Veritatis Amicitiaeque Causa

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Elephants, Pompey, and the Reports of Popular Displeasure in 55 BC

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In the late summer of 55 BC, residents of Rome celebrated the inauguration of the first permanent stone theater in their city. Construction of the theater had been commissioned by Gnaeus Pompeius Magnus, the powerful military leader and politician who was serving his second consulship in that year. For the inauguration, Pompey had ordered lavish dramatic spectacles in the new theater, and animal killings (*venationes*) in the circus. We have five ancient accounts of these *venationes*, ranging in date from 55 BC to about AD 200. Three of the authors report that the spectators were distressed by the suffering of the elephants who were being killed on the final day of these events. For modern readers, this record of humane sentiment is a comforting note in an otherwise bleak history of Romans abusing animals for entertainment because it seems to indicate that the Roman enthusiasm for watching the infliction of pain and death was, on some occasions at least, tempered by compassion for the victims. However, there are no other reports of spectator sympathy for arena animals on any other occasion. We cannot, therefore, from this one record, draw any conclusions about the frequency of compassionate responses by Roman audiences; but we may be intrigued about why this one display of public distress at Pompey's *venationes* engaged the interest of both contemporary and later writers. In this paper, I want to examine the significance which the events of that day may have had both for those who attended and for those who recorded them. I believe that the ancient reports tell us more about a tradition of anti-Pompeian commentary than about humane sentiment among the Roman public.

Pompey had ordered the production of the *venationes* to enhance the pleasure which he expected the Roman people to experience at the opening of his theater. To finance the construction of the theater, Pompey used the booty from his successful eastern military campaigns, for which he celebrated a dazzling triumph in 61 BC. The idea of building the theater had come to him while he was visiting Mytilene on his return from these campaigns (62 BC), and was delighted to hear his exploits glorified in the theater there. His theater was to be similar in design, but larger and grander (Plu. *Pomp.* 42.4). *Triumphatores* had traditionally used war booty to provide benefits for the inhabitants of Rome and thus enable them to savor the victories achieved by their army. The most common benefits were public entertainments, banquets, and distributions of money or gifts, but *triumphatores* also underwrote the building of religious structures.[1] Pompey's theater was, of course, a structure intended for secular use, but to comply with tradition, he also commissioned the design of a temple dedicated to Venus Victrix, Venus the Victorious, a deity who had helped ensure military victory for the Romans. The temple was built at the top of the theater auditorium, whose rows of seating thus appeared to be grand steps leading up to the temple.[2] According to Tertullian, in order to avoid condemnation Pompey called his building not a theater, but a temple of Venus under which there were tiers of seats for spectacles: *non theatrum, sed Veneris templum nuncupavit, cui subiecimus, inquit, gradus spectaculorum* (*De Spect.* 10.5). Most people, however, knew that the real purpose of the construction was to provide a permanent site for people to assemble for the dramatic spectacles (*ludi scaenici*) which the state produced several times a year as part of its public entertainments.

The construction of the theater had undoubtedly been controversial, at least among the senatorial class. Tacitus reports

[1]Veyne (235–36) discusses the benefactions of *triumphatores*.

[2]The design of Pompey's theater-temple is reported by Suetonius, *Claud.* 21, and Aulus Gellius 10.1.7. Pliny (*NH* 8.7.20) identifies Venus Victrix as the deity. For the conjunction of theaters and temples, see Hanson.

that Pompey was censured by his elders (*Ann.* 14.20). Cicero's opposition may perhaps be judged from his silence. Nowhere does he comment on the progress of the construction; by contrast, the basilica project of Aemilius Paullus is among the news of Rome which Cicero reports to Atticus in a letter of 54 BC (*Att.* 4.16.8). The idea of a permanent entertainment site had long troubled members of the senatorial class, so much so that previous attempts to build one had been scuttled. In 154 BC, for example, work had begun on a theater, but in 151 the Senate decided to tear down the project because it was "useless and harmful to public morals."[3] Moral decay was not, however, the only or even the main reason for the senatorial opposition to a permanent theater. A more compelling reason was a fear that gatherings of lower-class people—who were considered irrational and unpredictable—in the emotionally charged atmosphere of entertainments posed a considerable threat to public order. (There was, of course, a connection made between the notion of moral decay and the notion of acting against senatorial control, the latter being perceived as a manifestation of the former.) Nonetheless, state sponsored entertainments had originated early in Rome's history as thanksgiving celebrations offered to the gods in return for their support in military campaigns or in ending epidemics or famines. The religious element of these events made their production obligatory; any lapse might result in the loss of divine protection. Moreover, by the late republican period, public entertainments had become a key ingredient of the Roman political process because politicians recognized that they could use these popular events to influence the opinions of urban crowds.[4] The production of the

[3]Livy *Ep.* 48: *inutile et nociturum publicis moribus*; see also Val. Max. 2.4.2. On the theater as a threat to public morality, see also Tac. *Ann.* 14.20.

[4]See Hopkins 14–20. On the considerable direct influence of the urban plebs on the outcome of elections and the assignment of provinces and military commands, and the need for aristocratic politicians therefore to curry favor with the plebs, see Vanderbroeck 163–64; Yakobson (1992) and (1995); and Morstein-Marx. These studies contradict Veyne's assertion (259–61) that popular favor was a *reflection* of political glory

events was one of the duties of the aediles, and funding came from the state treasury. However, aediles with aspirations for higher political office were willing to add a supplement to the production budget from their own private funds in order to provide more extravagant spectacles and thus ingratiate themselves with voters. In a passage lamenting the waste of private money on public entertainments, Cicero writes that it had become a custom in Rome to demand sumptuousness from aediles (*Off.* 2.16.57).[5]

He himself had produced three sets of entertainments (*ludi*) during his aedileship of 69 because he knew that they delighted people (*delectant homines ludi*, *Mur.* 40). Plutarch reports that Caesar, recognizing the political value of expenditure, spent lavishly on spectacles and banquets during his aedileship of 65 BC and obliterated ("flooded out") his predecessors' reputations for generosity (*Caes.* 5. 8–9; cf. Suet. *Jul.* 10.1). In addition, politically ambitious individuals and families frequently sponsored special (one-time) entertainments entirely with private funds, allegedly to honor past deeds or deceased family members, but in reality to keep their name before the public and win political support for future campaigns.[6] In 65 BC, for example, Caesar produced a very expensive gladiatorial show to commemorate his father, who had been dead twenty years (Dio 37.8.1). The urban masses, for their part, used their presence at spectacles as an opportunity to demonstrate loudly and clearly their opinions about the politicians and their policies. In the rigidly stratified society of ancient Rome, where a small number of people possessed most of the wealth and power, opportunities for free expression by the lower classes were

rather than a means to attain it, and that the euergetism of the Roman oligarchy was based primarily on a desire "to be loved by the plebs."

[5]In *Pro Milone* 35, Cicero states that Milo used up three patrimonies to charm the masses with spectacles. Livy (7.2.13), comparing the humble origins of *ludi scaenici* to the opulent productions of his own time, claims that in his day even wealthy kingdoms could scarcely support the "insanity."

[6]Vanderbroeck (18–19) maintains that, because social status was not hereditary, members of the Roman upper class constantly had "to demonstrate their serviceability to the *res publica*."

rare. However, the relaxed atmosphere of the spectacles, and perhaps the safety which the lower classes felt in their assembled numbers, created situations where the crowd displayed its approval or disapproval with no apparent restraint. The upper class, in turn, tolerated these activities as legitimate expressions of popular will. Thus the entertainment sites served important functions for both the upper and lower classes, but functions which were in a sense contradictory because the rulers, in order to gain and retain control of the state, needed to yield control, albeit temporarily, to the masses. Popular approbation and condemnation were carefully noted by upper class politicians. In his discussion of how popular expression at public spectacles in Rome was valued as the "verdict" of the entire nation, Bell writes: "When the crowd shouted, its noise was usually read without nuance as a single unanimous force."[7]

In *Ad Atticum* 2.19 (59 BC), Cicero comments that popular opinion (*populi sensus*) about Pompey could best be discerned at a theater and at spectacles.[8] He then gives two examples. At a gladiatorial show, Pompey and his allies were insulted with hisses. And at a theatrical show, the audience asked an actor to repeat again and again the line *nostra miseria tu es magnus*, "to our misfortune, you are great." (*Magnus*, "great," was understood as a pun on Pompey's cognomen.) Then to the applause of the entire audience, the actor continued with this line: *eandem virtutem istam veniet tempus cum graviter gemes*, "a time will come when you will sorely lament this very strength of yours." In *Pro Sestio* 55–59, Cicero recounts a situation at a theater in 57 BC. The Senate had just passed a resolution to recall him from exile and, according to Cicero, the people were delighted. When the senators appeared soon afterward in the theater, they were greeted with applause by the spectators. But when Cicero's arch enemy Clodius arrived, the people lashed out at him with curses and rude gestures. The activity on stage was often less important than the activity in the seating

[7]Bell 21.

