



Colosseum – Rome’s Arena Of Death Pompeii – The Last Day

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www.bbc.co.uk/history

The Romans are coming to BBC ONE!

“I swear to endure branding, bondage, flogging, death by the sword or anything else that our master has ordered.”

Oath sworn by new gladiators.

“Darkness fell – not the dark of a moonless or cloudy night, but as if the lamp had been put out in a closed room. You could hear the shrieks of women, the wailing of infants, the shouts of men.”

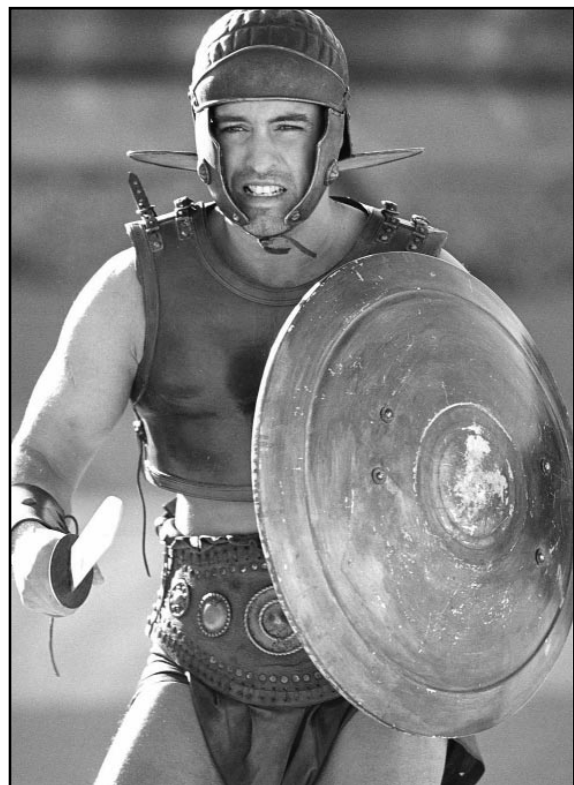
Pliny the Younger’s eyewitness account of Pompeii’s destruction.

BBC One viewers are being offered a two-way ticket to ancient Rome this October, as *Colosseum – Rome’s Arena Of Death* and *Pompeii – The Last Day* prove that time-travel is not just the stuff of fiction. The two prime-time history documentaries will peel away 2,000 years of time, to reveal just how real the Roman world was to those living – and dying – in it.

Both films are made in similar style to last year’s hit *Pyramid*, and combine compelling narrative with state-of-the-art computer graphics and high-quality drama reconstruction.

“Opening the door to a wide variety of subjects is key to BBC One,” says Lorraine Heggessey, Controller of BBC One. “This season we’re putting history centre stage. Building on the success of *Pyramid* and using our expertise in the area of computer-generated imagery, we’ve pushed technology to the limits to recreate the world of ancient Italy and bring to life history through the stories of those who lived it.”

Colosseum – Rome’s Arena Of Death throws new light on the way gladiators fought and trained, and reveals how many of them were the superstars of their age. It revolves around the true story of Verus, who rises from slave to star gladiator, but then faces the ultimate challenge. The film charts the story of one man’s journey from slavery to freedom and of the building where he was prepared to fight for his life. It is also the story of the Roman civilisation that demanded he should do so.



Verus (Robert Shannon), one of the star gladiators

Pompeii – The Last Day recreates the 24 hours around 24 August AD79, when Mount Vesuvius erupted with horrifying force, spewing 10 billion

tonnes of pumice, rock and ash onto the prosperous Roman cities of Pompeii and Herculaneum. Using state-of-the-art visual effects and high-quality drama reconstruction, the film recreates each stage of the eruption and explores the devastating impact it had on factual characters known from historical and forensic evidence unearthed in Pompeii and Herculaneum.

Says Laurence Rees, Creative Director, BBC History: "Our film on the Colosseum not only builds on the success of last year's breakthrough BBC One history film, *Pyramid*, but it also takes innovation in popular history film-making further still. The film contains the most realistic recreation of the life of a gladiator yet attempted on television. Unlike the Hollywood movies from which most people, up to now, have drawn their knowledge of Roman history, *Colosseum – Rome's Arena Of Death* is as historically accurate as we can make it. I think after watching this film most people's perceptions of what life was like for gladiators in ancient Rome will be fundamentally changed."

Says John Lynch, Creative Director, BBC Science: "*Pompeii – The Last Day* will appeal not only to traditional history and science viewers but also to a whole new audience. The evidence buried by the volcano has enabled us to reconstruct the lives of real people who lived in Pompeii and were destroyed by the eruption. The narrative story of each character as they struggle to escape from the terror of Vesuvius provides a powerful, emotional focus, enabling viewers to engage directly with the past. We learn of the different stages of the terrifying eruption via their struggles to survive, and we experience the horrors of the volcano through their eyes."

Digital TV viewers will have the chance to investigate the darker side of the Roman world in an interactive "whodunit" designed to accompany the BBC One transmissions. Using their remote, viewers on Freeview and DSat

are invited to examine a roman crime scene and deliver a "post mortem" on a character who appears in both films by applying their knowledge of ancient Rome. The BBCi website www.bbc.co.uk/history offers further exciting opportunities to learn about Roman life including a game in which visitors can arm gladiators for different styles of combat; a chance to reconstruct the Colosseum; and a dedicated message board. There are also two new BBC books to accompany the films.

Colosseum – Rome's Arena Of Death is a BBC production for BBC One in association with Discovery.

Pompeii – The Last Day is a BBC production for BBC One in association with The Learning Channel.

Viewers will also have another chance to see the hugely successful *Pyramid* on BBC One.



BBC Books

The following titles are available from all good book shops, The BBC Shop (www.bbcshop.com), or The BBC Listener Enquiry Line on 020-8433 2236.

