

Some Considerations on Hannibal's Elephants

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I. Introduction

First of all, I'd like to thank the organisers of this symposium for inviting me here, to pay tribute to Olga Tellegen Couperus. Coming back to the University of Tilburg reminds me the very pleasant times I had here in 2009, when I was given the opportunity to teach here, as holder of the TPR-Leerstool. It reminds me also of the honour I had to be a member of Tessa Leessen's PhD's commission in the month of June of that same year. At the time, the subjects of my lectures and conferences were Sales law, Rainwater, Comparative Law and *Occupatio*... But today, as you understood from the title of my speech, I will be speaking about something totally different!

Hannibal's elephants are a well-known story... I mean, almost everybody knows that Hannibal used elephants in his war against Rome, and that he crossed the Alps with his elephants to attack Rome from the North. It is of course an incredible story and that is certainly part of why Hannibal is still so famous today. Of course, this has little to do with Roman law, you will think, and you might even wonder why I'm talking about such a strange topic... And I could not blame you for that!

Actually, the only Legal Roman source mentioning elephants I could find, was in Gaius' Institutes (Gai.2.16):

At ferae bestiae nec Mancipi sunt, velut ursi leones, item ea animalia quae fere bestiarum numero sunt, velut elephanti et cameli. Et ideo ad rem non pertinet, quod haec animalia etiam collo dorsove domari solent: nam ne nomen quidem eorum animalium illo tempore fuit, quo constituebatur quasdam res Mancipi esse, quasdam nec Mancipi.

Wild beasts are *res nec Mancipi*, as for instance bears and lions, and the same is true about those animals which can be counted to wild beasts, like elephants and camels. And therefore it makes no difference that these animals are usually tamed and carry burdens, for there was not even a name for them at the time when the distinction between *res Mancipi* and *res nec Mancipi* was made.

This distinction between *res Mancipi* and *res nec Mancipi* has of course been much discussed: If the distinction has been invented to pay a bigger attention to some *res*, considered more important than others, it might seem strange, that donkeys are such a *res Mancipi* and not ships e.g. But just as Gaius puts it: The distinction is very old and by the time, Romans were peasants and not fishermen or traders... And had never seen elephants. The first time, the Romans met elephants, was in Heraclea, in 280 BC. Pyrrhus, King of Epirus, defeated the Romans, using elephants in his army. As the Romans did not know how to call these animals and they first saw them in Lucania, they called them Lucas Boves, Lucanian Oxen¹. This story is told by Pliny the Elder, in his Natural History (77 AD).

Now, if this is all there is to say about Elephants in Roman Law, you might wonder how I came across this topic. It all started with an article written by Fernand De Visscher: “Une histoire d’éléphants²”.

II. Fernand De Visscher’s excavations in Alba Fucens – The Elephants of Alba Fucens

Most of you probably know that Fernand De Visscher was an important Belgian Romanist, founder of the “Société Internationale d’Histoire des Droits de l’Antiquité”. He founded this Société during the Second World War. Shortly after the War, De Visscher has been appointed as Director of the Academia Belgica in Rome, the Belgian Academy for researchers in the Eternal City. Fernand De Visscher developed this Academy in a brilliant intellectual centre³. His life in Rome was never meant to become a sabbatical. On the contrary, he looked at it as the beginning of new challenges.

¹ Pliny the Elder, N.H., 8.6.1: *Elephantos Italia primum vidit Pyrrhi regis bello, et boves Lucas appellavit in Lucanis visos anno CCCCLXXII [282 BC.], Roma autem in triumpho VII annis ad superiorem numerum additis, eadem plurimos anno DII [275 v. Chr.] victoria L. Metelli pontificis in Sicilia de Poenis captos. CXLII fuere aut, ut quidam, CXL, travecti ratibus quas doliorum consertis ordinibus inposuerat.*

² Fernand De Visscher, *Une histoire d’éléphants*, in *L’Antiquité Classique* 29 (1960), p. 51-60.

³ See *Franz De Ruyt*, Notice sur Fernand De Visscher, Membre de l’Académie, in: *Annuaire de l’Académie royale de Belgique* 1985, 109.

His excellent relations with the Italian archaeologists played a big role here. While the USA received a concession in Cosa and France in Bolsena, Belgium would receive Alba Fucens. Fernand De Visscher really wanted Belgium to have an own archaeological site. Though he was no archaeologist yet, Fernand De Visscher was about to start becoming one⁴. By the time, little was know about Alba Fucens. Heavy city walls were all one could see of it, at the time.

