

GLADIATORS: THE DEADLIEST
THEATRICAL PERFORMERS

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Brandishing their weapons in salute, two men stand on the bloodstained, sand-covered floor of the Colosseum before the Emperor and the masses shouting, "*Ave Caesar, morituri te salutant!*" ("Hail Caesar! We, who are about to die, salute you!") They are criminals, slaves, prisoners of war, former soldiers seeking fame and fortune, common men desperately searching for an escape from their looming debt, yet they transformed themselves into the deadliest of fighting machines and performers—they are the gladiators of Rome. The recognition the gladiators of Ancient Rome earned as great theatrical performers of the age was a result of the grueling training they endured, the deadly weapons and armor they wielded, and the brutal environment that they were thrust into and forced to fight for their survival.

As new, upstart civilizations are wont to do, the Roman Empire borrowed many of its cultural practices from the surrounding, and subsequently conquered, nations. The Etruscans, a civilization living in the northern part of the Italian peninsula, supposedly first began the practice of gladiatorial games as part of their funeral rituals (Brown 1). As Rome expanded, the lands that once belonged *to the Etruscans shifted into the hands of Rome, and just as the Etruscan people were assimilated, so too were their cultural practices, including gladiatorial games. The earliest example of Roman funeral gladiatorial games was organized by the sons of Brutus Pera and took place in 264 B.C.E. in the Forum Boarium, a cattle market, where an unspecified number of pairs of gladiators fought in honor of the brothers' dead father (Brown 1).

Gradually gladiatorial games became separated from the context of only funeral games and were staged by the upper class as a means to display their wealth, power and influence within a community. According to Shelby Brown, a classical archaeologist and Vice-President for Education and Outreach of the Archaeological Institute of America, during the mid-60s B.C.E. before he became the dictator of Rome, Julius Caesar held lavish public theatrical performances, banquets, parades and games. These games included 160 pairs of gladiators in order to cement his extreme popularity with the masses (Brown 2). The popularity of the games spread like wildfire, and soon all throughout the Empire gladiatorial games were being held as displays of wealth and power. The Roman rulers began to realize the potential of the games as devices of control, believing they could keep the plebians, or middle and lower-classes, content by giving them “bread and games” (Folliant 1).

Some Roman emperors went to great lengths to gain the support of the people, even to the point of competing in the games. One of the most famous, or infamous depending on the viewpoint, is the Emperor-gladiator Commodus, who participated in over one thousand matches and enjoyed shooting sickle-headed arrows to decapitate ostriches during the hunts held at the games (Folliant 2). In 192 C.E. he held lavish games which he participated in that lasted fourteen days. Dio Cassius, a Roman historian, described his first hand experience witnessing these games:

On the first day [Commodus] killed a hundred bears all by himself, shooting down at them from the railing of the balustrade; for the

whole amphitheater had been divided up by means of two intersecting cross-walls which supported the gallery that ran its entire length, the purpose being that the beasts, divided into four herds, might more easily be speared at short range from any point...On the first day, then, the events that I have described took place. On the other days he descended to the arena from his place above and cut down all the domestic animals that approached him and some also that were led up to him or were brought before him in nets. He also killed a tiger, a hippopotamus and an elephant. Having performed these exploits, he would retire, but later, after luncheon, would fight as a gladiator. The form of contest that he practiced and the armor that used were those of the *secutores* as they were called: he held the shield in his right hand and the wooden sword in his left, and indeed took great pride in the fact that he was left-handed. His antagonist would be some athlete or perchance a gladiator armed with a wand; sometimes it was a man that he himself had challenged, sometimes one chosen by the people; for in this as well as other matters he put himself on equal footing with the other gladiators, except for the fact that they enter the lists for a very small sum, whereas Commodus received a million sesterce from the gladiatorial fun each day. (Futrell 116)

Not everyone approved of the emperor participating and competing in the games. Dio Cassius goes onto describe one senator who refused to attend the games

because he would not watch the son of Marcus Aurelius “conducting himself in such a manner” and was subsequently put to death (Futrell 117). In order to maintain the level of excitement experienced, the people who funded the games, known as muneraii, had to make the games more lavish and elaborate to slake the crowds’ lust for blood.

