

# Teobert Maler and the Myth of Atlantis

## Teobert Maler y el mito de Atlantis

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**Abstract:** Since the 1920s the Maya explorer Teobert Maler has been presented by certain writers as a promoter of the Atlantis myth. In this essay I provide an analysis of such material chronologically and evaluate its solidity or lack of it.

**Keywords:** Teobert Maler; Maya archaeology; myth of Atlantis; 19<sup>th</sup> century.

**Resumen:** Desde el siglo pasado el explorador de la cultura maya Teoberto Maler ha sido presentado por ciertos grupos como un promotor del mito de Atlantis. En este ensayo analizo esas propuestas de manera cronológica, evaluado la solidez –o debilidad– de tal material.

**Palabras clave:** Teobert Maler; arqueología maya; mito de Atlantis; siglo XIX.

The myth of the long lost island kingdom of Atlantis as the origin of all cultures has left its mark on Mexican Studies. Even some of the most representative early Mayanists played with this idea in the late 1800's. They used it to try to explain Maya culture – with its pyramids, palaces, and mysterious script – that at that time was emerging from the jungles of Middle America and the Yucatán peninsula, thanks to the efforts of adventurous explorers.

Atlantis as the mythical origin of Maya civilization was enough of an explanation for some. Given that the Indigenous peoples of this region were widely regarded as underdeveloped, their ancestors were unthinkable as creators of those magnificent monuments. Moreover, the imaginary of Atlantis as a mother culture attracted only some people; most preferred to think of Egypt, the Phoenicians or even the Lost Tribes of Israel. However, serious evidence to support this type of diffusionist theories could not be provided, and so they fell into oblivion over the years. Nevertheless, the first concept was resuscitated in 1939 when Robert Stacy-Judd published his book *Atlantis – Mother of Empires*.

In it, the author presented a photograph allegedly taken by the well-known and reputable Maya researcher Teobert Maler depicting the destruction of Atlantis. To this day, this photograph continues to circulate on popular websites, supposedly as

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Figure 1. Teobert Maler (1842-1917) (IAI, Nachlass Maler, N-0040 s 95).

evidence of a connection between the ancient Mayan culture and Atlantis. Maler in this context serves as a presumed source.

To say it straight away: There is no evidence in Maler's photographic legacy, nor in his published writings or handwritten texts and notes, which are housed in the Ibero-Amerikanisches Institut in Berlin, that this eminent documentarist of ancient Maya culture was a follower of the Lost Atlantis saga, let alone that he discovered evidence for the sinking of that continent. Howbeit, Teobert Maler mentions Atlantis twice: First in his note book "Auszüge aus gelesenen Büchern und sonstigen Aufzeichnungen" ('Abstracts from read books and other records').<sup>1</sup> This was written in "Paris, Monat Junius 1878."<sup>2</sup> In his notes on the report of friar Diego de Landa's *Relación de las cosas de Yucatán* ('An Account of the Things of Yucatan') Maler writes:

600 years before Platon [...] Homer speaks in the *Odyssey* about Atlantes et leur île. The Egyptians (following Platon) speak about an invasion of the Atlanten who came from Atlantis into Africa and Europe. [They] even took Athens. Atlanti, Atlantic ... Atlantis?<sup>3</sup>

The historian Claudine Leysinger interprets this last sentence as Maler referring to the well known Atlantes figures of Tula in the Mexican state of Hidalgo, and sees in general the above citation as a manifestation of Maler's doubts about Atlantis (Leysinger 2008, 80). However, I would not go that far. In my opinion these are just reflections upon a reading.

Actually, Atlantis itself does not appear at all in de Landa's text. What Maler wrote down comes from the text opening the book, authored by the editor, Charles Étienne Brasseur de Bourbourg (1814-1874), a French priest and early Mayanist (Brasseur de Bourbourg 1864, x-CXI). He was one of the proponents of a connection between the Maya and Atlantis. In many of his publications he saw parallels in Old and New World cultures and concluded that they all had a common source in Atlantis (Brunhouse 1978, 157ff.).