Alba Fucens is located in the middle of the Italian peninsula, in the western part of Abruzzo, 8 kilometres away from Avezzano, at a height of 1000 meters. During Antiquity, Alba Fucens was considered to be an important fortress, described by Cicero as a faithful city, full of brave men and loyal and virtuous citizens, devoted to the republic⁵.

In the 19th century, Carlo Promis describes Alba Fucens as a miserable little village with high city walls and some monuments in the middle. In 1915, a heavy earthquake has destroyed the modern village of Alba. Some mosaics⁶ have been revealed while building new houses after the earthquake. During Second World War, the place played its old strategic role again, when Generalfeldmarschall Albert Kesselring⁷ settled a command post in Alba Fucens.

But what we are interested about, is that systematic excavations of the antique city started in 1949. When Fernand De Visscher started – for the first time in his life – to conduct such archaeological excavations, he was already 63 years old! As he put it himself, he was a bit amazed to be involved in such an incredible enterprise⁸! He discovered the site on 26 February 1949 and was immediately fascinated by this new activity, standing before him. The first diggings started in April 1949 and the De Visschers passion would never decrease anymore, for the last 15 years of his life. It must be said, that life conditions were all but comfortable there, but on the other hand, the place at the foot of Monte Velino was absolutely wonderful.

⁴ Of course, Fernand De Visscher did not start to dig without the help of “real” archeologists. See *Sigfried De Laet*, Préface, in: ALBA FVCENS 1. Rapports et études, Hrsg. *J. Mertens*, Bruxelles-Rome 1969, 5.

⁵ Cic., *Phil.* III.15: *Cumque legio Martia Albae constiterit, in municipio fidelissimo et fortissimo, seseque ad senatus auctoritatem populique Romani libertatem contulerit (...); Phil.* IV.2: (...) *Albae constiterunt, in urbe opportuna, munita, propinqua, fortissimorum virorum, fidelissimorum civium atque optimorum.* (...).

⁶ *Franz De Ruyt*, *L'initiative...* (o. Fn. 1) 9; *Adele Campanelli*, *La petite Rome des Abruzzes. 50 années de recherche belgo-italiennes à Alba Fucens.* Sulmona 2007, 16.

⁷ *Franz De Ruyt*, *L'initiative...* (o. Fn. 1) 9: «un peu ahuri de (se) trouver lancé dans cette entreprise archéologique».

⁸ This is what Franz De Ruyt wrote [*Franz De Ruyt*, *L'initiative...* (o. Fn. 1) 9].

The first excavations were very promising and Fernand De Visscher's team was soon confronted with a new problem: The authorisation of the Italian government foresaw that the field where the diggings had been made, would have to be returned to the farmer in its previous state. They already had to buy him a whole maize harvest. But actually, the field was covered with heaps of dirt. Therms, temples, forum, basilica... All these buildings only waited to be uncovered... And the Italian government was sufficiently impressed to forget about these fields and to support the future excavations of Alba Fucens. Fernand De Visscher has been the mentor of these excavations until his death, on the 15th December 1964.

III. A Short History of Alba Fucens

The city of Alba Fucens has been founded in a period when Rome wanted to conquer the centre of Italy. In 304 B.C., Rome decided to sign a peace treaty with the Samnites and subdued the Aequans, the Marsians, the Marrucines and the Paelignes. In order to secure Central Italy, Rome founded the military colony of Alba Fucens in 303 B.C. (under the consulate of L. Genucius and Ser. Cornelius). This city was the most important military colony founded by the Roman Republic. It received the status of Latin Colony and had its own citizenship. Alba Fucens was autonomous and had also the right to mint money⁹.

Alba stood on Rome's side, especially during the wars of the third century B.C., as the war between Rome and Sentinum, won by Rome and its allies in 295 B.C. But the most important story about Alba Fucens happened during the Second Punic War. While Hannibal threatened Rome with his army, Rome begged its colonies for help. Alba Fucens was the only one to answer positively and sent 2000 men to Rome. These men were equipped by Rome and defended victoriously the city walls.

In the second century B.C., Alba Fucens was reduced to an ancient fortress that had lost most of its utility. It had also become a kind of place of banishment for dethroned Kings, like Syphax¹⁰ (King of Western Numidia), Perseus¹¹ (King of Macedonia) and Bituitus¹² (King of the Arverni).

