Venationes Africanae: Hunting spectacles in Roman North Africa: cultural significance and social function
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Chapter 3

Donating and commemorating hunting spectacles

‘The theatre is filling up, and all the people are sitting aloft presenting a splendid sight and composed of numberless faces. [...] You can see neither tiles nor stones but all is men’s bodies and faces. [...] Then, as the benefactor who has brought them together enters in the sight of all, they stand up and as from a single mouth cry out. All with one voice call him protector and ruler of the city that they share in common, and stretch out their hands in salutation. [...] They liken him to the greatest of rivers [...] they call him the Nile of gifts [...] and say that he in his lavish gifts is what the Ocean is among waters. [...] What next? The great man bows to the crowd and in this way shows his regard for them. Then he sits down amid the congratulations of his admiring peers, each of whom prays that he himself may attain to the same eminence.’

This is how John Chrystostom, bishop of Constantinople from 397 until 404, describes the opening of a theatre show in Antioch. In this theological treatise, the bishop presents the sponsors of entertainment shows as the prime examples of vainglory, which he condemns, stating that these men gave generously only in order to win the admiration of the crowd, receive public honour and stoke envy among their peers. Like other Christian authors and pagan moralists, Chrystostom denounces the benefactors’ pursuit of honour and glory, because of its vanity and emptiness.

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381 Ioh. Chrys. De inani gloria 67-85, translation Laistner 1951: ‘Πληροῦται τὸ θέατρον καὶ πᾶς ὁ δῆμος ἀνόι κάθηται ὄψιν πολὺ παρεχόμενος λαμπρῶν καὶ ἀπὸ τοσούτων συγκειμένην ὑγείων, ὡς πολλάκις καὶ τὸ τέγος αὐτὸ καὶ τὸν ὑποκείμενον ὄροφον καλοφθῆναι τοῖς σώματι τῶν ἄνδρῶν καὶ oὔτε κεραμίδας οὔτε λίθους ἔστιν ἰδεῖν, ἀλλὰ πάντα ὄψις ἁπάντως καὶ σώματα. Πρὸ δὲ πάντων εἰσελθόντος τοῦ συναγαγόντος αὐτοῦς ἄνδρος φιλοτίμων, διαναστάντες εὐθέως ἔστερ ἐξ ἕνου σώματος μίαν ἀφιᾶσι φωνῆν, συμφώνως ἀπαντεῖς κηδεμόνα καλούντες καὶ προστάτην τῆς κοινῆς πόλεως καὶ τῶν χειρῶν ἐκτένεσιν. Εἶτα μεταξὺ τῶν πάντων μείζον παραβάλλουσιν αὐτὸν ποταμό τῷ τῆς φιλοτιμίας ἄδρον καὶ ἐκκεχυμένον τῇ τῶν Νείλῳ ύδατῶν ἁφθονία συγκρίνοντες, καὶ Νεῖλον αὐτοῖς εἶναί φασι τῶν δορυφόρων. Οἱ δὲ μάλλον αὐτῶν κολακεύοντες μικρῶν νομίσαντες εἶναι τοῦτο τὸ ὑπόδειγμα, τὸ τοῦ Νείλου, ποταμοὺς μὲν ἀφιᾶσι καὶ θαλάσσας, τὸν δὲ θανάτον εἰς μέσον ἀραγόντες, τοῦτο αὐτῶν εἶναι φασιν, ὅτερ ἔκειν οὖ σῶσι, τοῖς ἐν ταῖς φιλοτιμίαις καὶ οὐδὲν ὑπὸ εὐφημίας ἀπολιψάνονσιν’.

382 Ioh. Chrys. De inani gloria 145-155: ‘Τί οὖν; φησίν, ὅταν διὰ τὰς λειτουργίας ἐκείνας τιμῶνται καὶ θαμαζόνται παρὰ πολλῶν, ἀρα μικρῶς ὄψις ὁ καρπός; Σφόδρα γε: οὐ γάρ μεγάλη ἢ τιμὴ ἄστη, ήν νῦν διήλθον, τὸ καὶ σκόμμασι βάλλεσθαι καὶ κατηγορεῖσθαι καὶ διαβάλλεσθαι. «Τί δὲ πρὸς τοὺς
reciprocity of euergetism, or munificence; the sponsor of a show invested a lot of money and time (as we have seen in the previous chapter), but in return he was applauded during the show and afterwards he could be honoured publicly with a statue and inscription. The fragment also reminds us that, for spectators, not only the spectacle itself, but also the sponsor, presiding over the games in his special loge, was a focal point of the crowd’s attention.383

Central to this chapter are the motivations and considerations of African donors of *venationes*. As we have seen in chapter 2, *venatio*-editors in Roman North Africa (and elsewhere) invested a lot, both literally in terms of money and figuratively with regard to the time and effort involved in procuring wild beasts, but in contrast to tangible benefactions such as public buildings, amphitheatre shows did not leave a physical remnant in public space. Editors were honoured for their gift during and briefly after their *venationes* or gladiatorial spectacles, but the gifts themselves were ephemeral. This raises questions, such as: what motivated African sponsors to donate hunting shows? How, why and what did they gain from producing these expensive events?

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τιμωμένους; Ὅσοι γὰρ διὰ τὰς λειτουργίας ἐκείνου τιμῶνται, ἀλλὰ διὰ τὸ προσδόκαν δαπανᾶται πάλιν τῷ πλήθει. Εἰ δὲ διὰ τὰ φθάσαντα, διὰ τί τῶν οὐκ ἔχοντων κατηχοῦσαν; διὰ τί δὲ μηδὲ προσέδαιον, ἀλλὰ καὶ σκόπουσαν ἀκόμως καὶ μικροὺς ἀνάρας ἀποκαλούντες; Εἴδες ὅτι μανία τίς ἔστιν ἡ καινοδοξία; ἄλλα τούτο μὲν ἀφείσθω τὸ ἐδόσα, ἔνοισι σοι καὶ δευτέρου ὅν, ἐφ’ ἑτατόν ἐν δέθησαν. Εἰ δὲ λέγοι τις: «Τί σον πρὸς τοὺς σύμμετρα δαπανομένους ἐν ταῖς τῶν πόλεων τέρψεσι; Εἴπε μοι, παρακαλῶ, τί τὸ κέρδος; καὶ γὰρ καὶ παρ’ ἐκείνους ἐρήμους ἡ δόξα καὶ ἡ βοή», translation Laistner 1951: ‘[…] they are honored not for the displays but because they are expected to spend further sums for the crowd. If they were honored for favors received, why do men accuse them when they have nothing? Why will men not even go near them but rather deride them and call them spendthrifts and profligates? Hast thou not seen that Vainglory is like a madness? But let us leave this aspect of Vainglory which is found only in one or two men, and turn to another. Suppose someone says: “What of those who spend in moderation on the amusements of the cities?” Tell me, I pray: What profits it? For them also the glory and the acclaim is but of a day’. In Cic. *Off.* 2.55-6, Cicero also distinguishes between vanities and good deeds: ‘There are, in general, two classes of those who give largely: the one class is the lavish, the other the generous. The lavish are those who squander their money on public banquets, doles of meat among the people, gladiatorial shows, magnificent games, and wild-beast fights - vanities of which but a brief recollection will remain, or none at all. The generous, on the other hand, are those who employ their own means to ransom captives from brigands, or who assume their friends' debts or help in providing dowries for their daughters, or assist them in acquiring property or increasing what they have.’, ‘Omnino duo sunt genera largorum, quorum alteri prodigi, alteri liberales: prodigi, qui epulis et viscerationibus et gladiatorum numeribus, ludorum venationumque apparatu pecunias profundunt in eas res, quorum memoriae aut brevem aut nullam omnino sint relictur, liberales autem, qui suis facultatibus aut captos a praedonibus redimunt aut aes alienum suscipiunt amicorum aut in filiarum collocaione adiuvant aut opitulantur in re vel quaeenda vel augenda.’ For an investigation of John Chrysostom’s critique on pagan munificence see also: Roskam 2014.

Was it worth the investment? In order to answer these questions, we will first survey some of the earlier research on euergetism and how it worked. After that, in the second section, we will come back to the motivations and considerations of the African donors of *venationes*.

§ 3.1 Civic euergetism

Throughout the imperial period, the emperor, his family and high officials in Rome, and provincial and municipal notables in the provinces, were actively involved in euergetism or munificence, ‘the provision - simultaneously voluntary and expected - of entertainment, amenities, and public buildings for the common good’. Honorary and building inscriptions indicate the range of their benefactions: among the most expensive were the construction of large public buildings, theatres, baths, temples and amphitheatres, and infrastructural projects, such as roads and aqueducts. Public entertainment shows, races in the circus, gladiatorial shows and *venationes* were also very expensive, whereas theatrical performances, athletic displays and boxing matches could be produced from a smaller budget. Central to euergetism were the ‘rules’ or ethics of reciprocity: each good deed (*εὐεργεσία* or *beneficium*) had to be repaid with an appropriate, but different, counter-gift to express gratitude; a public acclamation, a decree, a statue, an inscription or another honour that confirmed the social status of the benefactor. As we have seen in chapter 1, in the imperial period, the provision of games, the construction or restoration of public buildings, and the payment of sums of money became a normal, and in fact often ‘obligatory’, part of a municipal career: magistrates had to pay a *summa honoraria* and they were obliged to provide the games that they had promised before their election or upon the acceptance of the office of *duovir*, *aedile* or a priesthood. Voluntary benefactions did not disappear

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384 Euergetism was thus defined by Paul Veyne, Veyne 1990, 10 and Veyne 1976, 20 for the original definition in French. See also above section I.
385 Decisions about the sort of benefactions that were provided must have been shaped by many different considerations, such as requests from local or provincial authorities, financial capacity, the expected honour, strategies of commemoration, moral perceptions, or immediate practical issues, e.g.: Kokkinia 2011, 123.
387 The Urso charter indicates that in Urso, *duoviri* and *aediles* were obligated to produce *munera* or *ludi scaenici*. Although no complete similar regulations have been found in other provinces,
however; many magistrates gave more than the obligatory *summa honoraria* (an *amplificatio*) and thus shaped their social reputation and power through generosity.

Modern scholars have come up with a number of explanations for ancient civic munificence, a phenomenon that they say is unparalleled in pre-modern history. 388 According to some, civic euergetism was an economic necessity for Roman towns: without gifts from elite benefactors, municipal governments would not be able to finance public infrastructure, or at least not on the scale that they wanted to. 389 However, Duncan-Jones demonstrated that, even though gifts from benefactors were sometimes very substantial, towns were able to fund buildings with public funds, which consisted of payments for office by magistrates (the *summa honoraria*) and revenue from taxation and land. 390 In earlier studies, it was argued that classical euergetism functioned as a form of charity, an idea that has also been refuted, because most benefactions were gifts to all citizens, not exclusively, or even primarily, to the poor. 391 In fact, evidence makes clear that in case of distributions of food or money, the poor actually received the smallest share. 392 Paul Veyne argued that euergetism was essentially symbolic and non-political; he claimed that the primary drivers of euergetism were, on the one hand, the psychological urge of a wealthy man to be generous and receive honour, and on the other, ‘la distance sociale’, the gap between rulers and ruled that the elite wished to maintain. 393 Inspired by sociological and anthropological theory, others emphasised that the dynamic

there are many indications that similar laws were also in place elsewhere, e.g. Ville 1982, 175-200. For the transcription and translation of the relevant paragraphs in the Urso charter (Paragraph LXX and LXXI) see § 1.2 and p. 55-6 n. 240-3, for a discussion of this law: Crawford 1996, ch. 25, 393-454. The rates of the *summae honorariae* recorded in African inscriptions vary strongly from town to town, sums range from 1000 HS for the flaminate in Sarra to 20,000 HS for an aedileship or decurionate in Cirta or Rusicade, on average the summa honoraria is 4000 HS, see Duncan-Jones 1962, 65-9 and 103-4.

