

THE ROMAN GAMES: MOVING BEYOND GLADIATOR

David Posker-Hill
St Ignatius' College, Riverview
daposkerhill@riverview.nsw.edu.au
@poska

WHERE ARE WE GOING?

1) Warm Up Activity

2) Why?

- a) Should I teach this course?
- b) What benefits are there for the students?

3) How?

- a) Class Lessons
- b) Assessment
- c) Resources

4) What?

- a) I know nothing about the Roman Games - HELP!
- b) A real focus on the origins and representations - you know what a murmillio is!



The lower frieze shows the galloping chariots of **the funeral games of Patroclus at Troy** with the prizes depicted among them.

By Cleitias / Kleitias, ca. 570 B.C. Florence, Museo Archeologico, 4209.

“The first prize he offered was for the **chariot races**- a woman skilled in all useful arts, and a three-legged cauldron that had ears for handles, and would hold twenty-two measures. This was for the man who came in first. For the second there was a six-year old mare, unbroken, and in foal to a he-ass; the third was to have a goodly cauldron that had never yet been on the fire; it was still bright as when it left the maker, and would hold four measures. The fourth prize was two talents of gold, and the fifth a two-handled urn as yet unsoiled by smoke.”

The Iliad, Book 23.

WHY?

1. Fond memories of Gladiator?

- a. One of the key aspects of Ancient Rome that students remember from their Junior studies, is the Games.
- b. Students have an idealised picture of Gladiators, and *Gladiator*.
- c. Many have seen Spartacus: Blood and Sand, and are hooked on the concept.
- d. You'll likely know more than you think!

1. Context

- a. In *MY* context (16-17 Year Old Boys, in a very sport based schooling culture), they love war, weapons, and gore.
- b. I surveyed the incoming students at the end of Year 10, and they emphatically chose the Roman Games as their no 1.

WHY?

3. Historical Skills

- a. The unit gives a unique opportunity to examine perspectives, both past and present. Spend time comparing and contrasting Ancient images of the munera, with those in *Gladiator*, or *Spartacus: Blood and Sand*.
- b. The unit allows students to look deeply at an array of **archaeological sources** - much of my time was spent examining frescos, graffitti and tombs.
- c. The unit gives an opportunity to focus on short answer style responses, as well as 10-15 Mark style responses.

4. HSC Link

- a. The topic gives students a sound grounding in Roman sensibility, politics (roles and responsibilities of Senatorial Class and Emperor), geography, city layout, death, etc.

HOW - ORDER OF EVENTS/PROGRAMMING

1. **The Origins of the Roman Games**
2. **The Location of amphitheatres in the Roman world** - googlemaps class task
3. **The Flavian Amphitheatre** - preservation and conservation (link to syllabus)
4. **Circus Maximus** - preservation and conservation (link to syllabus)
5. **Frescoes, mosaics, graffiti** - Source Based Tasks (HSC EXAM Section 1)
6. **Tomb Epitaphs and Tombs** - Source Based Tasks (HSC EXAM Section 1)
7. **Depictions of gladiators and charioteers** - Source Based Tasks (HSC EXAM Section 1)
8. **The nature of armour and weaponry** - Short Answer (HSC EXAM Sec 2)
9. **The types of gladiators** - Short Answer (HSC EXAM Sec 2)
10. **Features of entertainment: mock naval battles** - Short Answer (HSC EXAM Sec 2)
11. **Gladiators and chariot racing in Roman culture**
12. **War of Spartacus** - 10/15 Mark Responses (HSC Sec 3)
13. **Commodus** - 10/15 Mark Responses (HSC Sec 3)
14. **The Political Role of the Roman Games** - 10/15 Mark Responses (HSC Sec 1 or 2)
15. **Representations of the Roman Games** - ancient and/or modern - 10/15 Mark Responses (HSC Sec 1 or 2)

HOW - INFORMAL ASSESSMENT

You'll notice that every syllabus point has an opportunity to upskill students in examination technique:

- Source Work - S1: Pompeii and Herculaneum
- Short Answer - S2: Societies
- Extended Responses - S1, S2, S3: Personalities

HOW - FORMAL ASSESSMENT - TASK 1

Part 1:

You are to investigate ONE Provincial Roman Amphitheatre/Hippodrome. You will place the site in its appropriate position on the shared google mymaps. You will then provide the following details:

- Where is the site? Who used the site? When was the site used?
- Outline the methods used by archaeologists in the excavation of the site?
- What does the archaeological and written evidence reveal about the building of, and events within your chosen amphitheatre/hippodrome?
- Three images of archaeological/written sources pertaining to your chosen site.

HOW - FORMAL ASSESSMENT - TASK 1

Part 2:

You will write a formal essay answering the following:

“Assess the importance of the Games to the Roman Empire’s political environ.”

