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Spectacular Tropes: Representations of the Roman Arena

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**SPECTACULAR TROPES: REPRESENTATIONS OF THE ROMAN
ARENA**

A Thesis Presented

by

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Honors College
University of Vermont
2018

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ABSTRACT

This paper will focus on the construction of representational tropes depicting the ancient Roman arenas and those involved with them, particularly within the spectacles of gladiatorial battles. The conceptions of representation within the arena influenced how differing Roman social groups perceived one another through social ideals and identities. I will analyze this by looking at three major methods of representation from the ancient Roman world: (1) literary sources, (2) epigraphical materials (inscriptions and graffiti), and (3) visual sources (mosaics and reliefs). These sources reflect the different characteristics of the Roman arenas and are defined by various social contexts, displaying how different ideals relating to the arena and its performers were valued within greater Roman society. I will examine these ancient ideals on representation by relating them to anthropological and sociological concepts related to the representation and public perceptions of athletes and sports. This includes representations of the body, masculine ideals, social status, and others.

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INTRODUCTION

From the late Roman Republic to the late Roman Empire, the arena was an important staple of society, incorporating spectacles into the daily life of Roman society. One of the most important was the gladiatorial combats. These combats were integrated into Roman society in the third century BC, during the First Punic War as funerary rites. The first of these combats were held as commemorative events given in honor of deceased ancestors. These performances became popular attractions, growing into a more normative feature of Roman life. By the end of the second century BC, the Roman state had begun to sponsor gladiatorial shows within *ludi* (state sponsored shows), which were integrated into major religious festivals. The growth of gladiatorial combats in extravagance and scale provided opportunities for their sponsors to expand their reputation and popularity, transforming their purpose and values within Roman society. By the end of the Roman Republican era and into the imperial era, these shows of combat became widely integrated into political and social life and came to reflect the values and ideals of the Roman world.

I will be examining three prevalent forms of ancient representation relating to gladiators: literature, epigraphy, and visual material. The literary sources come from a variety of Roman authors who perceived the gladiatorial games and other contests of the arena through different societal contexts (social, political, and economical). The epigraphical sources I focus on include epitaphs, funerary inscriptions commemorating gladiators and other athletic performers, and graffiti—etchings created by the Roman public to convey their ideas and perceptions. The visual sources are primarily mosaics depicting detailed scenes of the arena. My primary focus within each of these categories will be gladiatorial representation. I will, however, also be examining

other athletic spectacles, namely chariot racing and beast hunts (*venationes*). I have chosen to include these spectacles due the parallels and contrasts with gladiatorial representations and the values supporting them. Through this examination, I will discuss the role of the arena and how these representational tropes of the arena reflect social values and ideals for the performers, the Roman elite, and the Roman public.

To contextualize further the arena and its implications, I will be interpreting these ancient sources through relevant anthropological and sociological concepts, including ideas of masculinity in sports, primarily *hegemonic masculinity*. This term was defined by R.W. Connell (1990) as a practice which emphasizes 1) the connection of masculinity to toughness and competitiveness, and 2) the marginalization of women and other subordinated groups (94). I will discuss how such social ideals and identities were constructed through ancient representations of gladiators and the arena. Other notable of interpretation are ideals of honor, social unification/integration, violence, athletic prowess, and others. Past scholarship relating to sports and sport media will be used to interpret these the ancient representations in order to contextualize their conventions better.

LITERATURE

The first category of representation I wish to discuss is literary, as gladiators and other aspects of the arena were a common topic to authors of the Roman world. Gladiators were often discussed for their social, political and philosophical impact on Roman society due to their influential and controversial performances in the arena. These authors had varying ideas on what roles gladiators were supposed to play as both performers and members of the Roman social order; their discussions provide great detail about what occurred in the spectacles that were so prevalent in Roman society. These sources not only reveal how gladiators were viewed, but other social classes' relationships to the arena and gladiatorial combats.

IIA Social Advancement and Unification within the Arena

The first theme of literary representation is the idealization of the gladiatorial image through the promise of social advancement. From the viewpoint of Roman authors, the arena offered opportunities for those low on the Roman social hierarchy to prove their worth and gain value in Roman society through a celebrated reputation. This is conveyed by Cicero in his *Tusculan Disputations*, written in 45 BC, when he describes how gladiator shows provided training for the eyes and ears against death, with shows of grace for condemned criminals and slaves:

Look at

gladiators, who are either ruined men or barbarians, what blows they endure! See, how men, who have been well trained, prefer to receive a blow rather than basely avoid it! How frequently it is

made evident that there is nothing they put higher than giving satisfaction to their owner or to the people! Even when weakened with wounds they send word to their owners to ascertain their pleasure: if they have given satisfaction to them they are content to fall. What gladiator of ordinary merit has ever uttered a groan or changed countenance? Who of them has disgraced himself, I will not say upon his feet, but who has disgraced himself in his fall? Who after falling has drawn in his neck when ordered to suffer the fatal stroke? Such is the force of training, practice and habit. (*Tus.* 2.41, trans. 000)

As Cicero shows, gladiators were valued for their ability to take up arms and entertain the people through combat. With many gladiators being “ruined men or barbarians”, such ability could offer status and social value that was otherwise unattainable. Besnier and Brownell (2012) discuss how contemporary nations use sports as a means of integrating and empowering certain groups into the dominant society. As such, a greater sense of national belonging is attributed to these groups when they act as representatives in international competitions like the Modern Olympics (452-453). This will be discussed further in the discussion on epigraphical representation as epitaphs served as displays of social advancement and recognition through performance.

Gladiators were also considered to be offering a valuable service to the Roman people, as their combats served as spectacles of death and violence which were believed to be good inspirations, as shown by the Cicero passage above. This perhaps encouraged Roman men to serve aptly as soldiers in the Roman army. As a part of duty to the Roman state, citizens needed to complete obligatory military service. The desensitization of violence and death through arena

spectacles might help create better soldiers. Jansen and Sabo (1994) discuss the concept of the “sport/war metaphor” which formed during the Persian Gulf War. Sports, by playing a crucial role in human societies as an element of national ideals and identity which could transcend social boundaries, helped establish a mythos within American culture which reaffirmed involvement in the Persian Gulf War. This was done due to the relationship of sportspeak and warspeak and through this, sports and warfare in American culture became more synonymous with one another. For example, American football became reflective of strategic battles for territory with players reflecting actual soldiers (10-11). This reflects how the normalization of violent spectacles in Roman society could have helped discipline the mind for military service. Roman soldiers were expected to act solely in their public capacity.¹ This reflects how, as described by Cicero, gladiators were expected to put nothing before giving satisfaction to the public through their combats. Even the gladiatorial armaments could affect public perceptions of the Roman army. While many gladiators were made to look like cultural outsiders, one significant armament type emulated the Roman soldier. This was the *secutor*, a gladiator armed with short sword (*gladius*) and heavy shield (*scutum*). Roman foot soldiers were typically armed with these same weapons, making the *secutor* a reflection of the armed Roman soldier. The image of the *secutor* is also a prevalent trope in visual representations, as discussed below.