1 Maler used two out of his around 30 note books to compile annotations from books he was interested in. Occasionally he commented some terms found in them or complete passages.

2 Ibero-Amerikanisches Institut, Stiftung Preußischer Kulturbesitz (in the following: IAI), Nachlass Maler, N-0040 w 2.

3 "600 J. vor Platon [...] spricht Homerus in der Odyssee von den Atlantes et leur île. Aegypter sprechen (nach Platon) von einer Invasion der Atlanten von der Atlantis herkommend in Afrika u. Europa. Sogar Athen eingenommen. Atlanti, Atlantic ... Atlantis?"

The second occasion in which Maler mentions Atlantis is in his article “Nouvelles explorations des ruines de Palenque (Mexique)” (Maler 1879, 302), printed 1879 in Paris, and it certainly has an ironic tone. He ponders whether the head on the foliated cross in the tablet he discovered in Palenque evoked a

[...] souvenir of a bison from North America, or should we here find the last traces of an almost erased Christianity, which, in long past times, could have made its way up to the far-away races of Atlantis? Here are questions that are very difficult to resolve.<sup>4</sup>

I, again, do not see anything in that sentence which points to Maler as a believer of the Atlantis saga.

Why, then, is that Maler in pseudo-scientific texts is still associated with this mythical island kingdom and its destruction? I would like to explore this question by comparing different sources (known and previously ignored) and embedding them in the current state of the Maler research.

The story that I unravel here takes place mostly in the Mexican state of Yucatán and its capital Mérida, and it is full of contradictions, inconsistencies and impossibilities. Its dawn is grounded at a time when the archaeological exploration of Mesoamerica was mostly carried out by enthusiastic adventurers without a formal scientific training. The main actors involved in this special sideline of the extensive ‘Atlantis research’ are four men, each of them with a strong personality: Teobert Maler (1842-1917; Figure 1), his adversary, the North American consul to Yucatán Edward H. Thompson (1857-1935; Figure 2), the American industrialist, traveler and author Theodore A. Willard (1862-1943; Figure 3), and the British architect Robert Stacy-Judd (1884-1975; Figure 4), who became well known in the USA thanks to his Maya Revival architectural style. The latter two were avid aficionados of ancient Maya culture. Willard, who had made his money from the production of car batteries, traveled the land of the Maya for decades; through his interest he came across Edward Thompson. A deep friendship soon developed between the men which led to Willard generously sponsoring Thompson’s excavations for many years. From 1906 on he witnessed when



Figure 2. Edward Herbert Thompson (1857-1935) (Thompson 1932, n.p.).

4 “Un souvenir vague du bison de l’Amérique du Nord, où devons-nous y trouver les dernières traces d’un christianisme presque effacé, qui, dans des temps reculés, aurait trouvé son chemin jusqu’aux races lointaines de l’Atlantis. Voilà des questions bien difficiles à résoudre.”

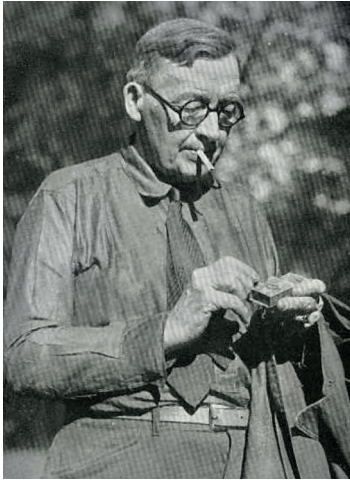


Figure 3. Theodore A. Willard (1862-1943) (Willard 1941, n.p.).

Thompson examined and dredged the ‘sacred cenote’ of Chichén Itzá and finally secretly brought the most valuable finds out of the country and into the USA. This at least very controversial action was violently rejected by Maler.

Willard also sought the acquaintance of Teobert Maler in Mérida, with whom he remained friendly until his death in 1917 – despite the latter’s enmity against Thompson. Stacy-Judd, who explored the Yucatan many years later, never met Maler but was friends with Willard. Expressions of that relationship can be found in the fact that Willard wrote a foreword for one of Stacy-Judd’s books, while Stacy-Judd designed a Neo-Maya style house for Willard in Beverly Hills, California (Hill 2009). Both published popular books on Maya culture that blend facts and fiction.

