



The Romans

Learning Objective:

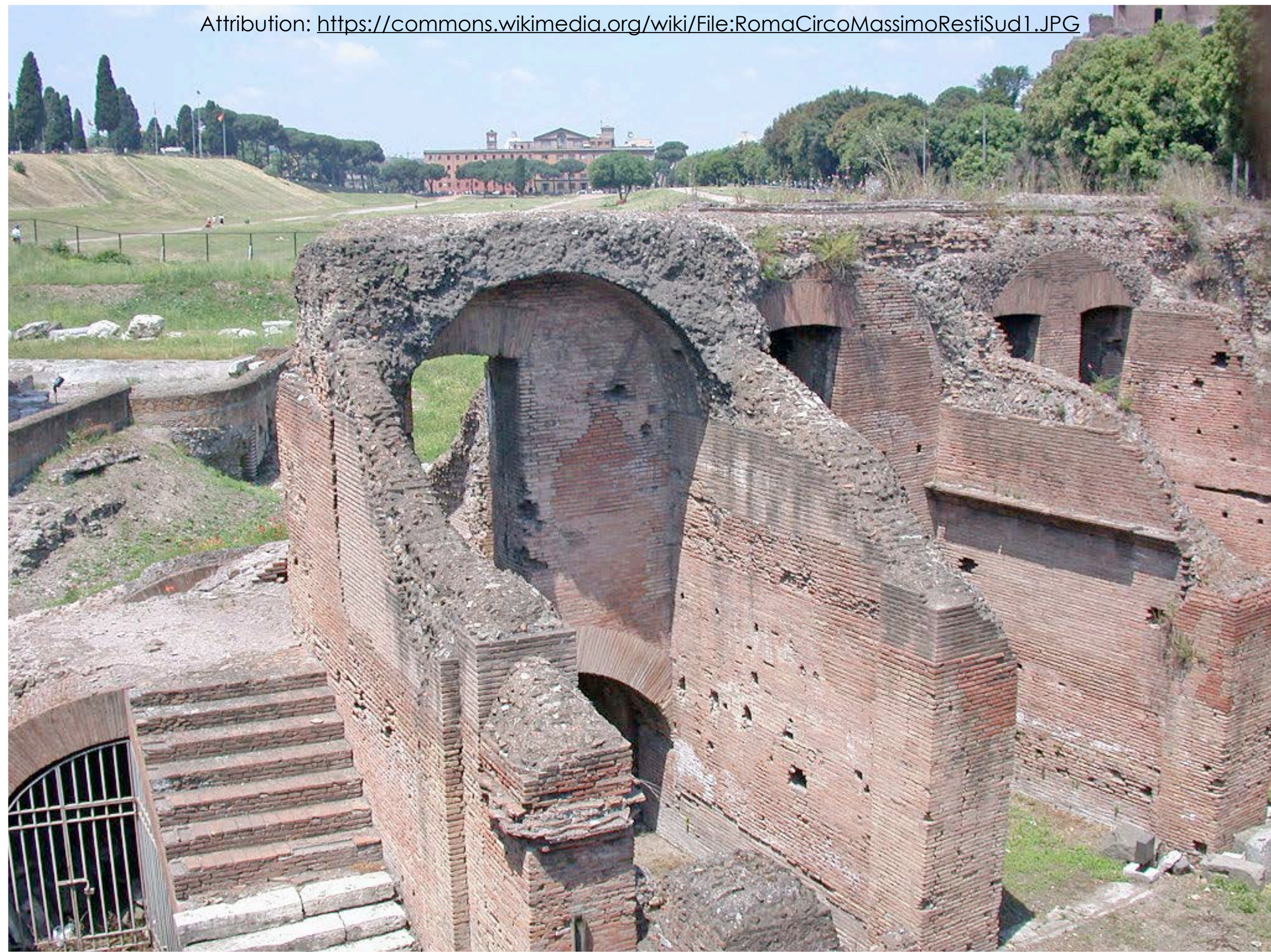
To find out about ancient Roman entertainment and to explore the life of a gladiator.

What activities do you like doing in your spare time?

