GUARDIANS OF THE THRESHOLD: THE IMAGE OF THE GLADIATOR AND ITS PROTECTIVE FUNCTION IN POMPEII

Joe Sheppard

Abstract

This essay draws on recent archaeological research into domestic religion and magic throughout the Roman Empire in order to explain the significance of a handful of paintings and statues of gladiators in Pompeii from locations beyond the amphitheatre. I demonstrate that these images are limited to transitional spaces – immediately next to front doorways or in the corridor leading to the apodyterium of the Suburban Baths – often in combination with a household shrine. Like the phallic, animal, and martial imagery decorating other entrances in Pompeii – or many less conspicuous rituals around Mediterranean doorways, which I briefly survey – I argue that these figures must be understood in the context of a desire to prevent intruders from crossing the threshold. The particular scene of the end of the gladiatorial combat was suitable for placement near doorways, as opposed to other images of gladiators, precisely because it implicated viewers in a moment of uncertainty. The protective power of these images was reactivated by pedestrians recalling past experiences at the arena, when the life of a gladiator had been spared – or not – and being briefly reminded, even if only subconsciously, of the potential for danger and threats ahead.

Keywords: Pompeii, gladiators, apotropaism, material religion, magic, protection
Full text: https://openartsjournal.org/issue-10/article-6/
DOI: http://dx.doi.org/10.5456/issn.2050-3679/2021s06

Biographical note

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Banner image: Detail from a garden painting, from the House of the Golden Bracelet, Pompeii (VI.17.42), collection of the Museo Archeologico Nazionale di Napoli. (Photo: Fine Art Images/Heritage Images via Getty Images)

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Gladiators and taverns

In October 2019, archaeologists working in the north of Pompeii uncovered a very well-preserved fresco facing an interior wall (V.8), which quickly made international headlines due to its colourful representation of that most sensational of subjects: the gladiatorial duel. By the end of the year Massimo Osanna, the archaeological superintendent of Pompeii, had already published a brief analysis of the painting in his monograph surveying the many extraordinary finds recently discovered in the ancient city. Noting that excavations in the area were still incomplete, Osanna suggested that the location of our painting can explain its original significance: 'To judge from the image depicted, placed under the stairs, immediately visible by whoever entered the structure, it must have been a meeting-place frequented by gladiators, perhaps an infamous tavern, where games of dice were played, people drank, and an evening was passed in merry cheerfulness' (2019, p.167; all translations by the author, unless otherwise credited).

This conclusion was based on three elements from the surrounding neighbourhood: first, the doorway into the room where the fresco was found is wider than usual for a household entrance, resembling rather the many establishments offering food or drink dotted across Pompeii and other Roman towns. These broad openings invite customers inside from the street, thus extending the public space. Osanna's second observation was that this bar is located just off a small piazza formed by the slight misalignment of the crossroads. The popularity of this intersection among locals is indicated by the enlargement of public space, the dense cluster of electoral advertisements in the vicinity, the Roman practice of worshipping the spirits of the crossroads, and the sophisticated provision of water, with a fountain and cistern fed by an adjacent water tower that regulated the hydraulic pressure. Finally, Osanna proposed that the proximity of this image to the 'gladiator barracks' (V.5.3), less than a hundred metres away, could be no coincidence. Perhaps the graffito of a gladiator, he suggested, scratched into a nearby façade was inspired by the 'continuous comings and goings of gladiators in the area, between the barracks and the tavern' (2019, p.167).

Since only one corner of the room has been unearthed at the time of writing – that is to say, only two walls of this interior space have only been partially excavated, with even its basic dimensions remaining unknown for the time being – detailed analysis of this important new discovery within its context is still impossible. It is nevertheless important to ask, how we move from necessarily imperfect information about a particular material artefact, in this case a painting of two gladiators on the wall, to sound conclusions about its precise purpose or meaning, especially when those conclusions depend on ephemeral practices that might not have survived in the archaeological record, such as socialising. A century ago, for example, a second painting of a gladiator duel in a different bar (IX.9.8), 'almost in front of' the gladiator barracks, was also explained by Antonio Sogliano with reference to the gladiators who frequented the premises (1921, pp.24–5). He even suggested that this painting functioned as a kind of 'speaking sign' for the establishment, which 'could well have been called' colloquially something like 'the bar of the gladiators' (p.25). Matteo Della Corte has likewise applied this idea of a shop sign to a third fresco of duelling gladiators, also contained within a thick red border, but this time painted onto the exterior doorpost of yet another bar (IX.12.7), the so-called Tavern of Purpurio, which apparently alluded to 'the special clientele who frequented' it (1965, p.323).

These interpretations, however, should invite scepticism for several reasons. First of all, the emphasis on targeted marketing, brand awareness, and commercial signposting sounds suspiciously anachronistic. Moreover, the message communicated by any 'speaking sign' is hardly obvious, since yet another painting of duelling gladiators (VII.5.14–15) has elsewhere been interpreted not as a nod towards the clientele but rather as 'the shop of an armourer' or as 'the banner' for the 'office of a gladiator-trainer' (Angelone, 1989, pp.342, 357). The subject matter depicted could easily be explained by some other reason, such as the general popularity of local gladiatorial spectacles. In fact, Thomas Fröhlich has rejected Della Corte's interpretation, for example, because the gladiators were unambiguously integrated into a larger composition of sacred imagery including a compital altar and two sacrificial scenes, one performed by the neighbourhood magistrates (*vicomagistri*) and another by the spirits who protected the crossroads,