⁹ *Joseph Mertens*, Etude topographique d'Alba Fucens, in J. Mertens, ALBA FVCENS 1. Rapports et études. Bruxelles-Rome 1969, 37-38.

¹⁰ At the beginning of the Second Punic War, Syphax was on Rome's side. But he changed side and was brought to Rome as a prisoner.

During the first century B.C., the power of Rome has been challenged by the rebellion of its allied cities. Alba Fucens was the only one staying faithful, but had to surrender after a long siege.

In 90 B.C., Rome was able to free its faithful colony and that was the beginning of a period of particular wealth. Alba Fucens became a *Municipium cum suffragio*, which gave the Roman citizenship to Alba's citizens.

Alba Fucens had suffered a lot during this war and the city centre needed important renovation works. Public places and private houses would be decorated with elegant mosaics, frescoes and sculptures. It impresses how many types of marbles have been used to renew Alba Fucens.

The decline of Alba Fucens becomes perceptible during the 3rd century AD. The presence of Constantine coins show that there still is some business during the 4th century. But at the same time – or shortly after – some areas of Alba seem to have been abandoned.

Procopius of Cesarea is the last chronicler to mention Alba Fucens in his writings. He writes that in Justinian's times, an imperial army wintered there in 573.

During the middle ages, all that was left, was a small village named Alba Vecchia, composed of a few houses around the Orsini castle. This castle collapsed during the earthquake of 1915.

So when Fernand De Visscher's team reached Alba Fucens, there were only a few intact houses left.

IV. The Elephants of Alba Fucens

As already mentioned, Alba Fucens was not a comfortable place to live, when the De Visscher Family arrived there: Neither current water, nor electricity, nor bathroom or toilets. But testimonies are unanimous to say that the De Visscher's never stopped smiling and being enthusiastic.

¹¹ Perseus, son of Philipp V. of Macedonia, has been arrested after the battle of Pydna, between Macedonia and Rome (168. B.C.).

¹² Bituitus lost against Rome in 121 B.C. But Rome only arrested him when he came to the Roman Senate as an ambassador. As the Romans were not very proud about this treason, but at the same time feared Bituitus, they kept him in jail in Alba Fucens.

There is no doubt about the great success these excavations are: A forum, a basilica, thermae, elegant villas, a theatre, a large amphitheatre and an important Heracles-temple have been brought to daylight! Many books and exhibitions in Brussels and Rome have celebrated these discoveries...

But among these archaeological pieces, there were also two big carved stones. These stones were found in 1951 and seem to be the lateral parts of a bench¹³. Both stones have been carved in the shape of an elephant. They are a bit archaic looking and Fernand De Visscher thinks that they had to be manufactured during the 2nd century B.C. The size of the ears makes it clear, that these elephants must have been African elephants. But then De Visscher started to wonder where this manufacturer of Alba had seen African elephants in such an early time¹⁴?

As I recalled it, when the Romans first saw Pyrrhus' elephants in 280 BC, they did not even know how to call these animals. Could it be Alba's manufacturer had seen Pyrrhus' elephants? De Visscher does not believe in this possibility, as he is certain that Pyrrhus' elephants were Asian elephants. He infers this from a painting on a plate he has seen in the museum of Villa Giulia: the so-called "Capena-platter¹⁵". This elephant has been painted in the 3rd century B.C. and his ears are quite small. De Visscher infers that it is an elephant of Pyrrhus' army from the fact that it has a small tower on its back, which the Carthaginians did not use. Furthermore, he thought that Hellenistic leaders bought their elephants in Syria.

¹³ These 2 blocks were found at a distance of 55 meters, at the NW and SW corners of the basilica. See: *Fernand De Visscher*, *Une histoire d'éléphants*, in: *L'Antiquité Classique* 29 (1960) 51.

¹⁴ *Idem*, 52: «où et quand les colons d'Albe ont-ils vu les premiers spécimens de cette variété d'éléphants?».

