# 6

## THE GENERIC FEATURES OF EARLY GRAECO-ROMAN BIOI

The ancient biographers can always claim the credit for having established biography as a major form of literature.[1]

The discovery of Satyrus' life of Euripides ... indicated that Hellenistic literary biography was far more elegant and sophisticated.[2]

In the next two chapters the model we have outlined for generic analysis will be used on ten examples of Graeco-Roman biography, of which five predate the gospels and five are later. They are a diverse group, reflecting the overall character and development of this genre. We start with the origins of βίος in Greek rhetorical encomia by Isocrates and Xenophon in the fourth century BC. Next, we enter the Hellenistic and Alexandrian phases with Satyrus' *Euripides*, the first extant work clearly identified as a βίος and 'our only first-hand survival of a Peripatetic biography'.[3] Finally, we come to two βίοι influenced by other cultures: the Roman strand with Nepos' *Atticus* and a βίος emerging from the Jewish world, Philo's *Moses*. If these diverse works show a similar pattern when analysed by our sequence of opening features, subject, external and internal features, then βίος is indeed a diverse and flexible genre.

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[1] From Dorey's introduction to *Latin Biography*, p. xi.
[2] Arnaldo Momigliano, *Second Thoughts on Greek Biography*, p. 11.
[3] D.R. Stuart, *Epochs of Greek and Roman Biography*, p. 179.

### A  Introducing the examples

#### 1  Isocrates' *Evagoras*[4]

Isocrates (436–338 BC) lived during the Peloponnesian War and the turbulent years when fourth-century Athens was challenged by Philip of Macedon. Influenced by both Gorgias and Socrates, he was a speech-writer and teacher of rhetoric, interested in philosophy. One of his pupils may have been Nicocles, king of Cyprus from 374, for Isocrates wrote three orations in the period 374–365 BC: *To Nicocles*, an exhortation to the new king, *The Cyprians*, on the duties of his subjects, and the *Evagoras*, about Nicocles' murdered father, born *c.* 435 and ruler of Cyprus *c.* 411–374 BC. Isocrates claims to be the first to write prose encomium (ἀνδρὸς ἀρετὴν διὰ λόγων ἐγκωμιάζειν), which no one has attempted previously (*Evag.* 8). Stuart is not convinced and argues that this is a mere literary rhetorical boast; praise of a contemporary individual can be seen in Plato's *Symposium*.[5] As regards genre, *Evagoras* may be seen as crossing over from rhetoric to βίος: it takes the form of a funeral eulogy praising the king, rather than a full biography. The embarrassing fact that Evagoras has just been murdered is not described at all; instead, we have praise of him as the ideal king, enumerating his virtues.

#### 2  Xenophon's *Agesilaus*[6]

Xenophon (428/7–*c.* 354 BC) probably followed *Evagoras* as a model for his *Agesilaus*, composed *c.* 360 BC. Agesilaus was born in 444 BC and became king of Sparta in 398; a great soldier, he led a major expedition in Asia Minor against Persia 396–394, and many other campaigns both in Greece and abroad before dying in 360, still on active service. Xenophon served under him in Asia and included discussion of Agesilaus in his history, the *Hellenica*. This

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[4] See Momigliano, *Development*, pp. 46–9; Stuart, *Epochs*, pp. 77–118; *Isokrates*, ed. Friedrich Seck (Darmstadt: Wissenschaftliche Buchgesellschaft, 1976), esp. pp. 74–121; Christoph Eucken, *Isokrates* (Berlin: Walter de Gruyter, 1983), esp. pp. 264–9; Paul Cloché, *Isocrate et son Temps* (Paris: Les Belles Lettres, 1963); *Isocrates: Cyprian Orations*, ed. E.S. Forster (OUP, 1912); Stephen Halliwell, 'Traditional Greek Conceptions of Character', in *Characterization and Individuality* (OUP, 1990), pp. 32–59.
[5] Stuart, *Epochs*, chapter 4: 'A Question of Priority: The Pretensions of Isocrates', pp. 91–118.
[6] See Momigliano, *Development*, pp. 49–57; Stuart, *Epochs*, pp. 69–90; J.K. Anderson, *Xenophon* (London: Duckworth, 1974), chapters 12 and 13.

material also occurs in the *Agesilaus* itself, but here we have encomium; nonetheless, it contains more historical material than *Evagoras*. It is constructed in two parts, the first being a factual account of Agesilaus' life and the second a systematic review of his virtues.

### 3 Satyrus' *Euripides*

Satyrus the Peripatetic was known during the nineteenth century as an important author of βίοι,[7] but his work was preserved only in very fragmentary form in quotations from Athenaeus. However, the discovery and publication of *Papyrus Oxyrhynchus* 1176 early this century allowed the first study of some actual text.[8] The fragments, dating from the second century AD, come from the end of the scroll, concluding with the title of the sixth book of Satyrus' βίων ἀναγραφή. This contained the Lives of the Tragedians, Aeschylus, Sophocles and Euripides, and it is from the βίος of the last that the fragments come. Fragments 37–39 are closely associated and contain the upper parts of some thirty columns. Fragments 40–57 are small scraps found with the larger items, whereas 1–36 are miscellaneous fragments found previously. Although such partial preservation makes a definitive study of the work impossible, sufficient remains to reveal a number of generic features.

The author came from Callatis Pontica (on the Black Sea)[9] and wrote various βίοι; the Περὶ χαρακτήρων is also widely attributed to him. He certainly lived earlier than the reign of Ptolemy VI Philometer (181–146 BC), when the βίοι were epitomized by Heraclides Lembus.[10] Some scholars place him in Alexandria in the third century BC;[11] others prefer to take Athenaeus' description of Satyrus as ὁ Περιπατητικός (vi.248d; xii.541c; xiii.556a) at its face value, i.e. that he was connected with the Peripatos and perhaps

even a contemporary of Aristotle.[12] For our purposes, it is sufficient that Satyrus was an influential early writer of βίοι in the Peripatetic tradition, popular enough to be epitomized two centuries before, and still being copied and circulated a century after, the gospels.

The fragments come from the βίων ἀναγραφή, Satyrus' best known work, frequently cited by Athenaeus and Diogenes Laertius. The βίοι are wide ranging: philosophers (the Seven Sages, Pythagoras, Empedocles, Zeno of Elea, Anaxagoras, Socrates, Diogenes, Anaxarchus, Stilpo), poets (the tragedians), statesmen and generals (Alcibiades), monarchs (Dionysius the Younger, Philip) and orators (Demosthenes).[13] The *Life of Euripides* was an important source for other accounts, such as the Γένος Εὐριπίδου, the Life often attached to ancient manuscripts of Euripides' plays.[14] In addition to confirming Satyrus as the source of stories already known, the fragments provide some new information about Euripides, about his prosecution by Cleon for impiety (Frag. 39.x.15–20), the reasons for his retirement from Athens (39.xv.26ff.) and his involvement in Timotheos' *Persae* (39.xxii.27–30).

