of Christianity in America by its annexation to economic capitalism may well prove irreparable. Thus Spartacus, both man and movie, have a poignancy now that they lacked in the heady days of the film's release. Yet in terms of thematic relevance, they have so far weathered the years better than *Exodus*, because the tale of Spartacus is not about the apparent triumph of social justice but about the dogged pursuit of a dream of social justice which has a moral validity despite its defeat, and in its defeat.

CHAPTER FOUR

Spartacus: History and Histrionics

Allen M. Ward

Stanley Kubrick's *Spartacus* has become a classic among cinematic epics set in the ancient world. A large budget provided all the elements for success: a superb cast, moral passion, intelligent and thought-provoking dialogue, detailed costumes and sets, beautiful photography, scenic grandeur, and, most importantly, a compelling story. From a strictly historical point of view, however, the film is problematic. Generally, filmmakers assume that audiences are not primarily interested in the actual facts when they view historical films.[1] Therefore their makers believe that it is necessary to provide mainly the impression, atmosphere, and feeling of history, not the kind of accuracy demanded from an academic historian writing on the same topic.[2] Consequently, it is hard not to agree with Jon Solomon that precise concerns with historical accuracy in a film like *Spartacus* are the petty preoccupations of "Ph.D.'d scholars."[3]

1 Cf. Martin M. Winkler, "*Gladiator* and the Traditions of Historical Cinema," in *Gladiator: Film and History*, ed. Martin M. Winkler (Oxford: Blackwell, 2004) 16–30, at 16–24. – I thank Nina C. Coppolino of Providence College for her generous help in critiquing my text for publication.

2 Jon Solomon, *The Ancient World in the Cinema*, 2nd edn. (New Haven and London: Yale University Press, 2001), 73 (caption to fig. 41).

3 Solomon, *The Ancient World in the Cinema*, 53.

But as a professional historian who realizes that the visual media more than any other modern medium shape the public's perception of the past, I wish that the makers of historical films took their inevitable, even if unintentional, role as historical educators more seriously.[4] In fact, it seems rather condescending to assume that the general public is not interested in the accuracy of historical films. A good story is essential, but the first question I am often asked after the final credits have rolled is: "How accurate was it?"

Certainly, some poetic license must be granted to artists, novelists, playwrights, and filmmakers to create vivid and dramatic portrayals or interpretations of actual people and events. Nevertheless, it would be desirable if creative artists showed greater concern for historical sources and did not contradict them more than necessary to meet their legitimate ends. A skilled and reasonably conscientious filmmaker should be able to make a historical movie not only entertaining and relevant to the present but also faithful to what is known about the time and people portrayed. Indeed, it is easy to check the historical record by consulting standard reference works, major sources in translation, and trained historians. In particular, the ancient historical record – sometimes, no doubt, itself fictional – is often more dramatic and entertaining than the modern fictions that filmmakers frequently introduce. By these criteria, then, *Spartacus* earns a decidedly mixed review for historical accuracy, whether the ultimate responsibility for a particular failing lies with Howard Fast, who wrote the novel on which the film is based, with Dalton Trumbo, the blacklisted Hollywood writer who wrote the original script, or with numerous others who introduced changes during production.[5]

4 On visual media and the past see, for example, Martin M. Winkler, "The Roman Empire in American Cinema after 1945," in *Imperial Projections: Ancient Rome in Modern Popular Culture*, ed. Sandra R. Joshel, Margaret Malamud, and Donald T. McGuire, Jr. (Baltimore and London: Johns Hopkins University Press, 2001; rpt. 2005), 50–76, at 51; and Mark C. Carnes, "Introduction," in *Past Imperfect: History According to the Movies*, ed. Mark C. Carnes et al. (New York: Holt, 1995), 9–10. Marcus Junkelmann, *Hollywoods Traum von Rom: "Gladiator" und die Tradition des Monumentalfilms* (Mainz: von Zabern, 2004), 150–165 and 391–394 (notes), provides a historian's perspective on *Spartacus*.

5 A comparison of Howard Fast's 1951 novel *Spartacus* with Kubrick's film reveals many major differences in historical details. For the roles of Trumbo and others in shaping the final version of the film see especially the contributions of Duncan L. Cooper in the present volume; cf. further Alison Futrell, "Seeing Red: Spartacus as Domestic Economist," in *Imperial Projections*, 77–118, at 97–99, and Theresa Urbainczyk, *Spartacus* (London: Bristol Classical Press, 2004), 122–125.

On the positive side, the film does have a solid historical core.[6] It conforms to the ancient accounts that in the late 70s B.C. Italy was wracked by a great slave revolt that was touched off when a charismatic enslaved gladiator named Spartacus and a number of comrades broke out of the gladiatorial training school run by Lentulus Batiatus at Capua.[7] The movie plausibly locates the beginning of the breakout in the kitchen of the gladiatorial school because, as Plutarch reports, the escapees seized cleavers and roasting spits from some kitchen for their initial weapons.[8] Although it is difficult to keep count in the melée that, quite realistically, accompanies their escape in the film, the initial number of escapees seems accurate or at least is not greatly exaggerated. While one source gives the low figure of "30 or more," others range from 64 to 78, with 74 being the most frequent.[9]

After their breakout, the slave-gladiators in *Spartacus* generally reflect the ancient accounts as they overcome local troops, confiscate weapons, gather followers from the surrounding countryside, and take refuge on the slopes of Mt. Vesuvius, where they continue arming themselves as they conduct local raids and defeat the first forces that the Roman Senate sends against them.[10] The film hints at further victories recounted in much more detail by the ancient sources as the slaves try to escape from Italy. Then, as history records, Marcus Licinius Crassus obtains a command from the senate to bring the massive resources of the Roman Republic fully to bear against the rebels.[11] In the meantime, Spartacus has negotiated with a representative of Cilician pirates for transport from

6 Acknowledged, e.g., by historian William V. Harris, "Spartacus," in *Past Imperfect*, 40–43, at 42.

7 The most important ancient sources are collected and translated in Brent D. Shaw, *Spartacus and the Slave Wars: A Brief History with Documents* (Boston and New York: Bedford / St. Martin's, 2001).

8 Plutarch, *Crassus* 8.2.

9 Florus, *Epitome* 2.8.3, gives the low count; 74 appears in Orosius, *History against the Pagans* 5.24.1 (erroneously given as 64 in Shaw, *Spartacus and the Slave Wars*, 151), and 64 in Velleius Paterculus, *History of Rome* 2.30.5. Appian, *The Civil Wars* 1.14.116, says "about 70." "80 fucking 2" is the number in Plutarch, *Crassus* 8.2 (erroneously 72 in Shaw, 131), while Sallust, *Histories* 3.90 (Maurenbrecher) = 3.60 (McGushin), Livy, *Periochae* 95, Frontinus, *Strategies* 1.5.23, and Eutropius, *Breviarium* 5.7, all agree on 74.

10 Plutarch, *Crassus* 8.2–9.3; Appian, *The Civil Wars* 1.14.116; Orosius, *History against the Pagans* 5.24.1; Velleius Paterculus, *History of Rome* 2.30.5; Florus, *Epitome* 2.8.3–4; and Frontinus, *Strategies* 1.5.21.

11 Plutarch, *Crassus* 10.1; Appian, *The Civil Wars* 1.14.118; Livy, *Periochae* 96; Florus, *Epitome* 2.8.12; Orosius, *History against the Pagans* 5.24.5; Velleius Paterculus, *History of Rome* 2.30.6.

