THE GENRE OF THE ATLANTIS STORY

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MUCH has been written about Plato's Atlantis story, which is outlined at the start of the *Timaeus* and narrated in its uncompleted sequel, the *Critias;* but very little of what has been written faces the basic question—what kind of story is it? The general reader usually assumes it is the true story it is said to be,[1] while most classical scholars, as readily, take it as the invented myth it is explicitly denied to be.[2] There have been some attempts to describe its character as intermediate between these two alternatives (a likely story),[3] or as a synthesis of them (a myth written in the form of a history);[4] but even the most satisfactory account, that of R. Weil, gives only a partial description of its nature and explanation of its presentation.[5] The subject merits further investigation.

THE EVIDENCE OF THE INTRODUCTORY CONVERSATIONS

The obvious point of entry to this investigation is through the introductory conversations of the *Timaeus* and *Critias*, for these seem designed to give us clues to the nature of the story.

"TIMAEUS" 19B–20C

Socrates has just summarized the ideal state, or ἀρίστη πολιτεία (17C), of the *Republic.*[6] Now he asks his interlocutors to give a representation of this

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1. *Ti.* 20D7–8, 26D1–E5. See, e.g., the works surveyed by H. Herter in "Platons Atlantis," *BJ* 133 (1928): 28–47, esp. 29–31, or in "Altes und Neues zu Platons *Kritias*," *RhM*, n.s. 92 (1943–44): 236–65, esp. 236–39; and by P. Vidal-Naquet, "Athènes et l'Atlantide," *REG* 77 (1964): 420–44, esp. 424–25.

2. *Ti.* 26E4–5. See, e.g., the scholars listed by Herter, "Altes und Neues," p. 238, n. 2; B. Jowett, *The Dialogues of Plato*[3] (Oxford, 1892), 3:519; A. E. Taylor, *Plato, The Man and his Work*[4] (London, 1937), p. 439; F. M. Cornford, *Plato's Cosmology* (London, 1937), p. 18, n. 1; A. Rivaud (ed. and trans.), *"Timée"–"Critias,"* Budé edition, vol. 10 (Paris, 1963), pp. 7–8.

3. For Herter, "Platons Atlantis," pp. 45–47, the story is "likely" or at least possible, in that it was consistent with the physical facts of the past, as Plato believed them. Cf., in this respect, J. V. Luce, *The End of Atlantis* (London, 1969), who cites in support the alleged comment of Plato quoted by Posidonius and recorded by Strabo (2. 102), ἐνδέχεται καὶ μὴ πλάσμα εἶναι τὸ περὶ τῆς νήσου τῆς Ἀτλαντίδος. See also H. Cherniss, "Some War-Time Publications Concerning Plato, 2," *AJP* 68 (1947): 225–65, at 252, n. 97.

4. R. Weil, *L' "Archéologie" de Platon* (Paris, 1959), pp. 18–33.

5. Weil, *L' "Archéologie,"* enumerates the features characteristic of historical method in the narrative (pp. 18–26) and the elements which indicate that it is a myth (pp. 28–32), but does not give any real explanation why a myth should be so carefully presented as a history; he notes Plato's increasing interest in history as he grows older (pp. 32–33), but does not analyze the "itinéraire intellectuel" (pp. 16–17) that explains this interest.

6. The notional conversation in which the ἀρίστη πολιτεία was described (which is summarized at *Ti.* 17A–19A) is not, clearly, identical with the conversation of the *Republic;* cf. P. Friedländer, *Plato* (London, 1958–69), 3:356–57, and Cornford, *Plato's Cosmology*, pp. 4–5. But *Ti.* 17C–19A is, nevertheless, a summary of *Rep.* 369–471; cf. G. E. L. Owen, "The Place of the *Timaeus* in Plato's Dialogues," in R. E. Allen (ed.), *Studies in Plato's Metaphysics* (London, 1965), p. 330. The elimination in the *Timaeus* summary of the φιλακες–ἐπίκουροι distinction (*Rep.* 414B, 458C) may signify

state in action, engaged in war with other cities. A representation of this kind requires mimetic gifts denied to poets and sophists, because they cannot imagine how philosopher-statesmen would act in such a situation. But his interlocutors, who share equally in philosophy and politics, will be equipped to do this job.

Socrates does not specifically say that the mimetic act must be an invention (his language is neutral: *ἡδέως . . . ἄν του λόγῳ διεξιόντος ἀκούσαιμ'*, 19C2–3), but it is the most natural inference that he expects a *πλασθεὶς μῦθος*, albeit one that may draw on the political experience of the narrators (20A ff.). Indeed, after Socrates' prolonged reminiscence of the *Republic*, we may legitimately expect the kind of *muthos* Socrates there complains most poets do not write: a representation of a good subject by those with knowledge of its real nature, a representation which attributes to its subject its proper character and shows that its moral goodness leads to its success in the world.[7]

"TIMAEUS" 20D–26E

Critias offers a story which is appropriate to Socrates' request (*λόγον . . . πρέποντα*, 26A5; cf. 21A1), but denies that he has made it up for the occasion. Socrates should listen to a *λόγου . . . παντάπασί . . . ἀληθοῦς* (20D7–8), an *ἔργον* (as Socrates specifies in response to Critias' announcement) *οὐ λεγόμενον μέν . . . πραχθὲν ὄντως* (21A4–6). As Critias outlines the story it becomes clear that it did not originate in Socrates' request, but is a memorized report of factual information, derived from a source which could offer *τὸ ἀληθές* about matters otherwise known only through *muthoi*, if at all (22D ff.). Critias is far from offering a *muthos* to illustrate Socrates' *logos*. He describes Socrates' account as a kind of *muthos* which he will now translate into true fact by identifying its subject with that of his narrative: *τοὺς δὲ πολίτας καὶ τὴν πόλιν ἣν χθὲς ἡμῖν ὡς ἐν μύθῳ διῆεισθα σύ, νῦν μετενεγκόντες ἐπὶ τἀληθὲς δεῦρο θήσομεν ὡς ἐκείνην τήνδε οὖσαν* (26C7–D1).

"CRITIAS" 106B–108A

Critias explains how his subject is, in one respect, more difficult that Timaeus', by comparing his task with that of a painter (*τὴν . . . τῶν γραφέων εἰδωλοποιίαν*). In the case of *τὰ οὐράνια καὶ θεῖα*, our *ἀπειρία καὶ ἄγνοια* make us happy to accept what is *σμικρῶς εἰκότα λεγόμενα* (cf. *σκιαγραφίᾳ . . . ἀσαφεῖ καὶ ἀπατηλῷ*). But, when we try to give a *mimesis* of *τὰ ἀνθρώπινα*, *ὀξέως αἰσθανόμενοι τὸ παραλειπόμενον διὰ τὴν ἀεὶ σύνοικον κατανόησιν χαλεποὶ κριταὶ γιγνόμεθα τῷ μὴ πάσας πάντως τὰς ὁμοιότητας ἀποδιδόντι*. Therefore, Critias should receive not less, but more, indulgence from his audience, in their

nothing more than that Plato is not here concerned with the process of establishing the *ἀρίστη πολιτεία*, which is the special job of the "higher" *φύλακες* at those points in the *Republic*, but with the fighting power of the whole guardian class: *Ti.* 17D ff. is particularly close to *Rep.* 374E ff., where the guardian class is first isolated (at *Criti.* 110C the job of isolating the guardian class is assigned to *ἄνδρες θεῖοι*, who do not figure again). *Ti.* 24C4 ff., esp. *φιλοπόλεμός τε καὶ φιλόσοφος ἡ θεὸς οὖσα . . . προσφερεστάτους αὐτῇ μέλλοντα οἴσειν* (cf. 19E5–6 *φιλοσόφων ἀνδρῶν . . . καὶ πολιτικῶν*), implies that this one guardian class has *all* the guardian virtues. But see n. 68.