We should highlight that with the first appearance of Ignatius Donnelly’s book *Atlantis, the Antediluvian World* in 1882, the myth of the sunken island kingdom experienced a new revival. It wasn’t the first: the report of the Greek philosopher Plato (ca. 427-347 BC) on Atlantis had already been brought up anew during the Renaissance, to be forgotten again in the following centuries. Donnelly’s book appeared at a time when the ancient Mesoamerican cultures, especially the Maya, were just being rediscovered and attracting great interest among the general public. It was presumed that the island empire, imagined to be between Africa and the Americas, was destroyed several thousand years ago by a gigantic volcanic eruption – and that its survivors found refuge lands on both sides of the ocean. If we believe Donnelly, when that catastrophe happened already commercial and cultural exchange had been established:

The western shores of Atlantis were not far distant from the West India Islands; a people possessed of ships could readily pass from island to island until they reached the continent. [...] We can therefore readily believe that commercial intercourse between Atlantis and Yucatan, Honduras and Mexico, created colonies along the shores of the Gulf which gradually spread into the interior (Donnelly 1882, 348).

In particular the eccentric Freemason Augustus Le Plongeon (1825-1908) and his wife, Alice Dixon Le Plongeon (1851-1910), who explored Yucatán between 1873 and 1883, took on the Atlantis saga – albeit with one small difference: they saw the Maya as the cradle of civilization. Alice’s premise was that the “very ancient Maya had, in remote times, gone forth from the west to people Atlantis,” while her husband declared

that “the Maya founded Atlantis” (Desmond and Messenger 1988, 121). Even if this daring theory of the Le Plongeurs found few supporters, a connection between the Maya and Atlantis was considered credible by many. But where was the proof?

The actual association of Maler to the Atlantis myth begins, in fact, with T. A. Willard’s book *City of the Sacred Well*, published 1926. In retrospect the latter writes:

During one of my visits [in Mérida] Maler promised me that the following year we should make a two weeks’ journey into the interior of Yucatan, where he had discovered a temple unknown to the world which contained some marvelous murals [that he copied]. He said that he had discovered an underground entrance to the temple and when he left he had covered up the entrance and planted shrubbery over it so that it would remain hidden from archaeologists. At that time I made a tracing of one of his drawings, showing a wall of this temple on which is depicted a water scene, with a volcano spouting fire and smoke, buildings falling into the water, people drowning, and a figure dressed like a warrior, paddling away from the scene in a boat. Maler was a firm believer in the Lost Atlantis theory and contended that this picture represented the destruction of Atlantis. It was an obsession with him that nothing from this secret temple should come into the possession of what he termed that infamous museum. I shall always regret that Maler died before I was able to make the intended trip with him to this hidden temple, as the knowledge of its location died with him (Willard 1926, 223-224).<sup>5</sup>



Figure 4. Robert Stacy-Judd (1884-1975) (courtesy: Architecture and Design Collection, Art, Design & Architecture Museum, University of California, Santa Barbara).

This is how the story of Teobert Maler as a believer in Atlantis came into the world.

13 years later, in 1939, Robert Stacy-Judd (Figure 4) circulated an alleged photo of Maler’s in his book *Atlantis – Mother of Empires*, which corresponds exactly to the apocalyptic scene described by Willard (Figure 5). The image description in Stacy-Judd’s book reads on page 91:

The beginning of a continuous bas-relief frieze discovered by Maler in Yucatan, which suggests to a remarkable degree the Atlantean cataclysm. The above photograph describes a pyramid and temple collapsing, a volcano in eruption and the land sinking. The figure in the water suggests destruction of life by drowning. Many escaped as symbolized by the figure in the boat.

5 The sources consulted for this article do not provide references as to where Maler’s copy and/or Willard’s sketch could be found.





