

Excerpts – Leisure and Entertainment (JP, KCL July 2019)

Res Gestae Divi Augusti [trans. Brunt and Moore – after buildings and before military achievement]

22. 1. I gave three gladiatorial games (*ter munus gladiatorum*) in my own name and five in that of my sons or grandsons; at these games some 10,000 men took part in combat. Twice in my own name and a third time in that of my grandson I presented to the people displays by athletes summoned from all parts.

2. I produced shows (*ludos feci*) in my own name four times and in place of other magistrates twenty-three times. On behalf of the college of *quindecimviri*, as its president, with Marcus Agrippa as colleague, I produced the Secular Games in the consulship of Gaius Furnius and Gaius Silanus [17 BC]. In my thirteenth consulship [2 BC] I was the first to produce the games of Mars, which thereafter in each succeeding year have been produced by the consuls in accordance with a decree of the senate and by statute.

3 I gave beast-hunts of African beasts in my own name or in that of my sons and grandsons in the circus or forum or amphitheatre on twenty-six occasions, on which about 3,500 beasts were destroyed.

23. 1. I produced a naval battle as a show for the people (*populo dedi*) at the place across the Tiber now occupied by the grove of the Caesars, where a site 1,800 feet long and 1,200 broad was excavated. There thirty beaked triremes or biremes and still more smaller vessels were joined in battle. About 3,000 men, besides the rowers, fought in these fleets.

...

Appendix 4. The expenditure that he devoted to dramatic shows, to gladiatorial exhibitions and athletes and hunts and the sea battle, and the money granted to colonies, municipia, towns destroyed by earthquake and fire or to individual friends and senators whose property qualification he made up, was beyond counting.

Cicero, *Pro Sestio* 106 (56 BC) (trans. Yonge)

‘In truth, there are three places in which the opinion and inclination of the Roman people may be ascertained in the greatest degree; the assembly, the *comitia*, and the meetings at the games and at exhibitions of gladiators.’

Ovid *Amores* 3.II The Circus (trans. May)

‘Though I am sitting here, it's not in the least because I am interested in the racing; all the same! I want your favourite to win. What I've come here for is to talk to you, to sit near you and to tell you how tremendously I love you. So you are looking at the races, I am looking at you. Let us both enjoy the sight that pleases, both drink our fill of delight. He's a lucky fellow, the man you back; he has the good fortune to enlist your interest. I wish I had his chance; like a flash I should be at the starting-post, and let my horses run clean away with me. Here, I'd shake the reins about their necks, here, I'd let them feel the whip, then round I'd go within a hair's breadth of the turning-post. But if, in my headlong career, I chanced to catch sight of you, I should pull up and the reins would drop from my hands. Ah, how narrowly Pelops escaped falling by a spear at Pisa, through gazing on thy face, Hippodamia! Nevertheless, he won because his mistress favoured him. May all lovers thus triumph when their ladies want them to.

Why do you keep trying to edge away from me? You can't do it; we've got to sit close because of the seats. That's an advantage I owe to the Circus arrangements. But you, there, who are sitting on the other side of this lady, mind what you're about; don't lean on her like that. And you behind there; don't thrust out your legs like that; don't let your hard knee dig into her back. Mind, darling, you're letting your dress drag on the ground. Pull it up a little, or I shall have to do it for you. Ah, jealous dress, how you liked to cover her beautiful legs. Aye, and the longer you looked--oh, you jealous dress, you! Atalanta's legs must have looked like yours, when she was running--no wonder Milanion wanted to catch hold of them--and Diana's too, when, with uplifted dress, she pursueth the wild beasts in the forests, beasts less fearless than herself. Though I never saw them, those legs set me on fire. What would happen if I saw yours? You will be adding fuel to fire, water to the ocean. I can just imagine, from what I've seen, what those other charms are like that you conceal so well under your dainty dress.

Would you like to have a little cool air in your face? If I wave this tablet a little it will refresh you, unless it's the warmth of my passion rather than the warmth of the air that is heating you, and lighting up such a charming flame in your heart. While I've been speaking, a horrid black smut has come and settled on your white dress. Begone, base smudge, from those snowy shoulders. But here they come; keep still and drink it all in. Now's the time to clap; the procession is coming in all its splendour. [continues on next page]

