

Source: Dio Cassius 60.5.⁶⁸ [Claudius] ordered the praetors not to give the customary gladiatorial exhibitions and also commanded that if anyone else gave them in any place whatsoever, it should at least not be recorded or reported that they were being given for the emperor's preservation.

Source: Tacitus, *Annals* 11.22.⁶⁹ During the same consulship (47 CE), Publius Dolabella proposed that a spectacle of gladiators should be annually exhibited at the cost of those who obtained the quaestorship. In our ancestors' days this honor had been a reward of virtue, and every citizen, with good qualities to support him, was allowed to compete for office . . . the quaestorship was obtained, without expense, by merit in the candidates or by the good nature of the electors, till at Dolabella's suggestion it was, so to speak, put up to sale.

Nero reversed Claudius' decision as one of the first actions of his reign; the context in which it appears links the quaestorian games to corruption under Claudius, to abuse of imperial judicial power and over-stepping of the boundaries of the emperor's authority. Supposedly, Nero extended the ban to the provinces, although there is no clear indication that this ban was ever enacted. Tacitus reads this as a move against corruption on the part of Nero, embedded in the "good years", i.e. the first few years of his rule when he allegedly was under the influence of responsible advisors and thus pursued a prudent and high-minded policy.

Source: Tacitus, *Annals* 13.5.⁷⁰ [At Nero's accession] several arrangements were made on the Senate's authority. No one was to receive a fee or a present for pleading a cause; the quaestors-elect were not to be under the necessity of exhibiting gladiatorial shows.

Source: Tacitus, *Annals* 13.31.⁷¹ The emperor [in 57 CE] by an edict forbade any magistrate or procurator in the government of a province to exhibit a show of gladiators, or of wild beasts, or indeed any other public entertainment; for hitherto our subjects had been as much oppressed by such bribery as by actual extortion, while governors sought to screen by corruption the guilty deeds of arbitrary caprice.

It should be understood that the membership of the ruling class changed during the shift from Republic to Principate; the civil wars had decimated the elite on the battlefield and in proscriptions. Augustus' restoration of the Republic involved the recruitment of great numbers of Italian and, eventually,

provincial, elite to fill the senatorial and equestrian ranks. These were people with no personal experience of the upper levels of Republican politics; they also had a certain obligation to the emperor, their patron, with regard to their new status. This kind of upward mobility becomes typical for the time of the emperors. Juvenal is unimpressed by Rome's nouveau elite, whom he characterizes as dishonest contractors. Their allegedly deceitful approach to exchange has warped the relationship of power in the games.

Source: Juvenal, *Satires* 3.29–40.⁷² So farewell Rome, I leave you to sanitary engineers and municipal architects, fellows who by swearing black is white find it easy to land contracts for a new temple, swamp-drainage, harbor-works, river-clearance, undertaking, the lot – then pocket the profit and fraudulently file their petition in bankruptcy. These creatures used to be horn-players, stumping the provinces in road-shows, their puffed-out cheeks a familiar sight; but now they stage gladiatorial games, and at the mob's thumbs-down will butcher a loser for popularity's sake, and then move on to lease public privies. But why draw the line at that? These are such men as Fortune, by way of a joke, will sometimes raise from the gutter and make Top People.

Juvenal is also responsible for the most notorious assessment of the imperial games.

Source: Juvenal, *Satires* 10.77–81: There was a time when the People bestowed every honor – the governance of provinces, civic leadership, military command – but now they hold themselves back, now two things only do they ardently desire: bread and games.

The statement is often interpreted as an indication of Roman imperial decadence, of the disempowerment of the public which was lured away from political engagement by government food subsidies and sensational entertainment. The continuing relationship between *editor* and audience, emperor and plebs, is more complex and powerful than this suggests, as it is played out in the arena.

The emperor and the arena

Augustus, the first of Rome's emperors, recognized the good public relations value of bloody spectacular entertainment and proudly published for posterity the shows he'd presented; the permanent record on display meant that the impact of the games would transcend the time and place they were actually held. But the sheer scale of his games would ensure their endurance in the collective memory of the Roman people. Augustus' spectacles were the largest

ever seen, far more splendid than anything offered by the politicians of the Late Republic.

Source: Augustus, *Res Gestae* 22: Three times I gave gladiatorial games in my own name and five times in the names of my sons and grandsons; at these displays about ten thousand men fought... I gave the people twenty-six *venationes* of African animals in either the circus, the forum or the amphitheater; about thirty-five hundred animals were killed in these spectacles.

On the basis of the numbers given by the emperor, the imperial *munera* averaged 1,250 combatants, ten times the size of the praetors' games, and each of the *venationes* offered 135 animals. The cost of simply staffing the arena with sufficient personnel must have been staggering.

The occasions for the imperial spectacles varied a great deal. Most of them were given to celebrate victories and to commemorate the anniversaries of events of particular significance to Rome, typically identified as achievements of imperial family members or their birthdays or funerals. One of the earliest public actions of Octavian, long before he became monarch, was the establishment of games for Julius Caesar, his adopted father; the story circulated that the sighting of a new star at these games in 44 BCE heralded the arrival of a new god in the heavens. The cult of the deified Julius developed over time and an elaborate set of spectacles commemorated the completion of his temple on the Forum in 29 BCE.

