

CRITIAS

At the beginning of Timaeus, Socrates, Critias, Timaeus, and Hermocrates agree to an exchange of speeches. For the entertainment of the others on the previous day, Socrates had explained the institutions of the Republic's ideal city. But a truly satisfying account of their excellence would require more than that 'theoretical' description: we need to see them fully in effect, functioning in a city's actual life—especially in wartime, the most severe test of a city's mettle. Critias (an Athenian) offers to do this, on the supposition that the Athens of nine thousand years before was governed by the institutions of Socrates' city, as a myth from Egypt that he has heard recited has suggested to him. (This Critias is either Plato's mother's cousin—the Critias of Charmides, Protagoras, and Eryxias—or that cousin's grandfather.) He will tell the tale of ancient Athens' war with the inhabitants of Atlantis, an island then located in the Atlantic Ocean near the entrance to the Mediterranean sea. Under their kings, the technologically advanced Atlantids had conquered Europe as far as Italy, and Africa up to the border of Egypt, and it fell to the freedom-loving, well-governed Athenians to defeat these interlopers and save the Mediterranean peoples from outside domination. At the successful conclusion of the war, Atlantis itself was destroyed in an earthquake and sank into the sea, carrying its inhabitants and all the warriors of Athens—its adult male population—to their deaths.

The Timaeus itself is taken up with Timaeus' preliminary account of the creation of the world, down to that of human beings, whose paragon specimens are the men of Athens at the time of the Atlantic war. Having heard that account, Critias now tells the tale of the conflict between Athens and Atlantis (or rather the introductory part of it—Plato left the dialogue incomplete, without reaching the war). To all appearances, Critias' speech would have completed the agenda agreed to at the outset; however, near the beginning of Critias, Socrates seems confusingly to suggest that the fourth personage of the dialogue, Hermocrates, an historical general and statesman of Syracuse, will have a turn to speak after that, though he does not indicate at all what his subject would be. If that marks an alteration of Plato's plan, he evidently never carried it out.

J.M.C.

106 TIMAEUS: What a pleasure it is, Socrates, to have completed the long march of my argument. I feel the relief of the traveler who can rest after

a long journey. Now I offer my prayer to that god who came to be long ago in reality, but who has just now been created in my words. My prayer is that he grant the preservation of all that has been spoken properly; but that he will impose the proper penalty if we have, despite our best intentions, spoken any discordant note. For the musician who strikes the wrong note the proper penalty is to bring him back into harmony. To assure, then, that in the future we will speak as we should concerning the origin of the gods we pray that he will grant the best and most perfect remedy—understanding. And, now that we have offered our prayer, we will keep our agreement and hand over to Critias the speech that is to follow ours in its proper sequence.

CRITIAS: Very well, Timaeus. I will accept the task, but I will make the same plea as you made at the beginning of your speech, when you asked for our sympathy and understanding on account of the magnitude of the argument you were undertaking. I make this same entreaty now too, but I ask to be granted even greater understanding for what I am going to say. And I must admit that I realize that what I am pleading for is self-indulgent and a less polite request than it should be. But I must make it nonetheless. Now, who in his senses would undertake to maintain that your speech was not an excellent speech? As for the speech you are about to hear, I must somehow bring home to you the fact that it requires greater indulgence, given the difficulty of my subject. It is easier, Timaeus, for someone to give the impression that he is a successful speaker when he speaks of gods to an audience of mortals. The audience's lack of experience and sheer ignorance concerning a subject they can never know for certain provide the would-be speaker with great eloquence. We know how we stand when it comes to our knowledge of the gods. To make my meaning plainer, let me ask you to follow me in this illustration.

It is inevitable, I suppose, that everything we have all said is a kind of representation and attempted likeness. Let us consider the graphic art of the painter that has as its object the bodies of both gods and men and the relative ease and difficulty involved in the painter's convincing his viewers that he has adequately represented the objects of his art. We will observe first that we are satisfied if an artist is able to represent—even to some small extent—the earth and mountains and rivers and forests and all of heaven and the bodies that exist and move within it, and render their likeness; and next that, since we have no precise knowledge of such things, we do not examine these paintings too closely or find fault with them, but we are content to accept an art of suggestion and illusion for such things, as vague and deceptive as this art is. But, when a painter attempts to create a likeness of our bodies, we are quick to spot any defect, and, because of our familiarity and life-long knowledge, we prove harsh critics of the painter who does not fully reproduce every detail. We must view the case of speeches as precisely the same. We embrace what is said about the heavens and things divine with enthusiasm, even when what is said is quite implausible; but we are nice critics of what is said of mortals and human beings.

