Chapter 3

Gladiators and Gladiatorial Displays

In modern public perception gladiators and gladiatorial display are characteristically Roman, summing up Roman culture as militaristic, bloodthirsty, cruel and uncivilised in its attitudes towards human life. However, such a perception ignores or misunderstands the reasons behind the extraordinary public success that gladiatorial displays came to enjoy. They not only had an important cultural function but also played a very significant political role.

Gladiatorial origins

The origins of gladiatorial combat are obscure and continue to be hotly debated by modern scholars. The evidence does not fit neatly together, but two main lines of argument have crystallised. The older view, first suggested in the middle of the nineteenth century, is that gladiatorial games originated in Etruria and were passed on to the Romans along with a number of other cultural traits (a view proposed by a number of ancient writers, e.g. Nicolaus of Damascus, *Ath.* 4.153-4). The second theory, first proposed in the early twentieth century, attributed gladiatorial origins to the Osco-Samnite cultures of Southern Italy. The literary evidence is contradictory, and the origins of gladiatorial combat were contentious even in ancient times. The physical evidence is rich and varied, consisting of the physical structures which housed gladiatorial displays, inscriptions, artifactual and forensic evidence, and iconographical representations. The range of media involved in the last in particular points to a certain familiarity and connoisseurship amongst the viewing public.

A number of Etruscan tomb paintings at Tarquinia (Italy) of the sixth century BC have been identified as depicting gladiatorial combat, for example the Tomb of the Bigae and the Tomb of the Augurs. Helmeted men, sometimes wearing a cuirass and armed with a shield and a sword are shown in rather static poses, but never actually in combat. It has been suggested that they may have been performers in the Pyrrhica, a showy kind of military parade involving flashy military manoeuvres, rather than combatants locked in some kind of bloody conflict. A possible Etruscan origin of the term for the trainer of gladiators (*lanista*) has also recently

7. Fresco from Tomb 53, Andriuolo necropolis, Lucania.

been questioned, and it is by no means certain that the mallet-carrying figure called Iovis Frater by Tertullian (*Ad Nationes* 1.10.47), whose job it was to remove the corpses of dead gladiators from the arena, should be associated with the similarly accoutred Etruscan god Charun.

The material evidence from Southern Italy is much more explicit. Scenes of single combat are depicted in Lucanian tomb paintings dating to the later fourth century BC in the area around Paestum (for example Tomb 53 in the Andriuolo necropolis, and Tomb 10 in the Laghetto necropolis). As well as scenes of chariot racing and boxing matches, men armed with shields, sometimes wearing helmets and carrying spears, are shown fighting each other. That real combat is shown is clear from the amount of blood visible in a number of them (Fig. 7). These seem to be representations of combat as public entertainment within a funerary context, a phenomenon well known in the classical world and beautifully exemplified by the funeral games of Patroclus in Book 23 of Homer's *Iliad*. According to Livy (9.40.17), gladiatorial combat was also part of the entertainment at Campanian banquets.

The first historically documented presentation of gladiators, three pairs drawn from prisoners of war, took place in 264 BC in the Forum Boarium

in Rome, part of a gift display (*munus*) staged by Marcus and Decimus Brutus in honour of their father Decimus Junius Brutus Pera (Livy, *Periochae* 16). The sources are silent on whether the combat was to the death, but the connection between gladiatorial display and funerals as well as warfare is very clear. In 216 BC, in honour of Marcus Aemilius Lepidus, his three sons staged gladiatorial displays over a period of three days, involving 22 pairs of gladiators in the Forum Romanum, the usual location for such events during the remainder of the Republic (Livy 23.30). Over the next two centuries the scale and frequency of gladiatorial shows steadily increased; they were still staged within a funerary context, but became an increasingly significant part of more general aristocratic status display, a factor made more important as imperial resources grew through conquest. However, it should be remembered that because of the nature of the sources, we only really hear of those displays that were out of the ordinary for their day.

By the middle of the first century BC, although the funerary context was still evident, gladiatorial displays had become a powerful tool in the struggles between prominent politicians intent on gaining and maintaining popularity and influence. Thus in 65 BC, when he was *aedile*, Julius Caesar gave elaborate funeral games for his father involving some 320 pairs of gladiators. His father had died 21 years before, but Caesar was in dire need of support at Rome and he was prepared to bankrupt himself, borrowing hugely from Crassus, in order to acquire it (Plutarch, *Caesar* 5).

The gladiators

The connection between *munera* and warfare becomes increasingly clear into the late Republic, emphasised by the fact that the gladiators themselves were often prisoners of war forced to fight at the funerals of Roman generals who had defeated their home territories. Some of the main gladiatorial types were named after some of Rome's main enemies, such as the Samnites, Gauls and Thracians. By the imperial period gladiatorial ranks had broadened to include:

- condemned criminals, sentenced to fight in the arena (*ad ludum damnati*);
- prisoners of war, far fewer in number than in the last two centuries BC;
- slaves, some of whom were bought by trainers (*lanistae*) from dissatisfied owners who looked upon this as a form of punishment, a practice finally banned by Hadrian;
- free gladiators (*auctorati*). These were individuals who voluntarily signed up with a *lanista* for a fixed duration, usually five years. It was possible to earn a respectable sum for retirement if a man survived the

arena, but, as with convicted criminals, once released from service their *infamia* debarred them from future public office.

