

# J.R.R. TOLKIEN AND JORDANES. SOME RESEMBLANCES IN SPIRITUAL OUTLOOK\*

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## Abstract

An analysis of three instances of the influence exerted by Jordanes on J.R.R. Tolkien's legendarium: (a) the notion that cultural and political decay may be caused by being exiled from a formerly paradisiacal situation; (b) the notion that winning a war against Evil may become an unwanted cause of cultural devolution; (c) the construction of a pseudo-history by establishing genetic and cultural links with a mythical, highly evolved people from the legendary past.

**Keywords:** Tolkien, Jordanes, *The Lord of the Rings*, sources.

## Resumen

Estudio de tres casos concretos del influjo de Jordanes sobre el legendarium de J.R.R. Tolkien: (a) la idea de que la decadencia cultural y política puede deberse al exilio de una antigua situación paradisiaca; (b) el concepto de que ganar una guerra contra el mal puede traer aparejada una involución cultural; (c) la creación de una pseudo-historia mediante la asociación con un pueblo mítico y muy adelantado del pasado legendario.

**Palabras clave:** Tolkien, Jordanes, *El Señor de los anillos*, fuentes.

The aim of this note is to analyse three instances of the influence exerted by the works of the late ancient historian Jordanes on the spiritual landscape of J.R.R. Tolkien's legendarium.<sup>1</sup> Those instances are the following: (a)

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<sup>1</sup> More extensive parallels in Librán 2011: 84-115. Tolkien's works are cited in accordance with the guidelines for abbreviations established by the journal *Tolkien Studies: Letters: The Letters of J.R.R. Tolkien*. Ed. Humphrey Carpenter, with the assistance of Christopher Tolkien. London: George Allen & Unwin, 1981. *Lost*

cultural and political decay caused by being exiled from a formerly paradisiacal situation; (b) winning a war against Evil as the unwanted cause of cultural devolution; (c) the construction of a pseudo-history by establishing genetic and cultural links with a mythical, highly evolved people from the legendary past.

Since his early youth, Tolkien was extremely fascinated with the Gothic language and the tragic history of those who spoke it.<sup>2</sup> One of the sources of inspiration for his literary creations was the national history of the Goths written by Jordanes,<sup>3</sup> as Tolkien's use of historical names of Gothic origin (some of them attested in Jordanes) proves. Among those Gothic names that may be found in Tolkien, we may cite Vidumavi (wife of King Valacar), Vidugavia (father of Vidumavi and king of the Northmen in Rhovanion), Vinitharya (King Eldacar's mother-name),<sup>4</sup> Marhari (lord of Rhovanion and descendant of King Vidugavia), Marhwini (son of Marhari) and Forthwini (son of Marhwini, *UT* 291).<sup>5</sup> To those Mannish names we may add a few discarded hobbit names: Alaric, Roderic, Theodoric, Athanaric [*Peoples* 99; cf. *RK*, Appendix F, II, p. 1109: "I have turned them (sc. the names of old families of Fallohide origin)] into old names, largely of Frankish and Gothic origin, that are still used by us or are met in our histories".

Jordanes (fl. A.D. 550), one of the so-called "narrators of barbarian history", was a Greek- and Latin-speaking German of Gothic descent who served as secretary to the Amali prince Gunthigis Baza (lord. *Get.* 265) in

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*Road: The Lost Road and Other Writings*. Ed. Christopher Tolkien. London: Unwin Hyman, 1987. *Lost Tales II: The Book of Lost Tales, Part Two*. Ed. Christopher Tolkien. London: George Allen & Unwin, 1984. *Peoples: The Peoples of Middle-earth*. Ed. Christopher Tolkien. London: HarperCollins, 1996. *RK: The Return of the King*. London: George Allen & Unwin, 1955. *Sauron: Sauron Defeated*. Ed. Christopher Tolkien. London: HarperCollins, 1992. *UT: Unfinished Tales of Númenor and Middle-Earth*. Ed. Christopher Tolkien. George Allen & Unwin, London, 1980. *OFS: On Fairy-Stories*, in J.R.R. Tolkien, *The Monsters and the Critics and Other Essays*. London: HarperCollins, 1997.

<sup>2</sup> E.g. *Letters* 357. See also Shippey 2003: 14-19, 127, 295-296; Straubhaar 2004: 108-109.

<sup>3</sup> On Jordanes' value as a source for Tolkien see Ch. Tolkien in *Lost Road* 53-54; Shippey 2003: 350.

