

**“Beast-Hunts” in Roman Amphitheaters:
The Impact of the *Venationes* on Animal Populations in the Ancient Roman World**

Author: Elliott Kidd

Faculty Mentor: Susan Brown Eve, Department of Sociology, College of Public Affairs and Community Service; Honors College

College and Affiliation: Department of History, College of Arts and Sciences; Honors College

Bio:

Elliott Kidd is a recent cum laude graduate of the University of North Texas with a Bachelor of Arts in history and a minor in English. As a member of the Honors College, he earned the Distinguished Honors Scholar Award. Elliott is a member of six honors societies including: Phi Kappa Phi, Tau Sigma, Golden Key, Theta Upsilon Eta Sigma Phi, Alpha Chi, and Alpha Sigma Lambda. In high school, Elliott participated in Academic Decathlon. In 2003, he participated in Duke University's Summer Talent Identification Program. In summer 2004, Elliott participated in the National Young Leaders Conference in Washington, D.C. where he won an award for the Best Grassroots Campaign. Elliott was also a former associate student editor of *The Eagle Feather*.

Abstract:

The brutality of the Ancient Roman culture is as much a part of its appeal as its obvious horror. Often, the Romans would entertain themselves with spectacles both benevolent and malevolent. One of many blood-filled sources of entertainment for the Romans was the *venationes*, or wild beast hunts, that took place in amphitheaters for hundreds of years around the Roman Empire. These games started out as relatively innocent festivals, but by the time of emperors such as Titus or Domitian, the *venationes* had escalated in large cities like Rome. Over time the small local shows and the grand *venationes* of the cities began to endanger populations of animals from all corners of Roman influence. Lions, elephants, tigers, bears, panthers, and other animals disappeared from their habitats. The impact of the Roman triumph over the wild is assessed and the extent of the loss of exotic animals that followed is estimated.

Introduction

The brutality of the Ancient Roman culture is as much a part of its appeal as its obvious horror. When it came to the gladiatorial arena, only the strongest (or in some cases, the cleverest or luckiest) would survive, and that produced a certain heroic quality about the games for those who witnessed the high pressure, life-and-death situations. Seneca said, “[W]e are stirred at times with pleasure if a youth of steady courage meets with his spear an onrushing wild beast, if unterrified he sustains the charge of a lion; and the more honorable the youth that does it, the more pleasing this spectacle becomes,” yet for all of those nameless heroes of the arena there are hundreds more that died violently without glory (qtd. in Toner 47).

Among those lost were those unfortunate souls that were fed to the beasts; lions, tigers, and bears joined panthers, wolves, and dozens of other animals that were to be showcased in the splendor of the amphitheaters. Like their gladiator counterparts, these captured animals seldom survived the harshness of the spectacles performed in the arena. As a result, thousands of animals died, sometimes on a daily basis. Eventually, some animal species slowly started to vanish from parts of the Empire while others migrated away; entire populations were wiped out or left with so few numbers that they went extinct. Between the beast hunts held in Rome and its provinces, the impact on the animal populations throughout its empire was severe.

This paper will start with a short history on Roman festivals and the origins of the wild beast hunts. The politics, games, and various uses of amphitheaters, both in the provinces and in Rome, will be discussed. The business of animal capture, transportation, and use in the arena, as well as the employment of beast fighters, is of particular interest

and focus. The mosaics and physical remains of amphitheaters like the Coliseum help one better grasp a sense of the proliferation of the wild beast hunts and the impact that the mass slaughter had on animal populations. In Rome, this phenomenon will be traced from the Early Republic, through the time of Caesar and Augustus, and ending with the later emperors. The effects on specific animals, such as elephants and lions, will be reviewed. Finally, a conservative estimate of the total number of animals that were killed will be calculated.

Background

In order to understand the extent of this massive extermination, one first has to have a sense of how it was possible. Just as there were jobs for slave traders and gladiator trainers, there were also jobs for animal trappers and handlers, as well as two categories of fighters known as *bestiarii* and *venatores*. *Bestiarii* were persons thrown in the arena to survive the beasts, and *venatores* were career beast fighters, although today the two terms are often used synonymously. The amphitheater's beast-hunts (*venationes*) would pit animal against animal as well as animal against man. Despite the modern assumption that gladiators would fight animals as they fought each other, this is not true. Only the *bestiarii* would fight in the *venationes*; gladiators were trained for combat against other gladiators and nothing more. “[Some *bestiarii*] became experts at fighting wild beasts, often deliberately stirring the beasts to the point of madness to keep the fight ‘interesting.’” One would not necessarily have to be an expert to attempt such feats—it was very easy to fix the fight to favor the *bestiarii* (Welch 104).

As with any business, the games required skillful management. Animals that were killed in the morning games had to be replaced before the next day's show. Any

successful businessman would already have the contacts necessary for acquiring new beasts and it was almost a necessity for any aspiring Roman politician. The animals, ranging from bears to elephants, deer to ostriches, would have been transported from their place of origin, either by boat or road, via an extensive trade network that would take the animals across continents, many to their eventual deaths at any one of a number of amphitheaters in the various provinces, or even Rome itself. This process was repeated thousands of times until some animals disappeared from their habitats.

History of Roman Games

The Roman games began as religious festivals, but eventually became political as showcases of military achievement or celebrations of victory over a foreign power with an accompanying set of games to directly appease the public with entertainment. The domination of animals was a clear objective; the more wild, the more splendid. The Romans expressed their control over the animals of the natural world in a number of ways: as food, hunted or herded; as beasts of burden; as means of transportation; and as farm animals used for work. They were also dominated as trained show animals, race animals, or personal pets; as sacrifices to the gods; and as goods themselves since hides, horns, teeth, tusks, and claws were all intrinsically valuable (Gilhus 12). So the arenas were not the only facet of Roman life that contributed to the endangerment or extinction of a great many animals; the fights of the arena were just the most prolific. “The arena can be regarded as the end-product of a long process in which people gradually established control over, and in some places eliminated, the threat from wild beasts,” yet the establishment of such control was only part of the picture (Gilhus 32).

As a mime of hunting, a sport most ancient, the wild-beast hunts of the arena sought to immortalize an individual or group's triumph over nature with each particular battle. Essentially,

The animal games in the arenas were a ritualization of hunting, and the arenas basically showed animals as foes that had to be conquered. The prototype of the animal as foe is the carnivore, although domesticated animals were also used. It is significant that the ritualized hunts in the arenas continued with the blessing of the government for more than a hundred years, in some places for nearly two centuries, after animal sacrifice had been banned. (Gilhus 36)

That sort of difference between animal hunt and sacrifice highlighted the importance of the hunt in establishing human will over nature. It was not enough to kill a supplicating animal; the ability to kill a dangerous beast was much more satisfying. Overall, "both the gladiatorial fights and the wild beast hunts reinforced the idea of Rome's Imperial domination" by merely suggesting the ultimate reach of its influence and power (Welch 104).

