



**Mansoura University**  
**Faculty of Tourism and Hotels**

**CIRCUS ACTIVITIES IN EGYPT DURING THE ROMAN AND BYZANTINE  
PERIOD; AN ASPECT OF ENTERTAINMENT AND HERITAGE**

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### أنشطة السيرك في مصر خلال العصر الروماني والبيزنطي؛ جانب من الترفيه والتراث

السيرك هو أحد أشكال الترفيه في مصر الروماني والبيزنطية وكان يضم العديد من البرامج المختلفة التي يتم تقديمها بداخله. وهو مبنى أستخدم من الرومان لسباقات العربات وغيرها من وسائل التسلية مثل؛ التمثيل الإيمائي والعروض المسرحية. قدمت البرديات معلومات حول موقع السيرك في مصر الرومانية والبيزنطية (مثل الإسكندرية، أرسينوي، هيراكليوبوليس ماجنا، أوكسيرينخوس، تبتينيس، أنتينوبوليس، ممفيس). على سبيل المثال، تم ذكر برامج السيرك ضمن مجموعة البرديات في أوكسيرينخوس. وفقًا لهذه البردية، فإن سيرك أوكسيرينخوس كان يضم ستة سباقات تتخللها عروض أخرى؛ صيد الحيوانات "الكلاب والغزلان" وغناء الراقصين على الحبال والتمثيل الصامت ومجموعة من الرياضيين. العروض المدرجة في هذه البرامج كان لها أصول رومانية.

يتناول هذا البحث السيرك وأهميته في مصر خلال العصر الروماني والبيزنطي ويتتبع تأثير عروض سيرك روما والقسطنطينية عليه. تركز الدراسة على الأماكن التي أقيمت فيها العروض وعلى البرامج التفصيلية للسيرك من ألعاب رياضية وعروض فنية بالإضافة إلى الألعاب المبهجة فيه. كما اعتمد البحث على الأدلة السردية والبرديات لتتبع وجود وتطور ومراكز عروض السيرك في مصر الرومانية والبيزنطية. يدرس البحث تمثيل ألعاب السيرك والعروض الفنية من خلال قطع فنية؛ المصابيح والعملات المعدنية. تهدف الدراسة إلى إبراز أماكن ألعاب السيرك، والقائمين عليها، والمشاهدين والمشجعين، وأهمية ألعاب السيرك للمجتمع المصري خلال العصر الروماني.

الكلمات الدالة : السيرك، الألعاب، العروض ، البرامج، العصر الروماني، مصر.

## Circus Activities in Egypt during the Roman and Byzantine Period; An Aspect of Entertainment and Heritage

### Abstract

Circus is a form of entertainment that features many different spectacular programs that were staged in it. It is a building used by the Romans for chariot races and other amusements such as; street parades, sideshows, pantomimes, and theatrical presentations. Papyri provided information about the location of circus buildings in Roman and byzantine Egypt (e.g. Alexandria, Arsinoe, Heracleopolis Magna, Oxyrhynchus, tebtynis, Antinoopolis, Memphis). For instance, circus programme was mentioned among the papyrus collection at Oxyrhynchus. According to this papyrus, this circus of Oxyrhynchus included six races interspersed with other spectacles; an animal-hunt 'dogs and gazelle', singing rope-dancers, mimes, and a group of athletes. The shows listed in these programmes have their origins in both the gladiatorial and wild beasts.

This research is concerned with the circus in Egypt during the Roman and Byzantine period and traces the effect of the circus performances of Rome and Constantinople on it. The study focuses on the locations where the performances were held and on the detailed programmes of circus comprising athletic games, artistic performances, as well as ephobic games and *Megala Antinoeia* games. Furthermore, the research depended on the narrative and papyrological evidence to trace the existence, development and centres of circus performances in Roman and Byzantine Egypt. The paper studies the representation of circus games and artistic shows through pieces of art; lamps, coins, and tomb scenes. The study approaches to explore circus games' activity and setting, their star performers, their spectators and fans, and the importance of the circus games for Egyptian society during the Roman period.

**Keywords:** Circus, Games, shows, performances, programmes, Roman period, Egypt.

### INTRODUCTION:

The Circus κίρκος<sup>(1)</sup> is a structure of theatrical leisure that points many different spectacular programs that were staged in it.<sup>(2)</sup> It is a building

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(1) Liddell, H., Scott, R., A Greek-English Lexicon: <http://www.perseus.tufts.edu/hopper/text?doc=Perseus:text:1999.04.0057:entry=ki/rkos>

(2) Bell, S., (2014), 'Roman chariot racing: charioteers, factions, spectators', in P. Christesen and D.G. Kyle (eds), *A companion to sport and spectacle in Greek and Roman antiquity*, Chichester, 493

used by the Romans for chariot races and other amusements.<sup>(3)</sup> Its name is derived from the circuit made by way of capacity of the racing chariots.<sup>(4)</sup> Circus acts often perform in a circle, or ring, with the audience sitting in tiers of seats on all sides.<sup>(5)</sup>

Specific games were presented in Roman circus as a method of entertaining the masses, and as the spectacles (*spectacula*) continued to grow in popularity, they also grew in scale, with elite citizens funding them to reinforce their status and to gain popular support in politics.<sup>(6)</sup> In Roman time, circuses offered additional attractions such as; street parades, sideshows, pantomimes, and theatrical presentations. The circus today has a similar programme like the late Roman period program such as tight-rope walkers, stilt-walkers and gymnasts or tumblers, and mimes.<sup>(7)</sup>

Many structures were associated with the circus shows in Roman and byzantine Egypt, such as; the Circus, the Hippodrome and the Amphitheatre. Also, Papyri provided information about the location of circus buildings in Roman and byzantine Egypt (e.g. Alexandria, Arsinoe, Heracleopolis Magna, Oxyrhynchus, tebtynis, Antinoopolis, Memphis ... etc)<sup>(8)</sup>

Suetonius indicates that Augustus arranged a complete classification of the spectators and reserved the podium for persons of high rank, and allotted special seats to soldiers, married plebeians, boys and their *paedagogi*, women, etc.<sup>(9)</sup> The fact that men and women sat together in the Circus had been one of its peculiarities as a place of amusement. Cushions (*pulvini*) were used, especially by ladies, on the hard marble seats, and footstools (*scabella*) were sometimes introduced.<sup>(10)</sup>

### **Circus Programmes in Roman and byzantine Egypt:**

The Papyri dating to the byzantine Period shows the programmes of the circus during the sixth-century.<sup>(11)</sup> This circus programme found among the

(3) Peck, H., (1898), *Harper's Dictionary of Classical Literature and Antiquities*, New York: Cooper Square Publishers ,350.

(4) Varro, *Lingua Latina* V,153

(5) Bell, S., (2020), "Horse Racing in Imperial Rome: Athletic Competition, Equine Performance, and Urban Spectacle," *The International Journal of the History of Sport* 37(3-4),184.

(6) Amara, D., (2019), *Spectatorship and Fandom of the Roman Chariot Races*, Phd. Thesis, *Classics, McMaster University, Hamilton, Ontario, Canada*,13.

(7) Mountford, M., (2012), *Documentary papyri from Roman And Byzantine Oxyrhynchus*. Phd. Thesis, UCL University College London,128.

(8) Gasiorowski, J., (1931). A Fragment of a Greek Illustrated Papyrus from Antinoë, *The Journal of Egyptian Archaeology* Vol. 17,6.; p. oxy. 43 3135, LL.1-8.; Remijsen, S. (2015).199.

(9) Tranquillus, C. Suetonius. (1889), *Suetonius: The Lives of the Twelve Caesars; An English Translation, Augmented with the Biographies of Contemporary Statesmen, Orators, Poets, and Other Associates*. Alexander Thomson, editor. Medford, MA: Gebbie & Co., 44.

(10) P. Ovidius Naso. (1855), *Ovid's Art of Love (in three Books), the Remedy of Love, the Art of Beauty, the Court of Love, the History of Love, and Amours*, ed. Anne Mahoney. New York: Calvin Blanchard, 160-162.

(11) W. B. Henry, P. I. Parsons et al. (2014). *The Oxyrhynchus Papyri LXXIV Graeco-Roman Memoirs 100* London. 183-184 186. Said M., Shalaby, N., (2019), "Recreation in Graeco-Roman Egypt." *International Academic Journal Faculty of Tourism and Hotel Management* 5 (1), 92.

