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Chariot Races and Water Shows

Chariot Races

Roman tradition hailed the circus races as the oldest of Rome's spectacles, established informally by Romulus, Rome's legendary founder, himself. The first races afforded a key opportunity for the Romans in the extended narrative of the origins of Roman identity. Frustrated by his attempts to arrange intermarriage with neighboring peoples like the Sabines, Romulus decided to work toward his goal using subterfuge, by hosting a regional festival in honor of the god Consus (a.k.a. Neptune) that included *ludi circenses* or chariot races.

Source: Livy 1.9:[1] Deliberately hiding his resentment, [Romulus] prepared to celebrate the Consualia, a solemn festival in honor of Neptune, patron of the horse, and sent notice of his intention all over the neighboring countryside. The better to advertise it, his people lavished upon their preparations for the spectacle all the resources – such as they were in those days – at their command . . . all the Sabines were there too, with their wives and children . . . Then the great moment came; the show began, and nobody had eyes or thoughts for anything else. This was the Romans' opportunity: at a given signal all the able-bodied men burst through the crowd and seized the young women.

Source: Ovid, *Art of Love* 1.103–108:[2] You first, Romulus, did disturb the games, when the rape of Sabine women consoled the wifeless men. No awnings then hung over a marble theater, nor was the platform red with the spray of crocuses; there, artlessly arranged, were garlands which the leafy Palatine had brought forth; the stage was unadorned; the people sat on rows of turf, any chance leaves covering their unkempt hair.

Whether chariot races were held in the eighth century BCE or not, certainly they were among the earliest games to be sponsored by the Roman state: they were the highlight of the *Ludi Romani* or *Ludi Magni*, the first ordinary games to be established as part of the Roman calendar. They remained favorite choices for extraordinary games, presented to celebrate victories, to fulfill vows, to mark important achievements.

Like other spectacles, the circus games regularly began with a *pompa* or procession, that typically started atop the Capitoline Hill, wound through the Forum along the Sacred Way then back toward the Forum Boarium near the Tiber. The *carceres* or starting gates of the Circus Maximus abutted the Forum Boarium and the grand entrance into the track was in the middle of these starting gates. The presiding magistrate, *triumphator* or emperor, headed up the *pompa*, typically riding in a *biga* or *quadriga*, a two- or four-horse chariot, typically dressed as a triumphant general. Juvenal lampoons the solemn ceremony of the *pompa*, carried out, it seems to him, by cynical experts in the trappings of public performance.

Source: Juvenal, *Satires* 10.36–46:[3] The praetor borne in his lofty carriage through the midst of the dusty Circus, and wearing full ceremonial dress – the tunic with palm-leaves, the heavy Tyrian toga draped in great folds round his shoulders; a crown so enormous that no neck can bear its weight, and instead it's carried by a sweating public slave, who, to stop the consul getting above himself, rides in the carriage beside him.[4] Then there's the ivory staff, crowned with an eagle, a posse of trumpeters, the imposing procession of white-robed citizens marching so dutifully beside his bridle-rein, retainers whose friendship was bought with the meal-ticket stashed in their wallets.

The *editor* presiding over the games was followed by a group of elites, then the drivers and their chariots, serenaded by musicians, then the priests and the ritual displays, including statues of the gods on litters or in carts. Dionysius describes a *pompa* dating to the Republic era; his tone is considerably less cynical than that of Juvenal as he depicts the parade as a celebration of Rome's present and future strength in leadership.

Source: Dionysius of Halicarnassus 7.72:[5] Before beginning the games the principal magistrates conducted a procession in honor of the gods from the Capitol through the Forum to the Circus Maximus. Those who led the procession were, first, the Romans' sons who were nearing manhood and were of an age to bear a part in this ceremony, who rode on horseback if their fathers were entitled by their fortunes to be knights, while the others, who were destined to serve in the infantry, went on foot, the former in squadrons and troops, and the latter in divisions and companies, as if they were going to school; this was done in order that strangers might see the number and beauty of the youths of

the commonwealth who were approaching manhood. These were followed by charioteers, some of whom drove four horses abreast, some two, and others rode unyoked horses.

Once the *pompa* was completed, starting teams went to their gates, assigned to a particular stall by lots rolled in an urn. Much visible ceremony attended this, as a means of building anticipation in spectators. The signal for the race to begin was the dropping of a *mappa* or cloth, done by the presiding magistrate, either from above the starting gates or from the imperial box. This was the sign for the release of the mechanism keeping the gates of the *carceres* closed; a grinding noise, audible to spectators, meant that the horses could now burst from their stalls and begin the race.

Source: Tertullian, *On the Spectacles* 16.2–3:[6] The praetor is too slow for [the fans]; all the time their eyes are rolling as though in rhythm with the lots he shakes up in his urn. Then they await the signal with bated breath; one outcry voices the common madness. Recognize the madness from their foolish behavior. "He has thrown it!" they shout; everyone tells everybody else what all of them have seen just that moment.

The events

Races were usually between *quadrigae*, four-horse chariots, although competitions between other sizes of chariots are also known, from as small as the two-horse vehicle up to the relatively rare ten-horse chariot.

To maximize speed and handling, the chariots were extremely light constructions of wood and leather, with a yoke only for the two middle horses; the outer two were only attached to the vehicle by the traces and were thus a bit more maneuverable. Accidents were called *naufragia*, which literally means "shipwrecks." How common these were is difficult to say; given the techniques of the charioteers coupled with the inherent danger of high speeds, a crowded track, and massed horses, they were probably not unusual. Clearly they were exciting, as almost every representation of a circus race from antiquity incorporates one into the narrative.

The technique and clothing of Roman charioteers differed significantly from those used by Greeks. Roman drivers steered using their body weight; with the reins tied around their torsos, charioteers could lean from one side to the other to direct the horses' movement, keeping the hands free for the whip and such. In any given race, there might be a number of teams put up by each faction, who would cooperate to maximize their chances of victory by ganging up on opponents, forcing them out of the preferred inside track or "helping" them lose concentration and expose themselves to accident and

injury. The driver's clothing was color-coded in accordance with his faction, which would help distant spectators to keep track of the race's progress. The charioteer wore a short tunic, wrapped with *fasciae* or padded bands to protect the torso, with additional *fasciae* as well around his thighs. A thick leather helmet provided some protection for his head and he carried a *falx*, a curved knife, to cut the reins and keep from being dragged in case of accident. A mosaic from the third century CE shows four leading charioteers from the different colors, all in their distinctive gear (figure 6.1).

Figure 6.1 Mosaic with charioteers of four colors. Scala/Art Resource, NY

As part of his history of the Punic Wars in poetic form, Silius Italicus presents a version of Scipio Africanus' games at Carthago Nova in 206 BCE (see chapter 1). He features the chariot races in this description, emphasizing the excitement of the crowd and their educated spectatorship as they second-guess the techniques of the drivers. The lead horses for each *quadriga* are likewise a focus of attention, their breeding and temperament assessed as key factors in their potential for success. A *naufragium* and a last-minute surge from behind infuse his running account with much excitement.

Source: Silius Italicus, *Punica* 303–456:[7] Now the appointed day came, and the plain was filled with the noise of a crowd past numbering; and Scipio, with tears in his eyes, led the semblance of a funeral procession with due rites of burial . . . Thence he went back to the race-course and started the first contest – that which was to test the speed of horses. Even before the starting-gate was unbarred, the excited crowd surged to and fro with a noise like the sound of the sea, and, with a fury of partisanship, fixed their eyes on the doors behind which the racers were standing.

And now the signal was given, and the bolts flew back with a noise. Scarcely had the first hoof flashed into full view, when a wild storm of shouting rose up to heaven. Bending forward like the drivers, each man gazed at the chariot he favored, and at the same time shouted to the flying horses. The course was shaken by the enthusiasm of the spectators, and excitement robbed every man of his senses. They lean forward and direct the horses by their shouting. A cloud of yellow dust rose up from the sandy soil, concealing with its darkness the running of the horses and the exertions of the drivers. One man backs with fury the mettled steed, another the charioteer. Some are zealous for horses of their own country, others for the fame of some ancient stud. One man is filled with joyful hope for an animal that is racing for the first time, while another prefers the green old age of a well-tried veteran. At the start, Lampon, bred in Gallicia, left the rest behind; he rushed through the air with the flying car, galloping over the course with huge strides and leaving the winds behind him. The crowd roared with applause, thinking that with such a start their favorite had as good as won. But those who looked deeper and had more experience of the race-course, blamed the driver for putting forth all his strength at the beginning: from a distance they uttered vain protests, that he was tiring out his team with his efforts and keeping no reserve of power. "Where are you careering too eagerly, Cyrnus?" – Cyrnus was the charioteer – "Be prudent! Put down your whip and tighten your reins!" But alas, his ears were deaf: on he sped, unsparing of his horses, and forgetting how much ground had still to be covered.