Such social integration and unification through spectacles could also influence the crowds by creating an environment for social categorization which helped members of the audience connect with one another. But with these spectacles’ focus on violence, members of the crowd would also be able to reinforce their social identities amongst one another as the ingroup,

¹ Phang 2008, 211

with arena performers acting as the outgroup.² As such, the social divisions between these groups would have created resentments as the audience wished to see greater acts of violence from the performers. In his *De Ira* (written around AD 45), Seneca the Younger conveys this in a discussion of the arena crowd being emotionally fueled by ‘mock anger’ (*quasi ira*):

Tell me, why do we see the people grow angry with gladiators, and so unjustly as to deem it an offence that they are not glad to die? They consider themselves affronted, and from mere spectators transform themselves into enemies, in looks, in gesture, and in violence. Whatever this may be, it is not anger, but mock anger, like that of children who, if they fall down, want the earth to be thrashed, and who often do not even know why they are angry—they are merely angry, without any reason and without being injured, though not without some semblance of injury and not without some desire of exacting punishment. And so they are deceived by imaginary blows and are pacified by the pretended tears of those who beg forgiveness, and mock resentment is removed by a mock revenge. (*De ir.* 3.2)

This ‘mock anger’ leads the crowd yearning for the sight of death in gladiatorial combats. This accentuation of the crowd as a unified being relates to the idea of “collective effervescence”, described by Emile Durkheim.³ This concept describes how a community or group can become unified when they come together to participate in the same activity. Individuality amongst the

² Fagan 2011, 150

³ Durkheim 1965

members of this group can become lost as unified excitement grows. Durkheim used this concept to describe the social impact of religion on human communities, but it can usefully be applied to athletic spectacles like those of the arena. According to Seneca, this pseudo-anger the crowd emits comes from their desire to witness greater acts of violence from the arena performers. It is only when gladiators exchange blows and one begs for forgiveness after defeat that they become pacified, now that their bloodlust has been satiated. As individuals and as a group, the those in the crowd reinforce their social identities through the violence gladiators inflict on one another and until these violent acts have been done, the crowd acts in anger.

The social constructions behind the organization of the arena crowds can influence how these social associations are purposefully constructed. The seating for Roman amphitheatres was established to ensure groups who were less socially accepted could not view the arena well, reflecting how one's seating for these spectacles was indicative of their social standing. One group which was particularly affected by this were women, who were typically forced into the upper stands of the amphitheatres, where the spectacles of the arena would be difficult to see. Such organization was established by the emperor Augustus, as described by Suetonius in AD 121:

He put a stop by special regulations to the disorderly and indiscriminate fashion of viewing the games, through exasperation at the insult to a senator, to whom no one offered a seat in a crowded house at some largely attended games in Puteoli. In consequence of this the senate decreed that, whenever any public show was given anywhere, the first row of seats should be reserved

for senators; and at Rome he would not allow the envoys of the free and allied nations to sit in the orchestra, since he was informed that even freedmen were sometimes appointed. He separated the soldiery from the people. He assigned special seats to the married men of the commons, to boys under age their own section and the adjoining one to their preceptors; and he decreed that no one wearing a dark cloak should sit in the middle of the house. He would not allow women to view even the gladiators except from the upper seats, though it had been the custom for men and women to sit together at such shows. (*Aug.* 44)

Besides the Vestal Virgins and those of the imperial family, most women, even of elite status, were forced to the back rows, amongst those of social inferiority. As such, it has been suggested that women were dissuaded to view the arena spectacles because of this.⁴ This reflects the concept of *hegemonic masculinity* as described by Connell (1990). With amphitheatres acting as a major social structure of Roman society, the marginalization of women in the seating organization and the acceptance of this marginalization reinforces the dominant Roman gender order.

IIB Social Relationship between the Arena and the Roman Elite

Just as Roman authors sought to convey the relationship between the lower social classes of Roman society and the gladiatorial games, another important aspect of literary discussion was

⁴ Fagan 2011, 106-108

societal elites and their relationship to the gladiators and the arena. As we discussed in the visual chapter, Roman elites certainly appreciated the spectacles, seeing them as venues for increasing their own popularity and reputation by sponsoring *munera* for the people. But to the critical eyes of some Roman authors, such appreciation reflected disgrace upon the Roman elite as many found themselves becoming participants in the arena, a position which (critics argued) was only for their social counterparts. This is seen in Dio Cassius' *Roman History* (written from AD 211-233), when he discusses how members of the Roman senatorial and equestrian orders performed in spectacles put on by the emperor Nero:

In honour of his mother he celebrated a most magnificent and costly festival, the events taking place for several days in five or six theatres at once. It was on this occasion that an elephant was led up to the highest gallery of the theatre and walked down from that point on ropes, carrying a rider. There was another exhibition that was at once most disgraceful and most shocking, when men and women not only of the equestrian but even of the senatorial order appeared as performers in the orchestra, in the Circus, and in the hunting-theatre, like those who are held in lowest esteem. Some of them played the flute and danced in pantomimes or acted in tragedies and comedies or sang to the lyre; they drove horses, killed wild beasts and fought as gladiators, some willingly and some sore against their will. (*Cass. Dio* 62.17.2-4, trans. 000)

Suetonius recounts a similar instance of patricians being compelled to take part in Nero's entertainments of the arena:

These plays he viewed from the top of the proscenium. At the gladiatorial show, which he gave in a wooden amphitheatre, erected in the district of the Campus Martius within the space of a single year, he had no one put to death, not even criminals. But he compelled four hundred senators and six hundred Roman knights, some of whom were well to do and of unblemished reputation, to fight in the arena. Even those who fought with the wild beasts and performed the various services in the arena were of the same orders.
(*Ner.* 12, trans. 000)

It is interesting to see the contrast between the support of the social relationships between the gladiatorial image and the lower social classes versus the social elites. The acts of a gladiator was fit only for those of lower social status but the same could not be said for the elites.

The relationship between the Roman emperor and the arena was a highly discussed issue within ancient literature. The arena was inherently tied to the Roman emperor through the Imperial cult. Just as local elites and magistrates would put on *munera* to spread their name, the Imperial cult staged the greatest spectacles throughout the Roman Empire to foster public approval for the imperial state. Many of these large spectacles were put on to celebrate the emperor's accomplishments and were on a scale unmatched by others. Dio Cassius describes the spectacles put on by Trajan after his victories over the Dacians between 108 and 109 AD:

Upon Trajan's return to Rome ever so many embassies came to

him from various barbarians, including the Indi. And he gave spectacles on one hundred and twenty-three days, in the course of which some eleven thousand animals, both wild and tame, were slain, and ten thousand gladiators fought. (*Cass. Dio* 68.15, trans. 000)

The emperors had much to gain by putting on spectacles of this caliber, which helped spread their reputations and accomplishments far and wide.⁵ But some emperors controversially expanded their relationship to the arena through personal participation. If social elites were disgraced for their participation in the arena games—something normally acceptable only for those lower on the social scale—the emperor himself taking part was unbelievably shocking for many. We know of several emperors who took part in arena performances, both in public and in private, where risks were minimal.⁶ It is interesting to consider how we saw that Roman authors valued the arena because of their ability to portray acts of death and violence in order to strengthen the public and yet, Roman emperors who competed within the arena were not prone to such acts because of their status.

