

awaited news that the enemy leader was dead. The leader, Simon son of Gioras, was taken from the prisoners in the procession, beaten and dragged by a noose, and executed at the edge of the Forum. News of the public murder of the Jewish leader, representing the vanquishing of the threat to Rome, was met with widespread expressions of joy and satisfaction. Sacrifices, offerings, and prayers followed, and widespread feasting and festivities celebrated the army's victory and the renewed hope for future prosperity. Such callous celebration of the suffering and death of a foe seems disturbing, but violence was part of the very fabric of Roman history and society. In triumphal spectacles, as in war, violence distinguished conqueror from conquered.

### Gladiators, Arenas, and Empire

Roman arenas housed gladiatorial combats and animal hunts for centuries, and ritualized and even mythologized executions were added under the Empire. As noted, in the Early Empire different blood sports were regularized into a day-long format (*munera legitima*). Hunts in the morning were sometimes supplemented by executions by means of animals (*damnatio ad bestias*). Lunchtime shows (*meridiani*) might include tame diversions (e.g., athletics, dances, and novelties) or staged executions. Gladiatorial combats followed in the afternoon. Dutiful emperors soon fully institutionalized these elaborate and costly entertainments, and the Roman people continued to expect and enjoy the spectacles provided for them.

Even local shows required extensive preparation, and only a large, autocratic empire could produce and afford the great extravaganzas of the emperors. Under the Republic, and in the provinces under the Empire, the producer (*editor*) who organized and financed the show had to gather or contract for the gladiatorial troupe, usually through a trainer (*lanista*). At Rome imperial procurators arranged and produced shows for the emperors. The privately owned gladiatorial schools of the Republic were banned from Rome as emperors, probably under Augustus and definitely by Domitian, set up four imperial gladiatorial schools (*Ludus Magnus, Dacius, Matutinus, Gallicus*), each with a small training arena and facilities for housing gladiators.

A high degree of standardization in gladiatorial types, equipment, and procedures existed throughout the Empire from the first to fourth centuries (Junkelmann, 38–67, in *G&C*). Well-equipped professionals, gladiators had flashy but effective armor. The fighter's head, arms, and

legs usually were well protected, but his torso, the main target, was bare, as if to symbolize his bravery. In the early imperial period, the heavily armed Samnite was replaced by the *Murmillo* and *Secutor*. The bare-chested *Murmillo*, with a heavily padded left leg with a short greave, wore a brimmed helmet with an angular crest in the shape of a fish. With a sword and a tall, oblong shield, this "heavyweight" gladiator was often set against the *Thraex* or *Hoplomachus*, who shared some of the same equipment (trousers, arm guards (*manicae*), pairs of high greaves). The *Thraex* (Thracian) used a distinctive, small rectangular shield and curved (thrusting) sword or scimitar. His helmet was like that of the *Hoplomachus* but with a curved crest and griffin. The *Hoplomachus* had a small, round shield, thrusting lance, and dagger. The *Provocator*, as during the Republic, was a middleweight with a breastplate and straight sword, who often fought another of his type. The most glamorous type, the *Retiarius* with his net, trident, and dagger, was introduced in the early imperial era. His only protection was an arm guard and a shoulder guard (*galerus*) on the left rather than the right side. While the net fighter wore no helmet and showed his face, other gladiators under the Empire wore visored helmets. The *Secutor* was a specialized opponent routinely set against the *Retiarius* in the second and third centuries. He resembled the *Murmillo* except for his rounded helmet with small eyeholes and a finlike crest, so designed to avoid entanglement in the net of the *Retiarius*.

### Combats in the arena

Announcements of shows on walls at Pompeii detailed the date, producer, and number and type of combatants, as well as any extra features (e.g., awning, executions). On the eve of the show gladiators received a sumptuous public meal (*cena libera*) and were put on display for anyone who cared to view them (Plut. *Mor.* 1099b). Shows began with a procession of gladiators, beasts, and condemned convicts, with placards (*tituli*) identifying fighters, victims, and the producer. The popular notion of the gladiatorial salute, "Emperor, we who are about to die salute you," is ill founded. Gladiators may well have hailed the emperor, but that famous phrase comes not from gladiators in an amphitheater but from doomed combatants in a ship-combat staged by Claudius (Suet. *Claud.* 21.6).

