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2. *Ludus Thronis: De novem orbis miraculis*. The Wonders of the Ancient World in George R. R. Martin's *A Song of Ice and Fire*

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Abstract

In George R. R. Martin's series of novels, *A Song of Ice and Fire*, and in its adaptation for TV as *Game of Thrones*, we can find multiple historical, artistic, geographical and literary references. They take us back to our own sense as a civilization. In this context, it is possible to understand how the appropriation of elements of Antiquity can give depth to a discourse, whether written or visual. Such an appropriation gives plausibility and a familiar scenario to new worlds and stories. In this way, we make them our own more easily. In Martin's world, we can see the creation of a list of wonders as such by a scholar and traveler named Lomas Longstrider. In his book, *Wonders Made by Man*, he collects nine wonders of the world, emulating the Seven Wonders of the Ancient World as a new Antipater of Sidon or Philo of Byzantium. Thus, we discover the Great Pyramid of Meereen, the Titan of Braavos, the Lighthouse of Oldtown or the gardens and walls of Quarth. And we see other scenarios that draw directly from the classical sources and their cultural transmission throughout history.

1. Introduction

The first time the audience had the opportunity to hear the already memorable soundtrack of the opening sequence of *Game of Thrones* was in 2011. Contemplating its distinctive and original intro, they were visualizing a true statement of what the plot of the television series was to be, being adapted from the novels of George R. R. Martin. The action would take place in different geographical locations of that fantastic world devised in his saga of novels, *A Song of Ice and Fire*. And these places—sometimes being representative of different cultures or civilizations—were defined by their most emblematic buildings or monuments. They were their Wonders, the Wonders of Game of Thrones.

In the novels, we learn about these great human wonders, most of which we have been able to see later on the screen, thanks to the TV series. We find even the figure of a traveling scholar, named Lomas Longstrider, who wrote two books on the Wonders of the World: *Wonders*, where 7 wonders of nature are collected, and *Wonders Made by Man*, where he makes a list of the 9 human constructions that he considers most prominent. The one who gives us the best information about him is Tyrion Lannister, who claims having learned by heart many passages when he was younger. He quotes Longstrider like this: “The gods made seven wonders and mortal man made nine”.¹

So the world of Game of Thrones connects us not only with the existence of great human constructions regarded as wonders, but also with the same historical practice of making lists of wonders, written by different scholars over the centuries.

In this chapter we intend to carry out, first of all, a general analysis of the phenomenon of lists of wonders in Classical Antiquity to explain its role in Martin's world. Secondly, we will review the monumental wonders quoted by Longstrider in his

¹ DwD 9 Tyrion 3.

writings and will study the possible influence of wonders or other prominent historical monuments in their conception. Finally, we will examine the reflection of the Seven Wonders of Antiquity in different wonders and monuments of the literary and television saga, taking into account their distinctive features.

This chapter aims to demonstrate one more case of the influence of the Humanities in the fantastic conceptions of the world of *A Song of Ice and Fire* and its visualization in *Game of Thrones*. We will see that the historical facts transcend fiction: the Wonders of Antiquity feed the imagination, while their figurative expression serves as a connection—even an unconscious one—to the cultural background of our civilization.

2. The phenomenon of the lists of wonders and its connection with Game of Thrones

The context of the emergence of these lists is linked with the scholars at the Great Library of Alexandria, such as Antipater of Sidon or Philo of Byzantium. Similarly, in the world of *Game of Thrones*, the character of Lomas Longstrider is mentioned as a writer and traveler. The idea that he was a *maester* is not unfounded, although he is never identified as such.

The empire created by Alexander the Great extended the Greek thought and way of life. Greek education, understood as *paideia* from Isocrates already,² is translated into the Roman world as *humanitas* by Varro or Cicero.³ The idea of culture as a transmitter of a legacy of great masterpieces which generated a scale of values leads to the creation of a canon. This will comprise not only philosophers or writers, but also artists. It is a constant reference to the past that allows a justification of the present.⁴ This entails a historical interest in works of art and monuments that encompasses the idea of wonders. In this way, these are understood as man-made astonishing accomplishments, which become eternal archetypes and symbols. They are a compendium of the great human works of art that will be incorporated into the world of utopia;⁵ and utopia, as a fantastic recomposition, anticipates and stimulates reality.

Similarly, it is also in Hellenistic times that the experience of *autopsía*—the “seeing with one’s eyes”—becomes generalized. Texts describing spaces, buildings and statues in the most important sanctuaries and cities are popularized, with the precedent of Herodotus’ *Histories* or Xenophon’s writings. We can consider these texts as the first travel guides, a *periegetic* literature that is closely linked to the traveling practice of the Greeks, as a people accustomed to maritime trade. The first *periplous*, originally navigation treaties, will be transformed into travel literature, thanks to the liking of Greek readers for the exotic and the unknown. These descriptions may reflect a real journey, but most of them are the result of geographical speculation or pure fantasy.⁶ Thus the sense of wonder and the extraordinary things make their appearance, and they will lead to the emergence of the paradoxographic account. However, these catalogues of wonders differ from the works of paradoxographers: these great pieces of art are man-made, excelling in their size and magnificence or their artistic beauty. On the contrary, *paradoxa* writings collect surprising data, but these are always more closely linked to the natural world. They

² Isocrates, *Panegyric*.

³ Quoted both in Aulus Gellius, *Attic Nights* 13.17.

⁴ Verdugo Santos 2007: 198.

⁵ Ramírez Domínguez 1983: 29.

⁶ García Moreno and Gómez Espelosín 1996: 7.

are usually compilation studies from other written sources, in which literary erudition predominates, rather than the *autopsía* that we have already discussed.⁷

Precisely, in this sense, we can say that the book on the natural wonders of Lomas Longstrider would be more related to this paradoxographic side. But when it comes to making his compendium of man-made wonders he follows that *autopsía* experience that we have talked about, given that Lomas is a traveler who contemplates in person those wonders.⁸

Lists of wonders take from the paradoxography genre the desire to compile and extract the amazing things in list form, but they add other criteria to that selection. For example, aesthetic or economic value is taken into account. From this perspective we can understand the influence of Herodotus' *Histories*. There we see his choice of motifs worthy of being mentioned, following a certain logic. Later we get to Callimachus, who has been considered the first paradoxographer, being also linked to the origin of the lists of wonders. It is, however, with the work attributed to Philo of Byzantium, that we find a concern to analyze the aspects that justify the inclusion of each of the described works of art in the realm of wonder, either by visual delight, their magnificence, grandiosity, boldness, technique, materials or economic value. This relation between the phenomenon of lists of wonders and the paradoxographic genre is also attested in the fact that we know Philo's work through the codex *Palatinus Graecus* 398,⁹ where the main examples of paradoxographic literature are evident.¹⁰

As we have noted above, the Greeks were a travelling people. Visiting all Seven Wonders and having the opportunity to see them in person was not feasible. But the habit of making pilgrimages to famous temples and shrines was widespread, especially for those able to pay for such a journey. Admittedly, some wonders arose in places that from more ancient times attracted many visitors, such as Olympia or Ephesus. These cases suggest that the tourist experience appeared in ancient Greece associated with religion in most cases, as will happen again with pilgrimages in the Middle Ages, both to the Holy Land and to Rome. And in Roman imperial times it was quite common—for those wealthy enough—to visit Egypt, which was a country that always fascinated the Greeks. The experience of the trip or *periégesis* aroused a great interest and special admiration in the most prominent buildings and works of art, namely *spectacula*, in Latin. The idea of wonder appeared in the collective imaginary, and many authors valued it when describing places or buildings worthy of being preserved and admired. Thus, in *A Song of Ice and Fire*, Lomas Longstrider's travel experience is part of this ancient idea of *periégesis*, with its corresponding requirements to translate those experiences into writing and to describe the wonders that are visited.

The geographically scattered arrangement of the Wonders of Antiquity forced anyone who wanted to see them in person to undertake a great effort and sacrifice:

⁷ Pajón Leyra 2011: 30.

⁸ DwD 68 The Kingbreaker.

