PERSONAL NAMES IN THE *VITA AESOPI*
(*VITA G* OR *PERRIANA*)[1]

The novelistic life of Aesop presents us with numerous difficult questions. These mainly regard the origin of the text, its literary worth, and not least, Aesop's historicity. This paper proposes to investigate whether a study of personal names in the *Vita Aesopi* (from now on the *Vita*) can shed some light on these questions.

Before we turn our attention to the names, it would be useful to summarize first what is known or believed by scholars about the origin of the *Vita*. The *Vita* has come down to us in three different Greek versions: *Vita G*, *Vita W*,[2] and *Vita Accursiana*;[3] it is believed that the archetype of *Vita G* and *W* can hardly be older than the first century B.C., but written tradition about the life of Aesop may reach as far back as the fifth, or even the sixth century B.C.[4]

Because the material used in the *Vita* is of so early a date, and Aesop in these older sources was associated with various places, the date and place of composition of the original *Vita* are hard to determine. The text has been thought to contain some clues which suggest Egypt as the place of composition, and an Egyptian Greek or similar person with an Egyptian background as the author;[5] however, the relevant arguments are weak: the importance attributed to the Egyptian goddess Isis in the narrative does not necessarily point to Egypt (the cult of Isis was by the third century B.C. already widely spread around the Mediterranean), and the negative depiction of the Greek philosopher Xanthus need not be seen as suggestive of hostility to Hellenic learning in general,[6] as it may well reflect something of the trend of *scholastikos* jokes

[1] This paper has benefited substantially from the comments of Dr Stephanie West and Mr Peter Fraser. I should also like to thank for a number of useful suggestions Mrs Elaine Matthews and Professor I.-Th. Papademetriou, to whom I am indebted for suggesting this subject of study.

[2] A critical edition of these (together with the Latin *Vita Lolliniana*), with commentary, was done by B. E. Perry, *Aesopica* (Urbana, IL, 1952). *W* stands for *Westermanniana*, from the name of its first editor, Westermann (1845); *G* is the name of the codex from which this version derives (*Vita G* is also referred to as *Perriana*, a term coined by Papademetriou in honour of its first editor, Perry). The Latin version is a translation which derives from the Greek text. Papademetriou, Αἰσώπεια καὶ Αἰσωπικὰ (Athens, 1989), esp. 24, n. 31 and 27, n. 38 provides a very useful summary of the manuscript tradition (as well as an overview of the scholarly work on the *Vitae*), with a rich bibliography; another extensive bibliography of the *Vita Aesopi* was compiled by A. Beschorner and N. Holzberg in N. Holzberg (ed.), *Der Äsop-Roman. Motivgeschichte und Erzählstruktur* (Tübingen, 1992), 165–87.

[3] This is a Byzantine text attributed to Maximos Planudes. There is one edition of it by A. Eberhard in *Fabulae Romanenses Graece conscriptae* (Leipzig, 1872).

[4] B. E. Perry, *Studies in the Text History of the Life and Fables of Aesop* (Haverford, PA, 1936), 24–5. Cf. Papademetriou (n. 2), 24–31. This is implied by the fact that sporadic information about Aesop's life is found at various places from the fifth century B.C. (see below).

[5] Cf. e.g. Perry (n. 4), 12–16; L. W. Daly, *Aesop without Morals* (New York, London, 1961), 22. See further the bibliography in N. Robertson, 'Aesop's encounter with Isis and the Muses, and the origins of the *Life of Aesop*', in E. Caspo and M.C. Miller (edd.), *Poetry, Theory and Praxis. The Social Life of Myth, Word and Image in Ancient Greece. Essays in Honour of William J. Slater* (Oxford, 2003), 250, n.9.

[6] Such an attitude to Greek culture was characteristic of the period starting at the end of the third/beginning of the second century B.C., which was marked by gradual Egyptianization, and which continued into the imperial age. See P. M. Fraser, *Ptolemaic Aexandria* (Oxford, 1972), 85.

(examples of which are concentrated in the *Philogelos*).[7] The special connections of the Greek novel with Egypt[8] may seem to make this place a good candidate (the *Alexander Romance*, to which the *Vita* is quite close in genre, is believed to have been composed there),[9]—but the evidence is not conclusive. However, the survival of several papyrus fragments (which correspond to various parts of the *Vita*) shows that the *Vita* must at least have enjoyed popularity in Egypt.[10]

The fact that a substantial part of the *Vita* has apparently been modelled on the *Story of Ahiqar* (G 101–23) has been seen as relevant to the question of the former's origin; it has been thought that the time and place of the *Vita* should be sought where the Anatolian story was as familiar a text as the Aesopic works, and that this place should be Asia Minor.[11] However, the wide diffusion of both the *Story of Ahiqar*[12] (Ahiqar seems to have had something of a career in Greek literature)[13] and of the Aesopic fables makes it difficult to decide for a particular place; in addition, there were several possible lines of communication between the Greeks and the Near East (not just Asia Minor).[14]

Could the use of personal names contain further clues? It is sensible to expect that the local character of particular names can be revealing as to the time and place of a particular text or story. Moreover, the systematization of onomastic evidence within the framework of the *Lexicon of Greek Personal Names* project (*LGPN*)[15] has in recent years increased the usefulness of onomastic studies in suggesting historical

[7] See jokes 1–103 in the recent Teubner edition by R. D. Dawe, *Philogelos* (Munich, Leipzig, 2000). Notably Xanthus' disciples are often called οἱ σχολαστικοί (see *Vita* G 22–7, 44, 47–8, 51–5, 69, 71–3).

[8] On these see S. A. Stephens and J .J. Winkler, *Ancient Greek Novels. The Fragments* (Princeton, 1995), 12–18.

[9] See more in R. Stoneman, 'The *Alexander Romance*. From history to fiction', in J. R. Morgan and R. Stoneman (edd.), *Greek Fiction. The Greek Novel in Context* (London, New York, 1994), 117–29. The *Vita Aesopi* and the *Alexander Romance* share common features, such as an interest in the figure of the Pharaoh Nektanebos and the episode with the flying machine (featuring in the later recensions of the *Alexander Romance*). Interestingly, Aesop is made the author of the *Alexander Romance* in some MSS of the mid-fourth-century Latin version of Iulius Valerius, *Res gestae Alexandri Macedonis*; see the recent Teubner edition by M. Rosellini (Munich, Leipzig, 2004).