Next came Panchates, a chariot-length and no more behind the leader. Bred in Asturia, he was conspicuous for the white forehead and four white feet of his sires. Though high-mettled, he was low of stature and lacked comeliness; but now his fiery spirit lent him wings, and he sped over the plain, impatient of the reins; he seemed to grow in stature and size as he ran. His driver, Hiberus, was radiant with scarlet of Cinyphian dye.

Third in order, neck and neck with Pelorus, ran Caucasus, a fractious animal that loved not the caressing hand that patted his neck, but rejoiced to bite and champ the iron in his mouth till blood came with the foam. Pelorus, on the other hand, was more tractable and obedient to the rein; never did he swerve aside and drive the car in crooked lines, but kept to the inside and grazed the turning-post with his near wheel. He was conspicuous for the size of his neck and the thick mane that rippled over it. Strange to say, he had no sire: his dam, Harpe, had conceived him from the Zephyr of spring and foaled him in the plains of the Vettones. This chariot was driven along the course by the noble Durius, while Caucasus relied upon ancient Atlas as his driver. Caucasus came from Aetolian Tyde, the city founded by the wandering hero, Diomede; and legend traced his descent to the Trojan horses which the son of Tydeus, successful in his bold attempt, stole from Aeneas by the river Simoïs. Atlas came last, but Durius was last and also moved no faster: one might have thought the pair were running peaceably side by side and keeping level.

And now, when near half the distance was completed, they quickened over the course; and spirited Panchates, struggling to catch up the team ahead, seemed to rise higher and at each moment to mount upon the chariot in front, and the hooves of his prancing forefeet struck and rattled on the car of the Gallician horse. When Hiberus, who came second, saw that the Gallician team of Cyrnus was tiring, that the chariot was no longer bounding ahead, and that the smoking horses were driven on by severe and repeated flogging, then, as when a sudden storm rushes down from a mountain-stop, he leaned forward quickly as far as the necks of his coursers and hung above their crests, and stirred up Panchates, who was chafing at being second in the race, and plied his whip, even while he called to the horse: "Steed of Asturia, shall any other get in front and win the prize when you are competing? Rise up and fly and glide over the plain with all your wonted speed, as if on wings! Lampon is panting hard; his strength is gone and he grows smaller; he has no breath left to carry the goal." At these words, Panchates rose higher, as if he were just starting in the race; and Cyrnus, though he strove to block his rival by swerving, or to keep up with him, was soon left behind. The sky and the race-course resounded, smitten by the shouts of the spectators. Victorious Panchates raised his triumphant crest still higher as he ran on; and he drew after him his three partners in the yoke.

The two last drivers were Atlas and Durius; and now they swerved aside and resorted to tricks. First, one tried to pass his rival on the left; and then the other came up on the right and strove to get in front; but both failed in their attempted strategy. At last Durius, young and confident, leaning forward and jerking at his reins, placed his chariot athwart his rival's course and struck the other car and upset it. Atlas, no match for the other's youth and strength, protested with justice: "Where are you rushing? or what crazy kind of racing is this? You're trying to kill me and my horses together." As he cried out thus, he fell head first from the broken chariot; and the horses too, a sorry sight, fell down and sprawled in disorder on the ground, while the conqueror shook his reins on the open course, and Pelorus flew up the middle of the track, leaving

Atlas struggling to rise. It did not take him long to catch up the weary team of Cyrnus: he flew past with speedy car, though Cyrnus was learning too late the wisdom of controlling his pace. A shout of applause from his supporters drove the chariot on. And now Pelorus thrust his head over the back and shoulders of terrified Hiberus, till the charioteer felt the horse's hot breath and foam upon his neck. Durius pressed on along the plain, and increased the pace of his team by the whip. Nor was the effort vain: coming up on the right, he seemed to be, or even was, running neck and neck with his rival. Then, amazed by the prospect of such glory, he cried out: "Now, Pelorus, now is the time to show that the West-wind was your sire! Let steeds that spring from the loins of mere animals learn how far superior is the issue of an immortal parent. When victorious, you shall offer gifts to your sire, and raise an altar in his honor." And indeed, had he not, even while he spoke, been beguiled, by too great success and by his fearful joy, into dropping his whip, Durius would perhaps have consecrated to the West-wind the altars he had vowed. But now, as wretched as if the victor's wreath had fallen from his head, he turned his rage against himself, tearing the gold-embroidered garment from his breast, and weeping, and pouring out complaints to heaven. When the lash was gone, the team no longer obeyed the driver: in vain he flogged their backs with the reins for a whip.

Meanwhile, Panchates, sure now of victory, sped on to the goal, and claimed the first prize with head held high. A light breeze fanned the mane that rippled over his neck and shoulders; then with proud step he raised his nimble limbs, and a great shout greeted his victory. Each competitor received alike a battle-axe of solid silver with engraving; but the other prizes differed from one another and were of unequal value. To the winner was given a flying steed, a desirable present from the Massylian king; the second in merit then received two cups overlaid with gold of the Tagus, taken from the great heap of Carthaginian spoil; the third prize was the shaggy hide of a fierce lion and a Carthaginian helmet with bristling plumes; and lastly Scipio summoned Atlas and gave him a prize also in pity for his age and ill-fortune, though the old man had fallen down when his chariot was wrecked. To him was given a beautiful youth, to attend on him, together with a skin cap of Spanish fashion.

Sidonius Apollinaris offers an extended poetic description of a "private" set of races, put together by the emperor and calling on the talents of members of the imperial court of the fifth-century western empire. Much attention is paid to the tactics of chariot racing, such as holding back the horses to keep them from early exhaustion and trying to gain the best inside position on the track or, failing that, keeping careful watch on the positioning of one's competitors, to take advantage of any wavering from the course. Especially to be noted is the "tag team" approach, the alliance between drivers of different colors to crowd their opponents out of a winning position.

Source: Sidonius Apollinaris, *To Consentius* 23.320–425:[8] you chose one of the four chariots by lot and mounted it, laying a tight grip on the hanging reins. Your partner did the same, so did the opposing side. Brightly gleam the colors, white and blue, green and red, your several badges. Servants' hands hold mouth and reins and with knotted cords force the twisted manes to hide themselves, and all the while they incite the steeds, eagerly cheering them with encouraging pats and instilling a rapturous frenzy. There behind the barriers chafe those beasts, pressing against the fastenings, while a vapoury blast comes forth between the wooden bars and even before the race, the arena they have not yet entered is filled with their panting breath. They push, they bustle, they drag, they struggle, they rage, they jump, they fear and are feared; never are their feet still, but restlessly they last the hardened timber. At last the herald with loud blare of trumpet calls forth the impatient teams and launches the fleet chariots into the field. The swoop of forked lightning, the arrow sped by Scythian string, the trail of the swiftly-falling star, the leaden hurricane of bullets whirled from Balearic slings has never so rapidly split the airy paths of the sky. The ground gives way under the wheels and the air is smirched with the dust that rises in their track. The drivers, while they wield the reins, ply the lash; now they stretch forward over the chariots with stooping breasts, and so they sweep along, striking the horses' withers and leaving their backs untouched. With charioteers so prone it would puzzle you to pronounce whether they were more supported by the pole or by the wheels. Now as if flying out of sight on wings, you had traversed the more open part and you were hemmed in by the space that is cramped by design, amid which the central barrier has extended its long low double-walled structure. When the farther *metae* freed you all from restraint once more, your partner went ahead of the two others who had passed you; so then, according to the law of the circling course, you had to take the fourth track. The drivers in the middle were intent that if perhaps the first man, embarrassed by a dash of his steeds too much to the right, should leave a space open on the left by heading for the surrounding seats, he would be passed by a chariot driven in on the near side. As for you, bending double with the very force of the effort, you keep a tight rein on your team and with consummate skill wisely reserve them for the seventh lap. The others are busy with hand and voice, and everywhere the sweat of the drivers and flying steeds falls in drops onto the field. The hoarse roar from applauding fans stirs the heart, and the contestants, both horses and men, are warmed by the race and chilled by fear. Thus they go once round, then a second time; thus goes the third lap, thus the fourth; but in the fifth turn the foremost man, unable to bear the pressure of his pursuers, swerved his vehicle aside, for he had found, as he gave command to his fleet team, that their strength was exhausted. Now the return half of the sixth course was completed and the crowd was already clamoring for the award of the prizes; your competitors, with no fear of any effort from you, were scouring the track in front with no concern, when suddenly you drew taut the curbs all together, tensed up your chest, planted your feet firmly before you, and chafed the mouths of your swift steeds . . . then one of the others, clinging to the shortest route round the turning post, was pressed forward by you and his team, carried

away beyond control by their onward rush, could no longer be wheeled around in a harmonious course . . . The other adversary, exulting in the public plaudits, ran too far to the right, close to the spectators; then as he turned aside and all too late after long indifference urged his horses with the whip, you sped straight past your swerving rival. Then the enemy in reckless haste overtook you and, foolishly thinking that his first man had already gone ahead, shamelessly made for your wheel with a sideways rush. His horses were brought down, a multitude of intruding legs entered the wheels, and the twelve spokes were crowded until a crack came from those crammed spaces and the turning rim shattered the entangled feet; then he, a fifth victim, was flung from his chariot, which fell upon him, caused a mountain of manifold havoc, and blood disfigured his prostrate brow. Then arose a riot of renewed shouting . . . the just emperor ordered ribbons to be added to the victors' palms and crowns to the necklets of gold and true merit to have its reward.

