MEDITERRANEAN RESONANCES IN TOLKIEN'S MIDDLE-EARTH

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Abstract. The paper examines the influences of Mediterranean heritage on the shaping of the culture of Gondor and more specifically on the appearance of its capital, Minas Tirith, as described by J. R. R. Tolkien, and portrayed in Peter Jackson's film adaptations of *The Lord of the Rings*. By tracing the similarities between Númenor and Gondor and the ancient and mediaeval civilisations they resemble, and by analysing the sources from the history of art which inspired the designs of Minas Tirith's architecture, the paper aims to demonstrate the interplay and transfer of meanings and cultural connotations from real to fictional places and cultures.

Discussing the semiotics of architecture, Umberto Eco highlights that we "experience architecture as communication, even while recognizing its functionality" with its utilitarian and symbolic functions being equally important (1986, pp. 58–68). Although the basic, denotative meaning of any built structure is rooted in its function, architecture also operates as a system of signs through which people identify with their environment and express and represent their worldviews, lifestyles, beliefs, values, needs, and ambitions (Preziosi, 1979, p. 6; Eco, 1986, pp. 57–59). The idea of the interconnectedness between architecture and cultural identity plays an important role in fictional world-building, where landscapes and built environments frequently act as cultural signifiers, informing us about the invented cultures we encounter.

J. R. R. Tolkien employs this strategy in his famous novels *The Hobbit* (1937) and *The Lord of the Rings* (1954–1955) by introducing new cultures and protagonists through first impressions of their architecture and surrounding landscape. Architecture is systematically employed as *a statement* about different cultures, and the built environment operates as a *framing technique* informing us about the races and peoples of Middle-earth, symbolising their qualities and values, aims and temperaments, as well as offering hints about the nature of the locations described and the events related to them (Brooke, 2017, p. 4; Honegger, 2004, pp. 59, 62). Similarly, Peter Jackson's film adaptations of *The Hobbit* and *The Lord of the Rings* consistently use architecture as a cultural signifier, utilising the overall design of material culture as a means to define and communicate individual and shared identities of Middle-earth's races and inhabitants.

Tolkien was concerned with creating a sense of place and providing spatial orientation, for himself and for his readers, in order to achieve a consistent world-building and make the story of Frodo's quest fit into spatial coordinates of Middle-earth he conceived in advance: "in such a story one cannot make a map for the narrative, but must first make a map and make the narrative agree" (Tolkien, 2000, pp. 168, 171, 177, 358). Therefore, he devoted more attention to maps and descriptions of landscape, nature, and architecture, than to the appearance of characters and objects. As he himself acknowledged, he was able to "visualise with great clarity scenery and 'natural' objects, but not artefacts"

(Tolkien, 2000, p. 280). Consequently, he was not very skilful in drawing human figure, but his artistic sensibility and talent came to the fore in the depictions of landscapes and architecture. Combined with textual descriptions, which often include references to landscapes, buildings, landmarks, monuments, or ruins, Tolkien's drawings became indispensable for understanding and envisioning many of the locations from his legendarium (Hammond and Scull, 1995; 2015).

Being a linguist, medievalist, and professor at the University of Oxford, Tolkien relied extensively on his own knowledge of history, mythology, literature, and languages when constructing the fictional world we know as Arda. As Hamish Williams observes in the introduction to *Tolkien and the Classical World*, "Tolkien was the master in twentieth–century popular fiction at working, kneading, and recasting the time-worn archetypal figures of Western cultural history and thought into new models […] both familiar and strange" (2021a, p. xi). Tolkien aimed to create a "realistic fantasy" and saw his invention as an imaginary moment in the history of our own world that he was documenting: "I had the sense of recording what was already 'there', somewhere: not of 'inventing'" (Tolkien, 2000, pp. 145, 244). When adapting *The Lord of the Rings*, Peter Jackson took the same approach: "I gave a little speech to the design crew very early on. I said, 'I want you to think that *The Lord of the Rings* was real; that it was actually history; that these events happened, and more than that, I want us to imagine that we've been lucky enough to be able to go on location and shoot our movie where the real events happened'" (Falconer, 2017, p. 10; Jackson et al., 2002b, 00:00:07–00:02:10). It comes as no surprise then that numerous instances from archaeology, history, and the history of art have served as a wellspring of inspiration for both Tolkien and the artists involved in the films, and helped them convey a sense of cultural specificity and longevity for the peoples of Middle-earth, inevitably appropriating some of the meanings of places and heritage they were modelled after.[3] Like all places in a fictional world, the locations of Arda represent a combination of the real and the imaginary, and the analysis of the connotations of the heritage that inspired them will offer a better insight into transfers of meaning that happen during fictional world-building, whether conducted by the authors themselves, or by the readers who imagine and reconstruct fictional worlds by following textual and pictorial guidelines.

Accordingly, this paper analyses textual and visual representation of Gondorian culture through architecture and compares the use and appearance of architecture in Peter Jackson's film adaptations of *The Lord of the Rings* to Tolkien's own vision, in the light of direct and possible stylistic influences from

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[3] Real world architecture is usually loaded with historical associations and meanings, so when integrated into a fantastical setting, it may retain certain meanings and create cultural expectations. To what extent and how this might have affected reception and experience of Middle-earth for both European and non-European audiences is a topic which requires further empirical research.

Mediterranean art and architecture. It focuses on the real places and heritage that inspired the architecture of Gondor's capital Minas Tirith, starting with Tolkien's descriptions and illustrations, and tracing how they were interpreted and translated into visual media by Alan Lee and John Howe, the artists who largely determined the aesthetics of the films and the way people imagine Tolkien's world today. Widely recognised illustrators of Tolkien's books long before the adaptations, they were responsible for conceptual design in both Jackson's trilogies and tried to be as faithful as possible to Tolkien's writings, maps, and drawings in devising visual identities of the cultures he invented, and in doing so they followed the sources he himself relied on (Lee, 2005, p. 44).

