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# The Roman Games

## Historical Sources in Translation

Alison Futrell

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## 1

# 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:<sup>1</sup> 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:<sup>2</sup> 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 *fascēs*, 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:<sup>3</sup> 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:<sup>4</sup> 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:<sup>5</sup> 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<sup>6</sup> 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:<sup>7</sup> (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<sup>8</sup>, 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:<sup>9</sup> 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 Messina] 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.<sup>10</sup> 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.<sup>11</sup> 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:<sup>12</sup> 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 Paulus, 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:<sup>13</sup> 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*<sup>14</sup>, 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:<sup>15</sup> 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:<sup>16</sup> 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:<sup>17</sup> 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:<sup>18</sup> [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:<sup>19</sup> 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:<sup>20</sup> (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.<sup>21</sup> 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.<sup>22</sup> On the occasion of their father's<sup>23</sup> 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.<sup>24</sup>

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.<sup>25</sup> 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 begging himself to put together funeral spectacle.

Source: Cicero, *Letters to His Brother Quintus* 3.8.6.<sup>26</sup> (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:<sup>27</sup> 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:<sup>28</sup> (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

matter of means, not personal qualities; and everybody is sick and tired of them. . . . Be sure that the highest expectations have been formed – all is expected of you that may be expected of the highest qualities and talents. If you are prepared to meet those hopes worthily, and I am confident you are, you will give us, your friends, and all your countrymen, and your country, the greatest of *munera*<sup>29</sup> – and many of them.

Nor is the political purpose for games truly a legitimate one, for Cicero, at least. Cicero is skeptical about the positive value offered not just by games, but by any "event" spending done by Rome's magistrates. This is cheap spending for immediate purposes, nearly bribery, not true beneficence. Here Cicero extols, instead, the "proper" use of wealth to strengthen ties within the ruling class.

Source: Cicero, *On Duties* 2.55–56:<sup>30</sup> In general, there are two sorts of liberal people: some are spendthrifts, some are generous. The spendthrifts are those who pour their cash into feasts and distributions of meat, into shows of gladiators and the equipment of wild-beast shows, and into the kind of spending that will leave behind either no memory of it or only a short one. Generous men, on the other hand, are those who, with their own resources, ransom prisoners from bandits, or underwrite the debts of their friends, or help friends in acquiring or in expanding property.

Some of the less-obvious costs of spectacle, i.e. the expenditure of energy and time, is demonstrated by a series of letters reflecting Caelius Rufus' difficulty in getting enough animals to enhance his aedilician games. He began his efforts well before being elected to office, deputizing friends abroad, like Cicero, to assemble the panthers and other such beasts and ship them to Rome.

Source: Cicero, *Letters to His Friends* 8.2:<sup>31</sup> (Letter from Caelius Rufus, dated early June, 51) . . . I have got one nobleman to contend with [in Caelius' campaign for aedile] and one acting-nobleman – M. Octavius, son of Gnaeus, and G. Hirrus are standing with me. I am telling you this because I know how eagerly you will wait for the result of our elections on Hirrus' account. As soon as you hear I am [aedile] designate, please see to the matter of the panthers.

Source: Cicero *Letters to His Friends* 8.9:<sup>32</sup> (Letter from Caelius Rufus, dated September 2, 51) . . . In almost every letter I have written to you I have mentioned the subject of panthers. It will be little to your credit that Patiscus has sent ten

panthers for Curio and you not many times as many [for me]. Curio has given me those same animals and another ten from Africa . . . If you will but keep it in mind and send for beasts from Cibyra and write to Pamphylia likewise (they say the hunting is better there) the trick will be done. I am all the more exercised about this now because I think I shall have to make all my arrangements apart from my colleague. Do be a good fellow and give yourself an order about it. . . . As soon as the creatures are caught, you have the men I sent in connection with Sittius' bond to look after their feeding and transport to Rome.

Source: Cicero, *Letters to His Friends* 8.8:<sup>33</sup> (Letter from Caelius Rufus, dated early October of 51) . . . Curio is behaving handsomely to me and has made me a somewhat onerous present in the shape of the African panthers which were imported for his show. Had he not done that, one might have let the thing go. As it is, I have to give it. So, as I have asked you all along, please see that I have a few beasts from your part of the world.

Source: Cicero *Letters to his Friends* 2.11:<sup>34</sup> (Letter from Cicero to Caelius Rufus, dated April 4, 50) . . . About the panthers, the usual hunters are doing their best on my instructions. But the creatures are in remarkably short supply, and those we have are said to be complaining bitterly because they are the only beings in my province who have to fear designs against their safety. Accordingly, they are reported to have decided to leave this province and go to Caria.

