Venationes Africanae: Hunting spectacles in Roman North Africa: cultural significance and social function
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Chapter 2

Procuring beasts for hunting spectacles

All *venationes*, in Rome, in North Africa and elsewhere, started with a sponsor who took the initiative to procure (wild) beasts for his show. The emperors could use the services of the army to transport wild beasts, that may have been captured on imperial estates, or bought from traders, but editors in Italy and the provinces who did not have imperial connections, had to find other ways to obtain wild animals for their *venationes*.283 With regard to the infrastructure and organisation that was needed for this, Christopher Epplett remarks:

‘Although animal spectacles including *venationes* (wild beast-hunts) were among the most popular spectator events in ancient Rome, relatively little evidence survives concerning the actual infrastructure and organization behind them. The Romans were evidently not so interested in such apparently trivial and uninteresting matters as compared to the excitement of the games themselves.’284

Perhaps Epplett is right in saying that ordinary spectators did not always think about the process that had taken place before they saw a show with wild beasts in the amphitheatre, but for the editors and the other persons involved in this process, the preparatory activities will certainly not have been ‘trivial and uninteresting’. And for the spectators who visited the *venationes*, the fact that donors went to great lengths to bring dangerous animals to the ‘civilised’ urban centres, must have been an important aspect of what made these events culturally significant. In this chapter we will therefore approach the preparations for hunting spectacles, the procurement of beasts, as an integral part of the cultural performance, a fase in the event that had the potential to shape, represent and thus confirm socio-cultural values and norms, like the actual performance itself. By exploring the entire process of procuring African animals for *venationes*, this chapter aims to shed more light on the socio-cultural significance of these events. First, it will investigate which African species were most frequently used and how much benefactors paid for these beasts, then it

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283 About transport of wild beasts for imperial games by the army; Epplett 2001a and below p. 69.
focuses on the distribution of these animals in North Africa and the ancient population’s relation to them, and finally on the process of capturing, transporting and keeping the beasts until the day of the show; who were involved in this process and how did they succeed?

Regrettably, Epplett is right about the available evidence with regard to the preparatory process of *venationes*; we have no African epigraphic, literary or documentary material that records the practices or identities of hunters, traders or other agents involved in the beast-trade from Roman North Africa, nor do we have any clear archaeological evidence for the practice. We will therefore have to rely on literary and epigraphic material from Rome and other provinces – texts that represent a Graeco-Roman perspective on the matter and not the African experience – and information from a comparative ethnographic perspective, in order to reconstruct the preparatory activities of African *venatio*-benefactors. This means that in this chapter we will partly deal with the preparations for *venationes* in Rome. However, the fact that these processes involved African beasts, hunters, traders and other specialists and were for a large part carried out in North-Africa, also affected the cultural significance of hunting spectacles in that province. Finally, we will come across a number of African domestic mosaic floors that depict episodes from the preparatory process of hunting spectacles, pavements that indicate that the infrastructure and organisation that were needed to produce *venationes* were not considered trivial and uninteresting, but even had a place in self-representation (see also § 3.2.2).

§ 2.1 African beasts: the different species and their prices

As we have seen in chapter 1, literary sources record that in Rome triumphs and *venationes* with exotic African animals were first held soon after the end of the second Punic war (218 – 201 BC). In the imperial period, Africa became the most important source of exotic wild animals for *venationes* in Rome; the fact that lions and leopards were even referred to as *ferae libycae* or *bestiae africanae* suggests that felids from Asia were not normally used, probably because of the longer distances. Most African beasts must have been shipped

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285 Jennison 1937, 45.
286 Africa was also strongly associated with its wild animals in literature: Vitruvius in a discussion of water and springs comes across the province of Africa which he describes as ‘the mother and nurse of wild animals’ (*Africa parens et nutrix ferarum bestiarum*), Vitr. *De arch.* 3.24.
to Rome via the fast and intensively used trading routes between the North-African harbours Hippo Regius, Carthage, Hadrumetum, Sabratha and Lepcis Magna, and Ostia, Portus and other Italian harbours. Brent Shaw estimates that from the republican era until late antiquity, thousands of African animals were captured and transported over the Mediterranean in order to appear in staged animal fights in amphitheatres in Rome and elsewhere. And indeed, if we may believe the reports of ancient authors, the emperors had many thousands of exotic beasts from Africa shipped to Rome to perform in the beast hunts (see § 1.1). And apart from these major imperial wild beast shows in Rome, private benefactors and magistrates in other Italian towns also produced games with wild beasts. If the numbers of hunted wild beasts that are provided in the literary sources are in any way realistic, the *venationes* will have had a great impact on the animal populations in North Africa. It has even been suggested that this intensive trafficking of wildlife contributed to the extirpation of lions, leopards, elephants and rhinoceroses in North Africa in the course of the centuries.

Thusfar, however, these enormous numbers cannot be supported by archaeozoological evidence; excavations yielded some bone material of exotic species, but not in the quantities that we would expect when indeed thousands of African animals appeared in amphitheatres throughout the Empire. The African archaeozoological material that may be related to *venationes* includes some bones of lions and elephants from Thamusida, a site nearby Sala in Mauretania, and some elephant remains that were found in the Magon Quarter at Carthage. A number of other North African sites contained remains of bears, gazelles, wild boar, deer, camels, ostriches, wild goats and sheep, and hartebeest, animals that may also have been used in hunting spectacles, but

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287 According to ORBIS, The Stanford geospatial network model of the Roman world (www.orbis.stanford.edu), the journey from Carthage to Ostia took 4 days in the most favourable conditions. From Iol Caesarea and Lepcis Magna, Rome could be reached in less than 10 days and Ephesus-Rome took up to 16 days, whereas the route from Antiochia to Rome lasted 3 or 4 weeks.


289 For an overview of the epigraphic evidence regarding the production of *venationes* in Italy and Africa, see Chamberland 2001, 69-80.

290 Hughes 2006, 33

291 MacKinnon 2006, 16.

292 Thamusida was a commercial town along the river Sububus. The bones were found in some kind of enclosure, which may – according to Wilson - suggest that they died here while awaiting further transport, likely through shipment over the river and over sea, Wilson 2002, 253 n. 25. For the elephant bones from Carthage: MacKinnon 2006, 17 and Nobis 2000, 583.
thus far no material of tigers, leopards, rhino’s, crocodiles or giraffes was discovered.293 Also in Rome, the archaeozoological material is not as overwhelming as one would expect on the basis of the descriptions of the imperial venationes; remains of horses, asses, bears, goats and ostriches was found nearby the Flavian amphitheatre, which suggests that these animals indeed appeared in the arena, but only 12 bones of lions, three of tigers and some material of leopards, hyena’s and wolves were discovered in Rome.294 Thusfar, Rome itself has not yet yielded any bones of elephants, rhinoceroses or hippo’s, but the wreck of a Roman African ship that was discovered near Pisa contained the jawbone of a lioness, and in the surroundings of Ostia, the bones of an elephant were discovered.295

The limited amount of bone material of exotic species in the archaeological record in Rome is striking and in sharp contrast with the numbers of wild beasts in venationes that ancient authors recall. It is likely however, that archaeozoological material of exotic venatio-beasts is underrepresented because they were disposed of in different manners and at other locations - perhaps more bones will be uncovered in the future.296 Lack of interest and misidentification of archaeozoological material by archaeologists in the past may also partly explain the low amount of exotic beasts in the archaeological record.297 For now, we may conclude, on the one hand, that the numbers of exotic venatio-beasts that are mentioned in literary sources are probably exaggerations, and on the other, that non-exotic animals such as bears, bulls, deer, boar, gazelles, wild asses, goats and sheep were probably hunted much more frequently in the African and Italian arenas than ancient game-givers and authors wanted to make us believe. Shows with large exotic beasts such as elephants, rhinoceroses, hippos, giraffes and crocodiles must

293 MacKinnon 2006, 16. An ostrich tibiotarsal was found at Lepti Minus, a late Roman site in Tunisia, Burke 2001, 442-456 and an ostrich vertebra was discovered in Carthage: Nobis 2000, 589, 615, Tab. 18.
294 MacKinnon 2006 and De Grossi Mazzorin et al. 2005, 338 lists the zoo archaeological remains of animals from the area of the Meta Sudans fountain at the piazza del Colosseo in Rome.
295 On Pisa: Guasti 2007, 144. The type of ship and these finds may suggest that the animals were transported alive, but it has also been suggested that only the head of the lioness was taken on board, perhaps as a trofee. See also: www.navipisa.it and www.cantierenavipisa.it. On Ostia: Guasti 2007, 143.
296 Kyle 1995, 181-205 lists the possible locations where the organic waste from the amphitheatre in Rome could be disposed off and also suggests that meat from the arena was distributed for human consumption.
297 MacKinnon 2006, 16.
have been so exceptional that they attracted the attention of authors and are therefore so commonly described in our literary material, but they were probably much less frequent than hunts with locally available, non-exotic animals such as bears, boars, deer, bulls, wild asses and horses.298

Paragraph 32 from Diocletian’s price edict that was issued in 301 allows us to identify the animals that were probably most frequently bought for *venationes* and also mentions their maximum prices.299 The edict distinguishes two categories: African beasts (*faerae Libycae*), lions, leopards and ostriches, and herbivores (*faerae hervaticae*), bears, boars, asses and stags, animals that were also available outside Africa (see App. Table 3).300 The large cats are the most expensive items on the list: the prescribed maximum price for a first class lion was 150,000 *denarii* and a first class leopard could cost up to 100,000 *denarii*, and of the herbivores the bear was most expensive: 25,000 *denarii* for a prime exemplar.301 The other herbivores and the African ostriches were notably less expensive (2000-6000 *denarii*). By issuing this list of maximum prices, Diocletian aimed to impose a ceiling to what could be charged or paid for certain products and services for the games. The edict was probably issued in combination with a currency reform in response to inflation and rising prices in the last decades of the third century. The regulation is preserved on numerous fragmentary inscriptions in the Roman East, but was probably valid throughout the empire, as Diocletian’s main objective appears to have been to secure provisions for the army.302 For our purposes here, not only the list of species is interesting, because it tells us that lions, leopards, ostriches, bears and boar, stags and wild asses were apparently the animals that were most commonly used for *venationes*, but also the prices that are indicated, because they give us an impression of the relative prices of wild *venatio*-animals in comparison to other products. When we assume that, despite the inflation and debasement of currency in the third century, the ratio between the various prices on the edict is consistent and realistic, we may conclude that in the Diocletianic period large felids were expensive, but not extraordinarily so. A