The early combats presumably ended in the death of one of the combatants in each pairing, but as gladiators became big business, this was far less common. It took years to train a good gladiator; thus very few contests between trained gladiators were to the death. Some scholars have suggested that death was the result of as many as 50% of all combats, but most now agree that the figure should be much lower, at 5-10%. It was possible for a gladiator to gain great popularity and wealth and retire very comfortably on the proceeds. Although gladiators, along with actors and charioteers, were considered *infames*, i.e. they had very low status, they were very much admired by the public for their skill. Rather like modern Spanish bullfighters, display of skill, as well as military *virtus*, by the combatants was part of the enjoyment of the spectacle for the spectators, although there was also the enticing possibility of the shedding of human blood to add an extra *frisson* to the occasion.

There is a certain amount of literary evidence for an enrolment oath taken by those voluntarily becoming gladiators, similar to the *sacramentum* taken by soldiers on enlistment (Seneca, *Letters* 37). Petronius (*Satyricon* 117.5) recorded the oath, which he rendered in an exaggerated style, as follows:

> We solemnly swear to obey (the *lanista*) in everything. To endure burning, imprisonment, flogging and even death by the sword.

The phrase, 'Those who are about to die salute you' (*morituri te salutant*), apparently uttered by gladiators before combat and made so famous by Hollywood depictions of the arena, is actually a popular myth. It occurs once in Latin literature, in Suetonius' account of Claudius' staged naval battle on the Fucine Lake in AD 52 (*Claudius* 21), and was actually the words of condemned prisoners manning the galleys.

Types of gladiator

The names of twenty or so different types of gladiators are known from literary and epigraphic sources, but few can be described in detail. 'Gladiator' literally means a man who fights with a sword, but the term came to refer to someone who fought in the arena against another person in single combat, no matter how he was armed. From the second century BC gladiators were trained in specific fighting styles and they would usually be paired with an opponent who was differently armed.

This was a further test of skill, while maintaining the fairness of the fight, and introduced an element of unpredictability to the outcome. All gladiators had some kind of dagger, which could be used for the final killing blow, and many wore helmets. Artistic evidence, such as the Tiber Relief (see Fig. 8), indicates that until the early first century AD these helmets did not have visors to provide protection to the face or a measure of anonymity.

The earliest attested gladiators are the Samnite, the Gaul, and the Thracian. The Samnites and the Gauls were Rome's traditional enemies of the mid-Republic. All were originally lightly armed, reflecting the native fighting style, but by the first century AD all were heavily armed with a shield and arm and leg protection; the torso was left bare.

Samnite/*hoplomachus*. The Samnite was probably originally a light-armed gladiator fighting in the Samnite fashion with shield and spear; by the end of the Republic he was one of the standard heavily armed gladiators. At the beginning of the imperial period he was known as the *hoplomachus* (Greek for 'heavily armed fighter'), probably because it was felt inappropriate to equate an Italian with the indignity of the arena. He wore a large crested helmet with a visor, and a thigh-length greave on his left leg. He is sometimes shown with a large rectangular shield of the type used by legionaries, but he was more often equipped with a small round shield, hence the need for protection on his left leg. He was armed with a long spear and a short dagger. The *hoplomachus* usually fought against either the *murmillo* or the Thracian, both heavily, but differently, armed gladiators.

Gaul/*murmillo*. The Gaul, like the Samnite, was probably originally lightly armed using the traditional Gallic weapons: a long flat shield with a spindle boss and a cut-and-thrust sword with a straight blade about 60 centimetres long. By the late Republic he was armed with a slashing sword and had acquired a helmet, a short greave on his left leg, and segmental arm protection (*manicae*) on his sword arm. He carried a large oblong curving shield. At the beginning of the imperial period, the Gaul, just like the Samnite, underwent a change of name, to *murmillo*, derived from the Greek word for the fish (*murmuros*) which decorated his helmet.

Thracian (*Thraex*). The Thracian first appeared in the arena in the second century BC when Thrace (roughly equivalent to Bulgaria) first came into contact with Rome. Armed with a broad-brimmed helmet, a relatively small, usually rectangular shield, and two thigh-length greaves, the Thracian is recognisable in the iconography by the distinctive shape of his weapon, the native Danubian curved short sword (*sica*) (see Fig.

26). This was a particularly vicious weapon that could efficiently rip open flesh, causing very significant bleeding. The Thracian was renowned for his speed and dexterity, and usually fought the *murmillo* or the *hoplomachus*.

Secutor. The *secutor* ('pursuer') is the most easily identified of the gladiatorial swordsmen. He was armed with the curved rectangular legionary shield (*scutum*) and sword (*gladius*) and usually wore a segmental arm-guard (*manica*) on his sword arm. His smooth, egg-shaped helmet with simple metal crest and no brim was unique and appears to have been specially designed so that it would not be caught in the net of the *secutor*'s main opponent, the *retiarius*. Such an enclosed helmet must have significantly impaired the gladiator's sight and hearing, not to mention his ability to breathe. However, it also gave the wearer a rather sinister appearance, contrasting with the unprotected head of his most usual opponent, the *retiarius*.

