

# ARISTOTLE AND PLATO'S ATLANTIS

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## ABSTRACT

Time and again scholars claim that Aristotle spoke out explicitly against the existence of Plato's island of Atlantis in Strabo's *Geographica* 2.3.6. Yet is this really true? Who established this claim? And by what arguments is this claim supported? Nobody seems to provide answers to these questions. Further observations foster doubts: some scholars add 'uncertain' in footnotes; other scholars conspicuously avoid the issue. Few contradict. Others have changed their mind on the topic from publication to publication. And the alleged words of Aristotle have never been included in academic collections of fragments from his works. This article reflects a study from 2010, translated into English in 2012, which gives a thorough analysis of the question, and arrives at a clear conclusion: Aristotle did not dispute the existence of Plato's Atlantis. It even seems more likely that Aristotle, being basically uncertain about the question, was rather inclined to be in favour of the existence of Plato's island of Atlantis, just as was Posidonius. The opinion that Aristotle spoke out against the existence of Plato's Atlantis in Strabo 2.3.6 is a typical collective error which should be ruled out.

## KEYWORDS

Plato, Aristotle, Atlantis, Timaeus-Critias, Posidonius

*Nunc rationem, quo ea me cumque ducet, sequar.*  
(M. Tullius Cicero Tusc. disp. II 15)

## INTRODUCTION

Time and again in the academic literature on Plato's Atlantis story in the Timaeus-Critias, scholars put forward the claim<sup>1</sup> that Aristotle spoke out explicitly against the existence of Plato's Atlantis in Strabo's *Geographica* 2.3.6. Here, Strabo wrote: *'That the story about the island of Atlantis is not a fiction. [...] and Posidonius thinks that it is better to put the matter in that way than to say of*

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1 For example: C. Gill, *Plato – The Atlantis Story* (Bristol, 1980), at vii; A. Cameron, 'Crantor and Posidonius on Atlantis', *CQ* 33 (1983) 81-91, at 84 and footnote 14, 89; T.A. Szlezák, 'Atlantis und Troia, Platon und Homer. Bemerkungen zum Wahrheitsanspruch des Atlantis-Mythos' in *Studia Troica* 3 (1993), 233-237, at 237 and footnote 6; J.-F. Pradeau, 'Le poème politique de Platon – Guiseppe Bartoli: Un lecteur moderne du récit Atlante' in A. Neschke-Hentschke (ed.), *Le Timée de Platon – Contributions à l'Histoire de sa Réception / Platos Timaios – Beiträge zu seiner Rezeptionsgeschichte* (Louvain, 2000), at 261 and footnote 22; D. Clay, 'Plato's Atlantis: The Anatomy of a Fiction' in *Proceedings of the Boston Area Colloquium in Ancient Philosophy* 1999 (Leiden, 2000), 1-22, at 5 and footnote 19; Ph. Vasunia, *The gift of the Nile – Hellenizing Egypt from Aeschylus to Alexander* (Berkeley, 2001), at 232 and footnotes 29, 30; P. Vidal-Naquet, *L'Atlantide – Petite histoire d'un mythe platonicien* (Paris, 2006<sup>2</sup>), at 46 f., 49, 58, and footnote 2.26; H.A. Tarrant, *Proclus on the Socratic State and Atlantis*, Vol. 1 Book 1 of *Proclus – Commentary on Plato's Timaeus* (Cambridge, 2006); printed 2007, at 289 in footnote 798

*Atlantis: "Its inventor caused it to disappear, just as did the Poet the wall of the Achaeans."* <sup>2</sup> Obviously, Aristotle is not mentioned at all in Strabo 2.3.6. The claim is that a word about Homer's wall of the Achaeans from the *Iliad* in Strabo 13.1.36 shows Aristotle's authorship of the statement denying the existence of Atlantis in Strabo 2.3.6: '[...] for the wall, Homer says, was constructed at a late period; or perhaps no wall was built and the erection and destruction of it, as Aristotle says, are due to the invention of the Poet.' <sup>3</sup>