[10] For a list see R. A. Pack, *The Greek and Latin Literary Texts from Greco-Roman Egypt* (Ann Arbor, 1965²), 113.

[11] Cf. M. J. Luzzatto, 'Esopo', in S. Settis (ed.), *I Greci. Storia Cultura Arte Società* 2* (Turin, 1996), 1323. Earlier A. La Penna, 'Il romanzo di Esopo', *Athenaeum* 40 (1962), 272–3 spoke of a Syriac origin.

[12] See now S. R. West, 'Croesus' second reprieve and other tales of the Persian court', *CQ* 53 (2003), 423–8. The oldest version of it that we possess is a fragmentary, late fifth-century B.C. Aramaic text from Elephantine (recent translation in B. Porten and A. Yardeni, *Textbook of Aramaic Documents from Ancient Egypt, Newly Copied, Edited and Translated into Hebrew and English* 3 [Jerusalem, 1993], 22–57) followed by the Apocryphal *Book of Tobit*. The story had an Assyrian origin.

[13] Authors who mention him include Strabo (16.2.39 [762]), Clem. Al. (*Strom.* 1.15.69), and Diog. Laert. (5.50), who claims that Theophrastus wrote a work called *Akicharos*; see further J. C. Greenfield, 'The wisdom of Ahiqar', in J. Day, R. P. Gordon, and H. G. M. Williamson (edd.), *Wisdom in Ancient Israel. Essays in Honour of J. A. Emerton* (Cambridge, 1995), 51–2.

[14] See M. L. West, *The East Face of Helicon* (Oxford, 1997), 2–4.

[15] So far the following volumes have appeared: P.M. Fraser and E. Matthews,(edd.), *Vol. I, The Aegean Islands. Cyprus. Cyrenaica* (Oxford, 1987); M. J. Osborne and S. G. Byrne (edd.), *Vol. II, Attica* (Oxford, 1994); P. M. Fraser and E. Matthews (edd.), *Vol. III. A, The Peloponnese. Western Greece. Sicily and Magna Graecia* (Oxford, 1997), *Vol. III. B, Central Greece. From the Megarid to Thessaly* (Oxford, 2000) and *Vol. IV, Macedonia, Thrace, Scythia Minor, South Russia* (Oxford, 2005).

surroundings for literary texts.[16] A look at the onomastic ambience of the *Vita* is, for these reasons, well worthwhile. The focus will be—apart from the name Aesop—those names for which some choice could be exercised (as these would be most likely to reveal something of the author's particular circumstances).[17]

Table 1 attempts a concise presentation of the onomastic material which is relevant to the *Vita*. References in the name field of the table are to *Vita G* (unanimously seen as the most ancient and extensive version, and the one that is closest to the archetypical *Vita*), unless otherwise stated.[18] The first six columns comprise data from the *LGPN* database (the distribution in volumes is followed here so as to give a more systematic idea of the geographical regions involved). It should be noted that information in the first five columns is more reliable than in the sixth (vols. I–IV are of course published, vol. IV most recently;[19] vol. V, however, is still under preparation).[20] Material in the seventh column (Egypt) is problematic: no complete onomastic corpus for Greco-Roman Egypt survives,[21] and the main onomastic dictionary remains F. Preisigke's *Namenbuch* (Heidelberg, 1922), supplemented by D. Foraboschi.[22] These do not include information about the nationality of the name-bearers, nor do they specify when multiple attestations of a name in fact correspond to one and the same bearer, and in addition Preisigke does not always mention dates. For material published after Foraboschi, all onomastic evidence has to be gathered either from subsequently published collections of papyri, or from the Indexes of the *Sammelbuch griechischer Urkunden aus Ägypten* (vols. 8–25!).[23] For the moment, the Egypt column below only presents a rough estimate of existing material (therefore the reference to precise numbers is for the most part avoided).

From Table 1 one may conclude the following:

Most of the personal names in the *Vita* were in use around the probable time of the composition of the *Vita*. The nomenclature is not that of Aesop's supposed lifetime, but of the Hellenistic-imperial period. It seems therefore probable that many of the characters surrounding Aesop in the *Vita* did not belong to an old biographical tradition, but were created by the author of the *Vita* (or in any case close to the author's own time), and were given contemporary names.

The names are attested at various places; not all of them are pan-Greek, but nearly

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[16] Although names can be suggestive of an ancient historian's truthfulness, things can be complicated by the fact that some names may be chosen to suit the time and place of each narrative, so as to guarantee verisimilitude. See S. Hornblower, 'Personal names and the study of ancient Greek historians', in S. Hornblower and E. Matthews (edd.), *Greek Personal Names. Their Value as Evidence* (Oxford, 2000), 129–43, who discusses such examples from Herodotus.

[17] Divine and mythological names (e.g. Ἐνδυμίων, Γανυμήδης *Vita G* 29, Μαρσύας 100) are not very helpful in suggesting any particular place or time. Ἑρμᾶ (3) is understood to be an invocation to the god Hermes (as the patron of thieves and a fig-lover); see Perry, 'The text tradition of the Greek life of Aesop', *TAPA* 64 (1933), 227, and above (n. 2), 36. The mention of historical figures such as Δημόκριτος (52), Δημοσθένης (32), Εὐριπίδης (32) reveals some of the intellectual/literary interests of the author and his intended audience.

[18] An *Index Nominum* from this version of the *Vita* was compiled by E. Demetriadou-Toufexi, 'Index Verborum Vitae Aesopi Perrianae', Ἐπιστημονικὴ Ἐπετηρίδα τῆς Φιλοσοφικῆς Σχολῆς *(ΑΠΘ)* (1981), 150–3.

[19] Fraser and Matthews (n. 15, 2005).

[20] *Vol. V.A, Coastal Asia Minor. Vol. V.B, Inland Asia Minor.* I have been very fortunate to have access to unpublished *LGPN* material; special thanks go to the editors, Mrs E. Matthews and Mr P. M. Fraser.