If Rome controlled the people, the land, and the animals (as a general symbol for nature itself), then it controlled everything under its power, and thereby increased its dominance. The games are certainly a symbol of Roman might and splendor; the variety of animals and people from around the world that participated in the games was a symbol of their ever-expanded presence throughout the world. To further increase the sense of Roman-led order, there was a sequence for carrying out the games on each day. Seneca confirms that in the morning the wild animals were set to fight each other or *bestiarii*; in the noon intermission people (typically criminals or, infamously, Christians) were thrown

in with the wild animals, often defenseless, in order to feed the beasts; afterward, the main attraction—the gladiatorial battles—would begin in the afternoon, “but gradually these divisions became blurred...[T]here were also shows of performing animals, often accompanied by music, and musicians performed during the intervals” (Christ 116; Adkins 349). These regulated times allowed for a smoother system throughout the empire, so that the focus could truly be on the spectacle. The hunts rarely disappointed the entertainment-hungry people who saw animals

[D]ecorated to increase their splendour: bulls could be white-washed, gilded with gold, and covered in silk. Psychedelic sheep, their fleeces dyed scarlet and purple, also appeared. Many animals were trained before entering the arena. Alternating with the exhibition of these tame performing animals there were fights between still wild ones: a bull might take on a bear, or a rhino an elephant, the combatants being driven on by whips and hot irons until one had savaged the other. (Toner 37)

This cruelty was sufficiently masked by the wonder of the show.

Splendor in the Amphitheaters

In addition to the remarkable architecture of amphitheaters, there was also often an accompanying display of scenery to set the stage for the battles. Over time, “greater numbers of increasingly exotic animals were sought, leading to an extensive trade in wild animals, mainly from frontier provinces” (Adkins 348). Altogether, the animal hunts were really only part of a very large business that could appeal to the populace. The various stages of the Roman Empire would provide entertainment via plays, mimes, athletic competitions, chariot races, mock sea-battles, and gladiatorial fights in addition to

the *venationes*. Not all forms of entertainment were violent in Roman culture, yet the popular contests increasingly involved bloodshed. Cicero, who often witnessed such events, wondered, “When either a weak human being is mangled by a most powerful beast, or a splendid beast is transfixed with a hunting spear,” what value could these violent shows bring (Gilhus 183)?

Cicero’s wisdom was ahead of its time; unfortunately, his fellow citizens did not all view the games under such a disapproving light. The games, especially the wild beast hunts, had been around since the times of their ancestors; there was no need to change. From Rome’s foundation, the interest in wild animals was high. “It was the custom in those days, before the introduction of the modern extravagance of filling the arena with wild beasts from all over the world, to seek out spectacular performances of all kinds,” regardless of the thrill of battle (Livy 565). Perhaps Rome’s early neighbors, the Etruscans, first stirred these interests.

Origin of Gladiatorial Contests

Some historians disagree, but Etruscans are generally believed to have created the gladiatorial contests that were adopted by their Roman neighbors and came to dominate the Roman landscape. “The Etruscans, whose kings dominated Rome for at least three generations, were fond of such activities as wrestling and chariot racing, acrobatics, and fights between wild beasts” (Welch 99). Given their proximity to Rome and the entertainment value of such shows, it is probable that the custom would have been assimilated by the Romans regardless of Etruscan supremacy. In addition to these contests, and certainly more relevant to the modern day, were the fights between men and bulls that the Etruscans first invented (Welch 99). Their popularity can even be witnessed

today within the modern bullring, which “is a western descendant of the amphitheatre. Sometimes, as at Arles and Nimes, in Southern France, the bull fights are held in the remains of its Roman amphitheatres....” (Welch 108).

Aside from the Etruscan-like games that were popular with the rise of Rome, others, such as the Olympics, were present and survived Roman occupation until gradually [they] lost...[their] financial support and the interest of the Roman public, which had acquired the taste for bloody gladiator sports, which had spread from the floor of the Coliseum [sic] to the far reaches of the empire. (Craig 87)

Of course, the contrast between the Olympics and the battles of the arena show that the two hardly compare as contests of skill. The beast hunts in particular leave one to suspect that “as in modern professional wrestling, genuine combat was often presented with a certain histrionic contrivance,” and the matches were often fixed toward a certain outcome (Cornell 186). This meant that the losing side, be it the animals or the people, was about to meet a bloody end. “The word *harena* is Latin for sand, sand that was spread to soak up the copious amounts of blood which characterized every aspect of such entertainment,” but the blood did not discourage viewers of the arena (Welch 102). The battles of the amphitheatres, even for the Etruscans, were indeed gruesome, but that fact has been infamous for centuries.

The origins of gladiatorial combats and wild beast fights in Rome were humble enough, but would eventually grow excessive. At first the relatively small number of festivals kept the number of days with games relatively few. “Gladiatorial combats are said to have been introduced into Rome in 264 BC,” but within two hundred years they

would become spectacles not previously experienced by mankind (Platner 324). The wild beast hunts (*venationes*) required importation of various types of animals and different pairings were constantly put together so that, no matter where one went, it was likely to be a new show. Most of these spectacles “involved the display and slaughter of animals, which could include big cats, bears, rhinoceroses, elephants, hippopotamuses, hyenas, seals, aurochs, crocodiles, ostriches, and even pythons” (Gilhus 32). The wide animal variety could be even further differentiated: “the animals were both imported and indigenous. They included wild animals (*ferae, bestiae*) and carnivores (*dentatae*—‘toothed’), but domesticated ones (*pecudes*) were also used” (Gilhus 32).

Animals were not necessarily separated into different types when the *venationes* began, which is partially responsible for the wide variety of now extinct animals in regions that were under Rome’s control. The wild beast hunts of the arena even outlasted ritualized, religious animal sacrifices, so that

[t]he last time that *venationes* were organized in Rome was in 523 CE, after which they were outlawed. After that, there is no record of that type of spectacle in Rome, while in the Eastern provinces, *venationes* seem to have survived for much of the sixth century. (Gilhus 35)

Over those approximately seven hundred years that *venationes* took place with varying popularity throughout the Roman Empire, a great many populations of animals were decimated. The battles themselves were the direct culprit, but the organization behind the games was the starting point.

Politics of the Gladiatorial Contests

The government was involved in the capture and transportation of the wild animals needed for the amphitheater. To start, the animals were captured using various means particular to each animal; pits were typical, but each region had its own methods. They were then transported, as described in Pliny's *Natural History*, "from all parts of the empire, from Mesopotamia and Egypt, England and the Rhine valley, animals were brought to Rome. Many of them were unloaded at Rome's docks" (Gilhus 32). Once they arrived in Rome or at their final destination, the animals might be placed in local zoos, called *vivarium*, that were specifically constructed by the local government or a rich investor to house the animals intended for the amphitheater. It is probable that they also employed (or enslaved) many workers. Eventually, the wild beasts would be moved to cages nearer the arena before experiencing it firsthand. In the case of Rome, this meant being kept in the cages under the Coliseum floor.

A middle rank of politicians called the *curule aediles*, were responsible for building maintenance and the regulation of festivals related to the shows and spectacles. "An edict issued by...the *curule aediles* pointed out that the keepers of dogs and wild animals were responsible for eventual damage caused by these animals," so there was some regulation of what could or could not happen to animals before their time in the arena (Gilhus 32-33). The system of purchase, transportation, and confinement until use was a fully developed industry, and the local magistrates were the ones most often in charge of orchestrating it.