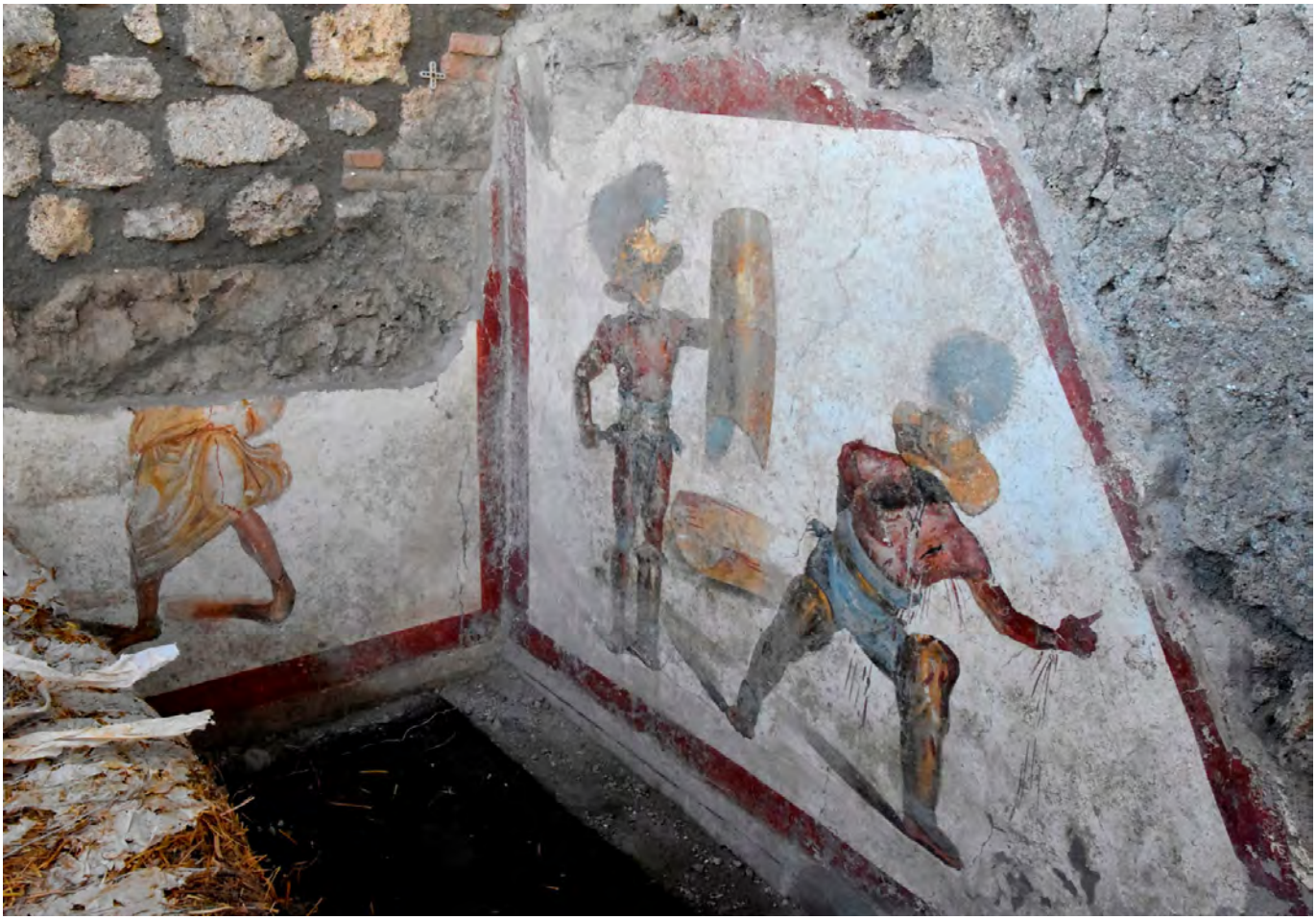

Figure 6.1: Fresco depicting gladiatorial combat, discovered in the recent excavations in Region V. (Photo with permission of the Ministero della Cultura – Parco Archeologico di Pompei / Courtesy of the Ministero dei Beni e delle Attività Culturali – Museo Archeologico Nazionale di Napoli)

namely the *genius loci* and *Lares compitales* (1991, p.339, n.176 = F71).

Above all, what warrants further interrogation is the assumption connecting the people who might have used or frequented a particular space to the subject matter represented in its decoration. It is not immediately clear why a gladiator would wish to look at a painting that highlights both the glory and extreme bloodshed of martial combat. Such an interpretation belongs to a long tradition of positivism in Pompeian studies, where unusually vivid and eloquent materials, quite unparalleled elsewhere in the Roman Empire, have often invited explanations that rely more on engaging narratives or modern analogies than a systematic approach to highly complex archaeological contexts based on comparable evidence.

Moreover, the identification of the gladiator barracks (V.5.3) is not entirely straightforward: it is possible that the site was repurposed during its final years, with scholars traditionally assigning the same function to another, much larger structure on the other side of the city – the so-called Quadriporticus (VIII.7.16) – not least of all due to the impressive cache of specialised armour found there (Beard, 2008, pp.270–2, 275). Even if one accepts the relevance of the gladiator barracks, however, the building is actually three blocks away from Osanna's newly discovered bar (V.8), while the third example mentioned above (IX.12.7) is more than 240 metres away from both the barracks and the Quadriporticus. Precisely how close or far apart should two sites be, in order for a link to be established between them? And why are the many other bars nearer the gladiator barracks and Quadriporticus not decorated with similar imagery?

The most immediate spatial context for the newly discovered painting of gladiators is not the piazza outside the building, but the interior area that it occupies: in the southwest corner of a room, in what appears to be a lower band of decoration beneath a staircase, whose course is still visible in section, evidently limiting the size and shape of the plaster surface available for the painter. Very little attention has been paid so far to the fragmentary panel on the other side of the interior corner, however, where the lower half of a figure is depicted wearing sandals and a tunic cinched at the waist, also on a white background

and within a red frame. In fact, the clothing identifies this figure as the *summa rudis* or umpire of the arena – typically represented with a staff and belted, knee-length garment marked by two vertical crimson stripes (Dunbabin, 2016, p.228) – which the Pompeians must have recognised from the generic example painted conspicuously on the central axis of the interior wall of their local amphitheatre, according to a recent reconstruction (Hufschmid, 2009, vol.1, pp.259–66). The content, scale, and style of these two adjacent panels thus suggest that a larger scene related to the arena extended around the corner from these gladiators and eastwards in the direction of the wide doorway leading outside, approximately two metres away.

Although the fresco of gladiators from the bar IX.9.8 was badly damaged even at the time of excavation, it is clear from the earliest reports that at least one figure there of about the same height (60cm) was also painted on an interior wall with a whitened background immediately to the east of the entrance from the street, albeit behind a low countertop (Mau, 1889, pp.28–9; Sogliano, 1899, p.126). This scene, too, appears to have represented the very end of the duel, when the victor steps forward, stretches out his shield, pulls back his right hand along with his sword next to his side, as if to strike, and twists his head towards the spectators, in order to find out their decision concerning the fate of his fallen adversary (Mau, 1889, p.29). The same climactic ritual was also depicted in the scene from the Tavern of Purpurio (IX.12.7), which was painted at a similar scale (75cm high) on a white background inside a thick red border, but this time onto the exterior face of the building, more specifically on the plastered doorpost immediately to the right of someone entering. Finally, the fourth example mentioned, on the pier next to a bar (VII.5.14–15) before it was destroyed during the war, rather unusually shows two separate moments of the duel, but the larger scene in the foreground once again depicts 'the final phase of combat: the loser has fallen and is being threatened by his opponent with a sword in his right hand. An umpire in a white tunic, who holds a stick or rod in his hand, runs in between the fighters' (Fröhlich, 1991, p.326 = F50).

In this essay, I shall argue that the locations and subject matter of these four paintings are not coincidental, but rather consistent with several other frescoes in Pompeii depicting gladiators. The scholarly treatment of such paintings has so far been concerned chiefly with questions of style or their relationship to literary and documentary sources, when they are not being analysed in isolation from one another, taken out of context, or neglected altogether. The frescoes with gladiator duels should be understood instead as part of a larger pattern already well documented in Pompeii for other motifs, namely the image of a *Schutzgott* or 'tutelary divinity', often painted onto the façade of a building but also found in houses, shops, and bars, either alone or else accompanied by scenes of sacrifice, sacred procession, or occupation, in a 'direct expression of private religiosity and superstition' (Fröhlich, 1991, p.13). Perhaps the most familiar and quotidian expression of this protective logic is the masonry *lararium* or household shrine, usually located in the atrium, kitchen, or peristyle of a dwelling, and near street corners, and typically decorated with images of local spirits, such as the aforementioned *genius loci*, twin Lares, or large serpents (see essays by Haug & Kreuz and Graham in this issue).

