

## RECENT WORK ON ANCIENT BIOGRAPHY, I<sup>1</sup>

### REVIEW ARTICLE

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#### 1. *Jacoby continuatus: Biography from Scylax to Christodorus*<sup>2</sup>

Jacoby's *Die Fragmente der griechischen Historiker* (FGrHist) is rightly considered one of the greatest achievements of twentieth-century classical scholarship, a judgement founded on the grand scale of the undertaking as well as on the author's philological acumen, encyclopaedic learning, and independent judgement. Sadly, but understandably, FGrHist has remained a torso. When Felix Jacoby died in 1959 at the age of 83, he had, since announcing the project in 1908, managed to complete seventeen massive volumes—but had still not reached more than half way. As a one-man performance (or rather, a two-scholar performance, since his wife Margarete seems to have been an indispensable partner throughout), this is of course formidable, not least when it is considered what the family had to go through from 1934 onwards.<sup>3</sup> It is understandable that no natural successor presented him/herself. Thus, for another forty years we have had to rely on Karl Müller's *Fragmenta Historicorum Graecorum* of 1841–70 for many of the Greek historical texts extant only in fragments.

Now, at long last, the project has been resumed on a large scale,<sup>4</sup> wisely, by a team of authors. Detailed plans have been drafted to cover the remaining areas of

<sup>1</sup> Under this heading, a series of review articles will appear in SO, discussing new monographs, editions, and (sometimes) articles related to Greek and Roman biography (the term being used in a wide sense). No pretension to completeness is made. The author is grateful for references to (or copies/offprints of) new publications, to be sent to Prof. Tomas Hägg, IKRR, Øisteinsgate 3, N-5007 Bergen (tomas.hagg@krr.uib.no).

<sup>2</sup> Felix Jacoby, *Die Fragmente der griechischen Historiker Continued*. Part Four: *Biography and Antiquarian Literature*. Ed. by G. Schepens. IV A: *Biography*. Fasc. 1: *The Pre-Hellenistic Period* by J. Bollansée, J. Engels, G. Schepens, E. Theys. Brill, Leiden, Boston & Köln, 1998. 394 pp. ISBN 90-04-11094-1. Price Dfl. 220.37/Euro 100.00/US\$123.00.

Fasc. 3: *Hermippos of Smyrna* by Jan Bollansée. Brill: Leiden, Boston & Köln, 1999. 631 pp. ISBN 90-04-11303-7. Price Dfl. 392.26/Euro 178.00/US\$218.00.

Fasc. 7: *Imperial and Undated Authors* by J. Radicke. Brill: Leiden, Boston & Köln, 1999. 492 pp. ISBN 90-04-11304-5. Price Dfl. 293.09/Euro 133.00/US\$163.00.

<sup>3</sup> Cf. M. Chambers, "Felix Jacoby", in: W.W. Briggs & W.M. Calder III (eds.), *Classical Scholarship: A Biographical Encyclopedia*, New York & London 1990, 205–210, and F. Mensching, *Nugae zur Philologie-Geschichte*, Vol. 2, Berlin 1989, 17ff.

<sup>4</sup> Simultaneously, Charles W. Fornara is revising and editing from Jacoby's Nachlass the commentary to FGrHist III C (Autoren über einzelne Länder); fasc. 1 (Commentary on *Nox*, 608a–608) of a projected eight appeared in 1994. FGrHist V (historical geography) is also on the programme again (see FGrHist IV A 1 [1998], VIII sq.).

History of Literature, Biography, and Antiquarianism.<sup>5</sup> (It should be remembered that by "history" Jacoby and his successors mean almost all non-fictional prose.) Of the eight "fascicles" (an odd term for these tomes) designed to house the biographical fragments (*FGrHist* IVA), the first appeared in 1998 (fasc. 1) and another two in 1999 (fasc. 3 and 7)—presumably enough to form a preliminary judgement of the principles and practice of the undertaking as a whole. These three stately volumes come from the same publishing firm, Brill of Leiden, as when the series was interrupted in 1958 (the pre-war publisher had been Weidmannsche), and they are (no surprise) as high-priced as they are professionally and attractively produced.

