

KATHLEEN M. COLEMAN

A LEFT-HANDED GLADIATOR AT POMPEII

aus: Zeitschrift für Papyrologie und Epigraphik 114 (1996) 194–196

© Dr. Rudolf Habelt GmbH, Bonn

## A LEFT-HANDED GLADIATOR AT POMPEII

A graffito from Pompeii (see figure) was published by M. Della Corte as follows (*CIL* IV 8056):



- a) Severus I(ib.) (victoriarum) xiii (perit);  
 b) Albanus Sc(auri?) I(ib.), (victoriarum) xix v(icit).

The abbreviation *sc* is surely too cryptic to stand for a name,<sup>1</sup> nor would the designation of the gladiator's 'stable' be included, since he is identified as *liber*. Yet Della Corte's supplement has recently been reproduced without comment in a general book on Roman spectacles.<sup>2</sup> The cartoon accompanying the graffito, however, clearly depicts the gladiator on the right (i.e. Albanus) wielding his weapon in his left hand and his shield in his right, whereas his opponent (i.e. Severus) has the normal posture, holding his weapon in his right hand; his shield lying on the ground is testimony to his defeat. Hence *sc* here stands for *scaeva*, 'left-hander'.

This term is attested in full in a funerary inscription for a *murmillo* from Sorrento:<sup>3</sup>

Valerius / scaeva mir/millo.

A slightly abbreviated form occurs in a funerary inscription for another *murmillo*, this time from Rome (*CIL* VI 10180):<sup>4</sup>

<sup>1</sup> Della Corte was presumably thinking of a relative of the prominent citizen A. Umbricius Scaurus who died at Pompeii before AD 62.

<sup>2</sup> K.-W. Weeber, *Panem et circenses. Massenunterhaltung als Politik im antiken Rom*, Mainz 1994, 33.

<sup>3</sup> P. Mingazzini, Sorrento. Necropoli romana in località Sottomonte, *NSc* 1928, 205–212 (at 211 no. 22).

<sup>4</sup> This is the only Latin inscription cited in the cursory entry by M. G. Mosci Sassi, *Il linguaggio gladiatorio*, Bologna 1992, 169–170 s.v. Scaeva.

d(is) m(anibus) / Lyco<sup>5</sup> lib(ero)<sup>6</sup> mur(milloni) / scaeu(ae) pugna(rum) III<sup>7</sup> / fec(it) Longinas / lib(er) contrarete / fratri b(ene) m(erenti).

The shorter form of abbreviation, as in the inscription from Pompeii, is attested in a funerary inscription for a Thracian gladiator, once again from Rome (*CIL* VI 10196):

d(is) m(anibus) s(acrum). / Apollonio / thraeci sc(aeuae)<sup>8</sup> / lib(ero) (pugnarum) vi.

The Latin word transliterated as a Greek substantive of the first declension is attested in an epitaph for a gladiator named Victor from Philippopolis in Thrace:<sup>9</sup>

Βίκτωρ σκευᾶς ἐνθάδε κείμεαι.

It also designates one of six gladiators recorded in an inscription from Iasos:<sup>10</sup>

Θράξι / σκευᾶς / Εὐκαρπος / [Σ]αμια(ρίου) νικησας α', στ(εφανωθείς) α'.

Commodus is reputed to have added to his titles the designation *πρωτόπαλος σκεκουτόρων* on the strength of his record in fighting left-handed.<sup>11</sup>

Gladiators are quite frequently depicted fighting left-handed, i.e. holding their shield in their right hand and their weapon in their left.<sup>12</sup> Sometimes shield and/or weapon are not depicted, but other clues survive: e.g., as Robert has pointed out, in cases where a gladiator wears a greave on his right leg alone he must be a left-hander.<sup>13</sup> When a relief-sculpture on a funerary monument includes a detail that deviates from the norm, it can be presumed to be deliberate commemoration of a characteristic of the

<sup>5</sup> *Lyco* is taken to be nominative by the *CIL* editor, followed by Louis Robert, *Les gladiateurs dans l'Orient grec* (= *Gladiateurs*), Paris 1940, 70. But the normal syntax of funerary inscriptions would create expectation of the dative of the name 'Lycus' (Λύκος). Heikki Solin allows that the name in this instance may have been 'Lyco' or 'Lycus'; two other instances of the name 'Lyco' are known at Rome, none of 'Lycus': *Die griechischen Personennamen in Rom. Ein Namenbuch* II, Berlin–New York 1982, 1058.

<sup>6</sup> The *CIL* editor opted for *lib(eratus)* in preference to *lib(ertus)*, thereby interpreting *pugna* as ablative with the following numeral an ordinal designating the fight after which the gladiator was freed (see next note). But Robert, *Gladiateurs*, 287–293, argued from the use of ἐλεύθερος as the equivalent Greek term that *lib* (*l* [as in *CIL* IV 8056], *libe*, *libr*) stands for *liber* (in full at *CIL* IV 2387): see G. Ville, *La gladiature en Occident des origines à la mort de Domitien* (= *Gladiature*), Rome 1981, 253 n. 60.