Italy by ship, and he and his now huge following of fugitive slaves and peasants reach the sea after a harrowing march through the wintry Apennines. The pirates, however, prove faithless, and the desperate fugitives, hemmed in on all sides by advancing Roman armies, make a heroic but futile stand against Crassus and his well-trained legions, with horrific casualties on both sides.[12]

The movie also manages to convey some important general truths about late Republican Rome. First is the brutality that Roman society often exhibited. The opening sequence conveys a correct impression of the brutal conditions under which slaves worked in Roman mines. The film also gives a good sense of the brutality endured by gladiators and the pleasure that spectators took in the violent games of death for which they were trained. The extensive use of crucifixions as brutal object lessons to terrorize other slaves into acquiescing to the domination of their masters is no figment of Trumbo's or Kubrick's imagination but was a common occurrence in Roman life, even if the numbers whom Crassus had crucified at once were unusual.

The highly personal nature of Roman Republican politics also comes through well. Although Gracchus, a fictional character, and Crassus represent different modern political ideologies, their personal rivalry for power and influence is much more conspicuous because of the dislike that they express for each other in their maneuverings for power. Their intense animosity not only produces good drama but also reflects the personal conflicts characteristic of the era that produced Marius and Sulla, Cicero and Clodius, and Pompey and Caesar.

The film also effectively portrays the pervasive role of rhetoric and oral communication in Roman life. Lentulus Batiatus feels compelled to give a formal speech from his balcony to the newly arrived gladiators, gray-haired senators who look as if they had just stepped out of a Roman portrait gallery orate in debate on the senate floor, great set speeches before mass audiences sharply delineate the social and ideological contrasts between Crassus and Spartacus, and the slave Antoninus, a singer of stories, gives voice to the longings of the poor and downtrodden around the slaves' campfire.

Costumes and sets show an admirable striving for authenticity. One major gaffe, however, reveals how art can create fictions that crowd out

12 This scenario is loosely based on Plutarch, *Crassus* 9.5, 10.3–4, and 11.5–7; Appian, *The Civil Wars* 1.14.120; Florus, *Epitome* 2.8.10–14; and Orosius, *History against the Pagans* 5.24.6–7.

historical reality in the modern imagination. The film shows the seats of the Senate House arranged in semi-circular tiers. The set is copied from a famous series of frescoes done between 1882 and 1888 by the Italian painter Cesare Maccari (1840–1919) in the Salone d'Onore in Rome's Palazzo Madama, home of the modern Italian Senate. The most frequently reproduced scene of Maccari's images shows the infamous conspirator Catiline in 63 B.C., sitting abandoned and dejected in the foreground at the end of the second row while Cicero excoriates him in his *First Catilinarian Oration*. This painting has been reproduced so often in Latin textbooks and histories of Rome that it has even shaped the presentation of the Republican Senate in some non-fiction books on ancient Rome.[13] Although the Curia Hostilia, the Republican Senate House at the time of Spartacus, has not survived, subsequent senate houses were always rectangular. In view of the Romans' deep-seated traditionalism, there should be no doubt that the interior plan of Emperor Diocletian's version, centuries later and still standing today for all to see, with its central door opening out onto the Roman Forum in one end, a dais at the opposite end, and rows of benches along the sides, reflects the basic layout of its predecessors.[14]

The houses of wealthy or well-to-do characters like Crassus, Gracchus, and Lentulus Batiatus are modeled on the sumptuous townhouses and villas excavated at Pompeii and its environs which date from the late first century B.C. until the eruption of Vesuvius in A.D. 79.[15] Members of the wealthy Roman elite and their imitators aspiring to power in the late Republic occupied similar homes in Rome, many of them on the Palatine Hill, where they were submerged under later imperial palaces.[16] In an admirable attempt to re-create the appearance of such homes for *Spartacus*, set designers copied not only the architecture of houses from Pompeii but also authentic furnishings and decorations. For example, a wall in Gracchus' house displays reproductions of the famous series of wall paintings in the Villa of the Mysteries, originally constructed in the

13 Most recently, it is the model for a small picture in a brochure addressed to classics teachers to urge them to incorporate into their courses the twelve-part television series *Rome* (2005), produced by HBO. I thank Lara Langer of the Metropolitan Museum of Art, New York City, for help in identifying the artist and location of the frescoes.

14 Cf. Alfonso Bartoli, *Curia Senatus: La Scavo e il Restauro* (Roma: Istituto di Studi Romani, 1963), 3.

15 Cf. Henri Stierlin, *The Roman Empire: From the Etruscans to the Decline of the Roman Empire*, tr. Suzanne Bosman (Cologne and New York: Taschen, 2002), 100–123.

16 Lawrence Richardson, Jr., *A New Topographical Dictionary of Ancient Rome* (Baltimore and London: Johns Hopkins University Press, 1992), 279–282, s. v. "Palatinus, Mons."

second century B.C., that date to about 60 B.C. and depict women participating in some Dionysiac rite.[17] The upper level of the walls in the room where Lentulus Batiatus entertains Crassus and his party at a private showing of gladiators is decorated with gladiatorial scenes similar to those depicted in mosaics from Leptis Magna in Libya and others now in the Galleria Borghese in Rome. The colonnaded garden in which Crassus inspects a group of slaves is an authentic representation with Grecian columns, marble and bronze statuary, and even a mosaic copied from an original found in Rome.[18]

This garden is part of a sumptuous suburban villa. Whether Crassus actually owned such a luxurious dwelling in either Rome or its suburbs at the time of Spartacus' revolt is unclear. His notorious acquisition of a pleasant suburban villa at a very favorable price may have taken place just about that time, but we do not know whether he kept it for himself or turned it over for a quick profit as he usually did with real estate.[19] Later, in 56 B.C., Crassus had a house at Rome in a very expensive neighborhood on the Palatine near an area where two houses had been sold for huge sums in recent years.[20] In 73, however, he may have still been living in the much less lavish accommodations in which he had lived with his father and two married brothers before they died.[21] By the time of Spartacus' revolt, Crassus had profited handsomely from being on Sulla's winning side at the Battle of the Colline Gate in 82 and then from his subsequent activities as a real-estate developer and entrepreneur. Nevertheless, he seems to have been careful not to waste money by living lavishly in the manner of many of the nabobs to whom he sold real estate.[22]

17 Cf. Stierlin, *The Roman Empire*, 118–119.

18 Solomon, *The Ancient World in the Cinema*, 57 (figs. 28–29); cf. Stierlin, *The Roman Empire*, 101–111.

19 On this cf. my *Marcus Crassus and the Late Roman Republic* (Columbia and London: University of Missouri Press, 1977), 74–75.

20 Cicero, *On Behalf of Caelius* 9 and 18; cf. Richardson, *A New Topographical Dictionary of Ancient Rome*, 125, s. v. "M. Licinius Crassus Dives"; Pliny the Elder, *Natural History* 36.103; Cicero, *Letters to Atticus* 1.13.6. Cf. Ward, *Marcus Crassus and the Late Roman Republic*, 47 and 55.

21 Plutarch, *Crassus* 1.1; cf. Ward, *Marcus Crassus and the Late Roman Republic*, 47 and 55.

22 Plutarch, *Crassus* 2.5. Cf. Ward, *Marcus Crassus and the Late Roman Republic*, 62–74, and Bruce A. Marshall, *Crassus: A Political Biography* (Amsterdam: Hakkert, 1976), 15. The story that Crassus had a private fire brigade that would refuse to douse a fire until the building's owner and threatened neighbors had sold to Crassus on the spot is a modern invention.

Crassus may not have sought a more impressive dwelling in Rome until 70 B.C., when he had reached the consulship. At that point in life, a man sought to advertise his success in climbing the social and political ladder. Cicero, buying from Crassus, did so in 62 after his consulship of 63, as did M. Valerius Messalla Niger during his consulship in 61.[23] Even if Crassus had been living in his less luxurious old family home in 73, it would have exhibited a level of comfort and quality far above the conditions in which ordinary citizens lived. That is the historically valid point that the film emphasizes in its depiction of the homes inhabited by Crassus, Gracchus, and even Lentulus Batiatus, a man of far lower rank who aspired to be like them by enriching himself as a trainer and purveyor of gladiators.

