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<b>Title</b>	Occide, verbera, ure! 'Kill him, Flog him, Burn him Alive!' (Seneca Epistles 7); The popularity, extent and duration of Roman Spectacula on Crete
<b>Author(s)</b>	Kelly, Amanda
<b>Publication date</b>	2011-10-08
<b>Conference details</b>	Proceedings of the 10th International Congress of Cretan Studies, Chania, Greece, 1-8 October 2006
<b>Publisher</b>	Philological Association 'Chrysostomos'
<b>Link to online version</b>	<a href="http://www.historical-museum.gr/eng/ekim/view/sunedria">http://www.historical-museum.gr/eng/ekim/view/sunedria</a>
<b>Item record/more information</b>	<a href="http://hdl.handle.net/10197/8111">http://hdl.handle.net/10197/8111</a>

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**ΠΕΤΡΑΓΜΕΝΑ**  
**Ι' ΔΙΕΘΝΟΥΣ ΚΡΗΤΟΛΟΓΙΚΟΥ ΣΥΝΕΔΡΙΟΥ**

**(ΧΑΝΙΑ, 1-8 ΟΚΤΩΒΡΙΟΥ 2006)**



ΤΟΜΟΣ Α5

ΙΣΤΟΡΙΚΟΙ ΧΡΟΝΟΙ

ΙΣΤΟΡΙΑ – ΘΕΣΜΟΙ – ΚΟΙΝΩΝΙΑ –  
ΕΠΙΓΡΑΦΙΚΗ – ΚΕΡΑΜΙΚΗ – ΤΕΧΝΟ-  
ΛΟΓΙΑ – ΠΛΑΣΤΙΚΗ – ΕΙΚΟΝΟΓΡΑΦΙΑ  
– ΘΡΗΣΚΕΙΑ – ΜΥΘΟΛΟΓΙΑ – ΛΑΤΡΕΙΑ

—ΑΝΑΤΥΠΟ—



ΦΙΛΟΛΟΓΙΚΟΣ ΣΥΛΛΟΓΟΣ «Ο ΧΡΥΣΟΣΤΟΜΟΣ»

ΧΑΝΙΑ 2011

Επιμέλεια τόμου:

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Πολιτισμού και Τουρισμού (*www.culture.gr/*)

Την ευθύνη της έκδοσης έχει το Δ.Σ. του «Χρυσοστόμου»:

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ISBN (vol.) : 978-960-9558-07-5

ISBN (set) : 978-960-8648-02-9



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ΕΤΟΣ ΙΔΡΥΣΕΩΣ 1899

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“Occide, verbera, ure!” (Kill him, Flog him,  
Burn him Alive! – Seneca *Epistles* 7); The popularity,  
extent and duration of Roman *Spectacula* on Crete\*\*

Purpose-built amphitheatres, as an architectural type, have always been instantly recognisable as Roman. The amphitheatre represents an exclusively Roman architectural medium, serving as a vehicle for reinforcing Roman social order throughout provincial contexts and thereby affecting cultural transition. Welsh states that “*true amphitheatres ... [were] rare in the Greek world throughout the imperial period, being built only in cities with the strongest Roman connections, such as Roman colonies and provincial capitals*” (1998: 569).

Wealthy capital cities, such as Antioch, incorporated purpose-built structures, while the colony at Corinth, and the potentially honorary colony at Caesarea Maritima,<sup>1</sup> not only boasted true amphitheatres (as coined by Welch), but were also home to adapted venues: an adapted theatre exists at Corinth and an adapted hippodrome at

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\*\* I thank Professor Kathleen Coleman (Department of the Classics, Harvard University) for reading a very early draft of this paper and for the various suggestions she made to me in pursuing this topic. Any subsequent errors are naturally mine alone. I am also indebted to Dr. S. Apostolakou of the ΚΑ' Eforeia (Aghios Nikolaos) for allowing me to include the photograph of the gladiatorial *stèle*, originally published in Papadakis, 1998, fig. 515.

1 Isaac presents a convincing argument for its honorary status under Vespasian (1998: 97-98)

Caesarea. The civic infrastructure of other flourishing centres, such as Nikopolis, Laodicea and Aphrodisias, all included an unusual type of Roman stadium (τὸ στάδιον ἀμφιθέατρον), designed specifically to host *spectacula* (Welch 1998: 563). In its design specifications, this structural type, although akin to a Greek stadium, also embodies the architectural prerequisites for gladiatorial display, resulting in a blueprint representative of a multi-purpose facility, catering for both Greek athletic contests and Roman gladiatorial display.<sup>2</sup> In light of these monumental constructions, it seems only fitting that Gortyna, the capital of the joint province of Crete and Cyrenaica, also receive all the trappings of a vibrant Roman centre.

