

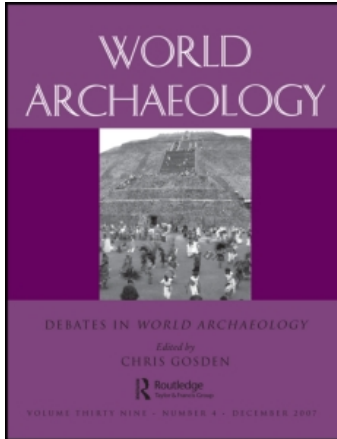
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Publisher Routledge

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## World Archaeology

Publication details, including instructions for authors and subscription information:

<http://www.informaworld.com/smpp/title~content=t713699333>

### The animals of the arena: how and why could their destruction and death be endured and enjoyed?

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Online publication date: 23 April 2010

**To cite this Article** Lindstrøm, Torill Christine(2010) 'The animals of the arena: how and why could their destruction and death be endured and enjoyed?', *World Archaeology*, 42: 2, 310 – 323

**To link to this Article:** DOI: 10.1080/00438241003673045

**URL:** <http://dx.doi.org/10.1080/00438241003673045>

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# The animals of the arena: how and why could their destruction and death be endured and enjoyed?

Torill Christine Lindstrøm

## Abstract

*Ludi* (games) (*spectacula*) were important in Roman visual culture. Those involving animals (*venationes*) developed from moderately sized ritualized killing and hunt into carnage. Their popularity and development in scale and frequency contrasted sharply with the Romans' love of pets, good veterinary medicine, and fascination with animals. I explore factors that contribute to explaining the spectators' endurance and enjoyment of the *venationes*. Contextual factors were hunting traditions and a political system where power and popularity was gained through donations (euergetism). I suggest that the explanatory psychological factors are: hunter-insensitivity, psychological and neurological processes connected to enjoyment of cruelty (killing, aggression, horror), desensitization, neurological feedback loops, curiosity, envy, competition, mass psychology, diffusion of responsibility (bystander effect), and changed states of mind through identifications and emotional turmoil. Finally, I scrutinize psychologically one exceptional case of divergent mass behaviour at Pompey's games in 55 BC. I deconstruct what has been described as a compassionate attitude by the spectators, and by Cicero, who commented on the incident.

## Keywords

*Ludi*; *spectacula*; *venationes*; classical archaeology; Rome; attitudes to animals; visual culture; spectatorship; enjoyment of cruelty; psychological and physiological processes.

## 'Fear and amazement is a very potent combination' (Maximus in the film, *Gladiator*)

The lives of the Romans resemble our own in many respects. This is perhaps a trivial observation, as essential parts of our modern systems have been, to a considerable extent, developed from Roman models. The differences are however also striking, often right at the heart of apparent similarities. Anyone who has entered the Colosseum (*Amphitheatrum Flavium*) in Rome will be struck by the similarity in structure to our modern arenas, yet

horrified by the difference in the activities that took place there, the Roman *ludi/spectacula*, as compared to our sports events. Both were however, and are, called ‘games’: a similarity among the differences.

Exploring the Romans’ attitudes to animals, Jocelyn Toynbee wrote:

one of the most outstanding paradoxes of the Roman mind – that a people that was so much alive to the interest and beauty of the animal kingdom, that admired the intelligence and skill to be found in so many of its representatives, that never seemed to tire of the sight of rare and unfamiliar specimens, that displayed such devotion to pets, should yet have taken pleasure in the often hideous sufferings and agonizing deaths of quantities of magnificent and noble creatures.

(Toynbee 1973: 21)

The aim of this paper is to try to explore and explain how and why the Romans could endure and enjoy the massacres of animals, wild and domesticated, that took place in their public games. A possible exception will be deconstructed.

