

Ad Fundum

Liber Amicorum
Olga Tellegen-Couperus

C.L. van Blom en E.J.M.F.C. Broers (red.)



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Some Considerations on Hannibal's Elephants

*Jean-François Gerkens*¹

1. Introduction

First, I would like to pay tribute to Olga Tellegen-Couperus. We have shared a pleasant time of professional exchange of thoughts and theories in Tilburg in 2009, when I had been given the opportunity to teach as holder of the *TPR-Leerstoel*. At the time, the subjects of my lectures and conferences were Sales law, Rainwater, Comparative Law and *Occupatio*... However, in this article, I will discuss something very different: Hannibal's elephants.

Hannibal's elephants are a well-known story. Almost everyone 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. One might wonder why I would ponder on such a strange topic, and more important, one might ask what this subject has to do with Roman law?

The only Legal Roman source, mentioning elephants I have found, 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 camelii. Et ideo ad rem non pertinet, quod haec animalia etiam collo dorso 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. 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.'

Of course, the distinction between *res mancipi* and *res nec mancipi* has been discussed before. If the distinction has been invented to pay a bigger attention to some *res*, considered more important than others do, it might seem strange that donkeys are such a *res mancipi* and e.g. ships not. It seems best to agree with Gaius: 'The distinction is very old and by the time, Romans were peasants and not fishermen or traders' ... let alone, they then knew elephants!

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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. According to Pliny the Elder, in his *Natural History* (77 AD), the Romans first saw them in Lucania and not knowing how to call these animals, they named them *Lucas Boves*, Lucanian Oxen.²

Apparently, this is not all there is to say about Elephants in Roman Law, otherwise, you might wonder how I came across this topic. It all started with an article written by Fernand De Visscher: 'Une histoire d'éléphants'.³

2. Fernand De Visscher's excavations in Alba Fucens – The Elephants of Alba Fucens

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 was appointed Director of the *Academia Belgica* in Rome, the Belgian Academy for researchers in the Eternal City. According to him his life in Rome was not meant to become a sabbatical. On the contrary, he looked at it as the beginning of new challenges. Hence, Fernand De Visscher developed this Academy in a brilliant intellectual centre.⁴

Although he was no archaeologist yet, Fernand De Visscher was about to start becoming one.⁵ He really wanted Belgium to have an own archaeological site and due to his excellent relations with the Italian archaeologists, Belgium received Alba Fucens while the USA received a concession in Cosa and France in Bolsena. By the time, little was known about Alba Fucens. All one could see of it, were heavy city walls.

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 an important fortress, described by Cicero as a faithful city, full of brave men and loyal

² Pliny the Elder, N.H., 8.6.1: *Elephantos Italia primum vidit Pyrrhi regis bello, et boves Lucas appellavit in Lucanis visos anno urbis 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.*

³ F. De Visscher, 'Une histoire d'éléphants', *L'Antiquité Classique* 29 (1960) 51-60.

⁴ See F. De Ruyt, 'Notice sur Fernand De Visscher, Membre de l'Académie', *Annuaire de l'Académie royale de Belgique* (1985) 109.

⁵ Of course, Fernand De Visscher did not start to dig without the help of 'real' archeologists. See S. De Laet, Préface, in: J. Mertens, ed., *ALBA FVCENS I. Rapports et études* (Bruxelles/Rome 1969) 5.

and virtuous citizens, devoted to the republic.⁶

In the 19th century, Carlo Promis described Alba Fucens as a miserable little village with high city walls and some monuments in the middle. In 1915, a heavy earthquake destroyed the modern village of Alba. Some of its old mosaics⁷ were revealed in the process of rebuilding houses after the earthquake. During the Second World War, the place played its old strategic role again, when *General Feldmarschall* Albert Kesselring⁸ settled a German command post in Alba Fucens.

Of interest for this article, is that systematic excavations of the antique city started in 1949. When Fernand De Visscher – for the first time in his life – set about conducting these archaeological excavations, he was already 63 years old! As he put it himself, he was overwhelmed by getting involved in such an incredible enterprise!⁹ He discovered the site on 26 February 1949 and became immediately fascinated by this new and challenging activity. The first diggings started in April 1949 and the De Visscher's passion would not dwindle for the last 15 years of his life. Let it be clear that life conditions were all but comfortable there, but on the other hand, the place at the foot of Monte Velino was wonderful.