[8]Cf. *Sest.* 50 (106): *Etenim tribus locis significari maxime de re publica populi romani iudicium ac voluntas potest: contione, comitiis ludorum gladiatorumque consessu.*

area. Morstein-Marx, discussing the process of canvassing for votes, writes that the "supplication" of the populace "can usefully be regarded as a performance before the audience of the Roman People, which observed and judged its aspiring leaders go through their parts and delivered its verdict at the *comitia*."[9] At *ludi*, politicians faced an audience eager to announce its verdict immediately and vociferously, and just as eager to observe how the politicians would respond, that is, how they would "act." In *In Pisonem* 65, which Cicero delivered shortly before the inauguration of Pompey's theater, he taunts Piso.

> Fac huius odii tanti ac tam universi periculum—si audes. Instant post hominum memoriam apparatissimi magnificentissimique ludi, quales non modo numquam fuerunt, sed ne quo modo fieri quidem posthac possint possum ullo pacto suspicari. Da te populo. Committe ludis. Sibilum metuis? . . . Ne acclametur times?
>
> Take this test of the great and universal hatred against you—if you dare. The most lavish and magnificent games in the memory of mankind are about to take place, games the likes of which not only have never before taken place, but also I cannot at all believe can ever in the future take place. Entrust yourself to the people. Venture into the games. Are you afraid of hisses? . . . Do you fear that you will not be applauded?

What is difficult for us to ascertain now is how spontaneous the crowd's responses were, that is, to what extent the opinions of the lower class were actually shaped by the upper class, and to what degree politicians manipulated the crowds to produce a favorable response for themselves, or an unfavorable one for their opponents. In *Pro Sestio* 54 (115), Cicero admits that paid agitators were

[9]Morstein-Marx (forthcoming).

sometimes planted in the audience to stir up the spectators.[10] During the political instability of the late republican period, the custom of free expression at entertainment sites posed two threats to the senatorial class. On the one hand, it seemed to confer too much power on the volatile lower classes, who might slip out of control; on the other hand, it created opportunities for unscrupulous politicians to manipulate the collective behavior of the audience for their own purposes. In either case, the competition for popular favor endangered traditional political institutions.

Pompey's plan for a permanent theater appears to have been a bid for the popular favor which he thought would elevate him above his senatorial colleagues and secure for him enduring supreme power in the Roman state. Consider his position at this time.[11] He had earned a reputation as Rome's most capable military leader. His quest for *gloria* had begun at an early age. In 81 BC, when he was only twenty-five years old and had never held a magistracy, he was granted an extraordinary *imperium* to eradicate Marian forces in Africa (Plut. *Pomp.* 11.1). He completed this assignment so successfully that his jubilant troops hailed him as Magnus ("Great"), an epithet which he continued to use as a cognomen (Plut. *Pomp.* 13.5). Even more remarkably, he was awarded a triumph, becoming the first *eques* to enjoy the privilege (Plut. *Pomp.* 14; Cic. *Man.* 61). Plutarch notes that Pompey's youth and his non-senatorial status contributed greatly to his popularity

[10]Cicero's claim that the responses the agitators provoked were weak and easily distinguished from honest ones can be viewed with some skepticism because his purpose in this passage is to establish that the responses of the audience were spontaneous. Plutarch (*Pomp.* 48.7) offers a vivid description of Clodius and his chorus of anti-Pompeians at Milo's trial in 56 BC. Vanderbroeck (61–62 and 143–44) discusses claqueurs at spectacles, trials and assemblies.

[11]Pompey's career is examined by van Ooteghem; Gelzer; Rawson; Gruen; Leach; Seager; Greenhalgh (1980) and (1981). The portrait which emerges from these studies is one of irreconcilable features, of a man who wanted to work within the system, but yet to dominate it, to be accepted by his senatorial colleagues, but yet to be preeminent, to support the constitution, but yet to have it bent again and again to allow him extraordinary power.

among the masses (Plut. *Pomp.* 14.6). He celebrated his second triumph in 71, for his victories in Spain against Sertorius (Plut. *Pomp.* 22.1). As Gruen notes, "the stunning rise to power and authority of Pompey the Great constituted the single most important political fact of the 60s."[12] After his consulship in 70 BC, with Crassus as his colleague, he was again granted two extraordinary *imperia*, the first in 67 BC (*lex Gabinia*), against Mediterranean pirates (Plut. *Pomp.* 25 and 26; Cic. *Man.* 44 ; Dio 36.23–37). "An immediate consequence of Pompey's appointment was a substantial fall in grain prices, to the unrestrained joy of the populace."[13] The second *imperium*, in 66 BC (*lex Manilia*), was against Mithridates, king of Pontus in Asia Minor (Plut. *Pomp.* 30; Cic. *Man.* 5 and 70; Dio 36.43 and 44). Once again Pompey proved that he was a brilliant general and, in his settlement of the eastern territories, a skillful strategist. His third triumph, celebrated in 61 BC, was an extravagant affair. "The event was a consummate piece of propaganda, meticulously stage-managed to record indelibly in the imaginations of the Roman audience an image of Pompey's power and majesty."[14] So numerous were Pompey's achievements that, even though the triumph occupied two days, there was still not time to exhibit displays of all of them. Pompey boasted that he had extended the boundaries of the Roman empire to the ends of the earth, had substantially increased the tax revenues coming into Rome from its imperial territories, and was now also bringing in an enormous amount of booty (Diod. 40.4.1; Plut. *Pomp.* 45.3). Plutarch states that this event was so unusual because Pompey was celebrating his third triumph over a third continent; the first honored his victory in Africa, the second, Europe (Spain), and now the third, Asia (Minor), so that he seemed to have brought the whole world into his three triumphs (Plut. *Pomp.* 45). Pompey was only about forty-five years old at this time and he reminded some of

[12]Gruen 268.

[13]*Ibid.*, 436.

[14]Beacham 157. Primary sources for the triumph are Plutarch, *Pomp.* 45; Vell. Pat. 2.40.3 and 5; Flor. 2.13.9.

Alexander the Great. Writing about 150 years after the event and therefore with the wisdom of hindsight, Plutarch declares:

> ὡς ὤνητό γ' ἂν ἐνταῦθα τοῦ βίου παυσάμενος, ἄχρι οὗ τὴν Ἀλεξάνδρου τύχην ἔσχεν· ὁ δὲ ἐπέκεινα χρόνος αὐτῷ τὰς μὲν εὐτυχίας ἤνεγκεν ἐπιφθόνους, ἀνηκέστους δὲ τὰς δυστυχίας.
>
> How Pompey would have benefited if his life had ended at this point when he enjoyed the good fortune of Alexander. For the time which followed brought him only successes that made him liable to envy, and failures that could not be remedied. (*Pomp.* 46.1)

Whether it was envy or a fear of Pompey's ambition which motivated his fellow senators, they blocked several of his projects, and he found that the support he had carefully assembled was eroding. Therefore in 60 BC he formed a political alliance with Caesar and Crassus and, with their combined resources, they were able to force their will upon the state. The cost of their strong-arm tactics was, however, unpopularity with both the senatorial and lower classes. Reference has been made above to the occasion in 59 when audiences at theatrical and gladiatorial spectacles expressed their disapproval (*Att.* 2.19.2–3).[15] In another letter to Atticus (2.21), written about the same time, Cicero states:

> Cum diu occulte suspirasset, postea iam gemere, ad extremum vero loqui omnes et clamare coeperunt. Itaque

[15]Seager (94–95) contends that Pompey was the prime target of popular criticism because the public saw him "as the senior partner and chief beneficiary of the coalition, and so assigned the greatest responsibility to him. But it also reflects the opposition's knowledge that of the three Pompeius was by temperament by far the most concerned about public opinion."

> ille amicus noster insolens infamiae, semper in laude versatus, circumfluens gloria, deformatus corpore, fractus animo, quo se conferat, nescit.
>
> Although the common people had sighed for a long time in secret, now at last they all began to groan, and finally to speak out and to shout. Therefore that friend of ours, Pompey, unaccustomed to unpopularity, always surrounded by praise, overflowing with glory, now disfigured in body and broken in spirit, does not know what to do with himself.

In the years between 60 and 55, Pompey, the man whom Sallust described as "moderate about all other things except unrestricted power" (*modestus ad alia omnia nisi dominationem*, *H.* 2.17 in *OCT*), suffered several humiliating defeats in the courts, assemblies and Senate house.[16] Nonetheless in 57 BC he was granted (despite Clodius' vigorous opposition) a five-year appointment to oversee the vital grain supply, at a time when food shortages had provoked a riot in a theater and attacks on the Senate (Cic. *Att.* 4.1.6, *Dom.* 5–14; Dio 39.9.2). Pompey engaged in his commission so zealously that he filled the markets with an abundance of grain, a feat which surely garnered the approval of the fickle urban populace (Plut. *Pomp.* 49.4, 50. 1 and 2). The *triumviri* renewed their alliance in 56 and agreed to secure the election of Pompey and Crassus as consuls for 55. To accomplish this goal, they used obstruction and violence, first to delay the date of the election and then to intimidate opposing candidates and hostile voters (Plut. *Pomp.* 52. 1 and 2, *Crass.* 15, *Cat.* 41; Dio 39.31). Once elected, Pompey and Crassus pushed through legislation granting themselves extraordinary provincial commands for a five year period, Crassus in Syria, Pompey in the two Spains and Africa (*lex Trebonia*: Plut. *Pomp.* 52.3, *Cat.* 43, *Caes.* 28; Dio 39.33–36, and Vell. Pat. 2.48.1, mention only the

[16]Gruen (111) itemizes Pompey's long "string of frustrations."

