# LIFE OF AESOP THE PHILOSOPHER

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# LIFE OF AESOP THE PHILOSOPHER

*Introduction, Text, and Commentary by*

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## CONTENTS

Preface....vii
Abbreviations....ix

Introduction....1
Plot 3
Structure 4
Textual Tradition 6
Life of Aesop as an Open Text 8
Reception 9

The MORN Recension and Its Textual Tradition....15
Manuscripts 15
*Recensio* 19
Contamination in M 24
Lolliniana 25
The Relationship of the MORN Recension to the G Version 34
Language and Style 35
Religion: Gods 37
Narratological Changes 39
The Relationship of the MORN Text to the BPThSA Recension 44
Omission of Episodes/Chapters 44
The Transposition of Chapter 131 46
Additional Episodes 46
Content 47
Style and Language 50
The Relationship of MORN to the Papyrus Fragments 53
PSI 156 54
Oxyrhynchus Papyrus XVII 2083 55
Papyrus Berolinensis 11628 55
The Golenischeff Papyrus 56

SBL Press

Oxyrhynchus Papyrus XLVII 3331 57
Oxyrhynchus Papyrus LIII 3720 57
Conclusions: The Redactor of the MORN Recension, Date, and Place 58

Editorial Methodology....61

Translator's Note....64

Sigla Codicum....65

Text and Translation....67

Commentary....167

Bibliography....221

General Index....235

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# PREFACE

My acquaintance with the Life of Aesop dates from my early years as an undergraduate student at the Philology Department of the National and Kapodistrian University of Athens; I have fond recollections of the months spent in the front rows of an amphitheater packed to capacity, trying to keep notes during the unforgettable lectures of my teacher and renowned Aesop specialist, I.-Th. A. Papademetriou. Since then, the Life of Aesop has been a constant companion of my academic career. In my next, graduate, steps at universities in Germany (Hamburg and Berlin), I agreed with great pleasure to the proposal to work on the Life of Aesop for my PhD degree. The result was my published thesis, *Vita Aesopi: Textüberlieferung, Sprache und Edition einer frühbyzantinischen Fassung des Äsopromans* (Serta Graeca. Beiträge zur Erforschung griechischer Texte 13 [Wiesbaden: Reichert, 2001]), which offers an edition of one of the two recensions of the version Westermanniana, the recension BPThSA. Therefore, I felt that the edition of the other recension (MORN) was a real desideratum that I owed the scholarly public.

The colleagues and friends who encouraged and assisted me in this major endeavor were numerous. My dear friend David (Konstan) was one of the first with whom I discussed this plan. With his innate optimism and enthusiasm, he prompted me to continue my research on the Life and was kind enough to undertake an English translation of the edition, something that I consider a great honor. To him I also owe the proposal to publish the edition in SBL Press's acclaimed series Writings from the Greco-Roman World. My collaboration with David was for me a true lesson in life, scholarly ethics, humanity, and incredible efficacy and productivity. I count myself really lucky to have had the opportunity to work with him. The contribution of my close friend Io Manolessou at all stages of this project, the wealth of her knowledge, and the generous offering of her time and patience are beyond words. My colleague Ioannis Konstantakos urged me on to work on recension MORN and was always more than

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willing to offer his assistance whenever I sought it. My colleague Mari Yosi read a first draft of this book and contributed greatly to its improvement with her perceptive remarks.

I owe a great debt of gratitude to the British School at Athens, which granted me a Centenary Bursary Award (2011/2012), thus funding my field trip to Oxford in order to study the manuscript Baroccianus 194 (O) at first hand. In Oxford, I benefited greatly from the assistance of Regius Professor Chris Pelling and from the always-enlightening discussions with Mr. Nigel Wilson. My research was also partly funded by the Special Account for Research Grants (SARG) of the National and Kapodistrian University of Athens, thanks to which I was able to visit Munich in order to study the manuscript Monacensis gr. 525 (M) at first hand. I would also like to express my gratitude to the General Editors of Writings from the Greco-Roman World series, Professor John Fitzgerald and Professor Clare K. Rothschild, who accepted this edition for publication and contributed considerably to its improvement with their wide knowledge and experience. Last but not least, I would like to express my deepest thanks to the Director of SBL Press, Bob Buller, for his patience and the professional editing at the final stage of this book. Of course, the responsibility for all errors or omissions remains exclusively mine.

This book is dedicated to my family: my husband Manolis and my children Symeon-Dimitris and Eirianna. Their love and patience inspire my scholarly work and make my life beautiful.

