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MUNERA GLADIATORIA AND FEMALE GLADIATORS IN THE ANCIENT WORLD*

The *ludi gladiatorii* in Ancient Rome

Before addressing the issue of female gladiators, it is necessary to outline a brief overview of gladiation, which many scholars have dealt with over the years.¹ The fights between gladiators are part of the wider context of the *ludi*, attested in Rome as early as the IV-III century BC.² In addition to the *ludi scaenici* (dramatic representations) and *circenses* (chariot races), the *ludi gladiatorii*, the *venationes* and the *naumachia* arouse more and more interest for the ancients. These last three types of spectacles were initially organized in the Forum³ or in other public spaces of the city, but later they found their main offices in the amphitheatres. One of the most interesting aspects connected to the *ludi* is undoubtedly the feeling of belonging to the civic community that the public manifested by taking part in the spectacles.⁴ The *ludi* also took on a mystical-religious component, since the killings during the performances assumed the value of a sacred

* All the translations in the article are by the author, unless otherwise indicated.

¹ On gladiators see G. Ville, *La gladiature en Occident. Des origines à la mort de Domitien*, Rome 1981; R. Paris, *Origine e diffusione della gladiatura*, [in:] *Anfiteatro Flavio. Immagine testimonianze spettacoli*, ed. M.L. Conforto, Rome 1988, pp. 119-130; M. Fora, *I munera gladiatoria in Italia. Considerazioni sulla loro documentazione epigrafica*, Naples 1996; I. Tantillo, *I munera in età tardo antica*, [in:] *Roma antica*, ed. A. Giardina, Rome-Bari 2000, pp. 120-125; F. Coarelli, *L'armamento e le classi dei gladiatori*, [in:] *Sangue e arena. Catalogo della mostra. Roma 2001-2002*, ed. A. La Regina, Rome 2001, pp. 153-173; *idem*, *Ludus Gladiatorius*, [in:] *Sangue e arena...*, pp. 147-151; L. Jacobelli, *Gladiatori a Pompei*, Rome 2003; F. Guidi, *Morte nell'arena. Storia e leggenda dei gladiatori*, Milan 2006; F. Paolucci, *Gladiatori. I dannati dello spettacolo*, Milan 2006; C. Ricci, *Gladiatori e attori nella Roma giulio-claudia. Studi sul senatoconsulto di Larino*, Milan 2006; S. Mattesini, *Gladiatori*, Rome 2009; D. Battaglia, L. Ventura, *De Rebus Gladiatoris*, Rome 2010; A. Mañas Bastida, *Munera gladiatorum. Mujeres gladiatoras*, "Florentia Iliberritana" 2012, XXIII, pp. 127-151; *idem*, *Gladiatores. El gran espectáculo de Roma*, Barcelona 2013; C. Mann, *I gladiatori*, Bologna 2014; P. Serra, *I gladiatori, atleti del passato*, Rome 2014; S. Rinaldi Tufi, *Gladiatori. Una giornata di spettacoli*, Rome 2018.

² J. Welch, *The Roman Amphitheater. From its Origins to the Colosseum*, Cambridge 2007, pp. 30-71.

³ P. Gros, *L'architecture romaine du début du III siècle av. J.-C. à la fin du Haut-Empire*, Paris 1996, p. 318.

⁴ M. Clavel-Lévêque, *L'espace des jeux dans le monde romain: hégémonie, symbolique et pratique sociale*, "Aufstieg und Niedergang der römischen Welt" 1986, II, 16, 3, pp. 2405-2563, esp. pp. 2462-2473; D.L. Bomgardner, *The story of the Roman Amphitheatre*, London-New York 2000, pp. 9-17.

ceremony and served as an *exemplum* for the community that participated in the event.⁵ The *ludi gladiatorii* are also known by the name of *munera gladiatoria*, an expression used above all since the Imperial age, from the Latin term *munus*, which indicates a duty to perform towards important personalities and towards the public itself.

The gladiators were officially introduced into Rome in 264 BC, when, according to the main sources, Marco and Decimo Pera, sons of the deceased Brutus Pera, made three pairs of gladiators fight in the Foro Boario on the occasion of the funeral services for their father:

Decimus Iunius Brutus munus gladiatorium in honorem defuncti patris primus dedit (Liv. *Perioch.* XVI).

Decimus Iunius Brutus was the first to organize a gladiator spectacle in honour of his deceased father.

Gladiatorium munus primum Romae datum est in foro boario Ap. Claudio Q. Fulvio cos. dederunt Marcus et Decimus filii Bruti Perae, funebri memoria patris cineres honorando. Athletarum certamen a M. Scauri munificentia tractum est (Val. Max. II, 4, 7).

The first spectacle of gladiators was organized in the Boario Forum under the consuls A. Claudio and Q. Fulvio. Marco and Decimo, sons of Brutus Pera, gave it, honouring their father's ashes with a funeral tradition. The competition between the athletes was made for the munificence of M. Scauro.

However, another passage from Livy would suggest the origin of the gladiatorial games from Campania.⁶ The historian, speaking of the Roman and Campanian victory over the Samnites in 310/309 BC, says that the Campanians made the gladiators dress during banquets with the weapons of the losers, calling them *Samnites*:

Et Romani quidem ad honorem deum insignibus armis hostium usi sunt: Campani ad superbiam et odio Samnitium gladiatores, quod spectaculum inter epulas erat, eo ornatu armarunt Samnitiumque nomine compellarunt (Liv. IX, 40, 17).

And the Romans undoubtedly used the glorious weapons of the enemies to honour the gods: the Campanians, due to pride and contempt towards the Samnites, armed the gladiators with that clothing, since a spectacle was made during the banquet, and they turned to them with the name of Samnites.

In the city of Capua, in Campania, there were very important gladiator schools.⁷

⁵ F. Rausa, *La morte come spettacolo nell'antica Roma. Osservazioni a proposito di alcuni contributi sugli spettacoli*, "Ludica" 2004, 10, pp.179-193, esp. p. 180.

⁶ E.T. Salmon, *Il Sannio e i Sanniti*, Turin 1985, p. 60 ff.; G. Ville, *op. cit.*, pp. 1-8; F. Guidi, *op. cit.*, pp. 8-11; F. Paolucci, *op. cit.*, pp. 11-14.

⁷ On the gladiatorial schools in Capua see F. Coarelli, *Ludus Gladiatorius...*, p. 147; K. Welch, *op. cit.*, p. 91; S. Cannavale, *Civiltà del teatro e dello spettacolo nella Campania Antica. L'area di Capua*, Naples 2015, pp. 84-87.

