

## Tolkien and the Classical World



# Tolkien and the Classical World

edited by Hamish Williams



2021

Cormarë Series No. 45

Series Editors:

Peter Buchs • Thomas Honegger • Andrew Moglestue • Johanna Schön • Doreen Triebel

Series Editors responsible for this volume: Thomas Honegger & Doreen Triebel

Library of Congress Cataloguing-in-Publication Data

Hamish Williams (ed.):

Tolkien and the Classical World

ISBN 978-3-905703-45-0

Subject headings:

Tolkien, J.R.R. (John Ronald Reuel), 1892-1973

Classical Literature

Classical Reception

Classical Epic

Greek Philosophy

Fantasy

Interdisciplinary Perspectives

Middle-earth

*The Lord of the Rings*

*The Hobbit*

*The Silmarillion*

Cormarë Series No. 45

First published 2021

© Walking Tree Publishers, Zurich and Jena, 2021

All rights reserved. No portion of this book may be reproduced, by any process or technique, without the express written consent of the publisher

Set in Adobe Garamond Pro and Shannon by Walking Tree Publishers

Cover by Jay Johnstone (copyright by the artist, published by permission of the artist)

## **BOARD OF ADVISORS**

### ACADEMIC ADVISORS

Douglas A. Anderson (independent scholar)  
Patrick Curry (independent scholar)  
Michael D.C. Drout (Wheaton College)  
Vincent Ferré (Université de Paris-Est Créteil UPEC)  
Dimitra Fimi (University of Glasgow)  
Verlyn Flieger (University of Maryland)  
Thomas Fornet-Ponse (Rheinische Friedrich-Wilhelms-Universität Bonn)  
Christopher Garbowski (University of Lublin, Poland)  
Mark T. Hooker (Indiana University)  
Andrew James Johnston (Freie Universität Berlin)  
Rainer Nagel (independent scholar)  
Helmut W. Pesch (independent scholar)  
Tom Shippey (University of Winchester)  
Allan Turner (Friedrich-Schiller-Universität Jena, retired)  
Frank Weinreich (independent scholar)

### GENERAL READERS

Johan Boots  
Jean Chausse  
Friedhelm Schneidewind  
Isaac Juan Tomas  
Patrick Van den hole  
Johan Vanhecke (Letterenhuis, Antwerp)

## Acknowledgments

First and foremost, I would like to thank Prof. Thomas Honegger (Friedrich Schiller University Jena) as the series editor at Walking Tree Publishers for guiding me through the various stages of the publication process and for providing clear, helpful advice. Thanks also to all the other staff at Walking Tree Publishers for their assistance, including Peter Buchs, Larissa Zoller, and Andrew Moglestue.

Second, I am thrilled to have an illustration by Jay Johnstone for the cover page of this book. The image, if we could etch it on a crumbling Athenian vase, would certainly fool an archaeologist, although the expert might be confused by the replacement of the Greeks and Polyphemus with Dwarves and Trolls!

Third, thanks to the various anonymous peer reviewers – across English literary studies, Classical studies, and other academic fields – for their insightful comments and helpful feedback to the various contributors of this volume.

Fourth, I am most grateful to the volume's fourteen contributors; I hope to work with many of you again on future projects. A special thank you to Graham Shipley, Professor of Ancient History at the University of Leicester, for his interest in our volume, for the contribution of his afterword, and for his help with the index.

Last but not least, to my family (Ksjusha, Kostja, Sasha), for your support and motivation.

Hamish Williams  
28 June 2020

# Contents

<b>Hamish Williams</b> Editor's Notes	i
INTRODUCTION	
<b>Hamish Williams</b> Classical Tradition, Modern Fantasy, and the Generic Contracts of Readers	xi
SECTION 1: CLASSICAL LIVES AND HISTORIES	
<b>Hamish Williams</b> Tolkien the Classicist: Scholar and Thinker	3
<b>Ross Clare</b> Greek and Roman Historiographies in Tolkien's Númenor	37
SECTION 2: ANCIENT EPIC AND MYTH	
<b>Giuseppe Pezzini</b> The Gods in (Tolkien's) Epic: Classical Patterns of Divine Interaction	73
<b>Benjamin Eldon Stevens</b> Middle-earth as Underworld: From <i>Katabasis</i> to <i>Eucatastrophe</i>	105
<b>Austin M. Freeman</b> <i>Pietas</i> and the Fall of the City: A Neglected Virgilian Influence on Middle-earth's Chief Virtue	131
<b>Peter Astrup Sundt</b> The Love Story of Orpheus and Eurydice in Tolkien's Orphic Middle-earth	165
SECTION 3: IN DIALOGUE WITH THE GREEK PHILOSOPHERS	
<b>Michael Kleu</b> Plato's Atlantis and the Post-Platonic Tradition in Tolkien's Downfall of Númenor	193

<b>Łukasz Neubauer</b>	
Less Consciously at First but More Consciously in the Revision: Plato's Ring of Gyges as a Putative Source of Inspiration for Tolkien's Ring of Power	217
<b>Julian Eilmann</b>	
Horror and Fury: J.R.R. Tolkien's <i>The Children of Húrin</i> and the Aristotelian Theory of Tragedy	247
SECTION 4: AROUND THE BORDERS OF THE CLASSICAL WORLD	
<b>Philip Burton</b>	
"Eastwards and Southwards": Philological and Historical Perspectives on Tolkien and Classicism	273
<b>Richard Z. Gallant</b>	
The Noldorization of the Edain: The Roman-Germani Paradigm for the Noldor and Edain in Tolkien's Migration Era	305
<b>Juliette Harrisson</b>	
"Escape and Consolation": Gondor as the Ancient Mediterranean and Rohan as the Germanic World in <i>The Lord of the Rings</i>	329
SECTION 5: SHORTER REMARKS AND OBSERVATIONS	
<b>Alley Marie Jordan</b>	
Shepherds and the Shire: Classical Pastoralism in Middle-earth	353
<b>Oleksandra Filonenko and Vitalii Shchepanskyi</b>	
Classical Influences on the Role of Music in Tolkien's Legendarium	365
AFTERWORD	
<b>D. Graham J. Shipley</b>	
Afterword: Tolkien's Response to Classics in Its Wider Context	379
INDEX	399







## Plato's Atlantis and the Post-Platonic Tradition in Tolkien's Downfall of Númenor

### Abstract

This paper analyses the relation between J.R.R. Tolkien's 'The Downfall of Númenor' and the Atlantis story as presented in Plato's dialogues *Timaeus* and *Critias*, after which Tolkien's story is assessed with regard to the post-Platonic Atlantis tradition. Finally, the paper suggests the purpose and the function of Tolkien's Atlantis reception.

### 1. Introduction

When the Greek philosopher Plato (428/427-348/347 BC) created his dialogues *Timaeus* and *Critias*, he could not possibly have imagined what an incredible impact these two dialogues were going to have on later generations; for the *Timaeus* and *Critias* are our oldest and most important sources for legendary Atlantis. Since antiquity, Plato's story of the lost island has inspired the imagination of men and women.<sup>1</sup> This is particularly true for the genre of speculative fiction. Countless works in this genre refer either directly or indirectly to Plato's Atlantis. Whether in novels, short stories, movies, television shows, games of all kinds (board games, role-playing games, video games), or even in music, Atlantis is omnipresent.<sup>2</sup>

Therefore, it is not surprising that some of the works of J.R.R. Tolkien also refer to Plato's creation. In fact, the island of Númenor resembles the Platonic narrative of Atlantis in many ways and is even called Atalantë ('The Downfallen') in one of the languages of the Elves. The parallels between Atlantis and Númenor have occasionally been discussed from different perspectives.<sup>3</sup> Nevertheless,

---

1 Kershaw 2017; Vidal-Naquet 2005.

2 The Wikipedia article 'Atlantis in Popular Culture' offers an impressive list of examples. <[https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Atlantis\\_in\\_popular\\_culture](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Atlantis_in_popular_culture)>.