Grammatiki Karla
National and Kapodistrian University of Athens

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# ABBREVIATIONS

## Primary Sources

| | |
|---|---|
| Acta Monast. Lemb. | Acta Monasterii Lembiotissae |
| Add. | Additional Manuscripts |
| Ber. | Berakhot |
| *Bib. hist.* | Diodorus Siculus, *Bibliotheca historica* |
| *Cant. dub.* | Romanus Melodus, *Cantica dubia* |
| *Comm. ad Hom. Il.* | Eustathius, *Commentarii ad Homeri Iliadem* |
| Conv. soppr. | Conventi soppressi |
| *Decl.* | Libanius, *Declamationes* |
| *Ecl.* | Stobaeus, *Eclogae* |
| *Ecl. nom.* | Thomas Magister, *Ecloga nominum et verborum Atticorum* |
| *EM* | Gaisford, Thomas. *Etymologicum magnum.* Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1848. |
| *Ep.* | *Epistulae* |
| *Epid.* | Hippocrates, *Epidemiae* |
| *Eup.* | Dioscorides, *Euporista* |
| Geop. | Geoponica |
| *Hist.* | Herodotus, *Historiae* |
| *Il.* | Homer, *Ilias* |
| *Nub.* | Aristophanes, *Nubes* |
| *Od.* | Homer, *Odyssea* |
| *Oed. tyr.* | Sophocles, *Oedipus tyrannus* |
| *Onom.* | Pollux Grammaticus, *Onomasticon* |
| *Or.* | *Orationes* |
| P.Apoll. | Papyrus Apollonopolites |
| Paris. gr. | Parisinus graecus |
| *Part.* | Herodian, *Partitiones* |
| P.Berol. | Papyrus Berolinensis |

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| | |
|---|---|
| P.Col. | Papyrus Columbia |
| P.Oxy. | Papyrus Oxyrhynchus |
| P.Ross.Georg. | Papyri russischer und georgischer Sammlungen |
| PSI | Papiri della Società Italiana |
| *Rhet*. | Aristotle, *Rhetorica* |
| Th | Thessalonicensis Bibliothecae Universitatis |
| *Thaum*. | Sophronius, *Thaumata* |
| Vat. gr. | Vaticanus graecus |
| *Vesp*. | Aristophanes, *Vespae* |
| Vit. Euth. | Vita Euthymii patriarchae Constantinopolitani |
| *Vit. phil.* | Diogenes Laertius, *Vitae philosophorum* |
| Vindob. theol. gr. | Vindobonensis theologicus graecus |
| Vulc. | Collectio Bonaventura Vulcanius |
| y. | Jerusalem Talmud |

## Secondary Sources

| | |
|---|---|
| *AJP* | *American Journal of Philology* |
| BETL | Bibliotheca Ephemeridum Theologicarum Lovaniensium |
| *Bib* | *Biblica* |
| *BNP* | Hubert, and Helmuth Schneider, eds. *Brill's New Pauly: Encyclopaedia of the Ancient World*. 22 vols. Leiden: Brill, 2002–2011. |
| *ByzZ* | *Byzantinische Zeitschrift* |
| *CP* | *Classical Philology* |
| *CR* | *Classical Review* |
| *DGE* | Adrados, Francisco Rodríguez, ed. 1980–. *Diccionario Griego-Español*. Madrid: Consejo Superior de Investigaciones Científicas. http://dge.cchs.csic.es/xdge/. |
| *DNP* | Cancik, Hubert, et al., eds. *Der Neue Pauly: Enzyklopädie der Antike*. Stuttgart: Metzler, 1996–. |
| *EBR* | Klauck, Hans-Josef, et al., eds. *Encyclopedia of the Bible and Its Reception*. Berlin: De Gruyter, 2009–. |
| ILNE | Ἱστορικὸν Λεξικὸν τῆς Νέας Ἑλληνικῆς (Historical Lexicon of Modern Greek). http://www.xanthi.ilsp.gr/mnemeia/en_default.aspx. |
| *JBL* | *Journal of Biblical Literature* |

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| | |
|---|---|
| *JGRChJ* | *Journal of Greco-Roman Christianity and Judaism* |
| LNTS | Library of New Testament Studies |
| *LBG* | Trapp, Erich, ed. 1994–2017. *Lexikon zur byzantinischen Gräzität besonders des 9.–12 Jahrhunderts*. 8 vols. Veröffentlichungen der Kommission für Byzantinistik VI/1–8. Vienna: Verlag der Österreichischen Akademie der Wissenschaften. |
| LSJ | Liddell, Henry George, Robert Scott, Henry Stuart Jones. 1996. *A Greek-English Lexicon*. 9th ed. with revised supplement. Oxford: Clarendon. |
| LSJSup | supplement section to LSJ |
| *MIOF* | *Mitteilungen des Instituts für Orientforschung* |
| MSG | Montanari, Franco. *The Brill Dictionary of Ancient Greek*. Edited by Madeleine Goh and Chad Schroeder. Leiden: Brill, 2015. |
| *NovT* | *Novum Testamentum* |
| *NTS* | *New Testament Studies* |
| *OCD* | Hornblower, Simon, and Antony Spawforth, eds. *Oxford Classical Dictionary*. 3rd ed. Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2003. |
| Pack | Pack, Roger A. *The Greek and Latin Literary Texts from Greco-Roman Egypt*. 2nd ed. Ann Arbor: University of Michigan Press, 1965. |
| PG | Migne, Jacques-Paul, ed. Patrologia Graeca [= Patrologiae Cursus Completus: Series Graeca]. 161 vols. Paris: Migne, 1857–1886. |
| *PRSt* | *Perspectives in Religious Studies* |
| *QUCC* | *Quaderni Urbinati di Cultura Classica* |
| *REG* | *Revue des études grecques* |
| *R&T* | *Religion and Theology* |
| *SCO* | *Studi Classici e Orientali* |
| Stephanus | Stephanus, Henricus. 1831–1865. *Thesaurus graecae linguae*. 8 vols. Paris. |
| SymS | Symposium Series |
| *TAPA* | *Transactions (and Proceedings) of the American Philological Association* |
| TLG | Thesaurus Linguae Graecae. http://stephanus.tlg.uci.edu. |
| *WD* | *Wort und Dienst* |

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| | |
|---|---|
| WUNT | Wissenschaftliche Untersuchungen zum Neuen Testament |
| *ZPE* | *Zeitschrift für Papyrologie und Epigraphik* |

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# INTRODUCTION

The Life of Aesop (hereafter Life) is a literary work dealing with the adventurous fictional life of the fabulist Aesop, the legendary and possibly historical personality of the seventh/sixth century BCE. It is written in Greek by an anonymous author and probably dates between the first century BCE and the first or second century CE.

