The Roman Games

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The Roman Games

A Sourcebook

Alison Futrell

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The roar of the crowd, the screams of animals and victims, the smell of blood, sweat, and perfume, the flash of weapons within the last frantic, fatal movements, the colors of the charioteers glimpsed through the dust and jostling crowd as the horses round the last turn. Given the heady sensualism embedded in the original phenomenon, it is not surprising that Roman spectacle holds a prominent position in the modern imagination, becoming a site of contemporary social and political meaning. The bloody entertainments of imperial Rome are like the stereotypically luxurious bath-houses, the banquets, and the orgies, all central to the popular perception of Rome as a civilization devoted to sophisticated luxury, to personal pleasures, a civilization doomed by its decadence. It is true that the Roman world devoted an overwhelming amount of time, energy, money, and attention to spectacle, with politicians bankrupting themselves to provide games, towns giving over huge amounts of public space and public funds for the construction of venues. But this was hardly a matter of officially sanctioned hedonism, pure and simple. The games carried a complex nexus of interlocking meanings in imperial Rome; the organization, production, and presentation of these performances articulated social, political and cultural meaning and provided substance and setting for the playing out of Roman values. This book considers Roman spectacle from the perspectives of those who created, used, experienced, enjoyed, hated, respected, condemned, and found themselves in the games as an active, living institution. Rather than trying to extract The One True Meaning of the games, I have attempted to present Roman spectacle as multiple complicated experiences that touched different individuals and groups in different ways.

The ancient resources assembled here are of many different types. Typically, literary texts favor the viewpoint of the wealthy elite, those who produced and read this kind of material. Inscriptions in stone and high-quality artistic representations also tend to reflect upper-class expectations, as it required a

certain financial status to pay for such items. The wealthy elite did not speak with one voice, however, as a range of agendas, regional backgrounds, and changes over time flavor the evidence. Graffiti and curse tablets are more ephemeral media and hint at motivations driving non-elites in the Mediterranean. The lived experience of performers leaks out in dribbles from fairly limited material, represented mostly in epitaphs and the Christian martyr acts. The interests of *editores*, imperial and otherwise, can be found in law codes and painted notices for games; these different texts spoke to different target audiences, however; the one offering practical precedents for administrators and the other celebrating a gathering of a specific social network, met for the purposes of exchanging honor and pleasure. The editorial introductions for each source attempt to locate the material in the ancient context, drawing out the distinctive points of emphasis and purpose.

The original inspiration for this collection came from Thomas N. Habinek, who organized a graduate seminar on the arena at UC Berkeley in the spring semester of 1991. The participants in the course provided much stimulating discussion and provocative perspectives. My gratitude to then fellow-students Martha Jenks, Haley Way, Judy Gaughan, Matt Roller, Eric Gunderson, John Harding, Trevor Murphy, and Mark Ryerson, and to Tom Habinek, whose discussions of the project in the years since have greatly influenced its ultimate framework and emphasis. The final manuscript owes much to the diligence and care of my two research assistants, Cynthia Ann Gonzales and Julia Hudson-Richards; Julia's help with the tedious minutiae is particularly appreciated, as is her wit. Thanks also to Jodie Kreider, who made me stop fiddling at a key moment. I'm also grateful for the support of Blackwell Publishing, particularly Al Bertrand and Angela Cohen, noteworthy in their patience and understanding. As always, the faculty, staff and graduate and undergraduate students of the Department of History at the University of Arizona have provided assistance, insight, and stimulation in bringing this effort to completion. A shout out to the U. of A. Classics Department as well. Finally, I extend enormous appreciation to friends and family for their continuing efforts to encourage me and maintain balance and sanity in my life.

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The Politics of the Arena

Origin and Growth of Games

The great games of the ancient Mediterranean grew out of religious holidays to become spectacular celebrations of the divine pantheon, events that not only called upon divine support to ensure continued prosperity for the state, but also offered an elaborate, formalized series of actions that encouraged, even required, the participation of an expanded human audience. These spectacles tended to follow a standard format of procession, sacrifice, and games. The procession, the first part of the festival, was, practically speaking, a means of conveying the worshipers, the officiants, and their implements of worship to the sacred space of the altar or temple. To enhance the ritual quality of the movement, the procession followed a specific, religiously significant pathway; the personnel were arranged in a specific order; the participants wore particular kinds of clothing, spoke or sang ritual words. These guidelines could involve sacrificial animals in the procession as well, who not only would be draped in wreaths or ribbons, to set them apart from "common" animals, to make them "sacred", but also were meant to conform to certain kinds of behavior: they had to seem willing to approach the altar, and cult officials who accompanied them made sure of this. The procession was followed by the sacrifice. Sacrifice was the basic act of Graeco-Roman religion, establishing a positive relationship between deity and worshiper through the offering of a gift; this could mean the immolation of an animal, the pouring of a wine or oil libation, or setting cakes or flowers on the god's altar for his enjoyment. In return, the deity would provide success and prosperity to the community of the worshipers. The sacrifice would be accompanied by prayer that often specified the nature of the relationship between divine and human, perhaps the declaration of a specific need or the acknowledgement of divine favor. Games were the third and, eventually, most elaborate, portion of the festival. Beginning perhaps with simple contests

