

Gladiatrix Kit Guide

Meaning of Gladiatrix

A gladiatrix (pl. gladiatrices) was the female counterpart to the male gladiator, an armed fighter who engaged in violent combat with humans or animals for the entertainment of audiences in the arena of the Roman Republic and Roman Empire. Though unusual, gladiatrices are attested in archaeology and literature.

There is no specific Latin word for a female gladiator nor was there a feminine form, *gladiatrix* being a modern construction, first used in a translation of Juvenal in 1802. The closest term to identify the female gladiator is *ludia* (from *ludus*, "stage performer") but even that word tends to refer to the wife or lover of a gladiator.

When Tacitus writes of the "many ladies of distinction" that appeared in the amphitheatre, he uses the word *feminae*, the respectable wives and daughters of Roman citizens. *Mulier* is used by Juvenal to describe the woman who shamelessly shuns her femininity and practices to be gladiator, and by Petronius to describe the *essedarius*. A distinction was made, therefore, between the lady who does not willingly debase herself in entertaining the mob in the arena, and the woman who does. But neither was ever called a gladiator, although both *femina* and *mulier* were used of necessity.

Gladiatrices in History

The first attested appearance of gladiatrices is under Nero, at the games organised by Patrobius for Tiridates I of Armenia. There is also a reference in Petronius's *Satyricon* - possibly based on a factual show - to a female *essedarius*, or one who fought from a Celtic-style chariot.

The Emperor Domitian liked to stage torch-lit fights between dwarves and women, according to Suetonius in *The Twelve Caesars*. From depictions it appears they fought bare-chested and rarely wore helmets, no matter what type of gladiator they fought as. Women apparently fought at night, and the fact that this coincided with the main events of a Games indicates either the possible importance or rarity of female gladiators.

Dio Cassius mentions that not only women but children fought in a gladiatorial event that Nero sponsored in 66 AD. It is known the emperor Nero also forced the wives of some Roman senators into amphitheaters, though it is not known if they were forced to fight.

Roman social historian Mark Vesley has speculated that as gladiatorial schools were not fit places for women, they may have studied under private tutors in the *collegia iuvenum*. These schools were for training high ranking males over the age of 14 in martial arts, but Vesley found three references to women training there, including one who died at age 17 years 9 months.

The gladiatrices employed by Emperor Domitian are mentioned in Suetonius, Martial, and Statius.

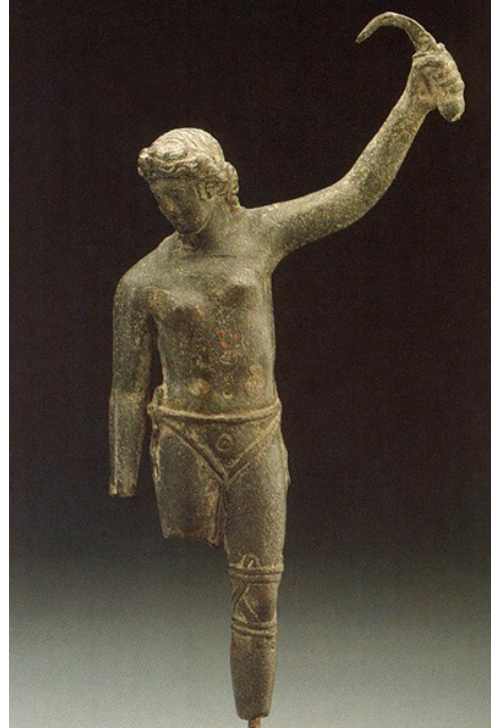
In archaeology there have been two female skeletons found that may be of gladiatrices, the first in Southwark London in 2001, and the second in Credenhill in Herefordshire in 2010. There is still debate as to whether these remains were gladiatrices or not.

Table 1 Historical depictions of gladiatrices



This marble relief from Halicarnassus in Turkey dates from the second century AD and resides in the British Museum. It depicts two women, Amazon and Achillia, fighting as gladiatrices. The Greek inscription declares them *missae sunt*, that they both have received *missio* and been granted a reprieve from this particular contest (both had been deemed to have won).

They are heavily armed in the manner of the *secutor*, with greaves and the right arm protected and carrying a large oblong shield. They wear no helmets and their breasts are bare.



This is a 2000 year old bronze statue of a woman in a Hamburg museum believed by archaeologists to be a female gladiator. She wears only a loincloth and her knee is wrapped in leather straps.. She holds aloft a *sica*, a short sword with a curved or angled blade that was the traditional weapon of the *thraex*. She is topless and has long hair.

