Venationes Africanae: Hunting spectacles in Roman North Africa: cultural significance and social function
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Introduction

The amphitheatres of Carthage and Thysdrus in North Africa seated respectively 30,000 and 40,000 spectators, only the Flavian amphitheatre in Rome was larger (more than 50,000 seats).\(^1\) And it is not only the size of the African arenas that is impressive, but also their number; thusfar, around 50 amphitheatres have been identified in the African provinces, and others are still discovered.\(^2\) Only in Italy the density of amphitheaters was higher.\(^3\) What happened in the numerous African arenas?

Circa 50 African floor mosaics from the third and fourth century that represent hunting spectacles with wild beasts (\textit{venationes}) suggest that wild animal shows had great cultural importance in late antique Roman African civic life.\(^4\) These events could consist of various elements, from the hunting of gazelles, ostriches or boar that were let loose in an artificial \textit{silva} in the arena, to single combat between a \textit{venator} and a ferocious lion, leopard, bear or bull. And there were also less bloody sights, for example the performance of acrobatic tricks with tamed bears or dramatic performances of myths for which real (wild) animals were used.\(^5\) Sometimes, beasts could also be incited to fight each other, for instance by chaining them together.\(^6\) Literary accounts of (imperial) wild beast games in Rome suggest that very large exotic animals such as rhinoceroses, crocodiles, hippopotamuses, tigers, giraffes and elephants appeared very frequently and in astonishing numbers (the highest numbers are attributed to Trajan who is said to have presented 11,000 carnivores and herbivores in his triumphal show after his victory in the second Dacian war),

\(^2\) See below and Table 1 and Map 4 in the Appendices (from p. 193-310).
\(^3\) Bomgardner 2000, 192-193.
\(^4\) I will, like the ancients, use the general term ‘\textit{venationes}’ to refer to all amphitheatrical spectacles with (wild) beasts, even though – in a modern view – single combat between a man and a lion or a staged hunt of deer in an artificially evoked natural environment in the arena, may have nothing to do with hunting ‘\textit{venari}’, from which the word ‘\textit{venatio}’ derives. On the \textit{venatio}-mosaics see below n. 8.
\(^5\) Modern studies often wrongly use the term ‘gladiator’ when referring to a beast-fighter, a ‘\textit{venator}’. ‘\textit{Bestiarius}’ or ‘\textit{arenarius}’ are also found in literary and epigraphic sources, but these can also be used to refer to assistants in the executions \textit{ad bestias}, or to the convicts who were condemned to the beasts. I will therefore only use ‘\textit{venator}’.
\(^6\) Public executions of convicted criminals (or Christians) by condemnation ‘to the beasts’ (\textit{damnationes ad bestias}) were technically a separate part of the program of an amphitheatre spectacle (\textit{munus}) and could only take place under state-authority. They will therefore not be included in this study.
but these are probably gross exaggerations. In chapter 2 we will see that in the African hunting spectacles, lions and leopards (*ferae* or *bestiae africanae* or *libycae*) and ostriches appeared regularly and that also bears, bulls, wild boar, deer, gazelles and wild horses, asses, goats and sheep were used.

Despite the high number of amphitheatres in Roman North Africa, gladiatorial combat is rarely depicted on African mosaic pavements; only two floors represent gladiators, whereas circa 50 mosaics depict *venatores*, *venationes* or associated themes such as the capture and transport of beasts for hunting spectacles. And gladiators are not only notably absent in the mosaical evidence, but also on terracotta fineware, the African red slip ware that was mass-produced and -exported in the late antique period. This raises a number of questions, such as: why were hunting spectacles so frequently depicted in African art? Were hunting shows in this area and period more popular than gladiatorial combat? Were they also more frequently staged? And if so, how can we explain this? We will come back to these questions in chapter 1, but it seems safe to assume for now that wild beast shows were highly significant cultural events in late antique Roman North Africa. And these spectacles were not only frequently depicted in material culture, but the high density of amphitheatres in North Africa indicates that they also attracted large audiences. The wild beast hunts must have required considerable financial investments, a solid infrastructure and the expertise of specialists in capturing, transporting, training and fighting wild animals. Surprisingly, however, wild beast shows, in Africa or elsewhere, have not nearly receive as much scholarly attention as gladiator fights, which have for centuries been a frequent object of scholarly investigations. Moreover, researchers who did investigate beast fights, focused mainly on imperial wild beast shows in Rome. Often they included material from the Roman provinces, such as the North African floor mosaics, to complete their image, but they did not attempt to trace potential

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7 In *Res Gestae* 22, for example, we find that Augustus had a total of 3500 animals slaughtered in the various *venationes* that he presented, and at the inauguration of the Flavian amphitheatre under Titus, 9000 beasts were killed according to Cassius Dio (Cass. Dio 66.25.1). And on Trajan’s triumphal show: Cass. Dio 68.15.

8 Hugoniot 2003, 389-390 and its appendix, vol. III, 9-50 list all African mosaic pavements that represent *venationes* (53 in total). Most of the floors listed by Hugoniot are also described in Dunbabin 1978, 65-87, with better photos. For the two African pavements with representations of gladiators see Appendix: App. ill. 1 and App. ill. 2.

9 Hoek, van den 2005 and Herrmann & Hoek, van den 2002.

10 For an overview of earlier research into the Roman games in Rome and the provinces see section II below.
differences in the function, meaning and attractive power of artificial hunts in imperial Rome as opposed to a provincial context.11

This dissertation will shift attention from amphitheatre games in imperial Rome to those in the African provinces, and from the well-known gladiatorial combat to the relatively understudied venationes, asking: What were the cultural significance, attractive power and social function of amphitheatrical wild beast shows in Roman North Africa? 12 Were wild beast shows more frequently staged and more popular in Roman Africa than gladiatorial combat, and if so, how can this be explained? What was their attractive power? I will not only focus on the importance of hunting spectacles in this specific provincial context, but also contribute to present research into the Roman games by investigating the ways in which provincial games such as venationes expressed and confirmed socio-cultural norms and values, and how they were used by the inhabitants of the provinces to construct social identity. First, however, we will turn to a brief introduction of civic munificence in general and sponsoring amphitheatre games in particular.

I. Sponsoring amphitheatre games in Roman North Africa and beyond

Throughout the imperial period, emperors and high magistrates in Rome, as well as provincial and municipal notables and town councils in the provinces were actively involved in munificence or euergetism, ‘the provision - simultaneously voluntary and expected - of entertainment, amenities, and public buildings for the common good’. 13 This euergetism included the

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11 Edmondson 1996, 75: ‘Because of the gaps in the evidence, many modern treatments draw together material from a range of periods and geographical contexts to construct a composite picture. But that is potentially misleading, not least because these spectacles evolved over time and were marked by considerable local variations in their nature and scale.’

12 When speaking of ‘Roman North Africa’ I refer to the western, Latin-speaking, provinces; Mauretania, Numidia, Africa Proconsularis and Tripolitania, an area that largely corresponds to what is presently known as the Maghreb, the broad strip of land along the coast of modern Morocco, Algeria, Tunisia and Libya. On the geographical scope of this book see App. Map 1 and 2 and further below section IV.

13 The definition is Paul Veyne's and comes from the translation of Le Pain et le Cirque. Sociologie historique d'un pluralism politique, by Brian Pearce, Veyne 1990, 10. In the French edition Veyne described the phenomenon as follows, Veyne 1976, 20-1: ‘L’éuergétisme est le fait que les collectivités (cités, college…) attendaient les riches qu’ils contribuassent de leurs deniers aux dépenses publiques, et que leur attente n’était pas vaine: les riches y contribuaient spontanément ou de bon gré. Leurs dépenses en faveur de la collectivité allaient surtout à des spectacles du Cirque et de l’arène, plus largement à les plaisirs publics (banquets), et à la construction d’édifices publics: bref, à des plaisirs et à des constructions, à des voluptates et à des opera publica.'
construction, restoration and refurbishment of large public buildings, such as theatres, baths, temples and amphitheatres, or infrastructural projects, for example roads and aqueducts, as well as the production of public entertainment shows, such as races in the circus (ludi circenses), theatre plays (ludi scaenici) and gladiatorial shows (munera gladiatoria) and animal spectacles (venationes).\(^{14}\)

Civic munificence is well attested in the epigraphic evidence from Roman Africa: benefactions included the funding, restoration and refurbishment of public buildings, such as baths, temples and entertainment venues, public games, banquets and distributions of money and food.\(^ {15}\) And often several benefactions were combined: a donor could, for instance, mark the dedication of a temple that he funded with gladiator fights and distributions. In the course of the first century AD, the provision of public games or other benefactions became part of the administrative responsibilities of provincial and municipal priests and magistrates, in Roman Africa as well as the other Roman provinces. The regulations in the Urso charter, a Flavian copy of a Caesarian municipal law of Colonia Iulia Genetiva, the village Urso in Baetica, in modern Andalucía, are indicative of the increasing institutionalisation of game-giving in the Roman provinces: in many towns, also in Africa, the production of munera appears to become part of the administrative responsibilities of aediles and duoviri, or they were promised during their campaigns for office (see further § 1.2).\(^ {16}\) Flamines and Augustales on the municipal level and the flamen or sacerdos provinciae on the provincial level, as well as the provincial Augustales, gave games in the context of the

\(^{14}\) On the distinction between ludi and munera see § 1.1 and §1.2.


\(^{16}\) Crawford 1996, 423-4; Chamberland 2001, 159-220; Hugoniot 2003, 332-8; Chamberland 2007, 137-8. Duncan-Jones 1963, 161 notes that public munificence ‘almost always took the form of celebrating the donor’s tenure of a local office, and that the gift was in fact usually promised before his election to that office’.
imperial festivals. But not all munificence was obligatory; magistrates and priests sometimes voluntarily added ‘private’ supplements to their shows and occasionally wealthy donors voluntarily produced private entertainment spectacles.

African munificence and the production of arena spectacles took a flight in the second century AD and continued into the fifth. The economic, political and military problems that affected the north-western provinces and Italy during the so-called ‘crisis of the third century’, the period of economic and political problems between the reign of the Severans and the tetrarchs (AD 235-285), appear not to have affected North Africa, or at least not at the same scale as other provinces. Some towns, such as Sabratha and Utica, experienced little economic setbacks in the mid third century, but others, for instance Hadrumetum, Thysdrus and Lambaesis, thrived. The size of the North African provinces and the differences between the different areas and cities do not enable the development of a model that suits the entire area, and local social upheaval or economic problems occurred occasionally in different towns, but scholars agree that in general the third century in Africa was a period of stabilisation after the Antonine and Severan booms. The classical civic tradition, characterised by the fulfilment of magistracies and priesthoods, the production of entertainment shows and the erection and restoration of public buildings, continued to flourish into the fourth and fifth century.

