

CHAPTER 32

Women with Swords

Female Gladiators in the Roman World

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I Introduction

Women figure prominently in the Roman games that Cecil B. DeMille staged for his film *The Sign of the Cross* (1932). Scantly clothed girls struggle to escape before they are mauled by ferocious animals. Wild-looking women face off against dwarfs dressed to imitate African pygmies and, with two kills to the dwarfs' one, the women clearly will be the victors. Cameos of women in the stands further depict the excesses of Nero's Rome: one wife, bored with the slaughter, consults the program with her husband, another gazes with a mixture of horror and lustful anticipation, and a third is more interested in flirting with the young men sitting next to her.

DeMille's decision to feature women in his depiction of Nero's games in *The Sign of the Cross* was not purely an act of imagination, but it was far from being historically accurate. That is understandable in a movie intended to entertain a modern audience, but scholars have sometimes been affected by the same tendency toward imaginative recreation of female participation in the games. DeMille's film serves as a reminder that it is all too easy to let our preconceptions and fantasies mislead us. We must, therefore, carefully examine what the ancient sources actually tell us about the women who fought in the arena. This is the only way to arrive at reliable answers to such questions as whether female gladiators were a common feature of the Roman games and why the Romans valued gladiatorial combats involving women. Moreover, what we learn about the women who fought in the arena, the women who came to watch the shows, and even the women who fantasized about being gladiators can help us understand Roman concepts of masculinity and the connections between the Roman games and the structure of Roman society. It is also informative to ask if

the Romans thought women should be spectators of the violence that filled the arena and, if not, why not?

2 What Do We Know?

This essay focuses on the women who took on a function in the games normally performed by men, either by fighting as gladiators or *venatores*, “beast hunters.” DeMille was not far off the mark in believing that women were sentenced to be savaged by beasts in a sexually explicit fashion (Coleman 1990; Frankfurter 2009; see also Chapter 35 in this volume). However, these criminals should not be confused with gladiators (see the essays by Dunkle and Fagan, Chapters 25 and 31 respectively), and these incidents tell us little about the women who actually fought in the arena except that the Romans were not automatically opposed to seeing women killed publically.¹

The earliest datable instance of women risking their lives in the arena as gladiators or *venatores* took place during Nero’s reign and was reported by two historians who felt that what happened in the Roman games reflected the nature of an emperor’s rule (see Chapters 27 and 30). In this case, Dio Cassius and Tacitus connected the incident with what they perceived to be a general licentiousness precipitated by Nero’s excessive interest in the games. Their accounts differ slightly on a few points. Dio Cassius indicates that upper-class men and women performed in plays, drove chariots, fought as gladiators, and hunted beasts (61.17.3–4). Tacitus only mentions that they appeared in the arena (*Annals* 15.32). According to Dio, some of the participants performed willingly and others quite unwillingly. Tacitus does not mention this detail, but he notes elsewhere that a request from an emperor like Nero would not have been easy to refuse, especially given Nero’s desire to perform in public (*Annals* 14.14; cf. Juvenal *Satires* 8.198–9). The important element for both historians was not that Nero had offered shows involving female gladiators; instead they found it degrading for anyone of the senatorial or equestrian classes to appear in front of an audience in any capacity. Romans watched spectacles; they did not perform in them.

We next hear of women fighting in the arena in connection with the emperor Titus’s inauguration of the Colosseum. The show was a massive affair with staged sea battles, gladiatorial combats, and the slaughter of nine thousand animals, some at the hands of women. They were, as Dio carefully noted, not of high status (66.25.1–2). The poet Martial refers to this same event in two short poems commemorating these games (*Spectacles* 7–8). The first describes how it was not enough for Mars to serve the emperor, but now Venus does as well, meaning, in prosaic terms, that having men fight in the arena was to be expected, but Titus had expanded this to include women. The second poem makes clear exactly what wonderful deeds these women had accomplished. In the past Hercules was known for killing the Nemean lion, but now the audience had seen the same feat done by a woman’s hand. So we are not dealing here with female gladiators but with female *venatores* assigned to kill the beasts collected for Titus’s show. (On staged animal hunts, see Chapter 34.)

