Hold Your Horses: Characterization through Animals in Plutarch's *Artaxerxes*, Part II

by
Eran Almagor
eranalmagor@gmail.com

Abstract

This paper is the second 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. This part addresses the presence of horses in the biography and how they indirectly characterize the hero.

Key-Words: Plutarch's *Artaxerxes*, Animals, horse, Phaedrus, Sun, Ancient Persia, Literary characterization, Platonism.

The animal typically used by Plutarch to portray the hero Artaxerxes in his *Life* by way of an indirect characterization of the hero is the stallion[1]. This is no wonder, as the horse had numerous connotations in ancient and in particular Greek mindset. Domesticated in the Eurasian steppes at about the fourth millennium BCE, and spreading to the Ancient Near East in the second millennium, and to Greece by the middle Helladic period (2,100-1,700 BCE)[2], the horse was associated with several acitivities

1 This is the second part out of three dealing with this subject in *Ploutarchos*, aiming 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. The second part was postponed to appear in this volume, which coincides with the Year of the Horse in the Chinese zodiac. I am again grateful to C. Pelling and T. Whitmarsh for their comments on earlier versions of sections of this paper.

2 See Gheorghiu (1993); Anthony & Brown (2000: 76). In Greece: Drews (1994: 80-84).

and uses and with a certain stratum of society. It implied transportation and a necessary vehicle in hunting and war; it indicated the social status of the elite and hence had a political, social and military importance[3]. By way of metonymy, it came to represent the human emotions that formed the bases of these activities and pursuits (such as prowess and bravery)[4] and even other other emotions[5], and was also to be a metaphor for voracity and ambition, bearing in mind its employment in games, races and shows of strength, ability and wealth[6]. Closely related to this image, the horse bore traces of a certain (vivid) memory of its pre-domesticated state, displaying features of violence, capriciousness, ungovernable primordial forces of nature, an unbridled spirit and freedom[7]. In view of its indispensable role within civilized society, it was also seen as a typical wild beast that can be tamed and broken; it was, indeed, a symbol of the civilizing process itself[8], acting as a metaphor for the state of pre-civilized people, such as horsemen[9]. As riding a horse was an essential part of education (of the Aristocratic elite), the breaking of the stallion was connoted with the training of the youths[10]. Thus, the steed constantly rode along the border between *physis* and *nomos* and became a perfect symbol suitable both for passions and for their restraint through education and training[11]. *Mutatis mutandis*, this

3 Social and economic rank and class was often defined in the aility to maintain a horse, as the *Hippeis* in Athens or the *Equites* in Rome. See DAVIES (1971: xxv-xvi), LOW (2012).

4 Cf. Soph., *Elect*. 25-26.

5 E.g., yearning, ποθέοντες: *Il*. 11.161; or delight, ἀγλαΐηφι πεποιθὼς: *Il*. 6.510 = 15.267.

6 In particular, book 23 of the *Iliad* or Sophocles, *Electra*, 680-763. Horseracing and chariot races figured prominently in all four of the Panhellenic games and in the Olympic games since 680 BCE. For their social importance cf. Hdt., VI 103, Pind., *Olymp*. 1-4, *Pyth.* 1-7, *Nem*. 1, 9, *Isth.* 1-3, Thuc., VI 16. There were also equestrian displays in other events, like the Panathenaea, in both races (cf. Athen., IV 168f), and the procession, a significance reflected in the unbalanced importance given them in the Parthenon frieze: OSBORNE (1987: 103-4). See Xen., *Anab*. 4.8.25, 5.5.5. Wealth: Aristoph., *Nub*. 61-62. See also Xen., *Oec*. 2.6, Isoc., XVI 33. Chariots and wealth: see HALL (1996: 280) on Timotheus' *Persians.*

7 E.g., Soph., *OT*, 467; *Antig.* 478, 985; *Ajas*, 143. Wild and destructive force: Eurip., *Orest*. 45; *Hippol.* 1355. Cf. Sen., *Phaedr.* 1101-1102.

8 Cf. Soph., *Antig*. 351.

9 Cf. Eurip., *Hecub.* 710.

10 See BUGH (1988), SPENCE (1993: 192-8). Horsemanship became an art known by the elite fraction of society. The difficulty involved in the skill was increased by the lack of saddle or stirrups. Cf. the works of Xenophon, *On Horsemanship* (*Peri Hippikon*) and *The Cavalry Commander* (*Hipparchikos*). Cf. *Od.* 9.49 50 (quoted by Plut., *De fort. Rom.* 326C).

11 Symbol for education and training: cf. Xenophon, *Mem.* 4.1,3, Plut., *Ages*. 1.2, *Them*. 2.7.

image was common to both Greek and Persian worldviews, even though it had other meanings in the east.

A Kingdom for a Horse

The Persians were among the first civilizations to breed heavier, superior horses, and the art of mastering a horse was considered an important aspect of the social and political life of the aristocracy[12]. According to Plato (*Alc*. 1, 121e-122a), the military education among the Persians included horsemanship and hunt (for seven year old boys), and was also aimed to induce courage (age fourteen)[13]. Horsemanship was part of the royal ideology and, reflecting physical strength and bravery in war, it was regarded as a proper justification for holding the crown[14]. Herodotus relates how the seven conspirators' decision on electing a king was based on horsemanship: they agreed that he whose horse neighed first in the day should have the throne[15]. The Great King is usually depicted as

12 See the description of Persia by Darius (DPd, 8): "This country... which Ahuramazda bestowed upon me, good, possessed of good horses (uvaspâ), possessed of good men". Cf. DSf, 11; DSp, 3: "possessed of good charioteers, of good horses". Cf. also in royal inscription AmH 6-9 (Ariaramnes' inscription from Hamadan): "This country Persia which I hold, which is possessed of good horses, of good men". Cf. AsH 10 (Arsames, Hamadan). See the depiction of Ahuramazda by Darius (DSs, 5): "A great god is Ahuramazda, who makes excellence in this earth, who makes man in this earth, who makes happiness for man, who makes good horses and good chariots". Note the many names derived from the stem 'Asp-' (OP horses) traceable in the Avesta. Xenoph., *Cyr*. 1.3,3 reports that this knowledge came only by influence of the Medes. Briant (2002: 14, 19-20) is justified in finding these statements hard to accept. See the figure on the seal of "Kuraš of Anšan" (= Cyrus I) of a horseman jumping over two fallen warriors. Horsemen were an important factor in the Persian Empire. In the archives of the house of Murašû, the plots of land referred to bear the names 'horse estate' (*bit sisi*), 'chariot estate' (*bit narkabti*) which indicate their original function to supply soldiers for the king. Cf. Briant (2002: 598). Cf. Xen., *Cyr*. 8.6.10. Note that the delegations of the Medes, Lydians, Cappadocians, Scythians and Sagartians on the west panel of the Apadana bring horses. See Polyb., X 27.1-2. See the 'ten thousand Persian horse' mentioned by Herodotus (VII 41).

