

# Accuracy of historical films

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How accurate a portrayal of Roman gladiatorial games and culture is the movie "Gladiator"? In society today historical films are merely valuable to society as a form of entertainment. Historical events have become another form of stimulus for directors when creating an engaging film for audience's. Len the creation of a film many historical inaccuracies occur as seen in the film Gladiator.

This film instead of being a historical recreation of the Roman culture and gladiatorial games tends to embody the idea of certain characters and events. They reflect 21st century ideals onto these historical events to create a film that will appeal to the masses. Ultimately these inaccuracies are insignificant in detracting from the purpose of these films which is to entertain. Historical films are merely a form of entertainment that is used to engage the masses but this is the extent of its value to society.

Unlike a documentary, films are supposed to be "aesthetic journeys" and historical events are merely another form of stimulus for a director trying to create an individual storyline. On the release of the "historical film" 300, Warner Bros issued a statement insisting that it "developed this film purely as a fictional work with the sole purpose of entertaining audiences". In order to entertain audiences film makers must use these historical events, edit where necessary, to create a film for a 21st century audience.

Gladiator is a key example of where an aspect of a culture has been reworked into a blockbuster film. The writer for Gladiator started to develop the story after reading "those who are about to die" by Daniel P. Mannix. The sinking of the Titanic is an important historical event but in order to pitch this

event to a current audience it was mixed with " aRomeo and Julietlove story" . David Benison summed up precisely the method in which accuracy in a historical film is undertaken " as for being absolutely faithful to the source material, I'm always going to pick the project" .

The accuracy of these film's depictions are compromised so that it can be " guided by the Inner logic of capitalism". Gladiator through this guidance made \$457, 640, 427 at the box office a very tricky task If you do not appeal to the audience. As seen In the film Gladiator, historical films tend to embody the Idea of a culture In order to appeal to the wider audience. While the film makers attempt to portray the emperor as the antagonist of the story, they however remove or add material where they see necessary.

In the film Gladiator Marcus Aurelia's describes his son Commodus as an " immoral man" and thus is unable to present him with emperors but this is contradictory as Commodus was a joint ruler with his father Marcus Aurelia . While ancient historian Did Cassias refers to Commodus as a greater curse to the Romans" the production team have excluded facts such as his self-portrayal as Hercules , his left handedness and the " conspicuous growth on his groin " as these weren't necessary to the plot line and catered to the needs of the actors.

This sense of recognition is further seen In how the film Gladiator portrays ancient Rome to be a grand city full of white buildings. The Coliseum was recreated as Riddle Scott felt that the real Coliseum was " too small" so Instead the CGI team created a grand " Rome of the Imagination" with a much larger coliseum ND fully white buildings as such to relate with the

modern perception of this many colored building but today modern society can only view these structure without the color and in less grandeur.

Gladiator's historical inaccuracies are further seen in its depiction of gladiatorial games as they aim to heighten the action within the film. The central character of Maximum is not a historical figure but is merely a personification of the traits that create a gladiator. Russet's Crow's depiction off brave, fearless, skilled gladiator mirror many historical sources such s 'Valerian Maximum' who references the bravery skill and passion that are common among the great gladiators. These characteristics are cited by Cicero who describes the gladiators to be incredible well disciplined.

Although they have avoided they have used historical figures as stimulus for the central character and as part of the story line. There was indeed a General Maximum who was an advisor to Marcus Aurelia's , and Commodus was killed by a gladiator named Narcissus . These however are two different people but their storyline have been merged to increase the excitement of he games which is further seen where Maximum a Protractor gladiator fights multiple different gladiators and animals.

This contrasts to ancient gladiatorial games where he would have only been able to fight another Protractor rather than the Retailers (gladiators fighting with nets), Estuaries (gladiators on chariots) and Tigris . The warping of facts can further been seen in the death of Commodus in the arena. Although Commodus did fight in the arena , he always fought as a Sector and therefore Maximum should have faced him as a Retailers but instead both

men ought as no particular gladiator type. This battle did not result in his death but rather Commodus was strangled in his home .

While the death rate in the film is over 50% Professor David Potter believes the death rate to be 5-10% as too much time and money had been invested into them. Therefore gladiatorial games were to first blood . All of these inaccuracies are created to increase the entertainment value and appeal to a 21st century audience. In the film industry and especially to a 21st century audience the inaccuracies of these films become irrelevant because they increase the entertainment value of the film. The problem however is when these films are described as being historically accurate.

Historical films are unreliable for a historian studying the time period but are still useful for discerning the 21st century western perception of Roman society. Gladiator is guilty of false advertising as Peter Russell, art director, states that the film is " based factually on the events of the time" . Though we can assume this is merely a marketing ploy as the majority of society is uneducated . As one review of the film dutifully states " there was no alternative odder audiences would have accepted or recognized" and this is true for many of the inaccuracies within the film.

Oliver Reed Justifies these inaccuracies when he states " we are not making a documentary' and anyway if they were to make a historically accurate film it would be too long. Jean Shaw further states that films " need to appeal to their audience by having an exciting plot, a lot of drama " in order to become successful. As George Lucas was quoted " the secret to film is that it's an

illusion" and this illusion allows millions all over the world to and gain an insight into past civilization.

In our modern 21st century society today, historical films are merely an individual's recreation of a culture. They have incredible value to the entertainment industry in providing stimulus for films, however the creation of these the goal of film. The film *Gladiator* clearly shows how the reliability of a film's portrayal of culture and in these particular case gladiatorial games is warped based on the decisions of the production team. Historical information is better suited to historians and let's leave film makers to cater for the rest of society.