**DECODING THE PLATO'S REPORT ON ATLANTIS**

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**Introduction :**

It must first be considered that, as Plato himself said, this is a story told by Egyptian priests to their Greek visitor Solon, while the Egyptians themselves have already translated into their language the words of a foreign language. And he specified that Solon translated their geographical indications into toponyms known to Greeks, and the names of foreign characters according to their Egyptian meaning into Greek names, to facilitate the understanding of his story to his compatriots *(Critias* 113d).

The failure of the identification of Atlantis so far, was due in large part to the error of location of the strait named Herakles’ Columns and of the Gadiric region (*Critias* 113d) by ancient geographers. This resulted of the misdirection of the maps of the known world before the Alexandrian era. But since the beginning of the 19th Century, we now benefit from more and more reliable archaeological evidence.

As for Plato, it is likely that he could take his sources in the now extinct *Periegesis* of Hecataeus of Miletus, because he himself said that Solon, probably already very old, had not the leisure to write his poem *(Critias* 112d). It is also noted that later Strabo quoting Eratosthenes describing the Island of Meroe (*Geography* XVII, 2: 2) gave the same details as Plato for his Atlantis *(Critias* 114).

1. **Geolocation of the Atlas’ kingdom**
	1. **The strait called the Heracles’ Columns**

At Plato’s time, on the old maps of the known world Africa and India were still oriented from West to East instead of North to South. The Nile therefore had its source in the West of Africa in the mountains of Morocco still called Atlas, while the Red Sea was considered as a part of the present Indian Ocean which was called the Eritrean Sea[[1]](#footnote-1) (Fig. 1).



Figure 1 : Map of the known world at Herodotus’ time

So, when we rectify the direction of Africa, from North to South, the course of the Nile becomes correct and the Atlas Mountains are now where the Simien Mountains in Ethiopia are located, whose basalt columns are the fourth highest peaks in Africa.[[2]](#footnote-2) Similarly, we see that the strait called by Greeks "The Heracles’ columns" appears to be The Strait of Bab El Mandeb facing the Horn of Africa. And the region called “gadiric” by Plato (Eumelos’ kingdom), which faced the strait of the Columns *(Timaeus* 114b) currently corresponds to Somalia and Ethiopia (Fig. 2).

Figure 2 : The Atlas’kingdom in Sudan

Thus, according to Herodotus (I, 202: 4) "The sea which is beyond the Heracles’ Columns which is called Atlantic and the Eritrean Sea together are one and the same sea". The word "atlantic” appeared here for the first time in ancient texts. And Aristotle added (*About* *Heaven,* II, 14, 298a): "That is why those who believe that there is continuity of the region surrounding the Heracles’ Columns and the region of India, and that in this way there is only one sea, do not seem to profess such an incredible opinion". Obviously, since after the Strait of Bab El Mandeb, the Red Sea leads to the Indian Ocean. A recent archaeological discovery in the archipelago of the Farasan Islands in the Red Sea seems to confirm this hypothesis: A small stele from Roman times bears an inscription mentioning a “sea of Hercules” in Latin "Pontus Herculis" (in genitive case “Ponti Herculis” in the inscription).[[3]](#footnote-3)

It remains to be seen where were the famous columns, of which no trace was ever found in Gibraltar. In this regard it should be noted that the Greek word στήλή means both stele, column or boundary. In the same way Latin word stela-ae means stele or column according to the context. This is why in Greek texts this strait was called Ἡράκλειαι Στῆλαι, while Latin authors used Columnae Herculis. So, instead of columns, it was actually great commemorative stelae like those of the Egyptian pharaohs, as Strabo reported in his *Geography*(XVI, 4: 4),concerning the area of the Strait of Bab El Mandeb: "There is a column of Sesostris the Egyptian, who tells in hieroglyphics his crossing of the Gulf (the Red Sea), because obviously he was the first man to subdue all the countries of the Ethiopians and the Troglodytes. Then he crossed into Arabia, then he invaded Asia (India)”. And according to Herodotus (II, 42-44) and Diodorus (III, 74): "There had been two people in an earlier time who had born the same name, the oldest Heracles who, according to myths, was born in Egypt, subdued by his arms a large part of the inhabited world and raised the column that is in Libya" (Africa). Strabo's Sesostris [[4]](#footnote-4) would therefore be the Egyptian Heracles.[[5]](#footnote-5)

* 1. **The meaning of the word “gadiric”**

The region called “gadiric” in Plato’s report, that is to say roughly the Horn of Africa, corresponds to the territory occupied by the large ethnic group of the Oromos, which is the majority in Ethiopia and overflows into several neighboring countries.[[6]](#footnote-6) This people is distinguished by the particular character of its government called "Gada[[7]](#footnote-7) system". The gadas of the Oromos would therefore be at the origin of the name of gadiric, for the region that corresponds to Ethiopia and Somalia, facing the Strait of Bab El Mandeb.