Source: Dio Cassius 51.22.⁷³ At the consecration of the shrine to Julius there were all kinds of contests... Wild beasts and tame animals were slain in vast numbers, among them a rhinoceros and a hippopotamus, beasts then seen for the first time in Rome... Dacians and Suebi fought in groups against one another... The whole spectacle lasted many days, as one would expect, and there was no interruption, even though Caesar fell ill, but it was carried on in his absence under the direction of others.

In 2 BCE, the sons of Agrippa, Augustus' deceased right-hand man and son-in-law, celebrated the dedication of the Forum of Augustus and the Temple of Mars Ultor; likely one of the five important spectacles noted by Augustus in his *Res Gestae*, this was an important demonstration of dynastic leadership because of the focus on the next generation of Julio-Claudians.

Source: Dio Cassius 55.10.⁷⁴ Augustus dedicated this temple of Mars, although he had granted to Gaius and Lucius once for all the right to consecrate all such buildings... and they did, in fact, have the management of the Circensian

games on this occasion, while their brother Agrippa [Postumus] took part along with the boys of the first families in the equestrian event called "Troy." Two hundred and sixty lions were slaughtered in the Circus. There was a gladiatorial combat in the Saepta, and a naval battle between the "Persians" and the "Athenians" was given on the spot where even today some relics of it are still pointed out.

The precedents established under Augustus were followed by generations of emperors after him. The largest spectacles known for Rome were presented by the emperor Trajan, who celebrated victory in his second war against the Dacians. Dio's brief account does not do justice to the scale of the event.

Source: Dio Cassius 68.15.⁷⁵ Upon Trajan's return to Rome... he gave spectacles on one hundred and twenty-three days, in the course of which some eleven thousand animals, both wild and tame, were slain, and ten thousand gladiators fought.

Septimius Severus combined a number of significant imperial commemorations at his games of 202 CE, when he bestowed spectacular gifts on the people in recognition of his holding of the imperial power.

Source: Dio Cassius 77.1.⁷⁶ On the occasion of his tenth anniversary of his coming to power, Severus presented to the entire populace that received the grain dole and to the soldiers of the Praetorian Guard gold pieces equal in number to the years of his reign... no emperor had ever before given so much to the whole population at once; the total amount spent for the purpose was two hundred million sesterces... [processions and banquets followed] At this time there occurred too all sorts of spectacles in honor of Severus' return, the completion of his first ten years of power, and his victories. At these spectacles sixty wild boars... fought together at a signal, and among many other wild beasts that were slain were an elephant and a corocotta... The entire arena of the amphitheater had been constructed to resemble a boat in shape, with a capacity for holding or releasing four hundred beasts at once; and, as it suddenly fell apart, bears, lionesses, panthers, lions, ostriches, wild asses, and bisons... came rushing out so that seven hundred beasts total, both wild and domesticated, all at once were seen running about and were slaughtered.

The political necessity of the games is acknowledged by Fronto, tutor to the future emperor Marcus Aurelius, in an analysis that nuances the cynicism of Juvenal. Here, he considers that the presentation of spectacle elevates the positive value of the government beyond the practical and the essential to

position the State as a source of pleasure, pleasure that has the capacity to unify Romans across the dividing lines of class and culture.

Source: Fronto, *Preamble to History* 17:⁷⁷ . . . for the arts of peace scarcely anyone has equaled Trajan in popularity with the people . . . based on the loftiest principles of political wisdom, that the Emperor did not neglect even actors and the other performers of the stage, the circus, or the amphitheater, knowing as he did that the Roman people are held fast by two things above all, the grain-dole and the shows, that the success of a government depends on games as much as more serious things . . . by the spectacles the whole population is conciliated.

The emperor and political spectacle

Roman politics was transformed by the long period of civil war at the end of the Republic. The Principate that followed greatly minimized the formal opportunities for the average male citizen to participate in politics; popular assemblies were rarely held during the reign of Augustus and phased out completely under Tiberius. Under the emperors, then, venues for political expression for "the people" as a group were few. Rather than viewing this change as the result of cynical manipulation by the powerful few, countered but feebly by a jaded and lethargic electorate, we can see the spectacles as the best forum for direct interaction between ruler and ruled. On issues of pressing importance to the people, they were regularly given immediate access to the emperor, who could take instantaneous action.

It was politically expedient for the emperor to attend spectacles and, furthermore, to demonstrate active interest and at least moderate enthusiasm for the events. It was thus important for the emperor to be seen, to be a visible focus at the spectacles as the directing force behind the presentation of all such displays of Roman power and wealth. Pliny hails such occasions as opportunities for the emperor (Trajan in this case) to improve his public image, by sharing the enjoyments of Romans of all stations.

Source: Pliny, *Panegyric* 51:⁷⁸ Elsewhere the vast facade of the circus rivals the beauty of the temples, a fitting place for a nation which has conquered the world, a sight to be seen on its own account as well as for the spectacles there to be displayed: to be seen indeed for its beauty, and still more for the way in which prince and people alike are seated on the same level. From one end to the other is a uniform plan, a continuous line, and Caesar as spectator shares the public seats as he does the spectacle. Thus your subjects will be able to look on you in their turn; they will be permitted to see not just the Emperor's box, but their emperor himself, seated among his people – the people to whom you have given an additional five thousand seats.

