

Spartacus

By Vickie Chao

Ancient Rome had a lot of marvels. Back in the heyday, the Romans put up many spectacular structures. Some of them still remain standing today. As we admire the civilization that ancient Rome left behind, we must keep one thing in mind. Rome's glory was built largely on the backs of countless slaves.

Slaves played an important role in ancient Rome. Aside from doing construction, they also worked as servants at bathhouses or private homes. They took part in public games, fighting as gladiators. They labored away in farms. As slaves, they had little control over their lives. They had to do everything they were told. If they refused to take orders, they could get beaten up. If they tried to escape, they could even be killed. Once sold, most slaves simply resigned themselves to their fate. Of the few who rose up to defy the Romans, Spartacus was the most famous.

Spartacus was actually not a slave by birth. According to a popular account, he once served in the Roman army as an auxiliary. For reasons unknown to us, he deserted the army and ran away. Unfortunately, he was not able to elude the Romans for long. After being caught, he was sold into slavery and began his rigorous training as a gladiator in Capua. In 73 B.C., Spartacus broke out of the gladiatorial school with over seventy followers. To fend for themselves, they used knives and other kitchen tools as weapons. Once they managed to escape the school compound, they went straight to hide on Mount Vesuvius nearby.

The Romans were not pleased with this turn of events. Fearing more slaves would join Spartacus's forces, they wanted to crush the uprising quickly. The first one up for the challenge was Claudius Glaber. Glaber and his army of 3,000 had success at the beginning. They besieged the rebels on a hill and blocked the only path leading to the top. They thought that a victory was at hand, but they were wrong. Using vines as ropes, Spartacus and his men climbed down the other slippery side of the mountain undetected. Once they reached the ground, they circled around and ambushed Glaber's troops. As the Roman soldiers ran for their lives in haste, Spartacus ordered his followers to haul away the discarded weapons for future use.

Disappointed by the defeat, the Roman senate replaced Claudius Glaber with Publius Varinius. It also doubled the army to a legion of 6,000 men. When the two sides clashed later that year, the Romans suffered another defeat. To make matters worse, this time they even lost their *fascies*. *Fascies* were bundles of rods tied together with an ax. They were the Romans' symbol for power and jurisdiction.

The loss of their *fascies* was a huge blow to the Romans. To reclaim their pride, the senate dispatched another legion to deal with Spartacus. But they failed, too! Finally, the Romans came to see that they had underestimated Spartacus all along. Over only a short period of several months, Spartacus had managed to overtake many cities in southern Italy. He had also increased his troops to nearly 70,000.

By the following spring in 72 B.C., Spartacus decided to leave Italy for good. He wanted to take his people back to their homelands and give them back their freedom. On their way north, the forces split up into two. The Gauls and the Germans went with Crixus and the rest with Spartacus. Little did they know that the Romans had a surprise for them!

Determined to do away with Spartacus and his people once and for all, the Senate sent its top two officials, Lucius Gellius Publicola and Cnaeus Cornelius Lentulus Clodianus, to the frontline. Each of the two consuls led two legions. Publicola stationed his troops near Foggia and ambushed Crixus' bands there. During the fierce battle, Crixus lost 2,000 or two-thirds of his men. He also lost his own life. While the fight was going on, Clodianus attacked Spartacus. But he failed to crush the rebels. In a dramatic turn-around, Spartacus defeated first Clodianus and then Publicola. Rumor had it that Spartacus was very upset about Crixus' death. To avenge the death, Spartacus had 300 Roman soldiers, all POWs, fight in pairs until they died.





After finishing off the two consuls' forces, Spartacus continued to travel north. Along the way, he won a couple more battles and finally arrived at the Alps. Freedom was nearer than ever! Once there, however, things took a surprising turn. For whatever reasons (probably convinced by his followers), Spartacus suddenly changed his mind. He turned his troops around and headed back south again.