According travelers of the 19th Century: "Maca (Oromos’ moon god)[[8]](#footnote-8) divided the country into 10 castes or gadas grouped two by two and exercising power successively for 8 years (power of the Lubas)" [[9]](#footnote-9); "Abba Bokou, speaker of the justice parliament, kills an ox, sprinkles himself with blood and sprinkles his ministers. To enact a law, a young bull is killed. The king plunges his scepter into blood."[[10]](#footnote-10) Here we find the sacrifice of the bull as described by Plato *(Critias* 119-120). And until now the Oromos practice a rite of passage for young men, whom they call "maza" : Fully naked boys with a rope wrapped around their necks must jump over the back of one or more bulls (now cows to avoid accidents)[[11]](#footnote-11). Finally, we see that the Gadas does correspond to the system of government of the Atlanteans described by Plato.

1. **The two Kings Atlas**

In a previous article, we have already demonstrated that Plato's Atlantis Island [[12]](#footnote-12) was the Island of Meroe, which is not in the middle of the sea, but a territory surrounded by three rivers: the Blue Nile, the White Nile and its large tributary the Atbara River, in northern Sudan.

Indeed, to understand Plato's account, one must consider the history of Sudan that Egyptians called the Land of Kush, their hereditary enemy for two millennia. As Pliny the Elder said *(H.N.VI,*35) "It was not the Romans who depopulated this country: Ethiopia was crushed by the wars with the Egyptians in alternatives of conquest and servitude."

It was Pharaoh Thuthmose I who crushed the power of the kings of Kush in the early 15th century B.C. and the whole country remained a colony of Egypt for seven centuries. Until the day when a Kushite king conquered Egypt as far as Memphis at the end of the 8th century B.C., ushering in the reign of the black pharaohs of the 25th dynasty over both Kush and Egypt, which lasted nearly a century.

**2.1 King Atlas Poseidon’s son : Atlanersa King Taharqa’s son**

The most famous of the black pharaohs of the Egyptian 25th Dynasty was Taharqa who ruled for 26 years over territories that stretched from Khartoum to northern Syria. In the 6th year of his reign, a great drought happened in Egypt and Nubia. Taharqa having prayed to his father the god Amun, a big rain arrived, followed by an exceptional flood of the Nile.[[13]](#footnote-13) It is thus understandable why Solon had assimilated him to the god Poseidon, lord of the rivers and the sea for Greeks. Taharqa had a son called Atlanersa who was king of Napata, capital of Nubia after the end of the Kushite grip on Egypt. And according to Plato, he was so called by his father after the first king of this country whose name was Atlas *(Critias* 114 b).

**2.2 Atlas the Elder : Pharaoh Thuthmose** **I**

The Kushite pharaohs of the 25th dynasty always claimed to be the heirs of the previous Egyptian pharaohs, because the kings of Egypt had ruled their country since the conquest of Thuthmose I. It would therefore not be surprising if Taharqa considered Thuthmose I to be the first ruler of his own country. But why would Thuthmose I have become Atlas the Titan for the Greek translator?

Homer thus spoke of this mythical character in his *Odyssey* (I: 44) "Atlas this cunning genius who knows all the abysses of the sea and watches alone over the high columns[[14]](#footnote-14) that separate Heaven from Earth"[[15]](#footnote-15). These high columns are the basalt peaks of the Simien Mountains[[16]](#footnote-16) in northeastern Ethiopia, which can be seen from afar to the west when sailing on the Red Sea towards the Strait of Bab El Mandeb. On the other hand, according to ancient authors,[[17]](#footnote-17) Kamose (aka Sesostris) could have been a great navigator, the first to build and use warships in Egypt.[[18]](#footnote-18) This is why it can be assumed that after driving the Hyksos out of Egypt, he could rule for 40 years over the Land of Kush[[19]](#footnote-19) from where he returned at the age of 67 years to ascend the throne of Thebes under the name of Thuthmose I, after the premature death of Pharaoh Amenhotep I remained without a male heir.

