

Quest for Atlantis. The search for archaeological evidence of a legend

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Introduction

As old as Stonehenge, the megalithic site of Carnac, in France, is not a stone circle or 'henge'. It is, instead, four separate groupings of linear alignments consisting of more than three thousand upright stones or 'menhirs'. As an archaeologist interested in the ability of ancient people to marshal the forces of enormous groups and coordinate their labor to produce monumental structures, I wanted to see Carnac for myself. My assistant during my 2001 visit to the site was my then fifteen-year-old son Josh. At first, we had the place all to ourselves and, except for the rumble of traffic on a nearby roadway, it was easy to imagine Carnac as it was when new, more than 4,000 years ago.

That is when we saw him. He appeared to be, at first, nothing more than another visitor to the site, entranced, as we were, by its alien majesty. Curiously, however, each time I looked up from my reverie, he appeared to be moving surreptitiously toward us. When he finally peered out from behind the standing stone my son and I were examining, I was startled and more than a little concerned about this gentleman's intent.

My French speaking abilities, already fairly limited, became even worse in my emotional state, but I managed to blurt out: 'Pardon? Que voulez-vous?' To which the stranger responded in heavily accented English: 'Oh, I am not French, I am Dutch. I am so sorry to disturb you. Pardon me, but aren't you an archaeologist?'

I was stunned. How could this person have known my profession? I responded: 'Well, yes, but how did you know that?' His response clarified the situation.

I have recently seen you on a BBC documentary about the Lost Continent of Atlantis. I recognized you immediately and thought it such an amazing bit of luck, running into an archaeologist from the television here at this wonderful place. I have had a long layman's interest in archaeology and I thought the documentary was fantastic, so very interesting. I very much enjoyed your contribution to the show.

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The program to which he was referring was titled *Atlantis Uncovered*. It was a 1999 BBC documentary, part of their *Horizon* science series.¹ I had, indeed, been interviewed on the program, wherein I expressed my strong skepticism concerning the historicity of Atlantis.

I admit, at that moment, to feeling rather full of myself as my new Dutch friend heaped praise upon the documentary, my profession in general, and me in particular. Of course, it did seem a bit odd when he leaned in and whispered, almost conspiratorially: ‘Are you searching for Atlantis here?’ I really had been unremittingly skeptical about the claim that Atlantis was a real place or even that Plato had based the dialogues in which the story appears on an actual location and series of events. At the conclusion of our conversation, the two of us shook hands and off he went, quite pleased, it appeared, to have met a ‘real’ archaeologist, one from the television no less.

I turned to my son, perhaps a little too prideful, and said: ‘You have to admit that was pretty impressive. Here we are, walking around an ancient megalithic monument in France and a Dutch guy recognizes me and praises my contribution to a television documentary produced by the BBC and then asks if I’m searching for Atlantis. I’m internationally famous! Aren’t you impressed?’ Josh gave me his best look of fake sincerity, put his hand on my shoulder and said: ‘Gee dad; I guess you know you’ve really made it when you have a fan club in Holland.’

The purpose of this story, however, is not to show how annoying teenagers can be, but to exemplify the abiding interest people have in the possibility that archaeological evidence proves that human history was greatly influenced by a precociously sophisticated ancient civilization which, despite its advanced technology, great wealth, and military power was destroyed by an unimaginable natural cataclysm about 11,600 years ago. The producers of the BBC documentary and my Dutch friend were certainly not the first to wonder if there was any truth to the tale told by Critias and passed along by Plato. That interest in Atlantis has inspired some to actually search for the truth behind Plato’s story in the physical record provided by archaeology. I will summarize a number of these attempts in this paper.

¹ ‘Atlantis Uncovered’, *BBC Horizon* (1999).

Finding Atlantis?

