

LAUNCHING INTO HISTORY: AQUATIC DISPLAYS IN THE EARLY EMPIRE*

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I. INTRODUCTION

Dio devotes almost an entire chapter to the aquatic displays forming part of Titus' one hundred days of spectacles to celebrate the inauguration in A.D. 80 of the Flavian Amphitheatre (which he calls θέατρον [κυνηγετικόν]).¹ He is not without limitations as an historian;² but when his testimony contains details which are difficult to explain, it is not to be dismissed out of hand. In his account of Titus' aquatic spectacles he distinguishes carefully between two venues — the Flavian Amphitheatre and the Stagnum Augusti — and he challenges us with an array of detail which throws into relief some of the practical and ideological problems raised by such displays (LXVI. 25. 2–4):

2 ἄνδρες τε πολλοὶ μὲν ἑμονομάχησαν, πολλοὶ δὲ καὶ ἀθροοὶ ἔν τε πεζομαχίαις καὶ ἐν ναυμαχίαις ἠγωνίσαντο. τὸ γὰρ θέατρον αὐτὸ ἐκείνο ὕδατος ἐξαίφνης πληρώσας ἐσήγαγε μὲν καὶ ἵππους καὶ ταύρους καὶ ἄλλα τινὰ χειροσῆθη, δεδιδαγμένα πάνθ' ὅσα ἐπὶ τῆς γῆς πράττειν καὶ ἐν τῷ ὕδατι, ἐσήγαγε δὲ καὶ ἀνθρώπους ἐπὶ πλοίων. 3 καὶ οὗτοι μὲν ἐκεῖ, ὡς οἱ μὲν Κερκυραῖοι οἱ δὲ Κορίνθιοι ὄντες, ἐναυμάχησαν, ἄλλοι δὲ ἔξω ἐν τῷ ἄλσει τῆ μὲν πρώτη ἡμέρα μονομαχία τε καὶ θηρίων σφαγή, κατοικοδομηθείσης σανίσι τῆς κατὰ πρόσωπον τῶν εἰκόνων λίμνης καὶ ἰκρία πέριξ λαβούσης, 4 τῇ δὲ δευτέρῃ ἵπποδρομία καὶ τῇ τρίτῃ ναυμαχία τρισχιλίων ἀνδρῶν καὶ μετὰ τοῦτο καὶ πεζομαχία ἐγένετο· νικήσαντες γὰρ οἱ Ἀθηναῖοι τοὺς Συρακουσίους (τούτοις γὰρ τοῖς ὀνόμασι χρῆσάμενοι ἐναυμάχησαν) ἐπεξῆλθον ἐς τὸ νησίδιον, καὶ προσβαλόντες τεῖχει τινὶ περὶ τὸ μνημεῖον πεπονημένῳ εἶλον αὐτό.

(2) Large numbers of individuals fought in single combat, whereas others competed against each other in groups in infantry and naval battles. For Titus had suddenly filled this same theatre with water, and he had brought in horses and bulls and other domesticated animals that had been taught to do in water everything that they could do on land. He also brought in people on ships; (3) they engaged in a naval battle there representing the Corcyreans versus the Corinthians. Others gave a similar display outside the city in the grove of Gaius and Lucius, which Augustus had once excavated for this purpose. There, too, on the first day — once the lake in front of the images had been covered with a platform of planks and wooden stands had been erected around it — there was a gladiatorial display and a slaughter of wild beasts; (4) on the second day there was a horse-race, and on the third day a naval battle involving three thousand men, followed by an infantry battle: the 'Athenians' conquered the 'Syracusans' (these being the designations the men fought under), landed on the island, and stormed and captured a wall that had been built around the monument.

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The following works are cited in abbreviated form:

Coarelli 1992: F. Coarelli, 'Aedes Fortis Fortunae, Naumachia Augusti, Castra Ravennatium. La via Campana Portuensis e alcuni edifici adiacenti nella pianta marmorea Severiana', *Ostraka* 1 (1992), 39–54.
Coleman 1990: K. M. Coleman, 'Fatal charades: Roman executions staged as mythological enactments', *JRS* 80 (1990), 44–73.
Golvin 1988: J.-C. Golvin, *L'Amphithéâtre romain*.

Golvin-Landes 1990: J.-C. Golvin and C. Landes, *Amphithéâtres et gladiateurs*.

Golvin-Reddé 1990: J.-C. Golvin and M. Reddé, 'Naumachies, jeux nautiques et amphithéâtres', in C. Domergue, C. Landes, and J.-M. Pailler (eds), *Spectacula-1. Gladiateurs et amphithéâtres*, 165–77.

Liberati 1986: A. M. Liberati, 'Le Naumachie e il Tevere', in *Tevere. Un'antica via per il mediterraneo*, 266–7.

Liberati Silverio 1987: A. Liberati Silverio, 'Naumachie e tetimimi', in *Lo Sport nel mondo antico*, 61–3.

Rea 1988: R. Rea, 'Le antiche raffigurazioni dell'anfiteatro', in *Anfiteatro Flavio. Immagine testimonianze spettacoli*, 23–46.

Traversari 1960: G. Traversari, *Gli Spettacoli in acqua nel teatro tardo-antico*.

¹ The normal Greek locution for an amphitheatre: see E. Rawson, *Discrimina ordinum: The Lex Julia Theatralis*, *PBSR* 55 (1987), 83–114, at 87 n. 18.

² J. W. Rich, *Cassius Dio. The Augustan Settlement* (Roman History 53–55.9) (1990), 4–12, and 'Dio on Augustus', in Averil Cameron (ed.), *History as Text. The Writing of Ancient History* (1989), 86–110.

Are we really to believe that aquatic displays were mounted in the Flavian Amphitheatre?³ Could it be flooded? What were the animals doing? Was the arena big enough for naval combat? Why stage such a contest in an historical setting? And, if the Flavian Amphitheatre is adequate for aquatic events, why replicate them in the Stagnum Augusti, let alone cover it with a platform for the staging of displays which properly belong to the amphitheatre or the circus? Above all, why stage a replay of an historical event (in this case the Athenians' unsuccessful attack on Syracuse in 414 B.C.), only to allow the outcome to contradict the facts of history?

All these issues are predicated upon an aspect of the Roman *mentalité* which is largely alien to our modern outlook: a passion for novel and elaborate ways of mounting spectacle, which in turn generates the notion of enhancing mortal combat by staging it in a theatrical setting. This theatrical instinct is most striking when public executions are used as the occasion for enacting variations upon well-known myths. It also manifests itself in the context of mass combat, as on the occasion of Julius Caesar's triumph in 46 B.C., when a series of *uenationes* in the circus culminated in a mass engagement involving infantry, cavalry, and elephants. Caesar enhanced the verisimilitude of the spectacle by replacing the turning-posts with an elaborate 'set' consisting of two camps (Suet., *Jul.* 39. 3):

uenationes editae per dies quinque ac nouissime pugna diuisa in duas acies, quingenis peditibus, elephantis uicenis, tricenis equitibus hinc et inde commissis. nam quo laxius dimicaretur, sublatae metae inque earum locum bina castra exaduersum constituta erant.

Beast-hunts were held over five days, and at the end a battle was fought involving two contingents, each comprising five hundred infantry, twenty elephants, and thirty cavalry. So that there would be more space for the fighting, the turning-posts were removed and replaced by two camps facing each other.

Suetonius does not say whether this encounter was staged in an historical context. But at least one such setting for a land-engagement is attested, when Claudius stormed a replica of a British town on the Campus Martius and re-enacted the surrender of the British kings (Suet., *Claud.* 21. 6):

edidit et in Martio campo expugnationem direptionemque oppidi ad imaginem bellicam et deditionem Britanniae regum praeseditque paludatus.

On the Campus Martius too he staged the storming and sacking of a town in an imitation of real warfare, culminating in the surrender of the British kings, and he presided in his campaigning cloak.

It seems likely that the 'Britons' were actual British prisoners; the whole spectacle will have enabled the people of Rome to participate vicariously and retrospectively in the campaign of which Claudius was so proud.⁴

By the late Republic gladiatorial combat, in which highly trained and elaborately equipped individuals were pitted against one another, is a well-attested form of public spectacle. In one sense, mass engagements are a predictable extension of this practice, with the difference that the emphasis is upon scale rather than upon individual skill. Next, given mass engagements on land, it is not altogether surprising that naval battles follow. But there is a difference between re-enacting on the Campus Martius (a venue at least nominally suitable) a land-engagement from one of Rome's recent campaigns, and staging inland, in an artificial basin, a naval battle from Greek history. Furthermore, as we turn to other sources we shall find that aquatic displays were not restricted to naval combat, but that the Romans adapted the theatrical genre of pantomime to stage myths set in a marine context. The choice of themes for re-enactments raises a further question: did the Romans perceive the distinction between 'myth' and 'history' in the same terms as we do?

³ The debate dates back nearly two centuries to the excavations in the Flavian Amphitheatre under the French: the papal antiquarian Carlo Fea, claiming that the arena floor was located at ground level, was opposed by the architect Pietro Bianchi and the professor of archaeology at Rome University, Lorenzo Re, who argued that the floor was raised on the recently excavated substructural walls. See R. T. Ridley, *The Eagle and the*

Spade. Archaeology in Rome during the Napoleonic Era (1992), 217–37. The views of Bianchi and Re are now universally accepted, but Fea's chief item of evidence has not been explained away: the literary sources attesting *naumachiae* in the Flavian Amphitheatre.

⁴ On Claudius' 'systematic exploitation' of his invasion of Britain see B. Levick, *Claudius* (1990), 148.

In attempting to answer these questions, I shall first examine the locations used for staging aquatic displays, so as to assess the facilities available; then I shall examine the displays themselves, concentrating upon Titus' cycle in A.D. 80, in order to establish what the performances involved; and finally I shall consider the purpose of these spectacles, with special attention to the element of theatricality and the Roman perception of 'history'.

II. VENUES

The site where a spectacle was put on determined the nature of the display. On the evidence of Dio, Titus' aquatic displays were mounted not only in a custom-built structure (Augustus' *stagnum*) but also in a building designed primarily for another purpose (the Flavian Amphitheatre). In the following section I shall examine the evidence for aquatic displays down to the Flavian period in order to determine the range of locations where they were held. Since the term *naumachia* can designate the site for a naval spectacle as well as the spectacle itself, I shall attempt to avoid confusion by using the term *stagnum* for the site and reserving *naumachia* for the spectacle.

a. Custom-built basins

The venue for the earliest attested *naumachia*, the naval engagement between 'Tyrians' and 'Egyptians' mounted as part of Julius Caesar's quadruple triumph over Gaul, Egypt, Pontus, and Africa in 46 B.C., is obscured by a textual corruption (Suet., *Jul.* 39. 4):

nauali proelio in minore Codeta (*Turnebus*: in morem cochleae *codd.*) defosso lacu biremes ac triremes quadriremesque Tyriae et Aegyptiae classis magno pugnatorum numero conflixerunt.

After a lake had been excavated in the smaller Codeta (*Turnebus*: in the shape of a shell *codd.*) biremes, triremes, and quadriremes of the Tyrian and Egyptian fleets, manned by a large number of combatants, clashed in a naval battle.

The emendation is usually accepted,⁵ and the *minor Codeta* is located either in Trastevere (Fest. p. 50 L.) or in the Campus Martius (Dio XLIII. 23); after Caesar's death it was filled in on suspicion of having caused an outbreak of plague (Dio XLV. 17). From this evidence we can deduce that Caesar's structure was a custom-built basin which survived beyond the occasion for which it was initially intended. A religious motive may have prompted the authorities to fill it in (it has been suggested that its construction was assumed to have offended the deities of the Tiber⁶); but, for the connection between plague and basin to have been made, unhealthy associations must have been apparent, most obviously stagnant and fetid water, so we may assume that the basin remained full after its initial function had been fulfilled.

The next *stagnum* to be constructed at Rome supplied the aquatic element in the gardens which Agrippa laid out as an annex to his baths on the Campus Martius. Water was supplied by the Aqua Virgo, constructed in 19 B.C.; a canal (*euripus*), set about with shrubs and trees, conducted the outflow into the Tiber. The *stagnum* lay to the west of Agrippa's baths and the Pantheon, in the space later bordered by Domitian's odeon and stadium in the west, the *Hecatostylon* in the south, and Nero's baths in the north, i.e. in the area between Piazza Navona and Largo di Torre Argentina.⁷ The *stagnum* was probably almost rectangular; its width is estimated at 180 m, and its length between 220 m⁸ and 300 m.⁹ In addition to its

⁵ The manuscript reading *in morem cochleae* is defended by Liberati (Silverio), who argues that because the excavation had to be deep enough to facilitate a water-supply from the Tiber, the tiers of seats rose in a spiral shape (1986, 266; 1987, 62). But rows of seats in an auditorium are parallel to one another; if they were arranged in a spiral and the spectators were not to slide off, each seat would have to be on its own step, which would be a waste of space and money.

⁶ See J. Le Gall, *Le Tibre, fleuve de Rome dans l'antiquité* (1953), 116.

⁷ F. Coarelli, 'Il Campo Marzio occidentale', *MEFRA* 89 (1977), 807-46; plan at fig. 1.

⁸ J.-M. Roddaz, *Marcus Agrippa* (1984), 254-5 (fig.), 284.

⁹ Coarelli, *op. cit.* (n. 7), 828.

ornamental function, it may have been intended as a swimming-pool; later it served as a *natatio* for Nero's baths. Clearly it would have been too small for staging a *naumachia*, but during the reign of Nero Tigellinus took advantage of its facilities¹⁰ to stage a water-borne banquet of spectacular notoriety (Tac., *Ann.* xv. 37. 2–7):¹¹

et celeberrimae luxu famaue epulae fuere quas a Tigellino paratas ut exemplum referam, ne saepius eadem prodigientia narranda sit. igitur in stagno Agrippae fabricatus est ratem cui superimpositum conuiuium nauium aliarum tractu moueretur. naues auro et ebore distinctae, remigesque exoleti per aetates et scientiam libidinum componebantur. uolucris et feras diuersis e terris et animalia maris Oceano abusque petierat. crepidinibus stagni lupanaria adstabant inlustrius feminis completa et contra scorta uisebantur nudis corporibus. iam gestus motusque obsceni; et postquam tenebrae incedebant, quantum iuxta nemoris et circumiecta tecta consonare cantu et luminibus clarescere.

There was a banquet famous for its luxuriousness and notoriety which was provided by Tigellinus; I am going to record it in detail as an example, so that I shall not have to describe such excesses again. So, in Agrippa's basin he constructed a raft supporting a banquet and towed by other vessels. The craft were picked out in gold and ivory, and the oarsmen were fancy boys arranged according to age and sexual prowess. He sent all over the place for birds and beasts from different lands and marine creatures from Ocean. On the edge of the basin were located brothels, thronged by prominent women, with naked prostitutes visible opposite them. Gestures and behaviour were obscene from the start; and after darkness began to come on, the trees and surrounding buildings resounded with music and blazed with lights.