Númenórean Legacy and Deathly Hallows

Tolkien's major races—Elves, Dwarves, and Men—have physically and culturally distinctive subgroups, located in different parts of Middle-earth. Among them, the cultures of Men and Hobbits are most obviously related to particular historical influences. Hobbits' culture is rustic, pre-industrial, and quasi-English, modelled to resemble Victorian middle-class culture (Fimi, 2018, p. 379), and it is well-known that Tolkien's inspiration for the Shire was rural England, especially Oxfordshire, Berkshire and the West Midlands countryside.[4] Meanwhile, Rohan and Gondor, the Mannish cultures most elaborately represented in the book and the films, have been aligned with early mediaeval Northern European influences (Rohan) and ancient and mediaeval Mediterranean influences (Gondor), by a number of scholars and fans, along with Tolkien himself. Gondor and its people "represent the ancient Mediterranean as a whole" and in particular the Roman Empire and its legacy (Harrisson, 2021, pp. 330–332), whereas the equestrian culture of the Rohirrim (i.e., the Horse-lords) reflects the heroic ideals of Anglo-Saxon and Germanic sagas that Tolkien greatly admired.[5]

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[4] See Tolkien, 2000, pp. 88, 230, 235, 250, 288, 360; Tolkien, 2014, pp. 1–8, and compare with his illustrations of Bag End and Hobbiton, which reveal the broad impact of British vernacular architecture and the Arts and Crafts movement (Hammond and Scull, 1995, pp. 97–106; Brooke, 2017; also see Reynolds, P. (1997). 'The Hill at Hobbiton': Vernacular Architecture in the Shire. *Mallorn*, XXXV, 20–24).

[5] The Old English epic poem *Beowulf* had the strongest impact on Rohan's culture, including king Théoden's hall Meduseld in Edoras, inspired by Heorot, the Golden Hall of King Hrothgar (Tolkien, 2014, pp. 519–520, 525). Both are described and depicted as mead-halls, which were the centres of political, military, and social life of Anglo-Saxon and early Germanic peoples; long, rectangular timber-framed buildings roofed with straw or grass or wooden shingles, with a central fire-pit, smoke-hole in the roof, and stave post and lintel construction system (Lee, 2005, p. 93). See Tolkien's drawing of Beorn's house, also modelled on mead-halls (Hammond and Scull, 1995, p. 123), and reconstructions of Anglo-Saxon buildings in Yeavering or Cowdery's Down, and of Norse longhouses in Norway, Sweden, and Denmark for comparison.

In terms of architecture, the main difference between the two is reflected in their favoured building materials: the Rohirric preference for timber and the Gondorian preference for stone were closely tied up with their understandings of time and mortality, their values and beliefs, and the traditions of their forebears (Brooke, 2017, pp. 5–8). Their choice of building materials recalls a similar dichotomy between Anglo-Saxon and Roman building customs. This analogy is underlined by Tolkien's description of Minas Tirith "with its seven walls of stone so strong and old that it seemed to have been not builded but carven by giants out of the bones of the earth" (Tolkien, 2014, p. 769; Hammond and Scull, 2014, p. 514), which echoes the sentiment of an Anglo-Saxon poet who marvelled at the remains of a Roman city calling them the "work of giants" (*enta geweorc*) in the Old English poem *The Ruin*.[6] Gondor indeed translates as "land of Stone" or "stone-land" from Sindarin (Hammond and Scull, 2014, p. 347; Fimi, 2018, p. 380), and through the use of stone the Gondorians hinted at the long duration of their culture and communicated their attitudes towards the passage of time and mortality, which was an essential feature of their Númenórean lineage.

The Númenóreans were the descendants of Men who fought against Morgoth at the end of the First Age and were thus rewarded with longevity, greater wisdom, and strength surpassing that of other mortals. They were given an island raised at the beginning of the Second Age between Middle-earth and Aman, and on that island, they established the mighty kingdom of Númenor. The Númenóreans were skilled seafarers, but they were forbidden to sail to the Undying Lands in Aman to the west, which only the Valar and immortal Elves were allowed to access. Despite being granted a lifespan three times longer than the Men who remained in Middle-earth, the Númenóreans became obsessed with death and desired immortality, gradually becoming more estranged from the Valar and High Elves in Valinor. When their last king, Ar-Pharazôn, rebelled against the Valar and attempted to reach Aman, thinking that that would grant him immortality, the supreme creator Eru Ilúvatar reshaped Arda, changing it from flat into spherical form, destroying Ar-Pharazôn's fleet and sinking the island of Númenor in the process (Tolkien, 1999, pp. 309–338; 2014, pp. 1061–1064).

The faithful Númenóreans who managed to escape the destruction of Númenor, sailed to the western lands of Middle-earth, where they set up the realms of Arnor in the north and Gondor in the south, and built many mighty structures, high towers, and strong places carved out of rock and stone, such as Orthanc or the Hornburg. When Gondor was established, its capital was Osgiliath, situated between two fortress cities of Minas Ithil (Tower of the Rising Moon) and Minas Anor (Tower of the Setting Sun). Minas Ithil was taken by Sauron and subsequently by the Nazgûl, who transformed it into a place of terror known as Minas Morgul

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[6] It also brings to mind the mighty stone walls of Troy or the large 'cyclopean' walls built in Mycenaean Greece, or the fortifications of Constantinople, as mentioned later in the text.

(Tower of Sorcery), Osgiliath fell to ruin and was deserted at the time of the War of the Ring, serving only as a military outpost, while Minas Anor became the new capital and was renamed Minas Tirith (Tower of Guard/Vigilance). Many other places, including Arnor, were destroyed and abandoned by the time of Frodo's quest, leaving numerous monuments and ruins scattered across Middle-earth, like the Argonath,[7] Amon Sûl, and Amon Hen, to testify about the skill, abilities, and glory of the Númenóreans and highlight the subsequent weakening of their descendants (Tolkien, 1999, pp. 348–349; 2014, pp. 251–252).

