

## Questions over Spartacus

Name:

1. How does Spartacus become a slave?
2. How was Spartacus able to defeat the Roman army?
3. Where did Spartacus want to take his followers?
4. Why didn't Spartacus go where he wanted to go?
5. Why did Spartacus have 300 prisoners fight to death in pairs?
6. Who was Crassus?
7. Why couldn't Pompey escape to Sicily?
8. Who was Pompey?
9. Where did Spartacus die?
10. What happens to Pompey and Crassus?
11. Why was Spartacus important?

## The Real Spartacus

The real Spartacus was a freeborn provincial from Thrace (Greek, but from the hill country and not considered "a real Greek" by the Athenians or the Romans.) He may have served as an auxiliary in the Roman army in Macedonia. He deserted the army, was outlawed, captured and sold into slavery. He was eventually purchased by Lentulus Batiatus and trained at his gladiatorial school in Capua.

**73 B.C.:** Spartacus escaped with 70-80 gladiators, seizing the knives in the cook's shop and a wagon full of weapons. They camped on Vesuvius and were joined by other rural slaves, overrunning the region with much plunder and pillage, although Spartacus apparently tried to restrain them. His chief aides were gladiators from Gaul, named Crixus and Oenomaus.

The Senate sent a praetor, Claudius Glaber against the rebel slaves with about 3000 raw recruits hastily drafted from the region. The Romans were overconfident in approaching Vesuvius. They thought they had trapped the rebels on the mountain, but Spartacus led his men down the other side using vines, fell on the rear of the Roman soldiers, and routed them.

Spartacus subsequently defeated two forces of legionary cohorts. He wanted to lead his men across the Alps to escape from Italy, but the Gauls and Germans, led by Crixus, wanted to stay and plunder. They separated from Spartacus, who passed the winter near Thurii in southern Italy.

**72 B.C.:** Spartacus had raised about 70,000 slaves, mostly from rural areas. The Senate, alarmed, finally sent the two consuls (L. Gellius Publicola and Cn. Cornelius Lentulus Clodianus), each with two legions, against the rebels. The Gauls and Germans, separated from Spartacus, were defeated by Publicola, and Crixus was killed. Spartacus defeated Lentulus, and then Publicola. To avenge Crixus, Spartacus had 300 prisoners from these battles fight in pairs to the death.

At Picenum in central Italy Spartacus defeated the consular armies, then pushed north and defeated the proconsul of Cisalpine Gaul at Mutina. The Alps were now open to the rebels, but again the Gauls and Germans refused to go, so Spartacus returned to southern Italy, perhaps intending to take ships to Sicily.

In the autumn, when the revolt was at its height and Spartacus had about 120,000 followers, the Senate voted to pass over the consuls and grant Imperium (Commander-in-Chief of all the armies) to Marcus Licinius Crassus, who had been a praetor in 73 B.C. but currently held no office.

Crassus was given six new legions plus the four consular legions. When one of Crassus' legates attacked Spartacus with two legions, against orders, Spartacus roundly defeated them. Crassus decimated the most cowardly cohort, then used his combined forces to

defeat Spartacus, who retreated to Rhegium, in the toe of Italy. Spartacus tried to cross the straits into Sicily, but the Cilician pirates betrayed him.

Meanwhile, the Senate recalled Pompey and his legions from Spain, and they began the journey overland; Marcus Licinius Lucullus landed in Brundisium in the heel of Italy with his legions from Macedonia. When Spartacus finally fought his way out of the toe of Italy, he could not march to Brundisium and take ship to the east because of the presence of Lucullus.

**71 B.C.:** When Spartacus started north some of the Gauls and Germans separated from him and were nearly defeated by Crassus before Spartacus rescued them. The slaves gained one more minor victory against part of Crassus' forces, but they were finally wiped out by Crassus' legions in a major battle in southern Italy, near the headwaters of the Siler river. It is believed that Spartacus died in this battle; there were so many corpses that his body was never found. The historian Appian reports that 6000 slaves were taken prisoner by Crassus and crucified along the Appian Way from Capua to Rome.

As many as 5000 slaves escaped and fled northward, but they were captured by Pompey's army north of Rome as he was marching down the peninsula enroute from Spain; Pompey subsequently tried to claim the glory of victory from Crassus, although he had not actually participated in any of the battles. The Senate voted Pompey a triumph because of his previous victory in Spain, but they decreed an ovation (a far less splendid and prestigious parade) for Crassus because his victory had been merely over slaves. There were no political purges or proscriptions after the rebellion was crushed.

**70 B.C.:** Pompey and Crassus were elected consuls, although Pompey was six years too young for the office and had never held any of the lower magistracies. As consuls, they repealed some of the unpopular laws of Sulla and restored the power of the tribunes.

## Significance of Spartacus

Quotation from Erich Gruen, *The Last Generation of the Roman Republic* (University of California Press, 1974) 20-21:

It was not the governing class alone that would react in horror to the prospect of a slave insurrection. Whatever the grievances of men disenfranchised and dispossessed by Sulla, they would have found unthinkable any common enterprise with Thracian or Gallic slaves. It causes no surprise that Marxist historians and writers have idealized Spartacus as a champion of the masses and leader of the one genuine social revolution in Roman history. That, however, is excessive. Spartacus and his companions sought to break the bonds of their own grievous oppression. There is no sign that they were motivated by ideological considerations to overturn the social structure. The sources make clear that Spartacus endeavored to bring his forces out of Italy toward freedom rather than to reform or reverse Roman society. The achievements of Spartacus are no less formidable for that. The courage, tenacity, and ability of the Thracian gladiator who held Roman

forces at bay for some two years and built a handful of followers into an assemblage of over 120,000 men can only inspire admiration.

The Roman reaction was tardy and ineffective. . . . Error of judgment induced the Senate to treat the uprising too lightly at the outset. By the time Rome took firm steps, Spartacus' ranks had considerably swelled and the state's finest soldiers were serving abroad. But Crassus' efforts obtained full support, and the revolt was wiped out in 71.