<sup>4</sup> See *RK*, Appendix A, iv, 1021-1022.

<sup>5</sup> "It is an interesting fact, not referred to I believe in any of my father's writing, that the names of the early kings and princes of the Northmen and the Éothéod are Gothic in form" (Ch. Tolkien in *UT* 311 n.6). See also Honegger 2011:123-124.

Moesia. While he was living in Constantinople, in A.D. 511 he was asked by a certain Vigilus to write a history of the sufferings of the Roman world (*Rom.* 2). While he was working on that piece, he was approached by a certain friend called Castalius for an abbreviated version of Cassiodorus' *History of the Goths*, which he added to *De summa temporum vel origine actibusque gentis Romanorum* (*Rom.* 4), gave the title *De origine actibusque Getarum* and dedicated to Vigilus in A.D. 552. *De summa temporum vel origine actibusque gentis Romanorum* (*Rom.*) deals with the history of Rome from its foundation down to Jordanes' times, whereas *De origine actibusque Getarum* (*Get.*) is the only extant classical work dealing with the early national history of the Goths (Bjornlie 2013: 109-112). Jordanes' perspective in recording the history of the Goths is primarily that of a subject of the Byzantine Empire. Although he was invested in the belief of Constantinople as the true heir and continuator of the Roman Empire, he bore witness to the feeling that the Imperium had decayed from its original splendour (O'Donnell 1982: 224-225; Goffert 1988: 46, 53-54):

What you want to know is the history of the calamities of this world here below from beginning right down to the present. You add that you would also be glad if I could summarize from my ancient sources how the Roman empire began, how it grew, how it subjected virtually the whole world to its dominion, and how it continues to hang on to its hegemony (at least in pretense) even now (*Rom.* 2).<sup>6</sup>

Jordanes' conviction of Byzantium's present decline from the height of its glory might be compared with Tolkien's assessment of the last stages of the historical degeneration of Gondor:

In the south 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 (*Letters* 157).

Jordanes saw in the Roman Empire the embodiment of the fourth and last stage of the Ages of the World before the end of times (*Rom.* 3-4), a

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<sup>6</sup> *Vis enim praesentis mundi erumnas cognoscere aut quando coepit vel quid ad nos usque perpressus est, edoceri. addes praeterea, ut tibi, quomodo Romana res publica coepit et tenuit totumque pene mundum subegit et hactenus vel imaginariae teneat, ex dictis majorum flosculos carpens breviter referam.* All English translations of Jordanes are by J.J. O'Donnell.

notion perfectly well known to Christian writers thanks to the Vision of the Four Kingdoms contained in the biblical book of Daniel (7). Jordanes had written a *Historia Romana* from the time of Romulus down to Justinian I as an indispensable introductory first part to his *History of the Goths*, and he intended to set the chronological stage for this final empire by similarly unfolding the ages of the world from the Creation down to the advent of Augustus (Goffert 1988: 47). Jordanes' biblical notion of the Ages of the World, and his portrayal of the Roman Empire as ushering in the last of them, call to mind the pattern of Tolkien's own arrangement of his legendarium and his concept of the Four Ages of Arda (*RK*, Appendix B, 1057-1072), described over the course of the *Silmarillion* and the *Lord of the Rings* as a series of endless battles of Elves and Men against Evil incarnate that take place from the First and Second Ages down to the times of the War of the Ring itself, at the end of the Third Age.<sup>7</sup> In the *Historia Romana* Jordanes explains in succession the providential ordinance of earthly rule since Creation, the tragedy of the Roman Empire as the last Power, which has fallen from a paradise of effortless might to the common condition of humanity, and finally the spectacle of a recent victory against a staggering assault by many barbarians (Goffert 1988: 107). Such an arrangement of the historical material corresponds quite well to the sequence of events included by Tolkien in the 'historical' narratives of the *Silmarillion* and the *Lord of the Rings*: that is, the description of the creation of Arda and the apparition of the angelic Valar into History, the marring of Arda and the Fall of Men and Elves, the long, protracted, bitter fight of Elves and Men against Evil during three Ages of the World, and their recent victory against Sauron in the War of the Ring (*RK*, Appendix B, 1057-1071).

