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CHAPTER 26

SPECTACLES OF ANIMAL ABUSE

JO-ANN SHELTON

Introduction

The focus of this chapter is community-sanctioned spectacles in the ancient world that featured the domination and/or destruction of animals as an entertainment. Such spectacles are generally less appealing to modern societies, in large part because we rarely feel threatened by animals. In our urbanized environments, we have little awareness of how they might endanger our lives by competing with us for food or attacking us. It is not, moreover, simply our physical separation from these animals that has made us unmindful of their potential to harm us. Our activities have brought to the brink of extinction many species by which our ancestors felt imperilled. We have now, ironically, become the conservators of species whose populations may not survive without the protection of humans. We no longer view these creatures as menaces to our survival, but as residents of a natural world that we are now able to cherish because we have obliterated much of it.

For our ancestors, however, the natural world was a frightening space, filled with animals who harmed them by attacking them or preying on their crops or livestock. The ancient Greeks and Romans constructed a narrative in which humans triumphed over the unpredictability of Nature by exploiting a few animal species for food, labour, and clothing, and by eliminating those species that threatened their survival. Enshrined in ancient mythology were tales of heroes who made the world safer and life easier for humans by subduing monstrous beasts. Hercules, for example, killed a lion that was terrorizing Greece, and then used its skin for clothing. Jason forced fire-breathing oxen to submit to a yoke, and plough a field. For ordinary mortals, hostile Nature could be defied if men formed societies and supported one another's efforts to protect resources. The domestication of some animals and the destruction of others had both practical and symbolic implications. The ability to subjugate (Latin *subjugare* = 'put under a yoke') or to exterminate animals was a testimony to the evolution of civilization, and a proof that

humans were unique in their possession of reason and their capacity to restrain bestial impulses within themselves. Spectacles that displayed the torment or killing of animals confirmed the superiority of humans over the natural world.

Crete

Cattle were a domesticated species, and the castrated males (oxen) were a primary source of draught power. So important were they in this capacity that the process of yoking oxen to a plough was a milestone of human culture. It was necessary, however, for breeding purposes, to leave some of the males uncastrated. These intact males (bulls) were not trained for labour, and were allowed to roam free like wild animals. Occasionally some were selected as gifts to the gods in community sacrifices. Confrontations with ferocious bulls, which needed to be captured relatively unharmed for sacrifices, threatened human life and limb. In turn, the ability to control bulls became an indicator of courage and ingenuity, and men developed exhibitions of their prowess in dominating bulls.

Such exhibitions occurred among the Minoans of Bronze Age Crete, whose best known palace compound was at Cnossos. Although scholars have not been able to decipher the written documents left by the Minoans, we can gain information about their culture from their art work, which has been discovered not only on Crete, but elsewhere in the eastern Mediterranean world, including mainland Greece. In one activity depicted by Minoan artists, young men vaulted on and off the backs of bulls. Because most of our evidence for bull-leaping has been found in the area of Cnossos, it may have been a spectacle that was peculiar to the residents of that palace compound. We are not able to determine with certainty from the artistic depictions the sequence of the leapers' movements. They may have faced a charging bull and leapt, from the ground or from an assistant's shoulders, onto its back, and then vaulted or somersaulted off its hindquarters. Another participant may have grabbed one of the bull's horns from the side, like a modern rodeo steer wrestler, in an effort to control its movements (Evans, 1963; Ward, 1968; Younger, 1976, 1995; Willetts, 1977; Pinsent, 1983; Marinatos, 1989, 1994; Scanlon, 1999; Loughlin, 2004; Kyle, 2007).

The spectacles in the palace compound may have evolved from activities in rural areas of the island, even as modern steer wrestling evolved from ranch work. Capturing a bull that had free-ranged in rugged terrain, and moving it to an altar for sacrifice, was a process fraught with danger. Artistic images depict cattle being wrestled with, driven into nets, and trussed with ropes (Davis, 1977: 256–7; Younger, 1995: pl. LX). Competitions among the Minoan 'cowboys', to display their fearlessness and skill, may have contributed to the development of spectacles at the palace compound.

The artists who recorded the palace events did not provide information about the cultural context. We do not know if the events were produced as religious rites, athletic competitions, or blood sports. Nor can we, from the highly conventionalized art work, identify the social status or even the gender of the leapers. They may have been slaves, war captives, professional performers, or perhaps young aristocrats undergoing a rite of initiation. Following the performances of 'leaping', the bulls were presumably killed in sacrifice (Ward, 1968: 117–22; Younger, 1995: 518–21).

One artefact juxtaposes scenes of bull-leaping with scenes of pairs of humans engaged in boxing and wrestling contests (Marinatos and Hirmer, 1960: pls. 182–5). This context suggests that bull-leaping was a competition in which humans contended for the title of 'best leaper'. However the presence of the bull sets the activity apart from human-against-human contests. The bull was not simply a 'stage prop' on which the athletes competed in gymnastic skills. It was their adversary. The goal of the event was, like modern bullfights and rodeo events, to demonstrate the ability of humans to prevail over the forces of savage Nature. Humans may compete against one another to be the best matador, or steer wrestler, or bull-leaper, but, in all these activities, the primary opponent is the non-human, the 'other', the bull.

