Chapter 4

Animals and Spectacle

The use of animals for display, whether through personal or state patronage, had enjoyed a long history before the Romans recognised the benefits. For Egyptian pharaohs and Assyrian kings, hunting and the collecting of wild animals was a major pursuit, and allowed them to demonstrate their power and sovereignty over the natural world, a practice continued by the kings of Hellenistic Egypt. In 275-274 BC at Alexandria Ptolemy II Philadelphus included a great procession in the festivities associated with the religious festival, the Ptolemaieia, in honour of the deified Ptolemy I Soter. According to Athenaeus (*Deipnosophistae* v.201b-I), the animals were both wild and domesticated and included 130 Ethiopian sheep, 26 Indian oxen, 14 leopards, 16 panthers, an Ethiopian rhinoceros, and 24 huge lions. This bestial magnificence advertised the wealth of the Ptolemies and their influence in foreign lands; indeed some of the exotic animals may even have been bred in captivity.

This interest in amassing wild animals for private collections can be observed in later historical periods, for example the Royal Menagerie at the Tower of London, started in 1235 under Henry III, when, on the occasion of his marriage, he was presented with a wedding gift of three leopards by his cousin, the Holy Roman Emperor. From the end of the third century BC there was an increasingly popular fashion amongst Roman aristocrats to keep tame and wild animals, with some even taught to do tricks. Monkeys, particularly the barbary ape, were imported into Italy, and often appear in Roman art and literature as household pets or performing entertainments. The emperor Caracalla kept a number of tame lions which travelled with him, including one called Scimitar which ate and slept in his room (Dio 78.7.2-3). Elagabalus (*Historia Augusta, Elagabalus* 25.1) had tame maneless lions whose teeth and claws had been removed; the emperor delighted in turning them loose in guests' bedrooms at night for comedic effect!

By the late Republic it was common practice for a wealthy landowner to have an enclosure or park on his estate, well-stocked with wild animals such as boar, wild goats and deer, which according to Columella (9.1) served to provide magnificence and pleasure, as well as profit. Such an

enclosure was often referred to in the ancient sources as a *vivarium*; it is also the term that came to be used for the place where animals for the public games were kept. A third-century AD inscription (*CIL* 6.130, AD 241) mentions a *custos vivari*, an official whose specific responsibility was apparently to oversee such an area. According to Procopius (*Gothic War* I.23.13-18) there was a large *vivarium* just outside the city walls by the Pincian Hill. Whether this was the area used to house the large collection of animals formed in Rome by Gordian III (238-244) for his Persian triumph is uncertain. It was Philip the Arab who actually exhibited the animals as part of his celebration in 248 of the Ludi Saeculares and the 1000th birthday of Rome. This menagerie is listed in the *Historia Augusta* (*Gordians* 33.1.2): 32 elephants, 10 elks, 10 tigers, 60 tame lions, 30 tame maneless lions, 10 hyenas, 6 hippopotamuses, a rhinoceros, 10 white or very large lions (the original text is unclear), 10 giraffes, 20 wild asses and 40 wild horses. An imperial elephant park at Laurentum to the south of Rome was under the control of a *procurator ad elephantos* (*CIL* 6.8583; *ILS* 1578), and was where an official stock of elephants was maintained. Elephants were actually bred in captivity there. Within Rome, the grounds of Nero's Golden House housed wild and domestic animals of all kinds (Suetonius, *Nero* 31).

The animal world was therefore an important one for the Romans to reference, exploit and display, and this is nowhere more evident than in the *venationes*, the animal hunts, of the Roman games. On one level Ptolemy's procession and the animal spectacles of the Roman world are similar in that they were a physical embodiment of the sense of burgeoning empire and expanding territorial control, coupled with control of the raw forces of nature. They differ, however, in terms of scale. Ptolemy Philadelphus' procession involved very small representative groups of the different animals, particularly the more exotic ones. For the Romans, the need to present variety and novelty on each occasion, in a form of inflationary competition between successive emperors, was all important. However, the most exotic and impressive animals continued to be major crowd-pleasers.