The old "Jacoby", with its separation of texts and comments in different volumes, its idiosyncratic system of numbering and lettering, and its lack of detailed indices,<sup>6</sup> was never very easy to survey or consult. In this respect, the new start means a break with tradition. For each author, the printed text of testimonia and fragments is immediately followed by an introduction, commentary, and bibliography. Another innovation, also welcome, is that all the testimonia and fragments are translated, text and translation being printed on facing pages. Thirdly—a change anticipated by Jacoby himself after his move to Oxford in 1939—English instead of German is now the language of the series,<sup>7</sup> no doubt a wise decision to ensure both sale and extensive use.

In this connection, a minor inconsistency may be noted. Finding in fasc. 1 and 3 the transliterated Greek forms of proper names (Skylax of Karyanda, Timaios of Lokroi Epizephyrioi, Eudoxos of Knidos, etc.), rather than the Latinized ones still common in British and American scholarship, one might have thought that this was a concession to consistency with the earlier, German-language volumes (a consistency important mainly for indices and references). But in fasc. 7 we meet with Ptolemy of Ascalon, Philo of Byblus, etc., so in this respect it has obviously been up to the individual contributors to follow their own preferences. Team-work will always entail inconsistencies, but this is certainly one we can live with.

Among principles taken over wholesale, or in modified form, from Jacoby is that "of editing together, as far as possible, all fragments of different works by a single author" (IV A 1, p. X). This means that an author who is known principally for his biographical writings will have all his fragments published in *FGrHist* IV A, even if some of his works should or might be classified as belonging to another genre. Conversely, some biographical fragments will have to appear in the volumes devoted to Literary History or Antiquarianism, if the author is judged primarily to belong

<sup>5</sup> The project was announced in *Gnomon* 66, 1994, 192 and is described in greater detail by G. Schepens, "Jacoby's *FGrHist*: Problems, Methods, Prospects", in: G.W. Most (ed.), *Collegium Fragmentis. Fragmenta samnena*, Göttingen 1997, 144-172, and in the same author's "Prolegomena" to *FGrHist* IV A 1 (1998), VII-XIV.

<sup>6</sup> This deficiency is now being abundantly remedied, see P. Bonnechere, *Indexes of Parts I, II, and III: Indexes of Ancient Authors*, Vol. 1-3, Leiden 1999.

<sup>7</sup> With some occasional slips: IV A 7 p. V: Nicolaus von Damascus, Maximus von Aegaeae. P. VII: Dionysius von Ephesus.

there. The main gain is that difficult decisions about the genre of a certain work or fragment may be avoided; cross references are promised, so (hopefully in the not too distant future) when the complete work is finally to hand, the disadvantage of not finding, for instance, Heraclides Ponticus' biographical fragments in *FGrHist* IV A (but instead in IV B, "History of Literature, Music, and Art"), will be a thing of the past. Luckily, an exception has been made for Aristoxenus of Tarentum, who will take his legitimate place among the pioneering professional biographers in IV A 2, while his musicological fragments will appear in IV B.

As in Jacoby, in *Jacoby continuatus* it is not a question of presenting a fresh critical edition of each fragment included; the text of the best available edition of the work to which the fragment owes its survival has been reproduced and a selective critical apparatus added. This is no doubt the only possible way; systematic consultation of the manuscripts and papyri of each source would effectively have delayed the work ad infinitum. The English translations borrowed from Loeb or Penguin, as apparently in IV A 1 (p. XXI), are another matter. If the reason for offering translations is both to serve those without sufficient Greek (a laudable purpose) and to provide an interpretation of the text "as an essential, sometimes even critical, part of the editor's task" (*ibid.*, p. XIV), the latter aspect is less well catered for if the editor's job is reduced to the occasional slight modification of an existing translation. In IV A 3, however, the editor himself assumes "all responsibility for the majority of [the translations]" (p. IX). One would have wished for a clearer general policy, or specific information concerning the source for each borrowed translation.

