

Plato's "atlantida nesos" as the island of Meroe

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Considering Plato's descriptions in *Timaeus* and *Critias*, I feel convenient to propose Plato's "atlantida nesos" as « the island of Meroe » today in North Sudan. This territory was so-called by ancient authors because it was encircled by three rivers : the Blue Nile on the South, the White Nile on the West and its affluent Atbara on the North-East. According to Flavius Josephus (*Antiquity of the Jews*, II, 10) : "The city of Meroe was located in a retired place, and was inhabited after the manner of an island, being encompassed with a strong wall, and having the rivers to guard them from their enemies, and having great ramparts between the wall and the rivers".

The archeological digging in Meroe began on 1909-1914 and are pursued until now but they are still greatly uncompleted. However they allowed to discover numerous pyramids, several temples, and a royal bath as described by Plato, as well as an important iron industry. Although the actual remains were dated from the 8th century B.C. to the 2nd century A.D., I propose to place the foundation of the Atlantis kingdom by Poseidon circa 1500 B.C. under the reign of the Egyptian king Thutmose I who had spend a great part of his life between Napata and Meroe.

This datation is based on the fact that the priests of could have difficulties to decipher the records of the temple written in hieratic characters whereas the current writing in the Saïs period was demotic. So the reading of the Egyptian records might be 900 years (instead of 9000 years) before the reign of Amasis. This datation corresponds to the beginning of the New Kingdom in Egypt, when pharaoh Thutmose I made several military campaigns against the Land of Kush. However until now we have no archeological proof that after reaching Kurgus beyond the fourth cataract he had pursued his conquest as far as Meroe.

On the other part the final cataclysm could occur on 591 B.C. under the reign of king Psametik II. Indeed this king made a victorious military campaign against Kushites (Ethiopians for Greeks) with an army mainly composed of Greek mercenaries led by general Potasimto (whose mother was Greek) and an Egyptian general named Amasis who will become himself pharaoh in Saïs twenty years later. Although Psametik II celebrated his great victory against Kushites, it is possible that an earthquake followed by a rockslide had buried a great part of his soldiers sleeping in the Mut's temple of Djebel Barkal (Napata). The same earthquake had destroyed the dams and ramparts in Meroe, allowing the rivers to drown the city on the monsoon season.

It is well known that Egyptians and Kushites were perpetually rivalizing for the domination of the Nile valley all along centuries. And it is a fact that Greek people did not know anything about the history of Egypt and the Land of Kush. So they named Atlantes the Kushites enemies of Egypt because Homer (*Odyssey* I, 14) described Atlas as "watching on the high columns that keep heaven and earth asunder", corresponding to Ras Dejen (in Amharic language "the head guard") the highest volcanic peaks of Semien mountains presently in Ethiopia (4,533 meters = 14,872 ft). But we can also remark that a Kushite king whose pyramid was found in Napata was named Atlanersa (653-643 B.C.) and a queen was named Qalhata (716-702 B.C.) cf. Cleito...

Obviously the "island of Meroe" was not in the middle of ocean : the mistake of the Greek translator could be due to the Egyptian expression "wadj our" (the great green) which sometimes meant the sea and sometimes the Nile.

The straits named by Plato "Heracles' Pillars" is in fact in Arabian language Bal-el-Mandeb. The identification of the Atlantic ocean with the Red Sea is confirmed by several ancient authors and by its name Pontos in Plato's text (cf. the Land of Pount for Egyptians). By the fact this sea was really easily crossed by passing from one island to another as just before the straits are the seven islands mentioned by Proclus as devoted to Persephone (i.e. Isis wife of Osiris king of hell), the Sawabi archipelago. Consequently the unnavigable sea mentioned by Plato could no be the remains of a drown island but the Straits of Bab el Mandeb whose access seemed to be impossible, as reported by a Portuguese sailer in the beginning of the 16th century A.D.

So I think that the source of Solon's report was an Amasis' propaganda aiming to remember to Greeks that thirty years earlier, together with Egyptian troops they have subdued the bellicose kingdom of Kush, this huge power whose Taharqa (690-664 B.C.) 4th "Ethiopian" pharaoh of the 25th dynasty in Memphis (and father of king Atlanersa) have spread the domination from Khartum as far as Lebanon (as far as Etruria which is Tyrrhenia according to Strabo V, 2, 2) thus reigning for twenty years on the largest empire ever created on the Nile in ancient times. In fact king Amasis who was confronted to the imminent threat of Babylon and Persia, was managing to obtain a new military alliance with Aegeans.

Although Plato's description mainly applied to Meroe, he must be considered as reporting the entire history of Kush whose kings always claimed to be sons of god Amun (god of water and fertility = Poseidon) and the heirs of their ancient Egyptian rulers. In fact egyptologists consider presently that the earliest Meroitic period was contemporaneous of the Napatean 25th dynasty and Meroe became the capital of Kush only after the Psametik II raid on Napata in 591 B.C. However many areas remained to be excavated inside and outside the royal enclosure of the city, so we can hope that new archeological materials will soon supply an earlier datation for the first royal foundation in Meroe as suggested by Plato and ancient authors.

To know more about the Island of Meroe and Plato's Atlantis, see the slideshow of my lecture in the 2nd International Conference on the Atlantis Hypothesis, in Athens 2008 and my article with illustrations.