Claudius' spectator image was decidedly plebeian, with little pretense at imperial dignity. This need not have been a spontaneous presentation on his part. Claudius' physical limitations and the unusual circumstances of his elevation to imperial power may have proven a barrier between him and other elites, pushing him toward the development of a "popular" image at the public games, in which he explicitly yielded power to his true "masters", the people of Rome.

Source: Suetonius, *Claudius* 21:⁷⁹ He gave many gladiatorial shows and in many places . . . Now there was no form of entertainment at which he was more familiar and free, even thrusting out his left hand⁸⁰, as the commons did, and counting aloud on his fingers the gold pieces which were paid to the victors; and always and repeatedly he would address the audience, and invite and urge them to merriment, calling them "*domini*" (masters) from time to time, and interspersing feeble and far-fetched jokes.

Claques, like those noted during the late Republic, continued under the emperors, working often in cooperation with a given emperor's interests. Nero became notorious for his performance on the public stage, pushing the public persona required for an emperor to an extreme that conservative Roman values, with their repugnance for performers as a class, found disgraceful. Perhaps because he anticipated a negative reaction, Nero assembled at the same time a claque, called the Augustani, specifically to lead the crowd in rousing praise of the emperor's tremendous performance abilities. In return, these high-status Augustani could anticipate benefits from the emperor.

Source: Tacitus, *Annals* 14.15:⁸¹ There were also present, to complete the show, a guard of soldiers with centurions and tribunes, and Burrus, who grieved and yet applauded. Then it was that Roman equestrians were first enrolled under the title of Augustani, men in their prime and remarkable for their strength, some, from a natural frivolity, others from the hope of promotion. Day and night they kept up a thunder of applause, and applied to the emperor's person and voice the epithets of deities. Thus they lived in fame and honor, as if on the strength of their merits.

As Nero's performance tendencies grew stronger, the emperor's claque was enhanced by drafting new members on an *ad hoc* basis, as need demanded. This proved something of a burden, Tacitus claims, for those who were serendipitously in town on other business, who, exhausted and afraid, were coerced into joining Nero's highly supportive audience. To falter in this support was dangerous, hence Tacitus' allusion to informers' inspection of spectators' faces, looking for signs of boredom or contempt.

Source: Tacitus, *Annals* 16.5.⁸² All, however, who were present from remote towns and still retained the Italy of strict morals and primitive ways; all too who had come on embassies or on private business from distant provinces, where they had been unused to such wantonness, were unable to endure the spectacle or sustain the degrading fatigue, which wearied their unpracticed hands, while they disturbed those who knew their part, and were often struck by soldiers, stationed in the seats, to see that not a moment of time passed with less vigorous applause or in the silence of indifference. It was a known fact that several equestrians, in struggling through the narrow approaches and the pressure of the crowd, were trampled to death, and that others while keeping their seats night and day were seized with some fatal malady. For it was a still worse danger to be absent from the show, as many openly and many more secretly made it their business to scrutinize names and faces, and to note the delight or the disgust of the company.

Commodus also took the lead in claque work at his shows, as relayed by Dio Cassius, who, along with the other senators at the time, was himself pressed into participating in the verbalized rhythmic approval of the emperor's feats in the arena.

Source: Dio Cassius 73.20: When he [the emperor Commodus] fought, we senators always went together with the equites, although Claudius Pompeianus the elder never happened to appear . . . preferring to have his throat cut for this rather than to look at the emperor, son of Marcus [Aurelius] doing such things. For among other things that we did, we would shout out whatever we were commanded, and especially these words continually: "You are lord and you are first, of all men most fortunate! Victor you are, and victor you shall be; from everlasting, Amazonian, you are victor!"

There is evidence, however, for the spectators' expressing their will in forceful and even hostile outbursts. The audience at the ancient spectacle made use of a certain freedom granted them in these venues, to articulate not only approval or disapproval of the *princeps* himself, but also to make known their needs and desires on a range of issues. This freedom is recognized by the ancient authors, referred to by them as *theatralis licentia*, "permission of the theater." Not only were spectators empowered to voice their needs at the games, emperors were obliged to respond to these requests, demands, comments. The nature of the imperial response was viewed as a demonstration of character and leadership. It became standard behavior to petition the emperor at the games, a context more likely to generate an immediate response than other options. At court, any given petition would be prioritized in competition with many others, assigned merit in accordance with the importance of the petitioner or the request, as determined by the emperor

on his timetable. At the shows, however, thousands of spectators served as witnesses to the petition and the emperor's response had to factor in the potential impact on his public image. It also became more difficult for the emperor to present his reasons for denial, should he decide to reject the petition, and yet important to do so to maintain a positive public image.

Titus was an extremely popular (albeit short-lived) emperor; in this particular instance, his declaration that all requests would be granted and that he relied on the public will to determine the progress of the event would, in itself, have a very positive response, whether or not he could realistically hold to his promise.

Source: Suetonius, *Titus* 8:⁸³ [Titus] had a rule never to dismiss any petitioner without leaving him some hope that his request would be favorably considered . . . Titus maintained that no one ought to go away disappointed from an audience with the emperor . . . He took such pains to humor his subjects that, on one occasion, before a gladiatorial show, he promised to forgo his own preferences and let the audience choose what they liked best; and kept his word by refusing no request and encouraging everyone to tell him what each wanted.