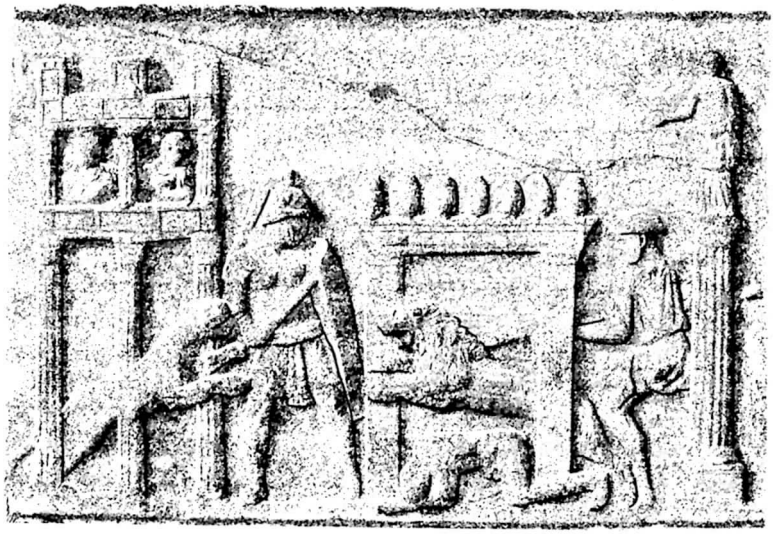
Early animal displays at Rome

The great animal shows of imperial Rome had a long prior history. The 'hunting' of animals such as hares, wild goats, wild boar and bulls in the Circus Maximus during festivals such as the Floralia was not unusual, but over time new contexts and new exotic *genera* were added. From the third century BC, animals were displayed in the city as living spoils of war – effectively living embodiments of Rome's acquisition of far-flung terri-

tories. Such overtly martial display is well-represented by the four Indian elephants exhibited in 275 BC in the triumph of Marcus Curius Dentatus after his victory over King Pyrrhus in Southern Italy (Pliny, *Natural History* 8.16). Elephants were highly symbolic animals given their role in eastern armies and their use as mounts by eastern potentates and by the Punic arch-enemy, and, of course, their colossal size was bound to impress. In 252 BC some 140 Carthaginian elephants were brought to Rome for the triumphal parade of Caecilius Metellus and then, according to Pliny (*Natural History* 8.16-17), they were hunted down in the Circus where they were killed with javelins, not so much as a demonstration of imperial power but more because the Romans were at a loss as to what to do with them subsequently. At this time elephants were also used as agents of public execution carrying out the imperial will; for example in 167 BC Aemilius Paulus executed foreign deserters from his army by having them crushed by elephants in Carthaginian style (Plutarch, *Aemilius Paulus* 16-23), and again in 146 BC similar action was taken by Scipio Aemilianus using elephants from North Africa (Valerius Maximus 2.7.13-14).

Over time increasing numbers of foreign animals were included in these displays, although details are obscure; the ostrich had certainly been seen in the Circus Maximus by the beginning of the second century BC (Plautus, *Persa* 199). The earliest recorded instance of a proper hunt (*venatio*) involving exotic animals took place in 186 BC as part of the victory games of Marcus Fulvius Nobilior (Livy 39.22.2). Exhibition of animals was part of the entertainment between races in the Circus Maximus; from this period onwards, the circus became the favoured location for such displays (Fig. 14). These Fulvian games were also important because they provided the context for the first appearance of Greek athletics in Rome, something that was subsequently to find only sporadic favour in the capital. The *venatio* involved lions and leopards, possibly from the East rather than from North Africa. In 169 BC (Livy 44.18.8) a show was given by the *aediles*, again in the Circus Maximus, which involved 63 *Africanae* (the usual term employed to indicate lions and/or leopards, irrespective of their geographical origin), 40 bears, and a number of elephants. Despite legislation in the second century BC which forbade the importation of animals from Africa into Italy (Pliny, *Natural History* 8.24), the tide could not be turned.

The atmosphere of intense political corruption of the first century BC stimulated the staging of animal displays with increasing frequency and elaboration, more often being held outside the traditional context of circus games. This set in motion an inflationary spiral as each individual *trium-*



14. 'Campana plaque' depicting *venationes* in the circus.

phator aimed to outdo his rivals in terms of the range and numbers of animals involved in his spectacles.

Thus by the imperial period animal displays were a firm favourite in Roman spectacle, but they could vary considerably in terms of scale, context and nature. In modern scholarship the term *venatio* (plural *venationes*) is used to refer to the full range of animal displays:

- presentations of exotic animals;
- shows with trained animals performing tricks;
- hunting displays with hunters on horseback and on foot, often with hunting dogs;
- fights between professional *venatores* (beast fighters) and dangerous wild beasts;
- fights between different types of wild animals;
- executions of criminals condemned to die as *damnati ad bestias*.

