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# Aelian in the Light of Plutarch. Notes on some Parallel Passages. Notes on some Parallel Passages

Lucía Rodríguez-Noriega Guillén

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# KTÈMA

## CIVILISATIONS DE L'ORIENT, DE LA GRÈCE ET DE ROME ANTIQUES

### Traitement du passé et construction de la mémoire chez les auteurs de la Seconde Sophistique

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## Aelian in the Light of Plutarch Notes on some Parallel Passages

RÉSUMÉ-. À travers l'analyse de quelques passages parallèles entre Plutarque et Élien (*Mor.* 363C ~ *NA* 10.28 et *VH* 4.8; *Mor.* 982D ~ *NA* 9.3), cet article vise à illustrer l'intérêt que peuvent présenter des études de cette nature au-delà de la recherche de relations d'interdépendance, du traçage de sources communes ou de l'édition d'œuvres fragmentaires. Plus spécifiquement, une telle approche peut contribuer à la connaissance d'Élien en tant qu'écrivain, à une meilleure compréhension de certains aspects du contenu de ses écrits, ou à la clarification de questions liées à la transmission du texte.

MOTS-CLÉS-. Élien, Plutarque, intertextualité, critique textuelle

ABSTRACT-. Through the analysis of several parallel passages between Plutarch and Aelian (*Mor.* 363C ~ *NA* 10.28 and *VH* 4.8; *Mor.* 982D ~ *NA* 9.3), this article aims to illustrate how studies of this nature can be of interest beyond the search for relationships of interdependence, the tracing of common sources, or the editing of fragmentary works. Specifically, this kind of approach can contribute to our knowledge of Aelian as a writer, to a better understanding of certain aspects of the content of his writings, or to clarify questions related to the transmission of the text.

KEYWORDS-. Aelian, Plutarch, intertextuality, textual criticism

Encyclopedic and miscellaneous works of the imperial period have traditionally been considered mere recipients of testimonies and fragments of other writings and, therefore, not valued in their own right. Even in recent decades, despite the new interest in studying scholarly works of this type for their intrinsic value, parallel passages have mainly been analyzed by scholars interested in editing fragmentary works, in establishing relations of dependence between the authors, or in detecting their sources. Aelian's two major works, *De Natura Animalium* (*NA*) and *Varia Historia* (*VH*), have not been exceptions.<sup>1</sup> As such, I am interested in analyzing parallel passages between Aelian and other authors in order to find out what such an approach can contribute to our knowledge of Aelian as a writer, especially in terms of how he handles the material he takes from others (what he adds, suppresses or changes, why he does so, etc.), or simply to better understand certain aspects of the content of his writings, in all of which cases comparison with other texts can

(1) Aelian, a Roman born in Praeneste, was a typical example of Greek bookish literature of the transition between the 2nd and 3rd centuries AD, and a member of the so-called Second Sophistic. On his life, education and works, see, for example, SCHOLFIELD 1958, p. xi- xiv, WILSON 1997, p. 2-6, RODRÍGUEZ-NORIEGA 2018, SCHETTINO 2018, p. 179-181, or RODRIGUEZ-NORIEGA 2020, p. 644-647. An online bibliography of the author is available at <https://www.lnoriega.es/eliano.html#animal>.

be illuminating. As we shall see, Aelian is not interested in the faithful reproduction of the historical narratives or scientific data he finds in his sources, but rather in recreation, that is, the re-use of this material to create new literary texts that respond to his personal interests and style. Thus, he feels free to manipulate the data transmitted by his sources and to alter them in the way that best suits him at any given moment.

I think this kind of approach is essential for a proper appreciation of the author, but is also fundamental for those who turn to Aelian as a source of fragmentary texts, since it can provide them with information regarding his reliability as a source, what kind of elements are most likely to be his own additions, etc. Besides, this type of analysis can sometimes contribute to improving either Aelian's text or that of the work containing the parallel passage, as we will see.

This, then, will be the focus of this article, in which I will compare two passages from Plutarch, from *On Isis and Osiris* and *On the intelligence of animals*, with several of Aelian's, from both *NA* and *VH*. Although all the passages are related to the Egyptian world,<sup>2</sup> this is incidental; my selection is motivated by the interest of the various issues that these texts raise.

#### I. OCHUS «THE ASS» IN AELIAN AND PLUTARCH

I will begin with a passage from Plutarch's *On Isis and Osiris* (363C) that has several parallels in the works of Aelian, but without there being a direct dependence between the two authors. Plutarch's text reads as follows:

Text 1.

ἀπολαύειν δὲ καὶ τὸν ὄνον, ὡς περ εἴρηται, τῆς ὁμοιότητος διὰ τὴν ἀμαθίαν καὶ τὴν ὕβριν οὐχ ἦττον ἢ διὰ τὴν χροάν οἴονται· διὸ καὶ τῶν Περσικῶν βασιλέων ἐχθραίνοντες μάλιστα τὸν Ὑχόν, ὡς ἐναγῆ καὶ μιάρῳν, ὄνον ἐπωνόμασαν. κάκεῖνος εἰπὼν ὅ μέντοι ὄνος οὗτος ὑμῶν κατευωχῆσεται τὸν βοῦν ἔθυσσε τὸν Ἄπιν, ὡς Δείνων ἰστόρηκεν.

