

► **CREDIT WHERE IT'S DUE**

The article 'Testing a F.A.N. theory' in issue XIII.2 was erroneously credited to Professor Boris Dreyer alone. He, however, wrote it together with Dr. Bernhard Gattermig.

Thracian gladiator appeals for mercy after a hard fight

Even today, images of gladiators excite the public's imagination. The discovery of an exceptional painting of actual armed and dangerous ancient fighting athletes on a wall in the city of Pompeii sets new expectations.

The painting is beautifully executed and, newly exposed, its colours are surely as vibrant

today as they were in AD 79. Seen from the perspective of a spectator, the artist has captured the moment at the end of a bout between two gladiators, where one is the clear victor while the other succumbs to his impending fate.

The gladiators shown are a *murmillio* and a *thraex*, two distinct types of combat-



ants distinguished by different armour and fighting styles, and classic opponents in gladiatorial matches.

The *murmillo* on the left holds a *gladius* and *scutum* and wears a wide-brimmed helmet with visor and plumes. The *thraex* is similarly equipped with a wide-brimmed helmet and a large visor to protect the face, surmounted by a high crest, but his main weapon is the *sica*, a short sword with a curved blade.

The fresco measures about 1.12 metres by 1.50 metres. It was found behind the widening of the intersection of the Alley of the Balconies and the Alley of the Silver Wedding. Located in a basement – perhaps of a shop – beneath a wooden staircase, it has a trapezoidal shape framed by wide red lines. There is another painting on a similar theme on an adjacent wall.

The archaeologists who found the painting speculate that it decorated a place frequented by gladiators. “We are in Regio V, not far from the barracks of the gladiators from where, among other things, come the highest

number of graffiti referring to this world,” said general manager Massimo Osanna.

“In this fresco, of particular interest is the realistic representation of the wounds, such as the ones on the wrist and chest of the unsuccessful gladiator, which let the blood escape and wet the legs,” said Osanna.

The final outcome of this fight is not depicted. In the painting, the wounded gladiator gestures with his hand to plead for his salvation. The viewer is left to decide whether he will live or die.

An alternative explanation is that the bar was a favourite meeting place of fans of gladiators. The barracks on the Via di Nola were closed after the earthquake of AD 62 and converted to a private house. The bar may have played on the area’s association with the men of the arena long after they had moved away.

The painting is preserved nearly complete. It is the last fresco found in *Regio V* in the north of the city as part of the work to secure and remodel the excavation fronts under the Great Pompeii Project.

A wounded *thraex* appeals to be allowed to live while the victorious *murmillo* stands tall, depicted in a recently discovered wall painting from Pompeii.

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► ON THE COVER



The troops of Clodius Albinus crossed over to mainland Europe while Septimius Severus was still on campaign in the East. Commanders loyal to Severus