### Control

The increasingly competitive nature of politics in the mid to late Republic involved the intensification of individual politicians' efforts to woo new constituents alongside their efforts to limit rivals' ability to do so. Attempts were made by the senate to exert control over the extraordinary games in several ways: by refusing to grant a triumph, by limiting the scale of extraordinary victory games by curtailing funding resources, and by controlling the timing of games (even those considered specifically "private", like *munera*) by excluding them as much as possible from the campaign cycle and the assignment of provincial governorships to recoup financial losses. Efforts were also made to limit access to the prime resource of gladiators; although this had an effect on games-planning, this was its secondary purpose, as gladiators themselves were also becoming a tool of Roman politics.

Games held to fulfill a victory vow were paid for by the general who made the vow, presumably out of the booty acquired during the campaign. M. Fulvius Nobilior set a new precedent by imposing a special tax on the conquered after his campaigns in Greece from 198 to 187 BCE, specifically to pay for the games.

Source: Livy 39.5:<sup>35</sup> [M. Fulvius] went on to tell them that on the day when he took Ambracia he had vowed the Great Games to Jupiter Optimus Maximus, and that for this celebration a hundred pounds of gold had been contributed by the cities; he asked the Senate to direct that this sum should be kept separate, out of the money which he intended to display in his triumphal procession and then to deposit in the treasury. The Senate gave orders that the pontiffs<sup>36</sup> should be consulted whether it was necessary to spend the whole amount [i.e. the whole hundred pounds] on the games. The pontiffs replied that the precise sum to be spent was irrelevant to the religious aspect of the festival; the Senate accordingly left it to Fulvius to decide how much he should spend, provided that he did not go beyond a total of 80,000 sesterces.

The precedent of limiting total expenditure for victory games established for Nobilior was then applied to later triumphant generals: Q. Fulvius Flaccus, consul in 179 BCE, would be compelled to use his own resources, up to the total of 80,000 sesterces, and not collect any *ad hoc* funding from subject peoples or allies. Presumably his personal wealth had been increased somewhat by his campaigns in Spain, even if the territory was not so rich in portable booty as the Greek area.

Source: Livy 40.44:<sup>37</sup> [Q. Fulvius] had vowed, he said, on the day when he had last fought with the Celtiberians, to give games to Jupiter Optimus Maximus and a temple to Fortuna Equestris; for this purpose money had been collected for him by the Spaniards. It was decreed that the games should be held and that two commissioners should be chosen to contract for the temple. As to the cost, the limit was set that a greater sum might not be spent for the games than the amount that had been decreed to Fulvius Nobilior when he gave his games after the Aetolian war, and it was voted too that he should not invite, compel or accept contributions for these or do anything contrary to that decree of the senate which had been passed regarding games in the consulship of L. Aemilius and Gn. Baebius (182 BCE). The senate passed this latter decree because of the lavish expenditures made on games by Ti. Sempronius the aedile, which had been a burden, not only on Italy and the allies of the Latin confederacy, but on outside provinces as well.

These limitations restricted the amounts which could be requisitioned from conquered peoples and the Italians and may have had some effect, for a time, on triumphal expenditure. It did not limit the money spent overall on games, which kept going up as the political potential of entertainment was enhanced. Magistrates spent their own money on the ordinary games they presented, in addition to the allotment from the treasury, to ensure that their *spectacula* would have the desired impact.

A series of legislative efforts were made in the first century to manage the use of spectacle, here, by controlling how they were used in the political cycle, how they featured as political bribery. The *Lex Calpurnia* on electioneering of 67 imposed fines, removal from office and loss of the *ius imaginum*<sup>38</sup> on those convicted of electoral bribery. What, exactly, could be interpreted as electoral bribery was in dispute in 63 BCE, a year when Rome (with Cicero as consul) was also struggling to deal with Catiline's efforts to disrupt elections and overthrow the government. L. Licinius Murena, elected for consul in 62 BCE (after impressive games sponsored as praetor a few years before), was hauled into court and charged with bribery during the campaign: the bribe was not cash but highly valued seats at a gladiatorial spectacle. At state-sponsored shows, Roman elites typically acquired blocks of seating from officials and magistrates, in accordance with the strength of their personal connections to those in charge of the show. In turn, they distributed these passes to their friends and clients, on the basis of ambition or generosity, as Cicero claims. Since gladiatorial combats at this time were still "private" and thus not necessarily following the custom for state-sponsored shows, to whom could these tickets be handed out? Murena had not distributed tickets to his friends and clients, i.e. those with a prior relationship to him who would expect these benefits, but rather to people who may have been the clients of others, whom he may have been trying to woo into supporting his political career. So does this indirect bribery, this opportunistic generosity of Murena's, count as a campaign violation? Cicero says no, that such generosity is an obligation of Rome's ruling class.

