GLADIATORIAL COMBAT: THE RULES OF ENGAGEMENT

Abstract: Though a dangerous and potentially fatal contest, gladiatorial combat during the Empire was nevertheless bound by recognizable rules and expectations. The contests were fought by expensive professionals and supervised by referees. But more than this, these combats may also have been governed by an unwritten "code of conduct" enforced by the gladiators themselves: to fight bravely in hope of victory, but not to wound or kill needlessly.

Introduction: Homicidal Gladiators?

A remarkable inscription from Milan preserves the epitaph of the *secutor* Urbicus:[1]

D(is) M(anibus).
Urbico, secutori,
primo palo, nation(e) Flo-
rentin(o), qui pugnavit XIII,
vixsit(!) ann(is) XXII, Olympias,
filia quem(!) reliquit me(n)si(bus) V,
et Fortune(n)sis filiae
et Lauricia uxor,
marito bene merenti,
cum quo vixsit(!) ann(is) VII.
Et moneo ut quis quem vic[e]-
rit occidat.
Colent Manes amatores ipsi-
us.

To the Immortal Shades.
For Urbicus, a *secutor*
of the first *palus*, from
Florence, who fought 13 times
and lived 22 years, his daughters, Olympias,
whom he left after five months,
and Fortunensis,
and Lauricia, his wife,
(erected this) for her well-deserving husband,
with whom she lived for 7 years.

[1] *CIL* V 5933 = *ILS* 5115 = Gregori (1989) no. 50 (with photograph).

> And I advise that one should kill him
> whom one has conquered.
> His supporters will honor the
> spirits.

Though still quite young when he died, Urbicus was clearly a successful gladiator, who had reached the first rank of *secutores* (*primus palus secutorum*) after 13 fights. He left behind a wife, Lauricia, to whom he was married for seven years and with whom he had two young daughters, Olympias and Fortunensis. He was wealthy enough to provide for them; the family had money for an inscribed and sculpted tombstone.[2] The epitaph is accompanied by a relief of a gladiator, presumably Urbicus himself, standing with his sword raised in his right hand and his shield on his left arm. His face was probably once visible (it is now heavily weathered), since his helmet sits atop a post beside him. In many ways this epitaph is like hundreds of others, often set up by spouses or fellow gladiators, erected for deceased gladiators across the Empire in the late 2nd to 3rd centuries CE. As in this inscription, most gladiatorial epitaphs include details of the deceased's professional life, usually his armament classification and often his rank and the number of his fights or victories. But what is especially interesting about Urbicus' epitaph is the admonition to his fellow gladiators, spoken in the first person, in lines 11 and 12: "And I advise that one should kill him whom one has conquered." Though this warning falls at the end of the inscription, the reader's attention is drawn to it: at line 12 there is a large and obvious space between (the indented) "*-rit*" (at the end of *vice* | *rit*) and *occidat*. What is the context of such ruthless advice?

In many ways this admonition would seem to confirm what is generally believed to have been the nature of gladiatorial combat during the imperial period. Most of us, both scholars and non-professional students of the games, assume that gladiatorial spectacles were brutal homicidal encounters between desperate men presented to satisfy the Roman mob. To take an (admittedly) older example, M. Poliakoff, in his excellent book on ancient combat sports, specifically excluded gladiatorial combat from his study, saying that such a contest did not constitute a "sport" and that "a gladiator fighting to kill or disable his opponent and save himself in any manner possible is not participating in a sport but in a form of warfare for spectators."[3] Scholarship has moved

[2] Cf. Gorden (1993) 155 "In a sense, every funerary epitaph makes reference, among other things, to the fact that other men could not afford one."

[3] Poliakoff (1987) 7–8; cf. 108–9. For similar opinions, we might consider Barton (1993), who dredges the depths of desperation she sees in the Roman

away from this position: D. Potter in particular has done much to show that the spectacle was about more than death.[4] Still, the image of the homicidal gladiator survives and Urbicus' cruel admonition would seem to support it.

Yet Urbicus' anxious exhortation to kill is remarkable because it is almost unparalleled. Of the hundreds of epitaphs surviving from throughout the Roman world, few provide anything like the homicidal declaration made here. If the gladiator's death is mentioned at all, his opponent is almost never blamed for it; instead blame is assigned to the Fates or even to the deceased's own choice. Furthermore, several gladiatorial epitaphs present a picture completely at odds with Urbicus' admonition, for instead of inciting murder, these other gladiators boast of having "saved many" in the arena or of having "hurt no one." Determining the context and motivation of Urbicus' admonition, therefore, is important for our understanding of the nature of the institution during the imperial period. If this is a sentiment that reflected what we today might call "industry standards" and was shared by most other gladiators, we may be right to follow Poliakoff and others and view the *munus gladiatorium* as a wanton, homicidal spectacle. But if Urbicus is unique—or misinterpreted—our understanding of the nature of the institution as a whole needs refining.

Life or death: the victor's choice?

