

Lecture 24: Gladiatorial Games and Circus Spectacles



Categories of entertainment

- *ludi* = games,
- *ludi scaenci* = at the theatre,
- *ludi circenses* = at the circus,
- *Munera* = lit. Burdens,
- *munera gladiatorial*,
- *venationes* = wild beast hunts.

Politics and Spectacles

- Public entertainments were the responsibility of the aediles.
- They in turn used this responsibility as an opportunity to ingratiate themselves with the voters and increase their popularity.
- With the transfer of the elections of magistrates from the popular assemblies to the Senate under Tiberius, politicians did not need to hold public spectacles to gain the favour of the masses.
- This role was almost exclusively assumed by the Emperors in the city of Rome and by municipal magistrates in other cities.
- Some were more generous and prolific than others in this field. The emperor's public image used to be also associated with the dimension and impact of the public spectacles he organised and funded.

The 'democratic' spectacles

“Based upon the highest principles of political wisdom, the emperor (Trajan) did not overlook even actors and other performers of stage and circus or amphitheatre. For he knew that the Roman people are held fast by two things above all, the corn supply and public spectacles. An emperor's rule is judged no less by entertainments than by serious things. Neglect of serious matters can cause great damage, but neglect of amusements causes greater discontent. By giving out gifts only the plebs who are on the corn list are pleased and only one by one are their names called out. But by the spectacles everyone is pleased”.

(Fronto *Introduction to History* 17)

Panem et Circenses!

Of the commons? They follow fortune as always, and detest
The victims, the failures. If a little Etruscan luck
Had rubbed off on Sejanus, if the doddering emperor
Had been struck down out of the blue, this identical rabble
Would now be proclaiming that carcass an equal successor
To Augustus. But nowadays, with no vote to sell, their motto
Is 'couldn't care less'. Time was when their plebiscite elected
Generals, heads of State, commanders of legions; but now
They've pulled in their horns, there's only two things that
concern them:

Bread and the Games (*panem et circenses*).

Juvenal *Satire* 10.71-8.



Bellotto, Capriccio with the Colosseum, 1743-44



Martial, On the Spectacles (AD 80)

- Martial's first book of Epigrams, On the Spectacles, contained 33 undistinguished epigrams celebrating the shows held in the Colosseum, an amphitheatre in the city begun by Vespasian and completed by Titus in 79.



The new Wonder of Rome: Martial on the Colosseum

Let the barbarian wonders of the Pyramids of Memphis be
silent,
And don't let the Assyrians boast of the labour of building
Babylon.
Don't praise the soft Ioanians for the temple of Diana.
The many horned altars of Delos should worry.
The soaring mausoleum with its empty air
Won't take the Carians to the stars with excessive
admiration.
Every work yields to the Imperial Amphitheatre.
Posterity will speak of this work instead of all the others.

Martial *Spect.*1.

Martial, De Spectaculis

“Believe that Pasiphae was mated to the Cretan bull; we have seen it, the old legend has won credence. And not let hoary antiquity plume itself, Caesar [=Titus]: whatever Fame sings of, the arena affords you.”

Martial *Spect* 7.

Martial, De Spectaculis.

