SOURCE OF PLATO DESCRIBING ATLANTIS
THE HECATAEUS’ PERIEGESIS

« *Long read as a myth, the story of Atlantis*

 *is now considered to be based on serious archaeological and historical data*»

 Christian Godin, a philosopher;

INTRODUCTION

In a previous article[[1]](#footnote-1), we highlighted the similarity of the Atlantis[[2]](#footnote-2) of Plato (428-348 BC) with the description of the Island of Meroe[[3]](#footnote-3) by Strabo (60 BC-20 AD), who quoted Eratosthenes (276-194 BC). It can therefore be assumed that three centuries apart Plato and Eratosthenes had a single and same source. Other authors before Strabo, notably Diodorus Siculus (90-30 BC)[[4]](#footnote-4), seem also to be indebted to the same source for their reports about this land remained mythical for so long[[5]](#footnote-5).

1. **The circumstances of Plato's account reported by himself in the Critias**

Plato made speak there one of the Athenian friends of his master Socrates, named Critias:

« I will report this old story, as I heard it told by a man who was not young. For Critias was then, [21b] to what he said, near his ninety years, and I was ten at most. It was just the day of Coureotis during the Apaturies. The party went as usual for us children. Our fathers offered us poetic declamation prizes. Many poems of different poets were recited, and as Solon's poems were then in their novelty, many of us sang them. A member of our siblings then said, either that he really thought so or that he wanted to please Critias, that he considered Solon not only as the wisest of men, but also, for his poetic talent, as the noblest of poets. The old Critias, I remember, was charmed by this speech, and said with a smile: «Amynandros, if Solon had not made poetry in passing, but had given himself seriously to it, as others have done, if he had completed the work that he brought back from Egypt, and if the factions and other evils he found here had not forced him [21d] to interrupt his work, in my opinion neither Hesiod, nor Homer, nor any other poet had surpassed his glory». — What was this work, Critias, said Amynandros. "It was the account of the greatest feat and the one that deserves to be the most renowned of all those this city has ever accomplished; but the time and death of its authors did not allow this account to reach us. - Tell me from the beginning, said the other, what Solon said and how and to whom he heard it told as a true history”.

A historical and geographical portrait of the Island of Atlantis follows [*Critias* 21e-25d]. “This, Socrates, in a few words, is the account that the old [25th] Critias had from Solon. Yesterday, when you were talking about your republic and the citizens who have to compose it, I was astonished, remembering what I just told you, of the wonderful relationship between your words and most of Solon's, by chance and without his knowledge. I didn't want to talk to you about it right away, because time had left me with only a confused idea... So yesterday, as Hermocrates once said, I told them, on my way, [26b] what I remembered. After departing, I thought about it all the night and I found all the thread of my story; it is so true that we have an amazing memory for everything we learned in our youth! I don't know if I'd remember everything I heard yesterday, but I'd be surprised if I'd forgotten what I learned so long ago. I then learned with pleasure, [26c] as a child, and the old man willingly answered all my questions; so all this is etched in my memory into indelible characters. This morning, I already reported this story to my companions to give them a topic of conversation with me. Now, to fulfill the purpose of our meeting, I am ready to set out here not only the general points, but also all the details, as I heard them. »

Since Solon abandoned the written report of his visit to Egypt, and Plato gave many details, including numerical dimensions (Critias 115e-120a) in his description of Atlantis Island, we can think that he had access to another written document. Indeed, Herodotus (482-425 BC) reported (*Histories*, II, 143) that the Ionian logographer Hecataeus of Miletus (550-480 BC), one of the oldest Greek speaking historians and geographers, also visited Egypt where he spoke with priests of Thebes. His intellectual journey around the Mediterranean allowed him to visit the three continents of the Œkumene: Libya, Europe and Asia. Unfortunately, the account of his travels entitled *Periegesis* (Around the Earth) did not reach us; only about 300 fragments are remaining cited by Stephanus of Byzantium, a Greek geographer of the 5th century AD.

1. **Atlantis and the ancient history of Sudan** (see also[[6]](#footnote-6))

Plato reported that Atlantis Island was in front of the strait known as the "Pillars of Heracles". However, we already showed that the Pillars of Heracles were actually in the Strait of Bab el Mandeb Strait at the exit of the Red Sea, between the Arabian Peninsula and Eastern Africa[[7]](#footnote-7). In Roman times, Northern Sudan was called Nubia, but for the Egyptians in the time of Solon, it was still the ancient Kingdom of Kush, Egypt's hereditary enemy. Therefore, in order to fully understand the history of Atlantis as reported by Plato, it is necessary to quickly outline the ancient history of Nubia:

For nine centuries (from 2450 to 1504 BC) the mighty kingdom of Kerma was the first civilization south of the First Cataract of Nile to unite the different regions of Nubia (now North Sudan). From the Old Kingdom until the beginning of the New Kingdom, the kings of Egypt had to fight the recurrent attacks of Nubians, their belligerent neighbors south of Aswan. But around 1504 BC, Pharaoh Thuthmosis Ist invested their royal capital near the Third Cataract (presently Kerma-Doukki Gel) and all of Nubia fell under the rule of Egypt.