On the other hand, <the Egyptians> believe, as has been said, that the ass too reaps the consequences of his resemblance <with Typhon> because of its stupidity and wantonness no less than because of the color of its skin. For this reason, too, as they hated Ochus more than all the Persian kings, because they considered him abominable and wicked, they nicknamed him "Ass". And he remarked: "However, this ass will feast upon your bull", and slaughtered the Apis, as Deinon has recorded.<sup>3</sup>

In this section of the work, Plutarch deals with the evil god Typhon (that is, the Egyptian Seth),<sup>4</sup> seeking to establish that he was a demon and not a real god, and discusses his association with

(2) Even after their settlement in Egyptian cities following the Macedonian conquest, the Greeks, who had always admired Egypt for its ancient culture and civilization, remained fascinated by the exoticism of its landscape and fauna; something which did not change after Egypt was incorporated into the Roman Empire. The spread of the cult of Isis also explains the interest of Greeks and Romans in Egyptian religion and myths. On Greek views of Egypt over time, see FROIDEFOND 1971, SMELIK, HEMELRIJK 1984, FOWDEN 1993<sup>2</sup>, BURSTEIN 1996, PESTMAN 1998, ASSMANN 2000, NIMIS 2004, or MCGING 2019, all with bibliography. On the "Nilotic setting" in the *NA* and its relationship to the famous Nilotic mosaic of Praeneste, see SCHEFFINO 2018, p. 192-184.

(3) Plut. *Mor.* 363C = Deinon *FGrHist* 690 F 21 = F 21 Lenfant.

(4) Very little is known about the origins of Seth as a divinity. In Egyptian religion he had a multiple function, which varied according to period, tradition and place, although the negative aspects always predominated (TE VELDE 1977, p. 100-104). Seth was primarily the god of chaos, a potentially evil and dangerous deity, and thus to be rejected, but he was also sometimes presented as a protective deity worshipped in various places in Egypt. His demonization became more acute from the Middle Empire onwards, when the myth of Seth's dismemberment of Osiris arose (TE VELDE 1977, p. 91), and became even more pronounced in the Ptolemaic period. As for the identification between Seth and Typhon (grounded on the fact that both had opposed the established divine order, the former confronting Horus and the latter Zeus), it is attested in Greek texts as early as the 5<sup>th</sup> century BC, as we find it in Aeschylus, *Supp.* 559-560; see also Herodotus 2.144, 156. Plutarch explicitly testifies to this in *On Isis and Osiris* 367D.

animals with red fur. According to the author, Typhon/Seth was said by the Egyptians to resemble a donkey, in part because of the redness of his skin, although in fact the resemblance went beyond that and incorporated the stupidity and lascivious behaviour of both Typhon and the donkey.<sup>5</sup> Plutarch remarks that the animal, in turn, suffers the consequences of this resemblance, alluding to the custom (previously mentioned in the same chapter, see 362F) of throwing a donkey, as a representation of Typhon, over a precipice during certain festivals.<sup>6</sup>

At this point, Plutarch includes an anecdote regarding the Persian king Artaxerxes Ochus (Artaxerxes III) which adds interest to the text and enriches it by providing a religious key to explaining an event in Egypt's historical past, thereby linking history, religion and politics. Ochus (who conquered Egypt in 343 BCE) was particularly hated by the Egyptians, according to Plutarch, because of his impiety and evilness (ὥς ἐναγῆ καὶ μιαρὸν), which earned him the nickname of 'Ass', precisely because of his resemblance to Typhon/Seth. According to the account that Plutarch explicitly takes from the 4th century BCE historian Deinon of Colophon,<sup>7</sup> Ochus reacted to the offense by claiming his nickname, and then slaughtering (and eating) the Apis, that is, the sacred bull which the Egyptians considered the incarnation of the god, which was housed in a temple in Memphis.<sup>8</sup> Plutarch most likely came across this story while compiling information for his *Artaxerxes*, where Ochus is mentioned on several occasions,<sup>9</sup> and brought it up here through the association of ideas. As we read in Herodotus 3.29, and is repeated by Plutarch in *On Isis and Osiris* 368F, before Ochus, the sacrilege of the slaughter of the Apis bull had already been attributed to the Persian Cambyses,<sup>10</sup> although in that case the details are different, there being no connection with Typhon and, indeed, Cambyses did not go so far as to eat the sacred animal. Now, the god Apis was closely associated with Osiris (and partially identified with him), and in that period he was also a symbol of the pharaoh's power. Seth, on the other hand, besides being a divinity traditionally linked to foreigners,<sup>11</sup> had killed and cut to pieces his brother Osiris.<sup>12</sup> So originally this story of the Persian invaders and the Apis bull, reminiscent of that of Seth and Osiris, suited the Egyptians' anti-Persian propaganda of the time very well,<sup>13</sup> although the approach is blurred in Plutarch, who

(5) Seth started to be associated with the donkey in the written sources from the Middle Kingdom onwards (WARD 1978, p. 23; VANDENBEUSCH 2019, p. 138; id. 2020, p. 27, 253-255), and in figurative representations it is not uncommon for him to be represented with an ass's head, or even directly by an ass. On the possible reasons for this association (including, among others, those mentioned by Plutarch), see VANDENBEUSCH 2020, p. 233-335.

(6) This piece of information does not appear to be present in other sources, but the slaughter of donkeys seems to have been regularly linked to the Khoiak festivals, which celebrated the rebirth of Osiris, and his victory over Seth and his other enemies (VANDENBEUSCH 2020, p. 214-219 and 250). There are also many representations of the animal in scenes from the Graeco-Roman period, where it is ritually slaughtered as a representation of Seth, especially in the temples of Edfou and Dendera (VANDENBEUSCH 2020, p. 209-219).

(7) On Deinon, see LENFANT 2009 (on this specific fragment: p. 193-200); on the use of his *Persica* by Plutarch, see LENFANT 2009, p. 41-45, and ALMAGOR 2018, p. 134-228.

(8) Aelian devotes a long chapter to the Apis bull in NA 11.10. At least part of his information comes from Herodotus (3.27) and the historian of the 4th century BCE Aristagoras (*FGrHist* 608 F 4), whom he mentions explicitly.

(9) See *Art.* 26.2, 26.4, 28.3, 28.5, 30.1-3, 30.8-9.

(10) The story also appears several times in Aelian, as we shall see below. On the subject, see SMELIK, HEMELRIJK 1984, p. 1864-1869.

