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Atlantis and Syracuse

Did Plato's Experiences on Sicily
Inspire the Legend?

A Study on Plato's Later Political Writings

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I.

The mystery of Atlantis has always inspired thought and imagination, and the attempts to divine Plato's meaning and determine what lies behind his words have been practically innumerable. Much thinking and dreaming of Atlantis has been done even in our own country, and Olof Rudbeck was clearly delving deep into the popular Swedish imagination when he placed Plato's legendary island at the center of his storsvensk ["Great Swedish"] speculation. There has been much thinking and dreaming, perhaps more of the latter, as much of what has appeared to be thought and science was, without a doubt, poetry in a broader sense — or scientific lyricism, if you will — and our poets have attempted to capture the legend of Atlantis time and time again, all the way through to the present day. If we look at the science, Atlantis has been treated not by philology or humanistic research at all, but rather by geology and geography; in other words, using a natural science approach. The Swedish explorer's spirit has come to the fore on this point as well, although the discoveries took place in the study and at the desk; nor is this type of research without its current-day representatives.

The following pages involve a much more modest task; to investigate the sources, primarily the introduction to *Timaeus* and the *Critias*, from a more philological perspective and to relate what can be gleaned therein to certain [p. 2] results from previous research. I am aware that many would like to deny that such a prosaic analysis is justified, as it focuses on a poem of such high

value as Plato's Critias — allow me to emphasize here that I consider this to be a poem by a philosopher and not solely a tale recounted from Egypt. But I daresay that such an examination is indeed justified if it can help cast light on its subject or perhaps merely on one dark side thereof; if it can clarify any of Plato's thoughts and moods during the period of his life to which these writings belong; or perhaps show us his way of working on one particular point. I think that some of this can be accomplished through an examination of the aforementioned type, and therefore I dare to present the following attempt, although it belongs to a branch of research which has not often been attempted in this country, and although so much remains uncertain and obscure.

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It may be appropriate, as a background for the following account and to avoid a number of repetitions, to recount in brief the content of Plato's Atlantis legend such as it is contained in the introduction to Timaeus and in Critias. I would first like to remind the reader that both dialogues seem to have been placed in dramatic relation to the Republic, although they were written long thereafter; they are thought to be part of the tetralogy which was begun by the Republic and whose fourth piece would have been the never-written Hermocrates (cf. Tim. 20 A), the planned content of which it therefore seems pointless to discuss¹. And Critias never moved past the beginning draft stage; it was as much a fragment in antiquity as it is today². The dialogues in both of these

¹ Cf. CHRIST-SCHMID, *Geschichte der griechischen Litteratur* I⁶, p. 701 with lit. (and chap. V below). The notion that Plato was not thinking about the Republic at the beginning of Timaeus, I find highly unlikely (cf. e.g. EBERZ in *Philologus*, N.F. 23 (69) [1910], p. 47).

² Plutarch. Solon 32; Proclus Diadochus, in *Plat. Tim. Comm.* 61 E (199. 25 ff. DIEHL), knows of course the situation and interprets in his own special way. — As to Critias' state of incompleteness, there is an interesting note in the scholia of Ptolemy's *Harmonica* in *Cod. Coislin.* CLXXII, fol. 31 (cf. BOLL, *Studien über Claudius*

Biographical Notes on Gunnar Rudberg

Gunnar Rudberg was a Swedish Classical Philologist. He was born October 17th, 1880, in Björsäter, and died August 6th, 1954, in Uppsala.

1908 Dr. phil., Associate Professor of Greek Language and Literature in Uppsala.

1919-1933 Professor of Classical Philology in Oslo; colleague of Samson Eitrem.

1933-1945 Professor of Greek Language and Literature in Uppsala.

1939 Corresponding Member for Hellenism of the Academy of Sciences, Berlin.

1940 Member of the Royal Swedish Academy of Sciences.

Gunnar Rudberg – son of a botanist and theologian with a wholehearted commitment to the Linnean tradition – he devoted his research both to Greek literature as well as to the New Testament. According to Jonas Palm, one of his successors in the professorship of Greek Language and Literature in Uppsala, Gunnar Rudberg wanted “to transfer to the educated public the message from Athens and Galilee in the form of a Christian humanism”.

Rudberg contributed to the scientific journal for Classical Philology *Eranos – Acta philologica Suecana*. With Samson Eitrem he edited the scientific journal *Symbolæ osloenses*. Since Rudberg published mostly in Swedish, major parts of his work remained unknown to the international scientific world.

Rudberg was also known for his patriotism, which he lived in the spirit of his ties to Greek and Christian culture. During World War II Gunnar Rudberg supported Norwegian refugees, particularly those from the University of Oslo, where he formerly taught. Gunnar Rudberg was the brother of Bishop Yngve Rudberg and played a prominent role in Swedish church life.

Selected Works:

Textstudien zur Tiergeschichte des Aristoteles, dissertation (1908)

Zum sogenannten zehnten Buche der aristotelischen Tiergeschichte (1911)

Neutestamentlicher Text und nomina sacra (1915)

Poseidonios från Apameia (1916)

Atlantis och Syrakusai (1917)

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Kristus och Platon (1920)

Platon, hans person och verk (1922)

Neuplatonismus und Politik (1922)

Ciceros Somnium Scipionis (1923)

Poseidonios, en Hellenismens Lærer og Profet (1924)

Kring Platons Phaidros (1924)

Plotinos, mystikern och reformatoren (1927)

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Zum antiken Bild der Germanen: Studien zur ältesten Germanenliteratur (1933)
Ur Hellas' liv (1934)
Zur Diogenes-Tradition (1935)
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Appendix B: Bibliography

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