388 For an extensive overview of previous research on euergetism and criticism of different models: Zuiderhoek 2009, 1, 6-12; 23-36; 40-9.
389 The rate of capital investment in public property during the imperial period was not exceeded until the modern area, Verboven 2012, 40. For the economic-necessity explanations: Duncan-Jones 1990, 176-82 and recently on Roman Africa: Hoyer 2013, 587.
390 Duncan-Jones 1990, 176-82. Eck 1997, 318-9 demonstrates that the importance of the gifts of civic benefactors is over-represented in epigraphic sources because inscriptions are biased towards the expenses of private benefactors rather than those of the civic governments. On the predominance of revenue from taxation: Schwarz 2001.
391 For the charity-argument: e.g. Hands 1968 and critique on the charity-model, e.g.: Gordon 1990, 229; Duncan-Jones 1982.
392 Zuiderhoek 2009, 33.
393 On 'la distance sociale', Veyne 1976, 298-327.
between a giver and a recipient is always reciprocal: the benefactor did not simply give, but always received public recognition, social prestige and honour in return.\textsuperscript{394} In the last decades, Veyne’s idea that euergetism was non-political has been contradicted, for instance by Arjen Zuiderhoek who argued that the euergetic system was crucial to the preservation of social stability in the oligarchic political system of the Roman Empire.\textsuperscript{395} In his view, the elite’s benefaction of public buildings, games and distributions, and the statues, inscriptions and public acclamations they received in return, constituted, confirmed and legitimated their socio-political dominance.\textsuperscript{396} In the Greek East, the benefactor’s civic virtues, such as public generosity, philanthropy and patriotism, and his dominant political position, were expressed in public acclamations, crowning ceremonies and during public gatherings, but mainly materialised in honorary inscriptions.\textsuperscript{397} In Roman North Africa, as we will see, donors frequently used domestic mosaic pavements to perpetuate the memory of their hunting shows.

§ 3.2 Hunting spectacles in the self-representation of African donors

As we have seen in chapter 1, amphitheatre spectacles were introduced in Roman North Africa in the Augustan period. Initially, gladiatorial combat and wild beast hunts were often staged together, but from the late second century onwards, \textit{venationes} were increasingly staged as independent spectacles and gladiatorial fights became less and less frequent (see § 1.2). Roughly contemporaneous to this development, a change in the self-representation of donors of amphitheatre games occurs: from the third century onwards, public ceremonies and acclamations, mosaics, contorniates and diptychs became more important media for self-representation than the statues and inscriptions that had been in vogue in the first and second century.\textsuperscript{398} Earlier, scholars used to think that the decrease of inscriptions, statues and public buildings was a symptom of crisis, but now it is commonly assumed that there is more to it: apparently, in the late antique period, public ceremonies, self-aggrandisement in the private or semi-private contexts of houses or baths suited the quickly changing political situations better than monumental buildings and statues in

\textsuperscript{394} Gordon 1990, 224; van Nijf 1997, 111-20.
\textsuperscript{395} Zuiderhoek 2009, 115 and for criticism of Veyne’s thesis see also Gordon 1990.
\textsuperscript{396} Ibid., 71-112.
\textsuperscript{397} Ibid., 116.
\textsuperscript{398} Borg & Witschel 2001, 89-93; Fejfer 2008, 41.
the urban landscape. It is on those mosaic pavements from private or semi-private contexts that we often find representations of *venationes*, the games that the owners of these houses had themselves produced. But the prominence of depictions of hunting spectacles on these late antique African mosaic floors, is probably not only a result of the changes in self-representation and the popularity of mosaics as a medium for the commemoration of games, but also reflects the actual popularity of *venationes* and increasing marginalisation of gladiatorial combat in this period, a development that is also attested in epigraphic and literary sources (see § 1.2). Unfortunately, difficulties in dating the mosaics and the inscriptions that record amphitheatre games, and the fact that the epigraphic material often does not specify whether a *munus* consisted of gladiator games, *venationes* or both, make it difficult to investigate this trend further. Therefore, we will focus on the ways in which African donors used their sponsorship of *venationes* in their self-representation in different media, without attempting to discern chronological continuity or change. We will investigate the ways in which the production of a *venatio* contributed to the shaping of its sponsor’s social identity, in other words: how these benefactions that required such great investments, were ‘repaid’ with certain honours – the counter-gifts – in honorific inscriptions (§ 3.2.1). Moreover, we will look at how editors themselves attempted to perpetuate the memory of their hunting spectacles in order to materialise the prestige that these events brought them on building - and dedicatory inscriptions (§ 3.2.1), on domestic floor mosaics (§ 3.2.2) and on illustrated African red slip pottery (§ 3.2.3). In this way, we will gain insight in the potential of this cultural performance in shaping and thus confirming cultural and social norms and social identities, of - in the first place - the benefactors themselves.

### 3.2.1 *Venationes* in inscriptions

In contrast to the high frequency of amphitheatres in the area and the abundance of venatorial scenes in African art, particularly on mosaic floors from the third and fourth century, the epigraphic evidence regarding the production of hunting spectacles is limited: 39 African inscriptions, dated to the second, third and fourth century, record amphitheatre shows, but only 11 of those specify that the event featured (also) hunting spectacles (see App.

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399 Borg & Witschel 2001, 93; Fejfer 2008, 41.
Table 2).400 Two of these texts (nr. 10 and 11) are too fragmentary to provide any useful information, which leaves us with nine remaining honorific -, building – and dedicatory inscriptions, almost all from the second and early third century.401 Of these, two texts record animal shows that were part of *ludi* and not *munera*; the ‘*ludi cum venatione*’ in Madauros (nr. 7) and the ‘*ludi in theatro*’, plays in the theatre, ‘*interposita venation[e] et gladiatoribus*’, ‘interrupted by a *venatio* and gladiators’ in Carthage (nr. 5).

It is clear from the outset that this small epigraphic corpus does not reflect the importance of arena shows in civic life in the African provinces. First of all, as noted in the introduction, it is possible that more than 11 of the 39 African inscriptions that record amphitheatre shows included *venationes*, but since the programs are not mentioned, there is no way of knowing this. Also, the majority of the African *venatio*-inscriptions are from the second to the early third century, the period when the so-called ‘epigraphic habit’ was strongest.402 As a result, the games of this period are well represented in epigraphy, but this does not mean that they were also more frequent then than in later times. After all, our iconographic evidence suggests that hunting spectacles were perhaps even more popular in the late antique period, when the majority of the *venatio*-mosaics were made, but yet again, also the iconographic material may be biased and thus cause an overrepresentation of *venationes* in our sources. And our epigraphic record, as well as our iconographic material, is not only shaped by geographical and temporal differences in the ancients’ epigraphic or

400 The African inscriptions that record entertainment spectacles are collected in Chamberland 2001 and in Lafer 2009 and Lafer 2007. Chamberland identified ca. 120 African honorific -, funerary - and dedicatory inscriptions dating from the first to the fourth century that record the production of entertainment shows: roughly half of these concern theatrical performances (*ludi scaenici*), about 30% amphitheatre shows (*munera*), of which about a third explicitly mention *venationes* (our sample, see App. Table 2), and the rest (20%) circus races (*ludi circenses*) and athletic competitions (*agones*) or boxing matches (*pugiles*). For his selection criteria: Chamberland 2001, 10, 25-26. Renate Lafer collected 192 African inscriptions that record public games, about 70 more than Chamberland, see Lafer 2009 and Lafer 2007, because she also included epitaphs of performers and curse tablets from the realm of the circus. The pie-chart in Lafer 2007, 184, Plate 51 demonstrates that 49% of her epigraphic material (nearly 100 texts in total) records theatrical performances, 23.6% athletic competition, 15% shows in the amphitheatre, 11.5% circus races and 0.4% other spectacles. Despite the differences in composition of these epigraphic datasets, plays in the theatre appear to be most prevalent in the epigraphic record. It is likely that this epigraphic prominence also reflects the actual prevalence of plays and athletic competitions over the much more expensive amphitheatrical - and circus shows.

401 Hugoniot 2003, 331.

402 Wesch-Klein 1990 also demonstrated that the majority of African inscriptions that record benefactions of games date from the Trajanic era until the reign of the Severans. On the epigraphic habit: MacMullen 1982, 243-4. See also Introduction III.
iconographic habits, but also by patterns of preservation and discovery of inscriptions and mosaics, or by other ancient customs. For example: many of the munera that were once held, with or without venationes, were produced as legal obligations of the sponsoring magistrates, they were regular statutory games and therefore they were normally not recorded on an inscription, which causes an underrepresentation of these events in our epigraphic evidence. We should remember that the production of a munus is only preserved in the epigraphic record when a benefactor received an honorific inscription and statue in return for his generosity (or another virtue), when he himself included information about ‘his’ games in a dedicatory or building inscription, or, but this was very exceptional, when he was commemorated as a munerarius on his epitaph.\footnote{An epitaph from Sufetula (150-200) commemorates a doctor with the name Marcellus, who died at the age of 33, only three days before he would ‘win praise’ with his munus, CIL VIII 241 = 11347; ILS 7801: ‘/ Marcellus hic qui/escit medica nobi/lis arte annis qui fe/re vixit triginta et / duobus sed cum / cuncta parasset / edendo placitu/rus tertium mu/neris ante valida / febre crematus / diem defunctus obi/it’; translation Chamberland, 2001, 294: ‘[…] The distinguished physician Marcellus lies here. He lived about 33 years, but when he had got everything ready to win praise by putting on games, on the third day before the games, he burnt up by powerful fever, he ended his days and died’. See further: Duval 1989, 444-5; Chamberland 2001, 205, 294, no. 381.} Thus, at first glance, the small number of inscriptions that record the production of amphitheatre games in Roman North Africa seem to be in contrast with the number of amphitheatres and the prominence of venatio-scenes in Romano-African art, but actually, it may be the other way around: the amount of epigraphic documents seems to be limited precisely because the provision of arena games was so regular and institutionalised.\footnote{See § 1.2 and App. Table 1 for an overview of the circa 50 African amphitheatres. Carter & Edmondson 2014, 544 and Chamberland 2012, 264-272 for the over- and underrepresentation of statutory games in the epigraphic evidence.} Now, let us take a closer look at the 11 African inscriptions that record the production of venationes, starting with the honorific inscriptions.

**Honorific inscriptions**

Honorific statues were normally set up by a public body, such as the city council, the provincial authorities or a collegium, in order to celebrate the achievements and generosity of important members of the population.\footnote{Fejfer 2008, 41.} The honorific text that accompanied the statue recorded the name, rank, career, benefactions and honours of the portrayed figure, which could be depicted in
civic costume, as a magistrate, as a priest, or in military garment. It was a great honour to receive such a monument in the public space of the town, and the location as well as the size and material of the statue could even increase its symbolic value. By way of introducing the manners in which the benefaction of an amphitheatre show could be ‘repaid’ with the honour of receiving a public monument, which shaped, expressed and confirmed the benefactor’s social identity, we will take a look at an extraordinary honorific monument from third century Lepcis Magna that was set up in honour of Plautius Lupus, *duovir*, *flamen* and producer of three public shows.406 This man was not honoured with a normal statue with inscription, but he received a *biga*, a special monument that depicted him in a two-horse chariot.407 *Bigae* and *quadrigae*, four-horse chariots, were exceptional honorific monuments that clearly distinguished the honourees from men (and women) who received ‘normal’ life-size standing statues.408 Thus, Plautius Lupus was lucky. Unfortunately the *biga* statue itself is not preserved, and the inscription on the front of the rectangular base is badly damaged, but the text on the left side of the block reads:

‘Since all members of the city council are demanding that a two-horse chariot be set up at public expense to Plautius Lupus, one of the best men of our city council, Lucius Cassius Longinus, duovir designate, proposed that action should be taken in this matter and the decision of the city councillors on the actions to be taken in this matter is: Since Plautius Lupus, one of the best men of our city council, willingly undertook the flaminate (priesthood) which was offered to him by universal agreement, and gave very splendid games, and, most remarkably, also served with magnificent liberality in the office of the duumvirate in accordance with the splendid tradition of his family and the status of our colony, and with lavish disposition again gave most splendid games; moreover, not content with this generosity, he ornamented the bathhouse cella with Numidian marbles and mosaic work; subsequently on every occasion he was unusually meritorious, and most recently, when he had been elected as a


407 Private citizens rarely received *bigae*, but when they were awarded, they were not necessarily only for members of the highest social order, Fejfer 2008, 444. Other *bigae* in the epigraphic evidence: e.g. one in Djemila (Le Glay 1955, 169) and two in Italy (Forbis 1996, no. 235 and 318). The emperor Maximian received a *biga* in Thysdrus (*CIL* VIII 22852). *Quadrigae*, four-horse chariots, were normally reserved for emperors, like on the forum in Thamugadi (Zimmer 1989, 50 fig. 22 and p. 40-3), but we also have one for a citizen in Sabratha (*IRT* 117 / *AE* 1925, 103, nr. 10 below).

408 Fejfer 2008, 444.
curator to give a public show in accordance with the bequest of Junius Afer, deceased, splendid man (of senatorial status), he was unsparing of his care and omitted no effort, and having observed the wishes of the honourable council, ensured that the games given were of the most splendid; and since behaviours of this kind ought to be rewarded so that others too could be stimulated to (give) the same pleasure [magnificent games], [therefore,] we decided that a two-horse chariot shall be erected, with public money, to Plautius Lupius, the best men of our city council at a place which he chooses. Plautius Lupus said that he would put it up at his own expense.  

