

Aristotle's Interest in Biography

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NO KNOWN WORK of Aristotle is devoted entirely to an account of the life of an individual. This fact is sufficient evidence for the truth of a recent statement that "Aristotle did not cross the bridge from anecdote to biography."¹ In many parts of his writings, however, there are remarks of a biographical nature about the thoughts and actions of individuals, and they form an important element in his view of the past. In this article I shall consider some of the remarks in order to show that Aristotle had worked out in detail the *βίοι* of many individuals. To early Greek poets he gave special attention, as we see, for instance, from the treatment of Solon in the *Ἀθηναίων Πολιτεία*; his interest in *βίοι* is also clear from numerous fragments of the *Politeiai* and from fragments of the dialogue *Περὶ ποιητῶν*.

Since most of the discussion will be concerned with the *Politeiai* and *On Poets*, it is necessary to distinguish first the two different classes of evidence. In the dialogue Aristotle is able to make statements without vouching for their truth² unless he himself is the speaker; in fact, none of the fragments in *On Poets* states unequivocally that it is Aristotle who is speaking. One advantage of the dialogue form was that it enabled Aristotle to report what was said in tradition (*λέγειν τὰ λεγόμενα*), somewhat in the Herodotean manner, without necessarily agreeing with one of the two or more differing stories. In the *Politeiai*, however, he is subject to the demands of historical truth through direct statement. An intermediate status is occupied by work such as *On the Pythagoreans*.³ Here fantastic details of the life of Pythagoras can hardly have been presented without qualifying words such as *ὡς φαίνεται*, but in this work, too, Aristotle comes close to writing biography.

¹ A. D. Momigliano, *The Development of Greek Biography* (Cambridge [Mass.] 1971) 76.

² This point, sometimes overlooked, is clearly made by Philip McMahon in his discussion of *On Poets* at HSCP 28 (1917) 37.

³ J. A. Philip, *TAPA* 94 (1963) 186–87, distinguishes this work from *Πρὸς τοὺς Πυθαγορείους*; criticism of Pythagorean philosophy was confined to the latter. Some lore in the former may be taken from Herakleides Pontikos, who wrote a book *On the Pythagoreans* (fr.40–41 Wehrli): see J. A. Philip, *Phoenix* 17 (1963) 261.

One topic discussed in the dialogue *On Poets* was the relationship between philosophy and poetry. Empedokles, for example, though he must be properly regarded as a physicist (*Poet.* 1447b18), was said to be "Homeric and skilled in diction, being full of metaphor and other devices of poetry" (fr.1 Ross); but we also find the biographical comment that Empedokles died at the age of sixty (fr.2 Ross). The remark that the form of Plato's dialogues lies between prose and poetry (fr.4 Ross) in effect neatly turns Plato's strictures on poetry as a mimetic art against himself.⁴ In Book III of *On Poets* a relevant biographical detail was added to the discussion, for it was remarked there that there had been rivals of Sokrates: Antilochos of Lemnos and Antiphon ὁ τερατοκόπος had vied with him (fr.7 Ross).

The longest biographical fragment in *On Poets* recounts the life of Homer (fr.8 Ross). The narrative in the ps.-Plutarchan fragment is not complete—we are not told, for instance, where and when Homer created the *Iliad* and the *Odyssey*, or what prompted the composition of the *Margites*, which Aristotle (*Poet.* 1448b30) believed to be the work of Homer also; but we can see that it was Aristotle's aim in the dialogue to show that the various traditions about Homer could be combined into a biography. That they were all true does not, of course, follow, and we have no means of telling how much of them Aristotle accepted.

One or more speakers were able in the dialogue to combine the following notions. (1) The poet was conceived in Ios and died there after failing to solve the riddle of the lice. (2) The poet was born in Smyrna, hence the name Melesigenes. (3) The change from Melesigenes to Homeros happened because the Lydians, suffering in the war with the Aeolians, decided to abandon Smyrna, and Homer 'the follower' went with them.