The gladiators lived in barracks, called *familiae*, under the guidance of a referent, the *lanista*, who was usually the owner of the gym and sometimes also the instructor of the gladiators. The *lanista* had the duty to give the *editores ludorum* everything necessary for the organization of the *ludus*.⁸ Starting from the Augustan age, gladiators are divided into different categories, among which the most attested are those of *thraeces*, *murmillones*, *retiarii*, *equites* and *oplomachi*.⁹ If, on the one hand, the majority of the fighters were made up of slaves, freedmen and prisoners, on the other hand, as we will see, there are cases of free men who decided to give up their civil rights and take up gladiators. These episodes, however, should not have been so rare, if in 11 AD and in 19 AD, as we shall see specifically, two *Senatus Consults* were issued to prohibit the practice of gladiators for senators and knights.¹⁰

The *munera gladiatoria*, that occupied the afternoon band of the *spectacula*, were organized both by the emperors and by wealthy private citizens with a certain regularity up to the age of the Severans. Starting from this period, although still attested for the next two centuries, this type of *ludi* went through a decline, mainly due to the economic crisis in the western part of the empire. Furthermore, with the spread of Christianity and with the Edict of Constantine the emperors outdistance from the fighting between men. Indeed, starting from the fifth century there is no more news of the *munera gladiatoria*.¹¹

Female Gladiators in the Ancient World: literary sources

The 'birth' of female gladiation¹² is a phenomenon that can hardly be contextualized with certainty. Among the sources available to us only one, namely a fragment of

⁸ C. Ricci, *op. cit.*, p. 88.

⁹ G. Legrottaglie, *Il sistema delle immagini negli anfiteatri romani*, Bari 2008, p. 27. For the gladiatorial classes see M. Junkelmann, *Das Spiel mit dem Tod. So kämpften Roms Gladiatoren*, Mainz 2000, pp. 46-65; F. Coarelli, *L'armamento...*, pp. 153-173; C. Vismara, *La giornata di spettacoli*, [in:] *Sangue e arena...*, pp. 199-221, esp. pp. 211-212; L. Jacobelli, *op. cit.*, pp. 7-17; S. Rinaldi Tufi, *op. cit.*, pp. 83-93.

¹⁰ C. Ricci, *op. cit.*, pp. 103-108. See also M. Buonocore, *Epigrafia anfiteatrale dell'Occidente Romano. III. Regione Italiae II-V, Sicilia, Sardinia et Corsica (Vetera, 6)*, Rome 1992, pp. 18-26, no. 2; G.L. Gregori, *I gladiatori e il loro mondo*, [in:] *Colosseo*, ed. A. Gabucci, Milan 1999, pp. 89-97, esp. pp. 89-91.

¹¹ R. Rea, *Il Colosseo, teatro per gli spettacoli di caccia. Le fonti e i reperti*, [in:] *Sangue e arena...*, pp. 223-243, esp. p. 234; F. Rausa, *op. cit.*, p. 185, no. 57; G. Legrottaglie, *op. cit.*, p. 26.

¹² On the general problem of female gladiators see: B. Levick, *The Senatus Consultum from Larinum*, "The Journal of Roman Studies" 1983, 73, pp. 97-115; W. Lebek, *Standeswürde und Berufsverbot unter Tiberius: Das SC der Tabula Larinas*, "Zeitschrift für Papyrologie und Epigraphik" 1990, 81, pp. 37-96; J. Evans, *War, Women, and Children in Ancient Rome*, London 1991; W. Lebek, *Das SC der Tabula Larinas: Rittermusterung und andere Probleme*, "Zeitschrift für Papyrologie und Epigraphik" 1991, 85, pp. 41-70; T. McGinn, *The SC from Larinum and the Repression of Adultery at Rome*, "Zeitschrift für Papyrologie und Epigraphik" 1992, 93, pp. 273-295; T. Wiedemann, *Emperors and Gladiators*, London 1992; D. Słapek,

Nicolaus of Damascus contained in the work of Athenaeus of Naucrati¹³, seems to mention it:

Νικόλαος δ'ὁ Δαμασκηνός, εἰς τῶν ἀπὸ τοῦ Περιπάτου φιλοσόφων, ἐν τῇ δεκάτῃ πρὸς ταῖς ἑκατὸν τῶν Ἱστοριῶν Ῥωμαίους ἰστορεῖ παρὰ τὸ δεῖπνον συμβάλλειν μονομαχίας, γράφων οὕτως· τὰς τῶν μονομάχων θέας οὐ μόνον ἐν πανηγύρεσι καὶ θεάτροις ἐποιοῦντο Ῥωμαῖοι, παρὰ Τυρρενῶν παραλαβόντες τὸ ἔθος, ἀλλὰ καὶ ταῖς ἐστιάσεσιν. ἐκάλουν γοῦν τινες πολλακίας ἐπὶ δεῖπνον τοὺς φίλους ἐπὶ τε ἄλλοις καὶ ὅπως ἂν δύο ἢ τρία ζεύγη ἴδοιεν μονομάχων, ὅτε καὶ κορεσθέντες δεῖπνον καὶ μέθης εἰσεκάλουν τοὺς μονομάχους. καὶ ὁ μὲν ἅμα ἐσφάττετο, αὐτοὶ δ' ἐκρότου ἐπὶ τούτῳ ἡδόμενοι. ἦδη δέ τις καὶ ταῖς διαθήκαις γέγραφεν γυναῖκας εὐπρεπεστάτας μονομαχησαί, ἃς ἐκέκτητο.

Nicholas of Damascus, one of the philosophers of Peripato, in the hundred and tenth book of the Stories tells that the Romans organized fights between gladiators during banquets, reporting these data: “The Romans organized gladiatorial shows not only during solemnities and in theatres, but also during banquets, according to a custom derived from the Etruscans. Indeed, some often invited friends to dinner and to other occasions, so that they could see two or three pairs of gladiators; and once they were satisfied with food and wine they let the gladiators enter. And one was being slaughtered, while the others cheered, enjoying that scene. Someone sometimes left written in his will that the most beautiful women he had bought had to fight as gladiators. [...]”