Jordanes' *History of the Goths* ends on a happy note, with the hopeful birth of a child that would unite Roman and Gothic blood in his person. After the defeat and death of her husband King Vitiges, the Gothic princess Mathasuentha was taken to Constantinople with her infant son Atalaric and the Gothic treasury; she was then married to the patrician Germanus Justinus (550 A. D.), a kinsman of Emperor Justinian I (*Iord. Get.* 42.251). Compare with Gilraen's flight to take refuge in Elrond's house with her two-year-old son Aragorn after the early and unexpected death of her husband Arathorn, the Chieftain of the Dúnedain, and Elrond's keeping of the royal heirlooms of Arnor at Imladris (*RK*, Appendix A, I, v, 1032-1033).

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<sup>7</sup> For a more in-depth analysis of Tolkien's notion of evil see e.g. Wood 2007.

Mathasuentha and Germanus had a posthumous child, Germanus Postumus, who united in his person the royal lines of the Amals and the Anicii and was regarded as the hope of both families (*Mathesuentham vero iugalem eius fratri suo Germano patricio coniunxit imperator. de quibus post humatum patris Germani natus est filius idem Germanus. in quo coniuncta Aniciorum genus cum Amala stirpe spem adhuc utriusque generi domino praestante promittit*, Iord. *Get.* 42.314) (Goffert 1988: 27).<sup>8</sup> Jordanes' train of thought matches fairly well Tolkien's description of Aragorn's birth as the hope of the Dúnedain:

If these two [sc. Gilraen and Arathorn] wed now, hope may be born for our people; but if they delay, it will not come while this age lasts... He [sc. Aragorn] was called Estel, that is, Hope (*RK*, Appendix A, I, v, 1032).

Jordanes may have hoped for the child's succession to the throne of the Eastern Empire, and the final reconciliation of Goths and Romans in the person of a Gotho-Roman emperor, but this younger Germanus failed of his promise, and the consequence was, that the history of Rome as the last kingdom from the Vision of Daniel will continue to decay amid pains and hardship till the end of the world (Goffert 1988: 48).<sup>9</sup> In accordance with Augustinian theology of history (O'Donnell 1982: 227), in which the notion that all earthly civilizations necessarily have an expiration date is intimately interlaced with the theme of mankind's supernatural destiny beyond the World,<sup>10</sup> the tenor of Jordanes' account of the Roman empire is to emphasise the *clades* ("misfortunes") and *casus* ("changes of fortunes") of this history of the world (as a consequence of the history of Rome) for the period up to the Byzantine-Gothic war (AD 535-553) (Schmidt 2005: 917):

These are the evils that have befallen the Roman empire, except of course the daily harassment of the Bulgars, Antae, and Slavs -- if you want to know about these, turn your unwearying gaze to the annals and consular chronicles and you will find the empire of our day fully worthy of tragedy.

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<sup>8</sup> "The tiny infant in whose veins run the blood of the most glorious of the Gothic families and the best-known of the First Families of Rome is presented, rather pathetically, to our consideration as a sign of hope for the future", O'Donnell 1982: 231-232.

<sup>9</sup> Compare with Madsen 2004: 41: "All of Middle-earth is in a state of devolution, a long decline from Elder Days to after-days".

<sup>10</sup> Marrou 1960: 10-11.

By now you should know how the Roman empire began, how it grew, how it subjected the whole world to its sway, and how it lost the world again under inept leadership. We have told this briefly to the best of our ability, so that the patient reader may understand them by reading us (*Rom.* 388).<sup>11</sup>

Jordanes' utterly pessimistic outlook may be compared to Tolkien's thoughts on the unstoppable devolution of the Reunited Kingdom after the high hopes placed on Eldarion, the child of the last and final union of both branches of the Half-elves, that of Aragorn and Arwen.<sup>12</sup> Tolkien insisted on this notion often:

He [sc. Aragorn] wedded Arwen Undómiel, daughter of Elrond, brother of Elros first King of Númenor, and so restored the majesty and high lineage of the royal house,<sup>13</sup> but their life-span was not restored and continued to wane until it became as that of other men (*Peoples* 202).

Of Eldarion son of Elessar it was foretold that he should rule a great realm, and that it should endure for a hundred generations of Men after him... and that from him should come the kings of many realms in long days after. But if this foretelling spoke truly, none now can say, for Gondor and Arnor are not more; and even the chronicles of the House of Elessar and all their deeds and glory are lost (*Peoples* 245).

A story placed about 100 years after the Downfall [of Sauron]... proved both sinister and depressing. Since we are dealing with Men it is inevitable that we should be concerned with the most regrettable feature of their nature: their quick satiety with good. So that the people of Gondor... would become discontented and restless- while the dynasts descended from Aragorn would become just kings and governors –like Denethor or worse (*Letters* 344).

