Chapter 1

The history of *venationes* in Rome and Roman North Africa

This chapter investigates the origins and historical development of amphitheatrical wild beast shows in Rome and in Roman North Africa with special attention for processes of cultural exchange and integration; when and how were hunting spectacles introduced in Rome and in Roman North Africa, how did they develop over time and in what way were these developments connected? Which circumstances influenced the early development of *venationes* in Rome and which aspects of the Roman cultural performances were consequently adopted and appropriated in Roman North Africa? Why were *venationes* so often represented on late antique African mosaic pavements and terracotta fineware, while gladiators are almost entirely absent in the iconographic material from this period? Were hunting shows more popular and more frequent than gladiatorial combat? And if so, how can we explain this?

§ 1.1 Hunting spectacles in Rome

Origins, development and cultural exchange

According to Livy, the first staged hunt of wild-beasts in Rome, with lions and leopards, took place in 186 BC as part of the votive games (*ludi*) in honor of Jupiter Optimus Maximus, vowed by M. Fulvius Nobilior in the Aetolian War (191-189 BC):

‘...About the time that these reports [about victories] were brought from Spain, the Taurian Games were performed for two days for religious reasons. Then for ten days, with great magnificence, Marcus Fulvius gave the games which he had vowed during the Aetolian war. Many actors too came from Greece to do him honour. Also a contest of athletes was then for the first time made a spectacle for the Romans, and a hunt of lions and panthers was given, and the games, in number and variety, were celebrated in a manner almost like that of the present time.’\(^{174}\)

\(^{174}\) Liv. 39.22.2: ‘Per eos dies, quibus haec ex Hispania nuntiata sunt, ludi Taurii per biduum facti religionis causa. Decem deinde <dies magno> apparatu ludos M. Fulvius, quos voverat Aetolico bello, fecit. multi artifices ex Graecia venerunt honoris eius causa. Athletarum quoque certamen tum primo Romanis
But events with wild African animals were not completely new in Rome in M. Fulvius Nobilior’s days; Seneca and Pliny tell us that processions with captured war elephants and displays of other African beasts had already been part of celebrations of military triumphs in the third century BC.¹⁷⁵ Elephants were first seen during the triumph of the Roman consul M. Curius Dentatus who defeated Pyrrhus of Epirus in a battle at Beneventum in 275 BC:

‘In the last few days I heard someone telling who was the first Roman general to do this or that; Duilius was the first who won a naval battle, Curius Dentatus was the first who had elephants led in his triumph.”¹⁷⁶

Seneca also notes that some 25 years later, 120 elephants from the Carthaginian chief Hasdrubal were displayed during Caecilius Metellus’ triumph after his victory in the Battle of Panormus in 251 BC.¹⁷⁷ And Appian records that Scipio Africanus exhibited elephants during his triumph at the occasion of his victory at Zama in 202 BC.¹⁷⁸ These elephants were brought to

spectaculo fuit, et venatio data leonum et pantherarum, et prope huius saeculi copia ac varietate ludicrum celebratum est.’ NB: These ‘Ludi Taurii’ should not be confused with bullfights since ‘Taurii’ most probably derives from ‘tarentini’.¹⁷⁵


¹⁷⁷ Sen. Brev. vit. 13.8: ‘Sed ut illo revertar, unde decessi, et in eadem materia ostendam supervacuam quorundam diligentiam: idem narrabat Metellum victis in Sicilia Poenis triumphetum unum omnium Romanorum ante currum centum et viginti captivos elephantos duxisse.’ ‘But to return to the point from which I have digressed, and to show that some people bestow useless pains upon these same matters—the man I mentioned related that Metellus, when he triumphed after his victory over the Carthaginians in Sicily, was the only one of all the Romans who had caused a hundred and twenty captured elephants to be led before his cart…” Almost the same information is provided by Pliny, who notes a number of 142 elephants: Plin. HN VIII 6.16: ‘Elephantos Italia primum vidit Pyrri regis bello et boves Lucas appellavit in Lucanis visos anno urbis CCCCLXXII, Roma autem in triumpho V annis ad superiorem numerum additis, eadem plurimos anno DII victoria L. Metelli pontificis in Sicilia de Poenis captos. CXLII fuere aut, ut quidam, CXL, travecti ratibus quas doliorum consertis ordinibus inposuerat’. ‘Italy saw elephants for the first time in the war with King Pyrrhus, and called them Lucan oxen because they were seen in Lucania, 280 BC; but Rome first saw them at a date five years later, in a triumph, and also a very large number that were captured from the Carthaginians in Sicily by the victory of the pontiff Lucius Metellus, in 252 BC. There were 142 of them, or by some accounts 140, and they had been brought over on rafts that Metellus constructed by laying decks on rows of casks lashed together.’

¹⁷⁸ App. Pun. 66: ‘Καὶ ὁ πρόπος, ὦ καὶ νῦν ἐπὶ χρώμαινι διακελοῦσιν, ἄστι τοιώδε: […] βόες δ’ ἐπὶ τοῖς λευκοῖς, καὶ ἐλέφαντες ἤσαν ἐπὶ τοῖς βοσάρι, καὶ Καρχερονίων αὐτῶν καὶ Νομάδων ὕστερ τῶν ἡμών ἐξηρῆσαν […]’ ‘The form of the triumph (which the Romans still continue to employ) was as follows […] White oxen came next, and after them elephants and the captive Carthaginian and Numidian chiefs. […]’.
Rome as ‘spoils of war’; they were the confiscated war-machines of defeated foreign enemies such as King Pyrrhus of Epirus and the Carthaginians Hannibal and Hasdrupal. And the abovementioned hunting show by M. Fulvius Nobilior in 186 BC - the first venatio in Rome - indicates that by the early second century, African animals were no longer solely displayed as spoils of war in triumphs, but also in artificial hunts as a form of spectacular entertainment. Non-violent displays and tricks with (tamed) animals continued throughout the imperial period, but - as we will see - the hunting and thus killing of exotic African beasts became very popular among sponsors who made great effort to obtain more and more exotic animals.

Around 170 BC, the tribune Cnaeus Aufidius blocked a vetus senatus consultum that aimed to restrict the import of African wild beasts into Italy:

‘There was a senatus consultum prohibiting the importation of African beasts into Italy. In disagreement with this, Cn. Aufidius, tribune of the plebs, took the measure to the people, and permitted the importation of these animals for the purpose of circus games.’

The senate’s motivation for this attempt to restrict the import of Africanae remains unclear and is further complicated because the dating of this event is insecure. It has been argued that the senate aimed to prevent individual generals from earning political favours by producing animal spectacles, but the restriction might also have been connected to war-time measures against trade from North Africa. Despite the efforts of the senate, the amounts of wild beasts that were shipped to Rome appear to increase in the late Republic. Livy notes, for instance, that in 169 BC no less than 63 leopards and 40 bears and

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179 About the symbolic significance of the elephant: Shelton 2006, 6-8 who demonstrates that elephants were framed as ‘the enemy’.
180 Epplett 2014, 506.
182 The dating of this event is not certain, as is pointed out by David Potter in Potter 1998, his review of Palmer 1997: ‘Dates for Aufidius vary between 170 BC and the end of the second century. Palmer accepts 170, but it should be noted that the argument is somewhat circular: Aufidius “must” have been tribune by that date since Cornelius Scipio Nasica and P. Cornelius Lentulus put on a display that included sixty-three African animals as aediles in 169 BC. […] It is equally possible, on this logic, that Aufidius was tribune in 187 BC. Fulvius Nobilior exhibited panthers and lions during his games in 186 BC (Liv. 39.22.2). But we don't know; the vetus senatus consultum could equally possibly have been a war-time measure at the time of the Second or Third Punic wars that was repealed as soon as one or the other ended.’
elephants performed at the games of the *aediles curules* Publius Cornelius Scipio Nasica and Publius Lentulus.\textsuperscript{184} And the Roman defeat of Carthage in 146 BC and the subsequent Roman conquest of land (*Africa Vetus*) probably gave an enormous impulse to the export of wild African beasts (*ferae africanae*) to Italy. In the first century BC, we see that the amounts of wild beasts used for *venationes* in Rome became even larger: in 93 BC Sulla staged a show in which 100 lions were fought by javelin-throwers provided by the Mauretanian king Bocchus I, an alley of the Romans, after the Jugurthine war (111-104 BC).\textsuperscript{185} In 58 BC Marcus Aemilius Scaurus presented a *venatio* with 150 leopards, a hippopotamus, and five crocodiles.\textsuperscript{186} And by the end of the Republic, Pompey and Caesar largely outdid their predecessors when they sponsored games with respectively 600 and 400 lions.\textsuperscript{187}

At this point, it is important to underline that the display and hunt (real or staged) of wild and exotic animals is not unique to Roman culture or mentality. In fact, the power of men over exotic and dangerous beasts is a well-known theme in cultural history: ‘From the earliest times, almost without exception, a very fine zoological collection has marked the crest of power in every great nation and shrunk with it to its fall. The presence of strange

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\textsuperscript{184} Liv. 44.18.8: ‘et iam magnificentia crescente notatum est ludus circensibus P. Corneli Scipionis Nasicae et P. Lentuli aedilium curulum sexaginta tres Africanas et quadraginta ursos et elephanto lusisse.’, ‘Display being now on the increase, it is recorded that at the games in the arena by the curule aediles Publius Cornelius Scipio Nasica and Publius Lentulus, sixty-three leopards and forty bears and elephants performed’.