Retiarius. The *retiarius* or net man (from the Latin *rete*, net) is probably the most famous of the gladiator types, although strictly speaking, as he did not use a sword, he should not be described as a 'gladiator' at all. The *retiarius* was very lightly armed and therefore could move swiftly and easily, providing a good balance and contrast to the fighting style of the *secutor*. He had no head protection and wore only defensive armour on his left arm with an upstanding plate (*galerus*) affording some protection to face and shoulder. Some artistic depictions show armour covered the left side of the torso as well. The *retiarius* would lead with his left and could tuck his chin into his left shoulder, thus reducing the area of the head as a target. His main weapons were those of a fisherman: the net and the trident. He also carried a dagger. The long trident allowed the *retiarius* to keep a safe distance from his opponent, who had to avoid being caught in his net and then finished off by his dagger, while he tried to slash the exposed arm or legs or stab at the torso of the *retiarius*. The pitting of the swift-footed *retiarius* against the much slower moving, heavily armoured *secutor* could produce very exciting connoisseur bouts and came to be the most popular combination in gladiatorial shows.

Contraretiarius and ***arbelas*-gladiator.** This type of gladiator seems to have fought specifically against the *retiarius*. He is attested in epigraphic evidence (as *contraretiarius*) from the western empire (e.g. *CIL* 6.631; 33983, both from Rome), although we have no depiction to identify specific weaponry. Indeed, it may be that this was an alternative name for the *secutor*. However, a type of gladiator is attested artistically in the eastern empire, equipped with a half-moon shaped knife (Greek *arbêlas*)

attached to an armguard which fitted onto the left arm, admirably suited to cut through the net of the *retiarius*; he also wore a helmet similar to that worn by a *secutor*, and carried a dagger or short sword. He seems to have worn a thigh-length cuirass of scale-armour (although some modern scholars identify it as quilted).

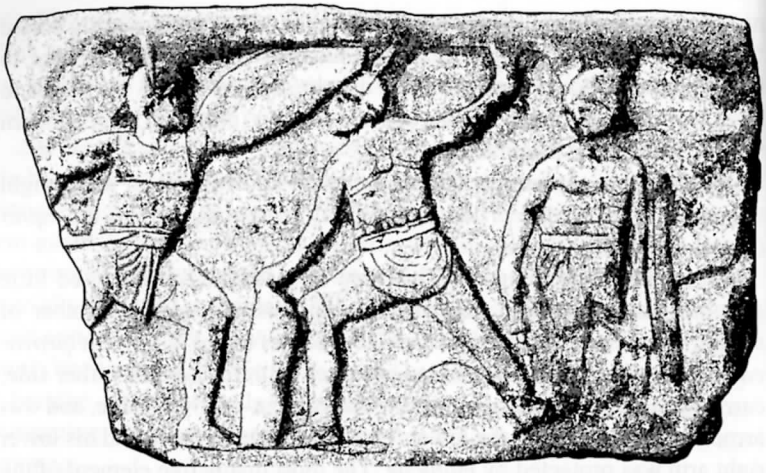
Two types of gladiator which are less well-known, both of which fight their own type, are the *provocator* (plural *provocatores*) and the *eques* (plural *equites*).

Provocator ('challenger'). This type of gladiator has attracted little attention among modern scholars, but he does appear in a number of artistic depictions, for example the Tiber Relief (see Fig. 8). The *provocator* typically wore a masked helmet often with feathers on either side, carried a large shield that was rectangular or a cut-off oval shape, and was armed with a sword. On the lower left leg he wore a greave and his lower right arm was protected by *manicae*. The most distinctive element of the *provocator* was the rectangular chest-plate, the *cardiophylax*, which was held in place on his upper chest by leather straps. No other gladiator wore protective armour on the torso.

Eques ('horseman'). The *equites* are mostly shown in artistic depictions on foot, but in fact (as their name implies) they were horsemen on white horses (Isidore of Seville, *Origins* 18.53). They usually fought the opening bouts in a day's programme and can be seen at the beginning of the procession on a funerary relief from Pompeii and now in the Naples Museum. Later in the same frieze they are fighting on foot. They would start off on horseback armed with spears and carrying round shields, as shown on a stucco relief, the 'Tomb of Umbricius' outside the Herculaneum Gate at Pompeii, but would dismount to end the bout using swords. Their helmets were a simple but distinctive bowler-hat shape with a wide brim and mask and decorated with feathers; they are depicted in a number of mosaics, in particular the Zliten mosaic from North Africa and a mosaic now in Madrid but found on the Via Appia in Rome.