The author links gladiation to banquet occasions organized by private citizens, as Livy already said in the text above. Nicolaus, however, provides more information, especially regarding the presence of women in the fighting. According to the text, it is probable that at the dawn of gladiation there were fights not only between males but also between female gladiators. The next reference to women engaged in arena activities is contained in a legislative provision, namely the *Senatus Consultum of Larinum*, issued in 19 AD to prevent members of the elite classes from competing in amphitheatres. The *Senatus Consultum* is a bronze tablet found at Larinum and published in 1978.¹⁴

Those who belonged to the high social ranks had long ago chosen to participate in the arena spectacles on several occasions. Therefore, a series of laws had been promul-

Natura horret vacuum. Rzymianki na arenach amfiteatrów, [in:] *Partnerka, matka, opiekunka. Status kobiety w starożytności i średniowieczu*, ed. J. Jundziłł, Bydgoszcz 1999, p. 159-182; K. Coleman, *Missio at Halicarnassus*, “Harvard Studies in Classical Philology” 2000, 100, pp. 487-500; S. Brunet, *Female and Dwarf Gladiators*, “Mouseion” 2004, 4, pp. 145-170; A. McCullough, *Female Gladiators in Imperial Rome: Literary Context and Historical Fact*, “Classical World” 2007, 8, 101, pp. 197-209; A. Manas, *New evidence of female gladiators: the bronze statuette at the Museum für Kunst und Gewerbe of Hamburg*, “International Journal of the History of Sport” 2011, 28, pp. 2726-2752; A.B. Miączewska, *Female Gladiators at the Roman Munera: A Fact or a Fantasy?*, “Res Historica” 2012, 34, pp. 9-28; S. Brunet, *Women with Swords. Female Gladiators in the Roman World*, [in:] *A Companion to Sport and Spectacle in Greek and Roman Antiquity*, eds. P. Christesen, D.G. Kyle, New Jersey 2014, pp. 478-491; T. Kocjan, *A Woman's Virtus? Perceptions of the Female Gladiator*, “Chronika” 2018, 8, pp. 49-56.

¹³ Nicolaus of Damascus, *FGrHist* 90 F 78 (*apud* Athen. 153F).

¹⁴ B. Levick, *op. cit.*, p. 97.

gated to counter the growing phenomenon: the first attestation dates to 46 BC, when the senators were forbidden to fight in the arena (Cass. Dio XLIII 23, 5); in 38 BC they were also prevented from choosing to become gladiators (Cass. Dio XLVIII 43, 2-3). A further important provision, also reported by Cassius Dio and relating to the year 22 BC, expressly includes women:

ἐπειδὴ τε καὶ ἰππῆς καὶ γυναικες ἐπιφανεῖς ἐν τῇ ὀρχήστρᾳ καὶ τότε γε ἐπεδείξαντο, ἀπηγόρευσεν οὐχ ὅτι τοῖς παισὶ τῶν βουλευτῶν, ὅπερ πού καὶ πρὶν ἐκεκώλυτο, ἀλλὰ καὶ τοῖς ἐγγόνοις, τοῖς γε ἐν τῇ ἰππάδι δῆλον ὅτι ἐξεταζόμενοι, μηδὲν ἔτι τοιοῦτο δρᾶν (Dio Cass. LIV 2, 5).

Since even then both knights and high-ranking women performed in the orchestra, he forbade not only the sons of the senators, which had already been forbidden before, but also the grandsons, who clearly belonged to the order of knights, to follow this custom.

A few years before the Senatus Consultum of Larinum, in 11 AD, another legislative provision prohibited free women under the age of twenty from participating in the arena games.¹⁵ But the aforementioned decrees, including that of 19 AD, did not have to be effective.

Seeing a woman fighting as a gladiator or as a *venatrix* inside the amphitheatre must surely have been a surprising sight, considering, moreover, that the women in the *cavea* were assigned the last place, in the highest part. Based on a reform of Augustus (Svet. *Aug.* 44), the spectators sat according to this order of importance: first the senators, then the knights, immediately after the plebs and finally the women.¹⁶ Generally speaking, gladiator men also benefited from a double reputation, positive and negative at the same time. If, on the one hand, several sources underline the characteristic courage and strength of the gladiators, qualities that allowed them to earn even huge sums of money, on the other hand, they were marked by infamy and had no rights.¹⁷ Even the sources are often suitable for double reading. Cicero, for example, uses the term *gladiator* as an offense against his political enemies (Cic. *Phil.* VI, 13; Cic. *Phil.* V, 20; Cic. *Phil.* VII, 17), but on other occasions he praises virtues of the combatants, first of all courage (Cic. *Tusc.* II, 41; Cic. *Pro Milone* XXXIV, 92; Cic. *Phil.* III, 35). Seneca admired the spectacles organized in Rome, but in his works he criticized the dehumanization which the spectators themselves were facing. Where there was excessive violence, those who watched the show became the real victims (Sen. *Brev. Vit.* XIII, 6-7).¹⁸ The philosopher also believes that the gladiator's behaviour in

¹⁵ A. McCullough, *op. cit.*, p. 199.

¹⁶ E. Gunderson, *The Ideology of the Arena*, "Classical Antiquity" 1996, 15, 1, pp. 113-151, esp. p. 123.

¹⁷ C. Ricci, *op. cit.*, p. 85.

¹⁸ P. Cagniard, *The Philosopher and the Gladiator*, "The Classical World" 2000, 93, 6, pp. 607-618, esp. p. 611 ff.

the arena represents an example of how the wise man should face the difficulties of life (Sen. *De ben.* II, 34).

Returning to the sources in which women fighting inside the arena are expressly mentioned, it is necessary to make a chronological leap directly under the empire of Nero. The authors who provide information on female gladiators are Cassius Dio, Tacitus, and Petronius.

On the same show, organized by Nero, the first two authors write:

ἐκεῖνο δὲ δὴ καὶ αἰσχιστον καὶ δεινότατον ἅμα ἐγένετο, ὅτι καὶ ἄνδρες καὶ γυναῖκες οὐχ ὅπως τοῦ ἵππικου ἀλλὰ καὶ τοῦ βουλευτικῆς ἀξιώματος ἐς τὴν ὀρχήστραν καὶ ἐς τὸν ἵππόδρομον τό τε θέατρον τό κυνηγετικὸν ἐσηλθον ὥσπερ οἱ ἀτιμώτατοι, καὶ ἠΰλησαν τινες αὐτῶν καὶ ὠρχήσαντο τραγωδίας τε καὶ κωμωδίας ὑπεκρίναντο καὶ ἐκιθαρώδησαν, ἵππους τε ἤλασαν καὶ θηρία ἀπέκτειναν καὶ ἐμονομάχησαν, οἱ μὲν ἐθελονταὶ οἱ δὲ καὶ πάνυ ἄκοντες, καὶ εἶδον οἱ τότε ἄνθρωποι τὰ γένη τὰ μεγάλα, τοὺς Φουρίους τοὺς Ὁρατίους τοὺς Φαβίους τοὺς Πορκίους τοὺς Οὐαλερίους, τὰλλα πάντα ὧν τὰ τρόπαια ὧν οἱ ναοὶ ἐωρῶντο, κάτω τε ἐστηκότας καὶ τοιαῦτα δρῶντας ὧν ἔνια οὐδ' ὑπ' ἄλλων γινόμενα ἐθεώρουν. (Cassius Dio. LXI 17, 3-4).