Thus, Plautius Lupus, duovir, flamen and curator muneri, was honoured for several benefactions: the decoration of the bathhouse and the production of games on three occasions, first on account of his flaminate (opulentissimos ludos edidit), then during his duovirate (splendidissimos ludos edidit), and finally as a curator muneri amplifying a testamentary fund (splendidissime munus curaverit). Being depicted in a biga was probably already a fantastic honour in itself and it must have been a welcome confirmation of Plautius Lupus social identity as one of the most generous benefactors in town, but it became even better; Plautius was allowed the privilege to choose the location of his monument himself. He chose the Severan harbour, apparently a public place that attracted many people. And the inscription on the right side of the base indicates that Plautius Lupus demonstrated his exemplary generosity again by indeed paying the biga from his own funds, whereas the council’s plan had been to erect it with public money:  

‘Given that every one of the city councillors is calling for a two-horse chariot appropriate to him to be set up at public expense in honour of

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409 Translation IRT, IRT 601b: ‘[Q]uod expostulantibus universis decurionibus uti Plautio Lupo o(ptimo) o(rdinis) n(ostri) vir(o) biga de pub(lico) collocetur q(uid) d(e) e(a) r(e) f(ieri) p(laceret) c(ensentis) L(uci) Cassi Longini Ilvir(i) desig(nati) q(uid) p(laceret) c(irca) i(d) f(ieri) dec(uriones) i(ta) c(ensuerunt) Cum Plautius Lupus o(ptimus) o(rdinis) n(ostri) vir cum flamonium consensu omnium sibi delatum liberter suscipisset opulentissimos ludos ediderit singu(lariter)q(ue) magnificentissima liberalitate promeruerit in Ilviratus quoq(ue) honore omnia secundum splendorem natalium s[eu]m dignitatem(ue) co(loniae) n(ostri) egerit et [effusissimis adjectibus iterae splendidissimos ludos ediderit nec contentus his liberalitatibus cellam thermar(arum) marmorib(us) Numidicis et opere musaeo exornaverit omni deinde occasione singu(ariter) [p]romeruerit et proxime cum ad munus publ(icum) [e]x t(estado) Iuni Afri c(entarissime) m(emoriae) viri edendum curator ele[c] tus esset sollicitudini laboriq(ue) suo non pepercerit et obseruata amplissimi senatus voluntate splendidissime munus ed curaverit[f] debentque huiusmodi adfectus remunerari ut reliqui quoque ad eandem volup[lat]em sollicitari possint placere Plautio Lupo o(ptimo) o(rdinis) n(ostri) v(iro) [bijgarm de publi(ico) ubi volet colocari pos]se Plau[tius Lupus de suo collocaturum se dixit.’

410 Fagan 1999, 271 argues that the ornamentation of the baths was his most important benefaction.
Plautius Lupus, duumvir last year, on account of his outstanding integrity and modesty and also because of his munificence, Acilius Pompeianus, duumvir, made the proposal: since Plautius Lupus has said, in accordance with his modesty, that he would not burden the city whose people and good faith, and the zeal of the city councillors, for him, he loved; and content with their decision, if they would allow it, he would set it up at his own expense; the city councillors decided thus in accordance with the proposal of Marcius Rufus, perpetual flamen (priest), that Plautius Lupus should erect the two-horse-chariot in his honour in whatever place he wished, at his own expense.\textsuperscript{411}

Unfortunately, the front of the inscription is only fragmentarily preserved, but the texts from the sides that we have seen here, indicate that it was the Lepcitanian city council's decision to award the monument. However, the texts also demonstrate that Plautius Lupus himself had an active role in the process of erecting his biga: he chose its location and paid it with his own money.\textsuperscript{412} It seems likely that he also had some influence on the way in which he was represented, both on the statue and in accompanying inscription, which provided the opportunity to perpetuate the memory of his munera and other benefactions, and thus to express and confirm his own social identity. Thus, even though honorific monuments were strictly not media that were meant for self-representation, they could sometimes be used for it. And the last lines of the inscription on the left side of the base (the first text cited above) indicate that not only the honourees, but also the city councils had an interest in awarding such monuments: they attempted to encourage other wealthy men to take Lupus' generosity as an example to produce equally magnificent games; 'since behaviours of this kind ought to be rewarded so that others too could be stimulated to (give) the same pleasure [magnificent games]'\textsuperscript{411}.  

\textsuperscript{411} Translation IRT, IRT 601c: '[Quod expost]ulantibus uni[versis] dec(urionibus] uti Plau[tio Lupo] [IIvi]r(o) anni praeteriti ob si[nqua]larem integritatem et modes[tiu]m si[mulque] ob munificentiam ei[us p]roximam bigam ei de publ(ico) pon[eret]ur Acilius Pompeianus Ilvir v(era) f(ecit) q(uid) d(e) e(a) r(e) f(ieri) p(laceret) Cum Plautius Lupus secundum[m] v(era) c[u]ndiam suam v(era) f(ecerit) ne oneraret urbem quis p[ubes] f(idem) studium in[:]ecurionum auctoritate ipsorum de suo si permitt[erent] positurum adq(ue) ita in s[e]ntentiam M(arci) Ru[fi] flami[n]i f(ieret) p(laceret) c(ircum) i(d) f(ieri) dec(uriones) c(f)(i)n[s]uorut ut Plautius Lupus sibi bigam quo loco vellet de suo poneret.'

\textsuperscript{412} The front side: IRT 601a: fragment 1: '[…] flamen (priest) / … universi[us ordo qua[…] / […]] / […]vit in verba is[…] / […]nus in testam[entos] / […]de suo […]'. Fragment 2: '[…]QACA[…]/ […]nter ceteras […] / […]nus]\textsuperscript{m TII[…]} […]'. Fragment 3: '[…]adit / […] sint quo / […]sententia]n dixit fide'. Translation IRT, Fragment 1: 'To […] flamen (priest), pontifex (priest) […] the whole city council […] statues on account of his munificence […] ?into words […]nus in accordance with the will […]set this up at his own expense […]' Fragment 2: ' […] among others (feminine) things […]' Fragment 3: ‘[…] by which […] he spoke his opinion in good faith’.

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Even though often, like in this case, only the inscribed bases of honorary statues are preserved, we have to keep in mind that to ancient viewers, at least those who were literate, not only the inscription, but the combination of image, material and text as well as the size and location of the monument constituted a message about the honoured person. In the case of Plautius Lupus’ monument, it was probably not the long text on the base that caught the eye of the passers-by, but the monument itself, the *biga* and Plautius Lupus’ image in the chariot. The location of honorific monuments was also significant: Plautius Lupus chose the west side of the Severan harbour, an area that had recently been redeveloped in the context of the massive Severan building campaign. The *biga*, set up in the newly renovated harbour that was full of imperial triumphal imagery, was a tangible manifestation of Plautius Lupus’ social capital. The monument was part of the euergetic process; it was the ‘profit’ of Lupus’ investments. This example reveals that honourees could have some influence on the location of their monument, and perhaps also the text of the inscription. It is also clear that municipalities attempted to fuel rivalry between donors, who competed with each other to provide the most magnificent benefactions, and receive the most prominent honorific monuments in return.

We have seen that Plautius Lupus was honoured with a *biga*, the crown on his career, because of his diligence and numerous generous gifts to the people of Lepcis Magna. Likewise, honorific inscriptions that record the production of arena shows with hunting shows were never erected on account of the donation of a *venatio* only, but they describe the career of the honouree and enlist all of his public benefactions. In order to assess the importance of animal spectacles in the self-representation of African benefactors, we will take a close look at the exact phrasing of four African honorific inscriptions that commemorate the benefaction of beast hunts in entertainment shows. The earliest of these honours Q. Voltedius Optatus Aurelianus (nr. 1, App. Table 2), a Carthaginian of equestrian rank, and priest for the cult of Nerva, who provided ‘a four-day spectacle in the amphitheatre, of gladiators and African beasts’ upon accepting the office of quinquennial *duovir* at some point in the 130’s. A second honorific monument (nr. 2, App. Table 2) commemorates

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413 E.g.: Woolf 1996, 28; Fejfer 2008, 41.
414 Tuck 2008 on triumphal imagery in the harbours of Ostia and Lepcis Magna.
415 *ILS* 9406; *ILAfr* 390; *IITur* 1050; *AE* 1910, 78: *Q(uinto) Voltedio L(uci) [fil(io) …] / Optato Aureliano [fl(aminii)] / divi Ner(vae) equo pub(lico) adlf[cto a divo] / Traiano et in quinqu(ue) dec(urias) ab [Imp(eratori)] / Caes(are) Hadriano Aug(usto) trib(uno) m[i]l[l(itum) leg(ionis)] / VI Victricis P(iae) F(idelis)
the generosity of Aelius Maximus, also *duovir* in Carthage, who provided ‘a spectacle of gladiators’ and most probably - but the inscription is incomplete here - ‘African beasts’, at some point in the late second or early third century. The decree of the council was carved into the statue base and indicates that the honorific statue was awarded at the instigation of Pompeius Faustinus, patron of Carthage and *duovir quinquennalis*. A third honorific monument is from Lepcis Magna and dates to the third or fourth century. It honours the *eques* Titus Flavius Vibiannus (nr. 3, App. Table 2), ‘most innocent man, irreplaceable leader and lover of his country and fellow-citizens’, who was *duovir* in Lepcis and held several priesthoods. He donated ‘a variety of delights and ten Libyan beasts’, probably a show with lions or leopards.

All of three of these benefactors were honoured for the benefaction of more than one gift; they gave sums of money, apparently more than they were obliged to, gladiator games combined with fights with African or Libyan beasts.

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_Only_...
and ‘other delights’. It is remarkable that these texts do mention the types of beasts that were presented (African beasts, lions or leopards), whereas the information provided about the other elements of the program of these arena shows is not very precise: the first two examples do not record the number of gladiatorial pairs that were presented and the third text specifies that ten Lybian beasts were donated, but the description of the other gifts is vague (‘a variety of delights’). The last example, a honorific inscription that accompanied a biga for a benefactor called Porfyrius from Lepcis Magna (nr. 4, App. Table 2), indicates that he received this monument because he donated four living toothed wild beasts (‘feras dentatas vivas’), by which – I think – real lions or leopards are meant, and not statues of those animals or elephants, as has been suggested. In return for this exceptional gift, Porfyrius received a two-horse chariot statue, like his fellow townsman Plautius Lupus whom we have met before. The base of the biga was a reused miniature honorific arch and the monument was erected on the Punic Market, in the courtyard near the market-building.

To conclude, honorific monuments mention the name and career of the honouree, and often commemorate a series of benefactions, among which spectacles with gladiators and wild African beasts. Even though such monuments were officially set up by public bodies, most often the city council,

419 IRT 603: ‘Amatori patriae et civium suorum quod indulgentia sacra civibus suis feras dentatas quattuor vivas donavit ex decreto splendidissimi ordinis bigam decrev(eru)nt. Porfyri Porfyri’, Translation Tantillo, Bigi et al. 2010, 408-12: ‘To [...] lover of his fatherland and of his fellow-citizens. Because, by sacred indulgence, he donated to his citizens four living toothed wild beasts, they have decreed, by decree of the most splendid council a two-horse chariot. Porfyrius, Porfyrius’. In Inscriptions of Roman Tripolitania, Reynolds & Ward-Perkins 1952, no. 603, ‘feras dentatas vivas’ is translated as ‘living tusked beasts’, which they interpreted as elephants. This interpretation is based on the reliefs of ships that ornament the tetrapylon that carries the inscription, which scholars such as Baratte 1970, 802 n. 3 have taken as evidence that Porfyrius was active in the elephant-trade from sub-Saharan Africa. However, close inspection of the monument demonstrated that this ornament was reused for Porfyrius’ monument and that the ships were connected with an earlier, now erased, inscription, Tantillo, Bigi et al. 2010, 408-12. Similar distinctions between toothed animals and herbivores are also found on other inscriptions, see for instance nr. 8 below and Wesch-Klein 1990, 38 and Wiedemann 1992, 58-9.

420 A few more bigae are known from Africa and two from Italy, see Forbis 1996, no. 235 and 318; Fejfer 2008, 444. A quadriga was erected for a citizen in Sabratha (IRT 117 / AE 1925, 103, nr. 10). Normally these were erected only for the imperial family, see Zimmer 1989, 40-3, fig. 22 and CIL VIII 22852, an inscription from Thysdrus that accompanied a biga for the emperor Maximian.

