

Veda Renzulli

Greco-Roman Political Thought

## **Primary Sources of Aristotle's from the composition to the first Greek Printed Edition**

### **What are we trying to trace?**

- The works of Aristotle that survive are mostly school texts, lecture notes, and drafts
- But how did the 4th- century documents from an Athenian School end up being printed in Renaissance Venice?

### **Notice:**

Most narrative sources are centuries after the events that are described, often without citing their own personal sources, so we just have to use their word of mouth and assume it to be possibly true

---

Some Sources:

Diogenes Laertius, *Lives of the Eminent Philosophers*, roughly 210-220 CE

Such then was the life of the philosopher. I have also come across his will, which is worded thus:

"All will be well; but, in case anything should happen, Aristotle has made these dispositions. Antipater is to be executor in all matters and in general; [12] but, until Nicanor shall arrive, Aristomenes, Timarchus, Hipparchus, Dioteles and (if he consent and if circumstances permit him) Theophrastus shall take charge as well of Herpyllis and the children as of the property. And when the girl shall be grown up she shall be given in marriage to Nicanor; but if anything happen to the girl (which heaven forbid and no such thing will happen) before her marriage, or when she is married but before there are children, Nicanor shall have full powers, both with regard to the child and with regard to everything else, to administer in a manner worthy both of himself and of us. Nicanor shall take charge of the girl and of the boy Nicomachus as he shall think fit in all that concerns them as if he were father and brother. And if anything should happen to Nicanor (which heaven forbid!) either before he marries the girl, or when he has married her but before there are children, any arrangements that he may make shall be valid. [13] And if Theophrastus is willing to live with her, he shall have the same rights as Nicanor. Otherwise the executors in consultation with Antipater shall administer as regards the daughter and the boy as seems to them to be best. The executors and Nicanor, in memory of me and of the steady affection which Herpyllis has borne towards me, shall take care of her in every other respect and, if she desires to be married, shall see that she be given to one not unworthy; and besides what she has already received they shall give her a talent of silver out of the estate and three handmaids whomsoever she shall choose besides the maid she has at present and the man-servant Pyrrhaeus; [14] and if she chooses to

a. What does this tell us?

- This document tells us what is in Aristotle's will: naming Theophrastus as the recipient of the books along with in charge of the household.
- Theophrastus of Eresus was one of Aristotle's students

b. Problem(s):

- Diogenes writes around 550 years after Aristotle's death
- Diogenes was not a critical historian, he was a collector and rarely brought up any uncertainties of legitimacy in his writings

- His collections are widely accepted as genuine from the archives

c. How:

- It is said Diogenes likely drew this information from Hermippus of Smyrna who wrote about many philosophers' wills much closer to the events.

---

Strabo, *Geographica*, XII, roughly 20 CE

[https://penelope.uchicago.edu/Thayer/E/Roman/Texts/Strabo/13A3\\*.html#ref34](https://penelope.uchicago.edu/Thayer/E/Roman/Texts/Strabo/13A3*.html#ref34)

(This was a collection/ encyclopedia of Strabo's geographical knowledge including 17 "books")



(Image above: Strabo's view of the world)

<sup>54</sup> From Scepsis came the Socratic philosophers Erastus and Coriscus and Neleus the son of Coriscus, this last a man who was not only a pupil of Aristotle and Theophrastus, but also inherited the library of Theophrastus, which included that of Aristotle. At any rate, Aristotle bequeathed his own library to Theophrastus, to whom he also left his school; and he is the first man, so far as I know, to have collected books and to have taught the kings in Egypt how to arrange a library. Theophrastus bequeathed it to Neleus; and Neleus took it to Scepsis and bequeathed it to his heirs, ordinary people, who kept the books locked up and not even carefully stored. But when they heard how zealously the Attalic kings<sup>32</sup> to whom the city was subject were searching for books to build up the library in Pergamum, they hid their books underground in a kind of trench. But much later, when the books had been damaged by moisture and moths, their descendants sold them to Apellicon<sup>33</sup> of Teos for a large sum of money, both the books of Aristotle and those of Theophrastus. But Apellicon was a bibliophile rather than a philosopher; and therefore, seeking a restoration of the parts that had been eaten through, he made new copies of the text, filling up the gaps incorrectly, and published the books full of errors. The result was that the earlier school of Peripatetics who came after Theophrastus had no books at all, with the exception of only a few, mostly exoteric works, and were therefore able to philosophise about nothing in a practical way, but only to talk bombast about commonplace propositions, whereas the later school, from the time the books in question appeared, though better able to philosophise and Aristotelise, were forced to call most of their statements probabilities, because of the large number of errors.<sup>34</sup> Rome also contributed much to this; for, immediately after the death of Apellicon, Sulla, who had captured Athens, carried off Apellicon's library to Rome, where Tyrannion the grammarian, who was fond of Aristotle, got it in his hands by paying court to the librarian, as did also certain booksellers who used bad copyists and would not collate the texts — a thing that also takes place in the case of the other books that are copied for selling, both here<sup>35</sup> and at Alexandria. However, this is enough about these men.