### *Ludi*

*Ludi* (singular: *ludus*; game, play, sport, fun) were originally religious festivals, referring to various kinds of entertainment, usually held over several days (Bernstein 1998). (The games were also called *spectacula*, but in the following the term *ludi* will be used.) They were held first in town and city centres (*fori*) and then later in circuses, theatres and amphitheatres specially constructed for such games (Bomgardner 2000; Holleran 2003: 46–59; Rüpke 2004: 183–84). Such structures are among the most impressive monuments from Roman times. Yet, the structures used for the *ludi* cannot be fully understood unless we try to unravel the motives and emotions underlying the activities that took place there. The aim of archaeology is not only to discover and excavate ancient structures and artefacts, but also to understand their purposes and functions for the people who produced and used them. This understanding cannot always be deduced or extracted from the archaeological objects alone. Written sources and anthropological analogies may contribute to our understanding, but, when the understanding of archaeological findings requires complex behaviours to be incorporated into the analysis, psychology must also be applied.

*Ludi* attracted enormous numbers of spectators and were important parts of the collective Roman visual culture (Veyne 1987: 200–1). Although strongly ‘visual’ in form and content, the *ludi* were also clearly multi-sensorial as they also had auditory, olfactory and kinaesthetic components, making viewing them into synaesthetic experiences of the visual culture (Bal 2003: 9–10). Spectatorship gave access to an extraordinary total experience that must have had various psychological concomitants. The great assembly of people must also have triggered reactions of a psychosocial nature.

*Ludi* could consist of a variety of events: chariot races, theatrical plays, colourful processions with music, gladiator contests, animal exhibits, animal fights and staged hunts (*venationes*). *Venationes* were introduced early in the second century BC, and held for more than 500 years (Kyle 2007: 304). Usually, all the animals were killed, even those which won fights. Fights could include human versus animal or animal versus animal, the latter often

in the form of combat between different species. People fighting against the animals were unarmed criminals (who mostly lost), professional fighters (*bestiarii*) (who might win) and professional hunters (*venatores*) who would hunt down the animals (or occasionally be hunted down by them) (Kyle 2007: 264–74, 280–329).

*Ludi* were *given*, implying that they were free to everybody. They were acts of euergetism ('doing of good things' and giving of gifts) by the rich and powerful towards the people, an essential part of Roman social and political life (Cicero, *De officiis* 1, 47; Seneca, *De beneficiis* I, 4, 2; Rüpke 2004: 182–83; Veyne 1990: 103–4).

*Ludi* manifested and strengthened *plebis favor* or *favor populi*, the popularity and position, political and otherwise, of the person who gave them (Harries 2003: 135). *Ludi*, at enormous expense, became important instruments in the fight for votes in the Roman political system (Flower 2004: 325). Rising politicians gave, or promised, various gifts to society, including *ludi*, in order to be elected. Magistrates already in post, consuls, generals celebrating triumphs and emperors gave *ludi* in order to pacify, impress and re-affirm their positions (Kyle 2007: 323; Veyne 1987: 106). Since *ludi* rapidly became more and more frequent and increased in magnitude they must have worked very well to this end.

Around 100 BC six *ludi* were given each year, taking about fifty days of the year in Rome. At the end of the fourth century AD as many as 176 days a year were spent on *ludi*. *Venationes* were among the most popular events. In Rome, in 169 BC, sixty-three large African cats, forty bears and a few elephants were used (Livy XLIV 18, 8) – a 'modest amount' of animals compared to the enormous carnage of the later periods. A few examples: in 55 BC Pompey gave *venationes* with 600 lions, 410 leopards, some apes, a lynx, a rhinoceros and twenty elephants (Cassius Dio XXXIX, 38, 1–4; Cicero, *Epistulae ad familiares* VII, 1, 3; Pliny, *Naturalis historia* VIII, 7, 20–1). At Probus' *venatio* in AD 281 more than 3000 ostrich, deer, boars and other herbivores, 400 big cats and 300 bears were killed (Scriptores Historiae Augustae, *Probus* 19, 4–8). The largest number of animals killed was some 11,000 over 123 days at Trajan's triumph in 108–9 BC (Cassius Dio LXVIII, 15, 1). And it should be remembered that *venationes* were given not only in Rome, but also on large scales in other cities of the Roman world, plus on smaller scales in various towns (Kyle 2007: 302–3, 322–3; Toynbee 1973: 20). The Romans' use, or misuse, of animal lives in extravagant carnage is probably unsurpassed in human history.