The animals

As we have seen, the earliest animals displayed in Rome were the elephants from the campaigns against Pyrrhus in the first half of the third century BC; these were almost certainly Indian elephants, but from the literary and artistic sources it is clear that it was North Africa which supplied a large proportion of the elephants and other wild animals for the Roman games. As Rome's influence in the region increased, so did the

Romans' capacity to stage *venationes* in more elaborate ways, using not only the animals but often also the hunters from their original regions as well. In 94 BC Sulla pitted lions against native spearmen expressly acquired for the purpose from King Bocchus of Mauretania (Seneca, *De Brevitate Vitae* 13.5); the king may also have supplied the lions. In 61 BC the curule *aedile* L. Domitius Ahenobarbus matched 100 Numidian bears against the same number of Ethiopian hunters (Pliny, *Natural History* 8.54). Such displays were therefore injected with a great deal of reality, as well as demonstrating an individual patron's influence in far-flung regions. Many of these animals can no longer be found north of the Sahara, and it has been traditional to suggest that the Romans effectively hunted them to regional extinction in their quest to supply animals for the arena in ever-increasing numbers and variety. However, there is still much debate about this among modern scholars. Nevertheless, Africa did supply beasts in huge quantities; the abundant and exotic fauna as well as the area's proximity to Italy and the role that region played in Rome's history in the last few centuries of the Republic gave it enormous symbolic importance.

The animals most often referred to in the sources and which are most frequently depicted in artworks are elephants, big cats and bears. This probably reflects their popularity and visual potency rather than necessarily their frequency of appearance in the arena. It is important to remember that the literary evidence takes particular notice of the extraordinary occasions, for example, the first *genus* appearance, the largest number to date of a certain animal, and the greatest variety of *genera* present.

Elephants. The elephant most often found in Roman spectacle is probably equivalent to the modern African Forest elephant (*Loxodonta cyclotis*), which is smaller than the Bush elephant (*Loxodonta Africana*). That elephants were common in the North African littoral is indicated by the artistic evidence; for example, a mosaic from El Djem shows the goddess Africa sporting an elephant headdress, emphasising a close association at least in Roman perception. The first recorded elephant fights in Rome, as opposed to elephants being used as part of a triumphal display, took place in 99 BC when C. Claudius Pulcher was *aedile*; twenty years later the first fight between an elephant and bulls took place (Pliny, *Natural History* 8.7). They could also be taught tricks, and Pliny referred to mind-boggling acts such as tightrope-walking and dancing elephants (Pliny, *Natural History* 8.2); it is in such benign performances, with some exceptions, that they most often appeared in public spectacle in Rome from the Augustan period onwards. Although Pliny also cited elephants performing duels resembling gladiatorial fights, elephants were rarely

killed as part of a spectacle. They were held in a certain amount of affection, being considered to display moral steadfastness and loyalty; this is almost certainly why during a huge set of games held by Pompey in 55 BC, on the last day when 20 elephants were pitted against Gaetulian javelin-throwers, the crowd came to pity the elephants as one by one they were killed (Pliny, *Natural History* 8.7; Cicero, *Ad Familiares* 7.1.3). On the odd occasion after this that they did appear in the arena pitched against other animals, for example in Titus' games celebrating the dedication of the Colosseum in AD 80, the usual foe was a bull (Martial, *On Spectacles* 22); such a pairing, with the elephant carrying a mahout, is depicted on a mosaic found on the Aventine in Rome.

Big cats. In the ancient sources, the term '*Africanae*' came to be used collectively for lions, leopards and other big cats, irrespective of their origin. From the first century BC these big cats appeared in huge numbers in the arena. The Romans acquired most of their lions from Libya (they are a common motif in mosaics from North Africa); certainly the largest specimens came from there, but lions also could be found in Syria and Mesopotamia. They first appeared in Roman spectacle in the early second century BC (Pliny, *Natural History* 8.20); Sulla staged a combat involving 100 lions in 93 BC, but there are actually far fewer instances of lions in the games in Rome in the imperial period, particularly after Nero's reign. This may have had something to do with increasing cost; by the early fourth century AD the maximum price for a top quality lion for the arena is listed in the Diocletian's *Edict of Maximum Prices* as 600,000 sesterces (possibly somewhere in the region of £4 million today), and a second-class lion as 400,000 sesterces (about £2.5 million).