\textsuperscript{185} Sen. Brev. vit. 13.6: ‘Num et hoc cuiquam curare permittes quod primus L. Sulla in circo leones solutos dedit, cum alioqui adligati darentur, ad conficiendos missis a rege Boccho jaculatoribus.’, ‘Perhaps you will permit someone to be interested also in this—the fact that Lucius Sulla was the first to exhibit loosed lions in the Circus, though at other times they were exhibited in chains, and that javelin-throwers were sent by King Bocchus to despatch them?’.

\textsuperscript{186} Plin. HN VIII 40.26: ‘Primus eum et quinque crocodilos Romae aedilitatis suae ludis M. Scaurus temporario euripo ostendit.’, ‘A hippopotamus was exhibited at Rome for the first time, together with five crocodiles, by Marcus Scaurus at the games which he gave when aedile, a temporary channel was made to hold them.’ and 8.24: ‘Primus autem Scaurus in aedilitate sua varias CL universas misti, dein Pompeius Magnus CCCX, divus Augustus CCCXX.’, ‘But Scaurus, in his aedileship, first in procession 150 female leopards in one flock, then Pompey the Great 410, and the late lamented Augustus 420.’

\textsuperscript{187} Plin. HN 8.20: ‘Leonum simul lurium pugnam Romae princeps dedit Q. Scaevola P.f. in curuli aedilitate, centum autem iubitatorum primius omnium L. Sulla, qui postea dictator fuit, in praetura; post eum Pompeius Magnus in circo DC, in is iubitatorum CCCXV, Caesar dictator CCC’, ‘A fight with several lions at once was first bestowed on Rome by Quintus Scaevola, son of Publius, when consular aedile, but the first of all who exhibited a combat of 100 maned lions was Lucius Sulla, later dictator, in his praetorship. After Sulla Pompey the Great showed in the Circus 600, including 315 with manes, and Caesar when dictator 400.’
creatures, beauteous birds or ferocious beasts was, according to Jennison, ‘a living proof of the monarch’s might and influence’. And zoos are not the only form of animal entertainment in the history of western civilisation: think for instance of nineteenth century colonial hunting safaris or royal hunting parties, and of circuses, wild-life documentaries on television or safari tourism. These examples indicate that ‘animals have always been central to the process by which men form an image of themselves’. In chapter 3 and 4, we will see that Roman and other ancient spectacles with wild beasts indeed functioned in this way, and that – in line with the formation of the image of the self – they were also used to form an image of ‘the other’.

Secondly, it should be noted that wild beast hunts and displays in Rome did not evolve in a cultural vacuum, but in interaction with a range of cultural practices that the Romans encountered in the ancient Mediterranean. Modern scholars have suggested that, for instance, spectacles with trained animals in the Greek city-states and forms of animal combat in Etruscan culture, as well as native Italian hunting festivals such as the Florialia and the Ceralia, private vivaria of exotic beasts in the Greek East and finally the emergence of gladiatorial combat, influenced the development of *venationes* in Rome. Practices from the Hellenistic East, on the one hand, and the North-African kingdoms on the other, appear to have been most influential. In fact, the Grand Procession of Ptolemaus Philadelphus II in 275 BC in Alexandria may have been a direct source of inspiration for the abovementioned triumph of Dentatus in the same year, which was the first in Rome to feature elephants. During Philadelphus’ Dionysiac procession, which was part of the second Ptolemaia in honour of the deified Ptolemy I Soter, technical innovations, works of art made of costly materials and many animals of exotic species were presented as a great exhibition of Alexandrian technical

188 Jennison 1937, XIII.
189 Hoage & Deiss 1996, 8-18 provides an interesting overview of collections of animals in pre-modern history. The title *New Worlds, New Animals* alludes to the connection between the conquering of new lands and the discovery of new animals, which is of course also interesting in the context of the Roman Empire. On the symbolism of the circus: Schwalm 2007, 79-104.
193 This procession is known through excerpts from the work *On Alexandria* by Callixeinus of Rhodes preserved in Ath. *Deip.* V 196a-203b, see also: Coleman 1996, 51.
innovations and Ptolemaic wealth and power. Modern scholars suggested that the Hellenistic procession was in itself a fusion of an Egyptian harvest festival, a Greek religious pompe and a military or political parade. And it is from this cultural amalgamate that the Roman triumphators enthusiastically adopted and appropriated cultural elements, such as the display of foreign artifacts and products, human and animal captives from conquered territories and the tableaux with depictions of geographical information about conquests.

Roman triumphs had been held to celebrate victories since the early Republic, and venationes originate in the third and second century BC, the period of the wars against the Carthaginians, Numidians and Macedonians. The Carthaginians and kings of the Numidians not only domesticated elephants and used them in their warfare, but they also depicted them on coinage, giving the powerful animals a central importance in their self-representation. After their victories, the Romans captured the war-elephants and displayed them in their triumphs as symbols of the defeated foreign kings. The triumphal presentation of these powerful animals as captives, along with prisoners of war, the defeated kings themselves and the plundered riches of the conquered land were of course intended to provide visual proof of the Roman victory over foreign leaders, wild nature and farflung territories. The captured elephant, the largest animal from the animal kingdom, became a symbol of the Roman victory over the powerful ‘other’ and closely associated with them, Carthage, perhaps Rome’s most powerful enemy. But how did these triumphal parades with elephants evolve into artificial hunting spectacles in which exotic beasts were killed?

Here again, the impulse seems to have come from Africa, and more precisely from the Numidian and Mauretanian kingdoms. Hunting was a major activity of the pre-Roman native African elites and played an important

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194 Ibid., 50-3.
195 Stewart 2006, 162.
196 Coleman 1996, 51-2. Other elements in the Roman triumphs have been identified as distinctively Roman or Etruscan, on the history of triumph, e.g.: Versnel 1970 and Beard 2007.
197 Beard 2007, 8; Epplett 2001b, 6-23.
198 Roller 2004, 205-7. Maritz 2000 argues that the personification of Africa with an elephant headdress were not indigenous ‘African’ types, but linked to the Roman concept of the continent.
199 Shelton 2006, 13-15: ‘Pyrrhus, Hannibal and their elephants acquired proverbial status as Rome’s most challenging opponents, and the wars against them were immortalized as having produced Rome’s most desperate, but also, finally, most glorious moments’.
part in their self-representation and in the Roman conception of them: Sallustius tells us, for example, that Jugurtha was very good at hunting lions, a proof of his suitability for kingship.\textsuperscript{201} And cultural exchange with the native African kingdoms not only inspired the producers of Roman venationes, but also unlocked a wealth of expertise on hunting and wild beasts, practical support in the form of specialised native African hunters and probably animal handlers, and – last but not least – the wild animals. Examples of this transfer of specialists and expertise can be found in Roman literature: Seneca notes, for instance, that a 100 lions were fought by native javelin-throwers provided by the Mauretanian king Bocchus I in games given by Sulla in 92 BC, and Pliny mentions that in 61 BC Numidian bears were fought by Ethiopian hunters.\textsuperscript{202} Furthermore, part of the cultural knowledge about the behaviour of wild beasts and the expertise that was needed to hunt and capture them that we find in Pliny and Plutarch was transferred from Africa to Rome through the work of Juba II, king of Mauretania, who wrote about natural history and geography.\textsuperscript{203}