(11) This link, which must have been established in the Ancient Empire or even earlier, was strengthened from the Hyksos dynasty onwards, as this people originating from the Near East particularly venerated Seth (GOEDICKE 1983, p. 31; VANDENBEUSCH 2020, p. 240).

(12) It is indeed Plutarch who, in *On Isis and Osiris*, has given us the fullest account of the myth of the Dismemberment of Osiris (TE VELDE 1977, p. 91).

(13) See HENKELMANN 2011, p. 131. In the words of SMELIK, HEMELRIJK 1984, p. 1864, "when a conqueror was depicted unfavorably [by the Egyptians], it was said that he had profaned, or even killed Apis". These authors (1984, p. 1865, with bibliography) consider the similarity between the two stories as an indication of their lack of historicity. HENKELMANN, *loc. cit.*, suggests that the story might be connected to older folk-tale traditions.

mostly resorts to the story—actually irrelevant to the central issue at hand—as an addition intended to enliven and embellish the narrative while adding a scholarly touch.

Aelian, for his part, alludes to the same story several times in his preserved works, first in the *NA* and then in the *VH*, although for different reasons each time, neither of which coincide with Plutarch's either. An exponent of an essentially bookish culture, Aelian selected material from his readings guided by the desire to entertain and educate, and, in the specific case of the *NA*, by the relationship of the texts with the animal world; moreover, he tended to favor information that allowed him to reflect on moral issues.<sup>14</sup> Besides, in the case at hand, Aelian mentions no source,<sup>15</sup> which is not unusual for him. The longest of the parallel passages from *NA* is part of a chapter that deals with the Egyptians' dislike of the donkey and the antelope. Aelian's text, which opens the chapter, reads as follows:

Text 2.

Σάλπιγγος ἤχον βδελύττονται Βουσιρίται καὶ Ἄβυδος ἢ Αἰγυπτία καὶ Λύκων πόλις· καὶ λέγουσιν τὴν αἰτίαν, ἐπεὶ πῶς ἔοικεν ὄνω βρωμιωμένῳ. ἀλλὰ καὶ ὅσοι περὶ τὴν θρησκείαν ἔχουσι τὴν τοῦ Σαράπιδος μισοῦσι τὸν ὄνον. τοῦτό τοι καὶ Ὀχός ὁ Πέρσης εἰδὼς ἀπέκτεινε μὲν τὸν Ἄπιν, ἐξεθέωσε δὲ τὸν ὄνον, ἐς τὰ ἔσχατα λυπήσαι θέλων τοὺς Αἰγυπτίους. ἔδωκε δὲ ἄρα καὶ αὐτὸς δίκας τῷ ἱερῷ βοῖ οὐ μεμπτὰς οὐδὲ ἤττονας Καμβύσου τοῦ πρώτου τὴν θεοσουλίαν ταύτην τετολημκότος. The inhabitants of Busiris, and the cities of Abydos and Lycopolis in Egypt, reject the sound of the trumpet. And they explain the cause, saying that it is because it resembles somehow the braying of a donkey. But also those who worship Serapis hate the ass. Now, Ochus the Persian, who knew this, killed the Apis and deified the Ass, wishing to upset the Egyptians to the utmost. Nevertheless, he too paid a well-deserved penalty to the sacred bull, no less than that of Cambyses, the first who dared to commit such a sacrilege.<sup>16</sup>

In the passage, the curious report of the inhabitants of some parts of Egypt rejecting the sound of the trumpet due to it resembling the braying of a donkey<sup>17</sup> is followed by the assertion that

(14) On this subject, see RODRÍGUEZ-NORIEGA GUILLÉN 2020, p. 644-647.

(15) For this reason, his testimony is not included in Deinon's editions of this fragment in particular, although Lenfant alludes to some of Aelian's passages when commenting on Deinon's fragment. Aelian does mention Deinon on two occasions (once in *NA* 17.10, with respect to some strange animals from Ethiopia [*FGrHist* 690 F 22 = F 22 Lenfant]), and another time in *VH* 7.1, when telling how Semiramis acquired the kingdom of Assyria [*FGrHist* 690 F 7 = F 7 Lenfant]), in both cases this being the only source of the passages he quotes. Aelian does not use Deinon as a source on Egyptian subjects in either case, but of course this does not preclude him having taken the anecdote about Ochus and the Apis from Deinon. The authors Aelian cites explicitly when he deals with Egypt are (besides Herodotus) Aristagoras (4<sup>th</sup> c. BCE), mentioned in *NA* 11.10, on the Apis bull (*FGrHist* 608 F 4); Manetho (3<sup>rd</sup> c. BCE), mentioned in *NA* 10.16, on the supposed effects of the consumption of sow's milk (*FGrHist* 609 F 23 = fr. 81 Waddell); Phylarchus (3<sup>rd</sup> c. BCE), mentioned in *NA* 17.5, on the asps of Egypt (*FGrHist* 81 F 27); Apion (1<sup>st</sup> c. CE), mentioned in *NA* 10.29 on the ibis (*FGrHist* 616 F 12), and *NA* 11.40, on animal teratology (*FGrHist* 616 F 13); and the Egyptian astrologer Pammenes (mid-1<sup>st</sup> c. CE), whose Περὶ θηρίων is mentioned in *NA* 16.42 with respect to Egyptian winged scorpions and two-headed snakes. It is impossible to know whether Aelian is also using material taken from any of these authors when dealing with topics related to the Egyptian world in other passages when he does not mention any source, or when he uses expressions such as "the Egyptians say" and the like. SCHOLFIELD 1958, p. XIX-XX, following WELLMANN 1896, considers that Aelian must have taken his material on Egypt mainly from Apion, but the data we have make it impossible to say for sure, just as we cannot exclude that he had used other authors without citing them. From Manetho, for instance, whom he praised for his wisdom, Aelian might have obtained information on many matters related to Egyptian religion and history, and we know that he spoke of Ochus in book III of his *History of Egypt* (cf. *FGrHist* 609 F 73a, b = fr. 75a, b, c Waddell). On the other hand, it is impossible to be certain that when Aelian mentions any of these authors he is quoting them first-hand.

