

THE SEXUALISATION OF GLADIATORS IN ANCIENT ROME

LIVES OF FAME, DEATH AND SEX

BY TERI HAMILTON

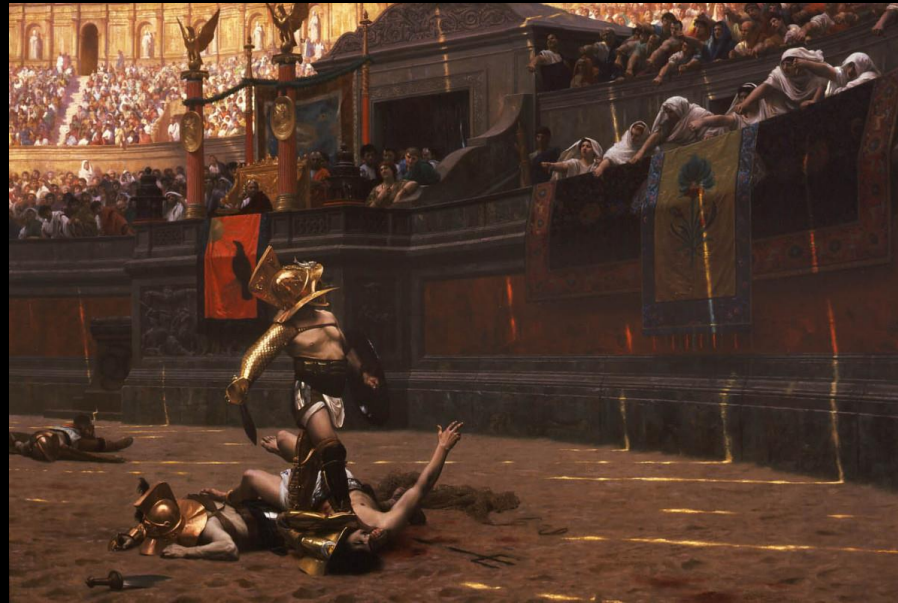


Image available at: <https://www.history.com/news/10-things-you-may-not-know-about-roman-gladiators>

WHAT IS SEXUALISATION?

Verb definition:

“To sexualize something or someone means to make them sexual or consider them in a sexual way.”

The definition of the word “sexualisation”, as written by the Collins English Dictionary, is to ascribe sexual associations; to regard a thing or person in a sexual way.

Sexualisation is something which can be seen in different ways across both the modern and the Ancient worlds, usually regarding the sexualisation of women.

The sex trade and sex work are among the oldest dated professions, and there has been evidence found (namely in the ruins and excavations of Pompeii) which showcase the fact that the Ancient world regarded sex not in a negative or secretive way, but rather as a regulated profession (though because regulating prostitution in Rome required paying a tax towards it, some women or men did not register as legal prostitutes).

- CollinsDictionary, “Sexualise” [online], Available at: <https://www.collinsdictionary.com/dictionary/english/sexualize> [Accessed: 30/10/2020]
- Knapp. R and Robert. C. “Invisible Romans: Prostitutes, Outlaws, Slaves, Gladiators, Ordinary Men and Women ... the Romans That History Forgot”. London: Profile, 2011. pg. 7. Web. [Accessed: 07/11/2020]

THE GLADIATORS OF ANCIENT ROME

Gladiators were men (although there have been some examples of female gladiators) who were slaves, convicted criminals, or trying to get out of a debt; there were some men that took part voluntarily in the games, such as Emperor Commodus. The Colosseum was host to the Gladiatorial games and could seat up to 50,000 spectators to the entertainment.

There were multiple different style/type of Gladiator, but the principal four are: **Myrmillo** (fighting in armour resembling fish-scales, they carried straight swords and sometimes allied with **Retiarius**), **Retiarius** (their weapons were a net and three-pronged trident), **Samnites** (they carried a short sword and a shield) and **Traex** (usually fighting in pairs, they carried a small shield and curved daggers).

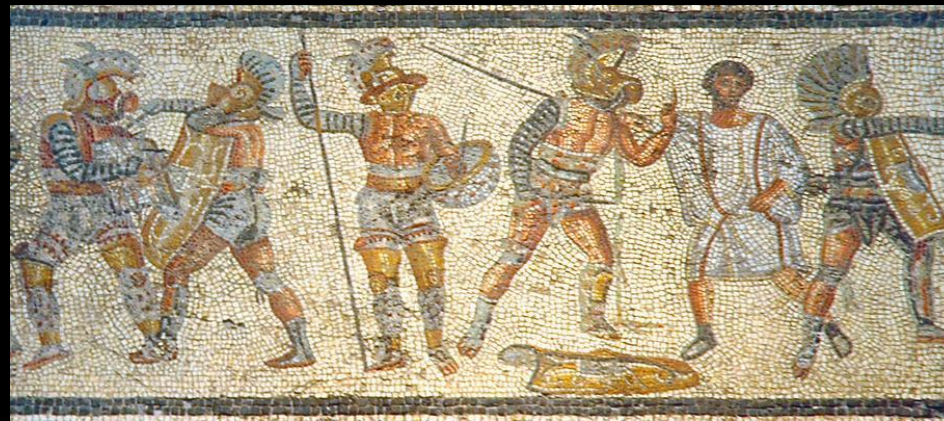


Image available at:

