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# Staging Death: Performing Greek Myths in Roman Arena Executions

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*This paper examines how criminal executions in the Roman arena staged as Greek myths blended distinctly Roman practices of bloodsport with Greek theater tropes. Reserved for the worst offenses against the empire, these executions altered well-known mythological narratives in order to inflict as much pain and humiliation on the criminal as possible. At stake is how the performance and reinterpretation of Greek myths in a distinctly Roman space not only satisfied the host's and audience's thirst for new and exciting forms of entertainment, but also represents a coded political statement of Rome's superiority and dominance over Greek culture and territory. By analyzing a case in which a criminal was executed in the guise of Orpheus, recorded as an epigram in the Roman poet Martial's Liber Spectaculorum, I situate these fantastic events within the function and design of Roman entertainment spaces. A comparative visual analysis of how the arena invoked both the form and events of the Greek theater demonstrates that while these spaces presumed to operate under their own distinct rules and expectations, they were in fact permeable and subject to adaptive use and reuse. Through incorporating the Greek theater prototype in amphitheater design and in mythological executions, the emperor, audience, and criminal-turned-actor all participated in activating a space, that while deeply indebted to Greek architectural design and theater practices, was always under Roman control.*

An epigram from the Roman poet Martial's *Liber Spectaculorum*, (Fig. 1), recounts the public execution of an anonymous criminal in the Flavian Amphitheater, ca. 80 C.E. (Fig. 2).<sup>1</sup> Unlike a typical arena execution, where convicted felons were customarily hanged or crucified, thousands of eager spectators instead witnessed an elaborate event, with moveable stage sets, props, and exotic animals. Martial's condemned man was forced to perform the Greek myth of Orpheus, assuming the role of the talented musician who retreats to the mountains after failing to save his wife, Eurydice. In the Greek myth, Orpheus charms all manner of living beings and inanimate objects with his lyre, before ultimately dying at the hands of a group of Dionysian nymphs whom he rejected in his grief.<sup>2</sup> Yet, in an ironic twist to this original ending, Martial reports that the criminal-turned-actor never met the scorned nymphs, instead prematurely encountering his end at the claws of an "ungrateful bear," evidently unmoved by the criminal's Orphic musical display.<sup>3</sup>

The introduction of Greek myth into the Roman amphitheater — of which Martial records three examples in *Liber Spectaculorum*<sup>4</sup> — represents a significant departure from the spectacles typically housed in the Roman arena, such as *venationes* (wild animals hunts); *naumachie* (staged-sea battles); and gladiatorial fights.<sup>5</sup> Like the structure of the amphitheater itself, each of these spectacles was a Roman invention and functioned as a celebration of Roman culture highlighting societal views on power, control, and death.<sup>6</sup> While it was common to carry out public executions in the arena — typically in the form of crucifying, burning alive, or *damnatio ad bestias* (death by wild beasts) — the integration of theatrical elements was reserved for exceptional cases, such as the execution of prisoners of war or military deserters — in other words, people

Figure 1.

*"Whatever Rhodope is said to have seen on the Orphic stage, Caesar, the amphitheater has displayed to you. Cliffs crept and a marvelous wood ran forwards such as was believed to be the grove of the Hesperides. Every kind of wild beast was there, mixed with the flock, and above the minstrel [Orpheus] hovered many birds; but the minstrel fell, torn apart by an ungrateful bear. Only this one thing happened contrary to the story."*

who directly affronted the Roman Empire.<sup>7</sup>

By forcing a state criminal to conform his or her body to the movements, attitudes, and dress dictated by the Greek plotline, I argue that Romans, including those who sponsored and designed the event and the attendees who witnessed it, all participated in transforming the criminal into one of the most maligned figures in Roman society; an actor.<sup>8</sup> Contrary to the elevated status of the actor in ancient Greek culture, Romans generally equated actors with prostitutes and slaves. The Roman denigration of the actor is substantiated by the fact that Roman citizens, and for a time women, were not allowed to become actors, which was in part due to the lewd and often politically critical nature of performances — including simulating sexual acts, cross-dressing, and performing naked on stage, which would have brought shame to elite families.<sup>9</sup> For these reasons, I assert that to be forced to perform in the arena in a mythological execution was indeed one of the most humiliating punishments a criminal could receive. Thus, by forcing a convicted criminal to perform before an audience, the Roman government exerted complete ownership over the criminal's body and inflicted the maximum amount of humiliation.