⁹ A manuscript preserved in the Library of the University of Heidelberg, dated in the ninth century, which is a part of the set known as "philosophical collection", originating in Constantinople and probable being a copy of a copy in the Library of Alexandria, around the fifth-sixth centuries. See Stramaglia 2011.

¹⁰ Pajón Leyra 2011: 183. Before the paradoxographic genre, Greek archaic poetry and popular songs already reflect the idea of choosing, of selecting the most beautiful thing—*tò kálliston*—or the best one. This in turn demonstrates that enumeration, in the form of a catalog or list, was a common process for expression and transmission of ideas. De Nazaré Ferreira 2012: 74.

Everyone has heard of each of the Seven Wonders of the World, but few have seen all of them for themselves [...] Only if you travel the world and get worn out by the effort of the journey will the desire to see all the Wonders of the World be satisfied, and by that time you will be old and practically dead.¹¹

Therefore, Philo of Byzantium already advises the journey through education, since the sensory experience is imperfect and fleeting, and it depends on memory. Hence the need for works about wonders, which offer the possibility of imagining beauty and leaving it etched on one's mind:

Thus, learning is a quality which is truly to be admired and to be treasured as a great gift because, at the same time as it gives their minds insight, it may show men, freed from the burden of travelling, the most remarkable of sights which are to be seen at home, and it designates the sight that is worthy of admiration. For the traveller who reaches these places sees them once, and as soon as he leaves, he forgets, because he has not firmly grasped the delicate beauty of the works he has gazed upon, and the individual details escape his memory. Whereas he, who by selective reading has become acquainted with a worthy sight knows the details of its form and has thus set eyes upon a complete work of art, and, because these sights have been seen in his mind's eye they remain, imprinted on his mind, each single image, never to be destroyed.¹²

Longstrider's writings respond perfectly to this idea of education as a way to know the world and its wonders without the need to travel. His journey can be interpreted as a true adventure that takes him to new, more unknown worlds, such as the farthest reaches of Essos. His own name, Longstrider, refers to his status as a traveller, as happened with Dionysius Periegetes—Dionysius of Alexandria—, whose work, *Periégesis*, enjoyed a great reputation in Late Antiquity and Middle Ages. This is demonstrated by its constant presence in the handwritten tradition of Byzantine scholars in the city of Constantinople. The poem was used there as a Geography manual and as a companion that facilitated the understanding of geographical and ethnographic concepts present in other classical texts. Many of those works became authentic treatises on Geography. In fact, the relation between Wonders and studies on Geography can be found in Pausanias, Pomponius Mela, and previously in Strabo, and it was intimately linked to the experience of the trip or *periégesis*.

Longstrider's journey along the continent of Essos recalls how the Greek world opened eastwards with Alexander the Great. Thus, the two most impressive great monuments since the time of Herodotus—the Egyptian pyramids and the city of Babylon—continued to dominate ancient architecture and to lay the foundations for the lists of wonders. The classical Greek world brought its creations: the Temple of Artemis at Ephesus, the Statue of Zeus at Olympia and the Mausoleum of Halicarnassus. The last two monuments to be included in the canon of the Seven Wonders—the Colossus of Rhodes and the Lighthouse of Alexandria—respond more to the moment the lists are drawn up. The “definitive” or canonical list will not crystallize until the Renaissance.¹³

¹¹ Philo of Byzantium, *The Seven Wonders of the World, Praefatio*, trans. by Hugh Johnstone, in Romer and Romer 1995: 230.

¹² *Ibidem*.

¹³ Clayton and Price 1988: 9-10.

We can draw a parallel with the Great Pyramid of Ghis and the pyramids of Meereen as clear allusions to the Egyptian pyramids, and the city of Qarth with its walls and gardens as a new Babylon. Although these correspondences will be discussed later, they now serve to explain that the Wonder, in the Hellenistic and Roman periods, while in the context of the world of Game of Thrones too, is a marker of the identity of a given country and its culture.¹⁴ It follows that the lists of wonders of the world create a connection with a particular people. Thus, they stand in an authentic vernacular heritage, as an element that constitutes the mental image of a city or a civilization.

What all the lists of wonders have in common, especially when it comes to justifying the inclusion of some things and not others, is the importance given to the size, majesty and beauty, the search for the feeling of awe, of amazement, and even of reverential fear.¹⁵ Such could be the case of the Zeus of Olympia on the one hand, and the Ice Wall or the Titan of Braavos, on the other. These attributes will constitute the epitome of the wonderful thing and their recurring use in the different lists of wonders will characterize these texts, which will often become true panegyrics.

Another important factor in the appearance of this early *mirabilia* literature is the compilation of books around the great libraries, especially that of Alexandria, as we have already pointed out. It does not seem a fortuitous thing that Callimachus was in charge of the Great Library of Alexandria in the time of Ptolemy II Philadelphus.¹⁶ Nor that he is one of the first sources referring to wonders. We can find a true *ekphrasis* in the description of a piece of art—the Zeus of Olympia—in his iambics.¹⁷ The importance of Alexandria as a nerve center of knowledge, with its Great Library as the guiding beacon, is undeniable. An Alexandrian papyrus from the second century BCE, known as *Laterculi Alexandrini*, attests to the first known news about a list of wonders, even if it has survived only in a highly fragmentary form.¹⁸ Likewise it appears in the work at hand, with the Citadel of Oldtown, a city in Westeros which is a clear copy of Egyptian Alexandria, both for its library and for its lighthouse.

We can also link Longstrider's writings to Herodotus' work, being as it is the first example of the historical genre: the interest in curious events—typical of paradoxographers—is very similar to his keen interest in the particularities of the territories he visits in his travels. His work is, in part, the story of a traveler. He uses oral sources and his way of preparing to carry out his work was through travel. In other words: a true *autopsía* that includes first-person visual research when he has the opportunity, witness questioning, copying of inscriptions and collecting oral traditions.

From the first lines of his work, Herodotus expresses his intention of not letting the ἔργα μεγάλα τε καὶ θωμαστά fall into oblivion. He understands the term ἔργα as any human action worthy of being remembered, from warrior exploits to findings or inventions, and of course, the architectural and engineering works that are worth mentioning. Θωμαστά corresponds especially to natural wonders, but for Herodotus, the man-made objects of astonishment are superior to them. A gradation is established in amazement, in which natural wonders are trumped by human achievements. This idea also can be inferred from the quote attributed to Longstrider: “The gods made seven

¹⁴ On the value of patriotic interest in creating different lists of wonders, see Sassi 1993: 449-468.

¹⁵ Clayton and Price 1988: 7.

¹⁶ Pajón Leyra 2011: 25.

¹⁷ Callimachus, *Hymns and Epigrams*, Iambi VI, Fr. 196 Pf.

¹⁸ *Laterculi Alexandrini*, *Papyrus Berolinensis* 13044v, col.8.22 ss.

wonders and mortal man made nine”; thus, mortals have surpassed the gods, at least in the number of built wonders.

With his words, Herodotus himself demonstrates that he is a clear and direct precedent of what will later be the different lists of wonders:

This is the display of the inquiry of Herodotus of Halicarnassus, so that things done by man not be forgotten in time, and that great and marvelous deeds, some displayed by the Hellenes, some by the barbarians, not lose their glory, including among others what was the cause of their waging war on each other.¹⁹

In the environment of the Great Library of Alexandria emerged the two lists of wonders that can be considered the core of this phenomenon. The first is due to Antipater of Sidon: an epigram from the late second century BCE is attributed to him, being one of the oldest testimonies of a list of seven wonders and the first one that is entirely preserved:

I have set eyes on the wall of lofty Babylon on which is a road for chariots,
and the statue of Zeus by the Alpheius,
and the hanging gardens, and the colossus of the Sun,
and the huge labour of the high pyramids,
and the vast tomb of Mausolus;
but when I saw the house of Artemis that mounted to the clouds,
those other marvels lost their brilliancy, and I said,
“Io, apart from Olympus,
the Sun never looked on anything so grand”.²⁰

With the same items on the Antipater’s list, Philo of Byzantium sought to save his readers the grueling effort to travel to know the Wonders of the World, as we have already discussed. He made his work a kind of an itinerary around the known world, with visits to the places that each housed a wonder. It is a profile similar to that of the ancient *periplois* or *propemptica*. Philo was a Greek engineer, living around 200 BCE, in Alexandria. From the preserved fragments of his treatises it can be inferred that they were objective and technical works, containing much precise data. However, the work known as *De Septem Orbis Miraculis*–Περὶ τῶν ἐπτὰ θαυμάτων, in the original Greek–,²¹ combines such technical descriptions with much more flowery language.²² For this reason, the idea that this work is a booklet belonging to a late-ancient writer is more plausible: Philo of Byzantium, “the Paradoxographer”, around the fourth century, who takes as a starting point the work of the first Philo and collects information of different sorts.