The Roman senate was not ready to trust the two consuls to fight again. So it picked a new chief, Marcus Licinius Crassus, for the task. Before the showdown, Crassus asked a commander, Mummius, to move his troops south. He specifically told the man not to make any contact with the enemy. Eager to score a victory for himself, Mummius ignored the order. He attacked Spartacus and lost. When Crassus learned of the defeat, he was furious. He rounded up Mummius' remaining forces and killed one out of every ten soldiers! The lesson was crystal clear - never disobey or stray away from the order. This practice gave us the word, "decimate," which means to kill one person in ten.

At the onset of the winter in 71 B.C., Spartacus and his men arrived at southern Italy. They wanted to cross a short strait to the island of Sicily. To their disappointment, the Cilician pirates they had hired never showed up, but Crassus did. Left with no choice, Spartacus engaged his men in a bloody battle and got crushed! In the end, Crassus killed tens of thousands of rebels, but he never found Spartacus's body. He recovered the *fascies* taken by Spartacus. And he crucified 6,000 of Spartacus's soldiers along the Via Appia, the road between Rome and Capua. He gave clear instructions to never take down the 6,000 crosses. He wanted to use them as a vivid reminder of the consequence of defying the Romans! Everybody got the message.

As Crassus celebrated the victory, a small band of Spartacus's forces broke loose and escaped. They ran into Pompey's army and were slaughtered. Since Pompey was the one who killed Spartacus's remaining followers, he got credit for suppressing the rebellion. This, of course, would not sit well with Crassus who actually did most of the fighting! The feud between the two would last for decades!

Spartacus, in spite of all the difficulties, stood up against the Romans and fought for his rights. His initial successes caught everybody by surprise. Though he eventually failed, his legacy lived on. For centuries, he represented the oppressed class in the society whose only aim was to be treated fairly and equally. Even in modern time, his story continues to inspire people. His struggle for freedom would be remembered forever!

Spartacus

Questions

- _____ 1. How many years did it take the Romans to end Spartacus's uprising?
- A. 5 years
 - B. 11 years
 - C. 3 years
 - D. 9 years
- _____ 2. Which of the following Roman military commanders did Spartacus NOT defeat?
- A. Claudius Glaber
 - B. Marcus Licinius Crassus
 - C. Mummius
 - D. Publius Varinius

Name _____



Date _____

- _____ 3. Who was credited for ending Spartacus's uprising?
- A. Marcus Licinius Crassus
 - B. Mummius
 - C. Lucius Gellius Publicola
 - D. Pompey
- _____ 4. What did the Romans use *fascēs* for?
- A. To please the god of wars
 - B. To mark the different legions
 - C. To symbolize their power and jurisdiction
 - D. To carry off wounded soldiers
- _____ 5. Where was Spartacus trained to be a gladiator?
- A. Rome
 - B. Sicily
 - C. Capua
 - D. Faggio
- _____ 6. Which of the following events took place first?
- A. Crassus crucified thousands of Spartacus's men along the Via Appia.
 - B. Spartacus and his men arrived at the Alps but decided to turn back.
 - C. Mummius defeated Crassus's order and attacked Spartacus.
 - D. Spartacus ordered 300 Roman captives to fight until their death.
- _____ 7. Why did Spartacus break out from the gladiatorial school?
- A. He wanted to join the Roman army.
 - B. He was starving.
 - C. He wanted freedom.
 - D. He was being bullied.
- _____ 8. How many of Spartacus's men did Crassus crucify?
- A. 3,000
 - B. 2,000
 - C. 6,000
 - D. 1,000
- _____ 9. When Spartacus first broke out of the gladiatorial school, how many people did he have?
- A. About 2,000
 - B. About 70,000
 - C. About 70
 - D. About 6,000
- _____ 10. Which Roman commander recovered the *fascēs* taken by Spartacus?
- A. Pompey
 - B. Marcus Licinius Crassus
 - C. Cnaeus Cornelius Lentulus Clodianus
 - D. Lucius Gellius Publicola

Name _____



Date _____

Suppose you were Spartacus. What would you do after you reached the Alps? Would you cross the mountain ranges and be a freed man? Or would you want to continue to fight the Romans? Explain your reasons.

Aside from Spartacus, think of another person famous for his or her struggle for freedom. Write a story about that person.
