

## INTRODUCTION

### **Plato's *Timaeus***

Plato's *Timaeus* is a dialogue of universal dimensions. It examines the composition and nature of our universe, beginning with its most elementary parts. Such extensive subject matter necessarily branches out into various disciplines: mathematics, harmonics, astronomy, biology, psychology, epistemology, physics, and metaphysics. The dialogue is far-reaching, moreover, in terms of its significance for Western intellectual history. Its dissemination shaped the ensuing philosophical discourse that began with Aristotle and Plato's successors in the Academy and that was enriched by the contributions of the Hellenistic philosophical systems and by the Jewish and Christian scholars of the early centuries CE, until the fascination with this deeply theological text subsided in the course of the rising secularism of the Renaissance.

The dialogue experienced renewed attention in the early decades of the twentieth century, which resulted in the important contributions by A.E. Taylor (1928) and F.M. Cornford (1937). In the subsequent decades the *Timaeus* was at the centre of a chronological controversy sparked by G.E.L. Owen, who rejected its categorization as a dialogue written by the late Plato. Owen's view was based on the similarities, metaphysical and epistemological, with what were perceived to be earlier dialogues: the *Phaedo*, the *Republic*, the *Symposium*, and the *Phaedrus*, as opposed to the 'later' *Theaetetus* and *Parmenides* that are critical of the metaphysical worldview conveyed by the other texts. Owen's view was questioned, in turn, by H.F. Cherniss and it is the traditional

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chronology supported by the latter that has prevailed up until this point.<sup>1</sup> This episode contributed much to reviving, over the last thirty years, the once sluggish interest in the dialogue, as is reflected by the growing body of modern Timaeian scholarship. To name but a few recent studies: T.K. Johansen's *Plato's Natural Philosophy* (2004) is devoted to demonstrating the overall teleological framework, both in content and in structure, of the *Timaeus* and places emphasis on the similarities between the Timaeian creation account and Aristotle's natural philosophy. The *Timaeus* in its role as the 'ultimate creationist manifesto' (p. 133) is discussed in the context of a broader study of ancient teleological thinkers and their adversaries in David Sedley's *Creationism and its Critics in Antiquity* (2007). The edited volume *One Book, The Whole Universe: Plato's Timaeus Today* by R. Mohr, K. Sanders, and B. Sattler (2010) examines various approaches to the dialogue, stretching from its immediate reception to modern-day cosmologists, architects, and physicists, and stresses the significance of the *Timaeus* for the wider Western scientific culture. Most recently, Sarah Broadie's *Nature and Divinity in Plato's Timaeus* (2012) has offered a thorough and complex examination of the dialogue that subjects many of its fundamental questions to a rigorous analysis: the nature of the creative divinity, the creation account and its relation to the Atlantis myth, the role of the intelligible forms and the receptacle. A further part of Broadie's study addresses the notorious crux of the Timaeian creation story: are we, or are we not, to take the creation account at face value? Undoubtedly, the renewed scholarly interest in Plato's dialogue attests to the perennial significance of the questions and topics it raises.

<sup>1</sup> For more recent contributions on the place of the *Timaeus* within the Platonic corpus, see Kahn 2010, who places Timaeian cosmology in a wider development of Plato's thought that reaches from the *Phaedrus* to *Laws* 10. Brandwood 1990: 250 and Ledger 1989 steer the discussion away from the relationship between the *Timaeus* and the *Theaetetus*/*Parmenides* towards texts that are more ambiguous in terms of their dating, e.g. the *Sophist* and the *Philebus*.