***Colosseum: The Wonder Of Ancient Rome* By Peter Connolly**

Published: 16 October 2003
Price: £16.99 (hardback)
ISBN: 0563 48892 1

Written by Peter Connolly, an expert on the history and architecture of the Colosseum, this book compiles fascinating research to explain the training methods used at the gladiator schools, as well as examining the brutal society of ancient Rome. New research, revealed here for the first time, debunks the stories perpetuated in the film *Gladiator* and helps us understand the nature of these games.

Containing a wealth of colour photographs and original artwork bringing ancient Rome to life, *Colosseum: The Wonder Of Ancient Rome* reveals how and why this incredible amphitheatre was constructed, exploding old myths and disclosing the latest discoveries and theories.

The book also considers the later history of the Colosseum, the effects on Christianity, excavations and the building's modern restoration. Peter Connolly is an internationally respected writer and illustrator and an expert on the history and architecture of the Colosseum. He has studied at the British School in Athens and in Rome and is an Honorary Research Fellow of the Institute of Archaeology in London.

***Pompeii – The Last Day* By Dr Paul Wilkinson**

Published: 30 October 2003
Price: £16.99 (hardback)
ISBN: 0563 487704

One of history's greatest stories, the destruction of the city of Pompeii was a natural disaster on an epic scale that has fascinated a succession of cultures around the world for centuries.

Pompeii – The Last Day sets out a brief history of the two cities and describes everyday life in a Roman province, then follows the last 24 hours of the inhabitants. Fully illustrated with photographs of the lost treasures, early excavations and the buildings as they appear today, this book is a comprehensive guide to the rise and fall of one of the world's most famous cities. For those inspired to visit the sites for themselves, the final chapter of the book comprises a 26-page, detailed one-day tour of the city, complete with a full colour plan of the streets and major buildings of interest.

Dr Paul Wilkinson is a freelance archaeologist specialising in Roman studies. He runs the Kent Archaeological Field School, which organises over a hundred days of archaeological courses throughout the year in Britain and abroad. His television work includes *Time Team*, *What The Romans Did For Us* and *History Seekers*. Formally Creative Director of Larousse, he is a member of the Institute of Field Archaeologists and a Fellow of the Royal Society of Arts.

BBC Interactive

To accompany both films, BBC Interactive Factual & Learning presents *Death In Rome*, an interactive murder mystery available on Freeview, DSat and on the web. This is an immersive, full-screen interactive TV challenge, with multiple outcomes and many different ways of playing the game. And there's a chance to win a holiday for four to Rome and Pompeii for those who successfully identify the culprit.

Both BBC One films feature a common character, Tiberius Claudius Eutychus, a merchant of Pompeii, played by Nicolas Chagrin. On pressing the red button or by logging on to bbc.co.uk/history immediately after either of the films, the audience will discover Claudius Eutychus lying dead on the floor of a tenement flat in Ostia, Rome's port and now the centre of trade for all the Empire, after the destruction of Pompeii. The audience has entered an ancient crime scene, and they must lead the investigation.

The challenge is to solve his death by leading an investigation which the audience controls. Using a range of different interactive tools – microscopes, a Latin translator and a camera control – viewers can analyse the evidence in the room and on the body of the victim to discover how Claudius met his grizzly end.

Throughout the enquiry, the audience will encounter flashbacks to the days leading up to the victim's death, rich in authentic detail of the life in the Roman Empire at the end of the first century. Expert witnesses, historians, archaeologists and classicists will be on hand to aid the understanding of how Roman society was structured, how Romans worshipped; how they traded; what they ate; and how they treated illness. By drawing on all these lines of investigation, the audience will draw their own conclusion as to how Claudius died.

Towards the end of the challenge, viewers will be invited to enter who they think the killer was. If they fail to identify the killer, the investigation will be repeated immediately for another chance of solving the crime scene. However, if the cause of death is correctly identified, then a secret password will allow entry into a prize draw for a holiday for four people to Rome and Pompeii.

Dcable and Ceefax will also have a text-based version of the competition where non-digital viewers also have the opportunity to take part in the prize draw if they manage to solve the murder mystery.

BBC Website

www.bbc.co.uk/history

Discover more about the splendours of ancient Rome with the BBCi History website. In *Death In Rome*, an interactive "whodunit", visitors can play the part of a Roman sleuth by unraveling the events behind an unexplained death, whilst finding out about mysterious cults and criminal activities along the way. Successful players could win a holiday to Rome.

Colosseum – Rome's Arena Of Death

Do you know your trident from your gladius, or your greaves from your shoulder guard? Visitors to the site can try their luck at arming gladiators in the *Dressed To Kill* game.

The website also allows visitors to explore a reconstruction of the Colosseum and find out more about the glorious but troubling monument to Roman imperial power and cruelty. You can also uncover the heroes of



A page impression of the Colosseum website on BBCi

the amphitheatre – who became gladiators and what was their role in Roman society?

From the emperor Vespasian, who commissioned the Colosseum, to Spartacus, the most famous of all gladiators, visitors to the site can get the lowdown on the movers and shakers of the Roman world.

There are opportunities to read thought-provoking feature articles on Roman women, slavery and the age of Augustus, match well-known Latin phrases with their English translations or trace the history of ancient Rome in a concise timeline.

A dedicated message board, hosted by an expert in the field, will continue the “how do they know that?” debate, inevitably provoked by the programme.

Pompeii – The Last Day

Visitors to the site will be able to piece together the last 24 hours of Pompeii, trace the history of the town’s archaeological excavations, explore a snapshot of Pompeian daily life, soak up the town’s architecture or marvel at its stunning frescoes.

There’s a chance to mug up on some fast facts about Pompeii and enter a competition to win a copy of the book written to accompany the programme. A holiday to Rome and Pompeii is also up for grabs, and there’s a chance to lead a crime scene investigation and submit evidence in the *Death In Rome* game.