Leopards appeared in much larger numbers, also being found in both North Africa and Syria. They first appeared in Rome in the games of Marcus Aemilius Scaurus (58 BC) when 150 were shown. Leopards are often depicted in mosaics, and a particularly gruesome example can be seen on the Villa Borghese mosaic. This depicts a number of leopards, all dead or in the process of dying very painfully with blood pouring from wounds caused by spears. Only slightly less gruesome are the scenes painted on the lower parts of the vaults covering the *frigidarium* of the Hunting Baths at Lepcis Magna; on one side of the room these show a leopard hunt. Six leopards, three of whose names survive – RAPIDVS, FVLGENTIVS, GABATIVS(?) – are hunted by *venatores*, four of whose names can be made out – NVBER, [V?]ICENTIVS, [L?]IBENTIVS, BICTOR. Blood flows freely from the wounds inflicted by the hunters' spears. On the opposite wall is a lion hunt. These detailed paintings have suggested to many scholars that these baths belonged to a guild (*colle-*

gium) of either professional fighters or merchants who dealt in animals for the arena. Such an association, the Telegenii, is well-attested in inscriptions across central North Africa from Timgad in eastern Algeria to the towns of eastern Tunisia, and is the subject of a famous mosaic now in the Sousse Museum (Fig. 15).

Of all the big cats the tiger was extremely rare and on most occasions was exhibited for its novelty effect. In 11 BC Augustus was the first to exhibit a tame tiger, and tigers formed part of the display in the celebrations of Domitian's Sarmatian Wars in AD 93 (Martial, *Epigrams* 8.26). In the early third century, in games held to celebrate the marriage of Elagabalus, 51 tigers were apparently killed (Dio 79.9.2), the largest number of which there is a definite record.

Bears. Bears are not today associated with North Africa, but literary and iconographic sources indicate that Africa supplied a large quantity for the arena; both Libyan and Numidian bears are mentioned, but they also came from Greece, Asia Minor and northern Europe, as well as Italy itself. The numbers of bears recorded in the arena are larger than for any other animal and they are the only species where hunting for the spectacles may have had an effect on the size of the population: 400 bears under Caligula (AD 37), 300 bears under Claudius (AD 41) and another 400 under Nero (Dio 59.7.3; 60.7.3; 61.9.1). Bears might be pitched against human combatants or against other animals, for example on the Zliten mosaic a bear is shown fighting a bull, the animals chained together to ensure they cannot ignore each other (Fig. 28). Bears appear in a number of other North African mosaics, often named. Intriguingly, there are two possible references to polar bears in the sources. Martial, in his description of the Colosseum inauguration (AD 80) (*On Spectacles* 15.3.4), referred to a bear which 'had been king of all the beasts beneath the Arctic sky'. This could have merely meant a bear from northern Germany or Caledonia. However, Calpurnius Siculus (*Eclogues* 65.66), in the context of Nero's great games (AD 57), described bears that chased seals, the chief prey of polar bears. Again it is perfectly possible that what was meant were bears from northern Europe that had been taught to swim.

Bulls. Bulls were frequently displayed in the arena and were often pitted against bears or elephants. The first recorded fight between bears and bulls took place in 79 BC (Pliny, *Natural History* 8.7), and Seneca witnessed a fight between bulls and bears tied together (*De Ira* 3.43.2). Bull-fighting was also popular and is attested at Pompeii (*ILS* 5053). Julius Caesar was credited with the introduction of Thessalian bull fighting in his games of 46 BC (Suetonius, *Julius* 29); this seems to have been an ancient form of rodeo in which bulls were pursued on horseback and

then wrestled to the ground. A second-century AD relief from Asia Minor (Ashmolean Museum, Oxford) appears to depict something like this.

Rhinoceroses. It was Pompey who exhibited the first rhinoceros in his great games of 55 BC (Pliny, *Natural History* 8.29). The sources are in disagreement about the exact nature of this particular animal – whether it was a two-horned African variety, possibly from Ethiopia, or a single-horned Indian rhinoceros. The single-horned was more commonly exhibited in Rome, and is depicted on the Great Hunt Mosaic at Piazza Armerina. The African variety occurred in Titus' games in AD 80. At first its keepers could not get it to fight, but when they did evoke a response it killed a bear by tossing it in the air (Martial, *On Spectacles* 22). Rhinoceroses were always unusual, but *venationes* involving a number of them are known under Antoninus Pius and Commodus (*Historia Augusta, Antoninus Pius* 10.9; Dio 73.10.3), but their variety is not known.

