

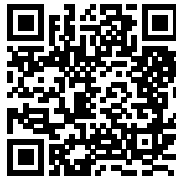
Critias

ΚΡΙΤΙΑΣ

Plato

translated by David Horan

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TIMAEUS: How glad I am, Socrates, to have come to the end of my protracted account. I feel relieved now, as if I were resting after a long journey. And I pray now to the god who has just been created in words, although created long ago in fact, to grant us the preservation of anything reasonable that we have said and to impose justice, as appropriate, if we have unwittingly gone out of tune on these subjects. And right justice means returning to harmony the person who has gone out of tune. Now, so that the remainder of our discourse about the creation of gods may be spoken aright, we pray that we may be given the most perfect and excellent medicine of all medicines, which is knowledge, and with this prayer I entrust the next discourse to Critias, as we agreed.

CRITIAS: Indeed, Timaeus, although I accept the task, I request some indulgence just as you did at the very outset, since I am about to speak on such major issues. I am now making the same request, but in view of what I am about to say, I deserve even more indulgence than yourself. And I am quite aware that the request I am about to make is most audacious and more blunt than needs be, but I must make it nevertheless.

CRITIAS: Who could reasonably even attempt to deny that everything you have said was good? But I must somehow endeavour to explain that the forthcoming exposition requires still more indulgence because it is more difficult. Indeed, Timaeus, to sound competent whilst speaking to us humans about the gods is easier to achieve than when speaking about mortals to fellow mortals. For the inexperience and downright ignorance of the listeners about the subject in question makes it very easy for anyone who intends to speak about them to such an audience, and when it comes to the gods, we know where we stand. Follow me here so that I may explain what I mean more clearly. Indeed, anything that is said by any of us must presumably be of the nature of an imitation or representation. Let's look at the production of images of divine and human figures by painters, and how easy or difficult it is to convince the viewers that the imitation is good enough. We shall see firstly that in the case of landscapes, mountains, rivers, woods, the heaven in its entirety and whatever resides and moves there, we are satisfied if someone is able to produce an imitation that bears even a slight resemblance to any of these. Furthermore, since our knowledge of things of this sort is inexact, we do

not scrutinise or challenge the paintings, but put up with an unclear and deceptive sketch in these cases.

CRITIAS: But whenever someone sets about producing a likeness of our own bodies, which we are so accustomed to observing, we quickly spot any deficiency and become harsh critics of anyone who does not present us with a full and complete likeness. Well, we need to observe that the same holds for accounts. In the case of the heavenly and divine, we are satisfied with accounts that are likely, even to a small extent, but when it comes to things mortal and human, we scrutinise the accounts with great precision. So, speaking at the moment, without any preparation, you will have to forgive us if we are unable to present an account that is fitting in every respect. For we need to bear in mind that to produce an acceptable likeness of things mortal is difficult rather than easy. Now, Socrates, I have said all this to remind you of these facts and to request more indulgence, rather than less, for whatever I am about to say. If my request for this favour sounds fair, please be willing to grant it.

SOCRATES: Why ever would we refuse your request, Critias? And let's grant the same favour again to our third speaker, Hermocrates. For it is obvious that in due course, when it is his turn to speak, he will make the same request as yourself, in which case, without being compelled to repeat the same opening request, let him rest assured that this indulgence is also available to him when it is his turn to speak so that he can provide a different preamble. And yet I forewarn you, dear Critias, of the disposition of your audience. The playwright who went before you was amazingly well received by them, and you will therefore require a great deal of indulgence if you are going to be a competent successor.

HERMOCRATES: The same warning you gave to this man also applies to me, Socrates. But, of course, a faint-hearted man never set up a trophy, Critias, so you must embark upon your discourse courageously, calling upon Paean and the Muses to present and sing the praises of your fellow citizens of old, who were such good people.

CRITIAS: My dear Hermocrates, having been assigned last place, with someone else going before you, you are still courageous, but you will soon find out what this process is really like. However, emboldened by your encouraging

words, I must have faith and call upon the other gods besides those you mentioned, and especially upon Memory. For the most important of all our accounts rests more or less with this god. Indeed, if I can adequately recall and proclaim what was once spoken by the priests and preserved here by Solon, I am quite confident that I shall be deemed by this audience to have done justice to my assigned task. So that is what I must now undertake without any further delay.