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17 Fishwick 1991 II.1, 576; Ville 1982, 188. According to Tert. De spect. 12.5 ‘public entertainment has passed from being a compliment to the dead to being a compliment to the living on entering office (I mean quaestorships, magistracies, flaminates and priesthoods), - still, since the guilt of idolatry sticks to the dignity of the name, whatever is done in the name of dignity must inevitably share the taint of its origin.’, ‘licet transferit hoc genus editionis ab honoribus mortuorum ad honores viventium, quaesturas dico et magistratus et flaminia et sacerdotia cum tamen nominis dignitas idololatriae crimine teneatur, necesse est quicquid dignitatis nomine administrator communice etiam maculas eius, a qua habet causas’. In Africa, the priests of the imperial cult survived also after they lost their religious functions in the late fourth century; now their main responsibility was the provision of games, Cameron 2011, 171.

18 Wiedemann 1992, 8-10. It is also important to distinguish between the different types of games: scenic or theatrical games (ludi scaenici), chariot races in the circus (ludi circenses), gladiatorial combat (munus gladiatorium) in the amphitheatre and venationes, which could be held in combination with gladiatorial shows, as independent spectacles, or as an addition to ludi, see below.

19 Lepelley 1992, 55.

20 Sears 2011, 98-114.


Civic munificence and the institutionalisation of game-giving in the Roman provinces are reflected in the construction of entertainment buildings all over the Empire. There are, however, marked differences between the provinces with regard to the prominence of certain types of entertainment shows in the available evidence.\textsuperscript{23} For instance, gladiatorial combat is clearly attested in areas that had a strong military presence, such as Britain, Germania inferior and the Danube area, but also in Gaul.\textsuperscript{24} Even though amphitheatres were found throughout the empire, epigraphic evidence for \textit{venationes} is limited outside Italy and the African provinces.\textsuperscript{25} Chariot racing appears very prominently in the material from Spain and late antique Africa, whereas theatre plays are more common in sources from Gaul, Italy and Africa than in those from the other western provinces.\textsuperscript{26} In the Greek East, references to agonistic contests and chariot racing are numerous, and there is also plenty of evidence to demonstrate that gladiatorial combat and \textit{venationes} were enthusiastically adopted here.\textsuperscript{27}

The correlation between the availability of archaeological, epigraphic or iconographic material that attests certain types of spectacular entertainment and historical reality, that is, the frequency and popularity of these events in a given area, is difficult to establish: for example, that the number of inscriptions from Britannia that mention amphitheatre games is low (3), does not necessarily mean that such events were not frequent or popular here (there were probably up to 13 amphitheatres), but may say more about the Britannian epigraphic habit.\textsuperscript{28} Sometimes, however, the combination of sources results in a pattern that cannot be ignored: the prominence of venatorial themes and the near absence of gladiators on third and fourth century African mosaics and

\textsuperscript{23} For an overview of the construction of amphitheatres and theatres in the cities of the Roman West, see e.g. Laurence, Esmonde Cleary & Sears 2011, 231-284, specifically on circuses see Humphrey 1986. The African provinces had around 30 theatres, eight circuses, one odeion and probably more than 50 amphitheatres (see App. Table1 and § 1.2).
\textsuperscript{24} For epigraphic evidence for amphitheatre games in the different provinces see the different volumes of \textit{EAOR}. About gladiator fights in Gaul, Britain and Spain: Futrell 1997. Bouley 2001 on arena- and other spectacles in Dacia and Pannonia.
\textsuperscript{25} Chamberland 2001, 69.
\textsuperscript{26} Humphrey 1986 passim and Chamberland 2001, 38, 42-3 for the epigraphic attestations of circus games in Spain.
\textsuperscript{27} Robert 1940; Carter 2009; Mann 2009 on gladiatorial combat in the Greek East and Remijsen 2015 investigates the evidence for (the decline of) \textit{agones} in the Greek East as well as the Latin West (Italy, North-Africa and Gaul), p. 33-163.
\textsuperscript{28} The inscriptions and amount of amphitheatres in Britannia can be found in \textit{EAOR} V, 169 and see also Cooley 2005, 363. On the epigraphic habit see Introduction III and § 3.2.1.
terracotta pottery suggests that in Roman North Africa in the late antique period, beast fights had attained greater cultural importance than gladiator fights. Epigraphic evidence supports this view; analyses of African inscriptions demonstrate that gladiatorial combat was a regular part of the program of amphitheatrical munera in Roman North Africa in the first and second century AD, but from the early third century onwards, venationes were increasingly held independent of gladiator fights and gradually became the main attraction of African amphitheatre shows. It seems safe to assume, therefore, that in the late antique period the 50 or more African amphitheatres were primarily used for venationes.

As noted before, the prominence and popularity of hunting shows in Roman North Africa have not received the scholarly attention that they deserve, a gap in present scholarship that this dissertation aims to fill at least partially. In order to have a sound grasp of the earlier research into the Roman games, we will now turn to an overview of the most important studies of amphitheatre spectacles, both gladiatorial and venatorial, in Rome and the Roman provinces.

II. State of the art: Roman amphitheatre games

Gladiatorial combat

The Roman amphitheatre has fascinated ancient historians for centuries; the Flemish philologist and humanist Justus Lipsius already wrote about gladiatorial combat in the late sixteenth century. In the modern age, some scholars found it difficult to reconcile the violence of the gladiatorial games with their perception of Roman ‘civilisation’ and attempted to trivialise their importance in Roman society, emphasising that gladiators were often spared, or simply neglecting the phenomenon. Others openly denounced the

29 For these analyses, e.g.: Ville 1982, 222; Chamberland 2001, 69-74; Hugoniot 2003, 332-8. The same development is attested in the Italian material, see further § 1.2 and § 3.2.
31 Some of the earliest modern works on gladiatorial combat and venationes include Lafaye ‘Gladiator’ and ‘Venatio’ in Darenberg and Saglio (1877-1919); Friedländer 1922; Jennison 1937 and Aymard 1951. An example of trivialising is Balsdon 1969, 248, 268 holds that plays in the theatre and circus races were much more common than gladiator fights. Robert 1940, 263 who
gladiatorial combat, for instance as ‘excesses of human cruelty’, comparable to those of the Nazi’s.\textsuperscript{32} Moving away from descriptive studies and denouncing or trivialising the games, in the last decades scholars attempted to grasp the cultural value, meaning, function and lure of the Roman arena shows, often adopting models and methods from social sciences.\textsuperscript{33} They asked questions such as: What was the cultural significance of the arena games, what did they symbolise? Did the amphitheatre shows contribute to the construction and confirmation of social norms and cultural values and in what way? And why did thousands of people come to watch the bloody spectacles?

The chapter ‘Murderous Games’ by Keith Hopkins, who was himself educated in sociology as well as ancient history, is the first example of this new approach to the Roman amphitheatre games.\textsuperscript{34} Hopkins was inspired by the work of the anthropologist Clifford Geertz, and ‘imitated’ (his own words) the method that Geertz had developed in his essay on Balinese cockfights, that of ‘thick description’.\textsuperscript{35} The method can be described as a process of scholarly interrogation during which all aspects of a cultural event, not only what actually happened, but also comments and interpretations of those involved, are analysed, described and interpreted by the researcher.\textsuperscript{36} According to Geertz, this method enables the investigator to expose and extract the


\textsuperscript{34} Hopkins 1983a, 1-30. As Hopkins explains in his preface, chapter 1 ‘Murderous Games’ and 4 ‘Death in Rome’, are very different in method, style and theme from chapter 2 and 3 which deal with ‘the ways in which the senatorial elite reproduced itself biologically and socially.’ The first and last chapter attempt to understand ‘how some Romans perceived and coped with death’. Hopkins 1983a, ix-xvii. Ville 1982 was published posthumously, and appeared after \textit{Death and Renewal} had gone to press. Ville’s \textit{La gladiature en Occident} is a valuable collection of sources and did not aim, like Hopkins, to understand meaning, function and lure of arena shows.

\textsuperscript{35} Hopkins 1983a, 1 n.1; Geertz 1972; 1974.

\textsuperscript{36} Geertz 1972, 1974; Rapport & Overing 2013, 349-352.
structures of meaning that make up a culture. Hopkins concluded from his thick-description of the Roman ‘murderous games’ that Rome was essentially a warrior state, the games ‘helped to maintain an atmosphere of violence, even in times of peace’: they expressed, celebrated and confirmed Rome’s martial heritage. Hopkins suggested that amphitheatre games were artificial battlefields during which bloodshed, virtus, military glory, moral order and imperial power, Rome’s cultural values, were re-performed and re-confirmed. The presentation and hunt of exotic animals under the emperor’s supervision, he thought, demonstrated and celebrated the sovereign’s power and the extent of his Empire. Hopkins also argued that the games served as a safety valve to release collective tensions: for instance, they provided the Roman mob with an opportunity to voice their discontent. Furthermore, he saw the magistrates’ obligation to provide public entertainment as a ‘tax on status’ and at the same time an opportunity for self-enhancement. A few years earlier, the French historian Paul Veyne had proposed a similar model: he also interpreted the giving of public games, and other benefactions, as mechanisms to preserve the balance between ruler and ruled. Veyne termed this phenomenon ‘euergetism’ and explained it as follows:

‘L’évergétisme est le fait que les collectivités (cités, collèges…) attendaient des riches qu’ils contribuassent de leurs deniers aux dépenses publiques, et que leur attente n’était pas vaine: les riches y contribuaient spontanément ou de bon gré. Leurs dépenses en faveur de la collectivité allaient surtout à des plaisirs publics (banquets), et à la construction d’édifices publics: bref, à des plaisirs et à des constructions, à des voluptates et à des opera publica’.

37 Hopkins 1983a, 1-2.
38 Ibid. The idea of ‘Rome as a warrior state’ was later refuted by Katherine Welch who argued that artificial battles were not a substitute for real warfare – after all, the Romans also waged war in the imperial period, when the amphitheatres were built – but rather ‘a conception of themselves as a military people’ Welch 1994, 80.
39 Ibid., 11-2.
40 Ibid., 30. This idea was not new: Friedländer 1922 and Auguet 1972 had also argued that the games were a sort of parliament, where people could communicate their dissatisfaction to the emperor, Fagan 2011, 18.
41 Hopkins 1983a, 13.
43 The English edition provides the following definition, Veyne 1990, 10: ‘The provision—simultaneously voluntary and expected—of entertainment, amenities, and public buildings by
By paying for a hunting spectacle, the restoration of a temple or the distribution of food, members of the local elites, according to Veyne, emphasised the social distance between themselves and their fellow citizens. He argues that the act of giving also gave them psychological satisfaction, but it did not bring any clear economic, social or political advantages, an idea that was later criticised: reviewers demonstrated that benefactors also received significant non-material rewards for their gifts: honour, status and prestige (about the work of Veyne see further § 3.1).

