

The Roman Emperor and His Court c. 30 BC–c. AD 300

VOLUME 1

Historical Essays

Edited by

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CAMBRIDGE
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University Printing House, Cambridge CB2 8BS, United Kingdom

One Liberty Plaza, 20th Floor, New York, NY 10006, USA

477 Williamstown Road, Port Melbourne, VIC 3207, Australia

314–321, 3rd Floor, Plot 3, Splendor Forum, Jasola District Centre, New Delhi – 110025, India

103 Penang Road, #05–06/07, Visioncrest Commercial, Singapore 238467

Cambridge University Press is part of the University of Cambridge.

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www.cambridge.org

Information on this title: www.cambridge.org/9781316513217

DOI: [10.1017/9781009063760](https://doi.org/10.1017/9781009063760)

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First published 2022

Printed in the United Kingdom by TJ Books Limited, Padstow Cornwall

A catalogue record for this publication is available from the British Library.

ISBN – 2 Volume Set 978-1-108-42361-8 Hardback

ISBN – Volume I 978-1-316-51321-7 Hardback

ISBN – Volume II 978-1-316-51323-1 Hardback

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13 | Dining and Hunting as Courtly Activities in the Roman Empire

MATTHEW B. ROLLER

Introduction

Dining and hunting were diverse activities in the Roman world. Yet they aligned in providing, or potentially providing, a context for structured, patterned interaction and communication among emperors and courtiers, as well as a basis for the moral evaluation of the ruler around whom these activities revolved. Dining was a central courtly activity for which information (sometimes substantial) exists regarding virtually every emperor in our period. Hunting in the wild, by contrast, had much more limited scope as a courtly activity, playing a significant role for very few emperors and courts. Other activities that resembled the hunt, like hunting spectacles (*venationes*) in the arena, occurred somewhat more broadly across imperial regimes. This chapter consequently focuses primarily on dining as a key social context in which emperors and courtiers articulated and negotiated relationships among themselves. There follows somewhat briefer discussion of hunting and related activities as contexts for such negotiations.

For the purposes of this chapter, it is convenient to begin with the definition of ‘court’ offered by Benjamin Kelly in this volume’s introduction – namely, ‘a circle of people who had reasonably regular verbal interaction with the emperor and/or who provided him with domestic or security services’¹ – and to specify four subcategories containing specific types and statuses of ‘courtiers’. These categories are:

- (1) certain high-ranking aristocrats, whether senators or equestrians, who constituted the emperor’s nearest peers socially and economically, and some of whom from time to time held high magistracies, commands, prefectures, and the like;
- (2) the emperor’s wife, children, siblings, parents, concubine(s), and others who were members or near-members of his family by blood or marriage;

¹ Above, 7.

- (3) people of less lofty social or economic status who may not have been directly involved in imperial administration, but had useful skills that catered to the cultural preoccupations of the emperor and aristocracy – rhetoricians, astrologers, philosophers, poets, architects, and the like. These people had elite educations and acculturation, and may well have possessed an equestrian census, but were not of the magisterial class; and
- (4) key slaves, freedmen, soldiers or bodyguards, (later) eunuchs, and other personnel who provided security or bodily services, managed the imperial household, and supported the emperor's activities there. These people were of inferior status juridically but enjoyed power, influence, and perhaps considerable wealth, thanks to their proximity to and regular personal interactions with the emperor. This group may have partially overlapped with group 3.

This list of potential courtiers is neither exhaustive nor exclusive: most courtiers (though perhaps not all) could be assigned to one or more of these categories, but many members of these categories would not have been courtiers. These categories do, however, cover the majority of types of people who are reported as interacting with the emperor while dining or hunting.

Dining

From as early as our sources allow us to judge, dining in company provided a crucial channel by which high-status Romans displayed their resources and articulated their relationships with their peers and lower-status connections. Roman emperors participated in this long-standing social practice, no less than any other high-ranking Roman; inevitably the social stakes of the interactions, the resources potentially available to guests, the level of display, and (sometimes) the sheer scale of these events were heightened in proportion to the emperor's social elevation and power. Through hosting and staging dining events, emperors communicated with their subjects generally, and with their courtiers in particular. When in Rome, emperors hosted dinners at every scale: from large public feasts outdoors on festival or other special occasions, providing a segment of the general populace with either a 'lie-down' dinner employing couches or *sigmata* ('semicircular couches'), or at least a handout (*sportula*) from time to time; to smaller but still expansive dinners in the imperial residence on

the Palatine Hill; to quite intimate events with a small and select cast of invitees.² For the emperor as host, the different scales and diverse venues in which dining could be arranged provided a plethora of tools for articulating social relations between himself and his courtiers, and among the courtiers. A related but distinct mode of communication was constituted by emperors appearing as guests at dining events hosted by others.

In the discussion to follow, I investigate how and to what end courtiers of different types participated in dinner parties (*convivia*) involving the emperor. I contend that imperial dining events were occasions on which courtiers sought, or stood to obtain, resources for themselves, whether from the emperor or from other courtiers, and competed with one another for status, visibility, and power.³ Dinners were also occasions for the emperor conspicuously to allocate resources and favour among his courtiers – elevating some, depressing others, and visibly creating hierarchies among them. As we shall see, these resources went well beyond the value of the food, drink, and entertainment of the dining event proper: they could also include valuable objects, prestigious and remunerative offices, and favourable decisions on matters of interest to particular courtiers. No less important was the symbolic, social capital that derived from being seen by those outside the court as being an intimate of the emperor – social capital which, in its turn, admitted of being converted into concrete forms in other social contexts.

Through the strategic and differential allocation of these material and symbolic resources, the emperor sought to manage competition among his courtiers, and especially among the higher-ranking aristocrats who might challenge his own position if they became too powerful.⁴ Reciprocity was central to this dynamic, as courtiers would (or would be expected to) indicate their gratitude for the favour of the invitation and/or for the particular honours or privileges accorded to them in the dining event. Conversely, these events were also occasions on which courtiers could

² Winterling (1999: 148–51) discusses the relatively constrained spaces for dining in the Palatine complex prior to the principate of Claudius; on the structures themselves see *ibid.* 48–65. Dining spaces in Nero's Domus Aurea and in the Flavian Palace are discussed below.

³ On courtiers competing for status see, e.g., Acton 2011: 105, 111–13; for seventeenth-century France see Elias 1983: 92–104 (German orig. 1969). Wallace-Hadrill (2011: 97) offers a functional definition of the court along these lines: 'the space around the ruler within which access to imperial favour is negotiated'.

⁴ Cf. Elias 1983: 85–92 (and *passim*). Other formalized modes of interaction between emperors and courtiers, notably the *salutatio* and the kiss, also allowed for ranking, establishing hierarchies, and allocating favour at various social scales: see Davenport above, 292–306; Pani 2003: 27–9, also 102–3 on these dynamics in the imperial *convivium*.

police and ‘domesticate’ the emperor through the pressure of social expectation and judgement.⁵ Courtiers could act and speak in the *convivium* in ways that put the emperor under pressure; but perhaps more importantly, they themselves circulated accounts of these events afterward – some of which survive for us to read – that conspicuously praise and blame the emperor’s convivial conduct. Narrative accounts of imperial dining therefore have a moralizing tendency, such that one could say, ‘the dinner is the emperor’: how the ruler is portrayed as dining in relation to his court communicates a great deal about the kind of ruler he was, and later emperors ignored this lesson at their peril.

The spatial dimension, moreover, is key to all these social and political dynamics: what sorts of spaces dining events were staged in; how the furniture was arranged; how courtiers were disposed on and around the furniture, and in what proximity and relation to the emperor; how the emperor made himself more or less visible or approachable; how he moved among the diners; and how all such spatial information was reported. Finally, we will consider notices about the emperor dining out and being hosted by his courtiers. Information on all these matters is considerably richer for the century and a half from Augustus to Trajan than for the nearly two centuries following Trajan, and this discussion will inevitably reflect the preponderance of information from the earlier part of our period. Nevertheless I adduce material touching on the later part insofar as the sources permit.

While there was considerable variation in the habits and preferences of individual emperors, systemic change in imperial dining involving courtiers over the first three centuries AD is difficult to identify. The advent of ‘soldier emperors’ in the third century no doubt accounts for the increasing notices from this period onward regarding (non-aristocratic) military men among the emperor’s guests. Also, courtly dining, like other aspects of court life, followed different patterns when emperors were on campaign or in the provinces, as they increasingly were in the latter part of our period, from those observed in Rome. Yet what changed in such cases, arguably, were less the principles and practices of courtly dining than the underlying composition and location of the court itself, which the dining practices themselves, and surviving accounts of these practices, merely reflected.⁶

⁵ On the sorts of interactions between emperors and courtiers that could be staged at dining events, see Winterling 1999: 146–8.

⁶ Schöpe (2014: 80–1) offers reflections on this matter, with further references.

The Emperor and his Guests: Competition, Moral Judgement, and Mutual Surveillance

Almost anyone could, potentially, receive an invitation to dine with the emperor. Our sources are acutely attuned to the social composition of guest lists for imperial *convivia*, and are quick to offer moralizing commentary and judgement about emperors who hosted this or that kind of guest in preference to others. Such commentary was a disciplinary tool, by which emperors were rewarded or punished for displaying what were deemed to be appropriate or inappropriate social preferences (usually from the perspective of aristocratic courtiers, who either themselves produced our sources, or whose perspectives are reflected in the sources). Our sources also suspect, as we shall see, that emperors used invitations to *convivia* as a tool for showing favour or disfavour to particular individuals or classes of associates, thereby disciplining their guests in turn. Thus the matter of who was granted access to imperial dining, how often, and under what conditions, was both a potential indicator of courtier status and a stimulus to competition among individuals and groups seeking access to the emperor in order to gain influence or favour. As epiphenomena of the perpetual competition among courtiers and potential courtiers, these dynamics are constantly visible throughout the period this survey covers.