CRITIAS: First of all, then, let us recall that it is in total nine thousand years since war was declared between those dwelling outside the Pillars² of Heracles and all those who dwell within them. This I must now recount. One side was led, and the entire war was said to have been waged by this city of ours, while the other side was led by the kings of the island of Atlantis, which was, according to reports, an island, once larger than Libya and Asia combined. But nowadays, having been submerged during an earthquake, it acts as a barrier of mud obstructing those who wish to sail out into the open ocean from there.

CRITIAS: As for the various non-Greek peoples, and whatever Greek races there were at the time, the course of our narrative, as it unfolds, will reveal in each case the details of what happened to them everywhere. But in the case of the Athenians and the adversaries against whom they fought, it is necessary to begin by first recounting the power of each side and their political systems. And in speaking of these we must give precedence to our own people. Once upon a time, the gods, without any strife, allotted the entire earth. For it would not be right to suggest that gods are ignorant of what is proper to each of them, nor indeed that, having recognised what most belongs to other gods, they attempt to acquire this for themselves through strife. So, by lots, each was justly allotted his own, and they settled regions. And having settled them, they reared us, their possessions and livestock, except that they did not use physical force as shepherds do when driving their flocks to pasture with a staff. Instead, they led and steered the entire mortal creature in the way that is easiest to manage any living creature, guiding it from the stern, after their own mind, by the rudder of persuasion.

CRITIAS: Now, other gods, having been allotted other regions, ruled over them, but Hephaestus and Athena, sharing a common nature as siblings born

from the same father, sharing also the same pursuit of philosophy and craftsmanship, were allotted a single region. This was our region, a fitting and natural home for excellence and wisdom, and they produced good men, born from its soil, and they implanted in their minds the order of its political system. Although the names of these people have been preserved, their works have disappeared owing to the destructions of their successors and the long time period involved. For the people left behind on each occasion, as we said before, were illiterate mountain folk who had only heard the names of that region's rulers but knew little of their deeds. So, although they were happy to give these names to their own offspring, they were unaware of the excellent qualities and the laws of their predecessors, save for some obscure reports. They and their children lacked the necessities of life for many generations, and so they were preoccupied with what they lacked, and this became their topic of conversation and they had no interest in events of the distant past. For mythology and interest in antiquity come to cities along with leisure when they see that some people have already been furnished with the necessities of life, but not before then.

CRITIAS: That's why the names of the ancients have been preserved, but not their deeds. My evidence for what I say is the report of Solon that the Egyptian priests, describing the war that once took place, used many of these very names such as Cecrops, Erechtheus, Erichthoneus, Erysichthon, and most of the various names of the predecessors of Theseus that are recorded. The same applies to the names of the women too. And, indeed, the figure of the goddess as depicted, displayed as she is in full battle armour, accords with the custom of the time whereby military activities were once common to men and women alike, an indication that in all cases where male and female creatures congregate together, it is always naturally possible for each kind to pursue its own proper excellence in common.

CRITIAS: Now, in those days, in this region, the various classes among our citizens were engaged in manufacturing and producing food from the earth. But the military class, having been set apart by divine men at the outset, dwelt separately, possessed of everything that was appropriate for their sustenance and training. None of them had any private property, and they asked their fellow citizens for no sustenance beyond the limits of sufficiency. Indeed, their

entire lifestyle and customs were the same as those we described yesterday when speaking of those guardians whom we hypothesised. Furthermore, what is said about our land is persuasive and true: firstly that its boundaries at the time were defined by the Isthmus, and on the land side by the heights of Cithaeron and Parnes, and the boundaries went down with Oropus on the right, and Asopus constituted the sea boundary on the left. The soil in the region was more excellent than anywhere else, and that is why it was able to support a large army which was exempt from working the land. And there is strong evidence for its past excellence, since what's left nowadays is a match for any territory in productivity and fruitfulness and in the abundant pasture it affords to any livestock. But its produce in those days, as well as being excellent, came forth in vast quantities.

