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Plutarch’s views on donkeys*

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Abstract
In this contribution Plutarch’s views on donkeys are analysed. On the basis of his texts on the matter, it is shown that he was influenced by Egyptian, Jewish and Greek traditions. Having recourse to the so-called allegoresis, Plutarch’s opinion on donkeys is presented as the result of his eclectic perspective in the frame of Platonic philosophy.

Key-Words: Allegoresis, Donkeys, Egyptian tradition, Jewish tradition, Middle-Platonism, Music, Myth, Platonism, Plutarch, Typhon.

This article aims to present Plutarch’s views on donkeys. After drafting briefly the traditions on which Plutarch appears to build (the Egyptian tradition playing so important a role in his work De Iside et Osiride, and the Jewish tradition), I will illustrate the Greek background influencing Plutarch’s own opinion. An analysis of Plutarch’s most significant texts on this topics follows. Lastly, a little excursus on allegoresis will help us to understand in which sense Plutarch’s views on donkeys can be read in (Middle)-Platonic terms.

1. A fascinating animal with contradictory characteristics

Of all animals, there is none to which one can associate as many different meanings as the donkey. This is due, basically, to its peculiarities: Less speedy than a horse but sturdier,

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