13 Cf. Xen., *Cyr*. 1.4,14 on the hunt as occasions for the young noble's initiation into the adult world.

14 See the way Darius presents himself in the Naqsh-i-Rustam inscription (DNb, 41-44): "As a horseman I am a good horseman (*asabâra uvâsabâra amiy*). As a bowman I am a good bowman both afoot and on horseback." Cf. Xen., *Anab.* 1.7,9, 1.8,12. Briant (2002: 90, 227-228). On the notion of linking or exchanging kingdom for a horse see the episode of Pheraulas and the Sacian (Xen., *Cyr*. 8.3,35-50) and Gera (1993: 174-175).

15 See Hdt., III 84. Cf. III 85-88 on the ruse employed by Darius. Cf. Ctesias, *FGrH* 688 F 13.17.

hunting mounted on horseback (Hdt., III 129, Arr., *Anab*. 4.13,1)[16]. In the royal personnel, there were special people in charge of the royal horses[17]. The stallion was, thus, an essential part of both the royal ideology and the imperial practice, and it is no surprise to find this animal in the *Life* of the Persian monarch.

Specifically, it is the image of the king's unstable position on his horse which recurs three times in the biography of Artaxerxes[18]. The first time this great fall from a horse is introduced in the *Artaxerxes* is in the letter Cyrus the Younger sends to the Spartans (6.4) with the aim of obtaining their support in his effort to overthrow his brother the king[19]. Cyrus glorifies himself while denigrating Artaxerxes, listing his own royal qualities as opposed to the shortcomings of his brother. In particular, Cyrus presents the king as someone who cannot keep his place on a horse[20]. As this disparaging portrayal closely follows the mention of Cyrus' courage and general restrained demeanour, one would assume that by contrast, the flaw attributed to Artaxerxes, namely, his inability to control a horse, would allude to the king's incapability of containing his passions, in particular his cowardice. This negative portrayal of Artaxerxes, which may come originally from one of the *Persica* works[21], appears to be

16 Cf. GABRIELLI, 2006: 14-15. Other descriptions, however, have the king riding in a chariot (see SPAWFORTH, 2012 on Ephippus, Fr 5.), as one can see in the Neo-Assyrian reliefs (cf. BM 124532, 124851-124853, 124858).

17 See BRIANT (2002: 426, 457, 1023). See the Persepolis fortification tablets which refer to "royal horses" (PF 1668-1669,1675, 1765, 1784-1787, 1793, 1942); cf. PFa 24, 29.

18 The methodological implications of assuming a recurrent imagery in a biography are clear. It is not just an incidental single occurrence which may signify the mental backdrop and literary milieu of the author. This recurrence has an important role in promoting an understanding of the work, acting as a sort of a subtext which is introduced in parallel to the main storyline with its own meanings and rules of progression. It cannot help but push the reader back and forward in the work, subverting the course of the narrative, and forcing him or her to re-evaluate former interpretations. Sometimes the subtext may refer to another work (as in the *Artaxerxes*) and in this case involves intertextuality, or a moulding of its significance by other texts.

19 Cf. Xen., *Hell*. 3.1,1 and Diod., XIV 19.4.

20 ἐν μὲν τοῖς κυνηγεσίοις μηδ' ἐφ' ἵππου, ἐν δὲ τοῖς κινδύνοις μηδ' ἐπὶ τοῦ θρόνου καθῆσθαι. There were many risks involved in horse riding, especially during hunt. See Xen., *Cyr*. 1.4.7-8, *Anab.* 1.9.6. Darius I is said to jump from his horse too quickly during a hunting expedition and to severely twist his foot (Hdt., III 129).

21 Probably Deinon. Note the thematic similarity between this letter and that of Glos to the Spartans (Diod., XV 9.4), which may originate from Deinon. Cf. TUPLIN (1999: 344) who believes the source is Ctesias. Plutarch plausibly found this description in one of his sources. Note that the letter appears again in *Reg. et Imp. Apoph*. (173EF) and *Quaest. Conv.* (620C). But cf. MOSSMAN (2010: 150-151).

a mirror image of his younger brother and his well-known love of horses, as depicted by Xenophon in the *Anabasis*. First, Xenophon mentions (*Anab*. 1.2,7) that Cyrus partook in hunting 'whenever he wished to give himself and his horses exercise', and in the elaborate panegyric of chapter 9, he states:

> [Cyrus was] the most devoted to horses and the most skilful in managing horses... when he was of suitable age, he was the fondest of hunting and, more than that, the fondest of incurring danger in his pursuit of wild animals" (1.9,5-6)[22].

This image is designed to present Cyrus as regal and majestic, through his handling and use of horses. Echoing, and perhaps corresponding to this portrait, the rest of Cyrus' letter to the Spartans has the following promises (*Art*. 6.2):

> he would give to those who came, if they were footmen, horses; if they were horsemen, chariots and pairs[23].

Cyrus appears to seek kingdom by allocating horses. In reality, by this presentation Plutarch subtly displays Cyrus' self destructive tendency, for when the prince promises to give his horseman chariots, he in effect unhorses his own men – the very vice he attributes to his brother. He therefore appears to be just as unsuitable to the throne. Furthermore, no rational self restraint is shown by increasing the presence and number of horses, with all their connotations of emotions[24].