The site also offers biographies of prominent Romans, including Pliny the Younger, plus articles by leading experts who investigate themes such as health, society and slavery, to build up the bigger picture of ancient Rome.



A page impression from the Pompeii website on BBCi

BBC Schools

Four 20-minute Schools programmes for children will transmit from 21 November on BBC Two. Entitled *The Romans In Britain*, the series is suitable for children aged 7-11 years.

Children, parents and teachers can also visit www.bbc.co.uk/schools/romans which covers Key Stage 2 History Unit 6A: A Roman case study.

Roman timeline

BC

- 753** – Founding of the city of Rome by Romulus.
- 510** – King Tarquin is expelled and Rome becomes a republic.
- 206** – The Romans conquer Spain.
- 146** – Greece falls to Rome.
- 100** – Birth of Julius Caesar.
- 55** – Julius Caesar invades Britain but fails to conquer the island.
- 44** – Julius Caesar is murdered in the Senate by Brutus and fellow senators.
- 27** – Augustus, Julius Caesar's adoptive son, becomes the first Emperor of Rome. There will be a further 82 Roman emperors.

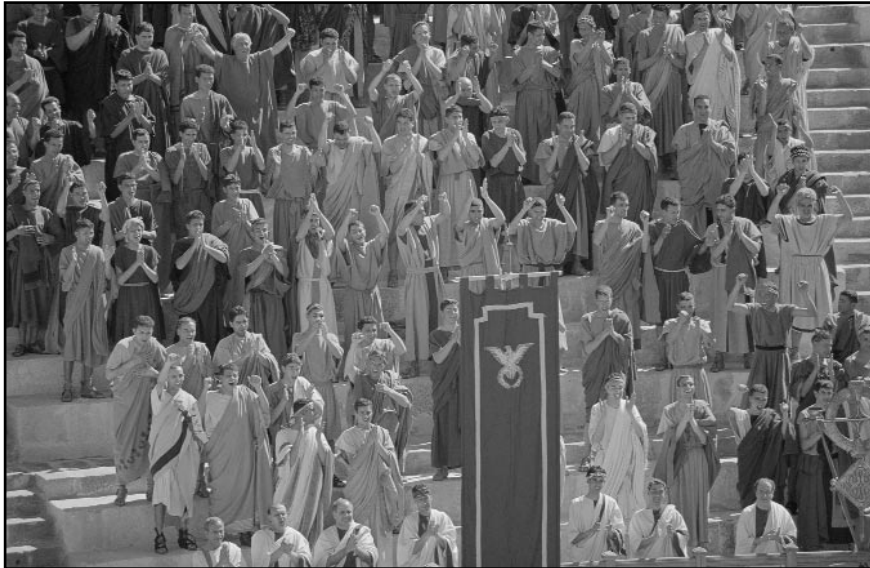
AD

- 0** – Birth of Christ.
- 24** – Birth of Pliny the Elder (Gaius Plinius Secundus), author of *Naturalis Historia* (Natural Histories) encompassing 37 books, an encyclopaedia of natural phenomena.
- 43** – Emperor Claudius's invasion force lands on the Kent coast. This time the Romans stay.
- 47** – Roman soldiers reach Cornwall, Wales and the Humber.
- 60** – Queen Boudicca rebels against the Romans but, after a great victory at Colchester, she is eventually defeated.
- 61** – Pliny the Younger (Gaius Plinius Cecilius Secundus) born in Como. At the age of eight he loses his father and is adopted by Pliny the Elder.
- 62** – A powerful earthquake, centred near Pompeii, "lays low" the city; most of

Herculaneum is destroyed. A flock of sheep is suffocated by poisonous gas, a sure sign that Vesuvius has become active again.

- 71** – Romans destroy Jerusalem and plunder the Temple of Solomon.
- 72** – The booty enables Emperor Vespasian to start building the Colosseum.
- 78** – Roman forces take the Druid stronghold of Anglesey.
- 79** – Pompeii and Herculaneum are destroyed when Vesuvius erupts; many thousands are killed. Pliny the Elder dies leading a rescue mission; Pliny the Younger survives to record the tragedy. Emperor Vespasian dies, and his son, Titus, takes over as Emperor.
- 80** – The Colosseum is completed and the inaugural games held for 100 days.
- 83** – The most northerly legionary fortress of the Roman Empire is established at Inchtuthill in Perthshire.
- 122** – The Romans begin building Hadrian's Wall.
- 213** – All free Britons become Roman citizens.
- 235** – The start of a turbulent 50 years during which over 20 Roman emperors are murdered.
- 305** – The Roman Empire splits into an eastern and western empire.
- 313** – Persecution of Christians ceases.
- 326** – Emperor Constantine closes Gladiator schools.
- 380** – Christianity becomes the official religion of Rome.
- 410** – Roman rule in Britain collapses.
- 455** – Vandals from Africa invade Italy and destroy Rome.
- 476** – Romulus Augustulus, the last Emperor of the Western Roman Empire, is forced to retire.
- 1453** – The empire of the east falls to the Turks.

Colosseum – Rome’s Arena Of Death



The Colosseum in Rome is one of the world’s most amazing buildings. Built over a 10-year period during the reign of Emperor Vespasian and completed in AD80, this immense oval stadium – bigger than Wembley Arena – was home to the most violent and deadly spectator sport in history; gladiatorial combat.

Gladiators thrilled and titillated the 55,000 spectators who regularly filled the Colosseum. They were literally the life-blood of the arena. One of the greatest of them all was Verus, whose story is told in *Colosseum – Rome’s Arena Of Death*. Like the fictional character Maximus in the blockbuster movie *Gladiator*, Verus was a slave who rose through the ranks of gladiatorial combat to win his freedom. Unlike Maximus, he really existed and is one of the only gladiators to have had one of his fights recorded in history.