Although the first excavations were very promising, 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, should be returned to the farmer in its previous state in due time. They already had to reimburse the farmer for a complete maize harvest. In fact, the field was covered with heaps of dirt. Therms, temples, forum, basilica... All these buildings only waited to be uncovered... Fortunately, the Italian government was sufficiently impressed to 'forget' about these fields and supported the future excavations of Alba Fucens. Fernand De Visscher has been the mentor of these excavations until his death, on the 15th December 1964.

⁶ Cic., *Phil.* III.15: 'Cumque legio Martia Albae constiterit, in municipio fidelissimo et fortissimo, seseque ad senatus auctoritatem populi Romani libertatem contulerit (...); *Phil.* IV.2: (...) Albae constiterunt, in urbe opportuna, munita, propinqua, fortissimorum virorum, fidelissimorum civium atque optimorum. (...).'

⁷ F. De Ruyt, L'initiative... (o. Fn. 1) 9; A. Campanelli, *La petite Rome des Abruzzes. 50 années de recherche belgo-italiennes à Alba Fucens* (Sulmona 2007) 16.

⁸ F. De Ruyt, L'initiative... (o. Fn. 1) 9: 'un peu ahuri de (se) trouver lancé dans cette entreprise archéologique'.

⁹ This is what Franz De Ruyt wrote. Cf. F. De Ruyt, L'initiative... (o. Fn. 1) 9.

3. A Short History of Alba Fucens

The city of Alba Fucens was 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). The city of Alba Fucens 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 the right to mint money as well.¹⁰

Alba Fucens 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. However, during the Second Punic War, Alba Fucens experienced its most glorious moments. While Hannibal threatened Rome with his army, Rome begged its colonies for help. Alba Fucens was the only one that reacted positively by sending a cohort of 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 become a kind of place of banishment for dethroned Kings, like Syphax¹¹ (King of Western Numidia), Perseus¹² (King of Macedonia) and Bituitus¹³ (King of the Arverni).

During the first century B.C., the power of Rome was challenged by the rebellion of its allied cities. Alba Fucens was the only one staying faithful, but it 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 Roman citizenship to Alba's citizens.

Alba Fucens had suffered a lot during this last siege and the city centre needed important renovation works. Public places and private houses were decorated with elegant mosaics, frescoes and sculptures. It is quite

¹⁰ J. Mertens, 'Etude topographique d'Alba Fucens', in: J. Mertens, *ALBA FVCENS 1. Rapports et études* (Bruxelles/Rome 1969), 37-38.

¹¹ 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.

¹² Perseus, son of Philipp V. of Macedonia, has been arrested after the battle of Pydna, between Macedonia and Rome (168. B.C.).

¹³ 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.

impressive to see how many types of marbles have been used to renew Alba Fucens.

The decline of Alba Fucens became perceptible during the 3rd century AD. The presence of Constantine coins show that there still was 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 who mentioned Alba Fucens in his writings; in Justinian's times, an imperial army wintered there in 573.

During the middle ages, all that 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 arrived at Alba Fucens, there were only a few intact houses left.

4. The Elephants of Alba Fucens

As already mentioned, Alba Fucens was not a comfortable place to live, when the De Visscher family arrived at the spot. Neither current water, nor electricity, nor bathroom or toilets were available. Nevertheless, testimonies are unanimous to say that the De Visscher never stopped smiling and being enthusiastic.

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

Among the archaeological pieces were also two big carved stones. These stones, found in 1951, seemed to be the lateral parts of a bench.¹⁴ Both stones were carved in the shape of an elephant. They looked a bit archaic and Fernand De Visscher thought that they had been manufactured during the 2nd century B.C. The size of the ears made it clear, that these elephants were African elephants. Then De Visscher started to wonder where the stonemason of Alba had seen African elephants at such early times?¹⁵

As I recalled it, when the Romans first saw Pyrrhus' elephants in 280 BC, they did not even know how to call these animals. Was it possible that Alba's manufacturer had seen Pyrrhus' elephants? De Visscher did not believe so,

¹⁴ These two blocks were found at a distance of 55 meters, at the NW and SW corners of the basilica. See: De Visscher, 'Une histoire d'éléphants', 51.