### 4 Nepos' *Atticus*[15]

Cornelius Nepos, born *c.* 99 BC in Cisalpine Gaul around Milan and the Po valley, moved to Rome *c.* 65 BC and spent his life writing; he died in 24 BC. His patron was Titus Pomponius Atticus (109–32 BC), a Roman knight not involved in political life, despite his very close acquaintance with Cicero. Although he too knew

7  See U. von Wilamowitz-Möllendorff, 'Lesefrüchte, § LI', *Hermes* 34 (1899), pp. 633–6; Leo, *Die griechisch-römische Biographie*, pp. 118ff.

8  *Oxyrhynchus Papyri* IX, ed. A.S. Hunt (London: Egypt Exploration Fund, 1912), pp. 124–82.

9  This is known from *P.Herc.* 558; see Stephanie West, 'Satyrus: Peripatetic or Alexandrian?', *GRBS* 15 (1974), p. 285, n. 19.

10  *F.H.G.* iii. p. 169; see Hunt, *Oxy. Pap.* IX, p. 125, and West, 'Satyrus', *GRBS* 1974, p. 284.

11  Wilamowitz, 'Lesefrüchte', *Hermes*, 1899, p. 635; Leo, *Die griechisch-römische Biographie*, p. 118; Dihle, *Studien*, p. 104; Momigliano, *Development*, p. 80, but see also *Second Thoughts*, pp. 4 and 7.

12  West, 'Satyrus', *GRBS* (1974), pp. 279–87; Adrian Tronson, 'Satyrus the Peripatetic and the Marriages of Philip II', *JHS* 104 (1984), pp. 116–26.

13  The fragments are collected and annotated in *De Satyro Peripatetico*, ed. C.F. Kumaniecki, Polska Akademja Umiejętności Archiwum Filologiczne Nr. 8 (Cracow: Gebethner et Wolff, 1929).

14  Full text in Graziano Arrighetti (ed.), *Satiro, Vita di Euripide*, Studi Classici e Orientali, vol. 13 (Pisa: Libreria Goliardica Editrice, 1964), Appendice, pp. 93–5; an English version is in Mary R. Lefkowitz, *The Lives of the Greek Poets* (London: Duckworth, 1981), Appendix 5, pp. 163–9; see her discussion on p. 99.

15  See Edna Jenkinson, 'Nepos – An Introduction to Latin Biography', in Dorey, *Latin Biography*, pp. 1–15 and 'Genus scripturae leve: Cornelius Nepos and the Early History of Biography at Rome', *ANRW* I.3 (1973), pp. 703–19; Geiger, *Cornelius Nepos and Ancient Political Biography* and 'Cornelius Nepos, De Regibus Exterarum Gentium', *Latomus* 38 (1979), pp. 662–9; Nicholas Horsfall, *Cornelius Nepos: A Selection, including the Lives of Cato and Atticus* (OUP, 1989).

many key figures of the disturbed end of the Republic, such as Cicero, Nepos similarly avoided participation in politics. Instead, he concentrated on his literary production, which included history, geography, moral *exempla*, love poetry and biography. He wrote separate βίοι, such as the Lives of Cicero and Cato (now lost), and the *De viris illustribus* in at least sixteen books, of which *Foreign Generals, Cato* and *Atticus* survive. It was first published *c.* 34 BC, with a second edition after Atticus' death in 32, probably by 27 BC (*Att.* 19). Nepos is often derided for his plain, simple style. He is important for our study, since his work is the first surviving example of Roman biography. He had clearly read the *Evagoras* and *Agesilaus*, and wrote a Life of the latter in *De viris illustribus* XVII. However, the influence of Roman funeral laudations and the *exempla* and *imagines* of the ancestors is also apparent. Geiger argues that Nepos is the real originator of ancient political biography with his combination of βίος and Roman political concern.[16] If not himself a great literary artist, Nepos inspired and influenced his successors, Plutarch, Tacitus and Suetonius.

### 5 Philo's *Moses*[17]

Like Nepos, Philo shows the development of βίος in another culture, Alexandrian Judaism. His dates are unclear, but he probably lived *c.* 30/25 BC to AD 45; a leading member of the Jewish community in Alexandria, he was part in the delegation to Gaius Caligula in AD 39/40. He has a clear intention in most of his work: to (re-)interpret Jewish beliefs via Greek, especially Platonic, philosophy, often using allegorical methods. He manages this so successfully that many commentators see him as more Greek than Jewish.[18] The *Life of Moses* is a little different, with less allegory, as he seeks to make Moses known to a wider Gentile audience. The influence of Greek models may be seen in the systematic treatment of Moses as king, lawgiver, priest and prophet; such a topical analysis is not unlike that of Isocrates and

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[16] See especially Geiger, *Cornelius Nepos*, pp. 66–116.
[17] See E.R. Goodenough, *An Introduction to Philo Judaeus* (Oxford: Basil Blackwell, 1962); and *ANRW*, vol. II.21.1 (1984), esp. S. Sandmel, 'Philo Judaeus: An Introduction to the Man, his Writings, and his Significance', pp. 3–46, and P. Borgen, 'Philo of Alexandria. A Critical and Synthetical Survey of Research since World War II', pp. 98–154; for a full bibliography, see E. Hilgert, 'Bibliographia Philoniana 1935–1981', pp. 47–97.
[18] See Goodenough, *An Introduction to Philo Judaeus*, pp. 75–90 and Sandmel, 'Philo Judaeus', *ANRW* II.21.1, pp. 31–6.

Xenophon. With this mixture of Greek βίος and a Jewish background, the *Moses* makes an interesting comparison with the gospels.

### B Opening features

#### 1 Titles

The titles of these works are essentially just the subject's name, although in some the genre is stressed by terms like βίος. The first two examples are known solely by name: the *Evagoras* and the *Agesilaus*. Fortunately, the Satyrus fragments contain the end of the scroll (Frag. 39, column xxiii) with the title as follows:[19]

Σατύρου
Βίων Ἀναγ[ρ]αφῆς
ϛ.
Αἰσχύλου,
Σοφοκλέους,
Εὐριπίδου.

Thus the full title of the work, βίων ἀναγραφή, is a clear generic indicator: Satyrus' *Euripides* is called a βίος, even though it has some odd characteristics. Further, after the title of the whole work, scroll/volume number and the colon, the name of the subjects come in the genitive case, dependent on the understood βίοι, denoting the specific Lives in this scroll. Even if this title is not original to Satyrus himself, it shows that the work was interpreted by ancient literary scholiasts or librarians as βίος. The *Atticus* is also known by the subject's name, although it too is part of a larger work entitled *De viris illustribus*, another clear indicator of βίος. Both the word 'Life' and the name in the genitive case are in περὶ τοῦ βιοῦ Μωυσέως, but in addition, Philo uses a formula often found in the titles of philosophical and other treatises, namely περὶ τοῦ . . .; this may suggest that the *Moses* also has elements of the philosophical treatise about it.

### 2 Opening formulae/prologue/preface

Some begin with a formal prologue: as is proper for oratory, Isocrates begins with a prologue, addressed to Evagoras' son,

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[19] There is a good photograph of the manuscript of Frag. 39, columns xvii–xxiii including the title, in Hunt, *Oxy. Pap.* IX, Plate V; see also, Oliver, 'The First Medicean MS of Tacitus', *TAPA* (1951), p. 245.