Louis Figuier was a well-respected naturalist and scientist in the second half of the nineteenth century. The author of several books, the one most relevant to our discussion here is *La Terre et Les Mers ou Description Physique du Globe – The Earth and the Seas or Description of the World*.² In this work, Figuier appears to be the first author to assert that: 1) Plato's Atlantis was a veritable place; 2) it was located, not in the Atlantic, but in the Mediterranean and; 3) its demise as described in the *Timaeus* and *Critias* dialogues was precipitated by an actual event, specifically the volcanic eruption of Thera on the island historically called Santorini.³ In *La Terre et Les Mers*, Figuier proposes that:

In other words, we hope to establish that Plato's Atlantis, accepted by some, denied by others, interpreted a hundred ways at various times, has really existed, and disappeared beneath the waves, because of earthquakes similar to those seen today in the vicinity of Santorini. Plato's Atlantis was, in our view, an island in the archipelago of Greece. A volcanic upheaval swallowed it beneath the waters of the Mediterranean in prehistoric times.⁴

Disputing the claims made by others that Atlantis was located in Palestine, Sweden, or America, Figuier maintains that Atlantis existed 'not beyond the Pillars of Hercules, as in the text of *Timaeus*, but we believe, in the Greek archipelago.'⁵ Like many authors who followed him, Figuier ignores many of the particulars of *Critias*'s rather precise details concerning the location of Atlantis (in the Atlantic Ocean) as well as its size ('greater in extent than Libya and Asia'⁶).

At one time associated with Queen's College in Belfast, K.T. Frost followed Figuier in a correspondence titled 'The Lost Continent', published anonymously in *The Times* (London) on February 19, 1909.⁷ There he asserts

² L. Figuier, *La Terre et Les Mers ou Description Physique du Globe* (Paris, 1872).

³ Plato, *Timaeus*. <http://classics.mit.edu/Plato/timaeus.html>, accessed 16 October 2016; Plato, *Critias*. <http://classics.mit.edu/Plato/critias.html>, accessed 16 October 2016.

⁴ Figuier, *La Terre et Les Mers*, 415; my translation.

⁵ *Ibidem*, 420-421.

⁶ Plato, *Critias*. <http://classics.mit.edu/Plato/critias.html>, accessed 16 October 2016.

⁷ K.T. Frost, 'The Lost Continent', *The Times*, 19 February 1909, 10.

that the essence of Plato's Atlantis story was based on fact. He specifies that: "The whole description of Atlantis which is given in the *Timaeus* and *Critias* has features so thoroughly Minoan that even Plato could not have invented so many unsuspecting facts."⁸ Sir Arthur Evans had, in 1903, excavated the great, labyrinthine structure at Knossos on Crete and, in so doing, had discovered what he believed to be an ancient, lost civilization, that of the Minoans. Frost believed that this Minoan civilization had been the inspiration for Plato's Atlantis.

Four years later, Frost abandoned his anonymity and expanded his thesis in an article published in *The Journal of Hellenic Studies* (1913).⁹ Frost makes clear the thrust of his argument in the title of that article: "The *Critias* and Minoan Crete". Frost reiterated in this article that much of Plato's description of the geography and culture of Atlantis was a remarkably close match to what was historically known and what had been archaeologically revealed about Minoan Crete, but his enumeration of similarities is quite generic. He notes, for example, that Plato's Atlantis was a 'great and wonderful empire' which held dominion over the sea in which it was located.¹⁰ Beyond this Frost points out that the Atlanteans had expansionist ambitions, hoping to economically and politically dominate their neighbors. Frost then asks rhetorically: 'Could the political position of Cnossus (today spelled Knossos) be expressed more accurately?'¹¹ Well, though such a summary of Atlantis as provided in *Timaeus* and *Critias* may seem to be an accurate match for Minoan Crete, it applies to virtually all civilizations, both ancient and modern. The very general nature of so many of the proposed identities between Atlantis and an archaeological source, especially Minoan Crete, is a fundamental problem that afflicts Frost's and, in truth, every attempt to link the literary creation of Plato to a real place.

Frost clearly recognizes that in order to transport an island nation placed by Plato in the Atlantic Ocean outside of the Pillars of Hercules (the Straits of Gibraltar), to a location within the Mediterranean where Crete is actually located, quite a bit of reworking needs to be done to Plato's story. Frost simply asserts that, regarding the location of Atlantis, the Egyptian source of the tale must simply have been confused. The details about

⁸ Frost, 'The Lost Continent', 10.