¹⁵ Idem, 52: 'où et quand les colons d'Albe ont-ils vu les premiers spécimens de cette variété d'éléphants?'.

as he was certain that Pyrrhus' elephants were Asian elephants. He inferred this from a painting on a plate he had seen in the museum of Villa Giulia: the so-called "Capena-platter".¹⁶ That elephant was painted in the 3rd century B.C. and its ears are quite small. De Visscher concluded that the painting on the plate depicted 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.

Some 30 years later, during the 1st Punic War, the Romans met African elephants for the first time. But Fernand De Visscher did not think that this war gave the opportunity to the stonemason 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*.¹⁷ But Alba's amphitheatre was built much later, in memory of Q. Naevius Macro,¹⁸ who was praetorian prefect under Tiberius. Even if he presumed that there might have been a previous amphitheatre in Alba, the probability was rather small, that a small city like Alba Fucens would have been able to afford such an expensive animal

¹⁶ 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, rossette 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: A.D. Seta, *Museo di Villa Giulia* (Rom 1918) 348-349, n. 23949.

¹⁷ Fernand De Visscher found an inscription on the *venationes legitimae* in the amphitheatre of Alba Fucens: See F. De Visscher, 'Une histoire d'éléphants', 53 n. 6.

¹⁸ 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. F. De Visscher, 'Une histoire d'éléphants', 53 n. 7.

for the games. The graffiti that was discovered in Alba Fucens showed a lion and maybe a bear. Moreover, the amount of boar tusks that were found seemed to indicate that it were precisely boars that were the usual game of the *venationes*.

Therefore, Fernand De Visscher believed that the sculptor found his inspiration in the 2nd Punic War, when Hannibal crossed Italy together with his elephants. 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 was sufficient to know that they also used elephants of the African type. However, and again, the fact that Hannibal's army used such African elephant did not mean that Alba's sculptor had the opportunity to see them.

Nonetheless, De Visscher explained 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 did not 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. Concerning the question which route Hannibal took to march on Rome, two versions are known: 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 Carthaginians, using the via Appia.¹⁹ Only, 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' version,²⁰ Hannibal's army went to Rome passing through

¹⁹ 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 Voltumnum traducit. Inde cum Hannibalem Latina via iturum satis compresisset, ipse per Appiae municipia quaeque propter eam viam sunt, Setiam, Coram, Lavinium praemisit ut commeatus paratos et in urbibus haberent et ex agris deviis in viam proferrent, praesidiaque in urbes contraherent ut sua cuique res publica in manu esset.'

²⁰ Πολύβιος, 9.5.7-9: 'Ἄννιβας δὲ μετὰ πέμπτην ἡμέραν τῆς παρουσίας, δειπνοποιησάμενος καὶ καταλιπὼν τὰ πυρὰ καιόμενα, τοιαύτην ἐποίησε τὴν ἀναζυγὴν ὥστε μηδένα συνεῖναι τῶν πολεμίων τὸ συμβαῖνον. χρησάμενος δὲ ταῖς πορείαις διὰ τῆς Σαυνίτιδος ἐνεργοῖς καὶ συνεχέστι καὶ τοὺς περὶ τὴν ὁδὸν τόπους αἱεὶ ταῖς προπορείαις ἔξερευνόμενος καὶ προκαταλαμβάνων, ἔτι τῶν ἐν τῇ Ρώμῃ ταῖς διανοίαις περὶ τὴν Καπύην καὶ τὰς ἐκεῖ πράξεις ὄντων ἔλαθε διαβάς τὸν Ἀνίωνα ποταμὸν καὶ συνεγγίσας, ὥστε μὴ πλεῖον τετταράκοντα σταδίων ἀποσχὼν τῆς Ρώμης ποιήσασθαι τὴν παρεμβολήν.'