These dynamics are best illustrated by surveying texts that describe dining events hosted by the emperor and pass moral judgement on the proceedings. According to Suetonius, Claudius frequently laid on large *convivia* in expansive venues for 'six hundred' reclining guests; he also invited his children and those of other aristocrats, boys and girls, to sit on or near the couches (presumably occupied by their parents) and share in the food.⁷ While 'six hundred' is a generically large number in Latin and perhaps should not be taken literally, it is entirely credible that emperors could and sometimes did stage very large dining events with guest lists that included some courtiers but also extended well beyond the court in even its most expansive conception.⁸ Conversely, *convivia* to which children of nobles (and their parents) were invited must be imagined as smaller scale, with more of a 'courtly' atmosphere: high-ranking aristocrats who were close associates, with their children constituting a kind of proto-court for Claudius' own children (principally Britannicus and the future emperor

⁷ Suet. *Claud.* 32 (= Vol. 2, 4.25).

⁸ See below, 333. That larger swaths of the aristocracy, including people with no close connection to the emperor, might sometimes be invited to large imperial *convivia*, need not mean that such invitations were regular or institutionalized; cf. Winterling 1999: 151, 154.

Nero, though Octavia is likely also meant). Indeed, emperors of all eras are said to have dined with their wives, near relatives, and concubines in attendance; and many emperors are said to have entertained the 'leading men', i.e. the high-ranking aristocrats who constituted one demographic within the court, with or without those men's wives (the children are not typically picked out for special attention).⁹ Thus we are frequently informed about imperial dining events in which courtiers of categories 1 and 2 as defined above were invited and treated with honour. Such information is usually conveyed with approval, as the authors of these texts tend to be aristocrats themselves or sympathetic to the aristocracy's status concerns; the implication is that this practice demonstrates the emperor's proper assessment and observation of status distinctions, in general or at least in this case.

We also hear of regular participants of lower status, albeit people who still had elite educations and consequently offered particular skills and capabilities – category 3 in our list of courtier types. A Greek *grammaticus* named Seleucus was apparently invited to dine by Tiberius with sufficient regularity that he began to inquire of the household slaves what authors Tiberius was just then reading, so that he could arrive prepared for questions and discussion. For this impertinence Tiberius dismissed him from his group of close associates (*contubernium*) and eventually drove him to suicide.¹⁰ The Flavian poet Statius, son of a professional poet and *grammaticus* with sub-equestrian Neapolitan origins, describes attending a vast *convivium* in the new Flavian Palace, and thanks Domitian for the invitation.¹¹ It is unclear how frequently Statius might have been invited even to so promiscuous an event, let alone a more selective and intimate one – though there are other indications that he had contact with Domitian at least occasionally, and with other prominent contemporaries more consistently. At any rate, he seems unlikely ever to have achieved 'reasonably regular verbal interaction with the emperor', and so should perhaps

⁹ Emperors hosting leading men: Tiberius: Dio Cass. 57.12.5 (while Livia hosts their wives). Vitellius: Dio Cass. 64(65).2.3 (Xiph.), 64(65).7.1 (Xiph.). Hadrian: Dio Cass. 69.7.3 (Xiph.; PP). Pertinax: SHA *Pert.* 6.2 (cf. Commodus, who allegedly stopped inviting them; also SHA *Car.* 17.2 on Carinus inviting *homines improbi*). Gallienus: SHA *Gall.* 17.7–8 (along with concubines and others – an image of decadent luxury). Caligula dining with his sisters: Suet. *Calig.* 24.1 (= Vol. 2, 4.24), see below. Tiberius dining with Germanicus' widow Agrippina the Elder: Tac. *Ann.* 4.54 (Vol. 2, 4.23); Suet. *Tib.* 53.1, see below.

¹⁰ Suet. *Tib.* 56; presumably Seleucus imagined he might find greater favour, and so perhaps obtain valuable resources, by being primed. At *Tib.* 70.3 Suetonius affirms that Tiberius regularly tormented *grammatici* with mythological riddles; probably he posed these questions at *convivia*.

¹¹ Stat. *Silv.* 4.2 (= Vol. 2, 4.29 [a]); discussion below, 333.

not be classified as a ‘courtier’ per our working definition.¹² Perhaps closer to his emperor was the scholar and antiquarian author Sammonicus Serenus, of the late second to early third century AD. He reports (in a fragment preserved by Macrobius) that he was served a fish called *acipenser* at a *convivium* hosted by Septimius Severus; his language leaves open the possibility that he was a regular guest.¹³ Aristocratic authors generally speak approvingly about emperors’ interactions with courtiers of category 3, notwithstanding their lower social status. For many aristocrats shared the interests to which these courtiers catered, and the emperor, by inviting such guests, not only entertained his high-ranking guests along with himself, but showed that he shared their cultural preoccupations and interests.

Courtiers of still lower juridical status – category 4 – are less visible, and also less approved, in our sources. Nevertheless their presence at imperial *convivia*, if not necessarily as ‘guests’ who recline, is indisputable. Suetonius relates that the aged and increasingly infirm Tiberius was kissed on the hand by his physician Charicles at the end of a dinner. Suspecting that Charicles was trying to feel his pulse, Tiberius ‘urged him to remain and recline, and he extended the meal’.¹⁴ As a physician and a Greek, Charicles was likely a freedman – though assuredly a courtier, given his abundant opportunity for verbal and other interaction with the emperor. The anecdote seems to suppose that he had previously been present in the dining room, but not reclining on a couch along with the other guests – otherwise the remark that Tiberius invited him to recline is pointless. The implication

¹² Statius competed, with some success, in several prominent poetic festivals in the late 80s and 90s, presumably with the emperor’s approval or acquiescence. He may have been close to the pantomime Paris, likely a courtier, whom Domitian put to death in 83, and he later addressed poems to prominent Domitianic figures. Also, Domitian as a youth was a pupil of Statius’ father, who taught at Rome in the 60s. On Statius’ family and connections see Hardie 1983: 2–14, 58–72.

¹³ Sammonicus apud Macrobius, *Sat.* 3.16.7: *quippe qui dignatione vestra cum intersum convivio sacro, animadvertam hunc piscem a coronatis ministris cum tibicine introferri* (‘for when I attend the sacred banquet with your Honour, I observe this fish being carried in by garlanded servants to the music of the flute’); see Schöpe 2014: 69; *PIR*² S 164. In the *Historia Augusta*, dining with literary or other learned men is a trope of the emperor who behaves appropriately (at least for the moment): SHA *Pert.* 12.7, *Macr.* 13.5, *Alex. Sev.* 34.6. One may wonder about the historiographer Cassius Dio, who reports that Caracalla quoted verses of Euripides to him during an imperial banquet: 79(78).8.4. Dio was a successful senator and courtier (of category 1) from the time of Commodus’ accession; it was only later in his career, in the 210s–20s, that he began collecting material and writing his Roman history (73[72].23 [Xiph.]). This late-career literary activity may have impacted his profile as a courtier to the later Severan emperors. But that activity is not the reason for his inclusion in the court in the first place.

¹⁴ Suet. *Tib.* 72.3; cf. *PIR*² C 710.

is that a man of his status or occupation, courtier though he may have been, would not normally recline in imperial and aristocratic company. Thus the invitation to do so, and the extension of the dinner party for his sake, was an extraordinary measure, cloaked as an honour, by which Tiberius sought to keep Charicles from detecting his actual frailty. The freedman courtiers who were powerful in the late Julio-Claudian and Flavian periods – Polybius, Narcissus, Pallas, Epaphroditus, and so on – seem certain to have reclined regularly at meals hosted by the emperor, given the numerous other honours and privileges they enjoyed, though no texts directly say so. Aristocratic authors express abundant irritation at the elevation of such men.¹⁵ Conversely, Augustus was praised for carefully discriminating among statuses and ranks at his *convivia*, and in particular for never inviting freedmen to dine.¹⁶ This explicit exclusion reveals the default assumption that emperors commonly did and would invite freedmen; that Augustus did not is a noteworthy mark of exceptional restraint and sensitivity to the status anxieties of his higher-status courtiers.

Slaves and other personnel who attended the diners were of course omnipresent, standing in service and moving about as the needs of the event required. Certain household slaves and bodyguards, though of low juridical status, enjoyed a significant degree of direct personal contact and interaction with the emperor, hence were courtiers of category 4. However, our sources only occasionally notice them at dining events. Suetonius says that Vespasian was always agreeable and generous in the dining room following a bath, and that his household slaves (*domestici*) seized those opportunities to make requests.¹⁷ More ominously, Suetonius says that Claudius, in the early days of his principate, never dined without armed bodyguards standing conspicuously about, and that – less conspicuously – he had soldiers instead of serving slaves attending the tables. Dio adds that the practice of emperors keeping soldiers in the dining room, which Claudius initiated, persisted to his own day in the early third century.¹⁸ The visible or suspected presence of such personnel likely impacted upon

¹⁵ On the powerful freedmen of Claudius' reign and aristocratic resentment about status inversion, see Roller 2001: 267–72. Formally these freedmen were probably adlected as equestrians or at least as freeborn, to 'officially' erase the stigma of their slave origins.

¹⁶ Suet. *Aug.* 74. ¹⁷ Suet. *Vesp.* 21.