CRITIAS: Why should we believe this story and what is left of the land of old to confirm this account? The land as a whole is a long promontory, so to speak, extending from the general land mass far out into the ocean, and the seabed round about is of great depth. Now, although there have been many enormous floods during the nine thousand years that have elapsed since that era, the earth that washed down from the heights during the ongoing deluges did not accumulate significantly, as happens in other places, because it constantly flowed down and vanished into the deep. What is left then, comparing that era with the present, resembles the skeleton of a diseased body. It is just like what happens on small islands where any fat, rich soil has flowed away, leaving behind only the bare frame of the territory. But during that era the land was pristine, our present mountains were lofty hills, and the stony plains of what we call Phelleus were covered in rich soil. The mountains contained lots of trees of which there is still evidence nowadays, for although some of our mountains now support only bees, it was not long ago that roof timbers were cut from the trees there for use in huge buildings, and the rafters still survive to this day. And there were also many cultivated trees providing fodder aplenty for livestock. What's more, the soil was made fruitful by the annual rains sent by Zeus, which were not wasted as happens nowadays by flowing into the sea from land that has been made bare. Rather, since the land had plenty of soil, it could indeed receive the water and store it in impervious clay ground. The water stored there was sent forth from the heights through

hollows, providing plenty of flowing water for springs and rivers. The shrines that still remain where the springs once stood are an indication that what we are now saying about this region is true.

CRITIAS: Such was the natural condition of our region in general, and it was managed of course by true workers of the land, dedicated to this task alone, lovers of all things noble, with natural talents. They had access to the very best land with plenty of water, governed by seasons that were blended to perfection. The arrangement of the city at the time was as follows. Firstly, the Acropolis at that time was not as it is nowadays, washed bare of its soil following a single night of extreme deluge when an earthquake occurred along with the third enormous flood prior to the destruction of the age of Deucalion⁴. But before this, in another era, it was vast, extending from the Eridanos to the Ilisos river, encompassing the Pnyx, with the hill of Lycabettos as a boundary opposite the Pnyx. The entire was covered in earth, and it was more or less flat on top. Outside, under the actual slopes, it was settled by craftsmen and those farmers who worked the land nearby. On the top, the military class dwelt just by themselves around the temple of Athena and Hephaestus, surrounded by a single wall, like the garden of a single household. On the north side, they lived in communal dwellings and provided shared dining halls for the winter, with everything appropriate to their communal political system being available to them in terms of buildings and temples, but without any silver or gold, for none of them had any use for these. Pursuing a middle ground between extravagance and meanness, they built moderate dwellings in which they and their children's children grew old, bequeathing them always to others like themselves. In summer they naturally vacated their enclosed gardens, and their gymnasia and dining halls, and used the southern parts for these purposes. There was a single spring, on the site of the present Acropolis, which has been blocked by the earthquakes, so that nowadays only trickles of water remain in the vicinity, whereas it once provided a plentiful flow of water for everyone at just the right temperature throughout winter and summer.

CRITIAS: This is how their lives were arranged as guardians of their own citizens and leaders of the other Greek peoples, their willing subjects. They kept careful watch that the number of men and women capable of military

service at any stage was always more or less the same at about twenty thousand. Now these Athenians, being themselves people of this sort, were renowned above all peoples of that age, justly managing their own region and Greece generally in such a consistent manner, famous throughout all of Europe and Asia for their physical beauty and the overall excellence of their souls. As for their adversaries, the sort of people they were and their origins, if my memory of what we heard as children does not desert me, I shall now bring their stories centre stage to share with you, my friends.

CRITIAS: But before I begin my account, I owe you a brief explanation in case you are surprised to hear of so many non-Greeks with Greek names. You shall now discover the reason for this. Solon, intending to make use of the Egyptian account in his own poem, found out, on investigating the significance of the names, that those Egyptians who had written them down initially had translated them into their own language. So he himself, having recovered the sense of each name, put them back once more into our language and wrote them down. And these writings were in the possession of my grandfather and are in my own possession now. Indeed, I studied them carefully as a child. So do not be surprised if you hear names of this sort, belonging to our region; you have the explanation.