Jacoby's principle of including only fragments attributed to the author in question by the explicit mention of his name, is also maintained. This is perhaps again a necessary decision, but a more problematic one. While often presented as a sign of rigid and objective scholarship,<sup>8</sup> it is in fact more a pragmatically dictated procedure, and one that makes the resulting collection of fragments deceptively meagre and potentially one-sided. It is deceptive because it excludes, *without discussion*,<sup>9</sup> many potential fragments that the source text does not label explicitly (the only exception being close parallels to properly labelled quotations, but they are *per definitionem* of less interest). In addition, it favours fragments that specify details or give variant information (such material is habitually furnished with names in the texts) while excluding the mainstream narrative (which also had its sources). As a reaction to much speculative attribution and perverse practice in the area of *Quellenforschung*, and to wildly idiosyncratic collections of fragments, the austerity of *FGrHist* may seem attractive. Yet the subjective element is present, even to a high degree, since the editor for the most part has to decide for himself how far back or forward in the source text the Name guarantees, or makes probable, that we are dealing with a "quotation" (*per se* or not). (To be quite strict, only fragments enclosed by *two* mentions of the

Certainly, this was Jacoby's own view; cf. his comment on a predecessor more open to hypothetical attributions: "Der Rattenkönig von Vermutungen ... bedarf keiner widerlegung" *FGrHist* IIIB Noten, p. 187, quoted from Schepens 1997 [above, n. 4], 148 n. 18). There are exceptions, as Radtke on Apollonius' *Life of Pythagoras* in IV A 3 (p. 150).

In addition, it is of course valuable to have this learned commentary on a number of Classical fragments to whatever genres one believes they belonged. Among the authors treated are Scylax, Stesimbrotus, Antisthenes, Eudoxus, Speusippus, and Phaenias. Theagenes is excluded, along with other writers on Homer who will be treated in one of the planned "History of Literature" volumes. Panyassis seems to have been overlooked. One misses a separate entry for Ion of Chios and his *Epidemiai*, with a reference to Jacoby's own masterly treatment in *FGHst* 392 (but cf. p. 56 n. 27).

While the presentation of the pre-Hellenistic fragments in *FGHst* IV A 1 is a work by several hands, IV A 3 has a sole author, Jan Bollaensée, and a sole topic, *Hermippos of Smyrna*. The text, translation and commentary published in this volume (no less than 631 pages for 92 fragments) are one part of Bollaensée's doctoral dissertation (Leuven 1996), the other part being simultaneously published as *Hermippos of Smyrna and his Biographical Writings: A Reappraisal*.<sup>13</sup> Though each book is constructed as a separate unit, with some mutual overlapping, they are best used together; the topical treatment in the latter needs consultation of the fragments, and vice versa. The two books are an impressive testimony to the author's learned industry, enthusiasm for his topic, and command of a vast secondary literature. If one sometimes longs for Jacoby's authoritative conciseness, or even the austerity and programmatic unhelpfulness of Fritz Wehrli's *Hermippos der Kallimacheer*,<sup>14</sup> this is a feeling that is soon overruled by gratitude for the wealth of information offered. Utterly despised for his sensationalism and mendacity by Leo and his generation, and only half-heartedly rehabilitated by Wehrli, Hermippos has at last found a commentator ready to engage seriously and untiringly with the many problems that the fragments raise, and to view one of the most prolific and successful Hellenistic biographers without anachronistic moralism.

In a work of such dimensions and complexity, it is of course not difficult to find fault. In Hermippos F 73 (IV A 3, pp. 80 f.), for example, deriving from Plut. *Alex.* 53.3-54.1, something has gone wrong in the coordination of text with translation. In the famous symposium scene, after Callisthenes has held his brilliant eulogy on the Macedonians, Alexander asks him to give a speech *against* the Macedonians as well. This he does so convincingly that he causes bitterness and hatred in everybody present, Alexander included. Plutarch's account continues, in Bollaensée's translation: "Hermippos adds that when Kallisthenes realized the king's alienation as he was leaving, he defiantly recited this verse to him two or three times: 'Patroklos is also dead, a man far better than you.'" But Bollaensée's own text reads: τὸν δὲ Καλλισθέων ἑπώνερα τὴν ἀλλοτριότητα τοῦ βασιλέως δις ἢ πλὴς ἀπὸντα πρὸς αὐτὸν εἰπεῖν. . . . rightly accepting Latte's emendation αὐτὸν, for αὐτὸν in the mss. The Loeb, keeping the mss. reading, translates "recited this verse", Bollaensée even intensifies it into "he defiantly recited this verse to him" (that is, to Alexander),<sup>15</sup> and then in his commen-

Name, one prospective and one retrospective, could be admitted!) In consequence, not all the potential fragments (by far) are presented, and what is presented is not necessarily "fragments" throughout.

