
LANGUAGE OF THE ARENA IN THE PONTIC REGION

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Abstract: *Gladiatorial combats were much more than violent spectacles to entertain an enthusiastic audience. The first such events were held in connection to funerary practices and, as the Roman Empire grew, the combats gained a new dimension, this time related to the imperial cult. Moreover, the organisation, choreography and promotion of these combats become the embodiment of the new reality of the Roman world and its symbiosis with the Greek culture. This study aims to analyze one of the aspects of this symbiosis in the Black Sea, starting from the Greek and Latin terminology used in relation to the organisation of gladiatorial combats in the Pontic provinces.*

Rezumat: *Luptele de gladiatori au reprezentat mai mult decât spectacole violente pentru publicul entuziast. Primele evenimente de acest fel au fost legate de ritul funerar, pentru ca o dată cu evoluția spre imperiu să capete o nouă semnificație legată, de această dată, de cultul imperial. Mai mult chiar, organizarea, punerea în scenă și promovarea luptelor ajung chiar să simbolizeze noua realitate a lumii romane și simbioza cu lumea greacă. Studiul de față își propune să analizeze unul dintre aspectele acestei simbioze, în zona Marii Negre, pornind de la terminologia greacă și latină utilizate în contextul organizării luptelor de gladiatori în provinciile pontice.*

Keywords: *Roman Empire, Pontus Euxinus, gladiators, organizers, terminology.*

Cuvinte cheie: *Imperiul Roman, Pontus Euxinus, gladiatori, organizatori, terminaologie.*

INTRODUCTION

The present study aims to discuss a number of Greek terms used in the inscriptions referring to *munera* and gladiators in the Roman provinces of the Black Sea, their Latin or Greek origin and the ratio of related inscriptions in Latin and Greek. Clearly, the available sources for this study are inscriptions announcing events and gladiatorial epitaphs, all discovered in the Roman provinces of the Black Sea. The inscriptions are dated to the 2nd and 3rd centuries AD and were found, all except one (*Colonia Deultum*), in Greek cities and in Roman cities with strong Greek influences. Romans' influence in the East was limited, except in eastern architecture, law (*lex*) and combats of gladiators, as Greek language remained dominant in culture and was used in administration.¹

Organization of the first gladiatorial combats in the Greek area is recorded in relation with major military events. Thus, in the year 169 BC, the battle of Pydna gave

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¹ Woolf 1994, 16-17.

way to the conquest of Macedonia by the Roman army led by consul Lucius Aemilius Paullus. Soon after the victory, extraordinary games were organized at Amphipolis that included *uictimis et quidquid aliud deorum hominumque*.²

The first records of gladiatorial combats in the Greek world, organized by Greeks, appear in the works of Polybios quoted later by Titus Livius.³ Polybios mentions that in autumn 166 BC, Seleucid king Antiochos IV Epiphanes was responsible for organising gladiatorial games at Daphne during the festivities of the cult of Apollo Archegetes. The king's main intention was to exceed the grandeur and popularity of the games organized by Paullus two years before.⁴ The festivities lasted 30 days and consisted of various spectacles and competitions whose highlights were the performances of 240 pairs of gladiators and wild animals.⁵ This is the first instance when such competitions are recorded unrelated to a funerary context and, moreover, the first-time gladiatorial combats are associated with wild animal fights.⁶

We may assume that at the end of the 2nd century BC - beginning of the 1st century BC gladiatorial fights were introduced by the Italian community in Delos, even though the hypothesis has not yet been proven beyond doubt.⁷ What does seem to be fairly sure is the fact that, in 71-70 BC, Roman General L. Licinius Lucullus presented such combats at Ephesus.⁸

A new stage in the history of these fascinating performances in the Greek-dominated areas is marked by Marcus Antonius bringing gladiators to Cyzicus to train for the future celebration of his triumph following his much-coveted victory against his enemy, Octavian. The celebration never took place, as he was ultimately defeated at the battle of Actium, but the commissioned gladiators decided to cross entire Asia Minor and eastern provinces to finally join him at Alexandria.⁹

More often than not, gladiatorial combats are mentioned in the transition period from Republic to Empire, when Greek magistrates offered such performances within specific festivities.¹⁰ Moreover, this is also the time when the imperial cult slowly begins to substitute the cult of Rome and gladiatorial performances became

² Titus Livius XLI, 20; Futrell 2006, 9-10.