It is also likely that Philo based his list on a previous compilation shortly after the founding of Alexandria. Therefore the Lighthouse would not appear in these first lists of wonders, as is equally the case in Antipateros, and Babylon is given special relevance. But it is also true that Philo lived and worked in Alexandria, seeing the Lighthouse daily, as something close and of everyday environment. And he saw it as something functional too, further away from the idea of wonder as amazement before the extraordinary thing.

¹⁹ Herodotus, *Histories* 1.1 (transl. Godley 1920).

²⁰ Antipater of Sidon, *Palatine Anthology* 9.58 (transl. Paton 1925).

²¹ Parchment Codex from Heidelberg University Library: *Codex Palatinus Graecus* 398, fol.56v.

²² Kroll 1941: 54-55.

Similarly, in Longstrider's work, the Oldtown lighthouse does not appear as one of the wonders, perhaps for the same reason that we have just argued: that Longstrider maybe was a maester of Oldtown, who saw the lighthouse every day and did not consider it as something extraordinary.

In the first century BCE, Marcus Terentius Varro had already developed the concept of *antiquitates* as the desire to justify and enhance the present through the analysis of the past and tradition. In this way, the Romans did possess a clear concept of inherited culture, and references to past buildings or works of art were made with the apparent intention to legitimize the present. In the world of *A Song of Ice and Fire*, the allusion to the wonders referred by Longstrider is almost always in past tense. Their display in the television series seems to highlight the ancient history of a world of medieval setting. The appropriation of elements of Antiquity to provide a greater scope for a discourse, whether written or visual, gives plausibility and a familiar scenario to new worlds and stories.²³

The Seven Wonders as a symbol of the extraordinary appear in the collective idea as something perfectly assimilated. And this happens even before their images are settled as archetypes in the common imagination.²⁴ In the first century CE, its use as a metaphor can already be attested.²⁵ From here, it will appear on a recurring basis in allegories, comparisons and parables as an emblem of the amazing thing. Myths, legends and epic poems are part of the "remembered history" within the collective memory. They subsist to the extent that they adapt to the incorporation of variations that, however, do not modify the core of "historical truth" that acts as a nexus of union between past and present.²⁶ In this way, the idea of the Seven Wonders, as material past or present that functions as cultural asset, as an allegory of the outstanding thing, is part of the general heritage and tradition of the Mediterranean world, which over time will extend to global level. From the fifth century and the start of sixth century CE, material culture became a symbolic realization of new social and political identities. Over the centuries, the appropriation of elements of that culture for legitimizing purposes will be a recurring thing.²⁷

The sustained interest in the Seven Wonders of the Ancient World led many artists to try to reconstruct them on paper, performing an exercise in speculation. This resulted in different series of engravings, often depicted in later paintings, which reflected not only the historical interest, but the aesthetic value too. In this sense, the words of Maria Luisa Madonna are very illuminating: their interest as a historical stage in the evolution of the world, their value as historical documents, their consideration as hieroglyphics or moral emblems, their recovery as historical facts, their importance as examples of technical efficiency and as models of the architectural Renaissance, their use as a pretext for

²³ In Martin's words: "I like to use history to flavor my fantasy, to add texture and verisimilitude, but simply rewriting history with the names changed has no appeal for me. I prefer to re-imagine it all, and take it in new and unexpected directions". Quoted by Álvarez-Ossorio Rivas 2019: 141.

²⁴ Martial, *Liber Spectaculorum* ed. Coleman 2006: 4; in his edition, Coleman talks about it "as a cliché of contemporary popular culture".

²⁵ A graffiti from Pompeii's amphitheatre, which was written by a vehement follower of a gladiator: "In all the battles you have won. One of the seven wonders of the world!": *Omnia munera vicisti; ton hepta theamaton esti* (*Corpus Inscriptiones Latinarum* IV, 1111). The text on the wall of Pompeii's amphitheatre, destroyed by the eruption of Vesuvius in 79 CE, has the particularity that its second sentence is written in Greek, but with Latin characters.

²⁶ Lewis 1975: 11-12.

²⁷ Carbó García 2015: 26.

fantastic reconstructions, their consideration as a memory horizon for mythological scenes, and even their acceptance as ironic or comical elements.²⁸

In this regard, one of the pioneers in considering the Wonders from an aesthetic point of view was Maarten van Heemskerck (1498-1574). And this happened thanks mainly to his stay in Rome and his discovery and assessing of the ruins and ancient monuments.²⁹ For his sketches and designs, Heemskerck has been described as a “Romanist painter”. Thanks to them, his repertoire was expanded with forms inspired by Antiquity, depicted in mythological, religious and allegorical scenes.³⁰

With this background, the artist created imaginary and fantastic landscapes where ancient vestiges had not only an iconographic value, but also a symbolic one. This is evident with the use of ruins, which accompanies the scene as a stage, and advances what will be one of the most recurrent themes in Romanticism, albeit with another intention. This symbolism alludes to the inevitable passage of time and relates the representation of ancient forms to the theme of *vanitas*, which will know a greater boom in the Baroque. The artist had a great capacity for synthesis, linking the assimilation of the visual language of Antiquity with the invention of new antiquities.

The *Octo Mundi Miracula* series reflects what we today have for the “canonical list” of the Seven Wonders. But it is true that in his depiction of Babylon—under the title *Babylonis Muri*—the Hanging Gardens and the Walls appear, and Van Heemskerck adds as an eighth wonder the Colosseum of Rome. It is a fact that he set not only the list of works, after confronting various ancient, medieval and early modern proposals, but also the iconography of these monuments. This would remain engraved in the collective imagination, with a great influence on various later artistic depictions of the Seven Wonders.³¹

Undoubtedly, the influence of artistic representations of the Wonders of Antiquity is present in the visual conception of the Wonders of the World of Game of Thrones. In fact, we might consider that there is another parallel in the same step from the written to visuals: if van Heemskerck’s series of engravings led to the leap from word to image, the television series, by doing the same with Martin’s novels, also gave the ultimate figurative character to Longstrider’s literary descriptions, barely outlined in the books. The display of some of these wonders for the audience has allowed them to connect with the archetypes of the Wonders of Antiquity existing in the collective imagination, in a much more effective way than with reading. Certainly, if cameras or video cameras had existed in the time of the first lists, those images would have been able to accurately convey the appearance of historical wonders. But in the case of some of these wonders we haven’t got any kind of contemporary representation nor archaeological remains.

The following two sections will focus on to the connection between the Wonders of Antiquity and the Wonders of Game of Thrones, beginning with the study of the influence of great historical buildings and masterpieces of art on the conception and visualization of Longstrider’s Wonders.

²⁸ Madonna 1976: 26-29.

²⁹ Di Furia 2012.

³⁰ Veldman 1977: 12.

³¹ For example, the various series about the Seven Wonders made in the Early Modern Period by Franciscus van Aeslt, Maartin de Vos, Antonio Tempesta, Louis de Caullery, Willen van Ehrenberg, Athanasius Kirscher or Johann Bernhard Fischer von Erlach.

