

Project X: The Elevation of Atlantis

The Greeks' belief in the constellations produced stories of ancient deities, forgotten cities, and heroic figures that were the foundation of most Greek mythology, history, and culture. One such famous story, as recounted by the ancient philosopher Plato, reveals the city of Atlantis. The account described by Critias in his dialogue with Timaeus, tells the story of an ancient civilization that was the first of its kind; an organized and technologically advanced society. Plato refers to this city as a "seed", because it was considered the birth of civilization.

However, like all mythical stories, Atlantis met its end due to a natural disaster. Part of the reason Atlantis failed as a nation was because it could not prevent divine providence. It was a strong naval power, but no amount of ships or barricades could prevent the city from being flooded as a result of an earthquake. The Atlantians war with the Athenians did not aid them either, because they were susceptible to attacks by way of the Atlantic sea. So what if we recreated this ancient civilization in a virtual world with the purpose of ensuring peace and avoiding natural disasters?

Minecraft serves as an alternate universe ripe with possibilities to recreate any structure or civilization, thus the notion of rebuilding Atlantis and elevating it into the sky interested us. This project aims to recreate a utopian society based on Greek ideologies and mythology, focusing on the story of Atlantis. However, we hope to resolve the pre-existing problems of the previous society. "A Utopia whose main aim is to highlight the defects of an existing society (the essentially critical utopia) demands different treatment from one which is offered as a supposedly practical manifesto for establishing a new, alternative society (the constructive utopia)." (Goodwin pp. 124). By adopting the concept of the Utopia, we are abandoning the idea of gender roles in order to focus on

rebuilding a more powerful, sustainable, and united society on the foundation of virtue and peace between all citizens and players.

The idea of androgyny in our Utopian society is inspired by the science fiction work *The Left Hand of Darkness*, in which utopian and dystopian ethics are explored. In the novel by Ursula Leguin, there exists a sexless society that inspires our vision of the population that would ideally inhabit our rendering of Atlantis. The following statement from the book supports the idea of a genderless society reducing conflict and discrimination. "A man wants his virility regarded. A woman wants her femininity appreciated, however indirect and subtle the indications of regard and appreciation. [Here] One is respected and judged only as a human being. It is an appalling experience." (Leguin, 2003). Our aim is to create a city that is motionless and impervious to the influence of the human condition; a civilization that draws upon the ideas of utopia and androgyny in order to unite. It is a society that is interchangeable, much like the Karhides from *The Left Hand of Darkness*. This is why the theory of platonic love is pertinent to this project. "In being the desire for the perpetual possession of the good, love strives for union with a metaphysical principle that does not exist (in nature or anywhere else) and shows itself only to philosophic intuition. In Platonism true love and true rationality coincide." (Singer, 1984, vol. 1, pp. 83-4). The idea of platonic love lacks any sexual distinction and is founded on rationality and virtue between brethren. For our project to fully embody this, we strive to adopt the practice ourselves by viewing each other as equals, thus strengthening the concept of androgyny in a society. Our group structure and model of Atlantis demonstrates this idea by employing a foundation that appreciates both collaboration and individuality.

Equally, as a group we are able to form our own small community that allows us to mimic the interactions and conflicts one may encounter in real life. This can be further

expanded upon when taking into account the rudimentary needs of the character; struggling to gather resources and create a stable ecological-economy from which the group is able to derive enough food and materials. Another feature worth noting about Minecraft is that it allows us to explore and interact with the environment. Unlike drawing a blueprint or constructing a tangible model, we are each able to perceive the environment as we come into contact with it, which creates a personal, individual experience.

Before building, we referenced the original structure of Atlantis. In Critias' description of Atlantis, he describes the dimensions as "three plethra in [width], one hundred feet in depth, and fifty shades in length." (Heinmann, 1929, pp. 287). He also mentions the importance of circular shapes. "Through the circles of land, which divided those of sea, over against the bridges they opened out a channel leading from circle trireme [...] or the lips of the land-circles was raised a sufficient height above the level of the sea." (Heinmann, 1929, pp. 287). From this understanding, the actual structure is meant to resemble an acropolis: a city built upon elevated ground.

The simplicity of the cube in Minecraft allows us to create our structure in a geometric, linear manner. The ancient Greek architects' approach, while mathematically based, was largely focused on elegance and decoration; conversely, our materials restrict the amount of detail we can include, but still permits the construction of a basic yet equally beautiful structure mimicking the Greek acropolis (Meintema, 2012). Similarly, because of the user-friendly design of Minecraft (basic cubic structures that can quickly be transformed into simple algebraic formulas), we are able to reduce the dimensions to fit our needs and likewise, construct it efficiently and symmetrically with ease, our circular structure measuring 351x351. The Minecraft server and the available materials do however, generate certain limitations. For example, a difference in size, a

constraint on the materials that can be used, as well as a lack of the actual population that would inhabit Atlantis; all of which affect the accuracy of our Minecraft representation.

