

Crassus & and Gladiator Wars

1st Triumvirate: Julius Caesar, Crassus, and Pompey

2nd Triumvirate: Octavian (Augustus), Mark Antony, and Lepidus

Crassus – wealthiest Roman of all time

The Romans once crucified 6,000 people along a 120 mile stretch of road between Rome and Capua.

People were travelling for days along a major trade route seeing a new person crucified every 100 feet.

Cicero declared,

“There is your triumph, Imperator!” he said suddenly, pointing in the direction of the Appian Way. That is the monument to the kind of man you are! For as long as Romans have tongues to speak, they will remember the name of Crassus as the man who crucified six thousand slaves over three hundred and fifty miles, with one hundred and seventeen paces between the crosses.”

Appian Way Stretched 350 miles

In it's entirety it spanned 350 miles (563kms). The Appian Way stretched from the Roman Forum to modern day Brindisi. Large stones made up the bulk of its construction and a softer gravel that was compacted between the rocks cemented it. Roman roads and especially the Appian Way were extremely important to Rome.

The Gladiator War & Crassus

The Third Servile War, also called the Gladiator War and the War of Spartacus by Plutarch, was the last in a series of slave rebellions against the Roman Republic known as the Servile Wars. This third rebellion was the only one that directly threatened the Roman heartland of Italy. It was particularly alarming to Rome because its military seemed powerless to suppress it.

The armies of Spartacus launched their full strength against Crassus's legions and were utterly defeated. Of the survivors, some 6,000 were crucified along the Appian Way.

Crassus treated his legions with harsh, even brutal, discipline, reviving the punishment of unit [decimation](#) within his army. Appian is uncertain whether he decimated the two consular legions for cowardice when he was appointed their [commander](#) or whether he had his *entire* army decimated for a later defeat (an event in which up to 4,000 [legionaries](#) would have been executed).

Plutarch only mentions the decimation of 50 legionaries of one cohort as punishment after Mummius' defeat in the first confrontation between Crassus and Spartacus. Regardless of events, Crassus' treatment of his legions proved that "he was more dangerous to them than the enemy" and spurred them on to victory rather than running the risk of displeasing their commander.

Hemmed in by Crassus's eight legions, Spartacus's army divided. The Gauls and Germans were defeated first, and Spartacus himself ultimately fell fighting in pitched battle. Pompey's army intercepted and killed many slaves who were escaping northward, and **6,000 prisoners were crucified by Crassus along the Appian Way**.

The Wealth of Crassus

Recently Forbes magazine published a list of the wealthiest people in history—Crassus was in the top ten, wealthier than any of the Roman emperors, Egyptian pharaohs or European kings. **Forbes estimated Crassus's wealth in contemporary dollars at \$170 billion!** Of course Crassus's wealth was built on the backs of slaves, and thus his motivation to crush Spartacus and the slave rebellion.

After Crassus defeated Spartacus the senator was given a triumph on the Appian Way — the Roman victory parade. The road was lined with 6,000 crosses! Upon each cross was a crucified slave. The message was clear: This was how Rome dealt with threats to their interests. This event as much as any established crucifixion as the symbol of Roman ruthlessness when it came to suppressing their enemies.

Later Crassus would finance the rise to power of an impoverished young man with political aspirations by the name of Julius Caesar. Goodbye Republic, hello Empire.

Trial of Gavius a Roman Citizen: Cicero's Interrogation of Verres

“Verres convened a tribunal in the forum of Messina,” said Numitorius, “and then he had Gavius dragged before him. He announced to everyone that this man was a spy, for which there was only one just penalty. Then he ordered a cross set up overlooking the straits to Regium, so that the prisoner could gaze upon Italy as he died, and had Gavius stripped naked and publicly flogged before us all. Then he was tortured with hot irons. And then he was crucified.”

