

re-sited in the western part of the Mediterranean. And so Sardinia, which became Phoenician very early on, can take on the functions traditionally attributed to the British Isles as a site of trade in metals, and the arena for Phoenician commercial and naval activity is thus moved to a more compact setting. Once Sardinia is put back beyond the Pillars of Hercules it becomes easy to identify it with Atlantis, which is found there in Critias' discourse.

The author is quite well aware that he is walking on extremely dangerous, slippery ground here, and his experience of writing lets him adopt a mischievous but effective strategy. Through a skilful technique which makes use of quotations from ancient and modern authors presented as the report of a session where he is the moderator, he manipulates evidence and viewpoints, thus managing to justify the identification.

If Critias' Atlantis and a Sardinia situated beyond the Pillars seem fated to be one and the same, there will always remain a final doubt, that Critias' account might have embroidered with picturesque details the constantly repeated myth of a fabulous island sinking to the bottom of the ocean in the context of a mythical and far-off geography. But at the same time the skill with which the comparison has been developed between Critias and the archaeological data, and its possible repercussions for a reconstruction of the facts, are of extreme interest to me as a mere reader.

Even though I am still a little suspicious of any historical reconstruction based on deductions and hypotheses, I am forced to admit that in fact any enrichment of knowledge can only arise from an ability to form hypotheses and draw conclusions from them. In short, an ability to go beyond the Pillars of Hercules as Frau has done.

Sergio F. Donadoni

Paradise Lost and the Pillars of Hercules

Andrea Carandini, archaeologist, University of Rome

Sergio Frau's investigation interested me immensely because it has in a way provided a real cartography for what we already knew: in this case, that the Greeks had a very ancient mythical past, the era of Cronus and Uranus, the period of the early times of Zeus, the Greeks' supreme deity, who established order in the world. That paradise was indeed situated in the far distant past but it also existed in the present for the Greeks, that is, it was in the west, in the western isles where that lost paradise survived and lived. It was there as well that the world of the dead was to be found. In much later eras that lost paradise was placed in the area of the Pillars of Hercules or beyond, and they were imagined as being at Gibraltar. Sergio Frau's great virtue is that he has opened, and brought coherently into the present, a completely different horizon. That lost world, which the Greeks conceived of with enormous nostalgia in a way, was not situated beyond the Mediterranean but was nothing but the western Mediterranean itself. The frontier was first the Adriatic, then at a certain point it was pushed back to the Strait of Sicily. This seems to me an important fundamental achievement by Sergio Frau, who also has the virtue of not being a uni-

versity teacher and so of having shown that *passion and research can grab hold of each of us at any time* [Editor's emphasis].

Andrea Carandini

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On either side of the Strait of Sicily

Jean Bingen, historian and Hellenist, Académie Royale de Belgique

The book by the culture journalist Frau is a comprehensive study of a problem that at first sight seems narrow: 'where were the Pillars of Hercules?', a Hercules who was in fact a Herakles-Melkart, against a background of the representation of the western frontier of the world that could be travelled, especially in the Greek world's imaginary. And those Pillars have been traditionally and unreservedly placed on either side of the Strait of Gibraltar.

The book is disturbing because of the light and rather subversive tone with which it accumulates a mass of research parameters, sometimes inducing dizziness. These innumerable components, which include illustrations, give the book its interest for an informed audience, who will discover, as they read the captivating story, many aspects of the Greek or pre-Hellenic world, the Phoenician world and the peripheral cultures, or even the geological substrate. The accumulation of detail and the impromptu dialogue with the reader somewhat upset the structured procedure adopted by orthodox researchers, but they provoke reflection.

The author's argument is based on an indisputable fact: the division of the pre-Roman Mediterranean into an eastern zone, in which Greek archaic, then classical cities and colonies predominated almost exclusively, and a western zone, which was an area of Phoenician expansion. The frontier between them is perhaps more complex, since it zigzags past Sicily and does not appear again until somewhere on the Libyan coast. This division has given the author the impression that the Pillars of Hercules were first of all situated on either side of the Strait of Sicily, 'the Greeks' horizon from Homer to Herodotus', and that it was only later, in the Hellenistic period, that all kinds of factors made people shift the Pillars to the strait of Gibraltar. The author reminds us that in the ice ages the water level in the strait was considerably lower and left only a relatively narrow passage between Sicily (which included Malta) and Tunisia, whose underwater plateau was largely exposed. The hypothesis of an initial location for the Pillars at the Strait of Sicily is seductive, and clarifies the meaning of several ancient sources. But I do not think the land's retreat could still have an influence at the time when the socio-economic landscape of the Mediterranean began to change at the start of the second millennium BC. Similarly the author's jokey tone refers somewhat unsubtly to mighty unpleasant Greeks and in particular their literary sources.

The hypothesis, which can no longer be dismissed, has as its corollary the identification of Sardinia as being the Greeks' Atlantis (beyond the Pillars) and, based on