But that (*scil.* The spectacle) was both more shameful and unworthy, since both men and women not only of equestrian but also senatorial rank entered the scene of the theater, the Circus and haunting theater, like those who do not have rights. Some of them played the flute, performed a pantomime, tragedies, and comedies, and sang with the lyre; and they drove horses, killed wild beasts, and fought as gladiators, some voluntarily, others no doubt forced. The men of the time saw the most important bloodlines – the Furi, the Horatii, the Fabi, the Porci, the Valeri and all those whose trophies and temples were seen – standing there and doing things that, even if done by others, they would never look.

[...] *Spectacula gladiatorum idem annus habuit pari magnificentia ac priora; sed feminarum inlustrium senatorumque plures per arenam foedati sunt* (Tac. *Annales* XV 32).

The same year gave gladiatorial spectacles of equal splendour to the previous ones, but many illustrious women and senators were dishonoured because of the arena.

The denigrating point of view of both historians towards the spectacle organized by Nero is well exemplified by some terms: “αἰσχιστον καὶ δεινότατον” for Cassius Dio and *foedati sunt* for Tacitus. The latter expression indicates the state of infamy to which the fighters of the arena were subjected. Tacitus also underlines the magnificence (*pai magnificentia ac priora*) of that spectacle, which probably attracted women of high social rank (*feminarum inlustrium*), precisely because of its wealth and importance.¹⁹ The adjective *inlustrium* next to the noun *feminarum* gives specific information on the social origin of the women in question. They were, therefore, women of high rank. In the Latin language there are different terms to indicate women (*femina/mulier*) and men (*vir/homo*). As for women, both words, *femina* and *mulier*, commonly mean a woman. However, since Roman society is divided into social classes, these terms

¹⁹ On the relationship between female gladiators and opulence see A. Manas, *op. cit.*, p. 2733.

sometimes have particular meanings and are used in a different context.²⁰ The noun *femina* is often connected to a respectable sphere, in which the woman stands out for her social and moral virtues.²¹ This is particularly evident in the prose of the Republican age and in authors such as Cicero.²² On the contrary, the term *mulier*, although it also commonly indicates a woman, is often associated with members of the lower classes.²³ Moreover, it takes on a pejorative meaning, sometimes connected to the sexual sphere in some authors such as Plautus.²⁴ In the context of poetry, instead, the term *femina* is always preferred over *mulier*.²⁵ It may therefore be probable that some authors deliberately choose to use the terms *femina* or *mulier* depending on social rank.

Cassius Dio is much more exhaustive in the illustration of the same event described by Tacitus. From his text we know that women participated in all kinds of performances, from fighting to acting. We are also informed that not all high-ranking participants wanted to perform in the arena, since some of them were forced by the emperor (οἱ μὲν ἐθελονταὶ οἱ δὲ καὶ πάνυ ἄκοντες).

The last source for the Neronian age is Petronius, who in the *Satyricon* tells of Echion's enthusiasm for the games that a local magistrate named Titus would soon organize:

Iam Manios aliquot habet et mulierem essedariam et dispensatorem Glyconis, qui deprehensus est cum dominam suam delectaretur (Petr. *Satyr.* XLV, 7).

He now has a number of bad guys, an essedarian woman and the treasurer of Glicon, who was caught seducing his mistress.

In the text it is highlighted that Titus, having a certain economic availability, guaranteed the presence of a woman for his games, in particular of an essedarian, or a gladiator on the chariot.²⁶ The use of the term *mulier* to indicate the female gladiator could indicate that the woman belonged to a low social rank. However, the fact that Petronius specifies that Titus could afford an essedarian woman of low or high rank in the spectacles he organized demonstrates, in my opinion, the non-ordinariness of hiring a woman in gladiator fights.

²⁰ F. Santoro L'Hoir, *The rhetoric of gender terms: "man", "woman", and the portrayal of character in Latin prose*, Leiden-New York-Köln 1992, pp. 1-2.

²¹ J.N. Adams, *Latin Words for "Woman" and "Wife"*, "Glotta" 1972, 50, 3/4, pp. 234-255, esp. p. 234-235. See also B. Axelson, *Unpoetische Wörter*, Lund 1945.

²² F. Santoro L'Hoir, *op. cit.*, p. 29 ff.

²³ *Ibidem*, p. 2 ff.

²⁴ *Ibidem*, pp. 30-32 (with references). See also J.N. Adams, *Words for "Prostitute" in Latin*, "Rheinisches Museum" 1983, 126, pp. 321-358.

²⁵ N. Adams, *Latin Words for "Woman" and "Wife"*, "Glotta" 1972, 50, 3/4, p. 239.

²⁶ On the *essedarius* see F. Coarelli, *L'armamento...*, p. 155; P. Serra, *op. cit.*, pp. 227-232.

After the reign of Nero, one of the main sources for the *spectacula* organized under the empire of Titus is Martial, who in the *Liber de spectaculis* offers an overview of the games set up for the magnificent inauguration of the Colosseum. The two most important references to the presence of women in the arena are the epigrams VI and VIb:

*Belliger invictis quod Mars tibi servit in armis,
non satis est, Caesar, servit et ipsa Venus* (Mart. *Spect.* VI).

The fact that the bellicose Mars serves you in undefeated weapons is not enough, Caesar, because Venus herself serves you.

*Prostratum vasta Nemees in valle leonem
nobile et Herculeum fama canebat opus.
Prisca fides taceat: nam post tua munera, Caesar,
hoc iam femineo Marte fatemur agi* (Mart. *Spect.* VIb).

The fame sang as a noble and typical labour of Hercules that of the lion killed near the great valley of Nemea. Let the ancient fame be silent: indeed, after your *munera*, Caesar, we admit that this labour is now carried out by a warrior woman.

Martial underlines that, during the sumptuous *munera* organized by Titus, the spectators could witness the presence of a female gladiator and a female hunter. The poet uses the figure of Venus, a female parallel of the gladiator often associated with Mars, the god of war, to describe the first woman. From the second epigram we learn that a female hunter, to whom the author refers with the oxymoronic expression *femineo Marte*, was able to replicate one of the twelve labours of Heracles inside the arena. The attitude of Martial towards the show is naturally encomiastic.

Cassius Dio also tells of the spectacles organized for the inauguration of the Flavian Amphitheatre:

καὶ ἐπὶ μὲν τοῖς ἄλλοις οὐδὲν ἐξαιρετὸν ἔπραξε, τὸ δὲ δὴ θέατρον τὸ κυνηγετικὸν τό τε βαλανεῖον τὸ ἐπώνυμον αὐτοῦ ἱερώσας πολλὰ καὶ θαυμαστὰ ἐποίησε. γέρανό τε γὰρ ἀλλήλοις ἐμαχέσαντο καὶ ἐλέφαντες τέσσαρες, ἄλλα τε ἑς ἑνακισχίλια καὶ βοτὰ καὶ θηρία ἀπεσφάγη, καὶ αὐτὰ καὶ γυναῖκες, οὐ μόντοι ἐπιφανεῖς, συγκατεργάσαντο (Cassio Dio. LXVI 25, 1-2).

