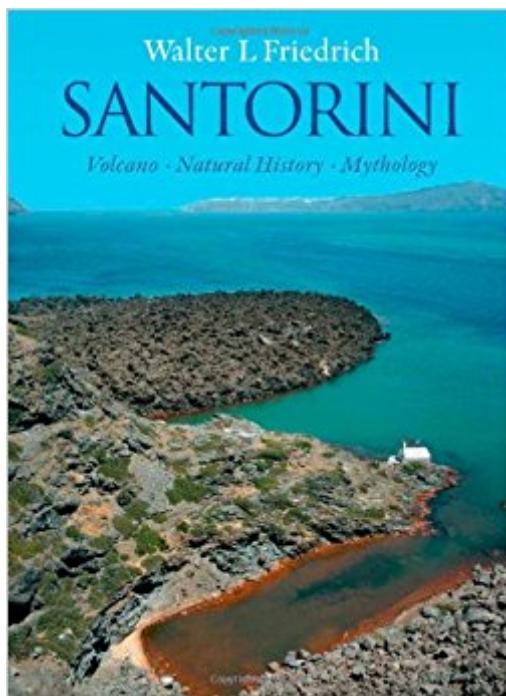


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Santorini: Volcano, Natural History, Mythology



Synopsis

This is a completely new and revised edition of the best-seller "Fire in the Sea: The Santorini Volcano, Natural History and the Legend of Atlantis" (originally published by Cambridge University Press, 2000). When the Greek island of Santorini, classically known as Thera, dramatically erupted in 1613 BC 13 years, it produced one of the largest explosions ever witnessed, thereby possibly giving rise to the legend of Atlantis. This so-called 'Minoan' eruption triggered tsunamis that devastated coastal settlements in the region. On Santorini it left behind a Bronze Age Pompeii, which is now being excavated. Thriving Bronze Age settlements on the island - rich in colourful wall paintings and highly sophisticated pottery - were buried under thick layers of volcanic ash. The ejection of an immense volume of dust into the atmosphere also altered global climate for several years. The author, a well-known geologist, blends the thrill of scientific discovery with a popular presentation of the geology, archaeology, history, people and the environmental settings of the island group of Santorini. He not only gives a comprehensive overview of the volcanic island and its past, but also reports on the latest discoveries: the finding, for example, of olive trees which had been buried by the Minoan eruption has now made it possible to give a direct and precise radiocarbon date for the volcanic catastrophe. The author also seeks to assign certain geological structures, such as faulted rocks, red lavas and harbour sites, as depicted on the Bronze Age frescos from Santorini, to still-existing details in the Santorini landscape of today. Excellent colour photographs and illustrations along with easily understandable scientific and historic details will make this book highly appealing to a wide audience. It will also be useful as a supplementary text for introductory courses in earth and atmospheric sciences, geology, volcanology, and paleoclimatology, as well as ancient history and archaeology.

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Customer Reviews

This book cannot decide whether it is a geology textbook or a popular account of this famous volcanic eruption, the largest in recorded human history. The text varies abruptly from nice photos, basic vulcanology, and discussions of Greek history and mythology, to arcane discussions of Plinian and phreaomagmatic eruptions and list of latin names of flora on the island. Technical terms are often not explained and there is no glossary. Items are described in different ways in different chapters (e.g. the Upper Pumice is sometimes referred to as Minoan Pumice, sometimes as the Bo layer). Nevertheless, it is written by a geology professor who has spent decades researching this volcano, and who is one of the world's experts on it. He shows definitive evidence for dating the eruption at 1600 BCE, not 1500 BCE as used to be thought. He describes in detail how the island formed and what shapes it had in earlier times, often correcting earlier ideas. He discusses the fascinating question of how the Santorini explosion affected the Minoan empire, which declined following the eruption but did not end until a century later. He analyses the frescoes uncovered at Akrotiri, to infer details of the society living on the island before the eruption. He speculates on whether Plato's description of Atlantis describes Santorini and/or Crete and makes a convincing case that it did. There is no soft and wild speculation of the kind found in some "new age" type books about Atlantis. Instead Friedrich offers a sober and fascinating critique. Starting with an introduction to plate tectonics, the chapters are laid out in a logical chronological sequence. The earliest eruptions, then the Minoan (1600 BCE) eruption, precise dating of that eruption, human society on the island, and archeological discoveries. Finally he describes the eruptions over the last 2000 years, which are precursors to the expected next major eruption. I definitely recommend this book for a lay person who is seriously interested in the origins of this amazing island before or after a visit. One can skip the most technical parts and get a lot out of it. A casual reader may be satisfied with simpler accounts than this book provides. This is not a tourist guide. Geology undergraduates should get good introductory material from it too, but will probably need more geological detail. But this newly revised (2010) book gives the latest science, plus fine illustrations.

This book is a mixture of notes from a professional geologist with items of interest to the casual reader. It thoroughly explores the question "Is Santorini the lost land of Atlantis?" without taking sides. The cover is an example of the many beautiful and unusual photos to be found inside. There

is a comprehensive history of eruptions, both those observed by humans, and those from the distant past inferred by geologic methods. The author has made an effort to predict any trends of future activity, though such predictions are necessarily very difficult and imprecise. The book is in serious need of an editor however. From typos to incorrect figure references, it looks like no one combed through the final draft for mistakes. That's my only reason for four stars instead of five. Still, I would recommend this book for the geology student, the geology-interested tourist, or anyone looking for some insights into Santorini / Atlantis history. There's even an appendix quoting the entire (translated) story which gave rise to the original Atlantis legend. Judge for yourself. Some of the facts seem to fit; some don't. Is it a story that got exaggerated through centuries of retelling? Or is Atlantis just too grand to fit within the confines of this caldera?

My wife and I recently returned from a trip to Greece where we spent four days on Santorini. It's a beautiful island with an amazing history, and we wanted to learn more about it when we got home. This book is an excellent and comprehensive resource with information about how the island formed (and is still forming), what its historical inhabitants were like, and even the mythology around the island (the lost island of Atlantis?). The book does go into some scientific details (such as around various methods to date antiquities), but it is all very readable and interesting, and it is loaded with pictures that illustrate the island and key points. It's a wonderful book that I would highly recommend.

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