Escaping the relentless grind of slave labour in the stone quarries, Verus is taken on as a trainee fighter and learns the complex and highly skilled techniques of the gladiator. He

forges friendships with other trainee gladiators and learns that life as a gladiator can be nasty, brutish and short. But he also learns that, with luck, skill and sheer courage, a star gladiator can become rich, attract admiring hordes of women and, ultimately, earn his freedom.

“Only if you understand the Roman arena can you understand what ancient Rome was all about,” says producer Tilman Remme. “For hundreds of years, gladiatorial games were right at the heart of Roman society. Romans couldn’t get enough of it.

“Yet, amazingly, the image we have of gladiators as victims of Roman blood lust simply doesn’t stand up. Gladiators were the celebrities of their age. Not only were they tempted by the thrills of the fight, but there were also huge winnings to be had if they succeeded. For a slave destined to die in one of Rome’s cruel quarries or mines, the chance to become a gladiator was his only hope of ever regaining freedom.



Colosseum – Rome’s Arena Of Death

“Gladiators still strike a chord today because they were the ultimate warriors. Not only were their skills as fighters without parallel, they were also known as ‘netters of women at night’ – a heady combination.”

Colosseum – Rome’s Arena Of Death follows Verus’s rise to fame and relives his dramatic fight during the inaugural games at the Colosseum when he faces a new and terrible challenge. Can Verus’s performance on the day earn him a wooden sword and his freedom, or is he destined for a glorious but bloody death?

The film also explores the building of the Colosseum and reveals the beauty and ambition of its design. With corridors and staircases leading from 76 public entrances to convey 55,000 spectators to their seats in minutes, the Colosseum also had a maze of subterranean passages and chambers which kept gladiators and wild animals in readiness below. Platforms raised by pulleys to concealed trap doors in the arena floor provided additional excitement.

Using drama reconstruction, choreographed fight sequences and state-of-the-art special effects, *Colosseum – Rome’s Arena Of Death* takes viewers back to a time and a place where fights to the death, not penalty shoot-outs, made spectators’ pulses race.

The main characters

Verus



He was born a free man but, in AD76, Verus was captured on the north east frontier of the Roman Empire. Verus was brought back to Italy and forced into slavery. He worked for a year in a quarry, before seizing his chance to train as a gladiator. He rose through the ranks to become a star gladiator.

The character of Verus is based on an historic figure, described by the Court poet, Martial, as having fought one of the most momentous fights in the history of gladiatorial games.

Priscus

A slave from Gaul (now France) and recorded by the poet Martial as having



fought against Verus in the inaugural games of the Colosseum.

Vespasian

After Nero’s death, four different emperors ruled Rome but, eventually, Vespasian took over in AD69. He wanted to forge a new dynasty for this family (the Flavians) and, as a symbol of his imperial power, he set in place a vast building programme, including the Colosseum. He died in AD79 and was succeeded by his son, Titus.

Titus

As a youth, Titus had briefly trained in a gladiator school and, on one occasion, had

Colosseum – Rome’s Arena Of Death



Titus was one of the most popular emperors in Roman history

To hold onto power, he decided to curry favour with the populace, by laying on extremely lavish inaugural games when the Colosseum was completed. His reign was far shorter than his father’s. He died of a mysterious illness only six months after the inaugural games. News of his death was greeted with spontaneous mourning. The games had turned Titus into one of the most popular emperors in Roman history.

even entered the arena for a mock fight against another nobleman. He was the general in charge of the successful Roman campaign against Judea in AD71. According to the historian, Josephus, Titus told his soldiers: “The Jews are inspired by audacity and desperation. We are inspired by disciplined courage and bravery. They face the dangers of war to defend their Liberty. What greater prize could we win, than Glory?”

According to another writer, Suetonius, Titus was well known in Rome as a lover of cruelty – in Judea he had regularly watched the crucifixion of captured prisoners. Even before his father’s death, Titus was a powerful man. He jointly held the Roman censorship with the emperor as well as seven consulships. He was also in command of the Praetorian Guards – the only armed force allowed inside Rome. He had a veritable army of informers, effectively turning Rome into a police state. He became Emperor in AD79 on his father’s death, having killed off many of his political enemies. In AD80, parts of Rome were struck by fire, and Pompeii and Herculaneum were destroyed by volcanic eruptions. Already unpopular as a ruler, this put further question marks over Titus’s right to rule.

Fascinating facts

- The Colosseum is the largest and most expensive Roman arena ever built. It replaced a wooden arena which had been burned down under the emperor Nero.
- Booty from the Roman's successful capture of the Temple of Jerusalem paid for the building of the Colosseum. This included a golden table weighing several hundredweight and a lamp stand of solid gold.
- Concrete was a new invention that made building a huge structure like the Colosseum possible. Roman concrete was made with volcanic sand which gave extra strength to the material and even allowed it to set under water. The Colosseum stood at a staggering 160ft high.
- Gladiatorial fights started out as funeral rituals for wealthy citizens. Over the centuries, they evolved into popular entertainment.
- The inaugural games for the Colosseum lasted over 100 days.
- Gladiators were graded into 10 levels. A top level gladiator was worth 15 times the yearly salary of a legionnaire.
- Far from all being slaves, by the second century AD, over a third of all gladiators were volunteers.
- There were over 12 different types of gladiator, including Murmillos, who carried large shields and long swords; Thracians, who fought like Greeks; and the Retarius, who used a net and trident as weapons.
- Nemesis was the goddess of chance, fortune and revenge – and the patron of Roman gladiators.
- Contrary to popular myth, not every fight resulted in a fatality. Gladiators had a 90 per cent chance of surviving each fight. Many retired after successful careers.
- Gladiators formed burial clubs to pay for a dead gladiator's funeral. Without proper burial, the dead were cursed to roam the earth forever as ghosts.
- So many wild beasts were killed in gladiatorial games that some exotic animals became virtually extinct. Hippopotami were no longer seen in Egypt, elephants died out in northern Africa and lions disappeared from the near East.
- To make them attack humans, lions and tigers were fed on human flesh, and then starved before games. Even then, they didn't always attack.

