UvA-DARE (Digital Academic Repository)

Venationes Africanae: Hunting spectacles in Roman North Africa: cultural significance and social function
Sparreboom, A.

Citation for published version (APA):

General rights
It is not permitted to download or to forward/distribute the text or part of it without the consent of the author(s) and/or copyright holder(s), other than for strictly personal, individual use, unless the work is under an open content license (like Creative Commons).

Disclaimer/Complaints regulations
If you believe that digital publication of certain material infringes any of your rights or (privacy) interests, please let the Library know, stating your reasons. In case of a legitimate complaint, the Library will make the material inaccessible and/or remove it from the website. Please Ask the Library: http://uba.uva.nl/en/contact, or a letter to: Library of the University of Amsterdam, Secretariat, Singel 425, 1012 WP Amsterdam, The Netherlands. You will be contacted as soon as possible.
Chapter 4

The attraction of hunting spectacles

‘For when he saw that blood, he drank deep of its barbarity and did not turn himself away but fixed his gaze and drank in the torments and was unaware, and found gratification in the wickedness of the contest, and became drunk on the pleasures of blood. Now he was no longer the same person as when he had come. He was one of the crowd that he had joined, a true companion of the friends who had taken him there. Why say any more? He watched, he shouted, he burned; he took with him from that place the madness that goaded him to return, not just with those friends who had first carried him away but even before them, and taking others along.’ 503

This is how Augustine describes the experience of his African friend Alypius during a spectacle in the Flavian amphitheatre in Rome. Alypius was allegedly dragged to the arena by his friends, not wanting to see the gladiator fights, but eventually he was completely carried away by the games and thoroughly enjoyed them. In the previous chapters we have seen that also in late antique North Africa, the games of the amphitheatre, and particularly hunting spectacles were immensely popular. In this chapter, we will investigate this African enthusiasm for venationes further by examining the program of the animal spectacles, the social identity, achievements and fame of individual African beast-hunters and teams of venatores and the spectator’s relation to them. In addition, we will pay attention to the ways in which this cultural performance contributed to, or was used to, shape, express and thus confirm cultural values, social norms and identities of both venatores and spectators.

I am not the first to attempt to understand the attraction of arena games, but - as we have seen in the introduction – thus far, most studies focused on gladiatorial combat in Rome. Coleman, for example, suggested that spectators came to the gladiator fights to see the supreme Roman virtue of physical and moral courage, because of the addictive uncertainty over the outcome of the combat and to experience overwhelming excitement, as well as

503 Translation Fagan 2011, 1, August. Conf. VI 13: ‘Ut enim vidit illum sanguinem, immanitatem simul ebiit et non se avert. sed fixit aspectum et hauriebat furias et nesciebat, et delectabatur scelere certaminis et cruenta voluptate inebriabatur. Et non erat iam ille qui venerat sed unus de turba ad quam venerat, et verus eorum socius a quibus adductus erat. Quid plura! Spectavit, clamavit, exarsit, abstulit inde secum insaniam quasi stimularetur redire non tantum cum illis a quibus prius abstractus est sed etiam prae illis et alios trahens.’
a sense of belonging in the group of spectators where they sat.\footnote{Coleman 1998, 65.}

Garrett Fagan pointed towards psychological phenomena such as crowd dynamics, satiation of prejudice, excitement at sporting events, attraction of violence as entertainment and morbid curiosity in order to explain ‘the lure of the arena’.\footnote{The title of his book is \textit{The Lure of the Arena. Social Psychology and the Crowd at the Roman Games}, Fagan 2011, 278.} He concluded that especially the psychological phenomenon ‘positive dispositional alignment’, sympathy for a particular performer, something we would probably call partisanship, and the consecutive ‘negative dispositional alignment’ for his opponent, can explain for a large part why spectators enjoy watching brutal spectacles, in the past as well as nowadays.\footnote{Fagan 2011, 282.} When the dispositional model is applied to Roman beast-fights, we can expect on the basis of the ancients’ mentality towards animals that the crowd would sympathise with the beast-fighters rather than with the beasts, and with the stronger animals rather than the weaker ones. In the case of gladiators, the basis for supporting them, despite their inferior social status, appears to be admiration for the quality of their performance, and in this chapter we will see whether the same was true for the African \textit{venatores}.\footnote{Fagan 2011, 283.} Retrieving the experiences of the spectators of beast fights in Roman Africa is difficult, particularly because we do not have the relevant sources, but by reconstructing the program of the \textit{venationes} and by looking at the popularity of African beast-fighters, as invididuals and in teams, we can come closer to the experience of the spectators.

This chapter is based on a variety of sources, iconographic, epigraphic and literary, and partly also on source material that has been known for a long time, but was not fully exploited in earlier studies of hunting spectacles: a set of eight binding curses (\textit{defixiones}) that target \textit{venatores}.\footnote{Bomgardner, for instance, in \textit{The Story of the Roman Amphitheatre}, dedicates only one paragraph to the curse tablets, Bomgardner 2000, 138. The curse tablets were first included in Audollent’s collection of \textit{defixiones tabellae}: Audollent 1906, \textit{AudDefTab} 247-254 and were recently also collected and translated into German in Tremel 2004, no. 93-100. A useful introduction into cursing in the ancient world is Gager 1992. For transcriptions and translations of a number of these curse tablets see below.} The curse tablets were discovered in a subterranean room of the amphitheatre in Carthage during excavations in 1896-7.\footnote{The excavations were carried out by the French archaeologist Alfred Louis Delattre, for the excavation report: Delattre 1898. I presented a paper about these curse tablets, ‘Risks and}
contained spells and magical symbols that were intended to evoke the help of demons to literally bind the target, to prevent him from moving, and thus make a good performance impossible. Note for instance this one, which was aimed at a \textit{venator} called Gallicus:

\begin{quote}
‘Kill, destroy and wound Gallicus, the son of Prima, at his hour in the ring of the amphitheatre and [...] hold his hands. So that he cannot bind a bear, bears [...] Bind Gallicus, the son of Prima, so that he cannot kill a bear or a bull with single blows, nor with two blows, or kill a bull [and] a bear with three blows. In the name of the living omnipotent [god] bring this about now, now, quickly, quickly: let the bear crush him and wound him.’\textsuperscript{510}
\end{quote}

The tablet also represents a drawing of a god with a serpent head, holding a spear in his right hand, and a lightning bolt in the left, probably a depiction of the demon that was evoked in the text (App. ill. 30).\textsuperscript{511} After inscribing the text, the tablet was folded and deposited in the subterranean room in the arena, possibly the \textit{spoliarium}, the location where the equipment of dead arena fighters was taken off, where it was found along with the other ‘\textit{venator}-curses’.\textsuperscript{512} Audollent has dated the curse-tablets to the second or third century on the basis of the lettertypes.\textsuperscript{513} Jordan narrowed this down and proposed a date in the middle or late third century for Aud\textit{DefTab} 253 and Aud\textit{DefTab} 252, on the basis of comparison to a group of \textit{defixiones} from the Athenian Agora, and suggests that the entire set of \textit{venatio}-tablets from the Carthaginian amphitheatre should be dated in this period.\textsuperscript{514}

---

\textsuperscript{510} Aud\textit{DefTab} 247; Tremel 2004, 221 no. 93; Translation based on Dunkle 2013, 149-50 and Mozley 1929 in the appendix ‘On cursing in ancient times’ to Ovid’s Ibis in \textit{Loeb Classical Library}, p. 365 with adaptions: ‘Occidite, exterminate, vulnerate Gallicum, quem peperit Prima, in ista hora in amphitheatri corona et ar.a...a... ludes orno..pe hoc terr...a...tas gula.netu que p...ave rite hoc tene, illi manus obliga ... obture. Non liget ursum, ursos ... par ill.u ...ra.orat ... Obliga Gallicum, quem peperit Prima, ut neque ursum neque taurum singulis plagis occidat neque bimis plagis occidat neque ternis plagis occidat taurum, ursum. Per nomen dei vivi omnipotentis, ut perficiatis iam, iam. Cito, cito. Allidat illum ursus et vulneret illum.’

\textsuperscript{511} Drawing by A. Audollent, Aud\textit{DefTab} 247 see Appendix App. ill. 30. On the snake-headed demon: Németh 2012.

\textsuperscript{512} Delattre reports: ‘Nous avons aussi recueilli bon nombre de monnaies romaines (Ocatille, Maximin, Maximien, Maxence, Constance II etc.) surtout dans une fosse carrée qui nous a fourni, en outre, des poteries du verres doré, des bagues, des clous de fer, des stylets en os et en cuivre, des lampes et 55 lamelles de plomb couverts d’inscriptions’, Delattre 1898, 139.

\textsuperscript{513} Audollent 1906, 288 and see the table in Tremel 2004, 39.

\textsuperscript{514} Jordan 1988, 120.
correct, the curses thus fall right within the period of great popularity of venationes in Roman North Africa, the era that also yielded most of the venatio-mosaics.

The Carthaginian sample are the only defixiones against venatores that are known to date, but, judging by the number of surviving curse tablets, the practice of issuing binding curses spread rapidly in the Latin West in the imperial period. Many defixiones, also from Africa, stem from the realm of public spectacles and competitions; most of them target charioteers or their horses. Apart from these ‘sport curses’ (magica agonistica), defixiones were used to request supernatural help in legal matters, for example the return of stolen properties and punishment of the thief or hindering the target’s judicial proceedings by causing voice loss and paralysis. Erotic curses, most often written by men, were intended to make women fall in love with them. Economic defixiones were generally aimed at eliminating business competitors.

Like defixiones from Rome, Hadrumetum, Athens and other cities in the eastern part of the empire, the Carthaginian venator-curses contained highly syncretized spells (voces magicae), they often apply linguistic code-switching (Latin in Greek letters or vice versa) and they invoke demons whose names betray Egyptian, Assyrian, Sumerian and Jewish influences. Magic symbols, drawings, palindromes, vowel-series and geometric shapes made out of letters

---

517 On ‘judicial prayers’, defixiones aimed at justice and revenge, see Versnel 1991.
519 On the curse tablets from the north western provinces of the Roman Empire which usually invoke more common deities such as Mercury: Adams 2006. On syncretism and the origin of the ‘foreign’ deities: Gager 1992, 13, 266: An example of such a demon is Bachachych, who appears on curse tablets found throughout the Mediterranean. His name is thought to derive from the Hebrew root word koḥav, which means ‘star’ (AudDefTab 250 and AudDefTab 251). And Bolcoseth, a name that often appears with the terms iô and iôerbêth, probably originates from the Egyptian spelling of the Semitic word for god or lord, ba‘al, combined with the name of the Egyptian god Seth, and cho, which derives from an Egyptian word that means ‘to strike’ or ‘to hit’. According to this reasoning, ‘Bolcoseth’ would mean ‘Ba‘al who strikes Seth’ (AudDefTab 253). On code-switching: five of our venatio-curses are in Latin, often with voces mysticae in Greek letters. The other three are in Greek, with a number of Latin words written in Greek letters (such as ‘αντιλατε ονοματουλον και βαλαρα αμπιθεατρ’; ‘implicate lacinia Sapaudios in cavea corona amphiteatre’ on AudDefTab 252.

144
could also be added to invoke the demons. In the *venator*-curses we find a number of formulas of *voces magicae*, which are also frequently used in binding spells from the Greek East, for instance the so-called ‘maskelli-formula’, ‘μασκέλλει μασκέλλω’, ‘erekisipthe’ (‘ἐρεκισίφζη’), ‘phnoukentabaoth oreobarza’ (‘φνοκενταβαωθ ὀρεοβαρζαγρα’) and ‘eulamo’ (‘εὐλάμω’). Textual analyses of ancient binding spells suggest that these formulas were taken from magical handbooks and recipes that were produced in Egypt and distributed throughout the Mediterranean in the second and third century. The Graeco-Egyptian magic appears to have been especially popular in coastal cities with heterogeneous populaces across the Mediterranean such as Carthage, where professional magicians and scribes copied them onto curse tablets on demand. The demons that were evoked, were often also of non-Roman origin, sometimes their provenance is literally recorded on the tablets: on our sample we find, for instance, ‘Noktoukit who possesses Italy and Campania’, ‘Bytybachk who possesses Africa and Spain and reigns over the sea’ and Bachachych, ‘a great demon in Egypt’. The foreign and mysterious origin of these demons was probably the reason why they were thought to be so powerful. Only one ‘traditional’ god from the Roman pantheon is mentioned in the *venator*-curses: Mercury. In this case, Mercury is addressed as the god of the underworld, ‘sanctus deus Mercurius infernus’ and more precisely as Mercury Psychopompus, the god who accompanied the dead to the otherworld. A fragment from Tertullian’s *Apology* indicates that this deity was well-known in the realm of the amphitheatre because masked men dressed up as Mercury Psychopompus removed dead and wounded gladiators and *venatores* from the arena:

‘I could not forbear smiling to see Mercury going about with a rod of iron red hot, probing the bodies to fetch out the souls, and Jove's brother Pluto, in like manner, with his mallet in his hand to finish those that were not quite dead, and make them ready for the ferry-boat.’

---

522 Noktoukit on AudDefTab 250; Tremel 2004, 40-1; Gager 1992, 265-269; Bytybachk on AudDefTab 250 and Bachachych on AudDefTab 251; Gager 1992, 266.
523 AudDefTab 251.
524 AudDefTab 251; Adams 2006, 10.
525 Tert. Apol. 15 ‘Risimus et inter ludicas meridianorum crudelitates Mercurium mortuos cauterio examinantem. Vidimus et Iovis fratrem gladiatorum cadavera cum malleo deducentem’, translation Loeb Classical Library. Kyle 1998, 157 provides a better translation: ‘We have laughed, amid the noon's blend of cruelty and absurdity, at Mercury using his burning iron to see who was dead.'
In this chapter, the information from this unique set of sources will be analysed and connected to what iconographic, literary and epigraphic evidence tells us about African *venatores* and their performances. The value of this material lies in the fact that, in contrast to literary, epigraphic or iconographic sources, curse tablets did not have a representational function, they were not aimed at representing someone or something to a public, but a performative one; they were commissioned by private persons in order to prompt a demon to eliminate their target. When analysed in detail, this material not only provides information about the fight routines that *venatores* performed, the characteristics of a good performance and the identity of the beast-fighters, but it also offers the possibility to catch a glimpse of the organisation of associations of *venatores*, and the rivalry that existed between these clubs and their fans. This information will be connected to what we know about beast-fights in Roman Africa from literary, epigraphic and iconographic material in order to understand the popularity and attraction of hunting spectacles in the African context. The chapter will be divided into three sections; first I will investigate the program of African animal spectacles (§ 4.1), secondly the fame and social identity of African *venatores* (§ 4.2) and finally the African sodalities of beast-fighters and the rivalry between them and their fans (§ 4.3).