Some of these scholars add 'uncertain' or similar caveats to their claim in footnotes, but explain neither their doubts nor why they maintain the claim although they consider it to be uncertain. At the same time, other scholars seem to avoid the issue completely. Some seem to change their mind on the topic from publication to publication.<sup>4</sup> Few scholars express a contradictory view.<sup>5</sup> The entire discourse takes place in subordinate clauses and footnotes. Rarely is an entire paragraph wasted on the issue. Almost never is any argument provided beyond the mere claim. And the alleged words of Aristotle have never been included in the established academic collections of fragments from his works.<sup>6</sup> What are we to make of this?

## TRACING THE ORIGINATOR

First we have to realize that practically no author explains *how* Aristotle's authorship of the statement denying the existence of Plato's Atlantis is supported by these two passages in Strabo. They all give a footnote – if the claim itself is not given in a footnote – which points to another author who made the same claim, without giving any explanation. Thus the first task of this study was to trace the claim back in time from author to author, from footnote to footnote, until the originator of the claim was found, and until some explanation of *how* Aristotle's authorship is supported by these two Strabo passages was found.

It was found that all chains of references, traced back in time from footnote to footnote, do indeed converge on one single author: the French astronomer Jean-Baptiste Joseph Delambre (1749–1822), who first put forward the claim in 1816. From Delambre, the claim spread to French astronomers such as François Arago and Abbé Théophile Moreux. The claim then jumped over to experts in

2 Strabo 2.3.6 translated by H. L. Jones; Loeb Classical Library. Original has 'Poseidonius' instead of 'Posidonius'

3 Strabo 13.1.36 translated by H. L. Jones; Loeb Classical Library

4 For example: E.H. Berger, *Geschichte der wissenschaftlichen Erdkunde der Griechen* (Leipzig, 1903<sup>2</sup>); vs. E.H. Berger, s.v. 'Atlantis 2) Der Mythos' in Georg Wissowa (ed.), *Paulys Realencyclopädie der classischen Altertumswissenschaft* (Stuttgart, 1896); P. Couissin, 'Le Mythe de l'Atlantide' in *Mercure de France* 15 February 1927, 29-71, within the very same work; J.V. Luce, *Lost Atlantis – New Light on an Old Legend* (New York, 1969); vs. J.V. Luce, 'The Literary Perspective – The Sources and Literary Form of Plato's Atlantis Narrative' in E.S. Ramage (ed.), *Atlantis – Fact or Fiction?* (Bloomington, 1978), 49-78; J.-F. Pradeau, *Le Monde de la Politique – Sur le Récit Atlante de Platon, Timée (17-27) et Critias*, Vol. 8 of the series: *International Plato Studies* (Sankt Augustin, 1997); vs. Pradeau (n. 1)

5 G. Rudberg, 'Atlantis och Syrakusai – En Studie till Platons Senare Politiska Skrifter' in *Eranos* 17 (1917), 1-80; English: *Atlantis and Syracuse – Did Plato's experiences on Sicily inspire the legend? A study on Plato's later political writings* (Norderstedt, 2012), at 11 resp. at 18 (transl.); H. Herter, 'Platons Atlantis' in *Bonner Jahrbücher* 133 (1928), 28-47, at 45 f.

6 V. Rose, *Aristotelis qui ferebantur librorum fragmenta* (Leipzig, 1886), also known as R3 or R<sup>3</sup>; H. Flashar, U. Dubielzig, and B. Breitenberger, *Aristoteles – Fragmente zu Philosophie, Rhetorik, Poetik, Dichtung*, Vol. 20/I of the series *Aristoteles – Werke in deutscher Übersetzung* (Berlin, 2006)

ancient geography, among them the German Ernst Hugo Berger. Berger included the claim in a revised version of the 'Atlantis' article in the renowned *Pauly's Realencyclopädie* in 1896. The claim has since become established science and spread world-wide.