Domitian, Titus’s brother and successor, was responsible for having women appear in his shows on two occasions (Dio Cassius 67.8.1–9.1; Suetonius *Domitian* 4). One incident – the inclusion in the Capitoline Games of a running race for girls modeled on

the Heraia at Olympia – is not relevant here since it concerns women’s role in Greek athletics rather than the Roman games (see Chapter 16). Regarding the other occasion, we are told that the remarkable aspects of Domitian’s games included nighttime contests, along with matches involving dwarfs and women. (Suetonius does not mention the dwarfs.) Domitian drew censure for other aspects of his games. For example, Dio criticized him for making the audience sit through a storm while he was safely bundled in a cloak. Domitian’s use of women in the arena, however, provoked no editorializing from either author.

This incident was undoubtedly the inspiration for DeMille’s contest between women and dwarfs, and, without the testimony provided by the poet Statius, DeMille’s version might seem historically justified. In one poem in the *Silvae* (1.6), Statius sought to list all the wonderful things that Domitian had provided the Roman people as part of a holiday celebration. Midway through the day, women, described as the gender inexperienced in warfare, enacted a fight characteristic of men, and Statius claimed that you would think you were watching Amazons (ll. 51–6). The women may have been costumed like Amazons so the audience would not miss the point. Next, dwarfs appeared to face a flock of cranes, re-creating a well-known incident from Greek mythology in which pygmies in Egypt fought off an invasion of cranes (ll. 57–64). This sight amused the gods Mars and Virtue.

A close look at Statius’s depiction makes it very clear that the women did not fight the dwarfs but each other (a careful reading of Dio shows the same point; see Brunet 2003).² The women were gladiators; they are literally described as being “ignorant of the sword.”³ The dwarfs were not armed at all but specialized in staging boxing matches. It was the incongruity of these dwarfs trying to use their martial art skills to subdue a group of cranes that led Mars and Virtue to laugh. In contrast, the first part of the show was a serious affair and intended to provoke amazement that women could take on the role of men, the only precedent for which derived from the mythical Amazons. No other evidence suggests that women ever fought dwarfs, so there is no historical basis for DeMille’s reconstruction. Nevertheless, DeMille shows us why such a battle would not have worked well in the Roman games. Dwarfs would have been no match for women, and such a contest would have been a dull show.

Women gladiators were not just restricted to Rome, although the evidence comes from archaeological material, not literary sources. Most famous by far is a marble relief, originally from Halicarnassos (see Map 32.1 for the locations of key sites mentioned in this essay) and now in the British Museum (Figure 32.1). It depicts two women facing each other, both wearing the moderately heavy armor associated with a type of gladiator called a *provocator* (Junkelmann 2008: fig. 17). One of them holds her sword in her left hand, a difficult stance against which to defend. Close examination reveals that they wore loincloths and protection across their stomachs. Their chests, however, were bare, exposing their breasts. Inscribed in Greek are their stage names, Amazon and Achillia, designed to recall, respectively, the famous warrior women of mythology and Achilles, the greatest warrior of the Trojan War. Also inscribed is the note “They were released.” (On the mechanics of gladiatorial combat, including the “releasing” of defeated gladiators, see Chapter 25.) Little is known about the archaeological context from which this relief came, and, as a result, we cannot accurately determine its date.



Map 32.1 Key sites mentioned in this essay.



Figure 32.1 Marble Relief from Halicarnassos showing female gladiators, first to second century CE. *Source:* British Museum GR 1847.4–24.19, © Trustees of the British Museum.