Feature: Gladiators – Natural Trained Killers

Stunt/fight co-ordinator Andreas Petrides knows better than most exactly how tough Rome’s gladiators must have been. He, along with colleague Nick Powell, arranged all of the fights for the blockbuster film *Gladiator*, and trained Russell Crowe and Joachim Phoenix in the not-so-gentle art of sword play.

“Personally, I can’t comprehend what it must have been like walking into the arena with thousands of people cheering you on, knowing you’d got to kill someone or be killed. They must have been disciplined, highly motivated individuals. The pressure must have been unbelievable.”



The fight scenes in the film were choreographed by Andreas Petrides

Joining the cast and crew of *Colosseum – Rome’s Arena Of Death* as action director and stunt/fight co-ordinator, Andreas’s job was to make the BBC’s fight sequences exciting and riveting to watch, but historically accurate as well.

“I’d already done a lot of historical research when I worked on *Gladiator* and, due to the nature of the BBC documentary, we had to make sure we were as near to 100 per cent accurate as possible.”

Most people have an image of a typical gladiator but, in fact, there were many different kinds of gladiatorial combat, with over a dozen categories, each with their own costume and weaponry. Many of these were drawn from the tactics of real soldiers and barbarians from the regions within the Empire. Murmillo means fish-head, and these gladiators fought like the Gauls with a large shield and long swords.

Thracians fought like the Greeks, with small, square shields and short, straight swords, whilst the Retarius used his net both to disable his opponent and to lash out at him. Because he resembled a fisherman and fought an essentially defensive fight, he was considered the lowest category of gladiator. Other gladiators were trained to fight on horseback.

“A trainee gladiator would have been assessed right from the start, and either trained up for one-on-one fighting or, if he was less lucky, selected as a crowdsman – basically cannon fodder,” explains Andreas.

Andreas choreographed all the fight stunts, working closely with the director/producer, Tilman Remme, and he actually stood in for Verus during training sessions whilst waiting for Robert Shannon to be cast in the role. “I had about three weeks to train Rob for the fights, and I have to say he really shone.” Learning fight sequences is like learning a dance. First of all you learn the moves, then

Colosseum – Rome’s Arena Of Death

you learn the routines, and finally you work on the style. Style includes aggression, speed and the powerful body language of a gladiator. You have to look like an expert fighter.

“I watch people during their training, video them and then play the sequences back to them, so we can work on their faults. If you don’t have enough rehearsal time, or actors are slow to learn, the director has to go for close-up shots. The wider the shot the weaker the fight technique and style may look.”

So can actors have any real sense of what it was like to fight as a gladiator? “People do get injured in staged fights – you should see the state of my fingers after 14 years in the business. I usually start complete novices on rubber weapons, which they can knock around and do no damage with. Then you work up to a wooden sword and, eventually, get them onto metal swords. These are made from mild steel or aluminium, so they’re light and made without sharp edges. The problem starts after several takes, when the edges become serrated and jagged and need to be filed down. This may happen as often as 10 times during a day’s filming.”



Gladiators didn’t just fight in Rome. They could be found right across the Roman Empire, wherever there was an arena to pitch fights in. “We filmed in Tunisia for the BBC, in locations where real gladiators are known to have fought,” says Andreas. “The heat was intense. Those gladiators would have had to be super fit to survive. Every so often I’d become aware that I was standing in exactly the same place as real-life gladiators had actually fought and died – we were only separated by time. That really makes you think.”

Biographies

Laurence Rees **Co-executive producer**

Laurence Rees is currently Creative Director of BBC History. In 1994, he launched *Reputations*, the BBC’s historical biographical strand and went on to become editor of the award-winning *Timewatch* strand, for which he won three Emmy Awards. Laurence has a raft of acclaimed history series to his name, including the six-part series for BBC Two, *The Nazis – A Warning From History*, which won him a BAFTA award in 1998.

Jonathan Stamp **Executive producer**

Jonathan Stamp is currently Director of Development for BBC History. “*Pyramid* was such a huge success last year, gaining the highest-ever audience for a history programme on British television. We’re excited because we feel that we’re building on those successful techniques to bring history even more effectively and excitingly to the widest possible audience.”

His BBC production credits include *Pyramid; Behind Bars*, a six-part series about imprisonment, which won the Howard League Media Award; BBC Two’s *Reputations* about Coco Chanel; and several programmes for BBC Two’s *Timewatch*. He was nominated for an Emmy as Best Director and also Best Writer for *Timewatch: Kamikazi* and has won two Emmy Awards for *Allied To The Mafia* and *The True Story Of The Roman Arena*, as well as Special Jury Prizes at the New York and San Francisco Film Festivals for the same films. He has also received an Amnesty International

Special Jury Award for *On Behalf Of The State* – a film about capital punishment in Britain.

Tilman Remme **Writer, producer, director**

Tilman Remme is a producer/director with BBC History. His credits include numerous *Timewatch* documentaries, including the recent documentary on King Akhenaten of Egypt, as well as three films in a series on the history of crime investigation, *Catching The Killers*. He was series associate producer for the award-winning *Nazis – A Warning from History*.