Imperial generosity

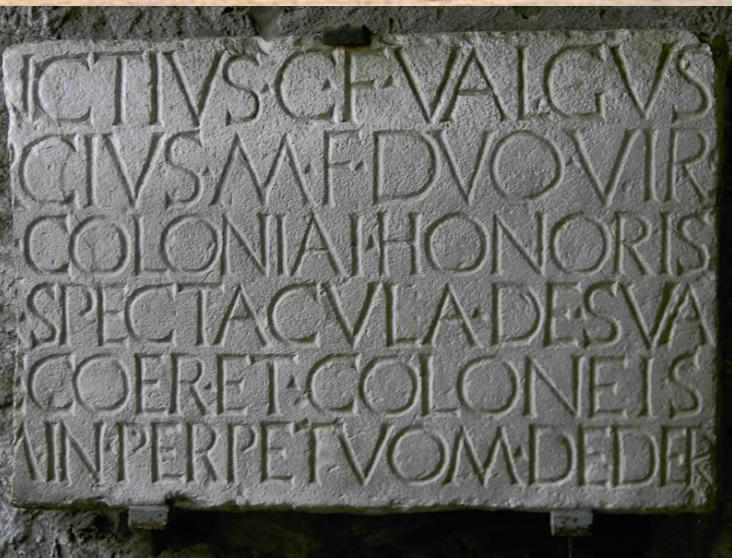
- “As Priscus and Verus each drew out the contest and the struggle between the pair long stood equal, shouts loud and often sought discharge for the combatants. But Caesar obeyed his own law (the law was that the bout go on without shield until a finger be raised [by a gladiator]). What he could do he did often giving dishes as presents. But an end to the even strife was found; equal they fought, equal they yielded. To both Caesar sent wooden swords [=discharge] and to both palms [=victory]. Thus valour and skill had their reward. This has happened under no prince but you Caesar: two fought and both won.”
- Martial *Spect* 31 (27 + 29).

Games and Riots, Pompeii AD 59

- **Tacitus, Annals, 14, 17:** “About the same date, 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, whose removal from the senate has been noticed. During an exchange of raillery, typical of the petulance of country towns, they resorted to abuse, then to stones, and finally to steel; the superiority lying with the populace of Pompeii, where the show was being exhibited. As a result, 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 trial of the affair was delegated by the emperor to the senate; by the senate to the consuls. On the case being again laid before the members, 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. Livineius and the other fomenters of the outbreak were punished with exile.”

