Aesop, both a fictional and historical figure, is held to be the inventor of well-known tales of animals. He is said to have lived in the 7th c. BC, and there exists a number of literary testimonies from antiquity that refer to him (Herodotus, Aristophanes, etc.). These agree on three main points: Aesop is linked to tales about animals; he had been a slave; and he met a tragic end at Delphi. These points become the narrative threads in a lengthy imaginary biography known as the Life of Aesop (henceforward Life).

The author of the Life is anonymous and there is no consensus over the date and place of composition of the work. The dating of a papyrus fragment from Berlin (P. Berol. 11628) to the 2nd or 3rd century AD stands as terminus ante quem for the Life, and scholars seem to agree on the dating of the archetype to the period of the 1st century BC – 2nd century AD. The question of where the work was composed is, however, still open. Perry’s suggestion that it was written in Egypt is not convincing, because the arguments he employs – the role of Isis as leader of the Muses (Μουσαναγωγός), the hostility towards Apollo and the mentioning of Nectanebo – do not definitively prove that the Life originated there. More appealing is the view that the anonymous author of the Life is likely to have been a bilingual scholar from somewhere in the East, who was familiar with both Greek and Eastern literature.

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1 The “Testimonia de Aesopo Fabulisque Aesopiis” are be found in Perry, Aesopica, pp. 211–41.
2 On the different suggestions regarding the date of the archetype, see Karla, Vita Aesopi, pp. 8–9; Konstantakos, Αχίφαρος ΙΙΙ, pp. 62–64.
3 Perry, Studies, pp. 24–26; Perry, Aesopica, p. 5.
4 Konstantakos, Αχίφαρος ΙΙΙ, pp. 347–51, 554.
The language is popular *koine* with many elements from the vernacular and from oral language.\(^5\) The vocabulary also includes rare words and phrases, some of which are not found in other literary texts.\(^6\)

**Textual Tradition**

The textual tradition of the *Life* is particularly rich. There are five papyrus fragments ranging from the 2nd/3rd century AD to the 6th/7th century.\(^7\) Furthermore, the manuscript tradition of the text is divided into the following three versions:

1. **Version G or Perriana** (named after its first editor, Ben Edwin Perry),\(^8\) is transmitted in a single manuscript, codex 397 of Pierpont Morgan Library New York (G) from the early 11th century.\(^9\) This is the most ancient manuscript of the *Life*, and in all likelihood the text transmitted therein is the one closest to the archetype.\(^10\)

2. **Version W or Westermanniana** (named after its first editor, Anton Westermann)\(^11\) consists of two recensions, MORN and BPThSA.\(^12\) The text transmitted in this version is briefer than that in the Perriana (G), but in some cases it has material from the archetype that does not exist in G,

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5 For the language of *Life* see Papademetriou, Ἀισώπεια, pp. 15–18; Karla, “Fictional Biography”; see also the specialized studies by Hostetter, *A Linguistic Study*, and Stamoulakis, Το λεξιλόγι της Μυθιστορίας.

6 Ruiz Montero, *Niveles de lengua*, p. 607, singles out no less than 45 *hapax legomena*. For rare and late words and new or late meanings and uses, see Hostetter, *A Linguistic Study*, pp. 108–14.


9 According to Husselman, “A Lost Manuscript”, p. 104, and Perry, “Text Tradition”, p. 198, the ms. dates back to the 10/11th century. This manuscript also preserves a fragment of an earlier translation in Greek of the work *Kalila and Dimna* (fol. 1–7). On this issue see the chapter by B. Krönung in the present volume pp. 427–62.

10 Karla, “Die älteste Version”.

11 Westermann, *Vita Aesopi*.

12 Both recensions are named after the initials of the mss.: M (Monacensis gr. 525; 14th century); O (Baroccianus 194, 15th century); R (Vaticanus gr. 1192, 14th century); N (Parisinus gr. 2894, 15th century); B (Londinensis Add. gr. 17015, 15th century); P (Vaticanus Palatinus gr. 269); Th (Thessalonicensis Bibliothecae Universitatis 86, 11th century); S (Mosquensis G.I.M. 436, 13th century); A (Atheniensis, Benaki Museum 53 (TA 72), 13th /14th century).