Bulls were prominent in the myths that the Greeks told about the people of Cnossos. One myth concerns King Minos and his wife, Pasiphaë, who became sexually obsessed with a handsome white bull. She concealed herself in a hollow statue of a cow so that the bull would mate with her (Apollodorus, *Library* 3.1.3–4; Diodorus Siculus, 4.77.1). The offspring of this unnatural union—a monster with the body of a human and the head of a bull—was called the Minotaur (the bull—Greek *tauros*—of Minos). It was imprisoned in a maze-like structure, known as the Labyrinth. Minos forced the Athenians to atone for their murder of his son by sending to Crete, every few years, fourteen young people who were placed in the Labyrinth to be devoured by the Minotaur. One year, Theseus volunteered to be sent to Crete. With the help of Minos's daughter, Ariadne, Theseus entered the Labyrinth, killed the Minotaur, and rescued the other Athenian youths (Plutarch, *Theseus* 15, 19). Theseus later had another encounter with a monstrous Cretan bull, one that Hercules had released on mainland Greece. When the bull terrorized a region near Athens, Theseus yoked and then killed it (Plutarch, *Theseus* 14).

The design of the real palace compound at Cnossos, which has many narrow passageways, may have encouraged stories about a labyrinth. And the myth of the man-killing bull-monster may have originated with an actual occurrence, when a bull, being transported for sacrifice, got loose and attacked people in the maze of streets. Or perhaps, as at modern Pamplona, a bull was goaded to run so that residents could participate in the torment of a symbol of savage Nature, and test their own skills at escaping its horns.

Victory over a bull signified more, however, than just physical prowess. The myth of the Minotaur was a cautionary tale. The tale of Pasiphaë's lust and the monstrous beast she bore is a warning that the inability to restrain animal passions may return humans to a bestial existence and destroy the achievements of human society. The bull symbolizes both the danger without—an antagonistic Nature that obstructs human endeavours—and the danger within the human soul—the potential to descend back into bestiality. The spectacles of bull-leaping in Crete were repeated year after year as a reminder that human culture and rationality could triumph over Nature.

Greece

Bulls were regarded elsewhere in the ancient Mediterranean world as fitting adversaries for men who desired to test their strength. Amesinas, a wrestler victorious in the Olympic Games of 460 BC, is reported to have trained by wrestling a bull while he was tending cattle (Eusebius, *Chronicle* 203, 207; Pausanias, 6.5.1–9). The Thessalians of northern Greece developed an event in which men mounted on horses chased bulls across an arena until the bulls were exhausted. A rider then jumped from his horse onto a bull, grabbed its horns, and wrestled it to the ground. One report states that the rider killed the bull by twisting its neck (Pliny, *Natural History* 8.70.182). This activity seems close to the steer-wrestling practised in modern rodeo arenas, although the object of the modern event is to subdue, not kill the animal. A relief from Smyrna, a Greek city in Asia Minor, may depict a similar activity (Vigneron, 1968: pl. 78b). Julius Caesar introduced the event to Rome in 45 BC, and it remained popular in the imperial period (Suetonius, *Claudius* 21.3; Dio Cassius, 61.9.1).

Chickens appear in modern metaphors as cowardly creatures, but male chickens—roosters or cocks—are naturally aggressive animals who will battle to the death to gain a dominant position in the flock. Greek men, like those in many other cultures, found these barnyard combats so entertaining that they began to stage them for their own amusement (Columella, *De re rustica* 8.2.4–5). Clifford Geertz, in his work on the culture of Bali, attributed the allure of such spectacles to antithetical sentiments. On the one hand, the display of bestial savagery reminded spectators of how humans would behave if not restrained by social conventions. It reassured them that they were superior to beasts. On the other hand, spectators admired the cocks' dauntless determination and envied their freedom to indulge in 'rage untrammeled' (Geertz, 1972: 10).

In ancient Athens, annual displays of cock-fighting were produced with state funds, probably in the Theatre of Dionysus (Hoffmann, 1974; Dumont, 1988; Csapo, 1993; Barringer, 2001: 89–95). The origin of this institution has been variously attributed. Miltiades believed that viewing a cock-fight would stimulate his soldiers to bravery more than any words could (Philo, *Quod omnis probus liber sit* 131–3). Themistocles ordered his soldiers to observe that fighting cocks were willing to endure fatal injuries rather than yield to defeat (Aelian, *Varia historia* 2.28). Solon stated that, by law, all men of military age were required to assemble and watch cocks fight to the limit of exhaustion (Lucian, *Anacharsis* 37). By viewing this spectacle, said Solon, the souls of men acquire an enthusiasm for danger because they do not wish to appear less courageous than cocks. The variations within these stories suggest that they are *aetia*, stories created to explain the genesis of an event whose true origin is unknown. All concur, however, that the tenacity of the chickens served as a lesson in martial valour. The philosopher Chrysippus commented on the utility of fighting cocks to instil in soldiers an appetite for courage (Plutarch, *Moralia* 1049a).

The Greek word for 'cock', *alektryon*, may be cognate with the verb *alekzo*, 'to defend' (Csapo, 1993: 10). The Greeks believed that the cock's crest resembled a military helmet

and that the bronze spurs attached to the legs of the fighting cock (to make it more lethal) resembled spears. Because of their bellicose behaviour, cocks were associated with Ares, the god of war (Lucian, *Gallus* 3). On some Attic vase-paintings, scenes of cock-fights are juxtaposed with scenes of combats between heroes or humans, so as to emphasize the fortitude of the latter (Hoffmann, 1974: 201–3). Fighting cocks were also associated with Athena, the defender of Athens. An image of a cock appeared on at least one of her statues, a reminder that the goddess, too, was always ready for battle (Pausanias, 6.26.3). At the Panathenaic Festival, victorious athletes received trophy vases that depicted Athena flanked by two cocks (Bentz, 1998: 51–3). The images were an artistic metaphor for the virtues required of athletes and soldiers.