The accent here is upon effort (the barge constructed *in situ*), extravagance (craft picked out with gold and ivory insignia), and exotic verisimilitude (deep-sea creatures imported for the occasion); the dimensions of the *stagnum* made it suitable for an affair on this scale.

In terms of a structure large enough for staging a naval battle, the heir to Caesar's basin was the *stagnum* built by Augustus in Trastevere, which features among the achievements for which he took care to be remembered (*RG* 23):

naualis proeli spectaculum populo dedi trans Tiberim in quo loco nunc nemus est Caesarum, cauato solo in longitudinem mille et octingentos pedes, in latitudinem mille et ducenti, in quo triginta rostratae naues triremes aut biremes, plures autem minores inter se conflixerunt; quibus in classibus pugnaverunt praeter remiges millia hominum tria circiter.

In the place across the Tiber where nowadays the 'Grove of the Caesars' is located I put on for the public a display in the form of a naval battle. I had the soil excavated over a distance of 1,800 feet and a width of 1,200 where thirty beaked ships engaged in combat, both triremes and biremes, as well as more numerous smaller craft; apart from the oarsmen, approximately three thousand men fought in these fleets.

Frontinus associates the *stagnum* with the Aqua Alsietina (*Aqu.* 11):¹²

quae ratio mouerit Augustum . . . perducendi Alsietinam aquam non satis perspicio . . . nisi forte cum opus naumachiae adgrederetur, ne quid salubrioribus aquis detraheret, hanc proprio opere perduxit et quod naumachiae coeperat superesse, hortis adiacentibus et priuatorum usibus ad irigandum concessit.

I am not altogether clear about Augustus' reason for building the Aqua Alsietina, unless perhaps it was that, when he was tackling the construction of the *naumachia*, he channelled the water in a special conduit so as not to draw from a purer source, and what was superfluous to the needs of the *naumachia* he made available to adjacent gardens and private individuals for the purposes of irrigation.

¹⁰ The *stagnum* was previously estimated to have been much smaller, since it was thought to have excluded the area occupied by the Porticus Boni Euentus (now known to have been constructed later): see F. W. Shipley, *Agrippa's Building Activities in Rome* (1933), 53–4, whose underestimation of its size caused him to suppose that Tigellinus' banquet was held not on the *stagnum* but in Agrippa's artificial harbour beside Lake Avernus.

¹¹ For a detailed discussion of Tacitus' presentation of

this episode, see T. Woodman, 'Nero's alien capital: Tacitus as paradoxographer (*Annals* 15.36–7)', in T. Woodman and J. Powell (eds), *Author and Audience in Latin Literature* (1992), 173–88 and 251–5.

¹² Golvin-Reddé 1990, 168, take this passage to mean that the Aqua Alsietina was normally used for irrigation purposes, and diverted to fill the Stagnum Augusti as and when required.

A canal provided an outlet to the Tiber; Nero sailed down it after holding a shipboard banquet on the *stagnum* in 59 (Dio LXII. 20. 5). It is sometimes supposed that Augustus flooded the *stagnum* solely for the inaugural occasion,¹³ draining it thereafter; but he surely meant it to remain full, since a gentle inflow could have been supplied from the aqueduct and the outflow controlled by a sluice-gate on the canal, thereby preventing stagnation and maintaining a constant water-level independent of the fluctuations of the Tiber.

An Augustan inscription on a slab of travertine found in 1887 over a modern branch of the Aqua Paola attests the alternative name of Aqua Augusta for the Alsietina, and locates its terminal point in the Nemus Caesarum (*CIL* VI. 31566 = XI. 3772a; cf. Front., *Aqu.* 22, 'Alsietinae ductus post naumachiam . . . finitur'). The location of the *specus* of the aqueduct, discovered in 1926 in the Viale XXX Aprile,¹⁴ bears out Lanciani's identification of the site of the Nemus Caesarum on the level ground at the foot of the Janiculum between the churches of S. Cosimato and S. Francesco a Ripa (see Fig. 1), and it is supported by an inscription found *in situ* in the Via S. Francesco a Ripa (*NSc* 1900, 50) which refers to the titulature of Gaius Caesar and has hence been taken to mark the location of the Nemus Caesarum.¹⁵ Coarelli has recently supported the theory¹⁶ that traces of a large, apparently rectangular structure on frg. 28 of the Marble Plan should be identified with the *stagnum*. While allowing that the exact location of this fragment is very uncertain, he maintains that it corresponds to the area of Trastevere just south of S. Cosimato, where there is sufficient space between the Tiber and the Janiculum to accommodate a structure the size of Augustus' *stagnum*. In close proximity to the putative *stagnum* on the plan is a circular building which Coarelli identifies as the temple of

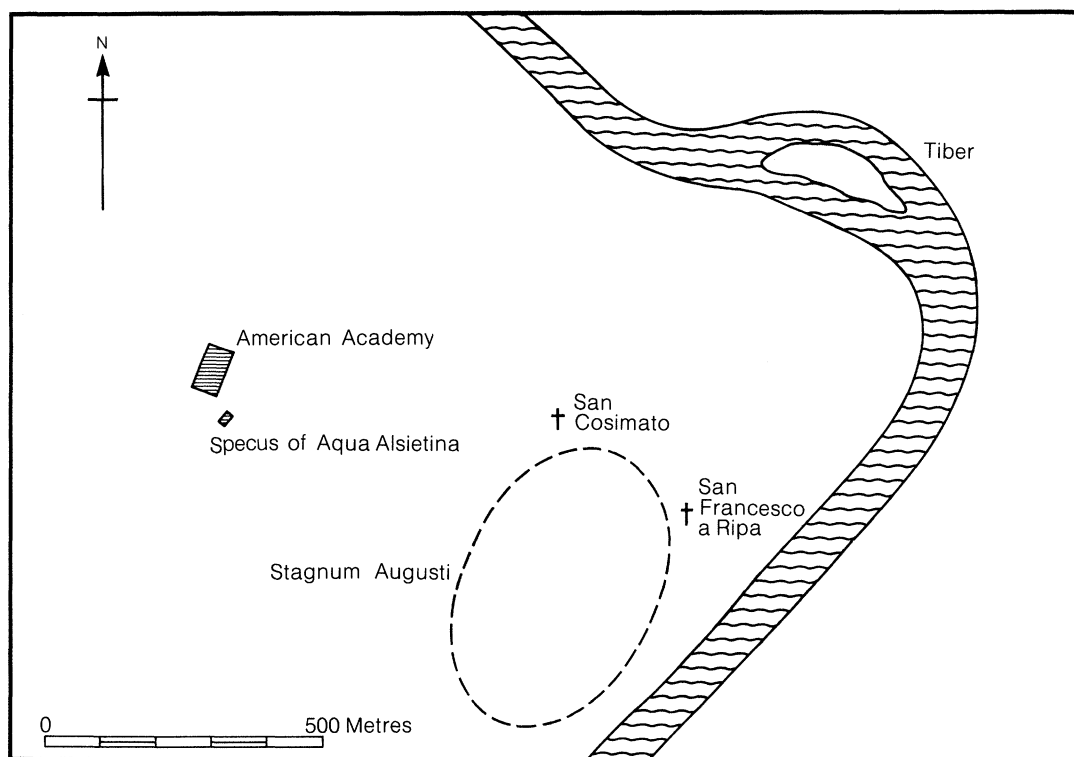


FIG. 1. PLAN OF TRASTEVERE SHOWING HYPOTHETICAL SITE OF STAGNUM AUGUSTI

¹³ An assumption adopted to prove the 'vast depths of inhumanity which . . . organisers . . . and spectators could plumb' (A. J. Brothers, 'Buildings for entertainment', in I. M. Barton (ed.), *Roman Public Buildings* (1989), 97-125, at 119-20).

¹⁴ A. W. van Buren and G. P. Stevens, 'The Aqua Alsietina on the Janiculum', *MAAR* 6 (1927), 137-46.

¹⁵ P. Grimal, *Les Jardins romains*³ (1984), 118-19 and n. 6.

¹⁶ Originally advanced by P. Bigot, *Rome antique au IV^e siècle ap. J.-C.* (1942), 62. See Coarelli 1992, 46-51.

Fors Fortuna;¹⁷ he points out that the aquatic rites performed in honour of this deity, especially the *Tiberina descensio*, might partially explain Augustus' choice of this site for his *stagnum*.¹⁸

What other reasons may have influenced Augustus in choosing where to dig his *stagnum*? It has been assumed from Suet., *Tib.* 72, 'ad proximos naumachiae hortos', that it was located in one of the gardens of Trastevere, for which the prime candidate has been identified as the Horti Caesaris, willed by Caesar to the Roman people.¹⁹ Suetonius' *horti* may rather designate the Nemus Caesarum; but available space for the *naumachia* would indeed be afforded by one of Trastevere's gardens, and parks were deemed suitable for buildings dedicated to public recreation, like the Circus Gai et Neronis, started by Caligula in the Horti Agrippinae which had belonged to his mother, the elder Agrippina.²⁰ An ideologically appropriate site for a *naumachia* whose inaugural battle in some sense celebrated the victory of the Caesarians (see Section IV below) would be the Horti Antonii, which passed to the *fiscus* on Antony's death (Dio XLVII. 40. 2) and are never subsequently mentioned; the irony would be even more pointed if Antony's *horti* had belonged to Cassius before him.²¹

Augustus' dimensions for the *stagnum*, 1,800 by 1,200 feet, yield a ratio of 3:2 (*RG* 23, cit. above). In modern terms it measured 536 by 357 m, slightly shorter than the Circus Maximus (580 m long) but two and a half times as wide (the width of the Circus Maximus is 140 m). If Coarelli's identification on the Marble Plan is correct, the *stagnum* was rectangular. But the following considerations argue for an elliptical shape: (i) given the massive dimensions, curved walls would better withstand the force exerted by the water; (ii) on the analogy of other custom-built auditoria and stadia from the Roman world, an elliptical structure would afford the spectators maximum visibility.²² Augustus' measurements would then refer to the length of the two axes, resulting in a smaller surface area (15.03 ha)²³ than would be contained in a rectangular structure of the same dimensions (19.14 ha). Hence, in calculating the time the *stagnum* would take to fill, I shall keep my estimate low by basing my calculations on an elliptical shape.

The depth of the *stagnum* must have been determined not only by the draft of fighting vessels (1.2 m) and the dip of the oars, but also by the demands of verisimilitude: those who fell overboard ought to be in danger of drowning. Hence Lugli's estimate of 1.5 m seems slightly shallow;²⁴ 1.7 m may be more realistic.²⁵ An island 100 m in diameter, covering approximately the area of a modern city block, could have accommodated a realistic infantry manoeuvre (Dio LXVI. 25. 4, cit. in Section I above), and would still only have occupied 5 per cent of the surface area of the lake (see the schematized diagram at Fig. 2).²⁶ Allowing for an island this size, and for the slope of the bank under water, the *stagnum* would have held approximately 281,836 m³. The water-level seems to have been topped up from the Aqua Alsietina rather than the Tiber (see above). Since this aqueduct delivered 392 *quinariae* (Front., *Aqu.* 71), i.e. 16,228 m³ in twenty-four hours (= 676.2 m³ per hour),²⁷ the empty *stagnum* would have taken seventeen days to fill from this source. Martial mentions a venue which was first filled with water for a *naumachia* and then, in a process described as *parua mora*, drained for terrestrial displays (*Spect.* 24. 6: see further III a below); such a rapid procedure cannot have taken place in this *stagnum*. Indeed, far from draining the lake in a matter of hours, it would not have been possible to adjust the water-level more than

¹⁷ Coarelli 1992, 43–6.

¹⁸ Coarelli 1992, 53.

¹⁹ Cic., *Phil.* II. 109, Plut., *Brut.* 20, Suet., *Jul.* 83, App., *BC* II. 143, Dio XLIV. 35; for the identification see Grimal, op. cit. (n. 15), 118.

²⁰ S. B. Platner and T. Ashby, *A Topographical Dictionary of Ancient Rome* (1929), s.v. Circus Gai et Neronis (pp. 113–14), Horti Agrippinae (pp. 264–5).

²¹ Grimal, op. cit. (n. 15), 120 and n. 6.

²² For diagrams contrasting the blind spots in an oblong auditorium with the superior visibility afforded by an ellipse see Golvin 1988, pl. LV (= Golvin-Landes 1990, 44). Agrippa's *stagnum*, which was not designed for spectator events, may have been rectangular: see Coarelli, op. cit. (n. 7), fig. 1.

²³ If the lake were oblong, the surface area would be 19.2 ha; Rea (1988, 36–7) misplaces the decimal point to arrive at an incredible 192 ha.

²⁴ G. Lugli, *Roma antica. Il centro monumentale* (1946), 335.

²⁵ In 1888 a trench 11 m deep was uncovered in the Via Morosini east of S. Cosimato (see R. Lanciani, *Forma Urbis Romae*, pl. 32); allowing that the ground-level has risen 7 m, this trench would have been 4 m deep in the time of Augustus. If the trench is to be associated with Augustus' *stagnum* (and if that structure was rectangular, as argued by Coarelli 1992, 48), the total volume of water in the basin would have been more than twice my conservative estimate.

²⁶ The island is centred for clarity, but probably lay closer to the bank: see further below.

²⁷ T. Ashby, *The Aqueducts of Ancient Rome* (1935), 183 n. 4.