While the presence of a true amphitheatre projects a civic interest in gladiatorial display, their absence does not signify a corresponding apathy. Indeed, the construction of an amphitheatre was not simply a prerequisite for hosting *spectacula*, as the games could be performed in a variety of improvised settings (Humphrey 1986: 524). It is often argued that amphitheatres were not common in the Roman East by virtue of the fact that Greek theatres, circuses/hippodromes and *stadia* could be, and were, adapted to stage the shows throughout the East. Even relatively wealthy centres, such as Ephesus and Perge, were devoid of true amphitheatres and sufficed with adapted structures (Dodge 1999: 234).

If the relative lack of true amphitheatres in the Greek East does not reflect an absence of display, the physical presence of a true amphitheatre, in regions where they were not regularly encountered, would have had a profound effect on the civic population; an impact which would have permeated through the city's extended regional networks. While the Athenians adapted the theatre of Dionysos, a true amphitheatre was still deemed a necessary luxury for the urban profile at Gortyna, despite the fact that the cityscape already included

2 It is interesting, with regard to this architectural hybrid, that the victories of the boxer Polo (as the abbreviation *puk* would indicate), recorded in full in an inscription from Gortyna, include victories at Laodicea and Aphrodisias, with an additional win at Tralles, three more at Ephesus and four at Gortyna (*ICret* IV 375).

a stadium and three large theatres, all of which could have been converted to host *spectacula*.<sup>3</sup> The fact that both a large theatre and an amphitheatre were incorporated into a major urban extension to the south and east of the city centre indicates a strong civic desire for the purpose-built structure and the displays therein, a demand which is effectively borne out by the epigraphic record.

### The amphitheatre at Gortyna

The discovery of a freestanding amphitheatre in the village of Aghioi Deka at Gortyna, roughly 600m east of the *praetorium*, firmly establishes Gortyna within the Roman world of show business. The street plan of the village reveals the extent of the amphitheatre while associated architectural foundations confirm an external perimeter measuring 120m x 91m (Di Vita 2000: xlv, fig. 22). These dimensions indicate a considerable structure, capable of seating approximately 18,000 spectators (Di Vita 2004: 470), demonstrating a comparable capacity to the amphitheatre at Leptis Magna in Tripolitania (Di Vita *et al.* 1999: 83).

The amphitheatre at Gortyna constitutes the only example which has been located with any degree of certainty on the island (Di Vita 1986-7: 327-47; 2000: xlv, fig. 22). Consequently, its construction may reflect the focus of an island-wide demand for gladiatorial shows. Its unique position on the island boldly advertises the unparalleled wealth of the centre (within Crete), thereby reflecting Gortyna's status in Roman Crete and beyond.

### Epigraphy relating to Roman *Spectacula* on Crete

Sanders claimed that the largest group of civic inscriptions on Crete related specifically to the games; however, his estimates were somewhat inflated as he did not differentiate between the Roman adoption of the Greek athletic contests and gladiatorial games and

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3 For the adapted Theatre of Dionysos, see Welch 1999. Research by Lippolis illustrates that netting was erected in the stadium at Gortyna, suggesting that *venationes* were performed in this structure (2004: 576 and figs 11-12).

*ventiones*.<sup>4</sup> Nonetheless, his statement, that “*apart from statue dedications, the largest group of civic inscriptions concerns the games*”, attests an intense interest in competitive physical display (Sanders 1982: 15).

As we might expect, at Gortyna there is clear evidence relating to the individuals who animated the institution. Epigraphic evidence found at Aghios Titos presents us with a public and permanent display of *munificentia*, its corresponding recognition and civic appreciation. Flavius Volumnius Sabinus, who held office for two years in Gortyna, put on special imperial games, of unprecedented length, in the form of a theatrical hunt, a *venatio*, in the middle of the 3<sup>rd</sup> century (Di Vita 2004: 470; *ICret* IV 305).<sup>5</sup> This transitory display was immortalised through the honorary public inscription, thus bolstering Volumnius’ high status (as *Archiereus*, or high priest, of the provincial council). *Spectacula* by nature were ephemeral, in contrast to both public inscriptions and private decoration; media which captured the moment, effectively creating a freeze-frame whereby the sponsor could be perpetually acknowledged.

