

From Atlantis to Athens: Plato's Hesiodic Project in the *Timaeus-Critias*

Plato sets his unfinished triptych dialogues, the *Timaeus-Critias*, at the Panathenaea, a festival during which the Athenians honored their patron goddess with rhapsodic song contests of canonical oral poetry. Gregory Nagy argues that Plato prompts his audience to compare these philosophical works with the Homeric epics performed at the Panathenaea through the dramatic setting and the themes of sacrifice and competition (2016). Plato furthers this intertextual competition by arranging the dialogue as a series of speeches presented as guest gifts to Socrates by his interlocutors: Timaeus, Critias, and Hermocrates. Since, as Egbert Bakker (2018) suggests, rhapsodes would also have also performed Hesiodic poetry at the Panathenaea, I argue that Plato establishes a competition between these dialogues and the poetic corpus attributed to Hesiod. Indeed, the cosmological content of Timaeus' speech challenges the cosmogony of Hesiod's *Theogony* and embedded references to the Hesiodic the ages of man myth (*WD* 106-201) in the dialogues prompt a further examination of Plato's use of Hesiod in the *Timaeus-Critias*. Building on Andrea Capra's reading of the dialogues as a rewriting of Hesiod's poems on an epic scale (2010), I argue that Plato makes a significant shift in genre and setting. He transforms panhellenic oral poetry into Athenian philosophy.

In this paper I first demonstrate that Plato sets the *Timaeus-Critias* in competition with Hesiodic poetry through his reference to the ages of man myth in the architecture of Atlantis (116b) and Critias' explanation of learning this myth through competitive oral performances (21a-b). Secondly, I argue that through the setting at the Panathenaea and the employment of a mythical contest between Athens and Atlantis, Plato shifts from the panhellenic poetry of Hesiod and Homer to a focus on Athens. Indeed, Plato chooses to employ Solon the lawgiver as the primary vessel for passing this myth from Egypt to Athens. Finally, I build upon David Pass'

recent argument that the historical context of democratic reconstruction is integral to understanding Plato's political arguments in the *Timaeus-Critias* and *Republic* (2021) by bringing this approach in conversation with Helen Van Noorden's (2015) analysis of Plato's use of Hesiod in the *Republic* (2015). Van Noorden investigates how Plato appropriates the Hesiodic narrative of races in Socrates' 'noble lie', a character myth for the citizens of Kallipolis (*Rep.* 3.414-15). Bringing these two approaches together, I show that Plato's use of Hesiod contributes to the long studied intertextual relationship between the *Republic* and the *Timaeus-Critias*. Ultimately, I argue that Hesiod's critique of unjust lawgivers in the *Works and Days* (238-273) adds to Plato's critical characterization of the tyrant in the *Timaeus-Critias* and the *Republic*.

Bibliography

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