A fictional account in Ps.-Quintilian (*Decl. Mai.* 9) relates preparations in the arena. Weapons were sharpened and inspected, and braziers heated pokers to be used, like whips, to motivate fighters and to

check that fallen fighters were indeed dead. The combatants usually were paired by contrasting and therefore complementary styles, often a net-fighter against a heavily armed pursuer. True gladiators fought duels, one pair at a time, not mass fights. Group fights (*gregatim*) were known, but they used the poorest combatants, probably condemned, non-professionals barely worthy of being called gladiators.

Gladiatorial combat was not indiscriminate slaughter, not some bizarre and berserk mass *mêlée* in which chaos reigned and death abounded. That misconception stems from Seneca's account of what explicitly was a mass execution staged as a combat during the midday show (see p. 328). Disturbing images in mosaics of what appear to be arenas littered with corpses and carcasses, while other fights and hunts continue about them, in fact represent a sequence of fights, hunts, and executions over the course of the day. The message of inscriptions and depictions in art is not that Romans sadistically enjoyed butchery, but that some generous editor put on grand games. Instead of senseless slaughter, rabid aggression, and murderous mayhem, a gladiatorial combat was a well-orchestrated *pas de deux* controlled by two attentive referees. Gladiators wanted to be matched against worthy opponents (Sen. *Prov.* 3.4); they were eager to fight and complained if they were not used (Arr. *Epict.* 1.29.37). Fights were not fixed or fake. The risks of these Roman extreme sports were real, but there were conventions, rules, and fair play. Knowledgeable and discerning consumers of gladiatorial entertainment, Romans hoped to see skilled swordsmanship, bravery, and virtue, not butchery and slaughter. How significant is it that the modern media prefers inaccurate, over-the-top depictions of gladiatorial gore?

Fighters carried about 20 kg of equipment, so combats only lasted a few (perhaps 10–15) minutes until one combatant, by injury or fatigue, was incapacitated or overly vulnerable (Potter, 311–17, in *LDERE*). Not insatiable sadists who “lusted for blood” – a tired phrase all too commonly used, the attentive crowd, aware of the losing gladiator's plight, called out “he's done.” The defeated gladiator dropped his weapon and raised his finger to admit defeat – the same gesture used in Greek combat sports – and to plead for a positive decision about his fate – a reprieve (*missio*) from death. As depicted in a famous mosaic from Zliten in Libya (see figure 15.2), an official referee, wearing a white tunic with a purple stripe and carrying a staff, made sure the victor awaited the decision. The loser's fate was up to the *editor*, since his property was at stake. He probably preferred to spare as many

