

## The Servile Wars: Searching for Patterns in the Motivation, Method and Results of Slave Revolts in Ancient Rome

Köle Savaşları: Antik Roma'da Köle İsyanlarının Motivasyonu, Yöntemi ve Sonuçları Bakımından Örüntü Arayışı

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### ÖZ

Antik Roma Cumhuriyeti döneminde, cumhuriyetin sınırları genişledikçe sayıca artan köleler, devlet, toplum ve ekonomi içinde kritik bir rol oynamıştır. Bu araştırma, MÖ 135 ile 71 yılları arasında gerçekleşen ve Köle Savaşları olarak bilinen üç büyük köle ayaklanmasını inceleyerek bu olayların motivasyonları, yöntemleri ve sonuçlarındaki örüntüleri belirlemeyi amaçlamaktadır. Eunus ve Spartaküs gibi önemli figürlerin motivasyonlarını, kölelerin kullandığı stratejileri ve bu eylemlerin daha geniş toplumsal ve siyasi sonuçlarını araştırarak bu çalışma, Roma otoritesine karşı direnişin doğası ve etkisi üzerine yinelenen kalıpları ortaya çıkarmayı hedeflemektedir. Ayrıca, bu köle isyanlarına yönelik antik ve modern tarih yazıcılığında değişen tutumları da gözden geçirmektedir. Özellikle tarihsel anlatıların değerlendirilmesi yoluyla, bu çalışma, köle isyanlarının izole olaylar olduğu yönündeki geleneksel görüşe meydan okuyarak Köle Savaşları'na kapsamlı ve bağlantılı bir anlayış sunmaktadır. Bu analiz ayrıca, bu ayaklanmaların ekonomik sömürü, toplumsal yapılar ve siyasi güç arasındaki karmaşık etkileşimi nasıl yansıttığına dair anlayışa katkıda bulunan içgörüler sunmaktadır.

**Anahtar Kelimeler:** Antik Roma, Eunus, Köle İsyanları, Köle Savaşları, Spartacus.

### ABSTRACT

During the Republican era of Ancient Rome, as the republic's borders expanded, the growing number of slaves played a critical role in the state, society, and economy. This research examines the three major slave uprisings, known as the Servile Wars, which took place between 135 and 71 BCE, aiming to identify patterns in their motivations, methods, and outcomes. By investigating the motivations of key figures like Eunus and Spartacus, the strategies employed by the slaves, and the broader societal and political consequences of their actions, this study seeks to uncover recurring patterns in the nature and impact of resistance against Roman authority. Additionally, it reviews evolving attitudes toward these slave rebellions in both ancient and modern historiography. In particular, through an evaluation of historical narratives, this study challenges the traditional view that slave rebellions were isolated events and presents a comprehensive and interconnected understanding of the Servile Wars. This analysis also offers insights that might contribute to understanding of how these uprisings reflect the complex interplay between economic exploitation, social structures, and political power in Ancient Rome.

**Keywords:** Ancient Rome, Eunus, Slave Rebellions, the Servile Wars, Spartacus.

### Extended Summary

The Servile Wars, three major slave revolts in the Roman Republic from 135 to 71 BCE, highlight the recurring tensions between Rome's reliance on slave labour and the socio-economic conditions

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that perpetuated systemic inequality. As the number of slaves steadily increased, fundamentally altering the economic and social structure of the state since the foundation of the Republic, these uprisings grew in significance. These revolts, collectively termed the First, Second, and Third Servile Wars, reveal patterns in the motivations, strategies, and outcomes of enslaved populations resisting Roman authority. By examining the works of Diodorus Siculus, Appian, Plutarch, and Sallust, alongside with modern historiographical sources, this study first identifies these patterns and then explores the partial interconnectedness of the revolts. Thus, it challenges the traditional perspective that interprets the rebellions as separate and isolated events. Furthermore, this study argues and offers that these incidents were, to some extent, unified expressions of deeper systemic issues in Roman society.

The First Servile War occurred in Sicily between 135-132 BCE, followed around 30 years later by the Second Servile War, also in Sicily, from 104-100 BCE. Both events are primarily documented in Diodorus Siculus' *Bibliotheca Historica*, as he lived only a few generations after these revolts, making his account a key source for this study. In contrast, the Third Servile War, which took place in mainland Italy from 73-71 BCE, is better documented, with detailed accounts found in Appian's *Civil Wars*, Plutarch's *Life of Crassus*, Sallust's *Histories*, and Frontinus' *Stratagems*. These sources allow for a more comprehensive and comparative analysis of this final uprising.