Figure 2. Flavian Amphitheater, Rome - commissioned by Emperor Vespasian and inaugurated by Emperor Titus in 80 C.E. Photograph by author.

Through a close reading of Martial's epigram on the execution of the criminal-as-Orpheus, this paper examines what was at stake for both the audience and event sponsors in the mythological-themed executions held within the amphitheater.<sup>10</sup> I first situate these executions within the larger frame of amphitheater games, particularly in relation to non-mythological public executions, to demonstrate how these Greek-inspired executions represent a significant divergence from the norm. Secondly, I offer a visualization of Martial's epigram on *Orpheus* and consider the implications of the myth's reinterpretation for its new venue. Finally, I explore how and why Romans sanctioned Greek entertainment tropes in a distinctly Roman-coded venue by contextualizing the mythological execution within the construction, use, and ideology of the architecture of the Roman amphitheater. I argue that by transforming the public execution from what was formerly a rudimentary event without fanfare, prior to 80 C.E., into a theatrical production predicated on surprise and amazement, Romans not only participated in and reinforced —whether actively as a sponsor or programmer or passively as an onlooker — control of the

criminal body and natural world, but also proclaimed ownership over the intellectual property and culture of the conquered territories.<sup>11</sup> As this paper demonstrates, these ideological underpinnings of control are also reflected in the design and function of the amphitheater space itself. I conclude that this relationship between venue and performance suggests that while theaters and amphitheaters purportedly operated under their own prescriptive rules and separate expectations, they were in fact permeable and subject to adaptation.

#### The Public Execution as Amphitheater Game during the early Empire

Public entertainment productions gained new importance following the fall of the Roman Republic and rise of the Empire under the Julio-Claudian dynasty (44 B.C.E.- C.E. 68) as signs of an emperor's power and support for his people.<sup>12</sup> These events provided an opportunity for his subjects to reciprocate these gestures of goodwill by attending and acknowledging their emperor.<sup>13</sup> Like most aspects of Roman culture, the realm of entertainment was defined by a highly regulated, codified, and hierarchical system, which included rules for sponsorship, scale, attendance, seating, and the appropriateness of venues for certain events.<sup>14</sup>

Under Augustus these regulations extended to the organization of the day's activities.<sup>15</sup> A day of games typically started with animal hunts in the morning, public executions at midday, and gladiatorial fights in the afternoon.<sup>16</sup> According to Suetonius, the animal hunts and gladiatorial fights attracted the most attention from attendees, with many skipping the public executions for lunch.<sup>17</sup>

Compared to the dramatic and unpredictable competition of most animal and gladiatorial battles, I argue the public executions were largely static and scripted. The former two events were ripe with suspense, novelty, and variety. For animal hunts, it was never clear if the exotic creatures — often imported at great expense — would cooperate in their given role. In some instances, animal trainers would have to encourage a non-aggressive animal to attack another, while in other cases, animals would be too lethargic and sickly from traveling to fight. In gladiatorial battles, meanwhile, onlookers could only guess as to who would emerge victorious and possibly earn the right to live.<sup>18</sup> As such, both of these events were contests where opposing parties were pitted against each other, whether fairly or not, and were encouraged to fight as competitively and aggressively as possible. Although the display of violence and death were integral to all three events, I believe it was the *guarantee* of death, the lack of a challenged contest, the absence of a novel outcome, and the clear distinction between executioner and the condemned that made the public slayings the most opportune time for a repast.<sup>19</sup> The finite number of execution methods also contributed to their predictability, with beheading being the quickest and most humane form of death often reserved for elevated and high ranking citizens, and burning or crucifying for lesser members of society—the latter eventually used for the killing of Christian martyrs.<sup>20</sup>

