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Recent decades have witnessed a strong scholarly and popular interest in the gladiatorial contests and animal fights of republican and imperial Rome, with emphasis on their political, social and cultural functions in the Roman Empire. In particular, regional analyses of the epigraphic material have increased our present knowledge of the so-called spectacles of death in both the western and the eastern part of the empire. To mention only two important recent publications that have improved our understanding of the gladiatorial combats and their performers: the multi-authored *Epigrafia anfiteatrale dell’Occidente Romano* (1988-2011) now includes eight volumes, including Spain and the northwestern provinces, while Christian Mann’s “Um keinen Kranz, um das Leben kämpfen wir”. *Gladiatoren im Osten des Römischen Reiches und die Frage der Romanisierung* (2011) provides an excellent up-to-date analysis of the popularity and importance of these spectacles in the eastern provinces.

Many reliefs depicting gladiatorial scenes are well known to a broader audience from books on the gladiatorial fights, and it is therefore rather surprising that Flecker’s book is the first systematic analysis of the monuments originating from Italy. The book consists of ten chapters of uneven length, including summaries in German, English and Italian (pp. 167-174), which seems superfluous in a scholarly book. The well-produced volume also has thirteen appendices (pp. 175-183), two very useful catalogues of (1) ninety-one gladiatorial reliefs presented according to provenience or location (pp. 185-282), and (2) forty-two lamps showing different types of gladiators or gladiatorial combats (pp. 283-300), together with two brief indices of personal names and places (pp. 307-309).

The short introductory chapter (pp. 27-29) presents the material that consists of more than seventeen gladiatorial reliefs from the Italian peninsula and Sicily and gives an overview of earlier research on *munera gladiatoria*and amphitheatres. Chapter Two (pp. 31-34) discusses the architectural contexts of the reliefs that are primarily large friezes on funerary monuments in central and southern Italy, but these tombs are in most cases no longer preserved. The armament and equipment of the depicted gladiators is important for the establishment of a relative chronology of the reliefs and is the theme of the next chapter (pp. 35-48). The identification of the different types of gladiators is discussed in Chapter Four (pp. 49-72) as a prelude to the important analysis of the gladiatorial reliefs in the very long chapter entitled *Zu Ikonographie, Bildsprache und Erzählweise der*
Gladiatorenreliefs der späten Republik und frühen Kaiserzeit (pp. 73-152). It is, together with the two catalogues, the nucleus of the book, and will certainly be consulted regularly. Chapter Six (pp. 153-165) discusses the gladiatorial reliefs in their social and historical contexts. This topic is, of course, closely connected with the development of the gladiatorial combats from their modest origin in 264 BCE in honour of a dead senator in Rome to the imperial regulations that transformed them from private offerings and gifts to the dead to annual institutions and obligations of local magistrates in the cities of Roman Italy. The earliest gladiatorial reliefs can be dated to the late second century BCE, but Flecker dates the majority to the Augustan Age. Their number declines in the second part of the first century CE, which the author argues is due to changes in the funerary habits of the local élite (with reference to the work of Henrik Mouritsen[1]), and to the fact that the glory of giving shows diminished after they were regulated by imperial legislation and partly subsidised by public funds. This is a reasonable explanation, but more questionable is Flecker’s identification of the owners of the funerary monuments on the basis of friezes depicting gladiatorial combats. He argues that the games were given by duumviri in the late Republic and the Augustan age, while the providers in the first century CE should primarily be identified with augustales. There are only a few cases where inscriptions record the name of the sponsor. One well-known example is the frieze from the first century CE funerary monument of the freedman and sevir C. Lusius Storax from Teate Marrucinorum, modern Chieti, (Catalogue no. A 27) that seems to support Flecker’s suggestion, as does the unknown tresvir augustalis who sponsored gladiatorial contests in Amiernum in the Abruzzi (Catalogue no. A 6) in the second half of the first century CE. The three other inscriptions show, however, another picture. We do not know anything of the sponsor P. Pollius Celsus in Paternopoli in Campania (Catalogue no. A 51). The statue base from 170 CE in Avella in Campania (Catalogue no. A 8) records an equestrian who organized gladiatorial combats in the city, while the Pompeian N. Festius Ampliatus (Catalogue no. A 56) was the owner of a familia gladiatoria.2

The study originates from a dissertation from Augsburg University defended in 2009, as is still evident in its composition and the apparatus with more than 1,000 footnotes and a bibliography with only a few minor inaccuracies that runs to seventeen pages. The book is a typical example of the strong German tradition of accurate stylistic analysis and chronology. Flecker’s descriptions and discussions of the iconography of the gladiatorial relief are very detailed and aim at establishing a typology and “Bewegungsschema” of the fighting gladiators. He also suggests the first chronological sequences of the gladiatorial reliefs that certainly will be seminal. Flecker argues that most of the reliefs with their detailed and accurate depictions of the gladiators and their equipment show contests that actually took place and were presented by the deceased. The reliefs are thus a further example of the strong competition within the Italian provincial elite, but their chronological and geographical distribution is slightly different from the surviving epigraphic material concerning gladiatorial contests in Italy. Unlike the gladiatorial reliefs, most epitaphs and inscriptions concerning the gladiatorial games come from central and northern Italy in the second century CE.3 With regard to the iconography of second-century reliefs, Flecker observes that the theme of the Italian reliefs was still mostly the capitulation and the final phase of the combat, whereas the motifs of reliefs produced in the eastern part of the empire shifted to include different phases of the combat.

The book is well written and well documented with maps, drawings and many photographs in black and white. The merits of Flecker’s book are obvious: it is a pioneering work, and the analyses and descriptions of the gladiatorial reliefs are
cautiously sound. It is of course always possible to question details or raise new questions not answered in the book that is a strictly iconographical analysis and not another example of the approach of new cultural history to the public spectacles in the Roman society. This would be unfair. It is precisely the traditional approach on style and chronology that makes the book an important contribution to the study of the archaeological remains of gladiatorial contests in Roman Italy.

Notes:

1. H. Mouritsen, “Freedmen and Decurions: Epitaphs and Social History in Imperial Italy”, *JRS* 95 (2005), 38-63; quoted by Flecker p. 164.

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