(16) Ael. *NA*, 10.28.

(17) This piece of information is also mentioned by Plutarch in *On Isis and Osiris* (362F), just before referring to the act of throwing a donkey over a precipice as a representation of Typhon. Nevertheless, Plutarch only speaks of the cities of Burisis and Lycopolis, to which Aelian adds Abydos. In the *Dinner of the Seven Wise Men* (*Mor.* 150F), whose authenticity is disputed, one of the characters, Neiloxenus, refers to the rejection of the trumpet by the inhabitants of Busiris as well, and says that the Egyptians treated the ass with contumely due to Thyphon. HANI 1976, p. 424-425, considers that this statement

the worshipers of Serapis abhor the animal, but no causal relationship is said to exist between the two facts. By contrast, a link between Serapis' cult and Ochus' actions is explicitly mentioned, in line with what Plutarch says. Also as in Plutarch's account, in NA 10.28 the story is told from the Egyptian point of view, and Aelian, in his own personal style, underlines Ochus' wickedness saying that he was led by his desire to distress the Egyptians as much as possible (ἐς τὰ ἔσχατα λυπήσαι θέλων τοὺς Αἰγυπτίους).

Nevertheless, there are also several important differences between this version and that of Plutarch. In the first place, in this section of the chapter Aelian neither mentions Typhon/Seth (whose identification with the ass explains the Egyptians' hatred of the animal, as we know thanks to Plutarch), nor does he allude to Ochus' nickname, which was clearly central to the original story. This is striking because later, after dealing with the Egyptians' rejection of the antelope, Aelian returns to the subject of the donkey (this time without explicitly referring to the Egyptians) and, after alluding to the Pythagoreans' opinion on the animal,<sup>18</sup> he says that there are even some<sup>19</sup> who claim that it is especially dear to Typhon (ἤδη δὲ αὐτόν τινες καὶ τῷ Τυφῶνι προσφιλή γεγονέναι φασί). Furthermore, Aelian speaks of the followers of Serapis, a syncretic cult introduced by Ptolemy I,<sup>20</sup> and therefore not yet in existence in the time of Artaxerxes III, an anachronism that may be his own responsibility or his source's,<sup>21</sup> but which in any case Aelian, who is not concerned with delving into the aspects of Egyptian religion that underlie the story, has no problem in including in his text.

Besides, the sentence in direct speech spoken by Ochus in Plutarch, warning that he was going to feast on the bull, which seems to be taken verbatim from Deinon, is replaced in Aelian by a statement in the third person, where Ochus is said to have killed the Apis and deified the ass (ἀπέκτεινε μὲν τὸν Ἄπιν, ἐξεθέωσε δὲ τὸν ὄνον). Now, the second statement seems a reinterpretation of the original story, since in Plutarch it is said that Ochus sacrificed (ἔθυσε) the Apis and that he himself feasted on the bull's flesh,<sup>22</sup> but not that he deified the ass. Given that Ochus' nickname actually came from his identification with Typhon/Seth, whose link with the donkey in Egyptian religion was well-known, it is this already existing divinity, often represented as a donkey, who would, in any case, be expected to be the recipient of the sacrifice.

Finally, while Plutarch, who in 363C is only marginally interested in Ochus, does not continue the story beyond the sacrifice of the Apis, Aelian places the emphasis on the king's well-deserved punishment for having slaughtered the bull (ἔδωκε δὲ ἄρα καὶ αὐτὸς δίκας τῷ ἱερῷ βοῖ οὐ μεμπτάς),

may have been originated by some misunderstanding, since in Egypt the trumpet was normally used in worship. However, VANDENBEUSCH 2020, p. 250, n. 102, points out that its veracity could be partly corroborated by a scene in the temple of Edfou, where Khonsou is shown trampling on a trumpet; as she indicates, the use or rejection of the instrument do not seem to have been unanimous throughout Egypt. She further suggests (p. 235) that the braying may have been associated with the thunder sometimes symbolised by Seth, and that this may have been one of several reasons for the association between this divinity and the donkey.

(18) Cf. *On Isis and Osiris* 363A, where Plutarch, quoting Eudoxus (fr. 293 Lasserre), says that the Pythagoreans also seem to consider Typhon a demon, without alluding at all to his link with the ass.

(19) In my view, Aelian is here willfully ambiguous about who are responsible for such a claim (as is so often the case in the work when the author does not want to refer to a specific source).

(20) Cf. Plutarch, *On Isis and Osiris* 361F-362E. On Serapis and his cult see, for instance, PFEIFFER 2008.

(21) If the anachronism was already in the source of Aelian, it could not have been Deinon (whose death predated the accession of Ptolemy I to the throne), nor Manetho, who played an important part in the introduction of the cult of Serapis (see WADDELL 1964, p. IX-XIV), so it is not plausible that he would have intended in his work to pass it off as older than his own time. In contrast, the error might have been in Apion, which HENKELMAN 2011, p. 130, points to as a possible intermediate source from which Aelian would have taken the story that ultimately came from Deinon's *Persika*.