The inherent lack of spontaneity and surprise in arena death sentences is but one explanation for their adaptation into mythological reenactments. Compared to the other events, public executions were devoid of props, costumes, and moveable scenery.<sup>21</sup> These sets were all part of what I consider to be the performance of animal and gladiatorial games, or in the specially occasioned *naumachie*, where a key component of the

event was witnessing the transformation of the arena into a body of water to recreate historic naval battles.<sup>22</sup> These elaborate settings and technological feats contributed to a thrilling and immersive experience, whereby the arena was converted into otherworldly — yet ostensibly believable — environments.<sup>23</sup> Thus, the role of these additional materials to transform the site of the arena into a completely distinct environment was as critical to the audience's experience of these events as the anticipation of death. In contributing vast amounts of capital and other resources, emperors and sponsors demonstrated their power to transform a known quantity — the amphitheater — into numerous unimaginable new spaces. Beyond demonstrating political influence and financial power to commission expensive and lavish games, these expenditures also conveyed the emperor's control over nature.<sup>24</sup> These efforts were greatly appreciated by the audience, as Seneca attests in his disdain for *mera homicidia sine arte* — mere homicide without art or artfulness.<sup>25</sup>

#### Tracing the Inception of the Mythological Execution<sup>26</sup>

The beginnings of staged executions can be traced back as early as Octavian's reign, with the integration of theatrical props and stage sets generally increasing under the reign of Nero (ruled 54-68 C.E.), an emperor well known for his love of the arts.<sup>27</sup> His self-fashioning as an "emperor-artist"<sup>28</sup> starkly contrasted with his predecessor, Claudius (ruled 41-54 C.E.), which makes Nero's influence on the games all the more conceivable. As evidence of this contrast, Suetonius records that during Claudius's sponsorship of the games, prior to Nero, people often left the arena during the midday executions for lunch, while Claudius reportedly stayed behind, delighting in them with gory fascination, much to the disgust of the Roman people.<sup>29</sup> Suetonius's

observations suggest there might have been a negative colloquial association with enjoying the standard and unglorified execution of criminals, especially without the theatrics inherent in the other amphitheater games.<sup>30</sup>

Once in power, Nero implemented embellished dramatic, myth-driven executions, reflecting his own love of the theater, self-performance and aggrandizement.<sup>31</sup> Nero toured Greece during his reign and certainly was exposed to the culture of Greek theater.<sup>32</sup> By instilling Greek theatrical elements into the otherwise hackneyed public executions, Nero strove to surpass his predecessors in greatness and innovation, while simultaneously making the events more appealing to his own tastes.<sup>33</sup> While Nero was disliked among the senate for his rejection of Republican ideals and the flaunting of his power, he was praised by the populace for providing never-ending sources of entertainment including extravagant parties and debauched festivals.<sup>34</sup> Nero's well-received innovations in entertainment, and their accessibility to all members of Roman society, continued into the Flavian period (69-96 C.E.).<sup>35</sup> It is in part thanks to Nero's love of theater and spectacular displays of self-aggrandizement to which we can attribute the development of these scripted executions that likely took place during the inauguration of the Flavian Amphitheater under Titus in 80 C.E., and were recorded in Martial's epigrams.<sup>36</sup>

#### Martial's Epigrams on the Mythological Executions: The Case of Orpheus

Martial recounts only a few myth-driven executions of criminals in *Liber Spectaculorum*, although many more likely existed.<sup>37</sup> Each epigram generally begins with a description of the criminal's mode of death and ends with a mocking of his or her demise, by both Martial and the perceived audience. Martial also often describes the

stage props and set designs that accompanied the enacted executions — in order to testify to the spectacular nature and the immersive quality of witnessing the event firsthand — an experience he wishes to invoke in his writing.

Martial's epigram on *Orpheus* is arguably one of his most evocative examples. Significantly longer than the others, his recounting of the criminal-as-actor's death captures the visceral feelings of the arena experience through its detailed description and humor.