Five centuries later (around 1085 BC), a new indigenous power emerged in the Middle Nile Basin downstream from the 4th cataract and formed the Kingdom of Kush, which lasted for about a thousand years. This period is traditionally divided into two epochs: the Kingdom of Napata from 747 to 569 BC and the Kingdom of Meroe from 568 BC to 340 BC when it was conquered by Ezana, King of the Ethiopians of Aksum.

1. The Napatan period

After the reign of Prince Alara and then King Kachta in Napata, the new royal capital downstream of the 4th Cataract of the Nile, we witness the conquest of Upper Egypt by the Kushite King Piye (or Piankhy). Motivated by the desire to seize Egypt's wealth by controlling almost the entire African part of the trade route between Arabia and the Mediterranean Sea, Piyé's successors ascending to the throne of Thebes founded the XXVth dynasty. These Nubian pharaohs ruled for about one century all of the Nile Valley from Khartoum to the Nile Delta, and as far as North Syria under the rule of Pharaoh Taharqa (690-664 BC). But in 656 BC, Tanoutamon, the last black pharaoh, was driven out of Egypt by the Assyrian king Assurbanipal. His successor in Nubia, King Atlanersa[[8]](#footnote-8) (655 – 640 B.C.) ruled from Napata over a Kingdom of Kush returned to its original borders.

1. The Meroitic period

Then in 592 BC Pharaoh Psamtik II of the XXVIth Dynasty, warned of an imminent attack of Kushites, sent an expedition against them that destroyed the last ambitions of the kings of Napata on Egypt. Their temples were burned and the royal city razed down. Consequently, Aspelta (600-568 BC), the defeated Kushite King, decided to move his capital 250 km further south to Meroe, a former provincial town[[9]](#footnote-9), in order to be permanently safe from Egyptian power. He found the city in ruins, as it had previously been destroyed by an earthquake and flooded by the Nile. The successors of Aspelta, Kings of Meroe, rebuilt the ancient city, but nevertheless continued to be buried in pyramids at Nurri near Napata until 280 BC. Then they built their pyramids in the desert near Meroe until the 4th century AD.[[10]](#footnote-10)

1. **Meroe and Plato’s Atlantis**

So, we realize that the history of the kingdom of Kush does correspond to Plato's account. We already showed that Pharaoh Thuthmose I (aka Kamose become old) is at the basis of Atlas the Titan in Greek mythology[[11]](#footnote-11). Thuthmose I would therefore be the first king of Atlantis whom Plato refered in *Critias* [114th]: "The oldest (of the sons of Poseidon), the king, received the name that was used to designate the entire island and the sea called Atlantic, because the first king of this country was named Atlas". This son of Poseidon was therefore the second Atlas. It corresponds to Atlanersa the first king of the Napatan Dynasty in the 7th century BC, whose father was Pharaoh Taharqa considered as master of the beneficent flood of the Nile.[[12]](#footnote-12) Indeed, according to archaeological findings, a first settlement did exist in Meroe as early as the 8th century BC, thus contemporary of the XXVth Dynasty in Egypt, before a major cataclysm transformed the whole country into a gigantic swamp.[[13]](#footnote-13) The reconstruction of the city and its development by the first kings of Meroe would be at the origin of the flourishing civilization described by Plato.[[14]](#footnote-14)

**CONCLUSION**

Solon, already very old, was said to arrive in Saïs during the reign of Pharaoh Amasis around 560 BC, some thirty years after the victory of Psamtik II against the Kushites in 591 BC. He must indeed have heard from the Egyptian priests the story of this glorious military campaign with the help Athenians. However, the Egyptians could not describe to him the Kingdom of Meroe at the height of his glory, because at this date the city was just beginning to rise from its ruins. On the other hand, Hecataeus of Miletus, a great traveller, had come there in the force of age around 500 BC, or even a little later. At that time, it had been at least sixty years since the first king of Meroe, Aramatelqo (568-555 BC) had begun to rebuild the city[[15]](#footnote-15). As Plato said in *Critias* [115th]: "First, they built bridges over the canals that encircled the ancient metropolis to make a way to and from the royal palace. And at the beginning, they built the palace where the god and their ancesters have lived[[16]](#footnote-16) ». This really corresponds to the second phase of occupation of the city of Meroe in the 6th century BC. As archaeological excavations showed, the new royal palace was built on the site of the ancient temple of god Amon. Therefore, all the numerical details given by Plato concerning the geography and populations of the Kingdom of Meroe [*Critias* 115th-120a], can only come from the *Periegesis* of Hecataeus of Miletus (see the following chronological tables pages 6 and 7).