(22) Plutarch, again in *On Isis and Osiris* 355B-C, adds that Ochus devoured the Apis in the company of his friends. Also, in Aelian's fr. 40a Domingo-Forasté, transmitted, without any indication of its author, in *Suda* α 3201, it is said that Ochus, after killing the Apis, wanted the cook to prepare its meat for his dinner.



a punishment which, according to him, was no less serious than that previously suffered by Cambyses for having committed the same sacrilege. As we have said above, the story of Cambyses and the Apis bull is recorded in Herodotus 3.29 and also mentioned in passing by Plutarch (368F), who does not connect the two episodes. In contrast, Aelian links them again in *VH* 6.8, a chapter entirely devoted to describing the killing of Ochus at the hands of Bagoas, who hated the king, according to Aelian, because, like Cambyses before him, he had killed the Apis bull when he was in Egypt (ἐπεὶ τὸν ἼΑπιν ἐν Αἰγύπτῳ γενόμενος ἀπέκτεινε καὶ οὗτος, ὡς ὁ Καμβύσης πρότερον). This second passage strongly suggests that both the linking of the assassination of Ochus with the sacrifice of the Apis and the comparison with Cambyses mentioned in *NA* 10.28 are not original to Aelian, but rather they already figured in some of the sources he consulted.

Aelian returns to the same story in *VH* 4.8, in a chapter where he brings together several short independent anecdotes intended to illustrate sharp and rapid turns of fortune for the better. The one that interests us is the fourth of these anecdotes, whose text reads as follows:

Text 3.

ἽΟτι τὸν ἼΟχον οἱ Αἰγύπτιοι τῇ ἐπιχωρίῳ φωνῇ ἽΟνον ἐκάλουν, τὸ νοθεὺς αὐτοῦ τῆς γνώμης ἐκ τῆς ἀσθενείας τοῦ ζῶου διαβάλλοντες. ἀνθ' ὧν ἐκεῖνος τὸν ἼΑπιν πρὸς βίαν κατέθυσεν ἽΟνω.

Note that the Egyptians called Ochus “the Ass” in their local language, mocking his slow wits by comparing them to the animal’s weakness. In response, Ochus enforced the sacrifice of Apis to Ass.<sup>23</sup>

If we compare this new passage with those we have seen so far, we can see that here Aelian has reduced the story to the minimum, once again mentioning no source. On the other hand, this time the final sentence suggests to the reader the pre-existence of an ass god (Seth/Typhon, we can assume), to whom the sacred bull would have been sacrificed, and there is no indication that it was Ochus himself who deified the animal, as Aelian states in *NA* 10.28. Furthermore, despite the gist of the story being the same as in the other versions, here Ochus’ character is described in a quite different way. As we have seen in Text 1, according to Plutarch, Ochus was ἐναγῆς and μιαιρός, “abominable and wicked”, and what had earned him his nickname was the similarity of his character and that of the evil Typhon, who, in turn, the Egyptians equated with an ass. The wicked character of Ochus is also highlighted by Aelian in *NA* 10.20 (Text 2), when he refers to his well-deserved punishment, and we can safely assume that Ochus was painted in a negative way in the original source.

In contrast, in *VH* 4.8 (where Typhon is again not mentioned), Ochus’ nickname is explained by his slow wits (τὸ νοθεὺς τῆς γνώμης), in accordance with the common (though erroneous) belief that donkeys are stupid animals.<sup>24</sup> So, this portrayal of Ochus as slow-witted rather than as a sacrilegious evildoer is a major alteration of what appears to have been the common version of the story,<sup>25</sup> intended to accommodate it to the overall theme of the chapter while maintaining an appropriate moral tone: Ochus had to suffer the uncharitable taunts of the Egyptians, but got his revenge by forcing the sacrifice of the Apis. To show a wicked character prevailing would have been the wrong moral lesson for Aelian’s readers; therefore, he chose to alter the story by presenting Ochus as someone dim, which in Greek culture would resonate perfectly with the nickname ‘Ass’, and thus avoided any comment on his sacrilegious behaviour or his subsequent punishment, contrary to what he does in all the other passages where he deals with the story of Ochus and the Apis. In other words, in order to adapt the story to the theme of the chapter without entering

(23) Ael. *VH*, 4.8.

(24) On donkeys in the Greco-Roman world, see KITCHELL 2014, p. 57-59, with bibliography.

(25) Although the germ of the idea probably occurred to Aelian because stupidity was one of the characteristics linking Typhon to the ass (see Text 1).



into open contradiction with the moral principles he wants to transmit with his work, Aelian has rhetorically manipulated the story, resorting to the alteration of the cause and the suppression or minimisation of counterproductive data.<sup>26</sup>

## II. PLUTARCH'S *ON THE CLEVERNESS OF ANIMALS* 982D AND AELIAN'S *NA* 9.3

Between Plutarch's *On the Cleverness of Animals* and Aelian's *NA* a number of parallel passages have been pointed out,<sup>27</sup> some of which seem to point to a direct dependence of the latter on the former, as is the case of those listed in the table below:

Plutarch's <i>De soll. anim.</i>	Aelian's <i>NA</i>
980B-C	8.16
980E	8.25
981D-E	8.28
982D, p. 1	9.3
982D, p. 2	9.9
982E	9.13
983B-D	9.17

In fact, that so many passages coincide in theme and relative order strongly suggests that in these cases Aelian did use Plutarch's text as a source. This is not surprising, considering that *On the Cleverness of Animals* was a work that undoubtedly enjoyed a good circulation in the 3rd century,<sup>28</sup> and which deals with subjects closely related to Aelian's interests. I will deal now with one of these cases, number 4 in the table, starting again with Plutarch's text.

At the beginning of this section (981E-F), Plutarch has stated that in the case of many animals both parents share the care of the offspring, and, quoting Aristotle,<sup>29</sup> that males do not devour their own progeny, but, on the contrary, protect the eggs. He then discusses several examples that demonstrate the love of certain animals for their offspring, among them the crocodile. In the part that interests us, Plutarch is referring to what happens when crocodiles hatch. This is what he says (for convenience, I reproduce the reading of the archetype, indicating some variants below):

Text 4.