One of the grandest and most lavish of games were those that were held in 249 C.E., in celebration of the one thousand years anniversary of the founding of Rome, where over two thousand gladiators fought in the Colosseum, and thirty-two elephants, a dozen tigers, more than fifty lions and six hippopotami were among the numerous animals butchered as part of the games (Follian 2).

As time passed, the magnificent gladiatorial games became too expensive for the muneraii to hold on a regular basis and were soon replaced with cheaper, but equally exciting animal hunts. The final blow was dealt to the games in 404 C.E. when Emperor Honorius closed the remaining gladiator schools, and no more gladiators would be “butchered to make a Roman holiday” (Follian 4). The era of the gladiators met its end.

The popularity of gladiatorial games catapulted the participants into celebrity status as they gained notoriety on the sands of the arena. “If they were good, the gladiators became heroes,” says Professor Fritz Krinzinger, director of the Austrian Archaeological Institute. “They were the Schumachers of the ancient world. They were in danger every time they performed, and they were ready to give their lives for sport” (Follian 4). With their great fame and popularity, the women of the Roman Empire swooned at the thought of their prowess and

viewed them as sex symbols. Some evidence of their sex symbol status was found in the ruins of the city of Pompeii, where graffiti scrawled on the walls stated things like, “Celadus, one of Octavius’s Thracian gladiators, fought and won three times. The girls swoon over him,” and “Celadus, the Thracian gladiator. Girls think he is magnificent,” (Knapp 275). Many highborn Roman women often sought the company of these lowborn “gods of the arena.” Some less scrupulous lanistas, or managers, were not above indulging these women’s desires, and for a fee the woman could spend the night with the gladiator of her choice. Roman writer, Juvenal recounted one such scandal:

What beauty set Eppia [a senator’s wife] on fire? What youth captured her? What did she see that made her endure being called a *ludia* [gladiator’s woman]? For her darling Sergius had already begun to shave [i.e. he was middle-aged], and to hope for retirement due to a wounded arm. Moreover, there were many deformities on his face; for instance, there was a huge wart on the middle of his nose which was rubbed by his helmet, and a bitter matter dripped continually from one eye. But he was a gladiator: this makes them Hyacinthuses. She preferred this to her children and her country, that woman preferred this to her sister and her husband. The sword is what they love (Futrell 146).

Due to their increasing popularity with women, it is speculated that the Emperor Augustus declared, at the behest of nervous husbands that women were to watch the games “only from the seats that were furthest away” (Follian 4).

Gladiators' sex symbol status was so strong that it was believed that the blood of a fallen gladiator could be used as part of a love potion:

Love spell of attraction performed with the help of heroes or gladiators or those who have died a violent death. Leave a little of the bread which you eat; break it up and form it into seven bite-sized pieces. And go to where heroes and gladiators and those who have died a violent death were slain. Say the spell to the pieces of bread and throw them. And pick up some polluted dirt from the place where you perform the ritual and throw it inside the house of the woman whom you desire, go on home and go to sleep (Knapp 288).

However, not all gladiators were fan favorites and recipients of such affections. In his work *Satyricon*, Roman novelist details a fictional critique of such men:

After all, what has Norbanus [a wealthy Pompeiian] ever done for us? He put on a two-bit gladiatorial show, decrepit men who would have fallen down if you breathed hard on them. I've seen better *beast fighters* than those guys. He killed off some caricatures of mounted fighters – those castrated cocks, one a feckless spawn, yet another bandylegged, and in the third match a man as good as dead, already hacked up badly. There was, I'll admit, a *thrax* who had some gumption, but even he fought strictly by the rules. In short, their manager flogged each and every one after the matches

– and the crowd hollered for him to beat them more! They were little better than runaway slaves! (Knapp 276).

Even the worst gladiators radiated an aura of myth, glory, power and eroticism that enticed the masses and captured their hearts and imaginations.

The training the gladiators of Ancient Rome underwent to transform them into deadly performers could often be just as brutal and life-threatening as the actual bouts themselves. The first gladiators during the time of the Republic were slaves, prisoners of war and criminals, who were sent to train at gladiator schools, or *ludi gladiatorium*, until the time had come for them to meet their end in the numerous arenas across the Empire (“Gladiator Schools”).