In Pliny's long and enthusiastic speech in praise of the emperor, Trajan is presented as the ultimate petitionee, who anticipates and grants the unspoken wishes of the people and yet still urges them to submit even more requests. Specific criticism of Trajan's unsatisfactory predecessor is also given in the context of his behavior at spectacles.

Source: Pliny, *Panegyric* 33:⁸⁴ What generosity went to provide this spectacle! And what impartiality the Emperor showed, unmoved as he was by personal feelings or else above them. Requests were granted, unspoken wishes were anticipated, and he did not hesitate to press us urgently to make fresh demands; yet still there was something new to surpass our dreams. How freely too the spectators could express their enthusiasm and show their preferences without fear! No one risked the old charge of impiety if he disliked a particular gladiator: no spectator found himself turned spectacle, dragged off by the hook to satisfy grim pleasures, or else cast to the flames! [Domitian] was a madman, blind to the true meaning of his position, who used the arena for collecting charges of high treason, who felt himself despised and condemned if we failed to revere his gladiators, taking any criticism of them as criticism of himself and interpreting them as violations of his godhead and divinity, he who deemed himself the equal of the gods yet treated his gladiators as equals.

Tiberius' general lack of ease in this kind of interaction meant that his public image was not a positive one, despite the overall success of his

administration. Tiberius responded to spectacle protests even when he was not in the capital city, although he replied by scolding the Senate rather than the spectacle audience. His strategy fell somewhat flat; Tiberius' lack of direct response to the protesters is not interpreted as his use of traditional channels in support of their interests but, rather, as further indication of his distance from the people, his "arrogance." Tiberius eventually stopped financing and even attending games, allegedly to avoid being put in a position where his responses to petitions would be constrained.

Source: Tacitus, *Annals* 6.13.⁸⁵ In the same year [33 CE] the high price of grain nearly caused riots. In the theater, for several days, sweeping demands were shouted with a freedom of language rarely displayed to emperors. Upset, Tiberius reproved the officials and senate for not using their authority to restrain popular demonstrations. He enumerated the provinces from which he was importing grain – more extensively than Augustus. So the senate passed a resolution of old-fashioned strictness censuring the public. The consuls too issued an equally severe edict. Tiberius was silent. However, this was not taken for modesty as he hoped, but for arrogance.

Fronto, Marcus Aurelius' tutor, had given him specific advice about the value for the emperor in attending to the crowd. The way that Fronto treats this is interesting: he expects that Marcus is familiar with approved conduct for the emperor at the games and should learn from that paradigm how to treat audiences at non-spectacle venues. The normative political interaction, then, is that of the *princeps* and the spectators.

Source: Fronto, *To the Caesar Marcus* 1.8.⁸⁶ Be prepared, when you speak before an assembly of men, to study their taste, not, of course, everywhere and by every means, yet occasionally and to some extent. And when you do so, remind yourself that you are but doing the same as you do when, at the people's request, you honor or enfranchise those who have slain beasts manfully in the arena; even though they are murderers or condemned for some crime, you release them at the people's request. Everywhere then the people dominate and prevail.

Emperors who ignored or abused this relationship were, almost by definition, "bad" emperors. The reign of Caligula offers a number of exemplary incidents of how not to behave at spectacles.⁸⁷ The following description by Dio Cassius of one such indicates the expectations of "normal" audience behavior: the display of visible gratitude for the emperor's generosity, the anticipated applause for the emperor's favorite performers, and the ability to engage in political criticism, even if only at the level of gesture. Caligula's "bad" response was to abuse the "bad" audience.

Source: Dio Cassius 59.13.⁸⁸ In fact, there was nothing but slaughter, for the emperor no longer showed any favors even to the populace, but opposed absolutely everything they wished, and consequently the people on their part resisted all his desires. The talk and behavior that might be expected at such a juncture, with an angry ruler on one side, and a hostile people on the other, were plainly in evidence. The contest between them, however, was not an equal one; for the people could do nothing but talk and show something of their feelings by their gestures, whereas Gaius would destroy his opponents, dragging many away even while they were witnessing the games and arresting many more after they had left the theaters. The chief causes of his anger were, first, that they did not show enthusiasm in attending the spectacles . . . and again, that they did not always applaud the performers that pleased him and sometimes even showed honor to those whom he disliked. . . . once he said, threatening the whole people: "Would that you had but a single neck."

The assassination of Gaius was alleged to be inspired, to some extent, by resentment of his spectacular abuse of the Roman people. Josephus, a near-contemporary of Caligula, asserts that all and sundry lived in terror of Gaius' fatal whimsy, which was especially likely to burst out when the audience made demands at the games. Cassius Chaerea and Cornelius Sabinus, members of the Praetorian Guard, would have been responsible for carrying out Caligula's orders; their resentment at this "barbarity" is a key factor in their successful conspiracy.