## NO EXPLANATION GIVEN

Where and how did Delambre come to believe in Aristotle's authorship of the statement denying the existence of Plato's Atlantis? In 1817 Delambre reveals his source: he simply read it in Casaubon's 1587 commentary on Strabo's *Geographica*. But this cannot be the case because Casaubon's comment on Strabo 2.3.6 reads as follows: '*Respiciebat Posidonius, cum haec scriberet, Aristotelis locum de muro Achivorum, quem refert Homerus. Nam cum multi e veteribus ejus muri rudera ac vestigia quaererent, Aristoteles merum esse poetae commentum existimabat.*'<sup>7</sup> Our understanding of this passage in English is: '*When he wrote this, Posidonius was taking into account the passage about the wall of the Achaeans about which Homer reports. For while many of the ancients searched for ruins and traces of the wall, Aristotle thought it to be a pure invention of the Poet.*' This passage does not explain how Aristotle's authorship of a statement on the Achaean wall can also be applied to the statement on Plato's Atlantis. So, the first author, whose claim all others have adopted, had no valid explanation for his claim. Most probably, Delambre just misread Casaubon's Latin commentary.

Furthermore, practically all authors following Delambre did not add any attempt to explain the claim they made. It was only in 2006 – almost 200 years after Delambre – that Harold Tarrant attempted to provide an argument by adding a short explanation in a footnote<sup>8</sup>: Tarrant points to the usage of similar verbs for 'invent' and 'make disappear' (*plasso* and *aphanizo*) in both passages, yet he expresses doubts about his own argument by adding: 'seems likely (though less than certain).' In fact, the choice of similar words in the two statements put forward for comparison is not very surprising: the words could have been chosen by the person who made the comparison, and, since the statements are compared precisely because of their similarity in content, it is, naturally, highly likely that the vocabulary will also be similar even if the authors of the statements are not one and the same person.

## ANALYSIS OF STRABO 2.3.6

After finding no explanation for the claim that the statement denying the existence of Atlantis in Strabo 2.3.6 has Aristotle as its author, let us thoroughly analyse the passage. It's composition is hierarchically nested as follows:

Strabo reports and agrees with:

Posidonius expresses opposition to:

An unknown author compares two statements:

Plato invented and made disappear: Atlantis;  
according to another unknown author.

Homer invented and made disappear: the Wall of the Achaeans;  
according to Aristotle (as we know from Strabo 13.1.36).

What we can see is that a statement by Aristotle about the wall of the Achaeans in Homer's *Iliad* is used to make an argument against the existence of Plato's Atlantis. But we cannot see how the

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7 I.P. Siebenkees (ed.), *Strabonis Rerum Geographicarum Libri XVII*, with commentary by I. Casaubon (Leipzig, 1796), Vol. 7, at 521 resp. 272 (= Strabo 2.3.6)

8 Tarrant (n.1), at 289 footnote 798, cf. 62 f.

authorship of the statement about the wall of the Achaeans is also assumed to apply to the authorship of the statement denying the existence of Plato's Atlantis.

We know from Strabo's *Geographica* that Strabo likes to name Aristotle as author of an opinion wherever it is the case – even when Strabo disagrees with him. Thus it is unlikely that Aristotle is one or both of the unknown authors. It is, rather, likely that Aristotle's statement about Homer's literary device (the disappearance of the wall of the Achaeans) plays the role of a 'winged word': a phrase which everybody knew and applied where fitting. It is likely to be a fragment from the lost work *Aporemata Homerika*, or *Homeric Problems*, which Aristotle is said to have written while still at Plato's Academy. Anyone could have used Aristotle's phrase about Homer's wall of the Achaeans in order to make a statement against the existence of Atlantis.