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### The Platonic Tradition

The present examination focuses on the development of Platonic philosophy at the hands of Roman writers between the first century BCE and the fifth century CE. The beginning of this period witnessed a gradual intellectual shift from the Hellenistic philosophical systems, the Stoics, the Academic Sceptics, the Peripatetics, and the Epicureans, to a dogmatist reappraisal of Platonic teaching. Severing the ties with their sceptical predecessors the Platonists, approximately from the first century BCE, absorbed Stoic, Neopythagorean, and Peripatetic nuances on their way towards a harmonizing dogmatism that allowed (Neo)Platonic thought to remain at the forefront of the ideological engagement with the Jewish and Christian scholars of the early centuries CE. Within this dogmatic synthesis, the authors under focus in the present study are witness to the attempt to reconcile and integrate Aristotelian and Stoic materialism with Plato's transcendent realm to arrive at a congruent and coherent analysis of our human existence and its relation to the divine. Perhaps reacting to the evolving Christian intellectual stance, the Platonic focus underwent a subtle reorientation, visible especially in the Middle Platonic thinkers of the second and third centuries CE, away from the intelligible ideas located in a divine transcendent realm, towards a hierarchy of divine agents, led by one supreme god, that was responsible for the creation and administration of the universe.

The rich conversations that accompanied Platonic, Aristotelian, and Stoic material into the early centuries of our era have been the focus of increased attention especially over the past two decades. Harold Tarrant's study *Plato's First Interpreters* (2000) focuses on Plato's Middle Platonic interpreters and sets them in relation to Plato's early successors in the Academy as well as his Neoplatonic successors. Tarrant discusses the concepts of doctrinal content and genre assumed by these authors, and traces the reception of individual dialogues such as the *Gorgias*, *Parmenides*, *Sophist*, *Cratylus*, and *Politicus*, and the *Philebus*. The volume *The Origins of*

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*the Platonic System: Platonisms of the Early Empire and Their Philosophical Contexts* (2009) edited by Mauro Bonazzi and Jan Opsomer carefully evaluates the process of doctrinal systemization by philosophical authors from the first century BCE onwards, and emphasizes the emergence of Platonic doctrine as the result of intellectual encounters of Platonic and Platonizing authors with Aristotelian, Stoic, and Pythagorean writings. Discussions on the development of individual philosophical schools are presented in Malcolm Schofield's edited volume *Plato, Aristotle and Pythagoras in the First Century BC* (2013).

With a specific focus on the *Timaeus* as the central point of reference for representatives of the Platonic tradition, Ada Babette Neschke-Hentschke's edited volume *Le Timée de Platon: Contributions à l'Histoire de sa Réception* (2000) sets the interpretations of the dialogue by a range of ancient authors, such as Galen, Calcidius, Proclus, and Boethius, in relation to the views of Marsilio Ficino, A.N. Whitehead, and others. The volume *Ancient Approaches to Plato's Timaeus* (2003), edited by Robert Sharples and Anne Sheppard, explores the dialogue through thematic contexts and through the eyes of individual interpreters such as Theophrastus, Epicurus, Philo, Calcidius, and Proclus. Finally, Francesco Celia's and Angela Ulacco's *Il Timeo: Esegesi Greche, Arabe, Latine* (2012) traces the dialogue's history of reception in the Arabic and Latin world by examining interpretations by Academic, Middle Platonic, and Neoplatonic authors.

At this point, let me add a methodological note. For my discussion of the Timaeian doctrine across the centuries I will apply the traditional labels to the periods under focus. I will use the term Middle Platonism when referring to the period from roughly the first century CE until the time of Plotinus, who marks the transition to Neoplatonism. I maintain this traditional chronological division simply to impose a rough framework within which we may situate the authors under focus. I do not wish to suggest that the intellectual development that occurred during this time frame lent itself to as clear-cut and simple a structure as may be implied by this method – indeed,

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the further we engage with the doctrinal settings of our authors, the more blurred the lines of demarcation appear between what should be considered Hellenistic, Middle Platonic and Neoplatonic, non-Christian and Christian material. While I will, therefore, attempt to place the individual doctrinal elements and influences we encounter in our authors into their appropriate time frames, it is not my primary aim to pinpoint exegetical affiliation. Instead, it is my wish to show that the contributions of each author discussed in the subsequent chapters deserve to be examined as self-contained, coherent, and original approaches to Plato's *Timaeus* in their own right.