*Figure 5.* The alleged photo of Maler showing the destruction of Atlantis (<https://atlantipedia.ie/samples/wp-content/uploads/2010/05/teobert-2.jpg>).

On page 92, the same author writes

The picture was taken by Teobert Maler in a remote and at the time unknown spot deep in the jungles of Yucatan. Maler states just prior to his death that the recorded scene was but a portion of a continuous frieze which surrounded the interior of an underground chamber.

The “murals” that Maler is supposed to have “copied” (not photographed!), and later reported to Willard, had by then turned into a bas-relief frieze in Stacy-Judd’s book. Willard obviously did not see this reputed photo of Maler, otherwise he would not have had to painstakingly reproduce the scene. The old explorer, who in his later years lived mainly from selling photographs, would most assuredly have given such a photo to Willard, as he had done many times before with other prints. In addition: If Willard had seen this relief as a photograph or in the form of a drawing by Maler, he would certainly have pointed out that the depicted mysterious place could be found in or around the famous ruins of Chichen Itza, not too far away from Mérida, which he knew very well through his work with Thompson at that site. Because if the style of the alleged relief can be assigned at all, then it is most likely to be the so-called ‘Maya-Toltec’ style, as it occurs in Chichen, but not deep in Yucatan’s interior. That site, in fact, has bas-reliefs inside rooms, rather an exception in the Maya land. However, there are no records in the very well archaeologically explored Maya city that show such a scene as described by Willard and Stacy-Judd.

Many years after Stacy-Judd’s publication, already at the time of the World Wide Web, another change was added to the story originally created by Willard. The “interior of Yucatan” was replaced by the great Maya city of Tikal, in Guatemala – which Maler

had explored extensively in 1895 and 1904.<sup>6</sup> Maler is said to have dismantled this bas-relief and brought it (or sent it) to Europe. The obvious question, what happened to the rest of the supposed frieze, remains unanswered. We have to remember that Stacy-Judd wrote that that apocalyptic scene was only “the beginning of a continuous bas-relief frieze,” which “surrounded the [complete] interior” of that temple. It is hard to imagine that Maler could have removed the entire frieze and shipped it to Europe, because the researcher always worked with only a few helpers while on an archaeological site. Moreover, without permission from the Guatemalan government that large number of sculpted stones could not have gone through by the customs officers of Puerto Barrios, the country’s main Caribbean Sea port. Let’s assume, then, that Maler only removed the part of the frieze referring to Atlantis, the remaining part must have stayed on site, right? However, Tikal is now one of the most intensively researched Maya sites and the large remain of the frieze in question has never been found there.

According to certain bogus websites, Maler sent the relief to an unspecified museum in Berlin, where it is said to have been destroyed in the bombing of World War II (O’Connell 2010). The Vienna Museum of Ethnology (today Weltmuseum) is also named occasionally as a depository:

Until 1945 it was part of the permanent Mesoamerica exhibition of that institution. Then it disappeared in the course of the usual looting by invading Soviet troops at the end of World War II. [...] Fortunately, [Maler’s original] photograph stayed with the University of Pennsylvania (Joseph 2005, 179).

However, this photo does not appear in the museum’s extensive online archives. I directed a specific question about this item to that institution, which, unfortunately, was not answered in good time.

The Viennese Museum of Ethnology could probably be ruled out as a possible temporary repository for the stone relief. If we consider that Maler always practiced self-promotion and highlighted his discoveries, he would certainly have mentioned such a generous donation (or sale) to the director of the museum, Franz Heger, as he unsuccessfully offered him a collection of his photos and some gold objects in 1912.<sup>7</sup>

Wherever the alleged frieze is said to have ended up, the questions arises, first, as to why such a sensational piece was not made public by the respective museum and, as second, why it did not circulate as a copy or photography, at least in scientific circles. The more than 20 years between the death of Maler and the outbreak of the Second World War would have been enough time to make such a historically significant work of

6 This information has been widely disseminated on the Internet without sources, therefore it is not possible to track its origins.