The works of Hopkins and Veyne sparked new interest in the Roman games: in the 1980’s and 90’s ancient historians developed many more models and theories, often based on sociology and anthropology, aiming to understand and explain the nature, meaning and function of the amphitheatre shows. Understandably, many scholars, just like Hopkins, connected the games to power and politics. Monique Clavel-Lévêque, for instance, regards arenas as symbolic urban spaces and explains how, in the early imperial period, the games functioned as much needed ideological rituals of integration and hegemony that communicated discipline, social hierarchy, submission and protection. Kathleen Coleman investigated how the emperor’s power was displayed during the various phases of arena spectacles, for instance in public executions that were staged as mythological re-enactments, which she called ‘fatal charades’. According to Coleman, the exotic animals that were used for the ‘damnatio ad bestias’, beast-to-beast fights and artificial hunts (venationes), reflected the extent of the empire and the success of the imperial project: they were brought to Rome as spoils of war just like slaves, captives or valuable goods. She argues that the violent death of convicted criminals, social outcasts and wild animals also demonstrated and confirmed social hierarchy, law and order and the emperor’s power over life and death. In *Emperors and Gladiators*, the German-British historian Thomas Wiedemann reached a similar conclusion; he suggested that the arena was ‘a symbolic meeting place of civilization and barbarism, chaos and order, where Romans dominated

wealthy patrons of the ancient city for the common good’. For more on the work of Veyne and on euergetism in Roman North Africa see § 3.1.

45 Supra n. 33.
46 Clavel-Lévêque 1986, 179-183.
47 Coleman 2006, lxxi-i.
enemies of all kinds’. Wiedemann demonstrated that the games became central to Rome’s cultural identity and that the emperors actively exploited the potential of the shows as surrogate assemblies and to confirm their own position in the social hierarchy. Furthermore, he suggested that the socio-psychological function of the gladiatorial combat lay in the fact that it provided spectators an opportunity to come to terms with their own mortality through watching a symbolic demonstration of the gladiator’s ‘power to overcome death’ by the pursuit of virtus. According to Wiedemann, Christians denounced gladiator fights because they had their own model of resurrection.

Paul Plass argued, also from a sociological perspective, that violence and death, potentially destructive forces, were ritualised in the form of spectacles and incorporated into Roman society as a sort of ‘cultural vaccine’ in order to maintain order, social hierarchy and security. He considered the arena a ‘liminal institution’ that facilitated controlled disorder and violence and thus safeguarded social stability. According to Plass, victory celebrations (triumphs) and venationes with exotic animals also represent ‘controlled disorder’: the events were an orderly demonstration of captives, spoils of war and wild animals which symbolised the organization of uncultivated and wild territories, nature and chaos. Because elephants were used in warfare, most famously by Hannibal, they also represented military danger. Furthermore, Plass suggests that the appeal of beast fights was in the fascination that exotic animals held, the fear they inspired, the danger of the fights and the vast scale

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50 Wiedemann 1992, 34: ‘Instead of seeing a gladiatorial combat as a public display of killing, it might be useful to see it as a demonstration of the power to overcome death. The victorious gladiator overcame death by showing that he was a better fighter than his opponent. But the loser, too, might win back his life by satisfying the audience that he had fought courageously and skillfully.’ Brown 1995, 380-4 and Potter 1994, 229-30 found Wiedemann’s ideas about the association between gladiators and (social) rebirth unsatisfactory and unfounded.
51 Plass 1995, 28: ‘Order implies disorder, and so all festivals are at the same time determined by the opposite of what they ostensibly celebrate: harvest festivals by famine, fertility rituals by sterility, parades of military strength by military danger. The same uneasy conjunction is operative again in liminal rituals, as order reemerges only after an interlude of its opposite. To the extent, then, that disorder was processed in much the same way through ritualization in public shows of violence at Rome, munera, too, can be understood in accordance with the antithetic logic of liminal institutions and their peculiar incorporation of potential dysfunction to assure proper functioning.’
52 Plass 1995, 44-5.
53 Ibid.
of the shows. And he notes that associations with religious sacrifice and hunting may also have played a role.54

In a rather philosophical article, Erik Gunderson focuses on the value and meaning of arena shows for members of the early-imperial elite in Rome.55 He investigates the way in which important elements in Roman culture, such as social stratification, civilisation, empire and ‘bellicose masculinity’, are expressed during amphitheatre games and concludes that ‘the arena played an important role in the moralization and maintenance of Roman social roles and hierarchical relations’. 56 The arena presented to the audience an ‘orderly construct’, an idealised version of the empire: people from the margins of society (convicted criminals, gladiators), captured tribes and their kings, and powerful wild animals from the fringes of the empire were brought to the centre and ‘contained, controlled and choreographed’. 57 Gunderson concluded that the events thus pictured the vast scale of the empire and symbolised the stability and order that Roman rule brought in previously wild areas and among ‘uncivilised’ people.

In his article ‘Dynamic arenas’, Jonathan Edmondson’s focus is on the transition from Republic to Empire. He analyses the Roman amphitheatre games as ‘cultural performances’ (see also p. 28-31):

‘In this chapter, I focus on one particular aspect of this cultural performance: the ways in which gladiatorial presentations provided important occasions for the construction of Roman society. By this I mean that they helped to shape, define, and occasionally redefine the social order. Both the spectators and those who performed in the arena combined to give tangible form to certain key aspects of Roman social structure and social relations. On this view, the Roman social order was not an abstract system, absolute and invisible. Rather, it took shape through actual experience; its form had to be constituted through practice. And, as anthropologists have demonstrated, rituals and festivals

54 Ibid.
55 Gunderson 1996.
56 Ibid., 115-6. Even though Gunderson does not refer to it, what he calls an Ideological State Apparatus, ‘an apparatus which not only looks in on a spectacle, but one which in its organization and structure reproduces the relations subsisting between observer and observed’, appears to me very similar to the theoretical concept of ‘performance’, a heuristic principle to understand culture and human behaviour, which is defined as follows by MacAlloon 1984, 1: ‘A cultural performance is an occasion in which as a culture or society we reflect upon and define ourselves, dramatize our collective myths and history, present ourselves with alternatives, and eventually change in some ways while remaining the same in others.’
57 Gunderson 1996, 133.
are often of primary importance for the construction and reproduction of cultural and social norms."\(^{58}\)

The most interesting aspect of Edmondson’s contribution is his analysis of the way in which social groups and hierarchy were constructed and confirmed during arena shows.\(^{59}\) The audiences at the games were a cross section of Roman society, but all groups had their own seats and they were clearly recognisable by their costume and attributes.\(^{60}\) For instance, seats were reserved for foreign guests, senators sat at the first row and boys who had not yet assumed their *toga virilis* (the *praetextati*) and their pedagogues were also assigned a specific spot. Members of the different groups could also be distinguished by their dress, such as togas with or without *clavi*, the *corona civica* for soldiers who had earned military awards and *stolae*, the dress of respectable married women (*matronae*).\(^{61}\) The podium wall was a social barrier that divided the world into two groups: those who were part of social order, emperor, senators, *equites*, citizens, women, slaves, each in their respective places, and those who were not, gladiators, *venatores*, convicted criminals and wild animals.

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\(^{58}\) Edmondson 1996, 73-4. He uses the definition of ‘cultural performance’ that is provided in MacAlloon 1984, 1: ‘an occasion in which as a culture or society we reflect upon ourselves, dramatize our collective myths and history, present ourselves with alternatives, and eventually change in some ways while remaining the same in others’.

\(^{59}\) Ibid., 86-7.

\(^{60}\) Ibid., 84-95. On Augustus’ assignment of rows of seats to specific groups; Suet. *Aug* 44, 1-3: ‘Spectandi confusissimum ac solutissimum morem correxit ordinavitque, motus iniuria senatoris, quem Puteolis per celeberrimos ludos consessu frequenti nemo receperat. Facto igitur decreto patrum ut, quotiens quid spectaculi usquam publice ederetur, primus subselliorum ordo vacaret senatoribus, Romae legatos liberalum sociorumque gentium vetuit in orchestra sedere, cum quosdam etiam libertini generis mitti deprehendisset. Militem secrevit a populo. Maritis e plebe proprios ordines assignavit, praetextatis cuneum suum, et proximum paedagogis, sanxitque ne quis pullato rum media cavea sederet. Feminis ne gladiatores quidem, quos promiscue spectari sollemne olim erat, nisi ex superiore loco spectare concessit. Solis virginibus *Vestalibus locum in theatro separatim et contra praetorius tribunal deduct*, ’He put a stop by special regulations to the disorderly and indiscriminate fashion of viewing the games, through exasperation at the insult to a senator, to whom no one offered a seat in a crowded house at some largely attended games in Puteoli. In consequence of this the senate decreed that, whenever any public show was given anywhere, the first row of seats should be reserved for senators; and at Rome he would not allow the envoys of the free and allied nations to sit in the orchestra, since he was informed that even freedmen were sometimes appointed. He separated the soldiery from the people. He assigned special seats to the married men of the commons, to boys under age their own section and the adjoining one to their preceptors; and he decreed that no one wearing a dark cloak should sit in the middle of the house. He would not allow women to view even the gladiators except from the upper seats, though it had been the custom for men and women to sit together at such shows. Only the Vestal virgins were assigned a place to themselves, opposite the praetor’s tribunal.’

\(^{61}\) On the distinction between different social groups in the arena by dress see Edmondson 1996, 85-6 and particularly n. 63-69.
that performed in the arena. Thus, according to Edmondson, social hierarchy was constructed and cohesion within social groups was reinforced: the amphitheatre was a microcosm of the ordered world as a whole. Examples of the cultural values that were celebrated are the prime position of military activity, the importance of *virtus* and the rule of law and order. Like his colleagues Gunderson, Plass, Coleman and Hopkins, Edmondson suggests that the exhibition and killing of exotic wild beasts underlined the extent of Roman power. Furthermore, the Roman games, he suggests, ‘glorified the patronage system’, they were instrumental in Augustus’ policy of shaping a new relationship between emperor, senate and plebs.62

The origins of both ludi (public state games) and munera (private funerary games) inspired modern scholars to investigate the religious significance of amphitheatre games.63 In *La Gladiature en Occident*, Georges Ville suggested that gladiatorial fighting evolved from funerary sacrifice that had been practised in some areas in early Italy.64 However, he argued, gladiator fights in the Romanised form were not human sacrifice, but ‘agonistic’, an element of funerary games. When the giving of munera became an important part of aristocratic competition, the games – according to Ville - lost their religious meaning and funerary connotations.65 Not all scholars accepted Ville’s ‘secularisation’ of the Roman gladiatorial games. Marcel le Glay, for instance, concluded from the close association of venationes with the Diana-Nemesis, Mercury and sometimes Dionysus, that amphitheatre spectacles of the imperial period were not solely entertainment or political instruments, but also had a religious significance that, he argues, ‘justified’ human sacrifice.66 The American scholar Michael B. Hornum also investigated the connection between the cult for Diana-Nemesis, goddess of vengeance and retribution, and the games.67 He demonstrated that imperial power and the order of the state