421 For photos and further information on the statue base and the inscription see: inslib.kcl.ac.uk/irt2009/IRT603 and Tantillo, Bigi et al. 2010, 408-412, no. 50, figs. 7.10-11, 10.57, pl. XVII.
the example of Plautius Lupus indicates that honourees could have some influence on the location of their statue and perhaps also on the text of the inscription. And sometimes the honourees also paid for their own statue and inscription. The games with animal fights that are recorded on these honorific inscriptions appear to be associated with the acceptance of certain offices; that of *duovir* or quinquennial *duuvir*, except perhaps that of Porfyrius about whose career we do not know anything because the inscription is incomplete. The monuments were awarded because these donors gave more than was officially required; large sums of money, ‘a variety of delights’, shows with gladiators and wild beasts, or only *ferae Africanae*. It is remarkable that the texts describe the number and species of the beasts that were donated in some detail (*ferae Libycae, Africanae* and *feras dentatas vivas*), whereas a gladiatorial spectacle is never specified: the quality and expertise of the gladiators are not mentioned. Also, neither of these honorific texts uses the word ‘*venatio*’, hunting spectacle. In fact, the inscriptions do not refer to artificial hunting shows (*venationes*) with deer, hares and boar, but they commemorate only the arena spectacles with the most dangerous and expensive African (or Libyan) beasts: lions and leopards. Even though the sample is small, the lack of details about the gladiators and the emphasis on the species of dangerous beasts may be significant: the donation of fights with Libyan or African animals appear to have been more interesting for their (self-)representation. This preference is probably also connected to the marginalisation of gladiatorial combat and the increasing popularity of hunting shows as independent spectacles in the late second and early third century.

The other producers of *venationes* in our epigraphic corpus are not commemorated on honorific inscriptions awarded by the city council, but had a more active role in perpetuating the memory of ‘their shows’; they themselves listed them on inscriptions that accompanied the building that they had funded (building inscriptions nrs. 5, 6 and 7, App. Table 2) or the statue for a goddess or emperor that they dedicated (dedicatory inscriptions nrs. 3 and 4, App. Table 2). These inscriptions also refer to very wealthy men from the upper classes of municipal society. We will investigate them now.

**Building inscriptions**

Building inscriptions were attached to or carved on buildings. They often start with the name of the emperor or the magistrate who had donated (restoration
of) the building in question. In contrast with honorific inscriptions, the donor of the project had complete control over the text that he would have carved onto his building: he could use this medium to publicly advertise his name, the offices that he held and, most importantly, his investments in the construction, restoration or ornamentation of the building, his benefactions. Sometimes building inscriptions also tell us something about the festivities that accompanied the dedication of the building, plays in the theatre or arena games, banquets or distributions. The production of gladiator fights and *venationes* in the context of dedications of buildings was probably rare, because of the costs. Yet, three African building inscriptions (nrs. 5, 6, 7, App. Table 2) attest the production of games with wild animals during such occasions. In these cases, the buildings that these donors had so generously sponsored were undoubtedly the main benefactions, the games added lustre to their dedication. However, since the donors of these games, the commissioners of these inscriptions, had the freedom to compose the text of the building inscriptions themselves, within the requirements of the genre, we may expect that they exploited the medium to present their gifts, and therewith themselves, as favourable as possible.

The first building inscription that records a *venatio* (nr. 5, App. Table 2) was incised into a - now fragmentary - marble plate from Carthage, at some point in the second century (post Hadrian) and it can be translated as follows:

‘[...] from the ground up, on his own expense, [he built] two woods with statues, he produced [...] for [...] days, he gave also a third porticus that was augmented with two *exedrae*, all [...] he gave, he gave two days of *ludi* in the theatre, that were interrupted by a *venatio* and gladiators, [...] he produced a spectacle of African beasts and gladiators [...]’

And on another fragment:

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422 Keppie 2002, 23.
423 On the function of building inscriptions in self-representation: Eck 1984, 131-2 and Fagan 1996, 91: ‘The commemorative inscription was a vital element in the social contract of euergetism [...] it represented the means by which the social prestige earned by the benefactor for the act of benefaction was publicly recognized’.
424 About the phraseology of African building inscriptions see: Saastamoinen 2010 and for a study of late Roman African urbanism and epigraphic evidence, Sears 2007, ch. 5. And for a recent discussion on the reliability of (re-)building inscriptions, see Thomas & Witschel 1992, 135-177 and contra Fagan 1996, 81-93.
425 *ILAfr* 400 = *ILAfr* 401: ‘... n(ummum) a solo omni sua impen[sa] / [...] duas silvas cum statu[is...] / [...]dileb(us) edid(it) tertiam quoq(ue) portic(um) / [...]exaltatis duab(us) exhedris(!) omni / [cultu [...]BO]...ius ded(it) lud(os) in thea(tro) biduo de[d(iti)] / [...]I interposita venation[e] et gladiator[ibus ...] / [...] spect[a]c(ulum) Aff[ri]c[anar(um) et gladia]lt(orum) edid(it)’.
‘[…] in the a[mphitheatre] […] Colonia Julia Concordia Gallieniana Karthago […] He built the porticus and the pronaus with his own money.’

Two copies of the complete inscription were probably attached to the wall of the porticus and the pronaus that are mentioned in the last fragment. The text lists the benefactions of a donor, whose name and career are unfortunately not preserved: he financed ‘silvas’, probably a parklike complex with statues, three porticoes, the latter of which was probably inaugurated with a two day theatrical show interrupted by gladiator fights and a hunting show, and finally an amphitheatre spectacle with gladiators and African beasts. This inscription and two copies were permanent markers of the donor’s generosity: they indicated not only the identity of the generous benefactor of the park, the porticoes and the pronaus, but also reminded visitors of the festivities that marked their inauguration. These texts and the complex itself were permanent manifestations of the donor’s generosity, the tangible results of his benevolence that earned him prestige and social capital.

Interestingly, this text distinguishes between ‘ludi in theatro interposita venatione et gladiatoribus’, ‘plays in the theatre interrupted with a venatio and gladiators’, on the one hand, and a ‘spectaculum Africanarum et gladiatorum’, ‘a spectacle of African beasts and gladiators’, on the other. Did the venatio in the theatre not include fights against lions and leopards (ferae Africanae)? Were the felids reserved for the spectacle with gladiators? This seems probable, because the use of ‘in theatro’ and ‘interposita’ suggests that the venatio was held in the theatre, instead of the amphitheatre. And we can indeed imagine that a venatio, an artificial hunt, with deer, boar and hares could take place in a theatre, whereas a spectacle with wild African beasts, lions and leopards, would require a more suitable venue, an amphitheatre, with a podium wall that provided protection for spectators and donor. 427 The phrasing of the honorific inscriptions that we have seen above seems to confirm that spectacles with African beasts are distinguished from venationes; they record a ‘spectaculum in amphitheatro gladiatorum et Africanarum’ (nr. 1, App. Table 2) and a ‘spectaculum gladiatorum et Africanarum’ (nr. 2, App. Table 2). A fight with African beasts was more expensive and therefore brought more prestige to the donor than a


427 On venationes held in circuses or theatres, e.g.: Bomgardner 2000, 192-3.
venatio, an artificial hunt, with herbivores, and that is probably why the patrons of these texts emphasised this on their building inscriptions.

Two other African building inscriptions (nrs. 6 and 7, App. Table 2) record a ‘munus gladiatorum et Africanarum’ and ‘ludi cum venatione’ that were part of dedicatory festivities of temples.428 The first (nr. 6) concerns a temple for Concordia built in the Hadrianic era in Ammaedara, and the second commemorates the dedication of a temple for Mars Augustus in Madauros in the third century.429 The Concordia temple was financed by Pinarianus Arator, flamen perpetuus and duovir quinquennalis from Ammaedara who gave it during his priesthood. Pinarianus not only financed the construction, but also furnished the temple with marble, golden ceilings and provided the cult utensils. The dedication was marked with a two day munus with gladiators and African beasts.430 The other building inscription (nr. 7), that from the temple for Mars Augustus in Madauros, was also commissioned by a perpetual flamen, but unfortunately his name is not preserved. He not only erected the temple, paid the summa legitima for the flamenate, and furnished the temple with a statue, but also added lustre to the dedication by presenting ludi with a venatio ‘to the people’ and sportulae (hand-outs) to the decuriones.431

Obviously, we are dealing here with three extremely wealthy individuals who secured a place in public space and public memory in the first place because they funded a temple or a public park with porticoes and in the second place because they enlivened the dedication of these structures with games, plays and distributions, which they also recorded in the inscriptions. The entire corpus of building inscriptions indicates that shows with gladiators

428 Saastamoinen 2010, 362-3.
429 Nr. 6 = AE 1999, 1781, Nr. 7 = ILAlg-1, 2055.
431 ILAlg-1, 2055 Madauros: '[Majr)ii A[uug(usto) s]acrum / [...] Qui[rina] [...]us fla[men perpetuus praeter] / [legitimam] summan [flaman]ii [...] rei p(ublicae) [...] / [...] summa pe[...] statuam(?) [...] / [...]SE cellam a solo ex[t]rixi[...] / [...] et o)b dedicationem ludos cum venat[ione populo et sportulas?] / decurionibus dedit.’ ‘Dedicated to Mars Augustus. [...] of the Quirina tribe, [...]us flamen perpetuus, [...] the legitimate sum for the flamanate, for the town (res publica), [...] sum for a statue, [...] erected [...] in the cella on his own and at its dedication, he gave ludi with a venatio to the people and sportulas to the decurions.’ Hugoniot 2003, 210, 385, 288, 494, 537; Saastamoinen 2010, 361-4 in particular p. 362 n. 2158.
and beasts were rare during dedicatory festivities: theatre plays, boxing matches, banquets and distributions were cheaper and therefore more frequent.\textsuperscript{432} We have also noted that these African building – and honorific inscriptions distinguish \textit{venationes} from spectacles with African beasts: \textit{venationes}, artificial hunts with herbivores, could also be held in the context of \textit{ludi} in the theatre, circus or even in the open air, whereas fights with lions or leopards had to be held in the amphitheatre.

\textbf{Dedicated inscriptions}

Finally, there are two second century African dedicatory inscriptions from the bases of imperial statues that record the dedicant of the statue as a donor of \textit{venationes} (nrs. 8 and 9, App. Table 2). Although these texts do not mention which animals were used, we may assume on the basis of the use of ‘\textit{venatio}’ that these donors presented herbivores, and not \textit{ferae africanae}. The prime purpose of such monuments, for which the \textit{decuriones} had to grant permission, was to honour the emperor, but these texts also offered an opportunity for the donor to present himself and his benefactions.\textsuperscript{433} We may expect, therefore, that the dedicants of these inscriptions attempted to present their gifts in the best possible light. And indeed, M. Cosinius Celerinus, the dedicant of the first inscription (nr. 8), which is preserved on a statue base from a monument for Commodus, set up in Rusicade in 186 of 187, appears to exploit the potential of the medium to boast about the magnificence of a spectacle that he donated:

‘For the health of the emperor Caesar Marcus Aurelius Commodus Antoninus Augustus Pius Sarmaticus Germanicus Britannicus Felix, father of the country, pontifex maximus, in his 12\textsuperscript{th} year of tribunician power, in the seventh year of his reign, during his fifth consulship. Marcus Cosinius Celerinus, son of Marcus, of the Quirina tribe, promised and produced a \textit{munus} of gladiators and a \textit{venatio} of various sort, toothed beasts, tamed [animals] and also herbivorous [animals] in the colony of Veneria Rusicade at his own expense.’\textsuperscript{434}

\textsuperscript{432} Saastamoinen 2010, 362.
\textsuperscript{433} Van Nijf 2000, 23.
\textsuperscript{434} CIL VIII 7969 + p.967 + 19851; ILS 399; ILAlg II 17, Rusicade, 186-7: ‘Pro salute / Imp(eratoris) Caes(aris) M(arci) Aureli / Commodi Antonini Aug(usti) Pi(etri) Sarm(atici) Ger(manici) / Britt(annici) Fel(ici) p(atriae) pont(ifici) max(imi) tr(ibunicia) p(otestate) XII imp(eratoris) VII / co(n)s(ulibus) V munus gladiat(orium) et venat(ionem) vari(i) gen(ericum) / dentatar(um) f(erae) et
Here it becomes clear that the terminology used in our epigraphic corpus is not consistent: Celerinus’ private munus that he immortalised on this monument for the emperor Commodus, consisted of both gladiatorial combat and a venatio, with not only tamed animals and herbivores, but also toothed beasts, most likely large felids. Apparently, the word ‘venatio’ was also used for hunting shows with felids, but the emphasis on the variety of different species is remarkable: thus Celerinus probably underlined the fact that he provided tamed animals and herbivores as well as the more expensive large cats (see § 2.1) in order to impress the viewers of this monument with the scale of his games.