§ 4.1 The program of hunting spectacles

As we have seen in chapter 1, in Rome the standard program of *munera* consisted of *venationes* in the morning, executions at midday and gladiatorial combats in the afternoon, but in Roman Africa, gladiatorial combat slowly disappeared and hunting spectacles were increasingly staged independent of gladiator fights in the second and third century. In the third and the fourth centuries, *venationes* were at the top of their popularity. We have also seen that *ferae africanae*, leopards and lions, were the most expensive and spectacular and therefore most wanted species for hunting spectacles. *Ferae africanae* were probably more widely available in Africa than in other regions of the empire, but it still required quite some effort and money to procure them and have them ready for a hunting show on time and in good condition. Therefore, African donors appear to have presented also great numbers of less expensive,
but still powerful beasts, such as bears, wild boar, bulls and wild horses. Those who did manage to obtain felids often proudly advertised this on votive and dedicatory inscriptions and on the floor mosaics in their houses, which may have caused an overrepresentation of lions and leopards in our iconographic and epigraphic sources.\(^{526}\) It seems likely that africanae were used less frequently than the commissioners of floor mosaics wanted to make their ancient audience - and us - believe. Our eight venator-curses support this assumption; the use of bears is recorded on five occasions, two bulls are mentioned and lions occur only on one tablet.\(^{527}\)

Hunting shows were not only popular because of the presence of exotic, or more ‘ordinary’, wild beasts; like in gladiator games, spectators probably also came to see the courage and hunting skills of their favorite fighters.\(^{528}\) Since the program of a munus was often publicly advertised before the spectacle took place, spectators probably knew in advance which venatores would perform, and which weapons, armour and techniques they would employ.\(^{529}\) Such announcements of upcoming shows are unfortunately not preserved from Africa, but the texts on the curse tablets indicate that the people who commissioned these curses knew when their targets were scheduled to perform. In some cases, this specific information is also mentioned on the tablet itself; two of our defixiones specify the day in the week or even the exact date of their target’s performance. A fighter called Sapatoulos, for instance, was scheduled to perform in January, a certain Vincentius Zarizo on a Wednesday, the day of Mercury, and the trio Tziolos, Adesicla and Tzelica would fight on the idus of January or the day before.\(^{530}\) Perhaps the African beast-fights were advertised through edicta munerum (gladiatorial announcements), which are also preserved in painted texts on Pompeian walls.\(^{531}\) These ancient equivalents of posters

---

\(^{526}\) Note for example App. ills. 3, 18 and 31 for venatio-mosaics with felids, see also below § 4.1. As we have seen in § 2.1, the zooarchaeological record also seems to confirm the overrepresentation of felids in our iconographic and epigraphic sources.

\(^{527}\) Bears: AudDefTab 247, 249, 250, 252 and 254; bulls: AudDefTab 247 and 250; boars and a lion: AudDefTab 250.

\(^{528}\) On the popularity and fame of beast-fighters and their portraits, see § 4.2.

\(^{529}\) Wiedemann 1992, 56.

\(^{530}\) Sapatoulos on AudDefTab 252; Vincentius Zarizo on AudDefTab 253 ‘in amphitheatre Carthaginis in die Mercurii’. It may be significant that the ‘day of Mercury’ – Wednesday - is mentioned, since Mercury was closely associated with the munera as the companion of the dead on their way to the underworld, see above n. 513, n. 525. Tziolos, Adesicla and Tzelica: AudDefTab 248: ‘in die muneris … pridie idus Ianuarius sive idus…’.

\(^{531}\) On gladiatorial announcements in Pompeii, e.g.: Sabbatini Tumolesi 1980, 71-4; Fora 1996, 128; Wallace 2005, XV-XVI; Fagan 2015, 136-7. There were also ‘libelli munerarii’, small
listed the name and function of the sponsor, the number of pairs of gladiators or *venatores* and beasts that were scheduled, possible distributions that would be offered to the spectators, the occasion of the show and, last but not least, the date and location. Of course, in order to attract a large crowd, sponsors would make sure that the announcement of their show highlighted the presence of ferocious and expensive beasts, famous *venatores* or promising novices and special acts. Knowing which *venatores* would participate and which routines they would perform probably greatly increased the excitement and enthusiasm for the spectacle.\(^{532}\) It could also arouse antagonism in fans of the rivalling party, as in the case of the commissioners of the *defixiones*. Note for instance the curse tablet aimed at the *venator* Maurussus, which reads:

‘[…] may his arms, strength and feet be bound, may he not be able to run, may he grow weary and lose his breath and spirit for every battle, in all conflicts may he be torn, beaten and wounded […].’\(^{533}\)

The public meal of the *venatores* on the evening before the show provided an occasion for excited spectators and nervous fans to come together to see their favourite *venatores* and have a taste of what was in store for the next day. During this event, the performers of the next day’s spectacle would come together for a banquet, which in the case of gladiators is often described as the ‘last meal’ or *cena libera*. Based on comparative, ethnographic research, modern scholars have suggested that the *cena libera* originally functioned as a ritual that transformed an undesirable man into a free and noble victim in order to make his blood suitable for funeral offerings.\(^{534}\) This would have applied to gladiators, who were – as we have seen in § 1.1 - originally indeed presented in a funerary setting. In the late republic, *munera* became private gifts and lost their funerary connotations, but the *cena libera* remained connected to

---

\(^{532}\) On the effect that this ‘arousal of anticipation and expectations’ had on the spectators’ behaviour and the overall enjoyment and lure of arena shows: Fagan 2011, 121-154.

\(^{533}\) AudDefTab 250: ‘[…]conligatum tenere omnino non possit, manus illi et robur?… pedes illi obligentur, non possit currere, lassetur… e animam et ispiritum deponat in omnem proelium, [in] omnibus congressionibus deparnetur vapulet vulneret […]’.

\(^{534}\) Meuli 1968, 49 and Brettler, Poliakoff 1990, 94 who argue, on the basis of a passage from the Babylonian Talmud, that the *cena libera* was ‘a ritual, paralleled in many societies, for making a worthy sacrificial victim: his [the gladiator’s] blood becomes, in the rabbis’ words, “sweet”.’
amphitheatrical munera in the imperial period; a fragment from Tertullian’s Apology indicates that in Roman North Africa, venatores habitually came to these public banquets:

‘Nor do I recline to eat in public at the Liberalia, which is the habit of the beast-fighters taking their last meal.’

Depictions of banqueting venatores on fragments of African red slip bowls and a contorniate (App. ill. 32) also indicate that such public banquets of beast-fighters were common. Tertullian’s references to the feast of Bacchus and a scene of banqueting venatores on a famous second or third century floor mosaic from a house in Thysdrus, the so called Fancy Dress mosaic, suggest that by the second century, the cena libera had developed into a festive dinner party for the performers and, at the same time, an event that advertised the next day’s show (App. ill. 33 and below p. 179-80). But what did the spectators hope to see the next day, which hunting-techniques and fighting-routines would the beast-fighters perform? What did the spectators expect from their favourite hunters? And what exactly made the wild beast shows so attractive to the public?

Like ludi, arena shows normally started with a procession (pompa) in which the editor, performers and arena staff entered the arena and performed a sacrifice. There are no African sources that record a pompa, but perhaps it was similar to the procession that is represented on a relief from a tomb outside the Stabian gate in Pompeii (App. ill. 34): first two lictors came in and they were followed by musicians with horns, after them entered some servants bringing in religious artefacts (cult statues) and arena staff who carried the palm destined for the victor and a sign indicating the name of the show’s donor. They were

535 Tert. Apol. 42.5: ‘Non in publico Liberalibus discumbo, quod bestiariis supremam coeantibus mos est…’. The cena libera is also attested in Pass. Perp. et Fel. 17.1 and Plut. Mor. XIV 1099a-d.
538 Note that the Zliten floor (App. ill. 1) also depicts musicians. On pompae: Versnel 1970, 94-131; on the Pompeian gladiator relief, which is now in the National Museum in Naples: Jacobelli 2003, 94-7. Also: Tert. De spect. VII 2: ‘But rather more pompous is the outfit of the games in the circus, to which the name pomp belongs, with the long line of images, the succession of statues, the cars, the chariots, carriages, the thrones, garlands, robes. What sacred rites, what sacrifices come at the beginning, in the middle, at the end; what guilds, what priesthoods, what offices are as stir, - everybody knows in that city where the demons sit in
followed by the gladiators who carried their weapons and armour which are, on the Pompeian relief, inspected by the editor (the man in toga). Another horn player and two harenarii leading two horses concluded the Pompeian procession. Such a pompa could of course be shorter or longer, depending on the splendour of the show and the fights that would be carried out. We can imagine that in the case of beast-fights, the venatores who would fight in single combat with wild carnivores – the best part of the show – came last in the procession, after the acrobats and actors who would start the show with their tricks and stunts (see below p. 153). The venatores may have entered in order of seniority, speciality or fame, possibly showing their weapons or some moves in order to loosen up and get the crowd excited, as is perhaps demonstrated on the T-shaped mosaic from the Maison d’Autruches (App. ill. 4A). The spectators probably cheered for their favourite fighters as they entered the arena. After the procession, the editor of the games would take his seat in his loge and open the games.

The entire setting of the decorated arena that was filled with chanting crowds, music and perhaps the smell and groans of wild beasts raging in their underground cages, the distribution of food and the splendour of the benefactor’s loge and his garments, combined with the prospect of witnessing a spectacular and long-awaited fight between professional, courageous venatores and exotic wild beasts must have been overwhelmingly exciting. The single combats between man and beast were probably reserved for the last part of the show; first there were performances of clowns, actors and acrobats with tamed and trained beasts, which sometimes included re-enactments of well-known mythical tales or mock fights in which performers used whips, sticks, lassoes or their bare hands to capture animals without injuring them (App. ill. 35). The iconographic evidence from Roman Africa provides a number of examples of

conclave [Rome], ‘Sed circensium paulo pompatior suggestus, quibus propriè hoc nomen: pompa præcedens, quorum sit in semetipsa probans de simulacrorum serie, de imaginum agmine, de curribus, de tensis, de armamaxis, de sedibus, de coronis, de exuviiis. Quanta praeterea sacra, quanta sacrificia præcedant, intercedant, succedant, quot collegia, quot sacerdotia, quot officia moveantur, sciant homines illius urbis, in qua daemoniorum conventus consedit.’

539 In his Ars Amatoria, Ovid instructs his reader that in order to win over the heart of a woman, he should applaud for the statue of Venus when it was carried into the circus during a pompa circensis, Ov. Ars Am. 1.147-8: ‘But when the long procession of ivory statues of the gods passes by, applaud Queen Venus with favouring hand’. ‘At cum pompa frequens cælestibus ibit eburnis, Tu Veneri dominae plaude faveunte manu’. We can imagine an arena crowd cheering in a similar manner for their favourite arena performers.

special routines. On the Zliten floor, for example, (App. ill. 1) we find a trainer, perhaps a dwarf, throwing an apple to a probably tame boar which sits up straight.\footnote{Dunkle 2013, 85.} The use of tamed animals (\textit{ferae mansuetae}) is also attested on an inscription from Rusicade (see ch. 3, App. Table 2 nr. 8, p. 117) and in a fragment from the \textit{Scriptores Historiae Augustae}:

\begin{quote}
‘There were thirty-two elephants at Rome in the time of Gordian (of which he himself had sent twelve and Alexander ten), ten elk, ten tigers, sixty tame lions, thirty tame leopards, ten belbi or hyenas, a thousand pairs of imperial gladiators, six hippopotami, one rhinoceros, ten wild lions, ten giraffes, twenty wild asses, forty wild horses, and various other animals of this nature without number. All of these Philip presented or slew at the secular games. All these animals, wild, tame, and savage, Gordian intended for a Persian triumph; but his official vow proved of no avail, for Philip presented all of them at the secular games, consisting of both gladiatorial spectacles and races in the Circus, that were celebrated on the thousandth anniversary of the founding of the City, when he and his son were consuls.’\footnote{SHA Gordian 33.1-3: ‘\textit{Fuerunt sub Gordiano Romae elephanti triginta et duo, quorum ipse duodecim miserat, Alexander decem, alces decem, tiges decem, leones mansueti sexaginta, leopardi mansueti triginta, belbi, id est hyaenae, decem, gladiatorum fiscalium paria mille, hippopotami sex, rhinoceros unus, argoleontes decem, camelopardali decem, onagri viginti, equi feri quadraginta, et cetera huius modi animalia innumera et diversa; quae omnia Philippus ludis saecularibus vel dedit vel occidit. Has autem omnes feras mansuetas et praeterea efferatas parabat ad triumphum Persicum. Quod votum publicum nihil valuit. Nam omnia haec Philippus exhibuit saecularibus ludis et muneribus atque circensibus, cum millesimum annum in consulatu suo et filii sui celebravit’}. See also Lo Giudice 2008, 17.}
\end{quote}

Another remarkable routine is performed by one of the Telegenii on the Magerius mosaic: the muscular Spittara is confronting a leopard while standing on stilts (App. ill. 3B). The stilts would have impeded rapid movements which probably made it more difficult to avoid the leopard’s charges, perhaps this is the reason why Spittara is wearing the necklace with pendant, which may be a protective amulet (on the use of magic for protection see also p. 159 below).\footnote{Bomgardner 2009, 173 proposes that Spittara’s pendant is a stalk of millet, an emblem of a rivalling sodality (see App. ill. 46 and § 4.3 below). I find this unlikely; the necklace does not resemble a millet stalk.} The fact that Spittara is performing naked, whereas Mamertinus and Bullarius are wearing a typical \textit{venator}-costume with cuirass, also indicates that Spittara was another kind of performer and may have had a different status than his team-members. The same may count for Hilarinus, also on the Magerius floor (App. ill. 3C), who is depicted with his bare bottom facing the viewer, perhaps a sexually submissive pose, and whose name also suggests a less serious
The four stalks of millet that are depicted on the collar of the tunic that Hilarinus, ‘the funny one’, is wearing, have been interpreted as a harassment of the rivalling team of venatores, the Leontii who had the millet stalk as their emblem (on the emblems of sodalities see § 2.3 and § 4.3). Examples of non-fatal routines with animals are bull-jumping (taurokapsia) whereby an acrobat (a salitor) jumped over an onrushing animal, sometimes with the help of a pole (App. ill. 36) and the tricks of dendrobates or toichobates (or arborarii) who escaped wild bears by climbing into artificial trees (App. ill. 7). A description of bull-jumping in a letter of Theoderic, king of the Ostrogoths and ruler of Italy from 493 until 526, illustrates that these routines were also highly exciting:

‘The first hunter, trusting to a brittle pole, runs on the mouths of the beasts, and seems, in the eagerness of his charge, to desire the death he hopes to avoid. They rush together with equal speed, predator and prey; he can win safety only by encountering the one he hopes to escape. Then the man’s bent limbs are tossed into the air like flimsy cloths by a lofty spring of his body; a kind of embodied bow is suspended above the beast; and, as it delays its descent, the wild beast’s charge passes beneath it.’

