

Postponements and Cancellations of Mass Events in Ancient Rome: *CIL IV 9967* in a Broader Context of Gladiatorial Games

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^{EN} **Abstract.** The article examines the literary and epigraphic evidence from the ancient Roman Italy for the postponement and cancellation of various arena shows, the reasons provided, and how changes were communicated to spectators. Like mass events today, the dates of theatre and arena performances in Antiquity were subject to sudden alterations, and the audience, often travelling from distant places in large numbers, somehow had to be notified of the cancellation. To offer a broader understanding of the reasons for the postponement or cancellation of games, this article also examines instances of spectator displeasure with events they attended, those they avoided altogether, and those that were cancelled. This is done with particular reference to *dipinto CIL IV 9976* from Pompeii, which, it will be argued, is the only known epigraphic evidence from Roman Italy for an arena event cancellation.

Keywords: ancient Pompeii; games; gladiators; inscriptions; *edicta munerum*.

^{ES} Aplazamientos y cancelaciones de eventos de masas en la antigua Roma: *CIL IV 9967* en un contexto general de los juegos gladiatorios

^{ES} **Resumen.** Este artículo examina las evidencias literarias y epigráficas de la Italia romana en torno al aplazamiento y cancelación de varios tipos de juegos celebrados en circos y anfiteatros, así como las razones aportadas y cómo los cambios les eran comunicados a los espectadores. Como en los actuales eventos de masas, en la Antigüedad las fechas de los espectáculos del teatro y de los propios juegos estaban sujetas a alteraciones sin aviso previo y el público, frecuentemente proveniente de lugares remotos, de alguna forma debía de ser notificado de dichas modificaciones o cancelaciones. Para profundizar en el conocimiento de las razones del aplazamiento y anulación de estos juegos, este artículo aborda, asimismo, las posibilidades que el espectador tenía de mostrar su inconformidad con los eventos a los que sí había asistido, con aquellos eludidos y con aquellos que habían sido cancelados. En particular, tomaré como referencia *dipinto CIL IV 9976* de Pompeya, que, como argumentaré, es el único testimonio epigráfico conocido de la Italia romana que refleja una cancelación de un juego de arena.

Palabras clave: antigua Pompeya; juegos; gladiadores; inscripciones; *edicta munerum*.

Sumario: 1. Unsuccessful mass events: generic reasons. 2. Audience complaints and disappointment. 3. Avoiding and postponing the games. 4. Cancellation of mass events. 5. Conclusion. 6. Bibliography.

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1. Unsuccessful mass events: generic reasons

Producing shows for the masses in the Roman amphitheatre or theatre in the first century B.C. and the first and second centuries A.D. was a challenging, complex, and lengthy undertaking.¹ The significance of those public entertainments which existed at the core of the Roman lifestyle, its value system, and concept of leisure, regardless of where in the Roman empire someone lived, has been demonstrated on numerous occasions.² On the other hand, very few details have been discussed on the problem about unpopular, unsuccessful, disappointing, and cancelled mass events, unless the criticism of such specific shows was expressed by one of the representatives of the elite groups in the Roman society. As ancient written sources attesting to the overall popularity of the *spectacula* are far more numerous than the narratives commenting on failed events, the general consensus in today's scholarship is that the actual popularity of various shows among most spectators cannot be contested. Even with the elite ancient authors frequently expressing ambivalence towards the more violent and less culturally-refined mass events, the conviction of a more generically and rudimentarily positive sentiments about the *munera* is prevalent in our understanding of people's enthusiasm for the arena events. Therefore, perhaps the issue regarding the popularity of *ludi* and *munera* should not so much question the level of people's active interest in and emotional attachment to all sorts of public entertainments offered in Rome, but rather the audience's rational reactions stemming from changes, problems, and unexpected situations occurring before, during, and after the *spectacula*. Like any other phenomenon in Rome, the entertainment sector was not free from mistakes and difficulties. Such problems had to be somehow communicated to the wider public, and there must have existed a safety margin for both the sponsors of *munera* and spectators where both groups could exchange information regarding possible postponements, lack of enthusiasm for the offered entertainment, and unforeseen circumstance.

Although references to unsuccessful or less popular shows are incomparably fewer, there are instances when the sources explain why a *spectaculum* could and did turn into a spectacular

¹ I would like to express my gratitude to the anonymous reviewers whose invaluable comments and suggestions drew my attention to issues previously overlooked in the process of writing this article. All the shortcomings are, of course, my own responsibility. I would also like to thank my friend Christopher Stait who is always the first person to read my work and offer his critical assessment. Preparations for writing this article would not be possible if not for the financial support offered by the Maria Curie-Skłodowska University (Mini-grant Project 2023/2024) to conduct my research on the Pompeian epigraphy.

² This article discusses examples of different types of mass entertainments from Roman Italy, for example, theatre performances, gladiatorial combats (*munera*), and animal blood sports (*venationes*). While *spectaculum* is translated into English as "entertainment", "show", or "games", *munera* indicates gladiatorial combats only, and *ludi* specifically refers to religious festivals with stage plays (as public games). This article tries to follow the standard terminology ascribed to these phenomena. At times, however, various types of entertainments are mentioned in the sources together, suggesting, for example, that gladiatorial sparring took place on many days of some festivals, with gladiators sometimes fighting in theatres and not amphitheatres, thus resulting in translations of *munus* as gladiatorial "games". When necessary, the specifics of this terminology are addressed in the article. For details on the Romans' attitude to leisure and entertainment, see Balsdon 1969, 244-250; Auguet 1972; Plass 1995; Toner 1995, 34-52; Futrell 1997, 29-43, 79-90, 152-160; Kyle 1998, 34-74; Potter 1999, 256-325; Kyle 2014, 298-311; cf. Ville 1981, 116-118, 158-161, 334-335.

fiasco. The first indicator of an inadequate show was if audience attendance did not meet the sponsor's expectations, potentially being able to affect the progress in the patron's career. In 54 B.C., a show put up by Cn. Domitus Calvinus was arranged to help him in the process of winning consulship for the next year, but the even turned out to be rather unpopular among the audience despite the sponsor's undoubted financial support from his wealthy friends (*valeat amicis*).³ Cicero is also quick to comment on the situation in July 44 B.C. when he expresses his great anxiety over the popularity of *ludi* offered by the then *praetor urbanus*, Marcus Junius Brutus, which, in Cicero's mind, could decide about the assassins' fate in Rome had the games been received negatively by the *populus*.⁴ The second indicator of an event that was considered failure was when unexpected incidents prevented the smooth progress of the games and were not to the viewers' liking, resulting in spectators' outright criticism.⁵ The combination of these factors could prompt disappointment, with any small mistakes influencing the viewers' reception of the proceedings. In some of the cases, however, the actual fault was often due to circumstances that were, at a given moment, beyond the sponsor's control. Time and again, ancient literary sources remark on the disorder instigated by unruly masses during the games, street fights, and the havoc-causing unrest often ending in death.⁶ The news of these unfortunate situations must have spread fast around Rome and Italy, particularly if specific restrictions were imposed on the *spectaculum* organiser and the residents of centres involved in the disorder, which, although enacted to deter potential bad actors at future mass events, likely also discouraged ordinary viewers who wished to watch the shows undisturbed. It is possible to distinguish three generic reasons mentioned in the ancient accounts for why an ordinary Roman would be reluctant to attend a mass event: 1. The out-of-town crowds roaming the local neighbourhoods; 2. The universal chaos caused by large numbers of visitors who arrived to watch the games; 3. The inherent dangers associated with visiting overcrowded places. The sources also provide information about temporary architectural features hastily built to hold various entertainments which eventually ended in disasters. Tacitus reports the best-known tragedy of a collapsed amphitheatre in A.D. 27, which killed or injured fifty thousand people in Fidenae.⁷ Suetonius, in turn, recounts the panic among spectators attending a *munus* offered in honour of Augustus' grandson as they feared that the venue would collapse; the crowd was so frantic that even Augustus' presence could not persuade people to stay for the entertainment.⁸ Suetonius recounts that in order to mitigate the general distress, Augustus had to leave his own seat and move to the part of the theatre that seemed the most suspect

³ Cic. *Att.* 4.16.6. All the excerpts and citations from ancient sources follow the original Latin and Greek texts from the LOEB editions.