[21] See Fraser (n. 6), 38.

[22] *Onomasticon alterum papyrologicum* (Milan, 1967).

[23] 1915–, various editors.

TABLE 1

Name	Vol. I: The Aegean Islands/Cyprus/ Cyrenaica	Vol. II: Attica	Vol. III.A: The Peloponnese/ Western Greece/ Sicily and Magna Graecia	Vol. III.B: Central Greece/ From the Megarid to Thessaly	Vol. IV: Macedonia/Thrace/ Scythia Minor/ S. Russia	Vol. V.A, Vol. V.B: Asia Minor	Egypt
Ἀγαθόπους (3)	25 (Hell.-imp.)	95 (Hell.-imp.)	34 (from 2A)	9 (imp.)	c. 45	>100	6 (1–3A)
Αἶνος (109)	2 (2B)	0	0	2 (4–3B)	0	1 (1B, Ionia-Priene)	0
Αἴσωπος (passim)	4 (4–2B)[a]	5 (6B–2A)[b]	3 (4B-imp.)	0	5 (Hell.-imp.)	5 (2B–3A)	4 (2–1B, Ptolem., late Rom.)
Διονύσιος (79)	608 (from 6B)	1103 (from 6B)	313 (from 6B)	304 (from 5B)	v. common	v. common	v. common from 1A
Ἑρμιππος (104–7)	15 (Hell.-imp.)	22 (6B–Hell.)	1 (imp.)	3 (1B–2A)	11 (5B–3A)	c. 160 (Hell.-imp.)	common from 3B
Ζηνᾶς (9–15)	5 (1B–3A)	1 (2–3A)	2 (imp.)	1 (3–4A)	0	13 (1B–3A)	several (1–2A)
Ἥλιος (109)	4 (2B–4A)	0	>10 (Italy, imp.)	1 (27B.C.–14A.D.)	c. 35 (imp.)	c. 25 (imp.)	1 (Rom.)
Αἴγυρις[c] (24)	3–4A	0	0	0	0	0	0
Λίνος[d] (110)	4 (Hell.-imp.)	1 (Hell.-imp.)	0	1 (Hell.-imp.)	0	2 (Hell.-imp.)	2 (Hell.-imp.)
Λυκοῦργος (101–23)	7 (5B–2B)	14 (6B–3A)	7 (Her., 6B–then from 3B)	0	4 (5B–3/4A)	2 (4B, imp.)	2 (3A)
Ξάνθος (passim until 90)	9 (4B–3A)	20 (from 6B)	8 (4B–2A)	7 (Hell.-imp.)	20 (5B–3A)	12 (5B–imp.)	several
Ὠφελίων (12)	12 (3B–3A)	14 (5B–imp.)	21 (5B–Byz.)	10 (4B– Hell.-imp.)	15 (Hell.-imp.)	5 (Hell.-imp.)	several (from 2B)

In the table B and A are used with centuries, B =B.C. and A = A.D.

[a]The attestations are from Crete, Delos, Euboea, and Rhodes; there is one additional Αἴσωπος from Delos (*SEG* 48 [1998] 1046), late second–early first century B.C., which should bring the total to five.

[b]There is one sixth-century B.C. attestation (on the famous Phanodicus stele, see more below); all other attestations are after the first century B.C., except for one, deriving from Sch. Ar. *Vesp.* 566 (this assumes that Αἰσώπου τι γέλοιον refers to a tragic poet/actor of that name; but Aristophanes clearly means our Aesop).

[c] Αἰγυρίς? Αἰγύρις?

[d]The *Vita* in fact has Λίνος, which is a mistake either for Αἶνος or for Λίνος, see more below.

all of them occur in Asia Minor, Egypt, and the Aegean islands around the time of the *Vita*. To start with the less common names, Αἴσωπος, Ζηνᾶς, and Λίνος occur in all three areas. There seem to be at least three attestations of Αἴσωπος in Egypt close to the time of the *Vita* (second–first century B.C., Ptolemaic period). Ζηνᾶς appears to recur from time to time only in Asia Minor and Egypt, while it is uncommon elsewhere. Λίγυρις has only one, much later, attestation in the Aegean islands (but it is not clear whether it is of a masculine or a feminine name—it could indeed be Λιγυρίς); it could also have existed in Asia Minor, judging by the fact that there is a Λιγυριανή in Pontus (second century A.D.). Λῖνος is attested in the Aegean islands and in Asia Minor, but not in Egypt. The unusual names in the *Vita* do occur in other regions, but the table shows that they are more relevant to Asia Minor, Egypt and the Aegean.

Common names tend to be less helpful in such a context—if they are common then they naturally occur throughout the Greek-speaking world—but common names here still do not invalidate the above indications. Dionysus is by far the commonest (very common everywhere), and in the *Vita* it is the name of a supposed king (Διονύσιος ὁ Βυζάντιος). Rather surprisingly, another sovereign, the king of Babylon, has (in both G and W) the Greek name Λυκοῦργος (which is apparently explained as the result of Hellenization, see more below). Of the rest of the names, Ὠφελίων is present overall, and so is Ξάνθος, though it may be significant that the latter has several attestations in both Asia Minor and Egypt. Ἀγαθόπους has most of its attestations in Asia Minor around the time of the *Vita* (notably nearly all are A.D.); it is also a common slave-name,[24] and its bearer in the *Vita* is in fact a slave. Ἕρμιππος, too, was common in Asia Minor.

On the whole, onomastic evidence agrees with the dating of the *Vita* but does not allow us eventually to pin it down to any particular place.