“Did Gavius speak at all?” “Only at the beginning, to swear that the accusation was not true. He was not a foreign spy. He was a Roman citizen, a councillor from the town of Consa, and a former soldier in the Roman cavalry, under the command of Lucius Raecius.” “What did Verres say to that?” “He said that these were lies and commanded that the execution begin.” “Can you describe how Gavius met his dreadful death?” “He met it very bravely, senator.” “Like a Roman?” “Like a Roman.” “Did he cry out at all?” “Only while he was being whipped and he could see the irons being heated.” “And what did he say?” “Every time a blow landed, he said, ‘I am a Roman citizen.’” “Would you repeat what he said, more loudly please, so that all can hear.” “He said, ‘I am a Roman citizen.’” “So just that?” said Cicero.

“Let me be sure I understand you. A blow lands”—he put his wrists together, raised them above his head, and jerked forward, as if his back had just been lashed—“and he says through gritted teeth, ‘I am a Roman citizen.’ A blow lands”—and again he jerked forward—“I am a Roman citizen.’ A blow lands. ‘I am a Roman citizen.’” The flat words of my transcript cannot hope to convey the effect of Cicero’s performance upon those who saw it. The hush around the court amplified his words. It was as if all of us now were witnesses to this monstrous miscarriage of justice. Some men and women—friends of Gavius, I believe—began to scream, and there was a growing swell of outrage from the masses in the Forum. Yet again, Verres shook off Hortensius’s restraining hand and stood up. “He was a filthy spy!” he bellowed. “A spy! He only said it to delay his proper punishment!”

“But he said it!” said Cicero triumphantly, wheeling on him, his finger jabbing in outrage. “You admit he said it! Out of your own mouth I accuse you—the man claimed to be a Roman citizen, and you did nothing! This mention of his citizenship did not lead you to hesitate or delay, even for a little, the infliction of this cruel and disgusting death!”

Imperium by Robert Harris

Quote from Imperium – A Novel of Ancient Rome Through the eyes of Cicero

“So this is why he dragged me out of Rome,” murmured Cicero, “to intimidate me by showing me these poor wretches.” He had gone very white, for he was squeamish about pain and death, even when inflicted on animals, and for that reason tried to avoid attending the games. I suppose this also explains his aversion to all matters military. He had done the bare minimum of army service in his youth, and he was quite incapable of wielding a sword or hurling a javelin; throughout his career he had to put up with the taunt of being a draft dodger.

At the eighteenth milestone, surrounded by a ditch and ramparts, we found the bulk of Crassus’s legions encamped beside the road, giving off that dusty smell of sweat and leather which always lingers over an army field. Standards fluttered over the gate and Crassus’s own son, Publius, then a brisk young junior officer, conducted us to the general’s tent. A couple of other senators were being shown out as we arrived, and there was Crassus himself at the entrance, instantly recognizable- “Old Baldhead,” as his soldiers called him-wearing the scarlet cloak of a commander, despite the heat. He was all affability, waving good-bye to his previous visitors, wishing them a safe journey, and greeting us equally heartily-even me, shaking my hand as warmly as if I were a senator myself, rather than a slave who in other circumstances might have been howling from one of his crosses. Looking back on it, and trying to fix precisely what it was that made him so disconcerting, I think it was this: his indiscriminate and detached friendliness, which you knew would never waver or diminish even if he had just decided to have you killed. Cicero had told me he was worth at least two hundred million, but Crassus talked as easily to any man as a farmer leaning on a gate, and his army tent-like his house in Rome -was modest and unadorned.

He led us inside-me as well, he insisted-apologizing for the gruesome spectacle along the Appian Way, but he felt it was necessary. He seemed particularly proud of the logistics which had enabled him to crucify six thousand men along three hundred and fifty miles of road, from the victorious battlefield to the gates of Rome, without, as he put it, “any scenes of violence.” That was seventeen crucifixions to the mile, which meant one hundred and seventeen paces between each cross-he had a wonderful head for figures-and the trick was not to cause a panic among the prisoners, or else one would have had another battle on one’s hands. So, after every mile-or sometimes two or three, varying it to avoid arousing suspicion-the requisite number of recaptured slaves would be halted by the roadside as the rest of the column marched on, and not until their comrades were out of sight did the executions begin. In this way the job had been done with the minimum amount of disruption for the maximum deterrent effect-the Appian Way being the busiest road in Italy.

