
Atlantis in Northern Europe

In 1876 Trubner and Co, a respected English publisher, released a curious work entitled The Oera Linda Book. It purported to be the translation of a thirteenth-century ancient Frisian text which spoke of the destruction of a landmass known to ancient mariners as Atland, and to the Frisians of the Netherlands and Denmark as the Aldland, the 'Old Land'. This lay in the North Sea between Denmark and the Shetland Isles, and was devastated by floods and cataclysms at a date given specifically as 2193 BC. The book went on to detail how its displaced peoples, who worshipped the goddess Freya, eventually settled in Frisia, where they developed a major maritime culture which traded regularly with the Phoenicians of the eastern Mediterranean. Indeed, the Oera Linda Book suggests that a Frisian sea-king named Teunis founded the Phoenician port of Tyre on the Lebanese coast, c. 2000 BC.

Even though the ancient text was advertised as genuine, its authenticity was quickly challenged by scholars. For instance, one of the Frisian sea-kings named Inka is said to have gone on a quest in search of lost Atland. Having journeyed in the direction of the setting sun, he finally came across an unknown land where he established a kingdom. This clearly is a reference to America, inferring therefore that Inka was the founder of the Inca civilisation of Peru ('inca' is Peruvian for king). Since we now know that the Incas only rose to power in the thirteenth century it makes nonsense of the claim made in the Oera Linda Book. It is also stated that the Greek alphabet is derived from a much earlier Frisian script. Yet scholars rightly point out that, according to Herodotus, the Greek alphabet came from Phoenicia, and is thus Semitic in origin. Other similar irregularities ensured that no academic ever took the book seriously.

The book was forgotten until 1977 when ancient mysteries writer Robert Scrutton took it upon himself to write a lengthy commentary and introduction for an abridged edition of the Oera Linda Book. Entitled The Other Atlantis, it was an instant bestseller and once again the authenticity of the Frisian text was debated by scholars and historians alike. Furthermore, the close similarity between the name Atland and Atlantis made the former North Sea landmass a major candidate for the site of Plato's ancient kingdom. Despite this new lease of life, the Oera Linda Book was quickly forgotten and the only references to it which appear in books today right it off as a nineteenth-century hoax.

Despite these drawbacks, it is now accepted by archaeologists that a land-bridge did once exist between Norway and the Shetland Isles. Yet

this was drowned by rising sea-levels as early as 6000-5000 BC, not `2193 BC' as the Oera Linda Book implies. It therefore seemed unlikely that any major landmass ever existed in the North Sea, or in the Baltic as has also been proposed.

Recently, Britain itself has been linked with the traditions surrounding Plato's Atlantis. Russian scientist Viatcheslav Koudriavtsev of the Institute of Metahistory in Moscow is convinced that evidence of the island's former existence will be found on the shallow banks that lie beyond Cornwall's Isles of Scilly, traditionally the site of lost Lyonesse.

Yet such ideas make nonsense of Plato's suggestion that the Atlantic island he describes in his works the *Timaeus* and *Critias*, written c. 350 BC, lay in front of an `opposite continent', very probably the Americas, which `voyagers' could reach via a series of `other' islands. This is unless we assume that these islands are those which mark the Northwest Passage from northern Britain to New England - the route taken by the Vikings to reach Newfoundland in around AD 1000.

Although there is ample evidence of pre-Columbian contact with New England by Iberic Phoenician, Carthaginian and Roman seafarers, it seems unlikely that an island in the North Sea, the Baltic or anywhere off the coast of Britain, would have been referred to as Atlantis, which means `daughter of Atlas'. Plato's legendary island takes its name from Atlas, the legendary Titan who was granted dominion over the lands of the Far West, including West Africa and the uncharted seas which lay beyond the Pillars of Hercules, the legendary rocks marked the entrance to the Atlantic or Western Ocean. All this would imply that only those islands which lay in this direction would have been known as Atlantides, `daughters of Atlas'. Furthermore, we know that Britain and Northern Europe as a whole was strongly identified with a legendary location sacred to the sun-god Apollo called Hyperborea, and not with any of the legendary islands spoken of in classical tradition.

There seems to be no good reason to link any site in Northern Europe with Plato's Atlantis tradition.



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