First of all comes Victory, with wings outspread. Be kind to me, O goddess, and help my love to win. Three cheers for Neptune, you rash people that put your trust in the sea. As for me, I don't like it. I prefer my own bit of land. You, my soldier friend, shout loud for Mars, he is your god. I loathe fighting. I love peace and love that thrives with peace. Let Phœbus be propitious to the augurs, and Phoebe to the huntsmen, and you, Minerva, receive the salutations of the craftsmen. And you, ye tillers of the soil, give hail to Ceres and to kindly Bacchus. May Pollux hearken to the gladiators' prayers and Castor to the horseman's. For us, 'tis thee, sweet Venus, thee and the Loves, thy bowmen, that we greet with cheers. Oh, help me, tender goddess; change thou my fair one's heart, that she may let herself be loved. See, Venus nods, and seems to tell me I shall win. What she foretells, tell me yourself, I pray. Hear thou my prayer and--Venus forgive me--you will be greater than that goddess herself. I swear it, and all the gods that shine in that procession I call to witness, you shall ever be my darling mistress. But you've nowhere to rest your legs. Put your toes, if you like, on these bars. They've cleared the course now, and the big races are going to begin. The prætor's just given the signal. The four-horsed chariots are off. I see your favourite. Whoever you favour is bound to win. The very horses seem to guess your wishes. Ye gods, how wide he takes them round the turning-post. Wretched creature, what are you about? Now you've let your rival get ahead of you. He went round ever so much more closely. What are you up to, foolish one? What's the use of a woman's backing you. For heaven's sake pull your left rein hard. Oh, he's an idiot, our man. Come on, Romans, have him back, wave your togas there. See they're calling him back. But mind they don't ruffle your hair, waving their togas about like that; come and hide your head in the folds of mine.'

Look, now they're starting again, the bars are down. Here they come, with their different colours, driving like mad. Beat them this time, anyhow; you've got a clear field in front of you. See that my mistress has her way, and see that I have mine. Well, she's got hers; but I must wait. He's won. Now I must see what I can do. She smiled, the darling, and there was a promise in her look. That's enough for here. Elsewhere you'll let me have the rest.'

Ovid, *Ars Amatoria*, I 135-162, trans. A. Kline

https://www.poetryintranslation.com/PITBR/Latin/ArtofLoveBkI.php#anchor_Toc521049261

'Don't forget the races, those noble stallions:
the Circus holds room for a vast obliging crowd.
No need here for fingers to give secret messages,
nor a nod of the head to tell you she accepts:
You can sit by your lady: nothing's forbidden,
press your thigh to hers, as you can do, all the time:
and it's good the rows force you close, even if you don't like it,
since the girl is touched through the rules of the place.
Now find your reason for friendly conversation,
and first of all engage in casual talk.
Make earnest enquiry whose those horses are:
and rush to back her favourite, whatever it is.
When the crowded procession of ivory gods goes by,
you clap fervently for Lady Venus:
if by chance a speck of dust falls in the girl's lap,
as it may, let it be flicked away by your fingers:
and if there's nothing, flick away the nothing:
let anything be a reason for you to serve her.
If her skirt is trailing too near the ground,
lift it, and raise it carefully from the dusty earth:
Straightaway, the prize for service, if she allows it,
is that your eyes catch a glimpse of her legs.
Don't forget to look at who's sitting behind you,
that he doesn't press her sweet back with his knee.

Small things please light minds: it's very helpful
to puff up her cushion with a dextrous touch.
And it's good to raise a breeze with a light fan,
and set a hollow stool beneath her tender feet.
And the Circus brings assistance to new love,
and the scattered sand of the gladiator's ring.
Venus' boy often fights in that sand,
and who see wounds, themselves receive a wound.
While talking, touching hands, checking the programme,
and asking, having bet, which one will win,
wounded he groans, and feels the winged dart,
and himself becomes a part of the show he sees.
When, lately, Caesar, in mock naval battle,
exhibited the Greek and Persian fleets,
surely young men and girls came from either coast,
and all the peoples of the world were in the City?
Who did not find one he might love in that crowd?
Ah, how many were tortured by an alien love!'

Pliny Letters, (trans. Melmoth Harvard Classics)

<https://sourcebooks.fordham.edu/ancient/pliny-letters.asp>

9.6 'To Calvisius

I have spent these several days past, in reading and writing, with the most pleasing tranquillity imaginable. You will ask, "How that can possibly be in the midst of Rome?" It was the time of celebrating the Circensian games: an entertainment for which I have not the least taste. They have no novelty, no variety to recommend them, nothing, in short, one would wish to see twice. It does the more surprise me therefore that so many thousand people should be possessed with the childish passion of desiring so often to see a parcel of horses gallop, and men standing upright in their chariots. If, indeed, it were the swiftness of the horses, or the skill of the men that attracted them, there might be some pretence of reason for it. But it is the dress they like; it is the dress that takes their fancy. And if, in the midst of the course and contest, the different parties were to change colours, their different partisans would change sides, and instantly desert the very same men and horses whom just before they were eagerly following with their eyes, as far as they could see, and shouting out their names with all their might. Such mighty charms, such wondrous power reside in the colour of a paltry tunic! And this not only with the common crowd (more contemptible than the dress they espouse), but even with serious-thinking people. When I observe such men thus insatiably fond of so silly, so low, so uninteresting, so common an entertainment, I congratulate myself on my indifference to these pleasures: and am glad to employ the leisure of this season upon my books, which others throw away upon the most idle occupations. Farewell.