The women have often been assumed to have fought without helmets so that their gender would have been clear to the audience. This would have been exceedingly unusual since only the lightly armed *retiarii*, “netfighters,” regularly fought with their faces visible. Coleman (2000) realized that their helmets can in fact be seen behind them, and that the artist included this detail to indicate how exceptional this match had been. If neither gladiator in a match could get the upper hand, both of them could be released and would earn the rare designation *stans missio*, “released while still standing.” Such a tie was considered the ultimate demonstration of martial valor and that is exactly what was being commemorated in the relief: the two women had removed their helmets once the match was declared a tie. The magistrate who had provided the spectacle then set up this monument to remind his fellow citizens of his generosity.

A similar monument, in this case an inscription, was discovered in the excavations at Ostia, the port of Rome. In a partially preserved section of the text, the magistrate, Hostilianus, boasted of having been the first one since the founding of Rome “to provide women for the sword” (*EAOR* 4.29). While “for the sword” might mean that these women were destined simply to be executed, it more likely indicates that they fought as gladiators in the games Hostilianus hosted at Ostia. We can assume that these women were not of high status since they are called *mulieres*, “females.” The document is usually dated to the mid-second century CE on the grounds that it must have taken place before the emperor Septimius Severus banned performances by women at the end of the second century (Cébeillac-Gervasoni and Zevi 1976: 614).

Septimius Severus’s edict was occasioned by an athletic contest that included both men and women. The female athletes competed so fiercely that, for some reason that Dio does not explain, women of noble status also came under ridicule (75.16.1). As a result, women of any social status were no longer allowed to fight against each other (*monomachein*). The verb *monomachein* is the regular term in Greek for fighting as a gladiator but the ban clearly resulted from the action of female athletes at an athletic contest. It is difficult, therefore, to decide if the ban applied to athletic contests, gladiatorial shows, or both. What is clear is that performances by women of low status were not viewed negatively in themselves but, as was often the case with edicts involving the games, the Romans took action when what happened on stage or in the arena was believed to have deleterious effects upon spectators or outside the world of the games.

Another much earlier edict involving women and the Roman games was discovered in Larinum, in southeastern Italy. This edict is a *SC* (*Senatus Consultum*, “decree of the Roman Senate”) that was passed in 19 CE, during the reign of Tiberius (*EAOR* 3.2). It was one of several attempts to limit the appearance by members of the senatorial or equestrian classes on the stage or in the arena. The *SC* from Larinum likely closed certain loopholes by listing anyone who might remotely fall under the restrictions, women included. For example, the provisions applied to “any woman whose husband, father, grandfather, or brother had ever had the right to sit with the equestrians at the games.” The effort made to publish this *SC* outside Rome indicates that the Senate felt the willingness of some members of the upper class to perform publicly was undermining the traditional structure of society. Dio, Suetonius, and Tacitus concur about the existence of this problem, and they provide several examples of men who fought or tried to fight as gladiators in the decades leading up to the edict (Levick 1983: 105–14). When it came to problems involving women, though, these authors fault

them only for appearing on stage or engaging in flagrant adultery. This suggests that no upper-class women had yet tried to become gladiators, but the framers of the *SC* were attempting to cover every eventuality, extrapolating from the crimes already committed by men to cover women as well.

Female gladiators also pop up in the world of fiction. One brief mention occurs in the *Satyricon* (45), a novel usually attributed to Petronius, a member of Nero's court. At a dinner party near Puteoli, just north of Naples, one of the guests, Echion, is ridiculed for being the archetypical fan of the arena, obsessed with the minutiae of the games provided by local magistrates. Echion expects an upcoming show to be particularly lavish because it will include a female *essedaria*. This uncommon type of gladiator derived its name from Celtic warriors who fought from chariots. In practice, though, an *essedarius* fought on foot and was distinguished by the use of an oval shield and helmet decorated with two feathers (Junkelmann 2008: 116–19). The women on the relief from Halicarnassos wear equally heavy armor, so we should not think this female *essedaria* was entirely the product of Petronius's imagination. Echion describes her as a *mulier*, "female," the same term used in Hostilianus's inscription. So we are not to envisage her as being of high status. Most importantly, we can conclude from Echion's excitement that spectators considered it a rare treat to see women risk their lives in the arena.