The escalation of *ludi* testifies to how well they functioned as political tools for, and socio-political markers of, success and influence. Conversely, this functionality also proves the popularity of the *ludi*. *Ludi* were gifts to the population. To have functioned, they must have been received with delight. Evidently even the violent parts of the *ludi*, such as the *venationes*, must have been attractive to people. How and why? Was it something peculiar in the Roman mentality? Or can it also be explicable from elements in our common human mentality?

### How and why?

Before venturing to seek an explanation, a word of caution: we should declare whether we try to understand the Romans on *their* terms or *ours*, whenever we try to explain the

‘hows’ and ‘whys’ of Roman behaviour. Both perspectives are legitimate and relevant, but the choice of perspective must be explicit.

Here, the title of this paper itself implies an evaluation, indicating a modern detestation of killing animals for the fun of it (although our modern cultures may be positive towards hunting for sport). Perhaps Toynbee’s paradox is only a paradox in relation to our modern, humanistic sentiments and animal-rights ideologies? Perhaps describing the *venationes* as monstrous is nothing but a modern Western cultural construct? Perhaps researchers from other cultural contexts would not discern any paradox to be explained at all?

This paper aims at understanding the Romans on their own terms, as far as we can know them. Yet, ‘their own terms’ will also be explained by modern psychological theory and reasoning, that is, to the extent that certain psychological, biological and social principles and phenomena pertain to humans in general, almost irrespective of time and space (Brown 1991; Buss 2005; Cosmides and Tooby 2003; de Waal 2005).

A pertinent question is: would the Romans *themselves* describe their *venationes* as carnage? Most probably, yes. The fighting and hunting, with the climax of mass killing, was the whole point, celebrated as a spectacular event. Toynbee points precisely to this fact when pointing out that *both admiring* animals for their peculiarities, intelligence and beauty, and taking ‘*pleasure in the often hideous sufferings and agonizing deaths*’ (1973: 21, italics added) were aspects of Roman behaviours towards animals. Separately, these behaviours are explicable, together: incompatible. The paradox therefore remains, even from a Roman point of view: ‘How can we enjoy the destruction of what we also admire?’ From a modern perspective, we may ask: what kind of mentality, emotionality, attitudes, motives and contexts can explain it? The answer must be of a psychological nature. Both intra- and inter-psychological aspects are relevant.

## Roman mentality

### *Forever hunters*

The Romans’ ancestors (like everybody else’s) were hunters. The Romans never ceased to be. Hunting continued to be part of Roman subsistence, particularly in the countryside. Inspired from the Hellenistic east, hunting became a sport for the nobility (Kyle 2007: 265). Hunting and tormenting of animals were parts of public festivals from Rome’s earliest days. In addition to animal sacrifices, ‘rites’ like an annual crucifixion of dogs (Pliny, *Naturalis historia* XIX, 14, 57), the honouring of the goddesses Ceres by attaching burning brands to the tails of live foxes (Ovid, *Fasti* IV, 681–712), and of Flora by hunting wild beasts (Martial, VIII, 67, 4), the latter two both taking place in Circus Maximus, clearly testify that the *venationes* must be seen as an extension of behaviours of cruelty and hunting that were already part of Roman tradition and cultural context (Bomgardner 2000: 35; Kyle 2007: 265–7). The *venationes* were ritualized hunts (Gilhus 2006: 36), not sacrifices. Sometimes also spectators took part, and the meat was part of the gift they received (Kyle 2007: 326–7). Being called ‘hunts’ (*venationes*), they could be cognitively conceptualized as simply the continuation of traditional, necessary and ‘good’ behaviours: providing subsistence and exterminating vermin.