The reconstruction of Batiatus' training school at Capua and the costumes and combat of the gladiators are historically more accurate than what many other movies have exhibited. One anomaly is each gladiator's little "queue" or *cauda* ("tail"), which resembles the one worn by Japanese sumo wrestlers or samurai and is supposed to mark a man as a gladiator. It seems to have no textual and little visual evidence to give it historical support.[24] The training school, however, with appropriate modifications for the less elaborate establishment run by a private entrepreneur, seems to conform to the picture developed from the excavations of the Ludus Maximus, the training school attached to the Colosseum in Rome. The kitchen area even has an accurate reproduction of a typical Roman grain mill, which consisted of a large conical stone base and a hollow truncated conical stone that fitted, small end down, over the top of the base and was turned like a capstan by horizontally projecting wooden arms to grind grain which was placed in the wide opening at the top. The major historically questionable item in the school is the large rotary training device with staggered upper and lower blades. While a slave turns it by pulling on a rope wrapped around a drum at the top, a

23 Cicero, *Letters to His Friends* 5.6.2; Ward, *Marcus Crassus and the Late Roman Republic*, 202 and note 11.

24 The filmmakers may have been misled by the tail-like projection on the back of some fancy gladiatorial helmets like the one in Toronto's Royal Ontario Museum or the one that seems to stick out from under the helmet of a *secutor* ("pursuer") on the Colchester Vase in England, but most depictions of helmeted or bareheaded gladiators unambiguously show no such thing. The charioteers showing the colors of Rome's four circus factions in mosaic panels now in the Museo Nazionale Romano have some kind of tail-like projections sticking up behind their caps, but charioteers were not gladiators. Cf., however, Vincent LoBrutto, *Stanley Kubrick: A Biography* (1997; rpt. New York: Da Capo, 1999), 170, on the hair design for Spartacus and the gladiators in the film. Cf. further Junkelmann, *Hollywoods Traum von Rom*, 131–132.

trainee alternately has to jump over and duck under the blades to avoid having his lower legs amputated or his head cut off. There is no evidence for this device, but it aptly illustrates the kind of ingenuity that the Romans applied to providing spectacles in the arena.'[25]

When Crassus has Lentulus Batiatus put on a private showing of gladiators, *Spartacus* fairly accurately presents the gladiators fighting in pairs with different kinds of equipment. The lack of the two referees usually present at Roman fights is a failing, but Spartacus, a Thracian by birth, appropriately fights armed as a Thraex ("Thracian"), while his opponent appears as a *retiarius*, a net man armed with a fishnet and trident.[26] Both men, following known practice, have one arm protected by armor. Neither has helmet or greaves (shin guards), although a Thraex would have had them later in the Empire. Unfortunately, Spartacus fights with a strange-looking sword that has a short and narrow blade on each side of its longer and wider central one instead of with the curved scimitar that was the distinctive weapon of a Thraex. In 73 B.C., however, all of the elaborate protocols of the imperial period will not yet have evolved, so that the scene as a whole does not do violence to what we know about that time.

Similarly, the film fairly re-creates some aspects of the military history of the period. The emphasis on Glabrus' failure to build a fortified camp underscores the basic principle that Roman soldiers were supposed to build one every time they stopped marching even for one night.[27] One might argue that some of the equipment and details of armor better reflect the early imperial army, for which there is much more visual evidence, but it would have been difficult to represent arms and armor of the late Republic more authentically.

Unfortunately, the great battle that resulted in Spartacus' disastrous defeat depicts the formation of a Roman legionary army that was based on the tactical unit of the maniple in the mid-second century B.C. and not on the cohort of around 70 B.C. Although cohorts are frequently mentioned earlier in the film, one of Crassus' subordinate officers even

25 Cf. Strabo, *Geography* 6.2.7; Pliny the Elder, *Natural History* 36.116–120.

26 On the arms and conventions of gladiatorial combat see Marcus Junkelmann, "*Familia Gladiatoria*: The Heroes of the Amphitheatre," in *Gladiators and Caesars: The Power of Spectacle in Ancient Rome*, ed. Eckart Köhne and Cornelia Ewigleben; tr. Anthea Bell (Berkeley and Los Angeles: University of California Press, 2000), 31–74. For all aspects of gladiatorial equipment and combat as well as modern recreations see Junkelmann, *Das Spiel mit dem Tod: So kämpften Roms Gladiatoren* (Mainz: von Zabern, 2000).

27 Cf. Lawrence Keppie, *The Making of the Roman Army: From Republic to Empire*, new edn. (Norman: University of Oklahoma Press, 1998), 36–38.

refers to the then-obsolete maniple, and the maniples of the two legions that Spartacus and his men watch being deployed are drawn up in three staggered ranks to form what some military historians call a quincunx, a formation like the five on our dice. Although this impressive army performs a number of precision drills that awe the slaves (and the viewers) and show them what a well-oiled killing machine it was, these particular drills seem to reflect mid-second-century B.C. maneuvers rather than those of Crassus' day.[28] Sadly, the slave rebels' use of huge rolls of flaming straw against the Romans is totally unhistorical. Appian does mention that at one point the rebels hurled bundles of dry sticks into a ditch and set them on fire to hinder the construction of Roman siege works, but that is a far cry from what the movie depicts.[29]

It would be pointless, however, to complain that at the time of the battle Crassus commanded not two but eight legions, the number actually mentioned when Gracchus discusses the senate's offer of a command to Crassus. Nominally, they would have amounted to 40,000 men, but 25,000 to 30,000 is a more likely number after deduction for casualties and desertions.[30] It would have been prohibitively expensive to field this many extras. Still, an accurate re-creation of the cohort-based organization and tactics of two legions would have convincingly conveyed a sense of the Roman state's overwhelming organized might that Crassus brought to bear against Spartacus' irregulars and would have been no more expensive than the anachronisms actually employed.

Much worse is the misrepresentation of the particular circumstances that forced the slaves' final confrontation with Crassus. It is true that a Lucullus had arrived with a Roman army at Brundisium. That was Marcus Terentius Varro Lucullus, whose army the senate had recalled from the province of Macedonia. Nevertheless, his troops did not join Crassus' legions for the final battle.[31] Pompey, moreover, had not landed

28 For the evolution of the Roman legion see Keppie, *The Making of the Roman Army*, 19, 33–36, 38–39, 63–67, and 173–174. Keppie, 39, cites this battle scene from *Spartacus* as a depiction of the second-century B.C. manipular legion in action. Under the heading "Training + Tactics = Roman Battle Success," the film's souvenir program – *Spartacus: The Illustrated Story of the Motion Picture Production*, ed. Stan Margulies (Bryna Productions and Universal Pictures Studios, 1960) – devotes two pages to a textual description, with diagrams, of this kind of fighting. They are reprinted, with additional editorial comments, in the present volume.

29 Appian, *The Civil Wars* 1.14.119.

30 Cf. Appian, *The Civil Wars* 1.14.118.

31 Plutarch, *Crassus* 11.2; Appian, *The Civil Wars* 1.14.120. Appian here misidentifies him as his brother Lucius Licinius Lucullus, who was still fighting Mithridates in the province of Asia.

another army at Rhegium. He was on his way back by land over the Alps from Spain and was nowhere near southern Italy.[32] Even those historical circumstances, however, were enough to make both Spartacus and Crassus want to confront each other quickly. Spartacus would have had no chance against three skilled commanders in Italy, and Crassus did not want anyone else to get credit for defeating Spartacus.