The last inscription (nr. 9, App. Table 2) that we will discuss is very interesting, but unfortunately only the left half is preserved, and the reconstruction of the text is uncertain (App. Inscr. Nr. 9). It concerns a second century dedicatory inscription of a statue put up by T. Flavius Caelestinus from Theveste. According to the reconstructed text, he dedicated statues to Caelestis and Virtus and a silver statue of Asclepius and stipulated that the interest of the 50,000 HS that he invested was to be used for a banquet every year on his birthday, a form of self-commemoration. The third and fourth line of the inscription have been reconstructed by the editors of the CIL as ‘munus quinque diebus cum occisionibus ferarum edidit’, ‘a munus of five days

\[\text{mansuet(arum) item herbat(icarum) / M(ARCUS) Cosinius M(ARCI) F(ILIIUS) Quir(ina) Celerinus / in colon(onia) Vener(a) Ruscade de sua pec(ania) / promisit edidit.}\]

\(435\) A similar clever technique to immortalise one’s munus on a dedicatory inscription is found on a base from Cirta in Numidia. The text indicates that the triumvir L. Scantius Iulianus erected a statue out of the revenue from entrance fees of his munus. Even though the show was given ‘in return for the honour of triumvir’, and the fact that the benefactor collected some revenues, both munus and the statue are presented as private benefactions, ‘de liberalitate sua’, CIL VIII 6995, Cirta, late second century A.D.: ‘Divo Pertinac / Aug(usti) patri / L(ucius) Scantius L(uci) fil(ius) Quir(ina) / Iulianus eq(uo) pub(lico) / exornatus statuam / quam promisit / ex reditibus locorum amp(h)ithe/atri dei muneris / quem de libera/litate sua ob ho/norem IIIvira/tus edidit dedit’, ‘To the divine Pertinax Augustus father. Lucius Scantius Iulianus, son of Lucius, of the Quirina tribe honoured with a public horse, gave this statue which he had promised (to erect) with revenues from seats in the amphitheatre on the day of his munus, which he produced out of his own generosity in return for the honour of triumvir.’ Translation and discussion: Chamberland 2007, 144 and Wiedemann 1992, 17.

\(436\) Celerinus was a member of a prominent African family, the Cosini: Láng 2007, 825-7.


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with the killing of wild beasts’ (App. Inscr. nr. 9). The idea that this fight included the killing of wild animals, whereas in other shows the animals may not always have been killed, which made them re-usable and lowered the costs of a *venatio*, is attractive, but we cannot be certain that it concerns a fight against wild animals, because the reconstruction is uncertain and the word ‘*ferarum*’ is not preserved.438

To conclude: almost 40 African inscriptions mention the production of shows with gladiators (*munera*), but we have investigated only 11 of these, the ones that specify that the games included also *venationes* or fights with *ferae africanae*. As noted before, this small group of honorific -, building – and dedicatory inscriptions by no means reflects the importance and frequency of arena shows in the towns of Roman Africa; in most towns, and certainly in large cities such as Lepcis Magna and Carthage, several months per year were filled with religious festivals and public entertainment, events that probably featured also a number of shows with gladiators and *venationes*.439

The four honorific inscriptions that we have investigated were not awarded solely because the honourees provided sensational wild animal shows, but to honour them for a whole range of benefactions; the restoration or decoration of public buildings or the donation of large sums of money (on top of the *summa honoraria*). Even though these honorific monuments were officially erected by the city council or another public body, the example of Plautius Lupus indicates that honourees could have some influence on, for instance, the location of their statue. With this in mind, it is remarkable that the animal shows are described in quite some detail on the honorific inscriptions and that only arena spectacles with African or Libyan wild beasts (lions or leopards) are commemorated, and not the less spectacular ‘true’ *venationes*, hunting spectacles with herbivores. Was the donation of a *venatio* with herbivores less useful for the donor’s self-representation than a show with African beasts? The five building- and dedicatory inscriptions seem to confirm this pattern: these texts provided more opportunities for donors to take the public advertisement of their benefactions in their own hands and we have seen that also these inscriptions put more emphasis on the species of animals that

438 Hugoniot 2003, 337 accepts the reconstructed text and uses this inscription as an example for the independence of *venationes* from gladiatorial combat, which he argues is typical for Africa Proconsularis.
439 Stern 2012, 431-75 on calendars; Cameron 2011, 169.
were used and clearly distinguish *munera* with African beasts from *venationes*, artificial hunts with herbivores.

Despite the limited size of this epigraphic sample, we may conclude that one-to-one combat between a *venator* and an ‘African beast’, a lion or a leopard, brought more prestige and social capital than a *venatio* with herbivores or a performance with tamed animals (see further § 4.2). This must be related to the prices of the different wild beasts; as we have seen in chapter 2 felids were much more expensive than herbivores (see § 2.1). And of course the danger that a lion or a leopard represented and the excitement over a fight against such a mighty animal, also greatly increased their value with regard to the self-representation of editors. However, on inscriptions the possibilities for benefactors to construct the memory of their beast fight and thus materialise the ‘return’ of their benefactions were limited. In the third and the fourth century, benefactors therefore appear to have turned to another, probably more convenient and certainly more illustrative medium that could preserve the memory of their games: the multi-coloured floor mosaics, sometimes with texts, that they placed in their villas or baths.

3.2.2 Hunting spectacles on floor mosaics

‘A freedman of the same prince [Nero], on the occasion of his exhibiting a show of gladiators at Antium, had the public porticos hung, as everybody knows, with paintings, in which were represented genuine portraits [of the gladiators] and the assistants. Indeed, at this place, there has been a very prevailing taste for paintings for many ages past. C. Terentius Lucanus was the first who had combats of gladiators painted for public exhibition: in honour of his grandfather, who had adopted him, he provided thirty pairs of gladiators in the Forum, for three consecutive days, and exhibited a painting of their combats in the Grove of Diana.’

This fragment from the work of Pliny indicates that the use of art, in this case painting, as a way of representing and thus commemorating an amphitheatre show in the semi-public realm, was well-known in Italy. And in his description of Trimalchio’s house, Petronius tells us that such pictures also

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441 On this fragment and this practice see also Wiedemann 1992, 15 and below, § 4.2.
ornamented a private villa, only in this case the gladiatorial show that was represented on a painting in the hall, next to ‘The Iliad and the Odyssey’ was not given by Trimalchio himself, but by a certain Laenas. In late antique Roman North Africa, domestic floor mosaics appear to have had the same function: thus far circa 50 floors with venatorial imagery have been found. Some of these pavements depict exciting episodes of fights against wild beast or artificial hunts, others represent the capture and transport of wild animals for the arena and yet others display standard, ready-made images of wild animals that were probably meant to illustrate how many beasts of different species an editor had presented. On many of these floors there were also texts; often only the number or names of the depicted wild beasts and *venatores* were indicated, but sometimes longer texts allow us to reconstruct the intention of the person who commissioned the pavement in more detail. Unfortunately, the archaeological context of many of the African *venatio*-floors was only rarely recorded at the time of discovery. However, their size, subject matter and the added texts suggest that most of these pavements are from semi-private contexts, probably the reception- and dining rooms of houses and villas where guests and clients could see them. The persons who commissioned and paid for the floors, the patrons, must have been the driving forces behind the popularity of the *venatio*-theme: they chose what was represented on their floors. Scenes from the theatre and particularly the circus were also popular themes on African floor mosaics, but – as noted before - gladiatorial combat is remarkably absent: thus far, only two African mosaics with gladiators are known, that from a villa in Bar Duc Amméra in Tripolitania nearby modern

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443 A list of all the African *venatio*-mosaics is provided in Hugoniot 2003, III, 9-50, see also supra n. 8, n. 159 and n. 259. We also have African wall paintings that depict *venationes*, those from the Hunting Baths in Lepcis Magna (App. ill. 20 see p. 163-5 below). This practice may well have been common, but not more of such paintings are preserved.


446 Other important factors were the mosaicists’ artistic repertoire and skills, the size and function of the room and the available budget.
Zliten (App. ill. 1), and that from a Villa at Lepcis Magna (App. ill. 2).\textsuperscript{447} Although especially the date of the Zliten floor is subject to debate, most scholars believe that both of these pavements should be dated to the late first or early second century, thus considerably earlier than the \textit{venatio} mosaics that were in vogue, particularly in Africa Proconsularis, from the Severan period until the fifth century.\textsuperscript{448} This absence of gladiators on late antique African floor mosaics seems to be in keeping with the marginalisation of gladiator games in North Africa in the second and third century, and the related increasing popularity of \textit{venationes} in the late antique period (see § 1.2).\textsuperscript{449}

Katherine Dunbabin dedicated an entire chapter of \textit{The Mosaics of Roman North Africa} to \textit{venationes}, and distinguished two functions of the wild animal mosaics; either, the figures were subjected to a formal arrangement and the purpose of the whole was principally decorative, or, figures were represented for informative purposes.\textsuperscript{450} The Magerius floor (App. ill. 3) that we have seen before and will investigate in more detail below, certainly belongs in the second category, but floors such as that from the Maison de Bacchus in Thysdrus (App. ill. 17), which represents Dionysus surrounded by fighting beasts, may be placed in the first group. However, this distinction between decorative and informative is somewhat artificial: both types of floors were intended as decoration, and the fact that a deity is depicted does not mean that the floor from Thysdrus was not informative. After all, it can refer to an event that actually took place; it is well known that some shows featured performers that were dressed up as gods.\textsuperscript{451} Furthermore, \textit{venatio}-mosaics were not only decorative or commemorative, but they also had entertainment value; they


\textsuperscript{448} On the date of the Zliten floor: Aurigemma 1926; Ville 1963; Dunbabin 1978, 235-7; Parrish 1985, 137-158; Coleman 1990; Kondoleon 1991; Brown 1992; Vismara 2007; Hoek, van den & Herrmann 2013, 413-5. The unusually explicit frieze-like ‘Zliten-mosaic’ runs around the central portion of a quadrangular floor. It represents a variety of routines that could be performed during a \textit{munus}: gladiator fights, \textit{venationes} and beast fights, \textit{taurokathapsia} or \textit{contomonobolon} (acrobatic routines with bulls) and public executions with lions or leopards (‘\textit{ad bestias}’). See also: amphi-theatrum.de/1424 and www.mediterranees.net/art_antique/oeuvres/zliten.

\textsuperscript{449} On the prevalence of animal shows over gladiatorial combat see also: Dunbabin 1978, 65. The discrepancy between the popularity of \textit{venationes} and the virtual absence of depictions of gladiators is not specific for mosaics, but also applies to other media from Africa, such as decorated fine ware, and appears to be in keeping with the more detailed description of \textit{venationes} in comparison to gladiator fights in inscriptions that we have noticed in § 3.2.1.

\textsuperscript{450} Dunbabin 1978, 7.

\textsuperscript{451} Coleman 1990.
were intended to please host and guests, they were exciting and attracted attention.\textsuperscript{452} Some of the \textit{venatio} mosaics from North Africa can certainly be characterised as violent entertainment: they represent the most exciting and bloody episodes of the fights, such as the instant of fatal wounding of a wild animal (App. ill. 18), powerful beasts attacking each other (App. ill. 1 west side), felids charging \textit{damnati} (App. ill. 1 west side and App. ill. 19) and also, on a wall painting from the Hunting Baths in Lepcis Magna, \textit{venatores} that are wounded (App. ill. 20). Finally, the reasons to depict particular scenes may have been of a more personal nature, such as affiliation with a specific \textit{venator} or team of \textit{venatores}, which appears to be the case in the Maison des Autruches in Hadrumetum where the beast-hunter Neoterius has a prominent place (App. ill. 4B and § 4.2).\textsuperscript{453}

As explained in the introduction of this book, the model for the interpretation of mosaics proposed by Sarah Scott will serve as the starting point for our investigation of self-representation through mosaic floors that represent wild beast fights.\textsuperscript{454} Scott’s model starts from the premise that material culture is a communicative symbolic field that is structured in relation to social strategies and power relations.\textsuperscript{455} According to this model, mosaics could be used as instruments for self-representation, identity formation and status-enhancement: they were not mere reflections of society but were active within, and integral to, social relations.\textsuperscript{456} The floors served as permanent reminders of munificence, but in a way also ‘restaged’ the \textit{munera}: through these floors, visitors, also those who had not actually been present at the show, could (re-)experience a beast fight long after it had taken place. In fact, today, more than 1500 years later, we still can. Glamorisation of the events is to be expected, and we cannot be sure whether the story that the mosaics tell, is the ‘real’ story, but neither could most viewers in antiquity. What is important is not what actually happened during the show, but what the commissioners chose to represent, what not, and why? How did benefactors construct their own image, social identity and the memory of ‘their’ games through these mosaics? And do we find the same distinction between \textit{venationes} and spectacles with African beasts that we encountered in the epigraphic material?