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e Now, with these reflections in mind, which I have offered for the present
 occasion, if we are unable to speak fully and fittingly in representing our
 theme, we deserve your sympathy. You must realize that human life is
 no easy subject for representation, but is rather one of great difficulty, if
 108 we are to satisfy people's opinions. I wanted to remind you of this, Socrates,
 to make my plea not for less but for greater sympathy and understanding
 as you listen to what I am about to say. If you find that I made a just
 claim on this favor, grant it with good will.

SOCRATES: Why, Critias, would we hesitate to grant it? Let this favor of
 ours be granted to Hermocrates as well who will follow you as the third
 to speak. It is clear that a little later, when it comes his turn to speak he
 b will make the same entreaty as have you and Timaeus. So to make it
 possible for him to invent another preamble and not compel him to repeat
 what Timaeus and Critias have said, let him speak when his turn comes,
 knowing that he has our sympathy. But now, my dear Critias, I must
 caution you about the attitude of your audience in this theater: the first
 of the poets to compete in it put on such a glorious performance that you
 will need a great measure of sympathy if you are going to be able to
 compete after him.

HERMOCRATES: The injunction you made to Critias here applies to me,
 c Socrates, as well. But, even so, Critias, the faint hearted have never yet set
 up a victory monument. You must march bravely forward to encounter
 your speech, and, as you invoke Paeon¹ and the Muses, display in your
 hymn of praise the bravery of your ancient citizens.

CRITIAS: Dear Hermocrates, you stand last in rank, but, since there is
 someone standing in front of you, you are still confident. That courage is
 needed, you will discover yourself, when you take my place. But I must
 d pay attention to your exhortation and encouragement, and, in addition to
 the gods you just named, invoke the other gods and make a special prayer
 to Mnemosyne.² The success or failure of just about everything that is most
 important in our speech lies in the lap of this goddess. For, if we can
 sufficiently recall and relate what was said long ago by the priests and
 brought here to Athens by Solon, you the audience in our theater will
 find, I am confident, that we have put on a worthy performance and
 acquitted ourselves of our task. So much said. Now we must act. Let us
 delay no more.

e We should recall at the very beginning that, in very rough terms, it was
 some nine thousand years since the time when a war is recorded as having
 broken out between the peoples dwelling outside the pillars of Heracles³
 and all those dwelling within. This war I must now describe. Now they

1. Apollo, the Healer.

2. The mother of the nine Muses and the goddess of memory.

3. The Straits of Gibraltar.

said that this city of Athens was the ruler of the [Mediterranean] peoples and fought for the duration of the entire war. They said, too, that the kings of the island of Atlantis were the rulers of the other peoples. This island, as we were saying,⁴ was at one time greater than both Libya and Asia combined.⁵ But now because of earthquakes it has subsided into the great Ocean and has produced a vast sea of mud that blocks the passage of mariners who would sail into the great Ocean from Greek waters and for this reason it is no longer navigable. 109

In its progress, our tale will describe, as if it were unrolled, the many barbarian nations and all the different Greek peoples of that time, encountering them as they emerge from place to place. It is first necessary at the beginning of this tale to describe the condition of the Athenians of that age and the adversaries with whom they waged war: their respective power and their respective constitutions. But of these themes, pride and place must go to the condition of Athens before this war.

At one time, the gods received their due portions over the entire earth region by region—and without strife. To claim that gods did not recognize what was proper to each would not be fitting, nor would it be right to say that, although they recognized what belonged by just title to others, some would attempt to take possession of this for themselves—in open strife. But, as they received what was naturally theirs in the allotment of justice, they began to settle their lands. Once they had settled them, they began to raise us as their own chattel and livestock, as do shepherds their sheep. But they did not compel us by exerting bodily force on our bodies, as do shepherds who drive their flocks to pasture by blows, but rather, by what makes a creature turn course most easily; as they pursued their own plans, they directed us from the stern, as if they were applying to the soul the rudder of Persuasion. And in this manner they directed everything mortal as do helmsmen their ships. b c

Now, as the gods received their various regions lot by lot, they began to improve their possessions. But, in the case of Hephaestus and Athena, since they possessed a common nature, both because she was his sister of the same father and because they had entered the same pursuits in their love of wisdom and the arts, they both received this land as their portion in a single lot, because it was congenial to their character and was naturally suited to them in its excellence and intelligence. And they fashioned in it good men sprung from the land itself and gave them a conception of how to govern their society. The names of these first inhabitants have been preserved, but their deeds have perished on account of the catastrophes that befell those who succeeded them and the long passage of time intervening. d

4. See *Timaeus* 24e–25d.

5. For Critias' contemporaries Asia was defined by the Nile and the Hellespont, and Libya enclosed the entire coast of Saharan Africa west of the Nile. Thus, with Europe, these were the other two parts of the known world.