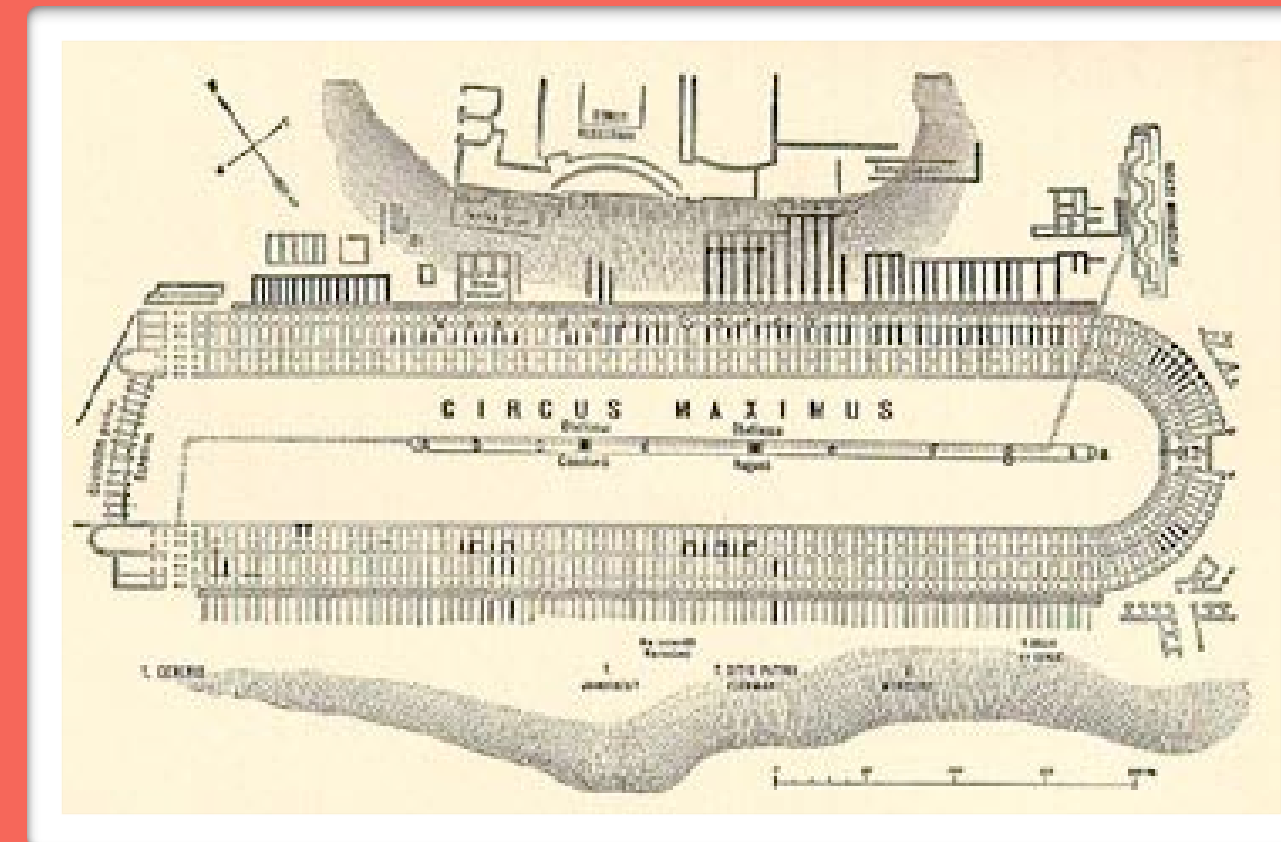
What events do you and your family do together on special occasions?



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Leisure activities were very different in ancient Rome to the leisure activities we enjoy today. There were no cinemas, bowling alleys or football stadiums. One of the most popular places for entertainment in ancient Rome was the circus. This was not the kind of circus that we have today but an arena that was used for chariot racing.



A floorplan of the Circus Maximus in Rome. This was the first circus to be built and was also the largest.

The ruins of the southern arches of the Circus Maximus in Rome.