⁹ K.T. Frost, 'The *Critias* and Minoan Crete', *The Journal of Hellenic Studies* 33 (1913) 189-206.

¹⁰ Frost, 'The *Critias* and Minoan Crete', 197.

¹¹ *Ibidem*.

Atlantis appearing in *Critias*, and which Frost acknowledges to be demonstrably false (for example, the significant role of elephants on the lost continent though they are wholly lacking in Minoan Crete), are dismissed as minor errors or embellishments which also can be ignored.¹² In other words, Frost picks and chooses those general details of *Timaeus* and *Critias* that match what was then known about Minoan Crete and ignores or rationalizes those that don't. Tellingly, concerning the precise and impossible dating of Atlantis and its utter destruction some 9,300 years before Plato, Frost has nothing to say at all.

Making Crete Atlantis

Following this, not much new was added to the Atlantis equation until Greek archaeologist Spyridon Marinatos proposed a mechanism for the fall, not of Atlantis, but of the Minoan civilization, in an article published in the venerable British journal *Antiquity* in 1939.¹³ Since Evans, archaeologists and historians have recognized that, beginning about 5,000 years ago, Minoan Crete had evolved into the dominant pre-Mycenaean and pre-Greek economic and political entity in the Mediterranean, an equal to that of Egypt to the east and south during the same time period. Centered on the island of Crete, the iconic architectural accomplishment of Minoan civilization is the sprawling complex at Knossos, a monumental palace/civic center, built more than 3,800 years ago, which was home to their king, and was also the hub of Minoan economic and social life.

Covering a vast expanse of 20,000 m², the Knossos palace contains more than one thousand separate rooms in its three and sometimes four individual levels, including a central courtyard, a ceremonial bath, rooms for storage, living quarters adorned with frescos of dolphins and bulls, and a complex of elaborate rooms thought to have housed the king and his family (see fig. 1). Archaeologists Runnels and Murray characterize the palace at Knossos as, fundamentally, 'a village under one roof.'¹⁴ Upwards of 100,000 people were citizens of the Minoan polity, living on Crete and surrounding

¹² Frost, 'The Critias and Minoan Crete', 204-205.

¹³ S. Marinatos, 'The volcanic destruction of Minoan Crete', *Antiquity* 13 (1939) 425-439.

¹⁴ C. Runnels and P.M. Murray, *Greece Before History: An Archaeological Companion and Guide* (Stanford, CA 2001) 80.

islands in the Mediterranean. Crete's geographic position in the Mediterranean allowed for its control of trade in the region and it became a dominant maritime power with important harbors and a large fleet of seaworthy ships.



Fig. 1: Photograph showing a small, reconstructed and refurbished segment of the expansive palace of Knossos on Crete. Photo: Bernard Gagnon, Wikimedia. https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Knossos#/media/File:Knossos_-_North_Portico_02.jpg, accessed 1 November 2016.

An ancient and magnificent palace on Crete was an unexpected discovery and it comes as no surprise that it inspired speculation concerning a possible connection to Plato's tale of an advanced civilization. At the time of Marinatos's writing, radiocarbon dating had not yet been developed and chronologies were proposed based largely on the analysis of stratigraphy, by sequencing ceramics, and, where possible, through the analysis of historical documents. This uncertainty in dating the fall of the Minoan civilization resides at the core of the hypothesis he proposed in his 1939 *Antiquity* article. In that piece, Marinatos suggests a direct correspondence between the cataclysmic eruption of Thera – that Figuier had already associated with the fall of fabled Atlantis – and the destruction of the historical Minoan

civilization. Marinatos proposed that this eruption, located just one hundred kilometers north of Crete, was the proximate cause of the fall of the Minoans.

Using the paroxysmal 1883 eruption of Krakatoa in the East Indies as a model for the destructive force of a pyroclastic volcanic eruption, Marinatos proposed that the Minoan civilization was virtually destroyed, nearly overnight, by a combination of the deposition of volcanic ejecta from Thera onto Crete, attendant powerful earthquake aftershocks of the eruption, and the devastating impact of gigantic sea waves, citing eyewitness accounts from Java and Sumatra of walls of water of ninety feet high crashing onto those coasts with disastrous effect. In Marinatos's view, a geographically small maritime civilization like that of Minoan Crete with a dense, urban population could not have survived the devastating impacts of such a natural catastrophe.