Those of their race who survived these successive destructions were, as I said before,⁶ left as an illiterate mountain people who had only heard the tradition of the names of the rulers of their country and beyond these only little of their deeds. Now, they were pleased to give their descendants the names of these rulers, even though they were unaware of their ancestors' virtues and institutions—except for some dim legends concerning each of them. Then, for many generations, these survivors and their children lived in distress for their survival and gave thought to their needs; they spoke only of supplying these needs, and had no interest in the events of the distant past. For it is in the train of Leisure that Mythology and Inquiry into the Past arrive in cities, once they have observed that in the case of some peoples the necessities of life have been secured, but not before.

This is why the names of the ancients have been preserved but not their deeds. I make this claim and cite as my evidence the statement of Solon, who said that, in their account of the war of that time, the Egyptian priests gave for the most part names such as Cecrops and Erechtheus, and Erichthonius, and Erysichthon,⁷ and the names of most of the others which have come down in tradition before the generation of Theseus. And the same is true of the names of the women. Consider too the attributes of the goddess Athena and her statue. At that time the military training of women and men was common. For this reason the people of that time fashioned the statue of the goddess as armed to reflect that ancient custom—an indication that all the female and male creatures that live together in a flock can very well pursue in common, as much as is possible, the special talents that are suited to each species.

Now, at that time, the other classes of citizens who dwelt in our city were engaged in manufacture and producing food from the earth, but the warrior class that had originally been separated from them by god-like men lived apart. They had all that was appropriate to their training and education. None of them had any private possession, but they thought of all their possessions as the common property of all, and they asked to receive nothing from the other citizens beyond what they needed to live. Their activities were all of the activities that were spoken of yesterday, when the guardians proposed by our theory were discussed.

The report of the Egyptian priests concerning our territory was plausible and true. First of all, at that time its boundaries extended to the Isthmus of Corinth, and, on the mainland to the north, they extended to the summits of Cithaeron and Parnes. And, descending to the east, the boundaries extended down to the region of Oropus to the north and they were defined by the Asopus river down to the sea. In its great fertility our land far surpassed every other, for it was then capable of supporting a great army of men who did not work the land. There is impressive evidence for this

6. *Timaeus* 22d ff.

7. Mythical figures in the early history of Athens and Attica, the first three as kings.

excellence. What has now survived of this land can rival any other land in the variety and quality of its crops and the pasture it offers all species of animals. But, at that time, our land produced all this not only of high quality but in great abundance. You might ask how this is credible and how our present land could possibly be called a vestige of our earlier land. 111

From the interior this entire land extends a great distance into the sea, as if it jutted out as a promontory. It so happens that the entire basin of the sea that surrounds falls off precipitously. Many and great were the floods that occurred in the space of nine thousand years—for this is the number of years between that time and the present—and during this succession of natural disasters the soil was washed down from the high places. It did not form any considerable alluvial deposits, as in other regions, but it disappeared into the deep, as in flood after flood it was continuously washed into the sea from all sides. What actually remains is like our small and barren islands, and, compared to the land it once was, Attica of today is like the skeleton revealed by a wasting disease, once all the rich topsoil has been eroded and only the thin body of the land remains. But in that age our land was undiminished and had high hills with soil upon them; what we now call the Rocky Barrens were covered with deep rich soil. And in the mountains there were dense forests of which there still survives clear evidence. Some of our mountains can now grow just barely enough for bees, but it was not so long ago that [lofty trees grew there].⁸ There can still be found intact rafters cut from trees that were felled and brought down to be used for the greatest building projects. And there were many trees that were cultivated for their fruit and they provided limitless fodder for flocks of sheep and goats. b c