³ Polybios XXX, 25; Titus Livius XLI, 20; XLV, 30-33

⁴ Polybios XXX, 25-26; Golvin, Landes 1990, 26; Carter 1999, 57; Wiedemann 1992, 42; Futrell 2006, 10; Erskine 2013, 51.

⁵ Polybios XXX, 26; Carter 1999, 57-58; Futrell 2006, 11; Mann 2011, 46.

⁶ Ville 1981, 51; Carter 1999, 58.

⁷ Robert 1940, 264; Carter 1999, 61.

⁸ Robert 1940, 264; Carter 1999, 62.

⁹ Cassius Dio LI, 7; Ville 1981, 99; Carter 1999, 62-63.

¹⁰ Robert 1940, 264; Carter 1999, 64.

part of the High Priest's responsibilities and began to be correlated with the practices of the cult. So far, there is no evidence that these combats were ever held in relation with the cult of Rome.¹¹

THE LANGUAGE OF THE ENTERTAINMENT

Organization of a *munus* in western Roman provinces fell on the local magistrates and the rich members of the elite that could afford such financial burden but could also benefit from the popularity of such events.¹² Instead, in the Roman provinces in the east, gladiatorial combats were integrated in the ceremony of the imperial cult, while the organization and financing of these events fell upon the *klerikós*, the priests of the imperial cult¹³. As it happened in Palestine, although Greek city dwellers did not agree with introducing gladiatorial events from the outset, they rapidly became popular, just as in the case of the Greek cities in the Roman provinces of the Black Sea¹⁴. The Greek cities in the eastern Roman provinces proved very resilient when it came to upholding their traditions; nonetheless, this particular Roman practice manages to find its place in society (Map 1). The terminology of the spectacles is uniform and similar to the rest of the Empire and Rome, with slight variations due to how the language was perceived and to the status of the gladiators themselves.

Honorary inscriptions or the *invitation ad munera* referring to the people responsible for the organization of gladiatorial combats in the Black Sea area are, all but one, discovered at Deultum and mention a *munerarius* who organized *venation* and *taurocathapsia*¹⁵, are written in Greek and almost all the terms used to describe combat-related activities are, in fact, the Greek equivalents of the Latin terms.¹⁶ Nonetheless, some Latin terms don't have an equivalent in Greek, thus keep their Latin form but are written in Greek by means of transliteration.

For instance, the Greek term used to refer to the fighter in the arena, the Latin *gladiator*, appears in Pontic inscriptions as *μονομάχος* – translated as “person fighting on its own”, while the fight between gladiators is called *μονομαχία*.¹⁷ The term *μονομάχος* is found in the Black Sea provinces in two inscriptions. One of them

¹¹ Carter 1999, 64; Bouley 2001, 77.

¹² Carter 1999, 144.

¹³ Robert 1940, 267-307; Wiss 1999, 26; Bouley 2001, 77-78; Carter 1999, 168-217.

