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WAS THERE A TABOO ON KILLING WOLVES IN ROME?

MIKA RISSANEN

ABSTRACT

The treatment given to wolves differed from the treatment meted out to other large predators. The Romans generally seem to have refrained from intentionally harming wolves. For instance, they were not hunted for pleasure (but only in order to protect herds that were out at pasture), and not displayed in the *venationes*, either. The special status of the wolf was not based on national ideology, but rather was connected to the religious importance of the wolf to the Romans.

INTRODUCTION

SIR James George Frazer, in *The Golden Bough*, his famous study of magic and religion writes, “But when a savage names himself after an animal, calls it his brother, and refuses to kill it, the animal is said to be his totem”.¹ Even though the term *totemism* is out of fashion in modern religious research, Frazer’s definition gives an interesting starting point for this article.

That the wolf had a special religious and symbolic significance to the Romans is indisputable. According to the well-known legend, a she-wolf nursed the founders of Rome.² Wolves also played a rather ambivalent role in the festival of the Lupercalia. The Romans, as a nation, were identified as wolves, both by themselves and by their neighbors.³ It is debatable, though, whether this identification could be considered to be equivalent to totemism, as suggested e.g. by Kurt A. Raaflaub.⁴ The Romans were certainly not named for wolves, unlike the Samnite tribe of the Hirpini.⁵

The Romans did not completely refuse to kill wolves, as literary and archaeological sources presented below prove. However, the scarcity of sources that explicitly speak of killing wolves makes one wonder whether

¹ Frazer 1922, 700.

² E.g. Dion. Hal. *Ant. Rom.* 1, 79; Liv. 1, 4; Ov. *Fast.* 2, 381-422; Plut. *Rom.* 3-4; Iust. 42, 2; Ps. Aur. *Vict. Orig.* 20-21.

³ E.g. Liv. 3, 66, 3-4; Hor. *Carm.* 4, 4, 49-53; Vell. 2, 27, 2; Prop. 4, 1, 55-56.

⁴ Raaflaub 2006, 38.

⁵ *Hirpus* is the Samnite equivalent of the Latin *lupus*, ‘wolf’. Fest. p. 106 M.; Strabo 5, 226; Serv. *ad Aen.* 11, 785. I discuss the Hirpini and the cult of the Hirpi Sorani in my recent article, Rissanen 2012.

there was in fact a kind of *taboo* (to utilize Frazer's anthropological terminology) on doing so – at least in the republican period and the early Empire.

A THREAT TO HERDS

In Antiquity the wolf was a serious threat to domestic animals. Since the number of wolves in southern Europe was significantly higher than it is today, there were frequently conflicts between pastoral culture and predators in the Italian countryside. In this context it was natural to kill wolves, either as self-defense or as a precaution. The fewer wolves there were prowling around the herd, the calmer the shepherd could be. However, as Jean Trinquier remarks, in the Roman countryside the wolf was not considered to be a demonic beast whose extinction was desirable, but rather a part of the natural order.¹ The predatory nature of wolves was undisputed: cases (real or fictional) in which a wolf lived peacefully with an animal which was normally its prey were commented upon with wonder.²

Wolves attacked mostly sheep and goats, of domestic animals the victims that put up the least resistance. Larger animals, such as cows, mules or even pigs, were much more dangerous for them.³ Shepherds defended their herds against wolves and other predators (bears, lynxes and foxes) with the essential help of dogs, some of which were equipped with spiked collars.⁴ Colu-

¹ Trinquier 2009, 13–22. Cf. Verg. *Georg.* 1, 130: [sc. Iuppiter] *praedarique lupos iussit* (...) “[Jupiter] bade wolves ravin (...)” (Transl. by J. W. MacKail).

² See e.g. Verg. *Ecl.* 5, 60; Verg. *Georg.* 3, 537; Hor. *Carm.* 3, 18, 18; Ov. *Met.* 1, 304.

³ Varro, *Rust.* 2, 9, 1–2: *Canes enim ita custos pecoris eius quod eo comite indiget ad se defendendum. In quo genere sunt maxime oves, deinde caprae. Has enim lupus captare solet, cui opponimus canes defensores. In suillo pecore tamen sunt quae se vindicent, verres, maiales, scrofae. Prope enim haec apris, qui in silvis saepe dentibus canes occiderunt. Quid dicam de pecore maiore? Cum sciam mulorum gregem, cum pasceretur et eo venisset lupo, ultro mulos circumfluxisse et unguibus caedendo eum occidisse, et tauros solere diversos adsistere clunibus continuatos et cornibus facile propulsare lupos,* “(...) the dog being the guardian of the flock, which needs such a champion to defend it. Under this head come especially sheep but also goats, as these are the common prey of the wolf, and we use dogs to protect them. In a herd of swine, however, there are some members which can defend themselves, namely, boars, barrows, and sows; for they are very much like wild boars, which have often killed dogs in the forest with their tusks. And why speak about the larger animals? For I know that while a herd of mules was feeding and a wolf came upon them, the animals actually whirled about and kicked him to death; that bulls often stand facing different ways, with their hind-quarters touching, and easily drive off wolves with their horns” (Transl. by W. D. Hooper and H. B. Ash).

⁴ Varro, *Rust.* 2, 9, 15: *Ne vulnerentur a bestiis, imponuntur his collaria, quae vocantur melium, id est cingulum circum collum ex corio firmo cum clavulis capitatis, quae intra capita insuitur pellis mollis, ne noceat collo durtia ferri; quod, si lupo aliusve quis his vulneratus est, reliquas quoque canes facit, quae id non habent, ut sint in tuto,* “To protect them from being wounded by wild beasts, collars are placed on them – the so-called melium, that is, a belt around the neck made of stout leather with nails having heads; under the nail heads there is sewed a piece

mella writes that shepherds preferred white dogs, because in the dark they were easier to distinguish from grey wolves.¹ Bludgeoning the animal to death or spearing it were in practice the only ways in which a lone shepherd could kill a wolf that was attacking his flock. It is quite difficult to hit a rapidly moving wolf with an arrow or a javelin.

Wolf hunting has been an organized activity since the Middle Ages; it has required both discipline and a lot of manpower, and its occurrence has been documented.² There are, however, no references to this kind of organized wolf hunt in Antiquity. Trapping pits might have been used in the Italian countryside as a way to defend herds from predators, but there is no explicit documentation of their existence, and no archaeological traces of pits have been preserved; some Roman authors do, however, mention wolves and pitfalls in a proverbial context.³

of soft leather, to prevent the hard iron from injuring the neck. The reason for this is that if a wolf or other beast has been wounded by these nails, this makes the other dogs also, which do not have the collar, safe" (Transl. by W. D. Hooper and H. B. Ash).

¹ Columella, *Rust.* 7, 12, 3: *Pastor album probat, quoniam est ferae dissimilis, magnoque opus interdum discrimine est in propulsandis lupis sub obscuro mane vel etiam crepusculo, ne pro bestia canem feriat*, "A shepherd favors the white one, because it is unlike to the beasts; and sometimes the great difference is needed so that the shepherd would not strike the dog instead of the wolf on a dark morning or in the twilight" (Transl. by the author).