What might be done, without endangering the progress or exceeding the framework of the present undertaking, would be to include in the following volumes, or in a separate supplement volume, an annotated list of the Name-less passages that scholars have attributed to the author in question, with the proper bibliographical references. Such a list would be even more useful if the editors, with the expertise they have acquired, also stated the reservations they might have against this or that attribution. This is not to ask for the impossible, for every conscientious editor-commentator must already himself have worked his way through this *Quellenforschung* jungle to achieve his primary task satisfactorily.

From principles to practice: we shall briefly survey what the three volumes so far published have to offer. The title and contents of the first one, *FGHst* IV A 1, *The Pre-Hellenistic Period*, would probably have surprised Jacoby himself. For Friedrich Leo and most scholars of the first part of the twentieth century, biography proper was an Hellenistic invention, whether of the "Peripatetic" or the "Alexandrian" type. But the second half of the century saw a proliferation of hypotheses concerning Classical antecedents in the biographical genre, some of them located as early as the first decades of the fifth century BC, but all lost, of course. Arnaldo Momigliano suggested that "The story of the tyrant Heraclides of Mylasa" of Scylax of Caryanda, mentioned in the *Suda*, was the earliest political biography known to us (ca. 480 BC). Klaus Meister called Stesimbrotus' *On Themistocles, Thucydides and Pericles* the first biography "die wir eindeutig nachweisen und inhaltlich greifen kann",<sup>16</sup> Tilman Krüger made a case for Panyassis of Halicarnassus and his *Heraclaea*. Italo Gallo found that the first attested Greek biography must be the investigation of Homer's poetry, family (*genos*) and date undertaken by Theagenes of Rhegium. Others had other candidates.

This is the background against which the decision to include fragments of pre-Hellenistic biography must be seen. Guido Schepens speaks of the "sobering experience" it has been for the team to work through "even the most promising fragments" of these shadowy figures in search for something that would merit the name biography.<sup>17</sup> The conclusion is: "we have not come across a single unambiguous piece of evidence attesting the existence of biographical writing as such in the pre-Alexandrian era."<sup>18</sup> Excluded, then, are biographical passages in the historians and other manifestations of "biographical interest" in works of any genre. Also excluded are encomia. One has to be grateful for the energy and patience with which Schepens and his collaborators have carried through the demonstration, in spite of being sceptical themselves right from the start. Hopefully, the detail of their exposition will prove an effective antidote to further hypothesizing in this area.

<sup>13</sup> In *Historia* 27, 1978, 291.

<sup>14</sup> Schepens in *FGHst* IV A 1 (1998), XVIII.

<sup>15</sup> *Ibid.*

ary on pp. 516 f. (with n. 274) agrees with scholars who find this parting word so unbelievable as to discredit the whole story. But reading  $\alpha\rho\tau\acute{o}\nu$ , of course, it should be translated (with Robin Waterfield in Oxford World's Classics): "... as he was leaving he muttered two or three times under his breath the line '...', and the case for naughtiness must find other arguments.

In the third volume issued so far, *FGrHist IV A 7*, Jan Radicke has edited the fragments of *Imperial and Undated Authors*. This is a mixed bag indeed. Radicke distinguishes three traditions of biographical writings in the Imperial period, the antiquarian, the philosophical, and the encomiastic (XI). Fragments of the former two, chronologically arranged, fill more than half the volume, while those of "Encomiastic and Panegyric Speeches" are added as an appendix. There follow the fragments of undated biographical authors, of the Imperial as well as earlier periods. In addition to the indispensable "Index Locorum", there is an "Index of Names and Places", an item regrettably missing in the other two volumes.

For the most part, the material in this volume is less rewarding than that of the earlier ones: this is after all a period from which the main biographical texts have survived in their complete form (with an important exception, the early Pythagorean lives). A particularly thankless task has been to deal with the undated authors, mostly obscure figures whose biographical credentials are sometimes microscopic. Radicke cannot do much more than print the testimonia and state his doubts, with due reference to the scholarly discussion. This is soberly and diligently done, qualities that characterize the whole volume. It contains few surprises, but much sound reasoning and sensible conclusions. It is extremely useful to have the fragmentary material from the Imperial period sorted and displayed in this way.