CRITIAS: Well then, the story, a long one, began somewhat as follows. As was said previously about the allotments of the gods, they portioned the land into lots, some larger some smaller, and instituted sacred places and sacrifices for themselves. And so, Poseidon, being allotted the island of Atlantis⁵, settled his own offspring, begotten of a mortal woman there, in a region of the island described as follows. By the sea, towards the centre of the entire region, there was a plain said to be of sublime excellence, and fertile too. Near the plain, towards the centre, at a distance of some fifty stades, there was a mountain that was low throughout. There was an inhabitant of that mountain, one of the men of that place born originally from its soil. His name was Evenor and he lived with his wife, Leucippe, and they had an only daughter, Cleito. When the girl had reached marriageable age, the father and mother both died. Poseidon was smitten with desire for the girl and made her his consort. He secured the hill on which she dwelt, fortifying it by making alternating circles of earth and sea, some smaller, some larger, enclosing each other, two of earth,

three of seawater, like round wheels in the middle of the island, equidistant from one another on all sides so that they were impassable for people because there were, as yet, no ships and no seafaring. He brought order to the middle part of the island, an easy task for a god, providing two sources of spring water from beneath the ground, one warm, the other overflowing with cool water, and he sent forth from the earth abundant and plentiful food.

CRITIAS: Having begotten and reared five pairs of twin male children, he divided the entire island of Atlantis into ten parts, and assigned the mother's homestead to the eldest of the firstborn twins, including the surrounding portion of land which was the biggest and the best. He installed this son as king over his brothers and appointed the others as rulers giving them dominion over large numbers of people and an extensive territory. He gave names to them all, naming the eldest, the king, after the whole island and the ocean too, which is called the Atlantic because the first-ever person to exercise kingship there was named Atlas. His other twin was granted the extremity of the island towards the Pillars of Heracles, as far as the region now called Gadeira. The place was named after the son whose Greek name was Eumelos, although locally it was Gadeirus in his own region which is named after him. The second pair of twins were called Ampheres and Euaimon. The eldest of the third pair was called Mneseus, while the other twin was called Autochton. The eldest of the fourth pair was called Elasippus, while the other was called Mestor. The eldest of the fifth pair was called Azaes, while the youngest was called Diaprepes. All these brothers, themselves and their descendants, dwelt there for many generations, ruling over numerous other islands of that ocean, and, indeed, as was said previously, governing all the peoples here within the Pillars of Heracles as far as Egypt and Tuscany.

CRITIAS: From Atlas sprang an extensive and revered people whose king, the eldest son, always passed his title on to the eldest of his offspring, thus preserving the kingship over many generations. They acquired enormous wealth such as no line of kings had amassed before or will easily attain in future. They were provided with all the provisions they needed in the city and in the rest of the country. For although a great deal came to them from outside because of their extensive rulership, the island itself furnished most of the provisions of life. Firstly, it yielded whatever solid or fusible materials are

extracted or mined from the ground, including a substance that now exists in name only, but was then more than a mere name. This was orichalc, mined in various locations throughout the island, more valuable at the time than anything else except gold. The island also brought forth an abundance of wood for carpenters to work on, and it was well able to sustain animals too, both tame and wild. And, indeed, there was a plentiful population of elephants, for there was enough pasture available for all sorts of creatures, including those who dwelt in marshes, lakes, rivers, or indeed in mountains or on plains, and enough in like manner for this enormous animal, by nature the most voracious creature of all. As well as all this, the island brought forth and easily sustained whatever fragrant products the earth supports nowadays from roots, herbs, trees or juices that ooze from flowers or fruits. There was also the cultivated fruit, the dry sort that is our sustenance, and those products that we use as our source of food, consisting in general of what we call pulses, and whatever grows on trees, providing us with drink, with solid food and oils, and tree-borne fruit that is difficult to store, acting as a source of pleasure and delectation which we offer to the fatigued to relieve their satiety. All these were brought forth then in limitless abundance and wondrous beauty by this sacred island beneath the sun. So, being in possession of all these products of the earth, they set about organising and building their temples, royal dwellings, harbours and dockyards, and the rest of their territory, based on the following plan.

