

FACT AND LEGEND IN THE BIOGRAPHY OF PLATO¹

OUR KNOWLEDGE of Plato's life is derived from the following sources: the *Dialogues*; the Aristotelian Corpus; the *Letters*; the *Lives* of Apuleius (*De Platone*, i, 1-4); of Diogenes Laertius (iii, 1); of Olympiodorus (in Hermann's edition of Plato's works, VI, 190-195); a fragment of Philodemus (ca. 110-28 B.C.) from the *Syntaxis* (published by S. Mekler, *Academicorum philosophorum Index Herculaneensis*, esp. 1-37); an anonymous life (in Westermann's *Biographers*, 388 ff.); the beginning of the *Prolegomena to Plato's Philosophy* (in Hermann's edition, VI, 196 ff.); the article on Plato in Suidas; and, if one wishes to be especially generous, Plutarch's *Dio*, though admittedly based on the *Letters*. Philodemus was born about 200 years after Plato's death; Apuleius over 470 years later than Plato's death; Diogenes Laertius was born not earlier than 200 A.D., since he quotes Sextus Empiricus, that is, 550 years after Plato's death; Olympiodorus, about 500 A.D., about 850 after Plato's death. There once existed in all probability other lives: one by Sotion, of the third or second century B.C., one by Porphyry, third century A.D., one by Favorinus, first and second centuries A.D. To these lost works may

¹The material for this paper was originally gathered for a seminar given jointly by Professor Harold Cherniss and me. Since writing it for publication, I have sent it to my collaborator for criticism and received additional material and corrections which I have incorporated in it. I have his permission to state that he approves its argument. I have not succeeded in obtaining his permission to sign his name to it along with my own. Yet whatever credit there may be for anything true in it should be shared with him.

It is not a paper written for philologists. It is addressed, except for a few paragraphs, to philosophers who may not have the equipment to read the sources in the languages in which they were written. It would not require publication at all, were it not that in recent years histories of philosophy have begun to appear in English based on secondary sources which do not seem to have been subjected to very careful scrutiny. It is hoped that others who may wish to write on Plato will be deterred, by reading this paper, from placing too great confidence in such writings.