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A consequence of the increased attention paid to post-Hellenistic philosophy has been the rise in profile also of Roman philosophical writers. Writing philosophy did not come naturally to Roman authors, and we have no knowledge of Latin philosophical writings preceding those of Varro, Cicero, and Lucretius in the first century BCE aside, perhaps, from low-quality manuals without much intellectual and literary pretense that may have circulated in Roman aristocratic settings.<sup>2</sup> The efforts of these Roman authors were encouraged by contemporary historical events that had seen the dissolution of the Greek philosophical schools, accelerated by the newly established Roman empire from 27 BCE, and the spread of philosophers and their ideas away from their centralized Greek institutions towards Rome. The dispersed generation of philosophers relied increasingly on the authority of their masters' writings that now provided a unifying ideological frame of reference where physical cohesion was no longer possible. At the same time, the shift of power towards Rome ensured the continued popularity of Greek philosophy among the Roman educated élite. With Greek philosophical literature and language restricted to upper-class Romans, many of whom held a political office for which they had received a thorough

<sup>2</sup> Cf. Chapter 2, n. 1.

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rhetorical education, it is no surprise that rhetorical methodology would contribute to the distinctive character of Roman philosophical writing.

The past decades have seen the publication of numerous studies of Roman philosophy, sometimes under the blanket of Hellenistic philosophy, for instance, *The Cambridge History of Hellenistic Philosophy* edited by Keimpe Algra et al. (1999), and *Post-Hellenistic Philosophy. A Study of its Development from the Stoics to Origen.* by George Boys-Stones (2001). Other volumes set Roman philosophy in relation to the Hellenistic systems, for instance, *Philosophy in the Roman Empire* (2007) by Michael Trapp, and *The Cambridge Companion to Greek and Roman Philosophy* (2003) edited by David Sedley. An important contribution that helped stress the distinct character of Roman philosophy is the two-volume study *Philosophia Togata* (1989 and 1997) edited by Miriam Griffin and Jonathan Barnes, and worthy of mention is, moreover, Mark Morford's *The Roman Philosophers* (2002). The most systematic study of the Latin philosophical tradition is Stephen Gersh's *Middle Platonism and Neoplatonism: The Latin Tradition* in two volumes (1986). This exhaustive survey approaches the individual authors by tracing exegetical references under unifying themes such as 'God', 'Form', and 'Nature'.

In the case of the individual authors under focus in the present study, J.G.F. Powell's edited volume *Cicero the Philosopher* (1995) is noteworthy as the first study that reflects the renewed interest in Cicero's *philosophica* during the final decades of the last century in a series of philosophical, historical, and philological investigations that have helped absolve Cicero of the charge of unoriginality and eclecticism. What is more, I owe many insights to David Sedley's 'Cicero and the *Timaeus*' (2013), a study on which I build in Chapter 2. A recent topical contribution to Cicero's philosophical writings is the volume *Cicero's De Finibus: Philosophical Approaches* edited by J. Annas and G. Betegh (2015), which highlights Cicero's authorial role in his portrayal of Hellenistic ethics with the help of philosophical, historical,

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and methodological approaches to the treatise. Worthy of note here, in particular, is the contribution to the volume by Charles Brittain who, after a careful analysis of evidence in Cicero's *De finibus*, concludes that Cicero may have adopted a rather more radical, Carneadean type of scepticism instead of the probabilist Philonian type that is usually associated with him.