A LITERARY USE OF NAMES

The *Vita* has often been thought to be of little literary value, though it has not lacked defenders. It is a sign of some literary sophistication that the choice and use of certain personal names is not random. The relevant examples are the following:

(1) Νεκταναβώ

The pharaoh's name has more than practical functions—it embodies literary allusions. Νεκταναβώ (105–22, spelling as in *Vita G*) was not meant to be a historical Nektanebos (two Egyptian kings of that name lived in the fourth century B.C. and cannot have been contemporaries of Aesop), but the name is chosen here for its literary connections; Nektanebos was important as the last native pharaoh, and his name was popular in Greek and Graeco-Egyptian literature. The *Vita* draws on the fictional narrative 'Dream of Nektanebos' (an admonitory narrative addressed to the

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[24] Cf. F. Solin, *Die stadtrömischen Sklavennamen: Ein Namenbuch.* II. Teil: *Griechische Namen* (Stuttgart, 1996), 189. Names of slaves were often bestowed by their masters, and perhaps names beginning with Ἀγαθο- (which were apparently common for slaves) reflected the master's wish for a good-natured slave. More commonly slaves received names that expressed their provenance, cf. the remarks of Strabo (7.3.12) on the naming of slaves in Attica: ἢ τοῖς ἔθνεσιν ἐκείνοις ὁμωνύμους ἐκάλουν τοὺς οἰκέτας, ὡς Λυδὸν καὶ Σύρον, ἢ τοῖς ἐπιπολάζουσιν ἐκεῖ ὀνόμασι προσηγόρευον, ὡς Μάνην ἢ Μίδαν τὸν Φρύγα, Τίβιον δὲ τὸν Παφλαγόνα. Cf. also slave-names in Aristophanes such as Θρᾷττα (*Ach.* 273) and Φρύξ (*Vesp.* 433).

pharaoh foretelling disaster for the kingdom unless certain measures are taken), of which there is a Greek translation in a papyrus fragment.[25] Nektanebos' literary importance is further seen in that he is made the father of Alexander at the famous opening of the *Alexander Romance*.

(2) Αἴσωπος

'Speaking' personal names are popular in comic and folk-literary contexts, to which the *Vita* is related, as they are known to please audiences. The name of Aesop is the most interesting candidate for such a function. We are told that Aesop is of non-Greek origin (a Thracian or, as in the *Vitae* and other later literary sources,[26] a Phrygian), and his name, which is not easily explicable in Greek, may be foreign. A Greek master would not have chosen to give a foreign name to a slave, but originally foreign names sometimes entered the Greek language in a 'Hellenized' form. The *Vita* is no stranger to 'Hellenized' names—there is Lycurgus, which has two alternative forms, Λύκωρος[27] and Λυκοῦρος,[28] probably stages in the transition from a foreign name to one that would be familiar to a Greek ear,[29] and also the name of Aesop's adopted son (on whom see more below). Αἴσωπος as a 'Hellenized' name does not of course require much effort for etymological justification; the name would have acquired the form which would seem most natural in Greek. On Greek ground the form of the name and its etymology became associated with the perception and the development of the figure of Aesop, as happened with other Greek literary figures with potentially non-Greek names.[30]

It seems indeed that the name of Aesop at least came to be regarded as 'speaking'. The *Vita Accursiana* (228) has a relevant comment: μέλας ('dark')- ὅθεν καὶ τοῦ ὀνόματος ἔτυχε· ταὐτὸν γὰρ Αἴσωπος τῷ Αἰθίοπι; hence in the description of Aesop in this version of the *Vita*, μέλας is assumed to correspond to the meaning of his name.[31] Although μέλας also features as an element of the hero's *physique* in both *G* and *W*, no connection with the name is made there. This makes *Vita Accursiana*'s comment sound like a later idea[32] (the implausibility of the etymological exercise

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[25] See Stephens and Winkler (n. 8), 14–5, cf. 470.

[26] These include the fable writer Phaedrus (prol. 3.52) and numerous rhetorical and sophistic texts from the imperial period; see Perry (n. 2), Test. 4.

[27] In papyrus fragments of the *Vita*, *POxy.* 3720, col. 1: 21–2; *PBerol.* 11628.

[28] Indicated by the SBP tradition. None of the alternative forms exist as independent Greek names.

[29] See M. W. Haslam, 'P.Oxy. 3720. Life of Aesop. (Addendum to 3331)', *The Oxyrhynchus Papyri* 53 (1986), 164, nn. 21–4; cf. Perry (n. 4), 53, 57–8.

[30] Some Homeric names are explicable in this way: e.g. 'Οδυσσεύς is of obscure etymology and has been considered pre-Greek, but it is definitely seen as meaningful in the epic, where it is associated with a specific perception of the hero: the ὀδυσσάμενος, 'hated' and 'he who hates'.

[31] In the context of this version of the *Vita* Aesop's name could indeed have functioned as a contrast to the name of his master, Xanthus ('blond'); cf. M. Papathomopoulos, ʿO Βίος τοῦ Αἰσώπου. ʿΗ παραλλαγὴ G. Κριτικὴ ἔκδοση μὲ εἰσαγωγὴ καὶ Μετάφραση (Ioannina, 1991²), 16.

[32] Cf. Eustathius' etymology, *Comm. ad Od.* 1.16.10–13: Αἴσωπος. καὶ αὐτὸς γὰρ, παρὰ τὸν ὦπα λέγεται, ἵνα ὥσπερ παρὰ τὸ αἴθω τὸ καίω τὸ ὄπτω ὄψω παρῆκται ὁ Αἰθίοψ ὡς ἐπικεκαυμένος τὴν ὄψιν, οὕτω παρὰ τὸ αἴθω αἴσω τὸ λάμπω ἐξ οὗ καὶ ὁ ἀστήρ, εἴη ὁ Αἴσωπος ἀντιφραστικῶς. This (clearly false) etymology was adopted by F. G. Welcker, 'Aesop eine Fabel', *RhM* 6 (1839), 366 = *Kleine Schriften* 2, 228–63.

involved does not seem to be such a great obstacle; ancient Greek literature is known
to have made use of inaccurate, popular interpretations of names).[33]

Still, Αἴσωπος clearly invites treatment as an etymologically meaningful name: an
obvious etymology would involve the components αἶσα, αἴσιος ('auspicious'),[34] and
ὤψ ('face, countenance'; -ωπος is a second component of adjectives as well as proper
names);[35] Αἴσωπος would be a strange compound, but it could come to suggest
someone with pleasant (and friendly) looks. However, the *Vita* emphasizes quite the
opposite idea, that Aesop was an individual with exceptionally repellent (almost
grotesque) looks; see especially the beginning of the *Vita*: κακοπινὴς τὸ ἰδέσθαι *Vita*
G 1.2; κακοειδὴς *Vita W* 1.3, but relevant hints are included throughout the *Vita*,
together with the idea that Aesop's repellent appearance was associated with things
going wrong and with bad luck (cf. the episodes in *Vita G* 11, 14, 15, 21, 31, 52)—this
is in striking contrast to the meaning of αἴσιος. One suspects that the physical
description of Aesop represented an ironic response to the etymology of the name.