ἐκλεπισθέντων δὲ τῶν σκύμων, ὃς ἂν εὐθὺς ἀναδὺς μὴ λάβῃ τι τῶν προστυχόντων, ἢ μυῖαν ἢ σέριφον\* ἢ γῆς ἔντερον ἢ κάρφος ἢ βοτάνην, τῷ στόματι διασπαράξασα τοῦτον ἢ μήτηρ ἀπέκτεινε δακοῦσα. τὰ δὲ θυμοειδῆ καὶ δραστήρια στέργει καὶ περιέπει, καθάπερ οἱ σοφώτατοι τῶν ἀνθρώπων ἀξιοῦσι, κρίσει τὸ φιλεῖν οὐ πάθει νέμουσα.

\*μυῖαν ἢ σέριφον Ξ : μιανῆς ἔριφον F α Z : μίαν ἢ σερίφον A : μυῖαν ἢ ἔριφον B : μὴ ἀνῆς ἔριφον P : εἰ μὴ ἔριφον (cum lacuna inter μὴ et ἔριφον) g : μὴ ἀνεῖς ἔριφον υ : μυῖαν ἢ σέρφον Bouffartigue, recte.

(26) On Aelian's rhetorical education, which transcends all his works, as happens with all the members of the so-called "Second Sophistic", see RODRÍGUEZ-NORIEGA GUILLÉN 2020, p. 645-646.

(27) SCHOLFIELD 1958, p. XXI.

(28) This is suggested, for example, by *P.Oxy.* 78.5158, whose text corresponds to *On the cleverness of animals* 963D, and which is thought to have been part of a 3rd century library or bookstore copy of the work; see BRUSUELAS, HENRY 2012. In Egypt, remains of at least 17 copies (mostly *volumina*, but also a few codices) of works by Plutarch from between the 2nd and 5th centuries have been found, most of them of high quality, attesting to the early esteem and dissemination of the author's work even outside Rome and Athens; see SCHMIDT 2019.

(29) If Plutarch is in fact referring, as some have suggested, to *HA* 621a23, it must be said that in this passage Aristotle specifically talks about catfish, and not about aquatic animals in general, as Plutarch says.

When <the crocodiles> have hatched, the one that, upon emerging, does not immediately catch with his mouth whatever is nearby, a fly or a praying mantis or an earthworm or a blade of straw or a plant, the mother tears it to pieces with her mouth and bites it to death. On the other hand, she is affectionate and solicitous towards the lively and active ones, administering her love, as the wisest men advocate, according to judgement and not to emotion.<sup>30</sup>

Aelian, for his part, deals with the subject in a chapter devoted to the offspring of a number of animals (mice, crocodiles, eagles) and, in particular, to what happens immediately after they are born. On the subject of crocodiles, he says the following:

Text 5.

οἱ δὲ κροκόδειλοι, ὅταν τέκωσι, τὸ γνήσιον καὶ τὸ νόθον τόνδε τὸν τρόπον ἐλέγχουσιν. ἔάν τι παραχρῆμα ἐκλυφῆς ἀρπάσῃ, τελεῖ τὸ λοιπὸν ἐς τὸ γένος, καὶ φιλεῖται τοῖς γειναμένοις, καὶ πεπίστευται κροκοδειλῶν εἰς εἶναι καὶ ἠρίθμηται· ἐάν δὲ ἐλινύσῃ καὶ βλακεύσῃ καὶ μὴ λάβῃ ποθὲν ἢ μυῖαν ἢ σέρφον\* ἢ ἔντερον γῆς ἢ σαῦρον τῶν νεαρῶν, διέσπασεν ὁ πατὴρ αὐτὸν ὡς ἀδόκιμον τε καὶ κίβδηλον καὶ προσήκοντά οἱ οὐδέν.

\* σέρφον VL : σέρφον PAH.

When crocodiles give birth they distinguish the legitimate from the bastard offspring in this manner: if, as soon as <the crocodile> hatches, it captures something, it is henceforward welcomed into the family, loved by its parents, considered a real crocodile and counted as one of them. However, if it remains inactive and lazy, and does not catch from somewhere a fly or a gnat or an earthworm or a young lizard, the father tears it to pieces, considering it a despicable and illegitimate creature, and no kin of his.<sup>31</sup>

The two versions have clear similarities: both describe what awaits the young crocodiles, depending on whether or not they actively seek food as soon as they hatch, and in both cases it is said that the lazy ones are torn to pieces by one of their parents, while the active and independent ones are affectionately accepted into the family. However, the two texts also show significant differences, some of which seem to be attributable to manuscript transmission (which is beyond the author's control), while others are clearly the result of intentional alterations on his part.

I will begin with the former. But, before entering into the textual analysis, it is useful to summarize the essentials of the manuscript transmission of the two works. In the case of *On the Cleverness of Animals*,<sup>32</sup> all the surviving manuscripts are descended from a single archetype, which contained errors of various kinds, due to confusion of paronyms (of the type δικαίων for ἄδικων 964F, μόνον for μονιόν, 966A, παραλαβών for παραβαλών, 979E), omission of letters, and misreadings of characters in uncial, among others. The manuscripts can be grouped into four families, related to each other in various ways.<sup>33</sup> In the case of NA, all manuscripts are also descended from a lost archetype, whose readings can be reconstructed through the agreement of the manuscripts VLP, or of V with either of the other two.<sup>34</sup>

We can now turn to some textual issues raised by the two versions. As can be seen, while the content in general is the same, the wording is rather different. This was something deliberately sought by all the authors of this period, who, trained in the rhetorical technique of paraphrase,<sup>35</sup> did

(30) Plut. *De soll. anim.* 982.

(31) Ael. *NA*, 9.3.

(32) See BOUFFARTIGUE 2012, p. LII-LIX, also for the details on the manuscripts.

