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## Not an “innocent spectacle”: Hunting and *venationes* in Plutarch’s *De sollertia animalium*

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### Abstract

This contribution focuses on Plutarch’s longest text on animals, *De sollertia animalium*, and proposes to consider more closely its cultural and political context by reassessing the significance of the theme of hunting. The author argues that Plutarch in the dialogue refers to Roman staged beast shows, *venationes*, and that their criticism constitutes a vital element of the text.

**Key-Words:** Plutarch, *Moralia*, Hunting, Animals, *Venationes*, Spectacles.

The title of Plutarch’s longest text devoted to the subject of animals Πότερα τῶν ζῴων φρονιμώτερα τὰ χερσαῖα ἢ τὰ ἔνυδρα (*Whether land or sea animals are cleverer*, usually referred to as *De sollertia animalium*)<sup>1</sup> suggests that it is a rather frivolous rhetorical piece, lightheartedly applying the technique of arguing on both sides of a question to a minor issue. Indeed, the bulk of

the text, constituted by two speeches arguing respectively for land and sea creatures (delivered by a young hunter Aristotimos and a young fisherman Phaidimos), validates the title. However, the scope of the dialogue is extended by an opening exchange, held by two other characters, Autobulos and Soklaros. Their conversation precedes the speeches and puts them in a broader context of the discussion about rationality of animals. The general argument of the text is that

<sup>1</sup> The edition I am using is C. HUBERT (ed.), Plutarch, *Moralia*, VI 1, Lipsiae, 1954, 11-75; the English translation is W.C. HELMBOLD’s in: Plutarch, *Moralia*, XII, Cambridge-Mass. London, 1957, pp. 319-479.

animals are rational beings (and in this respect the dialogue has a clear anti-Stoic character<sup>2</sup>): animal rationality is first defended by Autobulos in his exchange with Soklaros, and then supported by abundance of examples in the speeches of the young men. The argument for animal rationality is well developed in the text, and the dialogue's dynamics leads all the participants to the final consensus in this matter: in the last paragraph of the text, the young men are encouraged by Soklaros to combine their forces and put up a fight against those who argue that animals do not possess reason, by which Soklaros, who defended Stoic opinions in the first part of the text, signals his agreement with Autobulos' anti-Stoic position in the last words of the dialogue.

I will leave aside the smoothly argued question of animal rationality and will focus on another significant

theme which pervades the text, namely that of hunting.

The significance of this theme is signaled by the dialogue's framework. On the day before the dramatic date of the dialogue, all the characters – Autobulos, Soklaros and the two youths – listened to the *Encomium of hunting* performed by an unnamed person (959b)<sup>3</sup>. After the speech Autobulos worried that the young men, already passionate hunters, will become immoderately fond of this pastime, and proposed a contest of speeches praising the intelligence of animals. The conversation between Autobulos and Soklaros, which precedes the contest, starts off with their disagreement on the evaluation of hunting (959c-d). This disagreement leads Autobulos to argue in length in defense of animal reason, but Plutarch makes sure that the question of hunting does not disappear:

<sup>2</sup> I. S. GILHUS, *Animals, Gods and Humans. Changing Attitudes to Animals in Greek, Roman and Early Christian Ideas*, London-New York, 2006, pp. 39-41, 45-46; S.T. NEWMYER, *Animals, Rights and Reason in Plutarch and Modern Ethics*, New York-London 2006, pp. 30-47. For Stoic approach to animals, see e.g. R. SORABJI, *Animal Minds and Human Morals. The Origins of the Western Debate*, CORNELL, 1993, esp. pp. 20-28, 40-44, 58-61, 122-133.

