

The Lost City of Atlantis—Now Found?

PROFESSOR MAY HAVE HELPED SOLVE AN ANCIENT MYSTERY

Did the fabled lost city of Atlantis actually exist? If so, where was it located? What happened to it?

An international team of experts whose leaders include archaeologist Richard Freund, director of the University of Hartford's Maurice Greenberg Center for Judaic Studies, believes it has found the answers to those questions in the marshlands of southwestern Spain. Using satellite photography, ground-penetrating radar, and underwater technology, Freund and his colleagues say that they have found the remains of an ancient city that they believe is Atlantis, submerged by a tsunami some 4,000 years ago.

Their work was chronicled in a National Geographic Channel documentary, *Finding Atlantis*, which was broadcast nationally on March 13, just two days after the tragic tsunami in northern Japan.

The possible discovery of an answer to one of the most tantalizing mysteries of the ancient world—combined with the devastating, modern-day disaster in Japan—created worldwide interest in the Atlantis project and put Freund at the center of an international media frenzy.

From *Newsweek* to *The Jerusalem Post* to the BBC, Freund was interviewed by media outlets around the world. He also received hundreds of e-mails inquiring about the discovery, including many offers to help with the project.

"Everyone was surprised at how the story of an ancient civilization destroyed after an earthquake and tsunami was just so much more real after seeing the devastation in Japan," Freund says.

The Greek philosopher Plato wrote about Atlantis some 2,600 years ago, describing it as "an island situated in front of the straits which are by you called the Pillars of Hercules." He was referring to the Strait of Gibraltar and using the name by which it was known in antiquity. The strait connects the Mediterranean Sea

with the Atlantic Ocean between southern Spain and northwest Africa. Plato wrote that "one grievous day and night . . . Atlantis was swallowed up by the sea and vanished."

Eight years ago, a pair of German scientists examining satellite photographs identified what looked like a submerged city in the midst of one of the largest swamps in Europe, the Doña Ana National Park in southern Spain. The satellite photos showed a circular structure set deep in the swamp, which fit with Plato's description of the city of Atlantis.

In 2006 a group of Spanish archaeologists began following up on the satellite photographs. They invited Freund, who is well known for his use of cutting-edge imaging technology—ground-penetrating radar, digital mapping, and electrical resistivity tomography—to join them. Freund assembled his team, including three Canadian geophysicists led by chief geophysicist Paul Bauman and geographer Philip Reeder from the University of South Florida, and they headed to Spain to work in the mudflats of Doña Ana. Another group of Spanish marine archaeologists worked just off the coast.

Freund's team and the Spanish archaeologists found many artifacts, including multiple images carved as stone signposts of what looks like an Atlantean warrior guarding the entrance to the ringed city.

But the most powerful evidence, Freund says, was his discovery of a series of "memorial cities" built in the image of Atlantis about 100 miles away, in central Spain. Freund believes that the refugees of the Atlantis tsunami built these miniature versions of Atlantis as memorials to their former home.

Today, the media frenzy surrounding the possible discovery of Atlantis has begun to die down, but work continues at the archaeological site in the Spanish marshland. The Atlantis project will be chronicled in Freund's new book, *Digging through History: From Atlantis to the Holocaust* (Rowman and Littlefield, 2011), which is due out later this year. ■



Left: Richard Freund holds two female clay figures found at the Doña Ana National Park site in southern Spain.

Right: Freund at Badajoz Archaeological Museum in Spain with a stele found at one of the "memorial cities." He believes that the circular image carved into the stone slab may represent Atlantis and that the stele is commemorating the lost city.

