

Process For Making “Sunken Cities” Map

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Foundation

Contributing an original map to GC’s newest *Shelter: An Atlas* was very appealing to me for a couple of reasons: One, as an independent map illustrator, it would give my work wide exposure. Two, it would put me in good company with other talented mapmakers. Suggestions for shelter maps ranged from “housing legislation and homelessness to shelters of flora and fauna in nests, caves, tree canopies and under the sea; from historic house forms to psychological shelter.” It was the “under the sea” idea that grabbed my attention.

Inspiration

The idea for my Sunken Cities map came about in a rather unconventional way. I like to listen to ambient music when I create, and it was around the time of GC’s Call for Maps that I had stumbled upon a new album called *The Spectral Isle*, recorded by UK artist Mark Burford (recording under the moniker Field Lines Cartographer). Burford explained that the concept of his album was inspired by the legend of the phantom isle of Hy-Brasil. “Situated in the Atlantic, approximately two hundred miles off the west coast of Ireland, the island of Hy-Brasil was featured on maps from around 1325 until the mid 1800s. Legend has it that it was surrounded in mist, appearing only every seven years. It was long thought to be the home of an advanced mysterious ancient civilization.” [Bandcamp.com] I had never heard of this legend before, but like the lost island of Atlantis, the story completely fascinated me. So I went online to learn more about it, and discovered other mythical phantom islands, such as Antillia (Spain & Portugal), Baralku (Australia), and Aeaëa (Greece).

However, because many of these islands were based in myth and folklore, and did not have precise geographic coordinates, I realized that plotting them on a map would prove rather tricky. I preferred my map to be more factual. There are plenty of real islands and ancient civilizations that have been wiped out due to a cataclysmic event of one type or another. I thought this would make a very compelling and intriguing thing to map! I could plot various long-lost locations from around the globe and use them to illustrate the concept of shelter impermanence. My map would underscore the vulnerability of human habitation to the never-ending movement of land and sea. The fundamental message would be: No matter how large or fortified or long-lasting a city may be, every one, throughout human history, has ultimately succumbed to the forces of nature.

Research

My first step was to take a census of the most well-known and/or prominent cities and settlements that disappeared due to natural disaster. I learned there were many! Plotting every lost city on every continent would prove unworkable, so I decided to include only 15 of the most famous sites. Each of the sunken cities I investigated took me down a rabbit hole of discovery, digging ever deeper into journals, interviews, videos, documentaries, and expedition reports. I learned about past civilizations, archaeological expeditions, cultural artifacts, ruins, plate tectonics, climate instabilities, sea level changes, etc. For each site I chose to document the following data: 1) the name of the city; 2) its location; 3) the year it was believed to have disappeared; 4) the suspected cause of the sinking; and 5) the date and type of ruins or artifacts that had been discovered.

Researching each sunken city online was time-consuming and the data I collected represented the most widely accepted scientific consensus. I decided to represent each location with a numbered circle (which corresponds with the legend) and a simplified illustration to represent that city or civilization. I included tectonic plate boundaries because earthquakes and volcanoes were prominent causes of destruction.

Process

For the basemap I chose the Robinson Projection because of its pleasing shapes and relatively low levels of distortion. I cropped it so as to exclude those areas not relevant my plot points. There are many sunken cities around the Mediterranean Sea; it is one of the most complex, geologically active regions on earth. It took multiple rounds of trial-and-error to effectively plot all the points and illustrations in that relatively small region. My primary goal was keeping all the features on the map as clear and understandable as possible. Arrows were an ideal device to link each icon illustration to its sunken city.

To create a classical aesthetic, I chose a muted color palette and traditional typography. The artifacts or ruins I chose to illustrate were those I found most commonly mentioned or photographed in my research. The only outlier on my map is Atlantis. There is no agreement or documentation as to the existence of Atlantis, but I felt I had to include it because no other sunken city of antiquity can compare to its enduring mystery and mythology.

Result

My map went through many revisions but in the end it turned out pretty much as I’d envisioned it. I am very pleased with it and hope others will find it fascinating. Despite the limited space, I tried my best to include as much detail and information as possible, without becoming too crowded or confusing. I hope my illustrations add an extra level of interest and perhaps incite further exploration into the mysteries surrounding these sunken cities.

Map lower right: Hy-Brasil in Petrus Plancius’s *Orbis Terrarum Typus de Integro Multis in Locis Emendatus* (Amsterdam, 1594)



Human skeleton
Atlit-Yam, Israel



Sculpture
Baiae, Italy



Statue of Hapy
Thonis-Heracleion, Egypt



Stone lion
Mahabalipuram, India



Pirate ship
Port Royal, Jamaica



Stone sphinx
Alexandria, Egypt



Ceramic vessel
Samabaj, Guatemala