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<sup>11</sup> *Hi sunt casus Romanæ Rei Publicæ præter instantiam cottidianam Bulgarum, Antium et Sclavinorum. Quæ si quis scire cupit, annales consulumque seriem revolvat sine fastidio, reperietque dignam nostri temporis Rem Publicam tragædiæ. Scietque unde orta, quomodo aucta, qualiterve sibi cunctas terras subdiderit, et quomodo iterum eas ab ignaris rectoribus amiserit. Quod et nos pro captu ingenii breviter tetigimus, quatenus diligens lector latius ista legendo cognoscat..*

<sup>12</sup> Madsen 2004: 42: "These two restore the original glories only for a little while, before the world is altered".

<sup>13</sup> *Letters* 160: "The return in majesty of the true King, to take over the Dominion of Men, inheriting all that can be transmitted of Elfdom in his high marriage with Arwen daughter of Elrond, as well as the lineal royalty of Númenor".

Jordanes was not fooled by Justinian's propaganda about *renovatio imperii* and his pretensions to world-wide dominance, being well aware that the plight of Constantinople was very grim (O'Donnell 1982: 224-225). The fruitless and short-lived happy ending of Jordanes' history is very similar to Tolkien's heavily elegiac tone at the end of *The Lord of the Rings* and its hints about the decay of the Reunited Kingdom after all the hope the birth of Eldarion, the son of Aragorn and Arwen, engendered: victories prove either fruitless or bitter, and History within this world is conceived of as nothing but "the long defeat" (Flieger 1983: 28; Shippey 2003: 155-156, 300). The pessimistic expectation of the unavoidable defeat that awaits those within the Circles of the World at the core of *The Lord of the Rings*<sup>14</sup> is perfectly exemplified by Arwen's sad fate. In the end, despite the happiness Arwen found in her marriage to Aragorn and in the birth of Eldarion and their daughters, all she gained in exchange for the loss of her Elven deathlessness was lost, and with her sad passing the days of old come to an end and are forgotten (*RK*, Appendix A, I, v, 1038) (Shippey 2003: 155-1556).

In Jordanes, the course of imperial Roman history is reminiscent of Adam's, and mankind's, tragedy: the expulsion and banishment from paradise (Goffert 1988: 55). This theme that runs through Jordanes' history corresponds to Tolkien's dim view of the progress of human history in *Letters* 110:

Certainly there was an Eden on this very unhappy world. We all long for it, and we are constantly glimpsing it: our whole nature at its best and least corrupted... is still soaked with the sense of 'exile'... As far as we can go back the nobler part of the human mind is filled with the thoughts of... peace and goodwill, and with the thought of its loss. We shall never recover it.

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<sup>14</sup> Shippey 2001: 148-149; 2003: 156; Madsen 2004: 42-3. Cf. Flieger 1983: 4-5: "For these feelings [sc. pessimistic despair and cheerfulness] found a Christian context in Tolkien's Catholic view of the world as fallen and of man as imperfect. Pessimism is simply disappointed optimism, but a Christian acceptance of the Fall of Man leads inevitably to the idea that imperfection is the state of things in this world and that human actions – however hopeful – cannot rise above imperfection (...). The world, then, must be seen as a place of defeat and disappointment (...). Tolkien's enclosure of the word 'history' in quotations marks suggests that he means history to contrast with eternity, and that the 'long defeat' has to do with humanity's work in this world, not its expectations of the next".

The core of Tolkien's narrative hinges on the notion of the existence of a Paradise somewhere in the West, known to a select few who are, nevertheless, irrevocably cut off from returning there either because of old age, or after Aman is removed from the physical world and all the paths that used to lead to the deathless lands of Valinor and Elvenhome in the True West became bent (*Letters* 156, 198, 410-1, cf. Flieger 1983: 28; Shippey 2003: 300). Jordanes did not subscribe to any prospect of amelioration within this world. The lesson he proposed was *contemptus mundi* (Goffert 1988: 57), that is, the ascetic rejection of this fallen world supported by the notion that everlasting good and happiness can only be found in the next.<sup>15</sup> In his eyes, an understanding of history should lead, not to patriotism and pride in Roman grandeur, but to conversion and a turning away from the world (O'Donnell 1982: 225):