During the time of the Roman emperors, the *procuratores* of the *princeps* (Rome's first citizen or, at this time, the emperor himself) were "in charge of the wild and exotic animals which subject provinces and client kings, even the potentates of India, sent

to fill the emperor's...*vivarium*" (Carcopino 237). Even during the earlier era of the Republic, magistrates used the government to create the games. In the early years of the games, the Senate could grant a small allowance to the *aediles* that would hardly cover the cost, forcing them to pay the cost almost entirely out of their own pocket, often incurring debt. It is clear that "the Senate in fact took advantage of the knowledge that men who had reached the aedileship by popular favor were likely to entertain the people well in order to hold that favor at the next election" (Frank 88). The Senate could not lose politically in either case. If the young up and coming politician could not or would not pay for the games, or if the games went badly, or if he could not recover from the almost certain debt, then the people would remember and the active Senate members would have one less rival. On the other hand, if the young politician did incur the debt, produced successful games, and recovered from the debt, then he would be a great rival to his enemies, but certainly one deserving of the status of peer among the Senate. In this way it was an initiating rite for relatively new magistrates to pay for games mostly from their own monies in order to gain favor with the Roman populace as their ancestors, elders, and peers had done.

Contests in the Provinces

In the provinces, the games were an entertainment source but not a focal point of culture as in Rome. Among the many tasks facing provincial rulers were promoting peace, providing a fairly stable economy, and insuring a steady flow of grain, while also personally providing for "professional gladiators and charioteers, acrobats and jugglers, singers and musicians, and import[ing] exotic beasts to be hunted down in public shows for the general enjoyment" (Boardman, Griffin, and Murray 351). This may not seem like

a big job in a modern-world sense but the expenses could add up. The Roman magistrate held the top role as producer of the games, except in Rome, where the emperors were more involved; however, even officials in the lower ranks of government could be employed as producers. For instance, the Roman army could be used to capture and transport the animals from around their army's campsites. "Some of these soldiers had specific hunting duties as bear hunters (*ursarii*) or were assigned to capture lions (*ad leones*)" (Gilhus 33). The army's employment for this use could also help a general returning to Rome for a triumph (Gilhus 33). As a thriving business, one that today we may call "too big to fail," it was important for the Roman government to maintain its ongoing presence as a source of amusement for the populace from the outer reaches of the empire to its center in Rome. This, however, could not have been accomplished without the arenas in which the shows were performed, the amphitheaters.

Roman Amphitheaters

The Roman amphitheater was a popular source of entertainment throughout the empire, but not consistently so. There were various forms of entertainment: the Greek theater, for instance, when compared with the western-rooted Roman amphitheater, was more prolific "in the east where Greek influence was strongest," and as a result most animals were transported from the exotic east to the west where the shows were more popular and more amphitheaters existed (Adkins 140). There was, however, a correlation between the general structure of Greek theaters and Roman amphitheaters:

Amphitheaters were elliptical or oval structures surrounding an elliptical or oval open space (*arena*) on which the shows took place. The sloping tiers of seats around the *arena* could be supported on solid banks of earth held by retaining

walls with external staircases. Alternatively, the seating could be supported on vaulted masonry structures similar to that used in theaters. As with theaters, there was an awning (*velum* or *velarium*) to protect the spectators. (Adkins 140)

Despite their similarities and differences in construction, no one can doubt their differences both in function and practicality.

All the violent shows took place in the amphitheater including sacrifices, *venationes*, executions, and the gladiatorial battles, while the theater would house the docile exhibitions. Further, theaters were often buildings erected near the center of a town. “[B]ecause of their size, amphitheaters were usually sited on the edge of towns, sometimes even outside the circuit of the town walls. Military amphitheaters (*ludi*) were also built near forts and fortresses and were used for military training as well” (Adkins 141). As such, their presence was almost always one that reinforced the militaristic qualities of the particular location; whether as a training facility or as part of a defensive wall, the prospect of violence and death was connected with the strife of the arena. Theaters could not be considered to have the same function and this highlights the varying degrees to which a part of the empire might favor a benevolent show over the violence first made infamous by the construction of the Coliseum.

Amphitheaters in the Provinces

Many amphitheaters existed throughout the provinces of the empire; any area with a sizeable population would have had an amphitheater and even smaller locales would have had cheaply constructed arenas. In fact, “in some towns the amphitheater provided the only entertainment,” so for people outside Rome, it was still an event that would draw in the local people or travelers (Adkins 141). Some of the earliest

amphitheaters are not in Rome but Campania, in the area of Italy where Naples and Pompeii are now located. They were built around 120 BC and were really just structures used to contain the carnage that need no longer take place on the forum floor. As the games grew in popularity, so did the number of amphitheaters until they could be found almost everywhere. Most of these amphitheaters would be large enough to seat more than their city's population "so that visitors from the neighbouring towns and countryside could attend" (Welch 107). The cities, even those in the provinces, would need amphitheaters to keep their large populations entertained, but the number of relatively unimportant towns that also had amphitheaters gives a better picture of how widespread they were. "The number of provincial amphitheaters known today is very large...[and] games continued to be given until the beginning of the sixth century after Christ, even at Rome," though by that point Christianity had overtaken paganism as the dominant religion and, with it, the spread of anti-violent beliefs (Grimal 66). Not only was the construction of the amphitheaters prolific, but the games themselves were also replicated over hundreds of years.

The immense proliferation with which these shows spread can only be equated with modern-day soccer matches, especially in Europe, in terms of fervor generated, yet the Roman version was far more spectacular relative to its era. Some of the amphitheaters were rather large. The amphitheater at Pompeii was constructed in 80 BC and generally considered to be one of oldest known amphitheaters. After some improvement and extensions, it could seat 20,000 people, but amphitheaters from other large cities like "those at Verona, Pola, Corinth, Pergamum, Antioch, Berytos, Alexandria, Lambaesis, Caesarea in Mauretania, Arles, Nîmes and Trier" suggest the true extent to which

amphitheaters could be used with urban populations throughout the Roman Empire (Christ 116).

Actually the amphitheatre at Arles, which was built around 100 BC, was renowned for being “*par excellence* of the immensely popular beast-hunts and gladiatorial games” (Boardman, Griffin, and Murray 353). Rome may have had the best amphitheater and show, but throughout the provinces, a certain measure of renown might also be achieved.

The amphitheater at Italica in the Iberian Peninsula could hold 25,000 people, as could others from the same region at Tarraco and Emerita. “[T]he games in [those] amphitheatre[s] lasted four days, consisting of animal baiting and gladiatorial combats,” and were held at least once a year, at the local magistrate’s personal expense (Keay 87). Four days of beast hunts spread out of over three large amphitheaters could involve an extraordinary number of animals; given that the animals were taken from the same area year after year, the impact on local animal populations could be devastating.

Some of the amphitheaters of Britain at Cirencester, Silchester, Dorchester, Chichester, Richborough, Caerwent, and Carmarthen are not real structures but mounds of earth made to create a cheap barrier (Frere 367). Other amphitheaters in Britain, in cities like London, would have been sturdier, yet the seven amphitheaters mentioned above could easily have resulted in decimation of the animal population. It is easy to believe that the bear population in Britain dropped significantly after the Romans appeared especially since “gladiatorial shows were very costly, and it is possible that acrobats and wild-beast shows were more commonly exhibited in Britain” (Frere 347).