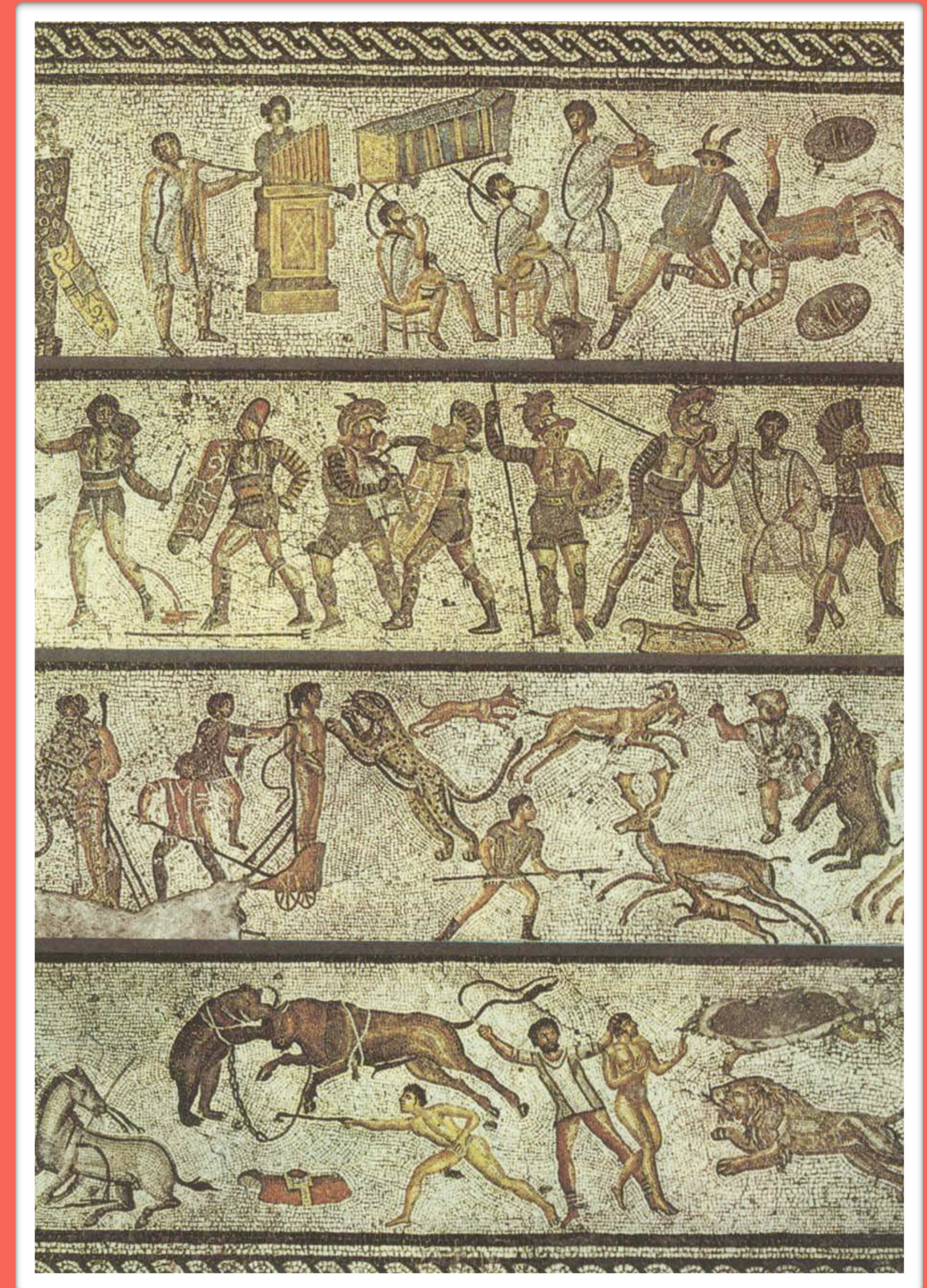
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A modern reconstruction of chariot racing in ancient Rome.



The most popular form of entertainment, however, was watching the gladiators at the amphitheatre. Gladiators were usually criminals, prisoners of war or slaves who were bought by an owner called a *lanista*. Some gladiators were trained in gladiator schools called *ludi*. They were given good food, medical care and were taught how to use different weapons and skills. It was in the *lanista's* best interests to take good care of their gladiator to give them the best possible chance in the arena.



Gladiators were trained to kill and to die with honour. In the amphitheatre, people would watch fierce battles between pairs of gladiators and sometimes between a gladiator and a wild animal, such as a bear or a lion. The crowds loved watching the bloodthirsty sport and would cheer on their favourite fighter. When a gladiator was near defeat, the crowds would use a simple hand gesture to show whether they wanted him to live or die. Many modern films depict this as 'thumbs up' to save the gladiator's life, and 'thumbs down' to have him killed. However, this is not accurate!

Whilst today the thumbs up sign is a positive one, and means 'OK', in Roman times showing your thumb meant disapproval, and so in a gladiator's case, death. One theory is that a thumbs down sign could have been used to mean 'swords down - let him live'. Another theory is that the crowd hid their thumb in their closed fist if they wanted the gladiator to be spared.

Let him die!