⁴ Cic. *Att.* 15.26.1; also 16.5.1-3; 16.7.5; cf. Sen. *Ep.* 7.4.

⁵ Plin. *NH* 8.21; Petr. *Sat.* 4.11-13; Suet. *Aug.* 34.2; *Cal.* 27.4; Dio 39.38.1-5; 59.13.4-5. Cf. Ville 1981, 15-18, 449-450.

⁶ In *Att.* 2.24.3, Cicero repeats the gossip that during Gabinus' gladiatorial shows Gnaeus Pompeius was to be attacked in the Forum, causing more disturbances during the already busy *munus*. Suet. *Iul.* 39.4 (people crushed during the *spectacula* in Rome due to overcrowding); *Cal.* 26.4 (people who came in the middle of the night to secure free seats for circus event caused the death of twenty *equites*, as well as women and other people; arguing mob at *ludi scaenici*); Tac. *Ann.* 1.16.3, 1.77.1-4, 4.14.3, 6.13.1, 11.13.1, 13.24.1, 13.25.4 (for troubles in theatres and necessity to use guards during theatrical performances) and 14.17 (riots between Pompeians and Nucerians in A.D. 59); Dio 57.11.5 (on Tiberius attending spectacles only to ensure the orderliness of the masses; cf. Suet. *Tib.* 37.3 and the bloodshed in the theatre). Dio (52.30.7; 61.8.1-2) pointed out that the problem of violent crowds considered mainly theatregoers and circus audience, but not the arena spectators despite the latter group being much more frequently exposed to different forms of violence (cf. Ulpian *Dig.* 1.12 on *milites stationarii* who were keeping order in the amphitheatre but had to guard the *noxii* as well). See also Scobie 1988, 218-221.

⁷ Fidenae disaster: Tac. *Ann.* 4.62-63; Suet. *Tib.* 40 (the number of people who died at the time is estimated at more than twenty thousand in Suetonius); Dio 58.1.1a; see also Chamberland 2007, 136-139 and 142-147. Other venues that suffered destruction: Suet. *Nero* 12.1; Tac. *Ann.* 13.31; Dio 50.10.3 and 62.18.2; Calp. *Sic. Ecl.* 7; for details on Dio and Suetonius' attitudes towards the shows see Newbold 1975, 589-604 and Bradley 1981, 129-137; cf. analysis on Pliny's letter complaining about an only half-built theatre with evident defects and the need for having a technician sent from Rome in Sherwin-White 1966, 616.

⁸ Suet. *Aug.* 43.5.

(*quae suspecta maxime erat*).⁹ The episode suggests that people's concern was perhaps not completely unfounded, if a section of the structure appeared unstable enough to make spectators fear for their lives. Another possible explanation is that the knowledge of various collapsed venues must have been so common that even a mere suspicion of the theatre's bad condition could trigger such an overwhelming reaction. These examples provide an insight into society's anxiety regarding attendance at some of the most desirable events in the Roman world, emphasising the underlying concern for one's own safety and spectators' conscious decision to avoid crowds. However, not all spectators were scared away from large public events. Cassius Dio confirms that after Tiberius' ban on *venationes*, some people were willing to exhibit them outside Rome, causing more accidents when the audience perished under the ruins of negligently built temporary theatre structures.¹⁰ Such situations were likely addressed by the Roman authorities, but as the literary sources inform us only about the most dangerous and disastrous incidents, it is impossible to deduce the frequency and severity of other similar episodes and how they were resolved by the benefactors of the unfortunate events.

The magnitude of the logistical problems associated with organising the *munera* and the complexity of sponsorship did not seem to limit patrons in their attempts to win over the crowd. At the same time, accidents, although they might have caused a spectator to think twice about attending, did not deter all interest. If anything, accidents likely caused greater buzz about the *spectacula*, probably stimulating a temporary discussion and dividing public opinion on which public mass events were better or worth seeing and which venues were safe to visit. Any negative effect these disasters had on the organisation of the shows must have stemmed primarily from the initial shock of an immediate reaction to the deadly tragedies, while the general criticism expressed would likely have been directed at the sponsors and venue builders rather than the institution of the shows themselves. The memory of these disasters may have remained vivid among the residents of Roman Italy and caused a temporary dip in the intensity of their enthusiasm for games or the frequency with which they were offered. However, apart from a ban on presenting gladiatorial fights at Pompeii after the violence that had erupted between the local spectators and Nuceriensians in A.D. 59, none of the incidents of unrest and accidents mentioned above resulted in strict sanctions on mass events in those places or on organisers as far as we know. In extreme cases, actors and members of gladiatorial *ludi* were the first to be dismissed from the local centres as they were regarded as dispensable and not the part of the society; indeed, gladiators together with the *lanistae* running training "schools", were sometimes exiled from the city, but these instances were never dictated by the failing entertainment market in Rome.¹¹ The only occurrence indicating that gladiators were forced to leave the area where they fought as entertainers was the imperial decision made after the above-mentioned riot of A.D. 59. Massimo Osanna's analysis on the exceptionally long and well-preserved *elogium* found on a tomb outside the Porta Stabiana in Pompeii shed light on the new evidence concerning this event, previously known only from Tacitus' account.¹² Even though the unrest in Pompeii was the reason for enforcing a *senatus consultum* with a ten-year ban on gladiatorial fights in the city, it has been argued that the punishment was most likely lifted between A.D. 63 and 65.¹³ Further discussion on the inscription seems to prove, however, that at some point, perhaps before the ban was annulled, the benefactor whose achievements are listed in the *elogium* had received official permission to have his gladiators return to Pompeii.¹⁴ This particular section of the *elogium* has two important implications. First, if we assume that the emperor's edict about sending away gladiators from the city (beyond the two-hundredth milestone from Rome) took place after the initial *senatus consultum* banning the *munera* and exiling the sponsors of the event in A.D. 59, this means that

⁹ Suet. *Aug.* 43.5.

¹⁰ Dio 58.1.1.

¹¹ Suet. *Aug.* 42.3; *Tib.* 34.1; 35.2.

¹² Osanna 2018, 318.

¹³ Mouritsen – Gradel 1991, 151-152; cf. Huet 2004, 92-98.

¹⁴ Bodel *et alii* 2019, 175.

the total removal of the Pompeian gladiatorial *familiae* from the area would altogether cancel the combats of this very specific group of slave fighters from any other amphitheatrical events in Campania. This must have been to the detriment of the general public, who would be unable to watch these gladiators, whether in Pompeii (owing to the ban) or anywhere else in the region, even though other cities with amphitheatres in Campania were not punished with the imperial *senatus consultum*. Although the reasons for sending gladiators away is not clear, perhaps this was an extension of the punishment meted out to people involved in the riots on that fateful day. On the contrary, bringing back the honorand's Pompeian *familia gladiatoria* to his hometown after the imperial permission suggests that the ban could have affected the Campanian entertainment of offering *munera* much more severely than previously thought. As a result, the emperor alleviated his punishment, giving the viewers access to combats of this particular group of fighters in at least some of the Campanian centres while Pompeii was still most likely under the restrictions concerning gladiatorial events.