Spartacus has many other particular historical inaccuracies, some of which combine a lack of respect for history with a desire to imbue a historical story with contemporary significance. First of all, there are several problems with the characters who appear in the film. As our sources make clear, a third leader accompanied Spartacus and Crixus in the escape from Capua. He was Oenomaus, who, along with Crixus, initially led those identified as Gauls and Germans.[33] Oenomaus never appears, and Crixus is always portrayed as Spartacus' dedicated lieutenant right up to the famous scene after the last battle when he is one of the first to stand up and call out "I'm Spartacus!" According to Sallust, however, there was a major disagreement between Crixus and Spartacus early on: Spartacus sensibly wanted to escape as soon as possible from where the slaves were, but Crixus and the Gauls and Germans imprudently wanted to fight the Romans head on or at least stay to raid and plunder.[34]

The only hint of any such disagreement appears in the scene when the gladiators return to the abandoned school of Batiatus. Noble Spartacus scolds Crixus and the others for acting like Romans in making prisoners fight like gladiators and persuades them that their goal should not be aimless raiding but to fight their way to Brundisium and to escape by sea. Crixus quickly and enthusiastically adopts Spartacus' plan and remains by his side. The sources, however, indicate that Crixus and Oenomaus either agreed to disagree with Spartacus or, more positively, made a strategic division of forces and split off with the Gauls and Germans to form a second rebel army, that Oenomaus was soon killed, and that Crixus became the leader of the Gauls and Germans until he, too, died in battle and was succeeded by Castus and Gannicus.[35]

32 Cicero, *On Behalf of the Manilian Law* 30; Plutarch, *Crassus* 11.2–5 and 7–8, *Comparison of Crassus and Nicias* 3.2, and *Pompey* 21.1–2; Appian, *The Civil Wars* 1.14.119.

33 Appian, *The Civil Wars* 1.14.116; Eutropius, *Breviarium* 5.7; Florus, *Epitome* 2.8.3; Orosius, *History against the Pagans* 5.24.1. Ignoring the anachronism of its excellent description of the second-century B.C. Roman army, the film's souvenir program also insists that both Lucullus and Pompey joined up with Crassus for the final battle.

34 Sallust, *Histories* 3.96 and 98 (Maurenbrecher) = 3.64 and 66 (McGushin); cf. Plutarch, *Crassus* 9.5–6.

35 Orosius, *History against the Pagans* 5.24.1–4; Appian, *The Civil Wars* 1.14.117; Livy, *Periochae* 96 and 97; Frontinus, *Strategies* 2.5.34; Plutarch, *Crassus* 11.3.

Even Spartacus, whose role is the most historical, often appears in ways the sources do not support. Physically, Kirk Douglas may be a little undersized to represent a man whose great bodily strength both Plutarch and Sallust stress, yet he does have a commanding presence that communicates the great spirit they praise.[36] Unfortunately, the film's illiterate "son and grandson of slaves" who was sold before his thirteenth birthday to work in the mines, as the narrator tells us at the beginning, bears no resemblance to the Spartacus of the sources except that he is identified as a Thracian. Plutarch says that in sagacity and refinement Spartacus was more Greek than Thracian, high praise that no Greek like Plutarch would have given to an illiterate slave-born miner.[37] Athenaeus' statement that Spartacus was "a slave, a Thracian by birth" refers only to his status at the time of his escape.[38] There is nothing to contradict Appian and Florus, who present Spartacus as a freeborn Thracian who had once fought as a paid auxiliary for the Romans and then, having turned against them – becoming a "deserter and bandit," in Florus' words – was captured and condemned to be sold into slavery as a gladiator.[39]

Indeed, that scenario fits the particular historical circumstances very well. In the late second century B.C., the Romans had already annexed part of western Thrace to Macedonia. Other Thracian tribes had remained free and probably supplied auxiliaries for the Roman armies in Macedonia, whose governors waged a number of campaigns against local tribes in the 70s. Then, to counter the growing threat of Mithridates VI, king of Pontus, to Bithynia on the eastern border of Thrace, the Romans began to push into free Thrace. That could have driven Spartacus to desert the Romans and fight against them.

The movie goes too far in romantically making the humble Spartacus into a paragon of natural virtue in contrast with the brutal, rich, and vice-ridden Romans.[40] There is absolutely no evidence that Spartacus ever dreamed of eliminating slavery. The ancient world embraced slavery as part of the natural order of things. Most ancient thinkers never questioned it.[41] Even the New Testament, the body of texts sacred to the soon-to-arise new religion invoked by the opening narrator, unquestioningly

36 Plutarch, *Crassus* 8.2; Sallust, *Histories* 3.91 (Maurenbrecher) = 3.61 (McGushin); Florus, *Epitome* 2.8.8, also stresses Spartacus' strength.

37 Plutarch, *Crassus* 8.2.

38 Athenaeus, *The Sophists at Dinner* 6.272–273.

39 Appian, *The Civil Wars* 1.14.116; Florus, *Epitome* 2.8.8; cf. Plutarch, *Crassus* 8.2, and Varro in Flavius Sosipater Charisius, *Ars Grammatica* 1.133 (Keil).

40 Cf. Harris, "Spartacus," 42.

41 Athenaeus, *The Sophists at Dinner*, 6.272, mentions a few noteworthy exceptions.

accepts the existence of master and slave.[42] Sallust, a contemporary of Spartacus, does imply that Spartacus was one of the few "prudent people" with "free and noble minds" in the slave army and portrays him as trying repeatedly, if vainly, to restrain the baser instincts of the majority of his men who were bent on rape, murder, and arson.[43] Other sources, however, clearly contradict the film's scene in which Spartacus castigates his men for making Romans fight as gladiators. Florus and Orosius explicitly assert that Spartacus used Roman prisoners as gladiators in funeral celebrations.[44] Appian is probably referring to one of these funerals when he says that Spartacus sacrificed 300 Roman prisoners on behalf of his dead friend Crixus.[45] Appian also reports that Spartacus crucified a Roman prisoner to inspire his followers by reminding them of the fate that awaited them if they did not win.[46]

We might be tempted to reject these stories as pro-Roman sources trying to make the Romans look better by blackening their enemy, but there is nothing improbable about the accounts.[47] Florus even speculates that Spartacus was trying to wipe out the stigma of having been a gladiator by being a giver of gladiatorial shows instead.[48] Indeed, Spartacus' reported actions reflect the behavior of a man operating within the cultural norms of his own time. After all, gladiatorial contests were supposed to be sacrifices of blood to sustain the dead, and Crassus had imposed the murderous punishment of decimation on at least one of his own cohorts after a cowardly performance in battle as an object lesson to those who might be tempted to turn tail and run in future battles.[49] In fact, to make Spartacus more believable, Kubrick wanted to have Spartacus conform less to modern moral standards, in contrast to Trumbo's more ideological vision.[50]

The opening scene, which shows Spartacus being brutalized as a slave carrying heavy loads of rock at the desolate site of a Roman mine in Libya, is completely unhistorical in its particulars. There was no Roman province of Libya until the reign of Diocletian (A.D. 284–305). Even

42 Pointed out by Harris, "Spartacus," 43. Cf. Matthew 10.24–25 and 25.14–30; Luke 12.47; 1 Peter 2.18.

43 Sallust, *Histories* 3.98 (Maurenbrecher) = 3.66 (McGushin)

44 Florus, *Epitome* 2.8.9; Orosius, *History against the Pagans* 5.24.3

45 Appian, *The Civil Wars*, 1.14.117

46 Appian, *The Civil Wars*, 1.14.119.

47 Harris, "Spartacus," 43, raises the possibility of propaganda against Spartacus.

48 Florus, *Epitome* 2.8.9.

49 Ward, *Marcus Crassus and the Late Roman Republic*, 88.

50 Cf. Futrell, "Seeing Red," 98.

Cyrene, the previous name for Roman Libya, did not become a Roman province until 74 B.C., one year before Spartacus' rebellion. Neither is the area known for any mines, but if it were and Lentulus Batiatus had, by some miracle, found his way there, he could not have come upon a strong mature man who had been sold off to work in the mines before his thirteenth birthday. Such a boy would have died long before from the harsh conditions under which ancient slaves labored in mines.