of athletic or musical skill, games can be understood as the offering of the best in human achievement in honor of the deity. As political systems became increasingly sophisticated, state sponsorship of an official religious calendar of festivals afforded an opportunity to celebrate not just the gods, but also to showcase the wealth and organizational talent of the state and its leaders. The games became more and more the dominant feature of the festival. More days could be added to accommodate more competitors and more events, presented in increasingly specialized venues to the delight of huge crowds of spectators, all recipients of a variety of powerful messages that went far beyond the pious acknowledgement of divine power.

Games and the Roman state

In Rome, the presentation of spectacles by state apparatus begins early in the Republic with the *Ludi Magni* or *Ludi Romani*, held in honor of Jupiter Optimus Maximus, chief god in the Roman pantheon. These were initially votive games, vowed on the field of battle as an extraordinary gift to Jupiter, if the god would grant victory to the Roman army. By adding *ludi* to the usual religious ritual, Rome's leaders ratcheted up the scale of the gift to the deity. The connection to victory is important as well. Roman military success was a major resource for the financial demands of Roman spectacle. Generals, by channeling booty seized from the enemy toward *ludi*, were able to present themselves as agents of pious duty toward the Roman state and as selflessly generous toward their fellow citizens who would take pleasure in these games. Chariot racing, *ludi circenses*, was the type of spectacle associated with the *Ludi Romani* from an early period. By the middle of the fourth century, *ludi scaenici* or theatrical presentations had been added to the spectacle repertoire of Rome. Until this time, the *Ludi Romani* were still "extraordinary", i.e. they were not held on a regular basis as part of the ordinary religious calendar. In 366 BCE, they became the first set of *Ludi* to receive annual sponsorship by the Roman state, to be organized by the curule aediles each year as part of their duties to protect the well-being of Rome, a link clearly stated by Cicero some three centuries after the regularization of the *Ludi Romani*.

Source: Cicero, *Against Verres* 2.5.36:[1] I am now an aedile elect; and I understand the position in which the nation's will has placed me. With the utmost diligence and solemnity I am to celebrate the holy festival of Ceres, Liber and Libera. By holding the solemn festival of our Lady Flora I am to secure her favor for the people and commons of Rome. In the most worthy and devout fashion, I am to perform the most ancient festival, the earliest to bear the name of "Roman" in honor of Jupiter, Juno and Minerva. I have been made responsible for the safeguarding of our sacred edifices and for the protection of the whole of our city.

Despite the serious tone of Cicero's declaration of duty, it is clear that the presentation of aedilician games became a real opportunity for an ambitious man relatively early in his career. A set of spectacular games would make a memorable impression on the people and establish the reputation of the aedile as a skilful administrator, a savvy and stylish auteur, and a generous benefactor, whose own resources would top off any gap in the funding supplied by the state. Scipio Africanus, the conqueror of Hannibal, for example, first comes into public view as the *editor* of impressive *Ludi Romani* in 213 BCE.

The late third and early second century saw a frenzy of multiple additions to the ritual calendar, including the *Ludi Plebeii* (for Jupiter), the *Ludi Apollinares* (for Apollo), the *Ludi Megalenses* (for the Great Mother) and the *Ludi Florales* (for Flora). A number of overlapping influences shaped spectacle and its importance in Rome at this time. This was a period of intensive overseas involvement for Rome. There was a huge influx of wealth into the hands of primarily Rome's elites, who, as military leaders, claimed control of war booty. Senatorial political power increased rapidly alongside this economic power, as the Senate was in control of administering and coordinating Rome's overseas interests. As the stakes were raised, the competition among leaders of the elite for access to the benefits of empire intensified. There was increasing contact with other peoples, particularly Greece, with its prestigious and highly appealing cultural achievement. New perspectives on life and new ways of expressing cultural values were infiltrating the Roman mindset, although not without generating some tension. Rome's ambitious leaders were interested in accessing innovative public displays, like the spectacles sponsored by contemporary Hellenistic kings and states in the eastern Mediterranean. There was concern, however, that Rome retain her distinctive identity, that leaders not be perceived as sacrificing their old-fashioned Roman morality for the sake of flashy and luxurious foreign ways. Spending newfound wealth on games was "safer" than personal expenditure and had the benefit of positive audience response. Ordinary games, however, were controlled by the aediles, a mid-range magistracy. Those at the top of Rome's political ladder therefore opted to present extraordinary games, often associated with the commemoration of their success in war, and private games, such as gladiatorial combats, which had the benefit of being less susceptible to carping criticism by one's rivals.