(33) 1<sup>st</sup> family: F α (and the latter's closest relatives: A γ E β ζ I G n δ j, among others). 2<sup>nd</sup> family (Ξ): Q i h k, which depend on two different copies that came from the same model. 3<sup>rd</sup> family (closely related to Ξ): P g q. 4<sup>th</sup> family: Z υ B.

(34) The relationships between the various manuscripts can be seen in the stemma given in GARCÍA VALDES, LLERA FUEYO, RODRÍGUEZ-NORIEGA GUILLÉN 2009, p. VIII; for full information on the various manuscripts, see p. VIII-XI.

(35) On paraphrase in antiquity, in its various forms, see ROBERTS 1985, esp. p. 5-60, and ZUCKER 2011, both with bibliography.

their best, whenever they were inspired by previous texts, to say the same thing in a different and, if possible, better way. Nevertheless, there is a textual segment of one sentence that is presented in a very similar way in both versions, namely that which contains what we might call “the list of the young crocodiles’ potential prey”:

Plutarch, *Mor.* 982D: ὃς ἂν εὐθὺς ἀναδὺς μὴ λάβῃ τι τῶν προστυχόντων, ἢ μυῖαν ἢ σέριφον ἢ γῆς ἔντερον ἢ κάρφος ἢ βοτάνην. “The one that, upon emerging, does not immediately catch with his mouth whatever is nearby, a fly or a praying mantis or an earthworm or a blade of straw or a plant”  
 Aelian, *NA* 9.3: ἐὰν δὲ ἐλινύσῃ καὶ βλακεύσῃ καὶ μὴ λάβῃ ποθὲν ἢ μυῖαν ἢ σέρφον ἢ ἔντερον γῆς ἢ σαῦρον τῶν νεαρῶν. “However, if it remains inactive and lazy, and does not catch from somewhere a fly or a gnat or an earthworm or a young lizard”

Nevertheless, there are two differences in the list. The first is the term that in the archetype of Plutarch’s *On the Cleverness of Animals* appeared as σέριφον, and in that of Aelian’s *NA* as σέρφον. The formal similarity between the two words, which may not have been too familiar to medieval copyists, undoubtedly explains the divergence. As can be seen in the critical apparatus of Text 4, in several manuscripts of *On the Cleverness of Animals*, the reading is ἔριφον, with no σ-, as a result of an erroneous cutting of words when the work was transcribed in minuscules, still very visible in F α Z (where, in addition, μυῖαν has been replaced by μίαν, so these manuscripts read μιανῆς ἔριφον instead of μυῖαν ἢ σέριφον), an error which led other copyists to make various attempts to amend the text. The form σέριφον is the accusative singular of two separate words, σέριφον (term designating sea wormwood, *Artemisia maritima*, L. or a plant of the same family), and σέριφος (the name given in Sicily to the praying mantis,<sup>36</sup> commonly called ἀρουραῖα ἀκρίς or μάντις in Greek). The word σέρφον, on the other hand, designated in common Greek any small winged insect (including the winged ant, as is explained in a scholium in the margin of Aelian’s manuscript L). The most recent editor of Plutarch’s *On the Cleverness of Animals*, Bouffartigue, amends the text on this point, considering that σέρφον is much more appropriate for the list, while commenting that although σέριφον is an error introduced in the text at an early point, it should not be attributed to Plutarch.<sup>37</sup> Indeed, both the reference to such a specific variety of plant as *Artemisia maritima* and the use of a Sicilian word seem inappropriate in the context.<sup>38</sup> So everything suggests that σέριφον is in fact the result of a corruption of the text, which originally read σέρφον. The reading σέριφον also figured in the common lost ancestor (γ) of the manuscripts PAH of Aelian’s *NA*<sup>39</sup> (which confirms how easy it was to make the mistake), but the coincidence of VL clearly indicates that σέρφον was the reading in Aelian’s archetype, and certainly the one that appeared in his source. So Aelian’s parallel allows for a correction of Plutarch’s text on this point, as Bouffartigue has correctly seen.

However, the greatest textual divergence is at the end of the list,<sup>40</sup> where in Plutarch we read ἢ κάρφος ἢ βοτάνην, “or a blade of straw or a plant”, and in Aelian, ἢ σαῦρον τῶν νεαρῶν, “or a young lizard”. Regarding Plutarch’s text, Bouffartigue<sup>41</sup> comments that the word βοτάνην seems

(36) See GIL FERNÁNDEZ 1959, p. 191-192; cf. BEAVIS 1988, p. 86; DAVIES, KATHIRITHAMBY 1988, p. 177.

(37) BOUFFARTIGUE 2012, p. 125.

(38) BOUFFARTIGUE 2012, p. 125, has not noticed the fact that σέριφος as a name for the praying mantis is a specifically Sicilian term, and explains his rejection because he considers it absurd to mention the praying mantis on the banks of the Nile, when in antiquity it was known for frequenting the cereal fields.

(39) See the critical apparatus of Text 5.

(40) I leave aside the syntagm which in all Plutarch’s manuscripts appears as γῆς ἔντερον, and as ἔντερον γῆς in those of Aelian. The order appearing in *On the Cleverness of Animals* is the most attested in the Greek sources that speak of the animal, but we cannot be sure whether the change in Aelian’s text is the result of a trivial error of transmission or if it is intentional on the author’s part. In fact, it is not uncommon for Aelian to resort to changes in word order as a strategy to divert from the wording of his sources; for some examples, see RODRÍGUEZ-NORIEGA GUILLÉN 2020, p. 650, 653, 660-661.