Source: Josephus, *Jewish Antiquities* 19.24–27.⁸⁹ Now at this time came the Circensian games; this spectacle was eagerly desired by the people of Rome, for they come with great alacrity into the circus at such times, and petition their emperors, in great multitudes, for what they need; the emperors usually did not deny them their requests, but readily and gratefully granted them. Accordingly, they most importunately desired that Gaius would now ease off on their tribute and reduce the harshness of the taxes imposed upon them; but he would not hear their petition; and when their clamors increased, he sent soldiers, some in one direction and some another, and ordered them to seize those that made the clamors and without any delay bring them out and put them to death. These were Gaius's commands, and those who were commanded carried them out; and the number of those who were killed on this occasion was very great. Now the people saw this, and bore it so far, that they left off clamoring, because they saw with their own eyes that this petition to have their payments reduced brought immediate death upon them. These things made Chaerea more resolute to go on with his plot, in order to put an end to this barbarity of Gaius against men.

Emperors could have discouraged the *theatralis licentia*; even if resisted at first, continuous and energetic suppression of this kind of expression would

eventually have had effect. Emperors could also routinely have followed the lead of Tiberius and stop attending shows. They did not do so. Emperors kept accepting petitions at shows well into the Byzantine period. They only did so, one assumes, because the perceived benefit to them outweighed the risk.

The unwanted criticism periodically mentioned by the ancient authors represented an unusual event and thus was reported as atypical behavior for crowd and for emperor. Normally, emperors expected applause and acclaim at the shows, an upwelling of gratitude not just for the games but for the impetus behind the presentation of games, be it the extraordinary achievement of victory, recognition of significant events in the life of a beloved and benevolent ruler, or the steady continual efforts to maintain the peace and prosperity of the empire. The setting was redolent with reminders of similar achievements in the past, such as the statues carried in the *pompa* and the monuments erected in and near the theater, the amphitheater, and the circus.

Hostile reactions could also serve as a safety valve; with the grievance articulated, a response from an emperor, even a minimal one, would diminish the tension in a given situation. Indirectly, this is demonstrated by the examples of Caligula and Domitian, whose efforts to silence the crowd are linked with their eventual assassinations. Dissent forced underground became much more dangerous.

In the aftermath of the death of Commodus, the relieved and angry people expressed their hatred of the former emperor in acclamations, like those habitually used by spectators at the games. The preserved chants are the "negative" ones, indicating disapproval (to say the least) and the recommendation that the target be dragged to execution and that the body be denied proper burial, a severe treatment appropriate for an enemy of the state. Mixed in are versions of the "positive" chants, like those that Dio and other spectators had been forced to perform at the games, here given new meaning in the context of the emperor's assassination.

Source: *Historia Augusta, Commodus* 18–19:⁹⁰ Let the parricide's honors be dragged away! Let the parricide be dragged away! Let the enemy of the fatherland, the parricide, the gladiator, be mangled in the charnel house! . . . He that killed the Senate, let him be dragged with the hook! He that killed the innocent, let him be dragged with the hook! Enemy! Parricide! Truly! Truly! He that did not spare his own blood, let him be dragged with the hook! He that was about to kill you, let him be dragged with the hook! . . . Good fortune to the victory of the Roman people, good fortune to the trustiness of the soldiers, good fortune to the trustiness of the praetorians, good fortune to the praetorian cohorts! . . . Let the remembrance of the parricide, the gladiator, be wiped out! Let the statues of the parricide, the gladiator, be dragged away! Let the remembrance of the foul gladiator be wiped out!

Gladiators outside Rome

Munera and other spectacles were regularly presented as part of the municipal package; magistrates were responsible for organizing and financially supporting this activity alongside the upkeep of roads and maintenance of public cult. Shows were an obligation of public office, as mandated in the municipal charters by which the central government regularized provincial practice in accordance with Roman expectations. Gladiatorial events were offered by local magistrates to celebrate traditional deities and the deified emperor; spectacles commemorated the dedication of public buildings and fulfilled vows for the health of the emperor and the victory of Rome.

The *Lex Ursonensis* is the charter for the colony of Urso in Baetica (modern-day Portugal), dating to the time of Julius Caesar. It offers details about the ordinary spectacles that could be anticipated by the residents. Note especially the fairly low level of expenditure on these events, in comparison with practice in the city of Rome during the Republic.

Source: *Lex Ursonensis* 71:⁹¹ Whoever shall be aediles, during their magistracy they are to organize a *munus* or *ludi scaenici* for Jupiter, Juno and Minerva, during three days, for the greater part of the day, as far as shall be possible, and during one day (games) in the circus or (gladiators) in the Forum for Venus, and each one of them is to spend on that spectacle and on that show not less than 2,000 sesterces from his own money and it is to be lawful to take from public funds 1,000 sesterces for each aedile.

These funding limits were meant to keep municipal budgets in line with imperial priorities: magistrates were not to bankrupt themselves on games when their personal financial resources were required to maintain the infrastructure of empire.

Pompeii offers a range of material documenting spectacular practice outside Rome. The volcanic debris provided protection for ephemeral evidence lost at other sites, such as graffiti and painted notices for games. The evidence indicates how important the shows were in assessing leadership during the imperial period. Funerary inscriptions, for example, which serve as the final accounting of a man's political career, are weighted heavily toward the description of resources pulled together to present spectacle.