¹⁵ About this plate (to be found in Museo Nazionale di Villa Giulia; inv.23949), Fernand De Visscher quotes Giulio Quirino Giglioli, *Corpus vasorum antiquorum*, Italia, Museo nazionale di Villa Giulia in Roma, Fasc. 3, IV B q (Ceramica di provenienza Etrusco-Laziale con decorazione sovrapposta; B. Piatti): « Il piatto è vernicato di nero e ha una ricca decorazione all'interno. Sull'orlo linee, rosette gialle, foglie di vite, bianche con corimbi gialli, poi fascia rosso vilacea: tutto tra varie linee concentriche bianche e gialle. Nell'interno su una linea che rappresenta il terreno è la rappresentazione di un elefante di guerra, di color giallo con ritocchi bianchi, seguito da un piccolo. Sull'elefante, che è di tipo asiatico, è una torre di guerra posata su una gualdrappa rossa con sottogualdrappa bianca e tenuta ferma con tre cinghie bianche. Nella torre stessa, che appare di legno e di color bianco ed è merlata e difesa da un grande scudo circolare giallo, che doveva esser metallico, sono due guerrieri di color bruno, armati di lancia e scudo e con elmo in capo. Sul collo dell'animale è il conducente, di color bruno, con elmo a berretto frigio e con il caratteristico pungolo ad arpione. La interessante rappresentazione, che, dai particolari, specialmente quello del piccolo elefante, appare chiaramente colta dall'artista italico dal vero; si riferisce evidentemente alla guerra di Pirro in Italia (280-270); data che conviene perfettamente e conferma la cronologia di questa classe di ceramica. Nella parte superiore il piatto ha due fori per poterlo appendere. Diam. 0,295 alt. 0,57. Trovato negli scavi diretti da G.Q.Giglioli nel gennaio-febbraio 1913 a Capena, Necropoli delle Macchie nel Comune di Leprignano, Tomba a camera n.CCXXXIII.». Similarly : *Alessandro Della Seta*, Museo di Villa Giulia, Rom 1918, 348-349, n.23949.

Some 30 years later, during the 1st Punic War, the Romans met African elephants for the first time. But Fernand De Visscher does not think that this war gave the opportunity to the manufacturer from Alba to see such an elephant.

A further possibility could be that the Albanians used elephants in their amphitheatre for their games, the *venationes*¹⁶. But Alba's amphitheatre has been built much later, in memory of Q. Naevius Macro¹⁷, who was praetorian prefect under Tiberius. Even if we admit that there might have been a previous amphitheatre in Alba, the probability is rather small, that a small city like Alba Fucens would have been able to afford such an expensive animal for the games. The graffiti that were discovered in Alba Fucens show a lion and maybe a bear. But the amount of boar tusks that were found seems to indicate that it were precisely boars that were the usual game of the *venationes*.

Therefore, Fernand De Visscher believes that the sculptor found his inspiration from the 2nd Punic War, when Hannibal crossed Italy together with his elephants. And these elephants certainly were of the African type. Carthaginian coins of the year 220 B.C. clearly show that at that time, Carthage used such elephants. They probably had both African and Asian elephants, but for De Visscher, it is sufficient to know that they also used elephants of the African type. Then again, the fact that Hannibal's army used such African elephant does not mean that Alba's sculptor had the opportunity to see them.

Now here's how De Visscher explains that he could have seen them. After their defeat in Cannae, on the 2nd August 216 B.C., the Roman armies started to turn the tables. They wanted to regain Campania and started to besiege Capua. Hannibal wanted to free Capua again but didn't succeed, so he decided to march on Rome, probably hoping that the Roman armies would abandon the siege of Capua. Another explanation can also be that Hannibal felt too confined in the South of Italy and wanted to breach the Roman lines. But which route did Hannibal take to march on Rome? Here we have 2 versions: one is given by Livy, the other one by Polybius.

Livy writes that Hannibal's army tried to take the quickest way to Rome: the via Latina. At the same time, the Roman army would have tried to overtake the

¹⁶ Fernand De Visscher found an inscription on the *venationes legitimae* in the amphitheatre of Alba Fucens: See *Fernand De Visscher*, (supra n. 13), 53 n. 6.

¹⁷ Eine Inschrift die sich über den Nordeingang des Amphitheaters befindet, erinnert daran, dass dieses Amphitheater auf Grund des Testaments von Q. Naevius Macro erbaut wurde; so S. *Fernand De Visscher*, (supra n. 13), 53 n. 7.

Carthaginians, using the via Appia¹⁸. But the choice of the via Latina is really unlikely, because the Carthaginian would have had to cross a large number cities faithful to Rome.

In Polybius' version¹⁹, Hannibal's army went to Rome passing through Samnium, in central Italy. Unfortunately, Polybius doesn't tell the way they used after that, as he makes them reappear in the North of Rome. Strange enough, this gap is filled by Livy himself²⁰, who knew this second version. After passing through Samnium, the Carthaginian army crossed areas traditionally hostile to the Romans: The Paeligni and the Marrucini. Then they turned back and crossed the Ager Albensis of the Marsi, before going north again, in direction of Amiternum near Aquila. Then they marched west again, until Rieti and then south, through the valley of the Tiber until Eretum.