https://commons.wikimedia.org/wiki/File:Gladiators_from_the_Zliten_mosaic_3.JPG

- Garland, Robert. "Celebrity Ancient and Modern." *Society* (New Brunswick) 47.6 (2010): 484-88. Web. [07/11/2020]
- Knapp, R and Robert. C. "Invisible Romans Prostitutes, Outlaws, Slaves, Gladiators, Ordinary Men and Women ... the Romans That History Forgot". London: Profile, 2011. pg. 8. Web. [08/11/2020]

THE APPEAL OF VIOLENCE

The sexualisation of Gladiators is in part due to the appeal which people find in violence and the masculinity that is demonstrated. The purpose of the Gladiators and the games in Ancient Rome was to entertain the citizens; the games featured fights to the death between Gladiators, with some including dangerous animals (such as lions) and executions took place during the breaks between fights. There have been some sources found showing that the Colosseum hosted mock naval battles, by flooding the arena with water from the river.

There is a close link in the brain between sex and violence; Neurobiologist, David Anderson, believes that in the human brain, similar to that of animals, the neurons controlling aggression have the same triggers as those controlling sexual impulses. This link has been identified in animals, and should humans have the same neurological link between the two impulses, the sexualisation of Gladiators, and subsequently the violence, can be further understood.

- Quartz, 2016, "There's a neurological explanation for the link between sex and violence" [online], Available at: <https://qz.com/678186/theres-a-neurological-explanation-for-the-link-between-sex-and-violence/> [Accessed: 07/11/2020]

GLADIATORS EXUDE MASCULINITY

In 'Invisible Romans:...', Knapp and Robert make mention of how the being a Gladiator would garner attention and recognition from the spectators. The show of masculinity and aptitude at fighting impressed both the men and women of Ancient Rome; the celebrity which the Gladiators enjoyed can be seen in the epitaphs on their graves, which boast of the cheers they used to enjoy from spectators.

Gladiators, like modern day athletes such as boxers, would have exuded a masculinity and manliness which would be attractive, not only because of the possible neurological answer but because of the primal aspect of sex and masculinity. The 'primal' based self of humans would find the masculinity and aggression seen in Gladiators as being something attractive, because it is a show of their abilities in protection and being in charge. When comparing the Gladiators to an average male Roman citizen, the masculinity which each would display would be disproportionate, in favour of the Gladiator.

- Knapp. R and Robert. C. "Invisible Romans Prostitutes, Outlaws, Slaves, Gladiators, Ordinary Men and Women ... the Romans That History Forgot". London: Profile, 2011. pg. 8. Web. [08/11/2020]
- PsychologyToday, 2014, "The Psychology of Sexuality: Why sex is a central concern in psychotherapy" [online], Available at: <https://www.psychologytoday.com/us/blog/evil-deeds/201405/the-psychology-sexuality> [Accessed: 29/11/2020]

THE SEX LIFE OF A GLADIATOR

Gladiators not only enjoyed the adoration of large numbers of spectators, Knapp and Robert also make note of the “unlimited sexual partners” which the Gladiators would have had. The manliness of the profession and the revealing nature of the armour the Gladiators wore would have made them appealing sexual partners for Roman citizens. Gladiators would have been the ideal masculine sexual partner and the sources which detail the female opinions towards Gladiators showcase the favour that they held. Graffiti found during the excavations of Pompeii have been translated to show a successful Gladiator’s boasts about his fighting success and the way women would “swoon” over him. Being a Gladiator attracted the attention of spectating crowds who sought the entertainment of live violence and death, as well as the love and sexual desire of the women who were attracted the Gladiatorial type, the primal aggression and masculinity.



Image available at: <https://www.historytoday.com/reviews/brothels-ancient-pompeii>

- Knapp. R and Robert. C. “Invisible Romans Prostitutes, Outlaws, Slaves, Gladiators, Ordinary Men and Women ... the Romans That History Forgot”. London: Profile, 2011. pg. 8. Web. [08/11/2020]