chapter 5 entails a more poetic, allusive approach to the material, since fantasies about a man's character cannot, after all, be reconstructed from sources in the way that his historical activities can.

Both chapters take the anecdotal mode of biographical narration seriously; but chapter 4 shows how anecdotes come together to give a biography thematic coherence, while chapter 5 takes anecdotes singly as evocative poetic images. Perhaps the difference can be stated quite simply. If, as we remarked earlier, biographies of holy men occupy a mythic "place between" fact and fantasy, then they can be viewed either as imaginal histories or as historicized mythic ideals. Chapter 4 is a reading of Eusebius' "Life of Origen" as imaginal history, while chapter 5 is a reading of Porphyry's *Life of Plotinus* as embodied poetry.

Finally, whether the entrée is by way of historical theme or poetic trope, both studies aim to show that the biographical portraits of holy men are neither solely fact nor solely fancy: they are, rather, both fact and fancy at once. Therein lies the persuasive power of their mythic appeal. As Porphyry said of the Delphic oracle's interpretation of the life of Plotinus, "We knew ourselves that he was like this."

# PART I

# Biography and Tradition: The Myth of Genre

CHAPTER ONE

# Graeco-Roman Biography: Form and Function

In recent years, New Testament scholars have revived the search which began around the turn of this century[1] for a literary prototype of the gospels. This new quest, like the older one, has delved into Graeco-Roman literature to find a genre tradition that will elucidate the form (and, to a great extent, the content) of the gospels. The focus has been on ancient collections of miracle stories because the reigning hypothesis of both the old and the new quest is that at some point prior to the composition of the gospels, a literary form was developed that used as its basis these collections of miracle stories. This hypothetical genre has been labeled "aretalogy," since it is thought to have evolved from early cultic practices of reciting the virtuous and miraculous acts (*aretai*) of a divinity. The major interest of those involved in the new quest has been to extend the parameters of the genre to include any story of a man to whom marvelous activities or capacities are attributed. In other words, their goal is to substantiate the claim for the existence, early in the Hellenistic period, of a literary form that follows a fixed pattern for the life of a holy or supernaturally gifted man and so to

1. Representative works of the first phase of the search are Richard Reitzenstein, *Hellenistische Wundererzählungen* (Leipzig: B. G. Teubner, 1906) and Ludwig Bieler, *ΘΕΙΟΣ ΑΝΗΡ*, 2 vols. (Wien: Buchhandlung Oskar Höfels, 1935–36). For an exhaustive survey of the older works see Morton Smith, "Prolegomena to a Discussion of Aretalogies, Divine Men, the Gospels, and Jesus," *JBL* 90 (June, 1971): 174–99. Among modern scholars who have revived the interests of these older writers are Moses Hadas and Morton Smith, *Heroes and Gods* (New York: Harper and Row, 1965); David Tiede, *The Charismatic Figure as Miracle Worker*, SBL Dissertation Series, no. 1 (Missoula, Montana: Society of Biblical Literature, 1972); Helmut Koester, "One Jesus and Four Primitive Gospels," *HTR* 61 (1968): 203–47; Jonathan Z. Smith, "Good News Is No News: Aretalogy and Gospel," *Christianity, Judaism and Other Greco-Roman Cults*, Studies for Morton Smith at Sixty, ed. Jacob Neusner, 4 vols. (Leiden: E. J. Brill, 1975), vol. 1: *New Testament*, pp. 21–38; Howard Kee, "Aretalogy and Gospel," *JBL* 92 (September, 1973): 402–22.

establish a literary niche for the gospels. In marshaling evidence for this thesis, however, scholars have adduced biographies written long after the gospels as testimony to the developed form of earlier aretalogies, none of which are extant. Because of the assumptions underlying the aretalogy hypothesis, these later works, foremost among which are Philostratus' *Life of Apollonius of Tyana* and Porphyry's and Iamblichus' *Lives* of Pythagoras, have been considered primarily with respect to their treatment of miracles. The integrity of these biographies as literary works in their own right, written to confront issues and problems in their own societies, has thus been slighted in the effort to construct an earlier literary form from supposed later examples of it.

