

# Ancient Catalogues of Aristotle's Works: Hesychius and Ptolemy al-Garib

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## THE EXTANT CATALOGUES OF ARISTOTLE'S WORKS

We have three catalogues of the writings of Aristotle:

[Diogenes Laërtius \*Lives of Eminent Philosophers\* - Book V. \*The Peripatetics\* 22-27](#) (III century);

The anonymous *Vita Menagiana* or *Vita Hesychii*, attributed to Hesychius of Miletus (V century);

The catalogue attributed to Ptolemy el-Garib and transmitted in two Arabic version by Ibn al-Qifti (ca. 1172-1248) and Ibn Abi Usaibia (1203-1270) (IV century?).

See the [Catalogue of Titles of works attributed by Aristotle \(PDF\)](#) compiled by Monte Ransome Johnson

for the Greek text and an English translation and the [Annotated bibliography](#) for the critical editions.

## THE ANONYMOUS *VITA MENAGIANA* OR *VITA HESYCHII*

"The Vita is known in the literature under the name of *Vita Menagiana*, because it was first edited by Gilles Ménage in the London edition of Diogenes, 1663. His *Animadversiones*, extended and considerably improved, were then published in the beautiful folio edition, Amsterdam 1693, printed by H. Wetstenius, together with the notes of H. Stephanus, Casaubonus father and son, and others; a veritable treasure-house from which all later commentators have borrowed material.

V. Rose reprinted the Index Hesychii in his *Aristoteles pseudepigraphus*, pp. 18-20, reporting that Tischendorf had seen a manuscript of the Vita Hesychii ("cum edito plane conspirantem") in St. John's monastery in Patmos. The Index is reprinted in the Berlin edition of Aristotle, vol. 5, p. 1466, and then in Rose's *Aristotelis fragmenta*, 1886, together with the Vita. It was also reprinted by Buhle in the first volume of his edition, by Westermann in his *Vitarum scriptores*, and by Flach in his *Hesychii Milesii Onomatologi quae supersunt*. P. Moraux in his *Listes anciennes des ouvrages d'Aristote* deals at length with problems connected with the Index librorum."

From: Ingemar Düring - *Aristotle in the ancient biographical tradition*. Stockholm: Almqvist & Wiksell 1957, pp. 80-81.

"If we count the books listed in the first part of the catalogue (1-139), accepting the transmitted numbers of books and assuming, when no figure is given, that the title represents one book, we get 403 books plus the 158 books of the Politics. Moraux counted in the original list of Hermippus (or as he believed, Ariston) 551 books (*Listes anciennes*, p. 192). The number of *stikoi*, according to Hermippus' catalogue was 445.270, corresponding roughly to 550 papyrus-rolls of about 800 lines each.

(...)

Hesychius' Catalogue of Aristotle's writings has been dealt with at length by P. Moraux, *Listes anciennes*, pp. 195-271. Plezia has a note on the catalogue in *De Andronici Rhodii studiis*, p. 51.

On the first part of the catalogue, titles 1-139, there is general agreement. As appears from the following survey, it is essentially the same *Pinax* as that transmitted by Hermippus.

Nos. 1-24. The works most widely known to the general public in Hellenistic times; the list agrees pretty well with Hermippus.

Nos. 25-68. Logical and dialectical writings; a few titles misplaced, but the general agreement with Hermippus is obvious. It is interesting to see that both lists preserve an old error: *ethikon* (title 38 in Diogenes Laërtius, 39 in Hesychius).

Nos. 69-70, and title 64, misplaced; the same three "political" writings as in Hermippus.

Nos. 81-98, eighteen writings on natural philosophy and biology; as in Hermippus, the list ends up with two interpolated titles, 97-98, another old error which both lists have preserved.

Nos. 99-104, the same six mathematical and astronomical writings as in Hermippus.

Nos. 105-119, hypomnematic writings; No. 111 must be a late addition, perhaps by Hesychius himself.

Nos. 120-131, collectanea; No. 121 is perhaps the general title. No. 123 has preserved an ancient gloss, probably an annotation by the librarian who made up the original *Pinax*. "This is the book by which he defeated the corresponding book of Menaechmus."