This second – all but rectilinear – route shows that Hannibal's army probably never wanted to attack Rome but tried to press them to abandon the siege of Capua, hoping that Rome would call their armies back. But the Romans never abandoned the siege of Capua.

Both chroniclers²¹ agree again on the fact that both armies stood in front of each other, on both sides of the river Anio: The Romans on the left bank, the Carthaginians on

¹⁸ Titus Livius 26.8.9-11: *Hoc senatus consulto Capuam perlato Q. Fulvius proconsul, cui collega ex volnere aegro redeundum Romam erat, e tribus exercitibus milite electo ad quindecim milia peditum mille equites Volturnum traducit. Inde cum Hannibalem Latina via iturum satis comperisset, ipse per Appiae municipia quaeque propter eam viam sunt, Setia, Coram, Lavinium praemisit ut commeatus paratos et in urbibus haberent et ex agris devii in viam profferrent, praesidiaque in urbes contraherent ut sua cuique res publica in manu esset.*

¹⁹ Πολύβιος, 9.5.7-9: Ἀννίβας δὲ μετὰ πέμπτην ἡμέραν τῆς παρουσίας, δειπνοποιησάμενος καὶ καταλιπὼν τὰ πυρὰ καιόμενα, τοιαύτην ἐποίησε τὴν ἀναζυγὴν ὥστε μηδένα συνεῖναι τῶν πολεμίων τὸ συμβαῖνον. χρῆσάμενος δὲ ταῖς πορείαις διὰ τῆς Σαυνιτίδος ἐνεργοῖς καὶ συνεχέσι καὶ τοὺς περὶ τὴν ὁδὸν τόπους αἰεὶ ταῖς προπορείαις ἐξερευνώμενος καὶ προκαταλαμβάνων, ἔτι τῶν ἐν τῇ Ῥώμῃ ταῖς διανοίαις περὶ τὴν Καπύην καὶ τὰς ἐκεῖ πράξεις ὄντων ἔλαθε διαβάς τὸν Ἀνίωνα ποταμὸν καὶ συνεγγίσας, ὥστε μὴ πλεῖον τετταράκοντα σταδίων ἀποσχὼν τῆς Ῥώμης ποιήσασθαι τὴν παρεμβολήν.

²⁰ Titus Livius 26.11.10-13: *Coelius Romam euntem ab Ereto deuertisse eo Hannibalem tradit, iterque eius ab Reate Cutilisque et ab Amiterno orditur: ex Campania in Samnium, inde in Paelignos pervenisse, praeterque oppidum Sulmonem in Marrucinos transisse; inde Albensi agro in Marsos, hinc Amiternum Forulosque vicum uenisse. neque ibi error est quod tanti <ducis tanti>que exercitus uestigia intra tam brevis aevi memoriam potuerint confundi – isse enim ea constat –: tantum id interest ueneritne eo itinere ad urbem an ab urbe in Campaniam redierit.*