Apuleius' writings are the focus of two examinations that coincide in their aim of placing him in the setting of the Second Sophistic. Gerald Sandy's *The Greek World of Apuleius* (1997) stresses the connection of the Roman author with the Greek sophists and the broader Greek cultural background, while Stephen Harrison's *Apuleius: A Latin Sophist* (2000) considers the Apuleian corpus in its entirety, combining a focus on the specifically Roman aspects of Apuleius' sophistic identity with a rich discussion of testimonia and individual fragments. Three recent studies are noteworthy. Richard Fletcher's contribution *Apuleius' Platonism. The Impersonation of Philosophy* (2014) encourages us to reappraise Apuleius' overall literary and philosophical achievement and what he terms his 'idiosyncratic brand of Platonism' (p. vii). Likewise, Claudio Moreschini's *Apuleius and the Metamorphoses of Platonism* (2015), an accessible and erudite discussion of all aspects of Apuleius' philosophical thought, offers a rather more positive evaluation of the role of rhetoric in Apuleius' Platonism. Finally, in his recent volume *A New Work by Apuleius: The Lost Third Book of the De Platone* (2016) Justin A. Stover argues that a previously unknown Latin work, the *Compendiosa expositio* (*exp.*), which appears in a thirteenth-century manuscript along with other Latin *philosophica*, was composed by Apuleius and intended by him as the third book of the *De Platone et eius Dogmatis*.<sup>3</sup>

In the case of Calcidius Gretchen Reydam-Schils, John Magee and Béatrice Bakhouché have considerably furthered our understanding of this author's underestimated

<sup>3</sup> Cf. Chapter 3, n. 1.



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contribution to the Platonic heritage, and have sparked a renewed interest in the Calcidian oeuvre. Notable studies are, among others, Professor Reydam's-Schils's *Demiurge and Providence: Stoic and Platonist Readings of Plato's Timaeus* (1999), and her edited volume *Plato's Timaeus as Cultural Icon* (2003). Professor Bakhouché's carefully researched approach to Calcidius and the philosophical influences on his thought are summarized in the two volumes of her French edition of Calcidius, *Calcidius: Commentaire au Timée de Platon* (2011). A significant recent advance for Calcidian scholarship is John Magee's first English translation of Calcidius' translation and commentary on the *Timaeus* (2016).

Following the seminal contributions, in the mid-twentieth century, to Augustinian scholarship by P. Courcelle, H. Chadwick, A.H. Armstrong, and J.J. O'Meara, numerous recent investigations offer a narrower topical approach to the subjects touched upon in the present study. Helpful examinations of Augustine's creation narrative and his concept of time are found in S. Knuuttila's 'Time and Creation in Augustine' (2001), and J.W. Carter's study 'St. Augustine on Time, Time Numbers, and Enduring Objects' (2011), both of which build on the important earlier work by Roland Teske in these fields. The study *Christ and the Just Society in the Thought of Augustine* by R. Dodaro (2004) examines Augustine's thoughts on the impact of Christ's mediation against the background of political and ethical views. L. Gioia's *The Theological Epistemology of Augustine's De Trinitate* (2008) studies the epistemological impact of human sinfulness and redemption in the context of the doctrine of soteriology. Worthy of note is, moreover, William E. Mann's edited volume *Augustine's Confessions: Philosophy in Autobiography* (2014), which explores Augustine's concept of the will, his eudaimonism, the role of philosophical perplexity in our ascent to the truth, his theories of time and eternity, and his interpretation of intelligible matter, among other themes that emerge in the *Confessions*.