As time passed, freeborn men saw that being a gladiator could be extremely lucrative and an opportunity to free themselves from debt, and soon many enrolled themselves in the gladiator schools. Upon their arrival, the prospective gladiators would swear an oath, the *sacramentum gladiatorium*, and entered into a legally binding agreement, known as the *auctoratum gladiatorium*, to “submit to beatings, burnings and death by the sword if they did not perform as required” in exchange for a signing bonus and the prospect of prize money if they were successful (“Gladiator Schools”). A piece of graffiti found in the ruins of Pompey affirms the trend of freeborn men become gladiators stating, “Severus, a freeborn man, has fought thirteen times. ‘Lefty’ Albanus, also freeborn, fought nineteen times and beat Severus!” (Knapp 266). The draw of becoming a gladiator not only offered young freeborn men the opportunity to free themselves from debt, but also to do something that was otherwise unattainable to them, an

opportunity to elevate their status in society. As a gladiator, a freeman would gain “excellence in courage, physical prowess and skill (especially at weapons), and perseverance. By showing himself to be ‘manliness-positive’ he could propel himself to the heights of social adoration for outstanding manliness (what Romans called *virtus*) trumped even money and birth and education when it came to gaining awe” (Knapp 270).

Not everyone who enrolled as a gladiator was actually allowed to train at the school, and fighting as untrained gladiator could mean certain death. A new recruit, called a *novicius*, was first assessed by a *medici*, a medical doctor, to determine whether the man was physically capable of withstanding the rigors of training necessary to become a gladiator (“Gladiator Schools”). If they passed the initial examination by the *medici*, the recruit was passed onto a manager. The manager, or *lanista*, along with the trainers, or *doctores*, would determine what type of gladiator the recruit would be trained as based on the recruit’s physique (“Gladiator Schools”). For example, if a man was larger and had a strong build, they would often place him in the heavily-armed classes, such as Murmillo and Secutores, but if the man were lean and slighter, he would train in a lightly-armed class, such as Retiarii or Thracian. Once the assessments were finished, the recruit would begin training with the *doctores*, who were often retired gladiators and specialized in specific styles of fighting and weapons (“Gladiator Schools”).

The recruit would endure some of the strictest and most sophisticated training regimes of the time. The gladiators trained using weighted wooden weapons in mock bouts and practiced attacking on two-meter poles, called *palus*

buried in the ground (“Gladiator Schools”). These wooden weapons could inflict some lasting wounds. At the discovery in Ephesus, Turkey, some skulls were found with blunt force trauma caused by their own helmets slamming into their heads from the force of the blows from the wooden practice weapons (Fabian 11). The specialized training the fledging gladiators received helped shape them into brilliant entertainers as well as deadly combatants. Gladiators were taught “to use their weapons with ostentatious flourishes, building leaps and spins into their fighting movements. Some even juggled with their weapons in an attempt to please the crowd and thus win the *missio*, or “draw with honor,” in the event of losing the fight” (Matthews 688).

In addition to the training, gladiators followed strict diets that could help determine if they lived or died. The gladiator’s diet was a vegetarian diet, rich in carbohydrates, with the occasional calcium supplement, which allowed the gladiator to build up a protective layer of fat (Curry 1). This layer of fat often kept the gladiator alive when they were wounded. Karl Grossschmidt, a paleopathologist at the Medical University of Vienna, said that, “Gladiators need subcutaneous fat. A fat cushion protects you from cut wounds and shields nerves and blood vessels in a fight. If I get wounded but just in the fatty layer, I can fight on. It doesn’t hurt much, and it looks great for the spectators,” (Curry 1). One of the favored meals was a bean and barley gruel called *sagina*. This staple of their diet led to gladiators earning the nickname *hordearii*, or “barley-men” (Knapp 283).