The main influences on Tolkien's vision of Númenor and Gondor that he acknowledged were the myth of Atlantis, ancient Egypt, as well as the ancient Roman civilisation and its heritage, passed down via Byzantium and mediaeval Europe.[8] In a letter to Rhona Beare he says that "the Númenóreans of Gondor were proud, peculiar, and archaic, and […] best pictured in (say) Egyptian terms", and likens them to the ancient Egyptians for their "love of, and power to construct, the gigantic and massive" stone structures, and "their great interest in ancestry and in tombs" (Tolkien, 2000, p. 281). He goes on to remark that "the crown of Gondor (the S. Kingdom) was very tall, like that of Egypt, but with wings attached, not set straight back but at an angle" and that the Northern Kingdom of Arnor "had only a diadem", advising her to look into "the difference between the N. and S. kingdoms of Egypt" and providing the illustration of a crown clearly based on the White Crown of Upper or Southern Egypt (Fig. 1) (Tolkien, 2000, p. 281; Hammond and Scull, 2015, pp. 192–195).
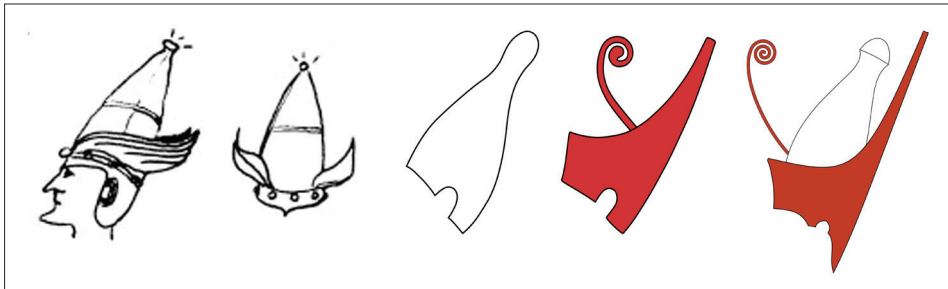

Fig. 1. Comparison of Tolkien's drawing of the crown of Gondor (first two from the left, reproduced in Tolkien, 2000, p. 281) with the White Crown of Upper Egypt, the Red Crown of Lower Egypt, and the Double Crown of unified Egypt (source: https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/File:Double_crown.svg)

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[7] Hammond and Scull note that: "These gigantic figures recall ancient Egyptian statues such as the two Colossi of Memnon, all that remains of the Mortuary Temple of Amenophis III (1417–1379 BC) on the west bank of the Nile near the Valley of the Kings" (2014, p. 347). Also, see Harrisson, 2021, pp. 333–334.

[8] For an in-depth analysis of those influences, compare: Ford, 2005; Lynch, 2018; Harrisson, 2021.

The Númenórean preoccupation with death is comparable with the fixation on the afterlife in ancient Egypt, both cultures "produced a cult of the dead" causing them to lavish "wealth and art on tombs and memorials" and pay special attention to their resting places (Tolkien, 2000, p. 155). The area where the Kings and Queens of Númenor were laid to rest is described as a shallow valley named Noirinan, the Valley of the Tombs, cut in the rock at the base of the mountain Meneltarma (Tolkien, 1998, p. 215). This imaginary location has a clear real-life analogy in the Valley of the Kings and the Valley of the Queens from Theban Necropolis, where Pharaohs and powerful nobles of the New Kingdom were buried in rock-cut tombs. Similarity between their burial customs does not end there:

> "But the fear of death grew ever darker upon them, and they delayed it by all means that they could; and they began to build great houses for their dead, while their wise men laboured unceasingly to discover if they might the secret of recalling life, or at the least of the prolonging of Men's days. Yet they achieved only the art of preserving incorrupt the dead flesh of Men, and they filled all the land with silent tombs in which the thought of death was enshrined in the darkness." (Tolkien, 1999, p. 318)

This passage indicates that their remains were treated in a manner equivalent to Egyptian mummification, which is supported by a number of Tolkien's mentions of embalming, some referring to the preservation of dead bodies, and others to a cultural stagnation and rigid resistance to change, typical of the Men of Gondor and of the High Elves who remained in Middle-earth during the Third Age (Tolkien, 2000, pp. 151, 197, 206). In *The Lord of the Rings* we learn that Gondorians inherited Númenórean "yearning for longevity, and the habit of embalming and the building of splendid tombs—their only 'hallows'" (Tolkien, 2000, p. 206), and that the embalming tradition had been maintained in Gondor for more than 3,000 years after the fall of Númenor: Denethor II, the penultimate Ruling Steward of Gondor, commands his guards to "send not for the embalmers", for there will be: "No tomb for Denethor and Faramir. […] No long slow sleep of death embalmed. We will burn like heathen kings before ever a ship sailed hither from the West" (Tolkien, 2014, pp. 844–846).

Denethor announces this in a sacred area of Minas Tirith where the Kings of Gondor, Ruling Stewards, and other important men were buried, and which was indeed called the Hallows. In the Hallows, the Houses of the Dead consisted of the House of the Kings and the House of the Stewards with "pale domes and empty halls and images of men long dead" situated along the Silent Street, Rath Dínen (Tolkien, 2014, p. 846). Interior of the House of Stewards is described as "a wide vaulted chamber" with "many rows of tables, carved of marble; and upon each table lay a sleeping form, hands folded, head pillowed upon stone" (Tolkien, 2014, p. 846). These certainly seem analogous to tomb effigies familiar

from the ancient Egyptian and the Etruscan funerary art, and even more so from the High and Late mediaeval *gisants*, but it remains inconclusive whether the sleeping forms of stewards were recumbent effigies carved in stone or simply their embalmed bodies. However, in the third film the House of the Stewards presents a crypt-like interior with black stone effigies resting upon blocks of white marble in niches (Jackson et al., 2004a, 02:21:17–02:21:45), not unlike sepulchral monuments common in European churches, and abundant in France and the UK.