The filiation and therefore the origins of Thuthmose I are not precisely known, but we already demonstrated that this obscure general come from Nubia was probably Kamose become old and being related to the Hyksos, he could be of Hurrian origin, that is to say from Central Anatolia, current Turkey. Now, it is known that an ancient king of this country was called An-Atal, so Atal could give Atlas in Greek.

**3. Compatibility of the Island of Meroe with the Atlas’ Kingdom**

* 1. **When history matches geography:**

Historians identify Taharqa with Tirhakah, king of Ethiopia who waged war against Sennacherib during the reign of King Hezekiah of Judah (Bible, Kings II, 19:9; Isaiah 37:9) and prevented him from destroying Jerusalem and deporting its inhabitants. Strabo (XV,1: 6) considers him among the best tacticians of antiquity and as a great conqueror: "Sesostris the Egyptian and Tearco the Ethiopian, advanced as far as Europe (sic). And Nabocodrosor, who is more famous among Chaldeans than Hercules among Greeks, even penetrated to the Columns, which Tearco also reached." But we know that the Kushite king Taharqa could not go to Gibraltar as Strabo believed, but rather to the Strait of Bab-El-Mandeb, since his African kingdom, the land of Kush was close to the Red Sea.

As for Sesostris, Herodotus (II, 102) reported: "He subjugated all the peoples who inhabit the shores of the Eritrean Sea. He sailed even further to a sea that was no longer navigable because of the shoals. But this area impassable to the navigation described by Plato *(Timaeus* 25) appears to be the archipelago of the Sawabi Islands at north of the Strait of Bab El Mandeb, considered for a long time as very dangerous place by the navigators of the Red Sea [[20]](#footnote-20) .

* 1. **The reconstruction of Meroe in the 6th century B.C.**

When the Kushite ruler Aspelta (600-568 BC.C.) defeated by Egyptians decided to establish his new capital at Meroe, the ancient metropolis of the Kushite dynasty, he found a city in ruins, as it had been wiped out by devastating flooding, after an earthquake had destroyed the dikes protecting the city[[21]](#footnote-21). And Diodorus (III, 55) reported "The Lake Tritonis completely disappeared as a result of the earthquakes that broke its dikes on the side of the Ocean". You should know that Egyptians called the Nile Okeanos and that Meroe was only 2 km from the bank of the Nile.[[22]](#footnote-22)

The reconstruction of the city widely described in *Critias* (115e) would therefore have happened circa the beginning of the 6th century B.C.; and it is necessary that the great cataclysm occurred before this date. Plato tells us that the island of Atlantis disappeared during the Greeks' campaign against the Atlanteans and that much of the army was swallowed up in the earth. It is therefore possible that the catastrophe took place during the campaign of Psametik II against the Kushites in 592 B.C. Moreover Psametik, although he celebrated his triumph with great pomp in Saïs, seems not to have exploited his victory over the conquered territories.

At the time of King Aspelta, the ruins of the ancient city had appeared as several islets still isolated by the waters[[23]](#footnote-23), since the newcomers had to build bridges to connect the different parts of the town, as Plato told us *(Critias* 115d-e): "They began by building bridges over the water enclosures that surrounded the ancient metropolis, to allow a passage to the outside and to the royal palace". While Heliodorus of Emese in his novel "*The* *loves of Theagen and Chariclea. Ethiopic History"* described the place as follows: "The city of Meroe being located between the two arms of the Nile whose Astaboras flows on the left side and Arsasoba on the right side, it needs several bridges that maintain communication and facilitate trade for the inhabitants."

**CONCLUSION**

Plato's Atlantis Island was therefore the Island of Meroe in Northern Sudan. As a result, the area impassable to navigation described by Plato *(Timaeus* 25) cannot be the remains of an island engulfed in the ocean that we call "Atlantic", since Meroe was not an island in the sea, but was surrounded by rivers, including the Nile.