While it was much better to endure the brutal training than to receive no training at all, even the specialized diet and training did not guarantee the man would survive his time in the arena. In one of the many gladiator cemeteries, there was one tombstone marking the resting place of a twenty-one year old gladiator, who had trained for four years, but died during his fifth match (Follian 3). On the other hand, some gladiators' tombstones boasted that they survived hundreds of bouts and eventually retired from the brutal profession. Without the grueling training the gladiators endured, no doubt many more men would have met their ends at the hands of another gladiator or in the jaws of a wild animal.

Just as the actors of Roman comedies learned to play specific roles within the play, so too did the gladiators. Armed with an array of weapons and armor, the gladiators of Ancient Rome were deadly combatants capable of dispatching their enemies with brutal efficiency. The weapons, armor and tactics used by gladiators were dependent upon the class, or role, of gladiator in which they had been trained. Gladiators were often classified into two general classes: heavily-armed and lightly-armed fighters. These general classes evolved into several sub-classes that were often named for a region and people conquered by the Empire. As with all attempts to classify and categorize there are anomalies. The gladiators who did not fit in either of the categories of heavily-armed or lightly-armed gladiators would be known as specialists.

The earliest class of gladiator was the Samnite, named for the Samnite people of central Italy. The Samnite was the first sub-division of the heavily-armed class, and was armed with weapons and armor similar to those used by

the Samnite army. The Samnite gladiator wielded a *gladius*. The *gladius*, the weapon from which the name gladiator is derived, was a straight, shortsword about twenty-seven inches in length with razor-sharp edges designed to thrust and parry rather than cut and slice (“Gladiator Weapons”).

In addition to *gladius*, the Samnite brought a large shield to battle, though there is some discrepancy as to the shape of the shield. Frescos and historical accounts of the Samnite army suggest that Samnite’s shield was round and “initially, used to fight in a formation similar to the ‘Macedonian phalanx’” (Mattesini 1507). Roman historian Livio purposes another possibility that their shield was trapezoid in shape. “The shape was like this: the upper part which was to protect the chest and shoulders was wider, with a straight edge; the lower part tapering into a wedge, to facilitate movement” (1531).

Appearing in late Republic period, the Provocator was another of the earliest classes of gladiators. Like the Samnite, the Provocator wielded a razor-sharp *gladius* and a large rectangular shield. The shield was a forerunner to the Roman legionnaires’s *scutum*, but was smaller in size. Experts are led to believe this because of the height of the Provocator’s greave, or metal leg guard (Nossov 62). In addition to the shield and greave, the Provocator protected himself by wearing a *cardiophylax*, a large, rectangular or crescent-shaped metal chest plate (61). These style chest plates varied from very plain to elaborately decorative. One example of a more elaborate and decorative *cadiophylax* could be found in the center of a monument from Pompeii were a provocator is depicted victorious with a chest plate consisting “of scales and is adorned with a

relief showing the Gorgon's head. The plate was fastened with leather belts fastened in a cruciform pattern at the back" (61). Perhaps the most distinctive part of any gladiator's armament was his helmet, and the Provocator was no different. The Provocator's helmet originally resembled an early legionnaire's helmet with large cheek guards (Mattesini 1599). As time passed, the helmet's appearance evolved. The cheek guards were replaced by visor and mask with two round, latticed apertures to allow the gladiator to see while defending against a lethal thrust to the eye. In addition to the visor and eye apertures, the neck guard was extended to protect not only the sides of the neck but the back as well (Nossov 62). The Provocator's helmet was often unadorned, lacking a crest or plume, but some were decorated with a single, long feather held vertical by a cup on either side of the helmet (Mattesini 1603).

Just as the weapons and pieces of armor used by the Roman army were tested during gladiatorial bouts, the tactics used by the Provocator were very similar to those used by the Velites of the legions. The Velites were used to "provoking the adversary' and luring them into pre-established strategies" (Mattesini 1563). The Provocator used a similar technique, involving false retreats and quick counterattacks, to catch their opponents fatally off-balance.

Another of the earliest classes of gladiators was the Gallus, a sub-division of the heavily-armed class, which was named for the people of Gaul, located in modern-day France, and armed with the weapons and armor similar to that of those used by Gallic warriors ("Types of Gladiators"). The Gallic weapons of choice consisted of mainly of the *gladius* and occasionally a spear or lance.