*Animals: fascinating and functional*

As in other contemporary Mediterranean cultures, the common attitude seems to have been to regard animals as inferior to humans, soul-less and potentially dangerous, but not representing evil ‘forces’ (Goguey 2003: 23–36; Kyle 2007: 264–5). Pets were popular (Gilhus 2006: 28–31). The wealthy even had private zoos (*paradaisoi*), and public displays of animals were enormously popular (Toynbee 1973: 20). Roman veterinary medicine was well developed (Walker 1973: 301–34). Pictures and sculptures of animals decorated private homes. Roman art testifies to the extraordinary precise knowledge they had of various animals’ physiognomies, movements and characteristic behaviours. In short, the Romans displayed great fascination with animals.

A division between ‘use’ and ‘enjoy’ functions, characterized as differing perceptions of dimensionality, is suggested to explain solidarity, according to *bellezza* theory (Wicklund and Vida-Grim 2004: 369–71). Solidarity connects to feeling empathy and compassion. ‘Dimensionality’ refers to perceivable stimuli: the way the other looks, sounds, feels, smells and moves. A high perceived dimensionality goes together with the ‘enjoy function’ of an interaction, facilitating an attitude of solidarity, whereas low perceived dimensionality characterizes the ‘use function’ and no, or poor, solidarity.

The Romans clearly *used* animals. Animals made Roman society work. It seems reasonable to assume that their ‘use animals’ dimensionality was not particularly heeded, and the attitude towards them was hardly characterized by solidarity and compassion. This ‘use function’ was not restricted to animals. The status and treatment of slaves paralleled those of Roman ‘use animals’. The Romans’ pets and zoo animals, on the other hand, were clearly ‘enjoy animals’. Their dimensionality was perceived and treasured, and was the very reason for keeping them. The good care and veterinary medicine these classes of animals were given testify to solidarity and compassion. So far, the *bellezza* theory fits. When it comes to the *venations*, however, this theory does not fit the data. A high dimensionality was perceived in the animals, their peculiarities, strength and beauty admired. And yet they were destroyed without solidarity or compassion from the onlookers. A partial explanation could be that lack of close contact reduces dimensionality perception and therefore the probability of feeling solidarity. The distance between spectators and animals during the *venationes* fits this modifying condition, but the difference in *bellezza* theory between use and enjoyment seems insufficient to explain how the carnage of the circus and arena could be enjoyed and endured.

The Roman mentality, in the cultural context of hunting and abuse traditions, explains the origins of the *venationes*. But the Roman mentality, with both use and enjoyment relationships to animals, is inadequate as an explanation for the continuation and expansion of the games. Perhaps more general human nature characteristics can provide some clues.

**Human mentality***Hunter insensitivity*

Human beings are omnivores and hunters. People in hunter-gatherer societies are reported to observe rituals that relieve them of the guilt for killing during their hunts (Ainslie 2001:

224). Modern hunters also sometimes express feelings of guilt or grief mingled with the joy at having slain an animal. These phenomena indicate a human capacity for identification with, and compassion for, animals. Yet, such psychological states would make hunting impossible. They must be set aside at the moment of killing. A mental state, called hunter insensitivity, has been suggested to enable hunters to kill prey effectively (Børresen 1996: 43–4), a state of focused attention and concentration characterized by a total emotional emptiness (Nell 2006: 216). A similar ‘cool’, compassionless mental state may have been experienced by the spectators when identifying with the hunters (*venatores*). As mentioned above, the *venationes* meant ‘hunts’, thereby conceptually facilitating this association and mental state. However, according to the sources (Cicero, *Epistulae ad familiares* VII, 1, 3; Cassius Dio, XXXIX, 38, 1–4; Pliny, *Naturalis historia* VIII, 7, 20–1), emotional upheavals were also experienced and expressed. How could this combination take place?