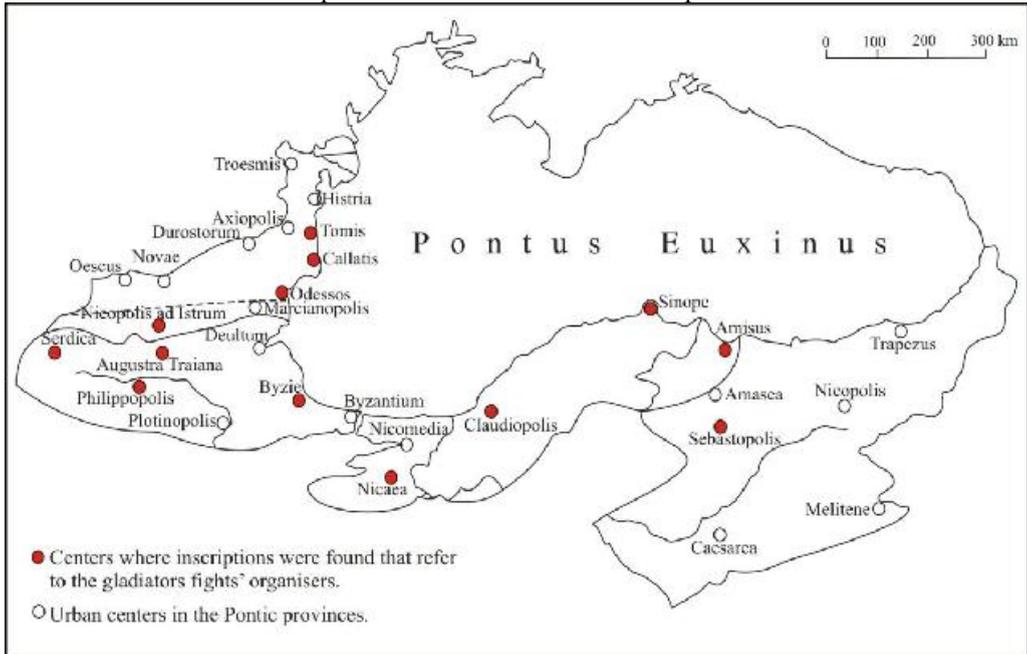
¹⁴ Wiss 1999, 40

¹⁵ Vagalinski 2009, 153, nr. 15.

¹⁶ Carter 1999, 146.

¹⁷ Carter 1999, 146; Erskine 2013, 43.

mentions a priest who organized gladiatorial combats at Claudiopolis¹⁸, while the second inscription was discovered at Amisos and mentions a pontarch¹⁹. The term *μονομαχία* – meaning a fight between two people, is found in nine inscriptions. Three of them were unearthed at Odessos²⁰, one at Nicopolis ad Istrum²¹, two at Serdica²², one at Niceea²³, one at Sinope²⁴ and the last one at Sebastopolis²⁵.



Map 1.

The Greeks also preferred to use their own language when referring to the gladiatorial performances, called *munus* in Latin, and to the organizer, named *munerarius*²⁶. The Greek equivalent for *munus* is *φιλοτιμία*.²⁷ This particular term is

¹⁸ SEG 39, 1339; Ündemiş-French 1989, 91-97, no. 1; Marek 2003, 100.

¹⁹ Robert 1940, 130, nr. 78; Carter 1999, 333, no. 177.

²⁰ IGBulg I², 70 bis = IGBulg V, nr. 5031; IGBulg I², 71, 73.

²¹ IGBulg V, 5217.

²² IGBulg IV, 1918; IGBulg IV, 1919 = IGBulg V, 5671.

²³ IK. Iznik, 60.

²⁴ Robert 1940, 131-132, nr. 80.

²⁵ Robert 1940, 128-129, nr. 75.

²⁶ Robert 1940, 276-280; Carter 1999, 149.

²⁷ Robert 1940, 278; Bouley 2001, 78, 123-124.

encountered in three inscriptions: two found at Tomis²⁸, mentioning pontarchs, and one found at Sebastopolis²⁹. The Greek term for the Latin *munerarius* - φιλότιμος³⁰ is written in three inscriptions: two at Nicopolis ad Istrum and the third at Augusta Traiana.³¹

Moreover, μονομαχία is not the only term used by the Greeks to describe gladiatorial combats. As well pointed out by Carter, gladiators appear in two inscriptions as war heroes. One of these cases, probably the most relevant for our area of interest, is the inscription ordered by the people of Tomis in honour of the pontarch whose name is still unknown, but who organized Ἄραιως ἄθλα – translated as “fights of Ares”, calling the gladiators Ἄραιως ἀθλητῆρες – athletes of Ares.³² The second inscription originates from Sagalassos and resembles the one from Tomis, referring to the gladiators as “the army of men loved by Ares”.³³