As companion to the *gladius*, the Gallus carried a shield called a *scutum*. The *scutum* was a large, rectangular, semi-cylindrical body shield with, whose curved shaped allowed the Gallus to defend himself against attacks from the front and the sides (“Gladiator Armor”). The *scutum* was not only an excellent defensive tool it could be used as an offensive weapon. A sharp metal band ran along the outer edge of the shield, which when swung horizontally the force generated from the centrally located arm could inflict devastating damage to an opponent (Mattesini 1660). While the *scutum* provided the Gallus with some protection, he supplemented his defense with pieces of armor. He wore a smooth, bell-shaped helmet with a visor and decorative crest called a *galea*, which protected his head and neck, an *orcea*, a metal leg guard that ran from below the shin to the knee, and his right arm and wrist were sheathed in a protective wrap of leather and cloth called a *manica* (“Roman Gladiator Armor”). When the country of Gaul was integrated as part of the Empire, it no longer was politically correct to portray as enemy outsiders. This led to many variations of the Gallus.

One of the most famous variations of the Gallus was the Murmillo, nicknamed the “Fish-fighter” because his helmet bore a distinctive crest resembling the dorsal fin of a large fish (Nossov 59). The crest of the Murmillo’s helmet was not the only detail of his equipment that helped distinguish the class from its predecessor, the Gallus. A Murmillo helmet was found with a unique silver finish resembling the silver of fish scales (59).

The technique used by the Gallus and Murmillo was one of extreme patience. The gladiator would hunker down behind the great defenses provided by his armor and *scutum* and wait for the opportune time to strike. According to historians, “the blows by the ‘Murmillo’ were usually few but decisive” (Mattesini 1680).

Another sub-division of the heavily-armed classes was the Secutores. The Secutor, whose name translates as “the chaser,” derives from the technique they employed of chasing their quicker, lightly-armed opponents around the arena wielding a *spatha*, a thirty-inch long broadsword used by the Roman cavalry (“Types of Gladiators”). With the discovery of a mass grave of gladiators in Ephesus, Turkey, experts have discovered how extremely lethal the *spatha* could be. A skull was found nearly cleaved in half from a blow of such violence that it split the skull from the top of one ear, across the front of his face, and under the nose to the opposite jaw line (Follian 1).

Like many of the other heavily-armed gladiators, the Secutor carried a *scutum* in addition to his main weapon, but with some subtle, yet necessary alterations. The shield was rounded at the edges to prevent being snagged by the Retiarii’s net, the Secutor’s main opponent (Mattesini 2001). Like the *scutum* carried by Secutor, special consideration was made in the design of the Secutor’s helmet. The helmet was smooth, stream-lined design, lacking the brim often featured on the helmets of other gladiators, and narrow eye holes (Nossov 67). Many of these features were an attempt to prevent the helmet from being snagged in the Retiarii’s net. The eye holes were extremely narrow, measuring

only about an inch and quarter wide, in an attempt to defend against the deadly thrusts of the Retiarii's trident, which could easily pierce the latticed eye holes of other gladiators' helmets (67). While providing great defense, the Secutor's helmet was not without drawbacks. The tight-fitting, stream-lined helmet with narrow eye holes not only greatly reduced the gladiator's field of vision and ability to hear, but it also made breathing difficult, which could prove extremely detrimental to gladiator's ability to continue to fight (67).

One variation of the Secutor was the truly frightening, Scissore. Instead of carrying a *scutum*, the Scissore was armed with an iron hammer with a double hook that could be used to deflect and defend against the thrusts of the Retiarii's trident and could also be used to deliver a lethal slash in close quarters (Mattesini 2042). The lack of a shield also meant that Scissore needed additional armor to supplement his defenses. The Scissore wore a long tunic of *lorica squamata*, or scale mail, and segmented metal sleeve on his right arm (2042). Historians believe that while the lack of a shield would have made the Scissore more mobile than his shield-bearing counterparts, they question how well *lorica squamata*, which was great for defending against slashes and cuts, but very weak against thrusts, would fair against the Retiarii's deadly trident (2042). It is also believed that this variation's appearance in the arena was short-lived due to the gladiator's inability to successfully defend himself.

