

VENATIONES CAESARUM: HUNTS OF THE CAESARS

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Abbreviations

BAtlas Barrington Atlas of the Greek and Roman World

BNP Brill's New Pauly

CIL Corpus Inscriptionum Latinarum

ILS Inscriptiones Latinae Selectae

LSJ Liddell-Scott-Jones

*PIR*² Prosopographia Imperii Romani (ed. 2)

RIC Roman Imperial Coinage

Introduction

The aim of this thesis is to research and assess the role of hunting in the lifestyle and image of the Roman emperors. The hunt of *bestiae* (wild animals) has been regarded as a distinctive monarchical activity for millennia. Hellenistic, Parthian, and European kings have all taken up hunting, and the practice continues to the present day. As recently as 2012, Juan Carlos, the King of Spain, received criticism for secretly undertaking a hunting safari in Botswana while his country was suffering from economic crisis.¹ Such widespread monarchical enthusiasm for the activity raises the question of whether or not the Roman *principes* (emperors) held similar regard for *venationes* (hunts), why that was or was not the case, and how that regard might have changed over time. In this thesis, I seek to explore these questions.

Jacques Aymard completed one of the fullest studies of hunting during the Roman period in his *Essai sur les chasses romaines* (1951). His work devotes a chapter apiece to the emperors Trajan, Hadrian, and Commodus. Alexander Demandt's *Das Privatleben der römischen Kaiser* (1996) is also relevant. While he does not focus solely on hunting, he does devote a chapter to "Sport und Jagd". Perhaps most significantly, Patrick Le Roux contributes an essay entitled *L'empereur romain et la chasse* to a 2009 collection, *Chasses Antiques*.

Wider ranging scholarship includes John Kinloch Anderson's *Hunting in the Ancient World* (1985), which examines hunting from the Homeric age through Late Antiquity, and devotes two of its seven chapters to *venationes* during the Roman Imperial period. Dacre Balsdon's *Life and Leisure in Ancient Rome* (1969) does the same in the context of the Middle/Late Roman Republic and Early Empire. By contrast, Fergus Millar's *The Emperor in the Roman World* (1977), while providing a fairly thorough study of the position of *princeps*, nevertheless omits hunting from its analysis. Hunting is covered in several reference volumes,

¹ Karimi, Faith. "WWF Ousts Spanish King as Honorary President over Botswana Hunting Trip." *CNN*. Cable News Network, 22 July 2012. Web. 23 Sept. 2013. <<http://www.cnn.com/2012/07/22/world/europe/spain-king-wildlife-group/index.html>>.

most notably *Paulys Real-Encyclopädie der classischen Altertumswissenschaft* and *Daremberg et Saglio*. Their “Jagd” (1914) and “Venatio” (1914) entries, respectively, provide an overview on ancient hunting with extensive footnotes and bibliographies. *Brill’s New Pauly* (2005) and *The Encyclopedia of Ancient History* (2013) also contain articles on ancient hunting.

However, the topic of Roman emperors and hunting is not one that has been fully explored. For the most part, modern scholarship has touched on it as part of a larger project to document hunting (both for sport and for sustenance) in the ancient world as a whole. Demandt and Le Roux’s work goes farther in examining the relationship between *venationes* and emperors, but neither do much to extend their scope beyond the second century AD.

This thesis takes a more focused look at the imperial relationship to hunting. It specifically addresses the significance of the hunt to the emperors, and the “messages” that they sought to project by engaging in hunts. The thesis also seeks to extend the scope of study by examining the Roman emperors of the third, fourth, and fifth centuries (up to the collapse of the Western Roman Empire in AD 476), an extension that has hardly been attempted before. Finally, this thesis is an attempt to present an overarching analysis of how the imperial relationship to hunting changed over time. Current modern scholarship examines mostly singular cases of emperors hunting, but it does not attempt to connect them or to suggest any sort of trend.

A variety of relevant sources have been incorporated into the development of this thesis. The vast majority of evidence is to be found in scattered passages from Greek and Latin texts, which are provided in the following chapters, and are accompanied by translations in the footnotes. Additionally, some numismatic, epigraphical, and sculptural evidence does survive, although these sources are considerably rarer; they are referenced when applicable.

Finally, it must be stated that the term “hunting” as used in this thesis refers specifically and exclusively to the sportive hunting commonly undertaken by the social and political elite of various historical cultures. What is not examined here is hunting by individuals whose primary goal is to obtain sustenance. The hunting discussed in this thesis is an activity of leisure. Similarly, the “hunting” of animals in arenas (often put on in conjunction with gladiatorial shows) is also excluded from the scope of this thesis. There is a section that compares and contrasts Roman imperial hunts with “arena hunts”, but these are to be considered two separate activities. The hunts examined in this thesis are those that took place either in the countryside or in large hunting parks (Latin *vivaria*).

Chapter I

The Hunting Tradition

Influences upon the Roman Hunt

Although the Roman aristocracy adopted the hunting practices of the Hellenistic east, those practices developed from the cultures of three regions: Greece, Macedon, and Persia. This opening section briefly examines the aspects of hunting in these cultures that were later adopted by the Romans. As stated in the Introduction, the term “hunting” in this context does not refer to activities undertaken with the primary aim of acquiring food for survival. Rather, here hunting is used to designate the sportive chase that has been practiced by elites in a plurality of historical societies.

For the Greeks, hunting was a cultural tradition that went back to the Homeric age. It was while he was on a hunt with his uncles that Odysseus, the eponymous hero of Homer’s second epic, received a scar that would eventually lead to his recognition by his old nurse, Eurykleia:

ἦμος δ’ ἠριγένεια φάνη ροδοδάκτυλος Ἥως,
βάν ρ’ ἔμην ἐς θήρην, ἡμὲν κύνες ἡδὲ καὶ αὐτοὶ
υἱέες Αὐτολύκου· μετὰ τοῖσι δὲ δῖος Ὀδυσσεὺς
ἦεν.¹

The use of hunting dogs was also already a part of Homeric lore, which describe Odysseus’ hunting dog, Argos:

τὸν δὲ πάροιθεν ἀγίνεσκον νέοι ἄνδρες
αἶγας ἐπ’ ἀγροτέρως ἡδὲ πρόκας ἡδὲ λαγούς...²

Hunting further permeated the Greeks’ mythology within their pantheon; Greece was home to hunting deities. There was the virgin huntress Artemis (see fig. I) – known to the Romans as Diana – to whom later Romans gave offerings in exchange for success in the hunt, as illustrated in this intended dedication from the Imperial period:

AEQUORA CONCLUSIT CAMPI

¹ *Odyssey* 19.428-431: When early-born, rosy-fingered Dawn appeared, they went forth to the hunt, the hounds and the sons of Autolycus too, and with them went noble Odysseus.

² *Odyssey* 17.294-5: In days past the young men urged the hound upon wild goats, deer, and hares...

DIVISQUE DICAUIT
ET TEMPLUM STATUIT TIBI
DELIA VIRGO TRIFORMIS
TULLIUS E LIBYA RECTOR
LEGIONIS HIBERAE
UT QUIRET VOLUCRIS CAPREAS
UT FIGERE CERVOS
SAETIGEROS UT APROS UT
EQUORUM SILVICOLENTUM
PROGENIEM UT CURSU CERTARE
UT DISICE FERRI
ET PEDES ARMA FERENS ET
EQUO IACULATOR HIBERO.³



Fig. I. Diana of Versailles; 1st or 2nd century AD Roman copy of a Greek original, sculpted by Leochares.

³ ILS 3259 (on the back side of the dedication): Tullius from Libya, the commander of the Spanish legion, has closed the expanse of the plain and dedicated it to the gods and has built a temple for you, three-formed virgin Delos (Diana), so that he might be able to transfix swift roe deer, stags, bristly boars, and the progeny of wood inhabiting horses; so that he might be able to fight on the course, so that he might be able to be carried **DISICE** both bearing arms as a foot soldier and as a javelin man on a Spanish horse.

Another important god was Herakles, originally a legendary demigod renowned, among other exploits, for slaying the Nemean Lion. Hesiod gives the tale in his *Theogony*:

Νεμειαῖόν τελέοντα,
τόν ῥ' Ἥρη θρέψασα Διὸς κυδρὴ παράκοιτις
γουνόισιν κατένασσε Νεμείης, πῆμ' ἀνθρώποις.
ἔνθ' ἄρ' ὁ οἰκείων ἐλεφαίρετο φύλ' ἀνθρώπων,
κοιρανέων Τρητοῖο Νεμείης ἠδ' Ἀπέσαντος.
ἀλλὰ ἐῖς ἐδάμασσε βίης Ἡρακληείης.⁴

As a direct consequence of this myth, he is commonly depicted wearing the lion's skin in Greco-Roman sculpture and art (see fig. 2).⁵



Fig. II. Attic bilingual amphora depicting Herkles wearing the lion skin, c. 525 – 500 BC.

⁴ Hesiod, *Theogony* 327 – 332: And the Nemean lion, which Hera, the illustrious wife of Zeus, brought up and made to dwell in the hills of Nemea, a calamity to men. Living there, he destroyed the tribes of men, ruling over Tretus of Nemea and Apesas. But the strength of mighty Herakles overcame him.

⁵ BNP, Heracles.

Herakles' status as a hunter continued for centuries and spread throughout the Mediterranean world and its adjacent lands. Tacitus even describes a cult to Herakles the hunter god in Parthia in the mid-first century AD:

*Sed capta in transitu urbs Ninus, vetustissima sedes Assyriae, et castellum insigne fama, quod postremo inter Darium atque Alexandrum proelio Persarum illic opes conciderant. Interea Gotarzes apud montem, cui nomen Sanbulos, vota dis loci suscipiebat, praecipua religione Herculis, qui tempore stato per quietem monet sacerdotes ut templum iuxta equos venatui adornatos sistant. Equi ubi pharetras telis onustas acceperere, per saltus vagi nocte demum vacuis pharetris multo cum anhelitu redeunt. Rursum deus, qua silvas pererraverit, nocturno visu demonstrat, reperiunturque fusae passim ferae.*⁶

Herakles served as an important god to many Roman emperors, and his status as a hunter no doubt attracted their attention; this was certainly the case for Commodus.⁷

Another contribution that the Greeks made to Roman hunting was a literary one. In the 4th century BC, Xenophon, among his works in various genres, wrote a treatise on hunting, entitled *Κυνηγητικός*, “On Hunting”. His work likely inspired similar texts by later Roman authors.⁸

Although the Greeks had a tradition of hunting⁹, its scale was far outstripped by the practices of the Persian elites, and especially by the Persian king. In his time in the Persian empire, Xenophon came across evidence for the land's wealthy hunts: ἐντεῦθεν ἐξελαύνει σταθμοὺς τρεῖς παρασάγγας εἴκοσιν εἰς Κελαινάς, τῆς Φρυγίας πόλιν οἰκουμένην, μεγάλην καὶ

⁶ Tacitus, *Annals* 12.13: But en route the city of Ninus was captured, the oldest seat of Assyria, as was a renowned fortress, famous because the resources of the Persians had perished there in the last battle between Darius and Alexander. Meanwhile Gotarzes, at Mount Sanbulos, undertook votive offerings to the local gods. The chief cult was Hercules', who at a fixed time advises his priests through a dream to place horses equipped for hunting near the temple. When the horses have received quivers loaded with arrows, wandering through the forests in the night, they at last return with empty quivers, panting heavily. In return, the god shows them where he has wandered through the forests in a nighttime vision, and wild animals are found scattered here and there.

⁷ See Chapter 2.

⁸ See The Roman Hunt below.

⁹ See Xenophon *Hellenica* 5.3.20 for the hunts of Spartan kings.

εὐδαίμονα. ἐνταῦθα Κύρῳ βασιλεία ἦν καὶ παράδεισος μέγας ἀγρίων θηρίων πλήρης, ἃ ἐκεῖνος ἐθήρευν ἀπὸ ἵππου, ὅποτε γυμνάσαι βούλοιτο ἑαυτὸν τε καὶ τοὺς ἵππους.¹⁰

The term that Xenophon uses for game park, παράδεισος, is Persian in origin; he is the first attested Greek author to have used it.¹¹ Given the wealth and resources of the Persian Empire, it is unsurprising that the Persian kings were able to construct and hunt in such enclosures. In comparison, Greece, which was politically divided and much less affluent, would not have been able to reproduce anything on a similar scale.

Alexander encountered these enclosures during his invasion of the Persian Empire. Curtius Rufus, writing in the 1st century AD, states with admiration that *Barbarae opulentiae in illis locis haud ulla sunt maiora indicia quam magnis nemoribus saltibusque nobilium ferarum greges clusi. Spatiosas ad hoc eligunt silvas crebris perennium aquarum fontibus amoenas; muris nemora cinguntur turresque habent venantium receptacula*.¹² Under the Roman Empire, wealthy individuals, and especially emperors, would keep similar hunting parks, a practice initially inspired by encounters while campaigning in the Hellenistic east.

Macedon did not take an interest in παραδείσοι until Alexander's conquests, but it did have a strong hunting tradition. Numismatic evidence survives from the reign of Alexander I (r. 498 – 454) onward, depicting a horse rider figure.¹³ Although it remains debated among modern scholars, it stands as one plausible interpretation that this figure could be a hunter. Certainly coins issued from the reign Amyntas III (r. 393, 392 – 370) onward explicitly portray a lion hunt;

¹⁰ Xen. *Anabasis* 1.2.7: The next leg was a three day march of twenty parasangs that brought him to Celaenae, an inhabited Phrygian city, large and prosperous, where Cyrus had a palace and a large park filled with wild animals which he used to hunt on horseback when he wanted to exercise himself and his horses.

¹¹ LSJ A.

¹² Curtius Rufus 8.1.11-12: There are no greater indications of the wealth of the barbarian in those regions than the herds of noble wild beasts enclosed in great forests and woodlands. For this purpose they choose extensive forests made attractive by numerous perennial springs; the woods are surrounded with walls and they have towers that serve as shelters for hunters.