And for the rest he did nothing remarkable, but after having consecrated the hunting theater and the thermal baths with his name, he organized numerous and surprising spectacles. Indeed, he made cranes and four elephants fight each other; nine thousand other sheep and beasts were slaughtered, and some women, certainly not of high rank, killed them together.

The historian reports that women also took part in the killing of many animals. It is, therefore, a question of female hunters, but “οὐ μόντοι ἐπιφανεῖς”, or of low social rank. This specification is present only in Cassius Dio, while Martial does not pronounce on the social class of the fighters.

The last sources we have before the Edict of Severus in 200 AD, date back to the age of Domitian. Cassius Dio reports some information:

[...] ἐποίησε δὲ καὶ θέαν πολυτελεῖ, ἐν ἧ ἄλλο μὲν οὐδὲν ἐς ἱστορίαν ἐπίσημον παρελάβομεν, πλὴν ὅτι καὶ παρθένοι τῷ δρομικῷ ἠγωνίσαντο· [...] πολλακίς δὲ καὶ τοὺς ἀγῶνας νύκτωρ ἐποίει, καὶ ἔστιν ὅτε καὶ νάνους καὶ γυναῖκας συνέβαλλε (Cassio Dio. LXVII 8).

And he also organized an expensive spectacle, in which we find nothing surprising for the purposes of the narrative, except for the fact that maidens also competed in the race. [...] And often he organized games at night, and it happened that he made dwarfs and women fight.

The *munera* set up by Domitian, as often happened for the spectacles organized by the emperors, were characterized by a considerable waste of resources (θέαν πολυτελεῖ). The most important information is that in those games, despite the magnificence and opulence, nothing noteworthy occurred, except that both women and dwarfs were engaged. Cassius Dio, therefore, is referring to an event that is not ordinary and, therefore, not frequent, since it is the only one worthy of being remembered for that occasion. The historian, in this circumstance, does not provide any information on the social rank of the involved women.

Suetonius reports the description of the same event. Both authors tell that those *munera* were also characterized by nocturnal sessions (ἀγῶνας νύκτωρ; *nam venationes gladiatorum et noctibus ad lychnuchos*):

Spectacula assidue magnifica et sumptuosa edidit non in amphitheatro modo, verum et in circo; ubi praeter sollemnes bigarum quadrigarumque cursus proelium etiam duplex, equestre ac pedestre, commisit; at in amphitheatro navale quoque. Nam venationes gladiatorum et noctibus ad lychnuchos; nec virorum modo pugnas, sed et feminarum. [...] In stadio vero cursu etiam virgines [...] (Suet. *Domitianus* 4).

He assiduously organized expensive and sumptuous spectacles not only in the amphitheatre, but also in the circus, where in addition to the usual two-and four-horse chariot races, he also organized a fight consisting of two parts, equestrian and infantry; but there was also a naval battle in the amphitheatre. Indeed, the hunting and gladiatorial spectacles also took place at night in the light of torches; and there were fights not only of men, but also of women. [...] In the stadium, to tell the truth, some girls also competed in the race.

Suetonius also insists on the sumptuous character of the spectacles (*Spectacula assidue magnifica et sumptuosa*), which are organized with a certain frequency, but further information can be deduced from the text. In addition to the *feminae* who fought as gladiators and hunters, young women, *virgines* to be precise, participated in the spectacles, taking part in the chariot race.

The poet Statius, in his *Silvae*, is the spokesperson for the new poetics of the Empire, aimed at celebrating luxury and wealth, both in the private and public fields. This new poetics insists on a completely different virtue from that promulgated by

Augustus and by the writers of his time, devoted, as it was, to conservatism and authority.²⁷ The presence of women in the arena, however outrageous it might be, is often connected to the wealth and splendour desired by the emperor. Statius praises Domitian's generosity during the *Saturnalia*:

*Hos inter fremitus novosque luxus
spectandi levis effugit voluptas:
stat sexus rudis insciusque ferri;
ut pugnas capit improbus viriles!
credas ad Tanain ferumque Phasim
Thermodontiaeas calere turmas,
hic audax subit ordo pumilorum,
quos natura brevis statim peracta
nodosum semel in globum ligavit,
edunt vulnera conseruntque dextras
et mortem sibi—qua manu! — minantur* (Stat. *Silvae* I 6, vv. 51-62)

Amid such excitements and strange luxuries, the pleasure of the scene flies quickly by: women untrained to the sword take their stand, daring, how recklessly, men's battles! You would think Thermodon's bands were furiously lighting by Tanais or barbarous Phasis. Then comes a bold array of dwarfs, whose term of growth abruptly ended has bound them once for all into a knotted lump. They give and suffer wounds and threaten death—with fists how tiny!²⁸

The poet, with these verses of an encomiastic nature (*novosque luxus... levis [...]* *voluptas*), tells those women, inexperienced in bellicose activities, used the sword as gladiators. The scene takes the spectator, and also the reader, back into the world of the Amazons, as Statius mentions the Tanais, the Phasis and the Thermodon, or places where the female warriors fought.²⁹ It is therefore likely that the female gladiators remembered the fighters of mythology in their clothing³⁰, as we will see specifically from the archaeological sources.

Before the Edict of Severus, the last source on the world of gladiation and women is Juvenal. In verses 22 and 23 of the first satire (book I), the author talks about a female hunter named Mevia:

*Cum tener uxorem ducat spado, Mevia Tuscum
figat aprum et nuda teneat venabula mamma, [...]
difficile est saturam non scribere.*

When a delicate eunuch marries, and Mevia pierces an Etruscan boar and, with bare breast, holds the hunting-spears [...], it is difficult not to write a satire.

²⁷ A. McCullough, *op. cit.*, p. 204.

²⁸ Translation by J.H. Mozley. *Statius*. Vol. 1, eds. T.E. Page, E. Capps, W.H.D. Rouse, London-New York 1928, pp. 67-69.

²⁹ C. Newlands, *Statius' Silvae and the poetics of Empire*, Cambridge 2004, pp. 227-259.

³⁰ On the parallelism between female gladiators and Amazons see A.B. Miączewska, *op. cit.*, pp. 24-28 (with references).

In a long list (vv. 22-30), in which Juvenal reports a series of inversions between the activities of men and women, there is the example of Mevia. She is a female hunter who, dressed like the Amazons (*nuda teneat venabula mamma*), killed a wild boar in the arena.