The Ietan birth is mentioned in literature as early as Bacchylides (*Vit.Hom.* 5, p.29.7 Wil.). The riddle of the lice appears already in Herakleitos (Diels-Kranz, *Vorsokr.*⁹ 22 B 56), though not specifically in connexion with Ios. In *On Poets* fr.8 the mother of Homer is said to be a local girl of Ios, Kritheis, who was taken by pirates to Smyrna, but the father was a δαίμων, who joined in the Muses' dances, as, no doubt, did Kritheis. The δαίμων is not identified, but a possible candidate for

⁴ See H. House, *Aristotle's Poetics* (London 1966) 31–32. A. Rostagni, *Scritti minori I* (Turin 1955) 268.

paternity is the vegetation spirit Phytalmios, who was worshipped in Ios.⁵

The abrupt remark in fr.8 that Homer sailed to Thebes to the musical festival of the Kronia after he had consulted the god (*πλέων ἐς Θήβας ἐπὶ τὰ Κρόνια*) suggests that a detail has fallen out; an alternative is to suppose that the author of the ps.-Plutarchan *Life* inferred that Homer had consulted some other oracle than Delphi, for example the oracle of the sea-god Glaukos in Delos, whom Aristotle mentioned in the *Δηλίων πολιτεία* (fr.490 Rose). The mention of the Kronia is significant because in *On Philosophy* (fr.14 Ross) it is said that no-one laments when he is a spectator at the Pythia or when he is drinking at the Kronia. The Kronia, then, was a festival of merriment, but it was also, according to *On Poets* fr.8, a festival with a musical competition. It is clear that in *On Poets* Homer was said to have competed in the merriment. The poem performed by him on that occasion was, we may suggest, the *Margites*, a work described by Aristotle in the *Poetics* (1448b26–30) as an invective, *ψόγος*, but also as a dramatic representation of *τὸ γελοῖον* (1448b34–38).

The unverified stories about the poet's travels in *On Poets* were supplemented by Aristotle in the *Politeiai*. In the *Λακεδαιμονίων πολιτεία* Lykourgos was said to have received poetry of Homer from the descendants of Kreophylos in Samos, whence he took it to the Peloponnese, being the first to do so.⁶ Lykourgos, according to Aristotle, lived at the earliest at the time of the first Olympic truce (fr.533 Rose), but Homer was said to be coeval with the Ionian migration (*De Poetis* fr.8 Ross), which happened long before the truce. So, if Homer met Kreophylos in the course of his travels, it was from the latter's descendants, not from Kreophylos himself, that Lykourgos received the poems, as Aristotle stated.

In the *Politeia* of the Kephallenians Homer puts in to Ithake and to Kephallenia on his way from Tyrrenia and, while there, goes blind. The notion that the poet lost his sight (after seeing enough of the West to enable him to reveal his topographical knowledge in the *Odyssey*) could be documented from the Homeric *Hymn to Apollo* (3.172), if Aristotle agreed with Thucydides (3.104.4–6) that the *τυφλὸς ἀνὴρ* of the *Hymn* was Homer himself. The 'blind man' in the *Hymn* is said to live in Chios, and Aristotle himself quoted Alkidamas for evidence

⁵ IG xii 5.13. For the month Homereon in Ios see IG xii 5.15.

⁶ Heraclid.Lemb. *Exc.Pol.* 10 (p.16, 19–20 Dilts).

that Homer, though he was not a citizen of Chios, was honoured by the Chians (*Rhet.* 1398b12–13).

In *On Poets* (fr.7 Ross) Homer's rival in poetry was said to have been Syagros—not Hesiod, whose contemporary rival was said to have been Kerkops. Since Syagros was reputed to have been the first to compose a poem on the Trojan War,⁷ we may suppose that Homer composed a superior poem on the same subject, namely the *Iliad*. The speakers in Aristotle's dialogue can hardly have agreed that Syagros defeated Homer, for the *Poetics* makes clear that in serious matters Homer is supreme amongst poets since he excels both in the quality of his artistry and in the dramatic character of his imitations (1448b34–36).