The Tiber Relief (Fig. 8)

A sculpted panel found in the River Tiber between Rome and Ostia and dated to between 30 and 10 BC gives a number of insights into contemporary gladiatorial combat. Three combatants involved in two bouts are shown. An inscription running along the top of the relief gives the professional record of each gladiator and the outcome of the particular fight. On the left are two gladiators; they each wear a helmet with feathers on either side, a heavily folded loincloth with a broad metal belt, and an over-the-knee greave on their left leg. They are equipped with a sword



8. The Tiber Relief, 30-10 BC.

and large rectangular shield with rounded corners, and their right forearms are protected by *manicae*. The breastplates on their upper chests identify them as *provocatores*. The inscription above the left-hand figure reads IVL VVV (*Iulianus pugnarum V coronarum V, vicit*), which identifies him as a member of the *ludus Iulianus*, a prominent gladiatorial school of the early imperial period, originally founded by Julius Caesar at Capua. This was his fifth fight and in all five he had been awarded a *corona*, a victor's laurel wreath bestowed not just for victory, but also for outstanding feats of arms. Most importantly, he was the victor in this bout also. The poses of the figures also clearly indicate his victory; his opponent, Clemens, has his arm raised and has dropped his shield, both iconographic shorthand for a gladiator's surrender. The inscription records that he was reprieved (M, *missus*) and allowed to leave the arena alive. *Missio* was granted to gladiators who, although defeated, were deemed to have fought bravely. To the right of the relief is another fight, but the slab is broken and only one opponent is clearly depicted. He is different from the other two. His torso is bare and he wears a helmet with flowing crest and is probably a *murmillo*. His large shield is lowered and his sword is lowered and dropping to the ground. His pose indicates that he also is defeated and the letters MΘ to the right of his head that he received *missio* but later died of his wounds. (The Θ, standing for *thanatos*, 'death' in Greek, is the *theta nigra*, the black theta indicating death in the arena.) Of his victorious opponent only a small rectangular shield can be discerned and an over-the-knee greave, but he may have been a Thracian. One further important

point is that none of the gladiators on this relief have enclosed helmets with face-masks. Face-plates for gladiatorial helmets are only really found from the later Augustan period onward. It has been suggested that this was to de-personalise the wearer for both his opponent and the audience, but protection would have been a much more important consideration; bloody face wounds may have disrupted the bout in the way that sometimes happens in boxing matches.

Gladiatorial armour from Pompeii

The largest body of surviving gladiatorial equipment was discovered in 1766/7 in the excavations of the portico attached to the theatre at Pompeii which at the time of the eruption of Vesuvius was serving as a gladiatorial barracks. Most pieces are now in the National Archaeological Museum of Naples. Among the finds were fiftteen gladiator helmets, of which eleven had lavish embossed decoration and all were intended to have face-plates; six single short greaves; one single medium-length greave; five pairs of long over-the-knee greaves; three shoulder guards; and a small round shield. The helmets in particular are very ornate and include in their embossed decoration scenes from the arena and allusions to military victory. The decoration is so elaborate that it has caused some scholars to suggest that this equipment could only have been used for the parade (*pompa*) at the beginning of a day's games. There is no identifiable damage on the equipment and, it is claimed, it is too heavy for actual use. However, the elaborate and showy decoration is exactly what is needed in the arena; display, not just of fighting skills, but also of equipment is an important part of the *spectacula*. The embossed decoration in copper alloy also served to increase defence through corrugation. The swords, which are stabbing weapons, are quite light but would have caused damage to unprotected parts of body; but it was important for the bout to last so that the spectators could enjoy the display of fighting skills between two differently armed but evenly matched opponents, not to be over in a matter of minutes. In fact it was only the trident of the *retiarius* that could do ferocious damage through armour, and as result the *secutor*'s helmet was thicker than other gladiatorial head protection.

The fact that some parts of the body were armoured and others left unprotected called for specialised fencing styles. It might be thought that leaving the torso bare, the case for nearly all gladiators, would lead to an inevitably short fight, but this does not take into account the visual stimulation of rippling muscles so often referred to in the ancient sources.

Training

Gladiatorial training was closely related to military training methods. At the end of the second century BC the consul Publius Rutilius had employed *lanistae* to train his legionaries using the same methods they used to school gladiators. As fighting displays increased in public significance, so it was important to have a ready supply of fit and skilled gladiators. Gladiatorial training schools (*ludi*) run by *lanistae* are known from the second century BC; such schools are first attested at Capua in Campania and were owned by wealthy Roman aristocratic families. In the late Republic there was a lively trade in gladiators, for example Lentulus Batiatus (Vatia), the nobleman owner of the *ludus* to which Spartacus belonged, was a *speculator* in gladiators for the personal troupes (*familiae*) of members of the Roman aristocracy. Atticus bought a troupe of trained gladiators as a financial investment in 56 BC, which was repaid after just two matches (Cicero, *Atticus* 4.49.2; 8.2). In 49 BC Julius Caesar established his own *ludus* at Capua. In Rome there were four imperial gladiatorial training schools, all probably established by the time of Domitian if not before, the *Ludus Magnus*, *Ludus Dacicus*, *Ludus Gallicus* and *Ludus Matutinus*. All were in the vicinity of the Colosseum and the last was for the training of beast fighters (*venatores*) (see Chapter 4). A procurator of equestrian rank, appointed directly by the emperor, was in charge of each school, which had a full staff of armourers, trainers and doctors. There were up to 2,000 gladiators accommodated in these schools in Rome. Part of the Ludus Magnus, the largest and most important of the training establishments, was situated just metres east of the Colosseum (and connected to it by a tunnel); its full plan is preserved on the *Forma Urbis Romae*, but part of the building can still be seen. This took the form of an oval arena about three-quarters of the size of the Colosseum arena, surrounded by rooms on a number of levels; a small bank of seats allowed for about 3,000 spectators, and an opportunity for Roman matrons to experience, at close quarters, the rippling muscles of gladiators, which according to the literary sources, provided such a draw for them. Privately owned *ludi* and gladiatorial *familiae* were not allowed in the city of Rome but clearly existed elsewhere in the empire, and the *lanista* of the school could either hire out gladiators or stage games himself.