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papyrus collection at Oxyrhynchus, gives a sense of the variety of events offered in the circus.<sup>(12)</sup> Mixed programmes of theatrical and athletic entertainment were well established.<sup>(13)</sup> The shows listed in these programmes have their origins in both the gladiatorial and wild beast (*venationes*) shows of imperial Rome and the Panhellenic festivals of classical and Hellenistic Greece.<sup>(14)</sup> Gladiatorial contests, which had become less popular over time, then became prohibited by the fourth century edict of Theodosius II in 438 A.D.<sup>(15)</sup>

At the end of the 5th century, the custom of throwing people to the animals (*condemnatio ad bestias*) was prohibited by Anastasius. Wild beast hunts (*venationes*) and shows of dogs and gazelle hunt continued but in rare scale.<sup>(16)</sup> As the artistic shows varied at the fifth and sixth centuries due to the increase of costs, races were interspersed with other entertainments such as mimes, acrobats and singers which continued the tradition of musical displays and contests that took place alongside the track and field events in the ancient Panhellenic festivals and their later equivalents.<sup>(17)</sup> According to the Papyri documents which mention that there were what we would today call “circus” entertainments, without chariot racing, even if the location had a hippodrome, because it is much cheaper to do the programme without chariot racing<sup>(18)</sup>

**Table (1): List of Circus Programmes Papyrus from Oxyrhynchus:**

<b>Papyri documents: Circus Programmes</b>	<b>Text in Greek</b>	<b>Translation</b>	<b>Date</b>
<b>P. Oxy. LXXIX 5216</b>	1 μ[ι]μων 2 ἄθλον 3 μῖμον 4 ἀβλατον 5 ἄθλο]ν	“ <i>Mime</i> <i>Race or chariot contest</i> <i>Mime</i> ????? <i>Race or chariot contest</i> ”	<b>5th to 6th century.</b>
.	Ⲫ Ⲁⲓⲁⲓⲛⲓⲧⲱⲕⲉ ⲛⲓⲕⲁⲓ ⲁ ⲙⲓⲥⲥⲟⲥ ⲓⲛⲓⲟⲕⲱⲛ	<i>For good fortune.</i> <i>Victories(?).</i> <i>1st chariot race.</i> <i>Procession.</i>	<b>6th century.</b>

(12) Futrell, A. (2006). Chariot Races and Water Shows. Chapter in: *The Roman Games: Historical Sources in Translation*, Wiley-Blackwell, 198.

(13) Jory, E.J. (1986). “Continuity and Change in the Roman Theatre,” in Betts, Hooker, and Oren, edd., *Studies in Honour of T.B.L. Webster* (Bristol), 143-52

(14) Mountford, M.(2012),128.

(15) Rouché C. (1993). *Performers and Partisans at Aphrodisias in the Roman and Late Roman Periods*. London, 25-28; Liebeschuetz, J., (2001). *Decline and Fall of the Roman City*, Oxford, 204-205

(16) Mountford, M. (2012),128.

(17) Mountford, M. (2012),129.

(18) Mountford, M. (2012),134.

P.Oxy.XXXIV 2707	<p>πομπή                      5καλοπ[α]ῖ[κτα]ι                      βοκ[άλιοι]                      β[μί]σσο[ς] ἡνιόχ[ων]                      1ο ἰκαλοπαῖται βοκάλιοι                      γ[μί]σσο[ς] ἡνιόχων                      δόρκος καὶ κύνες                      10δ μίσσο[ς] ἡνιόχων                      μῖμοι                      ε[μί]σσο[ς] ἡνιόχων                      ξυστός                      ς[μί]σσο[ς] ἡνιόχων                      15(hand 2) διεντύχει</p>	<p>Singing rope-dancers.                      2nd chariot race.                      The singing rope                      dancers                      3rd chariot race.                      Gazelle and hounds.                      4th chariot race.                      Mimes.                      5th chariot race.                      Troupe of athletes.                      6th chariot race.                      (2nd hand) 'Farewell.'<sup>19)</sup></p>	
P.Oxy.LXXIX.5215	<p>1 μῖμος                      2 βοκάλιοι                      3 γυροπασί[                      4 ἡθολόγοι</p>	<p>"Mime.                      Vocalists.                      Dancer with hoop?                      Mimics"</p>	6th century.

**Based on (Table. 1), following points could be concluded:**

- This table is showing the papyri related to the circus Programme from oxyrhynchus, where they commence with an invocation to good fortune and some form of display or shout of victory, so the use of ἀγαθῆ τύχῃ 'For good fortune' at the start of a programme was customary in pre-Christian times, when Tyche was thought to be a goddess of fortune of the city, possibly because the activities were dangerous or involved betting, and the tradition has continued later in Christian times but the victory was separated from the procession. Also there was a procession taking place before the first event. The procession was typical opening elements of *ludi circenses*.<sup>(20)</sup>
- The first part of the programme was followed by chariot races or that there were no chariot races and only other entertainments.
- These circus programmes from Oxyrhynchus included six races interspersed with other spectacles: an animal-hunt 'dogs and gazelle', singing rope-dancers, mimes, and a group of *athlete ξυστός*.<sup>(21)</sup> Venations might be presented between chariot

(19) Mountford, M. (2012),136

(20) Mountford, M. (2012),134

(21) P.Oxy. 2707; P.Oxy.LXXIX.5217, P.Oxy.LXXIX.5218 : <https://papyri.info/ddbdp/p.oxy;79;5217,5218> ;Cameron,A.,(1976). *Circus Factions: Blues and Greens at Rome and Byzantium*, Oxford: Oxford University Press.213

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races<sup>(22)</sup> some kind of ceremony involving Victories opened the games<sup>(23)</sup> and may be the statues of Victories were carried and placed at the finishing line. The programme on this sixth century race day shows without any doubts how the circus in Egypt was influenced by the circuses of Rome and Constantinople.<sup>(24)</sup> The performances are similar to the performances at Constantinople.<sup>(25)</sup>

### **Circus Performances**

#### **Clowns**

Clowns are artists who played different collection of tragic and comic performances. They can be funny, sad, clumsy or coordinated, witty or dumb; they used masks to depict the character they are performing such as the glutton, the knave and the fool.<sup>(26)</sup> The earliest Records go back to Ancient Egypt.<sup>(27)</sup>

The Ancient Egyptians were fond of keeping the so-called “Dangas” who African Pygmies. They functioned as a sort of amusement in the royal court. The fore mentioned, used to cover their bodies with leopard skins, as well as their faces with exotic masks. Therefore, while dancing, they typically imitated certain Egyptian deities, for instance; “Bes”, the God of Dance and Battle. However, Ancient Greece also were famed of having clowns, who used to wear “Chiton” which were apparently patterned short tunics, as well as, tight socks, and extraordinary unreal phallus strapped around their waists.<sup>(28)</sup>

Concerning Ancient Rome, it had numerous types of clowns, one of which is the so-called “Sannio”, who was well-known and popular, he had the ability to get the attention of the audience with his body and funny face-grimaces.<sup>(29)</sup> “Stupidus” is another type of clowns, the Latin nomination of which the word (stupid) is derived, it gives the meaning for “mimic fool”. As for his appearance, he had bald head, a long-pointed cap and a polychrome dress. He had the ability to make fun of the serious actor. “Stupidus” was also popular for his allusions, and puzzle-making, as well as destroying his fellow performers in the comical battles in a slapstick way. In

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(22) P.Oxy. 2707

(23) Humphrey,J.,(1986). *Roman Circuses: Arenas for Chariot Racing* .Berkeley: University of California Press, 518.

(24) Humphrey,J.,(1986),519.

(25) Humphrey,J.,(1986) ,p.518

(26) Simon, E., (2009), *The Art of Clowning* Palgrave Macmillan A

(27) Mucusker,S.,(2023). *Pedagogy of the Clown Clowning Principles in Education* , 14

(28) Nilsson A , Nilsen,D.,(2019).

(29) Chisholm,H.,(2015),*The Encyclopædia Britannica: A Dictionary of Arts, Sciences and general literature*, vol.VII, Palala Press,418.



addition, he used the current scandals as material of performing, and nothing could prevent his humour, even though a sacred one.