¹³ Carney, "Hunting and the Macedonian Elite: Sharing the Rivalry of the Chase", *The Hellenistic World: New Perspectives* 60.

they display a rider figure on the obverse and a lion breaking a spear in its teeth on the reverse (see fig. III).¹⁴



Fig. III. Amyntas III lion hunting didrachmon c. 389 – 369 BC.

Furthermore, in Macedon, hunting was a rite of manhood. Athenaeus reports:

Ἡγήσανδρος δέ φησιν οὐδὲ ἔθος εἶναι ἐν Μακεδονίᾳ κατακλίνεσθαι τινα ἐν δείπνῳ, εἰ μὴ τις ἔξω λίνων ὕν κεντήσειεν. ἕως δὲ τότε καθήμενοι ἐδείπνουν. Κάσανδρος οὖν πέντε καὶ τριάκοντα ὦν ἐτῶν ἐδείπνει παρὰ τῷ πατρὶ καθήμενος, οὐ δυνάμενος τὸν ἄθλον ἐκτελέσαι καίπερ ἀνδρεῖος γεγονώς καὶ κυνηγὸς ἀγαθός.¹⁵

It was particularly traditional for Macedonian kings to hunt. Although the custom predated Philip,¹⁶ he took it to a new scale:

Ἐκ Φιλίππου ἦν ἤδη καθεστηκὸς τῶν ἐν τέλει Μακεδόνων τοὺς παῖδας ὅσοι ἐς ἡλικίαν ἐμειρακιεύοντο καταλέγεσθαι ἐς θεραπείαν τοῦ βασιλέως, τὰ τε περὶ τὴν ἄλλην δίαιταν

¹⁴ Westmark 1989, 308, 314; Tripodi 1998, 59.

¹⁵ Athenaeus 1.18a: And Hegesander says that it was not the custom in Macedonia for anyone to recline at a meal unless he had speared a wild boar without a hunting net. Until then they sat when dining. Cassander, therefore, at the age of thirty-five continued to sit at meals with his father, being unable to accomplish the feat, though he was brave and a good hunter.

¹⁶ Diodorus 14.37.6.

τοῦ σώματος διακονεῖσθαι βασιλεῖ καὶ κοιμώμενον φυλάσσειν τούτοις ἐπετέτραπτο. Καὶ ὁπότε ἐξελαύνοι βασιλεύς, τοὺς ἵππους παρὰ τῶν ἱποκόμων δεχόμενοι ἐκεῖνοι προσῆγον καὶ ἀνέβαλλον οὗτοι βασιλέα τὸν Περσικὸν τρόπον καὶ τῆς ἐπὶ θήρᾳ φιλοτιμίας βασιλεῖ κοινωνοὶ ἦσαν.¹⁷

Alexander continued his father's practice, and often hunted with his pages and "companions". In fact it was during a hunt with his pages that Alexander insulted a young man named Hermolaus, who subsequently conspired with several others against the king's life.¹⁸ This and other hunts took place while Alexander was on campaign, deep within the territory of the Persian Empire. For example, upon reaching one of the aforementioned Persian παραδείσοι, Alexander decided to use it:

Quattuor continuis aetatibus intactum saltum fuisse constabat, cum Alexander cum toto exercitu ingressus agitari undique feras iussit. Inter quas cum leo magnitudinis rarae ipsum regem invasurus incurreret, forte Lysimachus, qui postea regnavit, proximus Alexandro venabulum obicere ferae coeperat; quo rex repulso et abire iusso, adiecit tam a semet uno quam a Lysimacho leonem interfici posse. Lysimachus enim quondam, cum venarentur in Syria, occiderat quidem eximiae magnitudinis feram solus, sed laevo humero usque ad ossa lacerato, ad ultimum periculi pervenerat. Id ipsum exprobrans ei, rex fortius quam locutus est fecit; nam feram non excepit modo, sed etiam uno vulnere occidit. Fabulam quae obiectum leoni a rege Lysimachum temere vulgavit ab eo casu quem supra diximus ortam esse crediderim. Ceterum Macedones, quamquam prospero eventu defunctus erat Alexander, tamen scivere gentis suae more, ne aut pedes venarentur aut sine delectis principum atque amicorum. Ille, IIII milibus ferarum deiectis, in eodem saltu cum toto exercitu epulatus est.¹⁹

¹⁷ Arrian 4.13.1,2: It was a practice going back to Philip's time that the sons of Macedonian notables who had reached adolescence should be enlisted for the service of the king and, keeping watch at night, it had been entrusted to them to guard him. And whenever the king rode out, they received the horses from the grooms and led them up, and they mounted the king in Persian fashion, and were his companions in the rivalry of the chase.

¹⁸ See Chapter 3.

¹⁹ Curtius Rufus 8.1.13-19: It was well known that the forest had been undisturbed for four successive generations, when Alexander, entering it with his whole army, ordered that the wild beasts be hunted from every side. Among these when a lion of extraordinary size rushed to attack the king himself, by chance Lysimachus, who was afterwards a king, being the man nearest to Alexander, began to raise his hunting-spear against the animal; but the king, pushing him aside and ordering him to stand down, added that a lion could so be killed by himself alone as by Lysimachus. And in fact Lysimachus, once when they were hunting in Syria, had indeed alone killed a lion of exceptional size, but his left shoulder had been torn to the bone and he had come to the greatest of perils. The king, taunting him with this very experience, acted more vigorously than he spoke; for he not only met the wild beast, but he also killed him with a single blow. I would have believed that the story, which randomly spread that Lysimachus was exposed to a lion by the king, arose from the incident that we mentioned above. But the Macedonians, although Alexander had been successful in his attempt, nevertheless voted in the manner of their nation that he should neither hunt on foot nor without being accompanied by selected officers and friends. He, after 4000 wild beasts had been killed, banqueted in that same woodland with his entire army.

It was the experience of such game parks by Alexander, his companions, and his soldiers, that led to their introduction in Macedon, where later Roman generals would encounter them. Curtius' account also demonstrates Alexander's apparent preference for hunting lions. He likely chose to do so partly due to his reputed descent from the lion hunter Herakles,²⁰ but also because the lion hunt had long been a tradition of near-eastern rulers (see fig. IV), something that Alexander was to become as he conquered the Persian Empire.²¹



Fig. IV. Assyrian lion hunt frieze from the royal palace at Ashurbanipal, now exhibited in the British Museum.

This choice of game recurs frequently in accounts of his life, such as in Plutarch:

²⁰ Anderson 76.

²¹ Carney, *The Hellenistic World: New Perspectives* 65.

Ἐπέτεινεν οὖν ἔτι μᾶλλον αὐτὸς ἑαυτὸν ἐν ταῖς στρατείαις καὶ τοῖς κυνηγεσίαις, κακοπαθὼν καὶ παραβαλλόμενος, ὥστε καὶ Λάκωνα πρεσβευτὴν παραγενόμενον αὐτῷ λέοντα καταβάλλοντι μέγαν εἰπεῖν: “Καλῶς γε, Ἀλέξανδρε, πρὸς τὸν λέοντα ἡγώνισαι περὶ τῆς βασιλείας.” Τοῦτο τὸ κυνήγιον Κρατερὸς εἰς Δελφοὺς ἀνέθηκεν, εἰκόνας χαλκᾶς ποιησάμενος τοῦ λέοντος καὶ τῶν κυνῶν καὶ τοῦ βασιλέως τῷ λέοντι συνεστῶτος καὶ αὐτοῦ προσβοηθοῦντος, ὧν τὰ μὲν Λύσιππος ἔπλασε, τὰ δὲ Λεωχάρης.²²

This passage mentions statues erected at Delphi by Craterus that depict Alexander hunting a lion. A similar scene can be found on the “Alexander Sarcophagus,” a late fourth century BC work that displays Alexander on horseback wearing a lion skin helmet while hunting a lion (see fig. V).²³ The lion hunts of Alexander—achievements which leading Romans strove to emulate—almost certainly played an influential role in the prestige of lion hunts in the Roman period (and particularly under the emperors).



Fig. V. Hunting scene on the Alexander Sarcophagus from Sidon.

²² Plutarch *Alexander* 40.3-4: Accordingly, he exerted himself yet more strenuously in military and hunting expeditions, suffering distress and risking his life, with the result that a Spartan ambassador who was standing by when he struck down a great lion, said: “Alexander, you have struggled well with the lion for the kingdom.” Craterus dedicated this hunting scene at Delphi, having commissioned bronze statues of the lion, of the dogs, of the king engaged with the lion, and of himself coming to his assistance. Lysippus sculpted some of these figures, and Leochares sculpted the others.

²³ Anderson 76.

Alexander's vast conquests facilitated the blending of Greek, Persian, and Macedonian cultural values in the Hellenistic period. His successors continued the hunt,²⁴ a practice that the Romans were to encounter and adopt in the second century BC.

The Roman Hunt

Rome's emperors therefore became part of a culture that had already developed a centuries-long hunting tradition. In order to fully understand the nature of the Roman imperial hunt, it is necessary to place it within the context of the hunts of Roman aristocratic society. This section has that aim.

Hunting is portrayed in Roman myth as having been present as early as the age of Romulus and Remus: *Ita geniti itaque educati, cum primum adolevit aetas, nec in stabulis nec ad pecora segnes, venando peragrarare saltus. Hinc robore corporibus animisque sumpto iam non feras tantum subsistere...*²⁵ However, this is myth as written by the first century BC historian Livy. Therefore the claim cannot confidently be made, as it can with Greece, that a tradition of hunting was embedded in early Roman culture. It is likely that it did occur (especially in the regal period), but hardly any evidence survives to explicitly attest for it. Given that hunting has historically been very common and routine across so many cultures, it should not be surprising that such an "ordinary" activity was not actively recorded in the early sources, and their silence

²⁴ Diod. 18.49.3; 34/35.34.1; Plut. *Pyrrhus* 4.4

²⁵ Livy 1.4.8: The boys were thus born and brought up. When they had matured, being lazy neither in tending the stables nor in watching their herds, they wandered through forest pastures intent on hunting. From all this they acquired strength for their bodies and minds, and now not only withstood wild beasts...

certainly should not be taken as cause to doubt that hunting took place in the early centuries of Rome.

The earliest evidence of an explicit Roman encounter with hunting comes from accounts of the second century BC. This is likely due to the fact that the earliest extant work of Roman history was written by a Greek, named Polybius, in the second century. It was also at this time that Roman generals were campaigning in the eastern Mediterranean, which intensified the hellenization of Roman culture. As a result of this increased cultural melding, many leading Romans of the period sought to give their children a Greek education, which included hunting. Lucius Aemilius Paulus, the victorious general of the Third Macedonian War, did as much for his sons: οὐ γὰρ μόνον γραμματικοὶ καὶ σοφισταὶ καὶ ῥήτορες, ἀλλὰ καὶ πλάσται καὶ ζωγράφοι καὶ πώλων καὶ σκυλάκων ἐπιστάται καὶ διδάσκαλοι θήρας Ἕλληνες ἦσαν περὶ τοὺς νεανίσκους.²⁶

One of Aemilius' sons was Scipio Aemilianus, to whom he gave access to one of the Macedonian hunting parks after the Battle of Pydna (168 BC). As Alexander is said to have hunted in a Persian park that had been maintained but untouched for four generations, so did Aemilianus enter into a Macedonian preserve that had not seen a hunt in four years:

Λοιποῦ δ' ὄντος τοῦ κατὰ τὴν ἀνδρείαν μέρους καὶ κυριωτάτου σχεδὸν ἐν πάσῃ μὲν πολιτείᾳ μάλιστα δ' ἐν τῇ Ῥώμῃ, μεγίστην ἔδει καὶ τὴν ἄσκησιν περὶ τοῦτο τὸ μέρος ποιήσασθαι. καλὸν μὲν οὖν τι πρὸς ταύτην τὴν ἐπιβολὴν αὐτῷ καὶ διὰ τῆς τύχης ἐγένετο συνέργημα. τῶν γὰρ ἐν Μακεδονίᾳ βασιλικῶν μεγίστην ποιουμένων σπουδὴν περὶ τὰς κυνηγεσίας καὶ Μακεδόνων ἀνεικότων τοὺς ἐπιτηδειοτάτους τόπους πρὸς τὴν τῶν θηρίων συναγωγὴν, ταῦτα συνέβη τὰ χωρία τετηρηῆσθαι μὲν ἐπιμελῶς, καθάπερ καὶ πρότερον, πάντα τὸν τοῦ πολέμου χρόνον, κεκυνηγῆσθαι δὲ μηδέποτε τῶν τεττάρων ἐτῶν διὰ τοὺς περισπασμούς; ἢ καὶ θηρίων ὑπῆρχε πλήρη παντοδαπῶν. τοῦ δὲ πολέμου λαβόντος κρίσιν, ὁ Λεύκιος καλλίστην ὑπολαμβάνων καὶ τὴν ἄσκησιν καὶ τὴν ψυχαγωγίαν ὑπάρχειν τοῖς νέοις τὴν περὶ τὰ κυνηγέσια, τοὺς τε κυνηγοὺς συνέστησε τοὺς βασιλικοὺς τῷ Σκιπίωνι καὶ τὴν ἐξουσίαν τὴν περὶ τὰ κυνηγέσια παρέδωκε τούτῳ

²⁶ Plut. *Aemilius Paulus* 6: For not only the grammarians and sophists and orators, but also the modellers and painters, the overseers of foals and puppies, and the teachers of the art of hunting were Greeks, who surrounded the young men.