Finally, it is proposed to identify the characters quoted by Plato as follows:

* Evenor (Poseidon's father-in-law) would be the eponymous ancestor of the Euonymites, a tribe mentioned near Meroe by Claudius Ptolemy in his *Geography* (IV, 7).
* Leucippus (Poseidon's mother-in-law): a white woman (although a male character in Greek mythology).
* Poseidon, the god of waters for Greeks, would be King Taharqa (6th king of the 25th dynasty), himself associated with the godod Hapy master of the flood in Egypt.
* Clito (Poseidon’s wife) would be Queen Qalhata, sister of King Taharqa, wife of King Shabaka and mother of King Tanoutamon (black pharaohs of the 25th dynasty reigning both on North Sudan and Egypt).
* Poseidon’s son, the second Atlas would be King Atlanersa, son of Taharqa, who reigned after his uncle Tanoutamon.
* The descendants of Poseidon (Taharqa) "through many generations"*(Critias* 114) therefore would correspond to the Kushite kings of Napata, followed by the rulers of Meroe (Table I).
* Finally, the first king of Atlantis, Atlas the Titan, would be Pharaoh Thuthmose I who was the first Egyptian ruler to conquer the Land of Kush and put the whole country under the government of Egypt for seven centuries.[[24]](#footnote-24)

Finally, we can also wonder if Plato himself did have understood everything in the report of Hecataeus of Miletus that he wanted to use for philosophical purpose.

**Table 1: Reigns of the kings of Kush (dates in years B.C.)**

|  |  |  |
| --- | --- | --- |
| Kings | Reigns | Comments |
| *25th Dynasty reigning on Kush and Egypt*Pye (or Piânkhy)ShabaqaShabataqaTaharqaTanutamun\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_*Kings of Napata*AtlanersaSenkamaniskenAnlamaniAspelta\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_*Kings of Meroe*AramatelqoAnd following kingsuntil 315 A.D. | 747 – 716690 - 664664 - 656\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_653 – 643593 – 568\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_568 - 555 | *These kings originated from Napata but a first settlement already existed in Meroe*.King of Napata invaded Egypt in 747Resided in Memphis. His wife was queen Qalhata a daughter of PiyeA son of Piye and brother of QalhataExpelled from Egypt by Assurbanipal\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_Son of Taharqa. Reigning only on Kush “Defeated by pharaoh Psametik II in 592 \_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_ First king having his royal residence in Meroe. But the kings were still buried in Napata (Nuri pyramids) until 280 B.C.**Solon in Sais circa 560 B.C.** |