As for Batiatus himself, the only fact known besides his name is that he did run the gladiatorial school from which Spartacus escaped. Therefore, there is nothing to prevent him from playing the role that Peter Ustinov memorably assumes in the rest of the movie. Much the same can be said for Spartacus' wife Varinia, at least after she and Spartacus are reunited after the gladiators' escape. Plutarch is the only source for her existence. He says that she was with Spartacus before he became a gladiator and that she escaped from Capua with her husband, but he gives her no name.[51]

One thing is certain, however: Spartacus' wife would not have been called Varinia. That is the feminine form of the Roman name Varinius, which belonged to one of the early Roman commanders against Spartacus.[52] Plutarch clearly says that Spartacus' wife was a Thracian from the same tribe as he was. Therefore she could not have been from Britannia, as Varinia, played by British actress Jean Simmons, tells Crassus she is. She should have had a Thracian name. Plutarch identifies her as a "prophetess subject to Dionysiac frenzies," so that Diaskentha, the feminine form of the Thracian name "Child of God," would have been appropriate. It is fittingly exotic without being hard to pronounce.[53]

Pity poor Gaius Claudius (or Clodius) Glaber, the hapless commander who disgraced himself when Spartacus made a surprise attack on him and the 3,000 men whom he had brought to besiege Spartacus on the slopes of Vesuvius.[54] His name is somewhat confused in the sources, but

51 Plutarch, *Crassus* 8.3.

52 Appian, *The Civil Wars* 1.14.116 (with the wrong *cognomen*); Frontinus, *Strategies* 1.5.22; Sallust, *Histories* 3.96 (Maurenbrecher) = 64 (McGushin); cf. Livy, *Periochae* 95 (with misspelling "Varenus").

53 Plutarch, *Crassus* 8.3.

54 Plutarch, *Crassus* 9.1–3; Frontinus, *Strategies* 1.5.21; Florus, *Epitome* 1.2.4; Orosius, *History against the Pagans* 5.24.1. Appian, *The Civil Wars* 1.14.116, mistakenly calls him Varinius Glaber. Livy, *Periochae* 95, gives him the more famous Claudian *cognomen* Pulcher. For his rank and for other sources concerning his name see T. R. S. Broughton, *The Magistrates of the Roman Republic*, vol. 2: 99 B.C.–31 B.C. (1952; rpt. Chico: Scholars Press, 1985), 109 and 115 note 1, and T. Corey Brennan, *The Praetorship of the Roman Republic* (Oxford and New York: Oxford University Press, 2000), vol. 2, 431.

the movie turns it into Marcus Publius Glabrus and makes him into the commander of the non-existent "Garrison of Rome." As Crassus rightly points out to him in the film, it was illegal for armed troops to enter Rome. The only exception was on the most temporary basis to celebrate a major military victory. Emperor Augustus first established what might be called a garrison for Rome: nine cohorts of the elite Praetorian Guard and three urban cohorts of regular soldiers. These latter cohorts, plus three cohorts of the Praetorian Guard, were the first troops ever permanently stationed in Rome. Whatever troops the historical Gaius Claudius Glaber commanded in 73 B.C. were not regular units but were hastily recruited on his way south.[55]

Spartacus greatly exaggerates Gaius Julius Caesar's physical appearance and political status. Suetonius says that he was tall, with slender limbs and fair skin.[56] All of the surviving ancient portraits show Caesar to have had rather sharp and angular features, so that he would not have looked much like bronzed and well-muscled John Gavin. Obviously Caesar could not have received command of Rome's non-existent garrison in the absence of the historical Glaber. Moreover, contrary to the movie, he was not yet even a senator but had begun his formal political career only shortly before the start of Spartacus' revolt. In 74 B.C. he had been appointed legate to M. Antonius Creticus, father of Mark Antony, in the ongoing war against piracy; in 73 he had returned to Rome upon being co-opted into the prestigious priestly college of pontiffs. Shortly thereafter he was elected military tribune for either 72 or 71. Therefore he could have served under Crassus in the war against Spartacus.[57] That would have given Trumbo a fine historical opportunity to hint at a future dictatorship with its attendant foreshadowing of modern Fascism instead of unhistorically making Crassus the vehicle of that message.

Laurence Olivier, on the other hand, bears an uncanny resemblance to a bust that some scholars have identified as a portrait of Marcus Licinius Crassus, the wealthy Roman who defeated Spartacus and crucified 6,000 survivors along the Appian Way from Capua to Rome.[58]

55 Cf. Appian, *The Civil Wars* 1.14.116.

56 Suetonius, *Julius Caesar* 45.1.

57 Harris, "Spartacus," 42, rejects Caesar's presence out of hand, but it is not impossible; see Ward, *Marcus Crassus and the Late Roman Republic*, 110–112.

58 This bust is in the Ny Carlsberg Glyptotek (inv. no. 749). A photograph appears in the exhibition catalogue *Kaiser Augustus und die verlorene Republik*, ed. Mathias Rene Hofter (Mainz: von Zabern, 1988), 317. For the uncertainty of the attribution see the review by R. R. R. Smith, *Journal of Roman Studies*, 79 (1989), 214.

Unfortunately, the rest of Crassus' portrayal is wildly inaccurate. Crassus and the other leading men of Rome were not all patricians. Unfortunately, modern English usage equates the word "patrician" with high-ranking hereditary aristocrats in general. Before 367 B.C., a small group of wealthy families whose ancestors bestowed on them the hereditary designation of patrician generally did monopolize Rome's highest-ranking positions. After 367, when members of wealthy non-patrician families regularly gained access to the highest offices, patrician families were no longer the only members of the ruling elite. The members of this elite were now designated as *nobiles* ("notables"), regardless of their patrician or non-patrician birth. Caesar was a patrician, but Crassus came from one of the non-patrician families who had made it into the highest ranks of the Roman elite.[59] Indeed, more of the senators in Crassus' day were non-patricians like him than patricians like Caesar.[60]

Equally invalid is the idea that there was anything like a "patrician party," a term Crassus uses in a conversation with Caesar. No political parties in the modern sense of the word existed at all. While like-minded men or those with a common interest might work together informally, there were no formal political organizations with registered members, official ideologies, and institutionalized leadership. Politics centered much more on rival personalities and ambitions as individuals struggled to achieve status as prominent leaders of the Republic.

Therefore there is no question that Crassus wanted to become the recognized leading man at Rome, as did Pompey and Caesar, his eventual partners in their opportunistic coalition known as the First Triumvirate of 60 B.C. He was, however, no law-and-order, proto-Fascist general itching to become dictator, as he appears in *Spartacus*.[61] Crassus always worked within the existing Republican framework in the period after Sulla's dictatorship (82–80 B.C.) and had no wish to overthrow the system that would validate the status he desired. He never had the non-existent titles "First General of the Republic," "Father and Defender of Rome," or "First Consul." Historically, he had no legions under his command to bring into the city as Glabrus suggests or to give up when he shares Glabrus' disgrace. It was Crassus' very lack of recent military

59 Ward, *Marcus Crassus and the Late Roman Republic*, 47–53; Marshall, *Crassus*, 16.

60 In general cf. T. P. Wiseman, *New Men in the Roman Senate 139 B.C.–A.D. 14* (London: Oxford University Press, 1971).

61 Cf. Harris, "Spartacus," 43.

glory that threatened his ability to compete for election to the consulship, and that is why he sought the command against Spartacus.[62]

It is also supremely ironic that *Spartacus* portrays Crassus as luxury-loving, amoral, and bisexual. (This last aspect, made explicit in the film's "oysters and snails" scene, had been excluded from the film's originally released version.) Crassus was notorious for his wealth, but not because he lived lavishly. As noted above, although he eventually built on the Palatine a house appropriate to his status, he did not squander his money on numerous luxurious homes and country villas. Instead, he was famous for his moderate lifestyle and preferred to invest his wealth as productively as possible.[63] What was scandalous about him was the way in which he became rich. Early on, he had profited from Sulla's proscription lists, even illegally, it was said.[64] Later, he took too much personal interest in making money, something that was considered to be beneath the dignity of a Roman noble. Plutarch gives the scandalous example that Crassus bought valuable properties at fire sales – literally so – and then resold them at a handsome profit after a large gang of skilled slaves whom he maintained had rebuilt or remodeled the buildings that had burned down.[65]