One of the few scholars to consider the motivation for Urbicus' admonition was Georges Ville, who tentatively suggested that it may reflect a "law" of the arena in place during the imperial period, whereby the life of a defeated gladiator could be left in the hands of his victorious opponent.[5] Ville pointed to two possible parallels, both drawn from imperial *munera*. First, he cited a passage in Cassius Dio (78.19) in which the emperor Caracalla, while attending a *munus* in his honor at Nicomedia in 215, claimed to be unable to intercede to save the life of a defeated gladiator, since the decision rested with his victorious

willingness both to watch and to participate in these murderous contests; Versnel (1993) 210–27 and Futrell (1997), who argues (independently) that these spectacles constituted a form of human sacrifice; or Plass (1995), who compares gladiatorial combat to suicide. For recent discussions of the relationship between *gladiatura* and the modern concept of "sport," see Junkelmann (2000a) 12–18; Junkelmann (2000b) 67–9; Horsmann (2001) 225–41.

[4] See Potter (1999), especially 311–17, and (2004).

[5] Ville (1981) 421.

opponent.[6] Ville also referred to a poem by Martial in which the emperor Titus claimed to be unable to intervene in a long and bloody duel between two equally matched gladiators, Priscus and Verus, even though the spectators were shouting for *missio* for them. Titus refused because he could not violate the *lex* he had established for the fight.[7] Ville admits that a "law" allowing a victorious gladiator the decision of life and death would have been exceptional, since the usual practice was to turn the decision over to the *munerarius* and people.

But how likely is it that there was a *lex pugnandi* like the one suggested by Ville? The evidence is slim. Indeed, Dio's story about Caracalla was meant above all to demonstrate the emperor's cruelty: the *munus* was held on his birthday and yet, says Dio, even then he would not refrain from bloodshed. Dio claims that the victorious gladiator killed his defeated opponent after Caracalla refused to intercede, since he did not want to appear more merciful than the emperor. So Caracalla knew what he was doing and wanted the defeated man to be killed. And the *lex* in Titus' show, as described by Martial, required the gladiators to fight until one signaled surrender: the fight was *ad digitum*. There was no requirement for one of the gladiators to die.

Indeed, such requirements seem especially rare. An inscription from Beroia in Macedonia did require the gladiators to fight περὶ ψυχῆς ("for their lives"), but the *munerarius*, a provincial chief priest, and his wife advertised that they had imperial *indulgentia* to do this.[8] Advertisements of similar extreme combats in other places are also often accompanied by notices of official permission, which would itself suggest that the fights were extraordinary. The reason for the imperial authorization has nothing to do with humanitarianism and everything to do with reducing or controlling the financial burden on the officials, who are usually priests of the imperial cult. A *munus* was expensive to provide, and became even more so if the gladiators, who were typically leased from a *lanista*, were seriously injured

[6] ἔνθα λέγεται, ἡττηθέντος τινὸς καὶ ἱκετεύοντος αὐτὸν ὅπως σωθῇ, τὸν Ἀντωνῖνον εἰπεῖν· ἄπελθε καὶ τοῦ ἀντιπάλου δεήθητι· ἐμοὶ γὰρ οὐκ ἔξεστί σου φείσασθαι· (Here it is said when a defeated man asked him to save him, Antoninus answered, "Go and ask your opponent, for I am not permitted to spare you").

[7] Mart. *Sp.* 31 (formerly 29). 4–5 *sed Caesar legi paruit ipse suae: / lex erat, ad digitum posita concurrere palma* ("But Caesar himself obeyed his own law, and that law was to fight to the finger (surrender) once the palm had been set up").

[8] Touratsoglou (1970) = *AE* (1971) 430 and 431. Cf. a similar inscription from Miletus: Günther (1985) 124–30 no. 1 (dr. and pl. 27) = *SEG* (1985) 1132. One of the sophist Polemon's wittier remarks came when he saw a gladiator terrified at the prospect of fighting a contest ὑπὲρ τῆς ψυχῆς: the gladiator's distress was as great as if he were about to declaim (Philostr. *VS* 25.9.1). Cf. Robert (1940) 255 (I thank the anonymous referee for reminding me of this passage.)

or killed. If a gladiator fought and came off unharmed, he would have been returned to the *lanista* and the contract considered fulfilled. But if he were injured or killed, the lease would convert to a sale and the gladiator's full cost would have to be paid, a sum that might be some 50 times higher than the lease price.[9] A *senatus consultum* from the time of Marcus Aurelius and Commodus attempted to reduce and control the prices of trained, professional gladiators, who ranged in overall value from as low as 3000 sesterces to as much as 12,000 or 15,000 sesterces. Thus the death of professional, high-ranking gladiators resulted in enormous increases in the costs associated with providing gladiatorial *munera*. Given that the costs involved in killing a gladiator jumped so much, it is unlikely that a "rule" of the arena would have turned the life and death decision over to the victorious gladiator. Other evidence suggests that sharp weapons may even have been unusual, again reflecting the enormous costs incurred by the death or serious wounding of a professional gladiator.[10] There may thus be a better explanation for Urbicus' admonition.