<sup>7</sup> The tally of fights is regularly expressed in the genitive: cf. *pugnarum* (unabbreviated) at *CIL* V 563, 3465, 4506, Ville, *Gladiature*, 316 n. 206; the restoration *sc(aeva, scil. pugna) pugna(rum) IIII*, postulating a syntactically untenable supplement, is printed without comment by P. Sabbatini Tumolesi, *Epigrafia anfiteatrale dell'occidente romano. I Roma* (= *EAOR* I), Rome 1988, 71 no. 75.

<sup>8</sup> Here again Sabbatini Tumolesi supplies the syntactically impossible supplement '*sc(aeva, scil. pugna)*': Gli spettacoli anfiteatrali alla luce di alcune testimonianze epigrafiche, in A. M. Reggiani (ed.), *Anfiteatro Flavio. Immagine Testimonianze Spettacoli*, Rome 1988, 91–99 (at 98), *EAOR* I 82 no. 95.

<sup>9</sup> Robert, *Gladiateurs*, no. 34.

<sup>10</sup> Robert, *Gladiateurs*, no. 178, formerly attributed to Miletus by Boeckh, *CIG* II 2889. Mistaking Σκευᾶς as the gladiator's name, Boeckh desperately emended the text to give the gladiator not one owner but two: Θράξι / Σκευᾶς, Εὐκαρπος[ῶ] [Σ]αμιά, vi. α', στ. α'. Robert demonstrates that his owner was one of the Samiarii, a family well attested at Iasos.

<sup>11</sup> ἄριστέρος: Dio 72.22.3. Dio elaborates on Commodus' technique at 72.19.2, where Boissevain suggested that ἐπαρίστερος (usually pejorative) should be emended to ἄριστέρος.

<sup>12</sup> Relief sculpture: Robert, *Gladiateurs*, nos. 4, 12 (a *secutor*: see pl. XXII), 18, 95, 275; *Hellenica* 8, 1950, nos. 334, 338.

<sup>13</sup> Robert, *Gladiateurs*, 71 (cf. nos. 12, 189, 302). The gladiator in no. 302 (pl. XIX) is not only wearing a greave on his right leg but also holding the palm of victory in his left hand, in contrast to the gladiator in no. 291 (also pl. XIX), who is holding the palm in his right hand as a normal right-hander would (and is wearing a greave on his left leg).

deceased.<sup>14</sup> But in genres laying more emphasis on schematic effects, there is always the chance that the artist has rearranged details to enhance the composition; this may sometimes be the case in mosaics depicting a pair of gladiators facing each other in armed combat, where the combatants may be ‘mirror-images’ of one another.<sup>15</sup>

The natural use of the left hand, while uncommon, was recognised as an innate capacity. Ulpian distinguishes between innate left-handedness and the enforced use of the left hand as a result of handicap (*dig.* 21.1.12.3): ‘item sciendum est scaeuam non esse morbosum uel uitiosum, praeterquam si inbecillitate dextrae ualidius sinistra utitur; sed hunc non scaeuam, sed mancum esse’. To illustrate how people’s capabilities differ, the elder Seneca points out that each gladiator has his own preferred type of opponent, and ‘one man’s meat may be another man’s poison’: Sen., *contr.* 3. pr. 10 ‘quidam cum hoplomachis, quidam cum Thraecibus optime pugnant, quidam sic cum scaeua conponi cupiunt quomodo alii timent’. Seneca implies that he is talking about a right-handed gladiator facing a left-hander. When a right-hander faced a left-hander, their vulnerable (weapon-wielding) sides would be directly opposite one another instead of diagonally opposite. This would give a potential advantage to the left-hander, trained (like everyone else) to fight right-handers, whereas a right-hander’s normal mode of combat (against another right-hander) would put him at a disadvantage against a left-handed opponent, whose combat style was the reverse of the norm.<sup>16</sup> This is why fighting left-handed was worthy of note, whether on a formal funerary monument or in a tally scrawled on a wall; *CIL* IV 8056, fully supplemented, should read:

Seuerus l(iber) (pugnarum) xiii (periit).  
Albanus sc(aeua) l(iber) (pugnarum) xix u(icit).

Trinity College, Dublin

Kathleen M. Coleman

<sup>14</sup> A striking example occurs on a funerary stele in Cologne, first published by W. Reusch, *Germania* 25, 1941, 98–104: a Thracian gladiator is portrayed wielding his weapon in his left hand; visible traces of an original depiction in which he was fighting right-handed are interpreted by Robert, *Hellenica* 3, 1946, 146, as evidence that the sponsors specifically wished the subject’s left-handedness to be commemorated, and insisted that the artist, who had taken right-handedness for granted, should correct his mistake.

<sup>15</sup> Cf. the gladiatorial mosaic from Augst (Augusta Raurica): on the first panel both combatants’ shields are on their foreground arm, whereas the gladiator advancing from the left should carry his shield on his background arm (which is hidden); in the third and fifth panels, on the other hand, both of which depict a *murmillo* fighting a *retiarius*, there seems no compositional reason why the *murmillo* is carrying his shield on his right arm instead of his left, and it has therefore been suggested that both these panels represent a left-handed gladiator: see. L. Berger and M. Joos, *Das Augster Gladiatorenmosaik*, Augst 1971, 17–21, 25–28, 30–32.

<sup>16</sup> Seneca’s category *quidam . . . cum scaeua conponi cupiunt* must refer to gladiators who had been specifically trained for combat against left-handers, as noted by F. Buecheler, *Kleine Schriften* II, Leipzig–Berlin 1927, 197.