Contrary to Columella, Oppianus recommends dogs which are similar in color to predators, because of their endurance (1, 430-435): *Κεῖνοι δ' ἐν πάντεσσιν ἀριστεύουσι κύνεσσι, / τοῖς ἕκλειαι μορφαὶ μάλα θήρῃσιν ὤμηστῆσι, / μηλοφόνοισι λύκοις ἢ τίγρεσιν ἠνεμοέσσαις / ἢ καὶ ἀλωρήκεσσι θαῶσι τε πορδαλίεσσιν / ἢ ὀρόσοι Δήμητρι πανεῖκελον εἶδος ἔχουσι / σιτόχροοι· μάλα γάρ τε θοοὶ κρατεροὶ τε πέλονται*, "But as to colour, both white and black are bad exceedingly; for they are not readily able to bear the might of the sun nor the rage of the snowy winter season. Among all dogs those are the best whose colour is like that of ravenous wild beasts, sheep-slaying wolves or wind-swift tigers or foxes and swift leopards, or those which have the colour of Demeter's yellow corn; for these are very swift and strong" (Transl. by A. W. Mair).

² Ortalli 1997, 73-83.

³ Hor. *Epist.* 1, 16, 50: *Cautus enim metuit foveam lupus*, "For the wary wolf dreads the pitfall" (Transl. by C. Smart). Silius Italicus compares an ambush made by the Greek-born mercenary general Xanthippus in the 1st Punic War, in 255 BCE, to a ploy of a shepherd (Sil. 6, 329-331): *haud secus ac stabulis procurans otia pastor / in foveam parco tectam velamine frondis / ducit nocte lupos positae balatibus agnae*, "Even so a shepherd, seeking safety for his flock, lures the wolves at night by the bleating of a tethered lamb into the pitfall masked by a slender covering of leafage" (Transl. by J. D. Duff). Cf. Phaedr. 1, 17, 8-9: (...) *Post paucos dies bidens iacentem in fovea prospexit lupum*, "A few days after, the Sheep saw the Wolf lying in a pit" (Transl. by H. T. Riley); Fest. p. 87 M.: *Fovi, qui nunc Favi appellantur, dicti, quod princeps gentis eius ex ea natus sit, cum qua Hercules in fovea concubuit. Alii putant, eum primum ostendisse, quemadmodum ursi et lupi foveis caperentur*, "The family of the Fovi, which is nowadays called the Favi [i.e. Fabii], has its name because the forefather of the family was a son of the woman who slept with Hercules in a pitfall [fovea]. Others think that he had been the first to show how bears and wolves are captured by pitfalls" (Transl. by the author).

Some characters in Plautus' *Poenulus* (*The Little Carthaginian*) play with the name of the procurer Lycus, which means 'wolf' in Greek: "Thus with a pitfall shall we deceive the Procurer Lycus"¹ and "This huntsman, myself, will be going home to-day with some spoil; the dogs are cleverly driving Lycus into the toils".² Pitfalls and dog chases do not necessarily reflect contemporary Roman customs, but may be stereotypical expressions based on Plautus' Greek sources.³ It should be noted that in the treatises on agriculture written by Cato, Varro and Columella, which are regarded as reliable descriptions of life in the Roman countryside, watch-dogs are often mentioned but pitfalls not at all.⁴

Wolves do not seem to have posed any great threat to humans in Antiquity.⁵ In Roman literature there are only mythological references to wolves attacking shepherds. For example Virgil, in his *Aeneid*, describes Arruns, a Trojan soldier, fleeing "out of sight to pathless mountains like a wolf after killing a shepherd or an ox".⁶ A different picture is provided by Horace, from whom a wolf had fled in the Sabine woods.⁷ Even if Horace's description is probably not based on actual experience, it accords with modern zoological views of wolves as timid animals that will avoid contact with humans whenever possible.⁸

PHARMACOLOGICAL PREPARATIONS FROM WOLVES' BODY PARTS?

Did the Romans have any need to hunt wolves? Wolf meat has never been popular with humans or valued in terms of nutrition. It smells bad, it tastes

¹ Plaut. *Poen.* 187: *ita decipiemus fovea lenonem Lycum* (Transl. by A. S. Kline).

² Plaut. *Poen.* 647-648: *Cum praeda hic hodie incedet venator domum: canes compellunt in plagas lepide lupum* (Transl. by A. S. Kline).

³ Cf. Zen. 3, 52: *Εἰς πάγας ὁ λύκος ἀντὶ τοῦ, εἰς ἡκονημένας μαχαίρας ἢ αἰξί. Ἐπὶ τῶν εἰς κίνδυνον προῦτον ἡκόντων*, "A wolf in the trap – or a goat in front of sharp knives. About someone who is in obvious danger" (Transl. by the author).

⁴ Cato, *Agr.* 127; Varro, *Rust.* 2, 9; Columella, *Rust.* 7, 12.

⁵ Trinquier 2009, 16-22.

⁶ Verg. *Aen.* 11, 809-811: *ac velut ille, prius quam tela inimica sequantur, / continuo in montis sese avius abdidit altos / occiso pastore lupus magnouē iuenco*, "And as a wolf that has killed a shepherd, or a great bullock, immediately hides itself deep in the pathless mountains before the hostile spears can reach it (...)" (Transl. by A. S. Kline).

⁷ Hor. *Carm.* 1, 22, 9-16: *Namque me silva lupus in Sabina, / dum meam canto Lalagem et ultra / terminum curis vagor expeditis, / fugit inermem, // quale portentum neque militaris / Daunias latis alit aesculetis / nec Iubae tellus generat, leonum / arida nutrix*, "While I was wandering, beyond the boundaries / of my farm, in the Sabine woods, and singing / free from care, lightly-defended, of my Lalage, / a wolf fled from me: // a monster not even warlike Apulia / nourishes deep in its far-flung oak forests, / or that Juba's parched Numidian land breeds, / nursery of lions" (Transl. by A. S. Kline).

⁸ Fritts *et al.* 2003, 302-305; Trinquier 2009, 17.

bad, and it is a potential source of the trichinella parasite.¹ There are few known tribes who, during periods of famine, have hunted wolves for their meat; one of them is the North American Naskapis.² Neither Greek nor Roman authors mention wolf meat as food.³ Possible reasons for wolf hunting in Antiquity must therefore be sought elsewhere.

Pliny the Elder, in the 28th book of his *Naturalis historia*, presents numerous pharmacological uses for the body parts of wolves: especially their gall, liver and fat seem to have had many medical and magical uses. Wolf's liver, prepared in different ways, could be used as a cure for a cough,⁴ tuberculosis⁵ and female diseases.⁶ Many other diseases, from eye problems⁷ to venereal diseases,⁸ were cured with medication made of other body parts of wolves. As for purely magical use, products made from wolves were said to defend their users against noxious spells⁹ or make an infant more courageous.¹⁰ However, the medicinal use of body parts of serpents or bears, for instance, is mentioned even more frequently.¹¹

¹ Zarnke *et al.* 1999; Kreeger 2003, 205-208.

² Lopez 1978, 319-320.

³ Richter 1978, 969.

⁴ Plin. *Nat.* 28, 193: *Tussim iocur lupi ex vino tepido sanat*, "A wolf's liver, administered in mulled wine, is a cure for cough" (Transl. by J. Bostock).

⁵ Plin. *Nat.* 28, 230: *Phthisicis medentur iocur lupi ex vino macro*, "The cure of phthisis is effected by taking a wolf's liver boiled in thin wine" (Transl. by J. Bostock).

⁶ Plin. *Nat.* 28, 247: *Lupi adipis inlitis vulvas molliat, dolores earum iocur*, "A wolf's fat, applied externally, acts emolliently upon the uterus, and the liver of a wolf is very soothing for pains in that organ" (Transl. by J. Bostock).