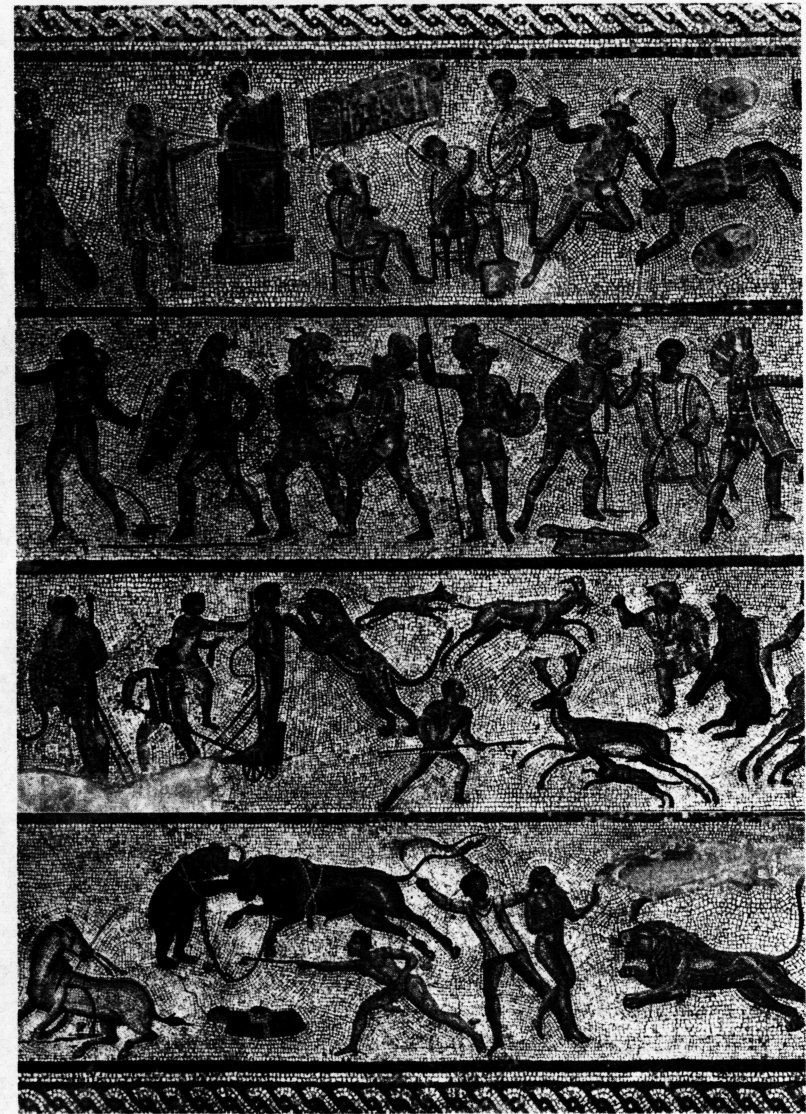


Figure 15.2 Arena scenes from a mosaic from the Villa of Bar Duc Ammera, near Zliten, Libya. German Archaeological Institute, Rome. Kopperman, *Neg D-Dai-Rom* 1961. 1889, 1890, 1891, 1892

fighters as possible for future use, but he often deferred to the crowd, which based its decision on the quality of the fight and perhaps the fame of the fighter as well. Audiences scorned cheap shows with lackluster fighters (Petron. *Sat.* 45.11–12), but a series of good performances by a brave fighter could turn him into a household name. The death of a virtuous gladiator was a tragic misfortune, not a delightful certainty.

Juvenal (3.36) satirizes producers who put on shows and kill whomever the crowd decides when they signal their will by “turning their thumbs (*verso pollice*).” Again contrary to common opinion, the signal for death seems not to have been thumbs down but rather thumbs turned up toward the throat, accompanied by shouts of *iugula* – “throat” or “kill him.” The gesture for mercy or release apparently involved pressing your thumb on a closed fist or pointing two fingers away or out.<sup>5</sup> If the decision was death, the victor executed – and the loser accepted – the quick and efficient deathblow. In Roman terms, the defeated fighter died like a soldier on the battlefield, having retrieved a certain degree of dignity for his efforts. The idea that slaves costumed as Charun and Mercury danced about the bodies stems from a confusion with rituals of execution in the arena. Losers were carried out on stretchers or biers, not dragged out by hooks – another misconception. Their corpses were not dumped into mass pits (Kyle 1998, 155–70). Gladiators could join burial clubs, and friends or family members claimed the bodies and arranged funerals. While the loser was being removed, the victor, like a Greek athlete, accepted the applause of the crowd, took a victory lap, and collected his rewards – normally money and a palm frond, and sometimes a laurel wreath (apparently for five wins). If he had completed three years as a slave gladiator, he also earned the wooden sword (*rudis*) symbolic of release from the arena. Full manumission from gladiatorial service came after five years.