“I doubt whether many slaves, once they hear of this, will rise against Rome in the future,” said Crassus with a smile. “Would you, for example?” he said to me, and when I replied very

ferverently that I most certainly would not, he pinched my cheek and ruffled my hair. The touch of his hand made my flesh shrivel. "Is he for sale?" he asked Cicero. "I like him. I'd give you a good price for him. Let us see-" He named an amount that was at least ten times what I was worth, and for a terrible moment I thought Cicero might accept the offer and I would lose my place in his life-a banishment I could not have borne.

"He is not for sale, at any price," said Cicero. The journey had upset him; there was a hoarseness to his voice. "And to avoid any misunderstanding, Imperator, I believe I should tell you right away that I have pledged my support to Pompey the Great."

"Pompey the who?" mocked Crassus. "Pompey the Great? As great as what?"

"I would rather not say," replied Cicero. "Comparisons can be odious." At which even Crassus, for all his ironclad bonhomie, drew back his head a little.

There are certain politicians who cannot stand to be in the same room as one another, even if mutual self-interest dictates that they should try to get along, and it quickly became apparent to me that Cicero and Crassus were two such men. This is what the Stoics fail to grasp when they assert that reason rather than emotion should play the dominant part in human affairs: I am afraid the reverse is true, and always will be, even-perhaps especially-in the supposedly calculating world of politics. And if reason cannot rule in politics, what hope is there for it in another sphere? Crassus had summoned Cicero in order to seek his friendship. Cicero had come determined to keep Crassus's goodwill. Yet neither man could quite conceal his distaste for the other, and the meeting was a disaster.

"Let us get to the point, shall we?" said Crassus after he had invited Cicero to sit down. He took off his cloak and handed it to his son, then settled on the couch. "There are two things I would like to ask of you, Cicero. One is your support for my candidacy for the consulship. I am forty-four, so I am more than old enough, and I believe this ought to be my year. The other is a triumph. For both I am willing to pay whatever is your current market rate. Normally, as you know, I insist on an exclusive contract, but, given your prior commitments, I suppose I shall have to settle for half of you. Half of Cicero," he added with a slight bow of his head, "being worth twice as much as the entirety of most men."

"That is flattering, Imperator," responded Cicero, bristling at the implication. "Thank you. My slave cannot be bought, but I can, is that it? Perhaps you will allow me to think about it."

"What is there to think about? Every citizen has two votes for the consulship. Give one to me and one to whomever else you please. Just make sure your friends all follow your example. Tell them Crassus never forgets those who oblige him. Or those who disoblige him, for that matter."

"I would still have to think about it, I am afraid."

Some shadow moved across Crassus's friendly face, like a pike in clear water. "And my triumph?"

“Personally, I absolutely believe you have earned the honor. But, as you know, to qualify for a triumph it is necessary for the military action concerned to have extended the dominion of the state. The Senate has consulted the precedents. Apparently it is not enough merely to regain territory that has been previously lost. For example, when Fulvius won back Capua after its defection to Hannibal, he was not allowed a triumph.” Cicero explained all this with what seemed genuine regret.

“But this is a technicality, surely? If Pompey can be a consul without meeting any of the necessary requirements, why cannot I at least have a triumph? I know you are unfamiliar with the difficulties of military command, or even,” he added sinuously, “with military service, but surely you would agree that I have met all the other requirements-killed five thousand in battle, fought under the auspices, been saluted imperator by the legions, brought peace to the province, withdrawn my troops? If someone of influence such as yourself were to put down a motion in the Senate, he would find me very generous.”

There was a long pause, and I wondered how Cicero would escape from his dilemma.

“There is your triumph, Imperator!” he said suddenly, pointing in the direction of the Appian Way. “That is the monument to the kind of man you are! For as long as Romans have tongues to speak, they will remember the name of Crassus as the man who crucified six thousand slaves over three hundred and fifty miles, with one hundred and seventeen paces between the crosses. None of our other great generals would ever have done such a thing. Scipio Africanus, Pompey, Lucullus”- Cicero flicked them away with contempt- “none of them would even have thought of it.”