²¹ See also: Appian, Hannibal 38-39, 162-169: [38] Καὶ ὁ μὲν οὕτω παραβόλως διεσώζετο, Ἀννίβας δὲ τῆς χρείας ψευσθεὶς ἐφ' ἣν ἐς Λευκανοὺς μετεκέκλητο, ἀνέστρεφεν ἐς Καπύην, μέγα ποιούμενος μὴ περιδεῖν πόλιν μεγάλην καὶ εὐκαιρὸν ὑπὸ Ῥωμαίοις γενομένην. Προσβαλὼν δὲ τῷ περιτειχίσματι καὶ μηδὲν δυνηθεὶς, μὴδ' ἐπινοῶν ὅπως ἂν ἐς τὴν πόλιν ἐσπέμψειεν ἢ σίτον ἢ στρατιάν, οὐδενὸς οὐδ' ἀπ' ἐκείνων αὐτῷ συμβαλεῖν δυναμένου διὰ τὴν ἐπιτειχίσιν πάντῃ περιλαμβάνουσαν, ἐπὶ τὴν Ῥώμην ἠπέιγετο παντὶ τῷ στρατῷ, πυνθανόμενος μὲν κάκεινους ὑπὸ λιμοῦ πιέζεσθαι, ἐλπίζων δὲ τοὺς στρατηγούς αὐτῶν ἀπὸ Καπύης ἀναστήσειν, ἢ αὐτὸς τι Καπύης μείζον ἐργάσεσθαι. Συντόνω δὲ σπουδῇ διελθὼν ἔθνη πολλὰ καὶ πολέμια, τῶν μὲν οὐ δυνηθέντων αὐτὸν ἐπισχεῖν, τῶν δὲ οὐδὲ ἐς πείραν ἐλθεῖν ὑποστάντων, ἀπὸ δύο καὶ τριάκοντα σταδίων τῆς Ῥώμης ἐστρατοπέδευεν ἐπὶ τοῦ Ἀνιήνος ποταμοῦ.[39] Καὶ ἡ πόλις ἐθορυβήθη θόρυβον οἷον οὐ πρότερον, οἰκείον μὲν οὐδὲν ἔχοντες ἱκανόν (ὃ γὰρ εἶχον, ἐν Καμπανίᾳ τότε ἦν), πολεμίου δὲ στρατοῦ τοσοῦδε σφίσις ἐπιστάντος ἄφρων, καὶ στρατηγοῦ δι' ἀρετὴν καὶ εὐτυχίαν ἀμάχου.

the right bank. The Romans destroyed the bridge over the Anio to protect themselves. But if the Carthaginians were on the right bank, they did certainly not take the via Latina, because then, they would have had to be on the other bank.

This means thus, that Hannibal – with his army and elephants – crossed the Ager Albensis. Actually even Livy admits that they passed there, but he doubts whether they did so on the way to or on the way back from Rome²².

In the opinion of De Visscher, the sculptor from Alba has been inspired by the march of the Carthaginian army on its way to Rome. For him, it is supplementary argument against Livy's Via Latina hypothesis.

V. Fernand De Visscher controversy with Antonio Guarino

Antonio Guarino²³ reacted very sceptically about this conclusion. In his opinion, Pyrrhus' elephants were not necessarily of the Asian type, as they would have had to come from the very far India. It is true that Alexander the Great imported 200 elephants from India to Egypt. Would Pyrrhus have done the same? Or were Pyrrhus' elephants descendants of Alexander's? Guarino does not believe in these hypotheses. He thinks that – knowing how good the relationship was between Pyrrhus and Ptolemy – it is more likely that Pyrrhus used African elephants from Egypt. Indeed, we know that the pharaohs used such African elephants. Therefore, in Guarino's opinion, Pyrrhus used both African and Asian elephants too. About the Capena-platter, Guarino writes that they are not sufficiently realistic to infer that Pyrrhus' army used Asian elephants. As for him, the ears might be small, but the tusks are too long to be sure. He also thinks that the tower on the elephant's back means nothing. About the elephants of Alba Fucens, Guarino writes that they don't correspond to any living animal but are probably inspired by some rough description or by coins on which African elephants are represented.

Ὅμως δὲ ἐκ τῶν παρόντων οἱ μὲν δυνάμενοι φέρειν ὄπλα τὰς πύλας ἐφύλασσαν, οἱ δὲ γέροντες ἐς τὸ τεῖχος ἀνεπήδων, γύναια δὲ καὶ παιδία λίθους καὶ βέλη παρέφερον. Οἱ δὲ ἐκ τῶν ἀγρῶν συνέθεον ἐς τὸ ἄστυ δρόμῳ. Βοῆς δὲ παμμιγοῦς καὶ θρήνων καὶ εὐχῶν καὶ παρακελεύσεων πρὸς ἀλλήλους πάντα μεστὰ ἦν. Εἰσὶ δ' αὐτῶν οἱ τὴν γέφυραν τὴν ἐπὶ τοῦ Ἀνιῆνος ἐκδραμόντες ἔκοπτον. Μικρὸν δέ τι πολίχνιον Ῥωμαῖοί ποτε ἐπιτειχίζοντες Αἰκανοῖς Ἄλβην ἀπὸ τῆς αὐτῶν μητροπόλεως ἐκάλεσαν· σὺν χρόνῳ δ' ἐπισύροντες ἢ διαφθείροντες, ἢ ἐς τὴν Ἄλβαν ὄντων σύγκρισιν, Ἄλβησέας αὐτοὺς καλοῦσιν. Τούτων τότε τῶν Ἄλβησέων ἐς Ῥώμην δισχίλιοι δρόμῳ διέθεον, τοῦ κινδύνου μετασχεῖν, καὶ ἅμα ἀφικνοῦντο καὶ ὠπλιζόντο καὶ τὰς πύλας ἐφρούρουσαν. Τοσῆδε προθυμίας βραχὺ πολίχνιον ἐκ τοσῶνδε ἀποικίων ἐχρήσατο μόνη, οἷόν τι καὶ Ἀθηναῖοις ἐς Μαραθῶνα μικρὰ πόλις ἢ Πλαταιέων ἔδραμε τοῦ τότε κινδύνου μετασχεῖν.

