

Spartacus: The Myth and the Man

M. J. Trow

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'I am Spartacus' ranks among the most famous lines in Hollywood, with its image of the man's comrades prepared to die in his place in the Kirk Douglas film. And die they did; not the actors but the real army of Spartacus, crucified in their thousands along the Appian Way that leads to Rome.

M. J. Trow has now revised his gripping biography, the first to be written in English, of this legend who has become all things to all men. He was the focus of a ballet and an opera. Karl Marx called him 'the finest fellow in ancient history' and a Communist group in 1920s Germany tried to topple the Weimar government in his name.

This link to the left made it difficult for Douglas to make the film, but he persevered and created one of Hollywood's greatest epics. The humble slave from Thrace (today's Bulgaria) became a gladiator, led a revolt and took on the greatest military system in history – Rome. The Romans were understandably anxious to air-brush him from history, so hard facts about the man are hard to come by. What we do know is that he fought not one, but six Roman armies and beat them all before his final defeat.

Not many men in history have achieved victories like that.



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