Nicocles, explaining his intention in the innovative, if difficult, task of praising a man's virtue in words (*Evag.* 1–11). This theme of difficulty in doing the task properly is also found in Xenophon's brief prologue/opening sentence in the *Agesilaus* I.1. Unfortunately the start of Satyrus' *Euripides* is missing, while Nepos launches straight in. Philo, however, follows his Greek models with a preface on his intention to write a Life of Moses (Μωυσέως ... τὸν βίον ἀναγράψαι διενοήθην, I.1). In addition to the feature of a prologue, we note that often the first word(s) is or includes the subject's name. Isocrates mentions Evagoras' name within his first periodic sentence. Xenophon's fifth word is ᾿Αγησιλάου. Nepos, with no prologue, begins 'T. Pomponius Atticus ...'. So too Philo, but in the genitive, Μωυσέως ... Thus our works all display the feature of the subject's name right at the start of the work.

### C  Subject

### 1  Analysis of verb subjects

We have suggested that in βίος one person will dominate as the focus and subject. Computer analysis of Xenophon's *Agesilaus* reveals that the subject's name occurs in 69 of the 370 sentences or major phrases (18.7%) and is in the nominative in 35 (9.5%). No other individual scores significantly; corporate proper names appear in the sentences – 10% contain Gree-k/ce, (῾Ελλ-) and 4% Persia/ns (Περσ-) – but few as subjects in the nominative (see Figure 5, Appendix, p. 264). The domination by Agesilaus is clear. The larger fragments of Satyrus' *Euripides* were submitted to manual analysis: Frags. 8, 37, 38 and 39 gave a moderately sized sample of 252 verbs in total.[20] The results show a heavy bias: Euripides himself is the subject of sixty-five (25.8%) of the verbs, with a further forty-four (17.5%) occurring within quotations from his plays. There are few other individual subjects: eleven first person singular and plural verbs (4.4%), referring to the main participants in the text, and four occurrences of the comic playwright, Aristophanes, who often mentioned Euripides in his works. Thus despite the limitations of the fragmentary state of the manuscript, verbal analysis shows a very significant dominance by

[20] As compared with 1,113 in Tacitus' *Agricola*, 628 in Lucian's *Demonax* and 2,500–4,300 in the gospels; see analyses below.

Euripides, both as the subject of a quarter of the verbs and with nearly a further sixth within quotations from his works (see Figure 6, Appendix, p. 265).

Of course, such a concentration on one person does not automatically make a work a βίος. A similar 'skewing effect' was noted in the *Odyssey* compared with the *Iliad*, but it is still epic because of its other features. Similarly, computer analysis of two other semi-biographical works of Xenophon also show this skewing effect: the *Cyropaedia* and the *Memorabilia*. The *Cyropaedia*, a long legendary account of the childhood of Cyrus in some 80,000 words, is dominated by Cyrus, whose name occurs in 16.3% of the sentences, including 9.5% where he is in the nominative (see Figure 7, Appendix, p. 266). Since the *Memorabilia* is the sayings of Socrates, it is not surprising that his name occurs in a tenth (9.9%) of the sentences, with just under half (4.8%) having him in the nominative (see Figure 8, Appendix, p. 267). Despite such pseudo-biographical concentration, other βίος features are missing. So Momigliano describes the *Cyropaedia* as a 'pedagogical novel ... not, and probably never claimed to be, a true account of the life of a real person' and the *Memorabilia* as a 'biographical form' for 'what amounted to fiction', a collection purporting to be sayings of Socrates.[21]

If we compare these figures with the 'control' results from Homer and Herodotus in the previous chapter, the point is clear. In other forms of literature, the subjects of the verbs are wide and varied. However, a distinguishing feature of βίος is the concentration on one person as subject, reflected even in the verbal syntax.

### 2  Allocation of space

It is often claimed that biography, unlike the gospels, covers the whole of the subject's life from birth to death.[22] We need to consider the allocation of space to see if it is even-handed. The *Evagoras* contains eight major sections of roughly equal length. This may reflect its rhetorical nature, rather than βίος: later rhetorical theory and school exercises emphasize covering various topics about the subject in a set order. Here, at the beginning, the

[21] Momigliano, *Development*, pp. 52–7.
[22] See above, pp. 62 (Momigliano), 96 (Tolbert) and 103 (Aune).

overlap with neighbouring genres, such as rhetoric and encomium, is bound to be greater.[23]

I: *Content analysis of Isocrates' 'Evagoras'*

| Chapters | Date (BC) | Topic | Percentage of work |
|---|---|---|---|
| 1–11 | | Introduction | 14.5% |
| 12–20 | | Background | 9.8 |
| 21–32 | 435–411 | Early years and rise | 13.0 |
| 33–39 | | Formal comparison | 8.7 |
| 40–50 | | Deeds and virtues | 14.5 |
| 51–64 | 411–374 | War deeds | 17.5 |
| 65–72 | | Evaluation | 11.0 |
| 73–81 | | Conclusion | 11.0 |

In the *Agesilaus*, however, *one* major campaign (396–394 BC) dominates, occupying well over a third, whereas the next thirty-four years and all the other campaigns are squeezed into just an eighth. This may be because Xenophon considers this campaign to show Agesilaus' character best,[24] or because Xenophon served under him in this campaign and thus knew it best. Clearly, even coverage is not a prerequisite for Xenophon; the first forty years of Agesilaus' life, his race and ancestry, and everything before he became king, are all covered in one opening paragraph (1–4). Another third of the work is an analysis of Agesilaus' virtues, tackled in turn: piety, justice, self-control, courage, wisdom, patriotism, graciousness, foresight and simplicity of life all having fairly similar coverage.

II: *Content analysis of Xenophon's 'Agesilaus'*

| Chapters | Date (BC) | Topic | Percentage of work |
|---|---|---|---|
| I.1–5 | 444–397 | Introduction and early years | 4.0% |
| I.6–II.16 | 396–394 | Persian campaign | 37.4 |
| II.17–II.31 | 394–360 | Other campaigns and deeds | 12.7 |
| III–X | | Individual virtues | 35.2 |
| XI | | Summary | 10.7 |

[23] Theon, *Rhet. Gr.*, II.109ff., has no less than thirty-six definite stages for encomium – see H.I. Marrou, *A History of Education in Antiquity* (London: Sheed and Ward, 1956), pp. 197–205; for *Evagoras* and Platonic philosophy, see Eucken, *Isokrates*, pp. 267–9.

[24] See J.K. Anderson, *Xenophon*, pp. 146–71.

Frags. 1–7, 12–34 and 42–57 of Satyrus are too small for their content to be reconstructed; Frag. 8 appears to be the end of a discussion of Euripides' style, whereas Frags. 37–39 cover his views on philosophy, religion, politics and women, concluding with his withdrawal to Macedonia and eventual death there, attacked by King Archelaus' dogs. What percentage of the total these sections are cannot be known. Nepos has a twofold approach, like Xenophon: while over half is devoted to Atticus' life, much of this is an account of the part Atticus played in the troubled last years of the Republic; then a quarter of the work discusses his character, before finally returning to chronology for the death.