Cocks were, however, also associated with Aphrodite, and were characterized as hypersexual creatures (Aristotle, *History of Animals* 488b4). The Greeks observed, moreover, that the behaviour of cocks during sexual arousal mirrored in several respects their behaviour during combat. And the cock who was the victor in battle crowed over the body of his vanquished opponent, as did the cock who was at the climax of copulation (Pliny, *Natural History* 10.24.27; Cicero, *De divinatione* 1.34.74, 2.26.56). Thus the successful cock could be viewed as possessing 'the essential characteristics of a "real man" in Greek society: an ideal hoplite and an assiduous lover' (Csapo, 1993: 22). In contrast, a cock that remained alive after being defeated in combat never crowed again, and was forever after submissive to its vanquisher. The phrase 'like a beaten cock' became a metaphor for servile behaviour (Aristophanes, *Birds* 70, 71; Pliny, *Natural History* 10.24.47). Philo quotes the tragedian Ion as saying that 'battered in body and blind in each eye, the fighting cock rallies his courage, for he prefers death to slavery' (*Quod omnis* 133). Spectators of a cock-fight learned that defeat in battle might cause men both a loss of virility and a reduction to slavery.

There were other spectacles of animal combats in the Greek world. At Sparta, young men, divided into two teams, engaged in an event at which boars were set against one another (Pausanias, 3.14.9–10, 3.20.2). The boar-fights were held in conjunction with a sacrifice of puppies to Enyalius, perhaps an epithet of Ares. The boar-fights occurred on the day before the teams of young men fought one another in a no-holds-barred contest. Perhaps the preliminary boar-fights were staged, like the cock-fights in Athens, to inspire martial valour and provide an object lesson for the young men who would, as Spartan soldiers, be expected to fight ferociously and never to yield in battle.

Spectacles of fighting animals sometimes involved pitting animals of different species against one another. A late sixth-century BC frieze, now in the National Museum in Athens, seems to show the pitting of a dog and a cat or a ferret (Rostovtzeff, 1928: pl. 64.4). Alexander the Great set dogs on deer, bears, boars, and even lions and elephants (Pliny, *Natural History* 8.61.149–150).

During an annual festival at Patrae to Artemis, a large bonfire was constructed around an altar (Pausanias, 7.18.11–13). Into it, people threw live wild animals—birds, boars, stags, roe deer, wolf cubs, and bear cubs. Any animal that managed to escape was dragged back to the flames. Although the origin of the event was religious, people were undoubtedly attracted to it because of the spectacle of seeing wild animals destroyed.

Not every display of animals resulted in death. Spectators were also entertained by exhibitions of humans forcing wild animals to act 'civilized'. There were at Athens annual displays of lions trained to be gentle and of bears taught to dance and wrestle (Isocrates, *Antidosis* 213).

The Roman Empire

The Romans developed public spectacles of animal abuse unparalleled in scale (Jennison, 1937: 42–98; Auguet, 1972: 81–119; Toynbee, 1973: *passim*; Ville, 1981: 51–6, 88–168; Wiedemann, 1992: 55–67; Kyle, 1998: 184–94; Bomgardner, 2000: 210–18; Kyle, 2007: 264–69). In AD 80, at the dedication of the Flavian Amphitheatre (later the Colosseum), 9,000 animals, some indigenous, some as exotic as a rhinoceros, were killed over a period of 100 days (Dio Cassius, 66.25; Suetonius, *Titus* 7.3). In AD 107, the emperor Trajan celebrated his military victory in Dacia with 120 days of spectacles during which 11,000 animals were killed (Dio Cassius, 68.15). (The figures given in our ancient texts may be exaggerated, but there is no question that the number of animals that perished during several centuries of spectacles was enormous.) Like other ancient cultures, the Romans considered civilization to be a triumph of human rationality over the chaos of Nature. Displays of animals killing other animals gave evidence of the violence, the 'rage untrammeled', of the brutish natural world. Exhibitions of humans killing animals attested to the proficiency of humans in constructing a secure environment for themselves. Both these entertainments reminded spectators that they were fortunate to belong to the human community. A third type of entertainment offered displays of animals killing humans who had threatened the community—criminals and prisoners of war, for example—and had therefore chosen to act like and be treated like irrational beasts.

The spectacles played a major role in defining Roman culture and influencing public affairs. As the Romans expanded their power in the Mediterranean world, traffic in exotic animals demonstrated that the Romans had won dominion both over people in very remote areas, and over Nature at the ends of the world. At its greatest extent, Roman dominion stretched from Britain to Syria and embraced people of many different cultures. Exhibitions of animal abuse, sponsored by officials who were advocates for the Roman state, promoted Roman values in even the farthest regions of the empire. Even outside of Rome and other large cities, aspirants to political authority sponsored displays of animal abuse, albeit on a much smaller scale. For example, in AD 249, at Minturnae, a town south of Rome, a four-day event included the killing of ten bears and four herbivores (*ILS* 5062). In fourth-century AD Syria, animal spectacles were so popular that people camped out on the streets at night in order to secure seats (Libanius, *Epistles* 1399.2, 3).