It is not possible to know whether ugliness was a characteristic of Aesop from the
start, but if not, it probably became one quite early; though ugliness was not
associated with him in the classical texts that mention his name, there is a portrait of
him on a vase[36] which shows that good looks were definitely not among his merits.
Aesop's ugliness (greatly elaborated at the opening of the *Vita*)[37] was perhaps meant
to make a moral point ('don't judge a book by its cover', 'all that glitters is not gold'),
especially since the juxtaposition of wisdom with physical disadvantages (and more
generally the contrast ὄψις–νοῦς) was not an unusual theme.[38] It is possible that this
theme provided inspiration for a Greek interpretation of the name Aesop; notably
Aesop himself comments on the striking contrast between his unattractive appear-
ance and his sharp mind (mind is what matters more), and the word ὄψις is used in the
relevant contexts (see *Vita G* 87–88, 99).

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[33] Plato's *Cratylus* has numerous examples of this kind (see e.g. 402D–403A on the name
Poseidon); cf. also the interpretations of the names Ἑλένη and Αἴας in tragedy (in Aesch. *Ag.*
688–9 and Soph. *Aj.* 430, 432 respectively).

[34] There are a few names from this root, e.g. Αἴσων, Αἴσιμος (both are attested—not more
than ten–fifteen times each—at various places from the fifth century B.C.); see P. Chantraine,
Dictionnaire étymologique de la langue Grecque (Paris, 1968–80), s.v. αἶσα. There is also the
(rather problematic) Homeric name Αἴσυμνος (*Il.* 11.303), the name of an Achaian leader, which
may be related to αἰσυμνήτης (*Od.* 8.258), αἰσυμνητήρ (*Il.* 24.347), and to αἶσα (*Il.* 1.416 etc.),
αἴσιος (*Il.* 24.376). There is an alternative etymology, which connects Αἴσυμνος with the
(possibly Thracian) place-name Αἰσύμ(ν)η (cf. *Il.* 8.304; *Suda* s.v.); see H. von Kamptz,
Homerische Personennamen (Göttingen, 1982), 347. The only other attestation of Αἴσυμνος is for
a Macedonian in the late fourth century B.C. (*IG* VII 4256); see O. Hoffmann, *Die Makedonen,
ihre Sprache und ihr Volkstum* (Göttingen, 1906), 202.

[35] The commonest ones (according to the *LGPN* database) are Μελάνωπος (about fifty
examples, from various places, from the fifth century B.C.) and Λύκωπος (about twenty examples,
mainly from the Peloponnese and central Greece, after the fourth century B.C.).

[36] Beazley *ARV²* 2, p. 916 no. 183

[37] This description seems to have inspired the two alternative etymologies proposed by
D. Ogden, *The Crooked Kings of Ancient Greece* (London, 1997), 38, ἄισος+ὤψ ('uneven face')
ἄισος+πούς ('uneven foot'); these produce appropriate meanings, but (contrary to what Ogden
thinks) have little linguistic credibility, and, with the lack of more specific hints in the text, they
seem unlikely even as folk-etymologies.

[38] B. Graziosi, *Inventing Homer* (Cambridge, 2002), 160–3, has rightly pointed out that stories
about Aesop resemble in this respect those about Homer. See further I.-Th. Papademetriou,
Aesop as an Archetypal Hero (Athens, 1997), 13–40.

(3) Αἶνος–Λῖνος–'Ήλιος

In *Vita W* Aesop's adopted son has the name Αἶνος (103–10 *passim*); in *Vita G* the name seems at first to be 'Ήλιος (104, 108), but then the son is addressed with Λῖνε (109), which Perry thought was a mistake for Αἶνε. (The mistake is paleographically an easy one; but it is also possible—as was mentioned earlier—that Λῖνος is a mistake for Λίνος).[39] It is fair to wonder whether there is more to the use of the name Ainos: if Perry was right, it must already have been present in the oldest version of the *Vita*, and it has a consistent presence in tradition.[40] From archaic up to Hellenistic times, αἶνος is often used to mean 'story with a moral', 'fable' (Hes. *Op.* 202, Archil. 86, 89W; Callim. *Iamb.* 1.211); also 'saying', 'proverb' (Eur. Fr. 508, Theoc. 14.43). These meanings of course reflect the quintessence of Aesop's traditional role. It may be possible, therefore, that the author of the version *W* was aware of the suitability of this name, especially as the name of the person who received so much moral advice from Aesop.[41]

Even so, the presence of alternative names calls for an explanation. This may be found in the provenance of the figure of Aesop's adopted son. He corresponds to Ahiqar's 'nephew', whose name in the Greek *Tobit* seems to be equally problematic: Νασβᾶς or Ναβάδ (or even Ναβάς) at 11.18, and Ἀδάμ or Ναδάβ at 14.10.[42] Nadab is thought to be preferable,[43] as it is closer to Nadin or Nadan, which occurs in the major Syriac texts of *Ahiqar* (but not in the Aramaic text), and which follows a frequent type in Accadian onomastics.[44] It seems that the alternative name-forms are the product of various attempts first, at the Hebraization and then at the Hellenization of the name of Ahiqar's nephew. It is noteworthy that in Hebrew too there seems to be a preference for a meaningful name: *nadab* means 'generous', 'noble'; *adam* is of course the name of the famous first man, which occurs more than 500 times in the Bible with the connotation 'man', 'man-kind'.[45]

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[39] Cf. W. Pape and G. E. Benseler, *Wörterbuch der griechischen Eigennamen* (2 vols., Braunschweig, 1911³), s.v. Λίνος. (The accentuation of proper names in -νος is extremely irregular, see H. W. Chandler, *A Practical Introduction to Greek Accentuation* [Oxford, 1881²], 84–6.) Λίνος was the name of a mythical singer and of a song, known from the *Iliad* (18.570), perhaps of oriental origin (see *OCD³* s.v. Linus). The name occurs a few times in Diels–Kranz, for one of the seven sages (1.61, 28), an astronomer (1.147, 4), a Linos of Thebes (1.21.7, 2.52,13) and a teacher of Orpheus (1.1, 9); see also Stob. 1.10.5 (119, 8 Wachsmuth). Linos was also the name of the first bishop of Rome, Eus. *Eccl. Hist.* 3.2.