7. See *Rep.* 601A–B and 603A–B, 377D ff. (cf. *Ti.* 19C5–6), 603C ff., 392A–B (cf. 613B ff.).

judgment of his ἀπεικασία, than Timaeus has received. Critias' concern here is markedly different from Socrates' initial anxiety about the *mimesis*. Socrates was anxious that the *mimesis* should allocate to the designated subject its appropriate character (τὰ προσήκοντα ἀποδιδοῦσαν τῇ παιδείᾳ καὶ τροφῇ, *Ti.* 19C5–6; cf. 20B5–6), an allocation which only his interlocutors (μόνοι τῶν νῦν, 20B5–6), with their special knowledge, could make (19C5 ff.). Critias is only anxious that his *mimesis* give to its subject the likeness people expect from their customary perceptions of it (107B5–E3; note πρὸς δόξαν . . . ἀπεικάζειν, 107E3). Far from sounding like the composer of the kind of *mimesis* Socrates would commend in the *Republic*, Critias sounds like the kind of μιμητής Socrates there condemns, one who aims to provide a deceptive likeness of the appearance of his subject, relying on men's ordinary perception of the subject (*Rep.* 598B–C). Or, to use the apposite distinction of the *Sophist* (236C6–7), Socrates looks for a μιμητής with the τέχνη εἰκαστική who imitates the true lineaments of his subject, regardless of its usual appearance (ἀποδιδοὺς τὰ προσήκοντα ἑκάστοις, 235E1); while Critias is concerned with the τέχνη φανταστική, which aims only at τὸ . . . φαίνεσθαι . . . καὶ τὸ δοκεῖν (236E1).

It is not, perhaps, necessarily the case that Critias' position is actually in contradiction with that which he adopts at *Timaeus* 20D–26E. He could have said that he possessed the facts of his story, and was here simply describing the problem of recording them in a way that would simulate and convey their factuality. Even so, his language here seems more appropriate to a μιμητής, a poet or verbal artist, than to a historian.[8] He talks like a man improvising his imitative effort (ἐκ . . . τοῦ παραχρῆμα νῦν λεγόμενα, τὸ πρέπον . . . ἀποδιδόναι, 107D8–E1), not like a man reproducing a memorized account which conveys its subject by its truthfully transmitted information.[9] In fact, Socrates describes him, together with Timaeus, as a ποιητής in a θέατρον (108B4–5), and Hermocrates invites him to invoke the Muses, like Homer, before starting his piece. It is only then, by a deft shift (Critias invokes the *mother* of the Muses, Memory, and returns to his stress on the memorized character of his story, μνησθέντες κ.τ.λ., 108D4 ff.), that Critias resumes the persona of the historian to begin the actual story.

Whatever is not clear about the story from the combination of these passages (and there is much that is not at all clear), one point emerges about Plato's presentation of the story. It is evidently not contrary to Plato's intentions that one character should differ from another, and indeed differ in the indications his own statements give, about the nature of the story. It is not exactly that the characters overtly disagree about this (as Phaedrus and Socrates argue about the truth of the Egyptian story at *Phdr.* 275B–C):

8. Cf. Weil, *L'"Archéologie,"* p. 30.

9. Contrast *Ti.* 25E5 ff., where Critias did not want παραχρῆμα εἰπεῖν, because he wanted to revive his thorough, and permanent (26C), memorization of the story. At *Criti.* 113B Critias says his account is based on a written text carefully studied (διαμεμελέτηται) by him in his youth (on the inconsistency with *Ti.* 25E ff., see T. G. Rosenmeyer, "Plato's Atlantis Myth: *Timaeus* or *Critias*," *Phoenix* 10 [1956]: 163–72). In neither case is it easy to see what there is left for Critias to improvise.

Socrates, with surprising eagerness, adopts Critias' characterization of his story (*Ti.* 21A, 26E). But the characters clearly begin with different assumptions about the kind of story in question, and with different philosophical positions, both about the aims of *mimesis* and about what gives truth to a story. In making his initial request for a story (*Ti.* 19–20), Socrates does not mention the word "truth"; but his description clearly implies the conditions for true *muthoi* in the *Republic*, that the μιμηταί should achieve truth by imitating the true nature of the subject (377E ff.) That the subject is νοούμενον, the ἀρίστη πολιτεία of the *Republic*, is no impediment to giving a true *mimesis* of it;[10] for it is in apprehending νοούμενα that the νοῦς is most capable of achieving ἀλήθεια (508D4–9, 511D6–E4), and correct representation of νοούμενα such as the ἀγαθὴ πόλις is envisaged at 472D4–E1. Yet for Critias ἀλήθεια is cognate with the world of concrete fact (τὸ ἀληθές, *Ti.* 22D1, 22E5, 26D1), γιγνόμενα or ἔργα; and his λόγος is ἀληθής insofar as it accurately records these (20D7–21A3).

As if to emphasize the distance between Critias and Socrates (at least the Socrates of the *Republic*), Plato makes Timaeus restate the position of Socrates in the *Republic* (511D6–E4; cf. 508D4 ff.) only two Stephanus pages after Critias has finished describing his ἀληθὴς λόγος. *Logoi* about οὐσία (viz., τὸ μὲν δὴ νοήσει μετὰ λόγου περιληπτόν, ἀεὶ κατὰ ταὐτὰ ὄν) can achieve ἀλήθεια; *logoi* about γένεσις (viz., τὸ δ' αὖ δόξῃ μετ' αἰσθήσεως ἀλόγου δοξαστόν, γιγνόμενον καὶ ἀπολλύμενον) can only achieve πίστις. The physical world is a γιγνόμενον, an εἰκών of the intelligible model, and *logoi* about it can only be, at best, εἰκότες (27D5–29D2). It is on this passage that Harold Cherniss bases his view that we are meant by Plato to infer that the Atlantis story is an εἰκὼς λόγος like Timaeus' creation account. This connection "is implied by Critias' comparison of the discourse he is about to give with that which Timaeus has just finished (*Critias* 106B8–108A4). *Critias* 106B8–C2 refers directly to *Timaeus* 29C7–D3" ("War-Time Publications, 2," n. 97). Cherniss concludes (ibid., p. 252) that "Critias comes as near to saying [that his story is an εἰκὼς λόαος, like Timaeus'] as he possibly can" through these backward references to Timaeus' statement. But, on closer inspection, the texts cannot be made to yield that message. It is true that, when Critias says, τὰ . . . θεῖα ἀγαπῶμεν καὶ σμικρῶς εἰκότα λεγόμενα (and later ἂν μὴ δυνώμεθα πάντως ἀποδιδόναι, *Criti.* 107D6–E2), we can detect an echo of [ἐὰν] πέρι, θεῶν . . . μὴ δυνατοὶ γιγνώμεθα πάντῃ πάντως . . . λόγους . . . ἀποδοῦναι . . . ἀλλ' ἐὰν . . . παρεχώμεθα εἰκότας, ἀγαπᾶν χρή (*Ti.* 29C4–9); and this echo may derive from conscious or unconscious recollection by Plato of the earlier passage. But what Critias is actually saying is quite different from what Timaeus said, as are his reasons. By σμικρῶς εἰκότα λεγόμενα, Critias means "statements that are only a little *like* their subject": by εἰκότας [λόγους], Timaeus means statements which are adequately descriptive (ἐξηγηταί, 29B5) of their subject, but whose subject is itself an εἰκών (viz., γένεσις), statements which are thus only *likely* to be true, not known to be

10. Gods can be truly or falsely represented and they are νοούμενα, not visible entities (377E; for the νοούμενα / ὁρώμενα distinction, see 508B13–C2).

true (cf. 28A ff.). The difference is not only that Critias is interested in likeness and Timaeus in likelihood.[11] Critias simply does not agree that we do not know the truth, and cannot make true statements, about γένεσις. After his comment about τὰ θεῖα (107B7 ff.), he goes on to say τὰ δὲ . . . ἀνθρώπινα ἀκριβῶς ἐξετάζομεν, and we can do so because in this area (as opposed to τὰ θεῖα) we are εἰδότες ἀκριβές (107C6), and our knowledge rests on our being ὀξέως αἰσθανόμενοι . . . διὰ τὴν ἀεὶ σύνοικον κατανόησιν (107D2–8). In this area of γένεσις we have the accurate knowledge that perception and close acquaintance can give us: it is the lack of this which produces our ἀπειρία καὶ . . . ἄγνοια of τὰ θεῖα.[12] And although Critias does not say in this passage that his *logos* is ἀληθής (his lack of interest, at this point, in truth—as opposed to verisimilitude—has already been noted), there would be nothing philosophically inconsistent in his saying so. So we cannot read into his words here Timaeus' statement about his *logos;* indeed, the backward glance to Timaeus' statement only reinforces Critias' difference of attitude.