By the 2nd century, the *munus* had become a complex spectacle often including both *venationes* and executions of various sorts. Professional gladiators appeared and fought toward the end of the day, after the animals had been hunted and the condemned men and women executed, often in ghastly ways. Unlike the spectacles earlier in the day, however, gladiatorial combat involved highly trained and expensive professionals.[11] More to the point, gladiatorial combats were governed by a series of "rules" and "standards of behavior," which served to encourage displays of martial excellence even as they limited or checked the lethalness of the spectacle. Perhaps because of the potentially enormous costs involved, ordinary combats were typically fought until one gladiator signaled surrender (*ad digitum*). Even the *munus sine missione* seems to mean only that there could be no *missio* until a clear victor had been declared (when one gladiator was compelled to surrender and that surrender was accepted by the *munerarius*). Of course, serious wounds and death were possible, but they were not the point of the show. Rather, gladiatorial combat was an exciting, rule-bound contest of martial excellence: a demonstration of bravery in the face of death, and of discipline and skill with arms.[12]

[9] See Carter (2003) 102–3 for a lengthier discussion.

[10] Carter (2006); cf. Potter (2004) 77; Coleman (2005) 3.

[11] Carter (2003). A translation and discussion of the inscription discussed in this article (*CIL* II 6278 = *ILS* 5163) can be found in Oliver and Palmer (1955). For the variety and social purposes of executions, see especially Coleman (1990).

[12] Other scholars emphasize the martial values presented and celebrated in the spectacle: Wieldemann (1992), esp. chapter 1; Welch (1994).

Gladiatorial leges pugnandi

The gladiatorial combats presented during the imperial period were rule-bound contests. The officials who supervised the combats, the *summa rudis* and *secunda rudis*, wore white tunics with purple *clavi* and carried a long rod or switch, presumably using it to signal fouls from a safe distance. L. Robert has shown that these officials served as technical experts to ensure that the gladiators fought bravely, skillfully and according to the rules: *un arbitre technique*.[13] It is probable that the *summa* and *secunda rudes* were drawn from the ranks of ex-gladiators, though this is disputed because the elevated social status they tended to enjoy does not square with our understanding of the *infamia* suffered by gladiators.[14] Yet we find these officials not only supervising gladiatorial combats in the arena but also involved with Roman youth, probably as weapons-instructors. A group of *iuvenes* from Paestum honored a freedman and Augustalis, M. Tullius Primigenius, as *summarudi suo*—"their *summa rudis*"[15]—and another inscription from Lucus Feroniae refers to a *summaruda* (*sic*) *iuvenum*.[16]

The *summa rudis* as technical expert seems primarily to have been able to determine when a combat should be stopped, an ability seen in many mosaics and reliefs in which he steps in to stop a combat before a fatal blow is struck. In most instances, the defeated gladiator is shown signaling submission by holding up a finger: combat *ad digitum*. Though there are numerous examples of gladiators submitting in this way, a late 1st- or early 2nd-century AD mosaic from the Villa at Dar Buc Amméra (Room D) in Zliten in modern Libya provides especially clear examples: several gladiators are either in combat or in the process of

[13] Robert (1982) 262–3.

[14] Ville (1981) 326 doubts that such officials could have been former gladiators, though Robert (1982) 263 is content to see the *summa* and *secunda rudes* as such. While gladiators certainly suffered from *infamia*, the recorded restrictions (e.g., *Tabula Heracleensis*: *FIRA* I², no. 18, l. 113) against the elevation of gladiators and ex-gladiators into positions of prestige imply not only that such social mobility was possible, but that it occurred. Potter (1994) 231 provides the example of an embassy to Septimius Severus which ended in failure when the emperor discovered that the ambassador had once fought in the arena (*Dig.* 50.7.5.1); despite his failure, this retired gladiator had clearly achieved a position of prominence in his own community. Cf. Robert (1940) no. 90 for the *summa rudis* Publius Aelius, who was not only a member of the *collegium* of *summae rudes* in Rome, but had also received the citizenship of a number of Greek cities.

[15] *AE* (1935) no. 27 = Buonocore (1992) no. 64.

[16] Gregori (1989) no. 36; the inscription has not been fully published. Gregori suggests that a *summa rudis* involved with *iuvenes* was a referee (*arbitro*), though since the *iuvenes*' arms-training was as much about instruction as it was about competition, the difference between a referee and an instructor may be minimal.

submitting, their shields lowered and their fingers wagging in the face of the officiating *summa rudis*.[17] This opportunity to submit *ad digitum* when defeated was a standard feature of gladiatorial combat during the imperial period. It is found even in *sine missione* ("without release") combat, an extreme form of the spectacle—it had been banned by Augustus—that required that one gladiator clearly defeat his opponent, perhaps by killing him, perhaps by seriously wounding or compelling him to surrender.[18] This last possibility produced a clear victor just as certainly as a death did. Perhaps the best definition of *sine missione* combat is found in Martial[19]: the crowd called for *missio* for both Priscus and Verus, but Titus could not allow it, since he had organized the combat as *sine missione*. Finally a happy ending was found: both gladiators submitted together and both were declared victors. But if the more unusual *sine missione* combat typically allowed for submission *ad digitum*, it must be that the regular—or ordinary—combat spectacles, which did allow *missio*, were also stopped before a gladiator was too seriously wounded.[20] Enforcement of this "rule" probably fell to the *summa* (and *secunda*) *rudis*, who could thus stop a fight even before a gladiator surrendered, perhaps in the same way that a modern boxing referee can stop a match if he thinks that one boxer is at risk of serious injury. D. Potter has even suggested that one principal task of these referees might have been to prevent gladiators from seriously wounding one another.[21] On the other hand, if the *summa rudis* could stop a fight, he necessarily could also allow it to continue. An epitaph for the gladiator Diodoros from Amisus in Asia Minor blames "the cunning treachery of the *summa rudis*" for his death: σουμμα-ρού<δου> δόλος αἰνός.[22] Although Diodoros had defeated his opponent (in the mind of whoever composed his epitaph, at least), the *summa rudis* compelled the gladiators to continue to fight, and that fight eventually resulted in Diodoros' death. I return to this inscription below.