Another aspect of the φιλοτιμία is that, just like *munera*, their organization was almost exclusively the privilege of the local or provincial priests and high priests of the imperial cult, very seldom of laymen. The Greek names for priest (ιερεὺς) and for high priest (ἀρχιερεὺς)³⁴ are often found as the phrase δι’ ὅπλων, creating the collocations ιερεὺς δι’ ὅπλων and ἀρχιερεὺς δι’ ὅπλων, used when referring to the priests in charge with organizing φιλοτιμία.³⁵ The office of ιερεὺς is mentioned twice: once in an inscription from Byzie as τὸν ιερέα καὶ ταλαντάρχην δι’ ὅπλων³⁶, and in another inscription from Claudiopolis, just as ιερεὺς³⁷. On the other hand, the office of ἀρχιερεὺς appears in its simple form in 5 inscriptions: two from Odessos³⁸, one from Nicopolis ad Istrum³⁹, and two from Serdica⁴⁰. The same office is also found integrated in the phrase δι’ ὅπλων at Tomis as ἀρχιερασάμενον τὴν δι’ ὅπλων⁴¹; at Augusta

²⁸ ISM II, 96 (62), 97 (63); Bottez 2009, 239, no. 39, no. 40.

²⁹ Robert 1940, 128-129, nr. 75.

³⁰ Robert 1940, 279.

³¹ Vagalinski 2009, 148, nr. 7.

³² Stoian 1962, 161-162; ISM II, 188 (24); Carter 1999, 147; Bottez 2009, 242, no. 44.

³³ Carter 1999, 147.

³⁴ Robert 1940, 270.

³⁵ Robert 1940, 24; Bouley 2001, 126; Carter 1999, 148.

³⁶ SEG 32, 660; Sayar 1983, 144-146; Carter 1999, 307-308, no. 47.

³⁷ SEG 39, 1339; Ündemiş-French 1989, 91-97, no. 1; Marek 2003, 100.

³⁸ IGBulg I², 70 bis = IGBulg V, 5031; IGBulg I², 71.

³⁹ Robert 1940, 100, no. 39; IGBulg II, 660; Carter 1999, 303, no. 25; Vagalinski 2009, 160-161, no. 30; Bottez 2009, 294, no. 177.

⁴⁰ IGBulg IV, 1918; IGBulg IV, 1919 = IGBulg V, 5671.

⁴¹ ISM II, 96 (62), 97 (63); Carter 1999, 299, no. 8; Bottez 2009, 239, no. 39, no. 40.

Traiana both as ἀρχιερέα δι' ὄπλων⁴² and as ἀρχιερέως δι' ὄπλων⁴³; at Philippopolis it is quite common in two alternative instances, as ἀρχιερέως δι' ὄπλων⁴⁴ and ἀρχιερέως δι' ὄπλων.⁴⁵ Gladiatorial combats were organized by priests of the imperial cult as part of their attributions, but it's seldom the case of important local laymen to offer such entertainment without any connection to the cult. In the text of an inscription discovered at Nicopolis ad Istrum we find a φιλότιμον δι' ὄπλων⁴⁶, while at Augusta Traiana there is a mention of a φιλότιμον ἀρχιερέα δι' ὄπλων.⁴⁷ The latter is particularly interesting, as it joins two attributes of the designated person. The reference suggests that the individual brought to our attention organized gladiatorial fights both as a layman and as part of the imperial cult, while holding the office of archiereus. We should also add here the illustrated example of two inscriptions from Serdica⁴⁸, where the δι' ὄπλων sequence is not clearly related to the ἱερέως, ἀρχιερέως or φιλότιμος, probably due to the monument's poor state of conservation.