300 *ZPE* 1979, 163-210, Ch. 32.1-14.
301 Bears are in fact omnivores; their diet depends on the food sources available, usually their diet is largely plant based, but they certainly also eat meat.
302 Scholarship on the Price Edict is vast and complicated: a number of ancient historians and economists have used it to investigate the distribution of income, recently e.g. Scheidel & Friesen 2009, living standards Allen 2007 and the value of labour Groen & Tacoma (forthcoming).
first class lion was as expensive as a pound of double-dyed purple silk, a top leopard could cost as much as an *equus curulis*, a cart horse, and a bear could be obtained for the same maximum price as a female slave between 16 and 40 years of age (25,000 denarii). Boars, wild asses, stags or African ostriches could be bought for 2000-6000 *denarii*; they must have been within the financial reach of editors with rather moderate budgets. The prices of *venatio*-beasts probably fluctuated as a result of supply and demand, but lions, leopards and bears are likely to have always been the most expensive species, because they are the most ferocious beasts on the list, the animals that made the most spectacular fights. And outside Africa and Asia, large felids were probably always more expensive and thus more rare than bears, because they had to be imported, whereas bears were available more widely throughout the Empire (see App. Map 5). The expertise, effort and risk involved in capturing, transporting and caring for captured wild beasts until the day of the games - about which we will see more in § 2.3 – also seems to be reflected in the price. Since ostriches could be bred, they were considerably cheaper than the other *ferae libycae*.

Unfortunately, however, comparing the prices of the Price Edict to the costs of public games that we know from other sources appears useless, because of the inflation and the debasement of currency in the third century: the 600,000 HS recorded as the maximum price for a lion on the Price Edict cannot be compared to the costs of entertainment shows in epigraphic material from the western provinces: in the second and third century, theatre plays and boxing contests in Thisi, Rusicade, Siagu and Barcino could be produced for less than HS 10,000 per day, whereas the range for *munera* in second century Paestum and Aeclanum started at HS 25,000 and lead up to a four day *munus* with gladiators and *venationes* in Carthage of in total HS 200,000, a price that is in line with the maximum of HS 200,000 that Marcus Aurelius and Commodus set for gladiatorial games in the *Senatus Consultum de sumptibus ludorum gladiatoriorum minuendis* in 176/7.

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303 Bomgardner 2000, 210-2; The maximum prize for a male slave between 16 and 40 years of age was 30,000 denarii, and that of a female slave of the same age 25,000 (ZPE 1979, ch. 29.1-4), Groen & Tacoma (forthcoming), 17.
There is one indication that in Roman North Africa, outside Carthage, *venationes* were also staged on a much smaller scale and at lower costs, possibly because lions and leopards were more readily available and cheaper than in other parts of the Empire: the text on the famous Magerius mosaic (see App. ill. 3 and p. 124-7, p. 180-2).\(^{305}\) On this early third century floor that was found in private baths in modern Smirat, not far from ancient Thysdrus, an African benefactor called Magerius proudly commemorates a *venatio* with fights against four leopards for which, as the text explains, he paid 4000 denarii (16,000 HS) (App. ill. 3E).\(^{306}\) It is usually assumed that this *munus* consisted of only these four leopard fights executed by four *venatores*, who were part of a team that the mosaic text refers to as ‘the Telegenii’ (more about them in § 3.2.2 and § 4.3). Magerius’ *munus* thus appears to have been quite modest, with only four leopards, and the costs were also moderate in comparison to those of the amphitheatre spectacles in Paestum, Aeclanum and Carthage mentioned above (25,000 – 50,000 HS per day up to 200,000 HS for a four day event). Unfortunately, however, we do not know whether the 4000 denarii that the Magerius floor mentions, was only the prize money for the *venatores*, or the total costs of the show. Although large scale, expensive entertainment shows are overrepresented in our epigraphic evidence, there are a number of other indications that the benefactors of more modest means in small African towns frequently regaled their fellow inhabitants with small and less expensive, but probably nonetheless entertaining, events comparable to Magerius’ *munus*. For example, the boxing contests at Gori (240 HS per day), and a two day event with chariot races at Auzia, which was probably held simply on a field instead of in a monumental circus (540 HS per day).\(^{307}\) Yet, the prominence of *venationes* on the late antique African mosaic pavements, suggests that these benefactors of modest means preferred to present hunting spectacles whenever they could obtain a lion or leopard.

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§ 2.2 The presence of wild beasts in North Africa

In order to estimate the likeliness of such a scenario, we will now investigate where exactly *ferae africanae* and other wild animals that were used in *venationes*, could be found in North Africa. According to the geographer Strabo from Pontus (64/63 BC – AD 24), everywhere:

‘The whole country from Carthage to the Pillars [of Hercules] is fertile, though full of wild beasts, as is also the whole of the interior of Libya.’

He notes that the northern part of modern Morocco, Maurusia, was supplied with lakes, rivers and forests, where elephants, leopards, lions, serpents, gazelles and crocodiles could be found. Pliny, however, holds that crocodiles – and hippopotamuses – were only present in the Nile and commemorates that they were first seen in Rome in the games of M. Aemilius Scaurus in 58 BC. The mountainous inlands of Maurusia were, Strabo tells us, known for their forests, which produced not only timber, but also apes, bears, antelopes and buffaloes. According to ancient authors, ostriches were present in several areas in the African provinces; Pliny says that they were available in Africa and Ethiopia, and Lucian records that the Garamantian tribes of the Sahara kept ostriches.

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308 Str. *Geog.* II 5.33: ‘πᾶσα δ’ ἡ ἀπὸ Καρχηδόνος μέχρι Στηλῶν ἄστιν εὐδαιμών, θηριοτρόφος δὲ, ὡσπερ καὶ ἡ μεσόγαια πᾶσα.’
309 Str. *Geog.* XVII 3.4. Plin. *HN* V.9 also records that the forests to the west of Mount Atlas were ‘teeming with the wild animals that Africa engenders’, knowledge that he owed to the work of the famous historian Polybius who travelled in Africa with Scipio Aemilianus. Aelian, a collector of zoological curiosities (Prænestæ, 170-235), also knew that elephants were present in the area of Mauretania that was enclosed by the Atlas and the Rif Mountains: ‘At the foot of Atlas (this mountain is celebrated by historians and also by poets) there are marvellous pasture-lands and forests of the deepest, whose dense foliage is like that of groves all shady and overarched. And that, you know, is where elephants are said to resort in old age when heavy with years...’, Ael. *NA*, VII 2: ‘Υπὸ τοὺς ποσὶ τοῦ Ατλαντος (δρος δὲ ἄρα τοῦτο ὄνειρα καὶ ὑπὸ τῶν συγγραφέων καὶ μέντοι καὶ ὑπὸ τῶν ποιητῶν) νομαί τε εἰσὶ θαυμαστά καὶ ἱεραταται, καὶ τὸ γε ὀδας αὐτὸν ἔοικε σκηνῆς πάνοικος καὶ συνηρεφέσιν. Ἑνταῖθα δήποτι τούς ὁδὴ παλαιοῖσ τῶν ἐλεφάντων φασίν ἀρικνείσθαι, γήρα βαρεῖς ὄντας’.
311 Str. *Geog.* 17.3.4.
312 Plin. *HN* X 1; Lucian. *De Dipsadibus* 2, 6, 7: ‘Only the Garamantes live near by—a slim, agile race, tent-dwellers, living for the most part by hunting. They sometimes cross into the country for hunting forays, generally about the time of the winter solstice, after waiting for rain, when most of the heat has abated and the sand, now damp, can be trodden after a fashion. They hunt for wild asses and the ostrich, monkeys a great deal, and an occasional elephant.’, ‘Γαράμαντες μόνοι πρόσοικοι ὄντες, εὐσταλὲς καὶ κούδου ἐνόθων, ἀνθρωποί σκηνέας, ὀπὸ θήρας τὰ πολλὰ ἄντες, ἐνότε ὦντες ἐσφάλλοσι δηράσσοντες ἀμφὶ τροπὰς τὰς χαμερνᾶς μάλιστα, ὡσπερ τὸν θεὸν τηρήσαντες, ὀπὸ
The view of the (natural) world that these and other writers construct in their literary works is firmly rooted in Greek tradition: they present the world as consisting of three continents, Europa, Asia and Africa or Libya, surrounded by an ocean.\textsuperscript{313} We can mentally picture this world as a range of concentric circles with Rome (or Greece) at the center, and the wild and uncivilized world on the outside. As we have seen, the wild beasts were imagined in the outer concentric circle, near the edges of the world; elephants, lions, leopards and ostriches in Africa, crocodiles, rhinos and hippos in Egypt, and even further away, in Asia, India, snakes, tigers and unicorns.\textsuperscript{314} The wild beasts lived there with wild peoples (such as Moors or other native tribes) who did not live in towns, like the civilized people in the centre, but in huts or caves. These people were not farmers, but shepherds or nomads, and they inhabited the deserts, mountains, marshes or thick forests. Sometimes, there were confrontations between the wild animals and the wild peoples, or the towns were threatened by wild animals, but in general foreign people and exotic beasts lived together in harmony and could even communicate with each other. An interesting example of this relation between wild animals and wild peoples comes from Pliny, who notes that the town \textit{Sala Colonia}, modern Salé in Morocco, was threatened by herds of elephants, but even more so by wild peoples:

‘The same number of miles from the Sebou is the town of Sala, situated on the river of the same name; this town is on the very edge of the desert, and is beset by herds of elephants, but much more seriously harried by the Autololes tribe, through whose territory lies the road to Mount Atlas, which is the subject of much the most marvelous stories of all the mountains in Africa.’\textsuperscript{315}

