

Femina Furiosa: Female Arena Performers and Their Role in Ancient Roman Spectacle

A Thesis Submitted to the College of Graduate and Postdoctoral Studies University of
Saskatchewan in Partial Fulfillment of the Requirements for the Degree

MASTER OF ARTS

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Abstract

Ancient evidence for female participation in arena spectacle dates to the Imperial Period in ancient Rome. Female arena performers played with gender conventions and were often cast in roles as exotic foreigners with mythical allusions, which increased their entertainment value. This study determines that the purpose of the female arena performer was to give spectators in the arena something entertaining and memorable to see. Positive impressions of such entertainments could later be used as social collateral to gain support for the *editor's* rise up the political ladder, or for the emperor to ingratiate himself with the people.

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Acknowledgments

To the academic mentors I had the great fortune to guide me along my journey in becoming a historian: your wisdom, encouragement, positivity, and support helped sustain me when I struggled. Thank you Dr. Martha Smith, Dr. Alan Reese, Dr. Zachary Yuzwa, and Dr. Tracene Harvey.

To my thesis supervisor, Dr. Angela Kalinowski, not only did you give me the encouragement and support I needed but you also always pushed me to do my best work. I would not have gotten to this point without you. Thank you!

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Abbreviations

Publications

- AC** *L'Antiquité classique. Louvain-la-Neuve, Inst. D'Arcéol., Collège Érasme, Place Blaise Pascal I.*
- AJA** *American Journal of Archaeology. New York, Archaeol. Inst. of America.*
- AJPh** *American Journal of Philology. Baltimore, The Johns Hopkins Press.*
- CJ** *The Classical Journal. Athens, Ga., Univ. of Georgia.*
- CIL** *Corpus Inscriptionum Latinarum (Berlin, 1862-).*
- CW** *The Classical World. Pittsburg, PA., Duquense University.*
- EAOR** *Epigraphia anfiteatrale dell'Occidente romano, 6 vols., Rome.*
- EMC** *Échos du monde classique (Classical Views). Calgary, Alberta, Univ. of Calgary Press.*
- G&R** *Greece & Rome. Oxford, Clarendon Press.*
- GLQ** *A Journal of Lesbian and Gay Studies. Durham, N.C., Duke Univ. Press.*
- HSPH** *Harvard Studies in Classical Philology. Baltimore, The Johns Hopkins Press.*
- ICS** *Illinois Classical Studies. Urbana, Champaign & Chicago, Univ. of Illinois Press.*
- ILS** *H. Dessau (ed.), Inscriptiones Latinae Selectae (Berlin, 1892-1916).*
- JRS** *Journal of Roman Studies. London, Soc. for the Promotion of Roman Studies.*
- JSSI** *Journal of Sport & Social Issues. Boston, Ma., Northeastern Univ.*
- MEFRA** *Mélanges d'Archéologie et d'Histoire de l'École Française de Rome, Antiquité. Paris, de Boccard.*
- NC** *Numismatic Chronicle. London, Numismatic Society.*
- PBSR** *Papers of the British School at Rome. London, Macmillan.*
- ZPE** *Zeitschrift für Papyrologie und Epigraphik. Bonn, Habelt.*

Ancient Sources

- | | |
|--|--|
| Ael. <i>Aelian</i> | Gai. <i>Gaius</i> |
| VH <i>Varia Historia</i> | Inst. <i>Institutes</i> |
| Cic. <i>Cicero</i> | Hdt. <i>Herodotus</i> |
| Fam. <i>Letters to Friends</i> | Hist. <i>The Histories</i> |
| Mur. <i>Pro Murena</i> | Juv. <i>Juvenal</i> |
| Planc. <i>Pro Plancio</i> | Sat. <i>Satires</i> |
| Sest. <i>Pro Sesio</i> | |
| Dio Cass. <i>Dio Cassius</i> | Liv. <i>Livy</i> |
| | Epit. <i>Epitome</i> |
| Dion. Hal. <i>Dionysius Halicarnassus</i> | Mart. <i>Martial</i> |
| Ant. Rom. <i>Roman Antiquities</i> | Spect. <i>Liber spectaculorum</i> |
| | Nonnus <i>Nonnus</i> |
| | Dion. <i>Dionysiaca</i> |

Ov. *Ovid*
Ars. am. *Ars amatoria*

Petron. *Petronius*
Sat. *Satyricon*

Plaut. *Plautus*
Poen. *Poenulus*

Plin. *Pliny the Elder*
HN *Natural History*

Plin. *Pliny the Younger*
Pan. *Panegyricus*

Plut. *Plutarch*
Pomp. *Pompey*
Caes. *Caesar*

Prop. *Propertius*
Eleg. *Elegies*

Apollod. *Pseudo-Apollodorus*
Epit. *Epitome*

Sall. *Sallust*
Iug. *Bellum Jugurthinu*

Sen. *Seneca the Younger*
Agam. *Agamemnon*
Ep. *Epistles*

Soph. *Sophacles*
Trach. *The Women of Trachis*

Stat. *Statius*
Silv. *Silvae*

Suet. *Suetonius*
Aug. *Divus Augustus*
Calig. *Gaius Caligula*
Claud. *Divus Claudius*
Ner. *Nero*
Dom. *Domitian*

Tac. *Tacitus*
Ann. *Annals*
Agr. *Agricola*

Tert. *Tertullian*
De spect. *De Spectaculis*

Val. Max. *Valerius Maximus*

Verg. *Vergil*
Aen. *Aeneid*

Introduction

Put a weapon in a woman's hand and people take notice. This appeal is precisely why female gladiators and other female arena performers became part of the popular entertainment of ancient Roman spectacle (or *spectaculum*), though on a smaller scale than their male counterparts. For the purpose of this study, female arena performers are those women that entered the arena as a type of entertainer, rather than as a victim of a staged execution. Modern people tend to focus on the role of gladiators when we think about ancient Roman entertainment, though there were many other types of arena performers. Other types of entertainment that took place in the context of the amphitheatre included: animal hunting (*venatio*), beast fights which required *bestiarii*, executions of criminals, mythological reenactments, battle reenactments, and even water shows with costumed swimmers. Executions of criminals (male and female) were performed as a part of arena spectacle, however, their victims will not be considered as performers for this study. The female performers discussed in this thesis showcased some sort of skill before a mass audience, usually in the amphitheatre or circus, rather than being publicly tortured and killed as a form of punishment and entertainment. The ancient sources show that female arena performers were costumed and cast in roles as foreigners, deities, and sometimes cross-dressed in male-gendered clothing to increase the entertainment value of their performance.

The existing body of evidence for women in Roman spectacle begins in the early first century CE and spans approximately 200 years. The first reference to female participation in arena spectacle in a *senatus consultum* dated to 19 CE which banned of women from taking part as arena performers; it references an earlier ban that had been passed regarding elite participation

in performance.¹ The *terminus ante quem* for women performing in the arena is generally thought to be the year 200 CE, when the emperor Septimius Severus outlawed public female combat.² According to the 3rd century historian Cassius Dio, Septimius Severus' edict stated that it was "forbidden for any woman, no matter what her origin, to fight in single combat."³ This edict meant that women were banned from gladiatorial contests, but other types of performances that did not involve combat might technically still have been allowed.

The language that designates a female gladiator was not *gladiatrix*, as commonly believed. According to Anna McCullough, there was no standard Latin term for a female gladiator.⁴ A word that may have been used to describe female arena performers that has come down to us from the ancient authors was *ludia*, (a feminized form of 'stage performer'). But *ludia* can also mean a wife or lover of a gladiator, a gladiator groupie, or a female slave owned by a gladiator training school (a *ludus*), so this is not a good example if we are looking for precise language.⁵ Sometimes the words *mulier* and *femina* ('woman/female') identifies the sex of performers, with *femina* describing a woman of high social standing and *mulier* for a woman who was of a lower class.⁶ The fact that no uniform term exists conveys to us the potential rarity of

¹ Barbara Levick, "The *Senatus Consultum* from Larinum," *JRS* 73 (1983): 97-99.

² Dio Cass., 75.16.1.

³ *Ibid.*, 75.16.1. "There took place also during those days a gymnastic contest, at which so great a multitude of athletes assembled, under compulsion, that we wondered how the course could contain them all. And in this contest women took part, vying with one another most fiercely, with the result that jokes were made about other very distinguished women as well. Therefore it was henceforth forbidden for any woman, no matter what her origin, to fight in single combat." (Trans. Cary & Foster)

⁴ Anna McCullough, "Female Gladiators in Imperial Rome: Literary Context and Historical Fact," *CW* 101, no. 2 (Winter 2008):198.

⁵ *Ibid.*, 189.

⁶ Stephen Brunet, "Women With Swords: Female Gladiators in the Roman World," in *A Companion to Sport and Spectacle in Greek and Roman Antiquity*, ed. Paul Christensen and Donald G. Kyle (Chichester, West Sussex: Wiley Blackwell, 2014), 482. Kathleen Coleman, "Missio at Halicarnassus," *HSPH* 100 (2000): 498.

female performers. Furthermore, gladiatorial combat was not the only type of arena performance that women took part in. For example, women also performed as *venatores* or beast hunters.

The Latin word for a gladiatorial show is *munus* (*munera* pl.), which also means ‘duty’. Roman gladiatorial combat began in funerary and religious contexts. The first gladiatorial spectacle in the historical record dates to 264 BCE and was put on by an ex-consul named D. Iunius Brutus Pera and his brother in honour of their deceased father.⁷ As well as being a part of funerary rituals, *munera* also took place at public festivals (called *ludi*). Religious festivals honouring goddesses of the fertile earth, such as the *Cerialia*, for Cere, and *Floralia*, for Flora, showcased gladiatorial combat and *venationes* (animal hunts) as early as third century BCE.⁸ The *munera* in funerary contexts became less popular in the late Republican period, but continued in the context of public festivals for centuries.⁹ Once those in power began to recognize the potential benefits to their political careers of providing such entertainments for the people, the original motivations of spectacle and games of honouring deities and the dead began to slowly evolve and became a political tool for the sponsors of the games.¹⁰ The ancient Roman games were only partially funded by the State and were organized and mostly paid for by members of the elite class.¹¹ From the time of the first gladiatorial contests to the end of Republican Period (27 BCE), those who were elected to the junior magistrate office of *aedile* were the sponsors of

⁷ Keith Hopkins, *Sociological Studies in Roman History, vol. 2, Death and Renewal* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1983), 4.

⁸ Alison Futrell, *Blood in the Arena: The Spectacle of Roman Power* (Austin: University of Texas Press, 1997), 20.

⁹ *Ibid.*, 30.

¹⁰ Claire Holleran, “The Development of Public Entertainment and Venues in Rome and Italy,” in *‘Bread and Circuses’: Eurgetism and Municipal Patronage in Roman Italy*, ed. Kathryn Lomas and Tim Cornell (London: Routledge, 2003), 51.

¹¹ Eckart Köhne, “Bread and Circuses: The Politics of Entertainment,” in *Gladiators and Caesars: The Power of Spectacle in Ancient Rome*, ed. Eckart Köhne and Cornelia Ewigleben (Berkeley: University of California Press, 2000), 15.

the games.¹² These elite politicians who financed the games were known as *editores*. Since the events themselves could cost exorbitant sums of money, it is worth asking why the elite sponsors spent their own fortunes on such events? This study aims to ascertain what purpose sponsoring public spectacle with novel entertainment of female arena performers served for those who financed them.

Augustus became the first emperor of Rome in 27 BCE and ushered in the Imperial Period. Upon coming to power, he decided to take over the responsibility of putting on public spectacles, which had previously been the role of magistrates.¹³ From that point on, emperors had a monopoly on *ludi* and *munera* in Rome, and those who wanted to sponsor games in the city had to get the emperor's permission.¹⁴ Clearly, the ability to finance public spectacles for the people was an important aspect of ancient Roman elite power if the emperor wanted to have control over it. The games were useful to the emperor as a way to establish his relationship with the populace.¹⁵ The *editor* of the games, whether an emperor or magistrate, had particular motivations for financing a public *ludus* outside of their duty of political office. We must consider what those motivations were in order to elucidate the reasons behind incorporating women in arena spectacle. We will establish what they were trying to convey by incorporating women performers and why they choose to cast women in the roles they did. Incentives will be discussed and analyzed in a more concentrated manner in the following chapters.

An Introduction to Spectacle

In order to better understand the role women had in spectacle, we must gain a more complete view of how a day at the games transpired, as informed by the ancient authors and

¹² Köhne, "Bread and Circuses: The Politics of Entertainment," 15.

¹³ *Ibid.*, 19.

¹⁴ Futrell, *Blood in the Arena*, 45.

¹⁵ Holleran, "The Development of Public Entertainment and Venues in Rome and Italy", 50.

modern scholars who have discussed the subject. A day at the games began with a *pompa* or procession that was both political and religious in nature. Due to the public nature of the event, it was an opportunity to highlight the role of the *editor*. He would often be the focus, as the magistrates and senators were always the ones to lead the procession.¹⁶ In the Imperial Period, the *pompa* was often a place in which to celebrate the imperial cult, honouring deified and living emperors.¹⁷ Priests and magistrates marched in a sacred parade with divine and imperial images, including portrait busts of the deified emperors.¹⁸ The *pompa* was an opportunity to excite the city's inhabitants and potential spectators and convey to the people the power and generosity of the *editor*. It also aroused the excitement of the people because the gladiators featured in the *pompa*, displayed their armature.¹⁹

After the *pompa*, the morning's entertainments in the arena consisted of the *venationes* where animals were showcased in hunts.²⁰ The killing of animals was a central feature of Roman religious ritual and would not have shocked the ancient spectator.²¹ The entertainment value in the *venatio* was in the pursuit, dramatic capture, and killing of the animal, as well as in the often exotic nature of the quarry. In the third century BCE, during the *ludi* associated with the *Cerialia* and *Floralia*, the quarry were local Italian animals.²² As Roman territory expanded, so too did the species of animals showcased at such events. The display and domination of exotic animals

¹⁶ Futrell, *Blood in the Arena*, 191.

¹⁷ *Ibid.*, 93.

¹⁸ Nathan T. Elkins, "The Procession and Placement of Imperial Cult Images in the Colosseum," *PBSR* 82 (2014): 76. Futrell, *Blood in the Arena*, 84.

¹⁹ Garrett G. Fagan, *The Lure of the Arena: Social Psychology and the Crowd at the Roman Games* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2011), 214-215.

²⁰ *Ibid.*, 89.

²¹ Donald G. Kyle, *Spectacles of Death in Ancient Rome* (New York: Routledge, 1998), 42.

²² Futrell, *Blood in the Arena*, 20.

became a symbol of the power and breadth of the Empire.²³ The inclusion of more exotic animals can be directly tied to Roman military expansion. Returning generals could sponsored victory *ludi* to promote their achievements. They brought animals back to Italy from the lands they had conquered to impress the multitudes. M.' Curius Dentatus displayed elephants in Rome for the first time in 275 BCE as the spoils of his victory over Pyrrhus of Epirus.²⁴ Showcasing exotic animals was a way to advertise the wealth and influence of the *editor* of the games, since only the most affluent and powerful could acquire such animals. Women also took part in arena entertainment as beast hunters (*venatores*) according to our ancient sources.²⁵ As well as having humans hunt animals, there were also beasts that fought one another for entertainment, with pairings selected for their potential to delight the crowd.²⁶ The late 1st century CE poet Martial discusses a bout between a bull and an elephant that ends in the bull being trampled by his adversary.²⁷ The thrill of such an entertainment would be in guessing which beast would defeat the other.²⁸ The *bestiarii* fought beasts or had the job of wrangling the animals for the arena for the morning entertainments as well as for the executions at noon.

At midday the program involved the execution of criminals (*noxii*).²⁹ There were many methods to dispatch condemned criminals, and those selected for the midday executions were carried out for their potential entertainment value. *Vivicomburium* or *crematio* involved burning

²³ Kyle, *Spectacles of Death in Ancient Rome*, 43.

²⁴ George Jennison, *Animals for Show and Pleasure in Ancient Rome* (Philadelphia: University of Pennsylvania Press, 2005), 44.

²⁵ Mart., *Spect.*, 8, 14-16. Juv., *Sat.*, 1.20-30.

²⁶ Futrell, *Blood in the Arena*, 26.

²⁷ Mart., *Spect.*, 22.

²⁸ Kathleen Coleman, "'The Contagion of the Throng': Absorbing Violence in the Ancient World," *Hermathena* 164 (1998): 72.

²⁹ Sen., *Ep.*, 7.3-5.

the condemned alive, while other criminals might be executed by gladiators.³⁰ However, the most popular and dynamic punishments were *damnationes ad bestias*, where the criminals were torn apart by animals. To add extra entertainment value, these executions were staged as mythological reenactments.³¹ The poet Martial recounts a reenactment of the torture of Prometheus where the condemned prisoner in the role of Prometheus was “bound to the Scythian crag” to be set upon by wild beasts.³² Mythological narratives or allusions were used in other facets of arena entertainment as well, in an effort to better engage the crowd. As we shall see, female arena performers were sometimes costumed as characters from myth.

The afternoon shows in the amphitheatre showcased gladiators fighting in pairs selected for maximum entertainment value.³³ Gladiators faced off to fight to the death or to the point where one asked for a halt in the fight, acknowledging defeat. In this case, the gladiator held up a finger to ask for judgment by the *editor*, who might also consult the people to inform his decision. The *editor* and audience might grant the defeated gladiator *missio* (reprieve from the match) or not. Summary execution was the result of a match without *missio*. The proliferation of gladiatorial imagery in ancient Roman media such as pottery, glassware, mosaics, frescoes, and oil lamps, suggests that gladiators were the favoured performers in the arena. Notably, only one example of a depiction of female gladiators survives and comes in the form of a relief sculpture from Halicarnassus, currently housed at the British Museum. However, literary sources reference female gladiators, real and imagined, elite and non-elite.³⁴ There were also other types of female

³⁰ K.M. Coleman, “Fatal Charades: Roman Executions Staged as Mythological Enactments,” *JRS* 80 (1990): 46. Kyle, *Spectacles of Death in Ancient Rome*, 91.

³¹ Coleman, “Fatal Charades,” 60.

³² Mart., *Spect.*, 9.

³³ M.J. Carter, “Gladiatorial Combat: The Rules of Engagement,” *CJ* 102 no.2 (2006/2007): 104.

³⁴ Stat., *Silv.*, 1.6.51-57. Suet., *Dom.*, 4. Suet., *Ner.*, 12. Juv., *Sat.*, 6.250-264 & 1.20-30.

arena performers: Martial notes costumed swimmers.³⁵ A third-century mosaic from Tunisia may represent female trick riders, as I shall argue in a later chapter.

How then do we reconcile this comparative lack of evidence for female involvement in arena spectacle? Brunet suggests that their relative paucity in the ancient sources is due to their rarity.³⁶ However, their lack of presence in ancient media cannot unequivocally be linked to rarity. Stevenson has demonstrated that the low representation of female athletes in contemporary media is not reflective of actual female participation in sport. Furthermore, these female athletes in these modern representations are highly sexualized.³⁷ Could the same be true for our ancient female athletes? While female arena performers were certainly less numerous than their male counterparts, I shall argue that they may not have been as rare as our ancient evidence implies. Even if the female arena performer was as rare as Brunet suggests, we should care about them because it is important to explore the lives of women in the ancient Roman context in a way that reaches outside the gender-normative matrona ideal. To explore the representations of those who existed outside the cultural norms give us a more complex, and more realistic idea of the intricacies of ancient Roman society. A study of the female arena performer will allow us to see how she was made “Other” due to her gender and perceived ethnicity because she was a woman who was in the public eye and meant to entertain the masses. What function does making the female arena performer “Other” serve? This study will allow us to better understand the role of gender and ethnicity in the context of spectacle in ancient Roman society.

³⁵ Mart., *Spect.*, 5.1-2.

³⁶ Brunet, “Women With Swords”, 486.

³⁷ Deborah Stevenson, “Women, Sport, and Globalization: Competing Discourses of Sexuality and Nation,” *JSSI* 26 (2002): 211.

Historiography

Louis Robert and Georges Ville were among the first modern historians to write academic works on the study of ancient Roman spectacle in the mid-twentieth century. Robert's *Les gladiateurs dans l'Orient grec* was published in 1940. Ville's work *La gladiature en Occident des origines à la mort de Domitien* was written before his death in 1967, but published posthumously in 1981 by the École Française de Rome. Robert's work focused on epigraphic evidence for gladiators in the Roman East.³⁸ Georges Ville's work included discussion of the genesis of gladiatorial combat, as well as a complete survey of all gladiatorial combats that took place up until the death of Domitian in 96 CE in the Roman west. It also included an analysis of the social roles and realities of the people on the lowest rungs of Roman social hierarchy that were involved in the world of spectacle.³⁹ While Robert was one the first to analyze the gladiator relief from Halicarnassus housed at the British Museum, he originally argued that the gladiators depicted were male.⁴⁰ Kathleen Coleman determined that the two figures in the relief were in fact female.⁴¹ Substantial scholarly work on the topic of ancient Roman spectacle had a resurgence in the 1980s and 90s. Greatly influenced by Ville, Paul Veyne's *Bread and Circuses: Historical Sociology and Political Pluralism* was first published in 1976 and discussed how spectacle served the political and social ambitions of the elites who funded the games, which would become an important theme in much of the forthcoming scholarship. Thomas Wiedemann's *Emperors and Gladiators* (1992), *Emperors and Caesars: The Power of Spectacle in Ancient Rome* edited by Eckart Köhne and Cornelia Ewigleben (2000), followed in Veyne's footsteps,

³⁸ Hugh M. Lee, *Review of Les gladiateurs dans l'Orient grec*, by Georges Ville, *AJPh* 105, no.3 (1984): 363.

³⁹ *Ibid.*, 364.

⁴⁰ L. Robert, "Monuments de gladiateurs dans l'Orient grec," *Ελληνικά* III (1946): 112-150.

⁴¹ Coleman, "Missio at Halicarnassus", 487.

addressing patronage, honour, and political and social mobility that accrued to the *editores* of the games, who was always an elite Roman male. Alison Futrell's monograph *Blood in the Arena: The Spectacle of Roman Power* (1997) described the amphitheatre and its entertainments as a symbol of Roman authority and politically motivated ritual.⁴² Futrell analyzed how the games benefitted both those in power as well as those who came to be entertained in what she calls the "sphere of social interaction" that was the amphitheatre or circus.⁴³ J.C. Edmondson's article "Dynamic Arenas: Gladiatorial Presentations in the City of Rome and the Construction of Roman Society During the Early Empire" (1996) analyzes arena entertainment as a "cultural performance" unpacking what these performances say about the social dynamics of ancient Rome during the early Principate. Carlin Barton's book *The Sorrows of the Ancient Romans: The Gladiator and the Monster* (1989) and Catherine Edward's "Unspeakable Professions: public performance and prostitution in Ancient Rome" (1997) addressed low social status of an arena performer. M.J. Carter's article "Gladiatorial Combat: The Rules of Engagement" (2006/2007) and Marcus Junkelmann's work *Gladiatoren: Das Spiel mit dem Tod* (2000) looked at the nuts and bolts of gladiatorial combat involving the particulars of style, armour, weaponry, and standards set for the combat itself. Academic sources such as Erik Gunderson's "Ideology of the Arena" (1996), Kathleen Coleman's "'The Contagion of the Throng': Absorbing Violence in the Roman World" (1998), "Fatal Charades: Roman Executions Staged as Mythological Enactments" (1990), *The Lure of The Arena: Social Psychology and the Crowd at the Roman Games* by Garrett G. Fagan (2011) and Donald Kyle's *Spectacles of Death in Ancient Rome* (1998) delved into what modern individuals often have trouble reconciling – the volume of arena spectacle and their appeal to a wide audience. Jean-Claude Golvin's work *L'amphithéâtre romain: essai sur la*

⁴² Futrell, *Blood in the Arena*, 8, 211, 212.

⁴³ *Ibid.*, 211-212.

théorisation de sa forme et de ses fonctions (1988) was the first comprehensive study of the Roman amphitheatre and influenced many future scholars. Katherine Welch's book *The Roman Amphitheatre: From its Origins to the Colosseum* (2007) is one such example of Golvin's influence. Her book looked at the development of spectacle through architecture and sees the amphitheatre as a symbol of Roman culture.

There are a handful of academics who have published specifically on the topic of female gladiators. Kathleen Coleman's article "*Missio* at Halicarnassus" published in 2000 looked specifically at the key piece of material evidence for female participation in gladiatorial combat – a relief depicting two female gladiators named Amazon and Achillia, currently housed at the British Museum. This is a piece of evidence that makes the connection between female gladiator and Amazons. While Coleman doesn't delve into this allusion, she notes that to both Greeks and Romans "fighting women naturally suggested Amazons".⁴⁴ One of Coleman's key findings is that this relief was not funerary in nature, but was commemorative, preserving this particular pairing to the benefit of the sponsor of the games. This thesis will examine in greater detail why the Amazon reference was attached to female arena performers.