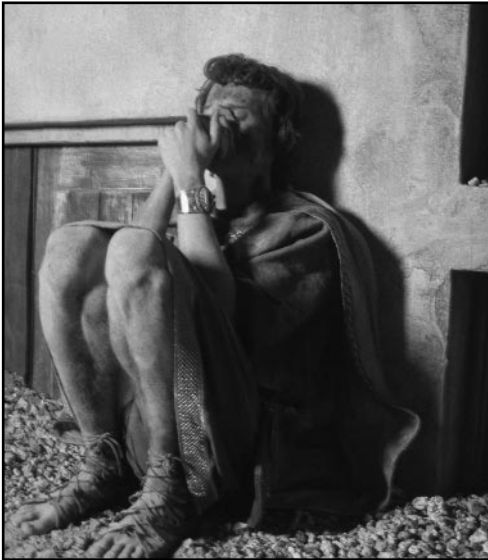
Robert Shannon **(Verus)**

Robert Shannon’s film work includes *Charlotte Grey, Too Real* and *Love, Honour & Obey*. He has also appeared in *2.4children, The Bill* and *Night Life Legends*.

Derek Lea **(Priscus)**

A member of the British Stunt Register, Derek Lea has appeared in numerous TV productions and over 30 feature films, including *Captain Corelli’s Mandolin, Die Another Day, Gladiator, Titanic* and *Hamlet*.

Pompeii – The Last Day



Stephanus (Jonathan Firth)



One of the many death casts found at Pompeii

On 24 August AD79, the magnificent Roman cities of Pompeii and nearby Herculaneum came to a devastating end. In just 18 hours, the entire city of Pompeii and all its inhabitants were buried in volcanic ash.

The twin cities lay undisturbed under metres of volcanic debris for more than 1,500 years, during which time all memory of them faded. The seal of wet ashes preserved public structures, temples, theatres, baths, shops and private dwellings, as well as the remains of some of the victims, including gladiators, soldiers, slaves and their masters, and entire families.

Pompeii – The Last Day tells the heart-rending story of the last hours of both Pompeii and Herculaneum. Their story is told first-hand by those who witnessed the disaster. Based on archaeological evidence and the writings of Pliny the Younger, the film utilises drama reconstruction and state-of-the-art special effects to take viewers back in time.

The narrative takes viewers through the main stages of the terrifying eruption of Vesuvius. Contrary to popular belief, the eruption occurred over 18 hours. From the first rumblings, to the start of the main eruption at 1pm on 24 August AD79, the inhabitants of Pompeii had to endure endless hours of choking pumice rain, falling debris and sustained poisonous gas emissions, until their fate was dramatically sealed.

At 7.30am to 7.45am on the morning of 25 August a large volcanic surge overran the city of Pompeii, burying all in its path. Escape was pointless, as those who had fled the city were caught by the sixth deadly surge at 8am. This last surge brought complete darkness, day turned to night, leading the scribe Pliny the Younger to believe “the whole world was dying and me with it”.

Vesuvius hadn’t erupted for almost 1,800 years and the inhabitants of Pompeii and Herculaneum would have been ignorant of



The volcanic surge reaches Pompeii as Stephanus remains defiant

the danger of living in its shadow. With no word in Latin for volcano, they might have thought the eruption was a message from the Gods. *Pompeii – The Last Day* is their story.

“Our film offers viewers a unique opportunity to learn about the worst natural disaster to strike the ancient world from the perspective of the people caught up in it,” says producer Ailsa Orr. “It also allows you to witness the terrifying behaviour of a volcano from as close as you’re ever going to want to!”



The main characters

Julius Polybius



Julius is the very successful son of a freed imperial slave. He owns bakeries in Pompeii and has strong political ambitions. As the crisis deepens, he finds true humanity; he frees his slaves and chooses a noble death beside his wife and heavily pregnant daughter, who cannot flee the torrent of pumice rain.

Character based upon: Written accounts and a skeleton found in the Polybius house.

Stephanus



Stephanus (Jonathan Firth) with Hedore (Inika Leigh Wright)

Stephanus is a very handsome but extremely arrogant man. A fuller (cloth worker) by trade, he is an odious social climber. His immense greed leads to his downfall when he chooses to stay and face the horrors of Vesuvius rather than lose his ill-gotten wealth.

Character based upon: Written records and a skeleton found at the gates of Pompeii.

Fortunata

Fortunata is the timid and sensitive young wife of Stephanus. As the crisis deepens, Fortunata discovers new fortitude. She attempts to flee from the torrents of pumice rain and choking ash and finds

solace with the gladiator Celadus and his dying friend.

Character based upon: Skeleton of a rich young woman found in the Gladiator barracks.

Celadus



A gladiator of renown, Celadus is handsome, charismatic and charming. He would rather take his chances and flee, than die like a rat, choking on poisonous gas and ash, but chooses to stay with his mortally injured friend and Fortunata.

Character based upon: Skeleton of a gladiator found in the barracks.

Pliny The Younger (Gaius Plinius Cecilius Secundus)

Pliny the Younger is a teenage follower of Stoic philosophy, the adopted son of his uncle, Pliny

the Elder. He declines to go on a rescue mission across the Bay of Naples, but finds inner strength as the crisis deepens.

Pliny the Younger was born in Como, northern Italy, on 24 August in AD61. He lost his father at the age of eight and was adopted by his uncle, Pliny the Elder.

Pliny the Younger was obsessed with writing and wrote in great detail about his everyday life and the characters that surrounded him. His account of AD79 remains the best explanation of the events surrounding the catastrophic eruption of Vesuvius. From his work, scholars have deduced that he was one of the most truthful and thoughtful writers of his age.