Despite the fact that the Samnites, Provocatores, Gallus, Murmillos, Secutores, and Scissores were heavily-armed and armored, they were not without weaknesses. The armor and shields they carried provided them with

great defense, but they also encumbered them more than their lightly-armed opponents. A common opponent of the heavily-armed classes was the lightly-armed Thracian or Thraex, named for the warriors of northern Greece that were captured following the Mithridates' Wars (Nossov 68). The Thracian wielded a weapon called a *sicca* and small square shield, or *parmula*. The *sicca* was a short, curved sword about eighteen inches in length and designed to be used in strong slashing motions ("Gladiator Weapons"). Thracian helmets had distinctive features that made the gladiator instantly recognizable to the spectators. The tall crest, or *crista*, of the Thracian helmet resembled a griffin and was lavishly adorned with feathers ("Types of Gladiators"). With exception of the helmet and a pair of high greaves, metal leg guards that ended above the upper thigh, the Thracian was relatively unarmored which allowed him to move quicker than his lumbering opponents, the Murmillo and Gallus.

The tactics used by the Thracian were designed to take full advantage of his superior speed and agility compared to his heavily-armed opponents. One of the favored tactics of the Thracian was to jump up, above his opponent's shield, and use the curved blade of the *sicca* to strike his opponent in the back of the shoulder crippling his ability to swing his sword or hold his shield (Mattesini 1698).

The Hoplomachus, gladiators based upon the *hoplite*, or citizen-soldier of Hellenic Greece, was armed with a *hasta*, a six-foot long spear used to thrust and impale opponents or thrown from a distance ("Gladiator Weapons"). In addition to the *hasta*, the Hoplomachus carried a short sword, or dagger, known

as a *machaera*, in the same hand with he carried a small shield, called a *parmula*. The Hoplomachus' *parmula* was a small, concave, round shield, usually made of bronze that could also be used as an offensive weapon to bash opponents ("Gladiator Weapons"). Due to the small size of the *parmula*, the Hoplomachus wore thigh-high metal greaves, similar to those worn by the Thracian, and quilted leg coverings to protect his legs from attack (Nossov 56). The helmet worn by the Hoplomachus featured large cheek guards and an imposing crest, heavily decorated with feathers (Mattesini 1862).

The tactics used by the Hoplomachus are believed to have hinged upon the success of a decisive throw of the *hasta*. Historians surmise that a Hoplomachus could approach a fight in two different ways: the first, involving lightning quick thrusts and stabs with *hasta*, and the second, ending the bout quickly with a lethal throw from a distance. If the throw missed its mark, the Hoplomachus would be forced to fight with his much shorter *machaera* (1845).

One of the most iconic images of lightly-armed gladiators is the Retiarii. The Retiarii, or "net-fighter," fought with a net made of strong hemp-rope with small blades or lead weights attached around its perimeter and a *fascina*, a long three-pronged trident ("Gladiator Weapons"). The net would be thrown in an attempt to ensnare their opponent, and if the opponent was successfully entangled, the Retiarii would finish their opponent off with a quick thrust of the *fascina*. In the same discovery in Ephesus, Turkey experts have found evidence of how brutally effective the *fascina* could be in combat. A skull, belonging to a gladiator, was found with three jagged holes, two-inches apart, that formed a

perfect line running from the top of the skull to where the man's brows met, and the wounds were a perfect match to a bronze trident found in 1989 at the bottom of the harbor of Ephesus (Follian 3). While the Retiarii's *fascina* and net provided him with a great offensive combination, he was extremely vulnerable because he wore very little armor. Unlike other gladiators, Retiarii did not wear a helmet of any kind, but he did wear a distinctive metal shoulder guard that protected the neck and head without restricting head movement called a *galerus* ("Roman Gladiator Armor").

There is only one recorded variation of the Retiarii, it is known as the Laquerarius. While the armor worn by the Laquerarius was nearly identical to that worn by the Retiarii, it is the weapons that distinguish the two. The Laquerarius wielded a *hasta*, similar to that used by the Hoplomachus, instead of the *fascina* and a lasso or noose, instead of the traditional net (Nossov 73).