III: *Content analysis of Nepos' 'Atticus'*

| Chapters | Date (BC) | Topic | Percentage of work |
|---|---|---|---|
| 1–6 | 99–49 | Early years, education, Rome | 26% |
| 7–12 | 49–40 | Civil War years | 32 |
| 13–18 | | Character and anecdotes | 25 |
| 19–22 | –32 | Later years, death, conclusion | 17 |

Philo also has a twofold pattern: Book I describes Moses' life in the manner of a king and Book II considers Moses topically as Lawgiver, Priest and Prophet, before returning to chronology for the death and conclusion. Within the first section, there is fairly even coverage of the main events described in the Pentateuch, although curiously the Sinai theophany and consequent events are merely mentioned (e.g. I.158, II.70) rather than described in full.

IV: *Content analysis of Philo's 'Moses'*

| Chapters | Topic | Percentage of work |
|---|---|---|
| I. 1–4 | Preface | 0.6% |
| I. 5–334 | Life, as King | 53.4 |
| II. 1–8 | Preface | 2.0 |
| II. 8–65 | Lawgiver | 8.0 |
| II. 66–180 | Priest | 18.8 |
| II.187–287 | Prophet | 16.3 |
| II.288–292 | Death and conclusion | 0.6 |

These analyses show that the author may order and allocate the interior structure of a βίος as he wishes, with material in a

chronological sequence, or mixed up with topical analysis. There may be a generally even coverage of the subject's life, as in the *Evagoras*, or the author may choose to emphasize one small period at the expense of others (e.g., *Agesilaus* and *Atticus*).

### D  External features

#### 1  Mode of representation

These works are all in the mode of prose narrative, but with some notable differences. First, whatever its later influence upon written βίος, *Evagoras* is in an essentially oral mode: it is a speech, ostensibly intended for a festival in honour of the deceased subject and addressed to his son. In addition to βίος features, therefore, rhetorical ones may be expected. Xenophon has rhetorical features also, but *Agesilaus* was probably always intended as a written document. Continuous prose narrative is the mode of *Atticus* and *Moses*.

Given that Satyrus' *Euripides* is called a βίος, its mode of representation is rather a shock, as it is written in dialogue, including some verse. There are at least three speakers: the main speaker, unnamed; a man, Diodoros (addressed by name in Frag. 39.iii.19, xv.13) and a woman, Eukleia (said to be 'well-named', Frag. 39.xiv.31). Scholars were surprised: as Hunt says, 'the method is a singular one to apply to biography'.[25] Perhaps other Lives of Satyrus were in dialogue mode also. The various metres are in the passages quoted from the tragedian himself (e.g. iambic in Frag. 38.iii.8ff. and an Anacreontic verse in 38.ii.12–14) and from comic poets (e.g. 39.xii.1–16 which is Aristophanes' *Thesmo.* 374–5, 335–7, and Frag. 39.ix.25–8, in trochaic metre). Since these metres reflect their originals, they indicate nothing about the genre of *Euripides* except to caution us against dogmatic assertions about exactly *how* βίοι must be written. The fact that an indubitably identified βίος is in such an unusual mode of representation shows that the genre is very flexible and does not always fit predetermined rigid rules; the text must be allowed to determine the genre rather than the rules. With this one exception, however, we may conclude that βίοι are normally written documents in prose narrative, often continuous in form.

[25] Hunt, *Oxy. Pap.* IX, p. 126; see also, Dihle, *Studien*, p. 105; Momigliano, *Second Thoughts*, p. 11; and Stuart, *Epochs*, p. 179.

#### 2  Size

The lengths of the four complete works are:

| | |
|---|---|
| Isocrates' *Evagoras*: | about 5,000 words |
| Xenophon's *Agesilaus*: | 7,558 words (computer count) |
| Nepos' *Atticus*: | about 3,500 words |
| Philo's *Moses*: | about 32,000 words |

Obviously, we cannot know the precise length of the *Euripides*. However, if Hunt is right that the title was normally placed in the centre of the papyrus (whereas it is at the bottom of the fragment), then each column had approaching sixty lines;[26] the thirty columns of Frags. 37–39, averaging two words to a line, would then contain about 3,600 words, although we do not know what proportion this is of the whole. However, Book VI of the βίων ἀναγραφή contained three Lives; on one papyrus roll with roughly similar treatment, the length of the *Euripides* would be about a third of a scroll, i.e. 7,000–8,000 words with the closely packed writing – about the same length as the *Agesilaus*.

Thus βίοι tend to be 'medium length': Isocrates, Xenophon and Satyrus will fit two or three to a scroll, whereas Philo is longer and would require two scrolls – one for each part of the work. Although Nepos' *Atticus* is the shortest of our examples, it is part of a larger work, the *De viris illustribus*. Therefore, βίοι belong with medium-length works, alongside monographs and treatises of historical, philosophical or scientific concern.

#### 3  Structure

The structure of these works usually has a chronological framework. After the prologue (if such exists), the subject's ancestry and birth are mentioned, with Nepos and Philo including an element about education also. However, all this may be extremely brief: Nepos covers it in one chapter, then carries straight on to when Atticus entered adult public life aged twenty-three, going to Athens to avoid Cinna. Equally, Xenophon covers Agesilaus' background and over forty years in barely a page to begin the narrative proper when he becomes king (I.5). After this early material, information about the subject's public life tends to come in a chronological fashion, especially in accounts of leaders and

[26] Hunt, *Oxy. Pap.* IX, p. 125.

statesmen like *Evagoras*, *Agesilaus* and *Atticus*, where the sections can even be dated. This is more difficult to do for literary or philosophical subjects: Philo attempts a chronological account of Moses' activity, based upon the Pentateuch, describing Moses as king – as though recognizing the chronological necessity of public life.

This *chronological approach* is interrupted by the insertion of *topical material*. Xenophon and Philo have a carefully structured analysis by topics (Agesilaus' virtues and Moses as lawgiver, priest and prophet) after their chronology. Nepos inserts a section arranged topically to display Atticus' character (13–18). Isocrates, however, inserts his topical material as he goes along. Careful study of the *Euripides* reveals topical sections, identified by structural markers. Thus Frags. 1–8 appear to be concerned with Euripides' style, followed by consideration of his character, identified by the statement, 'such was his artistic skill . . . and he was nearly as great of soul' (Frag. 8.9–12, 20–24). Frags. 37.i.22ff., 38, and 39.i–vi deal with Euripides' opinions. After this, another comment marks the shift from his attitude to women to the poet's withdrawal from Athens, 'let us return again to Euripides' (Frag. 39.xv.14–20), leading to the account of his sojourn in Macedonia and eventual death. However, βίοι do have some outer chronological structure into which the topical material is inserted: the absence of such a structure is one reason why Xenophon's *Memorabilia*, despite its high concentration on Socrates shown by our verbal analysis above, is not a βίος.[27]

After this, all our examples except one return to chronology to describe the last years or days and death, closing with the funeral or honours given or an evaluation of their subject. Even Satyrus has a summing up phrase to introduce the death: 'These were the things which happened to Euripides while he was alive; as for his death . . .' (Frag. 39.xx.22–26). Momigliano sees this as a definite indicator of genre: 'The text of the papyrus, with its clear transition from a section dealing with the life to a section dealing with the death of the poet, seems to make the biographical intention unmistakable.'[28] The death of Euripides occurs in column xxi of Frag. 39, with a story about Timotheos who composed the epigrammatic

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[27] 'Einen Bios des Sokrates erhalten wir nicht, nur isolierte, letztlich anekdotische Einzelheiten, die vom geschichtlichen Augenblick grundsätzlich ablösbar sind', *Kommentar zu Xenophons Memorabilien*, ed. Olof Gigon, in 2 vols. (Basel: Friedrich Reinhardt, 1953, 1956); quotation from vol. 2, p. 191.