[40] It is also found in some fragments of a modern Greek adaptation of the *Vita* contained in two manuscripts, one from Athens and one from Thessalonike. *Codex Atheniensis* (which contains the most extensive fragments) has Ἔνος for Αἶνος; see further Perry, 'Some addenda to the life of Aesop', *BZ* 59 (1966), 288–304.

[41] La Penna (n. 11), 267 indeed thought that Αἶνος was the original name, speculating that it was replaced with 'Ήλιος in *Vita G* under the influence of an oriental version of the story of Ahiqar which contained the latter name. *Vita W* sometimes preserves elements that were lost or corrupted in *G*; see Papademetriou (n. 2), 29.

[42] Thus according to the most recent edition of the text, see S. Weeks, S. Gathercole, and L. Stuckenbruck (edd.), *The Book of Tobit. Texts from the Principal Ancient and Medieval Traditions* (Berlin, New York, 2004). R. Hahnart, *Tobit*. Septuaginta vol. VIII,5 (Göttingen, 1983) and A. Rahlfs, *Septuaginta* 1 (Stuttgart, 1935) read Ἀμάν instead of Ἀδάμ.

[43] See F. Zimmermann, *The Book of Tobit* (New York, 1958), 122, n. 10.

[44] See Greenfield (n.13), 45, n. 11.

[45] See *The Interpreter's Dictionary of the Bible* (Nashville, New York, 1962), s.v. Nadab, Adam. As for Aman (ibid. s.v.), it may be seen as a reference to the villain of Esther.

(4) Λίγυρις

One of the two slaves who stand together with Aesop for auction in Samos is called
Λίγυρις (24). This is a significant name, derived from λιγύς, λιγυρός 'of clear, sweet
sound'.[46] One cannot help thinking that the name was specifically chosen for the
slave who happens also to be a ψάλτης (20). It is true that some text is missing at the
point of the slave's self-presentation (24); we have neither the name nor the words of
the second slave, and it is not clear whether Ligyris was indeed the *psaltes* (and not
the *grammaticos*), though his name suggests that he was the *psaltes*. In addition, it
seems significant that the equivalent of Ligyris in *Vita W* (the slave who speaks first
and who is a Καππάδοξ, like Ligyris), is indeed the *psaltes* (though his name there
is Tyros). The fact that it was such an uncommon name corroborates this inter-
pretation. The *grammaticos* in *W* has a suitable name too: Φιλόκαλος probably
implies 'he who is fond of the elegance of παδεία' (cf. Xen. *Cyr.* 2.1.22.8, φιλόκαλον
περὶ ὅπλα).

(5) Λύκαινα

Finally, *Λύκαινα* (the name of Xanthus' dog) sounds an appropriate name for a dog.
It could be a generic name, or a hint of the dog's appearance and behaviour: a
fierce-looking (and ferocious) dog.[47] Interestingly, *Λύκαινα* also occurs as a personal
name,[48] which suggests that the etymological sense had been diluted with time.

A HISTORICAL AESOP?

This last section will look at the possible relevance of Aesop's name (and of other
names connected with Aesop) to a discussion of his historicity. For this purpose,
names in the early Aesop-related evidence will be considered too (not only those in
Vita G). The background briefly: the potentially historical character of Aesop was
very obscure already in classical times, and it was clearly due to the connection of the
name with the fables that a *Vita* of Aesop was composed. The *Vita* did not aim at
historical accuracy and cannot enlighten us about Aesop's historicity. Whether Aesop
was a historical figure or not is a matter of disagreement among scholars, and the
situation can be summed up thus: the existence of evidence about Aesop in various
ancient authors has been taken to favour his historicity[49]—but the inconsistency of

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[46] For λιγύς cf. e.g. *Il.* 1.248 (λιγύς.. ἀγορητής, referring to Nestor), 9.186 (τερπόμενον
φόρμιγγι λιγείῃ, cf. *Od.* 8.67). λιγυρός (which is closer in sound to the name) is used by Homer
(e.g. *Od.* 12.44, Σειρῆνες λιγυρῇ θέλγουσιν ἀοιδῇ) and Hesiod (*Op.* 659, λιγυρῆς . . . ἀοιδῆς),
but also in later prose (Plut. *Mor.* 397A, Γλαύκης οὐ φθέγγεται τῆς κιθαρῳδοῦ λιγυρώτερον;
Lucian, *Salt.* 72.8, εἴτε αὐλοῦ καὶ σύριγγος τὸ λιγυρώτερον).

[47] Real-life examples of meaningful dog-names include a Φιλοκύνηγος (Pergamum, third
century A.D.; R. Merkelbach and J. Stauber (edd.), *Steinepigramme aus dem griechischen Osten* 1
(Stuttgart, Leipzig, 1998), a Νίκη and a Λάδας (cf. Hsch. s.v. λάδας· ἔλαφος νεβρίας; both
names are from Thessaly, Pherae, of the imperial period; N. Giannopoulos, ''Επιγραφαὶ ἐκ
Θεσσαλίας', *AE* [1932], 28.8).

[48] It occurs twice in the Aegean islands, in the fourth century B.C. and in the imperial period,
and once in literature (Lucian, *Dial. Meretr.* 12), where the context implies a *hetaira*.