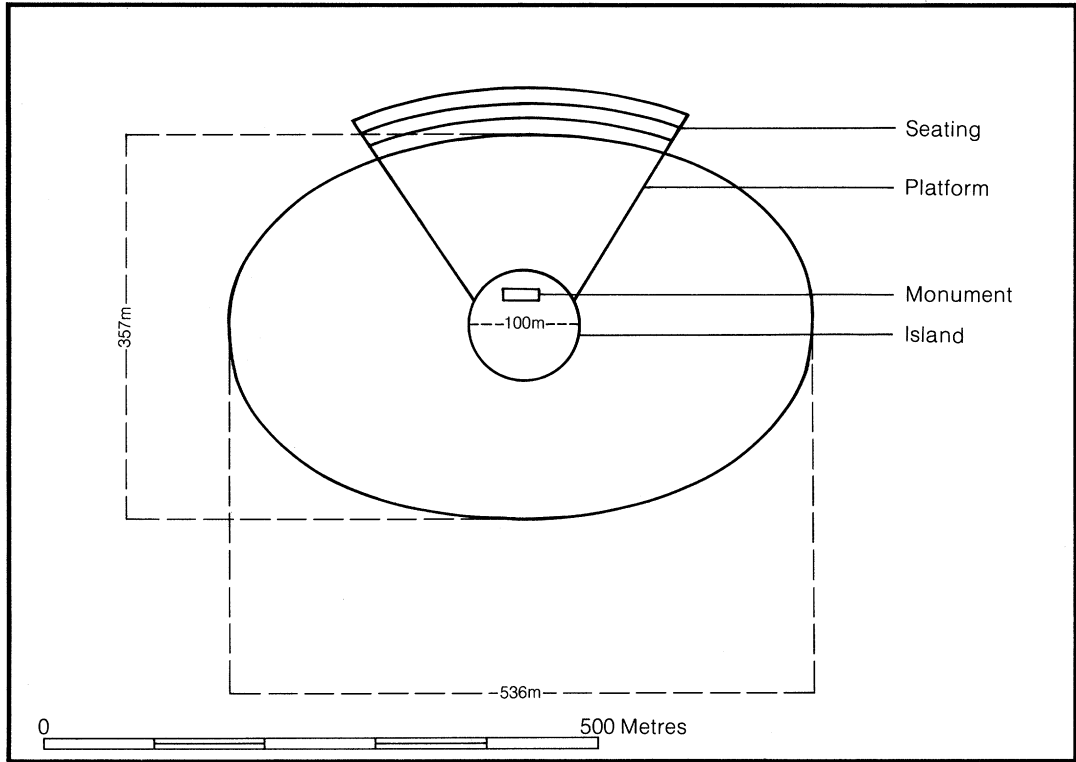


FIG. 2. STAGNUM AUGUSTI: SCHEMATIZED DIAGRAM

fractionally between spectacles held there on consecutive days, which is why for the terrestrial elements in these displays Titus covered the lake 'in front of the images' with a platform and erected stands for the spectators (Dio LXVI. 25. 3, κατοικοδομηθείσης σανίσι τῆς κατὰ πρόσωπον τῶν εἰκόνων λίμνης καὶ ἰσθμὸν πέριξ λαβούσης): see Fig. 2.

Augustus' *naumachia* simulated the battle of Salamis: Ov., *Ars* I. 171–2, 'quid, modo cum belli naualis imagine Caesar / Persidas induxit Cecropiasque rates?', Dio LV. 10. 7, ναυμαχία ... Περσῶν καὶ Ἀθηναίων; the island must have represented Salamis itself. The monument on it (μνημεῖον, Dio LXVI. 25. 4) may have been erected in honour of Gaius and Lucius when the surrounding area was turned into the *Nemus Caesarum*. The *pons naumachiarius*, whose restoration by Tiberius after a fire is mentioned by Pliny, sounds like a permanent structure connecting the island to the closest point on the bank (*NH* XVI. 190, 200);²⁸ perhaps we are to imagine Romans strolling across to see the monument when they visited the park on an afternoon's outing. Dio could still see traces of Augustus' *stagnum* more than two hundred years later (LV. 10. 7, σημειά τινα αὐτῆς). It may have been the site of the *naumachia* held by Philip the Arab to commemorate Rome's millennium: *Aur. Vict.*, *Caes.* 28.1, 'exstructoque trans Tiberim lacu, quod eam partem aquae penuria fatigabat, annum urbis millesimum ludis omnium generum celebrant'; since *exstruere* suggests not excavation but erection, Philip may have repaired Augustus' crumbling *stagnum* rather than excavated afresh to construct one of his own. Yet, by the time of Aurelian the basin must have been filled in, because the Aurelian Wall bisects the area where the *stagnum* may have been located.²⁹

In the meantime Domitian, having used the Flavian Amphitheatre for a naval display, excavated beside the Tiber to construct his own lake, upon which he launched almost full-scale fleets (Suet., *Dom.* 4. 1–2):

²⁸ Coarelli 1992, 49. Or it may have been a drawbridge across the canal to facilitate traffic along the bank of the Tiber (Liberati 1986, 267).

²⁹ Coarelli 1992, 49.

[edidit] in amphitheatro [spectaculum] nauale quoque . . . edidit naualis pugnas paene iustarum classium, effosso et circumstructo iuxta Tiberim lacu; atque inter maximos imbres perspectauit.

In the amphitheatre he also [put on] a naval [spectacle]. He had excavated a lake beside the Tiber and constructed an edifice around it³⁰ . . . Here he staged naval battles featuring virtually regular fleets, and he carried on watching even during very heavy rain.

On the basis of Suetonius' terminology a distinction in Domitian's displays has been drawn between 'spettacolo con navi' in the Flavian Amphitheatre and 'battaglia/combattimento navale' in his *stagnum*;³¹ the distinction may be one of scale rather than type (see III a and g below). Dio associates Domitian's display on his lake with celebrations commemorating his Dacian victory (LXVII. 8. 1–2, ἑορτάς τινας νικητηρίους). The structure was subsequently dismantled and the stone (*lapis*) used to repair the Circus Maximus, which had been damaged by fire (Suet., *Dom.* 5).

No securely identifiable representation of a *naumachia* exists. An engraving by Du Pérac bearing the legend 'Naumachia Domitiani' and frequently reproduced to accompany discussions of *naumachiae* is allegedly based upon a Domitianic coin.³² But, stripped of its baroque accretions, it is recognizably a misinterpretation of a Neronian issue advertising the harbour at Ostia;³³ a less common variant is entitled 'Naumachia Neronis'.³⁴ Some other depictions have been adduced to illustrate this theme: a relief in the Palazzo Torlonia, a panel-painting in the Villa Farnesina, and a lamp in the Musée Lavigerie in Carthage. The relief is not accessible to the public, but a cast in the Museo della Civiltà Romana shows a city, a gang of labourers, and a naval engagement, and has been identified as Alba Fucens, the workmen engaged in draining the lake, and Claudius' *naumachia* (on which see II b below).³⁵ The corridor panel (Gr. 1231, traditionally dated c. 23 B.C.) depicts a naval battle in which the ships are apparently confined within an enclosure. As most of the other panels in this sequence depict architectural subjects, it has been suggested that this panel may portray a *naumachia* staged on a custom-built *stagnum*;³⁶ but it seems rash to adopt this identification, since the scene could equally well be a naval battle taking place in a harbour. The clay lamp depicts two ships in front of a building, one of them manned by two oarsmen and the other by a standing figure brandishing a weapon; the building has a vaulted storey beneath a storey with columns, and on top there is a tiled roof.³⁷ But the identification of this scene as a *naumachia* is very dubious, since there is no evidence that the building is meant as a stadium for spectators, and a single pair of small vessels without supporting iconography is insufficient to depict a clash between two fleets.³⁸

b. *Natural settings*

The only *naumachia* that was staged at sea is unique also for the nature of its occasion: the occupation of Sicily by Sextus Pompeius in 40 B.C. (Dio XLVIII. 19. 1):

θεάς τε ἐπινικίους ἤγαγε, καὶ ναυμαχίαν τῶν αἰχμαλώτων ἐν τῷ πορθμῷ παρ' αὐτὸ τὸ Ῥήγιον, ὥστε καὶ τοὺς ἐναντίους ὄραν, ἐποίησε, πλοιαριά τινα ξύλινα πρὸς ἕτερα βύρσινα ἐς τὸν τοῦ Ῥούφου κατάγελων συμβαλόν.

³⁰ For *circumstruo* of a retaining wall, cf. Plin., *NH* xix. 163, 'ripis . . . undique circumstructis lapide', Cels., *Dig.* xix. 1. 38. 2, 'aquam duceret in aenum lateribus circumstructum'. In our context the wall may have been stepped so as to provide seating for spectators (as G. W. Mooney takes it in his translation).

³¹ Rea 1988, 37.

³² The claim is ubiquitous: cf. A. Manodori, *Anfiteatri, circhi e stadi di Roma* (1982), 205 (of a copy by Panvinio); Golvin-Landes 1990, 65.

³³ *BMCRE* 1, pl. 41.7, 48.2, *RIC* 1 (rev.), 157 no. 19, pl. 20 no. 182, R. Meiggs, *Roman Ostia*² (1973), pl. xviii. I am grateful to A. Wallace-Hadrill for this identification.

³⁴ Golvin-Landes 1990, 81.

³⁵ *Museo della Civiltà Romana. Catalogo* (1964), 310–11 (= ch. 18 no. 49), F. Coarelli and A. La Regina, *Abruzzo, Molise* (1984), 58.

³⁶ E. Winsor Leach, *The Rhetoric of Space. Literary and Artistic Representations of Landscape in Republican and Augustan Rome* (1988), 269.

³⁷ J. Martin, *Musées et collections archéologiques de l'Algérie et de la Tunisie. Musée Lavigerie de Saint Louis de Carthage Supplément II* (1915), 26 and pl. vi. 5; J. Deneauve, *Lampes de Carthage* (1969), n. 1049, pl. xcvi; Liberati 1986, 267, fig. 1.

³⁸ Neither of the older identifications is very plausible either (Martin, *ibid.*): the Antonine Baths at Carthage seem too localized for an illustration on what may have been an imported object, and the Villa Publica at Rome was too far from the Tiber to be the building depicted in this case.

He put on spectacles to celebrate his victory, and he used prisoners-of-war for a sea-battle which he staged in the strait facing Rhegium in full view of those on the opposite shore; he pitched wooden craft on one side against leather boats on the other, to mock Rufus' scheme.

The context enacted in the battle is meant to represent the type of engagement that Sextus Pompeius would have fought against Octavian if Salvidienus Rufus had launched the leather boats that he had constructed for the crossing to Sicily (he had abandoned the scheme because of the dangers it entailed and the mockery it attracted).

For the most ambitious *naumachia* recorded in antiquity, Claudius took advantage of the imminent draining of the Fucine Lake, and in the manner of a grand 'send-off' staged a battle between 'Sicilians' and 'Rhodians'; the spectators, accommodated on the surrounding hillsides, would have had a bird's-eye view (Suet., *Claud.* 21. 6):³⁹

quin et emissurus Fucinum lacum naumachiam ante commisit . . . hoc spectaculo classis Sicula et Rhodia concurrerunt, duodenarum triremium singulae, exciente bucina Tritone argenteo, qui e medio lacu per machinam emerserat.

When he conceived the notion of draining the Fucine Lake, he first staged a *naumachia* . . . In this spectacle the fleets of Rhodes and Sicily clashed with twelve triremes apiece; the signal was given on a bugle by a silver Triton which rose by mechanical means out of the middle of the lake.

Claudius also used quadriremes as well as triremes, and a total of 19,000 men were reputed to have been involved (Tac., *Ann.* xii. 56. 1). According to Dio there were fifty ships on each side (LXI. 33. 3, πεντήκοντα ναῦς ἑκάτεροι εἶχον); the discrepancy between his figure and Suetonius' can be resolved if Suetonius was counting only triremes whereas Dio included vessels of all types.⁴⁰

c. Structures intended primarily for other purposes

In default of a natural setting, a full-scale naval battle clearly demanded a custom-built structure; but existing buildings could be adapted to accommodate aquatic displays on a lesser scale. Augustus flooded the Circus Flaminius in 2 B.C. for an exhibition of thirty-six crocodiles in the same celebrations for which he had built his *stagnum* (Dio LV. 10. 8). The *stagnum* itself, however, would not have been suitable for a display calling for relatively close-range viewing: either at this display or another⁴¹ the crocodiles were accompanied by locals from Tentyra who netted them in their basin so as to drag them onto a platform in view of the spectators, and then released them into the water again (Strabo xvii. 1. 44).

Caligula was ridiculed for digging a basin in the Saepta and flooding it for the sake of bringing in a single ship (Dio LIX. 10. 5); presumably there was no space for more. On a more lavish scale, and therefore harder to account for, is an extravaganza staged by Nero. Suetonius mentions it after the *munus* for the opening ceremony at Nero's wooden amphitheatre in A.D. 57, to which the *naumachia* may therefore also belong (*Nero* 12. 1): 'exhibuit naumachiam marina aqua innantibus beluis' ('He put on a naval display with creatures swimming around in sea-water'). Dio goes into more detail; Nero flooded a θέατρον (presumably his wooden amphitheatre), stocked it with fish and other marine creatures, and, like Augustus, put on a performance of the battle of Salamis (LXI. 9. 5):

ἐν δέ τινι θεάτρῳ θεάς ἐπιτελών, εἶτα πληρώσας ἐξαιφνης τὸ θέατρον ὕδατος θαλασσίου ὥστε καὶ ἰχθύας καὶ κήτη ἐν αὐτῷ νήχεσθαι, ναυμαχίαν τε ἐποίησε Περσῶν δὴ τινῶν καὶ Ἀθηναίων, καὶ μετ' αὐτὴν τὸ τε ὕδωρ εὐθὺς ἐξήγαγε, καὶ ξηράνας τὸ δάπεδον πεζοὺς πάλιν οὐχ ὅπως ἓνα πρὸς ἓνα ἀλλὰ καὶ πολλοὺς ἅμα πρὸς ἴσους συνέβαλεν.

³⁹ cf. Coarelli's suggestion (1992, 47) that Augustus intended the spectators at his *stagnum* to sit on the slopes of the Janiculum.

⁴⁰ For a list of comparable discrepancies between

Tacitus and Suetonius, see C. Questa, *Studi sulle fonti degli Annales di Tacito*² (1967), 100 n. 24, 229 n. 4.

⁴¹ As suggested by J. M. C. Toynbee, *Animals in Roman Life and Art* (1973), 219.

While he was putting on displays at one of the theatres, first he suddenly filled the theatre with sea-water so that fish and other marine creatures swam about in it, and he staged a naval battle between Persians and Athenians; after that he immediately drained the water, and once the floor was dry he brought in the infantry again, not on a one-to-one basis but fighting in equally matched contingents.

The implication in both passages is that the fish and the ships occupied the water at the same time, in which case the novel combination of battle and aquarium display achieved new heights of verisimilitude. (Although he probably belongs to an age later than Nero's,⁴² we have Calpurnius Siculus' testimony for the presence of seals and hippopotami in an amphitheatre (7. 65–8); they may have been the quarry in a *uenatio*.) Relevant to Martial's claim that there was only a short pause while Titus converted sea back to land (*Spect.* 24. 6, discussed in II a above) is Dio's evidence that after the *naumachia* in his amphitheatre Nero rapidly drained the arena and staged a massed infantry engagement; in a similar notice under the year A.D. 64, Dio records that water was channelled into the amphitheatre for another *naumachia* and then rapidly drained away for the staging of a gladiatorial spectacle (LXII. 15. 1). The emphasis on the speed and suddenness of these engineering feats contributes to the impression that the emperors who commissioned them possessed superhuman powers.

