

versity teacher and so of having shown that *passion and research can grab hold of each of us at any time* [Editor's emphasis].

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Broadcast on the TV programme *Stargate*, 'La 7' channel,
Sunday 22 June 2003, at 8.40 p.m.

On either side of the Strait of Sicily

Jean Bingen, historian and Hellenist, Académie Royale de Belgique

The book by the culture journalist Frau is a comprehensive study of a problem that at first sight seems narrow: 'where were the Pillars of Hercules?', a Hercules who was in fact a Herakles-Melkart, against a background of the representation of the western frontier of the world that could be travelled, especially in the Greek world's imaginary. And those Pillars have been traditionally and unreservedly placed on either side of the Strait of Gibraltar.

The book is disturbing because of the light and rather subversive tone with which it accumulates a mass of research parameters, sometimes inducing dizziness. These innumerable components, which include illustrations, give the book its interest for an informed audience, who will discover, as they read the captivating story, many aspects of the Greek or pre-Hellenic world, the Phoenician world and the peripheral cultures, or even the geological substrate. The accumulation of detail and the impromptu dialogue with the reader somewhat upset the structured procedure adopted by orthodox researchers, but they provoke reflection.

The author's argument is based on an indisputable fact: the division of the pre-Roman Mediterranean into an eastern zone, in which Greek archaic, then classical cities and colonies predominated almost exclusively, and a western zone, which was an area of Phoenician expansion. The frontier between them is perhaps more complex, since it zigzags past Sicily and does not appear again until somewhere on the Libyan coast. This division has given the author the impression that the Pillars of Hercules were first of all situated on either side of the Strait of Sicily, 'the Greeks' horizon from Homer to Herodotus', and that it was only later, in the Hellenistic period, that all kinds of factors made people shift the Pillars to the strait of Gibraltar. The author reminds us that in the ice ages the water level in the strait was considerably lower and left only a relatively narrow passage between Sicily (which included Malta) and Tunisia, whose underwater plateau was largely exposed. The hypothesis of an initial location for the Pillars at the Strait of Sicily is seductive, and clarifies the meaning of several ancient sources. But I do not think the land's retreat could still have an influence at the time when the socio-economic landscape of the Mediterranean began to change at the start of the second millennium BC. Similarly the author's jokey tone refers somewhat unsubtly to mighty unpleasant Greeks and in particular their literary sources.

The hypothesis, which can no longer be dismissed, has as its corollary the identification of Sardinia as being the Greeks' Atlantis (beyond the Pillars) and, based on

its Phoenician past, the promotion of the part played by Sardinia and the city of Tartessos in the pre-Hellenistic western Mediterranean.

Jean Bingen

All the texts (except Jean Bingen's) translated from the Italian by Thierry Loisel

Translated from the French by Jean Burrell