Samnium, in central Italy. Unfortunately, Polybius does not tell the way they took thereupon, as he makes them reappear in the North of Rome. Strange enough, Livy, who knew this second version, fills in this lack of information.²¹ 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 – anything 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 chroniclers²² 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

²¹ 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 peruenisse, praeterque oppidum Sulmonem in Marrucinos transisse; inde Albensi agro in Marsos, hinc Amiternum Forulosque uicum uenisse. neque ibi error est quod tanti <ducis tanti>que exercitus uestigia intra tam breuis aei memoriam potuerint confundi – isse enim ea constat –: tantum id interest ueneritne eo itinere ad urbem an ab urbe in Campaniam redierit.'

²² See also: Appian, Hannibal 38-39, 162-169: '[38] Καὶ ὁ μὲν οὗτος παραβόλως διεσώζετο, Αννίβας δὲ τῆς χρείας ψευσθείς ἐφ' ἣν ἐς Λευκανοὺς μετεκέιλητο, ἀνέστρεφεν ἐς Καπύνην, μέγα ποιούμενος μὴ περιδεῖν πόλιν μεγάλην καὶ εὔκαιρον ὑπὸ Ρωμαίοις γενομένην. Προσβαλὼν δὲ τῷ περιτειχίσματι καὶ μηδὲν δυνηθείς, μηδ' ἐπινοῶν ὅπως ἄν ἐς τὴν πόλιν ἐσπέμψειν ἢ σῆτον ἢ στρατιάν, οὐδενὸς οὐδὲ ἀπ' ἐκείνων αὐτῷ συμβαλεῖν δυναμένου διὰ τὴν ἐπιτείχισιν πάντη περιλαμβάνουσαν, ἐπὶ τὴν Ρώμην ἡπείγετο παντὶ τῷ στρατῷ, πυνθανόμενος μὲν κάκείνους ὑπὸ λιμοῦ πιέζεσθαι, ἐλπίζων δὲ τοὺς στρατηγοὺς αὐτῶν ἀπὸ Καπύνης ἀναστήσειν, ἢ αὐτός τι Καπύνης μεῖζον ἐργάσεσθαι. Συντόνω δὲ σπουδῇ διελθὼν ἔθνη πολλὰ καὶ πολέμια, τῶν μὲν οὐ δυνηθέντων αὐτὸν ἐπισχεῖν, τῶν δὲ οὐδὲ ἐς πεῖραν ἐλθεῖν ὑποστάντων, ἀπὸ δύο καὶ τριάκοντα σταδίων τῆς Ρώμης ἐστρατοπέδευσεν ἐπὶ τοῦ Ανιῆνος ποταμοῦ.[39] Καὶ ἡ πόλις ἐθορυβήθη θόρυβον οἶον οὐ πρότερον, οἰκεῖον μὲν οὐδὲν ἔχοντες ίκανόν (ὅ γάρ εἶχον, ἐν Καμπανίᾳ τότε ἦν), πολεμίου δὲ στρατοῦ τοσοῦδε σφίσιν ἐπιστάντος ἄφνω, καὶ στρατηγοῦ δι' ἀρετὴν καὶ εὐτυχίαν ἀμάχου. Ὅμως δὲ ἐκ τῶν παρόντων οἱ μὲν δυνάμενοι φέρειν ὅπλα τὰς πύλας ἐφύλασσον, 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 Ανιῆνος ἐκδραμόντες ἔκοπτον. Μικρὸν δέ τι πολίχνιον Ρωμαῖοί ποτε ἐπιτειχίζοντες Αἰκανοῖς Ἀλβην ἀπὸ τῆς αὐτῶν μητροπόλεως ἐκάλεσαν· σὺν χρόνῳ δ' ἐπισύροντες ἢ διαφθείροντες, ἢ ἐς τὴν Αλβανῶν σύγκρισιν, Ἀλβησέας αὐτοὺς καλοῦσιν. Τούτων τότε τῶν Αλβησέων ἐς Ρώμην δισχίλιοι δρόμῳ διέθεον, τοῦ κινδύνου μετασχεῖν, καὶ ἄμα ἀφικνοῦντο καὶ ὠπλίζοντο καὶ τὰς πύλας ἐφρούρουν. Τοσῆδε προθυμίᾳ βραχὺ πολίχνιον ἐκ τοσῶνδε ἀποικιῶν ἔχρησατο μόνη, οἶον τι καὶ Αθηναίοις ἐς Μαραθῶνα μικρὰ πόλις ἡ Πλαταιέων ἔδραμε τοῦ τότε κινδύνου μετασχεῖν.'

