

The crossroads of cataclysm and counterfeit

Atlantis, Plato and medieval forgery

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By modern interpretations of Plato's dialogues *Timaeus* and its sequel, *Critias*, Atlantis flourished around 10,000 BCE before going under the sea. Those same dialogues relate that Plato's home city of Athens was then at war with Atlantis, though modern scholars hold that the pre-Greek Mycenaeans did not begin to settle near Athens until about 1700 BCE. This creates a discrepancy of some *eight thousand years*, an inexplicable time gap in culture, language, and written history longer than all recorded history available today.

Could paleo-era "Athens" have been warring with Atlantis twelve thousand years ago, completely vanish, and then suddenly reappear some eight thousand years later as a Mycenaean settlement with even a hint of cultural continuity? The idea seems unlikely, and even less likely to involve the faithful preservation of any detailed memories of that sunken land across such a long absence of civilised activity. Consider, by comparison, how only a few centuries of "Dark Ages" appear to have radically modified memories of the ancient Greeks themselves, as this article will show.

Despite all of these objections, a date of roughly 10,000 BCE coincides with modern geologists' estimates for when the ice age concluded with the Younger Dryas and apocalyptic sea level rises. It may be purely a coincidence that the time period and type of event indicated in Plato's dialogue both accurately correspond to a cataclysm flooding event that geologists believe submerged lowland areas, but such a coincidence seems suspiciously uncanny. If it is not a coincidence, then how

could such information survive for eight thousand years without any apparent civilisation existing in either written record or archaeology during the intervening time? Could there really be such deep history preserved in the *Timaeus*, or could there be some other explanation for this circumstance?

The French historical philosopher Marc Bloch suggested that historians may best understand the past if they begin with the places, people, and things closest and most familiar to them, as "the natural progression of all research is from the best (or least badly) understood to the most obscure," which is typically from the present time backward into the past.[1] This approach proves especially helpful with texts like *Timaeus*, since there are few other old sources by which we may "historically" conceive of Atlantis. The oldest surviving manuscripts of *Timaeus* (like virtually all ancient texts) date only to the medieval period, and are presumed to be copies of translations of copies. An investigation of the *Timaeus* thus leads back from modern times to a crossroads of cataclysms and counterfeits, at what the University of Notre Dame calls the "crossroads of everything": the end of the medieval world and the birth of the modern one at the dawn of the Renaissance.



Timaeus

The actual substance of *Timaeus* and its sequel *Critias* involves Timaeus, Critias, Socrates, and other characters discussing the general nature of the physical world and how it came to be, a considerably metaphysical topic. In these writings Plato provides the earliest descriptions of the lost island kingdom. The character named Timaeus (a real historical figure in the eyes of early scholars, but now viewed more as a literary invention of Plato) explains in the dialogue that Solon had heard about Atlantis from an Egyptian priest, and this is how he had come to hear the information. Timaeus then relates what he heard via Solon (supposedly an ancestor of Plato himself), despite the island having supposedly sunk thousands of years before any of these men were born. Taken at face value, these claims about Atlantis are hearsay on top of hearsay at best, and perhaps a literary fiction. The present investigation of the problem ultimately lands upon a more complicated reality, however, as so often happens.

Even if the details about Atlantis were purely fictional, something about that particular part of the dialogue has undeniably embedded itself into the popular culture of the Western hemisphere. The idea of Atlantis has inspired generations of professional scholars and amateur researchers, but the fascination clearly extends back into the most remote epochs of recorded memory as ancient flood myths appear all over the world.

Modern geologists have finally validated some aspects of these myths as they now understand that the previous glacial maximum or ice age ended with a massive melting event that raised global sea levels by more than two hundred feet. Even more remarkably, the same geologists date this climatic and environmental transformation to roughly twelve thousand years ago, corresponding very closely to Plato's era of roughly 10,000 BCE.