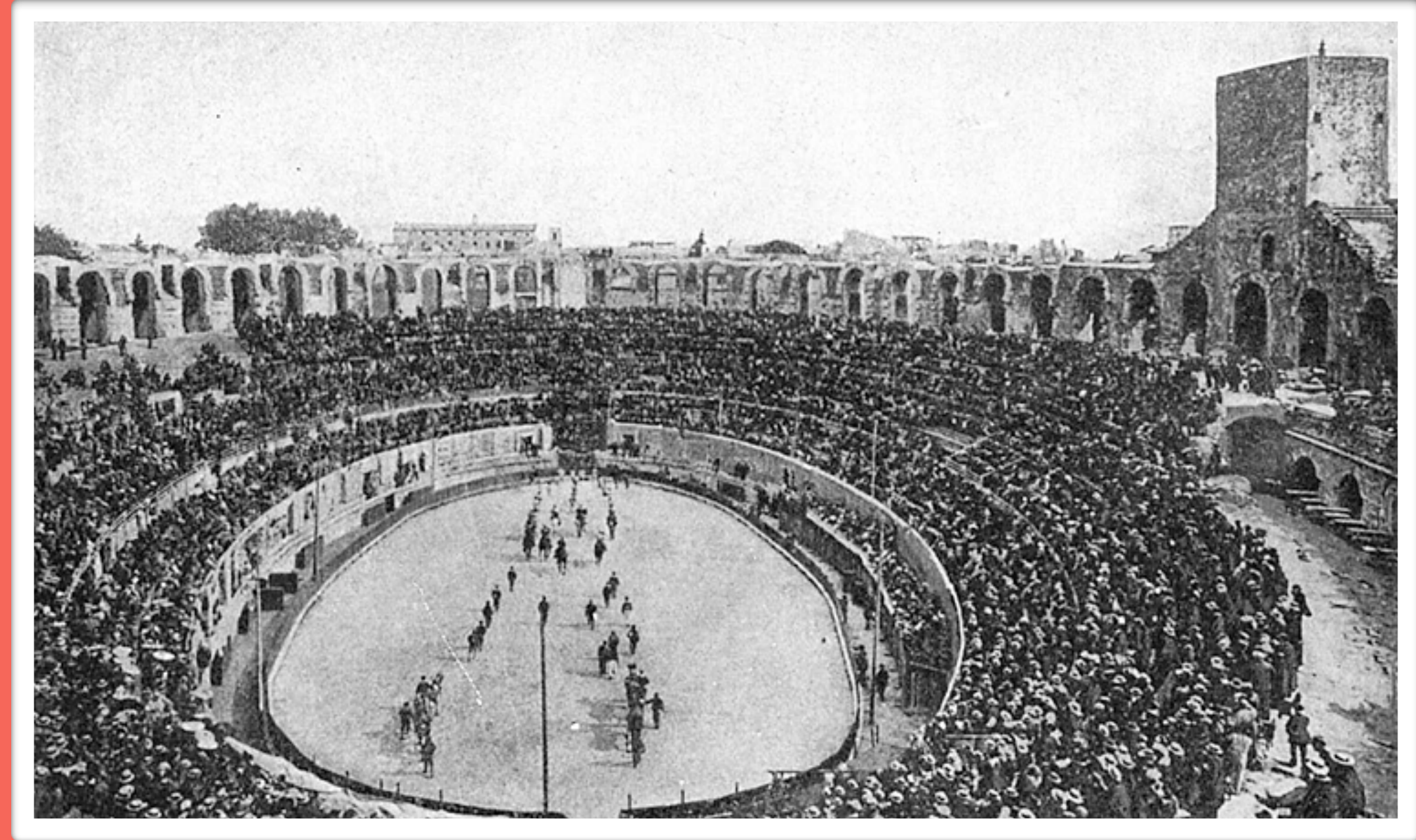
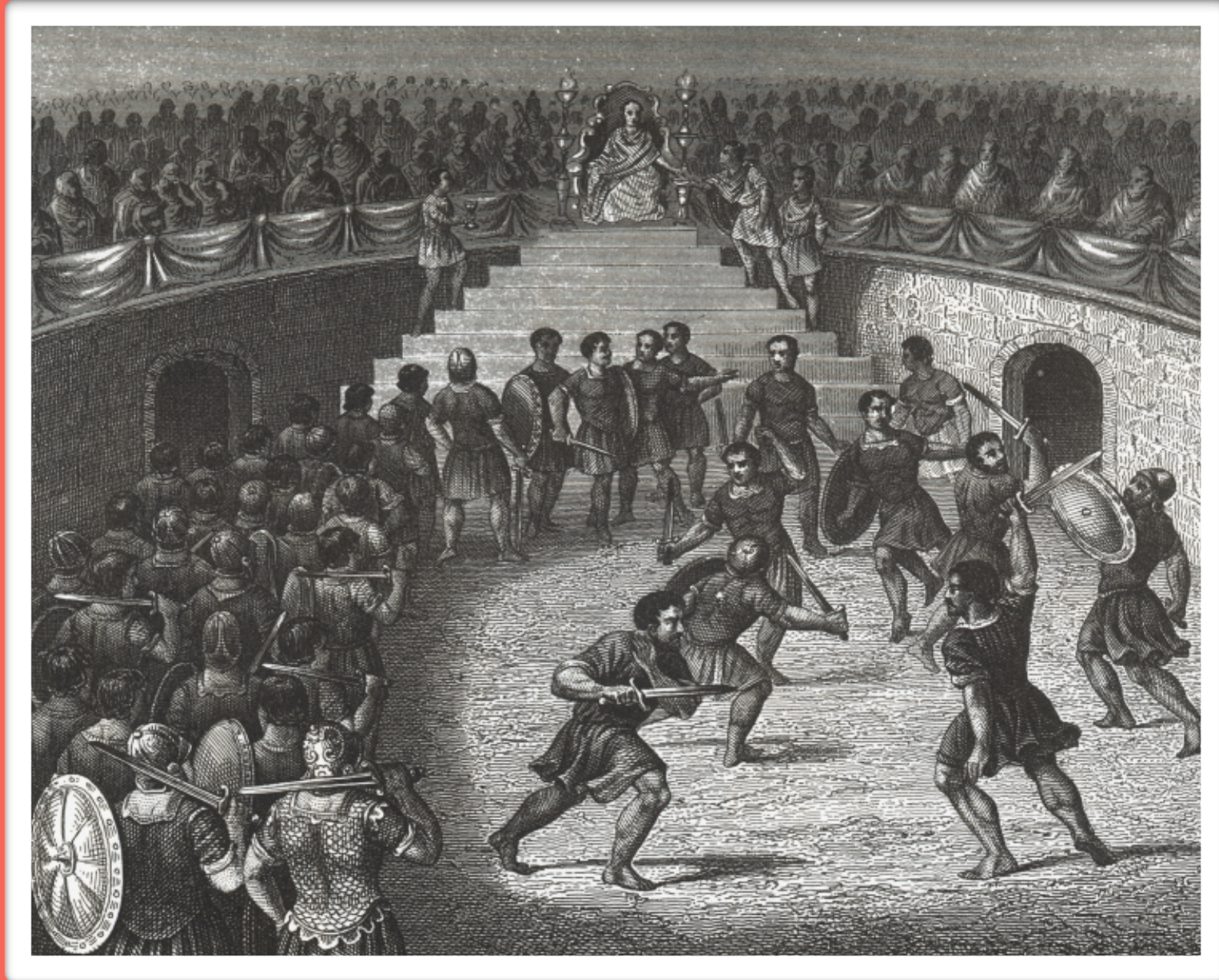




There were lots of different styles of gladiator fighting, depending on what weapons a gladiator was given:

<i>Andabatae</i>	These gladiators rode on horseback and wore visors with no holes. They simply had to charge at the enemy blind and hope for the best!
<i>Bestiarii</i>	These were the beast fighters who were made to fight a wild animal armed only with a knife.
<i>Dimachaeri</i>	These gladiators had two swords, one in each hand.
<i>Hoplomachi</i>	These gladiators wore full armour and had a shield and sword to protect them. They were based on the ancient Greek hoplites.
<i>Sagittarii</i>	These gladiators used bows and arrows on horseback.
<i>Laquerii</i>	These gladiators were armed only with a rope and a noose.
<i>Retiarii</i>	These gladiators had a trident, a net and a dagger. Sometimes they were given armour too.
<i>Velites</i>	Velites fought on foot and had a spear to throw at the enemy.

These gladiator games took place in the amphitheatre. Most towns had an amphitheatre. They were not only used for gladiator fights but also for other forms of entertainment during the year, such as animal shows with music or chariot racing if the town didn't have a circus.



What do you think the atmosphere would have been like at the amphitheatre?