In all three Servile Wars, the main driving forces behind the slaves' uprisings were, unsurprisingly, the brutal treatment they endured from their masters, their oppressive living conditions, relentless exploitation, a thirst for revenge, and, with some speculation, a potential aspiration to end slavery altogether. Rome's expanding borders led to an economy heavily dependent on slaves, primarily sourced from prisoners of war. Many of these newly acquired slaves were forced to work in rural parts of Sicily and southern Italy, particularly on agricultural estates. Moreover, both the legal status of slaves and the harsh Roman punishments—such as physical and sexual abuse, flogging, crucifixion, fighting to the death, and burning alive—fuelled their desire for revenge and influenced the structure of the rebellions. However, except Spartacus, the leader of the Third Servile War, there was no sign of desire like mass freedom or a systemic change to the institution of slavery once and for all.

In terms of methods, patterns emerged both in how the Romans responded to the rebellions and in how the slaves organized and managed them. The slaves adopted and inherited certain Roman political traditions, such as dual leadership—comprising one martial and one cunning leader—declaring kingships, and, in some cases, even donning purple togas as symbols of authority. In contrast, the Romans consistently underestimated new uprisings, initially relying on militias commanded by praetors and later deploying legions led by consuls to suppress them, while employing the same punitive measures. Additionally, the stories of slave leaders across the rebellions shared notable similarities, including prophetic visions and charismatic leadership. Finally, common methodological features of the slave uprisings included strategies for acquiring weapons, capturing and governing cities, and recruiting new soldiers.

The outcomes of the Servile Wars, though ultimately marked by failure for the slaves, had significant consequences for Roman society. The revolts were suppressed with brutal measures, including mass crucifixions and executions, particularly evident after Spartacus's defeat. However, the repeated uprisings may have prompted the Romans to reconsider their treatment of slaves to prevent future rebellions. Later evidence suggests some improvements, such as Columella's recommendations for treating slaves with greater fairness to maintain productivity and stability. Additionally, the practice of manumission seems to have become more frequent, leading to a growing class of freed individuals who gradually integrated into Roman society. Measures like limiting slave groups to fewer than ten workers on estates were also proposed to reduce the risk of rebellion.

In conclusion, the Servile Wars were not isolated incidents of resistance but a unified and general reflection of deep-rooted problems in Roman society. By framing these rebellions as interconnected events rather than singular incidents, this study contributes to a more nuanced understanding of resistance movements in antiquity and their relevance to broader discussions of power, inequality, and social change.

## Introduction

In the annals of ancient history, few events echo with the resonance of the Servile Wars – a series of slave uprisings that reverberated throughout the Roman Republic. Although stories of these quarrels differed, they had many things in common. From the remnants of these events emerge common strategies, motivations, and aftermaths apart from the popular tales of heroism.

This study centres on analysing three notable slave uprisings known as the Servile Wars, which took place from 135 to 71 BCE. It aims to identify common trends in the reasons behind these rebellions, the strategies employed, and the eventual results they yielded. To discern these patterns, this study draws on accounts from ancient historians, including Diodorus Siculus, Appian, Plutarch, Sallust, and Frontinus. As a result, this work employs a comparative historical approach, analysing the narratives of various ancient sources.

The first of this so-called trilogy of slave rebellions is the First Servile War, which took place in Sicily between 135-132 BCE. The Second Servile War followed the first after more or less 30 years, and emerged on the same island between 104-100 BCE. Considering that both of these events are mentioned in ‘Bibliotheca Historica’ of Diodorus Siculus and that he roughly lived a few generations after these events, his work is taken as the main source for these two rebellions in this research. On the other hand, sources about the Third Servile War, which was in mainland Italy between 73-71 BCE, are more abundant. ‘Civil Wars’ of Appian, ‘Life of Crassus’ of Plutarch, ‘Histories’ of Sallust, and ‘Stratagems’ of Frontinus offer a deeper and comparative study of this revolt. Ultimately, considering that there is approximately 30 years between each slave revolt, and that a few chronicles of ancient historians exist, this strengthens the possibility of inherited knowledge between the generations and, eventually, the existence of patterns.

The main purpose of this study is to discuss whether these slave uprising were isolated events, or they were part of a broader purpose and understanding of rebellion, and by exploring these patterns, this study presents the idea of intersection and connection between the motivations, methods, and results of three major slave uprisings known as the Servile Wars during the late-republic era of ancient Rome. This article has two parts. The first part is the stories of the Servile Wars based on chronicles of ancient historians. The second part discusses what kind of connections there are in both modern and ancient sources.

### 1. The Servile Wars

I would like to begin by questioning the conventional view that there were three major slave wars. As we can understand what Livy wrote about the slave uprisings in his work ‘History of Rome’, there were many slave uprisings even before the First Servile War.<sup>1</sup> If the criterion is the length of the source about the uprisings, then one should also question how long Livius wrote about Eunus? The only plausible explanation would be that there is almost no record of a consul arriving to suppress any of the earlier rebellions. However, in this scarcity of the sources, we should not be so certain about the impact of these uprisings. Nevertheless, the first two of these slave rebellions took place on the island of Sicily and the third in the heart of the Roman Republic, on the Italian peninsula.