Races were interspersed with other displays and diversions, along with a break at noon for lunch. Livy describes a military demonstration presented in circus games of the middle Republic, drawing a contrast between this kind of event and the excessive displays of imperial resources known in the Rome of the early Principate, contemporary with Livy.

Source: Livy 44.9:[9] It was the custom in those days, before the introduction of the modern extravagance of filling the arena with wild beasts from all over the world, to seek out spectacular performances of all kinds; for one race with *quadrigae* and one bareback display scarcely took up an hour for the two events. In one of these displays, groups of about sixty young men (sometimes more in the more elaborate games) entered the arena under arms. Their act was to some extent an imitation of army maneuvers, but in other respects it demanded a more sophisticated skill than that of ordinary soldiers, and it had more in common with the style of gladiatorial combats. After performing various evolutions they would form in order of battle, with shields massed together over their heads, the front rank standing, the second stooping a little, the third and fourth increasing their stoop, and the rear rank kneeling, the whole forming a "tortoise" with a slope like the roof of a house. From this two armed men would rush out, about fifty feet away from each other, and, after making threatening gestures at one another they would climb up from the bottom to the top of the "tortoise" over the close-packed shields. They would then perform a kind of skirmish along the outer edges of the "tortoise," or engage in combat in the center, leaping about just as if on solid ground.

Variations on equestrian skills were also featured at the circus *ludi*, including the acrobatic riding of the *desultores* which Livy compares to that of the Numidian cavalry, known for its special training.

Source: Livy 23.29:[10] [Numidians] had been trained to ride into battle leading a spare horse: such was the quickness of these men, and so highly trained were their mounts that often in the heat of an engagement when the horse they were riding tired, they would leap, like circus riders, fully armed upon the back of the fresh one.

Competition was given a special tingle with the *diversium*, in which a victorious charioteer exchanged teams with the competing faction for another race, to "prove" the superior skill of the driver. An inscription in the hippodrome at Constantinople celebrates the amazing versatility of the late fifth-century charioteer Constantine in his command of the *diversium*.

Source: *Planudian Anthology* 374:[11] Constantinus having won twenty-five races on one morning, changed his team with his rival's, and taking the same horses that he had formerly beaten, won twenty-one times with them. Often there was a great strife between the two factions as to which was to have him, and they gave him two robes to choose from.

This sixth-century CE circus program found among the papyrus collection at Oxyrhynchus, in Egypt, gives a sense of the variety of events offered in the later spectacles outside the major cities of the Roman world. Like the Republican games, these games do not display much in the way of extravagant productions. The "victories" might refer to an acknowledgment of successful competitors from the previous day. Unlike the program for *munera* from Pompeii, there is no indication here of specific drivers or horses with their win-loss records, to build excitement and/or calculate odds for gambling.

Source: *P. Oxy.* 2707:[12] For good fortune. Victories. 1st chariot race. Procession. Singing rope-dancers. 2nd chariot race. The singing rope-dancers. 3rd chariot race. Gazelle and hounds. 4th chariot race. Mimes. 5th chariot race. Troupe of athletes. 6th chariot race.

Charioteers

Victorious drivers, like successful gladiators, were awarded prize money in addition to the contractual pay arranged in advance. Since individual drivers competed in multiple races each day of the *ludi*, there was more opportunity for financial gain for circus performers than for most others. Drivers also stood to gain from gambling, winning a portion of the take from their backers. Martial mentions the example of Scorpus, the Green charioteer whose winnings in one hour alone were extraordinarily high.

Source: Martial *Epigrams* 10.74:[13] Spare at length the weary congratulator, Rome, the weary client. How long shall I be a caller, earning a hundred coppers in a whole day, among escorts and petty clients, when Scorpus in a single hour carries off as winner fifteen heavy bags of gold hot from the mint?

Juvenal's comparison for the Red charioteer Lacerta also gives a sense of the relative value of a star charioteer's earnings; a winning driver's income dwarfs not just that of a poet like Martial, but vastly overmatches the pay of professional advocates.

Source: Juvenal, *Satires* 7.105–114:[14] How about advocates then? Tell me the sum they extract from their work in court, those bulging bundles of briefs. They talk big enough . . . yet if you check their incomes (real, not declared), you'll find that a hundred lawyers make only as much as Lacerta of the Reds.

Scorpus was one of the most famous drivers of the first century, known not just for his fabulous prizes but for his outstanding successes as well as his early (and thus tragic) death. Martial's epigrams hint at the deep melancholy of the fans as Scorpus' death is given mythic scope.

Source: Martial *Epigrams* 10.50:[15] Let sad Victory break the palms of Idumaea. Favor, beat your breast with merciless hand. Let Honor put on mourning. Grieving Glory, cast your crowned tresses on the unkind flames. Ah villainy! Scorpus, cheated of your first youth, you die. So soon you yoke black horses. The goal, ever quickly gained by your hastening chariot – your life's goal too, why was it so close?

Source: Martial *Epigrams* 10.53:[16] I am Scorpus, the glory of the clamorous circus, your applause, Rome, and brief darling. Envious Lachesis snatched me away ere my thirtieth year, but, counting my victories, believed me an old man.

A number of funeral monuments set up in honor of particularly successful drivers inform us about their individual careers. We are given many career details from the epitaph of the charioteer Diocles, especially known for his Red victories in the mid-second century CE, although he spent two years driving for the Whites and eight years for the Greens before transferring to his final and most successful color. Of the recorded 1,462 wins, just over a hundred predated his joining the Reds. The inscription gives some sense of his career highlights, including references to 502 last-minute victories, again

with colors specified for these. The high number of "last-minute" determinations has been interpreted as evidence for inter-color cooperation, in which the Red team worked together with White or Blue or Green to exhaust or foul the other teams in a prearranged deal. There is much specific data about prize money as well, with different pay rates for different kinds of races. Diocles accumulated a very impressive career total of more than 35 million sesterces in prizes, truly a vast fortune.

Source: *CIL* 14.2884:[17] Gaius Appuleius Diocles, charioteer of the Red faction, from the Spanish Lusitanian people, aged 42 years, 7 months, 23 days. He drove his first chariot in the White faction, in the consulship of Acilius Aviola and Corellius Pansa. He won his first victory in the same faction, in the consulship of Manius Acilius Glabrio and Gaius Bellicius Torquatus. He drove for the first time in the Green faction in the consulship of Torquatus Asprenas (second term) and Annius Libo. He won his first victory in the Red faction in the consulship of Laenas Pontianus and Antonius Rufinus. Totals: he drove chariots for 24 years, emerged from the starting gate 4,257 times and won 1,462 victories, 110 in opening races. In single-entry races he won 1,064 victories, winning 92 major prizes, 32 of them (including three with six-horse teams) at 30,000 sesterces, 28 (including two with six-horse teams) at 40,000 sesterces, 29 (including 1 with a seven-horse team) at 50,000 sesterces, and 3 at 60,000 sesterces; in two-entry races he won 347 victories, including four with three-horse teams at 15,000 sesterces; in three-entry races he won 51 victories. He won or placed 2,900 times, taking 861 second places, 576 third places, and one fourth place at 1,000 sesterces; he failed to place 1,351 times. He tied a Blue for first place ten times and a White 91 times, twice for 30,000 sesterces. He won a total of 35,863,120 sesterces. In addition, in races with two-horse teams for 1,000 he won three times and tied a White once and a Green twice. He took the lead and won 815 times, came from behind to win 67 times, won under handicap 36 times, won in various styles 42 times, and won in a final dash 502 times (216 over the Greens, 205 over the Blues, 81 over the Whites). He made nine horses 100-time winners and one a 200-time winner.

Surviving celebratory inscriptions and paeans in tribute offer us not just career details but a sense of the emotional attachment between fans and famous drivers. One high achieving charioteer was Porphyrius Calliopas, star of the circus. Porphyrius arrived in Antioch in 507, having already achieved prominence as the best driver in Constantinople. His success allowed him a great deal of leeway in determining the course of his career, as had been the case with the earlier Diocles. Porphyrius had been affiliated with both the Blues and the Greens, having raked in huge number of victories for both and having been awarded with significant public monuments by his appreciative clubs. Some of these honors were displayed on the central barrier of the circus at Constantinople; they celebrated not only Porphyrius' achievement but the relationship he had with the fans.