Timaeus is remarkable for describing catastrophic flooding around the same general prehistoric time frame as modern geologists, but it is remarkable for other reasons as well. It is Plato's only work that describes Atlantis at all, but the main point of the discussion touched on other metaphysical and dangerously unorthodox ideas in a way that also happened to blur the usual academic distinctions between ancient Platonic and later Neo-Platonic time periods. Historian Sears Jayne wrote that the dialogue has proven "troublesome" for historians because of the way in which its themes more resemble medieval themes and ideas rather than those suggested by the other writings attributed to circa 300 BCE or earlier.[2] The English translator Benjamin Jowett accused *Timaeus* of being "the most obscure and repulsive" of Plato's writings, implying that it was a deviation from the philosopher's other works.[3]

The reference to a flood circa 10,000 BCE, the descriptions of Atlantis, and the "troublesome" and "obscure" manner in which the text fits with Plato's other writings all make *Timaeus* special, but there is yet another and even more historically consequential fact unique to this dialogue: it appears to have been the only authentic work by Plato available in most parts of Europe for many centuries prior to the Renaissance. In other words, these texts are how most medieval people knew of authentic Plato for several centuries. There were other popular writings with Plato's name on them circulating around the continent and beyond, but none of those others are accepted by modern scholarship as authentic works of Plato. Those mysterious and apocryphal works presented a different Plato: medieval Plato, the magician.



Plato the Magician

One of the most overlooked aspects of the medieval to modern transformation was in regard to how Western Europeans understood the ancient past and their own place in history. Medieval people, especially in England and Western Europe, had long understood their histories through traditional epics and tales of figures including King Arthur, King Alfred, and the French warrior Roland, and many others which may or may not be familiar to modern audiences. The popularity of these stories varied from region to region and spread by a combination of written and oral traditions. Today's academic consensus still considers some of these men (such as Alfred and Roland) to have been authentic historical figures, but wholly rejects others (King Arthur) as myths and legends. Medieval audiences appear to have always accepted all of these men as equally historical figures, though having very different understandings of figures including Plato.

Medieval scholars at Oxford, Cambridge, the University of Paris, and other early universities knew of Plato, but not so much as a classical Greek philosopher. In late medieval England, for example, he was associated with a popular herbarium or book of herbal remedies. His name was also linked to treatises on metaphysics (a subject upon which *Timaeus* and later Neo-Platonic works also touched), astrology, alchemy, and even prophecies regarding a Greek king, all of which were also available in England during the medieval period. Plato was thus known as more of an esotericist, a "physician-magician-scientist," according to Jayne.[4] In some ways, the medieval conception of Plato might even be compared to Hermes Trismegistus, the legendary figure who seems to have been cited more as a symbol or myth than a literal person. At any rate, modern scholarship has ruled out these writings as being written by the Greek philosopher.

Part of making the medieval world modern was transforming the medieval magician Plato into the classical philosopher Plato using more historically accurate literature suddenly being rediscovered in Florence during the Renaissance. That modern idea of Plato as a classical Greek philosopher appears to have been completely unknown in the libraries of England until as late as 1111 CE, when the *Timaeus* itself first appeared, and remained the only authentic work of Plato in England for about two centuries until *Phaedo* appeared in 1340 CE. Even the early Italian Renaissance scholar Petrarch (1304–1374) was at first only able to find copies of *Timaeus* and *Phaedo* in his home country. Compared to Italy, England was still a relatively small nation on the fringes of Western Europe with even less literature available. It is rather remarkable that so little authentic Plato was available in either country, especially considering the relative profusion of esoteric manuscripts falsely attributed to the same author.

Classicists today call the misattributed and fraudulent works of Plato the "Pseudo-Platonica." Aside from the more metaphysical and esoteric medieval works attributed to Plato, the Pseudo-Platonica also includes more classical Latin philosophical dialogues such as *Alcibiades* parts I and II, *Erastae*, *Epigrammata*, *Definitions*, *Confabulations*, *Demodocus*, *Eryxias*, *Axiochus*, and a number of others. These texts "feel" more like classical Plato in style and content, but modern scholars have nonetheless rejected Plato's authorship of them on various grounds.

