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## The Real Atlantis and Its Decline

### *In Crete*

Any myth contains a grain of truth. This is also the case of Atlantis, the country swallowed by the sea. The myth of the Atlantis, first mentioned by Plato 2400 years ago, talks about a real ancient civilization destroyed by the sea. The Atlantic Ocean got its name from Atlantis, as many people placed its location in the middle of this ocean. But historical data say this civilization could have been located in the Crete Island or in a nearby island, belonging to the pre-Greek Minoan civilization. 4 millennia ago, Minoans developed a complex civilization in the islands of the Eastern Mediterranean, while the rest of Europe was still in the Neolithic ("New Stone Age"), building palaces, paved streets and sewers when Greek tribes lived in shelters. These black-haired brown-eyed people were not Indo-European, but rather related to the Basque or Caucasus ethnic groups, and the center of their civilization was the island of Crete, in the southern extremity of the Aegean Sea. Minoans are believed to have come 5,000 years ago from Asia Minor, and had a developed bronze technology. They replaced quickly a Neolithic civilization of Crete. The Cretan and Minoan civilization could have developed internally or have been stimulated by trade and cultural link with Asia Minor (now Turkey). By 1,950 BC, Crete harbored splendid palaces and large prosperous cities thanks to the production on large scale of olive oil, wine, pottery products and processed metals and the intense trade in the Mediterranean basin, and Egyptian hieroglyphs show the Cretan traders were called "Keftiu". In Egypt, the Minoans traded their goods for papyrus, hard stone pots, black slaves, medicinal plants, and jewels. The Greek legend tells the city of Athens used to send boys and maidens as tribute to the Cretan king Minos every year. They were given to the Minotaur, the half man, half bull beast living inside the famous Labyrinth. In the end, the Athenian hero Theseus killed the beast and escaped from the labyrinth. The name of this civilization comes from Minos, the king. In reality, bulls, not humans were sacrificed and the only ones exposed to dangers were acrobats trained to execute jumps over the bulls, while catching their horns, a tauromachy popular with this civilization. The vividly colored frescoes from the walls of the palaces shows that the Minoans were optimistic, relaxed and life pleasures lovers. They were peaceful and felt themselves protected, as their palaces were unfortified and the soldiers did not wear armors for centuries. Still, the powerful Cretan fleet dominated the Aegean Sea for centuries. A large part of the men were incorporated in the royal army. Minos was known to dominate the Cyclades Islands, and he also ruled cities on the coast of Asia Minor. Cretans were skilled in both sea and terrestrial war. The soldiers wore bronze helmets with red tufts on the top. The Minoan palaces were made of a line of complicatedly distributed rooms. The largest was that of Knossos, but the palaces of Phaistos, Gurnia, Mallia, and Hagia Triada were impressive too, amongst about 90 such edifices. When talking about the labyrinth, the most common concept is that of the palace from Knossos, built by the legendary Daedalus, who escaped from captivity, together with his son, Icarus, endowing themselves with wax wings. The building had 1,500 rooms, connected through twisted corridors, contorted stairs, fake outdoors and reception halls, where the visitor could get easily lost. Each apartment had a bathroom. Minos's palace emerged from a nucleus (the yard and royal rooms) connected to other outhouses that spread over a few hectares, and rose on 4-5 levels, like a hive. The palace of Knossos had a central court (where Minoic festivities occurred, including bull fights), but also tens of smaller courts. The roofs were flat, like in modern blocks, but had inner drains through which the rainfall was amassed in cistern-basins, as Crete has a dry climate, and it rains only during the autumn and winter. The palaces were surrounded by terraces adorned with cypresses and olive trees and also had large wheat storehouses. Craftsmen and trademen lived in uni- or two levels houses. The facade of the houses was decorated with dark stripes and symmetrically placed windows. The cities have districts assigned to various professions: traders, potters, smiths, weavers, carpenters and so on. Wheat, olive and grapes were the main crops. Clothes were made mainly of flax. The concern for hygiene was amazing. In the ancient palace there was current water and drainage. In the courts of Knossos also existed gushers, which means that 4,000 years ago those people already knew the principles of the communicating vessels. Moreover, in the palace-labyrinth also existed ... elevators! They were, of course, operated by people, with the help of the winches. The Minoic