Furthermore, Britain exported bears to the Gallic coast for use in the continent's *venationes*.

The Business of Animal Trade

The trade system in place from Britain to the amphitheaters of Gaul illustrates the general conduct of animal trade throughout the provinces. There were ten sites along the British coastline that were Roman centers of control, each of which, though not specifically noted by the Romans, had a counterpart separated thusly: Branodunum (Current Name: Brancaster), a beach with Gariannonum (Burgh Castle), a harbor; Walton Castle, a beach with Othona (Bradwell), a harbor; Regulbium (Reculver), a beach with Rutupiae (Richborough), a harbor; Lemanis (Lympne), a beach with Dubris (Dover), a harbor; Anderita (Pevensey), a beach with Portus Adurni (Portchester), a harbor (Maxfield). These ten coastal sites represent places where ships carrying wild animals could land and unload their cargo. Taking animals across the empire was big business for everyone from the trainers and trappers before matches to the doctors and morticians afterward. Given the *venationes*' popularity, it is no wonder that an economy developed around it and that the animal populations were depleted.

Purchases of wild animals did not have to be made directly from Britain. Ships could have weighed anchor to land on the Gallic coast to drop off cargoes of foreign animals. Once there, the animals would be shipped to the amphitheaters of Gaul, Germany, or even Italy. In Gallic lands, there was even a type of amphitheater-theater, which

...differed from a true amphitheatre, however, in that about one third of the seating is replaced by the stage and stage-set for a theatre. This hybrid type gives

the air of a cost-cutting compromise, allowing less prosperous towns to have adequate entertainment facilities without the expense of building both a theatre and an amphitheatre. (King 80)

Furthermore, since it was not difficult or expensive to conduct games in the towns, the animal population of each locale was further endangered not only because of how much more prolific the games would be, but also by a larger budget allocation for buying animals. Over time, the shows of some of these smaller, provincial towns alone would decimate a population, yet many animals were simply traded to magistrates from bigger cities.

Animals of all types were traded through the far provinces until they reached their final destination. Naturally, the exotic animals were more desirable for the *venationes*, although that meant that the animals would have to be purchased from farther away which would be more expensive. The ever-expanding borders of Roman land opened fresh animal markets and created a sort of tiered pricing effect: local animals cost less than animals from other close provinces, which in turn cost less than animals from far away provinces or even foreign lands (carnivores too were generally more expensive than herbivores). Even though the *venationes* may have become increasingly more expensive and exotic, as the animals grew in number, the security of the Roman Empire allowed for relatively easy transportation. There was a trade system already in place for those new politicians who were putting on a show for the first time and had few connections to the provinces, although not every politician would have the most desirable connections. Generally the animals would be shipped from specific locales: bears from Caledonia (Scotland) and Panonia (Hungary, Slovenia, and Northern Croatia); wolfhounds from

Hibernia (Ireland); aurochs, an ancestor of the cow that was all but destroyed by the Romans, from Germania; bulls from Illyricum (Macedonia); hippopotami from Nubia; lions from Armenia, Mesopotamia, Thrace (when they could be found), and Northern Africa; elephants from North Africa; and tigers from Hyrcania at the south Caspian Sea. Most of these animals would be completely removed from those places of origin. In addition, a wide range of other animals from the Middle East and Africa were captured and shipped including rhinos, leopards, ostriches, cheetahs, seals, panthers, gazelles, antelopes, camels, snakes, zebras, and crocodiles (Barraclough 91). Certain areas might provide crucial supplies, some animals, and some both. According to Pliny, Ethiopia might supply animals as well as “ivory, rhino horn, hippo hides, tortoise shells, apes, slaves and carbuncles. It was also a prime area for hunters for the arenas of Rome” since trained hunters of animals were just as important to the arena as the animals themselves (Elton 85). *Bestiarii* were already trained in the methods of beast fighting which made them a valuable asset; some areas became known for this skill, such as the information from Aelian, telling us of the skill the Moors of North Africa had when hunting leopards (*On the Characteristics of Animals: Volume III* 93). As a business, the need for skilled hunters was but part of the overall picture. The entire production allowed the people of the Roman Empire to get their fill of carnage; there were multiple avenues for the animals to reach amphitheaters.

The Roman and the provincial governments bought and sold not only animals but parts of animals killed for their wares, such as ivory. Egypt, a gateway to southern Africa (or Ethiopia) via the Nile River, was a natural shipping point for all sorts of goods, and the Alexandrian Tariff mentions Babylonian furs and hides, Parthian furs and hides,

Arabian Onyx, ivory, lions, lionesses, maneless lions, and cheetahs explicitly (Elton 84). Other sources mention particular sites from which specific animal species were traditionally shipped, like the Egyptian archeological site at Berenike, which was a port used primarily by the government in the elephant trade with southern Africa (Tomber 64). Occasionally Berenike would function as a military shipping point as well since elephants were one of the few animals used in both the arena and in battle. Further examples of government involvement in the *venationes* exist, and, of course, one of the most obvious is those games produced by the emperors in the Coliseum. The games “were as constant a drain on the Imperial Treasury as they were on the wild life of Africa and Asia,” but most emperors truly enjoyed the spectacle of the games, and even those who did not would not risk turning away from the popularity created among the mass of citizens who reveled in the entertainment (Welch 108). Moreover, because of the increasing extravagance of each game, the emperors were very nearly required to bring in more animals for the slaughter as the games progressed, further adding to the burden on the treasury. Whether via battle or the arena, government-sponsored trade only served to increase the number of animals eventually slaughtered.

Animals were goods and the business simply kept seeking out its merchandise. This meant that for arena and military use, a variety of animals were used, but it is important to note that this was not always the outcome for animals as there was a trade for animals used as pets, farm animals, or simply for extravagant display. So, in addition to the wide variety of animals being traded, there were also a wide variety of uses for them, not all of which were violent. Removing animals from their natural habitat, whatever the intended use, still had the effect of thinning out that animal in its natural

region since it was no longer there to reproduce; furthermore, since they were unlikely to reproduce in their newfound home (especially in the case of exotic pets), the animal would be unable to pass on its genes. Regardless of why these animals were removed from their natural habitats, they would never return to their native lands. Since most were killed in the arena, there is ample evidence to validate the events that happened afterward.

Mosaics Depicting the Beast Hunts

Period mosaics give an accurate pictorial representation of the beast hunts. The mosaics were more widespread than one might think; mosaics from around the Roman world (especially from North Africa and Italy itself) show various scenes of animal hunts, capture, and transport, in addition to the *venationes*. The mosaics themselves created business as most painters would be paid for their work, which, like the rest of the animal-trade business, improved the economy. The mosaics were fantastically diverse, even when only depicting the *venationes*. One mosaic shows children imitating *bestiarii* by killing small animals.