Another minor form of clowns was called "Scurra", of which the word "scurrilous" is derived. Scurra was heavily jesting, and was different for his physical oddities comparing to his fellows. Nonetheless, other types were known, such as Moriones (moron), as well as Stulti and Fa.<sup>(30)</sup>

Eventually these characters became traditional figures in the circus, theatre and other performing arts, for example the comedic art.<sup>(31)</sup>

Normally, buffoons mocked situations from daily life. In Byzantine period the buffoon was known as the kordax dancer or the gelōtopoios (laughter maker). He performed suggestive dance by rotating his buttocks and abdomen, sometimes bending forward at the hips, might also hop, as if his feet were tied together, or leap into the air, or simply wiggle. His dance moves are similar to the 'bumps and grinds' of dancers in modern-day burlesque theatre.<sup>(32)</sup>

In the Coptic Museum in Old Cairo a clown is depicted on wooden relief. It shows a unique troupe of music, and a clown-like figure. On the far borders of the scene, the extremely smiling jester is portrayed while being positioned on a dome that surmounts a niche while slightly bending backwards. The latter holds a cord in the hand (fig.1).<sup>(33)</sup>

### Rope Dancing

Funambulist (καλοβάτης, σχοινοβάτης), a rope - dancer.<sup>(34)</sup> Rope dancing is one of the performances of the circus<sup>(35)</sup> in Egypt during the Byzantine period. It is the art of dancing on the tight rope which was carried by the Romans with great perfection.<sup>(36)</sup> At the end of the performance the dancer ran down the rope.<sup>(37)</sup> From excavations it was noticed that the performers were principally Greeks who were representing imaginary beings. They are exhibited holding thyrsus, double pipe, lyre and pouring wine. They all have been wearing caps for protection from falling (fig.2). Due to the falling accidents emperor Antoninus ordered feather beds (*culcitrās*) to be laid

(30) Percy, R., Timbs, J. (1840), *The Mirror of Literature, Amusement, and Instruction*, Vol. XXXV, London, 24.

(31) Simon, E., (2009), 4.

(32) Hanna, E., (2019). "Gliding Steps": Dance As A Performing Art In Late Antique Egypt, *International Journal of Tourism and Hospitality Management*, Volume 3, No. 1, 49.

(33) Hanna, E., (2019), 48.

(34) Smith, W., (1842). *A Dictionary of Greek and Roman Antiquities*, Ed. by W. Smith, Oxford University, 434.

(35) Evans, W., (1863). *Flowers of fable: a collection of choice fables in verse*. Kessinger Publishing LLC, London, 92.

(36) (1912). *The Hundred Riddles of Symphosius*, ed. and trans. by Elizabeth Wickham de Bois. Woodstock Vermont: The Elm Tree Press.

(37) Terence, (1899). *The Comedies of Terence: And the Fables of Phaedrus*, trans. by Henry Thomas Riley, Christopher Smart, London, Ver. 34, 259.

under the rope. Emperor Galba was establishing a display where elephants walked across ropes in front of the Roman public.<sup>(38)</sup>

### Mimes and Pantomimes

Both pantomime and mime performances were originally presented as entertainments alongside the competitive sections at the sacred contests which provided the framework for all public entertainments in the Greek world.<sup>(39)</sup>

Revealing the importance of the circus in Egypt during the Roman period are the numerous figurines of actors<sup>(40)</sup> (fig. 3) and the different kinds of theatrical masks that were found dating to the Roman period (fig.4) Also, the statuettes of caricature actors(fig.5) reflect the popularity of the mime in that period.<sup>(41)</sup>

Mimes are the common element in the entire circus papyri programme dating to the sixth century. It is mentioned by the general word μῖμος which means a comic actor, often one who imitated or parodied his subjects.<sup>(42)</sup> At byzantine times there was a specific type of mime who mimics or impersonates Christian figures and it was called ἠθολόγοι. A papyrus describes a person who makes people laugh as if he is a ἠθολόγος or a θαυματοποιός (a mimic or a conjuror/ stuntman).<sup>(43)</sup> Mime performers are explicitly identified as dancers.<sup>(44)</sup> Mimes performed in groups (fig.6), both of men and women, and used words and music to present scenes which were often comic, and sometimes encompassed tragic subjects.<sup>(45)</sup> Pantomime revolved around Greek mythology.<sup>(46)</sup> Pantomime usually depicted holding several masks, each representing a distinct character. According to Lucian, a pantomime dancer was said to have five masks laid out, one for each act of the drama (fig.7).<sup>(47)</sup>

Mime plays were taken from daily life scenarios.<sup>(48)</sup> These kinds of entertainments were so popular in the Roman period.<sup>(49)</sup> In the Theatre and

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(38) Shelton, Jo-Ann.,(2004). "Dancing and Dying: The Display of Elephants in Ancient Roman Arenas", *Daimonopylai* ,381.

(39) Rouché C. (1993).123.

(40) Mango, C. (1981). 'Daily life in Byzantium' *JOB* 31.1 , 337-53

(41) Said ,M., Shalaby, N., (2019),85.

(42) Mountford, M. (2012), 138.

(43) P. Oxy. 70 5212. P. Oxy. 3 413 <https://www.ancient.eu/article/440ACTION/1048Bookman?Book-P.Oxy.-%26%26Num=413&Side=443>

(44) Trapp, T. A. C. and Bassani, E. eds (2020). *A Companion to Ancient Greek and Roman Music*. Blackwell Companions to the Ancient World. Hoboken, New Jersey: John Wiley & Sons. 146.

(45) Rouché C. (1993).

(46) Hanna , E., (2019).50.

(47) Lucian. (1972). "On the Dance." In Works, edited by A. M. Harmon, vol. 5, 210–89. Loeb Classical Library 302. Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press.

(48) Hanna , E., (2019).50.

Odeon, as at other sites, there is relatively little space provided for the use of the performers. In the Theatre, there were probably rooms, and there were chambers at the back of the stage.<sup>(50)</sup> In sixth century Egypt, there is apparent evidence for an organization of mimes separate from the factions.<sup>(51)</sup> As for the mimes and other artists, they may have been competing rather than just performing. Mimes, actors and other travelling theatrical entertainers had organised themselves and represented by synods or guild since the fourth century BC.<sup>(52)</sup> Pantomime was a form of mime.<sup>(53)</sup>

An *Oxyrhynchus* papyrus no 2707, dated back to 552 AD, lists a circus program for a racing day in Oxyrhynchus in which the first race is followed by an exciting procession of dancers who have different ways each day they participate<sup>(54)</sup>, Dionysius of Halicarnassus described their movements in a procession:

*'The contestants were followed by numerous bands of dancers arranged in three divisions, the first consisting of men, the second of youths, and the third of boys. These were accompanied by flute-players, who used ancient flutes that were small and short, as is done even to this day, and by lyre-players, who plucked ivory lyres of seven strings and the instruments called barbata. The use of these has ceased in my time among the Greeks, though traditional with them, but is preserved by 348 the Romans in all their ancient sacrificial ceremonies. The dancers were dressed in scarlet tunics girded with bronze cinctures, wore swords suspended at their sides, and carried spears of shorter than average length; the men also had bronze helmets adorned with conspicuous crests and plumes. Each group was led by one man who gave the figures of the dance to the rest, taking the lead in representing their warlike and rapid movements, usually in the procelesmatic rhythms.'*<sup>(55)</sup>

### **The Circus Games during the Graeco-Roman period:**

The entertainments listed in circus programmes include some Circus Games. They grew in popularity in the fourth century.<sup>(56)</sup> Games are fundamental

(49) Rouché C. (1993).

(50) Rouché C. (1993).15.

(51) P.Oxy. 2480, line 43, with J. Gascou, J.(1976). 'Les institutions de l'Hippodrome en Egypte', *BIFAO* 76.194.

(52) Mountford, M. (2012).128.

(53) JORY, J., (2001). 'Some cases of mistaken identity? Pantomime masks and their context', *Bulletin of the Institute of Classical Studies* 45, Oxford University Press.2.

(54) Toepfer, K., (2019). *Pantomime: The History and Metamorphosis of a Theatrical Ideology*, San Francisco, California: Vosuri Media, 348.

(55) *Dionysius's Roman Antiquities* VII, chapter.72, 1940, 365-367.

(56) Gamed,competitors ,204

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and entertainment aspects of the daily life of the Greek polis<sup>(57)</sup>, during the second and early third century, bouletic elites organised games centred on the theatre and hippodrome.<sup>(58)</sup>

**Horse Racing:**

For horse racing, only three texts from the sixth century mentioned them where they had alterations with other shows such as acrobats, actors, staged hunt and demonstrations matches of athletes.<sup>(59)</sup> A circus horse could also be the focus of the image on small objects. The disk of a first century CE lamp depicts a circus victory procession in which the central figure is a horse, likely the lead horse from the winning team (fig.8).<sup>(60)</sup>

**Chariot Racing:**

Chariot racing was one of the most popular games in Greek, Roman and Byzantine periods.<sup>(61)</sup> The sport of chariot racing was an integral part of public entertainment that engrossed the majority of the population, with popularity so great that it pervaded society and politics. Chariots racing were a group of charioteers raced against each other counter clockwise in chariots (fig.9)<sup>(62)</sup> of two -horse (*biga*) (fig.9A)<sup>(63)</sup> or four horses (*quadriae*) (fig.9b) which used to be held in a circus, hippodrome and theatre.<sup>(64)</sup>

There are many papyri prove that the chariot racing were used in the circus of Alexandria, also prove of existence of them in other towns such as Oxyrhynchus, Antinoopolis, Herakleopolis, Memphis and Tebtynis. Chariot races were very important at the circus in Alexandria and this was touched by several ancient passages. In times of Trajan, Dio Chrysostom in his speech said that circus-games of all kinds including chariot-races, were an important factor in Roman Alexandria.<sup>(65)</sup>

Chariot-racing is attested in Oxyrhynchus from the foundation of the Capitoline Games there in 273 A.D.<sup>(66)</sup> which was the Greek style racing at festivals<sup>(67)</sup>, and this proved by a papyrus from oxyrhynchus dating Probably to 273/274A.D, mentioning a charioteer's work contract in which the

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(57) Abdelwahed, Y. (2012). "Egyptian cultural identity in the architecture of Roman Egypt (30 BC-AD 325)." Thesis, Durham University, 74.