Figure 6.2 Mosaic with Polydus the charioteer. Rheinisches Landesmuseum Trier

The surviving inscriptions also document tributes in other media that are no longer extant, like the statues mentioned here. The fabric of the statue, be it gold, silver or bronze, was interpreted as an indication of the merit of the honoree. Some portraits of specific drivers do survive: Polydus, a successful charioteer for the Reds in the third century, was the subject of an enormous mosaic on the floor of the imperial baths at Trier. Compressor, his lead horse, also has his name in the image (figure 6.2).

Source: *Planudian Anthology* 335:[18] The Emperor and the faction erected the statue of Porphyrius, son of Calchas, loaded with many crowns won by skilled toil, the youngest of all the drivers as well as the best, and winner of as many victories as any. This man's statue should have been of gold, not of bronze like the others.

Source: *Planudian Anthology* 338:[19] Victory gave to you, Porphyrius, while still young, this honor which time has given to others late in life and grudgingly; for, having counted the performances that won you many crowns, she found them superior to those of old drivers. Why! Did not the rival faction, in admiration of your glory, applaud you loudly? Blessed is the most free people of the Blues, to whom our great Emperor granted you as a gift.

Source: *Planudian Anthology* 340:[20] To others when they have retired, but to Porphyrius alone while still racing, did the Emperor give this honor. For often he drove his own horses to victory and then took in hand the team of his adversary, and was again crowned. Hence arose a keen rivalry on the part of the Greens, hence a shout of applause for him, O. King, who will give joy both to Blues and to Greens.

Porphyrius' fans solicited the emperor to bring their favorite out of retirement; their success in swaying Porphyrius' professional interest was commemorated with additional statues in commemoration of his new victories.

Source: *Greek Anthology* 15.44:[21] Here they set up again in bronze and silver Porphyrius, who formerly, too, stood here in bronze owing to his merit, when he had ceased from his labors and unbuckled his belt. Old man, after receiving honors from abroad, you did at the loud request of the people take up your whip again and rage furiously on the course, as if in a second youth.

Cassiodorus, the sixth-century official, served several kings of the Ostrogoths in Italy after the breakdown of the empire in the west. His *Variae* or *Compendium* is a collection of model imperial letters that document (literally) the continuation of certain civic and imperial values of the earlier Roman state. He puts in the mouth of King Theoderic an acknowledgment of the value of circus racing and, in particular, the power of the driver Thomas.

Source: Cassiodorus, *Variae* 3.51.1–2:[22] Now, some time ago, my judgement bestowed a reasonable salary on Thomas the charioteer, an immigrant from the east, until I should have tested his skill and character. But, since he has become the champion in this contest, and has willingly left his own country, and chosen to support the seat of my rule, I have decided to confirm him in the monthly allowance . . . For he, in his many victories, has "flitted on the lips" of many, riding more on popularity than on chariots. He took up a constantly defeated faction of the people . . . now overcoming the drivers by skill, now surpassing them in the speed of his horses. From the frequency of his triumphs, he was called a sorcerer – and among charioteers, it is seen as a great honor to attain to such accusations.

Just as the public value of charioteers was recognized by private and public means, the danger they represented could be a target of official action. Some charioteers used their celebrity status to push the envelope in terms of what could be tolerated by the state. This license tacitly granted to more prominent

charioteers to misbehave with impunity was occasionally addressed by the authorities; one such instance is cited among the "good" actions of the emperor Nero (alongside his execution of Christians).

Source: Suetonius, *Nero* 16:[23] [Nero] put an end to the diversions of the chariot drivers, who from immunity of long standing claimed the right of ranging at large and amusing themselves by cheating and robbing the people.

Scandal surrounding "bad" emperors alleged that they were not just the unseemly companions of unacceptably degraded people, like gladiators and charioteers, but that they elevated such persons to high office and power. Elagabalus is targeted for such criticism.

Source: Historia Augusta, *Elagabalus* 6, 12:[24] As his associates, first in the chariot-race and then as colleagues in the whole of his life and actions, he had the charioteers Protogenes and Gordius . . . To the prefecture of the Praetorian Guard he appointed a dancer who had performed as an actor at Rome. He made Gordius, a charioteer, prefect of the vigils and Claudius, a barber, prefect of the grain supply.

Enthusiasm for specific colors and specific charioteers entailed a corresponding hatred for rival drivers and factions. Evidence for this can be found in the hundreds of *defixiones* or curse tablets, found in and around circuses and graveyards of the Roman world. Using these *defixiones*, fans summoned the beings of the underworld to exert their powers against favorite performers, by writing their wishes on small strips of lead which were then rolled up and "delivered" to the infernal spirits by being buried in podium walls, race tracks, *carceres* or being placed in graves. This was a very common form of everyday magic, used primarily against racing performers but also to secure success in business and love. The following curse tablet from Apamea, dating to the fifth or sixth century CE, is very specific in its directions to the underworld deity, particularly urging that the charioteers be hampered in certain tactical maneuvers used against other drivers.

Source: *Supplementum Epigraphicum Graecum*, hereafter *SEG*, 34 (1984) #1437:[25] Most holy Lord Charakteres,[26] tie up, bind the feet, the hands, the nerves, the eyes, the knees, the courage, the leaps, the whip, the victory and the crowning of Porphyras[27] and Hapsicrates, who are in the middle-left, as well as his co-drivers of the Blue-colors in the stable of Eugenius . . . in the hippodrome at the moment when they are about to compete may they not squeeze over,

may they not collide, may they not extend, may they not force [us] out, may they not overtake, may they not break off [in a new direction] for the entire day when they are about to race. May they be broken, may they be dragged, may they be destroyed.

Another curse tablet compels the angry ghost to use his powers against not just the drivers but also the particular abilities of the horses, listed by name, who run for the Red and Blue factions.

Source: *Defixionum Tabellae* 237:[28] I invoke you, spirit of one untimely dead, whoever you are, by the mighty names SALBATHBAL AUTHGEROTABAL BASUTHATEO ALEO SAMMABETHOR. Bind the horses whose names and images/likeness on this implement I entrust to you; of the Red [team]: Silvanus, Servator, Lues, Zephyrus, Blandus, Imbraius, Dives, Mariscus, Rapidus, Oriens, Arbustus; of the Blues: Imminens, Dignus, Linon, Paezon, Chrysaspis, Argutus, Diresor, Frugiferus, Euphrates, Sanctus, Aethiops, Praeclarus . . . Bind their running, their power, their soul, their onrush, their speed. Take away their victory, entangle their feet, hinder them, hobble them, so that tomorrow morning in the hippodrome they are not able to run or walk about, or win, or go out of the starting gates, or advance either on the racecourse, or circle around the turning point; but may they fall with their drivers, Euprepes, son of Telesphoros, and Gentius and Felix, and Dionysius "the biter" and Lamuros. Bind their hands, take away their victory, their exit, their sight, so that they are unable to see their rival charioteers, but rather snatch them up from their chariots and twist them to the ground so that they alone fall, dragged along all over the hippodrome, especially at the turning points, with damage to their body, with the horses whom they drive. Now, quickly.

This use of curses to gain extracurricular advantages became a source of concern in the later empire, when the state sponsored a number of efforts to stop the deployment of magic for social and political purposes. Ammianus Marcellinus notes the indictment of a charioteer in 364 CE, who had had his son trained in magic, no doubt to serve the professional needs of the father.

Source: Ammianus Marcellinus 26.3.3:[29] Finally, after many punishments of the kind, a charioteer called Hilarinus was convicted on his own confession of having entrusted his son, who had barely reached the age of puberty, to a mixer of poisons to be instructed in certain secret practices forbidden by law, in order to use his help at home without other witnesses; he was condemned to death.

Figure 6.3 Lamp with acclaim of horse

The horses

Some horses also had outstanding careers, becoming celebrities alongside their drivers. Tuscus, for example, was a horse favored by Diocles, with whom he won 429 races, celebrated on the monument of Diocles for his tremendous abilities. This is paralleled in figural representations: one victorious horse is commemorated on a terracotta lamp dated to the first century, which depicts the lead horse, bedecked with a wreath, surrounded by celebrating fans. A placard above the horse's head would, in the original event, have displayed the name of the horse (figure 6.3). On the other hand, such resounding achievement also made horses targets for those employing curse tablets, as noted above.

One of the notorious popular stories about the "bad" emperor Caligula concerns "his" horse, Incitatus, being appointed senator. One should bear in

mind that Incitatus was a successful circus horse; Caligula's enthusiasm is linked to his passion for racing.