Unlike hunted beasts or convicts facing execution, elite gladiators had a significant chance of survival, of not being cast off the island of life. Ville (1981, 318–25) estimates that around the first century A.D. only twenty percent of fights brought the death of one of the combatants, but that by the third century the death rate had increased to around fifty percent. A first-century gladiator therefore was unlikely to survive more than ten fights, but the odds of a long, healthy life for the urban poor were probably worse. Gladiators usually only fought once per show, and perhaps only twice or a few times per year. Injuries were common, but gladiators were well tended by doctors, including the

famous Galen, who cared for gladiators in Pergamum. Since inscriptions often list multiple draws or ties and even losses, many fights were not to the death. An epitaph from Sicily (*ILS* 5113 = *CIL* 10.7297) records that a certain Flamma died at thirty having fought 34 fights, including 21 wins, nine draws, and four defeats. Martial (5.24.7) mentions a gladiator, Hermes, who was skilled at forcing his opponents *ad digitum* without having to kill them. In some epitaphs gladiators claim that they were merciful and spared opponents. Martial (*Spect.* 31(29)) praises Titus for obeying his own law that combats must go “to the finger signal (*ad digitum posita*).” When the crowd yelled for the release of a pair of gladiators, Titus discharged both fighters only when both yielded together. His clemency was probably not as rare as Martial suggests.

Often priests of the imperial cult, producers invested time and training in their gladiators, and often sold or rented them, so fighters were not to be wasted, unless for effect. An inscription of A.D. 249 (*CIL* 10.6012 = *ILS* 5062) from Minturnae says an *editor* gave a show with eleven bouts in which eleven gladiators died, as if this were unusually generous. Owners used a form of insurance policy against the unwished death of valuable gladiators: in rental contracts of the second century A.D. the charge for gladiators was 80 sesterces if they survived uninjured, but clauses stipulated extra payments of 4,000 sesterces if they were killed or maimed (Gaius, *Inst.* 3.146). Gladiators were so costly and precious that Marcus Aurelius and Commodus decreed maximum prices and expenditures for various levels of games in an effort to lessen the financial pressure on producers in the provinces. An inscription of c. A.D. 177 lists prices of combatants, ranging by rank from 3,000 to 15,000 sesterces (around A.D. 10 a Roman soldier earned about 12,000 sesterces a year).<sup>6</sup>

### Volunteers, dilettantes, females, and eros

Much interest has centered on volunteer or dilettante gladiators and female gladiators. Veteran freedmen gladiators often contracted themselves out as *auctorati*, essentially free agent or contract gladiators, who temporarily surrendered their freedom for the sake of gain – or to prolong their career. Funded by Augustus and Livia, Tiberius once paid some retired gladiators 100,000 sesterces each to appear in shows (Suet. *Tib.* 7.1). Free Roman citizens, however, were not supposed to fight as contract gladiators. Persons of status (of the equestrian or

senatorial orders) might enter the arena on an unpaid basis, to display military prowess or to fulfill an oath for an emperor's health, without the stigma of *infamia* attached to entering a contract (*auctoramentum*) for financial gain. The few free citizens who contracted themselves out as gladiators, out of debt or obsession with the arena, receive disproportionate attention from moralistic sources.

Enactments in 46, 38, and 22 B.C. had repeatedly but ineffectively prohibited participation by the elite as contract gladiators. A senatorial edict of A.D. 19 (under Tiberius) on a bronze tablet from Larinum prohibited relatives and connections of knights and senators from appearing on stage or in the arena because such acts were "contrary to the dignity" of those orders.<sup>7</sup> Lest the social order be threatened, the elite were not to hire themselves out, nor was anyone to hire them, for the arena. Nevertheless, the elite continued to turn up in the arena. Vitellius forbade the practice again (Tac. *Hist.* 2.62), and a senator under Marcus Aurelius remarked (SHA *Marc.* 12.3) that many praetors had fought in the arena. Some emperors, including Caligula, Nero, and Commodus, added to their infamy by allowing or even forcing decent men to fight.