Every year there was a harvest of Zeus-sent rain. It was not lost, as it is now, as it flows off the hard surface of the ground into the sea, but the deep soil absorbed the rain and it stored it away as it created a reservoir with a covering of clay soil above it; and, as it distributed the water it had absorbed from the high places into its hollows, it produced an abundant flow of water to feed springs and rivers throughout every region of the country. There are even today some sacred monuments at these ancient springs that are evidence of the truth of what we are now saying about our country. d

This was the nature of the countryside. The land was cultivated with great skill, as we can reasonably conjecture, by farmers who were farmers in the true sense of the word and who devoted themselves to this single occupation—but farmers who had an eye for beauty and were of a truly noble nature, and who in addition possessed a most fertile land and water in abundance, and above this land a climate and seasons that were most temperate. e

As for the city itself, it was laid out at that time in a plan that I will now describe. First of all, the acropolis was very different then than it is

8. There is a lacuna of a few words here in the mss.

- 112 now. A single night of torrential rain stripped the acropolis of its soil and reduced it to bare limestone in a storm that was accompanied by earthquakes. Before the destructive flood of Deucalion, this was the third such cataclysmic storm. In the past, the acropolis extended to the Eridanus and Ilisus and held within its circuit the Pnyx and Mt. Lycabettus that faces the Pnyx. It was entirely covered by soil and, except for some small
- b outcroppings, level on top. Outside the acropolis and under its slopes there lived the class of artisans and those of the farmers who worked the neighboring land. But on the heights the class of warriors lived in isolation, as if they belonged to a single household, around the sanctuary of Athena and Hephaestus, which they had enclosed by a single garden wall. On the far northern edge of the acropolis they inhabited common dwellings and ate together in common messes in buildings they had constructed for their winter quarters. And they had a supply of all that was needed for their
- c communal institutions—both in buildings for themselves and for the priests. They made no use of gold or silver—possessions they never had any need of. But, in pursuing a mean between ostentation and servility, they built for themselves tasteful houses and they grew old in them in the company of their grandchildren; and for generation after generation they passed these dwellings down to descendants who were like themselves. As for the south of the acropolis, when they left their orchards, gymnasia, and common messes, as they would for the summer season, they converted it to these uses.
- d There was a single spring in the location of the present acropolis, but it has been choked by the debris of the earthquakes [of that night], and its waters now flow only in a trickle about the circuit wall. But it provided the men of that age with an abundant supply of water, since it was situated in a location that made it neither too cold in the winter nor too hot in the summer.

This was the manner of their life: they were the guardians of their own citizens and the leaders of the rest of the Greek world, which followed them willingly. And they kept their population stable as far as they could—both of men and women—for generation after generation, maintaining the population of those who had reached military age or were still of military age at close to twenty thousand at most.

- e Such, to conclude, was the character of this people and such was their life generation after generation as they directed the life of their city and of Greece with justice. Their fame for the beauty of their bodies and for the variety and range of their mental and spiritual qualities spread through all of Asia and all of Europe. And the consideration in which they were held and their renown was the greatest of all the nations of that age.

- As for the state of those who went to war against them and the origins of that state, we will now openly reveal its history to you our friends, as the common property of friends, if we have not lost the memory of what
- 113 we heard when we were still boys. I must explain one small point before I enter into my history so that you will not be astonished as you hear

Greek names frequently used for people who are not Greek. You will now learn the origins of these names. Solon, when he was contemplating his own poetic version of this legend and was inquiring into the meaning of these names, discovered that his Egyptian sources had been the first to record them, once they had translated their meaning into their own language. He, in his turn, recovered the meaning of each of these names and recorded it as he translated them into Greek. These very manuscripts were in the possession of my grandfather and they now remain in my possession. When I was a boy, I studied them carefully. Consequently, do not be astonished if you hear names that sound like Greek names; you now know their explanation.

What follows, approximately, was the introduction to the long account I heard then. As I said before concerning the distribution of lands among the gods, in some regions they divided the entire earth into greater apportionments and in others into lesser apportionments, as they established sanctuaries and sacrifices for themselves. So it was that Posidon received as one of his domains the island of Atlantis and he established dwelling places for the children he had fathered of a mortal woman in a certain place on the island that I shall describe.