The Life deals primarily with Aesop's status as a slave, his Phrygian origin, his sojourn on Samos under a master, his efforts to exonerate himself from the accusation of the Delphians, and his death in Delphi, events already known from literary and other sources of the classical period.[1] At another level, many stories about Hesiod, Diogenes, Socrates, the Seven Sages, and other philosophers found their way into the Life from a number of earlier sources,[2] while oral popular traditions such as anecdotes, novellas, fables, jokes, and riddles were also incorporated in this fascinating piece of "light" literature. For example, the old story of Ahiqar was a work of Middle Eastern and perhaps Babylonian or Persian origin, which, in the light of a papyrus fragment from Elephantine, would seem to have been in circulation in Aramaic as early as 500 BCE and was probably available in Greek from the early Hellenistic period. It, too, was embedded in the Life (chs. 101–123).[3]

It seems, therefore, that the anonymous author of the Life was hardly interested in using authentic sources to depict the life of the real Aesop.

1. See, for example, Herodotus, *Hist*. 2.134–135; Aristophanes, *Vesp*. 1446–1448; and Aristotle, *Rhet*. 2.20. The testimonia on Aesop are published by Perry 1952, 211–41.

2. Holzberg 1993, 7; Jouanno 2005, 419–23; Hägg 2012, 112–13. In particular on the influence of the traditions regarding the Seven Sages on the Life, see Konstantakos 2004, with full bibliography at 102–3.

3. Konstantakos 2013 investigates the incorporation of the Aramaic Story of Ahiqar into the Life and illustrates the anonymous author's compositional technique.

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Instead, his aim was to compose a work at once didactic, amusing, and thrilling. Since it displays the features typical of the biographical genre (it follows the hero's life from a certain point onward[4] until his death) but also includes fictional elements, one might call it a fictional biography. Its inclusion in the biographical genre is congruent with the titles found in the Byzantine manuscripts which preserve the text of the Life. The manuscripts of the so-called Westermanniana version (recension MORN and recension BPThSA) give the title Βίος ("Life"), Διήγησις ("Narrative"), or both (Βίος καὶ Διήγησις, "Life and Narrative"), while the oldest manuscript (tenth–eleventh century), that of version G, bears the title Βίβλος Ξάνθου Φιλοσόφου καὶ Αἰσώπου δούλου αὐτοῦ. Περὶ τῆς ἀναστροφῆς Αἰσώπου ("The Book of Xanthus the Philosopher and of Aesop His Slave. Concerning the Course of His Life"); at the end of the work one may find the amplified title Αἰσώπου γέννα, ἀνατροφή, προκοπὴ καὶ ἀποβίωσις ("Aesop's Birth, Upbringing, Career, and Death").[5] The word Βίος in the title is also transmitted by the manuscripts of the Planudean version (at least those used in Eberhard's edition). It is likely, then, that the textual tradition mirrors the reception of the Life as biography.

David Konstan and Robyn Walsh characterize the Life as "subversive biography" in order to differentiate it (and other works such as the Alexander Romance and the gospels) from "civic biography" (to which belong works such as Plutarch's *Parallel Lives*) (Konstan and Walsh 2016, 28). Moreover, if we wish to focus on the novelistic elements of the Life and so include it in a larger category of similar literary works, we might call it a novel on the fringe. To this category belong works such as the Acts of the Apostles or Apuleius's *The Golden Ass*, and if we prefer to associate it with a narrower subgroup of "subversive" biographical works, we may mention not just the Alexander Romance but more especially the Life of Homer.[6]

4. Strangely enough, the Life, instead of beginning with the hero's birth, starts with an episode from his adult life. It has been suggested by several scholars (Dillery 1999, 279; Jedrkiewicz 2009, 196), and my own research corroborates this, that the incubation in the first chapters dealing with Aesop's healing by Isis and the Muses is of crucial importance. It signals for Aesop the beginning of his real life as the protagonist of the Life of Aesop; as such, it is the equivalent of the episode dealing with the birth of the protagonist (Karla 2014, 94–95 with bibliography).

5. See the comment on the title in Hägg 1997, 183–84.

6. See Perry 1936, 1–2; Papademetriou 1989, 11–14; Hägg 2012, 99–147; Rigopoulou 2012; Karla 2009b.

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Among the gospels, the one closest to the Life from a literary and narrative point of view is Mark.[7]

## Plot

At the beginning of the Life, Aesop is described as an exceedingly ugly slave who is also dumb (in the sense of speechless). Because of his ugliness, he is compelled to work in the fields. The episodes that follow illustrate two of Aesop's characteristics. He is clever and pious. When the priests of Isis lose their way, Aesop looks after them and helps them to find their way again. Tyche repays this good deed by giving him "the finest language and quickness of speech and the invention of ready arguments with colorful fables" (ch. 7).