### *The lust of killing, aggression and horror*

Successful hunters experience victorious joy and satisfaction (Nell 2006: 216). If the spectators identified with the *venatores*, a rapid change of mental states from hunter insensitivity to the hunter’s feeling of victory and relief at the moment of killing could have taken place in the minds of the spectators. To call it ‘the lust of killing’ may be a bit far-fetched, but the idea is that the victorious moment of ‘I’ve gotcha’ when a dangerous animal is finally killed, the danger it represented is averted and meat provided, is an exhilarating feeling, as old as human hunting. To perceive the connections between pain-blood-death (the PBD complex) during hunting or cruel acts releases dopamine in the brain, creating feelings of joy and pleasure, and general arousal (Nell 2006: 211–13, 215). Through identification (Sandler 1987) with the *venatores* the spectators could have gone through the emotions of fear, coldness and joy/pleasure in rapid succession. As will be elaborated below, such rapid changes in emotional states have particular effects on human susceptibility (Dolinski 2001: 195–8).

To watch competitions or fights is fascinating. Aggression may be experienced as ‘lustful’ or ‘pleasant’ (Bourke 1999: 1–31), as it is connected to dopamine excretion, and to experience physiological activation (arousal) is rewarding in itself. Physiological activation is quite uniform, regardless of the agitated psychological state of which it is a concomitant, and is fuelled through positive feedback loops in the body’s neural and endocrine systems (LeDoux 1996; Ursin and Olff 1993: 3–22). Aggressive agitation and activation share elements with sexual arousal through similar dopamine excretion (Giuliano and Allard 2001) and amygdala stimulation (Panksepp 1998: 199). Similarly, killing may lead to sexual arousal (Grossman 1995: 135–7), as a concomitant to our predator nature (Nell 2006: 220). Through identification, these processes can explain the *venationes* spectators’ lustful experience of agitation, and the fact that they sometimes engaged in intercourse while watching the violence and with prostitutes who waited outside the arena (Bruch 2004: 4). Evidently, one kind of excitement led to another.

The physiological activation of agitated states may also explain why people tend to seek and enjoy states of horror (Tiger 1992: 244). However, horror is mainly enjoyed if the danger and gruesome events are perceived as unreal or not threatening to oneself. *We* can permit ourselves to enjoy the horror of violence on film, knowing that it is only fiction. The

Romans of course did not have films. ‘*Ludus*’ meant ‘play’, including theatrical play. When *ludi* included animals ‘performing’ in an arena or theatre, the stage was, literally speaking, set for fiction. The violence was possibly no more ‘real’ for the Romans than violence in films is for us. The horror could be experienced and enjoyed at a safe distance, time limited and with only moderate, if any, sense of ‘reality’ or compassionate involvement.

#### *Desensitization and neurological feed-back loops*

Repeated exposures to stimuli, even horrifying ones, will reduce the emotional response to them through habituation and desensitization, meaning ‘one gets used to’ and becomes less reactive to them (Schwartz 1989: 72–4, 138–9). *Venationes* could be seen frequently enough, and long enough each day, for desensitization to occur. The spectators’ reactions must therefore have decreased. Since the very motive for watching *venationes* was to experience excitement, surprise and horror, the desensitization that took place implied that they simply *had to* escalate.

To experience strong emotions and then be relieved of them was called *catharsis* (‘rinsing’) by Aristotle (*Poetica*, VI), describing the positive effect he assumed Greek drama had on the spectators. Freud (1957 [1917]: 37–59) reinstated this concept as a positive effect of emotional outlets. However, as Plato realized (in *The Republic*) and recent psychotherapy research has confirmed, emotions, once kindled, tend to reinforce themselves, rather than disappear (Bonanno and Siddique 1999; McNally et al. 2003). Therefore, emotions evoked during Greek theatrical performances or Roman *venationes* were hardly ‘rinsed’ away. On the contrary, once induced, they were reinforced and retained through neurological feedback loops (Klein 2002: 60–2; Mallick and McCandless 1966).