In these introductory conversations, then, Plato seems determined not to assign a single description to his story, either overtly or by implicit connection between what the speakers say. In fact, the three passages considered give us the materials to form three different views about it: (1) that it is an exercise in philosophical myth-making, which extends the range of Platonic myth-making to include representation of political action and war; (2) that it is a factual report of a historical event, preserved by a unique line of transmission, which happens to be suitable for the required philosophical theme; (3) that it is a piece of virtually free invention, whose principal interest is in giving a *mimesis* of human action in a way which simulates its customary appearance, a kind of *Ur*-fiction or romance.[13]

POSSIBLE INTERPRETATIONS OF THE STORY

Generally, if the introduction to a piece of writing is ambiguous in its demarcation of the genre of the piece, we turn to the writing itself to settle the matter. Of course, in this case, we do not really possess the full piece of work. We have only the preliminary materials to the great war between Athens and Atlantis (*Ti.* 20E6 ff., 24D6 ff.)—a summary in the *Timaeus* and a description of the opposing cities in the *Critias*—and the text breaks

11. Cherniss, who notes ("War-Time Publications, 2," n. 97) that at "107E2–3 Critias indicates again that his discourse will be an ἀπεικασία," seems to confuse these two senses of εἰκώς. It is true that Timaeus deliberately associates the two senses in 29C1–2 (ὄντος δὲ εἰκόνος εἰκότας), so that his description of his account as "likely" (εἰκώς, 29D2) depends on his description of the physical universe as a "likeness" (29C1–2; cf. 29B). But Critias does not make this association, just as he shows no trace of Timaeus' ontological assumptions, and his εἰκότα at 107D7 means simply "like," for "likeness" is his concern throughout 107B5–E3.

12. Cherniss, "War-Time Publications, 2," n. 97, blurs this distinction between Critias and Timaeus in connecting *Criti.* 107B5–7, ἀπεικασίαν τὰ παρὰ πάντων ἡμῶν . . . χρεών . . . γενέσθαι ("where πάντων ἡμῶν means, of course, ἀνθρώπων ὄντων"), with *Ti.* 29C7–D3, ἐγὼ ὑμεῖς τε οἱ κριταὶ φύσιν ἀνθρωπίνην ἔχομεν ὥστε περὶ τούτων [θεῶν καὶ τῆς τοῦ παντὸς γενέσεως] τὸν εἰκότα μῦθον ἀποδεχομένους κ.τ.λ.

13. As B. E. Perry points out, *The Ancient Romances* (Berkeley, 1967), pp. 72 ff., the genre of, and the name for, freely invented narrative fiction only developed considerably later in Greek literature.

off just as the central action should have begun. What we do have can be read, without manipulating its details, in at least two ways, if not three.

A FACTUAL ACCOUNT

Let me take first the view that Critias is presenting a factual account, since this is, in a sense, the most obvious reading of the text, though it is the least popular among Platonic scholars.[14] The great merit of this reading is that it follows the explicit assertions of the characters in the dialogue, Critias, and Socrates (when he accepts Critias' description of his story). Holders of this view can point out that Plato introduces no other illustrative narrative into his dialogues with such affirmations of its factual truth;[15] that nowhere else is there so detailed an account of the transmission of the story, and so strong a claim made for the authenticity of the originating source.[16] They can point to the indications that Plato is genuinely interested in recovering factual information about the distant past, to his perceptive use of traditional stories and physical phenomena (even of comparative sociological material), and to the clear evidence of reflection on his part on the discontinuities in civilization and their impediment to the transmission of accurate information.[17] They may be a little embarrassed by the clear echoes of other historians, especially Herodotus,[18] and, even more, by the apparent use of Herodotean material as, at least, a source of inspiration,[19] since all this seems to point to a pastiche of history rather than the real thing.[20] But they can reply that Plato has written his true history in the style of (and with conscious allusion to) other true histories; or that he has embellished the true core of his story with materials drawn from Herodotus and elsewhere.[21]

14. An exception is Luce, who, following certain other scholars (see *The End of Atlantis*, pp. 46–57 and his bibliography on p. 217), upholds the Egyptian source named by Plato (*Ti.* 21E ff.) as the genuine origin of what is really a factual record of Minoan Crete under the pseudonym of "Atlantis." I have criticized this view in detail in "The Origin of the Atlantis Myth," *Trivium* 11 (1976): 1–11.

15. Contrast, e.g., the much more qualified presentation of *Phd.* 114D1–2, *Phdr.* 274C–275C, (cf. *Rep.* 621B8 ff., where Socrates, while confident that the *muthos* will "save" us if we believe it, does not affirm its factual truth in detail). *Plt.* 268E–274E, while claiming to disclose the facts behind men's *muthoi* (269C; cf. *Ti.* 22C–D), is itself described as a *muthos* (274E), χρήσιμον for a philosophical end. Only *Grg.* 523A1–3 and 524A8–B1 contain an analogous affirmation of truth (about an eschatological account similar to that of the *Phd.* and *Rep.*): E. R. Dodds notes that the Socrates of this section of the dialogue is characterized by unusual assertiveness, *Plato's "Gorgias"* (Oxford, 1959), p. 16.

16. There are analogously detailed accounts of the transmission of whole dialogues, e.g., *Symp.* 172A–173C, *Prm.* 126A–127A: though nobody today, to my knowledge, claims that this demonstrates the historical accuracy of these records of conversations.

17. *Ti.* 22C1–23C3, the "comparative sociology" is in 24A2–C2 (cf. Hdt. 2. 164–68). In *Criti.* 109D4–110C2 note the frequent use of existing physical phenomena as τεκμήρια and σημεῖα of the past (esp. 110D5, E6; 111A3–5, C3–4, D7–8; 112D1–2; cf. *Ti.* 25D3–6). Cf. Weil, *L' "Archéologie,"* pp. 21–23.

18. Cf. *Ti.* 20E4–6, 24D6–8, with Hdt. 1. 1 (cf. Vidal-Naquet, "Athènes et l'Atlantide," pp. 427–28) and Thuc. 1. 2.

19. Principally, Herodotus' description of Ecbatana (1. 98) and Babylon (1. 180 ff.; cf. 189–90) for the picture of Atlantis (*Criti.* 115C ff., 118C ff.). Cf. Friedländer, *Plato*, 1:319–20; Rhys Carpenter, rev. of Luce, *The End of Atlantis* and J. W. Mavor, Jr., *Voyage to Atlantis*, *AJA* 74 (1970)302.

20. Cf. Weil, *L' "Archéologie,"* pp. 18 ff.

21. Luce, *The End of Atlantis*, pp. 180–81.

They must admit that the story is in one respect quite unhistorical: it uses gods to set up the situation for the subsequent human action.[22] But they can reply that in this respect Plato has simply adapted a historical account to suit its literary context—that is, following the Timaeus creation account—and that we can generally see how the use of gods continues Timaeus' narrative.[23] In any case, Critias' final description of his story in the *Timaeus* (27A–B) gave some indication that it would take account of Timaeus' speech. He said that he would talk "as one having received from [Timaeus] men brought to birth by his account, some of them distinctively educated by [Socrates]" and would describe their actions "according to the story of Solon." This statement is not unambiguous in its characterization of Critias' story; but it could be read as meaning either that Critias' factual narrative would incidentally continue Timaeus' creation story and represent the guardian system of government in action (with its unique system of education, *Ti.* 18A9–10, described by Socrates);[24] or, alternatively, that Critias would actually adapt Solon's story so as to include material relevant to Timaeus' creation story and Socrates' description of the ideal state. These two readings carry widely different implications; but neither of them denies that the story is at least based on the transmission of a factual narrative.

A PHILOSOPHICAL MYTH

The second possible reading of the story is as a philosophical myth, specifically composed to show the ἀρίστη πολιτεία of the *Republic* in action. This, after all, is what Socrates asks for at the start of the *Timaeus;* and this may well be what he receives. It is surely not accidental that what Socrates requests conforms to the only kind of *mimesis* he finally approved in the *Republic* (ὕμνους θεοῖς καὶ ἐγκώμια τοῖς ἀγαθοῖς, *Rep.* 607A4; τοὺς ἄνδρας καὶ τὴν πόλιν [viz., ἀρίστην] ἐγκωμιάσαι, *Ti.* 19D2); and that, in this respect, what Socrates asked for, Critias seems ready to provide (τὴν θεὸν . . . ὑμνοῦντας ἐγκωμιάζειν, *Ti.* 21A2–3; cf. τοὺς παλαιοὺς πολίτας ἀγαθοὺς . . . ὑμνεῖν, *Criti.* 108C3–4). There are passages in the story itself where we can see the preliminary sketching of a moral conflict (between δίκη, *Criti.* 112E3, and

22. *Ti.* 23D6–E2, 24C4–D3; *Criti.* 109B ff., 113B7 ff., 120D6 ff. This use of gods is not comparable to Herodotus' more modest suggestions about divine causes underlying human events: see J. L. Myres, *Herodotus, Father of History* (Oxford, 1953), pp. 46–53.