Source: Suetonius, *Caligula* 55:[30] To prevent Incitatus, his favourite horse, from being disturbed [Caligula] always picketed the neighborhood with troops on the day before the races, ordering them to enforce absolute silence. Incitatus owned a marble stable, an ivory stall, purple blankets, and a jeweled collar; also a house, a team of slaves, and furniture – to provide suitable entertainment for guests whom Gaius invited in [the horse's] name. It is said that he even planned to award Incitatus a consulship.

Volucer ("Winged One"), who raced for the Greens, had a fan in the emperor Lucius Verus, who cherished the horse in material ways. The award of prize money to horses attributed to Verus' enthusiasm is an interesting point; who would hold this money in trust for the horse?

Source: Historia Augusta, *Verus* 6:[31] [Verus] had such great interest in the circus-games that he frequently both sent and received letters from his province concerning the games . . . he had a golden statue made of Volucer, a horse who ran for the Greens, which he used to carry around with him. Indeed, he used to put grapes and nuts in Volucer's manger instead of barley, and to order that he should be brought to him in the Palace of Tiberius covered in purple-dyed blankets. He made a tomb for him when he was dead, on the Vatican Hill. It was because of this horse that gold pieces and prizes first began to be demanded for horses.

Relatively few mares raced in the Roman *ludi*; the horses featured in inscriptions and in mosaic portraits almost all have male names, although some ancients thought that mares were a steady choice for the inside positions. Selection of horses for racing depended on development; a certain maturity was necessary to provide the weight and mass desired.

Source: Pliny, *Natural History* 8.162:[32] But a different build is required for the Circus, and consequently though horses may be broken as two-year-olds to other service, racing in the Circus does not claim them before five.

Certain areas of the empire were noted for the speed and strength of the race horses bred there, including Spain, Sicily, Thessaly and North Africa, although Juvenal points out that results mean more than bloodlines or origins, even for the stud-lines of the famous stallions Coryphaeus and Hirpinus.

Source: Juvenal, *Satires* 8.57–63:[33] The horse we most admire is the one that romps home a winner, cheered on by the seething roar of the crowd. Good breeding doesn't depend on a fancy pasturage; the thoroughbred earns his title by getting ahead of the field, by making them eat his dust. But lack of victories means that the auction-ring will claim him, even the one from the flock of Coryphaeus and the posterity of Hirpinus.

The elder Pliny recounts the unusual result of an accident at the races, in which the team of horses carried on without their driver and won the event. Note the tactics described here as typical for a successful team. Pliny attributes the victory to equine pride; we might see the benefits of intensive training.

Source: Pliny, *Natural History* 8.159–160:[34] Horses harnessed to chariots in the circus unquestionably show that they understand the shouts of encouragement and applause. At the races in the Circus, forming part of the Saecular Games of Claudius Caesar [in 47 CE], a charioteer of the Whites named Corax was thrown [out of his chariot] at the start; his team took the lead and kept it by getting in the way of their rivals and jostling them aside and doing everything against them that they would have had to do with a most skilful charioteer in control, and as they were ashamed for human science to be beaten by horses, when they had completed the proper course they stopped dead at the chalk [finish] line.

The colors

From the earliest documented days of chariot racing in Rome, there were four factions or teams in the circus: Red (*russata*), White (*albata*), Blue (*veneta*), and Green (*prasina*). Over time, the professional organizations of the circus would be simply referred to by color, instead of constantly using the formal "faction" designation. The origins of these organizations were not precisely known to authors of the imperial period, who nevertheless claimed cosmic or religious meaning as the inspiration for their formation. Tertullian sees in these connections superstition to be condemned by Christians like himself.

Source: Tertullian, *On the Spectacles* 9.5:[35] For at first there were only two colors: white and red. White was sacred to Winter because of the whiteness of its snow; red, to Summer because of the redness of its sun. But afterwards, when both love of pleasure and superstition had grown apace, some dedicated the red to Mars, others the white to the Zephyrs, the green to Mother Earth or Spring, the blue to Sky and Sea or Autumn.

These groups seem to have broken into pairs of rivals: Reds despised Whites and vice versa, while Blues and Greens went all out to destroy each other in competition. The intensity of this competition, both in the performers and in the fans, is noted as early as the first century BCE, when the fans of the Whites try to minimize the posthumous charisma of a Red driver, who was capable of inspiring self-sacrifice from one fan at least.

Source: Pliny, *Natural History* 7.53:[36] It is found in the *Acta*[37] that at the funeral of Felix the charioteer of the Reds, one of his fans threw himself upon the pyre – a pitiful story – and the opposing fans tried to prevent this score to the record of a professional by asserting that the man had fainted owing to the quantity of scents.

By the time of Augustus, *factiones* were the organizations in charge of the training, supply and maintenance of performers for the chariot races, roughly equivalent to the gladiatorial *ludi*. These *factiones* were run by *domini factionum*, equestrian-status (at least in the early days) entrepreneurs, who acted as liaisons with the sponsors of the games; politician *editores* could contract with the *domini* to rent the horses, charioteers and all necessary equipment and manpower for the circus events.

The great popularity of the chariot races in late Republic spectacle provoked a certain anxiety that equestrian suppliers of performers could hold such power over elite sponsors of circus *ludi*, a tension that is reflected in real-world conflicts with the *domini factionum*. Gnaeus Domitius Ahenobarbus, father of the future emperor Nero, as praetor was responsible for arranging games and may have tried to delay payment of financial prizes to the winners, as a means of controlling cash outlay, perhaps. (Presumably this prize payment was in addition to the contractual payment for the performance itself.) The faction leaders reacted against this effort by demanding that all future prizes be paid immediately, allowing no opportunity for hedging. Ahenobarbus' behavior as *editor* reflects badly on his honor as a leader and is used by Suetonius as an example of his general lack of integrity.

Source: Suetonius, *Nero* 5:[38] [Nero's father] was remarkably dishonest . . . while praetor, swindling victorious charioteers of their prize money . . . when the managers of the teams (*domini factionum*) complained he decreed that in future all prizes must be paid on the spot.

Nero's enthusiasm for chariot races led him to ratchet up the number of competitions in a given day; no doubt a large number of fans would be pleased to maximize the thrills of victory for each set of circus games. In

doing so, however, the emperor raised the bar of financial expectations for the professionals. In future, instead of negotiating contracts for part of a day (at a lower cost), faction leaders were able to demand that they be hired for an entire day, minimum.

Source: Suetonius, *Nero* 22:[39] Horses had been Nero's main interest since childhood; despite all efforts to the contrary, his chatter about the chariot races at the Circus could not be stopped . . . [He] came up from the country to attend all the races, even minor ones, at first in secret and then without the least embarrassment . . . He frankly admitted that he wished the number of prizes increased, which meant that more contests were included and that they lasted until a late hour, and the faction managers no longer thought it worth while to bring out their teams except for a full day's racing.

Pliny the Younger doesn't like the circus races, personally, but touches on something important about them: fans had extreme loyalty to the different factions as colors, not as homes of specific drivers or horses. Pliny finds this mindless, confused by and contemptuous of partisanship that focuses on the color of a shirt rather than an interest in technique or in equine bloodlines.

Source: Pliny, *Letters* 9.6:[40] The races were on, a type of spectacle which has never had the slightest attraction for me, I can find nothing new or different in them: once seen is enough so it surprises me all the more that so many thousands of adult men should have such a childish passion for watching galloping horses and drivers standing in chariots, over and over again. If they were attracted by the speed of the horses or the drivers' skill, one could account for it, but in fact it is the racing-colors they really support and care about and if the colors were to be exchanged in mid-course during a race, they would transfer their favor and enthusiasm and rapidly desert the famous drivers and horses whose names they shout as they recognize them from afar. Such is the popularity and importance of a worthless shirt – I don't mean with the crowd, which is more worthless than the shirt, but with certain serious individuals. When I think how this futile, tedious, monotonous business can keep them sitting endlessly in their seats, I take pleasure in the fact that their pleasure is not mine.

By the time of the emperors, however, Blues and Greens were the most prestigious factions, preferred by emperor and populace alike. Indeed, Reds and Whites are only rarely mentioned in the surviving literature, although their continued activity is documented in inscriptions and in curse-tablets, which record the initiative of the professionals rather than just the fans focused on by literary sources. Martial notes that topics of conversation for his dinner party include Scorpus, one of the most successful drivers, and the

Green faction; Martial considers this "safe" discussion, at a time when the encouragement of informers made more overtly political talk dangerous.

Source: Martial *Epigrams* 10.48:[41] When my guests are satisfied, I shall offer ripe fruit and leesless wine from a Nomentan flagon twice three years old in Frontinus' consulship. To boot there will be merriment free of malice, frank speech that gives no anxiety the morning after, nothing you would wish you hadn't said. Let my guest talk of Scorpus and the Green; let my cups get no man put on trial.