In his collection of anecdotes and fables about animals, the philosopher and rhetor Aelian also recalls a story in which a tribe, of Moors in this case, was confronted with dangerous animals; a troop of hungry lions. The men chased

\begin{footnotesize}
\begin{enumerate}
\item\textsuperscript{313} Irby 2012, 93-4.
\item\textsuperscript{314} Cf. Hdt. \textit{Hist.} III 116.1 admits that the edges of the known world had fantastic allure: ‘Suffice it that it is reasonable that the most distant parts of the world, as they enclose and wholly surround all other lands, should have those things which we deem best and rarest.’, ‘\textit{Αἱ οὖν ἐσχατιαὶ οἴκασι, περικλίνουσα τὴν ἄλλην χώρην καὶ ἐντὸς ἁπέργουσα, τὰ κάλλιστα δοκέοντα ἡμῖν εἶναι καὶ ἑπανύσκετα ἔχειν αὐτά.}’
\item\textsuperscript{315} Plin. \textit{HNV} 1.5.
\end{enumerate}
\end{footnotesize}
the animals and the women drove them away with words, by talking to them, because – Aelian presumed – lions and Moors understood each other, since they were reared together.\(^{316}\) Another fragment suggests that not all African tribes were able to communicate with wild beasts:

'It is said that in Libya there used to exist a race of men called the Nomaei. They continued generally prosperous in a territory where the pastures were good and land unquestionably rich, until finally they were wiped out when a vast herd of lions of the very largest size and of irresistible boldness attacked them. The whole race to a man was destroyed by the lions and perished utterly. A visitation by Lions in a mass is something that no creature can withstand.'\(^{317}\)

These descriptions of wild beasts, native peoples and the African landscape are full of literary \textit{topoi} and represent the Graeco-Roman perspective of Africa and its beasts. Modern biological and ecological research indicates, however, that the ancient authors were generally right about the presence and preferred

\(^{316}\) Ael. \textit{NA} III 1: ‘εἰ δὲ ἦπτοι καὶ κόνις διὰ τὴν συντροφίαν ἀπελευθέντων ἀνθρώπων συνάδε καὶ κατασκήνωσαν, καὶ Μαυρούσιος οὐκ ἦν θαυμάσαμε λεόντων ὅταν συνέρχετο καὶ ἐμπρόσθεν αὐτοῖς ὧν’ αὐτῶν ἐκείνων ἀκούσατα.’, ‘Now if horses and hounds through being reared in their company understand and quail before the threats of men, I should not be surprised if Moors too, who are reared and brought up along with Lions, are understood by these very animals’.

\(^{317}\) Ael. \textit{NA} XVII 27: ‘Ἐν τῇ Λιβύῃ χώρᾳ ἔθνος ἦν φασὶ τὸ καλούμενον Νόμαιον. καὶ τὰ μὲν ἀλλὰ διενεχόμενα εὐθύμον μᾶλλον καὶ εὐδαίμωνοι καὶ μᾶ διὰ λήξις εἶτα ἤφαινόσθησαν 8 τελείως, λεόντων αὐτοῖς ἐπελευθέντων πλῆθα πεποίηκεν καὶ μεγάλη μεγίστοι καὶ τὴν τῶν ὅμοιων ὁμάχου, ὡς ὅτι πανδημεὶ καὶ παγείην διαφθαρήσατε, εἶτα ἐς τὸ παντελὲς ἀπάλλοντες, λεόντων γάρ ὃθρῳ ἐπιμήκως χρῆμα ἀπρόσμαχον’. Aelian provides another story of a lion attack, Ael. \textit{NA} VII 23: ‘Τὸβας ὁ Μαυρούσιος ὁ τοῦ παρὰ Ρωμαίων ὁμαρεσάντας πατὴρ. ἡλικίᾳ ποτὶ διὰ τῆς ἐρήμου ἐπὶ τινα θέλη τῶν ἀποστάντων, καὶ τις αὐτῶν τῶν παραμερινῶν μειρακίσκος εὐγενής μὲν καὶ ὠραῖος ἡδὲ δὲ <καὶ> θηρατικὸς λεόντα πως παρὰ τὴν ὅλον ἐκφανέντα αἰκονία σβάλλει, καὶ σκόποι μὲν ἔχου καὶ ἄρονει, οὐ μὲν ἀπέκτεινε, κατὰ σπουδὴν δὲ τῆς ἐλάσσος σέσης, τὸ μὲν θηρίον ἀνεχώρησε, παραδόμας δὲ καὶ ὁ τρόφασ οι διὸ λοιποί. ἐνεισώζοι γὰρ μὲν διελθόντων ὀλοκλήρου ὁ μὲν Τὸβας κατορθώσας ἐφ’ ὃ ἐναλλάχθη, τὴν αὐτὴν ὑποστρέφουν ἐρέχεται κατὰ τὸν τόπον, ἔνθα ἔτυγχι ὁ λέων ἄλλως, καὶ ὄντος πλῆθος παμπόλλῳ προσέκει καὶ τὴν ἐρήμη ἐκείνῳ, καὶ τῶν μὲν ἄλλων ἀπέχεται, συλλαμβάνει δὲ τὸν πρώσαντα πρὸ ἐνεισώουτο, καὶ τῶν ἱματίων, ὁπερ ὃν παρὰ τῶν χρόνων τὸν προειρημένου ἐφύλαττεν, ὧν ἑκεῖ καὶ διαστὰ τὸ μεσαίον γνωρίσας’, ‘And Juba of Mauretania [Numidia], the father of the boy who was a hostage at Rome, bears witness to this [i.e. to the vengeance of a lion]. He was marching once through the desert against some tribes who had revolted, when one of the youths who ran beside him, well-born, handsome, and already fond of the chase, struck with a javelin a lion that chanced to appear by the roadside: he hit the mark and wounded the beast, but failed to kill it. But the expedition was in haste; the animal drew off, and the boy who had wounded it hurried by with the rest. Now when a whole year had passed and Juba had accomplished his purpose, returning by the same way he arrived at the spot where the lion had happened to be wounded. And in spite of the multitude of men that same lion came forward and without touching anyone else, seized him who a year ago had wounded it, and pouring forth the gathered anger which it had been nursing all that while, tore to pieces the boy whom it had recognised...’
habitat of wild beasts in Roman North Africa and the danger they posed to the local population.\textsuperscript{318} These studies confirm, for example, that elephants were present in ancient North Africa; only they were not the African bush elephants that we know from sub-Saharan Africa, but forest elephants, a smaller species that is presently only found in the tropical rain forest of central Africa.\textsuperscript{319} And a fragment from a publication in the \textit{Bulletin de la Société de Géographie d’Alger} about the Algerian village Souk Ahras, ancient Thagaste, hometown of Augustine, records that in the late nineteenth century lions and leopards were present in the village. Between 1877 and 1892, 17 lions and 37 leopards were killed, while others were lured and fed with goat-meat until they were big enough to be sold in Europe.\textsuperscript{320} This episode provides an interesting parallel with Roman North Africa where the local population must also regularly have been confronted with large felids on their territory; modern ecological research indicates that great cats were widely present in North Africa in the Roman period (see App. Map 5).\textsuperscript{321} Lions and cheetas lived in the savannahs of the Numidian interior, on the foothills of the Rif and the Atlas mountains and in the Sahelo-Saharan area in the south of Africa Proconsularis and Tripolitania, but leopards – that are known to have the widest habitat tolerance of all African felids - were also active in the fertile and densely populated area along the Mediterranean coast. Leopards can persist in human-modified habitats and often live in areas where prey, such as cattle, is present, which makes them a frequent target of hunting herdsmen and farmers in their attempts to protect cattle and themselves.\textsuperscript{322} And like the people in nineteenth century Souk Ahras,

\textsuperscript{318} A fascinating study into big-cat hunting in the colonial societies of early twentieth century Kenya and India provides an interesting parallel to Aelian’s anecdotes: during the construction of a railway in Kenya, the workmen were terrorised by two man-eating lions that were shot after they killed several dozen men, Storey 1991, 151-2.

\textsuperscript{319} According to Plin. \textit{HN} IX.9, African elephants were smaller than Indian elephants. We know now that this is not correct, but Hughes 1994, 98 explained Pliny’s remark by suggesting that he refers to the smaller African forest elephant (\textit{loxodonta cyclotis}); it was not until the twentieth century that scientists discovered the considerable genetic difference between forest elephants (\textit{loxodonta cyclotis}) and the bush / savanne elephant (\textit{loxodonta Africana}), Greaves & Bartlett Bruton 1996, 10-1. Forest elephants were pushed towards the south in the course of the centuries as a result of hunting, destruction of habitat caused by agriculture and the desertification of the Sahara; nowadays they can be found in the tropical rain forests of central Africa.

\textsuperscript{320} Publication by Rouquette in \textit{Bulletin de la Société de Géographie d’Alger} in 1904, cited in Benseddik 2010, 26. Many thanks to Matthew Hobson (Leiden University) for sharing this reference.


\textsuperscript{322} Ibid., 77-9: in present-day Africa, persecution by pastoralists as a result of serious damage to live-stock is one of the most important threats to lions.
the ancient population of North Africa had a number of options when they wanted to eliminate a felid; they could kill it, or capture and sell it to Europeans, in this case, Romans, or use it in local hunting spectacles.

Allthough lions and leopards were – as we have seen – widely present in Roman North Africa, capturing them will not have been easy or without danger. Ostriches, on the other hand, were probably easier to obtain because they could be bred, and they were abundant in the arid regions south of the Atlas and Rif mountains in Mauretania and Numidia and the savannah-desert plains of southern Proconsularis, Tripolitania, the Fezzan and Cyrenaeca (see App. Map 5).\textsuperscript{323} Archaeological evidence indicates that inhabitants of North-Africa had interacted with ostriches long before the Romans arrived: ostrich eggs decorated by Carthaginian artisans were exported to the western Phoenician colonies in Spain, Sicily and Sardinia.\textsuperscript{324} Pliny also knows of cups or containers that were made of ostrich eggs and he also notes that the feathers of wing and tail were used as ornaments for the crests on helmets of warriors.\textsuperscript{325}

The North-African familiarity with ostriches and the fact that they were relatively easy to handle and breed, made them very suitable for hunting games; the archaeozoological evidence, the Price Edict, literary sources and African mosaics confirm that ostriches appeared in \textit{venationes} very frequently in Rome and North Africa, and probably also in other provinces.