In the second book, in verses 82-113 of the second satire, Juvenal describes the Eppia's story with pungent sarcasm³¹. Eppia would certainly have avoided a life made of efforts and so far from the prosperity she was used to since her childhood, due to her social status (*Nupta senatoris*). However, she deliberately chooses to leave her comforts and her family to chase after Sergio, a gladiator in addition close to his retirement. What women like Eppia love is the *ferrum* and the status of a gladiator. Beyond the told story, the term used by Juvenal, or *ludia*, is very important for the classification of this type of women. The term defines Eppia as Sergio's life partner. It therefore indicates the wife, concubine, or partner of a gladiator³², and not a female gladiator, for whose figure a specific technical term has never been coined. The term *ludia* is also used with the same meaning in the *Epigrams* of Martial (V 24, v. 10: "*Hermes cura laborque ludiarum*"). Hermes, care and pain of the wives of gladiators). An inscription, found on a fragment of red terracotta³³, reads as follows: "VERECUNDA LUDIA LUCIUS GLADIATOR". On the basis of the cited sources and, in particular of Juvenal's text, the translation could be "Verecondia, wife of the gladiator, and Lucius, gladiator".

Juvenal re-uses the noun *ludia* again a few verses later:

*Endromidas Tyrias et femineum ceroma
quis nescit, vel quis non vidit vulnera pali,
quem cavat adsiduis rudibus scutoque lacessit
atque omnis implet numeros dignissima prorsus
Floralis matrona tuba, nisi si quid in illo
pectore plus agit veraeque paratur harenae?
Quem praestare potest mulier galeata pudorem,
quae fugit a sexu? Vires amat. Haec tamen ipsa
vir nollet fieri; nam quantula nostra voluptas!
Quale decus, rerum si coniugis auctio fiat,
balteus et manicae et cristae crurisque sinistri
dimidium tegimen! Vel si diversa movebit
proelia, tu felix ocreas vendente puella.
Hae sunt quae tenui sudant in cyclade, quarum
delicias et panniculus bombycinus urit.
Aspice quo fremitu monstratos perferat ictus*

³¹ On this topic see S. Braund, *Juvenal – Misogynist or Misogamist*, "Journal of Roman Studies" 1992, 82, pp. 71-86.

³² A. McCullough, *op. cit.*, p. 198.

³³ R. Jackson, *Gladiators in Roman Britain*, "British Museum Magazine" 2000, 38, pp. 16-21. See also C. Ricci, *op. cit.*, p. 97.

*et quanto galeae curvetur pondere, quanta
poplitibus sedeat quam denso fascia libro,
et ride positis scaphium cum sumitur armis.
Dicite vos, neptes Lepidi caecive Metelli
Gurgitis aut Fabii, quae ludia sumpserit umquam
hos habitus? Quando ad palum gemat uxor Asyli?* (II 6, vv. 246-267)

Women in purple tracksuits, women who wrestle in mud – these are a common sight. So are our lady-fencers – we have all seen them, stabbing the stump with a foil, shield well advanced – just the right training needed to blow a matronly horn at the Floral Festival, unless their aim is higher, to make the real arena. But then, what modesty is there in some helmeted hoyden, a renegade from her sex, who adores male violence – yet would not want to be a man, since the pleasure is so much less? What a sight, if one’s wife’s equipment were sold at auction, plumes, baldric, armlets, and one half of a left-leg shin-guard! Or if the other fashion of fighting attracts her, how happy you will be when the dear girl sells off her greaves! (And yet these same women have such delicate skins that even sheer silk chafes them; they sweat in the finest chiffon.) Hark how she snorts at each practice thrust, bowed down by the weight of her helmet; see the big coarse puttees wrapped round her ample hams – then wait for the laugh, when she lays her weapons aside and squats on the potty! Tell me, you noble ladies, descendants of Lepidus, blind Metellus, ‘Gut’ Fabius – what gladiator’s woman ever dressed up like this, or gasped at the fencing-stump?³⁴

In the first part, Juvenal inveighs a harsh criticism against high-ranking women who dedicate themselves to gladiation. While in the previous verses the author criticized Eppia for chasing after the gladiator Sergio, now Juvenal refers to those women who carry out this inappropriate activity in first person. These women, choosing to become gladiators, deny their real nature as a woman (*fugit a sexu*) and their status as Roman matrons. Those who decided to fight in the arena, indeed, lost their rights and earned the name of *infames*.³⁵ Further information is also provided in relation to the training of female gladiators. Women who decided to fight performed the same training exercises as male gladiators. This would also explain the remarkable skills of some female gladiators, as we read from the sources we have analysed, and of female hunters who were able to kill dangerous animals, such as a wild boar (see Mart. VIb). In the final part, in vv. 265-267, Juvenal uses the term *ludia* referring to the wives of gladiators³⁶, as confirmed by the parallelism with the successive *uxor*.

The last reference to female gladiators is contained in the Edict of Septimius Severus of 200 AD. Its content is reported by Cassius Dio:

ἐγένετο δ' ἐν ταύταις ταῖς ἡμέραις καὶ ἀγὼν γυμνικός, ἐν ᾧ τοσοῦτον πλῆθος ἀθλητῶν ἀναγκασθὲν συνῆλθεν ὥσθ' ἡμᾶς θαυμάσαι πῶς αὐτοὺς τὸ στάδιον ἐχώρησε. καὶ γυναῖκες δὲ ἐν τῷ ἀγῶνι τούτῳ

³⁴ Translation by P. Green. *Juvenal. The Sixteen Satires*, ed. P. Green, London 1998, pp. 85-86.

³⁵ T. Kocjan, *op. cit.*

³⁶ E. Courtney, *A commentary of the Satires of Juvenal*, London 1980, p. 252.

ἀγριώτατα ἀλάμεναι ἐμαχέσαντο, ὥστε καὶ ἐς τὰς ἄλλας πάνυ ἐπιφανεῖς ἀπ' αὐτῶν ἀποσκοπτεσθαι καὶ διὰ τοῦτ' ἐκωλύθη μηκέτι μηδεμίαν γυναῖκα μηδαμόθεν μονομαχεῖν (Cass. Dio LXXV 16, 1).

In those days there was an athletic competition, in which such a number of athletes competed, although necessarily, that we wondered how the course could contain them all. In this agon even the women fought competing with great ferocity, to the point that they mocked the others of high rank for their part. And for this reason, from that moment all women were prevented from fighting as gladiators in all kinds of circumstances.

The parable of female gladiation seems to end with a legislative provision, probably definitive this time, since, at least from a documentary point of view, there is no subsequent evidence of the presence of women in the arena. Although Cassius Dio is referring to an athletic competition for which no further descriptions are provided, the use of the verb “μονομαχεῖν”, already used in previous texts, makes us understand that the author is talking about fights between female gladiators. This same verb, used as a technical term for gladiatorial fights, is also found in Posidipp. 22, Luc. *Tox.* 58, Hdn. 1.17.2.