In the 1939 article, Marinatos never suggests, even tangentially, that the historical destruction of a powerful maritime civilization in the Mediterranean located just a shade more than three hundred kilometers from Plato's Athens and a bit more than three thousand years before Plato wrote the *Timaens* and *Critias* dialogues, might have in some measure inspired the tale of Atlantis. Nevertheless, the Marinatos *Antiquity* article was another key piece of the puzzle and it led to none other than Marinatos himself taking the next step and making overt the connection between Minoan Crete and Atlantis in an article he wrote in 1950 for the Greek journal *Cretica Chronica* (titled 'On the Legend of Atlantis'¹⁵), and which was later published as a 46-page booklet in English titled: *Some Words About the Legend of Atlantis*.¹⁶

In that article, Marinatos takes Figuier's hypothesis that the eruption of Thera caused the destruction of Atlantis, combines it with Frost's hypothesis that Minoan Crete and Atlantis were one and the same, then overlays his hypothesis that the Minoan civilization was destroyed about 3,500 years ago by the cataclysmic eruption of Thera, ties it up in a neat little package, and presents what has become the core of the modern claim that Atlantis was, essentially, Minoan Crete and that Crete/Atlantis was destroyed by the eruption of Thera (see Table 1).

¹⁵ S. Marinatos, 'On the legend of Atlantis', *Cretica Chronica* 4 (1950) 195-213.

¹⁶ S. Marinatos, *Some words about the legend of Atlantis* (Athens 1971).

Table 1: Chronology of the development of Figuiere's hypothesis

Author	Year	Claim
Louis Figuiere	1872	Atlantis was destroyed by the eruption of Thera.
K.T. Frost	1909, 1913	The Minoan civilization was Atlantis.
Spyrindon Marinatos	1939	The Minoan civilization was destroyed by the eruption of Thera.
Spyrindon Marinatos	1950	The Minoan civilization was Atlantis and was destroyed by the eruption of Thera.
Angelos Galanopoulos and Edward Bacon	1969	The Minoan civilization was Atlantis and major discrepancies between Plato's story and the archaeological record result from a math error.

Marinatos asserts that surely the Egyptians experienced impacts from the cataclysmic eruption of Thera. At about the same time, the Minoans, about whom they were aware and with whom they traded, disappeared. This 'gave rise' among the Egyptians, 'to the myth of an island, beyond all measure powerful and rich, being submerged.'¹⁷ In his view, the Egyptian priests wrote down that bit of history, told it to the Greek sage Solon during his visit to Egypt, Solon recorded it, passed it down, and three hundred years later it was told by Critias. Finally, Plato recorded the story in the form of a dialogue that bears Critias's name.

Marinatos's synthesis of Figuiere's, Frost's, and his own work was seductive, compelling, and convincing to many. Atlantis, as described by Plato through the testimony of Critias, was a vast and powerful ancient civilization until its destruction was wrought by a cataclysmic natural disaster. Minoan Crete was a vast and powerful ancient maritime civilization until its destruction was wrought by a cataclysmic natural disaster. Ergo, Atlantis and Minoan Crete were one and the same.

¹⁷ Matintos, *Some words about the legend of Atlantis*, 46.

One significant problem with this neat equation is that we now know that the dating simply doesn't work. Certainly we cannot blame Marinatos for not having access to modern dating methods which, essentially, negate the underpinning of his argument. Though he was largely correct concerning the timing of the waning and eventual collapse of the Minoan Crete civilization, the dating he applied to the major eruption of Thera, which he believed to have occurred nearly simultaneously with the fall of Minoan Crete, turns out to have been off by more than a hundred years. A radiocarbon date derived from a twig recovered from a volcanic deposit on the flanks of the island (Santorini) left behind by the eruption of Thera produced an age of between 1627 and 1600 B.C. (or about 3,643 and 3,616 years ago).¹⁸ As the twig was growing on a tree that was killed in the eruption, that date places the eruption relatively precisely in the late seventeenth century B.C. (more than 3,600 years ago).

