

List of Roman gladiator types

This is a list of the different types of gladiator in ancient Rome.

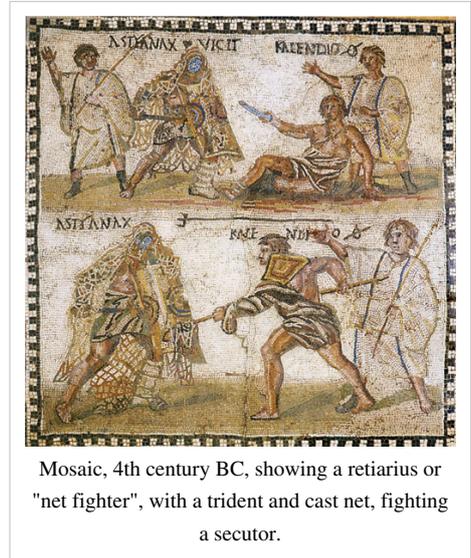
Introduction

Some of the first gladiators had been prisoners-of-war, and so some of the first types of gladiators, *Gauls*, *Samnites*, and *Thraeces* (Thracians) used their native weapons and armor.

Different gladiators specialized in different weapons, and it was usual to pair off combatants with widely different, but more or less equivalent, equipment. As a rule Gladiators only fought others from within the same school or troupe but sometimes specific Gladiators could be requested to fight one from another troupe.

During combat, musicians played musical accompaniments altering their tempo to match that of the combat in the style now familiar with music in action movies. Typical instruments were a long straight trumpet (*tuba*), a large curved instrument (*lituus*) similar to an exaggerated French horn and a water-organ (*organum*). The Romans loved burlesque and pantomime and these musicians were sometimes dressed as animals with names such as "flute playing bear" (*Ursus tibicen*) and "horn-blowing chicken" (*Pullus cornicen*), names sometimes found displayed on contemporary mosaics. Like today's athletes, Gladiators did product endorsements. Particularly successful Gladiators would endorse goods in the arena before commencing a fight and have their names promoting products on the Roman equivalent of billboards.^[1]

Forensic studies^[2] ^[3] have shown that as a rule gladiators fought to strict rules and barefooted.^[4]



Mosaic, 4th century BC, showing a retiarius or "net fighter", with a trident and cast net, fighting a secutor.



200 AD-Gladiators from the Zliten mosaic. The gladiators are (from left) a disarmed and surrendering retiarius and his secutor opponent, a thraex and murmillus, a hoplomachus and murmillus (who is signalling his surrender), and the referee.



Part of the Gladiator Mosaic, displayed at the Galleria Borghese. It dates from approximately 320 CE. The θ symbol (possibly Greek theta, for thanatos) marks a gladiator killed in combat.



A 5th century CE mosaic in the Great Palace of Constantinople depicts two *venatores* fighting a tiger.