Archaeological and epigraphic evidence on female gladiators

Archaeological data on the phenomenon of female gladiation are scant.³⁷ Undoubtedly the most significant and also the most studied find is a marble slab from Halicarnassus depicting two female gladiators. In addition, there are a bronze statuette, studied in 2011 by Manas, and an oil lamp, on which two female gladiators were identified by Miączewska.

The relief of Halicarnassus³⁸ (fig. 1), currently housed in the British Museum, probably dates back to the 2nd century AD. Both women wear a *subligaculum*, greaves (*ocreas*), the *balteus*, a rectangular shield (*scutum*), and a dagger in their right hand. The female gladiators are depicted without the helmet, which is placed on the ground³⁹, and show naked breasts, partly covered by the shield. On the relief there are two inscriptions: “ΑΠΕΛΥΘΗΣΑΝ” at the top, and “ΑΜΑΖΩΝ” and “ΑΧΙΛΛΙΑ” at the

³⁷ The discovery of the Londinium tomb has been deliberately excluded from this article. During the excavations outside Roman London some remains were considered to belong to a female gladiator, as also claimed by Zoll (A. Zoll, *Gladiatrix: The True Story of History's Unknown Woman Warrior*, New York 2002). However, already previously, Mackinder, in the publication of the excavations, was not certain of this identification (A. Mackinder, *A Romano-British Cemetery on Watling Street: Excavations at 165 Great Dover Street, Southwark, London*, London 2000, p. 28). Subsequently other studies, such as those of Junkelmann (*op. cit.*, pp. 170-179), Kanz and Grosschmidt (F. Kanz, K. Grosschmidt, *Stand der anthropologischen Forschungen zum Gladiatorenfriedhof in Ephesos*, “Jahreshefte des Österreichischen archäologischen Instituts in Wien” 2005, 74, pp. 103-123) pointed out that the woman could not be a gladiator.

³⁸ K. Coleman, *op. cit.*, pp. 487-500.

³⁹ *Ibidem*, p. 492.



Fig. 1. Relief from Halicarnassus, currently housed in the British Museum, dated to the 2nd century AD (Image source: British Museum GR 1847.4-24.19)

bottom. The first inscription is equivalent to the Latin *missae sunt*, which means that both female gladiators obtained the *missio*⁴⁰. The latter, or the discharge from the editor's authority, implies that the gladiator can return to the *familia* to train.⁴¹ The fight, therefore, ended in a draw and both fighters were dismissed. According to sources, the granting of the *missio* was a rare event, and even more rare was the discharge of both gladiators⁴², in our case female gladiators. The names engraved on the base of the relief leave no doubt about the sex of the fighters, who have been remembered with their "war" names. As for the reason why the two female gladiators were immortalized, Briquel believes that the relief was commissioned by the *editor* of those games, probably to eternalize his own glory.⁴³ Since the editor's name appears nowhere above

⁴⁰ L. Robert, *Les Gladiateurs dans l'Orient grec*, Paris 1940, p. 188, no. 184.

⁴¹ K. Coleman, *op. cit.*, p. 488.

⁴² *Ibidem*, pp. 490-491.

⁴³ D. Briquel, *Les femmes gladiateurs: examen du dossier*, "Ktema" 1992, 17, pp. 47-53, esp. p. 53.

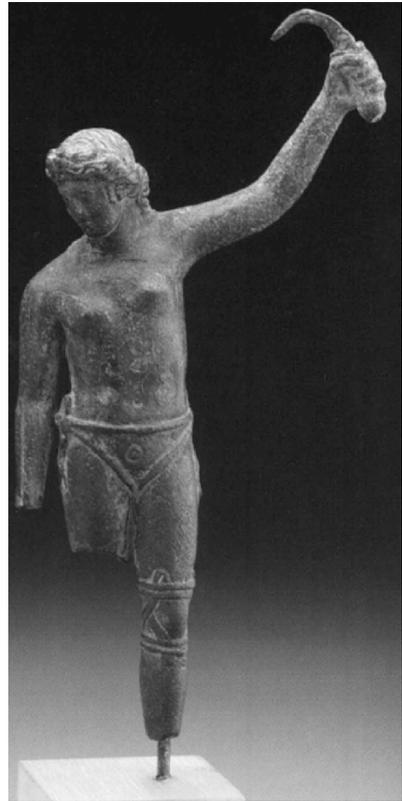


Fig. 2. Bronze Statuette, currently housed in the Museum für Kunst und Gewerbe in Hamburg, dated to the 2nd century AD (Image source: A. Manas, *New evidence of female gladiators: the bronze statuette at the Museum für Kunst und Gewerbe of Hamburg*, “International Journal of the History of Sport” 2011, 28, fig. 1, p. 2728).

the relief, this interpretation appears unlikely to Coleman.⁴⁴ Considering the rarity of women’s fights, as we have already seen from literary sources, it seems likely that the marble slab was made precisely for the extraordinary nature of the event, that is, for the participation of women in the *ludi*. The fact that both women fought so well that they deserved the *missio* makes the commemorative intent of the slab even clearer.

The second find is a bronze statuette currently housed in the Museum für Kunst und Gewerbe in Hamburg (fig. 2), of Roman origin and datable to the 1st century AD. The represented woman wears a *subligaculum* and has naked breasts, just like the two gladiators of Halicarnassus; her left arm is raised and in her hand is a curved object, while her right arm is lowered along the body; at last, there is a bandage around the left knee. As Manas points out⁴⁵, previous studies have considered the woman in the

⁴⁴ K. Coleman, *op. cit.*, p. 495.

⁴⁵ A. Manas, *op. cit.*, p. 2740.



Fig. 3. Oil lamp, currently housed in Louvre Museum in Paris, dated to 1st century AD (Image source: Wikimedia Commons)

statuette an athlete and not a female gladiator because of the object placed in her left hand. This has always been interpreted as a strigil (*strigilis*), but it could also be identified as a dagger (*sica*) typical of *thraeces* gladiators. Furthermore, Manas, based on the position of the woman's body, corresponding to the typical gesture of victory assumed by the gladiators, the clothing, and the knee bandage, concludes that the woman in the statuette can only be a female gladiator.⁴⁶

Anna B. Miączewska, in a 2012 article on female gladiation⁴⁷, describes an oil lamp depicting two female gladiators, datable to the 2nd century AD and probably of Asian manufacture (Cnido), currently housed in the Louvre Museum in Paris (fig. 3). The lamp, compared by the author with other examples of the same century, is very simple in the decorations. In the centre two female gladiators are depicted: the one on the left has a helmet with feathers and a sword (*gladius*) in the right hand; the defeated gladiator, on her knees, has a helmet with feathers, a *sica* in her right

⁴⁶ *Ibidem*, pp. 2741-2743.