#### 1.1 The First Servile War

<sup>1</sup> Some examples of slave revolts before the Servile Wars include: Liv. 32.26.4-18; 33.36.1-3; 39.29.7-9; 39.41.6-7; 40.19.9-10; see further, Shaw, Spartacus and the Slave Wars, 69-79.

Although the starting date of this revolt has been interpreted as 141 BCE by Urbainczyk, I will not take this date as a starting point because there is no certain information and so, any year between 141 BCE and 135 BCE, generally accepted date, can be the starting point.<sup>2</sup> In *Slave Revolts in Antiquity*, Urbainczyk claims that the beginning of the First Servile War was 141 BCE as Diodorus states that ‘When the affairs of Sicily, after the overthrow of Carthage, had remained successful and prosperous for the space of sixty years, at length war with the slaves broke out...’<sup>3</sup> Although Diodorus does not mention a specific date, Urbainczyk assumes that Diodorus’ account refers to this date if we consider that ‘overthrow of Carthage’ as 201 BCE.<sup>4</sup> With a similar attitude and approach, it can also be claimed that the revolt occurred in 134 BCE as it is firstly mentioned by Julius Obsequens.<sup>5</sup> However, as Diodorus notes, after the conquest of Sicily as a result of the Punic Wars, people had lived in wealth and prosperity for about 60 years. Yet, the time of peace and prosperity led to purchase of large quantities of slaves, who were driven from their homeland. As the abundance of slaves in number allowed low-cost labour, masters did neglect to provide the essential amount of food and clothes for the slaves, and the harsh treatment accompanied to all these omissions. As a result, actions of slaves in violence inevitably showed itself in robbery, banditry, and murder in order to obtain what their masters did not provide. According to Siculus, although the governors tried to suppress them, they could not dare as masters of the slaves were rich and powerful. On the other hand, since the most landowners in Sicily were *equites*, they had judiciary powers, which basically meant that charges against them were quickly dismissed, but accusations against governors were judged by them. Therefore, the governors were forced to ignore all the crimes. As Siculus notes, when slaves were sickened with exposure, malnutrition and corporal punishment, they began to band together to make plans to gain their freedom, and somehow, they managed to break free.<sup>6</sup>

Before the uprising, slaves went to the Eunus, who would become the leader of the slave movement, to ask whether they could be successful or not. When Eunus’ words had come true, he became the leader of the slaves, and Diodorus Siculus mentions and introduces him and reasons behind his leadership:

*...There was a Syrian, born in the city of Apameia, who was a slave of Antigenes of Enna, and he was a magician and conjuror; he pretended to foretell future events, revealed to him (as he said) by the gods in his dreams, and deceived many by this kind of practice... And though these were tricks that he played, yet by chance many of the things afterwards proved true. The predictions that were not fulfilled were ignored, but those which did come to pass were everywhere applauded... By some artifice or other, he used to breath flames of fire out of his mouth as from a burning lamp... There was one Damophilus of Enna, a man of great wealth, but of a proud and haughty disposition. This man above all measure was cruel and severe to his slaves... The slaves, who had been so cruelly used, were enraged by this like wild beasts, and plotted together to rise in arms and cut the throats of their masters. To this end they consulted Eunus, and asked him whether the gods would give them success in their designs. He encouraged them and declared that they would prosper in their enterprise... four hundred slaves, at the first opportunity they suddenly armed themselves and broke into the city of Enna, led by their captain Eunus...’<sup>7</sup>*

As the variety of contemporary records about the First Servile War lacks, comparison is quite difficult for what Diodorus Siculus wrote. On the other hand, both his approach and narration

<sup>2</sup> For further information about Urbainczyk’s claim of specific starting date for the First Servile War: Theresa Urbainczyk, *Slave Revolts in Antiquity* (London: Acumen, 2008; reprint, New York: Routledge, 2016), 10.

<sup>3</sup> Diod. Sic., 34/35, 2.

<sup>4</sup> Urbainczyk, *Slave Revolts in Antiquity*, 10.

<sup>5</sup> Julius Obsequens, sec. 27.

<sup>6</sup> Diod. Sic., 34/35.2.1–4.

<sup>7</sup> Diod. Sic., 34/35.2.5–11.

show the Roman masters as reason of the rebellion. Yet, it is obvious that he had no intention to romanticize the rebellion, instead mentioned many cruel acts committed by the slaves.