By the later first century AD a rank structure for gladiators had emerged, giving clear evidence of the highly organised nature of the training. The novice (*novicus*) was a new arrival at the *ludus*; the *tiro* was the recruit who was felt ready for his first fight; having survived his first fight, the gladiator was termed *veteranus*. The gladiator would train initially using

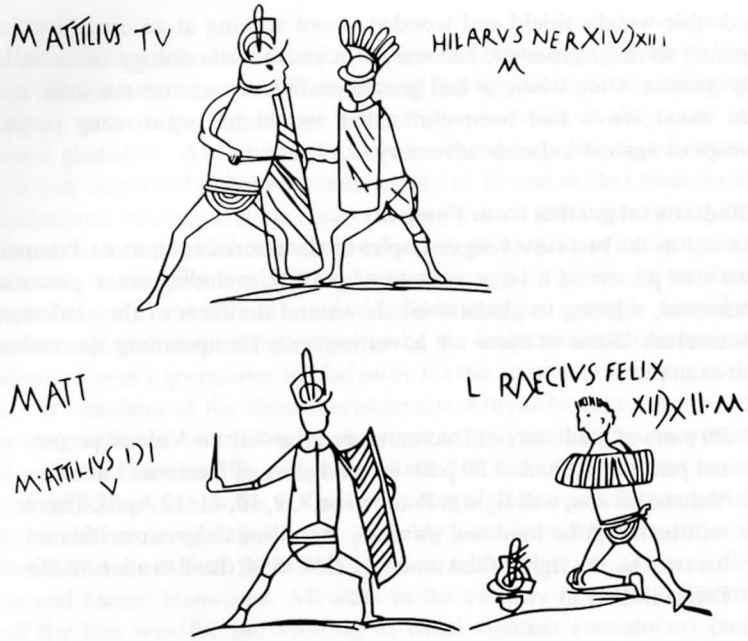
a double-weight shield and wooden sword striking at an upright stake (*palus*) set in the ground to become proficient in methodology and to build up stamina. Only when he had gained proficiency against the stake and his worst errors had been eliminated, would he begin using proper weapons against a chosen adversary.

Gladiatorial graffiti from Pompeii

As well as the best surviving examples of gladiatorial equipment, Pompeii has also preserved a large amount of graffiti, including some pictorial examples, relating to gladiatorial shows and the form of the gladiators themselves. Some of these are advertisements for upcoming spectacles, for example:

> 20 pairs of gladiators of Decimus Lucretius Satrius Valens, perpetual priest of Nero and 10 pairs of gladiators of Decimus Lucretius Valens, his son, will fight at Pompeii on 8, 9, 10, 11, 12 April. There will be a regular hunt and awnings. Aemilius Celer wrote this on his own by the light of the moon. (*CIL* 4.3884, dated to after AD 50: Pompeii III.vi.2)

Other graffiti are rather like form cards, naming the gladiators, giving their previous record and the outcome of their most recent combat. A particularly interesting series, with accompanying pictures, was found on a tomb outside the Porta Nuceria. Some refer to a gladiator, Marcus Attilius (Fig. 9). In his first fight, as a *tiro* (*CIL* 4.10238a), he was successful against the veteran fighter Hilarus of the Neronian school, who had won thirteen out of his fourteen previous bouts. Presumably because of his conduct in this particular fight, as well as his track record, Hilarus was granted *missio*; he lived to fight another day. In his next fight, which was in a set of games at nearby Nola, Hilarus was victorious (*CIL* 4.10237). Attilius' next fight was against another veteran fighter, Lucius Raecius Felix, and also ended in success for him and a reprieve for his opponent (*CIL* 4.10236a) (Fig. 9). This graffito illustrates an interesting convention in gladiatorial iconography; the defeated gladiator is shown falling to his knee, swordless and helmetless, the shield held at an angle so as to be totally useless. This can be seen in a number of other artistic representations, including the Tiber Relief and the Zliten mosaic. Another graffito (*CIL* 4.8056) appears to show a left-handed gladiator, Albanus, a southpaw in boxing parlance, very definitely dominating his opponent (Fig. 10).



9. Graffiti from Tomb 14EN in the Nuceria Gate necropolis, Pompeii, detailing the first two combats of the career of Marcus Attilius. *Above*: 'Marcus Attilius, novice, victor; Hilarus, Neronian, fought 14, 12 victories, reprieved' (*CIL* 4.10238a). *Below*: 'Marcus Attilius, fought 1, 1 victory, victor. Lucius Raecius Felix, fought 12, won 12, reprieved' (*CIL* 4.10236a).

