



## Julius Cæsar's "Panem et circenses"

### Description

"**Bread and circuses**" (or **bread and games**; from [Latin](#): *panem et circenses*) is a [figure of speech](#), specifically referring to a superficial means of [appeasement](#). As a [metonymic](#), the phrase is attributed to [Juvenal](#), a [Roman poet](#) active in the late first and early second century [AD](#) — and is used commonly in cultural, particularly political, contexts.

In a [political](#) context, the phrase means to generate public approval, not by excellence in [public service](#) or [public policy](#), but by diversion, [distraction](#) or by satisfying the most immediate or base requirements of a populace<sup>[1]</sup> — by offering a [palliative](#): for example food (bread) or entertainment (circuses).

Juvenal, who originated the phrase, used it to decry the selfishness of common people and their neglect of wider concerns.<sup>[2][3][4]</sup> The phrase implies a population's erosion or ignorance of [civic duty](#) as a priority.<sup>[5]</sup>

This phrase originates from Rome in [Satire X](#) of the Roman satirical poet Juvenal ([circa](#) A.D. 100). In context, the [Latin](#) *panem et circenses* (bread and circuses) identifies the only remaining interest of a Roman populace which no longer cares for its historical birthright of political involvement. Here Juvenal displays his contempt for the declining [heroism](#) of contemporary Romans, using a range of different themes including lust for power and desire for old age to illustrate his argument.<sup>[6]</sup> Roman politicians passed laws in 140 B.C. to keep the votes of poorer citizens, by introducing a grain dole: giving out [cheap food](#) and [entertainment](#), "bread and circuses", became the most effective way to rise to power.

... Already long ago, from when we sold our vote to no man, the People have abdicated our duties; for the People who once upon a time handed out military command, high civil office, legions — everything, now restrains itself and anxiously hopes for just two things: bread and circuses.<sup>[7]</sup>

[...] *iam pridem, ex quo suffragia nulli / uendimus, effudit curas; nam qui dabat olim / imperium, fasces, legiones, omnia, nunc se / continet atque duas tantum res anxius optat, / panem et circenses.* [...]

(Juvenal, Satire 10.77–81)

Juvenal here makes reference to the Roman practice of providing free wheat to Roman citizens as well

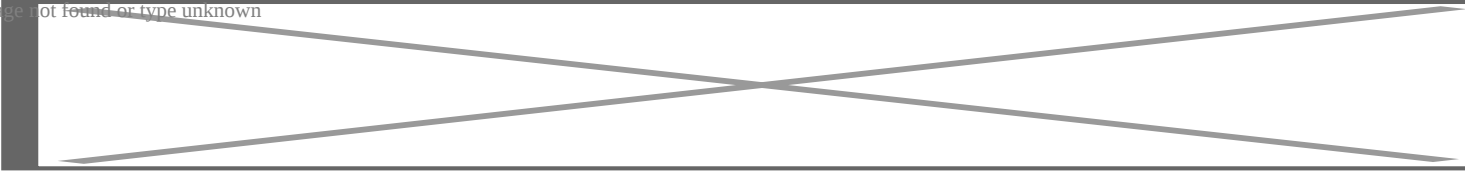
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as costly [circus games](#) and other forms of entertainment as a means of gaining [political power](#). The [Annona](#) (grain dole) was begun under the instigation of the *popularis* politician [Gaius Sempronius Gracchus](#) in 123 B.C.; it remained an object of political contention until it was taken under the control of the autocratic [Roman emperors](#).

[en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Bread\\_and\\_circuses](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Bread_and_circuses)

See also ["qua exstant" 1678](#)

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## Further References

Sanders, G.. (2012). Panem et circenses: Worship and the spectacle. Culture and Religion

Plain numerical DOI: 10.1080/14755610.2012.658419

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### Show/hide publication abstract

"Worship services are increasingly relying on a combination of products, services and technologies that result in the creation of what the late theorist, guy debord, referred to as the 'spectacle'. the spectacle, according to debord, is unique to contemporary society, in that it reproduces an economic ideology that relies on consumer desire and an expectation for unabated pleasure, amusement or emotional gratification. not merely a lavish visual display that inspires feelings of transcendence or awe, the spectacle is a culturally and historically specific apparatus that is made possible through the integration of technologies, producers, a normative set of beliefs and values and consumer bodies. because the spectacle operates ultimately on a visceral, affective level, the valorisation of experiential forms of consumption is reinforced. this paper outlines a theory of the spectacle as it is increasingly articulated in worship services. the spectacle is most salient within seeker-sensitive churches and those..."

Bueno Bravo, I.. (2009). El sacrificio gladiatorio y su vinculación con la guerra en la sociedad mexicana . Gladius

Plain numerical DOI: 10.3989/gladius.2009.219

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### Show/hide publication abstract

"El siguiente trabajo analiza cómo el estado azteca-mexica rentabilizó el éxito de la guerra a través de las ceremonias públicas, centrándose en la fiesta de tlacaxipehualiztli, una de las más importantes del

calendario, donde se daban cita los gobernantes de las provincias más poderosas, así como millones de personas venidas de todos los rincones del anahuac. este era el momento propicio para que el imperio desplegara toda su propaganda e hiciera ostentación de su poder. era el lado oscuro de la conquista, sangre y arena o parafraseando a juvenal panem et circenses."

Ripoll López, G.. (1990). Panem et circenses. El circo y las carreras de caballos. Espacio, Tiempo y Forma, Serie I, Prehistoria

## Show/hide publication abstract

"Múltiples son los artículos y libros científicos que se han escrito sobre el mundo del circo romano y sus espectáculos. había llegado el momento de hacer una reflexión conjunta sobre dicho tema. el director del museo arqueológico henri prados de lattes (montpellier), christian landes, tuvo la idea hace pocos años de hacer una serie de coloquios titulados spectacula. en esta idea fue asistido por varias instituciones pero particularmente por el centre archéologique de l'université de toulouse-le-mirail y por el museo saint raymond de tolosa, en la persona de daniel cazes. el primero de ellos fue celebrado en 1987 y trató el tema del anfiteatro y de los gladiadores, fruto del cual son un catálogo de la exposición 'las actas del congreso ^ y un magnífico libro ' estos volúmenes citados junto con la gran obra, que es en realidad la tesis de estado de jean-claude golvin, lamphithéâtre cubren un campo que hasta ahora podía parecer olvidado por los investigadores de la arqueología clásica romana"

Logothetis, G., Matsaridis, A., & Kaimakakis, V.. (2012). The panem et circenses policy of the Regime of the Colonels in Greek sport, 1967-1974. Studies in Physical Culture & Tourism

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"Panem at circenses' was the policy applied by the greek military junta between 1967 and 1973. the bread and circuses policy was a well-known recipe with its roots in the roman era. it included sport displays, rewarding athletes, formal participation of 'the aprilians' (the members of greek military junta) in sport games, along with the celebration of anniversaries of 'the 21st of april 1967 revolution' all over greece, which included gymnastic exhibitions. it must be pointed out that the april 21 regime shared a number of similarities with metaxas's regime of august 4. because the 'aprilians' were advocates of metaxas's 'no' response, they tried to imitate him and utilize cultural exhibitions, especially sports, as means of promoting the regime's propaganda to acquire a social face. both regimes utilized mass celebrations based on traditions of ancient greece, the byzantine period and greek-orthodox culture. abstract from author"

### Category

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### Date Created

26. December 2018

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