Aesop is sold off to a slave trader and ends up on Samos as a slave in the house of the philosopher Xanthus. A number of humorous stories featuring master and slave demonstrate Aesop's intelligence and intellectual superiority both to Xanthus, who is a professor of philosophy, and to his students. After a while, Aesop manages, thanks to his acumen, to interpret an obscure omen for the people of Samos and so avert an imminent attack on the city by King Croesus. The grateful Samians grant him his freedom and proclaim "the spot where he was turned over to King Croesus" a hallowed place dedicated to him, which they name the Aesopeum after him. After leaving Samos, he travels around the world, earning money and glory thanks to his public lectures.

Eventually Aesop reaches Babylon, where his special gifts earn him a high administrative position at the court of King Lycurus (or Lycurgos in G). There, however, he is falsely accused by his adoptive son and sentenced to death by the king. The executioner, however, instead of performing his duty, hides Aesop. Later, when the king regrets having put Aesop to death, the executioner brings him out of hiding. Aesop is sent to Egypt, to the

7. See Wills 1997, 29–31; Andreassi 2015; Elliott 2005; Shiner 1998; Grottanelli 1987; Watson 2010; Hägg 2012, 147. For other studies involving the ancient traditions of Aesop's life and fables in relation to biblical literature, see Beavis 1990, 1992; Froelich and Phillips 2019; Harnisch 1985, 97–105; Hauge 2016; Hedrick 2004, 18–22; Parsons 2007, 21–22; Parsons and Martin 2018, 45–70; Pervo 1998; Pesce and Destro 1999; Reece 2016; Ross 2016; Scott 1989, 313–16; Stigall 2012; Strong 2021, 2022; Vouga 1992, 1999, 2001; Wills 2008; Wojciechowski 2008; Zimmerman 2014 (I owe the references on this subject to Prof. John T. Fitzgerald).

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court of King Nectenabo, where he solves a series of riddles to the benefit of the Babylonians. Lycurus honors his wisdom by dedicating to him a golden statue.

Aesop decides to continue his travels around the world and proceeds to Delphi. Since the Delphians fail to show him any special honor, he makes some highly offensive remarks against them. As a result, they hide a golden cup from the temple of Apollo in his baggage and accuse him of theft. Aesop tries to prove his innocence and, in the attempt to talk some sense into them, narrates various myths as a warning against committing unjust acts, but in vain. He is executed by being thrown off a cliff.

> And so while the Delphians were afflicted by an unremitting and violent plague, they received an oracle to propitiate the death of Aesop, for they were stricken by conscience for having slain Aesop treacherously. So they built a temple and set up a stela in his honor. Afterwards, when the leaders of Greece and the other teachers heard what had been done to Aesop, they went to Delphi and formed an assembly and avenged the death of Aesop. (ch. 142)

## Structure

The views of scholars who have considered the structure of the text display two general trends. One school of thought divides the Life into five sections and the other one into three.[8] In my opinion, the text can be divided in three large units that in turn may be divided into smaller subsections as follows:

Chapters 1–100: Aesop as slave
- 1: prooemium (origin, social status, and physical description of Aesop)
- 2–9: (miracle of Isis, restitution of justice): “birth” of the logopoios
- 10–20
    - 10–11: Aesop is handed over to Zenas, a kind of first sale for Aesop
    - 12–20: Aesop is sold to a slave trader (Aesop is sold for a second time)

8. Holzberg 1992, 41. The five-section division of the Life has been accepted by several critics, who have, however, proposed a number of minor changes. Cf. for instance Merkle 1996, 212–13, 217–19; Jouanno 2006, 28; Hägg 2012, 112; Ruiz Montero 2014, 259. Papademetriou (1989, 21–22) also suggests a tripartite structure for the Life.

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21–100: Aesop in Samos
21–27: Aesop is sold to Xanthus (third sale for Aesop)
28–80: Various humorous episodes involving Aesop and Xanthus
81–98: Aesop and the Samians; Aesop earns his freedom
99–100: Aesop and Croesus; Aesop returns to Samos (conclusion of the first part: deification of Aesop)

Chapters 101–123: Aesop in the service of the Babylonian king Lycurus
101–111: Aesop at the court of Lycurus, in Babylon
112–123: Aesop at the court of Nectenabo in Memphis; his return to Babylon (conclusion of the second part: deification of Aesop)

Chapters 124–142: Aesop at Delphi and his death
124–127: The cause (the insult and the reaction of the people of Delphi)
128–131: Aesop imprisoned and condemned to death
132–141: Aesop's various attempts to save himself (narration of fables, supplication at the sanctuary of the Muses)
142: Aesop's death and deification

The first unit (chs. 1–100) may have originally been an independent narrative[9] that the author of the Life incorporated into his own composition, having made the necessary changes. This view rests on external (title, closure) and internal elements (transformation of the figure of the protagonist, setting, fables, register of language/style).[10] This first part is an early (if not the earliest) Greek literary example of the comic-picaresque narrative, a genre that is the Greek ancestor of the Latin *Satyrica* of Petronius and *The Golden Ass* of Apuleius.[11]

The second part (chs. 101–123) comes from a version of the story of Ahiqar that was circulating in Aramaic as early as the fifth century BCE, in demotic Egyptian since at least the Ptolemaic period, and in Greek perhaps since the fourth century BCE.[12]

9. Ludwig 1997, 17; Holzberg 1992a, 64–65, esp. on chs. 92–100; Kurke 2011, 12–4; Hägg 1997, 183.

10. Further analysis of this view in Karla 2016b, 318–20.

11. Karla 2016b, 321–22.

12. See p. 1, above. On this, see Konstantakos, 2008a, 23–36, 158–66; 2008b,17–81, 225–70; also Kussl 1992; Marinčič 2003; and additional bibliography in Beschorner and Holzberg 1992, 177–78.