Discussing invectives in the *Poetics* (1448b28–29), Aristotle remarks, “We know of no such poem by a forerunner of Homer, but it is likely that there were many poets.” One pre-Homeric poet is mentioned elsewhere: in the *Politics* (1339b22) Aristotle ascribes to Mousaios the words βροτοῖς ἠδιστον ἀεῖδειν, but in another place he writes cautiously about “the epic verses said to be by Mousaios” (*Hist. Anim.* 536a19). With equal caution about the poetry alleged to be the work of Orpheus, he uses the expressions ἐν τοῖς καλουμένοις Ὀρφέως ἔπεσιν and ἐν τοῖς Ὀρφικοῖς καλουμένοις ἔπεσι (*De Gen. Anim.* 734a18–19 and *De An.* 410b28).

If Aristotle doubted that the ‘Orphic’ poems were the work of Orpheus, did he also deny the existence of Orpheus? Philoponos (in *De An.* 186.21–26=*De Philosophia* fr.7 Ross) states ‘λεγομένοις’ εἶπεν ἐπειδὴ μὴ δοκεῖ Ὀρφέως εἶναι τὰ ἔπη, ὡς καὶ αὐτὸς (sc. Aristoteles) ἐν τοῖς περὶ φιλοσοφίας λέγει· αὐτοῦ μὲν γάρ ἐστι τὰ δόγματα . . . This means that Aristotle or somebody else in the dialogue denied that the Orphic poems were by Orpheus, but the words do not entail that anybody in the dialogue denied that Orpheus existed. If the last words quoted also come from the dialogue and are not comment by Philoponos, then in the dialogue Orpheus was said to have expounded doctrines but not in poetry. Cotta in Cicero's dialogue *De Natura Deorum* (1.38. 107=*De Philosophia* fr.7 Ross) asserts *Orpheum poetam docet Aristoteles nunquam fuisse*. It is not clear that in this instance Cicero is drawing directly on Aristotle: the Academic source here may well be Kleitomachos (Hasdrubal) of Carthage, and if Cicero has not misunderstood him, then we may infer that somebody in *On Philosophy* denied either

⁷ Eustath. *ad Il.* proem., following Aelian, *VH* 14.21 (p.164 Hercher). *Ὀϊαγρός τις* in Hercher's edition must be corrected to *Σύαγρος τις*.

that Orpheus the poet existed or that Orpheus had been a poet. Either way, it is not safe to use *On Philosophy* fr.7 as evidence that Aristotle himself denied the existence of Orpheus. Two Ὀρφεῖς had been posited by Herodoros of Herakleia (*FGrHist* 31 F 42), and it looks as though Aristotle in effect doubted the existence of one of them—the poet. We cannot assume that Aristotle denied reality to Orpheus as musician, or to Orpheus as teacher, or to Orpheus as μάντις.

The matter would have been clarified if a fragment of the Methonai-an *Politeia* had been more generously excerpted. In that constitution Aristotle had mentioned a Pierian ἔθνος, the Leibethrians, in connexion with the proverb ἀμουσώτερος Λειβηθρίων (fr.552 Rose=Zenob. 1.79 [1.27 Leutsch/Schneidewin]). The explanation of Zenobios is that the Leibethrians had a reputation for muselessness because the death of Orpheus had happened amongst them. It is highly probable, if not quite certain, that this explanation was Aristotle's too; besides, he had had plenty of opportunity to collect the lore of Pieria and Methone when he was living at Mieza as tutor to Alexander. In sum, we do not know that Aristotle denied the existence of Orpheus; on the contrary, he may well have regarded him as a distinguished musician, who associated with the Muses of Pieria.⁸

In the dialogue *On Poets* it was said that Syagros was Homer's rival; Hesiod was dated by Aristotle much later than Homer, and in the Orchomenian *Politeia* there was discussed the proverb τὸ Ἑκίοδειον γῆρας in connexion with the story of the Boiotian poet's two burials, the first near the Nemeion of the Ozolian Lokrians, the second at Minyan Orchomenos after the bones had been transferred thither. Hesiod's double burial was recalled by an epigram