[28] Momigliano, *Development*, p. 80; see also, Stuart, *Epochs*, pp. 181–3.

epitaph, 'All Greece is Euripides' monument, though Macedon holds his bones' (*Γένος Εὐριπίδου*, 40)[29] in xxii; finally, xxiii has the title, indicating the end. The one exception is Isocrates, who concludes with an evaluation of Evagoras, exhorting Nicocles to follow his father, but with no mention of his death. Aristotle tells us that Evagoras was murdered (*Pol.* 1311b) and in a rhetorical encomium such embarrassing, non-laudatory material was often omitted; thus we have a clear reason for our one exception of a βίος ending without the death.

Thus, βίοι usually have a basic chronological framework, which may be just the birth or public arrival as a starting point and the death as the end, together with topical inserts.

## 4 Scale

The scale is limited to the subject's life, deeds and character; as Cox says, 'biography was unique in concentrating on the life of a single personality'.[30] This is particularly notable in the *Atticus*, since here we have an account of the last half-century of the Roman Republic. Most of the great characters, Cinna, Sulla, Caesar, Cicero, Antony, are mentioned only in passing, while the momentous five years of the Civil War and Caesar's rule are covered in one chapter (7), since Atticus himself was neutral. A similar concentration on the subject occurs in the *Evagoras, Agesilaus* and *Euripides*. A slightly broader scale creeps into the *Moses*, since important events and customs of the Jews are recounted, but still all tied into the life of Moses. With this last exception, this feature is clear: βίοι are written on a narrow scale, limiting the focus upon the individual subject.

## 5 Literary units

A mixture of literary units make up βίοι, including anecdotes, sayings, stories, discourses and speeches. Cox is clear which is vital: 'One of the most important of these forms is the anecdote, a brief biographical narrative that relates a striking or unusual feature of the hero's character. Anecdotes are the major vehicles of biographical characterizations.'[31] A clearly structured chronological

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[29] Stuart, *Epochs*, pp. 184–5; see also Kumaniecki's note, *De Satyro Peripatetico*, p. 63.

[30] Cox, *Biography in Late Antiquity*, p. xiii.    [31] *Ibid.*, p. 58.

narrative, e.g. *Atticus*, betrays the units less well; on the other hand, the dialogue structure of the *Euripides* shows two main units, quotations and anecdotes. The former are varied, taken widely from both Euripides and the comic poets. Anecdotes form the major part: Hunt refers to his 'fondness for anecdote, which Satyrus shares with his kind, and which was a product of the prevailing interest in individual character and personal traits and details'.[32] Such anecdotes include Euripides being a recluse in the cave, 39.ix; Cephisiphon's seduction of his wife, 39.xiii; whether a mouth which produced such sweet poetry could have bad breath, 39.xx; and his killing by Archelaus' hunting dogs which ends with the punchline of the Macedonian saying: 'Justice even for a dog' (Frag. 39.xxi.33–5). Satyrus has been criticized for this predilection: 'Evidently anecdotes amused Satyrus and facts, as such, did not. He cared about literary style, but he neither cared nor knew about history.'[33] Other fragments of Satyrus preserved in Athenaeus also show this liking for anecdote, particularly if sensational or outrageous.[34]

Close examination reveals that these literary forms are present in all the βίοι, forming the stuff of their narrative. *Evagoras* betrays its rhetorical influence through units of formal oratory: prooimion, comparison, exordium, apostrophe. On the other hand, units which might be classed as 'legends' or 'miracle-stories' are found in the *Moses*. Thus we conclude that the literary units of stories, anecdotes and sayings are the primary building blocks of all βίοι, although in some they are linked into a more continuous whole than in others.

### 6  Use of sources

Writers of βίοι drew material from a wide range of oral and written sources. Philo refers to both the scriptures and oral tradition in his Preface: κἀκ βίβλων τῶν ἱερῶν ... καὶ παρά τινων ἀπὸ τοῦ ἔθνους πρεσβυτέρων (*Moses* I.4). Our other writers refer to sources in passing: personal knowledge of the subject is claimed by Nepos (saepe ... domesticis rebus interfuimus, *Att.* 13.7). Xenophon also knew Agesilaus personally, having served under him in the Asian campaign of 396–394 to which he devotes so much space.

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32 Hunt, *Oxy. Pap.* IX, p. 127.
33 G. Murray, *Euripides and his Age*, 2nd edn (OUP, 1965), p. 10.
34 See Tronson, 'Satyrus the Peripatetic', *JHS* (1984), p. 118.

Satyrus draws on the works of Euripides, as well as other poets, for his extensive quotations; for other details, he had Philochoros.[35] West sees the suggestion of 'fieldwork on the spot' – ὡς οἱ λόγιοί τε καὶ γεραίτατοι μυθολο[γ]οῦσι Μακεδ[ό]νων, 39.xx.29–33 – as 'surely bogus'.[36] In fact, as Mary Lefkowitz points out: 'Ancient biographers took most of their information about poets from the poets' own works.' With respect to the Γένος or *Vita*, often prefaced to ancient manuscripts of Euripides, which is heavily dependent on Satyrus, she says: 'Close analysis again shows that virtually all the information in the *Vita* derives from comedy or Euripides' own dramas.'[37] For example, it is inferred from his depiction of adulterous women that he had his own marriage difficulties, in Frag. 39.xiii.

All these writers select from their sources to display the subject and his character as they see him. Different criteria applied to βίος, and greater selectivity was allowed: 'The author who came to devote a Life, instead of a History, to a great man had to emphasize the difference in genre which allowed a different choice of material.'[38] Thus Isocrates chooses to omit Evagoras' ignominious death. In the *Hellenica*, Xenophon shows that he knows, and disapproves, of certain aspects of Agesilaus' conduct (such as his dealings with Pharnabazus or Sphodrias); these are absent in *Agesilaus* itself: 'He was clearly aware of failings which he felt it his duty, as a biographer, to suppress.'[39]

As in his allocation of space, the βίος writer has a certain freedom and licence, greater than that of the historiographer, to select and edit his oral and written sources, to deal with episodes in greater or lesser detail, or even to include or omit them when composing his portrait of the subject.

### 7  Methods of characterization

We have seen that character was usually depicted indirectly through words and deeds rather than by direct analysis, and this applies equally to βίοι: as Xenophon says, it is from Agesilaus' deeds (ἀπὸ γὰρ τῶν ἔργων) that his character's qualities (τοὺς

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35 Hunt, *Oxy. Pap.* IX, p. 127.    36 West, 'Satyrus', *GRBS* (1974), p. 282.
37 Lefkowitz, *Lives of the Greek Poets*, p. viii and p. 88.
38 Geiger, 'Cornelius Nepos, *De Regibus Exterarum Gentium*', *Latomus* (1979), p. 667; see also, Momigliano, *Development*, p. 56 and *Second Thoughts*, pp. 14–5; and G. Anderson, *Philostratus* (London: Croom Helm, 1986), pp. 227–36.
39 J.K. Anderson, *Xenophon*, p. 168; for full details, see pp. 167–71.