The paintings of gladiators here should not be understood as objects of worship, however, and certainly not as part of any official religious practice approved by the authorities. Instead, there is fairly good evidence for such liminal spaces – where domestic and commercial properties are accessed from the street, particularly in Pompeii but also throughout the ancient Mediterranean more widely (Porstner, 2020) – as being sites for a range of behaviours that may be characterised as superstitious, from stepping carefully to suspending elaborately sculpted bells or activating phallic amulets (Parker, 2018; Wilburn, 2018). After establishing a spatial pattern with a brief survey describing all paintings of gladiators found so far in Pompeii, I shall argue that these highly conspicuous, heavily armed, and socially stigmatised swordsmen – who performed before enormous audiences at ritualised games (*munera gladiatorum*) and religious festivals (*ludi*: e.g. *CIL* X 1074d, which is discussed in detail by Mugnari & Wyslucha and van der Graaff & Poehler in this issue), and were believed to possess supernatural powers, and even drafted as personal bodyguards during emergencies – were ideally suited as the choice for subject matter to decorate the spaces around doorways in Pompeii.

A taxonomy of paintings with gladiatorial combat

The contexts and compositional schemes of all paintings of gladiatorial combat found so far in Pompeii have been summarised below (Fig. 6.3) and described in the 'Appendix' section of the essay. The frescoes from the interior wall of the amphitheatre (II.6) and the tomb of Vestorius Priscus from the Porta Vesuvio necropolis (Jacobelli, 2003, pp.58–62, 92–4) have been excluded from this survey, because the function, audience, and context for each differ fundamentally

from the images painted on the walls of houses, shops, bars, and bathing complexes. There are so few examples of gladiators attested as part of the decoration of public buildings that it is difficult to treat the topic (Flecker, 2015, pp.132–5), whereas the many well-documented funerary monuments in Italy showing scenes from the arena, particularly in relief sculpture, must be understood in the tradition of aristocratic self-representation as an effective strategy for memorialising one of the most generous but otherwise ephemeral benefactions that local notables lavished on their community.

This selection leaves seventeen specimens from Pompeii, a sum that seems relatively small considering the overwhelming popularity of gladiatorial *munera* and their ubiquity as the subject for other inexpensive forms of visual media. There is good evidence both for large-scale spectacles being staged with some regularity in Pompeii and for Campanians travelling between towns in the region in order to watch games (Benefiel, 2016, pp.446–56). Gladiators were consistently among the most frequent figures in pictorial graffiti across every kind of location in Pompeii (Langner, 2001, pp.143–4), as well as 'the most common single subject' on moulded ceramic vessels from early imperial Gaul and the northern frontier provinces during the second and third centuries (Dunbabin, 2016, p.223). This paucity of gladiators in the local wall-painting repertoires warrants explanation no less, say, than the taste for mosaics depicting specific scenes of gladiators and especially hunts from prior games hosted by the owners of North Africa villas in the following centuries (Dunbabin, 2016, pp.188–208).

This scarcity is due in part to the values and practices of early-modern archaeologists, who were, on the whole, more interested in preserving, collecting, and documenting materials related to literature, mythology, or the imperial family than what was viewed as a violent form of entertainment for an unsophisticated crowd. Of the seventeen paintings from Pompeii, only two examples have survived well enough to allow comprehensive study in their original contexts (Fig. 6.1 and the fresco depicting duelling gladiators from the so-called Tavern of Purpurio, IX.12.7) either in person or working from clear photographs, with scholarly interest in the rest waning soon after each new discovery had been unearthed and described cursorily. Nevertheless, it is possible to make sense of such an incomplete set of variable data and even detect patterns by separating the examples of positively attested variables (Appendix, Group 1) from pieces of evidence that are more ambiguous or unclear (Appendix, Group 2), and of course anomalous (Appendix, Group 3). Implicit within this distinction is the recognition that a single, unifying explanation or monolithic function is highly unlikely to hold true for all paintings of gladiators across Pompeii. In theory the paintings from Group 2 could have originally possessed the same characteristics that define Group 1, but for the purposes of this argument it suffices to note merely that they are not contradictory.

The pattern of painting images of gladiators at points of access, where individuals transition from one defined space to another, has been noted in passing (e.g. Langner, 2016, p.137) but never explored systematically, perhaps because of a tendency in Roman archaeology to categorise places in other ways, such as public / private or domestic / commercial. In a similar way, Roman thresholds and boundaries more generally have long been established as sites where ritual practices concerned with protection often took place (e.g. Ogle, 1911; Kellum, 1999, pp.284–5) and classicists have also connected gladiators to similar superstitions about defending against charms or spirits (e.g. Coulston, 2009, pp.197, 204–6), but the possibility of these gladiatorial paintings also serving this purpose at points of access in Pompeii is yet to be explored in detail. (The relevant pieces of information are still, for all intents and purposes, practically buried in old and often recondite excavation reports.)

As a rule, the inner face of a narrow doorjamb was not decorated by Pompeians in the same way that a marble threshold or change in mosaic pattern often marked the point separating two different spaces on an otherwise level and continuous floor surface, nor does it make sense to define too narrowly the precise location where a graduated process of transition takes place, so the word *entryway* and phrase *point of access* have been selected since they are flexible enough to encompass both the interior and exterior faces of the wall on either side of a door. In the case of a bar or shopfront, whose doorway was usually much broader than the entrance to a household, there was no other conspicuous space available to decorate. This flexible concept also applies to paintings in a vestibule however, since this narrow corridor, which typically ran from the pavement in front of a property into the atrium, occupied an even lengthier distance than a stone threshold, and indeed implicitly acted as a kind of buffer zone between inside and outside. The differences between a household, bar, and shop or between luxurious and more modest buildings break down when faced with this idea of the entryway, since every edifice that can be entered is by definition exposed to risk: everyone has something to lose. This inclusive quality is appropriate for paintings of gladiators since *munera* were attended by people from all backgrounds, even if

the subject was largely banished from the more refined literary and artistic products favoured by respectable society.

The second pattern to emerge from these paintings is the specific moment of each gladiatorial duel represented, most often the final phase of combat, after the winner has been determined but before the consequences of that victory have been decided by the spectators and sponsor: either execution (*iugulatio*) or respite (*missio*) for whoever lost the contest (Ville, 1981, pp. 410–24; Junkelmann, 2000, pp.136–42; Fagan, 2011, pp.222–3). Since duels with no quarter (*sine missione*) were illegal in Italy from the time of Augustus (Suet. *Aug*. 45.3-4), this resolution process for each match – which guaranteed the active engagement of all parties in attendance, especially the spectators – soon developed its own system of communication, including the gesture of raising an index finger in order to ask for clemency – 'a hand gesture so well attested in the textual and material sources that its meaning seems beyond doubt' (Corbeill, 2004, p.54).