(58) Abdelwahed, Y. (2012).91.

(59) Remijsen, S. (2015).*The End of Greek Athletics in Late Antiquity*. Cambridge.128

(60) Amanda, D.,(2019),213

(61) Woolf,G.(2003), *The Cambridge Illustrated History of the Roman World*, Cambridge University Press,161.

(62) Amanda, D.,(2019),1.

(63) p.Oxy, 43, 3116, LL 12-13 in: <https://papyri.info/ddbdp/p.oxy;43;3116>

(64) Bell, S; Willekes,C."Horse Racing and Chariot Racing". chapter 27 *In The Oxford Handbook of Animals in Classical Thought and Life*, edited by G. Campbell, Oxford: Oxford University Press (invited contribution),483.

(65) Gąsiorowski, J., (1931).A Fragment of a Greek Illustrated Papyrus from Antinoë, *The Journal of Egyptian Archaeology* Vol. 17,6

(66) Humphrey,J.,(1986),516

(67) p.oxy. 43 3135, LL.1-8. In : <https://papyri.info/ddbdp/p.oxy;43;3135>

charioteer ἠνίοχος, a citizen of Hermopolis undertakes to drive the horses of a gymnasiarch γυμνασίαρχος from oxyrhynchus at the local kapitolia.<sup>(68)</sup> Another Receipt showing that the banker Anastasius has paid one solidus less 4 keratia for an embrocation needed by the horses of the public circus on the side of the Greens', and 1/3 solidus less 1 1/2 keratia for expenses.<sup>(69)</sup> So these papyri from Oxyrhynchus prove the existence of Circuses in that town in the sixth and seventh centuries A.D.<sup>(70)</sup> The hippodrome at Oxyrhynchus possessed starting gates at 614 AD and this proved by a papyrus document which mentions two starters (aphetai) who attended to the horses of the blue faction.<sup>(71)</sup>

There was a circus in Antinoe too, where artists could see all kinds of games, and among them chariot races.<sup>(72)</sup> A native of Hermopolis called Theopanes mentioned in his archive about some domestic accounts concerning wine and have a reference of payment to charioteers, this is great evidence that the charioteers have lived in the city of Hermopolis.<sup>(73)</sup>

At Memphis there was evidence in a papyrus for charioteers. This was proved by a private letter dating to the third century A.D. entrusted with its delivery charioteer was travelling to see of games.

At Fayoum and Antinopolis there was an interest in sporting during the roman period, this was shown in the form of terracotta figurines. Among the types of the figurine are individual charioteers (Fig:10), charioteers in chariots and individual show horses decorated with wreaths. It is unclear whether they were made as souvenirs for specific festivals or that they have references to any games or hippodrome.<sup>(74)</sup>

there were two letters dating to the third or fourth century sent from the Fayoum by charioteer named Xenos to his trainer mentioning the charioteer's costume which included breast protectors, felt straps or fasciae (presumably to be tied around the body) and a felt cap.<sup>(75)</sup>

A papyrus fragment was discovered at Antinoe (fig.11) and dates back to 500 A.D. The fragmentary painting depicts a group of six charioteers.<sup>(76)</sup> They are perhaps only part of a larger group, and standing

(68) p.oxy. 43 3135, LL.1-8.

(69) Gąsiorowski, J., (1931)6.; P.Oxy. 1 145 , A.D 552

(70) Abdou, I., (2021). A List of Payments for Rent and Tax, *Classical Papers, vol. xviii*,25.

(71) P.Oxy, 1 152.

(72) Gąsiorowski, J., (1931).7

(73) Humphrey, J., (1986), 519.

(74) Humphrey, J., (1986), 520.

(75) P.Oxy. 31.2598. LL.1-6.

(76) Gąsiorowski, J., (1931).1

**— Circus Activities in Egypt during the Roman and Byzantine Period; An Aspect of Entertainment and Heritage —**

roughly arranged in two rows.<sup>(77)</sup> Three of them standing in the frontline, each is slightly further back than his companion to the left, The colours of their knee length tunics and contrasting shirts indicate membership in Different factions of the hippodrome: Blues (1 man), greens (3 men), red (1 man) and white (the Jockeys). They were greenish helmets with yellow band, yellow belts, and narrow strips wound around the chest for protection against race course accidents. The figure to the right does not wear strips may be an attendant; a sixth driver is -partially visible at the left edge.<sup>(78)</sup> A yellow arch suggests an arcade of the circus. Other possibilities are that it represents the ropes by which the gate of the circus was closed, or the barrier between the spectators and the arena, or perhaps the gate. Four factions were still racing in the sixth century, thought to be the popular standard bearers for different social classes, political allegiances or religious beliefs. Recently, Turner pointed out that this is a fragment from a codex not a roll as had been maintained by previous scholars after he discovered on the verso the beginning of about thirteen lines of writing by the same hand as the writing on the recto. The whole group is drawn in a free Hellenistic style and possesses a charm of its own. There is no necessity that the illustration was made to Antinoopolis itself, but it is likely to be Egyptian and thus matches the other evidence that circus factions were known in Egypt by that date.<sup>(79)</sup>

By the Byzantine period, chariot racing as a part of circus performances maintained in Egypt. There is a Limestone ostracon was discovered at Monastery of St Phoibammon and preserved at the British museum is an obvious textual evidence of incorporating racing into circus shows. The literary Coptic text is written on two sides in a single hand with black ink, with irregular semi-uncial letters written in a careless hand. This text proves the continuation of the chariot racing during the 7th-8th centuries.<sup>(80)</sup>

**Text:**

† ΠΕΤΡΟΣ ΜΗΛΑΝΔΡΕ  
ΛΣ ΜΗΛΙΑΚΟΒΟΣ ΜΝΙ  
ΩΣ ΔΑΝΝΗΣ ΓΕΝΩΘΕΝΕ  
ΦΙΛΛΙΠΠΟΣ ΠΩΗΡΕΠΕ Ν  
ΝΕΟΝΙΟΧΟΣ ΕΥΣΩΡΜ ΘΜ  
ΠΑΒΩΝ ΟΥΡΜΒΕΤΣΑΒΕΠΕ  
ΘΩΜΑΣ ΟΥΛ Ν

**Recto translation:**

"Peter and Andrew and James and John were fishermen. Philip was the son of charioteers and drove in the race and was a man of Betsabe. Thomas, one of....."<sup>(81)</sup>

(78) Gasiorowski, J., (1931), 4-5

(79) Weitzmann, Kurt, ed. (1979). *Age of spirituality: Late antique and early Christian art, third to seventh century : catalogue of the exhibition at the Metropolitan Museum of Art*, New York, 102; <https://libmma.contentdm.oclc.org/digital/collection/p15324coll110/id/155895>

(80) [https://www.britishmuseum.org/collection/object/Y\\_](https://www.britishmuseum.org/collection/object/Y_)

(81) British museum :EA33065 :[https://www.britishmuseum.org/collection/object/Y\\_](https://www.britishmuseum.org/collection/object/Y_)

There were a several funding sources for the races.<sup>(82)</sup> Some funds for the circus came from private sources unrelated to the tax system.<sup>(83)</sup> Another important source of funding for the races was public collections and local taxes; a papyrus contain of short account of money received. The first column represents receipts from various trade guilds and the second gives the results of collections by collectors from several parts of the town. The account is in fact register of money collected by that faction for some kind of circus performances.<sup>(84)</sup> Gascou has demonstrated the increasing "fiscalization" of the financing of entertainments in sixth-century Egypt, where' some taxes were being paid directly towards the financing of spectacles.<sup>(85)</sup>

The Circus employee (administrator 'Προνοητής', Charioteer 'ἠνίοχος', Trainer 'ἀλείπτης', Horse veterinarian, race starter' ἀφέτης', Leather maker, Whipbearer 'ἰππόκομος', Donkey Rider' ὀνηλάτης', Chariot supplier' ἀκόλουθοντ ς τοῖς ἰνίοχοις' and Chariot maker' ἄρματοπηγός') are known from the papyri and the survey list in the public archives.<sup>(86)</sup> To maximize speed and handling, the chariots were extremely light constructions of wood and leather, with a yoke only for the two middle horses; the outer two were only attached to the vehicle by the traces and were thus a bit more manoeuvrable.<sup>(87)</sup> By the 6th century chariot racing was the main competitive "sport" for mass entertainment.<sup>(88)</sup> It continued until at least the 9<sup>th</sup> century but may have been in decline from the 6th and 7<sup>th</sup>.<sup>(89)</sup>

The Charioteer's costume was color-coded in accordance with his faction, which would help distant spectators to keep track of the race's progress. The charioteer wore a short tunic, wrapped with "fasciae" or padded bands to protect the torso, with additional "fasciae" as well around his thighs. A thick leather helmet provided some protection for his head and he carried a "falx," a curved knife, to cut the reins and keep from being dragged in case of accident.<sup>(90)</sup>

(82) Humphrey,J.(1986),518

(83) Mountford, M. (2012),132 ; P. Lond. III 1028

(84) Humphrey,J.(1986),518

(85) Gascou,J.(1976), 185-212.