List

Name	English	Details
Andabatae	Horseback fighters	From the Greek "ἀναβάται" (ascensores) because they fought on horseback. They wore mail like eastern cavalry (Cataphracti) and wore visored helmets without eye holes. They charged at one another on horseback similar to a medieval joust but without being able to see each other. ^[5]
Arbelas	Crescent Knife Fighter	Likely a renaming of the Scissor, the Arbelas was armed with a dagger in his right hand, and wore a Secutor-type helmet, chain or scale covering his torso to the knees, a quilted arm-guard (<i>manica</i>) on the right arm and a tubular vambrace with a crescent-shaped blade (similar to that used by shoemakers, and where the name Arbelas comes from) on the end on his left arm. From surviving artwork it seems he only fought his own kind, or the Retiarius.
Bestiarii	Animal fighters	Men specializing in fighting various types of exotic, imported beasts with spears. The fights were arranged in such a way that there was a small chance the animal would win. On occasion condemned criminals also fought animals in the arena, but under less favored conditions. Bestiarii were technically not considered gladiators as they did not fight other men.
Bustuarii	Funeral fighters	These fought in honour of a deceased person as part of his funeral rites.
Cestus	Boxers	These fighters were the predecessor to modern-day boxers. They would fight with their fists, which were wrapped in leather gauntlets. Occasionally, the gauntlets would have had spikes in the leather covering the front of the fist.
Dimachaerii	Double sworded fighters	From the Greek "διμάχαιρος" (bearing two knives). Used two swords, one in each hand. ^[6]
Equites	Horsemen	In early depictions, these lightly-armed gladiators wear scale armour, a medium-sized round cavalry shield (<i>parma equestris</i>), and a brimmed helmet without a crest, but with two decorative feathers. In Imperial times, they sport a manica on their right arm and sleeveless, belted tunics, in contrast to other gladiators who usually fought bare-chested, and no greaves. At least in Isidore of Seville's times, the <i>Equitis</i> rode white horses and opened a day's program of fights (<i>Origines</i> 18.53ff.). They started on horseback, but after they had thrown their lance (<i>hasta</i>), they dismounted and continued to fight on foot with their short sword (<i>gladius</i>). Generally, <i>Equitis</i> only fought other <i>Equitis</i> . ^[7]
Essedarii	War-chariot fighters	From the Latin word for a Celtic war-chariot, <i>Esseda</i> . Likely first brought to Rome from Britain by Caesar. <i>Essedarii</i> appear as arena-fighters in many inscriptions after the first century A.D. Yet since no pictorial representations exist, we do not know anything about their equipment and manner of fighting. ^[6] The traditional way of Celtic chariots, breaking a hole in the enemy line with a quick charge, deploying an elite warrior to keep it open and then retreating could have been used only in the mass battles that were sometimes arranged.
Galli	Gauls	Used a lance, helmet and a small Gallic shield.
Hoplomachi	Shield fighters	From the Greek "ὅπλομάχος" (armed fighters). They wore quilted, trouser-like leg wrappings, maybe made from linen, a loincloth, a belt, a pair of long shin-guards or greaves, an arm guard (<i>manica</i>) on the left arm, and a brimmed helmet that could be adorned with a plume of feathers on top and a single feather on each side. Equipped with a <i>gladius</i> and a very small, round shield made of one sheet of thick bronze (an example from Pompeii survives) and a spear, (which the gladiator would have to cast before closing for hand to hand combat). They were paired against <i>Myrmillonis</i> or <i>Thraecis</i> . They may have developed out of the earlier <i>Samnitis</i> after it became "politically incorrect" to use the names of now allied peoples. ^[8]
Laquearii	Lasso fighters	Laquearii may have been a kind of <i>Retiarius</i> who tried to catch their adversaries with a lasso (<i>laqueus</i>) instead of a net. They also used daggers they were equipped with once they snared their opponents. ^[6]
Myrmillonis	"Fishmen"	Wore a helmet with a stylised fish on the crest (the mormylos or sea fish), as well as an arm guard (<i>manica</i>), a loincloth and belt, a gaiter on his right leg, thick wrappings covering the tops of his feet, and a very short greave with an indentation for the padding at the top of the feet. <i>Myrmillonis</i> carried a <i>gladius</i> (40–50 cm long) and a tall, oblong shield in the legionary style. They were paired with <i>Thraecis</i> , occasionally also with the similar <i>Hoplomachi</i> . ^[9]
Paegniarii	-	Used a whip, club, and a shield which was fixed to the left arm with straps.
Praegenarii	-	These were used as an opening act to get the crowd in the mood. They used a wooden sword (<i>Rudis</i>) and wore wrappings around the body. As they fought, they were accompanied by light-hearted comical music using cymbals, trumpets, and a water organ (<i>hydraulis</i>). ^[10]