Carthaginians on the right. The Romans destroyed the bridge over the Anio to protect themselves. However, 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.

Consequently, this means 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 Rome.²³

In the opinion of De Visscher, the sculptor from Alba found his inspiration in the march of the Carthaginian army on its way to Rome. The Visscher considered it a supplementary argument against Livy's Via Latina hypothesis.

5. Fernand De Visscher controversy with Antonio Guarino

Antonio Guarino²⁴ reacted very sceptically on De Visscher's 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. Could Pyrrhus have done the same or were Pyrrhus' elephants descendants of Alexander's? Guarino did not believe these hypotheses. He thought – considering the good relationship between Pyrrhus and Ptolemy – it 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. About the Capena-platter, Guarino writes that the images are not sufficiently realistic to infer that Pyrrhus' army used Asian elephants. The ears might be small, but the tusks are too long to be sure. He also puts down that the tower on the elephant's back means nothing. About the elephants of Alba Fucens, Guarino writes that they do not correspond to any living animal, they are probably inspired by some rough description or by coins on which African elephants are depicted.

Fernand De Visscher answered to this scepticism by a second article,²⁵ explaining that Pyrrhus arrived in Taranto in 281 B.C. and that the elephant-taming centre on the shores of the Red Sea, in Ptolemais Theron was founded in 280 B.C. He also contradicted Guarino's analysis of the Capena-platter. According to De Visscher, the tusks are clearly those of Asian elephants. The tower protecting the soldiers on the elephant's back is common in Asia.

²³ Titus Livius 26.11.13: «*tantum id interest ueneritne eo itinere ad urbem an ab urbe in Campaniam redierit.*»

²⁴ A. Guarino, 'Lecture', in: *Labeo* 7 (1961) 265-266.

²⁵ F. De Visscher, 'Encore les éléphants d'Annibal', in: *L'Antiquité classique* 31 (1962) 234-235.

The army of the Indian king Porus used similar towers, 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 specified that they must have been African elephants, but of the species of the forest elephants: *Loxodonta Africana cyclotis*. They hold their head a bit lower and their trunk straight and close to their knees. For De Visscher, there was little doubt about the fact that the elephants that inspired Alba's artist were African forest elephants being part of Hannibal's army that crossed the Ager Albensis in 211 B.C.

I. 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 standard book about elephants in ancient Rome. As for the Capena-platter, Scullard follows De Visscher in admitting that the elephant is one of Pyrrhus' army.²⁶ Pyrrhus crossed the Adriatic Sea with 25.000 soldiers and 20 Asian elephants.²⁷ Funny enough, in Antiquity, the Asian elephant (also called *elephas maximus*), compared to the African elephant, was considered the bigger one because at the time, Greeks and Romans never saw the big bush elephants, but only the smaller forest elephants.²⁸

The Carthaginians used such forest elephants originating from Mauritania or Numidia. Probably, Hannibal had some Asian elephants as well, but the large majority of his elephants were African forest elephants.²⁹ The Carthaginians were able to transport these elephants on ships to Sicily.³⁰ During the first Punic War, they included 50 elephants in their army in Agrigentum.³¹ The Romans were able to capture some of them.³² They transported them over the Strait of Messina, but we do not know what happened with these elephants afterwards.³³ 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 second Punic War, he seems to have included 37 elephants in his army.³⁴ None of

²⁶ H.H. Scullard, *The Elephant in the Greek and Roman World* (Cambridge 1974) 105.

²⁷ Scullard, *The Elephant*, 102-103.

²⁸ Scullard, *The Elephant*, 60-63.

²⁹ Scullard, *The Elephant*, 148.

³⁰ Polybius, *History*, 1.18.

³¹ Scullard, *The Elephant*, 149.

³² Polybius, *History*, 1.19; Diodorus, *Biblioteca historica*, 23.8.

³³ Scullard, *The Elephant*, 151-152.