9.23 'To Maximus

...I have often likewise gained as much glory in the senate as my utmost wishes could desire: but I never felt a more sensible pleasure than by an account which I lately received from Cornelius Tacitus. He informed me that, at the last Circensian games, he sat next to a Roman knight, who, after conversation had passed between them upon various points of learning, asked him, "Are you an Italian, or a provincial?" Tacitus replied, "Your acquaintance with literature must surely have informed you who I am." "Pray, then, is it Tacitus or Pliny I am talking with?" I cannot express how highly I am pleased to find that our names are not so much the proper appellatives of men as a kind of distinction for learning herself; and that eloquence renders us known to those who would otherwise be ignorant of us.'

ILS 5287 Rome, the epitaph of Diocles, *agitor* (charioteer)

Gaius Appuleius Diocles, charioteer of the Red stable (*agitor factionis russatae*), a Lusitanian Spaniard by birth, aged 42 years, 7 months and 23 days. He first raced for the White stable in the consulship of Acilius Aviola and Corellius Pansa. He won his first victory for the same stable in the consulship of Manius Acilius Glabrio and Gaius Bellicius Torquatus. He raced for the first time for the Green stable in the second consulship of Torquatus Asprenas

and Annius Libo. He won for the first time for the Red stable in the consulship of Laenas Pontianus and Antonius Rufinus.

Grand totals (*Summa*): he raced a *quadriga* for 24 years, he started in 4257 races, he won 1,462 times. In the first race after the procession: 110 times, in single entry [per stable] races, 1064 times. He won 92 major prizes. Of these, 32 were of 30,000 HS, three of them with six-horse teams; 28 of 40,000 HS, two in races with six horse chariots, 38 of 50,000 HS, one of these in a seven-horse chariot; 3 of 60,000 HS. In two entry races he won 347 times, four of them in races with three horse teams with prizes of 15,000 HS. In three entry races he won 51 times. In all he won or placed 2900 times, taking second place 861 times, third place 576 times, fourth place once for 1,000 HS, he failed to place 1351 times. He tied a Blue 10 times, a White 91 times, twice for prizes of 30,000 HS. He won a grand total of 35,863,120 HS. In addition, he won 3 times in races with two horse chariots for prizes of 1,000 HS. He tied a White once, a Green twice. He took the lead and won 815 times, came from behind to win 67 times, won under handicap 36 times, won in various styles 42 times and won in a final dash 502 times (216 over the Greens, 205 over the Blues, 81 over the Whites. He made nine horses 100 time winners and one a 200 time winner. ...”

[This is c. half the epitaph. It continued with a list of records broken by Diocles (his *insignia*) and previous record holders ‘the champion of all charioteers, he excelled the charioteers of all the factions who ever participated in the circus games’. HS = sestertius]

ILS 8753 Sousse curse tablet (underlined text in text book p. 284).

(side A, Antmoraraito = demon? Noctivagus, Tiberus, Oceanus = horse names?; magical words)

Side B. ‘I call upon you, O demon, whoever you are, and ask that from this hour, from this day, from this moment, you torture and kill the horses of the Green and the White factions, and that you kill and crush completely the drivers Clarus, Felix, Oprimulus and Romanus, and that you leave not a breath in their bodies.’ (continues ‘I charge you by him who has released you from the bonds of Time, the god of the sea and the air, Iao Iasdao. Oorio Aieia’)

Tacitus *Histories* I. 72: Death of Tigellinus (AD 69) trans Church and Brodribb

‘72. Then followed as great a burst of joy, though from a less worthy cause, when the destruction of Tigellinus was achieved. Sophonius Tigellinus, a man of obscure birth, steeped in infamy from his boyhood, and shamelessly profligate in his old age, finding vice to be his quickest road to such offices as the command of the watch and of the Praetorian Guard, and to other distinctions due to merit, went on to practise cruelty, rapacity, and all the crimes of maturer years [under Nero].. They [i.e the people] rushed from every part of the city into the palace and forum, and bursting into the circus and theatre, where the mob enjoy a special license (*theatralis licentia*), broke out into seditious clamours. At length Tigellinus, having received at the springs of Sinuessa a message that his last hour was come, amid the embraces and caresses of his mistresses and other unseemly delays, cut his throat with a razor, and aggravated the disgrace of an infamous life by a tardy and ignominious death.’

(*Ofonius Tigellinus, prefect of praetorian guard under Nero, spared by Galba, execution ordered by Otho)