Despite his reputation for avarice, however, Crassus had the cleanest reputation of all his peers in regard to his familial and sexual life. Rumors about Caesar's bisexuality abounded.[66] Pompey had a series of wives in politically opportunistic marriages and divorces.[67] Crassus, on the other hand, dutifully married Tertulla, the widow of a childless brother. They raised at least two well-regarded sons together, and there is no hint of any later divorce or other marriage despite some malicious rumors about Tertulla's fidelity.[68] Moreover, at the very public trial of Marcus Caelius in 56 B.C., Cicero would have been laughed out of court if he

62 Ward, *Marcus Crassus and the Late Roman Republic*, 64 and 82–85; Marshall, *Crassus*, 30–31. If Crassus had held a military command as a praetor in 73 B.C., it seems likely that Plutarch would have noted it. Brennan, *The Praetorship of the Roman Republic*, vol. 2, 433, thinks that he may have held a minor command as an ex-praetor in 72 before receiving the command of the war against Spartacus.

63 Plutarch, *Crassus* 1.1, 2.4–6, and 3.1.

64 Plutarch, *Crassus* 2.3 and 6.6–7.

65 Plutarch, *Crassus* 2.4.

66 Suetonius, *Julius Caesar* 49.1–52.3; Catullus 57.

67 Suetonius, *Julius Caesar* 50.1; Plutarch, *Pompey* 4.2, 9.1–3, 42.7, 47.6, and 55.1–2; Cicero, *Letters to His Friends* 5.26.

68 Cf. Ward, *Marcus Crassus and the Late Roman Republic*, 55–56 and 291–292; Marshall, *Crassus*, 12–13.

had been exaggerating too much when he referred to "Crassus' irreproachable house."[69]

Gracchus, Crassus' populist opponent in the senate, did not exist at all. The name recalls Tiberius and Gaius Sempronius Gracchus, the two martyred popular reformers from the last third of the second century B.C. It took four generations for any of the Sempronii Gracchi to reach prominence again, and no one with the *cognomen* Gracchus was an important senator at the time of Spartacus' uprising.[70] As we shall see, however, there was a historical personage who could easily have provided the model for Charles Laughton's Gracchus. Neither Antoninus, Tony Curtis's slave character, nor Tigranes Levantus (better: Levanticus), Herbert Lom's stereotypically Oriental ambassador from the Cilician pirates, is a known person, but they are not contradicted by what we know, and each is a historically appropriate character. Slaves like Antoninus were common as teachers and entertainers in upper-class Roman homes. Even as an exaggerated stereotype, Tigranes reflects the Greco-Roman view of people from lands bordering the eastern Mediterranean. Historically, Spartacus had to have dealt with someone like him who represented the pirates. These invented characters are perfectly appropriate for historical fiction.

The film also excellently depicts the number and variety of Spartacus' followers as documented in the ancient sources and creatively imagines the complexity of the rebels' encampments and the difficulty of their treks over the length and breadth of Italy. On the other hand, it goes too far in turning the makeshift community of slaves and desperately poor peasants into a proletarian utopia in which, despite some hardships, the children are well nourished and loved, happy peasants dance around campfires, and leaders work in harmonious camaraderie. Appian does state that people flocked to Spartacus because he parceled out the loot from his raids in equal shares. Still, the film would have made the fugitive slaves and peasants and their leaders more heroic if it had depicted the harsh conditions, desperate struggles, and internal tensions they had to confront more realistically.

69 Cicero, *On Behalf of Caelius* 9.

70 There was no Sempronius Gracchus in the senate between the death of C. Sempronius Gracchus in 121 B.C. and the appearance of the T. Sempronius Gracchus who was identified as a quaestor designate on a coin of 37 B.C.; cf. Broughton, *The Magistrates of the Roman Republic*, vol. 2, 476, and vol. 3: *Supplement*, 190. A promising young orator named Tiberius Sempronius Gracchus was a paramour of Julia, daughter of Augustus, who exiled him in 2 B.C. (Tacitus, *Annals* 1.53).

An abbreviated chronology further diminishes the heroic achievement of Spartacus and the rebel masses. Historically, approximately two years passed between the start of Spartacus' rebellion in 73 B.C. and the final battle in 71. By the time the praetor Varinius had replaced the hapless Glaber and he and his officers had fought a number of engagements with Spartacus in 73, it was already late autumn, probably around November. Therefore, most likely the rebellion started in July or August.[71] Crassus took over late in 72 and finished in about six months, so that the last battle would have occurred around April of 71 and the rebellion would have lasted a total of about 22 months.[72]

In the movie, no more than a year can have elapsed from the time of the gladiators' breakout at Capua to the crucifixion of Spartacus at the end. Having fled Capua, Spartacus seems, quite reasonably, to spend a couple of months gathering more and more followers and training an effective army before Glabrus' arrival. Just before Spartacus ignominiously defeats Glabrus, Tigranes appears in Spartacus' camp and strikes a deal whereby the Cilician pirate fleet would transport the fugitives out of Italy from the port of Brundisium on the other side of the peninsula seven months later.[73] Upon defeating Glabrus, the slaves make a harrowing march over the Apennine Mountains in winter. Then, after a short respite during which Varinia announces that she is going to have a baby in the spring, they raid places like Metapontum to collect more loot to pay the pirates. They reach Brundisium at the appointed time only to have the pirates leave them in the lurch. Not long after that Spartacus is forced into the climactic battle with Crassus, during which Varinia miraculously survives while giving birth to Spartacus' son. It could not be more than about a month later when Spartacus is crucified on the Via Appia outside the walls of Rome and Varinia, with the help of Gracchus and Batiatus, escapes from Crassus with her baby to set off for a new life as a freedwoman in Aquitania.

This abbreviated chronology makes it impossible for the film to give its viewers a strong sense of the numerous humiliations that Spartacus and his forces inflicted on the Romans. Modern political considerations led to a conscious distortion of history. Trumbo wanted to show more of Spartacus' victories, but the executives at Universal Studios were anxious

71 Sallust, *Histories* 3.96 (Maurenbrecher) = 3.64 (McGushin). Cf. Ward, *Marcus Crassus and the Late Roman Republic*, 83 note 1.

72 Appian, *The Civil Wars*, 1.14.121. Cf. Ward, *Marcus Crassus and the Late Roman Republic*, 97 note 41.

73 Throughout *Spartacus*, the cast has great difficulty in pronouncing the city's name. Most of the time it comes out as "Brindusium."

to avoid arousing the ire of conservative Americans with too much proletarian revolution and wanted scenes of the slaves' military victories kept to a minimum.[74] Whatever ideological angle Trumbo might have pursued, he was right in this case. According to our sources, over approximately two years the rebels won at least thirteen battles and plundered at least four major cities. It greatly diminishes the historical Spartacus not to give audiences a better idea of the rebels' extraordinary success under his leadership.