Cyrus' portrayal of the king has to be judged against other descriptions in the *Life*. In fact, during the battle of Cunaxa, fought between the brothers and depicted by the historian Deinon (*Art.* 10.1-2), Artaxerxes is seen as actually thrown off from his horse twice before he mounts another one and charges against his brother[25]. As this dramatic scene is essential in presenting the change which takes place in the character of Artaxerxes and in marking the beginning of an intense honour-seeking phase in his life, the mention of his falling from his steed may well be taken to represent the fact that he is thrown off balance, letting his passions take over, while incidentally proving Cyrus' description correct.

22 φιλιππότατος καὶ τοῖς ἵπποις ἄριστα χρῆσθαι...ἐπεὶ δὲ τῇ ἡλικίᾳ ἔπρεπε, καὶ φιλοθηρότατος ἦν καὶ πρὸς τὰ θηρίαμέντοι φιλοκινδυνότατος. Loeb Classical Library Translation.

23 οἷς ἔφη δώσειν, ἂν μὲν πεζοὶπαρῶσιν, ἵππους, ἂν δὲ ἱππεῖς, συνωρίδας.

24 Cf. Mossman (2010: 151) on the way Plutarch undercuts Cyrus' claims to philosophy "by introducing this self-praise as μεγαληγορῶν ('talking big') – a contrast to Xenophon's 'most respectful'..."

25 εἰσελάσας βιαίως ὁ Κῦρος εἰς τοὺς προτεταγμένους τοῦ βασιλέως κατέτρωσεν αὐτοῦ τὸν ἵππον, ὁ δ' ἀπερρύη... πάλιν ὁ Κῦρος ἐνσείσας τῷ ἵππῳ κατέβαλε τὸν Ἀρτοξέρξην.

One of the last scenes in the *Life* depicts Artaxerxes as willingly stepping down from his horse and proceeding on foot, walking as many as two hundred *stadia* daily over mountainous roads like his common soldiers (24.10)[26]. This behaviour is commended by Plutarch, and may suggest the monarch's ability to endure hardships and to demonstrate a measure of self-control. It might even indicate that the king is not dominated by passion and a life of comfort, as he is able to postpone or renounce an immediate satisfaction of his appetites[27]. At first glance, it would seem that Cyrus was wrong, and that Artaxerxes can curb his emotions. Alternatively, this conduct may imply a change in the king. The picture can be interpreted in another way, and may be viewed as entirely ironic. After all, the demeanour of Artaxerxes only confirms the claim made by the prince, to the effect that the king is indeed incapable of holding his seat upon the horse. The scene clearly insinuates that Artaxerxes willingly lets his passions, such as pride, take control. This impression arises from the mention of the twelve thousand talents' worth of jewellery enveloping the body of the monarch, which do not detain him from marching. One would imagine that this is the irony intimated in the incident: it is the *way* in which Artaxerxes restrains himself that lets his emotions take hold of him. By releasing his horse from a rider and by walking on foot like his beast of burden, Artaxerxes both frees his stallion from a rein and lets loose the animal within his own soul[28]. A plain interpretation of the king's behaviour proves evasive, as his conduct defies any clear-cut designation. Due to the way Plutarch presents his actions, they show at the time both a natural inclination or appetite and a propensity toward self-control.

Platonic Horses

The employment of a steed to represent passion at once calls to mind

[26] οὔτε γὰρ χρυσὸς οὔτε κάνδυς οὔθ' ὁ τῶν μυρίων καὶ δισχιλίων ταλάντων περικείμενος ἀεὶ τῷ βασιλέως σώματι κόσμος ἐκεῖνον ἀπεκώλυε πονεῖν καὶ ταλαιπωρεῖν ὥσπερ οἱ τυχόντες, ἀλλὰ τήν τε φαρέτραν ἐνημμένος καὶ τὴν πέλτην φέρων αὐτὸς ἐβάδιζε πρῶτος ὁδοὺς ὀρεινὰς καὶ προσάντεις, ἀπολιπὼν τὸν ἵππον... καὶ γὰρ διακοσίων καὶ πλειόνων σταδίων κατήνυεν ἡμέρας ἑκάστης πορείαν.

[27] BRIANT (2002: 228, cf. 608) assumes that this picture reflects Achaemenid Imperial ideology and court propaganda. But the image of a hero stepping down from his horse and proceeding by foot is fairly common in Plutarch. Cf. *Cat. Min.* 63.9 and especially *Philop.* 30.6. Cf. *Alex.* 24.11. These instances would imply that our passage has more to do with the psychological make-up Plutarch wishes to convey and ultimately with the *Phaedrus'* chariot image (below).

[28] An interpretation which may be taken as a sardonic allusion to the Stoic argument (mentioned in *De sollert.* 964a) that humans shall be living the lives of beasts once they give up the use of animals. Cf. Porph., *De abst.* 1.4,13.

the Platonic imagery of the soul in the *Phaedrus* as a chariot driven by a team of winged horses (246a)[29]. In the Platonic picture, human souls strive to follow gods in seeing the true being, but one of the steeds, the evil, unrestrained one, evidently representing the passionate part of the soul, pulls down his driver (247b). In consequence, the soul sheds its wings and plummets down to earth, without a full vision of the truth (248bc). Plutarch seems to be fond of this image and employs it elsewhere in his works[30]. There are many verbal echoes between the Platonic dialogue and the biography. Cyrus promises the Spartans the two horses chariot *Synoris*, which evokes the Platonic image (246b: καὶ πρῶτον μὲν ἡμῶν ὁ ἅρχων συνωρίδος ἡνιοχεῖ). The allusion is then strengthened by the fact that Cyrus attributes to his brother the vices of cowardice and softness (δειλίας καὶ μαλακίας), which recalls the censure of the evil horse against the charioteer and his mate (254c)[31]. After the king's fall at the battle of Cunaxa, Tiribazus, one of his men, advises him to remember that day, "for it is unworthy of forgetfulness" (οὐ γὰρ ἀξία λήθης ἐστί), words which also seem to hint at the *Phaedrus* again, and to the mythic description of the soul's plummet. In that dialogue it is recounted that the human *psyche* not only moves away from the plain of Truth (τὸ ἀληθείας... πεδίον: 248b) - typically seen as the negation of forgetfulness (*lethe*/ *alethe*) - but also fails to recall what little it saw (250a)[32].