¹⁸ Suet. *Claud.* 35.1 (= Vol. 2, 4.4 [a]): *neque convivia inire ausus est nisi ut speculatores cum lanceis circumstarent militesque vice ministrorum fungerentur* ('he did not venture to go to banquets unless scouts with spears stood around him and soldiers acted as waiters'; perhaps *speculator* ['scout'] conveys that their task was to keep an eye on things); Dio Cass. 60.3.3. Slaves, of course, normally stood in attendance at *convivia*; SHA *Alex. Sev.* 37.4 presents Severus Alexander as notably kind in giving leftovers from meals to the (standing) slaves 'from his own

the atmosphere of the convivial event, possibly adding majesty or instilling fear, depending on context. In the third century we hear of emperors inviting soldiers and military men to partake of the food and wine, and to recline as guests; this development likely speaks to the rising status of the military in this period, as well as to the more humble social origins and extensive military experience of many third-century emperors. Aristocratic authors, inevitably, execrate such practices; the emperor who turns his back on his aristocratic courtiers (category 1) becomes a trope of the 'bad emperor' in this era.¹⁹ The conflicts exposed here reveal how the emperor and his aristocratic courtiers sought to domesticate and discipline one another: the emperor conspicuously favoured a lower-status social segment of his court over a higher-status segment in a convivial setting, possibly as a way of controlling ambitions or suspected threats from the latter, or simply demonstrating a lack of cultural affinity; the latter in turn showered condemnation upon the emperor in the effort to discipline him (or his successors) and thereby to restore imperial favour to themselves.

Social Interaction and Social (Dis)advantage at Imperial convivia

To illuminate further how emperors and courtiers cooperated, competed, and policed one another at imperial *convivia*, I now focus on the dynamics of social interaction among these participants. Our sources describe *convivia* in which courtiers pleased the emperor by their performance of conviviality, thereby gaining further gifts and favours from him. Suetonius reports that Tiberius so delighted in the companionable drinking of two aristocratic courtiers, L. Pomponius Flaccus and L. Calpurnius Piso (both ex-consuls), that he declared them 'utterly delightful, and friends of all hours', and appointed each to another high office. These courtiers manifestly leveraged their proximity to and interaction with the emperor in the *convivium* to secure additional resources and enhance their status.²⁰

hand' (*de manu sua*) – a mark of special favour (see Tac. *Ann.* 4.54 [= **Vol. 2, 4.23**], discussed below).

¹⁹ E.g. Dio Cass. 78(77).17.4 (Xiph.) (= **Vol. 2, 4.4 [e]**), 18.4 (EV) says that Caracalla provided wine to his bodyguards 'while we were present and watching' (i.e. senators, including Dio himself, had to witness this display of misdirected favour), and then that he ceased to wish to dine with 'us' (senators). Meanwhile SHA *Gall.* 20.2–5 describes a custom of soldiers reclining to dine at imperial banquets either with or without their sword-belts.

²⁰ Suet. *Tib.* 42.1, cf. *PIR*² C 289, P 715. Vitellius is also said to have conferred 'power' upon dinner-guests who pleased him: Tac. *Hist.* 2.95.2 (= **Vol. 2, 1.21**). Cf. Dio Cass. 64(65).2.3 (Xiph.; EV), where the courtier L. Iunius Q. Vibius Crispus (*PIR*² V 543, cf. I 847) deems himself lucky to have been ill so he was not compelled to keep pace with Vitellius' debauchery.

Mutually beneficial reciprocity is also thematized in a poem of Statius depicting a dinner in the Flavian Palace (see below) to which the poet was invited. The highly laudatory poem expresses gratitude for the invitation, presents to its readers an image of Domitian as Jupiter on earth, and depicts the great dining room in the palace as a cosmos. Thus the poem itself constitutes public reciprocation for the honour of participating in the event. In principle we might imagine the poet as a courtier of category 3, a favoured literary figure who leavens such occasions with his poetic skill and then provides flattering publicity. But while he represents himself as reclining and as seeing Domitian's face 'nearby' (*iuxta*), the divine figuration of the emperor that pervades the poem excludes the possibility of close interaction. Whatever the actual history and character of this poet's engagement and interaction with Domitian, he hardly portrays himself as a courtier.²¹ Finally, there is abundant indication that emperors were thought to behave appropriately if they sent their guests away from imperial *convivia* not only with the memory of the grand event itself and its no doubt singular food, wine, and entertainment, but also bearing 'takeaway gifts' (*apophoreta*) appropriate to the dignity of the occasion and/or the needs of the recipient.²²

Mutually beneficial reciprocity is not the only possible dynamic: reprisals and sheer terror might also have been part of the experience, particularly for courtiers who interacted closely with the emperor. A famous passage in Dio describes a dinner, staged as a funeral banquet of the sort held in a tomb, to which Domitian invited leading senators and equestrians.²³ Dio's account stresses the acute, unremitting dread the guests experienced, imagining they would be killed at any moment. In the end they were not killed, and on the contrary were given exceptionally

The quaestorial candidate rewarded by Tiberius for heavy drinking (also Suet. *Tib.* 42.2) seems unlikely to have been a courtier, but the story shows that even the very occasional or one-time invitee might dream of gaining resources by impressing or pleasing the emperor in the *convivium*. For discussion see Barzanò 1991: 237–8, 240–1; Roller 2001: 150–2.

²¹ Stat. *Silv.* 4.2.5–6, 12–13 (invitation), 4.2.10–12 (Domitian as Jupiter), 4.2.14–17 (reclining 'nearby'), 4.2.18–31 (cosmic dining room) (= Vol. 2, 4.29 [a]). On the poet's relationship with and position relative to the emperor as represented in and mediated by this poem, see Newlands 2002: 263–4, 271–3; also n. 12 above.

²² For (apparently) modest gifts: e.g. Plin. *Ep.* 6.31.14 (= Vol. 2, 2.20) (of Trajan). For rather excessive ones: SHA *Verus* 5.2–5, *Heliogab.* 21.7–22.1, 29.4. SHA *Alex. Sev.* 44.1 describes Severus Alexander as affable in *convivia* and ready to give each person what he requested (*in convi<vi>is comis, ita ut quisque posceret quod vellet*). Cf. Vespasian granting his slaves' requests in *convivia*: Suet. *Vesp.* 21 (discussed above, 325). Vössing (2004: 530–1) offers further examples, not all involving courtiers.

²³ Dio Cass. 67.9.1–5 (Xiph.) (= Vol. 2, 4.29 [b]).

rich gifts of silver and slaves: *apophoreta* as extreme as the dread they had experienced. This narrative seeks to stigmatize Domitian as a cruel, anti-social host to his aristocratic courtiers, and clearly serves as an aristocratic counterstroke against this emperor's alleged tyranny in general. So the narrative's veracity – and the character of any actual event standing behind it – is impossible to judge. However, it can only achieve its stigmatizing aim by activating and then inverting readers' expectations about what mutually beneficial convivial exchange between emperors and courtiers looked like. It shows us an emperor bringing his aristocratic courtiers brutally to heel employing a 'stick and carrot' approach: luridly displaying the potential costs of falling out of line, followed by an equally over-the-top display of the resources of which he disposed and with which he could gift his favourites, all wrapped up in a theme dinner.²⁴

Even this story pales, however, in comparison to Tacitus' harrowing account of Britannicus' death by poison at a *convivium* hosted by Nero. Having come to see Britannicus as a threat to his position, Nero had the poison administered as the boy sat with other children of leading men, at a table separate from but under the eyes of the (reclining) adults. The dose was instantly fatal.²⁵ Tacitus' narrative focuses on the shock and fear betrayed by the other children and some of the adults, though some managed to compose their faces and hide their emotions as they processed the implications of this event for themselves. Nero's mother Agrippina, in particular, perceived that her own death was inevitable.²⁶

In eliminating a potential rival so emphatically, and putting others on notice (above all his mother) who might seek to challenge his position, Nero at a stroke transformed the power dynamics within his own family. But not only there. For any alignment or faction within the court that may have been developing around Britannicus (or any other single member of the imperial family) was also thereby disrupted. For instance, Suetonius reports that the young Titus, raised in the court alongside Britannicus, was reclining (!) near him at the deadly *convivium*, and tasted and was sickened

²⁴ Kreuz (2016: 272–6) offers thoughtful discussion of a range of interpretations (with further references), and remarks upon the striking but inverted parallels between this passage and Stat. *Silv.* 4.2 (cf. Vol. 2, 4.29 [a]). Also Paterson 2007: 149–50.

²⁵ Tac. *Ann.* 13.14.2–16.4 (= Vol. 2, 4.26, 33 [b]).

²⁶ Tac. *Ann.* 13.16.4. Bartsch (1994: 13–16) discusses the dynamics of mutual inspection, theatricality, and the imposition of fiction as truth in this passage (with further references). Wallace-Hadrill (2011: 98–100) trenchantly compares this passage to Saint-Simon's account of courtiers' reactions (composed, feigned, sometimes real) to the death of Louis XIV's son.

by the poisoned drink himself.²⁷ If we accept this report as historical, then we can probably infer that Titus was being groomed as a proto-courtier for the eventual successor. Furthermore, Tacitus' statement that the children at these imperial *convivia* were seated 'under the eyes of their relatives' may allow us to infer that Vespasian was himself present (along with his wife Flavia Domitilla, if she still lived) among the adult guests at this *convivium*. Vespasian, then, may have been among those who, as Tacitus represents it, were seeking to compose their faces and to grasp what this event portended for themselves.²⁸ The anecdote itself, of course, has the moralizing aim of stigmatizing Nero's physical and psychological cruelty, as well as the complaisance of the courtiers who allowed this to be done to them (Tacitus elsewhere bewails the passivity of the Julio-Claudian aristocracy). Thus it participates in a developing discourse within Tacitus about the comportment proper to emperors and courtiers alike.

A key mark of imperial favour or disfavour toward courtiers in *convivia* is the placement of diners in more or less prestigious postures or locations on the couches, including their proximity to the emperor and the verbal or physical interactions that proximity affords. Tacitus provides another dramatic narrative of a tension-filled imperial *convivium* in which Agrippina the Elder, the widow of Tiberius' adopted son Germanicus, reclined 'close' to the emperor Tiberius.²⁹ She had been maliciously warned by Sejanus, who was seeking to rise in the emperor's estimation, that Tiberius might poison her. She duly kept to herself and touched no food. Tiberius noticed, picked up a fruit, praised it, and gave it to her 'with his own hand'; she passed it on, untasted, to a slave. Tiberius, deeming this an implicit accusation that he was seeking to poison her, hardened his opinion against her.³⁰ In this story, it is significant that Agrippina reclined near enough to Tiberius that he could address her directly and offer her the fruit with his own hand: regardless of exactly what position each diner occupied in what arrangement of couches, such close proximity indicated special favour and intimacy. Also, practically speaking, there was no intermediary who might

²⁷ Suet. *Tit.* 2.

