BOOKSTACKS CLASSICS

Critias

Plato (c. 428-348 BCE)

English EDITION

BOOKSTACKS EDITION

Publication record

Title	Critias
Author	Plato (c. 428-348 BCE)
Translator	Robert Gregg Bury
Edition	Bookstacks TEI edition, based on the source electronic edition
Source	Plato in Twelve Volumes. Harvard University Press. 1929
Published	21 August 2026
Edition ID	plato_critias
Canonical URI	bookstacks.org

Rights and availability

The underlying ancient work is in the public domain. Rights in this translation and source encoding are described below. This derived TEI file is made available under the Creative Commons Attribution-ShareAlike 4.0 International License; source rights remain as recorded in sourceDesc. View the canonical license terms.

No ISBN has been assigned. The stable Bookstacks edition identifier and canonical URI above serve as the publication record for this digital edition. Bookstacks asserts no additional restriction over this generated PDF beyond the canonical source terms.

Contents

Critias 1

Critias

Tim.

How gladly do I now welcome my release, Socrates, from my protracted discourse, even as a traveller who takes his rest after a long journey! And I make my prayer to that God who has recently been created by our speech [1] (although in reality created of old), that he will grant to us the conservation of all our sayings that have been rightly said, and, if unwittingly we have spoken aught discordantly, that he will impose the fitting penalty. And the correct penalty is to bring into tune him that is out of tune. In order, then, that for the future we may declare the story of the birth of the gods aright, we pray that he will grant to us that medicine which of all medicines is the most perfect and most good, even knowledge; and having made our prayer, we deliver over to Critias, in accordance with our compact, [2] the task of speaking next in order.

Crit.

And I accept the task, Timaeus; but the request which you yourself made at the beginning, when you asked for indulgence on the ground of the magnitude of the theme you were about to expound, that same request I also make now on my own behalf, and I claim indeed to be granted a still larger measure of indulgence in respect of the discourse I am about to deliver.

Crit.

I am sufficiently aware that the request I am about to make is decidedly presumptuous and less civil than is proper, but none the less it must

[1] i.e. in the Universe, cf. *Tim.*. 92 c, 27 c.

[2] See *Tim.* 27 A, B.

be uttered. For as regards the exposition you gave, what man in his senses would attempt to deny its excellence? But what I must somehow endeavor to show is that the discourse now to be delivered calls for greater indulgence because of its greater difficulty. For it is easier, Timaeus, to appear to speak satisfactorily to men about the gods, than to us about mortals. For when the listeners are in a state of inexperience and complete ignorance about a matter, such a state of mind affords great opportunities to the person who is going to discourse on that matter; and we know what our state is concerning knowledge of the gods. [3] But in order that I may explain my meaning more clearly, pray follow me further. The accounts given by us all must be, of course, of the nature of imitations and representations; and if we look at the portraiture of divine and of human bodies as executed by painters, in respect of the ease or difficulty with which they succeed in imitating their subjects in the opinion of onlookers, we shall notice in the first place that as regards the earth and mountains and rivers and woods and the whole of heaven, with the things that exist and move therein, we are content if a man is able to represent them with even a small degree of likeness; and further, that, inasmuch as we have no exact knowledge about such objects, we do not examine closely or criticize the paintings, but tolerate, in such cases, an inexact and deceptive sketch. On the other hand, whenever a painter tries to render a likeness of our own bodies, we quickly perceive what is defective because of our constant familiar acquaintance with them, and become severe critics of him who fails to bring out to the full all the points of similarity. And precisely the same thing happens, as we should notice, in the case of discourses: in respect of what is celestial and divine we are satisfied if the account pocesses even a small degree of likelihood, but we examine with precision what is mortal and human. To an account given now on the spur of the moment indulgence must be granted, should we fail to make it a wholly fitting representation; for one must conceive of mortal objects as being difficult, and not easy, to represent satisfactorily.

Crit.

It is because I wish to remind you of these facts, and crave a greater rather than a less measure of indulgence for what I am about to say, that I have made all these observations, Socrates. If, therefore, I seem justified in craving this boon, pray grant it willingly.

Soc.