3 Cf. Delattre 2007, 2011; Hren 2018: 49-64.

with regards to content the relation between Plato's description of Atlantis and Tolkien's account of Númenor has not yet been explored in detail.

Following the methodological framework developed by Lorna Hardwick for reception studies,<sup>4</sup> the present paper will analyze the relation between Plato's Atlantis and Tolkien's Númenor in order to discover how closely the latter is modeled on the former. In a further step, the context of the reception must be examined. What do we know about Tolkien's relation to Plato? And are there any works from the post-Platonic Atlantis tradition that might have influenced Tolkien's reception of this lost island? In a final step, this paper will suggest the purpose or the function of the reception.

## 2. Plato's Atlantis Story in *Timaeus* and *Critias*<sup>5</sup>

In the *Timaeus*, Socrates, Hermocrates, Critias, and Timaeus are discussing the best type of state. In this context, Critias reports an old story that was told to him a long time ago by his grandfather of the same name.<sup>6</sup> This narration dealt with a conflict that happened 9,000 years ago (*Ti.* 23e; cf. *Critias* 108e, 111a). In this conflict, the Athenians faced a great power named Atlantis. According to the story, Atlantis was an island situated beyond the Pillars of Hercules (the entrance of the Strait of Gibraltar) in the Atlantic Ocean, from where one could reach other islands and a continent further to the west. The island was larger than Libya and Asia together and was governed by kings, who, in addition, ruled over many other islands and even parts of the western continent. Regarding the Mediterranean region, Atlantis' dominion included Libya as far as Egypt, and Europe as far as Tyrrhenia (Etruria in Italy). But the superpower wished to rule over even more territories. Therefore, Atlantis started a massive attack on the free people of the Mediterranean region. The Athenians stood up against the intruders and defeated the enemy forces, al-

<sup>4</sup> Hardwick 2003: 5.

<sup>5</sup> For the question as to whether the Atlantis story is Plato's invention or whether it has a kernel of truth, cf. Broadie 2013; Gill 1977, 2017: 1f., 16, 103; Nesselrath 2002; Ramage 1978.

<sup>6</sup> According to Critias, an old Egyptian priest told the Atlantis story to the Athenian statesman Solon, while the latter was visiting Sais in Egypt. When Solon came back to Athens, he told the story to his friend Dropides, who was the great-grandfather of Critias. See *Critias* 20c-25e; Tulli 2013.

though they were deserted by the other Greeks (*Ti.* 24e-25c). Unfortunately, the Athenian army could not celebrate its heroic victory since earthquakes and floods destroyed in one day and one night the island of Atlantis and the Athenian forces as well. While Atlantis and its fleet sank below the sea, the Athenian soldiers disappeared below the earth (*Ti.* 25c-d). Until the destruction of Atlantis, the Atlantic Ocean was navigable, but from then on this was no longer possible due to the mud that appeared narrowly below sea level during the island's descent (*Ti.* 24e, 25d; cf. *Critias* 108e-109a).<sup>7</sup> The rest of the *Timaeus* (27c-92c) is not related to Atlantis but deals with cosmogony (cf. the end of Section 4 of this paper).

In the *Critias* (108e-109a), Critias summarizes what he has said regarding Atlantis in the *Timaeus* before he focuses on a description of Athens at that time (109b-112e). Afterwards he comes back to Atlantis by describing the island's history and its physical features. In the beginning there was a fertile plain<sup>8</sup> with a mountain in its middle. On that mountain lived a young girl named Cleito. The god Poseidon, who had received Atlantis as his sphere of influence, started an affair with Cleito. In order to protect her, he created a ring of sea around the mountain on which Cleito was living. This ring of sea was followed by further rings of land and sea, so that there were finally three rings of sea and two of land around the mountain that thereby became some kind of fortress (*Critias* 113b-e). After Poseidon had taken care of springs and foodstuffs, Cleito gave birth to five pairs of male twins. Each son received a part of the island, and Atlas, the oldest son after whom both the ocean and the island were named, became king, while his nine brothers became kings of a somewhat smaller status (*Critias* 113e-114c, 120c-d). In the following generations, the crown stayed in the line of Atlas and was always given to the

7 In Plato's time, it was a widespread opinion among Greeks that the Atlantic Ocean was not navigable. One of the reasons for this opinion was the idea that ships would get caught in mud. In Herodotus (4.43), there is a story in which a ship (for unidentified reasons) could not move forward anymore while trying to sail round Africa. It is well conceivable that the Phoenicians (and Carthaginians) started such rumors in order to protect their trade routes against unwanted competition (see Nesselrath 2002: 24-26). The *Timaeus* (24e-25a) gives the impression that before the destruction of Atlantis, the island served as a stop for journeys to other islands (see Gill 2017: 117).

8 Plato's description is at this point (113c) rather difficult to understand since he says that the plain was located at the coast and – at the same time – in the middle of the island (πρὸς θαλάττης μὲν, κατὰ δὲ μέσον πάσης πεδίου ἦν). For different interpretations, cf. Nesselrath 2006: 250.

oldest son. The kings were incomparably wealthy and gained control over many other islands and the parts of Europe and Asia that we have mentioned in our summary of the *Timaeus*. Atlantis itself was a very rich island with countless resources. In addition, the kings received further things from the inhabitants of their vast empire (*Critias* 114e-115b, 117d-118b). Temples, palaces, harbors, dockyards, bridges, streets, stone walls, and canals were constructed on an impressive level (*Critias* 115c-116c, 117a-d, 118c-e). In the middle of the richly decorated palace there was a silver temple of Poseidon, and an inaccessible shrine for the god and Cleito was situated in the place where the five pairs of kings had been conceived (*Critias* 116c-117a).

After a short report on the military (*Critias* 118e-119b), Critias describes the political system of Atlantis (119c-120d). Finally, the last parts of the story are concerned with the reasons for the moral decline of the Atlanteans. In the beginning the Atlantean kings were in every respect extraordinarily good rulers, which – according to Critias – was a result of their divine ancestry. But at some point, their human part started to prevail over their divine part, which led to greed, disgrace, and moral decline. Because of this behavior, Zeus wanted to discipline them by punishment and gathered all goddesses and gods (*Critias* 120d-121c).<sup>9</sup> Unfortunately, Plato's dialogue abruptly ends at this point in the middle of a sentence.<sup>10</sup>

---

9 It seems that Zeus wanted to punish the Atlanteans by letting them fight a war against Athens. It is rather surprising that, in the end, the Atlanteans were not only disciplined but also annihilated; it is even more surprising, however, that the Athenian army was destroyed as well. Therefore, it appears likely that the destruction of Atlantis was not part of the punishment but happened somewhat later (Nesselrath 2006: 429, 444f., 449f.). For the opinion that the catastrophe was part of the divine punishment, cf. Gill 2017: 172.

10 For the reasons for this abrupt ending, cf. Gill 1977: 303f., 2017: 8f., 33, 172, 180; Nesselrath 2002: 38-42, 2006: 34ff.