In Pompeii this motif appears in many paintings, funerary reliefs, graffiti, and lamps, but it is also not uncommon for two equally matched gladiators to be shown in the middle of a contest (Flecker, 2015, nos. A55–56; Langner, 2001, pp.51–2), and since the surviving evidence and excavation records are not always entirely clear and detailed in this regard, the entries in the appendix have been separated according to how securely they fulfilled this compositional criterion. The more explicit possibility of death in such images adds a certain frisson to the context of protection from superstitions, but the narrative logic of both compositions is ultimately teleological: the eternally uncertain future may bring surprising changes in fortune, which nothing can prevent. This idea brings us to the mechanisms through which these paintings of gladiators functioned.

Tutelary divinities in Pompeii

The word *apotropaic*, perhaps best known by the example of the so-called evil eye, typically refers to the ritual practice of seeking to avert (ἀποτρόπαιος) envy, malice, danger, and bad fortune, whether through visual symbols, speech, gestures, or other means. In a recent monograph on Roman laughter, Mary Beard criticised 'that overused term apotropaic', since 'this word is sufficiently technical to appear to be explanatory while also being agreeably primitive – as if we were going back into the deepest wellsprings of earliest Roman tradition', but in fact such a term only 'shelves the problems rather than solves them' if scholars simply invoke the concept as a way of explaining particularly unusual or challenging pieces of evidence (2017, p.58). In addition to this potentially hermeneutic cul-de-sac, another central problem with the concept of apotropaic images or objects is demonstrating that a particular specimen was actually believed by an individual to provide protection, since there is rarely any accompanying inscription or direct testimony by witnesses.

There are, however, ample literary and documentary sources for Roman superstitions connected to crossing a threshold to enter a building, which can help frame the material evidence from Pompeii, in order to reconstruct some of the specific mechanisms and practices through which such magical thinking was expressed. I shall argue that the gladiator duels in Pompeii, painted in several contexts that are quite literally liminal, are in certain ways analogous to the images and shrines of deities often found in similar spaces, such as the protective spirits that inhabited households, shops, and public crossroads (i.e. the Lares and *genius loci*), not to mention representations of the traditional Roman pantheon of gods, as well as more minor figures like Fortuna or Priapus. Of course, the Pompeians did not sacrifice to gladiators at altars or worship them in any sense that resembled the official state cults, but the selection of these painted scenes, which depict the most intensely charged moment of what was a highly ritualised and public form of bloodshed in the arena, may nevertheless be explained best in the context of popular traditions linking gladiators and arena spectacles to magical thinking about violence and protection: specifically the supernatural powers supposedly possessed by those who died violently (*biothanati*) and the practice of spectators at the games communicating to the sponsor whether or not the defeated combatant should be spared from being executed (*missio*).

The boundary separating a household from the outside world was the site of a particularly durable set of superstitions in Roman literature (Weidlich, 1893; Ogle, 1911; Wilburn, 2018, pp.110–11). It was considered a bad omen, for example, to trip up on the threshold (e.g. Ov. *Am*. 1.12.3–4), which may help explain in part the practice of new brides being carried over this short distance (e.g. Plaut. *Cas*. 815–17). A punchline about guests needing to enter the dining room 'with the right foot first' (Petron. *Sat*. 30.6) depended on extending to a domestic (albeit fictional) context the concept of ritual precision from religious spaces, where architects helped to ensure that anyone approaching a temple set their right foot first on the podium by building an odd number of steps (Vitr. *De arch*. 3.4.4). Moreover, the doorway

of a household was also the location for folk rituals designed to protect or harm residents: according to Pliny the Elder, the head of a snake buried beneath the threshold might bring good luck to the household (*HN* 29.20), while doorposts greased with fat from wolves 'prevented any enchantment entering' a new bride's house (28.34: *ne quid mali medicamenti inferretur*) – including those caused by iron pins, nail clippings, barley, blood, chameleons, and other magical devices fastened there (Ogle 1911, pp. 255–6). The logic of the protective amulet was explained by Macrobius with the example of the goddess Mania, mother of the Lares, whose image, hanging in front of doorways (*effigies Maniae suspensae pro singulorum foribus*) during the Compitalia festival, replaced the human sacrifice that had apparently been necessary originally in order to ensure the safety of the rest of the household (Macrob. *Sat*. 1.7.35).

From the long corridor leading into the House of the Tragic Poet (VI.8.5) in Pompeii comes perhaps the best-known image of a guarded entryway in the Roman archaeological record, where the mosaic of a large, fierce dog faces the visitor, who is instructed to 'beware of the dog' (*cave canem: CIL* 10.877). In a recent close analysis of this mosaic in its context, Andrew Wilburn has argued that the image of the dog was a 'power object' that acted to separate and protect the household against human intruders, the evil eye, and other unseen threats, perhaps being symbolically animated or activated through repeated actions such as sweeping and walking around it (2018). In addition to three further houses where dogs guarded the threshold either in the form of a mosaic (I.8.1;V.1.6) or a wall painting (IX.2.26n), the small mosaic at the end of the long entrance corridor leading into the House of Orpheus (VI.14.20) was complemented by a real dog, who was still chained to the nearby post during the eruption of Mt. Vesuvius (Porstner, 2020). This detail further emphasises interactions between the inanimate material remains and the population that inhabited a particular space, while also reminding us that even within a small sample the specific context remains important.

But it was not only the entryways of houses in Pompeii where the material remains and ritualised practices were carefully designed in a way that protected private property. Also, in the Caupona of Sotericus (I.12.3) can be found the painting of a dog, glowering across the front room at the visitor from its position on the far pillar, which marks the division between the large commercial area – with its bar, tables, and massive *dolia* jars – and the rear part of the property, where the garden, kitchen, and additional storage facilities were located. This time the dog is merely standing at attention, without any accompanying inscription, but anyone visiting would also have to walk past it in order to access the staircase against the eastern wall, which led upstairs to an apartment. The western half of the wide entrance to the building was blocked by a masonry counter that allowed customers to be served directly from the street. Painted against the red background of the pillar immediately next to this counter, just below the lintel of the door, was the large bust of a female divinity, typically identified as Roma (or perhaps Minerva) with a helmet, shield, and spear (Fröhlich, 1991, p.310 = F10). At 90 centimetres in height, this bust was larger than life, and its position on the façade of the building made it highly conspicuous. The eyes and spear of Roma are turned towards the east, as if watching over the doorway.

At least forty similar 'tutelary divinities' (*Schutzgötter*) were painted near entryways on Pompeian street façades, overwhelmingly (85%) at the entrances to shops, bars, and workshops rather than houses (Fröhlich, 1991, p.48). These images, clearly identifiable from each god's unique iconographic attributes, have been described as more talismanic than cultic in character, because they are lacking any of the apparatus associated with sacrifice or worship. Since the locations are privately owned but publicly conspicuous and frequented by the less wealthy and powerful members of society, the divinities have commonly been interpreted as either an expression of the owner's personal identity or a tool to attract attention to the business there (Fröhlich, 1991, p.49). This latter explanation is unsatisfactory – even if there are images of Bacchus and Minerva painted on taverns and fulleries respectively – since many divinities were never associated with trade in general nor any profession in particular (e.g. Venus or Romulus), not to mention again that the concept of a shop sign is culturally contingent and anachronistic. It is true, however, that the most commonly depicted divinity by quite some way was Mercury, whose connection to trade and prosperity is well documented. Along with Fortuna and Hercules, the next most commonly depicted tutelary divinities, it seems likely that Mercury was able to function as an 'all-purpose tutelary divinity' (*universeller Schutzgott*: Fröhlich 1991, p.50).