The only epigraphic source that attests the organization of gladiatorial fights alongside animal hunts, *taurocathapsia*, is the inscription discovered in Colonia Deultum.⁴⁹ What draws our attention is the use of Greek word *taurocathapsia* written with Latin letters. The term is used to describe acrobatics performed by athletes while confronting bulls, a type of performance of Greek origin dating back to the Bronze Age. Moreover, this is the only mention of such a spectacle ever being held in the Black Sea provinces during Roman times. As is the case with the Greeks borrowing non-existing terms from Latin, Romans also borrowed, through transliteration, this particular term from the Greeks to describe a spectacle from Greek culture.

The use of Greek language, when referring to organization of gladiatorial fights, invitations to such events and to other performances held together within a *munera*, seems natural from all points of view. Michael J.D. Carter had a very insightful take on this aspect: " For the Greek elite during the Roman Empire, language was a mark of their group identity, distinguishing them not only from their Roman rulers, but also from the less well-educated masses ".⁵⁰ All of the above examples make the use of

⁴² Robert 1940, no. 31; IGBulg III, 1571; IGBulg III/2, 1572 = IGBulg V, 5560; Gočeva 1981, 500; IGBulg V, 5565; Bouley 2001, 128; Vagalinski 2009, 148, no. 1, 2, 3, 7.

⁴³ Robert 1940, 93, no. 31; IGBulg V, 5566; Vagalinski 2009, no. 4.

⁴⁴ Gočeva 1981, 497; IGBulg V, 5408; Carter 1999, 306, no. 40; Vagalinski 2009, 193, no. 88.

⁴⁵ Gočeva 1981, 497; IGBulg V, 5407; Vagalinski 2009, 192-193, no. 87.

⁴⁶ IGBulg V, 5217; Carter 1999, 303, no. 26; Vagalinski 2009, 162, no. 33.

⁴⁷ IGBulg III, 1571.

⁴⁸ Robert 1940, 97, no. 38; IGBulg IV, 1918; IGBulg IV, 1919 = IGBulg V, 5671; Vagalinski 2009, 187, no. 72.

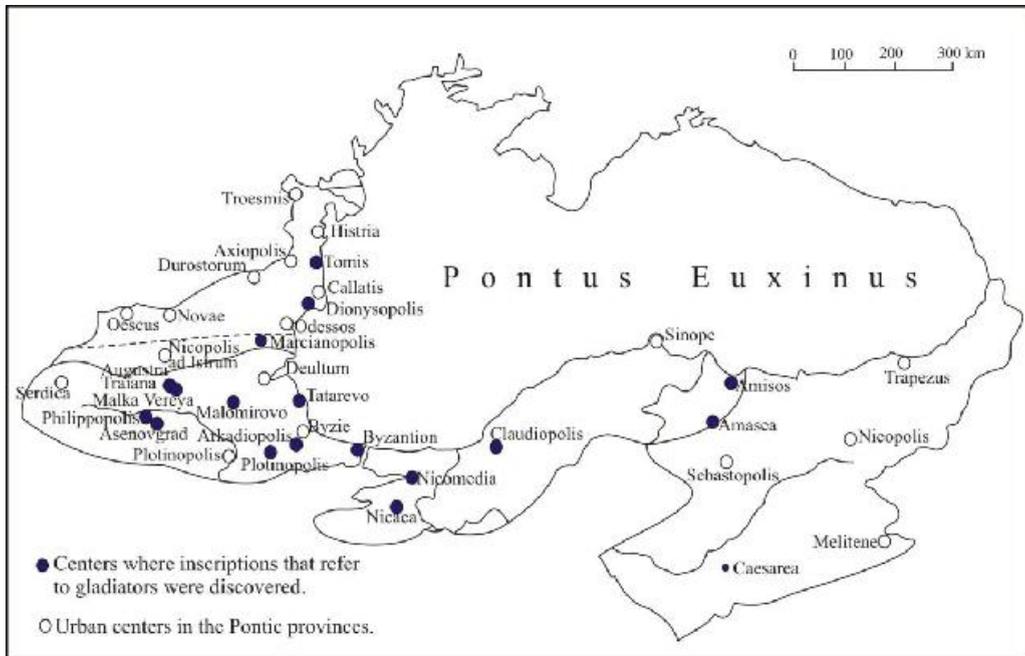
⁴⁹ Vagalinski 2009, 153, no. 15.