Against the testimony of Suetonius and Dio for aquatic displays in Nero's amphitheatre (of which, alas, no traces survive), we should set the evidence recovered to date from comparable archaeological sources. Such evidence is mainly restricted to basins far too small to have been meant for anything other than drainage (e.g. the basin in the military amphitheatre at Carnuntum on the Danube, 8 by 6 m).⁴³ But basins in the arena at Mérida (Augusta Emerita) and Verona were big enough to have accommodated aquatic displays on a small scale, and bear detailed discussion (for the staging of normal events in the arena they would have been covered with a floor).⁴⁴ The basin in the amphitheatre at Mérida was probably part of the original structure built under Augustus in 8 B.C.; it will have remained in use until the construction of the *hypogeum*, probably in the second century A.D. The basin is of cruciform shape (see Fig. 3):⁴⁵ its total length is *c.* 52 m⁴⁶ (as against 64 m for the long axis of the arena); for half its length (i.e. a distance of *c.* 13 m from either end) the width is *c.* 8 m; over the remaining distance of *c.* 26 m in the middle of the long axis the width is *c.* 20 m (as against 51.15 m for the short axis of the arena). It is 1.25 m deep; it was fed by an aqueduct on the west side of the short axis, and equipped with drainage channels at each end of the long axis; the walls were faced with *opus signinum*, which will have rendered them water-tight. The basin at Verona, which dates from the Julio-Claudian era, is basically rectangular in shape;⁴⁷ it measures approximately 34 by 8.84 m and is 2 m deep in the middle;⁴⁸ it was fed by an aqueduct and furnished with several drainage-channels. These basins must have been intended for aquatic displays, though they were clearly too small for a *naumachia*, except on a drastically miniaturized scale; in any case, that at Mérida was too shallow to ensure that people would drown (see II a above).

What, then, are we to make of Nero's aquatic display? It is possible that Dio has mistakenly conveyed an exaggerated impression of its scale: if the arena floor had been removed and the display staged underneath in a basin of the type known from Mérida and Verona, conceivably sufficient sea-water could have been supplied in barrels for a few small marine creatures and a token number of miniature vessels to have been displayed; Dio's assertion that the floor had to be dried out for the subsequent gladiatorial display would be a

⁴² For the post-Neronian dating of Calpurnius Siculus on metrical and stylistic grounds, see D. Armstrong, *Philol.* 130 (1986), 113–37 and E. Courtney, *REL* 65 (1987), 148–57.

⁴³ W. Jobst, *Provinzhauptstadt Carnuntum* (1983), 101 (fig.), 102, pl. 87 (aerial view); A. Obermayer, *Römerstadt Carnuntum* (1967), 60 (fig.), 63.

⁴⁴ See Golvin 1988, 335; Golvin-Landes 1990, 94–7, 99–103; Golvin-Reddé 1990, 169; K. Welch, 'Roman amphitheatres revived', *JRA* 4 (1991), 277–9.

⁴⁵ For photographs, see S. J. Keay, *Roman Spain* (1988), 87; Golvin-Landes 1990, 95, 97.

⁴⁶ My measurements are approximate because I have

calculated them from the scale diagram at Golvin 1988, pl. xxx (= Golvin-Landes 1990, 94). Golvin's various discussions supply a total of four sets of measurements (in metres) for the length and width, all different: 5 by 7.1 (Golvin 1988, 335), 18.35 by 3.7 (Golvin-Landes 1990, 96), 50 by 10 (Golvin-Reddé 1990, 168), 50 by 7.5 (Golvin-Reddé 1990, 169).

⁴⁷ See diagram at Golvin 1988, pl. xxxiii.

⁴⁸ Measurements from L. Franzoni, *Verona. Testimonianze archeologiche* (1965), 78; I treat them as approximate because they are slightly at variance with the length and width calculated by Golvin, 36.13 by 8.77 m (1988, 335).

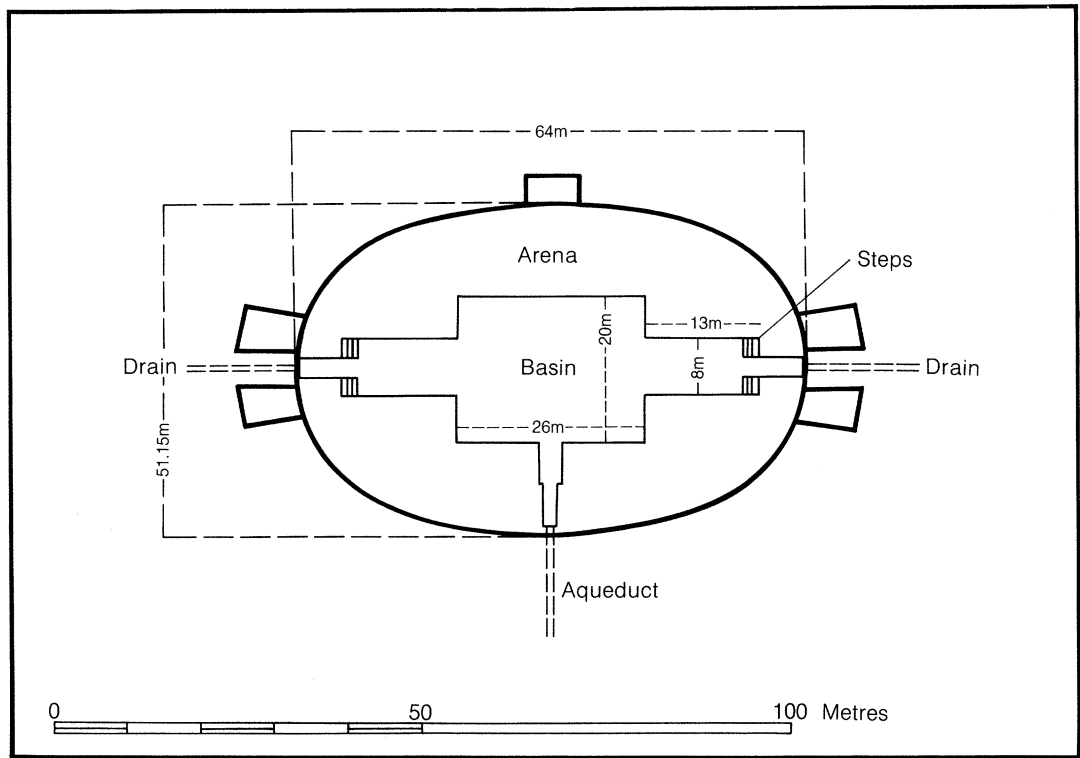


FIG. 3. AMPHITHEATRE AT MÉRIDA: ARENA WITH BASIN

natural error if he imagined water being introduced above floor-level rather than beneath it. This theorizing is hampered by the entire loss of all traces of Nero's amphitheatre. We shall now turn to an extant structure: the Flavian Amphitheatre.

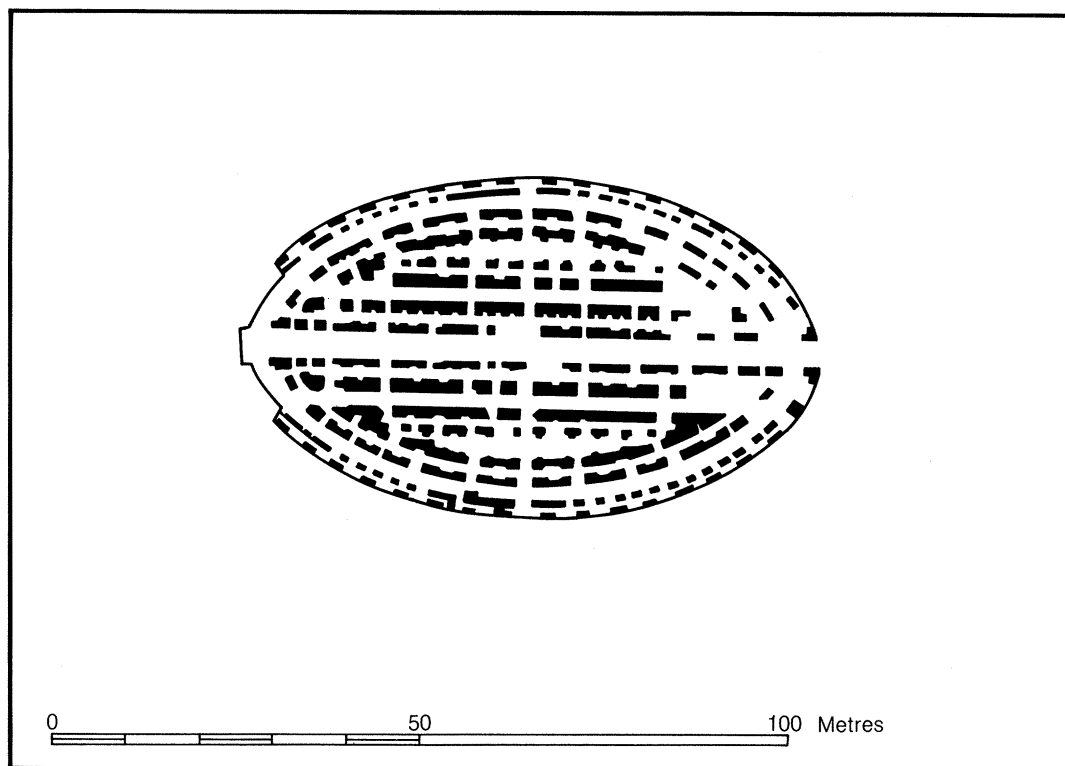
d. *The Flavian Amphitheatre*

Could any aquatic displays have been mounted in the Flavian Amphitheatre? A radically sceptical view is that whatever aquatic displays were performed there were mimed, no water being present.⁴⁹ The preceding survey, however, has demonstrated that water-borne spectacles, including naval displays, are attested in certain public buildings at Rome prior to the construction of the Flavian Amphitheatre, and that basins large enough for aquatic displays are attested outside Rome during the Julio-Claudian period. This evidence, combined with Suetonius' unequivocal statement that Domitian flooded the Flavian Amphitheatre for a naval display (*Dom.* 4.1) and Dio's claim that Titus staged a naval engagement there (*LXVI.* 25. 4), justifies us in speculating about the logistics involved.⁵⁰ Furthermore, since the amphitheatre was built upon the site of Nero's artificial lake in the grounds of the Domus Aurea, we can

⁴⁹ The 'mime' theory is suggested by Rea 1988, 37, on the strength of Dio's notice of a display mounted by Septimius Severus in which 400 animals were released from a 'shipwrecked' craft (*LXXVI.* 1. 4); this probably took place in the circus: see J. H. Humphrey, *Roman Circuses. Arenas for Chariot Racing* (1986), 115-16.

⁵⁰ Suspect 'evidence' for the full-scale flooding of the arena should be ignored, e.g. Fea's claim, *Osservazioni*

sull'arena e sul podio dell'anfiteatro flavio 1 (1813), 36, that traces of blue paint were still partially visible on the podium-wall (after nearly eighteen centuries of wear and tear, including fire); drawing an analogy with Vegetius' advice about marine camouflage (*Mil.* iv. 37), he inferred that the colour was intended to be reflected by the water in the arena. For the heated polemic and special pleading in which Fea was engaged see n. 3.

FIG. 4. FLAVIAN AMPHITHEATRE: EXISTING *HYPOGEUM*

assume that the facilities for supplying the lake with water and draining it into the Tiber, although almost certainly not the same as the channels servicing the present *hypogeum* (see below), will have been available for Vespasian to adapt to his own purposes.⁵¹

The arena of the Flavian Amphitheatre measures 79.35 by 47.20 m; underneath there is a *hypogeum* 6.08 m deep which is occupied by a series of internal walls dividing the space into a complex of service corridors and niched recesses (Fig. 4).⁵² From here equipment and animals would have been elevated into the arena in lifts and cages manoeuvred by pulleys. It is generally agreed that aquatic displays could not have been held in the Flavian Amphitheatre once the *hypogeum* had achieved this form, since the installations would have suffered water-damage (and in any case they would have been in the way). Hence it is assumed that Vespasian's original *hypogeum* either took a different form or did not exist at all; amphitheatres equipped with a *hypogeum* are the exception rather than the rule, and animals and equipment were normally introduced at ground level. The re-structuring (or creation) of the *hypogeum* is attributed to Domitian, and is assumed to have been what prompted him to excavate his own *stagnum* (II a above).⁵³ In fact, however, the *Stagnum Augusti* was available for him to use, and so alterations to the Flavian Amphitheatre cannot have been responsible for his decision to construct his own *stagnum*. Furthermore, Domitian required his *stagnum* for full-scale naval engagements, not for the miniaturized displays which were the maximum that could be accommodated in the amphitheatre; it would have been impossible to get full-scale ships through the entrances to the arena. But, whatever prompted Domitian to build his own *stagnum*, it may well have been he, if not one of his close successors, who converted the structures beneath the arena into the *hypogeum* visible today.

⁵¹ C. Panella, 'La valle del Colosseo nell'antichità', *Bollettino di Archeologia* 1-2 (1990), 34-88, at 68.

⁵² Golvin 1988, 176-7.

⁵³ See, e.g., Golvin 1988, 335.

Is it possible that originally there was a hollow space beneath the arena intended for aquatic displays? This theory is based upon the discovery of five channels in the *hypogeum*, one each along the perimeter and the four radial axes; that on the western axis is 1.30 m wide and 1.80 m high, and that on the east 1.20 m wide and 1.40 m high.⁵⁴ These have been vaguely estimated to have been large enough to flood and drain the *hypogeum* in rapid succession, and expressly linked with Dio's notice of a *naumachia* in the Flavian Amphitheatre.⁵⁵ There are two major problems with this theory: (i) unless the *hypogeum* were filled up to the level of the arena floor (i.e. a capacity of 17,887 m³), the sight-lines from the *cauea* would have rendered any displays in the *hypogeum* invisible to many of the spectators; (ii) while channels at the bottom of the *hypogeum* could have drained it of water, there were no pumping mechanisms available to fill it to the required capacity by means of these channels. (They are far more likely to have been intended to drain water running out of the *cauea* through the arena into the *hypogeum*, and to swill out debris, particularly as they slope downwards slightly in an outward direction.⁵⁶) Hence, if we are to envisage the Vespasianic *hypogeum* taking a form expressly designed for aquatic displays, it is completely unrealistic to assume that it was as deep as it is today.

The alternative is to assume that, although the Flavian Amphitheatre was constructed on an unprecedented scale, it was furnished with facilities attested in the evolution of this architectural form. Hence we should envisage not the cavernous depths of the present *hypogeum*, but a shallower basin underneath the arena floor, of the type known to have been fashionable from the Julio-Claudian era;⁵⁷ its surface area may have been proportionately greater than that at Mérida, perhaps nearly as large as the entire arena and hence suitable for aquatic displays on a sizeable scale.⁵⁸ When the space beneath the arena floor was extended for the construction of the *hypogeum*, the basin would have disappeared, and with it all capacity for staging aquatic displays in the amphitheatre.