The apotropaic potential of these painted tutelary divinities is clear from several specific contexts. For example, on the wall of the corridor leading to the latrine at the back of the bar IX.7.21–2 was painted the figure of Fortuna along with her usual attributes (rudder, cornucopia, globe, and modius), who has turned to face the legend *cacator, cave malu(m)* written

in black paint above the image of a nude man squatting on the ground (CIL 4.3832; Fröhlich, 1991, p.296 = L106). This message is reinforced by two serpents, rising from the ground to attack the head of this individual who would defile such a space by defecation. At the time of excavation 'a terra-cotta monopodium stood against the wall, perhaps serving as an altar' beneath this painting (Boyce, 1937, p.88 = no. 442) – a salient reminder that the rituals practised in relation to images are all but impossible to detect without the good fortune of durable objects and accurate excavation records.

The same *cacator* text was also painted at least three times in the alleyway between insulas III.4 and III.5, each with enormous red lettering more than one by three metres in size, one of which appended a threat: 'or if you don't care, you'll endure the wrath of Jupiter' (*CIL* 4.7714-16; Varone, 2016, p.122). Antonio Varone has connected the latter text, along with three more similar threats daubed onto Pompeian façades (*CIL* 4.6641, 7038, 8899), with the images of serpents immediately adjacent, based on a passage in Persius (1.112-14), where the satirist recommends painting two snakes on the wall in order to communicate the message: 'Guys, this place is sacred. Piss somewhere else' (2016, pp.124–5). Indeed, the snake should be considered the most commonly depicted deity in Pompeian painting, appearing in many different domestic spaces as well as on the streets (Flower, 2017), and is best understood as a protective spirit that guards over each location (Fröhlich, 1991; cf. Graham in this issue). A desire to protect vulnerable bodies against unregulated human waste may also help explain two fragmentary wall paintings of gladiators beyond the scope of this article: one found in the corridor next to the changing room of the Suburban Baths just outside Pompeii (Jacobelli, 2005); and another in a latrine on the Palatine hill, also dated to the early Flavian era and possibly connected to a bathing complex (Tomei, 1991).

The other figure in Pompeii often characterised as a tutelary divinity is Priapus, whose figure was painted in the entryways of the House of the Vettii (VI.15.1), the Complex of the Magic Rites (II.1.12), and now the newly excavated house at V.6.12 (Kellum, 2015). This interpretation stems from the apotropaic function of phallic representations, which is well documented in both Roman literary sources and archaeological remains (Levi, 1941; Adams, 1987, pp.3–6, 63–4). Perhaps the clearest demonstration of this concept is the *fascinum* – a phallic amulet, suspended from the necks of children (Varro, *Ling.* 7.97) and from triumphal chariots (Pl. *HN* 28.39) in order to protect against the evil eye (Whitmore, 2017). In the literary tradition, moreover, the figure of Priapus threatens intruders with sexual penetration, but there he is usually characterised as the more rustic guardian of garden spaces, in contrast to his more urbane counterpart in Pompeii (Hallett, 1977; Kellum, 2015).

Not unlike the dual role played by Fortuna – able both to bring wealth and good fortune in the form of a cornucopia, even as she protects against the wickedness of defecation – Priapus is characterised by a degree of ambivalence in these paintings, since the bounteous fruits at his feet and his enormous phallus, weighed on scales against a bag of coins, signal the fertility and prosperity associated with the deity (Fröhlich, 1991). In other words, the flip side of the mosaic warning intruders 'beware of the dog' is another floor in *opus signinum* that greets the concept of profit itself at the threshold of the atrium (VII 1, 47): *salve lucru* (*CIL* 10.874)! The ambivalence of tutelary divinities seems especially relevant to our images that depict both the victorious and vanquished parties at the end of a gladiator duel, immediately before either the final punishment or merciful reprieve has been issued.

The tutelary figures considered so far on the mosaics and paintings in Pompeian entryways were only the most conspicuous, durable, and eloquent expressions of what was also communicated through other media less immediately legible or accessible to the modern eye, such as portable objects and symbolic architectural features. For example, statuettes of tutelary divinities were placed inside the niches on street façades or onto the masonry shrines built into the wall or floor of a household's atrium, alongside the figures of snakes and Lares typically painted there (Fröhlich, 1991). According to a recent study (Parker, 2018) the elaborately sculpted bells known as *tintinnabula* were intended to produce apotropaic sounds precisely because they were typically phallic in form and functioned best as wind chimes if suspended at open but accessible boundaries of the house such as doorways, windows, and gardens. Two particularly notable specimens from the Vesuvian area include an ithyphallic Mercury and a gladiator attacking his own zoomorphic phallus. The twelve small plaques set into the street façades of Pompeii, with phallic designs sculpted from tufa, were also probably intended to protect or act as 'good-luck charms' for the nearest entryway, corner, or property (Ling, 1990, p.62).

As a final example of a tutelary divinity, it is worth examining the tufa statuette of a gladiator (107cm tall) resting his small, round shield on the head of a shorter Priapus figure, found in the so-called Inn of the Gladiators (I.20.1) at the end of the entrance corridor

leading into an enormous vineyard complete with its own outdoor dining area (Elia, 1975). The conjoined figures of gladiator and Priapus straddled the line between guardianship and revelry, for the safety and pleasure of visitors as they dined, drank wine, and passed the time at leisure, perhaps even after a day at the nearby arena. The ithyphallic figure of Priapus, perhaps about to be executed by the victorious combatant, hints at the erotic character of gladiatorial combat, well documented in both literary sources and local graffiti (Jacobelli, 2003; Coulston, 2009). The word 'sword' (*gladius*) was a euphemism for the phallus (Adams, 1987, pp.20–1), yet the vulnerable flesh of the gladiator, for the most part visible to the spectators, was subject to penetration by his opponent. The logic of this fascinating, monstrous, and curious individual, who paradoxically combined vulnerability and power within a single entity, thus resembled the mechanisms of the *fascinum* that was able to puncture the harmful gaze of the evil eye (Barton, 1993).

The gladiator as guardian of the threshold?

Needless to say, a gladiator was not the same thing as a phallus or a Priapus, even if the first public paintings of an actual gladiator duel, probably in the mid-second century BCE, were evidently deemed worthy of dedication to Diana Nemorensis (Pl. *HN* 35.51–2). It was nevertheless believed that the violent death suffered by many gladiators would have prevented the spirit from returning peacefully to its source (Tert. *De Anim*. 57; Serv. ad Verg. *Aen*. 4.386). The restless afterlives of these individuals who were 'dead by violence' (βιαιοθάνατοι or *biothanati*), not unlike 'those dead before their time' (ἄωροι) and 'those deprived of burial' (ἄταφοι), supposedly explained the manifestation of ghosts and supernatural phenomena (Waszink, 1954; Ogden, 2009, p.146). The author Tertullian remained sceptical about such apparitions, which he considered the work of demons, yet hinted at an otherwise obscure trope of exorcisms, whereby the creature 'claims sometimes to be one of the host's ancestors, sometimes a gladiator or beast-fighter, and at other times a god' (*De Anim*. 57.5). For our purposes, the great magical papyrus of Paris is particularly salient at this point (*PGM* IV.1390-9 = Betz, 1986, p.65), since the lovesick reader was advised to enlist the help of 'heroes or gladiators or those who have died a violent death' and to throw 'some of the polluted dirt' from the place where they had been slain 'inside the house of the woman' who is desired. Here the domestic doorway is the target of secret attacks, and the gladiator is once again understood to possess some kind of supernatural powers after death.

