



## Aesop

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### Life

Practically nothing is known about Aesop's (EE-sahp) life. He seems to have been born in Thrace, the region of southeastern Europe now divided between Greece and Turkey, and to have spent most of his life as a slave on Samos, an island lying off the coast of Asia Minor. Traditional accounts give his master's name as Xanthus.

Despite his status, Aesop appears to have worked as a kind of personal secretary to his master and to have enjoyed a great deal of freedom. His reputation derived from his skill at telling fables as illustrations of points in argument, possibly even in court. Such stories, which usually dealt with animals or mythological figures and were often quite caustic, were common throughout the ancient world.

### Influence

Aesop was apparently so talented at recounting fables that memorable examples became attached to his name, regardless of their origin or date. Thanks to later writers who collected them, these fables have become an integral part of the heritage of Western literature and folklore.

### Further Reading:

Aesop. *Aesop's Fables*. Translated by Laura Gibbs. New York: Oxford University Press, 2003. This compilation of six hundred fables represents all the main collections in ancient Latin and Greek. Fables are arranged according to themes and story elements.

Aesop. *The Fables of Aesop: Selected, Told Anew, and Their History Traced by Joseph Jacobus*. London: Macmillan, 1894. Reprint. New York: Macmillan, 1950. Skillful retellings of the fables with excellent illustrations and source notes.

Babrius. *Fabulae Aesopeae: English and Greek, Babrius and Phaedrus*. Edited and translated by Ben Edwin Perry. Cambridge, Mass.: Harvard University Press, 1990. A scholarly edition of the Greek and Latin texts, together with facing prose translations.

Daly, Lloyd W. *Aesop Without Morals: The Famous Fables, and a Life of Aesop*. New York: Thomas Yoseloff, 1961. This English translation of the *Fables* includes a translation of the first century c.e. *Life of Aesop*.

Wheatley, Edward. *Mastering Aesop: Medieval Education, Chaucer, and His Followers*. Gainesville: University Press of Florida, 2000. Includes bibliographical references and indexes.

Zafiroopoulos, Christos A. *Ethics in Aesop's Fables: The Augustana Collection*. Boston: Brill, 2001. Recounts the history of the fable and analyzes the theme of conflict in Aesop's fables from the perspective of ethical philosophy in ancient Greece. Argues that the fable is a form of ethical reasoning.

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