Finally, the evolution of the orchestrated hunting of wild animals in Roman games in the last two centuries of the Republic was influenced by the increasing popularity of gladiatorial combat, which is usually thought to have been a Campanian or Samnite invention.\textsuperscript{204} Gladiatorial contests originated as obligatory offerings (\textit{munera}) at the funerals of important men, which were

\textsuperscript{201} Wiedemann 1992, 64 and Sall. Iug. 6.1: ‘\textit{Qui ubi primum adolevit, pollens viribus, decora facie, sed \textit{muito maxume} ingeni\textit{ov validus, non se luxu neque inerti\textit{ae} corrumpendum dedit, sed, uti mos gentis illius est, equi\textit{tare, icculari, cursu cum aequalibus certare, et quom omnis gloria anteiret, omnibus tamen carus esse; ad hoc plerique tempora in venando agere, leonem atque alias feras primus aut in primis ferire: plurumum facere et minumum ipse de se loqui.’, ‘As soon as Jugurtha grew up, endowed as he was with physical strength, a handsome appearance, but above all with a vigorous intellect, he did not allow himself to be spoiled by luxury or idleness, but following the custom of that nation, he rode horses, hurled the javelin, contended with those of his same age in footraces, and although he surpassed them all in renown, he nevertheless enjoyed the affection of all. Besides this, he devoted much time to hunting, was usually the first, or among the first, to strike down a lion and other wild beasts, performed numerous accomplishments, but spoke very little of his own exploits.’

\textsuperscript{202} Sen. Brev. vit. 13.6 cf. supra n.185. The same information is provided in Plin. \textit{HN} 8.20. See also: Bomgardner 2000, 35. For the Numidian bears and Ethiopian hunters: Plin. \textit{HN} 8.54-131

\textsuperscript{203} Roller 2004, ix.

\textsuperscript{204} Etruscan or Sabellian origins were also proposed, for overviews of these investigations, eg. Ville 1982, 53-56; Coleman 1996, 52; Bomgardner 2000, 34. And see also Kyle 1998, 44-5: ‘The origin of gladiatorial and beast combats is probably not a historical question answerable in terms of a single original location (e.g. Etruria or Campania), a single original context (e.g. sacrifice, contests, vengeance, scape-goats), and a simple linear transmission (e.g. Etruria to Rome). Combats, sacrifices, and blood sports were simply too widespread in antiquity.’
intended to enlarge their public prestige and that of their family. Therefore, gladiator fights were not part of state occasions (ludi), events that were presided over by magistrates and paid from the state treasury, in which ceremonial processions were followed by chariot races (ludi circenses) and later also theatrical displays (ludi scaenici), triumphs and shows with wild beasts. Despite their different origins, in the late Republic gladiator fights and wild beast shows were gradually combined in one spectacle. Munera became very important in the competitive political arena of the late Republic: editors constantly attempted to exceed the splendor of games given by their predecessors. As a result, the connections with funerary practice loosened and the amount of gladiators that was used gradually increased. Displays, artificial hunts and single combat with wild beasts were probably added in order to make the shows even more spectacular. By the end of the Republic, wild beast fights were a standard feature of amphitheatre games, often the morning program, which was followed by public executions at midday and gladiatorial combat in the afternoon. However, venationes also continued to be staged in the circus as an appendix to ludi.

Imperial hunting spectacles

We have seen that wild beast shows originate in the context of triumphal celebrations in official state games (ludi) and that in the late Republic they were increasingly relocated to the amphitheatre, where they were combined with gladiator games, which were originally munera, obligations carried out for the dead. The editors of munera presented these spectacles in their private capacity, although they were often also public magistrates, whereas ludi were official state occasions; gifts to the gods on behalf of the entire community, which were presided over by magistrates and partly financed by the state

205 Wiedemann 1992, 2.
206 Ibid., 1-3. Cicero defined the ludi publici as follows in Cic. Leg. XV 38: ‘Iam ludi publici quoniam sunt cavea circue divisi, sint corporum certationes cursu et pugillatu et luctatione curriculaque equorum usque ad certam victoriam circu constituata; cavea cantu vigeat fidibus et tibiis, dum modo ea moderata sint, ut lege praescribitur’, ‘Next, since the public games are divided between theatre and circus, in the circus there shall be contest of body with body, consisting of running, boxing, and wrestling; and also horse-races, which shall last until a decisive victory is won; on the other hand, the theatre shall be filled with song to the music of harp and flute, the only limitation being that of moderation, as the law prescribes.’
207 Wiedemann 1992, 55; Chamberland 2001, 56.
208 Wiedemann 1992, 5-11.
In the first century BC, 
aediles
and praetors were not officially required to give munera, but it was increasingly expected from them, and men with political or social ambitions used their games to win popularity with their electorate in order to safeguard their support in future elections. Augustus started to restrict the frequency and scale of praetorial munera in order to limit the political power of high magistrates, and the other Julio-Claudian emperors further monopolised the production of ludi and munera: by the time of Domitian only the emperor, a member of his family, or a magistrate on his behalf, were allowed to present munera. Consequently, the production of animal shows was also largely brought under imperial control and organization. If we may believe the reports of ancient sources, the emperors had many thousands of exotic beasts from the African and Asian provinces shipped to Rome to perform in the beast hunts: in the Res Gestae, for example, we read 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. The largest number of animals ever presented in the Roman arena is said to have appeared in Trajan’s triumphal show after his victory in the second

209 Ibid., 7.
210 Ibid., 6-7.
211 From 20 BC onwards, praetors were allowed to sponsor gladiator shows only twice during their year of office and no more than 120 fighters could participate. The princeps also forbade praetors to spend more money on these games than their predecessors, Wiedemann 1992, 8-9. Cass. Dio 54.1.3-4: ‘καὶ τότε δὲ ὁ Αὔγουστος, καίτερ ἐκείνων αἴρεθεντοι, πολλὰ τῶν ἐς αὐτοὺς ἀνηκόντων ἐπραξε. τῶν τε παντελῶς κατέλυσε, τά δὲ πρὸς τὸ σωφρονέστερον συνετελεῖ, καὶ τοῖς μὲν στρατηγοῖς τὰς πανηγύριας πᾶσας προσέπαξεν, ἵκ τι τοῦ δημοσίου φθίνοντα τα αὐτοῖς κελέσας, καὶ προσαπεπτών μήτε ἐς ἐκείνας οἰκοθέν τινα πλεῖν τὸν ἐπέκειν ἀναλίσκειν μήτ᾽ ὁ πλομαχίαν μήτ’ ἄλλως εἰ μή ἤ βουλὴ ψηφίσατο, μήτ’ αἰὶ πλεονάκις ἢ δίς ἐν ἐκάστῳ ἔτει, μήτε πλεῖόνων ἐκοσι καὶ ἐκατὼν ἀνδρῶν ποιῶν’, ‘Augustus performed many of the duties belonging to their office. Of the public banquets, he abolished some altogether and limited the extravagance of others. He committed the charge of all the festivals to the praetors, commanding that an appropration should be given them from the public treasury, and also forbidding any one of them to spend more than another from his own means on these festivals, or to give a gladiatorial combat unless the senate decreed it, or, in fact, oftener than twice in each year or with more than one hundred and twenty men’. 212 Eppllet 2001b, 30; Chamberland 2001, 55-56.
213 Aug. RG 22; Wiedemann 1992, 60. Cassius Dio also reports the following numbers for the beast fights of the Julio-Claudian emperors, note the slight increases with each emperor: 600 animals during venationes in 13 BC (Cass. Dio 54.26.1); 260 lions and 36 crocodiles for games in honour of Augustus’ grandsons in 2 BC (Cass. Dio 55.10.7-8); 200 lions in 12 (Cass. Dio 56.27.4-5); 400 bears and 400 lybicae in one of Caligula’s shows (Cass. Dio 59.7.3); 400 bears and 300 lions under Nero (Cass. Dio 60.7.3; 61.9.1).
Dacian war: 11,000 carnivores and herbivores.\textsuperscript{215} These numbers must of course be treated with caution: the available archaeozoological evidence attests to much lower numbers and less grandiose hunting shows with more ‘common’ animals such as antelopes and other deer, wild sheep and asses, bears, wild boar, bulls and horses.\textsuperscript{216} The discovery of bone material from lions, leopards and ostriches near the Flavian amphitheatre indicates that exotic species were presented in Rome, but probably on a much smaller scale than our literary sources suggest.\textsuperscript{217}