Our best evidence regarding the popularity of the games on Crete is not derived from honorary tributes to the living, rather, it is gleaned from the funerary inscriptions of the participating combatants. A funerary inscription referring to Gaius, a gladiator from the Troad, was discovered at Aghioi Deka (*ICret* IV 374; Halbherr 1897: 236). The inscription was dedicated by a certain Ammias commemorating the gladiator who died, apparently by sudden or accidental

4 For athletic contests see *ICret* IV 373, 375 and *IG* XII i 77.

5 An escalating cycle (of increasing audience expectation and responding extravagance of display) developed, whereby sponsors attempted to surpass their predecessors. Comparatives, superlatives and unparalleled expense are characteristic of many honorary inscriptions relating to the games. Consequently, Sanders notes that Volumnius’ games were of such a scale that they required “special imperial permission” (1982: 15). Certainly, overspending on gladiators seems to be the main criticism of the games among Roman writers. Dio criticised Commodus for spending all of the money that he extorted from the senators on wild beasts and gladiators (Dio 73.16.3).

death, having defeated his adversary (Halbherr 1897: 236-38).<sup>6</sup> The inscription boasts that the gladiator was not subdued by a mere mortal but was overthrown by a destructive Fate (*ICret* IV 374; Halbherr 1897: 237-38, no. 40); thus preserving the defeated (and deceased) combatant's *virtus* — a formula which is attested throughout the Roman world.<sup>7</sup> The use of the term *deceptus* was commonly used to convey the nature of undeserved, and perhaps unexpected, defeats (Potter 1999: 315).



Fig. 1 : *Gladiatorial grave stele from Hierapytna (originally published in Papadakis 1998: 81, fig. 515)*

Somewhat surprisingly, it is the Cretan city of Hierapytna which yields a particularly well-executed funerary *stele* depicting gladiatorial imagery (figure 1). Funerary memorials illustrating gladiators operated within the confines of Roman convention and, as such, conveyed information relevant to the social position occupied by those commemorated. Chaniotis has observed that the epitaphs of Roman Crete apply the standard funer-

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6 Halbherr discovered this *stele* reused as building material in the village of Ambuluso, to the west of the acropolis of Gortyna; however, he believed that it was originally discovered on the acropolis (1897: 236-38). The inscription informs us that a destructive Fate placed the gladiator at the feet of his opponent, but only after he had physically overpowered his human opponent. The *demas* in line 10 should be understood as the accusative of specification connected with *damentos* i.e. “vanquished, in respect to his body, by me”. Halbherr believed that the gladiatorial bout took place in the circus but does not explain his reasons for such a context (1897: 237); that his publication predated the discovery of the amphitheatre at Gortyna by almost a century is relevant in this regard.

7 A similar inscription from Stobrec in Dalmatia refers to Amabilis, secutor, of Dacian extraction, fought 13 times, and cheated by fate not by man. [Amabili secutori / nat(iones) Dacus, pug(narum) XIII, fato deceptus/ non ab homine (*ILS* 5111).] Potter seems to interpret the stock phrase, referring to a *daemon* killing an opponent, as a loss of control in a combatant (1999: 315).



ary formulae as the rest of the Greek world (2004: 84). From the present evidence, it would seem that gladiatorial *stelai* are no exception as the text on the Hierapytnian *stele*, albeit brief, falls into a familiar Roman formula.

ΒΙΤΩΝ ΜΑΡΓΑΡΕΙΘΗ  
ΜΝΕΙΑΣ ΧΑΡΙΝ

The term *μνείας χάριν* is commonly seen in funerary inscriptions throughout the Eastern Empire (e.g. *SEG* 2000, no. 579-582, 639; *SEG* 2002, no. 1260; Nachmittag 2002: 76-77, Ephesos Museum 116/42/93). The name *Margarites* is a common gladiatorial stage name and gladiatorial names often include other gemstones, such as *Ametystus* and *Beryllus*.