Commodus is probably the best known imperial performer, taking part in the various spectacles of the arena. Commodus began his rule as emperor along with Marcus Aurelius, his father, in the year 177 AD. After Marcus Aurelius' death on 17 March, 180 AD, Commodus became sole emperor and was then able to pursue his desire to perform in the arena. A particularly significant source here is Herodian's *History of the Empire* (written around AD 238):

Throwing off all inhibitions, Commodus now gave orders for the celebration of public shows, at which he promised

⁵ Brown 2011, 184

⁶ Barton 193, 66

he would kill all the wild animals with his own hand and engage in gladiatorial combat with the stoutest of the young men. As the news spread, people flocked to Rome from all over Italy and the neighbouring provinces to be spectators at something they had never seen or heard of before. The topic of conversation was about Commodus' marksmanship and how he made sure he never missed with his spear or arrow. He had the finest Parthian archers and Mauretanian spearsmen with him as his teachers, but he was more skilful than any of them. At last the day of the show came and the amphitheatre was packed. A special raised enclosure was put up for Commodus' benefit so that he could spear the animals safely from above without endangering himself from close quarters, a demonstration of his skill but not of his courage. (*Hdn.* 1.15)

The idea of the Roman emperor competing in spectacles meant for slaves and criminals was something unusual and thus, was an attractive idea. Emperors such as Caligula, Titus, and Hadrian, to name a few, did perform in the arena, both in private and public.⁷ But Commodus is significant due to his strong, practically fanatical, commitment to his performances. Herodian seems to imply that Commodus enjoyed a purely positive reception due to his unusual but spectacular commitment to the arena, something which the people might adore due to their own admiration of arena spectacles. At first this seems a stark contrast to how other members of the elite were disgraced through their own performances. But when Herodian goes on to describe

⁷ Barton 1993, 66

Commodus as a gladiator (versus a *venator*), the public perception of such performances becomes clearer:

So far Commodus was still quite popular with the mob even if his conduct, apart from his courage and marksmanship, was unfitting for an emperor. But when he ran into the amphitheatre stripped and carrying his weapons for a gladiatorial fight, the people were ashamed to see a Roman emperor of noble lineage, whose father and forebears had all celebrated great triumphs, now disgracing his office with a thoroughly degrading exhibition, instead of using his weapons to fight the barbarians and prove himself worthy of the Roman empire. He had no difficulty in overcoming his opponents in gladiatorial fights by merely wounding them, since they all looked upon him as the emperor rather than as a gladiator and let him win. But his madness reached such a stage that he even refused to stay in the palace any longer and was intending to go and live with the gladiators in their barracks. (*Hdn.* 1.15, trans. 000)

Commodus' gladiatorial performances were therefore seen as a disgrace. Such a role belonged to those with no other choice—not the leader of the Roman Empire.

IIC Mythology within the Arena

The portrayal of mythology through different kinds of performances was another popular aspect of arena spectacles. Roman literary sources present several different perspectives on such portrayals. We can gain a better understanding of how mythological reenactments were used to create grander performances. There were various ways in which Greco-Roman mythology was

integrated into the arena, all of which displayed and even exploited different aspects of the mythological stories and tropes in order to allow for greater spectacles. Gladiatorial contests certainly reflected this trend of the arena through mythological identities placed onto individual gladiators. This will be discussed below due to their prevalence in epigraphical representation.

Mythological stories were adapted to the punishment and execution of criminals, as the violent nature of the arena was a suitable place to display the violent and disturbing mythological tales. Coleman (1990) terms such performances ‘fatal charades’, punishments which were set in dramatic contexts. Literary sources attest several instances of executions in the arena that doubled as mythological dramas. Tertullian evidently gives an eye-witness account in his *Apologeticus*, written in AD 197:

But you really are still more religious in the amphitheatre,
 where over human blood, over the dirt of pollution of capital
 punishment, your gods dance, supplying plots and themes for the
 guilty—unless it is that often the guilty play the parts of the gods.
 We have seen at one time or other Atys, that god from Pessinus,
 being castrated; and a man, who was being burned alive, had been
 rigged out as Hercules. We have laughed, amid the noon’s blend of
 cruelty and absurdity, at Mercury using his burning iron to see
 who was dead. We have seen Jove’s brother, too, hauling out the
 corpses of gladiators, hammer in hand. And all the details of it, who
 could inquire into them? If they overturn the honour of deity, if
 they blot out every trace of majesty, it simply means the sheer

contempt felt by those who do these things, and by those for whom they do them. (*Apol.* 15.4-6)

Tertullian gives us a look into the Christian perspective on the arena and its social impact on Roman society. Tertullian was clearly distressed by the celebration of social outcasts and criminals in the guise of mythological figures, including deities. But just as some authors celebrated the arena as a venue for those of lower social prestige to gain opportunities otherwise unobtainable, it is interesting to see how the Roman penal system would enact such executions as they better reflected the standard imagery of the arena.

EPIGRAPHY

The second major category of representation within the ancient Roman world is epigraphy. Ancient epigraphical materials give us a direct look into how gladiators, and the ancient Roman arena spectacles generally, were being perceived and represented both by those directly involved with the production of gladiatorial games, and by the greater Roman populace who watched them. The two major epigraphical types are inscriptions and graffiti. Epitaphs found on funerary monuments are valuable sources for how gladiators wished to be portrayed after death. Many ancient performers were able to build legacies and their monuments and tombstones convey these tropes of sports and masculinity. Their inscriptions provide a great amount of information about how they wished to be represented after death. The special significance of graffiti is that, unlike other ancient texts that were only available to certain groups and individuals, practically anyone could convey their feelings, and read those of others, on walls and other surfaces. It is through graffiti that we can see how gladiators were adored by the Roman people, who etched their images and names throughout the Roman towns.

IIIA Tombstone Inscriptions as Representations of Gladiators' Legacy

Epitaphs, commemorative inscriptions found on funerary monuments like tombstones, are a significant branch of epigraphical materials for gladiatorial representations. These epitaphs typically celebrated a performer's career, highlighting biographical information like number of wins, age of death and place of origin. A particularly prominent aspect of these inscriptions is the enumeration of honorable deeds and ideals. Gladiators were essentially expensive commodities of spectacle and entertainment and as such, much value was placed on them, especially on those

who performed well. When putting on a *munus*—gladiatorial contests as an individual aristocrat’s responsibility to provide to the community— sponsors typically had to lease gladiators from a *lanista* (manager of gladiators); if these gladiators were hurt or killed, the sponsors had to pay the more expensive sale price (beyond the lease price). We know this from Gaius’ *Institutes*, written around AD 161. The jurist uses gladiator contracts as an example in discussing the difference between sales and leases:

Again, if I deliver gladiators to you under the condition that twenty *denarii* shall be paid to me for the exertions of everyone who issues safe and sound from the arena; and a thousand *denarii* for every one who is killed or disabled; the question arises whether a contract of purchase and sale, or one of leasing and hiring has been made. The better opinion is that, in the case of those who come forth safe and sound, a contract of leasing and hiring was concluded; but so far as those who have been killed or disabled are concerned the contract is one of purchase and sale, for it is apparent that the contract depends upon circumstances taking place as it were under a condition; a contract of sale or hiring having been entered into with reference to each gladiator, for there is no doubt now that property can be sold or leased conditionally. (Gai. *Inst.* 3.146[3] , trans. 000)⁸

There was undoubtedly an economic incentive to keeping gladiators alive, as their deaths would result in greater expenses for the sponsor. But an important consideration when discussing the value of gladiators for sponsors is the contest between their simple economic value and their *social* value as martyrs for the public. Typically, the *editor* would have the final say on whether a gladiator would live or die after a defeat in combat. To stay popular with the public, the *editor*

⁸ For further discussion, see Carter 2006/2007, 100-101

would listen to the will of the audience and base his final decision on that. While it would be in the a sponsor's best financial interest to save a gladiator, what if the people wanted him to perish? As we saw in the passage from Seneca, the crowds were capable of making such demands through their 'mock anger'. Still, it seems that most gladiators were indeed saved. It has been estimated, on the basis of 000, that gladiators would only have a one in ten chance of being killed in combat.⁹

From epitaphs, however, we can see that gladiators' lives enjoyed another kind of value, that of personal honor among the gladiators themselves. Several inscriptions commemorate the deceased by celebrating the ideal of 'saving others' and 'doing no harm' to fellow combatants. For example, the epitaph of Meilesis found in Edessa (Urfa in modern Turkey) boasts about his rather pacifist career:

I was called Meilesis and had the civilian name Mestrianos. I fought five times and hurt no one. Now I have been hurt. And from her own funds [illegible] Alexandra erected this in memory of her husband. Farewell, all you who pass by. [trans. 000]

Another epitaph which displays this pride in saving others belongs to a certain Aias from Thasos:

I am not Locrian Aias whom you behold, nor the son of Telamon, but the one who was pleasing in the *stadia* in martial contests, who mightily saved many souls out from under necessity, myself expecting that someone would return the same to me. No opponent killed me, but I died on my own, and my revered wife buried me here in the holy plain of Thasos. Kalligenia (erected this) for Aias her husband in remembrance.