It is particularly praiseworthy that the editor never yields to the temptation to vindicate a fragment as deriving from a biography, just because it is a biographical collection he is editing. His discussion of the fragments of Pythagorean lives, mostly preserved in Philostratus' *Vita Apollonii* or in Porphyry and Iamblichus, is typical in this respect. Apollonius' lost *Life of Pythagoras* (No. 1064) "should be regarded as a 'biographical novel', which should be judged rather by literary than by historical standards" (150 f.). It is proposed that it is spurious and was written in Hadrianic or Antonine times (151). Damis of Niveh is duly registered (1065), but considered a creation of Philostratus. Maximus of Aegae's description of Apollonius' youth (1066), it is suggested, may have been part of "a local history of Aegae and its sanctuary rather than a biography" (169). (But why is the episode that Philostratus relates from the work (VA 1.12) classified as a Testimony (T2) rather than a Fragment?)

Some questionable editorial decisions should perhaps be blamed on the team as a whole rather than Radicke alone. Nicolaus of Damascus (1054) is omitted because his biographies "would merit a separate volume" (X). Will he get one, as Hermyppus did? Testimonia for Marinus' *Life of Proclus* are presented (1083), in spite of the fact that the *Life* itself has survived, whereas Damascus' *Life of Isidore*, which is only fragmentarily extant (cf. below, 3), is omitted without comment.

Teamwork such as this can never achieve the authoritative status of a "Jacoby"; the quality necessarily varies with the individual contributors. The masterly overview that Jacoby himself acquired in his lifelong occupation with the material cannot be

expected from the present editors, especially if the task is entrusted to young scholars as their first piece of work. Yet, these conditions taken into account, the project has had a very promising start, and one can only hope that the remaining five "fascicles" of biographical fragments will follow close. Everyone working with ancient biographical traditions will greet them with gratitude.

## 2. *Gospel and biography*<sup>6</sup>

Historians of Greek literature often overlook relevant work by New Testament scholars, especially when published in exclusively theological series. The purpose of the present note is to call attention to Dirk Frickenschmidt's recent *Evangelium als Biographie*, a German counterpart to Richard Burridge's *What are the Gospels?* (Cambridge 1992) but a more thorough and comprehensive study.

One may well feel that the particular question addressed in these two books is an esoterically theological one, and that all that needed to be said was said by Albrecht Dihle in his contribution to the Tübingen Gospel symposium in 1982, "Die Evangelien und die griechische Biographie".<sup>17</sup> As long as one uses "biography" in its general sense of (literary) *Lebensbeschreibung*, Dihle sees no reason to deny the gospels this designation. The evangelists themselves quite plainly aimed "to provide a chronologically ordered account of the earthly life of Jesus" (361), and the Gospels have since been read and understood as biographies until the 20th century. "The avoidance of the term 'biography' to describe this fact can only be explained in terms of specific and possibly short-lived concerns of New Testament scholarship" (ibid.). Reference, of course, is to the dominance in this field, from the 1920s on, of Rudolf Bultmann and his form-critical school.

It is quite another matter if one decides to reserve the generic label "Greek biography" for a particular type of life, for instance (as Dihle prefers), the Plutarchan type, displaying "the exemplary, morally assessed realization of human potentials in the actions of a human life" (382). Then, of course, the Gospels do not qualify as "Greek biographies", or they may aspire to the status of a specific subgenre. All depends on how one defines the term, or what works one chooses to bring in for comparison.

Yet, whatever one thinks of the question, the analytical work done on ancient biography in Burridge's and Frickenschmidt's works deserves serious attention. Burridge's study was systematic, but based on a rather limited selection of texts; Frickenschmidt's similarly conceived book attempts to cover all the biographical literature of classical antiquity (including biographical accounts in historiography) that is retrievable in one form or another. Such an ambition necessarily involves occasional summary judgements and a heavy reliance on secondary sources (it does not

<sup>16</sup> Dirk Frickenschmidt, *Evangelium als Biographie. Die vier Evangelien im Rahmen antiker Erzählkunst* (Texte und Arbeiten zum neutestamentlichen Zeitalter, 22). Francke Verlag: Tübingen & Basel 1997. 549 pp. Paperback. ISBN 3-7720-1873-4 (Diss. Heidelberg 1996).

