

Enrich: Fall of Rome/Byzantine Empire (6-2.5)

Directions: Read the article and complete the activity below.

Yeomans, Sarah. "From the Trenches - Victorious Gladiators." *Archaeology Magazine*, Sept.-Oct. 2007.

From the Trenches-Victorious Gladiators



After a three year investigation, Italian authorities have recovered a dozen stolen **frieze** (mural) panels with **superbly** (excellently) carved images of gladiators. Depictions of gladiators were somewhat common on **funerary** (death) monuments of upper class Romans in the later imperial period, but these document the gladiatorial games in the later first century BC. They give scholars a rare look into the games while they were evolving from **funerary** rituals with great religious significance to events that promoted the political power and **prestige** (standing) of Rome's **elite** (wealthy).

Authorities found the carvings hidden by thieves under a thin layer of earth near the modern town of Fiano Romano, site of the ancient settlement of Lucus Feroniae, about 25 miles north of Rome. "They were placed next to each other like dominoes," says Anna Marie Moretti, superintendent of archaeology in northern Rome. "The looters had placed them side by side with great **precision** (care)...so as not to damage them and lessen their value."

The slabs, thought to have decorated a tomb, **depict** (show) six pairs of fighters. "We can see a gladiator stepping on the hand of his opponent," Moretti says. "The downed gladiator raises a finger in the typical gesture used to plea for mercy. Another scene shows a dying gladiator, falling on the ground with his shield lost." The gladiator with his finger raised reflects the tradition of fighting *ad digitum*, that is, until one opponent raises a finger, signaling defeat. Musicians

are shown flanking the **combatants** (fighters). One plays a curved horn or *cornu*, and two others play the *tuba*, a four foot long straight trumpet.

“The panels are especially important because of their quality, as well as the **precision** with which the weapons and the armor of the gladiators are **depicted** (shown),” says Moretti. “They come from a period very early in Augustus’s reign, before he instituted certain changes in the *ludi* [gladiator schools] and the style of gladiators’ armor and weaponry. The images in these **friezes depict** much simpler battle dress and weapons than those that were created later in the Augustan age.”

Moretti suggests that the tomb’s decorative richness and sophistication must have honored a wealthy and influential member of the elite. The **reliefs** (murals) may indicate the tomb’s occupant was an organizer of public games, or they may **depict funerary bouts** (matches) held in his honor. In either case, the quality and nature of the images are meant to be a testament to this individual’s political **prestige** (status) and economic power. A fragmentary inscription recovered with the gladiator panels reveals that the tomb was likely for one “Rius, son of Marcus” who wanted to be remembered for his generosity in sponsoring games.

ACTIVITY

Create a mural (frieze) that shows the importance of the reign of Augustus. Include major changes that occurred under his leadership and personal information such as his family.

Yeomans, Sarah, and Marco Merola. "Victorious Gladiators: Sculptures from a First Century BC Tomb Escape the Clutches of Looters." *Archaeology* Sept.-Oct. 2007: 9-10.