And why should we hesitate to grant it, Critias? Nay, what is more,the

[3] Critias speaks as a skeptic.

same boon shall be granted by us to a third, Hermocrates. For it is plain that later on, before long, when it is his duty to speak, he will make the same request as you. So, in order that he may provide a different prelude and not be compelled to repeat the same one, let him assume, when he comes to speak, that he already has our indulgence. I forewarn you, however, my dear Critias, of the mind of your audience,—how that the former poet won marvellous applause from it, so that you will require an extraordinary measure of indulgence if you are to prove capable of following in his steps.

Herm.

And in truth, Socrates, you are giving me the same warning as Critias. But men of faint heart never yet set up a trophy, Critias; wherefore you must go forward to your discoursing manfully, and, invoking the aid of Paion [4] and the Muses, exhibit and celebrate the excellence of your ancient citizens.

Crit.

You, my dear Hermocrates, are posted in the last rank, with another man before you, so you are still courageous. But experience of our task will of itself speedily enlighten you as to its character. However, I must trust to your consolation and encouragement, and in addition to the gods you mentioned I must call upon all the rest and especially upon Mnemosyne. [5] For practically all the most important part of our speech depends upon this goddess; for if I can sufficiently remember and report the tale once told by the priests and brought hither by Solon, I am wellnigh convinced that I shall appear to the present audience to have fulfilled my task adequately. This, then, I must at once proceed to do, and procrastinate no longer. Now first of all we must recall the fact that 9000 is the sum of years [6] since the war occurred, as is recorded, between the dwellers beyond the pillars of Heracles and all that dwelt within them [7]; which war we have now to relate in detail. It was stated that this city of ours was in command of the one side and fought through the whole of the war, and in command of the other side were the kings of the island of Atlantis, which we said was an island larger than Libya and Asia once upon a time, but now lies sunk by earthquakes and has created a barrier of impassable mud which prevents those who are sailing out from here to the ocean beyond from proceeding further.[8]

[4] i.e., Apollo, as god of victory.

[5] The goddess of Memory.

[6] Cf. *Tim.* 23 E.

[7] Cf. *Tim.* 24 E.

Crit.

Now as regards the numerous barbaric tribes and all the Hellenic nations that then existed, the sequel of our story, when it is, as it were, unrolled, will disclose what happened in each locality; but the facts about the Athenians of that age and the enemies with whom they fought we must necessarily describe first, at the outset,—the military power, that is to say, of each and their forms of government. And of these two we must give the priority in our account to the state of Athens. Once upon a time the gods were taking over by lot the whole earth according to its regions,—not according to the results of strife [9]: for it would not be reasonable to suppose that the gods were ignorant of their own several rights, nor yet that they attempted to obtain for themselves by means of strife a possession to which others, as they knew, had a better claim. So by just allotments they received each one his own, and they settled their countries; and when they had thus settled them, they reared us up, even as herdsmen rear their flocks, to be their cattle and nurslings; only it was not our bodies that they constrained by bodily force, like shepherds guiding their flocks with stroke of staff, but they directed from the stern where the living creature is easiest to turn about, laying hold on the soul by persuasion, as by a rudder, according to their own disposition; and thus they drove and steered all the mortal kind. Now in other regions others of the gods had their allotments and ordered the affairs, but inasmuch as Hephaestus and Athena were of a like nature, being born of the same father, and agreeing, moreover, in their love of wisdom and of craftsmanship, they both took for their joint portion this land of ours as being naturally congenial and adapted for virtue and for wisdom, and therein they planted as native to the soil men of virtue and ordained to their mind the mode of government. And of these citizens the names are preserved, but their works have vanished owing to the repeated destruction of their successors and the length of the intervening periods. For, as was said before, [10] the stock that survived on each occasion was a remnant of unlettered mountaineers which had heard the names only of the rulers, and but little besides of their works. So though they gladly passed on these names to their descendants, concerning the mighty deeds and the laws of their predecessors they had no knowledge, save for some invariably obscure reports; and since, moreover,

[8]Cf. *Tim.*. 25 D.

[9]This contradicts the myth on *Menex.* 237 C, D, relating the strife between Poseidon and Athena.

[10]Cf. *Tim.* 23 A.

they and their children for many generations were themselves in want of the necessaries of life, their attention was given to their own needs and all their talk was about them; and in consequence they paid no regard to the happenings of bygone ages.

Crit.