Word Count: 1250 words.

Marks: 25 Marks

You must provide appropriate footnotes and a bibliography using Oxford Formatting.

HOW - FORMAL ASSESSMENT - EOY EXAM

Assessed in the style of Section 2 in the HSC Examination:

2 Marks - What were the *munera*?

3 Marks - Describe the weaponry use by a *murmillo*, *retiarius* and *thraex*.

5 Marks - Describe the main features of the *colosseum*.

15 Marks - With reference to **Source F** and your own knowledge, explain the purpose of gladiatorial contests in Ancient Rome.

HOW - RESOURCES - LITERARY

- **Bishop, M.C. Gladiators- Fighting to the death in Ancient Rome, Casemate, Oxford,**
- Edwards, C. *Death in Ancient Rome*, Yale University Press, UK, 2007.
- Fagan, G. *The Lure of the Arena*, Cambridge, UK, 2011.
- **Futrell, A. *Blood in the Arena*, University of Texas Press, USA, 1997.**
- **Futrell, A. *The Roman Games*, Blackwell, London, 2014.**
- Hope, V. *Death in Ancient Rome*, Routledge, UK, 2007.
- Hopkins, K and Beard, M. *The Colosseum*, Profile Books, London, 2011.
- Munoz-Santos, M. The Naumachiae of Rome, National Geographic, Sept/Oct, 2017.
- Natanson, A. 'Restoring the Colosseum - a colossal undertaking' History Today, Vol 61 Is. 10 October 2011.
- Rennell, T. 'He's revered as the heroic fighter who humiliated his Roman foes. But as a salacious drama retells his story... Was Spartacus just a savage?' Daily Mail.
- Rome's Colosseum sees more conflict over government restoration plan attacked for being like something from 'Las Vegas' - newspaper article
- Rome Colosseum Being Restored for Wider Public Viewing - newspaper article
- Pearson, J. *Arena*, Bloomsbury, London,
- Seiden, E. Spartacus, 'Rebel Without a Cause' Calliope. Jul/Aug 2009, Vol. 19 Issue 9, pp20-23.
- **Toner, J. *The Day Commodus Killed A Rhino*, Johns Hopkins University Press, Baltimore, 2014.**

HOW - RESOURCES - PRIMARY

- Augustine, *Acts of the Christian Martyrs*
- Cassidorus, *Cassidorus: Variae*
- Justinian, *The Digest of Justinian*
- Juvenal, *The Sixteen Satires*
- Petronius, *The Satyricon*
- Pliny the Elder, *Natural History*
- Pliny the Younger, *Letters of the Younger Pliny*
- Plutarch, *The fall of the Roman Republic: Six Lives.*
- Seneca, *Letters from a stoic*
- Seneca, *The Apocolocyntosis*
- Suetonius, *Lives of the Later Caesars: The first part of the Augustan History.*
- Suetonius, *The Twelve Caesars*
- Tacitus, *The Annals of Imperial Rome*
- Tertullian, *Apologetical Works and Minucius Felix*

HOW - RESOURCES - AUDIO VISUAL

- Gladiator (2000)
- Spartacus (Blood and Sand) TV Series – REMINDER this is R rated, however there are some good clips to pull that demonstrate gladiatorial contests.
- Spartacus (1960)
- Ben Hur (1959, 2016)
- Gladiator (TV Series)
- *Roman Empire: Reign of Blood* (Netflix), Episode 6 – 14 Days of Blood.
- Bettany Hughes, *8 Days that Made Rome* “Episode 2: The Spartacus Revolt”
- Bettany Hughes, *8 Days that Made Rome* “Episode 7: The Colosseum’s Grand Opening”
- “Colosseum: Roman Death Trap” NOVA PBS

WHAT - ANCIENT ORIGINS - THE ETRUSCAN INFLUENCE

The Ancient sources indicated to us that the origins of gladiatorial combat lay in Rome's Etruscan past. Whilst evidence is often scant, there are a variety of written and archaeological clues to assist us:

- 1. Athenaeus (2nd C. AD)** - observed that gladiatorial conflict came from the Etruscans.
- 2. Frescos from Etruscan tombs** - display combat between pairs of figures.
- 3. Figure of of Charun or Dis Pater** - Etruscan figure who is an assistant who kills any losers who are not yet dead.
- 4. Latin term** for gladiatorial trainer, *lanista*, is of Etruscan origin.