Martial writes:

*Whatever Rhodope is said to have seen on the Orphic stage, Caesar, the amphitheater has displayed to you. Cliffs crept and a marvelous wood ran forwards such as was believed to be the grove of the Hesperides. Every kind of wild beast was there, mixed with the flock, and above the minstrel [Orpheus] hovered many birds; but the minstrel fell, torn apart by an ungrateful bear. Only this one thing happened contrary to the story.*<sup>38</sup>

From Martial's description we begin to visualize how the arena may have appeared during this grand execution. For one, Martial gives special attention to the marvelously rendered and realistic setting. He emphasizes the movability of cliffs and the forest's or trees' capacity to accelerate at fast intervals, noting, "cliffs [that] crept" and a "wood [that] ran forwards." Martial's description of the scenery indicates a command over technology and mechanics, most likely consisting of a pulley and track system below the arena floor, which raised and moved the props.<sup>39</sup> The account also suggests that an emphasis was placed on the importance of setting, in that it was not just serving as a backdrop for the action, but that it functioned as an integral part of the overall narrative. Evoking the drama of the elaborate *naumachie*, Martial

underscores the importance of creating a fully immersive experience for the audience — one in which the spectacle was not just about the suspense of the kill, but of creating a convincing environment.

Midway through the third sentence, Martial introduces the criminal “acting” in the role of Orpheus. The criminal presumably occupied a central position in the arena — perhaps forced to play a lyre — as first the cliffs and forest, so enchanted, moved towards him. Next, animals, also transfixed by his music, must have risen from either cages or subterranean traps to encircle him. Here, Martial not only helps readers visualize the scene, but also conveys the vast amounts of money and labor that must have been dedicated to the implementation of this extravagant display (or, perhaps, Martial’s desire for it to be perceived as such). “Every kind of wild beast” suggests the ability to import a variety of exotic and known animals, as well as the capability of the animal handlers to not only train the beasts to coexist amongst each other in a high-stress environment, but to also feign enjoyment over Orpheus’s music and move towards him on cue. The ability of the animals to perform roles like actors provided awe and amazement for the audience. This ability was also significant because — unlike standard executions — it was often the trained animal which was responsible for carrying out the death sentence.

Leading up to Orpheus’s execution, Martial alludes to the triumph of art and artifice over nature, a critical aspect of Roman imperial ideology.<sup>40</sup> By constructing large-scale and interactive scenery that was, in Martial’s own words, “believable,” the performance represented the ability to convey or to surpass reality through artifice. In this regard, the successful reenactment of the myth is wholly dependent on its performance in the arena—the only space where events of this nature

could take place.

In Orpheus’s death by an “ungrateful bear,” Martial articulates the role of irony and surprise, another theme inherent in these performances. The bear, rather than being lulled into tranquility by Orpheus’s music, is instead bestowed the emotional capacity and agency to reject the minstrel’s performance and carry out Orpheus’s fatal blow.<sup>41</sup> Martial underscores this revision to the original myth in the last line of the epigram — “only this one thing happened contrary to the story” — to remind readers that Orpheus was indeed supposed to die, and by doing so, Martial drew attention to the tacit acceptance of the narrative change. I contend that this change reflects the authority of the emperor to alter original narratives. Thus, the revision to the myth’s ending was critical to the success and public enjoyment of the event by adding the element of competition that the previous public executions lacked.<sup>42</sup>

The figure of Orpheus was not only familiar to Roman citizens by way of Greek mythology, but also through his adoption as a masquerade figure. Bettina Bergmann notes that the mythical musician inspired masquerade events as early as the first century B.C.E., in which wealthy Romans would have their slaves perform as Orpheus, accompanied with a lyre, to entertain at dinner parties. The mythical figure also appeared in mosaics and frescoes in private homes. This recognition of Orpheus as a figure with cultural caché would have only made the mythological reenactment all the more evocative for viewers at the event and later readers of Martial’s epigram, alike.<sup>43</sup> By altering the ending of a Greek mythological story — one that audience members would recognize as Greek in origin — the sponsor and audience participated in asserting Roman control and authority over the Greek world. The criminal, in turn, experienced an additional

layer of humiliation and degradation through his body's conversion into an actor—here analogous to the “Greek body,”<sup>44</sup> through Roman culture's association of the theater and acting with Greek attitudes of *otium*, or excessive pleasure.<sup>45</sup>

