

## Plato and the Reception of the Persian Wars in The Myth of Atlantis

This paper investigates how the myth of Atlantis in Plato's *Timaeus* and *Critias* reflects the reception of the Persian Wars in 5<sup>th</sup> and 4<sup>th</sup> century Athens. The traumatic experiences resulting from the wars shaped the cultural identity of fifth- and fourth-century Athens, which is considered the dividing line between Archaic and Classical Greece. Plato's dialogues often employ myth to illustrate moral and political ideals to his contemporaries in the early 4<sup>th</sup> century. Throughout his dialogues, Plato repeatedly demonstrates a desire to reform the ethical identity of Athens, a reform he believes can be accomplished by replacing earlier myths with myths that would instruct his contemporaries in the psychological principles of his philosophy.

Continuity must be maintained between the Athenian past and the present, particularly between such culturally defining events as the Persian invasions and the Athenian repulsion. Previous researchers have treated the Myth of Atlantis in a variety of ways. Some authors such as Morgan and Marren treat the Atlantean state as an allusion to the Persian War, but in the sense that the Atlantean state is a warning to the Athenians that any empire can fall, including Persia and modern Athens (Morgan 1998; Marren 2019). Others, such as Griffiths, argue that there is no connection between the mythical conflict and the Persian Wars and instead try to demonstrate a link between the myth and the Egyptian repulse of the Sea peoples (Griffiths 1985). I will show that Plato's description of the Atlantean state is part of a continuous line of works tracing their origins back to the Persian Wars. In doing so, Plato invites contemporary Athenians to align themselves with the early Athenian state and thereby prepare themselves for any potential threats. Therefore, in light of the reemergence of the Athenian state as an entity capable of regaining its former power in the Aegean world, such a depiction of an early Athenian state

repulsing an invading *enslaver* would not only remind the Athenian people of the dangers they had faced but also their success in war when their state was properly organized. In order to do this, Plato employs motifs that echo earlier authors in a manner that would be familiar to an Athenian audience. Such echoes align the characteristics of the Atlantean state and the early Athenian states with the various links to Persia and Athens depicted in the tragedies of the fifth century, such as Aeschylus' and Sophocles' works. Yet, in this work, Plato includes allusions to the Iliad, which means he is also aligning this mythical war with the Trojan War. By doing so, he sets the Persian Wars as one part of a trilogy of epic wars in the Athenian past. Plato is no stranger to the defining moments of Athens. He adopts them as lessons on political and individual constitutions, cultural and ethical.

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