Gladitorial Combat Essay, Research Paper

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words

The culture of Ancient Rome had a distinct way to entertain its citizens. Besides spending times at the baths, Romans found pleasure and delight in the “games” held at the local coliseum. These games were among the bloodiest displays of public amusement in the history of man. Professional wrestling and boxing today, do not come close to the disgusting horrors that the people of Rome took so much pleasure in observing. Although the games were very bloody and extremely brutal, often killing many men and animals, the Romans enjoyed the scenery of life and death being very near. Watching men fight and eventually die a dreadful death, is what fascinated the Roman population in great degree as the games were one of their favorite ways to spend their leisure time. The ancient Romans had a very bloodthirsty taste for entertainment exhibited in the form of gladitorial combat.

The essence of the bloodthirsty entertainment was in the form of the gladiator. The word gladiator comes from the Latin for swordsman, from gladius or sword. The first gladiators were part of a sacrificial rite adopted from the Etruscans in 264, BC, nearly 500 years after the founding of Rome (Johnston 238). The sons of Junius Brutus first displayed gladiatorial combat when they honored their father at his funeral by matching three pairs of gladiators. Gladiatorial combat was originally part of a religious ceremony that was intended to insure that the dead would be accompanied to the “next world” by armed attendants and that the spirits of the dead would be appeased with his offering of blood (Johnston 286). Gladiators were generally condemned criminals, prisoners of war or slaves bought for this purpose. By the end of the empire, even free men volunteered to fight in hopes of receiving the great glory of a gladiator (Corbishley 44). The gladiators fought in various styles, depending on their background and training. Gladiatorial combat was so important to ancient Romans that they had gladiator schools to train men to be machines of slaughter for the scheduled entertainment (Johnston 287).

These trained machines fought in festivals held for ten to twelve day periods each year and often coincided with Saturnalia, a festival celebrating the god Saturn. Professional sign makers advertised with red lettered signs; heralds also proclaimed these spectacles. Programs were also available to aid in the inevitable betting. The fights were very brutal and gruesome. The most popular fights were against a heavily armed and shielded man against a fighter with only a net and a small dagger. Depending on the emperor of the day, you might see dwarfs fighting women, Amazons or even non-human opponents (Johnston 297).

Not only did people fight each other, but also bears, buffalo’s and other huge vicious animals. The gladiators would be forced to fight the wild beasts unarmed. In addition, many times the beast would be victorious. Beasts were also made to fight other beasts. One could watch bears fighting buffalos, buffaloes against elephants, elephants against rhinoceros. Even the ostriches that were brought in to amuse the spectators were not spared. After dashing around the arena, they were killed by arrows from archers who were located in the stands. Fights between men and tame beasts were also called to demonstrate man’s power over even the strongest of beasts. It is sad to note that the popularity of these spectacles led to the deaths of tens of thousands of animasl. Entire species were driven from extinction having been driven or captured from their natural habitat. Hippopotamuses were no longer seen in Egypt, elephants were not found in northern Africa and the population of lions disappeared from Assyria. This quest for bloodthirsty entertainment, involving man and beast, was soon centralized to a Roman theater (Burrell 83).

As the popularity of these bloody events grew with both the common people and political leaders, there was a need for a venue of entertainment. The coliseum, or “Flavian ampitheater,” was erected around 80 AD during the ruling of Vespian and his son Titus. It was to be one of the greatest architectural masses ever built. The immense structure held more than 50,000 people (Burrell 80). The monumental size of this structure and its central location in the city speaks directly to the importance of this building and consequently this sport in the Roman Empire. Studies of Western civilizations show that where a society invests its money is where its priorities are. For almost four centuries, this bloody sport was entertainment for the masses.

It seems that these gladiatorial games cause was not just purely entertainment purposes. It promoted a certain want for blood that aided in the need and want for political warfare. People were stimulated by the pure victory of the human masses, and in what was a conspiracy of sorts, it ultimately influenced Romans in later wars and fighting. It taught the massed that bloodshed was normal, tolerated and even prosperous for the underclass. The ultimate accomplishment of bloodthirsty entertainment was political, psychological brain washing.

It has to be said that many Romans were cruel and bloodthirsty. They were like ignorant and brutal peasants who had suddenly become rich enough to give in to whatever beastly passion they liked. Nothing else can explain centuries of men being butchered for sheer amusement. The games were as popular as they were gruesome and caused great excitement and destruction. Civilized people created and promoted these events, and participated in them, because they provided great political and economical strength and unavoidable commotion.

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