Gladiatrices in Imperium Romana

Imperium Romana strives for historical accuracy in our depictions of Roman life. However, the historical and archaeological records of gladiatrices are sketchy. We know that female gladiators fought each other and we also know they were pitted against dwarves. There is no evidence however to say that they were ever paired against male gladiators. Nevertheless there is no evidence to suggest this never happened either.

Imperium Romana gets over this problem by developing storylines that may conceivably have happened in ancient Rome. A certain degree of imagination is therefore allowed. All storylines must be approved by the Authenticity Officer, but in practise it is a group effort. Members are encouraged to put their own ideas forward for scripts and the club will work together to do their best to put them into action. It is quite satisfying to be both a writer and a performer.

The historical references we have of gladiatrices tell us that they did not come from one specific social group. The provenance of gladiatrices was as diverse as gladiators. Your persona therefore could slave or free, rich or poor, prisoner of war or volunteer.

Weapons and Protective Armament

The above historical depictions of gladiatrices show two types of combatant, the thraex and the secutor (see the gladiator kit guide). From this we know that gladiatrices could take on any gladiator style of fighting, using any of the weapons and protective armament of that gladiator type. It is up to the individual to decide what gladiator type to emulate as gladiatrix. The club has gladiator weapons that can be borrowed for shows until you have your own, or if you wish to change your fighting style for a particular performance.



Clothing

The historical depictions of gladiatrices show them as fighting topless. This was done in order to titivate the audience. This is obviously not something we can do in today's society. Authenticity must therefore be tempered with sensibility. In Imperium Romana we encourage our gladiatrices to be sexy without being vulgar or sleazy. In the following pages are suggestions that aspiring gladiatrices can use to create their own clothing style for the arena (and one example of how NOT to dress).

Sources

Shadrake, Susanna, 2005: *The World of the Gladiator*, Tempus.

Waugh, Rob, 2012: *The Gladiatrix: 2,000-year-old statue shows topless FEMALE gladiator standing triumphant over defeated foe*, Mail Online.

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Examples of Gladiatrices



Figure 1 Two overseas re-enactors fighting as gladiatrices, sword and shield (right) against sword and buckler (left).



Figure 2 Gladiatrices wearing leather tunic. The one on the left (Lysandra from the novel *Gladiatrix* by Russ Whitfield) has two swords (dimachaerus) and wears a balteus. The one on the right has sword and shield and her leather tunic has a shoulder guard on the right shoulder and thronging across the belly.



Figure 3 Gladiatrices Mamawi (Pam Grier) and Boudica (Margaret Markov), in the movie *The Arena* (1974).



Figure 4 Two gladiatrices, Serena (Nichole M Hiltz) and Brianna (Michelle Gutteridge), from the movie *Amazons and Gladiators* (2001) fighting only with swords.

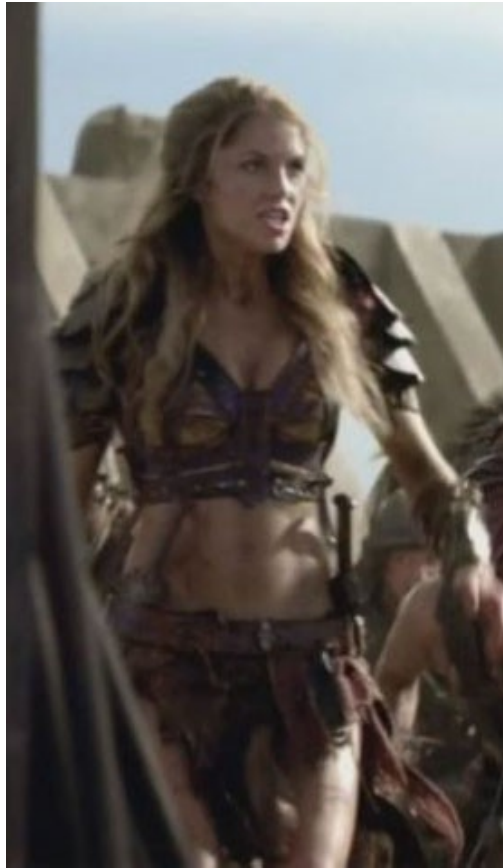


Figure 5 Gladiatrix Saxa from the TV series *Spartacus*.

HOW NOT TO DRESS AS A GLADIATRIX!!!



Figure 6 Smirgut (Fiona Allen), Dywfuc (Doon Mackichan), and Worthaboutapig (Sally Phillips) from the comedy film *Gladiator* (2004).