²⁸ This anecdote neatly aligns the Flavians with Nero's victim and the 'legitimate' heir to Claudius, as did the honours Titus later bestowed on the memory of Britannicus; thus it could be suspected of being a politically advantageous invention: Vössing 2004: 306, 384. On the varying dining postures ascribed to the children in this story, see Roller 2006: 170. For Flavia Domitilla, see *PIR*² F 416.

²⁹ Tac. *Ann.* 4.54.1 (= Vol. 2, 4.23): *cum propter discumberet*.

³⁰ Tac. *Ann.* 4.54 (= Vol. 2, 4.23); cf. Suet. *Tib.* 53.1. See Vössing 2004: 375–6.

introduce poison.³¹ Rejecting such an offer and gesture, and thereby deeply offending the emperor, was extremely risky for a courtier, even a close family member. The result was that the upstart courtier Sejanus made progress in his quest to topple other courtiers, particularly the various family members who not only influenced and received favour from Tiberius, but might succeed him. Sejanus thereby progressively cleared the path for his own eventual monopolization of imperial favour – even usurpation, as Tacitus envisions his aims.³²

To judge from Suetonius, Caligula was a master semiotician, who exploited postures, positions, and dress in *convivia* to put courtiers in their places (in every sense). Suetonius reports that this emperor ‘allowed certain men who had discharged the highest magistracies to stand as he dined, now at the head of the couch and now at the foot, wearing a linen garment girt at the waist’.³³ The girt tunic and standing posture were both characteristic of slaves who attended the diners in a *convivium*, and particularly their own master; Caligula thereby not only reduced these aristocratic courtiers (symbolically) to slave status, but figured himself as their master. Suetonius and other authors relate many further instances of Caligula’s degradation of aristocratic courtiers, in convivial and other settings.³⁴

Other groups of courtiers, meanwhile, found favour of a sort. Suetonius reports that Caligula ‘habitually committed *stuprum* (illicit sex, here incest) with all of his sisters, and in a well-attended *convivium* placed them below him (*infra se*), each in turn, while his wife reclined above’.³⁵ The position ‘below’ the host indicated special favour; also, a wife or concubine reclining ‘below’ a man commonly indicated a sexual connection. Caligula may have been leveraging these two dimensions of the ‘below’ position simultaneously, to indicate both the favour in which he held his sisters and to broadcast to the large company in attendance that he was having sex with them.³⁶ His wife was still favoured, as she reclined adjacent to him but

³¹ Commodus was allegedly poisoned by his concubine Marcia, who reclined alongside him and handed him, unsuspecting, a poisoned cup: Hdn. 1.17.8 (= **Vol. 2, 6.4 [b]**); SHA *Comm.* 17.1–2.

³² Tac. *Ann.* 4.3. ³³ Suet. *Calig.* 26.2 (= **Vol. 2, 4.24**).

³⁴ See Roller 2006: 85–6. More on Caligula and courtiers in *convivia* at Dio Cass. 59.29.5 (= **Vol. 2, 4.12 [b]**); Sen. *Ira* 2.33.3–6 (= **Vol. 2, 1.18**); Suet. *Calig.* 27.4 (with Roller 2001: 163–4), 32.3 (honorific positioning of consuls, until he threatens to kill them); Dio Cass. 59.14.7 (inviting his horse Incitatus to dinner, as if a courtier). For other humiliations see Suet. *Calig.* 26.1–3 (= **Vol. 2, 4.24**).

³⁵ Suet. *Calig.* 24.1 (= **Vol. 2, 4.24**); see Roller 2006: 120–1.

³⁶ On the position ‘below’ a given diner (*infra* or *in sinu*) and its implication of intimacy (sometimes sexual), see Roller 2006: 112–13, 150–3. So also Elagabalus, having declared himself a woman, assumes the ‘below’ position relative to his paramour Zoticus: Dio 80(79).16.5:

‘above’ and thus out of the ‘sex’ position; all this contrasted, presumably, with the humiliating positions and postures endured by the aristocratic courtiers. While Caligula himself was manifestly difficult for aristocratic courtiers to police directly, all such anecdotes were transmitted subsequently by authors of this status, as proof of this emperor’s viciousness and to warn his successors. Thus these anecdotes functioned, like many others describing social interactions at imperial *convivia*, as indicators of the moral status of the emperor around whom these events revolved – at least in the eyes of the aristocratic courtiers who trafficked in these tales.³⁷

Finally, an edgy imperial *convivium* under Nerva is described by Pliny the Younger.³⁸ An intimate meal hosted by the emperor for just a few guests (*cum paucis*) included Iunius Mauricus, a long-standing senator who was exiled by Domitian and recalled by Nerva, and whose courage, constancy, and level-headedness Pliny is otherwise praising in this letter. Another guest, Fabricius Veiento, reclined (Pliny says) ‘nearest, and even on Nerva’s breast’ (*proximus atque etiam in sinu*) – which seems to imply he reclined directly ‘below’ the emperor, his own back to the emperor’s chest. This position indicates intimacy and favour, as noted earlier, though in this case probably not a sexual connection. Pliny alludes to having an ill opinion of Veiento (*dixi omnia cum hominem nominavi*), who was a vastly influential courtier and thrice consul under the Flavians, but is represented as a shady dealer and illegitimate prosecutor. In due course a discussion arose regarding the ‘wickedness and bloodthirsty decisions’ (*nequitia, sanguinariae sententiae*) of another fearsome, powerful, shady courtier of the Domitianic era, Catullus Messalinus, now deceased: Pliny says Messalinus had a ‘savage spirit’, and that Domitian used him as a weapon against any who displeased him. Nerva asks rhetorically, ‘What do we reckon would have happened if he (sc. Messalinus) still lived?’, to which Mauricus responds: ‘He would be dining with us.’³⁹ The implication is that Veiento and Messalinus are two peas in a pod, and that the former’s presence at the current *convivium*, in a position of obvious favour with the emperor, undermines any suggestion, possibly implied in Nerva’s question, that the demise of Messalinus and Domitian have changed things

πασχητιάσας ἔν τε τοῖς στέρνοις αὐτοῦ κατεκλίθη, κἀν τοῖς κόλποις ὡσπερ τις ἐρωμένη δεῖπνον εἴλετο (‘he burned with lust and reclined on Zoticus’ chest and took a meal lying on his breast like some beloved mistress’) (cf. **Vol. 2, 3.51**); SHA *Heliogab.* 12.4.

³⁷ So, e.g., Winterling 1999: 147–8; Roller 2001: 154–73. ³⁸ Plin. *Ep.* 4.22.4–6 (= **Vol. 2, 4.30**).

³⁹ Plin. *Ep.* 4.22.6 (= **Vol. 2, 4.30**). This story is retold (from Pliny) in the late-antique *Epitome de Caesaribus* (12.5); Veiento and Messalinus are also paired as monstrous and ludicrous advisers to Domitian in Juv. 4.113–29 (cf. **Vol. 2, 3.6**).

for the better. Pliny, then, would have us understand that Mauricus, a victim of the former regime, with his characteristic courage is speaking truth to power,⁴⁰ subtly and skilfully attacking another aristocratic courtier in the dinner company who was a pillar of the former regime and as such deserves denigration. Mauricus is even policing the emperor himself, by putting him on notice that the bad old status quo has not been visibly ameliorated. The result of this exchange might be either to adjust the relative power and prestige of the courtiers involved, or failing that, at least to reorient the assembled party's perception of the true balance of the power within the court.⁴¹

Spaces for Imperial Dining

Since dining events always unfold in some kind of space, which necessarily impacts upon the social dynamics among the diners, it seems fitting to discuss what is known regarding imperial dining spaces and venues. As we have seen, many accounts survive describing dining events hosted by Julio-Claudian emperors. Yet little about the spaces in which these events played out can be divined from textual sources or archaeological investigation, apart perhaps from inferences about the size of the venues based on stated numbers of diners. Large public feasts were likely held in the open air, but there can be little doubt that the structures on the Palatine Hill occupied and employed by the Julio-Claudian emperors prior to Nero – the so-called House of Augustus, the House of Livia, and the Domus Tiberiana – contained rooms of various sizes, suitably appointed, that were either dedicated to, or could be used *inter alia* for, hosting groups of diners ranging from small to quite large. Poor preservation has hampered archaeologists in understanding these buildings, the spaces they contain, and their phases over time.⁴²

Somewhat more insight comes from the well-preserved remains of Nero's Domus Aurea on the Esquiline Hill, the surviving portions of which seem to be designed to host dining events. Probable dining rooms include the famous octagonal room, its immediate adjacencies, and other rectangular rooms in the suite along the south-facing portico (the more traditional

⁴⁰ Plin. *Ep.* 4.22.2: *idem apud imperatorem Nervam non minus fortiter* ('He (Mauricus) acted no less bravely in the presence of the emperor Nerva').

⁴¹ Mauricus: *PIR*² I 771. Veiento: *PIR*² F 91. Messalinus: *PIR*² V 57.