For legendary lore and the investigation of antiquity are visitants that come to cities in company with leisure, when they see that men are already furnished with the necessaries of life, and not before. In this way, then, the names of the ancients, without their works, have been preserved. And for evidence of what I say I point to the statement of Solon, that the Egyptian priests, in describing the war of that period, mentioned most of those names—such as those of Cecrops and Erechtheus and Erichthonius and Erysichthon and most of the other names which are recorded of the various heroes before Theseus—and in like manner also the names of the women. Moreover, the habit and figure of the goddess indicate that in the case of all animals, male and female, that herd together, every species is naturally capable of practising as a whole and in common its own proper excellence. Now at that time there dwelt in this country not only the other classes of the citizens who were occupied in the handicrafts and in the raising of food from the soil, but also the military class, which had been separated off at the commencement by divine heroes and dwelt apart.[11] It was supplied with all that was required for its sustenance and training, and none of its members possessed any private property, but they regarded all they had as the common property of all; and from the rest of the citizens they claimed to receive nothing beyond a sufficiency of sustenance; and they practised all those pursuits which were mentioned yesterday,[12] in the description of our proposed "Guardians." Moreover, what was related [13] about our country was plausible and true, namely, that, in the first place, it had its boundaries at that time marked off by the Isthmus, and on the inland side reaching to the heights of Cithaeron and Parnes; and that the boundaries ran down with Oropia on the right, and on the seaward side they shut off the Asopus on the left; and that all other lands were surpassed by ours in goodness of soil, so that it was actually able at that period to support a large host which was exempt from the labors of husbandry.

Crit.

[11]Cf. *Tim.*. 24 B.

[12]Cf. *Rep.*. 376 C ff.; *Tim.* 17 D ff.

[13]i.e., by the Egyptians.

And of its goodness a strong proof is this: what is now left of our soil rivals any other in being all-productive and abundant in crops and rich in pasturage for all kinds of cattle; and at that period, in addition to their fine quality it produced these things in vast quantity. How, then, is this statement plausible, and what residue of the land then existing serves to confirm its truth? The whole of the land lies like a promontory jutting out from the rest of the continent far into the sea and all the cup of the sea; round about it is, as it happens, of a great depth. Consequently, since many great convulsions took place during the 9000 years—for such was the number of years from that time to this [14]—the soil which has kept breaking away from the high lands during these ages and these disasters, forms no pile of sediment worth mentioning, as in other regions, but keeps sliding away ceaselessly and disappearing in the deep. And, just as happens in small islands, what now remains compared with what then existed is like the skeleton of a sick man, all the fat and soft earth having wasted away, and only the bare framework of the land being left. But at that epoch the country was unimpaired, and for its mountains it had high arable hills, and in place of the "moorlands," [15] as they are now called, it contained plains full of rich soil; and it had much forestland in its mountains, of which there are visible signs even to this day; for there are some mountains which now have nothing but food for bees, but they had trees no very long time ago, and the rafters from those felled there to roof the largest buildings are still sound. And besides, there were many lofty trees of cultivated species; and it produced boundless pasturage for flocks. Moreover, it was enriched by the yearly rains from Zeus, which were not lost to it, as now, by flowing from the bare land into the sea; but the soil; it had was deep, and therein it received the water, storing it up in the retentive loamy soil and by drawing off into the hollows from the heights the water that was there absorbed, it provided all the various districts with abundant supplies of springwaters and streams, whereof the shrines which still remain even now, at the spots where the fountains formerly existed, are signs which testify that our present description of the land is true. Such, then, was the natural condition of the rest of the country, and it was ornamented as you would expect from genuine husbandmen who made husbandry their sole task, and who were also men of taste and of native talent, and possessed of most excellent land and a great abundance of water, and also, above the

[14] Cf. 108 E.

[15] *φελλεύς* means a porous stone, like lava, or a field of stony soil.

land, a climate of most happily tempered seasons. And as to the city, this is the way in which it was laid out at that time.

Crit.