The origins of the spectacles were located in activities in rural areas. In order to protect their food supplies, people in agricultural communities sought to eradicate animals that preyed on their livestock or devoured their plants. At annual festivals, they celebrated their successes in food production and appealed to the gods to assist them in this effort (Jennison, 1937: 42; Scullard, 1981: 102–3, 110–111). Two festivals in April included spectacles at which pest species were tormented and killed. At the Cerealia, honouring the grain goddess Ceres, torches were tied to the tails of foxes. And at the Floralia, honoring the vegetation goddess Flora, wild goats and rabbits were netted and slaughtered (Ovid, *Fasti* 4.681–2, 5.371–2). The public spectacle of the destruction of these pest species offered reassurance that humans were able to shape the environment to their own needs. The festivals were also held in urban areas, where city-dwellers were less familiar with the threats posed by animals, but nonetheless recognized that the spectacles demonstrated the triumph of the rational human community over an unpredictable and therefore dangerous Nature. Spectators gave no moral consideration to the pain of the animals. The animals were enemies, and their suffering was the penalty they paid for endangering human lives. Even 'man's best friend' was publicly punished for putting human lives in jeopardy. At an annual event in Rome, dogs were tortured by being suspended from gallows in a ritual that punished their species for failing to warn the city of the approach of the Gauls up the Capitoline in 390 BC (Pliny, *Natural History* 29.14. 57, 10.26.51).

The roots of urban spectacles of animal abuse can also be traced to the sport hunting that upper-class men enjoyed at their rural villas. Sport hunting was advocated on the grounds that it developed the stamina and courage required of a leader (Polybius, 31.29; Pliny, *Panegyric* 81; Anderson, 1985: 83–7, 101–2). It was also endorsed as a public service because the eradication of dangerous or devouring animals increased the security of the entire community and encouraged agricultural expansion. Among town-dwellers, only the wealthy had the resources to travel to rural areas and mount expensive hunting parties. In the Republican period, therefore, politically ambitious men who were eager to gain the favour of lower-class voters brought the hunting experience to town by producing staged hunts. The Latin word *venatio* (plural: *venationes*), usually translated as 'hunt', came to mean both a pursuit of animals in the countryside, whether for subsistence or sport, and an urban show of killing animals that the masses attended as spectators. The popularity of the urban *venationes* was so great that, by the middle Republican period, or perhaps earlier, the Senate included them among the forms of festival entertainment, or *ludi*, receiving public financial support. In addition, ambitious politicians sometimes sponsored *venationes* to celebrate—and publicize—a military victory and thus draw attention to their fitness for public office. The costs of these *venationes* were paid from the spoils of the war successfully waged. And some of the displayed animals might have been transported, like prisoners of war, from the captured territory. In the Imperial period, *venationes* were often held on the same days as gladiatorial combats, or *munera*, although the origins of the two activities were quite different (Wiedemann, 1992: 1–54; Futrell, 1997: 9–24; Kyle, 1998: 43–7). In Rome, sponsorship of *ludi* was appropriated by the imperial family, but in towns throughout the empire, local benefactors and public officials continued to gain credit for producing them, although imperial permission may have been required (Symmachus, *Epistles* 4.12.2; 7.122.2).

Rural sport hunting and urban 'hunts' were similar in that their attraction lay in the kill rather then the pursuit. A passage in Varro sheds light on the parallels. He records that it was common for estate owners to have food put out for wild animals in order to condition them to appear at the sound of a horn. On one estate, the owner and his dinner guests watched as a servant dressed as Orpheus blew a horn: 'There flooded around so large an array of stags, boars, and other animals that it seemed to be no less beautiful a sight than when hunts take place in the Circus Maximus (but hunts without African beasts)' (*De re rustica* 3.13.3). (In Rome, large *venationes* were held in the Circus Maximus and, after its opening in AD 80, at the Flavian Amphitheatre). The purpose of conditioning the animals was apparently so that they would be conveniently available when the estate-owner and his guests wanted to kill them. Although the servant was dressed as Orpheus, whose myth signifies that humans, with their cultural creation of music, are able to live harmoniously with wild beasts, the animals on the estate were conditioned to trust humans only so that they could be killed with little effort. For upper-class Romans, most rural hunts were carefully staged events, where the 'hunters' simply waited for the animals to be summoned or herded towards them. The younger Pliny, for example, provides an account of a hunting expedition during which he sat waiting by a net while three wild boars were driven in for him to kill (*Epistles* 1.6; Dunbabin, 1978: pls. 21 and 32). Varro's favourable comparison of the spectacle on the estate to that at the Circus Maximus made sense to his readers. In both locations, 'beauty' could be discerned in the fact that a large number of animals of several species had been assembled through the ingenuity of humans—and would be killed by humans. Both locations were stages on which were presented spectacles that demonstrated that humans could outwit Nature (Beagon, 1992: 153–6).