3. Lomas Longstrider's *Wonders Made by Man*

In his book about the *Wonders Made by Men*, Longstrider identifies seven as such, although there are nine that he gathered in his compilation. The number seven was always associated with the different lists of historical wonders, for its symbolic, sacred, exoteric or mystical character, although there are examples of later lists with different numbers. In our case, from the complete Longstrider's list, only seven wonders mentioned as such appear in the novels. We will first refer to those seven and then try to figure out what the other two might have been, among the most suitable candidates.

3.1 The Wall

As a first wonder, and the only one located in Westeros among the seven we know for certain, would be the Wall, which separates the North from the even more northern wildernesses.³² Its legendary origin goes back to the First Men and the Children of the Forest, and even to the Giants. Various maesters of the Citadel of Oldtown offer different versions of its construction and the materials used: some claim that stone blocks were used in the earliest foundations and others that the ice was extracted from nearby lakes, cut into large blocks that were transported by sleigh to be placed one at a time at their final location.³³ Even some legends tell that the children of the forest used their magic to construct and strengthen the Wall; Maester Childer's *Winter's Kings, or the Legends and Lineages of the Starks of Winterfell*, refers to how Brandon the Builder sought their collaboration for the construction of the Wall.³⁴ With its approximately 100 leagues in length (about 340 miles) and 700 feet high (more than 200 m) at its highest point, its huge mass of ice could be seen from another 100 leagues away.³⁵ It is thus the largest and oldest wonder.

Quite a few features of the Wall remind us of the first of the Wonders of the Ancient World, the Great Pyramid of Giza, built by Pharaoh Khufu-Cheops, which was also the largest and oldest. In fact, it is the only one that still stands today. It also continues to raise questions about how it was built, how limestone blocks were removed from the quarry, how they were transported, how they were hoisted to their site, and how they were placed so accurately. At the same time, a large amount of legends, fantasies and extraordinary theories about its origin and functionality keep emerging around this great construction.

Because of its shape and functionality, we can relate the Wall directly to Hadrian's Wall, in the north of the British Isles, built by the Roman emperor Hadrian in the third decade of the second century CE. With its 24 leagues (73 miles), it is the longest wall in Europe. If the Wall was used to defend and geographically separate the Kingdoms of Westeros from the northernmost lands, the Savages and other worse threats, Hadrian's Wall was built to defend the conquered lands from the northern peoples not submitted to Rome. The presence of Hadrian's Wall since its construction has set up the geography of the territory, serving in the past as a boundary between England and Scotland.³⁶ Similarly,

³² *Thrones* S1: Ep.1, "Winter is coming", 0:01:06.

³³ Martin, García, Antonsson 2014: 145 ("The Wall and Beyond. The Night Watch").

³⁴ Martin, García, Antonsson 2014: 5-6 ("Ancient History. The Dawn Age").

³⁵ Martin, García, Antonsson 2014: 145 ("The Wall and Beyond. The Night Watch").

³⁶ As George R. R. Martin himself acknowledges in a *Rolling Stone* interview dating from 2014: <http://www.rollingstone.com/tv/news/george-r-r-martin-the-rolling-stone-interview-20140423>: "The Wall predates anything else. I can trace back the inspiration for that to 1981. I was in England visiting a friend, and as we approached the border of England and Scotland, we stopped to see Hadrian's Wall. I stood up there and I tried to imagine what it was like to be a Roman legionary, standing on this wall, looking at these distant hills. It was a very profound feeling. For the Romans at that time, this was the end of civilization; it

it could even relate to one of the seven unofficial wonders of today's world, the Great Wall of China.

3.2 The Titan of Braavos

The Titan of Braavos, in the free city of the same name, protects the narrow access from the sea and appears, almost omnipresent, as a symbol of the city. This is inspired by the plan and concept of the republic of Venice at the end of the Middle Ages, also as a commercial and financial nerve center—underlined by the Iron Bank of Braavos.

It is a fortress of stone and bronze in the shape of a warrior, at which Lomas Longstrider marveled. It is almost 400 feet high (approximately 122 m) and it has one leg on each side of the main entrance to Braavos. It is sculpted from a natural black granite rock arch, on which the rest of the statue was melted in bronze. Its hair was green-dyed hemp and its eyes were large beacon lanterns. Internally it contained different rooms and openings to be able to attack ships that tried to force their entrance.³⁷



Fig. 1. The Titan of Braavos. *Thrones* S5: Ep.2, “The House of Black and White”, 0:02:45.

It is probably the clearest example of inspiration from one of the Seven Wonders of the Ancient World, namely the Colossus of Rhodes. Or rather from the iconic image of this one which was fixed from the Renaissance with the engraving of the Flemish painter Maarten Van Heemskerck, already mentioned. He represented it with its legs open over the mouth of the harbor, the ships could pass under it, and it held a torch in its hand, which served as a beacon for ships. In any case, the image of open legs on the mouth of the port seems to have its origin in the testimony of an Italian pilgrim who, on his trip to Jerusalem, made a stop in Rhodes around 1394-1395.³⁸ This Nicolas de Martoni recounts:

At the end of the pier there is a church named St. Nicholas, and I have been told and confirmed that in ancient times there was a great wonder, a great idol, so admirably

was the end of the world. We know that there were Scots beyond the hills, but they didn't know that. It could have been any kind of monster. It was the sense of this barrier against dark forces—it planted something in me. But when you write fantasy, everything is bigger and more colorful, so I took the Wall and made it three times as long and 700 feet high, and made it out of ice.”

³⁷ Martin, García, Antonsson 2014: 273 (“Beyond the Sunset Kingdom. The Free Cities: Braavos”).

³⁸ Le Grand 1984: 585.

formed that it is said to have one foot at the tip of that pier where st. Nicholas Church is, and the other at the tip of the other pier, where the mills are.³⁹

In a few comments to the *Satires* of Juvenal, there are allusions to the image of the Colossus letting the boats pass under his legs with their sails deployed.⁴⁰ And another pilgrim, Felix Faber or Felix Fabri, refers to the same story of ships passing between its legs.⁴¹ This idea is the one that Heemskerck depicted in his work, *Panorama with the abduction of Helen amidst of the Wonders of the Ancient World*. For the figure of the Colossus he was inspired by the Capitoline Hercules. And it is the same idea that André Thevet will pick up in 1554 in his *Cosmographie de Levant*, where he describes the Colossus “with its legs in the two arches of the port, [...] so high, that the ships entering the harbor pass between them. He had a sword in his right hand, and a pike on the left, and a mirror burning in his chest”.⁴²

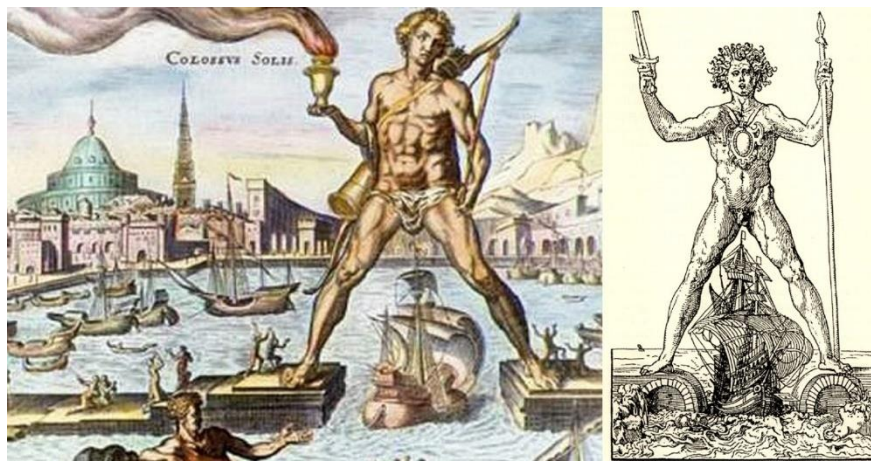


Fig. 2. On the left, Maarten van Heemskerck: *Colossus Solis* (1570-1572) (Public domain – Wikimedia Commons). On the right, André Thevet: *Cosmographie de Levant* (1554) (Public domain – Wikimedia Commons).