In the first place, the acropolis, as it existed then, was different from what it is now. For as it is now, the action of a single night of extraordinary rain has crumbled it away and made it bare of soil, when earthquakes occurred simultaneously with the third of the disastrous floods which preceded the destructive deluge in the time of Deucalion. [16] But in its former extent, at an earlier period, it went down towards the Eridanus and the Ilissus, and embraced within it the Pnyx; and had the Lycabettus as its boundary over against the Pnyx [17]; and it was all rich in soil and, save for a small space, level on the top. And its outer parts, under its slopes, were inhabited by the craftsmen and by such of the husbandmen as had their farms close by; but on the topmost part only the military class by itself had its dwellings round about the temple of Athene and Hephaestus, surrounding themselves with a single ring-fence, which formed, as it were, the enclosure of a single dwelling. On the northward side of it they had established their public dwellings and winter mess-rooms, and all the arrangements in the way of buildings which were required for the community life of themselves and the priests; but all was devoid of gold or silver, of which they made no use anywhere [18]; on the contrary, they aimed at the mean between luxurious display and meanness, and built themselves tasteful houses, wherein they and their children's children grew old and handed them on in succession unaltered to others like themselves. As for the southward parts, when they vacated their gardens and gymnasia and mess-rooms as was natural in summer, they used them for these purposes. And near the place of the present Acropolis there was one spring— which was choked up by the earthquakes so that but small tricklings of it are now left round about; but to the men of that time it afforded a plentiful stream for them all, being well tempered both for winter and summer. In this fashion, then, they dwelt, acting as guardians of their own citizens and as leaders, by their own consent, of the rest of the Greeks and they watched carefully that their own numbers, of both men and women, who were neither too young nor too old to fight, should remain for all time as nearly as possible the same, namely, about 20,000. So it was that these men, being themselves of

[16] Cf. *Tim.* 22 A, 23 A, B.

[17] The Eridanus ran on the N., the Ilissus on the S. side of Athens. The Pnyx was a hill W. of the Acropolis; the Lycabettus a larger hill to the N.E. of the city.

[18] Cf. *Rep.* 416 D ff.; *Laws*, 801 B.

the character described and always justly administering in some such fashion both their own land and Hellas, were famous throughout all Europe and Asia both for their bodily beauty and for the perfection of their moral excellence, and were of all men then living the most renowned. And now, if we have not lost recollection of what we heard when we were still children, [19] we will frankly impart to you all, as friends, our story of the men who warred against our Athenians, what their state was and how it originally came about.

Crit.

But before I begin my account, there is still a small point which I ought to explain, lest you should be surprised at frequently hearing Greek names given to barbarians. The reason of this you shall now learn. Since Solon was planning to make use of the story for his own poetry, he had found, on investigating the meaning of the names, that those Egyptians who had first written them down had translated them into their own tongue. So he himself in turn recovered the original sense of each name and, rendering it into our tongue, wrote it down so. And these very writings were in the possession of my grandfather and are actually now in mine, and when I was a child I learnt them all by heart. Therefore if the names you hear are just like our local names, do not be at all astonished; for now you know the reason for them. The story then told was a long one, and it began something like this. Like as we previously stated [20] concerning the allotments of the Gods, that they portioned out the whole earth, here into larger allotments and there into smaller, and provided for themselves shrines and sacrifices, even so Poseidon took for his allotment the island of Atlantis and settled therein the children whom he had begotten of a mortal woman in a region of the island of the following description. Bordering on the sea and extending through the center of the whole island there was a plain, which is said to have been the fairest of all plains and highly fertile; and, moreover, near the plain, over against its center, at a distance of about 50 stades, there stood a mountain that was low on all sides. Thereon dwelt one of the natives originally sprung from the earth,[21] Evenor by name, with his wife Leucippe; and they had for offspring an only-begotten daughter, Cleito. And when this damsel was now come to marriageable age, her mother died and also

[19] Cf. *Tim.* 21 A ff.

[20] Cf. 109 B.

[21] i.e. "autochthons," cf. 109c, *Menex.*. 237 B.

her father; and Poseidon, being smitten with desire for her, wedded her; and to make the hill whereon she dwelt impregnable he broke it off all round about; and he made circular belts of sea and land enclosing one another alternately, some greater, some smaller, two being of land and three of sea, which he carved as it were out of the midst of the island; and these belts were at even distances on all sides, so as to be impassable for man; for at that time neither ships nor sailing were as yet in existence. And Poseidon himself set in order with ease, as a god would, the central island, bringing up from beneath the earth two springs of waters, the one flowing warm from its source, the other cold, and producing out of the earth all kinds of food in plenty.

Crit.