\textsuperscript{452} Brown 1992, 208.
\textsuperscript{454} Introduction III; Scott 1993, 103-114.
\textsuperscript{455} Scott 1993, 103-4.
\textsuperscript{456} Brown 1992, 182; Kondoleon 1999, 323.
We cannot investigate all African *venatio*-mosaics, but by examining three types of *venatio*-pavements in detail, firstly the Magerius mosaic, secondly, animal catalogue pavements and finally, the capture and transport mosaics, we will be able to analyse how this cultural performance shaped and thus confirmed the social identity of its editor and how mosaics were used in this process. We will start with Magerius, who has been mentioned several times already, and finally investigate his floor in detail.

**The Magerius mosaic**

As noted before, the third century Magerius mosaic from Smirat in Tunisia must be the best known ancient depiction of a *venatio*; it features in almost every handbook on the Roman games and munificence (App. ill. 3). On the basis of the text (see below) it is generally accepted that this floor commemorates a historical beast-fight provided by a man called Magerius. It will become clear that the mosaic is not an objective report of the show, but a cleverly designed work of art that manages to communicate a very specific message through the combination of text and image.

The Magerius mosaic represents four *venatores* that are fighting four leopards. In the bottom left, a *venator* on stilts named Spittara is attacking a jumping leopard called Victor (App. ill. 3B). Blood gushes from the animal’s neck. Next to this scene are two *venatores*, Bullarius and Hilarinus, stabbing the leopard Crispinus that is lying on the sand, bleeding from several wounds. The opposite side of the mosaic depicts another *venator*, Mamertinus, who is jabbing a third leopard, Romanus. Behind Mamertinus is the fourth leopard, Luxurius, apparently eliminated, bleeding heavily from its chest. In the centre of the floor, we find a small, naked figure with a red cape, sandals and a staff with a crescent. On the basis of the clothing, the attributes and parallels with other mosaics – note for instance App. ill. 17 – it is assumed that this is

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458 Beschaouch 1966, 148; Dunbabin 1978, 67. Lane Fox 2006, 676-7 suggests a date between 260 and 280, but his criteria for this dating are not clear. Unfortunately, not much is known about the archaeological context of the mosaic: the find circumstances were not recorded when the floor was excavated in the 1960’s. Since no settlement was found, a number of scholars suggested that the pavement adorned an important room with several entrances, perhaps the *frigidarium* of private baths in a villa complex, see: Bomgardner 2009, 167.
Dionysus, who was syncretised in North Africa with the Punic deity Shadrapa, in Latin known as Liber Pater. The suggestion that this figure represents a deity, or an actor dressed up as a god, which was common practice in Roman entertainment spectacles, is supported by the identification of the female figure on the other side of the mosaic as the hunting goddess Diana. She is wearing hunting boots, a short tunic and a tiara, and carries a quiver of arrows slung over her back and a long stalk of millet. The association of the hunting goddess with venationes is not surprising and commonly occurs on mosaics.

The text on the floor refers to the donor of this leopard fight and commissioner of this mosaic: Magerius. He is probably depicted in the right upper corner of the floor. Unfortunately the pavement is damaged here: only the head, the point of a staff and part of the upper body are preserved. It is clear, however, that this figure is larger than the others. The extant clothing, a large and colourful garment with long sleeves, and his pose - not fighting but apparently looking straight at the viewer of the floor - suggest that this man is not a fifth fighter, but Magerius himself. The text ‘Mageri’, that is placed right above the figure’s head and on the other side of the floor upside down, appears to serve as a name label. At the same time, it records the crowd’s acclamations during or after the fights. The viewer’s attention is directed towards the centre of the floor, where a servant with a tray full of money bags with the symbol ∞ is represented. The text reads:

Magerius! Magerius!

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."

Then it was shouted out: “May your munus be an example for future generations [of benefactors], may past generations hear about a munus like yours! From whom did we ever receive such a show? When was such a show ever staged before? You will put on the spectacle by the example of the quaestors! You will pay the show with your own money! This is your day!”

461 Note for instance that from the triclinium of Sollertiana Domus in Thysdrus which depicts a shrine of Diana surrounded by amphitheatre animals, Dunbabin 1978, 46, 259, pl. X nr. 20.
462 Beschaouch 1966.
463 Ibid., 147.
Magerius gives [the money].

“This is what it is to be rich! This is what it is to have power! This is it! It is night already. They are to be sent away from your munus with their sacks [of money]!” 464

The depictions and the text appear to provide a verbatim account of what was shouted during Magerius’ show and to record precisely what happened, but the floor is, of course, a carefully constructed re-performance of the event and Magerius is telling us precisely what suits him best.465 The admiring chants are put into the mouths of the cheering crowds (‘Adclamatum est’) and are intended to demonstrate the splendour of the games and the enthusiasm of the spectators, on the one hand, and the donor’s benevolence and his willingness to provide good entertainment to the people, on the other. 466 The text also gives a sense of the rivalry between donors of venationes that we have also seen in the epigraphic evidence (§ 3.2.1): the show is presented as surpassing the splendour and attraction of previous games and as an example for future munerarii.467 Magerius is boasting and the aim of the floor is clear: it is a memento with which he aims to impress his guests. The explicit recording of the names of the animals and the venatores, who were part of a famous team, the Telegenii, was perhaps also intended to impress the viewer and to demonstrate Magerius’ affiliation with this group of beast-fighters (more about


465 That the chants must have been habitual and standard can be confirmed by the appearance of similar texts on other mosaics and inscriptions, for instance: ‘Sadunti ob merita missos sacco’, on an inscription from Theveste, CIL VIII 1884, see also: Beschaouch 1985, 454-6 and Briand Ponsart 1999, 144. The Sadunti may have been a team of venatores like the Telegenii, see further on these teams § 4.3. On acclamations: Roueché 1984, 183.

466 Fagan 2011, 131; and specifically Roueché 1984 on the status and function of acclamations in late Roman society in general and a set of acclamatory texts in honour of a local benefactor, Albinus, in Aphrodias in Caria. On Magerius: Roueché 1984, 183. Roueché thinks that the audiences in Roman theatres (and amphitheatres) were able to produce quite complex phrases in unison, without rehearsal or guidance, Roueché 1984, 184.

467 It is debated whether the text refers to the quaestors in Rome, the officials responsible for the production of gladiator games, or municipal quaestors: e.g. Fagan 2011, 131 n. 22, who favours the latter, and Beschaouch 1966, 143 who states that it must be the quaestors in Rome, because provincial quaestors did not give games. A venatio-mosaic now in the Bardo Museum that will be discussed below (App. ill. 5) presents a parallel for this case: the inscription ‘mel quaestura’, AE 1953, 145, is interpreted as melior quaesturae, ‘better than [the games of] the quaestors’.
the Telegenii above in § 2.3 and below in § 4.3). However, the key message of the mosaic seems to lie in the central section, where we find the servant presenting the money. This image and the surrounding text should be interpreted together: according to the first part of the text, the Telegenii would receive 500 denarii per leopard, but the symbol ∞ on the money bags indicates that Magerius doubled this amount and instead paid 1000 denarii per animal. This, allegedly unexpected, generosity, which is indicated by both the money bags and the words ‘Magerius donat’, probably evoked a sudden and final outburst of the crowd; ‘This is what it is to be rich! This is what it is to have power!’ By visualising the payment, and explicitly mentioning that Magerius paid more than was required, the floor puts great emphasis on the financial aspect: it is through this highly original combination of text and image that the designer of the floor managed to get Magerius’ message across. By visualising on this floor the venatio, the crowd’s enthusiasm and gratitude and the honour that they paid him, Magerius materialised and perpetuated the ‘return’ of his investment and shaped his own social identity.

Animal catalogue pavements

Magerius’ mosaic is exceptionally informative because of the combination of image and (long) text, but there are a number of other African venatio-mosaics that allow us to analyse how donors of beast fights attempted to perpetuate the memory of their shows and create their image through mosaics. One of them is the ‘Mel Quaestura’ mosaic from Carthage (App. ill. 5). This floor was found in a house near the amphitheatre in Carthage and is dated to the second half of the third century. The centre of this pavement represents six leopards, each in a different position, and on either side of them, separated by millet stalks, are various other animals; bears, ostriches, antelopes, moufflon rams, fallow deer, boar and an addax. The beasts in the left and right section are notably smaller than the leopards, and are represented in standard poses, which confirms the use of stock images from copy-books.

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468 Fanhood and rivalry between teams of venatores and their supporters will be discussed in the next chapter, § 4.3.
469 Beschaouch 1966, 143 n. 4; Fagan 2011, 131. The teams of venatores, of which the Telegenii are best known, will be discussed in § 4.3.
As on Magerius’ floor, the most interesting aspects of this mosaic are the texts, or actually, the combination of image and text. Some sections of the pavement are damaged, but on detailed photos of the remaining parts, we can see that some of the beasts have numbers on their flanks: to the right of the leopards (App. ill. 5), for instance, we see an ostrich with the inscription ‘N XXV’, a bear inscribed with ‘N XL’ and a moufflon ‘N X’. ‘N’ stands for ‘numerus’, ‘number’; the signs represent the number of animals that were displayed of each species: 25 ostriches, 40 bears and ten moufflons. The right section also represents fragments of a fallow deer and a boar. On the left half of the floor we can discern another bear (‘N XXX’), moufflon (‘N VT’) and an antelope (‘N XV’) and fragments of another boar, ostrich, fallow deer and a bull and an addax. 472 The numbers on the animals’ flanks effectively communicate the quantity and variety of different species that were provided: in total 139 animals of nine different species are recorded. Their size and central position on the floor indicates that the six leopards, after lions the most expensive commonly used animals in beast-fights, were the main attraction of the show, as we have seen on the price edict and in the epigraphic material (see § 2.1 and § 3.2.1). In between the two upper leopards, right in the middle of the mosaic, there is another inscription: ‘mel quaesturae’, which should probably be interpreted as ‘melior quaesturae’, ‘better than [the games of] the quaestors’ (App. ill. 5).473 This text, which reminds us of the acclamations of the crowd on Magerius’ floor, indicates that the commissioner of this floor like Magerius participated in the competition and rivalry between donors of amphitheatres shows, a phenomenon that we have also encountered on the inscription on Plautius Lupus’ biga (§ 3.2.1). As on some of the inscriptions that we have seen above, this donor underlined the number and variety of wild animals that he provided and also clearly distinguished the ferae africanae from the herbivores, whereas Magerius’ floor clearly emphasised the reactions of the spectators and the generosity of the donor.

A number of similar mosaics - Dunbabin calls them ‘animal catalogue pavements’ - from the third century have been found in and nearby Carthage. 474 These floors typically represent schematically arranged beasts in standard poses, which probably indicates that they are taken from ‘stock books’

472 AE 1953, 145. Dunbabin 1978, 72 suggests that the 2 bears and 2 moufflons, which were displayed in different numbers, represent 2 different varieties of the same beast.
473 The significance of another, fragmentary, inscription in the top left corner of the floor, ‘…LETI M…’, is unknown.
and combined according to the wishes of the commissioner. Like on the ‘Mel Quaestura’ floor, numbers on the flanks of the beasts can indicate the numbers in which each species fought in the arena, and often the animals’ names are also mentioned. The plain, sandy-coloured background could suggest the sand of the arena, but apart from this, no spatial settings are indicated. A good example of such animal catalogue pavements is a T-shaped floor from the triclinium of a house in ancient Maxula, modern Radès along the bay of Tunis (App. ill. 7).475 This pavement, that is contemporary to the Mel Quaestura floor, represents an ostrich, two boars and a bull with the inscription ‘N XVI’ on its flank, which probably indicates that the venatio featured 16 bulls. The bears Nilus, Fedra, Aleksandria, Simplicius, Gloriosus and Braciatus appear to be tamed animals (mansuetae): in the centre we see Fedra climbing a pole.476 According to Dunbabin, this scene represents an acrobatic routine in which a man was chased by a beast and escaped through climbing.477 At the time of discovery, a fragment in the left upper corner of the floor, contained the inscription ‘LUSIUS MORINUS’, unfortunately, at present only the letters ‘MORI’ are preserved.478 Lusius Morinus may be the munerarius who wished to perpetuate the memory of his spectacle with this floor. It was suggested that he was represented in the left upper corner of the floor, but unfortunately this section is not preserved.479 In this case, not the variety of species, or the numbers in which they were displayed were emphasised (except for the bulls), but the names of the bears, perhaps because these animals were part of a well-known bear troupe. It has become clear that the animal catalogue pavements were a relatively simple, but effective medium for the commemoration of beast fights. The use of stock images of animals and the addition of inscriptions enabled the designer of the mosaic to quickly compose a floor according to his client’s wishes and to produce the floor with many beasts at relatively low cost.