One such sponsor was Marcus Fulvius Nobilior, who celebrated his triumph over the Aetolians in 187 BCE with an extravagant triumphal procession, permanent monuments to his success, and ten days of impressive games that incorporated the first wild animal hunt as part of the extended spectacle. He had to struggle to do so, however. M. Aemilius Lepidus led a number of Nobilior's rivals in trying to suppress his triumph, challenging the military leadership that had won the victory in the first place. Other alleged irregularities were contested, as will be seen below.

Source: Livy 39.22:[2] Then for ten days, with great magnificence, Marcus Fulvius [Nobilior] gave the games which he had vowed during the Aetolian war. Many actors too came from Greece to do him honor. Also a contest of athletes was then for the first time made a spectacle for the Romans and a hunt of lions and panthers was given, and the games, in number and variety, were celebrated in a manner almost like that of the [late first century BCE].

Origins of gladiatorial combat

Sponsorship of gladiatorial combat began in the private sphere, as part of Roman funerals, a means of embellishing the public obsequies of Roman nobles. Although ostensibly these were unofficial spectacles, the *munera* were intended as a public demonstration of the prestige and importance of the noble Roman who had earned the acclaim of the public funeral. As was the case with many symbols of Roman authority, such as the toga, the *fasces*, and religious panoply and ritual, the origin of this custom was attributed to the Etruscans. Nicolaus of Damascus wrote a history of the games during the reign of Augustus, emphasizing the Etruscan connection.

Source: Nicolaus of Damascus, *Athletics* 4.153: Romans presented the games of gladiators . . . a practice they were given by the Etruscans.

Paintings from the tombs of Etruscan nobility point to their custom of commemorating the dead with extensive funeral games, which seem to incorporate a variety of contests, including combats. Others suspect the Roman *munera* developed under strong influence from the area of Campania to the south, where from 343 to 290 BCE Rome fought three wars against the Samnite people, expanding Roman influence and being influenced by local customs in return. There is some indication that gladiatorial-style combats were a feature of banquets in this area. Later Roman accounts of the practice, like those of Livy and Silius Italicus, tend to criticize it as an excess of luxury, rather than demonstrations of skill and control. This habit may, however, underlie the location of gladiatorial schools in the area of Capua, known from a later date.

Source: Livy 9.40:[3] The war in Samnium, immediately afterwards, was attended with equal danger and an equally glorious conclusion. The enemy, besides their other warlike preparation, had made their battle-line to glitter with new and splendid arms. There were two corps: the shields of the one were inlaid with gold, of the other with silver . . . The Romans had already learned of these splendid accoutrements, but their generals had taught them that a soldier should be rough to look on, not adorned with gold and silver but putting his trust in

iron and in courage . . . The dictator, as decreed by the senate, celebrated a triumph, in which by far the finest show was afforded by the captured armor. So the Romans made use of the splendid armor of their enemies to do honor to the gods; while the Campanians, in consequence of their pride and in hatred of the Samnites, equipped after this fashion the gladiators who furnished them entertainment at their feasts, and bestowed on them the name of Samnites.

Source: Silius Italicus 11.51:[4] Then too it was their ancient custom to enliven their banquets with bloodshed and to combine with their feasting the horrid sight of armed men fighting; often the combatants fell dead above the very cups of the revelers, and the tables were stained with streams of blood. Thus demoralized was Capua.

The Roman sources that document this practice, however, do so from a fairly hostile perspective. Capua was an early ally of Rome during the era of its expansion in Italy in the fourth and third centuries. When the Carthaginian general Hannibal invaded Italy in the late third century, Capua shifted allegiance to him, opting, perhaps, to maximize an opportunity to become the leading Italian city under a new Punic hegemony. Rome took Capua's decision badly, to say the least, and forced Capua to return to the Roman hegemony, severely punishing the Capuans for abandoning their Roman allies. This relationship has shaped the accounts of Campanian gladiators in the literature, as they are connected with what the Romans saw as Capuan decadence and luxury, the lack of ethics and self-serving political maneuvering leading up to Capua's betrayal of Rome in the Hannibalic war.

Tertullian, one of the more prolific surviving early Christian writers, objected to the spectacles for a number of reasons (see chapter 5), which he explained in his hostile survey of the games. His description of the origins of gladiatorial combat points to Etruria as the source of the practice; he expands on this by giving a negative interpretation of the early funerary context of such events.

Source: Tertullian, *On the Spectacles* 12.1–4:[5] It still remains to examine the most prominent and most popular spectacle of all. It is called "*munus*" [obligation] from being an "*officium*" [duty]. For "*munus*" and "*officium*" are synonyms. The ancients thought they were performing a duty to the dead by this sort of spectacle after they had tempered its character by a more refined form of cruelty. For in time long past, in accordance with the belief that the souls of the dead are propitiated by human blood, they used to purchase captives or slaves of inferior ability and to sacrifice them at funerals. Afterwards, they preferred to disguise this impiety by making it a pleasure . . . Thus they found consolation for death in murder. Such is the origin of the gladiatorial contest.