Nos. 132-133, added in the same way as Hermippus 141-142. Nos. 135-139, the same as Hermippus.

Both catalogues, then, are transcribed from the same original. According to Heitz, DL is more reliable, according to Howald the list of Hesychius is a deteriorated copy of the list in DL. Like Moraux I am more inclined to believe that Diogenes and Hesychius independently used the same original, and that in some small and rather unimportant details Hesychius has preserved the original better than Diogenes. At least two additions are very late and may be ascribed to Hesychius himself: title 96 (this work was not divided into two books until the second century A. D.), and title 111.

The *appendix Hesychiana*, titles 140-197, raises problems which can never be answered satisfactorily. Moraux's hypotheses are very ingenious, but I doubt whether he can persuade anybody to believe in them. And what has Porphyry to do with this list? As far as I know, his *Philosophos historia* did not include a biography of Aristotle, let alone a Catalogue of his writings, genuine or spurious.

The *appendix* consists of four different parts.

Nos. 140-147 belong to the class of *aporemata* or *problemata*, possibly with one exception, No. 140.

Nos. 148-158, a selection of the well-known pragmaties, as edited by Andronicus.

Nos. 159-187, a list of various writings, inviting wild conjectures as to the original arrangement. Christ, and later Plezia, suggested that this is an inventory of a Hellenistic library, e.g. in Rhodes or Pergamon, an attractive and simple hypothesis which, however, as Plezia rightly says, "aequo iure affirmari ac negari potest".

Nos. 188-197, a list of pseudepigrapha. Such a list was probably included in Andronicus' work; at least he discussed the titles of spurious works. Diogenes merely says that he knows that some books, circulated under Aristotle's name, are *anaepsilekta*. Moraux's reconstruction of the original alphabetical order in this list, p. 271, is attractive but does not carry us any further.

Hesychius, a diligent collector of facts, must have compiled this appendix from different sources. The first and the third section are probably pre-Andronicean. The second list, 148-158, is certainly made after Andronicus, but equally certain is that the titles are quite arbitrarily ranged. If Hesychius had known Andronicus' work, he would hardly have presented such a disordered list of the pragmaties. It is therefore more likely that this section, too, is an inventory of a library. It is futile to make any conjectures concerning the fourth section.

As to the individual titles, I refer to Moraux's careful and valuable comments. A characteristic feature of this catalogue is that so many of the titles are in the accusative. The history of the transmission of this list is entirely unknown; it may, or may not have been interfered with during this process.

It is generally assumed that the *Vita Hesychii* is an epitome of the original *Onomatologon* of Hesychius, and the language in ([*Vita Hesychii*] 4) would lend some support to this hypothesis. Concerning the relationship with Diogenes we can only say that Hesychius used the same biographical sources, but the mixture is his own, and on two or three points he transmits information which is plainly wrong and not found anywhere else. The catalogue proves that he had access to post-Andronicean sources.

The *Suda* contains an excerpt of our *Vita* under No. 3929 Adler. The text is identical with that of Ambros. 490 with a few minor variants, annotated in the critical apparatus."

From: Ingemar Düring - *Aristotle in the ancient biographical tradition*. Stockholm: Almqvist & Wiksell 1957, pp. 90-92.

## PTOLEMY EL-GARIB (OR AL-GHARIB)

"It is commonly held that the two surviving Syriac and the four extant Arabic *Vitae Aristotelis* are ultimately based on the biographical tradition represented or inaugurated by Ptolemy (-el-Garib) and his (lost) *Vita Aristotelis*.(1) Probably in the course of the fifth or sixth century A.D., a Syriac translation was made of Ptolemy's *Vita* or, more likely, of an epitome of this *Vita*. Of this original translation, only two rather scanty abridgements by some Syriac biographers survive, namely, *I Vita Aristotelis Syriaca* and *II Vita Aristotelis Syriaca*, which might also be called short resumes of an older and more comprehensive Syriac translation of Ptolemy's original Greek *Vita Aristotelis* or of an epitome of this *Vita*.