### 3. J.R.R. Tolkien's Númenor according to the 'Akallabêth' (and Other Writings)<sup>11</sup>

In the final war against Morgoth,<sup>12</sup> three houses of Elf-friends, the Edain, were the only humans that joined the Valar<sup>13</sup> in their fight against the forces of evil. After Morgoth was defeated, the Edain were rewarded in the form of wisdom, power, and a longer life. In addition, the Valar raised a new land from the sea floor of the ocean between the two continents of Middle-earth<sup>14</sup> and Aman<sup>15</sup> and gave it to the Edain. Since the fertile island was located westwards from Middle-earth, the Edain called it *Númenor* (Númenóre in full), which is Quenya (one of the languages of the Elves) for 'Anadûnê' or 'Westerness' (*Sil* 309-311, 416).<sup>16</sup> Therefore, the inhabitants of this island were known as Númenóreans or Dúnedain in Sindarin (another language of the Elves). These men were long-living, and their minds and bodies profited from their good relations with the Valar and the Eldar.<sup>17</sup> Númenor's main city and haven was called Andúnië and was located "in the midst of its western

11 In *The Silmarillion*, a collection of unfinished works, the downfall of Númenor is told in the 'Akallabêth' (or 'The Downfallen'). Earlier versions of the story, as presented in *The Lost Road and Other Writings* (7-38) and *Sauron Defeated* (331-440) ('The Drowning of Anadune'), offer only few additional insights regarding Plato's Atlantis story. The same is true for the short stories 'The Lost Road' (*LR* 39-116) and 'Aldarion and Erendis. The Mariner's Wife' (*UT* 223-280), the unfinished novel 'The Notion Club Papers' (*SD* 145-327), and the texts 'A Description of the Island of Númenor' (*UT* 213-222) and 'The Line of Elros: Kings of Númenor' (*UT* 293).

12 In the beginning, Eru Ilúvatar, the Father of All, created the Ainur ('The Holy Ones') who were the first beings. Among the Ainur were the Valar and the less powerful Maiar (singular: Maia). The mightiest of the Ainur was Melkor, who started a rebellion and was later called Morgoth ('The Black Enemy') (*Sil* 376, 409f., 412, 427). In the earlier versions of the 'Akallabêth', these higher beings are called *gods* (*LR* 7-38). In one of his letters Tolkien wrote that "'gods' is the nearest equivalent, but not strictly accurate" (*Letters* no. 154, p. 198).

13 Cf. note 12.

14 "Middle-earth is just archaic English for ἡ οἰκουμένη, the inhabited world of men. It lay then as it does" (*Letters* no. 151, p. 186; cf. *Letters* no. 183, p. 239, no. 211, p. 283).

15 Aman was a blessed continent westward from Middle-earth that was free from evil. The Valar dwelled there in a land called Valinor (*Sil* 377, 427).

16 Other names for Númenor were *Andor* ('Land of gift') and *Elenna* ('Starwards'). Regarding the name *Westerness*, Tolkien wrote in one of his letters: "I have often used *Westerness* as a translation. This is derived from rare Middle English *Westerness* (known to me only in MS. C of *King Horn*) where the meaning is vague, but may be taken to mean 'Western lands' as distinct from the East inhabited by the Paynim and Saracens" (*Letters* no. 276, p. 361). In another letter he wrote that "Númenóre means in 'Elvish' simply *Westerness* or Land in the West, and is not related to *numen* numinous, or νοῦμενον!" (*Letters* no. 131, p. 151; cf. *Letters* no. 131, p. 151, no. 227, p. 303, no. 276, p. 361). For Tolkien's playful choice of names and their classical references regarding Atlantis-Númenor, cf. Delattre 2007: 316-319.

17 In the beginning, Eldar was a name for all Elves. In later times it meant only a certain part of them (*Sil* 392).

coasts” (*Sil* 311f).<sup>18</sup> In the middle of the island was a high mountain that was called Meneltarma (Pillar of Heaven), and on the top of that mountain was a sanctuary for Eru Ilúvatar.<sup>19</sup> In the thirty-second year of the Second Age, Elros, son of Eärendil, who was descended partly both from the Eldar and the Maiar,<sup>20</sup> became the first king of Númenor (*Sil* 312).<sup>21</sup> Due to their old friendship with the Eldar, the kings and lords of Númenor spoke Elvish, while the wise men even knew High Elvish. Therefore, all lords and cities on the island had names both in their own language and in Elvish (*Sil* 312f). Regarding knowledge and craft, the Númenóreans were far superior to the rather backward humans in Middle-earth, but since they loved peace, they did not use their superiority to wage war against the other human kingdoms (*Sil* 312f).

Although they were extraordinary seafarers, the Valar did not allow the Númenóreans to come too close to Valinor, which was their home in Aman. Regarding the east, the Númenóreans could travel as they wished, but when they sailed westwards they were only allowed to go so far that they still could see the coast of Númenor. The reason for this rule was that the Valar did not want the Númenóreans “to overpass the limits set to their bliss, becoming enamoured of the immortality of the Valar and the Eldar and the lands where all things endure” (*Sil* 313). Although the Númenóreans did not fully understand the purpose of the Valar’s order, they still complied with it (*Sil* 313).<sup>22</sup> Therefore, they could not visit Aman in the west, but at least the most long-sighted among them could see under certain circumstances Avallónë, the haven of Eressëa which was an island inhabited by Elves and was located in front of Aman (*Sil* 313f). On their journeys to Middle-earth the Númenóreans visited the local humans and taught them so many things that they regarded them as gods. But they never stayed long in the east, since they always longed for the west (*Sil* 314f).

A little more than 2,000 years after the foundation of the kingdom, probably in some manner due to the works of Morgoth, the Númenóreans were not

---

18 Regarding the longevity of the Númenóreans, cf. *UT* 289f.

19 Eru Ilúvatar is the creator being in Tolkien’s world (cf. note 12).

20 For the Maiar cf. note 12.

21 For the date, cf. *UT* 281.

22 For the Númenóreans’ history as seafarers, cf. *UT* 220f.



pleased any more with not being allowed to sail to the west. Why did the Valar and the Eldar live endless lives in beautiful lands, while the mighty Númenóreans, the masters of the sea, were doomed to die? Why should they not visit Avallónë or even Valinor? Representatives of the Valar tried to bring the Númenóreans to their senses, but they failed in persuading the thirteenth king of Númenor, Tar-Ciryatan the Shipbuilder. Around the same time, the Númenóreans changed their attitude towards the people of Middle-earth and started to demand tribute. Although it had not reached the peak of its power yet, the kingdom would not become more blessed from that point (*Sil* 315-317).<sup>23</sup>

Most Númenóreans became estranged from the Valar and the Eldar and stopped worshipping the supreme being Eru Ilúvatar, but at least a minority stayed loyal. The twentieth king, on the other hand, forbade the languages of the Elves in his presence and called himself Adûnakhôr ('Lord of the West'), which was the title of the Valar and, therefore, some form of arrogance and pride. The twenty-third king, finally, forbade the Elvish languages in general and punished Númenóreans who secretly welcomed Elvish visitors (*Sil* 318, 320).<sup>24</sup>

Due to their obsession with death, many big graves were built, and wise men tried to discover the secret of immortality, but all they achieved was the ability to protect the flesh of the dead successfully from decay (*Sil* 318). Finally, the Númenóreans started to colonize Middle-earth by founding great settlements at the western coasts of the continent. The helpers and teachers had changed to lords and masters (*Sil* 318f.).

In the meantime, Sauron ('The Abhorred'), who was a former Maia and now the mightiest minion of Morgoth, had come back to power. He hated the Númenóreans for their might and for the deeds of their ancestors. At some point, he started to attack their possessions in Middle-earth. When king Ar-Pharazôn arrived with great forces, Sauron knew that he could not risk an open battle against him. Therefore, he pretended to bow to the king and followed him to Númenor, where he became the most influential royal advi-

---

<sup>23</sup> Cf. *UT* 284f.