The original purpose and meaning of such funeral games may be understood as a form of human sacrifice: men fought to the death at the funeral of a much-valued leader, whose spirit benefited from the spilling of blood. More importantly, the slaying of human victims acknowledged the importance of the loss to the community and enhanced the public reputation of the deceased in a way which transcended his mortality. The combats also demonstrated the capacity of the heir, who arranged the obsequies in pious duty and exercised the authority necessary to command death itself. The need to make such acknowledgements, to benefit the dead and the living, could be particularly strong in times of crisis for the community. The earliest Roman examples of *munera* took place during the conflicts with the Carthaginians, Rome's most serious opponents of the middle Republic.

Source: Livy *Summary* 16: [in 264 BCE] Decimus Junius Brutus first gave a gladiatorial *munus* in honor of his deceased father.

Source: Livy 23.30: (216 BCE) And in honor of Marcus Aemilius Lepidus, who had been twice consul and augur, his three sons, Lucius, Marcus and Quintus, gave funeral games over a period of three days and presented twenty-two pairs of gladiators in the Forum.

The gladiatorial combats thus began to grow at a time when Roman spectacle as a whole was expanding, and no doubt for similar reasons. The risks of warfare heightened tensions in Roman society; new festivals and *munera* both countered this anxiety by engaging supernatural support and demonstrating the continuing capability of Rome's leadership, even in a time of crisis. Gladiatorial combat was also perceived as "Roman"; it carried none of the questionable cultural baggage of some other forms of spectacle and, further, had moral value (see below).

Gladiatorial games grew in size and complexity from the third to mid-second century BCE. All were associated with public funeral celebrations of the noble dead, with gladiators a part of the *munus* or obligation owed to the deceased. At first these combats were staged as part of the funeral itself, within a few days of the death of the person commemorated; later, they were often held some time after the actual funeral, but with the stated purpose of celebration of the deceased still intact. As the panoply surrounding the games, the number of participants, the special accommodations required all grew more lavish, an extended period of time was required, in order to make all the arrangements, not just for the show but for accompanying feasts and huge quantities of funeral meats.

Source: Livy 39.46: (183 BCE) On account of the funeral of Publius Licinius[6] meat was distributed, and 120 gladiators fought. Funeral games were given lasting three days and, after the games, a public feast in which . . . dining couches were spread across the entire forum.

Source: Livy 41.28:[7] (174 BCE) Several gladiatorial games were given that year, and other small games; one was noteworthy beyond the others, that of Titus Flamininus, which he gave on account of his father's death[8], with a distribution of meat, a public feast, and theatrical shows lasting four days. The climax of the show, which was big for its day, was the fact that 74 men fought over a three-day period.

Origins of wild animal shows

From fairly early days, animals had been a part of the religious festivals of Rome, incorporated into ritual as part of the sacred performance meant to guarantee the good-will of Rome's gods. The grandiose display of exotic animals in Rome, however, is connected to the spread of Roman hegemony; Romans encountered unusual and intimidating beasts and gained access to supplies of such rare animals as part of the expansion of Roman authority. At first, animals were displayed as living war-booty, symbols of the acquisition of distant territories, living embodiments of the far-flung landscapes of the Roman empire. At first this symbolic value was enough; eventually Romans made use of exotic animals in a more dynamic way.

This happened very directly in the case of elephants; Romans met war-elephants, regularly featured in Hellenistic armies, on the field of battle. In spectacle these animals carried imperial meaning, partly because of their colossal size, partly because of the tradition of politically significant symbolic value of these animals: elephants were the special mounts of eastern powerbrokers, of Alexander and the Seleucid and Ptolemaic monarchs, as well as the affiliated deity Dionysus, carrying along with those kings messages of unstoppable conquest in the east. Elephants were also thought to have particular moral value because of their own characteristics. Pliny tells us about elephant piety, elephant patriotism and sense of duty, and the elephant's special capacity to recognize human sociopolitical categories. At the triumph celebrated by M. Curius Dentatus in 275 BCE, elephants captured from Pyrrhus were the highlight of the *pompa*. A few years later, L. Caecilius Metellus took this one step further; Pliny tells us that he captured and brought to Rome some 140 formerly Carthaginian elephants, who not only marched in the triumphal parade but were chased in the Circus as well. The description, however, acknowledges the relatively primitive state of Roman spectacle management at the time.

Pliny, *Natural History* 8.16–17:[9] A large number of elephants were captured from the Carthaginians in Sicily by the victory of the pontifex Lucilius Metellus in [252 BCE]: there were 142, or, as some authorities state, 140, and they were ferried across [the straits of Messana] on rafts which Metellus had made by putting a layer of planks on rows of wine-jars secured together. Verrius records that these elephants fought in the Circus and were killed by javelins, because the Romans were at a loss what to do with them, since they had decided not to look after them or give them to local kings. Lucius Piso says that the elephants were simply led into the Circus, and, in order to increase the contempt for them, were driven round it by men carrying spears tipped with a ball.