The early fourth century black-and-white ‘Fortuna Redux mosaic’ from the great baths in Theveste is based on the same principle (App. ill. 6). The upper register of this pavement depicts a ship loaded with amphorae, sea monsters and the inscription ‘FORTUNA REDUX’.480 Below the ship there are

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475 Poinssot & Quoniam 1952, 156; Dunbabin 1978, 72-3.
476 ILAfr 350.
477 Dunbabin 1978, 72. We will come back to the use of famous troupes of tamed animals, acrobatic routines and teams of venatores in § 4.2 and § 4.3.
478 ILAfr 350 and on the photo in Dunbabin 1978, Plate XXIV 58.
479 Dunbabin 1978, 73.
480 CIL VIII 16667 (p 2732) = ILAlg I 3097; Dunbabin 1978, 74, 126, 272, pl. 59.
two bulls and underneath them, in the third register, there is an athletic victory scene: on the left, we can discern the athlete Marcellus holding a palm-branch after his victory and on the right there is an arbiter or judge who is wearing a long tunic. The lower part of the floor presents an animal catalogue-like account of the *venationones* that were apparently held in combination with athletic games: four oppositely oriented square panels contain depictions of animals whose uniform size, position and shadows clearly indicate that they are copy-book images. From left to right, there are a boar with the number VIII, a gazelle with number II, an ostrich with the inscription ‘CURI[S]/XT’ and a bull with number X. Like on the other animal catalogue pavements that we have discussed, the numbers indicate how many animals of each species were displayed: eight boars, two gazelles, 11 ostriches and ten bulls. It is usually assumed that this floor, which combines various well known iconographic motifs in a rather chaotic composition, commemorates the athletic and venatorial games that were presented by an unknown donor on the occasion of the safe return of a trading vessel. The inscription ‘CURIS XT’ may refer to the municipal *curiae* of Theveste, and the provenance of this floor, the public baths of Theveste, may indicate that this mosaic was not a semi-private memento of a show, like the pavements that we have seen before, but a ‘monument’ of a more public nature.

**Capture and transport mosaics**

In chapter 2, we have seen that the process of ordering and obtaining wild beasts was complicated; producing *venationones* required not only time, but also financial investments and access to networks of hunters, transporters and traders of wild beasts. The last two African *venatio*-pavements that we will investigate in this chapter represent this preparatory process; a floor from the Maison d’Isgunthus at Hippo Regius (App. ill. 11) and a pavement from the Dermech quarter in Carthage (App. ill. 13). The fact that the capture and transport of *venatio*-animals is represented on mosaic pavements demonstrates that also the preparations for a hunting show were a culturally significant feature.

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481 Dunbabin 1978, 74 states that there was a fifth panel which contained a bear and the number XVIII, but this is not visible on the photo in her catalogue nor on the drawing in Reinach 1922, 259.

482 Dunbabin 1978, 74. The floor is also mentioned in Remijsen 2015, 161.

483 About the possibility that ‘CURIS’ refers to the municipal *curiae*: Kotula 1968, 63 n. 45 who concludes that the evidence is too meagre to confirm this.
aspect of the cultural performance. We will see that these floors are not necessarily realistic reconstructions of the process of capturing and transporting wild beasts, but works of art that may have been intended to visualise the house owner’s involvement in the production of a hunting spectacle, but at the same time represented the mystery and luxury associated with exotic beasts and alluded to the cultural significance of hunting as a typically aristocratic pastime.

We will start with the hunting scene from the Maison d’Isguntus (App. ill. 11), which is also known as Maison de la Pêche or Villa du front de Mer, from Hippo Regius in Numidia.\(^{484}\) Whereas the other rooms in this house were decorated with mosaics of fishing scenes, hence the name Maison de la Pêche, nereids riding on sea monsters and muses the pavement from a room of unknown function on the upper level of the house represents the hunt and capture of animals for the amphitheatre. This floor is usually dated between 310 and 330.\(^{485}\) The centre of the floor depicts two beaters on horseback that are driving three leopards, a lion and a lioness, towards a semicircle of men with speers, shields and torches. Nets covered with branches are spread in order to drive the felids into a cage on the right. In the centre of the circle, a man is attacked by one of the leopards. Several other scenes have been added in the corners of the floor: on the right a row of empty cages and a hunter on horseback who attempts to capture an onager with his lasso. Above and to the right of the central scene three enclosures with deer, cows and sheep, animals that were, according to Dunbabin, used as bait to lure the felids, a tactique that we have also seen in § 2.3.\(^{486}\) On the left, two men are hunting ostriches and antelopes, and a cage is laden on to a cart. In the right lower corner, we find a tent and a slave who is serving drink and preparing food, while two hunters are enjoying a picnic. The landscape consists of trees, rocks, bushes and plants and is clearly intended to represent a natural setting and not an arena context.

As we have seen in § 2.3, the hunting technique that is represented on this floor, a drive hunt, was probably too dangerous and not effective for capturing felids – as the leopard attack in the centre seems to suggest. The use of bait, the corralled cattle, and cages with trapdoors, which are also depicted on this mosaic, was probably more effective. As Dunbabin explained, this

\(^{484}\) Dunbabin 1978, 262. The house is called after a monumental mosaic with inscription ‘Isgunte nika’ that was found in one of the other rooms.

\(^{485}\) Ibid., 55, 262, pl.29; Inv. Alg. 45.

\(^{486}\) Ibid., 55.
pavement depicts a number of standard motifs and combines them in an interesting composition as if they occurred simultaneously: the baiting, driving and finally the capturing of the felids. The drive-hunt composition in which the semicircle formed by hunters and nets frames the scene is also well-known from other African mosaic floors (e.g. App. ill. 21). This floor may not be a realistic representation of the hunt and capture of wild beasts for *venationes*, but it contains some elements, such as the use of cages and bait to lure the felids that are probably realistic. It is with this combination of images of hunting parties in the countryside, the pastime of the landed elite, and the capture of wild beasts for *venationes*, a lucrative, but complicated activity that required influential contacts and the experience and expertise of professional hunters, that the owner of this house apparently felt that he could impress his visitors and construct his own social identity. And apart from this, the composition of the mosaic, with the most exciting episode (the leopard-attack) at the centre, and many other interesting scenes around it, makes it a very lively and attractive work of art.

The second mosaic in the capture and transport-group is the ‘Dermech-mosaic’, called after the district in Carthage where it was discovered (App. ill. 13). This pavement was found in a rectangular room with an apsidal end of an otherwise unidentified building and depicts various hunting scenes and the shipment of wild animals. The subject matter and a number of scenes on the floor bear strong parallels to the ‘Great Hunt mosaic’ from the *ambulatio* at the Villa del Casale at Piazza Armerina in Sicily (App. ill. 8) and dates to the same period, the early fourth century, but the composition is more chaotic. The mosaic represents several scenes in which carnivores attack herbivores and humans and others in which men hunt and capture a lioness, a leopard, a fox and a boar. In the upper register, two hunters await the capture of a lioness in a cage with trapdoor while a lion hides in a cave behind them. Underneath a

487 Dunbabin 1978, 55.
489 Dunbabin 1978, 53. The mosaic from the *ambulatio* of the great hunt in the Villa del Casale will not be investigated in detail here, because although there are indications that this floor was laid by Carthaginian mosaicists, it is not from Roman North Africa. Given its importance, however, some photos and a description are included in the appendix, App. ill. 8. See Carandini 1967, 105-108; Carandini et al. 1982; Dunbabin 1978, 196-212; Wilson 1982, 413 and Wilson 1983, ch. 2 for discussions about the possibility that all the mosaics at Piazza Armerina were made by a single Carthaginian workshop rather than by mosaicists from several different ‘schools’.
tree, an elephant is struggling with a large snake. The main focus of the floor is on the centre, where wild beasts are loaded onto a ship. Some of the motifs that the mosaicist of this floor combined are also known from the Villa del Casale floor, note for instance the two men accompanied by a hunting dog that are together carrying an ensnared boar (App. ill. 8B). And also the loading of wild beasts onto a ship is a known theme in Roman art; it is known from the Villa Casale floor, but it can also be found on a pavement from Veii (App. ill. 9) and on a sarcophagus from Isola Sacra at Ostia (ill. 14). Other than the floor from Hippo Regius, the mosaic from Carthage Dermech appears to be the work of a mosaicist who more or less randomly combined several standard hunt and capture motifs and did not care too much about the composition of his work. And the fact that the floor is severely damaged does not make it easier for us to understand what this mosaic intended to represent. However, since the capture and transport, over land and sea, of wild beasts for *venationes* appears to be the central theme of this mosaic, it is possible that the house-owner, who paid for the floor, with this pavement intended to demonstrate his involvement in the process of capturing and transporting wild beasts for *venationes*, as an editor of hunting games or perhaps because he was professionally connected to this business.

As we have seen, many of the *venatio* mosaics from North Africa were not only intended for decoration or entertainment: the floors combined carefully selected images and sometimes also included texts in order to create a meaningful unity. For donors of *venationes*, the medium provided the possibility to demonstrate, re-stage and perpetuate their beast fights and therewith (re)construct their own image. Magerius’ floor, for instance, emphasised his outstanding generosity in comparison with other *munerarii*, his willingness to please the spectators and their enthusiasm about his games. Perhaps the fact that he hired the Telegenii, a well-known team of *venatores*, also contributed to the prestige that this spectacle brought him. Like the inscriptions, the animal catalogue pavements primarily communicate the variety and quantity of the different species of wild beasts that were used. But the ‘Mel Quaestura’ floor, which recorded a *venatio* that had been ‘better than [that of] the quaestors’, attests also the competition between donors that we have seen in inscriptions and on Magerius’ floor: all editors wanted to surpass the splendour of the fights given by their rivals, not only in the arena, but also in retrospect, on the mosaic pavements in their houses that commemorated the games. The use of leopards on Magerius’ mosaic and the prominent position of these felids on the ‘Mel
Quaestura’ pavement, as well as the representation of a dangerous hunt of leopards and lions on the capture and transport-mosaics, also indicates that, like on inscriptions, donors wished to emphasise on these mementoes that they had presented felids and not only herbivores. The venatio-mosaics perpetuate and materialise the memory of a donor’s venatio in a much more lively way than the inscriptions, but – except in the case of Magerius – they do not depict the donor of the show himself. This is easily explained: the people who saw these mosaics in private houses, knew who the donor of the depicted games was; their host. Our last set of iconographic sources, tribunal scenes on African red slipware, allows us to finally see the donors of beast shows themselves.

3.2.3 Commemorating hunting spectacles on African red slip ware

Thus far, we have seen how hunting spectacles were occasionally recorded in public space, on inscriptions, and also how donors of venationes commemorated their games in the semi-private realm, on floor mosaics in their houses. As noted, most of the epigraphic material dates to the second and third century, the period that saw the most intense epigraphic habit, whereas the commemoration of beast fights on mosaic pavements commences in the Severan period and continues until the late fourth and early fifth centuries. In this period, around the turn of the fifth century, African benefactors of beast fights appear to have adopted another medium to advertise their sponsorship of games: African Red Slipware (ARS).490 Late antique ARS imitates the style and iconography of more expensive art, such as mosaics, ivory carving and silverware, but the themes reflect popular pagan, and often also Christian, culture: biblical scenes, depictions of martyrs and Christian symbols are frequent, as well as chariot races, damnationes ad bestias and wild beast hunts in the amphitheatre, but not gladiators, which had by this time completely disappeared in North Africa (App. ill. 22).491 For us, the (fragments of) dishes that represent episodes from beast fights and the donor in his capacity of president of the games, the so-called ‘tribunal scene’, are most interesting, because some of these contain inscriptions which indicate that they were

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490 African Red Slipware was produced in North African workshops from the first until the seventh century and is found in excavations throughout the Empire. ARS or ‘terra sigillata chiara’ is less shiny and more orange than ‘terra sigillata’ from Gaul and Italy, see Hayes 1972 and Herrmann & van den Hoek 2002.

ordered by sponsors of games as personalised mementoes of their shows (App. ills. 23, 24 and 28). It is generally assumed that benefactors of beast fights distributed these mementoes among important relations, in imitation of the practice of late antique officials in Rome and Constantinople who issued and sent round ivory diptychs and silverware among influential acquaintances and friends to notify them of the games that they had provided upon acceptance of office, usually that of consul, praetor or quaestor. Before investigating this practice in more detail, we shall take a closer look at two well-preserved ARS dishes with tribunal- and venatio scenes. How are the donors and the beast-fights represented?