Tertullian (*De spect.* 22), convinced that all spectacles reeked of lust and the forbidden, claimed women gave their bodies to gladiators and other performers. Not to be overlooked or overemphasized, the erotic appeal of gladiators, like that of modern boxers and matadors, was related to the inherent psycho-sexual allure of violence. References to gladiators as sex symbols, however, come mostly from Ovid, Juvenal, and Martial, as well as graffiti at Pompeii. Juvenal claims that gladiators were attractive even to noble women, but too much has been made of his feigned indignation (6.82–113) that the noble woman Eppia went off with the scarred gladiator Sergius, and of a woman's skeleton found in the gladiatorial school at Pompeii in the context of the eruption of Vesuvius. Romans became upset if good women fraternized with gladiators, but liaisons were not commonplace – nor were female fighters.

A grave of a Roman woman discovered in the Southwark district of London has been seen as that of a "gladiatrix" because of its location and artifacts (e.g., a lamp with an image of a gladiator), but it is likely that she was a prostitute or gladiatorial consort (*ludia*).<sup>8</sup> Female gladiators were known, but mostly in association with the games of Nero and Domitian. Nero made Ethiopian women (and children, Dio 62.3.1) fight in the arena, and Domitian had women fight at night by torchlight

(Suet. *Dom.* 4.1). Juvenal satirizes a woman for training in gladiatorial armor (*Sat.* 6. 246–67), and he (1.22–3) also scornfully mentions bare-breasted women fighting wild boars in games; but Martial (*Spect.* 8(6b)) flatters Titus for presenting a woman who killed a lion in the arena. A first- or second-century A.D. relief from Halicarnassus, now in the British Museum, commemorates the release of two female gladiators, with the inscribed names Amazon and Akillia. Female gladiators were well-trained performers who fought other females or beasts – but not against dwarfs, as commonly assumed. While rare, female combats were serious matters of skill and not just perverse parodies.<sup>9</sup>

### The Colosseum: a purpose-built amphitheater

Roman gladiatorial and beast shows were held in the Forum, the Circus, and the Saepta Julia long before the design and construction of a specialized, monumental facility to house performances of violent men and wild beasts.<sup>10</sup> Debate over the invention of the amphitheater continues. Some credit its introduction to Campania, an area associated with early funeral games and later gladiatorial training schools and local amphitheaters. The earliest known amphitheater, built in that area at Pompeii around 70 B.C., was a simple structure with a hollow oval arena surrounded by banks of earth for seating. The dedicatory inscription called it a "spectacle" (*spectaculum*), and the term *amphitheatrum* became prevalent later in the age of Augustus (*RG* 22). Rejecting a Campanian origin, Welch argues that the proto-amphitheater form, an elliptical arena with seating on all sides, and especially if complete with subchambers, emerged first in the Roman Forum itself. She suggests that Pompeii's amphitheater was made specifically for Sulla's military colonists there, and that the idea was taken from Rome to achieve freestanding monumental form at Pompeii.<sup>11</sup> Ironically, Rome probably borrowed the custom of gladiatorial combat from Campania, Romanized its ideology and operation, developed the form of a facility, and then sent the whole system back to Campania.

Pliny (*HN* 36.24.116–20; cf. Plut. *Cat. Min.* 45) reports a suspicious story that in 52 B.C. Gaius Scribonius Curio, a political opportunist, constructed two semicircular wooden theaters at Rome that could pivot on their axes. Supposedly, on the same day both theaters, facing away from each other, housed plays in the morning and then revolved to face each other in the afternoon to form an amphitheater for gladiatorial combats in Curio's funeral games for his father. On the final day of

the games he gave athletic displays (*scaenis athletas*) and more gladiatorial entertainment in the structure. If this marvel existed, it was a unique and impermanent arrangement.

As noted, Rome's first stone amphitheater was a benefaction from Augustus' associate, Statilius Taurus. That Dio (79.25.2–4) applies the same term, "hunting theater," to Taurus' facility, to that of Caesar in the Forum, and to the Colosseum may suggest that the logistical problems of staging beast fights were at least as important as the requirements for gladiatorial combat. True gladiators were thoroughly conditioned, and hopes of survival motivated them to behave, so even a modest arena sufficed. Wild beasts, however, had to be managed carefully for the sake of the show and for the security of the spectators. Accordingly, amphitheaters provided room for the cages, ramps, nets, and other elements needed for safety and stagecraft, as well as enough space for beasts to run and ravage.