Spains). Their apparent contempt for traditional institutions angered and frightened many people, some of whom angrily pelted statues of Pompey after a heated Senate debate (Plut. *Cat.* 43). While Crassus made preparations to travel to Syria, Pompey assigned his provinces to legates so that he could remain closely involved in political developments in Rome. Their triumvirate colleague, Caesar, was still in Gaul, accumulating military glory and booty; his successes threatened to overshadow Pompey's reputation.[17] It is against the background of these events that we must view Pompey's construction of a permanent entertainment venue.

In addition to the theater and temple, the building complex included a meeting place for the Senate, with a highly visible statue of Pompey (at the foot of which Caesar was assassinated in 44: Plut. *Caes.* 66; Cic. *Div.* 2.9.23), and a large park which was open to the public and adorned with a beautiful colonnade (Ov. *Ars* 1.67, 3.387; Prop. 2.32.11–12, 4.8.75) and a display of statues and paintings (Plin. *NH* 35.59, 114, 126, 132).[18] Beacham aptly comments that Pompey had built for himself a "continuous triumph."[19] The temple of Venus Victrix, the statue of Pompey in the assembly room, and the displays in the park were perpetual reminders of his outstanding contributions to the Roman state. However, Pompey wanted more than esteem for his past exploits in war. He also wanted to convert his military glory into unassailable political authority by securing durable support from the masses.[20] Greenhalgh notes that Pompey had built "a palace of entertainment

[17]Plut. *Pomp.* 50. Wiseman (12) discusses the competition at Rome for *gloria*, which could be had only at the expense of others, and therefore drew *invidia*. He uses Pompey as an example of "that competitive instinct, that urge to be first and greatest" (7). See also Hopkins (107–16) on competition in Roman political life.

[18]Tacitus (*Ann.* 13.54.3) writes that, in Nero's time, visitors to Rome were taken to Pompey's theater to be shown the greatness of Rome.

[19]Beacham 158.

[20]Pompey was hoping for the impossible. Because it was so bribed by aristocratic munificence, "the urban plebs (or parts of it) . . . was notoriously faithless" (Yakobson [1992] 51).

which would associate his name permanently with pleasure and detract from the glory of whoever happened to put on a show there."[21]

His theater was designed to gather the Roman people together for pleasurable activities during which they would happily express their gratitude and even love for him.[22] The inauguration in 55 was particularly important to Pompey's political efforts, and he therefore spared no expense for the entertainments. Consider Cicero's description of the preparations in the passage from *In Pisonem* quoted above (also *Off.* 2.16.57; and Asc. 1). The plays were selected and staged so as to remind the spectators of Pompey's military successes. In the *Clytemnestra*, for example, a string of 600 mules crossed the stage carrying the booty which the dramatic character Agamemnon had seized at Troy (Cic. *Fam.* 7.1.2).[23] Undoubtedly the Roman audience was prompted to recall Pompey's own magnificent triumphal procession of 61, and his willingness to use his war spoils to build the very theater in which they were now enjoying themselves. The crowd's applause was the satisfying response he had counted on. Of course, he expected this exhilarating situation to be repeated many times, over many years, but later writers describe this moment as a high point of his life, never again matched. Lucan, for example, records the story that on the eve of the fateful battle of Pharsalus (48 BC), Pompey dreamed of his theater:

[21]Greenhalgh (1980) 175.

[22]Vanderbroeck (163) remarks: "The foremost reason for a politician to seek support among the lower citizenry was that it was the only *legitimate* alternative to work his will if agreement among the elite proved impossible." The importance which Pompey placed on displays of approbation in his theater would seem to argue against Vanderbroeck's opinion that collective behavior in the theater and the circus tended to be anti-*popularis* (77–80, 143–44).

[23]Six years later, shortly before the battle of Pharsalus, L. Domitius Ahenobarbus and many others, complaining that Pompey wanted the power of a monarch, derisively called him Agamemnon and king of kings (Plut. *Pomp.* 67.3, *Caes.* 41.2; App. *BC* 2.67).

> Nam Pompeiani visus sibi sede theatri
> innumeram effigiem Romanae cernere plebis
> attollique suum laetis ad sidera nomen
> vocibus et plausu cuncos certare sonantes.
>
> (7.7–12)[24]

> He dreamed that he was seated at his own theater, and saw a countless throng of Roman people, and heard his name being raised to the stars by their happy voices, and the resounding tiers competing in applause.

The story is also recorded by Plutarch, who adds that Pompey dreamed that he was decorating the temple of Venus Victrix with war booty. Plutarch then remarks that the dream could be interpreted as a bad omen because Caesar was a descendant of Venus (*Pomp.* 68.2, also *Caes.* 42.1; and App. *BC* 2.68).[25] In the summer of 55 BC, however, with the crowd's applause ringing in his ears and providing what Bell terms "the validating power of popular judgement"[26] Pompey must have believed that his plan was successful.

Among the inaugural events was an exhibition of animal killings (*venationes*), held in the circus and designed to produce an even more enthusiastic show of crowd support.[27] The Circus Maximus held perhaps ten times more spectators than the new

[24]At 1.131–133, Lucan characterizes Pompey thus: *Famaeque petitor / multa dare in vulgus, totus popularibus auris / impelli, plausuque sui gaudere theatri.*

[25]"Venus Victrix" was the war cry of Caesar's troops at Pharsalus; Pompey's war cry was "Invincible Hercules" (App. *BC* 2.76). Just before the battle of Pharsalus, Caesar vowed a temple to his ancestor, Venus (App. *BC* 2.102). Vanderbroeck (33) astutely observes that, on the eve of this decisive battle, whose victor would emerge as the ruler of Rome, Pompey dreamed not that he was a monarch, but that he had *dignitas* within Roman society.

[26]Bell 18.

[27]Plass (43) observes that "spectators were as important as the show itself, since their attendance in great numbers at a public event *was* the show in a political and social sense."

theater,[28] and *venationes* excited crowds even more than stage entertainments (*ludi scaenici*). The word *venatio* means "hunt," but several different types of events were included in the category of entertainment *venationes*: the display of performing animals, animals killing other animals, and animals being killed by people.[29] Like all entertainments in which animals are victimized, disabled and destroyed by humans, *venationes* appealed because they proved that humans could indeed gain control over the savage and menacing elements of their environment. Although we have no written record of *venationes* before 186 BC, the torture and killing of animals as a public spectacle had a long history in Rome.[30] Ville maintains that urban *venationes* developed in the third century BC and were directly linked to Rome's experiences with Carthage, with hunting practices in north Africa and with the importation of African animals to Italy.[31] However, they probably had an older, indigenous, and agricultural beginning, although the development of some of the events was undoubtedly influenced by the practices of real hunts. In rural areas, people killed animals which threatened their survival by preying on livestock or consuming food plants. And several times a year, the agricultural community gathered together to re-enact and celebrate its divinely-assisted efforts to eradicate species which steal human food. For example, rabbits were killed every year at the state-sponsored spectacles (*ludi*) held in April to honor the goddess Flora, and at the annual festival of Ceres, also in April, foxes were set on fire (Ov. *Fast.* 4.681–682,

[28]Pliny (*NH* 36.115) reports that the theater held 40,000 people, but a figure of less than 20,000 is more probable (Beacham 160). The Circus Maximus held at least 250,000 spectators.

[29]Animals were also used to kill humans; such events (which the Romans also found entertaining) were considered executions of criminals (*damnationes ad bestias*), not *venationes*. See Coleman (1990).

[30]Livy (39.22.2) first uses the word *venationes* to define a spectacle when reporting a slaughter of lions and leopards in 186 BC, but he does not state that this was the first occurrence of such spectacles.

[31]Ville 51–56. On the history of *venationes*, see also Auguet (81–84); Hopkins (11–12); Wiedemann (55–67). D. G. Kyle, *Spectacles of Death in Ancient Rome*, London and New York, 1998, did not reach me in time to be used in this paper.

5.371–372; Mart. 8.67). In urban areas, very few people had personal experience with hunting or the damage to their food supply caused by species like rabbits and foxes, but the *venationes* in arenas allowed them to participate as spectators in the process of pest control, and without risk of injury. The symbolic dimensions of the publicly-witnessed destruction of pest species made the events appealing. The *venationes* provided reassurance that the orderly and rational civilization which the Romans had created could confront a hostile, chaotic, irrational, and therefore dangerous Nature, and subdue it.[32] There were no moral constraints about tormenting and causing pain to the animals because they were "enemies." In fact, their suffering was the penalty they paid for threatening humans (even as human criminals were executed in arenas by very painful methods, such as being attacked by animals). As the Romans expanded their imperial territory during the republican period, they imported to Italy animals from the most remote regions of their empire, and beyond. Now the slaughter of exotic and fierce animals, while still symbolizing human domination over Nature, also signified Roman military and political control over the rest of the world. The capture and long distance transport of these animals entailed enormous expense, considerable danger and careful planning. Thus the apparent ease with which the Romans brought the animals to their city, and the frequency with which they then destroyed them, offered proof that their state was powerful and prosperous, and could afford the costs of bringing pleasure to the urban masses, a pleasure which was in some sense a reward for their superiority to the rest of the world.[33] In addition,

[32]Beagon (153–56) contends that Pliny and many of his fellow Romans believed that Nature is a theater that provides spectacles for mankind. Coleman (1996, 68), discussing spectacles where one (non-human) species killed another, observes that the Romans "set up Nature to stage a self-destructing spectacle of combat: the ultimate manifestation of the domination of empire."