Now seaward, but running along the middle of the entire island, was a plain which is said to have been the loveliest of all plains and quite fertile. Near this plain in the middle of the island and at about fifty stades⁹ distance was a uniformly low and flat hill. Now, there lived on this hill one of the people of this island who had originally sprung up from the earth. His name was Evenor and he dwelt there with his wife Leucippe. They had an only child, a daughter by the name of Clito. When this girl grew to marriageable age, both her mother and father died. It was then that Posidon conceived a desire for her and slept with her. To make the hill on which she lived a strong enclosure he broke it to form a circle and he created alternating rings of sea and land around it. Some he made wider and some he made more narrow. He made two rings of land and three of sea as round as if he had laid them out with compass and lathe.

They were perfectly equidistant from one another. And so the hill became inaccessible to humans. For at that time ships and the art of navigation had not yet come into existence.

And the god himself greatly beautified the island he had created in the middle to make it a dwelling suitable for a god. Because he was a god, he did this with little effort. He drew up two subterranean streams into springs. One gushed out in a warm fountain and the other in a cold fountain. And from the earth he produced all varieties of crops that were sufficient to his island. He sired five pairs of twin sons and he raised them to manhood. He divided the entire island of Atlantis into ten districts: to the first born of the first set of twins he gave as his portion the dwelling

9. There are three units of measure in Critias' description of the island: the foot, the *plethron* (100 feet), and the stade (600 feet).

114 of his mother and the circular island, since it was the largest and the best. And he made him king over the others. The other sons he made governors and to each of these he gave the rule over many men and a great extent of land.

And he gave each of his sons names. To the son who was oldest and king he gave the name from which the entire island and its surrounding sea derive their names, because he was the first of the kings of that time. His name was Atlas; the island is called Atlantis and the sea Atlantic after him. To the twin born after him, who had received as his portion the cape of the island facing the pillars of Heracles opposite what is now called the territory of Gadir after this region, he gave the name that translates into Greek as Eumelos, but in the language of Atlantis, it is Gadirus. It would seem that he gave his name to the region of Cadiz. The two brothers of the second set of twins he called Ampheres and the Euaemon. To the third set he gave the name Mneseas to the first-born and Autochthon to the second-born. Of the fourth set Elasippus was the first-born, Mestor the second. For the fifth set he gave the name Azaes to the first-born and the name Diaprepes to the second. Now all of these sons inhabited the island, as did their sons and descendants over many generations. They were the rulers of many other islands in the Atlantic and, as I have said,¹⁰ they even extended their rule into the Mediterranean as near to us as Etruria and Egypt.

d The race of Atlas increased greatly and became greatly honored. And they maintained their kingdom through many generations, as the oldest king would hand his kingship on to his oldest son. They amassed more wealth than had ever been amassed before in the rule of any previous kings or could easily be amassed after them. And they provided for everything that was needed, both in the city and in the rest of the island. For their empire brought them many imports from outside, and the island itself provided most of what was needed for their livelihood. First, there were the mines that produced both hard and fusible ore. And in many regions of the island they exploited that metal which is now only a name to us, but which was then more than a name—*oreichalkos*.¹¹ In that age it was valued only less than gold. And the island provided all trees to be hewn and worked by builders and this in great abundance. It also produced abundant animal life, both domestic and wild. In addition to these there was a great population of elephants. There was pasture land for the other animals who graze in marshlands and along lakes and rivers and on mountainsides and plains, and there was plenty for them and for this the greatest of animals, which consumes the most fodder.

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The island produced in addition all the aromatic plants the earth produces now—sweet smelling roots and greens, herbs, trees, and gums from

10. *Timaeus* 25a–b.

11. “Mountain copper” or yellow copper ore.

flowers and fruits as well, and they flourished there. The island also produced the domesticated crop of grains on which we live and all the other crops on which we depend for our food. It also produced the kinds of crops we call “pulse” and the trees that give us our drink, food, and oils— and the crop that sprung up for the sake of our entertainment and pleasure, is hard to preserve, and comes from tree tops; it produced the side dishes we offer the weary guest as a relief after he has eaten his fill and that refresh him after dinner. All of these did that sacred island once bear in that age under a fostering sun—products lovely, marvelous, and of abundant bounty. And they took all these products from the earth and from their proceeds they constructed their sanctuaries and their palaces, their harbors and their ship-sheds, and they improved the rest of their land according to the plan I will now describe.