What makes "aretalogy" even more problematic is the existence in the same period as the works mentioned above of two biographies that clearly adhere to a schema of the divine sage yet do not use miracle working as a validating credential. These biographies are Porphyry's *Life of Plotinus* and Eusebius' "Life of Origen." Study of these two works and other biographies of the period has convinced me that it is impossible to define a stable literary pattern for the life of the holy man if miracles are posited as the organizing motif. Further, the attempt to construct from hindsight a hypothetical literary form does injustice to the literary works so used. The constricted notion of an aretalogical form based on a single motif leads to a distorted view of the divine sage; this figure cannot be equated with only one character trait. Also, the concentration on form has led to neglect of the social and philosophical contexts of the biographies. Meaning does not inhere in form alone; rather, form and content should be considered as interlocking features of the goals served by writing the biography. It is my contention that there is no need to postulate a new literary genre, "aretalogy," to explain the form and content of biographies that exhibit the "holy man" or the "divine sage." The historical development of Graeco-Roman biography provides a more suitable framework within which to consider these works. It gives a definite lineage for biography writing, and when later biographies are evaluated in the light of this lineage, the continuity in form, content, and function that the tradition fostered makes them more easily understood.

## Early Formation of Biography

Jacob Burckhardt once vehemently accused Eusebius of being "the first thoroughly dishonest historian of antiquity" because of the historical misconceptions fostered by the idealizations in his *Life of Constantine*.[2] A similar charge could easily be made against Eusebius' biography of Origen—indeed, against any ancient biography. Though Burckhardt's observation that Constantine's virtues are given a lavishly panegyrical treatment by Eusebius is certainly true, his charge of dishonesty is misbegotten. Burckhardt's error was to judge Eusebius' biography according to the canons of history writing. The fact is, however, that in antiquity biography was not simply a subgenre of history. It had its own unique characteristics, and sustained historical veracity was not one of them. To impugn the integrity of a Graeco-Roman biography on the basis of factual discrepancy is to misconceive the literary tradition of the genre to which it belongs.



As early as the fifth century B.C., Greek writers made a distinction between historiography and erudite research. Historiography focused on political and military events and excluded any systematic treatment of religious and social phenomena. Its tone was didactic and proposed to be "useful" to posterity, and it insisted upon a strict adherence to chronology. Thucydides' straightforward dedication of the historian's craft to truth based on observable data defined the essence of historical methodology for centuries: "And with reference to the narrative of events, far from permitting myself to derive it from the first source that came to hand, I did not even trust my own impressions, but it rests partly on what I saw myself, partly on what others saw for me, the accuracy of the report always tried by the most severe and detailed tests possible."[3] With tongue in cheek, Thucydides regrets that the "absence of romance" in his history may result in rather dull reading. He strongly disapproved of incorporating traditions into historical narrative which might make it "attractive at truth's expense."[4] The writers at whom this scorn was aimed were what we would call antiquarians, whose erudite monographs, often systematic or topical rather than chronological in organization, dealt with religious ceremonies, art, manners and mores, and the history of lesser-known cities and nations. Unlike Thucydidean historiography, which depended heavily on oral testimony, erudite research looked to written sources, including archival documents, for its material.[5] Antiquarian scholars differed from classical histo-

2. Jacob Burckhardt, *The Age of Constantine the Great*, trans. Moses Hadas (New York: Pantheon Books, 1949), p. 283.
3. Thucydides 1.23.
4. Ibid., 1.20–22.
5. Arnaldo Momigliano, "Historiography on Written and on Oral Tradition," *Studies in Historiography* (London: Weidenfeld and Nicolson, 1966), pp. 216–17. Examples of erudite

rians in yet another marked respect: they took individual achievement into account, whereas historians concentrated on the activities of the collective body of the state.[6]

The predilections of Greek biographers were much the same as those of the antiquarians. Biography appears to have developed within the context of erudite research, reflecting its interest in phenomena apart from mainline Greek politics. The earliest known biographers, Skylax of Caryanda and Xanthus of Lydia, were older contemporaries of Herodotus. Although Herodotus labeled them *logopoioi*[7] and Thucydides considered them among the *logographoi*, the pioneer historians,[8] these writers actually share the logographers' preoccupation with mythographic treatises, geographical travelogues, and cultural histories of non-Greek civilizations; this places them rather in the antiquarian camp.[9] Skylax of Caryanda, for example, wrote a treatise describing his travels along the Indian coasts as well as an account of the life of Heraclides, tyrant of Mylasa; and Xanthus of Lydia, who composed a work on the life of the philosopher Empedocles, wrote his major treatise on the history of his native land.[10]