Anna McCullough, in "Female Gladiators in Imperial Rome: Literary Context and Historical Fact" (2008) surveyed all the evidence available at the time of its publishing for the existence of female gladiators. She discussed how useful each piece is and calls into question the validity of some of the more recent finds thought to augment the body of evidence. McCullough also considered why female performers were included in the games and found that their purpose

⁴⁴ Coleman, "*Missio* at Halicarnassus", 499.

was “to mark a games as splendid and lavish, and ... to use this luxury context to comment on past emperors and moralize on Roman society”.⁴⁵

Stephen Brunet’s chapter titled “Women With Swords: Female Gladiators in the Roman World” published in *A Companion to Sport and Spectacle in Greek and Roman Antiquity* is the most recent work on the topic (2014). Like McCullough, he surveyed the current evidence at our disposal and judged their worth as sources. He made the connection between female gladiators and the allusion to Amazon warriors, which is very important in casting the women as “Other” in ways supplementary to their sex.⁴⁶ Brunet also posits the question what messages an *editor* sponsoring a spectacle with female performers was sending to the audience. He acknowledged the importance of the novelty of women’s inclusion, but also suggested that it served as a lesson to men in the community to increase their masculinity and combat ability, lest women outdo them.⁴⁷

There is one scholarly work that has claimed to augment the current study of women in the Roman arena, but I have found to be too problematic to claim as evidence for female gladiators. Mark Vesley’s article “Gladiatorial Training for Girls in the *Collegia Iuvenum* of the Roman Empire” (1998) argued that in the Imperial Period female gladiatorial combat training took place within the *collegia iuvenum*, a paramilitary association of young boys, or *iuvenum*.⁴⁸ He argued that before a young girl married, he supposed in her late teens, they would have had time for leisure activities, and that training in some type of combat was one of those leisure

⁴⁵ McCullough, “Female Gladiators in Imperial Rome”, 197.

⁴⁶ Brunet, “Women With Swords”, 480.

⁴⁷ *Ibid.*, 486.

⁴⁸ Mark Vesley, “Gladiatorial Training for Girls in the *Collegia Iuvenum* of the Roman Empire,” *EMC* 42 no.17 (1998): 87.

activities.⁴⁹ He pointed to a fragmentary inscription (CIL 14.4014b) from Ficulea (northwest of Rome) that has been reconstructed as follows:

[por]TICVM
[sua impens]A • FECIT PII
[seui]RVM • AVGVSTALIVM • ET • INCO[larum]
[iu]VENVM • ET • PVERORVM • ET [puellarum?]
VRA / ET
[a]CCENSI V[elati]⁵⁰

The inscription has been identified as a fragmentary copy of a longer inscription, which provides more information that is valuable for understanding its contents and context. The longer inscription, referred to as “Testo C” in an article by Ivan di Stefano Manzella is given:

[M(arcus) Consius M(arci) --- scholam?]
[statuis adornatam marmoreis n(umero) ---]
[et por]ticum [longam pedes ---]
[impensa su]a fecit p+ +[--- decurionum et]
[sevi]rum Augustalium et inco[larum et libertinorum]
[et iu]venum et puerorum et [puellarum ingenuorum]
[c]ura et [in memoriam M. Consii Cerinthi]
[patr-, a]ccensi v[elati ---]⁵¹

[Marcus Consius built] at his own expense [the schola]
adorned [with X number of marble statues]
and a portico the length [of X number of feet]
because of his care for the decurions, the seviri Augustales
both the inhabitants, and the freedmen
and the youth and of both free boys and [free girls]
and [in memory of his father Marcus Consius Cerinthus]
accensus velatus⁵² (trans. Kalinowski)

Line 4 of the fragmentary CIL 14.4014b entry is the one Vesley isolated in his article, and he translated it as “sons and boys and girls”.⁵³ Square brackets are used to show where text is

⁴⁹ Vesley, “Gladiatorial Training for Girls in the *Collegia Iuvenum* of the Roman Empire,” 87.

⁵⁰ CIL 14.4014b.

⁵¹ Ivan di Stefano Manzella, “*Accensi velati consulibus apparentes ad sacra*: proposta per la soluzione di un problema dibattuto,” *ZPE* 101 (1994): 273. CIL 14.4014b & 11.4664.

⁵² *accensi velati* are assistants to Roman priests.

missing or too damaged to discern and the text within is what the author or editor has restored. Vesley has put most of the weight of his argument on the reconstructed word *puellarum*, although the editors of the *Corpus Inscriptionum Latinarum* (CIL) did not feel confident about that particular word in the reconstruction, hence the question mark. Where the CIL has placed a question mark, Vesley opines an exclamation mark, declaring it fact upon which to base his argument. He claimed that *puellarum* should be assumed as the word missing in the inscription because “clearly there would be no need to specify *puerorum* with *iuvenum* if members of both sexes were not referred to, and the double *et* construction calls for a word parallel to *puerorum*. Thus, the *collegium* here appears to have contained male and female members.”⁵⁴ Vesley has over interpreted the Latin. Furthermore, he discussed combat training as a leisure activity instead of as training for a future career in arena entertainment. Stephen Brunet’s work from 2014 has since refuted Vesley’s supposition.⁵⁵ I am in agreement with Brunet, and while the idea that a girl could potentially train in a combat style for a leisure activity in *collegium* is interesting, it is not necessarily proof of training for professional arena performers.

This thesis augments the current scholarship by discussing in detail topics only briefly mentioned in the previous scholarship on female arena performers. There has been some discussion of character tropes that female arena performers played, yet there is little analysis of the social implications of those roles or why they might have been chosen. Representations of masculinized women were not very common in Greco-Roman culture, but by discerning their usage and reception, we can attempt to determine the impact of these female characters on the ancient Roman spectator. In the same manner, analyzing the representation of these women who

⁵³ Vesley, “Gladiatorial Training for Girls in the *Collegia Iuvenum* of the Roman Empire”, 88.

⁵⁴ *Ibid.*, 88.

⁵⁵ Brunet, “Women with Swords”, 484.

cast as foreigners, has the potential to elucidate that impact as well. The *editores* of the games clearly presumed that the audience would react positively to the inclusion of female performers. Furthermore, much of the current scholarship tends to focus mostly on female gladiators, and does not consider the whole body of types of arena performances in which women participated. It is only by studying all the types of performance that we are better able to understand a more complete picture of how women in ancient Roman spectacle disrupted gender norms and represented an exotic “Other”, and how these aspects of their presentation increased the entertainment value of their performances.

Ancient Literary Evidence

The body of ancient evidence for the participation of women in arena spectacle includes literary, epigraphic, and material sources. The surviving ancient literary sources were written by elite men and thus provide us with the viewpoints only of the educated male. It was elite men who sponsored and organized public spectacles exclusively. Ancient authors of senatorial, equestrian and *decurial* rank such as the historians Cassius Dio, Tacitus, Suetonius, and the poets Juvenal, Statius and Martial provide the majority of the literary evidence.

Juvenal wrote satirical poetry in the late first to early second century CE. The characters who appear in Juvenal’s satires are not historical people, but rather are examples of behaviours which he perceived as contrary to cultural norms and ideals. His works are often meant to be moral complaints with characters symbolizing transgressive elements in society.⁵⁶ For example, Juvenal had distaste for actors, and so we must consider his potential negative bias towards all performers, including gladiators and beast hunters.⁵⁷ Furthermore, his writings are misogynistic, so we cannot expect an approving assessment of female arena performers. However, his satires

⁵⁶ Brunet, “Women with Swords”, 19.

⁵⁷ E. Courtney, *A Commentary of the Satires of Juvenal* (London: The Athone Press, 1980), 6-7.

are useful in determining what social norms were by looking at the examples of the contrary. Thus, his invective tone must be considered in any analysis of his work. Several of his satirical poems will be consulted.

Like Juvenal, Statius was a poet of the late first century CE. One poem titled *Kalendae Decembres* (“The Kalends of December”) recounts events that took place at the imperial celebration of the Saturnalia. The emperor Domitian sponsored these games, and Statius spends a great deal of time praising the emperor for them. In the poem, Statius casts himself in the role of spectator, enjoying the spectacle with the people of Rome, and he makes sure to record the crowd’s reaction as appreciative and laudatory.⁵⁸ It is notable, however, that other ancient authors, such as Suetonius and Cassius Dio, say that Domitian was not particularly popular with the people, and in fact, a rather distant figure to them.⁵⁹ Statius, a contemporary of the emperor, was using flattery in order to gain imperial favour. We must keep this in mind when we read his poems describing arena entertainment.

Martial, another Roman poet of the first century CE is also important for this study. His series of epigrams known today as *Liber spectaculorum* highlight certain events of the one hundred days of games held to celebrate the opening of the Flavian Amphitheatre in Rome.⁶⁰ Like Statius, Martial also has been accused of writing to flatter the emperors Titus and Domitian.⁶¹ Spisak advises the readers of Martial’s poems of praise to look to the qualities of emperors that are highlighted as clues to broadly accepted imperial virtues.⁶² Studying Martial’s

⁵⁸ Anna McCullough, “Heard But Not Seen: Domitian and the Gaze in Statius’ *Silvae*,” *CJ* 104 2 (2008): 145.

⁵⁹ *Ibid.*, 145-146. Suet., *Dom.*, 23.1. Dio Cass., 67.1.2.

⁶⁰ William Fitzgerald, *Martial: The World of the Epigram* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2007), 21.

⁶¹ Art L. Spisak, *Martial: A Social Guide* (London: Gerald Duckworth & Co. Ltd., 2007), 2.

⁶² *Ibid.*, 54-55.

work also allows us to note the essential social responsibilities of reciprocity and patronage in ancient Roman society during the time he was writing.⁶³ We will see that the themes of reciprocity and patronage were an important factor for *editores* putting on *spectacula*. We can also see the importance of how the sponsor of the games was often a focal point in poetry that discusses spectacle.

Suetonius, a “bureaucrat” of the late first to early second century CE, is best known for his biographies of emperors. His *Lives of the Caesars* spans approximately 100 years of imperial history, from the life of Julius Caesar to the reign of Domitian. Suetonius in each biography typically dedicated a section to the spectacles put on by each emperor. Provision of spectacle was a particularly important part of an emperor’s patronage of his subjects, and of his legacy as a generous leader, displaying *liberalitas* (generosity or giving freely). He lived during the reigns of the emperors Vespasian, Titus, and Domitian, and wrote his biographies after the latter’s death.⁶⁴ Thus Suetonius was not concerned with fallout or reprisal from the subjects of his biographies. Suetonius came from a family that had social connections to the periphery of the Imperial court stretching back to Caligula’s reign. Suetonius worked under Trajan and Hadrian, and his imperial biographies were written while employed in Hadrian’s court.⁶⁵ Suetonius’ idea of the qualities of a good emperor were influenced by the *Panygericus* by Pliny, where he stated that a good emperor like Trajan was “a fellow citizen, not a tyrant, who is our father not our over-lord. He is

⁶³ Spisak, *Martial: A Social Guide*, 58.

⁶⁴ Andrew Wallace-Hadrill, *Suetonius* (London: Gerald Duckworth & Co. Ltd., 1983), 1.

⁶⁵ Donna W. Hurley, *An Historical and Historiographical Commentary on Suetonius’ Life of C. Caligula* (Atlanta: Scholars Press, 1993), vii.

one of us.”⁶⁶ We shall see that the emperors who are recorded in the ancient sources as featuring women in their spectacle are often the ones considered bad emperors.

While Suetonius was a biographer, Tacitus, his close contemporary was a historian proper.⁶⁷ What survives of Tacitus’ *Annals* is a year-by-year account of the Julio-Claudian emperors that begins after the death of Augustus in 14 CE and ends with the death of Nero in 68 CE. Tacitus, born during Nero’s reign, reported on the histories of the Julio-Claudian emperors with whom he had no actual contact. Tacitus, like Suetonius, believed that an emperor’s relationship with the Senate was what made him good or bad – good emperors empowered the Senate, and bad emperors disenfranchised it.⁶⁸ This viewpoint was informed by Tacitus’ status as a senator.⁶⁹ An incident recorded by Tacitus that is important for this study is his discussion of Nero compelling elite men and women to perform in the arena, which he says disgraced them.⁷⁰ Tacitus saw this as a great affront to privileged elites such as himself. Caligula also forced elite men and women to perform in the arena as well, but much of the segment of the *Annals* on Caligula has been lost. Modern versions of the *Annals* are missing two years from Tiberius’ reign, almost all of the section on Caligula, the first years of Claudius’ reign, and the last few years of the reign of Nero.⁷¹ We also have references to female participation in arena spectacle under Titus and Domitian, but Tacitus’ work ends before their reigns.

⁶⁶ Hurley, *An Historical and Historiographical Commentary on Suetonius’ Life of C. Caligula*, vii. Plin., *Pan.*, 1.2.

⁶⁷ Wallace-Hadrill, *Suetonius*, 9.

⁶⁸ S.P. Oakley, “*Res Olim Dissociabiles*: Emperors, Senators, and Liberty,” in *The Cambridge Companion to Tacitus*, ed. A.J. Woodman (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2009), 185.

⁶⁹ A.J. Woodman, “Tacitus and the Contemporary Scene,” in *The Cambridge Companion to Tacitus*, ed. A.J. Woodman (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2009), 31.

⁷⁰ Suet., *Ner.*, 12.

⁷¹ Clifford H. Moore & John Jackson, *Tacitus Annals* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 1934), 235.

Cassius Dio was a Roman statesman and historian born in Bithynia in the mid-second century CE. He enjoyed an illustrious political career from the end of the reign of Commodus (r. 177-192 CE) to the reign of Alexander Severus (r. 222-235 CE). Dio rose to the rank of consul in 205 CE. His access to Imperial records, and unique personal experience in the Imperial court served as excellent sources for his work. Dio's *Roman History*, written in Greek, is an 80-volume survey of the history of Rome beginning with Aeneas' arrival in Italy from Troy and ending in 229 CE, six years before Dio's death. Like Tacitus, Dio also commented on the games put on by emperors during their time in power. According to a study by R.F. Newbold, Dio discusses the role of the emperor as *editor*, the exotic and expensive nature of the games, as well as the types of gifts given out most frequently to please the audience.⁷² For Dio and his readers, these topics are important to record because they reflect the generosity of the *editor*. The focus of the games for Dio, if looked at in the broadest of categories, was not only to highlight the wealth and status of the *editor*, but also his willingness to share that wealth through gifts and games.⁷³

It is also important to note the particular temporal concentration of our sources. The poets Statius, Juvenal, and Martial were all living and writing from the mid-first century CE to the early-mid 2nd century CE, and were all contemporaries of each other. Suetonius and Tacitus lived and worked from the late first century into the second century CE, while Cassius Dio lived in the late second century into the third century CE. Together, these sources cover most of the period in which women participated in spectacle. Our educated authors were men of the elite, with social

⁷² R.F. Newbold, "Cassius Dio and the Games," *AC* 44 no. 2 (1975): 590. Newbold quantifies the number of times Dio discusses the following subjects: conduct of giver or president of games (46)=26%, identity of person who bore cost of games (15)=6.6%, explicit reference to expense and magnificence of games (11)=4.8%, extras such as *missilia*, free baths, banquets (8)=3.5%, persons of low status putting on games (6)=2.6%, and magistrates putting on regular games (5)=2.2%. Discussion of the *editor* and items that reflect on his generosity = 45.7% of all his writing regarding the games.

⁷³ Newbold, "Cassius Dio and the Games," 602.

connections to those who held political office or to the imperial court and we can use their writings to ascertain which factors regarding financing *spectacula* were most important to the *editores*. These sources also demonstrate how games were received and what impact their reception had on the lives and legacy of those magistrates and emperors who financed them.

Legal & Epigraphic Texts

The legal texts can tell us which social norms were important enough to be protected by law. They can also tell us what socially transgressive practices had taken place that laws were created to remedy them. A decree of the Senate, *Senatus consultum* (SC) dated to 19 CE and found inscribed on a tablet in ancient Larinum, prohibited men and women of higher social status from performing in the arena.⁷⁴ This piece of ancient evidence is particularly telling with respect to women's participation in the Roman arena. According to Levick's translation, the law states: "no one should bring on to the stage a senator's son, *daughter*, grandson, *granddaughter*, great-grandson, *great-granddaughter*...any *female* whose husband or father or grandfather, whether paternal or maternal or brother had ever possessed the right of sitting in the seats reserved for the knights, or induce them by means of a fee to fight to the death in the arena...[italics added]."⁷⁵ Surely the reason they were mentioned was due to either past or potential participation. Also mentioned in this SC is a previous law under Augustus that banned members of the elite from taking part as performers in the theatre. Elite female participation in public performance had become a practice that needed to be quelled.⁷⁶

Epigraphy, graffiti, and inscriptions are also useful for this study. Funerary inscriptions, for example, discuss the important accomplishments of the deceased and provide an insight into

⁷⁴ Levick, "The *Senatus Consultum* from Larinum," 98.

⁷⁵ *Ibid.*, 99.

⁷⁶ *Ibid.*, 99.

the values of that person and his contemporaries. An inscription from Ostia dated to the second half of the second century CE erected by a magistrate named Hostilianus tells of his exploits in local gladiator history: he claims that he was the first “to provide women for the fight”.⁷⁷ Scholars take this to mean that he was the first in Ostia to have women fight in the local games.⁷⁸ I shall delve into the motivations behind financing and memorializing such entertainments in the next chapter.

Ancient Material Evidence

While literary sources can tell us many things, material evidence also has an important role in this study. The material evidence comes in the form of sculpture, mosaics, and archaeological finds. Ancient images of female arena performers allow us to gain insight into the ways in which they were physically represented for the spectators. The best-known piece of material evidence for female participation in the arena is a relief from Halicarnassus, currently housed in the British Museum depicting two female gladiators facing one another [fig. 1].⁷⁹ Dated to the second century CE, it is within the same general time period as the existing ancient literary evidence described above.⁸⁰ The way in which these figures are armed, armoured, as well as the information given to us in the inscription can tell us many things regarding representation that will be addressed in the following chapters.

A spectacular mosaic from Tunisia dating to the late 3rd century CE depicting two Amazons on horseback could very possibly represent female arena performers dressed as an Amazons [fig. 2]. The connection between female arena performers and ancient Amazons will be discussed in detail in the following chapters. When one evaluates the context of the other mosaics

⁷⁷ CIL XIV 4616 & 5381. Brunet, “Women with Swords”, 482.

⁷⁸ Ibid., 482.

⁷⁹ Coleman, “*Missio* at Halicarnassus”, 488.

⁸⁰ Ibid., 487.

found in the same room in the building site (known as the *Maison des Atruches*) a theme of arena spectacle within the mosaics is apparent. The centre of the room boasts an amazing image of exotic animals for the *venatio* and four *venatores*. This leads one to see beyond the single mosaic to consider the context of all of the surrounding mosaics as a larger piece of work. Thus, the image of the Amazons on horseback could actually be female arena performers dressed as Amazons, which as we will see was fairly common costuming for them. This interpretation of the Amazon mosaic in the *Maison des Atruches* demonstrates that there may be a larger body of material evidence for female arena performers than we currently recognize.

While male arena performers are often commemorated in funerary monuments, few have been found for their female counterparts. The grave of the so-called “female gladiator” in the city of London unearthed in 1996 by the Museum of London’s archaeological team had the potential to fill this void, but fell lamentably short. A Channel 4 program dubbed the occupant of the grave a female gladiator even though that was not the conclusion made in the archaeological report.⁸¹ To this day, the staff at the Museum of London tend to roll their eyes at the very mention of this mistaken identification. A potentially stronger contender may be a female skeleton found in a gladiatorial graveyard in Ephesus, Turkey. The female, accompanied by a partial funerary inscription, was the sole woman among the male gladiators interred there.⁸² The bodies in this graveyard have been dated to the 2nd to 3rd century CE.⁸³ The cemetery where she was found consisted of four plots with funerary inscriptions for each, with the remaining three being

⁸¹ Museum of London, GDV96, 1996.

⁸² Fabian Kanz and Karl Grossschmidt, “Head Injuries in Roman Gladiators,” *Forensic Science International* 160 (2006): 209.

⁸³ *Ibid.*, 209.

identified as gladiators by their funerary inscriptions.⁸⁴ According to what's left of the woman's funerary inscription [fig. 3], her name was Serapias and from her remains, we know she stood at 159cm in height.⁸⁵ Kanz and Grossschmidt identified Serapias as a slave but have not identified her as a gladiator. Their hesitancy is due in part due to the imagery on her funerary stele. An image of Serapias from the knees down still remains, and she is not dressed in traditional gladiatorial garb. Moreover, Kanz and Grossschmidt do not note any signs of the types of wounds typical on gladiator skeletal remains. Without more conclusive evidence Serapias does not look like the forensic evidence that the study of female gladiators so sorely needs.

A small bronze statuette currently housed in the Museum für Kunst und Gewerbe in Hamburg, Germany has been declared as the newest piece of evidence of female participation in gladiatorial combat. Alfonso Manas published an article titled "New Evidence of Female Gladiators: the Bronze Statuette at the Museum für Kunst und Gewerbe of Hamburg" in 2011, and the story was subsequently picked up by National Geographic. He also published another article in 2012 on the same topic, but the article does not develop the argument much further than in the 2011 article.⁸⁶ The bronze statuette [fig. 4] is indeed of a woman, was made somewhere within the Italian peninsula, and can be dated to the first century CE.⁸⁷ However, his argument that the statuette is a female gladiator has not convinced me. Manas points to the object in the

⁸⁴ Fabian Kanz and Karl Grossschmidt, "Dying in the Arena: The Osseous Evidence From Ephesian Gladiators," in *Roman Amphitheatres and Spectacula: a 21st Century Perspective – Paper from an international conference held in Chester*, ed. Tony Wilmott (Oxford: Archaeopress, 2007): 212.

⁸⁵ Ibid., 212 & 213. Kanz and Grossschmidt, "Head Injuries in Roman Gladiators", 209.

⁸⁶ Mauricio Pastor Muñoz and Alfonso Mañas Bastida, "« Munera gladiatoria »: mujeres gladiadoras," *Florentia Iliberritana* 23 (2012): 127-151.

⁸⁷ Alfonso Manas, "New Evidence of Female Gladiators: the Bronze Statuette at the Museum für Kunst und Gewerbe of Hamburg," *The International Journal of the History of Sport* 28 no.18 (2011): 2740.

figure's left hand as a *sica* (a curved blade wielded by the *Thraex* gladiator).⁸⁸ However, it appears to more closely resemble a *strigil*, an ancient tool used to remove oil and dirt from the body after exercise. Manas admits that this is the opinion of most scholars who have studied this piece.⁸⁹ When compared to a *strigil* from the same region and time period, [fig. 5] one would have to agree with that conclusion. Manas points to the body position, the clothing, and the “knee bandage” of the statuette as the evidence that indicates the subject is a female gladiator.⁹⁰ Furthermore, some of the comparative pieces he uses such as the “bikini” mosaic from Sicily [fig. 6], do not depict gladiators. Most of the article itself is not even about the piece, but rather an overview of the history of female gladiators and his analysis of the statuette takes up only a few short paragraphs. This bronze statuette is indeed interesting and may very well be a type of female athletic performer. However, identifying the statuette as a female gladiator is far more eye-catching and interesting than a mere “arena performer” or “athlete”. This is not to say that the piece is not an important find, or even potentially useful for this study, but more work needs to be done on it to ascertain its place in the history of women in sport.

Approaches

Due to the varied types of evidence we have at our disposal, the methodologies used to interpret our sources will have to be varied as well. For the ancient literary and epigraphic sources, one must read beyond the text itself. Considering historical context as well as linguistic usage of each source is essential. Studying the iconography of each example of material evidence will be an important part of this study. I follow Jaś Elsner's approach for interpreting visual evidence in the ancient Roman context, emphasizing context and comparison. Elsner employs a “broad

⁸⁸ Manas, “New Evidence of Female Gladiators,” 2740-2741.

⁸⁹ Ibid., 2740-2741.

⁹⁰ Ibid., 2741-2742.

comparative method in which one grasps and then compares the relationship between objects, their producers and their viewers at different moments within the process of change.”⁹¹

Inscriptions can blend elements of both text and images and the methodology of epigraphy has been developed specifically for this type of evidence. Ancient Roman inscriptions utilize specific abbreviations or truncations and are found in different forms ranging from epitaphs to graffiti and so epigraphy will be critical to the comprehension of the ancient inscribed sources. CIL, EAOR, and ILS are the corpora of ancient Roman inscriptions utilized for this thesis. Scholar Renata Garraffoni has written on the usefulness of epigraphic evidence for the study of ancient Roman spectacle because the people who had first-hand experience of the games were often the ones who wrote the inscriptions.⁹² Stephen Tuck and James L. Franklin Jr.’s epigraphical studies are particularly useful for this study because they analyze political advertisements, which elucidate the connection between political life and the sponsoring of spectacle that will be discussed in the next chapter.

Radical feminist thought, post-modern feminism, and queer theory underpin notions of gender in this thesis. The idea that gender exists separately from biological sex was originally posited by radical and post-modernist feminists in the 1960s and 70s. They sought to break down the belief that sex and gender are one and the same. This position was viewed as a fallacy created by the patriarchy to keep women subjugated; the ultimate goal was to eliminate categories of gender entirely.⁹³ Queer theorist Judith Butler posited in the 1990s that both gender and sex function on a spectrum, rather than as the binaries of ‘man’/‘woman’ and

⁹¹ Jaś Elsner, *Art and the Roman Viewer* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1995), 8.