Χαῖρε δις ἡβήσας καὶ δις τάφου ἀντιβολήσας
Ἑκίοδ', ἀνθρώποις μέτρον ἔχων σοφίης,

which was quoted in the constitution (fr.565 Rose). Aristotle cannot have failed to discuss the historical context; according to local tradition the transfer of bones from Naupaktos to Orchomenos was made in obedience to an oracle after people of Askra, having been driven out by the Thespians, settled at Orchomenos. Hostility between Askra and Thespia is already implied by Hesiod's criticism of the

⁸ For the whole question of Orpheus in Greek historiography see Jacoby on Androktion 324 F 54 and on Philochoros 328 F 76–77. W. Jaeger, *Aristotle*, transl. R. Robinson (Oxford 1962), states confidently "Aristotle never doubted the historicity of Orpheus" (p.131), but "he denied that Orpheus wrote verse" (p.129).

gift-eating lords in the πόλις (*Op.* 269), which must be Thespia,⁹ not Askra, since Askra was a κώμη (*Op.* 639–40) in Thesopian territory.

It is remarkable that Aristotle stated Hesiod to have been the father of Stesichoros.¹⁰ The legend of their kinship grew out of Hesiod's mention of a son in *Opera* 270–71,¹¹ and its popularity was fostered by the evident interest of Stesichoros in epic-genealogical 'Hesiodic' themes. The Epizephyrian Lokrians, near whom Stesichoros was born at Matauros,¹² and the Ozolian Lokrians, in whose land Hesiod was said to have died (Thuc. 3.96.1), would have helped to develop the legend. Aristotle accepted it, for he felt little or no chronological difficulty of placing Hesiod close in time to Stesichoros. δὲ ἡβήσας eased the problem a little, if it was felt at all, since Hesiod could be supposed to have begotten Stesichoros in Ozolian Lokris in extreme old age. To what epoch, then, did Aristotle assign Stesichoros?

According to Aristotle, Epizephyrian Lokroi was founded as a consequence of the First Messenian War (fr.547 Rose). Stesichoros' association with the Lokrians—the Epizephyrians, that is to say—is noted in the *Rhetoric* (1395a1–2), which tells how the poet warned them not to behave outrageously “lest the cicadas chirp on the ground,”¹³ in other words, lest the enemy cut down the trees. Another parable of Stesichoros warned the Himeraians against giving military authority to Phalaris (*Rhet.* 1393b8–22). Phalaris was tyrant of Akragas, and Aristotle had studied his tyranny (*Pol.* 1310b28). Akragas was founded a little before 580 B.C. (Thuc. 6.4.4); Aristotle, to whom this foundation date was accessible in the writings of Antiochos of Syracuse or in Thucydides, is not likely to have placed Stesichoros in Akragas any earlier than that. Hesiod, therefore, even if he fathered Stesichoros at a ripe old age, cannot have been born earlier than the

⁹ H. T. Wade-Gery, *Essays in Greek History* (Oxford 1958) 11. Aristotle's remark that among the Thespians it was shameful to learn a trade and to spend time in agriculture (Heraclid.Lemb. *Exc.Pol.* 76 [p.40 Dilts]) may well have been prompted by Hesiod's strictures on the idleness of Perses amongst the lords of Thespia. For the ruin of Askra by Thespia see Plutarch in schol.vet. (Procl.) in Hesiod, *Opera et Dies* p. 202, 3–9 Pertusi.

¹⁰ Tzetzes, prolegg. comm. Hes. *Op. ap. Rose, Aristoteles Pseudepigraphus* (Leipzig 1863, repr. Hildesheim 1971) 505–06. Tzetzes writes 'Αριστοτέλης γὰρ ὁ φιλόσοφος, μᾶλλον δ' οἶμαι ὁ τοὺς Πέπλους συντάξας . . . simply because Hesiod's epitaph shares the words ὀκτῆα πληξίππων γῆ Μινύων κατέχει, which appear also in the Orchomenian epitaph in the *Peplos* (fr.640.19 Rose).