10. Graffito from Pompeii showing a left-handed (*scaeva*) gladiator. It reads 'Severus, ex-slave, 13 victories reprieved(?). Albanus ex-slave, left-hander 19 victories, won' (*CIL* 4. 8056).

Gladiators at Ephesus

In 1993 an amazing archaeological discovery was made in excavations outside the east end of the stadium at Ephesus (Turkey): that of the only securely identified gladiator graveyard. Three gladiatorial gravestones were found *in situ*, all dating to the turn of the second to third century AD; a fourth tombstone belonged to a female slave. The human remains from this cemetary comprised several thousand bones and bone fragments, and the cemetery had clearly been in use over a long period of time. Forensic studies have shown that at least sixty-eight individuals were represented; all but two were male between the ages of 20 and 30 who had died from wounds received in combat. A number of injuries were ante mortem and had healed. From the examples of acute trauma, the head was the most frequently damaged area, followed by the torso. This is particularly interesting given that most gladiators appear to have worn helmets; indeed, the neck muscles of these Ephesus gladiators were highly developed, suggesting the regular wearing of a heavy helmet. Perhaps the men's helmets were removed at some stage during the fight, probably for the *coup de grâce*. One particular head wound was caused by a trident and demonstrated that the central prong of the weapon was barbed.

From the shape and size of the bones it is quite clear that the training was harsh and intensive, the enlarged bones indicating heavy muscular development. There is also evidence for the kind of sports injuries we know of from modern athletes, but it is evident that the training was properly monitored; there are no stress fractures which would occur from overly harsh regimes and medical care for broken bones was very good. The skeletons also give information on the diet of the gladiators which was high in carbohydrates such as vegetables and pulses, particularly barley and beans. Interestingly, according to Pliny (*Natural History* 18.4), gladiators were called 'barleymen' (*hordearii*), presumably because that grain formed an important part of their diet. Foods such as these would have allowed the gladiators to develop a layer of fat which would have provided some protection against body blows and minor cuts. However, weapons such as the Thracian *sica* could still cause horrific wounds and major enervation through blood loss.

Women and gladiatorial display

Female gladiators (*gladiatrices*) were far less common than their male counterparts; the evidence for them is sparse and often ambiguous, but they did exist and their rarity gave them extra popularity with the audience. A senatorial decree of AD 11 laid down a minimum age for freeborn individuals before they could sign up as a gladiator or act on the stage, 25

years for men and 20 years for women. A few years later further legislation forbade upper-class women from becoming gladiators; it appears that they had been unable to resist the lure of the arena. Evidence suggests that women fought Amazon-style with one breast bared, emphasising their totally un-Roman female behaviour – and making them even more attractive to the Roman male. Both Martial (*Epigrams* 6.6.7) and Juvenal (*Satires* 6.251-67) poke fun at the butch nature and over-developed physiques of female gladiators, emphasising how out of the ordinary such fighters were considered to be by the Romans. Tacitus (*Annals* 15.32) drew attention to the high numbers of high-status women who appeared in the arena during Nero's reign. While acknowledging the lavish nature of the display, Tacitus was unequivocal about the disgrace of their crimes against class and gender. Not only were *gladiatrices*, no matter what their status, acting against Roman norms of female behaviour, but they were also somehow aping the laudable physical courage and male qualities (*virtus*) displayed by male gladiators. A particularly famous marble sculptural relief from Halicarnassus (modern Bodrum, Turkey, and now in the British Museum), depicts two female gladiators, neither apparently wearing a helmet; there is a helmet shown on either side of the accompanying inscription, which identifies them as Amazonia and Achillia. They both carry swords and rectangular shields, and wear the arm and leg defences similar to those worn by male gladiators. According to the inscription they were both granted a reprieve, presumably as a result of their good performance. According to Dio (76.16), in AD 200 Septimius Severus forbade women to fight in single combat.

Although the evidence for women fighting in the arena presents difficulties, it is quite clear that some women (and high-status women drew particular comment) much admired men who fought in the arena, at least for their manly courage, virility and physical attributes. Juvenal (*Satires* 6.110 -15) recounted the story of Eppia, a noblewoman, who had amorous feelings for a gladiator and eloped with him to Egypt even though he was battered and scarred from many fights; as Juvenal says, it can all be explained by the fact that he is a gladiator. A modern parallel can be found in the attraction and manageability of Sumo wrestlers.

The amphitheatre

Gladiatorial displays are first and foremost associated with the amphitheatre, but as a permanent building type it was a development of the late Republic. In Republican Rome, gladiatorial displays were staged in the political and symbolic heart of the city, the Forum Romanum. It has been suggested that the ovoid plan of early permanent amphitheatres was

modelled on the shape of the wooden seating that was erected for spectators of these displays around this piazza. Under the paving of the Forum was found a central corridor with four lateral arms bisecting it at regular distances 15 metres apart. The alignment of the central corridor is parallel with the Basilica Iulia, which was inaugurated in 46 BC, suggesting that the galleries may have been installed at about the same time. They gave access into the Forum through twelve shaft openings. Traces of installations in these galleries are reminiscent of the system of cages and pulleys that would later be installed beneath some developed amphitheatres of the imperial period for winching performers and animals up into the arena. To improve facilities for the spectators further, Julius Caesar apparently stretched awnings over the whole forum on several occasions (Pliny, *Natural History* 19.23).