A particularly famous mosaic from Smirat in Tunisia in mid-third century AD shows four *bestiarii* (named Spittara, Bullarius, Hilarinus, and Mamertinus) fighting four leopards (Victor, Crispinus, Romanus, and Luxurius) with the help of the producer Magerius. Some mosaics were advertisements rather than depictions of particular events. Some of the mosaics, however, were extremely realistic and might show the *damnatio ad bestias*, or the feeding of people to the wild beasts. This could be quite gruesome as the mosaics do not stray from gore; one mosaic shows a type of big cat (possibly a leopard) fatally biting a tied man in the neck, while another depicts a bear mauling a man. Despite the ominous power of these wild animals, domesticated animals were also often used for

the same purpose. These animals might range from horses and oxen to cows or even house pets; a mosaic from Silin in North Africa shows a man being charged by a bull; another painting shows an ostrich being loaded onto a ship. Some mosaics make the scenes more ambiguous and “the nature of the animals is not specified; they appear *en masse* and are collectively designated as ‘beasts’” (Gilhus 191). Mosaics show the impact that the *venationes*’ popularity had on the Roman world, yet it remains the great Coliseum of Rome that can best represent the splendor of the games.

The Coliseum

The most famous of the amphitheaters in which the *venationes* took place was in Rome at the gigantic amphitheater known as the Flavian Amphitheater or the Coliseum. Despite its legendary status as the epicenter of the glories of the arena, the Coliseum was not always a part of Rome; it “was begun by Vespasian [72 AD], finished by Titus [80 AD], and embellished by Domitian” (Rostovtzeff 244). One can draw two important bits of information from this information (excluding the obvious point that games held in Rome from 80 AD onward were shown in the Coliseum): (1) before the construction of the Coliseum, the contests were held somewhere else; and (2) the Coliseum was so impressive and colossal at its inception that it took the reigns of three different emperors to complete it—a structure that everyone remembered.

Before the Coliseum, there were a variety of constructs and places in which the people of Rome viewed the spectacle of a wild-beast hunt. “[G]ladiatorial and wild beast shows were first held at Rome in open areas such as the *forum* or *circus*,” but these venues were extremely dangerous to the spectators, who were often hurt by a stray sword thrust or an enraged animal (Adkins 140). It soon became quite apparent that a solid

structure, one that could offer protection while also remaining open enough to allow for battle, would be needed as the games grew and became more spectacular and violent. As a result, “the first permanent stone amphitheatre was erected in the Campus Martius by Statilius Taurus in 30 BC,” but this amphitheater lasted less than two generations before all that remained were the foundations (Platner 325). Eventually it was replaced in 57 AD when the emperor Nero had a wooden amphitheater built on the same foundations.

Despite its use of wood, the building was well built and “had ivory and gold ornamentation and was covered by an awning the colour of the sky and studded with stars; exotic beasts were brought for the entertainment of the crowd” (Woolf 161). This structure was destroyed in the Great Fire of Rome, of which Nero was rumored to be the cause. Regardless, the beginning of construction on the Coliseum would not occur for about another ten years, during the Flavian Dynasty. Once it was finished, however, the Coliseum was unlike anything built before it.

That the Coliseum itself is an extraordinary structure is verified by the fact that it still stands today. The site chosen by Vespasian for the Coliseum was that of the Golden House of Nero, “a palatial villa which Nero had built for himself between the Caelian and the Palatine [Hills]” (Rostovtzeff 244). The choice of location is ironic considering Nero’s amphitheater was previously the center of entertainment in Rome and his new palace continued to serve the same function. Its complex design made it seem like a modern-day stadium and was far more spectacular. It could seat roughly 50,000 spectators and was over 160 feet tall. An enclosed area of 3,500 square meters, four stories tall with eighty great arches, spoke to its grandiose nature. Yet it was the work by Domitian in which he built a series of underground tunnels (*hypogeum*), added the fourth

level, and finished the interior seating which made the amphitheater more than just a magnificent structure but an advanced feat of engineering.

Later, further changes would be made that provided cages of masonry specifically used to house the animals and a system of ramps, pulleys, and hoists so that people or the animals themselves could be placed quickly in the middle of the carnage of the Coliseum. Additionally, there were dressing rooms, equipment areas, and even piping used for drainage in the *hypogeum*, so the underground area was used to its full potential. There is no doubt that the planning and design developed over the years took into account the many ways that it could be used to entertain the people of Rome with the gore of its spectacles; in this it did not fail. The brutality caused many of the ancient Roman authors to give accounts of the *venationes* throughout Rome's history.

Early History of the Games

Stories from the ancient authors reveal more about how the games began. Livy tells us Marcus Fulvius Nobilior conducted in 186 BC “the first hunting spectacle with exotic animals—lions and panthers,” yet this was only the first using exotic animals, and more were soon to follow (Gilhus 31). These *venationes* in the earlier years before the Coliseum often were enacted in the Circus Maximus and originally included just Italian animals like bulls, bears, boars, oxen, and deer before progressing to the exotic animals brought in the late Republic. More exciting animals were shown when, in his aedileship, M. Scaurus exhibited a hippo for the first time at Rome “together with five crocodiles...in a piece of water which had been temporarily prepared for the purpose” (Pliny 290). As the animal shows' popularity rose, some *bestiarii* became relatively famous. Martial tells us the tale of Carpophorus who first killed a boar and then,

Plunged his hunter's spear also in a headlong-rushing bear, the king of beasts beneath the cope of Arctic skies; and he laid low a lion, magnificent, of bulk unknown before, one worthy of Hercules' might; and with a far-dealt wound stretched in death a rushing pard [a male leopard]. (Martial 13)

Despite the fact that one man might kill a boar, a bear, a lion, and a leopard in a single bout, not all showcases of animals ended violently. Martial and Pliny the Elder were enthralled by the circus tricks and exhibitions put on innocently at the *venationes* more than the violent clashes. Despite the authors' questions about the civility of the malevolent matches, the Roman citizens appear to have few qualms, so as the games' popularity continued to grow so did the size of the massacres.

As the Republic expanded the reaches of Rome and Roman influence, more exotic animals were shipped to the inner parts of their territory and in far greater numbers. Seneca tells us of the games of Sulla, who during his praetorship in 92 BC, had one hundred lions fight each other.

The Late Republic: Pompey, Cicero, and Caesar

Later that century, Pompeius (Pompey) Magnus would exhibit six hundred lions and Caesar four hundred. Pompey Magnus and Caesar would also bring other rare animals to the games and are especially known for increasing the *venationes'* exposure in the time just before the end of the Republic. Pliny, while describing an animal that resembles a lynx, says that it was Pompey Magnus who first displayed the animal "having the figure of a wolf, with the spots of the pard" (277-8). Rhinoceroses were also first shown at the *venationes* of Pompey Magnus. Caesar first displayed a giraffe in Rome during the triumph in 46 BC that also included elephants, bulls, and four hundred lions.

Caesar and Pompey were particularly like the later emperors in the absolute butchery they created. Julius Caesar, for instance, was made instantly popular during the games he produced when *aedile*. Pompey, who would harness as many as eighteen elephants to ride during his triumph, would later set those elephants to fight, but, as Seneca witnessed, he created such animosity among the crowd for slaughtering such majestic animals that the mob very nearly turned against Pompey. Even for the jaded Roman people, sometimes the producers of the shows could go too far. Such events would not be out of the ordinary within a few generations, and, sadly, the five hundred lions that Pompey killed in those same *venationes* would not be the largest single slaughter by the Roman Empire.