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The third part (chs. 124–142), which draws on a historical nucleus concerned with the death of Aesop, includes many fables and is based on the pattern of *pharmakos*.[13]

## Textual Tradition

The textual tradition of the Life is particularly rich. Six papyrus fragments ranging from the second/third century CE to the sixth/seventh century CE have come down to us:[14]

- P.Berol. 11628 (= Pack 2074) from the second/third CE, which transmits chapters 121–124
- P.Oxy. XLVII 3331 and P.Oxy. LIII 3720 (Addendum to 3331) from the third CE, which transmit passages from chapters 18, 75–76, and 107–111
- PSI II 156 (= Pack 2072) of the fourth century CE, which contains passages from chapters 1–3
- P.Oxy. XVII 2083 (= Pack 2073) dated to the fourth/fifth century CE, which transmits text from chapters 59–62
- P.Ross.Georg. I 18 (= Pack 2075) from the sixth/seventh century CE, which transmits text from chapters 124–133

Furthermore, the manuscript tradition of the text consists of the following versions:

1. Version G, or Perriana (named after its first editor, Ben Edwin Perry 1952, 35–77), is transmitted in a single manuscript, Codex 397 of the Pierpont Morgan Library New York (G) from the early eleventh century CE.[15] This is the most ancient manuscript of the Life, and in all likelihood the text transmitted therein is the one closest to the archetype.[16] This version was also edited by Papathomopoulos (1990, 2009) and Ferrari (1997).

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13. Wiechers 1961, 31–42; Nagy 1980, 279–316; Jedrkiewicz 1989, 99–107.

14. Perry 1936, 39–70; Haslam 1980, 53–56; 1986, 149–72; Ferrari 1995, 296.

15. According to Husselman (1935, 104) and Perry (1933, 198), the manuscript dates to the tenth/eleventh century CE.

16. Karla 2009a. Perry's edition of version G was translated into English by Daly 1961, 29–90, who also included in brackets supplementary material derived from Version W and other sources. It is reprinted in Hansen 1998, 111–62, along with Hansen's

2. Version W, or Westermanniana (named after its first editor Westermann 1845), consists of two recensions, MORN and BPThSA.[17] The text transmitted in this version is shorter than that in the Perriana (G) but in some cases includes material from the archetype that does not appear in G. It also survives in more manuscripts, which implies that it had a wider transmission. It was probably from this version, more specifically from recension MORN, that the Latin translation of the Life, the so-called Lolliniana, named after the Lolliniana library of Belluno in Italy (where the fourteenth-century Codex 26 transmitting chapters 1–88a is kept), originated.[18] Another Latin translation of the Life and the *Fables* of Aesop was produced by Rinuccio da Castiglione of Arezzo in 1448, who apparently used a Greek manuscript belonging to the recension BPThSA (perhaps an immediate ancestor of manuscript P; Perry 1934). Perry (1952, 81–107) also edited the Westermanniana, while Papathomopoulos (1999a) edited both recensions (MORN and BPThSA) separately and Karla (2001) the recension BPThSA.

3. The Byzantine version of the Life, the Accursiana (named after the first editor, Bonus Accursius, 1479/1480) or Planudean version, also derives from the Westermanniana and, to be more precise, from a manuscript of recension BPThSA (Karla 2001, 58–61). This redaction is a transposition of the Life into a more erudite linguistic register by the monk Maximos Planudes (fourteenth century).[19] It is transmitted in at least thirty manuscripts, although there is only one edition (based on seventeen manuscripts), produced by Eberhardt in 1872.

4. There are also four *metaphrases* (translations), in a low register, dating to the early Modern Greek period (sixteenth–seventeenth centuries) There are two editions of these early Modern Greek translations: Papathomopoulos 1999b and Eideneier 2011.

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introduction (106–11). For an English rendering of Papathomopoulos's edition of G, see Wills 1997, 180–215.

17. Both recensions are named after the manuscripts: M (Monacensis gr. 525, fourteenth century), O (Baroccianus 194, fifteenth century), R (Vaticanus gr. 1192, fourteenth century), N (Parisinus gr. 2894, thirteenth century), B (Londinensis Add. gr. 17015, fifteenth century), P (Vaticanus Palatinus gr. 269, fifteenth century), Th (Thessalonicensis Bibliothecae Universitatis 86, eleventh century) S (Mosquensis G.I.M. 436, thirteenth century), A (Atheniensis, Benaki Museum 53) (TA 72, thirteenth/fourteenth century).