Other ‘support acts’ of animal shows that are especially well attested in literary and iconographic sources are the re-enactments of myths. Sometimes such plays featured trained wild animals, theatrical scenery and actors, but the actors could also be replaced by convicted criminals who were meant to die in the arena, the damnati ad bestias. The examples that can be found in various literary sources are horrific: a criminal was castrated like the god Attis, a man was made to fly like Icarus (and crashed like Icarus) and a bull was forced to have intercourse with Parsiphae, a woman hidden in a wooden image of a cow. In one of Martial’s epigrams, a convict dressed up as the mythical musician Orpheus was sent into the arena in which wild beasts were released;

---

545 Ibid., 167. On the sodalities, their emblems and rivalry between them see below § 4.3.
548 Coleman 1990 calls them ‘fatal charades’ or pyrrichae. See also Carter 2014.
549 On damnati ad bestias see, e.g.: Wiedemann 1992, 68-97.
he was not able to calm the animals down with his music like in the myth and was attacked and torn apart by a bear.\textsuperscript{551} Scholars have noted that these ‘fatal charades’, as Kathleen Coleman has called them, were considered rightful because the victims were convicted criminals, and that their entertainment value probably lay in the fact that these performances contained well known elements, but also surprises; the plot of the performed myth, that everyone knew, could be changed, but nobody knew when and how this would happen.\textsuperscript{552} Some of these fatal charades also appear to have been commemorated on floor mosaics from Africa; note for instance the Ganymede mosaic from Hadrumetum which depicts the abduction of Ganymede by an eagle encircled by images of amphitheatre beasts (App. ill. 37).\textsuperscript{553} Christine Kondoleon suggested that the composition of this floor was inspired by a theatrical reinterpretation of the myth in which a convict dressed up as Ganymede was not abducted by an eagle, but attacked by several wild beasts in the arena.\textsuperscript{554}

The performances with tamed animals, humorous or acrobatic acts and fatal charades could be followed by artificial hunts in which \textit{venatores} armed with bow and arrow, spears and swords hunted large groups of herbivores that were released into the arena.\textsuperscript{555} Sometimes, the arena was decorated with pieces of scenery in the form of trees, bushes and rocks that were meant to suggest a natural environment. In these artificial hunts, the skill with which \textit{venatores} used different types of weapons and armour was probably the most important attraction for the spectators.\textsuperscript{556} The Zliten floor (App. ill. 1) and a mosaic that represents Dionysus amidst fighting beasts from the Maison de Bacchus at Thysdrus (App. ill. 17) indicate that animals could also be incited to attack each other, which required whipping by \textit{bestiarii} or even chaining the beasts together.

No matter how funny or spectacular the acrobatic tricks, mythological re-enactments or mock-fights and hunts in \textit{silvae} (artificial woods) were, single combat between man and beast was the main attraction of amphitheatre shows

\textsuperscript{551} Orpheus: Mart. \textit{Spect.} 21; Coleman 1990, 62-3.
\textsuperscript{552} Coleman 1990, 44; Fagan 2011, 184; Toner 2014, 85: ‘the fun for the spectator lay in knowing the plot, knowing that it would be subverted, but not know how, and the thrill of irreverence when the twist finally came.’
\textsuperscript{553} Gauckler 1897, 8-22; Dunbabin 1978, 39, 269.
\textsuperscript{554} Kondoleon 1991, 110-1.
\textsuperscript{555} Aymard 1951, 189-96.
\textsuperscript{556} On artificial hunts see further the T-shaped mosaic from the triclinium at the Maison des Autruches App. ill. 4A.
with wild beasts. Depending on the magnitude of a show, a smaller or larger number of single combats between *venatores* and different beasts were probably scheduled in a row, alternating varying techniques and famous *venatores* with novices.  

Particularly in North Africa, where lions and leopards constituted a real threat especially to farmers, herdsmen and their cattle, for many spectators part of the lure of single combat between man and lion or leopard, may have been in the saturation that they experienced when such a dangerous animal was eliminated by a skilled hunter. Felids were usually fought with a long-edged spear, the *venabulum*, like those that the Telegenii used in Magerius’ show (App. ill. 3), and sometimes incited with whips, whereas bear-fighters used pieces of cloth to incite the bears, large rectangular or circular shields to protect themselves, lassoes and nets to capture the bears and finally the *venabulum* to kill them (App. ills. 4B, 22, 23, 26, 38, 39, 40). We will now turn to more detailed descriptions of single combats between man and felid or bear in literary and iconographic sources. In the last paragraph, we will return to the curse texts in order to deduce what was considered a good performance: that is, the opposite of the outcome desired by the curser.

As noted, large felids were usually fought with a long edged spear (the *venabulum*), which – theoretically - enabled the fighter to keep the beast at ‘safe’ distance. Most of the depictions of such confrontations on mosaics, terracotta pottery and wall paintings depict the *venator* at the most exciting moment of his performance: the moment when the felid leaps to attack the beast-fighter (App. ills. 3, 18, 20 and 31). At this moment, the hunter had to keep his spear forward in order to stab the beast in the chest with a strong and sure stroke. Oppian describes this technique in more detail:

> 'As when a man skilled in the work of slaying wild beasts, when the people are gathered in the house-encircled market place [the arena], awaits the leopard maddened by the cracking of the whip and with long edged spear stands athwart her path; she, though she beholds the edge of sharp iron, mantles in swelling fury and receives in her throat, as it were in a spear-stand, the brazen lance [...]'  

---

557 Dunkle 2013, 78-82.  
559 The *venatio*-mosaic from the Maison des Autruches in Hadrumetum (App. ill. 4A) also depicts swords, but we have no iconographic sources that indicate how swords were used in beast-fights.  
560 Opp. Ηαλί II 348: ὅστις ὄστρακον, φάτειας δὲ περιπλάνουσα θεμελιώσα ὄλλου περισσότερος, ὅπ' ἀφραδίῃσι θανατοῦσα, ὅτε δὲ ἤθελον τις ἀνήρ δεδεμένης ἔργον, λαὸν ἀμφιδύμουσαν ἐναγομένους ἀγορησαί, πορφίλαν οἰστρηθεῖσαν ἐνί μοῦσαν ἰμάσθης ἐχείζη δέχεται τανακεί δοχῆς ὑποστάσας'
It was of crucial importance for the *venator* to perform this routine without mistakes because he would not have a second chance when the large cat jumped on top of him. And when he did not stab the animal correctly, he would have to confront an even more unpredictable and dangerous beast, or call in the help of a colleague, like Hilarinus on the Magerius floor did (App. ill. 3C). Of course, the fighters did not always succeed, even with the help of a colleague: that is what made the hunts exciting for the public and dangerous for the beast-fighters. Such an unsuccessful confrontation with a leopard can be seen on the wall paintings from the Hunting Baths in Lepcis Magna which depict a number of unfortunate beast-fighters, some of them wounded on the ground, while others are desperately trying to kill their opponent in a second attempt (App. ill. 20 and below).\(^{561}\)

Bears were also commonly used in beast fights in North Africa. According to Pliny, in the arena in Rome they were often killed with a well-aimed blow to the head:

‘A bear’s weakest part is the head, which is the lion’s strongest; consequently if when hard pressed by an attack they are going to fling themselves down from a rock they make the jump with their head covered with their fore paws, and in the arena are often killed by their head being broken by a buffet.’\(^{562}\)

Iconographic evidence from Roman Africa records another technique: the images on pottery and mosaics represent bear-fighters that are using large rectangular or circular shields to protect themselves, lassoes and nets to capture the bears and the *venabulum* to kill them (App. ills. 4B, 22, 23, 38, 39, 40). On a number of mosaics and one diptych we find assistants of beast-fighters coming from doors in the arena wall or the *venatores* themselves holding white cloths which were used to provoke or distract the bears (App. ills. 4B, 25, 38). The Thelepte floor suggests that assistants or colleagues who were positioned

---

\(^{561}\) Skeletal material from a Roman cemetery in York may present additional evidence of *venatores* who were wounded during their performance; it bears evidence of ‘large carnivore bite marks – probably inflicted by a lion, tiger or bear – an injury which must have been sustained in an arena context’, according to York Archaeological Trust www.headlessromans.co.uk (accessed 15/09/2014). Although the unusual burial and the diversity of childhood origins of the ‘headless Romans’ could support the identification of the cemetery as a gladiator graveyard, this is far from certain: Müldner et al. 2011, 288.

\(^{562}\) Plin. *HN* VIII 54.130-1: ‘*invalidissimum urso caput, quod leoni firmissimum; ideo urguente vi praecipitaturi se ex aligia rupe manibus cooperto laciuntur, ac saepe in harena colapho infracto examinantur*’. The smashed scull of a brown bear that was found in a well in the late Roman *castrum* of Oudenburg (Belgium) may confirm Pliny’s remark, Ervynck 2012, 485.
behind small doors in the arena wall waved these cloths in order to intervene and distract the beast when the venator was in danger (App. ill. 18). In addition, one of the curse tablets records the use of lassoes to capture a bear:

‘[…] nor may he be able to fling his lasso over the bear, nor bind it.

Iconographic material suggests that lassoes were only used in bear-fights and that the bears were captured and tied up before they were killed with a venabulum (App. ills. 26 and 38-40). Perhaps this routine was similar to that of the retiarius, the gladiator who used a net to capture his opponent and a trident to kill him. However, it is also possible that the routine consisted only of capturing the bear with the lasso, and that the beast was spared so that it could be used for other performances, a solution that may have been motivated by a restricted supply of beasts, economic considerations, or both.

Now that we have examined the different techniques that were used in single combat against felids and bears, we will look at what was considered a successful performance (of a venator). The people who issued the Carthaginian curses intended to achieve that their target delivered a bad performance or worse, that they were killed. Thus, by reading the defixiones carefully, we can deduce what was considered a good performance and how venatores were expected to behave in the arena. Let us first take another look at the curse against the venator Gallicus that was also cited above:

‘Kill, destroy and wound Gallicus, the son of Prima, at his hour in the ring of the amphitheatre and […] hold his hands. So that he cannot bind a bear, bears […]. Bind Gallicus, the son of Prima, so that he cannot kill a bear or a bull with single blows, nor with two blows, or kill a bull [and] a bear with three blows. In the name of the living omnipotent [god] bring this about now, now, quickly, quickly: let the bear crush him and wound him.’

From this text we can deduce that, ideally, the beast-fighter killed a bear or a bull in one blow without being injured himself. A fight in which a venator needed three or even more attempts to kill his opponent was considered a bad performance, and that is exactly what this curser wished for his enemy Gallicus. He even wanted Gallicus crushed and wounded by the bear. A parallel for the appraisal of a kill-in-one-attempt, which is what the curser

---

563 The Lampadius floor (App. ill. 38) and the Liverpool diptych (App. ill. 25) also represent assistants that are on stand-by behind doors in the arena wall.
564 AudDefTab 250: ‘[…]/ nec laq[ueos] possit super ursum mittere, non alligare […]’.
565 AudDefTab 247; Tremel 2004, 221 no. 93 and see n. 510 for the transcription.
negates his target, can be found in the work of Ammianus Marcellinus who tells us that the emperor Commodus managed to kill a hundred lions that were let loose in the arena with various weapons, without having to give any of them a second shot or blow. The ideal of ‘kill-in-one-attempt’ also reminds us of modern bull-fighting: successful matadors are applauded for a ‘clean kill’, a resolute and powerful final thrust of the sword in between the bull’s shoulder blades (the estocada) that kills it at once. Those who do not place the sword in the right position, are insecure or lack force so that the bull does not die instantly and they are booed by the audience.

The other curse tablets contain more of such examples; they ask that the targeted venatores were bound or chained to prevent them from moving, so that they were not able to throw a lasso over the bear or bind it, that they had no strength in their arms, that they were not able to walk, that they could not control their movements, that they would faint and fall and that they would be too slow to defend themselves from an attack. Note for instance this long curse aimed at the venator Maurussus (App. ill. 30):

Side A

‘Βαχαχυχ … who art a great deity in Egypt, bind, utterly bind Maurussus the hunter whom Felicitas bore; Iekri, take away his sleep, let not Maurussus sleep whom Felicitas bore; Παρπαζιν, god almighty, bring to the infernal abodes Maurussus whom Felicitas bore; Νοκτοκιτ who possessest the regions of Italy and Campania, who went drawn through the Acherusian lake, bring to the Tartarean abodes within seven days Maurussus whom Felicitas bore; Βυτυβαχκ deity who possessest Spain and Africa who alone passeth through the sea, pass through the soul and spirit of Maurussus whom Felicitas bore; pass through every remedy and every phylactery and every safeguard and every anointing of oil; and bring him, bind him, bind him utterly … carry off, take away, consume the heart, limbs, inward parts, entrails of Maurussus whom Felicitas bore; and thee I adjure whoever art the demon of the underworld by these holy binding names’.