As an explanation for the permanent amphitheatre's elliptical form, Pliny the Elder (*Natural History* 36.116-20) offered the extraordinary building put up by C. Scribonius Curio in 52 BC for the funeral games in honour of his father. Scribonius 'built close to each other two very large wooden theatres, each poised and balanced on a revolving pivot. During the forenoon, a performance of a play was given in both of them and they faced in opposite directions so that the two casts should not drown out each other's words. Then, at a certain point the theatres were revolved (and it is agreed that after the first few days this was done with some of the spectators actually remaining in their seats), their corners met, and thus Curio provided an amphitheatre in which he produced fights between gladiators.'

There are a number of permanent late Republican period amphitheatres in Italy, but the only one which can be securely dated was constructed at Pompeii and dedicated between 70 and 65 BC (*CIL* X.852). C. Quinctius Valgus and Marcus Porcius, *duoviri* of the new colony established at Pompeii in 80 BC, paid for the structure with their own money in accordance with their magistracies. Interestingly, the building is referred to as '*spectacula*' in the inscription. The permanent amphitheatre is an architectural form exclusively associated with the Romans, recognisable by its elliptical plan and arena, which is completely surrounded by seating. This is the literal meaning of the Greek word *amphitheatron*, which, from the time of Augustus, gradually came to be applied to this type of building. The amphitheatre at Pompeii was built on the eastern side of the city just within the town wall, and measures approximately 135 x 105 metres. It does not have the complicated system of vaulted substructures characteristic of many later amphitheatres, and the support for the seating was formed by upcast from digging the arena. At the upper level ran a retaining

wall strengthened by external buttresses and incorporating external staircases. A famous wall painting found in the peristyle garden of the House of Actius Anicetus at Pompeii provides a unique contemporary view of this building. The occasion is a riot which took place between rival fans in AD 59, one of the earliest ancient examples of spectator violence in a sporting context. The concession stands outside the amphitheatre are very clear, but most importantly the fresco supplies the clearest depiction of the awnings (*vela*, *velaria*) which provided shelter to the audience, the same awnings which are often mentioned in advertisements in Pompeii for gladiatorial games. A number of amphitheatres, and theatres, have external corbels for seating the masts which held the ropes for such awnings, but the exact practicalities of how these functioned are still not understood.

Many of the earliest amphitheatres in Italy were provided in towns that had particularly close ties with Rome, notably *coloniae* founded for army veterans, for example Capua and Paestum. Such centres also provided the context for the earliest amphitheatres in the provinces, for example at Carmona in Spain, Corinth and Antioch-on-the-Orontes.

In Rome the first permanent amphitheatre was that of T. Statilius Taurus, dedicated as late as 30 or 29 BC by one of Augustus' generals in the southern Campus Martius, and financed by *manubiae* awarded to him from the triumph he celebrated in 34 BC for securing the province of Africa for Octavian (Dio 51.23.1). Little is known about it except that it was small and built of stone and wood; Dio referred to it as a hunting theatre (*theatron kunêgetikon*) and probably it was never used as a fully public venue. It was destroyed in the great fire in AD 64. Several temporary amphitheatres were built in the city: Julius Caesar's in the Forum Romanum, and a particularly sumptuous one by Nero in AD 57 where it is claimed he even held aquatic displays (Suetonius, *Nero* 12; Tacitus, *Annals* 13.31).

The most famous, and most inspirational, of all amphitheatres in the Roman world is the Flavian Amphitheatre, better known today as the Colosseum in Rome. This was begun by Vespasian in AD 75 on the site of the drained lake of Nero's Domus Aurea. Though not fully completed, it was dedicated in AD 80 by Titus after his father's death. Predictably, it is the largest of all Roman amphitheatres with outer dimensions of 188 x 156 metres; the arena measures 80 x 54 metres. It had an estimated seating capacity of 45-55,000. The concrete foundations were 12 metres deep, supporting the 80 main load-bearing travertine piers on which rested the façade, which itself rose to a height of nearly 50 metres. At each level of the façade the arches were framed by engaged columns as in the Theatre of Marcellus, the bottom storey being of the Doric order, the second Ionic and the third Corinthian. The fourth storey, possibly not completed until

11. Amphitheatre, Nimes (France).

the reign of Domitian, was a plain wall with windows alternating with Corinthian pilasters. Around the top of this level were two rows of corbels, the mast supports for the ropes for the *velaria*. Beneath the now lost wooden floor of the arena is an elaborate system of subterranean passages and chambers where animals and gladiators were kept in readiness and winched up to the arena level or let up along ramps. Such substructures and their access points can be better appreciated in the amphitheatres at Capua and Pozzuoli in Campania. Here the arena floors of concrete (*opus caementicium*) are still in place and the trap doors for hauling up animal cages can still be clearly seen.