⁷ Plin. *Nat.* 28, 167: *Lupi excrementis circumlini suffusiones prodest, cinere eorum cum Attico melle inungui obscuritates*, "For the cure of cataract, it is reckoned a good plan to apply a wolf's excrements: the same substance, too, reduced to ashes, is used for the dispersion of films, in combination with Attic honey" (Transl. by J. Bostock).

⁸ Plin. *Nat.* 28, 216: (...) *item fel caprinum condylomatis per se, item fel lupinum ex vino*, "Goats' gall, too, is employed by itself, for the cure of condylomata, and sometimes, wolf's gall, mixed with wine" (Transl. by J. Bostock).

⁹ Plin. *Nat.* 28, 142: *Masurius palmam lupino adipi dedisse antiquos tradit. ideo novas nuptas illo perunguere postes solitas, ne quid mali medicamenti inferretur*, "Masurius informs us, that the ancients set the highest value of all upon the fat of the wolf: and that it was for this reason that the newly-wedded bride used to anoint the doorposts of her husband's house with it, in order that no noxious spells might find admittance" (Transl. by J. Bostock).

Plin. *Nat.* 28, 247: *Carnes vero lupi edisse parituris prodest aut si incipientibus parturire sit iuxta qui ederit, adeo ut etiam contra inlatas noxias valeat*, "It is found advantageous for women, when near delivery, to eat wolf's flesh, or, if they are in travail, to have a person near them who has eaten it; so much so, indeed, that it will act as a countercharm even to any noxious spells which may have been laid upon them" (Transl. by J. Bostock).

¹⁰ Plin. *Nat.* 28, 257: *Dens lupi adalligatus infantium pavores prohibet dentiendique morbos, quod et pellis lupina praestat*, "A wolf's tooth, attached to the body, prevents infants from being startled, and acts as a preservative against the maladies attendant upon dentition; an effect equally produced by making use of a wolf's skin" (Transl. by J. Bostock).

¹¹ In the 1st book of *Naturalis historia* Pliny gives a full list of authors he had used (14 Latin and 33 foreign authors) and the number of pieces of information (*res et historiae et observa-*

Pliny had no empirical experience of pharmacology. His purpose was to collect all possible information without troubling too much about assessing its reliability.¹ Wolf-related medico-magical folklore, similar to that which Pliny gives, can be found in Greek, Coptic and Demotic texts about magic, too.² This folk tradition was transmitted to Pliny by Greek authors. The main source for Pliny's writings about the medical preparations deriving from animals was the now lost work of Xenocrates of Aphrodisias, Περὶ τῆς ἀπὸ τῶν Ζώων Ὀφελείας (*On Useful Things from Living Beings*, written some decades before *Naturalis historia*).³

Before Pliny, the only Latin text to mention the pharmacological use of a wolf's body parts is the *Compositiones*, a pharmacology written by Scribonius Largus, which recommends a boiled and dried wolf liver for liver problems.⁴ Pliny knows the same cure, with the difference that the dried liver should be served with honeyed wine.⁵ Pliny, however, did not know the work of Scribonius Largus. The similarities between *Compositiones* and the pharmacological writings of Pliny must therefore be traced back to common Greek sources, as John Scarborough concludes.⁶ The same folkloric elements appear in the writings of later medical authors, from the late 2nd century Galen⁷ up to Marcellus Empiricus, who lived at the turn of the 4th and 5th centuries.⁸

It is quite conceivable that most of Pliny's numerous anecdotes about the medico-magical use of wolf body parts derive from Greek and Oriental folklore traditions, not from the Roman pharmacological practices of his own time. Contrary to what Nadia Canu proposes, it cannot be concluded that such preparations were commonly used in 1st century CE Italy.⁹ Therefore the information given by Pliny does not prove that wolves were hunted because of any demand for their body parts.

tiones) in each book. Of the 1682 pieces of information included in the 28th book, about medicine derived from men and large animals, 27 are related to wolves. Plin. *Nat.* 1, 28.

¹ Scarborough 1986, 63; 2011, 8-9.

² Richter 1978, 969-971.

³ Scarborough 1986, 67.

⁴ Scrib. 123, 1: *Ad tumorem et dolorem iocineris, item ad duritiam facit bene lupi iecur primum in aqua ferventi demissum atque ita arefactum*, "For an enlarged liver, liver pain and also for hardness of the liver, help can be found in wolf's liver which is first boiled in hot water and then dried" (Transl. by the author).

⁵ Plin. *Nat.* 28, 197: *Iocineris dolores lupi iocur aridum ex mulso*, "Liver complaints are cured by taking a wolf's liver dried, in honied wine" (Transl. by J. Bostock).

⁶ Scarborough 1986, 62-64.

⁷ Galen regards wolf's liver as a cure for liver problems, Galen. 13, 215 K.

⁸ Wolf's liver recommended for cough, Marc. *Med.* 16, 39.

⁹ Canu 2005, 96-97.

DEMAND FOR WOLF SKINS

Were wolves, then, wanted for their skins? The only literary evidence of the use of wolf skins in the Roman army is given by Polybius, who reported that among the 2nd century BCE light-armed infantry, *velites*, “Each man also wears a headpiece without a crest (*galea*); which he sometimes covers with a piece of wolf skin or something of that kind, for the sake of both protection and identification”.¹ The class of *velites* was introduced in the late 3rd century BCE and abolished in the Marian military reforms of 107 BCE.²

Polybius’ text probably refers to the emblems of individual *ordines* (groups of about 200 men) of *velites*. The practice of wearing animal skins was probably limited to a particular group of *velites*. Because the *velites* were the youngest and usually the poorest soldiers in the legion, and could rarely afford much equipment,³ there is no reason to believe that a large number of *velites* would have worn such relatively rare animal skins. Soldiers with an animal skin could have acted as leaders of each *ordo*. In the chaotic first line of battle, where the *velites* were positioned, it was difficult to carry a standard, but by wearing an animal skin the leader of each group would have been easily recognizable.⁴

Contrary to popular belief, the Roman standard-bearers (*signiferi*) do not seem to have covered their helmets with wolf skins. The widespread use of wolf skins in the costumes of standard-bearers in modern re-enactments⁵ cannot be defended in the light of the surviving sources: archaeological and literary sources indicate that standard-bearers wore only bear and lion skins, and wolf skins are never mentioned.⁶ Vegetius describes how, in the 4th century CE, “All standard-bearers, although members of the infantry, got smaller cuirasses and covered their helmets with the skins of bears to terrify the

¹ Pol. 6, 22, 3: προσερικοσμεῖται δὲ καὶ λιτῶ περικεφαλαίῳ· ποτὲ δὲ λυκείαν ἢ τι τῶν τοιούτων ἐπιτίθεται, σκέρης ἅμα καὶ σημείου χάριν, ἵνα τοῖς κατὰ μέρος ἡγεμόσι προκινδυνεύοντες ἐρρωμένως καὶ μὴ διάδηλοι γίνωνται.

² The use of wolves, minotaurs, horses and boars as emblems of the Roman army was abolished in the Marian reforms, too. Of the five emblematic animals, the only one to remain in use was the eagle. Plin. *Nat.* 10, 16.

³ Southern 2007, 92.

⁴ The use of animal emblems could have a parallel in the religious practice of *ver sacrum*. Some peoples of Central Italy, e.g. the above-mentioned Hirpini, were known to have followed their totemic animal to a new dwelling-place.