(86) Abu Al-Hassan, M., (2020). Chariot Racing in Oxyrhynchus during the Roman Period Documentary Study, *Journal of the College of Arabic Language in Itay Al-Baroud vol.35* , 966.

(87) Futrell, A. (2006). P.191

(88) Humphrey,J.(1986),516

(89) Cameron,A. (1973), *Porphyrius the Charioteer*, Oxford ,256-257

(90) Futrell, A. (2006),192

Victory in such races brought considerable tangible benefits to the victor.<sup>(91)</sup> The victory in this game was commemorated on monuments<sup>(92)</sup> Chariot races had some disadvantages like getting Injured and being accused of taking a bribe.<sup>(93)</sup>

### **The Roman Circus Factions**

The word faction (*factio*) means the performers and the professional organizations which employed them. Factions referring to Colours (indicate different teams). The colours served as a helpful visual aid for spectators, particularly those higher up in the stands, to identify the different charioteers despite the distance and dust kicked up from the high speed race<sup>94</sup>The Roman circus factions were supported the different teams They originally four in number (Reds, Whites, Greens and Blues), the Blues (βένετοι or καλλάινοι) and the Greens (πράσινοι) became the most prominent.<sup>(95)</sup>

The factions provided all necessary elements for the event, which included not only the charioteers and their horses but also the service staff and equipment needed to run the races.<sup>(96)</sup> The factions had some sort of alliance, so the Greens and Reds were always paired together, and Blues with Whites, therefore the Greens and Blues became referred to as “the major factions” (Potter 2010, 320). A 6th century papyrus from Antioch shows charioteers in the four Colours<sup>97</sup>. Roueché suggested that possibly the four Colours were maintained in the major urban centres while only the major factions were in less prosperous areas, but all four are depicted in the Antioch papyrus. By the mid sixth century the factions of the greens and the blues dominated the entertainment landscape throughout Egypt.<sup>(98)</sup>

Victorious charioteers (fig.12) were depicted on many monuments holding palm leave in their hands.<sup>(99)</sup> Graffiti (fig.13) from the theatre at Alexandria in the fourth century exactly 315 A.D<sup>(100)</sup> mentions the colours of the factions, although it only related to the charioteers and don't provide any evidence that the theatre entertainers were in colours also, although there are

(91) Humphrey, J., (1986), 516

(92) Abd El-Mohsen, E., (1963). *A Collection of Gems from Egypt in Private Collections. The Journal of Egyptian Archaeology*, Vol. 49 (Dec. 1963), 150. Retrieved from: [www.jstor.org/stable/3855705](http://www.jstor.org/stable/3855705)

(93) p.oxy. 43 3135, LL.1-8.

(94) Mountford, M. (2012), 131.

(95) Mountford, M. (2012), 130

(96) Devitt, Amanda M. (2020), 170

(97) Cameron, A., (1976), 316

(98) Roueché, C. (1993), 47.

(99) Weitzmann, Kurt, ed. (1979). 1104; Langner, M. (2001), *Antike Graffitizeichnungen: Motive, Gestaltung und Bedeutung* (Wiesbaden). 1130-1131

(100) Remijsen, S. (2015), 127; P.Cair.isid.57,58; SEGXXXII 492, 1493, 1498, 1494



areas of the theatre reserved for the faction supporters.<sup>(101)</sup> However, in Hermopolis which mentions (καλλαινων) in 320-325 A.D. but we have no evidence of them in Oxyrhynchus until 552 A.D.<sup>(102)</sup>

At Oxyrhynchus the circus factions didn't play any role in early races, probably introduced in provincial cities in the fifth century and played a major role at the sixth century.<sup>(103)</sup> About the middle or end of the fifth century the circus factions were known at Antinopolis.<sup>(104)</sup>

Circus factions based on the Roman model were introduced in Alexandria sometime between the late 1st and early 4th centuries,<sup>(105)</sup> The existence of factions appear when the Roman were shut up in Alexandria by Amr, there were battles in the streets where the blue faction led by Domentainus the perfect of Fayoum and the green faction were led by Menas the dux, and this proved not only the factions existence but also their strength of public and political importance for as late as the seventh century.<sup>(106)</sup>

There was no evidence in the fourth century that suggests that the factions played a role in the chroa.<sup>(107)</sup> The Blues and the Greens had joined under single organization probably at some point in the 5th century. Maybe it was during the reign of Theodosius II (408-450).<sup>(108)</sup> Roueché thought that the merge of the factions was the natural continuation, and the process was instigated by the performers themselves in which the various guilds of artists and athletes had become part of one world-wide organisation and this change had an imperial support.<sup>(109)</sup>

Regardless of whether there was any formal organization, there were probably a joined performance including racing, athletes and artists in Egypt as early as 320-325.A papyrus shows some payments to a "xystarch" (president of the athletes' association), a flute player, a boxer and cellar master of the Blues.<sup>(110)</sup>

There is a several papyri that documented a close ties between the Apions (the most prominent family in town) family and the organizations of the circus race, also there is evidences in the sixth century that the blue and

(101) Cameron,A.,(1976).316

(102) Mountford, M. (2012),131.

(103) Remijsen, S. (2015).128

(104) Humphrey,J.,(1986),519

(105) Humphrey,J.,(1986),511

(106) Gąsiorowski, J., (1931).6

(107) Remijsen, S. (2015).127

(108) Mountford, M. (2012),130

(109) Roueché,C.(1993),46,57.

(110) Mountford, M. (2012),131

green factions received important material assistance from the Apions.<sup>(111)</sup> This close ties also confirmed by the landlord box in the hippodrome which was restricted to members of Apion family and their invited guests, this box had a doorkeeper who was on the payroll of Apion family.<sup>(112)</sup> Also a papyrus dating to 618 A.D. in which a secretary of the Apions paid the starters of the Blues their wages for a month, this might suggest that the Apions are the patrons or the managers.<sup>(113)</sup> It appears, then, that the Apions provided help for the personnel of both the major factions in the town.<sup>(114)</sup> A papyrus probably dating to 565/566 A.D.<sup>(115)</sup> mentions an account from the records of the Appion family which contains several entries for wine for the horses of the blue faction at festivals. Wine is also allocated to the charioteers and the philitiani”club members” of the blue party. There is some evidence that it may have been used to inject the horses or to massage them.<sup>116</sup> All this support from Apion family financing of the sport hints their desire to bring to their own outpost of the empire games that would have something in common with those provided by the emperors in Constantinople.<sup>(117)</sup>

#### **The Capitoline games:**

The Capitoline games "**καπιτωλιόνικος**" appeared in Egypt ‘Antinopolis’ in 268 A.D. Mainly they were athletic games modelled on the festivals of ancient Greece and held every four years.<sup>(118)</sup> Charioteers from Oxyrhynchus would regularly travel south to Antinoopolis to participate at the Capitoline games.<sup>(119)</sup> "Kapitolia" were also introduced at Oxyrhynchus under Aurelian in 273.<sup>(120)</sup> According to the papyri documents<sup>(121)</sup>, the Capitoline games were held in Oxyrhynchus and Antinoopolis In the begging of Tybi. The charioteer or the owner of the team who won in the Capitoline games was rewarded many prizes which various from taxes exemption and liturgies and this was mentioned in a papyrus from Oxyrhynchus which mentions a charioteer victory in the biga race in the Capitoline games at Antinoopolis in 275/76 A.D. Another papyrus from Oxyrhynchus mentioning a charioteer or

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(111) J. Gasco, (1976), "Les institutions de l'hippodrome en Égypte byzantine", *BIFAO* 76,192-195.