πᾶσαν; ἤς ἐπιλαβόμενος ὁ προειρημένος καὶ νομίσας οἶονεὶ βασιλεύειν, ἐν τούτῳ κατεγίνετο πάντα τὸν χρόνον, ὅσον ἐπέμεινε τὸ στρατόπεδον μετὰ τὴν μάχην ἐν τῇ Μακεδονίᾳ. γενομένης δὲ μεγάλης ἐνθουσιάσεως περὶ τοῦτο τὸ μέρος, ὥς κατὰ τε τὴν ἡλικίαν ἀκμαίως ἔχοντος αὐτοῦ καὶ κατὰ φύσιν οἰκείως διακειμένου, καθάπερ εὐγενοῦς σκύλακος, ἐπίμονον αὐτοῦ συνέβη γενέσθαι τὴν περὶ τὰς κυνηγεσίας ὁρμὴν. διὸ καὶ παραγενόμενος εἰς τὴν Ῥώμην καὶ προσλαβὼν τὸν τοῦ Πολυβίου πρὸς τοῦτο τὸ μέρος ἐνθουσιασμόν, ἐφ' ὅσον οἱ λοιποὶ τῶν νέων περὶ τὰς κρίσεις καὶ τοὺς χαιρετισμοὺς ἐσπούδαζον, κατὰ τὴν ἀγορὰν ποιούμενοι τὴν διατριβήν, καὶ διὰ τούτων συνιστάνειν ἑαυτοὺς ἐπειρῶντο τοῖς πολλοῖς, ἐπὶ τοσοῦτον ὁ Σκιπίων ἐν ταῖς κυνηγεσίαις ἀναστρεφόμενος καὶ λαμπρὸν ἀεί τι ποιῶν καὶ μνήμης ἄξιον καλλίῳ δόξαν ἐξεφέρετο τῶν ἄλλων...καίπερ τὴν ἐναντίαν ὁδὸν πορευθεὶς ἐν φιλοδοξίᾳ τοῖς ἄλλοις ἅπασι πρὸς τὰ Ῥωμαίων ἔθη καὶ νόμιμα.²⁷

This passage demonstrates that some one hundred and fifty years after the death of Alexander, the Macedonians were still engaged in the hunt, and had indeed replicated the παραδείσοι of the Persians. Scipio Aemilianus really took to the activity, and was no doubt further influenced by his new friend Polybius, an exiled Greek who readily attested to his own enthusiasm for hunting.²⁸

By Polybius' own admission, the degree to which Aemilianus pursued hunting was not in accordance with Roman norms of the period. It appears to have become more prevalent among the Roman elite in the first century BC, however, and so perhaps Aemilianus' experiences in the Hellenistic East, and those of other Romans traveling to the region (particularly after the

²⁷ Polybius 31.29.1-12: It remained for him to gain a reputation for courage, nearly the most essential virtue in all states and especially so in Rome; and it was necessary that the greatest exercise be done regarding this. Through fate, some good support arose for him regarding this undertaking. For in Macedon the members of the royal house took the greatest pains regarding hunting, and they had reserved the most suitable areas for collecting wild game. It happened that these places had been carefully maintained, just as before, during the whole time of the war, but not at any time in four years were they hunted in, due to the distracting circumstances; they were full of beasts of every kind. When the war had been brought to a conclusion, Aemilius, thinking that the chase was the best training and pastime for the young men, placed the royal huntsmen at Scipio's disposal, and gave him every authority regarding the hunting establishments. Scipio, receiving this and regarding himself as a king, spent the whole time that the army remained in Macedonia after the battle in this pursuit. And as his enthusiasm for this became great, being in the prime of his youth and well disposed in his physique, like a well-bred dog, it happened that his desire for the chase became lasting. Consequently, when he arrived in Rome, and finding that Polybius was equally passionate about the chase, he devoted all the time that other young men gave up to law affairs and greeting clients, spending their time in the forum and trying to court the favor of the populace, engaged in hunting. He was always doing something brilliantly worthy of remembrance, and he acquired a higher reputation than anyone...although he was carried in his love of glory along a path opposite to all others according to the custom and usage of the Romans.

²⁸ Polyb. 31.14.2-3.

annexation of Macedon and Greece as provinces in 146 BC), can be seen as a turning point.

Certainly the Roman adoption of *vivaria* (hunting parks) derived directly from the Macedonian models.

The passage also indicates that Aemilius believed that hunting provided good martial training, a view echoed decades later by Cicero: *Iam vero immanes et feras beluas nanciscimur venando, ut et vescamur iis et exerceamur in venando ad similitudinem bellicae disciplinae...*²⁹ Given the frequency with which the Romans waged war, it should be unsurprising that they would have placed a high value on any activities that provided effective training. This may be another reason that hunting became more popular among the Roman elites in the Late Republic.

Not all Romans readily took to the more eastern practice of hunting. Sallust, at least, (in)famously (and perhaps atypically by his day) states in his writings that *igitur ubi animus ex multis miseriis atque periculis requievit et mihi reliquam aetatem a re publica procul habendam decrevi, non fuit consilium socordia atque desidia bonum otium contere neque vero agrum colundo aut venando, servilibus officiis, intentum aetatem agere...*³⁰

However, other Romans spent a considerable amount of time and money maintaining their hunting interests. Varro describes some hunting parks of his own time in the Late Republic, doubtless adapted from the models encountered in Macedon:

*Interea redit Appius*³¹, *et percontati nos ab illo et ille a nobis, quid esset dictum ac factum. Appius, Sequitur, inquit, actus secundi generis adfecticius ad villam qui solet esse, ac nomine antico a parte quadam leporarium appellatum. Nam neque solum lepores in eo includuntur silva, ut olim in iugero agelli aut duobus, sed etiam cervi aut capreae in iugeribus multis. Quintus Fulvius Lippinus*³² *dicitur habere in Tarquiniensi saepta iugera quadraginta, in quo sunt inclusa non solum ea quae dixi, sed etiam oves ferae, etiam hoc maius hic in Statoniensi et quidam in*

²⁹ Cicero *De Natura Deorum* 2.64 (161): Now in truth we track down enormous and wild beasts while hunting, so that we may both eat them and be exercised by hunting because of its similarity to warlike instruction...

³⁰ Sall. *Catiline* 4: Therefore when my mind rested from many distresses and dangers, I determined that I ought to spend the time remaining to me far from the republic. It was not my plan to waste my good leisure with inactivity and idleness, nor in truth was it my intent to spend my life cultivating a field or hunting, which are servile duties...

³¹ Appius Claudius Pulcher (cos. 54).

³² A large landowner, but otherwise unknown.

*locis aliis; in Gallia vero transalpina T. Pompeius*³³ *tantum saeptum venationis, ut circiter ∞ ∞ ∞ ∞ passum locum inclusum habeat.*³⁴

Here Varro uses different terms to describe the hunting parks. Instead of *vivarium*, he gives *leporarium*. He also gives some measurement of the enclosures; Lippinus' preserve at Tarquinii is forty *iugera*, or a little more than twenty-six acres. He appears to have had an even larger park at Statonia. Pompeius' contained four square miles of land.

Pliny the Younger recorded his own hunts in some of his letters around AD 100; the impression created is that while he clearly viewed hunting as a common activity for Roman gentry, he nevertheless treated it very much as a leisure activity. In a letter to Tacitus, he points out that he is utilizing neither spear nor lance, but has instead set up nets for his prey to trap themselves in; he has even brought wax tablets on which to write while he waits:

*Ridebis, et licet rideas. Ego, ille quem nosti, apros tres et quidem pulcherrimos cepi. 'Ipse?' inquis. Ipse; non tamen ut omnino ab inertia mea et quiete discederem. Ad retia sedebam; erat in proximo non venabulum aut lancea, sed stilus et pugillares; meditabar aliquid enotabamque, ut si manus vacuas, plenas tamen ceras reportarem. Non est quod contemnas hoc studendi genus; mirum est ut animus agitatione motuque corporis excitetur; iam undique silvae et solitudo ipsumque illud silentium quod venationi datur, magna cogitationis incitamenta sunt. Proinde cum venabere licebit auctore me ut panarium et lagunculam sic etiam pugillares feras: experieris non Dianam magis montibus quam Minervam inerrare. Vale.*³⁵

³³ Otherwise unknown.

³⁴ Varro *De Re Rustica* 3.12.1-2: Meanwhile Appius returned, and we questioned that man, and he us, about what had been said and done. "An act follows," Appius said, "of a second kind which is usually added to the villa, and it is usually called by its foremost name, a hare warren, because of a certain part of it. For not only are hares enclosed in it in woods, as used to be the case on a *iugum* or two of land, but also stags and roes on many *iugera*. Quintus Fulvius Lippinus is said to have an enclosure in the vicinity of Tarquinii of forty *iugera*, in which are enclosed, not only that which I have named, but also wild sheep, and he (Lippinus) has an even larger one near Statonia, and some in other places. In fact in Transalpine Gaul, Titus Pompeius is said to have a hunting preserve so large that he keeps a tract of about four square miles enclosed." cf. 3.13.

³⁵ Plin. *Epistulae* 1.6: You will laugh, and you can go ahead and laugh. I, that man whom you know, have captured three—and indeed the most beautiful—boars. "You yourself?" you ask. Me myself; nevertheless it is not that I departed entirely from my relaxation and rest. I was sitting near the nets; there was neither spear nor lance in the vicinity, but there was a pen and writing tablets; I was thinking over and marking down something, so that if I brought back empty hands, I would nevertheless bring back full wax. There is no reason for you to despise this type of activity; it is a wonder that the mind is excited by the activity and movement of the body; now everywhere there are woods and the solitude and that very silence which is given to the hunt, are great inducements of thought.

Clearly following in the example of Xenophon, at least four authors during the Roman period wrote treatises on hunting: Grattius (*Cynegetica* 1st century BC), Arrian (Κυνηγετικός, 2nd century AD), Oppian (Κυνηγετικά, 3rd century AD), and Nemesianus (*Cynegetica*, 3rd century AD). Additionally, scenes of hunting grew popular in Roman art and sculpture, particularly in the third century AD, when “hunting sarcophagi” became widespread (see fig. VI).³⁶



Fig. VI. 3rd AD Roman sarcophagus depicting the mythological hunt of the Calydonian boar.

Wealthy Romans continued to hunt in the ensuing centuries, and while it remained an activity of leisure, it nonetheless carried a certain expectation of physical exertion. Ammianus Marcellinus in the late fourth century, for example, mocks those elites who let their slaves do all

Consequently when you will hunt, you may carry, at my request, a bread basket, a little flask, and even writing tablets: you will know by having tried that Diana roves no more in the mountains than Minerva. Farewell.

³⁶ Zanker and Ewald 222-9.

the work: *Pars eorum si agros visuri processerunt longius, aut alienis laboribus venaturi, Alexandri Magni itinera se putant aequiperasse, vel Caesaris...*³⁷ Even more significant, however, is the implication by Ammianus that Alexander and “Caesar” (i.e. the Roman emperors) were commonly associated as great hunters, with whom these lazy elites undeservedly compared themselves. Alexander’s hunting prowess has been noted above. But the degree to which the Roman emperors hunted will be explored in the following chapter.

³⁷ Ammianus 28.4.18: Part of them, if they proceeded a rather long way off to see their estates, or to hunt with others doing the work, they think themselves to have equaled the journeys of Alexander the Great, or of Caesar...

Chapter II

Caesar Venator

Now that both influences upon Roman aristocratic *venationes* and Roman aristocratic *venationes* themselves have been outlined, we should move to look at the hunts of the Roman emperors. As already stated, it is important to distinguish between beast hunts that were put on in arenas, and *venationes* that took place either in the countryside or in *vivaria*, wild game warrens kept by the Roman elite for the purpose of hunting. The focus of the thesis is upon these latter categories (i.e. everything except for the arena beast hunts). It emerges that the early emperors rarely hunted, if at all; but from the second century AD and onwards emperors increasingly took to the activity. This was in large part out of a desire to display *virtus*, and it ultimately culminated in a formal association of hunting with the position of the emperor, as well as the creation of an imperial tradition of hunting.

The Julio-Claudians and Flavians

No evidence survives to suggest that the Julio-Claudian emperors ever took an interest in hunting. It would be difficult indeed to imagine that Augustus, whose weak constitution is well known, was ever eager to pursue wild game. He did appear to have a fondness for fishing, as Suetonius reports: *Animi laxandi causa modo piscabatur hamo*.¹ Angling hardly qualifies as an imperial hunt, however. His successor, Tiberius, similarly displays no *goût pour la chasse* in the sources. Rather, he is described as having once found fault with a legionary legate with shame *quod paucos milites cum liberto suo trans ripam venatum misisset*.² It would make little sense to suppose that this had been a hunting expedition intended to feed the troops; were that the case, there would have been no cause for censure. More than likely, the legate had sent his men on the expedition for sport, and Tiberius had seen this as an irresponsible use of the soldiers' time.

¹ Suetonius *Augustus* 83: For the sake of relaxing his mind he sometimes fished with a hook.

² Suet. *Tiberius* 19: because he had sent a few soldiers with his freedman across the bank of a river to hunt.

As for the remaining Julio-Claudians, the sources mention almost nothing worthy of note. Caligula apparently *curatorem munerum ac venationum per continuos dies in conspectu suo catenis verberatum non prius occidit quam offensus putrefacti cerebri odore*.³ Leaving aside the anecdote's gruesome details, the interest of this passage rests upon the *curator munerum ac venationum*. *Venatio* is used in the sources to denote both hunts in rural settings, and arena hunts. The *curator* who suffered under Caligula was without doubt involved in the latter type of *venatio*; it is logical that managerial responsibilities for arena *venationes* and gladiatorial games would have been paired together into a single position.

That the few passages above are the ones most closely linking the Julio-Claudian emperors with hunting suggests just how inconspicuous hunting was in this early period of the Principate. To be sure, it is possible that some of these *principes* went on hunting expeditions occasionally. Hunting had, after all, been an activity of the Roman elite since the time of Scipio Aemilianus,⁴ and no doubt much earlier as well. On the other hand, not all Roman aristocrats were avid hunters, and it is possible that the early emperors (certainly Augustus) might have felt a need to refrain from participating in a sport that was universally held to be a distinctive activity of kings.

The early Principate walked a very fine line in perpetuating a dynastic monarchy, while simultaneously attempting to downplay that fact. If the emperors of the first century adopted hunting as a regular imperial practice, it might have appeared too overtly monarchical, and a provocation to opponents. The counterargument, of course, is that Caligula, and to a lesser extent, Nero, did not hesitate to display their power and position; it is perhaps telling that even though Caligula and Nero might have felt little compunction about taking up a “kingly sport” such as

³ Suet. *Caligula* 27: Caligula did not kill the curator of the gladiatorial games and beast hunts, who had been beaten with chains for successive days in his sight, until he became offended by the rotten odor of the man's brain.