Source: *Corpus Inscriptionum Latinarum*, hereafter *CIL* 10.1084d: Aulus Clodius Flaccus, son of Aulus, Menenia tribe⁹², elected duumvir three times, once as quinquennial magistrate, elected military tribune by the people. During his first duumvirate, he offered the *ludi Apollinares* including a procession in the forum, bulls, bullfighters and their helpers, three pairs of *pontarii* fighters, group boxers and Greek-style boxers, all plays and musical pantomimes with Pylades. And he

paid ten thousand sesterces to the public treasury in return for holding the duumvirate. During his second duumvirate, as quinquennial magistrate, he provided the *ludi Apollinares* including a procession in the forum, bulls, bullfighters and their helpers and group boxers. On the next day, on his own, in the amphitheater he provided 30 pairs of athletes, five pairs of gladiators and with his colleague in office he provided 35 pairs of gladiators and a wild animal hunt, bulls, bullfighters, boars, bears, and other kinds of *venationes*. In his third duumvirate, he provided, with his colleague, games with a first-ranked troupe with musical accompaniment.

Here documented on the family tomb is the impressive spectacle history of Aulus Clodius Flaccus, son of Aulus Clodius Flaccus, who was three times elected duumvir, the senior magistrate in a Roman town, and served one of those terms as a prestigious quinquennial magistrate, an office filled every five years as the top rung of the political ladder. Flaccus is one of a group of prominent Pompeian magistrates during the reign of Augustus, whose affiliations with the regime were an important factor in their public success. The games presented by Flaccus took place during his terms in office, two of them for the festival of Apollo, a deity of particular significance to the emperor. Flaccus is careful to distinguish different kinds of generosity, such as the cash payment into the local treasury that was expected of municipal officials in the empire, in addition to other services they were required to subsidize financially. He also makes clear what events he personally sponsored in the amphitheater and which were jointly sponsored by himself and his fellow-magistrate. The types of animals noted here, the bulls, bears and boars, are not as exotic as those found in the capital city and may represent a more "typical" *venatio* for the Roman world.

Source: *CIL* 4.9979: A wild animal hunt and twenty pairs of gladiators, presented by Marcus Tullius, will fight at Pompeii the day before the *nonas* of November and seven days before the *ides* of November.

Source: *CIL* 4.9980: A wild animal hunt and twenty pairs of gladiators, presented by Marcus Tullius, will fight at Pompeii the day before the *nonas* of November, the *nonas* of November, and the eighth and seventh day before the *ides* of November.

Source: *CIL* 4.9981a: A wild animal hunt and twenty pairs of gladiators, presented by Marcus Tullius, will fight at Pompeii the day before the *nonas* of November, the *nonas* of November, and the eighth and seventh day before the *ides* of November.

These are three painted notices of a set of games scheduled for November 4–7. The descriptions are spare and do not suggest that the events took place as part of Marcus Tullius' magisterial duties, which is unusual. This has led some scholars to suspect that these may represent the opening salvo of Marcus Tullius' political career, which was indeed a very successful one. Like Flaccus, Tullius held the duumvirate three times, once as quinquennial magistrate, and was military tribune, an equestrian rank specific to the Augustan period. Although Suetonius claimed the military tribunate was awarded to local leaders by the townsfolk, scholars note that supporters of the Augustan administration are the recipients of this honor at Pompeii, which suggests that the choices for this award were not made on strictly local grounds. Marcus Tullius built the Temple of August Fortune on a lot in Pompeii that he'd purchased with his own money, thus joining his resources with a surge of construction that parallels (and may have been inspired by) the extensive building program sponsored by Augustus in Rome. This public structure was an explicit link to the regime of Augustus, completed probably in 3 CE, a time when the future of the imperial family was in a state of flux; the temple serves as a show of support for the emperor. Tullius' November games were effective in helping to establish a public persona in line with the emperor's vision of a renewed Roman world. The fact that these painted notices were left in place long after the games were held indicates the lasting influence Marcus Tullius had on Pompeii, despite the absence of children who became practical heirs to his public prominence.

Source: *CIL* 4.3884: Brought to you by Decimus Lucretius Satrius Valens, permanent priest of Nero Caesar, son of Augustus, twenty pairs of gladiators. And presented by Decimus Lucretius, son of Valens, ten pairs of gladiators. They'll fight at Pompeii from the sixth day before the *ides* of April, through the day before.⁹³ There will be a standard *venatio* and awnings.

Source: *CIL* 4.7995: Brought to you by Decimus Lucretius Satrius Valens, permanent priest of Nero Caesar, son of Augustus, twenty pairs of gladiators. And presented by Decimus Lucretius, son of Valens, ten pairs of gladiators. From the fifth day before the *kalends* of April.⁹⁴ There will be a *venatio* and awnings.

These notices of two sets of games follow a somewhat different pattern from that of Marcus Tullius. The name of the *editor* is very much foregrounded here, suggesting both that enhancing the public reputation of the giver was the point of the notice and the games, and that the name would already be recognizable to a potential audience, who would be drawn to games offered

by someone with a track record. D. Lucretius Satrius Valens is one of the most-documented Pompeians, adopted as an adult by a prominent politician of the preceding generation. His son, with whom he's affiliated here, like him changed names after adoption and was regularly associated with him in public actions and, in return, was the recipient of inscribed acclamations recording popular gratitude for their efforts. The family would be associated with Nero's regime; Satrius Valens' priestly title indicates that he took on this role in the Imperial Cult before Nero became emperor, when he was merely the *filius Augusti*, (adopted) son of the emperor Claudius. The games here, as elsewhere in the Roman world, are presented as part of the Imperial Cult, a more explicitly political aspect of Roman religion. Formal expressions of reverence and devotion toward the ruling family grant an elevated, numinous quality to what is primarily political power. Individual Pompeians, like Lucretius Satrius Valens, took the initiative to declare their support for the elder of Claudius' two potential heirs; Nero, as it turned out, had a powerful network of such advocates in place at the time Claudius died, a key factor in his smooth succession to the role of *princeps*. Valens backed the right imperial horse.