#### *Curiosity, envy, competition, and mass psychology*

Freud claimed that the strongest forces in the human mind are sexuality and aggression (Freud 1957 [1920]: 3–64). Witty tongues say they are in fact curiosity and envy. True enough, both are essential in human nature (Smith and Kim 2007). The Romans were extraordinarily *curious* about exotic animals, as demonstrated by the popularity of animal exhibits (Toynbee 1973: 17). The Romans’ access to animals from all over the known world nourished this curiosity. To see these animals in action, in combat, was clearly more stimulating. The impression that the resources seemed inexhaustible could have dampened any dawning concern for the animals’ death.

The psychology of ‘having been there’ is a combination of curiosity and envy. *Ludi* were important social events where ‘seeing and being seen’ were important elements (Tertullian, *De spectaculis* XXV). To have missed a spectacular *ludus*, and to hear colourful accounts of what ‘everybody’ had seen, must have been very frustrating, and worked to counteract any personal disgust at the horror scenes. Social competition is also essential to human nature (Smith and Kim 2007), and such a loss would motivate a determination not to miss the next one. So far curiosity, envy, and competition in the spectators.

Those who gave *ludi* were primarily motivated by the envious competition between candidates, magistrates, and emperors, caught in a spiral of spending, the *venationes*



probably being the most expensive parts. The escalation that took place was a logical consequence: every new *ludus* had to be bigger and better than those given by one's opponents or predecessors. As one's status, *honour* and political role were at stake, enormous fortunes had to be spent on *ludi*. Obviously, there was no place for sentimental concerns about animal welfare.

In large groups, people are inclined to behave in ways they would not as individuals. The intensity of mass excitement can be overwhelming. Each individual feels carried away to join in with the emotions and behaviours of the mass (Moscovici 1985: 15). This psychological state is called de-individuation, and is characterized by a loss of personal identity (Colman 2001). The sense of being included in a larger community gives feelings of strength, power, security, and invulnerability (Johnson and Downing 1979). It must have been almost impossible to resist this collective influence in the circus (Tertullian, *De spectaculis* XXV, 15, 2–6). Particularly for the more powerless, insecure, vulnerable, and poorer strata of Roman society, the experience of such moments must have given great satisfaction.

#### *Diffusion of responsibility*

Part of group and mass experiences is a feeling of reduced personal responsibility, called 'bystander apathy' or 'bystander effect', and is explained as an experienced diffusion of responsibility (Latané and Darley 1969). A consistent finding is that the more onlookers are present, the less probable it is that an assaulted individual will be helped. Many *ludi* had thousands of spectators. This number itself would render it unlikely that anybody would react to defend any animal or human being attacked in the arena.

Another aspect of the diffused responsibility was the fact that the spectators were not, personally, responsible for the *ludi*, *venationes* or anything that took place in them. Just as our (not too distant) ancestors enjoyed seeing public executions (Nell 2006: 221), the spectators could regard themselves as simply watching something that would take place anyway. They might as well enjoy it. Only the commissioners were responsible. And *they* could disclaim responsibility by arguing that they simply gave the people what the people wanted. What the people wanted was constant novelty and greater *ludi* to counteract boredom (Harries 2003: 129) (the boredom caused by desensitization, as explained above).

Not that ethical issues seem to have been any problem. The ruling distinctions between people/animals (and freeborn/slaves), reinforced by both philosophy and legislation (Gilhus 2006: 37–63), implied a collectively accepted fact that animals (and people) could be *used* as articles for consumption. The availability of animals, gladiators and criminals was manageable. To see the rich and influential pay for, and then destroy, very expensive objects may have been experienced as a luxurious extravagance. For the poor who could never afford a single slave or a donkey, to be spoiled in this way must have been quite satisfying.