When we encounter the Men of Gondor in *The Lord of the Rings*, they are said to be in a state of decline, less concerned with producing their own legacy than with veneration of their past (Brooke, 2017, p. 8). Their lingering "obsession with death" made them erect "tombs more splendid than houses of the living," with childless lords sitting "in aged halls musing on heraldry" (Tolkien, 2014, p. 694). Pippin feels this atmosphere of decline as he enters Minas Tirith, and we get the main impressions of the city through his eyes. While he admires the magnificence and permanence of architecture built in stone, he notices the sharp contrast with its silent streets, dwindling population, and deserted buildings:

> "Pippin gazed in growing wonder at the great stone city, vaster and more splendid than anything that he had dreamed of; greater and stronger than Isengard, and far more beautiful. Yet it was in truth falling year by year into decay; and already it lacked half the men that could have dwelt at ease there. In every street they passed some great house or court over whose doors and arched gates were carved many fair letters of strange and ancient shapes: names Pippin guessed of great men and kindreds that had once dwelt there; and yet now they were silent, and no footsteps rang on their wide pavements, nor voice was heard in their halls, nor any face looked out from door or empty window" (Tolkien, 2014, p. 770)

Narratives of development, decline, and renewal are recurrent in Tolkien's works, and are markedly tied to ancient civilisations' histories and sources of Classical provenance that Tolkien was well acquainted with (Pezzini, 2022). They reflect his highly critical stance towards the unwillingness to face change and inability to adapt, as well as towards those who seek control and supremacy over others, and over nature and its laws. Along with the ancient Egyptian culture, which remained impressively consistent, durable, and largely unchanged for more than three millennia, but eventually collapsed, Númenor parallels ancient Greece and Rome and their growth and decline, particularly exemplified by Athens in the 5th century BC and the Roman Empire, whose lust for imperial power and wealth ultimately led to their failing, followed by centuries-long deterioration of their great achievements, which have nonetheless survived in cultural memory as paradigms of brilliance and success (Clare, 2021, pp. 46–56). In a similar vein, Númenórean heritage is passed down and perpetuated through the faded Byzantine grandeur of Gondor: "Gondor rises to a peak of

power, almost reflecting Númenor, and then fades slowly to decayed Middle Age, a kind of proud, venerable, but increasingly impotent Byzantium" (Tolkien, 2000, p. 157). This comparison is further examined, as we move on from the Númenórean cult of the dead maintained in Gondor, and its historic counterparts, and delve deeper into the resonances of Roman and Byzantine origin.

Architecture of Minas Tirith

Tolkien scholars have stressed the similarity between the division and history of the Númenórean realms in exile, and the split and fate of the late Roman Empire with its Western and Eastern subdivision (Lynch, 2018, pp. 41–42). Gondor outlived Arnor like Byzantium endured for a millennium after the collapse of the Western Empire, although Charlemagne established a kind of successor to the Western Empire which lasted as the Holy Roman Empire until 1806 (Hammond and Scull, 2014, p. 689). Tolkien himself drew an analogy between the Holy Roman Empire and the Reunited Kingdom of Arnor and Gondor (restored by Aragorn after the War of the Ring), by saying that "the tale ends in what is far more like the re-establishment of an effective Holy Roman Empire with its seat in Rome" (Tolkien, 2000, p. 376). The comparison of Gondor with the legacy of the Roman Empire equally extends to the geography of Middle-earth and the architectural setting of Minas Tirith.

Referring to the creation of *The Lord of the Rings*, Tolkien states in one of his letters that he "wisely started with a map and made the story fit (generally with meticulous care for distances)" (Tolkien, 2000, p. 177). This meticulous care is aptly demonstrated by a map of Middle-earth previously owned by a renowned artist and book illustrator Pauline Baynes, now a part of the largest collection of Tolkien's manuscripts, papers, drawings, letters, and other materials housed at the Bodleian Libraries in Oxford. The map was annotated by both Tolkien and Baynes, with Tolkien providing more detailed explanations of his imaginary continent's topography, to give the artist an idea of the climate, fauna, and flora for certain locations on a map she produced in 1969 (Helen, 2015a). Among his instructions, notable are those in the bottom-left corner of the map comparing his fictional places with real-life locations: "Hobbiton is assumed to be approx. at latitude of Oxford […] Minas Tirith is about a latitude of Ravenna (but is 900 miles east of Hobbiton more near Belgrade). Bottom of the map (400 miles) is about the latitude of Jerusalem. Umbar & City of Corsairs—about that of Cyprus." (Helen, 2015b). Similarly, he explains in a letter to Charlotte and Denis Plimmer in 1967 that "The action of the story takes place in the North-west of 'Middle-earth', equivalent in latitude to the coastlands of Europe and the north shores of the Mediterranean[.]" and adds that Hobbiton and Rivendell are intended to be at about the latitude of Oxford,

while "Minas Tirith, 600 miles south, is at about the latitude of Florence. The Mouths of Anduin and the ancient city of Pelargir are at about the latitude of ancient Troy" (Tolkien, 2000, p. 376).

Clearly, in Tolkien's imagination Gondor was to a great extent equated with the Italian peninsula, as confirmed on his first visit to Italy in 1955, when he found Venice "incredibly, elvishly lovely—to me like a dream of Old Gondor, or Pelargir of the Númenórean ships, before the return of the Shadow" (from his travel diary, quoted in: Scull and Hammond, 2017a, pp. 580–581). Prior to the trip, he writes to Jennifer Brookes-Smith that he is off on "holiday to 'Gondor … Pelargir and Lossarnach', i.e., 'Italy: Venice and Assisi'" (Scull and Hammond, 2017b, p. 487), and upon return, to Richard Jeffery, that he "was away, in Gondor (sc. Venice), as a change from the North Kingdom" (Tolkien, 2000, p. 223).[9]

These connections established in Tolkien's notes and letters are not simply about pointing out certain geographic similarities, they also implicitly draw on various cultural meanings we assign to real-life places and specific spatial categories and relations, which is even more prominent when fictional places and built structures are visualised.

In the book we are first introduced to Gondor's state and fate during the Council of Elrond, but the earliest visual reference to Minas Tirith comes from Frodo's vision at Amon Hen, when it is described as "beautiful: white-walled, many-towered, proud and fair upon its mountain-seat; its battlements glittered with steel, and its turrets were bright with many banners" (Tolkien, 2014, p. 411). In the films, the White City is first glimpsed in *The Fellowship of the Ring* when Gandalf visits its library (Jackson et al., 2002a, 00:33:00–00:33:40); but in both the book and the films its appearance is only fully revealed in *The Return of the King* when Pippin and Gandalf approach "the great stone city".