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The present study discusses the interpretation of Plato's *Timaeus* by Cicero, Apuleius, Calcidius, and Augustine. It is intended to add to the above-named examinations of these authors by developing a more complete and coherent portrayal of each as an interpreter of Plato. I examine how these authors created new contexts and settings for the intellectual heritage they received and thereby contributed to the construction of the complex and multifaceted genre of Roman Platonism. Crucially, I will take advantage of each author's treatment of Plato's *Timaeus* as a continuous point of reference. This approach offers the unique possibility to illustrate the individuality and originality of each writer in his engagement with a Greek philosophical text. Each author chooses a specific vocabulary, methodology, and literary setting for his appropriation of Timaeian doctrine such as he finds it in the dialogue or in his exegetical sources. To deliver an authentic portrayal of our Latin interpreters, I will provide a thorough examination of each author's broader intellectual framework, his philosophical method and outlook, as well as his authorial agenda and chosen genre for his treatment of the *Timaeus*. In the case of Cicero, Apuleius, and Calcidius, I will argue, in particular, that Greek–Latin translation and paraphrase takes on the role of an exegetical tool that proves an essential part of these authors' philosophical project. With Plato's *Timaeus* as the unifying reference point, I am able to provide a concrete example that allows us to set an author's work in relation to his Greek primary and secondary sources, and to illustrate noteworthy instances of interrelation and overlap between the Latin authors themselves.

I consider this approach complementary to those studies that assess Roman philosophical writings predominantly according to their value to the *Quellenforscher*. No doubt, the latter approach remains invaluable for our understanding of the transmission of knowledge and the emergence of a systemized Platonic doctrine. Nevertheless, too strict a focus

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on the meticulous tracing of doctrinal elements in our Roman authors risks leaving us with the impression of little more than the accumulation of Platonic echoes. The comprehensive nature of my examination, it is hoped, will counteract such a disintegrated view, and show that each author offers a coherent and nuanced treatment of Timaeian doctrine that has not yet been appreciated to the full.

In Chapter 1 I sketch out the contents of Plato's *Timaeus* and introduce its central themes. Particular focus is given to a dilemma that has attracted attention from the dialogue's first dissemination and continues to puzzle scholars to the present day: should the Timaeian creation account be read in literal or metaphorical terms? My discussion of this apparent interpretative impasse provides the reader with the information necessary to appreciate some of the more complex exegetical responses to Plato's dialogue by our authors. The remainder of this chapter deals predominantly with such interpretative topics as are relevant to my discussion in Chapters 2 to 5.

Each of the subsequent chapters is divided into subsections that examine the author's intellectual background, his Plato and Platonism, and his specific engagement with the *Timaeus*, with the last section discussing the author's interpretation of Timaeian motifs or language and his method of incorporating the Platonic material into a new literary setting. Under these headings I allow for considerable flexibility and adapt my focus in each chapter to the individual strengths and interests of the author.

Chapter 2 discusses Cicero's translation of the *Timaeus*, set in relation to his philosophical treatises. Since Cicero's Timaeian project is perhaps the most complex compared to the other authors, I will develop this chapter at some length. First discussing his agenda as a translator of Plato, I then focus on Cicero's possible motivation for turning towards the *Timaeus* and, in turn, the reasons he may have had for excluding his translation of the dialogue from his published writings. Furthermore, I show how, with the help of certain terminological modifications, Cicero was able to reframe the Timaeian creation account in a manner that would have aligned it with

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sceptical policy, thereby appropriating the dialogue for the sceptical Academy. In this context, my particular emphasis is on the rhetorical aspects of the Academy's investigative method, which, Cicero recognized, was a tool most formidably suited to philosophical investigation.

Chapter 3 examines Apuleius' attempt to present to his audience a coherent Platonic doctrine by assuming the role of a priest and mediator between Plato's divine authority and the initiates of Platonic wisdom. What is more, I identify several lexical and exegetical items we re-encounter in Calcidius' commentary on the *Timaeus*, discussed in Chapter 4, such as his theories on demons, providence, and fate. The parallels we find in these two authors are examples for the continuity and systemized treatment of specific themes original to Plato's dialogue. Particular focus is given to Apuleius' cosmology, a complex theory that is intended to set out the relations between a transcendent divinity and the sub-lunary realm, and from which will emerge an interesting dynamic between the author's exegetical stance in his *De Platone et eius dogmate* and his *De mundo*, a translation of the Ps.-Aristotelian treatise *Peri kosmou*. With the help of subtle adjustments, Apuleius balances Platonic and Aristotelian nuances in a manner that leaves us with the impression of a more or less coherent exegetical programme on his part.