<sup>17</sup> Publ. in P. Stuhlmacher (ed.), *Das Evangelium und die Evangelien*. Tübingen 1983, 383-411. My quotations are from the English trans. of the book, *The Gospel and the Gospels*. Grand Rapids, MI, 1991. 361-386.

inspire confidence when *Der Kleine Pauly* is adduced as the sole source of information). Yet, as a compendium of ancient biographical texts of all kinds and of the received opinions on them (with bibliographical references), it has no counterpart in modern scholarly literature.

No less than 142 texts (including 50 by Plutarch, 25 by Nepos, 23 by Diogenes Laertius, 13 by Suetonius) are selected for comparison with the four canonical gospels. The focus is on biographical narrative conventions and on the function of the various *topoi* in the biographical totality. Fricke-Schmidt thereby aims to demonstrate that the gospels *eindringend* belong to the "literary family" of ancient biographies (he prefers *Literaturfamilie* to *Gattung*, perhaps a concession to Dible). Whether this conclusion impresses scholars of the other camp is doubtful (Burridge's similar conclusion did not, cf. Fricke-Schmidt's pp. 69–76); others will anyway profit from the energy, logic and learning displayed in the study.

### 3. *Three philosophical Lives: Plotinus, Proclus, Isidore*<sup>8</sup>

If Greek biography in general, with the exception of Plutarch, has been little studied from a literary point of view, this is particularly true for the philosophical Lives. Starting with Aristoxenus in the late 4th century BC (or even with the portraits of Socrates by Plato and Xenophon), this tradition continued steadily throughout the Hellenistic and Early Imperial periods; but only fragments have survived, many of them in Diogenes Laertius' large compilation. From the later centuries of the Empire, on the other hand, numerous texts are available for direct literary study: be they Neopythagorean, Neoplatonic, or Christian Lives.

Two of the Neoplatonic texts, *On the Life of Plotinus and the Arrangement of his Works* by Porphyry (ca. AD 300) and *Proclus, or On Happiness* by Marinus of Neapolis (AD 486), are now available in an annotated English translation with a magisterial introduction by Mark Edwards. Though, as Edwards notes (vii), "biography in the ancient world was seldom a branch of history", the book appears in the excellent Liverpool series "Translated Texts for Historians" that has earlier supplied students of ancient and medieval biography with similar editions of Iamblichus' *On the Pythagorean Life*, Gregory of Tours' *Life of the Fathers*, the *Liber Pontificalis*, the *Lives of the Visigothic Fathers*, and others. The Neoplatonic lives, it is true, contain no political history; these philosophers were private persons, and Edwards even suggests (ibid.); but they are full of interest not only to historians of philosophy and literature, but to anyone eager to understand pagan mentality just before, and a century after, the triumph of Christianity.

<sup>8</sup> *Neoplatonic Saints: The Lives of Plotinus and Proclus by their Students*. Translated with an introduction by Mark Edwards (Translated Texts for Historians, 35). Liverpool University Press: Liverpool, 2000. 150 pp. Paperback. ISBN 0-85323-615-1. £9.95. The Apamea Cultural Association: Athens, 1999. 403 pp. Paperback. ISBN 960-85325-2-3. Price £25.00/US\$45.00 (Oxbow Books/The David Brown Book Co).

Porphyry's *Plotinus* was already available in the excellent English translation of Hilary Armstrong in Vol. 1 of his Loeb edition of Plotinus (1976, <sup>2</sup>1989). Edwards' translation follows more closely the structure of the Greek original, while Armstrong's is accordingly easier to read, as the following sample from chapter 17 demonstrates. Amelius, Porphyry says, wrote a treatise entitled "How Plotinus differs from Numenius in his doctrine":

[Edwards:] This he addressed to me as Basileus [King], and this was indeed my name, because I Porphyry was called Malkus in the dialect of my homeland, this being also the name of my father, and Malkus has the meaning "King" if one elects to turn it into the Greek tongue.