One of the best preserved tribunal scenes in ARS is found on a lanx (a large rectangular dish) from the region of Thysdrus, modern El Djem (App. ill. 23). The shape of this plate, that has decorations of lions, lionesses and venatores on the rim, imitates a silver lanx, and the form, composition and style of the central panel are similar to that of ivory diptychs (App. ills. 25-27). The rectangular mould-impressed decoration represents three dignitaries sitting in the ‘skybox’ of the arena, presiding over a venatio. The man dressed in a long tunic and a pallium in the centre is the magistrate who donated the games. In his right hand that he holds before his chest is the mappa, the piece of cloth that was used by the president of the games to open the show in the amphitheatred, and also in the circus. On either side, a little behind him, are two lictores, recognisable by the fasces. Just outside of the donor’s gallery are two other men, perhaps arena officials; the one on the left wears a richly decorated mantle that is fastened with a pin at the shoulder, in his right hand is a book scroll, and the person on the right throws the praemium munerale, the price-money, down into the arena from a piece of cloth. The magistrates in the skybox are looking down at a vivid venatio. In the middle register, two venatores, one with a long spear, the other with a rectangular shield, appear to glance at each other before, or perhaps during, their fights against a deer and an ostrich. In the two lower registers animals are fighting each other: a bear chases a boar, and a lion attacks a bull. Nearly identical tribunal scenes are preserved on several fragments of ARS (App. ill. 24), which indicates that such terracotta dishes were mass-produced.

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The second example, a dish found in Egypt (App. ill. 28), currently kept in Cairo, indicates that sometimes mass-produced ARS lanxes were personalised with an inscription, it reads: ‘IULIUS FESTUS MISSIONE(m) FERIOR(um) DAT’, which has been translated as ‘Julius Festus is giving an amphitheatre show with wild beasts’ (felids).\(^{495}\) In the centre of this dish are two panel shaped fields that represent a *venator* (left) and a large feline (right) in the arena, which is indicated by a semi-circular wall. The left panel depicts the *venator*, with tunic and bandages around his legs, kneeling on a low podium. Behind him is a large oval shield and in his right hand he holds a stick with a piece of cloth attached to it that flies in the wind.\(^{496}\) Above the head of the *venator*, a large bundle is lying in the sand, probably a carpet or garment filled with money, the hunter’s remuneration for his performance, which can be paralleled to the ‘sacks of money’ that the Telegenii on Magerius’ mosaic received.\(^{497}\) The panel on the right presents a large, proud felid, a lioness or a leopard, and again the semi circled arena wall. In front of the animal is a triangular leaf shaped object, perhaps a palm branch that was thrown into the arena as a reward for the *venator*. The rim also presents *venationes*: the corners and the middle of the long sides depict fighters armed with shields and spears, and in between are lions jumping left and right. In the middle of the short sides are the same leaf shaped prizes. Exact copies, apart from the inscription, of the left panel of the Cairo lanx are found on plates presently kept in the Benaki museum in Athens (App. ills. 29). Again an indication that such ARS lanxes were produced *en masse* with the use of standard designs.

As we have seen, the ARS lanxes and fragments represent the donor in his official capacity presiding over his beast fight, exciting episodes of the spectacle itself and probably the rewards for the *venatores*. For the game-giver, these are precisely the aspects of a show that were important to commemorate: the tribunal scene represents him in his (new) official capacity, and the offering of the reward symbolises his generosity and the splendour of the games. In a short article, ‘A lost consular diptych of Anicius Auchenius Bassus (A.D. 408)

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\(^{495}\) Salomonson 1962, 60-1 fig. 2-3.

\(^{496}\) This cloth was probably used to spur the animals to fight and to distract or mislead them in order prevent an attack, like modern bullfighters, see § 4.1.

\(^{497}\) Sacks of money as remuneration for public performances of *venatores* or athletes are known from mosaics, for instance the Magerius’ mosaic (App. ill. 3) where the text even refers to them, ‘hoc est i(a)m nox est i(a)m munere tuo saccis missos’, (see above 124-7) and compare also CIL VIII 1884: ‘Sadunti ob merita missos sacco’ (n. 465, p. 126) and the fourth century athlete-mosaic from Gafsa where the prize table with sacks of money is prominently placed on the foreground, e.g.: Ben Abed Ben Khader 2006, 128-9.
on the mould for an ARS plaque’, Jeffrey Spier demonstrated that moulds to produce tribunal scenes in ARS were copied directly from ivory prototypes. And indeed, the style, composition and form of the tribunal scenes on ARS closely resembles that of ivory consular diptychs, which consist of two carved ivory panels that were clasped together like a writing tablet. These panels represented a seated magistrate in toga, with the mappa in his hand, presiding over his games from a beautifully decorated loge in the amphitheatre or the circus (App. ills. 25-27). In late antiquity, high officials in Rome, Constantinople and provincial capitals used such diptychs as mementoes of the games that they provided in return for a newly acquired office, that of consul, praetor, quaestor or provincial priest. They distributed the diptychs and other gifts, such as silverware, among influential acquaintances, colleagues and friends to notify them of the games that they had provided in honour of their new function. The depicted attributes, such as the fasces, a sceptre and an eagle (App. ill. 27), busts of emperors on the balustrade of the skybox (App. ill. 25) and a crown (ill. 26), identify the game-givers as provincial or municipal magistrates, military officers or imperial priests.

498 Spier 2003, 352-3: ‘It is apparent from the mould that the image does not imitate an ivory diptych but was made by pressing an actual ivory diptych into the clay. The marks of the modeler’s fingers are visible on the back of the mould where they held the clay as the diptych was pressed into it.’ I am not certain whether precious ivory would indeed be used to press into clay and thus create a mould; the use of a wood-carved prototype seems more likely and would also leave fingerprints in the pressed clay.

499 The compositional scheme of the tribunal scenes, with the semi-circular panelled wall that separates the arena from the spectator's stands and the president's sky box, is also known from other media, such as contorniates, coins and mosaics, most notably in this context the Fancy Dress Mosaic from Thysdrus which probably depicts banqueting venatores the evening before their performance (App. ill. 33), Salomonson 1960, 25-55. This suggests that not only the ivory diptychs, which are a fourth century invention, are the prototype, but older media, such as mosaics or depictions made on cheaper and perishable materials, Cameron 2013, 178.

500 Corpora of ivory consular diptychs: Delbrueck 1927; Volbach 1976; on their use, function and meaning: e.g. Olovsdotter 2011; Cameron 2013, on parallels and copies on African Red Slipware: Salomonson 1962; Spier 2003; van den Hoek 2005. Cameron 2013, 175 proposes to use ‘presentation diptychs’ instead of the traditional ‘consular diptychs’, because they were not only distributed by consuls, but by all officials who provided games. I will follow his suggestion.

501 Tert. De spect. 12.6: ‘We must give the same interpretation to the equipments which are reckoned among the ornaments of office. The purple, the rods (fasces), the fillets and garlands, and then the harangues and edicts, and the dinners on the eve of installation, do not lack the pomp of the devil nor the invocation of demons.’, ‘Idem de apparatibus interpretabimus in ipsorum honorum suggestu deputandis, quod purporae, quod fasces, quod vitiae, quod coronae, quod denique contiones et edicta et pultes pridaniae sine pompa diaboli, sine invitatione daemonum non sunt.’
A fragment from one of Symmachus’ letters to his friend Nicomachus Flavianus, concerning the quaestorian games of his son Memmius Symmachus in 393/94, illustrates perfectly how this gift-distribution worked:

‘Now that his games as [quaestor] candidatus are over, my son [Memmius] Symmachus offers you his quaestorian gifts, and also honours the rest of our connections with similar gifts. Please then, as one who made so many and such splendid contributions to his display, receive in his name the diptychs and souvenirs. In addition I have sent our Lord and Emperor [Eugenius] a diptych with gold trim. I have also honoured the rest of our friends with ivory writing-tablets and silver bowls. To your initiative and discretion I entrust the disposition of the enclosed to individuals as you think fit.’502

This passage indicates that ivory diptychs and silverware were not simply mementoes or souvenirs that could be obtained on every corner of the street. Instead, the precious gifts and accompanying letters were distributed among specifically selected recipients, sponsors and influential friends, according to carefully planned strategies. The same must be true for the imitations of such ivory diptychs on terracotta lanxes that were issued by African donors of venationes who probably sent these commemorative dishes to their friends, family, and important contacts higher up the social ladder, like their wealthy counterparts in Rome and Constantinopole, as a form of self-representation. The example of the ARS dishes again demonstrates that the production of venationes played an important role in the self-representation of the African elite.

§ 3.3 Conclusion

In chapter 2, we have seen that the production of a hunting spectacle was a long, complicated and expensive undertaking, also for editors in Roman North Africa. Therefore, in this chapter we focused on the motivations and considerations of editors of venationes. Why did they present hunting shows and what did they gain from producing such expensive events? Of course, the easy answer would be that these ‘benefactors’ were obliged to give munera as an obligation that came with accepting a municipal or provincial office and that they gave venationes because wild beasts were easily available in North Africa. However, our brief summary about the function of civic munificence demonstrated that there must be more to it: key to euergetism was reciprocity,

which meant that each benefaction was repaid with an appropriate counter-gift, a public acclamation, a decree, a statue, an inscription or another honour. A benefaction thus brought its benefactor public recognition, social prestige, honour and a confirmation of his social status.

In this chapter, we have therefore not investigated what *venationes* cost African benefactors, but what they brought them. During the event, the president of the games could of course be honoured and applauded for his generosity, but these ‘counter-gifts’ were temporary and intangible. In order to express, construct and thus confirm his social identity in a more permanent manner, the donor would have to preserve the memory of (his sponsorship of) a hunting spectacle in another way, through self-representation on a non-perishable medium. We have looked at self-representation of *venatio*-donors and the representation of their benefaction in three different media; inscriptions in the public sphere, floor mosaics in domestic contexts and ARS pottery that donors distributed in their networks. The material that has been examined spans a period of four centuries and reflects a well-known trend: in the second and third century, statues and inscriptions in public space were most frequently used by the civic elite as a medium for self-representation, but in the course of time their self-aggrandisement appears to have shifted to the more private realm, to domestic floor mosaics from the Severan period onwards and, around the turn of the fifth century, to African red slip ware. Of these media, inscriptions provided least opportunity to represent many details about the given hunting shows; often they mention only the number of beasts that was presented, thus commemorating the generosity of the donor. It is remarkable, however, that the African inscriptions that record the production of amphitheatre shows with animals, appear to distinguish artificial hunts with herbivores from the more expensive and thus more prestigious fights against ‘African beasts’, lions or leopards. That felids had a more prominent place in the self-representation of *venatio*-donors was probably not only related to their price, but also to the real danger that they represented in North Africa; by presenting themselves as the sovereign presidents over an event in which the threat that the lions and leopards posed was skillfully eliminated by the best *venatores*, the donors could confirm their leading position in their community.

Floor mosaics laid down in more private contexts provided much more opportunities to preserve the memory of the donor’s generosity; some commemorated the donor’s exemplary generosity, the use of famous *venatores* or beasts, the benefactors will to please the spectators, whereas others represent
the most exciting episodes in the fight, the number and variety of species that were provided or the process of capture and transport of the wild beasts before they appeared in the arena. Especially the pavements that had also texts indicate that competition between sponsors of *venationes* was very fierce; they wanted to outdo each other in presenting more spectacular beast fights than their peers. Of course, this competition not only encouraged the civic elites to sponsor more and more spectacular *venationes*, but also incited them to materialise the memory of their shows on mosaic floors, which were actually re-performances of the events. The fourth and fifth century ARS lanxes depicted the donors of *venationes* in their capacity of presidents of the games, events where they towered over the other spectators and were clearly the most important men in the community. They also opened the games and presented the rewards for the beast-fighters, which symbolised that they had the power to decide over the course of events and the achievements of the *venatores*. By thus investigating the place of *venationes* in the African benefactors’ self-representation, we have been able to uncover some of the ways in which cultural values and social hierarchies were negotiated during these cultural performances.