Source: *CIL* 4.7991: Presented by Gnaeus Alleius Nigidius Maius, as quinquennial magistrate, without the use of public funds, twenty pairs of gladiators and their *suppositicii* will fight at Pompeii.

Source: *CIL* 4.1179: Presented by Gnaeus Alleius Nigidius Maius, as quinquennial magistrate, thirty pairs of gladiators and their *suppositicii* will fight at Pompeii on the eighth, seventh and sixth day before the *kalends* of December. *Ellius*⁹⁵ will be there and a *venatio* will be held.

Source: *CIL* 4.7990: To Gnaeus Alleius Maius, first among the presenters of *munera*, happily [we hail you].

Source: *CIL* 4.7993: In dedication of the work of the painted panels funded by Gnaeus Alleius Nigidius Maius, at Pompeii, on the *ides* of June, there will be a procession, a *venatio*, athletes and awnings.

Source: *CIL* 4.1177b: To Maius, first of the colony, happily [we hail you].

Source: *CIL* 4.1180: On behalf of the health of the Emperor Vespasian Caesar Augustus and his children, on the occasion of the dedication of the altar, pairs of gladiators, presented by Gnaeus Alleius Maius, *flamen* of Caesar Augustus, will fight at Pompeii without any delay on the fourth day before the *nonas* of July. There will be a *venatio*, sprinkles and an awning.

Gnaeus Alleius Nigidius Maius, born to the Nigidii and adopted as an Alleius, served as quinquennial duumvir in 55 CE and presented *munera* as part of his official responsibilities; popular acclamations preserved as graffiti indicate that his efforts were well received. This is the last known set of gladiatorial combats prior to the riot in 59, after which *munera* were banned by senatorial decree for ten years at Pompeii (see chapter 3). During this decade, announcements were made for games but not with combats of pairs: athletes seem to have taken the place of gladiators. Alleius Nigidius Maius was also involved in repairs of the amphitheater made necessary by the earthquake in February of 62 CE, funding, for his part, the addition of paintings on the podium of the amphitheater. These panels featured gladiatorial combats, possibly even recreations of actual matches, a visual substitute for what was still forbidden in Pompeii and a reminder of past glories to be resurrected some day.⁹⁶ Games held to commemorate the completion of the renovation project still were absent gladiators, focusing instead on the athletes and the *venatio*, nevertheless, another salute in graffiti form indicates appreciation for Maius' continuing leadership, in the colony as in spectacle. Later in his career, Alleius Nigidius Maius served as priest of the Imperial Cult for Vespasian and dedicated an altar in this capacity. The act was commemorated with a set of *munera*, as might be expected for the Imperial Cult. Claiming this was done "without any delay" is unusual and may indicate the urgency felt by locals after their long dry spell during the ban on gladiators. The ten years imposed by the Senate would have been completed in 69, the year in which Vespasian claimed the imperial power.⁹⁷

This letter from the Younger Pliny to his friend, Valerius Maximus, gives us evidence for how spectacles functioned in towns outside the capital city and indicates the kind of relationship of "obligation" constructed between the *editor* and the potential audience at the games, who apparently could "request" that an individual sponsor funeral games with gladiators at great expense and with a certain risk involved, here with the delayed panther order. Note also that, here in Verona, *munera* offered in honor of a deceased woman occasion no comment; apparently Julius Caesar's innovation on behalf of his daughter Julia has become a commonplace some 150 years later.

Source: Pliny, *Letters* 6.34.⁹⁸ You did well to put on a show of gladiators for our people of Verona, who have long shown their affection and admiration for you and have voted you many honors. Verona was also the home town of the excellent wife you loved so dearly, whose memory you owe some public building or show, and this kind of spectacle is particularly suitable for a funeral tribute. Moreover, the request came from so many people that a refusal would have been judged churlish rather than strong-minded on your part. You have also done admirably in giving the show so readily and on such a lavish scale, for this indicates a true spirit of generosity. I am sorry the African panthers you had bought in such quantity did not turn up on the appointed day, but you deserve the credit though the weather prevented their arriving in time; it was not your fault that you could not show them.

Suetonius relates how in the time of Tiberius, the "request" that a private individual present *munera* for a deceased loved one could have a certain coercive element. Tiberius took decisive action to deter this abuse of spectacle and to maintain the prerogatives of the *editor* in this top-down relationship of power.

Source: Suetonius, *Tiberius* 37.⁹⁹ Trouble occurred in Pollentia, a Ligurian town at the northern foot of the Apennines, where the townsfolk would not let the corpse of a leading centurion be removed from the forum until his heirs had agreed to meet their importunate demands for a free gladiatorial show. Tiberius detached one cohort from Rome, and another from the kingdom of Cottius, to converge on Pollentia, after disguising their destination. They had orders to enter the town simultaneously by opposite gates, suddenly display their weapons, blow trumpets and consign most of the inhabitants and magistrates to life-imprisonment.

