

Gladiators

UNIT 1: THE ROMANS



Why Gladiators?

- ▶ This was Roman sports culture.
- ▶ They went to see their favourite gladiator win matches.
- ▶ Most matches were sponsored by the rich (like the emperor) so citizens could watch for free.
- ▶ It was very exciting to watch for most.
- ▶ Roman society valued military strength, honour, and bravery. Gladiators embodied all these values.



The Colosseum

- ▶ Actually called the Flavian Amphitheater.
- ▶ Commissioned in 72 CE by Emperor Vespasian.
- ▶ Completed in 96 CE under Emperor Domitian.
- ▶ The last recorded gladiatorial games took place in 404 CE.

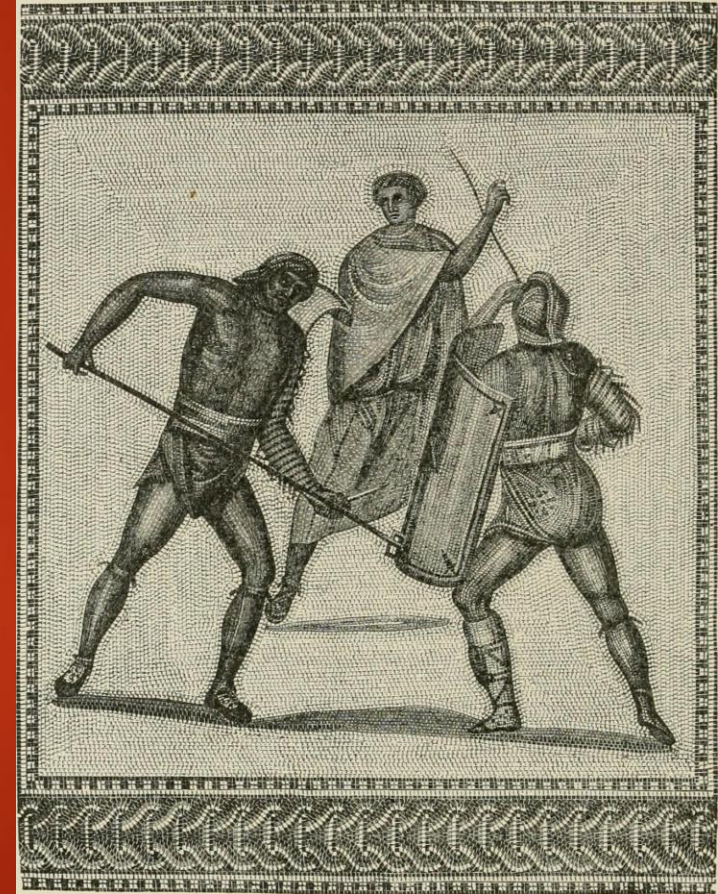


Types of fights in the Colosseum

- ▶ The big one → Duels between 2 gladiators.
- ▶ But also:
- ▶ Comedy or fantasy duels with wooden weapons.
- ▶ Bestiarii (animal hunters) killing deadly beasts (usually at a distance with spears or bows). Hunted lions, ostriches, and whales?
- ▶ Dramas with executions of real condemned prisoners.
- ▶ Public executions (usually held at lunch with minimal attendance).
- ▶ The Colosseum could be flooded for naval battles.

How dangerous was it to be a gladiator?

- ▶ Remembered as highly dangerous, but actually not that bad.
- ▶ A trained gladiator was too valuable to waste for their owner or handler.
- ▶ Most gladiators were prisoners of war, enslaved men, condemned criminals who had no legal status.
- ▶ Gladiator school was tough, but trained them on how to attack, move, and not kill each other.
- ▶ If popular enough, gladiators could earn social standing and legal status.



What killed gladiators?

- ▶ While the fighting was real, gladiators weren't trying to kill each other.
- ▶ Sharp weapons could still do a lot of damage on a glancing blow.
- ▶ Accidents could break bones when using wooden training weapons.
- ▶ Infections could kill even from a small wound if left untreated.
- ▶ Some gladiator fights were to the death.



While there were many types of gladiators, we will discuss 4 in more detail.



WORLD HISTORY
ENCYCLOPEDIA

COMMON TYPES OF GLADIATORS IN ANCIENT ROME

Gladiators in ancient Rome were professional fighters central to amphitheater spectacles. Drawn from slaves, prisoners of war, criminals, and even freeborn volunteers, they trained in specialized schools to master weapons and endurance. Classified into types often modeled on Rome's enemies, their contrasting styles were designed to heighten the drama of combat.