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62 Ibid., 111-2.
65 Ibid., 14-19.
66 Le Glay 1990 and also: Clavel-Lévêque 1986, 2438.
67 Hornum 1993.
were partly expressed through the cult for this goddess, who was often honoured during the games.\textsuperscript{68}

Donald Kyle’s \textit{Spectacles of Death in Ancient Rome} does not only provide a valuable overview of earlier research on the Roman arena shows, but also presents a new perspective on the role that the spectacles played in the Roman world: that of a purifying ‘ritual punishment’.\textsuperscript{69} Focusing on the treatment and disposal of the arena’s dead victims, Kyle concludes that the spectacles, forms of ritualised violence against enemies, were intended to ensure the survival and safety of the group. The games gave the plebs entertainment and the illusion that they could share in the power, wealth, and privileges of Rome. At the same time, the spectacles legitimised, dramatically communicated and reinforced the social and political order of the community and demonstrated the emperor’s power. With the ritual disposal of the arena’s victims, the pure and sacred city repelled, according to Kyle, malevolent spirits and pollution.\textsuperscript{70}

In \textit{The sorrows of the ancient Romans} Carlin Barton investigates the Romans’ collective psychology, their ‘despair, desire, envy and fascination with gladiators’.\textsuperscript{71} She proposes to see the Roman gladiators as monsters, grotesque figures, and suggests that the \textit{munera}, extreme events during which the despised and obscene (monsters, wild animals and gladiators) were defeated, functioned as compensatory systems that could balance the irresolvable tensions that were present in this emotionally unstable society.\textsuperscript{72} Jerry Toner, on a less gruesome note, discusses the amphitheatre games in the wider context of leisure, the \textit{otium} that the Romans valued so highly.\textsuperscript{73} Rejecting the anachronistic ideas of moralists who stated that violent spectacles cannot be classified as leisure, entertainment or sport, Toner argues that to the Romans they were exactly that: overwhelming entertainment, explosions of danger, colours, sounds and excitement.\textsuperscript{74} The cultural significance of gladiatorial combat lay, according to Toner, in the fact that these fights demonstrated what it meant to be Roman, more precisely, what it meant to be

\begin{itemize}
\item \textsuperscript{68} Ibid., 90: symbolically the arena was ‘a place where a confirmation of the established state order was displayed in the slaughter of military enemies, criminals, insolent slaves and wild animals’.
\item \textsuperscript{70} Kyle 1998, 265-271.
\item \textsuperscript{71} Barton 1993.
\item \textsuperscript{72} Ibid., 177.
\item \textsuperscript{73} Toner 1995; Toner 2014, 452.
\item \textsuperscript{74} Toner 1995, 34-52; Toner 2014, 453-4.
\end{itemize}
a Roman man. The games represented Roman imperial power and dramatized the key social ideas, such as the ideal of manliness and *virtus*.\(^{75}\) During *venationes*, the contrasts between people and wild animals, order and nature and city and countryside, clearly expressed civilized Roman (human) qualities: ‘to be fully human in the human environment was to be fully in control’.\(^{76}\)

One of the most recent contributions to scholarship on the Roman games is Garrett Fagan’s monograph *The Lure of the Arena. Social Psychology and the Crowd at the Roman Games*.\(^{77}\) Fagan acknowledges the value of previous studies of the Roman games, but he wants to go beyond theorizing about cultural function and significance.\(^{78}\) Thus he instead focuses on the lure of these events to spectators; what was it that made the bloody spectacles so attractive to thousands of people? His socio-psychological approach starts from the premise that spectacular violence is not exclusively a Roman phenomenon: people watching public executions in medieval town squares, bullfights Andalusian arenas or modern-day ultimate fighting are drawn by the same socio-psychological forces. Fagan demonstrates that socio-psychology has much explanatory promise; he concludes:

‘The immediate lure of the arena lay in the psychologically generated experiences of excitement, belonging, validation, and agency; enjoyment and prejudices sated (especially during hunts and executions); emotional involvement in competitive sports and appreciation of skill and dexterity in professional performers; and, for at least some of those present, the frisson of watching violence meted out to those judged deserving of it.’\(^{79}\)

We have seen that the Roman amphitheatre games were seen as occasions that celebrated Rome’s important cultural values, such as manliness (*virtus*), military glory, law and order and demonstrated and confirmed social hierarchies and the power of the emperor. It was also suggested that the games served as an assembly, a cultural vaccine or a safety valve which could release tensions in society. As such, it was argued, Roman amphitheatre games were an important instrument in the preservation of the balance between rulers and ruled.

\(^{75}\) Toner 1995, 39-40.

\(^{76}\) Ibid., 44.

\(^{77}\) Fagan 2011.

\(^{78}\) Ibid., 21.

\(^{79}\) Fagan 2011, 285.
Research into hunting spectacles

In most of the publications on the Roman games that have been discussed so far, gladiatorial combat and public executions received more attention than hunting spectacles. It is remarkable that while public executions and gladiatorial fights inspired, as we have seen, numerous theories on their socio-political function, religious or cultural significance and attractive power, *venationes* are often treated rather superficially and largely in the context of imperial Rome. There are, however, also a number of studies that are more exclusively devoted to *venationes* and representations of wild beast fights on mosaic floor pavements. We will now turn to a brief overview of previous research into hunting spectacles.

Jennison’s *Animals for Show and Pleasure in ancient Rome*, published in 1937, is somewhat old-fashioned, but nevertheless provides a valuable collection of literary and iconographic sources on the early development of *venationes* in Rome, a trend that the author associates with the expansion of the empire.80 In his discussion of the logistics of capture, transport and display of exotic animals, Jennison, who was a classicist but also superintendent of the Bellevue Zoo in Manchester, provides valuable insight in animal behaviour and handling. He knows, for instance, how difficult it would have been to force felids to come out of their cage and attack a person or another animal, and suggests that hot pokers may have been used to provoke them.81 Regrettably, the author’s explanation of the social meaning, cultural significance or attraction of *venationes* does not go any further than ‘the Romans had a liking for bloody spectacles’.82 Jocelyn Toynbee’s *Animals in Roman Life and Art* (1973) departs from the discrepancy that she perceives between the Romans’ love for pets and the slaughter of exotic animals in amphitheatre games.83 She investigates animals in Roman iconography, Roman knowledge about fauna and the use of animals in several aspects of daily life, such as entertainment, war, clothing and food. Toynbee suggests that the crowds’ unbridled

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80 Jennison 1937, 42–98 on development, 137–181 on logistics.
81 Ibid., 159-160, 168-169.
82 Ibid., 47.
83 Toynbee 1973, 21: ‘All this serves to underline what is one of the outstanding paradoxes of the Roman mind – that a people that was so much alive to the interest and beauty of the animal kingdom, that admired the intelligence and skill to be found in so many of its representatives, that never seemed to tire of the sight of rare and unfamiliar specimens, that displayed such devotion to its pets, should yet have taken pleasure in the often hideous sufferings and agonizing deaths of quantities of magnificent and noble creatures.’
enthusiasm for the skill and courage of the beast-fighters can perhaps partly explain the popularity of hunting spectacles, but she is unable to hide her own disgust at the practice and struggles to understand why *venationes* were held on such a large scale, and why they were so popular.\(^{84}\)

Related to modern scholars’ disgust of the Roman wild beast fights, is the discussion about whether *venationes* should be seen as a form of hunting or sport, or simply as a violent and wasteful phenomenon, as many of us would be inclined to believe. Kyle emphasised that this discussion springs from different definitions of hunting; the modern concept of hunting envisions men that are hunting unrestrained wild animals for food, or as a form of sport, whereas the Romans used the verb ‘*venari*’, ‘*venator*’ and ‘*venatio*’ to refer to spectacular hunts in the arena, as well as sport hunting in the countryside.\(^{85}\) This indicates that Romans regarded both *venationes* in the amphitheatre and, for instance, boar hunts on the countryside as forms of hunting. Kyle also argues that modern scholars should view Roman amphitheatrical hunting spectacles in their own context, instead of in our modern cultural context, where it has become normal to think of animals as creatures that have feelings and even rights that we should protect.\(^{86}\) In the Roman world and in most other pre-modern societies, such ideas about animals did not exist; Romans admired wild beasts, but at the same time, they saw them as predators, game, sources for materials (such as hides and ivory) and as food.\(^{87}\) Cartmill characterised the ancient attitude towards animals as follows:

‘No intrinsic value was attributed to the lives of beasts in ancient Greece and Rome... In a world where philosophers could seriously argue that human slaves are only detached parts of their masters’ bodies, and where

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\(^{84}\) Toynbee 1973, 21.

\(^{85}\) Kyle 1998, 188.

\(^{86}\) Of course modern western attitudes and customs towards animals are hugely ambivalent and contradictory; think for instance of our loving relations with our pets on the one hand, and the largely invisible and highly efficient meat-production industry, on the other. On this topic see e.g. Röcklingsberg & Sandin 2013.

\(^{87}\) Kyle 1998, 6. Cic. *Fam.* 7.1.3; Dio 39.38.2-4; Sen. *Brev. vit.* 13.6 and Plin. *HN* 8.21 record an anecdote about a crowd’s sympathy for a group of elephants that were hunted in games provided by Pompey in 55 BC. Cicero describes it as follows, Cic. *Fam.* 7.1.3: ‘on that day a great wonder arose in the common mob, but no pleasure. Indeed a certain pity resulted, a sort of belief that the huge beast had something in common with the human race’. *‘Extremus elephantorum dies fuit; in quo admiratio magna vulgi atque turbae, delectatio nulla extitit. Quin etiam misericordia quaedam consecuta est atque opinio eiusmodi, esse quondam illi beluae cum genere humano societatem.’* Fagan 2011, 249-52 investigates the episode in detail, concluding that this fragment should not be seen as evidence for sympathy with wild animals, but as an example of the spectators’ incidental positive dispositional alignment towards the elephants, who they felt had been done an injustice.
grotesquely awful deaths were regularly meted out to human victims to amuse the arena-goers, few concerned themselves with the lives of beasts.88

The multi-coloured African floor mosaics that depict capture and transportation of wild animals which were first collected and discussed in the work of Toynbee, inspired a range of studies into the logistics of capture and transportation of African animals for *venationes*.89 Not only the cages that were used and the problems that transporters encountered along their way, but also the identity of hunters, transporters and traders were investigated.90 In his dissertation and a number of articles, Epplett presents a wealth of evidence regarding the infrastructure and organisation behind hunting shows, from hunting techniques and transport to animal enclosures, the supply of personnel and the *venatores* themselves.91 He also discusses the role of the Roman army in capturing wild animals, while others have suggested that private corporations of shippers (*navicularii*) were also active in this trade.92

The discovery of the ‘Magerius mosaic’ in Smirat (Tunisia) was of particular importance to investigations of the supply and trade of wild beasts for *venationes* (see App. ill. 3 and p. 95, 124-7). The floor represents the performance of four leopards and four *venatores* that are referred to as ‘the Telegenii’ in the accompanying text. It appears from the text on the mosaic that the Telegenii were paid per leopard (1000 denarii), from which investigators have inferred that this corporation provided not only beast-fighters, but was also responsible for the capture and supply of the animals for *venationes* in Roman Africa and beyond.93 In a series of articles the Tunisian archaeologist Azedine Beschaouch presented evidence for the existence of a number of *venatio* corporations, identifiable by a system of logo’s and numbers, that were perhaps rivalling each other in a manner similar to the fierce

88 Cartmill 1993, 40-1.
89 On the logistics of capture and transportation of *venatio*-animals: Bertrand 1987; Meijboom 1997; Carandini et al. 1982; Deniaux 2000; Epplett 2001a; Epplett 2001b, 128-190; Guasti 2007. Examples of these mosaics are the famous Great Hunt mosaic from the ambulatory of the Villa del Casale in Piazza Armerina (Sicily) (App. ill. 8), the Carthage Dermech floor (App. ill. 13) and the Fortuna Redux mosaic from Theveste (App. ill. 6).
90 On cages: Bertrand 1987; on problems during transport e.g. Hauken & Malay 2009; on the identity of hunters e.g.: Beschaouch 1977, Epplett 2001b, 162-190.
91 Epplett 2001b.
92 Beschaouch 1977.
93 On the supposed international trading activities of these corporations see in particular: Beschaouch 1977.
competition that existed between the famous circus factions.\textsuperscript{94} The African sodalities of \textit{venatores} will be investigated in detail in chapter 4 (§ 4.3).

