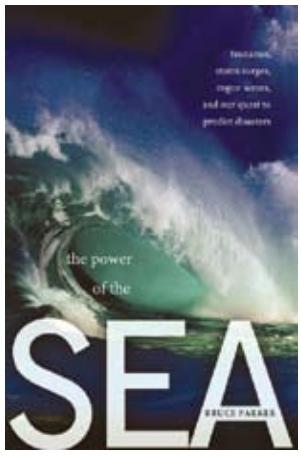
The Sea Around Moses, Napoleon, and Atlantis

by Rick Sanders



The Power of the Sea
Bruce Parker
New York: Palgrave Macmillan, 2010
Hardcover, 292 pp., $28.00

Have you ever wondered how Moses got the children of Israel across the Red Sea, without magic—and what this had to do with the (Passover) full Moon? Can you resist a story about Napoleon almost meeting the same fate as the Pharaoh at the hands of the Red Sea, 3,000 years later? Or how about cracking the mystery of the date of the destruction of Atlantis, looking at the 1755 Lisbon earthquake and tsunami?

That is why I recommend this book, even though the author, the former chief scientist of the National Ocean Service at NOAA, tries to sneak in some unconvincing global warming propaganda.

First, the story of Moses. There are some clues relating to Moses' experience and his genius as a leader. After killing the Egyptian overseer, Moses had fled to the land of Midian, in the southern part of the Sinai peninsula, near the Red Sea, which has substantial tides, perhaps 5 to 6 feet, and sometimes more, depending on the wind.

Furthermore, it seems that the tide in the Red Sea comes in very fast, because of the shape of the sea floor. Now, you will remember that the Jewish Passover and Christian Easter are both dated by the first full Moon after Spring equinox (with different particulars). Pharaoh, unlike Moses, not having lived near the Red Sea, but near the tideless Mediterranean, might not have suspected what was going to hit him. Moses, being a great leader, must have had it all planned.

When the Moon is new or full, the "Spring tides" are higher, lower, and longer than usual, the which gave the children of Israel the time to get across to the other side. Furthermore, something Moses could not have counted on, but which would have helped, was that "the LORD caused the sea to go back by a strong east wind all that night, and made the sea dry land, and the waters were divided" (*Exodus* 14, 21). This would have kept the ground bare longer, for the Israelites to pass over.

Then the tide rushed in, faster and higher than usual, washing over the heavy Egyptian chariots enmired in the sand, and as the song says, "Pharaoh's army got drownded."

3,000 Years Later

This same Red Sea tide nearly drowned Napoleon. Unlike the Pharaoh, Napoleon did know about tides: Off the French Atlantic coasts there are tides which have drowned many an unwary fisherman, rising 45 feet in 6 1/4 hours. The locals living along the coast describe the incoming tide as like galloping horses.

Parker tells the story about how, nonetheless, Napoleon nearly got caught by the Red Sea. During his invasion of Egypt, Napoleon wanted to visit a place called the Wells of Moses, which required leaving Suez and crossing a mile-long expanse of sea bottom that was exposed at low tide.

"Late in the afternoon he and his men left and began their return trip to Suez. The sun had set by the time Napoleon and his soldiers reached the seashore. The tide seemed to be out far enough for them to begin crossing the exposed sea bottom but the sea bottom did not stay exposed for long. Suddenly the tide began rushing in at them, seemingly from all directions surrounded by rapidly rising water, and with darkness adding to their confusion, they were thrown into disorder and panic. As the tide rose, the water quickly became deeper and threatened to engulf them. Their only chance was to find a shoal where the water might still be shallow enough to walk on.

"Napoleon called his men and ordered them to form concentric circles around him each horseman facing outward as part of several straight lines pointing in different directions like the spokes of a wheel. He then ordered each line of horsemen to advance outward. When the lead horse of a line reached deeper water

One of many contemporary depictions of the earthquake and tsunami that leveled the city of Lisbon on Nov. 1, 1755.

and had to begin desperately swimming, that column drew back and followed one of the columns still walking on the sea bottom. Eventually each of the columns lost their footing until only one remained, which everyone followed to an ultimate escape from the Red Sea."

Lucky for Napoleon, it was a only a neap tide (the twice monthly lowest level of high tide).

Parker tells a number of other fascinating, and little-told stories, including the Allied landing preparations for avoiding the obstacles that the Nazis had put underwater off the Normandy coast during World War II, and the difficult weather and tide predictions required for the landing in Africa.