Beyond regulating submission, there were probably other official "rules" or "standards" to enforce, though what these

[17] Aurigemma (1926) 150–4. The mosaic is well-known and reproduced in several places: see most readily Dunbabin (1978) 66 with Appendix I, 235–7 and pls. 1.1 and 20.46–9; Junkelmann (2000) 103 fig. 142.

[18] Suet. *Aug*. 45.3. For a discussion of gladiatorial combat *sine missione*, see Robert (1940) 261. Cf. Ville (1981) 404–6; Coleman (2000); Potter (2001) 482.

[19] *Sp*. 31 (referred to by Ville, above).

[20] The idea of surrender by holding up a finger originated in Greek combat sports (αἴρειν δάκτυλον): see most recently García Romero (2001) 31–2.

[21] Potter (1994) 231.

[22] Robert (1940) 130–1 no. 79.

were can only be surmised. For example, Petronius' crass *vox populi*, Echion, complains loudly that the gladiators of a certain Norbanus were so bad that they would have fallen over had one merely blown on them; only one, a *thraex*, was of any value, though even he, grumbles Echion, fought *ad dictata*—according to his lessons (*Sat.* 45.12). Petronius is of course lampooning what he sees as the base desires of the common people: in this case Echion wanted dirty fights and "low blows"; at the very least, he wanted gladiators to display something beyond the usual "textbook" style and tactics.[23] But other evidence suggests that gladiators were indeed expected to fight according to the way they had been taught, since gladiatorial organization and instruction was specific to armament type. *Secutores*, for example, were trained with other *secutores*, usually by a *doctor secutorum*, an arms-expert who specialized in the tactics of this gladiatorial type. So too we have epigraphically attested a *doctor murmillonum*, a *doctor hoplomachorum* and a *doctor thraecum*, to train *murmillones*, *hoplomachi* and *thraeces*.[24]

Other sources also suggest that the audience appreciated not simply gladiatorial combat, but more specifically the way the gladiators fought. The techniques and skill involved in gladiatorial combat were understood and applauded by spectators, and formed an important part of the overall spectacle. Aficionados of *gladiatura* organized themselves according to armament type (for example, the *parmularii* or *scutarii*), indicating that they were more interested in the fighting styles or tactics of distinct types than in the gladiators' death.[25] They wanted their *murmillones* to fight like *murmillones* and their *thraeces* to fight like *thraeces*. In his *Onirocritica*, Artemidorus notes that different armament types fought according to the tactics dictated by the weapons and defensive armor they had: some gladiators pursued and others were pursued, for example. Indeed, the very fact that Artemidorus deals not only with gladiatorial dreams but also with the distinct armament and tactics of several specific types of gladiators suggests that gladiatorial *armamentura* and combat styles were standardized and well-known enough to be a common and

[23] Cf. Suet. *Iul.* 26.3. For a brief discussion of *dictata*, see Mosci Sassi (1992) s.v. "dictata."

[24] Mosci Sassi (1992) s.v. "doctor," and also Carter (1999) for the Greek ἐπιστάτης σεκουτόρων.

[25] As observed by Potter (1994) 231. Cf. Mosci Sassi (1992) s.v. "parmularius" and "scutarius." φίλοπλοι organizations, presumably followers of gladiatorial spectacles, are attested in Ephesus. See Robert (1940) 24–7; and now also *Die Inschriften von Ephesos* (1979–) no. 2905; Jones (2001).

interpretable dream, or at least understandable to his audience.[26] The unique ability and particular challenge presented by a left-handed gladiator were also appreciated in both the West and the East, to judge from the proud statements of this talent made by gladiators on their tombstones.[27] Gladiatorial combat was even considered orderly enough to serve as a metaphor for rhetorical debate. For example, Quintilian compares the skillful orator to the gladiator who does not attack with simple and straightforward thrusts but feints and varies his assault. Similarly, the give and take of discourse is compared to the parry and thrust of gladiatorial combat.[28] The expectation that gladiators would maintain and demonstrate standardized combat tactics and maneuvers required the presence of officials who were competent to judge them. Thus it may be that the *summa rudis* and *secunda rudis*, as technical experts, also had to ensure that the gladiators fought according to the expectations their armament type dictated, which may have presented a dizzying number of "rules" or "standards of conduct" to enforce.