7 Ibero-Amerikanisches Institut, Stiftung Preußischer Kulturbesitz (IAI-SPK), Nachlass Maler, N-0040 b 11, correspondence Maler with Heger.

art internationally known and to give the respective museum a shine. For sure the press would not have missed such a find but reported extensively about it.

The new presumed place of the frieze's origin, Tikal in Guatemala, may be due to a mix-up. In 1878, the Swiss doctor and botanist Gustav Bernoulli removed large wooden lintels, decorated with magnificent hand-carved reliefs, from a building in Tikal and sent them home. Maler, who had met Bernoulli a year earlier in the Maya city of Palenque (in the Mexican state of Chiapas), writes about this in his report on Tikal to the Peabody Museum (Maler 1911, 42). These beams are now kept in the Museum der Kulturen in Basel. Thematically and stylistically, however, they differ significantly from Stacy-Judd's alleged stone frieze. The architect, with his relative knowledge of the ancient Maya, would not have made such a mistake. Whoever put Tikal as the place of origin of the 'Atlantis Frieze' in circulation likely had known far less about the Maya and its history of research.

The ominous temple also raises questions. Maya buildings do not have underground entrances, but perhaps Willard meant an entrance covered by debris from a collapsed building. Its localization is given as "the interior of Yucatan." This could refer to the Mexican state of Yucatan or, more likely, to the Yucatan peninsular probably somewhere between the Chenes and Rio Bec areas, the southernmost region that Maler had traveled in the Yucatan. The explorer's alleged offer to show Willard the site personally on a two-week trip cannot have been serious, especially if we consider Stacy-Judd's information that Maler had told Willard about the frieze "just prior to his death." In his last years the German-Austrian explorer was already an old man and in too poor of a health condition for such a long and arduous journey. Willard knew that too; therefore the industrial's assertion is not trustworthy.

According to Willard, Maler wanted to prevent that that "infamous museum" would have access to the temple. Here the reference is to the Peabody Museum at Harvard University, for which Maler undertook three research trips to Guatemala and Chiapas. Nevertheless, he had a violent argument with its executives in 1908, cut the relationship, and since then only spoke in derogatory and insulting terms about that institution. Accordingly, Maler could not have discovered that temple before 1908, otherwise he would not have kept this finding secret for several reasons. First, at that time he was still on good terms with the Peabody, and, as second, because it would have given him the fame he always aspired to and possibly additional income bestows. After 1908, however, Maler made no further explorations far from Mérida, neither into the interior of the Yucatán nor into the Petén.

A passage from another of Stacy-Judd's books, *Kabah – Adventures in the Jungles of Yucatan*, published in 1951, puts the story of the alleged Maler photo and stone frieze in a different light. Stacy-Judd claims:



I have in my possession an extraordinary photograph, taken by a well-known explorer and archeologist, now deceased, and presented to a friend of mine, who in turn presented it to me. It is of a bas-relief panel in stone depicting a volcano in eruption, a temple falling, people fleeing, a man in a boat and one in the water. The archaeologist stated that he photographed it from the panel in the wall of a tomb in a Mayan city which he discovered, but the location of which he never divulged. He believed that it represented the arrival of the Mayas in Yucatan (Stacy-Judd 1951, 70).

Even if specific names are not mentioned, it is clear: the well-known and deceased explorer is Teobert Maler and the “friend of mine” has to be Willard. The author again corrects Willard by repeating that it is not a mural but a bas-relief. It is no longer spoken about the frieze that surrounds the walls of a temple, but about a single panel. This now comes from a tomb, no longer from a temple, and Willard’s interpretation that this picture according to Maler represented the destruction of Atlantis is changed to the extent that it is now about the arrival of the Maya in Yucatan.

The real revelation, however, is presented by Stacy-Judd in the caption, placed under the identical photo he published in 1939: “The Unknown Panel. Does this frieze hold the secret of Mayan origin? (Panel made by Sculptor E. Yerbysmith from original photograph)” (Stacy-Judd 1951, 70). The information in brackets, which he does not mention in *Atlantis – Mother of Empires*, can only be interpreted in a way that Stacy-Judd took the alleged Maler photo to the well-known sculptor Ernest Yerbysmith in California and commissioned him to make a panel from this template that Stacy-Judd in turn photographed and brought into the world through his publications as an original Maler photo. The meaning of this action is incomprehensible. Why didn’t Stacy-Judd publish the alleged original photo right away?