29 I have already dealt with some of the manifestations of this image in the Artaxerxes in Almagor (2009).

30 Cf. *Ant.* 36.2 with Pelling, 1988: 217 and Duff, 1999: 78-9, 85. Trapp (1990: 157-61, 171-173) deals with other places where Plutarch appears to be alluding to the *Phaedrus,* which provided a rich point of reference for second century AD literature and culture. Most of the passages are in the *Moralia* (especially the *Amatorius*), and among the *Lives* mention is made of *Alc.* 4.4, and *Per.* 8.1. Yet, the horse imagery of the Platonic dialogue implicitly recurs numerous times in Plutarch's *Lives.* See Ash, 1997: 192-96 on its appearance in *Galba* 6.4. Cf. *Cim*. 5.2, where Cimon sacrifices the bridle of a horse (ἵππου τινὰ χαλινὸν ἀναθεῖναι τῇ θεῷ διὰ χειρῶν κομίζων). Ostensibly this picture symbolizes Athens' substitution of a cavalry force for a naval one, yet this figure also carries with it a hidden meaning, namely, that no restraint of passions is to be assumed in his (and his country's) conduct. In the chapter of the Cimon it is presumably the word 'phaidros', cheerful (φαιδρὸς ἀνιὼν εἰς τὴν ἀκρόπολιν: 5.2) that is designed to 'trigger off' this interpretation.

31 "But the other, as soon as he is recovered from the pain of the bit and the fail, before he has fairly taken breath, breaks forth into angry reproaches, bitterly reviling his mate and the charioteer for their cowardice and lack of manhood..." (ὁ δὲ λήξας τῆς ὀδύνης, ἣν ὑπὸ τοῦ χαλινοῦ τε ἔσχεν καὶ τοῦ πτώματος, μόγις ἐξαναπνεύσας ἐλοιδόρησεν ὀργῇ, πολλὰ κακίζων τόν τε ἡνίοχον καὶ τὸν ὁμόζυγα ὡς δειλίᾳ τε καὶ ἀνανδρίᾳ...).

32 ὥστε ὑπό τινων ὁμιλιῶν ἐπὶ τὸ ἄδικον τραπόμεναι λήθην ὧν τότε εἶδον ἱερῶν ἔχειν.

The allusion to memory is echoed in Tiribazus' injunction ("remember this day"; μέμνησο τῆς ἡμέρας ταύτης), again suggesting the Platonic description of the charioteer, whose memory is turned to the true nature of beauty (254bc)[33]. Tiribazus' further act of providing another horse for the king to mount strengthens this link between lack of memory and falling from a horse to the earth.

When describing the king's demeanour in stepping down from his horse after the Cadusian Campaign, the narrator uses a metaphor to depict the effect of this royal gesture. His metaphor is not straightforward. It is said that upon seeing the eagerness and energy of the Great King, the rest of the army had wings given them and the soldiers felt their burdens lightened[34]. Apparently, this scene might imply that the Phaedran image is referred to again, though in an inverted manner. In other words, it would seem that it is not a case of a soul shedding its wings because of an uninhibited horse, but that of a steed kept in check, which affects in turn the growing of wings[35]. The prospect of the soul restoring its wings as part of its spiritual ascent is described in the *Phaedrus* (249de, 251b-d; cf. 256de) as effected in the *psyche* of the lover after its contemplation of the form of beauty. Plato dwells on the dynamics occurring between the lover and the beloved, who answers with his "counter-love" (ἀντέρως) and the growing of wings (ἀναπτερῶσαν: 255cd). It is interesting to apply this model to the relations between the king and his soldiers at the focus of the next section (24.10-25.3). Plato speaks of ensuing licence and sursuit of pleasure in violation of nature (251a)[36], triggered by the vision of an earthly beauty. Yet, if the wings are not only to be taken as a sign of an allusion to the heavenly entities in the Platonic allegory, but also of an animal simile, the metaphor here may also show that some animalistic passion is hinted, brought to the fore in the following chapter (25) with the behaviour of the king towards his soldiers and the simile there[37].

Once the Platonic imagery and connotations are activated, it would seem that almost any reference to stallions in the *Life* could be taken to mean emotions and the passionate part of the soul. This assumption can be

33 ἰδόντος δὲ τοῦ ἡνιόχου ἡ μνήμη πρὸς τὴν τοῦ κάλλους φύσιν ἠνέχθη.

34 ὥστε τοὺς ἄλλους πτεροῦσθαι καὶ συνεπικουφίζεσθαι, τὴν ἐκείνου προθυμίαν καὶ ῥώμην ὁρῶντας.

35 Plutarch may also have been influenced here by a passage in Xenophon's *Cyropaedia* (2.3,14), where Pheraulas addresses Cyrus and describes the results of the soldiers' harsh conditions, which make the carrying of arms a light task, almost like having wings: … ὥστε νῦν ἐμοὶ δοκεῖν τὸ τῶν ὅπλων φόρημα πτεροῖς μᾶλλον ἐοικέναι ἢ φορτίῳ.

36 οὐδ' αἰσχύνεται παρὰ φύσιν ἡδονὴν διώκων.

37 See ALMAGOR (2009/2010).

corroborated in two cases where animals not only portray the king through his interaction with them, but also involve minor figures in the biography. I consider this mode a *Two-Step Indirect Characterization*, in which animals as passions incarnated underline a feature of other characters, who, in turn, shed light on a specific trait of the hero. The act of the noble courtier Tiribazus in giving another steed for the king to mount after he has fallen off (10.1)[38] could closely correspond to his function in the biography as someone who provokes desires and passions. This behaviour is apparent when he encourages the king both before (7.3) and during (10.1) the battle to stand out against his brother, and later on, when he sets Darius the crown prince against his father (28.1-5). Another person is a young soldier named Mithridates, who delivers a blow to Cyrus during the battle (11.5) but is not credited for the deed, since the king appropriates the glory for it. In the aftermath of the war, Mithridates is given gifts for another feat, namely, that of presenting the monarch with the blood-stained saddle-cloth of Cyrus, which has fallen off the prince's horse (14.5)[39]. Strictly speaking, this cloth is one of the means of restraining the horse and is symbolically relevant to the behaviour of the king. The act of giving it to the monarch would imply that this young soldier curtails Artaxerxes' uncurbed love of fame, as is soon evident in his relating of the true account of the events in a banquet (15.6)[40].