Like the criminal forced to perform the role of Orpheus and the animals that serve as the executioners, the amphitheater itself becomes an actor and conveyor of experience and meaning. Martial states in the opening sentence, “whatever Rhodope is said to have seen on the Orphic stage, Caesar, the amphitheater has displayed to you.”<sup>46</sup> In the first clause, Martial contrasts the Greek stage—here referred to as the “Orphic stage”—with the amphitheater, which can replicate anything seen in Greek theater for the honor of the emperor. By referring to the Greek theater as the “Orphic stage,” Martial also draws the reader's attention to the inherent “Greekness” of the figure of Orpheus.<sup>47</sup>

In the second clause, “Caesar, the amphitheater has displayed to you,” Martial assigns agency to the physical structure of the amphitheater, suggesting it played as significant a role as the emperor in the production and sponsoring of these events.<sup>48</sup> This phrase conveys a special relationship between the amphitheater and Caesar, a title bestowed upon the emperor. By directly addressing “Caesar,” Martial ingratiates himself with the emperor; in this case, we can presume he is referring specifically to Titus, the emperor who inaugurated the Flavian Amphitheater.<sup>49</sup> By putting the amphitheater in direct dialogue with Caesar, Martial significantly places the import of the amphitheater structure on par with the sponsor himself, alluding, I contend, to the all-encompassing expression of Roman control, evidenced as much by the space in which these events were held, as by the sponsor who organized and paid for them.

### The Amphitheater as Actor: The Importance of Site for the Mythological Executions

In considering the purpose and implications behind mythological executions, it is necessary to examine the actual physical site in which they were held. The structure, design, and decoration of the amphitheater contributed to the reception and suspense of these events as Roman appropriations of Greek culture. Here I argue the blending of myth and reality — so critical to the message of the executions — was only possible in the liminal space of the amphitheater.

According to Katherine Welch, one of the most critical components of these executions was that they upgraded and enhanced the experience of the Greek stage.<sup>50</sup> Since almost every myth incorporated into a staged execution was Greek in origin,<sup>51</sup> I contend that the Romans intentionally looked to Greek precedent as a means to illustrate and further extend their authority over the region and its culture.<sup>52</sup> Similarly, the Roman amphitheater itself derived from an expansion of the Roman theater, which was an adaptation of the Greek theater prototype.<sup>53</sup>

The Roman theater, both in its design and function, owes its origins to Greek architecture, as seen in the Theater of Marcellus (Fig. 3).<sup>54</sup> In bringing Greek myths into the distinctly Roman amphitheater, the emperor or host was exerting his influence over Greece and all Eastern provinces—exercised both through military and cultural dominion. This effect was not only achieved through the transformation of the amphitheater floor into a stage set and criminals into actors, but also through the actual space that all parties occupied, effectively turning the arena into an appropriated theater. The connection between Greek and Roman theaters and the Roman amphitheater indicates that these shared architectural affinities were

ideological in nature. As such, Roman theater and amphitheater structures signaled both the glory of Roman culture, as well as empire's dominion over its provincial holdings through the adaption of recognizably Greek architectural types.

While many similarities exist between Greek and Roman theaters, however, the adaption of the Greek prototype (Fig. 4) saw changes in architecture to suit the space's new Roman function.<sup>55</sup> A noticeable difference between the two, for example, was the arrangement of seating, dictated by cultural preferences.<sup>56</sup> Classical and Hellenistic Greek theaters were generally built into a natural hillside so that the theater could be cut into the rock, creating naturally sloped seating (Fig. 5).<sup>57</sup> While the lowest seats were reserved for priests, any person could occupy the rest of the spaces. Roman theaters by contrast, such as the Theater of Pompey,<sup>58</sup> were built up from level ground and erected with massive concrete or stone substructures, permitting the creation of passageways and vaulted spaces that could segregate audience members and guide them into assigned seats based on class, sex, and other markers of identity.<sup>59</sup>

This system of designated seating, codified under the reign of Augustus, was a crucial component in the assimilation of the theater structure into the design of the Roman amphitheater.