As we have seen in the introduction, modern historians have argued that amphitheatre games celebrated values that were important to the Roman community: control over nature and the enemy, the implementation of law and military virtues such as courage and skill.\textsuperscript{218} In the arena, the emperor presided over the elimination of forces that could endanger the Roman state: such as wild beasts, criminals and defeated enemies, which exemplified chaos and the power of nature, criminality and barbarian lawlessness.\textsuperscript{219} Venationes probably symbolized not only the emperor’s power, but also the geographical extent of his power; the slaughter of powerful wild animals from far-away corners of the Roman Empire echoed the submission of these territories to Roman rule and their agricultural exploitation. Thus the shows confirmed the geo-political position of Rome as the capital of an Empire.\textsuperscript{220} These explanations are all valuable and interesting, but they appear to ignore that hunting spectacles developed in interaction with a range of cultural practices that the Romans encountered in the ancient Mediterranean, most notably perhaps those from the native African kingdoms. The Roman expansion into North Africa not only provided a nearby source of wild beasts, but also unlocked a wealth of knowledge and practical expertise with regard to capturing and fighting wild African beasts was a factor of major importance in the historical development of venationes in Rome. In the second part of this chapter we will focus on the other side of the story, the situation in Roman North Africa where amphitheatres games were introduced in the early imperial period and where venationes in particular became a hugely important cultural performance in the late antique period.

\textsuperscript{215} Cass. Dio 68.15.
\textsuperscript{216} MacKinnon 2006, 18-19.
\textsuperscript{218} Hopkins 1983a, 1-12; Wiedemann 1992, 90-91; Hornum 1993; Toner 1995, 44.
\textsuperscript{220} Coleman 2006, lxxiii-bxxv.
§ 1.2 Amphitheatre games in Roman North Africa

As noted in the introduction, the majority of modern research into the Roman games focused on Rome, but *venationes* and gladiator fights were also frequently organised in the cities of the Roman provinces. This section addresses the historical development of hunting spectacles in Roman North Africa and their frequency and popularity. Were hunting shows more popular and more frequent than gladiatorial combat? And if so, how can we explain this? And which aspects of the Roman cultural performance were adopted and appropriated in Roman North Africa? Before turning to these questions, we will start with a short overview of Africa’s Roman history.

The Roman history of the western part of North Africa started in 146 BC, with the famous destruction of Punic Carthage that marked the end of the Punic wars. From 146 to 29 BC, the Roman possessions in Africa consisted of Carthage and its surroundings, the province that was later referred to as Africa Vetus, which was governed by a *praetor* in the new capital, Utica. Around the end of the Republic, the Roman presence in North Africa gradually increased: in 46 BC Julius Caesar added the eastern part of the Numidian territories (Africa Nova) and in 29 BC Octavian merged these areas into one new province (Africa Proconsularis) that was ruled by a proconsul in Carthage (see App. Map 1 and 2). In 44, Claudius added also the western part of Numidia and Mauretania, the former territory of client kings Juba II and his son Ptolemy of Mauretania. After this, in the late first and second century, there were some military campaigns against native tribes along the southern frontier, Moors in the west and Garamantes and Nasamones in the east, but no major conquests. The provincial frontier between Mauretania Tingitania and Mauretania Caesariensis remained in place until late antiquity, but Proconsularis and Numidia were divided into several smaller provinces a number of times in the course of the second, third and fourth century. Roman rule in North Africa ended for about a century with the invasion of the Vandals (435-533) and after that it was part of the Byzantine Empire until the Arab conquest in 690.

The African provinces, Africa Proconsularis in particular, were economically prosperous throughout the Roman period, and especially from the second to the fourth century. The wealth of the region was largely based on

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221 Numidia, Sitifensis, Circensis, Militiana, Byzacena and Tripolitania. See also Introduction IV and Sears 2011.
agriculture: in the imperial period, African olives and olive oil were exported all over the Empire and Rome strongly depended on the African grain supply. African merchants also traded in textiles, purpur, marble, wine, timber, livestock, wool and the well-known semi-luxury pottery, African red slipware, which was produced on an industrial scale and used throughout the Empire.\footnote{222} Africa Proconsularis became profoundly urbanized in the second century, with notable peaks in the Antonine and the Severan periods, when numerous small towns in what is now northern Tunisia were promoted and transformed into Roman towns with baths, theatres, fora and amphitheatres.\footnote{223} The ‘crisis of the third century’ (235-285) appears not to have affected North Africa on a great scale and has been characterised as a period of stabilisation, although a number of towns did experience economic setbacks.\footnote{224} In the fourth century, most African towns continued to flourish, but euergetism now largely consisted of the donation of entertainment spectacles, and therefore the construction of large public buildings, which had been the prime focus of munificence in the second and third century, came to a halt.\footnote{225} Related to this trend is the increase of investments in private buildings, such as villas and small baths, or amenities that were used by small groups, such as collegia, as opposed to public infrastructure.\footnote{226} The third and fourth century saw the rise of Christianity and the possession of urban property by the church, but the classical civic tradition, characterised by the fulfilment of magistracies and priesthoods and the production of entertainment shows continued to flourish into the fourth and fifth century.\footnote{227}

Unfortunately, our literary, epigraphic and iconographic sources do not record the first occurrence of a \textit{venatio} in Roman North Africa; the first (epigraphic) attestation of a hunting spectacle is from the 130’s (see App. Table 2), but it is likely that \textit{venationes} were introduced in Africa along with the first amphitheatres, those in Utica, Carthage and Iol Caesarea, that were constructed under Augustus (see App. Table 1 for the chronology of North-African amphitheatres).\footnote{228} The men who performed in the earliest African wild-

\footnote{222} Lepelley 2001, 54-5.
\footnote{223} Lepelley 1992; Sears 2011, 102; Kokkinia 2011, 106; Hobson 2012.
\footnote{224} Lepelley 1992, 55; Sears 2011, 98-114.
\footnote{225} Leone 2007, 67.
\footnote{226} Ibid., 67.
\footnote{227} Lepelley 1992, 50-76; Borg & Witschel 2001; Mattingly 2007 and Mattingly 2011.
\footnote{228} App. Table 1 lists all the African amphitheatres that have thusfar been identified, including estimates of capacity, date of construction, extensions, refurbishments, restorations and abandonment. Unfortunately, preservation issues or imprecise excavation techniques at the time
beast fights may well have been native Africans, like the abovementioned Mauretanian and Ethiopian hunters that were sent to Rome to fight in games in 92 and 61 BC, but they are unfortunately not visible in our sources (see also § 4.2).229 The amphitheatres, however, were a Roman invention, and their construction in North Africa keeps in pace with Roman expansion in the area.230 The earliest arenas are found either in major urban centres, often provincial capitals, and in places that were strategically and commercially important.231 As noted, the first African amphitheatre was built in Utica when it was the capital of Africa Vetus (between 146 and 29 BC)232 A second arena was built in Carthage in the 20's BC, when Augustus promoted the former Punic city to capital of Africa Proconsularis.233 Iol Caesarea, the capital of Mauretania Caesariensis, accommodated the third amphitheatre, probably built by King Juba II (25 BC – AD 23).234 A building inscription attests the construction of an amphitheatre in Lepcis Magna, an important commercial centre in the east of Proconsularis, in 56.235 And in the Flavian period, three

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229 On the spectacles with Numidian bears, Ethiopian hunters and Mauretanian javelin-throwers in Rome see above n. 202.
231 Wilkins 1988, 216.
232 Bomgardner 2000, 128-146. A second small republican arena in Utica is suspected beneath the imperial circus, Lézine 1970, 66; Bomgardner 2000, 177.
233 Bomgardner 2000, 128-146.
234 This arena had an unusual shape: it consisted of a central rectangle with semicircles attached to each end, a peculiar form that may derive from the wooden structures built on rectangular fora, which accommodated munera in republican Rome, where Juba II grew up as a hostage and may have become acquainted with this type of amphitheatre, Raven 1993, 55.
arenas arose in Roman settlements with strong military connections: Theveste, the base of the third legion, Sufetula, a military camp, and Thysdrus, where veterans of Caesar and Augustus had settled. Before continuing to the arenas that were built in the second century, in which Africa Proconsularis became profoundly urbanised, we should briefly come back to the institutional context in which wild beast fights were produced; that of civic munificence.