Of course, the spectators at a large public *venatio*, unlike those who participated in a private rural hunt, did not enjoy the pleasure of killing the animals, an activity that was reserved for *venatores* and *bestiarii*, men who, though of the lowest class, were well-trained and highly skilled performers (Ville, 1981: 227–67; Kyle, 1998: 79–80). On a few occasions, however, in the Imperial period, the people in the stands may have been invited to come down to the arena floor as participants. In AD 281, for example, the emperor Probus sponsored a hunt in the Circus, which had been transformed for the occasion into a forest by the introduction of live trees. Into this lavish setting were introduced thousands of animals—ostriches, stags, wild boars, deer (or gazelles), ibexes, wild sheep, and other herbivores (SHA, *Probus* 19.2–4). Probus then allowed people to come in and 'each to grab whatever he wanted' (cf. SHA, *Three Gordians* 3.7–8 for a similar event). Those fortunate enough to kill one of the animals secured an abundant supply of meat, a welcome addition to the lower-class diet, which consisted largely of wheat. Even the flesh of bears found its way onto the dinner plates of the poor (Apuleius, *Metamorphoses* 4.13–14).

Although hunting by spectators was probably rare, since it would be chaotic and dangerous, the carcasses of the animals slaughtered in the urban *venationes* were often given to the people in the stands, sometimes through a distribution system of tokens, sometimes by a free-for-all scramble (Suetonius, *Domitian* 4.5; Dio, 67.4.4; Martial, *Epigrams* 8.78.7–12; SHA, *Heliogabalus* 8.3). Perhaps each token designated a specific animal, and the lucky token-holder could watch with heightened pleasure as it was being 'hunted' (Kyle, 1998: 192). Although our sources, both artistic and literary, emphasize the presence of exotic and fierce beasts at *venationes* in Rome, cattle and pigs are the animals most often mentioned by Martial in his *De spectaculis* (Kyle, 1998: 210, n. 89) and species such as bears and wild herbivores were a mainstay of *venationes* in smaller towns. Nonetheless, elephants, rhinoceroses, and large cats may have also been considered acceptable as food by protein-deficient residents of Rome, who would also use the hides and bones. The scanty faunal evidence near the Colosseum suggests that the carcasses did not remain in the area (MacKinnon, 2006: 154–6). Distributing them to the crowd would certainly have solved the problem of disposal, and at the same time elicited popular favour. By providing both entertainment and food to the spectators, the sponsor gained a reputation for generosity. Thus the animal victims of the arena, both when alive and when dead, were 'an imperial resource in economic and symbolic terms' (Kyle, 1998: 187).

The acquaintance of the Romans with exotic species began in the mid-Republican period. In 275 BC, elephants, never before seen in Italy, were captured from Pyrrhus in southern Italy and put on display in Rome. In 251 BC, elephants seized from the Carthaginians in Sicily were paraded in the Circus Maximus, and then perhaps killed (Seneca, *De Brevitate Vitae* 13.3, 13.8; Pliny, *Natural History* 8.6.16–17; Polybius, 1.40.15; Diodorus Siculus, 23.21; Eutropius, 2.14). In both situations, the display of these exotic beasts served a purpose beyond the entertainment of the masses. The elephants had been part of the equipment of foreign military invaders. By tormenting and destroying them, the producers of the spectacles were, in a sense, recreating the Roman victories over enemies once thought to be formidable, and granting the Roman audience the opportunity to witness the process of conquest (Shelton, 2006).

As soldiers, administrators, and businessmen extended Roman influence over territory farther and farther away from Italy, they encountered a growing number of exotic species and recognized the profitability of sending them to Rome. In 186 BC, Marcus Fulvius Nobilior provided a *venatio* with lions and leopards as one event at the *ludi* that celebrated his military victory in Aetolia (Livy, 39.22.2). This is our first record of a *venatio* with large cats, but they became a popular item. Not long afterwards, the Senate voted to forbid the importation of African beasts into Rome, perhaps thinking that the cost was too extravagant, or perhaps concerned about public safety. However public outcry forced a revision of the resolution so as to allow importation for use in events in the Circus (Pliny, *Natural History* 8.24.64). In 169 BC, the curule aediles provided at the Circus a *venatio* of forty bears, sixty-three African beasts, and an unspecified number of elephants. In reference to this event, Livy commented that the lavishness of the spectacles was increasing (44.18.8).

The carnage continued in the final century of the Republican period, with ever larger numbers of exotic animals presented to the spectators. Shortly after 100 BC, Sulla presented a *venatio* that included 100 lions that had been supplied, along with the spearmen to kill them, by Bocchus, king of Mauretania (Seneca, *De Brevitate Vitae* 13.6; Pliny,

Natural History 8.20.53). Sulla thus gained credit with the Roman people for having even foreign kings in his control (the availability of the spearmen perhaps suggests that spectacles involving killing lions were well-established in Africa: Ville, 1981: 53; Bomgardner, 2000: 35). In his aedileship of 58 BC, Marcus Scaurus exhibited 150 large spotted cats and, for the first time in Rome, five crocodiles and a hippopotamus (Pliny, *Natural History* 8.24.64, 8.40.9).

Ambitious politicians, realizing the political capital to be gained by sponsoring *venationes*, scrambled to obtain animals whose appearance would delight Roman crowds. The aediles, in particular, had a strong interest in locating exotic animals, first, because they were the magistrates responsible for organizing the state-financed entertainments in Rome, and, second, because a crowd-pleasing spectacle would gain them votes when they ran for higher offices. In 51 BC, Marcus Caelius Rufus, preparing for his term as aedile, was anxious that the *venationes* he presented should outdo those of his political rivals. He therefore wrote several letters to Cicero, then governor of the province of Cilicia, pestering him to order residents to capture leopards for his *venationes* in Rome. Cicero replied to Caelius: 'About the leopards: the matter is being handled with diligence by men who are skilful hunters. But there is a remarkable scarcity of leopards. And I am told that the few leopards left are complaining bitterly that they are the only animals in my province for whom traps are set. And therefore they have decided, or so the rumour goes, to leave Cilicia' (*Ad familiares* 2.11.2; also *Ad familiares* 8.2.2, 8.4.5, 8.6.5, 8.8.10, 8.9.3; *Ad Atticum* 5.21.5, 6.1.21). The correspondence between Cicero and Caelius reveals that politicians took advantage of every connection they had to acquire crowd-pleasing animals for their shows. Caelius undoubtedly importuned other friends, in other provinces, and Cicero probably received similar requests from other acquaintances.