The Syriac translation of either Ptolemy's *Vita* or that of an epitome of this *Vita*, together with some additional (probably Neo-Platonic) materials transmitted through several intermediary sources, ultimately became the foundation of the four Arabic *Vitae Aristotelis*. It has been surmised that towards the end of the ninth century A.D., Ishaq Ibn Hunayn translated into Arabic a Syriac rendition of Ptolemy's *Vita* or, rather, of a Syriac translation of an epitome of this *Vita*. In any event, the Arabic biographers, without exception, ultimately derived their information and materials, through the intermediary of Syriac translators, from Ptolemy, although they seem to have included in their *Vitae* not only some elements that were probably added (or invented) by the Syriac translators (or by the Arabic biographers themselves), but also bits of information gleaned from some other (Neo-Platonic?) reports or accounts. There exists no evidence, however, that the later Arabic biographers made direct use of Greek or Syriac sources. It might be correct to maintain, therefore, that the Syriac and Arabic biographers, like the Neo-Platonic School of Ammonius, derived most of their information concerning the life of Aristotle from Ptolemy (-el-Garib) and his *Vita Aristotelis*.(2)

The four major Arabic biographers of Aristotle are: Al-Mubassir (or Al-Mubashir, subsequently cited as *II VA*), who wrote during the latter part of the eleventh century; (3) Ibn Abi Usaibia (subsequently cited as *IV VA*), who wrote during the latter part of the thirteenth century; (4) Ibn an-Nadim (subsequently cited as *I VA*), who wrote near the end of the tenth century; (5) and Al-Qifti Gamaladdin (subsequently cited as *III VA*), who wrote during the first half of the thirteenth century.(6) A cursory examination of the Arabic (and Syriac) *Vitae Aristotelis* might indicate that especially *I VA*, *II VA* and *IV VA*, which are based on a single main source, are quite similar in content. Closer analysis reveals, however, that there exist quite a few significant differences in the facts selected and discussed by the different Arabic biographers. It is also obvious that some of the later Arabic biographers simply copied from some earlier Arabic author. Thus, Usaibia, for instance, occasionally seems to quote from Mubashir without, however, acknowledging his source." pp. 54-55

(...)

"A long list of Aristotle's writings is preserved by Usaibia. This list or catalogue, which includes a number of pseudepigrapha, ultimately goes back to the list compiled by Ptolemy (-el-Garib).(104) A brief classification of Aristotle's works can also be found in An-Nadim (*I VA* 18). Mubashir (*II VA* 35), who maintains that Aristotle 'wrote many books, about one hundred, and that it is said that apart from these one hundred books he wrote others too,' (105) enumerates only twenty works which he claims to have seen, namely, 'eight books on logic; eight (actually seven) books on physics; (106) one book on ethics; one book on constitutions; one large book called *Metaphysics*, also known by the title of *Theology*, that is, *Divine Discourse*; one book on mathematics; and one book on mechanics.' (107)

A comparison of the Syriac and Arabic *Vitae Aristotelis* with other *Vitae* -- Diogenes Laërtius V. 1-16,(108) *Vita Aristotelis Marciana*, *Vita Aristotelis Vulgata*, *Vita Aristotelis Latina* and *Vita Aristotelis Hesychii* (*Vita Menagiana* or *Vita Menagii*) -- indicates that the Syriac and Arabic biographies supplement and implement, and must be implemented by, these other *Vitae*." pp. 68-69

(1) See A.-H. Chroust, 'A brief account of the traditional *Vitae Aristotelis*,' *Revue des Etudes Grecques*, vol. 77, nos. 364-5 (1964), pp. 50-69, especially, pp. 60-9, and Chapter I. The title of Ptolemy's *Vita Aristotelis* probably was something like 'On the Life of Aristotle, His Last Will and Testament, and a List of His Writings.' See Elias (olim David), *Commentaria in Porphyrii Isagogen et in Aristotelis Categorias*, CIAG, vol. XVIII, part I (ed. A. Busse, Berlin, 1900), p. 107, line 7, where we are told that Ptolemy wrote