<sup>3</sup> Some scholars noticed that the Lamprias Catalogue of Plutarch's works includes a text titled Περὶ κυνηγετικῆς and argued that the anonymous author of encomium is Plutarch himself, e.g. R. HIRZEL, *Der Dialog. Ein Literarhistorischer Versuch*, II, Leipzig, 1895, p. 173; M. SCHUSTER, *Untersuchungen zu Plutarchs Dialog De sollertia animalium*, Augsburg, 1917, p. 82; D.A. RUSSELL, "Arts and Sciences in Ancient Education", *G&R* 36 (1989), p. 221. Against this view argued T. SINKO, "Plutarchea", *Eos* 18 (1909), pp. 115-117, and more recently M. HUBERT, "Plutarch's De sollertia animalium 959B-C: The Discussion of the Encomium of Hunting", *AJPh* 100 (1979), pp. 100-105. On the theme of hunting in *De sollertia* see also F.-J. TOVAR PAZ, "El motivo de la caza en *De Sollertia Animalium* de Plutarco", *Estudios sobre Plutarco: Aspectos formales. Actas del IV Simposio Español sobre Plutarco, Salamanca 26 a 28 de Mayo de 1994*, Madrid, 1996, 211-217.

the first part of the dialogue ends with a passionate denouncement of hunting, which is hushed by Soklaros, who notices the arrival of the contest’s participants (965a-b).

Although the significance of the hunting theme in the dialogue is evident, there is a disturbing lack of coherence in Plutarch’s treatment of it. At the beginning of the dialogue Autobulos expresses his concern for the young hunters, but admits that he himself felt moved by the persuasiveness of the encomium and “caught the old fever all over again” – although his quotation from Euripides’ *Hippolytos*, by which he compares himself to Phaidra, suggests ironic dissimulation (959b)<sup>4</sup>. The tone of this moderate criticism of hunting as an occupation which may lead to neglect of other duties differs significantly from his subsequent passionate reaction to Soklaros’ enthusiastic endorsement of the arguments for hunting displayed by the anonymous speaker on the day before. Here Autobulos distances himself from Soklaros’ enthusiasm and

presents the opinion of ‘some people’ that hunting is the cause of human insensibility and cruelty (959d-f). That Autobulos shares this opinion is evident from his most passionate disapproval of hunting, with which his conversation with Soklaros ends (965a-b). But this disapproval is, again, oddly contrasted first with the appearance of the hunters, whom Autobulos playfully greets with flattering quotations from Homer and a reference to Artemis the Huntress (965c), and secondly with the speeches of the youths, especially the speech of Aristotimos, who starts off with a praise of hunting, quoting Plato’s *Laws* as authority (965e-f).

It may be rightly argued that this inconsistency of the dialogue may be to some extent explained by its didactic character: Autobulos, being a reasonable teacher, does not openly approach the young hunters with his criticism of hunting, but makes them defenders of animals for the sake of the contest, hoping that they will be persuaded by their own speeches. But

<sup>4</sup> HUBERT, 1979, points out the irony here, p. 103. Plutarch’s quote differs slightly from the text of *Hippolytos* as we have it (HELMBOLD, 1957, p. 320; W.S. BARRETT (ed.) *Euripides. Hippolytos*, Oxford, 1964, p. 202) both in *De sollertia* and in *Quomodo adulator ab amico internoscatur* (*Mor.* 52c), where the Euripidean passage is also cited; he either had a different version of *Hippolytos* (so Helmbold, Barrett) or he changed slightly the text purposefully. It is noteworthy that in Plutarch’s quotations, the verb ἐγγρίμπεσθαι is used in reference to the hunter, while in *Hippolytos* – in reference to the dogs that are chasing deer. Plutarch’s exaggerated version, in which Phaedra not only wants to shout to the dogs chasing deer but to chase the animal herself, fits well the ironic context of *De sollertia* and the context of *Quomodo adulator ab amico internoscatur*. (in which Plutarch uses the Euripidean verses to characterize a flatterer who fakes interest in hunting).

the didactic strategy does not entirely resolve the difficulties. In particular, it does not explain the inconsistency at the beginning of the dialogue, where Autobulos' moderate, ironic criticism turns into open disapproval of hunting. I would like to start with a detailed examination of this opening exchange between Soklaros and Autobulos, since it contains some significant, although usually overlooked threads, which may help partially resolve the difficulty.