Hippopotamuses. To the Greek and Roman worlds, the hippopotamus was essentially a denizen of the Nile; it was depicted on the first-century BC Palestrina mosaic depicting the Nile in flood. The first hippopotamus to be seen in Rome was in the games of Aemilius Scaurus in 58 BC when he was *aedile*, but their involvement in Roman spectacles was more for their novelty and display value than their combativeness. However, Commodus is recorded to have killed five with his own hand (Dio 73.10).

Crocodiles. The games of Aemilius Scaurus saw another animalistic first in the display of five crocodiles in a temporary tank (Pliny, *Natural History* 8.40). Of all the Nilotic animals, nothing fascinated the Romans more than the crocodile; Pliny (*Natural History* 8.37) called it 'a curse on four legs'. Although it was always associated with Egypt, it also came from East Africa. Augustus, during the games to celebrate the dedication of the Temple of Mars Ultor (2 BC), exhibited 36 crocodiles in a custom-dug basin in the Circus Flaminius (Dio 60.10.8). This spectacle ended with them being hunted to their deaths, a display of imperialism and autocracy, of the emperor taking into control that which was unusual, spectacular, naturally ferocious, and Egyptian. These may have been the same crocodiles mentioned by Strabo (17.1.44) which were accompanied by men from Tentyra in the Nile valley who prepared a pool with a platform on one side. These men would enter the pool and drag the crocodiles up onto the platform in nets so that they could be seen by the spectators, then drag them back into the water.

Ostriches. The ostrich appeared in Roman spectacles in some numbers. It was certainly to be seen in Rome by the early second century BC; Plautus (*The Persian* 199) comments on its speed. It is clear from North African mosaics that they were hunted in that region. Their popularity in

the arena was guaranteed not only because of their comedic run but also by their aggressive and vicious tendencies. According to Herodian (1.15.3-6), on one occasion Commodus shot the heads off a number of ostriches with crescent-shaped arrowheads. He apparently held up the heads to watching senators as if to say that this was what would happen to them – all the while the decapitated bodies were still doing 'headless chicken' impressions. Gordian I, along with a wide range of wild animals, kept 300 red Moorish ostriches which were eventually killed in games (*Historia Augusta*, *Gordians* 3).

Giraffes. The giraffe did not make many appearances in the Roman arena. It first appeared in the great games of 46 BC under Julius Caesar, when it was described as a cross between a leopard and a camel (*camelopardalis*: Pliny, *Natural History* 8.27; Dio 53.23.1); Pliny notes that it was admired for its looks rather than any ferocity. The only instance of a giraffe being killed for the spectators' delight is when Commodus killed a giraffe with his own hand (Dio 73.11).

A modern perception has it that there was little variety in these animal displays, but in fact it was enormous. The aim, as with gladiatorial combat, was to have a balanced and fair fight, but also one which was interesting, one where the true nature of the animals involved could be appreciated by the spectators. Different pairings appear in iconography and literature, ranging from the more 'regular' ones such as bull against elephant or bear, to the rather more unlikely pairing of a lion against a crocodile.

After the middle of the first century AD, Africa and the East still provided animals for the emperors' displays in Rome, but in smaller numbers; lions and leopards are rarely recorded in large numbers after the time of Nero, although this might be a product of the source material rather than reflecting actual practice. However, in AD 281 the emperor Probus was still able to display 400 big cats in the amphitheatre, and in the Circus, specially transformed into a forest, he staged a great hunt involving a wide range of animals including ostriches, boars, stags and gazelles during his triumphal celebrations.

Even in the third century there was still scope to impress the Roman population with exotic animals. In the reign of Septimius Severus 'Horses of the Sun, which resemble tigers', were carried off from an island in the Red Sea (Dio 75.14.3; 77 6.2); this was the *hippotigris* (literally the tiger-horse), the zebra, which probably became imperial property, only for some of them at least to be killed in a show early on in Caracalla's reign.

To judge from the Italian epigraphic evidence, similar shows occurred throughout the peninsula into the third century AD. African beasts (*bestiae Africani* and *ferae Libycae*) are mentioned for example at Allifae, Telesia

and Samnium (*ILS* 5059-61), as well as bears and herbivores. Where numbers are given, which is unusual, they are small. In the provinces, the scale and variety must have been at a reduced level, possibly more reliant on locally available animals as a result.