⁵ A *signifer* with a wolf skin can be seen, for example, at [<http://www.figurines.miniatures.de/reconstitution/legion-VI-victrix-signifer-baliste.jpg>], [http://farm3.static.flickr.com/2434/3776188682_536a2ff355.jpg] and [<http://www.roman-empire.net/army/pics/signifer-01.jpg>] (Pages viewed on Dec 16, 2011).

⁶ Couissin 1926, 422; Davies 1989, 170.

enemy”.¹ According to epigraphical evidence, some soldiers in the Roman army were specialized bear-hunters or lion-hunters, whose task was to acquire pelts for uniforms.² Later there was also a growing need for beasts for the mock wild beast hunts (*venationes*) performed in amphitheaters.³ There is no literary documentation of the existence of wolf-hunters, *luparii*, in the military context.⁴

Sculptures showing members of the Roman army are mostly too rough and too damaged for the exact identification of the skins worn by the standard-bearers. This means that the use of wolf skins cannot be completely ruled out, but the skins seen on Trajan’s Column, for example, resemble more those of lions (FIG. 1) or bears (FIG. 2). According to Danae Richter, there is no evidence of wolf skins on the helmets of the standard-bearers on Trajan’s Column.⁵ Michael P. Spiedel, on the other hand, identifies some skins worn by Germanic auxiliary soldiers as those of the wolf (FIG. 3).⁶ He claims that the use of wolf skins was quite common among warriors of the Germanic tribes.⁷

Most of the ancient literary references to the wearing of wolf skins are fictional or mythological. In the Trojan War, Dolon, a Trojan scout, was said to have worn a wolf skin as a disguise.⁸ The Greek geographer Pausanias

¹ Veg. Mil. 2, 16, 2: *Omnes antesignani vel signiferi, quamvis pedites, loricas minores accipiebant et galeas ad terrorem hostium ursinis pellibus tectas* (Transl. by the author).

² E.g. CIL III 7449; VI 130; VIII 21567; XIII 8174; AE 1901,72.

³ Epplett 2001a, 210-216. Cf. Iul. Afr. 1, 14.

⁴ Epplett 2001b, 211-215.

⁵ Richter 2010, 284-287. Similarly e.g. Webster 1981, 139.

⁶ Spiedel 2004, 17-20; with a comprehensive bibliography on p. 211 n. 22. On the disputed identification of the soldiers, see Spiedel 2004, 17-19; Richter 2010, 287.

⁷ Spiedel 2004, 21-31. Cf. Tac. Germ. 17: *Gerunt et ferarum pelles (...)*, “They likewise wear the skins of savage beasts (...)” (Transl. by T. Gordon); Tac. Hist. 2, 88, 3: *Nec minus saevum spectaculum erant ipsi, tergis ferarum et ingentibus telis horrentes*, “Nor were the men themselves a less frightful spectacle, bristling as they were with the skins of wild beasts, and armed with huge lances” (Transl. by A. J. Church and W. J. Brodribb).

⁸ Hom. Il. 10, 332-336: ὣς φάτο καὶ ῥ’ ἐπίορκον ἐρώμοσε, τὸν δ’ ὀρόθυνεν· αὐτίκα δ’ ἀμφ’ ὤμοισιν ἐβάλλετο καμπύλα τόξα, / ἔσσατο δ’ ἔκτοσθεν ῥίνδον πολιοῖο λύκοιο, / κρατὶ δ’ ἐπὶ κτιδέην κυνέην, ἔλε δ’ ὄξιν ἄκοντα, / βῆ δ’ ἰέναι προτὶ νῆας ἀπὸ στρατοῦ (...), “His oath proved without force, but it satisfied Dolon, who quickly slung his curved bow on his shoulder, threw a grey wolf’s pelt over it, placed a ferret-skin cap on his head, and grasping a sharp javelin set off towards the ships” (Transl. by A. S. Kline); Eur. Rh. 208-215: λύκειον ἀμφὶ νῶτ’ ἐνάψομαι δορᾶν / καὶ χάσμα θηρὸς ἀμφ’ ἐμῷ θήσω κάρα, / βᾶσιν τε χερσὶ προσθίαν καθαρμύσας / καὶ κῶλα κῶλοισι, τετράπουν μιμήσομαι / λύκου κέλευθον πολεμίοις δυσέυρετον, / τάφροις πελάζων καὶ νεῶν προβλήμασιν. / ὅταν δ’ ἔρημον χῶρον ἐμβαίνω ποδί, / δίβαμος εἴμι· τῆδε σύγκειται δόλος, “A grey wolf’s hide / shall wrap my body close on either side; / my head shall be the mask of gleaming teeth, / my arms fit in the forepaws, like a sheath, / my thighs in the hinder parts. No Greek shall tell / ‘tis not a wolf that walks, half visible, / on four feet by the trenches and around / the ship-screen. When it comes to empty ground / it stands on two. – That is the plan, my friend!” (Transl. by G. Murray).



FIG. 1. A detail of the frieze of Trajan's Column:
Roman standard-bearers wearing animal skins (lion?).
(From Coarelli 1999, tav. 126).



FIG. 2. A detail of the frieze of Trajan's Column:
Roman standard-bearers wearing animal skins (bear?).
(From Coarelli 1999, tav. 46).



FIG. 3. A detail of the frieze of Trajan's Column:
Warriors (probably German auxiliaries) wearing bear (and possibly wolf) skins.
(From Cichorius 1896, Taf. xxvii).

writes about Arcadian warriors who were clothed in wolf skins in the First Messenian War (in the 8th century BCE, about 850 years before Pausanias' time),¹ and about a picture in Temesa of a hero called *Lykas* who was clad in a wolf-skin.² The bodyguards of the 6th century BCE Athenian tyrant Pisistratus were known as *λυκόροδες*, "wolf-footed", which possibly meant

¹ Paus. 4, 11, 3: θώρακα γὰρ ἢ ἀσπίδα εἶχεν οὐχ ἕκαστος, ὅσοι δὲ ἠπόρουσαν τούτων, περιεβέβληντο αἰγῶν νάκας καὶ προβάτων, οἱ δὲ καὶ θηρίων δέρματα καὶ μάλιστα οἱ ὄρειοι τῶν Ἀρκάδων λύκων τε καὶ ἄρκτων, "Not all of them possessed a breastplate or shield, but those who lacked them were protected with the skins of goats and sheep, some of them, particularly the Arcadian mountaineers, having the hides of wild beasts, wolves and bears" (Transl. by W. H. S. Jones and H. A. Ormerod).