All of this points to the pertinence of Ps.-Quintilian's characterization of the severe restrictions found in gladiatorial combat, especially when compared to the freedom of actual military combat, where one really did fight to kill or wound an opponent in any manner possible. He describes these restrictions in the arena as a *lex pugnandi*: *facinus indignum, illum animum, illum ardorem non contigisse castris, non bellicis certaminibus, ubi vera virtus nulla pugnandi lege praecircumscribitur*—"the infamous activity, that spirit, that passion, has not touched the camp or military combat, where true virtue is not restricted by any *lex pugnandi*" (*Decl.* 9.9).

[26] Artem. *Onir.* 2.32 (cf. 1.5): he discusses the *thraex*, the *secutor*, the *retiarius*, the *equis*, the *essedarius*, the *provocator*, the *dimachaerus* and the "commonly-called ἀρβήλας." This last was long thought a corruption, but Artemidorus was indeed describing a known type of gladiator: see Pack (1957); Ritti and Yilmaz (1998) 469–79 (nos. 6 and 7); Junkelmann (2000) 111–12; Carter (2001) 109–15. Junkelmann is probably correct to identify the *arbelas* as a *scissor*. At 5.58, Artemidorus provides detailed evidence about a specific type of combat known in Greek as ἀπότομος-combat, for which see Robert (1940) 258–62.

[27] A left-handed gladiator was known as a *scaeva* (Latin) or σκεῦας (Greek). Cf. Robert (1940) 70; Mosci Sassi (1992) s.v. "scaeva"; Coleman (1996). Commodus was a famous left-handed *secutor*: see Dio 73.19.2 τὴν μὲν ἀσπίδα ἐν τῇ δεξιᾷ, τὸ δὲ ξίφος τὸ ξύλινον ἐν τῇ ἀριστερᾷ ἔχων· καὶ πάνυ καὶ ἐπὶ τούτῳ μέγα ἐφρόνει ὅτι ἦν ἐπαρίστερος ("he held his shield in his right hand and the wooden sword in his left, and he took great pride in the fact that he was left-handed"). See also Sen. *Con.* 3.*praef.*10: *quidam sic cum scaeva componi cupiunt quomodo alii timent* ("Some men thus desire to be placed with a left-hander, something other men fear").

[28] Quint. *Inst.* 5.8.54; 9.1.20. Cf. Grodde (1997) 16–30. Cicero too uses *gladiatura* as a metaphor for rhetorical debate; see, e.g., *de Orat.* 2.84, 316, 325.

In the end, gladiatorial combat had two possible results: either one gladiator defeated his opponent, or neither gladiator was able to defeat the other (*stantes missi*). Serious or perhaps even mortal wounds and death were possible, but despite the dangers, the death of a professional gladiator was not a necessary or perhaps even an ordinary outcome.[29] Longevity and prosperity were two results of the regulation and standardization of the institution. Many successful gladiators lived to retire from the occupation, and many more became wealthy enough to afford beautifully carved and inscribed tombstones. Once retired, they could assume positions of respect in their local society or they could return to the arena under a private contract and earn substantial amounts of money.[30] Some gladiators compiled large numbers of victories during the course of their career. For example, some gladiators listed in an inscription from Claudiopolis in Bithynia had as many as 65 victories, clearly life-time totals (to the date of the inscription).[31] True, most gladiators, to judge from their epitaphs, had much lower lifetime totals, but this is probably the result of the fact that they did not fight very often, especially in comparison with athletes, who competed far more frequently. Perhaps to the displeasure of Petronius' Echion, gladiatorial training may even have included the techniques necessary to defeat an opponent *without* killing or seriously wounding him. Thus Martial praises the gladiator Hermes as *vincere nec ferire doctus*—"trained to conquer, not to kill" (5.24.7).

In sum, the rules and standards of behavior enforced in the arena appear to have had two primary purposes: to encourage and promote aggressive but fair combats between equally matched gladiators, and to limit or reduce the possibility of intentional or even accidental fatalities. Shows at which professional gladiators were to fight to the death were rare and seem in general to have even required imperial authorization.

An unwritten code of conduct?

In addition to these rules and expected behavior, the gladiators themselves may have taken matters into their own hands. A number of gladiatorial epitaphs, most from the Greek East,

[29] Ville (1981) 318–25 argues that death in gladiatorial combat was relatively infrequent.

[30] The so-called *SC de Pretiis Gladiatorum Minuendis* (*CIL* II 6278 = *ILS* 5163) lists the *aestimatio* of up to 12,000 sesterces for an *auctoratus*. In the early 1st century AD, however, Tiberius is said to have paid an *auctoramentum* of HS 100,000 to lure retired gladiators (*rudarii*) back to the arena: Suet. *Tib.* 7.2. For discussion, see Carter (2003) 105.

[31] French and Ündemis (1989) no. 1 = Merkelbach and Stauber (2001) no. 09/09/02.

carry the otherwise odd boast that (for example) the gladiator had "hurt no one" or had "saved many in the *stadia*." The gladiator Meilesis was buried in Edessa with the following epitaph:[32]

Ἐγὼ Μειλήσις ἐκλήθην παγανὸς | δὲ Μεστριανός πέ[ντε] πυκτείσας | καὶ μηδένα λυπήσας· νῦν δὲ | [λε]λύπημαι· καὶ ἐκ τῶν ἰδίων ΝΗ | [. . .]ΠΑΚΕΙ Ἀλεξάνδρα δὲ τῷ | [ἰδίῳ] ἀνδρὶ μνείας χάριν ἐποίη | [σε. Χαίρετ]ε, πάντες οἳ παρο|δεῖτε.