In all the available ancient literature nobody ever repeats the statement denying the existence of Atlantis alleged to have been made by Aristotle, although a quotation from him was always welcome. On the contrary, Proclus used statements by Aristotle to argue in favour of the existence of Plato's Atlantis.<sup>9</sup> It is safe to say that Proclus would have been very surprised had he been told that Aristotle spoke out against the existence of Atlantis. Proclus used the Greek word *tines* for the doubters: that is 'certain' or 'some' (persons) whose names are obviously not worth mentioning.<sup>10</sup> It is rather unlikely that Aristotle is hidden in a pejorative *tines*.

It has to be noted that the doubts against the existence of Atlantis alluded to in Strabo 2.3.6 seem to be of a geological nature: this can be seen from the fact that a geological argument is considered sufficient to answer the doubts. Thus the literary device of the disappearance of the wall of the Achaeans is not the reason for the doubts – it is only an attempt to explain how to understand Plato's Atlantis if it turns out to be geologically impossible. Later, Pliny also expressed doubts based on geology, not on literary considerations.<sup>11</sup>

#### DOES PROCLUS INDICATE ARISTOTLE'S AUTHORSHIP?

In addition to his attempt to provide a direct argument for Aristotle's authorship of the statement denying the existence of Plato's Atlantis in Strabo 2.3.6, Harold Tarrant speculated that a passage in Proclus' commentary on Plato's *Timaeus* also indicated Aristotle's authorship. Tarrant observed that the words for 'invent' and 'make disappear' (*plasso* and *aphanizo*) in Aristotle's statement about the disappearance of the wall of the Achaeans are similar to the words concerning Atlantis in Plato's *Timaeus*. Since Proclus' commentary on the *Timaeus* mentions the Phaeacians as another example of the same literary device as the wall of the Achaeans<sup>12</sup>, Tarrant put forward the hypothesis that Proclus derived both examples from Aristotle's work *Aporemata Homerika*, and adds that Plato's Atlantis had, probably, been given as a third example. Besides the similar choice of words, says Tarrant, Poseidon is the god who performs the destruction in all three cases.<sup>13</sup>

Again, it is questionable whether a mere similarity in words is sufficient to draw such far-reaching conclusions. The use of similar sentences or phrases would be much more convincing. In fact, even the grammatical form of the words is different in these three examples. What is more, the word for 'invent', *plasso*, is negated in case of Plato's Atlantis.<sup>14</sup> Is a negation still a similarity?

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9 Proclus In *Timaeum* 1,187 (or 58A), and 1,188 (or 58B)

10 Proclus In *Timaeum* 1,197 (or 61A)

11 Pliny the Elder *Naturalis Historia* 2.90

12 Proclus In *Timaeum* 1,190 (or 58E)

13 Tarrant (n. 1) at 62 f.

14 *Timaeus* 26e

Also, in the case of Plato's Atlantis it is questionable whether or not its destruction can be attributed to Poseidon. In the Critias we read of Zeus' intention to punish the Atlanteans, not of Poseidon destroying Atlantis. Once again, Tarrant's hypothesis is based on an assumption only.

Furthermore, Proclus argues in favour of the existence of Plato's Atlantis by referring to passages from Aristotle's known works.<sup>15</sup> Is it reasonable to assume that Proclus argued for the existence of Atlantis using passages from Aristotle, while at the same time drawing several examples of the literary device of an invention – including, according to Tarrant's hypothesis, Atlantis – from Aristotle's *Aporemata Homerika*, without any attempt to resolve the contradiction?

We have also to consider the 'Sitz im Leben' of Aristotle's work *Aporemata Homerika*. As the title suggests, it is a work about Homer, not about Plato. It is reasonable to expect a discussion of Homer's wall of the Achaeans or of Homer's Phaeacians in this work, but not of Plato's Atlantis. Furthermore, a literary device first has to be established before you can apply it to other cases. It is unlikely that Aristotle's work established awareness of this literary device and, at the same time, started to apply it to other, very contemporary works.