III. PERFORMANCES

Having suggested how it was possible in A.D. 80 to introduce water into the Flavian Amphitheatre, we may now be able to determine more precisely where Titus' various aquatic displays were staged and what form they took. The late witness of Dio, with which this paper began, will be set against the evidence contained in a sentence from Suetonius' biography of Titus, a near-contemporary source (*Tit.* 7. 3), and five epigrams from a collection by Martial which purports to be an eye-witness account (*Spect.* 24, 25, 25b, 26, and 28).

a. *Naumachia: Corcyra versus Corinth, 434 B.C.*

This *naumachia* is specifically mentioned by Dio as having taken place in the Flavian Amphitheatre (*LXVI.* 25. 3). In the venue which Martial describes as being converted into a basin (and subsequently drained), a *naumachia* was mounted between unspecified opponents (*Mart., Spect.* 24):

⁵⁴ Dimensions from G. Ghini, 'Prime indagini archeologiche', in *Anfiteatro flavio. Immagine testimonianze spettacoli* (1988), 101-5, at 101.

⁵⁵ C. Mocchegiani Carpano and R. Luciani, 'I restauri dell'Anfiteatro Flavio', *Riv. Ist. Naz. Arch.*³ 4 (1981), 9-69, at 27 ('per allagare gli ipogei e il successivo scarico rapido'); R. Luciani, *The Colosseum* (1990), 18.

⁵⁶ Ghini, *op. cit.* (n. 54), 101.

⁵⁷ Mocchegiani Carpano and Luciani, *op. cit.* (n. 55), 36, argue that the foundations of the corridor walls in the *hypogeum* were independent of the amphitheatre's main foundation, and so they assume that the *hypogeum* was originally an empty shell and that it contained no

permanent structures before the reign of Domitian. But the same evidence can be adduced to support the theory that the only structure below the original amphitheatre was a basin along the main axes.

⁵⁸ Failure to accommodate this possibility forces Rea (1988, 35) to locate in the Stagnum Augusti all the aquatic events recorded by Martial. As evidence that Titus completed the installations in the *hypogeum* she adduces *Spect.* 2. 2, 'et crescunt media peggmata celsa uia' ('lofty scaffolding rises in the middle of the road'); but this clearly refers to a structure above ground-level, probably an arch in the process of construction over the Via Sacra.

Si quis ades longis serus spectator ab oris,
 cui lux prima sacri muneris ista fuit,
 ne te decipiat ratibus naualis Enyo
 et par unda fretis, hic modo terra fuit.
 non credis? specta, dum lassant aequora Martem:
 parua mora est, dices 'Hic modo pontus erat.'

If you happen to have only just arrived from remote shores to watch, and this has been your first day at the sacred games, don't be deceived by this naval war-goddess with her ships and sea-like waves: here not long ago there was land. Don't you believe it? Watch while the water tires the War-god out. There'll be a short delay, and then you'll say: 'Here just a moment ago there was sea'.

The order of the poems in the *Liber Spectaculorum* reflects in broad outline the order of events in Titus' programme,⁵⁹ but since the manuscript evidence has to be pieced together from excerpts in late medieval sources⁶⁰ it is unwise to press the analogy too far.⁶¹ Poem 24, however, does seem to be in its right place at the beginning of the group of epigrams describing aquatic displays: it is addressed to the hypothetical tourist who has arrived late on a pilgrimage to Rome for his first glimpse of the emperor's games (ll. 1–2). The allusion to the militant deity Enyo⁶² (l. 3) establishes the occasion as a naval battle. The site could rapidly be converted from land to water and back again (ll. 5–6): to identify this site as the Stagnum Augusti is out of the question because of the length of time it would take to drain and fill up again (see II a above); but the dismantling of the arena-floor in the Flavian Amphitheatre, and its subsequent re-laying, could be a realistic undertaking. The location of the events of this poem in the Flavian Amphitheatre coheres with the epigram's dramatic context, the address to a late arrival from distant regions (l. 1), since Martial would naturally envisage such a person making straight for the focal point of the celebrations, the amphitheatre itself. Hence we should identify this spectacle with the re-play of the battle between Corcyra and Corinth in 434 B.C. that is included by Dio among the events staged in the amphitheatre (LXVI. 25. 3).⁶³

How is the spectacle to be envisaged? It can be calculated that a trireme with its oars extended occupied 10 m of space laterally,⁶⁴ so there would have been room for at least two full-sized triremes to manoeuvre in an area the size of the arena (54.3 m across at its broadest point and 87.3 m long); but this would have afforded at best a symbolic clash, and in any case vessels 35 m long and nearly 5 m wide would not have fitted through the entrances into the amphitheatre, nor can they have been constructed inside the arena, because this space was required for the initial *pompa* and for the *munera* and other events preceding the aquatic displays. Hence the triremes must have been miniature replicas; there could have been room for several in each team.

Miniature craft may still have been large enough to carry people;⁶⁵ we may be in the world of the puzzling recreation pursued by Lollius and his brother who, with the help of their slaves, re-enacted the Battle of Actium on a lake on their ancestral estate (Hor., *Epist.* I. 18. 61–4):

partitur lintris exercitus; Actia pugna
 te duce per pueros hostili more refertur;
 aduersarius est frater, lacus Hadria; donec
 alterutrum uelox uictoria fronde coronet.

⁵⁹ First suggested by L. Friedländer in his edition (1886), I. 138.

⁶⁰ See U. Carratello (ed.), *M. Valerii Martialis Epigrammaton Liber* (1981), 20–30.

⁶¹ e.g. nos 27–30 occur in the order 27, 29, 30, 28 in one branch of the tradition (H), and in another (K) 27 and 29 are omitted. G. Ville, *La Gladiature en occident des origines à la mort de Domitien* (1981), 148 adopts the order in H to achieve the sequence *uenatio-munus-uenatio-naumachia*, from which he argues, in defiance of the testimony of Dio, that the events on the deck over the Stagnum Augusti lasted longer than one day. But since the manuscripts of *Spect.* are so far from unanimous in recording the order of the poems, the grounds for refuting the evidence of Dio are inadequate.

⁶² Associated with Ares, and identified by the Romans as Bellona: see *LIMC* iii. 1. 746–7 s.v. Enyo (Ruth Michael Gais), iii. 2 pl. 562.

⁶³ Conflation of the two battles mentioned in this passage has led to some sensational claims for Roman ingenuity: for an example from scholarly literature, see N. Hannestad, *Roman Art and Imperial Policy* (1988), 123 (locating in the Flavian Amphitheatre a naval battle involving three thousand combatants).

⁶⁴ From dimensions calculated by J. S. Morrison and J. F. Coates, *The Athenian Trireme. The History and Reconstruction of an Ancient Greek Warship* (1986), 199 fig. 57.

⁶⁵ The naval battle re-enacted every summer at Peasholm Park in Scarborough, United Kingdom, involves nine miniature craft, seven of which are exact replicas of historical British vessels. They have an average length of 8 m, each vessel accommodating one person in a sitting or supine position. Electricity and modern technology facilitate their manoeuvres.

The army shares out boats; under your leadership the battle of Actium is re-enacted by your boys with appropriate hostilities; your brother is the enemy, your lake is the Adriatic, until winged victory crowns one of you with her garland.

Lollius can surely not have had access to full-sized triremes, yet *lacus* suggests a stretch of water upon which one could go boating rather than a pond for ducks and model craft. Hence he must have simulated the Battle of Actium with teams of his slaves in small boats (*refertur* (l. 62) is the technical term for staging a *mise-en-scène*). The choice of Actium points to an enthusiasm for topical events which might seem naïve today, though the difference may merely be that CNN broadcasts enable us to indulge the same interest in a manner that is more vicarious (though, paradoxically, more immediate). Topicality, however, cannot explain why Titus chose to baptize the Flavian Amphitheatre with the re-enactment of a battle that had precipitated the Peloponnesian War; in Section IV below I shall attempt to account for the choice of occasions to be re-played in *naumachiae*.

b. *Charade: Leander*

Consecutive epigrams in the *Liber Spectaculorum* describe a re-enactment of the myth of Hero and Leander. In the first, the emperor's agency is credited with having prevented Leander from suffering his traditional fate of drowning in the Hellespont (Mart., *Spect.* 25):

Quod nocturna tibi, Leandre, pepercerit unda
desine mirari: Caesaris unda fuit.

Stop being amazed that the night's wave spared your life, Leander: it was Caesar's wave.

The second epigram describes a stage in the myth prior to that of the previous distich: Leander strikes a bargain with the elements whereby they may drown him if they will, but only when he is on his way back, i.e. from visiting Hero at Abydos (Mart., *Spect.* 25b):

Cum peteret dulces audax Leandrus amores
et fessus tumidis iam premeretur aquis,
sic miser instantes adfatus dicitur undas:
'Parcite dum propero, mergite cum redeo'.

While daring Leander was making his way to his dear beloved and was exhausted and on the point of being engulfed by the swell, the poor fellow is supposed to have addressed the following plea to the threatening waves: 'Spare me while I'm hurrying there; drown me when I'm on my way back'.

The close similarity between this poem and one published a few years later in the *Apophoreta* (14.181) has led scholars to condemn *Spect.* 25b as spurious.⁶⁶ There are, however, good reasons for retaining it, so long as the order of 25 and 25b is inverted:⁶⁷ in paired poems Martial frequently follows a longer and more explicit epigram with a cryptic distich which depends for its impact upon the information already conveyed in its companion-piece;⁶⁸ in this case, the inversion achieves a sequence that culminates in a tribute to the emperor: 'Leander' was prepared to drown on his return journey, but Titus' magnanimity saved him.

After the mass action of a naval battle (however small the craft), Leander's lonely swim may seem somewhat lacking in spectator appeal. Yet Fronto remarks that this myth was *fabula histrionibus celebrata*, albeit in a version in which the action was clearly subservient to the rhetoric; he complains at length about the fatuous soliloquies delivered by the actors (*Epist. ad Caes.* 3. 14 p. 47 van den Hout). If sentimental love-interest was the attraction in the theatrical

⁶⁶ e.g. Friedländer in his commentary (i. 136–7) ascribed it to a second edition of the *Liber Spectaculorum* under Domitian; K. Prinz, 'Martialerkklärungen I', *WS* 45 (1926–7), 88–101, at 94–8, suggested that it was either plagiarism based on 14. 181 or else a youthful work by Martial that was cited as a parallel by a scholiast and was subsequently incorporated into the tradition.

⁶⁷ Suggested by L. Herrmann, 'Le "livre des spectacles" de Martial', *Latomus* 21 (1962), 494–504, at 500.

⁶⁸ See M. Lausberg, *Das Einzeldistichon* (1982), 372, although she does not comment on the implications this principle carries for the ordering of 25 and 25b.

version, in Titus' re-enactment Leander's feat was presented as a spectacle of endurance. If the arena of the Flavian Amphitheatre seems too small for a display supplying the verisimilitude and excitement of a credible endurance test, we might suppose that the venue was the Stagnum Augusti.⁶⁹ In the myth Leander swims under cover of darkness; Titus' re-enactment would be the more atmospheric for being performed at night, the murky depths of the lake lit by occasional flares on the bank.⁷⁰ Perhaps 'Leander' swam across to the island in the middle of the Stagnum, climbed through a lighted window of the monument (supposedly — and titillatingly — into his beloved's bed), and then completed the return journey to emerge out of the water and the gloom. Obstacles could have been created in the water by the construction of rocky outcrops and similar hazards to pose a threat to him in the darkness. The greater the risks, the more likely that the spectators laid bets on the protagonist's chances of survival.⁷¹

But we shall see below that Titus' display of 'Nereids' was probably put on at night in the Flavian Amphitheatre (Mart., *Spect.* 26; see III c), and that it is only in the last poem in the sequence (*Spect.* 28; see III e) that Martial describes events which he specifically locates in the Stagnum Augusti. With due caution in making deductions from the order of the poems (cf. n. 61 above), we might envisage 'Leander' staged in the Flavian Amphitheatre rather than the Stagnum Augusti; in that case, to compensate for the short distance involved, he may have been made to swim under a handicap (e.g. wearing weights, or sharing the water with a crocodile). But, in whichever venue the performance was staged, a life-and-death situation must have been set up to keep the spectators in suspense. Stunts based on myth feature prominently in Titus' programme, and they almost invariably entail mortal risk to the protagonists. Titus' 'Leander' may have belonged to that category of criminal who gained a reprieve for surviving a dangerous stunt in a public arena.⁷² If he had not survived the test, he would have executed his own capital sentence by drowning; the clue on this occasion lies in the salvation afforded by 'Caesar's wave' (*Caesaris unda*, 25. 2), in contrast to the hostility of the elements which caused the mythological Leander to drown. By attributing Leander's survival to *Caesaris unda* rather than to the protagonist's stamina (or sheer luck), Martial deflects the credit on to the emperor; the reprieve is conceived in terms of his power over the elements, a flattering conceit which is a leitmotif of Martial's presentation of the aquatic displays (see Section IV below).

It has been supposed that an illustration of such a performance may have survived in a mosaic from a *frigidarium* at Thina in Tunisia which depicts various myths set in a marine context, including Leander swimming towards Hero's tower;⁷³ around its edge there are dolphins pulling racing-chariots, which has given rise to the theory that all the scenes illustrate live performances comparable to that described by Martial.⁷⁴ But the dolphins are clearly a fantasy parodying real life, like the common decorative motif of Erotes or children engaged in adult activities (including chariot-racing),⁷⁵ and the marine theme is chosen because it suits a bathing-establishment.⁷⁶ It remains a possibility, however, that live performances informed the artist's visual imagination.⁷⁷

c. *Pantomime: Nereids*

Leander's solo performance is balanced by a group display in a mythological spirit featuring a troupe of 'Nereids' (Mart., *Spect.* 26):

⁶⁹ Prinz, *op. cit.* (n. 66), 94 n. 1, argued for the *stagnum* on the basis that two lengths (2 by 532 m = 1,064 m) would nearly approximate to the actual distance between Sestos and Abydos (7 stades = 1,300 m).

⁷⁰ Two sources attest nocturnal displays under Domitian, both probably referring to the Flavian Amphitheatre (Stat., *Silu.* 1. 6. 85–95, Suet., *Dom.* 4. 1). Nocturnal displays are also attested at Rome under Caligula (Suet., *Cal.* 18. 2, 54. 2), and at Pompeii (*CIL* x. 854 = *ILS* 5653) and Lanuvium (*CIL* xiv. 2121 = *ILS* 5683): see L. Friedländer, *Darstellungen aus der Sittengeschichte Roms*⁹ ii (1920), 16.

⁷¹ For betting at *munera* and other contests, cf. Ov., *Ars* 1. 168 (with Hollis' note), *CIL* iv. 2508, J. P. V. D. Balsdon, *Life and Leisure in Ancient Rome* (1969), 321,

K. Hopkins, *Death and Renewal. Sociological Studies in Roman History* 2 (1983), 26.

⁷² Coleman 1990, 61–2.

⁷³ Traversari 1960, 125 fig. 32, K. M. D. Dunbabin, *The Mosaics of Roman North Africa* (1978), pl. ix, fig. 18.

⁷⁴ Traversari 1960, 124–7.

⁷⁵ Dunbabin, *op. cit.* (n. 73), 91.

⁷⁶ Dunbabin, *op. cit.* (n. 73), 106.