Before the slave rebellion, Eunus told that, even to his master, he had seen the Syrian Goddess, and had been told that he would reign. He even talked about how would his future reign be as a king as Siculus noted. Although Eunus said that he would treat everyone well, the extent of cruelty was immeasurable once the uprising was successful. Eunus and his man assembled at theatre since, probably, they had determined it as the main building. Once Eunus was determined as the king, he started to rule with absolute power. However, an assembly was also called, and as a Syrian, Eunus called himself Antiochus, which was a famous name of a Seleucid king. With the assembly, the appointment of advisors occurred, and bronze coin minted by Eunus under the name Antiochus.<sup>8</sup>

In the meantime, another slave named Cleon, who was Cilician, also led to another uprising in the island of Sicily. However, Siculus notes that Romans started to hope a conflict between two of rebel leaders, but Cleon decided to join forces with his five thousand men. Therefore, dual-leadership was implied. Interestingly, Siculus mentions the arrival of Roman troops on the island in small numbers. At that point, either Romans did not pay enough attention or Siculus may have been wrong about the numbers. Also, Siculus notes that after the victory against Roman troops, slave numbers quickly increased up to two hundred thousand, Siculus clearly exaggerated the number here. However, after victories against Romans and capturing many cities in Sicily, other slave uprisings occurred in Delos and Attica. Yet, these uprising were small in number and quickly suppressed. This spread of uprisings also indicates both the popularism and effectiveness of these events in Sicily. While Diodorus' account does not provide much about these other rebellions, much later Paulus Orosius provides relatively more data.<sup>9</sup>

*... the contagion of the Slave War that had arisen in Sicily infected many provinces far and wide. At Minturnae, the Romans crucified five hundred slaves, and at Sinuessa, ... about four thousand slaves. In the mines of the Athenians, the praetor Heraclitus broke up a slave uprising of like character. At Delos, citizens, anticipating the movement, crushed the slaves when they arose in another rebellion. These riots ... represented but additional sparks which, set ablaze by that trouble in Sicily, leaped forth and started all these different fires.<sup>10</sup>*

From what Orosius has written, it can also be seen that the revolt in Sicily sparked a sequence of uprisings in addition to those in Attica and Delos.<sup>11</sup> Furthermore, Diodorus also makes direct connection between the rebellion in Sicily and Pergamum. However, Keith Bradley claims that, but offers no evidence on his claim, both Orosius' and Diodorus' accounts are not credible, and the revolts were separated events rather than connected.<sup>12</sup> But as Joseph Vogt points out in his work 'Ancient Slavery and the Ideal of Man', slaves were generally central to the transmission of news in ancient society. If we accept Vogt's statement that slaves had role in communications network, then the possibility of some sort of connection between these rebellions becomes a distinct possibility.<sup>13</sup>

Until the Consul Rupilius recaptured Tauromenium, the slaves seemed to be advantageous. Siculus mentioned the siege of Tauromenium with the detail of cannibalism due to extreme famine conditions of defenders under siege. And, finally one of the slaves betrayed because of hard conditions under siege. After retaking Tauromenium, Rupilius besieged and

<sup>8</sup> Syrian Goddess: Diod. Sic., 34/35.2.7. Future reign: Diod. Sic., 34/35.2.8. Cruelty: Diod. Sic., 34/35.2.11-12. Theatre: Diod. Sic., 34/35.2.14-15. King: Diod. Sic., 34/35.2.14. Antiochus: Diod. Sic., 34/35.2.24.

<sup>9</sup> Diod. Sic., 34/35.2.17-19.

<sup>10</sup> Oros., 5A.9, 4-5.

<sup>11</sup> Diod. Sic., 34/35.2.26.

<sup>12</sup> Keith R. Bradley, *Slavery and Rebellion in the Roman World, 140-70 BC* (Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 1989), 73.

<sup>13</sup> Joseph Vogt, *Ancient Slavery and the Ideal of Man*, trans. Thomas Wiedemann (Oxford: Basil Blackwell, 1974), 88.

captured Enna, where Cleon lost his life while Eunus escaped. Eunus was followed until mountains and captured in a cave, later he died because of illness.<sup>14</sup>

## 1.2 The Second Servile War

Although there had been many uprisings, including Nuceria and Capua, after the First Servile War, the Second Servile War, which we again heavily rely on narrative of Diodorus Siculus, had relatively more impact. The Romans were having difficult times as they had suffered in their wars against the Gauls and Cimbrians. Before the uprising in Sicily, the Italian peninsula faced with couple small scale revolts. Although the one Nuceria and Capua were small in numbers and effectiveness, the third one had an interesting story: the love story of Titus Minutius to one of his slaves. In short, he tried to avoid the potential conflict due to his budget deficit by encouraging his own slaves to rebel. With his crown and purple cape, he declared himself king, and led to the uprising. Despite the fact that Roman senate managed to suppress the revolt with a small number of soldiers that they had sent, this story was like a rehearsal for what would happen in the Sicily again.<sup>15</sup>

