

Excerpt from *Factorum ac dictorum memorabilium libri IX* by Valerius Maximus (1st century CE)

The first gladiator [*gladiatorium munus*] show in Rome was given in the Forum Boarium in the Consulship of Ap. Clausius and Q. Fulvius [264 BCE]. The donors were Marcus and Decimus, sons of Brutus Pera, honouring their father's ashes with a funerary memorial. An athletic contest was held by the munificence of M. Scaurus (2.4.7). [Translation by D. R. Shackleton Bailey, 2000]

Excerpts from "Iulus" from *De vita Caesarum* by Gaius Suetonius Tranquillus (ca. 69-122 CE)

25. Briefly, his nine years' governorship [60-51 BCE] produced the following results. He reduced to the form of a province the whole of Gaul enclosed by the Pyrenees, the Alps, the Cevennes, the Rhine and the Rhône – about 32,000 miles in circumference – except for certain allied states which had given him useful support and exacted an annual tribute of 40 million sesterces. Caesar was the first Roman to build a military bridge across the Rhine and cause the Germans on the further bank heavy losses. He also invaded Britain, a hitherto unknown country, and defeated the natives, from whom he exacted a large sum of money as well as hostages for future good behaviour. He met with only three serious reverses: in Britain, when his fleet was all but destroyed by a gale; in Gaul, when one of his legions was routed at Gergovia; and on the German frontier, when his legates Titurius and Aurunculeius were ambushed and killed.

26. During this time Caesar lost, one after the other, his mother, his daughter, and his grandson. Meanwhile, the assassination of Publius Clodius had caused such an outcry that the Senate voted for the appointment of only a single consul, naming Pompey as their choice. When the tribunes of the people wanted Caesar to stand as Pompey's colleague, Caesar asked whether they would not persuade the people to let him do so without visiting Rome; his governorship of Gaul, he wrote, was nearly at an end, and he preferred not to leave until his conquests had been completed. Their granting of this concession so fired Caesar's ambitions that he neglected no expense in winning popularity, both as a private citizen and as a candidate for his second consulship. He began building a new forum with the spoils taken in Gaul and paid more than 100 million sesterces for the site alone. Then he announced a gladiatorial show and a public banquet in memory of his daughter Julia – an unprecedented event – and to create as much excitement as possible he had the banquet catered for partly by his own household, partly by the market contractors. He also issued an order that any well-known gladiator who failed to win the approval of the spectators should be forcibly rescued from execution and reserved for the coming show. New gladiators were also trained, not by the usual professionals in the schools, but in private houses by Roman equites and even senators who happened to be skilled at arms. Letters of his survive, begging these trainers to give their pupils individual instruction in the art of fighting. He fixed the daily pay of the regular soldiers at double what it had been. Whenever the granaries were full he would make a lavish distribution to the army, without measuring the amount, and occasionally gave every man a Gallic slave. [Translation by Robert Graves, 2007]

Epistulae morales ad Lucilium 1.7 by Lucius Annaeus Seneca (4 BCE-65 CE)

1. You ask what I think you should take special care to avoid: the crowd. You cannot yet trust yourself safely to it. I at least will admit my weakness; I never bring back the same character which I took from home. Something has been upset from the state of calm I had

achieved: something of the faults I had put to flight returns. It is like the experience of the sick, who have been so affected by long weakness that they cannot go out anywhere without being shaken up; this is what happens to us as our minds are being restored from a long sickness.

2. Association with a large group is harmful; there is no one who does not either recommend some fault to us or impose it upon us or smear it on us when we are unaware. At any rate, the bigger the gathering with which we are mingling, the greater the danger. But nothing is so harmful to good character as to sit idly at a show; it is then that faults sneak up on us more easily because of pleasure.

3. What do you think I mean? I come back more miserly, more ambitious, more self-indulgent, worse, more cruel and inhuman, because I was among human beings. I happened upon the midday show expecting entertainment and wit and some relaxation, to rest men's eyes from the sight of human blood. It was quite the opposite. Whatever combat there was before was an act of mercy. Now they have dropped fooling and it is pure murder. The men have no protective armour. Since their whole bodies are exposed to the blows they never strike a blow in vain.

4. This is what most people prefer to regular pairings and pairings on request. Why wouldn't they prefer such easy game? The steel is not fended off by helmet or shield. What is the point of protective devices or techniques? All such things are a mere obstacle to death. In the morning men are thrown to lions and bears, at noon to the spectators. They order the killers to be thrown to others who will kill them and keep back the victor for another slaughter; the outcome for the fighters is death. It is a total war of steel and fire. This is what happens with an empty arena. 'But maybe he committed a robbery or killed a man!'