By the height of the circus frenzy in the late Roman period, the Reds and the Whites were overshadowed by the primary organizations of the Blues and Greens, although whether this means that there had been a formal merger of structure to streamline the factions is not entirely certain. Red and White drivers continued to compete in races and to win, but the majority of the best charioteers worked for the Blues and Greens, whose power enabled them to offer the most lucrative deal to good drivers.

During the late Roman empire in Constantinople, greater centralization meant that services like spectacles were funded by public money, at least in the major cities. Shifting economic resources, including the decline of a monetary economy in much of the empire, affected the sustainability of games especially in smaller urban centers. Funding for games was likely to be deprioritized at a time when the payment of taxes stretched a community's resources beyond what it could bear. Fewer centers were able to support festivals, so there was a certain amount of consolidation of games in the later empire. The organization of performances likewise was centralized; by the end of the fifth century, the circus faction had been expanded to become a sort of super-guild, responsible for all kinds of spectacle performance. The imperial bureaucracy expanded to oversee housing, food, training, and salaries of the performers, although a staff of specialists continued to provide more professional services for the organizations.

Circus fans

By the fifth century, there had been a parallel consolidation of fans into what is often called "factions," but which should be distinguished from the *factiones*, the professional organizations of performers. Fan clubs were essentially private groups with a public presence, one of the remaining means of crafting social identity in a world of diminishing traditional affiliations. These fan clubs wore the blue and green colors of their favorites when they attended spectacles, thus providing a highly visible marker of their group identity. They sat in reserved sections where their close proximity made it easier for them to engage in one of the activities in which they excelled:

their group chants. Long practice in operating as a claque enabled the fan clubs to not only express their enthusiastic support for their faction, but also vigorously sneer, *en masse*, at the opponents. They could also articulate issues of public concern, as had been true for the audience claques of the earlier empire. They could chant for relief in times of grain shortage, for easing of taxes, and for enhancements of the spectacle.

Dio Cassius offers an eye-witness account of circus claque activity in 196 CE, during a period of ramped-up competition between a number of rivals for the purple.

Source: Dio Cassius 75.4.2–7:[42] The populace, however, could not restrain itself . . . There had assembled, as I said, an untold multitude and they had watched the chariots racing, six at a time . . . without applauding, as was their custom, any of the contestants at all. But when these races were over and the charioteers were about to begin another event, they first enjoined silence upon one another and then suddenly all clapped their hands at the same moment and also joined in a shout, praying for good fortune for the public welfare. This was what they first cried out; then, applying the terms "Queen" and "Immortal" to Rome, they shouted: "How long are we to suffer such things?" and "How long are we to be waging war?" And after making some other remarks of this kind, they finally shouted "So much for that" . . . in all this they were surely moved by some divine inspiration . . . This demonstration was one thing that increased our apprehensions still more.

Fan clubs had a formal role to play as recognized groups in the late Roman city. The "official" duties of the fan clubs, or at least the designated representatives of the partisans, included the ceremonial welcome and acclamation of newly inaugurated emperors and empresses. Theophylact disapprovingly describes the coronation of Phocas and Leontia in 602 and notes the dispute that rose between Blues and Greens over who would stand where to perform the formal acclamation.

Source: Theophylact Simocatta, *History* 8.10.9–10:[43] Since it is customary for emperors to proclaim their consorts with processions as well, the tyrant [Phocas] openly honored the custom and decided to lead the queen Leontia in triumph. On this day then, there was a conflict between the factions about their station, since they contested the arrangement of places: for the Greens wanted to take up station in the Ampelion, as it is called (this is a forecourt of the emperor's dwelling), and to serenade the queen with the customary applause, but the Blue faction objected, for they regarded this as contrary to custom . . . very great commotion arose.

The distinctive passion of the circus fan was something that was noted in the early empire and even before the imperial monarchy: the example of the fan responding with suicide to the death of a driver comes to mind (see above). Particularly disturbing to a number of authors is the fact that this passion was aroused by "nothing," by a color or a race, rather than a "real" problem that might merit such depth of feeling. Dio Chrysostom, in the late first century, articulates this as an issue of social status.

Source: Dio Chrysostom, *Discourse* 32.75:[44] Why are you so violently disturbed? What the contest? For it is not . . . a question of a kingship or a wife or a death that hangs in the balance, nay, it is only a contest of slaves for a paltry bit of silver, slaves who sometimes are defeated and sometimes victorious, but slaves in any case.

Philostratus' biography of the first-century CE philosopher and ascetic Apollonius includes snapshots of civic events in the Roman provinces, laying a moral overtone on such regular events as circus racing and the intense enthusiasm of the audience. Here, fandom from the early empire is described as the catalyst for civic violence; Apollonius' reaction to such situations emphasizes the waste and frivolity of such partisanship, in comparison to tensions generated by real problems, such as famine or even human competition.

Source: Philostratus, *Life of Apollonius of Tyana* 1.15:[45] Whenever, however, he came on a city engaged in civil conflict (and many were divided into factions over spectacles of a low kind), he would advance and show himself, and . . . would put an end to all the disorder . . . Well, it is not so very difficult to restrain those who have started a quarrel about dances and horses, for those who are rioting about such matters, if they chance with their eyes on a real man, blush and check themselves and easily recover their senses; but a city hard pressed by famine is not so tractable.

Source: Philostratus, *Life of Apollonius of Tyana* 5.26:[46] But because the Alexandrians are devoted to horses, and flock into the racecourse to see the spectacle, and murder one another in their partisanship, he therefore administered a grave rebuke to them . . . ". . . it were quite excusable if one should show an excess of zeal in the rivalry of human beings like himself. But here I see you rushing at one another with drawn swords, and ready to hurl stones, all over a horse race."

Emperors as fans

As seen with other kinds of spectacle, the emperor was ideally supposed to demonstrate a certain balance, to avoid abusing his overweening power on inappropriate targets and causes. The "good" emperors practiced moderation in the enthusiasm for spectacle in general, and the circus events prove no exception to this. Caligula, here as elsewhere, is a negative model for imperial behavior. His fervor leads him to abandon the palace for quarters unfit for his rank and to the use of extreme measures to ensure Green victory.

Source: Suetonius, *Caligula* 55:[47] He supported the Green faction with such ardour that he would often dine and spend the night in their stables and, on one occasion, gave the driver Eutychus presents worth 20,000 gold pieces.

Source: Dio Cassius 59.14:[48] Yet after doing all this he later put the best and most famous of these out of the way by poison. He did the same also with the horses and charioteers of the rival factions; for he was strongly attached to the faction that wore frog-green and from this color was also called the faction of the Leek. Thus even today the place where he used to practice driving chariots is called the Gaianum after him.

Caracalla also was said to have fed his partisanship with murder.

Source: Dio Cassius 78.1:[49] Caracalla put out of the way a man who was renowned for no other reason than for his profession, which made him very conspicuous . . . [Caracalla] killed [Euprepes the charioteer] because he supported the faction opposite the one he himself favored. So Euprepes was put to death in his old age, after having been crowned in a vast number of horse-races; for he had won seven hundred and eighty-two crowns, a record equaled by no one else.

Fan clubs and unrest

Consolidation of the organizations of performers in the fifth century may have allowed for more formal relationships between performers and recognizable groups of fans, who now directed their loyalties toward a single faction, rather than a range of performers in different events.

Ammianus Marcellinus' condemnation of the circus crowd emphasizes the parasite role played by the idle poor in the fourth century, whose values have deteriorated to encompass solely their sources of immediate physical

pleasure. He makes explicit the nostalgic view that the games, for them, are the equivalent of temple, home, political meeting, and state, all targets of Roman loyalty in a more virtuous time.

Source: Ammianus Marcellinus 28.4.28–31:[50] Let us now turn to the idle and slothful commons . . . These spend all their life with wine and dice, in low haunts, pleasures, and the games. Their temple, their dwelling, their assembly, and the height of all their hopes is the Circus Maximus. You may see many groups of them gathered in the *fora*, the cross-roads, the streets, and their other meeting-places, engaged in quarrelsome arguments with one another, some (as usual) defending this, others that. Among them those who have enjoyed a surfeit of life, influential through long experiences, often swear by their hoary hair and wrinkles that the state cannot exist if in the coming race the charioteer whom each favors is not first to rush forth from the barriers, and fails to round the turning-point closely with his ill-omened horses. And when there is such a dry rot of thoughtlessness, as soon as the longed-for day of the chariot-races begins to dawn, before the sun is yet shining clearly they all hasten in crowds to the spot at top speed, as if they would outstrip the very chariots that are to take part in the contest; and torn by their conflicting hopes about the result of the race, the greater number of them in their anxiety pass sleepless nights.