Side B

566 Amm. Marc. RG 31.10.19: ‘Ut enim ille, quia perimere iaculis plurimas feras spectante consueverat populo, et centum leones in amphitheatrali circulo simul emissos, te gorum vario genere, nullo geminato vulnere […]’, ‘[…] that emperor [Commodus] so often killed a great number of wild animals with javelins in the presence of the people, and slaughtered with various kinds of weapons in the arena of the amphitheatre a hundred lions that were let in together, without needing to inflict a second wound […]’. See also: Jennison 1937, 87.

‘Maskellei Maskello Phnoukentabaath that huntest upon the mountains and cleavest the earth […] kerderosandale kataneikandale seize him and make him pale mournful sad […] dumb not controlling himself Maurussus whom Felicitas bore; in every contest in every fight may he faint and fall […] Maurussus whom Felicitas bore; in the ring of the amphitheatre in the same hour may Maurussus suffer whom Felicitas bore; may he not be able to […] may he be misguided, utterly misguided, Maurussus whom Felicitas bore; nor may he be able to fling his lasso over the bear, nor bind it […] may his arms and strength and feet be bound, may he not be able to run, may he grow weary and lose his breath and spirit for every battle, in all conflicts may he be torn, beaten and wounded […] then may he be transfixed, dragged and go forth, Maurussus whom Felicitas bore; […] swiftly depress fix transfix consume […] Maurussus whom Felicitas bore; slackly may he […] the bites of the wild beasts […] bulls boars and lions […]’ 568

Also, that they would be sick or be torn, beaten and bitten, thrown to the ground and dragged along the arena, covered in blood and defeated by the beast.569 Apart from causing physical disability to perform the routine correctly

568 AudDefTab 250, Translation Mozley 1929, 369-70, Side A: ‘Βαχαχυχ… qui es in Egipto magnus Demon, obliges perobliges Mauroosum venatorem quem peperit Felicitas; Ιεκρι auferas somnum, non dormiat Maurussus quem peperit Felicitas; Παρ παξιν deus omnipotens, adducas ad domus infernas Mauroosum quem peperit Felicitas; Νοκτωκατ qui possides tractus Italie et Campanie, qui tractus es per Acreushium lacum, ad domus tartareas intra dies septe perducas ad domus tartareas Mauroosum quem peperit Felicitas intra dies septe; Βυτυβαχκ demon qui possides Ispaniam et Africam, qui solus per marem trassis, pertranseas omnen remedium et omnen filacterium et omnen tutamentum et omnen oleum libitorium; et perducatis obligetis per obligetis […] etis apsumatis desumatis consumatis cor membra viscera interania Maurussi… quem peperit [Felicitas]; Et te adiuro quisquis inferne es demon per hec sancta nomina necessitas.’ And AudDefTab 250 Side B: ‘Μασκελλει μασκελλω φνουκεν Σαβαωθ ορεοβαρξαγρα φηξικθων […] φιτ […] ιτ … ιω … ρ … κερδερνσανδαλε deprendatis et faciatis pallidum mextum tristem […] mutum non se regentem Mauroosum quem peperit Felicitas; in omnem proelium in omni certamine evanescat ruat […] e Maurussus quem peperit Felicitas; desub amplitiatri corona […] eadem auguriam patiatur Mauroosus quem peperit Felicitas; …ere [non]possit perversus sit perperversus sit Mauroosus quem peperit Felicitas,[…] nec lacaeos possit super ursum mittere, non alligare […] conligatum tenere omnino non possit, manus illi et robur?… pedes illi obligent, non possit currere, lassetur… e animam et spirtium deponat in omnen prolum, [in] omnibus congressionibus depannetur vapulet vulneretur …ur …et manus alienas inde figatur traatur exiat Mauroosus quem peperit Felicitas desub amplitiatri corona facie at terraes […] cito cito depremeite defigite consumite… Mauroosum quem peperit Felicitas; et remise ferarum morsus […] fe […] tam tauros, tam apros, tam leones quae […] […] Mauroosus quem peperit Felicitas occidere possit […]m […] […]’

569 AudDefTab 252 Text 2: ‘ursellum non respiciat, liget nomenem, pugni illi solvantur, non sit potestatis qua non vulneretur, sanguinetur Sapautulus; currere non possit, obligentur illi pedes’, translation A.S.: ‘so that he will not notice the bear, not bind any, that his fists are weak, that he will have no power, that he cannot hurt?, that he will be wounded, that Sapautulus will bleed, that he cannot run, his feet bound’. AudDefTab 248 Side B: ‘[…] vulneratos crudentatos de amphitheatro exire in die muneris […]’. Translation A.S.: ‘[…] let [him] come out of the amphitheatre on the day of the munus, severely wounded and bleeding’.
and defeat the beast, and bad injuries or even death, the cursers aimed to affect the *venatores’* mentality; they wanted to break their fighting spirit, cause insomnia and fear in order that the fighters would be out-of-control, confused and consequently unable to deliver a good show. All of this would result in the complete humiliation of the targeted beast-fighters: good *venatores* dominated their opponents, and it should not be the other way around.

Interestingly, not only the cursers relied on supernatural powers, but also the beast-fighters themselves, or at least the curser thought that they would. Note for instance this fragment from the abovcited curse against Maurussus:

`Βυτυβαχκ` deity who posseses Spain and Africa who alone passest through the sea, pass through the soul and spirit of Maurussus whom Felicitas bore; pass through every remedy and every phylactery and every safeguard and every anointing of oil'.

It is not hard to imagine why a *venator* would have attempted to protect himself and to increase his chances of success by using magical devices; there was a serious risk that he was badly injured or even killed by a raging beast. In both cases he would be humiliated in front of an entire arena full of people by an animal, which he was supposed to have dominated. And even when he was not injured and managed to kill the beast, if his performance was not good enough, the crowd and the editor will have showed their dislike.

We have seen that, even though it is difficult to reconstruct how exactly the different routines were performed, iconographic material, curse tablets and literary sources indicate that a good performance followed certain rules and required specific skills; these performances were not meant to be plain butchery. The *venatores* may not have been as diversified in terms of equipment and weapons as gladiators, but they certainly specialised in their own routine; fighting with a lasso, the *venabulum*, large shield or while standing on stilts, and the application of cloths each required a particular skill, agility and knowledge.

---

570 AudDefTab 250: ‘[…] Βύτυβαχκ δείσιν τοὺς Ἰσπανίαν καὶ Ἀφρικήν, τοῖς μόνος πασσεῖς ἐπὶ τὸ μῦρον, περπατησάς ὅλον τὸν ἱατρὸν καὶ ὅλον τὸν φιλακτηρῖον καὶ ὅλον τὸν τυάματόν τιν καὶ ὅλον τὸ ολεῖον λίβουστρον; καὶ περδευτικάς ὃ ὄλυμπος […]’. Phylacteriun is normally translated as ‘amulet’, but it may also refer to specific ‘chains and medals worn by gladiators around their necks as tokens of victory’, Lewis & Short Latin Dictionary.

571 Such an amulet may be depicted around the neck of Spittara, on the Magerius floor (App. ill. 3B). Oleum libutorium may be a kind of ‘lucky oil’ that was used by performers in the arena. See also above.
of the beasts’ responses. Beast-fighters could please the crowd with their strength, courage, speed and skill, but they could also be humiliated by a beast in front of an entire arena. Therefore, like in modern bull fights, not only the fierceness of the animals, the generosity of the producer and the general entertainment factor of an arena show were part of the attractions for spectators, but also the performance of the beast-fighters. Yet, even a venator who was widely admired for his courage and skill could be defeated and seriously injured by the beast; and this appreciation of certain fighters combined with the uncertainty over the outcome of each combat, must have made the beast fights immensely exciting. Furthermore, we have seen in this section that the programs of wild beast shows were often varied with regard to the species of animals that would appear, the weapons and techniques that were used and the playful intermezzo’s that were presented. These spectacles were thought out carefully in order to surprise, entertain and satisfy the public. I will end this section with a fragment from Martial’s epigrams, which indicates that even when no efforts were spared and the editor had planned the show meticulously, an animal fight could be disappointing when the beast did not behave as expected. In this epigram, fortunately for sponsor and spectators, the rhinoceros eventually put up a good performance:

‘While the trembling trainers were goading the rhinoceros and the great beast’s anger was long a-gathering, men were giving up hope of the combats of promised warfare; but at length the fury we earlier knew returned. For with his double horn he tossed a heavy bear as a bull tosses dummies from his head to the stars. […] He lifted two steers with his mobile neck, to him yielded the fierce buffalo and the bison. A lion fleeing before him ran headlong upon the spears. Go now, you crowd, complain of tedious delays!’

572 ‘One important difference between gladiators and venatores was that, while gladiators were subdivided into a number of different types based upon their particular equipment and weapons expertise, venatores were far less diversified in terms of their armament’, Epplett 2014, 514.

573 Coleman’s translation of Mart. Spect. 26 (22+23): ‘Sollicitant pavidi dum rhinocerota magistra sequi diu magnae colligit ira ferae, desperabantur promissi proelia Martis; sed tandem redit cognitus ante furor. Namque gravem cornu gemino sic extulit ursum, ictact ut impositas taurus in astra pilas. […] Ille tuit guminos facili cervice iuvencos, illi cessit atrox bubalus atque vison: hunc leo cum fugeret, praeceps in tela cucurrit. I nunc et lentas corripe, turba, moras!’
§ 4.2 Fame, social status and ethnic identity of African *venatores*

It has become clear by now that the attraction of animal spectacles lay not only in the presence of exotic wild beasts and the overwhelming atmosphere of the arena, but also in the variety of the many support acts, mythological reenactments and other surprising and innovative elements that sponsors offered in order to impress the public and outdo the shows of their colleagues. The curse texts have also indicated that the technical hunting skills, strength and courage of *venatores* were valued highly and that some beast-fighters were famous and admired because of their performances. In this section we will investigate the fame and admiration for African *venatores* in more detail, because they appear to be another important aspect of the enthusiasm for beast fights in Roman North Africa.

The ancient beast-fighter who is probably best known to us is Carpophorus, who is described as hunter of mythological proportions in a number of Martial’s epigrams:

‘If the ages of old, Caesar, in which a barbarous earth brought forth wild monsters, had produced Carpophorus, Marathon would not have feared her bull, nor leafy Nemea her lion, nor Arcadians the boar of Maenalus. When he armed his hands, the Hydra would have met a single death, one stroke of his would have sufficed for the entire Chimaera. He could yoke the fire-bearing bulls without the Colchian, he could conquer both the beasts of Pasiphae. If the ancient tale of the sea monster were recalled, he would release Hesione and Andromeda single-handed. Let the glory of Hercules’ achievement be numbered: it is more to have subdued twice ten wild beasts at one time.’

And a fragment from Pliny that we have also discussed in chapter 3 indicates that skilled *venatores* and gladiators were not only praised in poems, but that their portrayals were also depicted on wall-paintings in public buildings (also cited in § 3.2.2):

‘When a freedman of Nero was giving at Anzio a gladiatorial show, the public porticoes were covered with paintings, so we are told, containing life-like portraits of all the gladiators and assistants. This portraiture of gladiators has been the highest interest in art for many generations now;

---

but it was Gaius Terentius Lucanus who began the practice of having pictures made of gladiatorial shows and exhibited in public; in honour of his grandfather who had adopted him he provided thirty pairs of gladiators in the forum on three consecutive days, and exhibited a picture of their matches in the Grove of Diana.1

The gladiator mosaic from Torrenova on the Via Casilina just outside Rome is perhaps a good example of the life-like portrayals of gladiators that Pliny is referring to (App. ill. 41).2 This floor, that was found in the atrium of a villa, does not only represent the performances of gladiators and one venator, but the insertions of the Greek letter θ, short for Θάνατος, behind the names of the defeated gladiators, and ‘vic[it]’ for the winners, also record who died and who won the fight. Similar mosaic floors that portray famous venatores and commemorate their successes are also known from Roman Africa; one of them is a portrait of the beast-fighter Neoterius who killed two bears (App. ill. 4B). This floor was excavated in the so called ‘Maison des Autruches’ in Hadrumetum, modern Sousse, in 1964, a house with several venatio-mosaics that are dated to the third century.3 The mosaic panel with Neoterius was found in the corridor adjacent to the triclinium, from where it could probably be seen. Even though the panel is not completely preserved, we can discern the lower-body of a venator wearing a very short red tunic with a piece of cloth in his hands. Next to him are two wounded bears that he apparently stabbed with the venabulum that is depicted on the ground. A text reading ‘NEOTERIUS OCCIDIT’, ‘Neoterius killed [them]’, tells us that the venator is called Neoterius.4 The inscription and the central position of this mosaic at one of the entrances of the triclinium seem to indicate that this was not a stereotypical representation of a venator in a work of art, but a monument that commemorates the historical performance of this particular beast-fighter, Neoterius.5 The commissioner of this floor, who may also have been the sponsor of the beast-show in which Neoterius performed, apparently felt that a

1 Plin. HN 35.51-2. For the transcription of this fragment see ch. 3 p. 120 n. 440. See further: Toner 2014, 9. 
2 Helbig 1966, 2, 711. 
3 This house was situated in a residential area nearby the theatre, the amphitheatre and the sea and had several rooms decorated with marble and paintings that were grouped around a square central courtyard. Unfortunately, the mosaic floors of the other rooms were largely destroyed at discovery and could not be reconstructed. The preserved mosaics are dated to the mid-third century and the presence of several tombs in the triclinium suggests that the house was abandoned before the 280’s, Foucher 1964, 110-3; Dunbabin 1978, 74-5 n. 42. 
4 AE 1968, 618. 
5 Dunbabin 1978, 75.
depiction of this – perhaps expensive and famous - *venator* greatly contributed to the materialisation of the memory of his *munus*.