I was called Meilesis and had the civilian name Mestrianos. I fought five times and hurt no one. Now I have been hurt. And from her own funds [illegible] Alexandra erected this in memory of her husband. Farewell, all you who pass by.

Or consider this epitaph from Tenedos for the gladiator Autolykos:[33]

Θαυμάζις με θανον|τά, τυχόν, φίλε, τὸν Αὐ|τόλυκον· οὕτως πως | προλαβών, σῶσαι δὲ θέλω<ν>· | νικήσας ἔθανον παρὰ | μοῖραν. Σεβαστιανὴ Αὐ|τολύκῳ μνείας χά|ριν·…

Perhaps you are amazed that I am dead, friend, me—Autolykos. I took such care, and wished to save (my opponent); but although victorious, I died contrary to fate. Sebastiana (erected this) for Autolykos in remembrance….

Or this inscription for the gladiator Aias from Thasos:[34]

Οὐ Λοκρὸν Αἴαντά με κα|θορᾷς οὐδ᾽ αὖ Τελαμώνι|ον, ἀλλὰ τὸν ἐν σταδίοις | ἀρέσαντα ἀρηίοισι νείκε|σιν, ψυχὰς πολλὰς σώ|σ[α]ντα κρατερῶς ὑπ᾽ ἀ|νάνκην, ἐλπίζων καὐ|τὸς ὅτι κἀμοί τις ταὐτ᾽ ἀ|ποδώσει· καί με κατέ[πε] | [φν]εν ἀντίος οὐδείς, ἀλ|λ᾽ ἰδίῳ ἔθανον, καί με ἄλο|χος σεμνὴ ἔνθα θέ|το Θάσου πέδον | [ἀ]γνόν. Καλλιγένεια Α[ἴ] | [α]ντι ἀνδρὶ ἰδίῳ μνήμ|ης χάριν.

I am not Locrian Aias whom you behold, nor the son of Telamon, but the one who was pleasing in the *stadia* in martial contests, who mightily saved many souls out from under necessity, myself expecting that someone would return the same to me. No opponent killed me, but I died on my own, and my revered wife buried me here in the holy plain of Thasos. Kalligenia (erected this) for Aias her husband in remembrance.

[32] Robert (1940) 84–5 no. 20.

[33] Robert (1940) 223–5 no. 285 = Ricl (1997) no. 104 = Merkelbach and Stauber (2001) no. 07/05/02.

[34] Robert (1940) 113–15 no. 55.

Bold Olympus makes similar claims:[35]

Ὄλυμπόν με καθορᾷς θρασύν, ὦ παροδεῖτα, | πολλάκις ἐν σταδίοις νεῖκος αἱρησάμενον, | πολλοὺς δ᾽ ἐν σταδίοις σώσας· ὅτε δ᾽ ἤθελε μοῖρα, | ἔνατον μονομαχῶν τὸ πεπρ[ωμέ]νον | ὧδε ἀπέ[δωκα]. | χαῖρε παροδεῖτα. Τρωαδεύς | Πανθία Ὀλύμπῳ ἐκ τῶν ἰδίων μνείας χάριν.

Traveler, you look on me, bold Olympus, who often undertook combat in the *stadia*, and saved many in the *stadia*. When fate wished it, I, fighting in single combat for the ninth time, paid back what was fated. Farewell, traveler. Panthia from (Alexandria) Troas (erected this) for Olympus from her own funds in remembrance.

To this collection we might add the Elder Seneca's observation that "among gladiators the harshest condition for the victor comes with the death of a fighter" (*inter gladiatores quoque victoris condicio pessuma est cum moriente pugnantis*).[36] Cassius Dio believed that the victorious gladiator at Caracalla's birthday *munus* in Nicomedia would have spared his defeated opponent, given the opportunity (above). Indeed, Dio uses the episode to show Caracalla's cruelty: does that mean that most people would have expected the defeated gladiator to escape alive? We should also consider Dio's description of the behavior of some gladiators at Commodus' great imperial *munera* in 192. After Commodus won his own sparring matches (σκιαμαχίαι) down in the arena, the spectacle resumed (73.19.5):

ἐπράττετο δ᾽ οὐδὲν ἔτι παιδιᾷ ἐχόμενον, ἀλλ᾽ ὥστε πάνυ πολλοὺς ἀποθνήσκειν. καὶ δή ποτε βραδυνάντων τινῶν περὶ τὰς σφαγὰς τούς τε ἀντιπάλους συνέδησεν ἀλλήλοις καὶ πάντας ἅμα μάχεσθαι ἐκέλευσε.

Then nothing resembling play-fighting took place, but the combats were of such a sort that many were killed. Indeed, when some then hesitated to kill, he bound the opponents to one another and ordered them all to fight simultaneously.

Why should victorious gladiators have hesitated to kill their defeated opponents, especially if, as it would seem, such behavior was likely to infuriate the emperor? Were they supposed to fight to the death, and even so did not want to kill?