⁹² Renata S. Garraffoni, “Gladiators’ Daily Lives and Epigraphy: A Social Archeological Approach to the Roman *munera* during the Early Principate,” *Nikephoros* 21 (2008): 227.

⁹³ Rosemarie Tong, *Feminist Thought: A Comprehensive Introduction* (San Francisco: Westview Press), 95 & 96.

‘feminine’/’masculine’, and that furthermore the body was the locus of gender expression.⁹⁴

Additionally, Butler’s work is useful for exploring how gender is expressed as a type of performance that is influenced by the culture and time of the performer.⁹⁵ The female arena performer broke the feminine gender norms assigned to her sex, as she performed traditionally masculine behaviours and was sometimes dressed in male-gendered clothing. Although Roman society adhered to gender binaries, male/female, masculine/feminine as a cultural norm or ideal, the performance of gender did not always fit into those categories.

The first chapter of this thesis will explore the social imperatives behind the games that influenced *editores* to include women performers in their games. A survey of the ancient Roman social structure and where both the *editores* and arena performers were located within that structure allows us to see what role social status played in female inclusion in spectacle. The social distance between the performers and the *editores* is notable. This thesis will discuss how those of the lowest orders affected the social mobility amongst the higher echelons. Another key motivation for the *editor* was creation of public approval and personal legacy. In their desire to outdo any games that had come before, means that over time the *editores* felt compelled to include new and novel entertainments. Furthermore, female arena performers represented luxury and opulence and this affected the reputation of *editores*, their legacy, and the trajectory of their political careers.

The second chapter of this thesis will discuss the feminine or masculine qualities that female arena performers highlighted or augmented. Comparison of artistic depictions of both male and female gladiators will help underline differences and similarities in the ways in which

⁹⁴ Stephen Valocchi, “Not Yet Queer Enough: The Lessons of Queer Theory for the Sociology of Gender and Sexuality,” *Gender and Society* 19 no. 6 (2005): 752 & 754.

⁹⁵ Judith Butler, “Critically Queer,” *GLQ* 1:1 (1993): 17. Judith Butler, *Gender Trouble: Feminism and the Subversion of Identity* (New York: Routledge, 1990), xv.

certain gendered representations were emphasized. Gender norms must be elucidated to see how female arena performers transgressed them. This will allow us to gain understanding of the novelty of these female performers and the shock that they could elicit from the audience. Female arena performers were also eroticized to increase their entertainment value. Analyzing the literary sources that refer to how feminine and masculine presentations of these performers were chosen will elucidate representation of female participation in spectacle. We will also see how female arena performers dressing in male-gendered clothing had the potential to give their performances an erotic flair. This chapter will ascertain the way in which these women were represented to emphasize their divergence from gender norms, the way sexuality in their performance was highlighted, and how those representations served the aims of the *editores*.

The third chapter of this thesis explores the representations of the female arena performers as ethnic “Others”. Some of the earliest gladiator armour and fighting styles were developed to specifically imitate certain nations the Romans had conquered (i.e. Thracians and Gauls). Ethnicity must be addressed, as arena entertainment spread throughout Roman-occupied regions, and the ethnicity of slaves who may have taken part is bound to play a part in perception. We will also see that costuming was used to express the foreign nature of the performer as well. What was the message being conveyed to the audience when these performers were assigned the role of exotic “Other” and what characteristics were chosen to communicate this? Female gladiators and *venatores* were often depicted as or referred to as Amazon warriors. This will be discussed with an effort to understand why that was and what that particular allusion would have meant to the ancient Roman spectator.

Why did *editores* sponsor *ludi* that incorporated women performers, when male performers were the norm? Most researchers argue that inclusion of females showed the audience

something rare and novel, and generated a positive impression of the sponsor of the games. Local popularity and advertising high social standing was a way for an elite sponsor to elevate himself above others in the social pecking order. This study of women in ancient Roman spectacle analyzes the topic more acutely than previous studies have done. It explores the political capital achieved through providing entertaining female arena performers. It also examines the use of subaltern identities for these women who were subverting typical gender norms and were exoticized as foreigners and characters from popular myth (mainly Amazons). This was motivated by the desire for the *editor* of the games, whether emperor or magistrate, to garner popular support, and a reputation that outlived his mortal body. His popularity and power were an important part of his personal identity and the female arena performer was used to further that positive reflection in the eyes of his community by being featured in memorable games attached to his name and reputation.

Chapter 1 Incentives: Social and Political Power of Spectacle

This chapter will argue that certain social imperatives ingrained in the elite classes of the Roman Empire (*senators, equestrians, decurions*) motivated them, as sponsors or *editores*, to include female arena performers in public spectacle. An introduction to the ancient Roman social hierarchies will allow us to recognize the positions of those various orders under discussion in relation to one another. The importance of legacy and reputation among the Roman male elites will also help us to understand that there were important, particular incentives to having exotic female arena performers as a part of their games. Examples of inscriptions that discuss some sponsors who chose to include female performers can assist in elucidating this. A discussion of the social positions of the female performers themselves will also be important. How their performance in the arena affected their social position is also an important facet of this study. Indeed, all those who are involved in this practice must be considered in terms of their social position.

Funding the games afforded elite politicians the opportunity to ingratiate themselves with those whose approval could forward their political careers and reputations. Civic patronage – the provision of *beneficia* played an essential role in construction of elite reputation. Gratitude for such *beneficia* could come in the form of praise and the political support of the masses. This was a part of the social contract that brought together different classes of Roman society. Elite sponsorship of games was an important *beneficium* and this was indeed a reciprocal relationship between the elites and those who occupied the lower rungs of Roman society. The appetites of the crowd were satiated by exotic, unique entertainments, and the demand increased once the novel had been experienced. This created an evolution of opulent luxury where having female

arena performers perform became the next step in pleasing the audience with a new and exciting type of performance.

Ancient Roman Social Hierarchy: Politics & Popularity

Ancient Roman society was highly stratified. Social status designations were legal categories that denoted certain privileges or lack thereof. The elites were designated as *honestiores*, while the masses fell into the category of *humiliores*.¹ The *honestiores* were even further sub-divided into classifications or *ordines* - consisting of *senators*, *equites*, and *decurions* - that related to a family's prestige, affluence, and ability to hold magistracies as defined by the state.² Those belonging to the senatorial class were a relatively small group, only a few hundred families, while the equestrian order was a much a larger group, numbering in the thousands of families.³ *Decurions* were municipal councillors and in general, did not have enough wealth to be classified as equestrians (who had to have 100,000 *denarii* to qualify), but had at least 25,000 *denarii* in personal wealth.⁴ The *cursus honorum* was a hierarchical series of political/military positions or magistracies held by members of the Roman senatorial elite. Each magistracy had its own roles and responsibilities. A *cursus* of magistracies also existed for equestrians and municipal elites. Among the men of the *honestiores* were expectations to take part in civil service and take on political offices or magistracies suited to their family's rank. This social responsibility is well articulated by Eleni Manolaraki who characterizes it as "the Roman

¹ Peter Garnsey and Richard Seller, *The Roman Empire: Economy, Society and Culture* (London: Gerald Duckworth & Co. Ltd), 111. These two terms first occur in legal texts in the early second century CE, though the distinction between these two social groups had existed for a long time previous to this.

² Ibid., 112-113.

³ Ibid., 113.

⁴ Ramsay MacMullen, *Roman Social Relations: 50 B.C. to A.D. 284* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1974), 5.

masculine imperative to relinquish selfish pursuits for civic duties.”⁵ The *humiliores* greatly outnumbered the *honestiores*, but were excluded from holding any kind of political office due to lack of property. Overall the Roman social system aimed to keep property and political power within the elite classes.⁶ The maintenance of the social ranks was of most importance to those who resided in the positions of power, as Cicero stated in his *Pro Plancio* speech: “*servari necesse est gradus*” (rank must be maintained).⁷

All arena performers fell within the socio-legal category of *infames*. *Infamia* literally means a state of being without reputation.⁸ *Infames* included gladiators, other arena performers, prostitutes, pimps, actors, and *cinaedi* (adult males who allowed themselves to be penetrated).⁹ As Catherine Edwards has suggested, all persons who were *infames* were subject to the “tarnish of the public gaze”, and used or moved their bodies for the pleasure of others, either in a sexual way, or simply as entertainers.¹⁰ Persons who were labeled *infames* incurred legal disabilities. A non-slave who became an arena performer lost many of his or her rights as a free Roman citizen. Such persons were not able to bring charges against others in court. Furthermore, their bodies were at the complete disposal of others, which could involve violence; they could not write a will or gain full inheritance; they could also not run for political office or vote.¹¹ The *Tabula Heraclensis* or *Lex Iulia Municipalis*, which is thought to date to the time of Julius Caesar (100-

⁵ Eleni Manolaraki, “Imperial and Rhetorical Hunting in Pliny’s *Panegyricus*,” *ICS* 37 (2012): 179.

⁶ Garnsey & Seller, *The Roman Empire: Economy, Society and Culture*, 109-110.

⁷ Cic., *Planc.*, 6.

⁸ Catherine Edwards, “Unspeakable Professions”, in *Roman Sexualities*, ed. Judith P. Hallett and Marilyn B. Skinner (Princeton, N.J.: Princeton University Press, 1997), 66.

⁹ *Ibid.*, 67, 68.

¹⁰ *Ibid.*, 68.

¹¹ *Ibid.*, 66, 69. Robert Knapp, *Invisible Romans* (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 2011), 261.

44 B.CE), was a kind of rulebook for municipal administration.¹² One of the outcomes of these stringent rules was keeping the *infames* socially oppressed and unable to raise their status by holding office. It stated that no one who had either fought as a gladiator, trained gladiators, or had run a gladiatorial training school could serve in any political office in any municipality throughout the entire Empire.¹³ It served the purpose of both encouraging those of the elite classes to avoid behaviours that had been categorized as those belonging to the lowest classes, as well as keeping performers from turning the popularity or celebrity status that they enjoyed as a public figure into any kind of tangible political power. However, most arena performers were slaves, who had no rights. The *editor* of the games hired *infames*, who were the lowest of the low in socio-legal terms, but who could assist him in raising his own status if they put on a good show that was attached to his name.

With Augustus' rise to power in 27 BCE the Republican Period ended and Rome became ruled by emperors. Within the new power structure, the function and responsibilities of some magistracies were shifted to suit the emperor. Augustus took over what had previously been a magisterial responsibility of putting on most *ludi* in Rome.¹⁴ Previously, in the Republic period at Rome, *aediles* were expected to finance games in order to be elected to a *praetorship* later on.¹⁵ In the Imperial period, the emperor greatly influenced who would be elected to magistracies in Rome, and thus the relationship between magistrates and sponsoring games changed at that point. Lesser games in Rome that were not the emperor's responsibility were given to consuls and the more distinguished *praetors*, though they had previously been the

¹² ILS 6085. Edwards, "Unspeakable Professions", 70.

¹³ M.H. Crawford, *Roman Statutes*, ed. & trans. M.H. Crawford (London: University of London, 1996): 376.

¹⁴ Köhne, "Bread and Circuses: The Politics of Entertainment", 19.

¹⁵ Holleran, "The Development of Public Entertainment and Venues in Rome and Italy," 51.

responsibility of *aediles* in the Republican period.¹⁶ Although emperors allowed the consuls and *praetors* to put on games, they had to work within certain parameters. For example, their expenditures were strictly limited which, in turn, restricted the type and number of performers they could have.¹⁷ This ensured that the emperor's games would always be the most spectacular and memorable at Rome. A virtual imperial monopoly on the games in Rome and the ability to limit the lavishness of other magistrates' games underlined how important control of the games were to Augustus and later emperors. There will not be much discussion of the role of the games in the Republican Period because all of our ancient evidence for female participation in the games comes from the Imperial Period. However, the importance of sponsoring games by magistrates to acquire political popularity does have its genesis in the Republican Period and so it is important to understand what influenced the way spectacle was carried-out in the Imperial Period. The amount of money that would be supplied to the magistrate/*editor* of a set of games in Rome was set by the Senate and paid out of the state treasury (*aerarium*).¹⁸ The expectation was that the *editor* would at the very least match the amount provided by the state.¹⁹ The amount coming from the *aerarium* increased over time and the scale of the games grew. Dionysius of Halicarnassus recorded that, up until the Second Punic War (218-201 BCE) 80,000 sesterces were allocated from the treasury for games.²⁰ In the *Fasti Antiates*, dated to 67-55 BCE, the amount rose to 760,000 sesterces for the *Ludi Romani*, 600,000 for the *Ludi Plebeii*, and 380,000

¹⁶ Suet., *Aug.*, 43.3.

¹⁷ *Ibid.*, 43.3.

¹⁸ *Fasti Antiates* = CIL I (2), 248 f.

¹⁹ Thomas Wiedemann, *Emperors and Gladiators* (London: Routledge, 1992), 8-9.

²⁰ Dion. Hal., *Ant. Rom.*, 7.71.2.

for the *Ludi Apollinares*.²¹ If these amounts were then matched by the magisterial or imperial *editor* we can see how exorbitant the cost for games was as a whole.

Outside of Rome, the rules regarding giving games were different, and followed more closely the practices at Rome during the Republican Period. Roman municipalities still elected magistrates, and so the role of *aedile* still retained that important function in the realm of spectacle there. Ancient evidence can tell us how the responsibility for putting on civic *ludi* was allocated to local magistrates. Each city in the Roman Empire had to administer their justice system, maintain streets and buildings, liaise with the central government when needed, and take care of the celebration of local religious cults and festivals.²² At Pompeii for example, the first annual magistracy a municipal noble held at the beginning of his political career was *aedile*. *Aediles* looked after the civic matters of roads, markets and public buildings.²³ The office of *duovir iure dicundo* followed *aedile*; the *duoviri* were head of the civic administration and did any liaising with Rome. The highest office in the municipal *cursus* which was held only once every five years, was the *duovir iure dicundo quinquennalis*, often simply called *quinquennial*.²⁴ Both *duoviri* and *aediles* financed local games, but the Senate in Rome established the amounts that each office received from the city treasury to put on their games.²⁵ For example, in the city of Urso, the *duoviri* were given 2,000 sesterces to cover one set of games that took place over four days, but were expected to contribute an equal or greater sum of their own money towards

²¹ Wiedemann, *Emperors and Gladiators*, 8.

²² Luciana Jacobelli, *Gladiators at Pompeii* (Los Angeles: J. Paul Getty Museum, 2003), 42.

²³ *Ibid.*, 42.

²⁴ James L. Franklin Jr., *Pompeii difficile est: Studies in the Political Life of Imperial Pompeii* (Ann Arbor: The University of Michigan Press, 2001), 9.

²⁵ Wiedemann, *Emperors and Gladiators*, 9.

the games.²⁶ Compared to Rome, the games in cities of Italy or the provinces were on a much smaller scale, however they could still be a financial burden to those expected to finance them.

Providing games could be quite expensive for municipal magistrates, especially if they wanted to put on something memorable that would ingratiate them with the electorate. For a municipal magistrate, keeping his name in the mind of local voters could serve him in the future. Being the one who distributed tickets to the games, especially in Rome, could actuate Roman magistrates' political rise as well. Tickets that were distributed by the magistrates could be given out to family members, friends and associates, as well as to any clients to whom they acted as patron.²⁷ Ticket distribution could be perceived as a *quid pro quo* agreement where the politician would be expected to receive future political support from those to whom he had provided seats. In fact, Cicero defended in court a magistrate named Murena who was accused of trading tickets to the games for votes.²⁸ Since the same for financing games was used during Murena's lifetime (in the first century BCE) that was utilized in municipalities during the Imperial Period, it is possible that there was the potential for buying votes with tickets to the games in places outside of Rome. Regarding Rome, Claire Holleran discusses the impact that financing of games had on *aediles*:

“Indeed the shows that were being staged by senators towards the end of the Republic show all too clearly the fight for individual glory and the fierce competitiveness which was coming to characterize Roman politics. Games grew ever more expensive and lavish, and politicians disliked taking the post of *aedile* at the same time as a richer colleague, whose games would eclipse their own.”²⁹

²⁶ Wiedemann, *Emperors and Gladiators*, 9.

²⁷ Holleran, “The Development of Public Entertainment and Venues in Rome and Italy”, 50 & 56.

²⁸ Cic., *Mur.*, 67-73.

²⁹ Holleran, “The Development of Public Entertainment and Venues in Rome and Italy”, 51.

Expense and success were very closely associated because novelty and lavishness were ways to surpass previous games and acquire a reputation of benevolence. Provision of *beneficia* in the form of games was an essential component of the career of a politician in Rome of the Republic and the municipalities of the Empire.

Editores, Spectators & Public Approval

Paul Veyne summarizes social imperatives motivating *editores* to curate the most lavish spectacles as follows: “careerism, paternalism, kingly style, corruption, conspicuous consumption, local patriotism, desire to emulate, concern to uphold one’s rank, obedience to public opinion, fear of hostile demonstrations, generosity, belief in ideals.”³⁰ These potential motivators that *editores* were not only part of the social expectations placed on Roman elites, but were also self-serving. Even generosity was not entirely altruistic in the context of the provision of the games because it was the reputation for generosity that the ancient Roman *editor* craved. Generosity and patronage were a central imperative for elite Roman men. *Liberalitas* (generosity or giving freely) was an important virtue for an elite to possess and was influenced by the Hellenistic elite obligation of *euergetism* (private funding for public benefit).³¹ Patronage was an important aspect of life for elites, who patronized individuals and their city as a part of their perceived and official civic duties.³² Any man in a *senatorial*, *equestrian*, or *decurial* family, would have learned the importance of *liberalitas*, its practical expression in public benefaction, and the necessity of carrying on the family tradition of benefaction. Reciprocity was the other side of the coin in acts of benefaction as the elites who provided games as a part of their civic

³⁰ Paul Veyne, *Bread and Circuses: Historical Sociology and Political Pluralism* (London: The Penguin Group, 1976), 5.

³¹ *Ibid.*, 10.

³² Richard P. Saller, *Personal Patronage Under the Early Empire* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1982), 1.

duties knew that there would be a return on their investment in the form of future political support and good reputation.³³ The *editor* who chose to take on the expense of a novelty act with female arena performers did so knowing that it would please the crowds and curry favour to their benefit in the future.

Political approval and popularity could lead to election to magistracies, which made popularity the social currency that the elite coveted. Furthermore, a positive reaction to the *ludus* the *editor* sponsored was important to his reputation. For, without those who watch and applaud, there can be no spectacle. The viewer was not a passive figure, but rather a participant in the arena entertainment. Viewers interacted with the entertainments taking place on the sand. We must take what we can glean from our sources to posit how the ancient Roman arena spectator might have reacted to the female arena performer and how a positive reaction would have benefitted the *editor* of the games. The cheers extended to the arena performers were a reflection of the support for the *editor* of the games. The *editor* could interpret the cheers and excitement of the crowd as appreciation for himself. To him, that applause was the sound of future election wins and elevated reputation.

In Rome of the Imperial Period, the games were also seen as an important opportunity to set the tone for the relationship between an emperor and the people.³⁴ Just prior to the Imperial period, Suetonius recorded how Julius Caesar was often distracted with work during games and that this was met with censure from the people.³⁵ By contrast, Suetonius describes the emperor Claudius as exuberant, involved, and affable at the games, even referring the audience as *domini*,

³³ Saller, *Personal Patronage Under the Early Empire*, 15.

³⁴ Holleran, "The Development of Public Entertainment and Venues in Rome and Italy", 50.

³⁵ Suet., *Aug.*, 45.

or masters.³⁶ By making himself accessible to the masses, he presented himself as a peer who had similar tastes. The games were also an opportunity to gauge the attitudes of the crowd and in turn, the people felt they had an outlet for voicing their opinions to those in power.³⁷ Although the *editor* of the games gave the final word on the outcome of gladiatorial matches, for example, whether to give reprieve or *missio* to a combatant, his decision might be swayed by the desires of the crowd.³⁸ This gave the spectators a feeling of empowerment and was another way, beyond financing the games, that demonstrated the *editor's* benevolence.

Political & Personal Legacy

The social values of the elite can be gleaned by analyzing the public epigraphy left them. Using these sources, we can discern what virtues, deeds, and accomplishments they chose to associate themselves with. *Edicta munerum* - advertisements for upcoming games - and funerary inscriptions from Pompeii demonstrate that sponsoring games was an essential part of the promotion of an elite male's political career. Pompeii had a particularly intense political competition. The dates of elections and when the assumption of office by the elected played a major part in when spectacles would be scheduled during a given year.³⁹ Stephen Tuck's research has illuminated the standard elements of Pompeian *edicta munerum*, and determined what information was deemed consistently important to the *editor* of games:

ven(atorum) et glad(iatorum)
par(ia) XX / M. Tulli pugn(abunt)
Pom(peis) (a) pr(idie) Non(as)
Novembres / (ad) VII Idus

³⁶ Suet., *Claud.*, 21.

³⁷ Holleran, "The Development of Public Entertainment and Venues in Rome and Italy", 51.

³⁸ Wiedemann, *Emperors and Gladiators*, 165-166.

³⁹ Franklin Jr., *Pompeis difficile est*, 2. Stephen L. Tuck, "Scheduling Spectacle: Factors Contributing to the Dates of Pompeian 'Munera'," *Rivista di studi pompeiani* 19 (2008): 25.

*Nov(embers)*⁴⁰

Twenty pairs of animal hunters and gladiators of Marcus Tullius will fight at Pompeii from 4 November to 7 November (trans. Tuck)

Tuck notes that the *editor's* name on this *edicta munerum* is visually the most prominent feature, written in larger letters than the rest of the announcement; and his name appears in the genitive case to demonstrate ownership of the entertainments.⁴¹ The number of fighting pairs of gladiators is noted, serving to provide information to potential spectators and act as a record and promise of the fun to come. What Tuck terms as “additional embellishments” were also added in some *edicta munera*, including gifts that were distributed to the crowds (*sparsiones*), or awnings to shade the crowd on a hot day. Such special features set one *editor's* games apart from another's.⁴² Marcus Tullius was a successful and important politician who left this mark on Pompeii, as a *schola* was built in his honour by order of the city council and he funded the construction of the Temple Fortuna Augusta there as well.⁴³

Funerary inscriptions demonstrate that games were a significant achievement for municipal magistrates and were worthy of commemoration. In Pompeii, a local politician named Aulus Clodius Flaccus recorded for posterity the games he put on during his various magistracies:

A(ulus) Clodius A(uli) filius
Men(enia tribu) Flaccus Ilvir i(ure) d(icundo) ter(tium)
quinq(uennalis)
trib(unus) mil(itum) a populo.
Primo duomviratu Apollinarib(us) in foro pompam
tauros taurocentas succorsores pontarios

⁴⁰ CIL IV 9979

⁴¹ Tuck, “Scheduling Spectacle,” 25.

⁴² Ibid., 25.

⁴³ Wilhelmina F. Jashemski, “Tomb Gardens at Pompeii,” *CJ* 66, no. 2 (1971): 130.

*paria III pugiles catervarios et pycetas ludos
omnibus acruamatis pantomimisq(ue) omnibus et
Pylade et HS N CCI↯↯ in publicam pro duomviratu.
Secundo duomviratu quinq(uennali) Apollinaribus in foro
pompam tauros taurarios succursoses pugiles
catervarios poster die solus in spectaculis athletas
par(ia) XXX glad(iatorum) par(ia) V et gladiat(orum) par(ia) XXXV et
venation(em) tauros taurocentas apros ursos
cetera venatione varia cum collega.
Tertio duomviratu ludos factione prima
adiectis acruamatis cum collega.⁴⁴*

Aulus Clodius Flaccus, son of Aulus, tribe Menenia, three times *duovir iure dicundo*, (once as) quinquennial, military tribune by choice of the people. During his first duovirate, for the *ludi Apollonares*, he provided in the forum a parade, bulls, bullfighters and their aides, three pairs of gladiators who fought on a platform,⁴⁵ group boxers, and boxers in the Greek style. He also provided for all plays and musical pantomimes featuring Pylades; and for the privilege of holding the *duovirate*, he paid ten thousand sesterces to the public coffers. During his second *duovirate*, his *quinquennial*, for the *ludi Apollonares*, he provided in the forum a parade, bulls, bullfighters and their aides, and group boxers. Alone on the following day, in the amphitheatre, he alone provided thirty pairs of athletes, and together with his colleague, he provided thirty-five pairs of gladiators, a hunt, bulls, bullfighters, boars, bears, and other hunting variations. During his third *duovirate*, he provided, together with his colleague, a production by a foremost troupe, with musical accompaniment. (trans. Franklin)

Aulus Clodius Flaccus' political credentials and legacy were very closely tied to the games he provided to the people of Pompeii. The numbers of gladiatorial pairings are almost always mentioned and the variety of entertainments, for example the various bull acts. Care was taken to discuss specifically what types of entertainments were given, and at what point in his career. One will notice that the year of his *quinquennial* magistracy was of some importance, as there were more types of entertainments provided at this time, and the number of gladiator pairs had

⁴⁴ CIL X.1074d = ILS 5053.

