

2. Atlantis through the ages.

Atlantis' mystery's history begun about two thousands and half years ago, when in 379 A.C. the great philosopher Plato spoke about it in his dialogues *Timeus* and *Critias*. The idea of a huge beautiful land which suddenly disappeared caught early the curiosity and skepticism of people. Many, since Plato's age, begun to ask themselves if such a story could be possible. Among others it's interesting knowing his disciples opened a discussion in the Academy on this subject. One of them, recalling what said Proclus, the first commentator of Plato's dialogues, was named Crantor and looks he went to Egypt to verify the tale's truth and the response was positive. Peter James, a notorious English archeologist who believes Atlantis is in Turkey, pointed out how the comments of Proclus have been translated ambiguously. In fact, speaking about the trip in Egypt, he uses the pronoun *he*, which according to the context can be referred to both Plato and Crantor. Here we show the most meaningful piece of Proclus' comment:

"With full respect for the Atlantis' tale, some people say it is a true story: that is the opinion of Crantor, the Plato's first commentator, who upholds he was mocked by his contemporaneus because he was not the inventor of the Republic but just always limited himself copying what Egyptians already wrote... Crantor even says it was said by Egyptian priests, who gave confirmation that the details, like Plato told, have been cut out in coloumns still existing.

From this passage would seem that Proclus words can't be mistaken for others. The problem is in the last sentence because the original subject was the pronoun *he* which Taylor in 1820 (in the only existing translation of Proclus' work) wrongly translated referring it to Crantor. That is James' opinion. Anyway we are going to offer another point of view: in that sentence the name of Plato appears again thus making hard he was even the subject of the sentence (We mean, if really Proclus really referred to Plato as subject probably he needn't to repeat his name a second time because it sounds bad and because it was better using another pronoun: e.g. "like *he* told"). There is more: Proclus speaks about some coloumns were the history of Atlantis was cut out while Plato never wrote where if the Egyptian priest read the history in a papyrus, a wall or coloumns. This was probably an additional testimiance brought by Crantor and so he likely could have found clues of Plato's truth! Criously enough, Proclus also spke about a work which has not kept up to pur days, The *Historia Etiopica* by Marcellus, where he looks like to collect one more proof about the evidence of Plato's dialogues:

"the fact that such a huge island really existed it's obvious thanks to what some respectable historians use to say about the outer ocean. Because in their opinion in that sea there were seven islands devoted to Persefone and three huge islands, which one of them was devoted to Pluto, another to Ammon and the one in the middle, big at least a thousand stadia, devoted to Poseidon. The inahbitants of these islands saved the memory of their ancestor and of the Atlantic island which was once there and that for a long time ruled other Atlantic islands and that was devoted to Poseidon too."

Instead we know who was the first being to show an opposition against Atlantis: the most famous disciple of Plato, Aristotle. In his opinion the tale was made up by Plato because a large mass of land can't disappear in just 24 hours and so "*who invented it even destroyed it*", alluding to the big mistake Plato did by concluding abruptly the history of Atlantis. Excluding the mystery of Crantor no one ever showed concrete proofs about the truth or the falsity of the dialogues. Before Plato someone used to mention beautiful islands further the Pillars of Hercules but never spoke about lost civilizations. Classical writers who came after Plato always underlined the shadow of uncertainness surrounding the story, which already became a mystery, and used to point out the voices about beautiful islands in the Ocean as proof of Plato's dialogues' reliability. It's very important and meaningful the interpretation of Diodor Siculus, an historian, who spoke a lot about the people of Marocco near the chains of mountain Atlas; he believed in the history of Atlantis and speaks about some islands in the Atlantic:

"Now that we already discussed about the islands that lay inside the pillars of Heracles, we have to speak about the ones that lay in the ocean. In fact at Lybia's open sea there is an island of remarkable dimensions, that being in the middle of the ocean, is far some days of navigation towards west from Lybia. It's a island rich of fruits and mountains with a small extraordinary beautiful plain where there are some navigable rivers

used for irrigation. There are lot of parks in the island and each kind of tree and they' re crossed by freash water streams. There are even private comfortable houses... the clime of this island is so mild that the trees can produce great quantity of fruits and even seasonal products are abundant so that, for such a incredible prosperity, the island looks like home of gods and not of men. Then Phoenicians, exploring the coasts beyond the pillars of Heracles for the reasons we already said, being clos to the Lybic coast were compelled by strong winds to drift to open sea and after being troubled by a storm for some days they approached the island we told and when they realized the prosperity ans happiness of the place they wished to let men know about that.