In the *triclinium* and the corridor at the opposite end of the Neoterius panel, we find more mosaics that depict *venationes*, perhaps episodes from the same event sponsored by the owner of the house. The T-shaped mosaic depicts not only the four ostriches that gave this house its name, but also four deer, eight antelopes and four onagers (wild asses) in a rather dense and artificial composition (App. ill. 4A).\textsuperscript{580} Straight and bended swords scattered on the floor amidst the running animals give the impression of a chaotic artificial hunt in which all the beasts were released into the arena simultaneously. In the bar of the T are four men, identifiable as *venatores* by their costumes and weapons, overseeing the animals. The *venator* at the left holds a cloth and a bended sword and his barefooted colleague next to him seems to pull a straight sword from a sheath attached to his belt. The others are represented with a long javelin and a sword with a straight top. The variation in their clothing, hairstyle, armour and pose may be intended to represent these men as members of a particular team of *venatores* who all had different specialties.\textsuperscript{581} Their names are not added, which may mean that they were not intended to be recognised as individually famous fighters, but as a team. At the other end of the *triclinium* was another square panel mosaic, similar in shape to the Neoterius mosaic. This panel is seriously damaged, but we can discern three, originally probably four figures of amazons, with their horses, armour, double axes and a shield (App. ill. 4C). It has been suggested that this floor refers to another team of amphitheatre performers, possibly called the Amazonii, and that they were associated with the patron deity of the amphitheatre, Diana.\textsuperscript{582} Neoterius is not the only African beast-fighter who is commemorated in art by name; we have already seen the named Telegenii on the Magerius floor, and in the description of bear-fights (§ 4.1) we have come across Lampadius the bear-fighter on a fifth century floor from Khanguet el-Hadjaj (App. ill. 38) and a certain Bonifatius with a colleague who were confronting two bears with the suitable names Omicida and Crudelis on a mosaic from the Maison du Paon in Carthage (App. ill. 40).

The wounded *venatores* on the wall paintings from the *frigidarium* of the Hunting Baths in Lepcis Magna that were briefly introduced above were also

\textsuperscript{580} Ibid., 74-5.
\textsuperscript{581} Dunbabin 1978, 75.
\textsuperscript{582} Ibid.
indicated with their names (App. ill. 20). These baths were built in the late second or early third century, nearby the sea shore in Lepcis Magna. Modern scholars came up with the name ‘Hunting Baths’ because of the wall paintings of beast-fights on the friezes of the frigidarium and the mosaic representing hunting trophies that was found in room 17, of which unfortunately no photos are published. These decorations have inspired scholars to suggest that the baths were used as a meeting-place by an association of commercial hunters, but there is no direct evidence for this; it is also possible that the paintings were there because the owner of the baths felt sympathy for this group of beast-fighters or simply as decorations. The fact that the names of the venatores are recorded, seem to confirm, however, that the painting represents actual fighters that were known to the visitors of the baths.

Ward-Perkins and Toynbee inspected the baths shortly after its excavation and recorded a painting of a lion-hunt on the north wall of the frigidarium, which is unfortunately hardly preserved and no photos are available. The archaeologists recorded, however, that they saw the legs of a lion, a whip, and further to the left, the head, one leg and parts of the spear of a venator, the legs of another hunter by the name of ‘NUBER’ and the letters ‘ELEN’ which probably belonged to another name. The leopard-hunt on the south-wall, on the contrary, is almost completely preserved: ten venatores with dark hair and skin are fighting six leopards. Inscriptions indicate the names of five fighters, ‘NUBER’, ‘[V]INCINUS’, ‘[L]IBENTIUS’, ‘INGENIUS’ and ‘BICTOR’, and three of the leopards, ‘RAPIDUS’, ‘FULGENTIUS’ and ‘GABATIUS’ (App. ill. 20 A-C). The scene on the left represents two venatores, wearing the typical short tunics, bandages around the lower legs and sandals, attacking a leopard called Rapidus with spears (App. ill. 20 A). The blood gushing from the beast’s chest and the gesture of the venator on the right (a raised hand) indicate that the beast-fighters won in this confrontation. In the background, we see a less fortunate figure. Even though this scene is not as well executed as the one on the foreground, a man who is attacked by a

584 Ward-Perkins & Toynbee 1949, 195; Matthews 1957, 45; Leone 2007, 73, 186.
585 Leone 2007, 72.
586 Ward-Perkins & Toynbee 1949, 181. The name Nuber may be connected to Nubia and suggest native African origin.
587 According to Ward-Perkins & Toynbee 1949, 181, the figure stabbing Rapidus is wreathed with flowers, which may also allude to his victory, but unfortunately these cannot be discerned on photos.
leopard can be distinguished, his spear somewhere on the sand behind him. In the centre of the painting (App. ill. 20 B), right in between the two windows, we can distinguish, despite some damage, four *venatores* and three leopards. On the foreground, a *venator* with Nubian features has speared a leopard called Fulgentius while next to him two colleagues with spears, one of them called ‘[L]ibentius’, are attacking the leopard ‘Gabatius’. In the background, a hunter by the name of Ingenius runs towards the left, holding his spear in his left hand, the beast that he was fighting cannot be discerned. The right part of the painting (App. ill. 20 C) is damaged, but we can see a muscled man in a loincloth, ironically called ‘Bictor’ (Victor), who is bleeding heavily from a head wound, and appears to be tumbling on his feet before falling over. Next to him, the same ‘Bictor’ is on his knees trying to stab a leopard (‘FUR…’) which appears to bite him in the neck. Perhaps these scenes represent two consecutive phases of the same fight between Bictor and the leopard. Interestingly, Bictor is naked except for a loincloth, whereas the other fighters are wearing the typical *venator*-costumes: the sandals with ribbons and short, long-sleeved tunics. And where Libentius, Nuber and Vincinus appear to overcome the leopards they are confronting, Bictor is wounded and appears to be defeated by the beast. His wounds, dizziness and defeat, as well as the fact that he is not wearing a *venator*-costume, contrast sharply with the skill and bravour that characterises the victorious *venatores* and may indicate that Bictor was a slave or a convict condemned to the beasts.

This wall painting and the mosaics that record *venatores* that we have seen thus far, that of Neoterius, Lampadius and the Telegenii on Magerius’ floor, depict the fighters during or right after their performances and recorded their names so that viewers could recognise their favourites. It seems most likely that these mosaics and wall-paintings were commissioned by the sponsors of the games in which these performers appeared. With these depictions of the performances of famous beast-fighters, the donors wished to construct meaningful mementoes of their *munera*. These monuments do not tell us precisely, however, why the depicted *venatores* were valued so highly. Two texts written during the reign of the last Vandal kings (520s – 530s) by the Romano-African poet Luxorius of Carthage, a eulogy and a literary epitaph for the beast-fighter Olympius, provide more insight in what exactly was admired in a good *venator*. 
About Olympius, an Egyptian Hunter

Pleasing sight of joy and reason for popular acclaim, stronger by your countless victories, animal fighter Olympius, you bear a fit name because of your bodily strength, a Hercules by virtue of your neck, shoulders, back, and limbs. O wonderful, O bold, O swift, O spirited, O always ready! Not at all does your swarthy body harm you because of its blackness. So did nature create black precious ebony. So does the purple deeply placed in the tiny murex gleam, so do violets of deepest shade bloom in the soft grass, so does a certain grace set off gems of sombre hue, so does the huge elephant please because of its dusky limbs, so do black Indian incense and pepper give pleasure. Finally, you are as beautiful in the great love the people bear you as another man, handsome without strength, is ugly.\(^{588}\)

By way of literary epitaph of the above-mentioned Olympius’

Animal fighter who brought us great joy and often delighted us with your skill against the wild beasts —quick, pleasant, most brave, daring—who, as a boy that had not yet reached the age of young men, used to perform all feats with mature effort, (5) who gave to others the privilege of winning with you, although you could give great pleasure to the spectators and win acclaim by yourself—so great were the rewards of your remarkable physique that after your death your companions are still awed by you and praise you. (10) Alas, now this tomb contains you carried off so unexpectedly by envious death, you whom the walls and towers of Carthage could not bear when you triumphed in the arena! But you lose nothing among the shades because of this bitter death. The fame of your glory will live everlasting after you, and Carthage will always say your name!\(^{589}\)

---

\(^{588}\) Luxorius *Anth. Lat.* 67, translation and transcription Rosenblum 1961, 150-1: ‘*De Olympio venatore Aegyptio / Grata voluptatis species et causa favoris / Fortior innumeris, venator Olympie, palmis / Tu verum nomen membrorum robore signas / Alcides collo, scapulis, cervice, lacertis / Admirande, audax, velox, animose, parate. / Nil tibi forma novet nigro fuscata colore. / Sic ebenum pretiosum atrum natura creavit / Purpura sic parvo depressa in murice fulget / Sic nigrae violae per mollia gramine vernat / Sic tetras quaedam commendat gratia gemmas / Sic placet obscuros elephans inmanis ad artus / Sic turis piperisque Indi nigredo placessit / Postremum tanto populi pulcrescis amore / Foedior est quantum pulcher sine viribus alter.’ On Luxorius, e.g.: Lafer 2007, 104 and Hugoniot 2008, 173-182.

\(^{589}\) Luxorius *Anth. Lat.* 68, translation and transcription Rosenblum 1961, 150-3: ‘*In epitaphion supra scripti Olympii / Venator iucunde nimitis atque arte ferarum /saepe placens agilis gratus fortissimus audax / qui puer ad iuvenes dum non adiunxeris annos / omnia maturo complebas facta labore. / Qui licet ex propria populis bene laude placers, / praestabas alis ut tecum vincere possent. / Tantaque mirandae fuerant tibi praemia formae / Ut te post fatum timeant laudentque sodales. / Heu nunc tam subito mortis livore peremtum / iste capit tumulus quem non Karthaginis arcas / amphiteatrali potuerunt ferre triumph! / Sed nihil ad Manes hoc funere perdis acero. / Vivet fama tui post te longaeva decoris / atque tuum nomen semper Karthago loquetur.’
Luxorius’ poems, which are preserved in the Latin Anthology, present an image of a famous *venator* who performed in a team and who was popular because he was quick, bold, spirited and strong like Hercules, as is said of Martial’s Carpophorus. And Luxorius also mentions that Olympius’ skill was ‘pleasant’ (*placens*) and that he already performed ‘all feats with mature effort’ when he was still a boy. Finally, it is interesting that Olympius is presented as an Egyptian, with dark skin, which was associated with exotic and expensive materials, such as black ebony, Indian incense and pepper, murex (a natural purple dye that was used to colour robes), certain gems and the largest African animal, the elephant. Even though he was loved for his skill and many victories, these poems at the same time represent Olympius as a foreign performer, an exotic man of completely different social status than the crowds in the arena who cheered for him.\(^{590}\) The epitaph also suggests that Olympius performed in a team, and that he shared his victories with his companions (‘you gave to others the privilege of winning with you’).\(^{591}\) The sentence ‘after your death your companions are still awed by you and praise you’, may suggest that Luxorius means that Olympius’ *sodales* had erected the epitaph, a practice that is also attested by grave inscriptions for *venatores* from Timгад and Ammaedara (see below, p. 173).\(^{592}\)

Even though these texts are of a much later date than the mosaics and wall-paintings that we have seen earlier in this section, both the eulogy and epitaph for Olympius above are firmly rooted in classical literary tradition.\(^{593}\) Therefore, and because the qualities that a *venator* needed to be successful are unlikely to have changed much between the third and the sixth century, it

\(^{590}\) It is remarkable that most of the charioteers described in Luxorius’ epigrams are also said to be dark men; Egyptians, Garamantians or Ethiopians, see Stevens 1988, 155.

\(^{591}\) On sodalities of *venatores*, see below § 4.3 and Hugoniot 2008, 182-7.

\(^{592}\) *AE* 1967, 549, region Timгад: ‘*Diis Manibus Sacrum / C. Antonius Maximus vixitannis […]/ Telegenii sodali aere collato fecerunt*.’, ‘Dedicated to the spirits of the deceased. C. Antonius Maximus lived … years. The companions of the Telegenii made this after having collected the money [among themselves]’. And *CIL* VIII 11549, Ammaedara: ‘*Sic ego pro meritis audio nomineque salutor / Et sum post obitum Felix, cui cari sodales hoc titulo fixerunt nomen aeternum / Decasi, valet et semper harena placete / Vixit annis XL[…].*’ ‘I got what I deserved, people greet me with my name, and after my death I am still Felix [happy], the dear companions have secured that with this epitaph. Long live the Decasii and let the arena always please you. He lived 40? years.’ Beschaouch 1977, 487-9.

\(^{593}\) Stevens 1988, 161; Miles 2005, 310.
seems safe to assume that Olympius represents an exemplary beast-fighter.594 Apparently, applauding skilled beast-fighters was not unknown to Luxorius' readers in Vandal Africa: archaeological and epigraphic sources from this period attest a decline of euergetism in smaller towns, but a continued use of the amphitheatres in the large cities where the Vandal monarchs continued the tradition of financing *venationes* (see also § 1.2).595

A fragment from the letters of the consul Symmachus that was also cited above (in § 2.3 and see also § 3.2.3), we find a fragment which indicates that African *venatores* were not only famous in Africa itself, but also in Rome. In this letter, written in 393, Symmachus requests the proconsul of Africa, Paternus, to send him ‘the best African *venatores*, because only they would be good enough to please the spectators during his son’s praetorian games.596 This not only indicates that the skill of African *venatores* was also well known in- and outside North Africa, but also that in the fourth century, as in the late Republic, both wild beasts and specialised hunters were still imported from Africa in order to perform in amphitheatre shows in Rome. However, amphitheatrical beast-fighting was not a monopoly of Africans; in letters sent by Libanius (314-393), an influential Greek rhetor from Antioch, we find similar efforts to obtain ‘nimble’, well-trained hunters and the fiercest animals for the games of his cousin, but in this case from the governor of Phoenicia.597 Libanius emphasises that not only the *venatores* had to be skilled and fast, but it was equally important that the beasts were wild and fierce, so that man and animal were a good match and would put up a good fight: ‘For a bear to be

---

594 The Latin Anthology also contains 10 circus poems from the hand of Luxorius, 6 of which are epigrammatic portraits of charioteers. *Anth. Lat.* 288, 301, 319, 322, 323, 331, 307, 308, 315, 388, for an analysis of the circus poems see Stevens 1988.

595 Hugoniot 2005, 371-73, 500-02; Leone 2007, 138; Leone 2013, 11-14. Richard Miles considered only Luxorius' poems, on the basis of which he finds it 'dangerous to take these poems as secure evidence that the arena was still in use'. Therefore he prefers to see the idealised image of the *venator* Olympus as an indication that the hunting games were 'still present in the cultural imaginaire of the Romano-African elite in Vandal Carthage', Miles 2005, 310.