[33]Plass (18), writing about various violent spectacles at Rome, states that "the original simple expenditure of physical energy was transposed into conspicuous consumption of public resources measured by both blood and money and carrying the symbolic meaning which frequently

the animals were viewed as representatives of the regions from which they had been imported, and the slaughter of lions from Africa, for example, dramatically symbolized the triumph of the Roman military in bloody battles with fierce, but ultimately inferior human Africans. *Venationes* thus allowed spectators to participate in the process of imposing Roman justice on a barbarian world. The gathering together of the Roman people was an important element of these spectacles because it reaffirmed their existence as a community, united by their responsibility to impose order on the rest of the world and by their right to enjoy the success of their state's military expansion and ventures. The gratification of the popular desire to see the victimization of exotic species was one method for men of wealth and political ambition to advance their careers. Because *venationes* were so expensive and troublesome to produce, they offered proof to voters that the producer (*editor*) was generous, attentive to popular wishes, had the important military and political connections needed to obtain animals from foreign lands, and was thus worthy of election to a position of great power and prestige. In the late republican period, competition was intense to eclipse the *venationes* produced by one's political rivals and predecessors. One familiar story is that of Caelius' pestering of Cicero, then governor of Cilicia (51–50 BC), in order to obtain leopards from that province to display during his year as aedile (Cic. *Att.* 6.1.21, and 2.11, and *Fam.* 8.2.2, 8.4.5, 8.6.5, 8.8.10, and 8.9.3).

To celebrate the inauguration of his theater, Pompey arranged for the exhibition of several hundred lions (Plut. *Pomp.* 52.4; Plin. *NH* 8.20.53) and leopards (Plin. *NH* 8.24.64), baboons and a rare lynx (Plin. *NH* 8.28.70), and, perhaps for the first time in the circus, a rhinoceros (Plin. *NH* 8.29.71).[34] But the grand finale was the

accompanies consumption."

[34]In 46 BC, Caesar exhibited a giraffe for the first time. Coleman (1996, 62) discusses the exhibition of exotic animals as a demonstration of one's control over foreign territory and one's possession of powerful foreign allies. "Pompey's rhinoceros made a statement about his power base; and when Caesar capped it with his giraffe, he may have been

slaughter of about twenty elephants. Elephants were a crowd-pleaser for several reasons. As the largest land mammal, they were—and still are—an impressive sight. In addition, they had been used as war machines by Rome's enemies, and the humiliation of elephants could be interpreted as the humiliation of human opponents. Roman soldiers first encountered elephants during Pyrrhus's invasion of Italy (Flor. 1.13.8).[35] In 275 BC, Manius Curius Dentatus gave inhabitants of Rome their first view of elephants when he displayed in his triumph some which he had captured from Pyrrhus (Plin. *NH* 8.6.16). In 251 BC, during the First Punic War, L. Caecilius Metellus brought back to Rome Carthaginian elephants captured in Sicily. Pliny reports that they were displayed in his triumphal procession and then either prodded through the Circus "in order to increase the contempt for them" (*ut contemptus eorum increscerent*) or killed with javelins (*NH* 7.43.139; 8.6.17). Thereafter, Metellus' descendants adopted the elephant as a family emblem and placed representations on coins which they minted.[36] Elephants were also prominently displayed on Carthaginian coins as a symbol of that city's military strength.[37] Some might argue that they symbolized Carthaginian cruelty because at the end of the war, Hamilcar used elephants to trample to death rebellious mercenaries (Polyb. 1.82.2). In the Second Punic War, Hannibal used war elephants in Italy,[38] but, in 202 BC, the Carthaginians and their elephants were defeated on African soil by P. Cornelius Scipio, who then transported some of the elephants to

assisted by Cleopatra." (Dio 43.23.1, records the appearance of a giraffe.) See also Jennison (30, 51–59).

[35]Florus, in the second century AD, writes that the Romans would have won a battle at Heraclea in 280 BC, but Pyrrhus' elephants charged and frightened the Roman horses, and "turned the battle into a spectacle" (*converso in spectaculum bello*). His comment provides evidence of how, for Romans of the imperial period, staged battles were more real than actual battles.

[36]For the numismatic evidence, see Scullard 274 n.90; also Toynbee 53.

[37]Scullard 170–73 and 275 n.92.

[38]Livy 23.13.7; for numismatic evidence, see Toynbee 36.

Rome for his triumph (Zonar. 9.14). "This must have been a moment of tremendous feeling for the Romans: Hannibal, who had defied them for so long and had come so near to overwhelming them, was at last humbled, and the elephants in the procession must have reminded them that the war had been completed in Africa and by the man who came to be called Africanus."[39]

During the second century BC, the Romans themselves used elephants in battle, and in 167 BC, L. Aemilius Paullus, after his victory against Perseus at Pydna, had army deserters trampled to death by elephants (Val. Max. 2.7.14). About this time, the Senate voted a resolution forbidding the importation of African animals into Rome, perhaps because of the inherent dangers, but the resolution was repealed, or at least amended, when a tribune appealed to the popular assembly to allow African animals for use in the circus (Plin. *NH* 8.24.64).[40] The action of the assembly may be an indication of how popular *venationes* were with the urban masses. And the display of elephants continued to be an attraction in the first century BC. Pliny, for example, reports that elephants fought in the circus in 99 and 79 BC; on the latter occasion at least, the audience was treated to the novelty of matches in which elephants fought bulls.[41]

Pompey, like those famous generals who had preceded him in victories over African nations, capitalized on the symbolic significance of elephants. In 81 BC, after his conquest over the Marians[42] and their African allies, Pompey spent several days

[39]Scullard 170.

[40]Ville 54–55 discusses the problems of assigning a date to this legislation.

[41]Plin. *NH* 8.7.19; Ville (89) addresses the confusion about the meaning of *pugnasse* in Pliny's accounts here and in 8.6.17 (mentioned above).

[42]The Marians were led by Cn. Domitius Ahenobarbus, descendant (perhaps grandson) of Cn. Domitius Ahenobarbus who in 121 BC used elephants in his successful battles against Gallic tribes and then, to celebrate this victory, rode through the province on an elephant (Suet. *Nero* 2; Flor. 1.37). The younger Cn. Domitius may be the brother of the L. Domitius who called Pompey "Agamemnon"; see above n.23; and, on the family connections, Seager 10 n.25.

hunting lions and elephants because, he declared, the wild animals of Africa must not be left without experiencing the strength and courage of the Romans (Plut. *Pomp.* 12.5). He also shipped to Rome some of the elephants he had captured from the African kings and planned to enter the city triumphantly in a chariot drawn by four elephants, perhaps to prompt a comparison between himself (he was now only twenty-five years old) and Alexander the Great.[43] His plan was thwarted by the narrowness of the city gates and he was forced to use horses (Plin. *NH* 8.2.4; Plut. *Pomp.* 14.4). Twenty-five years later, during his second consulship, Pompey coerced legislation which assigned to him the provinces of Africa and the two Spains, and he inaugurated his theater complex with lavish *venationes*. He undoubtedly hoped that the elephant killings which he commissioned for the circus would remind the Roman populace of his past glorious achievements in Africa and presage similar successes for the future. The slaughter of elephants was intended to validate Pompey's claim to supreme authority and to demonstrate that, with him as their leader, Romans could feel confident in their domination of both the physical and political worlds.

That must certainly have been Pompey's intention: to amuse the spectators and to bring them the pleasure which comes from knowing that you are a superior race and will, with excellent leadership, remain superior. Elephants possessed several attributes which made them ideal representatives of the victims of Roman ascendancy. They were, like many of the people the Romans had subjugated, strange-looking. In addition, their enormous size and strength conveyed an impression of almost invincible power—"almost," because the Romans had, of course, vanquished military forces, particularly those of Hannibal and other Africans,

[43]Toynbee (39) describes a coin from Cyrene depicting Alexander in a chariot drawn by four elephants, an allusion to his return from India; he also discusses the Hellenistic practice of associating Dionysus and Alexander with elephant-drawn chariots (see also Plin. *NH* 8.2.4), and contends that Pompey's plan was probably a "conscious imitation of the Hellenistic practice." Rawson (28) characterizes Pompey's behavior as "willful and hubristic conduct."

which employed elephants. The harnessing of an elephant to a chariot both demonstrated a real subjugation of the natural world and also symbolized the subjugation of people living in territories inhabited by elephants. Elephants displayed in arena combats represented the most intimidating of Rome's human opponents, and yet, because elephants are bulky and have large floppy ears, long flexible trunks, and a lumbering gait, they can appear comical. What a perfect combination of qualities for the amusement and edification of the Roman mob—a situation in which the *editor* not only symbolically recreates the harrowing battles against Rome's most formidable enemies, but also presents an opponent which can be so easily ridiculed.[44] Thus a spectacle which begins as a terrifying re-enactment of war ends as a farce, and the audience is reassured that an apparently formidable enemy was, in the end, not just inferior, but absurdly inferior.