Capture and transport of animals

In the Republic, the hunting and capture of animals for shows seems to have been more impromptu, with little or no organisation or infrastructure. Animals were supplied for prominent magistrates by their 'contacts' in the provinces as required. However, by the imperial period the demand had become so great that in order to keep a supply of animals for Rome's arenas a sophisticated and complex organisation was required, with a huge investment in time, money and manpower. Because many of these animals were difficult to maintain in good condition, they were very much an illustration of conspicuous consumption, also providing a direct expression of Rome's imperial ambition and world-wide power, and at a more personal level, an individual's wealth, status and power.

By the first century AD the Roman army was involved in this supply process. Evidence from across the empire attests to the fact that the capturing and transport of exotic animals was an important part of a soldier's duty. A late first/early second century AD letter surviving from Egypt written by one Antonius Proculus, an auxiliary soldier stationed in the Eastern Desert of Egypt, described hunting for a variety of animals for a whole year. Another document from Egypt, the early third-century AD *Cestes* of Julianus Africanus, recommends the capture of wild animals as a type of military exercise and gives detailed instructions for the apprehending of wild lions. A number of inscriptions from Rome and the Danube region mention *venatores immunes* who seem to have been soldiers exempted from certain routine duties in return for involvement in animal-capturing expeditions.

The mosaics of North Africa provide one major source for the logistics and practice of capturing animals for the arena. The hunt mosaic from the Maison d'Isguntus at Hippo Regius (Algeria) illustrates a hunt for and capture of a lion, a lioness and three leopards who have been driven into a semicircular area defined by nets and the shields of armed men, where a cage awaits them. Behind the latter is a group of unsuspecting cows and sheep serving as a lure. The Great Hunt Mosaic of Piazza Armerina illustrates not only the hunting and capture of animals, but also their loading onto ships. An elephant is led on a chain up a gangway; an ostrich is rather incongruously carried onboard in the arms of a very calm-looking man (Fig. 15); a tiger and a rhinoceros require a number of men to control

15. Great Hunt Mosaic, Piazza Armerina (Sicily). Detail of ostrich.

them. The mosaic also emphasises that it was not just exotic animals that were hunted and captured in great numbers; various varieties of deer and gazelle were also required for the larger hunting displays. These are shown being driven by horsemen into a netted enclosure. Soldiers are involved throughout the process.

A number of 'animal-catalogue' mosaics also survive. These depict animals exhibited in a *munus*, with a single representative standing for the overall number of each type indicated in an accompanying inscription; a particularly good example is in a house near the amphitheatre at Carthage

(Tunisia). Three pairs of leopards are shown fighting each other, but other animals are shown singly and not in combat – a boar, an ostrich, a bear, a bull, some deer and antelopes. Under the bear the inscription NXL (40) appears, under the ostrich NXXV (25). In another mosaic from Radès (Tunisia), animals are again shown with a number, but the bears are also individually named, presumably members of a troupe especially trained to perform tricks. Presumably such trained animals would seldom have been killed in the arena.

The sailing season in the Mediterranean limited the effective transport period to between March or April and October. Pliny the Younger wrote to his friend Maximus in commiseration that his games at Verona had been spoilt because big cats which he had ordered had been delayed by the weather (*Letters* 6.34). In particular the scale of some of the spectacles in the capital involved huge co-ordination efforts; in his *Res Gestae* (22) Augustus claimed that in 26 *venationes* some 3,500 animals were killed. In the games for the inauguration of the Colosseum (AD 80), 9,000 animals were killed over 100 days (Suetonius, *Titus* 7.3). According to Dio, in games held in AD 107 after Trajan's return from Rome having defeated Dacia, 11,000 were killed over 123 days (Dio 68.15). These animals had to be fit for display and be able to perform well. They had to be fed and watered during transport and then kept, presumably for as short a time as possible, to preserve their ferocity, ready for their star turn in the arena. Symmachus, consul in AD 391, lamented in a letter of AD 401 that crocodiles brought in for a spectacle had effectively been on hunger strike for 50 days (*Epistles* 6. 43). Crocodiles were particularly difficult to transport, not least because of their cold-blooded nature requiring careful regulation of their body temperature. Equally they will not eat if they are boxed in; effectively they become depressed, something of which Symmachus had rather painful first-hand experience!