<sup>24</sup> Cf. *UT* 286f.

sor. As the king's intimate, Sauron succeeded in inciting the Númenóreans against Eru Ilúvatar, the Valar, and the Eldar. In addition, he instrumentalized Ar-Pharazôn's greed and arrogance by telling him about unknown lands and seas that were just waiting for conquest. If Númenor had become master of the whole world, there would be still the Ancient Darkness from which the Lord of Darkness, Melkor/Morgoth, could create even more worlds for his followers. As a result, Ar-Pharazôn and many other Númenóreans started to worship Morgoth, and darkness befell the kingdom.<sup>25</sup> On the Meneltarma mountain, Sauron let them build a mighty temple with a silver roof for Morgoth (*Sil* 327). Eventually, Sauron went as far as convincing the king to start a war against Valinor (*Sil* 319f., 323-334), despite the Valar sending a last warning in the form of eagles with "lightning beneath their wings" (*Sil* 332, cf. *UT* 215, 218). When the Númenórean fleet had reached Aman, Eru Ilúvatar opened a great abyss between Númenor and Valinor. The fleet disappeared in the chasm, while the king and those of his soldiers who had already set foot in Aman were buried by falling hills (*Sil* 334). But the abyss did not only devour the fleet:

In an hour unlooked for by Men this doom befell, on the nine and thirtieth day since the passing of the fleets. Then suddenly fire burst from the Meneltarma, and there came a mighty wind and a tumult of the earth, and the sky reeled, and the hills slid, and Númenor went down into the sea, with all its children and its wives and its maidens and its ladies proud; and all its gardens and its halls and its towers, its tombs and its riches, and its jewels and its webs and its things painted and carven, and its laughter and its mirth and its music, its wisdom and its lore: they vanished forever. (*Sil* 334f.)<sup>26</sup>

Due to the enormous forces, the face of the west coast of Middle-earth was changed forever, and at some places new lands and new seas appeared (*Sil* 334-336). The world even became round at this point (*Sil* 337f.).<sup>27</sup> Of the smaller group of Númenóreans who stayed loyal to the Eldar, the Maiar, and the

---

<sup>25</sup> "Thus Ar-Pharazôn, King of the Land of the Star, grew to the mightiest tyrant that had yet been in the world since the reign of Morgoth, though in truth Sauron ruled all from behind the throne" (*Sil* 328). In this context, the Númenóreans offered human sacrifices to Melkor/Morgoth (*Sil* 327f., 335).

<sup>26</sup> For the destruction of Númenor cf. also *RK* 289; *SD* 290.

<sup>27</sup> The transformation of a flat world into a round world comes along with the end of the mythical age and the beginning of "ordinary History" (*Letters* no. 152, p. 186; cf. no. 131, p. 154; *SD* 249; *Flieger* 2005: 102-103).

Valar, only some could escape on a total of nine ships (*Sil* 335f.).<sup>28</sup> The surviving Númenóreans called their lost home from now on *Mar-nu-Falmar* ('that was whelmed in the waves') or *Akallabêth* ('the Downfallen'), which is in the Eldarin language *Atalantë* (*Sil* 336f.). Among them were two descendants of Elros Tar-Minyatur (the first king of Númenor): Elendil and Isildur, who were father and son. More than 3,000 years later, their descendant Aragorn would finally defeat Sauron and become king of Gondor and Arnor.<sup>29</sup>

#### 4. Plato's Atlantis and Tolkien's Númenor

The summaries presented above have shown several analogues, correspondences, and equivalents.<sup>30</sup> First of all, both islands are located in the west, in an ocean between two continents (if Europe, Africa, and Asia are counted as one big land mass). Either island is extraordinary fruitful and rich in resources and wildlife. In both cases, we have a mountain in the middle of an island, and on the top of the mountain a sanctuary.<sup>31</sup> On the mountain in Atlantis, there is also a giant temple of Poseidon, whose outer parts were covered in silver. On the mountain in Númenor, Sauron initiated the construction of a giant temple with a silver roof.<sup>32</sup> While Atlas, the first king of Atlantis, was the son of a god, Elros, the first king of Númenor, was in the maternal line a descendant of Eldar and Maiar. Atlantis and Númenor both were advanced civilizations and the mightiest sea powers of their time who started to conquer or colonize the countries in the East.<sup>33</sup> In the beginning, both monarchies

28 Tolkien described this flight in one of his letters as "a kind of Noachian situation" (*Letters* no. 156 p. 206).

29 For the chronology of the Second Age, cf. *RK* 1420-1423.

30 According to the terminology presented by Hardwick (2003: 9f.), an *analogue* is "a comparable aspect of source and reception," while *correspondences* are "aspects of a new work which directly relate to a characteristic of the source." An *equivalent* is "fulfilling an analogous role in source and reception but not necessarily identical in form or content."

31 Apart from this, the physical form of Atlantis does not resemble Númenor as it is described in *Unfinished Tales* (212-222). Delattre (2007: 306) stresses "la perfection géométrique" of both islands. The sanctuary for Eru Ilúvatar was "open and unroofed" (*Sil* 312); the shrine for Poseidon and Cleito was surrounded by golden walls, which indicates that it also had no roof (see *Critias* 116c; Nesselrath 2006: 328f).

32 See Hren 2018: 54. For the use of gold and silver as a possible parallel between Númenor and Atlantis, cf. Delattre 2007: 306.

33 While Atlantis also had possessions on the continent in the west, the Númenóreans were forbidden to sail westwards.

were governed in an exemplary way.<sup>34</sup> After some time, moral decay, pride and arrogance befell the people of both states, which finally resulted in wars that (somehow, in the case of Atlantis) led to the destruction of the whole islands and their empires.<sup>35</sup> Due to the unfinished status of the *Critias*, it is not clear what Zeus' exact plans were for Atlantis, but he seems to have been involved in its sinking.<sup>36</sup> This corresponds with the fact that the Valar sent eagles with "lightning beneath their wings" as a last warning to the Númenoreans since eagles and lightning are well known attributes of Zeus. While the Atlantean fleet sank below the sea, the Athenian soldiers disappeared below the earth. Likewise, the Númenórean fleet sank, and their soldiers on land were buried by falling hills. As long as the divine parts of the kings and lords of Atlantis were still dominant, they were good rulers. When the human part prevailed, the moral decay began. Something very similar happened in Númenor. In the beginning, the rulers spoke Elvish beside their own language, and some Númenóreans even knew High Elvish. When the kings started to dissociate themselves from Elvish, this went hand in hand with their moral decay. Since the kings were in the maternal line descendants of the Eldar and the Maiar, the acceptance of the language might be regarded as a metaphor for the Elvish and Maiarian parts in them.<sup>37</sup>

There are two passages which indicate that Tolkien had read Plato's dialogues in close detail. As we have seen, Andúnië, the main city of Númenor, was located "in the midst of its western coasts" (*Sil* 311f.). Remarkably, this lo-

---

<sup>34</sup> The Númenóreans only started to conquer or to command other people after the beginning of their moral decay. Atlantis, on the other hand, had already foreign possessions before the start of its moral decay. The difference is probably due to the fact that conquest was much more acceptable (or even normal) in Plato's times than in Tolkien's.

<sup>35</sup> The Númenóreans felt mistreated regarding their mortality and regarding the law that forbade them to sail west. Sauron used this dissatisfaction for his own purposes and led Númenor to disaster. The moral decline of the Atlanteans, on the other hand, was related to a loss of divine nature. It seems that Zeus caused their final arrogance because he wanted them to start a war against Athens (Nesselrath 2006: 428f., 449). Therefore, both wars were caused by the intervention of higher beings. One can interpret this passage of the *Critias* (121a) as an indication for inner conflicts in Atlantis (Gill 2017: 172). If this is true, there would be another parallel to Númenor (*Sil* 318, 320f., 326-328). Nesselrath (2006: 435), however, is rather skeptical regarding this understanding of *Critias* 121a. One could also get the impression that leaving the self-sufficient island of Atlantis might not have been what Poseidon wanted for his people. This would correspond to the Númenóreans not being allowed to sail westward. But whether this is what Poseidon wanted is rather uncertain (Gill 2017: 154).

<sup>36</sup> Cf. note 9 of the present paper.