With Calcidius, my focus lies on the author's exegetical method. I show that his translation of the *Timaeus* and his commentary on the dialogue form two intrinsically linked components of an exegetical method that is intended to guide the student to the knowledge of the truth. Calcidius' translation aims at the simplification of specialist terminology and at an increased access to Platonic dogma for a non-specialist audience, thereby laying the groundwork for the didactic programme of his commentary. What is more, I examine how Calcidius merges his role as a commentator with that of Timaeus, the narrator of Plato's dialogue, which enables Calcidius to present his exegesis as an authentic insight into Platonic dogma. Additional sections address 'Calcidius the Translator', and the doctrinal parallels between Calcidian and Apuleian exegesis.

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Given that Augustine approaches the *Timaeus* through Cicero's Latin translation, one of my aims in Chapter 5 is to illustrate the extent to which specific renderings in Cicero's Latin text impact on Augustine's understanding of Plato's cosmology and metaphysics. Since Augustine often attributes to Plato views that are easily aligned with Christian dogma, he finds himself able to corroborate the Christian stance by drawing on Plato's own words (via Cicero). Individual sections in this chapter discuss the manner in which Augustine's creation narrative has been shaped by the encounters between Neoplatonist and Christian writers, and draw attention to Augustine's polemical treatment of Apuleius' demonology, which Augustine exposes as self-contradictory by pointing, once again, to passages from the *Timaeus*, thereby turning Plato against his own disciple. What is more, Augustine's discussion of matter exhibits several noteworthy parallels to Calcidius' treatment of this topic.

Naturally within the framework of the present study I can do justice neither to every aspect of Plato's *Timaeus*, nor to each of the authors and their vast combined output. What is more, the selective line-up of authors in the present investigation has been determined by various criteria. Firstly, it focuses on those authors whose Timaeian exegesis, in my view, results in the most original and distinctive combinations of philosophical and methodological features. Secondly, I aim to exhibit an engagement with the *Timaeus* in a variety of literary settings. The genres chosen by our authors are: translation intended as a part of a philosophical dialogue (Cicero), translation in combination with philosophical commentary (Calcidius), paraphrase, translation, moralizing lecture, and 'textbook' survey of Platonic doctrine (Apuleius), and the autobiographical, often polemical manifesto of Christian doctrine in the case of Augustine.

Finally, it is my aim to showcase Latin interpreters of Plato from various periods. While I consider Cicero's *Timaeus* translation to represent the sceptical Academy, Apuleius offers a 'classic' Middle Platonic approach. Calcidius' stance, even though it strikes me as overall closer to Middle Platonism, shows Neoplatonic tinges. Augustine's Christian outlook, in turn,

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deeply influenced by Neoplatonic perspectives, makes for a fascinating interplay with the Platonic doctrine he draws from Cicero's translation, which is itself a relict from an earlier period of Platonism, and which is used by Augustine to polemical effect against Apuleius' Middle Platonic stance. As noted previously, the doctrinal similarities between Augustine and Calcidius that emerge in the context of the authors' interpretation of matter make for an intriguing comparison. These and other points of contact, both direct and indirect, between our four authors recommend their writings for a joint analysis of the kind I shall attempt in the present study. Among them, Augustine stands out since, unlike the others, he produced neither a translation of the *Timaeus*, nor longer stretches of recognizable paraphrase. Nevertheless, Augustine's treatment of the dialogue is a crucial witness to the confluence of various terminological and doctrinal features we encounter in Cicero and Apuleius, in particular. Precisely because Augustine could not rely on an extensive knowledge of Greek, these authors counted among the various Latin channels of transmission through which he accessed Platonic philosophy. In Augustine's engagement with the *Timaeus*, therefore, earlier influences come together, resulting in a striking exegetical synthesis.