EXAMPLES FROM ETRUSCAN TOMBS



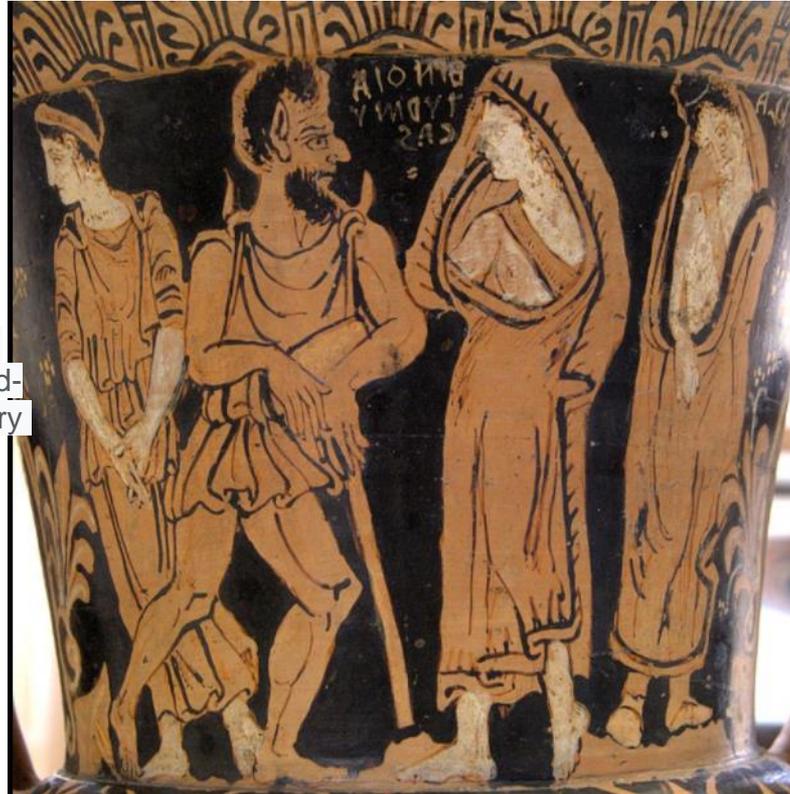
Tomb of the Augurs, Tarquinia, ca. 520 BCE. The Phersu Game. After Steingraber 1986, pl. 20 (T. Okamura).

EXAMPLES FROM ETRUSCAN TOMBS



Etruscan Tomb Painting - Sacrifice of the Trojan Captives - 200 B.C.

CHARUN



Charun (Etruscan demon of death) and dead souls. Side B from an Etruscan red-figure calyx-crater. End of the 4th century BC-beginning of the 3rd century BC.

ORIGINS IN FUNERAL GAMES

Whilst such origin stories can be unreliable, it is most likely that deeper roots of gladiatorial contests were found in funerals. **Tertullian** attests:

“Once upon a time, men believed that the souls of the dead were propitiated (*favour won*) by human blood, and so at funerals they sacrificed prisoners of war slaves of poor quality bought for the purpose” *On the Public Shows* 12.

ORIGINS IN FUNERAL GAMES

The first recorded contests remain expressly linked to funerals, with Livy recording the following:

“[in 264 BC] Decimus Junius brutus first gave a gladiatorial munus in honour of his deceased father” Livy, *Summary* 16.

Held initially in the *forum boarium* (ox market), the contests were dual roled: to placate the gods, and a means of lavishing praise (honour) upon the dead. *Munera* itself may find its origins in ‘obligation’ - they quickly became the duty of the descendents to honour the dead.

FROM FUNERALS TO POLITICAL TOOL

In the mid to late Third Century, gladiatorial contests increased in both frequency, and size.

264 marked the first public gladiatorial spectacle, and by 216 the venue had become clearly public:

“[216 BC] An in honour 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.” Livy 23.30

216 followed soon after Rome's catastrophic defeat at Cannae and it has been suggested that the games were used as a form of public entertainment for 'feel-good' factor.

FROM FUNERALS TO POLITICAL TOOL

As the religious and funerary aspects of gladiatorial shows became to be eclipsed by political purpose, the size and spectacle inherently grew.

Public participation in the shows became another opportunity for both reverence and political persuasion.

The grow of such shows can be attributed to the competition between aristocratic families.

FROM FUNERALS TO POLITICAL TOOL

Gladiatorial shows soon became part of the regular provision of games within the roman state, alongside theatrical shows and chariot races.

By 42 BC, gladiatorial contests replaced chariot races in the official games, and for the first time they became part of the obligatory duties of the aediles.

“[Caesar]... 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.” Plutarch, *Caesar* 5.9.

REPRESENTATIONS - FX: SPARTACUS BLOOD AND SAND

Mins 0 - 1.30.



REPRESENTATIONS - ROMAN

You get a great opportunity to look at both representation, and the styles of gladiators at the same time. For those taking History Extension, it is a start in the role of Hollywood in shaping our understanding of the past.



Mosaic at the National Archaeological Museum in Madrid showing a retiarius (net-fighter) named Kalendio fighting a secutor named Astyanax