And he begat five pairs of twin sons and reared them up; and when he had divided all the island of Atlantis into ten portions, he assigned to the first-born of the eldest sons his mother's dwelling and the allotment surrounding it, which was the largest and best; and him he appointed to be king over the rest, and the others to be rulers, granting to each the rule over many men and a large tract of country. And to all of them he gave names, giving to him that was eldest and king the name after which the whole island was called and the sea spoken of as the Atlantic, because the first king who then reigned had the name of Atlas. And the name of his younger twin-brother, who had for his portion the extremity of the island near the pillars of Heracles up to the part of the country now called Gadeira after the name of that region, was Eumelus in Greek, but in the native tongue Gadeirus,—which fact may have given its title to the country. And of the pair that were born next he called the one Ampheres and the other Evaemon; and of the third pair the elder was named Mneseus and the younger Autochthon; and of the fourth pair, he called the first Elasippus and the second Mestor; and of the fifth pair, Azaes was the name given to the elder, and Diaprepes to the second. So all these, themselves and their descendants, dwelt for many generations bearing rule over many other islands throughout the sea, and holding sway besides, as was previously stated, [22] over the Mediterranean peoples as far as Egypt and Tuscany. Now a large family of distinguished sons sprang from Atlas; but it was the eldest, who, as king, always passed on the scepter to the eldest of his sons, and thus they preserved the sovereignty for many generations; and the wealth they possessed was so immense that the like had never been seen before in any royal house nor will ever easily be seen again; and they

[22] Cf. *Tim.* 25 A, B.

were provided with everything of which provision was needed either in the city or throughout the rest of the country. For because of their headship they had a large supply of imports from abroad, and the island itself furnished most of the requirements of daily life,—metals, to begin with, both the hard kind and the fusible kind, which are extracted by mining, and also that kind which is now known only by name but was more than a name then, there being mines of it in many places of the island,—I mean "orichalcum," [23] which was the most precious of the metals then known, except gold. It brought forth also in abundance all the timbers that a forest provides for the labors of carpenters; and of animals it produced a sufficiency, both of tame and wild.

Crit.

Moreover, it contained a very large stock of elephants; for there was an ample food-supply not only for all the other animals which haunt the marshes and lakes and rivers, or the mountains or the plains, but likewise also for this animal, which of its nature is the largest and most voracious. And in addition to all this, it produced and brought to perfection all those sweet-scented stuffs which the earth produces now, whether made of roots or herbs or trees, or of liquid gums derived from flowers or fruits. The cultivated fruit[24] also, and the dry, [25] which serves us for nutriment, and all the other kinds that we use for our meals—the various species of which are comprehended under the name "vegetables"— and all the produce of trees which affords liquid and solid food and unguents, [26] and the fruit of the orchard-trees, so hard to store, which is grown for the sake of amusement and pleasure, [27] and all the after-dinner fruits [28] that we serve up as welcome remedies for the sufferer from repletion,—all these that hallowed island, as it lay then beneath the sun, produced in marvellous beauty and endless abundance. And thus, receiving from the earth all these products, they furnished forth their temples and royal dwellings, their harbors and their docks, and all the rest of their country, ordering all in the fashion following. [29]First of all they bridged over the circles of sea which

[23]i.e. mountain-copper; a "sparkling" metal (116 C) hard to identify (cf. Hesiod, *Shield.* 122).

[24]i.e. the vine (cf. Hom. *Od.* 5.69).

[25]i.e., corn.

[26]Perhaps the olive, or coco-palm.

[27]Perhaps the pomegranate, or apple (cf. *Laws.* 819 A, B).

[28]Perhaps the citron.

[29]See Illustration facing p. 286.

surrounded the ancient metropolis, making thereby a road towards and from the royal palace. And they had built the palace at the very beginning where the settlement was first made by their God [30] and their ancestors; and as each king received it from his predecessor, he added to its adornment and did all he could to surpass the king before him, until finally they made of it an abode amazing to behold for the magnitude and beauty of its workmanship. For, beginning at the sea, they bored a channel right through to the outermost circle, which was three plethra in breadth, one hundred feet in depth, and fifty stades [31] in length; and thus they made the entrance to it from the sea like that to a harbor by opening out a mouth large enough for the greatest ships to sail through. [32] Moreover, through the circles of land, which divided those of sea, over against the bridges they opened out a channel leading from circle to circle, large enough to give passage to a single trireme; and this they roofed over above so that the sea-way was subterranean; for the lips of the landcircles were raised a sufficient height above the level of the sea. The greatest of the circles into which a boring was made for the sea was three stades in breadth, and the circle of land next to it was of equal breadth; and of the second pair of circles that of water was two stades in breadth and that of dry land equal again to the preceding one of water; and the circle which ran round the central island itself was of a stade's breadth.