The herbivores (\textit{faerae hervaticae}) that were mentioned in the Price Edict, the wild boar, asses and stags, were probably not exported from Africa on a large scale, because they were also present in Italy and other provinces.\textsuperscript{326}

The African mosaics suggest that wild boar, asses and stags, as well as wild horses, bulls, wild sheep and goats, gazelles and other deer – animals that were all widely available in North Africa - were frequently used in African \textit{venationes} (see for example App. ills. 4A, 5 and 6). And the beforementioned archaeozoological evidence suggests that also hyena’s and hartebeest, which would probably also classify as ‘African beasts’, appeared in hunting spectacles in Roman Africa. However, performances with wild and tamed bears were probably most frequent; shows with bears are often represented on mosaic floors, for example that from the Maison des Autruches in Hadrumetum (App. App. ill. 4A) and a floor from Maxula (App. ill. 7) and bear-fights are also

\begin{footnotes}
\item[323] Cooper, Mahrose et al. 2009, 1670.
\item[324] Pisano 1999; van Dommelen, Bellard & Docter 2008, 8.
\item[325] Plin. \textit{HN} X 1.
\item[326] MacKinnon 2006, 16.
\end{footnotes}
attested in eight curse tablets that were discovered in the Carthaginian amphitheatre (see further ch. 4).\textsuperscript{327} The brown bear (\textit{ursus arctos}) could be found in the North African mountains; analyses of fossil remains and bones have indicated that brown bears were present in the mountains of Morocco and Algeria until circa 1870.\textsuperscript{328} Even though bears were also available in the Italian Apennines, literary sources indicate that Rome imported bears: Pliny, for example, notes that Ethiopian \textit{venatores} and Numidian bears performed in a show produced by Domitius Ahenobarbus in 61 BC and Dio records the performance of ‘bears and other Libyan beasts’ in spectacles given by Publius Servilius in 25 BC and by the emperor Caligula in 37.\textsuperscript{329} The correspondence of the Roman politician and orator Quintus Aurelius Symmachus (345-402) that we will investigate in more detail below, also records the import of bears, but in this case from Dalmatia.\textsuperscript{330} In the north-western provinces, bears were captured locally by \textit{ursarii}, bear hunters that are attested in epigraphic evidence from Germany and Belgica.\textsuperscript{331} Because of their wide availability in different parts of the Empire, bears were probably the most popular dangerous wild beasts in \textit{venationes} in provincial towns: in Germany, Britannia, Gaul or Spain, the costs of importing felids from Africa must have been immense, but bears could be obtained closer to home and therefore cheaper, as Diocletian’s Price Edict confirms.\textsuperscript{332}

\textsuperscript{327} See also Sparreboom 2015.
\textsuperscript{328} Hamdine, Thevenot & Michaux 1998, 566.
\textsuperscript{329} Plin. \textit{HN} VIII 54: ‘\textit{Annalibus notatum est M. Pisone M. Messala coss. a. d. xiv kal. Oct. Domitium Ahenobarbum aedilem curulem ursos Numidicos centum et totidem venatores Aethiopas in circo dedisse.}’, ‘It is noted in the Annals that on 19 September in the consulship of Marcus Piso and Marcus Messala, Domitius Ahenobarbus as curule aedile provided in the circus a hundred Numidian bears and the same number of Ethiopian huntsmen’. Cass. Dio LIII 27, 6: ‘\textit{Πούππλιος τε Σερουίλιος ονόμα και αυτός ἔλαβεν, ὅτι στρατηγῶν ἄρκτους τε τριακοσίας καὶ Λιβυκὰ ἑτερα θηρία ἵσα ἐν πανηγύρια τινὰ ἀπέκτεινεν},’ ‘Publius Servilius, too, made a name for himself because while praetor he caused to be slain at a festival three hundred bears and other African wild beasts equal in number’.
\textsuperscript{330} Symmachus \textit{Epistulae} II 76; IX 135, 142.
\textsuperscript{331} E.g.: \textit{CIL} XIII 8639, a votive monument to the god of the forests erected by a bearcatcher in Colonia Ulpia Traiana (Germania Inferior, Xanten): ‘\textit{Deo Silvano / Cessorinius / Ammausius / ursarius legionis / XXX Ulpiae) V(ictriciis) S(everianae) A(lexandrianae) / v(otum) s(olvit) l(ibens) m(erito)},’ ‘To the god Silvanus. Cessorinius Ammausius, \textit{ursarius} (bearcatcher) of legion XXX Ulpia Victrix under the command of Severianus Alexandrianus willingly and deservedly fulfilled his vow’. This epigraphic evidence, the presence of amphitheatres and iconographic material, such as the gladiator mosaic from the Roman villa in Nennig, south of Trier, also attest to the practice of bear-fighting during gladiator games and \textit{venationes} in this area.
\textsuperscript{332} The bear whose smashed skull was deposited in a well in the late Roman \textit{castellum} of Oudenburg (Belgica) was probably killed in a local \textit{venatio}: a single blow to the forehead appears
Finally, a note on elephants, the animals that are perhaps most often associated with ancient North Africa, especially with Carthage, and that also appeared frequently in the ancient authors’ descriptions of *venationes* in Rome. As noted in the above, in the Roman period, the small forest elephants could be found in Mauretania and some archaeozoological evidence suggests that they were also captured and exported to Rome. In addition, there are a number of mosaics that depict the shipment of an elephant: the famous floor from the *ambulatio* of the Great Hunt at Piazza Armerina (App. ill. 8) and a much less spectacular black and white pavement from Veii (App. ill. 9). The mosaic with depiction of an elephant in the ‘Statio Sabratensium’ at the Piazzale delle Corporazioni in Ostia (App. ill. 10) has also been associated with the trade of elephants from Africa to Rome. However, elephants are not mentioned as ‘*ferae libycae*’ on the Price Edict and Aelian mentions that they were only hunted for their ivory. And in North Africa, the use of elephants in *venationes* is not at all attested in the source material. Apart from the absence to have been the most effective and successful way to knock down a bear, see Plin. *HN* VIII 54.130-1 cited below, p. 155, n. 562.

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333 Best known is probably the story preserved in the work of Pliny about the elephants in a spectacle given by Pompey the Great, see above n. 87.

334 The date of extinction of elephants in the northern part of Africa varies from region to region: Scullard 1974, 25 notes that the last herd was recorded in southern Mauretania 1947 whereas in the rest of Morocco elephants were extinct since the eleventh century and in the rest of Africa they had already disappeared since the seventh century AD. According to Blondel & Aronson 1999, 241 elephants persisted in Southern Morocco until the eleventh century, whereas in other parts of North Africa they were extinct since the seventh century, Shelton 2006, 7.

335 Aurigemma 1940; Epplett 2001b, 243-245.

336 Ael. *NA* VI 56: ‘It appears that the Libyans do not confine themselves to waging war upon their neighbours with a view to gaining an advantage over them, but they wage war upon elephants also. And the latter are well aware that the purpose of their attack is nothing else than to get their tusks. So those beasts that have had one tusk mutilated stand in the front line, the rest of the herd using them as a cover in order that they may receive the first assault and that the rest may help with the strength of their tusks undamaged and equal to the struggle. And perhaps they are trying to convince the Libyans and to prove to them that they are risking their lives for an inconsiderable reward. One of their tusks they use as a weapon and keep sharpened; the other they use as a mattock, for with it they dig up roots and lever up and bend down trees’. Also: Ael. *NA* XIV 5.
of elephants on the Price Edict and Aelian’s remark about ivory, the imaginable practical difficulties that a shipment of elephants must have entailed, suggest that in the imperial period elephants were not on a great scale exported from Africa for shows in Rome. It seems more likely that the majority of the elephants that appeared in the imperial shows in Rome were kept, bred and tamed there, perhaps by experienced elephant-handlers and trainers from North Africa, Egypt or India.\textsuperscript{337} Fragments from the works of Pliny and Aelian indicate that taming elephants was fairly common in the Roman period; the texts provide numerous hints and tips concerning the subjection and training of wild elephants with the use of alcohol, starvation and peer-pressure of tamed elephants.\textsuperscript{338} And the presence of such capable elephant trainers – to which a grave inscription mentioning a ‘\textit{procurator ad elephantos}’, an imperial freedman probably working at an imperial menagerie, may also attest – would render the capture and shipment of wild elephants from North Africa unnecessary.\textsuperscript{339} The fact that these beasts were not on a great scale imported from Africa and the investment of time and effort involved in breeding, keeping and perhaps taming them, probably also resulted in a more gentle approach in the arena; it is likely that the elephants were not hunted and killed like lions, leopards, bears and herbivores, but trained to perform tricks and kept alive in order that they could be used in entertainment spectacles more often.

Now that we have a better idea of the distribution and availability of wild beasts in North Africa and the demand for \textit{venatio}-beasts from Rome and local towns, we will investigate how \textit{venatio}-editors managed to procure animals for their hunting spectacles.

\textsuperscript{337} Epplett 2001b, 234.
\textsuperscript{338} Plin. \textit{HN} VIII 24-5; Ael. \textit{NA} III 24.
\textsuperscript{339} \textit{Procurator ad elephantos}: \textit{CIL} VI 8583 = \textit{EAOR} I 8: ‘\textit{D(is) M(anibus) / Ti(berio) Claudio Specatori / Aug(usti) lib(erto) procurator(i) / Formis Fundis Caietae / procurator(i) Laurento ad / elephantos / Cornelia Bellica coniugi / b(ene) m(erenti)}’, ‘To the spirits of the deceased. To Tiberius Claudius Specatorius, imperial freedman, procurator of the Formis Fundis Caietae and procurator of the elephants in Laurentum. Cornelia Bellica his wife [made this] well-deserving’, see further Kolendo 1969, 291-6 and Ville 1981, 351.
§ 2.3 Mobilising networks: capture, transport and trade of wild African beasts

As noted in the introduction of this chapter, in absence of African literary evidence regarding the process of capturing, transporting and keeping *venatio*-beasts until the day of the show, we will have to rely on literary sources to learn more about the process of procuring animals for *venationes* in Rome. For African benefactors, this process must have been similar, although they probably operated lower on the social ladder and perhaps ordered smaller amounts of animals than the highest magistrates and emperors in Rome. Moreover, African editors will have profited from the closer presence of beasts in North Africa, which will have shortened the process considerably. Unfortunately, the literary sources cannot tell us much about the identity of the hunters and transporters who were involved in the process, but with the help of comparative ethnographic studies, we will attempt to reconstruct how they set to work.