In early-imperial medical literature, the 'hot blood' from an executed gladiator (Cels. *Med*. 3.23.7) was also mentioned as a way to relieve epilepsy, albeit with disdain and incredulity (Pl. *HN* 28.2). For Scribonius Largus it was the liver of a slain gladiator that possessed special healing powers, which he categorised along with drinking blood or eating from the skull of a deceased person as treatments that 'fall outside the profession of medicine, although they have seemed to benefit some patients' (*Compositiones* 17). Celsus likewise distinguished between the remedies of the doctor and those of 'the peasants' (*rustici: Med*. 4.3.13, 5.28.7b) and 'common crowd' (*vulgus*: 4.7.5). We should expect such details about the defiled bodies of legally and socially stigmatised gladiators (*infames*) to lie otherwise beyond the scope and beneath the dignity of most Roman authors, but the material evidence from Pompeii does not share the same bias against the beliefs and practices of the 'common crowd'.

Indeed this ambivalent position of the gladiator as both despised outcast yet brave, skilled, and popular performer may help explain superstitions about his special potency, in particular the gladiator's power to protect and harm (Jahn, 1855, pp.95–6). The clearest visual representation of an unequivocally apotropaic gladiator appears on the Woburn marble relief (Fig. 6.2), where a *retiarius* is shown aiming his trident at a large eye, which a lion, snake, scorpion, crane, and corvid are also attacking, along with a man wearing a Phrygian cap and squatting in an act of defecation (Jahn, 1855, pp.30–1, pl.3.1). The subject matter of this sculpture seems to be unique, although the image of gladiatorial weapons directed at a large eye appears in other media, such as the trident in a mosaic near Antioch (Levi, 1941). The logic of transferring a gladiator's protective powers onto another creature or object through physical contact was also described by Scribonius Largus (*Compositiones* 13), since the stag's blood able to treat epilepsy had apparently been shed by the same blade used to kill a gladiator. Another example of such magic was the 'bridal spear' (*coelibaris hasta*) mentioned by Festus, whereby the bride's hair was combed with a weapon removed from the corpse of a gladiator, in order to bind her just as tightly to the groom (Jahn, 1855, p.95, n.278).

The gladiators themselves were not immune to such superstitions either, as might be expected from such a dangerous occupation. The tombstone of Victor from Philippopolis claims that it was 'the divine power' (δαίμων) that slew him, not his treacherous opponent Pinnas, before noting that his comrade ultimately avenged his death by killing Pinnas (Robert, 1940, no.34). No graveyard for gladiators has been unearthed

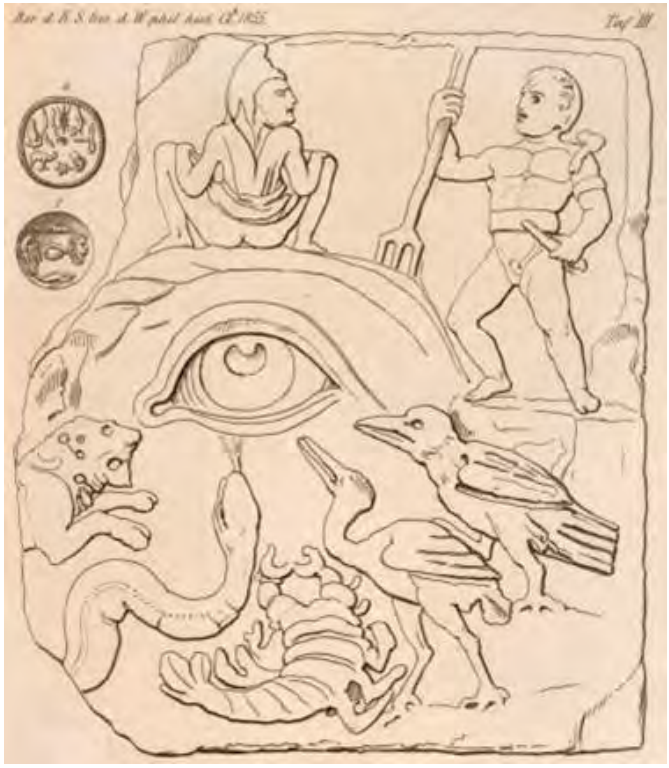

Figure 6.2: Sketch of a marble relief now in Woburn, England, depicting a gladiator aiming his trident at a large eye. (Source: Jahn, 1855, pl.3)

yet at Pompeii and their social lives are still poorly understood locally beyond the remains of architecture, weaponry, and scores of very chatty graffiti found at the old barracks (V.5.3) or the Quadriporticus (VIII.7.16). It seems plausible, however, that some of the local fighters will have practised a bitter antagonism similar to their counterparts from other provinces and later centuries, even if, for example, there was no shrine to the avenging goddess Nemesis inside the Pompeian amphitheatre – as would become common (Kyle, 1998, p.100; Pastor, 2011). Nor have any lead tablets scratched with curses against one's adversaries (*defixiones*), yet surfaced locally, even though gladiators and charioteers were the most commonly cited occupations in such documents, apparently followed by the proprietors of taverns (Gager, 1992, p.153) – a fact that once more highlights in passing the need to protect public establishments in Pompeii, such as the property at V.3.

The gladiators of Pompeii instead left behind scratched texts and images that are difficult to interpret but may yet reveal some local evidence for protective superstitions or ritualistic thinking more broadly. One bronze shoulder guard, for example, embossed with fine busts of Hercules and two Cupids, was also lightly incised afterwards – first with crude engravings of leaves and branches, perhaps intended to represent a victor's crown, and then a secondary image of a duel between *retiarius* and *secutor* (Junkelmann, 2000, pp.85, 254 = G2). The faintness, inferior quality, and different technique of these incisions suggest that they were not created as part of the original design by a skilled artisan, with the intention of being viewed on parade or in the arena but were rather a later product of the person owning, storing, or wearing the armour, presumably in order to increase their perceived capacity for symbolic protection and thereby the likelihood of success. Such activity makes sense given that finely sculpted images both of victorious gladiators and protective divinities (e.g. Minerva, Mars, Gorgoneion) already dominated the main decorative fields on several other helmets and greaves from the same armoury (e.g. Junkelmann, 2000, nos.B5–6, 13–14, 16, 18; H11, 13–15), and can be understood as a kind of defensive corollary to writing curses on lead tablets or casting slingshot projectiles with sexually aggressive messages of abuse (Gager, 1992; Hallett, 1977). According to this reading, the figures of gladiator and divinity are both experienced at least in part as individuals able to provide protection – not unlike what I have claimed about these subjects in the local wall-painting repertoire.