The White City was built on seven levels which delved into the hill, with "all the circles of the City save the first" divided in two by the out-thrust bulk of Mount Mindolluin, "its edge sharp as a ship-keel", on top of which was the Citadel with the High Court and the glimmering White Tower of Ecthelion, "tall and fair and shapely" (Tolkien, 2014, p. 769). Every level was encircled by a wall, each wall had its own gate, but "the gates were not set in a line", the Great Gate was facing east, lined up with the pier of mountain rock, while the next gate "faced half south, and the third half north, and so to and from upwards" (Tolkien, 2014, p. 770).[10] The first wall, labelled "Othram or City Wall" in one

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[9] Tolkien spent almost two weeks visiting Venice and Assisi with his daughter Priscilla in late July and early August 1955, and visited Venice for the second time while on a cruise with his wife Edith in September 1966, when went ashore to attend mass in St Mark's Basilica (Scull and Hammond, 2017a, pp. 580–582).

[10] There are numerous examples of Tolkien's use of number seven within the legendarium. Similar to Minas Tirith, the seven-named city of Gondolin, built on a hill, had numerous levels and walls of white stone, with the King's palace and a fountain on its topmost level.

of Tolkien's sketches, "was of great height and marvellous thickness, […] and its outward face was like to the Tower of Orthanc, hard and dark and smooth", while all other walls, towers, and buildings were made of white stone (Tolkien, 2014, p. 842; Hammond and Scull, 2015, p. 140).

In their magnificence and strength, the walls of Minas Tirith are comparable to numerous mythical or real-life defences, the frequently mentioned ones are: the unbreachable walls of Troy as immortalised by Homer, Dante's seven walls and seven gates in Limbo, the seven-gated wall of ancient Greek Thebes and other 'cyclopean' walls of Mycenaean Greece, or the stone and brick fortifications of Constantinople which "were perhaps the strongest ever built and withstood many assaults" (Hammond and Scull, 2014, p. 570; Lynch, 2018, p. 46; Garth, 2020, pp. 150–152; Williams, 2021b, p. 24; Harrisson, 2021, pp. 335–336).[11] Likewise, the siege of Gondor has been correlated to the siege of Constantinople, whose "commanding position on the Bosporus" is not dissimilar to the position of Gondor's capital on the river Anduin, and whose endurance till 1453 is matching the resistance put up by "the half-ruinous Byzantine City of Minas Tirith" against Sauron's forces (Hammond and Scull, 2014, p. 747).

The basic layout of seven levels of Minas Tirith, thoroughly developed in Tolkien's descriptions and drawings (Hammond and Scull, 2015, pp. 140–148), is beautifully rendered in Alan Lee's illustrations, which show the jutting rock of Mount Mindolluin splitting the White City in half, resembling a mountainous ship's prow, which is a deliberate symbolic reminder of the importance of ships and sailing in the Númenórean culture. Following Lee's designs, said layout is faithfully reproduced in the films (Jackson et al., 2004a, 00:42:27–00:42:41), and it is widely acknowledged that the additional inspiration for its overall look came from Mont-Saint-Michel in France and St. Michael's Mount in Cornwall (Jackson et al., 2004b, 00:17:53–00:18:17). However, there are certain departures from Tolkien's vision in the adaptations, such as that the originally dark city wall Othram is intentionally depicted as white (Russell, 2004, p. 25; Destler, 2014) (Fig. 2).

In order to reach it, one would have to pass through its seven gates, The rich symbolism of numbers in Tolkien's works is examined in: Kreuzer, C. (2008). Numbers in Tolkien. In: S. Wells (ed.), *The Ring Goes Ever On. Proceedings of the Tolkien 2005 Conference: 50 Years of The Lord of the Rings, Vol. 2* (325–338). Coventry, England: The Tolkien Society. For a more comprehensive analysis of number symbolism throughout history, see Hopper, V.F. (2000). *Medieval number symbolism: its sources, meaning, and influence on thought and expression*. Mineola, New York: Dover Publications. Available at: https://archive.org/details/medievalnumbersy0000hopp; and Butler, N. (1970). *Number symbolism*. New York: Barnes & Noble. Available at: https://archive.org/details/numbersymbolism0000butl_b1t9.