about Aristotle's 'list of writings, about his life, and about his last will and testament.' *I VA* 19 (An-Nadim) reports that 'Ptolemy-el-Garib . . . is the author of a book "On the Life of Aristotle, His Death, and the Classification of his Writings.'" See also *IV VA* (Usaibia), at the beginning. For the Syriac and Arabic *Vitae Aristotelis*, see, in general, F. A. Muller, 'Die griechischen Philosophen in der arabischen Überlieferung,' *Festschrift der Frankischen Stiftungen für Professor Bernhardt* (Halle, 1873); F. A. Muller, 'Das Arabische Verzeichnis der Aristotelischen Schriften,' *Morgenländische Forschungen: Festschrift für H. L. Fischer*[=Fleischer] (Leipzig, 1875); M. Steinschneider, 'Die arabischen Übersetzungen aus dem Griechischen,' *Centralblatt für Bibl.-Wesen*, Beiheft no. II, part 5 (Leipzig, 1890-1), and Beiheft no. IV, part 12 (Leipzig, 1893); J. Lippert, *Studien auf dem Gebiete der Griechisch-Arabischen Übersetzungsliteratur* (Braunschweig, 1894); A. Baumstark, 'Lucubrationes Syrio-Graecae,' *Jahrbuch für Klassische Philologie*, Supplement, vol. 21 (Leipzig, 1894), pp. 333-524; A. Baumstark, *Syrisch-Arabisches Biographien des Aristoteles* (Leipzig, 1900); J. Lippert, *Ibn al-Qiftis Tarih al-Hukama* (Leipzig, 1903). For additional and detailed information about the literature on our subject, see M. Guidi and R. Walzer, 'Studi su al-Kindi I: un scritto introduttivo allo studio di Aristotele,' *Memorie della Reale Accademia Nazionale dei Lincei. Classe di Scienze Morali*, series VI, vol. VI, fasc. 5 (Rome, 1940), pp. 375-419; R. Walzer, 'New light on the Arabic translations of Aristotle,' *Oriens*, vol. VI (1953), pp. 91-142; I. During, *Aristotle in the Ancient Biographical Tradition*, *Acta Universitatis Gothoburgensis*, vol. LXIII, no. 2 (Goteborg, 1957), pp. 183-92, 193-246.

(3) His full name is Abu-(e)l-Wafa al-Mubashir (or Mubassir) Ibn Fatik. He authored the *Kitab Mukhtar al-Hikam wa-Mahasin al-Kilam* (The Book of Selections of Wisdom and Wonderful Sayings). For simplicity's sake the accents on the Arabic words have been omitted.

(4) He authored the *Kitab uyun al-Anba fi Tabaqat al-Atibba* (The Book of Sources for Information Concerning the School of Physicians). Usaibia, who died in 1270, was a physician.

(5) His full name is Ibn Abi Yaquub an-Nadim. He authored the *Kitab al-Fihrist*, which was written before the year 987. This work, like that of Al-Qifti (see note 6), is more in the nature of a 'biographical encyclopedia.'

(6) His full name is Al-Qifti Gamaladdin al-Qadi al-Akram. He authored the *Tabaqat al-Hukama* (The School of Wise Men). He died in 1248. See note 5.

Neither the work of An-Nadim nor that of AlQifti will be used extensively.

(104) Usaibia also contains a short survey of Aristotle's writings. This survey is based upon, or taken from, Ibn Said Al-Qordubi.

(105) The number 'one hundred' is probably a mistranslation or misreading of the Greek *chilioi* (one thousand), which can be found in *Vita Marciana* 45 and *Vita Lascaris* 48.

(106) Like An-Nadim (*I VA* 18), Mubashir (*II VA* 35) actually recites only seven titles on 'physics.'

(107) Mubashir (*II VA* 36) also mentions the 'public' and private letters of Aristotle. These 'public' letters might well contain the 'official reports' which Aristotle sent to Macedonia and to Antipater in particular. In his *Oration Against the Philosophers* of 306 B.C., Demochares implies that Aristotle 'conspired' with Macedonia against Athens.(...)

(108) A.-H. Chroust, 'A Brief Analysis of the Vita Aristotelis of Diogenes Laërtius (DL V. 11-16),' pp. 97-129, and Chapter III.