23. *Criti.* 109B6–C4 (concluding with τὸ θνητὸν . . . ἐκυβέρνων) seems to develop the demiurge's instructions to the other gods τὸ θνητὸν διακυρβερνᾶν ζῷον (*Ti.* 42E3–4). The διακόσμησις, both physical and political, carried out by the gods (*Ti.* 23E3, 24C4–5; *Criti.* 113E3), seems to continue the demiurge's (*Ti.* 37D5, 69C1; cf. 53A7). For cosmic διακοσμεῖν in Plato, cf. *Cra.* 400A9; *Phdr.* 246E5; *Phlb.* 28E3; *Leg.* 966E4, 967B6; see R. Hackforth, "The Story of Atlantis: Its Purpose and its Moral," *CR* 58 (1944): 7–9. In particular, Poseidon's inscribing of circles as if with a compass (οἷον τορνεύων ἐκ μέσης τῆς νήσου, πάντῃ ἴσον ἀφεστῶτας, *Criti.* 113D8–E1) is reminiscent of the demiurge's perfection of the spherical world (σφαιροειδές, ἐκ μέσου πάντῃ πρὸς τὰς τελευτὰς ἴσον ἀπέχον, κυκλοτερὲς αὐτὸ ἐτορνεύσατο, *Ti.* 33B4–5). The Zeus who enters the *Critias* at the last minute is reminiscent, at least, of the demiurge: his οἴκησις . . . κατὰ μέσον παντὸς τοῦ κόσμου βεβηκυῖα καθορᾷ πάντα ὅσα γενέσεως μετείληφεν.

24. At *Ti.* 23E4 ff. Critias could be taken as providing historical evidence for the coincidence of customs in Socrates' ideal state and primeval Athens, namely the support of comparison with another ancient culture, Egypt.

πλεονεξία ἄδικος, 121B6; between εὐνομία, *Ti.* 23C6, 24D4, and ὕβρις, 24E2).[25] And we can see how the story might have been developed into the kind of conflict between the ἀρίστη πόλις and an all-wealthy opponent envisaged at *Republic* 422D–423B.[26] On this interpretation, Critias' claim to describe a historical event, if it is more than simply an arresting way to present a story,[27] indicates to a reader that this mythical account of a war will be more like a history (like the histories of Herodotus and Thucydides) than any previous Platonic narrative,[28] and, possibly, that this story will have a closer relationship to historical fact than its genre, philosophical myth, might lead us to expect.

There are, in fact, a number of indications that the story will have special relevance to an Athenian audience, and have particular significance against the background of Athenian history.[29] It will celebrate the deeds of Athenian citizens (*Ti.* 27B), recorded by the Athenian σοφός (who was also a πολιτικός; cf. *Ti.* 19E5–6), on the festival of Athena (21A), not that of Bendis (*Rep.* 327A ff.). In his summary of the story in the *Timaeus*, Critias describes these deeds in a way that would remind his audience of Athens' repulse of Persia in the Persian Wars, particularly as described by Herodotus.[30] An audience might stand ready for a more oblique version of the *Menexenus*, a eulogistic account of a glorious event in recent Athenian history, transposed into prehistoric time and presented as the act of the ideal state.[31]

If that is what is expected, the *Critias* holds a rude shock. While the picture of Atlantis contains some echoes of the Persian empire's wealth and technology, and the engineering of the invading army of Xerxes,[32] primeval Athens is very unlike historical Athens. It is least unlike Marathonic Athens, and most unlike the Athens of the time of Critias, Hermocrates, and Socrates, i.e., the late fifth century.[33] It is an Athens which, to judge

25. These hints of Plato's possible development of his theme help in part to justify A. E. Taylor's view of the moral of the story, *A Commentary on Plato's "Timaeus"* (Oxford, 1928), p. 50, against the criticisms of Hackforth, "The Story of Atlantis," p. 9.

26. Note the unprecedented concentration of the world's wealth into the city of Atlantis (*Criti.* 114D–E; cf. *Rep.* 422D7–E1, ἐὰν εἰς μίαν . . . πόλιν συναθροισθῇ τὰ τῶν ἄλλων χρήματα). This wealth contributes to the power which πᾶσα συναθροισθεῖσα εἰς ἕν attacks the ἀρίστη πόλις and brings out its finest qualities (*Ti.* 25B).

27. See Herter, "Platons Atlantis," p. 45.

28. With the exception of *Menex.* 239A ff., whose start is also reminiscent of the *prooimia* of Herodotus and Thucydides (cf. n. 18).

29. The following interpretation, while formulated independently, has a number of features in common with that suggested by G. Bartoli in 1779 (see Vidal-Naquet, "Athènes et l'Atlantide," p. 429, n. 44), explored briefly by Herter ("Platons Atlantis," p. 40) and Friedländer (*Plato*, 1:321; cf. 3:385), and developed by Vidal-Naquet: only major points of contact with the views of these scholars will be noted.

30. Cf. *Ti.* 25B5–C6, esp. C4–6, with Hdt. 7. 139. 5–6.

31. The eulogistic clause at 25B5–6 is the same, word for word (except that it has διαφανής instead of ἐκφανής), as that applied to Athens at Arginusae at *Menex.* 243B7–C1.

32. Cf. n. 19. For bridging water and digging canals through land, cf. *Criti.* 115C4 ff. and 118C4 ff. with Hdt. 7. 22 ff. The moral decline of the Atlantians (*Criti.* 121E ff.) is similar in some respects to that attributed to the Persians at *Leg.* 695–98. Cf. Herter, "Platons Atlantis," p. 39; Friedländer, *Plato*, 1:203–4.

33. I take the obvious view that Critias and Hermocrates are, respectively, Plato's mother's cousin and the Syracusan general and not any more obscure figures with the same name (cf. Rosenmeyer, "The Family of Critias," *AJP* 70 (1949): 404–410: *contra*, Taylor, *A Commentary on Plato's "Timaeus,"* pp. 14 ff.; and, on Hermocrates, Cornford, *Plato's Cosmology*, p. 2).

from Critias' description, seems to have no navy, no harbor, no marketplace, no mines, and no elaborate temple architecture.[34] With its impressive army, its able farmers, and its stable hoplite democracy,[35] it can be seen as a graphic picture of Athens, the victor at Marathon, of Athens before Pericles, that conservative upholders of the πάτριος πολιτεία, like the historical Critias, held as a model.[36] But it can also, and more persuasively, be seen as a picture of Sparta lodged in an Attic locale. Its εὐνομία is the most obvious sign,[37] but there are more concrete indications. Like Sparta, primeval Athens is basically an army of rulers, supported by a separate group of farming subordinates (*Criti.* 110C). The locale itself is adapted to suit its role, made more fertile (110E), and also made into a land power, like Sparta (to which the sea power, Athens, was consistently opposed in the later fifth century),[38] by giving it more land, with expanded boundaries,[39] and with an increase of soil (subsequently, according to 111A ff., lost by soil erosion). It is an appropriate vision for the pro-Spartan Athenian, Critias, to formulate:[40] but it implies that for the author of the *Critias* also, Athens was, or could be, ideal, only by approximation to Sparta.

What about Atlantis? In this interpretation, Atlantis is, in essence, not simply a dream island in the mythical west,[41] but the dream of Athens in

34. *Criti.* 110C–112D: the absence of these features is rendered more pronounced by their presence in Atlantis (115C ff.).

35. Critias does not say that only the 20,000 φύλακες shared in ἀρχή, but it is the natural assumption (cf. *Criti.* 112D4 and *Ti.* 17C10–18A2).