[11] For further Gondor-Byzantium analogies, see Librán–Moreno, M. (2011). "Byzantium, New Rome!" Goths, Langobards, and Byzantium in *The Lord of the Rings*. In: J. Fisher (Ed.), *Tolkien and the Study of His Sources: Critical Essays* (84–115). Jefferson, North Carolina–London: McFarland & Company, Inc., Publishers.
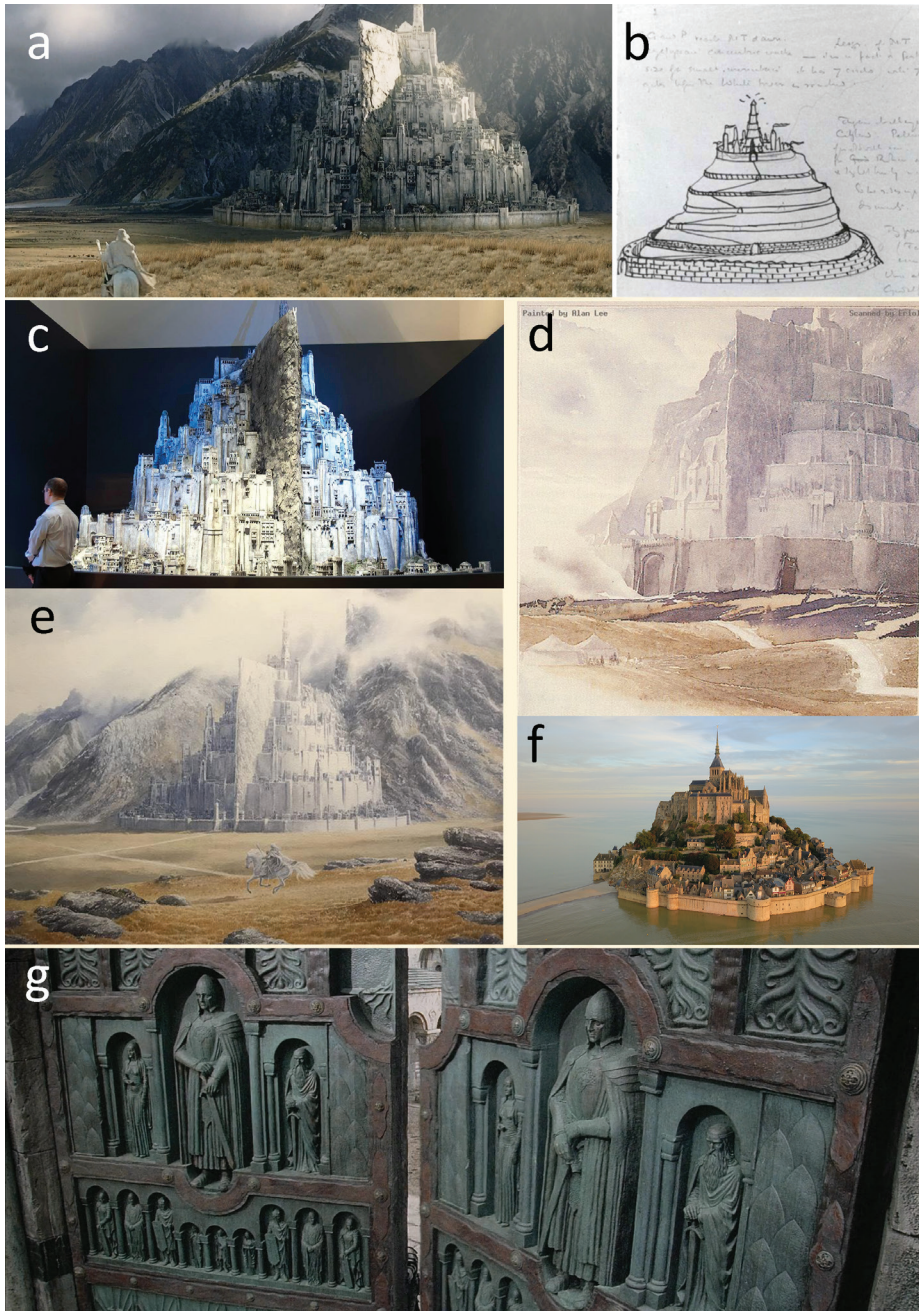
Fig. 2. a) Screenshot of Minas Tirith in *The Return of the King*; b) Tolkien's drawing of Minas Tirith; c) Model of Minas Tirith used for filming the aerial views of the city; d) and e) Alan Lee's illustrations; f) Mont–Saint–Michel in France; g) Screenshot of the Great Gate
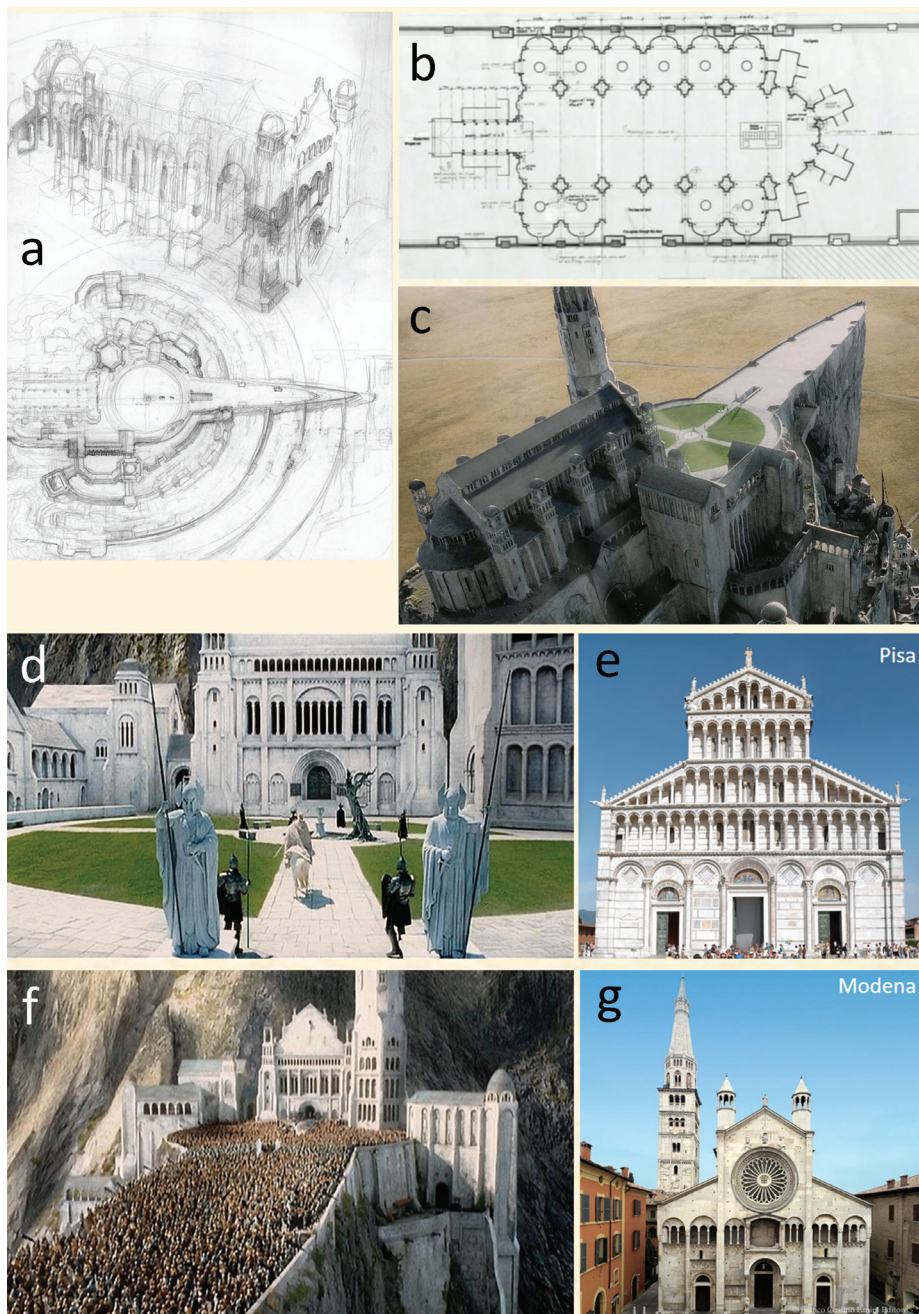
Fig. 3. a) Alan Lee's sketches of the Hall of the Kings in Minas Tirith;
c) d) and f) Screenshots of the topmost level of Minas Tirith showing
the Hall of the Kings' façade and the base of the Tower of Ecthelion;
e) and g) Cathedrals of Pisa and Modena