Similar confirmatory dates have been derived in a research project directed by Sturt Manning.¹⁹ In that work, 28 samples of seeds and twigs were recovered on the island of Santorini from volcanic deposits dating to the eruption of Thera. Those samples produced dates which ranged from 1639 to 1616 B.C., confirming that the eruption of Thera occurred more than one hundred years before the documented collapse of Minoan Crete and, therefore, cannot have been the direct cause of its demise. This is fundamentally contradictory to a major element of Plato's tale for those who assert that Minoan Crete was Atlantis.

Certainly, Marinatos was correct that the powerful eruption of Thera had a significant impact on the Minoan civilization. The sprawling palace at Knossos was severely damaged at about the time of the eruption and almost certainly Minoan harbors were destroyed by the ensuing tsunamis. However, in the overall trajectory of Minoan civilization, the destructive impact of the eruption of Thera registers only as a deflection not a destruction. The ability to withstand a powerful natural catastrophe, to persevere and rebuild its infrastructure, is the hallmark of a great civilization and Minoan Crete was just such a civilization. Surely it suffered an economic blow, but it rebounded, and quickly. The palace at Knossos was rebuilt, and Minoan dominance rose again.

¹⁸ W.L. Friedrich et al., 'Santorini eruption dated to 1627-1600 B.C.', *Science* 312 (2006) 548.

¹⁹ S. Manning, 'Chronology for the Aegean Late Bronze Age 1700-1400 B.C.', *Science* 312 (2006) 565-569.

So, ultimately, if Plato's purpose was to exemplify the destruction of a great power by a natural catastrophe visited upon them by the gods, then Minoan Crete was an imperfect bit of source material. The correspondences between history and philosophy are simply far too weak to make any sort of definitive or non-generic connection.

A mathematical fix?

Seismologist Angelos G. Galanopoulos, in a work co-authored by Edward Bacon titled *Atlantis: The Truth Behind the Legend*, proposes what he believes to be a simple mathematical fix to the problem of the metrical discrepancies between Plato and the archaeology of Minoan Crete.²⁰

To begin, Galanopoulos and Bacon freely acknowledge that: "The date of 9600 BC for Atlantis is both incredible and impossible."²¹ Rather than reject the hypothesis that Atlantis was Minoan Crete because of this discrepancy, Galanopoulos and Bacon instead offer a workaround, asserting the following: "This leads us to the inevitable conclusion that the mistakes in the date of the Atlantis catastrophe are systematic and not accidental; and arise in the same way."²²

It would seem, however, that such a conclusion is 'inevitable' only if one is committed to confirming the hypothesis rather than testing it. The mathematical solution provided by Galanopoulos and Bacon is that some measurements provided by Plato regarding Atlantis – those that happen to conform to the archaeological record of the Minoans – are quite accurate, while others – those that contradict the archaeological record of the Minoans – are off by a factor of ten.

As transmitted by Critias, Solon reported that Atlantis was destroyed nine thousand years ago (that's nine thousand years before he was told the story by the priests in 600 B.C., therefore, 9600 B.C. or about 11,600 years before the present). However, the eruption of Thera had occurred only (very roughly) nine hundred years before Solon recorded that fact. "This seems to indicate," Galanopoulos and Bacon maintain, "that when Solon was transcribing the Egyptian writings the word or symbol representing

²⁰ A.G. Galanopoulos and E. Bacon, *Atlantis: The Truth Behind the Legend* (New York, NY 1969).

²¹ Galanopoulos and Bacon, *Atlantis*, 42.

²² *Ibidem*, 133.