²² Titus Livius 26.11.13: «*tantum id interest ueneritne eo itinere ad urbem an ab urbe in Campaniam redierit.*»

²³ Antonio Guarino, Letture, in: Labeo 7 (1961) 265-266.

Fernand De Visscher answered to this scepticism by a second article²⁴, explaining that Pyrrhus arrived in Taranto in 281 B.C., but that the elephant taming centre on the shores of the Red Sea, in Ptolemais Theron was founded only in 280 B.C. He also contradicts Guarino's analysis of the Capena-platter. As for De Visscher, the tusks are clearly those of Asian elephants. The tower protecting the soldiers on the elephant's back, is common in Asia. Similar towers were used by the army of the Indian king Porus, at the battle of the Hydaspes in 326 B.C. Carthaginian elephants never had such towers on the back and this is why the elephants on the Capena-platter are of Pyrrhus' army.

About Hannibal's elephants, De Visscher specifies that they must have been African elephants, but of the forest elephants: *Loxodonta Africana cyclotis*. They hold their head a bit lower and their trunk straight and close to their knees. For Devisscher, there is little doubt about the fact that the elephants that inspired Alba's artist probably were African forest elephants that were part of Hannibal's army that crossed the Ager Albensis in 211 B.C.

VI. Hannibal's Army, the Second Punic War and the Elephants

Howard Hayes Scullard's book "The Elephant in the Greek and Roman World (1974)" still counts as the reference about the elephants in ancient Rome. As for the Capena-platter, Scullard follows De Visscher in admitting that the elephant is one of Pyrrhus' army²⁵. Pyrrhus crossed the Adriatic Sea with 25.000 soldiers and 20 Asian elephants²⁶. Funny enough, in Antiquity, the Asian elephant (also called *elephas maximus*) was considered the bigger one, compared to the African elephant. This is because at the time, Greeks and Romans never saw the big bush elephants, but only the smaller forest elephants²⁷.

The Carthaginians used such forest elephants originate from Mauritania or Numidia. It is probable that Hannibal also had some Asian elephants, but the large majority of his elephants were African forest elephants²⁸. The Carthaginians were able to transport these elephants on ships to Sicily²⁹. During the 1st Punic War, they included 50 elephants

²⁴ Fernand De Visscher, Encore les éléphants d'Annibal, in: L'Antiquité classique 31 (1962) 234-235.

²⁵ Howard Hayes Scullard, The Elephant in the Greek and Roman World, Cambridge 1974, 105.

²⁶ Scullard, (supra n. 25) 102-103.

²⁷ Scullard, (supra n. 25) 60-63.

²⁸ Scullard, (supra n. 25) 148.

²⁹ Polybius, History, 1.18.

in their army, in Agrigentum³⁰. The Romans were able to capture some of them³¹. The Romans transported them over the Strait of Messina, but we don't know what happened with these elephants afterwards³². There is no possible doubt though, that the Romans already had the opportunity to see elephants during and after the 1st Punic War.

When Hannibal attacked Rome, passing through the Alps, for the 2nd Punic War, he seems to have included 37 elephants in his army³³. None of these elephants seems to have died before arriving in Italy³⁴. It is only after the first battles that all but one died because of the cold³⁵. Hannibal himself then mounted the only surviving elephant³⁶, before receiving some fresh elephants in the Calabrian harbour of Locri³⁷. The number of elephants is not certain. Livy³⁸ writes that during the siege of Capua, in the year 211 B.C., Hannibal had 33 elephants at his disposal. The same Livy³⁹ also writes about a Spanish cohort of only 3 elephants. Even if these affirmations are not necessarily contradictory, Scullard thinks that 33 elephants must be an exaggeration⁴⁰.

About Hannibal's route to Rome, Scullard is again of the same opinion as De Visscher: He must have crossed the Ager Albensis⁴¹. He also follows De Visscher's opinion about the stone-elephants found in Alba Fucens: they were a testimony of this crossing⁴².