Ammianus does not emphasize the danger of mayhem represented by the circus mob in Rome, and there may have been a genuine difference between the western and eastern empire at this time. It's in the east, with its larger cities, its greater concentration of wealth, and the retention of the imperial machinery that we find more active and regular threat generated by the fan clubs. Uncontrolled partisanship generated riots that put the general safety at risk. The fact that social identities were more compressed may also have ramped up the intensity of the connection generated by fan clubs, a factor in the phenomenon of circus riots.

Procopius' contemporary description of the fans' activities in early sixth-century Byzantium highlights the criminality that he suggests is an outgrowth of the indulgence inherent in spectatorship. He also emphasizes imperial corruption at the core of the problem, the cynical manipulation of such groups by the emperor Justinian to create chaos and thus, allegedly, to enhance his own power. Justinian is a target of Procopius' hostility throughout the narrative.

Source: Procopius, *Secret History* 7.1:[51] The people had for a long time previous been divided . . . into two factions, the Blues and the Greens. Justinian, by joining the former, which had already shown favor to him, was able to bring everything into confusion and turmoil, and by its power to sink the Roman state to its knees before him.

Procopius finds the visible benefits of the Blues' association with the emperor evidence of corruption.

Source: Procopius, *Secret History* 7.41:[52] Justinian's crime was that he was not only unwilling to protect the injured, but saw no reason why he should not be the open head of the guilty faction [of the Blues]; he gave great sums of money to these young men, and surrounded himself with them: and some he even went so far as to appoint to high office and other posts of honor.

Extreme fans tended to be young men, who, in the earlier empire, might have belonged to associations focused on athletics or the support of particular kinds of performances, including gladiatorial combats and *venationes* (see chapter 3). Procopius acknowledges that only a small and intense minority of the fans formally affiliated with the partisan clubs, to help organize their activities, especially those which were not confined to the arena.

Source: Procopius, *Secret History* 7:[53] . . . Collecting in gangs as soon as dusk fell, [the Blues] robbed their betters in the open Forum and in the narrow alleys . . . Some they killed after robbing them, so they could not inform anyone of the assault. These outrages brought the enmity of everybody on them, especially that of the Blue partisans who had not taken active part in the discord. . . . the evil progressed; and as no punishment came to the criminals from those in charge of the public peace, their boldness increased more and more.

The Nika revolt

Eventually, the partisan mayhem Procopius describes evolved into a full-scale revolt in 532, one with political weight and likely political causes at heart: this revolt was not about the color of a shirt. Justinian had been sole emperor in Constantinople since the death of his father Justin in 527. There had been an ongoing war with Persia, and in 532 Justinian succeeded in forcing the new Persian king to a negotiated truce to fix the eastern boundaries so Justinian could devote imperial resources to regaining control in the west. Justinian's extensive reform program had had the effect of strengthening the power of the Praetorian Praefect, John the Cappadocian, who was the agent responsible for the enactment of administrative changes. John had been particularly good at maximizing imperial revenues, which proved extremely useful for Justinian's military, diplomatic, and construction needs. John's capacity to accrue personal profit while performing his duties did not make him popular with a number of people. Especially annoyed were wealthy

landowners and local officials, who suffered the loss of elite privileges, while being compelled to pay additional taxes and submit to intensified scrutiny of municipal and military accounts. The instability caused by the Nika rebellion would force Justinian to replace John with Phocas, whose sympathy for elite interests was meant to ease tension between the throne and the privileged classes, for the time being at least.

Urban disruption by the more intense, typically young, members of fan clubs had become a standard feature of life in the late Roman world. Once Justinian was solidly established as emperor, however, he attempted to crack down on fan club lawlessness. His intent to follow through on the botched hanging of a Blue and a Green drove rabid fans of both factions to join forces to force the compliance of the emperor. "Nika" or "victory," a word typically screamed by partisans in the circus stands, became their slogan and gave the revolt its name. On January 13, 532, Nika rebels attacked public buildings in Constantinople, damaging such symbols of imperial power as the vestibule of the Palace and Hagia Sophia, the Church of Holy Wisdom. Efforts to distract the rioters with chariot races the next day failed: rebels set fire to the Hippodrome itself. By now the numbers of rebels were being increased with disgruntled opponents to Justinian's reforms, such as displaced small farmers, driven off their lands by increased taxation; the rebels demanded that key agents in Justinian's administration be ousted from their position, then demanded the replacement of the emperor himself, elevating the nephew of Anastasius, the former emperor. Justinian wanted to cut his losses and run. The empress Theodora stood firm. Theodora had allegedly come from the circus herself, daughter of a *bestiarius* who grew up to perform risqué dances that attracted the eye of the emperor. She sneered at the rioting circus fans and recommended vigorous strategy to reclaim power. Justinian drove a wedge between the factions, bribed key players, launched a ruthless counter-assault on the crowd in the Hippodrome and rounded up ringleaders in the wake of the massacre.

Source: Procopius, *The Persian War* 1.24:[54] At this same time [January 1, 532] an insurrection broke out unexpectedly in Byzantium among the populace, and, contrary to expectation, it proved to be a very serious affair . . . In every city the population has been divided for a long time past into the Blue and the Green factions; but within comparatively recent times it has come about that, for the sake of these names and the seats which the rival factions occupy in watching the games, they spend their money and abandon their bodies to the most cruel tortures and even do not think it unworthy to die a most shameful death. And they fight against their opponents knowing not for what purpose they put themselves in danger, but knowing well that, even if they overcame their enemy in the fight, the conclusion of the matter for them will be to be carried off immediately to the prison and finally, after suffering extreme torture, to be killed. So there grows up in them against their fellow men a hostility which has

no cause, and at no time does it stop or disappear, for it yields neither to the ties of marriage nor of kinship nor of friendship . . . they care neither for things divine nor human in comparison with conquering in these struggles . . . I, for my part, am unable to call this anything except a disease of the soul . . . At this time the officers of the city administration in Byzantium were leading away to death some of the rioters. But the members of the two factions, conspiring together and declaring a truce with each other, seized the prisoners and then entered the prison and released all those who were in confinement there . . . fire was applied to the city as if it had fallen under the hand of an enemy . . . During this time the emperor and his consort and a few members of the senate shut themselves up in the palace and remained quietly there. Now the watchword which the populace passed around to one another was Nika . . . Now as long as the people were waging this war with each other in behalf of the names of the colors, no attention was paid to the offenses of [the corrupt John of Cappadocia, praetorian praefect at the time, and Tribunianus, a greedy quaestor] against the constitution; but when the factions came to a mutual understanding . . . then openly throughout the whole city they began to abuse the two and went about seeking them to kill. Accordingly the emperor, wishing to win the people to his side, instantly dismissed both these men from office [but his appointment of honest men has no impact] . . . the whole population ran to [Hypatius and Pompeius, nephews of the former emperor Anastasius] and they declared Hypatius emperor and prepared to lead him to the forum to assume the power . . . they proclaimed him Emperor of the Romans . . . now the emperor and his court were deliberating as to whether it would be better for them if they stayed or if they took to flight in ships . . . the empress Theodora also spoke to the following effect: ". . . My opinion is that the present time, more than any other, is not the time for flight, even though it brings safety . . . consider whether it will not turn out that after you have been saved, you would gladly trade that safety for death. As for myself, I approve a certain ancient saying that the purple makes a good burial shroud." When the queen had spoken thus, all were filled with boldness and turned their thoughts toward resistance . . . [loyal generals Belisarius and Mundus try to attack Hypatius in the emperor's box in the circus] But since the soldiers had decided to support neither side, until one of them should be manifestly victorious, they pretended not to hear at all . . . Belisarius returned to the emperor and declared that the day was lost for them, for the soldiers who guarded the palace were rebelling against him . . .

Concluding that he [Belisarius] must go against the populace who had taken their stand in the hippodrome – a vast multitude crowding each other in great disorder – he drew his sword from his sheath and, commanding the others to do likewise, with a shout he advanced upon them at a run . . . Mundus, who was standing not far away . . . when he observed that Belisarius was in the struggle, he immediately made a sally into the hippodrome through the entrance which they call the Gate of Death. From both sides the partisans of Hypatius were attacked and destroyed . . . There perished among the populace that day more than thirty thousand. But the emperor commanded that [Hypatius and Pompeius] be kept in close confinement. Then, while Pompeius was weeping . . . Hypatius reproached him at length and said that those who were

about to die unjustly should not lament. For in the beginning they had been forced by the people against their will, and afterwards they had come to the hippodrome with no thought of harming the emperor. And the soldiers killed both of them on the following day . . . the emperor confiscated all their property for the public treasury and also that of all the other members of the senate who had sided with them . . . this was the end of the insurrection in Byzantium.