Cicero, a contemporary of the two men, served as governor of Cilicia in present-day Turkey. In 50 BC, he informed a friend that he could no longer ship panthers to him because the region's supply had been exhausted. During the time these men lived, the games had become an entertainment staple, and, since "in Cicero's day the games at festivals were more frequently gladiatorial shows and wild beast hunts," it is easy to see how animals might already be running in short supply in certain regions (Frank 60). With every event or cause for celebration, there was another *venatio* and more animals were used. These ever more splendid games and the beginning of animal disappearances came to fruition just before the emperors came to power, truly foreshadowing the coming brutality.

Augustus

The early Roman emperors only increased the slaughter of animal populations begun by earlier generations. The first emperor, Augustus, notes himself in his

autobiographical list of self-accomplishments known as *Res Gestae Divi Augusti* that “on twenty-six occasions [he] gave to the people, in the circus, in the Forum, or in the amphitheater, hunts of African wild beasts, in which about 3,500 beasts were slain” (Grant 107). That number is staggering for just the first of Rome’s emperors.

Augustus was also the first person to exhibit a tiger; as many as four would not be shown at once until the Emperor Claudius came to power. The numbers and types of animals shown and killed would only increase. There were two positive stories told by Aelian. The first was that Germanicus Caesar, the nephew of Tiberius, would give shows of both male and female elephants performing uncanny feats. A second story was about the slave Androcles who was condemned to be eaten by a lion; the lion recognized him as “the very man who had once taken a thorn out of his paw and therefore spared him” (Balsdon 110). The crowd demanded that both Androcles and the lion be released, and Claudius granted the mob’s wishes. These stories are well-known for their uniqueness and, at times, fantastical qualities; the animals, after all, were not slaughtered. By the time of later emperors, the story was apt to change.

The Roman Emperors

The games of emperors like Domitian, Trajan, and Titus served to only further assist in the extinction of animals in the Roman world. The emperors would, from time to time, even personally participate in the games, and the *venationes* were no exception. To be sure these staged contests were often not really contests at all. Domitian was particularly known for his unfettered hunt escapades, in which animals from around the empire were placed in a game park at his country estate outside of Rome. His biographer, Suetonius, made note that “many people often saw [Domitian] slay a hundred wild beasts

of different kinds” after they were driven into traps—he used nothing but a bow (Anderson 101).

No one doubts “when the degenerate Nero opened a show in the amphitheater by killing wild beasts with his own hand,” the beasts were not in a position to harm the emperor (Anderson 100). Skill was not a factor in these types of exhibitions. Hadrian was also an avid hunter who famously killed a lion, a bear, and a boar, the scenes of which are depicted on the Arch of Constantine in Rome. This, however, is relatively benign when compared to the shows produced by emperors in the Coliseum. The *bestiarii* were always armed and often accompanied by dogs. To be sure, the *bestiarii* wanted to entertain the crowd and there was a sense of pride and honor that came with a daring feat against wild, enraged animals. At times, groups of arrows let loose by gladiators or slaves from safe locales around the arena (usually up high) would supplement the *bestiarii*. In the Coliseum this often included the imperial box from which the emperor Commodus, “who on a single afternoon killed five crocodiles by his own hand, on others again two elephants, several rhinoceroses and a giraffe” (Christ 114).

Whereas these examples might give us a sense of how unfairly some *venationes* were conducted, it in no way gives us a scope of the waste of animal life. The most remarkable tale is that of Trajan’s games, which took place over three months of 107 AD, when about 11,000 wild animals were killed as part of a triumph over the Dacians (as commemorated on Trajan’s Column). Dion Cassius relates a similar tale about the opening of the Coliseum in 80 AD by the emperor Titus, which was followed by 100 days of carnage that left 9,000 animals dead, reportedly 5,000 of which were slaughtered in only a day (Carcopino 238). It is uncanny to think that this would become

commonplace for the Roman people, yet by the time Antoninus Pius was introducing “a hundred lions in a single day” it would not have seemed out of the ordinary at all for Roman citizens to be witnessing such a sight (Dal Maso 79).

The idea of human dominance over the wild beasts of the arena had long been ingrained into the citizens’ psyche. This was emphasized in a number of ways. From the popularity of the games themselves, to mosaics and other artworks, to something as everyday as a coin, the people were reminded of the games. The coins of Titus depict the Coliseum, and others, like that of Antoninus Pius, who shows an elephant being slaughtered on his coin, might feature animals directly (Grant 108). The games were a main focus of the empire, so when animals started disappearing from parts of the empire, the problem was already too far advanced, especially for the larger exotic animals.

Elephants

Particular casualties of Roman domination of the animal world were elephants because of their tri-fold use, in the arena, in combat, and for the ivory from their tusks. In Roman times, elephants could be gathered in Northern Africa, Ethiopia, or India and the far reaches of Rome’s influence. For the elephants of Ethiopia, Egypt was again a main port, but goods from India often were shipped through Egypt as well. The main source of elephants was Northern Africa because of their close proximity to Rome, since it was important for businesses to purchase the elephants by the cheapest means possible. Often this meant that elephants were simply herded onto a transport at the closest natural locale, but this was not necessarily the case (especially in later times as the elephant population of North Africa thinned). These elephants might all be shipped to the coast of Italy, as Mutianus states, “when some elephants were being landed at Puteoli” on the northern

coast of Campania (qtd. in Pliny 246). Regardless, the transport of elephants from their varied sources was a big business that required some knowledge of the differing sub-species and connections with those who could provide them. The differences between the elephants were well-known, and Pliny conjectured that African elephants feared Indian elephants due to their overwhelming size, but of course such conjectures were typical of Roman tales (257). It is, however, the elephants of Northern Africa that no longer exist.

The elephants of Mauretania were remarked on for being smaller in size than even the other African elephants (perhaps only as tall as eight feet). Pliny informs us that these elephants would “come down from the forests of Mauritania to a river, the name of which is Amilo,” now believed to be the river Valo (244). Yet Pliny, writing in the mid-first century AD, later remarks that, “except in India, the demands of luxury exhausted all those [elephants] in our part of the world” because of their overuse (247). By this point the taking of elephants in the region had already made the North African elephants extinct. Some local people, Pliny claimed, would also use the tusks of elephants for constructing temples, houses, or even fences (259). While a certain amount of this is just using available resources to construct shelter, it became excessive. This of course does not take into account those elephants used by Carthage in war and later by Rome itself. To further exacerbate the situation, Aelian notes that Libyans are just as happy to wage war on their neighbors as “wage war upon elephants,” so it is easy to see how these elephants were completely wiped out over a period of only a few hundred years (Characteristics of Animals: Volume II 77). Yet, across the Roman sphere of influence, elephants of all types were being used in battles and as part of Roman agreements (through exchanges, treaties, and more) with foreign lands.