Texts having their historical authenticity debated and rejected by universities may sound troubling, but scholars

of the medieval era all belonged to the Roman Church, and they outright suppressed such esoteric works for many centuries as heretical. When the famous medieval writer Abelard took an interest in medieval Plato during the 1100s, for example, Catholic authorities "ruthlessly silenced" him.[5] Again, Abelard was not reading the same Plato as most people think of today, but the medieval Plato. The Platonic apocrypha continued spreading so that late medieval scholars knew of Plato almost exclusively from this corpus of now-rejected and once-forbidden literature. Even Oxford's scholars knew of Plato principally as an astrologer until the Renaissance. It was within this earlier, medieval world where Plato was a kind of esoteric magician that late medieval audiences would have read and interpreted *Timaeus* and its references to Atlantis.[6]

Plato's Renaissance Rebirth

Classical Plato's revival or rebirth was initiated in the 1390s, when the classical Greek scholar, teacher, and Byzantine agent Manuel Chrysoloras left the embattled Byzantine Empire to visit the Italian cities of Venice and then Florence. It was from Florence in the 1400s that he and his students (most notably Leonardo Bruni) introduced most of the accepted works of Plato in Latin texts for the first time, including three separate translations of Plato's *Republic* (appearing in 1402, 1439, and 1447), *Gorgias* (appearing in Latin in 1409), *Apology* (1409–1412), *Crito* (1423), part of *Symposium* (1435), and others. Many of these works had previously been rare or unknown in Western Europe, and (aside from *Timaeus* and *Phaedo*) had all been totally unknown in England. Even so, the ideas in the newly appeared texts coincidentally played into ongoing religious and political debates relevant to church and state officials during the early Renaissance.

This reinvention of the popular European understanding of history during the Renaissance involved a network of Catholic clergy, largely operating in Italy, France, and Germany. Mostly between the 1400s and 1600s, men such as the French Calvinist scholar Joseph Scaliger (1540–1609) formulated the basic framework of world history as understood today. The early annalists and chronologers relied heavily upon newly translated writings which had been introduced to Renaissance Europe from Florence as part of a revival of Greek learning which began in the 1400s. Meanwhile, old medieval manuscripts like *Timaeus* challenged those new frameworks and have never fit neatly into them. Non-standard histories comparable to the story of Atlantis appeared quite frequently during the medieval period in Western Europe and can be difficult for modern historians to contextualise, and so are easily rejected as spurious or fraudulent works by ignorant or deceitful authors without much deeper consideration.

Pseudo-Platonica

Examining the Pseudo-Platonica more closely, scholars have rejected the authenticity of these texts on a number of different grounds, but overall the writings fall into two distinct categories: (1) spurious works of Greek and Latin which possibly circulated alongside the originals since the time of Plato himself; and (2) works translated out of Arabic or Syriac sources during the Middle Ages and attributed to Plato but which have no known counterparts anywhere in the ancient Greek literature.

The first category seems at least to superficially conform to now-accepted ideas of the ancient philosopher, and some texts conform so well to accepted literature that some scholars still debate whether those texts should have ever been relegated to the Pseudo-Platonica at all. The second category of misattributed texts, present in early Eastern sources and also circulating in medieval England prior to the Renaissance, ranged from discussions of morality, metaphysics, alchemy, astrology, herbalism, prophecies, occult practices, and even early attempts at understanding economics.

The common interpretation is that the esoteric Platonic works all originated from the eastern Mediterranean or even the Middle East and then spread westward to reach



Bust of Plato, Vatican Museum, Rome (Photo: Dudva)

France and England. Without assuming origins and just looking at where the text was distributed, the second category of Pseudo-Platonica was circulating more or less simultaneously in various parts of western, central, and eastern Europe, as well as parts of the Middle East.