VII. Conclusions

To conclude, I think that De Visscher and Scullard convincingly showed that Hannibal's army crossed the Ager Albensis with African forest elephants. Whether the 2 elephant statues really are a souvenir of this is less certain I would say, even if it is not impossible.

³⁰ Scullard, (supra n. 25) 149.

³¹ Polybius, History, 1.19; Diodorus, Biblioteca historica, 23.8.

³² Scullard, (supra n. 25) 151-152.

³³ Polybius (History, 3.342), who gives this number in the context of the crossing of the Rhone-river.

³⁴ Scullard, (supra n. 25) 159.

³⁵ Scullard, (supra n. 25) 161.

³⁶ Polybius, History, 3.379.

³⁷ Livy, Ab Urbe condita, 23.41.10. Scullard (supra n. 25, 163) thinks that this is likely because of the fact that, by the time, a new silver coin was issued in Capua, bearing the figure of an African elephant. The author writes that these pieces must have advertised and underlined the importance of the fresh supply of elephants for the Carthaginian army.

³⁸ Livy, 26.5.3.

³⁹ Livy, 26.5.11.

⁴⁰ Scullard, (supra n. 25) 162-163.

⁴¹ Scullard, (supra n. 25) 163.

⁴² Scullard, (supra n. 25) 163-164.

To gain a personal opinion about these elephants, I travelled to Alba Fucens. The archaeological site is beautiful. Unfortunately, nobody seems to know where these sculptures are located now. Alba's archaeologists at least have no idea about it. We do have a certain number of pictures of these elephants. If I'm not mistaken, the most recent pictures have been taken in the years 1971 and 1978 by Josef Mertens⁴³, an archaeologist who worked in Alba Fucens together with Fernand De Visscher.

As I already said it, De Visscher thought that these elephants were rough and expressive, which makes them look archaic. This is why he thought that they might have been carved during the 2nd century B.C. But actually, this assumption is impossible to confirm. These elephants are simply two of a kind and cannot easily be compared to any other sculpture. Therefore, they are also very uneasy to put a date on.

We have to admit that other sources of inspiration can also be imagined. It is difficult to exclude completely the assumption that the elephants captured during the First Punic War might have been seen by our artist⁴⁴.

Another interesting hypothesis, apparently the one preferred by the archaeologists of Alba Fucens⁴⁵ today, lies in an inscription found in the city of Avezzano, very close to Alba Fucens. African soldiers dedicated this votive stone to Hercules⁴⁶. These soldiers were probably veterans of Quintus Cecilius Metellus Pius, a general of Sulla, of whom we know that he recruited African soldiers. Sulla distributed also pieces of land in Alba Fucens to his veterans. This means that there have been soldiers with African roots living in Alba Fucens. This might also be the link between Alba Fucens and the African forest elephants.

Generally speaking, we must admit that if these sculptures have not been carved in the 2nd century B.C. but later, the number of potential inspiration sources increases.

⁴³ Jean-Charles Balty (Hrsg.), *Belgica et Italica*. Joseph Mertens : une vie pour l'archéologie. *Alba in excelso locata saxo... Obscura incultis Herdonia ab agris*. Atti del Convegno in memoria di Joseph Mertens. Academia Belgica, 4-6 dicembre 2008, Bruxelles-Roma 2012.

⁴⁴ See supra n. 30.

⁴⁵ This possibility was suggested to me by the archaeologists Emanuela Ceccaroni and Claire De Ruyt. The latter is the daughter of Franz De Ruyt, an archaeologist who worked in Alba Fucens together with Fernand De Visscher and Joseph Mertens. She told me that this hypothesis was also her father's favourite.

⁴⁶ CIL, IX, 3907; I², 1815. *Cesare Letta*, Schede delle epigrafi esposte, in: *L'Aia dei musei. Le parole della pietra*, Hrsg. *Flavia de Sanctis, Rossella Del Monaco, Antonella Saragosa, Daniela Villa*, Avezzano 2012, 36:

Herculei d(onum) [d(ederunt)]
milites Africa[nis]
[C]aecilianis.
Mag(ister) curavit
C(aius) Saltorius C(ai) f(ilius).

How could we possibly exclude any of them? I have no definitive answer to this question, but somehow I wish to thank all those who contributed to this discussion in the past, as I had a lot of fun thinking about it and travelling to Alba Fucens!