



I'm Spartacus!

History 101

Spartacus (c. 111–71 BC) was a Thracian gladiator who, along with Crixus, Gannicus, Castus, and Oenomaus, was one of the escaped slave leaders in the Third Servile War, a major slave uprising against the Roman Republic. Little is known about him beyond the events of the war, and surviving historical accounts are sometimes contradictory. However, all sources agree that he was a former gladiator and an accomplished military leader.

According to the differing sources and their interpretation, Spartacus was a captive taken by the legions. He was trained at the gladiatorial school near Capua. He was a heavyweight gladiator. These fighters carried a large oblong shield, and used a sword with a broad, straight blade, about 18 inches long. In 73 BC, Spartacus was among a group of gladiators plotting an escape.

Though few in number, Spartacus and others seized kitchen utensils, fought their way free from the school, and seized several wagons of weapons and armor. The escaped slaves defeated soldiers sent after them, plundered the region surrounding Capua, recruited many other slaves into their ranks, and eventually retired to a more defensible position on Mount Vesuvius. The escaped gladiators chose Spartacus and two others—Crixus and Oenomaus—as their leaders.

The response of the Romans was hampered by the absence of the Roman legions, which were already engaged in fighting a revolt in Spain and the Third Mithridatic War. Plus, the Romans considered the rebellion more of a policing matter than a war. Rome dispatched militia under the command of Gaius Claudius Glaber, who besieged Spartacus and his camp on Mount Vesuvius, hoping that starvation would force Spartacus to surrender. They were surprised when Spartacus, who had made ropes from vines, climbed down the cliff side of the volcano with his men and attacked the unfortified Roman camp in the rear, killing most of them.

The rebels also defeated a second expedition, nearly capturing the its commander, killing his lieutenants and seizing the military equipment. With these successes, more and more slaves flocked to Spartacus, as did "many of the herdsmen and shepherds of the region", swelling their ranks to some 70,000. At its height Spartacus led an army derived of many different people, Celts, Gauls, and more. Some were even legion veterans.

In these altercations Spartacus proved to be an excellent tactician, suggesting that he may have had previous military experience. Though the rebels lacked military training, they displayed a skilful use of available local materials and unusual tactics when facing the disciplined Roman armies. They spent the winter of 73–72 BC training, arming and equipping their new recruits, and expanding their raiding territory to include the towns of Nola, Nuceria, Thurii and Metapontum. The distance between these locations and the subsequent events indicate that the slaves operated in two groups commanded by the remaining leaders Spartacus and Crixus.

In the spring of 72 BC, the rebels left their winter encampments and began to move northward. At the same time, the Roman Senate, alarmed by the defeat of the praetorian forces, dispatched a pair of consular legions under the command of Lucius Gellius and Gnaeus Clodianus. The two legions were

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initially successful—defeating a group of 30,000 rebels commanded by Crixus near Mount Garganus—but then were defeated by Spartacus.

Alarmed at the continued threat, the Senate charged Marcus Licinius Crassus, the wealthiest man in Rome and the only volunteer for the position, with ending the rebellion. Crassus was put in charge of 40,000 trained Roman soldiers. Crassus's legions were eventually victorious, forcing Spartacus farther south. By the end of 71 BC, Spartacus was encamped in Rhegium, near the Strait of Messina.

According to Plutarch, Spartacus made a bargain with Cilician pirates to transport him and some 2,000 of his men to Sicily, where he intended to incite a slave revolt and gather reinforcements. However, he was betrayed by the pirates, who took payment and then abandoned the rebels.[37] Minor sources mention that there were some attempts at raft and shipbuilding by the rebels as a means to escape, but that Crassus took unspecified measures to ensure the rebels could not cross to Sicily, and their efforts were abandoned.[38] Spartacus's forces then retreated toward Rhegium. Crassus's legions followed and upon arrival built fortifications across the isthmus,[*citation needed*] despite harassing raids from the rebels. The rebels were now under siege and cut off from their supplies, and eventually were routed completely, with the vast majority of rebels being killed on the battlefield.

The final battle that saw the assumed defeat of Spartacus in 71 BC took place on the present territory of Senerchia. In this area, since 1899, there have been finds of armour and swords of the Roman era. Plutarch, Appian and Florus all claim that Spartacus died during the battle, but Appian also reports that his body was never found. Six thousand survivors of the revolt captured by the legions of Crassus were crucified, lining the Appian Way from Rome to Capua. [*Wikipedia/Spartacus*]

Unfortunately, I've never come across a 'Spartacus' cover, but I still have hope!

