

## We investigate lost city Atlantis

For thousands of years the mystery of Atlantis has remained as deep as the ocean covering the fabled city itself. Despite lying lost beneath the waves since the dawn of civilization, the mythical home of an ancient utopian society has never been forgotten. Indeed, interest in the legend is very much alive today, as has been proved by the global shockwaves created by the mysterious picture in yesterday's Sun showing the possible location of Atlantis off the coast of Africa.

The Greek philosopher Plato first mentioned Atlantis in 360BC and since then it has been obsessed over in scientific study, scholarly research and popular culture. Plato described what he said was a translation of Egyptian hieroglyphs telling of a large island beyond "the pillars of Hercules" (the ancient name for the Straits of Gibraltar).

Atlantis had smaller islands nearer it, so travellers could easily reach the mainland of Europe and Africa. According to historian Lewis Spence in his 1924 book *The Problem Of Atlantis*, the Canary Islands and Madeira could be what was left of Atlantis after it was destroyed by a huge earthquake. This very much fits in with the Google Ocean pictures in yesterday's Sun, as they were taken almost an equal distance west of the Canaries and Madeira.

The Egyptian records described Atlantis as mostly mountainous in the north with a great oblong plain in the south. That is almost an exact description of the Sun's picture — mountains on the left and a plain on the right. Plato's sources described Atlantis as a great naval power that conquered North Africa and what is now Spain, southern France and parts of Italy. But the Atlanteans may also have been doomed by natural phenomena. Plato says that soon after a defeat by Athens the island was destroyed by a series of huge earthquakes and a flood. Scientists have speculated that the flood was caused by a tsunami.

The Canaries were off the map of the known world for hundreds of years until they were rediscovered by the Spanish in the 1300s. Intriguingly, the natives found living there have been shown to have strong genetic links to the Berbers of North Africa and the Nile Valley, leading to speculation that today's Berbers are descended from the Atlanteans who were said to have conquered the region more than 11,000 years ago. A Dutch map of 1669 shows an improbably large Atlantis stretching from south of the Canaries to north of Spain.

Many seekers of Atlantis have looked even farther north, to the British Isles. For example, a team of Russian scientists claimed 12 years ago to have identified Atlantis off the south west coast of England, about 100 miles off Land's End in a relatively shallow area of sea known as Little Sole Bank. Between it and Britain are the Scillies, which, the Russian scientist said, could be the islands Plato identified as providing stepping stones from Atlantis to the mainland.

The Atlantis story has fascinated people across the ages. Even the Nazis got in on the act, believing that Atlanteans were a master race who were the ancestors of modern Germans, Scandinavians and the English. SS chief Heinrich Himmler organised an expedition to Tibet in 1938 in support of a theory that Atlanteans were supermen who originated from near the North Pole.

For now, the Google Ocean pictures cannot be said to prove the Atlantis legend. A Google spokesman said last night that while many amazing discoveries have been made in Google Earth there may be a more scientific explanation for the regular lines on the sea floor. He

went on: "Bathymetric, or sea-floor terrain data, is often collected from boats using sonar to take measurements of the sea floor. *"The lines reflect the path of the boat as it gathers the data. But the fact that there are blank spots between these lines is a sign of how little we really know about the world's oceans."*

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