Also found in the Quadriporticus of Pompeii, but scratched into a column this time, was a textual graffito in which a *provocator* called Mansuetus promises to bring Venus his winner's palm (or, less likely, his shield) once victorious (*CIL* 4.2483). This inscription may well have been intended as a literal vow to the town's patron divinity, since the erotic graffiti ascribed to gladiators elsewhere in Pompeii speak in the language of forthright boasts rather than double entendres (Jacobelli, 2003, pp.48–9).

The figure of the armed gladiator in Roman culture was in its most basic sense someone who was required to protect himself from attacks while delivering blows to an adversary. The protective aspect of the gladiator is highlighted in the painted panels that flanked the small doorway exiting the arena in Pompeii to the west, which two life-sized gladiators appeared to be guarding, according to a recent reconstruction of the now-lost frescoes (Hufschmid, 2009). Like the gladiators actually fighting in the arena, these highly conspicuous paintings were also intended to attract the gaze of the spectators, which is to say that they too functioned as a kind of *fascinum*. In the generic gladiator duel painted onto the wall of establishment V.8, the victorious gladiator was able to pose as a protective figure who met this gaze and threatened any potentially hostile party, even as the defeated combatant could insulate the owner or proprietor from harm by standing in

as a replacement for them, according to the logic of symbolic magic. In other words, the scene just inside the entrance of this establishment could function at once like the *cave canem* mosaic as well as the effigy of Mania during the Compitalia, both of which were placed on the threshold between public and private space.

Furthermore the precise moment of combat shown – just after the victor has been determined but before the audience has decided the fate of the defeated gladiator – highlights both the power over life and death enjoyed by the spectators in the arena and a sense of uncertainty about the future. At this key 'moment of truth' (Ville, 1981, p.410), when the excitement of the contest had reached its climax (Hufschmid, 2009), the will of the audience dramatically manifested itself, first communicated through formulaic acclamations and predetermined gestures and then enacted by the sponsor of the games and his staff (Aldrete, 1999; Corbeill, 2004). The detailed accounts of specific gladiatorial duels recorded in Pompeian graffiti clearly demonstrate that many defeated combatants were in fact spared to fight another day (Sabbatini Tumolesi, 1980). With few exceptions, this active involvement by the audience in determining the final outcome of the duel seems to have taken place consistently both in Rome and smaller towns like Pompeii and, far from capricious or chaotic, such a highly ritualised decision-making process probably contributed to a wider sense of cultural integration and political consensus within the community (Flaig, 2007).

This particular moment of gladiatorial combat may have been selected for placement near doorways – as opposed to, say, the image of gladiators standing at guard or in the middle of a fight – precisely because it implicated them in a moment of uncertainty. The protective power of these images was reactivated by pedestrians recalling past experiences at the arena, when the life of a gladiator had been spared – or not – and being briefly reminded, even if only subconsciously, of the potential for danger and threats ahead. This genre of paintings from Pompeii, forever suspended in dried plaster at transitional spaces that symbolised both vulnerability and changes in fortune, thus appears to be designed to maximise engagement with the viewer qua spectator – be they friend or foe – before inviting them to reconsider what exactly was going to happen next.

Appendix: Paintings of gladiatorial combat in Pompeii

The entries below provide a catalogue of all gladiatorial paintings unearthed so far in Pompeian buildings, along with a brief description of the spatial contexts and compositional schemes of each specimen. (The frescoes from the amphitheatre and from tombs are not included because their contexts are completely different, and they have been studied in greater detail.) This list builds on the detailed catalogue from Jacobelli's 2003 monograph (pp.72 –89), updated with supplementary material (e.g. Fröhlich, 1991, p.312; Osanna, 2019, pp.162–7) and several reinterpretations. Each entry records the location and the type of building if clear, with any traditional nomenclature, before summarising the position of the painting within each location, which moment in the gladiator duel is represented, and any further salient details about the surrounding decoration. For the sake of brevity, any establishment serving food or drink from a countertop with a wide doorway is referred to as a bar and readers are pointed in each case to the reference source with the most detailed description or complete bibliography, as well as one high-quality image where possible. The entries have been divided into three groups according to spatial and compositional criteria in common, as summarised below in tabular form (Fig. 6.3), then topographically by the conventional numbering system.

Group 1: Paintings certainly near an entryway and showing the final phase of combat

V.8 (bar with fresco of gladiator contest): originally beneath a staircase, in the interior corner on the walls immediately to the left as one enters, were painted at least two scenes in adjacent panels, each within red borders: a victorious gladiator and a defeated combatant, who has lost his shield and is signalling for clemency (*missio*); an umpire, probably attending to another duel (Osanna, 2019, pp.162–7, figs.7–9).

VI.1 /VI.17? (house): in the early nineteenth century Francesco Morelli painted in tempera a composite scene with a *lararium* on the left and two panels with gladiators to the right, labelling the whole page 'at the northern gate of Pompeii' and 'in the atrium not far from it' (i.e. the Porta Ercolano, since other gates to the north of the city had not been excavated yet). The larger painting is a figure with helmet, shield, and sword lunging towards another helmeted figure, who has lost his shield and is turned away, holding up his left hand in a signal of *missio*; it is difficult to discern details in the smaller panel, but a figure in a loin cloth is lunging forward, armed either with sword, shield, and helmet or with net and trident but no helmet (Baldassarre & Bragantini, 1995, p. 120).

Location of building	Type of building	Type of space	Near entryway?	Final phase of combat?	Grouped by category
I 3, 23	house?	peristyle	x	✓	3
I 4, 27	bar	?	?	?	2
I 7, 7	house	vestibule	✓	x	3
II 1, 13	house	façade	✓	?	2
II 2, 2-5	house	façade	✓	?	2
V 8	bar	front room	✓	✓	1
VI 1 / VI 17?	house	atrium	✓	✓	1
VII 4, 26	shop, house	cubiculum	x	?	3
VII 5, 14-15	shop, bar	façade	✓	✓	1
VIII 4, 4-49	house	peristyle	x	x	3
VIII 5, 37	house	atrium	✓	x	3
VIII 7, 24	house	peristyle	x	✓	3
IX 3, 13	shop, house	front room	✓	?	2
IX 9, 8	bar	front room	✓	✓	1
IX 9, d	house	façade, atrium	✓	?	2
IX 12, 7	bar	façade	✓	✓	1
VII 16, a	baths	vestibule	✓	✓	1

Figure 6.3: Summary of Pompeian buildings with paintings of gladiatorial combat.

VII.5.14-15 (shop and bar; now Autogrill): on the pier separating two entrances were painted two scenes from the same duel, long since lost: (1) two gladiators in the foreground at 'the end of the duel'; (2) the same pair, only smaller, preparing for battle in the background, with the names *Tetraites* and *Prude(n)s* painted above (Fiorelli, 1861, pp.236–7 = *CIL* 4.538, no image). In still larger letters above were written again the same names, along with further information about the careers of these gladiators, who were evidently renowned throughout the Empire. In small red letters, Venus Pompeiana is invoked in a curse against anyone who would deface 'this thing' (*hoc*) – presumably the property more broadly, if not the mural, and another strong connection between tutelary divinities and a painting of gladiatorial combat.