<sup>37</sup> Regarding their beautiful bodies and efficient minds, the Númenóreans did not resemble the Atlanteans but the Athenians (*Critias* 112e; *Sil* 311f.). For more parallels between the Númenóreans and Athenians, see Clare in this volume.

calization resembles a rather difficult description by Plato, who says that the fertile plain was situated “on the coast, in the middle of the whole island” (*Critias* 113c).<sup>38</sup> In the first version of the ‘Akallabêth’, Tolkien had already written “in the midmost of its western coasts” (*LR* 14). In the second version, he used the same expression as in the third and final version (*LR* 27). Therefore, this description seems to have been a fixed conception from the beginning which might well be a direct correspondence to Plato’s *Critias*. And there is another part in the ‘Akallabêth’ that reminds me of a passage from the *Critias*. Let us begin with Plato (121b-c):

But when the portion of god in them became weakened through frequent admixture with a large mortal element, and the human character became predominant, then they were unable to bear their current good fortune and started to disgrace themselves. To someone who could see clearly, they were obviously shameful since they had lost the finest of what had been the most valuable of their possessions; but those unable to see the life that truly leads to happiness, they were regarded as being most splendid and blessed, though they were activated by unjust greed for possessions and power.<sup>39</sup>

In *The Silmarillion* we read the following:

Nonetheless for long it seemed to the Númenóreans that they prospered, and if they were not increased in happiness, yet they grew more strong, and their rich men ever richer. For with the aid and counsel of Sauron they multiplied their possessions, and they devised engines, and they built ever greater ships. And they sailed now with power and armoury to Middle-earth, and they came no longer as bringers of gifts, nor even as rulers, but as fierce men of war. And they hunted the men of Middle-earth and took their goods and enslaved them, and many they slew cruelly upon their altars. (*Sil* 328)

Both cases are related to the respective situation after the beginning of the moral decline. From the outside, everything appeared to be almost perfect

---

38 Translation by Gill (2017: 77). Donnelly, whose book Tolkien must have read (see below), wrote in 1882: “On the side toward the sea, and in the center of the whole island” (13). Cf. note 8 of the present paper. The mountain Meneltarma, on the other hand, appeared for the first time in the second version (see *LR* 33).

39 Translation by Gill (2017: 86). Donnelly wrote in 1882: “By such reflections, and by the continuance in them of a divine nature, all that which we have described waxed and increased in them; but when this divine portion began to fade away in them, and became diluted too often, and with too much of the mortal admixture, and the human nature got the upper-hand, then, they being unable to bear their fortune, became unseemly, and to him who had an eye to see, they began to appear base, and had lost the fairest of their precious gifts; but to those who had no eye to see the true happiness, they still appeared glorious and blessed at the very time when they were filled with unrighteous avarice and power” (20f.).

in Númenor and in Atlantis; however, something dark was hiding behind the splendid appearances.<sup>40</sup>

One other point might be worth a closer look. In his commentary on the *Critias*, Heinz-Günther Nesselrath (2006: 207) praises Plato for the Daedalian idea of inventing an Atlantean king called Atlas after whom the island and the ocean are named. This is indeed an ingenious move since it is commonly believed that the Atlantic Ocean received its name from the titan Atlas. In this context, Tolkien seems to be a worthy heir of Plato because he names the mountain in the middle of Númenor *Meneltarma* ('Pillar of Heaven'). On the one hand, Pillar of Heaven alludes to the Pillars of Hercules.<sup>41</sup> On the other hand, it is a reference to the titan Atlas, who carries the heavens on his shoulders and who is identified with the homonymous mountain in North-West Africa (Hes. *Theog.* 517-520), and since this mountain is called *Pillar of Heaven* by Herodotus (4.184.3), there can be no doubt about the interpretation.<sup>42</sup> This applies even more regarding the unfinished novel 'The Notion Club Papers', in which the destruction of Númenor/Atlantis is thematized. One of the characters of this story thinks about the etymological roots of the word *Atlantis* and believes that it must mean 'a daughter of Atlas', as in the case of Calypso, and in the same passage, there is made a clear connection between the titan Atlas and the Pillar of Heaven (*SD* 249).<sup>43</sup>

Tolkien wrote that it is a "curious chance" (*Letters* no. 257, p. 347; cf. *SD* 249) that the Elvish word *Atalantë* ('the Downfallen') comes so close to the word *Atlantis*. Although this statement is often taken seriously, it might as well be evaluated as irony.<sup>44</sup> Greek mythology knows a female character named

40 See Hren 2018: 54.

41 See Delattre 2007: 315.

42 Herodotus' report on the Atlas Mountains has presumably been a source for Plato's Atlantis story and might even have been an inspiration for the name of the island (Vidal-Naquet 2005: 35f.).

43 See Delattre 2007: 315. Calypso is indeed a daughter of Atlas, but she is usually not called *Atlantis* but *Atlantios thygatēr* (Ἀτλαντος θυγάτηρ, "the daughter of Atlas") (Hom. *Od.* 1.52, 7.245). In Hesiod's *Theogony* (938), on the other hand, Atlas' daughter Maia is referred to by the patronymic *Atlantis* (Ἀτλαντῆς) in the meaning of "daughter of Atlas". Herodotus (1.202.4) calls the Atlantic Ocean in the same manner *Atlantis* (θάλασσα ἡ Ἀτλαντὶς καλεομένη, "the sea that is called Atlantis"). Plato's Ἀτλαντὶς νῆσος (*Ti.* 25 a) is therefore "the island of Atlas".

44 Christopher Tolkien seems to take it seriously (*LR* 8), while Delattre (2007: 316n57) classifies it as irony. See Flieger 1997: 76-77. For more of such 'coincidences', cf. *UT* 518. The central region of Númenor is called *Mittalmar* ('Inlands'), which might refer to the German word *Mittelmeer* ('Mediterranean Sea'). See *UT* 212, 214; Delattre 2007: 306.

*Atalante*, yet the fact that Thucydides (3.89.3) mentions a Greek island called *Atalante* which was affected by a flood in 426 BC and might well have been an inspiration for Plato is definitively more interesting.<sup>45</sup> That the Elvish word *Atalantë* comes that close to Plato's *Atlantis* by chance is already hard to believe; the fact that the word is identical to the name of an island that might have been a possible model for Plato's story makes it even harder not to regard Tolkien's statement as irony.

It is remarkable that in his letters Tolkien never refers to Plato, although Atlantis is mentioned several times.<sup>46</sup> Only in 'The Notion Club Papers' does he refer to Plato's *Timaeus* (SD 249), and Charles Delattre (2007: 305) is definitely right when he remarks that some elements of the Atlantis story became so popular that Tolkien's reception does not necessarily prove that he had read the *Timaeus* and the *Critias*. Nevertheless, some of the analogues, correspondences, and equivalents shown above suggest that Tolkien had not merely read some summary of Plato's Atlantis story. One might rather assume a direct reception of the Platonic story. As we have seen in Hamish Williams' chapter of the present volume, Plato was a part of Tolkien's undergraduate syllabus when he studied Classics at Oxford. In addition, research has shown several references to Plato in Tolkien's works.<sup>47</sup> Therefore, Gergely Nagy is probably right when he says: "Tolkien certainly knew Plato's works and possibly read some in the original Greek" (2007: 513). Regarding the Atlantis story, his deep personal interest (cf. Section 6 of this paper) makes it particularly likely that Tolkien had read the *Timaeus* and the *Critias* either in Greek or in an English translation.