Finally, we have to consider that even if the comparison of the wall of the Achaeans and Plato's Atlantis in Strabo 2.3.6 was put into words by Aristotle, we do not know whether he was in favour of, or against the existence of Plato's Atlantis. The reason is that we do not know where to draw the line between the statements of Posidonius and Aristotle in Strabo 2.3.6. If we expand Aristotle's role from his authorship of the statement about the wall of the Achaeans to the authorship of the statement about Plato's Atlantis, and if we then expand it further to the authorship of the comparison between the two, why should we stop there? Why should we not also assume Aristotle's authorship of the rejection of this comparison, as expressed by Posidonius in Strabo 2.3.6?

There are good reasons for doing so. The invention of Atlantis is negated in Plato's Timaeus. Posidonius also rejects the invention, and he is known to have been a loyal follower of many of Aristotle's teachings.<sup>16</sup> Maybe Posidonius is just expressing what Aristotle thought about it? Maybe Aristotle did indeed compare Plato's Atlantis and Homer's wall of the Achaeans (and the fate of Homer's Phaeacians) in his *Aporemata Homerika*, but to say they were different cases? We do not know and since we do not know these are all mere speculations.

On the basis of such speculations Harold Tarrant has put forward further claims. Contrary to the common interpretation, he says, Crantor, Strabo and Posidonius did also not believe in the existence of Plato's Atlantis. (We do not discuss these surprising claims here.) According to Tarrant, the idea that Plato's Atlantis was a real place and that Crantor believed in its existence has existed only since the time of the Neoplatonists, especially Proclus, and, since then, Crantor and Aristotle have been put forward as the symbolic protagonists 'for' and 'against' the existence of Atlantis.<sup>17</sup>

But this is simply not possible, because no one ever put forward the claim that Aristotle disputed the existence of Plato's Atlantis before Delambre did so in 1816. On the contrary: beginning with Proclus himself, many authors throughout the Middle Ages, the Renaissance, the Baroque, and the Enlightenment until Delambre – and some even after that – used statements from Aristotle's works

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15 Proclus In Timaeum 1,187 (or 58A), and 1,188 (or 58B)

16 See below: The Implicit Argument

17 H.A. Tarrant, 'Atlantis: Myths, ancient and modern' in *The European Legacy* Vol. 12 Issue 2 (2007), 159-172

(and some from pseudo-Aristotelian works) to defend the case of Atlantis as a real place.<sup>18</sup> Tarrant's whole approach on this question is highly speculative and, in certain parts, clearly wrong.<sup>19</sup>

## THE IMPLICIT ARGUMENT

In order to clarify the authorship of the statement denying the existence of Plato's Atlantis in Strabo 2.3.6 we have to look at other statements made by Aristotle about geography, geology and history and their implicit connection to our topic. Does a rejection of Plato's island as a real place fit into Aristotle's views? Or do Aristotle's works show an implicit inclination towards the existence of Atlantis? Furthermore, we have to look what Aristotle's followers said.

### *Geology and geography*

It is very telling that Aristotle mentions the mud that allegedly exists in the sea before the Straits of Gibraltar.<sup>20</sup> According to Plato this mud is the remnant of the sunken island of Atlantis.<sup>21</sup> When talking about this mud, Aristotle does not provide any explanation for it and, at this time, the only explanation for its existence was Plato's. Thus anyone reading or listening to Aristotle's discourse could only think of Plato's Atlantis. From Late Antiquity, we have evidence that this was the imagined explanation for the alleged impassability at the Straits of Gibraltar. Proclus uses Aristotle's mention of mud at Gibraltar as an argument in favour of the existence of Plato's Atlantis<sup>22</sup>, and Martianus Capella qualifies the alleged impassability with '*consumtae telluris*', that is saying it is caused by 'swallowed-up land'.<sup>23</sup>

Furthermore, Aristotle mentions the mud at the Straits of Gibraltar in a work full of explanations for geological and geographical phenomena: his famous *Meteorologica*. If Aristotle had any explanation for the mud other than given by Plato, it is reasonable to expect he would have presented it in this work – but he did not.