Elephants were the first exotic animals to serve in spectacles as the executors of the Roman will, the agents of public execution, a duty surely appropriate to animals with an innate sense of justice. Spectacle executions can be traced to 167 BCE, when Aemilius Paullus, newly victorious over Perseus, ordered that deserters from the Roman troops be crushed by elephants. Valerius Maximus says that this reinforced army discipline even more because of the spectacular nature of the punishment. In 146, a similar set of spectacle executions, the squashing of foreign deserters by elephants, was part of the triumphal games of Scipio Aemilianus, using North African elephants, symbols now of Carthaginian defeat, to carry out the imperial will of Rome.

Source: Valerius Maximus 2.7.13–14: For the Younger Africanus, after having destroyed the Carthaginian Empire, threw foreign deserters to the wild beasts as part of spectacle he offered to the people. And Lucius Paulus, after King Perseus was vanquished, for the same fault (desertion) threw men under elephants to be trampled . . . And indeed military discipline needs this kind of severe and abrupt punishment, because this is how strength of arms stands firm, which, when it falls away from the right course, will be subverted.

Roman spectacle overseas

Rome's intensified production of spectacle was associated with expansion of Roman influence outside Italy and increased involvement with the other powers in the Mediterranean. To some extent, Roman presentation of lavish events was meant to demonstrate Roman capacity beyond the military, to show that, culturally, Rome was fully able to engage in leadership. Romans adopted and adapted politically charged spectacle techniques developed by Hellenistic kings. When Scipio Africanus presented *munera* in Spain in 206 BCE, he commemorated his uncle and father, who had died five years earlier. More significantly for Scipio, 206 was the year in which he settled the Iberian front of the Second Punic War on Rome's behalf. The games made use of

local performers; note, however, how political competition is imported into the arena itself, a literalization of the fight for public office that Livy finds reprehensible.

Source: Livy 28.21:[10] Scipio returned to [New] Carthage to pay his vows to the gods and to conduct the gladiatorial show which he had prepared in honor of his deceased father and uncle. The exhibition of gladiators was not made up from the class of men which *lanistae* are in the habit of pitting against each other, that is, slaves sold on the platform and free men who are ready to sell their lives. In every case the service of the men who fought was voluntary and without compensation. For some were sent by their chieftains to display an example of the courage inbred in their tribe; some declared on their own motion that they would fight to please the general; in other cases rivalry and the desire to compete led them to challenge or, if challenged, not to refuse . . . Men also of no obscure family but conspicuous and distinguished, Corbis and Orsua, being cousins and competing for the post of chief of a city called Ibes, declared that they would contend with the sword. . . . Since they could not be made to give up such madness, they furnished the army a remarkable spectacle, demonstrating how great an evil among mortals is the ambition to rule. The older man by his skill with arms and by his cunning easily mastered the brute strength of the younger. In addition to this gladiatorial show there were funeral games so far as the resources of the province and camp equipment permitted.

Aemilius Paullus was in charge of the Roman military when it defeated Perseus, King of Macedonia, at the battle of Pydna in 168 BCE. The Macedonian Kings had been, since the time of Philip II and Alexander the Great, preeminent creators of the kingly image in the Mediterranean. Macedonia itself was a major player in contemporary diplomacy until the Roman victory entailed the establishment of a Roman administrative presence and the end of the monarchy. In the months following Pydna, Aemilius Paullus engaged in a number of image-building activities as Rome's agent in the Greek east, including the presentation of elaborate games at Amphipolis, which would be the Roman capital in the new Macedonia. These demonstrations were meant to impress the Greeks with the high level of Roman cultural sophistication, Rome's facility with the Greek symbols of power, as well as assert that Rome's leaders were not simply brutal generals but astute producers of impressive political theater. Paullus' pithy remark was meant to drive this last point home.

Source: Livy 45.32–33:[11] The serious business was followed by an entertainment, a most elaborate affair staged at Amphipolis. This had been under preparation for a considerable time, and Paulus had sent messengers to the cities and kings

of Asia to give notice of the event, while he had announced it in person to the leading citizens in the course of his tour of the Greek states. A large number of skilled performers of all kinds in the sphere of entertainment assembled from all over the world, besides athletes and famous horses, and official representatives with sacrificial victims; and all the other usual ingredients of the great games of Greece, provided for the sake of gods and men, were supplied on such a scale as to excite admiration not merely for the splendor of the display but also for the well-organized showmanship in a field where the Romans were at that time mere beginners. Banquets for the official delegations were put on, equally sumptuous and arranged with equal care. A remark of Paulus himself was commonly quoted, to the effect that a man who knew how to conquer in war was also a man who would know how to arrange a banquet and to organize a show.