In the fifth chapter of \textit{The Mosaics of Roman North Africa. Studies in Iconography and Patronage} Katherine Dunbabin systematically describes the African floor mosaics with depictions of \textit{venationes}.\textsuperscript{95} Only one of the mosaics in this chapter depicts a fight between gladiators (the Zliten mosaic, App. ill. 1), the other floors represent fights between \textit{venator(es)} and animal(s) or scenes of the hunt, capture and transport of African \textit{venatio}-beasts.\textsuperscript{96} Dunbabin’s aim is twofold: on the one hand she intends to document and describe features in composition and iconography that are typical for the ‘African mosaic style’, and on the other hand she investigates the influence that commissioners or patrons had on the design of the mosaic floors. She concludes that, in comparison to the Italian, north-western and eastern mosaic tradition, the North-African mosaicists and patrons were less bound to traditional iconography and composition, which resulted in greater variety, innovative designs and a remarkable realism in the African floors.\textsuperscript{97} Dunbabin’s study indicates that the African pavements often reflected directly the interests and activities of patrons. In the \textit{venatio}-mosaics, Dunbabin discovered three ‘strains in the attitudes with which the patrons regarded the \textit{venationes}. […] They are: a love of exotic beasts and of scenes of violent, often bloody, action for their own sake; a desire to commemorate the giving of spectacular displays to the community; and an attachment to the games of the amphitheatre for their symbolic and religious associations’.\textsuperscript{98}

Thus Dunbabin addressed the development of artistic techniques and design of the African \textit{venatio}-mosaics, but also attempted to grasp the motivations and intentions of the commissioners, whereas many other scholars that have been presented so far studied the mosaics purely as mirrors of what

\textsuperscript{94} For the logo system: Beschaouch 1966; Beschaouch 1977; Beschaouch 1979; Beschaouch 1985. On teams of \textit{venatores} see also: Salomonson 1960; Thébert 1991. Salomonson 1960, 51: ‘we have no certain knowledge of the existence in any other part of the Roman Empire of rivaling teams of \textit{venatores}, comparable in a way with the factions of the circus. There are strong indications though, that in Africa such rivalry belonged to the special attractions of the shows in the arena’. On circus factions: Cameron 1976.

\textsuperscript{95} Dunbabin 1978, 65-87.

\textsuperscript{96} Ibid., 17-18, 278, Plate XX. As noted in the introduction of this book, the prominence of images related to \textit{venationes} and the near absence of gladiators on these mosaics is in keeping with the presumed marginality of gladiatorial shows in Roman North Africa, and the preponderance of \textit{venationes}, see also: Hugoniot 2003, 342-3.

\textsuperscript{97} Dunbabin 1978, 10.

\textsuperscript{98} Ibid., 84-5.
actually happened during the games.\textsuperscript{99} Shelby Brown aims to take Dunbabin's work a step further, conducting a study into ‘why and how the images depict what they do’.\textsuperscript{100} Her focus is on the depiction of animal and human suffering on game-mosaics in an attempt to understand the Roman attitude or mentality toward the games. Her analyses indicate that some of the mosaics with \textit{venationes} and gladiators commemorate an actual benefaction, while others were intended to simply evoke the sensation of a spectacular show. Most of these scenes simulate the situation in the arena; the house-owner who commissioned the floor (the editor) provides the games (the floor) and the viewers (visitors) watch the performers from the perspective of spectators in the arena. Because amphitheatre games were intended to please the audience, the commissioners and artists chose to depict the most exciting and sensational moments of the fights, the moments that the public enjoyed most: bloody wounds, large numbers of panicking herbivores, ferocious predators and skilled and courageous fighters at the decisive moments in the fights.\textsuperscript{101} Brown concludes that, even though for us this is hard to understand, the spectators enjoyed exactly the panic, aggression, blood and fatal moments - they had no empathy for the victims like we do (see also p. 142).\textsuperscript{102}

In his investigation of the capture, trade, maintenance and disposal of exotic animals for the Roman amphitheatre games, MacKinnon – like Brown - emphasises that uncritical use of art (mosaics as well as literature) as a source is problematic, because artistic creations provide selective information.\textsuperscript{103} Therefore, he adopts a multidisciplinary method, analysing literary, artistic, archaeozoological, and ethno historical data. The image that results from this combined material differs markedly from that presented in Roman art and literature: much of the dangerous capturing of exotic wild animals was probably carried out by native hunters, and many of the captured beasts may have been lost during the consequent transport as a result of heat strike, trauma, malnutrition, disease or shipwreck. The limited presence of exotic species in archaeozoological material from Roman Africa and Rome may suggest that part of the meat from animals that were killed in the amphitheatre

\textsuperscript{99} Massimiliano Papini, Papini 2004, also investigates images of \textit{munera} (gladiatorial displays) and \textit{venationes} on mostly Italian mosaics, paintings, relief sculpture, statuettes and glass vessels, but does not really attempt to explain their significance or the mentality toward the games.
\textsuperscript{100} Brown 1992, 181.
\textsuperscript{101} Ibid., 207.
\textsuperscript{102} Ibid., 208.
\textsuperscript{103} MacKinnon 2006, 2-3.
was distributed for consumption, which may account for its scattered deposition in presently unknown contexts. MacKinnon also proposes an argumentum ex silentio; suggesting the possibility that the limited amount of exotic archaeozoological material indicates that venationes were less grandiose than ancient texts and art make us believe.

In her commentary on Martial’s Liber Spectaculorum, epigrams that were probably inspired by the inaugural games of the Flavian amphitheatre, Kathleen Coleman discusses a number of poems that narrate of hunting shows. Coleman is well-aware that the epigrams are artistic creations and not merely reflections of actual events, but despite this, she aims to find out what really happened in the arena. She recovers interesting information on the different species that were exhibited – most notably a rhinoceros, a tame tiger and cranes – their behaviour, hunting techniques and the skills of a particular bestiarius, Carpophorus. Finally, she explains that the emperor’s power over wild nature has been part of dynastic propaganda since Xerxes, or even earlier; in Martial, ‘nature – both animal and human – bows to Caesar’s command’.

In his article ‘Animal Spectacles in Ancient Rome: Meat and Meaning’, which is part of the afore mentioned research project on the disposal of human and animal remains of amphitheatre games, Donald Kyle also suggests that in imperial Rome, venationes symbolised power, empire and leadership. But he argues that it was not only violence, erotic and exotic sights and appreciation of the venatores’ skills and courage that lured the spectators to the arena, but also the prospect of receiving a share of the arena meat for private consumption. Kyle explores the distribution of meat from venationes against the background of hunting, because – he states - in the Roman mind sport hunting, commercial hunting and hunting spectacles were connected. This appears for instance from the usage of spears and nets by

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104 Ibid., 18; on the human consumption of arena meat see also: Kyle 1994 and Kyle 1998.
105 Ibid., 19.
106 Coleman 2006, poems on venationes, beast-fights and performance of trained animals: 7, 8, 11, 12, 13, 14, 15, 16, 17/32, 18, 20, 21, 22, 26, 33.
108 On this theme: Coleman 2006, lxxiii-lxxv and her discussion of Epigram 12, p. 112-3. Whether the games were dedicated to Titus or Domitian remains a topic of discussion, on this discussion: Coleman 2006, section 6 ‘The Identity of Caesar’, p. xlv-lixv.
111 Ibid., 190-1: ‘Some scholars of hunting have seen the venationes as a disassociated, violent and vulgar phenomenon, as a foreign and imperial corruption, as perverse and wasteful – neither true
venatores, the presence of scenery in the arena to suggest a natural setting and the fact that animal shows were held in the morning, the traditional time for hunting. Kyle also turned to the work of comparative anthropologists who explain how game meat acquires a special value, and how hunting often becomes an important, institutionalised and ritualised activity when people transform from subsistence hunters into herdsmen, farmers, villagers and urbanites. According to Kyle, the development of the Roman hunting spectacles and the consumption of arena meat should be understood in this context. This is an interesting perspective, particularly with regard to venationes in Roman African towns.

Like his colleagues, Garrett Fagan suggests that the hunting spectacles symbolised human, or more precisely, Roman, control over the dangerous forces of nature. Psychologically, spectators in North Africa may have been attracted by the animal spectacles because they found gratification in seeing the public destruction of wild animals that were a potential threat to livestock and crops. Other elements of the outlook of the audience, and the lure of venationes were, according to Fagan, fascination with the exotic animals, fear, excitement and surprise at unexpected events or so called ‘inversions of reality’. These are situations in which the opposite of what the audience expected, happened; animals performing tricks such as the kneeling elephant described in one of Martials epigrams whose gesture resembled that of men performing proskynesis. According to Beagon, this apparent similarity between man and animal, and a love for mirabilia in the form of size, number, exotic provenance and fighting qualities of the beasts, were also part of the attraction of the animal shows.

It has become clear in this section that earlier studies focused not only on the cultural significance of Roman hunting spectacles, but particularly on practical issues concerning the logistics and infrastructure, such as the capture and transport of exotic animals and the activities of African sodalities or cooperations of venatores. Many of these studies are based on the iconographic
evidence provided by the numerous African floor mosaics with venatorial imagery. A number of scholars also explored the cultural significance of hunting spectacles, suggesting that in imperial Rome, *venationes* symbolised Roman hegemony, the extent of the empire and human, or more precisely, Roman, control over the dangerous forces of nature. Finally, earlier research has made clear that modern ideas and mentalities with regard to hunting, sport and animals should not be projected on the Roman hunting spectacles.