Though some form of biographical writing is thus attested early in the fifth century B.C., the genre was not distinguished by receiving a name, *bios*, until the Hellenistic period.[11] Scholarly attempts at ferreting out the obscure genealogy of ancient Greek biography have variously credited both the Academy and the Peripatos with the invention of the genre. Representative of the partisans of the Academy, Albrecht Dihle theorized that the necessary prerequisite for the subject of biography writing was a charismatic personality—for example, Socrates, whose force of character led to the collecting of his personality traits by the Socratic schoolmen. Friedrich Leo, advocate of the Peripatos, traced the invention of biography proper to the Aristotelian school and characterized two branches of biographical development: the "Plutarchian" type—chronologically ordered biography which grew from the early Peripatetics' desire to characterize statesmen in the way that their master had characterized states; and the "Suetonian" type—systematically arranged biography developed by antiquarians to portray literati and artists.[12] Though both of these theses are open to objections, what remains true of their interpretations is the important role attributed to the Academy and the Peripatos in the gradual evolution of biography.

works are: Hippias, list of Olympic victors and monograph on names of nations; Critias, study of different constitutions.

6. Arnaldo Momigliano, *The Development of Greek Biography* (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1971), pp. 39–40.

7. Herodotus 2.134, 143.

8. Thucydides 1.21.

9. See Lionel Pearson, *Early Ionian Historians* (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1939).

10. Momigliano, *Development of Greek Biography*, pp. 29–31.

11. In *Development of Greek Biography*, p. 12, Momigliano notes that the term *biographia* is of a much later provenance. The earliest surviving reference to it is in Damascius' *Life of Isidorus* dating from the end of the fifth century A.D.



The long-standing interest of the Greeks in preserving traditions surrounding such mythical heroes as Heracles, Theseus, and the Seven Wise Men received its complement in the fourth century when the Socratic school memorialized an historical hero, Socrates. The apologies produced after Socrates' death by Plato and Xenophon, while not biographies in full flower, contain elements that became standard features of later biographical portraits. The *Apology* and the *Memorabilia* create a charged atmosphere in which neither fact nor fiction prevails. Plutarch once wrote that "when history descended from its poetical chariot and walked on foot, it distinguished between myth and truth."[13] In contrast to history, these apologies present an intermingling of fantasy and historical reality with the intent of capturing the ideals suggested by the actual life. The reader is confronted with a conflict between earthly and supramundane truth, a tension that later biographers will exploit for the benefit of their own particular philosophical visions.

Among Socratic contributors to biography, the foremost was Xenophon. His "apology" for Socrates, the *Memorabilia*, was written to counter the *Accusation of Socrates*, an attack on Socrates by the Sophist Polycrates written shortly after the death of the philosopher. Xenophon's work was not, however, a pugnacious counterattack but rather a favorable commentary on Socrates' philosophical principles and corresponding behavior. Xenophon's presentation is not what we would normally expect in a biographical work since there is no systematic ordering of the events in Socrates' life from birth to death. His method is to develop Socrates' character by presenting illustrative (and imaginary) dialogues pertaining to Socrates' social and moral

12. Albrecht Dihle, *Studien zur griechischen Biographie* (Göttingen: Vandenbroeck and Ruprecht, 1956); Friedrich Leo, *Die griechisch-römische Biographie nach ihrer litterarischen Form* (Leipzig: B. G. Teubner, 1901). The theses of both of these works are discussed and criticized by Momigliano, *Development of Greek Biography*, pp. 17–20, 86–87.

13. Plutarch *Pyth. orac.* 24, 406e.

tenets. Interspersed with the dialogues are anecdotes and incidents that give indications of Socrates' personal traits. The *Memorabilia* thus contains basic ingredients of biography: the first two books give an account of the man's character, while succeeding books illustrate this by conversations and stories.[14] It is significant that the conversations that Xenophon presents are not, for the most part, authentic reproductions of Socrates' speeches. They are, rather, a distillation of the best of Socrates' thought, and represent what Socrates *could* have said, even if, historically speaking, he did not. This convention of presenting as fact something that could have taken place but did not is what rhetoricians would later define as myth.[15] The process of "mythologizing" a man's life by using fiction to convey truth became one of the enduring features of biography.

Another of Xenophon's biographical experiments, the *Agesilaus*, was based on a prose encomium model formalized by the Athenian rhetor Isocrates. In his *Evagoras*, Isocrates followed the custom of previous encomiasts, according to which the traits of the man considered were made to conform to preconceived notions of the virtues inherent in that man's particular occupation.[16] Thus the Cypriot Evagoras assumes the mantle of Isocrates' conception of the ideal monarch. The organizational scheme that Isocrates used, while basically chronological, was punctuated with descriptions of the hero's virtues apart from his acts.[17] It was this combination of a systematic review of virtues and a chronological narrative of the life itself, albeit in rudimentary form in the *Evagoras*, that Xenophon seized upon and developed in his *Agesilaus*.