After Autobulos expressed his moderate criticism of the encomium, Soklaros eagerly agrees with his comments about the persuasiveness of the speaker who presented the speech. Without noticing the irony of Autobulos (quotation from Euripides' *Phaidra*), he expresses his personal opinion: μάλιστα δ' ἦσθην τοὺς μονομάχους αὐτοῦ παραθέντος, ὡς οὐχ ἦκιστα τὴν θηρευτικὴν ἄξιον ἐπαινεῖν, ὅτι τοῦ πεφυκότος ἐν ἡμῖν ἢ μεμαθηκότος χαίρειν μάχαις ἀνδρῶν πρὸς ἀλλήλους διὰ σιδήρου τὸ πολὺ δεῦρο τρέψασα καθαρὰν παρέχει θέαν, ἅμα τέχνης καὶ τόλμης νοῦν ἐχούσης πρὸς ἀνόητον ἰσχὺν καὶ βίαν (959c: "I was particularly pleased with his introduction of gladiators and his argument that it is as good a reason as any to applaud hunting that after diverting to itself most of our

natural or acquired pleasure in armed combats between human beings it affords an innocent spectacle of skill and intelligent courage pitted against witless force and violence"<sup>5</sup>). Soklaros rephrases here the argument made by the speaker, that the art of hunting, ἡ θηρευτικὴ, fulfills the human need for violence and diverts people from greater cruelty, like watching the gladiator fights<sup>6</sup>. It is in reaction to these words that Autobulos suddenly changes his tone. His concern, as expressed previously, was that the young men will become immoderately passionate hunters; but now he portrays hunting as a detrimental activity that enhances human cruelty: καὶ μὴν ἐκεῖθεν, ὃ φίλε Σώκλαρε, φασὶν τὴν ἀπάθειαν καὶ τὴν ἀγριότητα γευσασμένην φόνου καὶ προεθισθεῖσαν ἐν ταῖς ἄγραις καὶ τοῖς κυνηγεσίοις αἷμα καὶ τραύματα ζώων μὴ δυσχεραίνειν ἀλλὰ χαίρειν σφαττομένοις καὶ ἀποθνήσκουσιν (959d: "Yet that is the very source, my dear Soclarus, from which they say insensibility spread among men and the sort of savagery that learned the taste of slaughter on its hunting trips and has grown accustomed to feel no repugnance for the wounds and gore of beasts, but to take pleasure in their violent death"). This is a striking

<sup>5</sup> We may notice that some of Soklaros' sentiments are repeated in Plutarch's short essay *On chance (De fortuna)*, *Mor.* 98e-f.

<sup>6</sup> For epigraphic and archaeological evidence on gladiatorial games in Greece in imperial period see L. ROBERT, *Les gladiateurs dans l'Orient grec*, Paris, 1940; K.E. WELCH, *The Roman Amphitheatre. From Its Origins to the Colosseum*, Cambridge, 2007, pp. 163-185).

inconsistency, even if we accept that his previous expression of the sentiment for hunting was mere ironic dissimulation. What is the cause of this sudden change?

The problem may be solved, I believe, if we pay closer attention to the words of Soklaros. It must have been clear to ancient readers of the dialogue that Soklaros here extends the meaning of “hunting” and is not referring any more to men accompanied by their dog and horse in pursuit of a hare or a deer. The connection between hunting and gladiator shows, and the use of the word *θέα*, “spectacle”, indicate that the hunting implied here is not the aristocratic pastime that Autobulos had in mind while worrying about his young friends, but Roman staged beast hunts, the *venationes*, which were the morning spectacles preceding gladiator shows. By the first century CE the *venationes* were by no means limited to the city of Rome, but, as epigraphic and literary evidence demonstrates<sup>7</sup>, they were present in many Greek cities, whose inhabitants called them either *κυνηγέσιον* or *κυνήγιον*. The epigraphic

sources usually list the gladiator shows and *venationes* together, and for a person so intimately acquainted with them as Louis Robert it was evident that this is the context to which Soklaros’ words refer – a fact which is usually overlooked by literary scholars who have worked on Plutarch<sup>8</sup>.