First, they constructed bridges joining the rings of sea, which surrounded the ancient metropolis, making a road out from the palace and in to the palace. Their first project was to build a palace in the dwelling of the god and of their ancestors. One king inherited the project from his predecessor, and, as he improved on the beauty of what had already been improved, he would surpass to the extent of his resources what his predecessor had been able to achieve. They continued this progress until they had created for themselves a dwelling astonishing in its size and in its manifold beauty. And starting at the sea they excavated a canal three plethra in width, one hundred feet in depth, and fifty stades in length up to the outermost sea ring. They then made passage from the sea into the interior possible by opening a channel into the sea ring that was wide enough for the largest ships to sail into it as if it were a harbor. And, as for the land rings that separated the rings of sea, they pierced them at the point of the bridges, and thus joined them by water. The resulting canal was wide enough for a single trireme to sail through as it passed into a ring of water. They constructed a roof over the channel to protect the passage of ships, for the walls of the canal through the land rings were high enough from the sea to the bridge above to allow ships to pass under. The largest of the water rings into which the passage from the sea had been excavated was three stades in width and the next land ring was equal to it. Of the next rings of water and land, the ring of water was two stades wide and, as in the first case, the land ring was equal to it as well. And, finally, the ring of water running around the island in the middle was a stade wide.

The island where the palace was located had a diameter of five stades. They threw up an unbroken stone circuit wall around this island, and they also walled the land rings, and the bridge, which was a plethron wide. They built towers and gates at the point where the bridges crossed over the rings of water. They quarried stone from under the circular island that formed the center ring and from the inner and outer land rings as well. There were three colors of stone: white, black, and red. As they quarried this stone, they fashioned ship sheds for two ships in the rock roofed by the stone of the quarry itself.

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b Some of their buildings they constructed of stones of uniform color. But to delight themselves they made of others a tapestry of stones of different colors, variegating the colors to bring out their natural charm. And they invested the entire circuit wall of the outermost land ring with bronze, as if the bronze revetment were a bright dye. The interior of the land wall they invested with tin. And the wall surrounding the acropolis itself they
c invested with *oreichalkos*, which glittered like darting fire.

I will now describe the palace buildings erected within the acropolis. At its center was the shrine of Clito and Posidon. It was kept consecrated and no one was permitted to enter it. It was surrounded by a wall of gold. It was here that Posidon and Clito first begot and produced the race of the ten kings. It was to this shrine that each of the ten divisions came to offer their first fruits to each of these original kings in a yearly festival. The temple of Posidon was in this area. It was one stade long, three plethra
d wide, and of a height that appeared to be proportional to its length and width, but it had something barbaric about its appearance. They invested the entire exterior of the temple with silver, except for the acroteria, which they gilded with gold. The interior presented a roof of solid ivory inlaid with gold, silver, and *oreichalkos*; and they plated all the other areas of the temple with this same metal—the cella walls, the interior columns, and the floors. They placed gold statues within the temple. There was a statue
e of Posidon standing in a chariot with a team of six winged horses. This statue was so tall that his head touched the rafter of the temple roof; there were a hundred Nereids riding dolphins and arranged in a circle about him, for men of that age thought that the Nereids were a hundred in number; and there were many other statues inside which were the offerings of private individuals.

Outside and surrounding the temple there stood gold statues of all the descendants of the ten kings and their wives and many other dedications of great size made by the kings and private individuals who came from
117 was an altar on the same scale as the temple and its workmanship was equally lavish. The palace was magnificent in its monumental architecture and it was worthy of the greatness of their empire and the adornment of the temple and shrines.

They drew their water from two springs—a spring of cold water and a spring of hot water. Both had an abundant flow and in the amazing natural freshness and quality of its waters each had its own use. They built fountain houses around them and plantations of trees suitable to the temperature
b of the waters. And they also built reservoirs around the springs. Some they left open, but to the north they covered the reservoirs to convert them to warm baths. The reservoirs of the kings were separate from those of the rest of the population. Some reservoirs were reserved for the use of women, others for watering horses and other draft animals, and each they fashioned appropriately to its use. The overflow they channeled into the grove of Posidon, where, thanks to the fertility of the soil, there grew all

varieties of trees of extraordinary beauty and height. They also irrigated the outer land rings by means of canals that crossed over along the bridges joining them.

