

Gladiators and Gladiatorial Games in the Eastern Provinces of the Roman Empire

By Jesper Carlsen

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Gladiatorial games have always held a central place in modern popular perceptions of the ancient Romans, but more serious investigations of these entertainers began as late in the 1970's when studies of popular culture, cultural communication and mass-media became respectable academic disciplines. Louis Robert published the monuments from the eastern provinces already in the first year of the Second World War, but it was the posthumous work of Georges Ville on the gladiatorial fights in the western Mediterranean in 1981 that marked the real turning-point, being the first comprehensive examination of the literary and epigraphical sources. Due to the preserved number of amphitheatres in the western part of the empire, the traditional view was for centuries that gladiatorial games, munera, and other bloodthirsty entertainments did not find favour in the Greek speaking Roman East where *ludi scaenica* and athletic competitions were preferred. The relatively high numbers of gladiatorial monuments that can be found in many cities of Roman Greece and Asia Minor suggest that the gladiatorial contests and animal shows played an important role in the provincial cities, and that they were normally presented in connection with the imperial cult.

In this paper, the gladiatorial games in the eastern provinces of the Roman Empire will be analysed with focus on the life of the performers, the gladiators, and the organizers. The point of departure will be the Augustan colony Patras that due to recent excavations has provided extensive evidence from Roman Greece on the organization of munera and gladiators. Furthermore, the popularity in the eastern provinces will be highlighted by recently published gladiatorial reliefs from Asia Minor.

Jesper Carlsen teaches ancient history at University of Southern Denmark and has written extensively on Roman slavery, agriculture, family, Roman North Africa, and gladiatorial games. He is the author of several books, including *Vilici and Roman Estate Managers until AD 284* (1995), *The Rise and Fall of a Roman Noble Family: The Domitii Ahenobari 196 BC – AD 68* (2006) and *Land and Labour. Studies in Roman Social and Economic History* (2013). He has also edited many volumes, including *Africa Proconsularis III. Regional Studies in the Segermes Valley of Northern Tunisia* (2000) and *Agricoltura e scambi nell'Italia tardo-repubblicana* (2009).