In the first section of this chapter we have seen that in Rome *venationes* were staged both as an appendix to *ludi*, official state games in the theatre or circus, and as the morning program of *munera*, arena spectacles with gladiators which were essentially private gifts by public persons (who were often also magistrates). In the provincial towns of the early Empire this distinction between state *ludi* and private *munera* dissolved; the production of circus-, theatre- and arena games was institutionalised and became a central feature of cultural and political life. The most important source for this institutionalisation of game-giving in the Roman provinces is the Urso charter, a Flavian copy of a Caesarian municipal law of Colonia Iulia Genetiva, the village Urso in Baetica, in modern Andalucía. Although no such regulations have been found in other provinces, scholars assume that similar laws were in place elsewhere, also in Roman Africa, because – as we have seen – the first amphitheatres were built under the Julio-Claudian and Flavian emperors. The Urso charter stipulates that both *duoviri*, a city’s two chief magistrates, were obliged to produce four-day arena games or theatrical spectacles in honour of Jupiter, Juno and Minerva. To this end they were granted 2000 sesterces from the town treasury, but they also had to spend at least the

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236 Note that the first century arena in Thysdrus concerns the small amphitheatre (Thrysdrus Minus), and not the well-known third century ‘Colosseum of Thysdrus’, Wilkins 1988, 216; Welch 1994, 79-80; on veteran settlements: Mann 1956. Wilkins 1988, 216 n. 9 suggests that the arena of Sicca Veneria, another Augustan veteran colony, and Lixus, were also built in the first century. Lixus appears to have been one of several residential cities of the Mauretanian kings (Aranegui & Mar 2009). The dating of the unusual theatre-amphitheatre at Lixus - which is smaller than the first century arenas in Proconsularis, and was probably more often used for theatre than for arena spectacles – is disputed. For an overview of the different suggestions; see Lenoir 1992, 276-8.


238 For the transcription, translation and discussion of this law: Crawford 1996, ch. 25, 393-454.

equivalent of that sum from their own funds. Aediles were obligated to present a three-day dramatic spectacle for the gods of the Capitoline triad and one day of games in the circus or a gladiator show in the forum for Venus. They could take 1000 sesterces from the public treasury, but also had to pay no less than 2000 sesterces from their own money. Epigraphic and literary evidence indicates that the sponsoring of spectacles was arranged similarly in the North African towns: priests of the provincial and municipal cults and duoviri and aediles were expected to produce games upon accepting office.

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240 Paragraph LXX of the Urso charter, translation Crawford 1996, 423-4: ‘Whoever shall be IIviri, [...] they during their magistracy are to organise a show or dramatic spectacle for Jupiter, Juno, Minerva, and the gods and goddesses, during four days, for the greater part of the day, as far as <shall be possible> according to the decision of the decurions, and each one of them is to spend on that spectacle and on that show not less than 2000 sesterces from his own money, and it is to be lawful to take and spend out of public money up to 2000 sesterces for each IIvir […]’, §LXX: ‘IIviri quicunque erunt, […] ei in suo magistratu munus ludus sceenicos Iovi Junoni Minervae deis deabusque quadriduum maiore parte diei, quot eius fieri poterit, arbitratu decurionum faciunto inque eis ludis eoque munere unusquisque eorum de sua pecunia ne minus (sestertium) (bina milia) consumito et ex pecunia publica in singulos IIvir(os) d(um)t(axat) (sestertium) (bina milia) sumere consumere liceto […]’

241 Paragraph LXXI of the Urso charter, translation Crawford 1996, 423-4: ‘Whoever shall be aediles, during their magistracy they are to organise a show or dramatic spectacle for Jupiter, Juno, and Minerva, during three days, for the greater part of the day, as far as shall be possible, and during one day (games) in the circus or (gladiators) in the forum for Venus, and each one of them is to spend on that spectacle and on that show not less than 2000 sesterces from his own money, and it is to be lawful to take from public funds 1000 sesterces for each aedile, and a IIvir or prefect is to see that that sum is given or assigned, and it is to be lawful for them to receive it without personal liability’, §LXXI: ‘Aediles quicumque erunt in suo magistratu munus ludus<sce>enicos Iovi Junoni Minervae triduum maiore parte diei, quot eius fieri poterit, et unum diem in circulo aut in foro Veneri faciunto, inque eis ludis eoque munere unusquisque eorum de sua pecunia ne minus (sestertium) (bina milia) consumito de<qui>ue publico in singulos aedil(es) (sestertium) (singular milia) sumere liceto, eamque pecuniam IIvir praef(ectusue) dandum adtribuendum curanto itque eis s(ine) f(raude) s(ua) c(capere) liceto.’ See also: Chamberland 2001, 159-220; Hugoniot 2003, 332-8; Chamberland 2007, 137-8.

242 Crawford 1996, 423-4; Chamberland 2001, 159-220; Hugoniot 2003, 332-8; Chamberland 2007, 137-8. Tertullian ridicules this practice, 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, flaminate 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 transierit hoc genus editionis ab honoribus mortuorum ad honores viventium, quaesturas dico et magistratuse et flamina et sacerdotia cum tamen nominis dignitas idololatriae crimine tenetur, necesse est quiquid dignitatis nomine administrator communicet etiam maculas eius, a qua habet causas’ (also cited in the introduction).
Sometimes the priests or magistrates were instructed by the emperor not to sponsor games, but to spend their *summa honoraria*, the payment for their office, on civic building projects or restorations instead.\(^{243}\) Often candidates who were competing for the same offices already promised spectacular games during their election campaigns, attempting to convince potential voters by promising to add extra – that is, voluntary - distributions or special features to their shows. Consequently, public munificence ‘almost always took the form of celebrating the donor’s tenure of a local office’.\(^{244}\) Because of this institutionalisation of game-giving, the majority of all entertainment shows in Roman North Africa was probably produced by municipal and provincial office-holders and priests.

In the second century, blooming civic munificence and intense urbanisation went hand in hand; North Africa underwent a major building boom in which the majority of its arenas and many other civic buildings, such as theatres, temples and thermal complexes were built (see App. Map 4).\(^{245}\) This is also the beginning of the period in which the Roman epigraphic habit was strongest (the second and third century) and indeed, our epigraphic corpus attests that the abovementioned ‘system of game-giving’ by magistrates and priests was in full swing in the new *coloniae* and *municipia* of the second century.\(^{246}\) Allthough the number of inscriptions that record *munera* is limited and not always attests the exact program of the events, the arena shows of the second century appear to have normally combined gladiatorial combat and

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\(^{243}\) An example of such a situation is provided in *IRT* 396 = *AE* 1991, 1691, Lepcis Magna, A.D. 198-210 which records a quinquennial duovir who restored the frigidarium of the baths instead of producing the games that he had promised: ‘[…] Rusionianus fl[amen] augur I[vir] q[uin]nemalis] cellam f[rigidarii] et […] ry [sic] ru[n]a con[fas] [e]x pollicitatione m[an]i eris gladiato[ri] o[b honorem quinquennali]tis p[…] permissu sacratiss[imi pr]incipis divi M(arci) Antonini[i f(ilii)] […]’. Translation IRT: ‘Rusionianus, flamen (priest), augur (priest) quinquennial duovir [gave] the main chamber of the cold bath and [...] which had collapsed in ruins, instead of the gladiatorial show promised on account of the office of the quinquennial duumvirate [...] with the permission of the most sacred emperor, son of deified Marcus Antoninus [...]’.

\(^{244}\) Duncan-Jones 1963, 161.

\(^{245}\) I.e. the amphitheatres of: Carpis, Uthina, Bulla Regia, Simiththu, Sicca Veneria, Thibari, Djebel Moraba, Upenna, Agbia, Seressi, Thuburbo Minus, Acholla, Thaenae, Thapsus, Ulissipira, Leptiminus, Lambeesis, Messarleta, Rusicade and possibly Sabratha. Refurbishments or extensions in: Caesarea, Sabratha, Carthage, Sufetula, Utica and Lepcis Magna, Bomgardner 2000, 124. For maps that record other public buildings in Roman Africa, such as circuses, theatres, baths, temples, *basilicæ* and arches see Jouffroy 1986.

\(^{246}\) Lafer 2007, 206; Blänsdorf 1990, 116-120.