This is further suggested by the fact that the 'Akallabêth' ends with some metaphysical thoughts regarding (*true*) *Being* and *Becoming* (Sil 337). Similar ideas can be found in many of Plato's dialogues. One of them is the *Timaeus*, in which Timaeus speaks in the context of his (or rather Plato's) cosmogony about the changeable physical and the unchangeable eternal world. Directly

---

45 See Vidal-Naquet 2005: 151. For other possible inspirations, cf. note 42 of this paper; Nesselrath 2002: 24-30.

46 Cf. chapter 6 of the present paper.

47 Cf. Cox 1984; De Armas 1994; Delattre 2007, 2011; Hren 2018: 49-64; Morse 1980; Nagy 2004, 2007; Neubauer in this volume; Rose 1981; Weinreich 2008. For the influence of Neo-Platonism and Platonized Christianity on Tolkien, cf. Cox 1984 and Flieger 1986.



after this cosmogony, Critias presents his summary of the Atlantis story.<sup>48</sup> In ‘The Notion Club Papers’, one of the protagonists describes a giant wave towering above a landscape. A few sentences later he says: “I could not embark tonight on even one of the immense and ramified legends and cosmogonies that these belong to” (*SD* 194). Since the wave alludes to Atlantis, this passage shows that Tolkien knew very well that the Atlantis story is related to Plato’s cosmogony.

Let us end this part of the paper with a final example of Tolkien’s playful handling of myths. Plato and Tolkien both told their version of the Downfall of Atlantis-Númenor about 9,000 years after it actually ‘happened’.<sup>49</sup> Although Plato’s version is more than 2,000 years older and – of course – the original, Tolkien suggests in ‘The Notion Club Papers’ that the Greek philosopher did not invent the Atlantis story but might himself have been inspired by the ‘real’ story: the Downfall of Númenor (*SD* 249).<sup>50</sup> In this way Tolkien presents his adaption of the Atlantis story as the model of its own source.

## 5. Post-Platonic Traditions of the Atlantis Narrative and Tolkien’s Númenor

To understand which story elements Tolkien might have taken from sources other than Plato, a closer look at the development of the post-Platonic traditions of the Atlantis narrative is worthwhile. In antiquity only minor additions were made to Plato’s description of the lost island, while there seems to have been no specific interest in further developing the story in the Middle Ages. The situation changed significantly when Columbus discovered America in 1492. Only a few years before (1485), Marsilio Ficino had translated the *Critias* and the *Timaeus* into Latin, whereby these dialogues became available to a wider audience. On the one hand, the new continent was consistent with

---

48 See Hren 2018: 59-60. For the reference to the changeable and the unchangeable world in Plato’s dialogues, cf. Gill 2017: 180; Nesselrath 2006: 447f. For more parallels between Plato’s *Timaeus* and Tolkien’s writings, cf. Cox 1984: 57-61, 64.

49 The Downfall of Númenor happened in the year 3,319 of the Second Age, an age which ended with the first victory over Sauron and Isildur’s capture of the One Ring in 3,441. The Third Age ended in the year 3,021, which is two years after the One Ring had been destroyed by Frodo and Gollum and Sauron was finally defeated (*RK* 1422, 1437). In Tolkien’s imagination, the latter happened about 6,000 years before his own time (*Letters* no. 211, p. 283).

50 See Fisher 2007: 258.



Plato's description of larger lands in the west; on the other hand, these lands were not mentioned in the Bible. This led in the next decades and centuries to several most interesting ideas. Had Atlantis been destroyed by the biblical Flood? Was the land Columbus had discovered Plato's continent to the west of the lost island or even a remnant of Atlantis itself? And were the native inhabitants of America the descendants of the Atlanteans?

After such discussions had started, other authors – some of them with nationalistic intentions – located Atlantis in Sweden, Italy, Mexico, Palestine, in the Arctic, or in the Caucasus. Very influential was Olof Rudbeck (1630-1702), for whom the (Swedish) Atlanteans were the ancestors of all European and Asian people who had, in the form of the runes, laid the foundation of all later alphabets. Yet other authors without any nationalistic intentions were looking for some kind of 'original people' to explain the fairly simultaneous appearance of advanced civilizations in China, India, and the Near East. In short, a colorful bouquet of theories regarding Atlantis already existed when towards the end of the eighteenth century authors such as William Blake (1757-1827), Francis Wilford (1761-1822), or Antoine Fabre d'Olivet (1767-1825) combined Atlantis with rather occult ideologies. In 1882, Ignatius Loyola Donnelly (1831-1901) wrote the most influential book of the post-Platonic tradition. According to him, Atlantis was an island in the Atlantic Ocean and was head of an empire stretching from parts of America in the west to parts of Europe and Asia in the east (see below). By the end of the nineteenth and the beginning of the twentieth century, the theosophist William Scott-Elliot (1849-1919) published a book on Atlantis with quite fantastic elements (see below). Another author of importance in our context is Denis Saurat (1890-1958), who published *L'Atlantide et le règne des géants* (1954).<sup>51</sup>

From all the authors mentioned above Tolkien refers only to Saurat in the context of Númenor-Atlantis.<sup>52</sup> But the original outline of the Fall of Númenor dates back to ca. 1936 (*LR* 10) and already shows heavy influences of older traditions regarding Atlantis. Therefore, *L'Atlantide et le règne des géants*

---

51 This short overview is based on Kershaw 2017; Vidal-Naquet 2005. For some reason, Denis Saurat is neither mentioned by Kershaw nor by Vidal-Naquet.

52 See *Letters* no. 154, p. 197f. [quoted in note 5]. The English translation of Saurat's book (*Atlantis and the Giants*) was published in 1957, but Tolkien's letter dates to September 1954.

cannot have been a major inspiration for Tolkien. Instead, it seems that he just mentioned Saurat in his letter from September 1954 because the latter's popular book had been published the very same year.

However, there are striking analogues to and correspondences with Ignatius Donnelly's extremely popular *Atlantis, the Antediluvian World* (1882).<sup>53</sup> From Donnelly's point of view, the Azores were the mountain tops of immersed Atlantis (1882: 46, 123). In Tolkien's version, some Dúnedain believed that the top of the Númenórean mountain Meneltarma did at some point rise above sea level again (*Sil* 337).<sup>54</sup> Furthermore, survivors of the catastrophe came to Europe, Africa, and Mesoamerica and brought their knowledge to the 'backward' people of these regions (Donnelly 1882: 276-471). In this context, they introduced these people to the construction of pyramids. As I have mentioned above, the Númenóreans were obsessed with death. They built great tombs and learned to prevent the decay of dead bodies (*Sil* 315-318, 328; cf. *LR* 23). In this regard, the Númenóreans clearly resemble the ancient Egyptians, who – according to Donnelly – received their knowledge on this matter from the Atlanteans (1882: 330-342).<sup>55</sup> And the people of Donnelly's Atlantis and the people of Númenor both taught the other humans agriculture and the like (Donnelly 1882: 24, 61-63, 177f., 455, 475; *Sil* 314). Another analogue is that both the Númenóreans and Donnelly's Atlanteans were perceived as gods by other humans (*Sil* 314f.; Donnelly 1882: 283-316).<sup>56</sup> Donnelly believed that volcanic eruptions and earthquakes were connected with the destruction of Atlantis (1882: 112), while in Tolkien's Númenor the Meneltarma mountain started to spew fire and "a tumult of the earth" occurred (*Sil* 334). Finally, Donnelly states that after the destruction of the island the face of the earth had changed, and new lands had appeared from the sea (1882: 31-34).<sup>57</sup> The same is true for Númenor (*Sil* 336). Interestingly, Donnelly offers his readers a long translation of the relevant parts of the

53 For the terminology (analogues and correspondences), cf. note 30 of the present paper.

54 For the Azores, cf. also *LR* 88, 90.

55 Tolkien himself compares the Dúnedain of Gondor with ancient Egyptians (*Letters* no. 211, p. 281; cf. *Letters* no. 154, p. 197). In the earlier versions of the 'Akallabêth', the obsession with death started only after the downfall (*LR* 23).

56 Cf. the third of Arthur C. Clark's famous laws: "Any sufficiently advanced technology is indistinguishable from magic." This means that representants of extremely advanced cultures can easily be mistaken for gods by civilizations with a much lower technological knowledge.

57 The same idea had already been addressed seventy years earlier by Fabre d'Olivet (1824: 192-194).

*Timaeus* (20e-25d) and the *Critias* (108d-109a, 111a-b, 112e-121c) with only minor omissions (1882: 6-21). Therefore, Tolkien could have worked with Donnelly's translation of Plato's account.