#### *Changed states of mind through identifications and emotional turmoil*

A hunter identification with the *venatores* was mentioned above. People tend to identify easily with aggressive models, to adopt the state of mind, and to copy aggressive behaviour

(Bandura 1973). Yet, the spectators seldom behaved in an overtly aggressive manner (Kyle 2007: 301). Mostly, the aggressive reactions were restricted to shouting, movements, and mimicry.

The aggressive feelings could have been experienced as ‘righteous’. Identification with the aggressive *venatores* could have given a sense of achieving revenge by proxy. Many slaves and poor people lived under miserable conditions and were badly treated. For them, to see other creatures, in particular humans, but also animals, being tortured and killed, could give a kind of ‘emotional outlet’ for or, rather, expression of, pent-up feelings of constant humiliation. By imagining the animals to represent their tormentors, and by identifying with their killers, motives of revenge could be symbolically satisfied.

The audience could also identify with the persons who gave the *ludi*: the rich and powerful, even the emperor himself, who might actually be present. To see, and be seen by, such persons, to be spectators *together with* them, to feel treated by them and to be able to shout to them (and sometimes *at* them) (Kyle 2007: 326) gave feelings of having contact with the uppermost elite of the state. An elevated and unifying sense of ‘we-ness’ and identification with the Roman state could ensue. As such, the *ludi* could have important identity-constructing functions (Flower 2004: 338). As the state, and Rome itself, consisted of various ethnic and religious groups, such experiences could have profound Romanizing, uniting, and socially pacifying functions (Dupont 1989: 213; Kyle 2007: 300–3).

More than anything, *venationes* demonstrated the strength and power of the Roman state. There was no question of who was in control. All the ferocious animals could be, and usually were, killed. This gave the spectators two messages: a warning not to oppose the state, and a reassurance of the state’s strength and protective powers. This power display was an essential part of ‘the game’ (Gilhus 2006: 34; Nell 2006: 112, 220). The more overwhelmingly cruel the *venationes*, the more convincingly powerful the state, and its leaders, seemed to be. To identify with this power could have had a symbolic and psychological significance that transcended the immediate perception of the cruelty taking place: the more brutal and bigger, the better.

The multiple identifications could be used for political and ideological indoctrinations and impressions. A particular mental state of receptiveness may have enhanced this effect. Psychological research has documented that ‘fear and amazement’ is indeed ‘a very potent combination.’ To induce emotions of uncertainty, fear and horror, and then rapidly shift the situation to induce surprise, safety, and relief, renders people extraordinary receptive to any message’ (Dolinski 2001: 195–6). As the *venationes* provoked a bundle of emotions in rapid succession, they represented exactly such a situation. The combination of identifications and rapidly shifting emotional reactions would make the audience likely to identify with the Roman state and accept everything done in its name, such as the *venationes* themselves.

### Exceptions?

An inevitable question is: were there no exceptions? There are some indicators, but their content and motivation are ambiguous. One situation, and an outstanding

commentator, will be mentioned. The most important protest is the reaction during Pompey's *ludi* in 55 BC (Cassius Dio, XXXIX, 38, 1–4; Pliny, *Naturalis historia* VIII, 7, 20–1; Cicero, *Epistulae ad familiares* VII, 1, 3). On the last day of those *ludi*, about twenty elephants were to fight against men with javelins. The elephants amazed in several ways. One surprised by dying instantly from a single javelin hit under the eye. Another, its feet wounded, crawling on its knees, defended itself by throwing the attackers' shields into the air, delighting the spectators by acting like a juggler. When the elephants tried to escape by starting to break down the iron bars that held them in place, people were terrified and, finally, when the elephants simultaneously started to trumpet in desperation, the spectators rose to their feet and, weeping, cursed Pompey for his cruelty.

Cicero's comment on the emotional reactions is unique: 'There was even an impulse of compassion, a feeling that the monsters had something human about them' (*quin etiam misericordia quaedam consecuta est atque opinio eius modi, esse quandam illi beluae cum genere humano societatem*) (Cicero, *Epistulae ad familiares* VII, 1, 3, trans. Shackleton Bailey 2001: 175–7).