The film would have been much more exciting and spectacular if it had shown Crassus' elaborate attempt to isolate Spartacus somewhere in the toe of Italy by building a great fortified rampart and ditch, which Spartacus finally breached in a daring nighttime attack.[75] It would not have been difficult to construct an appropriate set for this. Even the two battles whose details are actually shown do scant justice to Spartacus' ingenuity and heroism. In the film's surprise attack on the misnamed Glabrus, Spartacus and his men simply rush Glabrus' unfortified camp on foot and horseback, but, as described by Plutarch and others, the attack on the historical Glaber was far more worthy of Hollywood scriptwriters. Spartacus and his men cleverly plaited ladders out of wild vines that grew on Vesuvius, they stealthily scaled down the precipitous cliffs separating them from the Romans below while one man stayed behind to toss down their weapons, and they surrounded Glaber's unprotected camp before anyone was aware of the danger.[76]

Spartacus looks even more like a Hollywood hero than does Kirk Douglas in Plutarch's description of the last battle. Instead of meeting the Roman attack on horseback, Spartacus refused to mount his steed, a symbol of aristocratic generalship, when it was brought to him before the battle. Dramatically proclaiming that he would have plenty of horses if he won and no need of one if he lost, he killed the animal with a thrust of his sword. Then he rushed fearlessly into the fray on foot and almost reached Crassus before he was cut down.[77] With a little research, a scriptwriter could have created a screenplay that better reflects the

74 Futrell, "Seeing Red," 98 and 117 note 52.

75 Plutarch, *Crassus* 10.4–6; Appian, *The Civil Wars* 1.14.118–120; Frontinus, *Strategies* 1.5.20. It is improbable that the siege works stretched for the 600 stades (ca. 35 miles) that Plutarch claims, but they were still a massive undertaking. See Ward, *Marcus Crassus and the Late Roman Republic*, 89–90 note 20; Patrick McGushin, *Sallust: The Histories*, vol. 2 (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1994), 150.

76 Plutarch, *Crassus* 9.1–3; Frontinus, *Strategies* 1.5.21; Florus, *Epitome* 2.8.4.

77 Plutarch, *Crassus* 11.6–7. Much of this description and that of Appian, *The Civil Wars* 1.14.120, may be rhetorical commonplaces.

ancient sources and does not contradict the historical particulars while yielding an equally dramatic, entertaining, and uplifting film story. Below, I outline the plot of such a film.

Instead of opening with a bogus scene at a Libyan mine, this movie begins with Spartacus, a Thracian who has formerly fought as an auxiliary for Rome but now opposes the expansion of Roman power into his tribal land. He and his recent bride Diaskentha are captured and sold to Lentulus Batiatus, who has use for both of them at his gladiatorial training school. Not only is Spartacus humiliated by having his wife work as a kitchen slave while he is forced to train as a gladiator, but he is predictably outraged when Batiatus and his overseer, the Marcellus character of Kubrick's film, sadistically goad him by assigning her as a sexual favor to Crixus. Honorably and wisely, Crixus refuses to violate her. When he and fellow slave Oenomaus manage to convince a murderously enraged Spartacus that his wife is unharmed, the three become fast friends and begin plotting to organize a breakout of all those gladiators not suspected of being informants. We also see, much as in Kubrick's movie, interspersed scenes of training, the daily life of the gladiators, and a private show requested by the wealthy Crassus to celebrate the elevation of his young friend Julius Caesar to the college of pontiffs. Crassus, always on the lookout for skilled slaves, notices Diaskentha's grace and intelligence. Batiatus, who now considers her a liability, happily sells her to him. When Spartacus finds out, his loose-tongued anger reveals to an informer that an escape plan is afoot. When the three friends discover this informer talking to Marcellus in the kitchen, they and about seventy others jump into action, kill Marcellus, outfight the guards, rescue Diaskentha, and escape to Vesuvius.

We now cut to Rome and a more authentic representation of the Senate House. The senate is meeting to deal with the crisis after local forces have failed to capture the rebels. The ambitious praetor Crassus, whose vast wealth largely rests on slave labor, does not want to interrupt his business and political affairs to take up a command against a few marauding fugitives, but his less accomplished fellow praetor Gaius Claudius Glaber does. Crassus, wishing to acquire more political allies as he looks toward running for the consulship, works to obtain the command for Glaber. One of the consuls-elect for 72 B.C., the populist politician Lucius Gellius, backs Varinius, another praetor. In the process Gellius engages in some populist rhetoric by pointing out that many poor farmers also support Spartacus. They do so because it is hard for them to survive in the face of the great landowners and their huge slave-run estates, whose brutal working conditions drive many additional slaves to

revolt. In the end, however, the rich Crassus successfully pulls strings for Glaber.

Since little is known about Glaber and Varinius and their political relationships, a writer of historical fiction is perfectly free to create such a scenario. Moreover Gellius, who was about 63 years old in 73 B.C., is an excellent historical analogue to the character of the unhistorical Gracchus in Kubrick's film. He had studied oratory under Gaius Papirius Carbo, who had been a supporter of the reformist Gracchi brothers who had served on Tiberius Gracchus' land commission.[78] Although Carbo eventually turned against Gaius Gracchus, Gellius, during his impressionable teenage years, would have known Carbo principally as a follower of the Gracchi, and this probably shaped Gellius' populist leanings. The *cognomen* Publicola ("Favoring the People") no longer appears to belong to Gellius, but his adopted son bore it. The name is an indication of the family's populist orientation.[79]

The real Gellius had been praetor in 94, but for twenty-two years his career had been blocked by the rise of the conservative Sulla and his political heirs. Their hold on power was challenged by younger men willing to take a populist stance.[80] One of those people was Pompey, with whom Gellius had served in 89 B.C. under Pompey's father during the war with the Italian Allies, the Social War, as it is generally called, of 91–88 B.C. Gellius now seemed to favor Pompey, whose own ambitions were bringing him into conflict with Sulla's political heirs in the senate and soon would form a direct challenge to Crassus' bid for prominence.[81] Gellius is therefore the perfect character to provide a dramatic opponent to Crassus in a film.

As our imagined movie continues, Glaber's ignominious defeat is a setback for Crassus and allows Gellius to have Varinius put in charge of the slave war. Now it is possible to show Spartacus' defeat of Cossinius, one of Varinius' officers who, according to Plutarch, suffered the comic embarrassment of almost being captured while bathing before he was killed.[82] Next, Spartacus' reputation soars during a series of battles, in one of which Oenomaus perishes. The series culminates with the capture of Varinius' lictors and Varinius' horse right from under him.[83] To save

78 Cf. Ward, *Marcus Crassus and the Late Roman Republic*, 24.

79 On the *cognomen* see E. Badian, "The Clever and the Wise," *Bulletin of the Institute of Classical Studies*, Supplement 51 (1988), 1–11, at 8 note 11.

80 See Ward, *Marcus Crassus and the Late Roman Republic*, 24–25.

81 On this cf. Ward, *Marcus Crassus and the Late Roman Republic*, 24 and 91–102.

82 Plutarch, *Crassus* 9.4–5.

83 Plutarch, *Crassus* 9.5; Appian, *The Civil Wars* 1.14.116 (despite the confusion of names).

time and avoid repetition, the film could show these battles as a quick montage of short scenes but with some attention on the death of Oenomaus and the capture of Varinius.

Then we see the arduous trek over the snowy Apennines to the relatively safe eastern side of the Italian peninsula, from which Spartacus hopes to march north to the Alps in the spring and to escape from Italy. There, a long simmering dissension comes to a head between those who want to follow Spartacus' plan and those, particularly the Gauls and Germans, who want to stay and plunder Italy under Crixus. Diaskentha, whose prophetic powers would have brought her respect in ancient society, mediates their dispute and points out the strategic and logistical advantages that separate forces would have. The two leaders, remaining friends, agree to split their followers into two armies. Spartacus spends the rest of the winter preparing for a spring march to the Alps.

Back in Rome, Lucius Gellius, now consul, argues that he and his colleague, Gnaeus Cornelius Lentulus Clodianus, can bring this unfortunate war to a satisfactory conclusion and then make reforms to prevent another outbreak. Crassus, seeing the war as an opportunity for himself, argues that unlike him they have no meaningful military experience, but the senate defers to their rank. Having recruited two consular armies of two legions each, the consuls march east as soon as possible in the spring to engage the two rebel armies. Gellius' army manages to kill Crixus and inflict a crushing defeat on the Gauls and Germans in the Garganus region. Lentulus blocks Spartacus in the north so that Gellius can take him in the rear. Spartacus boldly seizes the initiative, smashes Lentulus first, then wheels around and defeats Gellius. Again, a quick succession of brief scenes can cover the military action.

