

INTRODUCTION

There are certain words which possess a magic all their own, and have, perhaps, for centuries. Who can resist looking with closer attention at any page on which "treasure," "gold," or "jewel" appears in the text? However, there is one name which has always held, become a part of, one of the most powerful lures, not just for years, but, in fact, for untold time—and that is "Atlantis."

The tale of the sunken and vanished land is better known than any other myth or legend of our world. Since Plato first introduced it to a literate people, countless books have been written about the existence, non-existence, history, or fantastical myth of its being. Arguments, heated, scornful, disparaging, emphatic, have been advanced concerning the truth or falsity of the story. That is only on the investigative side of the matter.

This famous "lost" land has, by the most detailed arguments and bits of garnered "evidence" firmly advanced by one student of the past to another, been situated everywhere on the globe, from the middle of the Atlantic Ocean, the center of the Sahara Desert, the cold waters of Heligoland in the far north, the warm wash of waves off Bimini, to the volcanic-riven

island of Thera in the Mediterranean—the latest serious addition to Atlantean lore.

Are the Canary Islands, which once harbored a native race strangely differing from those peoples of the mainland, the last remaining outposts of that vanished land? Are the unexplicable “finds,” made from time to time in both Europe and the American continents, “drift” or forgotten remnants left by shocked and perhaps mind-blasted survivors of so great a catastrophe that the human race was thrown back into abject barbarity for a millenium after the blow? For there are indeed bits of physical evidence which no authority, no matter how learned, can fit into the pattern of history as we have always been taught it.

If historians and archaeologists are at war with one another over a world-wide legend (known even to peoples who have never seen the Bible) which deals with titanic waves, the riving of a world swallowed up in water, and the saving of a handful of people and animals here and there—if they dispute, then who does know the answer? Or perhaps will ever discover it?

We are now made free in scores of books, many illustrated by photographs of unusual finds, of a wide wealth of conjured speculation. This library is added to substantially in every generation—there have been a number of such volumes newly published in the past decade—so that the interested has access to a wide spectrum of such arguments.

If the field of facts, pro and con, has been so wide, the library of serious discussion so augmented by interest, as it has been for hundreds of years—what of the fiction which has grown out of such speculation and legendary lore? Atlantis for many years provided a peg for writers on which to hang pet theories of Utopian life, drawing wishful developments of sociological or economical suggestions for the betterment of mankind.

Even in the eighteenth century books were appearing with a golden age Atlantis to point up the

human errors of the day—to confront the murky drabness of reality with the wonders of what might be if mankind was only led, for his or her own good, into new ways.

Thus for a space, the major interest in Atlantis was not in the existence of the lost land as a fact, but rather the use of the legend to provide a background to point up some belief fostered by the writer—a sugar coating to a pill which was more than slightly bitter at times.

From the position of having been an Utopia once known, it passed naturally (under the impetus of the change from the idea of fiction as a genteel form of instruction to that of entertainment). Now the sunken paradise is no longer introduced as a pattern for all right thinking readers to aspire to follow, but rather as a backdrop for sheer adventure. Haggard, Verne, and their lesser known contemporaries could well see the value of such rich material.

The novels varied greatly, from those steeped in early occult beliefs to others in which the “sinful” Atlanteans expiated their blasphemies in the horror of a single night or day of punishment and death, for one of the lingering tenets of the legend is the often reiterated fact that the end of the island continent was brought about either by some evil meddling with nature, if not the well documented old fashioned “sin” on the part of its inhabitants. Either they blew themselves up by some misuse of a powerful and unstable discovery, or provoked a “god” to the point of fearful retaliation.

Another theory advanced was predicated on some “scientific” speculation—a sudden change in the poles (supposed to have frozen the oft-cited Siberian mammoths so instantly that their half-chewed flower and grass meal remained in their mouths), or the coming into our heavens of the present moon well attended by a deadly rain of meteors which tagged behind. The resulting volcanoes, tidal waves, and earthquakes were enough to finish off the world-wide civilization—

with or without divine intervention—and that was it.

Thus the excellent choice of background material is lying ready to hand for any questing writer, and a plot can be well fitted into the necessary doom with a good number of interesting variations.

The form or method of presentation also offers a wide variety of approach methods. One may write of time travel, or of a modern discovery perhaps still water-bogged on the deep and unknown ocean floor with a sealed city still inhabited by Atlanteans. Another way is to regress a modern hero or heroine into reliving a former life in the lost land.

Mr. Ashton chose the latter way. Oddly enough two of the important factors which he introduced in *The Breaking of the Seals* have been actually investigated and explored recently—to produce some odd results.

His hero, confronted by a fossilized artifact found in a French cave, reacts to it in almost the identical manner as a trained sensitive of the present day when asked to use the power of psychometry. It is now a proven fact that such reactions do lead to the location of archaeological sites hitherto unknown. Also there is on record the recent unusual, and so far unexplicable, discoveries in certain French caves, perhaps not Atlantean remains—but what of the inscribed pebbles carrying what may be an unknown language, or the provocative wall drawing of a young lady wearing a most fashionable and modern style of clothing—certainly not a primitive in a huddle of furs?

So in 1946 this author foresaw the use of psychometry—a good thirty years before it became cautiously accepted as a tool. However, it is the truth of science fiction that sooner or later reality catches up to the imagination.

Not only is the hero exposed to this attempt at psychometry, but he is also “regressed”—another modern experiment now under serious study, though the process as used by Professor Kurdt of the book does not follow the methods now in employment. No matter,

this combination of both of these now better known forms of practice does serve the purpose well, and the reader is allowed, thus, to travel through the final days of both a nation and a continent. The fast moving action leads well into the horror and despair of what was literally the end of a world.

Certainly *The Breaking of the Seals* is well tied to our modern age by the imaginative foresight of the author, and can take place to the fore of the wealth of Atlantean adventure stories.

There have been many of these in the past. There will undoubtedly be more to come. This is our world's greatest unsolved mystery—and who does not relish a mystery?

—Andre Norton

A handwritten signature in cursive script that reads "Andre Norton". The signature is written in dark ink and is positioned centrally on the page.