

Gladiators in the House: A Phenomenological Approach to Gladiatorial Imagery in the Roman Dining Room

In Petronius' *Satyricon* we find that Trimalchio has incorporated representations of gladiators into his home: paintings of the gladiatorial games sponsored by Laenas decorating a portico (29); heavy silver cups depicting the fights of Hermeros and Petraitēs (52); a slave, Carpus, is described as a *scissor*, a known type of gladiator; and another slave has purchased the gladiatorial kit for a *thrax* (75). Furthermore, Trimalchio describes in detail the decoration of his tomb which will include all the fights of the gladiator Petraitēs (71). This scene represents the dichotomous appropriation of gladiatorial imagery in the Roman world. On the one hand Trimalchio is the gladiator fanatic “basking in the reflected glory” of victorious gladiators (Fagan (2011)), and on the other he is playing at being an *editor* of his own games, represented in the text by the highly choreographed nature of his dinner party and his planned funeral monument.

This paper proposes that the Trimalchio's dinner party further demonstrates a common appropriation of gladiatorial imagery in the context of domestic dining for the purposes of expressing personal prestige. Furthermore, it is argued that the distribution and use of certain artifact types, especially mosaics and drinking cups, depicting scenes of gladiators engaged in combat, when examined through a phenomenological approach, effectively move the amphitheater into the dining room layering the agonistic discourse of the arena on to the performance of power by the host. Such artifacts frequently emphasize the combat between gladiators allowing the viewers to engage with them as if they were spectators in the arena, and the host who has organized the dinner becomes also the *editor* of the games. While earlier

Roman narratives juxtaposing gladiatorial combat and dining are represented as arrogant and extravagant (e.g. gladiatorial combats staged at Campanian banquets ca. late 4th century B.C.E., Livy 9.40.17 and Strabo 5.4.13), by the first century C.E. it had become acceptable to include at least images of gladiators in the context of the dining room. In particular, gladiatorial scenes appeared on floor mosaics, and ceramic and glass drinking cups. These media were particularly associated with dining spaces and rituals, and they were fundamentally interactive, encouraging the participants to engage with them (Dunbabin (1999) on mosaics and Cassibry (2018) on glass cups). Furthermore, it has been suggested that some portable objects depicting gladiators, such as cups and lamps, may have been sold as souvenirs at gladiatorial games (Künzl and Koepfel (2002)), in which case they would have served as direct link between arena and dining room. Thus the distribution and use of these artifact types, depicting scenes of gladiators engaged in combat, effectively move the amphitheater into the dining room layering the agonistic discourse of the arena on to the performance of power by the host.

Bibliography

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