Studies of amphitheatre games in the Roman provinces

As we have seen, scholars suggested that the gladiatorial games celebrated Rome’s important cultural values and heritage: the idea of manliness (*virtus*), military glory, civilisation and the power of the emperor. The games may have served as a sort of assembly, a cultural vaccine or a safety valve to release collective tensions and could thus have been an important instrument in the preservation of balance between ruler and ruled. Furthermore, the shows demonstrated and confirmed the emperor’s power, law and order, social hierarchy and stability. *Venationes* are thought to reflect the extent of the empire, the success of the imperial project, the emperor’s power to bend nature to his will, the triumph of civilisation over bestiality, or order over chaos. And finally, scholars suggested that the lure of the games lay not only in the overwhelming excitement and entertainment that they provided, but also in spectators’ appreciation of skill in professional performers, the emotional involvement and sense of belonging that they experienced, and the satisfaction of seeing those deserving of it punished.

These interpretations and explanations all provide interesting insights, but they are almost exclusively focused on arena shows in imperial Rome. Therefore, we will finally review the state of present scholarship into amphitheatre games in the Roman provinces. In this area of study, especially the relation between the entertainment spectacles and the dissemination of Roman culture is debated: some scholars have argued that spectacles were

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117 In *Gladiateurs dans l’Orient Grec*, published in 1940, Louis Robert collected hundreds of inscriptions that related to amphitheatre shows in the Greek world. Robert explained the popularity of the games as ‘one of the successes of Romanisation’. Recent studies of amphitheatre shows in provincial contexts include Futrell 1997 on Gaul, Britain and Spain; Bomgardner 2000 on African amphitheatres; Bouley 2001 on arena- and other spectacles in Dacia and Pannonia; Welch 2007 particularly chapter 6 on the reception of the amphitheatre in Athens and Corinth; Carter 2009 and Mann 2009, also on arena shows in the Greek East.
‘Romanising institutions’ or ‘vehicles of Romanisation’, instruments that the Roman state consciously connected to the imperial cult and applied to spread Roman culture and power, events that were key to the process of cultural unification.\textsuperscript{118} Even though it is not always made explicit, many of these studies seem to regard the provincial games as ‘cultural performances’, events that shaped, defined and redefined cultural values and social order. Allison Futrell, for instance, demonstrated on the basis of an investigation of amphitheatre games in Britain, Gaul and Spain, that the arenas were centres for the expression and dissemination of Roman imperial values and power.\textsuperscript{119} She describes how Augustus connected the amphitheatre games, ‘the site of a direct expression of symbolic power’, to the imperial cult and the army, thus creating a powerful ‘vehicle of Romanization’, an instrument for the distribution of Roman imperial values and for transmitting and maintaining control in the provinces.\textsuperscript{120} For inhabitants of the provinces, on the other hand, she thinks, the arena shows provided an opportunity to express their loyalty to the emperor. And Gunderson, whose work was discussed above (p. 12), approaches the arena as an ‘Ideological State Apparatus’, he states: ‘the arena serves to reproduce the Roman subject and thus acts as an instrument of the reproduction of Romanness as a variously lived experience’.\textsuperscript{121}

Not all scholars envisioned such a prominent and deliberate policy from Rome, but instead attributed more agency to, for example, local elites, that were assumed to have organised amphitheatre shows as a way to declare their loyalty to the Roman regime and establish their own identity and position.\textsuperscript{122} Christoph Hugoniot, in his article ‘Peut-on écrire que les spectacles furent un facteur de Romanisation en Afrique du Nord?’ suggests that a spectacle in itself, most notably a theatre play, facilitated interaction between municipal elites who adopted Roman culture, and the people in the Roman African towns and countryside, many of whom adhered to Punic religion and customs, and thus contributed to Romanisation.\textsuperscript{123}

\textsuperscript{118} For an overview of studies into ‘Romanization through Spectacle in the Greek East’, see Carter 2014.
\textsuperscript{119} Futrell 1997, 79-93.
\textsuperscript{120} Ibid., 93.
\textsuperscript{121} Gunderson 1996, 117.
\textsuperscript{122} Carter 2014, 620. Local elites: Mann 2009. However, Wiedemann also regards the spread of games as a means of establishing a sense of Roman community, Wiedemann 1992, 1.
\textsuperscript{123} Hugoniot 2005.
Especially the diffusion of gladiatorial spectacles in the Greek-speaking part of the Roman Empire has been studied extensively. Louis Robert was the first to collect the wealth of epigraphic material related to amphitheatre shows in the Greek world, but he did not attempt to explain the cultural significance of the games in the East, simply describing them as ‘one of the successes of Romanisation’ and a Roman disease that had infected Greek society. Only fairly recently, scholars have begun to investigate the cultural significance of the incorporation of gladiator shows in provincial Greek contexts. Price, for instance, argued that the imperial cult and accompanying arena shows provided an opportunity for Greeks to ‘translate the power of Rome into a local setting, either civic or provincial’. Michael Carter interpreted the gladiatorial games in the East as cultural performances, his study of Greek gladiator’s epitaphs demonstrated that the fighters were perceived and represented as athletic heroes and that they took the names of heroic figures from Greek mythology. On the other hand, the shows were dedicated to the Roman emperors and the Greeks often used the Latin technical language from the gladiatorial arena, for instance the terms referring to different types of gladiators, but in Greek characters: σεκούτωρ (secutor), μυρμίλλων (murmillo), θράξ (thrax). These examples show, according to Carter, how the Greeks actively engaged with gladiatorial shows: they adopted some Roman elements, but also shaped aspects of them according to their own cultural traditions and preferences.

The point of departure and the aim of this study

We have seen that scholars have developed many theories about the social function and cultural significance of the Roman games. Munera were, for

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124 In Gladiateurs dans l’Orient Grec, published in 1940, Louis Robert collected hundreds of inscriptions that related to amphitheatre shows in the Greek world. Robert explained the popularity of the games as ‘one of the successes of Romanisation’.
126 Scholarly research into Greek and Roman public games has long been underpinned by the modern moral dichotomies between sport vs. spectacle and Greek vs. Roman, presenting Greek athletic contexts as honest sport and Roman spectacles as simple, bloody and mindless entertainment. For a summary of this debate: Kyle 2007; Carter 2014, 622.
127 Price 1984 passim.
129 Ibid., 312.
130 Carter 2009; Carter 2014.
example, seen as artificial battlefields during which bloodshed, *virtus*, military glory, moral order and imperial power, Rome’s social and cultural values, were re-performed and re-confirmed. The events were also interpreted as safety valves or cultural vaccines, occasions that could help to release collective tensions in society and that contributed to the maintenance of order, social hierarchy and security. Others regarded gladiatorial combat as forms of justified human sacrifice or purifying ritual punishments. Rome’s spectacular hunting shows are often understood in the context of the city’s historical development from a humble rural community to a dominant power in the Mediterranean: the presentation of exotic beasts under the emperor’s supervision is thought to have demonstrated and celebrated his power and the extent of the empire. *Venationes* also symbolised the emperor’s power to bend nature to his will and the triumph of civilisation over bestiality, or order over chaos. Scholars agree about the importance of amphitheatre games in Roman society: the arena played an important role in the expression, celebration and confirmation of cultural values, social norms, social roles and hierarchical relations.

Though these theories about the significance and function of amphitheatre games are all interesting and plausible, they apply primarily to Rome, the centre of the empire and are centred on gladiatorial combat.131 Many of these explanations are not applicable to amphitheatre shows in provincial contexts where the attitude towards the emperor, Roman power and ideas about Roman expansion or the empire are likely to have differed. However, for many provincial contexts, the sociocultural significance and function of amphitheatre games has not been investigated in detail. With regard to *venationes* in particular, it seems likely that the experience of spectators at hunting spectacles in Asia or Africa, where lions and leopards were not symbols of farflung conquered territories, but an actual threat to cattle and humans, was completely different from that of the crowd in Rome. This and the fact that these events took place in a provincial context and not in Rome, must have affected the meaning and function of events with wild animals.132 However, most studies that focus on wild beast fights in Rome or

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131 Edmondson 1996, 75: ‘Because of the gaps in the evidence, many modern treatments draw together material from a range of periods and geographical contexts to construct a composite picture. But that is potentially misleading, not least because these spectacles evolved over time and were marked by considerable local variations in their nature and scale.’

132 After all, as Brown emphasised, ‘a scholarly consensus as to ‘the’ explanation for the arena, especially across a wide geographical extent and a history of more than 700 years is surely
the provinces generally do not attempt to explain their symbolic value or socio-political function. Instead, they merely collect source material and describe the *venatio*’s historical development, or investigate practicalities related to production of *venationes*, such as the activities of African sodalities of beast-fighters and the logistics of capture, transport and trade of African beasts for spectacles in Rome.¹³³

This dissertation aims to contribute to previous research in two respects: firstly it shifts attention away from Rome, and focuses on the sociocultural significance of arena shows in a provincial context, that of Roman North Africa. Secondly, it aims to contribute to our understanding of the local cultural significance of hunting spectacles, without projecting an imperial Roman value system on a provincial context. It will be investigated not only in what ways inhabitants of Roman Africa engaged with the *venatio* as a cultural phenomenon, as hunters and traders of exotic animals, as producers and sponsors of hunting shows, as performing *venatores*, or as spectators, but also in what ways *venationes* functioned as cultural performances, as events that contributed to, or were used to, shape, express and confirm cultural and social norms and social identities within Romano-African society.

III. Concepts, sources and approach

As noted above, this dissertation aims to come to a better understanding of the cultural significance, attractive value and social function of amphitheatrical wild beast shows in the Roman provinces of North Africa. This aim follows from the theoretical concept on which this study is based; that of ‘cultural performance’, a principle from the field of performance studies that was developed from the 1970’s onwards by anthropologists, sociologists and impossible’, Brown 1995, 383. Fagan 2011, 278 notes that we can expect variation in local orientations towards the games: not all regional cultures of the Empire shared a homogeneous concept of ‘Romanness’.

¹³³ Ville 1982 and Hugoniot 2003 are hugely valuable works because they provide great overviews of sources and aim to describe the historical development of amphitheatre games in Rome and the provinces (Ville) and entertainment shows in Roman North Africa (Hugoniot). On the logistics of capture and transportation of *venatio*-animals: Jennison 1937, 159-160, 168-169; Bertrand 1987; Meijboom 1997; Carandini et al. 1982; Deniaux 2000; Epplett 2001a; Epplett 2001b, 128-190; Guasti 2007 and Hauken & Malay 2009. And on the African sodalities of *venatores*, e.g.: Salomonson 1960; Beschaouch 1966; Beschaouch 1977; Beschaouch 1979; Beschaouch 1985; Thébert 1991; Epplett 2001b, 162-190; Bomgardner 2000, 139; Vismara 2007.
scholars from the field of theatre studies. Social scientists, and later also a number of ancient historians, applied this concept in order to understand other cultures and human behaviour. The central idea is that all people enact, relive, remember and pass on beliefs and knowledge through performing them. Thus, cultural performances have the potential to shape, represent and thus confirm cultural and social norms and a community's perception of itself. By analysing performances, the researcher may come to a better understanding of the people creating them. Many events can be seen as cultural performances; musical concerts or theatrical plays, but also sport contests and civic or religious festivals. All cultural performances have a set of performers, an audience, an organised program, a limited time span and a specifically assigned location and occasion. Finally, all performances are guided by conventions and accepted procedures, expectations and obligations.