Are there also references to other authors besides Donnelly? Remarkably, the original outline and the earlier versions of the Fall of Númenor all mention the flying ships the Númenoreans used after the fall of their island (*LR* 12f., 18, 31). This might point to William Scott-Elliott's *The Story of Atlantis. A Geographical, Historical and Ethnological Sketch* (1896), in which the Atlanteans had propeller-operated flying boats at their disposal, both as private yachts and as war machines for fifty to a hundred soldiers (51-55). The same author frequently calls the capital of Atlantis the "City of the Golden Gates" (29-31, 49, 51, 59, 64), while Tolkien names the later capital of Númenor "Armenelos the Golden" (*Sil* 327). Furthermore, Scott-Elliott describes an inner conflict between good and evil forces fighting each other. Since the evil force relies on black magic – including bloody sacrifices – *The Story of Atlantis* comes close to fantasy literature and might have been an inspiration for Sauron's deeds in Númenor (28-31, 37, 66f.). In addition, Scott-Elliott also believed the Atlanteans brought their advanced knowledge on agriculture to their colonies (6f.).

One might expect that Tolkien also took inspiration from authors such as William Blake or Francis Wilford who combined Atlantis with Britain. This cannot be confirmed: no obvious analogues, correspondences, or equivalents are identifiable between their works and Númenor.

## 6. The Purpose or the Function of Tolkien's Atlantis Reception

Tolkien expressed himself several times on the reasons for his reception of Atlantis. In one of his letters he wrote:

Of all the mythical or 'archetypal' images this is one most deeply seated in my imagination, and for many years I had a recurrent Atlantis dream: the stupendous and ineluctable wave advancing from the Sea or over the land, sometimes dark, sometimes green and sunlit. (*Letters* no. 276, p. 361).

In another letter he commented in more detail on this topic:

I say this about the ‘heart’ for I have what some might call an Atlantis complex. Possibly inherited, though my parents died too young for me to know such things about them, and too young to transfer such things by words. Inherited from me (I suppose) by one only of my children, though I did not know that about my son until recently, and he did not know it about me. I mean the terrible recurrent dream (beginning with memory) of the Great Wave, towering up, and coming in ineluctably over the trees and green fields. (I bequeathed it to Faramir.) I don’t think I have had it since I wrote the ‘Downfall of Númenor’ as the last of the legends of the First and Second Age. (*Letters* no. 163, p. 213)<sup>58</sup>

Elsewhere Tolkien added:

They [the legends of Númenóre] are my own use for my own purposes of the *Atlantis* legend, but not based on special *knowledge*, but on a special personal concern with this tradition of the culture-bearing men of the Sea, which so profoundly affected the imagination of peoples of Europe with westward-shores. (*Letters* no. 227, p. 303)<sup>59</sup>

Due to this remarkably personal connection to the topic, it is not surprising at all that Tolkien “really wanted to make, a new version of the Atlantis legend” (*Letters* no. 294, p. 378).<sup>60</sup> At the same time, he needed the Númenóreans to be ancestors of Aragorn, one of the main characters from *The Lord of the Rings*. Elendil and Isildur have the function of “culture heroes, ancestors of kingly lines, in boats” (see above) as Tolkien knew them not only from post-Platonic Atlantic stories but also from traditions of the North Sea. By creating him as a direct descendant of Elendil and Isildur, Tolkien equipped Aragorn with an extraordinary heritage (*Letters* no. 257, p. 347). Ultimately, Tolkien’s

58 For this dream, cf. also *Letters* no. 180, p. 232, no. 257, p. 347. For Faramir’s version of Tolkien’s dream, cf. *RK* 289; Post 2014. It is uncertain if Tolkien read as a teenager Edith Nesbit’s *The Story of the Amulet* (1906), with its description of the destruction of Atlantis by a giant wave (see Lobdell 2007: 94).

59 Cf. also the quote of *Letters* no. 154, p. 197f., in note 60 of this paper.

60 Cf. *Letters* no. 276, p. 361: “N. is my personal alteration of the Atlantis myth and/or tradition, and accommodation of it to my general mythology.” In *Letters* no. 154, p. 197f., Tolkien mentioned: “The particular ‘myth’ which lies behind this tale, and the mood both of Men and Elves at this time, is the Downfall of Númenor: a special variety of the Atlantis tradition. That seems to me so fundamental to ‘mythical history’ – whether it has any kind of basis in real history, *pace* Saurat and others, is not relevant – that some version of it would have to come in.” In another letter Tolkien spoke about “the great ‘Atlantis’ isle of *Númenóre*” (*Letters* no. 131, p. 151; cf. *Letters* no. 144, p. 175, no. 151, p. 186, no. 156, p. 206, no. 163, p. 213 [quoted above], no. 227, p. 303, no. 252, p. 342, no. 256 p. 347; *LR* 7, 10; *SD* 281).

reception of Atlantis is primarily based on a deep personal interest, whereby the content-based functions seem to be rather secondary.

## 7. Conclusion

Regarding the basic concept, Tolkien's story about Númenor is a version<sup>61</sup> of the Platonic dialogues *Timaeus* and *Critias* that has been migrated<sup>62</sup> or transplanted<sup>63</sup> to a fantasy world. Sometimes it even seems to refer to details of Plato's writings, as in the case of the silver temples. Therefore, we can find several analogues, correspondences, and equivalents in this version. Ultimately, there are many reasons to believe that the *Timaeus* and the *Critias* were direct sources of inspiration for Tolkien, although it is impossible to deduce in which language he might have read them. The playful use of Greek myths related to Atlas and the possible utilization of Thucydides' report on the island of Atalante indicate a certain preoccupation with the ancient tradition going beyond the reception of Plato. At the same time, Tolkien took several central ideas from pseudo-historic works of modern authors, in which Ignatius Donnelly seems to have been a major influence. It might even be possible that Tolkien consulted Donnelly's translation of the *Critias* and the *Timaeus*. A letter from 1954 clearly shows that Tolkien did not necessarily believe what Saurat and other authors of the post-Platonic tradition wrote about Atlantis.<sup>64</sup> For him, the cultural impact of the Atlantis story was more important than its historicity. Likewise, Tolkien measured his personal affection higher than his knowledge of the topic.<sup>65</sup>

To a lesser degree, he added some biblical aspects (the Fall of Men; Noah) and elements of other origin such as Avallónë, which is of course *Avalon* from

---

61 According to the terminology presented by Hardwick (2003: 10), a *version* is "a refiguration of a source (usually literary or dramatic) which is too free and selective to rank as a translation," whereby in this context *refiguration* means the "selecting and reworking [of] material from a previous or contrasting tradition."

62 In this context *migration* means a "movement through time or across place; may involve dispersal and diaspora and acquisition of new characteristics" (Hardwick 2003: 9).

63 *Transplant*: "to take a text or image into another context and allow it to develop" (Hardwick 2003: 9).

64 See *Letters* no. 154, p. 197f. [quoted in note 60 of the present paper].

65 See *Letters* no. 227, p. 303.

Arthurian legend.<sup>66</sup> By translating Númenor as Westernessee, Tolkien also referred to an island from the thirteenth century chivalric romance *King Horn*.<sup>67</sup> Hence, he mixed elements of ancient, mediaeval, and modern origin and created thereby a hybrid, according to Hardwick's terminology.<sup>68</sup> Like many authors before him and after him, Tolkien used very different traditions to create a new narration that fitted into his idea of Middle-earth. One wonders if Plato might have worked in a similar way when he composed the Atlantis story.

### Acknowledgments

I would like to thank the editor of this volume and the anonymous reviewer for their respective assistance with this paper. Their notes and remarks led to a significant improvement of my thoughts on the present topic.