Another glancing reference comes in Juvenal's list of all the ways the world's proper order had been perverted. First up is a eunuch who had taken a wife, followed by a woman named Mevia who, dressed like an Amazon (with one breast bare), participated in a staged boar hunt in the arena (*Satires* 1.22–3). While Mevia's name suggests an aristocratic background, Juvenal's comments in another poem suggest that her gender was also an issue. In his famous attack on the faults of women, mainly sexual, Juvenal complains about a baby that looks like a gladiator, not its noble father, and then about Eppia, a noble woman who, oddly aroused by a gladiator's wounds, had forsaken her family to run off with him (6.80–114). Later, Juvenal pities a husband whose wife plays at being a gladiator, training in full armor and loving to act like a man but never really wanting to be one. Not even the wife of a gladiator would have endured such training (6.246–67). Finally, a certain Ogulnia wastes the family fortune so she can go to the games in style and then gives her last bit of wealth to a good looking athlete, a type of performer Juvenal despised nearly as much as he did gladiators (6.352–6).

Juvenal was not alone in his belief that noble women "loved the sword" (6.112). Graffiti at Pompeii refer to gladiators, possibly jokingly, as heartthrobs of the girls (Garraffoni 2008: 230). Dubious stories circulated about how Messalina, Claudius's wife, and Faustina, mother of Commodus, became enamored of gladiators (Dio Cassius 60.28.2; *Scriptores Historiae Augustae Marcus* 19). This idea that noble women could not keep their hands off lowborn types was a commonplace in Roman thought (Braund 1992; Edwards 1997: 78–81). A similar belief probably underlies the popular claim made by many modern authors that the wealthy woman found buried in the gladiatorial barracks at Pompeii was there to visit her lover, one of the gladiators. Yet excavators found more than fifty other skeletons, including those of children and dogs, in the same location, so this woman was probably one of the many people who had taken refuge in the building while trying to escape via the nearby Stabian Gate (Richardson 1988: 85–6; Kyle 1998: 85). The most important thing to remember, though, about the complaints made about women and the games

is that they are concerned nearly exclusively with the effects of the games outside the arena. When it came to woman actually performing in the arena, Mevia is the sole example in the long list of errant women censured by Juvenal and, in Juvenal's opinion, her misbehavior warranted less than two lines of comment.

3 Problematic Evidence

Our earliest source concerning female gladiatorial combat, if we understood the context, would be a passage from Nicolaus of Damascus, a historian and philosopher who was active in the first century BCE. Nicolaus's work survives only in fragments, but he is quoted in a later source (Athenaeus 154a) as having reported that two unnamed individuals commanded in their wills that, in one case, his most beautiful female slaves and, in the other, his favorite young boy slaves should fight at their funerals. These wills were ostensibly abrogated as being unlawful. The vagueness of the account should give us pause for thought. No women (or young boys) were ever actually forced to take up a sword. The men responsible for these wills are not named nor is any date given. We are not told whether it was illegal for women and boys to become gladiators at this time or whether it was illegal to make one's own slaves do so. Tantalizing as it may be, Nicolaus's testimony does not advance our understanding of when or how the Romans came to think it would be a good idea to watch women fight.

Vesley (1998) has proposed that the *collegia iuvenum*, an institution developed during the Roman Empire to provide education and physical training for aristocratic youth, became a major training ground for the many upper-class girls who wanted to enter the arena. The idea that girls were regularly admitted to these schools rests on the slim testimony of three fragmentary inscriptions. Equally problematic is the underlying assumption, which I will later show to be false, that a large number of upper-class girls wanted to become gladiators. So there is no need to search for some special mechanism like the *collegia iuvenum* that would have allowed them to take up a profession disapproved of by their parents and society. A more reasonable view is that women became gladiators by the same paths as men. They were slaves who were sold or, if free, surrendered themselves to a *lanista*, the manager of a gladiatorial school, and thereby received the training that would give them a chance of surviving in the arena. This is the implication of the report that the emperor Hadrian forbade the sale of a male or female slave to a *lanista* or to a pimp unless the master provided a reason (*Scriptores Historiae Augustae Hadrian* 18).