³⁴ Polybius *History*, 3.342, who gives this number in the context of the crossing of the Rhone-river.

these elephants seems to have died before arriving in Italy.³⁵ It is only after the first battles that all but one died because of the cold.³⁶ Hannibal himself then mounted the only surviving elephant,³⁷ before receiving some fresh elephants in the Calabrian harbour of Locri.³⁸ The number of elephants is not certain. Livy³⁹ writes that during the siege of Capua, in the year 211 B.C., Hannibal had 33 elephants at his disposal. The same Livy⁴⁰ 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 exaggeration.⁴¹

About Hannibal's route to Rome, Scullard is again of the same opinion as De Visscher, Hannibal must have crossed the Ager Albensis.⁴² Scullard also follows De Visscher's opinion about the stone-elephants found in Alba Fucens, they were a testimony of this crossing.⁴³

6. 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 two elephant statues really are a souvenir of this crossing is less certain, even if it is not impossible.

To gain a personal opinion about these elephants, I travelled to Alba Fucens. The archaeological site is beautiful. Unfortunately, nobody seems to know where the elephant sculptures are located now. At least, Alba's archaeologists have no idea about it. We do have a certain number of pictures of these elephants. If I'm not mistaken, Josef Mertens, an archaeologist who worked in Alba Fucens together with Fernand De Visscher, took the most recent pictures in the years 1971 and 1978.⁴⁴ As I already said, De Visscher

³⁵ Scullard, *The Elephant*, 159.

³⁶ Scullard, *The Elephant*, 161.

³⁷ Polybius, *History*, 3.379.

³⁸ Livy, *Ab Urbe condita*, 23.41.10. Scullard, *The Elephant*, 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.

³⁹ Livy, *Ab Urbe condita*, 26.5.3.

⁴⁰ Livy, *Ab Urbe condita*, 26.5.11.

⁴¹ Scullard, *The Elephant*, 162-163.

⁴² Scullard, *The Elephant*, 163.

⁴³ Scullard, *The Elephant*, 163-164.

⁴⁴ J.C. Balty, ed., *Belgica et Italica. Joseph Mertens: une vie pour l'archéologie. Alba in excelsis locata saxo... Obscura in cultis Herdonia ab agris. Atti del Convegno in memoria di Joseph Mertens*. Academia Belgica, 4-6 dicembre 2008, (Bruxelles/Roma 2012).

thought that these elephant sculptures were rough and expressive, which makes them look archaic. This is why he thought that they possibly were carved during the 2nd century B.C. Actually, this assumption is impossible to confirm. These elephant sculptures are simply two of a kind and cannot easily be compared to any other sculpture. Therefore, to put an exact date on the sculptures is quite difficult.

We have to mention some other sources of possible inspiration. First, it is difficult to exclude definitely the assumption that the elephants, captured during the First Punic War, have been seen by our artist⁴⁵.

Second, another interesting hypothesis, apparently the one preferred by the archaeologists of Alba Fucens⁴⁶ today, lies in an inscription found in the city of Avezzano, very close to Alba Fucens. African soldiers dedicated this votive stone to Hercules.⁴⁷ 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. Therefore, soldiers with African roots lived in Alba Fucens. Hence, this might be the link between Alba Fucens and the African forest elephants also.

Furthermore, we have to admit that if these sculptures were not carved in the 2nd century B.C. but later, the number of potential inspiration sources increases.

How could we possibly exclude any of the hypotheses? I think a definitive answer to this question is still shrouded in the veils of the past. However, I wish to thank all those who contributed to this discussion in the past, because I had a lot of fun thinking about it and travelling to Alba Fucens!

⁴⁵ See supra n. 30.

⁴⁶ 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.

⁴⁷ CIL, IX, 3907; I², 1815. C. Letta, 'Schede delle epigrafi esposte', in: F. de Sanctis, R. Del Monaco, A. Saragosa & D. Villa, ed., *L'Aia dei musei. Le parole della pietra* (Avezzano 2012) 36: 'Herculei d(onum) [d(ederunt)]. milites Africaf[nis]. [C]aecilianis. Mag(ister) curavit. C(aius) Saltorius C(ai) f(ilius).