Source: Cicero, *For Murena* 67, 72.<sup>39</sup> You pointed out that the Senate, on my proposal, passed a decree that it should be deemed a violation of the *Lex Calpurnia* if men were paid to meet the candidates, if they were hired to escort them, if seats at gladiatorial games were given out wholesale by tribes, or if lunches were likewise given out wholesale. . . . "But seating was given out by tribes and invitations to lunch distributed wholesale." Murena abstained entirely from such practices . . . and his friends engaged in them only in moderation, and as far as custom allows. Nevertheless, this reminds me how many votes, Servius, these complaints in the senate lost us. For when was there ever a time, in living memory or in the memory of our fathers, when people did not want, whether from self-interested motives or out of simple generosity, to give their friends and fellow-tribesmen seats in the circus or the forum? These are the rewards and benefits that poorer people receive from their fellow tribesmen by time-honored custom.

Earlier in 63, Cicero himself had sponsored legislation specifically against the direct link between *munera* and campaigning: the *Lex Tullia* mandated that politicians could not present gladiatorial shows within two years of running for office. The bribery legislation was publicly scrutinized in the

Roman courtroom in 56 BCE, when Publius Sestius was charged with irregular campaigning tactics and with the use of violence, including the use of gladiators as "muscle," while tribune in 57 BCE. The interrogation of Publius Vatinius by Cicero in his speech defending Sestius includes the denunciation of Vatinius' illegal action of holding *munera* in connection with campaign for public office (Vatinius was running for praetor during 56). Cicero notes an exception to the *Lex Tullia*, if it can be proven, by reference to testamentary wishes, that the *munera* are genuinely offered as funeral celebrations.

Source: Cicero, *For Sestius* 133–135.<sup>40</sup> [Vatinius] despises that law which expressly forbids any one to exhibit shows of gladiators within two years of his having stood, or being about to stand, for any office. And in that, O judges, I cannot sufficiently marvel at his rashness. He acts most openly against the law; he does so and yet is neither able to slip out of the consequences of a trial by his pleasant manner, nor to struggle out of them by his popularity, nor to break down the laws and courts of justice by his wealth and influence. What can induce the fellow to be so intemperate? I imagine it is out of his excessive desire for popularity, that he bought that troupe of gladiators, so beautiful, noble, and magnificent. He knew the inclination of the people, he saw that great clamors and gatherings of the people would ensue. And elated with this expectation, and burning with a desire for glory, he could not restrain himself from bringing forward those gladiators, of whom he himself was the finest specimen. If that were the motive for his violation of the law, and if he were prompted by zeal to please the people on account of the recent kindness of the Roman people to himself, still no one would pardon him; but as the fact is that this band did not consist of men picked out of those who were for sale, but of men bought out of jails, and adorned with gladiatorial names, while he drew lots to see whom he would call Samnites and whom *provocatores*,<sup>41</sup> who could avoid having fears as to what might be the end of such licentiousness and such undisguised contempt for the laws? But he brings forward two arguments in his defence. First of all, "I exhibit," says he, "*bestiarii*, and the law only speaks of gladiators." A very clever idea! Listen now to a statement which is still more ingenious. He says that he has not exhibited gladiators, but one single gladiator; and that he has limited the whole of his aedileship to this one *munus*. A true aedileship truly. One lion, two hundred *bestiarii*. However, let him urge this defence. I wish him to feel confidence in his case; for he is in the habit of appealing to the tribunes of the people, and to use violent means to upset those tribunals in which he has no confidence.

Further legislation is linked to the danger hinted at by Cicero: the potential for violence represented by gladiators themselves and the increasing use of these trained fighters, not in shows, but as a coercive political tool in an increasingly turbulent Republic.