Another striking hint comes from Aristotle's famous passage about the possibility of sailing around the globe from Gibraltar to India. Here, Aristotle points out that the existence of elephants in India as well as in West Africa indicates the proximity of Gibraltar and India: '*Hence one should not be too sure of the incredibility of the view of those who conceive that there is continuity between the parts about the pillars of Hercules and the parts about India, and that in this way the ocean is one. As further evidence in favour of this they quote the case of elephants, a species occurring in each of these extreme regions, suggesting that the common characteristic of these extremes is explained by their continuity.*'<sup>24</sup>

What does this mean? Obviously, the elephants at the Western and Eastern ends of the known earth are connected. But how can they be, if there is a sea in between? The only answer is that Aristotle assumed that once a land connection between Gibraltar and India existed. And this is exactly where Plato located his island of Atlantis. It is maybe no coincidence that Plato talks of elephants on

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18 Th.C. Franke, *Aristotle and Atlantis – What did the philosopher really think about Plato's island empire?* (Norderstedt, 2016<sup>2</sup>); Th.C. Franke, *Kritische Geschichte der Meinungen und Hypothesen zu Platons Atlantis* (Norderstedt, 2016)

19 Find a more detailed discussion in Franke (n. 18, 2016) at 197-211

20 Aristotle *Meteorologica* II 1 354a

21 Timaeus 25d

22 Proclus *In Timaeum* 1,188 (or 58B)

23 Martianus Capella 6.624; cf. Franke (n. 18, 2016) at 161 f.

24 Aristotle *De caelo* II 14 297b-298a, translated by John L. Stocks

Atlantis. Very cautiously, Ernst Hugo Berger, one of the luminaries of ancient geography, expressed this thought in the following words: *'How the reference to the existence of elephants was actually used remains unclear. Simplicius says that [Aristotle] relied here on proximity of location, rather than similarities in climate across great distances; perhaps, however, one could imagine an earlier land bridge, and it may be worth noting that according to Plato, the sunken Atlantis was home to elephant herds as well.'*<sup>25</sup>

Here, we have to keep in mind that the statement denying the existence of Plato's Atlantis in Strabo 2.3.6 does not only doubt the existence of an 'Atlantean civilization' which may have been invented or embellished by Plato – it doubts the existence of the whole island. We should not expect the author of the non-existence statement in Strabo 2.3.6 to be involved in speculations about sunken land between Gibraltar and India.

### *History and politics*

In various works of Aristotle we find time and again statements which support Plato's idea of a cyclical concept of history, of repeated development and destruction of civilisation.<sup>26</sup> Like Plato, Aristotle talks of a flood and of the loss of collective memory. His geological considerations even provide mechanisms for such catastrophic events: Aristotle theorizes that land may become sea and sea become land, and about earthquakes and tsunamis.<sup>27</sup>

Aristotle has many passages on political issues which show striking similarities with Plato's Atlantis story in the *Timaeus-Critias*.<sup>28</sup> These include statements about the organization of the city, about citizens who surpass their fellow citizens in virtue and thus are like gods among men, about the observation that sons of kings are often of lesser virtue than their fathers, about the need to have co-rulers who should be of the same nature as the ruler, etc. These passages do not express explicit support for the existence of Atlantis, yet they obviously affirm many of the concepts discussed in Plato's Atlantis story.

### *Rhetoric and poetry*

In his *Rhetoric*, Aristotle expresses the opinion that a more factual text should be written in prose.<sup>29</sup> This form therefore suits to Plato's Atlantis story which at least pretends to be a factual text. In his *Poetics*, Aristotle sees the hexameter as being naturally suited to an epic.<sup>30</sup> And if considered to be a piece of poetry, the Atlantis story surely would fall into the category of an epic: Plato let Critias say that Solon would have surpassed Homer if he had written his Atlantis poem.<sup>31</sup> Thus, at least according to the concepts of Aristotle, the Atlantis story cannot be an epic.