Gladiatorial games were incorporated into spectacle by some non-Romans, most prominently by Antiochus IV Epiphanes, King of Syria, whose long stay in Rome as a hostage for his royal father's good behavior may have influenced his choices. Significantly, his time in Rome overlaps with the early second-century massive upswing in spectacle, when frenzied expenditure on ever more lavish shows became thoroughly embedded in elite political competition. When he returned home to take up his family's throne, Antiochus introduced significant Roman-style innovations into his panoply of royal symbols, including the construction of a Capitolium or Temple of Capitoline Jupiter, use of the toga, use of a Roman magisterial chair, Roman-style banqueting, and gladiatorial combat. Livy notes that Antiochus had to gradually acclimatize the locals in Antioch to this type of spectacle. The results are perceived as valuable, not only in enhancing Antiochus' connections with powerful Rome on a politico-cultural basis, but, as Livy points out, to promote militarism.

Source: Livy 41.20:[12] In regard to the splendor of his shows of every sort [Antiochus] surpassed earlier kings, his other spectacles being given in their own proper style and with an abundance of Greek theatrical artists; a gladiatorial exhibition, after the Roman fashion, he presented which was at first received with greater terror than pleasure on the part of men who were unused to such sights; then by frequent repetitions, by sometimes allowing the fighters to go only as far as wounding one another, sometimes permitting them to fight without giving quarter, he made the sight familiar and even pleasing, and he roused in many of the young men a joy in arms. And so, while at first he had been accustomed to summon gladiators from Rome, procuring them by large fees, finally he could find a sufficient supply at home . . .

The best description of how the *munera* were used by Antiochus is in Athenaeus' account of his celebration of victory over Ptolemy VI in 166

(a victory significantly shaped by Roman active interest). Antiochus saw these games as an opportunity to establish his own reputation as a leader of international prominence, specifically competing with Aemilius Paulius, recent presenter of remarkable games, in so doing. Having sent announcements of this extraordinary event to cities all over the Mediterranean, Antiochus was personally involved in arranging the enormous procession to open the games, showcasing thousands of soldiers, sacred paraphernalia and luxury items, and in their midst 240 pairs of gladiators. This was followed by feasts and shows, all meant to demonstrate the wealth, power and international influence of Antiochus.

Source: Athenaeus, *Philosophers' Banquet* 5.194–195:[13] This same king, hearing about the games instituted in Macedonia by Aemilius Paulus, the Roman general, and wishing to outdo Paulus in magnificence, dispatched envoys and delegates to the cities to proclaim the games which were to be given by him near Daphne . . . [the parade] was led by certain men in the prime of their youth, five thousand in number, who wore Roman armor of chain-mail; after them came five thousand Mysians; close to these were three thousand Cilicians equipped in the fashion of light-armed troops, and wearing gold crowns. After these came three thousand Thracians and five thousand Celts. These were followed by twenty thousand Macedonians, ten thousand of them with gold shields, five thousand with bronze shields, and the rest with silver shields; close upon these came two hundred and forty pairs of gladiators . . . The games, gladiatorial contests and hunts took thirty days to conclude; during the first five days in which spectacles were carried out, all persons in the gymnasium anointed themselves with saffron oil from golden basins . . . For a banquet on one occasion there were spread a thousand *triclinia*[14], on another fifteen hundred, with the most extravagant deckings . . .

Spectacle and Roman Politics

Politics and shows

By the late Republic, gladiatorial matches had become public entertainment like the ordinary holiday games, votive games, and the triumphs, a powerful political tool for attracting voters and enhancing one's reputation as a public benefactor. The funerary association had become merely a pretext by this time; *munera* would be offered years after the death of the alleged honoree. The primary motivation was political ambition. The *munera* thus were presented as "extraordinary" games, like those offered by triumphators as part of the celebration of victory. *Munera*, however, anticipated "victory", helping politicians to secure success in the battle for public office. L. Licinius Murena, as praetor of 66 BCE, prepared for success by sponsoring games; not having presented spectacle prior to this had been a real obstacle in his recent

campaign, just as his deluxe praetorian games would be an asset far into the future.

Source: Cicero, *For Murena* 37–39:[15] There were two things which Murena, in his campaign for the praetorship, suffered seriously from the lack of, but which were both of considerable benefit to him when he came to stand for the consulship. One was games, the expectation of which had been brought about by certain rumors and by the deliberate suggestion of his rivals for office . . . Both of these advantages fortune held back for him until he stood for the consulship . . . as for his not having put on games, a factor which had hampered Murena in his campaign for the praetorship, this deficiency had been made up for by the extremely lavish games he put on in the course of his year as praetor . . . It may be that you . . . attach more weight to the urban vote than to that of the soldiers. But, if so, you can hardly show the same contempt for the high quality of Murena's games and the magnificence of the spectacle, since this was unquestionably of enormous help to him. Do I need to point out that the people and the ignorant masses adore games? It is hardly surprising that they do.

Innovation in spectacle was a means of distinguishing oneself from the pack of candidates; devising novel means of enhancing the games was becoming increasingly difficult as Roman tastes became more sophisticated through familiarity. The aedile for 65 BCE, Julius Caesar, offered spectacles which became legendary for their rich and exciting production values. Caesar maximized the impact of the games by mounting in addition a lavish public exhibition of all the special items, such as the silver armor, assembled for his spectacles.