A BBC program *Gladiator Girl* (*Gladiatrix* on the Discovery Channel) has made widely popular the idea that the remains of a female gladiator had been found during excavations outside Roman London. The impulse for making this claim is again the assumption that women regularly fought in arenas throughout the Roman world and hence it should be just a matter of time before archaeologists turn up the tomb of a female gladiator. The actual identification in this case, though, is based on tenuous evidence, essentially that the grave goods included a lamp with the representation of a fallen gladiator and the cones of the stone pine, a tree believed to be associated with the amphitheater. Given the popularity of gladiatorial scenes on small objects like lamps and the use of these pinecones in other rituals, the identification of the occupant of this grave as

a gladiator would require something rather more substantial. For example, we might have expected the bones to show signs of wounds like those noticed during the excavation at Ephesos of a gladiator graveyard (Kanz and Grossschmidt 2005). Even better would be the typical gladiator's tombstone indicating her specialty and perhaps the reason she lost her last match.

4 The Phenomenon of Female Gladiators

Barring new archaeological discoveries, our understanding of the women who fought in the arena must be based on the evidence we have at hand: five certain cases in which women fought in front of an audience (three at Rome, two elsewhere), several possible references to the legal issues involving women as gladiators, and two brief appearances in fiction. Since the essential feature of female gladiators was that they were *not* men, a useful approach in analyzing our evidence is to catalog all the things these women were not. First, the Romans never used the term *gladiatrix*. Similarly, the term *ludia* referred not to a female gladiator or beast hunter but to a gladiator's wife or concubine.⁴ In fact, Hostilianus's awkward "He provided women for the sword" suggests that the Romans never developed a standardized terminology to describe female gladiators because they were not a sufficiently common phenomenon. Second, women did not always appear as gladiators. A substantial proportion probably functioned as *venatores* like the women who starred in the Colosseum's inauguration. Trying to kill a boar might have seemed less dangerous and better suited for a woman than learning to fight in heavy armor. Moreover, the Romans surprisingly had no interest in seeing women perform as chariot-eers, an area where women had a reasonable chance of holding their own against men.

Watching women lose to men was not where the Romans' interest in female gladiators lay. The paradigm we should use for female gladiators is the Halicarnassos relief – two equally well-armed women faced off against each other, using all the skills at their disposal to beat the other. Such a contest fits a principle inherent in staging gladiatorial matches: fighters were supposed to be well matched in terms of weaponry and level of training. Seneca, for example, remarks that a gladiator considered it a source of shame to have to face an inferior (*On Providence* 3.4). A match between a female and a male gladiator would have been innately uneven, and none of our sources mention such an inappropriate contest. The same reasoning applies to matches between women and dwarfs but in reverse. As DeMille sensed when choreographing his battle, the women would have easily overwhelmed the dwarfs and the result would have been laughable.

One thing that the sources agree on is that female gladiators were not a joke. The dwarfs in Domitian's games may have provoked a laugh, but Statius is quite clear that the women's willingness to fight like Amazons was met with amazement. Statius's suggestion that they were a reincarnation of the Amazons indicates why the Romans thought it was worthwhile to train women to fight even though men were better suited for the job. The games provided women an opportunity to transcend their nature and, like their mythological predecessors, do deeds of which only men were considered capable. So Statius remarks on how the female gender, although inexperienced at warfare, undertook "manly battles." Martial extols Titus for having brought it about that the deeds of Hercules were now accomplished by "a woman's hand." The names of the two gladiators

on the Halicarnassos relief were thus no accident. The magistrate wanted people to remember that he had arranged for the ultimate test of feminine military ability: a personification of the famous warrior women against a female version of the greatest fighter of Greek mythology.