CRITIAS: First, they bridged the rings of seawater that surrounded the ancient mother city, creating a way out of and into their palace. They immediately built the palace, at the very outset, in the original dwelling place of the god and his offspring, passing it on from one generation to the next, each adding to its adornments, each doing their best to continually improve upon the work of their predecessor, until they turned the residence into a marvel to behold for the majesty and beauty it displayed. In fact, they dug a canal running from the sea to the outermost circle, three plethra wide, one hundred feet deep and fifty stades long. In this way they created a passage from the sea into the outer circle by opening up an entrance big enough for the largest ships to sail into. And what's more, at the bridges they made openings in the circles of earth which were separating the circles of seawater,

openings wide enough for a single trireme to sail through, and they covered these from above so that the ships travelled underground. For the banks of the earthen circles were high enough above sea level to allow this.

CRITIAS: Now, the largest circle, the one that opened directly to the sea, was three stades wide, while the next circle, the earthen one, was the same width as that one. Of the second pair, the circle of water was two stades wide, while the circle of dry land was again equal in width to the previous circle of water. The circle running round the central island itself was one stade wide, while that island on which the palace stood had a diameter of five stades. This island and the circles and the bridge which was one plethron wide, they enclosed roundabout on every side with a stone wall, erecting towers and gates upon the bridges on either side at the sea crossings. They quarried the stone, some of which was white, some black, some red, from beneath the central island, all over, and from beneath the inner and outer circles. And by quarrying the stone, they simultaneously hollowed out a pair of internal docks which they covered over with native rock. Some of their buildings were simple, while in others they combined stone of various colours to amuse themselves, thus making them naturally pleasing to the eye. They covered the entire wall surrounding the outer circle with brass all around, as if they were painting it, while they covered the wall of the inner circle with a coat of tin, and the wall surrounding the acropolis itself with orichalc, which gave it a fiery gleam.

CRITIAS: The palace within the acropolis was designed as follows. In the centre, on the very spot, surrounded by a wall of gold, was a sacred shrine on untrodden ground, dedicated to Cleito and Poseidon. This stood in the place where their family of ten kings was initially begotten and born. To this very place, every year, the first fruits from all ten regions were brought as an offering to each of the kings. There was also a temple to Poseidon himself, one stade in length, three plethra wide, with its height duly proportioned to these dimensions, while its appearance was somehow foreign. The entire exterior of the temple was overlaid with silver, except for the acroteria, which were covered with gold. On the inside the ceiling was all ivory, decorated with gold and silver and orichalc, while everything else, including the walls, columns and floor, was covered with orichalc. Within, they erected golden statues depicting the god standing upon a chariot, controlling a team of six winged horses, he

himself being so tall that his head touched the roof. Encircling this were statues of a hundred Nereids riding upon dolphins, for people at the time believed that there were this many Nereids. Inside, there were also many other statues erected by private individuals. Outside, around the temple, stood golden images of the wives of the ten kings and their descendants, and various other large statues of the kings and of private persons from the city itself, or from foreign places over which they ruled. Their size and workmanship were in harmony with the overall design, and the palace was similarly well suited to the sheer scale of their rulership and the glory of the shrine.

CRITIAS: They made use of both springs, the hot one and a cold one, each providing plenty of water, wondrously pleasant and excellent by nature. And they built dwellings round about and planted suitable trees. There were pools in the area, some cold and in the open air, others warm and covered over for use as baths in winter. There were separate pools for the kings, for private citizens and for women, and others for horses and the various beasts of burden, with appropriate facilities provided in each case. The overflow was channeled to the grove of Poseidon, which, because of its excellent soil, contained a variety⁷ of lofty trees of exceptional beauty. They also channelled the water to the outer circles through pipes running along the bridges. There they had constructed many shrines to various gods, and gardens and gymnasia aplenty, some for men, some especially for horses, on each of the two circular islands. And, in particular, in the middle of the larger island there was a racing track reserved for horses, which was one stade wide and whose length was the circuit of the entire island. This space was set aside for equestrian competitions. And around the track on either side were guard houses for most of the bodyguards, although the more trustworthy among them were posted on the smaller circle, closer to the acropolis, while the most eminently trustworthy of all were allowed to reside within the acropolis, close to the kings themselves. The dockyards were full of triremes and all their necessary equipment, and everything was at the ready.