36. Critias is not specifically mentioned as a promoter of the search for the πάτριος πολιτεία in 411 (see M. I. Finley, *The Ancestral Constitution* [Cambridge 1971], pp. 5–10), but there can be little doubt that this movement would have commanded his support. That it should be Solon to whom Critias appeals as the source of information for the ancient Athenian constitution is also appropriate, since in the mid-fourth century, as distinct from the late fifth century (ibid., pp. 11–14), Solon was the alleged author of the constitution advocated by Athenian conservatives: Isoc. *Areop.* 7. 15–16; Finley, *The Ancestral Constitution*, p. 36; Vidal-Naquet, "Athènes et l'Atlantide," p. 433. At *Leg.* 698B4–5 the Athenian Stranger attributes the Marathonic victory to the πολιτεία . . . παλαιὰ καὶ ἐκ τιμημάτων ἀρχαί τινες τεττάρων, viz., the Solonian constitution (cf. Glenn Morrow, *Plato's Cretan City* [Princeton, 1960], pp. 83 ff.), ignoring Cleisthenes' modifications to that constitution (C. Hignett, *The History of the Athenian Constitution* [Oxford, 1952], pp. 142 ff.). That Solon should appeal to the Egyptians, those arch-conservatives and archaizers (*Leg.* 656D ff.), as the source of information for antediluvian Athens, carries the search for the πάτριος πολιτεία almost to self-parody.

37. On εὐνομία as a virtual synonym for the Spartan way of life, see Morrow, *Plato's Cretan City*, pp. 43 ff.

38. See Thuc. 2. 62. 2–3; [Xen.] *AthPol* 2, passim; A. Momigliano, "Sea-Power in Greek Thought," *CR* 58 (1944): 1–7, esp. 2–3.

39. *Criti.* 110D5–E3: Megara is included, as it was, by tradition, under Pandion (Ernst Meyer, s.v. "Megara," *RE* 29 [1931]: 180–81), and so is the disputed territory of Oropis (J. Wiesner, s.v. "Oropos," *RE* 35 [1939]: 1171 ff.).

40. Critias was, of course, one of the Spartan-installed "thirty tyrants," and as such carried out the symbolic, oligarchic act of turning the βῆμα in the Pnyx to face the land, not the sea (Plut. *Them.* 19). Rosenmeyer's dissertation, "The Isle of Critias," summarized in *HSCP* 55 (1950): 302–3, maintained that Plato's version of Critias' story was based on the ideas of the historical Critias.

41. The name "Atlantis" (= Atlas' island) may have been suitable for this island because of its ambivalent mythic associations: those of a favorable ideal, a garden or orchard of the Hesperides, or Atlas' daughter (Hom. *Od.* 1. 50–54, 5. 63–74; Hes. *Th.* 518); and those of a Titanic struggle (cf. *Leg.* 701C), settled by Zeus's intervention (Hes. *Th.* 687 ff.; cf. *Criti.* 121C), after which Atlas (or his island, *Criti.* 25D) was sunk beneath the sea (Hes. *Th.* 746; see M. L. West, *Hesiod's "Theogony"* [Oxford, 1966], ad loc., and p. 311, on the confusion surrounding Atlas' physical position). Atlas was also associated in Plato's mind with the cosmological speculation the Atlantis story's

the later fifth century, above all, the dream or ideal Periclean Athens had about itself. For one thing, Atlantis is an island (what Pericles wanted the Athenians, in war, to consider Athens).[42] For another, it has a fantastic concentration of wealth, accumulated chiefly by water-borne trade and by sea-borne military power over a neighboring empire in the Mediterranean (*Ti.* 25A–B; *Criti.* 114D ff., 117E, 118D–E). In his account of Atlantis, Critias tells the story of the growth of that power and wealth; and it can be taken as a graphic symbol of the development of Athenian maritime imperialism, perhaps with specific allusions to the Long Walls, Peiraeus, and Parthenon, which were the visible symbols of that development.

The city of Atlantis was originally a fertile and well-watered garden, supplying all the needs of Poseidon's human wife and their children.[43] Through Poseidon's divine power this "island" of land was encircled by three rings of water (with two rings of land between them) to make it "inaccessible to men; for in those days ships and sailing did not yet exist" (*Criti.* 113E1–2). It was the descendants of Poseidon who opened up their "ancient mother city" (115C4–5) to mankind, by bridging the rings of water and digging a canal from the sea to the rings of water, and so to the island of land at the center. The canal itself and the rings of water formed a series of harbors; dockyards were hollowed out of the sides of the rings, and the stone thus excavated was used for a series of walls, surrounding each ring of land and the whole city. The central acropolis (116C3) was adorned by a number of temples, of which Poseidon's was the most splendid.[44] The city was also connected to a canal system which intersected and enclosed the great, fertile plain of Atlantis: by this means, wood and natural produce (and metals and minerals) were floated to the city, which was itself an entrepôt for sea-borne trade (118C–119B). The result of this process was that the original "mother city" of Atlantis, far from being an inaccessible garden, became a lavishly decorated center of commerce and the base for a great navy (117D; cf 119B), the entire complex protected by a system of walls (117D–E). "The whole area was densely inhabited; the canal and the biggest harbor were full of ships and merchants arriving from all parts, whose number caused shouting, confusion, and all sorts of din, day and night" (117E).

Plato is careful in this picture to avoid more than the occasional touch of implied censure.[45] In fact, to the general reader, if Plato's account is a

summary prefaces (see *Phd.* 99C). The "islands of the blessed" may also be linked with this mythical area (it is παρ' Ὠκεανόν at Hes. *Op.* 171); and in this connection it is of interest that the author of the *Epinomis* (992B8–C1) suggests that the "islands of the blessed" may really be "continents," as though in recollection of the alteration of traditional geography in the *Timaeus*, by which the farthest limit of the world becomes a continent and not Oceanus (25A), an alteration which surely reflects Plato's preference for land over sea in this myth.

42. Thuc. 1. 143. 5; cf. [Xen.] *AthPol* 2. 14.

43. The wife was one of the autochthonous inhabitants of Atlantis (113D1; cf. her child, Αὐτόχθων, 114C1) like the autochthonous Athenians (*Ti.* 23E1–2; *Criti.* 109D2). For Plato's interest in Athenian autochthony, see *Menex.* 237D–238A; cf. Rivaud, *"Timée"–"Critias,"* p. 235, n. 1.

44. Vidal-Naquet sees this temple as based on the Parthenon ("Athènes et l'Atlantide," pp. 441–42); Friedländer, on that of Bel at Babylon (*Plato*, 1:319). On the fusion of Persian and Athenian elements, and the possible significance of that fusion, see n. 53.

45. Note the restrained puritanism in the description of fruit and nuts for dessert as παραμύθια πλησμοσυνῆς and as παιδιᾶς (Burnet's reading) ἕνεκα ἡδονῆς τε (115B); cf. the use of variety of stone

description of an ideal state, it is Atlantis, with its fabulous natural and material civilization, that seems to be the ideal and not the austere Attica. And this is a measure of how well, and with what restraint, Plato has sketched what must have been for him a false ideal. For the development of Atlantis contains too many of the features Plato elsewhere criticizes in Athens' growth for the similarity to be merely coincidental.[46] In the *Gorgias* Socrates savagely attacks the process of expansion by which successive democratic politicians filled Athens with "harbors, dockyards, walls, tribute, and rubbish like that" (518E3–519A4), thus making the Athenians worse by indulging and increasing their desires instead of disciplining and reducing them (515C ff., 517B ff.). In the *Laws* the Athenian Stranger describes the sea (which, through the canal system, gradually penetrates Atlantis) as that which, by encouraging trade, makes a city ἄφιλον toward itself; and he recounts how the conversion of Athens from an army to a naval power undermined her previous valuation of ἀρετή.[47] In the *Republic* the "fevered" city of wealth and artistic variety is opposed to the "true" city of simplicity and functionalism.[48] In the last paragraph of the *Critias* Plato removes the veil of restraint from his true attitude to the maritime power of Atlantis. As time went on, the Atlantians lost that ἀρετή which they formerly valued above wealth, and the φιλία which helped them amass that wealth, and fell into a state where they seemed πάγκαλοι μακάριοί τε to the outward eye but in fact were πλεονεξίας ἀδίκου καὶ δυνάμεως ἐμπιμπλάμενοι (121B6–7).