The astonishment produced by seeing such women fight would have brought with it an important lesson. If women could, on special occasions, show the sort of courage and martial determination that Romans viewed as being essential characteristics of men, then men should be inspired to do the same or better. The rationale for using women in this fashion fits well with a major theory regarding why the Romans valued the games as a whole (Wiedemann 1992: 38). On this model, which finds support in the work of several Roman authors, Romans were supposed to be inspired to be better by watching these martial exercises, especially the displays of fortitude by gladiators and others who ranked at the bottom end of Roman society. So, for instance, Pliny praised Trajan's games for inspiring "men to endure honorable wounds and have contempt for death since a love of glory and desire for victory was discernible even in the case of slaves and criminals" (*Panegyric* 33.1). Admittedly, novelty must have also played some part in the Roman fascination with the women who risked their lives in the arena. Yet it was not the novelty of women ridiculously pretending to be gladiators but the novelty of seeing women fully assuming the role normally held by men with all the risks that entailed.

Apparently the belief that female gladiators were commonplace is hard to give up. A recent study, for example, suggests that female gladiators were more widespread than our sources would suggest because authors overlooked examples, especially early ones (McCullough 2007/8). Yet Suetonius and Dio Cassius, our best sources for the games during the first century of the Empire, are not likely to have overlooked the use of women in the games by an emperor such as Caligula or Claudius. More importantly, our evidence actually speaks to the comparative rarity of female participants. Suetonius and Dio mention the appearance of women in Titus' and Domitian's games because they viewed it as exceptional. Dio, in particular, is very clear that female *venatores* were as unusual and noteworthy as the mock sea battles, the horses that swam in the flooded Colosseum, or the other "amazing things" arranged for the Colosseum's inauguration. Further, the Roman games were a highly popular subject in art, but female gladiators show up neither in mosaics, the medium in which wealthy givers of games recorded their generosity, nor on lamps, the inexpensive memorabilia that testify to the popularity of the games throughout the Roman world. The complete absence of female gladiators from the world of art (other than the Halicarnassos relief) testifies to their rarity.⁵ How infrequently women appeared in the arena can be judged from the pride that Hostilianus took in being the first – at a rather late date – to provide women for the games in Ostia, the closest major center to Rome and not a backwater of the Empire. Thus Petronius was right to assume that seeing a woman fight in the arena was an unusual treat, even near Naples, an area noted for its numerous amphitheatres.

Our evidence for upper-class women fighting as gladiators or hunting animals in the arena is even more tenuous. The *SC* from Larinum is at best inconclusive, and it is hard to make much of Juvenal's glancing reference to the fictional *venator* Mevia. The only occasion when we can say for certain that the Romans saw noble women perform in the arena is under Nero, and this was partially a result of coercion. While we might hold a romantic view of gladiators, the fact that Nero had to force nobles to take part in his

games suggests that senators and equestrians of both genders generally found performing in the arena an unattractive option. So while a senator's wife might like to play at being a gladiator, as Juvenal claims, the likelihood of seeing an upper-class woman actually perform in the arena was probably nonexistent.

Whether women had fought in the arena before Nero's reign is hard to tell. On the one hand, beginning with Julius Caesar, the resources of the Roman state were increasingly harnessed to produce novel and astounding displays such as mock sea battles and exhibitions of strange animals. In this context, the idea of introducing "Amazons" into the arena would have made sense. The silence, though, of Suetonius and Dio should make us hesitate about making any specific claims. It is likewise hard to tell whether Septimius Severus's edict actually meant the end of female gladiators. We do not have enough information about the later history of the Roman games to determine if the decree even applied to women who fought as gladiators or only to female athletes, much less whether it was enforced. This is an area in which new archaeological discoveries could be most helpful.