What does this tell us?

- It tells us what happened to the library after Theophrastus
- Theophrastus left the books to Neleus, then Neleus' heirs hid them, yet not carefully, from the Attalic/Attalid dynasty of Pergamon kings
- The books then got damaged by moths and moisture
- Apellicon, a bibliophile eventually bought the damaged collection, to then make "copies" of what had been damaged by making up the gaps of literature
- These copies were then sold in Athens to the school of Peripatetics, which were told to read these copies with a grain of salt due to the errors
- After the death of Apellicon, Sulla a roman dictator who had captured Athens, brought the library to Rome where a man named Tyrannion the grammarian got the books

Problem(s):

- ~200 year gap
  - Theophrastus died in 287 BCE
  - Apellicon was active in 10 BCE
  - Strabo did not witness this
  - Aristotelian texts were circulated throughout this period of concealment, early Stoics engaged with them
  - Maybe this was just a private collection as opposed to the whole tradition

How:

- Strabo was from Asia minor and worked in Rome after Sulla's conquest
  - Perhaps oral or written accounts were from Anatolian or Roman scholarly networks

---

Plutarch, *Life of Sulla*, 26, around 100 CE

[https://penelope.uchicago.edu/Thayer/E/Roman/Texts/Plutarch/Lives/Sulla\\*.html](https://penelope.uchicago.edu/Thayer/E/Roman/Texts/Plutarch/Lives/Sulla*.html)

26<sup>1</sup> Having put to sea with all his ships from Ephesus, on the third day he came to anchor in Piraeus. He was now initiated into the mysteries, and seized for himself the library of Apellicon the Teian, in which were most of the treatises of Aristotle and Theophrastus, at that time not yet well known to the public. But it is said that after the library was carried to Rome, Tyrannio the grammarian arranged most of the works in it, and that Andronicus the Rhodian was furnished by him with copies of them, and published them, and drew up the lists now current. 2 The old Peripatetics were evidently of themselves accomplished and learned men, but they seem to have had neither a large nor an exact acquaintance with the writings of Aristotle and Theophrastus, because the estate of Neleus of Scepsis, to whom Theophrastus bequeathed his books, came into the hands of careless and illiterate people. <sup>45</sup>

What does this tell us?

- When Sulla seized Athens, he acquired Apellicon's library and shipped it to Rome

Problem(s):

- 180 years after the sack of Athens and Piraeus (87-86 BC)
- He doesn't distinguish the difference between the manuscripts or the copies of Aristotle in Apellicon's collection

How:

- Plutarch was concerned with using sources systematically
- Multiple Roman sources were available to him to use as a reference

---

Porphyry, *Life of Plotinus*, 24, roughly 300-301 CE

[https://www-loebclassics-com.ezproxy.uvm.edu/view/porphyry-life\\_plotinus\\_order\\_his\\_books/1969/pb\\_LCL440.73.xml?rskey=jKZARu&result=1](https://www-loebclassics-com.ezproxy.uvm.edu/view/porphyry-life_plotinus_order_his_books/1969/pb_LCL440.73.xml?rskey=jKZARu&result=1)

24. This, then, is my account of the life of Plotinus. He himself entrusted me with the arrangement and editing of his books, and I promised him in his lifetime and gave undertakings to our other friends that I would carry out this task. So first of all I did not think it right to leave the books in confusion in order of time as they were issued. I followed the example of Apollodorus of Athens,<sup>1</sup> who collected the works of Epicharmus the comedian into ten volumes, and Andronicus the Peripatetic,<sup>2</sup> who classified the works of Aristotle and Theophrastus according to subject, bringing together the discussions of related topics. So I, as I had fifty-four treatises of Plotinus, divided them into six sets of nine (Enneads)—it gave me pleasure to find the perfection of the number six along with the nines. I put related treatises together in each Ennead, giving the first place to the less difficult questions.<sup>3</sup>

What does this tell us?