(112) *U. .... I (1086)*,518

(113) P.Oxy XXVII 2480

(114) *U. .... I (1086)*,518

(115) P.Oxy. XVIII 2204

(116) Humphrey,J.,(1986),517

(117) Humphrey,J.,(1986),519

(118) p.Oxy, 47, 3367, P.Oxy. 60 4079 , BGU IV.1074.20-1

(119) Humphrey,J.,(1986),515

(120) p.Oxy, 47, 3367, P.Oxy. 60 4079 ,BGU IV 1074.16, 20

(121) p.Oxy, 43, 3116, LL 12-13; P.Oxy, 47, 3367, L.16.

owner of the team named Aurelius Stephanus won in the 'Dacian' chariot race and it asks that he may be provided with rewards due to his victory.<sup>(122)</sup> These games also included professional artists (e.g. musicians and dancers) were hired from different cities such as Arsinoe, Oxyrhynchus and Hermopolis.<sup>(123)</sup>

#### **Megala Antinoeia Games:**

The *Megala Antinoeia* is the name used in several ancient texts for the sacred games commemorating Antinous. They were held annually starting in 130 A.D., They had included equestrian as well as athletic and rowing races. Megala means that the contest had extra competitions were added to the standard festival. In this case the ephebis Antinoeia seem to have become Megala by the addition of competitions for boys and adult men. The ephebic competition of Antinoopolis was a trendsetter, later two other Egyptian contests were designed after it and called ἱσαντινινοέιοις.<sup>(124)</sup>

The circus at Antinoopolis was built in the second century for this sacred games 'the Megala Antinoeia' and later used for Kapitolia.<sup>125</sup> Early at the late second century, a chariot team called biga for colts won in the isthmian games in the name of the city of Antinoties (or maybe the owner decided to have his victory proclaimed in the name of his home city). Also another citizen of Antinoopolis won a biga event at the same games.<sup>(126)</sup> These games established at Alexandria.<sup>(127)</sup>

#### **Athletic Contests:**

Athletic, equestrian and artistic competitions (agones) flourished from the sixth and seventh centuries. Agones started in Egypt after its conquest of Alexander the great who celebrated his coronation as pharaoh in Memphis with games.<sup>(128)</sup>

Metropoleis competed against each other in athletic contests, which were elevated to 'sacred' status.<sup>(129)</sup> Athletic performances continued to be offered as an entertainment in the late Roman period; for example 'athletes', designated as ξυστός are attested as appearing between chariot-races at Oxyrhynchus<sup>(130)</sup>. Alexandria had athletic games when Hadrian endowed the city with sports infrastructure suitable for the athletic and equestrian events of

(122) Humphrey, J., (1986), 513

(123) Said, M., Shalaby, N., (2019), 93.

(124) Remijsen, S. (2015), 111-112

(125) Remijsen, S. (2015), 199

(126) Humphrey, J., (1986), 515

(127) Boatwright m M., (2003), Hadrian and the Cities of the Roman Empire, Princeton University Press, note: 80, p. 100

(128) Henry W.B, Parsond P.J, et al., (2014), 190.

(129) Rigsby, K. J. (1977). 'Sacred Ephebic Games at Oxyrhynchus', *CdE* 62, 147-55.

(130) (P.Oxy. 2707).

an agon, he opted for a grand circus in the roman style.<sup>(131)</sup> At Antinoopolis a Roman style circus was constructed for it Greek-style agon.<sup>(132)</sup>

### **Ephobic Games**

Ephobic games were athletic shows that held in the circus which provided enjoyable spectacles for the inhabitants of the nome capitals in Graeco-Roman Egypt. They included two types of games first the periodic games at which young males from various classes competed in boxing, wrestling and running<sup>(133)</sup>. Second games were megalia Antinoeia. Both games were designed after the Antinoeia, thus they were called Isantinoeios.<sup>(134)</sup>

Antinoopolis had a strong ephobic tradition, as its ephobic games were instituted by the founder Hadrian.<sup>(135)</sup> After the construction of the circus in Antinoopolis, other metropolis proposed to establish ephobic games such as Oxyrhynchus in 210 A.D, Leontopolis in 220 A.D., Hermopolis, Panoopolis and Memphis appeared by the early third century AD. An inscription from Leontopolis (fig:14) dated to the third year of Marcus Aurelius and Lucius Verus 162/3 A.D. which is a list of ephobes who were victorious of that year.<sup>(136)</sup>

In 199/200 A.D Aurelius Horion, a wealthy Oxyrhynchite, petitioned the emperor to be allowed to establish a fund of 10,000 Attic drachmae to provide prizes for the ephobic games to rival those offered at Antinopolis, showing the familiar civic rivalry among Greek cities.<sup>(137)</sup>

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(131) Remijsen, S. (2015).125

(132) Decker, W.,(1973),*Bemerkungen zum Agon für Antinoos in Antinopolis (Antinoeia)*, Hofmann,40., P.Oxy. 34 2707; P.Oxy. 79 5216 ; P.Oxy. 79 5215; P.Oxy. 79 5217

(133) Said ,M., *Shalaby*, N., (2019),94

(134) Ashour , S. (2014).A Table-Leg Decorated with a Statue of a Boxer in Cairo , *BIFAO 113* , 35

(135) Remijsen, S. (2015).125

(136) Rigsby , K.J. (1978).An ephobic inscription from Egypt', *GRBS 19*,239

(137) Rigsby , K.J. (1978).247.

### Animal Shows

Animals were used also in the circus in different shows such as wild hunt or for circus performances.

### Animal Hunting

It is a form of performances that was introduced to Egypt in Roman period<sup>138</sup> and became part of the circus games by the 2nd century BC. ALSO, amphitheatre used for the exhibition of this spectacle. Venationes (animal's hunts) are type of public shows that featured animal hunting. They were contests between animals or between men and animals staged in an amphitheatre, usually in connection with gladiator shows (munera).<sup>(139)</sup> The 2<sup>nd</sup> century BC was the beginning of the venationes<sup>(140)</sup> they were so popular with the Roman public. Rome searched all around the world for animals to be displayed at public celebrations such as lions, bears, bulls, hippopotamuses, panthers, and crocodiles. Although it is uncertain how long the *venationes* were displayed, they were still in existence even after gladiators shows that were ceased in the 5th century.<sup>(141)</sup>

A papyrus letter found in Egypt attests the capture of animals for venationes by troops stationed there. Since Egypt was the prime source of arena animals such as Hippopotami and Crocodiles. This letter dating to early second century written by a soldier of an auxiliary regiment stationed at Wadi Fawakhir: *Antonius Proculus to Valerianus. Write the note to say that from the month of Agr until now we have been hunting all species of wild animals and birds for a year under orders of the prefects. We have given what we caught to Cerealis and he sent them all the equipment to you.*<sup>(142)</sup>

The fact that Proculus and his colleagues were involved in hunting all sorts of animals for an entire year strongly suggests that they were capturing animals for animal spectacles.

Another letter of a much later date found in Fayum also proved the capture of wild animals by Roman troops in Egypt. Also a document dated to mid fourth century A.D. records the devastation of crops by a large herd of gazelles in the area that made a local priest to write to the commander of nearby detachment of cavalry to get rid of the raging herd where it was

(138) Said, M., Shalaby, N., (2019), 85.

(139) Futrell, A. (2006), 89

(140) Venationes had been a Roman public spectacle comprising animal hunts or contents between people and wild beasts. Along with gladiator fights, venationes were the most famous public sports activities in the Roman and Byzantine Empires. Francis Lepree, James: Diukic, Liudmila (2019), *The Byzantine Empire :A Historical Encyclopedia*, 323.

(141) Epplett, Ch., (2001), *The Capture of Animals by the Roman Military, Greece & Rome Vol. 48, No. 2*, Cambridge University Press, 190.

