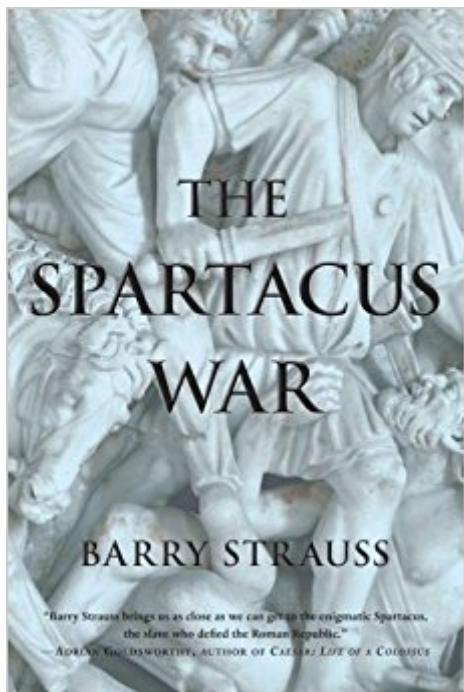


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The Spartacus War



Synopsis

An authoritative account from an expert author: The Spartacus War is the first popular history of the revolt in English. A leading authority on classical military history, Barry Strauss has used recent archaeological discoveries, ancient documents, and on-site investigations to create the most accurate and detailed account of the Spartacus rebellion ever written— and it reads like a first-rate novel. A thrilling story that has inspired novelists and filmmakers: The real-life Spartacus is even more amazing than his fictional counterparts. A slave from Thrace (modern day Bulgaria), possibly of noble origins, he led a shocking rebellion at a gladiatorial school in Capua in 73 BC. Within two years the ranks of his army, which started with fewer than 100 men, swelled to 60,000; they routed nine Roman armies and for a time controlled all of southern Italy. The Roman general Crassus eventually defeated the slave army and while Spartacus apparently died on the field of battle, his body was never recovered. The legend arose that he escaped and remained undefeated..

Book Information

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Customer Reviews

No one presents the military history of the ancient world with greater insight and panache than Strauss (The Trojan War). His latest work tells the story of a slave from the Balkans, a gladiator who in 73 B.C. led an uprising of 700 gladiators that eventually attracted over 60,000 followers. Strauss depicts Spartacus as a charismatic politician, able to hold together a widely disparate coalition of Celts, Thracians, Germans and Italians. As a general, he was a master of maneuver and mobility, keeping the ponderous Romans consistently off balance. Strauss reconstructs the rebels' movements across southern Italy and their development into an army good enough to overcome

Rome's legions in battle after battle. Not until Marcus Licinius Crassus was given command of Roman forces did Spartacus face an opponent who could match him. Spartacus forced a battle that resulted in complete defeat and his anonymous death. But the uprising he sparked left a permanent mark on the Roman psyche and made Spartacus himself a figure of myth as well as history, as Strauss shows at the end of this brisk, engrossing account. 8 pages of b&w illus., maps. (Mar. 17)

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The first-century BCE slave revolt against Rome was led by Spartacus, a Thracian-born gladiator who had previously served as a Roman auxiliary soldier. Spartacus and the struggle he led have served as the inspiration for movies, an opera, and several fictionalized accounts. He has also been adopted as a symbol of freedom by political movements of both the Left and Right. Yet the historical Spartacus remains a murky figure, while the details of the revolt remain subjects of historical dispute. Strauss, professor of history and classics at Cornell University, has made an admirable attempt to fill in some of the gaps in the historical record in a compelling but highly speculative effort. Strauss admits the lack of reliable primary sources has forced him to engage in some tricky conjectures regarding the character and motivation of Spartacus. Still, many of his assertions are credible, and his efforts to portray the political and social milieu of Italy during the late Republic are superbly done. Strauss sees Spartacus as a brave and charismatic leader who was limited by some personal shortcomings. --Jay Freeman --This text refers to an out of print or unavailable edition of this title.