Apparently the unnamed author of the *Encomium* argued that the art of hunting, ἡ θηρευτική, may be commended because it provides spectators with an innocent entertainment. Following the implication of the language, in which the same word was applied to the staged beast hunts and the pastime hunting, he made the concept of the art of hunting broad enough to include both, and enhanced his encomium with reference to *venationes*. People find certain pleasure in watching violent spectacles like the gladiator fights – the *venationes* fulfill this need for violence, but at the same time remain “innocent”, because they do not present men fighting with men and do not culminate in human death.

It seems that Autobulos’ sudden outburst of criticism of hunting was inspired by Soklaros’ reference to the

<sup>7</sup> For the epigraphic sources confirming staging *venationes* in Greek cities, see L. ROBERT, *Les gladiateurs dans l’Orient grec*, Paris, 1940. S. Mitchell presents evidence that *venationes*, tied with the imperial cult, were staged in Anatolian cities in the 1<sup>st</sup> c. CE (S. MITCHELL, *Anatolia. Land, Men and Gods in Asia Minor*, I, Oxford, 1995 pp. 105-111). For the *venationes* in the 1<sup>st</sup> c. CE Corinth (also connected with the imperial cult), see A. SPAWFORTH, “Corinth, Argos and the Imperial Cult: Pseudo-Julian, Letter 198” *Hesperia* 63.2 (1994), pp. 217-8 and E. CAPPS, JR., “Observations on the Painted Venatio of the Theatre at Corinth and on the Arrangements of the Arena”, *Hesperia Suppl.* 8 (1949) 64-70.

<sup>8</sup> L. ROBERT, 1940, p. 329.

*venationes*. His response is general enough to refer to both pastime hunting and staged hunts – and, in fact, to every other type of unnecessary killing of animals – but there is some evidence that Plutarch indeed might have had the latter in mind. He argues that killing animals leads to human insensibility and outlines the process of the decline of human nature: in their hunting trips people have learnt to find pleasure in killing animals (thus hunting, ἄγραι, led to savagery, ἀγριότης, 959d); killing animals for self-defense and sacrifice then led to an escalation of violence towards them. As a consequence, ὅσον ἔνεστι τῇ φύσει φονικὸν καὶ θηριῶδες ἔρρωσαν καὶ πρὸς οἴκτον ἀκαμπῆς ἀπειργάσαντο, τοῦ δ' ἡμέρου τὸ πλεῖστον ἀπήμβλυαν (959e: “the brute and the natural lust to kill in man were fortified and rendered inflexible to piety, while gentleness was, for the most part, deadened”). How does the argument of Autobulos refer to *venationes*? The word ἄγραι, though certainly used because of its affinity with ἀγριότης, indicates individual hunting rather than staged hunts, and the hunting trips described refer to some past, pre-historical events rather than present practice. But that this outline of the “historical” decline of human nature must be read as a model for the similar decline of individual human soul, occurring within the temporal limits of a single human

life, is signaled by the reference to the Pythagoreans, who τὴν πρὸς τὰ θηρία πραότητα μελέτην ἐποιήσαντο πρὸς τὸ φιλόανθρωπον καὶ φιλοίκτριμον· ἡ γὰρ συνήθεια δεινὴ τοῖς κατὰ μικρὸν ἐνοικειούμενοις πάθεσι πόρρω προαγαγεῖν τὸν ἄνθρωπον (959f-960a: “in order to inculcate humanity and compassion, made a practice of kindness to animals; for habituation has a strange power to lead men onward by a gradual familiarization of the feelings”). The συνήθεια, “habituation”, may cause moral improvement, but also moral decline; it operates on both “historical” and “individual” level.

