

Barry Strauss, *Spartacus War*, Humanitas, Bucharest, 2022, 290 p.

Alex – Marian CORNEA*

We mark the appearance of a publication that deals with a subject of interest to the general public, namely the story of the legendary Spartacus. We look at the issue of slaves in the ancient world, which has inspired novelists and filmmakers over the years. Barry Strauss is a professor at Cornell University and a renowned expert on ancient military history. He has written or edited several works in his sphere of influence: *The Fathers and Sons of Athens: Ideology and Society in the Age of Peloponnesian Warfare* (Princeton University Press, Princeton, 1993), *The Battle of Salamis* (Simon&Schuster, New York, 2005), *The Trojan War* (Simon&Schuster, New York, 2007), *Masters of Command* (Simon&Schuster, New York, 2012), *The Death of Caesar* (Simon&Schuster, New York, 2015), and *Ten Caesars* (Simon&Schuster, New York, 2019).

This work, published in a special format, combines narrative with historical truth. In terms of structure, we note the first part, *Chronology* (p. 9-14), in which the author wishes to establish the temporal landmarks from the outset, followed by the *Introduction* (p. 17-28) in which B. Strauss begins an interesting preamble to the historical foray he wishes to relate. Here, too, the author justifies his approach: from his perspective, the Spartacus revolt was the most famous slave revolt of antiquity; an event that influenced the southern part of Italy, directly involving Rome. His good documentation can also be seen in the biographical account of the main protagonist of his work. We are pleased with the author's emphasis on archaeological sources and his honesty in discussing the shortcomings of his research.

* Faculty of History, "Alexandru Ioan Cuza" University of Iasi; alex.marian.cornea@gmail.com.

The book is divided into four parts, with titles specific to a work popularising a subject. The first part, *The Escape* (p. 27-68) consists of two chapters. The first chapter, *Gladiator* (p. 29-47), is intended to capture the image of the arena fighter, Spartacus, the state, and the beginning of the revolt he was to start. During the reading, I could notice certain confusions made by the translator, namely: "[...] the producer usually asked for the public's verdict." (p. 32) For the term editor, we consider that a happier translation would be that of the organizer, not the producer. We have in mind a person in charge of the smooth running of an event, not a producer; if we turn our attention to the Explanatory Dictionary of the Romanian Language, we will notice that the term *producer* is defined as a person or economic entity that finances the film industry or economic unit that produces material goods. This chapter leaves some question marks, even by the author (p. 47): "To answer this question, I will have to ask his wife". This is an unfortunate expression, considering that in the second chapter, *The Thracian Woman* (p. 48-68) the author develops the subject, in particular, he adds information to what was presented in the previous chapter. It is necessary to mention a terminological deviation. The Latin *tyrs* is misspelled: 'usually wears a tirs [...]'].

The second part entitled, *Revenge* (p. 69-136) is composed of three chapters. The third chapter of this publication, *Praetors* (p. 71-91) deals largely with the socio-political situation in Rome and the first events of the revolt by Spartacus. Unfortunately, from the very first pages read of this chapter I could notice the use of a non-academic term: *sexy* - "And it was sexy." (p. 73). We believe that the author could have used a term more favorable to the situation. Even if we are dealing with a work of popularization of the subject, we believe that the author owed it to himself to remain true to his defining intellectual state. In this regard, we make a few suggestions for replacing this word, which is less felicitous for the context in which it was placed: attractive, tempting, seductive. The statement made by the author at the end of this chapter we consider to be the synthesis of what has been said: 'Rome could get rid of praetors. The rebels needed a leader.' (p. 91). The next two chapters, *The Hangmen* (p. 92-112) and *The*

Stoic (p. 113-136) are the dramatic accounts of this great rebellion initiated by Spartacus. This legendary figure managed to gather an army of about 60,000 soldiers, which, as we can see in these chapters, gains control of the countryside of southern Italy. An interesting aspect discussed interestingly by Barry Strauss is the role played by religion in the support that Spartacus received in his action.

The third part of Barry Strauss's work, entitled *Withdrawal* (p. 137-183) consists of three chapters. Unfortunately, in the sixth chapter, *The Decimator* (p. 139-154) we again notice a departure from the use of academic language: 'they accepted a kick in the butt' (p. 147). In this chapter, as in the next, *The Pirate* (p. 155-168), the author continues the itinerary of the journey of Spartacus and his acolytes, excelling in battle. We also note the author's good documentation through the use of writing as well as archaeological documents. Barry Strauss's travel experience to the places Spartacus once conquered gives him an advantage in his account of these events. The final chapter of this part, *The Fisherman* (p. 169-183) already recounts the decline Spartacus feels in his struggle with Rome. Spartacus's rebel army suffers two great ruptures that will influence the course of events.

The last part of this book, *Until Death* (pp. 185-232), seeks to capture the outcome of the revolt Spartacus started. The three chapters, *Celtic Women* (p. 187-190), *Spartacus* (p. 200-218), and *The Conquerors* (p. 219-231) paint a picture of the man who started one of the greatest and most remarkable revolts in the Empire has ever seen. He defeated Rome's armies nine times, managing to hold the Empire in check for about two years before being defeated by Crassus. Spartacus' great disadvantage was the indiscipline of the army he commanded. They often chose wealth over freedom.

At the end of the work, in the *Conclusion* section (p. 233-246), the author has chosen to set out some considerations on the effects of the Spartacus revolt, considering that these events put an end to the Republic. We also note that the author had the good inspiration to provide a *Glossary of important names* (p. 247-249), which is necessary, from our point of view, when it

comes to specialized work. We also appreciate the section *Notes on bibliographical sources* (p. 251-267), which helps the reader, through historiographical recommendations, in deepening the subject. Barry Strauss's serious documentation of his approach is highlighted by the extensive bibliography (p. 263-280) and *Indexes* (p. 283-290) set out to make his work easier to read, even for the uninitiated.

I am inclined to believe that the purpose of this work has been achieved, so we can only hope that the work by Barry Strauss and translated into Romanian by Dan Crăciun will bring benefits due to those who want to browse this current publication.



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