⁴ See Chapter 1.

hunting, they still apparently chose not to do so. In the end, the most that can be said is that the emperors of the Julio-Claudian dynasty evidently did not pursue hunting as a personal activity, let alone an imperial one.

Although no conclusive evidence exists showing that any of the Flavian emperors hunted, some sources do at the very least point to the conclusion that Domitian took an active interest in personally killing *bestiae*. This interest is demonstrated in Suetonius: *Armorum nullo, sagittarum vel praecipuo studio tenebatur. Centenas varii generis feras saepe in Albano secessu conficientem spectavere plerique atque etiam ex industria ita quarundam capita figentem, ut duobus ictibus quasi cornua efficeret.*⁵ The existence of this Alban retreat is corroborated by Cassius Dio,⁶ and there is the temptation to regard it as an imperial *vivarium*. However, that cannot have been the case. For one, the apparent scale of Domitian's slaughter—up to one hundred animals at a time—is an unrealistic figure for someone hunting, even in an artificial game preserve. Rather, that total would have been far more plausibly reached through mass slaughter in a smaller, more enclosed area, in which the animals were trapped. These were arena *venationes*. Juvenal confirms as much in his fourth satire:

*profuit ergo nihil misero, quod comminus ursos
figebat Numidas Albana nudus harena
venator.*⁷

This is a reference to Acilius Glabrio's⁸ experience in Domitian's arena; it can also be found in the Dio passage. Given this information, it can be reasonably assumed that Domitian

⁵ Suet. *Domitian* 19: He was not held by any interest for arms, but he was very keen on archery. At his Alban retreat many people often witnessed him kill a hundred animals of different types, and even so intentionally affix the heads of some of them that he might with two shots give the effect of horns.

⁶ Cassius Dio 67.14.3.

⁷ Juvenal 4.99: It did the unfortunate man no good to strip like a hunter, and, standing close, to spear Numidian bears in the Alban arena.

⁸ PIR² A67.

accomplished his killings, not by hunting the animals in forests, but by standing on some sort of platform, entirely safe from harm, and shooting at them.

Domitian's activities at his Alban retreat are still significant, however. He is the first emperor to be described by the sources as taking a personal role in any sort of *venatio*, arena-based or otherwise. It is still possible that earlier emperors—Caligula, for example—might have felled a few *bestiae* by their own hand, but Domitian is likely to have been the first to do it on any significant scale. And just because he was fond of killing animals at his retreat does not necessarily mean that he denied himself the pleasure of rural *venationes* too.

Patrick Le Roux suggests that a bronze statue⁹ displaying Domitian—the head of which was later modified to portray Nerva—riding on a horse may be a depiction of imperial hunting (see fig. VII).¹⁰ He believes that the imperial figure once held a spear in its raised arm, which it is prepared to throw.



Fig. VII. 1st century AD bronze equestrian statue of Domitian/Nerva.

⁹ Found in the *Aedes Augustalium* at Misenum; now located in the Archaeological Museum of the Phlegraean Fields at Baia.

¹⁰ *Chasses Antiques* 25-7.

Le Roux also agrees with Steven Tuck's work on the statue; Tuck argues that the statue's lack of a helmet and shield demonstrates that it is likely not fighting in a military context.¹¹ Rather, he interprets the statue as being reminiscent of Alexander the Great, and more suggestive of a lion hunt than of a combat scene (making comparisons with the Alexander sarcophagus and the Alexander statue group at Delphi).¹² However, no accompanying statue of a lion or any other wild animal survives to confirm this view, and it is equally plausible that there another reason for the depiction of the emperor on horseback; it could have been intended as an image of triumph or athletic prowess. In the end, the sculpture is too ambiguous for its original meaning to be definitively deduced.

Trajan and Hadrian – The First Hunter Emperors

Trajan is the first Roman emperor whom the sources explicitly describe as having hunted. His activity is addressed by Pliny the Younger in the *Panegyricus*:

*Quae enim remissio tibi nisi lustrare saltus, excutere cubilibus feras, superare immensa montium iuga et horrentibus scopulis gradum inferre, nullius manu nullius vestigio adiutum, atque inter haec pia mente adire lucos et occursare numinibus? Olim haec experientia iuventutis, haec voluptas erat, his artibus futuri duces imbuebantur, certare cum fugacibus feris cursu, cum audacibus robore, cum callidis astu; nec mediocre pacis decus habebatur submota campis inruptio ferarum et obsidione quadam liberatus agrestium labor. Usurpabant gloriam istam illi quoque principes qui obire non poterant; usurpabant autem ita ut domitas fractasque claustris feras, ac deinde in ipsorum (quidni?) ludibrium emissas, mentita sagacitate colligerent. Huic par capiendi quaerendique sudor, summusque et idem gratissimus labor invenire.*¹³

¹¹ Tuck *The Origins of Roman Imperial Hunting Imagery: Domitian and the Redefinition of Virtus under the Principate* 228-229.

¹² Tuck 244 – 245

¹³ Pliny the Younger *Panegyricus* 81.1-4: In fact what relaxation is there for you except to range the forests, to shake out wild beasts from their lairs, to scale the immense ridges of mountains, and set foot on rocky crags, to have been helped by the hand of no one, by the foot-mark of no one, and amidst all these things to go with a pious mind to the sacred groves and to go to meet with the divinities? In the days of old this was the training and delight of youth, by these arts future leaders were instructed—to contend with speeding animals in running, with bold animals in strength, with clever animals in cunning; and no small glory of peace was had, an incursion of wild animals having been

A favorable bias toward Trajan is clearly evident here. Nevertheless, there is no reason to doubt the veracity of the central points of the passage. Whether sportive hunting was an effective means of saving rural inhabitants from the threat posed by wild animals is debatable, and certainly Trajan's efforts alone would not have made a significant impact. Regardless, the passage represents him as hunting primarily for enjoyment, rather than in an attempt to keep the countryside safe from dangerous animals.

At the same time, Pliny refers to other emperors who, desiring the glory of the hunt but being either unable or unwilling to take part in person, elected instead to kill captive animals. This suggests Domitian, and perhaps his activities at his Alban retreat. Pliny is evidently making a pointed distinction between Domitian's arena *venationes* and Trajan's rural ones.

A second significant piece of evidence from around Trajan's time comes in the form of an inscription:

d. m.
M. Ulpius Aug. lib.
Euphrosynus
a veste venatoria¹⁴

This *Augusti libertus* has the *nomen* Ulpius. Trajan was the only Roman emperor to possess that *nomen*, so it is clear that he was the *princeps* who freed this particular *libertus*. Equally important are the last three words of the inscription, which indicate what Euphrosynus' duty was: he was in charge of the emperor's hunting outfit. However, it is not necessarily the case that Euphrosynus became *a veste venatoria* during Trajan's lifetime; it is possible that

removed from the fields and the labor of countrymen having been freed from a certain siege. And also those emperors who were unable to perform appropriated that glory; claimed by a mere pretense of skill, as they rounded up animals who had been tamed and weakened by captivity and then let loose (why not?) for their sport. But our Caesar puts just as much effort into the chase as he does into making a capture, while the hardest task of hunting out a quarry is what delights him most.

¹⁴ ILS 1762.

Euphrosynus outlived Trajan, and was only promoted to the position of a *veste venatoria* during Hadrian's reign. It may even be that Hadrian, whose passion for hunting is more widely attested by the sources than Trajan's, was more likely to employ a freedman specifically to look after his hunting clothes. This is pure conjecture, however, and all that can be known for certain is that the freedman Euphrosynus was eventually made a *veste venatoria* under one of the Antonine emperors.

Although Trajan's activities fit well into the type of imperial hunting that is our focus, his successor was in another league entirely. Sources abound in describing Hadrian's *goût pour la chasse*. The *Historia Augusta* attests his earliest hunting activity: *Quintodecimo anno ad patriam rediit ac statim militiam iniit, venandi usque ad reprehensionem studiosus. Quare a Traiano abductus a patria...*¹⁵ This story claims that Hadrian's passion for hunting long predated his accession as emperor, and that even at a young age, his love of the hunt was so great as to be considered excessive. This passion continued into his adult life: ἐθήρα δὲ ὁσάκις ἐνεδέχετο.¹⁶

Early in his reign, Hadrian seems to have been the target of an unsuccessful conspiracy, supposedly hatched while he was hunting. Cassius Dio reports:

Ἀδριανὸς δέ, καίτοι φιланθρωπότατα ἄρξας, ὅμως διὰ τινὰς φόνους ἀρίστων ἀνδρῶν, οὓς ἐν ἀρχῇ τε τῆς ἡγεμονίας καὶ πρὸς τῇ τελευτῇ τοῦ βίου ἐπεποίητο, διεβλήθη, καὶ ὀλίγου διὰ ταῦτ' οὐδὲ ἐς τοὺς ἥρωας ἀνεγράφη. καὶ οἱ μὲν ἐν τῇ ἀρχῇ φονευθέντες Πάλμας τε καὶ Κέλσος Νιγρῖνός τε καὶ Λούσιος ἦσαν, οἱ μὲν ὡς ἐν θήρᾳ δῆθεν ἐπιβεβουλευκότες αὐτῶ...¹⁷

¹⁵ *Historia Augusta Hadrian* 2.1-2: He returned to his native city in his fifteenth year and at once entered military service, but he was constantly eager to hunt, to the point of censure. Wherefore he was recalled by Trajan from the fatherland....

¹⁶ Dio 69.7.3: And he went hunting as often as possible...; cf. 63.7.3, 69.10.1-3.

¹⁷ Dio 69.2.5: Hadrian, though he ruled with the greatest mildness, was nevertheless severely criticized for slaying several of the best men in the beginning of his reign and again near the end of his life, and for this reason he came near failing to be enrolled among the demigods. Those who were slain at the beginning were Palma and Celsus, Nigrinus and Lusius, the first two for the alleged reason that they had conspired against him during a hunt...

The same incident is reported in the *Historia Augusta*, except that it does not attest that Hadrian was hunting: *Nigrini insidias, quas ille sacrificanti Hadriano conscio sibi Lusio et multis aliis paraverat, cum etiam successorem Hadrianus sibimet destinasset, evasit.*¹⁸

Although the sources disagree over what precisely Hadrian was doing while the conspirators were plotting, at least they indicate that these were the sorts of activities that he could have been plausibly engaging in.

In addition to hunting frequently, it appears that Hadrian was selective in the types of game that he pursued. *Venatus frequentissime leonem manu sua occidit. Venando autem iugulum et costam fregit. Venationem semper cum amicis participavit.*¹⁹ This passage seems to suggest that Hadrian's prey of choice was the lion. Lions had long been considered prestigious animals to hunt,²⁰ and it is probable that Trajan had sought them as well. But Hadrian is depicted as having especially singled them out, and in this way he set the precedent for later emperors. As Le Roux puts it, "Hadrien est resté dans la tradition comme le créateur impérial de la chasse au lion."²¹ The injuries that Hadrian incurred from hunting are also significant, in that they indicate the degree of physicality and apparent danger of his efforts; it is markedly different from Domitian's arena *venationes*, for which he had stood safely on a platform while he shot down his prey.

The statement that Hadrian always brought friends with him is not in and of itself significant, but it does raise the issue of an imperial hunting entourage. Surely one of the marks of elite *venationes* in any society was the ability by wealthy aristocrats to bring others—both friends and attendants—to accompany and aid them in the hunt. We note above the *libertus a*

¹⁸ HA *Hadrian* 7.1: He evaded the plot of Nigrinus, which, with Hadrian sacrificing, the latter had prepared with Lusius as his accomplice, and with many others, even though Hadrian had appointed him as his successor.

¹⁹ HA *Hadrian* 26.3: Having hunted, he most frequently killed a lion with his own hand. However, while hunting he broke his collar-bone and a rib. He always participated in a hunt with friends. cf. Dio 69.10.2.

²⁰ See Chapter 1.

²¹ *Chasses Antiques* 28.

veste venatoria who managed either Trajan or Hadrian's hunting wardrobe. But once out in the countryside, Hadrian's entourage consisted of both his friends and of such men as Mastor: μετεπέμψατο Μάστορα ἄνδρα βάρβαρον Ἰάζυγα, ᾧ αἰχμαλώτῳ γενομένῳ πρὸς τὰς θήρας διὰ τε ἰσχὺν καὶ δι' εὐτολμίαν ἐκέχρητο...²² Mastor was almost certainly a slave (or possibly a *peregrinus dediticius*), given his designation as a captive. It appears that Hadrian recruited Mastor so that he might aid in the emperor's hunts. In all likelihood Hadrian employed other slaves or freedmen as well for this same purpose. It is impossible to tell how large his entourage was, or what duty each person had—holding the hunting dogs, carrying different types of weapons—but it is clear that an imperial hunting staff did exist.

In addition to hunting staff, Hadrian had a favorite hunting horse named Borysthenes. Dio writes τῆς δὲ περὶ τῆς θήρας σπουδῆς αὐτοῦ καὶ ὁ Βορυσθένης ὁ ἵππος, ᾧ μάλιστα θηρῶν ἠρέσκετο, σημεῖόν ἐστιν. ἀποθανόντι γὰρ αὐτῷ καὶ τάφον κατεσκεύασε καὶ στήλην ἔστησε καὶ ἐπιγράμματα ἐπέγραψεν.²³ The inscription that Dio describes has survived in part, while the remainder was recorded in a 16th century manuscript:

BORYSTHENES ALANUS
CAESAREUS VEREDUS
PER AEQUOR ET PALUDES
ET TUMULOS ETRUSCOS
VOLARE QUI SOLEBAT
PANNONICOS IN APROS
NEC ULLUS INSEQUENTEM
DENT(E APER ALBICANTI
AUSUS FUIT NOCERE
VEL EXTIMAM SALIVAM
SPARSIT AB ORE CAUDAM
UT SOLET EVENIRE:
SED INTEGER IUVENTA

²² Dio 69.22.2: ...he sent for Mastor, one of the barbarian Iazyges, who had become a captive and had been employed by Hadrian in his hunting because of his strength and courage...

