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The 'Creation' of the Roman Beast-Hunts

The Roman beast-hunts (*venationes*), despite being popular arena spectacles, have generally received far less scholarly attention than the gladiatorial games with which they were associated. While numerous attempts have been made by modern scholars to explain the origin and purpose behind gladiatorial combat in the Roman empire, this and other aspects of the *venationes* have been relatively ignored by academics (Jennison's *Animals for Show and Pleasure in Ancient Rome*, written over 60 years ago, is a notable exception).

Antecedents for beast-hunts have been identified in Greek and Italic contexts, but the increasing violence of these events in the Late Republic can plausibly be linked to contemporary developments in gladiatorial combats. In my paper I investigate closely the process by which animal processions became animal slaughters. I do so first of all by noting that the violence of gladiatorial spectacles in Rome, which first became especially pronounced during the Second Punic War, was soon after followed by increasingly bloody animal spectacles in the course of the second century B.C. While this development may well have been linked to the increased supply of exotic animals which Roman conquests in this period made available, I will argue that a more important cause was competition between magistrates staging gladiator and animal spectacles; had the latter events remained mere processions of animals, they would have swiftly lost their appeal for Roman audiences otherwise becoming accustomed to public displays of bloodshed in the arena.