

ATHENS AND ROME: LIFE AND CULTURE IN CLASSICAL ANTIQUITY

Lecture 10 – Entertainment, Sports and
Games (Rome)

CLCS4007

Matthew Cobb

Types of Games and Spectacles

- ▣ *Munera* – public spectacles – gladiatorial games.
- ▣ *Venationes* – Games with animals.
- ▣ *Naumachiae* (Greek naumaxi/a) – mock sea-battles.
- ▣ *Ludi circenses* – chariot racing in the circus.
- ▣ *Ludus Troiae* - Troy game – young equestrian display of horsemanship.

Origins and Occasions for Games

- Early gladiatorial games associated with funerals of the elite families.
- Could be celebrated as part of a general's triumph.
- Religious festivals – *ludi Romani* (honouring Jupiter, Juno, and Minerva), *ludi Plebei* (Jupiter), *ludi Apollinares* (Apollo).
- Imperial period – emperors put on games to mark various occasions.

Competitors

- ❑ Gladiators or those fighting in *naumachia* are usually slaves or condemned criminals.
- ❑ Freemen could compete put often at a cost to their social status.
- ❑ Low status but could led to wealth and fame for the very successful.
- ❑ Competitors tended to belong to a gladiatorial school or a circus faction.

“Gaius Appuleius Diocles, driver for the Red Team, from Lusitanian Spain, [retired?] at age 42 years, 7 months, and 23 days. His first race was for the White Team in AD 122; his first victory was for the same team in AD 124. He first drove for the Greens in AD 128, and first won for the Reds in AD 131. His career statistics: he drove chariots for 24 years making 4,257 starts, with 1,462 first place finishes, 110 of them in the opening race after the procession. In races for which he was his team's sole entry he came in first 1,064 times, 92 of them in the big-money events: he won 30,000 sesterces 32 times (three times with a six-horse team); 40,000 sesterces 28 times (twice with a six-horse team); 50,000 sesterces 29 times (once with a seven-horse team); and 60,000 sesterces three times. In double-entry contests he came in first 347 times, winning 15,000 sesterces four times with a three-horse team. In three-entry races he came in first 51 times.” - *ILS 5287 = CIL 6.10048*.

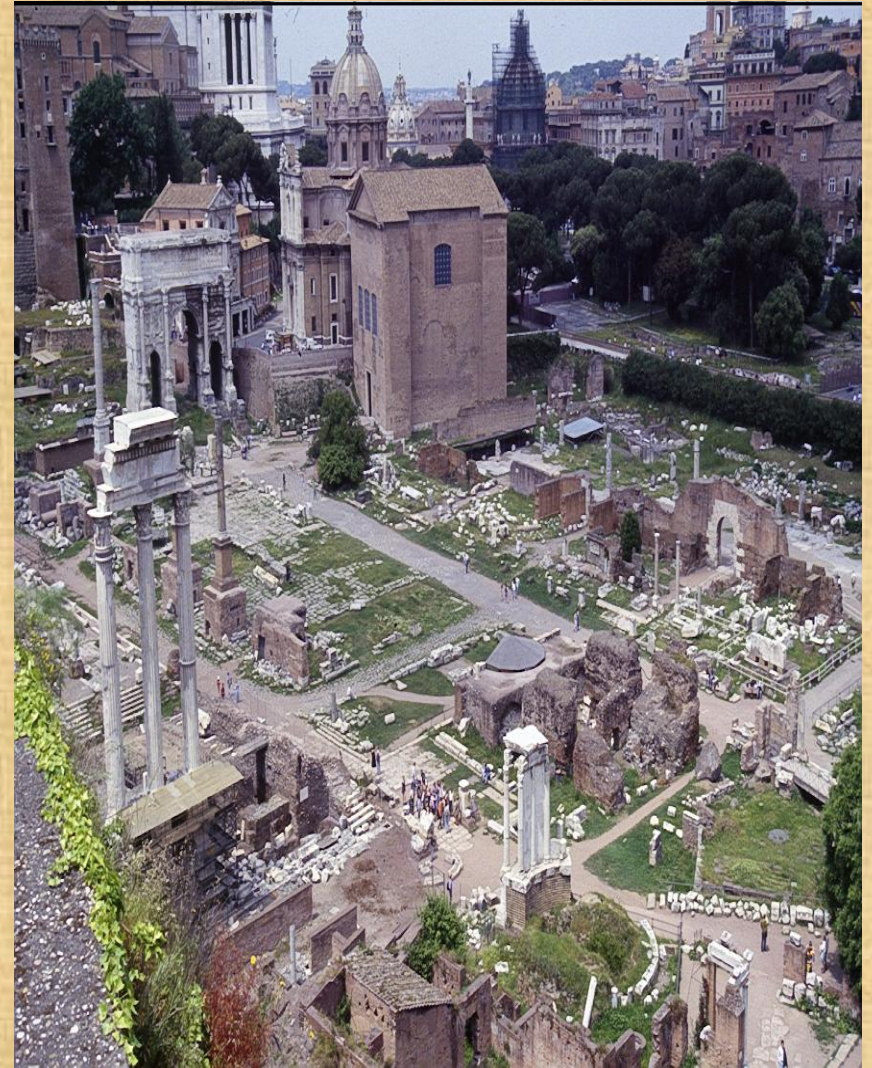
Gladiatorial Games

- First recorded gladiatorial games in 264 BC – put on by ex-consul D. Junius Boarium Pera in honor of his father.

“men believed that the souls of the dead were appeased by human blood, and so at funerals they sacrificed prisoners of war or inferior slaves brought for the purpose.” – **Tertullian**
On the Public Shows 12.