It is true that Plato does not say that the material development of Atlantis was itself the cause of this decline (in fact, he denies that the development accompanied the decline, 121A7–8). The blame is placed on the gradual reduction of the divine μοῖρα in the Atlantian genetic constitution. It was when the ἀνθρώπινον ἦθος ἐπεκράτει that they could not τὰ παρόντα φέρειν, i.e., they could no longer bear οἷον ἄχθος τὸν τοῦ χρυσοῦ τε καὶ τῶν ἄλλων κτημάτων ὄγκον and became μεθύοντες ὑπὸ τρυφῆς διὰ πλοῦτον ἀκράτορες αὐτῶν (121A–B). But this is, in itself, an indictment of a πολιτεία which permits the "burden" of great wealth to be placed on human nature. The Athenians were wholly human from the time of the foundation of their city,[49] but their πολιτεία, with its denial of gold and silver to the rulers, at least (*Criti.* 112C), pre-empted such temptations. For humans, like the contemporary Athenians for whom the story was told, the fabulous wealth of Atlantis

(ποικίλα) παιδιᾶς χάριν, ἡδονὴν . . . ἀπονέμοντες (116B; primeval Athens has no such luxuries). The successors of Poseidon's children ἕτερος δὲ παρ' ἑτέρου δεχόμενος, κεκοσμημένα κοσμῶν, ὑπερεβάλλετο εἰς δύναμιν ἀεὶ τὸν ἔμπροσθεν (115C8–D1); cf. the final Atlantian moral decline, πλεονεξίας ἀδίκου καὶ δυνάμεως ἐμπιμπλάμενοι (121B7).

46. It is the underlying presence of the Athenian model which helps to imply the "indictment of navigation" which Momigliano, rightly, does not find explicit in the *Critias*, even though he sees in the story "the victory of the ideal state over sea imperialism" ("Sea-Power," pp. 4–5).

47. *Leg.* 705A, 706A–707D; cf. J. Luccioni, "Platon et la mer," *REA* 61 (1959): 43–46.

48. At *Rep.* 372E–373A cf. ποικιλίαν, καὶ χρυσὸν καὶ ἐλέφαντα with *Criti.* 116C (note also ποικίλα κ.τ.λ., 116B).

49. Athena takes ἐκ Γῆς τε καὶ Ἡφαίστου τὸ σπέρμα of the Athenians (*Ti.* 23E1–2), but this seems only to mean that they are autochthonous (*Criti.* 109D2) and shaped by Hephaestus (cf. *Ti.* 42E–43A), not that they are children of the god. Timaeus says there is a divine element in all humans (41C), but that is a different point.

constituted a false ideal, which—while it should be graphically and uncritically presented to delineate its nature, as Plato habitually builds up philosophical positions he intends to attack—was built up only to be the more ruthlessly torn down.[50]

Just how it was to be torn down, how primeval Athens would demonstrate its superiority in action as well as in nature, is not clear, since at this point Plato breaks off his story. But there are hints that Athens' history could be an influential model here also. It was by the overweening ambition of its Sicilian expedition that, in Thucydides' account, post-Periclean Athens provoked her own eventual downfall.[51] And it can scarcely be an accident that the chief architect of the defeat of that expedition, Hermocrates, is standing listening to the story of the war, ready possibly to complete its narrative.[52] Even the hints of Persia in Atlantis have their relevance for this theme, since it was Hermocrates' complaint that, after the Persian Wars, Athens had become the new Persia, the new tyrant from whom Greece should be liberated.[53] The unwritten sequel might have built on the model of the Peloponnesian Wars (with a Spartanized Athens defeating an Athenian Atlantis) and thus have painfully reversed the impression of a re-enactment of the Persian Wars—a re-enactment of Athens' heroic victory—which the *Timaeus* summary carefully gave.

OTHER ELEMENTS IN THE COMPOSITION OF THE STORY

I think that this view of the genesis of the Atlantis story is far and away the most convincing, explanatory of the significance of the details of the story and consistent with Plato's political position; and that, in essence, the story was intended to be a politico-philosophical myth constructed out of historical ingredients, and specifically designed as a cautionary tale—and possibly a protreptic—for an Athenian audience.[54] But I think it is a view which does not describe all of Plato's motivation, and which does not, by itself, explain why the story is presented as ambiguously as it is or why the

50. This partly explains what Rosenmeyer points out, that the Atlantians are "only in the eleventh hour . . . somewhat unconvincingly, changed [from heroes] into villains to provide a cause for the war" ("The Isle of Critias," p. 303).

51. Thuc. 2. 65, esp. 8–11 (the section leading up to ἐξ ὧν πολλὰ . . . ἡμαρτήθη καὶ ὁ ἐς Σικελίαν πλοῦς) and 6. 24, esp. 3–4; cf. *Criti.* 121B6–7. The Thucydidean word πρόφασις (notably at 1. 23. 6) enters the *Critias* at 120D8, when the cause of the war is given.

52. At *Ti.* 26C3–5, Critias implies that all three interlocutors will share in the telling of the Atlantis story: τοῖσδε . . . ἔλεγον αὐτὰ ταῦτα ἵνα εὐποροῖεν λόγων μετ' ἐμοῦ (cf. 26D5–6). By 27A–B he has found a new job for Timaeus, but none is mentioned for Hermocrates (nor at *Criti.* 108A5 ff.). On Hermocrates' possible role, see Cornford, *Plato's Cosmology*, pp. 6–8; Rivaud, "*Timée*"–"*Critias*," pp. 16–17.

53. Thuc. 6. 76. 4 (cf. 6. 33. 5–6). At *Leg.* 706A4–5, Athens is said to have acquired naval power through μίμησιν . . . τῶν πολεμίων . . . κακήν, i.e., of the Persians, after Marathon but before Salamis (cf. 707B–C). The Persian note in Atlantian architecture (cf. n. 44 and εἶδος . . . βαρβαρικόν, *Criti.* 116D2) may owe something to Pericles' imitation of the Great King's Pavilion in the Odeon (Plut. *Per.* 160).

54. The *Menexenus*, another eulogistic history of Athens (for verbal parallels between *Menex.* and *Criti.*, see Friedländer, *Plato*, 3:384–85), idealizes Athens by misdescribing her history and omitting discreditable actions, while the Atlantis story does so by projecting the undesirable features of Athens onto "Atlantis"; but both can be taken as warning Athens from certain courses and advocating others; cf. C. Kahn, "Plato's Funeral Oration: The Motive of the *Menexenus*," *CP* 58 (1963): 220–34.

story is not carried through to its end. For one thing, the story itself, in particular the description of Atlantis, shows traces of that gratuitous interest in realistic depiction of human life that Critias enunciated at the start of the *Critias*. As we read the account of Atlantis, with its fantastic and uniquely detailed picture of a fictional reality, we can easily believe that Plato is momentarily infatuated with the world he is creating.[55] The political significance of the picture is by no means on the surface; and, while I have suggested reasons why this restraint, in itself, served those political purposes, it is still remarkable—in a Platonic text—just how unsymbolic the picture superficially seems. There is an uncomfortable haste about the way Plato introduces a moral dimension into the story in the final paragraph of the *Critias;* and it is possible that a certain unease about the combination of the imaginative description and the moral political intent was one of the motives that led him to break off at this point. He stops just at the point when the real *mimesis* of τὰ ἀνθρώπινα (the representation of human actions as well as physical and political organization) was about to begin; and the demands of this representation (which Socrates envisages at *Ti.* 19E) may have seemed too difficult—or alternatively too attractive—a project to be kept easily within the bounds of the original philosophical fable.

There is another element in the story which this interpretation does not quite explain (one whose presence may also have played a role in Plato's final abandonment of his project). This is the stress on the factual truth of the story, the presentation of the account as if it really were a historical narrative, the evidence of a genuine interest in historic and prehistoric investigation. It is true that Critias' claim to present a history (and he makes allusions to one history, at least, that of Herodotus) helps to draw attention to the historical implications of the story. It is also possible that Plato intended eventually to make plain that his story was "true" in a sense ironically divergent from Critias': his story would be an invention, but one which would reshape the history of Athens in such a way as to demonstrate the moral truth which underlay it, that justice leads to success and injustice to its opposite.[56] But this does not quite explain Plato's seemingly authentic interest in prehistory (his account of soil erosion in Attica, *Criti.* 110E ff., does not seem to be motivated only by his political theme) and in the development and discontinuity in civilization (*Ti.* 22B–23C, *Criti.* passim). Nor does it explain why he chooses to make his philosophical myth so full of historical implications.