Many of these inscriptions were first collected by L. Robert, who explained the behavior as the result of gladiatorial camaraderie borne out of shared experiences in the *ludus*.[37] Gladiators who had to face and fight each other in the arena often lived

[35] Robert (1940) 115–16 no. 56.

[36] Sen. *Con.* 9.6.1. I thank the anonymous referee for drawing my attention to this passage. See also Potter (2004) 77.

[37] Robert (1940) 306.

together in the same gladiatorial *familia*. The situation was no doubt difficult and uncomfortable, and drew the attention of ancient thinkers such as Seneca and Quintilian, both of whom remark on this sad fact.[38] Certainly some gladiators, such as Phoebus buried in Larissa, explicitly claim to have "lived well and shared quarters with others who were friends" (καλῶς δὲ βιώσας, φίλοις ἑτέροις συμβιώσας).[39] In other cases we may assume the existence of friendships between gladiators from the fact that the dead man was buried by his fellows. Shared dangers in communal life doubtless produced a sense of camaraderie.

Certainly gladiators from the same *ludus* might have known each other, even though it is unlikely that those who were to face one another in the arena (for example, *secutors* and *retiarii*) trained together. Yet no evidence suggests that only friends were "saved" in the arena; the boast to have saved many or hurt no one extends to any opponent, and it would not be the case that a gladiator always fought against members of his own *ludus*. For example, it is doubtful that only one *ludus* was represented at Commodus' *munera* in 192, where at least some gladiators hesitated to kill their opponents.

K.M. Coleman has recently ascribed this behavior to professionalism rather than camaraderie. For Coleman, it was "within the gladiator's professional capacity to so act; the rules of the game permit him to grant quarter in victory."[40] Multiple references to the practice imply that it was widespread, and if so, it might even have been expected by gladiators in the arena, whether they knew each other or not. Moreover, the behavior—fighting to defeat an opponent while actively trying not to kill or injure him—seems to have been enforced by the gladiators themselves. If victorious, there was little to be gained by killing an opponent, and the man who did so may have been perceived as needlessly cruel by his fellows. Consider, for example, the fate of the gladiator Victor buried at Philippopolis:[41]

Βίκτωρ σκεῦας ἐνθάδε κεῖμαι, πατρὶς | δέ μου Θεσσαλονείκη· ἔκτεινέ με δαίμων, οὐκ ὁ ἐπίορκος Πίννας· μηκέτι | καυχάστω· ἔσχον ἐγὼ συνοπλᾶ | Πολυνείκην, ὃς κτείνας Πίνναν | ἐξεδίκησεν ἐμέ. Κλ(αύδιος) Θάλλος | προέστη τοῦ μνημείου ἐξ ὧν κατέλιπεν.

[38] Quint. *Inst.* 2.17.33 *saepe gladiatores sub eodem magistro eruditi inter se componuntur.* Sen. *Dial.* 4.8.2 (= *de Ira* 2.8.2) *...non alia quam in ludo gladiatorio vita est cum isdem viventium pugnantiumque...* Cf. Ville (1981) 362 n. 42; Coleman (2005) 4.

[39] Kontoyannis (1981).

[40] Coleman (2005) 14.

[41] Robert (1940) 94–5 no. 34 = *IGBulg* III 1019.

I, Victor, a left-handed gladiator, lie here, though my fatherland is Thessaloniki. Fortune killed me, not perjured Pinnas; no longer let him boast. I had an arms-mate, Polynices, who avenged me by killing Pinnas. Claudius Thallus was in charge of this memorial from what Victor left behind (*ex testamento*).

Gladiators who did not adhere to the "code" but intentionally sought to kill an opponent rather than defeat him without inflicting serious injury were dangerous and had to be stopped. This may be simple camaraderie, since Victor is said to have been avenged by his arms-mate, presumably a man from the same *ludus*. But he speaks of justice (δίκη): is this the "code" put right? The sentiments of the gladiator Stephanos, who was buried at Hierapolis, are similar. He proclaims that he killed his opponent because the man "was filled with irrational bitterness" (κτείνας ἀντίπαλον μεστὸν πικρίας ἀλογίστου).[42] Robert and Coleman both describe the actions of Stephanos, who died in this same combat, as those of a calm, rational professional: he killed his opponent, who let anger and passion get the better of him.[43] What is important for our purposes is that Stephanos killed his opponent because of his irrational and dangerous behavior. In other words, his opponent was guilty of bad or somehow unacceptable conduct. Though, as discussed above, it is probable that the spectators and the *munerarius* generally expected gladiators to fight properly and according to established rules, the irrational anger described here would have offended the gladiators themselves rather than the spectators or *munerarius*: Stephanos' opponent had violated the code, and Stephanos stopped him, but at the cost of his own life. I suggest that this self-regulating behavior goes beyond either the sentiment or the professional attitude of any individual gladiator and represents what we might today call "industry standards."

Where does Urbicus fit in all this? At first glance, he too seems an irrationally angry gladiator advising his fellows to kill whenever they had the opportunity. Yet, if we compare Urbicus with Diodoros, the gladiator mentioned above who blamed the cunning treachery of the *summa rudis* for his defeat, we might form a different opinion of him. Diodoros claims actually to have defeated his opponent, whom he names (Demetrios). Interestingly, though Demetrios ultimately killed him, Diodoros does

[42] Robert (1940) 155 no. 124 = Ritti and Yilmaz (1998) no. 20 = Merkelbach and Stauber (2001) no. 02/12/08.