Two features of Xenophon's *Agesilaus* are important for understanding subsequent developments in the composition of biography. The first is the bipartite division of the biography into *praxeis*, a chronological account of the life, and *ēthos*, a systematic treatment of character.[18] These two categories had been presented in a haphazard mixture in Isocrates' *Evagoras*, but

14. Duane Reed Stuart, *Epochs of Greek and Roman Biography* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1928), pp. 33–34; Momigliano, *Development of Greek Biography*, pp. 52–54.
15. Aelius Theon, *Progymnasmata* 3, defined myth as *logos pseudēs eikonizōn alētheian*. See the discussion in Robert M. Grant, *Earliest Lives of Jesus* (London: SPCK, 1961), pp. 37–43, 121–22.
16. Stuart, *Epochs of Greek and Roman Biography*, p. 64.
17. See Leo, *Die griechisch-römische Biographie*, pp. 91–92; Momigliano, *Development of Greek Biography*, pp. 49–50; and Hadas, *Heroes and Gods*, p. 8.
18. Leo, *Die griechisch-römische Biographie*, p. 91.



Xenophon separated them into distinct sections. The interaction of *praxeis* and *ēthos* continued as the major focus of biographers like Plutarch and Suetonius. Although Xenophon's two-part format was not always rigidly adhered to, its significance lies in the fact that the hero's deeds were clearly viewed as a backdrop for his virtues: the historical elements of the man's life, while important, were subservient to the essence of his life, his noble character. Xenophon's *Agesilaus* thus illustrates the biographers' use of historical detail to lend credence to the ideal portrait they were concerned to develop. The second important feature of the *Agesilaus* is its emphasis on the youth and education of its hero. Historians were interested primarily in the military and political prowess of men at the height of their careers, but biographers, following the precedent set by Xenophon, presumed to recognize the seed of greatness in the child and then to trace the fruit of that seed in the charmed manhood of the hero.[19]

As a contributor to the development of biography, Xenophon had counterparts in the Aristotelian school. It is probable that biographical writing within the Peripatos was stimulated in part by its interest in individual writers. Treatises like *On Sappho* and *On Pindar* were historical exegeses of passages from the particular author's work, not biographies, but they used the technique of extracting information about the lives of writers from allusions in their works. Related to this process of biographical deduction was the interest of Peripatetics in the various competing philosophical schools, which resulted in collections of anecdotes about philosophers, like Dicaearchus' *Lives*.[20] Another important result of this fascination with fellow philosophical schools was the growth of a kind of biographical polemic against them. For example, in his work on the Socratics, Phainias of Eresus included stories about some of the philosophers that were clearly discreditable and that tended to cast a shadow on the school's reputation. Although, as Momigliano speculates, this kind of polemic was first written by Peripatetics, it soon became the "common patrimony" of Hellenistic literature.[21]

19. In *Die griechisch-römische Biographie*, pp. 89–90, Leo notes that Thucydides' portrayal of character was confined to the intellect, whereas in Xenophon's biographical writings there is a "determined turn toward the moral," an indication that men are important in themselves and not simply for the course of History writ large.
20. Ibid., pp. 99–101; Momigliano, *Development of Greek Biography*, pp. 69–72.
21. *Development of Greek Biography*, pp. 71–72. Examples from other schools are the hostile works "On the Socratics" by the Epicurean Idomeneus and "On the Stoics" by Philodemus.

The most outstanding biographer that the Aristotelian school produced united the various biographical impulses of Peripatetic literature to form full-fledged biographies. He was Aristoxenus of Tarentum, a Pythagorean convert to the Peripatos whose fame as a biographer is attested by Jerome's citation of him as one of Suetonius' predecessors.[22] Aristoxenus' *Lives*, which included biographies of Pythagoras, Socrates, and Plato, were, like Xenophon's biographies, marked by the use of legendary traditions, the invention of characteristic traits, and the use of anecdotes as a method for depicting character, though he seems to have been the first to make anecdotes a basic component of biography.[23] More important, however, is the fact that he capitalized upon the Hellenistic habit of composing derogatory books on rival philosophical schools by using biography for this purpose. Aristoxenus' abiding dislike was focused on the Socratic school. In the *Life of Plato*, his malice against the school's master was revealed in his insistent accusation that Plato had plagiarized "the fruit" of Pythagoras' doctrines.[24] Even more indicative of his hostility toward the Academy was his *Life of Socrates*. His characterization of Socrates was little short of scathing. Socrates is portrayed as an uneducated, undisciplined man whose temper was often uncontrollable.[25] He is accused of an excessive need for sexual pleasures, and rumors concerning pederasty with his teacher Archelaus and bigamy are related as fact.[26] This is not the rational, self-controlled Socrates that one would expect. It is difficult to avoid concluding that Aristoxenus was using Socrates as a scapegoat for the school of which he was the traditional founder, since Aristoxenus was born thirty years after the philosopher's death and so could have had no personal enmity against him. Evidence for this scapegoat function and the corresponding lack of personal spite as a motive for the biography is the fact that Aristoxenus' most serious