5. Just because he killed, did he deserve to suffer this? What did you do, you wretch, to deserve watching this display? 'Kill him, beat him, burn him!' 'Why is he so timid in hurling himself on the steel? Why is he not falling more bravely? Why is he dying so apathetically? Let them battle it out with slashing blows that make open wounds, so that the fighters suffer mutual death strokes while exposing their bare breasts.' The show is interrupted. 'Have some men throttled in the interval so there is something to watch.' Come, don't you even realize that bad examples fall back on those who make them happen? Thank the immortal gods that you are teaching a man to be cruel who cannot learn.

6. An unformed spirit, one not sufficiently firm in its grasp of morality, must be rescued from the people. It is so easy otherwise to cross over to the majority. The alien crowd could have shaken the moral purpose of Socrates or Cato or Laelius: so true is it that none of us, even when we try hardest to shape and trim our mind, can withstand the onset of faults escorted by such a great retinue.

7. A single example of self-indulgence or avarice does a great deal of harm; a fussy dinner companion gradually weakens and softens our manhood. A rich neighbour rouses our greed, a malicious companion rubs off his envy on the most open and spotless fellow; what do you think happens to a character on whom a communal assault has been mounted?

8. You must either imitate men or loathe them. In fact, you should avoid either course. You should not become like evil men because they are many or be hostile to the many because they are unlike you. Withdraw into yourself as far as you can, and associate with those who

will make you better. Invite those whom you can make better. This benefits both sides, and men learn while they are teaching.

9. There is no reason for pride in displaying your character to push you into the public eye, to recite or debate, as I might have wished you to do, if your wares were suitable for the people: there is no one who can understand you. Perhaps some person, one man or another, will come upon you, and even he will need to be shaped and trained to understand you. 'Then for whom did I learn these teachings?' You need not be afraid of having wasted your effort if you have learned them for yourself.

10. But so that I have not learned this just for my own good, I shall share with you three magnificent sayings that came my way to the same effect: this letter will pay out what is due to you as a debt; accept the other two as advance payment. Democritus¹ said: 'one man is as good as a whole city for me, and the city is as good as one man.'

11. And that other man, whoever it was (the author is disputed), made a good point, when he was asked why he observed so carefully an art that would reach only a few. He said: 'a few are enough for me, one is enough, or even no one is enough.' Epicurus made the third, quite splendid, comment when he was writing to one of his fellow students. 'I am not saying this for many, but for you. For one of us is a good enough audience for the other.'

12. You must bury these thoughts deep in your mind, Lucilius, so that you condemn the pleasure that comes from the agreement of a majority. Many men praise you, but what reason do you have to be pleased with yourself, if you are the kind of man whom the common crowd can understand? Let your virtues look inwards. Keep well. [Translation by Elaine Fantham, 2010]

Epistulae morales ad Lucilium 4.8 by Lucius Annaeus Seneca (4 BCE-65 CE)

1. You have promised to be a good man, the greatest bond to ensure a good state of mind, and you have done it on oath. Anyone who tells you the campaign will be soft and easy will be making fun of you. I don't want you to be deceived. The words of this most honourable oath and that most shameful one are the same: 'to be burned and bound and killed by the sword.'

2. But what is enjoined on those who rent out their actions to the arena and pay for their food and drink with their own blood is that they will suffer such hardships even against their will: instead, you are enjoined to endure these things willingly and gladly. They are allowed to lower their weapons and seek the mercy of the crowd; you will neither lower them nor ask for your life; you must die upright and unconquered. After all, what is the benefit of gaining a few days or years? We are born without the chance of discharge. 'So how shall I acquit myself?' you ask.

3. You can't escape emergencies, but you can defeat them: "Force makes a way" [*Aeneid* 2.494] and philosophy will give you this other way. Take yourself to her if you want to be safe, carefree, and happy, in short, if you want to be free, which is the greatest gain: it cannot come to you any other way. Stupidity is low, contemptible, shabby, slavish, and dominated by many savage emotions.

¹ The fifth-century atomist and sage whose teachings were revived and developed by Epicurus.

4. But wisdom, which alone is liberty, sends away from you these burdensome tyrants who sometimes demand opposite things and sometimes the same. One way alone leads to this, and it is straight; you will not wander off: go forward with a sure step. If you want to subject everything to yourself, subject yourself to reason: you will rule over many if reason rules over you. From reason you will learn what to attempt and how; you will not do things by accident.

