

Atlantis

Atlantis: We will ever know

Fantasy is a tough sell in the twentieth century.

The world has been fully discovered and fully mapped. Popular media has effectively minimized the legend and the fantastic rumor, though to make up for this it has generated falsities not as lavish but just as interesting. Satellites have mapped and studied the earth, leaving only a space frontier that is as yet unreachable.

But standing out is a charming fantasy the modern world has yet to verify or condemn: the lost continent of Atlantis.

The father of the modern world's perception of Atlantis is Plato (circa 428- circa 347 b.c.). (1) The Greek philosopher spoke in his works *Timaeus* and *Critias* of a continent in the Atlantic ocean larger than Africa and Asia Minor combined which rivaled Athens as the most advanced in the world. (2) According to the legend surrounding Plato's dialogues, the island of Atlantis was violently thrown into the sea by the forces of nature, and its few survivors managed to swim ashore and relate their story. (3) There the legend was passed by word of mouth until an Egyptian priest related the story to Solon, a character in *Timaeus*. The priest admired the achievements of prehistoric Athenians, because when the rulers of Atlantis threatened to invade all of Europe and Asia the Athenians, on behalf of all Greeks, defeated the Atlanteans to avoid enslavement. (4)

The works of Plato opened the floodgates to endless speculation on whether the continent described was fact or fiction. Atlantis has since been placed in Spain, Mongolia, Palestine, Nigeria, the Netherlands, Brazil, Sweden, Greenland and Yucatan. Every nook and cranny of the globe has been hypothesized; mountain peaks, desert lands, the ocean floor and even the barren wasteland of Antarctica have been mentioned in theories. (5)

While some of these theories are compatible with Plato's works and are within relative reason, numerous crackpot theories have been developed using the lost continent as a basis. One of these theories, posted on the computer internet where it has access to over fifteen million people, talks in twenty-one pages of pre-historical lands with names like Oz and Luxor. These world wide web pages list over two hundred separate articles of proof for the existence of Atlantis, as in the following: (6)

"Most all ancient civilizations believed in the TITANS, the race of giant humans that inhabited Earth long ago. Different races knew them by different names. These 7 to 12 foot humanoids were thought to be legendary until the excavation of over a dozen skeletons 8 to 12 feet tall, around the world, shocked archeologists. These skeletons were positively human. Some of these skeletal remains are on Maui in lava caves near Ulupalakua and Olowalu. The Spanish Conquistadors left diaries of wild

blond-haired, blue-eyed 8 to 12 foot high men running around in the Andes during the conquest of the Incas. A couple were reportedly captured but died en route to Europe. If giant animals (dinosaurs) were possible then why not giant men? And why are these goliaths populating both Eurasia and the Americas? Only on a land bridge created by the vast continent of Antarctica can there be a sufficient bridge for the spread of these giants." (7)

This text, written by self-proclaimed Atlantologist Steve Omar, represents Plato's text taken to the extreme- using his ideas as a basis for outlandish and unfounded ideas.

These unverified fantasies make a dubious complement to the other dark side of the Atlantean fantasy: hoaxes. Atlantis has been "discovered" many times, but most notably in the fall of 1912 by Dr. Paul Schliemann. Schliemann introduced himself as the grandson of the famous Heinrich Schliemann, the archeologist who discovered the ruins of ancient Troy in 1873. His "discovery" made front page news (The New York American, October 1912.) and boasted of an advanced civilization with aircraft, power-driven boats and the like. Schliemann said his grandfather told him on his deathbed of the family's secret: the location of Atlantis. Schliemann's claims made waves, but didn't hold water; when pressed for details, Schliemann was unresponsive and eventually disappeared from public view. (8)

Unfortunately, the falsities concerning Atlantis frequently overshadow the possibilities. The subject has gathered its share of honest journalists as well. Ignatius Donnelly wrote the first extensive study of the possibility of existence in 1882, and his views have not been found to be false with twentieth century technology. Donnelly believed in Atlantis, but believed it to be worldly; his reasons for Atlantis's existence are unable to be proven, but make sense. Some examples:

-There is nothing improbable in Plato's narrative; it describes rich, cultured and educated people but doesn't mention things of fantasy like giants, hobgoblins etc. (9)

-Plato speaks of hot and cold springs in the center of Atlantis, a feature common to islands with volcanic activity. Chances are Plato didn't know this. (9)

-Plato says in his stories that the Poseidon, the Greek god of the sea, is always seen on a chariot with horses because he was originally the god of Atlantis, where horses were domesticated. But when Atlantis fell to the sea, the Greeks believed Poseidon brought his horses with him. (9)

Responding partly to Donnelley's theories and partly to the urge to discover, some 20th century archeologists have used twentieth century technology to look for Atlantis. But many have dismissed Atlantis as glorified myths of volcanic eruptions

in  
the island of Thera in 1450 b.c. The eruption may have destroyed that island and  
caused  
a small earthquake and tsunamis that ruined the civilization of Crete, but didn't  
sink a  
continent. (10)

Therefore, none of Donnelley's theories can be proved without the actual  
discovery of the continent. The legend of Atlantis is only a huge collection of  
theories  
and guesses, but theories and guesses also led to the discovery of the lost Roman  
cities  
of Pompeii and Herculaneum, discovered after being buried and preserved by the  
volcanic  
ash of nearby Mt. Vesuvius. Because of this, the mystery of Atlantis's existence  
will  
tantalize the world until the continent is either proven or disproven. (11)