Nevertheless, Minecraft helps our group achieve a more realistic representation of Atlantis, because it functions as an emergent narrative in which we are able to speculate on how the population would have approached the planning, building and inhabitation of Atlantis (Jenkins, 2004). We also have the opportunity to create our own narrative and map it onto our space and structure. As we develop our structure, so does the expansion of our narrative. This creates numerous possibilities for interactions with other users, which also raises the issue of conflict between members and other users on the server. This shows how human emotion ties into the game and how each individual's activity has consequences on the team and environment. Correspondingly, the fact that we're attempting to incorporate history and philosophy into our design forces us to create a balance among group and game rules, game play, and Greek culture (Salen & Zimmerman, 2004).

To conclude, Minecraft enlightens our understanding and exploration of a subject that fascinates scholars and scientists to this day. While it is a fictional city, we have taken the opportunity to evaluate its strengths and weaknesses and correspondingly alter the structure to construct an improved yet realistic version. Minecraft as a platform allows us to better understand early Greek ideologies, and theories relating to utopian societies. Similarly, it allows us to relate to our project as an academic work and piece of art, rather than just a product of consumerism. Our model will reveal both the benefits and flaws of a utopian civilization, and the criteria for survival in a virtual world in order to achieve peace and longevity.

Constitutions

- 1) Communicate clearly and promptly with your group members
- 2) Do not steal or use someone else's materials without consultation
- 3) Contribute regularly to your designated part (be it building or writing)
- 4) Help one another when time and resources provide
- 5) Listen to one another's ideas and discuss pros and cons
- 6) Respect other members' roles in the group

Works Cited

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## Appendices

Figure 1

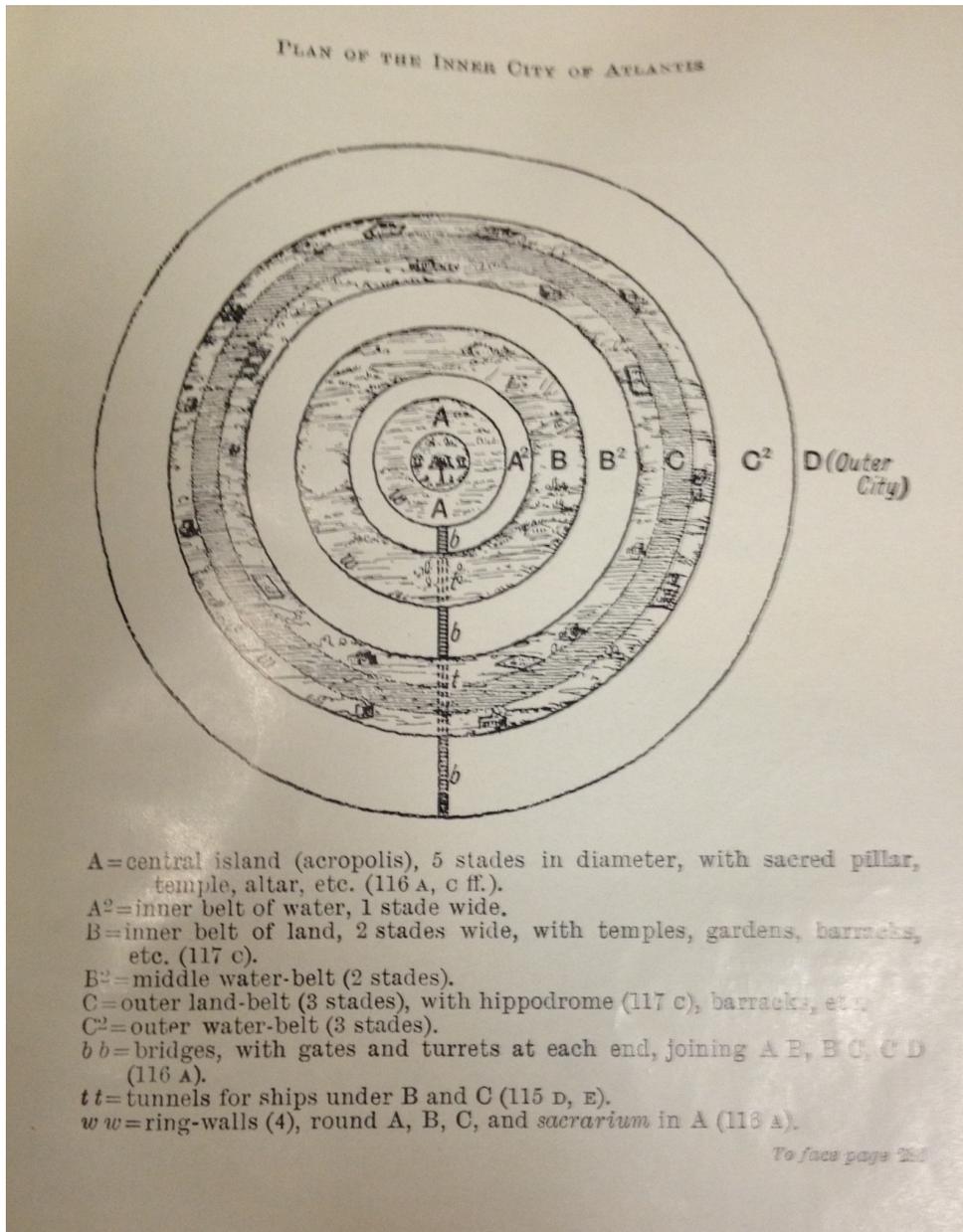


Figure 2

