

Topic Page: [gladiators](#)

Definition: **gladiator** from *The Hutchinson Unabridged Encyclopedia with Atlas and Weather Guide*

In ancient Rome, a trained fighter, recruited mainly from slaves, criminals, and prisoners of war, who fought to the death in arenas for the entertainment of spectators. The custom was introduced into Rome from Etruria in 264 BC and continued until the 5th century AD.

Summary Article: **gladiators**

From *The Columbia Encyclopedia*

[Lat.,=swordsmen], in ancient Rome, class of professional fighters, who performed for exhibition. Gladiatorial combats usually took place in amphitheatres. They probably were introduced from Etruria and originally were funeral games. Gladiatorial combats, which took place in the Colosseum and in hundreds of other amphitheatres throughout the Roman world, reached their height in the 1st and 2d cent. A.D.

The gladiators were paired off to fight each other, usually to the number of about 100 couples, although in the imperial shows there were sometimes as many as 5,000 pairs. There were various types of gladiators, armed and armored differently. Thus a heavily armored man, a Mirmillo or Samnite, might be opposed to a Retiarius, who fought almost naked, with a net and a trident as his only weapons. He also might be pitted against a Thracian, who fought with a dagger and a small round shield. Often gladiators were made to fight wild beasts. A defeated gladiator was usually killed by the victor unless the people expressed their desire that he be spared.

At first, gladiators were invariably slaves or prisoners, including Christians. They normally underwent rigid training, and some gained immense popularity. Later, impoverished freedmen also sought a living as gladiators, and finally even members of the ruling classes took part in gladiatorial combats on an amateur basis. Some gladiators, led by Spartacus, took part in the third of the Servile Wars (73 B.C.–71 B.C.). Constantine I forbade gladiatorial games, but they nonetheless continued until A.D. 405.

See studies by M. Grant (1968), E. Kohne, ed. (2000), A. Futrell (2001), and F. Meijer (2005).

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