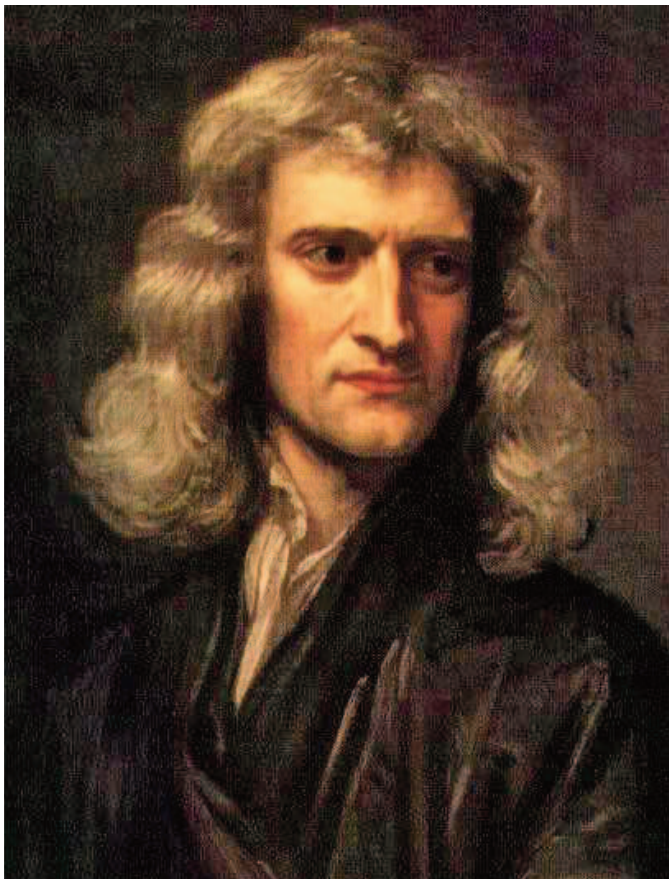
Whether the texts were falsely attributed to Plato out of ignorance, or mistakes introduced from copying the text over and over through the centuries, mistranslations, or whatever the case may have been, they nonetheless travelled over a far greater area, in greater numbers, and from an earlier date than most or all of the Platonic texts which later appeared during the Renaissance. Those Renaissance texts, as mentioned, had previously been virtually unknown.

The revival of ancient Greek studies in Florence during the 14th and 15th centuries introduced most of Plato's now-famous works to Western Europe. But what if the texts that the Medici family's translators introduced at the dawn of the Renaissance are subjected to the same critical review as the late medieval texts? Are all of those first editions unimpeachable enough to credibly reject the authenticities of already circulating works attributed to Plato? Not according to the emphatic accusations of one controversial French scholar, who argued that the rampant medieval and Renaissance-era editing and forgery of ancient classics had impacted the works of Plato among many others.

Early Revisions and Accusations of Forgery

Born between the bursts of political and religious violence on opposite sides of the English Channel were two remarkable revisionists: the English physicist Isaac Newton (1643–1727) and the French classical scholar Jean Hardouin (1646–1729). These men's lives, interests, and opinions on the learning of classical antiquity mirrored each other in fascinating ways. They shared the belief that Renaissance-era scholars had (wittingly or unwittingly) scrambled the histories of ancient nations, and not in small details, but with significant errors of centuries or worse. Both also believed that their wrong-headed predecessors had created the appearance of chronological anomalies and other problems due to their poor understanding of the ancient languages and calendars involved, and had often confused ancient sources more than they clarified them.

Newton went so far as to revise the chronology of ancient nations, though he died in 1727 before completing his work. An editor cleaned up the text and published it as *The Chronology of Ancient Kingdoms Amended* in 1728. Though little-known today, the posthumous work represents Newton's final and incomplete contribution to the academic world. The English genius remains better remembered for his work on gravity, calculus, light, and even his more esoteric interests in subjects like alchemy, but hardly at all for the chronological revisionism that he began tackling at the very end of his life.



Portrait of Issac Newton by Gottfried Kneller, 1689

Meanwhile, a devout Catholic boy from a small village in Brittany, France had moved to Paris and dedicated his life to studying God by joining the Society of Jesus, or the Jesuits. Jean Hardouin (the French equivalent of John Hardwin) thus became a librarian in Paris, where he developed a reputation for a gruelling daily study routine. He became an "immensely learned and argumentative man" according to one biographer, who was not afraid to advance controversial opinions when his own understanding of truth deviated from that of his colleagues.