[Armstrong:] He dedicated it to me under the name of Basileus [King]. Basileus was in fact my name, for in my native language I was called Malkus (my father's name), and if one translates Malkus into Greek it is interpreted as Basileus.

Each procedure, of course, has its justification; and since the Greek text is not printed along with Edwards' translation, it may have been deliberate to give the reader a flavour of the original style. At the same time, it is evident that Edwards himself favours a somewhat convoluted, non-conformist English style even when he is not translating from the Greek.

A major bonus with Edwards' edition is his learned commentary, housed in footnotes that sometimes fill more than half the page. It is the sort of commentary that does more than just answer the questions immediately arising from the text, such as names, allusions to historical events, or difficulties in the philosophical subject matter. In addition, the commentator lavishly shares his knowledge of the language, literature, religion, and philosophy of the period, and directs the reader to the modern, mostly non-British, literature on the subjects; the twenty-page bibliography bears witness to his industry. It is one of Edwards' professed aims (cf. lix sq.) precisely to make available to an English-speaking audience the vigorous research on these texts that has been carried out in France, Italy, and Greece in recent decades.

In a beautifully produced book, Polymnia Athanassiadi of Athens University has edited the last of the Neoplatonic biographies, Damascius' *Life of Isidore*, as it is commonly called, though Athanassiadi prefers the alternative title, *The Philosophical History*. In some illuminating pages (39–42, 58–60) she discusses the genre of this "unique piece of literature" and motivates her choice of title, Φιλοσοφικός Ἱστορία, "[i]n its triple meaning of history of philosophy, history of philosophers and enquiry into philosophy" (39). She stresses, however, that this does not make it a successor to Porphyry's work of the same title or to Eunapius' *Lives of the Philosophers*, a work "half-way between hagiography and obituary" (40). It is the critical, even polemical character of Damascius' work that makes it an outsider in late antique philosophical biography. Numenius, Marcel Proust and Ronald Syme are brought in as characterizing parallels; Antigonus of Carystus might also have been mentioned.

One basic reason for the generic difficulties, of course, is the fact that the work survives in fragments only, even if they are unusually numerous. Photius' *Bibliotheca*,

with two separate series of excerpts in cod. 242 (some 50 Budé pages) and a critical assessment in cod. 181, is the main source, supplemented by hundreds of entries in the *Suda*. Athanassiadi relies on the standard editions of these works, by Henry (1960, 1971) and Adler (1928–38), respectively, for her Greek text, noting in her own apparatus only the deviations from their text. There is a facing English translation with comments in footnotes. In the Introduction there is insightful discussion of Damascius' career, the cultural milieu of Alexandria and Athens, and various other aspects of late antique Hellenism. Three appendices, six plates, a plan and a map, a select bibliography, three indices, and concordances with Zintzen's Olms text (1967), complete this model edition, obviously a labour of love (or rather, to quote Damascius fr. 33A, of "love, industry, sagacity" [ἔρωτα, φιλοπονίαν, ἀγχινόταν]). Modern-day efforts to find coherent meaning and a structure in these rich, but unusually complex series of fragments, have thus taken a decisive step forward.<sup>19</sup>

In the history of biography, Damascius' work is famous for containing the first attestation of the term βιογραφία (rather than βίος).<sup>20</sup> This is the passage in question in Athanassiadi's lucid English (fr. 6A):

But possibly one might think that, as the proverb goes, "I sing a song of bliss [= talk nonsense]", and indeed it would be appropriate to ask "How can you prove, my friend, that your philosopher [= Isidore] descended from that order of souls?" To these words I will answer not in an aggressive spirit, as one does in a law court, but calmly; not with the zeal which strives for absolute accuracy in argument, but according to the rules of biography (μέτρα βιογραφίας), putting forward only what I believe to be true and what I have heard from my master.

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<sup>19</sup> For a detailed and insightful review, see R. Lamberton, *Bryn Mawr Classical Review* 2000.01.23.

<sup>20</sup> Cf. the interesting reflections on the term and its Syrian context in G.W. Bowersock, "Rabbula and Syrian Hellenism", in: T. Hägg & Ph. Rousseau (eds.), *Greek Biography and Panegyric in Late Antiquity* (The Transformation of the Classical Heritage, 31), Berkeley 2000, 258 f.

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