²³ Dio 69.10.2-3: His horse Borysthenes, which was his favorite horse for the chase, is a sign of his zeal for hunting. For when Borysthenes died, Hadrian prepared a burial, and he stood up a gravestone and upon it he wrote an inscription...

INVOLATUS ARTUS
DIE SUA PEREMPTUS
HO)C SITUS EST IN AGRO²⁴

The horse's apparently young age must have made his death all the more upsetting. It is important to note that Hadrian only speaks of hunting boars in the inscription; this should not be taken to refute the idea that Hadrian hunted lions, but rather as additional evidence that he hunted a variety of animals, boars and lions included.

Another notable instance of Hadrian's fervor for hunting involves his founding of a town (see fig. VIII): *Oppidum Hadrianotheras*²⁵ in quodam loco, quod illic et feliciter esset venatus et ursam occidisset aliquando, constituit.²⁶

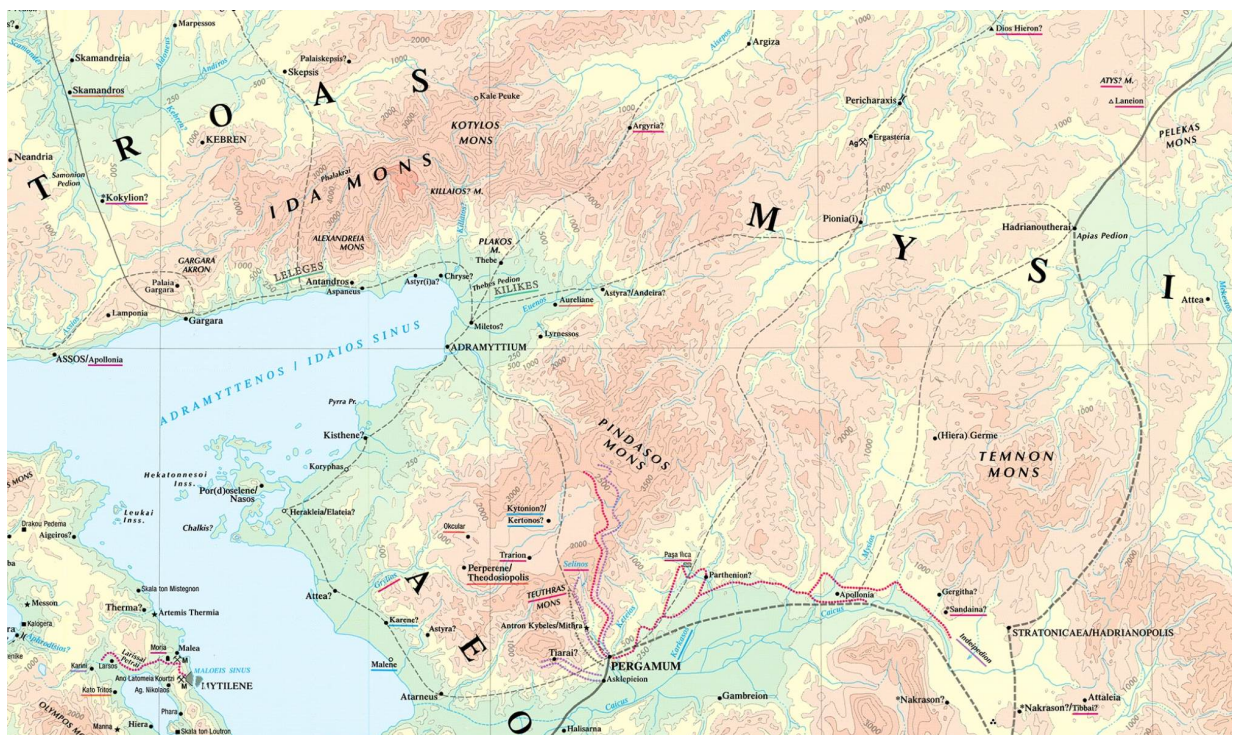


Fig. VIII. Map showing Hadrianotherae.

²⁴ Smallwood 520 = CIL XII 1122: Borysthenes of the Alani, the swift horse of Caesar, who was accustomed to rush through the plain and the marshes and the Etruscan hills at Pannonian boars and not any boar dared to harm the pursuing outermost tail with a white tooth or strewed saliva from its mouth as is accustomed to happen: but the intact, uninjured limb, having been destroyed in its youth, has been laid down on this day in this field.

²⁵ BATlas 56F2.

²⁶ HA *Hadrian* 20.13: And in one locality he founded a town called Hadrianotherae, because supposedly at some time he had hunted successfully there and killed a bear. cf. Dio 69.10.2.

Sculptural evidence for Hadrian's imperial hunts is also extant. Eight roundels survive from a lost monument of the emperor, and they depict Hadrian leaving to hunt, hunting, and sacrificing to deities afterward.²⁷ The roundels were reused in the Arch of Constantine, which is the state in which they have survived. Within four of the roundels, Hadrian is shown hunting the bear, the boar, and the lion. In the sacrifice depictions he addresses Silvanus, Diana, Apollo, and Hercules.²⁸

Numismatic evidence for Hadrian's hunts may exist. There are coins upon which the emperor is depicted with his foot on a crocodile, and he holds a spear and a dagger.²⁹ No legend is present. One possible interpretation of these coins is that Hadrian is being depicted as hunting crocodiles; this would perhaps be the most straightforward view. Alternatively, they could possibly represent some sort of symbolism involving a submissive Egypt. The emperors always took a special interest in the administration of Egypt, given its wealth and use as a supplier of food to Rome. It is possible, therefore, that coins might have been issued to emphasize the idea of the emperor tightly controlling Egypt, particularly at a time of unrest (whether real or perceived).

Hadrian's Antonine Successors

Although no subsequent emperors are portrayed as having a fervor for the chase to match Hadrian's, many nevertheless do appear to have hunted. Antoninus Pius receives a brief mention of his participation in *venationes* in the *Historia Augusta: Piscando se et venando multum*

²⁷ See Page 40 for Images

²⁸ Kleiner 251-3, figs. 219-220.

²⁹ RIC II. Pg. 444 #830, Pg. 440 #782.

oblectavit et deambulatione cum amicis atque sermone.³⁰ Granted, this description may merely reflect what the author of the *Historia Augusta*—whose veracity is questionable—expected of a “good” emperor. One of Pius’ successors, Lucius Verus, seems to have been an avid hunter: *Nam cum interfecto legato, caesis legionibus, Syris defectionem cogitantibus, oriens vastaretur, ille in Apulia venabatur...*³¹ So while the author of the *Historia Augusta* might have thought hunting to be an appropriate activity for emperors, he seems to have equally condemned those who neglected their duties in favor of excessive *venationes*. Some caution must be exercised here, however: the author is clearly setting up Verus to be compared in a negative light to Marcus Aurelius.

Regarding Marcus Aurelius’ interest in hunting, Cassius Dio reports: ἐκ δ’ οὖν πολλῆς ἀσχολίας τε καὶ ἀσκήσεως ἀσθενέστατον τὸ σῶμα ἔσχε, καίτοι τοσαύτη εὐεξία ἀπ’ ἀρχῆς χρησάμενος ὥστε καὶ ὀπλομαχεῖν καὶ σὺς ἀγροῖους ἐν θήρᾳ καταβάλλειν ἀπὸ ἵππου...³² However, the *Historia Augusta* offers a different account, and states that *fuit autem tanta indulgentia ut cogeretur nonnumquam vel in venationes pergere vel in theatrum descendere vel spectaculis interesse*.³³ The implication is that M. Aurelius was only willing to engage in *venationes* when he was asked, and that since it required so great an exertion on his part, he must not have enjoyed hunting very much. Even so, the *Historia Augusta* may be downplaying M. Aurelius’ *goût pour la chasse* in order to depict him as being clearly more serious and responsible than Verus.

³⁰ HA *Antoninus Pius* 11.2: He passed time pleasantly by fishing and hunting and by taking walks and making conversation with friends...

³¹ HA *Lucius Verus* 6.9: For although a legate was being slain, legions were being slaughtered, the Syrians were meditating revolt, and the East was being devastated, Verus was hunting in Apulia...; cf. 2.10, 9.8; cf. HA *Marcus Antoninus* 8.12.

³² Dio 72.36.2: As a result of his frequent occupation and exercise he possessed a weak body, and indeed in the beginning he proclaimed himself to be in such good health that he served as a man-at-arms, and on the chase would strike down wild boars from his horse...

³³ HA *Marcus Antoninus* 4.8: He possessed such great indulgence, moreover, that he was sometimes compelled to go on with hunts or to descend to the theatre or to be present at spectacles.

The *Historia Augusta*'s portrayal of M. Aurelius also contrasts with the image that emerges from his correspondence with Marcus Cornelius Fronto. Marcus, writing to Fronto in 144-145, mentions: *Ad venationem profecti sumus, fortia facinora fecimus, apros captos esse fando audiimus, nam visendi quidem nulla facultas fuit.*³⁴ The tone of the letter, unless wholly ironic, is hardly that of a man who has been reluctantly persuaded to go hunting. Rather, it appears that young Marcus was proud of the “brave deeds” of his expedition. It is unknown why Marcus did not get a chance to see the boars that had been captured.

A further piece of correspondence between the two men, this time from Fronto to Marcus, confirms that the latter was a hunting enthusiast: *Ubi vivarium dedicabitis, memento quam diligentissime, si feras percuties, equum admittere.*³⁵ Had Marcus Aurelius not enjoyed hunting, he hardly would have had a hunting park built for himself. Marcus is in fact the first emperor attested as having acquired a *vivarium*. Such game preserves had existed among the Roman elite,³⁶ but no evidence exists to suggest that an emperor—Domitian's Alban retreat had been a *harena*—had used one until this point.

Marcus Aurelius' son and successor, Commodus, also established a relationship with hunting. Cassius Dio reports that Κόμμοδος δὲ ἀπὸ τῶν εὐθυμῶν καὶ παιδιῶν ἀνανεύων ἐφόνα καὶ τοὺς ἐπιφανεῖς ἄνδρας διεχειρίζετο...Ἰούλιός τε Ἀλέξανδρος, οὗτος μὲν ὥς καὶ λέοντα ἀπὸ τοῦ ἵππου κατακοντίσας.³⁷ Among the various other persons that Commodus had put to death during his reign, he appears to have had a Julius Alexander executed for hunting a lion. The

³⁴ Marcus Aurelius to Fronto; *Ad M. Caes.* 4. 5 (Naber, pg. 68): We set out for the chase and did brave deeds. We heard through word of mouth that boars had been bagged, for there was certainly not any opportunity to see them. Nevertheless, we ascended a sufficiently steep slope; then in the afternoon we drew back home.

³⁵ Fronto to Marcus Aurelius as Caesar; *Ad M. Caes.* 3. 20 (Naber, pg. 56): When you inaugurate your game preserve, remember as diligently as possible, if you will strike beasts, to set your horse at full gallop.

³⁶ See Chapter 1.

³⁷ Dio 73.14.1: Commodus, throwing his head back from the childish cheerfulness, was athirst for blood and slew the men who were distinguished by rank...and Julius Alexander, this man [was executed for] having shot down a lion from his horse. (It is unclear whether Julius was executed for having shot down the lion, or for having done so while on horseback)

significance of this incident will be addressed later in the chapter, in relation to a fifth century decree in the Theodosian Code.

Numismatic evidence also survives that demonstrates how important the lion hunt—and the hunt in general—had become for the emperor by Commodus' time. There are coins which depict Commodus riding on a horse and brandishing a javelin at a lion in front of him (see fig. IX).³⁸



Fig. IX. Imperial sestertius of Commodus with possible lion hunting scene (RIC 332).

Others show him riding a galloping horse and striking a panther with a javelin, which has broken in its chest.³⁹ Nothing about the coins suggest that the depictions take place in an arena, and it appears far more likely that they are depicting Commodus engaged in rural *venationes*. The legends on the coins lend support to this interpretation, for they all display, sometimes abbreviated, sometimes spelled out, and sometimes with additional imperial titles, *Virtuti Augusti*. The message that these coins conveyed to inhabitants of the Roman Empire in the late

³⁸ RIC III. Pg. 370 #39, PG. 378 #114, Pg. 407 #332.

³⁹ RIC III Pg 418 #453.

second century was that that *princeps* possessed the manly excellence that it took to hunt and kill lions (and other animals, such as panthers). In general, hunting was seen as an act of great *virtus*, and this was reflected not just in imperial coinage and in Roman literature, but also in the hunting sarcophagi that grew in popularity in the third century.⁴⁰

It is possible that the lions and panthers symbolized here the enemies of Rome, from whom the emperor is defending the empire, but such an interpretation can be no more plausible than that of the emperor hunting. The latter is the simpler explanation, after all, and the non-elites of the empire, not as well versed in artistic symbolism as the upper classes, would likely have primarily viewed the coins as hunting scenes.

Commodus is also attested to have favored the hunting deity Herakles,⁴¹ known to the Romans as Hercules. Dio reports that ἐαυτῷ δὲ ἄλλας τε παμπόλλους ἐπωνυμίας καὶ τὴν Ἡρακλέους ἀπήνεγκε...καὶ ἀνδριάντες αὐτοῦ παμπληθεῖς ἐν Ἡρακλέους σχήματι ἔστησαν.⁴² That Commodus had statues of himself dressed as Hercules (see fig. X) erected is especially significant, since Hercules was depicted in Antiquity wearing the skin of the Nemean Lion, which he had hunted and slain. For Commodus to wear the garb of Hercules was arguably to portray himself as a great lion hunter.

⁴⁰ Zanker and Ewald 222-9.

⁴¹ See Chapter 1.

⁴² Dio 73.15: Upon himself he bestowed, in addition to a great many other names, that of Hercules...And they erected vast numbers of statues representing him in the garb of Hercules.