Pliny the Elder, a famous Roman naturalist and encyclopedist in the 1st century AD, was the first who identified the Atlas’ kingdom with the “Island of Meroe”. He recounted in his *Natural History* (VI, 35): "The Island of Meroe enjoyed a great reputation and according to tradition, they used to maintain an army of 200,000 men and 4000 craftsmen. The country in the whole was successively named Aetheria, Atlantia, and finally Aethiopia[[17]](#footnote-17),from the name of Aethiops the son of Vulcan [[18]](#footnote-18)». But for twenty centuries nobody has believed him...

However, a question remains : When was the most ancient city of Meroe destroyed by an earthquake and submerged by the Nile flood ? This was certainly before the reign of Aramatelqo (568-555) the first king of Meroe, who had to rebuild a ruined city in the middle of a swamp. Plato [*Timaeus* 25c-25d ] told us that the cataclysm took place just after the victory of Egyptians over Atlanteans (Kushites), so in 591 BC. The submersion of the city could therefore lasten for at least twenty years, long enough for the place to remain known as the "great lake", mer ouret in Egyptian language become Meroe[[19]](#footnote-19) in Greek.

Please see also the following pages 6 and 7.

**historical background OF PLATO’S ATLANTIS REPORT**

Atlanersa (le 2e ATLAS)
the son of Taharqa (Poseidon)

King of Napata (- 653 to - 643)

* 591 Victory of Pharaoh Psamtik II
(-595 à -589) over Aspelta, the last Kushite King reigning in Napata (- 600 to – 568)

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Aramatelqo (- 568 to - 555)

1st King of Meroe. He found the city in ruins.

* 571 à - 526 reign of Pharaoh Amasis in Egypt
(A veteran general of the victory of Psamtik II over Kushites become king).

Herodotus in Egypt around - 450

 

**Circa – 500, when Hecataeus** (-550 à - 480)visited Egypt**, Meroe was rebuilt since 70 years.**

**Circa - 560** **Visit of Solon** (- 638 à - 558 )in Saïs. At that time Meroe was just beginning to be rebuilt.

**CHRONOLOGY OF ANCIENT AUTHORS**

**Authors Dates of life**

* **Solon in Egypt circa 560 B.C. 638 – 558 B.C.**
* **(Pharaoh Amasis** **571 – 526) «**
* **Anaximandre (Ionian philosopher and geographer) 610 – 546 «**
* **(Aramatelqo the Kushite king who rebuilt Meroe 568 - 565) «**
* **Hecataeus of Miletus “Periegesis” now lost 550 – 480**

**but probably the main source of Plato and Eratosthenes**

* **Hérodote (II, 143) : la visite d’Hécatée en Égypte** **482 – 425 «**
* **Socrate 470 -399 «**
* **Platon described Atlantis** (Critias) **427 – 348 «**
* **Eratosthenes (cited by Strabo XVII, 2 : 1-3) 276 – 194 «**

**(The same description of Meroe as Plato for Atlantis)**

* **Diodorus (Panchea : V 41-46; III 68:2, 69: 1-4) 60 - 30** **«**
* **Strabo from Eratosthenes (XXI 4 :8; XVII 2 :2) 57 B.C.**

 **- 25 A.D.**

* **Pliny the Elder (N.H. VI, 35: 8) Atlantia = Ethiopia 23 - 79 «**
* **Flavius Josephus : Moises in Meroe** (circa 1550 B.C.) **37 – 100 «**
* **Claudius Ptolemeus : the Euonymites near Meroe 83 – 161 “**
* **Heliodorus of Emesus :
« Theagenus and Chariclea. Ethiopian stories » IIIrd century «**
* **Proclus: 3 big islands near the Detroit 412 – 485 «**