Source: Suetonius, *Julius Caesar* 10:[16] During his aedileship, Caesar filled the Comitium, the Forum, its adjacent basilicas, and the Capitol itself with a display of the material which he meant to use in his public shows, building temporary colonnades for the purpose. He exhibited wild-beast hunts and stage-plays; some at his own expense, some in cooperation with his colleague, Marcus Bibulus – but took all the credit in either case.

Source: Dio Cassius 37.8:[17] Not for this alone did [Caesar] receive praise during his aedileship, but also because he exhibited both the *Ludi Romani* and the *Megalenses* on the most expensive scale and furthermore arranged gladiatorial contests in his father's honor in the most magnificent manner. For although the cost of these entertainments was in part shared jointly with his colleague Marcus Bibulus, and only in part borne by him individually, yet he so far excelled in the funeral contests as to gain for himself the credit for the others too, and was thought to have borne the whole cost himself.

Source: Plutarch, *Caesar* 5.9:[18] [Caesar] spent money recklessly, and many people thought that he was purchasing a moment's brief fame at an enormous price, whereas in reality he was buying the greatest place in the world at inconsiderable expense. We are told, for instance, that before entering upon public office, he was thirteen hundred talents in debt . . . And, when he was aedile, he provided a show of 320 pairs of gladiators fighting in single combat, and what with this and all his other lavish expenditure on theatrical performances, processions and public banquets, he threw into the shade all attempts at winning distinction in this way that had been made by previous holders of the office.

Source: Pliny, *Natural History* 33.53:[19] We too have done things to be deemed mythical by those who come after us. Caesar, the future dictator, was the first person in the office of aedile to use nothing but silver for the appointments of the arena – it was at the funeral games presented in honor of his father; and this was the first occasion on which criminals made to fight with wild animals had all their equipment made of silver.

Gn. Pompeius Magnus, having eluded custom and law to build a permanent venue in Rome for spectacle, gave extravagant games to inaugurate his theater in 55 BCE. The games were not a complete success. Cicero's perception of Pompey's lavish shows demonstrates a certain boredom with lavish spectacle as lavish spectacle, a perception that excessive display did not have the same energy that less expensive shows had. Cicero also expresses a distaste for death by beast as something that appeals to less cultured tastes, even though the most genuine enthusiasm in the letter is for the animal-hunts.

Source: Cicero, *Letters to his Friends* 7.1:[20] (Letter to M. Marius, dated September of 55 BCE) . . . To be sure, the show (if you are interested) was on the most lavish scale; but it would have been little to your taste, to judge by my own. To begin with, certain performers honored the occasion by returning to the boards, from which I thought they had honored their reputation by retiring . . . I need not give you further details – you know the other shows. They did not even have the sprightliness which one mostly finds in ordinary shows – one lost all sense of gaiety in watching the elaborate productions. These I don't doubt you are very well content to have missed. What pleasure is there in getting a Clytemnestra with six hundred mules or a Trojan Horse with three thousand mixing bowls or a variegated display of cavalry and infantry equipment in some battle or other? The public gaped at all this; it would not have amused you at all . . . Or perhaps, having scorned gladiators, you are sorry not to have seen the athletes! Pompey himself admits that they were a waste of time and midday oil! That leaves the *venationes*, two every day for five days, magnificent – nobody says otherwise.

> But what pleasure can a cultivated man get out of seeing a weak human being torn to pieces by a powerful animal or a splendid animal transfixed by a hunting spear? Anyhow, if these sights are worth seeing, you have seen them often; and we spectators saw nothing new.

Julius Caesar's enduring popular support was sustained and strengthened throughout his career by a "package" of popular expenditures, including public building and spectacles. When he was granted the special concession of being able to run for a second consulship in absentia, he let it be known that he would produce *munera* and an *epulum*, or public banquet, on behalf of his deceased daughter Julia. Julia had been a popular presence in Rome, wife to Pompey as well as Caesar's only child; this new precedent of honoring women with such presentations points forward to the public prominence of female members of the imperial family during the Principate.

> Source: Suetonius, *Julius Caesar* 26:[21] Caesar neglected no expense in winning popularity, both as a private citizen and as a candidate for his second consulship. He began building a new Forum . . . and paid more than a million gold pieces for the site alone. Then he announced a gladiatorial show and a public banquet (*epulum*) in memory of his daughter Julia – an unprecedented event; and to create as much excitement among the commons as possible, had the banquet catered for partly by his own household, partly by the market contractors. He also issued an order that any well-known gladiator who failed to win the approval of the Circus should be forcibly rescued from execution and kept alive.