Despite the undoubted visual appeal and magnificence of such a design, which is also reproduced on the Titan, it is practically impossible that the Colossus had taken this

³⁹ Manuscript at the National Library of France, Paris, n. 6521 Latin Stocks, fols. 67-103: *In capite moli, est quaedam ecclesia vocabuli Sancti Nicolai et dictum ac certificatum fuit michi quoddam magnum mirabile quod, antiquo tempore, fuit quidam magnus ydolus, sic mirabiliter formatus quod unum pedem tenebat in capite dicti moli ubi est ecclesia Sancti Nicolai et alium pedem tenebat in capite alterius moli ubi sunt molendina quae mola distant unum ab alio per medium mileare super quibus stabat squaratus et rectus.*

⁴⁰ *Hic in Rhodiorum portu erectus erat, ita divaricatis cruribus, ut inter ea transirent naves extensis velis.* Note of Iohannes Britannicus: *Junius Juvenalis, opus quidem divinum, antea impressorum vitio tetrum, mancum et inutile, nunc autem a viro bene docto recognitum [...]*, Venice, 1512, fol. 78 v (about Juvenal: *Satires* 8.230: *et de marmoreo citharam suspende colosso*).

⁴¹ Hassler 1849: 252: *Dicunt enim, quod Colossus ille in mari stabat et portum rhodianum observabat, distentis enim ab invicem cruribus stabat in introitu portus ita in altum erectus quod naves quantumcumque altae et magnae per crurium medium sub ventre ejus intrabant.*

⁴² André Thevet: *Cosmographie de Levant*, Lyon, 1554, 106: “ayant les iambes sur les deus arches du port, [...] si haut esleué, que les nauieres entrans au port passoient entre ses deus iambes. Il tenoit en la main dextre une espee, & en la senestre une pique, & avoit deuant la poitrine un miroër ardent”.

position, taking into account the testimonies of the sources and our knowledge of the construction techniques of the Greeks.

The image of the Colossus answers, on the one hand, to the lack of information on the part of the ancient sources on its appearance and its location, and on the other hand, to the dissemination of a very suggestive model with great visual impact that arises from misinterpretations of some texts.

First, ancient sources, such as Strabo or Pliny the Elder, indicate its height—seventy elbows, about 32 m—, the name of its creator—Chares of Lindos—and that it was destroyed by an earthquake. They neither describe its posture nor its exact location. They do inform us about the construction material, bronze, and that it was hollow inside.⁴³ For his part, Philo of Byzantium adds more or less accurate information about its construction, but he does not clarify its appearance or its location. However, he offers details that can give some clues about it, such as that a white marble base was built on which the feet of the statue were placed; a base is mentioned, so it is understood that it did not present an open-legged posture, for which two bases would have been necessary, which means that its feet stood together.⁴⁴

The conception of the Titan of Braavos as a fortress is similarly inspired by the Colossus of Rhodes, but through the cinematic representation of the latter in the 1961 film, *The Colossus of Rhodes*, directed by Sergio Leone. In the film, the great statue is precisely a fortress-prison that guards the harbor entrance.⁴⁵ In addition, in the 1963 film *Jason and the Argonauts*, directed by Don Chaffey, a giant bronze statue with armor, wheel and sword appears, much like the Titan. He is Talos, the guardian of the island, who comes to life, and who at one point appears with one foot on either side of the entrance to the bay, grabbing and lifting the ship that tries to pass underneath.⁴⁶

And it is virtually impossible not to think of the sequence of the 2001 film *The Lord of the Rings: The Fellowship of the Ring*, directed by Peter Jackson. It features the two huge statues of the Argonaths, arranged on the Anduin River. The literal translation is “stones of kings”, although the most accurate name is Pillars of the Kings; these are two colossal statues depicting Isildur and Anárion, the first kings of the men of the West, marking the entrance to the kingdom of Gondor.⁴⁷ In this case, we find an inspiration from the Colossus of Rhodes for the visualization of colossal statues in the fantasy world

⁴³ Strabo, *Geography* 24.2.5. Pliny the Elder, *Natural History* 34.17-18: “But that which is by far the most worthy of our admiration, is the colossal statue of the Sun, which stood formerly at Rhodes, and was the work of Chares the Lindian, a pupil of the above-named Lysippus; no less than seventy cubits in height. This statue fifty-six years after it was erected, was thrown down by an earthquake; but even as it lies, it excites our wonder and admiration. Few men can clasp the thumb in their arms, and its fingers are larger than most statues. Where the limbs are broken asunder, vast caverns are seen yawning in the interior. Within it, too, are to be seen large masses of rock, by the weight of which the artist steadied it while erecting it” (transl. Bostock and Riley 1855). It is interesting to compare Pliny’s description with that made by Martin in his novels. *FfC* 7 Arya 1: “But dead ahead the sea had broken through, and there above the open water the Titan towered, with his eyes blazing and his long green hair blowing in the wind. His legs bestrode the gap, one foot planted on each mountain, his shoulder looming tall above the jagged crests. His legs were carved of solid stone, the same black granite as the sea mounts on which he stood, though around his hips he wore an armoured skirt of greenish bronze. His breast plate was bronze as well, and his head in his crested halfhelmet. His blowing hair was made of hempen ropes dyed green, and huge fires burned in the caves that were his eyes. One hand rested atop the ridge to his left, bronze fingers coiled about a knob of stone; the other thrust up into the air, clasping the hilt of a broken sword.”

⁴⁴ Philo of Byzantium, *The Seven Wonders of the World* 4.3.

⁴⁵ *The Colossus of Rhodes*, Metro-Goldwyn-Mayer, 1961.

⁴⁶ *Jason and the Argonauts*, Columbia Pictures, 1963.

⁴⁷ *The Lord of the Rings: The Fellowship of the Ring*, New Line Cinema, 2001.

created by Tolkien. At the same time, they have become iconic images of modern fantasy that have also inspired Martin's work.

3.3 The Long Bridge of Volantis

This is the longest bridge in the known world, located in another of the free cities of Essos. It joins the two halves of the city on the wide channel of the Rhoyme river mouth. Apart from its length, it also stands out for containing a large number of buildings of various kinds on its structure. It includes buildings of several floors high, with shops, houses, temples, taverns and brothels. It was built by Vhalaso the Munificent, a triarch, due to the strong and changing currents of the river mouth, and it took forty years to build. It was said that it could bear the weight of 1,000 elephants and, as seen in the series, the bridge's roadway was wide enough that two wagons could cross without problems –the sort of fact that we often find in some descriptions of ancient wonders.⁴⁸

No bridge is mentioned in the various lists of Wonders of Antiquity. The Drobeta Roman bridge over the Danube, in the second century CE, was the longest in the ancient world, if we exclude the bridge of barges ordered by Xerxes over the Dardaneles to cross into Europe with his grand army. And we have the mention of Quintus Curtius Rufus about the bridge over the Euphrates in the city of Babylon, which he cites as one of the wonders of the East.⁴⁹

In *Game of Thrones*, the bridge is clearly the Roman bridge of Cordoba, in Spain. The idea of the built suprastructure on it immediately recalls, albeit in an exaggerated way, Florence's Ponte Vecchio. And in the background you can even observe the Cathedral of Salamanca, again in Spain, dominating the urban skyline of Volantis, and representing the Temple of the Lord of Light, R'hllor.⁵⁰

3.4 The Walls of Qarth

The triple Walls of Qarth are another wonder listed by Longstrider.⁵¹ Qarth is a city located in the Jade Gates Strait, at the eastern end of the Summer Sea:

Three thick walls encircled Qarth, elaborately carved. The outer was red sandstone, thirty feet high and decorated with animals: snakes slithering, kites flying, fish swimming, intermingled with wolves of the red waste and striped zorses and monstrous elephants. The middle wall, forty feet high, was grey granite alive with scenes of war: the clash of sword and shield and spear, arrows in flight, heroes at battle and babes being butchered, pyres of the dead. The innermost wall was fifty feet of black marble, with carvings [...] of men and women giving pleasure to one another.⁵²

⁴⁸ Martin, García, Antonsson 2014: 268 ("Beyond the Sunset Kingdom. The Free Cities: Volantis"). In relation to such mentions, we can refer, for example, to the testimony of Quintus Curtius Rufus, when he describes the Walls of Babylon and refers that two quadrigas could cross without touching each other: *History of Alexander* 5.1.24: *quadrigae inter se occurrentes sine periculo commeari dicuntur*.