⁴⁵ Franklin's original translation uses the term "skirmishing gladiators" but *pontiarii* are gladiators who fight on a platform called a *pons*. Fagan, *The Lure of the Arena*, 191.

increased markedly from games during his previous *duovirate*. Although financing *ludi* was part of his duty as a magistrate, he was proud of them because they had been a particularly successful part of his career. Notably, he was elected three times as *duovir*, which may have been, in part, a result of the games he financed. The variety of types of performers, as well as the fact that some had exotic appeal, such as the boxers in the Greek style, *pontiarii*, and bull fighters, were significant enough to be recorded. He also notes an exact amount of money he gave to the civic treasury on one occasion. The great expense that Clodius Flaccus incurred as magistrate funding games is apparent. The *beneficia* in the form of games were important events that Clodius Flaccus wanted to commemorate.

To have put on games that included female arena performers was also considered one of the lifetime highlights worthy of record as we see in the funerary inscription of Hostilianus from Ostia. Scholars date this piece to the first century CE.⁴⁶ This inscription was written on a white marble slab with a border around the text and discovered in three pieces and later restored.⁴⁷

What remains of the inscription is as follows:

[--]sa[- H]ostilian[us] / [iiv]ir q(uaestor) aerar[i Osti]ensium flam(en)
d(ecreto) d(ecurionum) cur(ator) lusus iuvenali(is) / [--] qui primus om[niu]m
ab urbe condita ludos cum / [--]or et mulieres [a]d ferrum dedit una cum /
[sa]bina u[x]ore fecit sibi et / [---]nio agonio [--] / [--] corporis togat [--] /
[--]um [--].⁴⁸

Hostilianus

duovir, *quaestor* of the public treasury, *flamen* of Ostia, and curator of the youth games by decree of the town council.

He was the first from the city's founding to give games with [-] and to provide women to the fight.

He did this for himself together with his wife Sabina and [...]⁴⁹

⁴⁶ Mirelle C beillac Gervasoni and Federico Zevi, "R visions et nouveaut s pour trois inscriptions d'Ostie," *MEFRA* 88, no. 2 (1976): 613.

⁴⁷ *Ibid.*, 613.

⁴⁸ CIL XIV 1225 C, 8460, 4616.

The inscription has been confirmed to be funerary, so the mention of being the first to provide this type of entertainment was a major lifetime achievement for Hostilianus and his wife Sabina.⁵⁰ It is interesting to note that we have an ancient source for another way a woman could be involved in this practice, other than as a performer, but as a patron in association with her husband, though this must be fairly rare or we would have more ancient examples with mention of women. The landmark event in question most likely happened during Hostilianus' time as a magistrate of some sort.⁵¹ The word to designate the entertainers in this section of the inscription is *mulieres* ("females") as opposed to *feminae*, which, according to Brunet and Coleman, indicates that they were women of low status.⁵² Hostilianus and Sabina put on a set of *ludi* that would have been very memorable for the people as it was the first time in Ostia that they saw women fight in gladiatorial combat – and this was exactly the intention of having women perform. The wording "*mulieres ad ferrum* - women for the fight, or women for the sword" was a common phrasing in reference to gladiatorial combat, which Cébeillac Gervasoni and Zevi note are also utilized in that context in the works of Suetonius and Martial.⁵³ Hostilianus also made sure to have it mentioned in his epitaph, so that even after death, his reputation as a magistrate who put on unique entertainments for the people of Ostia would not be forgotten.

One can also look to the role of emperors in the Imperial Period to see how important funding extravagant games was for their reputation, their future legacy, and the rapport they had with the people of Rome. The way the emperor Augustus "published" on sponsorship of games

⁴⁹ Translation by Dr. Zachary Yuzwa & Courtney Tuck-Goetz.

⁵⁰ Joaquin L. Gómez-Pantoja, *EAOR* 4 (Rome: Quasar, 2009), 65.

⁵¹ Cébeillac Gervasoni and Zevi, "Révisions et nouveautés pour trois inscriptions d'Ostie", 615.

⁵² "The diction is significant: these were "women" (*mulieres*), not "ladies" (*feminae*)." Coleman, "Missio at Halicarnassus", 498. Brunet, "Women with Swords", 482.

⁵³ Cébeillac Gervasoni and Zevi, "Révisions et nouveautés pour trois inscriptions d'Ostie", 617.

as a part of his legacy. In his *Res Gestae*, a kind of autobiography on stone, he details the types of *ludi* he put on in his lifetime, along with impressive numbers:

“Three times in my own name I gave a show of gladiators, and five times in the name of my sons or grandsons; in these shows there fought about ten thousand men. Twice in my own name I furnished for the people an exhibition of athletes gathered from all parts of the world, and a third time in the name of my grandson. Four times I gave games in my own name; as representing other magistrates twenty-three times. For the college of *quindecimvirs*, as master of that college and with Marcus Agrippa as my colleague, I conducted the Secular Games in the consulship of Gaius Furnius and Marcus Silanus. In my thirteenth consulship I gave, for the first time, the games of Mars, which, since that time, the consuls by decree of the senate have given in successive years in conjunction with me. In my own name, or that of my sons or grandsons, on twenty-six occasions I gave to the people, in the circus, in the forum, or in the amphitheatre, hunts of African wild beasts, in which about three thousand five hundred beasts were slain.”⁵⁴ (trans. Shipley)

One of the reoccurring themes within the *Res Gestae* is all of the things Augustus gave to the people, whether that is money, land, grain, or entertainments. These are all things that show Augustus was a leader who gave *beneficia* and this was clearly an important part of his legacy that he wanted preserved and promoted. Cassius Dio advised that the way patronage of the games was memorialized and recorded for posterity should not always be accepted at face value. Dio stated, when referring to Julius Caesar, that: “In honour of this and of his daughter he exhibited combats of wild beasts and gladiators; anyone who cared to record their number would find his task a burden without being able, in all probability, to present the truth; for all such matters are regularly exaggerated in a spirit of boastfulness.”⁵⁵ If the urge to exaggerate was present enough to be commented on, that speaks to the importance of the numbers of entertainers and entertainments provided by *editores* to their personal reputation.

One could even have the option of funding public games after they died. Elites could set aside money in their will with instructions for holding games in their name in perpetuity, which

⁵⁴ Augustus, *Res Gestae*, 1.22.

⁵⁵ Dio Cass., XLIII.22.4.

would benefit their personal legacy and those of their descendants as well.⁵⁶ According to our ancient sources one woman did just that and bequeathed 30,000 *denarii* with the express instructions that the games should take place every four years and that her husband, and later sons and descendants must serve as the master of ceremonies for the events.⁵⁷ The will might also state that if the games could not be put on, or the parameters left by the benefactor could not be honoured, the money would have to be instead surrendered to the deceased's heirs.⁵⁸ Legacy was integral to an elite Roman male's images and the sponsorship of public games assured the benefactor that the positive public image last as long as possible.

Opulence & Exoticness

One important way an *editor* could set himself apart from the sponsors of previous games was by having memorable entertainment, performers, and free gifts for members of the audience. If these items were perceived as exotic and/or expensive they had a better chance of impressing the spectators. Having remarkable games attached to one's name was an important impetus for a magistrate or emperor to choose particular entertainments. To achieve the goal of providing memorable games, they had to be different and remarkable to the spectators. Cassius Dio serves as an excellent source for this topic, as he found the cost of games and those who financed them as an important subject to highlight when discussing spectacle.⁵⁹ An *editor* could make his games more memorable through the types of performers hired for the games, the easily recognized narratives being played-out in the arena, and in the types of "extras" on offer, such as gifts hurled into the stands or means of cooling the audience with awnings or water being sprinkled on the

⁵⁶ Diana Ng, "Commemoration and Elite Benefaction of Buildings and Spectacles in the Roman World," *JRS* 105 (2005): 113.

⁵⁷ *Ibid.*, 113.

⁵⁸ *Ibid.*, 112.

⁵⁹ Newbold, "Cassius Dio and the Games," 592.

spectators. Extravagance was an expression of wealth and power of the *editor*, and a way to showcase his civic generosity to those he hoped to gain political support from.⁶⁰ The cost of arena performers and other accoutrements for *ludi* could be quite high. The more performers, exotic animals, and prizes given away to the crowd, the greater the perceived success, and more memorable the day of games. Each set of games was meant to out-do those that had come before it. For example in Rome, the first recorded gladiatorial *munera* staged in 264 BCE featured three pairs of gladiators.⁶¹ In 65 BCE, Julius Caesar's *munera* in honour of his deceased father showcased 320 pairs of gladiators.⁶² In the Imperial Period, *ludi* continued to grow in scale. The emperor Trajan's games, which celebrated his triumph over the Dacians in 105 CE, took place over 123 days and in them 10,000 gladiators fought.⁶³ In tandem with growth in scale was a growing desire to wow the crowd by showing something new and unusual because funding spectacle became an excellent tool to increase a politician's or emperor's popularity with the people.⁶⁴

Including lavish and exotic entertainments was thought to be a safe investment with high returns of good standing in the eyes of one's community. Julius Caesar was a politician at the end of the Republican Period who knew that money spent on lavish arena entertainment was well invested, even though it put him in a precarious financial situation. According to Plutarch Caesar:

“Unsparing in his outlays of money, and was thought to be purchasing a transient and short-lived fame at a great price, though in reality he was buying things of the highest value at a small price. We are told, accordingly, that before he entered upon any public office he was thirteen hundred talents in debt. Again, being appointed curator of the Appian Way, he expended upon it

⁶⁰ Coleman, “The Contagion of the Throng”, 80.

⁶¹ Hopkins, *Death and Renewal*, 4. Plin., *HN*, trans. H. Rackham (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 1938), 33.53.

⁶² *Ibid.*, 4 & Dio Cass., *Rom. Hist.*, 43.23.

⁶³ Dio Cass., 68.15.

⁶⁴ Köhne, “Bread and Circuses: The Politics of Entertainment”, 19.

vast sums of his own money; and again, during his aedileship, he furnished three hundred and twenty pairs of gladiators, and by lavish provision besides for theatrical performances, processions, and public banquets, he washed away all memory of the ambitious efforts of his predecessors in the office. By these means he put the people in such a humour that every man of them was seeking out new offices and new honours with which to requite him.”⁶⁵ (trans. Perrin)

What is important is that the positive reaction was so great that it surpassed any that previous office-holders enjoyed. This highlights the way in which lavish and exotic entertainments increased in an effort to eclipse those that had come before. Pliny the Elder discusses specifically what some of Caesar’s large expenses were, most notably that all of the gladiatorial equipment was made of silver.⁶⁶ It was a calculated risk that Caesar was willing to take in order to set himself apart from other politicians, and in the end (though not as a result of this alone) he rose to the highest ranks of the Senate and consolidated so much power for himself that his peers feared he had effectively made himself king.

The introduction of various novel and exotic items became a part of the show. Food and prizes (called *sparsiones*) were distributed by means of a *missilia* to audience members.⁶⁷ They were even more noteworthy if they were something rare or were sourced from a far-off place. Statius’ *Silvae*, in addition to discussing the games, also describes the *sparsiones* of foodstuffs enjoyed by the audience at Domitian’s games for the Saturnalia, highlighting where the items came from:

*Vix Aurora novos movebat ortus,
iam bellaria linea pluebant:
hunc rorem veniens profudit Eurus.
quicquid nobile Ponticis nucetis
fecundis cadit aut iugis Idumes*

⁶⁵ Plut., *Caes.*, 5.

⁶⁶ Plin., *HN*, 33.16.

⁶⁷ A *missilia* is a contraption used to hurl gifts and tokens that could be redeemed for prizes into the audience.

*quod ramis pia germinat Damascos
 et quod percoquit Ebosea Caunos
 largis gratuitum cadit rapinis,
 molles gaioli lucuntulique
 et massis amerina non perustis
 et mustaceus et latente palma
 praegnantes caryotides cadebant.
 non tantis Hyas inserena nimbis
 terras obruit aut soluta Plias
 qualis per cuneos hiems Latinos
 lebem grandine contudit serena.
 ducat nubila Iuppiter per orbem
 et latis pluvias minetur agris
 dum nostri Iovis hi ferantur imbres.⁶⁸*

Scarce was Aurora moving another dawn and already dainties were raining from the line—such the dew that rising East Wind poured down: the best that falls in Pontic nutteries or Idume’s fertile hills, what pious Damascus grows upon her boughs and what Ebosean Caunus ripens—free of charge descends the lavish loot. Soft mannikins and pastries, Ameria’s solidities unscorched, must cakes and pregnant dates from an invisible palm—down they fell. With no such showers does stormy Hyad or raining Pleiad deluge the earth as the tempest that pounded the people throughout the Latian theater with hail from a clear sky. Let Jupiter bring clouds throughout the world and threaten rains on the broad acres so long as our own Jove sends us downpours like these. (trans. Parrott)

Foods from Pontus in North-eastern Turkey, Idumea in Southern Israel, and Damascus are given out “free of charge”, as are cakes from Ameria, north of Rome. They shower the crowd like gifts from the gods. However, as the poet notes, they are from the emperor, who is likened to Jupiter himself. Only gods and emperors have such wealth, power, and ability. The theme of the exotic runs throughout the games.

Exotic animals displayed and killed in the arena were also symbols of the wealth and power of the *editor*, displayed for all to see and revel in and increased the reputation of the *editors* who acquired and showed them. As early as the third century BCE sources discuss the transport of exotic animals to Rome to be displayed to the people. After his victory over Carthage

⁶⁸ Stat., *Sil*, 1.6.9-27.

in 251 BCE, Lucius Caecilius Metellus brought 100 elephants to Italy.⁶⁹ Rome's domination of the Mediterranean basin, including North Africa, Macedonia, Asia Minor, Egypt, Spain and Syria gave her access to new and exotic animal species to exhibit before the Roman people. The earliest examples of exotic animals such as elephants, ostriches, and leopards that were showcased in Rome date to the Punic Wars of the 3rd century BCE according to Plautus and Pliny.⁷⁰ Presenting a new and exotic animal for the crowd would indeed be memorable for them. Imagine seeing an elephant or giraffe for the first time and the excitement felt seeing such peculiarly proportioned creatures. The cost and effort to bring these types of animals to the city could be quite immense, and magistrates who had connections or political postings in particular provinces that were home to these types of animals could be used to an *editor's* benefit.⁷¹ The correspondence between Cicero and M. Caelius Rufus famously details the effort required to acquire panthers for a *ludus*.⁷² Caelius Rufus, who was a candidate for *curule aedile* in Rome, and whose position required him to put on games, beseeched Cicero "as soon as you hear that I am designate, please attend to the matter of the panthers".⁷³ Putting on games was an important factor in being elected, but in addition, the message that Caelius Rufus, and other Roman elites who sponsored games were trying to convey with exotic food, prizes, animals, and other entertainments was: I am rich, I am powerful, I am well-connected, and I am a good and benevolent leader. It also highlights the stress that an *editor* must have faced to attempt to ensure a positive reaction to his games and how high the stakes were for them personally and professionally.

⁶⁹ Jennison, *Animals for Show and Pleasure in Ancient Rome*, 44.

⁷⁰ Plaut., *Persa*, tr199. Plaut., *Poen.*, 1011-1012. Plin., *HN*, VIII.

⁷¹ Jennison, *Animals for Show and Pleasure in Ancient Rome*, 53.

⁷² Cic., *Fam*, 1.78, 1.81, 1.82, 1.84, 1.88, 1.90.

⁷³ *Ibid.*, 1.78

The female arena performer was an exotic entertainment, not unlike the animals from the far-flung regions of the Roman Empire. McCullough's work discusses how female arena performers were a symbol of lavishness and opulent spending for the games.⁷⁴ A woman taking part in masculine pursuits such as fighting and hunting was very uncommon in ancient Graeco-Roman society, where gender roles for women were strict and binary. The ideal Roman woman was supposed to be chaste, domestic, physically weak and passive – and the female arena performer was the antithesis of these qualities. Another way in which to increase the novelty of these performers was to cast or costume them in a way that created a familiar narrative to the spectator. The performer in some of our ancient sources plays the part of a deity or character from myth. If that character was an exotic foreigner, all the better. These types of performances would fit the theme of other parts of the spectacle such as exotic animals, foreign treats and prizes, and demonstrate the wealth and influence of the *editor*. Statius characterizes female performers and fighting dwarves as “*novosque luxus*” (novel luxuries).⁷⁵ They were novel in that they were rarely seen, and they were a luxury because they came at a high cost – the female arena performer encapsulated these two qualities completely. Anna McCullough argues that female arena performers became associated with elite luxury, even though extravagance and decadence were things that elites should avoid in order to be seen as morally upright by other elites.⁷⁶ However, the benefits to a career could outweigh the potential censure of lavish expenditure on luxurious games, or scathing commentary of peers. Furthermore, expenditure on games was for the people; for the *editors* could be seen as having the virtue of *liberalitas*, and not necessarily negatively associated with luxury.

⁷⁴ McCullough, “Female Gladiators in Imperial Rome”, 203.

⁷⁵ Stat., *Silv.*, 1.6.51-64.

⁷⁶ McCullough, “Female Gladiators in Imperial Rome”, 202-203.

The Status of Women in the Arena

In our ancient sources female arena performers belong to various social statuses. The *Senatus consultum* from Larinum issued in 19 CE, which forbade elite participation in public performances specifically referenced females as well as males, there was evidently a problem with participation by elite women. There is also the reference to an (albeit potentially fictional) elite woman who trains as a gladiator in Juvenal's Satire 6, which will be unpacked in the next chapter. These are examples of elite women who likely had taken on the role of arena performer by choice. We should assume that all female arena performers that are not described as being elites in our ancient literary sources were non-elite performers. Male and female performers of the elite class are often designated as such in the sources because of the strong, and usually negative, reaction to their participation. Indeed, there were specific laws in place that date to the early first century CE that expressly forbade performing publicly for members of the senatorial and equestrian orders.⁷⁷ In the cases where there is no mention of the performer's status, the tone of disapproval is not present; instead it is often the opposite. For example, Martial refers to female performers in *Liber spectaculorum* taking part in gladiatorial combat, beast fighting and hunting with a complementary tone.⁷⁸ These women are likened to deities such as Venus, Diana, Lucina, and even Hercules, but they are never named and their social status is never noted. In our current body of ancient sources we have no reference to a female arena performer who is described as both skilled in combat and of high-status; they are portrayed as being one or the other. The poet Statius also describes female gladiators as Amazons in his *Silvae*, without naming

⁷⁷ Line 5 & 6 of the *Senatus consultum* from Larinum, dated to 19 CE. Levick, "The *Senatus Consultum* from Larinum," 99.

⁷⁸ Mart., *Spect.*, 7, 8, 14, 15, 16.

them or commenting on their status.⁷⁹ Thus we can assume these women are low-status professionals. Likewise Suetonius notes that in one *ludus* put on by Domitian, he had women fighting and does not note their status.⁸⁰ By contrast, there is often reference to great skill on the part of the female performer whose status is not noted, which reinforces the likelihood that those performers are professionals who are owned, and trained by a *ludus*. An example of this can be seen in Epigram 8 of Martial's *Liber spectaculorum* where he describes a female *venator* who fights a lion so successfully he compares her to Hercules himself.⁸¹ The female gladiator relief from Halicarnassus hints at the skill of these performers [fig. 1]. An inscription in the upper register gives the result of their fight: "ΑΠΕΛΥΘΗΣΑ[N]" the Greek verb ἀπελύθησαν which is equivalent to the Latin *missae sunt* or *stans missus*, meaning that the fight ended in a draw.⁸² For the match to end in a draw meant that neither combatant signaled defeat (*ad digitum*).⁸³ This is different than fights that end in *missio*, as those were fights that gave only one combatant pardon who signaled defeat and was given reprieve from death by the *editor*.⁸⁴ To be granted *missae sunt* was not a very common outcome and signified that the two combatants fought well and were evenly matched.⁸⁵ Coleman discusses the nature of the Halicarnassus relief as most likely being commemorative of the event itself rather than an epitaph memorializing Amazon and Achillia, which tells us that this particular pairing chosen for contest was worthy of commemoration due to its rarity not only in the outcome of *missio*, but also the exotic nature of

⁷⁹ Stat., *Silv.*, 1.6.51-64.

⁸⁰ Suet., *Dom.*, 4.1.

⁸¹ Mart., *Spect.*, 8.

⁸² Coleman, "Missio at Halicarnassus", 488.

⁸³ Carter, "Gladiatorial Combat: The Rules of Engagement," 101.

⁸⁴ *Ibid.*, 488.

⁸⁵ Kanz and Grossschmidt, "Head Injuries of Roman Gladiators," 208.

the competitors.⁸⁶ Just as we saw with Augustus' *Res Gestae*, Hostilianus' inscription, and in the inscription of Aulus Clodius Flaccus of Pompeii, these types of extraordinary entertainments were worth memorializing. Sadly, no information about the *editor* of the games featuring Amazon and Achillia has been preserved. Coleman's theory is that the relief is one of a series, and that the information about the *editor* was most likely on the first piece in a series.⁸⁷ We can assume that the perceived exotic nature of the performers was a benefit to the *editor* by demonstrating his wealth, power, influence, and ability to curate a memorable spectacle, which is why this particular match was preserved for posterity.

While the professional female arena performer was presumably a slave and therefore not free to choose her life, there is some limited ancient evidence for free, high-status female volunteers in the arena. Anna McCullough speculates about the possible reasoning behind an elite woman wanting to take part in an activity that could bring with it public scorn and legal ramifications. She suggests that female arena performers, specifically female gladiators, created a new gender category that was neither strictly male or female, and that these types of elite women who chose to perform "aspired to the new gender category, the choice of a new gender role suggests dissatisfaction with the old ones".⁸⁸ Sir Moses Finley suggests that these women used arena performance as an "outlet for pent-up female energies and rebelliousness".⁸⁹ The word "rebelliousness" doesn't seem to capture just how aberrant an elite woman taking part in public entertainment and demonstrating masculine prowess would have been perceived by those who clung to the social norms of the time. It also does not take into account the that we have little

⁸⁶ Coleman, "*Missio* at Halicarnassus", 495.

⁸⁷ *Ibid.*, 495.

⁸⁸ Anna McCullough, "Not a Pretty Girl: Female Gladiators in Ancient Rome, Augustus to 200 A.D." M.Litt diss., University of St. Andrews, 2003, 25.

⁸⁹ M.I. Finley, "The Silent Women of Rome," in *Sexuality and Gender in the Classical World: Readings and Sources*, ed. Laura K. McClure (Oxford 2002), 156.

evidence for elite women's motivations. Juvenal refers to an elite woman training as a gladiator but his work is satire. The *senatus consultum* from Larinum, also does not say that elite women entered the arena by choice. The wording of the *Senatus consultum* from Larinum, states that anyone who fights to death in the arena disgraces themselves and their station, which makes it clear that no one should compel an elite to perform, or offer their services as a performer without dire consequences.⁹⁰ It indicates that elites had or could potentially enter the arena by choice, or by force, though our evidence for elites entering by choice is rather meager.

Though we have placed the *terminus ante quem* for female participation in arena entertainment at 200 CE with emperor Septimius Severus' ban, did this actually end the practice? It may have only diminished an already limited participation of female arena performance to end the involvement of gladiatorial combat only. Our source for this ban is Cassius Dio who says that at some point between 197 and 200 CE a spectacle took place, where: "in this contest women took part, vying with one another most fiercely, with the result that jokes were made about other very distinguished women as well. Therefore, it was henceforth forbidden for any woman, no matter what her origin, to fight in single combat."⁹¹ The claim here is that the ban is to save elite women from being put in a position to be ridiculed, though there may have been more to it than that. We must consider the historical context of this ban that could have potentially influenced its conception. In 192 CE emperor Commodus was assassinated and the Empire threatened to fall into civil war in the years between 193 and 197 CE before Septimius Severus became emperor. The second century saw some economic instability, as well as shortages of silver due to previous excessive Imperial spending, so by the time the Severan Dynasty began price inflation of goods

⁹⁰ Levick, "The *Senatus Consultum* from Larinum", 99.

⁹¹ Dio Cassius references that this contest took place during the Roman statesman, Plautianus's imperial service, which took place from 197-205 CE. Dio Cass., 76.16.1.

became a real problem and the economy was struggling.⁹² The poor economy may have been a factor in Septimius Severus cutting some of the lavishness of the previous dynasties that had been a factor in the economic crisis he had inherited, and why female arena combatants became outlawed. Due to their novelty, female arena performers would have cost more to source and had been a symbol of opulence and sumptuousness in the first century CE. Another issue we must consider is the actual implementation of this ban. While our evidence does drop-off at this point in time, but this may be a result of a decline in the epigraphic habit during this period. It may be the case that the practice carried on to a degree, but the record does not reflect this. At this point in history, does female arena performance cease, or do we just not hear about it anymore? With the downturn in the economy, was it no longer fiscally responsible to spend lavishly on such entertainment? Did the struggling economy, in concert with the Imperial ban cause the practice to decline sharply? One of the outcomes of an economic depression was that the previously established posthumous benefactions of games found their coffers depleted and their memorial games would cease.⁹³ We must also look at this ban together with other previous imperial bans. The *Senatus consultum* from Larinum of 19 CE banned elites (women expressly included in this) in participating in arena entertainment. Why must these types of regulations be made again and again over time? The *Senatus consultum* from Larinum banned elite participation, and Septimius Severus' ban included all women, though Cassius Dio leads us to believe that saving elite women's reputations were the motivation behind it.