**of the Heracles’ columns**

1. See my paper on-line: [Consistency of the Island of Meroe with the Atlas' kingdom](http://antiqua91.fr/wa_files/MeroeCHAPTER_20III.doc) [↑](#footnote-ref-1)
2. Plato, *Timaeus* 23e-25d, *Critias* 113c-120a. [↑](#footnote-ref-2)
3. Strabo, *Geography*, XVII, 1-2, 35 :7-8. [↑](#footnote-ref-3)
4. Diodorus Siculus, *Historical library*, V, 41-46 ; III, 68 : 2 ; 69 : 1-4. [↑](#footnote-ref-4)
5. See my paper on-line: [The sacred island and the origin of gods : If Euhemerus had said the truth ?](http://antiqua91.fr/wa_files/Article_20EVHEMERE2_20en_20anglais.docx) [↑](#footnote-ref-5)
6. On-line: [Egypt and the Land of Kush](http://antiqua91.fr/wa_files/ancient_20history_20of_20sudan.pdf) [↑](#footnote-ref-6)
7. They were not columns but high steles inscribed with hieroglyphs. There was surely a mistake of translation made by Diodorus, a Latin author writing in Greek. See my article on-line: [Consistency of the Island of Meroe with the Atlas' kingdom](http://antiqua91.fr/wa_files/MeroeCHAPTER_20III.doc) [↑](#footnote-ref-7)
8. 10 Atlanersa was a son of Taharqa. The succession of Nubian kings was often from uncle to nephew, rather than from father to son, as is sometimes still the case in Saudi Arabia. [↑](#footnote-ref-8)
9. See my article online: [Meroe the last royal city of Kush](http://antiqua91.fr/wa_files/MeroeCHAPTER_20II.doc). [↑](#footnote-ref-9)
10. Neither Plato nor Strabo mentioned the pyramids of Meroe, for when Hecataeus visited the city in the 6th century BC, there was still not any pyramid in Meroe. [↑](#footnote-ref-10)
11. See my article online: [Kamose -Thuthmose I: the first Egyptian ruler of Kush](http://antiqua91.fr/wa_files/MeroeCHAPTER_20II.doc) [↑](#footnote-ref-11)
12. Pharaoh Taharqa contemporary of an exceptional Nile flood obtained on his prayer to God Amon after a great period of drought (Legrain, G., Textes gravés sur le quai de Karnak, *Zeitschrift für Ägyptische Sprache und Altertumskunde*, 1896, 34, 111-118. Vikentiev, V., La haute crue du Nil et l'averse de l'an 6 du roi Taharqa. *Recueil de Travaux* 1930, 4e fascicule, 1-59).<http://www.cfeetk.cnrs.fr/index.php?page=document&n=235>

The Egyptian god Amon was assimilated to the Greek god Poseidon by Plato. All pharaohs themselves were considered as gods. [↑](#footnote-ref-12)
13. Diodorus Siculus, *Historical Library* III, 55: "Lake Tritonis completely disappeared as a result of the earthquakes that caused its dykes to break on the Ocean side." Remember that for Egyptians, Okeanos was the Nile (*Diodorus I, 6*). In a fragment of his *Prometheus delivered*, Aeschylus described "With its brass shine at the edge of Ocean, the lake feeding all Ethiopians, where the Sun which always sees all things makes the immortal body of his horses rests from their fatigue in the warm, soft waters that pour into it." [↑](#footnote-ref-13)
14. This corresponds to the transfer of the royal residence of the Kushite kings from Napata to Meroe in the early 6th century BC. [↑](#footnote-ref-14)
15. Rilly, C. « Le royaume de Méroé », *Afriques* [En ligne], Varia, mis en ligne le 21 avril 2010,
on line : <http://afriques.revues.org/379> (summary in english) [↑](#footnote-ref-15)
16. The successor of King Aspelta defeated by Egyptians, Aramatelqo the first king of Meroe (568-555 BC) had found the ruins of the city on three large mounds surrounded by water and he had to build bridges to connect these islets between them and big remparts to proctect the city against the Nile flood.. [↑](#footnote-ref-16)
17. Ethiopia was once called Abyssinia. The people of present-day Sudan accuse the Ethiopians of stealing their ancient name. [↑](#footnote-ref-17)
18. Vulcan was the god of forge and volcanoes for Romans; he corresponds to Hephaestus, God of metallurgy for Greeks. Remains of a metallurgical industry were discovered around Meroe (now distric of Keraba in Butana province, 200 km north of Khartoum). [↑](#footnote-ref-18)
19. Greek mythologists understood Meroe as mero (μηρό), which means thigh. Hence the phrase "to get out from Jupiter's thigh" alluding to the legend reported by Herodotus (II, 146): "Regarding Dionysus (the Zeus of Nysa), Greeks say that as soon as he was born, Zeus (Jupiter) sewed him in his thigh and took him to Nysa (The Island of Meroe) which is above Egypt in Ethiopia (North Sudan)". This seems to be a figurative expression of the adoption of young Prince Kamose by Pharaoh Antef (VII) Nubkheperre of the 17th Dynasty, who had taken refuge in Nubia. [↑](#footnote-ref-19)