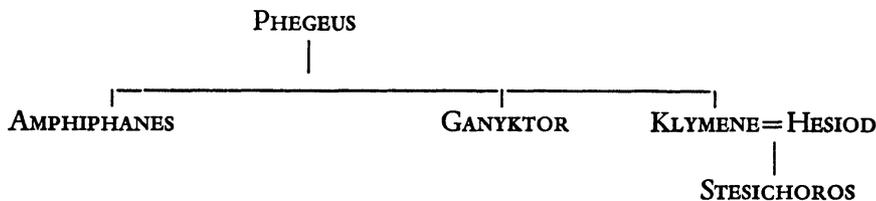
¹¹ See Jacoby on Philochoros 328 F 213.

¹² Steph.Byz. s.v. Μάταυρος.

¹³ Contrast *Hist.Anim.* 556a21: οὐ γίνονται τέττιγες ὅπου μὴ δένδρα ἔστίιν.

seventh century b.c. according to Aristotle, if he thought the problem through. With Hesiod he placed Kerkops, who according to *On Poets* was the Boiotian's rival in his lifetime (fr.7 Ross).

In the Orchomenian *Politeia* the ancestry of Stesichoros was given as follows:



In the Naupaktian legend Amphiphanes and Ganyktor, mistakenly suspecting that Hesiod had seduced Klymene their sister, killed him; but not all the evidence in fr.565 (Rose) comes from Aristotle, and it is not clear that he gave a version of the tale in the Orchomenian *Politeia*. The double burial of Hesiod was the focus of his biographical and antiquarian interest.

An oracle had warned Homer against the young men's riddle (*De Poetis* fr.8 Ross); another had told Hesiod that he was fated to die in the grove of Nemean Zeus (fr.565)—as indeed he did, but in Lokris, not in the Argolid. Aristotle recognized that oracles, like proverbs, preserved valuable evidence of the βίαι of poets. At Delphi and elsewhere Apollo's ministrants spoke in verse, sometimes giving encouragement to poets with the help of the god. Archilochos, for example, had been favoured by the Pythia because he was a servant of the Muses,¹⁴ and the Spartans had been persuaded by an oracle to bring Terpander from Lesbos to ease their civic ills. Aristotle discussed the poet's visit to Sparta in the Lakedaimonian *Politeia* (fr.545 Rose)¹⁵ in connexion with the proverb μετὰ Λέσβιον ᾠδόν, which alluded to the success of Terpander, his descendants and other Lesbian poets in the musical contests at Sparta: every other competitor was second to a poet from Lesbos.

The treatment of Alkman's life further illuminates Aristotle's biographical approach to literary history. He discussed Alkman's activity at Sparta, but believed him to have been a Lydian by origin, not a Spartan. For this opinion Aristotle was strongly attacked in antiquity,¹⁶ but he was also defended. The attack was well founded, if

¹⁴ Oracle no.4 Parke/Wormell, and Heraclid.Lemb. *Exc.Pol.* 25 (p.22 Dilts).

¹⁵ See also *Exc.Pol.* 11 (p.16 Dilts).

¹⁶ *P.Oxy.* 2389 fr.9 col. i attests Aristotle's involvement in the debate.

Aristotle's argument was based only on the fragment mentioning someone *Σαρδίων ἀπ' ἀκρᾶν* (fr.16 Page), for there is no evidence in the quotation that Alkman refers to himself in it—nor, on the other hand, does the use of the Doric third person singular ἦc prove that Alkman is not talking about himself.

To support his argument, however, Aristotle had plenty of opportunity to gather Asiatic allusions in Alkman's poetry. In the extant fragments we find, for example, Ibenian horses of Lydia (fr.1.59), the Lydian girl's name, Nanno (fr.1.70), a Lydian *μίτρα* (fr.1.67–69), the streams of Xanthos (fr.1.100), girls from Atarneus (*P.Oxy.* 2506 fr. 1(c) col. ii 15; *P.Oxy.* 2389 fr.6 col. ii 8–9); Karneus the Trojan, the exceptional eponymous hero of the Karneian festival (fr.52); the Phrygian names of the pipers Sambas, Adon and Telos (fr.109), the Kerbesian pipe-tune of the Phrygians (fr.126), Assos the town in the southern Troad (fr.153), and Gargaros or Gargara the town nearby, also on the gulf of the Adramytteion (fr.154).

