

De Rebus Gladiatoriis

The two authors are members of the Milan based Istituto Ars Dimicandi which is dedicated to experimental archaeology. For quite some time they have reconstructed the armature of gladiators, testing them in gladiatorial combat and demonstrating them at various Roman festivals all over Europe. In 2002 Dario Battaglia published his first book on gladiators entitled *Retiarius vs. Secutor*. In the present volume Battaglia is responsible for the text while Ventura did the bibliographical research.

The book is divided into an introduction and three parts as well as an appendix consisting of three chapters.

The introduction immediately goes into a lot of detail. It does not only list the main sources for gladiatorial matters – iconography, literature, inscriptions and archaeological finds – it provides an in-depth analysis of the finds of gladiator bones from Ephesos. There follows a discussion of the deductions by the team of Austrian archaeologists who excavated examined these bones. Among the extensive analysis of the Ephesos finds is also the unique four-pronged weapon.

The first part covers the origins of the *gladiatura*. In contrary to most scholars who focus mainly on the Campano-Lucanian and Etruscan origins and touch armed duels in the Greek world only briefly, Battaglia sheds more light on the different types of Greek *agons* and their influence on the Greek parts of the Italian peninsula. The Campano-Lucanian cities were especially influenced by the Greeks, while the Etruscans got some ideas from the Celts. Battaglia in fact, sees the origins of the *gladiatura* not in funeral games, but in armed contests of free citizens.

The second part forms the bulk of the book, and deals with the various gladiator types. To each is dedicated a single chapter. It starts with the oldest types: the *samnis* and *gallus*. Battaglia refers to many depictions of frescoes and mosaics which presumably show these types of gladiators. These categories are neglected by most scholars due to their supposed lack of evidence. Battaglia maintains the classical typology and, though well aware of Junkelmann's theories, has decided to ignore the latter's revised range of gladiators. The reader gets an extensive explanation why this is done, however. Battaglia's subcategories sometimes seem too far 'stretched' and complicated. Did the Romans really make such a detailed distinction? For example, is it reasonable to subdivide the *thraex* into *thraex A* and *B*? And for the *mur-millo* even three subdivisions are given. In contrary to most other authors Battaglia also takes the time to explain the sources of the minor categories such as *cruppelarius*, *arbelas/scissor*, *dimachaerus*, etc.

The third part is dedicated to the weapons and armor of the various gladiator types. Battaglia lists, for example, shield types used by the Greeks which came into use by the 'pre-gladiators.' He also includes Greek helmets in the typology of helmets, but classifies them more after shape than origin.

The fourth part consists of three appendices. The first deals with hand gestures and of course explains what the

pollex versus may have looked like by referring to Ancient iconography where this special gesture is seen. He also analyses other gestures, such as that of the umpires seen on Ancient depictions on frescoes, mosaics, reliefs, etc.

The second appendix deals with the relationship between the army and gladiators. Here again he reaches back to Ancient Greece before he has a look at the military training of Roman youths and finally the usage of gladiators in the Roman army.

Last but not least the book is rounded off with reconstruction drawings of the most common gladiator types. There we find e.g. *provocatores* with a reconstruction of *achilia*, *scutati* and *parmulati*, *retiarii* and *contraretiarii*.

The bibliography has a long list of Ancient sources of inscriptions, Ancient literary sources and a rather shorter list of modern sources. Unfortunately this book lacks a glossary and an index.

Each chapter is prefaced with tables with depictions relevant to this chapter. Battaglia does sometimes refer to certain depictions from other chapters, but because they are numbered they are very easy to find. Ancient iconography from sources such as frescoes, reliefs, mosaics, oil lamps, statuettes, tombstones, etc. are shown as drawings only, made by the authors. This makes it very often much more easy to see what these images show than by just looking at a photo of this item. However, making a drawing of a not always crystal clear image inevitably entails a degree of interpretation. Because of that, it would have been better to have a photo of the actual depiction available as well. The photos of the gladiators of Ars Dimicandi are unfortunately only in black and white. These would have been much better in color.

Another positive point is that all sources are mentioned and, when cited in the original language, a translation is given as well. Inscriptions from the *CIL*, however, are only referred to by their number, and have their contents described. They are never quoted directly.

As this book goes into great detail about the origins, types and equipment of gladiators it is definitely not for those who just want to get an overview about this interesting topic. But for those awaiting an extensive monograph on gladiators, this book should be it. Even if you have read your Junkelmann you cannot get around Battaglia, because this offers a very different view on gladiators.

This review was written for the Italian version, but German and English translations have been promised.



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Author/editor:

Dario Battaglia, Luca Ventura

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Reviewer:

Svenja Grosser