All of these inconsistencies inevitably lead to questions about the credibility of the two main informants, T. A. Willard and Robert B. Stacy-Judd, who are behind the story of Maler and his alleged find, which is put forward as evidence for the connection between Atlantis and the Maya. Willard was evidently quite imaginative; the titles of two of his books suggest it: *Bride of the Rain God: Princess of Chichen Itza* (Willard 1930) and *The Wizard of Zacna: A Lost City of the Mayas* (Willard 1929). In his books, he made “frequent flights into fantasy” and “freely admitted to [...] an admixture of fact and fiction” (Gubler 1987, 22). Sometimes, US-Author Robert Brunhouse assumes, Willard’s imagination went too far:

In The City of the Sacred Well Willard reports that Maler had bribed Thompson’s worker to sell him several gold objects, dragged from the cenote. Willard claimed that he was allowed to examine and photograph the objects. After Maler’s death, none of those artifacts were found in his home (Brunhouse 1975, 26).



Figure 6. The Aztec Hotel in Monrovia (photo: <https://www.flickr.com/photos/fe2cruz/44697426355/>; CC BY-NC-SA 2.0).

Even if by reading his books one cannot locate Willard as a believer in Atlantis, he at least had an open ear for the theory: “What is more natural to suppose than that in some prehistoric period the lost continent of Atlantis did exist and proved an easy means of passage between Europe and America?” (Willard 1926, 36).

Stacy-Judd was a colorful personality. The filmmaker and writer Jesse Lerner comments:

His career as an architect is linked to the Mayan culture. Stacy-Judd came to Los Angeles in late 1922 where he stayed for the duration of his career. He named himself to be the first architect to utilize Mayan architectural motifs under modern American conditions but his claim ignored the earlier work by such architects as Frank Lloyd Wright. [...] The most interesting example of Stacy-Judd’s ideas of Mayan expressionism can be seen in his eclectic design of the Aztec Hotel [see Figure 6] in the Monrovia neighborhood of Los Angeles (1925), where he incorporated dense and richly ornate stucco decoration to the entrance facade and cornice elements of the building (Lerner 2001).

Willard concluded that the old man had melted them down and sold the metal for money. He supported his story by publishing photographs of some of these items (Willard 1941). Brunhouse at least has doubts on Willard’s trustworthiness, on this

[...] intriguing anecdote. Willard liked to write entertaining narratives, had a romantic streak in his makeup and admitted that he could, and sometimes did, doctor photographs. [...] The Willard tale contradicts what we know about Maler’s character. It is difficult to believe that this man, who loved Maya ruins, devoted decades to recording them, and castigated anyone who moved even a stone at the sites, would have resorted to the destruction of artifacts. Nor is it certain that Maler was as penniless as Willard suggests (Brunhouse 1975, 26).

In fact, Maler in his late years still had some financial resources, in spite of that he had lost most of his money in the international bank crisis in 1907.<sup>8</sup>

8 Durán-Merk and Merk (2011, 344, 348). Maler owned, for example, a house that he rented and cash deposited in a bank in Munich. Alone in 1916 he made at least 1056 pesos from the selling of prints, see Merk and Durán-Merk (in print).

According to Lerner, Stacy-Judd's buildings reveal a sensibility that is more theatrical than architectural. He did not confine his professional activities to architecture, but also published poetry and speculative rants, filmed a travelogue, lectured, and recorded radio broadcasts on archeological topics. He even designed and patented the "Hul-Che Atlatl Throwing Stick," which he claimed was derived from ancient Maya prototypes (Lerner 2001).

Stacy-Judd may have been far more convinced than Willard of the lost continent and the story of its demise. However, apart from the alleged Maler photo, he had nothing new to add to the state of research:

At a time when the wild armchair speculations of Victorian anthropology were almost becoming outmoded, he brought to the table a poorly synthesized stew of ideas borrowed from Ignatius Donnelly, James Churchward,<sup>9</sup> and Alice and Augustus Le Plongeon (Lerner 2001).