VII.16.a (Suburban Baths): in the corridor connecting the changing rooms (*apodyterium*) to the rest of the bathing complex, several paintings of gladiators were found on either side of the doorway immediately to the west of this *apodyterium*, including a frieze with smaller figures and at least two larger duels, one of which must have taken place at the end of the battle because the figure is lying on the ground (Jacobelli, 2005, pp.163–7; figs.1–6). The *apodyterium* was decorated with frescoes showing a great variety of erotic scenes, although the highly fragmentary nature of the gladiator paintings prevents reconstructing securely the composition of each duel and the overall decorative scheme.

IX.9.8 (bar): behind the marble counter on the left as one enters were painted two gladiators, apparently on an earlier layer of plaster that had been gouged with a pick in order to facilitate adhesion of a later layer: the victor, perhaps named in a fragmentary black text to the left, 'holds out his shield, lowering it almost down to the ground, draws back his right hand next to his side, as if to strike the final blow, and turns his head back, no doubt towards the audience, to find out their decision concerning the fate of his fallen opponent' (Mau, 1889, pp.29 = *CIL* 4.3789, no image).

IX.12.7 (Tavern of Purpurio): immediately to the right of the entryway was painted a 'monochromatic red depiction of the final phase of a gladiatorial duel', where the defeated combatant is shown disarmed, bleeding from his knee, and gesturing with his right hand (Fröhlich, 1991, pp.176, 339 = F71; Spinazzola, 1953, vol.1, figs. 211–14). The scene was one of a series

of panels belonging to a larger composition, each within a thick red border, including two large snakes flanking a circular altar and a sacrifice attended by the *Lares compitales* and Genius, as well as five figures immediately above a masonry altar immured at the intersection (probably the *vicomagistri* and a musician).

Group 2: paintings perhaps near an entryway and showing the final phase of combat

I.4.27 (bar): at the time of excavation no precise information was given about whether the image was from the bar, the smaller room at the rear, or the façade. The only description mentions 'a pair of gladiators fighting against each other', with spare details about their armature (Jacobelli, 2003, pp.73–4, 118, after Sogliano, 1879, no image).

II.1.13 (house attached to bar II 1, 1): on the exterior face of the wall to the left of the entrance was painted a scene on a brownish baseline against a white background: one person apparently with a long stick advancing towards two other people who were armed, i.e. the compositional schema of the umpire intervening at the end of a gladiatorial duel. Above the scene was a painting of four red shields (Fröhlich, 1991, p.312, no image).

II.2.2-5 (House of Loreius Tiburtinus): on the façade to the right of the rear entrance to a large garden, where the street broadens on the north side of the grand palaestra (II 7), was painted a long frieze against a yellow background, separated into panels by thick red borders, apparently including a victorious gladiator and a fallen combatant who had lost his shield, as well as other figures marching, perhaps in parade. Now all but lost (Spinazzola, 1953, vol.1, p.415; fig.479, of context only).

IX.3.13 (shop and house): on the western wall of the front room, on the left as one enters and just before a door leading from the shop into the residential atrium, the plaster had been painted with 'a *genius* flanked by Lares, the caricature of a man's head, and two gladiators in the act of fighting', all beneath a staircase leading up to a mezzanine (Fiorelli, 1861, pp.375–6, no image). No traces of decoration have survived.

IX.9.d (house): 'near the entrance, to the left, was painted on the outer wall, above a layer of lime, two gladiators fighting, now vanished', while in the atrium itself were apparently painted three further pairs of gladiators: 'two gladiators fighting' on the wall of a small chamber that extends into the western part of the atrium; 'another pair was painted higher up'; and 'another pair, completely armed and in the act of fighting, was painted on the north wall against a black background on the northern wall' (Sogliano, 1889, p.130, no image). The specimens from inside the atrium appear to be on either side of the doorway leading to a triclinium, although excavation records differ and are not detailed enough to reconstruct precisely which moments from a duel or duels were portrayed. No traces of decoration have survived.

Group 3: paintings in other locations and / or showing other compositions

I.3.23 (House of Anicetus): on the western wall of the courtyard (N) were two paintings of gladiator duels, now lost, one on either side of the large riot scene. In each painting the contest has been decided, with the defeated combatant on their knees (Jacobelli, 2003, pp.72–4, 118; fig.60a–b).

I.7.7 (House of the priest Amandus): beneath the plaster facing on the right-hand wall of the long vestibule leading from the street to the atrium was a badly damaged frieze painted in monochromatic red, including a figure blowing a long horn; two combatants on horseback, armed with shields and lances; two combatants on foot, armed with helmets, shields, and swords; and labels in Oscan, most legibly '*Spartaks*' – all of which suggests a historical or military scene rather than the arena (Jacobelli, 2003, pp.75–6, 118; fig.62).

VII.4.26 (shop and house): a chamber off the atrium was evidently decorated at the time of excavation 'with the scene of a gladiatorial combat and more animals grappling with each other', although the fact that no trace remains today, along with the uncharacteristically brief description, may suggest that it was already badly damaged at the time of discovery (Fiorelli, 1861, p.216, no image).

VIII.4.4-49 (House of Holconius Rufus): on a pilaster at the intersection of the tablinum and peristyle was painted 'in red the name *P(rimigenius)*, followed by some letters almost completely erased, and below was a ship crudely painted in the same colour, and still lower a crude figure of a gladiator with rectangular shield, helmet, and sword' (*CIL* 4.728, no image). There is some ambiguity in the word 'dipinto', and this coarse ('rozza') and monochrome figure may not even have been a genuine fresco, painted onto fresh plaster by an artist, but rather added informally to the dry plaster at a later moment, not unlike a spontaneous graffito (hence Langner, 2001, no.897), perhaps influenced by nearby images of animals in flight. Likewise, the description of the two pairs of gladiators recorded in room D of house V.3.4 reads more like a crude dipinto than a true fresco (pace Fröhlich, 1991, p.66, n.388).

VIII.5.37 (House of the Red Walls): painted on the tympanum of a lavishly decorated masonry lararium

in the atrium were 'gladiator weapons', including a crested helmet, greaves, shield, and a dagger, but no figure of a gladiator (Fröhlich, 1991, pp.291–2; Boyce, 1937, figs.31.1–2). At the time of excavation, six bronze statuettes (two Mercuries, two Lares, Apollo, and Hercules) were found on the lararium, along with a lamp.

VIII.7.24 (House of the Sculptor): on the eastern wall of a large peristyle garden area adjacent to the small theatre were paintings of a naval battle, various Nilotic scenes, and a duel between two gladiators armed with swords and rectangular shields, although the top half of the latter image had already been destroyed by the time of excavation (Maiuri, 1955, pp.65–80, pl.8.2). The figure at right appears to be unbalanced, which suggests a moment towards the end of the fight. The garden setting and exaggerated phalluses of the pygmies recall the tutelary guardian Priapus.

Acknowledgements

Many thanks to Jessica Hughes and the anonymous readers for invaluable suggestions. The Columbia University Center for Archaeology and Lance Jessup greatly improved earlier drafts of this work, but all errors remain the author's.

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