⁹ Grout 2017

Evidently it mattered most more to Aias to be remembered for saving his opponents than for his name, origins, and family relations. This gladiator bore the persona and title of the mythological hero Aias (Ajax), a gladiatorial naming trend which was not uncommon. Through epigraphical evidence, names like Achilles, Ajax, Amphiaraus, Eteocles, Hippomedon, Idomeneus, Meleager, Meriones, Orestes, Parthenopaeus, Patroclus, Perseus, Polydeuces, Pylades, Troilus, and Tydeus are all observed.¹⁰ It has been suggested that such names could have reflected these gladiators' defining traits to some extent; for example, that a gladiator named Ajax would be a giant man.¹¹ But even still, Aias recognizes that this did not fully reflect who he was; instead he chose to emphasize his honorable accomplishments as a gladiator.

This importance placed upon the conveyance of adhering to a sense of honor within these gladiatorial representations is significant as it portrays the importance of honor in masculine representation. Gladiatorial epitaphs demonstrate the importance of honor as an aspect of masculine identity. These epitaphs attest to a "code" among gladiators, not to take the lives of their opponents needlessly.¹² In a violent environment like the arena, this may indicate an ideal of shared masculinity among the group. In a discussion on the emergence of dueling among elites in Italy in the late 19th century, Hughes (2007) looks at how honor laid at the heart of dueling, something many would consider a "barbaric" custom, in 19th century Italy. The elites who took part in these duels formed bonds of masculine identity that helped to cement their relationships among one another and like the rules which governed the gladiatorial contests, forms of etiquette were established and governed by these elites which helped to uphold ideals of

¹⁰ Robert 1971, 299

¹¹ Cameron 2004, 230

¹² Carter 2006/2007, 111

honor (270). The same could be said for the gladiators of the Roman arenas who, through their common understanding of their social standings, formed their own masculine identity which helped them to relate with one another when competing. It is also likely that the gladiators were trained by their *lanista* to subdue, not kill, their opponents, due to their economic and social value. In a study on gladiatorial remains found in a cemetery in Ephesus (Turkey), Kanz and Grossschmidt (2006) found that most individuals did not suffer from perimortem trauma (i.e. there were no signs of excessive violence). This disciplined training is reflected in the epitaph of the celebrated gladiator Hermes, who was taught to win without wounding his opponents, as described by Martial in his *Epigrams*, published between AD 86 and 103:

Hermes, favorite fighter of the age; Hermes, skilled in all weaponry; Hermes, gladiator and trainer both; Hermes, tempest and tremor of his school; Hermes, who (but none other) makes Helius afraid; Hermes, before whom (but none other) Advolans falls; Hermes, *taught to win without wounding*; Hermes, himself his own substitute; Hermes, gold mine of seat-mongers; Hermes, darling and distress of gladiators' women; Hermes, proud with battling spear; Hermes, menacing with marine trident; Hermes, formidable in drooping helmet; Hermes, glory of Mars universal; Hermes, all things in one and thrice unique. (Mar. *Epi.* 5.24, trans, 000)

Such discipline made gladiators highly skilled athletes with rarified skills.¹³ Such skills further reflect the gladiators' economic value as performers, and social value amongst one another as honorable combatants.

¹³ Shogan 1999, 39

But other gladiators display a somewhat more dishonorable tone on their tombstones, reflecting the circumstances of their deaths. The first of these belongings Urbicus, a *secutor* from Florence who died at the age of twenty two after having fought thirteen times:

To the Immortal Shades. For Urbicus, a *secutor* of the first *palus*, from Florence who fought thirteen times and lived twenty two years, his daughters Olympias, whom he left after five months, and Fortunensis, and Lauricia, his wife, (erected this) for her well-deserved husband, with whom she lived for seven years. And I advise that one should kill him whom one has conquered. His supporters will honor his spirit.

This epitaph would suggest that unlike other gladiators, Urbicus did not seem to adhere to the honorable nature that many other gladiators identified with. While the epitaph does not specifically say what would cause Urbicus to be represented in this way. Whether it was Urbicus' actual beliefs or the beliefs of his family who created this tombstone, it would seem that Urbicus' death was caused due to his failing to kill an opponent in the arena. As such, this epitaph would seem to suggest that gladiators kill their opponents so to avoid their own death. This is not the only gladiatorial epitaph to display such beliefs.

The tombstone belonging to the gladiator Diodorus (2nd to 3rd century AD, Amisus in Northern Asia Minor)¹⁴ gives us a look into how the combats were officiated, and how this affected gladiators' perception of combats in relation to their status as victors. The epitaph is as follows:

Here I lie victorious, Diodorus the wretched. After breaking my opponent Demetrius, I did not kill him immediately. But murderous Fate and the cunning treachery of the

¹⁴ Figure 1 in Appendix

summa rudis killed me, and leaving the light I have gone to Hades. I lie in the land of the original inhabitants. A good friend buried me here because of his piety. [trans. 000]

Even after death, Diodorus is portrayed as the true victor due to the controversial nature of his defeat. This is also reflected in the relief, which shows Diodorus standing victoriously over a defeated opponent, surely Demetrius, holding a palm branch—a sign commonly attributed to Victory in ancient Rome.¹⁵ Diodorus blames his death on the *summa rudis*, an official who acted as referee. It would seem that the *summa rudis* was responsible for ensuring that combatants followed established rules.¹⁶ While we do not know everything about the procedures which governed the Roman arenas, we can infer much from our sources. Demetrius is shown raising his finger to indicate defeat, meaning that Diodorus and Demetrius fought *ad digitum*, “to the finger”.¹⁷ The meaning of this phrase is clarified by one of Martial’s epigrams, which describes how Julius Caesar established such rules for the games he sponsored:

As Priscus and Verus each drew out the contest and the struggle
between the pair long stood equal, shouts loud and often sought
discharge for the combatants. But Caesar obeyed his own law (the
law was that the bout go on without shield until a finger be raised).
What he could do, he did, often giving dishes and presents.

¹⁵ It would be incredibly unlikely that Diodorus would be depicted in defeat on his own tombstone so he must be the one standing victoriously. For further discussion, see Carter 2011, 63

¹⁶ Robert 1971, 262-263

¹⁷ Carter 2011, 63-64

But an end to the even strife was found: equal they fought, equal they yielded. To both
Caesar sent wooden swords and to both palms. Thus valor and skill had their reward.

This has happened under no prince but you, Caesar: two fought and both won.

(Mar. *Epi.* 1.31, trans. 000)

It was the duty of the *summa rudis* to recognize and validate such surrenders (*missio*), reporting to the *editor* (sponsor) for a decision on the fallen gladiator's fate; the *editor's* answer was usually determined by the whims of the spectators.¹⁸ In this case, however, the *summa rudis* saw that Demetrius' fall did not constitute defeat, and so the fight continued, resulting in Diodorus' death.