Crit.

And this island, wherein stood the royal palace, was of five stades in diameter. Now the island and the circles and the bridge, which was a plethrum in breadth, they encompassed round about, on this side and on that, with a wall of stone; and upon the bridges on each side, over against the passages for the sea, they erected towers and gates. And the stone they quarried beneath the central island all round, and from beneath the outer and inner circles, some of it being white, some black and some red; and while quarrying it they constructed two inner docks, hollowed out and roofed over by the native rock. And of the buildings some they framed of one simple color, in others they wove a pattern of many colors by blending the stones for the sake of ornament so as to confer upon the buildings a natural charm. And they covered with brass, as though with plaster, all the circumference of the wall which surrounded the outermost circle; and that of the inner

[30] i.e., Poseiden.

[31] The plethron was about 100 ft.; the stade (=6 plethra) about 600 ft.

[32] See Illustration facing this page.

one they coated with tin; and that which encompassed the acropolis itself with orichalcum which sparkled like fire. The royal palace within the acropolis was arranged in this manner. In the center there stood a temple sacred to Cleito and Poseidon, which was reserved as holy ground, and encircled with a wall of gold; this being the very spot where at the beginning they had generated and brought to birth the family of the ten royal lines. Thither also they brought year by year from all the ten allotments their seasonable offerings to do sacrifice to each of those princes. And the temple of Poseidon himself was a stade in length, three plethra in breadth, and of a height which appeared symmetrical therewith; and there was something of the barbaric in its appearance. All the exterior of the temple they coated with silver, save only the pinnacles, and these they coated with gold. As to the interior, they made the roof all of ivory in appearance, variegated with gold and silver and orichalcum, and all the rest of the walls and pillars and floors they covered with orichalcum. And they placed therein golden statues, one being that of the God standing on a chariot and driving six winged steeds, his own figure so tall as to touch the ridge of the roof, and round about him a hundred Nereids on dolphins (for that was the number of them as men then believed) [33]; and it contained also many other images, the votive offerings of private men. And outside, round about the temple, there stood images in gold of all the princes, both themselves and their wives, as many as were descended from the ten kings, together with many other votive offerings both of the kings and of private persons not only from the State itself but also from all the foreign peoples over whom they ruled.

Crit.

And the altar, in respect of its size and its workmanship, harmonized with its surroundings; and the royal palace likewise was such as befitted the greatness of the kingdom, and equally befitted the splendor of the temples. The springs they made use of, one kind being of cold, another of warm water, [34] were of abundant volume, and each kind was wonderfully well adapted for use because of the natural taste and excellence of its waters; and these they surrounded with buildings and with plantations of trees such as suited the waters; and, moreover, they set reservoirs round about, some under the open sky, and others under cover to supply hot baths in the winter; they put separate baths for the

[33] The usual tradition made them 50 in number; cf. Hes. *Theog.* 240 ff.; Pind. *Isthm.* 5.6.

[34] Cf. 113 E.

kings and for the private citizens, besides others for women, and others again for horses and all other beasts of burden, fitting out each in an appropriate manner. [35] And the outflowing water they conducted to the sacred grove of Poseidon, which contained trees of all kinds that were of marvellous beauty and height because of the richness of the soil; and by means of channels they led the water to the outer circles over against the bridges. And there they had constructed many temples for gods, and many gardens and many exercising grounds, some for men and some set apart for horses, in each of the circular belts of island; and besides the rest they had in the center of the large island [36] a racecourse laid out for horses, which was a stade in width, while as to length, a strip which ran round the whole circumference was reserved for equestrian contests. And round about it, on this side and on that, were barracks for the greater part of the spearmen [37]; but the guard-house of the more trusty of them was posted in the smaller circle, which was nearer the acropolis; while those who were the most trustworthy of all had dwellings granted to them within the acropolis round about the persons of the kings. And the shipyards were full of triremes and all the tackling that belongs to triremes, and they were all amply equipped. Such then was the state of things round about the abode of the kings. And after crossing the three outer harbors, one found a wall which began at the sea and ran round in a circle, at a uniform distance of fifty stades from the largest circle and harbor, and its ends converged at the seaward mouth of the channel. The whole of this wall had numerous houses built on to it, set close together; while the sea-way and the largest harbor were filled with ships and merchants coming from all quarters, which by reason of their multitude caused clamor and tumult of every description and an unceasing din night and day.

