

Murderous games: gladiatorial contests in ancient rome keith hopkins research pap...

[Environment](#), [Animals](#)



**ASSIGN
BUSTER**

\n[toc title="Table of Contents"]\n

\n \t

1. [A Summary](#) \n \t
2. [As Politics Came In](#) \n \t
3. [Commentary on the Article by Keith Hopkins](#) \n \t
4. [Works Cited](#) \n

\n[/toc]\n \n

A Summary

War came naturally to Rome. Slaughter and cruelty were pillars of the Roman culture. The fact that Rome had ruled close to over one sixth of the World's population at one point in time had a by-product and the innumerable inhuman suffering of slaves and gladiators was only one of these by-products. Even while at war and later, Roman armies are known to have indulged in human slaughter. Warriors would brutally crush the one weak link of their team to death. At other times, they would coolly kill another soldier of their army, ' for his own good.' Cruelty was also an integral part of the general Roman lifestyle at the time when the empire was at its peak. ' Masters' are known to have ' crucified' slaves publicly or simply fed them to animals. Wild animals and domestic animals have been killed in worse ways.

Out of all this in built cruelty came out the most notorious game of all time: The gladiatorial contests. From 260 BC to 5th Century AD, more than fifty thousand people witnessed from the stands of the Roman Colloseums, the cruel and gory death of thousands of men day in and day out. The

gladiatorial fights were primarily a death fest where slaves and prisoners of war would be left unguarded in the grounds of the large Colloseums to watch wild animals of various sizes and shapes and armed guards fight and kill them. Men who stood victorious at the end of this were pardoned their crimes. That was how ironic the game was. All one got for standing hours of brutal bloodshed and torture was pardon.

There were animals galore in the contests. There are known to have been as many as 600 lions in one single event. Some of the emperors, such as Commodus are known to have killed many wild beasts themselves. Huge elephants, hippopotamus' and giraffes would die just like that, as the emperor would shoot them with a bow from where he was sitting. These animals died only after rampaging through hundreds of war prisoners and slaves. After a point of time, the slaves and prisoners of war surrendered to death and did not find the prospect of waiting for a gruesome death amusing. They would go stand in the face of death and die in an instance. The crowd seemed to enjoy this too.

As Politics Came In

What started off as a private idea which was organized for close circle at a place the Romans called the forum, the gladiatorial contests? Slowly this shifted to the Colloseum, automatically expanding in size and magnificence. From the private sphere the emperor started taking control of the fights and gatherings. Around this time, the insanity surrounding these gruesome acts increased. The height of the megalomania was the time when the emperor, upset with low participation, asked the guards to throw in the spectators

themselves. Somehow this seemed to have thrilled the spectators and only went on to encourage more audience to attend the event – again reflecting on the fact that the act of cruelty was ingrained in the thinking of the Romans of that time.

Caligula and Commodus are known to be the emperors who had brought politics closer to these games. Another important feature of these contests was the increasing rate at which demonstrations found a platform to express themselves. The crowd would protest against prizes and not cheer, the prisoners would protest against ill treatment and not perform, so on and so forth. The emperors however only crushed such short rebellions with an iron hand. It is at these times that their individual fascinations with cruelty and mass executions came to the forth. Like mentioned earlier, they would either throw the spectators into the ring or set animals free on them to silence their demands.

All said and done, the gladiators, from Gladius – the Latin word for Sword, evoked an immediate interest from the audience and especially the women. They by nature seemed more handsome than others. Somehow, the Romans had managed to pack a drama of bloodshed, gore, romance, politics and freedom into one packed Colloseum .

Commentary on the Article by Keith Hopkins

The article by Keith Hopkins draws three major themes. Firstly the barbarism and cannibalism evident in mainstream Roman culture and the apathy towards that lifestyle from the people of today is discussed with remorse and regret. Secondly the manner in which the gladiatorial games had become a

courtroom is drawn out through examples and anecdotes. Finally the romance associated with the concept of a gladiator is brought out. Let us look at each of these aspects independently.

When Keith Hopkins argues that today's world which harps and cries about human right violations at the drop of a pin is blind to the disgustingly violent history of one of the world's supposedly greatest empires, he is being both right and wrong about it. He is right because the international apathy towards a history of this kind reflects on the fact that human rights for the leaders and the people today are still the last box of a 'feel good' checklist. Like environmental concerns, which despite their threatening nature have not got beyond sales results in the news columns, human rights too are things we stand up for just because we have to. In this regard, Hopkins is right when he points out to the cold times of the Roman empire, very much a part of our past, where men were not just killed but assaulted and cut and smashed day in and day out. Where Hopkins does go wrong is when he distances these acts from psychology. He says in his essay that this is not individual psychology but a society gunning for blood. The social psychology of the Roman Empire was probably society at its animalistic best. A series of political events somewhat only aided in sustaining this psychology. If sport today is still played in stadiums and if the first sport to have ever been played is wrestling, then this Empire and society had a key role.

Secondly, in Hopkins' interpretation of the Colloseum as the Roman court itself, one finds both irony and hope. Irony because what the protestors got for expressing their view was wild beasts jumping on them and tearing them into pieces; hope because even in a society so characterized as close to

cannibal, the very face of that cannibalistic joy was made into a platform of expression by none other than the human beings of that society. This gives us hope that there is inherent in the human a benevolent yet righteous side as opposed to the brutality of slave treatment that the Roman Empire witnessed en masse.

Finally in the romance that a Gladiator naturally carried with him to the field, Hopkins discusses the bipolarity with which the gladiators were both despised and loved. Quoting texts relating to that time, he says that while the men gave the gladiators their souls, the women gave them their body. That seemed to be the effect that the gladiators had on the people watching them.

In conclusion, the entire 600 odd years when these games were common place do form a significant period in the history of human civilizations. Parts of the history question the very word called civilization while other parts stand testimony to the human element of this civilization. That said, one must pick from history a lesson that will guide actions in the future. For us to stop spiraling back to animal hood, we must take from mankind the ability with which he was able to close down these gladiatorial games and instead see hope in them for a better future and a better world to live in. That initiative that the human being is inherently capable of, to see the peak, while missing the steps, to see forests while missing the trees, is the initiative that we must display time and again in an effort to recycle our self as beings, as a species that we were actually designed to be. It is in this effort that lies the hope for a future that otherwise seems a fast dwindling

dream that is ready to turn into a nightmare the moment you wake up from it.

Works Cited

Hopkins, Keith. Murderous Games: Gladiatorial Contests in Ancient Rome. 01 April 2013 .