τρόπους αὐτοῦ) will appear (*Ages.* I.6). However, Nepos suggests that mere recitation of deeds belongs more to history ('historiam scribere') than to biography ('vitam enarrare'); the subject's virtues should also be included (*De viris illustribus* XVI: *Pelop.* 1.1). If character traits (τρόποι) and virtues are to be deduced from deeds (ἔργα), then it is not surprising that much of βίοι is devoted to describing the subject's words and deeds, unlike modern predilections for psychological analysis. Even direct analysis still tends to be through anecdote: Nepos displays Atticus' character as a careful, economical, loyal friend and *pater familias*, with illustrations of these traits (13–18). Xenophon will point out the character trait to be admired in an incident lest an inattentive reader miss it; e.g. Agesilaus' courage at the battle of Coronea: Ἐνταῦθα δὴ Ἀγησίλαον ἀνδρεῖον μὲν ἔξεστιν εἰπεῖν ἀναμφιλόγως (II.12; see also I.20, 27, 36; II.8 for similar comments). Isocrates praises his subject's deeds and, since this is encomium, uses other formal methods such as comparison with other great men (e.g. Cyrus) to reveal the character of Evagoras (see 33–39). Nonetheless, as Halliwell makes clear, the *Evagoras* is typical of much Greek literature in relying 'primarily on descriptive and narrative means of characterization'.[40]

Satyrus' interest in character is demonstrated by his other work, the Περὶ χαρακτήρων (Athenaeus, iv.168e). Here, Frag. 8.20ff. introduces a section on Euripides' character, and it may continue through Frags. 9 and 10. Anecdotes, particularly the more sensational ones, also help to form an impression of the subject's character. Tronson concludes that he 'gives a general indication of his character through word and action'.[41] This, then, is the typical method employed in all our βίοι.

## 8 Summary

The external, structural similarities between these works have now emerged. There are occasional differences as is expected with this flexible genre, particularly at the beginnings of the genre with Isocrates' *Evagoras* and its rhetorical features. Nonetheless, a clear family resemblance from this external, structural point of view is as follows:

βίοι are works mostly in prose narrative and of medium length;

40  Halliwell, 'Traditional Greek Conceptions of Character', p. 58.
41  Tronson, 'Satyrus the Peripatetic', *JHS* (1984), p. 118.

their structure is a bare chronological framework of birth/arrival and death with topical material inserted; the scale is always limited to the subject; a mixture of literary units, notably anecdotes, stories, speeches and sayings, selected from a wide range of oral and written sources, displays the subject's character indirectly through words and deeds rather than by direct analysis.

### E  Internal features

#### 1  Setting

The geographical settings take us all over the ancient world: to Egypt and the wilderness with *Moses*, to Cyprus with *Evagoras*, to Athens, Sicily and Macedonia with *Euripides*, and to Rome, the heart of the dying Republic, for the *Atticus*. However, all of these settings are chosen because this is where the subject was active. Additionally, the subject is always the focus of the dramatic settings. The *Life of Euripides* is unusual, being a dialogue between three people. Such a setting is more akin to philosophical debate, or indeed to tragedy itself: three speakers are the same number as actors allowed by tragic convention to Euripides in his plays. The three speakers are always discussing Euripides himself. Even when other material does appear, it is linked to the subject: for instance, the religious material in the *Moses* – the laws, the details of the tabernacle and so forth – still focusses on Moses, for he introduced it all. Equally, topical material, like the analysis of virtues in the *Agesilaus*, still directs our attention onto the man himself since they are *his* virtues. This constant internal focus on the subject affects the settings of the individual scenes and also of their overall content.

#### 2  Topics

A number of standard, typical biographical topics or motifs recur throughout these works. Nepos conveniently lists some at the start of *Epamonidas*: 'We shall talk first about his ancestry, next of his education and his teachers, then about his habits and traits of character and anything else which is worth remembering; then finally about his deeds, which many place before the virtues of his mind.' (*De viris illustribus* XV: *Epam.* 1.4). Some of these occur in all or most of our works; of the others, a selection is made according to the sort of βίος.

(a) *Ancestry:* Most βίοι begin with a mention of the subject's ancestry and heritage, his family, or his land or city. Isocrates has a long section on the nobility of Evagoras' ancestry, tracing it back to Zeus and down through the Trojan War hero, Teucer (chapters 12–20). Xenophon also praises Agesilaus' ancestry (back to Heracles), his royal family and the greatness of his country, Sparta (I.2–4). Nepos' opening sentence tells us that Atticus was born of the most ancient Roman stock ('ab origine ultima stirpis Romanae generatus'), whereas Philo comments that Moses was a Chaldean by ancestry (Μωυσῆς γένος μέν ἐστι Χαλδαῖος), but born and raised in Egypt (*Moses* I.5).

(b) *Birth:* Isocrates refers to Evagoras' birth, but in true rhetorical style mentions omens and portents only to say he will ignore them (21). *Moses* has the familiar story of the baby's birth and the bulrushes (I.8–17). The other three works do not include the birth.

(c) *Boyhood and education:* These are often used to prefigure the qualities of the later adult: so Isocrates refers to manly virtues and excellence in the boy Evagoras (22–24).

(d) *Great deeds:* These form the bulk of the narrative, but vary according to the subject. Thus, for a statesman like Evagoras, great deeds include government in peace (40–50) and direction of war (51–64). Xenophon recounts the deeds of Agesilaus on campaign in I.7-II.31. Atticus' greatness consists of avoiding public office and war, continuing his financial transactions and still managing to be a friend to everyone (6–12). Philo depicts Moses' great deeds as a king leading the Israelites out of slavery through the wilderness in Book I, but also his greatness as lawgiver, priest and prophet in Book II. Perhaps Satyrus recorded Euripides' great successes in the dramatic contests in the missing sections.

(e) *Virtues:* Virtues can be seen in the subject's great deeds (*Ages.* I.6), but also as another separate topic, e.g. Xenophon's treatment of Agesilaus' virtues in III–XI or Nepos' analysis of Atticus' character in 13–18. Other works do not tackle virtues separately, but in the narrative itself.

(f) *Death and consequences:* Except for *Evagoras*, all these works conclude with the subject's death. This can be in some detail concerning its cause, as in *Atticus* 22 or *Euripides* Frag. 39.xxi, or a briefer reference, as in *Agesilaus* X.3–4 and XI.16

or *Moses* II.291. The subsequent events often include the funeral or burial: *Ages.* XI.16; *Att.* 22; *Moses* II.291.

Thus we have here a set of standard topics used in βίοι, yet without forcing any particular work into a constrictive mould. Each author selects topics from his sources or reinterprets them to suit his subject; but they are all engaged in a similar exercise.