Here there were constructed numerous shrines to numerous gods and the land was laid out for many orchards and gymnasia. There were gymnasia for men on each of the two ring islands and tracks for horses were set apart as well. And, remarkably, through the middle of the greatest of the islands they laid out a separate race course for horses, one stade wide, and it extended in a circle around the entire island. Located on each side of the central race course were quarters for the palace guard. c

The garrison of the most reliable soldiers was established on the smaller of the ring islands, the island situated nearest to the acropolis. And quarters were built on the acropolis for the most reliable soldiers of all, surrounding the palaces of the kings themselves. The ship-sheds were filled with triremes and all the fittings needed for triremes, and all were in good working order. Such, then, were the buildings they constructed around the [dwellings of the] kings themselves. d

Now, once you had crossed over the three rings of water, you would come to a circuit wall that began at the sea and surrounded the greatest of the land rings on all sides at a uniform distance of fifty stades from the greatest land ring and its harbor. It began at the point where the channel had been dug through to the sea. The entire area within was settled by a dense population whose houses were crowded close together. The waterway into the interior and the greatest harbor was teeming with ships and crowds of merchants who had arrived from all over the world and whose voices and bustle produced a commotion and hubbub that could be heard day and night. e

I have recalled this description of the capital and the ancient dwelling of the kings pretty much as it was told [to Solon] at that time. But now I must attempt to recall the nature of the rest of the country and the manner in which it was improved. To begin with, the priests said that the entire country was very high and that it rose sheer from the sea. The entire plain that surrounded the capital was itself surrounded by a ring of mountains that sloped down as far as the sea. The plain was smooth and level and entirely rectangular. On its long sides it extended for three thousand stades and, as measured from the sea, it was over two thousand stades across. The slope of the island was to the south and it was protected from the northerly winds. The mountains surrounding the plain were legendary for their number and size and beauty. None of the mountain ranges that exist today can compare with them. They contained on their slopes and in their valleys many populous and wealthy villages. And they contained rivers and lakes and meadows that supplied enough to feed all the animals there, both domesticated and wild. In their abundance and variety, the shrubs and trees were plentiful for all kinds of constructions and uses. b

I will now relate how this plain had been developed by nature, and by many kings and over a long period of time. For the most part, the plain c

was naturally rectangular, regular, and oblong. Where it was not perfectly straight and even they evened it out by excavating a Great Canal around it. As described, its depth and width and length provoke disbelief, since it was the work of human hands and so vast when compared to the other building projects. Nevertheless, I must repeat precisely what we heard then. The Great Canal was excavated to the depth of a plethron, it measured
 d a stade wide along its entire length, and as it framed the entire plain it came to a total length of ten thousand stades. As it received the flow of water that came off the mountains, and as this water circulated and reached the city on two sides, the trench allowed the water to flow out to the sea. Towards the interior, canals were cut in straight lines from the city over the plain a hundred feet broad at most and these emptied their waters into the Great Canal facing the sea. These were spaced at an interval of a hundred stades. They also cut horizontal connecting channels linking one
 e canal with another and with the city, and it is by these canals that they transported timber and the other products of the land on barges from the mountains to the city.

They harvested their crops twice a year. In the winter season they relied on the water of Zeus-sent rains, and in the summer season they used the waters stored in the earth drawing it into their canal system to irrigate the crops.

Now, as for the numbers of the men of the plain who were fit to serve in the army: each military district was assigned to contribute one commander. The area of each district was as much as a hundred stades. The
 119 total of these districts came to sixty thousand. And as far as the population of the mountainous regions and the rest of the country goes, it was said to be too large to calculate. But, counted by regions and villages, all men fit for military service were assigned to one of the sixty thousand military districts and they served under the commander of each district. In times of war each commander was assigned to have in readiness a sixth part of the complement of a war chariot as a contribution to a force of ten thousand
 b chariots; and in addition, two horses and two riders, a pair of horses without a chariot, with its complement of two riders, a runner, a rider who could fight on foot armed with a small shield, and serving as a charioteer a rider who could mount either horse, two hoplites, two archers, and two sling men; three light armed soldiers with stones and three with javelins. He also had to contribute four sailors to the crews manning twelve thousand ships. These were the principles for raising an army in the royal city. The formulas varied in the nine other cities, and it would take a long time to describe them.