2. Audience complaints and disappointment

The more tangible dissatisfaction with mass events can be discerned in specific cases of complaints against performers. For example, this criticism was expressed against gladiators who were too unskilled or unwell (either sick or injured) to fight.¹⁵ Since the viewers tended to vocalize demands to see specific gladiators, they also freely articulated their frustrations from the stands.¹⁶ The most anticlimactic were those shows with predictable programmes marred by schematic execution and banal performances, which failed to inspire spectators' emotional involvement and resulted in their equally indifferent opinions on the spectacles.¹⁷ *Venationes* in which sick animals were unwilling to fight or show sufficient aggression were a common source of disappointment.¹⁸ Crucifixion could also provide unsatisfactory entertainment value as the audience could see similar events daily. Cicero's remarks on the event in Messana of searing people with hot plates or crucifying offenders along the road outside of Pompeii suggest that even those unwilling to view any form of corporal punishment were nevertheless regularly exposed to them during their walks to the marketplace or travels to Roman towns.¹⁹ The careful planning of criminal punishments as staged and choreographed shows, which were meant to attract and perhaps also shock the first-century A.D. audience, confirms an escalating pressure to offer new elements and surprises to public executions.²⁰ Unique or previously unseen novelties at shows, such as members of equestrian rank acting on stage, female gladiators, or the first appearance of a wild beast species, could likewise easily win over and satisfy the crowd, provided that the event was carried out without any major interruptions.²¹ Neither the grandeur of the occasion nor the sponsor's alleged popularity, however, guaranteed the games' success nor the viewer's satisfaction.

Although evidence for audience disappointment with mass events is limited, it suggests that the popularity of any show was hit and miss and in many instances unknowable until the later stages

¹⁵ Suet. *Cal.* 26.5, 27.3-4, 35.2. Cf. Suet. *Tib.* 71.

¹⁶ Mart. *Spect.* 23; Suet. *Cal.* 30.2 and *Dom.* 4.1. Cf. Verg. *Aen.* 12.296; Ovid *Ars am.* 1.165-6; Petr. *Sat.* 45.12; Sen. *Ep.* 7.5. On the phenomenon of the audience's chanting in order to get the emperor's attention see Potter 1996, 132-141 and Fagan 2011, 128-131, 137-140.

¹⁷ Petr. *Sat.* 45.4-13; Sen. *Ep.* 7.4; (cf. later sources: Pseudo-Quint. *Decl.* 9.6-9; Tert. *Spect.* 21.2).

¹⁸ Sen. *Ben.* 2.19.1; Suet. *Cal.* 26.5, 27.3-4, 35.2; Plin. *Ep.* 6.34; Dio 59.71-5, 59.10.1-4, 59.13.2-3 (cf. later sources: Apul. *Asin. au.* 4.14; Au. Gell. *NA* 5.14.1-6; Claud. Aeli. *NA* 7.48). Presenting exotic animals could, but did not have to, be associated with hunts at the arena. Suetonius' comments on Augustus' display of tigers, rhinoceros, and snakes in three different venues (local stage, Saeptra, and Comitium respectively; Suet. *Aug.* 43.11; cf. Dio 54.9.8) suggests that the animals were displayed even where no *venationes* were taking place, thus confirming that all novelties and surprises were welcomed by the masses even if no violence was associated with the event. Cf. Mart. *Ep.* 1.6, 1.14, 1.22, 1.44, 1.48, 1.51, 1.60, 1.104.9-22.

¹⁹ E.g. Cic. *Verr.* 2.5.162-69 (*maenia columna* as a place for publicly whipping people in the forum); Kyle 1998, 91-102; Wiedemann 1995, 68-97; Coleman 2006, 92. Cf. Cook 2012, 92-98.

²⁰ Suet. *Claud.* 14.1; 21.1-4; Sen. *Contr.* 4.1; Hammer 2010, 64 and 77.

²¹ E.g. Petr. *Sat.* 45.7; Suet. *Iul.* 39.1; *Aug.* 43.3; *Cal.* 18.1-3; *Claud.* 21.1-2; *Nero* 4.1, 12.1, 54.1; *Dom.* 4.1; Stat. *Silv.* 1.6.51-64; *Juv. Sat.* 1.22-23; Dio 62.17.3.

of the event. The example of Gnaeus Pompeius' games in 55 B.C., during which the elephants triggered the crowd's pity and then indignation, confirms that even the most lavish exhibitions could turn against the benefactors, however popular or powerful.²² The spectators could, as the evidence suggests, become easily tired and bored, while their tastes were notoriously variable.²³ While criticism of the events was openly and immediately communicated during the show, little can be said about the audience's disapproval and negative reactions *after* the event, and even less can be known about how a single unpopular show could influence the long-term perception of the game sponsors and public entertainments generally. One unfortunate occurrence could result in the entire enterprise being ridiculed, and thus deemed worthless.²⁴ As a result, the pressure on patrons was relentless. Since spectator satisfaction could make or break officials' careers in Rome,²⁵ in the smaller centres of the empire they were probably even more determined to offer the most appealing entertainment possible, to induce positive sentiments towards the local political elites.

Lack of enthusiasm could not be left unaddressed and sponsors had to react quickly to any widespread dissatisfaction. While the epigraphic material from Campania confirms the regular use of *edicta* (notices with information about the upcoming *munera* and *venationes*) as a method of encouraging attendance, literary sources suggest that similar motivating messages were offered in Rome, often via verbal announcements. In the first century B.C., announcements were primarily short and informative. However, when the emperor's games became unrivalled entertainment, verbal communication took the form of imperial invitations addressing the crowd and holding a special promise of high-quality shows and the distribution of gifts.²⁶ The inducement to enjoy the games included the emperor's messages encouraging merriment and jubilation.²⁷ Regardless of these encouragements, instances of random spectators being thrown into the arena to fight wild animals or to be matched against each other to fight as gladiators for the emperor's entertainment may have led some Roman elites to express, and then consequently repress, their criticism.²⁸ Little is known about the reactions to these sudden and alarming occurrences at public venues, but the sources unanimously condemn the excessive bloodshed and the expense associated with the shows.²⁹ One instance from the reign of Commodus details spectators that purposefully (and with good reason) avoided the shows out of fear for their lives because of the emperor's unpredictable behaviour.³⁰ The shows were regarded as extreme and disturbing, and likely did not leave audiences in Italy completely impartial to events taking place in the capital. But complaints about the opportunistic overuse of power by patrons who tried to further their

²² Cic. *Fam.* 7.1.3; Plin. *NH* 8.20-1; Dio 39.38.2-3; cf. Sen. *Dial.* 10.13.6-7 and Plut. *Pomp.* 52.4; Shelton 1999, 231-271.

²³ In 164 B.C., the audience preferred gladiatorial *munus* over the plays they were watching and rushed to change their seats in order to see gladiators from a closer distance (Ter. *Hec.* 39-42).

²⁴ According to Petronius (*Sat.* 45.10-13), bad games could end the *editor's* popularity; in contrast, the sponsor's unpopularity, caused by using shows as means for political advancement and self-aggrandisement, was emphasised by Cic. *Fam.* 2.3.1; Sen. *Ep.* 7.4. See also Ewigleben 2000, 125-129, 131-134.