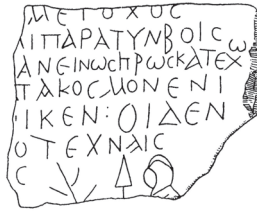
The Hierapytnian *stele* was originally published by Papadakis in 1998, and, while the image was accurately described, its broader implications were never addressed (1998: 81, fig. 515). All of the imagery on the Hierapytnian *stele* is distinctly Roman. The gladiator depicted on the Hierapytnian example is either a *murmillo* or a *secutor*, the two being distinguished by their helmets alone. Both the *secutor* and *murmillo* fought with their torso bare, a *manica* (arm-guard) on their right arm and a single gaiter. The shield was a tall curved section of a cylinder, similar to the contemporary army infantry *scuta*, and the offensive weapon was a short-medium length sword with a broad blade — a *gladius*.

Both a wreath and possibly a crown are depicted in the lower corners of the *stele*. The two motifs were symbols easily recognizable to the illiterate and were incorporated into the common repertoire depicted on grave *stelai* in the Eastern Empire (Hope 2000: 105). The palm on the Hierapytna relief is particularly schematic and, as the palm-fronds are incised rather than depicted in relief, the outline is clumsily emphasized, at the expense of the sideways bars for the leaves. Originally the standard prize was a palm leaf and, if the victor was particularly valiant, a gladiator might also receive a crown; however, a process of prize inflation resulted in a combined prize, of both palm and crown, becoming customary by the end of the 1<sup>st</sup> century AD.

The inclusion of household pets on sepulchral monuments, as illustrated on the Hierapytna *stele*, is also a common Roman feature (figure 1). A small dog is depicted on another gladiatorial tombstone from Ephesus and on a variety of tombstones throughout the Roman world (Nachmittag 2002: 76-77, Ephesos Museum 116/42/93). In Petronius' *Satyricon*, Trimalchio, the master of kitsch and bad taste, describes the funerary monument that he is designing for himself — the sculptural ensemble includes a statue of himself accompanied by his little dog at his feet (*Satyricon* 71). It is only in the accompanying design that Trimalchio departs from regular Roman convention, whereby he insists that all of the matches of the gladiator Petraitres are represented too. The jibe here is that images like these were to remind the viewer of the individual's munificence in sponsoring the games but Trimalchio merely likes the games — he does not sponsor them — and, consequently, makes a serious social *faux-pas* in depicting them on his tomb.

Unlike the inscriptions from Aghioi Deka, the Hierapytna *stele* relies more on imagery than text to convey the gladiator's prowess. The *stele*, through its reliance on visual image, dispenses with the need for mass literacy and a common tongue. As such, these physical objects can thereby stand as symbols, representing both the individual and the group as a whole. Such sculptural reliefs and imagery reaches the mob, the fans and, perhaps more significantly, fellow gladiators and, as such, are far more communicable than text alone.

A second inscription from Hierapytna has also received little attention, despite its intriguing accompanying imagery (figure 2). Mariani, who first published the inscription in 1895, informs us that the inscription was found in the city's necropolis (1895: 320). The text is, very loosely, in verse and is clearly sepulchral, but unfortunately does not refer to a gladiator explicitly; it is possible that the use of the term “hero” suggests the relative elevated status of the individual in question, but it is also commonly encountered in funerary texts relating to a variety of professions and there is no absolute surety that this is a gladiatorial tribute.



- 
- μέτοχος
  - ]αι παρά τύνβοις
  - ]ανειν ὡς ἥρωϊς κατέχω
  - κα]τά κόσμον ενι.
  - 5 -- ]ικεν : οἶδεν
  - ]ο τέχνας.
  - ]ς.

Fig. 2 : *Inscription from Hierapytna*  
(published in Guarducci ICret III 51)

vision. A rounded streamlined effect, marginally offset by a low fin-like crest, lends the helmet the appearance of a fish-head, suiting the role of the customary opposing gladiator — the *retiarius*, a fisherman with a net and trident (Junkelman 2000: 40, fig. 22). This humorous Roman parody, veils a practical consideration, as the helmet was specifically designed to deflect attack from the weaponry of the opponent.

Robert's initial identification of the accompanying image on the Hierapytnian inscription prompted his claim that “*on connaît un amphithéâtre de petites dimensions à Hiérapytna*” (Robert 1946: 116). While Robert does not cite his source, it is conceivable that he is referring to Onorius Belli who reported an amphitheatre, and two separate theatres, among a host of structures at Hierapytna in 1595 (cited in Falkener 1854: 11). It is likely that Belli's reportage also led Spratt to depict an amphitheatre on his map of the region published in 1865.<sup>8</sup> Indeed, Belli's enthusiasm for amphitheatre-spotting

8 An amphitheatre is visible on the British Admiralty Map included in Spratt's *Travels and Researches in Crete* published in 1865 (executed in 1852).