These two epitaphs seem to depict an aversion towards the rules established within the Roman arenas. The focus of Diodorus' epitaph on his defeat, rather than overall career, shows an inclination to defend rather than celebrate his reputation. Diodorus sought to protect his pride as a victorious gladiator by blaming his defeat and subsequent death on the overseeing official, and thus on the rules that governed such fights. This could be seen as a protection of masculine identity through ideals which seek to defy established methods of organization in sports and competition. Frey (1994) discusses how in college athletic departments, defiant behavior is the "violation of normative expectations surround the organization and this behavior has peer and elite support, conditions that facilitate group rule breaking and the adoption of goals inconsistent with societal values" (110). Such defiant behavior was also described by Hughes (2007) as many duelists in modern Italy took to dueling in order to overcome images of weakness which may have been associated with them. Such views on dueling were seen as unfortunate traditions

¹⁸ Mosci Sassi 1992, 59

which did not adhere to the societal norm (109). I believe the instances of Diodorus and Urbicus reflect this sense of defiant behavior: their epitaphs urge others to learn from their mistakes and oppose the established laws of the arena to which they attribute their deaths. Diodorus' tombstone reflects the ideals conveyed in Urbicus' epitaph: though it would have gone against the rules, Diodorus could have lived if he had killed Demetrius when he had a chance.

Interesting comparative material comes from the epitaphs of another class of performers, the charioteers. Originating in ancient Greece, chariot racing was by far the most popular sporting event of the ancient Roman era. There are interesting parallels and contrasts between how gladiators and charioteers were portrayed in their epitaphs.. As we saw with Urbicus, the charioteers' epitaphs typically expressed the highlights of their careers, such as their origins and their statistics. A particularly significant example is a late second to early third century AD epitaph belonging to a charioteer named M. Aurelius Polynices, found in Via Praenestina just outside of Rome:

M. Aurelius Polynices, a houseborn slave, who lived 29 years, 9 months, 5 days, won 739 palms as follows: 655 in the Red faction, fifty-five in the Green faction, twelve in the Blue faction, seventeen in the White faction. He won prizes of 40,000 sesterces three times, prizes of 30,000 sesterces twenty-six times, lesser prizes eleven times. He won eight-horse chariots eight times, in ten-horse chariots nine times, in six-horse chariots three times.

This epitaph is typical: it describes the athlete's age, his overall number of victories, and how many were achieved in each of the factions he raced with (Red, Green, Blue, White) and how much money he gained during career. An interesting aspect of Polynices' epitaph is his mention

of beginning as a houseborn slave; this origin low on the Roman social spectrum made his success as a celebrity athlete even more significant. Polynices' father (who commemorated his son with this epitaph) and his brother were also "famous charioteers". His brother, Marcus Aurelius Mollicius Tatianus won 125 victory palms, raced for all four factions and like his brother, was also a *verna* or houseborn slave.¹⁹ This can relate to the media representations of American baseball pitcher Nolan Ryan which has been attributed to ideals of *hegemonic masculinity*. Trujillo (1991) discusses how Ryan is considered a significant athletic figure due to the prominence of ideals related to *hegemonic masculine*. Media representations of Ryan were instrumental in displaying him as a capitalist worker who exemplified the traditional American capitalist lifestyle which grew him into a champion. Trujillo defines these aspects of achievement and successful performance in sport as key indicators of *hegemonic masculinity* in American society due to significant display of Ryan as the patriarchal bread-winner (21). I believe that these instances of Roman charioteering reflect this same idea. These houseborn slaves display great success in the arena which otherwise would not be available to them due to their social restraints. As such, Polynices' achievements displays how the Roman arenas can be designed to socially advance those who succeed and validate the ruling system of Roman society, similar to discussions in section IIA.

One of the most highly celebrated charioteers of the Roman imperial era was Gaius Appuleius Diocles of Lusitania (Roman province in modern Portugal). His epitaph describes his participation in 4,257 races with 1,462 victories with his superstardom arising due to his 1,064 victories in single-entry races, where only the best charioteers of each stable were pitted against

¹⁹ Bruun and Edmondson 2014, 541

one another (Kebric year 42). Even though Diocles was highly popular during his life, he was not even the most victorious charioteer of the Roman era. Pompeius Musclosus earned 3,559 victories and Flavius Scopus earned 2,048. Diocles is especially notable, however, for living to see retirement at the age of 42 and enjoying the fruits of his labors. More often we see that the death of charioteers during their careers had a great impact on those who partook in the races. Martial wrote an epitaph to Scopus as follows:

I am Scopus, the glory of the clamorous circus, your applause, Rome, and brief darling.
Envious Lachesis snatched me away ere my thirtieth year, but, counting my victories,
believed me an old man. (Mar. *Epi.* 10.53, trans. 000)

IIIB Graffiti as Representation of Public Adoration for Gladiators

The second major category of epigraphical materials relevant to gladiators is graffiti. These documents most directly reflect what the Roman populace itself thought of gladiators, and how they chose to represent these thoughts within their society. Such graffiti took the form of inscriptions and drawings, etched into hard surfaces like walls. Graffiti could be created by men, women and children who wanted to openly share their feelings to the greater public.²⁰ Many examples of Roman graffiti featuring gladiators are concentrated in Pompeii due to the prevalence of the amphitheatre and its spectacles. From these graffiti, we can interpret a number of important aspects concerning how those in Pompeii viewed the gladiators as celebrities, both in life and in death.

²⁰ See Jacobelli 2003, 41

The first major trend of gladiatorial representation through graffiti is the portrayal of dismay over the fall of favored gladiators. Various graffiti show the public perceptions of particular gladiators, and other performers of the arena, who stood out to the audience. Graffiti like “Heart-throb of the girls, Celadus, the Thracian!” show how gladiators could be perceived as archetypes of manhood—the center of attraction for many in the Roman world. We see a similar example in one of Juvenal’s *Satires*, written in the early second century AD:

Eppia, the senator’s wife, accompanied a troop of gladiators to
 Pharos and the Nile and the notorious walls of Lagus, while
 Canopus expressed its disapproval of the monstrous morality of
 Rome. Oblivious of her home and husband and sister, she
 disregarded her fatherland and
 shamelessly deserted her wailing children and, what’s more
 amazing, Paris and the Games...

...But what were the good looks and youthfulness
 that enthralled Eppia and set her on fire? What did she see in him
 to make her put up with being called a gladiator’s groupie? After all,
 her darling Sergius had already started shaving his throat and with his gashed arm had
 hopes of retirement. Besides, his face was really
 disfigured: there was a furrow chafed by his helmet, an enormous
 lump right on his nose, and the nasty condition of a constantly
 weeping eye. But he was a gladiator. That’s what makes them into
 Hyacinthuses. (*Satires* 6.82-88, 6.103-110, trans. 000)

It must be considered that Juvenal wrote as a satirist, acting as a morally and socially outraged observer and critic and as such, this specific instance is most likely an exaggeration. Despite Juvenal's satirical perspective, he complements the graffiti to show that gladiators became central figures of attractiveness. Another example of Pompeiian graffiti documents another dimension of public perception, this time the mourning that a deceased performers might arouse: "Actius, lord of stage-players, farewell!" Such 'texts' show that gladiators and other performers could become part of a celebrity culture amongst the Roman public.

Graffiti from Pompeii display visuals of gladiators and offers details on gladiatorial careers and as public representations, graffiti can be used to interpret public reception to such careers. One of particular significance is from Tomb 14 EN, found outside the Nuceria Gate.²¹ This graffito contains three detailed drawings, each depicting encounters between two gladiators from a spectacle in the Nola amphitheatre; these drawings are accompanied by inscriptions naming the gladiators, their win-loss records, and whether they were the winner or loser of the encounter. The first drawing shows a fight between a gladiator labeled as the *Princeps Neronianus* and the gladiator Creunus (who was defeated). Interestingly the *Princeps Neronianus*, as the foremost gladiator of the *Neroniani*—gladiators from imperial school at Capua which was given name by Nero—is labeled with his prominent title, rather than his proper name. The artist even depicts accompanying musicians, showing the importance of this particular fight (these details are missing in the next two scenes). The second drawing shows the fight between a rookie gladiator (designated by 'T' for 'tiro') Marcus Attilius and Hilarus, a gladiator belonging to the *Neroniani*. Hilarus is indicated as having a record of twelve wins in

²¹ Figure 2 in Appendix

fourteen fights and with such a record, he was likely favored to win over the rookie gladiator. Attilius, however, managed to defeat Hilarus. The third fight shows Marcus Attilius against Recius Felix, a gladiator with a perfect record of twelve victories in twelve fights. But once again, Attilius was victorious.²² These graffiti make two important contributions to our understanding of gladiatorial representation in the Roman world. First, much like the epitaphs, they stand as surviving legacies of the Roman gladiators and chronicles of individual fights. Second, they document the Roman public's love of arena spectacles and gladiators, which they displayed by portraying the performers *within* Roman society and *outside* the arena through their appearances, names and records.