[43] Robert (1940) 155; Coleman (2005) 14. Coleman compares Stephanos' actions to a passage in Seneca where the philosopher observes the importance of skill for a gladiator and the dangers of anger (*de Ira* 1.11.1 *gladiatores quoque ars tuetur, ira denudat*).

not blame him for his final defeat and death, but rather Fate and the *summa rudis*:[44]

Ἐνθάδε νεικήσας κεῖμαι Διόδωρος | ὁ τλήμων· ἀντίπαλον ῥήξας | Δημήτριον οὐκ ἔκτανον εὐθύς· | ἀλλά με Μοῖρ᾽ ὀλοὴ καὶ σουμμα|ρου<δου> δόλος αἰνὸς ἔκτανον, ἐκ δὲ | φάους ἤλυθον εἰς Ἄϊδην. [Κεῖ] | μαι δ᾽ ἐν γαίῃ αὐτοχθόνων· ἠδέ μ᾽ ἔ|θαψεν ἔνθα φίλος ἀγαθὸς εὐσε|βίης ἕνεκεν.

Here I lie victorious, Diodoros the wretched. After felling my opponent Demetrios, I did not kill him immediately. But murderous Fate and the cunning treachery of the *summa rudis* killed me, and leaving the light I have gone to Hades. I lie in the land of the original inhabitants. And a good friend buried me here because of his piety.

What we might take from this is the observation that Diodoros did not fully press his initial advantage against Demetrios and wound or kill him: Diodoros was not a murderer. We might even go so far as to speculate that the "good friend" who buried Diodoros was Demetrios himself, the only other person named in the inscription; otherwise that ostentatious and generous act of piety would remain anonymous. If so, it would seem that Demetrios too was an unwilling killer. Seen in this light, Urbicus' admonition from beyond the grave—*et moneo, ut quis quem vicerit occidat*—does not necessarily mean that Urbicus was a wantonly homicidal maniac either. Instead, the possible existence of this gladiatorial "code of conduct" suggests that, like Diodoros, Urbicus in his last engagement initially defeated his opponent, but chose *not* to kill him, a decision he later bitterly regretted: Urbicus, too, was not a murderer. This is more than camaraderie among friends or professional behavior and, I suggest, may indicate the existence of a "code" among gladiators. The epitaphs quoted above indicate that the deceased gladiators did not needlessly take their opponents' lives.

Conclusion

Epictetus extols the desire for competition and combat displayed by some gladiators: they complain when not matched with an opponent, and beg to be allowed to fight.[45] Seneca notes that a gladiator considered it dishonorable to be matched with an inferior (*Prov.* 3.4), and Juvenal likewise notes the embarrass-

[44] Robert (1940) 130–1 no. 79.

[45] Arr. *Epict.* 1.29.37 ἀλλ᾽ ἐν μὲν τοῖς Καίσαρος μονομάχοις εἰσί τινες οἱ ἀγανακτοῦντες ὅτι οὐδεὶς αὐτοὺς προάγει οὐδὲ ζευγνύει καὶ εὔχονται τῷ θεῷ καὶ προσέρχονται τοῖς ἐπιτρόποις δεόμενοι μονομαχῆσαι ("But among Caesar's gladiators there are some who complain because no one brings them out or matches them against an opponent, and they pray to the god, and go to their managers begging to fight").

ment of a *secutor* compelled to fight a noble but cowardly *retiarius* who fled once his net had been cast in vain (8.209–10). All this agonistic bravado may have been born from a competitive spirit, but it was probably sustained—at least in part—by the conviction that defeat would not automatically bring death. Rules, standards of combat and perhaps even an unwritten "code of conduct" governed the contests.[46] Of course, few authors speak directly about the rules and standards, and even fewer about the "code." But other evidence, especially gladiatorial epitaphs, points to their existence.

Gladiatorial combat was not without danger, and every fight brought with it the risk of death from a fatal cut or stab-wound intentionally or unintentionally delivered, loss of blood or perhaps infection afterward. But it did not necessarily or unavoidably bring death, for homicide was not the point. A *munus* presented the spectators with death in many forms—animals were hunted and killed in the associated *venationes*, and *damnati* were executed—but the gladiatorial combats at the end of the festivities presented something different: men confronting, ignoring and overcoming the risk of death though bravery, skill and martial excellence, key features of the Roman value-system. To defeat an opponent while not killing or even seriously wounding him ("to save" him) was a demonstration of extreme prowess, and an ability to be boasted of and admired. Victory, not murder, was the goal.[47]

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[46] Dio Chrysostom (*Or*. 28.5–8) speaks about the great boxer Melankomas, who was able to defeat his opponents without hurting them because he could outlast them. I thank the anonymous referee for the reference.

[47] I would like to thank S. Douglas Olson for his careful proof-reading and many thoughtful comments and observations. His knowledge and attention to detail have greatly improved this paper. Errors that remain are, of course, my own.

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