596 For this fragment and the translation see above p. 85, n. 346.

597 Lib. *Ep.* 108.4: 'He is not a governor, but he must at times turn his possessions over to the chariot drivers, or to people who walk the stage, and collect nimble huntsman and animals that can overcome all their skill, for the person who puts up the money earns praise when the hunters come in well-trained and the animals get the better of them despite that. For a bear to be beaten or a panther conquered is a criticism of the sponsor of the show'. οὗτος άρχει μὲν οὐδενός, δεῖ δὲ αὐτὸν τὰ αὐτὸν τὸν μὲν ἰναχθεὶς ποιεῖν, νῦν δὲ τῶν εἰς τὸ θέατρον εἰσίν τοι κοινήτας τε ἀγείρειν κούφους καὶ θηρία κρίττειν τέχνης ἀπόψης. ἐπιανεῖται γὰρ ὁ ὀστανώμενος ὁ οἷς, ὁξείνην τε δὲ πτασίμενοι, τὰ δὲ σταῖν καὶ οὕτω κρατήρι ἁρκτος δὲ ἁπτομένη καὶ πάρδαλες νικομένη τοῦ χορηγοῦντος ἐγκλήματα'.
beaten or a panther conquered is a criticism of the sponsor of the show’. Libanius also notes that his cousin strove to perfection in every detail of his show; not only was his spectacle bigger than earlier events and did he provide more wild beasts than others, he also wished to collect ‘from every quarter the men to fight them’. All this praise for and admiration of skilled beast-fighters may lead us to think that good (African) venatores led a good life, if at least they managed to kill beasts without being injured themselves. We should not forget, however, that despite their popularity, venatores – like gladiators, actors and other performers - had a low social position, they suffered the stigma of infamia (‘lacking in reputation, fama’) because of the way they earned their money; by hiring themselves out for public entertainment. A discussion recorded in the work of the third century jurist Ulpian illustrates that not capturing wild beasts for the arena or fighting an animal that was threatening the area was considered disgraceful, but performing as a beast-fighter.  

598 Ibid.  
599 Lib. Ep. 71.1-2: ‘My cousin is approaching the end of his liturgy. The custom is for the last stages also to be the most important, at least in such a liturgy as this. With a nice appreciation of the perfect, he will devise means whereby it may be achieved in every detail of his programme, not just by putting on a show bigger than any before nor yet by presenting more wild beasts for slaughter, but also by collecting from every quarter the men to fight them, for that is to cap it with the absolute peak of perfection. Well, perfection in the beast shows depends mainly upon you. Phœnicia produces expert huntsmen, and if you are willing, we shall employ them; if not, we will be deficient in this respect, and people will reproach not us, for our disappointment, but the one who pays no regard to his friends, for no one is unaware of the fact that we are inviting people from there or of the person to whom we direct our request. If nothing comes of it, they will know who is responsible for that. And that will be no credit to you’.  

600 Performers were not the only persons who suffered from this social debasement; prostitutes, pimps, convicted criminals and soldiers who were dishonourably discharged from the army were also infames. It appears from legal and literary sources that chariot-drivers, though also public performers, were generally thought less shameful than gladiators or actors, perhaps because of the historical, heroic, associations with chariot-driving, Edwards 1997, 75. More on the infamia of performers e.g.: Edwards 1997, 66-95 and Knapp 2011, 265-289.  

601 Ulp. Dig. 3.1.1.6: ‘So too the man who has hired out his services to fight wild beasts. But we ought to interpret the term beast with reference to the animal’s ferocity rather than according to
certain legal disabilities; they could, for instance, not be a witness for wills or other legal matters, nor could they bring accusations against others.\textsuperscript{602} Also, they could not be elected as magistrates or honoured with a public statue.\textsuperscript{603} Despite this stigma, many \textit{venatores}, gladiators and actors could be very popular and loved by their fans. Especially in the case of gladiators, this ambiguity is remarkable: on the one hand, the fighters reminded the Romans of the military courage and manliness (\textit{virtus}) that had made Rome great, while on the other hand, they were despised because of their low social standing and the way they made their living.\textsuperscript{604} This contrast between the fame of certain protagonists, their social marginalisation as a group and the ambiguity of the Roman elite’s attitude toward them, is accurately explained by Tertullian:

‘Take even those who give and who administer the spectacles; look at their attitude to the charioteers, players, athletes, gladiators, most loved of men, to whom men surrender their souls and women their bodies as well, for whose sake they commit the sins they blame; on one and the same account they glorify them and they degrade and diminish them; yes, further, they openly condemn them to disgrace and civil degradation; they keep them religiously excluded from council chamber, rostrum, senate, knighthood, and every other kind of office and a good many distinctions. The perversity of it! They love whom they lower; they despise whom they approve; the art they glorify, the artist they disgrace.

\textsuperscript{602} Edwards 1998, 66-68.
\textsuperscript{603} Fejfer 2008, 201.
\textsuperscript{604} Wiedemann 1992, 28; Edwards 1997, 77.
What sort of judgement is this—that a man should be blackened for what he shines in? 605

Despite their infamia, venatores were glorified for their hunting skills, agility, courage and intelligence, as we have seen for instance in the case of Carpophorus, the famous beast-fighter from Martial’s epigrams who was praised for killing a lion of unprecedented size, a charging polar bear and a fast leopard with the strong and sure stroke of his spear and for confronting a raging rhinoceros and furious bulls without fear. 606 And a fragment in a letter of Fronto to the emperor Marcus Aurelius suggests that (slave) venatores who had shown great courage during their performance in the arena, could be honoured or even manumitted at the people’s request. 607 That venatores may have been even more loved than charioteers is suggested by Libanius who notes in one of his letters that ‘the people like racing and enjoy stage shows, but nothing attracts them as much as men fighting animals; escape from the beasts seems impossible, yet through sheer intelligence the men succeed’. 608

---

605 Tert. De spect. 22: ‘Etenim ipsi auctores et administratores spectaculorum quadri-garios scaenicos xysticos arenarios illos amantissimos, quibus viri animas, feminae aut illis etiam corpora sua substernunt, propter quos se in ea committunt quae reprehendunt, ex eadem arte, qua magnificiunt, deponunt et diminuunt, immo manifeste damnant ignominia et capitis minutione, arcantes curia rostris senatu equite ceterisque honoribus omnibus simul et ornamentis quibusdam. Quanta perversitas! Amant quos multant, depretiant quos probant, artem magnificant, artificem notant. Quale iudicium est, ut ob ea quis offiscetur, per quae promeretur?’ Edwards 1997, 75 notes that Tertullian falsely included charioteers in this list; they did not suffer infamia. On the ambiguity that Tertullian addresses, see also, e.g.: Knapp 2011, 280.

606 Mart. Spect. 17; 26; 32. Martial places Carpophorus’ performances in a mythological context; Mart. Spect. 32.1-4 ‘If the ages of old, Caesar, in which a barbarous earth brought forth wild monsters, had produced Carpophorus, Marathon would not have feared her bull, nor leafy Nemea her lion, nor Arcadians the boar of Maenalus.’ On Mart. Spect.: Coleman 2006.

607 Fronto Ep. Ad Marc. Caes. 1.8.2: ‘Quorsum hoc retuli? Uti te, Domine, ita comparas, ubi quid in coetu hominum recitabis, ut scias auribus serviendum: plane nec ubique nec omni modo, attamen nonnumquam et aliquantum. Quod ubi facies, simile facere atque illud facitis ubi eos, qui bestias strenue interfecerunt, populo postulante ornatis aut manumittitis, nocentes etiam homines aut sclere damnatos, sed populo postulante conceditis. Ubiqueigitur populus dominatur et praepollet. Igitur ut populo gratum erit, ita facies atque ita dices.’ ‘Why have I told you this? That you, my Lord, may be prepared, when you speak before an assembly of men, to study their taste, not, of course, everywhere and by every means, yet occasionally and to some extent. And when you do so, remind yourself that you are but doing the same as you do when, at the people’s request, you honour or enfranchise those who have slain beasts manfully in the arena; criminals even they may be or felons, yet you release them at the people’s request. Everywhere, then, the people prevail and get their way. Therefore must you so act and so speak as shall please the people.’

608 Lib. Ep. 199, translation Toner 2013, 44: ‘Ο παύζω εὐχόμην, ἐγὼ παύδα σόν, βραδέως μὲν, ἀλλ’ ἐγὼ πάνθ’ ὡς εἰπέν ἐκοικά τὸ πατρί, τὴν μορφήν, τὴν ἐπείκειαν, τὴν βάρσιν, καὶ μὴν καὶ δόκησιν ἀποικεῖται καὶ πρὸς λόγους ἔρρωτα. τούτῳ ὅ τ’ τὸ σόν. ἐνός ὡς ἀπ’ ἐμί, τῆς Τήγης. ἀλλ’ εὐχόμηθα, σὺ τ’ κάκω
Because of their inferior social status, performers were normally not honoured with statues and inscriptions. As a result, the only epigraphic material that can tell us something more about them are epitaphs. Hundreds of gladiator tombstones are collected in different corpora, and scholars have used these to analyse not only the types of gladiators and their arms, their life course, salaries and training schools, but also more abstract subjects such as the introduction and appropriation of Roman gladiatorial fights in the Greek East and identity formation on gladiatorial epitaphs in the Latin West. Unsurprisingly, the image of the gladiators as constructed on funerary monuments centred on their weapons, skills, courage and victories, and – obviously - not on their inferior social status. Likewise, epitaphs of charioteers also commemorated victories and prizes, the types of races in which they performed and the factions they were part of. Tombstones of performers in the theatre also indicate that there was a certain hierarchy within this group: pantomimes and mime-actors were more popular than other actors, musicians and dancers. Like gladiators and charioteers, theatre performers were organised in associations (collegia).

καὶ ὁ τοῦ νεανίσκου μὲν θεῖος, ἐμοὶ δὲ φίλος. οἶμαι δὲ καὶ τὸν ἄριστον Ἰουλιανὸν παρακαλέσειν τὸν Ἐρμήν. ἐμοὶ μὲν γὰρ ἐπέταξεν, ἐκεῖνον δ᾿ ἰκτείσαι.

609 There are some exceptions: for instance an honorific statue erected between 211 and 217 in the portico behind the theatre of Lepcis Magna for a ‘leading pantomime of his time’, the imperial freedman Marcus Septimius Aurelius Agrippa. This monument indicates that the status of infamis did not always get in the way of receiving public honour, Carter & Edmondson 2014, 553-4: IRT 606: ‘M(arco) Septimio Aurelio Agrippae / M(arci) Aureli Antonini Pii Felicis Aug(usti) lib(erto) / pantomime temporis sui primo / Romae adulescentium productorum / condiscipulo ad Italiae / spectacular / a domino nostro Aug(usto) prope / decurionalibus ornamentiis Verona / et Vicetia ornato / Mediolano in/ter juvenes recepto in Africa / Lepci Mag(na) a domino nostro Aug(usto) / ordinate / P(ublius) Albucius Apollonius / Mediolanensis ex Italia amico rari / exempli permissu splendissimi ord(inis) / p(osuit).’ Translation Gunderson & Carter 2014, 554: ‘To M. Septimius Aurelius Agrippa, freedman of M. Aurelius Antoninus Pius Felix Augustus, leading pantomime of his age, a fellow-pupil of the (?) educated youth at Rome, promoted by our lord Augustus, decorated with the insignia of a town-councillor at Verona and Vicetia, at Mediolanum accepted as a member of the youth organization, in Africa, at Lepcis Magna, enrolled by our lord Augustus as a town-councillor. P. Albucius Apollonius of Mediolanum, from Italy, erected (this) to a friend of a rare kind by authorization of the most splendid city council.’


611 Hope 2001, 112.

612 Horsmann 1998 on epitaphs of charioteers and Cameron 1976 on factions.

613 E.g. Slater 1994.
Unfortunately, grave inscriptions for *venatores* are notably less frequent in Rome and the provinces.\(^{614}\) According to Fagan and Ville, this indicates that beast-fighters were less popular than other performers.\(^{615}\) It can, however, also reflect a difference in commemoration strategies; perhaps the profession of a *venator* was not normally recorded in his epitaph, or perhaps there were simply much less beast-fighters than gladiators, actors and charioteers. From Africa, our only epigraphic material that records *venatores* consists of two votive inscriptions erected by *venatores*, one of which is only fragmentarily preserved, two short epitaphs and the texts on mosaics and curse tablets that we have seen above. One of the dedicatory inscriptions was set up in Carthage, by a ‘*venator Taelegeniorum*’ with *tria nomina*, Cnaeus Lurius Abascantianus, the other is only fragmentarily preserved.\(^{616}\) The epitaphs are both erected by sodalities of *venatores* in commemoration of one of their members: the first, from Tingad, commemorates Caius Antonius Maximus of the Telegenii.\(^{617}\) The other, which was found in Ammaedara, was erected by a sodality called ‘the Decasii’, it reads:

‘I got what I deserved, people greet me with my name, and after my death I am still Felix [happy], the dear companions have secured that with this epitaph. Long live the Decasii and let the arena always please you. He lived 40[?] years’.\(^{618}\)

This small epigraphic sample tells us a number of things; firstly, the fact that the erectors of these monuments – the *venatores* themselves or their colleagues - found their profession worth mentioning must mean that they were not ashamed of it, despite their *infamia*. On the contrary: apparently, it brought

---

\(^{614}\) Ville 1982, 334-343.

\(^{615}\) Fagan 2011, 127, n. 12.

\(^{616}\) *CIL* VIII 24532 Carthage: ‘Cn(aeus) Lurius / Abascanti/anus voto / posuit libe(n)s / venator / Taelegeni/rum’, Cnaeus Lurius Abascantianus, *venator* of the Telegenii, willingly erected this after the fulfilment of a vow’. According to Bombgardner 2000, 139 this *ex voto* inscription was found in the surroundings of the amphitheatre in Carthage. The other votive inscription erected by a *venator* in Carthage is not helpful in this matter; we do not know anything about his status because his name is only partly preserved, ‘…chus’, *CIL* VIII 24533 Carthage: ‘*pro salut[e Aug[us]]/[g(ustorum)] CLCIA[ // ]chus venator votum solvit*’.

