The article analyzes the philosophical centrality of Plato’s book “Timaeus” in Hellenistic times. The author argues that a significant development took place in the reception history of the “Timaeus.” For centuries, this book was not used to define boundaries. The connection between texts and social formations is discussed.


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The article analyzes the philosophical centrality of Plato’s book “Timaeus” in Hellenistic times. The author argues that a significant development took place in the reception history of the “Timaeus.” For centuries, this book was not used to define boundaries. The connection between texts and social formations is discussed. Plato’s Timaeus, in the beginning widely invoked, became with Philo and Plutarch a privileged source of authority for the Middle Platonists, and with Celsus and Porphyry a marker of pagan identity. When the Demiurge created the universe, he also created time. But what is Plato’s definition of time? Plato’s text at 37d reads: [the Demiurge] began to think of making a moving image of eternity: at the same time as he brought order to the universe, he would make an eternal image, moving according to number, of eternity remaining in unity. Other passages in the Timaeus make it clear that Plato thought of time as a kind of celestial clockwork—that is, a certain kind of motion, rather than a measure of motion. Consider 38d and 39d. Problem: Plato’s theory does not allow for transformation of earth into other elements. Since earth is made of different atoms (isosceles triangles) from the other elements (scalene triangles), this transformation is impossible, as Plato knew.