5. You will not be able to cite any man to me who knows how he began to want what he wants: he was not brought to this point by deliberation but driven by an impulse. Fortune does not come up against us any less often than we come up against her. It is shameful not to walk but to be carried, and suddenly dazed in the midst of worldly confusion to ask: 'How did I come to this point?' Keep well. [Translation by Elaine Fantham, 2010]

Excerpt from *Toxaris vel amicitia* (Τόξαρις ἢ Φιλία) by Lucian (ca. 125-180 CE)

Tox. I am schooled. Brevity you shall have; I will not run you off your ears this time. My next story shall be of a service rendered to myself, by my friend Sisinnus. Induced by the desire for Greek culture, I had left my home and was on my way to Athens. The ship put in at Amastris, which comes in the natural route from Scythia, being on the shore of the Euxine, not far from Carambis. Sisinnus, who had been my friend from childhood, bore me company on this voyage. We had transferred all our belongings from the ship to an inn near the harbour; and whilst we were busy in the market, suspecting nothing wrong, some thieves had forced the door of our room and carried off everything, not leaving us even enough to go on with for that day. Well, when we got back and found what had happened, we thought it was no use trying to get legal redress from our landlord, or from the neighbours; there were too many of them; and if we had told our story,—how we had been robbed of four hundred darics and our clothes and rugs and everything, most people would only have thought we were making a fuss about a trifle. So, we had to think what was to be done: here we were, absolutely destitute, in a foreign country. For my part, I thought I might as well put a sword through my ribs there and then, and have done with it, rather than endure the humiliation that might be forced upon us by hunger and thirst. Sisinnus took a more cheerful view and implored me to do nothing of the kind: 'I shall think of something,' he said, 'and we may do well yet.' For the moment, he made enough to get us some food by carrying up timber from the harbour. The next morning, he took a walk in the market, where it seems he saw a company of fine likely young fellows, who as it turned out were hired as gladiators, and were to perform two days after. He found out all about them, and then came back to me. 'Toxaris,' he exclaimed, 'consider your poverty at an end! In two days' time, I will make a rich man of you.' We got through those two days somehow, and then came the show, in which we took our places as spectators, Sisinnus bidding me prepare myself for all the novel delights of a Greek amphitheatre. The first thing we saw on sitting down was a number of wild beasts: some of them were being assailed by javelins, others hunted by dogs, and others again were let loose upon certain men who were tied hand and foot, and whom we supposed to be criminals. The gladiators next made their appearance. The herald led forward a strapping young fellow, and announced that anyone who was prepared to stand up against him might step into the arena and take his reward, which would be 400 pounds [1000 drachmae]. Sisinnus rose from his seat, jumped down into the ring, expressed his willingness to fight, and demanded arms. He received the money and brought it to me. 'If I win,' he said, 'we will

go off together, and are amply provided for: if I fall, you will bury me and return to Scythia.' I was much moved.

He now received his arms, and put them on; with the exception, however, of the helmet, for he fought bareheaded. He was the first to be wounded, his adversary's curved sword drawing a stream of blood from his groin. I was half dead with fear. However, Sisinnus was biding his time: the other now assailed him with more confidence, and Sisinnus made a lunge at his breast, and drove the sword clean through, so that his adversary fell lifeless at his feet. He himself, exhausted by the loss of blood, sank down upon the corpse, and life almost deserted him; but I ran to his assistance, raised him up, and spoke words of comfort. The victory was won, and he was free to depart; I therefore picked him up and carried him home. My efforts were at last successful: he rallied, and is living in Scythia to this day, having married my sister. He is still lame, however, from his wound. Observe: this did not take place in Machlyene, nor yet in Alania; there is no lack of witnesses to the truth of the story this time; many an Amastrian here in Athens would remember the fight of Sisinnus (58-60).

[Translation by A. M. Harmon, 1936]

Excerpt from *Historia Romana* by Lucius Cassius Dio (ca. 155-235 CE) concerning events in 38 CE

The performances of his [Gaius Julius Caesar Augustus Germanicus, i.e., Caligula] next to be enumerated elicited the censure of all without distinction. He caused very great numbers of men to fight as gladiators, forcing them to contend both separately and in groups, drawn up in a kind of military formation: he requested permission from the senate to do this, and again,—something quite contrary to the spirit of the enacted law that he might do whatsoever he pleased,—he asked leave to put to death a number of persons, among them twenty-six knights, some of whom had already devoured their living, while others had merely practiced gladiatorial combat. It was not the number of those who perished that was so bad (though it was bad enough) but his frenzied delight in their slaughter and his never satisfied gazing at the scene of blood. The same trait of cruelty led him once, when there was a shortage of condemned criminals to be given to the beasts, to order some of the mob that stood near the benches to be seized and thrown to them. And to prevent the possibility of their making an outcry or attacking him orally he had their tongues cut out first of all. One of the prominent knights, too, he compelled to fight in single combat on the charge of insult offered to his mother Agrippina, and when the man proved victorious handed him over to the accusers and had him slain. The same person's father, though guilty of no wrong, he confined in a cage (as he had confined numerous others), and there put an end to him.—These contests he at first conducted in the Saepta, after excavating the entire site and filling it with water, to enable him to bring in one ship. Later he transferred his operations to another place, where he tore down a large number of massive buildings and set up benches. The theatre of Taurus he held in contempt. All this behavior, expenditures and murders alike, subjected him to criticism (59.10, translation by Herbert Baldwin Foster, 1905).