From: Anton-Hermann Chroust - *Aristotle. New light on his life and on some of his lost works - Vol. I. Some novel interpretations of the man and his life* - London, Routledge & Kegan Paul, 1973, pp. 54-55; 68-69

"The *Kitab al-Fihrist* by Ibn An-Nadim: "Ptolemy-el-Garib who was an adherent of Aristotle and spread

knowledge about his merits; he is the author of a book *On the life of Aristotle, his death, and the classification of his writings*. -- Usaibia, in the introduction to his biography, says: "Thus speaks Ptolemy in his book to Gallus on the life and history of Aristotle, his Will and the list of his famous writings." -- Apart from the fact that his name is mentioned several times in the biographies, this is all information we have on Ptolemy in Arabic sources." Düring, *cit.*, p. 195

"The *Life of Aristotle* current in the neoplatonic schools was written by a certain Ptolemy. The identification of this Ptolemy, the character and scope of his biography, the relationship of the numerous late epitomes to the original work: all this is very problematic.

We possess three neoplatonic epitomes, all from the fifth century, Vita Marciana, Vita vulgata, and Vita Latina; the two Syriac Vitae are probably from the same period; the Arabic tradition is represented by an-Nadim's *Fihrist*, transcribed by al-Qifti, and by the extracts in al-Mubashir and Usaibia; there are also some scattered fragments of other writers; the entire Arabic tradition goes back to a translation (or epitome) of Ptolemy's Life of Aristotle, presumably made by Ishaq ibn Hunayn towards the end of the ninth century.

All the material handed down to us in these nine Vitae is very uniform in its general character, in spite of differences in details. But sometimes, even in small details, their agreement is complete, as I have shown in my comments. I do not for a moment doubt that these nine Vitae ultimately are derived from the same common source, Ptolemy's Life of Aristotle. I have found no vestiges of any other independent source. This conclusion is confirmed by the neoplatonic prolegomena. The biographical material in these prolegomena (and incidentally in the commentaries) shows such close relationship with the Vitae and with Ptolemy's Catalogue of Aristotle's writings that there is no room for doubt.

The examination of the three Greek and Latin Vitae has led to the result that they are three independent versions of the same original epitome. This epitome was used as the basis of oral instruction in the school of Ammonius Hermeiu and by his disciples Olympiodorus, David and Elias. It was also used by Philoponus and Simplicius, and after the time of Elias and David by the anonymous professor called Pseudo-Elias: thus by three generations of students from about 480 A. D. until the middle of the following century.

The Syriac Vitae are very meagre in content and not derived directly from any of the existing epitomes; they too must be regarded as independent versions of the same original. They may have been current in the school of Ibas of Edessa, but it is also possible that they are products of the seventh century used in the schools of Bishop Sebocht of Qennesrin or Jacob of Edessa.

The Arabic tradition is rich in facts which are not found at all in the Greek and Syriac Vitae, and in many cases when the Greek Vitae merely contain a hint or a simple fact, we find a more elaborate account in the Arabic tradition. The Arabic tradition has been unduly neglected; as I have shown in my comments, it contains much valuable material of undoubtedly Greek origin; the Arabic elaborations, distortions and embellishments stand out clearly, and in most cases we can easily detach them. The Arabic text of Aristotle's Will affords an excellent criterion, since we can directly compare the Greek and the Arabic text paragraph by paragraph. The result is that there is a remarkable agreement between Diogenes' text (derived from Hermippus, probably via Phavorinus), and the Arabic text (derived from Andronicus, via Ptolemy, via Ishaq's translation and other possible intermediate sources). As a matter of fact, the Arabic text of the Will is in certain respects superior to that given by Diogenes. This should warn us not to be too suspicious of the Arabic tradition. The criteria that I have used in my scrutiny of the Arabic sources are these: agreement in substance with Greek sources, agreement in language of such a kind that it is possible to recognize typically Greek idioms behind the Arabic text, and finally, agreement in tendency.