Another text by Plutarch proves useful in elucidating the connection between the *venationes* and moral decline. In his political work *Precepts of Statecraft*<sup>9</sup> Plutarch discusses various ways in which politicians gain the favor of the *demos*. Ensuring one’s popularity through personal virtue is commended as the most noble and praiseworthy way, while pleasing the crowd with theatrical performances, distributions of money, and gladiator shows receives Plutarch’s disdain. He advises the addressee: οὕτως σὺ τῶν φιλοτιμιῶν ὅσα τὸ φονικὸν καὶ θηριῶδες ἢ τὸ βομολόχον καὶ ἀκόλαστον ἐρεθίζουσι καὶ τρέφουσι μάλιστα μὲν ἐξέλαυνε τῆς πόλεως, εἰ δὲ μή, φεῦγε καὶ διαμάχου τοῖς πολλοῖς

<sup>9</sup> I use the edition of C. HUBERT, Plutarch, *Moralia*, V 1, Lipsiae 1960, 58-126, and English translation by H. N. FOWLER, Plutarch, *Moralia*, X, Cambridge Mss.-London, 1936, 159-299.

αἰτουμένοις τὰ τοιαῦτα θεάματα (822c: “if possible, remove from the State all those free exhibitions which excite and nourish the murderous and brutal or the scurrilous and licentious spirit, or, if you can not do it, avoid them and oppose the multitude when they demand them”). The spectacles such as gladiator shows are said to excite and nourish τὸ φονικὸν καὶ θηριῶδες – in other words, they lead to the moral degeneration of the audience, just like the killing of animals in *De sollertia animalium*. Indeed, the wording here is strikingly similar to 959e of *De sollertia* (ὅσον ἐστὶ τῇ φύσει φονικὸν καὶ θηριῶδες ἔρωσαν). If we read Autobulos’ words keeping this parallel in mind, then we can see in them a veiled criticism of the arena, and more precisely of the staged beast hunts, the mention of which provoked Autobulos’ protest. The “historical” decline of human kind may be deepened in individual lives, and violent spectacles, such as the *venationes*, are among the factors responsible for it.

The evidence that these connections - between “historical” and “present” degeneration of human soul, between the moral decline and staged beast hunts - were visible to the ancient readers of

Plutarch is provided by Porphyry. This Neo-Platonist of the third century CE made an extensive use of Plutarch’s *De sollertia animalium* in his text *On Abstinence from Killing Animals*. In the third book, chapter 20, he defends “deadly animals” which kill their prey because of hunger or other need, and adds: μηδὲν ἡμῶν κατὰ τοῦτο δρῶντα χαλεπώτερον, πλὴν ὅτι τὰ μὲν ἔνδεια καὶ λιμὸς ἐπὶ ταύτην ἄγει τὴν ἀδικίαν, ἡμεῖς δὲ ὕβρει καὶ τρυφῆς ἕνεκα παίζοντες πολλάκις ἐν θεάτροις καὶ κυνηγεσίαις τὰ πλεῖστα τῶν ζῴων φονεύομεν. ἐξ ὧν δὴ καὶ τὸ μὲν φονικὸν καὶ θηριῶδες ἡμῶν ἐπερρώσθη καὶ τὸ πρὸς οἶκτον ἀπαθές, τοῦ δ’ ἡμέρου τὸ πλεῖστον ἀπήμβλυναν οἱ πρῶτοι τοῦτο τολμήσαντες (3.20: “In this they do nothing more cruel than we do, with the difference that we murder most animals out of aggression, or of luxury, or often for fun in theatres and hunting. Such behavior strengthens that in us which is murderous and bestial and impassive to pity, and the first people to venture such things eliminated most of our gentleness”)<sup>10</sup>. Porphyry here clearly rephrases Autobulos’ words, in a more explicit manner: he refers both to the past - “the first people” – and the present, and explicitly states that theatre (i.e. beast shows)<sup>11</sup> leads to moral decline.