²² Jacobelli 2013, 50-52

VISUAL

The third major category of evidence for gladiators is visual representations. These are significant for several reasons. These sources display gladiators and other performers within various forms of combat and performance and visualize the scale of the arena spectacles. These visual sources also indicate the importance of elite sponsorship and investment in the gladiatorial combats and arena spectacles, and convey a sense of admiration and dedication to these spectacles from both the sponsors and the public. The primary medium I will be discussing is mosaics. These large-scale creations were carefully crafted to recreate scenes of the Roman arena and display the important figures associated with it. These representations portray the significance of commemorating those involved with the arena, whether they were participants or the sponsors who organized the games.

IVA Gladiators as 'Beautiful' and 'Broken' Figures

Throughout the Roman world, mosaics were a common feature in private elite homes and public buildings. They are valuable for their detailed and realistic portrayals of activities like the arena spectacles. Within these mosaics, we can interpret what images associated with the gladiatorial combats were most prevalent to Roman audiences due to their recreations in these striking visualizations. These mosaics have an intrinsic connection to the social elites of the Roman world due to their locations in rich private villas and amphitheatres, and their high level of craftsmanship. They would typically be found in the public areas of private houses and villas of the wealthy elite, like the receiving and dining rooms.²³ From these images we gain a greater

²³ Dunbabin 1978, 25-26

understanding of the intrinsic social relationships between the elites who sponsored these spectacles, the people who went to see them, and the performers who took part in the arena. Just as Diodorus' tombstone has a relief of Diodorus standing over his opponent Demetrius, the victorious and defeated gladiators are a prevalent trope in mosaics. A good example is found in a villa at the Wadi Lebda, near Lepcis Magna (Roman Libya). Amphitheatres scenes were a well established motif in Roman domestic art in Lepcis Magna, due to the prevalence of the local amphitheatre. While there is no direct inscription on the Wadi Lebda mosaic indicating that the villa's owner put on the *munera* shown in the mosaic, it was not uncommon for the elites who owned such villas to put on lavish *munera* during their careers.²⁴ The mosaic in question is currently in the Lepcis Magna Mosaic Museum, and has been dated to the early third century AD.²⁵ It contains five large panels which depict multiple scenes of the amphitheatre events, with the central panel showing a racing chariot, and the two flanking panels portraying various beast hunts. But the mosaic's most significant scenes are the two outer panels which depict detailed outcomes of single gladiatorial combat. One depicts a gladiator with the *thraex* armament (small shield and sword) standing victoriously over a *murmillo* (similar to the *secutor*), with a lost large shield and helmet.²⁶ The second shows a victorious *secutor* with a small sword, seated next to a defeated *retiarius* with shield and trident.²⁷ This visualization of the victorious gladiator over a conquered foe is significant for its representation of the 'broken body', an image which many associate with those who take part in sports and other activities which involve some form of combat. In such activities, the bodies of competitors ideals of beauty with physical fitness,

²⁴ Dunbabin 2016, 192

²⁵ Figure 3 in Appendix

²⁶ Figure 3.1 in Appendix

²⁷ Figure 3.2 in Appendix

muscle and skill and are equated to one's health, success, and strength. But with the threat of bodily harm, these ideals are disrupted and this causes a polarization between the images of the 'beautiful body' and the 'broken body' and masculinity is attributed to the corporeal nature of these bodies.²⁸ This contrast between the two outcomes which gladiators could face after their combat is complete within such visual representations is significant as it shows the inherent infatuation with this aspect of such violent sports. Although gladiators were the only ones expected to undertake such grueling violence in combats, nevertheless such acts of courage for the sake of victory was generally valued in the Roman world. The attraction towards the gladiatorial games for this reason is expressed by Pliny the Younger in his *Panegyricus*, from AD 100:

Citizens and allies alike had had their needs supplied. Next came a public entertainment—nothing lax or dissolute to weaken and destroy the manly spirits of his subjects, but one to inspire them to face honourable wounds and look scorn on death, by exhibiting love of glory and desire for victory even in the persons of criminals and slaves. (*Paneg.* 33, trans. 000)

Pliny's insistence that people in Roman society could learn from the gladiatorial combats, if they set aside any social preconceptions, enhances the significance of their representations in detailed mosaics.

Gladiatorial armaments are also an important consideration when discussing the image of victorious and defeated gladiators. This is particularly significant for the *secutor* and *retiarius* types. As discussed above, the *secutors* were gladiators which reflected the Roman soldiery

²⁸ Woodward 2007, 64-65

through their weapons and shield. A prevalent aspect of the *secutor* was their combats against gladiators of the *retiarius* armament, who were defined by their use of a trident and net. *Secutors*, meaning “chasers”, were specifically trained to pursue the *retiarius*, with these two armaments types providing a contrast in strategy and combat styles. Burdened with heavy weaponry and armor, the *secutors* would rely on offensive attacks, using their large shields for protection. The *retiarrii*, on the other hand, would rely on their speed and agility to maintain distance, using the net and trident effectively in battle.²⁹ A significant mosaic which depicts such a combat is a two panel mosaic depicting combat between Astyanax, a *secutor*, and Kalendio, a *retiarius* (Rome, third century AD).³⁰ The bottom register depicts the two gladiators in the middle of combat, with Astyanax defending from Kalendio’s trident as he is caught in the *retiarius*’ net. This happens while an official looks on. The top register shows a victorious Astyanax, still caught in the net, standing over the defeated Kalendio. This reflects the panels from the Wadi Lebda mosaic, which both depict the victory of a *secutor* over a different armament type. It is interesting to think about how the *secutors* may have fit the Roman ideal of the ‘beautiful body’. Due to their aggressive fighting style and their arsenal, the *secutor* seems to relate to Roman ideals of masculinity, as related to gladiators and soldiers.

IVB Significance of Representing Gladiatorial Skill

A key feature of Roman mosaics depicting the gladiatorial combats is the lack of blood. In contrast to what many would expect from these violent spectacles, domestic mosaics seem averse to representing gladiators as inflictors of gory violence. Yet blood was certainly a

²⁹ Grout 2017

³⁰ Figure 4 in Appendix

prevalent element of arena spectacles. The word “arena” comes from the Latin word *harena*, ‘sand’; ‘arena’ thus refers to the sand used in the amphitheatres to absorb blood.³¹ This is reflected in the gladiator panels from the Wadi Lebda mosaic discussed above. The only prevalent instances of blood in these two panels is the red coloration that can be seen on the ground beneath the fallen gladiators. Outside of this, it can be difficult to tell what wounds have been inflicted on the defeated combatant. Another scene which depicts such a wounding is the mosaic of Symmachus, found in Rome on the Caelian Hill.³² One panel shows a fight between two gladiators in two registers, to be read from bottom to top.³³ The lower register depicts two gladiators named Maternus and Habilis about to fight, with an official behind each. The upper shows Habilis standing over a fallen Maternus, likely waiting to hear the verdict of the *editor* before either sparing or killing his opponent.³⁴ In the top register, Maternus is depicted on the ground in a pool of what appears to be blood. Once again, we do not actually see the the wound itself. One case where a wound can actually be seen is in a mosaic found at the Dar Buc Ammera villa in Zliten (modern Libya).³⁵ This mosaic, dated to the second century AD, depicts a number of gladiators in various stages of combat, some in the final throes with one gladiator admitting defeat.³⁶ Two scenes of victorious and defeated gladiators show a contrast in how such victories were obtained. A detail shows a gladiator who has been knocked to the ground and is requesting *missio* (as we see from the raised left hand). The detail to the right of this scene depicts another end to a gladiatorial combat, with the vanquished gladiator not only raising his hand in defeat but

³¹ Mosci Sassi 1992, 111

³² Figure 5 in Appendix

³³ Brown 1992, 204

³⁴ Brown 1992, 204-205

³⁵ Dunbabin 2016, 190

³⁶ Figure 6 in Appendix

also bleeding from a wound to his left calf. This suggests that the defeated gladiator is surrendering because of this wound.