THE PROVOCATEUR

engaged in verbal taunts
and psychological tactics'
full suit of armor,
rectangular shield and a gladius



THE THRACIAN (THRAX)

after the Thracian people
of the Balkans
armed with a sica (curved sword)
Phrygian helmet with a visor
armor on the sword arm
rectangular or round shield (parma)



THE SAMNITE

after the Samnites people
of ancient Italy
armed with a gladius sword,
crest-adorned helmet,
a breastplate or mail shirt,
greaves for the lower legs



THE MURMILLO

from Latin "mur" - "wall"
armed with a gladius sword,
helmet with a visor,
often with a breastplate or mail shirt,
carried a scutum (large shield)

THE SECUTOR

known for their pursuit
and relentless fighting style,
short sword & a helmet with
narrow eye opening for protection

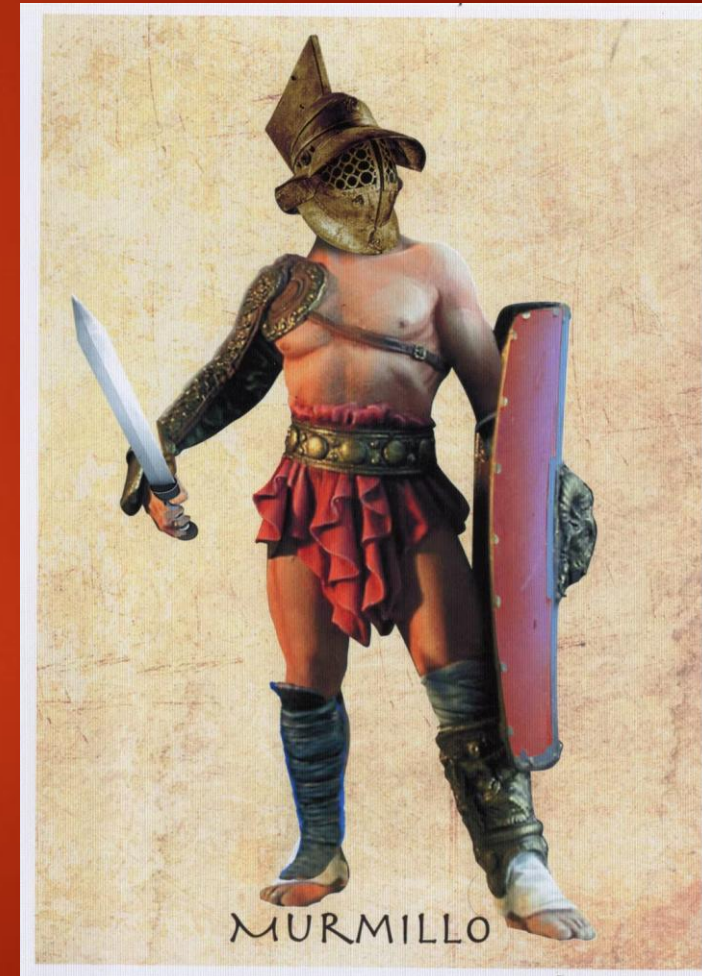


THE RETIARIUS

armed with a trident and a net,
only armour - galerus (a shoulder guard)
great speed and agility in combat

The Murmillo

- ▶ Named after the Greek word for saltwater fish (mormyros) due to the scale-like pattern of the helmet.
- ▶ Used a large rectangular shield and a short stabbing sword (gladius) to appear like a Roman legionary.
- ▶ Used brute force and endurance to win matches.



The Thraex

- ▶ While Murmillo's represented the Roman soldiers, Thraex's represented the Thracians (Bulgaria), a fearsome once enemy of Rome.
- ▶ Carried a small shield and a curved sword (sica) that hooked around shields.
- ▶ Wore lots of leg protection and a scary looking griffin helmet.
- ▶ Represented an exotic danger.



The Hoplomachus

- ▶ Represented the Greek warrior of the Hoplite.
- ▶ For educated Romans, this brought a sense of nostalgia that other gladiators couldn't.
- ▶ They were armed with a shield and spear.
- ▶ Armoured with a helmet, greaves, and a manica (armoured sleeve) on the weapon arm.
- ▶ Used agility and reach, but had some armour to fall back on.



The Retiarius

- ▶ The most unconventional gladiator.
- ▶ Named after the Greek word for net (rete).
- ▶ Used a net to trap opponents and a long trident.
- ▶ Usually wore no helmet and only 1 arm had armour.
- ▶ Relied on speed and agility to dance around opponents.