The reduction in the elephant population was also caused, as Livy mentions, by the use of elephants in various battles ranging from those with King Pyrrhus at the Battle of Beneventum in 275 BC to those that Carthage used in the war against Rome. This was the first time they had been viewed by Romans, who called them “Lucanian oxen.” Four of them would be first shown in a triumph seven years later (Pliny 251). After the war in 251 BC, one hundred and forty plus elephants were shipped from Sicily to Italy where, Pliny says, “they fought in the Circus, and [...] they were slain with javelins, for want of some better method of disposing of them” (251-2). Further battles with Antiochus of the Seleucid Empire demanded that the Numidians send North African elephants to aid in battles in the Far East (Livy 239). Later, when Antiochus was surrendering, he was forced to “hand over all his elephants, and shall not acquire any others” as part of the bargain (Livy 370). So, in some ways, elephants can be seen to represent any large piece of battlefield equipment, therefore making them just as disposable. Other treaties demanded that all the elephants be removed from an army, as with Philip V of Macedon, whom the Romans, as part of their peace terms, insisted keep only a small army with no elephants (Livy 124). Often, Rome could employ its own people to capture the elephants necessary to match the size of an opposing army. These trappers would obtain permission from the emperor to “set out to hunt [elephants] in the manner of the natives of Mauretania” in order to bring them back for the emperor’s use (Aelian, *On the Characteristics of Animals: Volume II* 289).

If, however, the elephants were not destined for war or the immediate stage of the arena, they might be relocated to a farm specifically devised for the Roman citizens to contain and control the elephants. One such man who was the procurator of an elephant

farm is remembered via a gravestone that has been discovered; the man, Tiberius Claudius Speclator, was freed by the emperor Claudius and managed an elephant farm for him in Laurentum, just south of Ostia, near Rome (Harvey 159). These lucky (if one can call it that) elephants that had been captured would live longer than if they had been directly shipped to the arena or even a battlefield, but it was only a delay of the inevitable; rarely did a captured elephant escape a Roman death (either directly or indirectly). Of course, elephants were only one of the animals which experienced similar fates, not in battle, but in the amphitheater.

Lions

Lions, in addition to elephants, were among the most popular of the animals showcased in the arena. To be sure, lions from around the Roman world simply disappeared after years of being weeded out. Herodotus claims that lions from the mountains of Thrace (a region comprising parts of modern-day Greece, Bulgaria, and Turkey) came to attack the camels of Xerxes on his way to conquer Greece in the 5th century BC; these lions no longer exist. Additionally, Aristotle verifies Herodotus' claim of lions in Europe only existing "in the tract of country between the rivers Acheloös and Nessos," which were in Thracian Greece (341). Though Pliny calls the rivers by slightly different names (Achelous and Nestus, respectively), he makes the same claim as Aristotle, while only adding that these lions of Europe were "much superior in strength to those which [were] produced in Africa or Syria" (266).

Aelian relates a story about a bear, which ate some Thracian lion cubs, but when the parents returned to dead cubs, they sought and killed the bear with relative ease (*On the Characteristics of Animals: Volume I* 179-181). The modern world is unsure if a story

of this caliber could even be true, but regardless, it is clear that the biggest of cats once roamed the mountains of Thrace.

The lions of other countries were also once plentiful. As mentioned above, the lions of Syria were once great in number. Other stories from northern Africa are but reminders of the land's modern lack of lions. Aelian tells us that lions of Mauretania would often venture into homes or follow people to springs of water (*On the Characteristics of Animals: Volume I* 159). Furthermore, Pliny relates how in Libya lions might understand the language of the natives (267). Of course that is just a tale and needs to be taken with a grain of salt, but the fact still remains that large lion populations were well known in North Africa in ancient times—but now they are gone. Even the lions of India, which Aelian claimed were “exceedingly wild and savage,” are no longer present in the region (*On the Characteristics of Animals: Volume III* 357). Overall, the lion population was wiped out completely in the Roman world by the time the Empire ceased to be. Other big cats met the same fate. Tigers, panthers, and lynxes were hunted down and captured for the amusement of the Roman population.

Tigers, Panthers and Other Large Cats

It was well known in ancient times that Hyrcania (modern-day northern Iran) and India produced the tiger, so Hyrcania was the main source of export since it was closer to Rome. Hyrcania no longer has any tigers and even India, though not entirely through the Romans' fault, is running out of stock swiftly. In India the trade of these animals took a back-seat to the need for them as local homages to kings who, Aelian states, were given trained tigers along with other wild animals as a handsome gift (*On the Characteristics of Animals: Volume III* 235). With the abundance of tigers in the ancient times, it must have

seemed impossible to thin out the population of Hyrcania and India—yet this did occur, but because of their relative distance from the epicenter of Roman influence, these cats were not as well pursued as some of the others. In his section on panthers, Pliny mentions that they were both common in Syria and Africa (going so far as to call the panthers in Syria “black lions”) (274). Aelian claimed that the panthers of Southern Turkey were calmer than other species and that those in Mauretania would not harm monkeys (*On the Characteristics of Animals: Volume III* 355).

The panther can no longer be found in Turkey, Syria, Iraq, or North Africa, so these descriptions by ancient authors cannot be verified. Even lynxes, which were once produced by “Aethiopia...in abundance,” conform to the large list of vanished cats (Pliny 278). The Moors of North Africa, according to Aelian, would often relate stories about lynxes including exact descriptions of lynxes (*On the Characteristics of Animals: Volume III* 143). The lynxes of all parts of Africa no longer exist, and even a large number of those that once populated Europe have disappeared and were most likely slaughtered with many of the other big cats from across Roman provinces and beyond. The tigers, panthers, and lynxes of the present-day Middle East, Northern Africa, and southern reaches of the Nile River no longer exist specifically because they were hunted down and used for combat in the arena, yet these carnivorous animals were not the only ones meant for slaughter.

Other Animals

Many herbivorous animals met the same fate as the big cats: death in the arena. Many domesticated animals like horses, oxen, and camels were used in battles of the amphitheater. The camels, of which there were two different kinds, Bactrian, those with

two humps and Arabian, those with one hump, were brought in from those foreign lands. Of course, being closer, the camels of Arabia would have been used more often, but one has to acknowledge the impressiveness of the Roman influence that would allow purchases of Bactrian camels from the steppes of China just so that they could be slaughtered on the arena floor. A similar observation might be made with other animals like the “herbivorous animal” from India, which from Aelian’s description would suggest the yak (*On the Characteristics of Animals: Volume III* 271).

Other exotic animals were brought from different parts of the globe as well. Elk from Scythia (north of the Caspian Sea) and northern Europe was a favorite for its size and would be brought in from time to time when a particularly extravagant show demanded their presence. Hippopotami, which Aelian (and Pliny as well) called “nurslings of the Nile,” were also sights that greatly amused the Roman populace (Aelian, *On the Characteristics of Animals: Volume I* 353; Pliny 290). Because their main habitat was actually southern Africa (they naturally traveled northward along the Nile to reach Roman influence), the hippopotami never experienced the same decimation that many other animals experienced. This, however, does not mean that the hippo was the most unusual of animals glimpsed by the Romans.

Aelian describes a *Katoblepon*, which can be identified as the gnu, as a visitor to the arena (*On the Characteristics of Animals: Volume II* 99). Like the gnu, which we might recognize today, the ancient aurochs were ancestors of our modern-day cows or oxen whom they resembled except that they were twice the size of cows and were covered in a shaggy fur. Pliny remarks that Germany used to produce this animal, which he referred to as the “urus” (262). Aelian describes the aurochs similarly but claimed that

the animal lived as far south as Paeonia in northern Macedonia (*On the Characteristics of Animals: Volume II* 97). These animals were almost completely used up by the time the Roman Empire disappeared, so that by contemporary standards, they were all but extinct. Today a small number of them remain in the forests of Lithuania. This, however, is only one part of the massive extinction event that the Romans orchestrated on a variety of species. The total number of animals killed as a result of Roman games is staggering.