How can this unusual reaction be explained? First, if the descriptions are correct, the spectators went through a series of strong and different emotions: surprise, delight, and fear. Fear, in particular, made the spectators receptive to experiencing other emotions. Second, it is probably significant that this happened on the last day of the *ludi*. Fatigue can facilitate alterations in perception, interpretation, and mood (Groeger 2006). Third, how the situation developed makes it understandable that the spectators started to identify with the elephants. Seeing the enormous animals trying to escape must have been experienced as potentially dangerous for the spectators. The spectators wanted to flee, but found themselves practically 'trapped' in their benches. They may have discovered that they, in a sense, were in the same situation as the elephants: in fatal danger, afraid, and trapped. The sounds of the elephants may have contributed to this identification, as elephants' panic trumpeting is not unlike human screams of terror. These shared emotions and needs could therefore have made the spectators identify with the elephants, as all identification processes are dependent on some kind of perceived similarity. Cicero's comments actually allude to such identifications, calling it compassion (*misericordia*). It was then a short step from identifying with the elephants, to pitying them, and accusing Pompey for having brought about their misery. But, as identifications are often projective (Mitchell and Black 1995: 101–2), it must be added that these reactions could just as well have been expressions of the spectators' own death anxiety, self-pity, and accusations towards Pompey for having lured *them* into a dangerous situation. Therefore, it is not clear whether the spectators' reactions were truly expressions of compassion with *the animals*. The lack of similar public spectator reactions against *venationes* in other *ludi* makes the latter interpretation more likely.

In the same text, Cicero wrote: 'What pleasure can a cultivated man get out of seeing ... a splendid [*praeclara*] beast transfixed by a hunting spear?' (*sed quae potest homini esse politico delectation cum ... praeclara bestia venabulo transverberatur*) (Cicero, *Epistulae ad familiares* VII, 1, 3, trans. Shackleton Bailey 2001: 175). Compassion with *the animals* may not have fuelled his statement. He may simply have been annoyed at the fact

that beautiful objects were destroyed, as he might have objected to destruction of works of art. The statement could have been about the taste of a truly cultivated man, in stoic control of his emotions, in contrast to the taste of the uneducated masses who took pleasure in vulgar and violent destructive acts. Cicero may not have had the interest of *animals* on his mind at all.

Cicero, although unwillingly, actually once helped to procure leopards for *venationes* to be given by his friend Marcus Caelius Rufus. His unwillingness was connected to his reputation as a new governor, not to resentment of the *venationes*. On another occasion he wrote that animals had no rights in relation to humans and ‘men can make use of beasts for their own purposes without injustice’ (Cicero, *De finibus bonorum et malorum* 3, 67, trans. Rackham 1914: 287).

Whatever Cicero’s personal opinions were, the reality was, however, that the ‘educated man’ too, philosophers and other intellectuals, and the social elite went to *ludi* and ‘found pleasure’ in *venationes* (Bomgardner 2000: 9–17; Kyle 2007: 321, 328; Veyne 1987: 200). Still, it is possible that Cicero unwittingly expressed a resentment or unease felt by, at least, *some* Romans. Some Stoics criticized this killing of animals (Kyle 2007: 265). And, it is interesting that philosophers and lawyers discussed the question of animals’ rights, and went to great lengths to justify human practices and relationships with animals (Gilhus 2006: 37–63). A subconscious sense of moral unease is a hypothetical, but also very obvious psychological interpretation.

So, the conclusion must be that there were exceptions. Some cases of critique against the *venationes*, but seldom and not unequivocally against the animals’ destiny *per se*. For most Romans, the cultural context of hunting and cruel rites, along with a range of psychological factors, from the psycho-physiological to the psycho-social, rendered the killing of animals in the arena acceptable, as *venationes* were both endured and enjoyed.

### Acknowledgements

I thank Mark Pearce for reading the draft and for invaluable comments. The conclusions, opinions, and the paper’s final form are entirely my responsibility.

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