## Violence

Gladiatorial *familiae* were highly visible participants in the deterioration of the Roman political system and the disruption of Roman society during the fall of the Republic. Gladiatorial games were extremely popular events which won votes for their candidate *editores*. Candidates thus had to get their hands somehow on troupes or *familiae* of fighters, which could remain in their possession for an extended period of time while the games were being organized. Once the games were over, the surviving combatants could be either sold to another ambitious politician or be kept on as a sort of bodyguard; in practice, these lethal gangs acted as political thugs for Roman political activists growing increasingly violent. The Senate was alarmed, for example, by Caesar's lavish preparations for *munera* in 65 BCE, which included a huge number of professional fighters; the senators responded by restricting the number of gladiators which any private citizen could possess within city limits.

Source: Suetonius, *Julius Caesar* 10.2.<sup>42</sup> [During his aedileship] Caesar . . . put on a gladiatorial show, but he had collected so immense a troop of combatants that his terrified political opponents rushed a bill through the House, limiting the number of gladiators that anyone might keep in Rome; consequently far fewer pairs fought than had been advertised.

The Senate's fear seems justifiable, given the lingering fear of Spartacus and the alleged involvement of gladiators in the Catilinarian conspiracy in 63 BCE. The situation turned ugly in the 50s, when a number of politicians made overt use of gladiators to further their political interests. Clodius, for example, exploited his brother's *familia* to stage a riot in 57 BCE, in order to prevent a vote on legislation to which he was opposed. The gladiators had been assembled for the aedilician games Clodius anticipated hosting the following year, hoping for success at the elections of January 56. Cicero points to the violation of precedence this represented: instead of using these performers to persuade the public, the public was victimized by the gladiators, as if the people of Rome were the unfortunate losers in a vast *munera*.

Source: Dio Cassius 39.7.<sup>43</sup> Many disorderly proceedings were the result, chief of which was that during the very taking of the vote on the measure [to recall Cicero from exile] Clodius, knowing that the multitude would be on Cicero's side, took the gladiators that his brother held in readiness for the funeral games of Marcus, his relative, and rushing into the assemblage, wounded many and killed many others. Consequently, the measure was not passed.

Source: Cicero, *For Sestius* 77–78.<sup>44</sup> You remember gentlemen, how the Tiber was filled that day with the bodies of citizens, how the sewers were choked, how blood was mopped up from the Forum with sponges, enough to make everyone think that so great an array and so magnificent a show of gladiators was not provided by any private person, nor by any plebeian, but by a patrician and a praetor.<sup>45</sup> . . . Are you [i.e. Clodius] to send into the Forum before daybreak your raw gladiators, provided for an expected aedileship, with a pack of assassins discharged from prison? Are you to wreak great slaughter? Are you to drive magistrates from the Rostra?

This was not an isolated incident; T. Annius Milo, a rival of Clodius, used tactics very similar to his, leading up to Clodius' eventual death in a bloody skirmish outside Rome.

Source: Dio Cassius 39.8.<sup>46</sup> While contesting this very point [the timing of selection of aedile and quaestor] Milo caused much disturbance, and at last himself collected some gladiators and others like minded with himself and kept continually coming to blows with Clodius, so that bloodshed occurred throughout practically the whole city.

Some Roman aristocrats, Julius Caesar and Cicero's good friend Pomponius Atticus included, invested in gladiatorial *ludi* or training schools as a profitable enterprise; political Romans also could see the advantage in having spectacle resources on hand. Even at the distance mandated by law, it was feared these schools could be a military asset in the event of civil war. This threat is behind contradictory stories about Caesar's gladiatorial school in Capua and the kind of danger it represented in 49 BCE, in the face of Caesar's invasion of Italy. The version preserved in the pro-Caesarean tradition has L. Cornelius Lentulus Crus, one of the consuls of that year and an opponent of Caesar, scrambling frantically to put together some resistance to Caesar and resorting to desperate measures, such as drafting gladiators, to do so. Supposedly, he gave up the plan when he realized what a negative impression this would leave. Cicero's contemporary account of the situation asserts the gladiators themselves presented a danger, apparently planning to take advantage of the civil uproar to escape from custody and, no doubt, run amok.

Source: Caesar, *Civil War* 1.14.<sup>47</sup> It was at Capua that [the opponents of Caesar] first took heart and collected themselves and began a levy among the colonists who had been settled there by the Julian law. The gladiators whom Caesar had in a training school there were brought into the forum by Lentulus, who encouraged them with the hope of freedom, gave them horses, and ordered

them to follow him; later, because this action was universally condemned, on the advice of his friends he distributed them among the households of the Campanian Assembly so that they could be kept under guard.