Despite reservations by Mariani, in 1895, and a veritable silence by Guarducci, in her publication of 1942 (ICret III 51), the image accompanying the text is relevant to this discussion. In 1946 Louis Robert stated that the depiction represents a gladiator accompanied by the upper part of a palm leaf (1946: 116). The individual's helmet is distinctive and is immediately recognisable as that of a *secutor*.

The helmet of the *secutor* enclosed the head completely, incorporating small eyeholes which only permitted restricted

in Crete sparked a plethora of subsequent citings, only one of which, that at Gortyna, has since come to light in the field.<sup>9</sup>

In Robert’s defence, beyond Crete there does seem to be a correlation between gladiatorial funerary monuments and proximity to the performance venue. At Salona a group of funerary urns inscribed with gladiatorial epitaphs was discovered to the west of the amphitheatre (Hope 2000: 99) while at Ephesus the cemetery, with its multitude of gladiatorial *stelai*, was located close to the converted stadium and connected to it by a tunnel (Nachmittag 2002: 65).

In the case of Hierapytna, it suffices to say that such funerary monuments are indicative of an active island-wide interest in the Roman games, rather than reify the existence of an amphitheatre in this specific locale. The fans here could always travel to Gortyna to view such spectacles, as was the case in Campania, where the citizens of Nuceria, a city which did not have its own amphitheatre, frequently travelled to Pompeii to participate in inter city games (Moeller 1970: 84-95; Benefiel 2004: 363).

The strict hierarchical structure within Roman society was reflected within the amphitheatre; both amongst the audience (through its rigidly designated seating areas) and amongst the participants, as attested by the treatment they received in death. The bodies of criminals (*trinci* and *noxii*) executed in the amphi-

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9 Belli cited amphitheatres at Gortyna, Hierapytna, Chersonisos and Kasteli Kissamou (cited in Falkener 1854: 11, 16 and 26); however, a detailed study of Belli’s plans would perhaps lend more to our knowledge of his familiarity with the Imperial monuments of Rome and the 16<sup>th</sup>-century architectural schools of Venice, than reflect the actual ancient architectural structures of Crete. Regardless, amphitheatres on Crete are still cited in subsequent publications with scanty architectural justification (at Hierapytna: Spanakis 1968: pls Λ’ 1 and 2; Knossos: Evans 1928: plan opp. 547 and Sanders 1982: 152-53, fig. 56; Kasteli Kissamou: Pologiorgi 1985: 70, fig 2, no. 23). The discovery of an inscription referring to *ludi* held at Knossos may allude to the use of an adapted structure (*ICret* I 51). Ambiguity between theatres and amphitheatres, in both their terminology and architectural format (especially when the remains are partial or lie unexcavated in the field), has undoubtedly contributed to the perseverance of amphitheatrical citings throughout the archaeological record of Crete, and indeed, throughout the Roman East.

theatre continued to be punished and defiled after death by exclusion from formal burial rites. In contrast, a steady rise in gladiatorial status can be traced through the epigraphic record. An early inscription from Sassina, recording the provision of a public burial ground (by one Horatius Balbus) which assimilates gladiators, even if they are free, to prostitutes and to those who committed suicide (through hanging) (*CIL* XI, n. 6528). In this inscription gladiators are essentially equated with those in Roman society whose deaths are deemed dishonourable, and, consequently, they are excluded from any burial rites (*ILS* 7846 – *Extra au[ct]orateis et quei sibi [la]queo manu attulissent et quei quaestum spurcum professi essent*). By the 1<sup>st</sup> and 2<sup>nd</sup> centuries AD an even distribution of gladiatorial epitaphs is attested in the corpus of inscriptions published in *Epigrafia anfiteatrale dell'occidente romano* (Hope 2000: 96), while at Ephesus a gladiatorial cemetery was located about 200m from the stadium where some 120 individuals are cited on *stelai*, which date mostly to the 3<sup>rd</sup> century AD (Nachmittag 2002: 6-7, 75-88).