The Second Servile War occurred, as conventionally agreed, between 104-100 BCE, approximately 30 years after its predecessor on the same island. Again, Diodorus Siculus provides insights into this uprising and is quite helpful for the purpose of this article as his work makes it possible to compare the two events. According to Siculus, story continues as it follows. As part of Marius's campaign against the Cimbri, the senate authorized him to recruit soldiers from overseas regions. To fulfil this, Marius sent envoys to Nicomedes, the king of Bithynia, requesting auxiliary troops. However, Nicomedes responded that the majority of the Bithynians had been enslaved by tax collectors and dispersed across the provinces. After this respond, the senate decided that no free citizen of any province allied to Rome could be forced into slavery, and that the praetorians would take measures to ensure their release. With the declaration of this decision, the praetor in Sicily, Licinius Nerva, liberated too many slaves that in the following days eight hundred slaves were set free. This ignited the sparkle of the idea of freedom within slaves. Furthermore, as the prominent Sicilians approached to the praetor with the complaints about setting the slaves free, Licinius Nerva immediately stopped the liberation process. Yet, eventually slaves gathered in the countryside and planned the uprising.<sup>16</sup>

With the uprising of 80 slaves in near to Heraclea, and the late reaction of Nerva caused to the start of the Second Servile War as these 80 slaves grow in number up to two thousand in couple days. Once they defeated Marcus Titinius and his 600 soldiers and declaring that they would not kill the ones who laid down arms, the slaves got access to a lot of weapons, which ultimately led to increase in their number.<sup>17</sup> Diodorus Siculus mentioned their selection of leader: ‘...They now called an assembly, and held a debate; in the first place they chose a king called Salvius, who was reputed to be a fortune-teller, and one who played the flute wildly in the women's entertainments...’<sup>18</sup>

As it seems about their leader Salvius, he had similar abilities with Eunus. Both became leaders for their groups due to their divine and prophetic visions in addition to their cunning skills. Lately, slaves arranged attacks on Morgantina, and managed to beat another Roman army of ten thousand men.<sup>19</sup>

After all this, the slaves in Segesta and Lilybaeum revolted under the lead of Athenion, a brave Cilician man with divine talents as Siculus noted. He differed from his fellows as he did not accept everyone who wanted to join his forces. He desired that everyone who lacks physical

<sup>14</sup> Diod. Sic., 34/35.2.20–23.

<sup>15</sup> Gauls: Diod. Sic., 36.1.: Nuceria, Capua and the love story of Titus Minutius: Diod. Sic., 36.2.1–4.

<sup>16</sup> Diod. Sic., 36.3.

<sup>17</sup> Diod. Sic., 36.4.1–3.

<sup>18</sup> Diod. Sic., 36.4.4.

<sup>19</sup> Diod. Sic., 36.4.4–8.

requirement to be a soldier must continue to work on their own profession. By this means, he ensured to provide supply to his army. Siculus also emphasized the way of his legitimacy and title, since he was called king and put a crown to his head like other slave leaders.<sup>20</sup>

At the same time, Salvius declared himself king under the name of King Tryphon of Seleucid. Considering the time between the two Servile Wars, almost everything about the leaders of the First Servile War was succeeded by the Salvius and Athenion. At that point, either Diodorus Siculus wanted to tie the story of the Servile Wars together, or the fame of the story of the First Servile War had been passed down from generation to generation. The only missing pattern was also shown itself when these two kings got together and merged their powers: the dual-leadership. The fact that Athenion and Cleon served as commander and second ruler may indicate the potential for slaves to inherit Roman politics. Once, they came together, the slave army besieged and captured Triocala. Diodorus Siculus notes the importance and change in the politics with the conquest of Triocala:<sup>21</sup>

*... After he had built a city wall of eight stades round about it, and had surrounded it with a deep trench, he made it the his royal capital... He likewise built there a stately palace and an agora... He chose a suitable number of the most prudent men to be his councillors, and used them as his advisers. Moreover, whenever he was conducting business, he put on a toga, edged with purple, and a wide-bordered chiton...<sup>22</sup>*

Deciding to settle a city, and making it capital by constructing different buildings, and conducting business with a purple toga have remained unique to the Salvius and story. There was no such example of this kind of governance among the slave rebellions. Furthermore, emphasis on the purple toga had distinctive effect in the traditions of Roman Republic. Romans were quite allergic to the tyranny or a rule of one man, and probably intentionally, Salvius wanted to declare himself king not only of the slaves, but also of the Romans.