22. "apud Graecos Hermippus Peripateticus, Antigonus Carystius, Satyrus doctor vir et omnium longe doctissimus Aristoxenus Musicus." *De viris inlustribus*, pref. By way of noting the importance of the Aristotelians' contribution to biography, only one of these four, Antigonus, was not connected with the Peripatetic school.

23. Leo, *Die griechisch-römische Biographie*, pp. 102–103.

24. "*ta men karpima spheterisasthai*." See *Die Schule des Aristoteles*, ed. Fritz Wehrli, 10 vols. (Basel: Benno Schwabe and Co. Verlag, 1944–1959), vol. 2: *Aristoxenos* (1945), p. 27, fr. 68 (= Porphyry *Vita Pythagorae* 53).

25. "*apaideuton kai amathē kai akolaston*," Wehrli, *Aristoxenos*, p. 25, fr. 55; "*hōs phūsei gegogei trachus eis orgēn*," ibid., fr. 56.

26. Ibid., p. 24, fr. 52b (pederasty); pp. 24–25, fr. 57–58 (bigamy).



charge against Socrates, that of sexual licentiousness, was a stylized mode of defamation that had been applied to Pericles and a veritable host of others.[27]

Aristoxenus' *Life of Pythagoras* was perhaps meant to be a weapon in the same anti-Socratic battle. Pythagoras assumes the role of rational wise man and moralist credited with founding a society of virtuous sages. Aristoxenus' technique in this biography is the same as in the *Life of Socrates*: he presents only one aspect of the traditional lore surrounding the philosopher. His portrait of Socrates uses material that maligns Socrates' reputation and excludes favorable opinion, while his depiction of Pythagoras ignores or explicitly counters earlier traditions that cloaked Pythagoras in an aura of the supernatural and emphasizes instead his numerological and musical contributions to philosophy and his rational approach to the conduct of human affairs.[28] Also, just as the biography of Socrates was an indictment of the Socratic school, so the biography of Pythagoras commends the Pythagorean community as a whole with sympathetic descriptions of its lifestyle.[29]

Aristoxenus' biography of Pythagoras was highly regarded by later biographers. It formed the heart of the *Life of Pythagoras* by Nicomachus of Gerasa and is quoted frequently by Porphyry and Iamblichus in their biographies of Pythagoras.[30] Although the lineage of polemical biography cannot be traced from Aristoxenus' time to the Imperial era due to the loss of most of the biographical writing from the third to the first centuries, his school orientation must be credited as a milestone in the use of biography. His method of glorifying or condemning a philosophical school by creating a biographical caricature of a representative of that school was taken up by such authors as Philostratus, Porphyry, Eusebius, and Iamblichus in the

27. The accusation against Pericles is reported by Plutarch *Pericles* 13–14. See Stuart, *Epochs of Greek and Roman Biography*, p. 148, for further examples.

28. For earlier miracle traditions about Pythagoras, and Aristoxenus' criticism of them, see Isidore Lévy, *Recherches sur les sources de la légende de Pythagore* (Paris: Éditions Ernest Leroux, 1926), pp. 6–22, 46–48. For an example of Pythagoras' statesmanship according to Aristoxenus, see Wehrli, *Aristoxenos*, p. 12, fr. 17 (= Porphyry *Vita Pythagorae* 21–22), where Pythagoras is represenred as bringing democracy and justice to cities in Italy and Sicily.

29. For Aristoxenus' good opinion of the Pythagorean community, see Wehrli, *Aristoxenos*, p. 16, fr. 30 (= Iamblichus *Vita Pythagorica* 197), which shows that Pythagoreans never act in anger, and ibid., pp. 16–17, fr. 31 (= Iamblichus *Vita Pythagorica* 233), which describes friendship within Pythagorean circles.