Domestic mosaic panels which display other staple events of the arena, particularly the beast hunts (*venationes*), are less callous when it comes to depictions of the violent scenes which would have been commonplace in the amphitheatres. These mosaics detail how encounters between men and beast in the arena would be grisly sights, visualized with intense blood and gore. There are significant examples of this that can be seen in multiple mosaics which depict the enhancement of the bloody arena spectacles. In the Wadi Lebda mosaic, two panels depict various scenes of participants wrangling numerous animals including boars, elks and bulls. The most violent detail is a bear mangling a man, while a group of men attempt to restrain it. The bear is clearly biting into the man's arm, from which the blood gushes; this already sets this scene apart from those depicting gladiators, who are displayed in post-combat, with a victor and loser clearly conveyed. These beast-hunt mosaics depict the variety of contexts in which animals were used in the arena, with both fair and unfair encounters shown between men and animals. A prevalent and gruesome image is the execution of prisoners in the arena by condemnation to beasts (*damnatio ad bestias*). On a frieze found in the Zliten mosaic, several people are being given to the violent animals for punishment. In the far left corner, two prisoners are tied to poles on small carts, with one about to be jumped onto by a leopard and the other already being mauled by a leopard. On the other end of the frieze a man is forced towards an advancing lion by an attendant armed with a whip. A gory scene of a *damnatio ad bestias* comes from Sollertiana Domus, a villa found in El Djem (modern Tunisia).³⁷ The *damnatus* is depicted being held

³⁷ Figure 7 in Appendix

upright by a *bestiarius* as a leopard perches on his chest attacking his head; streams of blood are especially conspicuous.³⁸

By comparison with such violent images—the details of which must reflect what actually occurred—the lack of blood in gladiatorial scenes can be quite puzzling. What was it about gladiators that made it less desirable to them being severely harmed, despite their participation in combats that could end in severe harm and even death? We have seen that there was a practical, economic incentive to ensure that gladiators were not harmed. We know from Gaius’ *Institutes*, discussed above, that there would be greater costs to the *editors* of the games if gladiators were killed or severely injured. This dimension of gladiatorial sponsorship may well explain why gladiators were depicted without serious injuries. The trope may also reflect the code of gladiatorial honor discussed in the epigraphy chapter. As we saw from several epitaphs, gladiators took pride in their ability to save others and minimize harm during their careers in the arena. The gladiator Hermes also valued his ability to win without harming his opponents (in one of Martial’s *Epigrams*, discussed above). The mosaics thus corroborate the gladiatorial ideals that can be inferred from inscriptions: skill and technique were admirable and ideal traits that helped gladiators perform worthy spectacles while also protecting one another. Such skills would certainly be valued by arena sponsors. Several ancient sources refer to such skill as valuable and worthwhile. Seneca the Younger discusses how skill protects gladiators, while anger can be their undoing:

“But against the enemy,” it is said, “anger is necessary.” Nowhere is it less so; for there the attack ought not to be disorderly, but regulated and under control. What else is it, in

³⁸ Futrell 2006, 90

fact, but their anger—its own worst foe—that reduces to impotency the barbarians, who are so much stronger of body than we, and so much better able to endure hardship? So, too, in the case of gladiators skill is their protection, anger their undoing. Of what use, further, is anger, when the same end may be accomplished by reason?

(*De ir.* 3.11, trans. 000)

Seneca seems to indicate that skill can protect gladiators from defeat and gain them victory, while anger weakens this. The “same end” that skill and anger can bring a gladiator to is surely victory within the arena. While anger might grant a gladiator victory, it can equally hinder his ability to win skillfully and without harming the opponent unnecessarily. This can also reflect the skills needed for a soldier in the Roman military. Just as the gladiatorial shows helped to desensitize the public to violence, the gladiators and their skill in combat reflected the importance of disciplined aggression in combat. Well trained soldiers in the Roman military were believed to demonstrate *animus* (confidence, morale) and *impetus* (onslaught, energy) in combat. But such soldiers could also display *furor* (madness) and *ira* (anger). As such, aggression was considered a double-edged sword.³⁹

IVC Representations of the Sponsor within the Arena

The representations of the *editor* and his power over the spectacles features prominently in ancient mosaics of gladiators and the arena. These spectacles were opportunities for Roman officials and magistrates with sufficient resources to gain public recognition and prestige. Mosaics were a medium for displaying such accomplishments in grand detail, with a variety of

³⁹ Phang 2008, 37

methods for conveying the presence and influence of the *editor*. These include inscriptions that mention individual *editors* and their influence over the spectacles. Sometimes the presence of an *editor* and his role in the arena can be indirectly inferred from visual details. This is displayed through the With such information, the social relationships that are formed within the arena through the combatants, the *editor* and the audience are clearly established as we gain greater understandings into the social interactions that took place between these groups.

For mosaics which directly display the identity of the *editor* through epigraphical information, it is interesting to note how the role and influence of such sponsors is conveyed as an important aspect of arena spectacles and the identity of arena sponsors. The locations of these mosaics in elite villas is a significant aspect of this identification since these mosaics glorify moments which sponsors would wish to immortalize in their homes for visitors to see and admire. The mosaic of Symmachus, discussed above, contains a great deal of information in its many visual elements: the performers, the officials, and Symmachus himself, the official who put on the spectacle for which the mosaic is named. Alongside the gladiators' names, Symmachus is identified as *editor*. The bottom register, above the names of the two competing gladiators, states that while the gladiators were fighting (*quibus pugnantibus*), Symmachus "thrust the sword" (*ferrum misit*). Inscriptions in the top register serve conclude the visual narrative of the combat and its outcome. With Habilis standing over the defeated Maternus, the official on the left turns his back away from the combatants and towards an outside entity, the unpictured *editor*. This acknowledgement of the *editor*, even unseen, reflects their power and key role in the arena. This can also be seen in the Zliten mosaic, and the mosaic portraying Astyanax and Kalendio. While no *editor* is identified, their influence can be inferred from this positioning of the *summa rudis*.

In the mosaic of Symmachus, the word *neco*, meaning “I kill [him]” can be seen above the official, indicating that Maternus was killed after his defeat. This is answered by *haec videmus* (“We see”), likely the crowd’s acceptance of Symmachus’ decision to kill the defeated. With this, the crowd proclaims Symmachus a happy man (*Symmachi, homofelix*), attesting to his ability to put on a great show and make the appropriate decision for the outcome.⁴⁰ There is even a little heart next to this proclamation, possibly to further display these affections for Symmachus. This new social relationship between Symmachus and the public is established within this mosaic and with this new popularity growing, Symmachus would take pride in such a spectacle he put on and have it commemorated in a detailed visual form.