Leisure and struggles. Amphitheater in Pompeii, AD 59



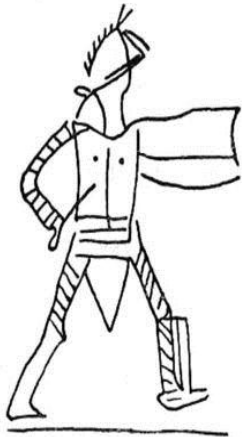


Amphitheatre at Pompeii

Gladiators in Pompeii. Graffiti

C.I.L. IV 8055

OCEANVS. I XIIIIV



ARACINTVS. L VIII



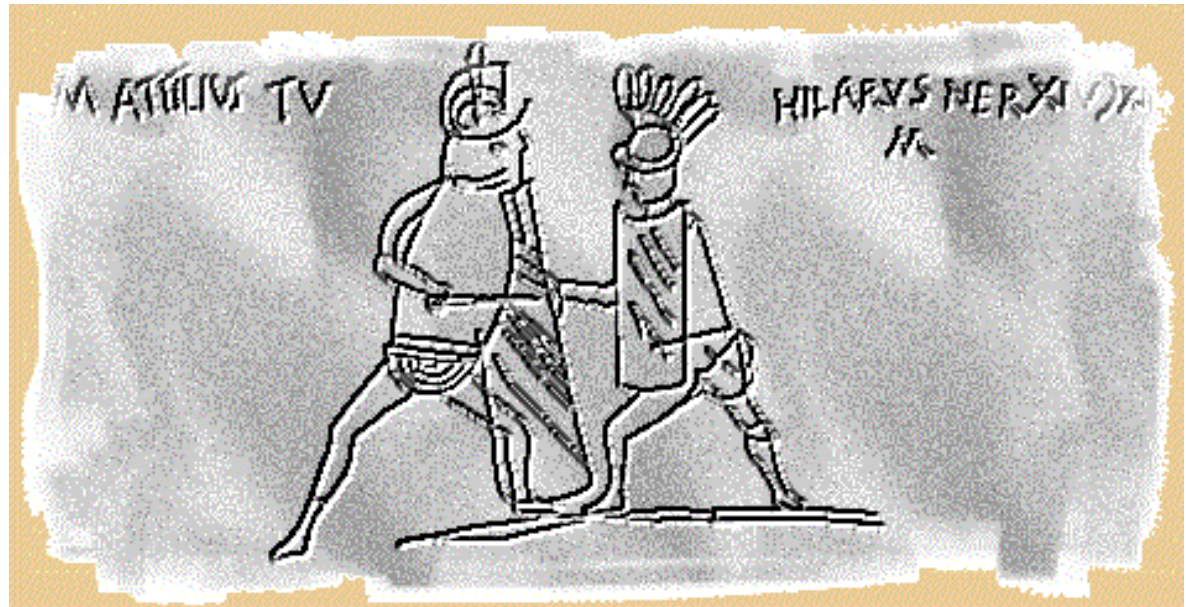
PISTARIO



HILARVS NER. XN) (REVNVS VII) VM
V ## ~~TA~~



Gladiators in Pompeii. Graffiti



M(arcus) Attilius T(iro) V(icit)
Hilarus Ner(onianus)
(victoriarum) XIV C(oronarum)
XIII

Magistrates holding spectacles in the amphitheatre. CIL IV 9979



VEN ET GLAD PAR XX
M TVLLI PVGN POM PR NON
NOVEMBRES
VII IDVS NOV

A hunting and 20 couples of gladiators of Marcus Tullius will fight in Pompeii the jour before and the day of the Nones of November and 7 days before the Ides of November.



D(ECIMI) LVCRETI(I)

SATRI VALENTIS FLAMINIS ~~NERONIS~~

CAESARIS AVG(VSTI) FILI(I)

PERPETVI GLADIATORVM PARIA XX ET

D(ECIMI) LVCRETIO VALENTIS FILI(I)

GLAD(IATORVM) PARIA X PVG(NABVNT)

POMPEIS VI V IV III PR(IDIE) IDVS APR(ILES)

VENATIO LEGITIMA

ET VELA ERVNT

SCR(IPSIT) CELER

SCR(IPSIT) AEMILIVS CELER SING(VLVS) AD

LVNA(M)

Decimus Lucretius Satrius Valens, flamen perpetuum of ~~Neron~~ Caesar, son of Caesar Augustus, will stage a fighting of 20 pairs of gladiators and Decimus Lucretius Satrius Valens son will stage a fighting of 10 pairs of gladiators, in Pompeii, on the 6th, 5th, 4th and 3rd days of the Ides of April, as well as the day before the Ides of April.

They will offer a hunting according to the rules and will fix the veils. Written by Celer. Written by Aemi Celer on with the light of the moon

(dates: from 8th to 12 April 12 These dates were coincident in Rome with the festivals of Cybeles (magna mater) and Ceres) **CIL 4,**

3884



PRO SALVTE
[IMP VESPASIANI] CAESARIS
AVGV[STI] LI[B]E[RO]RVMQV[E]
EIVS
OB] DEDICATIONEM ARAE
[FAM.GLADIAT.] CN [ALL]EI NIGIDI
MAI
FLAMI[NIS] CAESARIS AVGVSTI
PVGN POMPEIS SINE VLLA
DILATIONE
III NON IVL VENATIO [SPARSIONES]
VELA ERVNT

“For the health of the [emperor Vespasian]
Caesar Augustus and of his sons, on
occasion of the consecratio of his altar the
troup of gladiators of Gnaeus Allius Nigidius
Maius, flamen of Caesar Augustus, will fight
in Pompeii. The fighting will take place
without delay the 4th day of the Nones of
July . A hunting will be offered , perfumes
will be spread, and the tends will be
extended.”

*(on July the fourth, the festival of the peace
was celebrated in Rome). CIL 4, 1180*

Inscriptions and spectacles

“To the *Di Manes* of Ti. Claudius
Speculator, imperial freedman, procurator
at Formiae, Fundi and Caieta. In charge of
the elephants at Laurentum. Cornelia
Bellica for her well-deserving spouse.”

ILS 1578.

Inscriptions and spectacles

- “To the *Di Manes* of M.Antonius Niger, a veteran *Thraex*, who lived 38 years and fought 18 times. Flavia Diogenis made this from her own money for her well-deserving spouse.”

ILS 5090.