18. Edition in Perry 1952, 111–30.

19. For the ascription of this version to Planudes, see Karla 2003.

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## Life of Aesop as an Open Text

The existence of many versions is one of the main features of so-called open texts. The differentiation between open and closed texts is due to Umberto Eco: "According to Eco, a 'closed' text is one which encourages a particular interpretation, whereas an 'open' text invites a diversity of readings."[20] Konstan (1998) and Thomas (1998) have adapted this terminology in order to characterize ancient (postclassical) literary texts such as the Life of Aesop, the Alexander Romance, the Historia Apollonii regis Tyri, and the Life of Homer, which share some common elements: they survive without an author's name or are assigned to a pseudonym, and they are notable for the stratification of the various sources, the concentration of the narrative on a central figure or protagonist, the fluidity of the narrative structure, the abundance of translations and versions, and the chameleon-like fashion in which they have come down to us.[21]

The Life is transmitted anonymously. It is remarkable that no author's name or even a pseudonym is mentioned in any of the manuscripts that transmit this work.

As we have already mentioned above, the Life is based on various literary sources enriched with material from popular oral tales. In particular, the Life consists, first, of legends about Aesop's life as a slave and his death at Delphi, which were circulating from the fifth/fourth century BCE onward, and, second, of incorporated tales and anecdotes about other literary figures, such as Hesiod, Diogenes, Socrates, or the Seven Sages, which circulated orally or in writing, in historical works, treatises, biographies, and anthologies.[22] It is characteristic of such compositions that a whole work, the story of Ahiqar, ends up embedded in the Life as an entire unit, with Ahiqar replaced by Aesop (detailed in Konstantakos 2013). Third, the Life includes popular oral tales such as the story of the widow of Ephesus (ch. 129) or "Aesopic" fables that are also incorporated in the Life.[23]

The structure of the Life, at a superficial level at least, is not complex. The whole work concentrates on the life of a single personage and offers a selection of his deeds up to his death. The reader follows the life of an

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20. Cuddon 2013, 494. See also Hawthorn 2000, 245–46.

21. Fusillo 1994, 239; Konstan 1998; Thomas 1998; Karla 2009b, 26–28; Hägg 2012, 99–101.

22. Merkle 1996; Konstantakos 2004.

23. Karla 2009b, 24–25.

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antihero, a trickster, a picaro, rather than a hero who succeeds in achieving what he needs or truly desires, such as freedom, recognition, and honors, either by divine intervention (such as the miracle by which he regains his voice and vocal abilities generally) or, chiefly, by means of his own intelligence (Karla 2016a, 55).

Konstan writes, “The episodic form is to some degree a function of the armature: the story of an individual’s life serves as the pole on which to hand an indefinite string of adventures and encounters” (1998, 124). The Life is an episodic narrative, a “string of pearls narrative.”[24] It consists of various episodes that have narrative autonomy.[25] Each one is a short story with a beginning, middle and end.[26] The recording of parallel action is exceptional (e.g., ch. 46). Actions are usually not interrupted by other actions because they unfold in chronological sequence (see, e.g., chs. 65–66; for additional details on the structure of the Life, see Karla 2016a, 55–56).

The textual fluidity of the Life, in combination with the simple language of the work, means that author(s), compilers, redactors, or translators of the Life felt free to intervene and alter the text, tampering with the details of various narratives and editing the content through the addition or elimination of self-contained stories. This in turn resulted in the transmission of several different revised narrations (*versiones* and *recensiones*).[27]

## Reception

The Life spread widely in both East and West, from the Middle Ages to the present time.[28] It was probably the didactic character of the Life that secured its survival up to late antiquity and the Byzantine era.[29]

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24. Hawthorn 2000, 338.

25. On episodic narrative in the Life of Aesop and a comparison with the Gospel of Mark in this aspect, see Shiner 1998.

26. Fusillo (1996, 289) compares this structure with that of television serials, especially soap operas.

27. Karla 2016a, 62. On different versions of the Life, see Perry 1933, 198–200; and pp. 6–7, above.

28. See, for example, in modern German literature the novels Bronnen 1956; Schädlich 1999. On the first novel, see Beschorner 1992. A general bibliographical survey on the reception of the Life can be found at Beschorner and Holzberg 1992, 179–87; and Holzberg 2021, 17.

29. On the reception of the Aesopic fables in Byzantium, see Papademetriou 1989, 105–25; and Adrados 1999, 559–629.

In his “Testimonia de Aesopo Fabulisque Aesopiis” (Perry 1952, 211–41), Perry notes references to Aesop recorded in the Suda (T3, T6, T31, T37), in works of the Patriarch Photius (T14, T17, T37, T47), and even in the work of Constantine Porphyrogennitus (T4). These passages, however, do not prove the existence of any direct interaction with the Life at the level of vocabulary or meaning, because they report views on the fabulist that were widely accepted in antiquity or alternative versions of the Aesop narrative different from the story recorded in the Life. Possible exceptions to this are the references in the works of the late antique authors, Julian (T58) and Himerius (T30, 56).[30] The phrase *δοῦλος οὐ τὴν τύχην μᾶλλον ἢ τὴν προαίρεσιν* (“slave not by chance but by choice”), recorded in Julian’s text, probably indicates knowledge of a similar phrase of the Life, *τὴν μὲν τύχην* <*ἦν*> *δοῦλος* (“he was slave by chance”), found in the prologue of the work (ch. 1). The reference to the ugliness of Aesop in the speeches of Himerius (*Or.* 13.5, Perry T56)[31] and more specifically the phrase *ἀλλ’ ἤδη καὶ αὐτὸ τὸ πρόσωπον καὶ τὴν φωνὴν γέλωτα καὶ χλεύην ἤγηντο* (“his face and his voice provoked laughter and mockery”) seem to point to corresponding expressions attested in the Life.[32]