⁴² For a detailed summary of what is currently known of these pre-Flavian palatial structures, see Michel 2015: 31–54; see too Pflug and Wulf-Rheidt above, 204–7; **Vol. 2, 2.9–11.**

shape for a Roman dining room designed to hold the classic three-couch arrangement or *triclinium*).⁴³ Furthermore, recent excavations in the Vigna Barberini on the Palatine Hill have revealed foundations plausibly identified as substructures of Nero's Cenatio Rotunda, the rotating circular dining room memorably described by Suetonius. The exact size and configuration of the round dining space, however, remains to be determined, and little can be conjectured about how it was utilized.⁴⁴

Our understanding of imperial dining spaces as an ensemble, and of their relationship to other spaces useful to emperors and courtiers, is much better for the Flavian period and later, following the development of the Flavian Palace on the south-west corner of the Palatine summit.⁴⁵ Regarding dining spaces in particular, a large apsidal hall at the west end of the northern segment of the palace (the so-called Domus Flavia) is flanked by garden installations and opens on a large peristyle; this hall is usually identified as a large dining room and is traditionally given the moniker Cenatio Iovis, 'Jupiter's dining room'. Estimates based on populating the room's floor space with *triclinia*, i.e. three-couch arrangements holding nine diners, suggest a maximum capacity of perhaps 200; for larger dining events couches could possibly be set up in the flanking gardens, the large peristyle adjacent to the north-east, and even in the two large rooms north-east of the peristyle – the rooms traditionally called the Basilica and the Aula Regia – to accommodate hundreds more diners.⁴⁶ This is the space, relatively recently built and lavishly decorated, in which the imperial banquet Statius describes in *Silvae* 4.2, discussed above, may have taken place. Statius' ekphrasis endows the room with cosmic dimensions and characteristics, decorates it with columns made of stone from all over the Empire, and fills it with the emperor's quasi-divine radiance, richly evoking the excitement and wonder that the guest who dines in such a space, in sight of the emperor, might feel.⁴⁷

⁴³ On possible arrangements of couches in these rooms of the Domus Aurea see Sojc and Winterling 2009: 296, 299.

⁴⁴ Suet. *Ner.* 31.2 (= Vol. 2, 2.11 [a]); cf. Sen. *Ep.* 90.15. Excavations: Villedieu 2016 (with p. 107 n. 2 for further bibliography).

⁴⁵ For an overview of this palace, see Pflug and Wulf-Rheidt above, Chapter 9.

⁴⁶ Cenatio Iovis is reported as the name of a location within the palace at SHA *Pert.* 11.6, and is inferred to label the great dining room. For estimates of capacity, and sketches of possible couch arrangements in this and the other spaces, see Zanker 2002: 111–14; Mar 2009: 260–2; Vol. 2, 4.27 (fig. 4.5.1).

⁴⁷ Stat. *Silv.* 4.2.18–37 (= Vol. 2, 4.29 [a]). On Statius' ekphrasis and the dining room in the palace see now Kreuz 2016: 239–54; the poem dates probably to the mid-90s AD. Mart. 8.39 (probably early 90s) also speaks of a large new dining space in the palace.

A second significant dining area is adjacent to the large dining room, but on a lower level – the Sunken Peristyle of the southern segment of the palace (the so-called *Domus Augustana*). This area, which has received intensive study in recent years, contains a number of more intimate dining rooms of various sizes and shapes, and with various lines of sight – some octagonal, some rectangular, some oriented (axially or off-axis) toward the large central fountain installation, others turned toward smaller internal lightwells – in which the emperor could host smaller parties, or larger groups of guests divided up into separate rooms or areas (rather than occupying a single, large, open space, as the larger dining room upstairs allowed). The emperor himself seems likely to have moved among his guests, whether from room to room in the Sunken Peristyle or among the couches in the larger spaces above.⁴⁸ In the more intimate rooms of the Sunken Peristyle we might imagine Domitian's 'funeral banquet' to have played out, and Nerva's small *convivium* with Mauricus and Veiento.

Emperors Dining Out

Besides hosting *convivia* in the palace, emperors seem not infrequently to have dined as guests at the townhouses or rural villas of favoured courtiers – a practice that constituted an important dimension of the exchange relations emperors maintained with their courtiers, and provided aristocratic authors with another index of imperial 'civility'. Undoubtedly the most lurid account of imperial 'dining out' is the emperor Augustus' meal in the luxurious Campanian villa of the wealthy equestrian P. Vedius Pollio, as memorably narrated by Seneca. Angry at a slave for breaking a crystal drinking vessel, Vedius made ready to throw him into his fishpond, to be devoured by the lampreys he was raising there. Shocked by this display of savagery, Augustus ordered that the remaining crystal vessels be broken, so that the slave could not be punished for what the emperor had also done, and that the fishpond be filled in. Here the exchange dynamic was complex, as the amicable, mutually beneficial reciprocity of hosting and counter-hosting between Augustus and his friend was interrupted by an extraordinary exchange of offences. Also, while the emperor here disciplined a (possible) courtier, the reception of that disciplining in later aristocratic

⁴⁸ On the Sunken Peristyle as dining space see Sojc and Winterling 2009; Sojc 2012b: 29–37. Pflug (2014: 374–8) discusses the emperor's possible movement through these spaces.

writing is positive; Augustus is deemed to display moderation and dispense justice appropriately when faced with a savage act.⁴⁹

More routinely, emperors of whom aristocratic authors approve are described as accepting invitations, or even turning up unannounced, to dine at their courtiers' tables, ideally in an unassuming style. These notices imply that, in engaging in regular exchange relations with high-ranking courtiers, these emperors showed themselves to be 'one of them', and to be (properly) favouring this segment of the court.⁵⁰ The flavour of such exchange may emerge from an anecdote in Dio, in which Trajan is said to have arrived unannounced to dine at the house of his friend and colleague Licinius Sura. The background to this unannounced arrival, Dio suggests, was the urgent accusation by others that Sura wished to kill Trajan, by which the accusers sought to turn Trajan against Sura. Thus Dio implies that competition among courtiers, some of whom were evidently seeking to enhance their own status at Sura's expense, had reached a kind of fever pitch that required Trajan's intervention. Accordingly, Dio says, Trajan left his bodyguards behind, had his eyes treated by Sura's doctor, and his beard shaved by Sura's barber, all before bathing and dining at Sura's house. Trajan thereby dispelled the rumours that Sura wished to kill him: for Sura could easily have arranged to poison him or cut his throat during these proceedings.⁵¹

The point of Trajan's actions was ostentatiously to display an ideal enactment of the guest-host relationship, an enactment of the presumption that a guest in a close friend's house would naturally entrust all aspects of his comfort and well-being to that friend, for the duration of the visit. The anecdote thus shows Trajan managing competition among his courtiers effectively but without violence – strategies and qualities of which an aristocratic courtier like Dio can approve. But it also ascribes the virtues

⁴⁹ Sen. *Ira* 3.40.2–5 (= **Vol. 2, 4.22**). See also *Clem.* 1.18.2; Dio Cass. 54.23.1–6; Plin. *HN* 9.77; cf. *PIR*² V 323. Discussion in Roller 2001: 168–71.

⁵⁰ Vespasian often hosted senators for dinner, and dined in turn at the houses of his closest friends (οἱ πάντων φίλοι): Dio Cass. 65(66).10.6 (Xiph.). Similarly of Trajan: Dio Cass. 68.7.3 (Xiph.); Eutr. 8.4. Elagabalus: SHA *Heliogab.* 30.4. Severus Alexander: SHA *Alex. Sev.* 4.3. Aurelian (for a particular occasion): SHA *Tyr. Trig.* 25.4.

⁵¹ Dio Cass. 68.15.4–16.1^a (Xiph.; EV; JA) (cf. **Vol. 2, 4.31**); anecdote with similar flavour at SHA *Pius* 11.8 (though here the occasion for Pius' visit to his friend is unclear). *Convivia* apart, what other reasons did an emperor have for visiting another aristocrat's townhouse? Eutropius (8.4) praises Trajan for going to friends' houses for the *salutatio* (this would seem a very rare occasion for an emperor), or when they were sick, or on occasions of festivals; cf. Suet. *Claud.* 35 (= **Vol. 2, 4.4 [a]**); Dio Cass. 68.7.3 (Xiph.) (Trajan), 69.7.4 (Xiph.) (Hadrian), 76(75).15.4 (Xiph.) (Septimius Severus). Emperors were perhaps more likely to be hosted by others when travelling outside of Rome, as evidently with Augustus and Vedius Pollio.

of civility and fidelity to Trajan (and Sura) by demonstrating that the emperor and his courtier can be ‘normal friends’. Such fellow-feeling can extend to extravagance, however, which reverses the moral valence of the emperor’s companionability. Tiberius, Nero, and Vitellius are all said to have dined at the houses of favoured courtiers who were notable for their extravagant dining, and whose extravagance competed with, in some respects surpassed, and assuredly exacerbated these emperors’ own worst impulses in that direction.⁵²

Hunting

We turn now to hunting, and consider how and to what extent this activity provided a context for engagement and communication between the emperor and his courtiers. Romans of all periods and every social status probably hunted if they lived or spent time in the countryside and had access to wild areas that were the habitats of animals useful for food or sport. Poorer rural dwellers may have depended to some extent on their hunting take for sustenance, while wealthier ones likely hunted, rather, for reasons of enjoyment and/or sociability with others participating in the hunt – even if they did eat animals they killed. A fair number of references to hunting, descriptions of hunts, and similes involving the hunt appear in texts. Also, numerous images of hunters in action with their equipment, sometimes including hunting dogs and game animals, are found in visual media of the later Empire in particular. Such imagery presupposes a broad familiarity with this activity and its accoutrements. Aristocrats were among the Romans who hunted – in the middle Republic we hear that Scipio Aemilianus was an enthusiastic hunter, though he was likely an outlier (see below), and in the imperial age we hear of others, including emperors. When aristocrats hunted, they no doubt did so with more and better equipment, personnel, dogs, and the like than the average rural Roman could muster. Yet nothing seems to mark hunting as *characteristically* aristocratic or ‘kingly’ in the Roman world.⁵³

⁵² Tiberius: Suet. *Tib.* 42.2 (imposing a dinner on a senator, renowned for being *libidinosus*, requesting that he employ his usual nude serving girls). Nero: Suet. *Ner.* 27.3; Plut. *Galba* 19.3–5 (Otho’s convivial display outdoes even Nero’s, in one respect). Vitellius: Dio Cass. 64(65).2.2–3 (Xiph.; *EV*; *PP*) (emperor and friends exchange vastly extravagant dinners).

⁵³ On the general background see, e.g., Green 1996: 228–35; Badel 2009: 38–9.