In contrast to those emperors who discouraged female participation in arena performance, we have examples of elite women being forced to take part by the emperor. The emperors who

⁹² Kevin Butcher and Matthew Ponting, "The Beginning of the End? The Denarius in the Second Century," *NC* 172 (2012): 63.

⁹³ Ng, "Commemoration and Elite Benefaction of Buildings and Spectacles in the Roman World," 114.

did this were Nero and Domitian according to ancient authors such as Suetonius, Tacitus, and Cassius Dio.⁹⁴ Suetonius also makes reference to Caligula making elites fight in the arena to humiliate them, though they were not specified as women.⁹⁵ These were all emperors who gained a reputation for shocking behaviour and have gone down in history as “bad” emperors. These incidents are described by our sources as being: “degrading” and “disgraceful and most shocking”.⁹⁶ Cassius Dio also highlights this same theme when discussing Septimius Severus’ ban on one-on-one combat for women as a result of women who were compelled to perform in the arena that faced public humiliation.⁹⁷ If the elite woman in the arena is being forced there by a bad emperor, to what end? The outcome of humiliation is recorded, so is that the intention? Perhaps the message Caligula, Nero, and Domitian were sending to the elites is that these *honestiores* may have had money and influence, but they were under the emperor’s power and at the mercy of his whim. The emperor could punish the elites for any perceived affront. Perhaps this was a way of impressing the masses by taking those who lorded over them down a peg or two for their amusement. This was potentially a good way for an emperor to ingratiate himself with the lower classes by allowing them the guilty pleasure of seeing elites debased. Caligula is recorded as having voiced his pleasure at the power he held over those in his circle of elites. According to Suetonius, when dining with consuls he suddenly burst out laughing and upon being asked what was so funny, he replied jovially: “*Quid, nisi uno meo nutu iugulari utrumque vestrum statim posse?*” or “What do you suppose, except that at a single nod of mine both of you

⁹⁴ Suet., *Ner.*, 12.1. Tac., *Ann.*, t15.32. Dio Cass., 62.17.3 & 76.16.1.

⁹⁵ Suet., *Calig.*, 26.5.

⁹⁶ “*foedati sunt*” Tac., *Ann.*, 15.32. Dio Cass., 62.17.3.

⁹⁷ Dio Cass., 76.16.1.

could have your throats cut on the spot?”⁹⁸ (trans. Rolfe) Perhaps it is this same pleasure in having control over the elites to the point of being able to humble or even kill them that motivated these emperors to showcase them in the arena.

Conclusion

The social imperatives for members of the Roman elite who acted as *editores* of the games to include female arena performers in the *ludi* they sponsored are now lucid. For those whose political office required it, they were fulfilling their civic duties. This duty could come with a hefty price tag, and an overzealous *editor* could end up in financial ruin if he chose to make sure that his games eclipsed all others at any cost. The personal benefit for going above and beyond in his civic duty was the potential popular approval gained that could later be turned into political support. In order to have his games remembered and lauded, an *editor* had to ensure that his games included great displays of skill, exotic entertainments and gifts, as well as performances that were novel and exciting. This could be achieved by offering foreign foods and gifts and exotic animals from the far reaches of the Empire to impress the spectators and potential political supporters. For those who wanted to be sure to secure a place in the hearts and minds of the people, the inclusion of female arena performers was a safe bet. Their presence alone was not enough, and representing them in particular ways through costuming and familiar narratives played-out in the arena could increase their entertainment value for the spectators. The roles in which these women were cast were purposefully chosen in order to impress those whose support they coveted.

⁹⁸ Suet., *Calig.*, 32.3.

Chapter 2 Representation: Gender & Sexuality of the Female Arena Performer

The female arena performer was novel by virtue of her sex, and she was often presented to the crowd with both feminine and masculine attributes to increase the entertainment value of her performance. This chapter will explore how representations of the female arena performer's sex served the motivations of the *editor* of the games. Spectator interest was generated by female performers, who presented a non-traditional gendered appearance and did not conform to the examples of women they knew and saw in their daily lives. We will also analyze the way their costuming served to communicate gender non-conformity. Finally, we will examine whether the presentation of the female arena performers subjected them to the eroticized gaze of the viewers.

Gender

Approaches to gender for this study are informed by feminist and queer theory. Post-modern feminists such as Hélène Cixous viewed all cultural dichotomies as reflections of the ultimate dichotomy of man/woman and that these dichotomies place men as the paradigm and women as the "Other".¹ Radical feminism rejected the man/woman binary that was created by and essentially serves the patriarchy, and asserted that androgyny should be the ultimate goal.² Queer theorists like Butler expanded on those concepts to discuss how gender is an artificial concept created by society and that we internalize those gendered norms and "perform" our gender based on societal expectations.³ Sex, gender and gender identity are three facets of identity that are separate and non-binary. Sex is determined biologically by genitalia and chromosomes, and can identify a person as male, female or intersex. Gender is formed in the mind of the individual and how they perceive themselves as either masculine/male, feminine/female, or somewhere in

¹ Tong, *Feminist Thought*, 224.

² *Ibid.*, 95.

³ Butler, "Critically Queer," 17. Butler, *Gender Trouble*, xv.

between. The gender that is formed in the mind of the individual is their gender identity. Gender expression is how an individual communicates that gender identity to the world. This can be accomplished by communicating with the physical cues that a society has delineated as its gender conventions. For example, clothing can mark gender, such as dresses for women, suits and ties for men. The gender spectrum, informed by societal norms, is a continuum that ranges from hyper-masculine to hyper-feminine. An individual's gender identity and gender expression can fall in various locations on that spectrum and can does not have to remain static at that position. Uroš Matic's work, utilizing queer theory within the context of archaeology analyses representations of the female Pharaoh Hatsheput with both male and female attributes. He advises those working within this framework to "not assume the number of sexes/genders before analysis.... there is no one 'woman' or 'man'... These categories intersect with other facets of identity, such as social class, ethnicity, status, and occupation."⁴ In ancient Roman society gender and sex were not separate but more seen as biologically determined and static; however, this was not necessarily the reality of all individual experiences. Historically, both women and men have existed outside these binate norms and lived lives that demonstrate that gender exists on a spectrum, rather than within the binaries of man/woman and masculine/feminine. Female arena performers sometimes dressed and carried out actions that were considered traditionally male. The varying ways female arena performers expressed femininity and masculinity could be described as gender fluidity. Gender theorist and artist, Kate Bornstein articulates the variants of gender fluidity: "Fluidity provides for any number of genders: the ability to freely and knowingly become one or many of a limitless number of genders for any length of time, at any rate of

⁴ Uroš Matic, "(De)queering Hatshepsut: Binary Bind in Archaeology of Egypt and Kingship Beyond the Corporeal," *The Journal of Archaeological Method and Theory* 23 (2016): 811-812.

change. Gender fluidity recognizes no borders or rules of gender.”⁵ Given the limits of our evidence we cannot know whether the female arena performer internalized her gender fluidity as a part of her personal identity, or was simply costuming and play-acting for the benefit of the crowd, taking on a persona created by the *editor* that had no bearing on her own self-perception. To assume that the gender-bending that they took part in was a reflection of their gender identity may be giving the female arena performers more agency than they actually had. Examining briefly the cultural norms and ideals of ancient Graeco-Roman society will help determine how female arena performers either adhered to or challenged gender norms, so that we may discover their place within what was considered male/masculine and female/feminine.

Ancient Roman gender ideals were closely tied not only to a patriarchal hierarchy but also to ideas about the physical body and mental capacity of men and women. In line with traditional Roman gender norms, women were not supposed to assume or even desire any masculine characteristics.⁶ The second-century Roman jurist, Gaius, discusses the laws regarding women and guardianship in his *Institutes*. With the exception of the Vestal Virgins, Roman women required male guardians “women, even those of full age, should be in guardianship as being dim-witted.”⁷ Women needed male custodians because they did not have the intellectual capacity to care for themselves and their property completely. Gaius adds further that, women are “frequently subject to deception,” indicating a kind of naiveté that was inherently female.⁸ Gaius

⁵ Kate Bornstein, *Gender Outlaw: On Men, Women and the Rest of Us* (New York: Routledge, 1994), 68.

⁶ McCullough, “Not a Pretty Girl”, 18.

⁷ Gai., *Inst.*, 1.144-145: “*ueteres enim uoluerunt feminas, etiamsi perfectae aetatis sint, propter animi leuitatem in tutela esse.*” I translate *animi leuitatem* as “light of mind” or “dim-witted”, while the translation by Gordon and Robinson is “scatterbrained”.

⁸ *Ibid.*, 1.190. “*quia leuitate animi plerumque decipiuntur*”

did admit, however, that in practice women had more autonomy, although they required authorization from their guardian for matters regarding their own affairs.⁹

Female arena performers opposed the gender norms of their time and culture, which must have been entertaining, even for the shock value alone. Playing with gender conventions and performing gender inversion - taking on the visage, clothing, traits, and actions of the opposite sex- had entertainment value for the ancient spectator. Today we still enjoy viewing performance of gender inversion and exaggeration. There are some modern entertainments that share the same type of appeal to their audiences. Women's professional wrestling is an examples of women taking on traditionally male pursuits for entertainment. The female wrestlers of the "Gorgeous Ladies of Wrestling" (GLOW) enjoyed great popularity in the 1980s, giving them an opportunity to enjoy the spotlight in popular media in a sport that was male-dominated. Women fighting one another was exciting because women were thought to be "the gentle sex". However, these performers had strong bodies and were fiercely brutal against their opponents. Furthermore, they often played into ethnic stereotypes in the same way many ancient Roman female arena performers did, as we shall see. Their faux ethnicity allowed them to be perceived as "Other" by the audience. For example, Mountain Fiji, was a Pacific Islander character, Matilda the Hun was a German character, and Ninotchka was a Russian character. Steve Blance, one of the head writers for GLOW and also one of the referees stated in an interview, "To understand what was happening on the GLOW set, you have to get an idea of what was happening with women's wrestling at the time. First of all, women's matches were a rarity, they were an oddity."¹⁰ It was also oddity and novelty that drew the ancient spectator to the female arena performer because

⁹ Gai., *Inst.*, 1.190.

¹⁰ Steve Blance, "GLOW: The Story of the Gorgeous Ladies of Wrestling," interview by Brett Whitcomb, 2012.

male performers were the norm. Men were expected to take part in these types of sports and entertainment because they had been labeled as masculine. Women wrestlers of the modern age not only took on masculine physical pursuits, but they also emphasized their beauty, femininity, and sexuality to highlight the gender inversion in order to please the crowds in a visually stimulating way. Just as female arena performers took on a masculine aspect for entertainment value, modern drag queens take on feminine physical characteristics to entertain. Drag performance has recently become more mainstream in Western culture thanks to the popularity of RuPaul's Drag Race, which began airing on television in 2009. Taylor and Rupp encapsulate what makes drag performance appealing to the spectator: "these drag queens perform cultural critique by highlighting the performativity of sexual and gender identities and the constructed nature of the normative alignments between anatomical sex, gender role, and sexual identity" and these performers are "a gender category outside of femininity or masculinity".¹¹ Female arena performers of ancient Rome could potentially be characterized using these same descriptors. It is perhaps these traits, in part, that make performing gender inversions appealing on a universal level that crosses cultures and time periods.

While female arena performers played with gender norms to make their performances entertaining, exemplary women of ancient Roman society can elucidate what the female norms and ideals were in their context. The ideal was a *matrona*, or married woman who procreated and extended the illustrious family line of an elite *gens* or clan. She was a model of feminine behaviour meant to inspire women, and perhaps also to reassure Roman men of their own masculine role. The archetypal Roman *matrona* was Lucretia. According to Roman legend, Lucretia played a significant role in the story of the foundation of the Roman Republic. Her rape

¹¹ Leila J. Rupp and Verna Taylor, *Drag Queens at the 801 Cabaret* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2003), 5.

and subsequent suicide caused the revolution that overturned the monarchy of the Tarquins and ushered in the Republic. In Livy's version of the story, Lucretia is introduced by her virtues as an exemplary Roman woman. She is found weaving by lamplight when her husband and his noble companions, including her future rapist, Sextus Tarquinius, arrive unannounced. They declare her the most virtuous in comparison with the rest of the cohort's wives who had been found dining and socializing with friends.¹² Lucretia inflames Sextus Tarquinius' desire, not only because of her physical beauty but also due to her virtue: "Sextus Tarquinius was seized with a wicked desire to debauch Lucretia by force; not only her beauty, but her proved chastity (*castitas*) as well, provoked him."¹³ Her sexual modesty, as well as her abiding duty to her domestic tasks, are a large part of what makes Lucretia an exemplary Roman woman. Her response to the rape is to take her own life because she cannot live with the violation that had "brought ruin" upon her.¹⁴ Her superior virtues and the shame that provoked her subsequent suicide shocked the sensibilities of prominent Roman families who then expelled Tarquinius. This act ended the age of kings and ushered in the Republican period. The exemplary Roman woman possessed chastity (*castitas*) and modesty (*pudor*), and was domestically inclined. This was diametrically opposed to the female arena performer, who was semi-clad, violent, and on display for all to view.

Ancient Roman understanding of female physiology also affected the perceptions of women. Anatomy, in short, influenced women's behaviours and abilities. Ancient cultural ideas regarding sex and gender influenced medical practice, and writers like Hippocrates on the subject

¹² Liv., *Epit.*, 1.57.9-10

¹³ Ibid., 1.57.11. "*Sex. Tarquinius mala libido Lucretiae per vim stuprandae capit; cum forma tum spectata castius incitat*"

¹⁴ Ibid., 1.58.9.

of female anatomy and gynecology.¹⁵ These Hippocratic works, influenced by Aristotle, came down to Roman medical professionals and informed much of their understanding of the human body.¹⁶ Ancient physicians thought that motherhood made women healthy –thus a societal expectation determined medical theory and practice. Women were also perceived as being “wetter” and “colder” physiologically, and therefore less perfect than men.¹⁷ According to the prominent late second century CE physician, Galen, the female form was a deficient version of the male:

“The female is less perfect than the male for one principal reason, because she is colder, for if among animals the warm one is the more active, a colder animal would be less perfect than the warmer. . .so too the woman is less perfect than the man in respect to the generative parts. For the parts were formed within her when she was still a foetus, but could not because of the defect in the heat emerge and project on the outside.”¹⁸ (trans. May)

The formation of the female genitalia was central to women’s inferiority. Galen, as other physicians before him, believed the male was the model and the female was an aberration due to the improper gestational environment the mother provided. Musculature was also seen as being principally a male aspect of anatomy and so was strength.¹⁹ Women were not expected to be physically capable of doing the physical activities deemed masculine, including fighting and hunting. The female arena performer’s demonstration of masculine skill therefore was seen as unnatural and shocking. Physical inactivity was also tied to Roman ideas of the domestic role of women, for it was better suited to their physical limitations. The female arena performer’s visage was a rejection of societal norms and she was not subject to the supposed physical limitations of

¹⁵ Gynecological works of Hippocrates include: *Diseases of Women, On the Nature of Women, On Sterile Women, on Superfoetation, On Diseases of Young Girls, On Generation/On the Generation of the Child, and On the Excision of the Foetus.*

¹⁶ Rebecca Flemming, *Medicine and the Making of Roman Women* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2000), 114-115.

¹⁷ *Ibid.*, 117.

¹⁸ Galen, *On the Usefulness of the Parts of the Body*, 14.6.

¹⁹ Flemming, *Medicine and the Making of Roman Women*, 295.

“normal Roman woman.” Instead she demonstrated what were traditionally male behaviours: ferocity, skill with various weaponry, bravery, and strength. This was in complete opposition to the feminine archetype of the modest homebound woman whose body was cold, idle, and lacking the required muscle for physical exertion.

The impact of the extreme gender non-conforming actions that the female arena performers exhibited must have both shocked and excited the arena spectator. These women were clearly physically female but were expressing themselves in a traditionally masculine way, and sometimes were even dressed in male-gendered clothing. According to McCullough, displaying conventionally male, martial skills and virtues created a whole new gender category for the female arena performer.²⁰ Female arena performers were displaying gender-bending of which there are very few examples of in Greco-Roman culture. For this study the term gender-bending is the type of gender fluidity previously discussed, where someone could look like or demonstrate a mixture of traditionally female and male attributes. According to ancient Roman female gender conventions, “women were not supposed to want masculine traits, much less be able to adopt them.”²¹ Martial skill, strength and bravery were all facets of the Roman masculine value of *virtus*. It is a quality with clear gendered connotations, as the Latin word *vir*, meaning man is present in its root. Both Anna McCullough and Thomas Wiedemann have acknowledged that *virtus* was an aspect of the female arena performer’s presentation. Wiedemann highlights the

²⁰ McCullough, “Not a Pretty Girl”, 25.

²¹ “Fluidity provides for any number of genders: the ability to freely and knowingly become one or many of a limitless number of genders for any length of time, at any rate of change. Gender fluidity recognizes no borders or rules of gender.” Bornstein, *Gender Outlaw: On Men, Women and the Rest of Us*, 68. McCullough, “Not a Pretty Girl”, 18.

paradox that a female gladiator or *venator* could display *virtus*, or even symbolize this distinctively male quality.²²

Roman literature presents examples of women taking up arms and breaking gender norms. Juvenal's Satire 6 warns Postumus not to marry and gives examples of fictional misbehaving women in an effort to assert his point.²³ Some women take up working at a local brothel even though they are married, another commits adultery with a gladiator and abandons her family for him, or another bears the children of a gladiator.²⁴ But the aberrant woman who concerns us most is a *matrona* who trains as a gladiator. In this passage he questions her divergence from traditional female behaviour:

*Endromidas Tyrias et femineum ceroma
quis nescit, vel quis non vidit vulnere pali,
quem cavat adsiduis rudibus scutoque lacessit
atque omnis implet numeros dignissima prorsus
Florali matrona tuba, nisi si quid in illo
pectore plus agitat veraeque paratur harenae?
quem praestare potest mulier galeata pudorem,
quae fugit a sexu? vires amat. haec tamen ipsa
vir nollet fieri; nam quantula nostra voluptas!*²⁵

Everyone knows about the tracksuits in Tyrian purple and the women's wrestling floors. And everyone's seen the battered training post, hacked away by her repeated sword thrusts and bashed by her shield. The lady goes through all the drill, absolutely qualified for the trumpet at the festival of Flora. Unless, of course, in her heart she's planning something more and is practicing for the real arena. What sense of modesty can you find in a woman wearing a helmet, who runs away from—her own gender? It's violence she likes. All the same, she wouldn't want to be a man—after all, the pleasure we experience is so little in comparison!

(trans. Morton Braund)

The qualities of an exemplary Roman *matrona* included the importance of modesty (*pudor*).

This woman had negated her *pudor*, donning a gladiator helmet, preparing herself to be exposed

²² Wiedemann, *Emperors and Gladiators*, 112.

²³ Courtney, *A Commentary of the Satires of Juvenal*, 252.

²⁴ Juv., *Sat.*, 115-135 & 6.82-87 & 6.80-81.

²⁵ *Ibid.*, 6.250-254.

to the public's gaze in the arena. The woman in this poem actually enjoys violence, which was considered a distinctively masculine trait. She is actively challenging female gender norms, which the author describes as "running from" her gender, yet she doesn't want to be a man either, as men supposedly feel so much less pleasure than women. Juvenal perceives this woman as a gender-bender because she is neither fully male nor female. This woman's gender expression manifested in wearing gladiatorial armour, taking pleasure in martial behaviour and investing in different types of gladiatorial equipment, was undeniably outside the norm for any woman. The fact that a woman can abandon her feminine obligations and take on more masculine characteristics is threatening to any men in her vicinity – most notably, her husband. This follows the ancient Roman male belief that the empowering of a woman, or any adoption of masculine behaviours had to come at the expense of emasculating a man. In the following example from the same poem, we see how the female arena performer does not fit into the binaries "male" or "female" in regard to her gender expression to an even further degree. Juvenal continues his description of the woman who trains as a gladiator. Highlighting the contradictions in her by discussing the feminine characteristics that she also demonstrates:

*quale decus, rerum si coniugis auctio fiat,
 balteus et manicae et cristae crurisque sinistri
 dimidium tegimen! vel si diversa movebit
 proelia, tu felix ocreas vendente puella.
 hae sunt quae tenui sudant in cyclade, quarum
 delicias et panniculus bombycinus urit.
 aspice quo fremitu monstratos perferat ictus
 et quanto galeae curvetur pondere, quanta
 poplitibus sedeat quam denso fascia libro,
 et ride positis scaphium cum sumitur armis.
 dicite vos, neptes Lepidi caecive Metelli
 Gurgitis aut Fabii, quae ludia sumpserit umquam
 hos habitus? quando ad palum gemat uxor Asyli?*²⁶

²⁶ Juv., *Sat.*, 6.257-264.

What a fine sight it would be if there were an auction of your wife's things—her sword belt and her arm protectors and her crests and the half-size shin guard for her left leg! Or, if it's a different kind of battle that she fights, you'll be in bliss as your girl sells off her greaves! Yet these are women who break out into a sweat in the thinnest wrap and whose delicate skin is chafed by the finest wisp of silk. Hark at her roaring while she drives home the thrusts she's been taught. Hark at the weight of the helmet that has her wilting, at the size and the thickness of the bandages that surround her knees—and then have a laugh when she takes off her armour to pick up the chamber pot. Tell us, you granddaughters of Lepidus and blind Metellus and Fabius Maw, what gladiator's woman ever put on gear like this? When does Asylus' wife grunt at the training post? (trans. Morton Braund)

The humour lies in the fact that the woman is uncomfortably sweaty in the thinnest and most delicate and ultra-feminine of garments, yet she happily dons a gladiator's helmet and padding. She grunts like a man practicing as she practices her sword thrusts. She then has to take off her armour in order to squat to piss, rather than stand up like a man. Which also begs the question, is she urinating publicly? These actions certainly would not fit the matronly ideal of *pudor*. It is also important to note that Juvenal is alluding to the fact that this fictional woman is elite. We are informed of this when her distinguished ancestors' names are evoked with an obvious overtone of disapproval. This is not the behaviour of a proper Roman *matrona*. She strays so far from the feminine ideal that she demonstrates a confusing mix of feminine and masculine behaviours that the elite Roman male writer Juvenal could not reconcile; and certainly, she should not be anyone's wife. The female arena performer would have been seen as gender-bending in the same way as this fictional matron of Satire 6, and this may have made her both intriguing to the audience and potentially scorned by people who did not like to see gender norms challenged.

One must take into account the genre of satire and its purpose when reading such works. The whole point of a satire is to lampoon behaviours, in this case of women, with “shock and

malice.”²⁷ The intended audience for this work was “male, citizen-Roman, dominant-conservative.”²⁸ To try and deduce any real historical characters from this time within this Satire is not useful, though attitudes towards normative sexuality and gender behaviours (specifically of the elite male) can be ascertained by looking at the way they are contradicted.

In other examples female, arena performers are likened to goddesses that possessed bellicose or traditionally masculine characteristics. Evidence for this can be found in an epigram in Martial’s *Liber spectaculorum*. The epigrams within the *Liber spectaculorum* all recount a specific event: the opening games of the Flavian Amphitheatre.²⁹ Coleman points to many clues within Martial’s text that indicate that the amphitheatre is brand new at the time of the games being discussed.³⁰ These epigrams allow the reader to visualize and mentally experience, or re-experience the games given to inaugurate the amphitheatre. In epigram 7, one can vividly imagine this could have been the audience’s impression of the arena performers as they entered the arena. In this epigram, Martial makes the connection between a female arena performer and the goddess Venus:

*Belliger invictis quod Mars tibi servit in armis,
non satis est, Caesar; servit et ipsa Venus.*³¹

It is not enough that warrior Mars serves you in unconquered arms, Caesar. Venus herself serves you too. (trans. Shackleton Bailey)

²⁷ Suzanne Dixon, *Reading Roman Women* (London: Duckworth Publishing, 2001), 34.

²⁸ *Ibid.*, 34.

²⁹ Fitzgerald, *Martial: The World of the Epigram*, 21.

³⁰ Kathleen Coleman, *M. Valerii Martialis Liber Spectaculorum* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2006), xlvi. “The atmosphere in this epigram is highly topical; if *pegmata* (in epigram 2) refers to scaffolding, construction in the area is still proceeding apace; the verb applied to the amphitheatre itself, *erigitur* (in epigram 6), may imply that that it is not yet complete... The third epigram, describing the international audience that has flocked to Rome, does not require us to assume the building is newly opened; but it does encourage the inference.”

³¹ Mart., *Spect.*, 7.