In addition, the works of two other scholars, from the Late Byzantine period this time, attest to the knowledge and study of the Life. The prolific scholar and monk of the Palaeologan era, Maximos Planudes (1255–1305), “translated” the Life and the fables into Atticizing prose,[33] while Andreas

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30. To Perry’s testimonia on the Life, Avlamis (2011, 74 n. 26) adds one more, by Himerius (*Or.* 66; Colonna 1951), where, in the phrase *τῶν πάνυ Φρυγῶν* (“the very Phrygians”), Avlamis notes a definite allusion to the opening of the Life of version G *Φρὺξ τῆς Φρυγίας* (“a Phrygian from Phrygia”). To be sure, Perry includes the same fragment in his testimonia on the type of the fables (*de generibus*) (T92).

31. *φασὶ δὲ καὶ Αἴσωπον … οὗ μὴ ὅτι τοὺς λόγους τινές, ἀλλ’ ἤδη καὶ αὐτὸ τὸ πρόσωπον καὶ τὴν φωνὴν γέλωτα καὶ χλεύην ἤγηντο, γενέσθαι μὲν πάνσοφον.…*

32. *ἦν δὲ καὶ νωδός* (“he was dumb,” ch. 1 G), *ἦν καὶ βραδύγλωσσος καὶ βομβόφωνος* (“he stammered with a booming voice,” ch. 1 W), *οὗτος τῆς γερανομαχίας σαλπιστής ἐστιν. οὗτος ῥιζοκάλαμός ἐστιν*… (“Is this the trumpeter in the battle between pygmies and cranes [*Il.* 3.3–6]? Is this a man or a turnip?,” ch. 14, G), *οἱ δὲ Σάμιοι, ἰδόντες τὸν Αἴσωπον καὶ γελάσαντες, ἐπεφώνουν ‘ἀχθήτω ἄλλος σημειολύτης, ἵνα τοῦτο τὸ σημεῖον διαλύσηται’* (“But when the Samians saw him, they began to laugh, and shouted, ‘Bring us some other interpreter of omens to explain this sign,’” ch. 87 G).

33. For arguments in favor of the identification of the translator of the Life (this Byzantine version has been named Accursiana or Planudea) as Planudes, see Karla 2003.

Libadenos (fourteenth century CE) wrote the Life in the codex Monacensis gr. 525.[34] There is also indirect testimony in the work of Nicephoros Gregoras (1290/1293–1358/1361), which suggests that this scholar of the Palaeologan period probably knew some version of the Life.[35] In *Ep*. 1 (*τῷ ἐπὶ τῆς τραπέζης*, PG 149:649, 652; and Leone 1982–1983) there is a passage in which the Phrygian origin of Aesop and his wisdom contrary to nature seem to testify to knowledge of one of the recensions of the Life.[36] In the early Modern Greek period (sixteenth–seventeenth centuries), the Life was transmitted in a low register, and there are four Modern Greek translations.[37]

The Life spread to the West, in countries such as Italy, Germany, the Netherlands, England, Spain, and France, in the following versions (Papademetriou 1997, 61–62): (1) the Latin translation of the fourteenth century called Lolliniana (see above), which is transmitted in only one manuscript; (2) the Latin translation by Rinuccio da Castiglione, which was produced in circa 1448 and was widely diffused in the West (Perry 1934); (3) the Planudean version, published in 1479 in Milan by Bonus Accursius; this version offered both the Greek text and a Latin translation by Rinuccio da Castiglione.

An Aesopic collection (known as Ulmer Aesop), compiled by the German humanist Heinrich Steinhöwel and published in a bilingual Latin-German edition by Johann Zainer in Ulm (1476/1477), was prefaced by a

34. Perry 1933, 200. On this codex, see below.

35. This excerpt is not included in Perry's testimonia but is mentioned in Papademetriou 1997, 8 n. 3.

36. *ἐγένετό τις ἀνὴρ ἐν Φρυγίᾳ πάλαι σοφός, τοὔνομα Αἴσωπος, οὐ κατὰ τὴν Πυθαγόρου σοφίαν καὶ Πλάτωνος, οὐδὲ κατὰ τὴν Ἀκραγαντίνου Ἐμπεδοκλέους … ἀλλ' ἦν Αἰσώπῳ τῷ Φρυγὶ τὸ ἐξαίρετον τῆς σοφίας, ὡς ἦν αὐτοδίδακτος καὶ φύσει σοφός, οὐκ ἀνθρώπων σοφῶν ὁμιλίαις, οὐδὲ τέχνης ἀνάγκαις, … ἀλλὰ ξένῃ φύσεως ἀνὴρ ἐκεῖνος δυνάμει χρησάμενος τέρας ἔδοξε τοῖς ἔπειτα σοφοῖς οὐ μικρόν* ("there was once a very wise man in Phrygia called Aesop, and his wisdom was not that of Pythagoras or Plato nor that of Empedocles…, but this Aesop the Phrygian possessed the highest wisdom, since he was self-taught and wise by nature, not through intercourse with wise men or through artificial means, … but possessing a strange innate power he seemed a great marvel to the wise men of later times") There is no edition of this letter in Guilland 1927, only a brief summary of the content, a date (1325–1330), and a catalog of the sources (p. 16). For more details on the reception of the Life in Late Byzantine times, see Karla 2016b, 329–32.