Nevertheless, Romans from the late Republic onward were entirely aware of the Near Eastern and Hellenistic traditions of hunting as a central, high-prestige activity for aristocrats, kings, and courtiers. Roman authors of the imperial period declare that Alexander the Great hunted regularly, accompanied by aristocratic companions; also, that he inherited giant Persian hunting enclosures, and hunted in them with close associates. Plutarch says that Demetrius Poliorcetes, luxuriously imprisoned by Seleucus, seized this opportunity to hunt along with comrades in royal hunting-gardens (*paradeisoi*).⁵⁴ Projecting such eastern practices into the Trojan past, Vergil presents to his readers a great hunt featuring the oriental potentates Dido and Aeneas, accompanied by a full retinue of aristocratic companions from both peoples and the young prince Ascanius as well – a courtly assemblage, all told – and equipped with a panoply of nets, javelins, horses, and dogs.⁵⁵

Yet there is little indication that Republican aristocrats, who had direct contact with Hellenistic rulers and their courts, and who deemed themselves the equals of these rulers, took up or engaged in that style of hunting. Scipio Aemilianus is the exception that proves the rule. Polybius reports that, after the battle of Pydna, Aemilius Paullus handed control of the Macedonian royal hunting grounds to the young Scipio, thinking this would provide training and amusement. Polybius implies that Scipio had not previously hunted, but developed a taste for it in the Macedonian game preserves. Upon returning to Italy he continued to hunt in preference to cultivating the arts of the forum, and so gained a great reputation by following a path quite contrary, says Polybius, to normal practice at that time. This final observation implies that hunting, while not unfamiliar and perhaps not unprestigious, was also not a typical activity by which young aristocrats of the middle Republic sought to make a name.⁵⁶ This, then, is the background against which we must assess information about the hunting activities of emperors and courtiers over the first three centuries AD.

⁵⁴ Alexander: Curt. 8.1.11–19; Plut. *Alex.* 40.4–5. Demetrius: Plut. *Demetr.* 50.8–9. For brief discussions of the eastern and Hellenistic traditions of royal hunting, see Aymard 1951: 43–9; Brosius 2007: 41–5; and Strootman 2014a: 199–202.

⁵⁵ Verg. *Aen.* 4.129–59. Legendary rulers of early Latium can also be imagined as hunters: Romulus and Remus are presented as having a penchant for hunting – though likely more by virtue of their hardy rural youthfulness than their inceptive kingliness (Livy 1.4.8–9; Plut. *Rom.* 6.3–5); king Picus of the Ausonians is also imagined as hunting (Ov. *Met.* 14.341–64).

⁵⁶ Polyb. 31.29; discussion in Green 1996: 244–54.

Several emperors or usurpers are said to have hunted in the wild as youths, to discipline and harden themselves towards their future exertions. Pliny says that Trajan as a young man learned the arts of the military commander (*dux*) by contending with fast animals in speed, with fierce ones in strength, and with clever ones in cleverness; he also praises Trajan for finding his relaxation by pursuing animals across mountains and crags. Dio Chrysostom, in his *Third Discourse on Kingship* addressed to Trajan, recommends that ‘good kings’ take up hunting for largely the same reasons: to strengthen one’s body, firm up one’s courage, and learn to endure heat and thirst, thereby preparing for all forms of military activity. Much later, the *Historia Augusta* deploys this same trope – that youthful hunting is a vehicle for developing virtue and hardiness – in relation to Odaenathus, the third-century dynast of Palmyra. And Marcus Aurelius, though supposedly frail later in life, is said to have hunted in his youth; Cassius Dio says he could strike down a boar from horseback, as well as fight in armour (as if these were parallel activities). The young Marcus, however, in a droll letter to Fronto, portrays himself as more bibliophilic than cynegetic: he set off boldly on a hunt, evidently in a group, and eventually heard that some boars were taken, out of his sight.⁵⁷

These texts present an image of hunting as, at best, a propaedeutic means of cultivating vigour and virtue, a way to prepare the future ruler for his role – not least as a potential general or warrior – prior to his occupying that role. Moreover, the focus in these passages is on development of the hunter’s individual virtues; there is little or no interest in companions, or concern for hunting as a collective or social activity that furnishes the future ruler with a channel for communication with his peers or (proto-)court. Our texts provide additional bare mentions of emperors or other rulers hunting at one time or another, or imply that they did so. With the exception of only a few emperors, discussed below, these kinds of references give no indication of how hunts were carried out, whether companions were invited (hence whether the hunts could be considered ‘courtly’ activities), or whether they took place while the emperor reigned,

⁵⁷ Trajan: Plin. *Pan.* 81.1–2; Dio Chrys. *Or.* 3.135–8 (on these passages and their figuration of Trajan, see Manolaraki 2012: 180–6). Odaenathus: SHA *Tyr. Trig.* 15.7–8. Marcus Aurelius: Dio Cass. 72(71).36.2 (Xiph.); SHA *Marc.* 4.9; Fronto, *Ad M. Caes.* 4.5.2 (ed. vdH 61 = Haines 1.178): *ad venationem profecti sumus, fortia facinora fecimus, apros captos esse fando audimus, nam videndi quid* (so Hauler; others read *quidem*) *nulla facultas fuit.* (‘We set out on the hunt, we did mighty deeds, we heard word that boars had been taken – for there was no opportunity to see anything.’)

as opposed to taking place during a youthful, pre-ruling stage of life.⁵⁸ One may suspect that the claim that an emperor hunted in his youth constitutes a moralizing stereotype – a way of characterizing his virtues and capacities, and not necessarily a veridical assertion about his actual activities.⁵⁹

One dimension of this moral claim, namely the idea that hunting in the wild parallels or constitutes preparation for warfare, warrants further discussion. We just noted that Dio presents Marcus Aurelius' hunting and fighting in armour as equivalent demonstrations of youthful vigour; Marcus himself, in one of his *Meditations*, reflects on the similarities among those who hunt fish, boars, bears, and Sarmatians ('Are these not robbers?' he asks), as if hunters and warriors were similar. Pliny characterizes Trajan's youthful hunting as the 'liberation' of the rustics from a 'siege' of predatory beasts, as if hunting were a form of warfare. And Horace can recommend to Lollius Maximus that he go hunting at a friend's invitation, for it benefits one's reputation, life, and limbs, and enables one to handle weapons on the exercise-field more attractively.⁶⁰ Many a simile in Latin literature likens war-fighting to hunting, with opposing warriors compared to a hunter facing dangerous prey (without it being clear, necessarily, which party will prevail).⁶¹ Indeed, hunting large, strong, dangerous game always has a warlike, even heroic and epic, aura: boar hunts verge mythologically and literarily on the realms of Meleager and Hercules; lion hunts are Herculean as well as kingly. The broad diffusion of such similes and associations might support the idea that emperors (and any aristocratic courtiers who accompanied them) would seize opportunities to hunt and kill such animals. These associations also seem to require that the hunter engage the dangerous animal directly, with a spear or javelin, as one would confront a human enemy; bow- or net-hunting that keeps the hunter safely distant from the animal muddies the desired message of personal valour.⁶²

⁵⁸ Trajan: Dio Cass. 68.7.3 (Xiph.) (apparently while emperor). Antoninus Pius: SHA *Ant. Pius* 11.2 (apparently while emperor). Lucius Verus: SHA *Verus* 9.8 (Verus hunts and dines while brother Marcus does the real work). Tacitus: SHA *Tac.* 16.2 (describing a painting that showed this emperor in various costumes, including *venatorius habitus*).

⁵⁹ For hunting as an activity stereotypically assigned to youth, see Badel 2009: 38–9, with further references.

⁶⁰ M. Aur. *Med.* 10.10; Plin. *Pan.* 81.2–3; Hor. *Epist.* 1.18.40–54; cf. *PIR*² L 317, 322.

⁶¹ Two of hundreds: Hor. *Carm.* 3.2.6–12; Luc. 1.205–12 – here, both lion similes.

⁶² Badel (2009: 42–3) discusses the mixed indications of whether lions, bears, and boars have particularly 'noble' status as game. In Dido and Aeneas' hunt, young Ascanius longs for a boar or lion to present itself to him – a worthy opponent for this high-born youth: Verg. *Aen.* 4.156–9. Gutsfeld (2000: 86) notes the ideological importance of being seen to engage the

The idea that dangerous prey is to the hunter as the enemy is to the warrior finds expression in Roman iconography as well. Certain large sarcophagi from the mid-third to early fourth centuries AD depict the deceased as sitting astride a rearing horse, from which he brandishes a spear downward toward a lion rising to attack him. Standing or walking behind is an ideal helmeted female figure usually identified as a personification of *Virtus*. In some cases a second image of the deceased, costumed as a general, is also present. Thus *virtus* is linked with hunting (of lions, at least) and sometimes to war-fighting as well.⁶³ Indeed, the visual motif of the rider who sits astride a rearing horse and poises a spear in his right hand, preparing to strike downward, by itself visually links hunting and war-fighting. For in this iconography the creature on the ground that the rider is preparing to spear may be an animal, in which case it is a hunting scene; or a fallen enemy warrior, in which case the rider is a cavalryman in battle. A number of emperors issued coins bearing one or both variants of this iconography on the reverse. Commodus, in particular, employed both types, representing himself on different coinage issues in almost identical form astride a rearing horse preparing to spear either a crouching lion or fallen enemy.⁶⁴

A spectacular instance of this iconography is the large bronze statue in Misenum (modern Miseno) of an emperor brandishing a spear astride a rearing horse. This statue originally represented Domitian, but its face was replaced by a portrait of Nerva. Recent scholarship has raised the question of whether this equestrian statue was accompanied by a second figure – a barbarian warrior lying on the ground and providing the explicit target of the poised spear, or alternatively a lion or other animal being hunted. Perhaps, however, no additional figure is required. For the message about imperial valour and vigour is the same in either case, and is conveyed entirely by the iconography of the emperor poisoning a spear astride the

dangerous animal directly with soldierly weapons; see also Hekster 2002: 158. See below, 341–3, on Hadrian's hunts.