Water Shows

In an effort to maximize the variety and extravagance of spectacle in the late Republic, Roman sponsors began to make use of water as an innovative medium for events, enhancing both the beauty of water as it cascades or sprays over performers and audience, as well as the capacity for danger as humans negotiate a potentially hostile environment. Spectacle held on water falls into two major categories: mock naval battles or reenactments and what one might call "aquacades" or water ballets, in which narratives, often using mythic themes, are acted out by performers in damp, clinging costumes, with a certain amount of sexual content.

Julius Caesar, in this as in all other spectacle, was notorious for the inventiveness of venue and the sheer scale of his displays. Having built a special *naumachia* facility (see chapter two), the dictator presented a sea battle alongside a variety of events with a military flavor.

Source: Appian, *Civil Wars* 2.102:[55] [Caesar] gave also various spectacles with horses and music, a combat of foot-soldiers, 1,000 on each side, and a cavalry fight of 200 on each side. There was also another combat of horse and foot combined. There was a combat of elephants, twenty against twenty, and a naval engagement of 4,000 oarsmen, where 1,000 fighting men contended on each side.

Domitian's *naumachia* fits the Caesarian model, and for a specific purpose: Domitian's military achievements were contested in antiquity, with allegations that triumphs were claimed for negotiated truces or even for fictional battles. Domitian's militarized spectacle, however, emphasized the martial mindset of the emperor *editor*, more so than might have been the case had he simply presented the more usual races or *munera*. This plan backfired when the emperor refused to yield to an act of nature, requiring that he hold additional public events to make up for the debacle.

Source: Dio Cassius 67.8:[56] In the course of holding what purported to be triumphal celebrations, [Domitian] arranged numerous contests. In the Circus, for example, he exhibited battles of infantry against infantry and again battles between cavalry, and in a new place he produced a naval battle. At this last event practically all the combatants and many of the spectators as well perished. For, though a heavy rain and violent storm came up suddenly, he nevertheless permitted no one to leave the spectacle; and though he himself changed his clothing to thick woolen cloaks, he would not allow the others to change their attire, so that not a few fell sick and died. By way, no doubt, of consoling the people for this, he provided for them at public expense a dinner lasting all night.

One of the largest *naumachia* spectacles was that presented at the Fucine Lake by Claudius. As one of his many public works projects, Claudius had ordered the draining of the lake, a land reclamation effort designed for public benefit. He combined celebrating the completion of the drain facilities with a grand naval battle, presented at nearly full-scale, using both real military and condemned criminals as participants. Seating was set up for the spectators on the hilly terrain surrounding the lake.

Source: Tacitus, *Annals* 12.56:[57] Nearly at this date, the tunnelling of the mountain between Lake Fucinus and the river Liris had been achieved; and, in order that the impressive character of the work might be viewed by a larger number of the visitants, a naval battle was arranged upon the lake itself . . . Claudius equipped triremes, quadriremes, and nineteen thousand combatants: the lists he surrounded with rafts, so as to leave no unauthorized points of escape, but reserved space enough in the center to display the vigor of the rowing, the arts of the helmsman, the impetus of the galleys, and the usual incidents of an engagement. On the rafts were stationed companies and squadrons of the praetorian cohorts, covered by a breastwork from which to operate their catapults and ballistae: the rest of the lake was occupied by marines with decked vessels. The shores, the hills, the mountain-crests, formed a kind of theater, soon filled by an untold multitude, attracted from the neighboring towns, and in part from the capital itself, by curiosity or by respect for the sovereign. He and Agrippina presided, the one in a gorgeous military cloak, the other – not far distant – in a Greek mantle of cloth of gold. The battle, though one of criminals, was contested with the spirit and courage of freemen; and, after much blood had flowed, the combatants were exempted from destruction.

Caligula is depicted by Dio Cassius as an emperor whose inappropriate enthusiasms lead him to test boundaries, indulging capricious whimsy in governing Rome and involving the emperor too much in the presentation of spectacle. Here, he conflates the realms of sea and land in a lavish engineering feat in which the Mediterranean was converted to an arena and

the emperor starred in his own water show. The capacity to mount an extraordinary show is explicitly compared to military conquest; Caligula's references to Alexander the Great play on this as well, suggesting that Caligula's achievement in making the world his showcase is fully equal to Alexander's conquest of the world.

Source: Dio Cassius 59.17:[58] [Gaius rejected the "normal" kind of triumph], as he did not consider it any great achievement to drive a chariot on dry land; on the other hand, he was eager to drive his chariot through the sea, as it were, by bridging the waters between Puteoli and Baiuli. [he makes arrangements for a pontoon-style bridge to be constructed across the Bay of Naples, using what boats were available, with added features such as rest areas and running water available for his use] . . . when all was ready, he put on the breastplate of Alexander, or so he claimed it was, and over it a purple silk *chlamys*, adorned with much gold and many precious stones from India; moreover he donned a sword, took a shield, and put on a garland of oak leaves. Then he offered sacrifice to Neptune and some other gods and to Envy, in order, as he put it, that no jealousy should attend him, and entered the bridge from the end at Baiuli, taking with him a multitude of armed horsemen and foot-soldiers, and he dashed fiercely into Puteoli as if he were in pursuit of an enemy . . . then [the next day] wearing a gold-embroidered tunic, he returned in a chariot over the same bridge, being drawn by race-horses accustomed to win the most victories. A long train of what purported to be spoils followed him, including Darius, a member of the Arsacid family, who was one of the Parthians then living in Rome as hostages. His friends and associates in flowered robes followed in vehicles and then came the army and the rest of the throng, each man dressed according to his individual taste . . . after so magnificent a victory[59] he had to deliver a harangue; so he ascended a platform which had been erected on the ships near the center of the bridge. First he extolled himself as an undertaker of great enterprises, and then he praised the soldiers as men who had undergone great hardships and perils, mentioning in particular this achievement of theirs in crossing the sea on foot . . . since the place was crescent-shaped, fires were lighted on all sides, as in a theater, so that the darkness was not noticed at all; indeed it was his wish to make the night day, as he had made the sea land.

Nero's aquacade was a combination of different events; both banquet and water pageant, the show was presented with the intent of winning favor by sharing the luxury of the emperor's private life with the people of Rome. It's unclear that the emperor actually distributed food to the populace outside the invited guests, but the fact that the water spectacle took place in a public space enabled the people to vicariously enjoy the emperor's pleasures. Tacitus' disapproval rests on the excess involved, as well as the too-nuanced provisions for carnal fulfillment. Nero here, as elsewhere, is depicted as a violator of status, making private behavior public and degrading the dignity of high rank.

Source: Tacitus, *Annals* 15.37:[60] Nero himself now tried to make it appear that Rome was his favorite abode. He gave feasts in public places as if the whole city were his own home. But the most prodigal and notorious banquet was given by Tigellinus. To avoid repetitious accounts of extravagance, I shall describe it, as a model of its kind. The entertainment took place on a raft constructed on Marcus Agrippa's lake.[61] It was towed about by other vessels, with gold and ivory fittings. Their rowers were degenerates, assorted according to age and vice. Tigellinus had also collected birds and animals from remote countries, and even the products of the ocean. On the quays were brothels stocked with high-ranking ladies. Opposite them could be seen naked prostitutes, indecently posturing and gesturing. At nightfall the woods and houses nearby echoed with singing and blazed with lights.

Water events were a part of Titus' shows arranged to inaugurate the Flavian Amphitheater in 80 CE. Martial's description suggests that these included a range of displays, from synchronized swimming by women in water nymph costumes, to mythicized combats between performers dressed as divinities, to lavish naval combats, likewise given a supernatural tone. As with the other spectacle poems, Martial here emphasizes that Titus' achievement outstrips those of earlier emperors, both virtuous and excessive ones.

Source: Martial, *Spectacles* 30:[62] The well-trained bevy of Nereids sported all over the surface and in various conformations decorated the yielding waters. The trident menaced with upright tooth, the anchor with curved. We thought we saw an oar, we thought we saw a boat, and the Laconians' star shining, welcome to the seamen, and broad sails bellying in conspicuous folds. Who invented such devices in the clear water? Thetis either taught these games or learned them.

Source: Martial, *Spectacles* 34:[63] It had been Augustus' labor to pit fleets against each other here and rouse the waters with naval clarion. How small a part is this of our Caesar! Thetis and Galatea saw in the waves beasts they never knew. Triton saw chariots in hot career in the sea's dust and thought his master's horses had passed by. As Nereus prepared fierce battle for ferocious ships, he was startled to find himself walking on foot in the liquid expanse. Whatever is viewed in the Circus and the Amphitheater, that, Caesar, the wealth of your water has afforded you. So no more Fucinus and the lake of direful Nero; let this be the only sea fight known to posterity.