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PANEM ET CIRCENSES
SAND AND BLOOD

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Edizioni **Efesto**

ETRUSCAN ORIGIN

The theory of possible Etruscan origin of gladiatorial games dates back to the old date, and it is based on one source, *Atenaeus*, who says, citing another source to him earlier, the historian Nicholas of Damascus (first century), that "... the Romans had learned the art of gladiatorial games from the Etruscans ..."¹. This hypothesis stems from the fact that the first evidence of the games in Rome, comes from the fourth century B.C. and is happened in the *Forum Boarium*, in a Republican *Urbs* strongly influenced by the Etruscan culture. Furthermore, it seems that the word *lanista* itself, with whom they identified the owner of a gla-



Fig. 1 *Charon on a jar from Vulci, Italy*

diatorial *familia*, basically a group of gladiators, should come from an Etruscan word meaning "executioner"², while for others it is derived from a transformation of "*laninus*", "butcher"³. Another clue in favor of Etruscan origin, can be found in the figure of Charon, or that type of some arena attendants who had the task of ending up dying gladiators with a hammer,

¹ *Atenaeus, The Deipnosophists*, IV, 153

² *Isidor of Seville, Origines*, 10, 247

³ *F. Guida, Morte nell'arena*, pag. 75



Fig. 13 A denarius struck by Mark Antony for the battle of Actium

Somehow Rome also had to suffer, and not a little, its new passion for gladiatorial games. The establishment of schools where train real fighters use swords, swept throughout the territory of the Roman Republic. Just in one of these gyms, or *ludus*, located in Capua with lanista *Lentulus Batiatus*, took off the revolt that led to the name of the Third Servile War (73-71 BC). For two years, thousands of slaves followed a large group of escaped gladiators from Capua and followers of the man who led the revolt: the famous *Spartacus*. Well trained, and if we want to, undervalued by the Senate, succeeded in defeating the Roman armies on several occasions sent from Rome to stop them, tarnishing the value of the various consuls. Finally, while trying to sail to leave Italy, *Spartacus* was surprised by the legions of *Marcus Licinius Crassus*, which with *Caesar* and *Pompey* formed shortly after the First Triumvirate. *Spartacus* fell in battle, although some legends say that his body was never identified with certainty and that he survived the battle, ended up on the cross, along with thousands of slaves posted along the Appian Way from Rome to Capua, an eternal warning against any further rebellion; and the



Fig. 20 A *naumachia* inside the Colosseum by G. Napi-Lautai, 1913

The story goes that those sentenced to death greeted the Emperor *Claudius* with the words "*Ave Caesar, morituri te salutant!*" which, translated into English means, "*Hail Caesar, those who are about to die salute you!*". The story continues on that the Emperor answered, "*...aut non...*" or "*...maybe not...*". With these words the fighters had hoped to read the intention of the Emperor on whether he was going to pardon them or not and, having assumed from his response that the pardon was coming, they threw down their arms full of unfounded hope. The timely intervention of the army was necessary to restore order and to continue the *naumachia* though it was again temporarily stopped for a terrible gag played on *Claudius*. In any case, "*morituri te salutant*" remained in the collective imagination as the greeting of the fighters, gladiators or *naumacharii* to the Emperor or to the host of the games. In spite of the multiple appearances in Hollywood films of different budget



Fig. 34 *Mosaic showing a leopard*

ghout the stadium with his roaring and ferocity. Among those sentenced *damnatio ad bestias* was a certain *Androcles*, a slave of a noble consular who had fled from the cruelty of his master and for this he was sentenced to die by mauling. When the lion saw him the crowd thought that surely the lion would tear him to pieces but instead he came over and began to rub his head along the man's legs tied up at the pole and lick his hands. *Androcles*, who had closed his eyes waiting to die, opened them and stood in disbelief and returned the happy lion's affection with his own, his eyes full of affection. The audience was enraptured with this scene and began to applaud both the man and the beast. The emperor wanted to know the reason for this attitude and asked *Androcles* who told him that once he had escaped from the palace of his master, and after wandering the wild, he had taken refuge in a cave and heard a strange moa-

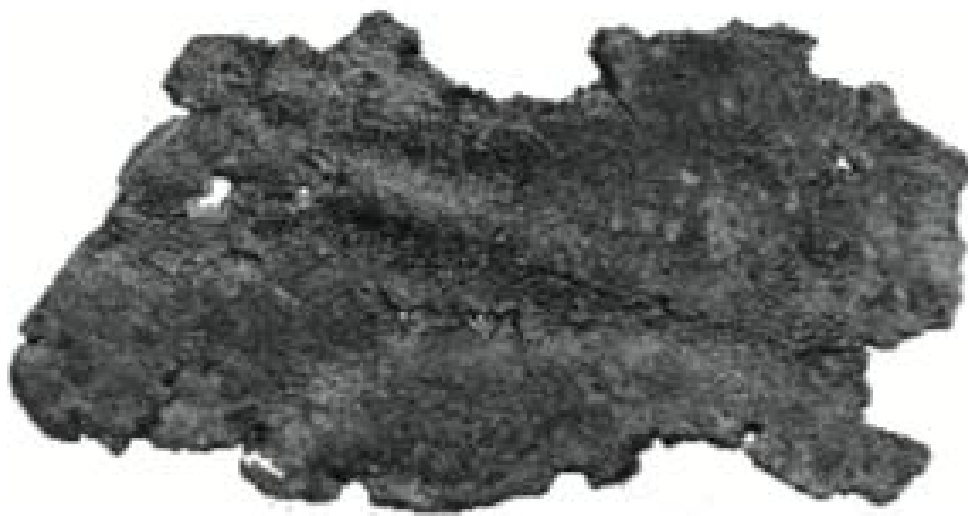


Fig. 40 *Tabula defixionis*

*of Prima so that he cannot kill the bear and the bull, neither with one shot, nor with two, nor three shots. In the name of the living, omnipotent god, hear me, now, now, quickly, quickly The bear crush against him and inflict injury*⁷⁴.

At midnight the amphitheater opened for the public to allow them to choose the best available seats. Entrance was free, but that didn't mean all the seats stayed that way as walk-up convenience could mean an expensive ticket for those who could afford to pay. Even in those days there were people who were similar to today's ticket scalpers. They occupied the best seats the night before the show and then sold them to the highest bidder who paid dearly for not spending the night in the open, on the cold marble steps of the amphitheater. In regards to seating in the stands, it is to be noted that the people respected the strict set of seating instructions given by *Augustus*. During his rule there was an incident in the amphitheater of *Putcoli*

⁷⁴ A. Audollent, *Defixionum Tabellae*, n.247