Furthermore, Aristotle expresses the opinion that nobody had ever written a long epic in any form other than hexameter. This again suggests that Aristotle did not understand Plato's Atlantis story to

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25 Berger (n. 4, 1887) Vol. 2 at 144; translated by Cecelia Murphy in Franke (n. 18, 2016<sup>2</sup>)

26 Aristotle *De caelo* I 3 270b; *Meteorologica* I 3 339b; *Metaphysica* XII 8 1074b; *Politics* VII 10 1329b; *De philosophia*, Fragment 13 R3; *Protrepticus* or *De philosophia*, Fragment 53,2 R3

27 Aristotle *Meteorologica* I 14 351a-352b; *Meteorologica* II 8 367b-368a; *Meteorologica* II 8 368a-b; *Meteorologica* II 8 368b-369a

28 Aristotle *Politics* II 5/6 1264b; *Politics* III 13 1284a; *Politics* III 15 1286b; *Politics* III 16 1287b; *Politics* III 17 1288a

29 Aristotle *Rhetoric* III 1 and 8

30 Aristotle *Poetics* XXIV 5 f.

31 *Timaeus* 21d

be a piece of poetry.

### *Theophrastus and Posidonius*

Theophrastus was Aristotle's successor as head of his Peripatetic school. In Philo of Alexandria's *De aeternitate mundi* there is a fragment of Theophrastus' *Opiniones Physicorum* in which he talks of Plato's Atlantis as a real place.<sup>32</sup> Colson<sup>33</sup> and Runia<sup>34</sup> have disputed Theophrastus' authorship of the relevant passage, although, in fact, they have put forward no arguments supporting their claim. Colson states '[...] I cannot help suspecting that [...] the account from the *Timaeus* of Atlantis [...] belongs to Philo and not to Theophrastus' but he does not support this opinion by any argument other than his feelings.

Runia says that '*in all probability it has been added by Philo.*' Yet the only argument provided by Runia is that Strabo 2.3.6 allegedly shows that Aristotle thought differently. Of course, this is insufficient because it is a circular argument. We cannot try to analyse the meaning of Strabo 2.3.6 by relying on a predefined meaning of Strabo 2.3.6. Runia continues, saying that '*our scanty evidence points to a Philonic intrusion, as suspected by Colson [...] (but he gives no reason for his suspicion).*' Runia is aware that there are no real arguments to deny the authorship of Theophrastus. Thus, we have to assume that Theophrastus as disciple and successor of Aristotle spoke out in favour of the existence of Plato's Atlantis. Vidal-Naquet and Luce also expressed this assumption, although they did not provide any argument against Colson's and Runia's doubts.<sup>35</sup>

Posidonius who is cited in Strabo 2.3.6 with an argument in favour of the existence of Plato's Atlantis was a famous Stoic philosopher. He is known to have been a loyal follower of Aristotle in many fields. Bolchert notes '*Posidonius' close relationship with Aristotle*', and says '*Even in the field of geography, we had to detect threads that led from Posidonius to Aristotle.*'<sup>36</sup> Ernst Hugo Berger also provides countless examples which show that the geography of Posidonius relies on the geography of Aristotle.<sup>37</sup> Reinhardt also confirms the close relationship of Posidonius' views to those in Aristotle's geographical and geological work *Meteorologica*.<sup>38</sup> Is it reasonable to assume that, if Aristotle spoke out against the existence of Plato's Atlantis, Posidonius would speak out in favour without considering Aristotle's views?