To tell the truth we have clues Phoenicians were successful in reaching Brazilian coasts, in South America, where there are lot of navigable rivers and abundance of fruits. Anyway, in this case, being an island, it' likely they navigated around it and understood it was an island, probably Hispaniola or Cuba. Diodor source could be Phoenician. An extraordinary document comes from Elianus, who mentioned Atlantis providing additional information unknown by Plato. From the following translation we have only to understand if he read written sources or the habits of some populations that Elianus identified with Atlantis:

"People living in the oceanic coasts tell that the ancient kings of Atlantis, who said to be descendants of Poseidon, weared on the head some belts obtained from water arieses' skin, as sign of authority. Likewise queens weared belts obtained from female water arieses' skin..."

Anyway no confirmations or discoveries and the doubt still remained and during High and Low medieval time it was forgotten. In fact the interests, curiosity and research of Atlantis started again thanks to the transoceanic travels which signed the modern discovery of the New World in 1492. The courage of exploring new lands and reaching the Indies leaving towards West thanks to the roundness of Earth was fed up by the possibility of finding resources and refuge in islands laying in the Ocean. In order to have a more comfortable and planned travel captains and admirals used to recovery some strange maps and draw some to understand what could wait for them beyond the Pillars of Hercules. Cristoforo Colombo owned many of them and he was sure he would have found many islands during his journey to the Indies. some maps represented (and still represents...) a rectangular island called Antilia but there is no trace about Atlantis. The most outstanding map of the period is the one which belonged to admiral Piri R'eis. It's dated back to 1513 and it's certainly the copy of a more ancient map maybe saved in the library of Constantinople. It shows, through a great precision in the proportions, the coasts of Spain, north Africa and Brasil, where the mouth of the Rio is clearly visible. At the bottom of the map there is another profile, connected to South America, which revealed to be the one of Antarctica when free from ice. Anyway there is no clue of Atlantis yet. These maps are indirect sources which look not to point out the presence of a large land mass in the middle Atlantic, where Atlantis was supposed to be. The more people explored the Oceans the more maps were compiled and even the first plan spheres were drawn too. The map of Al Mamhud dates back to 1555 and shows perfectly the North America, linked to Asia through a bridge of land in the Beiring strait like what science suppose to be 12,000 years ago. According to this particular and to the fact that the profiles of America are too exact if compared to the number of explorations made up to then we can conclude it was a copy of an ancient source too. While the interest of Atlantis was awakening again some maps and plan spheres showed perfectly the entire Antarctica before it was discovered in 1859! among these there are the plan spheres of Oronzio Fineo and Mercator, but the most amazing piece is the Bauche's map (1737) which reveals Antarctica is divided in to two islands. In fact in the second half of 1900 scientists discovered that leaving the ice from the continent effectively two islands, one bigger and one smaller, would appear. This is a map which inspired the theory of Atlantis in Antarctica in the second half of 1900.

For the moment, in the centuries which see the scientific, industrial and cultural revolutions with illuminism and romanticism Atlantis remains an unsolvable mystery, but something begun to move. From a side the colonization of the New World brought a huge cultural patrimony of ancient pre - Columbian civilizations. Unfortunately even a considerable part of this was irremediably lost as Catholics used to burn and destroy each form of knowledge which didn't suit their ideas. However they discovered in America a lot of myths concerning the end of a fatherland and several destructions of Earth occurred. Moreover a lot of affinities between these civilizations and Mediterranean' s ones (which came before Romans) didn't miss. When Incas were colonized, their

cities, covered by gold and valuable metals, looked like a dream to travelers' eyes. Thinking about the abundance of valuable metals Atlantis had, many thought America was maybe Atlantis itself. Anyway in 1882, thanks to this cultural importation and to the development of science the "atlantologic" studies had a revolution. Ignatius Donnelly, an erudite man of American Congress, published a best - seller (which is still printed) entitled "*Atlantis: the antediluvian World*". This book, which explained a theory based over 13 main points, used a deep (even if not always exact) analysis of global mythology and of the new geologic findings. In fact, during that century, through the use of the sonar, the mid Atlantic ridge was discovered and it came (and still come) out from water giving consistence to the Azores. This is a big chain of mountains that reaches some kilometers under the sea level. Donnelly thought it was the main part of the continent of Atlantis which sunk just when Plato said. But Donnelly didn't know that a considerable part of the chain, in order to form a big land mass, would be over sea level only if we lower this one of at least 1,000 - 800 meters. If, since the end of Atlantis till now, the waters had raised so much there would have not been problems, but we know that this was impossible. In the same way the mid Atlantic ridge couldn't collapse over itself owing to the concept of Earth's crust. What is more valuable in Donnelly's work is the union of several field of knowledge in order to solve a common problem: geology, mythology, zoology, linguistic, arts and so on. His theory of a large continent in the mid Atlantic has been the main one for great part of 1900 before being slowly put aside owing to the discoveries we spoke before. A lot of authors wrote books following the red line of Donnelly and correcting his imprecision, sometimes very rough.