After all this failure of the Romans, the senate sent Lucius Licinius Lucullus as the commander of seventeen thousand soldiers. As Lucullus entered to the fields of Sicily, Salvius paid attention to the words of Athenion, and went out the city to fight in a pitched battle with a force of forty thousand men, as Siculus claimed. While the battle was continuing, Athenion was injured and the soldiers were discouraged as they thought Athenion had been killed. Even though, Athenion hid until everyone had moved away, the Romans were victorious.<sup>23</sup>

However, the Romans could not recapture the Triocala, and both Lucullus and his appointed successor in command, Gaius Servilius, was charged due to corruption. In the meantime, Tryphon died and was succeeded by Athenion as king of the rebels. The next year, Gaius Marius was elected consul in Rome for the fifth time, with Gaius Aquilius serving alongside him. Aquilius was appointed as the general to lead the fight against the rebels, and through his own courage, he achieved a significant victory over them in a major battle. Athenion was killed in the battle and some of the remaining slaves committed suicide, and the other were put to death. Thus, this defeat marked the end of the Second Servile War.<sup>24</sup>

### 1.3 The Third Servile War

The Third Servile War was the final and relatively most significant of the slave revolts. Unlike earlier uprisings, this one posed a direct threat to the heart of the Roman Republic, with Spartacus and his forces causing widespread fear across mainland Italy for three years between 73-71 BCE. The war had far-reaching and lasting impacts, solidifying Spartacus as a symbol for revolutionaries throughout history. It also served as a stepping stone for the political careers of

<sup>20</sup> Diod. Sic., 36.5.

<sup>21</sup> Diod. Sic., 36.7.1–2.

<sup>22</sup> Diod. Sic., 36.7.3–4.

<sup>23</sup> Diod. Sic., 36.8.1–4.

<sup>24</sup> Corruption: Diod. Sic., 36.8.5. Death of Tryphon: Diod. Sic., 36.9.1. Major battle: Diod. Sic., 36.10.

several key Roman figures, who would later play a role in the Republic's downfall and the emergence of the Roman Empire. In terms of historiography, there are more sources about the Third Servile War. Therefore, such sources like 'Civil Wars' of Appian, 'Life of Crassus' of Plutarch, 'Histories' of Sallust, and 'Stratagems' of Frontinus offer a comparative study of this revolt.

The first two Servile Wars had been centred in Sicily, where there was a large population of oppressed slaves. However, this issue was not confined to Sicily, as it was widespread across Magna Graecia, including southern Italy. Thousands of these slaves were assigned to work on latifundia, large agricultural estates, while many others, especially those with military backgrounds, were sent to gladiator schools to be trained for combat in the Roman games.<sup>25</sup>

The early phases of the revolt were put into writings, relatively in detail, by Appian and Plutarch. As they were Roman citizens, their approach to the slave rebellion might be considered as more biased. However, their works provide crucial insights. Slaves in the Third Servile War were under the leadership of Spartacus, who was a Thracian gladiator that served as a former auxiliary in the Roman army according to Appian. His path to leadership involved both cunning and martial abilities. Appian's emphasis on the beginning of the uprising was mainly that it was Spartacus who convinced the other gladiators to break free. Appian noted the state reaction of Romans to the uprising as:

*...Varinius Glaber was first sent against him and afterwards Publius Valerius, not with regular armies, but with forces picked up in haste and at random, for the Romans did not consider this a war yet, but a raid, something like an attack of robbery. They attacked Spartacus and were beaten. Spartacus even captured the horse of Varinius; so narrowly did the very general of the Romans escape being captured by a gladiator.<sup>26</sup>*

As it seems the Romans were underestimating the rebels. Although it might be seen as the Romans had been underestimating the situation by sending Praetors with militias or garrison soldiers in the previous slave rebellions, it was also more expensive to bring legions. However, the intention or the approach of Appian must be questioned.

Apart from the previous slave rebellions, direct dualism in the leadership lacks in this slave uprising, instead Plutarch notes that they chose three leaders after breaking free:

*...Lentulus Batiatus had a school of gladiators at Capua, most of whom were Gauls and Thracians. Through no misconduct of theirs, but owing to the injustice of their owner, they were kept in close confinement and reserved for gladiatorial combats. Two hundred of these planned to make their escape... Then they took up a strong position and elected three leaders. The first of these was Spartacus... ...possessed not only of great courage and strength, but also in sagacity and culture superior to his fortune, and more Hellenic than Thracian... A serpent was seen coiled about his face as he slept, and his wife, who was of the same tribe as Spartacus, a prophetess, and subject to visitations of the Dionysiac frenzy, declared it the sign of a great and formidable power which would attend him to a fortunate issue...<sup>27</sup>*

As seen in the quotation above, there was still a sense of divinity and prophecies within the story. Thus, as there had been in the first two Servile Wars, things believed to be sacred or divine were dedicated to these slave leaders, and whether by design or coincidence, this practice

<sup>25</sup> Latifundia: Brent D. Shaw, ed., *Spartacus and the Slave Wars: A Brief History with Documents*, The Bedford Series in History and Culture (New York: Palgrave Macmillan, 2001), 10; gladiator schools: 41.

<sup>26</sup> App., 1.14.116.