Crit.

Now as regards the city and the environs of the ancient dwelling we have now wellnigh completed the description as it was originally given. We must endeavor next to repeat the account of the rest of the country, what its natural character was, and in what fashion it was ordered. In the first place, then, according to the account, the whole region rose sheer out of the sea to a great height, but the part about the city was all a smooth plain, enclosing it round about, and being itself encircled

[35] Cf. *Laws* 761 A ff. for the importance attached to water supplies.

[36] i.e., the larger circular belts of land (cf. 113 D).

[37] The technical term for the body-guard of a tyrant (cf. *Rep.* 567 D, 575 B).

by mountains which stretched as far as to the sea; and this plain had a level surface and was as a whole rectangular in shape, being 3000 stades long on either side and 2000 stades wide at its center, reckoning upwards from the sea. And this region, all along the island, faced towards the South and was sheltered from the Northern blasts. And the mountains which surrounded it were at that time celebrated as surpassing all that now exist in number, magnitude and beauty; for they had upon them many rich villages of country folk, and streams and lakes and meadows which furnished ample nutriment to all the animals both tame and wild, and timber of various sizes and descriptions, abundantly sufficient for the needs of all and every craft. Now as a result of natural forces, together with the labors of many kings which extended over many ages, the condition of the plain was this. It was originally a quadrangle, rectilinear for the most part, and elongated; and what it lacked of this shape they made right by means of a trench dug round about it. Now, as regards the depth of this trench and its breadth and length, it seems incredible that it should be so large as the account states, considering that it was made by hand, and in addition to all the other operations, but none the less we must report what we heard: it was dug out to the depth of a plethrum and to a uniform breadth of a stade, and since it was dug round the whole plain its consequent length was 10,000 stades. [38] It received the streams which came down from the mountains and after circling round the plain, and coming towards the city on this side and on that, it discharged them thereabouts into the sea. And on the inland side of the city channels were cut in straight lines, of about 100 feet in width, across the plain, and these discharged themselves into the trench on the seaward side, the distance between each being 100 stades. It was in this way that they conveyed to the city the timber from the mountains and transported also on boats the seasons' products, by cutting transverse passages from one channel to the next and also to the city. And they cropped the land twice a year, making use of the rains from Heaven in the winter, and the waters that issue from the earth in summer, by conducting the streams from the trenches.

Crit.

As regards their manpower, it was ordained that each allotment should furnish one man as leader of all the men in the plain who were fit to bear arms; and the size of the allotment was about ten times ten stades, and the total number of all the allotments was 60,000; and the

[38] The sides of the plain being 2000 and 3000 stades (118 A above). See Frontispiece.

number of the men in the mountains and in the rest of the country was countless, according to the report, and according to their districts and villages they were all assigned to these allotments under their leaders. So it was ordained that each such leader should provide for war the sixth part of a war-chariots equipment, so as to make up 10,000 chariots in all, together with two horses and mounted men; also a pair of horses without a car, and attached thereto a combatant [39] with a small shield and for charioteer the rider who springs from horse to horse; and two hoplites; and archers and slingers, two of each; and light-armed slingers and javelin-men, three of each; and four sailors towards the manning of twelve hundred ships. Such then were the military dispositions of the royal City; and those of the other nine varied in various ways, which it would take a long time to tell. Of the magistracies and posts of honor the disposition, ever since the beginning, was this. Each of the ten kings ruled over the men and most of the laws in his own particular portion and throughout his own city, punishing and putting to death whomsoever he willed. But their authority over one another and their mutual relations were governed by the precepts of Poseidon, as handed down to them by the law and by the records inscribed by the first princes on a pillar of orichalcum, which was placed within the temple of Poseidon in the center of the island; and thither they assembled every fifth year, and then alternately every sixth year—giving equal honor to both the even and the odd—and when thus assembled they took counsel about public affairs and inquired if any had in any way transgressed and gave judgement. And when they were about to give judgement they first gave pledges one to another of the following description. In the sacred precincts of Poseidon there were bulls at large [40]; and the ten princes, being alone by themselves, after praying to the God that they might capture a victim well-pleasing unto him, hunted after the bulls with staves and nooses but with no weapon of iron; and whatsoever bull they captured they led up to the pillar and cut its throat over the top of the pillar, raining down blood on the inscription. And inscribed upon the pillar, besides the laws, was an oath which invoked mighty curses upon them that disobeyed.