⁷⁷ For a study of the iconography of Hero and Leander, and the theory that surviving representations may have been influenced by book-illustrations, see D. Kemp-Lindermann, 'Hero und Leander', in U. Höckmann and A. Krug (eds), *Festschrift für Frank Brommer* (1977), 201–5 and pl. 56.

Lusit Nereidum docilis chorus aequore toto
 et uario faciles ordine pinxit aquas.
 fuscina dente minax recto fuit, ancora curuo:
 credidimus remum credidimusque ratem,
 et gratum nautis sidus fulgere Laconum
 lataque perspicuo uela tumere sinu.
 quis tantas liquidis artes inuenit in undis?
 aut docuit lusus hos Thetis aut didicit.

A well-trained group of Nereids were frolicking all over the water and describing richly varied patterns on the compliant waves. The trident with its upright tooth and the anchor with its curve looked menacing: we believed in the oar, we believed in the ship, and that the Laconians' star was shining to welcome the sailors, and that the broad sails were swelling till their canvas was transparent. Who has invented such arts in limpid waves? Thetis has either taught these tricks or learned them.

Since it is the *métier* of Nereids to swim and dive, this must be what these ladies were doing. *uario . . . ordine* (l. 2) suggests choreographed groupings and re-groupings somewhat akin to a water-ballet. The swimmers, moving in concert, mimed a water-borne craft, one group adopting a formation suggestive of the outline of the vessel and others describing patterns reminiscent of the sweep of the oars: 'credidimus remum credidimusque ratem' (l. 4). The modern equivalent is synchronized swimming. The visual impact would depend upon a bird's-eye view, which the spectators would have had from the *cauea* of the Flavian Amphitheatre rather than from the bank of the Stagnum Augusti.

When Martial says that one could imagine the Dioscuri shining (l. 5), he implies that the performance was staged at night (cf. n. 70). The point of this may have been that the display approximated to a modern strip-tease show: John Chrysostom criticizes people who watch naked prostitutes swimming in the theatre instead of worshipping in church (*In Matt. Hom.* 7. 6).⁷⁸ If Titus' Nereids were naked, as would have been required by mythological veracity and allowed by the conventions of the stage (conventions which were surely extended to the amphitheatre),⁷⁹ torch-light would have increased the titillating element. Myths set in an aquatic context gave the reader (or spectator) an opportunity to appreciate the erotic associations of water and nakedness, a combination epitomized by the Nereids.⁸⁰ Cf. Catullus 64. 14–18:

emersere feri candenti e gurgite uultus
 aequoreae monstrum Nereides admirantes.
 illa atque haud alia uiderunt luce marinas
 mortales oculis nudato corpore Nymphas
 nutricum tenus exstantes e gurgite cano.

Wild faces emerged from the shining swell, the Nereids of the waters marvelling at the miracle. On that day, and no other, mortal eyes beheld the sea nymphs in their nakedness, standing out breast-high from the white water.⁸¹

In interpreting Titus' display it is mistaken to draw an analogy with the so-called 'bikini girls' at Piazza Armerina;⁸² they were almost certainly athletes, and there is no evidence that

⁷⁸ The ubiquity of water-proofing alterations to theatres in the late Empire, especially in the East, attests the popularity of the type of display to which John Chrysostom objected; drawing on Martial's poem as the earliest example of an aquatic pantomime, the term *tetimimi* (from *Spect.* 26. 8) has been coined for these displays. See Traversari 1960, 50 n. 2.

⁷⁹ Normally at this period women wore a modesty garment for mixed bathing: Mart. 3. 87, E. Mehl, *Antike Schwimmkunst* (1927), 87. But nudity was allowed in mimes on certain occasions, e.g. the Floralia: see *RE* vi. 2751, s.v. Floralia (Wissowa); virtual nudity was one of the attractions of pantomime: cf. Apuleius' description of the woman playing Venus in the 'Judgement of Paris'

(*Met.* x. 31. 1): 'nudo et intecto corpore perfectam formositatem professa, nisi quod tenui pallio bombycino inumbrabat spectabilem pubem' ('Her body was naked and unadorned, thereby displaying her perfect figure, except that the view of her private parts was obscured by a swathe of flimsy silk'). The similarity between Titus' Nereids' and this type of pantomime is observed by Welch, *op. cit.* (n. 44), 279.

⁸⁰ On the relation between water and nakedness, see J. Griffin, *Latin Poets and Roman Life* (1985), 88–111.

⁸¹ Translation by Griffin, *op. cit.* (n. 80), 93.

⁸² Attempted by B. Pace, 'Theatralia', in *Anthemon. Scritti di archeologia e di antichità classiche in onore di Carlo Anti* (1955), 309–17, at 312–17.

they were supposed to be performing in water.⁸³ More apposite is the description of Venus' marine cortège in Apul., *Met.* iv. 31. 6: 'adsunt Nerei filiae chorum canentes . . . iam passim maria persultantes Tritonum cateruae hic concha sonaci leniter bucinat' ('Nereus' daughters are there, singing in harmony . . . Troops of Tritons cavort over the sea, one blowing softly on his sounding conch'); this kind of word-picture (which may itself have been influenced by a pictorial representation) was translated into a motion-picture in the amphitheatre. Typically, Martial effects the closure of the epigram with a panegyric conceit (l. 8), 'aut docuit lusus hos Thetis aut didicit': if the sea-goddess Thetis was herself taught these tricks, it can only have been by a fellow-deity; in other words, the emperor who master-minded such a performance can have been none other than a god.⁸⁴

d. *Dressage: terrestrial animals*

Dio is the sole authority for this feature, which he locates in the Flavian Amphitheatre: domesticated animals, including horses and bulls, executed in the water routines which they had been trained to perform on land (LXVI. 25. 2, δεδιδραγμένα πάνθ' ὄσα ἐπὶ γῆς πράττειν καὶ ἐν τῷ ὕδατι). This is neither a *uenatio* nor a zoological parade, but a form of dressage. Plutarch records a terrestrial version performed in θέατρα, i.e. probably amphitheatres (*Mor.* 992b = *Brut. anim. rat.* 9):

ἵπποι δὲ καὶ βόες ἐν θεάτροις κατακλίσεις καὶ χορείας καὶ στάσεις παραβόλους καὶ κινήσεις οὐδ' ἀνθρώποις πάνυ ἑαδίας ἀκριβοῦσιν.

In theatres horses and bulls perform an exact routine in which they lie down or dance or hold a precarious pose or execute movements not at all easy even for men.

Dio is expressing himself rather loosely, and we need not assume that the horses and bulls performed exactly the same tricks; but the animals' 'precarious pose' may mean that they stood on their hind-legs, and the difficult movements may have been something like goose-stepping. If Titus' version entailed tricks such as these, the depth of water must have been shallow enough for the animals to keep their hooves on the bottom, since they could not have performed these feats while swimming; a Mérida-style basin in the arena of the Flavian Amphitheatre fulfils this criterion.

e. *Venatio*

We now move to the first of three consecutive days of games held at the Stagnum Augusti. Since this cycle of events is mentioned by all three of our authors, I shall begin with a brief survey of the sources. After *Spect.* 26 the order in the manuscripts is disturbed: the cycle of epigrams on aquatic displays is interrupted by *Spect.* 27, which compares the achievements of the *bestiarius* Carphorus with heroic feats from Greek mythology, and it has been variously conjectured that the disturbance in order may extend further than that (cf. n. 61 above). It is clear, however, that *Spect.* 28 represents the climax of the aquatic cycle: it is the longest poem on this theme (twelve lines for a single epigram is the maximum length attested in the book), and the display is on a grand scale:

Augusti labor hic fuerat committere classes
et freta nauali sollicitare tuba.
Caesaris haec nostri pars est quota? uidit in undis
et Thetis ignotas et Galatea feras;

⁸³ See A. Carandini, A. Ricci, and M. de Vos, *Filosofiana. La Villa di Piazza Armerina* (1982), 154.

⁸⁴ For brief but pertinent remarks on the theme of

Titus' divinity in *Spect.* see J. P. Sullivan, *Martial: the Unexpected Classic* (1991), 9–10.

uidit in aequoreo feruentes puluere currus
 et domini Triton isse putauit equos:
 dumque parat saeuis ratibus fera proelia Nereus,
 horruit in liquidis ire pedestris aquis.
 quidquid et in Circo spectatur et Amphitheatro,
 diues Caesarea praestitit unda tuba (*Dubielszig: tibi codd.*).
 Fucinus et +tigris+ taceantur stagna Neronis:
 hanc norint unam saecula naumachiam.

It had been the labour of Augustus to pit fleets against one another here and rouse the waves with naval trumpet. What fraction of our Emperor's achievement does this amount to? Thetis and Galatea have seen strange beasts among the waves; Triton has seen chariots churning up the water like dust, and thought it was his master's horses galloping by; and while Nereus was organizing fierce battles for the hostile fleets, he shuddered to go on foot over the limpid water. Whatever can be seen in the Circus and the Amphitheatre the diverse wave has provided at a blast of Caesar's trumpet. Boasting about Fucinus and Nero's pools should stop: posterity must acknowledge this *naumachia*, and this one only.

Martial explicitly locates these events in the Stagnum Augusti (ll. 1–2).⁸⁵ He devotes three couplets to the spectacles (ll. 3–8), corresponding to the three days of displays. Suetonius, by contrast, supplies minimal information, although if his work on spectacles were extant it might compensate for the disappointing brevity of this notice (*Tit.* 7.3):

et tamen nemine ante se munificentia minor, amphitheatro dedicato thermisque iuxta cele[b]riter
 extractis munus edidit apparatissimum largissimumque; dedit et nauale proelium in ueteri
 naumachia, ibidem et gladiatores atque uno die quinque milia omne genus ferarum.

[Titus] was second to none in generosity, and when he dedicated the amphitheatre and the baths that he had hastily built next door to it he gave a most lavish and magnificent gladiatorial show; he also put on a naval battle in the old *naumachia*, and on the same site gladiators and, in a single day, five thousand animals of all kinds.

Suetonius mentions only one aquatic display, a naval battle in what he calls the *uetus naumachia*, where a *munus* was also held and an unprecedented number of animals were displayed. Since the only site for a *naumachia* in existence at that time was the Stagnum Augusti, this must be what Suetonius means by *uetus naumachia*, and his *munus* and *uenatio* must be Dio's μονομαχία τε καὶ θηρίων σφαγή (LXVI. 25. 3).

Martial refers to the *uenatio* in terms of animals 'unknown' (*ignotas*) to sea-goddesses appearing in *undis* (28. 3–4). On the face of it, Martial's remark accords better with the displays of terrestrial animals that Dio attributes to the flooded amphitheatre (III d above). Yet Suetonius' claim that five thousand animals were displayed at the *stagnum* in one day suggests that the spectacle staged there was indeed a *uenatio*, since it is inconceivable that so many animals would be merely paraded and then rounded up again and taken away alive. Yet, how can an event which Martial locates in the water have happened on Dio's platform? Since the platform only extended over part of the water (see II a above), the *uenatores* could have driven the animals off it into the lake, so that Martial can envisage Thetis and Galatea reacting to the miraculous sight of terrestrial animals thrashing about in the water (28. 3–4). The *munus* and *uenatio* are not strictly aquatic displays; indeed, the paradox of staging terrestrial events on water is what Titus seems to have been concerned to advertise (see Section IV below).

f. Chariot-race

On the second day a chariot-race was held (ἵπποδρομία, Dio LXVI. 25. 4). Martial implies that the vehicles raced in water: he exploits the similarity between spray and dust (with

⁸⁵ Overlooked by Traversari (1960, 113–15), who locates these events in the Flavian Amphitheatre.

the oxymoron *aequoreo puluere*), and he imagines Triton confusing the chariots with Neptune's car (*Spect.* 28. 5–6): 'uidit in aequoreo ferentes puluere currus / et domini Triton isse putauit equos'. This suggests that for the chariot-race the platform was slightly submerged (a fractional adjustment in the water-level would have been possible overnight), so that the chariots gave the impression of scorching through the water as the horses galloped over the submerged platform kicking up clouds of spray.

g. *Naumachia: Athens versus Syracuse, 414 B.C.*

The third day saw a naval battle, from which a land-engagement ensued (Dio LXVI. 25. 4). Titus re-enacted Athens' historically disastrous attack on Syracuse in 414 B.C., but his 'Athenians' succeeded in landing on the island in the middle of the *stagnum*, which on this occasion would have represented Ortygia, just as it had represented Salamis in Augustus' inaugural *naumachia* in 2 B.C.; in the ensuing *πεζομαχία* the 'Athenians' stormed and captured structures on the island. The entire exercise must be what Martial (*Spect.* 28. 7–8) and Suetonius (*Tit.* 7. 3, 'nauale proelium') characterize as a purely naval engagement. Martial describes the preparatory stages rather than the battle itself, in order to conclude the triple conceit whereby he imagines Titus taking the marine deities by surprise with his *adynata*: after Thetis and Galatea have gazed in astonishment at the terrestrial animals in the water, and Triton has taken Titus' chariot-race to be Neptune's cavalcade, Nereus, supervising arrangements for the naval battle, is horrified at having to walk in the water instead of swimming. This suggests that the marines and their equipment are being marshalled on the platform which, being slightly submerged, cannot be seen by the spectators; Nereus, who is used to total immersion, is appalled at having to wade instead (*Spect.* 28. 8): 'horruit in liquidis ire pedestris aquis'.

Three thousand marines participated in this battle (as in Augustus' replay of Salamis); to this figure we should add the oarsmen, as was explicitly stated by Augustus (*RG* 23, 'praeter remiges millia hominum tria circiter'). As their 'marines' Julius Caesar and Claudius deployed prisoners-of-war and criminals condemned on capital charges:⁸⁶ we may legitimately infer that this was standard practice in *naumachiae*.⁸⁷ The oarsmen were probably also prisoners: even though their station was below deck, they would still have been at risk, especially when ships collided; and since skilled oarsmen are a valuable commodity, professionals cannot have been squandered on such spectacles. Nor would real proficiency have been required; some rudimentary instruction would have been sufficient to get a gang of prisoners to put the craft in motion, especially as there would not have been enough room for them to pick up significant speed.

Given that Augustus specifies thirty triremes and biremes for a battle on a similar scale, we should assume that Titus too deployed about thirty vessels. They would have gained access to the *stagnum* from the Tiber via the inter-connecting canal (see II a above). The craft deployed had to be expendable, since they were liable to damage if not complete destruction. Augustus may have had veteran craft from the Civil Wars at his disposal, but by the Flavian era the fleet comprised lighter, more manoeuvrable vessels for transport, communications, and piracy-control.⁸⁸ There is, however, no need to assume that a preoccupation with authenticity prevented Titus from using available craft, since appropriate trappings would make up for anachronistic specifications. The two sides in a *naumachia* must have been easily distinguishable, both for their own sakes and for the benefit of the spectators; 'colour-coding' for ships and armour along the lines of the circus factions would have been the most economical way to distinguish the opposing teams, but the historicizing context suggests rather that each side was kitted out in what was supposed to be authentic gear and that the ships were distinctively

⁸⁶ Furneaux comments 'the number . . . is suggestive of iniquitous condemnations'. Cf. (of Caesar) Dio XLIII. 23. 4, ἐμάχοντο . . . οἱ τε αἰχμάλωτοι καὶ οἱ θάνατον ὀφληκότες, (of Claudius) Tac., *Ann.* XII. 56. 5, 'pugnatum quamquam inter sontis fortium uirorum animo', Dio LX. 33. 3. θανάτω . . . καταδικασμένοι.

