

# Ancient Greek Commentaries on Aristotle's *Categories*

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## INTRODUCTION

“The five introductions to the study of Aristotle by Ammonius, Olympiodorus, Elias, Philoponus and Simplicius give us a very good idea of the organization of the neoplatonic exegesis. The elaborated plan, and the long list of predecessors which Simplicius gives, make it certain that the five extant prolegomena are the result of a long development. Part of the material used in the prolegomena is old, especially the facts presented in the chapter on the names of the different philosophic schools (see Diels, *Doxographi* p. 246). But the scholastic approach and outlook is so apparent even in the earliest of these prolegomena,

that of Ammonius, that we cannot go too far back. Porphyry, Iamblichus, Syrian and Proclus were great individualists, compared to Ammonius and his disciples, and their prolegomena have a different character. Simplicius says, CIAG [*Commentaria in Aristotelem Graeca*] VIII, p. 3.3, that he has freely used and transcribed Iamblichus' commentary, and it is possible that Iamblichus added prolegomena of the later type, but on the whole I am more inclined to regard Ammonius as the real originator of this scholastic type of introduction. Littig and, more recently, Moraux are certainly wrong in assuming that the elaborate neoplatonic classification of Aristotle's writings goes back to Andronicus. Firstly, there is no ancient evidence at all for this hypothesis, and that in itself ought to be enough; secondly, the prolegomena are throughout coloured by neoplatonic conceptions and doctrines; thirdly, they are intimately connected with a type of scholastic and professional study of Aristotle which cannot have existed earlier than in the fourth or fifth century; they are also so closely connected with Porphyry's famous *Isagoge* that, as Praechter says, the whole course could be entitled "Erklärung von Porphyrius' *Eisagoge* mit Einleitung in die Philosophie". Generally speaking, the highly speculative character of this classification is incompatible with what we know of Andronicus and his period. We may compare the Alexandrian and Hellenistic approach in the extracts preserved by Diogenes III 65.

The edition of Aristotle's works used in the neoplatonic school in Athens about 500 A. D. was the same as that we possess, i. e., in principle, Andronicus' edition. It was introduced by the *Categories*, preceded by a short biography of Aristotle, late copies of which we possess in the *Vitae Marciana* and *vulgata*. This biography, which included a list of Aristotle's writings, was an epitome of Ptolemy's *Vita*."

From: Ingemar Düring - *Aristotle in the ancient biographical tradition*. Stockholm: Almqvist & Wiksell 1957, pp. 444-445.

(to be continued...)

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