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Definition: **Atlantis** from *Collins English Dictionary*

n

1 (in ancient legend) a continent said to have sunk beneath the Atlantic Ocean west of the Straits of Gibraltar



Image from: [Map showing the ostensible extent of... in Encyclopedia of Archaeology](#)

Summary Article: **Atlantis**
from *Chambers Dictionary of the Unexplained*

A legendary vanished island in the Atlantic Ocean.

The legendary lost island of Atlantis is mentioned by the Greek philosopher Plato (c.428–c.348 bc) in two short pieces: the *Timaeus* and the *Critias*. In these works Plato describes a civilization that was already ancient at the time of his writing, a powerful and almost ideal kingdom ruling an empire that extended into the Mediterranean from its island home in the Atlantic Ocean.

According to Plato, Atlantis was at war with Athens when it was rocked by earthquakes and floods before being entirely swallowed up by the sea.

Plato discusses the structure and layout, as well as the political and social organization of Atlantis in some detail but is more vague about its precise location. This has led many scholars to believe that it was imaginary and that the philosopher was merely using a convenient fiction, based perhaps on myths brought to Greece from Egypt, to make points about the ideal form of government. However, many believe in the reality of Atlantis and have suggested various possible locations for the vanished civilization. Candidates include the Greek city of Helike (known to have been destroyed by earthquake and tidal wave in 373 bc), the Caribbean and Polynesia. One of the more popular theories connects the story with the Bronze Age civilization of Minoan Crete which was largely destroyed by ash and tidal waves generated by the massive volcanic explosion of the island of Thera c.1500 bc.

There are those who believe that the concept of Atlantis really concerns an extraterrestrial race who colonized the earth thousands of years ago but established their civilization in the deepest parts of the sea. According to this theory, Atlanteans still operate from undersea bases and this explains the numerous reports over the years of unidentified metallic craft that can move at great speed both beneath the water and in the air. The existence in many parts of the world of structures that have been identified as underwater ruins has fuelled speculation that these may be remnants of Atlantis. The Bimini Road, a linear stone formation in the Caribbean off the island of Bimini, has been particularly identified with the story since the American psychic Edgar Cayce prophesied that Atlantis would be discovered in that very location.

Madame Blavatsky believed that Atlantis was peopled by the inhabitants of the (similarly lost) continent of Lemuria, and, at around the same time, the US politician and writer Ignatius Donnelly did much to revive interest in Atlantis with the publication of his *Atlantis, The Antediluvian World* (1882). He believed that Atlantis had disappeared below the Atlantic 12,000 years earlier. The Scottish poet, anthropologist and occultist Lewis Spence also wrote on the subject in a series of books beginning with *The Problem of Atlantis* (1924), claiming to find evidence for its existence and cataclysmic

destruction in the myths of Native American cultures. In any case, the idea of Atlantis exercises an enduring grip on popular imagination and continues to turn up in many places, from the novels of Jules Verne to the children's animated films of Disney.

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"Atlantis." *Chambers Dictionary of the Unexplained*, edited by Una McGovern, Chambers Harrap, 1st edition, 2007. *Credo Reference*, <https://search.credoreference.com/content/topic/atlantis>. Accessed 25 Jun. 2019.