The arena games at Rome have also been regarded as cultural performances, as events that played a key role in the production and maintenance of Roman cultural values, social norms and identity. In Rome, ancient historians argued, gladiators were expected to demonstrate Roman virtus, military skill, courage and endurance, and those who were brave were liberated after victory. Public executions symbolised the power of the

134 Milton Singer first coined the concept, Singer 1972. He suggested that performances encapsulated culture, and that during these cultural performances people exhibit their culture to themselves and to others, Singer 1972, 71. Some other main influencers and contributors to the development of the concept are Victor Turner, Clifford Geertz and Richard Schechner. Turner, who saw performances not as events that expressed settled and uniform 'culture', but as sites of negotiation where people reflect on, challenge and eventually abandon or reaffirm certain cultural norms, Turner 1969, 125. Geertz distinguished between deep and shallow play in performance; deep play is likely to raise concerns about the fundamental ideas and codes of a culture, while the experience of shallow play is more distant. Furthermore Geertz approached deep play, a performance, as 'a story people themselves about themselves', which also implies that cultural values and meaning are actively constructed instead of naturally present during the performance, Geertz 1972, 448. Schechner 2002, 23 states that performances are 'twice-behaved behaviours' or 'restored behaviours', that is, performed actions that people train to do, that they practice and rehearse. MacAlloon has brought these different understandings of performance and its function together in one definition: 'Cultural performance is an occasion in which as a culture or society we reflect upon and define ourselves, dramatize our collective myths and history, present ourselves with alternatives, and eventually change in some ways while remaining the same in others', MacAlloon 1984, 1.


136 Schechner 2002, 188.

137 Ibid., 214.

138 Hopkins 1983a, 1; Edmondson 1996, 111.
emperor and the enforcement of law and thus confirmed social norms. Wild beast shows exemplified control over the danger and chaos of wild nature, the success of the imperial project and the geographical extent of the Empire. The division of the arena crowd into social groups, such as senators, *equites*, *collegia*, women and slaves, contributed to and confirmed social identities and the community’s conception of itself. In Carter’s words: ‘The [amphitheater] shows had much to say to Romans about who was a Roman and who was not’. The concept of cultural performance has also been applied to arena games in the Roman provinces and often it was concluded that amphitheater shows contributed to the formation and confirmation of identity and society of the provincial towns where they took place. Some scholars even argued that the Roman games in the provinces functioned, or were even intended, as ‘Romanizing institutions’, that by experiencing a Roman performance, provincials could internalise Roman culture and that these events were instruments that spread Roman culture and power. As a result of this theory, the number of amphitheaters built in certain provinces or the discovery of domestic mosaics depicting arena spectacles has been interpreted as symptoms or even indicators of ‘Romanisation’. Remarkably, however, there are very few investigations and explanations of how amphitheatre spectacles were integrated in provincial contexts, and how such provincial spectacles could shape social identities, cultural values and social norms. A notable exception is the work of Michael Carter who used the concept of cultural performance to explain the cultural significance of the ‘ostentatiously Roman gladiatorial munus’ in the Greek regions of the Roman Empire, and its impact on Greek culture. He stated that Roman gladiator fights were popular and widespread in Greek civic culture, because the cultural values present in gladiatorial combat were essentially the same as those at the heart of traditional Greek culture: ‘Homeric paradigms and athletic ideals at the centre of Greek culture came alive in gladiatorial combat’. Thus, Carter concludes, the importance of a performance to the assembled audience is key to its successful appropriation and operation in local culture: a cultural performance in a

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139 Carter 2009, 301.
141 Futrell 1997, 79-93.
142 Futrell 1997; Bouley 2001; Chamberland 2001; Hugoniot 2003; Rouché 1993 and Khanoussi 2006 are examples of studies about ‘Roman’ games in provincial contexts.
143 Carter 1999 and following from this dissertation; Carter 2009 and Carter 2014.
144 Carter 1999, 296.
provincial context ought to reflect the values and priorities of the people who watched it.  

Here we touch upon another theoretical concept that will be important in this study, that of cultural exchange, which is often used as an alternative for the Romanisation-model.  In the early twentieth century, the British archaeologist F. Haverfield first used the term ‘Romanisation’ to describe the process by which Romans ‘civilised’ the provinces, a development that he saw as a conscious program to unify the Roman Empire by imposing Roman language, religion and culture upon its subjects. Inspired by post-colonial theory many ancient historians have rejected the model since the 1990’s, for a number of reasons. One of the principal objections is that the concept implies the execution of a conscious top-down cultural policy to ‘Romanise’ provinces, a model that fails to acknowledge that cultural change is not unilateral and unilinear; it leaves no room for the agency of provincial populations who may have chosen or attempted to ‘become Roman’ or not and whose culture may also have changed Roman culture. Furthermore, the concept implies a binary opposition between superior and dominant Roman culture and less advanced native culture, a distinction that is not only problematic because it is elitist and Rome-centred, but also because these categories are not clearcut and unproblematic; neither Roman culture, nor native- or provincial cultures were uniform.

The model of cultural exchange allows more room for the complexity and dynamic of processes of cultural change, the agency of both parties and the possibility that certain aspects of another culture were borrowed, appropriated and sometimes adapted, and others not. With regard to the Roman games, this model provides opportunities to discern variation in local orientations towards the games: not all regional cultures of the Empire shared a

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146 For an insightful summary of the Romanisation debate and the concept of cultural integration see Roselaar’s introduction to Processes of Cultural Change and Integration in the Roman World, Roselaar 2015, 1-19.
147 Haverfield 1923, 11.
149 See Mattingly 2011, 38-9 for a longer overview of the objections against the Romanisation model.
150 Wallace-Hadrill 2008, 10: provincials engaged in ‘a dialectic of appropriation by which cultural goods and traits of the conquering power are taken on to serve specific ends.’
homogeneous concept of ‘Romanness’ and editors of provincial arena games will perhaps not have found all cultural and social values celebrated in the arena in Rome worth borrowing. In fact, even within a provincial culture, different social groups will probably have had other reasons for seeing a cultural performance as a meaningful event. In *The day Commodus killed a rhino: understanding the Roman games*, Jerry Toner connects cultural performance and cultural appropriation as follows:

“Roman” did not mean the same thing everywhere. Empire was diverse; dozens of languages and cultures, “Roman” was never a stable category. Romans had to adapt and adopt, and use local elites to exercise authority, and the subordinate groups were able to interpret cultural performances in the arenas in different ways. Games created a focal point for Roman society in which it was able to articulate its own self-image and core values, but this was not simply rolled out across the Roman world: different benefactors, different social groups had different opinions on what games meant, interpretations developed over the span of the imperial period.

And the Roman games were not only occasions where cultural values, social boundaries and social hierarchy were negotiated, but itself a result of cultural exchange and integration. As we will see in chapter 1, Roman arena games did not evolve in a cultural vacuum, but in interaction with a range of cultural practices that the Romans encountered in the ancient Mediterranean. Elements of wild beast fights in particular, most notably many of the exotic beasts and specialised hunters, were imported from Africa, which makes the subsequent popularity of *venationes* in Roman North Africa even more interesting. The predominance of wild beast fights on African floor mosaics and the apparent African disinterest in gladiatorial combat seems to indicate that certain aspects of the Roman cultural performance were indeed appropriated more enthusiastically than others and that North Africans were not passive recipients of the amphitheatre games as a Roman cultural phenomenon, but active, and highly selective, producers and consumers. By selecting and appropriating certain elements of the Roman performance, namely the amphitheatres and the wild beast fights, and adding elements of

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151 Coleman 2006, lxxiii-lxxv and 112-3, the introduction and discussion of Martial’s Epigrams.
152 Wiedemann 1992, 33.
154 Eppllett 2001b, 6-26; Eppllett 2014, 505.
155 Keay & Terrenato 2001. Whether *venationes* were actually a purely ‘Roman’ invention or not is discussed in chapter 1.
their own, such as the African animals and native African hunters as *venatores*, they shaped their own meaningful performances. By investigating ‘what they told themselves about themselves’ during this cultural performance, we can come to a better understanding of cultural values and social norms in Roman North Africa and the community’s perception of itself.\(^{156}\)

As stated, this dissertation aims to come to a better understanding of the cultural significance, attractive value and social function of amphitheatrical wild beast shows in the Roman provinces of North Africa and uses the perspective of the theoretical concepts of cultural performance and cultural exchange and integration. The source material that can provide insight in the cultural significance and social function of wild beast shows is incomplete and diverse. It ranges from literary and epigraphic material to iconographic sources and archaeological remains, and therefore requires a combination of approaches. First of all, there are physical ‘remains’ of wild beast shows, most notably the archaeological remains of amphitheatres, which were of course also used for gladiatorial combat, but also archaeozoological material, bones of wild beasts that were used for *venationes*. They show that an exotic animal was present at a location and perhaps whether and how it was used for a wild beast show, but they may not tell much about the cultural significance or social function of *venationes*. Amphitheatres are plentiful in Roman North Africa, which may be taken as an indication of the popularity of arena spectacles and their importance in civic life.\(^{157}\) Archaeological investigations of the buildings can provide insight in the historical development of amphitheatre games in the provinces, but it should be kept in mind that not all *munera* were actually held in an amphitheatre; gladiatorial combat and wild beast fights could also be staged in open fields or squares with wooden stands that are not preserved, or, with some adaptations, in other entertainment buildings, such as theatres or circuses. Moreover, the physical remains of the arenas themselves do not indicate what type of entertainment spectacle was most frequently held there.

Apart from physical remains, there is a wealth of indirect evidence, from Roman Africa and the rest of the ancient world that can tell us more about *venationes*. Literary sources, such as the writings of Christian authors from Africa, Cyprian, Tertullian, Augustine and Quodvultdeus, and the Vandal writer Luxorius can provide information about entertainment with wild beasts in late antique Africa, but also the works of Roman historians and


\(^{157}\) The African amphitheatres are mapped and listed in App. Map 4 and Table 1.
moralists such as Livy, Tacitus, Cassius Dio and Seneca, the epigrams of Martial, the letters of Cicero, Pliny the Younger and Symmachus and the books about the animal world by Aelian, Oppian and Pliny the Elder can tell us more about wild beast fights in general.\footnote{Unless stated otherwise, I have used translations from \textit{Loeb Classical Library}. For the bibliographic details of the other translations and abbreviations of ancient authors and their works see Translations p. 341-342.} Africa itself offers numerous representations of wild beast fights, material that provides information about their preparation or production, or their producers and protagonists, namely inscriptions, mosaic floors, wall paintings, statues and decorated pottery. It should be kept in mind that all of these representational sources were made for specific reasons and created according to particular conventions; they cannot be regarded as mirrors of ‘what actually happened’ or reflections of reality, but should be seen as the results of cultural processes, which makes them valuable for assessing the place that \textit{venationes} held in Roman African culture, societal attitudes towards them and the experiences and mentality of producers, performers and fans. I will here briefly discuss my approach towards these sources and their possibilities and pitfalls. Here, focus will lie first on the most important sources, the iconographic material, and then on epigraphic sources, but most of the following also applies to the other source categories.