Source: Cicero, *Letter to Atticus* 7.14:<sup>48</sup> (January 25, 49) . . . Pompey has expressed a wish for me to go to Capua and help with the levy, in which the response among the Campanian settlers is less than enthusiastic. Caesar's gladiators at Capua, about whom I earlier sent you a false report based on Torquatus' letter, have been very sensibly distributed by Pompey among the population, two per household. There were 1,000 shields in the *ludus* and they were said to be going to break out. Certainly a valuable precaution in the public interest.

### *Shows as political assembly*

As games became more regularized and the popular will became a more important feature of political persuasion, the shows offered the opportunity for the audience to express popular feeling on important matters. Cicero argues for the spectacle venue as a legitimate and representative assembly of the Roman electorate, alongside more overtly political gatherings, such as elections and the *contiones*; he contrasts this with informal public meetings called by populist demagogues, such as Clodius, outside a formal and traditional venue. His speech for Sestius contains extended analysis of how one can discern the will of the people from their reactions in the audience at spectacles. Cicero's analysis in this speech has been influenced by his own experiences in 58 BCE, when political rivalry resulted in Cicero's exile from Rome and substantial loss of property, as well as public humiliation imposed on Cicero by the sentence. His suspicion of *contiones* and *comitiae* is probably based on their condemnation of him, and the role played by his opponent P. Clodius in crafting this outcome.

Source: Cicero, *For Sestius* 106:<sup>49</sup> For in three places the opinions and sympathies of the Roman people concerning public matters can be demonstrated; in a public meeting, at the elections, and in the communal attendance at games and gladiatorial shows.

How it is that the people air their views at spectacles is then explained by Cicero. Applause or hissing may seem, to a modern reader, to be fairly generalized means of declaring a political stance; one should keep in mind the political system of the Roman Republic, in which the general body of the citizenry did not personally participate in policy debates. Cicero lauds the

"sincerity" of this kind of popular expression as well as its wisdom in selecting righteous targets for their clapping.

Source: Cicero, *For Sestius* 115:<sup>50</sup> Let us now come to the shows . . . expressions of public opinion at *Comitiae* and *Contiones* are sometimes the voice of truth, but sometimes they are falsified and corrupt: at theatrical and gladiatorial shows it is said to be common for some feeble and scanty applause to be started by a hired and unprincipled claque, and yet, when that happens, it is easy to see how and by whom it is started and what the honest part of the audience does.

Cicero acknowledges that clagues could, through rehearsed chants, manufacture a false "will of the people", but suggests that this can be easily detected and disregarded by Rome's leaders and by the "honest" citizens. True popular opinion was spontaneous and universal and directed its energies toward the "best men," by which Cicero generally means the conservative elites. One of Cicero's letters to Atticus from 59 discusses the multiple expressions of the people's views specifically on the so-called First Triumvirate. There was uproarious laughter at ridicule of Pompey, the silence of mute disapproval for Caesar (who is actually present) and cheers for Curio the younger, which annoys Caesar. Pompey and Caesar take the opposition expressed at the shows very seriously and even contemplate legislative reprisals.

Source: Cicero, *Letter to Atticus* 2.19:<sup>51</sup> (July of 59) Pompey, the man I loved, has, to my infinite sorrow, ruined his own reputation. They<sup>52</sup> hold no one by affection, and I fear they will be forced to use terror . . . The feeling of the people was shown as clearly as possible in the theatre and at the shows. For at the gladiators both master and supporters were overwhelmed with hisses. At the *Ludi Apollinares* the actor Diphilus made a pert allusion to Pompey, in the words: "By our misfortunes thou art Great." He was encored countless times. When he delivered the line, "The time will come when thou wilt deeply mourn / That self-same valor," the whole theatre broke out into applause, and so on with the rest. For the verses do seem exactly as though they were written by some enemy of Pompey's to hit the time. "If neither laws nor customs can control," etc., caused great sensation and loud shouts. Caesar entered as the applause died away, followed by the younger Curio. The latter received an ovation such as used to be given to Pompey when the constitution was still intact. Caesar was much annoyed. A message is said to have been sent flying off to Pompey at Capua. They are offended with the equestrians, who rose to their feet and cheered Curio and are at war with everybody. They are threatening the *Lex Roscia* and even the grain law.

Cicero's sensitivity to nuances of applause and jeers stretched to include an appreciation for timing and the ability to unpack gesture and expression,

as well as, no doubt, audible emoting, to indicate political support of specific issues as well as condemnation of, for example, the agenda of his political opponent Clodius.