5 Women as Spectators

The Roman games were spectator sports par excellence. If nobody saw the show that Titus mounted for the inauguration of the Colosseum, if nobody came to the games offered to the citizens of Ostia by Hostilianus, the rationale behind the games would have been destroyed. The question then arises: if it was considered good to watch women fight, was it considered good for women themselves to watch the games? A simple answer is that even if women wanted to see the games, the opportunity to do so was greatly restricted once Augustus introduced his law regulating seating at the games. Prior to this time men and women were not kept apart; the dictator Sulla was able to meet his future wife at a gladiatorial exhibition held in the Forum (Plutarch *Sulla* 35.3–5). Also, not long before this law was passed, the poet Ovid could recommend the circus and the gladiatorial games as good places to pick up girls (*Art of Love* 1.135–76). Augustus's law extended existing regulations that reserved seats for equestrians and senators at the theater (mentioned in the *SC* from Larinum) to venues like the arena. He further divided the seating to reflect his conception of how Roman society should be arranged. Among a multitude of smaller divisions, he reserved sections for married men, boys, and their tutors. In this scheme, women were relegated to the back, as far up and away from the action as possible. By Nero's time, with two exceptions mentioned below, it would no longer have been possible, as DeMille implies, for young women to sit in the front rows and flirt with the men around them.

This reorganization was not primarily designed to shield women from the immoral influences of the games, as Edmondson asserts (2002: 49). Otherwise, the Vestal Virgins and the female members of the emperor's family would not have been allotted front row seats where they would have been most vulnerable to any corrupting influence (Rawson 1987: 91). The key to understanding the change is to realize that what went on in the stands was as much a part of the show as what happened in the arena. The games came to function as a way of demonstrating to the Romans and to their subjects how society should be organized and where the power lay. For the same reason, Augustus required

all citizens to wear the toga and other ceremonial garb in order to reinforce visually the idea that the audience was a model of Roman society (see Chapter 30). At least from a political and military point of view, women did not have a major position in this scheme. The other important point is that one of the lessons Romans thought was learned from watching the games – the value of fortitude and endurance in battle – was not aimed at women. Therefore, to the degree that women were extraneous to what went on at the games, there was no need to provide a prominent place for them in the audience.

The Romans, however, were not entirely blind to the potentially corrupting effects of the Roman games on women. Augustus delayed a boxing match because the athletes' nudity was unsuitable for the women in the audience (Suetonius *Augustus* 44). Juvenal is our best guide as to why some Romans might worry about women watching the games. As noted, his real concern was not with women who performed in the arena but with cases in which the line between the world of entertainment and world outside the arena had been blurred. So he attacks a Roman wife for running off with a gladiator, someone she should have never met. Another Roman wife is criticized for spending all her time training in a gladiatorial school, a place where men could gain instruction in the use of weapons without suffering reproach, but a woman had no business being. As a result of their misplaced interests, both of these women neglected their duties as wives and mothers. The authors of the *SC* from Larinum seem to have shared Juvenal's concern that there were dangers in allowing women to frequent gladiatorial schools. One provision prohibits them from assisting gladiators with their armor (if this is the meaning) or "undertaking any other service."

Juvenal sensed that if a woman showed an interest in gladiators, and especially if she wanted to have contact with men of such low status, something had to be at work besides an interest in their military prowess. Unlike men, women were not supposed to be attracted to weapons and combat. The whole world of warfare was presumed to be alien to them, and therefore illicit sex could have been the only thing they had on their minds. Yet, paradoxically, the reason that the Romans believed women should not be interested in watching gladiators – their lack of a warlike nature and their inability to endure hardship – was also the reason they were so effective when they appeared in the arena. Taking part in the games, an activity normally open only to men, allowed women a chance to overcome the limitations of their feminine nature. They were thereby able to teach the men who watched them to be more like men.

ABBREVIATIONS

EAOR = *Epigrafia anfiteatrale dell'Occidente romano* (1988–). Rome. 7 vols. (to date).

