

**PLATO'S DOCTRINE RESPECTING
THE ROTATION OF THE EARTH,
AND ARISTOTLE'S COMMENT
UPON THAT DOCTRINE**

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Plato's Doctrine Respecting the Rotation of the Earth, and Aristotle's Comment Upon that
Doctrine by George Grote

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PLATO'S DOCTRINE

RESPECTING THE

ROTATION OF THE EARTH,

AND

ARISTOTLE'S COMMENT UPON THAT DOCTRINE.

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EXAMINATION OF THE THREE FOLLOWING QUESTIONS:—

1. WHETHER THE DOCTRINE OF THE EARTH'S ROTATION IS AFFIRMED OR IMPLIED IN THE PLATONIC TIMEUS?
2. IF AFFIRMED OR IMPLIED, IN WHAT SENSE?
3. WHAT IS THE COSMICAL FUNCTION WHICH PLATO ASSIGNS TO THE EARTH IN THE TIMEUS?

P R E F A C E.

THE following paper was originally intended as an explanatory note on the Platonic *Timæus*, in the work which I am now preparing on Plato and Aristotle. Interpreting, differently from others, the much debated passage in which Plato describes the cosmical function of the Earth, I found it indispensable to give my reasons for this new view. But I soon discovered that those reasons could not be comprised within the limits of a note. Accordingly I here publish them in a separate Dissertation. The manner in which the Earth's rotation was conceived, illustrates the scientific character of the Platonic and Aristotelian age, as contrasted with the subsequent development and improvement of astronomy.

PLATO—ON THE EARTH'S ROTATION.

IN Plato, *Timæus*, p. 40 B, we read the following words—Γῆν δὲ τροφὸν μὲν ἡμετέραν, εἰλλομένην δὲ περὶ τὸν διὰ παντὸς πόλον τεταμένην φύλακα καὶ δημιουργὸν νυκτὸς τε καὶ ἡμέρας ἐμνηχανήσατο, κρωτῶν καὶ πρεσβυτάτην θεῶν, ἔσοι ἐντὸς οὐράνου γεγονάσι. I give the text as it stands in Stallbaum's edition.

The obscurity of this passage is amply attested by the numerous differences of opinion to which it has given rise, both in ancient and in modern times. Various contemporaries of Plato (ἔνοι—Aristot. *De Coelo*, II. 13, p. 293 b. 30) understood it as asserting or implying the rotatory movement of the earth in the centre of the Kosmos, and adhered to this doctrine as their own. Aristotle himself alludes to these contemporaries without naming them, and adopts their interpretation of the passage; but dissents from the doctrine, and proceeds to impugn it by arguments. Cicero mentions (*Academic* II. 39) that there were persons who believed Plato to have indicated the same doctrine obscurely, in his *Timæus*: this passage must undoubtedly be meant. Plutarch devotes a critical chapter to the enquiry, what was Plato's real doctrine as to the cosmical function of the earth—its movement or rest (*Quæstion. Platonic.* VII. 3, p. 1006.)

There exists a treatise, in Doric dialect, entitled *Τιμαίω τῷ Λόκρῳ Περὶ Ψυχᾶς Κόσμου καὶ φύσεως*,—which is usually published along with the works of Plato. This treatise was supposed in ancient times to be a genuine production of the Lokrian *Timæus*, whom Plato introduces as his spokesman in the dialogue so called. As such, it was considered to be of much authority in settling questions of interpretation as to the Platonic *Timæus*. But modern critics hold, I believe unanimously, that it is the work of some later Pythagorean or Platonist, excerpted or copied from the Platonic *Timæus*. This treatise represents the earth as being in the centre and at rest. But its language, besides being dark and metaphorical, departs widely from the phraseology of the Platonic