<sup>27</sup> Plut., 8.1–3.



likely helped reinforce the legitimacy that was crucial for the rebel leaders to maintain their authority.

Plutarch also provides details about the Mount Vesuvius matter. After Glaber arrives, slave army was on Mount Vesuvius. Glaber was reluctant to confront a well-trained force in such a fortified position, so he decided to block the only path leading up the mountain, hoping to compel Spartacus to surrender. However, Spartacus demonstrated his cleverness as a leader. Using the vines and trees nearby, his forces crafted long ladders and ropes, enabling them to quietly descend the steep sides of the mountain. They swiftly circled around its base and launched a surprise attack on Glaber's men from behind. After victory against Glaber, Varinius and his troops arrived, yet they were also defeated.<sup>28</sup> Appian emphasised that Spartacus even captured the horse of Varinius, and the slave army grew in numbers up to seventy thousand.<sup>29</sup> In this process, Sallust mentioned many of the slaves' cruel actions.<sup>30</sup>

However, from this point on the story of Spartacus and the slave army began to differ according to Plutarch and Appian, for some unknown reasons. According to Appian, there was a split in paths between Spartacus and Crixus. Spartacus desired to cross the Alps and leaving the borders of the Republic, and Crixus wanted to keep plundering in mainland Italy. Consul Gellius defeated Crixus, started to follow Spartacus, on the way of the Alps. Spartacus' path was blocked by Consul Lentulus. Spartacus defeats Lentulus and went back to defeat Gellius. According to Appian Spartacus changed his mind and marched on Rome.<sup>31</sup>

In contrast, according to Plutarch after the Spartacus and Crixus parted ways, and Crixus was defeated by Gellius, Spartacus defeated Lentulus and then Cassius, the governor of Cisalpine Gaul confronted him. Spartacus was victorious again. However, even though Spartacus wanted to cross the Alps, his men did not share the same desire as they were too confident; thus, Spartacus moved south.<sup>32</sup>

At the end, senate chose Crassus to defeat Spartacus and he immediately took position in Picenum. While waiting for an attack from Spartacus, Crassus sent his legate, Mummius, with two legions, instructing him to take a roundabout path and track the enemy, but under strict orders not to engage in battle or even skirmish. Despite these orders, Mummius seized the first favorable moment to attack, resulting in his defeat. Thus, when Mummius joined Crassus' forces, Crassus punished the soldiers who first fled to maintain the authority with the decimation.<sup>33</sup>

Spartacus decided not to engage in a direct conflict with Crassus, instead heading south and attempting to make deals with Cilician pirates, but the pirates betrayed Spartacus and his intentions to stimulate slave movements in Sicily failed. As a result, Spartacus stayed in Rhegium, and Crassus gave the order to construct a wall with the purpose of starvation for the enemies. Spartacus and his men were trapped, and waited for a snowy night. When the night came, the slaves filled the ditch with earth and escaped. Spartacus marched north but with the arrival of Pompey and Lucullus, Spartacus understood that he had nowhere to go. Eventually, the slaves took up the battle formation against the Crassus' army. Both Plutarch and Appian noted that Spartacus was killed in the battlefield, and this battle also marked the end of the Third Servile War.<sup>34</sup>

## 2. Seeking Patterns in Other Sources

<sup>28</sup> Plut., 9.1–5.

<sup>29</sup> App., 1.14.116.

<sup>30</sup> Sall., 3.66.

<sup>31</sup> App., 1.14.117.

<sup>32</sup> Plut., 9.5–7.

<sup>33</sup> See in general, Plut., 10.1–3; see also, App., 1.14.118.

<sup>34</sup> Cilician pirates: Plut., 10.3–4. Construction of the wall: Plut., 10.4–6. Pompey and Lucullus: Plut., 11.2. For detailed information about the last battle between Spartacus and Crassus see: Plut., 11.5–7. For another narrative of the story see also, App., 1.14.118, 119, 120.

In order to understand the motivation of the revolts, both the importation and conditions of slaves and the latifundia farming system should be examined deeply. Keith Bradley's 'Slavery and Society at Rome' provides crucial explanation to these uprisings. Throughout his book, Bradley connects the revolts with especially several systematic problems: the overreliance on slave labour, economic displacement of free poor, and the brutal conditions imposed on the enslaved population. Firstly, Bradley states that the Romans supplied slaves through prisoners of war, slave borns (*vernae*), infant exposure, trade and piracy. Among them, prisoners of war constituted the majority, but the means of supplying slaves alternated.<sup>35</sup> For example, Cicero provides insights for the slaves as means of purchase.<sup>36</sup> With the increase in the number of slaves, Keith Bradley argues that between the 1st century BCE and the 1st century AD, Roman Italy was a slave society as the slaves represented a large part of society and the economy. Therefore, the Romans divided slaves into two categories for legal purposes: the *familia rustica* (rural slaves) and the *familia urbana* (urban slaves).<sup>37</sup> This classification by the Romans was mainly to define the responsibilities of the slaves on a daily basis. However, the responsibilities of slaves in these categories could vary based on the preferences of their owners. Still, this categorization might be helpful in understanding the involvement and effectiveness of slaves from any category on slave uprisings.