(142) Epplett, Ch., (2001), 193.

suggested the use of nets for capturing the herd which may be intended to use them for upcoming venationes.<sup>(143)</sup>

### **Animal's Entertainment**

African elephants shows were a new form of entertainment that was introduced to Egypt during Philadelphus reign where they were hunting elephants to use them in these shows.<sup>(144)</sup>

An elephant scene was found in the tomb of Petosiris at Tuna El Gebel (fig:15) represent a young child accompanied his father in front of a young elephant. This scene refers to the relation between children and elephants where the elephants play the amusement role for the children as in our modern circus today.<sup>(145)</sup>

Animal acts and shows were held in street parades during the Graeco-Roman period. King Ptolemy II Philadelphus who staged the first circus, gathered animals, birds and reptiles from Africa and the Middle East to use them on parade for his people on days of celebration. It was known that King Ptolemy II was interested in collecting and hunting animals.<sup>(146)</sup> Before the Second Syrian War, Ptolemy II sent an expedition to hunt African elephants that were mainly used for shows in this procession.<sup>(147)</sup>

A long day procession of exotic animals was held in honour of god Dionysus through the street of Alexandria. This was led by twenty-four chariots pulled by elephants, followed by lions, leopards, panthers, camels, antelopes, wild asses, goats, and ostriches apparently in pairs plus a bear, a giraffe and a rhinoceros for good measure.<sup>(148)</sup>

Trained animals are mentioned occasionally that could walk the tight rope such as the elephants and other animals that participated in entertainment such as dancing or fighting.<sup>(149)</sup>

A third century fragment of a papyrus represents a brown bear in the circus apparently leaping an athlete, whose legs preserved (fig:16)<sup>(150)</sup>. The papyrus depicts a bear with opened mouth, caught just on the moment of rising up, or perhaps about to leap, to try to catch the figure whose legs are visible in the top left corner. The hoop in the top right is perhaps a ring

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(143) Epplett, Ch., (2001),212; Bomgardner, D.L.,(1992) 'The Trade in Wild Animals for Roman Spectacles: A green perspective', *ANTHROPOZOOLOGICA* 16,163.

(144) Casson,L., (1993), Ptolemy II and the Hunting of African Elephants, *TAPhA* 123,247, 259

(145) Ahmed, D., (2019).Uncommon Scene of Elephant in the Tomb of Petosiris at Tuna El Gebel, *International Journal of Heritage, Tourism and Hospitality Vol. (13), No. (2)*, 31

(146) Casson,L., (1993),259.

(147) Hubbell, H.,(1935).Ptolemy's Zoo, *The Classical Journal* Vol. 31, No. 2, 73

(148) Bishop, M.C.,(2019).*Warefare through the ages : Gladiators*, Newyork, 24; Harry M. Hubbell, (1935), 73-74.

(149) B. Lawler, L., (1930), Zoologically Speaking, *The Classical Journal*, Vol. 25, No. 9, 676.

(150) Skeat,T.C.,(1963). *Papyri from Oxyrhynchus*, *The British Museum Quarterly*, Autumn, Vol. 27,3

through which the figure is aiming to jump or maybe it is a light purple cloth a circus performer was using to bait the bear. The red swoosh to the right of the fragment is harder to make any sense of, but it seems to serve the purpose of marking off the acrobatic scene from something else. Perhaps it is supposed to designate the curve of the seating at the amphitheatre? Just above the legs of the acrobat are the feet of some letters, reconstructed as ερσωις, though what exactly that might mean (perhaps a name) is unclear.<sup>(151)</sup>

On the different hand, trained animals are stated once in a while that may want to fight in the circus arena such as the bulls at Memphis and the lions at Oxyrhynchus. At Memphis Strabo saw the bull fights in the circus and noticed allowed to seem to be at the bull Apis via a window of his stable.<sup>(152)</sup>

In the Byzantine period, Oxyrhynchus offered a variety of events for having a glimpse of a lion's semblance. For instance, considering the venationes recorded in the Oxyrhynchus papyri.<sup>(153)</sup> During these occasions, the inhabitants may have had the event to see lions combat in the nearby circus arena. However, a supply of idea may have been additionally the surrounding urban space, the place the lions flanking the historic dromoi main to the primary sanctuaries of Oxyrhynchus perchance nonetheless constituted a dominant landscape function up to the Byzantine period. There is a illustration of a lion on stone block (Inv. no. 572), measuring (35,7 x 20,6 cm), factors the drawn with charcoal; a line painted in red overlaps the special iconographic motif.<sup>(154)</sup>

### **The circus in Egyptian heritage:**

In modern Egypt, the circus or the so-called "Gymnastics Stadium"- "Gymnasium", is one of the government's recreational facilities that was founded in Al-Azbakeya next to the Khedivial Opera House during the 19th century<sup>(155)</sup>. The instruments of the circus' arena were imported from Europe. It was inaugurated in 1869 under the direction of Khawaja Theodore Rancy<sup>(156)</sup>. However, this inauguration was announced according to following text:

(151) ١٤٦، pl. 12.

(152) Sharpe,S.,(1852). The history of Egypt from the earliest times till the conquest 640 A.D., Vol.II,London ,80.

(153) P.Oxy. XXXIV 2707

(154) García, J. J.; Mascia, L. (2023). Figural graffiti from the Basilica of St. Philoxenos at Oxyrhynchus (El-Bahnasa, Egypt), *Imafronte* 30, 41.

(155) Ismail,S.,(2017). History of theater in the Arab world: the nineteenth century,43.

(156) Ismail,S.,(2017),44.

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*“From the French Horse-Acrobat Stadium in Azbakeya in 1869 under the direction of Khawaja Theodore Rancy; On Saturday, 11<sup>th</sup> of Rajab, every night from 8 o'clock after sunset, the aforementioned Horse-Acrobat Stadium conducts great horse-games, that are entertaining, humorous, and gymnastic. They are played by all the famous captains, including the crew of the above-mentioned French Horse-Acrobat Stadium, and the ticket offices will be opening to buy tickets of watching the aforementioned games at seven and a half after sunset. As for the prices of entry tickets, they were three francs for the first-class-seat, one franc for the second-class-seat. Therefore, the ticket offices are also open during the daytime from one o'clock to 4 in the afternoon, and on Sunday and Thursday of each week it takes place during the day for families who can attend for watching at night, and the beginning of the daytime-games, starting from 3 o'clock in the afternoon”.*<sup>(157)</sup>

The circus was not only confined to acrobatic performances, but also touched upon the art of pantomime and folk dance, and began to announce its acting program with the mention of the members of the pantomime troupe, they are: (Philippe? Frédéric? / Críost?), Salon and Miss Anna. The Circus achieved success in its initial years. Khedive Ismail then appointed David Guillaume as its director, who was the successor of Rancy the old director. Guillaume tried to develop the circus and brought a troupe to the European circus in April 1872 and in January 1874 brought a full troupe

(157) Ismail,S.,(2017),45.



from Astana, as it is presented that he descended from a ship so called "Tanta" 26 individuals, including acrobats, musicians and dancers with their own instruments, tools and luggage, and will be sent tomorrow by the passenger-train.<sup>(158)</sup>

But the circus was neglected during the reign of Guillaume. At the end of the 19<sup>th</sup> century, it was transformed into a theater for foreign plays to be held by the European troupes, the only reference of which was in the newspaper Al-Mo'ayyad in 1899.

The circus went out of business for many years, and the documents remained silent, later on, the first reference to it was for the first Egyptian circus, the famous Al-Helw Circus, who followed the steps of the old circus in presenting acrobatics and theatrical plays. On 1<sup>st</sup> of January 1889, Cairo newspaper published under the title "The Famous Teatro of Hajj Ali Al-Helw": "This Teatro includes multiple games of various styles and is composed of men adept in the art of characterization and modern games and concludes with a comic chapter. One of its famous games is to put tables above the wire with strange regularity, walk in the air with the fastest movement and wrap everyone as well as setting fires on the course of performing these games. Therefore, in all the parts, the music resounds with the most beautiful melodies, managed by Mahmoud Effendi Ahmed. The headquarters of this Teatro in the Hussein Mawled next to the Shanawani Mosque has won the turnout of the public to attend, which necessitated praise for its brilliant members.

As for the Circus of Al-Helw, besides what is fore mentioned, it added predators and horses to its shows, such as the Roman Circus in which human-lion-fight was its most famous shows in the Circus (fig.18). In Egypt the family of Akef, held circus shows, it depended on acrobatics and spectacles. The Egyptian Circus moved between places and on religious and national occasions in which the largest number of spectators gathered.

The circus continued to rely on these individual efforts until it began to falter by the late fifties, because the public turned away from it after they witnessed the potentials of the Russian, Italian and Indian circus that visited Egypt during this period. After the 1952 revolution, the state intervened with its potentials and established the National Circus, it enlisted all the talents that were sponsored by the families of Al-Helw and Akef as well as the acrobats. Hence, the circus stood up again and competed the world circuses,

(158) Ismail,S.,(2017),46.

with the acknowledgment of foreign players who came to present their performances with their Egyptian colleagues.<sup>(159)</sup>

### **Conclusion**

Circus programmes which dates back to the Roman and byzantine period included two types of shows; Firstly are athletic shows such as Horse Racing, Chariot Racing, equestrian competitions, gladiatorial shows, animal hunting, boxing, wrestling and running. Secondly are the artistic shows such as clowns, mime, pantomime, rope dancers, comic actors, rope walkers and stilt walkers. The entertainments listed in circus programmes did not change significantly over long periods of time. Even today circuses include the same artistic shows mentioned above. Not all Circus programmes include horse racing and this proved by papyri documents that didn't mention horse racing while mentioning other performances.