Source: Cicero, *For Sestius* 117:<sup>53</sup> What feelings the Roman People showed they entertained at that time was made plain in both ways [i.e. at both the explicitly political venue of the senate hearing and at the shows]. First, when the decree of the Senate had been heard, unanimous applause was given to the measure itself, and to the Senate, before they came in; next, to the senators, when they returned one by one from the Senate to see the shows. But when the consul<sup>54</sup> himself, who gave the entertainment, took his seat, people stood up with outstretched hands, giving thanks, and weeping for joy openly showed their goodwill and sympathy for myself. But when Clodius arrived, that raging fiend, at the height of his frenzy, the Roman People could scarcely restrain themselves, men could scarcely help wreaking their hatred upon his foul and abominable person; cries, menacing gestures, loud curses came in a flood from all. But why do I speak of the spirit and courage of the Roman People, when at last after long servitude they had a glimpse of freedom, in their attitude towards a man whom even the actors did not spare to his face as he sat in the audience, though he was then a candidate for an aedileship!

Although Cicero himself had been the glad recipient of popular support, in his speech for Sestius he declares that the most-favored target of such approval had been Sestius, the defendant. The fact that this alleged declaration of enormous support had taken place at *munera* hosted by Scipio Nasica may have been something of a disappointment to Scipio Nasica, who as presenter of the spectacle might have hoped to be the primary object of the crowd's gratitude and affection.

Source: Cicero, *For Sestius* 124–125:<sup>55</sup> But the strongest expression of the judgment of the whole Roman People was plainly given by an audience at gladiatorial games. They were a show given by Scipio, one worthy both of the giver and of Quintus Metellus in whose honor it was held.<sup>56</sup> And it was that kind of show which is attended by crowds of all classes in great numbers, and which has a special charm for the masses. Into that crowd of spectators came Publius Sestius, then tribune of the plebs . . . and showed himself to the People, not that he was eager for applause, but he wished that our enemies themselves might recognize the goodwill of the whole Roman People . . . At once from all the spectators' seats right down from the Capitol, and from all the barriers of the Forum, there were heard such shouts of applause, that it was said that the whole Roman People had never shown greater nor more manifest unanimity in any cause . . . I for my part think that there has never been a greater crowd than at that gladiatorial show, neither at any *contio* nor indeed at any *comitia*. What then

did this countless throng of men, this unanimous expression of the feeling of the entire Roman People . . . what did it declare except that the welfare and honor of the best citizens was dear to the whole Roman People?

Alongside the advantage to be gained from presenting spectacle, advantage to be built on in the exchange, verbal or not, between the *editor* and the spectators, there was also a real risk of evoking a negative reaction from the target audience. This could be prompted by a "failure" of the spectacle; Pompey's elephant show of 55 BCE became a notorious example of beneficence gone bad.

Source: Cicero, *Letter to his Friends* 7.1:<sup>57</sup> . . . The last day was for the elephants. The groundlings showed much astonishment thereat, but no enjoyment. There was even an impulse of compassion, a feeling that the beasts had something human about them.

Source: Pliny, *Natural History* 8.20–21:<sup>58</sup> In Pompey's second consulship [in 55 BCE], when the temple of Venus Victrix was dedicated, twenty elephants (some say seventeen) fought in the Circus against Gaetulians armed with throwing-spears. One elephant put up a fantastic fight and, although its feet were badly wounded, crawled on its knees against the attacking bands. It snatched away their shields and hurled them into the air . . . All the elephants, en masse, tried to break out through the iron railings that enclosed them, much to the discomfiture of the spectators . . . But when Pompey's elephants had given up hope of escape, they played on the sympathy of the crowd, entreating them with indescribable gestures. They moaned, as if wailing, and caused the spectators such distress that, forgetting Pompey and his lavish display specially devised to honor them, they rose in a body, in tears, and heaped dire curses on Pompey, the effects of which he soon suffered.

Fear of generating a bad response exerted some power over Roman politicians, shaping their public presence by changing their plans for day-to-day activity. Indeed, Piso had refused to go to the dedication games for the Theater of Pompey in 55 BCE; Cicero claims that this was due to his fear of rejection of the crowd, that their cat-calls might turn to body-blows.