Venationes continued to be a key element of the spectacles with which victorious military leaders celebrated their triumphs. In 55 BC, Pompey sponsored *venationes* that included 600 lions, 410 large spotted cats, about twenty elephants, a lynx, a rhinoceros (the first seen in Rome), and some apes (Pliny, *Natural History* 8.20.21; 20.53; 24.64; 28.70; 29. 71; Dio, 39.38.2–4; Cicero, *Ad familiares* 7.1). And Julius Caesar, at his triumph in 46 BC, featured elephants, 400 lions, Thessalian bulls (see above), and a giraffe (Pliny, *Natural History* 8.20.53, 8.70.182; Suetonius, *Julius* 37.2; Dio, 43.22–23). The giraffe, the first of its species to be seen in Rome, may have been a gift to Caesar from Cleopatra (Coleman, 1996: 62). Such extravagant displays of exotic species reminded spectators that the generous sponsor was a man who had expanded Roman control over foreign territories and had the connections among foreign rulers to acquire—for their entertainment—creatures as strange as a rhinoceros and a giraffe.

After Octavian/Augustus established the imperial state, sponsorship of *ludi* in Rome was restricted to members of the imperial family. The scale of the *venationes* increased, however. Augustus recorded that he presented twenty-six *venationes* of African beasts at which about 3,500 animals were slain (*Res Gestae* 22). The emperor Commodus was not content simply to watch the slaughter on the arena floor. Fancying himself to be a second Hercules, he is recorded as having killed in public bears, ostriches, lions, leopards, hippopotamuses, elephants, domestic animals (some confined in nets), and a rhinoceros, a tiger, and a giraffe (SHA, *Commodus* 8.5; Dio, 72.10, 72.18, 72.19; Herodian, 1.15.3–6; Ammianus Marcellinus, 31.10.19). Septimius Severus once commissioned for the arena a contraption that resembled a boat. Inside were several hundred animals, including bears, lions, leopards, ostriches, wild asses, bison, and domestic animals. The contraption was designed to fall apart, providing spectators with the pleasure of watching the panicked animals attack one another and be killed by 'hunters' (Dio, 76.1). Roman spectators enjoyed observing the agonized final moments of dying animals, and were particularly delighted if something out of the ordinary happened. For example, Martial records that, at a spectacle in the Flavian Amphitheatre, when a pregnant wild sow was stabbed with a spear, a piglet emerged from her lacerated womb and ran away. 'At one and the same time, the sow lost life and gave life... By her fatal wound, she became a mother. O, how ingenious are sudden and unexpected events' (*De spectaculis* 13, 14).

Capturing and transporting animals throughout the empire required an enormous amount of effort and money (Bertrandy, 1987). Unfortunately, we have scant information about the various stages of this complex process. Undoubtedly, local people worked as trackers and trappers, in the manufacture of equipment and the sales of animals and provisions, and in transportation. Supplying animals for arenas may thus have played an important role in the economies of some parts of the empire. In the Imperial period, many aspects of the animal spectacle 'industry' were brought under imperial control, and Roman soldiers were sometimes assigned to the tasks of capture and transport (Bomgardner, 2000: 212–3; Epplett, 2001). For example, 'specialist' bear-hunters (*ursarii*) are recorded in military inscriptions from several areas of the empire (Epplett, 2001: 214). They helped satisfy the enormous demand for bears at arenas large and small throughout the empire. The participation of soldiers in hunts could be justified as a military task because their removal of animals freed residents from concerns about predators and encouraged them to cultivate more wilderness areas. Trappers were not troubled by the cruelty of their methods, some of which are depicted in the mosaics from Piazza Armerina (Gentili, 1964; Dunbabin, 1978: pls. 26 and 29). Undoubtedly, many animals were killed in the attempt to capture one animal alive (MacKinnon, 2006: 147–8).

The chain of events that took an unfortunate animal from its native habitat to a Roman arena may have included middlemen at several points along the way. We do not know how or by whom the capture of animals was commissioned. The correspondence between Cicero and Caelius suggests that, in the Republican period at least, animals were captured as specific requests were made. Cicero had relayed to a local trapping company Caelius's request for leopards. He provides no information, however, about how or when payment for the animals would have been made. As the popularity, number, and size of urban *venationes* increased, producers of the spectacles would want assurance that supplies of animals were dependable. It is possible that animals were transported from the hinterlands to more inhabited areas and kept in stockyards, or *vivaria*, where vendors could show them to purchasing agents. In the Imperial period, the army may also have been involved in the maintenance of stockyards (Epplett, 2001: 219).

