

Plato's Cosmos

MISREAD OR DISTORTED?

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In *Astrology and Cosmology in the World's Religions* (2012), Campion writes that of Plato's works "two contain explicitly cosmological material: The *Timaeus* includes his cosmogony, and the *Republic* details the soul's origin in, and return to, the stars." Cicero held a similar view: he translated a portion of *Timaeus* – the part where the Demiurge creates two intersecting cosmic circles – and he reinterpreted Plato's Vision of Er at the end of *Republic* as his Dream of Scipio at the end of *On The Republic*. Through the theoretical framework posited by Campion, divergent views of Plato's cosmology are explored. In Plato's Vision, departed souls arrive at a pillar of light in the sky while in Cicero's Dream, Scipio meets his adoptive ancestors in the Milky Way. The Galaxy was seen as the heavenly abode by Heraclides of Pontus (a pupil of Plato, c. 300 BC), by the Neoplatonist Porphyry (c. AD 280), by Martianus Capella (c. AD 400), and by Macrobius (c. AD 400) who, in his *Commentary on Cicero's Dream of Scipio*, located the gates of the afterlife at the intersections of the Milky Way and the zodiac, the constellations along the ecliptic – the path of the seven Wanderers. This Neoplatonist cosmology is traced back from Macrobius to Cicero and thence to Plato himself. Yet Aristotle, Plato's pupil, wrote about the Milky Way not in *On The Heavens*, but in *Meteorologica*, ascribing the 'galaxias kyklos' to atmospheric phenomena and thus removing it from the heavens. By the Middle Ages, Aristotle's view was predominant and Michael Scotus would claim that the Milky Way was the abode of the 'demon meridianus' that mortals should fear. Through a comparative analysis of relevant texts, we examine how and why such different cosmological views emerged.