37. On published editions of these texts, see p. 7, above.

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Life of Aesop based on Rinuccio's Latin translation.[38] A year later, in 1478, Günter Zainer reprinted the German text in Augsburg, and in 1479/1480 Anton Sorg published one Latin and two German editions, again in Augsburg. Julien Macho, an Augustinian monk, translated the collection in French and published it in 1480 in Lyon. This translation was reprinted ten times by 1534. Macho's translation was also the basis for the English translation by William Caxton (1484), a Dutch translation produced in Gouda (1485), a Spanish translation in Toulouse (1488), and a Czech version in Prague by J. Kamp in the same year. The German printer Johann or Hans Hurus published another Spanish version of the text that was translated from a German edition and produced in Saragossa (1489). In the same year there was an edition in Cologne and in 1492 a Low German version produced in Magdeburg. Catalan and Danish translations were published from the mid-sixteenth century onward.[39]

In addition, literary motifs and novellas derived from the Life found their way into later literature in the West, for example, in Boccaccio's *Decameron*, Balzac's *Contes Drolatiques*, the picaresque novel, upon which it exercised a decisive influence, and, possibly, the Italian novel *Bertoldo* (*Le sottilissime astuzie di Bertoldo*, 1606), by Giulio Cesare (dalla) Croce, and *Don Quixote*, by Miguel de Cervantes.[40]

In Slavonic literature there is the work The Story of Iosop the Wise and How He Lived, dated to the fifteenth century CE. The life of the protagonist displays some similarity to the adventures of Aesop of the Life, and it is not impossible that the Slavonic text is based on the Greek. Iosop is depicted in the introduction as mute, deaf, and wise. God rewards one good deed, his benefaction, with eloquence and hearing. He becomes the slave of a nobleman named Xanthio in Constantinople. The clever slave plays tricks on his master. In the second part of the story of Iosop, Emperor Digin (a word akin to the Greek Digenis, "born of two races") poses a riddle, and

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38. See the detailed study in Hilpert 1992, 131–54.

39. This paragraph is based on Wheatley 2000, 19. See also Dicke 1994.

40. The Life was particularly influential on the chief representative of the picaresque genre in Spain, "La vida de Lazarillo de Tormes y de sus fortunas y adversidades," which was first published in 1554 (Holzberg 1993, 1–2; Papademetriou 1997, 58–72). On its influence on *Bertoldo*, see Papademetriou 1997, 43–57. Regarding *Don Quixote*, Adrados writes, "It is even possible that Quijote, whose Sancho could have taken his name from the Sanctius of the Latin versions of the *Life* (the Ξάνθος of the Greek *Life*) … has been influenced by this work" (1979, 93).

Xanthio is called upon to solve it. He proves unable to do so and hands the matter over to Iosop. Iosop impresses the emperor and becomes a palace counselor. After considerable success at court, he is captured and executed by his own nephew.[41]

The figure of Aesop is expanded in Eastern literature.[42] An interesting case is the Uyghur Book of Yosipas. In the ancient town of Qočo, fragments written in the Manichaean Uyghur script were found on a ninth-century CE codex. The book bears the title in red ink on the top margin: "The Good and Beautiful Book of Yosipas." The published fragments of this book indicate that there are some similarities with the Life, especially regarding the stories set on Samos.[43] Yosipas here seems to be in the service of a master named Kidinus (an equivalent to Xanthus).[44] A Syriac translation, of the seventh or eighth century, probably lies behind the Uyghur Book of Yosipas (Rásonyi Nagy 1930, 440–43).

There is also evidence for a Syriac translation of the Life; as Pavlos Avlamis notes:

> in a letter to John the Stylite of Litarb dated to 715 CE, George, bishop of the Arab tribes, provides a Syriac paraphrase of the *Life of Aesop*, which has remained unacknowledged by classicists. George provides John the Stylite with a commentary concerning the literary characters of Aesop and Xanthus by paraphrasing the *Life of Aesop*, especially chs. 20–31. This is the first episode of the Samos section, in which Xanthus strolls around the agora with his entourage of students and buys Aesop at the slave market. (Avlamis 2013, 278–79)

41. A detailed comparison between the Greek Life and the Story of Iosop may be found in Toth 2005, 118–24.

42. On the late antique translations of the Life into Syriac and into Uyghur (a Turkic Language of central and eastern Asia), see also Perry 1959, 14–15 and 21; Zeitz 1935, 24–25; Zieme 1968; Avlamis 2013.

43. See the comprehensive examination of the interaction between the Greek Life and the Uyghur translation via linguistic and cultural reencodings in Avlamis 2013, esp. 269–84.

44. Le Coq (1922, 33; frag. 14) published one fragment of the Book of Yosipas and identified it as an Aesopic fable. But the Hungarian Turkologist László Rásonyi Nagy (1930) identified the fragment as an Uyghur version of chapters 47–48 of the Greek Life of Aesop. Zieme (1968) edited further eight fragments of the Book of Yosipas and suggested that they corresponded to various chapters of the Life. Jens Wilkens (2000) reedited these fragments and added two further fragments (all information in Avlamis 2013, 269–72).

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