Fig. X. Commodus as the “Roman Hercules”

All of this does not necessarily mean that Commodus actually hunted, however. In fact, the literary sources describe him as having instead acted much like a *bestiarius*.⁴³ So in many ways this coinage and statues reflect what Pliny said about Trajan in his *Panegyricus*; to hunt in a rural setting brought glory to the hunter, while lesser emperors sought to falsely appropriate that glory by slaughtering animals in the arena, attempting to pass it off as an equivalent accomplishment. Nevertheless, it is important to know that Commodus wished to attain the *virtus* that accompanied hunting, and as a result, favored having himself portrayed as such on coins and in statues.

⁴³ Dio 73.17.

Escalation after Commodus

Following Commodus' assassination and a brutal civil war, the Severan dynasty was established. The sources name several of its emperors as having partaken in *venationes*. Septimius Severus is shown on an early third century (210-211) *aureus* on horseback, brandishing a javelin at a lion.⁴⁴ Herodian describes the hunting proclivities of two of the Severan emperors, the first being Caracalla: ἀπάρας δὲ τῆς Ἰταλίας, ἐπὶ τε ταῖς ὄχθαις τοῦ Ἰστροῦ γενόμενος, διώκει δὴ τὰ ἀρκτῶα τῆς ἀρχῆς μέρη, γυμνάσια τοῦ σώματος ποιούμενος ἡνιοχείας καὶ θηρίων παντοδαπῶν συστάδην ἀναιρέσεις...⁴⁵ He also mentions Elagabalus: διέτριβε δὲ μετὰ ταῦτα ἐν τῇ Μεσοποταμίᾳ ὁ Ἀντωνῖνος, ἡνιοχείαις σχολάζων καὶ θηρία παντοδαπὰ ἀναιρῶν.⁴⁶ The *Historia Augusta* quotes a court poet (although this is almost certainly an invention of the author) who referenced Severus Alexander's hunting.⁴⁷ It also mentions hunting by several of the third century "Tyranni Triginta:" Odaenathus,⁴⁸ Zenobia,⁴⁹ (not that Odaenathus or Zenobia were ever Roman emperors) and Tacitus.⁵⁰ Additionally, Gallienus is, like Commodus and Septimius Severus, depicted on a coin on horseback, spearing a lion; the legend reads *Virtus Augusti*.⁵¹

Diocletian hunted before he was emperor:

Post quod verbum Druis dixisse fertur, "Diocletiane, iocari noli, nam eris imperator cum aprum occideris." ...apros tamen in venatibus, ubi fuit facultas, manu sua semper

⁴⁴ RIC IV.1 Pg. 134 #342.

⁴⁵ Herodian 4.7.2: And having departed out from Italy and having arrived on the banks of the Danube, he then sought after the northern parts of the empire, bringing about his bodily exercises— chariot racing—and the destruction of wild animals of every kind hand to hand...

⁴⁶ Herodian 4.11.9: And Antoninus wasted his time after these things in Mesopotamia, occupying his leisure in chariot racing and killing wild animals of every kind.

⁴⁷ HA *Severus Alexander* 38.3-4.

⁴⁸ HA *Odaenathus* 15.

⁴⁹ HA *Zenobia* 30.18.

⁵⁰ HA *Tacitus* 11.4.

⁵¹ RIC V.1 Pg. 183 #594.

occidit. Denique cum Aurelianus imperium accepisset, cum Probus, cum Tacitus, cum ipse Carus, Diocletianus dixit, “Ego semper apros occido, sed alter utitur pulpamento.” *Iam illud notum est atque vulgatum, quod, cum occidisset aprum praefectum praetorii, dixisse fertur, “Tandem occidi aprum fatalem.”*⁵²

Although this story is likely an invention by the author of the *Historia Augusta* (like much of his material), it nonetheless underlines that hunting had become a regular activity of emperors (and in this case, of those who wished to be emperor). It also reflects a continuance of the need to display *virtus* that dates back to the second century.

The Constantinian dynasty, too, is represented as one of hunters. The eight Hadrianic roundels in Constantine’s arch (see fig. XI) suggest that whoever reused them there wished to portray the emperor as a hunter.



Fig. XI. Arch of Constantine c. AD 315.

⁵² HA *Carus, Carinus, Numerian* 14.3 – 15.5: After which word the Druidess is said to have said, “Do not jest, Diocletian, for you will become emperor when you have slain a boar.”...Nevertheless, in his hunting, whenever there was opportunity, he always killed the boars with his very own hand. In fact, when Aurelian received the imperial power, then Probus, then Tacitus, and then Carus himself, Diocletian remarked, “I am always killing boars, but the other man enjoys the meat.” It is now well known and a common story that when he had killed Aper, the prefect of the guard, it is said that he declared, “At least I have killed my fated boar.”

It is curious that the four showing the emperor (though admittedly the heads were re-cut to portray both Constantine and Licinius⁵³) sacrificing to Silvanus, Diana, Apollo, and Hercules were included, despite Constantine's adoption of Christianity. Perhaps the eight roundels were seen as a set; given their placement on the arch, it is clear that at the very least, an even number of roundels was desired.



Fig. XII. Hadrianic roundels on the Arch of Constantine.

Constantine's son, Constans, is specifically described as a hunter. Pseudo Aurelius Victor relates that *Constans vero venandi cupidine dum per silvas saltusque erraret, conspiravere aliquanti militares in eius necem...*⁵⁴ As with Hadrian, a conspiracy appears to have been formed against Constans while he was hunting. The Byzantine writer Zosimus records the same incident: *Πρὸς ἃ δυσχεραίνοντες οἱ περὶ τὴν αὐλήν, ἐπειδὴ ταῖς περὶ θήραν τέρψεσιν αὐτὸν ἐγκείμενον*

⁵³ Kleiner 446

⁵⁴ Aurelius Victor (Pseudo) 41.22: While Constans, with his passion for hunting, was wandering through the woods and glades, not a few soldiers plotted his death...

εἶδον, ἡγεμόσι πρὸς τοῦτο χρησάμενοι Μαρκελλίνῳ...⁵⁵ The tendency for conspiracies to arise in relation to hunting will be explored in the following chapter.⁵⁶

Other notable imperial hunting anecdotes include two from Ammianus Marcellinus, the first of which concerns Valentinian I, who is well known for his rage. Ammianus writes that *adultus quidam ex his quos paedagogianos appellant, ad observandam venaticiam praedam, Spartanum canem retinere dispositus, ante praedictum tempus absolvit, adsultu eius evadere conantis appetitus et morsu: ideoque necatus ad exitium fustibus, eadem humatus est die.*⁵⁷ Here the emperor can be seen, as was the case with Hadrian, with an imperial hunting entourage. This passage makes mention of pages whose job it was to handle hunting dogs. It is highly likely, especially by this period in the Empire, when hunting appears to have become a very regular activity for emperors, that every *princeps* who hunted brought along dogs or attending huntsmen. It would have made the imperial hunt a grand event, much like later royal hunts in medieval Europe.

Ammianus' second passage remarks on Gratian's activities:

*Ut enim ille (Commodus), quia perimere iaculis plurimas feras spectante consueverat populo, et centum leones in amphitheatrali circulo simul emissos, telorum vario genere, nullo geminato vulnere, contruncavit, ultra hominem exsultavit, ita hic quoque, intra saepta quae appellant vivaria, sagittarum pulsibus crebris dentatas conficiens bestias, incidentia multa parvi ducebat et seria: eo tempore quo etiam si imperium Marcus regeret Antoninus, aegre sine collegis similibus et magna sobrietate consiliorum, lenire luctuosos rei publicae poterat casus.*⁵⁸

⁵⁵ Zosimus 2.42.2: Those at court were angry at this and, perceiving that he was devoted to the delights of hunting, they appointed as leaders Marcellinus...

⁵⁶ See Chapter 3.

⁵⁷ Ammianus 29.3.3: A well-grown youth of the class called pages was posted, holding in leash a Spartan hound, to watch for game at a hunt; but he let the dog loose before the designated time, because the animal in an effort to escape leaped at him in a rush and bit him; for that he was beaten to death with cudgels and buried the same day.

⁵⁸ Amm. 31.10.19: For as that emperor (Commodus) felt superhuman exultation because he had been accustomed to kill a great number of wild animals with javelins with people watching, and he cut down a hundred lions who were sent out in the amphitheatrical circle at the same time, with various types of missile weapons, without needing to inflict a second wound, just so Gratian also, killing toothed beasts with many an arrow-shot within the enclosures which are called *vivaria*, he considered many occurrences and serious things of little importance; at which time even if Marcus Antoninus was ruling the empire, he would hardly, without like-minded colleagues and the great reasonableness of counsels, have been able to mitigate the sorrowful misfortunes of our country.

Although Ammianus is comparing Gratian to Commodus, whom he describes as having slaughtered animals in an arena, he nevertheless states that Gratian killed animals in *vivaria*. It might have been Ammianus' intention to compare, not the circumstances of these two emperors' "hunts", but rather to draw attention to the fact that both excessively pursued their leisure to the extent that it interfered with their imperial duties. In any event, game warrens were distinct from amphitheatres; "actual hunting" could take place within a *vivarium*, where the animals, despite being enclosed, were not confined to as small a space as when inside an arena.

Valentinian II also hunted, as reported by Ambrose of Milan. *Ferebatur primo ludis circensibus delectari: sic istud abstersit, ut ne sollemnibus quidem principum natalibus vel imperialis honoris gratia circenses putaret celebrandos. Aiebant aliqui ferarum eum venationibus occupari atque ab actibus publicis intentionem eius abduci: omnes feras uno momento iussit interfici.*⁵⁹ That Valentinian II ordered all of the animals to be slain at once means that they must have been caught and kept in captivity beforehand. Yet the passage makes no mention of the arena, and indeed, had these been animals meant for the amphitheatre, then there would have been no reason for Valentinian to have had them killed; he could have simply used them in a show with *bestiarii*. It would appear instead that these were animals that were kept in a *vivarium*. This seems even more likely given that Gratian, whose enjoyment of *vivaria* is explicitly attested in the sources, was his brother.

The late fourth century poet Claudius Claudianus wrote two poems in Latin about the emperor Honorius and his *venationes*.⁶⁰ Honorius is also depicted on a coin, on horseback,

⁵⁹ Ambrose *De Obitu Valentiniani* 15: First of all, it used to be said that he enjoyed the games of the circus. He refuted this assertion so thoroughly as to be unwilling to have circus games performed even on imperial birthdays or for the sake of imperial honor. Some people used to say that he was preoccupied with hunting wild beasts, and that his attention was being distracted from public duties. He ordered all the wild animals to be slain at one moment.

⁶⁰ Claudian Fescennina *De Nuptiis Honorii Augusti* 1-17; *Epithalamium (X)* 1-7.

raising his right hand, with a dead lion lying beneath the horse.⁶¹ Although this could be interpreted as a hunting image, the lack of a weapon seems to suggest otherwise. In fact, the “fallen lion” could be interpreted as symbolic for a defeated enemy.⁶²

Decree on Lions

During Honorius’ reign the following decree was issued:

XV. 11.1 (414 Mai. 20).

*IMPP. HONOR(IVS) ET THEOD(OSIVS) AA. MAVRIANO COM(ITI)
DOMESTIC(ORVM) ET VICES AG(ENTI) MAG(ISTRI) MIL(ITVM).*

Occidendorum leonum cunctis facimus potestatem, neque aliquando sinimus quemquam calumniam formidare, cum et salus nostrorum provincialium voluptati nostrae necessario praeponatur et haec ipsa propria voluptas intercludi minime videatur, quandoquidem occidendi feras, non venandi venundandique licentiam dederimus.

*Occidendi igitur memoratas feras, et ducibus et officiis eorum conventis, cunctis licentia tribuatur.*⁶³

DAT. XIII KAL. IVN. CONSTANTIO ET CONSTANCE VV. CC. CONSS.

This decree from the emperors Honorius and Theodosius permits everyone else the right to kill lions without fear of legal repercussions. The implication is that, up until this time, the emperors had reserved to themselves the exclusive right to hunt lions, which here is called *ipsa propria voluptas*. It is unclear whether this was some sort of official edict, or simply an informal precedent set by an earlier emperor. It should also be noted that while Honorius and Theodosius

⁶¹ RIC X Pg. 341 #1373.

⁶² RIC X Pg. 60.

⁶³ *Codex Theodosianus* 15.11.1: Emperors Honorius and Theodosius Augusti to Maurianus, Count of the Household Troops and Vice-Master of the soldiers.

We allow everyone the right to kill lions, and We permit no one at any time to fear malicious prosecution, since the safety of Our provincials is by necessity placed before Our pleasure; and this pleasure of Ours itself would seem to be hindered most minimally, since We will have given license to kill wild beasts, not to hunt and sell them. Therefore let License of killing the mentioned wild beasts be granted to everyone, and with the dukes and their office staffs in agreement.

Given on the thirteenth day before the calends of June in the year of the consulship of the Most Noble Constantius and Constans. — May 20, 414.

granted everyone the right to kill lions, they did not give others license to “hunt and sell” them. What the decree appears to be trying to do is allow all residents of the Empire the ability to defend themselves against lion attacks, while still restricting sportive lion hunts to the emperors. Of course, how much of an effect this decree had upon the residents of the empire is unknown. By this point in the empire, there were likely few lions to be found in the wild, and in fact the purpose of this decree might have been to simply win goodwill from the people for the emperors; it casts the emperors as caring for the safety of their subjects.

Regardless of the intentions behind the decree and whatever impact it did (or did not) have, the implication that there had previously been a moratorium on lion hunting raises the question of which emperor first set the precedent or issued the decree. This is where the earlier passage concerning Commodus and Julius Alexander becomes relevant. Dio does not mention any decree on lions in this passage, but it seems reasonable to assume that at least by Commodus’ reign, the right to hunt lions had already been limited to the emperor. Some scholars believe that the moratorium goes back to Hadrian’s rule,⁶⁴ but although he might have taken a special interest in lions, no evidence survives to suggest that he had reserved the right exclusively to himself. That Commodus desired both to be depicted as the lion hunter Hercules, and as possessing great *virtus*, lends more weight to the idea that it was he who first instituted the moratorium on lion hunts; it certainly fits Commodus’ personality to think of him as wanting to reserve all of the glory of hunting lions to himself. His imperial predecessors also seem far less likely to have been willing to punish others simply for hunting lions; they almost certainly would not have put a Roman aristocrat to death over it.