'hundred' was mistaken for that representing one thousand.²³ So, though he recorded the Thera eruption – and the simultaneous destruction of Atlantis – as having occurred nine thousand years before his time, Solon meant to write – or should have written – nine hundred. This argument, however, appears to be little more than rationalization. It ignores the fact, as pointed out by Castleden, that the hieroglyph representing 'one hundred' (a coiled rope) cannot possibly be confused with the symbol representing one thousand (a lotus flower).²⁴

The problems raised in identifying Atlantis as Minoan Crete are dismissed by Galanopoulos and Bacon as the result of confusion, embellishment, conflation, and simple error between the story first being recorded by the Egyptian priests (at, by the way, an unspecified time, and that record has never been found) and Plato recording it just a little before he died in 347 B.C. Certainly, traditions about a historical event, filtered through translation, passed down orally, and recorded hundreds of years later are subject to all manner of transformation. The arguments presented by Figuier, Frost, Marinatos, and Galanopoulos and Bacon aren't inherently unreasonable, but ultimately, in each case, much of Plato's Atlantis has to be ignored, altered, or rationalized.

As the author L. Sprague de Camp phrased it: 'Now, while some of these points may be well taken, you cannot change all the details of Plato's story and still claim to have Plato's story.'²⁵ Indeed, you cannot. Figure 2 graphically depicts the lack of correspondence between Plato's description of Atlantis and the archaeology of Minoan Crete. Clearly there are, indeed, too many details to change to make Minoan Crete ancient Atlantis.

²³ Galanopoulos and Bacon, *Atlantis*, 133.

²⁴ R. Castleden, *Atlantis Destroyed* (London 1998).

²⁵ L. Sprague de Camp, *Lost Continents: The Atlantis Theme in History, Science, and Literature* (New York, NY 1954).

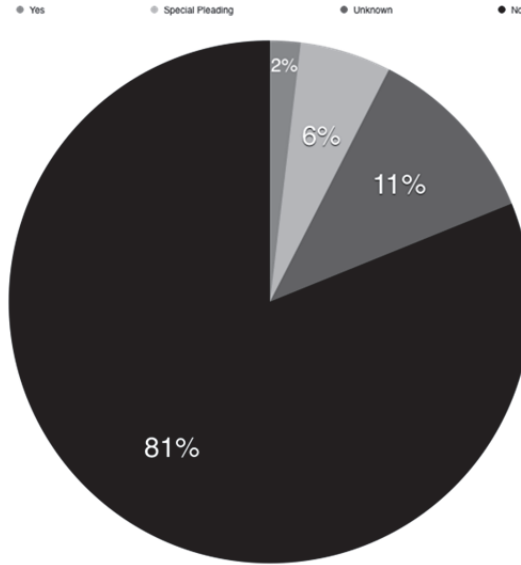


Fig. 2: Pie graph showing the lack of correspondence between Plato's description of Atlantis and the actual archaeological record of Minoan Crete. Of forty-three very specific descriptions of the physical appearance of Atlantis by Plato in *Timaeus* and *Critias* – all of which should be reflected in the archaeological record – only 2% are supported archaeologically, 6% can be matched, but only by special pleading, 11% cannot be determined, and the largest slice of the 'pie', fully 81%, consists of cases in which Plato's Atlantean details are contradicted by the archaeological record of Minoan Crete. Source: K.L. Feder.

Atlantis as Atlantis

More than anyone else, we have Ignatius Donnelly and his monograph, *Atlantis: The Antediluvian World* to credit – or blame – for bringing the discussion of Atlantis into the broader public arena.²⁶ In this monograph, first published in 1882 and still widely available more than 130 years later, Donnelly makes no effort to reinterpret Plato, to move his Atlantis in space

²⁶ I. Donnelly, *Atlantis: The Antediluvian World* (New York, NY 1882).

or time, or to identify it as a historically known ancient civilization. Donnelly is an Atlantean literalist and *Timaeus* and *Critias* are his bibles. For him, Atlantis was Atlantis, precisely as Plato presented it. None of Plato's story of a lost continent is, for Donnelly, allegory, cautionary tale, or philosophical treatise. It is all veritable, a forgotten and hidden history whose revelation and correct interpretation (by Donnelly, of course) inspires a historical epiphany.