⁴⁹ Quintus Curtius Rufus, *History of Alexander* 5.1.29: *Pons lapideus flumini inpositus iungit urbem. Hic quoque inter mirabilia Orientis opera numeratus est*.

⁵⁰ *Thrones* S5: Ep.3, "High Sparrow", 0:49:08.

⁵¹ *Thrones* S2: Ep.4, "Garden of Bones", 0:30:44.

⁵² *CoK* 28 Daenerys 2.

This wonder seems to be inspired directly by the Walls of Babylon,⁵³ which also appeared as one of the seven wonders in some of the various lists made of different authors, such as Antipater of Sidon and Philo of Byzantium. Let us remember that, unlike the canonical list that has been fixed since the Renaissance, these ancient lists did not include the Lighthouse of Alexandria. The enormity of the Babylonian Walls, both in height and in their extraordinary length for a city wall—approximately 10 miles—present a more than considerable similarity to the Walls of Qarth. Their arrangement with successive stretches and their distinctive adornment with the sacred animals of the Babylonian gods support the argument. In fact, Maarten van Heemskerck's engraving of the city of Babylon depicted the wall with three defensive stretches.

When, in the television series, the doors of the Walls of Qarth open and a panoramic view of the city is offered, the feeling of contemplating an imitation of Babylon is even greater, with palaces, hanging gardens or with terraces, and even the Euphrates River in the background.⁵⁴ The whole city is conceived as a wonder in itself, highlighting all its antiquity and splendor, an idea historically present with Babylon and underlined here.⁵⁵

3.5 The Palace with a Thousand Rooms, in Sarnath of the Tall Towers

This wonder is not mentioned in the novels and it does not appear in *Game of Thrones* because, in the time that the story is set, the palace no longer existed. It had been destroyed in a Dothraki attack, when Khal Loso set the city on fire. However, it was known in Westeros and Longstrider included it among his Nine Wonders.⁵⁶

Some depictions of the Palace have been made.⁵⁷ An influence of Hindu palatial architecture and Arab religious architecture is portrayed in some of them, a reminiscent of the Basilica of Hagia Sophia, in Istanbul, which was included in lists of wonders by some medieval authors.⁵⁸ In fact, the very name of the city of Sarnath, near the Dothraki Sea, is taken from a city in India, namely one of the four holy cities of Buddhism.

3.6 The Valyrian Roads

The Valyrian Roads were built by the Valyrian Freehold to link the economic centers of the free cities. They were made with rocks melted with dragon fire, following straight lines. They were raised half a peak on the ground to prevent the accumulation of water or snow, and they were so wide that three wagons could pass at once. Four centuries after the fall of Valyria many of them are still in use, with no apparent erosion even in the

⁵³ *DwD* 58 Tyrion 11: "The city walls are one of the wonders of the world".

⁵⁴ *Thrones* S2: Ep.4, "Garden of Bones", 0:35:48.

⁵⁵ Philo of Byzantium, *The Seven Wonders of the World* 5.1-3, trans. by Hugh Johnstone, in Romer and Romer 1995: "The height of the wall certainly exceeds eighty feet, and truly the width of the course is such that four quadrigas can drive along them at the same time. There are numerous multi-storeyed towers stretching in an unbroken link of sufficient size to house within them a large army. For this reason, the city-state is a fortress for the Persians. From the outside you can't believe it contains a city inside."

⁵⁶ Martin, García, Antonsson 2014: 291 ("Beyond the Sunset Kingdom. Beyond the Free Cities. The Grasslands").

⁵⁷ <https://thegreatgame.fandom.com/wiki/Sarnath?file=Sarnath.jpeg> (accessed 1 July, 2020).

⁵⁸ For example, in the eighth century, Cosmas of Jerusalem points it out as the most admirable of all wonders: Cosmas of Jerusalem, *Patrologia Graeca* 38, 545.

absence of maintenance.⁵⁹ The allusion to the Roman roads is so evident that there is no need to add more. It is known: “All roads lead to Valyria.”

3.7 The Three Bells of Norvos

This is the seventh and final one of the identified wonders in Lomas Longstrider’s work. Norvos, one of the free cities, was a theocracy ruled by bearded clergymen, who were governed by the commands directed to them by their god. Through the Three Bells, they controlled all aspects of city life: when to get up, when to sleep, when to work, when to rest, when to take up arms, when to pray and even when to have sex. These bells have three sounds: Noom, which is a deep sound; Narrah, which is a loud sound; and Nyhel, which is a soft sound.⁶⁰

It is probably the wonder whose inclusion in the list is more controversial, maybe responding more to a feeling of Longstrider in relation to its use than to the bells as objects in themselves. Some of the lists of historical wonders also include questionable elements, the inclusion of which responds more to curiosity or extravagance. This is the case with some of the wonders selected by the Venerable Bede: in the eighth century CE, this monk from Jarrow, in the north of England, chooses the Capitol of Rome as the first wonder, and he sustains this choice in statues with bells that ring if any enemy attacks Rome:

The first of the seven wonders of the world, made by the hand of man, is the Capitol at Rome, the very salvation of the inhabitants, and greater than a whole city. In it were statues of the nations subdued by the Romans, or images of their gods, and on the breast of the statues were inscribed the names of the nations which had been conquered, with bells hanging from their necks. Priests or watchmen attended on these by turns, day and night, and showed much care in watching them. If either of them should move, the bell made a noise, and so they knew what nation was rebelling against the Romans.⁶¹

Likewise, he includes the Lighthouse of Alexandria, which would have nothing extraordinary if he had not described it as supported by four crystal crabs. Or the iron statue of Bellerophon in Smyrna, supported in the air thanks to the action of large magnetic stones. Or the Baths of Apollonius of Tyana, which were heated by the action of a single candle. Anyway, a whole series of wonders that can only exist in the world of imagination or fantasy, being influenced by the writings of Gregory of Tours, who in the sixth century also classified as a wonder Noah’s Ark.⁶²

3.8 About the other possible wonders in Longstrider’s list

So far we have collected the wonders that appear mentioned as such, but considering that there were nine in Longstrider’s book, there are still two to identify.

Among the options we have are the cities of Yi Ti, in the northeastern part of the Jade Sea, to the east of Qarth and the Bones Mountains, and to the northwest of Asshai, in the easternmost part of Essos. Yi Ti’s Golden Empire was, according to legend,

⁵⁹ *DwD* 6 Tyrion 2.

⁶⁰ *FfC* 3 The Captain of Guards.

⁶¹ Venerable Bede: *De septem mundi miraculis*, *Patrologia Latina*, 90, 961 (transl. Giles 1843: 11).