CRITIAS: That is how the residence of the kings was arranged. But beyond the three harbours, outside them, was a circular wall beginning from the sea, everywhere fifty stades distant from the largest circle and its harbours, circling back to the same place where the mouth of the canal opened to the sea. The

wall was densely populated with large numbers of houses, while the canal and the largest harbour was full of ships and traders arriving from all quarters, so many that they produced a fantastic commotion and din, day and night.

CRITIAS: Well, I have now given a fairly good report of the city and the environs of the ancient dwelling place as recounted then. I should now attempt to recall the nature and arrangement of the rest of the region. Firstly, the place was said to be elevated, with sheer cliffs rising out of the sea, while the entire area surrounding the city was a plain enclosing the city, itself enclosed by a ring of mountains stretching as far as the sea. The plain was level and smooth, elongated throughout, three thousand stades in one direction and two thousand stades inland from the sea at its centre. This particular section of the entire island was south-facing and was sheltered from the north winds.

CRITIAS: The mountains around the city were lauded at the time for their number, size and beauty, surpassing anything we have nowadays. In the mountains there were many prosperous villages with local populations, and rivers, lakes and meadows that could adequately support all the domesticated and wild animals, and an abundant variety of timber, more than enough for each and every function. Now, the plain, by nature, and because it had been cultivated by many kings over many years, had the following characteristics. It was originally four-sided, oblong, and for the most part a rectangle, but whatever it lacked in this respect they corrected by digging a trench around it. As for the depth, width and length of the trench, it is incredible to relate how any work of human hands could be so vast when compared with our usual endeavours, but I must tell you what I heard in any case. It was excavated to a depth of one plethron and it was everywhere one stade wide, while its length, running around the entire plain, was a thousand stades. It received the waters that flowed down from the mountains as it encircled the plain, and arriving at the city from both directions, it was set on its course out to the sea. Further inland from the city, one-hundred-foot-wide straight channels were cut across the plain, emptying again into the trench on the seaward side. Each of the channels stood a hundred stades apart from the other. These were used to transport wood from the mountains down to the city, and for conveying the rest of the seasonal produce in ships by cutting cross-channels sideways,

connecting the channels to one another and to the city. They took two crops from the land each year, relying upon the rains sent by Zeus in the winter, and in summer upon whatever the earth produced when they irrigated it from the channels.

CRITIAS: Out of the total number of men on the plain fit to bear arms, it was decreed that each lot was to provide one leader. The size of a lot was ten stades by ten, and the total number of lots was sixty thousand. From the mountains and the region in general, there was, according to reports, an enormous number of people, all assigned on the basis of their localities and villages, to these lots and their leaders. Each leader was directed, for military purposes, to provide one-sixth portion of a war chariot for a thousand chariots, two horses with riders, a team of two horses without a chariot-board, including a fighter with a light shield and a driver for the pair of horses who was to remain with them, two hoplites and two archers and slingers, three light-armed stone-throwers and the same number of javelin-throwers, and four sailors for the ships whose full fleet numbered twelve hundred. So this is how the military equipment of the royal city was organised. The various arrangements of the other nine cities would take too long to recount.

CRITIAS: The distribution of positions of authority and of honour was, from the very beginning, as follows. Each one of the ten kings had authority over the people and most of the laws in his own region and his own city, punishing and executing whomsoever he wished. Their authority over one another and their communal affairs were subject to the edicts of Poseidon, which the law transmitted to them, as did the inscriptions of the first kings written on a pillar of orichalc placed on the central island in the sanctuary of Poseidon. There they gathered every fifth year or every sixth year, alternately, thus showing equal respect for the odd and the even portion. When they met they deliberated about their communal affairs, enquired into any transgressions by any of them, and passed judgement. When they were about to deliver their judgement, they first gave pledges to one another as follows. There were bulls roaming free in the sanctuary of Poseidon. The ten kings, being present on their own, prayed that the god would select a sacrificial victim that was pleasing to himself. They then hunted with ropes and with wooden weapons containing no iron, and whatever bull they captured they

brought to the pillar and cut its throat over the top of the pillar, drenching the inscription with blood.