Our earliest report on Pompey's *venationes* is a skillfully-crafted eye-witness account by Cicero, who was describing the inauguration events in a letter to Marcus Marius (*Fam.* 7.1), who had been unable to travel to Rome for the festivities, probably because of illness. Cicero wrote to console him on missing events which he (Cicero) had earlier predicted would be "the most lavish and magnificent games in the memory of mankind" (*Pis.* 65, cited above).[45] To mitigate Marius's disappointment, Cicero tells him that he was, in fact, fortunate to have been absent because the entertainments were tedious. Wiedemann rightly reminds us that Cicero's purpose in writing the letter is consolation; however this is not the only reason why the Roman politician "marshals every possible argument to suggest that the games were a failure."[46] Cicero writes of the *ludi scaenici* that they were very elaborate (*apparatissimi*), but not to Marius's tastes (*non tui stomachi*). And he even suggests that the emphasis on grand spectacle ruined any

[44]Metellus' elephants, in a passage cited above, were prodded to increase the audience's contempt for them.

[45]In the penultimate sentence of the letter, Cicero reminds Marius that he had requested a letter describing Pompey's spectacles.

[46]Wiedemann 140.

possibility of true amusement: *apparatus spectatio tollebat omnem hilaritatem*. To reinforce his point that extravagance can actually detract from the enjoyment of men with good taste, he asks: *Quid enim delectationis habent sexcenti muli in* Clytaemnestra*? aut in* Equo Troiano *craterarum tria milia*? "What pleasure is there in 600 mules in the *Clytemnestra*, or in 3000 wine bowls in the *Trojan Horse*?" He then modifies his point by saying that such excesses won the admiration of the crowd (*popularem admirationem*), although they would have given no pleasure (*delectatio)* to Marius.[47] The underlying message is that Pompey successfully catered only to the tastes of the rabble, which could be won over by lavish spectacles.[48] Of course, that was precisely the group which Pompey was hoping to win over.

After a brief dismissive mention of some athletic competitions, Cicero describes the *venationes* in the same scornful tone.

> Reliquae sunt venationes binae per dies quinque, magnificae, nemo negat; sed quae potest homini esse polito delectatio, cum aut homo imbellicus a valentissima bestia laniatur aut praeclara bestia venabulo transverberatur? Quae tamen, si videnda sunt, saepe vidisti; neque nos, qui haec spectamus, quicquam novi vidimus. Extremus elephantorum dies fuit. In quo admiratio magna vulgi atque turbae, delectatio nulla exstitit; quin etiam misericordia quaedam consecutast atque opinio eius modi, esse quandam illi beluae cum genere humano societatem.

[47]It is worth noting that the word *delectatio* appears seven times in this letter, a fact which persuades me that the main theme of the letter is "pleasure." Cicero begins it by consoling Marius for having been absent during Pompey's entertainments (pleasure lost), and then ends it by consoling himself (*me consolor*) with the thought of Marius' future visit (pleasure anticipated). The central portion of the letter dwells on different definitions of pleasure and on Pompey's failure to provide the populace with pleasure.

[48]There is a similar message in *Off.* 2.16. 56 and 57.

> The last events to report are the animal spectacles, two a day for five days. They were magnificent. No one denies that. But what pleasure can there be for a man of refined tastes when either a feeble human being is mangled by a very strong animal, or a beautiful animal is pierced by a spear? In any case, even if these things are worth seeing, you've seen them many times. I, who was among the spectators, saw nothing new. The final day was the day of the elephants. On that day, the mob and crowd experienced great wonder, but no pleasure. In fact, a certain compassion arose, and an opinion of this sort, that this huge animal has a certain kinship with the human race.

Cicero's grudging admission that the *venationes* were *magnificae* (a statement which corresponds to the earlier use of *apparatissimi*) tells us that the *venationes*, like the *ludi scaenici*, were produced on a grand scale, and that Pompey seemed, by the usual criteria, to have successfully performed the role of generous *editor*. But Cicero immediately undercuts this compliment by commenting that a man of refined tastes (*homini polito*) could not find pleasure (*delectatio*) in the mutilation of either a man or a beast. Again a comment in this section seems to correspond to an earlier phrase (*non tui stomachi*). Yet Cicero offers a different explanation for why the *venationes*, as opposed to the *ludi scaenici*, were distasteful to men of refinement like himself and Marius. Although Cicero did not find *ludi scaenici* generally to be distasteful, he judged those commissioned for Pompey's celebration to be of a mediocre quality which even an abundance of "special effects" could not mask. In his comment about *venationes*, however, he suggests that they were always and generally distasteful because witnessing physical injury, however lavish the production, does not bring pleasure to a man like himself. He also mentions that the animal spectacles offered nothing new, a serious flaw certainly in a period when politicians were eager to satisfy audience demands for novel stimulations. Cicero next describes the

crowd's response to the slaughter of elephants: there was *admiratio*, but not *delectatio*. The conjunction of the words *admiratio* and *delectatio* occurs also in the description of the *ludi scaenici*, but there Cicero draws a contrast between the undiscriminating admiration of the crowd and the lack of pleasure for men like Marius and himself. Here he implies that even the crowd felt no pleasure, despite its admiration for the scale of the event. It is interesting to note how Cicero both focuses and expands his disparagement of Pompey's *venationes*. Whereas he previously remarked that the hypothetical mutilation of any beast (general category) was not pleasing to refined men (small number), he now observes that the actual mutilation of elephants (specific category) did not please the common crowd (large number). For Cicero, the real novelty during the many days of entertainment, the event most worth reporting, was the audience's anomalous response to the killing of the elephants. The role expected of spectators was: 1) to enjoy (and express gratitude to the *editor* for) the torment and slaughter of animals which they perceived i) as dangerous and hostile both in the wild (nature) and in battle (culture), and ii) as symbols of Rome's enemies; and 2) to participate as witnesses to a recreation of Pompey's victories in Africa. As Coleman notes, in her discussion of events in which humans were executed, spectators were expected to identify with those who were implementing justice, rather than with those criminals being dispatched. If the sympathies of the audience were transferred to the "objects" being displayed, the *editor* would find himself alienated.[49] For Pompey to achieve his goal of bringing pleasure to the populace, the spectators had either to objectify or to demonize the elephants. But an extraordinary situation occurred. As Cicero relates, there arose among the spectators a certain compassion (*misericordia*). Although Cicero makes no explicit comment that the widely-anticipated *venationes* were a failure, the reader's final impression of this report must be that they failed. In four days of expensive

[49]Coleman (1990) 58. She cites Pompey's elephants as evidence for her statements.

combats, Pompey offered nothing new. On the fifth and final day, he provided grand spectacle, but not pleasure. In fact, in a most startling and embarrassing inversion of his design, he produced the opposite of pleasure. For the spectators, the elephant slaughter provoked pity, and thus discomfort and dis-pleasure. We might ask what consolation Marius would derive most from this account: the satisfaction of having missed tedious spectacles, or the satisfaction of knowing that Pompey had failed, at least partially, to win the adoration of the crowd?

One other element of Cicero's report deserves scrutiny: his explanation for the discomfort of the audience. He tells us that the spectators pitied the elephants and held the opinion that a certain closeness or kinship (*societas*) existed between humans and elephants. For a few moments in the Roman circus, the crowd denied the rigid distinction between humans and animals, a construction which is so critical for human justifications of our exploitation of other animals. In those brief moments when the spectators recognized that the elephants were not alien, they could no longer ignore their pain, and therefore could no longer experience pleasure. But Cicero's phrasing is curious because the extension of kinship is an element of Stoic theories of justice, and is thus perhaps a surprising sentiment for a spontaneous mob expression.[50] Perhaps the crowd commented only that the elephants seemed human-like in their response to distress, and the educated Cicero recorded their comments as a philosophical statement. Or perhaps the crowd actually did express a philosophical position that elephants *are* close or akin to us and that their mistreatment therefore constitutes a denial of justice.

A second report on Pompey's elephants is given by Pliny the Elder in a compilation of stories about elephants (*NH* 8. 20–21).

[50]Among Stoic philosophers, kinship, that is, a feeling of mutual belonging, was the foundation of justice, but the Stoics excluded animals from considerations of justice, or moral rights, by arguing that animals lacked rationality and thus the ability to participate in our circle of kinship. See Sorabji 122–24; also Motto 178 (6b).

Although written about a hundred years after the event, it provides considerably more detail than Cicero's account.