After the amphitheater of Taurus was destroyed, Nero built a wooden version in A.D. 57 (Suet. *Ner.* 12.1) in the Campus Martius near the Saepta Julia. Also in 57, he ordered a temporary ban on non-imperial gladiatorial, beast, or other shows in the provinces (Tac. *An.* 13.31.4–5), probably trying to focus attention on his facility. Calpurnius Siculus (*Ecl.* 7.23–4) describes a shepherd visiting Nero's amphitheater and marveling at the exotic beasts (e.g., seals, hippos), props, and stage effects in the shows. The arena could be flooded, and Nero gave one or possibly two naumachies, but this venue too was destroyed.

The Flavian Amphitheater was later known as the Colosseum because a colossal (37 m high) statue of Nero (as the sun god Sol) stood nearby. When the Flavian dynasty came to power in A.D. 69, they constructed a purpose-built facility, monumental and in stone, as a gift to the people. Locating it strategically on the site of Nero's lake, within his palatial Golden House complex, the Flavians declared that they were restoring order by giving the site back to the people to house entertainments for them. Begun by Vespasian, the construction continued under Titus, and a structure of c. 188 by 156 m, 50 m in height, surrounding an arena 86 by 54 m, arose in a mere eight to ten years. The edifice has dominated the historical imagery of Rome for almost two millennia.

As Dio recounts (66.25.1–5; cf. Suet. *Tit.* 7.3), Titus dedicated the (nearly complete) structure in A.D. 80 with extravagant spectacles lasting for a hundred days. Some 9,000 animals were killed, there were infantry battles, the arena was flooded to house a sea battle, and there

were gladiatorial combats, beast hunts, and a horse race. A contemporary observer, Martial penned his *On the Spectacles* to praise and please the Flavians. Not one for understatement, Martial claims that the structure surpasses earlier wonders of antiquity, and that members of every race assembled to acclaim the emperor as father of the country and master of the world. Noting mythological analogies, Martial lavishes praise on skilled hunters such as Carpophorus, a veritable Herakles who kills 20 beasts. Wild animals (e.g., lions, tigers, bears, a rhinoceros) fight and pursue each other. Titus is said to control the very nature of beasts, to make them act contrary to their instincts, to be obedient, and to beg for his mercy. The arena lacked substructures at this point, but spectators still beheld technical marvels of stagecraft – bulls lifted in the air, and artificial woods complete with animals. Martial also showers praise on the other entertainments, including gladiators, a *naumachia*, and even mythologized executions. He emphasizes the message of the shows: the generous provision of wonders for the people and the demonstration of the power of the just and godly emperor in upholding social, natural, and imperial order. Like Augustus, in construction and generosity, the Flavians set a standard for later emperors.

The Colosseum was a show place and a place of control. Like the Circus, the amphitheater provided optimum visibility and exciting entertainment, but the shows and spectators were to be orderly. A metaphor for Rome's hierarchical society, the seating areas included four tiered levels. The podium, a high platform directly above the arena, had special seats for the emperor, priests, Vestal Virgins, and senators. The imperial box and the box of the urban prefect were centrally located on the ends of the axis of the arena. The level above was assigned to knights, the next to normal citizens, and the highest level was for women and slaves.<sup>12</sup> Perhaps 50,000 spectators entered through 76 numbered arcades. The free tickets indicated which entrance to use, and spectators followed arcades, staircases, and tunnel exits to the proper seating area. All viewers had excellent sight lines, and all were kept safe from the beasts by a series of devices, including nets and rollers. Contingents of troops, probably from the Praetorian Guard, formed a security force.<sup>13</sup> Spectators were provided with fountains and lavatories, and there might be sprays of perfume to refresh them and keep down the stench of the arena. Emperors might arrange distributions of gifts and food to the people, often by lotteries or tokens (*missilia*) thrown to the crowd or dropped from above, adding further entertainment and crowd involvement (see p. 326). A contingent of

sailors could spread an elaborate awning from masts at the top level to provide shade; by denying the crowd such relief as a punishment, Caligula again proved himself insensitive to propriety at games.