Donnelly's support for the historicity of Plato's Atlantis story is based largely on the approach of 'trait list comparisons,' a methodology that was popular in the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries within the diffusionist school of anthropology and cultural geography. The underpinning assumption in the diffusionist school was that most human groups are culturally static and do not progress unless and until new technologies are introduced into their territories by more advanced peoples who are, for whatever reason, intrinsically more inventive and creative. For many diffusionists there was a single source (often it was Egypt), or, at most, a very few 'mother cultures' from which all or at least most of human progress could be derived. Donnelly was a diffusionist, essentially data mining for cultural traits across the globe that he could trace back to the one true source of civilization: not Egypt, but Atlantis.

The archaeological record was rich with source material from which Donnelly could compile his lists. For example, there were pyramids on either side of the Atlantic, among Egyptians on the east, and the Maya and Aztecs to the west. These cultures, Donnelly asserted, must have learned to build their pyramids from an even more ancient and even more advanced civilization: Atlantis – never mind that Egyptian and New World pyramids bear little resemblance to one another beyond the fact that they are larger on their bottoms than on their tops. Also, ancient people on either side of the Atlantic practiced agriculture. For Donnelly, they could only have made this great advance in subsistence by having been taught by an even more ancient and more advanced civilization: again, Atlantis – never mind that the plant and animal species domesticated and relied upon for subsistence on either side of the Atlantic were entirely different. Further, the ancient civilizations of the Old and New Worlds possessed writing systems. Donnelly maintained that they must have been taught to write by an even more advanced and ancient civilization: of course, Atlantis – never mind that the ancient writing systems on either side of the Atlantic were entirely different and mutually unintelligible.

As wrong as Donnelly may have been, however, it must be said that, as an inductive reasoner, he felt compelled to collect actual data in support of his hypothesis of an ancient Atlantean source for all human technological and scientific progress. For others, no such source material was necessary.

Atlantis of the imagination

America's 'sleeping prophet' Edgar Lynn Cayce, for example, didn't need to collect and collate historical or archaeological evidence. He could merely go to sleep and dream the details of ancient Atlantis, which he would then recount to his followers.²⁷ Cayce's evidence-free descriptions of the lost continent (and the imaginings his testimony inspired among his followers) included technologies that sound quite a bit like lasers, nuclear power, submarines, television, and aircraft, none of which, of course, are even hinted at by Plato. As author Paul Jordan points out, Cayce's descriptions of the sophistication and precocity of Atlantean technology include nothing beyond that with which he would have been familiar during the time he had his visions between the 1920s and 1940s.²⁸ There is no internet, smart phones, laptops, tablet computers, or even microwave ovens in Cayce's ancient Atlantis. Cayce, essentially, was little more than a science fiction author, and one with a rather limited imagination.

Cayce asserted that Atlanteans fleeing the destruction of the continent arrived in Egypt where they built an underground 'hall of records.'²⁹ No such hall of records has ever been found. Furthermore, it should go without saying that his prediction that parts of Atlantis would rise again sometime during 1968 or 1969 was not accurate.³⁰

Cayce also claimed that the islands of Bimini in the Caribbean were remnants of Atlantis and this, in part, inspired his followers to search for broader evidence of the lost continent in submarine deposits in the region.³¹ It was during one such search that a feature usually called 'the Bimini Wall' was located. Interpreted by Cayce's followers as the remnant of an ancient wall or road and, potentially, the remains of an Atlantean structure, it

²⁷ E.E. Cayce, *Mysteries of Atlantis Revisited* (New York, NY 1997).

²⁸ P. Jordan, *The Atlantis Syndrome* (Sutton Mill, 2001).

²⁹ E.E. Cayce, *Mysteries of Atlantis Revisited*, 127.

³⁰ *Ibidem*, 159.

³¹ *Ibidem*, 154.

consisted of a large number of rectangular blocks of limestone, extending across a linear distance of about six hundred meters and ending with a curved section, giving the entire feature the appearance of a backwards letter J.