⁸⁷ The participants in a *naumachia* staged by Nero were *barbari* (Sen., *Epist.* LXX. 26).

⁸⁸ L. Casson, *Ships and Seamanship in the Ancient World* (1971), 141.

decorated (cf. Tigellinus' craft *auro et ebore distinctae*, discussed at II a above). Since Titus' 'Athenians' were victorious, history on this occasion was not vindicated; in Section IV I shall discuss the implications of this deviation from historical fact.

IV. PURPOSE

Titus' aquatic displays offer a convenient focus because our sources for them are so detailed. Starting from the events of his programme, I shall now attempt to address the purpose of such displays by examining three issues: why Titus went to the trouble of putting on aquatic spectacles in the Flavian Amphitheatre at all, given that the Stagnum Augusti was not only available but already incorporated in the programme; whether there is a tradition into which we should fit aquatic displays in the amphitheatre; and why the Romans enacted sea-battles as a form of display. Consideration of these questions may enable us to draw some conclusions about the purpose, the theatricality, and the 'historicity' of aquatic displays under the early Empire.

The occasion being celebrated in A.D. 80 was the inauguration of the Flavian Amphitheatre; hence this building should not be eclipsed by another site. At the same time, however, it was worth repeating some of the displays in the Stagnum Augusti for the scale and special effects that could be achieved, especially the paradox of chariots racing in water and the unique combination of a sea-battle with a landing. The appropriateness of holding aquatic displays in the Flavian Amphitheatre also has to do with the history of the site: in one of the introductory epigrams of the *Liber Spectaculorum*, built upon a 'then and now' contrast, Martial lists various monuments to Nero's megalomania that have been replaced by the Flavians' legacy to the people of Rome; as he says of the amphitheatre (2. 5–6), 'hic ubi conspicui venerabilis amphitheatri / erigitur moles, stagna Neronis erant' ('here, where the distinctive amphitheatre raises its awesome bulk, Nero used to have his pools'). The lake inside the private park of the Domus Aurea had been designed exclusively for Nero's own pleasure; how fitting that this stretch of water should be replaced by a pleasure-dome for the whole people in which their entertainment included aquatic displays.

We should also not lose sight of the fact that both Suetonius and Dio (explicitly) and Martial (implicitly) associate Titus' displays with the opening of the *thermae* as well as the amphitheatre; just as marine subjects often decorate the floors of bathing establishments (n. 76 above), so the connection between baths and aquatic displays is not too banal to be made by an emperor putting on popular entertainment. This is not to say that we should posit a specific connection between aquatic displays and inaugural ceremonies, except in so far as the expense of a *naumachia* could only be justified by a special occasion: Augustus' *naumachia* celebrated the dedication of the temple of Mars Ultor, but in the context of a larger programme of inaugural games; Nero's *naumachia-cum-uenatio* (II c above) sounds appropriate for an opening-ceremony,⁸⁹ but Dio's phrase ἐν δὲ τινὶ θεάτρῳ (LXI. 9. 5) militates against this interpretation.⁹⁰ Julius Caesar and Domitian, on the other hand, put on *naumachiae* in the context of a triumph; but before arguing the importance of this connection we should examine some more general considerations.

In the imperial ideology that evolves during the early Principate one constant feature is the ambition to match, if not surpass, the achievements of one's predecessors: Nero's aquatic displays in his amphitheatre had achieved wide renown, and Titus is not to be found wanting. Part of the Julio-Claudian challenge to the Flavians could be termed the 'miracle-factor': as the emperor's image moved further from man and closer to god, so his achievements must appear demonstrably superhuman. The tradition of *Xerxes togatus* was securely accommodated within the Roman value-system, as is demonstrated by Hortensius' admiration for Lucullus, who defied nature in flamboyant style by joining his fresh-water ponds to the Bay of Naples with a tunnel so as to keep them from stagnating (Varro, *RR* III. 17. 9): '[Hortensius] aiebat . . . L. Lucillum . . . Neptuno non cedere de piscatu' ('[Hortensius] used to say that L. Lucullus was as good as Neptune when it came to looking after fish'). A notorious imperial

⁸⁹ Golvin 1988, 61 assumes that the occasion was the dedication of the wooden amphitheatre (see II c above).

⁹⁰ *RE* xvi. 1970–4 s.v. Naumachie (Bernert).

example is Caligula's bridge of boats across the bay at Baiae, explicitly associated by Suetonius with a desire for outrageous innovation ('nouum praeterea atque inauditum genus spectaculi excogitauit', *Cal.* 19. 1), and commonly believed to have been conceived *aemulatione Xerxis* (19. 3, cf. *Sen.*, *Dial.* x. 18. 5, *Dio LIX.* 17. 11). The festivities included a banquet that lasted well into the night, illuminated by fires on the surrounding hillsides: as well as turning sea into land, Caligula could turn night into day.⁹¹ The explanation for this undertaking that Suetonius heard from his grandfather explicitly equates the emperor's power to rule with his capacity to work miracles (*Cal.* 19. 3): Thrasyllus flung down the gauntlet in predicting of Tiberius' successor 'non magis Gaium imperaturum quam per Baianum sinum equis discursurum' ('Gaius would no more rule than race across the bay of Baiae on horseback').⁹²

In our context, the spectacle of aquatic displays staged on what was apparently *terra firma* realizes a type of *adynaton*, all the more miraculous in that sea-battles are fought in the middle of a land-locked city. It is significant that Titus works the miracle in the opposite direction too: as well as creating a miniature lake in a venue in which displays are customarily performed on dry land (the amphitheatre), he stages terrestrial events on top of a permanent stretch of water by covering part of Augustus' *stagnum* with a deck. The novelty is obvious, also the propaganda motif of 'no expense and effort spared', which had a tradition stretching back at least as far as Xerxes himself.⁹³ At the same time, a different propaganda-point could be scored by effecting certain economies; it would be a suitable irony if Titus' deck had been constructed and dismantled by the same convict-gangs who were to be killed in his *naumachia*.

The narrative element of spectacles put on in the amphitheatre, both during the reign of Titus and at other times, is derived from mythology and legend. Granted that sea-battles do not feature in ancient mythology, it is easy to imagine a conflict between, say, the followers of Proteus and Nereus; but no such conflict was ever evoked in a *naumachia*. In the known instances, as we have seen, re-enactments from Greek history preponderate: Augustus and Nero each staged a 'Salamis' (although history was vindicated in Augustus' version, the outcome of Nero's is unknown); in Titus' version of the Athenian attack on Syracuse, historical fact was confounded. In other enactments the occasion for inspiration seems to have been pseudo-historical rather than authentic. Claudius staged an apparently fictitious battle between 'Sicilians' and 'Rhodians', although this may reflect a simplification of the struggle for west Sicily c. 580–576 B.C. between colonists from Cnidus and Rhodes on the one hand and an alliance of Phoenicians and Elymians on the other.⁹⁴ Caesar's battle between Tyrians and Egyptians, historically unattested, finds an interesting parallel in Book VII of Chariton's *Callirhoe*, where Egyptian forces under Greek leadership attack the Persian army gathered at Tyre; after the Persians have suffered a defeat at sea and the Egyptians have been defeated on land, the Greco-Egyptian forces rout the Persians at the island of Arados off the coast of Tyre. The novel is set within an historical framework: prominent roles are played by Hermocrates (the conservative statesman at Syracuse mentioned by Thucydides) and the Persian king Artaxerxes (probably Artaxerxes II, who reigned from 404 to c. 360 B.C.); the clash between Egypt and Persia seems to conflate the Egyptian offensive against the Persian Empire in 360 B.C. and Alexander the Great's attempt in 333 B.C. to plunder Phoenicia, where the Persian navy was based.⁹⁵ The 'historical' context lends plausibility to the narrative;⁹⁶ like Chariton's novel, Caesar's *naumachia* may reflect the same preference for verisimilitude over veracity.

It is striking that, like the 'historical' battles in *naumachiae*, portrayals of myth in the arena are not always faithful to the story either;⁹⁷ frequently the alteration contains an irony that can only be appreciated by spectators who recognize the deviation. Even allowing that Petronius exaggerated for comic effect, Trimalchio and his friends provide evidence enough that, despite the ubiquity of mythological scenes as decorative motifs, the average person's grasp of

⁹¹ A. Ferrill, *Caligula Emperor of Rome* (1991), 116.

⁹² A. A. Barrett, *Caligula. The Corruption of Power* (1989), 211–12.

⁹³ Well formulated by B. S. J. Isserlin, 'The canal of Xerxes: facts and problems', *Annual of the British School at Athens* 86 (1991), 83–91, at 86: 'overawing the people in invaded regions by works of incredible scope and efficiency would have served as a useful tool of psychological warfare and imperial propaganda'.

⁹⁴ For a reconstruction of the circumstances, see T. J. Dunbabin, *The Western Greeks* (1948), 328–9.

⁹⁵ See K. Plepelits (ed.), *Chariton von Aphrodisias. Kallirhoe* (1976), 10–17.

⁹⁶ On the 'historiographical pose' in the ancient novel, and the blurring of the distinction between fact and fiction, see J. R. Morgan, 'History, romance, and realism in the Aithiopika of Heliodorus', *Classical Antiquity* 1 (1982), 221–65.

⁹⁷ Coleman 1990, 69.

mythological detail was tenuous;⁹⁸ everyday acquaintance with the highlights of Greek history, which were neither the subject of a Homeric primer nor the stuff of frescoes and mosaics, is likely to have been even more sketchy. Yet Augustus and his successors set their *naumachiae* in the context of battles that were fought (or might have been fought) five centuries earlier at the other end of the Mediterranean. If the average Roman with a modicum of education had heard of them, it would surely not have been from Diodorus and Thucydides but from a handy epitome or a compendium along the lines of an *Everyman's Guide*.⁹⁹ Perhaps 'heard' contains an important clue, since declamation largely drew its material from Greek history,¹⁰⁰ and it was precisely in the Augustan age that declamation became popular. The *enumeratio* of great Athenian victories at Sen., *Suas.* 5 may point to a general, if uninformed, enthusiasm for the highlights of Greek history. As modern media have re-discovered, a visual message makes the most memorable impact; how much the more so in a society which was largely illiterate.¹⁰¹ Dio frequently stresses the naming of the teams: LV. 10. 7 (Augustus), LX. 33. 3 (Claudius), οἱ μὲν Ῥόδιοι οἱ δὲ Σικελοὶ ὀνομασθέντες, LXVI. 25. 4 (Titus), τούτοις γὰρ τοῖς ὀνόμασι χρῆσάμενοι ἐναυμάχησαν; we should not rule out the possibility that a *naumachia* was preceded by a parade in which prominent leaders on each side were identified on inscriptions similar to those carried in a triumph.

The romance of the past is also a factor to be reckoned with. Once Actium had marked the definitive conquest of the Greek East, there were no more naval battles (and there would not be another for centuries); Titus could impress the populace with the spectacle of a type of engagement which no living person had ever experienced. To provide a context for his displays he would naturally look east, since in trying to capture a glamorous or exotic mood the Romans automatically turned to Greece and Egypt for inspiration. Starting from Augustus' Palatine residence, Woldemar Görler¹⁰² has recently shown that when Greek toponyms are transferred to Rome, the parallel being drawn is primarily historicizing and sentimental rather than geographical: it must have been for the spiritual associations of the name that Augustus called his study 'Syracusae' (Suet., *Aug.* 72. 2), since any physical similarity between the two settings is hard to imagine.¹⁰³ The resonances of the foreign name evoked the associations of a famous place; if Greece represented for the Romans 'eine große, jedenfalls im Geistigen vorbildhafte Vergangenheit', a spiritual past to be emulated, Egypt was 'ein noch immer geheimnisumwitterter Schauplatz jüngerer Geschichte', a venue permanently shrouded in the mystery of its recent past.¹⁰⁴ Just as wishful thinking, rather than exact correspondences, determined the adoption of foreign toponyms in Rome and Italy (Cicero, *Law*s II. 2, complains of the ubiquity of *euripi* and *Nili* in Roman gardens), so it mattered little whether the grand historicizing enactments in the emperors' *naumachiae* reproduced engagements that had actually happened (Salamis), happened differently (the Athenian attack on Syracuse), or — while they might plausibly be imagined — had apparently not happened at all (the naval engagement between Tyre and Egypt).

Was this nostalgia for the exotic past of the Greek East countered by *naumachiae* re-enacting a naval battle in which Rome was historically involved? Incontrovertible proof is lacking. Yet such an occasion may be reflected in an issue of coins from Gadara in Syria dated to the year of Marcus Aurelius' accession, A.D. 160/1.¹⁰⁵ The reverse depicts a trireme beneath variations on the legend Γαδαρέων / τῆς κατὰ ποταμὸν / ναυμά(χης) (or ναυμα(χίας)). Formerly the iconography was interpreted¹⁰⁶ as a naval display on Lake Tiberias to commemorate the occasion in A.D. 67 when a small fleet under Vespasian and Titus captured the port of Joppa from Jewish insurgents;¹⁰⁷ but the occasion did not have the éclat that is

⁹⁸ N. Horsfall, "'The uses of literacy" and the *Cena Trimalchionis*', *G&R* 36 (1989), 74–89, 194–209, at 81.

⁹⁹ On summaries of historical works for general consumption see A. Momigliano, 'The historians of the classical world and their audiences: some suggestions', in *Sesto contributo alla storia degli studi classici e del mondo antico* I (1980), 361–76, at 369.

¹⁰⁰ See S. F. Bonner, *Education in Ancient Rome* (1977), 278.

¹⁰¹ Even if we inflate the pessimistic estimate of W. V. Harris, *Ancient Literacy* (1989). See now the responses in J. H. Humphrey (ed.), *Literacy in the Roman World* (1991).

¹⁰² 'Syracusae auf dem Palatin; Syracuse, New York. Sentimentale Namengebung in Rom und später', in W. Görler and S. Koster (eds), *Pratum Saraviense. Festschrift für Peter Steinmetz* (1990), 169–88.

¹⁰³ Görler, op. cit. (n. 102), 169.

¹⁰⁴ Görler, op. cit. (n. 102), 170.

¹⁰⁵ Evidence collected by B. Lifshitz, 'Études sur l'histoire de la province romaine de Syrie', *ANRW* II 8 (1977), 11–12.