\(^{617}\) AE 1967, 549 Tingad region: ‘*Diis Manibus Sacrum / C. Antonius Maximus vixit annis [?] / Telegenii sodali aere collato fecerunt*’, ‘Dedicated to the spirits of the deceased. C. Antonius Maximus lived … years. The companions of the Telegenii made this after having collected the money [among themselves]’.

\(^{618}\) *CIL* VIII 369 = *CIL* VIII 11549, Ammaedara: ‘*Sic ego pro meritis audio nomineque salutar / Et sum post obitum Felix, cui cari sodales hoc titulo fixerunt nomen aeternum / Decasi, valete et semper harena placete / Visix annis XL…*’.
them prestige among their peers and they were proud of that. And secondly, it shows that membership of an association was an important aspect of their social identity.

All *venatores* were *infames*, but the African epigraphic evidence indicates that they were not all slaves; Caius Antonius Maximus and Cnaeus Lurius Abascantianus had the *tria nomina*, which means that they were free(d) when these inscriptions were erected. The other *venatores* that we have seen on mosaics and wall-paintings; Mamertinus, Spittara, Hilarinus and Bullarius on the Magerius mosaic (App. ill. 3), Lampadius, Neoterius and Oivicida on other floors (App. ills. 38, 4B, 40), and Nuber, Vincinus, Libentius and Bictor on the wall paintings of the *frigidarium* in the Hunting Baths in Lepcis Magna (App. ill. 20), all have single names. And the Carthaginian curse tablets also only record single-named beast-fighters: Maurussus, Nuber, Tzelica, Tziolos, Gallicus, Sapautoulos, Asturius, Syndicius, Cardarius, Celsanus and Felix.619 Finally, the Egyptian *venator* who is applauded in the poem by Luxorius that was cited above also has a single name; Olympius.620 This does not mean, however, that all of these beast-fighters were slaves; the single names may also be *cognomina* or stage names, or indications of indigenous status (*peregrini*), which is substantiated by the non-Roman background of most of the names.

We have seen above and in § 1.1, that throughout the imperial period, both wild beasts and skilled *venatores* from Africa and other provinces were imported to perform in spectacles in Rome. Therefore, one would expect that shows in Roman Africa itself also featured hunters of indigenous African origin, such as perhaps the dark men that are depicted in the Hunting Baths in Lepcis Magna (App. ill. 20). Some of the names of the *venatores* that are cursed in the *defixiones* appear to confirm this: the names commencing in ‘tz’, such as Tzelica, Tziolos (*Τζείουλος*, *Τζίουλος*, Tzeioulos or Tziolus) and Tzaritzo (*Τζαρίτζο*), are probably Libyan, and the name ‘Maurussus’ probably reflects this fighter’s Mauretanian background.621 Some of the other names on the curse tablets, however, suggest other origins: Asturius appears to be a name from

---

619 The only exception is Vincentius Theariteones in AudDefTab 253.
620 See above p. 165-7.
621 Inscriptions of other Lybian names starting with ‘Tz’ are listed in Kerr 2010, 128: Tziro, Tzaiza, Tzinc[...], Tzo[...]. For a short introduction on Lybian, about which not much is known: Adams 2003, 245-7. On the name ‘Maurussus’: Tremel 2004, 64. See also Strabo on Africa, Str. Geog. 17.3 ‘Here dwell a people called by the Greeks Maurusii, and by the Romans and the natives Mauretanii, a populous and flourishing African nation, situated opposite to Spain, on the other side of the strait, at the Pillars of Hercules, which we have frequently mentioned before.’
Tarracenses, Gallicus was probably from Gaul and perhaps the name Sapautoulus is connected to Sapalo, Sapalus, Sapaudus and Sapalonis, names that are known from several inscriptions from Gaul and Cisalpine Gaul. And the dark-skinned hunter Olympus described by Luxorius, is said to be Egyptian. Thus, it appears that beast-fighters in the African hunting shows were not only of native North-African descent, but also originated from other parts of the empire. Some of the other fighters cursed on the defixiones, such as Celsanus, Felix and Cardarius have latinised names. The possibility that the names recorded on the curse tablets are nick names or stage names, which referred to certain characteristics in fighting style or appearance, should, however, also be kept in mind: perhaps Maurussus was called thus because of the colour of his skin, and Gallicus may have looked or fought like a Gaul (whatever that may have meant).

A particularly remarkable aspect of the naming of the targeted venatores on the curse tablets is that their maternal lineage is mentioned, but not the names of their fathers, as was common in Roman nomenclature. The defixiones attack Gallicus whom Prima bore, Tziolos who was Restuta’s son, Adesicla the son of Victoria, Maurussus, whose mother was Felicitas, Sapautoulos whom Pomponia bore and Vincentius Tzaritzo, the son of Concordia. And on all tablets the wording is similar: ‘[name of venator] quem peperit [name of mother]’. Only the defixio that attacks a team of seven venatores records neither maternal nor paternal lineage. This particular matrilinear nomenclature is not connected to possible servile status of these fighters, as one

---

622 CIL VII 3886; CIL V 5734; CIL XII 1838; CIL XIII 187; CIL XII 2033; Wierschowski 2001, 196-7.
623 Physical anthropological research into remains of bones of gladiators and venatores excavated in Eboracum (York) indicates that these gladiators and venatores more often than the average local population spent their childhood in a region far away from the location of their burial, Müldner et al. 2011, 288 and York Archaeological Trust, www.headlessromans.co.uk (accessed 15/09/2014). This confirms what we have seen in the literary sources; not only wild beasts were transported across the Empire for venationes, but (associations of) arena fighters also travelled to perform in different cities.
624 Stage names were very commonly used by performers and are well known from mosaic floors depicting spectacles, see also Leader-Newby 2007, 197.
625 AudDefTab 248 is an exception; it refers to ‘filios Aemilian’, which may suggest that Ziolus, Tzelica and Adesicla had different mothers but the same father (Aemilianus). Or, if ‘filios’ was intended in a more metaphorical way, it might mean that they were fighters belonging to a team directed by a certain Aemilianus (a group perhaps similar to the familia gladiatoria).
626 AudDefTab 247; AudDefTab 248; AudDefTab 249; AudDefTab 250; AudDefTab 251; AudDefTab 252; AudDefTab 253; AudDefTab 254.
627 AudDefTab 251.
may think, but it is part of the Graeco-Egyptian magic repertoire; it is based on Egyptian onomastic practices that were adopted along with the Graeco-Egyptian magic.628

We have seen above that only three epitaphs of *venatores* are known from North Africa, one of which, the one written by Luxorius, from the Vandal era. There are, however, two more funerary monuments for African beast-fighters: a funerary mosaic from a mausoleum in Hadrumetum (App. ill. 42) and a funerary statue from Sidi Ghrib (App. ill. 43). The statue, which is now preserved in the garden of the Byrsa museum in Carthage, was found in the proximity of a thermal complex in the modern village Sidi Ghrib, 40 km southwest of Tunis.629 It is the only statue of a *venator* that is known thusfar.

That this representation of a beast-fighter, unique in the Roman Empire, was found in North Africa seems significant and is certainly in keeping with the popularity of *venationes* in the area, and the predominance of beast-fight depictions in Romano-African art. The figure is recognisable as a beast-fighter by his costume; a short, wide tunic and a cuirass with epaulets, and sandals with ribbons around the ankles and lower legs. The head of an animal - probably a leopard - on the socket confirms that a beast-fighter is represented. The inscription ‘TER’ and the emblem of an ivy leave on the centre of the hunter’s cuirass may refer to the name of his team, even though no sodality by the name of ‘Ter...’ is known from other sources (on sodalities see § 4.3). François Baratte dates the statue to the period between 250 and 300, and suggests that, at some point in the fifth century it was taken from its original position on a cemetery, perhaps the Yasmina necropolis in Carthage, and brought to the thermal complex in Sidi Ghrib.630 The statue is made of a reused block of white marble, probably a cornice, part of which is still visible at the socket. On the back, a groove filled with metal suggests that the figure was originally fastened to a background and not meant to be seen from behind, may indicate that this statue was originally placed in a niche in a grave monument. Two African funerary statues for charioteers (App. ills. 44 and 45) provide interesting parallels for the *venator* from Sidi Ghrib.631 The first was

628 Curbera 1999, 201.
631 Baratte & De Chaisemartin 2012, 513 argue that a much smaller statuette found in the sanctuary of Saturn in Ammaedara can be classified in the same category, but given the size of this object and its provenance from a sanctuary, it seems to me more likely that it was a votive gift. On this statuette: Baratte, Benzine Ben Abdallah, Fourmond 2000.
found on the Yasmina necropolis nearby Carthage, is dated to the third century and is also displayed in the Byrsa museum (App. ill. 44). It is perfectly preserved: the charioteer is depicted in his short tunic with the reins around his waist, carrying a whip in his left hand and a jug in the right.\textsuperscript{632} On the other side of the monument is a statue of a woman, probably his wife.\textsuperscript{633} The other example is not intact anymore; only the lower right leg of the third century charioteer statue from Hadrumetum, now in the Musée de Sousse, is preserved (App. ill. 45).\textsuperscript{634} Despite the condition of this piece, the bandages around the leg of the figure and the horse head that is depicted on the socket that was supporting the statue, enable us to identify this as a charioteer statue.

Funerary statues for performers were rare in the Roman Empire; gladiators and other performers could be commemorated on tombstones with a relief depiction, and in the Greek East victorious athletes were honoured with honorific statues, but graves with statuary representations of the deceased performers, such as these from Carthage and Hadrumetum, are not common.\textsuperscript{635} We can imagine that these statues were erected by rich members of their sodality or faction and that the statue bases had inscriptions such as those for \textit{venatores} from Ammaedara or Timgad that we have seen above (p. 173). To the \textit{venatores} commemorated in these inscriptions, and on this statue, or more precisely, to the persons who erected these monuments (the families or sodalities of the deceased \textit{venator}) these funerary monuments were apparently adequate media to claim a place in the social hierarchy of Roman Africa, to materialise the ‘social capital’ that these fighters earned through skilled fighting. Like gladiators and other performers, African beast-fighters were \textit{infames} because of their profession, but they could also win respect, admiration and popularity among their social peers and fans with a courageous and technically superior performance.\textsuperscript{636} In Africa, their fame is also celebrated on mosaic floors and wall-paintings, and the prospect of seeing the performance of a famous star-\textit{venator} in the arena, must have been an important part of the attraction of wild beast shows. Literary sources show that the African beast-fighters were not only popular in their own province, but also in Rome. Whether the \textit{venatores} were native Africans, Egyptians, Gauls, slaves or free(d) men, their social identity was not based on their social status or origin, but on

\begin{footnotesize}
\begin{itemize}
\item[\textsuperscript{632}] On this statue: Veyne, Beschaouch, Ennabli 1995.
\item[\textsuperscript{634}] About this statue: De Chaisemartin 1987.
\item[\textsuperscript{635}] Fejfer 2008, 201.
\item[\textsuperscript{636}] Fagan 2011, 152.
\end{itemize}
\end{footnotesize}
their performance and membership of a team. It is to those teams, or sodalities of *venatores*, that the last section of this chapter is dedicated.

§ 4.3 African sodalities of *venatores*, partisanship and rivalry

We have already come across the African sodalities of *venatores* a number of times and now it is time to review the evidence and literature on the topic in more detail, since partisanship for these sodalities and the rivalry between them and their fans appear to be important aspects of the popularity of wild beast fights in Roman Africa. Supporting a particular team of beast-fighters, and consequently loathing (the fans of) another team, probably gave fans a sense of belonging within their own group and this may have been an important aspect of the attraction of wild beast fights in which the favourite team performed. We will start by going back to the ‘Fancy Dress’ mosaic from Thysdrus, which we have already identified as a representation of the *cena libera* of a team of beast-fighters on the evening before their performance above (App. ill. 33 and § 4.1). This so called ‘Fancy dress mosaic’ or ‘Mosaic with the Bulls’ was unearthed in 1954, 500 meter from the famous ‘Colosseum’ of Thysdrus. It was found in a large rectangular room, probably in a *domus*, and is usually dated to the third century. Unfortunately nothing else is known about its archaeological context. The scene, which is enclosed by four stalks of millet, represents five men drinking and talking in a lively way. In front of them is a small stool with two jugs on it and a large mixing bowl for wine. A person, probably a servant, hands a cup to one of the feasting men. The other servant moves his hand towards his lips, apparently whispering ‘Silentium dormiant tauri’, ‘Ssshht, let the bulls sleep’. The bulls that he is referring to are in the foreground of the scene, sleeping. The figures at the table are all depicted with different garments and attributes. On the right is a man in a grey tunic with three-striped *clavi* and in his hands a thin stick with a crescent on top. The man sitting next...
to him is dressed in a red tunic with two-striped green clavi and holds a stalk of millet, the same as the crop enclosing the banquet scene. The figure in the middle, in the green tunic with two-striped black clavi, wears a golden wreath topped by five spikes, one of which has a little blue-green fish on top. The second figure from the left has a green tunic with two-striped black clavi and also wears a wreath, in this case with three spikes and an S on top. The last man, on the extreme left, is leaning backwards in a white tunic with two-striped brown clavi, an ivy leave on a stick in his right hand and a drinking bowl in the other.

Various interpretations for the depiction on this mosaic have been proposed. Picard for example, proposed that the drinking figures were men and women (!) dressed as gods, while Seyrig connects them to the Saturnalia; the feast on which masters and slaves switched roles. Floriani Squarciapino suggested that the banquet was related to cults for Mithras, Magna Mater or local fertility gods. However, the presence of the bulls and the little depictions (brand marks) on the behinds of two of the bulls in the foreground, surely indicate that this scene is connected to the animal-fights in the amphitheatre (App. ill. 33). The ‘tattoos’ on the bulls represent a gladiator and a sistrum shaped object and were probably intended to be able to distinguish bulls provided by different trainers, stock-breeders or perhaps professional associations of venatores. The men are reclining on a C-shaped couch, as was the custom during banquets in this period. The texts above them records what they said to each other:

‘We will be naked. We have come to drink. You have spoken too much already. Let us amuse ourselves. We have three.’