Firstly, we will turn to the letters that Cicero and his acquaintance M. Caelius Rufus exchanged around 50 BC, and to the correspondence of Q. Aurelius Symmachus, a renowned senator who held high offices in Africa and Rome some four centuries later. This correspondance provides an interesting insight in the networks of hunters, traders, transporters and middle-men in the provinces that were needed to import beasts and the way they were managed by the ambitious benefactors in Rome. The *venationes* that Rufus and Symmachus were preparing were to take place in Rome and the beasts were captured in Cilicia (Rufus) and in Africa, Egypt, Scotland and Dalmatia (Symmachus), but the process of instructing local hunters and transporters to capture wild beasts for *venationes* must have been similar for editors in Roman Africa. Let us start with the exchange of letters between M. Caelius Rufus’, aedile candidate in Rome, and M. Tullius Cicero, who was at the time of writing, in 51 BC, governor of Cilicia. In his letters, Rufus urgently and repeatedly calls for Cicero’s mediation and help in providing him with leopards for his tribunician games in 50 BC. In one of the letters he writes:

‘In almost every letter I have written to you I have mentioned the subject of panthers. It will be little to your credit that Patiscus has sent ten panthers for Curio and you not many times as many. Curio has given me those same animals and another ten from Africa—in case you imagine that country estates are the only form of present he knows! If you will but keep it in mind and send for beasts from Cibyra and write to Pamphylia...’
likewise (they say the hunting is better there), the trick will be done. I am all the more excited about this now because I think I shall have to make all my arrangements apart from my colleague. Do be a good fellow and give yourself an order about it. You generally like to be conscientious, as I for the most part like to be careless. Conscientiousness in this business is only a matter of saying a word so far as you are concerned, that is of giving an order and commission. As soon as the creatures are caught, you have the men I sent in connection with Sittius’ bond to look after their feeding and transport to Rome. Indeed, if you hold out any hope when you write, I think I shall send some more men over.’

Cicero’s response is humorous, probably somewhat sarcastic after Rufus’ continuous requests for panthers:

‘About the panthers, the usual hunters are doing their best on my instructions. But the creatures are in remarkably short supply, and those we have are said to be complaining bitterly because they are the only beings in my province who have to fear designs against their safety. Accordingly they are reported to have decided to leave this province and go to Caria. But the matter is receiving close attention, especially from Patiscus. Whatever comes to hand will be yours, but what that amounts to I simply do not know. I do assure you that your career as aedile is of great concern to me.’

This tells us not only that Cicero as a governor maintained contacts with hunters in his province, men who were apparently more often instructed to hunt for him, since they are described as ‘the usual hunters’, but also that Cicero had instructed a certain Patiscus to oversee the process. Apparently Rufus himself did not have access to this network of hunting professionals led by Patiscus and therefore attempted to use that of Cicero. Rufus’ worries about the (punctual) arrival of the animals in Rome are understandable: Rufus feared for his popularity and career as an aedile if his spectacle would not meet

340 Cic. Fam. 82.3 (VIII-9): ‘Fere litteris omnibus tibi de pantheris scripsi. Turpe tibi erit Patiscum Curioni decem pantheras misisse, te non multis partibus pluris; quas ipsas Curio mihi et alias Africanas decem donavit, ne putes illum tantum praeda rustica dare scire. Tu si modo memoria ten<eris et Cibyratas accesseris itemque in Pamphyliam litteras miseris (nam i bi pluri capi aiunt), quod voles efficies. hoc vehementius laboro nunc quod scorsus a collega puto mihi omnia paranda. Amabo te, impera tibi hoc. Curare soles libenter, ut ego maiores partem nihil curare. In hoc negotio null a tua nisi loquendi cura est, hoc est imperandi et mandandi. Nam simul atque erunt captae, qui alant eas et deportent habes eos quos ad Sittianam syngrapham misi. Puto etiam, si ullam spem mihi litteris ostenderis, me isto missurum alios.’


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expectations. Yet we get the impression that Cicero is ridiculing Rufus’ worries with his remarks about the panthers’ complaints about their safety and their decision to leave Cilicia. However, to benefactors like Rufus this matter was of great importance for his career. In a letter of Pliny the Younger to Maximus, a wealthy and influential man who organized gladiator games and fights with African panthers in Verona, we find similar worries about the editor’s career in case the planned games turned out to be a disappointment:

‘[...] I am sorry the African panthers you had bought in such quantities did not turn up on the appointed day, but you deserve the credit although the weather prevented their arriving in time: it was not your fault that you could not show them.’

Thus Pliny attempts to comfort his friend: he compliments Maximus for fulfilling his promise, notes that he deserves credit for this, even though the African panthers did not arrive timely and could not be exhibited. Pliny appears to know that the process of procuring beasts was long, complicated and risky; Maximus’ success, like that of other editors of hunting spectacles, depended on complicated networks of hunters, traders, transporters and middle-men in the provinces and in this case something went wrong.

The letters written to and by Quintus Aurelius Symmachus provide more examples of the networks of hunters, transporters and middle-men that were needed to obtain wild beasts for *venationes* and the problems that could arise in this process. Symmachus, himself a renowned senator who had been governor of Africa in 373, urban prefect of Rome in 384 and 385 and consul in 391, wrote several letters to a number of high officials, among whom Paternus, then governor of Africa, and Stilicho, a high-rank general (*magister utriusque militiae*) and perhaps the most powerful man in the western Empire in this period, asking for favours and help in the preparation of circus games and amphitheatre spectacles to be given on behalf of his son Memmius upon his acceptance of the quaestorship in 393 and the praetorship in 401. For these

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342 Plin. *Ep.* VI 34: ‘nam per haec etiam magnus animus ostenditur Vellem Africanae, quas coemeras plurimas, ad praefinitum diem occurrissent: sed licet cessaverint illae tempestate detentae, tu tamen meruisti ut acceptum tibi fieret, quod quo minus exhiberes, non per te statit’.

343 Pliny the Younger wrote *Epistulae* to a number of different Maximi, whom modern scholars have attempted to identify. According to Syme 1985, 332 this Maximus was a man of high rank (a knight or senator) and very wealthy, because he was able to and apparently also felt obliged to present a spectacle to the population of his late wife’s town of origin.

344 Symmachus makes mention of chariot races or *venationes* that he is producing in many of his letters; Symm. *Ep.* II 46; II 76-78; IV 7-8, 12, 58, 60, 63; V 56, 59, 62, 65, 82; VI 33, 43; VII 48, 59, 82, 121; IX 27, 117, 132, 135, 142, 144. See also Brown 2013, 116-8.
games, Symmachus attempted to obtain animals from different parts of the Empire: crocodiles from the Nile, bears from the Balkan, lions from the southern mountains of North Africa and antelopes and gazelles from the Sahara.\(^{345}\) In addition, in a letter sent in 393 he asks Paternus, the governor of Africa, to send some of the best African beast-hunters:

‘A reminder adds weight to our previous requests. Also I repeat my request with regard to the hunting spectacle, in order that double writings will stir up your zeal more easily. The day of our munus is coming closer: the generosity of the candidate in itself will not suffice when arena staff of good quality is lacking. The munificence is after all inferior, when one produces it with people who are not worthy. For this reason, I request the best venatores, because of your authority as a high magistrate [proconsul of Africa] and brotherly friendship, do me a favour, so that we can add much to what we are preparing for our fellow citizens without saving on anything. Goodbye.’ \(^{346}\)

It is remarkable that Symmachus started collecting the animals for the first spectacle circa two years before the event took place; apparently he expected the preparations to require some time.\(^{347}\) And that it was wise to take enough time for the preparations becomes clear from a letter to Patruinus, in which Symmachus expresses his concerns about a delayed transport of bears from Dalmatia and asks his addressee to exert his influence in order to prevent fraudulent practices and ensure that the cargo of bears arrived in Rome punctually:

‘Bears are in great numbers transported from Dalmatia for the celebration of our games and we wish to have them quickly in need of the munus that we will produce shortly. Please be so kind to pursue their passage urgently with your diligence and, at the same time, assure their protection, in order to restrain those who commit fraud. Most of all,

\(^{345}\) Symm. Ep. II 46; II 76; II 78; V 62; VI 43.


\(^{347}\) Epplet 2001b, 53.
delays have to be avoided, because the close day of the performance does not permit delay in the collection of the equipments. Goodbye."\(^{348}\)

This letter indicates that the organizers of animal spectacles faced not only delays of the cargo that they ordered, but also fraud (\textit{fraus avara}), perhaps in the form of corruption or swindle of intermediary (customs) officers, and loss of the cargo because of the circumstances during the long journeys. Symmachus attempted to avoid this by arranging that his agents and the horses that they were transporting from Spain to Italy, could winter on the estate of a friend in Arles.\(^{349}\) Unfortunately, however, sometimes the transport of wild beast went wrong; in one of the other letters, Symmachus notes that the bears that he had ordered were lost in a shipwreck during a storm.\(^{350}\)

It has become clear that the collection of wild animals for hunting shows in Rome was very time consuming and required large financial investments. Like Rufus, Maximus and Memmius, African editors sometimes will have needed high-ranking friends, acquaintances or family members (such as Cicero and Symmachus), who could instruct middle-men, traders, transporters and hunters to deliver wild beasts.\(^{351}\) However, the letters also indicate that ‘help from friends’ could not always prevent delays of the delivery, death or diseases of the beasts, accidents such as shipwrecks, crime or simply shortages of the desired animals. The preparation of grand shows with exotic animals was also a risky financial investment: the pressure to produce impressive spectacles must have been high, we have seen that the prices for beasts – especially lions and leopards – were considerable, and the prestige that the benefactors enjoyed from it was substantial. Especially when wild beasts died \textit{en route} or briefly before their intended performance in the amphitheatre, this will have been a big disappointment and financial setback for the editor and perhaps also the transporters who may have received less than the agreed price or not at all when they did not deliver the beasts punctually and in good condition.


\(^{350}\) Symm. \textit{Ep. IX} 117: ‘\textit{Est igitur optio tua <ursis adiunctis> quos tempestate dicis amissos naufragia taxare}, ‘You thus have the choice to taxate, by adding bears, those which you say were lost in shipwreck’.