- It discusses Andronicus of Rhode's categorizing Aristotle's world
- He produces the first organized edition of Aristotle known as the *Corpus Aristotelicum*

Problems(s):

- ~350 years after Andronicus
- Such a brief reference so cannot be verified completely

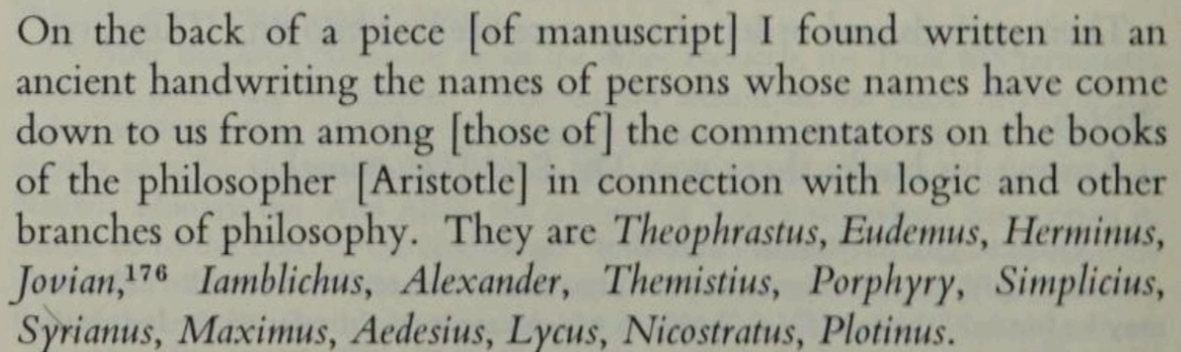
How:

- Porphyry was a philosopher who must've had access to Andronicus' own catalogue
- Andronicus was apparently aided by Simplicius, a Neoplatonist, who attested to Andronicus being the systematic editor

---

Ibn al-Nadim, *Kitab al-Fihrist* ('*The Catalogue*'), Chapter 7, roughly, 987 CE

<https://archive.org/details/fihristofalnadim0000ibna/page/596/mode/2up?q=aristotle>



On the back of a piece [of manuscript] I found written in an ancient handwriting the names of persons whose names have come down to us from among [those of] the commentators on the books of the philosopher [Aristotle] in connection with logic and other branches of philosophy. They are *Theophrastus, Eudemus, Herminus, Jovian*,<sup>176</sup> *Iamblichus, Alexander, Themistius, Porphyry, Simplicius, Syrianus, Maximus, Aedesius, Lycus, Nicostratus, Plotinus.*

What does this tell us?

- Abū al-Faraj Muḥammad ibn Ishāq an-Nadīm, Ibn al-Nadim was a bookseller from Baghdad who had a catalogue of all books of the Arabic-reading world
- He lists what works existed in Arabic translation, marks the Arabic transmission route

Problem(s):

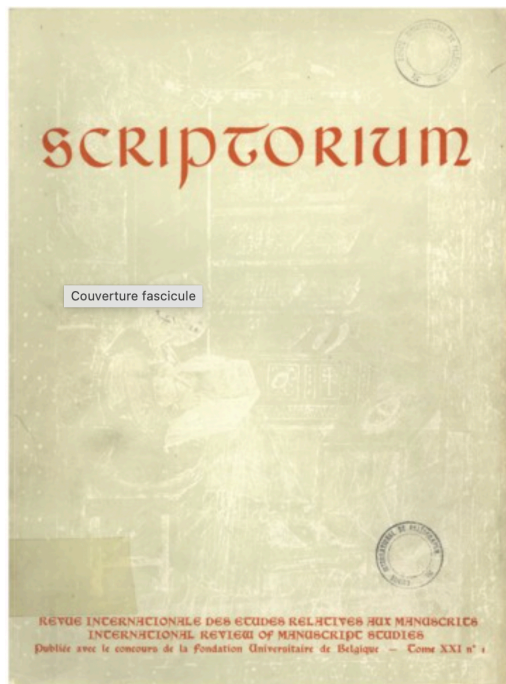
- He occasionally confuses attributions and the Greek text information if second hand

How:

- He had direct access to manuscripts and translator's networks

---

## Physical Evidence: *Parsinus graecus* 1853 (Greek manuscript kept in Paris) and related Byzantine Codices, roughly 800-1500 CE