Despite recent findings, gladiatorial tombstones are still relatively rare and the fact that one example exists on Crete is highly relevant. Prior to the discoveries at Ephesus, five examples recorded at Brixia and four from Verona were considered the largest groups of gladiatorial grave *stelai* outside of Rome (Hope 2000: 95-96). Many graves of the Roman era would have remained unmarked or received less durable indicators of wood or pottery. Indeed, the purchase and the erection of a stone funerary monument would have constituted a considerable investment and gladiators who received this distinctive burial treatment seem to be in the minority, highlighting the significance of their discovery at Hierapytna.

Moreover, the existence of these sepulchral monuments exposes a formal and organised burial procedure which suggests the existence of *collegia* within gladiatorial troops, who arranged, and possibly even funded, such memorials (Kyle 1998: 161). In the broader Empire the ivy leaf (*hederal/hederi*) is a common symbol on gladiatorial grave *stelai* and, in other contexts, can symbolise a *collegium*

or *sodalitas*.<sup>10</sup> Indeed, there are numerous examples of Roman *stelae* being erected by fellow gladiators, or wives of gladiators elsewhere in the Empire (*ILS* 5104, *ILS* 5089: Rome; *ILS* 5113: Sicily; *ILS* 5123: Trieste).

### Portable paraphernalia

Beyond honorary inscriptions and funerary reliefs, more portable objects may also convey the popularity of the games, although admittedly, their ubiquity serves to undermine an indisputable correlation.<sup>11</sup> Cretan lamps bearing gladiatorial motifs flooded the market and have been found at a host of sites including Gortyna, Knossos, Herakleion, Lendas, Eleutherna, Kommos and Psychro, while Sapouna's studies reveal that they represent an impressive 10% of the corpus of lamps from the Idaean Cave (Catling – Catling 1992: 282-3, L341-L353, pl. 238, 341, 347, 348, 350; Sapouna 1998: 159; for Kommos see Hayes 2000: 327, plate 4.75, no. 60; Baldini – Parello 2001: 120, 139, no. 224, no. 407, fig. 101; for Eleutherna see Yangaki 2005: 229, pl xxvi, no. 5, n. 742).

While the motifs could be mass-produced, lamp-makers took pains to show gladiatorial equipment in such detail that the category of the fighters could immediately be identified; an example found at Kommos depicts a *hoplomachus*, identified by his round shield (Hayes 2000: 327, plate 4.75, no. 60).<sup>12</sup> The fact that the gladi-

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10 Two late 1<sup>st</sup> century BC inscriptions deal with a *collegium* of Priapus at Gortyna (*ICret* IV 266-7) while an example of AD 125 from Hierapytna gives the Council's permission for a certain Ago, a woman, to found a *sodalitas* or dining club (*ICret* III iii 7)

11 Perlzweig sees a direct correlation between gladiatorial motifs on lamps and interest in the games as he posited that, judging from the lamps, interest in gladiators in Athens was slight compared to that in Corinth (Perlzweig 1961: 123). While the correlation is somewhat simplistic, it is still interesting that this apparent disparity in the demand for the games, seems also to be reflected in the architectural profile of the two cities, whereby Corinth boasts an amphitheatre, while Athens hosted shows in a converted theatre.

12 The figures on a gladiatorial lamp from Eleutherna are in fact *secutores* and are clearly recognisable by their distinctive curved cylinder shield type and *manica*.

atorial types were instantly recognisable suggests that these lamps represented the essential accoutrement of a true fan. They may be designed specifically to appeal to the supporters of particular gladiatorial types, thereby attracting a highly lucrative market. Nonetheless, if detail was depicted, often no sense of real movement was achieved as is illustrated in Petronius' *Satyrica* when a patron was criticised for his *munera* with one observer noting “as for the horsemen killed, he got them off a lamp — they ran round like roosters in a backyard” (Petronius *Satyrica* 45.4-13).

### The demise of Roman *spectacula* on Crete

The amphitheatre provided the stage where displays of *talio*, *euergetism*, *munificentia* and *liberalitas* were played out in front of as large an audience as possible, thereby securing and consolidating a rigid Roman social hierarchy.<sup>13</sup> Consequently, the presence of an amphitheatre at Gortyna reflects the Cretan development of a thoroughly Roman social structure.

The concept of *talio* meant that criminals received a form of reciprocal punishment, in that the punishment fit the crime; however, despite such seeming reciprocity, punishment was not equal for all members of Roman society and much weight was placed on the individual's status. An especially cruel punishment was not normally executed on Roman citizens, while spectacular forms of retribution were reserved for *noxii* who were regarded as common criminals (Kyle 1998: 95, 268-71; Potter 1993: 69).