Source: Cicero, *Against Piso* 64–65:<sup>59</sup> Come on, the senate hates you . . . The Roman equestrians cannot bear the sight of you . . . The Roman people wishes your destruction . . . All Italy execrates you . . . Test this excessive and universal

hatred if you dare. The most carefully prepared and magnificent games within the memory of man are now at hand, games not only like none ever shown before, but such that we cannot even imagine how any like them ever could be exhibited in future. Trust yourself to the people... Are you afraid of [their] hisses?... Are you afraid that there will be no acclamations raised in your honor? Surely it does not become a philosopher even to consider such a thing as that. You are afraid that violent hands may be laid on you. For pain is an evil, as you assert. The opinion which men entertain of you, disgrace, infamy, baseness – these are all empty words, mere trifles. But about this I have no question. He will never dare to come near the games.

Appian depicts the efforts to sway popular opinion in 44 BCE, in the months following the death of Caesar when domination of the Roman government swiftly passed from one set of leaders to another. At this moment, the interests of Antony seem to align with those of Caesar's assassins, who have been forced out of Rome. Here, games become the means of persuasion and the venue for an articulation of the will of the people, heavily prompted by the organizers. Cash payoffs to the audience by Octavian, cloaked as his performance of filial duty, stymie the efforts.

Source: Appian, *Civil War* 3.23–24.<sup>60</sup> The games were now approaching, which Gaius Antonius, the brother of Antony, was about to give on behalf of Brutus, the praetor, as he attended also to the other duties of the praetorship which fell upon him in the absence of Brutus. Lavish expense was incurred in the preparations for these games, in the hope that the people, gratified by the spectacle, would recall Brutus and Cassius. Octavian, on the other hand, trying to win the mob over to his own side, distributed the money [to pay out the legacy granted by Caesar to the Roman people in his will] derived from the sale of his property among the head men of the voting tribes by turns, to be divided by them among the first comers... [the people] showed their feelings clearly while Brutus' games were in progress, lavish as these were. Although a certain number, who had been hired for the purpose, shouted that Brutus and Cassius should be recalled, and the rest of the spectators were thus caught up in a feeling of pity for them, crowds ran in and stopped the games until the spectators stopped the demand for the recall.

Cicero was an eye-witness to this competition for the support of the spectators at games in 44. In his denunciation of Antony, he emphasizes the chants on behalf of Brutus as the "true" expression of the people's will.

Source: Cicero, *Philippics* 1.36.<sup>61</sup> Think of the clamor raised by countless citizens at gladiatorial shows, think of all the versified popular slogans, think of those endless acclamations in front of the statue of Pompeius... Did you attach no importance to the applause at the *Ludi Apollinares*? – rather I should call it the testimony and judgment of the entire Roman people. What an honor for the men who were prevented by armed violence from being present in person – though they were present in the hearts and emotions of the people of Rome!... Brutus was the man for whom the cheering and the prize were intended. He could not himself attend the games that were displayed in his name, but the Romans who witnessed that sumptuous show paid their tribute to him in his absence and sought to comfort the sadness which they felt because their liberator was not with them by incessant cheers and shouts of sympathy.

### Imperial Spectacle

The Republican tradition of using public games as an enhancement of political achievement was extended and elaborated during the empire, when the number of days allocated to each of the *ludi* was inflated in commemoration of accomplishments of the emperor and his family; archaic festivals, newly resurrected and revised, were brought "up-to-date" with the addition of *ludi* to the old-fashioned rituals. The nature of politics was radically changed under the Principate, however. Augustus' establishment of the imperial monarchy meant that all leadership was subordinated to that of the emperor; individual senators would no longer compete to dominate Roman politics, so the typical Republican motivation for presenting spectacles, i.e. the wooing of the electorate, was no longer present. The meaning and purpose of the games was adjusted to fit the emperor's agenda.

Augustus centralized the institution of the games, to a great extent, and made significant provisions in the infrastructure of support. Under Augustus, the first permanent amphitheater was built in Rome and imperial *ludi* were established, to supply the needs of the games. Augustus also regularized access to the spectacles, particularly for the elite, by mandating that spectators be seated by status. Venues for *munera* began to spread across the empire to key locations, particularly administrative centers and military zones, nexuses of contact between Roman authority and the subjects of empire. The emperor took control of spectacle of all kinds. Outside Rome, the local officials acted as the agents of the center, not only in providing the arena facilities, but also in sponsoring the events as local *editores*. As the representatives of Augustus and of the Roman power structure, they had much to gain from the assertion of control and the validation of the hierarchy.