So that when you understand the devastation of the various nations you may long to be freed from all worldly tribulation and turn yourself towards God, who is true freedom. As you read these two little books, know that Necessity ever looms over the head of the man who loves this fading world. Give an ear to the apostle John when he says, "Beloved, do not love this world or the things in it. This world and its desires pass away; but he who does the will of God shall abide forever." Love God and your neighbor with your whole heart, obey his law, and pray for me, noble and splendid brother (*Rom.* 4-5).<sup>16</sup>

Tolkien's deeply-felt condemnation of this mutable, fallen world, where nothing good lasts, and his hope of the existence of "Joy beyond the walls of the world", are strongly reminiscent of Jordanes' lesson:

I am a Christian, and indeed a Roman Catholic, so that I do not expect 'history' to be anything but a 'long defeat' –though it contains (and in a

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<sup>15</sup> On the subject of *contemptus mundi* in late ancient and medieval thought see e.g. Bultot 1963-1964.

<sup>16</sup> *Quamvis breviter, uno tamen in tuo nomine et hoc parvissimo libello confeci... , quatinus diversarum gentium calamitate conperta ab omni erumna liberum te fieri cupias et ad deum convertas, qui est vera libertas. legens ergo utrosque libellos, scito quod diligenti mundo semper necessitas imminet. tu vero auscultat Iohannem apostolum, qui ait: 'carissimi, nolite diligere mundum neque ea quae in mundo sunt. quia mundus transit et concupiscentia eius: qui autem fecerit voluntatem dei, manet in aeternum'. estoque toto corde diligens deum et proximum, ut adimpleas legem et ores pro me, nobilissime et magnifice frater.*

legend may contain more clearly and movingly) some samples or glimpses of final victory (*Letters* 255).<sup>17</sup>

The consolation of fairy-stories, the joy of the happy ending: or more correctly of the good catastrophe, the sudden joyous ‘turn’ ... This joy, which is one of the things which fairy-stories can produce supremely well, is not essentially ‘escapist’, nor ‘fugitive’. In its fairy-tale – or otherworld– setting, it is a sudden and miraculous grace: never to be counted on to recur. It does not deny the existence of *dyscatastrophe*, of sorrow and failure: the possibility of these is necessary to the joy of deliverance; it denies (in the face of much evidence, if you will) universal final defeat and in so far is *evangelium*, giving a fleeting glimpse of Joy, Joy beyond the walls of the world, pignant as grief (*OFS* 153).

Let us turn now to the construction of a pseudo-history. Jordanes’ attempt to present the Goths as the equals of the Romans in historical dignity by (falsely) identifying the historical Goths with the quasi-mythical and heroic Getae (Goffert 1988: 26), a famous Thracian tribe who had become a frequent subject of interest for Greek historians, might have appealed to Tolkien as well: famously, he once dreamed of doing a similar thing with a mythology for and of England (*Letters* 144-145) grounded on the imaginative identification of Great Britain with the elven island of Tol Eressëa, and its later role as the primary vehicle for transmission of knowledge about the Elves and the land of the Gods in the True West (Shippey 2003: 303-308; Honegger 2007: 109-130). Goths played a large part in Tolkien’s mythology and his inventive construction of an early English pseudo-history (Drout 2004: 238; Librán 2011: 108-111). In the oldest strata of Tolkien’s legendarium, contained in the *Book of Lost Tales*,<sup>18</sup> it is said that the Elves marched from the True West into Luthany (later, England), where Ing/Ingwë was king. Many Elves of Luthany returned west over the sea and settled in Tol Eressëa. Ing set sail with many of his people to find Tol Eressëa, but was blown back east across the North Sea. He became king of the Ingwaiwar or children of Ing, the ancestors of the Anglo-Saxon invaders of Britain. Ing instructed the Ingwaiwar in the true knowledge of the Gods and Elves, and prophetised that his kin should one day return again to Luthany. Seven successive invasions of Luthany

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<sup>17</sup> Flieger 1983: 1-2, 27. For more general parallels between the outlook of Jordanes and that of Tolkien see Ford 2005: 56-59.