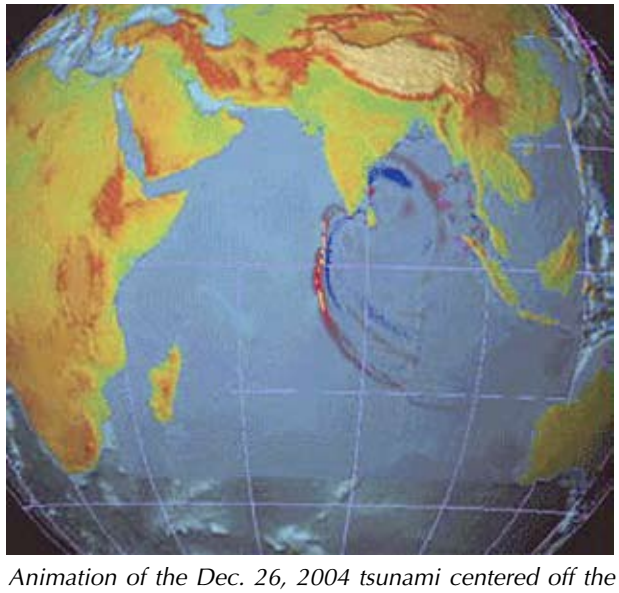
He also tells the lesser-known story of the treacherous storm surges, less notorious than tsunamis but much more frequent, which have killed many more people—including in the middle of what appears to be local good weather! For example, in Bengal on Oct. 4, 1864, the day was beautiful, sunny, and dry after nearly five months of torrential downpours. But within an hour or so, a cyclone-created storm surge killed at least 80,000 people and 100,000 cattle.

Ruins of Lisbon's Convento do Carmo, which was gutted by the 1755 earthquake. More than 85 percent of Lisbon's buildings were destroyed by the earthquake and fires.

The Killer Tsunamis

Parker does give the tsunami its due, with a fascinating and horrifying minute-by-minute description of the 2004 tsunami, which killed 300,000 people within the first two hours. At one place, the tsunami came in as two waves, the second one 115 feet high—as high as a 10-story building. We will come back to this one.

But first, let's look at the earthquake and tsunami that destroyed Atlantis, and how this was discovered by indirection. Parker gives a detailed description of the Nov. 1, 1755 earthquake on All Saints Day, when Lisbon, Portugal was full of churchgoers. The ground began to tremble around 9:30 a.m. People who escaped the collapsing buildings ran in panic to the riverbank, where there were no high buildings. Ninety minutes after the first earthquake shock, the water of the Tagus river began rising, ships rocking wildly, although there was no wind. In the distance, a large body of water, rising as it were like a mountain, came foaming and roaring towards the shore.



Animation of the Dec. 26, 2004 tsunami centered off the coast of Sumatra, Indonesia, that killed more than 230,000 in several countries. http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/File:2004_Indonesia_Tsunami_Complete.gif

The first wave was 40 feet high and swept away thousands; the massive quay was flipped over like a toy. When the wave subsided, many people were inexorably dragged into the river. The second wave came 10 minutes later, charging even farther up the shore, followed by a third one.

Tsunamis wiped out entire cities to the south, along the coast of southern Portugal, Spain, and Morocco, and on Madeira, an island 600 miles southwest of Lisbon.

On the island of Antigua, in the Caribbean, the water rose 12 feet several times, and then subsided.

Now here's the punch line: Modern marine geologists have examined the sediment in the coastal area around Lisbon, and have found that eight large tsunamis hit there in the last 12,000 years, roughly one huge tsunami every 1,500 years. The 1755 tsunami, one of the largest in human history, pales in comparison with a tsunami of 12,050 years ago whose sediment layer, the deepest of the eight, was five times larger than the 1755 layer. And that date, 12,050 years ago, is the date Plato gives for the destruction of Atlantis, west of the Strait of Gibraltar!

Tsunami Ironies

The 2004 tsunami brought out certain ironies, one of them being that certain modern people who fancy themselves educated, perished because they were too illiterate to "read" the warning signs, while some so-called primitive people, who had an oral tradition about tsunamis, headed for the hills and survived.

However, if Western tourists on the beach had not been cut off from their own traditions, and had studied the *History of the Peloponnesian War*—where Thucydides attributes the 425 B.C. tsunami that washed away an Athenian fort, to an earthquake, saying that the shock drives the sea back, and then it recoils with redoubled force causing an inundation—they might have saved themselves.