The interpretation of ‘nos nudi fiemus’ and ‘nos tres tenemus’ is uncertain, but the other phrases, ‘avocemur’, ‘bibere venimus’ and ‘iam multum loquimini’ surely refer to the festive character of this meeting. The luxurious setting of the meal, the

---

642 Salomonson 1960.
644 Floriani Squarciapino 1957, 245-249.
645 Salomonson 1960, 39.
646 Dunbabin 2003 provides good photos of banquet scenes.
648 Notermans 1997, 387 comes up with a rather farfetched explanation of ‘Nos tres tenemus’, suggesting that it might refer to drinking ‘ad numerum’; a game in which one had to drink as many sips or cups as the number on the dice indicated.
drinking of wine and the apparent carefree pleasure of this party are in contrast with the danger – symbolised by the group of bulls - that is awaiting the fighters in the next day’s spectacle. Scholars have suggested that the attributes that the *venatores* are carrying had apotropaic value and that they were intended to protect fighters from danger and to bring luck. These ‘lucky symbols’ may have been of special importance to the fighters of the arena who had to face dangerous animals the next day before the eyes of thousands of spectators. But the attributes that the banqueters are carrying as well as the large millet stalks framing the scene have also been interpreted as the ‘emblems’ of sodalities of beast-fighters, which could mean that the figures represent five different teams of *venatores*. Judging from the size of the letters and the central position of the remark ‘*Shht let the bulls sleep*’, this text probably formed an important aspect of the mosaic’s message. The discovery of another mosaic representing bulls accompanied by the text ‘*at dormiant tauri*’ in a house in Uzitta (App. ill. 46), confirms that this sentence apparently had a commonly known, specific, symbolic meaning in the realm of African hunting shows; it has been suggested that ‘*tauri*’ does not literally refer to bulls that were present during the *cena libera*, but to a rivalling team of *venatores* who were called ‘the Taurisci’.

The discovery of the Magerius-mosaic which depicted the Telegenii (App. ill. 3) in 1966 accelerated the search for more African associations of beast-fighters. Since then, the Tunisian archaeologist Azedine Beschouch and a number of other scholars have published an impressive series of articles in which they identified more than 20 sodalities of beast-fighters that they thought would have been active in Africa Proconsularis and the eastern part of Numidia in the third and fourth century. For the identification of these groups, they relied on the emblematic symbols, such as the millet stalks on the Fancy Dress floor (App. ill. 33) and a floor with a lion from private baths in Uzita (App. ill. 46b) and the crescents-on-stick in the hands of the righternmost banqueter and on the Magerius mosaic (App. ill. 3), to identify associations of *venatores* in the African evidence, assuming that these symbols were ‘emblems’

---

649 Salomonson 1960, 40 for a list of the signs including references to relevant literature.
650 Beschouch 1979, fig. 8.
651 Dunbabin 1978, 81; Leone 2007, 69.
which referred to particular sodalities (see the table in App. ill. 15). In terms of organisation, he thinks that the African corporations of beast-fighters were similar to other professional collegia, because they also had patron deities, were divided into sections presided by magistri and could arrange the funerals of their members. As noted in § 2.3, Beschaouch also argued that the sodalities of venatores supplied service personnel and beasts for the amphitheatre. And by referring to the presence of symbols that are similar to the emblems of corporations of beast-fighters on amphorae from Ostia and Thaenae (App. ill. 16), he also attempts to substantiate that the sodalities undertook economic activities in trade and agriculture.

Beschaouch was not the only scholar who was looking for emblems that could attest to the existence of more sodalities of venatores; the French archaeologist Yvon Thébert, for example, claims to have found the symbols of more associations of beast-fighters on the walls of the frigidarium of the baths of Julia Memmia in Bulla Regia (App. ill. 47). He proposes that the benefactress of the thermal complex, Julia Memmia, may have been acquainted to the sodality in some way or another and that a number of these groups were therefore allowed to use the baths, which would explain the presence of their emblems above the niches in the frigidarium. Thébert also reviews evidence for the presence of corporations of venatores in other bath-complexes in Africa, suggesting that some sodalities owned baths, which they used as meeting places and that in other cases benefactors had particular emblems represented in their baths, in order to express their fanhood of a certain team of venatores.

The French scholar Christophe Hugoniot is one of the most recent contributors to these investigations. He dismisses – I think rightfully - much of the suggestions that were brought forward by Beschouch and Thébert, emphasising that the venatio was the key activity of the sodalities of venatores, who were – he argues – infames and of low social status like other performers.

---

653 Beschaouch has (not always convincingly) identified fourteen of these ‘sodalitates venatorum’ as he calls them Beschaouch 1977, 1979, 1985, 1997, 2007. See also Hugoniot 2003, vol. III, 40-48 for a list of all ‘insignes de sodalités’ that were thusfar collected.


656 Thébert 1991.


658 Ibid., 203-4.

Hugoniot agrees with Thébert that the sodalities probably functioned in a way similar to other *collegia*, with patrons, honorary members, communal banquets and funerary activities, but he does not believe that they were involved in the long-distance trade of olive-oil or wild beasts, as Beschaouch suggested.\textsuperscript{660} Cinzia Vismara also collected and reviewed all the sources and secondary literature concerning the sodalities and concluded – like Hugoniot - that the available material does not allow us to reconstruct the corporations’ activities with certainty.\textsuperscript{661} However, Vismara is less cautious than the French historian and suggests that the sodalities were similar to *familiae gladiatoriae*, that they trained *venatores* and that they produced beast-fights upon request, providing wild animals, fighters, settings and costumes.\textsuperscript{662}

As I have argued in § 2.3, it is unlikely that corporations of *venatores* were involved in capturing beasts, firstly because there is hardly any evidence for this: the symbols on the *amphorae* that Beschouch found may be any kind of emblem and there is no reason to associate them to African corporations of beast-fighters. And secondly, because tracing, capturing and transporting wild beasts over land and sea required very specific knowledge, expertise, equipment and experience; it is more likely that the donors of *venationes* relied on the services of native African hunters and professional traders and not on sodalities of beast-fighters, who were – as the sources demonstrate – only the performers in the arena (and *infames*). Furthermore, I think that instead of tracing other potential sodalities of *venatores* by searching for possible emblems, or speculating about their commercial activities, we should focus on the cultural significance and social function of these sodalities. After all, the sources that we have investigated indicate that these associations were an important aspect of the African enthusiasm for and attraction to *venationes*. As noted above, ‘positive dispositional alignment’, as Fagan describes it, or - put more simply – supporting a particular team of beast-fighters as a fan, and the consequential loathing of (the supporters of) another team, appear to have given African spectators of *venationes* a comfortable sense of belonging to a group. Cheering for a favourite (team of) *venator(es)* or booing the performances of rivalling team must have been an important part of the attractive power of

\textsuperscript{660} Hugoniot 1996, 401-3.
\textsuperscript{661} Vismara 2007, 118: ‘Ma quali fossero esattamente le loro funzioni non siamo in grado di stabilire con certezza, sulla base della documentazione disponibile.’
\textsuperscript{662} Vismara 2007, 118-120.
the African wild beast fights. Tertullian characterises the partisanship and resulting rivalry at spectacles in general, not only at *venationes*, as follows:

‘There is no public spectacle without violence to the spirit. For where there is pleasure, there is eagerness, which gives pleasure its flavour. Where there is eagerness, there is rivalry which gives its flavour to eagerness. Yes, and then, where there is rivalry, there also are madness, bile, anger, pain, and all the things that follow from them, and (like them) are incompatible with moral discipline. For even if a man enjoy the spectacles in modest and upright fashion, agreeably to his dignity, his age, and his natural character, still he cannot with a mind quite unstirred or without some unspoken agitation of spirit.’

Apart from this passage and the inscriptions and mosaics that we have seen so far, there are two other sets of sources that are informative in this regard; African red slipware and – once again - the Carthaginian curse tablets. We will deal with the pottery first.

It concerns a group of third century ARS jugs with depictions of palm branches, wreaths with plumes and fights between *venatores* and beasts. Applied to the jugs are cartouches with inscriptions: ‘*Telegeni nika*’, ‘*Telegenius, be victorious!*’, and in the same vein, ‘*Pentasi nika*’, ‘*Taurisci nika*’ and ‘*Sinemati nika*’ (App. ill. 48). These terracotta flasks may bring us closer to the partisans of particular sodalities of beast-fighters than we have been so far. This pottery was probably produced in a workshop in the region of modern El Aouja nearby ancient Thysdrus and was first studied by Jan Willem Salomonson. He concludes that the jugs were probably sold as ‘gadgets’, the merchandise items of particular teams of beast-fighters before the show would begin, or distributed afterwards in order to commemorate the victory of a particular team. They clearly record a lively partisanship of sodalities of beast-fighters and may be

---

663 Tert. De spect. XV: ‘Omne enim spectaculum sine concussione spiritus non est. Ubi enim voluptas, ibi et studium, per quod scilicet voluptas sapit; ubi studium, ibi et aemulatio, perquam studium sapit. Porro et ubi aemulatio, ibi et furor et bilis et ira et dolor et cetera ex his, quae cum his non conpetunt disciplinae. Nam et si qui modeste et probe spectaculis fruatur pro dignitatis vel actatis vel etiam naturae suae condicione, non tamen immoblis animi est et sine tacita spiritus passione.’

664 Salomonson 1960, 51; Salomonson 1962; Salomonson 1968; Salomonson 1969. Salomonson 1960, 51; Hermann & Hoek, van den 2013, 74-5. On the basis of the shape and workmanship of the jugs, the inspiration and the make of the applied reliefs, as well as the character and lettering of the inscriptions, Salomonson 1960, 51 concludes that the Nika jugs were probably produced by one workshop in the immediate vicinity of El Aouja, which is where the majority of them were found. On the Taurisci: Heron de Villefosse 1915, CLCCVII-CLXXXI; Leone 2007, 69.

665 ‘Nika’ acclamations are well-known from the realm of the circus, but were also used during theatrical and agonistic performances as well as amphitheatres games in the Greek and Latin speaking part of the Empire. Cameron 1973, 65-80.
compared to the paraphernalia that supporters of sports teams can buy nowadays. The curse tablets from Carthage demonstrate that rivalry between different sodalities of *venatores* and their supporters existed in late antique North Africa. As we have seen, the curse texts tell us quite a lot about the targeted *venatores* and what was (not) expected of them, but nothing about the persons who commissioned these curses. It seems probably, however, that they were passionate supporters of a competing sodality of *venatores* or persons who were otherwise closely involved with the shows, such as the owners or trainers of teams of *venatores*. The intense rivalry between (teams of) *venatores* and their supporters reminds us of the competition between the different factions of chariot racers that were immensely popular in late antique cities, particularly in Rome and the cities of the eastern empire.ööö The African mosaic floors, the ARS jugs and the curse tablets indicate that a similar atmosphere, characterised by admiration of skilled fighters, partisanship of certain sodalities of *venatores* and the intense dislike of (partisans of) another team existed in late antique North Africa. In addition to the entertaining power of the hunting spectacles and satisfaction in seeing natural enemies skilfully eliminated in the amphitheatre, this emotional alignment to particular beast-fighters or their entire team and the sense of belonging with a group of supporters must for thousands of African *venatio*-spectators have contributed greatly to the attraction of *venationes*.

§ 4.4 Conclusion

This chapter investigated the attractive power of hunting spectacles in general, and the African enthusiasm for *venationes* in particular. We have seen that the program of wild beast fights was often varied and carefully planned: the shows normally started with a *pompa* and some entertaining, but not yet violent, support acts, such as reenactments of myths with animals, acrobatic tricks or performances of tamed animals. On the day before the games, overexcited fans could already go to the *cena libera* to see their favourite performers. Others anticipated the coming games in a less positive way; they issued binding curses, probably with the help of specialised magicians or magical books, so that demons would attack the *venator* that they despised during his performance, causing loss of concentration, courage and strength so that he would be injured.

---

or even killed by the beast he was facing. Expectant anticipation of a show, fascination with wild exotic beasts, the overwhelming atmosphere of the arena, the generosity of the producer, the addictive uncertainty of the outcome of a fight against powerful and truly dangerous wild beasts, must have made wild beast fights immensely exciting and attractive for all ancient audiences, not specifically in Roman Africa.

Another important part of the experience of spectators of hunting spectacles was the amazement and admiration or disappointment felt in seeing the performance of the venatores. The curse tablets and mosaics indicate that fighting wild beasts in the arena was not plain butchery and that routines were executed according to certain ‘rules’, which required knowledge about the behaviour of different beasts, skilled use of different weapons and probably also a sense of machismo and showmanship. Good venatores were admired for their courage, speed, strength and skills and they could win fame and appreciation despite their inferior social status. The names of venatores from Africa indicate that many of them were probably of indigenous North-African descent and literary sources indicate that the skills of African beast-fighters were not only celebrated on mosaic floors and wall-paintings in their own province, but were also well-known elsewhere in the empire. Along with the large numbers of African beasts that were shipped to perform in arenas in Rome, Italy and elsewhere, also the African beast-fighters themselves appear to have been used in venationes throughout the empire. In Roman Africa this perhaps incited a sense of pride of their African venatores and even accelerated the African enthusiasm for hunting shows; for spectators the prospect of seeing a famous star-venator in the arena, must have been an important part of the attraction of wild beast shows.

The cultural importance of venationes in Roman Africa and the appreciation for the most courageous beast-fighters and their supreme fighting skills is also clear from the existence of rivalling associations or teams of beast-fighters and their equally rivalling partisans, which is typical for North Africa and perhaps comparable to the rivalry between the late antique circus factions and their partisans. For the African venatores, some of whom were of free(d) status, but still infamis, membership of such a sodality appears to have been the most important aspect of their social identity. And also for their fans, the sense of belonging to a social group of partisans who all supported the same sodality and loathed venatores from the other teams may have been of great importance. All in all, the satisfaction in seeing natural enemies, particularly lions or
leopards, destroyed by African hunters, the admiration for their skill, courage and fame, and the rivalry between different African sodalities beast-fighters and their partisans, can - I think - explain for a large part the African enthusiasm for hunting spectacles. These opportunities that the *venationes* offered for shaping social identities, for *venatores*, spectators and editors, as well as the African involvement in the hunt, capture, trade and transport of wild beasts that we have seen in chapter 2, appear to have been key to the popularity and cultural importance of the performance in North Africa.