Inscriptions and spectacles

- “To the *Di Manes*. For Lycus, *missus*, a left handed *murmillo*, fought 4 times. Longinas the *contraretiarius*, *missus*, made this for his well-deserving brother.”

ILS 5105.

Inscriptions and spectacles

- “Eutychus Neronianus, imperial freedman, doctor of the *ludus matutinus*, made this for himself and for Irene the freedwoman, his beloved well-deserving spouse, and for their freedmen and freedwomen and their successors.”

ILS 5152.

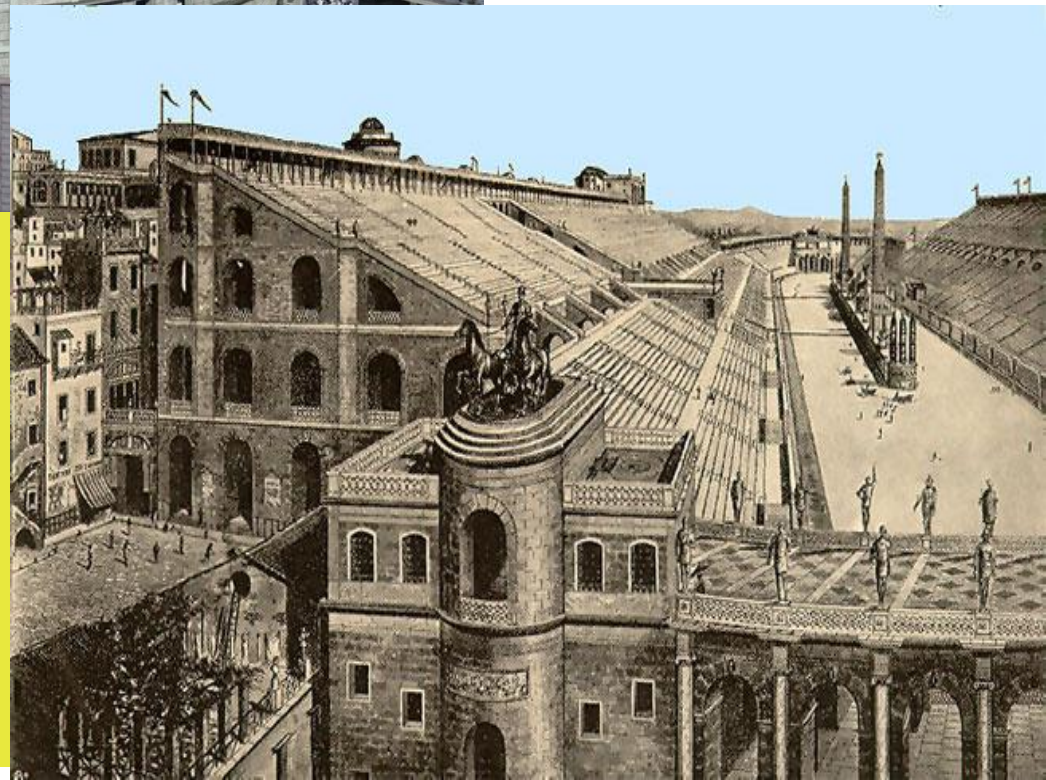
Circus Maximus





**Tra Palatino
e Aventino**
Una ricostruzione del
Circo Massimo, il più
grande edificio di Roma
dedicato ai giochi:
aveva una pista lunga
circa un chilometro e
mezzo per le corse dei
carri e per i combattimenti
250 mila spettatori.

Circus Maximus



The Circus Maximus

“Round about the Circus Maximus on the two longer sides and one of the shorter sides a canal has been dug, 10 feet deep and wide, to receive water. Behind the canal are erected porticos three storeys high, of which the lowest storey has stone seats, gradually rising, as in the theatres, one above the other, and the two upper storeys wooden seats. The two longer porticoes are united into one and joined together by means of the shorter one, so that all three form a single portico like an amphitheatre, eight stades in circuit and capable of holding 150,000 people. The other of the shorter sides is left uncovered and contains vaulted starting places for the horses, which are all opened by means of a single rope. On the outside of the portico there are entrances and ascents for the spectators at every shop, so that the countless thousands of people may enter and depart without inconvenience.”