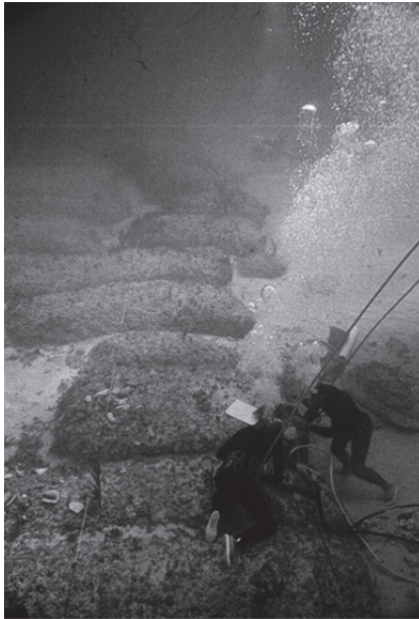


Fig. 3: Photograph of a part of the geological feature mistakenly referred to by some as the 'Bimini Wall' or 'Bimini Road'. Neither wall nor road, the rectangular blocks are elements of a common natural feature called beachrock. Photo: John Gifford.

Geologists who examined the feature recognized it as an entirely natural formation called 'beachrock' (see fig. 3).³² Perform an internet search under the term 'tessellated pavement' and you can see multiple examples from all over the world of far more impressive formations than the Bimini Wall. All of them are entirely natural. No artifacts – no tools, pottery shards, carvings – have ever been found associated with the Bimini Wall and radiocarbon

³² J.A. Gifford and M.M. Ball, 'Investigation of submerged beachrock deposits off Bimini', *National Geographic Society Research Reports* 12 (1980) 21-38.

dating of shells incorporated in the limestone blocks in the feature indicates that it formed about 2,200 years ago, which certainly doesn't conform to any measurement of the age of Atlantis.

Still searching

The desire to find in antiquity a greatly advanced, hugely powerful and technologically precocious civilization appears to be a quest without an end. Historian Richard Freund suggested in 2011 that he had found Atlantis at an archaeological site in Spain.³³ Popular author Graham Hancock, while assiduously avoiding the 'A' word, posits the existence of a very Atlantis-sounding lost civilization in his 1996 book *Fingerprints of the Gods*.³⁴ In a more recent work, *Magicians of the Gods*, Hancock (2015) is now content to actually call that ancient lost civilization 'Atlantis.'³⁵ This longing for Atlantis has resulted in Atlantis-themed attractions at popular theme parks in America (see fig. 4) and in Italy and even a feature-length Disney animated movie (*Atlantis, the Lost Empire*).

³³ E. Owen, 'The Lost City of Atlantis buried in Spanish Wetlands'. <http://www.telegraph.co.uk/news/worldnews/europe/spain/8381219/Lost-city-of-Atlantis-buried-in-Spanish-wetlands.html>, 16 October 2016.

³⁴ G. Hancock, *Fingerprints of the Gods: The Evidence of Earth's Lost Civilization* (New York, NY 1995).

³⁵ G. Hancock, *Magicians of the Gods* (New York, NY 2015).



Fig. 4: The producers of theme parks recognize the power of Atlantis. Here is seen a part of the Atlantis attraction at the Universal Orlando Resort, in Florida, U.S.A. Universal also has an attraction titled The Wizarding World of Harry Potter. At least visitors realize that Harry Potter is entirely fictional. I hope. Photo: K.L. Feder.

In his book, *Atlantis: the Antediluvian World*, Ignatius Donnelly ends on an optimistic note concerning the future discovery of archaeological evidence that will convince even hard-nosed skeptics that Atlantis was just exactly as Critias (through Plato) described it and what he, Donnelly believed it to have been, the source of human cultural development:

We are on the threshold. Scientific investigation is advancing in great strides. Who shall say that one hundred years from now the great museums of the world may not be adorned with gems, statues, arms, and implements from Atlantis, while the libraries of the world shall contain translations of its inscriptions, throwing new light upon all the past history of the human race, and all the great problems which now perplex the thinkers of our day?³⁶

Donnelly wrote this in 1882. It is now 2016, considerably more than one hundred years later, and we are still waiting for the realization of Donnelly's

³⁶ Donnelly, *Atlantis: The Antediluvian World*, 480.

hypothetical scenario. I suspect this is not because archaeologists and other scientists haven't looked hard enough for the lost continent but because, after all, Atlantis was located, not in the Atlantic or the Mediterranean or anywhere else on Earth, but instead in the mind of the great Greek philosopher, Plato.