To the consternation of his friends and colleagues, Hardouin began asserting strange things in 1693 which bordered dangerously close to heresy. He alleged that much of the Church Fathers' and other ancient literature had been forged by his medieval predecessors and colleagues among the clergy. His Jesuit superiors were at first unsure of how to respond to him, and gave him mixed signals. He initially received permission to put some of his new claims into print, but two months later the rector of the Jesuit College went directly to the printer and physically seized every copy of Hardouin's offensive work that he could find, preventing them from being distributed. It would not prove so easy for the Parisians to silence this frank and stubborn man from rural Brittany, however.

Hardouin managed to publish other works where he built his argument that "a certain band of fellows existed, some centuries ago, who had undertaken the task of concocting ancient history as we now have it, there being at that time none in existence." Another librarian remarked that Hardouin "dares not say everything he thinks," and that the radical accusations he made in his publications had already been self-censored in order to limit the amount of trouble to which he exposed himself.[7] Evidently, Hardouin was holding back his full thoughts and feelings. Even so, he accused medieval authorities of church and state of having overseen the manipulation or outright fabrication of almost everything that had allegedly come from the ancient world.

Going into discussions of specific texts, Hardouin unleashed a barrage against alleged forgers and courts or monasteries where scribes fabricated writings. He accused Joseph Scaliger of having published a fraudulent list of ancient Egyptian rulers and of using that list to create a fake historical relationship between ancient Egypt and ancient Greece (much of whose histories Hardouin also argued were fabrications). (Incidentally, *Timaeus* also purports a connection between ancient Egypt and ancient Greece, as well as "ancient" or in fact pre-flood Atlantis with these two other polities.)



Portrait of the Jesuit Jean Hardouin by J. Biondi

The French classicist was not alone in his attack on Scaliger. The earlier German scholar Gaspar Scioppius (1576–1649) had denounced Scaliger as early as 1607, enumerating hundreds of alleged lies in *Scaliger Hypobolymaeus*. Scioppius pointed out that even Scaliger's own family tree was impossible, as he could not have been descended from a certain prince of Verona as he had claimed. Scaliger was still alive when Scioppius wrote all this, and replied (in *Confutatio fabulae Burdonum*) that Scioppius himself made many errors.

Scaliger did not, however, attempt to refute the bulk of Scioppius's challenges, and even failed to substantiate his claims about his own family tree. Isaac Newton later found Scaliger's chronological frameworks problematic as well, revising them in his last and unfinished work. Scaliger had been closely connected to the French royal court, however, and none of his critics ever gained much traction with wider academia, and so for example Egyptologists continue operating more or less from the basic framework originally established by Scaliger until today.

Moving on to other alleged forgers, Hardouin made thinly veiled accusations against Benedictine monks and the imperial court of the Holy Roman Emperor Frederick II, accusing them not only of forging documents but also of counterfeiting paintings and coins in a medieval form of money laundering. He went so far as to argue that most ancient texts were medieval forgeries thanks to the industriousness and ingenuity of his colleagues, and that he had detected them by a careful study of the language of their sloppy work.

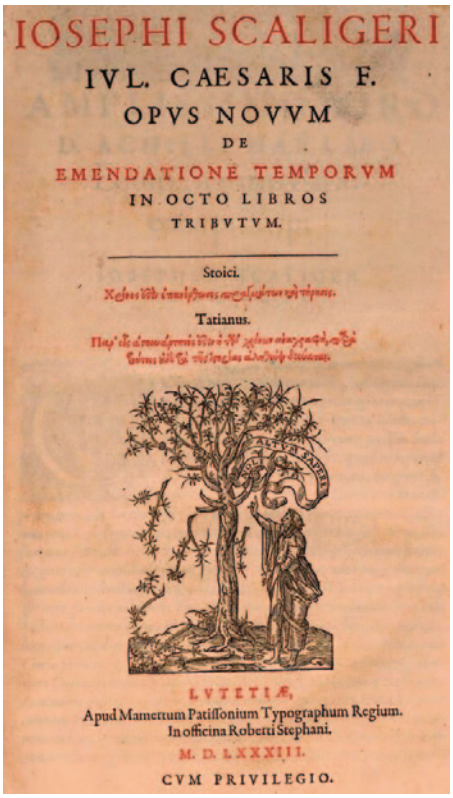
Newton, a more reserved Englishman, never made the same kinds of inflammatory accusations as his Gallic counterpart, but the substance of both men's arguments challenged the very heart of the narratives then being constructed and still serving as underlying frameworks today. For Hardouin, very little authentic history had survived from the ancient period that had not already been corrupted or fabricated outright by officials of church or state, a radical position even compared to that of Newton. This perhaps explains why Hardouin did not even attempt a reconstruction as Newton had, as he appears to have rejected too many sources.