² Paus. 6, 6, 11: πρὸς δὲ ἠρώϊόν τε καὶ Τεμέσα ἦν ἡ πόλις, ἐν δὲ σφισι καὶ δαίμων ὄντινα ἐξέβαλεν ὁ Εὐθύμος, χροῖαν τε δεινῶς μέλας καὶ τὸ εἶδος ἅπαν ἐς τὰ μάλιστα φοβερός, λύκου δὲ ἀμρίσχετο δέρμα ἐσθῆτα· ἐτίθετο δὲ καὶ ὄνομα Λύκαν τὰ ἐπὶ τῇ γραφῇ γράμματα, "Besides, there were a hero-shrine and the city of Temesa, and in the midst was the ghost that Euthymus cast out. Horribly black in color, and exceedingly dreadful in all his appearance, he had a wolf's skin thrown round him as a garment. The letters on the picture gave his name as Lycas" (Transl. by W. H. S. Jones and H. A. Ormerod).

that they wore shoes made of wolf skin, or alternatively that they went barefoot.¹ According to Diodorus Siculus, Macedon, son of the Egyptian Underworld god Osiris, was “wearing (...) the fore-parts of a wolf”.² The Etruscan god of the Underworld, *Aita*, too, was often depicted wearing a hood like a wolf’s head.³ In Roman literature, caps made of wolf skin are mentioned twice in Virgil’s *Aeneid*, as being worn by the troops of Caeculus⁴ and the Trojan warrior Ornytus.⁵ Propertius, in his elegy about the origins of the temple of Jupiter Feretrius, presents Romulus wearing a helmet made of wolf skin,⁶ and in Ovid’s *Metamorphoses* a centaur called Dorylas “wore a wolfskin on his head”.⁷

THE HUNTING OF WOLVES

According to a funeral inscription from Apulia from the first half of the 2nd century CE, an imperial slave called Fortunatus had worked as a *luparius*, a wolf hunter.⁸ The only other extant reference to a *luparius* can be found in Servius, writing in the late 4th century CE; according to him, “it is known that wolf-hunters kill wolves with meat that is soaked in poison”.⁹ The poison mentioned by Servius was probably extracted from *aconitum*, which was called *λυκοκτόνον*, “wolf-killer” in Greek.¹⁰ This is the only reference to the use of poison against wolves in Italy.

From all of the above it seems safe to conclude that in Antiquity wolves were probably not hunted for pleasure in either Greece or Italy. The hunting of wolves was practiced only for the protection of herds or for some similar practical reason, such as acquiring wolf skins for the crests of the above-mentioned *velites*. The Greeks did not hunt carnivorous beasts in the

¹ Arist. fr. 394 Rose: οἱ τῶν τυράννων δορυφόροι λυκόποδες, “the wolf-footed spear-bearers of the tyrant” (Transl. by the author). Cf. Catenacci 2012, 175-176.

² Diod. Sic. 1, 18, 1: περιθέσθαι (...) τὸν δὲ Μακεδόνα λύκου προτομήν.

³ See e.g. Krauskopf 1987, 61-67; Krauskopf 1988.

⁴ The legendary founder of Praeneste and son of the fire god Vulcan. Verg. *Aen.* 7, 688-689: (...) *fulvosque lupi de pelle galeros / tegmen habent capiti*, “(...) and have reddish caps of wolf-skin for headgear” (Transl. by A. S. Kline).

⁵ Verg. *Aen.* 11, 680-681: (...) *caput ingens oris hiatus / et malae texere lupi cum dentibus albis*, “his head protected by a wolf’s huge gaping mask, and white-toothed jaws” (Transl. by A. S. Kline).

⁶ Prop. 4, 10, 20: *et galea hirsuta compta lupina iuba*, “and his helmet was wolf-skin, decorated with a shaggy crest” (Transl. by A. S. Kline).

⁷ Ov. *Met.* 12, 379-380: (...) *tempora tecta gerebat / pelle lupi* (...).

⁸ CIL IX 6173: *Fortunato · Caesae | ris · n(ostri) · ser(vo) · lupario* (...).

⁹ Serv. *ad Georg.* 1, 139: *constat (...) luparios carnibus tinctis veneno lupos necare* (Transl. by the author). Cf. Malavolta 1985.

¹⁰ Cf. Gal. 11, 820 K.; Ael. *Nat.* 9, 18. Similarly, *aconitum* is called ‘wolfsbane’ in English.

Homeric world or in Classical times, but went mainly after herbivores, such as boar or deer.¹ The Roman aristocracy adopted similar customs of hunting for sport, their primary game being boars and hares.²

In the late Empire the aristocracy introduced horseback hunting with nets. Jacques Aymard thinks that nets could have been used for wolf hunting, too.³ There are no written sources to support this suggestion, but hunting scenes represented on two sarcophagi could involve a wolf. One of these, the 4th century Christian sarcophagus of St. Ludre, lies in the church of Saint-Etienne at Déols, France. Its relief shows, beside the hunting of boars and lions, a net hunt of two beasts with a mane. The identification of these animals as bears cannot be totally excluded, but it is more likely that the figures represent wolves (FIG. 4).⁴ Also on the 3rd century "Sarcophage de la chasse" in the Musée de Cahors Henri-Martin one of the hunted animals could, perhaps, be identified as a wolf.⁵

Although the Romans did not really worship the wolf, some dedications have been found to the *Lupa Romana* and the *Lupa Augusta* in Hispania, dating from the late 1st or 2nd centuries CE.⁶ However, they should be seen as a part of the Roman Imperial cult, not as a cult of the she-wolf itself.⁷

The rise of Christianity together with worsening economic conditions changed the attitude toward wolves in Late Antiquity. In Christianity the wolf was not appreciated: Christ was the good shepherd, and wolves were commonly associated with evil.⁸ It is therefore possible that wolves were indeed hunted, and the sarcophagi above may reflect the 4th century hunting habits of Roman Gaul, but certain reservations must be voiced. Hunting scenes were a common motif in Roman funeral reliefs. Especially in Late Antiquity they were conventional and included neither personal details of the deceased nor local characteristics.⁹ Hunting scenes also had a very strong symbolic significance: success in hunting, especially on a lion, proclaimed triumph over death.¹⁰ In the Christian era, a funeral relief depicting the hunting and killing of a wolf, an animal associated with heretics,¹¹ could have been a powerful symbol of the victory of the true faith.

¹ Anderson 1985, 15; Barringer 2001, 147-161, 174-181, 203-207.

² Green 1996, 229; Trinquier 2009, 29-30.

³ Aymard 1951, 349-351.

⁴ Espérandieu 1908, 1560; Aymard 1951, 351.

⁵ Musée de Cahors Henri-Martin, inv. n. Ca.2.3. Espérandieu 1908, 1648.

⁶ *CIL* II 2156; II 4603.

⁷ Dulière 1979, 261-262; Balil 1985.

⁸ *John* 10, 11-12; *Matth.* 10, 16. See Ortalli 1973 and 1997, 57-122 (especially 95-107), on the demonization of wolves in Late Antiquity and the Middle Ages.

⁹ Warland 2000, 181-183.

¹⁰ Andrae 1985, 8-14; Gaggadis-Robin 2008, 36.

¹¹ St. Ambrose, 'Expositio Evangelii secundum Lucam', in Adrien 1957, VIII cap. 49, 230. Cf. Ortalli 1997, 97-99.

The paucity of bone finds is consistent with the paucity of literary reference to wolf hunting; together they seem to confirm that wolf-hunting was not a regular feature of Roman life. Only six archaic remains of wolf bones have been found in cult sites of Latium, four of them dating from the middle or late Bronze Age (11th to 10th century BCE) and two from the early Iron Age (9th century BCE). Thus between the 8th century BCE and the 2nd century CE there are no findings (on the bones dating from Late Antiquity, see below).¹ In general the data from bone finds are very sparse, and too far-reaching conclusions should not be drawn. However, since each of the findings included the remains of only one wolf, it seems unlikely that wolves were commonly sacrificed in pre-historic Latium. The Etruscans, on the other hand, did practice wolf sacrifice to some extent, and wolf bones have been found in the Etruscan sanctuaries of Sorgenti della Nova, Ortaglia and Monte Savino.²

The only recorded traces of wolf sacrifices in the Roman world are found in the provinces. In some Mithraic sites, e.g. in Martigny, bones of canines that had been sacrificed, probably wolves, have been found, but the possibility that these were the bones of large dogs cannot be excluded. These sacrifices, however, belong to the cultural context of Mithraism, which differed greatly from the traditional Roman religion.³

In Greece, the symbolic value of the wolf was quite different from the value it had in Rome.⁴ Xenophon, in his *Anabasis*, writes that Greek soldiers ratified their oaths by sacrificing “a bull, a wolf, a boar, and a ram over a



FIG. 4. A detail of the 4th century sarcophagus of St. Ludre in Déols. Hunting wolves (or bears) with nets. (Photographed by Didier Dubant).