people used columns for sustaining the ceiling of the larger halls. But, curiously, the Cretan columns were thicker in the upper part and slimmer in the lower part, giving the impression of an upside down view. The walls of the labyrinth-palace were painted in vivid colors, like blue, depicting dolphins, but also human bodies, ceremonies and weaponry. It's amazing how the paint resisted over the millennia. The labyrinth employs just simple geometrical forms: circles, squares, rectangles and right angles, without steeples, arches or vaults. It seems the main deity of the Minoans was a mother goddess, probably controlling crop production and human fertility. This was a naturist religion. Rites were accomplished by priests and priestesses, when double blade axes (labrys) were used. The snake, the bull and the pigeon were sacred animals in the Minoan civilization. Wall paintings depict ceremonies headed by a priest raising a palm leaf, followed by seminude instrument (horns and rattles) players. The ceremonies were assisted by the public, and usually celebrated the harvest of cereals or olives. Of course, ship building had achieved a great advance in the Minoan civilization. Trade ships had wide keels with large cellars for storing large amounts of goods while war ships were rapid, having pointed keels. Fishing ships were smaller, able to anchor on the beaches. Fishing was a main occupation, and fish was marinated or salted to be preserved for longer time. Sponges were collected by divers tied via a rope to the boat. Around 1750 BC, a strong earthquake wrecked the palaces. But the civilization re-grew from its ashes. Still, after 1650 BC, a decline was obvious. Around 1450 BC the civilization of the Minotaur and the Labyrinth suddenly disappeared, being destroyed, it seems, by a giant tsunami. The Minoan civilization was made of seafarers and their towns were located mostly on the coast, exposed to tsunamis. The ancient tsunami could have been as powerful as the 2004 Asian one that killed 250,000 people and was connected to the huge eruption of the volcano on the Santorini (Thera) island, 70 km (43 mi) north of Crete, up to 10 times more powerful than the Krakatoa's eruption in 1883. Volcanic stones even reached the Egyptian shore of the Sinai Peninsula and its sound was heard over 3,000 miles (4,800 km) away. The eruption destroyed everything on a distance of 150 km (92 mi). The Santorini's huge cone fell into the sea together with the western part of the island, provoking a big wave that flooded many islands in the Aegean Sea and eastern Mediterranean shores. The Atlantis, no matter if it was an island or a city (the continent variant is too fictional), could have collapsed due to earthquakes and tsunamis accompanying the eruption. The stifling volcanic ashes impeded the sunlight reaching the eastern basin of the Mediterranean for days. About 80 cubic km of Santorini either blew up or fell into the sea, and all the nearby life forms were erased. Excavations made at Santorini in 1966-1967 revealed the presence of a rich royal city, buried in the volcanic debris and kept intact as it was when the eruption occurred. Probably the inhabitants of Santorini or Crete did not want to admit that their splendid cities were gone, so the legend of the Atlantis, still flourishing on the bottom of the sea, began. 3,450 years ago, the wave may not have destroyed Knossos, the inland Minoan capital, but the massive ash falls could have ruined the crop, causing famine. At the same date, the Egyptians mentioned a huge invasion of the "People of the Sea", seafaring raiders that could have been chased away from the Crete Island by famine. In Canaan, they mixed with local Hebrews, forming another civilization of seafarers, the Phoenicians. The Etruscans of Italy could have also rooted in the Atlantis collapse. Following the tsunami, the palaces were not re-built for centuries, and the Minoan civilization was gone. Numerous clay slates from that time contain writings in an alphabet similar to the Greek one, suggesting that, by that time, Crete had been occupied by the Greek warriors coming from the Peloponnesian peninsula (southern Greece), the Aegeans (Myceneans). The Aegeans entered Greece from the north, coming from the Danube area, about at the same time with the birth of the Minoan civilization. Minoans were short and did not wear beards, while the Aegeans were tall, blond and bearded, skilled warriors employing war chariots driven by four horses and horse riding, unknown in Crete. About 1800 BC, Minoans and Aegeans already shared peacefully the Island of Melos, which had important deposits of obsidian. The Aegeans built fortified cities in the Peloponnesus. The most important was Mycene, that's why the Aegeans (which were a Greek tribe, unlike the Minoans, which were not even Indo-Europeans) were called Myceneans. By 1600 BC, the Mycenean culture was strongly influenced by Minoans. Mycenean palaces imitated the Minoan ones, with wall paintings, water alimentation and sewers. Aegeans occupied all the islands of the Aegean Sea and, with the decline of Crete, and tried to replace the Minoans in the trade network of the eastern Mediterranean. They did not succeed this, as they did not have the navigational skills of the Minoans, which were replaced in the Mediterranean trade by the Phoenicians. Aegeans had a war-like society, in which everybody had military training. The society was ruled by a military aristocracy. For a time, Mycene was a superpower, negotiating from the same position with the Hittites and Egyptians. The

Mycenean kings were buried wrapped in golden sheets and wore mortuary golden masks. The helmets of the Mycenenan warriors were made of bronze or wild boar tusks. Only the king and the nobles wore armors covering the whole body. Aegeans perfected the sword, with a major blade, which could be used as rapier and saber. Around 1350 BC, the entire Crete was Aegean. But the war from the 13th century BC exhausted the Myceneans. Around 12th century BC, the Dorian (another Greek tribe) invasion contributed to their decline. During this time, many Aegeans migrated to Ionia (on the coast of Asia Minor). By the 11th century BC, art work and writing were lost. Greece entered into a black historical period.