Researchers may disagree on the extent to which medieval forgers have impacted ancient history, but some appreciable degree of impact from forgery is undeniable. Forgery was one of many deceptive arts employed by courtiers and clergy. With no clear laws to stop them, monasteries, courts, and other seemingly credible institutions of the medieval era fabricated misleading documents as a matter of routine business, and on an industrial scale considering the era. The historian Thomas Tout, writing in 1920, described medieval forgery in these terms:

> "It was almost the duty of the clerical class to forge. If it did not always commit culpable forgeries for its own particular interest, it forged, almost from a sense of duty, for the benefit of the society, the community, the house whose interests it represented...For to mediæval eyes forgery in itself was hardly regarded as a crime. It was not, like homicide, punishable as such...Only some sorts of forgery were regarded by the law as criminal at all. The most notable of these were the forging of the King's seal or the forging of a lord's seal by a member of his household."[8]

One may think that Tout was exaggerating, but a closer study will show he was more likely understating the problem in 1920. Deep dives into the majority of ancient texts reveal longstanding debates over their authenticity and provenance, not to mention priceless manuscripts being lost in wars, fires, floods, or simply disappearing without a trace. Put simply, historical evidence abounds of forgery, extreme censorship, and other documentary abuses throughout the medieval era and afterward.

One relatively mundane example is scribes modifying family genealogies to turn commoners into nobility (as Scaliger allegedly did to his own family tree, according to Scioppius). In more brazen cases, forgers in Italy sometimes issued fake documents in the name of the pope or other authorities so that the ruling families could commit some larger frauds against one another. While the vast majority of people remained illiterate, kings and nobles misrepresented the outcomes of distant wars in writing to save face with ministers and courts at home. The political demand to shape perceptions caused documents to be wielded more as weapons than as faithful representations of reality, and the possibilities were limited only by the imaginations of the deceivers.


IOSEPHI SCALIGERI
IVL. CAESARIS F.
OPVS NOVVM
DE
EMENDATIONE TEMPORVM
IN OCTO LIBROS
TRIBVTVM.
Stoici.
Tatianus.
LVTETIÆ,
Apud Mamertum Patissonium Typographum Regium.
In officina Roberti Stephani.
M. D. LXXXIII.
CVM PRIVILEGIO.

Joseph Justus Scaliger (1540–1609)
Emendatione Temporum

Byzantine Agents

Hardouin believed he had detected the basic motives behind many of the Renaissance-era forgeries. These motives involved the collapse of the Eastern Roman or Byzantine Empire from the ongoing Islamic conquest that had been taking place in the East. As the Byzantine Empire lost more and more territory to invading armies, the Byzantines and Greeks were desperate for military assistance from Western Europe. The ancient capital of Constantinople itself was threatened, and so Hardouin believed that the Byzantines resorted to forging literature which essentially posited Greece as the birthplace of European civilisation and the origin of a common heritage shared with the Romans and their empire in the West, hoping they might recruit more help from among the Latin-speaking Westerners.

