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Characterization Through Animals: 
The Case of Plutarch’s *Artaxerxes*: Part I*

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Abstract
This paper is the first part of three dealing with the subject of characterization through animals in Plutarch’s *Lives*. It argues that beasts have important narratological significance in the biographies, namely, to shed light on the character of the hero through their association with the realm of passions within the human soul. The text chosen to demonstrate this claim is Plutarch’s most neglected biography, the Life of the Persian king Artaxerxes.

Key-Words: Plutarch’s *Artaxerxes*, Animals, Literary characterization, Platonism.

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2 Nourishment: Lyc. 12.2; Cor. 3.4; Pomp. 2.6; Luc. 40.2; Ant. 17.6. Garments: Lys. 7.4; Crass. 23.8.

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for the transportation of people and goods. Some animals are manifested in descriptions of battles, in depictions of hunts, and as part of religious ceremonies, where they are either sacrificed to the gods, or used as omens and in prophecy. Certain creatures are introduced as being kept solely as symbols of power and status, as pets, or for entertainment. Wild or tame, living or dead, used as metaphors and similes, or described in lengthy digressions, the presence of animals in the biographies is strongly felt.

This paper, the first part of three dealing with this subject in Plutarchos, aims to show that all the living creatures mentioned by the Chaeronean are not included in the text simply in order to make the Lives livelier, but have important narratological significance. In particular, it is claimed here that beasts are incorporated in the biographies with the intention of characterizing the nature of each hero, portray its complex relation with nurture in moulding character, and even suggest the possibility of a change in it. The seemingly random assortment of anecdotes and straightforward details involving animals are in fact laden with meanings and also indicate Plutarch’s views on the relation of beasts and human beings. The biography chosen to explore these references to animals is that of the Persian king Artaxerxes, which is probably the most neglected Life of Plutarch. This work is relevant

3 Beasts of burden: Sul. 29.3; Pub. 19.2; Luc. 11.6, 17.6, 34.4, 37.5.

4 Battles: Alex. 33.8; Demet. 28.6; Pyr. 17.6, 21.7, 25.6, 27.5. Hunts: Pomp. 12.5; Tim. 22.5; Demet. 3.2, 50.9. Sacrifice: Thes. 4.1, 18.3; Rom. 21.10; Sol. 23.3; Ages. 17.3, 33.4; Luc. 10.1, 24.5-6. Omens and prophecy: Sul. 27.2-5; Rom. 9.5-7; Tib. Grac. 17.3; Alex. 73.4, Ages. 9.5, Pyrrh. 30.5, Cim. 18.5; Arat. 43.6.

5 Power and status: Sert. 11.7-8; Pub. 19.4; Luc. 39.3. Pets: Per. 1.1; Alc. 9.1-2; Them. 10.9-10. Entertainment: Sul. 5.1; Lyc. 20.6.

6 Dead animals: Alex. 61.1-3; Cat. Mai. 5.3-4. Metaphors and similes: Demos. 23.5-6; Luc. 39.4; Ages. 36.5; Them. 29.2. Digressions: Pomp. 25.7; Flam. 10.6.


8 It rarely appears in discussions dealing with Plutarch’s aims, methods and literary techniques. Till recently, the only extant commentaries were the short ones of Flacelière & Chambry, 1977, Manfredini, Orsi & Antelami, 1987: 267-308 and of Marasco, 1994: 657-670, none of them comprehensive and none treating the literary side. C. Binder’s Plutarchs Vita des Artaxerxes: Ein historischer Kommentar (Berlin, 2008) does not radically change the picture, as it is essentially a historical commentary. Other studies examine specific issues, such as Quellenforschung. See M. Haug, Die Quellen Plutarchs