The idea that Alkman was a Lydian from Sardis was taken up by, amongst others, Krates of Mallos, for whom as an Asiatic and a Pergamene scholar it had an obvious appeal. Others said that Krates had blundered, because Alkman was in fact a Lakonian from Messoa.¹⁷ The view that he was not a Lakonian by birth had other supporters;¹⁸ but the evidence of the poems themselves cannot have been conclusive, or there would not have been so protracted a controversy. Alexander Polyhistor's work *Περὶ τῶν παρ' Ἀλκμᾶνι τοπικῶς εἰρημένων* (*FGrHist* 273 F 95–96) looks to have been an attempt to solve the biographical problem by studying the poet's geographical allusions.

If Alkman was a Spartan from the village of Messoa, that was not proof of his having been born a Spartan rather than a Lydian. Aristotle maintained that the poet, though of Lydian birth, had been a servant of Agesidas, but that he was freed in recognition of his natural ability after he had turned out to be a poet. The poetry would have been first revealed before the liberation, though the text of the *Excerpta Politiarum* places the freeing before the poetical career.¹⁹

¹⁷ *Suda s.v.* Ἀλκμᾶν [A 1289 Adler].

¹⁸ Alexander Aetolus (*The Greek Anthology: Hellenistic Epigrams*, edd. Gow/Page, I [Cambridge 1965] lines 150–55); *Vell.Pat.* 1.18.3; *Ael.* VH 12.50. See also D. L. Page, *Alkman, The Partheneion* (Oxford 1951), App. for a discussion of testimonies.

¹⁹ Heraclid.Lemb. *Exc.Pol.* 9 (p.16 Dilts): ὁ δὲ Ἀλκμᾶν οἰκέτης ἦν Ἀγησίδου, εὐφυῆς δὲ ὧν ἡλευθερώθη καὶ ποιητῆς ἀπέβη. (H)Agesidas may be the same person as the *χοραγός* Ἀγησίδαμος, whom Alkman praises in *P.Oxy.* 2506, fr.5 col. ii (Alkman fr.10 [b] Page), the former

As a final example of Aristotle's interest in individual lives we may consider his mentions of Aesop. In Aristotle's opinion fables had a significant place in the history of literature beside proverbs and oracular precepts; they could also be valuable historical sources when their contexts were known. The *Rhetoric* classifies a fable as a *λόγος* that is a *παράδειγμα* (2.20 1393a28ff): Stesichoros' *λόγος* of the horse and rider had a political message in a historical context (*Rhet.* 1393b8–22), and so did a tale told to the Samians, according to Aristotle, by Aesop himself (1393b22–1394a1). Because of their political content Aesop's fables were mentioned in the Samian *Politeia*, wherein Aristotle stated that Aesop the *λογοποιός* was famous about the time of Pherekydes of Syros: "A Thracian by descent, Aesop was first the slave of Xanthos and was granted his freedom by Idmon the wise."²⁰ The freeing of Alkman the Lydian at Sparta thus had an analogy in Samos.

The fable in the *Rhetoric* comes down from the time of troubles in Samos after the overthrow of the aristocratic Geomoroi about 600 B.C. by the men of the fleet, whose *coup* brought greater power to the populace.²¹ The tale leaves little doubt that Aesop himself was then concerned with the island's politics:²² "And Aesop in Samos as defending counsel for a demagogue on a capital charge said that a vixen while crossing a river was driven into a cleft in the bank; being unable to escape, she suffered for a long time and many dog-ticks fixed themselves in her. Now a hedgehog out for a stroll took pity when he saw her, and asked if he should remove the dog-ticks. But she would not permit it. When asked why, she explained 'these are already gorged from me and draw little blood, but if you take them away others will come hungry and will drink what blood is left.' 'Men of Samos', said Aesop, 'this man likewise will harm you no more (since he is now rich); but if you put him to death there will come others who are poor, and they will use up the rest of your property by their thievings'."

Thus Aristotle's Aesop used his literary skill in affairs of state—and not only in Samos, for the Delphic *Politeia* explained with reference to

name being a *hypokoristikon* of the latter, or *'Αγγελίδου* in the *Excerpta* is a corruption of *'Αγγελιδάμου*.