There is more than one manner, however, in which the *ethos* of the king is characterized through these two minor figures and the horse imagery. By the use of the device of *Synkrisis*, Tiribazus could be made to be seen as bringing into light the king's traits of ambition and pursuit of power, while Mithridates would, in opposition, underscore the aspect of restraint. Yet, as Tiribazus consciously offers a horse to the king so that he would mount it, hold his place upon it and eradicate Cyrus' sedition, the comparison could equally establish that it is this courtier who emphasizes the facet of control. Similarly, as Mithridates is said to hand over the saddle of Cyrus' horse, it may

38 Τιριβάζου δ' ἀναβαλόντος αὐτὸν ἐπ' ἄλλον ἵππον ταχὺ... It was Tiribazus' privileged position to assist the king onto his horse (Xen., *Anab.* 4.4,4). The Persian practice, as Curtius Rufus (III 11.11) and Arrian (*Anab.* 2.11) relate, was to provide the king with a horse so that he would leave the battlefield safe.

39 οἰόμενος (scil. ὁ βασιλεύς) δὲ καὶ βουλόμενος δοκεῖνκαὶ λέγειν πάντας ἀνθρώπους, ὡς αὐτὸς ἀπεκτόνοι Κῦρον, Μιθριδάτῃ τε τῷ βαλόντι πρώτῳ Κῦρον ἐξέπεμψε δῶρα καὶ λέγειν ἐκέλευσε τοὺς διδόντας ὡς "τούτοις σε τιμᾷ [ὁ] βασιλεύς, ὅτι τὸν ἐφίππειον Κύρου πῖλον εὑρὼν ἀνήνεγκας". Cf. 11.6: τὸν δ' ἐφίππειον πῖλον ἀπορρυέντα λαμβάνει τοῦ τὸν Κῦρον βαλόντος ἀκόλουθος αἵματος περίπλεω.

40 Cf. Almagor (2009).

be the case that he himself is to be judged as unbridled, as his feeling of discontent and his conduct during the symposium show him to be. This two-edged interpretation similarly applies in the case of the king. As he is obviously in need of another stallion during the battle, this fact would allegorically mean that his natural hesitancy requires some sort of a thrust to balance it, a conclusion that would portray him as naturally cautious. Conversely, the rein brought to him by Mithridates would implicitly suggest the existence of an unbound desire in the king's soul that needs to be restrained.

The portrayal of the minor figures in a similar manner to that of Artaxerxes becomes even more slippery in a distorted world. The horse handed to the king is intended to be employed in the war against Cyrus. Its use is calculated to hold back the passions displayed by the young prince. The steed thus turns from being an allegory of appetites, to a tool of restraint. By contrast, the saddle-cloth brought to Artaxerxes is an object which provides proof of Cyrus' death. Instead of curtailing the monarch's emotions, its presence only leads to the intensification of his ambitions and the growth of his love of glory. The remarkable outcome would be that a bridle incites passion. Through this horse imagery, Tiribazus and Mithridates seem to pull the king in different directions within an on-going allusion to Plato's *Phaedrus*. They both pull towards the truth and away from passion and towards forgetfulness away from reason and restraint, constantly switching roles.

Love, Marriage, Horses and Carriage

As seen above, Artaxerxes' mode of submission to Hera in chapter 23 may not be suitable for a king. The same image can be interpreted in two manners: an act of self humiliation of the extreme kind on the part of the king can simultaneously be construed as an indication of his unconstrained appetites. It is the employment of horses in the image that brings out this elusiveness, in the same way it does in the *Phaedrus*[41]. Bearing in mind the fact that Artaxerxes' behaviour may be seen as unkingly, another allusion to the *Phaedrus* might be ironic, for the reference to "followers of Hera who seek a kingly nature" (253b: ὅσοι δ' αὖ μεθ' Ἥρας εἵποντο, βασιλικὸν ζητοῦσι) does not fit here. Moreover, the picture of the king falling down to the ground while horses are set free is another allusion to the Platonic image. Even though the steeds are to be given to the deity as a means of pacification, they are not portrayed as sacrificed to Hera, but are brought to the road. They are shown out in the open, very much like the incestuous passion of Artaxerxes for his own daughter Atossa, which is

41 Cf. Plat., *Phaedr*. 252a, and HACKFORTH (1952: 98) on the Platonic passage: "...a passionate self-surrender, which is nevertheless a profound satisfying of the self".

made public through their marriage. The association of passionate love and horses in this passage would be clear to any reader of the *Phaedrus*, as the chariot image is meant to depict the internal conflict and irrational frenzy of the lover's soul (253c-256e). One could say that horses are used here as intertextual markers, as if the narrator, emulating the king's candid behaviour, puts the hidden allusion now in the open. Indeed, the connection of horses and love is suggested by a comparison of the items set upon the road for Hera with a former description of Persia in the *Life* (20.1), this time depicting the court as filled with gold and luxury and women (τὰ Περσῶν καὶ βασιλέως πράγματα χρυσὸν ὄντα πολὺν καὶ τρυφὴν καὶ γυναῖκας). The list in chapter 23 has "gold and silver and purple and horses."[42] Thus, the second list exchanges silver for luxury, and horses for women (with the addition of 'purple').