²⁵ The widespread and overwhelming popularity of all entertainments was also as enthusiastic as the general, socio-political situation allowed. The volatile situation in the city and the impact of the *ludi* on the fate of Caesar's killers is well-reflected in Cic. *Att.* 15.26.1; 16.4.1-4; *Phil.* 1.36; cf. other instances where politics influenced the audience's reactions: Cic. *Att.* 1.16.11; 2.19.3; 4.16.6; *Fam.* 8.11.4; 12.3.1; *Quint.* 3.6.6; *Phil.* 1.36.

²⁶ Invitations: Suet. *Claud.* 21.1; 21.4 (*invitantis more sollemni ad ludos*); promising high quality of games: Suet. *Claud.* 21.2 (*quos nec spectasset quisquam nec spectaturus esset*); offering of gifts and additional games: Suet. *Cal.* 18.3; *Nero* 22.2; Dio 51.1.2; 59.9.6-7; 59.13.8-9. See also Köhne 2000, 26-28.

²⁷ Suet. *Claud.* 21.5.

²⁸ Suet. *Cal.* 27.3-4; 35.2; *Claud.* 34.2; Dio 59.10.3.

²⁹ The notion of injustice during the *munera* was not altogether unknown to those attending various mass entertainments (Suet. *Cal.* 27-35; *Claud.* 34.2; Tac. *Ann.* 14.42-5, 15.44.4-5; Plin. *Pan.* 33.3; Dio 59.10.3-6, 72.20.3). The sources confirm that the most violent of midday executions were also not as frequently attended as other shows (i.e. Sen. *Ep.* 7.4; Suet. *Claud.* 34.2; cf. Dio 60.13.4). Nevertheless, it should be kept in mind that some of the executions were specifically staged to draw the crowd's attention, in which case the fact of the *noxii* appearing in the arena was advertised (*CIL* IV 9968, 9983a; cf. Suet. *Nero* 12.1). On unnecessary violence during the shows see Cic. *Fam.* 7.1.3; Plin. *NH* 8.20-21; Suet. *Cal.* 30.3; *Nero* 4.1; Tac. *Ann.* 1.76.3; 12.56.3.

³⁰ Dio 72.20.2. Cf. Suet. *Nero* 23.3; *Dom.* 10.1.; Hnd. 1.15.7-9; Dio 59.10.3; 59.13.4-5.

careers by sponsoring the shows or occasional distrust at the excess of some performances never turned into a serious backlash that threatened the institutions outright. Even Augustus' extraordinary restrictions on festivals and *munera* were aimed primarily at controlling sponsors' private expenditures and not at reducing the public's participation in these events, at least as far as male spectators were concerned. It was Augustus himself who organised a spectacle presenting pantomimes for the first time.³¹ Discontent and aftereffects of any failures at ancient mass events could be compared to today's criticism and negative commentaries after incidents with sports pseudo-fans, accidents at sporting events, and disappointment about the outcomes of the most anticipated championships and tournaments, which unavoidably induce the general public's displeasure. Despite repetitious and, now with social media, instantly and widely broadcast criticism of unruly crowds and unsatisfactory performances, the organisers do not restrict the attendance of devoted sports followers or, for that matter, random spectators. Likely, unsuccessful contests were as quickly forgotten about in the Roman world, with spectators, sooner rather than later, returning to their seats and filling the theatres, amphitheatres, and circuses.

3. Avoiding and postponing the mass events

Spectators were usually reluctant to attend public events in the heat, deciding to either avoid the shows in warm weather or to choose event venues protected from the sun.³² The long sunny days during which even the *velarium* could not protect the audience from long exposure to the sun posed as great a challenge to attendee enjoyment as occasional heavy rain, strong winds, or even bitter cold.³³ Epigraphic sources from Campania confirm that weather conditions were often a deciding factor in whether *munera* were carried out on schedule or postponed. In general, the vast majority of the Pompeian *edicta* use the stock phrase "*vela erunt*", promising spectators protection from the sun and rain should they be tempted to come and watch the event. Since the promise of the *velarium* is a major element in the persuasive wording of many *edicta*, the weather conditions must have had a significant impact on the overall marketing of the shows and their attendance.³⁴ With the overwhelming heat or rain, the audience could grow fatigued due to hours-long performances, which, in turn, could make viewers either leave early or not come at all. The *edicta munerum* found in Pompeii explicitly mention the possibility of event cancellation, perhaps owing to the lack of *velarium* on the day or because of the capricious spring weather.³⁵ The cancellations and setting of another date for an event ring true in the context of two preserved *edicta* from Pompeii, *CIL* IV 1181 and 11036. The wording of both inscriptions, using the same phrase *qua dies patientur (erunt)*,³⁶ confirms that at least in these two cases the organisation of *munus* was contingent on good weather on the day of the event.

³¹ Suet. *Aug.* 34.2; Dio 54.2.4; 54.17.4; 55.31.4; 56.1.2. The changes introduced by Augustus could potentially have discouraged spectators from attending the *spectacula* as the audience must have felt generally unwelcome and repressed by the new legislation (Rawson 1987, 89–92; Jones 2009, 127–134). Cf. Slater 1994, 122.

³² Cic. *Quint.* 3.1.1; 3.4.6; Suet. *Cal.* 26.5. The awnings protecting the audience were used also in the fora during exceptionally hot summers (Lucr. *De rer. nat.* 4.71–84; Plin. *NH* 19.6.23–24; Dio 53.31.3; 59.12.2). Cf. Hartnett 2011, 148–149.

³³ Mart. *Ep.* 4.2; 11.21.6; 14.28–9; 14.38; Suet. *Dom.* 4.2; Dio 37.58.4 (storm caused a wooden amphitheatre to collapse in 60 B.C.); 56.4.5 (floods preventing the initial *Iudi Martiales* from taking place in A.D. 12).

³⁴ E.g. the *dipinto* *CIL* IV 10161 does not provide direct information regarding the absence of the *velarium*, because then the notice would express a negative undertone; it does, however, mention the fact that the show will take place "in the open air" (*munus hypaethron*). To avoid connotations that would antagonise the audience, the *editor* avoided giving the audience a message about what would be missing at the *munus*. According to Mau (1904, 142), the awnings in the Teatro Grande in Pompeii were added only in 3–2 B.C. when the theatre was rebuilt. Perhaps this was, at least in part, an incentive to watch the stage performances in that venue. In turn, the amphitheatre *velarium* in Pompeii was in use since 80 B.C. so the repetitious wording of *venatio et vela* phrase was only meant to enhance the concept of the audience's comfort.

³⁵ *Vela* in Campania: Plin. *NH* 5.19.6 and Val. Max. 2.4.6.

³⁶ In *CIL* IV 11036 the word *patientur* is used instead of *patientur*. This is likely the effect of a hastily written advertisement with a *scriptor's* mistake.