⁵⁰ Carter 1999, 151.

Greek language obvious and justified in our given context, mainly in the cases of honorary inscriptions and the *invitatio ad munera*.

THE LANGUAGE OF THE ENTERTAINERS

In regards to the Greek terminology related to the gladiatorial combats, in the Black Sea provinces during Roman times, the use of the term $\mu\omicron\nu\omicron\mu\acute{\alpha}\chi\omicron\varsigma$ in the epigraphic monuments (Map 2) is not very common. It actually seems to be quite a rare discovery, as it was only found in two inscriptions of pontarchs from two cities of Bythinia et Pontus, *Claudiopolis*⁵¹ and *Amisos*.⁵²



Map 2.

When it comes to the fighters themselves, the terms used are Greek. From the study of gladiators' tombstones, it is obvious the predilection for Latin terms written in Greek letters. In four inscriptions from *Tomis*⁵³, *Plotinopolis*⁵⁴, *Nicomedia*⁵⁵ and

⁵¹ SEG 39, 1340 = SEG 51, 1707 bis; Ündemiş-French 1989, 91-97, no. 2; Mann 2011, 251-252, no. 161.

⁵² Robert 1940, 130-131, nr. 79; Junkelmann 2000, 31.

⁵³ Stoian 1962, 199-200, no. 3; ISM II, 288 (124).

⁵⁴ Robert 1940, 92-93, nr. 30.

⁵⁵ Mann 2011, 252-253, nr. 163.

Amaseia⁵⁶, the gladiators are described using the term *πυγμῶν*, related to the Latin word for combat, *pugna*. It seems that this word, specific for boxing matches, was equally used for gladiatorial fights⁵⁷, leading us to believe that the status of the performers had evolved and the spectacle managed to find its place on the same level as Olympic competitions, making the gladiators as honourable in society as the athletes.

Most of the words related to gladiators also refer, *inter alia*, to the fighters' equipment. Such words are of Latin origin. All gladiatorial categories are defined by the equipment entailed, according to the funerary inscriptions. Among such terms we mention *σεκούτωρ*⁵⁸ (*secutor*), *προβοκάτωρ*⁵⁹ (*provocator*), *μυρμίλλων*⁶⁰ (*murmillo*), *ἐσσεδάριος*⁶¹ (*essedarius*) and *ρήτιάριος*⁶² (*retiarius*).⁶³ There is, however, one exception of a particular type of gladiator referred to in Latin as *venator* and in the Pontic inscriptions in Greek as *κυνηγός*.⁶⁴ It is obvious, in this case, the use of the Greek correspondent for *venator*, facilitating the use of the Greek term at the expense of Latin.

Certain gladiators were part of a special group that belonged to a *lanista*, or to the high priests of the imperial cult. This group was generically called *familia gladiatorum*.⁶⁵ In the Pontic area we have one mention of such *familia gladiatorum* at Amisos, in Bithynia et Pontus.⁶⁶ The Greek word for it is *φαμιλία μονομάχων*. The phrase resulted by joining a Latin word – *familia* – in Greek alphabet – with the Greek word *μονομάχων* (*monomachiarum* in Latin).

φαμιλία μονομάχων τῶν
περὶ Καλυδῶνα.⁶⁷

In this case, the Greeks borrowed a series of Latin terms to use in contexts related to gladiatorial combats and to describe actions from such performances new to

⁵⁶ Mann 2011, 256, nr. 168.

⁵⁷ Robert 1940, 19-20; Carter 1999, 73-74. The two authors broadly discuss the origin of the term in their studies, as well as the plausibility of the theory that the kinship of the term in the two languages led to the use of *πυγμῶν*, meaning gladiator in the eastern area of the Empire.

⁵⁸ SEG 39, 1339; AE 1999, 1337.