Some tourists were just lucky: At one tourist spot, eight elephants, tourists onboard and

all, took off for the jungle-covered hills behind the resort as soon as the tremors began. At one rural location in Thailand, water buffalo all suddenly lifted their heads, pricked up their ears, looked out to sea, and stampeded up the hill with the confused villagers chasing after them, thus saving their lives.

The Power of the Noösphere

However, we beg to differ with Parker on the title of the book: *The Power of the Sea*. Agreed, he has given abundant evidence of the power of the ocean. Yet, as we more and more master the noösphere and through it, the biosphere, the number of deaths from "natural disasters" ought to decrease dramatically. Besides, some of these disasters are not so "natural": People should not be living in tin shacks on the coast, for example.

What can't we do thanks to satellite observation and GPS (thanks to JFK's space program), combined with sea walls, earthquake-proofed buildings, warning systems, and the like? We landed on the Moon, 60 short years after the Wright brothers' first flight—despite two world wars, the Depression, and some lousy Presidents. That is "the power of the noösphere."

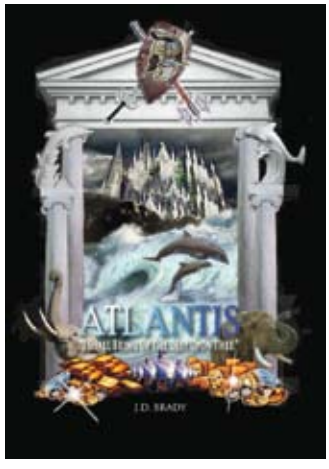
If we do things right in greening Africa, we might tame and eventually wipe out the hurricanes (which, as NASA has shown recently, are born in East Africa, and from there make their way to terrorize the southeast of the United States). We will domesticate the Earth, and turn it into a garden.

But that's only the beginning. The real moral of the story should be, that we must not be victims of accidents, but rather develop our creative powers, taking responsibility for what does and does not happen in our Solar System and beyond. Shall we just wait for such cataclysms as the Sun's going supernova, which it likely will when most of its hydrogen has burned up? Or shall we colonize a large number of new "Solar Systems" within our galaxy, and eventually beyond to other galaxies, to ensure mankind's eternal existence.

A Flawed Account of Atlantis

by Charles E. Hughes

Atlantis: 'I Shall Bring Up the Deep Upon Thee'
J.D. Brady
Bloomington, Ind.: Ex Libris, 2010
Paperback, 268 pp., $19.99



The burden of evidence indicates that the civilization of Atlantis, so-called, actually existed somewhere in the Atlantic Ocean, north of the equator, at the end of the last ice age, or circa 10,000 B.C. This was a culture of sea people, who had sailing ships and the capabilities to cross oceans.

Author J.D. Brady, however, would have us believe that Atlantis was in the eastern Mediterranean Sea, near the entrance to the Black Sea, in the more recent period of the historical Bronze Age. I strongly doubt this.

The ancient philosopher Plato (427-347 B.C.) left us the most extensive account of Atlantis in his two dialogues *Timaeus* and *Critias*. Unfortunately, the Black Sea did not even exist in the time period when Atlantis actually existed—10,000 B.C.

In Brady's account, the Atlantis civilization was connected to the cities of Troy and the Etruscans. It seems that Brady is trying to propitiate mainstream opinion on these matters of archaeology. The book has abundant material on Troy and the Etruscans, save that Brady denies Professor Barry Fell's decipherment of Etruscan, and instead claims that the language is still a mystery. Epigrapher Fell stated that the Etruscan language had obvious Hittite word roots, and found 500 word roots with close similarity with respect to sound and meaning in the Hittite language, which is well known by philologists. (See "Barry Fell's Revolution in Deciphering Old World Scripts," *21st Century,* Summer 2001).

If any investigator is serious about finding a lost city, he should look in the Atlantic Ocean off the Spanish coast, near the city of Cadiz, an area of undersea ruins reported by many divers. Prof. Maxine Ascher's book *The Atlantis Expedition* (1975), describes this, including an account of how the Spanish government cancelled her permits, after she had located ruins underwater. Ascher was then a teacher at Pepperdine College in California.

In his *Atlantis,* Brady makes the evidence fit the established paradigm, which is an act of disrespect to Plato and the sea people of the Atlantis island, our ancestors.