30. See the detailed source analysis of Porphyry's *Vita Pythagorae* and Iamblichus' *Vita Pythagorica* in Lévy, *Recherches sur les sources de la légende de Pythagore*, pp. 90–128.

battle between pagans and Christians in the third and fourth centuries. His biographies are good examples of how legend, history, and pure fabrication were combined in the production of biographical portraits. This stylized exaggeration of either virtues or vices was the essence of early Greek biography, and it continued to dominate the character of biography writing under the Empire.

## Biography in the Imperial Age

By the beginning of the Imperial era, biography had gained currency as an established literary genre. The distinctiveness of the genre was made explicit by Plutarch, who used historiography as the standard against which to define biography much in the same way that classical writers had contrasted erudite monographs with history. According to Plutarch, the difference between history and biography lay not primarily in form but in content. Using the same basic categories that Xenophon had used, *praxeis* and *ēthos*, he stated that history depicts the *praxeis* of men whereas biography illustrates the *ēthos* of a man. In biography, a man's acts are recounted only to the extent that they shed light upon his character.[31] This theory of biographical composition explains why Plutarch pleads with his readers not to criticize the selective nature of his account of deeds and events in his biography of Alexander. For biography does not aim to give exhaustive historical reporting. It succeeds in its portrayal of character by a careful selection of whatever actions serve best to illustrate it.[32] This "pars pro toto" technique was well suited to the perpetuation of political and moral ideals.

31. Plutarch, *Pompey* 8. See also the prefaces to his biographies of Julius Caesar, Nicias, and Galba.

32. On selectivity in biography see Plutarch, *Alexander* 1.1–2: "For it is not histories that I am writing, but lives; and in the most illustrious deeds there is not always a manifestation of virtue or vice, nay a slight thing like a phrase or jest often makes a greater revelation of character than battles where thousands fall." That biography could be distinguished from history primarily by its concentration on character is illustrated by late Hellenistic literary theory, which viewed character portrayal as only one component of history. The subject matter for true history is defined by the first-century B.C. grammarian, Asclepiades of Myrleia: "*tēs de alēthous, tria palin merē: hē men gar esti peri ta prosōpa theōn kai hērōōn kai andrōn epiphanōn, hē de peri tous topous kai chronous, hē de peri tas praxeis.*" (Quoted in Richard Reitzenstein, *Hellenistische Wundererzählungen* [Leipzig: B. G. Teubner, 1906], pp. 90–91). It is obvious that at least in Plutarch's opinion, biography was concerned only with *ta prosōpa andrōn*; matters of place, time, and action were introduced only to highlight character. Literary theorists were not unanimous in their definitions of history, however, and their confusion makes it difficult to discover a precise niche for biography within literary theory apart from what the biographers themselves say. Cicero, for example, supposed history to be no more than a collection of models to be studied for the purpose of "calling to our minds illustrious and courageous men and their deeds, not for any gain but for the honor that lies in praising their nobility by itself" (*De finibus* 1.10.36). This sounds very close to the ideals biography espoused. However, Quintilian *Oratorical Institutes* 10.1.31 and Polybius 12.25–28 both held to the Thucydidean style of history devoted to truth and the transmission of events. For detailed discussions see G. M. A. Grube, *The Greek and Roman Critics* (London: Methuen and Co., Ltd., 1965), pp. 157–58, 170–72; and Reitzenstein, *Hellenistische Wundererzählungen*, pp. 84–94.

33. Leo, *Die griechisch-römische Biographie*, pp. 179–85.



Like other biographers, Plutarch was not an unbiased observer of character. He maintained the standpoint of moral judge, and in this sense his biographies are pedagogical since they measure character against certain ideal virtues. Usually "men above the crowd," the individuals delineated by Plutarch became historical exempla of preconceived notions about the characteristics which men in certain societal niches should possess. The historical selectivity that Plutarch claimed for biography made the matching of the person with the ideal possible without tedious apology for actions that deviated from the model put forth. Plutarch did not, however, indulge in heavy-handed moralizing; rather, he presented the life of the hero from birth to death and inserted characterizations along the way—much in the manner of Isocrates—and he took care to note the early appearance of traits that influenced and guided the course of the entire life considered.[33]

Plutarch's interest in types of men was shared by his fellow biographer, Suetonius, whose *Lives of the Caesars* used the now-familiar *praxeis–ēthos* categories. But in the biographies of Suetonius, as in the *Agesilaus* of Xenophon, the narrative of events is little more than a framework for the discussion of character. Although, like Plutarch, Suetonius was interested in portraying ideal traits that statesmen should possess, he used biography as a vehicle to criticize as well as to extol. He did not refrain from constructing rather scurrilous profiles of those emperors who exemplified the dark side of his political ideal and thus evaluated the emperors on the basis of two models, one of virtue and one of vice. The individual personality was not entirely subsumed by the type since he personalized his portraits of the various emperors by reporting distinguishing traits and habits. However, it is indicative of the tendency of biography to stylize reports of character that