⁶⁴ Anderson 105.

To the end of the Western Empire

Honorius' nephew, Theodosius II, also hunted, according to John of Antioch:

Ὅτι Θεοδοσίος τὴν ἀρχὴν παρὰ Ἀρκαδίου τοῦ πατρὸς (δια) δεξάμενος ἀπόλεμος ἦν καὶ δειλία συνέζη καὶ τὴν εἰρήνην χρήμασι καὶ οὐχ ὅπλοις ἐκτήσατο. Καὶ ὑπὸ τοῖς εὐνούχοις πάντα ἔπραττεν...ἀλλ' ἐς ν' ἐνιαυτοὺς συνελάσαντα βαναύσοις τέ τισι τέχναις καὶ θήραις προσκαρτερεῖν παρέπεισαν, ὥστε αὐτοὺς τε καὶ τὸν Χρυσάφιον ἔχειν τὸ τῆς βασιλείας κράτος...⁶⁵

Once again, here hunting is depicted as an activity that preoccupied the emperor while others sought his power. The story is not quite the same as Hadrian's or Constans', however. Theodosius' *venationes* are described as one of a series of activities that the eunuchs pushed upon him (and it is important that the wild beast hunts are designated separately from the low-class pursuits; the point is that hunting is a sport for the elite), presumably to distract him from the affairs of the state (and thus the eunuchs' machinations). The passage is reminiscent of the *Historia Augusta's* characterization of Lucius Verus, who it claims preferred to hunt rather than attend his imperial duties. And although John of Antioch may be throwing in the stock accusation of "too much hunting" (also previously seen with Hadrian in his youth) to make Theodosius seem like a negligent emperor, his claim still substantiates the idea that hunting was an established imperial activity (that could be pursued to excess). Moreover, it is very likely that Theodosius did hunt; he was known to have been an active rider, and he in fact met his death after sustaining injuries from a riding accident.⁶⁶

⁶⁵ John of Antioch Fragment 220 = fr. 194 M: Theodosius II, having received rule from his father Arcadius, was unwarlike and lived a life of cowardice, and he procured peace for himself with money, not arms. Everything he did was under the influence of the eunuchs...Even when he had reached fifty years of age they persuaded him to persist in certain low-class pursuits and wild beast hunting, so as for them, and Chrysaphius in particular, to possess imperial power.

⁶⁶ John Malalas, *Chronographia* 14.27 [366.19-367.5]; cf. *Chronicon Paschale* 589.17-590.5.

Imperial hunting continued right up to the end of the Western Empire (and beyond, although that is not within the scope of this paper). Sidonius Apollinaris wrote the following in his Panegyric to the Emperor Anthemius, who ruled from 467 to 472:

*Ludus erat puero raptas ex hoste sagittas
festina tractare manu captosque per arcus
flexa reluctantes in cornua trudere nervos,
nunc tremulum tenero iaculum torquere lacerto
inque frementis equi dorsum cum pondere conti
indutas Chalybum saltu transferre catenas,
inventas agitare feras et fronde latentes
quaerere, deprensas modo claudere cassibus artis,
nunc torto penetrare veru: tum saepe fragore
laudari comitum, frendens cum belua ferrum
ferret et intratos exirent arma per armos.
conde Pelethronios, alacer puer et venator,
Aeacida, titulos, quamquam subiecta magistri
terga premens et ob hoc securus lustra pererrans
tu potius regereris equo. non principe nostro
spicula direxit melius Pythona superstans
Paeon...*⁶⁷

The surviving sources certainly do not record every instance of a Roman emperor hunting. However, it does appear possible to attempt some broad generalizations. First, it is clear that the Julio-Claudians and Flavians did not hunt in any significant manner. Rather, the imperial hunt appears to have really begun with Trajan and Hadrian, the latter of whom established himself as one of the foremost emperors to have taken part in *venationes*. It is important to realize that, particularly in the early Empire, the decision to hunt was an individual choice for

⁶⁷ Sidonius, *Carmina* 2.138-154: In boyhood it was his sport, with a hasty hand, to wield arrows seized from the foe, and to force through captured, resisting bowstrings onto curving horns, now to hurl the quivering javelin with a slender upper arm and to transfer, with a leap, his chain armor of steel onto the back of a neighing horse with the weight of a long spear, to harry wild beasts that he has found and to seek those hiding in the foliage, at one time to shut in those caught with tight snares, at another to penetrate them with the hurled spear: then to be often praised with the noise of his comrades, since the beast gnashing its teeth was carrying iron and the arms exited through the shoulders which they had entered. Hide your Pelethronian honors, lively boy and hunter, descendant of Aeacus, though pressing the subjected back of your master and on account of this safely wandering through the woodlands, you rather should have been ruled by the horse. Not better than our emperor did Paeon Apollo, standing over Python, direct the points of his arrows...

each emperor. They surely all recognized that hunting was a prime opportunity to display *virtus*, but it is unlikely that, at least through the second century, any of the Roman emperors viewed hunting as an imperial tradition. Only with the imperial moratorium on lion hunts, which potentially dates back at least to Commodus' reign, did hunting become tied to the position of emperor in any formal capacity.

Even with the (possible) decree on lions in place, it is likely that many emperors chose not to exercise their right to hunt lions; some might not have hunted at all. That being said, as the Empire entered into military and political crisis in the third century, and faced increasing external threats in the fourth and fifth centuries, the need for strong rulers, who possessed immense *virtus*, grew. As previously stated, hunting, in addition to warfare, provided *principes* with a means to demonstrate their *virtus* to the people, to the aristocracy, and to the army. Furthermore, as more emperors hunted, the idea of an imperial hunting tradition must have become more firmly established. These are both plausible contributing factors to the general increase in imperial *venationes* over the Empire's lifespan, which the sources, although incomplete, appear to illustrate conclusively.

Chapter III

Arena and Conspiracy

Arena Beast Hunts

The term *venatio* in Latin literally means “hunting”. It is used, therefore, as a general noun to refer to different types of hunting. *Venatio* may designate the pursuit of animals in the countryside or within an expansive game park, both of which hunts have been discussed in the preceding chapters (and which, in this thesis, have been categorized as “hunting”). However, Latin authors also employ the term to designate beast fights in the arena: *Edidit et circenses plurimos a mane ad vesperam interiecta modo Africanarum venatione modo Troiae decursione...*¹ Such events pitted either wild animals against other wild animals, or wild animals against human beings. A human who made a profession out of fighting animals in the arena was known as a *bestiarius*.

The Romans first began to use animals in public spectacles in the third century BC; in this they were influenced, as they were in so many other fields, by the Greeks, and particularly by the beast performances in Athens.² However, the evidence for these early shows does not refer to the slaughter of animals by *bestiarii* or any such similar persons. Rather, the first attested beast hunt took place in 176 BC, in a show put on by Marcius Fulvius Nobilior.³ Livy explains:

*Per eos dies, quibus haec ex Hispania nuntiata sunt, ludi Taurii per biduum facti religionis causa. Decem deinde dies magno apparatu ludos M. Fulvius, quos voverat Aetolico bello, fecit. Multi artifices ex Graecia venerunt honoris eius causa. Athletarum quoque certamen tum primo Romanis spectaculo fuit, et venatio data leonum et pantherarum, et prope huius saeculi copia ac varietate ludicrum celebratum est.*⁴

¹ Suetonius *Caligula* 18: And he gave many games in the Circus, from morning to the evening, introducing between the races at some times a hunt of panthers, and at other times a maneuver of the game called Troy...

² Chris Epplett, Roman Beast Hunts, *A Companion to Sport and Spectacle in Greek and Roman Antiquity* 505-506.

³ Epplett 507.

⁴ Livy 39.22.1-2: During those days, in which these things were announced from Spain, for two days the games of Taurius were put on for religious reasons. Then for ten days Marcus Fulvius put on games with great splendor, which he had vowed for the Aetolian War. Many performers came from Greece in his honor. There was also then a contest of athletes as the first spectacle for the Romans, and a hunt of lions and panthers was given, and the show was celebrated with the abundance and variety nearly of our own present age.

As the Roman Republic grew in size and wealth, its officials deployed greater resources with which to put on larger and more frequent games for the public; these included staged beast hunts. It soon became the goal of leading politicians to seek to outdo each other in the grandeur of their games. When the Roman state shifted to imperial governance with the reign of Augustus, it became the domain of the emperors to sponsor games for the people in Rome. In his *Res Gestae*, Augustus attests to the number of beast hunts that he offered, and to the number of wild animals that were slaughtered as a result: *Venationes bestiarum Africanarum meo nomine aut filiorum meorum et nepotum in circo aut in foro aut in amphitheatris populo dedi sexiens et viciens, quibus confecta sunt bestiarum circiter tria millia et quingentae.*⁵

In his account, Augustus lists the circus, the forum, and amphitheatres (most, if not all, were likely to have been temporary structures) as the locations of his *venationes*. It is the limited space of these locales that distinguishes arena *venationes* from hunts that took place in the countryside or within *vivaria*. Within such confines, the animals were trapped and forced to engage with hunters. The situation was similar to what is today termed a “canned hunt” – where an animal is released into a confined area so that the hunter is virtually guaranteed a kill. Hunting in the countryside, or even within a *vivarium*, meant that the animals had a much better chance of fleeing with their lives, and certainly much more effort was required of the hunters, who had to track down and approach the beasts. These sorts of hunts therefore necessitated a higher degree of skill on the hunter’s part, and they could be considered as having been “fairer” (although this was arguably less the case within *vivaria*).

It is unclear to what degree the Romans recognized this distinction, even as the emperors began to hunt at the end of the first century AD. As we have seen, they engaged in hunting for a

⁵ Augustus *Res Gestae* 22: I gave for the people hunts of African beasts, either in my name or in the names of my children and grandchildren, in the circus, in the forum, or in amphitheatres, twenty-six times, in which approximately three thousand and five hundred of the animals were killed.

variety of reasons: personal enjoyment, the desire to demonstrate *virtus*, and, eventually, the desire to adhere to the evolving imperial precedent of hunting. However it is almost a certainty that not all emperors wished to hunt, and that some even sought to use arena *venationes* as an alternative. Virtually every Roman emperor sponsored arena *venationes*, which pitted wild animals against *bestiarii*, but in this context the *principes* cannot be viewed as being anything other than patrons.

Such imperial patronage was important in pleasing the urban mob, and did its part to demonstrate the wealth, power, and munificence of the emperor, but it did nothing to burnish the image of the emperor as a hunter. For him to be considered that, it naturally follows that he had to take a leading part in the hunt. To attempt otherwise would have opened him up to the sort of derision that Ammianus displays toward those senators who boasted of their hunting prowess after their slaves had done all the work for them: *Pars eorum si agros visuri processerunt longius, aut alienis laboribus venaturi, Alexandri Magni itinera se putant aequiperasse, vel Caesaris...*⁶

A few emperors chose to slaughter animals in the arena personally, thereby taking on the role of *bestiarii* themselves. Our sources name two, Domitian and Commodus. Domitian, as shown in the previous chapter, enjoyed shooting animals with his bow in an arena at his Alban retreat.⁷ It is unclear whether he did this in an attempt to attain the prestige that came with hunting without having to actually “rough it” in the countryside, or if he just preferred to shoot trapped prey. Given that at this point in the Principate no emperor is yet attested to have taken any interest in hunting, the latter may seem the more likely explanation (although this is simply conjecture).

⁶ Ammianus 28.4.18: Some of them, if they proceeded a rather long way off to see their estates, or to hunt with the labors of others, think themselves to have equaled the journeys of Alexander the Great, or of Caesar...

⁷ Suetonius *Domitian* 19; Cassius Dio 67.14.3; Juvenal 4.99 (echoes that he fought in an arena and not in a *vivarium*).

Regardless of his intentions, Domitian is nevertheless criticized for his actions in Pliny the Younger's Panegyric to Trajan.⁸ As noted above, given that Domitian is the first emperor for whom evidence survives of a preference for participating in arena hunts, and the fact that his reign almost immediately preceded Trajan's (Nerva's short rule notwithstanding), he was almost certainly foremost in Pliny's mind when he spoke of emperors who used *domitas fractasque claustris feras*. The passage suggests that hunting in arenas was an inferior substitute for actual hunting. Pliny claims that arena animals are tamed through their captivity, and that it necessitates a higher degree of skill and dedication to track wild beasts in the countryside, rather than to pin them in enclosed amphitheatres.

However, close attention should also be paid to Pliny's motives for making the comparison between Domitian and Trajan. The obvious purpose of his *Panegyricus* was to praise Trajan, and an effective means of flattering a new ruler is to contrast him favorably with his immediate predecessor (again, ignoring Nerva). The worse that Pliny makes Domitian out to be, the better that Trajan comes off in comparison. Therefore, it is understandable that Pliny would have seized the chance to belittle Domitian's arena activities so as to give Trajan higher praise. It is therefore difficult to determine to what degree Pliny's statements about arena hunting held true outside of the context of his speech to Trajan and the Senate.

Similar problems arise when examining Commodus. Dio Cassius describes the emperor's arena hunts in no uncertain terms: Καὶ ἐν μὲν τῇ πρώτῃ ἡμέρᾳ ἄρκτους τε ἑκατὸν αὐτὸς μόνος, ἄνωθεν ἀπὸ τῆς περιβολῆς τῆς κρηπίδος ἀκοντίζων, ἀπέκτεινε. διείληπτο γὰρ τὸ θέατρον πᾶν...⁹ Further reports survive in Herodian and the *Historia Augusta*.¹⁰ However, although substantial

⁸ Plin. *Panegyricus* 81.4: quoted above, pg. 27.