Even so, during the empire *munera* and *venationes* were presented on an extraordinary basis, for the most part. Although the Roman people were



guaranteed a certain minimum of such blood spectacles as part of the regular calendar, the potential persuasive impact of these games made it desirable that the emperor alone control the presentation of particularly lavish, and politically charged, *munera*. In this, as in other matters, Augustus set the standard by providing for *munera* to be presented as part of the "ordinary" games with certain limitations: these events, sanctioned formally by the Senate, were restricted in size and expenditure.

#### *Ordinary spectacle*

In 22 BCE, the praetors were put in charge of the ordinary or official imperial *munera*. These took place in December, with more days devoted to gladiatorial spectacle being gradually added over the years; by the fourth century ten days were given over to ordinary *munera*.<sup>62</sup> They were to receive a certain amount of public funding for these spectacles, which could be topped up by the individual magistrate, but on a limited basis: each could spend no more than any of his peers. They were limited as well to sixty pairs, maximum, of fighters. The nature of these limitations points to the fact that Augustus wanted to decrease the utility of these events in the competition for elite prestige. To put a more positive spin on his agenda, Augustus wanted to eliminate the waste of resources and manipulation of vulgar emotions entailed in the politicization of the games, decried by Cicero and others as the corruption of Republican politics. He recognized that the shows were important, but minimized the negative effects of the late Republican games by limiting the political impact they could have. By giving control to the praetors, instead of the aediles as in Republican tradition, Augustus cut back on how much games could serve as career builders for budding politicians.<sup>63</sup> These limits were continued under Tiberius.

Source: Dio Cassius 54.2:<sup>64</sup> He committed the charge of all the festivals to the praetors, commanding that an appropriation should be given them from the public treasury, and also forbidding any one of them to spend more than another from his own means on these festivals, or to give a gladiatorial combat unless the senate decreed it, or, in fact, oftener than twice in each year or with more than one hundred and twenty men.

Source: Dio Cassius 54.17:<sup>65</sup> . . . later [Augustus] raised [the senatorial rating] to one million sesterces . . . And because of this he allowed the praetors who so desired to spend on the public festivals three times the amount granted them from the treasury.

Caligula eased up on the imperial control of the *munera* and other spectacles, although the analysis of his motives provided by Dio Cassius does not indicate this was done to foster uninhibited campaigning by senatorials nor to encourage public generosity among a wider range of potential benefactors. Dio reads this action as part of a pattern of hostility toward the elites expressed by Caligula, hostility that often turned to actual bloodshed. This, in turn, fits the pattern of condemnation of tyrants, alienated from the elites by their bad behavior, abuse of power and reliance on popular support that bespeaks their insecurity in ruling. In this instance, Caligula is trying to entrap and bankrupt Rome's ruling class.

Source: Dio Cassius 59.13–14:<sup>66</sup> [In 39 CE] Gaius now became consul again . . . he held the office for only thirty days . . . during these and the following days many of the foremost men perished in fulfillment of sentences of condemnation . . . and many others of less prominence [died] in gladiatorial combats . . . At the same time that he was perpetrating these murders, apparently because he was in urgent need of funds, he devised another scheme for getting money, as follows. He would sell the survivors in the gladiatorial combats at an excessive valuation to the consuls, praetors and others, not only to willing purchasers, but also to others who were compelled very much against their will to give such exhibitions at the Circensian games, and in particular he sold them to the men specially chosen by lot to have charge of such contests (For he ordered that two praetors should be chosen by lot to have charge of the gladiatorial games, just as had formerly been the custom); and he himself would sit on the auctioneer's platform and keep raising the bids. Many also came from outside to put in rival bids, the more so as he allowed any who so wished to employ a greater number of gladiators than the law permitted and because he frequently visited them himself. So the people bought them for large sums, some because they really wanted them, others with the idea of gratifying Gaius, and the majority, consisting of those who had a reputation for wealth, from a desire to take advantage of this excuse to spend some of their substance and thus by becoming poorer save their lives.<sup>67</sup>

Claudius, in an effort to demonstratively cut back on the spectacular excesses of Caligula, placed limitations on honors given the imperial family and formalized the games and rituals affiliated with the Imperial Cult. His ban on *munera* was meant to make the point that his regime was to be austere and well within the traditions of Rome that had been so flouted by Caligula. Later, Claudius gave responsibility for the ordinary *munera* to the quaestors, the lowest of the magistracies in Rome. Sponsorship of the *munera* thus became a sort of tithe on those who were elevated into the senatorial class by being elected to this office. Tacitus interprets this as bribery, putting an extremely nostalgic spin on Republican practice as emblematic of virtuous and clean competition.