Suetonius followed closely the schemata contained in current handbooks of physiognomy.[34]

The physiognomists sought to reveal a man's virtuous or vicious nature by emphasizing certain aspects of the physique and linking these to specific character traits. Suetonius was the first biographer to connect the physical and moral portraits of a man in this way; and though it would be difficult to agree with one scholar's opinion that his biographies were scientific studies of personality,[35] given his overriding interest in ideal types, it is certain that he was an astute observer of human foibles and cleverly integrated his observations with physiognomic theory.

Suetonius' source for his physiognomical material was the handbook of Pseudo-Aristotle, *Physiognomy*,[36] which provided three principal methods of description. The first described the body with general phrases; the second described the effects of emotion on the face or body; and the third involved a photographic description of the entire body.[37] It was this third method that Suetonius used, and he applied it in the greatest detail when dealing with those emperors whose characters he regarded as extreme: monsters like Tiberius, Caligula, and Nero; heroes like Caesar and Augustus. One example of each extreme will be sufficient to show how this physiognomical artifice allowed Suetonius to propagandize for his political principles by creating ideal and demonic types for the Imperial character.

Suetonius' description of Augustus in *Augustus* 79 has exact parallels in the physiognomical literature. Augustus' "clear, bright eyes" signify energy and boldness (Pseudo-Aristotle 15; 68); his wavy golden hair denotes a well-endowed nature (Pseudo-Aristotle 69, 41; Polemo 39); his aquiline nose means greatness of soul (Pseudo-Aristotle 61; Polemo 34); and the

34. On the topic of ancient physiognomy, see Geneva Misener, "Iconistic Portraits," *Classical Philology* 19 (1924): 97–123; Elizabeth C. Evans, "The Study of Physiognomy in the 2nd century A.D.," *Transactions and Proceedings of the American Philological Association* 72 (1941): 96–108; idem, "Roman Descriptions of Personal Appearance in History and Biography," *Harvard Studies in Classical Philology* 46 (1935): 43–84.

35. Jean Coussin, "Suetone Physiognomiste dans les Vies des XII Césars," *Revue des études Latines* 31 (1953): 255.

36. It is possible that Suetonius also knew the work of his contemporary, Polemo of Laodicea, Sophist and friend of Hadrian, who wrote a treatise based on the *Physiognomonica*. On Polemo, see Philostratus *Vitae Sophistarum* 1.530–44. Texts of Pseudo-Aristotle and Polemo are in *Scriptores Physiognomonici*, ed. R. Förster, 2 vols. (Leipzig: B. G. Teubner, 1893).

37. Evans, "Roman Descriptions of Personal Appearance in History and Biography," pp. 44–45.



"fine proportion and symmetry" of his body are characteristic of an upright and brave man (Pseudo-Aristotle 13; Polemo 44). Similar parallels can be found in the portrait of Caligula, *Gaius Caligula* 50. Caligula's pale skin means cowardliness and a taste for inflicting harm (Pseudo-Aristotle 31); his "very thin neck" denotes a lack of energy, bad morals, and a dishonest spirit (Pseudo-Aristotle 59; Polemo 31); his hollow eyes and temples indicate folly and an agitated nature (Pseudo-Aristotle 63); his "broad and grim" forehead signifies bestiality, drunkenness, and avarice (Pseudo-Aristotle 64; Polemo 17).

Suetonius' physical descriptions of the emperors, which often bring to mind grotesque images, are not simply photographic impressions of the actual men. He had never even seen the earlier emperors; and in the case of Caligula, for example, statues and coins give an impression of physical beauty that hardly coheres with Suetonius' portrait—and this in an age when iconography was leaning more and more toward realism.[38] Suetonius' physical descriptions were not based solely on physical appearance, then, but were taken from physiognomic manuals that attached definite moral attitudes to specific bodily features. This method of typecasting was not so esoteric as it might seem, for physiognomical theory had captured the imagination of a broad spectrum of the Graeco-Roman literati.[39]