\(^{351}\) On these networks see also Deniaux 2000, 1306-7.
As noted, in Roman Africa the process of procuring animals for *venationes* may have been slightly less time consuming and complicated, because wild beasts were available at closer distance, which reduced the amount of time that was needed to obtain them and the risks connected to long transport and shipping oversea. Yet, in order to trace, capture and transport wild beasts and delivering them, timely and in good condition, also African editors will have required the services of knowledgeable, skilled and experienced hunters, transporters, traders and probably middle-men, such as Patiscus whom Cicero mentions. Unfortunately, the people who were active in this process are not visible in our African sources, and therefore we will have to rely partially on information from ethnographic studies and compare it to the descriptions of hunting techniques that are provided by Pliny, Aelian and Oppian. Here and there, mosaic pavements that depict the hunt and transport of wild beasts can be illustrative, but I shall return to these floors in the next chapter, which focuses on the self-representation of editors of *venationes*. The focus will lie on descriptions of the capture of lions, leopards, ostriches and bears, because these were the species that were most commonly exported to Rome and used in African *venationes*. Also, the capture of these beasts required more expertise and experience than collecting the less dangerous herbivores.

Let us start with the most expensive and most wanted African beasts: lions and leopards. The report of a hunting safari to Africa by James Kilgo, a novelist and professor in American literature, offers an intriguing insight in the techniques and experiences of modern big cat hunters. A perhaps unsurprising but important insight that follows from Kilgo’s work is that, for a hunting technique to be effective, hunters have to use methods that are adapted to the behaviour and habitat of the beast that they want to kill (as some do nowadays) or capture (as did the ancients who hunted to provide beasts for *venationes*). In the case of lions and leopards, it is important to realise, first of
all, that these are nocturnal predators, and, secondly, that felids hunt solitary, except lionesses who operate also in groups. Furthermore, the big cats all have a keen scent, they can smell humans from a large distance and are generally very cautious; they do not normally approach people, but if they are threatened, they are likely to attack and severely injure or even kill a human. Because of their speed, sense of smell, cautious nature and potential aggressiveness to intruders, hounding and driving large cats into an enclosure was probably dangerous and ineffective, as is illustrated on the pavement from the Maison d’Isgunthus (App. ill. 11) where lions and leopards are driven into a circle by nets and men with shields and torches. It is therefore more likely that ancient hunters captured lions and leopards through baiting, like their modern successors. Kilgo describes how modern baiting works: first trackers localise a spot that a lion or leopard frequently attends during nocturnal hunting trips. At this location, bait is tied to the underside of a large horizontal branch (for a leopard), or hung onto a tree so that a lion is able to reach it from the ground. Consequently, the bait is frequently controlled to see whether a felid has touched it. As soon as this is the case, the hunters construct a hiding place close to the bait and wait there silently, sometimes for several nights, until the leopard or lion, attracted by the scent of the bait, arrives and can be shot from close range with bow and arrow or, from a larger distance, with a rifle. Of course, ancient hunters who captured beasts for venationes did not kill the lions and leopards they were after, but we will see in the descriptions of Oppian and Aelian that their techniques, the tracking, use of bait and silent nighttime waiting, were very similar. The challenge for the ancient hunters was to capture beasts alive and to deliver them to the editor of the venatio or a middleman in good shape, preferably also without being injured themselves. Oppian describes how this was done:

‘But I would have thee first of all lay to heart the excellent lion-hunt and the valiant spirit of the hunters. First they go and mark a place where among the caves a roaring well-maned lion dwells, a great terror to cattle and to the herdsmen themselves. Next they observe the great path with the worn tracks of the wild beast, whereby he often goes to the river to drink a sweet draught. There they dig round a pit, wide and large; and in the midst of the trench they build a great pillar, sheer and high. From this

*with dark blue. The strength in their limbs is limitless, and the Libyan lions greatly lord it over the lordly lions,* and about the leopard: Cyn. III 63-73: ‘Next the deadly leopards are a double race [Oppian refers to the ‘African’ leopard, *panthera pardus* and the Anatolian leopard ‘*panthera pardus tulliana*’] ... Very swift it is in running and valiant in a straight charge.’

they hang aloft a suckling lamb taken from its mother that hath newly yeaned. And outside the pit they wreathe a wall around, built with close-set boulders, that the lion may not see the crafty chasm when he draws near. And the high-hung suckling lamb beats, and the sound strikes the lion’s hungry heart, and he rushes in search of the lamb, exulting in his heart, hasting in the track of the cry and scanning this side and that with fiery eyes. And anon he comes nigh the snare, and he wheels about and a great hunger urges him, and straightway obeying the impulse of hunger he leaps over the wall, and the wide round chasm receives him, and he comes unwittingly to the gulf of a pit unlooked for. Everywhere he circles about, rushing ever backwards and forwards, even as a swift racehorse round the turning-post, constrained by the hands of the charioteer and by the bridle. And from their far-seen place of outlook the hunters see him and rush up, and with well-cut straps they bind and let down a plaited well-compacted cage, in which also they put a piece of roasted meat. And he, thinking straightway to escape from the pit, leaps in exulting; and for him there is no more any return prepared. Thus they use in the alluvial thirsty land of the Libyans.

Aelian records that Moorish hunters used a similar technique to capture leopards:

‘The hunting of leopards seems to be a Moorish practice. The people build a stone structure, and it resembles a kind of cage: this is the first part of the ambush; and the second part is this: inside they fasten a piece of roasted meat. And from their far-seen place of outlook the hunters see him and rush up, and with well-cut straps they bind and let down a plaited well-compacted cage, in which also they put a piece of roasted meat. And he, thinking straightway to escape from the pit, leaps in exulting; and for him there is no more any return prepared. Thus they use in the alluvial thirsty land of the Libyans.’

357 Opp. Cyn. IV 75-110: ‘Ἄλλα σύ μοι πρickerViewείσθα λεόντων ἐξοφοι: ἦρην ἐν θημῷ βάλλοιο καὶ ἄνθρων ἄλκιμον ἦτορ. χόροιν μὴν πρῴτοστον ἐπιφράσασον κιόντες, ἔνθα πρὶς σπάλλης εἴρθυμος ἥδεκομος λίς ἐνδιάς, μέγα δέμα βοῶν αὐτόν τε νομοῖοι θηρίος δ` αὐτῇ μετεύπεται πελώριον ὀψηπάντει ήγεσαι τριβομένοις ἀπαρτιεῖν. ἔνθα ποιλὸς λαρὸν παόμοιο ποταμηπόροι ἠθεὶς ὀδέκει. ἔνθα ἦτοι βόθροι μὲν ἐδρόμοι ἂμφίς ὀροῖς, εἰρῖν καὶ περίμετρον· ἀτόρ μεσάται ἐν τῷ τόρῳ κλίνα δειμάσθην μέγας, ὀρθός, ψυκόκης· τοῦ δ` ἔνθα μὲν κρεμάσαντο μετῆρον, ἀξίσαντες ἁρτικóκον τεκούσης· ἔκτοτε δ` αὐτῷ βόθροι περίστροφον ἐπιφάνεσαν αἰμασίαν, πυκόκεςςς ἐπασώτεροις μυλάκασαν, ὕφορο ἐς πεῖλας δολερόν χάος ἀθρήσκεται· καὶ ὅ` ὁ μὲν ψυκρημνής ἄρωμαζος ἀμύνος αὐτεῖ· τοῦ δ` ἐς τε πενελεύθερον κραδήν ἐπάταξαν λιθ`· μαίνομενος δ` ἦλθε, φίλον κεφαρμένος ἦτορ, ἦγος ἐπιστέρχον βλήσης ἡ δ` ἐνθα καὶ ἐνθα πεπαταίνων πονὔν· τάμα δ` ἡδονὴν τηλεόν ἀμφίς ὀρίνει, ἄμφις τε δινέιται, κρατείς δ` ἐς λιμός ὀρίς, ἀντίκα δ` αἰμασίαν μὲν ὑπέρθρος τοις πθήσασι, δέκτος δ` μὲν χάος εἰρήν περιστερφεῖς, οὗτ` ἐνόησαν, ὡς ἐπὶ βισσόν ἱκάνει ἀνοικτόσθω βερέθρον· παντότε δίνεται δ` παλάσσιτος αἰεν ὀροῖν, ὅπποισ` περί νύσαν ἀθλοφόρος θᾶς ἵππος, ἁρμαγῶνος παλάμης, ὁντικόμοι θυμῷ δειμάσθην· ὑπατεῦσαν δ` ἤλυθεν νόστο χαλινίδος, οὐ` ὅ` ἀν χαλαρώσασις ἀβρήσασις ἀμφάτομης ὀροῖσαν, ἐμπρόσθεν δ` ἠϊόμενοι καθάπαν ἐπιστέρχον τεκτά μέλαθρα, ὑπατεῦσαν κάκεσα δόλον κρύψαντος ἐδωδῆς· αὐτός δ` γ` εἰ βόθρου ὀδεμένος αὐτός· ἀλλικά ήθος εὐθαλικός· παρά δ` ὁ συκότος νόστος ἐτομος, ὅδε μὲν ἁμφί χατήν Ἀλβίον πολυδύμων αἰαν.’
them assails them whether they are on mountain tops or in a ravine or even in a glen. Then when the leopard encounters the smell it gets excited and in its excessive desire comes rushing to the feast it loves: it is drawn to it as though by some spell. Then it dashes at the door, knocks it down, and fastens upon the fatal meal – fatal, because on to the aforesaid cord there has been woven a noose most dexterously contrived, and as the meat is being eaten this is dislodged and encircles the gluttonous leopard. So it is caught and pays the penalty for its ravenous belly and its foul feasting, the poor wretch.358

Even though both these descriptions contain the literary topos of the wild beast driven by an impulse, hunger (‘hungry heart’ and ‘ravenous belly’), the consistencies with the techniques explained by Kilgo are remarkable, which makes it likely that the fragments by Aelian and Oppian describe actual practice in which felids were first traced, then lured with bait and finally captured after some nighttime waiting.359 The use of well-placed traps perhaps enabled ancient hunters to capture felids efficiently, because it enabled them to wait at safe distance from the bait thus reducing the risk of being wounded by an infuriated lion or leopard. Furthermore, this technique will have enabled the hunters to capture a felid without injuring it.