- Dionysius of Halicarnassus *Roman Antiquities* 3.68-.2-4.

The Circus Maximus

- 4. These people spend all their life with wine and dice, in low haunts, pleasures and the games. Their temple, their dwelling, their assembly, and the height of all their hopes is the Circus Maximus... among them those who have enjoyed a surfeit of life, influential through long experience, often swear by their grey hair and wrinkles that the state cannot exist if in the coming race the charioteer whom each favours is not first to rush out from the starting gates, and fails to round the turning post closely with his ill-omened horses. And when there is such a plague of thoughtlessness, as soon as the long-for day of the chariot-races begins to dawn, before the sun is yet shining clearly, they all hasten in crowds to the spot at top speed, as if they would outstrip the very chariots that are to take part in the contest; and torn by their conflicting hopes about the result of the race, the greater number of them in their anxiety pass sleepless nights.
- Amminaus Marcellinus 28.4.

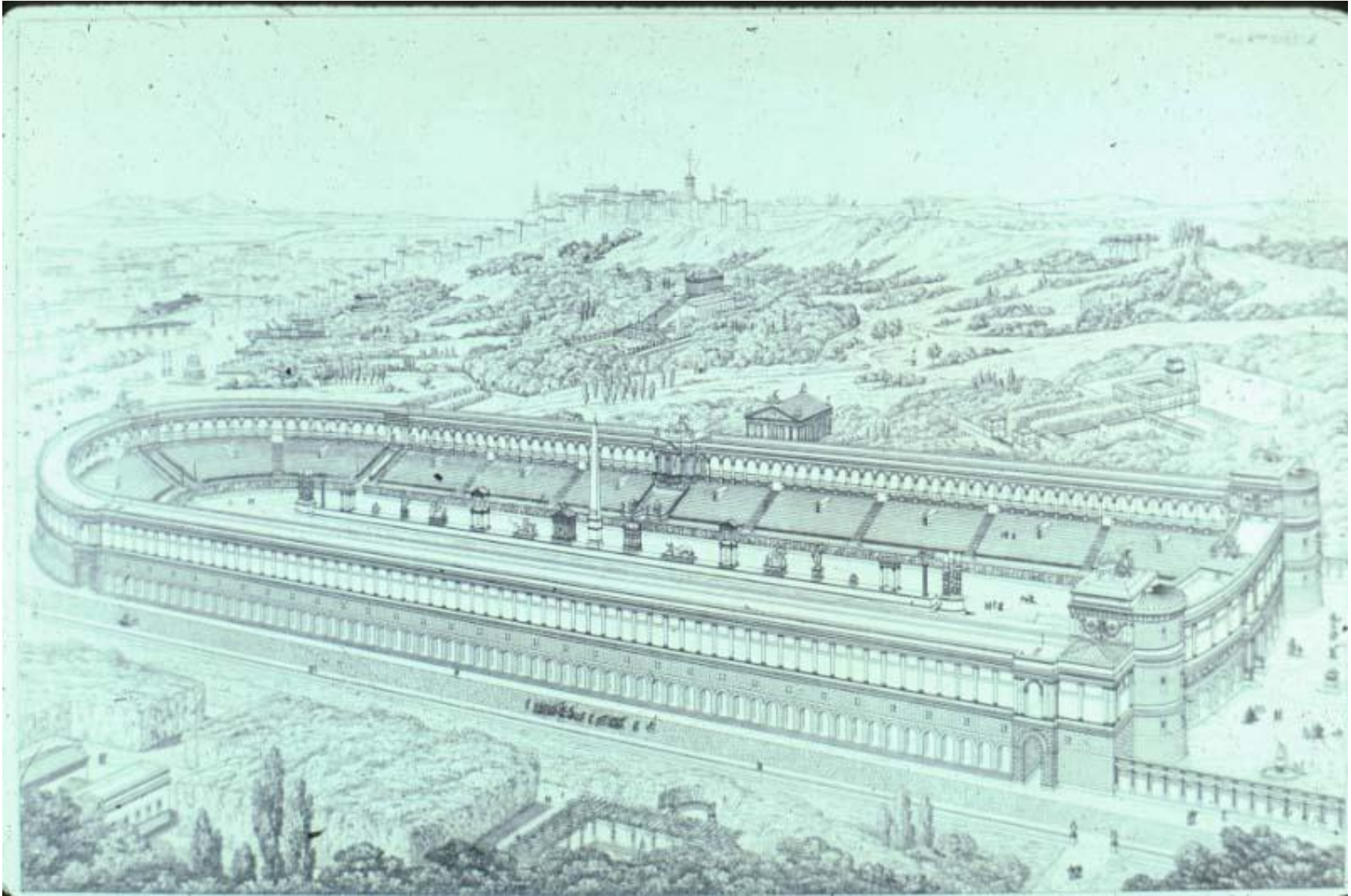


Circus Maximus. Afterlife

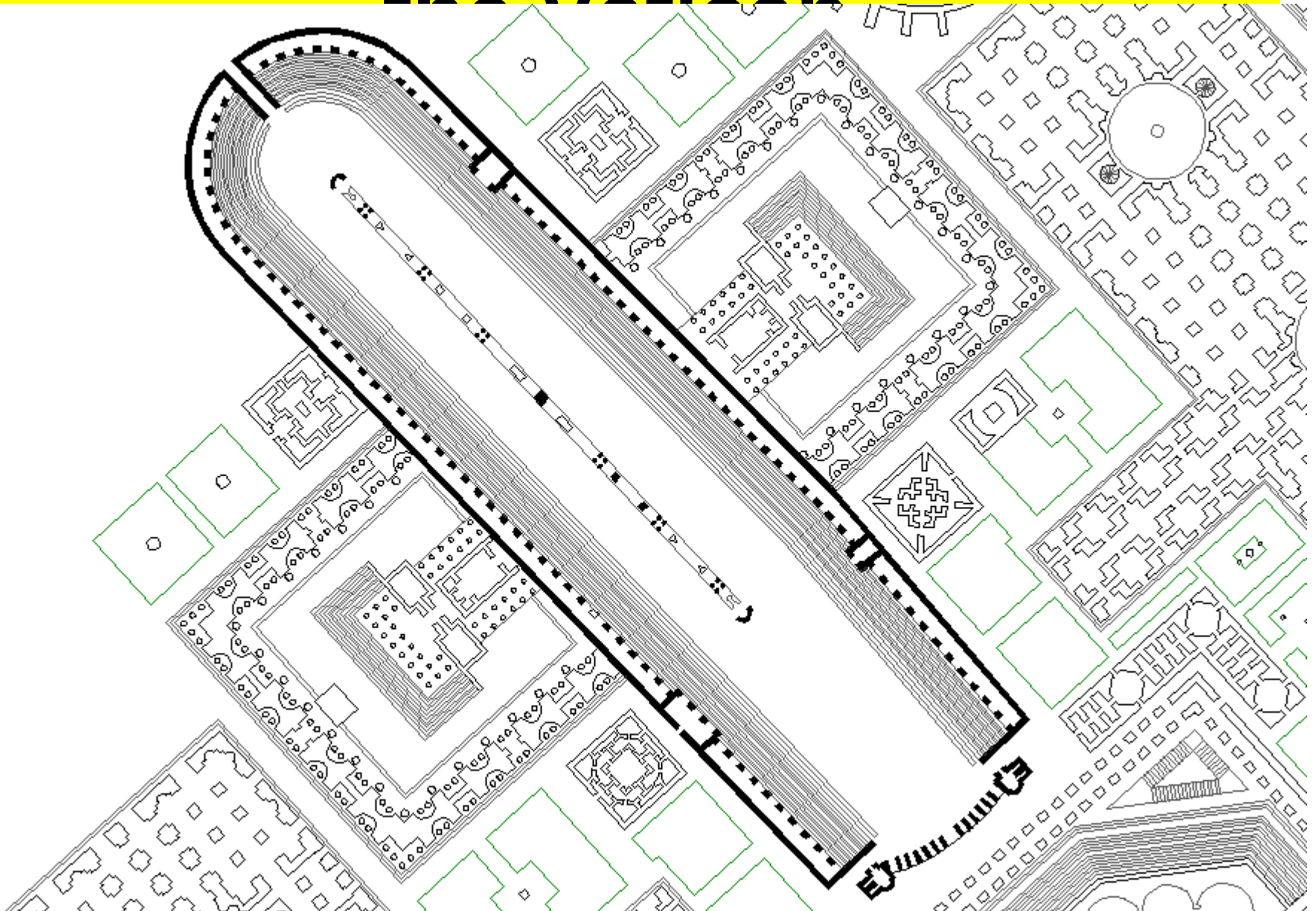


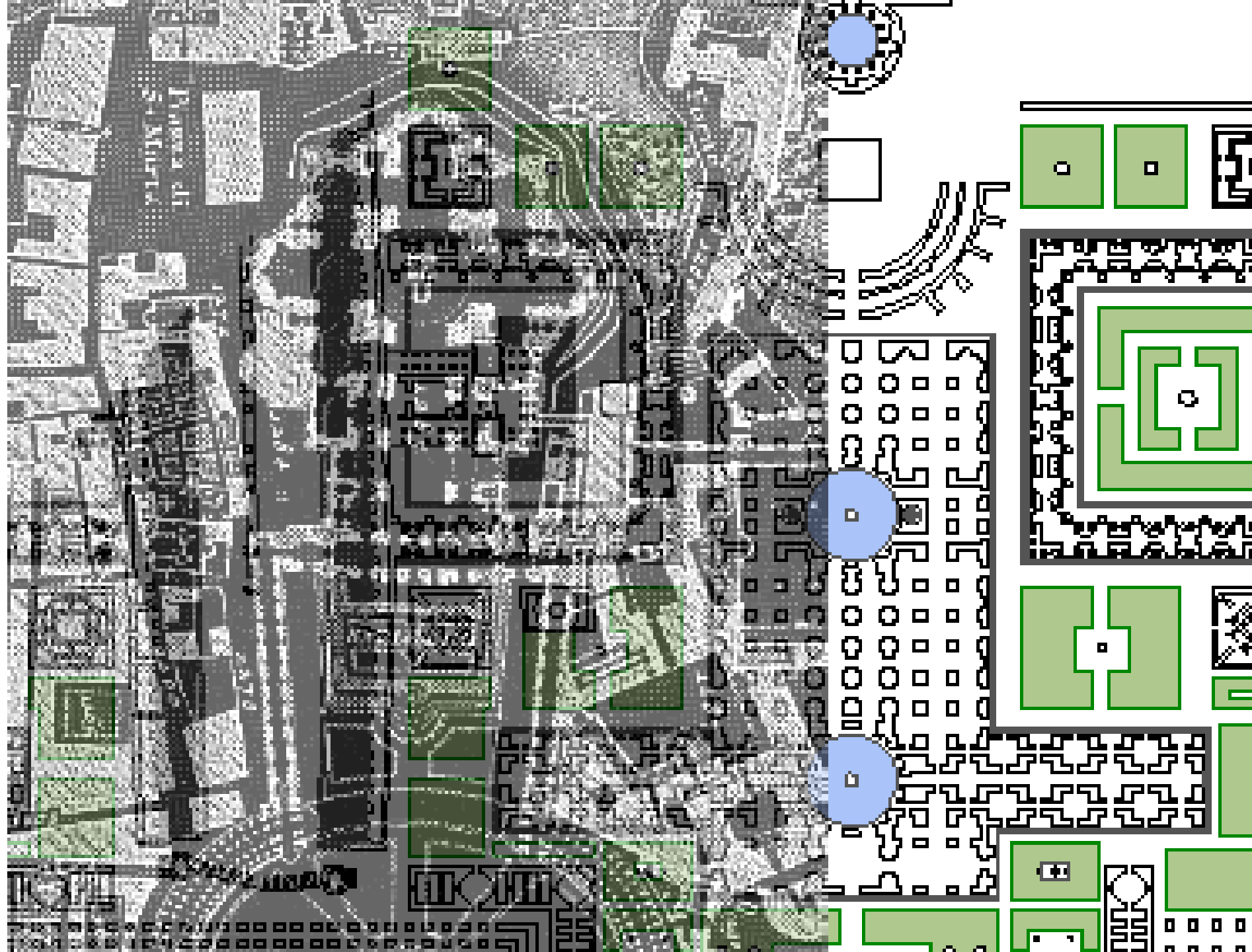
<http://www.trinitysaintdavid.ac.uk/en/rbla/onlineexhibitions/monumentsofancientrome/circus/#d.en.7627>