Added or enlarged by Domitian, subchambers (7.6 m deep) on two levels under the wooden and sanded floor of the arena allowed beasts and fighters to emerge from trap doors to appear suddenly and dramatically in the arena. With cages for animals, lifts, ramps, drains, and space for storing equipment, scenery, scaffolding, weapons, and armor, the chambers were essential preparation areas, the back- and sub-stage. They allowed shows to become ever more spectacular, with artificial hills, forests, pools, and props and stagecraft that would rival modern circus productions or half-time shows.

Meticulous organization and a large, specialized workforce were needed, from officials in the arena, to beast handlers, engineers, armorers, and laborers. Musicians played trumpets and water organs, and slaves dressed in costumes of psychopompic and chthonic gods (Mercury, Dis Pater) verified the death of executed victims. Both staff and performers worked diligently and expeditiously to fulfill the wish of the producer, usually the emperor or his delegate, to put on an entertaining, memorable demonstration of power, resources, and generosity (*liberalitas*). With the parsimonious Tiberius as an unpopular exception, emperors spared no expense in trying to surpass earlier shows with novelties and visual wonders. Failures were not well tolerated. Casting Claudius as a sadist, Suetonius (*Claud.* 34.2) says he forced arena workers themselves into combats if their work disappointed him. Ever sensitive to embarrassment, Claudius probably acted out of frustration because emperors were not to fail in putting on shows.

### Amphitheaters and adaptations beyond Rome

The Colosseum inspired grand provincial amphitheaters, in Tunisia at El Djem, in France at Arles, in Spain at Merida, and elsewhere, but there were fewer amphitheaters in the Greek East. Welch reads performance venues as culturally symbolic documents that reflect the spread of, and resistance to, Roman gladiatorial games in late Hellenistic and early imperial times. For example, when settlers in Julius Caesar's colony at Corinth built an amphitheater, it was disdained in traditional circles at Athens. Athens became a model for many other Greek cities by converting its Theater of Dionysus with a parapet wall and net system. Greeks preferred to adapt and preserve their traditional form,

the theater, because the uniquely Roman structure, the amphitheater, symbolized Roman power.<sup>14</sup> In time, however, the Greek East adapted to Roman rule and supported arena shows, sometimes lowering orchestras in theaters or closing off the ends of stadiums to house beast or gladiatorial combats. With more compatible traditions of violent armed performances, areas of the northwest built amphitheaters or combined facilities, including theater-amphitheaters in Gaul; and North Africa provides abundant art and architectural evidence of beast combats and violent shows (Bomgardner 2000, 121–96; Futrell 1997, 53–76). Whatever the adaptation, there were arena games, some sort of facilities, and audiences throughout the Empire. The interest of the army and the obligation on priests of the emperor cult to hold annual shows were factors, but clearly many local patrons and spectators found Roman games more than acceptable. As Robert demonstrated, the Greeks in the east came to accept and support gladiatorial combats in the imperial era. In fact, gladiatorial combat in the Greek East adopted the iconography (wreaths, palms) and terminology (*monomachoi*, *agones*, *athla*) of boxers and heavy athletes, and the same elite class in provincial society put on both types of games. Entrenched modern resistance to such ideas – the traditional desire to see sport and spectacle as incompatible, lasted for decades, but Robert's conclusions have been vindicated by recent studies that increasingly treat gladiators under the rubric of sport. For example, Mark Golden compares the ideology, iconography, risks, and rewards of gladiators and Greek combat athletes: both were talented performers who fought according to rules in competitions with unpredictable results. Spectators saw both types of fighters as similar, and the gladiators wanted to be associated with athletes.<sup>15</sup>