In his own words (translated out of Latin), Hardouin stated that the "impious cohort" of Byzantine-influenced forgers had taken the "greatest care…to fabricate Greek historical fathers and writers in large numbers up to the capture of Constantinople by the Turks and later." The fabricated texts promoted certain sociopolitical ideas to perhaps not only rally additional support for Constantinople against the Turks, but also (and especially *after* Constantinople had already fallen) for more regional sociopolitical objectives of the Medici, Hapsburg, Valois, and other ruling families of the time period.[9]

The French classicist does not appear to have been speculating about this. There is surviving documentation that Byzantine agents were indeed responsible for the earliest appearance of many ostensibly ancient Greek texts in Renaissance Italy. Foremost among these was Manuel Chrysoloras, the same man responsible for introducing many classical Greek works of Plato into Italy from the late 1300s into the early 1400s. Chrysoloras first taught Greek in Venice, where he served as eyes and ears for the Byzantine courts gauging Roman Catholic appetite for embarking on yet another military crusade in the East. Chrysoloras later moved to Florence with the support of a city leader named Coluccio Salutati who also financially supported the translations made by Chrysoloras's students during the first half of the 1400s.

By the second half of that century, printing presses were in operation and Florence was leading Europe in the arts and sciences, including in the study of classical Greek. This was thanks in large part to the generous investments of the Medici family, who in turn gained power and influence from the social and technological advances of this Renaissance. When the Byzantine scholar named Gemisthus Pletho (or Gemistos Plethon, among other spelling variations) came to Italy in the middle of the 15th century to attend a religious conference, the Medici family hired him to introduce and translate more of Plato's ancient Greek philosophy.

The close resemblance of Gemistos's last name to the ancient Greek philosopher ("Platon" is how the philosopher's name is spelled in Greek, Latin, and French, for example) has led to speculation about whether the Byzantine might have intentionally named himself after the philosopher, but it is unclear if Pletho himself ever addressed this apparent coincidence. It was Pletho, with the support of the banker Cosimo de' Medici, who first translated and published a large collection of Plato's ancient works between the years 1446 and 1476. From

there those texts spread across Italy to France, England, and other nations and remain among the accepted canon of Plato's classical works today.[10]

As it happened, Pletho was responsible for much more than just introducing new works of Plato. He was deeply involved in the religious and political activities of his era, as with the religious conference in Italy mentioned earlier. It was Pletho who first drew attention to the differences between Plato and Aristotle in *De Differentiis*, starting the great debate over whether Plato's conception of God was more powerful than Aristotle's (as Pletho himself argued) and playing into ongoing religious and political debates of his day.



Portrait of Gemistos Plethon, detail of a fresco by acquaintance Benozzo Gozzoli, Palazzo Medici Riccardi, Florence, Italy.

Even more significantly, the conference which had first brought him to Italy in 1439, the Council of Ferrara-Florence, had been convened for the explicit purpose identified by Jean Hardouin as the motive for forgery: to try to unify the Roman and Greek churches in the face of the Islamic invasion from the East. Pletho used the works of Plato which he was now introducing to Renaissance Europe in order to make his arguments toward that objective.

Less publicly, Pletho favoured reviving the Hellenistic religion of the ancient Greeks, including replacing Christianity with a state-backed religion based on a mix of Hellenic paganism with his ideas of Platonism, as he proposed in a privately circulated work entitled *Nomoi*. Pletho of course kept his real thoughts quiet during his lifetime as they would have been a direct and heretical challenge to Roman Catholic order, and even the hint of these sorts of feelings was enough to have turned some of his friends against him, though the Medici family continued to support Pletho.

The Noble Lie

Since the Renaissance-era editions of Plato first appeared in the context of Byzantine agents supporting or fleeing the collapsing Eastern Empire, it is not surprising that Jean Hardouin considered them to have been complete fabrications. It is at this juncture that one might consider a concept raised within the famous *Res Publica* (Plato's *Republic*) itself: the concept commonly referred to as the "noble lie," though those exact words do not appear in the original text. In the translated words of the *Republic*, this is the distinction between "the lie in words" and "the lie in being," with the author arguing through the dialogue that it is acceptable to promote falsehoods if they accomplish certain favourable outcomes. This argument is made in the broader theme of ruling what the author proposed to be the ideal state and society.