Suetonius' biographies are good examples of a major dynamic operative in biography writing: the molding of a man's character to a preconceived model. From its inception, biography was marked by its encomiastic tendencies to exaggerate a person's achievements and virtues, carefully selecting traits and deeds that lent themselves to idealization. Heroes were created by using historical detail as a backdrop to display nobility of character; the ideal would thus gain credence by having a base in historical reality. Certain literary and thematic devices aided the process of characterization: the use of legendary materials and rumor, the invention of character traits, the use of anecdotes and speeches, and the development of character from traits revealed in childhood. Equally important for the uniqueness of biog-

38. See, for example, the realistic sculpture of Vespasian and Titus in J. J. Bernoulli, *Römische Ikonographie*, 2 vols. (Stuttgart: W. Spemann, 1882–94), vol. 1, plate 7. Nero was also treated realistically: Bernoulli, vol. 2, plates 23–25.

39. The following writers, to name a few, all commented on physiognomical theory: Seneca *Ep.* 52.12; Tacitus *Ann.* 13.8, 15.53, 4.57; Pliny *NH* 11.143–46, 11.274; Clement of Alexandria *Paedagogus* 2.5, 46, *Protrepticus* 2.26; Origen *Contra Celsum* 1.33; Ammianus Marcellinus 15.8.16, 23.5.15.

raphy as a genre was its propagandistic, often polemical, mood. The biographies of Aristoxenus and Suetonius were often profound critiques of men who far from measuring up to an ideal exemplified its reverse. The philosophical, scholastic orientation of Aristoxenus was also a polemical device; he used biography as a weapon to further the cause of one school at the expense of others by making an individual philosopher the embodiment of the virtues, or vices, of his school. The conclusion that many of these biographies were written to sway, perhaps even create, opinion about certain political and philosophical principles is unavoidable.

The biographies to which we now turn exhibit the idealizing and propagandistic features of Graeco-Roman biography but with a crucial addition. They were involved in religious controversy and so attempted to sway not mere opinion but belief. We shall see that the nature of this struggle led to a new standard for biographical idealization, the "divine sage," a literary type that became a major influence on the portrayal of the character of philosophers in Late Antiquity.

CHAPTER TWO

# Biography and Paradigms of the Divine Sage

Biographers of Late Antiquity thought divinity to be a distinguishing characteristic of the philosopher. This conviction can be viewed as an intensification of older philosophical notions of the extent to which men can be divine. Plato, for example, stated in *The Republic* that "the lover of wisdom, by keeping company with the divine and orderly, becomes himself divine and orderly in so far as it is possible for man," but he qualified this statement by adding that "there is much imbalance in all men." Any man who loves wisdom, then, is divine because his love places him in harmony with cosmic order; no man, however, is completely divine since we are all prey to human factiousness. Aristotle held a similar opinion. Writing about the life of contemplation, he remarked in the *Nicomachean Ethics* that consistent practice of such a life is beyond our mortal element: "for it is not in so far as he is man that he will live so, but in so far as something divine is present in him." Reason is divine, and the "activity of philosophic wisdom" is divine in comparison with ordinary human life.[1]

Six centuries later, the Neoplatonic philosopher Porphyry could speak of the philosopher as the "priest of the universal god."[2] Notions of what the philosophic life is, and who is capable of living it, had undergone a great change, such that the comments of Plato and Aristotle would have seemed gross understatements to their philosophical heirs, the intellectual elite of Porphyry's time. A more aristocratic idea had replaced their rather egalitarian thought that once apprised of the course of the truly virtuous life, all men could at least aspire toward philosophy, the one divine activity. For Porphyry's contemporaries, philosophy was a profession limited to a select

1. Plato *The Republic* 500c–d; Aristotle *Nicomachaean Ethics* 1177a–b.
2. Porphyry *De abstinentia* 2.49: "*ho tou epi pasin theou hiereus.*"

THE TRANSFORMATION OF THE
CLASSICAL HERITAGE
Peter Brown, General Editor

I
Art and Ceremony in Late Antiquity
*by Sabine G. MacCormack*

II
Synesius of Cyrene: Philosopher-Bishop
*by Jay Alan Bregman*

III
Theodosian Empresses: Women and Imperial Dominion
in Late Antiquity
*by Kenneth G. Holum*

IV
John Chrysostom and the Jews: Rhetoric and Reality
in the Late Fourth Century
*by Robert L. Wilken*

V
Biography in Late Antiquity: A Quest
for the Holy Man
*by Patricia Cox*

PATRICIA COX

# Biography in Late Antiquity

## A QUEST FOR THE HOLY MAN



UNIVERSITY OF CALIFORNIA PRESS

Berkeley Los Angeles London