Significant legislation was sponsored by the emperor Marcus Aurelius in 177, again in an effort to maintain the power of the presenter of games as an agent of empire. Catalyzed by the skyrocketing cost of games and its corrosive effect on the financial stability of the elite classes, the central government took action to limit the financial burden spectacle placed on local magistrates. The preserved law on limiting the prices for gladiators includes a portion of the senatorial discussion of the problem, as well as a system for setting price ceilings. The inscription dramatizes the rationale for this measure in an anecdote on the financial woes of a priest of the Imperial Cult, one of the major categories of *editores* in the Roman world.

Source: *CIL* 2.6278:¹⁰⁰ (lines 16–18) There was one who upon being appointed priest had given up his fortune for lost, had named a council to help him in an appeal addressed to the Emperors. But in that very gathering, he himself, before and after consulting his friends, exclaimed, "What do I want with an appeal now? Their most sacred Majesties the Emperors have released the whole burden which crushed my patrimony. Now I desire and look forward to being a priest, and as for the duty of putting on a spectacle, of which we once were solemnly asking to be relieved, I welcome it."

The specific limitations are based on the total expenditure the magistrate or priest planned for the games, the lowest of which greatly exceeds the costs specified for the colony at Urso two centuries earlier. The law lays out package prices as well, spreading the cost over gladiators grouped by "grade", which probably reflects skill level and veteran status (see chapter 4).

Source: *CIL* 2.6278: (lines 29–37)¹⁰¹ [the law mandates] that to those, however, who produce spectacles at an expenditure between 30,000 and 60,000 HS¹⁰², gladiators be furnished in equal number in three classes: maximum price for the first class be 5,000 HS, for the second class 4,000 HS, for the third class 3,000 HS. That when it is from 60,000 to 100,000 HS, the company of gladiators be divided into three classes: maximum price of a gladiator of the first class be 8,000 HS, middle class 6,000, lowest 5,000. Next, that when it is from 100,000 to 150,000 HS, there be five grades: for a man of the first grade the price be 12,000 HS, second 10,000, third 8,000, fourth 6,000, last 5,000. Next in order, finally, that when it is from 150,000 to 200,000 HS or any sum which may be over and above this, the price of the gladiator of the lowest grade be 6,000 HS, of the next higher 7,000, of the third by backward count 9,000, fourth 12,000 up to 15,000 which is the amount fixed for the gladiator of the highest and last grade. That at every spectacle of all the categories into which they have been classified the *lanista* provide as half of the whole group a number of men who are not expected to perform singly, and that of these, who are known as *gregarii*, one who may be rated "superior among *gregarii*" fight in a team under a standard for 2,000 HS and that no one from this group fight for less than 1,000.

A third-century mosaic from a private home in Smirat in Tunisia (figure 1.1) documents how the financial commitment by the *editor* helps to establish a positive relationship between the holders of imperial power and the subjects of the empire. Both image and text clarify how this is done. Along the long sides of the mosaic are a series of duels between men and leopards, with the names of each performer, human and feline, given. The viewer's attention is drawn to the center by a name repeated in the vocative case: the mosaic hails Magerius, the sponsor of the game, just as the audience would have done at the games themselves, just as the ancient reader of the mosaic would



Figure 1.1 Magerius mosaic. Gilles Mermet/Art Resource, NY

echo the salute. Inside the vocative brackets are two divinities appropriate to the arena but also suitable to the message conveyed in the representation. On the left is a winged female in hunting boots, who may be Nemesis/Fortuna, a powerful divinity of the amphitheaters; she was the goddess who saw to the appropriate outcome in each combat and also safeguarded the financial risk of the sponsor of the games. On the right is a youthful god, wearing a cloak and sandals and carrying a caduceus. This is probably Mercury, the god of commerce, who in the arena would be known as Hermes Psychopomp, who leads the souls of dead performers through the gates of death down to the underworld. The divinities gesture toward the remaining two figures, drawing the eye of the viewer further inward. Next to Nemesis, an unnamed, well-dressed youth faces out toward the audience, carrying a tray loaded down with bags, each labeled 1,000 *denarii*, representing a portion of what Magerius spent on the games. To the right of the moneyholder is the transcription of the dialogue between Magerius as *editor* and the audience.

Source: Magerius mosaic: "Magerius!" "Magerius!" Through the herald was said: "My Lords, since the Telegenii¹⁰³ have earned your favor, give to them 500 *denarii* for each leopard." It was acclaimed: "By your example may those to come learn the *munus* and may those past hear. Who has ever offered such games? When have such games been offered? By the example of the quaestors, you will present the *munus*. At your own expense you will present the *munus* on that day." Magerius gives. "This is what it means to be wealthy. This is what it means to be powerful . . . From your *munus* they are let go with these sacks."

Magerius' epigram about the meaning of wealth and power is a strong statement that captures the meaning of the arena in Roman society. Magerius, who likely put on the show as part of holding a high magistracy, spent his money well and engaged the audience appropriately. His capacity to command the resources of empire demonstrated simultaneously his cultural sophistication, his organizational skills and his understanding how best to use the power over life and death. The members of the community vigorously recognize his favor and recognize his effort as a model for past and future interactions of imperial authority. This is why Magerius is the figure being crowned by Mercury, officially hailed as the true victor of the games.