### *The implicit argument summarized*

When considering the statements Aristotle is known to have made on geology, geography, politics, history, rhetoric and poetry, we find many that support views expressed in Plato's Atlantis story. Although we have not found clear evidence, some of these statements hint strongly that Aristotle believed in the existence of Atlantis. At the same time, we do not find any statement which provides an obstacle to making this assumption. Finally, followers of Aristotle, such as Theophrastus and Posidonius, expressed at least a clear inclination towards the opinion that Plato's Atlantis was a real place. Thus it is likely that Aristotle thought so, too.

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32 Philo Alexandrinus *De aeternitate mundi* 138-142; Diels *Doxographi Graeci* fr. 12, at 490

33 F.H. Colson, *Philo*, Loeb Classical Library (Cambridge, 1941), at 172-178

34 D.T. Runia, *Philo of Alexandria and the Timaeus of Plato* (Leiden, 1986) at 85

35 Luce (n. 4, 1978) at 51 and footnote 8 at 177; Vidal-Naquet (n. 1) at 53 f. and footnote 15 at 156 f.

36 P. Bolchert, *Aristoteles – Erdkunde von Asien und Libyen* (Berlin, 1908) at 94, translated by Cecelia Murphy in Franke (n. 18, 2016<sup>2</sup>)

37 Berger (n. 4, 1887) Vol. 4 at 63-93; cf. Franke (n. 18, 2016<sup>2</sup>) at 33

38 K. Reinhardt, *Poseidonios* (Munich, 1921) at 94 footnote 1, 175; cf. Franke (n. 18, 2016<sup>2</sup>) at 33

## A COLLECTIVE ERROR

The circumstances of this situation show all features of a collective error within academia. The claim that Aristotle spoke out explicitly against the existence of Plato's Atlantis has no real basis, but it is used time and again without much care. We can only guess at the deeper reasons for this. Obviously, the erroneous claim comes in handy when rejecting pseudo-scientific views about Plato's Atlantis. Indeed, it is striking that the alleged statement of Aristotle is often cited in the context of such rejections. Maybe the need for academic scrutiny is felt less strongly when arguing against the views of those who know little of classical philology, so that problems with this claim have escaped the attention they deserve?

What is more, contradicting the incorrect claim removes an argument against pseudo-scientific views about Plato's Atlantis. Pseudo-scientists may therefore feel vindicated and even start spreading rumours about a conspiracy in academia. So it is 'politicall'y unfavourable to contradict the incorrect claim. There is even the risk that contradicting the claim could be perceived in academia as arguing in favour of pseudo-scientific views about Plato's Atlantis.

Finally, when an incorrect claim has been established for a long time and has developed a certain tradition, it is always difficult to put forward contradictory views: it is easier to stay silent and to avoid the issue. We see all the typical features of a collective error: some light-heartedly express a certain claim, and dissenters stay silent to avoid problems. Of course, this is not how science should work. It is time to rule out the incorrect claim.

## CONCLUSION AND PROPOSAL

We have found that there is no basis for the claim that Aristotle disputed the existence of Plato's Atlantis. There is, in particular, no basis for the claim that there is an explicit statement by Aristotle denying the existence of Plato's island of Atlantis in Strabo's *Geographica* 2.3.6. This claim was erroneously introduced by Delambre in 1816. Before then, no one ever argued that Aristotle disputed the existence of Atlantis. Delambre's incorrect opinion has, over time, grown and become a collective error in academia.

What remains is the silence of Aristotle on the topic. While he is silent on the issue *per se*, he expresses support for many relevant details that suggest he is far from denying the existence of Plato's Atlantis. A reasonable, likely, and worthy assumption would be that Posidonius – known to be a loyal follower of many of Aristotle's teachings – expressed an opinion that was not only his own but also that of Aristotle: there was uncertainty, but he inclined towards accepting the existence of Atlantis, as we read in Strabo 2.3.6: *'That the story about the island of Atlantis is not a fiction. [...] and Posidonius thinks that it is better to put the matter in that way than to say of Atlantis: "Its inventor caused it to disappear, just as did the Poet the wall of the Achaeans."* '