¹⁰⁶ By F. de Saulcy, *Numismatique de la Terre Sainte* (1874), 299 no. 2.

¹⁰⁷ Jos., *Bj* III. 414–31, E. M. Smallwood, *The Jews under Roman Rule* (1976), 309.

usually associated with the models for *naumachiae*, nor is it easy to see what the Romans less than a century later would have hoped to gain from such a crass allusion. Latterly a connection has been postulated between the occasion for this coin-issue and the rendering of Gadara's title as Πομπηϊέων Γαδαρέων (the epithet is attested solely under Marcus Aurelius):¹⁰⁸ it has been suggested that Pompey's name was added to the city's nomenclature at Marcus Aurelius' accession, and the occasion celebrated with a *naumachia* commemorating Pompey's exploits against the pirates in this area — stressing, no doubt, his contribution to the stability and prosperity of the region. The venue could have been a lake formed by damming the R. Yarmûk before it flowed into the Jordan. If the display was a true *naumachia*, the sponsors must have been able to guarantee that the outcome would be faithful to history, perhaps by putting the 'Romans' in craft superior in size and design to those of the 'pirates'. It would be mistaken to postulate a connection between this display and the Syrian festival of the *maïouma*, which did not take the form of a naval enactment;¹⁰⁹ the most that can be said is that the Syrians' aquatic festival may have made them receptive to a commemoration taking the form of an aquatic display.

In the fourth century A.D. Ausonius apparently alludes to re-enactments of naval battles from the end of the Civil Wars. The context is a simile in which he compares the view enjoyed by a spectator looking down on the Moselle to the view that might be enjoyed by Bacchus looking down over the Gulf of Cumae (*Mos.* 208–19):

tales Cumanò despectat in aequore ludos
Liber, sulphurei cum per iuga consita Gauri
perque uaporiferi graditur uineta Veseui, 210
cum Venus Actiacis Augusti laeta triumphis
ludere lasciuos fera proelia iussit Amores,
qualia Niliacae classes Latiaeque triremes
subter Apollineae gesserunt Leucados arces,
aut Pompeiani Mylasena pericula belli 215
Euboicae referunt per Auerna sonantia cumbae:
innocuos ratiumpulsus pugnasque iocantes
naumachiae, Siculo qualis spectata Peloro,
caeruleus uiridi reparat sub imagine pontus.

Such displays does Bacchus look down at in the bay at Cumae when he processes over the cultivated ridges of sulphur-bearing Gaurus and over the vineyards of steaming Vesuvius, when Venus, rejoicing in Augustus' triumphs at Actium, has ordered her naughty Cupids to play at fierce battles like those joined by the fleets of the Nile and the triremes of Latium beneath the citadels of Apollo at Leucas, or like the hazards of the Pompeians' engagement off Mylae which Euboean boats re-enact on echoing Avernus: these harmless clashes between ships, and playful engagements of a naval battle like that seen by Sicilian Pelorus, are reflected by the blue 'sea' in a green image.

Ausonius likens contemporary *spectacula* on the Moselle (not, *pace* Green, ordinary river-traffic) to *naumachiae* at Cumae reproducing Octavian's victory at Actium (ll. 208–14) or at Avernus reproducing the defeat of the Pompeians at Mylae (ll. 215–16). The *naumachia* at Cumae (and, by implication, that at Avernus) was strictly for fun (*ludos*, l. 208; *ludere*, l. 212), thus providing a particularly apt comparison for the safe and civilized *naumachiae* staged on the Moselle ('innocuos . . . pulsus pugnasque iocantes', l. 218). The choice of themes from the end of the Civil Wars may suggest that these re-enactments were part of a tradition stretching back to the Augustan age; if so, quite apart from Ausonius' emphasis on playful mimicry,¹¹⁰ we are not dealing with full-scale *naumachiae*, which were exceptional

¹⁰⁸ J. Meshorer, 'Coins of the city of Gadara struck in commemoration of a local naumachia', *Bulletin of the Maritime Museum [Haifa]* 1 (1966), 28–31.

¹⁰⁹ *RE* xiv. 610–13 s.v. Maïumas (Preisendanz-Jacoby), C. Roueché, *Aphrodisias in Late Antiquity* (1989), 73. The name attests aquatic connections (cf. *mai* = 'water', *maïouma* = 'port'). The festival was probably religious in origin and perhaps included nocturnal celebrations and ritual feasting. Libanius associates it with licentiousness (*Ad Timocr.* 16). The superficial resemblance of Titus' aquatic pantomimes ('Leander', 'Nereids') is probably mere coincidence.

¹¹⁰ Harmless, too, are the naval battles which Claudian hopes will form part of the celebrations in the amphitheatre on the occasion of Flavius Manlius Theodorus' assumption of the consulship in A.D. 399 (*Carm.* 17, 331–2): 'lasciui subito confligant aequore lembi / stagnaque remigibus spument inmissa canoris' ('Let ships meet in mock conflict on a hastily improvised ocean and let the water channelled in for the occasion be churned up by the singing oarsmen').

events, costly in both human and material terms, and never predictable as a regular feature in the festive calendar. Defined like this, the ritual to which *naumachiae* approximate most closely is the triumph.

Like a *naumachia*, the occasion of a triumph, with its exotic pageantry, its pomp and ceremony, was the more special for being unpredictable; the interval until the next one could not be calculated like a recurrent festival. Furthermore, a triumph was, at least in part, a religious celebration;¹¹¹ so were the spectacles in the amphitheatre, however hard it may be to recover the evidence.¹¹² It would be rash to assume that a ceremony as extravagant as a *naumachia* was an entirely secular affair (Sextus Pompeius' display may have been sanctioned as a thank-offering from the 'son of Neptune' to his 'father': Dio XLVIII. 19. 1, τοῦ Ποσειδῶνος παῖς); but it is the visible and glamorous elements of a *naumachia* that are most immediately reminiscent of a triumph, and it was precisely on the occasion of a triumph that the earliest *naumachiae* were staged. Rome's first *naumachia* was part of Julius Caesar's triumph in 46 B.C. In 40 B.C. Sextus Pompeius, far from Rome in the Straits of Messina, celebrated his victory over Octavian's fleet with a *naumachia* in which mockery of his opponents was meant to be witnessed by the opposition as well as by his own victorious fleet. Augustus' *naumachia* in 2 B.C. has been variously interpreted: according to the theory first proposed by Sir Ronald Syme it looks forward to Augustus' projected Parthian campaign and portrays Rome as the defender of Hellenistic traditions and the protector of the Greeks;¹¹³ lately Paul Zanker has interpreted it as a retrospective allusion to the Battle of Actium in terms of the victory of the civilized West over the barbaric East.¹¹⁴ The immediate context, the dedication of the temple of Mars Ultor, was a respectable façade for what might be read as Augustus' long-delayed triumph over Mark Antony; as Octavian he had celebrated a triumph over Cleopatra two years after Actium, but there was no sanction for a triumph over a fellow-Roman.

This raises a difficult question: was the outcome of a *naumachia* rigged? The absence of a battle involving Rome may indicate that the outcome was unpredictable; it would not strike the right note for a Roman fleet to be defeated. Furthermore, these displays were a matter of life and death for the participants, whose survival depended on a combination of skill and chance, and spectator satisfaction would be considerably diminished if a foregone conclusion removed the element of suspense. It is hard to know how to interpret Dio's notice about the outcome of Augustus' 'Salamis' (LV. 10. 7):

ναυμαχία . . . Περσῶν καὶ Ἀθηναίων ἐποιήθη· ταῦτα γὰρ τὰ ὀνόματα τοῖς ναυμαχοῦσιν ἐτέθη, καὶ ἐνίκων καὶ τότε οἱ Ἀθηναῖοι.

A naval battle . . . was staged between the Persians and the Athenians; for these were the names given to the combatants, and on this occasion too the Athenians won.

I have suggested before¹¹⁵ that Dio may have regarded the outcome as coincidental, though equally his remark could be a neutral comment merely recording the result. Since the staging of *naumachiae* manifestly did not always follow the course of history (cf. Titus' storming of Ortygia), imperialist sympathies may have determined which battles were chosen and how they turned out: if the Romans saw a parallel between their own role and that of fifth-century Athens, then their 'Salamis' had to endorse the known course of history, whereas their 'Syracuse' had to subvert it. If the outcome is known in advance, the suspense is shifted from 'winning' (which is where the emphasis would be in a primarily competitive encounter) to 'performing'; rigging might be done very subtly, as with Anicetus' arrangements to capsize Agrippina's boat in the Bay of Naples (Tac., *Ann.* XIV. 3. 6), and the uncertainty of how and when the inevitable outcome would be reached can only have enhanced the excitement of the battle.

¹¹¹ For a recent overview, see E. Künzl, *Der römische Triumph* (1988), 85–108.

¹¹² M. Le Glay, 'Les amphithéâtres: loci religiosi?', in C. Dometguy, C. Landes, and J.-M. Pailler (eds), *Spectacula-I. Gladiateurs et amphithéâtres* (1990), 217–29.

¹¹³ R. Syme, 'The crisis of 2 B.C.', *SBAW* 1974, 3–34, at 15 = *Roman Papers* III (1984), 912–36, at 922; G. Bowersock, 'Augustus and the east: the problem of the

succession', in F. Millar and E. Segal (eds), *Caesar Augustus. Seven Aspects* (1984), 169–88, at 174; C. Nicolet, *L'Inventaire du monde. Géographie et politique aux origines de l'empire romain* (1988), 64; Coarelli 1992, 54.

¹¹⁴ P. Zanker, *Augustus und die Macht der Bilder* (1987), 89.

¹¹⁵ Coleman 1990, 71.

We cannot hope to recover precisely what the spectators thought they were seeing, but the more detailed and spectacular the staging, the more likely they were to have accepted its authenticity. Another factor is the conflation of an event that is known to have happened in the past with a display that can be seen to be happening in the present. The emperor was advertising an achievement somewhat analogous to the claims made by makers of early historical feature-films, who asserted that their cinema-audiences would 'actually see what happened . . . be present at the making of history';¹¹⁶ the filter of the present was not in any sense perceived as distorting the authenticity of what was portrayed. The novelty of the genre engenders a naïve belief in it; the main thing is that the ambience should be right. The crucial distinction between early cinema-audiences and the Roman spectators at *naumachiae* is that the Romans were not being duped by the violence and bloodshed; in that sense, the historical re-enactment was not 'put on' but real. When Nero staged 'Pasiphae' in the arena, the majority of the spectators thought that the bull was actually coupling with a woman inside the wooden heifer (Suet., *Nero* 12. 2); to the extent that historical realism was not bounded by conventions respected today (and despite Suetonius' patronizing tone), their attitude was not so much credulous as reasonable. Credulity depends on hearsay;¹¹⁷ seeing is believing.

What is important here is the actuality of the replica, comparable to the realism of the *damnationes* enacted in mythological contexts in the arena.¹¹⁸ Throughout this discussion I have avoided calling *naumachiae* 'mock' naval battles because, although these conflicts were not taking place in an actual theatre of war, they were in grim earnest in the sense that people were meant to get killed. The glamour of these rare occasions is the more striking when we juxtapose them with instances in which naval battles were staged as purely symbolic re-enactments. Our sources usually make it plain when naval engagements were staged as pure pageantry: such is the earliest attested usage of the term *naumachia*, where the sport it describes is put on the same level as a board-game (Lucil. 457–8 M.): 'naumachiam licet haec, inquam, aluelumque putare, / et calces. delectes te hilo non rectius uiuas' ('I tell you, you ought to place such occupations on the same plane as a *naumachia* and a game of draughts. You may enjoy yourself, but you won't live a morally better life'). This *naumachia* may have been a rowing contest, a Greek practice first attested before the Sicilian expedition in the Peloponnesian War (Thuc. vi. 32. 2) and adopted by the Romans in their preparations for the first war with Carthage (cf. Servius on Virg., *Aen.* v. 114, 'prima pares ineunt grauibus certamine remis'); the old Greek term νεῶν ἄμιλλα has been replaced by the Hellenistic expression ναυμαχία.¹¹⁹ (The alternative explanation is to equate Lucilius' expression with a sham naval engagement such as Scipio is alleged to have conducted before he set out for Carthage (Liv. xxix. 22); but it is difficult to see how a battle could be simulated without risk of damage to the vessels, if not loss of life.¹²⁰) It is in contrast to innocuous sports of this type that our sources — particularly in prose — stress the life-and-death element in *naumachiae*: while the Roman historians record the statistics of which Augustus and his successors boasted (vessels deployed, casualties achieved), poetic sophistication and panegyric propriety permit Martial the merest of urbane allusions, elegantly clothed in the guise of a mythological conceit, 'parat saeuis ratibus fera proelia Nereus' (*Spect.* 28. 7); but, unquestionably, the acclaim of posterity is guaranteed: 'hanc norint unam saecula naumachiam' (28. 12).

Just as the emperor re-enacts the great sea-battles of the remote Greek past, so he recreates myth: Leander actually swims in front of the spectators' eyes, and the cabaret artistes in an aquatic pantomime, naturally, are Nereids. Without going so far as to claim that the Romans could not distinguish myth from history, I believe that the evidence of the aquatic

¹¹⁶ D. W. Griffith, director of *The Birth of a Nation*, a film about early American history produced in 1914; quoted by P. Sorlin, *The Film in History* (1980), ix. The comparison between this attitude and the canons of ancient historiography was originally made by A. J. Woodman, *Rhetoric in Ancient Historiography* (1988), 207–8.

¹¹⁷ On the credulity of the educated public, see A. Scobie, *More Essays on the Ancient Romance and its Heritage* (1973), 37. For the related phenomenon of a belief in ghosts (generated partly by a combination of superstitious beliefs and misleading sense-impressions),

see J. Winkler, 'Lollianos and the desperadoes', *JHS* 100 (1980), 155–81, at 160–5.

¹¹⁸ Coleman 1990, 68.

¹¹⁹ E. Norden, *Ennius und Vergilius. Kriegsbilder aus Roms grosser Zeit* (1915), 166.

¹²⁰ For the theory of a practice-battle, see P. Gardner, 'Boat-races among the Greeks', *JHS* 2 (1881), 90–7, who argues that Servius mistook the battle for a race. He accounts for the Greek term *naumachia* by postulating that practice-routines for a naval battle may have been Greek in origin, if Livy (xxxv. 26) is correct in ascribing them also to Nabis, tyrant of Sparta.

displays suggests that the classical age of Greece was sufficiently remote from imperial Rome for the actual and the mythical past to be accorded equal status in the popular imagination. The emperor who reversed the fate of mythological heroes and turned back the course of history, whose technology could change land into sea and back again, for whom horses and bulls walked on water and the nymphs of Ocean swam in synchronized obedience, at whose behest the great navies of the past clashed once more, and by whom thousands of superfluous foreigners were despatched in a single extravagant display: this was the heir of Rome's new dynasty, destined for apotheosis, 'amor ac deliciae generis humani'.

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