This picture points at a well-known Greek imagery connecting women and unbridled horses in sexual and marital contexts. Aristophanes' *Lysistrata* (677-679) contains a commemt on the amazonomachy scene depicted in the Painted Stoa, beginning with the statement "woman is the most horsey thing" (ἱππικώτατον γάρ ἐστι χρῆμα κἄποχον γυνή)[43]. Women falling in love or being unable to curb their emotions are portrayed sometimes as losing control of horses[44]. Marriage itself is depicted as an act of breaking the horse[45], and in a subtle extension of this metaphor, the bride may be shown to arrive in a chariot[46]. In the biography, the character of Artaxerxes and a possible change in his conduct may be discernible through this allegory of women/horses and its extension. At the outset of the *Life*, the king gives free rein to the royal women (5.3) and even permits his wife to expose herself in her chariot (5.3: γυμνὴ). On the other hand, while there is a hunting scene, no horse is mentioned, though one would expect the monarch to hunt on a horseback and there was most probably a story involving the king's stallions[47]. The depiction of Cyrus is like a mirror image: the prince stresses the presence of horses (6.3),

42 τὰ μεταξὺ τοῦ ἱεροῦ καὶ τῶν βασιλείων ἑκκαίδεκα στάδια χρυσοῦ καὶ ἀργύρου καὶ πορφύρας καὶ ἵππων ἐμπλησθῆναι.

43 This image insinuates a form of copulation in which the woman is "on top", as if riding a horse. See Rosen (1997:157-8). See Camp (1998: 14).

44 See Sen., *Phaed*. 309-316, 785-794 with the interpretation of Paschalis (1994). Cf. Eurip., *Hipp*. 229-236.

45 E.g., Eurip., *Androm*. 619-620 on married woman as a "foal" (πῶλον). Cf. *Hipp*. 545-554 and *Troj*. 665-670 with its comparison of a woman who loses her former husband and a horse who loses a stablemate.

46 See Eurip., *IA* 607-23 on the transition of the bride from the chariot to her groom.

47 Presumably the hunt mentioned in Diod., XV 10.3, where two lions leaped at the king's chariot and tore apart two horses of the team. Cf. Briant (2002: 321-322) who believes it is a different hunt and Almagor (2009).

but hides his mother's support and his special relationship with her (4.1, 6.6). In the latter part of the biography, the roles change. While horses are visible (23.7 , 24.10), now it is Artaxerxes who tends to curb (27.3-4) and hide his royal women in their chariots (27.1):

> it is death for a man, not only to come up and touch one of the royal concubines, but even in journeying to go along past the carriages on which they are conveyed[48].

The *analepsis* involving Cyrus (26.5-9) displays his love affair with Aspasia, which became well-known and was done in the open; no horse is associated with Cyrus in these sections, though the reader may remember that the prince's steed rode freely at the battle of Cunaxa (11.6: καὶ ὁ μὲν ἵππος ὑπεκφυγὼν ἐπλάζετο) with no further mention of its eventual fate. The episode which may mark the juncture of this reversal is at chapter 14, which dwells on the case of Arbaces, one of the king's supporters, who changed sides during the battle. Artaxerxes orders him to walk about in the market-place, carrying a naked (γυμνὴ) prostitute astride his neck for a whole day (14.3)[49]. This punishment is explicitly designed to rectify Arbaces' vices of cowardice and softness (δειλίαν καὶ μαλακίαν), the exact same features attributed to the king by Cyrus. It effectively turns Arbaces into a beast of burden.Accepting the working of the Greek association of women and (unbridled) horses in the imagery found in the biography, one has to acknowledge that this picture spells a reversal of human rider and his steed. Thus, Artaxerxes is characterized by Plutarch not only via the use of real animals, but also through his actions, which aim to turn a man into a beast. While a punitive measure usually intends to discipline and restrain the manifestations of inhibited appetites, here it produces passions, exposing the animal within the condemned, and highlighting, by the cruelty or evil of the deed, the animalistic nature of the king himself.

Equine, Human and Divine Beings

Another mode of characterizing the hero is done through *personification* of animals, namely, making beasts virtually *dramatis personae* of the biography[50]. It involves not a presentation of the-

48 μὴ μόνον τὸν προσελθόντα καὶ θιγόντα παλλακῆς βασιλέως, ἀλλὰ καὶ τὸν ἐν πορείᾳ προεξελθόντα καὶ διεξελάσαντα τὰς ἁμάξας ἐφ᾽ αἷς κομίζονται,θανάτῳ κολάζεσθαι. LCL Translation slightly changed.

49 Ἀρβάκην μὲνγάρ τινα Μῆδον ἐν τῇ μάχῃ πρὸς Κῦρον φυγόντα καὶ πάλιν ἐκείνου πεσόντος μεταστάντα,δειλίαν καὶ μαλακίαν καταγνούς, οὐ προδοσίαν οὐδὲ κακόνοιαν, ἐκέλευσε γυμνὴν ἀναλαβόντα πόρνην περιβάδην ἐπὶ τοῦ τραχήλου δι᾽ ἡμέρας ὅλης ἐν ἀγορᾷ περιφέρειν.

50 See LONSDALE (1990: 74) on the presence of horses in the Iliad: "The horse is a ubiquitous and indispensable actor in the plot... Homeric horses are flesh and blood creatures with a will and a way of their own, individuals [with] a rich system of epithets and sometimes accorded names and lineage".

riomorphic men, alluding to the beast within the human, but rather of anthropomorphic animals, hinting at the man within the beast. It is seen in the biography through Cyrus' steed, a horse with a name, that is, *Pasacas* (9.1)[51]. In the chapter where the name of the animal appears, that of the Cyrus and its derivation from his great Persian namesake are also mentioned, creating another similarity between the prince and his horse (9.2)[52]. The personal name of the stallion evokes other notable named horses in Greek tradition, in particular Alexander's Bucephalus[53] and those of the Achaeans in the Trojan War[54]. This beast is closely linked to the prince. The unruly character of the stallion (ἄστομον δὲ καὶ ὑβριστὴν) reflects that of Cyrus (cf. 6.1), who pushes ahead to his unattainable goal with no restraint. Echoing Plato's image again, the steed is described as ὑβριστὴς, the exact same term characterizing the unrestrained horse of the *Phaedrus* (254c)[55]. The ambition and pursuit of honour of Cyrus and the unruliness of his horse accentuate in turn these very traits of his brother, Artaxerxes.