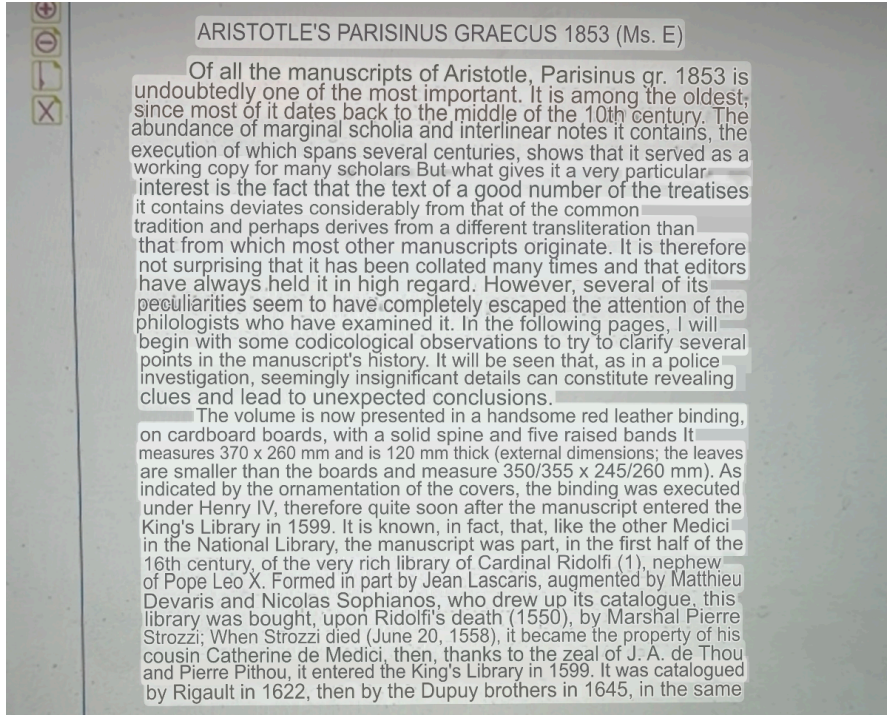


Couverture fascicule

### LE PARISINUS GRAECUS 1853 (Ms. E) D'ARISTOTE

De tous les manuscrits d'Aristote, le *Parisinus gr.* 1853 est sans contredit l'un des plus importants. Il compte parmi les plus anciens, puisqu'il remonte, dans sa plus grande partie, au milieu du X<sup>e</sup> siècle. L'abondance des scholies marginales et des notes interlinéaires dont il est pourvu et dont l'exécution s'étale sur plusieurs siècles montre qu'il a servi d'exemplaire de travail à de nombreux spécialistes. Mais ce qui lui confère un intérêt tout particulier, c'est le fait que le texte d'un bon nombre des traités qu'il renferme s'écarte sensiblement de celui de la tradition courante et remonte peut-être à une translittération différente de celle d'où sont issus la plupart des autres manuscrits. Aussi n'est-il pas surprenant qu'il ait été collationné à maintes reprises et que les éditeurs en aient toujours fait grand cas. Cependant, plusieurs de ses particularités semblent bien avoir échappé totalement à l'attention des philologues qui l'ont eu en mains. Dans les pages qui suivent, je partirai de quelques observations d'ordre codicologique pour tenter de préciser plusieurs points de l'histoire du manuscrit. On verra que, comme dans une enquête policière, des détails apparemment dépourvus d'importance peuvent constituer autant d'indices révélateurs et mener à des conclusions insoupçonnées.

Le volume se présente aujourd'hui sous une belle reliure en cuir rouge, sur ais de carton, avec un dos plein, à cinq nerfs. Il mesure 370 × 260 mm, et est épais de 120 mm. (dimensions extérieures; les feuillets sont plus petits que les ais et mesurent 350/355 × 245/260 mm.). Comme l'indique l'ornementation des plats, la reliure a été exécutée sous Henri IV, donc assez tôt après l'entrée du manuscrit à la bibliothèque du roi en 1599. On sait, en effet, que, comme les autres *Medicee* de la Bibliothèque Nationale, le manuscrit faisait partie, dans la première moitié du XVI<sup>e</sup> s., de la très riche bibliothèque du cardinal Ridolfi (1), neveu du pape Léon X. Formée en partie par les soins de Jean Lascaris, augmentée par Matthieu Devaris et Nicolas Sophianos, qui en rédigèrent le catalogue, cette bibliothèque fut achetée, à la mort de Ridolfi (1550), par le maréchal Pierre Strozzi; quand Strozzi mourut (20 juin 1558), elle devint propriété de sa cousine Catherine de Médicis, puis, grâce au zèle de J. A. de Thou et de Pierre Pithou, elle entra, en 1599, à la Bibliothèque du Roi. Elle fut cataloguée par Rigault en 1622, puis par les frères Dupuy en 1645, en même