At Gortyna the basilica dedicated to the Ten Saints was built directly over the centre of the amphitheatre's arena, whereby the floor

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Yangaki observes that the lamp is made from a much-used mould and she compares it with Italian lamps of the 2<sup>nd</sup> and 3<sup>rd</sup> centuries AD which would correspond with the dates supplied by gladiatorial grave *stelai* throughout the Eastern Empire (2005: 229, pl xxvi, no. 5, n. 742).

13 The presence of an amphitheatre in any Roman centre was not simply a prerequisite for exclusively hosting *spectacula*, but served a host of functions (doubling as contexts for religious festivals and military training grounds). Statius' *Silvae* commemorates a public banquet, held in the Colosseum, celebrating the Saturnalia in AD 96 (*Silvae* 1.6).

level in the central nave of the church is 1.36m lower than that of the surrounding area. This drop in elevation purposefully implies that the interior of the church constitutes the original ground on which the Ten Saints were martyred under Decius c. AD 250. It is important to recognise that these executions constituted a form of display in and of themselves, serving primarily as a Roman method of maintaining social order through the very public exhibit of reciprocal punishment — a visual expression of the Roman concept of *talio*. The amphitheatral setting for such punishments was paramount, as the strict seating order within the *cavea* reinforced the social divisions within society at large, while the mass audience was witness to the consequences of unacceptable behaviour, a display which served as a tried and tested Roman method to quash revolution.

Vismara and Gregori include martyrs in their chapter on gladiators, as while they do not constitute gladiators *per se*, they became a significant aspect of Roman public display (2001). Punishments were usually shown during the interlude and formed an integral part of the day's show. The public execution of the Ten Saints in the amphitheatre in Gortyna would have sent a resounding message throughout the entire Cretan population and an Episcopal letter of AD 458 indicates that the martyrs represented every region of the island (Schwartz 1936: 96-97, epist. 48; Detorakis 1994: 107-8). These persecutions, not only point to the growth of Christianity in Crete, but also illustrate the persistence of public Roman display in an amphitheatral setting.

With the advent of official Christianity, gladiatorial shows were banned in AD 326 (Jones 1964: 977), and chariot races took centre stage, emphasising the importance of the circus over the amphitheatre within the civic architectural layout (*ICret* IV 513; Di Vita *et al.* 1984: 99, 100, fig. 82, plan opposite 73). An unknown author, of a mid 4<sup>th</sup>-century AD work, *Expositio Totius Mundi et Gentium*, mentions circuses and the delights of circus games at Gortyna, among a host of other cities (Humphrey 1986: 441-42, fig. 205). Admittedly, it seems that the author had not witnessed the races at Gortyna first hand



but uses *dicunt* ‘they say’ which perhaps implies that they are much talked about (Humphrey 1986: 444).<sup>14</sup>

Wharton notes that parallel to the conversion of the populace of the city is the conversion of the city’s space (1995: 102). The incorporation of the amphitheatre at Gortyna into the Church of Aghioi Deká secured its prolonged obscurity for centuries. This architectural eclipsing of the amphitheatre announced unequivocally that the Roman tradition was gone forever, signifying the perpetual and public dominion of Christianity. At Gortyna, marble columns from the amphitheatre deployed as columns marking the nave of the succeeding basilica, represent a public display of *spolia* signifying a transfer of power and ideology, rather than simply constituting a pragmatic reuse of stone. The transformation was so thorough that this integral aspect of Roman life, which once held the Cretan populace firmly in its grip, only survived as the fragmented and decontextualised *spolia* pertaining to a long-forgotten social construct.



#### ABBREVIATIONS

- AAA : *Ἀρχαιολογικὰ Ἀνάλεκτα ἐξ Ἀθηνῶν*  
 CIL : *Corpus Inscriptionum Latinarum*  
 ICret : M. Guarducci, *Inscriptiones Creticae* I-IV, Roma 1935-50.  
 IG : *Inscriptiones Graecae*  
 ILS : *Inscriptiones Latinae Selectae*  
 SEG : *Supplementum Epigraphicum Graecum*

<sup>14</sup> Alternatively, such intently vague language may imply that he does not stand by the statement; a strategy common to many ancient texts.

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