To meet the viewers' satisfaction, organisers wanted to anticipate spectators' wishes and any disadvantageous situations for their audience and to avert possible disappointment before the events began.³⁷ Consequently, in extreme conditions, it was not unusual to postpone outdoor activities due to bad weather. In July 54 B.C., Cicero comments on locally held shows which, despite being successful and appreciated by the public, were marked by the hunt being put off "to another day" (*venatio in aliud tempus dilata*).³⁸ Nero, who wanted to show off the newly installed client king of Armenia, Tiridates I, to the Roman people on a day that had already been appointed and publicly proclaimed, was similarly prevented, despite his imperial prerogative, by the weather.³⁹ Tiridates was eventually presented to the crowds "at the first available opportunity" (*quo opportunissime potuit*), but it is unknown how the crowd learned about the postponement. Probably, some cancellations and schedule changes occurred abruptly. When two boxers were introduced to compete at the games organised to honour Augustus, he stopped the contest and rescheduled it to the next day so that the women present in the stands would not be able to watch the athletes.⁴⁰ This would have been a completely unexpected turn of events which must have altered the entire entertainment programme for the day, but since it was offered in honour of Augustus and he was the one ordering this change, the postponement would not have been questioned. In A.D. 41, emperor Claudius postponed the annual festival so that it would not take place at the same time as the games organised by him in the circus in honour of Drusus and Antonia's birthday.⁴¹ As Cassius Dio uses a plural form (πανηγύρεις) for the festivals, which were associated with celebrations of specific deities, it is worth noting that if needed, even annual religious events could be rescheduled. As the emperor's father, Drusus the Elder, was born on 14 January and his mother, Antonia the Younger, on 31 January, the πανηγύρεις that were put off until later should have been selected from within this short time frame. The known religious festivals annually taking place between these days were Carmentalia (dedicated to the goddess of prophecies), *feriae Sementivae* (for goddess Ceres and Tellus), and *dies natalis* celebrating the construction of the temple of Castor and Pollux.⁴²

Adding to this the fact that Claudius himself was granted the power as emperor in the turbulent circumstances of 24 January (A.D. 41), it seems probable that his interest lay at the time in drawing the *populus'* attention away from the conspiracy and sudden assassination of his predecessor.⁴³ Arranging an opulent public event in the circus elevating and honouring the memory of his own family members was, therefore, a skilful attestation to his own rule and future decision-making. In this instance, the postponement of any other public festivals in the capital must have been in the new emperor's eyes a matter of mere logistics only.

Claudius' imperial decision about putting off the annual events was irrefutable and probably extensively communicated to the residents of Rome in advance, but the situation in smaller Italian centres was less straightforward. Since offering smaller scale events by the local *editores* was directly linked to their beneficence and geared towards influencing their public careers, any changes to the original programme would have been both costly and potentially disruptive to the

³⁷ Various forms of comfort offered to the audience: lunch breaks (established already in 61 B.C. and continued under the empire, see Dio 37.46.4); senators were allowed to wear hats, sit on cushions or under a roofed Diribitorium (Dio 59.7; cf. Suet. *Cal.* 26.5); water-cooling system in Pompeius' theatre (Val. Max. 2.4.6); washing off blood from the arena and using saffron water for sprinkling the stage (Ovid, *Fast.* 4.728-40, 5.675-80; Mart. *Ep.* 9.38); *cathedrae* for female spectators in the *summa cavea* (Calp. Sic. *Ecl.* 7.27; *AE* 1927, 157); tickets for 'pre-arranged' seats (literary sources: Cic. *Att.* 2.1.5.; *Mur.* 72-73; Ovid *Ars. am.* 1.141, 3.2.19; Mart. *Ep.* 5.24.9; Plut. *Gracch.* 12.3-4; epigraphic sources: *CIL* V 3456; *CIL* VIII 6995); distributing gifts to spectators (Suet. *Nero* 11.2; Dio 62.18.2); see also Nibley (1945), to this day the most detailed work on the *sparsiones* offered at the shows; cf. Scobie 1988, 215-216; Edmondson 1996, 84-95; Rose 2005, 102-103.

³⁸ Cic. *Att.* 4.15.

³⁹ Suet. *Nero* 13.1.

⁴⁰ Suet. *Aug.* 44.1-4.

⁴¹ Dio 60.5.1-2. Cf. Suet. *Claud.* 11.1.

⁴² Ovid, *Fast.* 1.461-542; 1.673-684; Varro *Ling. lat.* 5.62; Cic. *Verr.* 2.1.129 (respectively).

⁴³ Suet. *Claud.* 11.1.

schedule of all *munera* planned around the agricultural activities of a given region.⁴⁴ Therefore, any rescheduling would have been problematic on many different levels (personal, logistical, local, and regional) and unwelcome to spectators who planned to attend. The pressure put on the organisers to reschedule the shows and inform the potential audience about the changes is illustrated by the wording of one Pompeian *edictum*, *CIL* IV 1180, which advises that the gladiatorial combats would take place “without any delay” (*sine ulla dilatione*). The wording of the notice suggests that the said *munus* must have already been cancelled at least once and could not be postponed any further, perhaps due to spectator impatience, technicalities associated with the sponsor’s investments in the show, or simple calendar clashes with other locally held festivals, market days, and public events.⁴⁵

4. Cancellation of mass events

The precise methods undertaken by the game organisers to inform the masses about the changes in a programme are unknown to us. The literary sources are silent on the matter of notifying the crowd about postponements and cancellations, but it should not be assumed that the audience was left in the dark about the events they had been anticipating for months. Since the majority of the shows had predetermined dates, rescheduling them would have necessitated the sponsors communicating this to the spectators to stop them from arriving on the previously set date, and then informing them when to gather for the rescheduled event. The most common method of spreading the news among the masses while they were already present in the venue was via placards. These were used primarily to inform audience members about the criminal acts committed by those who had been condemned *ad bestias*.⁴⁶ These placards were either attached to the criminals themselves, who were then paraded around the arena, or carried by heralds who walked around the stands and showed them to the people present in the *cavea*.⁴⁷ Although this method was employed in Rome, very little is known about how the *editores* of smaller-scale events in smaller centres communicated with their audience when spectators were already present in the venue. Even if communication with local viewers in the provincial theatres and amphitheatres was similar, the information shared with the crowd probably concerned entertainments that were to follow soon thereafter.⁴⁸ Unless an unforeseen circumstance at that very moment prevented a show from taking place, it would seem too late to inform spectators about a cancellation once they were already in their seats. Indeed, no source records the use of placards or any other written forms of communication to inform audiences already present in the venue about the cancellation

⁴⁴ Tuck 2008/2009, 128-133.

⁴⁵ Piccaluga 1965, 117-121; MacMullen 1970, 339-341, and Kondoleon 1999, 325-329. So far only Tuck’s article (2008/2009) has approached the local Campanian calendar of religious festivals and market days by examining *edicta munerum*. The calendar of the annually held religious festivals in Rome ran from early April (*Iudi Megalenses*) to late December (*Consualia* and *Saturnalia*), making the private organisers of shows in Campania compelled to host their own *munera* in the time free from officially held *spectacula* in Rome and during days that would not interfere with the plans of the residents of Rome willing to travel to watch the shows in Campania (Tuck 2008/2009, 136-141). This would explain why the *munus* and *venatio* advertised for 4 of July in *CIL* IV 1180 was expected to take place with no further delay: the rest of July was filled with events in Rome (starting on 6 July with *Iudi Apollinares*, then the *Apollinares* market days, and finally *Iudi victoriae Caesaris*), making it virtually impossible for the Campanian sponsor to attract enough spectators from Rome and give successful shows in Pompeii after 4 of July. Cf. Cic. *Fam.* 16.20 (*tu potes Kalendis spectare gladiators, postridie redire, et ita censeo; verum ut videbitur*).

⁴⁶ Coleman 1999, 231-245.

