In archaic societies myths were believed to tell true stories – stories about the ultimate origin of reality. For us, on the contrary, the term ‘myth’ denotes a false belief. Between the archaic notion of myth and ours stands Plato’s. This volume is a collection of studies by eminent scholars that focus on the ways in which some of Plato’s most famous myths are interwoven with his philosophy. The myths discussed include the eschatological myths of the Gorgias, the Phaedo, the Republic and Laws X, the central myths of the Phaedrus and the Statesman, and the so-called ‘Myth of the Noble Lie’ from the Republic. The mythical character of the Timaeus cosmology is also amply discussed. The volume also contains seventeen rare Renaissance illustrations of Platonic myths. The contributors argue that, in Plato, myth and philosophy are tightly bound together, despite Plato’s occasional claim that they are opposed modes of discourse.

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Contents

List of illustrations vii
List of contributors ix
Preface xiii
Acknowledgements xv
List of abbreviations xvi

Introduction
Catalin Partenie 1

1. Plato’s eschatological myths
   Michael Inwood 28

2. Myth, punishment and politics in the Gorgias
   David Sedley 51

3. Tale, theology and teleology in the Phaedo
   Gábor Betegh 77

4. Fraternité, inégalité, la parole de Dieu: Plato’s authoritarian myth of political legitimation
   Malcolm Schofield 101

5. Glaucon’s reward, philosophy’s debt: the myth of Er
   G. R. F. Ferrari 116

6. The charioteer and his horses: an example of Platonic myth-making
   Christopher Rowe 134

7. The myth of the Statesman
   Charles H. Kahn 148

8. Eikős muthos
   M. F. Burnyeat 167
Contents

9. Myth and eschatology in the Laws
   Richard Stalley 187

10. Platonic myth in Renaissance iconography
    Elizabeth McGrath 206

Suggested further reading 239
Bibliography 240
Index 251
Illustrations


viii Illustrations

14. French or Flemish, Plato’s Cave. Oil on canvas, late sixteenth century. Douai, Musée de la Chartreuse, inv. 2787 (photo: Musée de la Chartreuse).
17. Plate III from Johannes Kepler, Mysterium cosmographicum, Tübingen (Georgius Gruppenbachius) 1597 (photo: Warburg Institute).
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“And what is the use of a book”, thought Alice, “without pictures or conversations?” This question rounds off the first paragraph of Alice’s Adventures in Wonderland, and it is, at least for Alice, a rhetorical question. Judging from his writings, Plato seems to believe, just like Alice, that a good book, even a philosophy book, should have both pictures and conversations; although in his case the pictures are conjured up in words and the reader has to imagine them himself. Conversation is ubiquitous in Plato’s writings, which take the form of philosophical dialogues between both real and fictional characters. Once in a while the conversation is interrupted, and then the pictures appear. One of the characters puts the conversation on hold and tells his audience a myth. The myths are visual – ‘iconic’ one might say. They not only narrate a story, but paint before our mind’s eye vivid images of the creatures and landscapes that feature in them. Details regarding shape, colour, and even dimension are abundantly provided: the original two-headed, eight-limbed human beings in the Symposium, the spindle-like universe in the Republic, or the city of Atlantis in the Critias – these are all as meticulously described as if Plato were giving instructions to an illustrator. Plato’s myths are not abstract tales; and those listening to, or reading, them cannot but attempt to picture what they are being told.

Plato is both a myth teller and a myth maker, and there are many myths in his writings. Some are traditional myths, which he sometimes modifies slightly; others are heavily modified versions of traditional myths; while others still are his own invention, although they are never completely free of elements drawn from various traditions. Whether the myths he tells are his inventions or not, they are, most of the time, inextricably linked with his philosophical thinking. And this makes any reader of Plato’s dialogues wonder at them; for he explicitly opposes philosophical discourse to myth while in practice he mixes the two. This volume is a collection of eleven studies (all but one of them – Chapter 8 – appearing here for the first time) dealing, from a philosophical perspective, with the puzzling issue of Plato’s
The mythical character of the Timaeus cosmology is also amply discussed.

This volume, too, contains both pictures and conversations. Only this time it is, in a sense, a reversal of what happens in Plato’s texts: the pictures (some rare Renaissance illustrations of Platonic myths) are not conjured up in words, but presented to the reader’s eyes; while the conversations of the contributors – which took place during a conference held in Budapest in 2005, and which improved the arguments put forth in this volume – are to be imagined behind its continuous prose.

I thank all the contributors for their patience and encouragement. I am especially grateful to Dr Michael Sharp, editor at Cambridge University Press, for his support and suggestions. I also wish to thank the two anonymous readers of the Cambridge University Press for their helpful comments.

I am grateful to the Central European University in Budapest, to Pasts, Inc., its Centre for Historical Studies, and to Professor Sorin Antohi, the then director of the Centre, for their support in organizing a conference on Plato’s myths in April 2005. I am also grateful to the publishers of Rhizai for permission to reprint M. F. Burnyeat’s article.

Last but not least, I wish to express my gratitude to my wife, son and parents for their continuing tolerance.
Acknowledgements

By kind permission of Oxford University Press, Malcolm Schofield’s chapter, ‘Fraternité, inégalité, la parole de Dieu: Plato’s authoritarian myth of political legitimation’, includes material first published in Chapter 7 of his Plato: Political Philosophy (Oxford University Press, 2006).

## Abbreviations

**PLATO’S WORKS**

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Abbreviation</th>
<th>Title</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Alc. I</td>
<td>Alcibiades I</td>
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<td>Ap.</td>
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<td>Charmides</td>
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<td>Grg.</td>
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<td>Hp. Ma., Mi.</td>
<td>Hippias Major, Minor</td>
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