After being transported overland in cages to a seaport, the animals were loaded onto ships for the continuation of their journey to an arena. Undoubtedly, many died along the way, from injury, stress, malnutrition, thirst, heat, and disease (MacKinnon, 2006: 148–50). Shipwrecks also took their toll (Symmachus, *Epistles* 9.117). The collapsible ship that Septimius Severus commissioned for his spectacle may have been intended to replicate a real shipwreck. Animals that survived the journey sometimes, perhaps often, arrived at their destination in very poor condition. In AD 393, Symmachus ordered bears (and other species) for *ludi* that his son would sponsor as quaestor. He makes reference in his letters to men who specialized in providing bears: *ursorum negotiatores* (*Epistles* 5.62). However when the bears arrived, he discovered that he had received only a few cubs, who were wasting away because of starvation and stress (*Epistles* 2.76.2). In AD 401, concerned about being cheated again when he was planning spectacles for his son's praetorship, he asked his correspondent to keep track of the large number of bears that were being transported for the occasion from Dalmatia to Rome (*Epistles* 7.121). For these same spectacles, he also purchased crocodiles, but they were wasting away because they had refused to eat for fifty days (*Epistles* 6.43). At a spectacle sponsored by the emperor Probus in the third century AD, 100 lions that were brought into the arena disappointed spectators when (perhaps because ill) they did not leap out of their cages as the doors were opened. Most were therefore simply shot with arrows in or close to their cages (SHA, *Probus* 19.5–6).

The traffic in animals, especially exotic animals, was apparently profitable, despite the risks that they might die before reaching their final destination. In Diocletian's edict on prices and wages of AD 301, the ceiling price for a prime African lion was set at 150,000 denarii (*SEG* 14.386; Jones, 1964: 1017–8; Bomgardner, 2000: 211). This was at a time when the wage for a mule driver or scribe was set at 25 denarii a day, and the price of a *libra* (12 ounces) of pork at 12 denarii (*CIL* 3, pp. 805–9). The cost of just one exotic animal was exorbitant, and yet hundreds of thousands of them were trapped and transported to arenas for the amusement of spectators. Even more astonishing is that these very expensive animals were killed almost as soon as they arrived. In some ancient cities, such as Alexandria, menageries had been assembled to allow residents to admire animals foreign to them (Athenaeus, *Deipnosophists* 5.200c–201c; Hubbell, 1935; Coleman, 1996: 59, 62, 64). There was no zoo in Rome. The Romans brought animals into their city to watch them being killed. A third-century mosaic from North Africa records scenes of four *venatores* killing four leopards with spears. It also records the name of the sponsor (*editor*), Magerius, the price he paid for the leopards (double what had been anticipated), and the appreciation of the community for his generosity (Dunbabin, 1978: 67–70; Brown, 1992: 198–200). In fact the most prominent place in the mosaic is occupied by a depiction of the bags of coins that Magerius expended on the *venatio*. His costly gift to the community was, however, ephemeral in nature (Bomgardner, 2000: 211). At the end of the day, the expensive leopards were dead. In order to secure the enduring recognition he desired, Magerius had to commission a mosaic for his villa.

This mosaic provides the names of the *venatores*. They belonged to one of the travelling troupes of *venatores* who performed in arenas in North Africa (Bomgardner, 2000: 139). We do not know what sorts of arrangements were made to pay them for their work. Similar troupes may have existed elsewhere in the empire. Like other performers, such as actors, chariot drivers, and gladiators, the *venatores* and *bestiarii* were often slaves or former slaves, and they therefore occupied the lowest rank of the rigid social hierarchy. However, they won the admiration of the spectators for their bravery and skill. Certainly confronting wild animals was a very hazardous activity, but we may presume that most *venatores* and *bestiarii* survived these encounters. The intention of the event was, after all, to demonstrate that humans were able to triumph over even the most ferocious beast. In any case, the animals were sometimes too traumatized by the stresses and injuries of capture and transport to put up much of a fight.

The enormous demand for animals to be killed in *venationes* throughout the empire caused a substantial decline in the populations of many species and thus a change in local environments (Bomgardner, 2000: 214–6). In his reply to Caelius's request for animals, Cicero commented that there was a remarkable scarcity of leopards in the province of Cilicia. The decline in or even disappearance of populations can be attributed both to the capture of animals and to the destruction of their habitat. When large cats were removed from an area, shepherds and farmers moved into wild lands. Strabo, writing in the early Imperial period, remarked that the Roman fondness for killing animals had encouraged the expansion of agriculture in North Africa (2.5.33). A poem in the Greek Anthology (7.626) comments on a similar situation in Libya: 'The mountains that were once the habitat of wild beasts are now pastures for the domesticated animals of men' (as the populations of animals nearer to coasts were decimated, it would have been necessary to trap animals farther inland, and thus to subject them to more arduous journeys to seaports).

The last record of a *venatio* at Rome can be dated to 1 January 523 (Cassiodorus, *Variae* 5.42). However there are indications that, by the third century AD, it was becoming more difficult to procure animals. Excessive trapping and habitat destruction were not the only reasons for the diminishing size of Roman *venationes*. As the economy faltered, there was less money available for public spectacles. After the capital of the empire was moved to Constantinople, the burden of financing spectacles in Italy fell more and more to wealthy noblemen (Jones, 1964: 1018; Coleman, 2011: 343). The tradition of *venationes* continued, however. In the late fourth century AD, Symmachus expended an enormous amount of time and money in his efforts to secure animals for the *venationes* to be produced by his son in 393 and 401 (Balsdon, 1969: 312–3). His correspondence documents his extensive efforts, as he appealed to friends to ship animals to Rome, sent agents to collect animals, requested imperial permission to purchase animals, and urged officials and friends to monitor the process (*Epistles*, 2.46.3, 2.77, 4.12.2, 5.62, 6.35, 7.59, 7.98, 7.122, 9.15, 9.16, 9.27, 9.135, 9.141, 9.151). The fates of some of these animals—collected from Italy, Africa, Egypt, the Balkan region, and Britain (large Irish hounds)—have been mentioned above. We also know that, of sixteen chariot-racehorses he was importing from Spain, five died on the journey to Rome and several others died before the start of the events (*Epistles* 5.56).