Figure 7. Robert Stacy-Judd posing in Maya costume (courtesy: Architecture and Design Collection, Art, Design & Architecture Museum, University of California, Santa Barbara).

However, his focus was not on Atlantis, but on the Maya:

The ancient Maya [...] were not a phase for Stacy-Judd, but a lifelong fascination. He filtered his perceptions of the ancient Maya through esoteric ideas about the spiritual power of the ruins. [...] Stacy-Judd saw in the Maya the mawkish story of a lost Eden, enlivened by royalty and pomp, which he dramatized in colorful costumes [see Figure 7], flamboyant architecture, romantic poetry, and speculative literature. His greatest triumph was the Aztec Hotel which achieved overwhelmingly popular success, and earned praise in important publications. It was the Aztec Hotel that launched Stacy-Judd's career as a promoter, explorer, and chronicler of the ancient Maya (Lerner 2001).

With the alleged Maler photo, he brought both of his 'passions' together.

My interpretation of Willard's version of the story – if this conversation really took place and was not invented by the industrialist – is that the educated and well-read Maler knew of Willard's interest in Atlantis and used it for a fantastic story to endear

9 James Churchward (1851-1936) proposed the existence of Mu, a lost continent in the Pacific Ocean.

himself to his gullible guest, perhaps to keep him happy as a potential client for his photos and at the same time to make fun of Thompson. As already introduced, Willard was not only well acquainted with Maler, but above all a close friend of Maler's sworn enemy, Edward H. Thompson. The latter, in turn, had written an article in 1879 (before Donnelly's book was printed!) on a connection between the Mexican and Maya cultures and Atlantis, of which Willard, with his great admiration for Thompson, was certainly aware. Later Thompson was rather uncomfortable with his contribution about Atlantis: "It may have been a case of a fool—or a schoolboy [...]. I would not dare write such an article today" (Thompson 1932, 16-17).

US journalist Jason Colavito, who's work has largely focused on debunking 'alternative archaeology', suspects the Stacy-Judd photography by comparing it with "hundreds of Maler's photos" to be "a well-done drawing," obviously without knowing that Stacy-Judd himself tells us that the frieze or panel was created by a sculptor. He comes to the conclusion that "it's lines are harder, squarer than typical Maya art, but much in keeping with the Art Deco-inspired Mayan Revival style (also called Aztec Revival) favored by Robert Stacy-Judd" (Colavito 2014). The architect was an accomplished artist and may well have fabricated the sinking scene himself, implies Colavito. Wishing to use Teobert Maler as a prominent and reliable "witness" of the Atlantis theory, he probably took Willard's story as a model for his narrative.

In conclusion, the implied evidence for Maler as a follower and advocate of the Atlantis theory can only be dismissed. The whole story about the lost frieze from the lost temple and the contended Maler photo is based on the claims of two imaginative men who were often inexact with the truth. Stacy-Judd's "peculiar genius lay in his flare for showmanship, not in his scholarship" characterizes Lerner (2001). It is indeed a superficially cobbled together story, which partly contradicts itself. None of it can be proven, but much can be refuted. It is more likely to be an attempt to produce 'facts' in the sense of Atlantis research, based on possible statements by Maler to Willard, which probably served to impress the latter as a potential customer. Stacy Judd decisively changed the narrative and expanded it with the ominous photo – presumably to market his own interests.

Willard and Stacy-Judd created the story of Maler and Atlantis. On the internet, it is accepted by supporters of the Atlantis theory as an established fact and, depending on the author, new details are added or changed – usually without evidence.

It is typical of many pseudo-scientific theories, such as that of Atlantis, that real evidence is lacking. It's no different here. The photograph: gone. The temple with the frieze: lost or destroyed. The panel: a hoax. The alleged informant (Maler): already deceased before the story was set into the world. What remains is faith.

## Acknowledgements

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