The rise of imperial rule following the reign of Augustus coincided with the proliferation of a new form of entertainment space: the amphitheater.<sup>60</sup> Theaters, due to restrictions in space, seating, and technology, seem to have become inadequate sites in which to house the increasingly massive imperially sponsored games.<sup>61</sup> The amphitheater adopted the semicircular seating of the theater and expanded it into a circular arrangement, so that performers and spectators alike were visible from all angles.<sup>62</sup> This new emphasis on sightlines in the amphitheater was in opposition to the restricted viewing of the Greek theater, where all audience members unilaterally observed the actors in front of them.<sup>63</sup> By erecting an exceedingly vast and prolific structure, such as the Flavian Amphitheater, with which to house the increasingly popular imperial blood sports, the Flavians signaled a new era simultaneously characterized by the



Figure 3. Theater of Marcellus, Rome - 13 BC - started by Julius Caesar and inaugurated by Augustus. Photograph by author.



emergence of mythological executions and elaborate arena sets.<sup>64</sup>

The Significance of Mythological Executions in the Amphitheater

As James Harley aptly notes,

*In the Romans' relentless quest for novelty and variety, the mythological executions in the amphitheater represented a continuation of Roman aesthetic traditions, which consistently adapted, altered, and assimilated stylistic forms from other societies to suit their desire for constant reinvention and heightened spontaneity.*<sup>65</sup>

These attitudes were especially made manifest in emperors' unwavering desire to outdo the previous ruler as part of a culture preoccupied with immortality and legacy.

Mythological executions, and spectacles more generally, enjoyed popularity for over four centuries in the Flavian Amphitheater, as well as in the amphitheaters erected within the Roman Empire. The significance of these events is conveyed by iconographic representations of amphitheater scenes that adorn mosaics, wall paintings, lamps, statues, and other decorative types, ranging from elite to sub-elite objects.<sup>66</sup>

In designing staged executions that relied on associations with Greek mythology, and incorporated theatrical elements including scenography, costumes, and technical machinery, emperors proved their powers of transformation by converting a banal punishment of death into a miracle of suspense. The impact of this spectacle extends as far as the reign of the Severans, who for the purpose of propaganda incorporated