### Beast Hunts: Nature and Empire

Associated mostly with triumphs and the circus under the Republic, beast shows or hunts (*venationes*) were increasingly associated with *munera* under the Empire. They came under imperial supervision and generally moved to the amphitheater. A great variety of animals – fierce and timid, carnivores and herbivores, from elephants to ostriches, died in shows. Numbers escalated as emperors put on lavish shows to bolster their legitimacy and popularity. One of the “good” emperors, the imperialistic Trajan had 11,000 beasts killed over 123 days in his Dacian triumph in A.D. 108–09. The great quadrennial games at



Figure 15.3 "Magerius Mosaic" with scenes of *venatio* with leopards, third century A.D., from Smirat, Museum of Sousse, Tunisia. Gilles Mermet

Olympia and Athens sacrificed 100 cattle per festival but Trajan's games used up roughly 90 beasts per day for many days. Pragmatic and demanding, Romans saw animals from the provinces and frontiers as imperial commodities to be supplied by the emperor for their amusement. The display, control, and killing of grand and exotic beasts in the arena provided entertaining and reassuring demonstrations of Rome's territorial extent and imperial might.

The goal was always to put on a good – a thrilling but safe – show. Sometimes trained professionals hunted wild prey in the arena, using specialized weapons and equipment, and often assisted by hounds. Mosaics from North Africa depict associations of professional hunters (*venatores*), and a third-century example from Smirat in Tunisia applauds the expenditure of the editor Magerius with depictions of leopards, hunters (of the venatorial family of the Telegenii) and bags of money (see figure 15.3). Often beasts were pitted against each other. Sometimes odd pairings of animals, who would not naturally confront each other, such as a bull against a bear, or an elephant against a

rhinoceros, were forced to fight by whips or firebrands, or by being chained together. Large cats (lions, tigers, and leopards), elephants, bears, bulls, and boars were expensive but popular performers. Camels, giraffes, rhinoceroses, and crocodiles appeared, often with elaborate props, artificial pools, and forests. The brutal hunts in Roman art shock moderns, but Romans found them a source of wonder and pride.<sup>16</sup>

### The traffic in beasts

Gladiators get more modern attention, but for economic more than moral reasons, *venationes* were far more common than gladiatorial combats, and the greatest quantities of victims killed were animals. Some of the beasts were small and native to Italy (e.g., rabbits, goats), but most animals brought to the arena were foreign and wild, the more exotic or impressive the better, especially big cats and bears. Rome classified beasts by ferocity and fodder: as wild (*ferae*) or domesticated, carnivores (*dentatae*) or herbivores. Expert handlers and veterinarians attended to the health and readiness of expensive animals for shows. Beasts in cages were brought from the corners of the empire by wagons, rafts, and ships to Rome's docks, but the *vivarium* or stockyard for arena animals at Rome was meant only as a temporary holding area. Animals were costly to keep, so most beasts soon ended up in the arena. Driven from cages in the basement, beasts were lifted up to the arena and thrust before loud and excited crowds. Some were trained but most fought, fled, or attacked out of instinct or terror.

Rome constantly needed more beasts, and importance was attached to catching beasts in the wild, which presented numerous dangers and challenges. From the letters of Cicero (see p. 287) to the letters of the consul Symmachus from the Late Empire (A.D. 393, 401, as he collected animals for his son's games), from mosaics in North Africa to those of Piazza Armerina in Sicily (e.g., the Great Hunt depicting the capture and transport of beasts), abundant evidence reveals the private and imperial arrangements for the hunting and transport of beasts.<sup>17</sup> A system of equestrian imperial procurators supervised vast supply networks of hunters, beast-handlers, shippers, entrepreneurs, and bureaucrats, from the Baltic Sea to Africa and Asia.<sup>18</sup> While the hunts provided jobs and rid areas of dangerous animals, there was some negative ecological impact. Some suggest that spectacles caused the extirpation of species and changes in patterns of fauna, especially in North Africa (e.g., midget elephants disappeared, hippos withdrew to the interior).<sup>19</sup>