Spartacus honors Crixus with a great funeral that includes 300 gladiatorial duels to the death by Roman prisoners. On this occasion he delivers a great speech about his hatred of the Romans and about the slaves' fight to be free. In another series of vignettes, he and his followers march north. They defeat Cassius, the proconsul of Cisalpine Gaul, at Mutina and, realizing that they are not strong enough to risk fighting the large number of veteran troops still in the rest of the province, return south. Now they quickly defeat the forces of the two consuls regrouped in Picenum and then capture the port city of Thurii, which Spartacus uses as a base for resupplying his army and preparing for a direct attack on Rome itself. There he learns that Diaskentha is pregnant.[84]

84 The confusion in the relevant sources permits my reconstruction of events in the preceding three paragraphs: *Plutarch, Crassus* 9.5–7; *Appian, The Civil Wars* 1.14.117; *Livy, Periochae* 96; *Orosius, History against the Pagans* 5.24.3–7; Florus, *Epitome* 2.8.8–11.

In the meantime, Crassus seizes the opportunity to humiliate his opponent Gellius by persuading the senate to recall both consuls and to put him in sole command of the war, which he offers to finance on his own. With this commission he hopes to build up a following of loyal veterans large enough to offset the one that Pompey will soon be bringing back from Spain. Crassus even enlists a number of opportunistic aristocrats as staff officers, among them his friend Caesar, newly elected as a military tribune. Crassus hires six veteran legions and sets up camp in the vicinity of Picentia astride the road from Rhegium to Rome, the main road that is closest to Thurii if one went from there to Rome. While whipping his legions into shape, Crassus summons Lentulus Batiatus to brief him on Spartacus.[85]

In late winter to early spring, Spartacus and his whole army march west from Thurii to the road for Rome. Crassus orders his legate Mummius to circle around Spartacus' rear but not to engage him. Mummius' subsequent disobedience and defeat need only be reported to Crassus and not shown on the screen, but Crassus' punishment of the most cowardly 500-man cohort of Mummius' troops would make a dramatic statement about the nature of Roman power. This punishment is decimation: one tenth of the cohort is selected by lot and clubbed to death by the rest.[86]

After that brutal lesson, Crassus' legions defeat a detachment of the rebels and pursue Spartacus, who flees south to the Straits of Messina. There he negotiates with Cilician pirates to transport his men to Sicily, which had been the scene of massive slave rebellions over the last sixty years. Spartacus hopes to open up a new front against Rome on Sicily.[87] The pirates, however, betray him, and he desperately tries to cross the straits on crudely constructed rafts. Bad weather and the notoriously tricky currents wreck this venture.[88] By now Crassus has had his men construct a huge ditch and a rampart fortified with palisades across the neck of the promontory on which Spartacus' forces are encamped. A

85 Plutarch, *Crassus* 10.1, confuses Picenum with Picentia. Cf. Ward, *Marcus Crassus and the Late Roman Republic*, 86 note 11.

86 Plutarch, *Crassus* 10.1–3; Sallust, *Histories* 4.23 (Maurenbrecher) = 4.18 (McGushin); Appian, *The Civil Wars* 1.14.118; Florus, *Epitome* 2.8.12. Either Appian or his source exaggerates the number of men executed. Polybius, *Histories* 6.38.1–3, first describes the practice of decimation in the Roman army.

87 Plutarch, *Crassus* 10. 1–3; Appian, *The Civil Wars* 1.14.118. Shaw, *Spartacus and the Slave Wars*, 79–129, provides the sources for the Sicilian slave wars.

88 Sallust, *Histories* 4.30–31 (Maurenbrecher) = 4.26–27 (McGushin); Florus, *Epitome* 2.8.12.

series of rapid cuts back and forth between the activities on the two sides would effectively indicate the passage of time.

Spartacus becomes desperate to break Crassus' siege. He crucifies a Roman prisoner to unnerve the Romans and to remind his followers of what will happen to them if they should fail. On a dark night during a late spring snow squall, Spartacus' men hurl anything that they can find into the ditch and set fire to the palisade with bundles of burning branches. Thus they break the Roman blockade and flee to the surrounding mountains, from where they make a dash toward Brundisium, the port in which they hope to commandeer ships and escape from Italy.[89]

Unfortunately, however, they learn that Marcus Terentius Varro Lucullus, whom the senate has summoned to return with his army from Macedonia, is now landing at Brundisium. Hoping to panic Crassus, who wants to end the war before Pompey returns from Spain, the slaves again split their forces and head toward Rome. Castus and Gannicus lead one group. Spartacus heads the other. In response, Crassus splits his forces. Spartacus, seemingly unstoppable after a hard-won victory over the contingent left to cover him, learns that he immediately has to face Crassus' fresh troops, who have annihilated Castus and Gannicus. The decisive battle is imminent. Spartacus plunges his sword into his horse. He dies, heroically fighting on foot.[90]

Kubrick has been criticized for having his Spartacus survive to be crucified later, despite Appian's explicit testimony that Spartacus died in battle and that his body was never found.[91] That testimony does not force a screenwriter to jettison what Jon Solomon has rightly identified as the most satisfying part of *Spartacus*.[92] If Spartacus' body was never found, there is no proof that he did not survive. The story of his death could have been a ploy to protect his identity in the hope that he might escape and continue the fight. Spartacus might have survived to become one of those anonymously crucified along the Appian Way.[93] Therefore it is not too much to imagine the scene in which all the survivors reply "I'm Spartacus!" to Crassus' offer of sparing the rest if only they identify Spartacus.

Trumbo's script stretches credulity, however, by not having Crassus use Batiatus to identify Spartacus when his other ploy has failed. After all, Crassus had detained Batiatus in the Roman camp for this very

89 Appian, *The Civil Wars* 1.14.120.
90 Plutarch, *Crassus* 11.2–7.
91 Cf. Harris, "Spartacus," 42.
92 Cf. Solomon, *The Ancient World in the Cinema*, 53.
93 Appian, *The Civil Wars* 1.14.120.

purpose. Our version could have Crassus flog Batiatus out of his camp before the battle because Batiatus insists on trying to obtain the right to sell all potential captives despite Crassus' plan to crucify them. Batiatus need not be present in our script to identify Diaskentha, since Crassus had earlier paid close enough attention to her to want to buy her from Batiatus. She could more realistically give birth a day or two before the battle and be in hiding in a nearby cave. Crassus discovers her as he happens to pass and hear the baby's cries. He takes her and the child to Rome, not because he lusts after her as in the film but because, in the absence of Spartacus himself, they are the greatest trophies that he can display in his victory celebration. Afterwards, they would be killed according to Roman custom.

Gellius, affronted and envious, conspires with a peeved Batiatus to steal these symbols of Crassus' victory and spirit them out of Rome to freedom. Without dictatorial powers, Crassus is not the kind of enemy who could force the popular Gellius into committing suicide. Instead, Gellius savors his personal triumph over his rival in the private luxury of his home while Batiatus (now guilty of theft, even treason) and Spartacus' wife and infant son make their way to the Via Appia and get past Crassus' troops, who are quartered outside Rome to await his victory ovation.[94] Diaskentha bids her wrenching farewell to the dying Spartacus, who is hanging anonymously on his cross. The three fugitives set off south down the Via Appia toward the port of Puteoli, from which they will take ship for new lives in the free city of Massilia.

In this way, history and histrionics could dramatically complement each other. Audiences could enjoy the kind of grand and thought-provoking epic that has made Kubrick's *Spartacus* a classic. At the same time they would have a memorable narrative of people and events that closely matches the historical record.

94 Cf. Ward, *Marcus Crassus and the Late Roman Republic*, 98 and note 45; Marshall, Crassus, 33–34.

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