To emphasise the logistical challenge of moving these animals, it is worth examining a nineteenth-century example. No hippopotamus had been seen in Europe after the Roman period until 1850 when one was brought to the London Zoological Gardens. This was a present given by the Pasha of Egypt as a result of extreme persuasive pressure by the British Consul. A whole army division was occupied in capturing it, then it took five to six months to reach Cairo. From Alexandria it travelled in a specially constructed steamer with a large freshwater tank of 400 gallons capacity which had to be renewed on a daily basis. Two cows and ten goats barely satisfied its milk requirements; it would have required a daily food intake of 150 lb. This was just one animal, whereas thousands were required for some of the Roman spectacles.

The *venatores* and *bestiarii*

Originally the *venatores* were professional hunters and animal handlers. The *bestiarius*, later equated with the *venator*, was at first armed with a spear and condemned to fight the beasts with a high probability of death. Over time the *venatores*, and some of the *bestiarii*, were trained and, like the gladiators, even though they were *infames*, could become famous. Carpophoros, who appeared in Titus' games in AD 80, was much praised for his many kills (Martial, *On Spectacles* 15.22, 27). *Venatores* appeared in a number of guises. They hunted relatively harmless game, such as deer, ostriches and wild asses, using spears on horseback or on foot; essentially these displays were a demonstration of equestrian and weapons skills.

A number of artistic representations give some idea of how they were equipped. One of the so-called 'Campana' terracotta reliefs shows *venatores* wearing helmets, loincloths and greaves, and carrying swords, looking not unlike contemporary gladiators, but this might have been unusual (Fig. 14). Certainly after the mid-first century AD, *venatores* were shown dressed more like ordinary hunters, with only a *tunica* and short or knee-length wrappings on their legs (*fasciae crurales*), and armed with a hunting spear (*venabulum*), for example on a funerary relief from Pompeii (now in the Naples Museum); one is fighting a bull with his spear, the other is in combat with a boar. Three other fighters have been thrown to the ground by an attacking bear. The *venatores* on the Zliten mosaic are similarly clothed. A second century mosaic from the Roman villa at Nennig in Germany figures *venatores* wearing what appear to be knee-breeches and very broad belts plus leg wrappings; some of the fighters have small decorated breastplates.

The third-century AD Magerius mosaic from a villa at Smirat near Sousse (Tunisia) gives the most comprehensive account of animal displays (Fig. 16). It commemorates a *ludus* funded by the eponymous local worthy. It depicts four named members of the troupe of animal-fighters along with four leopards, also named, all of which are severely wounded. At the centre of the mosaic is a figure of a herald holding a tray with four bags on it. On either side is a lengthy inscription, in which the display is referred to as a '*munus*'; the troupe is identified as the Telegenii and an appeal is made to the audience for support for the sum of 500 *denarii* for each leopard from the would-be *munerarius*, Magerius. To the right of the herald is the *acclamatio*, the audience's enthusiastic response to the requested payment; on each of the four bags is a symbol denoting 1000, indicating that Magerius responded by paying 1000 *denarii* for each animal, double the going rate. Other evidence from North Africa suggests that this action was not that unusual. Also depicted on the mosaic is a figure of Diana, goddess of hunting, who

16. Magerius Mosaic, Smirat (Tunisa).

approaches from the left carrying millet stalks which were probably the emblem of the Telegenii, and Bacchus who carries a type of spear topped with a crescent, apparently another feature peculiar to depictions of this troupe. Yet another figure, which appears twice, has been identified as Magerius himself. This mosaic, either on the floor of the *triclinium* or a bath suite, represents a physical symbol of Magerius' power and wealth, keeping alive the *kudos* already accrued from the *munus* itself.

The Telegenii are the best known troupe of *venatores* in the North African evidence, and together such professional groups have been termed '*sodalitates venatorum*' by modern scholars. With their close knowledge of wild animals, such groups were probably also involved in the acquisition, transport and trade of animals for the spectacles.

In Rome animal fighters were trained in the Ludus Matutinus, its name derived from the fact that, in large games, animal fights traditionally took place in the morning (Seneca, *Letters* 7). This training school, possibly founded as early as the time of Caligula, was located close to the Colosseum and, just like the Ludus Magnus, was under direct imperial control (*CIL* 6.352).