### About the Author

MICHAEL KLEU teaches history at the University of Cologne. Previously, he taught ancient history for ten years at the Universities of Bonn, Cologne, and Mannheim. His publications include *Die Seepolitik Philipps V. von Makedonien* (2015) and *Antikenrezeption in der Science Fiction* (2019). His current research projects focus on classical reception in science fiction, horror, and fantasy (<https://www.fantastischeantike.de>).

### Bibliography

- BROADIE, Sara. 2013. 'Truth and Story in the *Timaeus-Critias*.' In George Boys-Stones, Dimitri El Murr, and Christopher Gill (eds.). *The Platonic Art of Philosophy*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 249-268.
- COX, John. 1984. 'Tolkien's Platonic Fantasy.' *Seven* 5: 53-69.
- DE ARMAS, Frederick A. 1994. 'Gyges' Ring: Invisibility in Plato, Tolkien, and Lope de Vega.' *Journal of the Fantastic in the Arts* 3: 120-138.

---

<sup>66</sup> As we have seen above, Avallónë is the haven of Eressëa. The idea to place the mythical island of Atlantis into the geographic neighborhood of the mythical island of Avalon is a quite appropriate metaphor for both islands' cultural influence. For Tolkien's usage of Celtic versions of the motif of the drowned land in the context of Númenor, cf. Flieger 1997: 156-157.

<sup>67</sup> See *Letters* no. 276, p. 361 [quoted in note 16].

<sup>68</sup> According to Hardwick, a *hybrid* is "a fusion of material from classical and other sources" (2003: 9). For the interweaving of ancient and mediaeval elements regarding Númenor, cf. Delattre 2007: 311.

- DELATTRE, Charles. 2007. 'Númenor et l'Atlantide: une écriture en héritage.' *Revue de littérature comparée* 323: 303-322.
2011. 'Histoires d'Atlantide: mythe et dispositif fictionnel de Platon à Tolkien.' In Rémy Poignault and Sandrine Dubel (eds.). *Présence du roman grec et latin. Actes du colloque tenu à Clermont-Ferrand (23-25 novembre 2006)*. Clermont-Ferrand: Centre de recherches A. Piganiol - Présence de l'Antiquité, 725-743.
- DONNELLY, Ignatius. 1882. *Atlantis: The Antediluvian World*. New York: Harper & Brothers.
- FABRE D'OLIVET, Antoine. 1824. *Histoire philosophique du genre humain, ou L'homme considéré sous ses rapports religieux et politiques dans l'état social, à toutes les époques et chez les différents peuples de la terre Tome II*. Paris: Brière.
- FISHER, Jason. 2007. 'Greek Gods.' In Michael D.C. Drout (ed.). *J.R.R. Tolkien Encyclopedia. Scholarship and Critical Assessment*. New York and London: Routledge, 258-259.
- FLIEGER, Verlyn. 1986. 'Naming the Unnamable: The Neoplatonic 'One' in Tolkien's *Silmarillion*.' In Thomas P. Halton and Joseph P. Willimer (eds.). *Diakonia: Studies in Honor of Robert T. Meyer*. Washington, DC: Catholic University of America Press, 127-132.
1997. *A Question of Time. J.R.R. Tolkien's Road to Faërie*. Kent OH: Kent State University Press.
2005. *Interrupted Music. The Making of Tolkien's Mythology*. Kent OH and London: The Kent State University Press.
- GILL, Christopher. 1977. 'The Genre of the Atlantis story.' *Classical Philology* 72: 287-304.
2017. *Plato's Atlantis Story. Text, Translation and Commentary*. Liverpool: Liverpool University Press.
- HARDWICK, Lorna. 2003. *Reception Studies*. Oxford: Oxford University Press.
- HREN, Joshua. 2018. *Middle-earth and the Return of the Common Good. J.R.R. Tolkien and Political Philosophy*. Eugene OR: Cascade Books.
- KERSHAW, Stephen P. 2017. *A Brief History of Atlantis: Plato's Ideal State*. London: Robinson.
- LOBDELL, Jared. 2007. 'Childhood of Tolkien.' In Michael D.C. Drout (ed.). *J.R.R. Tolkien Encyclopedia. Scholarship and Critical Assessment*. New York and London: Routledge, 93-95.
- MORSE, Robert E. 1980. 'Rings of Power in Plato and Tolkien.' *Mythlore* 7: 38.



- NAGY, Gergely. 2004. 'Saving the Myths. The Recreation of Mythology in Plato and Tolkien.' In Jane Chance (ed.). *J.R.R. Tolkien and the Invention of Myth: A Reader*. Lexington KY: University Press of Kentucky, 81-100.
2007. 'Plato.' In Michael D.C. Drout (ed.). *J.R.R. Tolkien Encyclopedia. Scholarship and Critical Assessment*. New York and London: Routledge, 513.
- NESSELRATH, Heinz-Günther. 2002. *Platon und die Erfindung von Atlantis*. München and Leipzig: K. G. Sauer.
2006. *Platon. Kritias. Übersetzung und Kommentar*. Göttingen: Vandenhoeck & Ruprecht.
- POST, Tim. 2014. 'Educational Frontiers of Training Lucid Dreams.' In Ryan Hurd and Kelly Bulkeley (eds). *Lucid Dreaming. New Perspectives on Consciousness in Sleep, Volume 1: Science, Psychology and Education*. Westport CT: ABC-Clio, 127-144.
- RAMAGE, Edwin S. (ed.). 1978. *Atlantis: Fact or Fiction?* Bloomington IN: Indiana University Press.
- ROSE, Mary C. 1981. 'The Christian Platonism of C.S. Lewis, J.R.R. Tolkien, and Charles Williams.' In Dominic J. O'Meara (ed.). *Neoplatonism and Christian Thought*. Norfolk NY: SUNY Press, 203-212.
- SAURAT, Denis. 1954. *L'Atlantide et le règne des géants*. Paris: Editions Denoël.
- SCOTT-ELLIOT, William. 1896. *The Story of Atlantis. A Geographical, Historical and Ethnological Sketch*. London: Theosophical Publishing Society.
- TOLKIEN, J.R.R. 1992. *Sauron Defeated*. The History of Middle-earth 9. Edited by Christopher Tolkien. London: HarperCollins / Boston: Houghton Mifflin.
1993. *The Return of the King*. London: HarperCollinsPublishers.
1996. *The Lost Road and Other Writings*. The History of Middle-earth 5. Edited by Christopher Tolkien. New York: Ballantine Books.
1999. *The Silmarillion*. Edited by Christopher Tolkien. London: HarperCollinsPublishers.
2004. *The Lord of the Rings*. 50<sup>th</sup> anniversary edition. Boston: Houghton Mifflin.
2006. *The Letters of J.R.R. Tolkien*. Edited by Humphrey Carpenter, with the assistance of Christopher Tolkien. London: HarperCollinsPublishers.
2014. *Unfinished Tales of Númenor and Middle-earth*. Edited by Christopher Tolkien. London: HarperCollinsPublishers.



- TULLI, Mauro. 2013. 'The Atlantis Poem in the *Timaeus-Critias*.' In George Boys-Stones, Dimitri El Murr, and Christopher Gill (eds.). *The Platonic Art of Philosophy*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 269-282.
- VIDAL-NAQUET, Pierre. 2005. *L'Atlantide. Petite histoire d'un mythe platonicien*. Paris: Les Belles Lettres.
- WEINREICH, Frank. 2008. 'Metaphysics of Myth. The Platonic Ontology of "Mythopoeia".' In Margaret Hiley and Frank Weinreich (eds.). *Tolkien's Shorter Works*. Zurich and Jena: Walking Tree Publishers, 329-352.
- Wikipedia*. 'Atlantis in Popular Culture.' <[https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Atlantis\\_in\\_popular\\_culture](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Atlantis_in_popular_culture)> (accessed 12 September 2019).