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venationes (see also further below and § 3.2.1). This combination of venatorial routines and gladiator combat is also represented on a first century mosaic pavement from a villa in modern Bar Duc Amméra nearby Zliten in modern Libya, the so called Zliten floor (App. ill. 1). This frieze-like mosaic runs around the central portion of the quadrangular floor and represents a variety of routines that were probably part of the same spectacle: gladiator fights, beast fights, damnationes ad bestias and acrobatic tricks with bulls (taurokathapsia or contomonobolon).

The popularity of munera is particularly prominent in the coastal region and the northern half of Proconsularis where in the second century 18 amphitheatres were built relatively close to each other (see App. Map 4). The newly discovered arenas in Thibiua, Abbir Maius, Thizika, Vallis, Avitta Bibba and Ucubi, all in the northern part of Proconsularis, probably result from the same building boom, but await closer archaeological investigation and dating (see App. Table 1). Bomgardner suggested that a number of these arenas were built on the occasion of a visit of the Emperor Hadrian in the summer of 128 or as a result of the inter-city competition that followed. In most cases, the construction of amphitheatres was probably financed from public funds, but inscriptions also attest a number of cases in which private individuals participated in financing the reconstruction or embellishment. In

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247 The date of the Zliten floor (App. ill. 1) is subject to debate, but most scholars believe that it was made in the late first or early second century; Aurigemma 1926; Ville 1963, 147; Dunbabin 1978, 235-7; Parrish 1985, 137-158.
249 On the coast: Carpis, Upenna, Ullissipira, Leptimina (Leptis Minor), Thapsus, Acholla and Thaenae and in the interior: Uthina, Bulla Regia, Simitthu, Sicca Veneria, Thibaris, Djebel Moraba, Agbia, Seressi, Thuburbo Minus and Thuburnica.
250 Matthew Hobson (Leiden University) has brought these arenas to my attention, see App. Table 1 and supra n. 228.
251 Those at Uthina, Bulla Regia, Thaenae, Acholla and Rusicade; Bomgardner 2000, 124.
252 At Thuburnica, for example, the aedile C. Sallustius Felix not only produced games in return for his aedilship, but he also financed major restauration works of the city’s amphitheatre in the late second or early third century, Wilkins 1988, 216-7. Wilkins 1988, 220: ‘The public construction of three (Lepcis Magna, Lambaesia and Sitifis) is certain, and of another three (Thysdrus, Carthage and Caesarea) very probable. The repair of four amphitheatres (Bulla Regia, Lambaesia, Mesarfelta and Sitifis) was also publicly financed, and those at Carthage and Sufetula probably so. While these figures perhaps bear out Duncan-Jones’ contention that amphitheatres were probably ‘not built from private resources as a rule’, it must be admitted that the total evidence from Africa remains very small.’
the interior, the construction of arenas remained closely connected to Roman military activity; amphitheatres arose in Lambaesis, where the legion III Augusta had moved under Trajan, and in the auxiliary forts along the Numidian limes; in Gemellae and Mesarfeletta and in Tigava Castra, a military camp in Mauretania Caesariensis. The arenas of Thignica, Mactaris and Thuburbo Maius, towns that received the status of *colonia* under Commodus, are dated to the Commodan or Severan period, but after the second century the construction of new arenas slowed down markedly. The first half of the third century saw the construction of an unusual ellipse-formed arena in Tipasa, probably inspired by the circus-shape amphitheatre at nearby Caesarea, and the enormous ‘Colosseum of Thysdrus’ that was built during the emperorship of Gordian III (238-244), and a seemingly conscious imitation of it, though on a much smaller scale, in nearby Bararus. That the construction of new amphitheatres came to halt in the mid third century should by no means be interpreted as a sign that *munera* were no longer organized or popular in this period. In fact, epigraphic and archaeological material attests restorations, refurbishments and enlargements into the fifth century, which demonstrates that most African amphitheatres were in use from the first century until the fourth century and some of them even into the Vandal period.

But what happened in the African amphitheatres? The number and size of the African arenas confirms that in the first and the second century *munera* with gladiators and *venationes* had become an important part of civic munificence and life in Roman North Africa; like in other provinces, the arena games were a focal point of competition between the magistrates and individuals who sponsored them, as a return for their office, or voluntarily as

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253 Bomgardner 2000, 153-5.
254 Ibid., 125-6.
255 On the Tipasan amphitheatre: Bomgardner 2000, 155-6. The construction of the Thysdrus maior amphitheatre has been dated quite securely to the emperorship of Gordian III (238-244) which followed after the period of political chaos that had started when in March 238 the young men (*iuvenes*) and decurions of Thysdrus killed the *procurator fisci* of emperor Maximinus and proclaimed M. Antonius Gordianus Sempronianus, senatorial governor of Proconsularis, emperor (Gordian I) instead. The revolt of Gordian I and his son, Gordian II, was unsuccessful, and a large part of the Carthaginian elite was killed, but eventually the young grandson of Gordian I, Gordian III, became emperor at the age of 13. The large arena in Thysdrus appears to have been built during his six-year reign and is often interpreted as a dynastic monument of the Gordians. The history of the Gordians is described in *SHA, The Three Gordians*. For the revolt in Thysdrus and the reign of the Gordians, see: *SHA The Three Gordians* VII-XXXI. See also: Bomgardner 2000, 127-8.
private benefactions. In the late second century, however, something appears
to change: epigraphic evidence and literary sources indicate that *venationes* were
increasingly held independent of gladiator fights, which gradually lost
importance and became rare.\(^{257}\) In the third century, *venationes* became the
main attraction of African amphitheatre shows, a development that can be
illustrated with the text from the famous early third century Magerius mosaic
(App. ill. 3) which indicates that by the time that this floor was created, the
word ‘*munus*’ referred to a show that included only *venationes* (see further §
3.2.2). This marginalisation of gladiatorial combat also happened elsewhere, in
Rome and the north-western provinces, but later; only after the third century.\(^{258}\)
And the prominence of venatorial themes on third and fourth century African
mosaics (circa 50 floors represent venatorial themes) and terracotta pottery
suggests that in Africa in the late antique period, beast fights had attained
greater cultural importance than gladiatorial combat had ever had.\(^{259}\)

This early marginalisation of gladiatorial combat in the second century
and the resulting popularity of *venationes* in late antique Africa appears to be
related to a change in the patterns of civic euergetism: from the third century
onwards, benefactors in North Africa invested less in the construction of public
buildings and infrastructure and more in public entertainment and the private
or semi-private contexts of villas.\(^{260}\) At the same time, their self-representation
changed: these events themselves and the perpetuation of the memory of the
games on domestic mosaics, contorniates and diptychs became more important
media for self-aggrandisement than the public statues and inscriptions that had
this function in the first and second century (on self-representation see further
ch. 3).\(^{261}\) That the African benefactors chose hunting spectacles and not

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257 For these analyses, e.g.: Ville 1982, 222; Chamberland 2001, 69-74; Hugoniot 2003, 331-8;
258 Wiedemann 1992, 159
259 As noted in n. 8, Hugoniot 2003, 389-390 and its appendix, vol. III, 9-50 lists all African
mosaic pavements that represent *venationes*, 53 in total. 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. For the two African pavements with
representations of gladiators see App. ill. 1 and ill. 2. On the prevalence of animal shows over
gladiatorial combat in Roman Africa see further, e.g.: Ville 1982, 222; Wiedemann 1992, 16;
the popularity of *venationes* and the virtual absence of depictions of gladiators on material from
late antique Africa is not specific for mosaics, but also applies to other media from Africa, such
as decorated fine ware and curse tablets. I will come back to these media in chapters 3 and 4.
gladiator fights can be explained by three mutually related and reinforcing factors that all have a geographic basis; the actual presence of lions and leopards in North Africa and resulting financial considerations and a cultural tradition of hunting and watching beast fights. The economic explanation is the most straightforward; the donor's financial situation must have been an important - if not decisive - factor in their decision which show to produce; gladiator fights became very expensive in the second century, whereas wild beast fights could probably be produced at lower cost, because wild beasts and the specialist expertise that was required to capture and transport them were available at relatively short distance (see § 2.1). Furthermore, it seems probable that pre-Roman, local cultural traditions and the presence and close acquaintance of the Africans with wild beasts (see § 2.2 and § 2.3) also contributed to the remarkable popularity of venationes in this part of the Empire. The amphitheatres and gladiatorial combat, as well as the institutionalisation of game-giving itself may have been a result of Roman influence in North Africa, but the wild beasts and the men who captured them, as well as the tradition of spectacular hunting and often also the venatores themselves, were African (see further ch. 4).