1. Since then, the maps were straightened, but the local toponyms remained in their former place in Spain and Marocco, as they continued to be used by the inhabitants of the country who had no reason to change them. They can be considered as "mirror sites" of Africa in Europe. [↑](#footnote-ref-1)
2. At the beginning of the 19th Century, a traveler reported: "Ethiopia supports on its basalt pillars and granite columns a kind of Europe lost in the Tropics." Peron, R. *Revue des Deux Mondes,* April 1901, Paris. [↑](#footnote-ref-2)
3. F. Villeneuve, W. Facy and C. Phillips "A Latin inscription from South Arabia" in P*roceedings of the Seminar for Arabian Studies*, 2004, 34, pp. 239-250. On line in french : F. Villeneuve "Une inscription latine de l'archipel Farasan, Arabie Saoudite, (sud de la Mer Rouge) et son contexte archéologique » [Comptes-Rendus de l'Académie des Inscriptions et Belles Lettres, 2004, 148 (1), 419-429 (p. 422).](http://www.persee.fr/web/revues/home/prescript/article/crai_0065-0536_2004_num_148_1_22717) [↑](#footnote-ref-3)
4. In fact, it is Thuthmose I (18th dynasty) whose reign name was Âa-kheper-ka-Râ. He was confused with Sesostris I (12th dynasty) whose reign name was Kheper-ka-Râ. [↑](#footnote-ref-4)
5. The Greek Heracles, son of Alcmene and Zeus, who begat him after taking the appearance of Amphitryon, was named at birth Alcide after his grandfather Alcea. But because of his exploits, he then took the name of his Egyptian ancestor which really meant in Greek "The Glory of Hera", his mother Queen Ah-hotep, mother of the great prince Kamose at the end of the 17th dynasty. We understand that the Egyptian Heracles is Kamose, the great conqueror named Sesostris by Herodotus and Sesoosis by Diodorus, and that it is he who erected big commemorative stelae during his passage through the strait of Bab El Mandeb, the famous "Heracles’ columns". [↑](#footnote-ref-5)
6. The Oromo are a big nation of 35 million people living in Ethiopia, Kenya, Somalia and Egypt. They speak a Cushitic language, the third by the importance of its number of speakers in Africa*.* [↑](#footnote-ref-6)
7. The Gadas system is now inscribed on the Intangible Cultural Heritage of Humanity by UNESCO. [↑](#footnote-ref-7)
8. Abadie (d') A. (1880) Les Oromos. *Annales de la Société Scientifique de Bruxelles,*4th year, Namur. [↑](#footnote-ref-8)
9. A man becomes a gada from 40 to 48 years old; There are 5 gadas who become leaders by election each for 8 years (power of the lubas) which makes a cycle of 40 years. When a man becomes a luba, his son can become a luba after 40 years. The lubas can be compared to 5 parties that would be in power each for 80 years by rotating alternation, always respected for centuries. This indigenous socio-political system of the Oromos was considered the most democratic in the world. This is probably why Plato was interested in it as it appears transposed in his account concerning the 5 pairs of twins of Poseidon (cf. the lubas). [↑](#footnote-ref-9)
10. Salviac, (P. de) M. *"Un peuple antique au pays de Ménélik :*  *Les Galla*  *(Oromo) une grande nation africaine",* Oudin, Paris. 1905, p. 35. According to De Salviac, Galla was their war cry, which allowed him to relate them to the Gauls (sic). But he had probably misheard, as their war cry could only be “Gadas !" [↑](#footnote-ref-10)
11. Arnott, W.G."Bull Leaping as Initiation Ritual," *Liverpool Classical Monthly* 18 (1993), pp. 114-116.
(Considering the acrobatic scenes over bulls by dark-skinned men depicted in the frescoes of Avaris and Knossos, this might signify that some Oromo were present in Egypt and Crete circa 1500 B.C.) [↑](#footnote-ref-11)
12. [**Meroe the last royal city of the Land of Kush**](http://127.0.0.1:8080/ANTIQUA91/web_sites/site_1/resources/cariboost_files/MeroeCHAPITRE_20II_202021_20FR.doc) [↑](#footnote-ref-12)
13. Vikentiev, V. (1930) The high flood of the Nile and the shower of the year 6 of King Taharqa. *Recueil de Travaux* 4e fascicule, 1-59. [↑](#footnote-ref-13)
14. Not to confuse with the Heracles’ columns which were in fact large commemorative stelae on the shore of the Red Sea recalling the passage of the hero in this area. [↑](#footnote-ref-14)
15. According to a tradition, it was to prevent Heaven and Earth from uniting again to spawn Titans because they had waged war on Zeus and the Olympians. Gaia (or Gé) Earth was also called Titéia as the mother of the Titans (or Giants). We recognize there in Egyptthe Queen MotherTeti-sheri, grandmother of the great prince Kamose and Pharaoh Ahmose of the 18th dynasty, both having had to fight the Hyksos (Titans) occupants of the Lower Gypte. [↑](#footnote-ref-15)
16. Their highest peak, Ras Dejen, meaning "the watchman", rises to 4,550 m. Herodotus (IV, 184) describes this mountain whose name is Atlas as follows: "It is narrow, round on all sides and so high that it is impossible to see its summit, because never in summer nor winter the clouds abandon it; the locals say it's the column of heaven." [↑](#footnote-ref-16)
17. Strabo, Book XVI, 4: 4. [↑](#footnote-ref-17)
18. Herodotus II, 102. [↑](#footnote-ref-18)
19. Herodotus II, 110. [↑](#footnote-ref-19)
20. Kammerer A. *The Red Sea, Abyssinia and Arabia since Antiquity,* Cairo,1929. Volume I. Les pays de la Mer Érythrée jusqu'à la fin du Moyen Age, p.55. [↑](#footnote-ref-20)
21. Flavius Josephus *(Antiquity of the Jews,*II, 10): "The city of Meroe was located in a secluded place, and inhabited in the manner of an island, being surrounded by a powerful dike, and having the rivers to protect it from its enemies, with a powerful wall between the dike and the rivers, so that it cannot be flooded if the flood comes to be too violent". [↑](#footnote-ref-21)
22. Diodorus I, 96. [↑](#footnote-ref-22)
23. Bradley, R. (1982) Varia from the city of Meroe. *Meroitic Studies MEROITICA*  6, 163-170.

 Bradley, R. (1984) Meroitic chronology. *Meroitica* 7, 195-211. [↑](#footnote-ref-23)
24. I proposed that Thuthmose I be Kamose become old. For Kamose could be the son of the incestuous Hyksos king Âa-ouser-Râ Apophis with his daughter Ah-hotep before she married her brother Pharaoh Se-qen-en-Rê. Kamose the bastard adopted by King Antef (VII) Nubkheperre in exile in Nubia had been raised as a warrior prince able of reconquer the kingdom of Egypt remained in the hands of the Asian invaders. [↑](#footnote-ref-24)