Summary

Since many of these animals were completely wiped out, and more still were needlessly killed for the entertainment of the Romans, it is important to try to get some sense of the total number of animal dead during this time period. When one begins to assess the total number of animals killed by the Romans, the results are mind-boggling. The festivals held to commemorate the gods became more numerous and the days of games multiplied:

The Ludi, though not strictly *feriae*, were recorded in the calendars, held on *dies festi*, and have a religious origin and ritual, beginning as votive Games vowed in honour of Jupiter Optimus Maximus by a general and celebrated on his return from a successful campaign. However, at least as early as 366 BC they had become annual events held each September and remained unique until Plebeian Games were established c.220 BC. Then, during the anxieties of the Hannibalic War, the authorities tried to bolster up public morale by establishing the Ludi Apollinares in 212, the Ludi Megalenses in 204, [and] the Ludi Ceriales in 202, and then finally the Floralia in 173. The duration, as well as the number, of some of the Games was increased to several days: thus in the later Republic no less than

17 days of April were devoted to Games, 7 to the Megalenses, 8 to the Ceriales and 2 to the Floralia. Games were also established to commemorate the victories of Sulla (in 81 BC) and of Julius Caesar (in 46). (Scullard 40)

There were at least four other festivals, the Capitolini, Romani, Taurei, and Troiae, not even mentioned in this account—just those festivals held before the end of the Republic [in 27 BC]. The games grew exponentially with the emperors and the construction of the Coliseum. By the second-century AD, 130 annual days of festivals were taking place, easily twice the number of Republican times (Grant 108). This was, however, at the height of the *venationes* and by the middle of the fourth century AD, only sixty-four days of wild beast hunts (a number akin to that of the Republic) occupied the time of Rome's citizens (Balsdon 111). One cannot, however, assume that these numbers can even begin to give an accurate portrayal of the total damage because they only address Rome.

If one were to assume that the Roman Empire had an estimate of fifty amphitheaters and that each amphitheater only showed an average of twenty-five days of beast fights per year, then they would show a combined 1,250 days of games per year. If, also, the average number of wild beasts to die on each day was only four (sometimes thousands were killed in a single day in Rome), then the number of animal dead would be five thousand for a single year. Multiply that number by a five hundred year span of wild beast shows and 2.5 million is the estimated total. These are all conservative numbers that could easily make the outcome double this estimate.

With at least 2.5 million dead animals, it is completely realistic that, over time, the Romans completely removed entire animal species and depopulated entire regions of

fauna. When cataloguing the many cruelties of Roman civilization (though, to be sure, some good accompanied the bad), the Romans' treatment of the animal population at their disposal is often overlooked. Clearly this perception needs reconsideration.

Works Cited

- Adkins, Lesley and Roy A. Adkins. *Handbook to Life in Ancient Rome*. New York: Oxford University Press, 1994.
- Aelian. *On the Characteristics of Animals: Volume I*. Trans. By A.F. Scholfield. Cambridge, Massachusetts: Harvard University Press, 1958.
- . *On the Characteristics of Animals: Volume II*. Trans. By A.F. Scholfield. Cambridge, Massachusetts: Harvard University Press, 1959.
- . *On the Characteristics of Animals: Volume III*. Trans. By A.F. Scholfield. Cambridge, Massachusetts: Harvard University Press, 1959.
- Anderson, J.K. *Hunting in the Ancient World*. Berkeley and Los Angeles: University of California Press, 1985.
- Aristotle. *Historia Animalium: Volume II*. Trans. A. L. Peck. Cambridge, Massachusetts: Harvard University Press, 1970.
- Balsdon, J.P.V.D., ed. *The Romans*. New York: Basic Books, 1965.
- Barracough, Geoffrey, ed. *The Times Atlas of World History: Revised Edition*. London: Times Books Limited, 1984.
- Boardman, John, Jasper Griffin, and Oswyn Murray, eds. *The Oxford Illustrated History of the Roman World*. New York: Oxford University Press, 2001.
- Carcopino, Jerome. *Daily Life in Ancient Rome: The People and the City at the Height of the Empire*. New Haven: Yale University Press, 1940.
- Christ, Karl. *The Romans: An Introduction to their History and Civilisation*. Trans. By Christopher Holme. Los Angeles: University of California Press, 1984.
- Cornell, T. and John Matthews. *Atlas of the Roman World*. New York: Facts on File, 1983.
- Craig, Steve. *Sports and Games of the Ancients*. Westport, Connecticut: Greenwood Press, 2002.
- Dal Maso, Leonardo D. *Rome of the Caesars*. Trans. By Michael Hollingworth. Rome: Bonechi, 1975.
- Elton, Hugh. *Frontiers of the Roman Empire*. Bloomington and Indianapolis: Indiana University Press, 1996.
- Frank, Tenney. *Life and Literature in the Roman Republic*. Berkeley and Los Angeles: University of California Press, 1965.

- Frere, S. *Britannia: A History of Roman Britain*. Boston: Routledge & Kegan Paul, 1978.
- Gilhus, Ingvild Sælid. *Animals, Gods and Humans: Changing Attitudes to Animals in Greek, Roman and Early Christian Ideas*. New York: Routledge, 2006.
- Grant, Michael. *The World of Rome*. New York: Meridian, 1987.
- Grimal, Pierre. *Roman Cities*. Trans and Ed. By G. Michael Woloch. Madison: University of Wisconsin Press, 1983.
- Harvey, Brian K. *Roman Lives: Ancient Roman Life as Illustrated by Latin Inscriptions*. Newburyport: Focus Publishing, 2004.
- Keay, S.J. *Roman Spain*. University of California Press, 1988.
- King, Anthony. *Roman Gaul and Germany*. University of California Press, 1990.
- Livy. *Rome and the Mediterranean: Books XXXI-XLV of the History of Rome from its Foundation*. Trans. By Henry Bettenson. New York: Penguin, 1976.
- Martial. *Epigrams: Volume 1*. Trans Walter C.A. Ker. New York: G.P. Putnam's Sons, 1930.
- Platner, Samuel Ball. *The Topography and Monuments of Ancient Rome*. Boston: Allyn and Bacon, 1911.
- Pliny. *The Natural History of Pliny: Volume 2*. Trans. By John Bostock and H.T. Riley. London: Taylor and Francis, 1855.
- Rostovtzeff, M. *A History of the Ancient World: Volume II*. Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1933.
- Scullard, H.H. *Festivals and Ceremonies of the Roman Republic*. Ithaca, New York: Cornell University Press, 1981.
- Tomber, Roberta. *Indo-Roman Trade*. London: Duckworth, 2008.
- Toner, J.P. *Leisure and Ancient Rome*. Padtow, Great Britain: Polity Press, 1995.
- Welch, Kathryn. *The Romans*. New York: Rizzoli, 1996.
- Woolf, Greg, ed. *Cambridge Illustrated History of the Roman World*. New York: Cambridge University Press, 2003.