(41) BOUFFARTIGUE 2012, p. 125.

strange in the context, and he suggests that it could originally have been a gloss intended to explain the word σέριφον, understood as referring to the *Artemisia maritima*, but in this case he retains the transmitted text, and does not mention Aelian's version. For my part, I must say that not only βοτάνην, but also κάρφος ('straw', 'twig') strike me as anomalies in the list. Hatchling crocodiles measure some 20-30 cm, and feed primarily on insects, invertebrates and other small animals which come within their reach as they are opportunistic feeders. Thus, a young and therefore small specimen of lizard may be among its preys; on the other hand, they do not eat plants.<sup>42</sup> With this in mind, I consider it plausible that in this case too Aelian's text retains the original reading, and that κάρφος in Plutarch is the result of a misreading, facilitated by the similarity of the forms ΣΑΥΡΟΝ and ΚΑΡΦΟΣ,<sup>43</sup> while βοτάνην was originally a gloss introduced into the text in error but was intended to explain κάρφος, and not σέριφον as Bouffartigue suggests. If I am right, the young crocodiles' prey, all animals, were originally ordered in the list, as Aelian testifies, from smallest to largest, and from invertebrates to vertebrates—insects < worms < small lizards—and in *On the Cleverness of Animals* we are therefore again dealing with an error predating the archetype, and which is probably not to be attributed to Plutarch, but rather to a copyist. The syntagm τῶν νεαρῶν could be an addition by Aelian or it may have been eliminated by mistake in Plutarch's text, an error which would have occurred at the same time as the false reading of κάρφος for σαῦρον. If the latter was the case, the reason may have been that at that point the antigraphon of Plutarch's archetype was poorly legible or had suffered some material damage.

Finally, let us turn to the differences in content between the two versions that are not due to textual transmission. In this case, the main differences are undoubtedly due to intentional alterations by Aelian. In narrating the events surrounding the birth of the crocodiles, Plutarch attributes an important role to the mother, and expresses himself in terms of what we might call "natural selection": the mother, acting in accordance with reason, gets rid of those offspring that are not capable of feeding themselves, while favouring the fittest and most capable. The idea that female crocodiles devour their young comes from a misunderstanding of their behavior. Female crocodiles, after laying and burying their eggs, keep a close watch on the nest, and when the hatchlings begin to emerge, they help them to dig themselves out and, if necessary, carry them gently in their mouth to a safe spot in the water, where they will watch over them for up to a year. It is therefore true that the mother watches over the offspring, and the eugenic explanation given, although erroneous, is based on conjecture from the observation of reality.

Aelian, for his part, alters the story, replacing the mother with the father, and presenting it in terms of what happens to legitimate and illegitimate offspring (τὸ γνήσιον καὶ τὸ νόθον), thus implicitly drawing animal behavior into the legal human sphere.<sup>44</sup> In Aelian's version, the male crocodile gets rid of the young that do not feed themselves, not simply because they are less fit, but because this deficiency leads him to consider that they are not his own offspring, a behavior to which Aelian is totally sympathetic.<sup>45</sup> Thus, he manages to give the subject an original twist, which, moreover, exonerates the mother from the guilt of getting rid of her progeny by acting according

(42) On the Nile crocodile, its growth and feeding, see, for instance, HUTTON 1987; WALLACE, LESLIE 2008. On crocodiles in the Greco-Roman world, see KITCHELL 2014, p. 37-42, with bibliography.

(43) I therefore take a different view to that of VARA DONADO 1989, p. 348-349, who considers that Aelian would have adulterated the original reading.

(44) This is a strategy that Aelian uses very frequently in the *NA*. For other examples of Aelian's use of this resource, see RODRÍGUEZ-NORIEGA GUILLÉN 2020, p. 651-652.

(45) The relevance that Aelian attaches to the question of legitimate offspring, and his sympathy for the father's position when this is put to the test, is clearly seen later in this same chapter, as well as in other passages of the *NA*, especially 1.57, 2.26; cf. also 3.30.

to reason (an idea that no doubt clashed with Aelian's views on the natural behavior of animals),<sup>46</sup> while attributing the action of infanticide to what from the point of view of human rule could be considered a legitimate motive for the father. Here, therefore, we see once again how Aelian alters the original data, this time to conform to his moral principles and his ideas about natural law.

#### CONCLUSION

I trust that these few examples have contributed to illustrating how the study of Aelian's passages that parallel other texts may be of interest for reasons that go beyond the search for relationships of interdependence, the tracing of common sources or the importance that this material may have for the editing of other works preserved only in fragments.

Plutarch's testimony allows us to better understand and appreciate the manipulations to which Aelian has subjected the original material in accordance with his interests (to entertain, educate and transmit certain moral teachings) and his rhetorical training.<sup>47</sup> In the case of the parallels analyzed in section I, we have seen how *On Isis and Osiris* helps to illuminate various aspects of Aelian's texts that are not self-evident; also, the comparison of these passages shows how Aelian has used the same story in two completely different ways, adapting it to different purposes, namely, while in *NA* 10.28 and *VH* 6.8 he assumes (like his source(s), we can presume) the Egyptians' point of view, and retains the portrayal of Ochus as an evil, impious character, in *VH* 4.8 he resorts to various rhetorical strategies (alteration of causes, suppression of undesirable elements) in order to offer an explanation for the nickname "Ass" that allows him to make Ochus the protagonist of a story that ends well for the Persian king, without introducing morally undesirable elements. In section II, the comparison of a passage from Aelian with the text of *On the Cleverness of Animals* has enabled us to show, on the one hand, how this type of study can sometimes help to detect and correct errors that have arisen in the course of manuscript transmission. And, on the other, that Aelian also does not hesitate to rewrite the information from the naturalistic tradition in the way that best suits him. In the end, what interests him above all are the possibilities offered by the sources of the past (whatever their subject matter) in order to develop, from the material taken from them, variations with different approaches, all in the service of the narrative logic of his works. Thus, by resorting to different rhetorical strategies, Aelian succeeds in turning these old materials into new creations, that are entirely his own.

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Universidad de Oviedo

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(46) On this subject see GARCÍA VALDÉS 2003 and 2013.

(47) All this with a freedom that benefits from the fact of him not mentioning any sources and, therefore, not having to stick to them.

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