⁶³ E.g. Andrae 1980: 42–52, 59–61. For *Virtus* accompanying the hunter, see cat. nos. 41, 126; for the presence of the general, see nos. 75, 128, 131. For such imagery on securely senatorial (hence potentially courtier) sarcophagi, see Wrede 2001: 103–4.

⁶⁴ See *RIC* 3 Commodus 39, 114, 332a–b for the emperor spearing a crouching lion (with legends *VIRT AVG* or *VIRTVTI AVGVSTI*); no. 299d, f for him spearing a fallen enemy. For fallen enemies see also *RIC* 2².1 Vespasian 429–30, 497, 564; *RIC* 4 Septimius Severus 146 a–b (with legend *VIRTVS AVG*). All these coins were issued by the mint in Rome. *Virtus*, then, can be attached to either the hunter or the warrior. On the moral dimensions of Hadrian's self-representation as hunter, see Kasulke 2000: 122–3, Martini and Schernig 2000: 138–45, and the discussion below.

rearing horse. Hunting and warfare have blurred in this iconography to the point that they are entirely indistinct.⁶⁵

For only two emperors in our period, Hadrian and Severus Alexander, does information survive about hunting in company with friends or courtiers, and the sorts of interactions that took place in that context. Hadrian is by far the more important of these, and warrants more detailed discussion.⁶⁶ The chief narrative sources for Hadrian's principate, Dio and the *Historia Augusta*, emphasize his passion for hunting. The latter calls him an enthusiastic hunter, indeed overly so, as a youth. Both note that he suffered various injuries in this activity, including a broken collar-bone.⁶⁷ Both further note his fondness for his hunting dogs and horses – in particular for his horse Borysthenes, for whom Dio says Hadrian even erected a tomb with an inscription. Delightfully, this inscription survives.⁶⁸ Hadrian is said to have pursued dangerous game (as one would expect of an emperor): the Borysthenes inscription implies boar hunting in Etruria, and the *Historia Augusta* claims that he killed a lion with his own hand. A hexameter poem by Pancrates, discussed by Athenaeus and partly surviving on papyrus, details an epic lion hunt carried out by Hadrian and Antinous together.⁶⁹ Hadrian himself emphasized the danger of the game he pursued (and the prestige he accrued thereby) in monumental public art: the eight large tondi or roundels now mounted on the Arch of Constantine, before the faces of certain figures were recut to resemble later emperors, show Hadrian in three hunting scenes, taking a bear, a boar, and a lion. The former two scenes show the emperor, spear in hand, seated on a rearing horse, preparing to strike downward at the animal below – precisely the iconography discussed above. The lion hunt tondo, meanwhile, shows the aftermath, with the animal lying dead on the ground before the standing hunters. The remaining five tondi depict the departure for the

⁶⁵ Tuck (2005) argues that the Misenum emperor is hunting; Le Roux (2009: 25–8) proposes that no figure need be restored at all. Numismatic images of emperors on horseback striking enemies tend to portray them in armour, while the parallel hunting images may show no armour (as on the Hadrianic tondi discussed below, and on certain coins and medallions) or leave the costume and its implications unclear. See Martini and Schernig 2000: 146–7, with Mittag's correction (2010: 97 n. 345); Tuck (2005: 226–9) discusses the sartorial ambiguities of the Misenum statue.

⁶⁶ For Hadrian and his self-representation as a hunter, see especially Gutsfeld (2000), Kasulke (2000), and Martini and Schernig (2000); also Aymard 1951: 173–82; Le Roux 2009: 23–5.

⁶⁷ Youthful enthusiasm: SHA *Hadr.* 2.1 (*venando usque ad <re>prehensionem studiosus*). Broken bones etc.: Dio Cass. 69.10.2 (Xiph.); SHA *Hadr.* 26.3.

⁶⁸ Fondness for dogs and horses: SHA *Hadr.* 20.12; Dio Cass. 69.10.2 (Xiph.). Borysthenes epitaph: *CIL* 12.1122 (from Apta Iulia, Gallia Narbonensis, modern Apt, France).

⁶⁹ Ath. 15.21 (=677e), describing the hunt as a great deed, freeing Africa of a beast that had been devastating it; *P.Oxy.* 8.1085.

hunt and four sacrificial scenes. In what context these tondi were originally displayed, before their spoliation for use in the Arch of Constantine, is unclear. But they were without doubt part of a large-scale Hadrianic public building or work of art. That Hadrian chose to thematize his hunting activity on such a monument is itself telling of this emperor's interests and priorities, as no other representation of an emperor hunting in large-scale public art is known from our period.⁷⁰

Each tondo shows Hadrian accompanied by at least one companion (in one case, perhaps more, Antinous is present), and in some scenes as many as three companions;⁷¹ they remind us that, despite the general reticence of written sources on imperial hunting, emperors are unlikely to have hunted alone, just as they did very little else alone. The minimal information we possess regarding Hadrian's hunting companions suggests that courtiers were among those who accompanied him. Antinous, featuring in the poem of Pancrates and in one or more tondi, was obviously a member of Hadrian's court, perhaps a courtier of category 2 or 3. The *Historia Augusta* asserts that Hadrian invited friends along for his hunts, and Dio says that, early in his reign, Hadrian executed a couple of high-ranking senators on the ground that they conspired against him during a hunt. The physiognomical writer Antonius Polemo, Hadrian's contemporary, describes a man (perhaps fictional) who intended ill against the emperor as he prepared to set off on a hunt.⁷² This all suggests that Hadrian, at least, invited a few select people to accompany him (no doubt a high honour for those few), and that an occasion on which the emperor was by design in the countryside accompanied by armed companions, with everyone in motion on horseback, might have been propitious for assassins. Finally Dio says

⁷⁰ On these tondi see Aymard 1951: 527–37; Boatwright 1987: 190–202; Martini and Schernig 2000. For a pair of the tondi, see **Vol. 2, 5.13** (fig. 5.2.3). Hadrian also thematized his hunting in smaller visual media. A few of his coins bear hunting imagery, as do medallions dating probably to the 130s. Most employ the familiar iconography of the emperor astride a rearing horse, spearing downward at a lion or boar, sometimes with the VIRTVTI AVGVSTI legend. Mittag (2010: 94–8) provides discussion and images of the medallions; also Gutsfeld 2000: 89–91 and Kasulke 2000: 123–4 on these small media in general, with further references.

⁷¹ On the figures represented in the tondi, see Martini and Schernig 2000: 148–9, with further references.

⁷² SHA *Hadr.* 26.3: *venationem semper cum amicis participavit* ('he always took part in the hunt with friends'); Dio Cass. 69.2.5 (Xiph.): οἱ μὲν ἐν τῇ ἀρχῇ φονευθέντες Πάλμας τε καὶ Κέλσος Νιγρῖνός τε καὶ Λούσιος ἦσαν, οἱ μὲν ὡς ἐν θήρᾳ δῆθεν ἐπιβεβουλευκότες αὐτῷ . . . ('those killed at the beginning (of his reign) were Palma, Celsus, Nigrinus, and Lusius, some on the pretext that they had plotted against him during a hunt . . .'); Polemo *De Physiognomonía* vol. 1, pp. 138–40 (ed. Foerster 1893) (Latin translation of the surviving Arabic translation of the lost Greek original); cf. *PIR*² A 862.

that Hadrian, at the end of his life, sought assistance in committing suicide from his Iazygean slave Mastor, whose strength and daring had secured his employment as a hunting assistant.⁷³ Mastor may be imagined as a courtier of category 4, given his service to Hadrian in hunting and the trust Hadrian evidently lodged in him by soliciting his help to end his life.

Among these texts and images, then, we gather glimpses of a kind of ‘courtliness’ in Hadrian’s hunting: his efforts, perhaps, to elevate or show special favour to certain courtiers by inviting them along, or providing them opportunities to gain influence and power (intentional or not) by the service they could provide; and perhaps the courtiers’ own efforts to domesticate and control the emperor, or raise their own profiles, by threatening or potentially threatening his person during the hunt.⁷⁴

Beyond Hadrian, information about an emperor’s disposition toward hunting and his engagement as a hunter with others survives only in an anecdote about Severus Alexander in the *Historia Augusta*. The biographer quotes an anonymous, gently satiric poem directed at Alexander suggesting that this emperor hunted and ate hares.⁷⁵ This poem was inspired, the biographer says, by an old saying that one who eats hare will be handsome for seven days – a saying that stands behind a poem of Martial, to which the biographer here refers.⁷⁶ Alexander is said to have responded to this satiric poem with a poetic riposte in Greek, of which the biographer provides a Latin version. Whatever the truth value of this anecdote, the biographer imagines that his reader will find it credible that the emperor’s hunting activities might be sufficiently visible to inspire discussion (or satire) among his contemporaries and friends, and that the emperor might respond in kind.

In assessing hunting as a courtly activity in our period, it seems appropriate to mention what might be characterized as quasi-hunting activity in which emperors and courtiers from time to time engaged: namely, *venationes* or ‘hunts’ in the arena, staged as spectacles and typically accompanying gladiatorial displays. Captured and sometimes tamed or trained animals were introduced into the amphitheatre, where *venatores* (‘arena hunters’) or condemned criminals fought them to provide a spectacle to the assembled audience.

In this context we sometimes hear of emperors displaying diverse talents not unrelated to hunting. Suetonius reports that Tiberius, in his last days,

⁷³ Dio Cass. 69.22.2 (Xiph.).

⁷⁴ Gutsfeld (2000: 83–4) discusses Hadrian’s hunts as ‘courtly’ activities. ⁷⁵ SHA *Alex. Sev.* 38.