Capturing the third African beast that was listed on Diocletian’s Price Edict, the ostrich, was undoubtedly less dangerous than hunting felids, but probably still not easy. Most ancient authors rightfully emphasise that the giant birds are very fast runners: ostriches can reach 70 km (44 miles) per hour in sprints and use their wings to balance or slow down. According to Aelian, the ostriches were able to sling or kick stones backwards with their feet: 358

358 Ael. NA XIII.10: ‘Θήρα δὲ παραδέλλων Μαυρουσία εἴη ἄν. καὶ ἐστιν αὐτοῖς οἰκοδομία λίθων πυττοιμήν, καὶ ἐκ τῶν ζωγρείος τινι, καὶ ἐστί μὲν ὁ λόγος οὗ ὁ πρῶτος· ὃ γε μὴν δεήτερος, ἕνοδότερος σαφρὸν κρέως καὶ ὀδυνότερος μοῦραν μηρίνθου τινὸς μακροτέρας εξαρτόσθη, θύραν δὲ ἐκ ἐκείνων καὶ τινῶν καλάμων ἀραιὰν ἐπέστησαν, καὶ μέντοι καὶ ἐν αὐτῶν ἐκπνεύται ἡ τοῦ κρέως τοῦ προερχόμενον ὀσμή διαφεύγουσα. αὐθάνατα δὲ αἱ θῆρες, καὶ γὰρ πως τοῖς κακόσμοις φιληδοῦσι· προοροσβάλλει γὰρ αὐτὰς ὁ τῶν προερχόμενων ἀγάθων, δῶν τε ἐν ἀκροίς τοῖς ὀρείσιν ή ἐν ἐν πάροιχοι, καὶ μέντοι καὶ ἐν αὐλῶνι. εἶτα ἀνεφλέξθη τῇ ὀσμῇ ἐντυχόντος, καὶ ὑπὸ τῆς ὀρμῆς ἐν τῇ τῆς τοῦτον τὴν φίλον ἄτει φερομένην ἔλεκτω δὴ ὑπ’ αὐτῆς ὡς ὑπὸ τοῖς ἱγγοίς, εἶτα ἐμπιέθη τῇ θύρᾳ καὶ ἀνατρέπει αὐτὴν καὶ ἐξεύθετο τοῦ δυστυχοῦς δείπνου. τῇ γὰρ τοῦ μηρίνθου τῇ προερχόμενη πάγη καὶ μᾶλλα σοφή, ἦτορ δὴν ἐσθιομένον τοῦ κρέως κινεῖται, καὶ περιλαμβάνει τὴν ἱγγον πάροιχιν. καὶ ἐλάω, γαστρὸς ἀδηφάγου καὶ μοισαρᾶς ἐστιάσεως δίκας ἐκτίνουσα ἡ δυστυχής.’

359 Interestingly, Oppian in his description of the qualities of good hunting dogs also notes the use of trackers and the importance of silence during the hunt: ‘Neither let them [the dogs] be prone to bark; for silence is the rule for hunters and above all for trackers’, Opp. Ὅην. I 449-50: ἐπεὶ μάλα θηρευτῆρα σημά τῆς ἡμείως ἑστι, πανεξαγόμεν δ’ ἐγενετῆραν.’
And if one chases the ostrich it does not venture to fly but spreads its wings and runs. And if it is in danger of being captured it slings the stones that come in its way backwards with its feet.\textsuperscript{360}

Aelian may have read about this in the work of Pliny, which he used as a source. Pliny also describes that the swiftness of the ostrich and its aggressive behaviour in case of threat may have been a challenge to hunters:

‘The next subject is the nature of birds. Of these the largest species, which almost belongs to the class of animals, the ostrich of Africa or Ethiopia, exceeds the height and surpasses the speed of a mounted horseman, its wings being bestowed upon it merely as an assistance in running, but otherwise it is not a flying creature and does not rise from the earth. It has talons resembling a stag’s hooves, which it uses as weapons; they are cloven in two, and are useful for grasping stones which when in flight it flings with its feet against its pursuers.’\textsuperscript{361}

When hunters on horseback could not be faster than the ostriches, they had to be smarter: a mid-third century, roughly semi-circular mosaic (App. ill. 12) from Sicca Veneria suggests that hounds were used to drive the ostrich(es) towards a net or another enclosure, which is nowadays still a common technique for ostrich hunting.\textsuperscript{362} The low price of African ostriches on the price edict (20,000 HS, as much as a wild ass), and the possibility to breed and keep them outside their natural habitat, may also suggest that the large birds used in venationes were often not captured in the wild and then transported, but more commonly bred in captivity.

Capturing bears demanded yet again different knowledge, expertise and other hunting techniques, because they had a different habitat than felids and ostriches; the remote mountainous woodlands in the Rif, Atlas and Tell mountains. Oppian provides a description of a bear hunt: first the animal’s lair was located by skilful trackers and their ‘keen-scented dogs’, then the hunters set up strong stakes and spread nets around, on either sides of the nets are

\textsuperscript{360}Ael. NA IV.37: ‘εἴ δὲ αὐτὴν διώκοις τις, ἢ δὲ οὐκ ἐπιτολμᾷ τῇ πτήσει, θεῖ δὲ τὰς πτέρυγας ἀπλώσασα· εἴ δὲ λίσκεσθαι μέλλοι, τοὺς παραπίπτοντας λίθους ἐς τοῦπιστο σφενδονᾶ τοῖς ποσίν.’

\textsuperscript{361}Plin. HN X 1: ‘Sequitur natura avium, quorum grandissimi et paene bestiarum generis struthocamiel Africi vel Aethiopici altitudinem equitis insidentis equo excedunt, celeritatem vincunt, ad hoc denum datis pinnis ut currentem adiuvant: cetero non sunt volucres nec a terra attolluntur. Ungulæ iis cervinis similes quibus dimicant, bisulcae et comprehendendis lapidibus utiles quos in fuga contra sequentes ingerunt pedibus.’

\textsuperscript{362}Dunbabin 1978, 69 pl. 54; Poinssot & Quoniam 1952, 157-65. Some poor quality home videos of greyhounds chasing an ostrich can be found on You-Tube. Aelian dedicates an entire paragraph to a description of the best races of hunting dogs and their qualities: tracking, running, good sight, a strong physique and fearlessness, Ael. NA I 433-538.
armed men and a rope with many-coloured patterned ribbons to scare the bear.\textsuperscript{363} After this preparation, more men hid themselves in camouflaged huts and blew a trumpet in order to scare the bear out of its lair and drive it into the nets. This moment must have been quite dangerous, Oppian recounts:

‘Then the watchers at the ends of the net near at hand spring forth and speedily draw tight above the skirting cord of broom. Net on net they pile; for at that moment bears greatly rage with jaws and terrible paws, and many a time they straightaway evade the hunters and escape from the nets and make the hunting in vain.’\textsuperscript{364}

When the catch was successful, the next phase would be to release the raging animal from the nets and put it into a solid wooden cage.\textsuperscript{365} Since bears usually have a solitary lifestyle, hunters would have to successfully execute this manoeuvre more than once to obtain a number of bears. Only when hunters discovered bear cubs, they had the opportunity to catch more than one bear at once, and cubs were probably easier to capture than full grown adults, although protective mothers undoubtedly made this considerably more complicated and dangerous.

After the various wild beasts had been captured, perhaps by different independent groups of hunters that were each specialised in a certain species and worked in different regions, the workers - not necessarily the same men as the hunters - faced the next challenge: transport. The cages with wild beasts had to be transported to the African towns where the venationes would be held, or to the harbours from where they would be shipped to their final destination. For transport overland, the cages were probably loaded onto wagons that were pulled by oxen, and for transport over rivers or sea they were put on ships (see App. ills. 8, 9, 13, 14). In a panegyric written by the court poet Claudian in honour of Stilicho’s acceptance of the consulship in 400, we find a fascinating poetic account of the transport of exotic animals for his venatio:

‘Whatsoever inspires fear with its teeth, wonder with its mane, awe with its horns and bristling coat — all the beauty, all the terror of the forest is taken. Guile protects them not; neither strength nor weight avails them; their speed saves not the fleet of foot. Some roar enmeshed in snares; some are thrust into wooden cages and carried off. There are not carpenters enough to fashion the wood; leafy prisons are constructed of

\textsuperscript{363} Oppian Cyn. IV 353-420. Nowadays, bears are still tracked and hunted with hounds: Etling 2003, 31-3.
\textsuperscript{364} Oppian Cyn. IV 412-416.
\textsuperscript{365} Ibid. 417-421.
unhewn beech and ash. Boats laden with some of the animals traverse seas and rivers; bloodless from terror the rower's hand is stayed, for the sailor fears the merchandise he carries. Others are transported over land in wagons that block the roads with the long procession, bearing the spoils of the mountains. The wild beast is borne a captive by those troubled cattle on whom in times past he sated his hunger, and each time that the oxen turned and looked at their burden they pull away in terror from the pole.366

The irony of the situation that these powerful wild beasts found themselves in – being imprisoned by men and brought to an unknown place on wagons that were pulled by their former prey, the oxen - is an interesting literary theme that Claudian fully exploits. Claudian also contrasts the wild beasts with domesticated animals, and wild nature (the terror of the forest, the spoils of the mountains) with the organised and civilised world (with skillful carpenters, sailors, rowers, boats and roads). Halfway between the wild natural world and the civilised Roman towns were the indigenous people: ‘At length the countryside breathes again and the Moorish farmers unbar their now safe huts.’367 It is remarkable that some of the scenes that are so poetically described in this fragment are also known from art, most notably floor mosaics, such as the abovementioned those from the ambulatory of the Great Hunt in the Villa del Casale at Piazza Armerina (App. ill. 8), a floor from Carthage Dermech (App. ill. 13) and the abovementioned mosaic from Veii (App. ill. 9), but also the relief on a sarcophagus from Ostia (App. ill. 14).368

The archaeologists who excavated the bones of lions and elephants in Thamusida, a commercial town along the river Sububus nearby Sala in Mauretania Tingitania (see App. Map 1 and 3), concluded that these animals died while they were kept in some kind of enclosure, where they were perhaps awaiting further transport, likely through shipment over the river and over


368 Bertrandy 1987, 235 provides drawings of the different cages that are depicted on mosaic floors.
This again demonstrates that the process of supplying wild beasts for the arenas was complicated and risky, not only literally because capturing the animals was dangerous, and because of the regular problems and risks involved in land and sea journeys, such as robbery or bad weather at sea, but also financially, because the transporters were responsible for the physical condition of their living cargo that had to be fed and watered adequately.