The enhancement of social relationships within the arena through displays of wealth and power is another important motif of these amphitheatre mosaics. Like the mosaic of Symmachus, the mosaic of Magerius⁴¹ can be interpreted through the epigraphs which form a narrative along with the visual details. This mosaic was found in Smirat, Tunisia, and has been attributed to the mid-third century AD.⁴² It depicts a *venatio* with four leopards and four *venatores*. A central figure carries a silver tray with four bags and is surrounded by inscriptions which convey the story of this spectacle. The inscription begins with the words of a herald who declares to the audience that the hunters, identified as the Telegenii (discussed below), must be paid five hundred *denarii* per leopard; following this, the audience begin to praise the spectacle taking place in front of them. It is then that Magerius, the *editor*, responds and pays the hunters double the requested pay, as shown by the infinity-like symbol (symbolizing one thousand *denarii*) on

⁴⁰ Brown 1992, 205

⁴¹ Figure 8 in Appendix

⁴² Dunbabin 2016, 199-200

the money bags. This act of generosity did not go unnoticed and, with it, Magerius' social position began to rise as the crowd recognized what he had done for them. The crowd's acclamations of Magerius are strong: "This is wealth, this is power, this is *now*" (*hoc est habere, hoc est posse, hoc est ia(m)*).⁴³ Mosaics can also convey direct images of the spectacle sponsors and these are significant as they help directly portray the sponsors within the arena, garnering them fame and prestige to those who see these visual works. The primary example in this category is the mosaic of bulls and banquet from Thysdrus in El Djem (modern Tunisia), dated to the third century AD. This mosaic is significant for its display of the *Telegenii*, an organization of merchants who sponsored amphitheatre spectacles in Roman North Africa. The mosaic depicts a drinking party of five representatives of arena factions who can be identified by the emblems they hold and wear.⁴⁴ Portraying these individuals as the directors of the arena would help increase their social prestige and reputation.

⁴³ Dunbabin 2016, 200

⁴⁴ Dunbabin 2016, 205-206

CONCLUSION

The perceptions of gladiators and their spectacles was built upon the social structures which defined the arena and its relationships to the various groups within Roman society. The ways in which gladiators and other athletics performers were conveyed through literary, epigraphical, and visual representation displayed how such relationships were constructed and maintained through social, economic, and political interests. The image of the gladiator was enhanced through skill, honor, and even the adoption of mythological personas. Being a gladiator provided opportunities of social advancement for those who performed in the arena, and social unity for those who watched their spectacles. Representations of this reinforced values which gladiators provided, whether they be were portrayed as economic and social investments for the elite, or as honorable comrades to each other.

It is interesting to consider how our own contemporary representations of Roman gladiators across different media compare to their ancient counterparts. Gladiators are an incredibly popular image in modern film and television. A significant example of this is Ridley Scott's 2000 film *Gladiator*. The story follows Maximus Decimus Meridius (Russell Crowe), a Roman general who seeks revenge after the Roman emperor Commodus (Joaquin Phoenix) murders his family. Maximus is forced into slavery and must make a name for himself as a gladiator in order to avenge his family. While Scott did want *Gladiator* to portray Roman culture more accurately than previous films, it is certainly filled with historical inaccuracies, made for the sake of entertainment and narrative continuity. The most prevalent example being is the overall brutality of the arena which, as we discussed above, was not so clear cut in ancient gladiatorial representations due to the social and economic repercussions. There are, however,

themes in the film which do reflect the ancient representations. Maximus' social movement through the arena, which takes him from fighting in the Roman province of Zucchabar (North Africa) to the Roman Colosseum, reflects how Roman authors sought to encourage the gladiatorial lifestyle for those who were of low social standing. Maximus' trainer, Proximo (portrayed by Oliver Reed), also represents this, as he reveals to Maximus that he too was once a gladiator and it was through his career that he won his freedom. This freedom was symbolized by the gift of a wooden sword from the Roman emperor Marcus Aurelius (the *editor*). This may be connected with the Martial poem discussed in section IIIA, in which the gladiators Priscus and Verus, who both fought valiantly, received their freedom from the *editor* Julius Caesar in the form of wooden swords. While the film's gladiatorial combat scenes may not fully reflect what occurred in the ancient arenas, the central focus of Maximus' inversion of social and political boundaries, through his own skills and courage in the arena, resonates in ancient representation and modern audiences alike.

Images of gladiators have also become a trend in marketing, particularly in sports media. The 2004 Pepsi Super Bowl commercial, for example, depicts an ancient Roman gladiatorial spectacle. The 3-minute advertisement follows three female gladiators, portrayed by Britney Spears, Pink, and Beyoncé, who enter the Colosseum and throw down their weapons at the sight of the Roman emperor, portrayed by Enrique Iglesias, keeping all the Pepsi to himself. The trio begin to sing Queen's hit song, "We Will Rock You". The members of the audience, which includes the surviving members of Queen, sing along and the emperor's supply of Pepsi falls from the private balcony, launching the emperor himself into the arena where a lion awaits. The gladiator trio drink and begin throwing Pepsi cans into the stands. It is interesting to consider

how such an advertisement utilized ancient gladiatorial representation into a contemporary sporting environment as these images of the ancient gladiators and their raging fans is something which resonates with ourselves as sports fans. In many aspects, the spectacle of a modern sporting event like the Super Bowl reflects the spectacles of the Roman arenas and as such, the ancient context becomes more relatable.

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APPENDIX

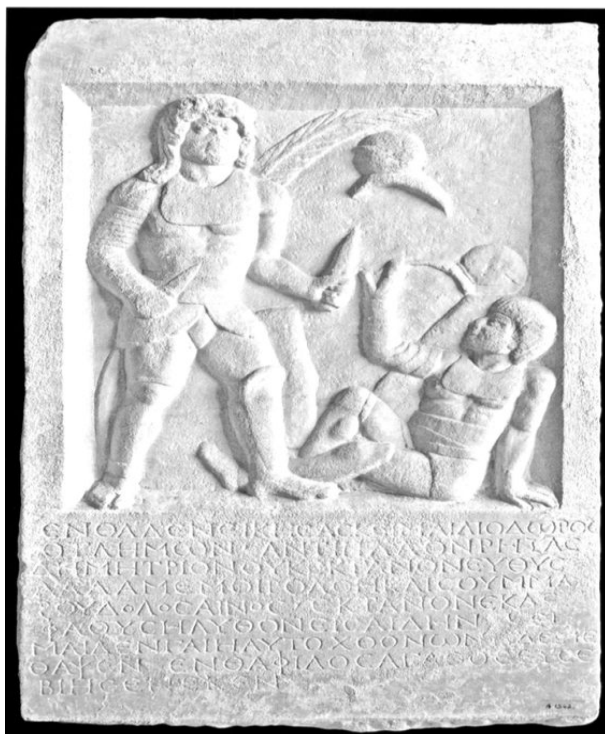


FIG. 1 Tombstone of the gladiator Diodorus



FIG. 2 Graffiti. Tomb 14EN (Nucerian Gate, Pompeii)



FIG. 3 Amphitheatre mosaic. Wadi Lebda villa



FIG. 3.1 Panel 5, amphitheatre mosaic. Wadi Lebda



FIG. 3.2 Panel 1, amphitheatre mosaic. Wadi Lebda



FIG. 4 Mosaic of Astyanax and Kalendio. Rome



FIG. 5 Mosaic of Symmachus. Caelian Hill (Rome)



FIG. 6 Amphitheatre mosaic. Zliten (modern Libya)



FIG. 7 Sollertiana Domus mosaic. El Djem (modern Tunisia)



FIG. 8 Mosaic of Magerius. Smirat (Tunisia)