France, Paris, National Library of France (BNF), Greek 1853

Link : | PDF | Viewer:

Diktyon number: 51479

Rating type: Current

Copyists, owners & others:

Name	Century	Dates	Noticed	Nature of the relationship	Folios	Comment	DBI	IRHT - People	DBBE- People	RGK II	PLP
Catherine de Medici	16	1519-1589	Florentine, daughter of Lorenzo di Piero de' Medici, Duke of Urbino. Queen of France, wife of Henry II of Valois	possessor				caterina-de-medici-regina-di-francia	2460		
Jean Hurault de Boistailié	16	?-1572	During his embassies to Constantinople and Venice, he collected nearly one hundred and fifty Greek manuscripts, a catalogue of which, compiled in the 16th century by the Cretan Zacharie Skordylis (now in Bern, ms. 360), was most recently published in the <i>Serapeum</i> (Intelligenz-Blatt, 1858, vol. XIX, pp. 161 and 169). Most of these volumes entered the King's Library in 1622 with the collection of Philippe Hurault, Count of Chiverny.	possessor		Disputed ownership			48550		
Firenze, Libreria Medicea privata	15 (2/2)			possessor		See A. Diller			104509		
Φιλολογικὸς (RGK II 514)	14 in.			copyist	345-351, 445v-453	subscription			108854	514	
Niccolò Ridolfi card.	16	1501-1550	Upon his death, his collection of manuscripts was purchased by Marshal of France Piero Strozzi.	possessor					109230	1031	
Piero Strozzi	16	1510-1558	Marshal of France. When Piero Strozzi's widow had his collections of objects and books transported to France, the manuscripts joined Catherine de Medici's library on the promise of compensation that was never paid.	possessor					109810		
Θεόδωρος Φιλολογικὸς	14			copyist	345-351, 445v-453				118129		29715

What does it tell us:

- The manuscripts are the texts, not reports but actual physical transmissions
- Specifically the *Parisinus graecus 1853*, determines the tree of copies, errors and trace lines of descent

Problem(s):

- The earliest Greek manuscripts were from around 900 CE, which is 1,200 years after Aristotle
- Scribal errors

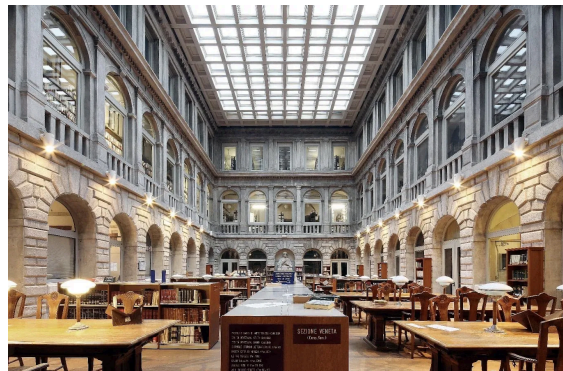
How:

- No single author, copying centers were primarily Byzantine tradition and after the 15th century Italian humanist workshops

---

Cardinal Bessarion's collection (Biblioteca Marciana), roughly 1420-1468 collected

[https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Biblioteca\\_Marciana](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Biblioteca_Marciana)



stipulation that a library of public utility be established. The collection was the result of Bessarion's persistent efforts to locate rare manuscripts throughout Greece and Italy and then acquire or copy them as a means of preserving the writings of the classical Greek authors and the literature of Byzantium after the fall of Constantinople in 1453. His choice of Venice was primarily due to the city's large community of Greek refugees and its historical ties to the Byzantine Empire. The Venetian government was slow, however, to honour its commitment to suitably house the manuscripts with decades of discussion and indecision, owing to a series of military conflicts in the late-fifteenth and early-sixteenth centuries and the resulting climate of political uncertainty. The library was ultimately built during the period of recovery as part of a vast programme of urban renewal aimed at glorifying the republic through architecture and affirming its international prestige as a centre of wisdom and learning.



Image left: Justus van Gent, *Portrait of Cardinal Bessarion* (c. 1473–1476)

Image right: Bessarion's letter to the doge and Senate of Venice announcing his donation

What does this tell us?

- A Greek humanist, scholar, Cardinal Bessarion, the bishop of Tusculum and Latin patriarch of Constantinople donated his Greek and Latin manuscripts to the Republic of Venice to preserve Greek learning for Latin Christendom

- This was a direct source for the Aldine press editors who produced the first printed Greek Aristotle, ~1485-1498