CRITIAS: Now, inscribed on the pillar, in addition to the laws, was an oath calling down mighty curses upon those who disobeyed. So when they had sacrificed in accordance with their own laws, they would dedicate all parts of the bull, and having blended a mixing bowl of wine, they threw in a clot of blood on behalf of each of them, and then having first cleansed the pillar, they poured the rest of the blood into the sacrificial fire. After this, they drew off some wine into golden vessels and made a libation over the fire, swearing an oath to judge in accordance with the laws inscribed upon the pillar, to punish anyone who had previously been a transgressor, and, furthermore, never intentionally to transgress any of the ordinances nor to exercise or submit to authority, save in accordance with the laws of their father. Having sworn all this on his own behalf and on behalf of their succeeding generations, each of them drank and offered up their vessel in the sanctuary of the god. Then, having spent their time engaging in the banquet and any necessary transactions, they all, once darkness had fallen, robed themselves in the most beautiful purple raiment, sat upon the ground by the embers of the ritual fire, and by night, with all fires in the sanctuary extinguished, they delivered and submitted themselves to judgement, if any of them accused the other of any transgression. When the light returned, they inscribed these on a tablet of gold and dedicated this along with their robes as a memorial.

CRITIAS: Now, although there were many other particular laws concerning the rights of the several kings, the most important were that they should never bear arms against one another; that they would all provide assistance if anyone tried to overthrow the royal family in any city; that in accordance with tradition they would deliberate together on military issues and general concerns, granting leadership to the house of Atlas; and that the king was to have no authority to put a kinsman to death without the agreement of half of the ten. Such was the nature and the extent of the power in those regions at the time. The god, however, arrayed this power and set it against our region, and the motive for this was said to be as follows.

CRITIAS: For many generations, as long as the nature of the god held sway in them, they were obedient to the laws and lovingly disposed towards their kindred god. For their thoughts were true and universal, dealing with one another and life's chance events with wisdom and humility. So they despised everything apart from excellence, thought little of their possessions, and easily bore their heap of gold and other acquisitions as if it were a light burden. They were not drunk on luxury, nor did they flounder because their wealth robbed them of self-control. Being sober-minded, they clearly saw that through communal love accompanied by excellence, all these material goods increase, but the more seriously we take them and the more we honour them, the more do they diminish, while excellence perishes along with them. So, based upon such reasoning as this, and with the persistence of their divine nature, all the wealth we previously described increased. But once the divine portion within them became faded by being mixed again and again with much mortality, their human character became dominant, they were unable to bear their possessions, their behaviour deteriorated, and to those with eyes to see they were an obvious disgrace for they had destroyed their most sublime and precious of possessions. But to those who were unable to see what, in truth, constitutes a happy life, these people seemed, at this stage, to represent the very pinnacle of goodness and happiness, despite being infected with unjust ambition and power.

CRITIAS: Zeus, god of gods, who exercises his kingship through laws, since he was able to view such matters with clarity, recognised the wretched plight of this fair race, and decided that they should meet with justice to chasten them and make them more orderly. So he gathered all the gods together in their most hallowed dwelling-place, situated at the very centre of the universe with a clear view of the entire realm of becoming, and, having assembled them, he said...

Notes

1. A healing god associated with Apollo.
2. The 'Pillars of Heracles' is a reference to the Straits of Gibraltar.

3. These are the names of legendary Greek kings. The first three were kings of Attica, the wider region that includes Athens; the fourth was a king of Thessaly.
4. Deucalion was a mythical figure associated with a cataclysmic flood, which he and his wife Pyrrha survived.
5. The account of Atlantis mentions three units of measure: the foot, the plethron (100 feet), and the stade (600 feet).
6. Modern-day Cádiz in southern Spain.
7. The name orichalc, which literally means 'mountain copper', refers to a precious metal of unknown variety.
8. Acroteria were architectural ornaments that were situated at the apex or corners of pediments.
9. Nereids were sea nymphs who were often depicted riding various real and imagined sea creatures.