

Spartacus Lecture Notes

I. The story of Spartacus

Karl Marx: "...finest fellow that the whole of ancient history has to show, a great general, a noble character, and a true representative of the ancient proletariat."

The reality is that Spartacus is a much more prosaic figure.

Plutarch says that he was a Thracian who had served as a Roman soldier, but he then been imprisoned and then sold as a gladiator.

Florus agrees that he was Thracian and a Roman soldier whose imprisonment was the result of desertion.

His revolt began at a gladiator camp at Capua and progressed against inept Roman generals (until Crassus arrived at the end of 72 BC).

II. Marcus Licinius Crassus

He had served under Sulla and become the richest man in Rome.

Later, he became a very important figure as part of the triumvirate with Pompey and Caesar.

He was upset with Pompey for taking credit over the Spartacus victory, but nevertheless became consul with Pompey in 70 BC, doing away with many of Sulla's reforms.

III. Significance of the story

78-76 BC: The people Sulla had put in charge fade away and there is a power vacuum (one result of the proscriptions). For example, there are only two patricians with enough seniority to preside over the 600 senators.

Consequently, Pompey's name starts to be thrown around as an answer.

Wars are still going on before this time -> revolts in Spain (85 BC), so senate sends Quintus Sertorius to settle them. One example of choosing the wrong people for the most important tasks.

Sulla replaces Sertorius, and so he revolts with other Spaniards.

Pompey is sent in 77 BC to put down the revolt *until 72 BC).

In 74 BC, Mithridates revolts again; the senate sends Lucullus, which amounted to nothing (another example of the wrong leader chosen).

All of Rome is holding its breath to see what Pompey will do with his army when he gets back to Rome (Marius and Sulla being so fresh in mind).

The Senate solves the problem by putting him up for consul immediately (without having run for praetor or quaestor) and senate passes laws that will care for his veterans.

Pompey becomes consul with Crassus in 70 BC and they boost the equites (reform the Sullan reforms).

IV. Pompey the outsider

He wanted to please everyone rather than fight.

He was arrogant and not afraid to espouse his own virtues.

He respected Republican institutions and the senate.

He wanted to use the senate to become exceptional (become the "go-to" guy).

He tried to stay in the background, and this worked for a while until people started to see his scheme.

His ambition made him an outsider (out of jealousy)