To judge from the number of amphitheatres surviving in Italy, North Africa, the Danube area and the western provinces, as well as much epigraphic and sculptural evidence, gladiatorial displays were extremely popular in those areas. Amphitheatres occur in large numbers, although with much variation in size and design, for example in Italy, Verona, Alba Fucens and Syracuse; in Spain, France and Germany, Mérida (Fig. 21), Nimes (Fig. 11), Lyon and Trier; and in North Africa, Carthage, Lepcis Magna and El Djem. Amphitheatres were also built in certain locations in Britain, for example Silchester and Cirencester. Such structures were also often found associated with legionary bases and other military installations.

Gladiators in the eastern provinces

By comparison, there are far fewer purpose-built amphitheatres known in the eastern empire (Figs 12 and 13). Consequently, an outdated view held that gladiatorial displays and their necessary venues were rare in the

12. Amphitheatre, Pergamum (Turkey).

13. Amphitheatre, Ptolemais (Libya).

eastern provinces. The view that the Greek provinces of the Roman empire were somehow more 'civilised' than Italy and the western provinces, and therefore could not have indulged in such blood sports has been a popular one, particularly among academics, since the nineteenth century. However, there is an undeniable wealth of evidence from the eastern provinces for gladiatorial and other arena displays, in the form of literary notices, epigraphy and iconography, as well as now the excavated remains of the gladiators themselves. Indeed, a large body of the sculptural and epi-

graphic material, particularly rich for Greece and Asia Minor, has been available since its publication by Louis Robert in the 1940s.

The earliest recorded instance of gladiatorial displays in the eastern Mediterranean was in a Hellenistic royal context when the Seleucid king Antiochus IV Epiphanes staged games at Daphne near Antioch in 166 BC (Polybius 30.25-6; Livy 41.20.10-13). It is clear from the accounts that such combats were unusual at this time; Polybius opined that Antiochus was aiming to emulate Aemilius Paulus, the victorious Roman general at the Battle of Pydna in north-east Greece just a few years before. The shows, which included both gladiatorial and animal displays, lasted thirty days and were equal in lavish scale to contemporary displays in Rome, though, according to Livy, at first these displays caused more alarm than anything else among the local population. Significantly, the gladiators were imported from Rome.

Twenty-two purpose-built amphitheatres have so far been identified in the East (this includes a number in the Danubian region, for example Diocletianopolis, Marcianopolis and Serdica). The earliest example was constructed at Antioch-on-the-Orontes, according to literary sources by Julius Caesar (Malalas 216.21-217.4; Libanius, *Orations* 2.219). Malalas refers to it as 'a place of single combat' (*monomachikon*). The simple form of this building, partly rock-cut, with no arena substructures, was probably similar to other contemporary amphitheatres known in Italy and the West, for example at Paestum and at Carmona. None of the amphitheatres in the Roman East have the monumentality of such structures in the West as at Nimes in the south of France, Mérida in Spain, or El Djem in Tunisia, except perhaps Pergamum (Fig. 12) or Cyzicus. Only Eleutheropolis in southern Israel has been properly excavated.

Not surprisingly, some of the earliest evidence, within a Roman context, for gladiatorial spectacles and animal displays in the eastern provinces is in connection with the cult of the deified emperors. An early first-century AD priest list of the cult of the Deified Augustus and Roma (*OGIS* 533) survives inscribed on one wall within the porch of the main cult temple in Ankara (Turkey). The form of some of the names of the priests indicates they are Galatians (e.g. Albiorix, Ateporix), of local descent, and their benefactions during their period of office are laid out in full. Gladiatorial games were the most prominent form of entertainment provided, though animal displays, including bull-fights, are also often mentioned. The presence of gladiatorial schools (*ludi*) and troupes (*familiae*) can probably also be associated with those cities in which provincial festivals were held, for example at Pergamum, Smyrna and Cyzicus in Turkey (*CIG* 3123; Galen VI.529; XIII.654; XIV.599-600). The *ludus* at

Pergamum was made famous by Galen, who was physician there for several years early in his career; later he became the court physician of Marcus Aurelius in the middle of the second century AD. There is also abundant epigraphic evidence from Aphrodisias for investment in gladiators. Tiberius Claudius Paulinus, high priest in the city during the first century AD, owned a troupe of gladiators (*monomachoi*) and condemned convicts (*katadikoi*). Another inscription mentions the gladiatorial *familia* of Zeno Hypsicles that comprised not only single combatants and convicts condemned to fight, but also bull-catchers (*taurokathaptai*).

In many of the cities of the East amphitheatres were never provided and other entertainment structures were adapted to accommodate gladiatorial and animal displays. As early as the first century AD gladiatorial contests were staged in theatres, for example in the Theatre of Dionysus in Athens. Many other theatres, as well as stadia, were adapted to a more multi-purpose function. This was achieved in a number of different ways. For example at Ephesus, the original iron railing around the orchestra was replaced by a wall 2 metres high formed by the removal of the lowest seats. On the other hand, some venues were built to be multi-purpose right from the start, for example the Hadrianic theatre at Stobi in Macedonia and the later first century AD stadium at Aphrodisias in Turkey, to accommodate a whole range of different types of entertainment.

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