NOTES

- 1 Also not considered here are shows such as a hunt during Nero's reign that involved numerous Ethiopians, including women and children (Dio Cassius 63.3.1–2). Hunting native animals was their traditional occupation, and the participation of women was not unusual.
- 2 Duke (1955) believes that women never fought dwarfs, but he does not believe that the dwarfs in Domitian's show could have performed as boxers.

- 3 All translations of ancient texts found in this essay are my own.
- 4 Watson and Watson (1996) convincingly argue that *ludia* did not mean a woman who performed publicly, as long thought, but a woman who belonged to the *ludus*, the gladiatorial school. While they suggest otherwise, we have sufficient evidence for the existence of a family life among gladiators to justify the translation as “wife” in the passages from Juvenal discussed above so long as we remember that in a strict sense gladiators, normally being slaves, could not legally marry.
- 5 Manas 2011 appeared after this entry was complete and cannot be addressed here in detail. His major claim concerns a statuette long thought to represent a female athlete with a strigil. He thinks that she is actually holding the bent sword typically used by Thracian gladiators. I do not find his arguments, notably his claim that her minimal clothing indicates she fought in the arena, to be particularly compelling.

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GUIDE TO FURTHER READING

Brunet (Brunet, 2004, with Brunet 2003 on dwarf boxers) demonstrates that women never fought dwarfs and reviews in detail the evidence for female gladiators and *venatores*. McCullough (2007/8) does not add to the evidence but provides an accessible introduction, although Roman authors are not likely to have overlooked appearances by women in the arena during the Early Empire as she claims. Duke (1955) (not cited in Brunet 2003) does not believe that the dwarfs in Domitian's show could have performed as boxers, although he provides no substantial arguments for that belief.

The literary evidence is often connected to wider issues. For Juvenal and the theme of the adulterous wife, see Braund (1992). Kleijwegt (1998) explores how Petronius used the gladiatorial games to highlight Echion's and Trimalchio's lack of sophistication. Martial's *Liber Spectaculorum* is dealt with in detail in Coleman (2006). On Suetonius' and Dio Cassius's value as sources for the games, see Chapter 27.

The Halicarnassos relief of Amazon and Achillia is often illustrated, but many descriptions fail to take into account Coleman's essential analysis (2000).

Levick (1983) provides an English translation of the SC from Larinum and a review of cases where upper-class Romans performed publicly. Lebek (1990, 1991) provides the most thorough evaluation. McGinn (1992) argues that the SC and preceding legislation had no connection with adultery or prostitution by upper-class women. Edmondson (2002) provides an accessible overview of the restrictions on seating at the games. Rawson (1987) lays out the evidence for Augustus's edict on seating, the *Lex Julia Theatralis*.

Fighting as a gladiator is included by Evans (1991: 101–65) among the occupations regularly pursued by Roman women. Women likely found other options on his list more attractive or lucrative, which would be one explanation for the rarity of female gladiators.

Wiedemann (1992: 109–11) provides several examples of upper-class men who were instructed by gladiators in the use of arms or provided instruction to gladiators. Yet, unlike the woman described by Juvenal, they were not subject to reproach so long as they did not become gladiators. Wiedemann (1992: 36–9) also surveys the Roman authors who, like Pliny, valued gladiatorial games because, despite the performers' low status, their display of valor supposedly inspired Romans to be courageous.

Zoll (2002), the companion volume to the highly speculative BBC *Gladiator Girl*, has further popularized the notion that the excavators had found the tomb of a female gladiator. The actual publication of the excavations, Mackinder (2000: 28), is much less confident in the identification. Junkelmann (2008: 170–9) illustrates the grave goods from the London burial and some of the documentation for the trauma suffered by the gladiators found in the Ephesos graveyard. At least 68 individuals were found in this graveyard and the forensic analysis was performed by Kanz and Grossschmidt (2005). Only one woman was identified in this group, a female slave whose gravestone was located in this graveyard. Nothing about her remains, such as evidence that she had suffered the type of wounds often sustained when fighting in the arena, suggests that she was a gladiator.