But who were these men who captured and transported wild beasts for *venationes*? As noted, they are hardly known from our sources, but the Tunisian archaeologist Azedine Beschouach has argued in various articles that African sodalities of *venatores*, similar to the *familia gladiatoria* (gladiator schools) and factions of charioteers in Rome, had a major role in this process. Beschouach has identified about a dozen of these sodalities, as he calls them, by investigating their names and emblems on inscriptions, jugs of African red slipware and mosaics (see App. ill. 15 and § 4.3). Apart from the fact that these identifications are not always convincing - because they are often based only on the presence of one single multi-interpretable emblem on a mosaic floor, inscription or other object, - scholars do not agree on what activities these sodalities precisely carried out (see further § 4.3). Beschouach believed that they were more than teams of *venatores* and suggested that they not only provided arena-hunters, but also captured wild beasts and transported them to sponsors of *venationes* in North Africa and Rome. This idea may be inspired by the first sentence of the inscription on the beforementioned Magerius floor (App. ill. 3), which records the Telegenii, the best known sodality of beast-fighters:

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369 Wilson 2002, 251 n.24; for a preliminary report of the research on this site see Papi, Cerri and Passalacqua, 2000 and www.digiter.it/geoarcheologia/geoarchaeology-en/thamusida. An edict of the emperor Caracalla on a bronze tablet dating to 215-6 from Colonia Iulia Valentina Banasa, a town nearby Thamusida, also along the river Sububus, also indicates that this area supplied wild beasts for *venationes* in Rome: Banasa was given a remission of taxes by Caracalla in exchange for a shipment of animals, *IAM-S* 100 / *AE* 2008 1707.


371 Beschouach 1979, 418.


373 Beschouach 1985; Beschouach 1977, 499.
‘Spoken through a herald: "My lords, in order that the Telegenii have the reward of your sympathy [or: what they deserve], give them 500 denarii for each leopard.”’ 374

This inscription, that will be investigated more closely in chapter 3 (p. 124-7), indicates that the Telegenii received a sum of money for each leopard that they fought and killed, but not that they had also captured and transported these felids to the arena. In fact, as noted above, 500 denarii (2000 HS) or 1000 denarii after Magerius doubled it, appears to be a very low price for a leopard and it therefore seems more likely that the Telegenii received this money only for fighting these animals, and that others were paid to capture and safely deliver the beasts to Magerius. Beschaouch, however, believed that the members of the African sodalities were not only involved in hunt, capture, trade and transport of wild beasts, but also performed as venatores themselves, and he attempted to support his theory with an incision of a symbol that he identifies as a sodality eblem on an African amphora that was found in Ostia, and another one on the cap of an amphora from Thaenae (App. ill. 16 and for my scepticism about Beschaouch’s identifications see further § 4.3). 375 He imagined that the amphorae were marked with the emblems of African venatorial sodalities and that they brought these jars back to North Africa after delivering shiploads of beasts in Ostia. However, this scenario seems rather speculative and far fetched on the basis of this evidence.

Also, as I have demonstrated in this section, because of the knowledge, expertise and experience that was required in each phase of the process of supplying wild beasts for arena shows, it is more probable that different experts were involved in capturing, transporting and fighting in the arena; the hunters were probably not the same men as the sailors who shipped them. Furthermore, comparative evidence indicates that newcomers in exotic areas, such as colonists in Africa and India, often rely on local hunters and herdsmen when dealing with wild animals, because they have the expertise and experience to act as guides, trackers and hunters. 376 This appears logical and in the ancient literary evidence about capturing wild beasts we have seen

374 Translation Chamberland 2001, 221-2 with slight adaptations. AE 1967, 549 = AE 2000, 1597-8 = AE 2007, 1684: ‘Per curionem dictum domini mei ut Telegeni(i) pro leopardo meritum habeant vestri favoris donate eis denarios quingentos.’ For the text see also App. ill. 3 and p. 124-127 below. The Telegenii are also attested in two African inscriptions and on a cartouche on a jug in African Red Slipware (App. ill. 48), see further § 4.3.

375 Beschaouch 1977, 499.

indications that also in Roman North Africa, ‘the hunting of leopards seems to
be a Moorish [that is: native] practice’.377 These literary sources thus appear to
provide a realistic account of the Africans’ relation to wild beasts. As in the
early venationes in Rome, native African hunting specialists probably played a
major role in the process of producing venationes, because only they had the
expertise to successfully trace, capture and transport the valuable wild beasts.
These people are almost invisible in our evidence, but the letters of Cicero and
Symmachus indicate that they were directed by middle-men such as Patiscus
and that they were the ones who oversaw the process and delivered the beasts
to editors of games. Because of the financial investment of the editor and the
potential risk that the beasts would become sick or die before delivery, these
middle-men probably made great profits when they succeeded, but shared in
the sponsor’s loss when something went wrong.

Probably only editors who were part of the imperial family, could use
the services of the military for transporting wild beasts to Rome.378 An edict
issued by Hadrian in 129 that was intended to regulate the behaviour of
soldiers who were transporting money, prisoners and wild beasts through Asia
for imperial games in Rome, indicates that soldiers enjoyed certain advantages
when they were transporting wild beasts for the emperor.379 Hadrian issued this
edict after he had received complaints from towns and villages in Asia Minor
because they were heavily burdened by soldiers who abused their requisitional
powers; apparently the villagers were obliged to give these troops food and
lodging, but they found the expenses too high. Therefore, the edict stipulated:

‘Free lodging shall not be allowed for any soldier to take while travelling
on private business. But if someone is passing through while on duty or if
they are bringing the ruling power’s money, or transporting prisoners or
wild animals, public lodgings shall be given only to them and provisions
at the market price which was effective ten days earlier’.380

Sponsors of venationes outside Rome, in Italy, North Africa or other provinces,
could not rely on this service from the army and had to organise the transport
by themselves, often with the help of influential ‘friends’, who had the
connections to instruct several different networks of native hunters and
transporters in various regions in the provinces.

377 Ael. NA XIII.10 see above, p. 90 for the full passage and translation.
378 Epplett 2001a provides an extensive overview of the sources that document these activities.
379 AE 2009, 1428.
332. See also Edmondson 2014, 134-5.
§ 2.4 Conclusion

This chapter investigated the production of hunting spectacles as an integral part of the cultural performance, a fase in the event that had the potential to shape, represent and thus confirm socio-cultural values and norms like the actual hunting spectacle itself. The production of a venatio started with localising suitable wild beasts and that was also the point of departure of this chapter. In the first section we have investigated ancient epigraphic and literary sources, archaeozoological evidence and modern research which indicates that wild animals were widely available in North Africa in the Roman period: the diverse landscapes of the African provinces were the habitats of forest elephants, lions, leopards, ostriches, hartebeest, cheetas, hyena’s and bears as well as bulls, wild boar, gazelles, deer, wild asses (onager) and – horses. Diocletian’s price edict and archaeozoological material suggest that of all of these African beasts, particularly lions, leopards and ostriches (ferae Libycae) and bears were commonly and in large quantities exported from North Africa for *venationes* in Rome and elsewhere in Italy. Large exotic animals such as elephants, rhinoceroses, hippos, giraffes and crocodiles were probably exported from Egypt and only presented in imperial spectacles in Rome, but even there they must have been highly exceptional. In African *venationes* lions, leopards, bulls, wild boar and bears on the one hand and ostriches, deer, gazelles, onagers and wild goats and – sheep on the other appear to have been most frequent.

Diocletian’s price edict and other epigraphic sources provide some hints as to the prices that benefactors paid for venatio-beasts, but inflation, the debasement of currency and the absence of important details in these texts make it impossible to draw conclusions about the costs for hunting spectacles in Rome or North Africa with any certainty. It seems, however, that of the beasts that were most commonly used in *venationes*, lions, leopards and bears were most expensive whereas ostriches and herbivores could be obtained at much lower costs. These prices for beasts appear to reflect not only their availability and spectacular characteristics, but also the expertise, time, effort and risk connected to capturing and transporting them. Large and spectacular hunting shows are always overrepresented in our evidence, both in Rome and in North Africa, but there are some indications that the near presence of felids allowed African benefactors to produce small-scale *venationes* with lions and leopards.
In the second section we have seen that the wide availability of wild beasts in North Africa appealed to the fascination of ancient authors such as Pliny, Oppian, Strabo and Aelian, who made much of the African closeness to and familiarity with wild beasts. However, this was not only a literary topos; particularly lions and leopards were a realistic threat to herdsmen and farmers and their cattle and this must have been of influence to the experiences of African spectators of *venationes*. Another result of the presence of felids was that Africans, most likely natives, were closely involved in the trade of wild beasts to Rome and other destinations. This was clear from the letters of Cicero and Symmachus and other literary sources which have demonstrated that donors of *venationes* in Rome and elsewhere relied on the services, experience, knowledge and expertise of native African hunters, especially for tracing and capturing lions and leopards for their games. Capturing and transporting exotic beasts, often over land and sea, were complicated and dangerous activities. Therefore, apart from time, substantial financial investments and a dose of good luck, donors of hunting spectacles also needed influential contacts and mediators who could help them to communicate with and manage these complex networks of hunters, transporters, traders, shippers and coordinators. We can hardly trace these workers in our sources, but the African floor mosaics that depict the capture and transport of African beasts, confirm that the professional involvement of these men in the supply of great quantities of African beasts to Rome, also contributed to the cultural significance of *venationes* in North Africa itself in some way or another. All in all, the near presence, wide availability and realistic danger that wild beasts posed to the inhabitants of North Africa and the close professional involvement of many (indigenous) Africans in the preparatory process of *venationes* in Rome and elsewhere contributed greatly to the specifically African cultural significance of hunting spectacles.