⁵⁹ ISM II, 288; SEG 39, 1339.

⁶⁰ Robert 1940, 92-93, nr.30; SEG 39, 1339; AE 1999, 1337.

⁶¹ SEG 39, 1339.

⁶² Robert 1940, 132-133, nr.81; IK.Iznik, 277; ISM II, 343 (179); SEG 39, 1340 = SEG 51, 1707 bis; Mann 2011, 256, nr. 168.

⁶³ Carter 1999, 75; Robert 1940, 65.

⁶⁴ Robert 1940, 20; ISM II, 340 (176).

⁶⁵ Robert 1940, 25-26.

⁶⁶ Robert 1940, 130, nr. 78.

⁶⁷ Robert 1940, 130, nr.78.

their culture.⁶⁸ Even if the people responsible for organizing these spectacles, members of the imperial and local elites, preferred using Greek terms, since it was the language of their cultural heritage, the gladiators seemed to have a preference for Latin terms and helped perpetuate this prestigious Roman form of entertainment that eventually became a real social phenomenon.⁶⁹

CONCLUDING REMARKS

Gladiatorial combats entered the Greek world as part of a military triumph of the Romans and carried on sporadically in the Aegean region, east Mediterranean and the Propontis. Unlike the Greek Aegean-Mediterranean area, where gladiatorial combats were documented early (2nd century BC), in the Black Sea area, gladiators arrived relatively late, in the second half of the 2nd century AD and almost exclusively in connection to the imperial cult.

It is common knowledge that Greek remained the language of choice in communication and culture for the majority in the Greek-speaking Roman provinces⁷⁰, therefore we will not dwell on this aspect. However, speaking about gladiatorial combats, an essentially novel spectacle, we would expect the Greeks to borrow Latin terminology literally. But it does not happen so, as the organizers of such events prefer the use of Greek terms to give a Greek allure to these games. Thus, the Greeks not only appropriated the Latin terms, but also somewhat adapted gladiatorial events as their own. The organizers awarded the title of *philotimos* and called the gladiatorial spectacles *philotimia*, appealing to the highest virtue in Greek culture, *philotimo*, to emphasize the importance they held both as game and as performance. As for the fighters, in the funerary inscriptions of gladiators, we notice that most of the terms use Latin script in Greek alphabet. The use of Latin terms to refer to the category of the fighter, with one exception, indicates that they did not have correspondents in Greek, therefore they were using those already existing in Latin, obviously, changing the script.⁷¹ On the other hand, by using *πυγμαῶν* instead of *μονομάχος*, gladiators show clear preference for the Latin word, which could be construed as a preference for Latin vocabulary, considered eminently prestigious and one of the main features of this Roman phenomenon.⁷²

Comparing the Roman Black Sea provinces to other provinces in the Eastern Roman Empire we notice that there is almost no difference when it comes to these

⁶⁸ Carter 1999, 76.

⁶⁹ Carter 1999, 76-77.

⁷⁰ Sartre 2007, 231.

⁷¹ Sartre 2007, 232.

⁷² Carter 1999, 76-77.

events. In Palestine, we find *munera* and *venationes*, this time in Talmudic literature, in the form of Greek words, *monomachia* and *kunegesia* (equivalent $\pi\upsilon\gamma\mu\tilde{\omega}\nu$); while the terms used for gladiator were *ludarius* or *monomachos*.⁷³

In Asia Minor we find no difference between the terms used in connection with gladiatorial spectacles and wild animal hunts and what happens in the Roman provinces of the Black Sea.⁷⁴

To conclude, the Greeks borrowed several Latin terms to use them in the context of gladiatorial combats, to describe actions related to this event that was new to them.⁷⁵ The following quote thus seems a relevant conclusion: "Greeks remained resistant to Latin to the end ..."⁷⁶

⁷³ Weiss 1999, 41.

⁷⁴ Robert 1940, 20-31; Carter 1999, 72-77.

⁷⁵ Carter 1999, 76

⁷⁶ Wolf 1994, 131.

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