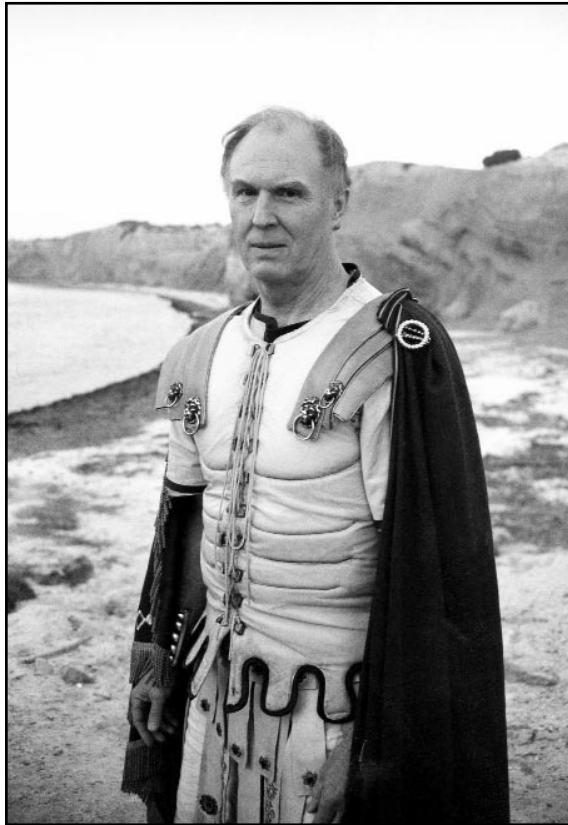
In a letter to his friend, Cornelius Tacitus, Pliny the Younger wrote of the death of his uncle, Pliny the Elder, as he led the rescue mission to Pompeii:

“My uncle decided to go down to the shore and investigate on the spot for the possibility of any escape by sea, but he found the waves wild and dangerous. A sheet was spread on the ground for him to lie down, and he repeatedly asked for water to drink.

“Then the flames and the smell of sulphur gave warning of the approaching fire drove others to take flight and roused him to stand up. He stood leaning on two slaves and then suddenly collapsed. I imagine because the dense fumes choked his breathing by blocking his windpipe, which was constitutionally weak and narrow and often inflamed. When daylight returned on the 26th – two days after the last day he had been seen – his body was found intact and uninjured, still fully clothed and looking more like sleep than death.”

Character based upon: The real-life personality who recorded the events of AD79.

Pliny The Elder (Gaius Plinius Secundus)



Pliny the Elder, played by Tim Pigott-Smith

With an important place in the hierarchy of the Roman Empire, Pliny the Elder was a lawyer who also served as a Calvary officer throughout Europe. He died in his attempt to lead a rescue mission to the stricken city of Pompeii.

Character based upon: The real-life personality who died leading a rescue mission to Pompeii.

Pliny the Elder is the Admiral of the Roman fleet stationed across The Bay of Naples at Misenum. He is in charge of the rescue mission and is a well-thought-of academic and lawyer.

Born in AD24, also in Como, northern Italy, Pliny the Elder was a remarkable man. A prolific scholar, whose biggest work, *Naturalis Historia* (*The Natural Histories* – an ancient encyclopaedia of natural phenomena), encompassed an incredible 37 books. We know from the writings of Pliny the Younger that Pliny the Elder was a man of great powers of mental concentration, who could manage with very little sleep. Instead of walking around the city, he would be carried so he could spend the extra time in study.

Fascinating facts

- The inhabitants of Pompeii did not know that Vesuvius was a volcano – it hadn't erupted in almost 1,800 years. So much so, there is no word in Latin for volcano.
- The longer a volcano sleeps, the more deadly the eruption. There were signs that Vesuvius was beginning to stir – earthquakes, ground rising up, underground springs drying up – but the people didn't know how to read these signs or understand what they meant.
- A reservoir of boiling magma some 3km wide had formed beneath Vesuvius, trapped inside by a plug of old magma. A chemical reaction involving water and gases finally shattered the lava plug and Vesuvius roared back to life.
- The eruption of AD79 was very unusual, without lava or other characteristics normally associated with volcanoes. It was a Plinian eruption – the most dangerous and feared kind of all – involving superheated gas, magma and ash that form a giant towering column that builds up into the sky. The magma cools and falls to the earth as pumice. Vesuvius erupts in this way approximately every 2,000 years.
- Mixed in with the pumice stones were lithics – cold, dense rocks torn from inside the volcano and carried up into the atmosphere only to fall back to earth as deadly missiles travelling at speeds reaching 180kph.
- At the peak of the eruption, a staggering 100,000 tons of magma, ash and gas was released from the volcano every second, travelling upwards at the speed of a jet plane to reach 33km in height – that's 3.5 times the height of Everest.
- The eruption took just under 24 hours from start to end.
- Had the eruption taken place on any other day, the people of Pompeii might have stood a better chance of escape. Usually, the wind blew in a south-westerly direction, which would have blown the column out over the Bay of Naples. But, on that fateful day, the wind was blowing in a north-westerly direction – straight over Pompeii.
- Vesuvius ejected more than four cubic km of material over Campagna that day. Ash fall was traced as far away as Africa.
- The seaside resort of Herculaneum was buried under 25m of pyroclastic material, extending the coastline by some 450m.
- Vesuvius emitted enough ash to fill a cube 1.5 miles on each side.
- Pompeii was first uncovered in 1594, although archaeological excavations only began in 1748 and have been continued since then. A massive area has now been excavated; however, even today, more than a quarter of Pompeii still awaits excavation.

Feature: Vesuvius – The Sleeping Timebomb

“I’d already done a lot of the historical and scientific research before I visited Pompeii for the first time on a filming recce last year,” says producer, Ailsa Orr. “But it was only when I first saw the casts of victims that the full horror of what took place in Pompeii really hammered home. These were ordinary people – men, women, children, babies – who got up as usual one morning and, hours later, they had died in the most traumatic and devastating way. It really compelled us to want to tell the story of what happened to them – particularly from their perspectives.”



The BBC team first had to piece together the evidence of who these people were, how they spent their final hours and why they had chosen to stay in Pompeii rather than flee when the eruption began; clues came from the victims themselves. Many of the victims discovered in Pompeii are old, young, sick and, in some cases, pregnant. So the team concluded that escape for the most vulnerable had simply been too dangerous. Other victims have been found clutching bags of gold and other precious objects, so some people had

probably tried to return to the city to retrieve their valuables. All of this enabled the team to build a cast list for the film.