> Pompei quoque altero consulatu, dedicatione templi Veneris Victricis, viginti pugnavere in circo aut, ut quidam tradunt, XVII, Gaetulis ex adverso iaculantibus, mirabili unius dimicatione, qui pedibus confossis repsit genibus in catervas, abrepta scuta iaciens in sublime, quae decidentia voluptati spectantibus erant in orbem circumacta, velut arte non furore beluae iacerentur. Magnum et in altero miraculum fuit uno ictu occiso; pilum etenim sub oculo adactum in vitalia capitis venerat. Universi eruptionem temptavere, non sine vexatione populi, circumdatis claustris ferreis. (Qua de causa Caesar dictator postea simile spectaculum editurus euripis harenam circumdedit, quos Nero princeps sustulit equiti loca addens.) Sed Pompeiani missa fugae spe misericordiam vulgi inenarrabili habitu quaerentes supplicavere quadam sese lamentatione complorantes, tanto populi dolore ut oblitus imperatoris ac munificentiae honori suo exquisitae flens universus consurgeret dirasque Pompeio quas ille mox luit imprecaretur.
>
> In the second consulship of Pompey, during the inauguration of the temple of Venus Victrix, twenty (elephants) or, as some have reported, seventeen fought in the circus against Gaetulian men armed with javelins. The battle waged by one elephant was remarkable. When its feet had been pierced through, it crawled on its knees against its human opponents, snatched their shields, and threw them in the air. The spectators experienced pleasure when the shields, as they fell to the ground, made a loop, as if thrown by design, not by the rage of the huge animal. There was also a wondrous sight when another elephant was killed by a single blow, for the javelin thrust under its eye had reached the vital parts of its head. All the elephants

> together attempted to break out from the iron barricades which surrounded them, and this caused anxiety among the people. (Therefore, at a later date, when Caesar the dictator was planning a similar spectacle, he surrounded the arena with trenches which the emperor Nero later removed to add seats for the equestrian class.) But Pompey's elephants, when they had lost hope of escape, sought the compassion of the crowd and supplicated it with an indescribable gesture and bewailed their fate with a kind of lamentation. There resulted so much grief among the people that they forgot the generosity lavished in their honor by General Pompey and, bursting into tears, all arose together and invoked curses on Pompey for which he soon paid the penalty.

Pliny's use of the phrase *ut quidam tradunt* informs us that the story of Pompey's elephants had attracted the attention of several earlier writers. From Pliny we learn that the spectators had initially experienced pleasure (*voluptas*) in watching a wounded elephant's attempts to defend itself, paid no heed to its suffering, and been delighted when it crawled on its knees toward its tormentors and flung their shields into the air—delighted because they construed the animal's desperate actions as the clever tricks of a trained performer. In the imperial period, the spectacle of trained elephants performing tricks was not uncommon at Rome. We have accounts, for example, of elephants kneeling, walking on tightropes, and hurling weapons through the air.[51] Such comic movements may also have been displayed in the republican period. At Pompey's *venationes*, however, the wounded elephant was not a performer; it was fighting for its life, yet the audience did not make a

[51]Sen. *Ep.* 85.41; Dio 61.17; Plin. *NH* 8.2 and 3 (4–6). Perhaps the most poignant, if least credible story is of an elephant who was slow to learn and therefore frequently whipped. He was discovered one night to be practicing his tricks all alone in the moonlight (Plin. *NH* 8.3.6; Plut. *De Soll. An.* [12] 968c).

distinction, perhaps because to do so would have meant denying themselves pleasure. The elephant amused the spectators because it presented an incongruous display of a clumsy animal mimicking the actions of a skillful human.[52] Another source of wonderment which Pliny reports was the sight of an elephant killed by a single javelin skillfully thrust through its eye. Again, the fate of the elephant was of no concern, as the audience focused on the accuracy with which the human "hunter" hit his "target." Plass argues persuasively that public brutality was accepted as entertainment at Rome as long as there was an underlying "reassuring sense of order"; pleasure ends when "violence threatens to become seriously disturbing."[53] At Pompey's spectacle, the sense of order was destroyed when the elephants stampeded. Certainly the potential for danger was one of the attractions of these events, which re-enacted both human battles against Nature, and Roman battles against bellicose humans. However, the spectators did not expect to encounter imminent danger to their own life and limbs. The fear they experienced was vicarious, as they watched other humans (*bestiarii* and *venatores*) engaged in combat with animals. When the elephants stampeded, the fear of the spectators became real and personal, and it displaced the pleasurable sensation which arose from the vicarious fear. This, in itself, would constitute a failure for Pompey. But a more startling situation followed: the frustrated and tormented elephants seemed to surrender and beg for mercy.[54] In

[52]Pliny (*NH* 8.2.4) and Aelian (*NA* 2.11) both record an amusing spectacle of elephants trained to mimic dancing humans and to act like well-mannered humans at a dinner party.

[53]Plass 21.

[54]Martial (*Spect.* 17) describes a scene at the opening of the Colosseum in AD 80, where an elephant, who has just engaged in a battle with a bull, appears to supplicate the emperor. Pliny's account is remarkably similar in some respects to a story told by Tacitus (*Ann.* 3.22 and 23) about an event which occurred in AD 20. Aemilia Lepida was on trial, accused by Quirinus of fraud, adultery, and poisoning. On the days of the *ludi* which interrupted her trial, she went to Pompey's theater. There, with wailing and lamentation, she called on her ancestors and on Pompey himself, whose buildings and statues were visible, and she moved the audience to such sympathy that it wept and shouted curses at Quirinus.

this re-enactment of war, the enemy admitted defeat and sought clemency. Now an elephant which kneeled was a suppliant, not an entertainer. The spectators' emotions were in turmoil because the elephants were no longer amusing, because their movements reminded the audience of their pain. The indistinct line between laughter and sorrow had been crossed. Unlike Cicero, Pliny offers no philosophical basis for the spectators' distress. They simply responded on an emotional level to what they perceived to be a human-like appeal for pity, even as they had earlier responded with delight to a human-like juggling act. But pity is not a pleasurable experience, and the disappointed crowd, contrary to Pompey's plan to buy popular favor through his generosity, forgot his generosity, became angry at the *editor* and invoked upon Pompey curses for which he soon paid the penalty. The remark about curses is a reference to the fact that Pompey's fortunes declined within a short period and, seven years later, he was defeated in battle by Caesar (who was careful not to allow an elephant stampede at *his* spectacle in 46 BC!) and killed while fleeing to Egypt. Pliny's report invites us to make associations, first, between the killing of African elephants (and African men: Gaetulians) in Rome and the killing of a Roman general off the coast of Africa, and, second, between public dissatisfaction with Pompey in 55 BC, and his failures in subsequent years.

A third account of the *venationes* is found in Dio Cassius (39.38). Writing about two hundred and fifty years after the event, Dio first states that the inauguration events included musical and athletic competitions in the theater, and, in the circus, horse races and the slaughter of many wild animals of all kinds.

> λέοντές τε γὰρ πεντακόσιοι ἐν πέντε ἡμέραις ἀναλώθησαν, καὶ ἐλέφαντες ὀκτωκαίδεκα πρὸς ὁπλίτας ἐμαχέσαντο. καὶ αὐτῶν οἱ μὲν παραχρῆμα ἀπέθανον, οἱ δὲ οὐ πολλῷ ὕστερον. ἠλεήθησαν γάρ τινες ὑπὸ τοῦ δήμου παρὰ τὴν τοῦ Πομπηίου γνώμην, ἐπειδὴ τραυματισθέντες τῆς μάχης ἐπαύσαντο, καὶ περιιόντες τάς τε

προβοσκίδας ἐς τὸν οὐρανὸν ἀνέτεινον καὶ ὠλοφύροντο οὕτως ὥστε καὶ λόγον παρασχεῖν ὅτι οὐκ ἄλλως ἐκ συντυχίας αὐτὸ ἐποίησαν, ἀλλὰ τούς τε ὅρκους οἷς πιστεύσαντες ἐκ τῆς Λιβύης ἐπεπεραίωντο ἐπιβοώμενοι καὶ τὸ δαιμόνιον πρὸς τιμωρίαν σφῶν ἐπικαλούμενοι. λέγεται γὰρ ὅτι οὐ πρότερον τῶν νεῶν ἐπέβησαν πρὶν πίστιν παρὰ τῶν ἀγόντων σφᾶς ἔνορκον λαβεῖν, ἢ μὴν μηδὲν κακὸν πείσεσθαι.

Five hundred lions were destroyed in five days, and eighteen elephants fought against heavily armed men. Some of the elephants died on the spot, but others died a little later. For, in contradiction to Pompey's plan, some were pitied by the people when, having been wounded, they stopped fighting and walked around and stretched their trunks toward heaven. And they lamented in such a way that they even caused talk that they were not acting in this manner by chance, but were crying out against those oaths in which they had trusted when they journeyed from Libya. And they were calling on the gods to avenge them. For the story is that the elephants did not embark on the ships until they received a sworn oath from their handlers that they would suffer no harm.

A few lines later (39.39.1), Dio reports that Pompey pleased the populace to no small degree with his spectacles, but he displeased them very much in the matter of the arrangements which he and Crassus made for military campaigns in their provinces.