¹ De Grossi Mazzorin 1995, 339; De Grossi Mazzorin-Minniti 2009, 43-44. Wolf remains dating from the Iron Age have been found in Italy outside of Latium, too; for example in Tortoreto (Abruzzo); De Grossi Mazzorin *et al.* 2008, 66-74; Wilkens 2003.

² Negroni Catacchio 1995, 346; Bruni 2005, 20-23; Curci *et al.* 2006.

³ Prieur 1988, 187-188; Olive 2004, 147-155.

⁴ Cf. Detienne-Svenbro 1979; Mainoldi 1984.

shield”.¹ According to Pausanias, wolves were sacrificed in the Laphria festival, which was celebrated in Patras in honor of Artemis.² Bones of wolves have been found in the sanctuary of Messene and the Artemision of Ephesus.³ In Oppian’s *Cynegetica* (written in the early 3rd century CE), the wolf is named along with other animals that were hunted.⁴ Also in the homonymous Latin work of Nemesianus (late 3rd century CE), wolves are mentioned in a hunting scene which was set in a Greek context.⁵ If we compare the osteological results of Greek and Roman cult sites and other archaeological excavations, then, the absence of wolf bones in the Roman world is striking.

The Edict of Diocletian on Maximum Prices (issued in 301 CE) proves that at the beginning of the 4th century there was some hunting of wolves in the eastern part of the Empire. The maximum price of a wolf skin was relatively low (40 *denarii* for a tanned skin, 25 *denarii* for an untreated skin),⁶ compared e.g. with a lion or a leopard skin (1250 / 1000 *denarii*).⁷ One reason for the low price could be the steady supply caused by the common practice of hunting wolves, as Nadia Canu suggests.⁸ However, a more likely explanation in my opinion would be the low demand for wolf skins – since they were not commonly used in public, as I have shown above.

¹ Xen. *Anab.* 2, 2, 9: Ταῦτα δ’ ὤμοσαν, σφάζαντες ταῦρον καὶ λύκον καὶ κάρρον καὶ κρινὸν εἰς ἀσπίδα. However, the authenticity of the word “wolf” in the text is disputed. It is found only in some manuscripts, and P. Masqueray, for example, has not accepted it in his edition (Les Belles Lettres, 1930). On textual criticism, cf. Keller 1887, n. 156.

² Paus. 7, 18, 12: ἐσβάλλουσι γὰρ ζῶντας ἐς τὸν βωμὸν ὄρνιθάς τε τοὺς ἐδωδίμους καὶ ἱερῆα ὁμοίως ἅπαντα, ἔτι δὲ ὕς ἀγρίουσ καὶ ἐλάφους τε καὶ δορκάδας, οἱ δὲ καὶ λύκων καὶ ἄρκτων σκύμνους, οἱ δὲ καὶ τὰτέλεια τῶν θηρίων, “For the people throw alive upon the altar edible birds and every kind of victim as well; there are wild boars, deer and gazelles; some bring wolf-cubs or bear-cubs, others the full-grown beasts” (Transl. by W. H. S. Jones and H. A. Ormerod).

³ Nobis 1997, 102-107; Bammer 1998, 38. However, it must be remembered that not all animals killed and eaten in sanctuaries can be considered sacrificial victims, as Ekroth (2007) notes.

⁴ Opp. 1, 73: θηρητῆρε λύκους ὄλεσαν, θύννουσ ἀλιῆσ, / ἀγρευτῆρεσ οἷσ, τρήρωνασ ἔλον δονακῆσ, / ἄρκτον ἐπακτῆρεσ, καὶ μορμύρον ἀσπαλιῆσ, / τίγριν δ’ ἱπρῆσ, καὶ τριγλίδασ ἰχθυβολῆσ, / κάρριον ἰχγευτῆρεσ, ἀηδόνασ ἰξευτῆρεσ, “Hunters kill Wolves, fishermen kill Tunnies; the hunter with his net takes Sheep, the fowler with his reeds takes Doves; the hunter with his hounds takes the Bear, the angler takes the Mormyrus; the mounted hunter takes the Tiger, the fisher with his trident takes the Red Mullet; the tracker takes the Boar, the fowler with his birdlime takes the Nightingale” (Transl. by A. W. Mair).

⁵ Nemes. *Cyn.* 51-53: *nos timidos lepores, imbelles figere dammas / audacesque lupos, vulpem captare dolosam / gaudemus (...)*, “We enjoy transfixing the nervous hare, the unresisting doe, the daring wolf or capturing the crafty fox” (Transl. by J. W. Duff and A. M. Duff).

⁶ *Edict. Diocl.* 8, 27-28: *Pellis lupina infecta x [viginti q]uinque / Eadem confecta x [quadrag]inta δέρμα λύκειον ἄνεργον X κέ’ / εἰργασμένον X μ’.*

⁷ *Edict. Diocl.* 8, 39-41.

⁸ Canu 2006, 97.

AVOIDANCE OF VIOLENCE AGAINST WOLVES TAKEN AS PORTENTS¹

Annalists have recorded sixteen incidents of a wolf entering the city of Rome which were regarded as portents. Contrary to what F.B. Krauss and J. Trinquier suggest,² it seems that such wolves were usually not harmed on purpose, at least in the republican period. According to Livy, in 196 BCE a stray wolf ran through the city of Rome and escaped “almost untouched”.³ In 177 BCE another wolf escaped “amid great uproar on the part of the pursuers”.⁴ The Romans did not try to stop or surround wolves in order to kill them, which would have been the easiest way to ensure the safety of bystanders. Instead, people drove the wolves along the streets towards a gate in order to get them out of Rome alive. Similar incidents of wolves of ill omen entering Rome and escaping unharmed were recorded by Orosius⁵ and Julius Obsequens.⁶ Nor were such wolves harmed in smaller Italian towns or military camps.⁷

¹ I discuss the wolf portents at length in my Rissanen 2015.

² Krauss 1930, 109: “In all these citations [Liv. 27, 37, 3; 32, 29, 2; 33, 26, 9; 41, 9, 6] it is apparent that the wolf was regarded as the bringer of evil, especially martial distress and reverses, and as such must be caught and killed”.

Trinquier 2004, 114: “Comme les autres animaux sauvages pourvoyeurs de prodiges, il était impitoyablement poursuivi, et son apparition déclenchait une véritable fièvre meurtrière. (...) il fallait au contraire prévenir la fuite du loup et le mettre à mort, de préférence dans le périmètre du *pomerium*”.

³ Liv. 33, 26, 9: *lupus Esquilina porta ingressus, frequentissima parte urbis cum in forum decurrisset, Tusco vico atque inde Cermalto per portam Capenam prope intactus evaserat*, “a wolf entered the City through the Porta Esquilina, the busiest part of the City, and ran down to the Forum; it then ran through the Tuscan and Cermalian wards, and finally escaped through the Porta Capena almost untouched” (Transl. by C. Roberts).