By this reasoning, if perhaps the author of the *Republic* were lying about his true identity, for instance, then that would be morally justifiable as long as it was for a noble cause… like bringing the Byzantine Greeks and Roman Catholics closer together in the face of the Islamic threat. So if the *Republic* were a forgery as Hardouin alleged, then that would be okay by its own philosophy. It seems to ask: What real harm has been done in pursuit of a noble cause?

Again, Gemistos Pletho used this same literature he helped introduce to Renaissance Europe in his attempt to construct a new and ideal society uniting Greeks and Romans, and so the question must sooner or later be raised: could the Renaissance-era rebirth of classical Greek philosophy have been based on false or misleading premises from the start, bent toward some political or religious agenda of the medieval era?

If that were the case, then one could argue that the classical revival during the Renaissance was a forerunner of the same kind of sociological phenomena seen in the Enlightenment-era Rosicrucian movement at the end of the Renaissance. Early Rosicrucian texts purported that mysterious figures were working together in a secret order to bring enlightenment to the world. The earliest texts appear to have been entirely fabricated, but they inspired the creation of real intellectual clubs and secret societies which made major contributions to civilisation comparable to those of the Renaissance. These intellectual movements advanced public education and favoured greater personal liberties, giving rise to revolutions, including the American Revolution. One could thus argue that a series of great "noble lies" may have contributed directly to the foundation of the United States and British Empire.

A noble lie nevertheless remains a lie. No matter how justified the reasoning may have been at the time, if medieval or Renaissance-era scribes fabricated supposedly ancient texts, then modern historians will still have a valid interest in finding them, recognising them for what they are, and better recalculating the truth of the past from there.

As unsophisticated as our medieval predecessors may have been in some respects, they already had some understanding of what had come before them, and much of that has been preserved until today. These were the tales of the Middle Ages which were widely popular before Renaissance-era scholars began flooding the zone with materials of more questionable origin. The non-standard histories of the Middle Ages may seem more confounding to modern scholars, but they nonetheless deserve very careful attention and may reveal more of our real past than currently suspected. *Timaeus*, as a "troublesome" holdover of the pre-Renaissance literature, may be a small hint of this possibility.

Lingering Questions

What is the dialogue *Timaeus*? Is it a philosophical dialogue based on the teachings of the ancient Athenian philosopher Plato, faithfully preserved from the 300s or 400s BCE? Is it a fragment of medieval esoterica dedicated or attributed to an entirely different conception of Plato as an almost legendary or mythical figure? Is it a fabrication of the medieval church in order to attract attention away from other non-standard histories persisting from the Middle Ages, and projected into the classical past to give it an air of authority?

The prevalence of medieval forgery provides a perfect example of why it is foolhardy to take manuscripts at face value, and why it is impossible to understand ancient history without first looking through the hall of mirrors that is medieval historiography. Honest confusion and a general lack of education undoubtedly aggravated the faithful preservation of old texts, but incompetence was not the only factor at play in the medieval world. Surviving glimpses of the truth will not be understood without making some effort to see through these lapses and distortions from medieval record-keepers. This is especially the case when it comes to whatever authentic memories may or may not have been preserved of a sunken island kingdom called Atlantis.

This article opened with a question of whether there could be more to *Timaeus* and its apparent knowledge of a cataclysm circa 10,000 BCE. Though perhaps not fully resolving that problem, the present article has shown that the origins of *Timaeus* can hardly be reliably traced back beyond the medieval period of about 1,000 years ago, let alone securely tied to any ancient Greek knowledge 2,000 years ago regarding what happened eight thousand years before that.

However, here is another, equally important question regarding the dating of the ice-age cataclysm: could there also be more to modern geology and its prehistoric dating schemes? After all, the dating coincidence of Plato's cataclysm and modern geology's cataclysm is only significant if they arrived at the information independently of one another. If one were to discover, for example, that modern dating techniques have always been calibrated to conform to the pre-existing dating schemes of the 19th-century and earlier, then this coincidence might prove to be far less meaningful. Perhaps the idea of dating a global cataclysm to twelve thousand years ago also originated from some monastic order of the church during the Renaissance. That, however, is an investigation for another place and time.

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Endnotes

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