c The original ordering of powers and honors in Atlantis was as follows. Within his own patrimony and in his own city, each of the ten kings held power over the inhabitants and over most of the laws, and he could punish or put to death whomever he wished. But, as for their common empire and federation, the kings were regulated by the laws of Posidon as these had been passed down by tradition and according to an inscription which

the first kings had cut on a stele of *oreichalkos*. This inscription was placed in the middle of the island in the sanctuary of Posidon. Here in every fifth or sixth year, and in alternating sequence, it was their custom to gather. To both the even and to the odd they accorded an equal share. Once they had assembled, they deliberated on matters of common concern and held an assize to determine if anyone of them had broken the law, and they gave judgment. Whenever they were about to declare judgment, they first offered one another pledges in this manner: as all ten kings were alone in the sanctuary of Posidon, where bulls had been allowed to run free, they joined in prayer to ask the god to be allowed to capture the bull which would be the most acceptable offering to him. They pursued the bulls with staffs and nooses—but with no iron weapon, and they led the bull they had captured to the stele.¹² There they slaughtered it on the crest of the stele and let its blood spill down over the inscription. In addition to the laws written on the stele there was an oath inscribed calling terrible curses down upon those who broke them. And, when they had then sacrificed the bull following this ritual, they would burn all the limbs of the bull and, mixing his blood in a mixing-bowl, they would pour a clot of his blood over the head of each of them, and, once they had scrubbed the stele clean, they would bring the remaining blood over to the fire.

After this, they would draw the blood from the mixing-bowl into gold pouring vessels. Pouring the blood over the fire they would take an oath to render justice according to the laws inscribed on the stele and to punish anyone who had violated these laws since last they met. They swore that in the future they would not willingly violate any of the provisions of the inscription and that they would neither rule nor obey a ruler if either they or he did not issue commands that were in conformity with the laws of their father. When each of the kings had made this oath and engaged both himself and his descendants, they drank and dedicated their pouring-vessels in the sanctuary of the god. And, once they had finished with their dinner and everything else they had to do and night had fallen and the fire about the sacrificial offerings had subsided, they all put on a deep blue robe of the most splendid appearance and, sitting on the ground next to the embers of the sacrificial victim, at night, they put out the fire still flickering in the sanctuary and judged anyone accused of violating any of their laws and were judged themselves. Once they had passed judgment, when day dawned, they recorded their judgments on a gold tablet which they dedicated as a memorial offering along with their robes.

There were many other particular laws concerning the prerogatives of each of the kings, but the most important of these were those forbidding them to bear arms against one another and commanding them to help one another should anyone in any of their cities make an attempt to overturn the divine family; that they should deliberate together, as had their

12. A block or slab, of the sort to be inscribed with a record of victories, dedications, treaties, decrees, etc.

d ancestors before them, over their decisions concerning war and their other actions, but that they should cede leadership to the royal family of Atlantis; and, finally, that the king should have power to put none of his kinsmen to death, if he could not obtain the approval of the majority of the ten kings.

Now, this was the power, so great and so extraordinary, that existed in that distant region at that time. This was the power the god mustered and brought against these [Mediterranean] lands. It was said that his pretense
 e was something like what I shall describe. For many generations and as long as enough of their divine nature survived, they were obedient unto their laws and they were well disposed to the divinity they were kin to. They possessed conceptions that were true and entirely lofty. And in their attitude to the disasters and chance events that constantly befall men and in their relations with one another they exhibited a combination of mildness and prudence, because, except for virtue, they held all else in disdain and thought of their present good fortune of no consequence. They bore their
 121 vast wealth of gold and other possessions without difficulty, treating them as if they were a burden. They did not become intoxicated with the luxury of the life their wealth made possible; they did not lose their self-control and slip into decline, but in their sober judgment they could see distinctly that even their very wealth increased with their amity and its companion, virtue. But they saw that both wealth and concord decline as possessions become pursued and honored. And virtue perishes with them as well.

Now, because these were their thoughts and because of the divine nature that survived in them, they prospered greatly as we have already related. But when the divine portion in them began to grow faint as it was often
 b blended with great quantities of mortality and as their human nature gradually gained ascendancy, at that moment, in their inability to bear their great good fortune, they became disordered. To whoever had eyes to see they appeared hideous, since they were losing the finest of what were once their most treasured possessions. But to those who were blind to the true way of life oriented to happiness it was at this time that they gave the semblance of being supremely beautiful and blessed. Yet inwardly they were filled with an unjust lust for possessions and power. But as Zeus, god of the gods, reigning as king according to law, could clearly see this state of affairs, he observed this noble race lying in this
 c abject state and resolved to punish them and to make them more careful and harmonious as a result of their chastisement. To this end he called all the gods to their most honored abode, which stands at the middle of the universe and looks down upon all that has a share in generation. And when he had gathered them together, he said . . .