⁴ Liv. 41, 9, 6: *lupus etiam Romae interdum agitatus, cum Collina porta intrasset, per Esquilinam magno consecrantium tumultu evasit*, “a wolf was pursued even in Rome by day, after entering by the Porta Collina, and escaped by the Porta Esquilina amid great uproar on the part of the pursuers” (Transl. by C. Roberts).

⁵ In 269 BCE. Oros. *Hist.* 4, 4, 2: *lupi tres ante lucem ingressi urbem, semesum cadaver intulerunt sparsumque membratim in foro ipsi strepitu hominum exterriti reliquerunt*, “Before dawn three wolves came into the city, bringing in a half-eaten corpse. When they were frightened by the shouts of the people, they left the remains strewn in the Forum” (Transl. by A. T. Fear).

⁶ In 165 BCE. Obs. 13: *et lupi Esquilis et in colle Quirinali meridie apparuerunt exagitati que fuerunt*, “and wolves appeared on the Esquiline and on the Quirinal hill at midday and were driven off” (Transl. by C. E. Evans).

⁷ Liv. 21, 46, 2: *nam et lupus intraverat castra laniatisque obviis ipse intactus evaserat*, “A wolf had entered the camp and after worrying all it met had got away unhurt” (Transl. by C. Roberts); Liv. 21, 62, 5: *in Gallia lupum vigili gladium ex vagina raptum abstulisse*, “in Gaul a wolf had snatched a sentinel’s sword from its scabbard and run off with it” (repeated also in Val. Max. 1, 6, 5); Obs. 27: *Minturnis lupus vigilem laniavit et inter tumultum effugit*. “At Minturnae a wolf lacerated a guard and escaped amid the confusion” (Transl. by C. E. Evans). Cf. Liv.

However, in 96 BCE a wolf was killed in a private house in Rome,¹ and in 31 BCE “a wolf was caught as it was running into the temple of Fortune and killed”.² In both of these incidents the wolves had got into a place from which there was no escape: the killings seem to have been carried out when there was no way to get the terrified animal out of the building alive without putting human life in danger.³

There are several mentions of other creatures of ill omen such as wasps, oxen or an owl, which religious magistrates ordered should be killed.⁴ Unlike these, the wolves that I mentioned above were killed only in despera-

10, 27, 8-9: *Cum instructae acies starent, cerva fugiens lupum e montibus exacta per campos inter duas acies decurrit; inde diversae ferae, cerva ad Gallos, lupus ad Romanos cursum deflexit. Lupo data inter ordines via; cervam Galli confixere. Tum ex antesignanis Romanus miles “illac fuga” inquit “et caedes vertit, ubi sacram Dianae feram iacentem videtis; hinc victor Martius lupus, integer et intactus, gentis nos Martiae et conditoris nostri admonuit”*, “Whilst the two armies were standing ready to engage, a hind driven by a wolf from the mountains ran down into the open space between the two lines with the wolf in pursuit. Here they each took a different direction, the hind ran to the Gauls, the wolf to the Romans. Way was made for the wolf between the ranks; the Gauls speared the hind. On this a soldier in the front rank exclaimed: ‘In that place where you see the creature sacred to Diana lying dead, flight and carnage will begin; here the wolf, whole and unhurt, a creature sacred to Mars, reminds us of our Founder and that we too are of the race of Mars’” (Transl. by C. Roberts).

¹ Obs. 49: *Lupus urbem ingessus in domo privato occisus*, “A wolf that had invaded the city was killed in a private house” (Transl. by C.E. Evans).

² Cass. Dio 50, 10, 2: λύκος τε ἐς τὸ Τυχαῖον ἐσπίρτων συνελήφθη καὶ κατεσφάγη.

³ Cassius Dio compares two wolves killed in 211 CE with the co-ruling emperors Geta and Caracalla, who both later met violent deaths. The prophecy and its fulfilment could be regarded rather as an urban legend than a recorded historical fact. On the other hand, the importance of the characters involved and the extreme gravity of the events that were connected to the prophecy can be seen as indicating the exceptional nature of the hunting of wolves. Cf. Rissanen 2015, 133. Cass. Dio 78, 1, 6: δύο λύκοι ἐς τὸ Καριτώλιον ἀναβάντες ἐκείθεν ἐξεδιώχθησαν, καὶ ὁ μὲν ἐν τῇ ἀγορᾷ που καταληφθεὶς ὁ δὲ μετὰ ταῦτα ἔξω τοῦ πωμηρίου ἐσφάγη. καὶ τοῦτο καὶ περὶ ἐκείνους ἐγένετο, “Two wolves went up on the Capitol, but were chased away from there; one of them was found and slain somewhere in the Forum and the other was killed later outside the pomerium. This incident also had reference to the brothers” (Transl. by E. Cary).

⁴ Liv. 35, 9, 4: *A Capua nuntiatum est examen vesparum ingens in forum advolasse et in Martis aede consedissee: eas conlectas cum cura et igni crematas esse*, “It was reported from Capua that a huge swarm of wasps flew into the forum and settled in the temple of Mars, and that they were carefully collected and burnt” (Transl. by C. Roberts); 36, 37, 2: *boves duos domitos in Carinis per scalas pervenisse in tegulas aedificii proditum memoriae est. Eos vivos comburi cineremque eorum dei in Tiberim haruspices iusserunt*, “There is a tradition that two tame oxen in the Carinae climbed up the stairs on to the flat roof of a building. The haruspices ordered them to be burnt alive and the ashes thrown into the Tiber” (Transl. by C. Roberts); Obs. 26: *Bubonis vox primum in Capitolio, dein circa urbem audita. Quae avis praemio posito ab aucupe capta combustaque; cinis eius in Tiberim dispersus*, “The cry of an owl was heard firstly on the Capitol, then around the city. After a reward was placed on this bird it was captured by a fowler and incinerated. Its ashes were scattered in the Tiber” (Transl. by C. E. Evans).

tion, when it was impossible to seek or receive instructions as to how to deal with them. These instances do seem to have been the exception rather than the rule.

Wolves certainly enjoyed special protection not afforded to other animals whose appearance was taken as a portent. The fact that people refrained from violence against them may have had its roots in a popular belief that harming a wolf could bring ill fortune, but it is more likely that it was due to the special religious role of the wolf in Roman society.

WOLVES IN THE ARENA?

Thousands of animals were killed in the spectacular *venationes* in the amphitheatres of Rome and major provincial towns. Literary sources mention lions, tigers, leopards, cheetahs, lynxes, bears, rhinoceroses, elephants and hyenas, but no wolves.¹ The *lupi cervarii* from Gaul, which Pompey the Great presented in the arena,² were not wolves but presumably lynxes.³ There do not seem to have been wolves in any of the numerous private animal enclosures (*vivaria*) of Rome, either.⁴ According to Ulpian, the possession of dangerous wild animals, wolves among them, was in fact forbidden in Rome for security reasons in the 2nd century CE.⁵

In two Roman reliefs depicting a *venatio* in an amphitheater there are animals that have some lupine features: sharp teeth, a long muzzle and a mane (Figs. 5 and 6). These, however, are more likely to be bears than wolves.⁶

¹ See e.g. Liv. 39, 22, 2; Plin. *Nat.* 8, 53; 8, 64-65; 8, 70; 8, 130-131; Mart. *Spect.* 11, 12; 22; Suet. *Aug.* 43, 4. A complete listing of the species can be found in Epplert 2001a, 'Appendix C', 233-344. In modern studies, there are some indefinite references to wolf hunting, such as in Giebel 2003, 195: "... auf dem Balkan suchte man Bären und Wölfe", "... bears and wolves were sought in the Balkans", but they do not give any supportive evidence.