Ptolemy's biography has a clear tendency: it is a glorification of Aristotle, based on some typically neoplatonic conceptions. Aristotle is *dios Aristoteles*. He was entrusted to Plato in compliance with an oracle of the God in Delphi. He made an extraordinary impression on Plato, and when Plato went on his second visit to Sicily, he deputed as head of the school. He was held in great honour by Philip and

Alexander and was very influential in political affairs, "using philosophy as an instrument". He dissuaded Alexander from attacking Persia, telling him that the omens were unfavourable. He was great as a benefactor, both towards individuals and cities. The inhabitants of Stagira honoured him in many ways after his death. They believed that "their coming to the place where Aristotle's remains were buried would purify their minds". It is said that a swarm of bees was found around the urn containing his ashes. And so forth.

It is further characteristic of Ptolemy's biography that he frequently refers to Aristotle's correspondence as evidence. It is probable that he used Artemon's collection of letters and the additional collection made by Andronicus as principal sources. The section on chronology is probably taken from Hermippus; the fact that Aristotle was not elected head of the Academy after Plato's death is explained in exactly the same way as by Hermippus: "Aristotle was on a mission to Macedonia". Other facts are of such a nature that it is impossible to determine whether he has taken them from Hermippus or from the *koiné historia*. Although his tendency to glorify Aristotle forbids us to speak of critical scholarship, it cannot be denied that his biography is a scholarly work, based on extensive investigations and a thorough knowledge of the biographical tradition. He wanted to find material likely to extol Aristotle and present him as an almost divine personality, and he found it. If suitable for his purpose, he transferred to Aristotle qualities, honours, and actions originally ascribed to other persons. Philip, Alexander and Antipater were honoured by the Athenians after the battle of Chaeronea with statues on the Acropolis and the status of *proxenoi* -- Ptolemy felt no scruples in transferring this to Aristotle, perhaps using faked letters as evidence; other examples of similar transfers are cited in my comments. The habit as such is old; a short time after Aristotle's death the historian Eumelus is already describing Aristotle as a second Socrates. Ptolemy is really critical only when he refutes stories which, if believed, could damage the memory of his idol." Düring, *cit.*, p. 469-471

"Who was this Ptolemy and when did he live? The identification with Ptolemaios Chennos should in my opinion be discarded. The general character of the Vita tells us that the author was a neoplatonist, writing after Porphyry's time. A neoplatonist named Ptolemy is mentioned as disciple of Porphyry and Iamblichus, Stobaeus I 378 Wachsmuth; he might well be our Ptolemy. But the name was indeed very common, especially in Alexandria. A curious detail in *Fihrist* 15 is the dating of Aristotle's death to "the beginning of the reign of Ptolemy, son of Lagos". An Arabic writer can hardly have invented this; it must be derived from Ptolemy; it would be natural for an Alexandrian scholar to use the Alexandrian List of Kings instead of or parallel with the Athenian List of Archons. This is admittedly a weak argument, but it points to Alexandria. So does the scholarly character of the biography. My conclusion, then, is that Ptolemy was a member of Porphyry's and Iamblichus' school and that he wrote his Life of Aristotle in the first half of the fourth century. I base this conclusion mainly on the general tendency of the biography.

Two problems, in themselves of little importance, must be left open: the alleged dedication of the biography to a certain Gallus, and the name Ptolemy-el-Garib. The simplest solution is to accept both facts as true. Dedications of books to Roman noblemen was a common habit; Porphyry is a good example. It is possible to translate el-Garib with "the unknown", and explain it as a surname given to him by Ishaq to distinguish him from the well-known Ptolemy, the author of *Al-Magest*. Other possible explanations are discussed in my comments on al-Qifti.

With this my brief survey comes to an end. After Ptolemy no ancient writer is known who has made an independent or original contribution to the biographical tradition.

The biographical tradition on Aristotle is interesting from two quite different points of view. Part of this material is important because it is true and gives us knowledge about the historical Aristotle, about the events of his life and about his personality. His Will is one of the most precious documents that antiquity has preserved to us. Another part of the fragments and the biographies is interesting because it provides us with material for a history of Aristotelianism. But it is not my object in this book, either to write a Life of Aristotle or a history of the changes in the conception of his personality and importance as a philosopher

and scholar, but rather to provide a source-book for such work." Düring, *cit.*, pp. 475-476

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