Martial notes that the performers can be seen to represent divinities and that they serve (*servit*) the emperor, placing deities below the emperor who perform at his whim. There is the warlike Mars whom the male gladiator represents; but the presence of female gladiators requires a female divinity that they can be associated with in kind. At first glance, it seems odd to connect the goddess of feminine beauty and erotic love with a female arena performer, especially one who takes on the manly art of combat, but one of Venus' epithets is *Venus Victrix* ('Venus the Victorious').³² A Greek version of *Venus Victrix* (*Aphrodite Hoplismene* 'Armed Venus') was worshipped in Corinth and Sparta previous to the Roman period.³³ The emergence of *Venus Victrix* is associated with the rise of Sulla and Pompey during the late Republic. Sulla, Julius Caesar, and Pompey chose to align themselves with different incarnations of Venus.³⁴ Pompey built a beautiful theatre that housed a temple to *Venus Victrix*, which was completed and dedicated in 55 BCE and is said to have been the first to assign this epithet to Venus.³⁵ Her image appeared in sculpture, gem intaglios and every-day use items such as mirrors.³⁶ An example of *Venus Victrix* portrayed in sculpture dated to the second century CE can be found in the collection of the Louvre, in Paris [fig. 7].³⁷ Furthermore, the reference to Venus and Mars together could have sexual undertones, as the two gods were famously lovers. Does the allusion to Venus in Martial's epigram hint at the eroticization of the female arena performer? Roman poetry often utilizes the metaphor of love as

³² Coleman, *M. Valerii Martialis Liber Spectaculorum*, 69.

³³ Stephanie L. Budin, "Aphrodite Enoplion" in *Brill's Companion to Aphrodite*, ed. Amy C. Smith and Sadie Pickup, 79-112 (Leiden: Koninklijke Brill, 2010), 80.

³⁴ *Ibid.*, 108.

³⁵ *Ibid.*, 106.

³⁶ *Ibid.*, 107.

³⁷ *Ibid.*, 111. Louvre Catalogue #: MA 370.

a battle, alluding to erotic aspects of combat.³⁸ A more in-depth discussion of the erotic nature of the female gladiator will be forthcoming in this chapter.

A female arena performer who is compared to female divinities in three epigrams by Martial demonstrates how she could be presented as very feminine characters from familiar cultural narratives as a way to heighten the entertainment value. He relates the story of a hunt in the amphitheatre that stars a female *venator* (or hunter) who gives a rather shockingly memorable show for the crowd. The *venator* takes the guise of a goddess and her quarry is a pregnant sow. The way the *venator* is described here, the reader can picture that a woman is playing the role and her femininity is highlighted, rather than masculinity:

[14] *Inter Caesaræ discrimina sæua Dianæ*³⁹
fixisset grauidam cum leuis hasta suem,
exiuit partus miseræ de uulnere matris.
O Lucina ferox, hoc peperisse fuit?
pluribus illa mori uoluisset saucia telis,
omnibus ut natis triste pateret iter.
quis negat esse satum materno funere Bacchum?
Sic gentium numen credite: nata fera est.

[15] *Icta graui telo confossaque uulnere mater*
sus pariter uitam perdidit atque dedit.
O quam certa fuit librato dextero ferro!
hanc ego Lucinae credo fuisse manum.
experta est numen moriens utriusque Dianæ,
quaque soluta parens quaque perempta fera est.

[16] *Sus fera iam grauior maturi pignora uentris*
emsit fetum, uulnere facta parens;
nec iacuit partus, sed matre cadente cucurrit.
*O quantum est subitis casibus ingenium!*⁴⁰

³⁸ Margherita Carucci, "Aphrodite and the Spectacle of the Amphitheatre in Roman Africa", in *Brill's Companion to Aphrodite*, ed. Amy C. Smith and Sadie Pickup, 307-320 (Leiden: Koninklijke Brill, 2010), 312.

³⁹ Diana is used here as a poetical reference to the hunt.

⁴⁰ Mart., *Spect.*, 14-16.

[14] When, amid the cruel engagements of Caesar's hunt, a light spear had pierced a pregnant sow, one of her progeny leapt out of its wretched mother's wound. O merciless Lucina, was this a delivery? She would have been ready to die wounded by more weapons so that a sad path should open up for all her young. Who denies that Bacchus was brought forth by his mother's death? A deity was delivered by that means, you must believe it: so was born a beast.

[15] Struck by a fatal weapon and pierced by the wound, a mother pig simultaneously lost and bestowed life. How steady was the hand that balanced the spear! I think it must have been by Lucina's hand. At the moment of death the sow felt the power of both Dianas: by one the mother was delivered, by the other was dispatched the beast.

[16] A wild sow, now well advanced in pregnancy, produced her young, testimony to her ripe womb, made a mother by a wound; her progeny did not stay lying down, but as its mother began to fall it ran off. What ingenuity is demonstrated in sudden blows of fate! (trans. Coleman)

In the first line of the Latin text of epigram 14, Diana's name is invoked as a convention by which to reference the event taking place – a hunt.⁴¹ Diana was a patron goddess of *venatores*. The hunt portrayed here is an unusual one. A pregnant sow is the quarry. The hunter lands the spear right at the point that opens the sow's gut, which releases the sow's young to be born from her wound. The figure of Diana then returns in epigram 15 to highlight that the sow felt the goddess Diana's powers, underscoring her dual role as both a goddess of childbirth and as a goddess that brings the death of animals in hunting – her dual nature is highlighted bringing both life and death in this instance. The deity Lucina, an incarnation of Juno as the goddess of childbirth, is invoked in epigrams 14 and 15 as well. She is often associated with Diana because they are both connected with birth.⁴² Lucina is the goddess who assists the sow as she gives birth to her piglets as she dies. That this *venatio* is described with reference to Diana and Lucina could mean that the *venator* is, in fact, a woman. It would be fitting if the *venator*'s costume suited her role and she was dressed as Diana, the greatest

⁴¹ Coleman, *M. Valerii Martialis Liber Spectaculorum*, 121.

⁴² *Ibid.*, 133.

huntress of them all. Both female goddesses represent the life cycle in completion and working together in the actions of the *venator*. J.M.C. Toynbee also interprets this epigram cycle as having a “Diana” actually present in the scene.⁴³ The *venator* is taking part in gender-bending in that she is compared to female deities that represent facets of the maternal (a hyper-feminine trait) while simultaneously taking part in what would have been considered a masculine activity – hunting, although it is performed by a female goddess. This demonstrates that female arena performers could be seen in varying combinations of feminine and masculine in a way that was positioned outside the gender norms of the time.

Another epigram in Martial’s *Liber spectaculorum* likens a female arena performer to a *male* divinity. While epigram 7 conveys the spectator’s impression of the female performers as they are presented to the crowd, and are likened to Venus, which highlights their sex (and thus their difference and novelty), the next epigram stars a female *venator* who is described in masculine terms.⁴⁴ This female arena performer in epigram 8 is likened to the ultra-masculine Hercules:

*Prostratum vasta Nemees in valle leonem
nobilis Herculeum Fama canebat opus.
prisca fides taceat: nam post tua munera, Caesar,
haec iam feminea vidimus acta manu.*⁴⁵

Venerable tradition used to sing of the lion laid low in the spreading valley of Nemea, a Labour of Hercules. Let ancient testimony fall silent: for now that we have witnessed your games, Caesar, we have seen these feats performed by a woman’s hand. (trans. Coleman)

⁴³ J.M.C. Toynbee, *Animals in Roman Life and Art* (Ithaca, NY: Cornell University Press, 1973), 134.

⁴⁴ Coleman, *M. Valerii Martialis Liber Spectaculorum*, 69.

⁴⁵ Mart., *Spect.*, 8.

While in previous examples we have inferred that the *venatores* were female by the references to Diana and Lucina, here Martial states unequivocally in the last line of the epigram that the hunter is female. Martial gives us a powerful visual image of a female *venator*, fighting and killing a lion for the audience. Whether this was a mythological reenactment or merely poetic allusion is unclear. Was the performer herself in fact dressed as Hercules to make that connection clear to the spectators? It would have been a missed opportunity for the *editor* if he did not use the Herculean allusion to its fullest with costuming. The standard attributes of Hercules' costume are a lion skin and a club. Having these attributes as part of a performer's costume would make it clear to the audience what character the performer was playing. Martial also makes a comparison between a male *bestiarius* named Carpophorus and Hercules when describing his proficiency in killing a lion in epigram 17, so the comparison to Hercules may also be a way to describe killing a lion with great skill.⁴⁶ The fact that Martial likens male and female arena performers to the same male heroic divinity and one of Graeco-Roman mythology's greatest heroes is extremely complimentary and speaks to the ability of both performers. Watching a man defeat a lion in one-on-one combat would be entertaining, but to watch a woman do it, when women were seen as too physically weak to take on active roles, would be more captivating and fascinating than anything the audience would have ever seen, and certainly more memorable. Hercules was a symbol of Graeco-Roman traditional masculinity.⁴⁷ He is a character who is physically strong, violent, and always successful in his endeavors, which is probably why he was a favourite deity of victorious generals and was prominently featured in their triumphal parades.⁴⁸ Martial's reference to a woman taking on the appearance and actions of the hero Hercules might also invoke in the mind of

⁴⁶ Mart., *Spect.*, 17.

⁴⁷ Tara S. Welch, "Masculinity and Monuments in Propertius 4.9," *AJPh* 125, no. 1 (2004): 67.

⁴⁸ *Ibid.*, 64.

the Roman viewer, who was well-versed in mythology, the character of Omphale who emasculated Hercules.

In Sophocles' *Trachinae* Omphale, the queen of Lydia, owned Hercules as a slave for one year as a punishment meted out to him by the Delphic Oracle Xenoclea for the crime of murdering the hero Iphitus.⁴⁹ Omphale is often depicted wearing the Nemean Lion skin of Hercules and holding his club, with the remainder of her body exposed. A marble statue dated to 200 CE, now housed in the Vatican Museum depicts a woman as Omphale: she is nude, save for a lion skin and holds a club [fig. 8]. It has been suggested that this statue may have been created in memoriam of a woman who perhaps wanted to be remembered as being “as beautiful as Venus and as strong as Herakles.”⁵⁰ This could demonstrate that a living woman of the second century CE could have seen these qualities as desirable, not mutually exclusive, and suitable for her memorialization. The gender swap between Omphale and Hercules is made complete in a sculpture currently housed in the Naples Archaeological Museum that dates to the first century CE. Here, Hercules and Omphale have switched clothes completely; she wearing his lion skin, he wearing her clothing. She drapes one arm around him in a gesture of guardianship, displaying her control over him [fig. 9]. These characters were utilized in comedies with an aspect of “romantic burlesque” in Hellenistic and Roman times.⁵¹ This may help us elucidate the intended narrative of the female *venator* in the guise of Hercules in epigram 7. Regardless of whether the allusion was meant to reference Hercules or Omphale through costuming and/or other visual aspects, the reference to gender non-conformity would be communicated to the spectators. This allusion would have allowed them to recall the story or

⁴⁹ Soph., *Trach.*, ed. and trans. Hugh Lloyd-Jones (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 1994), 250-290.

⁵⁰ John P. O’Neil, ed., *The Vatican Collections: The Papacy and Art* (New York: The Metropolitan Museum of Art, 1982), 214.

⁵¹ Elmer G. Suhr, “Herakles and Omphale”, *AJA* 57, no. 4 (Oct, 1953): 251.

characters and connect them to the female *venator*; which would also draw attention to the masculine nature of the performance she was giving.

The female arena performer presented a gender inversion because female/feminine and male/masculine were considered to represent diametrically opposed traits. Women were soft and quiet. Men were hard and boisterous. Women were domestic, while men were expected to go out and be part of civic life. Women sought peace and were not fit for war, while men were warriors and hunters. Thus, women who stepped into the arena were perfect subjects for satire. Juvenal demonstrates this when discussing a female *venator* as one of many examples of paradoxes that inspire him to write satire:

*si vacat ac placidi rationem admittitis, edam.
cum tener uxorem ducat spado, Mevia Tuscum
figat aprum et nuda teneat venabula mamma,
patricios omnis opibus cum provocet unus
quo tondente gravis iuveni mihi barba sonabat,
cum pars Niliacae plebis, cum verna Canopi
Crispinus Tyrias umero revocante lacernas
ventilet aestivum digitis sudantibus aurum,
[nec sufferre queat maioris pondera gemmae]
difficile est saturam non scribere.⁵²*

I'll explain, if you have the time and can listen quietly to my reasoning. When a womanly eunuch takes a wife!—when Mevia shoots a Tuscan boar, holding the hunting spears with one breast bared! —when the man who made my stiff beard rasp while he shaved me in my youth can single-handedly challenge all the aristocrats with his wealth!—when that remnant of the Nile's trash, that native slave of Canopus, that Crispinus, wafts a gold ring in summer on sweaty fingers while his shoulder hitches up a Tyrian cloak! —then it is hard not to write satire. (trans. Morton Braund)

The female *venator*, Mevia is a gender-bender. She exposes her breast, which displays her femaleness, but also hunts a boar, which is a masculine display. Another example of a character that exists outside gender norms is the eunuch who takes a wife: the two are seen as comparable here. A

⁵² Juv., *Sat.*, 1.20-30.

man with no or incomplete sexual organs does not have the ability to sire children associated with masculinity but has taken a wife. The joke is to what end would this coupling take place if he cannot complete his husbandly duties of creating progeny? Those who do not fit within the gender conventions of the patriarchal Graeco-Roman culture are figures ripe for satire. Those who live outside cultural conventions are symbols of transgressive entities that must be hammered into line with the rest of society.⁵³ The probably fictional female *venator*, Mevia is costumed as an Amazon as she is dressed “with one breast bared”. The Amazon was a female character where gender inversion was assumed. It was intriguing to see a woman taking on traditionally male actions within the androcentric culture of the Graeco-Roman world. The fact that the Amazon and the female arena performer were seen as comparable demonstrates that transgressing gender norms was central to their image. Those who facilitated the games chose to heighten the entertainment value for the audience and create a more memorable experience for them by including them in the games. Casting them in the role of Amazon amplified the already dramatic narrative in a way that highlighted the gender inversions taking place.

We only have one piece of material evidence that depicts female gladiators that has scholarly consensus as archeological proof of their participation in ancient Roman spectacle. This piece is very useful regarding the costuming of female arena performers and demonstrates gender non-conformity in the way they were presented. The piece in question is the only visual representation of female gladiators. The female gladiator relief from Halicarnassus is in the British Museum’s collection [fig. 1].⁵⁴ It is dated to the second century CE and measures 57.15 cm (l) x 33 cm (w) x 18 cm (d).⁵⁵ According to the inscription on the lower register of the relief, the figure on the right is named

⁵³ Courtney, *A Commentary of the Satires of Juvenal*, 19.

⁵⁴ British Museum Ref#: 1847,0424.19.

⁵⁵ Measurements taken by author.

“ΑΧΙΛΛΙΑ” (Achillia) and the figure on the left is “ΑΜΑΖΩΝ” (Amazon). Amazon and Achillia face each other with their *scuti* (shields) raised and bodies in an advancing stance, with their swords in their left hands. The two female figures stand facing off with one another but do not wear helmets, which instead appear in the bottom register. Much debate has swirled over the reason they are not wearing helmets, as all gladiatorial fighting styles, with the exception of the *retiarius*, wore helmets in combat. Was it to reveal their hair, which marks them as female? Both figures are wearing a *subligaculum* (a loincloth traditionally worn by gladiators), padded armguards on their sword-wielding arm known as *manicae*, although the right figure’s left arm is mostly missing; they carry curved rectangular shields that seem to represent *scuti*. Their armature indicates that they may be *murmillones*.⁵⁶ Amazon and Achillia are gender-benders in that they are dressed as male gladiators, but have their hair styled in a feminine way; they are mixing masculine and feminine attributes together. While their shields mostly obscure their breasts, it is evident that they are topless. Amazon’s right breast is partially exposed. But in this way they conform to the exposure of the chest of male gladiators. The female gladiators performed a gender inversion for the entertainment value that held, while demonstrating the skill that all professional gladiators had.

A comparison of this piece with a relief of a male gladiator from the same region and time period highlights similarities and differences in gender representation between the two. The comparison piece chosen also comes from the British Museum’s collection and was part of the same

⁵⁶ Stephen Brunet, “Women with Swords”, 480.

Gladiators in the style of *murmillio* often fought against the *thraex* and were outfitted with the above described armature. Gladiatorial academics such as Marcus Junkelmann posit that the *murmillio* was derived from the previous fighting style *samnis*. Marcus Junkelmann, “*Familia Gladiatoria: The Heroes of the Amphitheatre*,” in *Gladiators and Caesars: The Power of Spectacle in Ancient Rome*, ed. Eckart Köhne and Cornelia Ewigleben (Berkeley: University of California Press, 2000), 37.

donation as the female gladiator relief. It is also a marble relief sculpture where the figure holds the same stance as Amazon and Achillia [fig. 10].⁵⁷ The inscription above the male gladiator names him as “ΙΛΑΡΟΣ” (Hilaros). Though he is dressed in the same type of armour and carries the same type of weaponry as Amazon and Achillia, he is wearing a helmet. It is interesting to note that the artist has chosen Amazon and Achillia’s faces and hair to represent their femaleness, rather than to render them with completely exposed breasts. The reason for this may have been the artistic conventions, allowing the artist to render the body in the style he was used to. But many other similarities between these two reliefs can be seen. Besides the figures’ armaments, their stances are identical with knees bent, advancing forward. Keeping the knees bent and the body mostly covered by the shield protected the body from their opponent’s weapon thrusts.⁵⁸ Other than the difference in the location of their helmets, the muscles of the bicep of the sword-bearing arm, the exposed pectoral as well as the calf muscles of the male figure are slightly more well-defined than in the female example, but this may be a result of the amount of wear the female relief has experienced. The figures of Amazon and Achillia appear to be a feminized form of the male example. Though it is hard to discern unless you see the relief in person, Amazon’s face has been rendered with an intense expression of severity. [fig. 11] The fierce expression on Amazon’s face indicates that the perceptions of these female gladiators as ferocious competitors. The greater the skill-level of the performers in the arena, the greater the entertainment value for the audience. It was in the *editor’s* best interest to hire not only female arena performers, but also ones that would put on a good show. It is more likely that the skilled female professional arena performers were of low status, probably slaves, bought and sold by training schools for the sole purpose of training and performing for the public. In this way they are like their male counterparts. The positioning of the

⁵⁷ British Museum Catalogue #: 1847,0424.18.

⁵⁸ Fagan, *The Lure of the Arena*, 268.

figures meets the artistic conventions for the portrayal of gladiators in this geographic region and medium. The way Amazon and Achillia are portrayed with characteristics of both femaleness as well as traditionally male conventions could demonstrate that these women were represented as not purely male or female, but rather a fascinating mix of the two.

From the ancient evidence at our disposal, it seems that female arena performers were often dressed in male-gendered clothing. In the same way that Amazon and Achillia were dressed in male-gendered clothing, the character of Mevia in Juvenal's Satire 1 does as well. She is described as having "one breast bared".⁵⁹ The costume that is often referenced in our descriptions of female arena performer is the Greek garment called an *exomis*. Romans often associated this garment with Amazons when representing them in art. Interestingly, Greek artists did not use those artistic conventions when depicting Amazonian characters, but rather often portrayed them in trousers.⁶⁰ The *exomis* - a traditionally male-gendered garment - is a short *chiton*, which exposes half of the wearer's chest, so when a woman wears it, it exposes one breast.⁶¹ Traditionally, slaves, artisans, laborers, soldiers, and sailors wore this male-gendered article of clothing because it allowed for physically active work.⁶² The *exomis* was the garment Amazons were most often dressed in ancient Roman art, which is why Amazons are often described in a Roman context as having "one breast bared" [fig. 12].⁶³ Amazons, the goddess Diana, and Spartan girls who took part in athletics were female figures who were depicted wearing a short *chiton*, though Diana keeps both

⁵⁹ Juv., *Sat.*, 1.22-23.

⁶⁰ Adrienne Mayor, *The Amazons: Lives and Legends of Warrior Women Across the Ancient World*, (Princeton, N.J.: Princeton University Press, 2015), 191.

⁶¹ Nancy Serwint, "The Female Athletic Costume at the Heraia and Prenuptial Initiation Rites," *AJA* 97, no. 3 (1993): 411.

⁶² *Ibid.*, 416-417.

⁶³ Serwint, "The Female Athletic Costume at the Heraia and Prenuptial Initiation Rites," 411-413.

breasts covered in reference to her chastity.⁶⁴ The wily Amazons and Spartan girls are often described as inspiring lust in men and were seen as sexual objects in the mind of the Roman male. When women wore this garment it was a reference to a female taking on a traditionally male activity. The Romans chose to depict Amazons in art wearing the *exomis* because it was a male-gendered article of clothing associated with men in active trades; the Amazons were associated with active pursuits that were perceived as male-gendered activities such as warfare. Female arena performers wearing either the *exomis* or dressed as their male performer counterparts in the *subligaculum* were essentially cross-dressing but with the added titillation of having one or both very female breasts exposed. However, not all female arena performers performed topless, or partially topless. Female *venatores* also likely wore a short *chiton* as a reference to Diana, who was the patroness of the traditionally male pursuit – hunting but also the goddess of the moon, virgins, and childbirth: all very feminine entities. Just as a female arena performer was a mix of both feminine and masculine traits, so was Diana. Visual evidence of male *venatores*, shows them wearing tunics that covered their whole chest but with their legs exposed [fig. 13]. If a female *venator* was dressed in a similar type of hunting tunic, she would be less uncovered when adopting this type of male garb, but she would still be cross-dressing. Ancient Graeco-Romans found Amazons fascinating because their culture's gender roles were completely inverted from their own.⁶⁵ Within the Roman imagination, Amazons were nomadic women who exhibited skill in horsemanship as well as in battle, and lived in a society that did not restrict their movement or power in any way.⁶⁶ More discussion of the connection of the female arena performer to the Amazon warrior woman will be unpacked in the next chapter. However, it

⁶⁴ Thomas F. Scanlon, *Eros and Greek Athletics*, (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2002), 189.

⁶⁵ Mayor, *The Amazons*, 158.

⁶⁶ *Ibid.*, 171.

must be highlighted that the Amazon was a symbol of gender inversion because they were women gifted in typically masculine martial skills.

The female arena performer was a violent, martial woman who could be safely viewed in the arena because there she held no power other than her physical prowess. Roman sources, however, present other gender nonconforming women who displayed martial behaviours as dangerously challenging masculinities. Hiring a woman to perform in the arena was a way for an elite Roman male to utilize a subversive female character, who may have been seen as threatening to masculinity, ultimately to his benefit. Ancient male elite writers portray women who undertake masculine endeavours with censure because they believed that a woman's power came at the expense of a man's emasculation. Narratives that include gender non-conforming female characters, both mythical and real, can be found within the ancient Graeco-Roman canon of sources. We have already seen an example of Omphale who took Hercules' freedom and also seized his symbols of power, his club and lion skin, trading them for her female clothing. Indeed, the Roman poet of the Augustan age, Propertius references Omphale in his *Elegies* as symbols of female power.⁶⁷

Boudicca, the historical warrior queen of the Iceni tribe of Britannia, is an example of an ancient martial woman whose real political authority was perceived as emasculating to Romans, like the historian Tacitus.⁶⁸ Boudicca's husband had led the tribe and made deals with their Roman occupiers in order to foster a peaceful relationship. But when Roman legionaries sacked the Iceni's territory, Boudicca was flogged, her daughters raped and her husband killed. Boudicca

⁶⁷ Prop., *Eleg.*, III.11.14.

⁶⁸ Francesca Santoro L'Hoir, *Tragedy, Rhetoric and the Historiography of Tacitus' Annals* (Ann Arbor: University of Michigan Press, 2006), 116.

then led the Iceni to revolt against the Romans in revenge.⁶⁹ Tacitus took offence that this woman took on the manly role of a warrior, and even more so that she was a leader of men. He writes as though a woman taking a powerful leadership role over military forces emasculated the men she commanded.⁷⁰ Just as we saw in the case of the mythical Omphale, a woman's power and leadership had to be at the cost of a man's masculinity. Tacitus writes of several barbarian women in powerful positions, expressing his censure in the language he uses.⁷¹ The elite Roman male's perception of a powerful woman who exhibited martial skill provides insight into his disapproval of such behaviour. Perhaps the female arena performers then, were an entertaining and safe way of viewing women with masculine martial skill. Unlike real women like Boudicca, who held power over men, the female arena performer had no tangible authority to threaten the fragile masculinities of the male arena spectators. They were usually merely slaves entertaining the masses for the benefit of elite men's political ambitions.

Women who broke out of the ancient Graeco-Roman gender norms forged identities that were not fully masculine and not fully feminine. Sometimes a woman's femininity was highlighted in the way she was represented; other times her masculine qualities were. As we have seen, this type of gender-bending was often met with disapproval. Women with real power were not to be trusted because that power came at the cost of a man's dominance and masculinity, as if power existed in a finite amount and these women were taking a man's share. While female arena performers could take on the roles of women who did not conform to traditional gender norms, their image was utilized to tell a story in which she had no real power or authority. Gender theorist, Judith Butler discusses the role of gender-bending and gender ambiguity that is very apt

⁶⁹ Tac., *Ann.*, 14. 31.

⁷⁰ L'Hoir, *Tragedy, Rhetoric and the Historiography of Tacitus' Annals*, 116.