Like Pliny, Dio provides the information that the *venationes* of 55 BC attracted the interest of several writers ("the story is"). Dio does not mention a stampede, but he describes in some detail the unusual behavior, recorded by Pliny only as *inenarrabili*, "indescribable," which converted the experience of the spectators from pleasure to distress. However in Dio's report, the wounded

elephants do not appear to beg for clemency, but rather to present a claim for justice. They "argue" that their handlers had violated sworn oaths that they would not be harmed. If Dio's reader assumes that the handlers were themselves African, then their behavior matches the stereotype which Romans had, since the Punic Wars, of perfidious Africans. However, if the handlers were Roman (and there is no way of knowing their nationality), then there is surely an irony in the Roman treachery toward these natives of Africa. As in the earlier accounts of Cicero and Pliny, the spectators in Dio's account came to the circus for enjoyment, but were placed in a situation which caused them discomfort because it forced them to see the elephants as acting like injured humans and therefore deserving moral consideration. In fact, the elephants' lament of a breach of contract was effectively a request for moral consideration. I earlier mentioned that Cicero's account of the crowd response could be viewed in the context of Stoic theories of justice. Dio's account should be compared with Epicurean theories. For Epicureans, the foundation of justice was contract formation. Epicurus himself had excluded animals from considerations of justice, or moral rights, on the grounds that they lacked rationality and were thus unable to enter into contracts with us.[55] Dio, however, suggests that the crowd at Pompey's games believed that the elephants *had* entered into a contract and therefore had been treated unjustly when the contract was violated. The spectators in Dio's report thus use a philosophic basis different from Cicero's to protest the mistreatment of the elephants, but we again have an account of a Roman crowd framing its protest in philosophic terms. Dio's story may be an accurate record of events, or it may be a record on to which he or his sources embroidered an explanation for the elephants' actions, an explanation derived in part from the philosophical schools and in part from the "scientific" lore about elephants. Pliny, for example, in a passage unrelated to Pompey's spectacles, reports that elephants are known to refuse to board ships until their handlers swear an oath that they (the elephants)

[55]Sorabji 162–63.

will return.[56]

Dio's concluding statement, that the events which celebrated the opening of Pompey's theater gave the Roman masses no small pleasure, does not contradict Cicero, who grudgingly admitted that most of the events pleased the masses. However, Dio's telling of the event more clearly isolates the crowd response to the elephant slaughter and thus stresses its anomalousness.

Our fourth account of the *venationes* was written by Plutarch (*Pomp.* 52.4) about one hundred and fifty years after their occurrence. We might expect that Plutarch, who elsewhere reveals an interest in the moral status of animals,[57] would report a demonstration of human compassion, but there is no mention. His entire account of Pompey's spectacles is quite brief, and is introduced by the statement that Crassus (Pompey's colleague in the consulship of 55) went to his province at the end of his term.

> Πομπήϊος δὲ τὸ θέατρον ἀναδείξας ἀγῶνας ἦγε γυμνικοὺς καὶ μουσικοὺς ἐπὶ τῇ καθιερώσει, καὶ θηρῶν ἀμίλλας ἐν οἷς πεντακόσιοι λέοντες ἀνηρέθησαν, ἐπὶ πᾶσι δὲ τὴν ἐλεφαντομαχίαν, ἐκπληκτικώτατον θέαμα, παρέσχεν.
>
> But Pompey dedicated his theater and presented athletic and musical competitions at the inauguration, and provided combats of wild animals in which 500 lions were destroyed, and finally the elephant battle, a most astounding and terrifying spectacle.[58]

[56]Pliny (*NH* 8.1.3) uses this information as evidence that elephants understand the significance of religious practices (such as swearing an oath). On the difficulty of moving elephants on to water vehicles, see O'Bryhim.

[57]Plutarch's work includes: *De Sollertia Animalium* (On the Cleverness of Animals), *Bruta Animalia Ratione Uti* (Animals are Rational), and *De Esu Carnium* (On Eating Meat).

[58]I have used both "astounding" and "terrifying" to translate the Greek word ἐκπληκτικώτατον because Plutarch gives us no precise indication of whether the spectacle caused astonishment or terror.

The following sentence informs us that Pompey was admired for these things and regarded with affection, but regarded no less with ill-will because he assigned his provinces and armies to legates so that he could remain in Italy with his wife.[59] Thus the description of the spectacles is framed by statements which present a contrast between the actions of Crassus and Pompey; the description itself, moreover, serves to build a positive portrait of Pompey ("admired") which is immediately opposed by a negative portrait ("not admired"). If Plutarch seems to ignore an instance of audience displeasure, it may be because the information would compromise his rhetorical design. Thus we learn from him only that the elephant battle was a very astounding or terrifying spectacle, with no explanation of why. His comment that the inauguration events won admiration and affection for Pompey does not preclude his knowing of audience displeasure at the final event. Dio, for example, was able to report both that the audience pitied the elephants and that it gained no small pleasure from the events overall. He was also able to create the same "admired - not admired" dichotomy as Plutarch. Ultimately we gain from Plutarch's description of the inaugural events a quite different impression than from Cicero's; the former persuades us that they achieved their purpose (i.e. won popular favor for Pompey), while the latter persuades us that the elephant spectacle ruined Pompey's plans.

Our fifth account is provided by Seneca the Younger in his philosophic essay *De Brevitate Vitae* (13.6–7), written about a hundred years after the event. His purpose is not to provide a historical record, but to engage his reader in a consideration of philosophic issues. One of Seneca's topics in this essay is that men waste their time on frivolous pursuits such as ball games, sun-bathing, and treating unimportant subjects as significant. (Did he have a premonition of modern Classical scholarship on elephants?) As examples of useless data, Seneca lists the information that Dentatus was the first to have elephants in his triumphal

[59] *his wife*: Julia, the daughter of Julius Caesar, Pompey's colleague in the triumvirate and, later, opponent in the civil war.

procession, that Sulla was the first to give a spectacle with unleashed lions, and that Metellus was the only Roman to have one hundred and twenty elephants walk in his triumphal procession. Seneca was particularly opposed to preserving a record of Pompey's elephant fight and thus honoring it as a noteworthy achievement because he believed that the publicity might provoke other men to emulate it.

> Num et Pompeium primum in circo elephantorum duodeviginti pugnam edidisse, commissis more proeli innoxiis[60] hominibus, ad ullam rem bonam pertinet? Princeps civitatis et inter antiquos principes, ut fama tradidit, bonitatis eximiae memorabile putavit spectaculi genus novo more perdere homines. Depugnant? Parum est. Lancinantur? Parum est. Ingenti mole animalium exterantur. Satius erat ista in oblivionem ire, ne quis postea potens disceret invideretque rei minime humanae. O quantum caliginis mentibus nostris obicit magna felicitas! Ille se supra rerum naturam esse tunc credidit, cum tot miserorum hominum catervas sub alio caelo natis beluis obiceret, cum bellum inter tam disparia animalia committeret, cum in conspectu populi Romani multum sanguinis funderet, mox plus ipsum fundere coacturus. At idem postea Alexandrina perfidia deceptus ultimo mancipio transfodiendum se praebuit, tum demum intellecta inani iactatione cognominis sui.
>
> Is it relevant to any good purpose that Pompey was the first to produce in the circus a fight of eighteen elephants

[60]*innoxiis*: I follow the Oxford edition of L. D. Reynolds. One manuscript reads *noxiis* which is inappropriate in this context where concern is expressed for the lives of the men. In *Ep.* 7.5, Seneca sanctions the arena executions of criminals: *Quia occidit ille, meruit ut hoc pateretur. Cf.* Seneca's use of *noxii* in *Ep.* 70.27.

> against innocent men drawn up in battle formation?[61] The leading citizen in the state and a man of exceptional goodness among ancient leaders, as the report goes, thought that destroying men in a novel fashion was a memorable kind of entertainment. "Fight? That's not enough. Be torn to bits? That's not enough. Let them be crushed by the massive weight of the animals." It would have been better for this story to pass into oblivion, lest some powerful individual learn and emulate this very inhuman deed. What a thick fog great good fortune puts in our minds! Pompey believed that he was above the natural order of things at the time when he cast so many groups of wretched men before monstrous beasts born under a foreign sky, when he arranged a war between beings so unequal, when he caused a huge amount of blood to be shed before the eyes of the Roman people, and would soon force the people themselves to shed even more blood.[62] But later this same man was deceived by Alexandrian treachery and exposed himself to be stabbed through and through by the lowliest slave.[63] Then finally he understood the hollow boast of his name.[64]

Seneca strays from his main topic (the inappropriate interest in insignificant data) to raise several other topics dear to his heart. First, he deplores the fact that Pompey was so uncaring of human life that he put men in a situation which proved fatal. The words

[61]The first elephant fights in the circus had occurred decades earlier (see above). Seneca does not specify in what respect Pompey was "first."

[62]Seneca is referring to the civil war which broke out in 49 BC.

[63]After his defeat by Caesar's forces at Pharsalus in 48 BC, Pompey sailed to Egypt. The Egyptians did not want him to come ashore. They sent a small boat out to meet his ship, as if to help him land. When Pompey entered the small boat, they stabbed him.