Costs

All these elaborate preparations for spectacle came at a price. A political career in the late Republic required huge amounts of cash; elites, whose wealth tended not to be in liquid form, went heavily into debt to finance candidacy. The office of aedile demanded considerable financial resources, just for the ordinary games; the additional presentation of *munera* and the increasingly glitzy nature of Roman spectacle made this a heavy burden indeed. By the end of the Republic, the level of expenditure on games by politicians was exorbitant, even ruinous. This was particularly true of the *munera*, which were private, not part of the official calendar and were thus in a special class. Republican notables took it upon themselves to offer gladiatorial games; there was no technical obligation for them to do so. As a result, the cost of giving such spectacles was met by the *editores* alone. This cost could be quite high as noted by Polybius in the mid-second century.

Source: Polybius 31.28:[22] On the occasion of their father's[23] funeral Fabius wished to give a gladiatorial show, but because of the immense cost of such entertainments, he was unable to meet the expense, whereupon Scipio provided half the amount out of his own resources. The total cost of such a show, if it is mounted on such a lavish scale, is not less than thirty talents.[24]

Caesar incurred huge debt to finance his career, but given his remarkable success, he probably considered the money well-spent. Some expressed skepticism about the ramping up of spectacle obligation as part of the price of power. Cicero sees it as a necessary evil, pointing to the long tradition of expenditure by aediles and to the expediency of living up to public expectations.

Source: Cicero, *On Duties* 2.57–58:[25] In our own country, even in the good old times, even the most high-minded citizens were generally expected to produce grandiose displays during the year when they were serving as aediles . . . [Mamercus'] refusal to seek office as aedile, on grounds of the expense involved, meant that later on he was rejected for the consulship. In other words, since there is a popular demand for these displays, a sensible man is obliged to submit; even if he cannot summon up any enthusiasm for the idea . . . Another reason why he has to comply is that there are occasions when generosity of this kind towards the public will help him to achieve some more truly significant and useful purposes at a future date.

There were limits, however; Cicero suggests that only an aedile should be expending huge sums on games, that, indeed, the only reason to present spectacles is the political one, having to do with the expectations of one's constituency and their capacity to remember any neglect of such obligations and punish the politician in his later career. Reverent commemoration of the deceased is no longer a sufficient purpose; in the following letter, Milo as "only" an executor is under no obligation to offer games and therefore should not be beggaring himself to put together funeral spectacle.

Source: Cicero, *Letters to His Brother Quintus* 3.8.6:[26] (Rome, late November 54 BCE) . . . [T. Annius Milo] is preparing games on a most magnificent scale, at a cost, I assure you, that no one has ever exceeded. It is foolish, on two or even three accounts, to give games that were not demanded – he has already given a magnificent show of gladiators; he cannot afford it; he is only an executor, and might have reflected that he is now an executor, not an aedile.

Cicero claims that Milo went through three fortunes in the presentation of spectacles as part of his candidacy for the consulship. In his defense of Milo on charges in the death of Clodius, Cicero pleads that Milo spent so hugely not out of personal ambition but because he wanted to safeguard the Republic from truly dangerous politicians, like the demagogue Clodius. Granted, Cicero is trying to have Milo acquitted of murder charges and so would be presenting Milo's motivation in the most positive and persuasive light. Still, Cicero voices concern in a number of contexts that presentation of games distracts politicians from their "real" service to Rome, and here he suggests that Milo's games have overshadowed his other leadership.

Source: Cicero, *For Milo* 95:[27] Milo reminds us about the plebs and the lowest rabble, which was threatening your [i.e. the Senate's] possessions under the leadership of P. Clodius, and the fact that he worked to safeguard your livelihood not only by turning them with his good example but also by winning them over by spending his three patrimonies; he is not worried that, having pleased the people with his gladiatorial shows, he won't win you over with his distinctive services on behalf of the republic.

In 52 BCE, G. Scribonius Curio gave extremely elaborate games in honor of his father, for which a marvelous mechanized venue was constructed at great expense (see chapter 2). When these events were still in the planning phase, Cicero wrote to Curio about how games were not the best way to go about building political power, with a number of disadvantages arguing against reliance on showmanship to gain support. The games were not the best way to build up a support base. The high cost limits one's options for campaigning, nor do they really demonstrate a candidate's capacity for leadership: they display wealth, not worth. Besides, the money could be put to better purposes, as could the organization and networking required to pull the games together. Cicero suggests that Curio's personal abilities will serve him better politically than wasting his energies and funds on games. Note that it is "the friends" of Curio, i.e. his fellow elites, who are dissuading him from currying popular favor with spectacles, rather than "the people." Nevertheless, Cicero does recognize that nothing pulls people in so much as spectacle.

Source: Cicero, *Letters to His Friends* 2.3:[28] (Letter to Curio dating to the first half of 53) Rupa [acting as Curio's agent] was ready and willing to announce a *munus* in your name, but I and all your friends thought that no step should be taken in your absence by which you would be committed on your return . . . Do realize that you are returning at a juncture in which your gifts of nature, application and fortune will count for more in winning you the highest political prizes than will *munera*. Nobody admires the capacity to give shows, which is a