Animal displays in the provinces

Animal displays were popular across the empire, but they were far from homogeneous, being much more dependent on locally available animals. As a result, spectacles involving exotic animals were far less frequent.

17. *Denarius* of Septimius Severus depicting his animal shipwreck in the games of AD 202-203 (*RIC* 274).

There were exceptions to this, for example the *munus* of Magerius, but often the non-visual sources are very unspecific about the types of animals involved. For example, Hadrian gave a large scale *venatio* of 1000 beasts staged in the Panathenaic stadium in Athens (*Historia Augusta, Hadrian* 19); the animal displays listed in the Galatian priest list, with the exception of bulls, are equally vague.

The venue for animal displays also varied. In Rome, initially the Circus Maximus was the preferred location. Subsequently, other locations were used, for example the Amphitheatre of Statilius Taurus, called a 'hunting theatre' (*theatron kunêgetikon*) by Dio (51.23.1), and later the Colosseum, though the Circus remained the favoured location. A memorable occasion was in AD 202/3 when Septimius Severus, as part of his *decennalia* celebrations, dressed up an animal display as a great shipwreck. A huge mock ship was hauled into the Circus and when it broke apart 400 animals poured out, including lions, leopards, bears, ostriches and wild asses (Dio 76.1.3-5) (Fig. 17). In Italy and the provinces, where the variety of locations was much more limited, animal displays were also staged at a range of different locations. The amphitheatre was of course still used, as indicated by the scenes of animal hunts on the podium walls of the amphitheatres at Pompeii and Mérida. The small amphitheatre at Maktar (Tunisia) was specifically equipped for such displays. There are no arena substructures but entrances in the podium wall gave access for both human and animal combatants (Fig. 18). In the eastern provinces, the stadium, and some theatres were either provided with the necessary facilities from the beginning, such as the Hadrianic theatre at Stobi, or modified at some point so that animal displays could take place in them. The former is certainly the case in the later first-century stadium at Aphrodisias (Turkey) and the Panathenaic Stadium rebuilt in the mid-second century AD by Herodes Atticus in Athens, and the recently excavated Herodian period

18. Amphitheatre, Maktar (Tunisia). The doorways into the arena contained a smaller, and separate, access for animals from cages.

structure at Caesarea Maritima was similarly a multi-purpose entertainment venue from the outset.

Modifications, such as in the theatre at Philippi in Greece, involved the provision of nets supported on timber uprights which protected the spectators from inadvertent audience participation. Big cats can jump fences 4 metres high, so most venues required extra audience security on top of the podium wall, which was usually no more than 2 metres in height at best. No depiction of such an installation survives, though the cuttings in stonework can be discerned, for example in the Colosseum and the stadium at Aphrodisias. However, Calpurnius Siculus (*Eclogues* 7.50-6) describes an arrangement in Nero's temporary amphitheatre on the Campus Martius in Rome, built in AD 57, comprising a fence and netting topped by some kind of device with horizontally-mounted metal rollers which, by turning, would prevent an animal gaining purchase and thus being able to jump over. The rather comedic effect would no doubt have appealed to a Roman audience, while frustrating and angering the animals even further.

Classical World Series

SPECTACLE IN THE ROMAN WORLD

Hazel Dodge

Bristol Classical Press

First published in 2011 by
Bristol Classical Press
an imprint of
Bloomsbury Academic
Bloomsbury Publishing Plc
36 Soho Square,
London W1D 3QY, UK
&
175 Fifth Avenue,
New York, NY 10010, USA

CIP records for this book are available from the British Library and the Library of Congress

ISBN 978-1-85399-696-2

Illustration sources and credits

Figs 1, 2, 5, 6, 7, 11, 12, 13, 15, 16, 18, 21 and 25: photographs by Hazel Dodge. Figs 3, 4, 8, 9, 10, 14, 17, 22, 23, 24, 26, 28, 29, 30, 31: drawings by M.C. Bishop. Fig. 19: after K. Coleman, 'Fatal Charades: Roman Executions staged as Mythological Enactments', *Journal of Roman Studies* 80 (1990), 44-73, reproduced by kind permission of the Roman Society and Professor Coleman. Fig. 20: reconstruction of Augustus' stagnum in Rome according to Rabun Taylor, reproduced by kind permission of Professor R. Taylor.

Typeset by Ray Davies
Printed and bound in Great Britain by
CPI Antony Rowe, Chippenham and Eastbourne

www.bloomsburyacademic.com