Circus of Caligula and Nero



Circus of Caligula and Nero on the Vatican



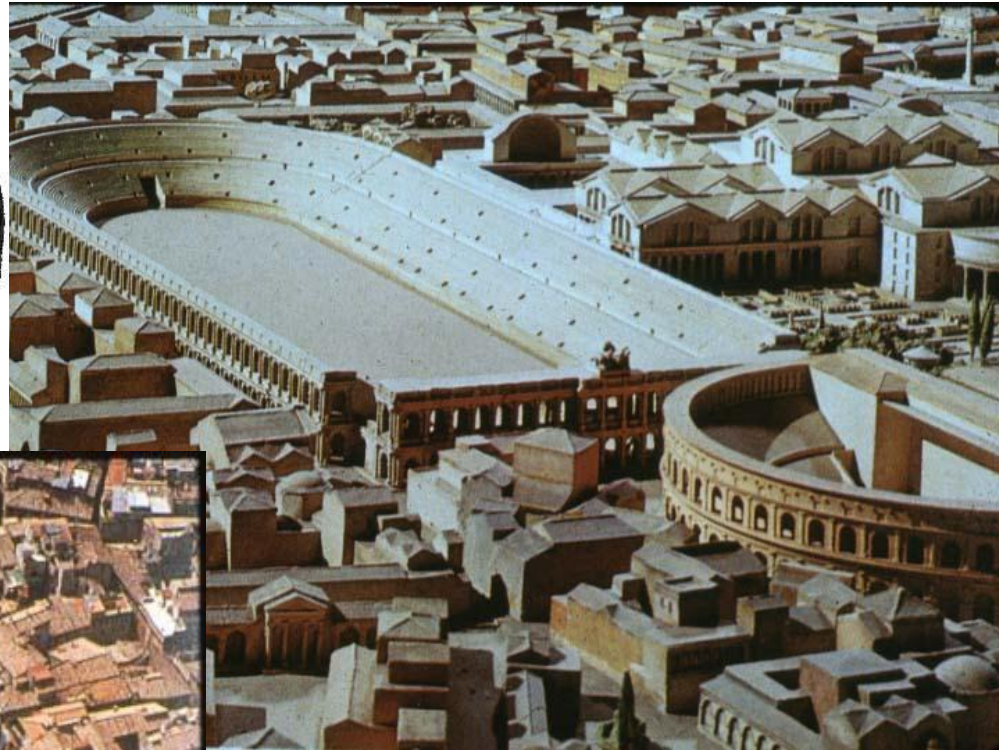






DIVO
CASARI
DIVI IVLII F
AVGVSTO
TI
CAESARI
DIVI
AVGVSTI F
AVGVSTO
SACRVM

The Obelisk was dedicated to Augustus and Tiberius by Caius Caligula. Caligula transported it from Alexandria, where it had been erected by G. Cornelius Gallus, the first praefectus of Egypt in the age of Augustus. Caligula put it on the spina of his Circus on the Vatican.



**Stadium of
Domitian.
Piazza Navona**

Arles, Bull fighting in the Amphitheatre