⁶² Gregory of Tours: *De cursu stellarum ratio* 1ff.

preceded by the Great Empire of the Dawn.⁶³ It is characterized by its legendary wealth, which allows its princes to live in solid gold houses and have sweets made with pearl and jade powder. Lomas Longstrider, awestruck by its marvels, called Yi Ti “the land of a thousand gods and a hundred princes, ruled by one god-emperor.” According to Lomas Longstrider, none of the cities of the west can compare to those of Yi Ti in size and splendor: “Even their ruins put ours to shame.” In his *Jade Compendium*, Colloquo Votar—the best source available in Westeros on the lands of the Jade Sea—wrote that “beneath every YiTish city, three older cities lie buried.”⁶⁴

Yi Ti is represented as a forested region of which four cities are known, Yin, Jinqi, Asabhad and further north, Tiqui. Descriptions of the landscapes, the presence of emperors, as well as their names, recall the medieval and early modern Cipango. It is considered an almost mythical region, because almost all the knowledge that is available comes from sailors. One of its greatest export resources is saffron and it is famous in Qarth for its poetry.⁶⁵

The Five Forts are another option. They are fortified citadels of great antiquity, also in the far east of Essos, but inland from the Golden Empire of Yi Ti, between the Mountains of the Morn and the Bleeding Sea.⁶⁶ As described by Martin, García and Antonsson, they are very ancient fortified citadels dating back to the Golden Empire itself. According to them, some scholars argue that they were built by the Pearl Emperor to keep the Lion of Night and his demons away from the kingdoms of men. Others argue that the Valyrians were involved in their construction, based on the surrounding walls, which are constructed of a single block of molten black rock. However, it is believed that this is unlikely, the Five Forts preceding the rise of the Valyrian Freehold.⁶⁷

Both options, which are included in the Yi Ti region, respond to the desire to expand the world of wonders to the east, as already happened with historical wonders, which were confined to the known world to the Greeks and went no further. The Far East was an unknown place, given over entirely to fables and fantasies. Thus, geography and the myths of the various regions of the new world conquered by Alexander contributed to an expanding civilization that finds its common identity in the wonders and human achievements. These become an element of affirmation of the vast territories conquered and an ideal image of the Empire, delimiting its borders.⁶⁸ From Alexander onwards, the Greek world would be linked to that of the East, and a more universal vision of human achievement was evident. Likewise, the journey of Lomas Longstrider connects Westeros and Essos, including some of its easternmost regions if we accept the options that we have just discussed for his two unnamed wonders.

But above all, it seems that two other wonders are better suited to be included in Longstrider’s list, based on what we are looking at in relation to the ancient historical lists and the wonders contained in them, some of which have directly inspired those of *A Song of Ice and Fire*.

The Great Pyramid of Ghis, on the coast of the Summer Sea, near the Slaver’s Bay, was in ruins at the time when the novels and the TV series are set. But the Great

⁶³ Martin, García, Antonsson 2014: 301-302 (“Beyond the Sunset Kingdom. The Bones and Beyond. Yi Ti”).

⁶⁴ *Ibidem*, 303.

⁶⁵ *CoK* 41 Daenerys 3.

⁶⁶ Martin, García, Antonsson 2014: 303 (“Beyond the Sunset Kingdom. The Bones and Beyond. Yi Ti”).

⁶⁷ *Ibidem*.

⁶⁸ Laury-Nuria 2013: 185.

Pyramid of Meereen, in the city of the same name located in the final turn of that bay, had been built imitating that of the old Ghis, whose ruins were visited by Lomas Longstrider.⁶⁹ It has thirty-three levels, like its predecessor, a number intentionally chosen as a sacred number for the Ghiscari.⁷⁰ Among those in Meereen, the Great Pyramid stands out above the rest. They are pyramids located inside the city,⁷¹ some of them more similar to the Egyptian pyramids and others, to the Mayan pyramids, depending on how they have been depicted in the television series.



Fig. 3. Meereen. *Thrones* S4: Ep.3, “Breaker of Chains”, 0:46:29.

The function of the immense building, however, is different, as it is a palace-prison. It is not necessary to remember that the pyramids of Giza, like the rest of the Egyptian pyramids, being tombs, were in the necropolises and therefore outside the cities. However, the scene of the pyramids of Meereen reminds us of the imaginative reconstruction of the Egyptian capital of Thebes depicted by Antonio Basoli in the Romantic period. In it we can see a large pyramid in the center of the city, with smaller ones around it. Its great pyramid, with monumental entrances, windows and upper balconies, only lacks the harpy on its top to look even more like Meereen’s.⁷²

In any case, the source of inspiration in the Egyptian pyramids and especially in the Great Pyramid of Giza is more than evident. The Great Pyramid of Khufu/Cheops is the oldest historical wonder. It is the one wonder that appears in virtually every list, from Antipater of Sidon and Philo of Byzantium. And being the only one still standing, it is also considered today the dean of the New Seven Wonders of the World, placed above them.⁷³

And, of course, another possible wonder could be the Lighthouse of Oldtown, the oldest city in Westeros, southwest of the Reach. It is a huge tower-shaped fortress, with a multi-phase construction design, and a permanent fire on its top. In the same city is the Citadel, the place where the maesters are trained and which contains an immense library. It is said that King Uthor of the High Tower had a new tower built on the same location, the fifth that had been made, but this time entirely made of stone.⁷⁴ The new tower rose

⁶⁹ Martin, García, Antonsson 2014: 13-14 (“Ancient History. The Rise of Valyria”).

⁷⁰ *DwD* 64 *Victarion* 1.

⁷¹ *SoS* 72 *Daenerys* 6.

⁷² *SoS* 58 *Daenerys* 5; *DwD* 12 *Daenerys* 2; *DwD* 37 *Daenerys* 6.

⁷³ Machu Picchu, Peru; Chichen Itza, in Mexico; the Colosseum, in Rome, Italy; the Christ the Redeemer statue in Rio de Janeiro, Brazil; the Great Wall of China; Petra, in Jordan; Taj Mahal, in Agra, India. This list was voted on 7 July, 2007 in a public and international competition held on the initiative of Swiss entrepreneur Bernard Weber, founder of New Open World Corporation. More than one hundred million votes, via the Internet and SMS, resulted in this new classification.

⁷⁴ We see in this data a new parallel with the history of another of the Seven Wonders of the Ancient World, the Temple of Artemis in Ephesus: this great temple was built five times, on the same site, and each of them

two hundred feet above the harbor. Legend has it that he commissioned Brandon Stark the Builder or his son, also named Brandon, to build it. Thanks to the construction of this fortress, the House Hightower was established as a noble house and the descendants of Uthor ruled Oldtown and the lands of the Honeywine River as kings.⁷⁵



Fig. 4 On the left, the Lighthouse of Oldtown. *Thrones* S6: Ep.10, “The Winds of Winter”, 0:27:04. On the right, Johann Bernhard Fischer von Erlach: *Entwurf einer historischen Architektur*. The Lighthouse of Alexandria (1721) (Public domain – Wikimedia Commons).

It is not difficult to see in Oldtown an imitation of the city of Alexandria, in Egypt, with its two most characteristic attributes: the Pharos and the Great Library. The Pharos, the Lighthouse of Alexandria, built in the time of the first two Ptolemies, was the third tallest building in the ancient world and the first wonder with a clear pragmatic purpose.

As we have already mentioned, it was not definitively fixed in the canonical list of the Seven Wonders until the Renaissance, and neither Antipater of Sidon nor Philo of Byzantium included it in their list. We could accept that none of them included it in their respective lists because, when they saw it daily in Alexandria, it was something close and not extraordinary. And then we could find ourselves in the same situation with Lomas Longstrider, that is, if we consider it that he must have been a maester. This might make us think that the Lighthouse was not among his nine wonders. On the contrary, we might consider that it was there, although not openly quoted, since, as with the Colossus of Rhodes and the Titan of Braavos, the influence of the Lighthouse of Alexandria on the Lighthouse of Oldtown is equally evident, the clearest manifestations of all the phenomenon we are looking at.

4. The presence of the Seven Wonders of the Ancient World in *Game of Thrones*

We dedicate the following section to a little review of the reflection of the Seven Wonders of Antiquity in the world devised by Martin.

To begin with, we have already talked about some of them, as their correlation is unambiguous. If the first of the Seven Wonders of the Ancient World was the Great

was greater and more perfected than the previous one. The fifth construction (Phase E) was the great wonder, the first Greek temple built entirely of marble.

⁷⁵ Martin, García, Antonsson 2014: 213 (“The Seven Kingdoms. The Reach. Oldtown”).

Pyramid of Giza, we just saw that its equivalent would have been the Great Pyramid of old Ghis (note the proximity between the two toponyms: Giza-Ghis; and also the name as Great Pyramid). Or failing that, the Great Pyramid of Meereen, which is the one that appears in the plot of the novels and is visually reflected in the television series.

The Hanging Gardens of Babylon were the second historical wonder by their age, if we stick to the canonical list. However, they have often been linked to another wonder that appeared numerous times on different lists, the Walls of Babylon, thus giving rise to the very conception of the city of Babylon as a wonder as a whole. In this way, as we have also mentioned above, we would understand the city of Qarth, where we can observe both elements, especially in its display in the television series.