We have seen above that gladiatorial combat and wild beast hunts had different origins, but were integrated into one event, the amphitheatrical munus, in late republican Rome (p. 46-7). In Roman Africa, venationes and gladiator fights were also combined, but the two parts of the spectacle were never completely integrated. From the late second century onwards, venationes were increasingly staged as independent spectacles, whereas gladiatorial fights became less and less frequent. The same disintegration of gladiatorial and venatorial spectacles is also attested in the north-western provinces, but appears to have begun only a century later. Furthermore, the prominence of venationes in the African iconographic material is unparalleled. The popularity of hunting spectacles was longlasting, both in Africa and in Rome: venationes

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263 The capture of wild beasts in North Africa will be investigated in § 2.3 and the identity of venatores in § 4.2.
265 Several emperors issued restrictions on gladiatorial combat and damnationes ad bestias in the fourth century, but gladiators were not actually forbidden until Honorius’ ban in 399, For an extensive overview of imperial restrictions on gladiatorial combat: Wiedemann 1992, 128-164 and on the end of gladiatorial games and other public games e.g. MacMullen 1986; Blänsdorf 1990; Meier 2009; Potter 2010.
continued into the Vandal era. 266 The decline of euergetism in this period probably led to the disappearance of spectacles in smaller towns, but in large cities, *venationes* and chariot racing were financed by the Vandal monarchs. 267

Many scholars have attempted to understand and explain the complex process that led to the end of gladiator fights and eventually all public games. Several explanations for the slow disappearance of gladiatorial combat from the second century onwards were brought forward: the enormous costs of gladiator shows, the greater popularity of wild beast hunts, and the moral and religious objections of Christian emperors, theologians and bishops. 268 Especially the idea that the objections of Christians finally caused the demise of gladiator fights has been persistent in modern scholarship, probably because of the western European (Christian) background of many modern ancient historians who sought for indications of ancient Christian sympathy for the non-Christian and animal victims of the arena, humanitarian arguments against games or condemnation of cruelty, but did not find any. 269 Also, Christian authors were certainly not the first to have objections against public games; elite authors such as Cicero, Pliny and Seneca, for example, denounced all spectacles as boring and unsophisticated entertainment that required no skill and had a corrupting influence on the audience. 270 Still, it is interesting to have a closer look at the critique of public games uttered by the African Christians Tertullian, Cyprian, Augustine and Quodvultdeus from the second until the fifth century, because it tells us more about public entertainment in late antique Roman Africa.

The objections to public games raised by the Christian apologetic Tertullian (ca. 160-220) and his pupil Cyprian, who became bishop of Carthage and died as a martyr in 258, were partly the same as those of pagan philosophers; they argued, for instance, like Seneca, that the unchecked

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266 The latest recorded *venatio* in Rome was in 523 and was sponsored by the consul designate Anicius Maximus, with permission of the Vandal King Theoderic, Cameron 1973, 229-30: ‘In Cassiodorus [Cassiod. *Var. V* 42] there are frequent references to circus games, but only one to a *venatio*, that of Anicius Maximus, consul designate for 523, who wrote to King Theoderic asking for permission to give a *venatio* (*Var. V* 42). Theoderic agreed, but the fact that Maximus felt it necessary to ask, and that Cassiodorus published Theoderic’s answer, shows that *venationes* were no longer a regular item even on the consular programme. Contorniate types confirm that by the sixth century, chariot races in the circus were much more frequent than *venationes* or gladiators.’


269 MacMullen 1986, 332; Wiedemann 1992, 128-60; Wiedemann 1995, 152-3.

270 Wiedemann 1992, 141.
passions that games aroused, made virtuous living impossible. Public entertainment shows would also distract Christians from their faith. Therefore, Tertullian and Cyprian urged fellow Christians not to attend games (which they apparently did). Tertullian and Cyprian also drew on religious arguments, stating that all public games were essentially idolatrous, because they were linked to rituals and celebrations that were dedicated to pagan gods. Around 400, Augustine, who lived and worked in North Africa and Rome and eventually became bishop of Hippo Regius, also attempted to convince his fellow Christians not to attend the games. At this time public games were still a central feature of urban life, also for African Christians, and the result was that churches were competing for audience with theatres,

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271 Note for example Sen. Ep. VII 3 about how attending the games destroys good character: ‘But nothing is so damaging to good character as the habit of lounging at the games; for then it is that vice steals subtly upon one through the avenue of pleasure. What do you think I mean? I mean that I come home more greedy, more ambitious, more voluptuous, and even more cruel and inhuman,—because I have been among human beings.’, ‘Nihil vero tam damnosum bonis moribus quam in aliquo spectaculo desideri. Tunc enim per voluptatem facilis vitia subrepunt. Quid me existimas dicere? Avarior redeo, ambitiosior, luxuriosior, immo vero crudelior et inhumanior, quia inter homines fui’.

272 Tert. De spect. 15.2: ‘Deus praecepit spiritum sanctum, utpote pro naturae suae bono tenerum et delicaturn, tranquilitate et lenitate et quiete et pace tractare, non furore, non bile, non ira, non dolore inquietare’, Translation Loeb Classical library: ‘God has instructed us to approach the Holy Spirit – in its very nature tender and sensitive, – in tranquillity, gentleness, quiet and peace; not in madness, bile, anger and pain to vex it’. Van Slyke 2005, 56; Lim 2014, 140.

273 Tert. De spect. 12.4: ‘Quid ego de horrendo loco perorem, quem nec perturia sustinet? Pluribus enim et asperioribus nominibus amphitheatrum consecrator quam Capitolium: omnium daemonum templum est. Tot illic immundi spiritus consistunt, quot homines capiti. Ut et de artibus concludam, Martem et Dianam utrisque ludi praesides novimus’, ‘Finally, what am I to say about that dreadful place, the amphitheatre? Even perjury could not face it. For it is dedicated to more names, and more awful names, than the Capitol itself; it is the temple of all demons. There are as many unclean spirits gathered there as it can seat men. And, by way of a last word on the arts concerned, we know that Mars and Diana are the patrons of both types of games’. Cypr. De Spect. 4: ‘Idololatria, ut iam dixi, ludorum omnium mater est, quae ut ad se christiani fideles veniant blanditur illis per oculorum et aurium voluptatem.’, translation Schaff: ‘Idolatry, as I have already said, is the mother of all the public amusements; and this, in order that faithful Christians may come under its influence, entices them by the delight of the eyes and the ears.’ Sider 2001, 98; Devoe 2003, 116-7; Lim 2014, 140.

274 The public games are an important theme in Augustine’s Confessiones, particularly in book 3 and book 6, where he discusses his own attachment to theatre shows, and his friend Alypius’ obsession with gladiators and circus races. According to Lim, Augustine uses philosophical and literary topoi about the dangers of curiositas, emotions and youthful recklessness in a cleverly constructed narrative that cautions against ‘placing too much trust in one’s own ability to confront and overcome temptations without humbly seeking the help of God’, Lim 2014, 143-5. The church father also discusses the public spectacles in sermons, letters and psalms, for an overview see Markus 1990, 107-20 who examines the chronological development of Augustine’s ideas about public games and Lim 2014.
circuses and amphitheatres. Augustine attempted to change this by applying a number of different strategies and arguments. For instance, he recycled some of the arguments about idolatrty, as well as the idea that spectacles were a source of moral corruption that had been formulated by Tertullian and Cyprian and previously by classical moralists. Secondly, the bishop of Hippo attacked the ideology of civic munificence itself, arguing that sponsors of games were not actually giving something to society, but were only inspired by vainglory and desire for praise. Only gifts to the church and the poor could – he argued – be true benefactions. And finally, he joined other late antique Christians in their attempts to promote religious gatherings as attractive alternatives to public games by making Christian religious events literally more spectacular, for instance through the establishment of popular cults for martyrs of the arena who were represented as ‘athletes of god’ or ‘victors of the arena’.