[64]*his name*: a reference to the cognomen Magnus (Great) which Pompey received for his swift and decisive victories in Africa in the late 80s (see above).

ingenti mole animalium exterantur ("let them be crushed by the massive weight of the animals") may be a reference to the stampede reported by Pliny. It is not surprising that Seneca fails to mention any spectator compassion for the elephants. As a Stoic, he would have thought that sympathy for animals was misplaced (see above n.50). Seneca's second point is that Pompey was blinded ("fogged") by his good fortune and wrongly believed that he was invulnerable to failure and that he could work outside the laws of Nature, by bringing humans and animals together in a bloody circus combat, for example. Seneca's discussion highlights several ironic correspondences: Pompey produced both an unnatural arena event and an unnatural civil war; he was unmerciful at the spectacle and was subsequently denied mercy by the Egyptians; he received his cognomen Magnus for his defeat of the Africans, but was subsequently killed by them; he was once at the pinnacle of power, but died ignominiously. Pliny's account correlated Pompey's downfall with his inability to please the crowd. Seneca, who makes no mention of the crowd's reactions, correlates Pompey's downfall with his failure to understand his place in the universe and to realize that the most exalted man may share the fate of the lowliest.

The five extant accounts of the elephant slaughter differ in tone, purpose, and details. The authors may, moreover, have "contaminated" their reports by enhancing them with material from other stories about elephants, or even about humans (see, for example, above n.54). Nonetheless we can derive from the accounts a narrative outline. *Pompey's lavish expenditure on the entertainments for the inauguration of his theater achieved its goal, that is, the urban masses were pleased by them. Nonetheless, one surprising mishap did occur. On the final day, the behavior of the elephants failed to amuse the spectators who, quite contrary to expectation, pitied the animals.* This unanticipated conclusion to the extravagant and otherwise well-received spectacles was recorded by Cicero and other writers who became sources for later authors. There is no doubt that the story became well known—too well known according to Seneca, who wished that it would pass into oblivion (although ironically he

helped to preserve it). But what was it about the *venationes* that engaged the interest of Pompey's contemporaries? Since the tormenting of elephants had been a circus event as early as 251 BC, it is difficult to believe that Roman spectators in the late republican period had never before observed the actions of terrified and wounded elephants. The trumpeting, raised trunks and massing together, described by Pliny and Dio, are common behaviors for elephants in distress. Nor, given the long history at Rome of public slaughter, is it probable, as Seneca suggests, that this particular event was unusually cruel. It even seems unlikely that no Roman spectator had ever before expressed sympathy for the victims of arena violence. If there was anything anomalous about this event it was that so many spectators felt pity and voiced displeasure. And yet if the spectators were truly annoyed at Pompey, their annoyance was certainly not construed by other politicians as a permanent conversion to the opinion that the abuse of elephants was inherently wrong. In 46 BC, just nine years after Pompey's spectacles and two years after his death, Caesar, the victor of Pharsalus, commissioned a spectacle of at least forty elephants in the circus (where protective trenches were constructed), with no recorded whisper of audience displeasure.[65] What then was the significance of Pompey's *venationes*? The answer lies in part in the fears of Pompey's peers and competitors. For members of the senatorial class, who were uneasy about his powerful position in the Roman state and anxious about the additional popular support which would accrue to him from a permanent theater and grandiose spectacles (whose

[65]Plin. *NH* 8.22; App. *BC* 2.102; Dio 43.23.3; Suet. *Jul.* 39.3. The elephant spectacle was one event in the entertainments which accompanied Caesar's triumph. On one evening during the celebrations, Caesar was escorted through the streets by elephants carrying lighted torches in their trunks: Suet. *Jul.* 37.2; Dio 43.22.1. Caesar was celebrating several victories, including the decisive defeat of the Pompeian forces in Africa in 46 BC. The Pompeian forces, led by Q. Caecilius Metellus (whose adoptive family displayed the elephant as an emblem; see above), employed elephants in the final battle, but the animals panicked and, in fleeing, trampled their own men; *BAfr.* 83–86; Dio 43.8.1–2.

"themes" were designed to remind the audience of Pompey's *gloria*), the public expression of dis-pleasure, the reversal of expectation, was a gratifying incident. However inconsequential the moments of audience discomfort may actually have been in comparison to the several days of pleasure which Pompey's other events produced, men like Cicero were relieved to see that Pompey's bid for popular favor was not an unqualified success; and they were therefore also eager to publicize this incident. Pompey's detractors could moreover easily magnify the story, put a "spin" on it, and record for posterity that, in the end, in the final verdict, the people had rejected Pompey's ostentatious attempt to buy their approval. The man whom Cicero had described as being "unaccustomed to unpopularity"[66] had failed to please the *populus*. The embarrassing elephant incident had several symbolic features which could also be exploited. The declaration of compassion for the elephants was startling because the audience seemed to be denying the boundary between human and animal, civilization and nature, order and chaos which such spectacles were designed to reaffirm. Moreover, the sympathy for African animals could be construed as a rejection of the military achievements by which Pompey had earned his powerful position in the state. In a symbolic sense, Pompey had, with his elephant spectacle, produced a repudiation and nullification of the Roman domination of the world which he wanted to celebrate. The failure of the event was so convenient for his critics that I want to go way out on the limb of speculation and suggest that it is even possible that the protests were instigated, or at least encouraged and amplified, by anti-Pompeian agitators in the audience. We know that such orchestrations did occur at public events, but the evidence for an orchestrated protest on this occasion is admittedly very slim. Two elements in our accounts might provide evidence; first, Pliny's report that the spectators arose "all together," *universus*,[67] and

[66] *Att.* 2.21 (quoted above); cf. Plut. *Pomp.* 49.1.

[67] Pliny's description may, however, be influenced by protests at the circus in his own (early imperial) time.

second, Cicero's and Dio's implication that the spectators expressed their compassion in terms of a philosophic belief that the elephants had been denied justice. We can imagine that Pompey's critics may have sat, disappointed, through several frustrating days of entertainments when the crowd's adulation of Pompey was unshakable; but, on the final day (their last chance to rain on his parade), when they heard some isolated murmurs of compassion for the elephants, they may have rejoiced, seized the opportunity, and fanned the individual protests into a collective behavior, even providing some rather sophisticated reasons for the emotional outbursts. Of course, if the complaints about the spectacle arose without prompting and spread spontaneously, the event was even more newsworthy. In any case, Cicero's letter offers evidence of how and why the story of the incident was publicized and preserved by Pompey's contemporaries.

Decades and centuries later, the story still attracted interest, but for different reasons. After Pompey's ignominious death, Romans reflected on how a man who had conquered so many nations and reached the pinnacle of power could fall to such a low point, and they wondered whether his fate could have been predicted and whether it provided any lessons. In the conjecturing about when and why his fortunes had begun to decline, the report of events at the inauguration of his theater seemed to supply satisfying answers: the fall began at the very moment Pompey reached the pinnacle, and it originated with his attempt to secure permanent popular approbation. He heard applause in the theater, and then curses in the circus. He pleased the spectators, then displeased them. This simplistic interpretation of Pompey's career gives the Roman populace a starring role in the making and breaking of its leaders, and serves perhaps to warn other aspirants to power that the will—and the pleasure—of the people must not be ignored. This shaping of the story was undoubtedly influenced by the development during the imperial period of "dialogues" between the emperor and the people at entertainment venues. "Long after *contiones* and *comitia* had disappeared, the people continued to express their hopes, fears, and resentments freely and often forcibly

at the public shows. No emperor was able to curb this 'theatri licentia' and many had to bow before it, in matters large and small."[68] Seneca discovered other lessons in the story of Pompey's *venationes*. For him, the elephant spectacle offered moral enlightenment about the foolishness of considering oneself above the laws of Nature, and Pompey became an *exemplum* of the destructiveness of self-ignorance and hubris. The man who claimed he had imposed order on the world had no real understanding of order. The story recorded by Pompey's contemporaries also offered succeeding generations the easily recognized coincidences which hindsight can interpret as omens (and the Romans loved omens). Pompey had conquered Africa, killed Africans, and chosen the elephant as a symbol of his victory. But in the circus, when he was again killing Africans, the elephants ominously won the support of the Roman people. Then Pompey was killed off the coast of Africa, and his forces were defeated in Africa when their own elephants (treacherously?) trampled them. The incident in the circus in 55 BC seemed to foreshadow Pompey's pathetic end.

Thus a public expression of sympathy for elephants was exploited both by Pompey's contemporaries and also by later writers to serve several different purposes. An investigation of why and how the incident was recorded can increase our understanding of the significance of popular protests in Roman society. Unfortunately, it can tell us little about compassion among the Roman people.

* I wish to express my gratitude to Anna Lydia Motto and John R. Clark for their many and valuable contributions to the scholarship on Seneca the Younger. Their critical insights have helped us all to appreciate the work of this fascinating Roman.

** This article is dedicated to Tyk, an African elephant who was shot to death on August 20, 1994, while trying to escape the torment of the circus.

[68]Cameron 160.

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