The thrust given by Donnelly made the researches of Atlantis grow very quickly and during the last century the books on Atlantis became thousands! The theory of an "atlantic" Atlantis belonged to a *rational* school, meaning it was based on a study which wanted to be objective and scientific. Among the most famous writers in such theory there were Lewis Spence, a Scottish mythologue, and Charles Berlitz, one of the most skilled linguist in the world. They corrected some of the mistakes of Donnelly but unfortunately they suffered the fact that some gologic theories were still too young at that time. In fact Berlitz is really vague when speaks about big islands in the Mid Atlantic which would appear if we lower the sea level. The same for Spence that did a useless comparison between American civilizations and Mediterranean civilizations to show that there was one between them. The highest favors of this theory were reached in 1968, when in the water of Bahamas was discovered what we know as *Bimini road*. It's a sort of road made with squared block of stones and which features even 90 degrees angles; it's surely work of mankind. The most amazing thing is that this site was free from water just before the end of the last ice age, 12,000 years ago. The discovery, made by the naturalist J.Manson Valentine surprised all the world and opened a hot debate on this site which was continuously visited by experts. A part of them agrees with their artificial origin and another, of course, not. In my opinion, after seeing the photos of the blocks extracted for C14 analysis, no doubt remains over their artificial origin. For the Bahamas, which still today are a candidate for the possible location of Atlantis, there is always the problem that never before 12,000 years ago were a large continent or island. Before his death, Valentine had already registered a lot of underwater sites that could serve other information. The theory, always belonging to the rational school, which most challenged that one is the one which born during the excavations at Crete and Thera. This theory was enlighten in 1900 when Sir Arthur Evans managed the excavations around Cnosso, finding even the legendary labyrinth of Minotaur. After several years Indi Frost already claimed Crete as the source of inspiration for Plato (see the article in the section "archives"). In the development of this theory we must point out the work of Angelos Galanopulos during '30s and of Spiridon Marinatos during '70s. This one was so unlucky to die in an accident during the works. Anyway this theory took even two different directions: some say Plato was inspired by Crete, others think he receipted a confused story of Crete in Egypt and didn't recognized that. The background of the theory is the proved explosion of Thera in 1,500 A.C. which stoke irremediably the Minoan civilization and put it in the path of decline. This "Atlantis" still survives nowadays differently from the "atlantic" one, but found another friend, the "Antarctic Atlantis". Without any doubts this new identification of Atlantis rescued a great success during '90s thanks to the work of Rand and Rose Flem - Ath but it's not so convincing and didn't show concrete evidence. Most of the last would be represented by the Bauche's map as if someone knew Antarctica he would live there... Eventually some of the arguments pro this theory can be even referred to many other places in the world. It's a theory too general and sometimes provides

scientific elements not so reliable. Another theory that is actually capturing press and people attention is Cuba, supported by Andrew Collins. This theory represents the last serious attempt to locate Atlantis in the actual Atlantic Ocean. Interestingly enough some scientists claim to have discovered regular structures 700 m below sea level near Cuba itself. They already speak about a submerged city even if no one really took a photo or saw with his eyes. We can only say that hardly enough a city like Atlantis, which was once on a plateau, can be now in such a place, considering sea level growth and reasonable geologic events.

But the problem wasn't only finding the sunken land mass of Atlantis but even finding out its degree of civilization. To tell the truth this is a question and a research without any sense since, if Atlantis already existed, Plato spoke widely about it, making a picture of a civilization skilled in working metals, engineering, arts, navigation and with original and valuable spiritual conceptions. Above this subject anyway the most fantastic and unbelievable theories took place thanks to what we can call the *science fiction* school of Atlantis. Here the theosophical theories of Madame Blavatsky and of her disciples, the readings of Edgar Cayce find the right place. The first haven't any reason to exist and caused skepticism on Atlantis by people: in fact speaking arrogantly without any proof of a transcendent civilization which was the absolute beginning of man isn't the right way to show Atlantis. Cayce's readings were not less fantastic since he stated Atlanteans could fly, record videos and voices, use laser and store energy in special crystals. His readings seem to recall the contents of the ancient epic poems of India, the *Ramayana* and *Mahabarata*, but this belongs to another kind of discussion. The fact is that none of what he said could be verified in Plato's dialogues.

The curiosity of people and the popular interest over Atlantis grew even thanks to the spreading of this information, which to tell the truth it's not based on scientific evidence or philosophical... So, actually, some people has a hyper technologic Atlantis in their mind but they can't show anything. Objectively the problem of technology can't be proposed yet. We must notice then that Cayce and theosophists agreed in placing Atlantis in the middle Atlantic. Science, along more concrete reasons, showed the opposite, what a pity...

More hundredths of theories exist which all bring to different paths and almost all are constructed without reading the original sources of Plato. Thanks to this vice and to the academic thought Atlantis still remains a mystery, at least until the revolutionary theory of J.M. Allen will satisfy all.