⁴⁷ Communication via placards: Suet. *Claud.* 21.5 (*tabulam ilico misit admonens populum*); *Dom.* 10.1; Dio 60.13; 69.16.3 (cf. Aul. Gell. *NA* 5.14); wooden placards (Plut. *Pomp.* 45.2). Heralds verbally announcing information to the crowd can be found on the Magerius mosaic and in the following ancient sources: Mart. *Spect.* 4, 7, 9; Plin. *Pan.* 34-35; Petron. *Sat.* 45.7; Sen. *Ep.* 7.5; Dio 60.13.5. It is not impossible that the service of both heralds and the placards was applied at the same time in order to maximise all the spectators’ chances to either hear or read the communicated information. Suetonius confirms that the emperor could also communicate with the audience via his personal *praeco*, but the presence of this assistant is confirmed only until Domitian’s reign (Suet. *Dom.* 13.1).

⁴⁸ Suet. *Nero* 22.2.

of future events, or explains how information about rescheduled events reached those outside major population centres. It is quite possible though that in specific circumstances when the audience already present in their stands had to be informed about changes in the programme of the event, the heralds' involvement by verbally conveying the necessary details was the only method to spread the information by the word-of-mouth.

The communication method for cancelling the events, practiced between the local sponsors and their potential spectators, can perhaps be best explained in the context of the *edicta munerum* in Pompeii. The role of the *edicta* as a medium advertising the upcoming entertainments possibly offered some space for expressing any changes to the programmes of the *spectacula* that had to be communicated to the wider public. Since the *edicta* were painted on the building façades of the Pompeian streets as well as outside of the city *pomerium* on the tombs situated along the main approaches leading to the city gates, they could potentially reach a vast audience. Additionally, because some of the *edicta* in Pompeii advertised shows organised in other Campanian towns, people travelling through Pompeii could also find *edicta* about gladiatorial sparring held in other places. This system of written communication supported sponsors all over Campania and offered to advertise shows in Pompeii and at other popular centres. The advertisements at Pompeii for spectacles held, for example, in Nola or Nuceria suggest that the process of promoting these events was conducted at various cities and towns across the region and that Pompeian *munera* and *venationes* were likely also promoted at Nola or Nuceria.⁴⁹ The fact that the *dipinti*, painted wall messages, were used for advertising gladiatorial shows (*edicta munerum*), pre-electoral canvassing (*programmata*), and smaller-scale daily economic activities such as house rentals, suggests that they were an efficient, widely applied, and recognised system of communication. Adding to this assessment is the fact that it was in continuous use in Pompeii for nearly a century and there is no evidence to suggest that its use as a public communication system waned before the disaster in A.D. 79.

One extraordinary *edictum*, *CIL* IV 9976, offers a possible explanation for the process of communicating changes with the wider audience before the event took place. The painted *edictum* was found on the upper edge of the plinth of tomb 10EN (PNc 5), an *aedicula* dated to 27 B.C.–A.D. 14, which is situated on the north-eastern side of the Porta di Nocera cemetery in Pompeii.⁵⁰ Although the *edictum* itself is no longer visible *in situ*, there is sufficient surviving information to provide an interpretation of this *dipinto's* role, which goes well beyond the ordinary advertising notice for upcoming *munus*.⁵¹ The damage to the *edictum*, visible on the original photographs of the excavated tomb, confirms that many words were missing already upon the discovery of this *dipinto*.⁵² It is, therefore, impossible to ascertain the name of the sponsor and the number of gladiatorial pairings scheduled. Despite the fragmentary nature of the surviving notice, however, the phrase *glad(iatorum) p(aria)*, the discernible date of the upcoming show (May 18–20), and the city where it was supposed to take place (Cumae) confirm that the *dipinto* was a full-scale *edictum* officially advertising an

⁴⁹ *Edicta* advertising shows in Caes: *CIL* IV 9977; Capua: *CIL* IV 11037; Cumae: *CIL* IV 9976, 9983a; Forum Popilii: *CIL* IV 11038; Herculaneum: *CIL* IV 9969; Nuceria: *CIL* IV 10161, 1195, 9972, 9973, 9974, 3882; Puteoli: *CIL* IV 7994, 9970, 9984a, 9969; Formia: *CIL* IV 1184; Nola: *CIL* IV 1187, 1204, 9978, 3881. There is also one *dipinto* from Herculaneum which probably advertises a spectacle in Nola: *AE* 182b.

⁵⁰ The tomb numeration after D'Ambrosio – De Caro 1983, 10 EN, and Campbell 2015, 215–216. On tomb's details and the *edictum* *CIL* IV 9976 see also Della Corte 1958, 140–141, 144–145, 150; Solin 1973, 265; Sabbatini Tumolesi 1980, 109; Varone – Stefani 2009, 485–487.

⁵¹ *CIL* IV 9976 will be interchangeably referred to as a *dipinto*, *titulus* or notice.

⁵² The first funerary monuments at the Porta Nocera necropolis were excavated in 1886, but they have been reburied again in the 1980s and are no longer visible. The funerary monuments that are accessible today were excavated in the 1950s by Amadeo Maiuri and then in the 1980s further research was conducted by Antonio D'Ambrosio and Stefano De Caro. It was in the early 1950s that the *dipinti* on the 10EN funerary monument came to light together with a female statue situated between 10EN and 12EN. I would kindly like to thank Dr Pia Kastenmeier for directing me to the details concerning the early excavations of the area and its history (Kastenmeier 2014, 7–11; published as part of Pompeii Sustainable Preservation Project, The Fraunhofer Institute for Building Physics IBP). The archival photographs of the funerary monument: *CIL* PH 0003710, 0003711, 0003712, 0003713; cf. Varone – Stefani 2009, 485–487.

upcoming *munus*. The wording in the *dipinto* and the information that did survive are quite standard for any *edicta* with one glaring exception: a red line running horizontally through the middle of all the black, painted letters of the surviving lines of text. Sabbatini-Tumolesi interprets this red line as having been added to indicate an error made during the initial painting.⁵³ However, as the discussion below will demonstrate, the elimination of any written mistakes in the Pompeian *dipinti* never took the form of the crossing out of errors that were instead left intact.



Fig. 1. *Edictum* CIL IV 9976 on the funerary monument⁵⁴

Advertisements for local games were normally large-sized *edicta* painted on the façades of houses and tombs, usually in places strategically chosen to attract the attention of passers-by. Both *edicta munerum* and *programmata* from Pompeii have minor mistakes with misspelled words, typically consisting of errors in one or two letters.⁵⁵ None of the many *dipinti* with mistakes have ever been eliminated from the cityscape by crossing them out. *Scriptores*, the professional letterers responsible for painting the *edicta*, just left the incorrectly executed advertisement with the mistakes they had made, or they had the entire *dipinto* white-washed and most likely redone from scratch.⁵⁶ It seems that the former solution was more frequent for the *edicta*. Mistakes appear to have been purposefully left to not interfere with the completed *edictum* or for the sake of not wasting time redoing a message whose content was, despite a couple of minor errors, nevertheless decipherable. Spelling mistakes appear to have been treated as minor errors or one

⁵³ Sabbatini Tumolesi 1980, 109 (“[...] per cancellare un’errata esecuzione”).

⁵⁴ Photograph of the inscription taken in 1956 by Konrad Schubring (CIL-Archiv, Inv.-Nr. PH0003712) provided by courtesy of Dr Andreas Faßbender (CORPVS INSCRIPTIONVM LATINARVM Berlin-Brandenburgische Akademie der Wissenschaften).