Different animals such as dogs, gazelles, elephants and bears were used in different shows in the circus. Elephant hunting, dramatic performances including tragic and comic shows of the Greeks as well as venationes (animal hunts) or munera (gladiatorial combat) were new forms of entertainments that were introduced to Egypt in Graeco Roman and Byzantine period. At an early stage, organizing entertainment was used by the Roman elite to not only reflect their authority, but also to achieve influence and prestige. There were a several funding sources for the races such as private sources unrelated to the tax system and public collections and local taxes.

Chariot racing were the most famous programme in the circus during the Roman period and had many spectators in that period. Charioteers were, like other categories of Roman entertainers such as gladiators and actors were almost of a low status. Most were slaves (whose participation in the games might eventually win them their freedom), hired freedmen, or foreigners (Greeks especially); they were not, in the main, freeborn Roman citizens in search of fame and fortune. Chariot racing was organized into teams, each identified by a colour which was red, white, blue, or green. Victory in such races brought considerable tangible benefits to the victor and also was rewarded many prizes such as taxes exemption and liturgies. In Christian times the traditional shows continued but the victory event was separated from the procession event in the circus.

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(159) Ismail,S.,(2017),47-48.

**Table 2: Circus Performances in Roman and byzantine circus in Egypt**

Name of circus shows	City	Date	Category	Building	Time
<b>1-Games</b>					
<b>Athletic contests</b>	Alexandria	Hadrian then M.Aurelius	sacred and eiselastic	-----	-----
	Antinoopolis	-----	Sacred	Circus	-----
	Oxyrhynchus	6th century	Sacred	-----	Biennial
<b>Epebic contest</b>	Alexandria	Ptolemaic	-----	-----	Annual
	Leontopolis	220 A.D	Sacred	-----	Annual
	Oxyrhynchus	210 A.D	Sacred	-----	Annual Tybi(january)
	Antinopoolis	Hadrian	-----	Circus	Annual
	Hermopolis	early third century AD	-----	-----	Annual
	Panoopolis				
	Memphis				
<b>Horse racing</b>	Oxyrhynchus	6th century	-----	-----	-----
<b>Kapitolia</b>	Antinopoolis	268	sacred and eiselastic	Circus	Quadrennial-Tybi (January)
	Hermopolis	Septimius Severus	-----	-----	-----
	Oxyrhynchus	273/274	sacred and eiselastic		Quadrennial-Tybi (January)
<b>Megala Antinoeia</b>	Alexandria	-----	-----	-----	-----
	Antinopoolis	130	By 264 sacred and eiselastic	Circus	Annual – Mecheir (February)
<b>chariot contest</b>	Alexandria	1st and early 4 <sup>th</sup> centuries	-----	Amphitheatre Hippodrome	-----
	Oxyrhynchus	sixth century	-----		-----
	Antinoopolis	fifth century	-----	Circus	-----
	Herakleopolis, Memphis	third century	-----	-----	
	Tebtynis	320-325 A.D	-----	-----	-----
	Hermopolis				

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<b>2-Artistis shows</b>	<b>City</b>	<b>Date</b>	<b>Category</b>	<b>building</b>	<b>Time</b>
<b>Acrobats</b>	Oxyrhynchus	6 <sup>th</sup> century	-----	-----	-----
<b>Mimes</b>	Alexandria	4 <sup>th</sup> century	-----	theatre	-----
	Oxyrhynchus	6 <sup>th</sup> century	-		--
<b>staged hunt</b>	Oxyrhynchus	6 <sup>th</sup> century	-----	-----	-----
<b>Rope dancing</b>	Oxyrhynchus	6 <sup>th</sup> century	-----	-----	-----

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**Figures**



Fig.(1) a. Decorative wooden relief depicting a musical band  
After: Hanna, E., (2019), figs 20-21, PP.69-70.



Fig.(1) b: Detail of a decorative relief showing a clown



Fig.(2) The engraving represents one of the nine figures seen dancing on the tightrope in a painting of Herculaneum  
After: Juvenal.D.,(1890), The Satires of Juvenal, 125,fig14.;  
Smith,W.,(1842), *A Dictionary of Greek and Roman Antiquities*, Ed. by W. Smith, Oxford University,434.



Fig.(3): Comic figurine, terracotta, Roman period,,  
Egypt, Ihnasya el-Medina (Herakleopolis Magna),  
House E05.266  
After: <https://collections.mfa.org/objects/36670>



**Fig.(4)a.** Theatrical mask, terracotta, Roman Period, Alexandria, El-Hadara, preserved Antiquities Museum in Bibliotheca Alexandrina, No. 0409  
**After:** <https://antiquities.bibalex.org/Collection/Detail.aspx?a=409&lang=en>



**Fig.(4)b.** Theatrical mask, terracotta, Roman Period, Alexandria, El-Hadara, preserved Antiquities Museum in Bibliotheca Alexandrina, No. 0455  
**After:** <https://antiquities.bibalex.org/Collection/Detail.aspx?lang=en&a=455>



**Fig.(5) a.** Caricature head (grotesque), terracotta, Graeco-Roman Period (332 BCE-395 CE), preserved Antiquities Museum in Bibliotheca Alexandrina, Inv. no. 23152  
**After:** <https://antiquities.bibalex.org/Collection/Detail.aspx?a=141&lang=en>



**Fig.(5) B.** Caricature head (grotesque), terracotta, Graeco-Roman Period (332 BCE-395 CE), preserved Antiquities Museum in Bibliotheca Alexandrina, Inv. no. 23154  
**After:** <https://antiquities.bibalex.org/Collection/Detail.aspx?lang=en&a=143>

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**Fig.(6):** Comb with representations of three mime dancers, 5<sup>th</sup> century, from Antinopolis, preserved at the Louvre Museum No: E 11874

**After:** Rutschowskaya, M.H., (2000), Peigne à coiffer. In *L'Art copte en Égypte: 2000 ans de christianisme*, Paris: Institut du Monde Arabe and Éditions Gallimard, 222, No. 277.



**Fig.(7):** Plaque with pantomime Dancer, from Alexandria, now in the Antikensammlung, Staatliche Museen, in Berlin

**After:** Hanna, E., (2019), figs 16, p.61



**Fig.(8)** lamp depicts a circus victory procession

**After:** Amanda, D., (2019), Fig.30, p.213; Junkelmann (2000), 'On the Starting Line with Ben Hur: Chariot-Racing in the Circus Maximus', in Kohne, E. and Ewigleben, C. (eds.), *Gladiators and Caesars: the power of spectacle in ancient Rome* (Berkeley, CA), 86-



**Fig. 9A** A chariot pulled by two horses, Copper alloy, 310 BC-301 BC., Alexandria, British Museum  
**After:** [https://www.britishmuseum.org/collection/object/C\\_1921-0213-196](https://www.britishmuseum.org/collection/object/C_1921-0213-196) :Accessed in: 10/8/2021 at 9:00 pm

102 2000: fig. 113)



**Fig.9 B** A chariot pulled by four horses, Alloy, 97-117 A.D, Alexandria, British Museum.  
**After:**[https://www.britishmuseum.org/collection/object/C\\_CR-5378](https://www.britishmuseum.org/collection/object/C_CR-5378); Accessed in: 10/8/2021 at 9:00 pm.;Poole, Reginald Stuart (1892). Catalogue of the coins of Alexandria and the Nomes. London: Trustees of the British Museum.p.49



**Fig.10** Money box with representation of a victorious charioteer. Late first to early second century A.D. Ceramic. Gotha, Stiftung Schloss Friedenstein, inv. no. Ahv.A.K. 97.  
**After:** Bell, S.,(2020),Fig.7,p.194



**Fig.11** Fragment of An illustrated Greek papyrus from Antinoe, 500 A.D  
**After:**S Gąsiorowski, J., (1931),.pl.I



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**Fig. 12** Terracotta medallion depicts a charioteer in his quadriga, holding the victor's crown and palm branch- late 2nd–early 3rd century A.D.- The Metropolitan Museum of Art 17.194.2125  
After: <https://www.metmuseum.org/art/collection/search/250464>



**Fig. (13):** Graffito of two chariot teams and victor Rome, Domus Aurea, room 64 Alexandria, theatre  
After: Langner, M. (2001), *Antike Graffitizeichnungen: Motive, Gestaltung und Bedeutung*, (Wiesbaden). 1130-1131



**Fig. (14):** Ephobic inscription from Antinoopolis, 162-163A.D After: Rigsby, K.J. (1978).