



mythLORE

A Journal of J.R.R. Tolkien, C.S. Lewis,  
Charles Williams, and Mythopoeic Literature

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Volume 1  
Issue 1

Article 8

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January 1970

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### Recommended Citation

Ralph, David (1970) "A Comparison of the Calormenes with the Arabs, Turks, and Ancient Babylonians," *Mythcon Proceedings*: Vol. 1 : Iss. 1 , Article 8.

Available at: <https://dc.swosu.edu/mythpro/vol1/iss1/8>

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## Mythcon 51: The Mythic, the Fantastic, and the Alien

Albuquerque, New Mexico • Postponed to: July 30 – August 2, 2021



### Abstract

Notes some of the parallels between Lewis's Calormenes and traditional Arabian society and government, Babylonian religion, Turkish military dress and tactics, and general Middle Eastern geography and architecture.

### Keywords

Lewis, C.S.—Characters—Calormenes

# A Comparison<sup>of</sup> the Calormenes with the Arabs, Turks, and Ancient Babylonians by David Ralph

This is a comparison of the mythical empire of the Calormenes to the medieval Turks and Arabians and the ancient Babylonians.

The most obvious comparison is probably in the people. Like Arabian people, the Calormenes have dark complexions. Both are noted for their manners and polite behavior, which are essential to their social life. Rich and nobility in both Calormen and Arabia live in a luxury nearly identical, with fine fruits, perfumes, and litters carried by slaves. The nobility in both lands enjoy the same entertainment, such as dancing girls and royal hunts. The males, rich or poor, wear turbans, and the Calormenes wear shoes turned up at the toes as do the Turks living in the highlands. Some phrases Calormenes use have an Arabian feeling, such as the phrase "glorious one", "expected one", etc. Also like Arabians they many times quote words of wisdom.

The religion of Calormen resembles that of the Babylonians. Both Tash and the Babylonian gods were parts of different animals, and the worshippers performed human sacrifices to them before great altars. Although the Calormenes feared their god Tash to a certain extent, the Babylonians feared their gods more.

The government of Calormen bears some likeness to Arabia. In Calormen the equivalent of a Caliph might be a Tisroc, and both lands had administrators called Grand Viziers who were a few steps down from the Caliph or Tisroc. Lastly there were great families, the head of which was called a Tarkaan in Calormen.

The war dress was a most noticeable likeness between Calormen and the Turks in THE LAST BATTLE. Calormenes used scimitars, spiked helmets, mail coats, and round shields typical of the Turkish warrior of the middle ages. Like Turks the Calormenes often fought on horseback, sold the conquered into slavery, and were known for their cruelty.

The desert near Tashbaan is another aspect that might remind the reader of the Near East; also the fact that south of Tashbaan near the sea there are many fishermen, as on the Red Sea coast of Saudi Arabia. The city of Tashbaan is built on a river as are many great Arabian cities such as Baghdad, Cairo, Alexandria, and Khartoum. The location of Tashbaan is most like that of Khartoum. Both cities are built on an island in a river with a bridge leading to the mainland.

Calormen architecture in Tashbaan has an Arabian flavor with its domes, square towers, great gardens, and the palace of the Tisroc built in the center of the city and elevated so that it can be seen outside the city walls. Calormen tombs

were built above ground and had openings in them and were built in a domelike fashion as were Arabian tombs.

In this comparison I hope I have shown how the fictional Calormenes resemble some of the people of our own world.



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