⁹ Dio 73.18: On the first day he killed a hundred bears all by himself, shooting from above the railing of the edge; For the whole amphitheatre had been divided...

¹⁰ e.g. HA *Commodus* 12; Herodian 1.15.

literary evidence attests to Commodus' actions in the arena, it is still difficult to judge the popular reaction. Cassius Dio reports the reaction of one senator:

ἀγωνιζομένου δ' αὐτοῦ ἡμεῖς μὲν οἱ βουλευταὶ ἀεὶ μετὰ τῶν ἱππέων συνεφοιτῶμεν, χωρὶς ἢ ὅτι Πομπηϊανὸς Κλαύδιος ὁ γέρων οὐκ ἔστιν ὅτε ἀπήντησεν, ἀλλὰ τοὺς μὲν υἱεῖς ἔπεμπεν, αὐτὸς δὲ οὐδέποτε ἀφίκετο, αἰρούμενος ἀποσφαγῆναι ἐπὶ τούτῳ μᾶλλον ἢ τὸν αὐτοκράτορα τὸν τοῦ Μάρκου παῖδα ἐπιδεῖν τοιαῦτα ποιοῦντα.¹¹

Although Commodus' actions in the arena are not contrasted with rural hunting, as Domitian's are, it is nonetheless telling that Claudius Pompeianus was so ashamed to witness them that he was willing to risk imperial displeasure (which under Commodus could and did have dire consequences).

It is difficult to estimate how widely Pompeianus' view was shared by others. Like Pliny above, Dio offers the perspective of a single Roman aristocrat. Although Pompeianus stayed away, Dio himself and other senators appear to have regularly attended. They must have done so out of fear and a desire to win the emperor's good graces, and some perhaps might have genuinely enjoyed the spectacle. What cannot be assumed, however, is that all necessarily shared Pompeianus' opinion regarding Commodus' behavior.

In fact, there is testimony from Ammianus in the fourth century to suggest that at least some Romans were not bothered by the difference between an arena hunt and a rural *venatio*. Ammianus directly compares Commodus with Gratian, and even states that the former used amphitheatres while the latter preferred *vivaria*.¹² Ammianus appears to be likening Gratian to Commodus, even though he specifically states that they "hunted" in different venues. Were he prejudiced against arena hunting, he likely would have remarked upon it in some manner. Rather, his focus appears to be on the fact that both men were so engrossed in their hunting

¹¹ Dio 73.20: When the emperor was fighting, we senators together with the equestrians always attended. Only Claudius Pompeianus the elder never appeared, but sent his sons, while remaining away himself; for he preferred even to be killed for this rather than to witness the emperor, the son of Marcus, doing such things.

¹² Ammianus Marcellinus XXXI.10.19: quoted above, pg. 42.

pastimes that neither gave much thought to the matters of state; he is therefore condemning both for negligence.

Finally, none of these authors appears to report on the reception of such arena hunts by the Roman mob. Given the overwhelmingly aristocratic nature of the sources, this is unsurprising, but some information concerning Commodus does appear in Herodian:

Μέχρι μὲν οὖν τούτων, εἰ καὶ βασιλείας τὰ πραττόμενα ἦν ἀλλότρια πλὴν ἀνδρείας καὶ εὐστοχίας, παρὰ τοῖς δημώδεσιν εἶχε τινα χάριν. ἐπεὶ δὲ καὶ γυμνὸς ἐς τὸ ἀμφιθέατρον εἰσῆλθεν ὅπλα τε ἀναλαβὼν ἐμονομάχει, τότε σκυθρωπὸν εἶδεν ὁ δῆμος θέαμα, τὸν εὐγενὴ Ῥωμαίων βασιλέα μετὰ τοσαῦτα τρόπαια πατρός τε καὶ προγόνων οὐκ ἐπὶ βαρβάρους ὅπλα λαμβάνοντα στρατιωτικὰ ἢ Ῥωμαίων ἀρχῇ πρέποντα, καθυβρίζοντα δὲ τὸ ἀξίωμα αἰσχίστῳ καὶ μεμιασμένῳ σχήματι.¹³

The passage demonstrates a mixed reception for Commodus. On the one hand, his beast slayings in the arena were seen (presumably by Herodian) as unbecoming of an emperor; on the other, those very actions appear to have won him some popularity with the crowd (although the general populace appears to have drawn the line with gladiatorial fights). So the likelihood is that the emperor's actions were variously interpreted by different groups of people. It might have offended the aristocratic sensibilities of senators like Pliny or Pompeianus to see an emperor such as Domitian or Commodus hunting in an arena instead of in the countryside, but to the urban mob it likely made for great entertainment, especially if the *princeps* was a talented marksman.

It is also important to note that while Roman aristocrats and perhaps soldiers in the army (when the emperor was on campaign) might have been aware of when an emperor went off to

¹³ Herodian 1.15.7: As far as these activities are concerned, even if his conduct, apart from his courage and his marksmanship, was hardly becoming for an emperor, he still held some favor among the people. But when he came into the amphitheater naked, took up arms, and fought as a gladiator, the people saw a sad spectacle, a nobly born emperor of the Romans, whose fathers and forebears had won many victories, not taking up arms against barbarians or showing himself to be worthy of the Roman empire, but disgracing his high position by degrading and disgusting exhibitions.

hunt in the countryside or in a *vivarium*, the majority of the population would not. Imperial hunting propaganda potentially shown in coinage¹⁴ would have been the most effective means of disseminating this information to the general populace, but no testimony survives to suggest how much thought the everyday Roman or provincial gave to imperial hunting activities. Rather, it seems that just as hunting was an activity almost exclusively reserved to societal elites, it was also likely to have been the case that so too were any thoughts of the hunt.

Difficult as it is to track the progression of imperial hunting through the sources, it is no less difficult to form a picture of what contemporaries thought of it, and how they compared it to hunting in the arena. In all likelihood, the majority probably never thought about it. Perhaps the best argument for the case that arena and countryside hunts were different is how few emperors are attested in the sources as having taken part in the former. Domitian and Commodus appear to be the only two. If more emperors had thought that killing beasts in the arena was equivalent to hunting in the countryside and also earned them credit, it is likely that more would have chosen the controlled and less dangerous option, especially if they did not enjoy “roughing it” in woodlands or mountainous terrain. This, coupled with the fact that imperial hunts became something of a norm over the course of the Empire’s duration, perhaps demonstrates that emperors did not have a preferable alternative.

Hunting and Conspiracy

The imperial hunts of the Roman emperors developed from centuries of cultural inheritance and exchange. As outlined in Chapter 1, three major societies influenced the Roman hunting tradition: Greece, Persia, and Macedon. The Roman imperial hunts subsequently derived

¹⁴ See Chapter 2.

from those of the broader aristocracy. Such interconnection can also be found in the tradition of ancient historiography. One recurring feature in the literary sources regarding hunting is its common association with political conspiracy and plots against rulers. An early, notable example is Alexander the Great, whose passion for hunting led directly to a plot against his life:

*Igitur Hermolaus, puer nobilis ex regia cohorte, cum aprum telo occupasset, quem rex ferire destinaverat, iussu eius verberibus affectus est. Quam ignominiam aegre ferens deflere apud Sostratum coepit. Ex eadem cohorte erat Sostratus, amore eius ardens; qui cum laceratum corpus, in quo deperibat, intueretur, forsitan olim ob aliam quoque causam regi infestus, iuvenem sua sponte iam motum, data fide acceptaque, perpulit, ut occidendi regem consilium secum iniret.*¹⁵

That this story features in both Curtius Rufus and Arrian's narratives is notable.

Alexander's determination that no one keep him from his quarry led him to punish one of his pages for getting to a boar before him. To Hermolaus, this was a grievous enough humiliation that he and his lover began a coup against the king. Therefore, a direct relation between the hunt and the subsequent conspiracy can be traced, the former being the trigger.

Several such stories also occur in Livy. The first goes back to the early monarchical period of Rome, and therefore, in contrast to the page conspiracy of Alexander's time, it is almost certainly fiction, but still illustrative. After the death of the king Ancus Marcius, Tarquinius Priscus schemed to maneuver the former's sons out of the way so that he might be chosen as the next king. Livy relates that *iam prope puberem aetatem erant. Eo magis Tarquinius instare, ut quam primum comitia regi creando fierent. Quibus indictis sub tempus*

¹⁵ Curtius Rufus 8.6.7-8: So then, Hermolaus, a high-born boy belonging to the royal entourage, because he had attacked a wild boar with his spear, a boar which the king had determined to strike, by his order was afflicted with wounds. Bearing the disgrace with difficulty, he began to complain to Sostratus. Sostratus was a member of the same entourage, and he was in love with him; when he, perhaps also already hostile to the king for some other reason, saw Hermolaus' lacerated body, he induced him (who was already stirred up on his own account), with a promise both given and received, to join with him in a plot to kill the king. ; cf. Arrian 4.13.

*pueros venatum ablegavit.*¹⁶ Tarquin sent Ancus' sons on a hunting expedition so that they would not be present at the election for the next king, thus opening the path for his own advancement. Although not a coup or assassination attempt, the steps that Tarquin took to achieve power did exploit hunting.

The second example of this motif to be found in Livy occurs during the Second Punic War. While Hannibal moved about in Italy following his early victories at Trebia, Trasimene, and Cannae, members of some communities sought to ally with him against Rome. At Tarentum, several noblemen conspired to deliver their town to Hannibal and his army: *Ex iis tredecim fere nobiles iuvenes Tarentini coniuraverunt, quorum principes Nico et Philemenus erant. Hi priusquam aliquid moverent conloquendum cum Hannibale rati, nocte per speciem venandi urbe egressi ad eum proficiscuntur...*¹⁷ Here, hunting was used as the pretext for the members of the conspiracy to leave town without attracting suspicion.

Two Roman emperors are also described as targeted by conspirators while they were hunting. The first is Hadrian, early in his reign.¹⁸ The other Roman emperor that the sources attest as having been plotted against while hunting is Constantine.¹⁹ Additionally, Tacitus, writing about a first century A.D. Parthian king, Vardanes I, asserts that he was assassinated while on a hunt.²⁰

¹⁶ Livy 1.35.2: Now Ancus' sons were nearly of age. Because of that, Tarquin insisted that an election for a new king happen as soon as possible. When these things were announced, just before the time [of the election], Tarquin sent the boys away to hunt.

¹⁷ Livy 25.8: From these some thirteen young noblemen of Tarentum formed a conspiracy, its leaders being Nico and Philemenus. Before these men could stir up anything, they thought that matters should be discussed with Hannibal, and so, leaving the city on the pretence of going hunting, they set off at night to see him.

¹⁸ Dio 69.2.5: quoted above, pg. (INSERT).

¹⁹ Aurelius Victor (Pseudo) 41.22 and Zosimus 2.42.2: quoted above, pg. 41.

²⁰ Tacitus, *Annals* 11.10.

The recurring theme of conspiracies arising during hunts is significant, but caution should be exercised not to interpret them merely as an artificial literary motif. At least some of these instances appear to have actually occurred.

Instead, a more rewarding approach would be to consider unifying elements of the accounts. In each, the hunts are undertaken by upper class individuals, be they kings, emperors, or simply local aristocrats. In the three societies mentioned—Macedonian, Parthian, and Roman—hunting was a common enough activity of the privileged classes. Hunting requires that an individual leave home for an extended period of time (at least a day). It was therefore an ideal time to plot against a ruler, and the risk certainly must have caused anxiety to those who chose to pursue hunting.

In the case of Nico and Philemenus, who chose to side with Hannibal in the Second Punic War, hunting served the opposite purpose. It allowed them to deliberately remove themselves from observation by their fellow townsmen, enabling them to go off and negotiate with the Carthaginians out of the view of their peers. Hunting provided an excellent cover, since it was an aristocratic pastime. All of this, therefore, illustrates another political dimension to hunting, one that was exploited by conspirators throughout Antiquity.

Conclusion

The hunts of the Caesars developed from a long tradition of aristocratic hunting that spanned multiple cultures in Antiquity. Taking inspiration from the Greeks, Persians, and Macedonians, the ascendant Roman aristocracy of the Middle and Late Republic imported the various practices and traditions that they encountered in the Hellenistic East. *Vivaria* were built in Italy, and hunting became a topic for discussion in literature and for expression in art and sculpture.

After the Roman Republic shifted to the Principate, it is a century or so before we hear of a *princeps* beginning to undertake *venationes* of his own. Even then, this was clearly a matter of personal preference, with no imperial precedent clearly established until at least the late second century. Hadrian created the model of a hunter-emperor, and yet no successor appears to have gone to great pains to attempt to match his prowess (which some considered excessive in any case). Hunting was another opportunity for emperors to prove their *virtus*, which became especially important as the military role of the *princeps* became more prominent in the third century and beyond.

A plausible imperial ban on lion hunting that arguably dates back at least to Commodus' reign confirms that at some stage hunting did become an activity linked to the position of *Princeps*. Even so, it is likely that not all emperors hunted, even in the later history of the Empire. The extant sources certainly do not attest that every emperor hunted, although they cannot be expected to offer a complete picture. Even so, there is little reason to doubt that hunting became increasingly associated with emperors, to the point that it was automatically assumed of them, whether or not they did hunt.

By and large the emperors appear to have chosen to hunt either in rural areas or in artificially constructed *vivaria*. Domitian and Commodus were the exception in deciding to kill

their prey in arenas, although it is unclear if they did so in an attempt to find a safer alternative to rural *venationes*. Regardless, their practice does not appear to have appealed to other emperors. Imperial hunting also appears to have occasionally provided the opportunity for a conspiracy; it was easier to plot against the emperor while he was out for the day (or longer) pursuing wild game. These incidents find a place among similar occurrences attested throughout ancient historiography.

A focused and thorough study of Roman imperial *venationes* is a not topic that modern scholarship has addressed until now. While undeniably a minor aspect of the emperors' lifestyle and image, its study nonetheless illuminates a revealing and instructive dimension of Roman culture.

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