### 3 Style

The style and level of βίοι can vary; some are formal and highbrow, e.g. Isocrates and Xenophon both write in a high literary manner using formal rhetorical style, following Gorgias: Isocrates uses a long list of antitheses in 43–46,[42] whereas Xenophon probably derived his idea of the succession of virtues in III–IX from Gorgias and occasionally betrays his influence in his style. Nepos and Philo are capable of high style and rhetorical forms, but their βίοι attempt to reach a wider audience; Nepos writes quite plainly in short, simple sentences with a limited vocabulary,[43] and the *Moses* is less allegorical and more accessible than the rest of Philo. Satyrus also has elements of the popular: Hunt describes him as 'a writer with considerable pretensions to literary style' and the fragments as 'smooth and pleasant', avoiding hiatus.[44] Yet this style is not 'high-brow', but rather at a popular anecdotal level.

Thus βίος literature is *not* limited to any one formal or high-brow style and level. Many surviving examples do reflect that approach, but others indicate that the genre stretched much further down the scale; even if many popular βίοι were in circulation, unfortunately, they were less likely to be preserved for posterity.

### 4 Atmosphere

The four features of tone, mood, attitude and values are taken together to form an impression of the atmosphere. Four of the works (*Evagoras, Agesilaus, Atticus, Moses*) are similar: their tone is respectful and serious, and the mood is generally steady, with

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[42] Forster considers Isocrates' style to be 'the purest Attic' with the careful rhythm and balance of the clauses, with smoothness resulting from the avoidance of hiatus; here, too, the influence of Gorgias is noted, *Cyprian Orations*, pp. 21–4.

[43] See Jenkinson in *Latin Biography*, pp. 11–14 or *ANRW* I.3 pp. 715–17 for Nepos' style; Horsfall is uncomplimentary about his literary abilities, *Cornelius Nepos*, pp. xviii-xix.

[44] Hunt, *Oxy. Pap.* IX, pp. 126–7.

undercurrents of thankfulness. The attitude to the subject is respectful and admiring, and often openly encomiastic, causing a didactic or hortative attitude to the reader to encourage emulation. The values come from different situations: the stress on power and honour for the ruler of a Greek city state (*Evagoras*); the virtues important in Greek philosophy (*Agesilaus*); the social approach of the Roman *equites* (*Atticus*); and a mixture of Jewish religious values with Greek philosophy (*Moses*). However, all four reflect the established values of their respective place and periods. Thus a common atmosphere emerges which is fairly serious and respectful to the point of eulogy.

The atmosphere of *Euripides* reflects its mixture of literary pretensions and the popular level. It is more light-hearted in tone than the others: Euripides' marital problems are fair game (Frag. 39.xii-xiii) and the story of his death ends with the saying 'Justice even for a dog' (39.xxi.33–5). The mood of the dialogue is like friends conversing rather than the intensity of a Socratic dialogue. Nonetheless, Lefkowitz believes that it still 'preserves a sense of debate over the application of quotations from plays' and Satyrus 'has discussions of Socratic notions in Euripides', whereas in the *Vita* attached to later manuscripts 'all sense of debate has disappeared'.[45] The attitude towards the subject is mixed: there is respect for his skill, yet also fun to be had at the expense of his more unusual habits or sayings. The values of Satyrus are those of a 'moralist and gossip-monger'.[46] All together, these features provide a light atmosphere here. This is a further reminder of the flexibility of βίος, with the contrast between this lighter atmosphere and the more serious tone of the others.

## 5  Quality of characterization

The selective use of sources to provide a particular picture, together with the encomiastic elements within some of these works, predispose them to a stereotypic element in the quality of their characterization. Isocrates is clear: 'everyone knows that those wishing to praise someone must depict him with more good qualities than he really has, while his attackers must do the opposite' (*Busiris* 4). This stereotypic element is there also in *Evagoras*. Halliwell argues that the influence of encomium on the

45 Lefkowitz, *Lives of the Greek Poets*, p. 99.
46 Tronson, 'Satyrus the Peripatetic', *JHS* (1984), p. 118.

development of βίος led to a lack of individuality: 'Interest in the individual, without which we would have no biographical form at all, is qualified and coloured by the tendency to see him as an exemplar of general, ethical qualities – qualities, that is, which are not uniquely his.'[47] Stereotype is common in character analysis: Nepos' account of Atticus' loyalty and economical attitudes (e.g. *Att*. 13) is too good to be true; on the other hand, the stories about him give the impression of a fairly shrewd financier at work, rather than merely a philanthropic stereotype.

## 6  Social setting and occasion

All the examples reveal a setting within the educated and ruling classes. The occasion for the delivery of the *Evagoras* is a public festival, as the final chapters of direct address to the dead ruler's son show; the *Agesilaus* was probably occasioned soon after his death, perhaps as an apologetic. There are hints in some texts that a wider audience is sought: Philo wants to inform those ignorant of Moses (I.1–4), and Nepos hoped to reach more with his *De viris illustribus* (see *Praefatio* 1–7). The *Euripides* reveals a social environment interested in stories about important figures, so there is an element of the popular about its setting. For Satyrus and Nepos, the occasion of writing was producing a larger work. Satyrus, for example, is writing a comprehensive collection of βίοι: Euripides must be included in the section on the tragic poets. So these examples contain evidence of a social setting within the upper or educated classes, but with hints that βίοι can have a variety of settings and occasions further down the social scale.

## 7  Authorial intention and purpose

These βίοι display many possible purposes, which we shall consider separately to aid clarity, but several intentions may be combined in one particular work.

(a)   *Encomiastic:* This is the most obvious purpose of βίοι which are also rhetorical encomia, or works in the overlap of the

47 Halliwell, 'Traditional Greek Conceptions of Character', p. 56; see also, 'er ist die Schilderung eines Idealkönigs. Diese sittlich-idealistische Darstellungsweise ist in der ganzen Erzählung zu verfolgen', Johannes Sykutris, 'Isokrates' "Euagoras"', in *Isokrates*, ed. F. Seck, p. 81; for rhetoric and character, see D.A. Russell, 'Ēthos in Oratory and Rhetoric', in *Characterization and Individuality*, pp. 197–212.

genres. Isocrates describes his intention as both encomium (ἐγκωμιάζειν, *Evag.* 8) and eulogy (εὐλογεῖν, *Evag.* 11). Xenophon has a eulogistic purpose in mind when he says that it is difficult to write worthily of Agesilaus' ἀρετή (I.1). The others do not state an explicit encomiastic intent, though in some it may be implicit.