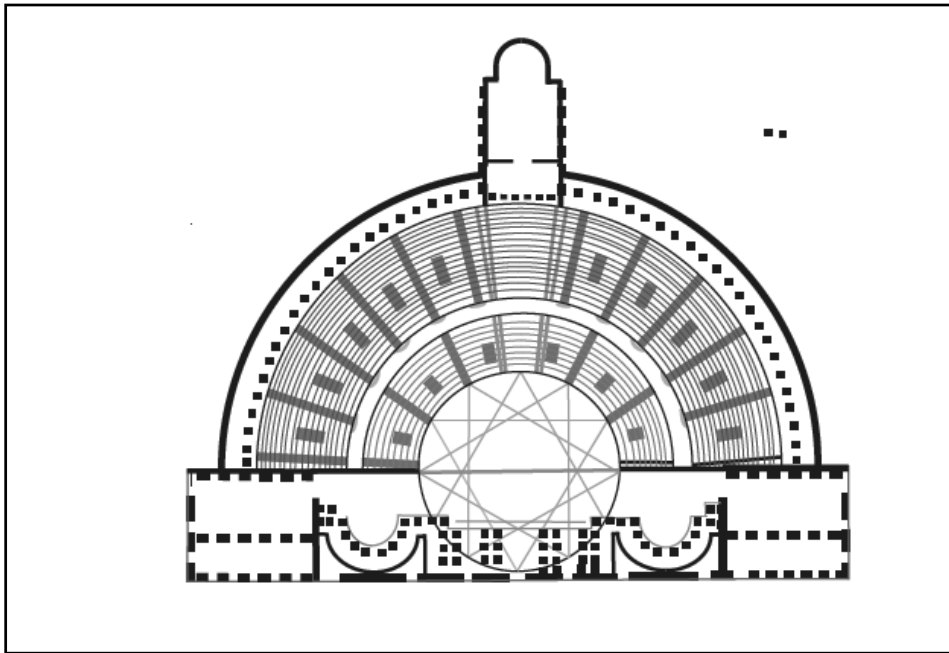


Figure 4. Model of the Theater of Pompey, by Miranda Elston (Inspired by a diagram from Frank Sear. 2006. Roman Theatres: An Architectural Study. Oxford: Oxford University Press, Plate 25, Page 134).

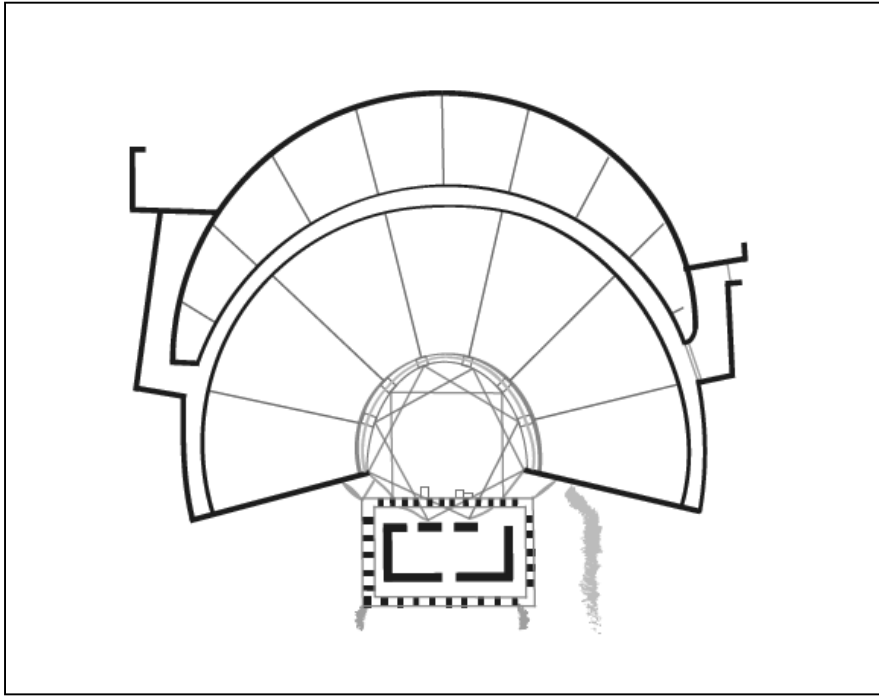


Figure 5. Model of a Greek Theater by Miranda Elston (Inspired by a diagram from Frank Sear 2006. *Roman Theatres: An Architectural Study*. Oxford: Oxford University Press, Figure 2).

theatrical displays into the execution of Christian martyrs. By transforming condemned criminals into actors, emperors not only participated in the declassification and denial of these figures' individual identities, but also made them Greek and thus inferior—a message that would have been comprehensible to all audiences. The choice of portraying the criminal as Orpheus was also deliberate because of the Greek hero's relationship with theater and music.

Associations with the theater also extended to the architecture of the Roman amphitheater. In contrast to its prototype, the amphitheater functioned as a dynamic and technologically flexible space, while theater plays and events provided limited opportunity for true suspense over the loss of life — a defining

characteristic of amphitheater games.<sup>67</sup> Unlike the generic public executions that could take place in town or a variety of other settings, the mythological performances in the arena provided greater variety, aided by the sponsorship of the emperor, and in particular, the vast technological advantages afforded by the scale and construction of the Flavian Amphitheater. By converting elements and connotations of the Greek theater into a Roman frame of entertainment, the emperor and audience participated in another form of imperial conquest.