On the other hand, we could also detect the influence of the Hanging Gardens on the conception of the Dorne Water Gardens, in the vicinity of Sunspear. We are told in the novels that they were built by Prince Maron Martell as a gift to his wife, Princess Daenerys Targaryen, who was a daughter of Jaehaerys I the Conciliator. Thus they celebrate Dorne's union with the rest of the Seven Kingdoms.⁷⁶ In this tale we can see an evocation of the stories about the origin of the Hanging Gardens of Babylon, which state that they had been a gift from the king to his Median wife.⁷⁷ In addition, the scenes of the Water Gardens in the TV series were filmed in the gardens of the Royal Alcazar of Seville, in which the Arab architectural influence on the conception of palaces with gardens is felt.⁷⁸ Arabs had first met that conception in the East, with a tradition present in Mesopotamia and Persia, a descendant of the ancient Assyrian and Babylonian palatial gardens.

There is no clear equivalence in Game of Thrones for the chryselephantine Statue of Zeus made by Phidias in Olympia.⁷⁹ However, if we stick to its size and majesty, and its typology as a cult statue inside a great temple, we could draw an analogy with the equally huge statues of the Seven in the Great Sept of Baelor, in King's Landing. By changing one by seven, for obvious reasons, the idea of power and majesty of the deities remains, underlined by their size and the twilight and mystery that surrounds their faces.⁸⁰

We have already analyzed the very obvious equivalences between the Colossus of Rhodes and the Titan of Braavos, on the one hand, and between the Lighthouse of Alexandria and the Lighthouse of Oldtown, on the other. And we also noted that they are the clearest correlations between ancient wonders and those of Game of Thrones, not only for their visual conception, but also for their location or functionality.

On the contrary, we find no clear equivalents for two of the Seven Wonders of the Ancient World, namely the Temple of Artemis at Ephesus and the Mausoleum of Halicarnassus. True, some great temples appear in the TV show, such as the Great Sept of Baelor or, above all, the Temple of the Lord of Light, R'hllor, in Volantis, considered

⁷⁶ *FfC* 14 The soiled knight.

⁷⁷ Quintus Curtius Rufus, *History of Alexander* 5.1.35: *Syriae regem Babylone regnantem hoc opus esse molitum memoriae proditum est, amore coniugis victum, quae desiderio nemorum silvarumque in campestribus locis virum conpulit amoenitatem naturae genere huius operis imitari*. "There is a tradition that a king of Syria, who ruled in Babylon, undertook this mighty task, induced by the love for his wife, who for longing for the woods and groves, prevailed upon her husband to imitate in the level country the charm of Nature by a work of this kind" (transl. Rolfe 1946).

⁷⁸ *Thrones* S5: Ep.2, "The House of Black and White", 0:19:29.

⁷⁹ Burton 2015.

⁸⁰ *Thrones* S5: Ep.1, "The Wars to come", 0:06:56. As a comparison, we can see the reconstruction of Phidias' Zeus in Olympia by F. Adler, in Barringer 2015: 21.

the greatest in the world.⁸¹ But none of them resemble the great classical temple. As for the Mausoleum of Halicarnassus, it seems that there is no such construction, either by architectural-sculptural design or by functionality, that is, a monumental tomb designed to preserve the memory of the person or people buried in it.

Beyond the Seven Wonders of the canonical list, Maarten van Heemkerck included the Colosseum, in Rome, as one more wonder, in recognition of the most emblematic building of the Roman Empire. The Colosseum had already been regarded as a wonder by ancient authors, such as the Roman poet Martial.⁸² He cited it as the most important wonder of all, since when the first lists were drawn up by the Greeks, Rome had not yet made its great monumental constructions. And yet, in his time, the Roman Empire dominated all that world known to the Greeks in which the Seven Wonders had been. Since then, it has been almost unanimously regarded as the eighth Wonder of the Ancient World and today is one of the New Seven Wonders of the World.⁸³ In the world of *Game of Thrones*, it is depicted in the Great Arena of Meereen, Daznak's Pit, practically with all its features.⁸⁴ We can see the social division in the tiers of seats, a royal box, *vomitatoria*, *velarium* and gladiator fights in the arena.⁸⁵

5. Conclusions

The idea of the Seven Wonders as a cultural treasure, as an allegory of the outstanding things, is part of the general heritage and tradition of the Mediterranean world. Over time, this idea extended to all the world.

In this chapter we have seen how this idea has transcended the very reality of that cultural and artistic heritage to get to the plane of fantastic fiction. It is found in our cultural background and even unconsciously manifests itself in any kind of representation—being real or imaginary—of great human constructions as symbols of various civilizations. The figurative expression of this idea, that is, its visualization, has greatly contributed to the connection with this cultural background. Thus, the conversion of lists of wonders into series of engravings and paintings has historically played the same role that, in the case of Martin's world, the passage from the written text of novels to television image has played too. That conversion from words to image in relation with the wonders can be clearly understood when *A Song of Ice and Fire*—the novels—became *Game of Thrones*, the television series. Whereas in the former there are lists, where wonders are kept, in the latter there are maps, from where wonders emerge.

We have seen that also present is the phenomenon of the elaboration of lists of great human constructions, as well as that of the scholarly compilers who dedicated

⁸¹ Martin, García, Antonsson 2014: 268 ("Beyond the Sunset Kingdom. The Free Cities: Volantis"): "in *Remnants of the Dragonlords*, Archmaester Gramyon claims that it is fully three times larger than the Great Sept of Baelor."

⁸² Martial, *Liber Spectaculorum* I: "*Barbara pyramidum sileat miracula Memphis, / Assyrius iactet nec Babylona labor; / nec Triviae templo molles laudentur Iones, / dissimulet Delon cornibus ara frequens / aere nec uacuo pendentia Mausolea laudibus / inmodicis Cares in astra ferant. / Omnis Caesareo cedit labor Amphitheatro, / unum pro cunctis fama loquetur opus*"; "Let barbarous Memphis stop talking about the miracle of the pyramids; Assyrian toil is not to vaunt Babylon and the soft Ionians are not to garner praise for Trivia's temple; let the altar of many horns say nothing about Delos, and do not let the Carians lavish extravagant praise on the Mausoleum suspended in empty air and exalt it to the stars. All labour yields to Caesar's amphitheatre: Fame will tell of one work instead of them all" (transl. Coleman 2006: 1).

⁸³ See note 73.

⁸⁴ *Thrones* S5: Ep.9, "The Dance of Dragons", 0:33:07.

⁸⁵ Martin, García, Antonsson 2014: 297. Beyond the Sunset Kingdom. Beyond the Free Cities: Ib.

themselves to it. The ideas of wonder, *autopsía* or *periégesis*, the criteria to be able to consider something a wonder, the possibility of the same scholarly origin of the lists in a great center of knowledge, even cultural openness to the East, all of this is present in the same way in our history and in the work that is the subject of this chapter.

Likewise, we have seen the influence of wonders or other great historical constructions, or some of their features, on the creation of Longstrider's Nine Wonders.

And in turn, we have also seen how most of the Seven Wonders of the Ancient World have also had their reflection in various wonders or great human constructions of Martin's world.

It would be difficult to try to imagine the different locations of that imaginary world without the constructions that have become distinctive symbols of those regions. No one could imagine the separation with the northernmost areas of Westeros or think of the dangers lurking beyond without the Wall. No one would differentiate the city of Oldtown from the other cities of Westeros, especially as characterized by their castles, were it not for its Lighthouse and by the Citadel of the Maesters, and the appeal to Alexandria. Meereen, a city of slavers, would not be seen equal without its pyramids and fighting pits, which link it to the two greatest slave societies of our ancient past, Egypt and the Roman Empire. Qarth would not be seen as the wonder of the East if it were not assimilated to Babylon through its walls and gardens. Braavos, a free city founded on trade and maritime power, as Rhodes and Venice were, would not be so easy to understand without its Colossus, the Titan, its canals and the Iron Bank.

In other words: the world of Game of Thrones would be incomplete without its wonders.

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