[49] M. J. Luzzatto, 'Plutarco, Socrate e l'Esopo di Delfi', *ICS* 13 (1988), 427–45 (where she may
be taking Plutarch's *Symposium of the Seven Sages* a little too seriously; but see also her article in
Brill's *New Pauly* s.v. Aesop: 'to a certain extent [he] may be regarded as a historical figure; the
number of details that have been passed down to us make it difficult to speak of Aesop as being
only a mythical character'); Papathomopoulos (n. 31), 13–15.

this evidence, together with some other serious considerations, can swing the balance of probability the opposite way.[50]

The earliest mention of our Αἴσωπος dates from the fifth century B.C.[51] It is significant that Herodotus believed in his historicity, not least because he evidently knew quite a lot about Samos at first hand; this makes the names in his account particularly interesting. Herodotus places Aesop in the sixth century B.C. (2.134–5), and says he was the slave of a man called Ἰάδμων. This name is absent from the *Vita*, where Aesop's master is named Xanthus; Aristotle in his πολ. Σαμίων (Fr. 573 Rose) says that Aesop first belonged to Xanthus and then to Ἴδμων. This I(a)dmon is said to come from Samos, but no such name is attested there—or indeed anywhere else;[52] and there is no attested Samian named Αἴσωπος.[53] Notably Herodotus also mentions a Ξάνθος (or Ξάνθης), a man who took the courtesan Rhodopis, Aesop's fellow-slave (she may or may not be a historical person)[54], to Egypt (2.135). It is possible that Xanthus' name in the *Vita* may originate from this tradition.[55] The name of the Samian philosopher is of special importance as it is the one name which is both related to the Samian tradition about Aesop, and present (and most central) in the *Vita*—but the name is only attested on Samos in the imperial period.[56] *Vita* W (90) mentions the name of Xanthus' father, Δεξικράτης, a name which is not unhistorical, but is totally absent from Samos.

Herodotus does not assume a Samian origin for Aesop, and indeed he does not mention any other place of origin for him; he mentions, though, that his fellow-slave Rhodopis was 'of Thracian birth'. This becomes more interesting in the light of the

[50] See more in M. L. West, 'The ascription of fables to Aesop in archaic and classical Greece', *Entretiens Hardt* 30 (1984), 105–28. Cf. *RE* Suppl. 14, s.v. Aisopos, esp. 21–2 (S. Josifović).

[51] Ar. *Vesp.* 566, 1446–8, *Av.* 471; and on the vase mentioned above (Beazley *ARV* ² 2 p. 916 no. 183) and perhaps also on some others, cf. Ogden (n. 37), 38. Aesop is mentioned by Aristotle (fr. 573 Rose), while in the fourth century B.C. he also became a hero of a Middle Comedy by Alexis (entitled Αἴσωπος, fr. 9 K-A), and there was a λόγων Αἰσωπείων συναγωγή by Demetrius of Phalerum.

[52] With the exception of one doubtful Idmon ([Ἴ]δμων) from Athens, third century B.C. (*LGPN II*). The two entries in *LGPN I* only list this specific Iadmon and his homonymous grandson (the source for both is the Aesop-related evidence in Hdt., Aristot. and Plut.). Robertson (n. 5), 248, n. 1; 254, n. 22 thinks the name must have been meaningful, but then surprisingly (and unconvincingly) suggests that it was understood to have a different meaning for grandfather and grandson. If Iadmon is the same name as Idmon (cf. also Heraclides Lembus, *Exc. Pol.* 33 Dilts), then a meaning 'Knowing' (which Robertson assumes for Aesop's master) is not impossible; but that the grandson's name could come to be connected with the (linguistically irrelevant!) ἰάομαι ('heal') is hardly realistic. The name of Iadmon's father (which we hear from Hdt. 2.134), Ἡφαιστόπολις, is unattested so far; although there are compound names starting with Ἡφαιστο- (Ἡφαιστόδωρος is the most common) and obviously many names in -πολις, these two elements are never found together in a name.

[53] The one Αἴσωπος in *IG* XII.2.754 (second century A.D.?) is a Σιδώνιος.

[54] See West (n. 50), 116–17. She was also called Doricha (Sapph. 15b,11 [perhaps also 7,1] Voigt). Cf. Heliod. 2.25.1,4. Ῥοδῶπις certainly was an unusual name: she is the only one from Thrace, and the only other occurrences of the name are two from Athens (on vases, late sixth–early fifth century B.C.) and one from Delphi (a slave, first century B.C.). The name (also that of a beautiful virgin in Ach. Tat. 8.12.1) is meaningful, 'rosy-faced' (*LSJ* s.v. ῥοδωπός), and almost identical with the name of the Thracian mountain-range Ῥοδόπη (already in Hdt. 4.49, 8.116). All this makes Ῥοδῶπις seem like an appropriate name (nick-name perhaps?) for a Thracian 'belle'. See also *RE* s.v. Ῥοδῶπις (J. Miller).

[55] Cf. West (n. 50), 118.

[56] Its earliest attestation could be in Athens, if the restoration of the name Ξσάν-[θος] (which appears on a vase) is correct (see *LGPN II*); otherwise the name is not attested before the fourth century B.C., except in Herodotus.

testimony of another historian: Euagon, who was a Samian himself, and roughly a contemporary of Herodotus,[57] states that Aesop was born in Thrace (Mesambria), on the west coast of the Black Sea (*FGrH* 535 fr. 4 = Perry, *Aesopica* Test. 6; this is followed by Aristotle, πολ. Σαμίων, fr. 573 Rose, and Heraclides Lembus, *Exc. Pol.* 33 Dilts).

