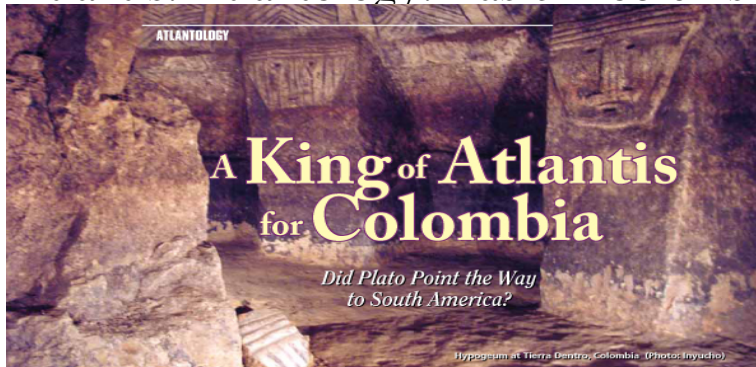


Atlantis: Atlantology: Basic Problems



• BY FRANK JOSEPH

In his 2,300-year-old "dialogue" known as the *Timaeus*, Plato provides the names of the first kings of Atlantis. Athens' famous philosopher tells us very little about them, although at least some have been identified by investigators with particular places, peoples, or persons. For example, he cites an Atlantean monarch called Gadeiros. Curiously, that is the same name by which the modern Spanish city of Cadiz was known to Plato's fellow Greeks. Another member of the Atlantean kings list is Eliassos, as Portugal's Lisbon was called by the earlier Phoenicians. Eusemon from the *Timaeus* suggests Eremon, the flood hero of pre-Celtic Irish myth who survived the cataclysmic deluge of a splendid kingdom with his wife and children to settle in Ireland, where they became the Emerald Isle's first royal family. Four hundred years after Plato, a Greek geographer, Dioscorus Siculus, told of an indigenous people dwelling along the Atlantic coast of Morocco who called themselves the Autochthones, apparently after Autochthon, the sixth Atlantean ruler. Appropriately, each of the first ten kings of Atlantis has been associated with a particular location, folk, or mythic figure in non-Greek societies on both sides of the Atlantic Ocean which long ago was dominated from its center by the great capital of Atlantis. It seems unlikely Plato merely fabricated these names, given their geographical and cultural affinities.

A case in point is his fifth Atlantean monarch, Musaeus. The name bears a philological resemblance to Muysca, the founding father of the Chibcha Indians. They occupied the high valleys surrounding Bogota and Neiva at the time of the Spanish Conquest, in the early sixteenth century. Although Muysca means, literally, "the Civilizer," they also referred to him as the "White One," a bearded man from across the Eastern Water (i.e., the Atlantic Ocean), who long ago laid down the ground rules for Colombia's first civilization. The Chibcha referred to themselves, after Muysca, as the Muisca. Appropriately, Colombia's outstanding archaeological remains may be found along the Atlantic shores of Santa Maria, just where Muysca was said to have landed in the company of fellow "sorcerers" who escaped a great flood that overwhelmed their overseas homeland.

It was here, along this coastal region, that G. Reichel-Dolmatoff, the dean of Colombian archaeology, found abundant evidence of a sprawling public works system, cities and ceremonial centers, paved roads, efficient irrigation, and sophisticated agricultural practices (G. Reichel-Dolmatoff, *Colombia*, NY: Praeger Press, 1965). Although these abundant ruins were discovered in the mid-twentieth century, they are still largely unknown to the outside world, just as the identity of their builders continues to defy scholars.

Among the best preserved and most dramatic physical remains from this enigmatic

people are huge, sepulchral chambers cut into the soft rock at Tierra Dentro, in Colombia's southwest. Concealed beneath stone slabs bedged with earth, they were laid out in a circular or oval plan with squat columns hewn from the living rock. Roofs are slanted and vaulted, and niches, perhaps once containing effigies, were chiseled out of the interior walls on either side of stone blocks formed as columns. The walls themselves were colored black, white, and red, and decorated with spirals, lozenges, concentric circles, and rhomboids. Shallow pits in the floor contained human bones, and a large, apparently ceremonial urn was found nearby.

Colombia's Tierra Dentro complex so resembles a similar underground structure on the other side of the world, that both might have been designed by the same architect. The South American site's twin counterpart occurs at a place called Hal Sattien, on the island of Malta, in the Mediterranean Sea. Hal Sattien is part of a Stone Age complex—dated to the early third millennium BC, contemporaneous with the pyramid-builders of Dynastic Egypt—and no less mysterious than the pre-Chibcha civilizations of Colombia. The Maltese site is likewise a subterranean series of rooms carved out of limestone rock to resemble a vault supported by slanting arches. Stone slabs covered with earth conceal entrances. Niches containing statues are spaced off by squared columns. The grand plan circular or oval. There are sunken pits in the

Continued on Page 70

44 ATLANTIS REISING • Number 82

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