See Van Slyke 2005, 64-6 and 58-9 where he lists the evidence for the continuous flourishing of the games in fifth century Carthage. At the same time, the Africans' liking for public games appears to have become proverbial; the Gallic presbyter Salvian noted in De gubernatione dei, Salv. Gub. 6.12: ‘The barbarian peoples were sounding their arms around the walls of Cirta and Carthage and the Christian population of Carthage still went mad in the circuses and reveled in the theatres. Some were strangled outside the walls; others were committing fornication within. A portion of the people was captive of the enemy without the walls and a portion was captive of the vice within’, Translation O’Sullivan. ‘Circumsonabant armis muros Cirtae Carthaginis populi barbarorum: et ecclesia Carthaginensis insaniebat in circis, luxuriabat in theatris: aliis foris jugulabantur, alii intus fornicabantur: pars plebis erat foris captiva hostium, pars intus captiva vitiorum.’ See also Conant 2012, 57-8.

About games as idolatry: August. De civ. D. 1.32; 2.4; 4.26; 8.13 and about the games as distractions of faith in the Confessiones, e.g. August. Conf. VI 8.13, see also above n. 17, n. 242.

Lim 2014, 149; and August. Serm. 32.20 about members of the city élites who continued to compete for civic honours and incurred heavy expense in order to outdo the largesses of their rivals: ‘The worldly man prays to God for riches; if he gets them, he seeks empty honours from men, and, to obtain them, he offers indecent games... and public bear hunts. He gives his patrimony to the professional hunters of the arena, while Christ, in the person of the poor, goes hungry’, Translation Lepelley 1992, 60.

Apparently Augustine’s appeal was in vain; many wealthy Christians continued to sponsor games, including even the sons of priests whom it was in the year 419 forbidden by decree not only to give spectacles, but also to watch them, Van Slyke 2005, 66, n. 86 and Canones in causa Apiarii XVd (CCSL 149, p.138): ‘De spectaculis. Ut filii sacerdotum spectacula saecularia non tantum non exhibeant sed nec spectent licet. Et hoc semper christianis omnibus interdictum sit ut ubi blasphemia sunt non accedant.’ Translation NPNF African Code AD 419, XV: ‘And [it seemed good] that the sons of bishops should not take part in or witness secular spectacles. For this has always been forbidden to all Christians, so let them abstain from them, that they may not go where cursing and blasphemy are to be found’.

Lim 2014, 148. The presentation of martyrs as ‘athletes of God’ is very clear in Perpetua’s vision in which she is undressed as rubbed with olive oil, like in the games, and then defeats an Egyptian opponent, receives a green branch with golden apples and walks towards the gate of life (an anecdote symbolic for her victory over the devil), Pas. Perp. et Fel. 10: ‘7. Et expoliata sum
Augustine’s efforts appear to have had some result: a law from 400 which was repeated in a decree issued by the Council of Carthage in 401 prescribed that it was no longer allowed to produce public spectacles on Sundays.\textsuperscript{280} The fact that Augustine’s colleague Quodvultdeus, deacon in 421 and bishop of Carthage in 437, had to continue the opposition against \textit{damnationes ad bestias} and \textit{venationes} indicates, however, that the African amphitheatres remained in full use in the early fifth century. He writes:

‘Let the contests of the amphitheatre not seduce or entice the Christian: the more eagerly you hurry off to them, the more stupid you show yourself to be. But further, of the things inflicted on one’s vision there – what is not dangerous, what is not bloody – where, as most blessed Cyprian said, harmful desire condemns men to the beasts without a charge? May that harmful desire not lure you, beloved, to look upon that cruel spectacle of two hunters competing with nine bears. May it rather delight you to see one man, our Daniel, overcoming seven lions by prayer... In the former spectacle, the showman is disappointed if the

\textsuperscript{280} Lim 2014, 147. \textit{Registri ecclesiae Carthaginensis excerpta}, LXI (CCSL 149, p. 197): ‘De spectaculis, ut die dominico vel ceteris sanctorum festivitatibus minime celebrantur. Necnon et illud petendum, ut spectacula theatrorum ceterorumque ludorum die dominica vel veteris religionis christianae diebus celeberrimis amoveantur; maxime quia sanctae paschae octavum die populii ad circum magis quam ad ecclesiam conventiunt, debere transferri devotionis eorum dies, si quando occurrerint, nec oportere etiam quemquam christianorum cogi ad haec spectacula, maxime quia in his exercendis, quae contra praecepta Dei sunt, nulla persecutionis necessitas a quoquam adhibenda est, sed, uti oportet, homo libera voluntate subsistat sibi divinitus concessa. Corporatorum enim maxime periculum considerandum est qui contra praecepta Dei magno terrore coguntur ad spectacula convenire.’ Translation \textit{NPNF African Code AD 419}, LXI: ‘Of spectacles, that they be not celebrated on Lord’s days nor on the festivals of the Saints. Furthermore, it must be sought that theatrical spectacles and the exhibition of other plays be removed from the Lord’s day and the other most sacred days of the Christian religion, especially because on the octave day of the holy Easter the people assemble rather at the circus than at church, and they should be transferred to some other day when they happen to fall upon a day of devotion, nor shall any Christian be compelled to witness these spectacles, especially because in the performances of things contrary to the precepts of God there should be no persecution made by anyone, but (as is right) a man should exercise the free will given him by God. Especially also should be considered the peril of the cooperators who, contrary to the precepts of God, are forced by great fear to attend the shows.’
hunter, who has destroyed many of his beasts, escapes unharmed. In this spectacle of ours, the contest is waged without a sword; Daniel is not harmed, nor is a beast killed... Our spectacle is remarkable and truly wonderful, in which God provides the assistance, faith is strengthened, innocence fights, holiness wins the victory, and the reward acquired is such that he who conquers receives it, and He who bestows it loses nothing.'

§ 1.3 Conclusion

This chapter investigated the historical development of *venationes*, in Rome, and in North Africa. We have seen that *venationes* did not evolve in a cultural vacuum, in Rome nor in Roman Africa, but were a result of cultural interaction and exchange. The historical development of *venationes* in Rome is relatively well known from literary sources; the hunting spectacles took shape in the era of Roman expansion, a period of intense cultural exchange between Rome, Carthage, the Hellenistic world and the native kingdoms of Mauretania and Numidia. There was much about the Roman *venationes* that was not ‘Roman’; many of the wild beasts and specialised hunters that appeared in republican and imperial arena games were imported from North Africa, often probably with the help of Punic, Numidian or Mauretanian mediation and hunting expertise. Nor was the Roman interest in exotic animals unique: it had parallels in the royal hunts of exotic animals by Carthaginian, Numidian and Mauretanian kings, religious processions of wild beasts in Assyrian and Babylonian cities, and zoo-like collections and hunting in the Greek and Hellenistic world. Rome selected, transferred and appropriated wild animals and some of the cultural knowledge and practices associated with them, to create a meaningful show that suited their circumstances. Bringing wild and

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exotic animals from the fringes of the world to Rome, the civilised centre, and hunting them, probably symbolised Roman success in ordering chaos, its hegemony in the world and the power of man over nature.

In the towns of Roman Africa, the introduction of amphitheatres, civic munificence and the institutionalisation of game-giving were a result of the establishment of Roman power in the area, but the popularity of arena games cannot simply be explained as a result of ‘Romanisation’, as for instance Futrell did.\textsuperscript{282} After all, the exotic beasts and specialised hunters that appeared in the late republican \textit{venationes} in Rome were often African, and this makes the appropriation of \textit{venationes} in early imperial Africa, the preponderance of hunting spectacles and the marginalisation of gladiatorial combat in the second and third century even more interesting; amphitheatrical hunting spectacles were as much a Roman cultural performance as they were African. And particularly the iconographic material from Africa that depicts \textit{venationes} suggests that people in this area did not simply adopt the \textit{venationes}, but actively engaged with this cultural practice: whether they were spectators, or actually involved in the events as hunters, producers or performers, they were not passive recipients, but active producers and consumers of their own cultural performances. The marginalisation of gladiatorial combat in the second century and the great popularity of \textit{venationes} in late antique Roman Africa that we have investigated in this chapter demonstrates that the Roman amphitheatrical \textit{munus} was not simply ‘inserted’ in this provincial context, but that certain aspects of it (\textit{venationes}) were enthusiastically selected, appropriated and developed, probably because of a cultural acquaintance with wild beasts, whereas others (gladiators) were less important.

\textsuperscript{282} Futrell 1997, 79-93.