Mostly based on Alan Lee's designs, the overall architecture of Minas Tirith in the films was largely inspired by Italian architecture (Jackson et al., 2004b, 00:17:30–00:17:54). The city footage reveals numerous alleys, narrow streets, squares, marketplaces, shops, public buildings, and houses (Jackson et al., 2004a, 00:42:27–00:43:41; 01:13:31–01:14:11), all akin to places and structures one may find in the old town centres of Pisa, Siena, Florence, Venice, or Ravenna, which corresponds with repeated Tolkien's comparisons of Gondorian locations and Northern Italian cities. The Great Gate of Minas Tirith, said to have the iron doors and posts of steel in the book, has impressive wooden doors in the film, ornamented with bronze figures, and modelled after similar richly decorated portals of Romanesque, Gothic, and Renaissance religious buildings (Fig. 2.g). The Gate opens into a wide court dominated by a large equestrian statue, identical to those erected to commemorate successful military leaders in ancient Rome or early Renaissance Italy, as still visible in quite a few Italian cities (Jackson et al., 2004a, 01:13:30–01:13:55; Jackson et al., 2004b, 00:21:00–00:22:55).

As we arrive to the Citadel, the topmost seventh-walled circle of the City, we encounter the Great Hall of the Kings, described in the book as a cool, echoing stone hall situated at the base of the gleaming Tower of Ecthelion (Tolkien, 2014, p. 771). In the films, the Hall is a separate building adjacent to the Tower (Jackson et al., 2004a, 00:43:26–00:43:52). Such positioning of the Tower and the façade of the Hall are reminiscent of Italian Romanesque basilicas, especially of the Pisa Cathedral (Fig. 3).

Describing the Hall of the Kings' interior, Tolkien portrays a "long solemn hall" with white-gleaming floor "of polished stone, inset with flowing traceries of many colours", "lit by deep windows in the wide aisles at either side, beyond the rows of tall pillars" carved in black marble with intricate capitals. Between the pillars "there stood a silent company of tall images graven in cold stone", underneath the wide vaulting which "gleamed with dull gold" (Tolkien, 2014, p. 772). Following this account, Alan Lee devised the Hall as a basilica, historically a long rectangular building divided into three or more aisles by pillars or columns, used for public meetings and administration of justice in ancient Rome, and a typical Christian edifice from the 4th century onwards. When Pippin and Gandalf enter the throne room to meet Denethor, we see a "long solemn hall" with white walls and an arcade of black pillars and arches built in alternation of black and white stone, with mighty kings' statues lining the aisles (Fig. 4).

As Judy Ann Ford notes, the Great Hall's interior is described by Tolkien "as though it were a church typical of the Byzantine influenced architecture of Ravenna in the fifth and sixth centuries, with domed ceilings decorated with mosaic tiling" (2005, pp. 60–61). However, its on-screen version shows only occasional traces of gold on the pillars' bases and capitals, and a small portion of the rich golden mosaic ceiling above the throne, with white and black marble dominating the interior (Jackson et al., 2004a, 00:44:19–00:48:11,

Fig. 4. a–d) Screenshots of the Hall of the Kings' interior;
e–g) Charlemagne's Throne in the Palatine Chapel in Aachen

01:15:10–01:16:32; Lee, 2005, p. 140). The alteration of dark and light stone in basilicas is not rare, and there are many examples which could have served as an inspiration for film-makers. The use of alternating courses of dark and white stone in masonry goes back to the Romans, it remained popular in Byzantium, but found the largest use in Islamic architecture, where the technique was named *ablaq*. During the Crusades it was introduced into Italian Romanesque architecture, as observable in the cathedrals of Pisa or Siena.

However, as Alan Lee acknowledges, the major influence on the look of black and white *voussoirs* in the arches of the King's Hall was not a Romanesque Basilica, but the Palatine Chapel of Charlemagne in Aachen (Jackson et al., 2004b, 00:31:48–00:32:06) (Fig. 4). In turn, the Palatine Chapel was modelled on the Early Byzantine church of San Vitale in Ravenna, whose polychrome Proconnesian marble revetment on the arches has an effect similar to the *ablaq* technique of alternating courses of dark and light stone. The architecture of the Palatine Chapel in Aachen was also influenced by *Chrysotriklinos*, the throne room in the Great Palace in Constantinople, an utmost embodiment of Byzantine political ideology (Praet, 2022, p. 243). All three places are therefore highly symbolic in terms of Early Mediaeval royal ideology, and both San Vitale in Ravenna and the Palatine Chapel in Aachen are related to great rulers (Justinian I and Charlemagne respectively) whose reigns signalled ambitions of *renovatio imperii*, or "restoration of the Roman Empire." In the context of Tolkien's narrative, hope that the people of Gondor have for the return of the king "echoes the lingering hope of medieval Europeans that the Roman Empire could be restored" (Ford, 2005, pp. 54, 70; Jackson et al., 2004a, 00:46:39–00:49:11).