These elements seem to point to the growth of an interest in prehistory and history (and a belief in the relevance of these inquiries to the understanding of the nature of the ἀρίστη πολιτεία) which is not present in the *Republic.* The *Republic*'s search for the just state includes a kind of prehistory of civilization (369A ff.), but it is one which is transparently devoted to demonstrating the theoretical principle that, in the true *polis*, each man

55. The echoes in the story of the demiurge's διακόσμησις (see n. 23) may denote Plato's own sense of creativity.

56. Cf. *Rep.* 392B, 612C, ff.; *Criti.* 112E3, 121B6.

should fulfill an essential function suitable to his nature (370C–D). The survey of degenerate constitutions in Book 8, while presented in apparently temporal sequence (and heralded as a kind of epic-history in a way similar to the *Critias*),[57] is in fact arranged on purely theoretical principles;[58] and it simply uses key examples, like Sparta or Athens, for local color,[59] rather than as a central ingredient in the formation of the "history" (as Spartan and Athenian history is for the Atlantis narrative).[60]

Socrates' opening request for a story in the *Timaeus*, while avowedly taking its start from the *Republic*'s ideal, and implying a desire for the kind of *muthos* cognate to that work, sounds a new note. Socrates wants to see his ideal demonstrate in action the virtue of its distinctive nature, its unique system of education and way of life (*Ti.* 19B–C). Socrates does not say that he wants to test his ideal to see if it works, or even that he wants to confirm by action the conclusions he has reached by theory; but even the wish to see his ideal represented in action at all, and expressing its nature in that way, is the first step in the direction of requiring practical demonstration of its merit. Of course, in the *Republic*, Socrates thinks it would be the best thing for his *polis* to be realized in action; but he makes it clear in two key passages, 472B–473A and 591E–592B, that, if his state is not to be realized in fact, it requires no further demonstration of its merits than his argument has already provided. The ideal that has been sketched, the paradigm laid up in heaven, is adequate as the basis for our own inferences about the good life (472C7–D1) as something we may try to imitate in our personal lives (592B3). *Timaeus* 19B seems virtually an allusion to these passages, but one which introduces a new impulse (ἐπιθυμίαν, 19B7). At *Republic* 472C–D Socrates speaks of the παράδειγμα of the κάλλιστος ἄνθρωπος (or of the ἀγαθὴ πόλις) that an ἀγαθὸς ζωγράφος might create and which one can ἀποβλέπειν (cf. 591E1 ff.). At *Timaeus* 19B he compares himself, contemplating his own description of the ἀρίστη πολιτεία, to one who looks at ζῷα καλά, εἴτε ὑπὸ γραφῆς εἰργασμένα εἴτε καὶ ζῶντα, and who feels the ἐπιθυμίαν θεάσασθαι κινούμενά τε αὐτὰ καί τι τῶν τοῖς σώμασιν δοκούντων προσήκειν κατὰ τὴν ἀγωνίαν ἀθλοῦντα. And his ἐπιθυμία seems to derive from the idea that an intelligible entity, as well as a physical athlete, shows its nature to an observer better in motion and action than when it is pictured at rest.[61] The genre of the story whose opening sections we possess is, in fact, precisely what Socrates asks for: a narration which represents in motion and action the *polis* whose organization has already been described

57. Cf. *Rep.* 545D7–E3, 547A6–B1, with *Criti.* 108C3–4.

58. Cf. Cherniss, *Aristotle's Criticism of Plato and the Academy* (Baltimore, 1944), p. 425, n. 358.

59. E.g., at 547B–548C, or 562C–563D (cf. *Leg.* 701B–C).

60. A point overlooked by Weil, *L'"Archéologie,"* p. 31, who assimilates "l'histoire fictive de l'Atlantide" and "la sociologie arbitraire de la *République*."

61. It is interesting that at *Ti.* 19D7–E2, Socrates, for no obvious reason, adopts a related idea, divergent from the position taken in the *Republic:* namely, that it is easier to imitate a strange or intellectually difficult idea in action than in words (contrast *Rep.* 473A ff.). Even if ἔργοις at 19E1 were taken more narrowly as "works of art" (cf. εἰργασμένα at 19B6), that would conflict with the tribute to the imitative power of λόγος at *Rep.* 588D1–2 (it is εὐπλαστότερον κηροῦ καὶ τῶν τοιούτων, viz., the ἔργα δεινοῦ πλάστου). But, in view of ἔργοις . . . λόγοις at 19C7 and ἔργῳ καὶ λόγῳ at 19E7, ἔργοις . . . λόγοις at 19E1 are probably to be taken as "actions" and "words."

(the description of which corresponds, I take it, in Socrates' simile at 19B, to the picturing of ζῷα καλά in repose).

But Critias claims to provide something more than Socrates asks for: a proof, through concrete events, that the ideal state (*a*) can be realized in action, and (*b*) if realized, is more successful in action than any other. For he claims that the ideal state, in all essentials, has already been realized in fact, in the state of primeval Athens (*Criti.* 110C, 111E, 112B–D; cf *Ti.* 24A–D). It is the closeness of Socrates' ideal to the historical state Critias knows about which justifies his presenting the historical state as the representation of the ideal in action (*Ti.* 25D7–E5, 26C7–D5). And he claims that this realization of the ideal has demonstrated its superiority by its amazing victory over the Atlantians (*Ti.* 24D ff.). Now in fact, as we have seen, Critias' claim goes well beyond what is really the case, and his story is far from being the factually true account it claims to be: Critias' very use of the word "true" to describe such an account is implicitly disputed by Timaeus when he begins to speak (29C). But the notion of verification of an ideal by action (verification that the ideal can be realized, and that, if realized, its superiority can be demonstrated by action) is nonetheless proposed. And it points to an interest in empirical verification of theory which is latent in the story and which is new to Plato's thinking. Also, the fact that the images of the truly and falsely ideal state are, in large measure, composed out of elements modeled on states which have existed (notably Athens and Sparta) points to a stronger interest in correlating ideals with the facts of history.

In the *Laws* the interest in verifying theory by observation of events, and in surveying historical events to formulate descriptive generalizations, is an integral part of the Stranger's procedure. The search for the best state is presented as proceeding through such an inquiry (702B), and the model proposed (or, at least, the "second best" posited as actually attainable in human life [739A ff.]) exhibits the principle of μετριότης isolated by this inquiry,[62] and singled out as instrumental to the success of Sparta (691C–692A), Persia (694A–B), and Athens (698B ff.), at particular moments of their history.[63] *Laws* 3 deals explicitly with many of the events alluded to in the telling of the Atlantis story: the Athenian repulse of the Persians (698B), the moral and political decline of the Persians (694 ff.) and of the Athenians (699E ff., 706A ff.), and the influence of the sea in that decline (707B; cf. 705A ff.). The admired states of the *Laws* are the implicit models of the Atlantis story, Sparta, with its εὐνομία, and Marathonic Athens. The Stranger, openly and with straightforwardly historical data, carries out the project of correlation of theory with practice which is hinted at by Socrates in the *Timaeus*, stated (or overstated)[64] by Critias, and obliquely carried out through the allusions of the story. The Stranger talks about the ἀλήθεια

62. 701E; cf. 756E9 ff., 759B4 ff.; Morrow, *Plato's Cretan City*, pp. 81 ff., 525 ff.

63. The νόμοι of the *Laws* owe much to existing Greek, esp. Athenian, νόμοι, as is often noted; see Morrow, *Plato's Cretan City*, pp. 295–96.