<sup>10</sup> The Greek text follows the edition by J. BOUFFARTIGUE, M. PATILLON: Porphyre, *De l’abstinence*, t. II, Paris 1979; the English translation is by G. CLARK: Porphyry, *On Abstinence from Killing Animals*, Ithaca NY 2000.

<sup>11</sup> It is noteworthy that Greek cities frequently held Roman-style spectacles in their theatre buildings which were remodeled to suit this purpose (e.g. the Theatre of Dionysos in Athens); only few cities, especially Roman colonies, provincial capitals or cities with



I would like to examine two more references to spectacles in the dialogue which confirm my suggestion that their criticism constitutes an important element of the text. In passage 963c Autobulos explicitly refers to Roman spectacles. He says that if it were not that the young men will soon provide plentiful examples of intelligence of animals, he would have himself brought up μυρία μὲν εὐμαθείας μυρία δ'εὐφυΐας παραδείγματα θηρίων διηγούμενος, ὧν ἅμαις καὶ σκάφαις ἡμῖν ἐκ τῶν βασιλικῶν ἀρύσασθαι θεάτρων ἢ καλῆ Ῥώμῃ παρέσχηκε (“countless examples of the docility and native capacity of beasts – of which fair Rome has provided us a reservoir from which to draw in pails and buckets, as it were, from the imperial spectacles”). This seemingly innocent statement in fact entails concealed criticism: the imperial spectacles which provide μυρία examples of animal docility and μυρία examples of animal capacity are in fact the ones that have the least regard for animal life. The vast number of animals involved is emphasized additionally by the phrase ἅμαις καὶ σκάφαις, “with pails and buckets”. This down-to-earth expression, with possible comic undertone<sup>11</sup> undermines the grandeur of the expression ἢ καλῆ Ῥώμῃ.

Another explicit mention of spectacles occurs at the very end of the conversation of Autobulos and Soklaros. In the final words before the arrival of the young men, Autobulos proposes a solution of the practical problem of treating animals. His proposition is to “punish” anti-social animals and make the gentle ones friends and helpers of human kind by taming them. He protests against luxurious lifestyle which leads to unnecessary killing of animals: οὐ γὰρ ἀναρῆται τὸ ζῆν οὐδὲ βίος ἀπόλλυται τοῖς ἀνθρώποις, ἂν μὴ λοπάδας ἰχθύων μηδ' ἥπατα χηνῶν ἔχωσι (...) μηδ' ἀλύοντες ἐν θεάτροις μηδὲ παίζοντες ἐν θήραις τὰ μὲν ἀναγκάζωσι τολμᾶν ἄκοντα καὶ μάχεσθαι, τὰ δὲ μηδ' ἀμύνεσθαι πεφυκότα διαφθείρωσι (965a: “for living is not abolished nor life terminated when a man has no more platters of fish (...) – or when he no longer, idling in the theatre or hunting for sport, compels some beasts against their will to stand their ground and fight, while he destroys others which have not the instinct to fight back even in their own defense”). The theatre undoubtedly means here the *venationes*, and is censured together with luxurious food and hunting.

The references to staged beast hunts, spectacles of Roman provenance,

significant Roman presence, constructed amphitheatres (K.E. WELCH, *The Roman Amphitheatre*, 2007, pp. 163-185).

<sup>12</sup> T. КОСК (ed.), *CAF*, III p. 494 (adesp. fr. 454).

compel us to reconsider the cultural and political context of the dialogue. The criticism of the *venationes* in *De sollertia* complements the criticism of the gladiator shows in the *Precepts of Statecraft*, with both types of spectacles being a part of the same cultural phenomenon. In *De sollertia* Plutarch is concerned mostly with the audience and its degeneration, while *Precepts of Statecraft* offers the perspective of a statesman, who is responsible for maintaining, introducing and creating cultural practices. In the *Precepts of Statecraft*, Plutarch is concerned with the fact that the gladiatorial spectacles are spreading over the Greek world and especially, that Greek statesmen are using the spectacles as a way of expressing their power and ensuring their popularity. By doing this they not only do harm to the audience, but also put other politicians – the ones who are not willing to embrace this Roman practice – in a difficult situation.