⁷⁶ Mart. 5.29.

attended games in Circeii, seeking to cloak his increasing frailty.⁷⁷ To this end he threw javelins down from above (*desuper*) at a boar that had been let loose in the arena – evidently he was positioned well above the sand, out of range of the boar’s tusks. Domitian had a notable propensity for arena *venationes*, which our sources say he held at his Alban estate (where, evidently, he had constructed an arena). According to Suetonius he was a virtuoso archer, and loved to shoot down animals of all different sorts before an audience of spectators.⁷⁸ One way he displayed his virtuosity was to strike the game animals in their heads with two arrows in such a way as to give them ‘horns’. Again, these animals must have been captured, brought to the arena, and let loose there for the emperor to ‘hunt’, while the emperor himself presumably (given his weaponry) shot from a platform safely distant from the animals themselves. Dio reports that M’. Acilius Glabrio, a lofty noble, was himself a splendid *venator*; invited by Domitian to the Alban estate and asked to kill a large lion, Glabrio did so with verve and without injury, and so incurred Domitian’s deadly wrath – perhaps due to appearing more ‘kingly’ than Domitian himself.⁷⁹

Pliny and Dio Chrysostom, both evidently thinking of Domitian’s arena performances in relation to the youthful Trajan’s admirable hunting in the wild, speak contemptuously of rulers who shoot down captured animals in enclosures, while remaining safe from toil and danger themselves.⁸⁰ Cassius Dio also relays with gripping detail his own recollection, as a young senator, of watching Commodus, who fashioned himself after Hercules, striking down animals in the arena. He describes the emperor killing numerous bears with javelins, which he threw from an elevated platform in the stands (as Tiberius seems to have done); also he describes the emperor entering the arena proper to kill animals that approached or were led to him, including very large ones. In one particularly memorable vignette, Dio relates that Commodus killed an ostrich and then brought its decapitated head to the seats from which the senators were watching, waving it before them and leading Dio to believe that he was threatening to treat them all similarly. Being generally required to shout acclamations as

⁷⁷ Suet. *Tib.* 72.2. ⁷⁸ Suet. *Dom.* 19.

⁷⁹ Dio Cass. 67.14.3 (Xiph.); *PIR*² A 67. Cf. Dio Cass. 73(72).14.1–3 (Xiph.), a similar story about Iulius Alexander (*PIR*² I 135), a ‘prominent man’ under Commodus. Here it is unclear whether the lion he speared was in the wild (a ‘proper’ hunt) or in the arena. Letta’s (1985) argument that these men’s lion-killing constituted usurpation on the ground that lions were reserved for kings is stimulating but overstated.

⁸⁰ Plin. *Pan.* 81.1–3; Dio Chrys. *Or.* 3.137–8.

they watched the emperor perform, in this case (Dio says) he and other senators chewed laurel leaves to avoid being seen as laughing.⁸¹

This last observation invites the question of how arena *venationes* might have constituted a ‘courtly’ activity that provided a medium for communication between the emperor and his courtiers. Since an emperor in the arena performed before an audience consisting of all ranks and orders, it seems certain that some courtiers would have been in the audience – as Dio, undoubtedly a courtier, was for Commodus’ displays. With ostrich head in hand, Commodus may be interpreted as seeking to manage or police the aristocratic segment of his court. These courtiers, in turn, publicly displayed their loyalty and support via their shouted acclamations, while quietly watching for omens of Commodus’ impending death, and building solidarity among themselves by devising laughter-suppression strategies (laughter, presumably, being fatal). On the other hand, Dio implies that Commodus cultivated and spent time among gladiators – who, to the extent they had regular contact and engagement with the emperor, could be considered courtiers of type 3 or (more likely) 4 – raising their status relative to the aristocracy and other segments of the court. But if Commodus’ aim was to stabilize and secure his own rule by playing these sectors of the court off against one another, he ultimately failed. For his two most favoured courtiers, Q. Aemilius Laetus the praetorian prefect and Eclectus the *a cubiculo*, both of whom had even appeared in the arena with him, hatched the plot that killed him.⁸²

Some scholars have supposed that Roman emperors, like certain Hellenistic and eastern kings, maintained ‘hunting parks’ in which game was raised for them and their courtiers to hunt for sport – the kinds of parks that Scipio Aemilianus and others are said to have enjoyed, as mentioned earlier.⁸³ Our sources occasionally mention enclosures, sometimes called *vivaria*, in which animals of various sorts, including game animals, were raised. However, the sources make it equally clear that

⁸¹ Commodus fighting animals in the arena: Dio Cass. 73(72).10.3 (Xiph.), 18–19.1 (Xiph.; *EV*), 21.1–2 (Xiph.) (ostrich incident); also SHA *Comm.* 8.5, 12.10–12, 13.3–4; Hdn. 1.13.8, 1.15.1–6. Shouted acclamations: Dio Cass. 73(72).18.2 (Xiph.; *EV*), 20.2 (Xiph.); cf. SHA *Comm.* 18–19. Discussion of the ideology and military/Herculean resonances of Commodus’ *venationes* in Hekster 2002: 152–8; also Aymard 1951: 537–8.

⁸² Laetus and Eclectus in the arena: Dio Cass. 73(72).19.4 (Xiph.). Leading the plot: Dio Cass. 73(72).22 (Xiph.) (= **Vol. 2, 6.4 [a]**). Cf. *PIR*² A 358, E 3.

⁸³ E.g. Aymard 1951: 68–73, with further references; see also nn. 54 and 56 above.

vivaria were commercial in purpose, and provide no hint that they were ever used by emperors, courtiers, or anyone else as 'hunting parks'.⁸⁴

The overall picture of imperial and courtly hunting seems to change in later antiquity, toward the end of our period and on into the fourth and fifth centuries AD. An explosion of representations of hunting in art, especially on sarcophagi and in mosaics, suggests that this activity assumes a larger imaginative role, whatever people's actual behaviour. Hunting is more prominently ascribed to emperors as a characteristic activity (the emperor Gratian is particularly associated with hunting and quasi-hunting activities), and late-antique texts seem to feature hunting somewhat more prominently than earlier ones. Perhaps, as Badel suggests, the tendency for late Roman aristocrats to spend more time on their rural villas and in the provinces had the effect of elevating this quintessentially rural activity.⁸⁵ But the transformations of courtly culture in Late Antiquity are beyond the scope of this volume.

Conclusions

One instructive consequence of examining, in the same chapter, dining and hunting as courtly activities is the opportunity to compare them, and I conclude with some comparative observations. First, it is patent that conviviality was a central mode of interaction and communication among emperors and their courtiers, and was regarded as such by external observers. Conviviality regularly engaged all types of courtiers, and took place in some form virtually every day, regardless of where the emperor was located. For virtually every emperor in our period, and many rivals or usurpers as well, our sources offer more or less detailed observations on their convivial practices in relation to courtiers. These accounts reveal the efforts made by all participants to control one another, and to enhance their own status and seek advantage relative to other participants. Among these efforts at control is the (often obvious) moralizing aim of the accounts themselves, as the ascribed practices are presented as revealing the emperor's values, priorities, and orientations ('the dinner is the emperor').

⁸⁴ Badel (2009: 40–2) offers more extensive discussion of *vivaria* and their functions, along with a critique of Aymard 1951.

⁸⁵ Badel 2009: 39–40; see also Smith 2007: 222–5.

Hunting, by contrast, is barely visible as an activity of Roman emperors or courtiers, let alone as an important mode of interaction and communication among them.⁸⁶ Some emperors are said to have hunted in the wild as youths, on foot or on horseback, or they portray themselves in visual media as hunting on horseback. But our sources seldom present details about events or activities in these alleged hunts, or indicate who if anyone accompanied the emperor. These representations, again, are moralizing, and seem aimed more at ascribing certain virtues to these rulers than at reporting their actual activities (if such activities even took place). In Hadrian's case alone, we may be justified in speaking of hunting in the wild as a somewhat regular activity of the emperor and his court, with identifiable social dynamics – though the Hadrianic dossier is no less moralizing than that of any other emperor. Other emperors are presented as hunting, or killing animals, in ways that expose their cruelty and viciousness, as in most accounts of emperors shooting down animals in the arena. Thus representations of imperial hunting assume that 'the hunt is the emperor', just as representations of imperial dining do. Representations of both activities, then, to some extent reveal actual practices and activities of emperors and those close to them; but they also describe and themselves constitute the ideological messaging deployed by emperors and courtiers to enhance their own positions and to control and domesticate one another.

The reasons for hunting's lack of prominence compared to dining are both mysterious and obvious. They are mysterious in the sense that hunting was as prominent a vehicle for communication and interaction within the Persian and Hellenistic courts as dining was,⁸⁷ and it is not clear why hunting was not more readily taken up by Roman emperors and their courts – unless, perhaps, these 'eastern' associations themselves created a substantial barrier to that uptake. But the reasons are obvious in the sense that, when Roman emperors and their courts were resident and active in the city of Rome, they lacked immediate access to the countryside and its hunt-friendly terrain, even as they had full access to state-of-the-art dining

⁸⁶ In his important study of Roman hunting, Aymard (1951) greatly overstates this activity's significance for Roman emperors and their courts, as other scholars have noted (e.g. Le Roux [2009: 24–5]). Some of this overstatement results from anachronistic projections of early modern practices onto the Roman situation. But it may also result from Aymard's focus on this single activity: for when the small quantity and thin detail of representations of imperial and courtly hunting are set against the profusion of highly detailed representations of imperial and courtly dining, the former's relative insignificance is patent.

⁸⁷ Above, 337 with n. 54.

facilities in the palace (though when staying in their rural villas the reverse would have been the case). It seems no coincidence that, when emperors were resident in the city, the arena presented the most viable option for engaging in hunting-like activity – which was also a medium of communication with courtiers, since a representative subset of the people and aristocracy, including members of the court, would sit in the audience and interact with the emperor both visually and verbally. Nor is it a coincidence that Hadrian, who was not only a passionate hunter but also more mobile and less anchored to the city of Rome than any emperor until Late Antiquity, is so well documented as indulging his passion, in company with courtiers, in every corner of the Empire.

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