64. His claim that the ideal has already been realized overstates the actual position.

of γιγνόμενα[65] in an unselfconscious way that has none of the striking, but dubious, quality that Critias' assertion of the truth of his facts, in context, possesses. It is a reasonable guess that Plato broke off the *Critias* because he came to realize that he wanted to do what the Stranger does straightforwardly, rather than what Critias does through the oblique medium of his story.[66]

But if that was what Plato wanted, or came to want, to do, why did he not set out to do something more like it in the first place? Why do we have this curious charade of a philosophico-political myth presented as a piece of history? One possible reason is that Plato had not, at this point, as he had when he wrote the *Laws*, formulated any "second best" state which was closer to actually existing states (and which could more easily be imagined coming into existence) than the ἀρίστη πολιτεία of the *Republic* and *Laws*.[67] Yet he felt some impulse (*Ti.* 19B–C) to correlate theory with facts in a way he had not done before. Therefore he tried to create a myth which would be faithful to that ideal but which would connect that ideal with the world of mundane politics. And he did so by creating his own world (with its own time scale, geography, and politics, *Ti.* 22B–25D; *Criti.* passim), and by making that world as complex and realistic as the mundane world (cf. *Criti.* 107). He also did so by linking that world to the familiar one with a network of borrowings and allusions which helped him both to find the material for his world and to indicate his judgments on the closeness of actual states to, or their distance from, his ideal.[68]

In this respect, as in certain others, there is a close parallel between the character of the Atlantis story and the character of Timaeus' creation story, of which Plato's program (*Ti.* 27A) makes Critias' narrative the sequel. Both take as their starting point the political and ontological idealism of the *Republic* (*Ti.* 17C–19A, 27D ff.; cf. 51B ff.). But both take as their subject not those ideals themselves but their relationship to the world of *genesis* (*Ti.* 26A–E, 28B ff.). Both claim to have found, in some entity which has come into being in the past, a fitting image or embodiment of these ideals (i.e., of the ἀρίστη πολιτεία or the νοητὸν ζῷον). Both set out to tell a story (the creation or action of this embodiment) which many of its

65. 682A4 (on the exact meaning of the phrase, see T. J. Saunders, *Notes on the "Laws" of Plato*, BICS, suppl. 28 [London, 1972], p. 13 and refs.); cf. περὶ γεγονός τε καὶ ἔχον ἀλήθειαν (684A1).

66. On *Leg.* 3 as the continuation of the uncompleted *Critias*, see Cornford, *Plato's Cosmology*, pp. 7–8; Rivaud, *"Timée"–"Critias,"* pp. 233–34.

67. Saunders (trans.), *Plato's "Laws"* (Harmondsworth, 1972), p. 28, suggests that "even when Plato wrote the *Republic*, he had some realistic practical programme, which may have been more or less what we find in the *Laws*" and that both works are simply "opposite sides of the same coin." This is an interesting view but, on the face of it, undemonstrable. Certainly the "diminution in rigour" (ibid.) envisaged in putting the ideal state into practice (*Rep.* 472–73) contains no hint of the complex, "second best" program put forward in the *Laws*.

68. This process of reviewing actual states as candidates for models of the ideal might, indeed, have helped him formulate the character of the "second best" state, as it is presented as helping the Stranger do in the *Laws*. The lack of stress, at least, on philosopher-kings (though see n. 6) and the repeated stress on εὐνομία and νόμοι (*Ti.* 23C, 24A, 24D, 27B1–2 [Σόλωνος . . . νόμον]; *Criti.* 119C–120E, 121B7–8 [θεὸς . . . ἐν νόμοις βασιλεύων]) may, *pace* Owen ("The Place of the *Timaeus*," pp. 331–32), point in this direction rather than back to the *Republic*. Cf. G. Vlastos, *Platonic Studies* (Princeton, 1973), p. 213, n. 20. I discuss the relations between the politics of the *Critias* and the *Statesman*, and Owen's views, in an article to appear in *Phronesis* in 1979.

readers have classed as a myth, but which is presented as an account of a past factual event.[69] The attempt—or the idea of the attempt—to describe a past factual event, and to treat such a description as philosophically significant, is new in Plato;[70] as is the comparatively close relation of the two stories, as they proceed, to the world of physical and political fact with which we are familiar. But both attempts take place under the shadow of a philosophical program (basically the program of the *Republic*) which denies full philosophical significance, and indeed, truth, to statements about the phenomenal world.

The tension between Plato's pre-existing position and his new interests is dramatized by him in the opening dialogue between Socrates, who retains the political idealism of the *Republic* (*Ti.* 17C ff.), and Critias, whose words show him to be, in a number of ways, an empiricist. This dialogue, whose position before Timaeus' creation account is so formally awkward,[71] must be meant, in some sense, to introduce that account as well. Plato seems to have believed that this tension could be resolved by the peculiar genre of the creation story Timaeus actually gave; and that it could be similarly resolved in the history of Critias. But Critias' final description of his job as a storyteller discloses, through the very length of the description, the complexity of what he is to attempt: ἐμὲ δὲ μετὰ τοῦτον, ὡς παρὰ μὲν τούτου δεδεγμένον ἀνθρώπους τῷ λόγῳ γεγονότας, παρὰ σοῦ δὲ πεπαιδευμένους διαφερόντως αὐτῶν τινας, κατὰ δὲ τὸν Σόλωνος λόγον τε καὶ νόμον εἰσαγαγόντα αὐτοὺς ὡς εἰς δικαστὰς ἡμᾶς ποιῆσαι πολίτας τῆς πόλεως τῆσδε ὡς ὄντας τοὺς τότε Ἀθηναίους, . . . τὰ λοιπὰ δὲ ὡς περὶ πολιτῶν καὶ Ἀθηναίων ὄντων ἤδη ποιεῖσθαι τοὺς λόγους (*Ti.* 27A–B6). And this sentence, by the excessive accumulation of clauses and phrases before the main infinitive ποιεῖσθαι (governed by ἔδοξεν in 27A2), by the repeated ὡς,[72] and by the use of the same word, λόγος, to

69. The question whether Timaeus' creation story is a myth, which aims to analyze through narrative form the constituent nature of its subject, or an attempted account of an actual event, is one of the oldest exegetical problems in the *Timaeus* (see Arist. *Cael.* 279b32 ff.; Cherniss, *Aristotle's Criticism*, pp. 421 ff.); but it arises in virtually the same form in the Atlantis story, except that Critias' language (20D–26D) is less guarded than Timaeus' (29D).

70. *Menex.* 239 ff. describes a series of past factual events, though how philosophically significant that is is another matter: see L. Méridier (ed. and trans.), *Platon: "Ion"—"Ménexène"—"Euthydème,"* Budé edition, vol. 5.1 (Paris, 1964), pp. 74–76; and Kahn, "Plato's Funeral Oration," pp. 220–34.

71. The introduction of Timaeus' account at *Ti.* 27A must be the most awkward formal transition in all Plato's works: hence Rosenmeyer's speculation about a change of intention, "Plato's Atlantis Myth," pp. 163–72.

72. The story must operate (to paraphrase the sentence) *as* a continuation of Timaeus' creation story—whatever genre that is—and *as* the representation of Socrates' ideal state, and *as* an account of actual Athenians claimed to have lived in the past, and *as* a specifically Athenian, civic tale (ὡς περὶ πολιτῶν καὶ Ἀθηναίων): it is *as* one doing all this that Plato's spokesman must fulfill his role and satisfy his audience's standards of criticism (ὡς εἰς δικαστὰς ἡμᾶς). An association of ideas seems to lead Plato to this final point (Σόλωνος–νόμον–δικαστάς); but it contributes to the continuing theme that each spokesman in the sequence is trying to fulfill a project which has been assigned to him and to which his audience will apply strict, partly preformulated, standards of judgment (*Ti.* 19E8 ff., 27B7–8; *Criti.* 106B8–108D8). In this way, I take it, Plato designates the various projects he assigns to himself and the standards of judgment (different in different cases [*Criti.* 107A7 ff.], but related to a single overall aim) which he mentally applies to the execution of these projects. (Cf. Weil's analysis of this sentence, *L'"Archéologie,"* pp. 30–31, which, however, elicits rather different implications.)

denote different kinds of discourse,[73] discloses to us the strain (which Plato perhaps already feels) involved in combining in one story so many different functions. And finally the strain seems to have proved too much. Perhaps Plato realized that the empirical note, sounded so loudly by Critias, could not in fact be fully expressed in the mythical form he had chosen. Perhaps it was as the prospect of creating a world of imagined political action, as vast as but necessarily more realistic and particularized (*Crit.* 107) than Timaeus' world, rose exhaustingly into view, that Plato, at *Critias* 121C5, threw down the pen.[74]

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73. Contrast the sharp distinctions of the previous page (μύθῳ / τἀληθὲς, 26C8–D1, πλασθέντα μῦθον / ἀληθινὸν λόγον, 26E4–5): it is as though Plato is trying to compress these different genres of discourse he has delineated into one, composite, *logos*.

74. There is no reason to suppose that Plato wrote the remainder of the *Critias* and that we have lost it; see Rivaud, "*Timée*"–"*Critias*," pp. 233–34.