Romans also enjoyed watching animals who had been trained to perform stunts. Elephants, for example, were trained to kneel on command (Seneca, *Epistles* 85.41), to

walk tightropes (Dio, 61.17), and to carry torches (Suetonius, *Julius* 37.2, Dio, 43.22.1). These stunts reinforced the spectators' conviction that humans could bend the natural world to their will (Shelton, 2004: 380–2). Elephants were also taught tricks that made them look both ridiculous (and therefore vulnerable) and 'civilized', such as dancing in frilly costumes (Aelian, *Characteristics of Animals* 2.11) or acting like dainty guests at a banquet (Pliny, *Natural History* 8.2.5). Performing bears also were forced to amuse humans by, for example, taking roles in a play (SHA, *Carinus* 19.2; cf. the dancing and wrestling bears at Athens, mentioned above: Isocrates, *Antidosis* 213). At this same spectacle, a human performer, called a wall-climber (*toichobates*, and therefore not a *venator*), dazzled the crowd by running up a wall to elude a bear. Such displays of human agility and cleverness, which nonetheless left the animal alive, may have become more common as animals became more expensive and more difficult to obtain (Bomgardner, 2000: 217–8). The sixth-century historian Cassiodorus describes several contraptions that were used in these spectacles (*Variae* 5.42). For example, men in baskets were lowered just to within reach of the animals, whom they taunted. Or, men were placed in hollow metal balls, fitted with holes from which they could prick the animals. The frustrated animal could roll the ball around the arena, but not reach the man inside. Modern rodeo clowns jump in and out of barrels to attract the attention of bulls, but their purpose is to rescue a bull-rider, not to torture the animal. The intention of the ancient performers, however, was specifically to entertain the crowd by tormenting animals. Their antics, like those of the wall-climber, were not, of course, without risk, and the crowd also enjoyed the suspense of wondering whether the human would falter and be mauled.

In one type of spectacle, animals were utilized for the deliberate purpose of killing humans who had been condemned to a capital punishment (Coleman, 1990). These people were not trained 'hunters', nor did they have weapons or protective equipment. Like other death penalties, such as crucifixion and burning alive, *condemnatio ad bestias* was a very painful and public method of execution. Its purpose was not only to satisfy the community's demand for vengeance, but also to deter potential law-breakers by the threat of a hideous death (Brilliant, 1999: 228). People 'condemned to the beasts' had flouted the laws that their community had established to restrain bestial behaviour in humans. Because they had acted like predatory animals, they had, in effect, willingly forfeited the protection that human society provides to its members, and thus made themselves vulnerable to the same treatment that was imposed on animals that threatened society. *Condemnatio ad bestias* was an expensive form of execution because of the costs related to the animals, but it seemed particularly appropriate because it allowed the bestial criminal to be dealt with by beasts. His gruesome death demonstrated the savagery of the natural world in which he had chosen, by his lawlessness, to live. As he was mauled by a 'fellow' animal, his mutilated body became unrecognizable as human, and his voice was reduced to inarticulate, animal-like shrieks, confirming for the spectators that he had been a beast all along. In the final process of his reduction to the status of animal, the condemned person was eaten and thus converted to bestial flesh. Spectators would watch his torment with the same detachment and even amusement with which

they watched (other) animals being abused (Brilliant, 1999: 228; Coleman, 1999: 238–40, on degradation as an instrument of Roman public policy).

By the first century AD, executions were enhanced to provide novelty for the audience. Martial describes an execution at which animals of several species and a condemned man, who was costumed as Orpheus, were placed in forest scenery (*De spectaculis* 21). The man was mauled to death by a bear. The pleasurable experience of the spectators was amplified as they watched not only the execution of someone who had menaced their society, but also a novel inversion of a traditional myth. Unlike the mythical Orpheus, who was able to live in harmony with wild animals, the arena 'Orpheus' was killed by them. The grim drama played out on the arena floor reminded spectators that humans could not coexist with wild beasts. Irrational creatures—beasts and criminals—did not belong in the moral community, and it was correct to eliminate them.

The fact that Roman leaders were able to bring vast numbers of animals to their city, from the far corners of their empire, and then simply destroy them, was a verification that the Roman state was powerful and prosperous, and that its leaders cared about the pleasures of their fellow-citizens. The victimization of animals became a celebration not only of the victory over Nature; the appearance of exotic animals was a reminder that the people and regions from which they had been captured had been brought under Roman control. Roman society was diverse and very stratified, but as the spectators at these communal events focused their gaze on the creatures below them, their collective identity as a community was reinforced.

Abbreviations

CIL *Corpus Inscriptionum Latinarum*
ILS *Inscriptiones Latinae Selectae*
SEG *Supplementum Epigraphicum Graecum*

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