The throne reserved solely for the King of Gondor, described in the text as "a high throne under a canopy of marble shaped like a crowned helm" situated on "a dais of many steps" but empty, was accompanied by "a stone chair, black and unadorned" for the Steward of Gondor (Tolkien, 2014, p. 772). Raf Praet compares the empty King's throne and the Steward's seat with the Christian iconographic motive of the *hetoimasia*, and its architectural expression in the *Chrysotriklinos*, where the Byzantine Emperor posed himself as the main representative of Christ on earth, ruling in his absence and awaiting his return. Praet concludes that Tolkien used the elements of both, although obscured by additional historical allusions, to produce a multi-layered image of rulership which represents a "literary emanation of his strongly rooted Catholic beliefs in an ultimate restoration of a fallen world" (2022, pp. 233–248). The King's throne in the film intentionally evokes the Royal Throne of Aachen, one of the most iconic and significant mediaeval royal seats preserved, which may be interpreted as the point of intersection of all the symbolic meanings and royal ambitions of the restoration of the Roman Empire/Gondor and preservation of their inheritance (Jackson et al., 2004a, 00:44:19–00:48:11).

Conclusion

While it is certain that *The Lord of the Rings* should not be read as an allegory, Tolkien did conceive the history of Arda as an imaginary history of our own world. He used his vast knowledge of history, languages, and myths as a foundation for relatable and convincing stories, in which many elements echo the real world's events, traditions, legends, and artefacts, although substantially modified by the work of his imagination. In both Tolkien's books and their film adaptations, various values and beliefs of the peoples of Middle-earth are encapsulated in their material culture, hence their views of time and mortality are reflected through their art, architecture, building techniques, and materials they use.

In the process of defining collective and individual identities of Middle-earth's inhabitants, the designers who worked on the films followed Tolkien's vision and tapped into a vast repository of real-world art and architecture for inspiration, drawing on British vernacular and folk art for Hobbiton; on Celtic, Anglo-Saxon, and Norse art for Rohan; on Classical, Byzantine, and Romanesque influences for Gondor; and Art Nouveau and Art Deco for Elven and Dwarven aesthetics respectively. In most of these cultures, collective identities expressed through architecture are also largely tied to individual rulers and their residences, which are portrayed as representative of the whole culture, e.g., Meduseld in Edoras or the Hall of the Kings in Minas Tirith, both symbolising kingship and its history and the values and traditions both cultures tend to uphold.

As demonstrated in this paper, the legacy of ancient and mediaeval Mediterranean civilisations impacted the vision of the Gondorian culture, most of it brimming with royal, religious, and cultural symbolism, which is explicitly or implicitly familiar to Western audiences. Due to the more immediate nature of film as a visual medium, the connotations of many built environments from Peter Jackson's adaptations more openly evoke the symbolism and conventionally acknowledged meanings of the heritage from which they emerge, which is why Jackson's oeuvre is criticised by some as possessing a Western-leaning bias. However, considering the initial inspiration embedded in Tolkien's writings, it is justified to say that the film-makers succeeded in being faithful to Tolkien's vision by relying on the same real-world influences he himself acknowledged.

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Резиме

Рад испитује утицаје медитеранске баштине на обликовање културе Гондора, а посебно на изглед његовог главног града Минас Тирита, онако како га је описао Џ. Р. Р. Толкин и како је приказан у филмским адаптацијама Питера Џексона. Поређењем Нуменора и Гондора са њима сличним античким и средњовековним цивилизацијама, и анализом извора из историје уметности, који су инспирисали дизајн имагинарног архитектонског окружења Минас Тирита, рад указује на међусобно преплитање и пренос значења и културних конотација са употребљене баштине на фикционална места и културе.

Рад почиње истицањем везе између архитектуре и идентитета и употребе пејзажа и архитектуре као културних означитеља у процесу дефинисања имагинарних култура у фикционалним световима попут Толкинове Арде. Указује се на то у којој мери су се Толкин и уметници који су радили на Џексоновим адаптацијама *Господара прстенова* и *Хобита* инспирисали стварним историјским културама, догађајима и наслеђем, и користили архитектуру као средство путем кога читаоцима и гледаоцима пружају кључне информације о главним протагонистима и различитим расама и народима који настањују Средњу земљу. Описује се Толкинов начин рада у коме поред текстуалних описа важно место имају мапе и цртежи, неизоставни за разумевање и визуелизовање многих локација из његовог легендаријума.

У одељку *Нуменорејанско наслеђе и реликвије смрти* говори се о цивилизацији Нуменора и њиховом односу према сопственој пролазности, који је резултирао развојем култа мртвих налик оном који је постојао у старом Египту. У домену архитектуре то је водило опредељењу за камен као доминантни грађевински материјал, које је блиско повезано са њиховим вредностима и веровањима, разумевањем времена и смртности. Култ мртвих и опсесију постизањем бесмртности неговали су и потомци Нуменорејаца у Гондору и то је водило стагнацији према којој Толкин заузима критички став, говорећи о њиховој способности да подижу величанствене структуре од камена и томе супротстављеној опадајућој популацији која их све мање користи, и која је због окренутости традицији и прошлости занемарила сопствену садашњост и будућност. Из Толкинових дела и писама, као и из бројних научних студија о изворима који су га инспирисали, ишчитавају се параллеле са историјом Старог Египта, античке Грчке, Рима и Византије, чији су развој и судбина уобличени у парадигматске наративе успона, опадања и пропасти великих цивилизација.

У другом одељку, насловљеном *Архитектура Минас Тирита*, подробније се анализира Толкинова визија престонице Гондора, поређења која је он сам правио

са простором Медитерана и посебно са Италијом, да би се она повезала начином на који је Минас Тирит представљен на илустрацијама Алана Лија и у филмским адаптацијама Питера Џексона, где приказ архитектуре града, уличица, тргова и пијаца, као и изглед Ехтелионове куле и екстеријера и ентеријера Дворане краљева, имају пандане у италијанским градовима попут Венеције, Фиренце, Равене и Пизе. Велика грађевина базиликалног типа, Дворана краљева, добар је пример архитектонске симболике која почива на позноримским, византијским, каролиншким и романичким утицајима. У њој су препознатљиви одјеци сред-њовековних тежњи и наде у обнову Римског царства, отелотворени у иконичним грађевинама попут Палатинске капеле Карла Великог у Ахену, која је пресудно утицала на изглед унутрашњости Дворане и упражњеног престола краља Гондора.

Кључне речи: Џ. Р. Р. Толкин; *Господар прстенова*; Нуменор; Гондор; Минас Тирит; архитектура као културни означитељ; употреба баштине.