Moreover, it would appear that after Cyrus is hit, thrown off his horse and dies, his spirit lives on in the horse that runs wild into the area of the enemy[56] without its saddle cloth (11.6-8)[57]. The fact that no end is mentioned of this stallion turns this creature into a powerful symbol of the fallen prince's soul, which continues and permeates the rest of the biography. As Platonic concepts are still at the background of the scene, it may be suspected that the relation between Cyrus and his horse alludes to the idea of the transmigration of souls found at the end of the Phaedran picture. According to this view, presented in the myth, souls as immortal entities (cf. 245c) that transcend corporeal existence can move back and forth between animal and human embodiments (249b)[58]. These

[51] Herodotus mentions (III 88) that upon the accession of Darius I, a monument was erected of a man on horseback and that "the horse's name was included". See Briant (2002: 217).

[52] Κύρῳ δὲ γενναῖον ἵππον, ἄστομον δὲ καὶ ὑβριστὴν ἐλαύνοντι, Πασακᾶν καλούμενον, ὡς Κτησίας φησίν, ἀντεξήλασεν ὁ Καδουσίων ἄρχων Ἀρταγέρσης, μέγα βοῶν· "ὦ τὸ κάλλιστον ἐν Πέρσαις ὄνομα Κύρου καταισχύνων."

[53] Three chapters of the *Alexander* are devoted to this horse: 6.1-8, 44.3-5, 61.1-3. Cf. also Arr., *Anab*. 5.19; Aul. Gel., *NA* 5.2.

[54] The reference to the horses of Hector (*Il*. 8.185) was excised by Aristarchus and may be a late interpolation (three out of the four names also belong to famous Achaean steeds).

[55] On ἄστομος see Soph., *Elect*. 724-725.

[56] Ctesias, who is the author of this riderless horse image, may allude to the Homeric lines at *Il.* 11.159-162. Cf. 8.127.

[57] καὶ ὁ μὲν ἵππος ὑπεκφυγὼν ἐπλάζετο...

[58] Cf. *Phaed*. 81d-82b, *Tim*. 42bc, 90e ff. Cf. the myth of Er at the end of the *Rep*. (X 617d

philosophical ideas of immortality, travel of soul and transformation are put into literary use, serving the author as a basis for maintaining the existence of Cyrus' character traits beyond the death of the prince, and introducing later manifestation of these features in other figures. One should also recall that most of the mythic named steeds are immortal, like Achilles' Xanthus and Balius (*Il*. 16.149, 19.400-420) and Adrastus' Arion (*Il*. 23.346-347), so that the reference to Pasacas' name may allude to these beasts and may also serve to strengthen the possibility that the horse is to assume the transmigrated soul of Cyrus[59].

Part of this doctrine includes the belief in the transmigration of souls into heavenly bodies[60]. There is a sense in which one such celestial entity interacts in particular with horses. Chapter 16 of the biography presents the punishment meted out to Mithridates for daring to disclose the truth about the death of Cyrus. It may be that this depiction is a clever allusion to the Persian rite of sacrificing horses to the sun. This sacrifice is attested in Greek literature[61], as well as a similar ritual for the god Mithra[62], which is probably to be identified with the sun (Strabo, XV 3.13)[63]. Like the Greeks[64], the Persians too associated the sun with horses[65]. Mithridates is associated with the horse's saddle cloth of Cyrus. In his torture, the king forces him to gaze at the sun, not letting him avert his look from it (16.5). With the Phaedran overtones of the entire *Life* (together with an allusion to *Rep*. VII 515c-516b) the reader comprehends that Mithridates does not only see the physical sun but also the true being

ff.), in which animal form is chosen as the incarnation of certain persons. See HACKFORTH (1952: 89-91); OSBORNE (2007: 54-61).

59 For Plutarch's attitude towards these ideas see *De esu* 997E, 998C. See SORABJI (1993: 178-179). See the criticism of transmigration by Aristotle, *De an*. 407b22.

60 Cf. cf. Plat., *Tim*. 42bc, *Rep*. X 621b.

61 See Xen., *Anab*. 4.5,35; *Cyr*. 8.3,12, 24; Philost.,*VA* 1.31; cf. Hdt., I 216, on the Massagetae, and also BRIANT (2002: 94-96, 245-246, 281) on Hdt., I 189-190; cf. BOYCE (1975: 122, 151).

62 Strabo (XI 14.9) claims that the satrap of Armenia sent 20,000 colts to the Great King for the feasts of Mithra (Mithrakana) each year.

63 But cf. Curtius Rufus (IV13.12), who differentiates the two in Darius III's invocation to Sun and Mithras. Cf. Plut., *Alex*. 30.7. See BRIANT (2002: 251-2) who concludes that in the Achaemenid period, Mithra was closely related to the Sun (but without any formal or exclusive assimilation). See GNOLI (1979).

64 See *Il*. 16.779; Parmenides (DK fr. 28b1); Pind., *Olymp*. 7.71; Eurip., *Electr*. 866; *Ion*, 82, 1148; *Helen*, 341-342, *Orest*. 1001-1004; *IA* 159.

65 See that Curtius Rufus (III 3.11) refers to a large horse in Darius III's procession, called "the steed of the sun". Herodotus (III 90) states that Cilicia had to supply 360 white horses to the king, "one for each day in the year", whereby a reference is made to the solar calendar of 360 days plus 5 epagomenal days.

this astral body represents. Ostensibly, this punishment constitutes a decisive moment in the *Life*, one that upsets the previous portrayal of Artaxerxes. If we trace, however, the implicit horse imagery throughout the biography, we find that this cruelty had some previous manifestation, namely, in the penalty of Arbaces, who is literally turned into a beast of burden. This understanding helps the reader see that the real brutal character of Artaxerxes is gradually disclosed. The Mithridates scene foreshadows the last one, in which Artaxerxes has his son Darius executed (29.11-12), before he goes out and prostrates himself before the sun. The king appears unable to control his inner passions (both spirited and appetitive), which are allegorized by horses, as we have seen. While Cyrus' real horse runs uncurbed, Artaxerxes executes two people (one of whom is his son) as surrogate horses in a substitute sacrifice to the sun. When he finally prostrates himself before the sun (= 'Cyrus' in Persian, as we are told, ch. 1.3), he proves his brother was right: Artaxerxes can hold his place neither on the horse nor on the throne.