(b)  *Exemplary:* The other purpose of encomium was to provide an example for others to emulate, and this is common too in many other forms of ancient literature. Isocrates ends with a section explicitly telling Nicocles to emulate his father's greatness (73–81); the speech is intended as the best exhortation (πολὺ καλλίστην . . . ταύτην παράκλησιν) for him and for his children (76). Xenophon's picture of Agesilaus is an example (παράδειγμα) for others to follow to become better people (ἀνδραγαθίαν ἀσκεῖν, X.2).[48] This intention can become almost evangelistic in calling the readers to follow the hero – and there may be an element of this in Philo's attempt to commend Moses to a larger audience as the 'supreme law-giver whose laws they are to accept and honour'.[49] Conversely, an exemplary motive may be discerned in the moralising criticism of Satyrus about Euripides' haughtiness (Frag. 39.ix.16–18) or his aloofness (39.x.5–6). Tronson points out from his other works that 'Satyrus thus had a propensity for relating not only bizarre deaths but also *exempla* of moral excess or extravagance.'[50]

(c)  *Informative:* This was important for 'Satyrus' work, which, like that of other biographers of the Peripatetic school, was essentially popular in its aim, and endeavoured to supply interesting information in an attractive shape'.[51] Philo writes similarly about people's ignorance concerning Moses and his desire to inform them (*Moses* I.1). Nepos says that he wishes to provide a portrait of his subjects' life and character from their deeds ('de rebus gestis', *De viris illustribus* XV: *Epam.* 1.3–4) or virtues ('de virtutibus', XVI: *Pelop.* 1.1), which has an informative approach. Such statements bear out the truth of Momigliano's comment that not all biography was for great debate: 'The educated man of the Hellenistic world was

[48] 'In the *Agesilaus*, Xenophon represents the King as setting an example of all virtues', J.K. Anderson, *Xenophon*, p. 168.
[49] Borgen, 'Philo of Alexandria', p. 118; see also p. 151.
[50] Tronson, 'Satyrus the Peripatetic', *JHS* (1984), p. 118.
[51] Hunt, *Oxy. Pap.* IX, p. 126.

curious about the lives of famous people. He wanted to know what a king or a poet or a philosopher was like and how he behaved in his off-duty moments.'[52]

(d)  *Entertainment value:* Like the last aim, this was part of Satyrus' intent. Certainly, in the fragments of his other Lives, cited in Athenaeus, we hear of 'the outrageous lifestyle of Alcibiades, the bigamy of Socrates, the dining couches of Dionysius II and the gross flattery of Philip's courtier Cleisophus'.[53] The *Euripides* has its own share, such as the sensationalized account of his death or the gossip about his wife's affair.

(e)  *To preserve memory:* Another informative purpose arises from the desire to preserve the memory of the deceased. Isocrates suggests that his praise of Evagoras' deeds and character (τῶν πράξεων καὶ τῆς διανοίας) is a far better memorial than any statue in its ability to capture his character more truly and in its worldwide fame (*Evag.* 73–74). As personal acquaintances of their subjects, Xenophon and Nepos may be fulfilling this intention also.

(f)  *Didactic:* In philosophical or religious βίοι the desire to teach is natural, about both the subject himself and his teachings. Philo wants to teach what sort of person Moses was (τοιοῦτος μὲν ὁ βίος, II.292), and he also includes discussion of his subject's teachings.

(g)  *Apologetic and polemic:* The use of βίοι in debate was a common intention in early philosophical βίοι. As Cox says:

> Biography was from its inception a genre that found its home in controversy. Biographers like Aristoxenus were self-conscious mediators of specific traditions, and their works had both apologetic and polemical aims, apologetic in defending, affirming, and sometimes correcting opinion about a hero; polemical in suggesting by the strength of the defense, and sometimes by outright attack, the unworthiness of other traditions by comparison.[54]

In the *Agesilaus* Xenophon seems to be defending his hero against criticisms, e.g. 'some may blame him for this' (II.21; see also IV.4; V.6; VIII.7 – the latter stressing Agesilaus'

[52] Momigliano, *Second Thoughts*, p. 15.
[53] Tronson, 'Satyrus the Peripatetic', *JHS* (1984), p. 118.
[54] Cox, *Biography in Late Antiquity*, p. 135; see also Berger, 'Hellenistische Gattungen im NT', *ANRW*, II.25.2, p. 1242.

simple lifestyle). Goodenough sees similar aims in Philo: the *'Life of Moses* has always been taken as another apology for the Jews'.[55]

Thus, any attempt to prescribe a single aim for βίος misses out on a rich variety of possible purposes. These include encomiastic intent, to preserve memory, for exemplary, moral, philosophical purposes, polemic, apologetic, entertainment, didactic or informative aims, or to correct false ideas.

### 8  Summary

Internal features are concerned with areas of content, and so it is not surprising that similarities of these features emerge from works all concerned with one person. Of course, there are divergences, especially between the different sorts of subject, but overall a clear family resemblance may be seen:

βίοι are works with a setting focussed upon a person, about whom the writer selects topics from a group of standard motifs. The style and level of extant works are fairly literary, but there is evidence for a wider range which has not been preserved. Likewise, the texts reveal educated social settings and occasions, with popular tendencies. The atmosphere is mostly respectful and serious, although it can be more light-hearted. The quality of characterization may be good, but there is a tendency to stereotype. Finally, we have discovered a wide range of possible purposes, and many works have several intentions simultaneously.

### Conclusion

We have now examined five works predating the gospels: two early rhetorical works, a Hellenistic literary βίος and two examples from other cultures, Republican Rome and Alexandrian Judaism. Despite this variety of date and setting, they exhibit a similar range of generic features within a flexible pattern. The primary similarity derives from their subject – an account of a person. This is usually first signalled by the title, the subject's name, sometimes with the word βίος itself (in Satyrus and Philo). Verbal analysis of Xenophon and Satyrus demonstrated the dominance of the subject.

55  Goodenough, *An Introduction to Philo Judaeus*, p. 33; see also Borgen, 'Philo of Alexandria', p. 118.

Allocation of space need not be even-handed; some concentrate on one particular period. Similar content produces other similar internal features, such as a concentration of the geographical and dramatic setting upon the person and a tendency towards the typical in characterization as the authors make selections from a similar range of topics and motifs. The style and atmosphere of the works are mostly respectful and serious, revealing a social setting within the educated classes; however, Satyrus shows that βίος can be written in a light style and easy atmosphere conducive to a more popular setting. There are a large number of possible purposes and intentions, any of which can be combined within one of our examples. As regards external features, the works tend to be in prose narrative, although *Evagoras* is a speech and *Euripides* is in dialogue. They are of medium length, about 7,000 words long, although Nepos is shorter and Philo longer. All have a basic chronological structure with topical inserts, drawn on a fairly narrow scale. Each author selects common literary units, such as anecdotes, stories, speeches and quotations, drawn from a variety of oral and written sources to portray the subject's character through the indirect means of narrating his deeds and words.

There are boundaries to this flexible genre, however: *Evagoras* often seems the odd one out, as it contains many features typical of rhetoric. Equally, mere concentration on an individual is not sufficient for admission: thus the *Memorabilia* displays some features of βίος, such as the concentration on Socrates, but its other features, such as excessive length, philosophical dialogue and lack of chronology, place it more naturally within philosophical genres, while the *Cyropaedia* is more of a romance or novel.

By the first century AD there was a clear generic grouping of βίος literature, which was widespread from Rome to Alexandria, across the social classes from the high-brow to the popular levels. As a flexible genre, it continued to develop, but within a recognizable family resemblance. Before we consider how the gospels compare with these examples, we shall analyse a further five examples dating from later times to obtain a full picture of how the genre developed.

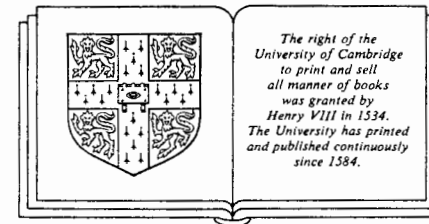# What are the Gospels?

## A Comparison with Graeco-Roman Biography

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