While the majority of gladiators could be classified as either heavily-armed or lightly-armed, there are several who fall outside of those classifications. They are known as specialists or specialty acts. One of the most popular gladiators in contemporary culture, though actually exceedingly rare in Ancient Rome was the Diamachaerus. The Diamachaerus wielded two short swords, or *gladius*, and wore no helmet and very little armor with the exception of heavy, leather *manicas* to protect his arms (Mattesini 2278). Many historians believe that, like the Scissore, the Diamachaerus was phased out from the arena due to the gladiator's inability to defend himself.

While the majority of gladiators engage in melee combat, the Saggiarius excelled at ranged combat. Armed with an intricate composite bow, the Saggiarius was outfitted as an archer of the Roman army. He wore a tunic of either *lorica squamata*, scale mail, or *lorica hamata*, chainmail, and a conical helmet of Asiatic design similar to the ones worn by the Roman auxiliaries (Mattesini 2168). In order to feature a bout between Saggiarii certain security measures were needed. Amphitheatre scenery builders were forced to create protective screens to shield the audience members who found themselves within the lethal range of bows, which could be up to 500 feet (Nossov 74).

Perhaps the most intriguing specialist gladiator was the Gladiatrix “Foeminae,” or female gladiators. Historians have discovered bas-relief images of women participating in the great animal hunts as venetors and dressed as Murmillos or Provocatores (Mattesini 2358). Being a female gladiator was often looked down upon by Roman society. The writer Petronius alludes to female gladiators in his writing saying, “...The women forgot the old virtue of Roman women of rank. [...] The female gladiators forgot their femininity and the disappearance from the old Roman families that were linked to the cult of ‘Lares’ and they forgot to exercise the virtues that made Rome great...” (2357). Petronius was not the only ancient writer to delve into the taboo world of female gladiators. Juvenal satirically wrote of female gladiators:

“... The thick woollen covers (but coloured Tyrean purple) and the fenced in area full of mud reserved for the female contests, who is not familiar with them?... Who has not seen the wounds she inflicts

on the post?... She scars that trunk with her continuous hard blows of the sword, and she pushes and shoves it with her shield (fulfilling all the manoeuvres that swordsmanship requires) [...], despite being a woman of rank, she is certainly worthy of blowing the horn that signals the start of the festivities of Flora, unless in that heart of hers she is thinking of something more interesting, and she is preparing herself for real fights in the arena!... How can you respect the social status of a woman in a helmet, who shuns her sexuality and loves masculine strength? (But they do not really want to become men... in fact they know that we men have so few pleasures!) What an honour it would be if they sold your wife's arms at auction, from the huge leather belt for the sword, the protection for the right arm and the coloured crest from the helmet to the shin guard for the left leg! Or, if she trains for a different discipline, lucky you... when she sells her greaves! These are the same women who swelter in the heat beneath their thin, delicately embroidered blouses, their femininity chafed even by soft, silk clothes! Look how she strikes the blows she has been taught, with strength and anger, and how she is bowed down beneath the weight of that horrible helmet! Look how thick and rough those bandages are, made from tree fibres, that press around her tender calves... and smile when she lays down her arms and, delicately, takes her boat shaped pan! You tell me, granddaughters of Lepido or blind Metello or Fabio

Gurgite, what woman has ever behaved like this? When did the wife of Asilo ever grunt at the pole like this?..." (Mattesini 2349-2350).

It did not take long before these negative opinions of the Gladiatrix "Foeminae" led to their exclusion from the games. It came in the form of an edict from Septimus Severus forbidding all "foeminae" from participating in the games.

Each class and combination of weapons and armor possessed strengths that often outweighed their weaknesses which helped to make the deadly gladiatorial games an extremely popular form of entertainment.

The gladiators of Ancient Rome, while celebrities during their own time, are still idolized in modern popular culture with numerous television programs, movies, novels and plays glorifying their deeds on the sands of the arena. This is, in no small part, due to their legacy as some of the deadliest performers of ancient times because of the grueling training they endured, the deadly weapons and armor they wielded, and the brutal environment that they were thrust into and forced to fight for their survival.

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