⁵⁵ E.g. CIL IV 7989 (should be ‘k’ instead of ‘f’) or CIL IV 7994 (should be ‘erunt’ instead of ‘erit’); on writing errors see Wallace 2005, 24-26.

⁵⁶ On the option of correcting the entire text of a painted notice (a process that can be attested to *programmata* only) see e.g. CIL IV 7166 and 7170 in Franklin 1980, 57-58.

cannot discount the possibility that these misspelled words simply were not considered by the *scriptores* as overly important.

Since there is no evidence that erroneous *edicta* were purposely corrected, rewritten, or crossed out, it is even more improbable that the advertisements of gladiatorial games without any spelling mistakes, such as *CIL* IV 9976, would have been “removed” by simply crossing them out. Not a single example of eighty *edicta munerum* known from Pompeii was disposed of in this manner.⁵⁷ The standard method of removing *dipinti* was to whitewash them, which in turn had the two-for-one benefit of simultaneously preparing the wall surface for the painting of a new notice in the same spot.⁵⁸ The ongoing academic discussion on the whitewashing of parietal writing generally assumes that the process was routinely applied only to those *edicta* and *programmata* that were outdated because their events had already been held.⁵⁹ The examples of more than one advertisement concerning a specific show offered by the same patron suggests, however, that the notices were not removed at all but instead were left on the walls. Some *edicta* of renowned sponsors such as Decimus Lucretius Satrius Valens and his son, painted in different parts of Pompeii, were not only not removed, despite having the exact same content in every advertisement, but kept intact in all parts of the town.⁶⁰ Epigraphic material also confirms that when disposing of expired advertisements, local *dealbatores* would, based on the existing evidence, always paint over the entire notice and never remove just one line of the text by crossing it out and leaving the rest of the *dipinto*'s content intact and untouched. Crossed-out sections of any notice would be an expensive waste of prime advertising space and would defeat the *dealbatores*' purpose of preparing enough space for the making of new *dipinti*.⁶¹

The vast majority of *edicta munerum* found in Pompeian cemeteries measure around two metres in breadth, i.e., from the left to the right margin of the text. The tomb surfaces onto which the *scriptores* painted political notices and advertisements for gladiatorial games, while residents also scratched their variously themed *graffiti*, was limited. The limited space on tombs and house façades was also due to the practice of overcrowding the wall surfaces by keeping on them some of the outdated *dipinti* for much longer than necessary. It is unclear if advertisements had to be removed within a specific period after the show, or if the sponsors were allowed to keep their persuasive messages for as long as they wished. Since all *edicta* included the *tria nomina* of sponsors, which were, at least temporarily, commemorated on the walls around the town, city, and region and available for all passers-by to view and admire, leaving some *edicta* on the tombs and house walls for quite a long time was, we can only surmise, an opportunity for sponsors to continue to publicise their benefactions for the city.⁶² The organisers of successful games likely wished to prolong the celebratory aura of the events they financed for reasons of personal prestige. The out-of-date advertisements, therefore, still functioned to remind the people of Campania of their

⁵⁷ In contrast, removal by “blurring” and deliberate crossing out of *graffiti* seems typical and did occur in Pompeii (e.g. *CIL* IV 8560, 8917).

⁵⁸ *CIL* IV 1190 (*Scr(ipsit)/Secundus/dealbante Vit[tor]e/adstante Vesbino/[red]em[p]tore [---]*). This *dipinto* confirms that there could be at least three people working on the making of one *edictum*, whereby each man involved in the process of preparing it had a specific task to fulfil.

⁵⁹ Sabbatini Tumolesi 1980, 113, 122-124; Mouritsen 1988, *passim*; Chiavria 2002, 89 (nn. 191), 91-92, 272; Mouritsen – Gradel (1991, 146), suggested that the lack of evidence for whitewashing was the result of these *dipinti* dating back to the period just before the city's destruction, a hypothesis later questioned and eventually refuted by Franklin's numerous examples of *programmata* (Franklin 1997, 434-447); Franklin 2001, *passim*. The method of whitewashing notices as means of removing outdated information, and then adding new ones, was ultimately confirmed by the study conducted on an information pillar from Herculaneum by Falcone *et alii* 2008, 1708-1710, 1713-1715.

⁶⁰ See and compare: *CIL* IV 1185, 3884, 7992, 7995, 11033.

⁶¹ See *CIL* IV 222; *CIL* IV 9968b, *CIL* X 3785; cf. Cormack 2007, 604. A particularly intriguing comment on *dealbatores*' work appears in Manius Curius' letter to Cicero in which the former states that he wants to be a man of honour and thus he 'does not want to paint two walls with the same pot of whitewash' (*nec solere duo parietes de eadem fidelia dealbare*; Cic. *Fam.* 7.29.1-2). It seems that the expression was perhaps a set phrase meant for ridiculing stinginess and working style, and criticising the *dealbatores* at the same time.

⁶² Franklin (1980, 25) proved this to be true regarding *programmata*, but the same process could have been practiced also by the patrons of locally held *munera* and *venationes*.

patrons' generosity and, in the long term, help them win votes during local elections. Consequently, the *edicta* would stay with all their textual content on the building and tomb façades until the time of their complete removal.

By contrast, *CIL* IV 9976 was not only *not* removed by the local *dealbatores*, but it was also not kept intact. Instead, it was intentionally modified. The red line running through the middle of the writing disrupted the advertisement's content, without making it illegible. Whoever crossed out the content of this *edictum* wanted the words to remain visible. The application of the colour red for the strikethrough is also unusual. Red was normally reserved for the most important words in local advertisements.⁶³ The selection of this colour for the horizontal line may also be explained by the *edictum*'s location on the tomb. This black-lettered *edictum* was placed on the lower section of the monument, a less advantageous place for an advertisement than the upper sections, which were closer to eye level. The red would have stood out and drawn attention to the advertisement's content, those black letters, still visible, through which it passed. As the red line did not obliterate the message but rather drew attention to it, the most likely interpretation is that it served to inform viewers of cancelling the gladiatorial show.

Even though the *edictum* was painted in the upper part of the tomb's base, it covered the entire span of the plinth and would have stood out from the lower panel of the monument. It was not unusual for the *scriptores* to place the advertisements in the lowermost sections of the funerary monuments. Although the upper parts would have been preferred by the *editores* due to the increased visibility there, other *edicta* from the Porta di Nocera tombs were placed in the same position as *CIL* IV 9976.⁶⁴ The decision to have the advertisement painted in the lower segments of the tomb might have been dictated by the availability of space on the tomb's surface. At least two other *edicta* and two *programmata* are discernible on the upper and middle sections of the tomb.⁶⁵ *CIL* IV 9976 was likely painted in the only spot available. Despite this potentially unfavourable location for advertising, the *edictum* was rendered using the standard formulaic and artistic pattern of all advertisements for games in Pompeii. The *dipinto*, measuring 2.4 metres in breadth, covered nearly the entire width of the tomb façade.⁶⁶ Its total height cannot be easily determined as only the size of the letters from the *edictum*'s first line is known (10 cm). While the height of the entire façade was 4.3m, the height of the space on which the *edictum* was painted could have been no more than 1.22m.⁶⁷ Therefore, the cancellation of the event, both the lettering and the red strikethroughs, would have been noticeable from a distance, even though the notice

⁶³ Red colour in *edicta* was reserved for writing only specific elements of the text: *causa muneris* (i.e. *CIL* IV 1197, 7986(a), 7988(b), 7988(c), 7989(a), 7993, 11035); names of the shows' patrons and/or place where their gladiators were going to fight (*CIL* IV 1186, 1191, 7991, 7992, 7993, 7995); only a few *edicta* are known to have been painted in red colour in full (*CIL* IV 1177, 1178, 1180, 1183, 1184, 1189, 3883, 7994, 9979, 9980, 9983(a), 11033, 11037, 11038, also 11034 and 11036, but they were not preserved completely; perhaps also 7986(a)), the remaining *edicta* were either painted all in black or alternated the two colours (the latter option: i.e. *CIL* IV 7991, 7993, 7995); in comparison, there is only one known example of an *edictum* with black letters painted on a red background (*CIL* IV 9962). The painting of the red strikethrough did not have to be expensive though as the red pigments were probably of local origin, thus diminishing the eventual costs of paying for red paint brought from outside of Campania, see Aliatis *et alii* 2010, 1538, 1541.