As noted, the predominance of representations of amphitheatrical wild beast shows on African floor mosaics is remarkable; thusfar circa 50 mosaics are known that depict \textit{venationes}, \textit{venatores} or other scenes related to hunting spectacles, whereas there are only two floors that represent gladiators (App. ill. 1 and 2).\footnote{Hugoniot 2003, 389-390 and its appendix, vol. III, 9-50 list all known African mosaic pavements that represent \textit{venationes} (53 in total). Most of the floors listed by Hugoniot are also described in Dunbabin 1978, 65-87, with better photos. 20 of the 53 mosaics with venatorial scenery that Hugoniot counted will be discussed in this dissertation, with references to the photos and information provided in the Appendix.} Precise dating of the mosaic pavements is often difficult, especially since the archaeological context in which they were found is often not known, but the majority of the floors were probably made in the third or fourth century AD. Their unparalleled design, unusually explicit and detailed depictions and the occasional presence of texts on these floors, have led scholars to assume that the majority of the \textit{venatio}-mosaics were commissioned by wealthy African townsmen in order to commemorate the amphitheatre games that they produced.\footnote{Dunbabin 1978, 69; Brown 1992, 188.} However, we cannot be sure that all of these floors were inspired by real events. And if they were, they will certainly not literally depict ‘what
actually happened' in the arena.\footnote{Much of the investigations into the practicalities of (the production of) wild beast shows is based on depictions on the famous African \textit{venatio}-mosaics, most notably the abovementioned articles by Beschaouch, but also Toynbee 1973; Bertrand 1987; Deniaux 2000 and Papini 2004 who investigates images of \textit{munera} (gladiatorial displays) and \textit{venationes} on mostly Italian mosaics, paintings, relief sculpture, statuettes and glass vessels, but does not really attempt to explain their cultural significance or the mentality toward the games.} After all, these floors were works of art, which were designed with a specific purpose, most likely to impress its viewers and thus convey a message about its commissioner. Furthermore, the mosaicists were bound by artistic conventions and the available material, expertise and space of the designated room.

The approach that I will use for the interpretation of mosaics as well as for the other ‘representational’ material (inscriptions, wall paintings, statues and illustrated pottery) is that proposed by Sarah Scott.\footnote{Scott 1993, 103-114.} Scott’s model starts from the premise that material culture is a communicative symbolic field that is structured in relation to social strategies and power relations: ‘It is through the manipulation of both material and other practices that the individual is able to make changes to his or her position within this order,’ she states.\footnote{Ibid., 103-4.} According to this model, our mosaics and other media could be used as instruments for self-representation and identity formation: ‘there were not mere reflections of society but were active within, and integral to, social relations’.\footnote{Brown 1992, 182; Kondoleon 1999, 323.} The \textit{venatio}-mosaics served as permanent reminders of a donor’s munificence, but in a way also ‘restaged’ the \textit{munus}: through these floors, visitors, also those who had not actually been present at the show, could (re-)experience a beast fight long after it had taken place. In fact, today, more than 1700 years later, we still can. Of course, a certain amount of glamorisation of the events is to be expected, and we cannot be sure whether the story that the mosaics tell is the ‘real’ story, but neither could most viewers in antiquity. What is important is not what actually happened during the show, but what the commissioners chose to represent, what not, and why? By analysing the influence that commissioners or patrons had on the design of the mosaic floors, a line of inquiry that was initiated by Katherine Dunbabin and continued by Sarah Scott and Shelby Brown, will provide more insight in the way in which Romano-Africans used \textit{venationes} for self-representation.\footnote{Dunbabin 1978, 65-87; Brown 1992, 181.}

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The epigraphic material that attests animal spectacles in Roman North Africa is limited (see further below) and consists of around 20 honorary -, votive -, building – and funerary inscriptions. Most of these texts cannot be dated precisely, but the majority can be ascribed to the second and third century on the basis of letter-forms, linguistic formulae, onomastic conventions or roughly known archaeological context. Since the habit of erecting inscriptions, the so called ‘epigraphic habit’, was essentially an urban phenomenon, it is not surprising that the majority of our epigraphic evidence derives from the most urbanised regions of northern Africa Proconsularis. Like the floor mosaics, these epigraphic texts will be regarded as instruments that could be used for self-representation, and such an approach of course necessitates that we know who erected these inscriptions. Therefore, it will be important to distinguish between the different types of inscriptions: the honorific inscriptions from our corpus were set up by a public body in order to celebrate the generosity of a sponsor of venationes, whereas the text of building- and votive inscriptions were determined by an editor of a wild beast show himself, which of course allowed him to personally construct the memory of his show, within the boundaries and possibilities of epigraphic conventions. Furthermore, we have two votive inscriptions set up by (groups of) venatores, one grave statue of a venator and a number of epitaphs of beast-fighters, media that can tell us something about the position of these performers in society.

It is clear from the outset, however, that the limited size of this epigraphic corpus does not reflect the great cultural importance of arena shows with wild beasts in civic life in the African provinces. Of course, our epigraphic record is shaped by many different factors, not only by geographical and temporal differences in epigraphic habit, patterns of preservation and discovery, but also by ancient commemorative customs. One of these customs was to record an amphitheatre show simply as a ‘munus’, without specifying the program of such an event, which makes it impossible for us to ascertain whether only gladiator fights, only venationes, or a combination of the two had taken place. Because of this incompleteness of the epigraphic evidence, some

166 Most of the epigraphic material is collected in App. Table 2 and 3 and will be discussed in chapter 3 and 4.
20 munus-inscriptions had to be excluded from our corpus. Apart from this, the low number of inscriptions that explicitly record venationes on African inscriptions may be a result of the popularity of these spectacles; magistrates who presented regular statutory games, a legal obligation that came with their function, were normally not honoured with an honorary inscription. As Guy Chamberland has noted, this means that the majority of amphitheatre shows that were ever held, the statutory games, almost never appear in our epigraphic material: the amount of venatio-inscriptions may be limited precisely because the provision of such games was so regular and institutionalised.

The set of nine curse tablets (tabellae defixiones) against venatores from the middle or late third century, found in the Carthaginian amphitheatre will be regarded as a separate category of epigraphic material, because they were not intended to represent something or someone. These curses were inscribed on thin sheets of lead and contained spells and magical symbols that were intended to evoke the help of demons to literally bind the target, in this case one or several venatores, to prevent them from moving, and thus make a good performance impossible. The defixiones not only provide information about the routines that were performed, the characteristics of a good performance and the identity of the beast-fighters, but they also offer the possibility to catch a glimpse of the living environment of venatores and the sodalities in which they were associated, the rivalry that existed between these sodalities and their fans and the attractive power of beast fights to spectators.

IV. Limits of the study

The geographical limits of this book are those of the Latin speaking provinces of Roman North Africa, Mauretania, Numidia, Africa Proconsularis and Tripolitania, roughly the modern Maghreb (see App. Map 1 and Map 2).
This area was very diverse in many respects; most notable are the level of urbanisation, the existence of pre-Roman urban civilisations and the landscape, ranging from the pre-desert in the interior and the desolate Atlas Mountains, to the fertile and highly urbanised northern part of Proconsularis. Because amphitheatre games were urban events, our focus will lie on the most urbanised areas, the areas along the coasts of Numidia and Tripolitania, and the intensely urbanised northern part of Africa Proconsularis, which had very close connections to Sicily and the Italian mainland. Although Mauretania Tingitania was also part of Roman North Africa, it was both geographically and culturally closer to Roman Spain, because of the distance to the eastern part of North Africa and the effect that the Atlas Mountains had on communication and trade routes (see App. Map 3). Mauretania will therefore have only a marginal role in the present study.

This book also has a large chronological scope: the period in which Africa was part of the Roman Empire ranges from the Roman victory over Carthage in 146 BC until the arrival of the Vandals in AD 435. However, because the available source material is largely from the second, third and fourth century, I will largely focus on that period. Finally, it is important to note that this book is not a systematic investigation of all *venationes* in all towns of Roman North Africa: the availability, nature, often unprecise dating and uneven preservation and distribution of our evidence do not allow such a study. Instead, this dissertation explores in a more general manner, the cultural significance, attractive power and social function of wild beast fights in the African provinces.

V. Research questions and chapter outline

My investigation will be guided by the following research questions: were wild beast shows more frequently staged and more popular in Roman Africa than gladiatorial combat, and if so, how can this be explained? What was their attractive power? In what way did the African *venationes* function as cultural performances, how did they shape, represent and confirm cultural and social norms, social identities and the community’s perception of itself? Which

Greek-speaking east of North Africa, the Roman provinces Cyrene and Egypt, are normally not included in studies about Roman North Africa, because they had a very different (cultural) historical development, and the dominant language was Greek, e.g. Sears 2011, 9.

173 Unless stated otherwise, the dates that I refer to are AD.
beliefs, what knowledge and which social norms and cultural values were enacted, relived, remembered and passed on through performing wild beast fights? Concretely, each chapter - apart from the first – investigates a different phase of the performance and the people involved; the process of preparation and the role of African wild beasts, hunters, traders, transporters and producers in chapter 2, the considerations of the producer in his capacity of game-giver (munerarius) in chapter 3, and in chapter 4 the performance itself, but also the beast-fighters, beasts and spectators and the relations between them. Each chapter will depart from a different sub-question. In chapter 1: when and how were amphitheatrical hunting shows introduced in Rome and in Roman North Africa, how did they develop and in what way were these historical developments connected? Why were venationes so often represented on mosaic pavements, were they indeed more popular and frequent than gladiatorial combat and why? The second chapter investigates the practical organisation of hunting spectacles with African beasts, exploring the entire process of procuring animals; which species were used, where in North Africa could they be found, how were the wild beasts captured and transported and who were involved in this process, how much did benefactors pay and what else was needed to produce a venatio? Chapter 3 focuses on the editors of wild beast shows, asking: what motivated African sponsors to produce hunting shows instead of other spectacles? How, why and what did they gain from offering these spectacles? In what ways did the production of a venatio contribute to the shaping of the sponsor’s social identity? And in the fourth and final chapter: what happened during animal spectacles, how did spectators experience them, what was their relation to beast-fighters and what was the attractive power of the venationes? Especially in the two final chapters, I will also focus on the ways in which venationes as cultural performances contributed to, or were used to, shape, express and confirm cultural and social norms and social identities within Romano-African society.