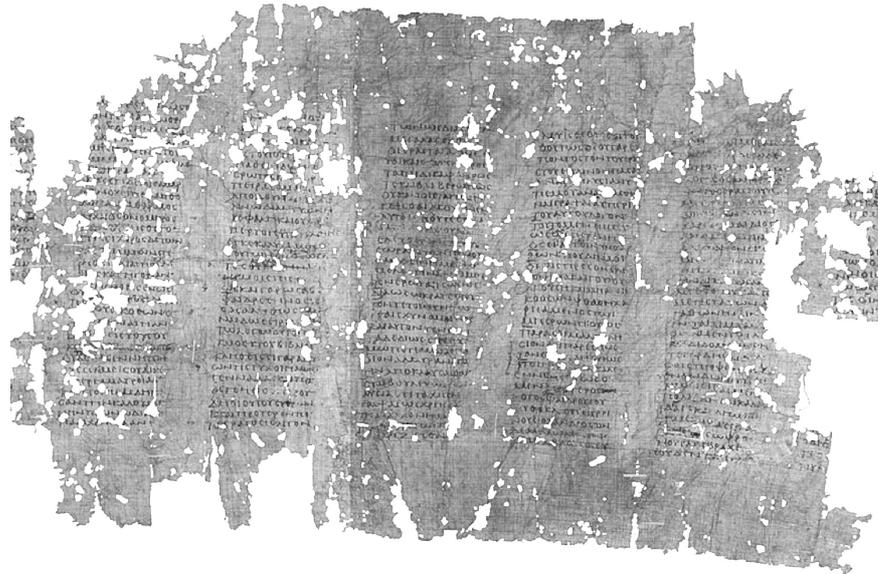


1. Plato: Influences and Context¹

1. *Socrates*. Plato is a member of his inner circle (*Apology* 34a, *Phaedo* 59b). Like others, he began to write ‘Socratic discourses’ (Aristotle) after Socrates’s death, continuing for forty years. Philosophy is a dialectical inquiry. Lifelong engagement with sophists.
2. *Politics in Athens*. The trial and execution of Socrates in 399 BCE shatters Plato’s political confidence. His aristocratic origin contributes to scepticism about democracy and the philosopher’s role in the city (cf. *Tht.* 172c). Yet: philosophy flourished in late 5th-century Athens.
3. *Italy, Sicily*. Plato visits Syracuse three times (see next page). He aimed to meet Pythagoreans, in particular Archytas (Tarentum), whose ideas are discernible in his work: immortality of the soul, mathematics, philosophical community. Consequence: founding of Academy in c. 387 BCE (dissolved in 527 CE).
4. *Isocrates*. The highly influential rhetor (orator) was a life-long foe. Tyranny at home: political rhetoric does (even) more harm than the Sophists (cf. the confusing logic-chopping in *Euthydemus*; cf. *Tht.* 164 c, 197a). Rivalry shapes Plato’s mature philosophy.
5. *Parmenides, Heraclitus*. Before joining Socrates, Plato studied with Cratylus and thus knew Heraclitean views (flux theory). Parmenides of Elea (Italy, early 5th century): only what is could be an intelligible object of thought—the forms.
6. *Academy*. Plato’s late work depends increasingly less on Socrates. His own views develop in the academy, in conversation with fellow ‘academics’, such as Aristotle. In 347, there are about 20 ‘disciples’, including two women.² Leaves no dogmatic canon. Successors: Speusippus, Xenocrates, and Polemo (i.e. the ‘Old Academy’;³ after them Arcesilaus (who gives the Academy a sceptical turn; ‘Middle Academy’), and then Carneades and Philo amongst others.

http://commons.wikimedia.org/wiki/File:Papyrus_of_Plato_Phaedrus.jpg



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- 1 See Schofield, M. (2008). Plato in his Time and Place. In G. Fine (ed.), *The Oxford Handbook of Plato* (pp. 36–62). Oxford: Oxford University Press.
 - 2 Diogenes Laertius, *Lives of Eminent Philosophers*, DL III 46.
 - 3 For details, see Dillon, J. (2003). *The Heirs of Plato*. Oxford: Clarendon Press.

2. Plato: Life and Works

The earliest sources are more or less damaged papyri. Since Thrasyllus († 36CE), the works are arranged in nine more or less arbitrary sets of *tetralogies*.⁴ The first complete manuscript dates from 895.⁵ In 1578, Henri Estienne published a Greek/Latin edition of all tetralogies; its pagination is still in use (i.e. ‘Stephanus pages’). Scholars debate the chronology of Plato’s work since the 19th century. Rough groups are discernible, but order *within* groups is virtually impossible. A tentative chronological ‘standard’ view is justified by thematic, historical, developmental, and stylistic features.⁶

Life (all dates BCE)	Works (probable dramatic date)	
427	born in Athens receives traditional aristocratic education, does military service	
406	meets Socrates and abandons plans for a poetic career	
399	stays away from Socrates’s execution, begins writing dialogues travels to Megara, Cyrene, Egypt, and then	Early: Socratic
389	Italy (to meet Pythagorean philosophers) and Sicily (Syracuse), sold into slavery (cf. DL III 18–20)	
388	back in Athens	
387	founds the Academy (‘bought the little garden in the academy’) ⁷ , probably inspired by Pythagorean communes	Middle: Forms
366	travels to Syracuse for a second time	
365	back in Athens	
361	visits Syracuse for the third time	
360	returns to Athens	
347	† in Athens	

Phaedo (399), *Symposium* (416)
Republic Books II–XI (421), *Phaedrus* (421), *Parmenides* (450), *Theaetetus* (399), *Sophist*, *Statesman*

Late:
Dogma

Timaeus, *Critias*, *Philebus*,
Laws (unfinished)
Letters [some dubious]

4 DL III 56–62.

5 It is in the Bodleian Library (MS. E. D. Clarke 39).

6 See, e.g., Irwin, T. H. (2008). The Platonic Corpus. In G. Fine (ed.), *The Oxford Handbook of Plato* (pp. 63–87). Oxford: Oxford University Press. Examples for style-changes: in later dialogues Plato avoids hiatus (e.g., ‘Julia Annas’), and he ceases to use certain phrases (*καὶ ἐγὼ ἔφη*, *kai ego ephen*, ‘and I said’, cf. *Tht.* 143c).

7 DL III 20 (*κηπίδιον*, *kepidion*).