In the conclusion of this paper I would like to come back to the uneasy question of the evaluation of pastime hunting in *De sollertia*. I have argued that Soklaros extended the concept of the art of hunting to include the *venationes*, and that this caused the outburst of the criticism of Autobulos. But neither this nor the didactic character of the text removes the dialogue’s ambivalence in the matter of “pastime hunting”. The same arguments

that are aimed at *venationes* retain their validity when hunting is considered. This is clearly implied in the passage, which enumerates in one breath hunting, theatre, and luxurious food. But if Autobulos condemned hunting utterly and wished to lead the youths towards giving up this activity, why did he choose to greet them with flattering references to Homer (965c)? And why did Plutarch decide to include within the speech of the young Aristotimos a praise of hunting? Although this praise is explicable as indicative of Aristotimos’ tastes, it oddly becomes the dialogue’s last word on the subject. Why did Plutarch not remain in accord with the arguments developed within the text and unreservedly censure hunting? I believe that the text does not offer a decisive solution to this dilemma, and I will allow myself to offer some conjectures. It is possible that Plutarch was hesitant to do away with hunting altogether because of its traditional connotations with education, manliness, and nobility – connotations which are played out in authors such as Homer or Plato, both quoted in *De sollertia*. Although hunting was by no means a uniquely Greek domain, as was formerly held by scholars, the link between virtue and hunting seems to have been especially rooted in Greek tradition and literature<sup>13</sup>. On the other hand, during the lifetime of Plutarch this Greek connection of

<sup>13</sup> On Greek versus Roman approach to hunting, see C.M.C. GREEN, “Did the Romans Hunt?”, *Classical Antiquity* 15 (1996) 222-260.

hunting and virtue was increasingly more exploited by the Romans. It was during the reigns of Domitian, Trajan, and Hadrian that the Roman emperors began to be represented as hunters in both literature and the arts<sup>14</sup>. Pliny, in his comparison of Trajan and Domitian in the *Panegyric* (81-82), brings up the theme of hunting and praises Trajan, whose only leisure is to chase a game in his solitary expeditions to forests and mountains. In this respect Trajan differs significantly from Domitian, who preferred to hunt in the style of Near Eastern monarchs, in parks in which game animals were gathered for the enjoyment of hunters. Pliny's description, besides bearing some resemblance to Aristotimos' praise of hunting in *De sollertia*, is also strikingly similar to Dio Chrysostom's portrayal of the ideal monarch in the third *Kingship Oration*: this is the man who turns to hunting whenever he is in need for some leisure and relaxation, considering it the best recreation (3.133-135). The ideal monarch is contrasted with people preferring "the Persian chase", hunting in game parks (3.137), and the comparison with Pliny leaves no doubt that this is a reference to Domitian. After Trajan, Hadrian's fondness of hunting is testified by Cassius Dio and mentioned

by the *Historia Augusta*<sup>15</sup>, and thus it is probably not only sentiment for Xenophon the Athenian that led Arrian of Nikomedeia, a close associate of Hadrian, to writing a treatise on hunting. The existence of the imperial hunting imagery is noteworthy, and may be one of the reasons for the paradoxical character of Plutarch's dialogue, which at the same time does and does not condemn hunting.

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<sup>14</sup> On introduction of hunting imagery under Domitian, see S. L. TUCK, "The Origins of Roman Imperial Hunting Imagery: Domitian and the Redefinition of *Virtus* under the Principate", *G&R* 52 (2005) 221-245.

<sup>15</sup> Dio Cassius: 69.7; 69.10; *SHA*: Hadrian 2.

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