Endnotes:

1. There are multiple possible explanations for the inspiration behind Martial's epigrams. A plausible option that I support is that they served as a record of the events that took place during the Flavian Amphitheater's inaugural celebration

games. It is also possible that Martial's writings describe a compilation of disparate celebratory events, and that his *Liber Spectaculorum* was published in honor of the Amphitheater's opening. Unfortunately, the literary record is not clear as to when this public execution occurred in relation to when Martial published his epigrams. Part of the difficulty in assigning particular dates to the epigrams is due to Martial's lack of identification of the name of each convicted criminal, which I contend was intentional and contributes to the believability of the criminal's transformation into the mythological figure he or she was forced to enact. For a discussion of the debate over the timeline and function of these executions, see Coleman 2006, xviii-lix.

2. Powell, Barry B.: 2015. For a full summary of the myth, see chapter 16: "Orpheus and Orphism: Mystery Religions in Roman Times."

3. Martial, Trans. 1993, 24 (21), 29.

4. The other two myths are of Daedalus and Pasiphae—the latter suggesting that convicted women too suffered this humiliating fate. Other writers, such as the Early Christian author Tertullian, also cite examples of criminals executed in the guise of mythological heroes, including figures of Hercules who is burned alive, and Attis, who is castrated. See Tert., *Apol.* 15.4-5, also discussed in Coleman 1990, 44-73.

5. For more information on these types of events see Beacham 1999; Coleman 2000, 227-241.

6. See Hazel 2011.

7. Coleman 1990, 45-50.

8. This form of execution was not restricted to men, as Martial cites at least one example of a woman forced to perform as the mythological figure Pasiphae, in which she is forced to couple with the bull of Dictae as part of her punishment. See Martial's epigram 6 (5), translated in Coleman 2006, 62.

9. The maligned status of the actor in Roman society is further compounded when considering the culturally embedded associations with the actor to "Greeknness" and a Greek love of theater, which will be discussed later in the paper. This cultural phenomenon also explains why it was so problematic when emperors such as Nero and Commodus performed on stage as actors or in the arena as gladiators. See Toner, 2014. We also have evidence that writers such as Cicero and Quintilian warned against the dangers of appearing like an actor. See Bergmann and Kondolen, eds. 1999, 167. For a more detailed discussion on the reception of the theater and

emperor participation see C.E. Manning 1975, 164-175.

10. My paper is indebted to the scholarship of Katherine M. Coleman, particularly her 1990 article, which is one of the first and only works to identify and fully address the conundrum of the mythological execution, which she aptly terms "fatal charades." See Coleman 1990, 44-73; 1998 and 2006.

11. There is not a single identifiable catalyst for the change seen in the format of executions. It is likely that the more simplified versions also persisted alongside the grandiose iterations. What is clear from the historical record, however, is that we do not see the implementation of theatrical elements in executions until the first emperor. Theatrical elements coupled with Greek myths seem to have coincided with the reign of Nero, at the end of the Julio-Claudian dynasty, which will be discussed later in the paper. See Coleman 1990 for a discussion of Augustus's use of theatrics in public executions.

12. Beacham 1999; Kyle 2007.

13. Means of acknowledging the emperor included active gestures, such as cheering for him when he made a decision, as well as more passive or subtle gestures, such as making eye contact or gestures of reverence. I would also argue that the mere presence of citizens attending games sponsored by the emperor was also an act of acknowledgement.

14. For a larger discussion of the evolution of spectacle games and the first emperor Augustus' role in codifying other systems to promote his vision for Rome's social structure, see Bergmann and Kondolen, eds., 1999, 11-16.

15. Before the emperor Titus inaugurated the Flavian Amphitheater in 80 C.E., spectacular events often took place in temporary wooden structures during the Republican period (when senators were still permitted to sponsor games) as well as other venues throughout the capital city during the early Empire. See Welch 2007 for a chronology of the development of different architectural forms for entertainment from the Republic through the Empire.

16. Rawson 1987, 83-114.

17. Kyle describes a passage from Suetonius, in which he remarks that during the reign of the emperor Claudius, attendees left their seats during the requisite executions for lunch, while the emperor stayed behind to watch them (this point will be addressed later in the paper). See Kyle 1999, 51.