Ok, to be completely honest---I absolutely love this book. I've already read it three times through and I have no doubt I'll keep reading it over again and again, and what's not to love about it? Whenever one mentions the name "Spartacus", the image of gladiators comes instantly to mind and usually a close second is the terrific Kirk Douglas movie (admit it---you just said to yourself "I am Spartacus!" didn't you?) or more recently, the outstanding Starz TV series by the same name. While the name and person of Spartacus has come down to us linked with the concepts of freedom and justice, just how accurate is that image? Dr. Barry Strauss takes us to a time and place long ago; one that may even seem vaguely familiar to us but strangely alien at the same time. It was a world of drastic dichotomies between the rich and poor; between the powerful and the weak; and between the free and the slave. Roman, though still a Republic much like ours, was nearing its end; soon to be faced with a series of internal civil wars resulting from an economic, political, and societal

breakdown, and in its place, the Rise of the Dictator along with Imperial Rome. Slaves revolts weren't unique, but none had the organization, planning that this one had. None were able to raise an army of over 60,000 slaves and freemen, and none had the brilliance of a charismatic leader like Spartacus. Dr. Strauss' telling of the story is masterful, from the wonderful descriptions of the countryside to the mindset of the Rome's leading Senators and generals and that of the man himself, Spartacus and his generals like Crixus, Gannicus, or Oenomaus. We learn about the possible causes of the revolt; how they trained and survived while being chased by Rome's mighty legions and ultimately defeated by the epitome of Rome herself, Marcus Licinius Crassus and the great Pompey. I could literally go on and on about this book. Suffice it to say that this book is for anyone interested in history---ancient or military, the Roman Empire, political movements, slavery and ancient economies, or just likes a great adventure book. This book also offers something more. It offers a possible glimpse at ourselves. The Roman Republic was on the verge of collapsing for some of the very reasons now facing us, and social injustice was growing rapidly. What happens when the dispossessed has had enough? In 1919 Germany for instance, social democrats embraced the name of Spartacus in their fight for democracy; a fight which failed and eventually made way for the rise of the Nazis. Nevertheless, the name of Spartacus continues to inflame the imagination of the poor and powerless and inspires fear in rich and powerful.

The book is entertaining and informative. It crams as much info as is available regarding the subject in. The topography and possible thoughts of Spartacus as a general also are explored. Gladiators, slaves, the Roman army...all are explored to some extent. The only reason I am giving it four stars is not because of the book or the author, but simply because of the subject matter. This is not a story of the Punic Wars, where Rome saw honor in fighting their enemy and hence documented well on it. Remember, history is written by the victors and the Romans ultimately here. To be honest though, seeing as it was a slave rebellion, asking the Romans to document the event is like asking someone to recall the story of a rape or murder: that is, they don't want to talk about it! The Romans saw the Third Servile War (the Spartacus War) as a time that they were repeatedly and utterly humiliated...time and time again. Finally, they won! But there is very little documentation regarding the war itself. So if one is looking for specific battles plans and such, we are only left with the author's speculation--well-grounded, logical, and descriptive, indeed, but still speculation. There are several times that a full-scale battle between the Romans and the rebels is summed up as basically "the two armies engaged at this location and all we know is that Spartacus was again victorious." It starts to get a little bit disappointing, but keep in mind that this demonstrates a historical lesson in

and of itself! The Romans viewed a war with slaves as a embarrassing and unworthy of their time. The generals seeking glory, a triumph, a consulship, etc... viewed the war with Spartacus as one would view painting a wall--that is, "I really don't want to do this, but I guess someone has to..."Kudos to the author for writing a full book about a topic where the primary historians develop amnesia.

This is a wonderful book. A page-turner. An eye-opener for those whose eyes are filled with the movie 'Spartacus.' In clear, exciting, often times poetic prose, Barry Strauss gives us the true story as best it may be known from the scant historic record. After all, as the quote goes, history is written by the victors. But did Spartacus truly lose in his heroic and daring bid for freedom from his Roman oppressors? His name remains vivid and vital on the lips of men down through the centuries unto our present day. He may have lost the war wherein he and his army of slaves held Rome at bay for two long years - but he most assuredly won the history writ in the heart of man. This book is tangible proof of that immortality. The book reads as bravely and briskly as Spartacus fought for the freedom all peoples dream of. The only things that would have made the book all-the-better would have been a few maps outlining strategic movements in the gladiator-rebel's numerous battles with the enemy - especially of the last battle, speculative as it might have been to reconstruct. Also, there is a bit too much geographical description that, rather than clarifying key locations of the story, tend to confuse it. I would have liked to have learned more about Rome itself - it's history, it's day-to-day life in the days of Spartacus; also a deeper delving into the origins of crucifixion (which plays a huge part in the end game of the gladiatorial revolt) would have been welcome. Who first practiced it - and why? What actually kills a man on a cross? There is no analysis as to why the captured 6,000 did not fight to the death - or commit suicide - knowing what awaited them once they laid down or lost their weapons. Despite these few matters, Mr. Strauss has given us the living man Spartacus whose Life is every bit as compelling as his Myth. Thumbs up on this one (even though we learn within the book that thumbs up actually signalled death for the defeated.)

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