⁴⁷ A.B. Miączewska, *op. cit.*

hand and a rectangular shield. Although the representation is not well preserved, the author concludes that the figures are undoubtedly female thanks to the presence of the breasts.⁴⁸

The last example we will report is a Latin epigraph⁴⁹ engraved on a white marble slab. It is a funerary inscription – variously dated between the first century AD and the III AD⁵⁰ – which celebrates the career of the magistrate Hostilianus:

[--]sa[- H]ostilian[us] / [iiv]ir q(uaestor) aerar[i Osti]ensium flam(en)
d(ecreto) d(ecurionum) cur(ator) lusus iuvenali(is) / [--] qui primus om[niu]m
ab urbe condita ludos cum / [--]or et mulieres [a]d ferrum dedit una cum /
[Sa]bina u[x]ore fecit sibi et / [---]nio agonio [--] / [--] corporis togat [--] /
[--]um [--].

The most interesting section for the purpose of our discussion is “*qui primus om[niu]m ab urbe condita ludos cum / [--]or et mulieres [a]d ferrum dedit*”. Hostilianus, therefore, since the foundation of the city of Ostia was the first to “give the sword to women” during the games he organized together with his wife Sabina. The women who participated in the spectacles are defined as *mulieres* and could therefore be women of low social rank.

Conclusion

The article first reviews the literary sources and then the archaeological and epigraphic finds relating to the world of female gladiation. The phenomenon, as a matter of fact, has been re-discussed in recent years, although there are still open issues. Therefore, the aim of this study was to recreate a picture of the phenomenon, in an attempt to answer questions about the importance of the event in ancient Rome, its frequency, and its characteristics.

What is certain is that we cannot presume a hypothetical date of “birth” of the female gladiation. It is probable, according to Nicholas of Damascus, that occasionally women were present during the private banquets in which male gladiators fought.

⁴⁸ *Ibidem*, p. 24.

⁴⁹ CIL XIV 1225 C, 8460, 4616.

⁵⁰ Cébeillac Gervasoni and Zevi date the inscription to I century AD (M. Cébeillac Gervasoni, F. Zevi, *Révisions et nouveautés pour trois inscriptions d'Ostie*, “Mélanges de l'École française de Rome – Antiquité” 1976, 88, 2, pp. 607-637, esp. p. 613); Ricci dates it to III century AD (C. Ricci, *op. cit.*, p. 96); McCullough dates the inscription to the second half of the II century AD (A. McCullough, *op. cit.*, p. 200). On the epigraph see also M. Fora, *Epigrafia anfiteatrale dell'Occidente romano*, IV. *Regio Italiae I: Latium*, Rome 1996, p. 65 ff.

In my opinion, if male gladiation has been a recurring phenomenon in every part of the Empire (although with different frequency depending on the area)⁵¹, the same cannot be said for female gladiators. The extraordinariness with which the presence of women in the arena is often presented from the sources, and the scarce archaeological and epigraphic finds demonstrate the low frequency of the phenomenon, already opposed by the first legislative decrees.

It is likely that the legislative decrees, although not abrogative, nevertheless put a stop to female gladiation. If in 22 BC a law prohibited high-ranking women from performing, it is very plausible that similar events must have occurred already during the Augustan age. The literary sources, however, never mention female gladiators, perhaps due to the Augustan political program, which would never have approved their existence.⁵²

Among the authors who talk about the female gladiators Cassius Dio, Tacitus and Juvenal exhibit a negative attitude towards both the *feminae* and the *mulieres*, because women, as such and regardless of their status, belonged to the domestic sphere, far from that of the combatants. It is clear, however, that, although the denigrating attitude was directed towards all women, more criticism is addressed to those who belonged to the upper classes. In particular, Juvenal, inveighing both the female gladiators and the *ludiae*, provides a very detailed social and emotional picture. Juvenal, furthermore, describes the typical training of female gladiators. The attitude of Martial and Statius is instead linked to the sphere of praise. Martial, as a matter of fact, does not give moral judgments on the presence of women in the arena and Statius, more than exalting female gladiators, celebrates the splendour and the pomp of the spectacles organized by Domitian.

Both Juvenal's and Martial's description lead us to think that women, as I have already pointed out, underwent the same life as male gladiators and, therefore, the same training.

As for the "birth" of female gladiators, there is no definite information also about its end. From a documentary point of view, the last source in which reference is made to female gladiators is the Edict of Severus, which prohibited women of any social rank from fighting as gladiators. Thus, while in the East women continued to perform in different types of shows until late antiquity⁵³, in the western part of the empire we no longer have information of female gladiators, especially as regards the presence of high-ranking women, after 200 AD.

⁵¹ On the topic see the bibliography in note 1.

⁵² A. McCullough, *op. cit.*, p. 203.

⁵³ R. Webb, *Female Entertainers in Late Antiquity*, [in:] *Greek and Roman Actors: Aspects of an Ancient Profession*, eds. P. Easterling, E. Hall, Cambridge 2002, pp. 286-287.

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MUNERA GLADIATORIA AND FEMALE GLADIATORS IN THE ANCIENT WORLD

S u m m a r y

In recent years, the phenomenon of female gladiators has received much scholarly attention. Some issues, however, remain unresolved, especially as regards the importance of the games in ancient Rome, its frequency, and its characteristics. The aim of this study is to present a summary on the topic, starting with a careful analysis in chronological order of all the ancient sources that have reported the phenomenon

and commented on the presence of women in the arena. In the second part of the paper, I analyse the archaeological and epigraphic evidence, although fewer in number than the literary ones. In this way, I will try to recreate a picture of the situation as complete as possible.

Keywords: female gladiators, female gladiation, female fights, *munera gladiatoria*, gender studies

MUNERA GLADIATORIA I GLADIATORKI W ŚWIECIE ANTYCZNYM

Streszczenie

W ostatnich latach świat nauki poświęcił sporo uwagi fenomenowi gladiatorów. Niektóre problemy pozostają jednak nierozwiązane, zwłaszcza kwestia ważności igrzysk w starożytnym Rzymie, ich częstotliwości i charakteru. Celem niniejszego badania jest zaprezentowanie tej problematyki, poczynając od szczegółowej, chronologicznej analizy wszystkich starożytnych źródeł pisanych, które odnoszą się do omawianego zjawiska. W drugiej części artykułu analizuję źródła archeologiczne i epigraficzne – jest ich jednak mniej niż w przypadku źródeł literackich. Tym sposobem staram się skonstruować obraz zjawiska w możliwie kompletnym kształcie.

Słowa kluczowe: gladiatorzy, walki kobiet, *munera gladiatoria*, gender studies