²⁰ *Exc. Pol.* 33 (p.24 Dilts). Idmon is the Iadmon of Hdt. 2.134.3–4.

²¹ On the fall of the Geomoroi see Plut. *Quaest. Graec.* 57.

²² The historicity of Aesop and his rôle in Samian politics are well discussed by J. Sarkady, "Aisopos der Samier," *Acta Classica* (Debrecen) 4 (1968) 7–12.

the proverb τὸ Αἰώπειον αἶμα that Aesop had come to Delphi with gold from Kroisos. A dispute arose, Aesop sent the gold back, and the Delphians threw him over the rock Hyampeia, after a trumped-up charge of ἱεροσυλία. The god was much vexed at this, and the μῦθος was not removed until in the third generation recompense was paid to a Samian called Idmon, the grandson of the Idmon who had freed Aesop.²³ So the proverb τὸ Αἰώπειον αἶμα came to mean a stain hard to remove. Its context, in Aristotle's view, showed Aesop to have been a person of consequence in interstate politics. Some of the details Aristotle would have gathered at Delphi, but the life of Aesop may already have been discussed by the local Samian historian Euagon, who was one of Aristotle's sources in the Samian *Politeia*.²⁴

Aristotle's interest in individual βίοι enabled him to connect his study of literature with political history. His emphasis upon the significance of individuals is again evident in his historical survey of early Greek philosophy in *Metaphysics A*, where he is as careful to sift the detailed evidence and to report tradition conscientiously²⁵ as he is in the *Politeiai*. Because he was a wonderfully learned man he was able to think coherently about the multiple aspects of the past, patiently fitting the detailed and fragmentary evidence together or deploying it in different works, in order to illumine the Hellenic heritage as a whole. So he sees fit to report not only that Empedokles was said to have written a poem on Xerxes' invasion of Greece (*De Poetis* fr.1 Ross), but also that he had a reputation as a champion of freedom from constraint (*Sophista* fr.2 Ross); not only that Pherekydes of Syros vied with Thales (*De Poetis* fr.7 Ross), but also that the Milesian made a fortune by opportune hiring of olive presses in Miletos and Chios (*Pol.* 1259a9–19). His fondness for scarcely relevant anecdotes takes on a meaning within the unifying scope of his historical thought. Anecdotes may be told for their own sake, and Aristotle tells many just because they take his fancy.²⁶ But anecdotes are for him an essential part of biography, and so of historiography, because in Aristotle's view the deeds and experiences of individuals are the matter of history—even the deeds of an individual such as Alkibiades, since

²³ Arist. fr.487 Rose. See also Hdt. 2.134.4.

²⁴ FGrHist 535 F 4 (*Suda* s.v. Αἰώπος· Σάμιος ἢ Σαρδιανός· Εὐγείτων (Εὐγαίων Meineke, i.e. Εὐάγων) δὲ Μεσημβριανός (-ὄν Küster) εἶπεν, ἄλλοι Κορυαία Φρύγα.

²⁵ For a reasoned defence of Aristotle as a historian of philosophy against the charge of distorting his data, see, first and foremost, W. K. C. Guthrie in *JHS* 77.1 (1957) 35–41.

²⁶ Momigliano, *op.cit.* (*supra* n.1) 68–69.

history deals with the particular, τὸ καθ' ἕκαστον, τί Ἀλκιβιάδης ἔπραξεν ἢ τί ἔπαθεν (*Poet.* 1451b11).

So much evidence had Aristotle gathered about the βίοι of poets, statesmen and philosophers that, had he wished, he could have arranged his material into genuine biographies—genuine because they would not simply have been chronologically ordered anecdotes; Aristotle could have identified in distinct treatises the μεταβολαί of individual lives (just as he determined the μεταβολαί in the histories of city-states). But he never did so, not even in his work on Pythagoras or on Archytas. Thus Aristotle, who has an important place in the history of biography and whose historical thought has a discernible biographical component, was not a biographer. It is true that he “did not cross the bridge from anecdote to biography”; but it is not the whole truth, for Aristotle was more than half way across the bridge.

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