⁷¹ *Ibid.*, 116.

in this context: “Sometimes gender ambiguity can be rendered ambiguous without disturbing or reorienting normative sexuality at all. Sometimes gender ambiguity can operate precisely to contain or deflect non-normative sexual practice and thereby work to keep normative sexuality intact.”⁷² This is precisely what the gender-bending of the female arena performer accomplished – the thrill of seeing a woman step outside gender norms, but without upsetting the gendered power balance. The common thread, whatever way she was represented, was highlighting her “Otherness”. More ways that “Otherness” could be augmented will be discussed in the next chapter.

Erotic Entertainment

We must consider the context of the arena to understand whether the female arena performer was meant to be a type of erotic entertainment. The arena was a sexually charged place where one could view activities with inherent sexual overtones. The partial nudity of the arena performers, both male and female, may have been a tool to accentuate the erotic nature of the performance for the ancient Roman viewer. In the arena, the male gladiator, dressed in a *subligaculum* and padding bared a good portion of his body. The female arena performer, as we have seen, could be costumed either in an *exomis*, with a breast bared or topless to mimic the male gladiatorial costume which would expose much of her body. Her costuming exposed more of her body, while casting her as a gender-bender. The utilization of the *exomis* for female arena performers, which exposed one breast, demonstrates that partial nudity was a part of the arena performer’s costume. As we have seen above, the costume referenced a certain type of masculine woman such as an Amazon or Diana but also had the added bonus of exposing flesh. There is one veiled reference in Martial regarding young scantily dressed or nude maidens doing synchronized

⁷² Butler, *Gender Trouble: Feminism and the Subversion of Identity*, xiv.

swimming in the guise of Nereids.⁷³ The relief from Halicarnassus where female gladiators perform topless requires us to reflect on the following: are they simply dressed as male gladiators, or does exposing a female performer's breasts make for better entertainment? Furthermore, did nudity, partial or otherwise, equate to sexuality in the Graeco-Roman context or is this only a modern concept? Larissa Bonfante's work has interpreted nudity as often referencing power: either as a lack of power - weakness and vulnerability - or its presence, as for example, in the magic that a woman's body houses, or heroic nudity.⁷⁴ Although artworks from the Classical period feature nudity, Nigel Crowther warns us not to assume that its representation in art has any bearing on actual social realities because it represents " [the] aesthetic rather than [the] realistic" especially in the case of athletic nudity.⁷⁵ Importantly, athletic nudity was a Greek convention, not a Roman one. René Rodgers interprets nudity in costuming of foreigners, especially in female allegorical representations of Roman provinces, as "the most obvious feature of Otherness: being female".⁷⁶ Perceptions around nudity also seemed to shift along social lines as well. The intellectual class seemed to be the group most vocal about connections between nudity and immorality, while it was not as much of a concern for those of any of the other classes.⁷⁷ The nudity of those of the lower classes, to which all arena performers belonged, would not have been as scandalous due to the perception that their bodies were "available as sexual objects."⁷⁸ Thus the low status partially nude female arena performer was easily sexualized.

⁷³ Coleman, "The Contagion of the Throng", 69. Mart., *Spect.*, 30.

⁷⁴ Larissa Bonfante, "Nudity as a Costume in Classical Art," *AJA* 93, no. 4 (1989): 544 & 560.

⁷⁵ Nigel B. Crowther, "Nudity and Morality: Athletics in Italy, *CJ* 76, no. 2 (1980-81): 120.

⁷⁶ René Rodgers, "Female Representation in Roman Art: Feminizing the Provincial 'Other'," in *Roman Imperialism and Provincial Art*, ed. Sarah Scott and Jane Webster (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2003), 84.

⁷⁷ *Ibid.*, 123.

⁷⁸ Knapp, *Invisible Romans*, 137.

One thing that all arena performers had in common, regardless of sex, ethnicity or performer type was being subject to the gaze of the audience. According to Amy Richlin “There is something erotic about being looked at, always”.⁷⁹ It was partially the inherently sexualized gaze that degraded the performer’s status to *infames*. The intention of each viewer’s gaze is informed by “the values, expectations, and emotions of the viewer”, so we must discern the expectations of the arena viewer in order to understand if an atmosphere of sexuality was an inherent part of the games.⁸⁰ The word *voluptas* connotes “pleasures of the flesh” in relation to the games when used by Livy, Statius, Tertullian, and St. Augustine.⁸¹ According to Lewis & Short, other translations for this word include: “satisfaction” and “male semen” so an ancient author’s use of this word may have been a nod to this aspect of sexuality within the atmosphere of the arena. The female arena performers and entertainments in the arena in general are discussed utilizing such language,⁸² so their entertainment may have been considered a type of “pleasure of the flesh”.

Sexual violence was a part of the erotica on offer in the day’s events at the games, especially during the noontime executions. Sexual punishments might involve forced bestiality. Martial’s *Liber spectaculorum* describes a reenactment of the story of Pasiphae. Pasiphae famously copulated with a bull – and gave birth to the Minotaur as a result, though the episode in *Liber spectaculorum* only describes the bestiality in the arena.⁸³ Such a punishment would tear the woman apart painfully and internally.⁸⁴ These types of public punishments served the

⁷⁹ Amy Richlin, *Arguments With Silence* (Ann Arbor: University of Michigan Press, 2014), 279.

⁸⁰ Carucci, “Aphrodite and the Spectacle of the Amphitheatre in Roman Africa”, 313.

⁸¹ Edwards, “Unspeakable Professions”, 83.

⁸² Stat., *Silv.*, I. 51-52: “*Hos inter fremitus novosque luxus spectandi levis effugit voluptas*” is the line right before describing the female gladiators.

⁸³ Mart., *Spect.*, 5.

⁸⁴ Coleman, “Fatal Charades”, 64.

functions identified by Coleman as retribution, humiliation, correction, prevention, and deterrence with entertainment value - mythological story-telling and sexual titillation - in order to get the most out of the noon-time executions.⁸⁵ Does the way that sex and violence come together here, lend itself to sexual titillation of the spectator, or is this just another type of gruesome punishment inflicted on criminals?

It is well known that male gladiators were the celebrity heartthrobs of their day, so we must consider whether their female counterparts were seen in a similar light. The “aggressive masculinity” of the male gladiator was a large part of his sexual appeal.⁸⁶ For example, the *thraex* Celadus is described in Pompeian graffiti as “the sigh of the girls” and “the glory of the girls”.⁸⁷ Graffiti from Pompeii may represent popular reflections about gladiators, possibly written by members of a non-elite class. The late second century Christian writer Tertullian comments on the phenomenon of female lust for gladiators with great disgust. He feels repulsion for the games in general, but elucidates for us the reputation gladiators had with women: “*quibus viri animas, eminea autem illis etiam corpora sua substernunt*. To whom men surrender their souls and women their bodies as well.” (trans. Glover and Rendall)⁸⁸ The notorious hyper sexuality of the gladiator resulted in the word *gladius* – the sword used by some types of gladiators – being used as a euphemism for a phallus.⁸⁹

Were female arena performers also viewed as hyper sexual or at least sexually available? Female arena performers not only broke with normative gender behaviours, they also adapted masculine garb, like prostitutes who wore togas. Furthermore, their costume and partial nudity

⁸⁵ Coleman, “Fatal Charades”, 45-48.

⁸⁶ Edwards, “Unspeakable Professions”, 78.

⁸⁷ CIL 4.4342 & 4.4345.

⁸⁸ Tert., *De Spect.*, 22.

⁸⁹ Hopkins, *Death and Renewal*, 22.

heightened the perception of their sexual availability. Like actresses, who were almost, in public perception, like prostitutes in their availability, so too were female arena performers. Their appearance in any arena spectacle added a certain spice that appealed to the crowd. Having sexual undertones and titillating the crowd could have been one way to make the entertainments more memorable for the people, which was the *editor's* main motivation for including females in arena entertainments.

Conclusion

Ludi were curated with much forethought and great cost for the *editor* so the inclusion and representation of female arena performers would have been carefully considered and planned to receive the reception they were hoping for from the crowd. The way these performers were represented reminded the spectators just how unusual and special this type of performer was by virtue of her sex, her atypical gender expression, and also suggest her potentially erotic nature. Their costuming allowed them to be cast as either a representation of a divinity or as a gender non-conforming character with the added bonus of nudity to entice the crowd. Sexualized entertainment was potentially beneficial to the *editor* because it increased the entertainment value of the performance. By including such performers in this way the *editor* of the games to have his games remembered and potentially outdo others that had come before. Female arena performers demonstrated and represented both traditionally masculine and feminine attributes that would have been something very novel in a patriarchal society with such strict gender norms. The outcome of such performances would be a spectacle that would be talked about and remembered as part of the *editor's* life and career.

Chapter 3 Representation: Ethnicity and the Creation of “Other” in the Arena

The draw of the female arena performer was her presentation as an oddity. The more anomalous and rare she was perceived to be, the bigger the wow-factor for the audience. While she was different by the nature of her sex, it could not end there. She had to be exoticized further by making her a figure of distinctive “Otherness”. She was often cast as an exotic foreigner with mythical connections. Presenting the female arena performer as an exotic foreigner allowed for important impressions to be conveyed to the audience. It permitted the performers to be more easily sexualized because they didn’t have to fit the gendered expectations of the Roman woman of being chaste and modest. They could instead be connected with foreign peoples that the Romans associated with gender inversion. The *editor* of the games could showcase his power and the great expense he had undertaken to create a great experience for the spectators by emphasizing exotic features of the entertainments on offer for the day. Mytho-historical allusions within the performances increased their entertainment value as well. Through mythical narratives the audience was transported to another time and place while remaining in the amphitheatre. Referencing familiar narratives also had a positive effect on the spectators. Familiarity with the characters or storyline allowed the audience to feel clever and affirmed their social identity to give themselves the positive feelings associated with social conformity and belonging. Female arena performers’ costuming and actions alluded to the Amazon warriors of myth and legend, as well as female warriors that Rome encountered during its past expansionist campaigns.

The tradition of gladiators as foreigners is present in some of the earliest gladiator armour and fighting styles. They were developed to specifically imitate nations the Romans had conquered. The *thraex* was a prime example of this, as they were modeled on the Thracians located northwest of Macedonia. In addition to the *thraex*, the *samnite*, *gaul* and *essedarius* were

also gladiatorial combat and armament styles that were based on conquered enemies of Rome. Furthermore, in the earliest periods of spectacle, captured prisoners of war from conquered lands actually furnished the supply of gladiators. These prisoners made potentially excellent gladiators as they already had skills gained during their military service.¹ Showcasing faunal exotica as a part of Roman spectacle was a powerful tool the *editor* of the games could use to portray his power and authority (in association to the Empire's power as a whole), and to promote his reputation of wealth through the expense that had clearly been undertaken to provide the people with these entertainments. The popularity of gladiatorial combat and Roman arena spectacle spread across the Roman Empire, which is why so much of our material evidence originates from places other than the Italian peninsula. The remains of approximately 200 amphitheatres exist in 26 countries other than Italy. The Empire was powerful and expansive, which allowed for access to wild and exotic creatures – which included female arena performers. The *editor* was powerful in that he had access to this imperial power and authority and used it to his benefit. In the Imperial period, gladiators were often foreigners. Funerary monuments demonstrate that gladiators hailed from all over the Empire: from Thrace, Spain, Alexandria, Macedonia, Greece, Gaul, Batavia (The Netherlands), and Vienna.² Funerary monuments of gladiators are an invaluable resource to help determine the ethnicity as well as status of the gladiator, as the inscriptions were fairly formulaic and often noted their ethnicity.³ Representing female arena performers as foreigners was a continuation of a tradition that was deeply ingrained in arena entertainment, but executed in a different fashion that accentuated the “Otherness” of their gender and their ethnicity.

¹ Kyle, *Spectacles of Death in Ancient Rome*, 79.

² ILS 5085, 5087, 5088, 5089, 5095, 5101, 5118, 5120.

³ Ray Laurence and Joanne Berry, “Introduction”, *Cultural Identity and the Roman Empire* (London: Routledge, 1998), 7.

Being Roman was not defined by a person's skin colour or the nation of their birth but instead was a type of "common citizenship".⁴ An example of what could make a person Roman written by Statius discusses one of his contemporaries, Septimius Severus⁵ who hailed from Lepcis (modern-day Libya). In this reference, he states: "*non sermo Poenus, non habitus tibi, externa non mens: Italus, Italus*. Your speech was not Punic, nor foreign your dress or your mind: Italian, Italian!"⁶ Though this man is from Africa, he is affirmed as Roman, by stating that he is not foreign in aspects that matter, such as language and clothing. This also allows us to see that dress and speech seem to be paramount among Roman cultural conformity. This is why clothing style and costuming was such an effective way to communicate foreignness in the case of many female arena performers.

The feminine and the foreign were connected because they represented the antithesis of the elite Roman male ideal. This is demonstrated in the way that ancient Roman iconography often depicted conquered Roman provinces as women.⁷ This practice can illuminate the connection between gender and the image of the conquered foreigner that may have influenced the way female arena performers were represented in the arena. Representations of personified provinces were common on coins, triumphal monuments, and temples.⁸ The allegorical woman as conquered foreign country was often depicted wearing the clothing native to the land and sometimes holding weapons or other items that were associated with the country.⁹ They could be rendered with

⁴ Laurence and Berry, "Introduction", 2.

⁵ Not the emperor.

⁶ Stat., *Silv.*, 4.5.45-46. David Noy, *Foreigners at Rome: Citizens and Strangers* (London: Gerald Duckworth & Co., 2000), 33.

⁷ Rodgers, "Female Representation in Roman Art: Feminizing the Provincial 'Other'", 85.

⁸ *Ibid.*, 85.

⁹ *Ibid.*, 88.

mournful body language or as a captive,¹⁰ and in some cases are depicted as being physically dominated or assaulted by a male figure, who represented the emperor, or the Roman State.¹¹ Entering the arena as a performer in itself was subjugation, so the connection between the foreign and the conquered would have been innate in the performance. Overall there was a theme of violence, domination, and subjugation in these types of representations. René Rodgers suggests that female figures are often chosen to embody foreign lands because femaleness increases the “Otherness” of the figure. Furthermore, men were seen as the norm and women were not only an aberration and inferior, but also inherently subject to a man.¹² An excellent example of female figures rendered as foreigners are the twenty so-called “provinces reliefs”, from the Temple of the Divine Hadrian at Rome. Each figure is dressed in her native costume and carries a weapon and other attributes that identify the province she is meant to represent [figs. 14 & 15].¹³ With this tradition of visual representation of conquered foreigner as a woman, is it possible that the female arena performer was costumed in a similar manner to make a similar allusion? Was the female arena performer dressed in the garb that a female personified country would be to help reinforce the nature of exoticness and expressly connect them to that country? The entertainment value of seeing female arena performers like those allegorical figures, usually seen in public sculpture or on coinage, come to life in the arena would have had a spellbinding effect with the underlying theme of Roman supremacy over its conquered provinces.

Just as the visual cues of costuming or attributes were utilized for depictions of Roman provinces, similar attributes were utilized as a way to demonstrate that a female arena performer was meant to be foreign. One of the most effective ways of conveying a person’s foreignness was

¹⁰ Rodgers, “Female Representation in Roman Art: Feminizing the Provincial ‘Other’”, 79.

¹¹ Ibid., 85-86.

¹² Ibid., 76 & 84.

¹³ Ibid., 88.

through their dress. We have seen that costuming could cast these arena performers as Amazons or deities to increase the entertainment value of these performances. We also have evidence for animals being made more exotic with costuming. Seneca the Younger discusses a lion on display in the arena whose mane has been gilded.¹⁴ The lion, though wild, exotic and exciting on its own, was costumed in gold to increase the wow-factor for the audience, so too was the female arena performer further costumed to augment her exotic nature and enhance her uniqueness for the audience.

Female arena performers were often associated with some aspect of the exotic. In the ancient Roman novel *Satyricon* by Petronius, a female arena performer costumed as a Celt was referenced as an exciting addition to the entertainment in an upcoming *ludus*. The character Echion asserts to his friends that this show will be worth attending as the *editor* Titus has spent quite a lot of money on these games. Among the list of sights he anxiously anticipates is the “*mulierem essedariam*,” a woman *essedarius*.¹⁵ Titus’ lavish spending and the inclusion of a female arena performer go hand-in-hand here. The translation of *essedarius* as a “chariot-fighter” (which it often is in editions of *Satyricon*) is not completely accurate.¹⁶ These fighters did get their names from war chariots used by the ancient Celts but they fought on foot and only entered the arena in chariots.¹⁷ It is interesting to note that the Roman people could have known that there was a famous

¹⁴ Sen., *Ep.*, 41.6.

¹⁵ Petron., *Sat.*, 45.7.

¹⁶ The words “*mulierem essedariam*” have often been translated as “a woman to fight from a chariot” (Petronius, *Satyricon*, 89.) or “a woman who fights in a chariot” (Petronius, *Satyricon*, trans. J.P. Sullivan (Middlesex: Penguin Books Ltd., 1965), 64.) though *mulierem essedariam* consists of: *mulierem* meaning ‘woman’ and *essedariam*, the adjective describing the woman being a feminized form of the gladiator categorization of *essedarius*.

¹⁷ Brunet, “Woman with Swords”, 483.

example of a female warrior and leader of the Celtic people: Boudicca.¹⁸ Could this be why a Celtic-influenced fighting style was chosen for this (albeit fictional) female arena performer? Boudicca's role in the uprising of the Iceni took place around the same time Petronius wrote the *Satyricon*.¹⁹ This means there is a possibility that there was some influence of the tales of the Celtic warrior-queen that could have inspired the idea of a Celtic-style female arena performer. It would also fit with the theme of arena performers being presented as foreign enemies of Rome.

We certainly see evidence of female arena performers cast as conquered foreigners and especially, as Amazon warriors. The Amazons are a common figure in Graeco-Roman myth and literature, representing women untamed. Famous examples are Penthesilea, Hippolyte, and Antiope. The Amazons of myth whose tales were transmitted throughout the Graeco-Roman world fight heroes such as Achilles in the Trojan War, and Hercules during his famous twelve labours, and are usually conquered by them.²⁰ The Romans may also have connected the Amazons with the female warriors who fought against the Romans on the side of King Mithridates of Pontus during the Mithridatic Wars of the first century BCE.²¹ The Mithridatic Wars ended only decades before the beginning of the Imperial Period. The female warriors from the Black Sea region of Pontus may have even influenced the way the ancient Romans in the Imperial period envisaged the archetype of the Amazon warrior. This image would have been informed by the writing of Valerius Maximus and Plutarch, who recorded the historical encounters between the Roman Empire and the warrior women of Pontus.²²

¹⁸ Ancient sources that discuss Boudicca: Tac., *Agr.*, 16.1, Tac., *Ann.*, 14.31-34, Dio. Cass., 62.1-12.

¹⁹ The Iceni uprising was approximately 60 CE and the *Satyricon* was written during the reign of Nero 54-68 CE.

²⁰ Verg., *Aen.*, I.485-294. Sen., *Agam.*, V.844-851.

²¹ Plut., *Pomp.*, 32.8. Val. Max., 4.6.2.

²² Mayor, *The Amazons*, 342.

Female arena performers were often portrayed or perceived as Amazon warriors as evidenced by their costuming, their naming, or the allusions ancient writers use when describing them. The poet Statius recounts the following scene in the amphitheater during Domitian's games to celebrate the Saturnalia:

*Hoc inter fremitus novosque luxus
Spectandi levis effugit voluptas.
Stat sexus rudis insciusque ferri:
Et pugnas capit improbus viriles.
Credas ad Tanian ferumque Phasin
Thermodontiacas calere turmas.*²³

Amid such hubub, such novel luxuries, the pleasure of spectacle flits lightly by. The sex untrained and ignorant of weaponry takes stand and dares engage in manly combat. One would think them troops of Thermidon in battle heat by Tanais or wild Phasis. (trans. Shackelton Bailey)

The “troops of Thermadon” and the reference to a battle by the “Tanais or wild Phasis” are geographical references that have Amazonian connections. Herodotus refers to Thermadon as the location from which the Amazons are said to have launched their attack against the Athenians.²⁴ The Tanais and Phasis rivers can be found on ancient maps of Scythia as well [fig 16]. This could mean that the female performers Statius describes as fighting in the arena were dressed as Amazons, which would make for an exciting visual component of the entertainment. The word chosen to describe Phasis in itself is very telling of the Roman impressions of this region. It is the word *ferum*: wild, uncultivated or untamed. The land is a reflection of its inhabitants and the two were correlated in the minds of the ancient Roman. The wildness and exoticness of the performers is a reflection of what makes them more exiting to the spectator.

²³ Stat., *Silv.*, 1.6.51-57.

²⁴ Hdt., *Hist.*, 9.27.

Gender non-conformity was so closely linked to foreignness that figures from myth who demonstrated it were represented as foreign. Atalanta displayed gender non-conformity with her skills in traditionally male activities such as athletics and hunting.²⁵ The fifth century CE author Nonnus uses the word ἀντιάνειραν to describe Atalanta in his work *Dionysiaca*,²⁶ which Thomas Scanlon translates as either “a match for men” or “anti-male”.²⁷ The ancient Greek vocabulary reflects the status and perception of women who took on what was perceived as male behaviour and/or actions. Although a Greek woman, Atalanta’s behaviour was so far outside the Greek gender norms that it nullified her Greek-ness. She was often depicted in Amazonian garb or described with words such as ἀντιάνειραν, which was generally reserved for Amazons.²⁸ Although she was a Greek from Arcadia,²⁹ there was a need to make her “Other” by casting her as a foreigner. She is described like an Amazonian barbarian because this helps the ancient Graeco-Roman audience reconcile the way she opposed gender norms. Lorna Hardwick identifies two important themes that Amazons were associated with: the Amazon as hero, and as an outsider.³⁰ The female arena performer could be described using those same labels. She was a hero in the successful performance of exciting deeds such as combat and other kinds of manly skill, and she was also an outsider in that she did not fit into the societal norms of being a proper woman, or proper Roman.

²⁵ Ancient authors who discuss/reference Atalanta: Pacuvius, Callimachus, Hesiod, Musaeus, Apollodorus, Euripides, Xenophon of Athens, Sidonius, Ovid, Aelian, Oppian, Pausanias, Strabo, among others.

²⁶ Nonnus, *Dion.*, 35.82.

²⁷ Scanlon, *Eros and Greek Athletics*, 177.

²⁸ *Ibid.*, 175.

²⁹ Ancient Sources that reference Atlanta being from Arcadia: Ov., *Ars am.*, 1.7.14-17 Ael., *VH*, 13.1 & Musaeus, *Hero and Leander*, 153.

³⁰ Lorna Hardwick, “Ancient Amazons – Heroes, Outsiders or Women?,” *G&R* 37, no. 1 (1990): 15 & 17.

Foreign characters are also often sexualized in Graeco-Roman sources. For example, Amazons are almost always discussed in relation to their amorous connection to men such as Theseus (Antiope), Hercules (Hippolyte), Achilles (Penthesilea). This may be connected to how foreigners (Amazons included) were not only exoticized but also eroticized. Donald Kyle proposes that while the Amazons fit well as a symbol of gender inversion, the concept of a woman with power could be hard for the ancient Roman to support. One way to reconcile this in the mind of the Roman was to have the “nonconforming female ... defeated and tamed by a male, ultimately reinforcing social norms.”³¹ The female arena performer presented as Amazon represented strong female figures, but ultimately they were put in their place by virtue of their status as *infames*. This meant any power she had rested in her physical strength and ability to entertain the crowd. She had physical power, but no authority over anyone, which was the type of power most lauded by the Roman elites. Female power was kept in check by having the gender-nonconforming character from myth in the arena visually reference women who would ultimately be sexual conquests for men. They are exotic, wild, strong, and skilled, but can ultimately be dominated. They are “Other” which means they are not expected to act in the traditional gender norms, but still conform to a narrative more comforting to the androcentric Roman culture.

The female gladiator relief from Halicarnassus highlights the pervasive nature of the association between female arena performers and Amazons and allows broader connection to be made to the Amazonian mythology. The inscription on the lower register of the relief, names the figure on the right “AXIΛΛΙΑ” (Achillia) and the figure on the left “AMAZΩN” (Amazon). Both “Amazon” and “Achillia” make Amazonian references here. While Amazon’s is obvious, Achillia must be given more ancient literary and cultural context. Achillia is a feminized form of

³¹ Donald G. Kyle, *Sport & Spectacle in the Ancient World*, 2nd ed. (Chichester, West Sussex: John Wiley & Sons, Inc., 2015), 211.

the name of the hero “Achilles”. According to Pseudo-Apollodorus, an episode from the Epic Cycle recounts how Achilles must kill the Amazon Penthesilea, although he had fallen in love with her.³² The Amazon is the sexual conquest of a male hero. On the Halicarnassus relief the Amazon reference was not made with their costuming, because they were dressed in the same way as male gladiators, but were still able to convey the Amazonian allusion. Both of their stage names effectively portray characters that are mythic, and are associated with war-like behaviours, which allows the spectator to gain information about the performer before their match even begins. It also tells the audience explicitly that these two performers are exotic foreigners by making Amazonian allusions.