<sup>18</sup> See Shippey 2007: 117-118; Honegger 2007; Drout 2004: 230-231, with bibliography.

took place, including that of the Rómhoth (Romans), and at each new war more of the remaining Elves of Luthany fled over the sea. The seventh invasion of Luthany-England, that of the Ingwaiwar, who were coming back to their own ancestral home, was not hostile to the Elves.<sup>19</sup> A descendant of Ing from the Anglo-Saxon period, Ælfwine (“Elf-friend”), had derived a knowledge of and love for the Elves from the tradition of his family; one of those items of traditional knowledge was the legend of King Sheave (*Lost Road*, 85-86, 88; *Sauron* 27). In Tolkien’s legendarium King Sheave is the culture hero that came straight from the True West to teach culture and craft to the Northern men (*Lost Road* 99). The direct link between the True West and the men of the North through the mediation of King Sheave is stated clearly in Tolkien’s poem *King Sheave*, ll. 145-148:<sup>20</sup>

Sheave begat them:  
Sea-danes and *Goths*, Swedes and Northmen,  
Franks and Frisians, folk of the islands.  
Swordmen and Saxons, Swabes and English.

Ælfwine took a ship to seek the land King Sheave came from, and in the process he found the Straight Road, cast anchor in Tol Eressëa, and was then told by the Elves the Book of Stories (*Sauron* 278-279).<sup>21</sup> Thus, for Tolkien Angles, Saxons, Jutes, and Frisians (*Lost Tales II* 312), the children of Ing, had inherited by tradition a direct knowledge and perception of the Elves, whereas the Romans did not even believe in their existence. The meaning of the name Ælfwine, “Elf-friend”, attests to that fact. Goths, among other Northern people, are culturally and genetically connected to an awareness of the existence of Elves and the Valar that lay beyond the

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<sup>19</sup> Ch. Tolkien’s painstaking reconstruction of all the main features of Tolkien’s tangled account of the pseudo-history of ancient England (*LT II*, 314-315).

<sup>20</sup> On the complex textual history and dating of this poem and its later prose form see *Sauron* 294-295.

<sup>21</sup> *Sauron* 279: “From the beginning of this history, the story of the Englishman Ælfwine, called also Eriol, who links by his strange voyage the vanished world of the Elves with the lives of later men, has constantly appeared. So in the last words of the Quenta Noldorinwa (IV.165) it is said: ‘To Men of the race of Eärendel have they at times been told, and most to Eriol, who alone of the mortals of later days, and yet now long ago, sailed to the Lonely Isle, and came back to the land of Leithien [Britain] where he lived, and remembered things that he had heard in fair Cortirion, the city of the Elves in Tol Eressëa’.”

perception of the supposedly more ‘civilised’ and powerful Romans. This contention is proven by Tolkien’s insistence on the Goths’ cultural and historical descent from King Sheave (e.g. *Sauron* 273). Thus, just as Jordanes had identified the historical Goths with the semi-legendary and prestigious Getae to prove his point that Goths and Romans ought to be on the same cultural footing, Tolkien performed a similar task by portraying England’s native inhabitants as friends to the Elves from the True West, and the Romans as peculiarly hostile to the Elves of Luthany (*Lost Tales II*, 336 n.26): Tolkien felt that descent from the legendary King Sheaf proved that Goths and Anglo-Saxons, among other Northern people, preserved some inkling of the existence of the Elves and the True West still, whereas the Roman Empire remained either in ignorance or in wilful opposition. Therefore, the ‘barbarian’ Northerners are equal and even superior to the highly ‘civilised’ Romans.

In sum, Tolkien could not fail to be interested in a national history of Christian tint, centered on a Germanic nation, unsubordinated to the historical progress of Rome (Goffert 1988: 20, Herrera 2006: 19), written by a man who appeared to be himself a native Goth. Tolkien and Jordanes share a common outlook, as proven by the similarities in their handling of the three elements discussed (decay caused by being exiled from a formerly paradisiacal situation; unwanted consequences of winning a war against Evil; the construction of a pseudo-history). Jordanes wrote both his works at a grim moment in Byzantine history. The work of Jordanes is a work of secular history meant to deny the significance of secular history, a recounting of stirring events designed to show that stirring events do not bring happiness (O’Donnell 1982: 239). Jordanes’ cultural milieu must have resonated with Tolkien, as a man who, like the Professor, wrote, in Goffert’s words (1988: 13), “in the dismal nature of the times in which they were fated to live”.<sup>22</sup>

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<sup>22</sup> Contrast with Gandalf’s statement: “I wish it need not have happened in my lifetime,” said Frodo. “So do I”, said Gandalf, “and so do all who live so see such times. But that is not for them to decide. All we have to decide is what to do with the time that is given us” (*The Fellowship of the Ring I*, ii, 50).

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