Julius Polybius's pregnant daughter, Julia (Katherine Whitburn) and his wife, Epidia (Chrissie Cotterill)

“Getting inside the minds of people that died 2,000 years ago is not easy,” admits Ailsa. “Fascinatingly, research suggests that the majority of people living in Pompeii would not even have known that Vesuvius was a volcano. It hadn’t erupted in over 1,500 years – and when it went off, they would have simply no idea what was happening. We made a real effort to portray this innocence in the film and to show how people’s different reactions to the eruption ultimately sealed their fate. Out of this comes a very tense and compelling human drama.”

Ailsa and her team spoke to a crisis psychologist to understand how people react in crisis situations. “The peculiar thing is how little panic there is. Instead, people very often

concentrate on little things; personal things that are completely inconsequential in the situation. We fed this information into the drama – for example Julius Polybius frets about his political career while his wife worries about the state of her garden.



People in Pompeii do not realise it is their last day

“We also learned that people quite often do things that are completely out of character when faced with a situation of extreme crisis. We developed this idea with one of our characters called Fortunata, the shy wife of Stephanus, a real-life character from Pompeii. She’s terrified to leave her house and, as the crisis develops, she finds herself abandoned by everyone – her husband and her slaves. She’s forced to become strong and ultimately ends up with a gladiator called Celadus, who we know was Pompeii’s most celebrated character at the time. The factual basis for this scenario

is that the body of a rich woman was found in the gladiator’s barracks.”

All the pre-eruption filming took place in Tunisia, on a Roman set just outside the town of Hammamet. But for post-eruption scenes, Ailsa needed something tailor-made; somewhere the team could deliver raining pumice, ash and lithics, recreate surge clouds and topple buildings. “We built a set at Ealing Studios where we filmed for three weeks. Eighty per cent of filming took place in the dark with cast and crew wearing gas masks. It was dark, dirty and fairly unpleasant for all concerned.

“*Pompeii – The Last Day* is the ultimate disaster movie. It’s *Man versus Volcano* – how the greatest civilisation in the world was brought to its knees by a deadly threat it knew nothing about. It’s a true story and its significance today is that it could all happen again, much sooner than most people realise.”

Biographies

John Lynch Creative director, BBC Science

John Lynch is head of the BBC Science Unit, and is responsible for all major BBC science documentary programmes. As a producer and director, he made several television series for BBC Science, including 14 *Horizon* films. A run of award-winning films culminated in producing the extraordinary story of Fermat's Last Theorem, which won a BAFTA Award. In 1994, he was appointed editor of the BBC's *Horizon* series, which won a BAFTA award for best documentary series. He was also executive producer on the BBC's landmark science series, *The Planets*, and the international smash hit, *Walking With Dinosaurs*, netting another BAFTA award in the process.

Michael Mosley Executive producer

Michael Mosley is currently Director of Development, BBC Science. After qualifying as a doctor, he joined the BBC, first working in current affairs, then for BBC Science making award-winning programmes for *Tomorrow's World*, *Horizon* and *Troubleshooter*; as well as being editor of *QED* and *Trust Me I'm a Doctor*. His recent work includes *The Life Of Leonardo da Vinci*, *How to Build A Human*, *Superhuman* and *Human Face*.

Awards include: "Prize du Jury" at the International Science Television Festival in Paris; Medical Journalist of the Year in 1995; Grand prize, International Scientific Festival; Gold medal, Beijing Film Festival 2002; Bafta, Grierson and Emmy nominated.

Ailsa Orr Producer

Ailsa Orr has produced a number of highly successful science documentaries, including *Neanderthal*, which was an RTS Award-winner in 2000, and BBC One's *Threads Of Life*, presented by Lord Winston, which won the "Prize du Jury" at the International Science Television Festival in Paris, and was Emmy-nominated in 2003. Prior to that, she was assistant producer on BBC One's *Walking With Dinosaurs*, series associate producer on *When Dinosaurs Ruled*, and involved as a researcher or reporter on a number of BBC One, RTE and Channel 4 productions.

Tim Pigott-Smith (Pliny the Elder)

Tim Pigott-Smith is a renowned film, television and theatre actor. Highlights of his career include feature films such as *Remains Of The Day* and *Bloody Sunday*, directed by Paul Greengrass. Recent television roles range from Carlton's *The Vice*, to the BBC's *Inspector Lynley Mysteries* and *North And South*. Recent theatre credits include *The Ice Man Cometh* at The Almeida, Islington and Shakespeare's *Cymbeline* and *The Tempest* at The National Theatre.

Jonathan Firth (Stephanus)

Jonathan Firth, brother of Colin, has starred in several television productions including playing the role of Albert in the BBC's *Victoria And Albert*, and Romeo in Channel 4's recent adaptation of *Romeo And Juliet*. Recent

theatre roles include Henry in *Henry VI Part III* for the RSC, and Schwartz in *The Lulu* plays for The Almeida, Islington.

Jim Carter **(Julius Polybius)**

Jim Carter is a regular face on British television and is well known for his film work including *The Madness Of King George*, *Richard III*, *Shakespeare In Love* and *Heartlands*.

Rebecca Clarke **(Fortunata)**

Rebecca Clarke has appeared in numerous television productions such as the BBC's *Silent Witness* and *Out Of Tune*. Theatre work includes the RSC's *The Lion, Witch And The Wardrobe*.

Robert Whitelock **(Celadus)**



A regular on British television, Robert Whitelock has appeared in programmes ranging from *The Bill* to *Playing The Field*. Theatre work includes numerous plays for the RSC such as *Dr Faustus* and *Henry VIII*.

Martin Hodgson **(Pliny the Younger)**

Martin Hodgson's television credits include BBC television's *Vanity Fair* and Carlton's *Big Bad World*.