Mythological or mytho-historical reenactments were a central aspect of the performative nature of the games. They increased the entertainment value of the games, by referencing stories known widely to the audience. Such familiar narratives are what Coleman calls the “cultural currency” of this society.³³ Female arena performers cast as Amazon warriors in the arena are an example of how mythological characters could be utilized to make reference to a narrative that was familiar to the spectators and that could be utilized for its entertainment value. Amazons were familiar characters within Graeco-Roman mytho-history and the “cultural currency” of the Classical world.³⁴ The audience would pick up on mytho-historical allusions and fill in the gaps with their knowledge of the familiar narrative. Giving the audience a cultural touchstone to recognize also affirmed their social identity, giving them satisfaction of having identified the reference.

³² Apollod., *Epit.*, 5.1. Coleman, “*Missio at Halicarnassus*”, 500.

³³ *Ibid.*, 67.

³⁴ *Ibid.*, 67.

Ancient Romans, living in or near the city of Rome at the end of the Mithridatic Wars (around 63 BCE) would have had the opportunity to marvel at real foreign warrior women that corresponded to their image of the Amazon of myth and literature. Captive Pontic women were displayed in Pompey's triumphal procession in 61 BCE after he defeated King Mithridates.³⁵ This would have been the first time many Roman citizens saw in person these wild, martial women from distant foreign lands they had only heard tales of, making for a very exciting viewing for the public. Within the next 50 to 100 years of the presentation of these women at Pompey's triumph (according to the dates of our existing evidence) we begin to see evidence for women performing in the arena. The positive reaction of the crowds may have been the impetus for the inclusion of women in the arena, and the decision to depict them as wild, Amazonian warrior women.

The connection between female figures of the arena and the Amazons became so ingrained in the culture of the games that it influenced the way the emperor Commodus expressed his love for the games. Commodus is known for his obsession with the gladiatorial games and his participation in gladiatorial combat – much to the chagrin of his elite contemporaries and subsequent historians.³⁶ According to Cassius Dio, Commodus was assassinated because he was planning on dressing as a gladiator for his inauguration as consul in 193 CE.³⁷ The author of *The Life of Commodus* in the *Historia Augusta* notes that Commodus had a concubine named Marcia (or Martia, as a feminized form of the Roman god of war, Mars), whom he dressed as an Amazon and made to fight as a gladiator.³⁸ He even renamed the month

³⁵ Plut., *Pomp.*, 45.

³⁶ *Scriptores Historiae Augustae*, I.7-8.

³⁷ Edwards, "Unspeakable Professions", 90. Dio Cass., 72.19-22.

³⁸ Mayor, *The Amazons*, 336.

of December to Amazonius.³⁹ Commodus was so beguiled by the images of the Amazon, that his signet ring featured the image of one.⁴⁰ This connection between Commodus and Amazons can also be found on the most famous visual representation of the emperor, his portrait bust housed at the Musei Capitolini in Rome. [figs. 16 & 17] Dated to 180-193 CE, the bust portrays Commodus with the attributes of Hercules, a club and lion skin.⁴¹ It is supported by an ornate stand, which is flanked by two kneeling Amazons.⁴² The figure may recall the myth of Hercules and Hippolyte, but more importantly, the kneeling Amazons serve as a symbol for the wild barbarians of the outer-regions of the Empire supplicating themselves to Imperial power. The figure of the Amazon was synonymous with wild and ferocious warrior women and this is why they were such a common character for female arena performers to play. Female arena performers and Amazons were so connected to one another that an Amazonian reference could also be a nod to female arena performers in some contexts. The strength of this association was demonstrated best by the way Commodus utilized Amazonian imagery and allusions.

Beautiful North African mosaics found in a third century CE home in Sousse, Tunisia features the themes of both Amazons and arena spectacle and are worth discussion regarding the way female arena performers may have been dressed as Amazonian characters. Within this one room located between the courtyard and principal hall in a Roman-style house there is a mosaic that depicts two Amazons on horseback [fig. 2]. This mosaic, located in the apse of the room, has been dated to the late third century, which is after Septimius Severus' ban. It has been noted, however, that a loophole can be found in the way the ban is worded that suggests that it may not

³⁹ *Scriptores Historiae Augustae*, XI.8-9.

⁴⁰ Mayor, *The Amazons*, 336. George Frederick Kunz, *Rings For the Fingers* (New York: Dover Publications, 1917): 131.

⁴¹ Musei Capitolini, Rome, Inv#: MC1120.

⁴² http://en.museicapitolini.org/collezioni/percorsi_per_sale/museo_del_palazzo_dei_conservatori/sale_degli_horti_lamiani/busto_di_commodo_come_ercole, Accessed: October 17, 2016.

have ended female participation in the arena completely. We have evidence for an occasion on which a politician took advantage of a loophole regarding laws putting on spectacle from Cicero's time. In Cicero's *Pro Sestio* speech he recounts an instance where the Roman politician named Vatinius was only allowed to have a certain number of gladiators, so he decided to display a large number of *bestiarii*, because technically they weren't gladiators.⁴³ As previously discussed, even though female participation in single combat was made illegal, non-combat arena performance with women may have been allowed to continue. The subject-matter of this Amazon mosaic within one room in the building (known as the Maison des Atruches) seem to follow a theme of arena spectacle when considered with other mosaics in the room. In the centre of the room is a large T-shaped mosaic that features four *venatores* and below them, animals for the hunt. The two female figures in Amazon mosaic are each wearing a different colour *exomis*, plumed helmets, and seem to be hanging off their horses, which are rendered in motion. Images of a half-moon shield and double-headed axe are also featured in the mosaic and are attributes often associated with Amazons as well.⁴⁴ Could these Amazons on horseback be depicting a scene from the arena to complement the other mosaic of the *venatores* in the same room? We have seen that female arena performers were often costumed as Amazons, and the other mosaics in the Maison des Atruches depict individualized *venatores* and animals for the hunt⁴⁵ suggesting that they are based on real arena performers [figs.13 & 19]. Louis Foucher notes that the way in which the Amazons are depicted is remarkable: they are active characters, rather than vanquished foes, as was common in Roman art in this time period.⁴⁶ These factors could mean

⁴³ Cic., *Sest.*, 133-135.

⁴⁴ Hardwick, "Ancient Amazons – Heroes, Outsiders or Women?," 29.

⁴⁵ Louis Foucher, "Venationes à Hadrumète," *Oudheidkundige mededeelingen uit het Rijksmuseum van Oudheden te Leiden XLV* (1964): 96, 97 & 103.

⁴⁶ *Ibid.*, 99.

that the Amazons in the mosaic of the Maison des Atruches could actually be arena performers of some type. Perhaps because of the way they are depicted hanging off their moving horses they were some kind of trick-riding performers. Due to the popularity of mythological reenactments in the arena, female arena performers could have been playing the part of Amazon warriors, who were showcasing skill in riding, and even perhaps some skill with a bow from horseback, as this was an ability the Amazons were known to have.⁴⁷ Displays of expert bowmanship were part of arena entertainments. Emperor Domitian would shoot at animals for an audience and to show his skill for accuracy, strategically shooting his quarry in the head to give it the appearance of horns.⁴⁸

Floor mosaics in Roman homes dating from the second to sixth centuries CE in North Africa have many examples of images of public spectacle and those who could afford such lavish mosaics in their home were often the elite who sponsored *ludi*.⁴⁹ If the theme of arena entertainment is present in this ancient North African home with portraits of four individual *venatores* rendered, it may be because a magistrate who put on a particularly memorable *ludus* chose to preserve the memory of the event with his home décor. Just as we saw with the inscriptions memorializing the games put on by distinguished politicians, the depiction of particularly successful spectacles in an *editor's* home décor could serve the same purpose of advertising an *editor's beneficia*, wealth, power, and civil service. By commemorating games they had sponsored this way, they could display it for all who came into their home and advertise their virtues before their death. These female performers and the skills they demonstrated for the crowd performed on the day of that particular *ludus* but were also chosen to decorate the *editor's*

⁴⁷ Hardwick, "Ancient Amazons – Heroes, Outsiders or Women?," 14.

⁴⁸ Suet., *Dom.*, 19.

⁴⁹ Christine Kondoleon, "Timing Spectacles: Roman Domestic Art and Performance," *Studies in the History of Art* 56 (1999), 321, 322.

home. It is notable that the entertainments being preserved in the home décor of the Maison des Atruches was worth preserving for posterity and speaks to the success of this showing of female arena performers, and in particular female arena performers who dressed as mythological, foreign characters.

The Amazon character could symbolize themes that were well suited to the type of character the female arena performer was to portray or represent. Lorna Hardwick's work identifies two important motifs that Amazons are associated with: the Amazon as hero, and as an outsider.⁵⁰ The female arena performer could be described in similar terms. She was a hero in the successful performance of exciting demonstration of manly skill. She was also an outsider in that she did not fit into the societal norms of a proper woman, or proper Roman. The ancient sources that describe female arena performers as taking on the appearance of Amazons are not typically gladiators, but more often *venatores* or other type of performer who demonstrates a type of skill that is associated with Amazons (such as proficiency on horseback or with a bow). The fact that the women of the arena are not just foreigners, but conquered foreigners is important. They are wild, yet tamed. They are a reminder of the force, breadth, power, and authoritarianism of the Empire as well as the status and benevolence of the *editor* of the games. The entertainment value of their performances could be augmented by allusions and reenactments of famous mytho-historical narratives that the crowd would have been familiar with (most often depictions of Amazons). Exoticization also meant that the performers could play by different gender rules. They did not have to be chaste and modest, which allowed for them to be seen as sexualized objects of desire. Exoticization lent itself to eroticization in this instance. It was a safe way for Roman spectators to view these foreigners, in the same way they were displayed during a

⁵⁰ Hardwick, "Ancient Amazons – Heroes, Outsiders or Women?," 15 & 17.

triumphal procession, subdued and brought to their knees – making it easier to sexualize them. The gaze of the crowd feasted on the image of these foreign women and the Roman Empire consumed them. Costuming and casting the female arena performer as a mytho-historical figure also augmented the entertainment value of the performance because it allowed the spectator to be immersed in an exciting narrative that was also somewhat familiar to them and transported them to the episode being retold. After including such a dynamic performer in such an exciting role, surely this *ludus* and the *editor* who facilitated it would not be soon forgotten.

Conclusion

By studying the role that women played in spectacle we can better understand the social and political role the games played in ancient Roman culture. Within this thesis we have seen that in ancient Roman social history, a more complex view of gender expression can and should be explored. Ancient Roman women are often cast in the roles of *matrona* or whore when we think about ancient Roman society and gender roles, but the reality is much more complex. The fact is, female arena performers existed and played a role in acquiring and consolidating power for elite Roman men.

Our ancient sources, ranging from the early first century to the early third century CE, allow us to see the practice of including women as performers in spectacle as observed mostly through the eyes of elite men. Mention of women as performers in the arena comes from historians, politicians, and poets. The legal and epigraphic texts consulted allow us to see the impact female inclusion in the games had on ancient law, societal expectations, and popular culture. The material evidence enlightens us to the way female arena performers were deliberately presented to the crowds and how the personas that were selected for them were meant to be interpreted by the audience. When considered comprehensively, a picture of the motivations behind female inclusion, and the way in which they were presented to the crowds allow us to better understand how an ancient culture with such strict gender binaries and norms took part in a practice that was so contrary to those cultural models.

This thesis has argued that the purpose of the female arena performer was to give the people something entertaining and memorable to see in the arena. The positive feelings generated by putting on such entertainments could later be used as social collateral to gain support for the *editor's* rise up the political ladder, or for the emperor to ingratiate himself with the people. The

role of an the emperor or an elite male with political aspirations required them to put on games, but the potential positive outcomes for their career and legacy was the incentive to put on memorable, spectacular games. Legacy was central to the male elite identity. The Roman historian and politician Sallust writes: “The glory of men’s ancestors is like a light shining on their descendants, which allows neither their virtues nor their vices remain hidden.” (trans. Seager)¹ The way an elite man lived his life was guided by the idea that all of the achievements he had accomplished would augment his family’s reputation, and any misdeeds could potentially taint it.

The way female arena performers were represented to the crowd highlighted their novelty. This was accomplished with their costuming and by emphasizing their gender differences. Non-traditional gender expressions shocked and intrigued the viewer, making the games memorable. Furthermore, by including gender-bending characters and narratives familiar from mythology in the performance any concerns about upsetting the gendered social order were quelled. For example warrior women, like Amazons were often ultimately conquered or tamed by a man, signaling to the audience that these performers were put in their (gendered) place. Also, the arena performer’s low social status and the gaze of the audience positioned them to be eroticized by the viewer. The erotic gaze of the audience and sexual objectification of arena performers was something that had been a part of Roman spectacle even before female participation so the context of erotic entertainment was one into which the female arena performer was adapted. The female arena performer could be presented in a way that continued this tradition through either costume that allowed for partial nudity, or by casting them in roles that were associated with erotic narratives. The way these performers were represented would remind the spectators just

¹ Sall., *Iug.*, 85.23.

how unusual and special this type of performer was by virtue of her sex, her atypical gender expression, and also suggest her potentially erotic nature.

The “Othering” of the performer by highlighting her sex could be taken even further by presenting her as an exotic foreigner. The feminine and the foreign worked well together to represent the female arena performer as the antithesis of the elite Roman male ideal. Just as a tradition of sexualized entertainment existed in the arena before female inclusion, there also existed a tradition of presenting performers as foreigners. Furthermore, lands conquered by the Roman Empire were often represented as women in the foreign dress associated with that land. By casting female arena performers in this same way, the audience envisioned not only the expanse and power of the Empire but also that the female performers were ultimately tamed property there for their amusement. Amazons were often chosen as characters that the female arena performer was either cast as or likened to, because they were associated with women who took on masculine pursuits such as fighting and hunting. Foreign women did not have the same gendered expectations that Roman women were expected to live by, and so it quelled any gender anxieties by portraying them as foreigners.

Ultimately these women were presented in a way that the *editor* of the games desired because they wanted their games to outdo those that had come before. Featuring a novelty performer was one way to accomplish this. In patriarchal Roman culture women were not thought to have the physical ability to take on masculine exploits and they were expected to strive only toward feminine ideals. To see a woman break with these gendered norms certainly labeled her as rare and firmly placed in the mind of the audience-member. Having the female arena performer associated with foreign and exotic lands often augmented this further. It made the performance more memorable, and also served as a reminder of the wealth and power of the

editor for being able to bring entertainments from the far reaches of the Empire. Not only was the *editor* wealthy and well connected, but he was also a generous civic benefactor for using his affluence and influence for the benefit of the people. The female arena performer's draw was not only in the way she was presented, but in the skill she demonstrated. Her ability in combat, beast fighting, or hunting garnered approval from the crowd in the form of applause though this praise would ultimately serve the *editor*.

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Appendix for Images



Fig. 1

Female gladiator relief from Halicarnassus, Currently housed in the British Museum, dated to the 2nd cent CE
Cat #: 1847,0424.19 Image Source: Image taken by author



Fig. 2

Mosaic from the Maison des Atruches, Currently housed in the in the Sousse Archeological Museum, Tunisia,
Dated to the 2nd cent. CE
Image Source: Photo taken by Dr. A.V. Kalinowski



Fig. 3

Remains of funerary inscription for Serapias in Ephesian gladiator graveyard
Grave dated to the turn of the 2nd to 3rd cent. CE
Image Source: Fabian Kanz and Karl Grossschmidt, "Dying in the Arena: The Osseous Evidence From Ephesian Gladiators," in *Roman Amphitheatres and Spectacula: a 21st Century Perspective – Paper from an international conference held in Chester*, ed. Tony Wilmot (Oxford: Archaeopress, 2007), 213.



Fig. 4
Bronze Statuette currently housed in the Museum für Kunst und Gewerbe in Hamburg, Dated to the 2nd cent CE
Image Source: National Geographic <https://news.nationalgeographic.com/news/2012/04/120419-female-gladiator-statue-topless-science-ancient-rome/>



Fig. 5
Strigils currently housed in the British Museum from Italy dated to 50-79 CE
Cat#: 1856,1226.891
Image Source: http://www.britishmuseum.org/research/collection_online/collection_object_details.aspx?objectId=400343&partId=1&searchText=strigil&page=2



Fig. 6
The so-called “bikini mosaic” from the Villa Romana del Casale in Sicily, dated to the 4th cent CE
Image Source: Wikimedia Commons

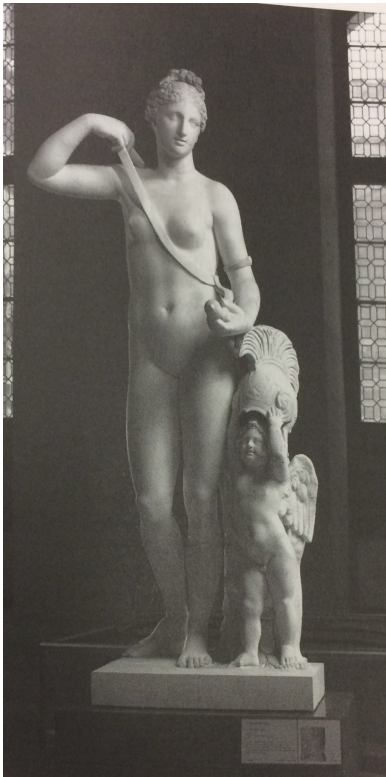


Fig. 7
Statue of Venus Victrix currently housed in the Louvre, dated to the 2nd cent CE
Image Source: Stephanie L. Budin, “Aphrodite Enoplion” In *Brill’s Companion to Aphrodite*, ed. Amy C. Smith and Sadie Pickup, 79-112 (Leiden: Koninklijke Brill, 2010): 111.

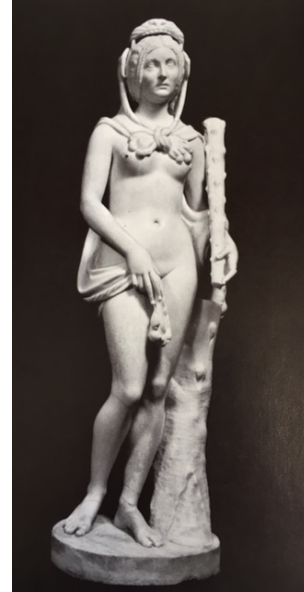


Fig. 8
Omphale statue from the Vatican Museum, dated to 200 CE
Image Source: John P. O’Neil, *The Vatican Collections: The Papacy and Art* (New York: The Metropolitan Museum of Art, 1982), 214.



Fig. 9
Hercules and Omphale
statue currently housed in
the Naples Archaeological
Museum, dated to 1st cent.
CE
Image Source:
<http://classics.virginia.edu/2017-classics-graduate-student-colloquium>



Fig. 10
Male gladiator
("Hilaros") relief
from Halicarnassus,
currently housed at
the British Museum,
dated to 2nd cent. CE
Cat#: 1847,0424.18
Image Source: Image
taken by author



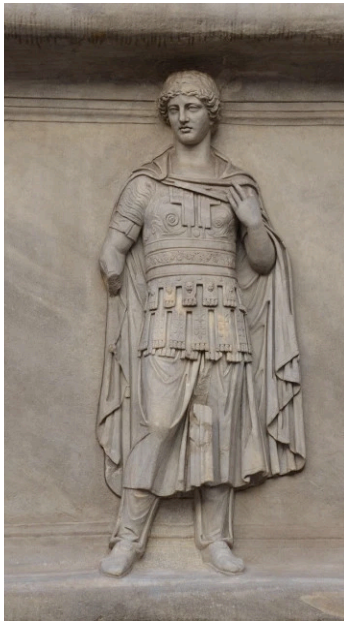
Fig. 11
Detail of Amazon's face from female
gladiator relief
Image Source: Image taken by author



Fig. 12
Statue of an Amazon wearing
an *exomis*, Currently housed
in the Metropolitan Museum
of Art, dated to 1st to 2nd cent.
CE
Cat #: 32.11.4
Image Source:
<https://www.metmuseum.org/toa/h/works-of-art/32.11.4/>



Fig. 13
 Detail of *Venatio* mosaic from the Maison d'Atruche, Currently housed in the Sousse Archeological Museum, Tunisia, Dated to the 2nd cent. CE
 Image Source: Photo taken by Dr. A.V. Kalinowski



Figs. 14 & 15
 Relief sculptures of female personifications of the Roman provinces of Hispania (left) and Egypt (right) from the Temple of the Deified Hadrian, Currently housed in the Naples Archaeological Museum, Dated to 145 CE

Image Source:
<https://followinghadrian.com/2015/01/21/the-hadrianeum-and-the-personifications-of-provinces/>

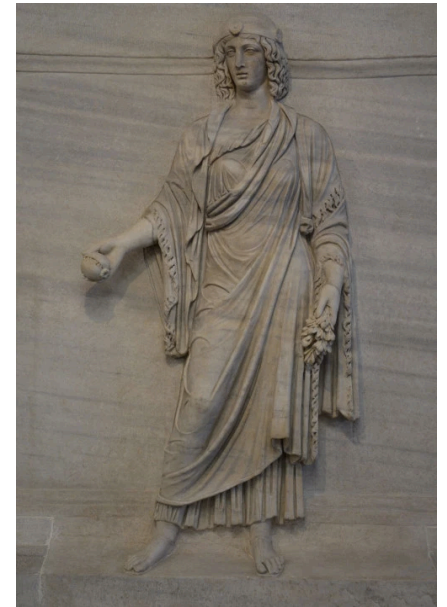


Fig. 16
 Map of ancient Scythia
 Image Source:
<http://www.worldhistory.biz/ancient-history/51994-imizons-eige-pliins-crifters.html>



Fig. 17 & 18
 Bust of Commodus as
 Hercules, dated to 180-
 193 CE, currently house
 in the Musei Capitolini
 Image Source: Image
 taken by author

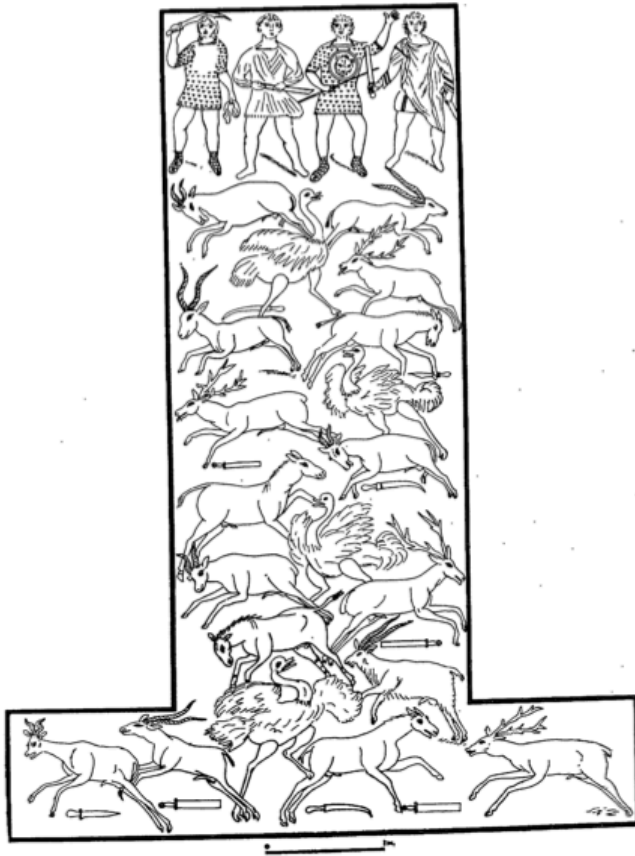
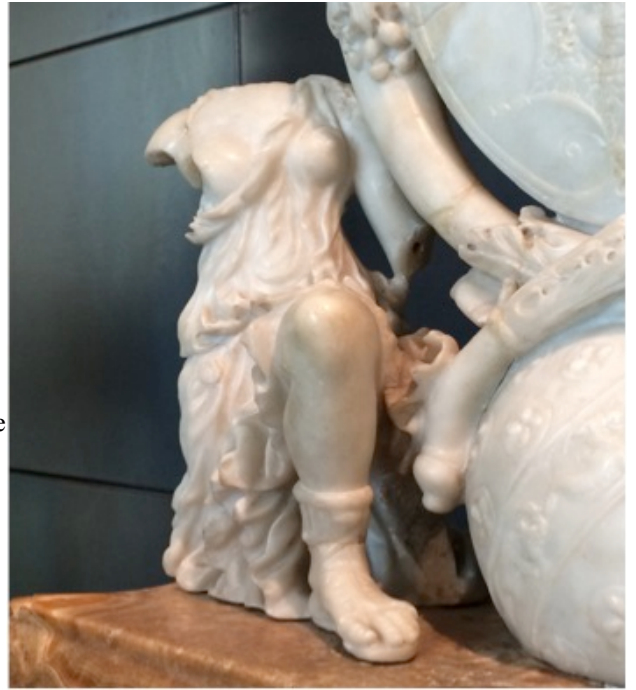


Fig. 19
Venatio mosaic from the Maison des Atruches,
 currently housed in the Sousse Archeological
 Museum, Tunisia, Dated to the 2nd cent. CE
 Image Source: Foucher, Louis. "Venationes à
 Hadrumète." *Oudheidkundige mededeelingen uit
 het Rijksmuseum van Oudheden te Leiden* XLV
 (1964): 103.