Provocatores	Challengers	Their armament, in the late Republican and early Imperial era, mirrored standard issue legionary armature. In the later Imperial period, their armament ceased to reflect its military origins, and changes in armament followed changes in arena fashion only. They have been shown wearing a loincloth, a belt, a long greave on the left leg, a <i>manica</i> on the lower right arm, and a visored helmet without brim or crest, but with a feather on each side. They were the only gladiators protected by a breastplate (<i>cardiophylax</i>) which is usually rectangular, later often crescent-shaped. They fought with a tall, rectangular shield and the <i>gladius</i> . They were only ever paired against other <i>Provocatores</i> . ^[11]
Retiarii	Net fighters	Developed in the early Augustan era, the <i>Retiarius</i> carried a trident, a dagger, and a net. They wore a loincloth held in place by a wide belt and a larger arm guard (<i>manica</i>) extending to the shoulder and left side of the chest. The <i>Retiarius</i> fought without the protection of a helmet. Occasionally a metal shoulder shield (<i>galerus</i>) was added to protect the neck and lower face. A tombstone found in Romania shows a <i>Retiarius</i> holding a dagger with four spikes (each at the corner of a square guard) instead of the usual bladed dagger. This was previously thought to be an artistic invention or perhaps a ceremonial weapon, but a recent discovery of a gladiator graveyard found that several of the remains had four odd-looking marks that form the outline of a square on their bones which is consistent with the use of such a weapon. A variation to the normal combat was a <i>Retiarius</i> facing two <i>Secutores</i> at the same time. The <i>Retiarius</i> stood on a bridge or raised platform with stairs and had a pile of fist-sized stones to throw at his adversaries. While the <i>Retarius</i> tried to keep them at bay, the <i>Secutores</i> tried to scale the structure to attack him. The platform, called a <i>pons</i> (bridge), may have been constructed over water. ^[12] <i>Retiarii</i> usually fought <i>Secutores</i> but sometimes fought <i>Myrmillonis</i> . ^[13] There appears to have been an effeminate class of <i>Retiarius</i> (<i>retiarius tunicatus</i>) that wore tunics to distinguish them from the usual <i>Retiarius</i> . ^[14]
Rudiarii	Free Gladiators	A gladiator who had won his freedom (received his wooden sword or <i>rudis</i>) but chose to remain a gladiator. Not all continued to fight and there was a hierarchy of <i>rudiarii</i> such as trainers, helpers, referees, fighters, etc. These were very popular with the public as they were experienced and could be relied on to provide a good show.
Sagittarii	Mounted bowmen	These were armed with a reflex bow capable of propelling an arrow a great distance.
Samnites	Samnites	The <i>Samnis</i> , an early type of heavily-armed fighter that disappeared in the early imperial period, point to the Campanian origins of gladiatorial contests because the Samnites were a powerful league of Italian tribes in the region of Campania south of Rome against which the Romans fought three major wars between 326 and 291 BC. A <i>Samnis</i> was armed with a long rectangular shield (<i>scutum</i>), a plumed helmet, a short sword, and probably a greave on his left leg. It was frequently said that <i>Samnites</i> were the lucky ones since they got large shields and good swords. ^[15]
Scissores	Carvers	Little is known about this type of gladiator apart from the name and the weapon they used. They used a special short sword called the Roman Scissor. This sword had two blades that looked like a pair of open scissors without a hinge. It is speculated that they attempted to trap their opponent's weapon between the twin blades in order to disarm them.
Secutores	Pursuers	This kind of fighter, specifically developed to fight the <i>Retiarius</i> , was a variant of the <i>Myrmillo</i> and wore the same armour and weapons, including the tall rectangular shield and the <i>gladius</i> . His helmet, however, covered the entire face with the exception of two small eye-holes in order to protect his face from the thin prongs of the trident of his opponent. The helmet was almost round and smooth so that the <i>retiarius</i> net could not get a grip on it. ^[16]
Tertiarii / Suppositicii	Substitutes	In some games three men were matched against each other. The first two would fight, with the winner then fighting the third man, called the <i>Tertiarius</i> . <i>Tertiarii</i> would also act as a replacement (substitute) if an advertised gladiator was unable to fight.
Thraeces	Thracians	These wore the same protective armour as the <i>Hoplomachi</i> with a broad-rimmed helmet that enclosed the entire head, distinguished by a stylized griffin on the protome or front of the crest (the griffin was the companion of the avenging goddess Nemesis), a small round or square-shaped shield (<i>parmula</i>), and two thigh-length greaves. His weapon was the Thracian curved sword (<i>sica</i> or <i>falx</i> , c. 34 cm/13 in long). They were introduced as replacements for the Gauls after Gaul made peace with Rome. They commonly fought <i>Myrmillonis</i> or <i>Hoplomachi</i> . ^[17]
Velites	Skirmishers	Fought on foot, each holding a spear with an attached thong for throwing. Named for the early and similarly armed Republican army units of the same name.
Venatores	Hunters	Specialized in wild animal hunts instead of fighting them as the <i>Bestiarii</i> did. As well as hunting they also performed tricks with animals such as putting an arm in a lion's mouth, riding a camel while leading lions on a leash, and making an elephant walk a tightrope (Seneca Ep. 85.41). Technically they were not gladiators but were still a part of the games.

Noxii	Criminals	These were condemned criminals who fought each other. Sometimes one had a weapon and was blindfolded while the other was unarmed but had no blindfold. Sometimes they both fought with blindfolds with two referees (and the audience) giving them directions. The audience was known to yell misleading directions at times for their own amusement.
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External links

- Gladiator graveyard in York England (<http://channel.nationalgeographic.com/episode/gladiators-back-from-the-dead-4654/facts>)

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