

# Piotr Ł. Grotowski

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## Preface

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Series Byzantina 8, 7-8

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2010

Artykuł został opracowany do udostępnienia w internecie przez Muzeum Historii Polski w ramach prac podejmowanych na rzecz zapewnienia otwartego, powszechnego i trwałego dostępu do polskiego dorobku naukowego i kulturalnego. Artykuł jest umieszczony w kolekcji cyfrowej [bazhum.muzhp.pl](http://bazhum.muzhp.pl), gromadzącej zawartość polskich czasopism humanistycznych i społecznych.

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Tekst jest udostępniony do wykorzystania w ramach dozwolonego użytku.

# Preface

In his dialogues *Timaeus* (23b–25d) and *Critias* (108e–109c, 113c–121c), Plato retells the story told by priests from the temple of Neith in Sais to Solon when he visited Lower Egypt. According to the legend, the rich and prospering Kingdom located on the island of Atlantis ('Ατλαντις νῆσος) that nine thousands years before the time of Solon had ruled over the western part of the Mediterranean was destroyed in a series of catastrophes. While attacked by brave Athenians, the island was sunk during one day and night after numerous earthquakes and floods.

Already ancient writers could not decide whether Plato's words should be read as an historical account or as an allegorical figure<sup>1</sup>. Despite the never-ending discussion concerning the real or imaginative character of the island, Atlantis became an important myth connecting popular culture with Mediterranean antiquity. Therefore, to use it as metaphor in relation to Byzantium may not seem improper.

Byzantium, like Atlantis – a once-great civilization with fabulous culture created in its capital surrounded by colorful walls and washed by the waves of the sea – disappeared half a millennium ago. Its traces, monuments, precious vessels, books or icons appear from time to time, just like fragments of the buildings of the city covered by the Ocean are washed ashore. A modern scholar involved in the matters of its culture is similar to a man walking along the shore trying to reconstruct the shape of a real building on the basis of its collected pieces. On the one hand, there is a chance that he may find additional evidence if he keeps walking far enough, but on the other, there is a risk that already known objects may disappear, taken by the waves of the time. The seashore where the “Byzantine island” was once erected is especially rough even in modern times. Wars, riots, and revolutions still take away memories of the past, unattended treasures disappear in the pockets of thieves and merchants. New generations of researchers appear on the shore. Some of them follow the paths set by their antecessors; the others give prevalence to the arising questions over traditional methods of interpretation.

There is a rule that every generation of historians write their own history, focusing on problems different from those dealt with by the past generations and leaving aside ques-

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<sup>1</sup> Plato's story was treated as historically valuable for example by Crantor, who visited the temple in Sais. A moderate attitude is presented by Olimpiodorus, *Gorg.* 46,6 (ed. Westerink, p. 240) and Proclus (76,1–195), whereas, according to Strabo, *Geographika* II 102 (ed. Radt, p. 248, 250), Aristotle rejected the account as a Plato's invention, see NESSELRATHI 2005, 161–171 and *Introduction to Proclus, Commentary*, 60–84.

tions their antecessor deemed crucial. They try to use new methods, new tools and new approaches – they try to look directly at the ruins of Atlantis, through the surface of the Ocean. What will they manage to see? An outline of the battlements and colourful walls of the underwater city or merely a reflection of themselves and their own times?

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In order to give an answer to the question how Byzantine Art History will look in the future, we will have to wait. However, what we can do now is to put before the audience the collected papers presented at the International Symposium *Towards Rewriting? New Approaches to Byzantine Art and Archaeology*, organized by the Faculty of Church History of the Pontifical Academy of Theology in Cracow and the Institute of Art History, Jagiellonian University in Cracow, held on September, 8–10, 2008, and attended mostly by scholars of the younger generation. We decided not to divide texts on art history and archeology into separate sections as we deeply believe that close cooperation between the two disciplines is inevitable and modern Byzantine scholars should use as much evidence delivered by their colleagues as possible. The volume was instead divided – just like the conference itself – into three parts: *Attitudes*, *Interpretations* and *Discoveries*. The authors of the papers included into the first two sections tried to look under a different angle (sometimes using new methods or assumptions) in order to find out answers for issues still unresolved. It is on the reader to assess whether they managed to do it and whether their theories appear verifiable. The third part focuses on the objects unknown to the broader audience – not only new archaeological finds, but also unpublished artifacts stored in museums. At the end of the volume we added three texts under headline *Contribution to the Studies on Byzantine Art – Past & Future*, presenting issues connected with the history of Byzantine Art History and a project recently undertaken by a group of art historians from Vienna.

*P. L. Grotowski*

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