It may be significant that a name *haisopos* is attested not very far from Thrace, in an inscription from Sigeium (the famous stele of Phanodicus), in the sixth century B.C.[58] The chances that Aesop was historical may seem even better if he bears an attested name (than if his name appears for the first time used of himself). In addition this particular attestation, which would be the earliest of the name, would imply that the name was in use—or at least known—at the time Aesop was supposed to have lived and near the place of origin given in the oldest tradition. However, the name on the Sigeium stele has a rough breathing, and it may not be the same name as Αἴσωπος— though *LGPN II* includes this attestation under Αἴσωπος. It is possible that the rough breathing denoted a slightly different form of Hellenization (perhaps in a different dialect?) of the same original name—though this *haisopos* possibly originated from Attica,[59] *hais-* hardly sounds like the beginning of a Greek name. On the other hand, the name Αἴσωπος itself seems rather to suggest a Phrygian origin; it is indeed similar to the name of the river and river-God Αἴσηπος in Phrygia and Mysia, as was pointed out a long time ago.[60] In this light a different view of the Xanthus of the *Vita* (or at least of the inspiration for the name) becomes possible: the figure of Aesop's master may indeed owe something to the fifth-century B.C. historian Xanthus from Lydia (*FGrH* 765).[61]

It appears that of all names that are relevant to Aesop in the evidence, it is the name Αἴσωπος itself which is the most telling. It may not guarantee the historicity of its bearer, but it makes him seem a historically more convincing figure by means of its connection with the places and the time associated with Aesop in the tradition. This (probably) non-Greek name, the accounts of Aesop's provenance from Thrace or

[57] Euagon must belong to the last third of the fifth century B.C.; he is regarded by Dion. of Hal. *De Thucydide* 5 as one of the earliest historians, but it is unclear whether he could have been one of Herodotus' sources. See further *RE* s.v. Euagon (1) (Jacoby). The name has often become corrupt, cf. e.g. the form Εὐγείτων in *Suda* s.v. Αἴσωπος (note that the *Suda* also mentions another Αἴσωπος, an obscure figure, a 'Μιθριδάτου ἀναγνώστης', who 'ἔγραψε περὶ Ἑλένης . . . καὶ Μιθριδάτου ἐγκώμιον'.

[58] *SIG* I³ 2 = *IG* I³ 1508.

[59] L. H. Jeffery, *The Local Scripts of Archaic Greece* (Oxford, 1990²), 366–7 considers this *haisopos* an Attic colonist, and he is included in *LGPN II* with a question-mark—Athens?. The attic dialect of the inscription and the connections of Athens with Sigeum may suggest (but do not guarantee) that he was an Athenian.

[60] See *RE* s.v. Fabel (Hausrath) and s.v. Aisepos (Hirschfeld). Cf. La Penna (n. 11), 274–5. The river Αἴσηπος is mentioned in the *Iliad*, together with other names of rivers which are believed to be foreign (*Il.* 12.20–2; cf. 2.825, 4.91; cf. also Strabo, 12.3.23). Αἴσηπος was also a personal name, that of a Trojan in the *Iliad* (6.21–2), significantly the son of a water-nymph with the strange name Ἀβαρβαρέη; it is also the name of a Phrygian in a sixth-century B.C. inscription from Cyzicus (*SIG* I³ 4); cf. L. Zgusta, *Kleinasiatische Personennamen* (Prague, 1964), 49–50. But the name is also found on an inscription from Thasos, for two men (third-second century B.C. and first century B.C.) who may be Greek; both are fathers of a Meleagros, which may reflect different generations of the same family; see *LGPN I*.

[61] The two are identified in *Suda* s.v. Αἴσωπος (Σάμιος ἢ Σαρδιανός . . . οἰκέτην δὲ γενέσθαι Ξάνθου τοῦ Λυδοῦ, ἄλλοι ἀνδρός τινος Σαμίου Ἰάδμονος). The force of this identification is weakened (but not demolished) by the fact that Xanthus was a common name; see further *RE* s.v. Xanthos (K. Ziegler), esp. 1354: 'mehr ist wohl nicht hinter dem Quiproquo zu suchen'.

Phrygia,[62] his slave status, and his connection with fable, are effectively mutually supportive: the Black Sea regions exported people for enslavement in Greece;[63] the origin of fable has now been firmly placed in the Orient,[64] and there are proven links between Aesop, Ahiqar,[65] and oriental wisdom-literature. Later evidence for the name Αἴσωπος may not be entirely coincidental: of the five occurrences of the name in Asia Minor, four come from Lydia;[66] of the five in *LGPN IV*, three are from Thrace.[67] Interestingly, the name was often used as a slave-name, perhaps inspired by Aesop's capacity as a slave.[68]

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[62] It is noteworthy that a link seems to have existed between Thrace and Phrygia in the form of the Βρύγοι, the Thracian neighbours of Macedon (Hdt. 6.45), who were probably connected with the Βρίγες, the European ancestors of the Phrygians (Hdt. 7.73); see W. W. How and J. Wells, *A Commentary on Herodotus* 2 (Oxford, 1928), 80. I thank Dr K. Kopanias for drawing my attention to these passages.

[63] This was an existing practice already in the seventh century B.C.; see M. I. Finley, *Economy and Society in Ancient Greece* (London, 1981), 167–75. The theme of the philosopher-slave was, by the time of the composition of the *Vita*, a familiar one; see S. Mazzarino, *Il pensiero storico classico* 2.2 (Bari, 1966), 131–99.

[64] Cf. West (n. 50), 106.

[65] Ahiqar too, an Assyrian name, has an etymological meaning, 'precious brother'. See *The Interpreter's Dictionary of the Bible* (n. 45), s.v. Ahiqar.

[66] The remaining one is possibly from Pontus; four fall between the second century B.C. and 100 A.D., and one (from Lydia, *SEG* 48 [1998] 1431) is later, around 211–12 A.D. The collection of onomastic data from Asia Minor is ongoing; I am grateful to Prof. Marijana Ricl for providing additional data for Lydia.

[67] The other two are from Italy (first century B.C.–second century A.D.).

[68] See Solin (n. 24), 255; the most notable entry is Clodius Aesopus, a tragic actor and a friend of Cicero, see *RE* s.v. Clodius Aesopus (16) (Münzer). An Αἴσωπος of unknown provenance was a slave at Athens as early as the fifth century B.C. (*IG* I³ 1032, 397). Αἴσωπος the sculptor (his name is attested on a couple of inscriptions from Calymnos of the second–first century B.C.), was perhaps a slave (*TCal.* 136–7; cf. *RE* Suppl. 8 s.v. Aisopos (G. Lippold). The status of the third century A.D. Aesop from Lydia (n. 66) was probably that of a slave.