- In republic forum often served as public venue for gladiatorial games, in imperial period amphitheatres began to be built to host these events.

... in light of the customs established by our ancestors of holding gladiatorial displays in the forum... the space between the columns should be widened for better viewing.” - **Vitruvius *Architecture* 5.1.1.**



Amphitheatres

- ▣ *Amphitheatre* – seeing on all sides.
- ▣ Often elliptical rather than circular in plan.
- ▣ Early amphitheatres were temporary wooden constructions.
- ▣ First permanent amphitheatre in Rome built by T. Statilius Taurus, dedicated in 30 or 29 BC.



**Amphitheatre at
Pompeii**

Coliseum



The Colosseum (Flavian amphitheatre) - AD 69-80, booty from Jewish Revolt - Replaced the lake/park of Nero's *Domus Aurea* palace. – Room for at least 50,000 spectators.

Gladiators

- ▣ *Gladiator* – swordsman (*gladus* – sword).
- ▣ No mandatory fighting to the death for gladiators, though sometimes for condemned criminals (*noxii*).
- ▣ *Ad digitum* – raising a finger to acknowledge defeat.
- ▣ *Pollice verso* – thumbs down or up was signal *numerarius* gave to referee if he decided death was appropriate.
- ▣ Well-trained and expensive.
- ▣ Symbol of freedom is *rudis* – wooden staff resembling that used by the referee.

Zilten Mosaic - Leptis Magna



Retiarius -
trident
and
net.

Secutor -
helmet that
covers face and,
rectangular
shield and
gladus.

Thraex - broad-
rimmed
helmet, greaves
and small
shield +
Thracian curved
sword.

Murmillo -
armguard,
Loincloth,
oblong
shield
+ *gladus*.

Hoplomachus -
armguard,
small round
shield, spear,
helmet and
gladus.

Types of Fighting

- ▣ Beasts Vs beasts – displays ability to command great resources (especially for more exotic or fierce animals).
- ▣ Beasts Vs man – hunting or exposure to beasts – *venatores* (often formed into independent associations).
- ▣ Man Vs man – gladiatorial combat.
- ▣ Timetable for combat:
 - morning – parade through the amphitheatre.
 - beast hunts (beast against beast then beast against man).
 - lunchtime – execution of condemned criminals.
 - gladiatorial displays for the rest of the day.

“Q. Scaevola, the son of P. Scaevola, when he was curule aedile, was the first to exhibit at Rome a combat of a number of lions; and L. Sulla, who was afterwards Dictator, during his praetorship, gave the spectacle of a fight of one hundred lions with manes. After him, Pompey Magnus exhibited six hundred lions in the Circus, three hundred and fifteen of which had manes; Caesar, the Dictator, exhibited four hundred.” - **Pliny *Natural History* 8.20.53,**

“When, however, the elephants in the exhibition given by Pompey had lost all hopes of escaping, they implored the compassion of the multitude by attitudes which surpass all description, and with a kind of lamentation bewailed their unhappy fate. So greatly were the people affected by the scene, that, forgetting the general altogether, and the munificence which had been at such pains to do them honour, the whole assembly rose up in tears, and showered curses on Pompey, of which he soon afterwards became the victim.”

– **Pliny *Natural History* 8.7.20-21.**



Magerius Mosaic depicting the Telegenii, a family of *venatores* – Smirat (Tunisia).

Naumachiae

- ▣ Usually held in artificial lakes (*stagnum*) built for the purpose.
- ▣ A few amphitheatres may have had the drainage systems that would allow them to hold aquatic displays – Merida in Spain and Verona in Italy.
- ▣ Augustus built artificial lake of 1,800 to 1,200 Roman feet, fed by a specially built aqueduct (*aqua Alsietina*) – *Res Gestae* 22-23.
- ▣ Often fights to death between prisoners and prisoners of war.
- ▣ Not always violent spectacles – **Martial** *Concerning Spectacles* 25.26.

Chariot Racing

- ❑ Circus – by imperial period it had a hairpin shape – starting gates, two turning posts and banks of seating for spectators.
- ❑ Racers went counter-clockwise, usually around the track seven times around the *spina* – the 344-meter long barrier along the central axis of the circuit.
- ❑ Crashes common, especially at the start of the race.



Mosaic from Piazza Armerina villa – Sicily.

- Mostly used for chariot-racing, especially two-horse (*bigae*) and four-horse (*quadrigae*) chariots.
- Maximum of 12 chariots could compete in one race.
- Teams – white and red (initially), and green and blue – **Tertullian *De Spectaculis* 9.**



Reconstruction of the Circus Maximus

- Circus Maximus in Rome – under Trajan venue was made marble – 600 metres long (including race track and seating) – may have been able to accommodate from 150,000 to 350,000 people.



Modern area of the Circus Maximus

Sporting Riots

- ▣ Violence of amphitheatre could spill over into the crowd.
- ▣ Passionate rivalry between chariot teams and their supporters – Nika riots (AD 532).

“About the same date [AD 59], a trivial incident led to a serious affray between the inhabitants of the colonies of Nuceria and Pompeii, at a gladiatorial show presented by Livineius Regulus... During an exchange of banter, typical of the petulance of country towns, they resorted to abuse, then to stones, and finally to steel... many of the Nucerians were carried maimed and wounded to the capital, while a very large number mourned the deaths of children or of parents... the Pompeians as a community were debarred from holding any similar assembly for ten years, and the associations which they had formed illegally were dissolved.” – **Tacitus *Annals* 14.17.**