² Plin. *Nat.* 8, 84: *Sunt in eo genere qui cervarii vocantur, qualem e Gallia in Pompei Magni harena spectatum diximus*, "There is a species, which is known as the stag-wolf, such as we have already said were brought from Gaul and exhibited in the Circus by Pompeius Magnus" (Transl. by J. Bostock). Cf. Plin. *Nat.* 8, 70: *Pompei Magni primum ludi ostenderunt chama, quem Galli rufium vocabant, effigie lupi, pardorum maculis*, "It was at the games of Pompeius Magnus that the chama was first exhibited; an animal called rufius by the Gauls; having the figure of a wolf, with the spots of the pard" (Transl. by J. Bostock).

³ *ThLL* VII 2, 1857, app. B 2, s.v. 'lupus'; Holder 1962, s.v. 'rufius'.

⁴ Epplert 2001a, 10-13.

⁵ Ulp. fr. D 31, 21 (Iust. *Dig.* 21, 1, 40-41): *Ne quis canem, verrem vel minorem aprum, lupum, ursum, pantheram, leonem aliudve quod noceret animal, sive soluta sint, sive alligata, ut contineri vinculis, quo minus damnum inferant, non possint*, "No one may keep a dog, a bull or a young boar, a wolf, a bear, a leopard, a lion or any other animal that can be harmful, whether un tethered or kept on a leash or a chain to minimize the danger" (Transl. by the author).

⁶ The animal in Fig. 5 was identified as a bear by Mazois (1824, 51) and Kockel (1983, 82). The animal in Fig. 6 was identified as a bear by Reggiani (1981, 60-61), R. Bosso and V. Moesch (in La Regina 2001, 397), and F. Lezzi (in Coarelli-De Santis 2009, 171).



FIG. 5. A detail of a frieze representing a *venatio* in an amphitheater. From the grave of N. Festius Ampliatus in Pompeii, 1st century BCE. The speared animal in the middle is a bear (note the short tail). (From Kockel 1983, Taf. 20).

Despite the lack of literary and archaeological evidence, there could have been wolves in the arena in Late Antiquity. Six bone remains, presumably of wolves, have been found in the sewers of the Colosseum, dating from the late Empire (2nd to 5th century CE).¹ However, because large dogs were also used in animal spectacles, the identification is uncertain.² Even if all of these remains were indeed wolf bones, their number is minimal compared with the remains of other species.

Three different explanations can be suggested for the absence of wolves from the arenas. First, the wary or retiring nature of wolves could have made them unsuitable for the shows.³ Secondly, there could have been difficulties in the logistics: in capturing, transporting or keeping the animals alive.⁴ Thirdly, the use of wolves could have been barred on religious grounds.

From the ethological point of view there is no difference between wolves and dogs (which were used in the arenas), except that the latter can be trained. Wolves, if provoked, can attack as fiercely as furious dogs – or hyenas, which were also displayed in *venationes* in the 3rd century CE.⁵ The hunting practice of canines, based on a chase and team work, lacks the explosive power of the hunting of big cats (tiger, lion, leopard, cheetah), but it could still have offered entertainment for the masses. A retiring nature did not seem to protect some other species from the demands of the arenas. Since even timid herbivores like hares and roe deer appeared in *venationes*,⁶ the character of wolves would certainly not have been enough to prevent their use in the arenas.

¹ De Grossi Mazzorin *et al.* 2005, 340-341.

² E.g. Mart. *Spect.* 33; Mart. *Ep.* 11, 69; Cass. Dio 61, 6; Symm. *Epist.* 2, 77. For the archaeological evidence, see e.g. Rea 2001a, 224-225.

³ Trinquier 2009, 30.

⁴ King 2002, 415.

⁵ *Hist. Aug. Pius* 10, 9; *Hist. Aug. Gord.* 33, 3, 1.

⁶ E.g. Ov. *Fast.* 5, 371-372; Mart. 1, 6, 3-4; 1, 14, 4; Calp. Sic. *Ecl.* 7, 58. Eppllett 2001a, 340-342.

The second alternative, difficulties in logistics,¹ does not seem probable either. The capture of living wolves was no more difficult than the capture of other beasts living in forests, such as bears or leopards. It required manpower, but the expenses of the capture and transportation would not have been very high, nor were wolves as dangerous for the hunters as tigers, bears or rhinoceroses. It is significant, in my opinion, that wolves could have been found in Italy and elsewhere in southern Europe within relatively easy reach of Rome. The diet of wolves is not restricted and they endure captivity fairly well.² Thus there would have been no overwhelming obstacles to getting dozens or even hundreds of wolves for the animal spectacles of Rome, if anyone had wanted to do so.

It is therefore reasonable to conclude that the absence of wolves from the amphitheatres was due to the religious importance of the wolf to the Romans, even though this is not explicitly mentioned in any of our sources.

CONCLUSION

During the republican period and the early Empire, wolves do not seem to have been hunted for pleasure in the Roman world; they were killed only to protect herds that were out at pasture and to provide skins for the *velites*. The practice of actually using wolf-based products in medicine is debatable, and after the military reforms of Marius in 107 BCE there is no evidence of the wearing of wolf skins in the Roman army. Wolves were not displayed in the *venationes*, either, and the killing of wolves whose appearance was thought to be portentous seems to have been avoided.

The treatment given to wolves differed from the treatment meted out to other large predators. Whereas bears, lions or leopards were widely hunted and utilized in many ways (both dead and alive), wolves enjoyed special pro-



FIG. 6. A fragment of a limestone relief representing a scene in a *venatio*. Museo Civico di Rieti, inv. n. MCR_0110_AR (previously inv. 661). The Augustan period. The animal above on the right is a bear. (From Papini 2004, Fig. 51).

¹ Studies on the logistics, see Rea 2001b; MacKinnon 2006.

² Petersen-Ciucci 2003, 104-105; Kreeger 2003, 214-217.

tection. The Romans generally seem to have refrained from intentionally harming wolves.

However, as the shepherds' wolf hunting and the use of wolf skins on the *velites* of the 2nd century BCE prove, the killing of wolves was not an absolute taboo. There was no public prohibition against harming wolves. The special status of the wolf was not based on national ideology, but rather was connected to the religious importance of the wolf to the Romans. This explains why the wolf was less important in the Greek half of the Empire.

The Greek view of wolves remained visible also in Roman literature. For example, some proverbs related to wolves and numerous medico-magical uses for the body parts of wolves seem to resemble Greek practices rather than indigenous Italian practices. In the eastern provinces, where Greek culture was dominant, the hunting or even sacrificing of wolves seems to have continued under Roman rule.

The decline of the traditional Roman religion meant a dramatic change in the attitude towards wolves. The honored religious position they had enjoyed was replaced by their demonization once Christianity became stronger.

The wolf was not actually worshipped in ancient Rome, although there are some dedications to the *Lupa Romana* and the *Lupa Augusta* as part of the Roman Imperial cult. Nevertheless, the religious appreciation of the wolf was the main reason why wolves were not intentionally harmed. This policy of refraining from unnecessary violence against wolves may have been based on the worshipping of the wolf in prehistoric Latium, but given the shortage of evidence, this hypothesis must remain open until further comparative research can throw more light on the subject.

University of Jyväskylä
Finland

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