Conclusion

Utilizing all the connotations associated with the horse, namely, cultural, cross-cultural, literary, political, religious and philosophical, Plutarch is able to link diverse images and scenes within his description and add significant layers to his characterization of his protagonists. The method he uses is 'triggering off' certain allusions and notions that work in the readers' mind. The stallion is not an outlandish beast, nor is it overtly symbolic like the lion. It is for this reason that its presence and its importance for the understanding of the meaning of the narrative are ever more evasive. True to the symbol the animal has come to represent, that is, of a wild beast on the one hand and of a manageable creature, on the other, the horse imagery within Plutarch's text is hard to control and stabilize, yet once the layers are visible, reading can steadily progress along interpretive roads.

Bibliography

Almagor, E.,
- "A 'Barbarian' Symposium and the Absence of Philanthropia (*Artaxerxes* 15)", in J. R. Ferreira, A, D. F. Leão, M. Töster & P. B. Dias (eds.), *Symposion and Philanthropia in Plutarch*, Coimbra, Classica Digitalia/Centro de Estudos Clássicos e Humanísticos, 2009, pp. 131-146.
- "Characterization Through Animals: The Case of Plutarch's Artaxerxes: Part I" *Ploutarchos*, n. s., 7, (2009/2010) 3–22.

Anthony, D. W. & Brown, D.R.,
- "Eneolithic horse exploitation in the Eurasian steppes: diet, ritual and riding", *Antiquity,* 74 (2000) 75–86.

Ash, R.,
- "Severed Heads: Individual Portraits and Irrational Forces in Plutarch's *Galba* and *Otho*", in J. M. Mossman (ed.), *Plutarch and his Intellectual World*, London, 1997, pp. 189-214.

Boyce, M.,
- *A History of Zoroastrianism*, vol. 1, Leiden, 1975.

Briant, P.,
- *From Cyrus to Alexander*, Winona Lake, IN, 2002 (an English translation of *Histoire de l'Empire Perse: De Cyrus à Alexandre*, Paris, 1996).

BUGH, G. R.,
- *The Horsemen of Athens*, Princeton, 1988.

CAMP, J. M.,
- *Horses and Horsemanship in the Athenian Agora*, Agora Picture Book, 1998.

DAVIES, J. K.,
- *Athenian Propertied Families 600–300 B.C.*, Oxford, 1971.

DREWS, R.,
- *The Coming of the Greeks: Indo-European Conquests in the Aegean and the Near East*, Princeton, Princeton University Press, 1988.

DUFF, T.,
- *Plutarch's Lives: Exploring Virtue and Vice*, Oxford, 1999.

GABRIELLI, M.,
- *Le cheval dans l'Empire achéménide*, Istanbul: Ege Yayınları, 2006.

GERA, D.,
- *Xenophon's Cyropaedia: Style, Genre and Literary Technique*, Oxford, 1993.

GHEORGHIU, D.,
- "A First Representation of a Domesticated Horse in the Fifth Millenium B.C. in Eastern Europe? Ceramic evidence", in L. BODSON (ed.), *The History of the Knowledge of Animal Behavior*, Liège, 1993, pp. 93-115.

GNOLI, G.
- "Sol Persice Mithra," in U. BIANCHI (ed.), *Mysteria Mithrae*, Leiden, 1979, pp. 725-740.

HACKFORTH, R.,
- *Plato's Phaedrus*, Cambridge, 1952.

HALL, E.,
- *Inventing the Barbarian*, Oxford, 1989.
- *Aeschylus: Persians*, Aris and Phillips, Warminster, 1996.

LONDSDALE, S. H.,
- *Creatures of speech. Lion, herding, and hunting similes in the Iliad,* Stuttgart, 1990.

LOW, P.,
- "Cavalry identity and democratic ideology in early fourth-century Athens", *PCPhS*, 48 (2002) 102–19.

MOSSMAN, J.
- "A Life Unparalleled: Plutarch's Artaxerxes" in N. HUMBLE (ed.), *Plutarch's Lives: Parallelism and Purpose*, Swansea: Classical Press of Wales, 2010, pp. 145–168.

OSBORNE, C.,
- *Dumb beasts and dead philosophers: humanity and the humane in ancient philosophy and Literature*, Oxford, 2007.

OSBORNE, R.,
- "The viewing and obscuring of the Parthenon frieze", *JHS,* 107 (1987) 98-105.

PASCHALIS, M.,
- "The bull and the horse: animal theme and imagery in Seneca's Phaedra". *AJPh*, 115 (1994) 105-128.

PELLING, C.
- *Plutarch: Life of Antony*, Cambridge, 1988.
- *Plutarch and History*, London, 2002.

ROSEN, R.,
- "The Gendered Polis in Eupolis' Cities", in G. W. DOBROV (ed.), *The City as Comedy*, Chapel Hill and London, 1997, 149–76.

SAID, S.,
- "Plutarch and the People in the *Parallel Lives*", in L. DE BLOIS, J. BONS, T. KESSELS, D. M. SCHENKEVELD, *The Statesman in Plutarch's Works. Volume I: Plutarch's Statesman and His Aftermath: Political, Philosophical, and Literary Aspects*, Leiden: Brill, 2004, pp. 7-25.

SORABJI, R.,
- *Animal Minds and Human Morals: The Origins of the Western Debate*, Ithaca, NY: Cornell University Press, 1993.

SPAWFORTH, A.,
- "The Pamphleteer Ephippus, King Alexander and the Persian Royal Hunt", *Histos,* 6 (2012) 169-203.

SPENCE, I. G.
- *The Cavalry of Classical Greece*, Oxford, 1993.

TRAPP, M. B.,
- "Plato's Phaedrus in second-century Greek literature" in D. A. RUSSELL (ed.), *Antonine Literature*, Oxford, 1990, pp. 141–73.

TUPLIN, C. J.
- "On the Track of the Ten Thousand", *REA*, 101 (1999) 331-366.