Crit.

When, then, they had done sacrifice according to their laws and were

[39] This "combatant" ("desultor") jumped off the chariot to fight on foot.

[40] For the sacrifice of bulls to Poseidon cf. Hom.*Od.*. 3.6.*Ταύρεος*was also a local epithet of the Sea-god (Hes.*Shield.* 104).

consecrating all the limbs of the bull, they mixed a bowl of wine and poured in on behalf of each one a gout of blood, and the rest they carried to the fire, when they had first purged the pillars round about. And after this they drew out from the bowl with golden ladles, and making libation over the fire swore to give judgement according to the laws upon the pillar and to punish whosoever had committed any previous transgression; and, moreover, that henceforth they would not transgress any of the writings willingly, nor govern nor submit to any governor's edict save in accordance with their father's laws. And when each of them had made this invocation both for himself and for his seed after him, he drank of the cup and offered it up as a gift in the temple of the God; and after spending the interval in supping and necessary business, when darkness came on and the sacrificial fire had died down, all the princes robed themselves in most beautiful sable vestments, and sate on the ground beside the cinders of the sacramental victims throughout the night, extinguishing all the fire that was round about the sanctuary; and there they gave and received judgement, if any of them accused any of committing any transgression. And when they had given judgement, they wrote the judgements, when it was light, upon a golden tablet, and dedicated them together with their robes as memorials. And there were many other special laws concerning the peculiar rights of the several princes, whereof the most important were these: that they should never take up arms against one another, and that, should anyone attempt to overthrow in any city their royal house, they should all lend aid, taking counsel in common, like their forerunners, concerning their policy in war and other matters, while conceding the leadership to the royal branch of Atlas; and that the king had no authority to put to death any of his brother-princes save with the consent of more than half of the ten. Such was the magnitude and character of the power which existed in those regions at that time; and this power the God set in array and brought against these regions of ours on some such pretext as the following, according to the story. For many generations, so long as the inherited nature of the God remained strong in them, they were submissive to the laws and kindly disposed to their divine kindred.

Crit.

For the intents of their hearts were true and in all ways noble, and they showed gentleness joined with wisdom in dealing with the changes and chances of life and in their dealings one with another. Consequently they thought scorn of everything save virtue and lightly esteemed their rich possessions, bearing with ease the burden, as it were, of the vast

volume of their gold and other goods; and thus their wealth did not make them drunk with pride so that they lost control of themselves and went to ruin; rather, in their soberness of mind they clearly saw that all these good things are increased by general amity combined with virtue, whereas the eager pursuit and worship of these goods not only causes the goods themselves to diminish but makes virtue also to perish with them. As a result, then, of such reasoning and of the continuance of their divine nature all their wealth had grown to such a greatness as we previously described. But when the portion of divinity within them was now becoming faint and weak through being ofttimes blended with a large measure of mortality, whereas the human temper was becoming dominant, then at length they lost their comeliness, through being unable to bear the burden of their possessions, and became ugly to look upon, in the eyes of him who has the gift of sight; for they had lost the fairest of their goods from the most precious of their parts; but in the eyes of those who have no gift of perceiving what is the truly happy life, it was then above all that they appeared to be superlatively fair and blessed, filled as they were with lawless ambition and power. And Zeus, the God of gods, who reigns by Law, inasmuch as he has the gift of perceiving such things, marked how this righteous race was in evil plight, and desired to inflict punishment upon them, to the end that when chastised they might strike a truer note. Wherefore he assembled together all the gods into that abode which they honor most, standing as it does at the center of all the Universe, and beholding all things that partake of generation and when he had assembled them, he spake thus:[…]

This offline edition was generated from the canonical TEI text.

bookstacks.org