

## The Father of History in Plato's *Timaeus*: Herodotus' *Histories* and Critias' Atlantis *Λόγος*

Studies on the Atlantis myth at the beginning of Plato's *Timaeus* often focus on the vexed question of its link to the cosmology of the rest of the poem. With a view to shedding light on this perplexing relationship, in this paper I will consider how Critias presents the Atlantis account as historical narrative in the Herodotean tradition.

At the opening of the *Timaeus*, Critias sets forth the Atlantis story as true history: "Hear then, Socrates, an account that is exceedingly strange, but altogether true" (Ἄκουε δὴ, ὦ Σώκρατες, λόγου μάλα μὲν ἀτόπου, παντάπασι γε μὴν ἀληθοῦς," 20 E 1). This *λόγος*, Critias tells us, was first declared by Solon, the wisest of the Seven. Solon's presence and the promise of a true historical tale already bring us into the realm of the *Histories*. To make the connection explicit, Critias borrows Herodotus' own words in the prologue of the *Histories*: "He told our grandfather Critias, who as an old man in turn related it to us, that the great and wondrous ancient deeds of this city would become obscured by time and the death of men" (πρὸς δὲ Κριτίαν τὸν ἡμέτερον πάππον εἶπεν, ὡς ἀπεμνημόνευεν αὖ πρὸς ἡμᾶς ὁ γέρον, ὅτι μεγάλα καὶ θαυμαστά τῆσδ' εἶη παλαιὰ ἔργα τῆς πόλεως ὑπὸ χρόνου καὶ φθορᾶς ἀνθρώπων ἠφανισμένα, 20 E). Here, Critias reworks the famous prologue to the *Histories*: "What Herodotus the Halicarnassian has learnt by inquiry is here set forth: in order that so the memory of the past may not be blotted out from among men by time, and that great and marvellous deeds done by Greeks and foreigners and especially the reason why they warred against each other may not lack renown" (Ἡροδότου Ἀλικαρνησσεὸς ἱστορίας ἀπόδεξις ἦδε, ὡς μήτε τὰ γενόμενα ἐξ ἀνθρώπων τῷ χρόνῳ ἐξίτηλα γένηται, μήτε ἔργα μεγάλα τε καὶ θαυμαστά, τὰ μὲν Ἕλλησι τὰ δὲ βαρβάροισι ἀποδεχθέντα, ἀκλεᾶ γένηται, τὰ τε ἄλλα καὶ δι' ἣν αἰτίην ἐπολέμησαν ἀλλήλοισι, 1.1). Plato's *μεγάλα καὶ θαυμαστά* reiterates Herodotus' *ἔργα μεγάλα τε καὶ θαυμαστά*; the *ἠφανισμένα*

echoes the ἐξίτηλα; and time is the common destructor in both passages (ὕπὸ χρόνου and τῷ χρόνῳ).

The linguistic overlap between these two prologues invites consideration of the thematic interplay between the Atlantis *logos* and Herodotus' *logoi*. Herodotus, unlike his rival Thucydides, makes almost no mention of written records as sources for his writings (although the prologue to the *Histories* itself is evocative of an inscription on a monument or a Theognis-like seal). Instead, Herodotus prizes autopsy and spoken tales in the construction of his text, ἔργα for subsequent generations to marvel at. In a similar vein, the *Timaeus* relies on spoken words for the preservation of memory. At the opening of the dialogue, the interlocutors swap stories in a χάρις exchange: Socrates reminds Hermocrates, Critias, and Timaeus of their previous day's conversation regarding the ideal city, and in turn out of obligation and gratitude, Critias shares the Atlantis story. In both cases, the trade of words are essential for the preservation of memory and the dissemination of history. This exchange also alludes to Herodotus' historical methodology, which relies upon the exchange of curious stories. Logoi are essential for the preservation of human knowledge and memory, both in the *Histories* and in the *Timaeus*. Without the exchange of story, the memory of marvelous history—whether μῦθος or λόγος—becomes eclipsed by the vicissitudes of time.

### Bibliography

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