⁶⁴ In the necropolis area, the length of the base of tomb fronts where *edicta* were usually found ranges from a minimum of 2.80 m (i.e. *tomba a podio* 38EN (PNc20)) to a maximum of 6.50 m (e.g. *tomba a fornice* 70S (PNc38)). On the tombs, which in turn had the narrowest walls at the base, the gladiatorial *dipinti* were still impressive, measuring about 2 meters in length (*CIL* IV 9970, *CIL* IV 9986, *CIL* IV 9984a-b). On the other hand, in the case of slightly wider tomb fronts, the content of some advertisements was distributed over the entire width of funerary structures and reached up to 4 meters in length (e.g. *CIL* IV 9978). Thus, the size of the *edicta* could dominate not only the neighbouring *dipinti* and *graffiti*, but sometimes even the content of engraved epitaphs.

⁶⁵ *CIL* IV 9948, 9949, 9950, 9971, 9972, 9973, 9974, 9975, 10226, 10227, 10228.

⁶⁶ D'Ambrosio – De Caro 1983, 10EN (3.57m).

⁶⁷ The archival photographs of the 10EN (PNc 5) façade suggest that the letters in other lines of the *edictum* were bigger than in its first line of the text. The differences in letters' height within one *dipinto* were not an uncommon occurrence, but since *CIL* IV 9976 has not been fully preserved, the conjecture on the size of the *edictum* should be treated with caution.

was situated on the tomb's lower section. To see this advertisement one did not have to travel into the city either, given that the tomb was situated along the cemetery alley (*Via delle Tombe*) parallel to the city walls outside the *Porta di Nocera*. Unlike some other *dipinti* on the side walls of the tombs, *CIL IV 9976* was written on the front of the tomb, facing the alley, and thus those travelling along the *Via delle Tombe* would have been able to read them without even necessarily stopping their carts. If a strikethrough, particularly one in red, was a universally recognised visual motif for communicating a cancellation, it did not require any additional signification, even for those who were illiterate.⁶⁸

One possible explanation is that the red line was added to the *dipinto* much later, as an act of vandalism. However, there is no evidence that the crossing out of *edictum* with red paint was ever done to spoil or destroy a message communicated in any advertisement. If clear exposition of some of the *dipinti* seemed obscured, it is usually due to the painting-over of outdated advertisements, which would eventually end up overlapping, surrounded by incised or charcoal *graffiti* or other brush-painted texts that would potentially "destroy" the notice's original wording and display.⁶⁹ In contrast, the red line in *CIL IV 9976* does not resemble the chaotic jumble of outdated and unrelated texts which often clustered on Pompeian wall surfaces.⁷⁰ This red line was not only carefully ruled and in such a way as to not obscure the information underneath about the upcoming games, but it was kept intact as part of the advertisement. The strikethrough could have been added sometime after the initial *edictum* had been painted, but only to indicate the cancellation of the planned event. Its careful rendering suggests that the content of the *edictum* was not erroneous or outdated but that the original reason for its painting, i.e., the holding of upcoming games, was no longer valid. Had the advertised games been a long-forgotten event, the entire *edictum* would have been removed from the tomb façade. In the case of *CIL IV 9976*, however, the question requiring deliberation is not why the *edictum* was never painted over, or when exactly it was made (particularly since none of the *dipinti* found on the 10 EN (PNc 5) tomb can be dated with any certainty), but rather why the red strikethrough was added to the *edictum* in the first place and then kept in its form along with the advertisement's content. Considering the location of *CIL IV 9976* and the means of executing the red line, it functioned to signify the cancellation of the upcoming games.

5. Conclusion

It should not be assumed that every games enthusiast would receive information about postponed or cancelled games via the same information channel. The current collection of epigraphic data contains nothing that explicitly indicates how viewers were notified of cancelled or postponed events in the theatre or the arena. In addition, the literary sources offer few explanations for why events were rescheduled. This is primarily because information about postponements and cancellations were communicated mainly via word-of-mouth verification spurred by official announcements to local crowds by the heralds sent by the organisers of the cancelled shows. However, the effectiveness of this method could be limited. The dissemination of information outside the city, especially if a larger number of spectators was expected, must have included a more widespread approach. Crossing out the *edictum* but leaving its content intact and legible was likely the fastest, cheapest, and least complicated technique of broadcasting the news to the widest possible audience.

CIL IV 9976 is the only *dipinto* known that has been crossed out with a red line along the entire length of the text and left in this state in a place visible to passers-by. Its uniqueness does not mean, however, that this technique for cancelling or postponing the events was not widely applied

⁶⁸ On the level of literacy in Pompeii see Franklin 1991, 80-86; cf. Tuck 2008/2009, 134.

⁶⁹ Examples of overlapping *edicta* or fragments of their contents: *CIL IV 7988, 7989*, and *dipinti* from the southern wall to the entrance to the gladiatorial *ludus* (VIII.7.16) in Pompeii.

⁷⁰ See the overlapping texts of *dipinti CIL 1093* and *CIL IV 1186* near the Teatro Grande or a mixture of various texts on the funerary monuments (particularly useful here are the appendixes in Campbell's publication from 2015).

also in other centres of Campania as well as outside of the region. The Pompeian fresco painting from Praedia di Giulia Felice in Pompeii, which presents people reading placards in the forum, confirms that written communication with residents was conducted via notices posted in public places.⁷¹ Ancient literary sources record instances of edicts and speeches distributed to the public in a written form, suggesting that particularly pressing information was placed in areas with easy access and visibility.⁷² Considering the interest in the games expressed by people from rural or distant areas of Roman Italy who were willing to travel to watch the shows, and the limitations of literacy in this same demographic, a universal method of notifying audiences about changes to planned events must have been well established. The responsibility for informing viewers rested with the show's sponsor or, more likely, with the middlemen commissioned to prepare the *munus*. Holding the event could be demanding in terms of the personal finances and reputation of the sponsor, and *editores* certainly took great pains to anticipate and counteract possible issues that could affect their investments and political advancement. It is not possible to estimate how many events were delayed or cancelled, or whether the audience was accustomed to seeing the shows postponed or watching the postponed shows at some other time. However, the literary sources and epigraphic material confirm that the sponsors preferred to reschedule the planned entertainment rather than put their reputation at a disadvantage by displaying sick animals, unprepared actors, or unskilled athletes and gladiators.

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⁷¹ The Praedia di Giulia Felice fresco is in the National Archaeological Museum of Naples (no. inv. MNN 9068). Well-presented colour photographs of the frescoes from the Praedia, together with detailed descriptions, can be found in Nappo 1989, esp. 87-88.

⁷² Cic. *Att.* 2.20.4; Suet. *Tib.* 66.1.

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