As for the matter of agricultural estates, Keith Hopkins' and Brent D. Shaw's explanations are quite sufficient. As Keith Hopkins notes, based on what Livy had written, after the second war with Carthage, a lot of farming land in Italy was up for sale and as the men of high status had provided money in the time of crisis, they demanded it back from the state. Thus, government paid it back by distributing lands as it lacked cash. Moreover, he claims that this kind of process was continuing in the first century BCE as well.<sup>38</sup> With this reference, it can be easily said that existence of these farming estates was a valid reason that led to all three Servile Wars. Furthermore, Shaw explains that this new latifundia system focused on producing surplus crops to support the luxurious lifestyles of Roman and Italian aristocrats, including the political elite in Rome and wealthy figures in cities like Capua, Pompeii, and Sicily. There were two types of latifundia slaves: first was the ones who cultivated lands for agricultural products, and the other were basically herdsman (*pastores*). The first type slaves were kept in quarters called 'work barracks' at night and forced to work under close supervision. The herdsmen were allowed to carry weapons in order to protect the herd and to move freely with the herds. Also, there were administrative slaves, such as farm managers, who had some sort of authority in the farming estates.<sup>39</sup>

These rights of herdsman deserve to be paid attention as it creates a pattern on the methodological side of the slave wars. Despite the fact that they were the ones who probably suffered most, their allowance to carry weapons, and their nature and physical status made them prominent figures in the slave armies.<sup>40</sup> For their physical condition, Varro provides details in his *De Re Rustica* (On Agriculture):

*...The men chosen for this work should be of a sturdy sort, swift, nimble, with supple limbs; men who can not only follow the herd but can also protect it from beasts and robbers, who can lift loads to the backs of pack animals, who can dash out, and who can hurl the javelin...*<sup>41</sup>

<sup>35</sup> Means of supplying slaves: see in general, Keith Bradley, *Slavery and Society at Rome* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1994), 31–39.

<sup>36</sup> Cic., sec. 24.

<sup>37</sup> Slave society: Bradley, *Slavery and Society at Rome*, 30; rural and urban slaves: 58.

<sup>38</sup> Keith Hopkins, *Conquerors and Slaves*, vol. 1 of *Sociological Studies in Roman History* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1978), 56.

<sup>39</sup> Shaw, *Spartacus and the Slave Wars*, 10–11.

<sup>40</sup> Shaw, *Spartacus and the Slave Wars*, 35.

<sup>41</sup> Varro, *Rus.* 2.10.3.

It is not a surprising fact that shepherds later became prominent figures in the slave armies. Moreover, as if to prove Shaw's claim, Florus tells that Athenion was also a shepherd in his 'Epitome of Roman History': '... A shepherd, Athenion, having murdered his master, released the slaves from their prison and formed them into an organized force...'<sup>42</sup>

From another point, considering that the slave importation increased due to the wars, and farming estates were built, Hopkins states the amounts of poor Italians migrated to the cities as nearly 50 percent. And, so, reason of the slave rebellions relied on the changing patterns of land ownership. Hopkins claims that this migration of the free poor from rural places to the city and to the army resulted in chaos during the late Republic.<sup>43</sup> Probably because of these reasons, some of the free poor joined to the rebel forces in the rebellions. And for the same reasons again, Bradley argues that it would be wrong to say that slaves were an entirely worse-off class.<sup>44</sup>

Another point on the motivation of the slaves is the issue of rights and privileges of slavery as a social institution. As a starting point, Bradley states that 'slaves could claim no human rights or privileges of any kind. By definition slaves were kinless and were permitted no legally sanctioned familial bonds. Nor could they own property of any kind.'<sup>45</sup> This perception might have meant nothing to those born into slavery, but to prisoners of war it probably meant humiliation for once being free. Bradley also states, according to what Galen written in 'On the Passions and Errors of the Soul', it was not inappropriate to mistreat a slave, it was simply to do so in a reckless and undisciplined manner. Thus, it was common for slaves to be punched, kicked, and had their eyes gouged out.<sup>46</sup> However, this was not always the case; punishments inflicted on slaves included physical and sexual abuse, flogging, crucifixion, fighting to the death, and burning alive. This explains the Roman mentality towards slaves. They were treated and viewed as animals. In Roman law, the sale of a slave was equivalent to the sale of an animal. Moreover, their foods were '*cibaria*' which meant most of all lower grade bread, and they accommodate in some sort of cells.<sup>47</sup> All these might also explain the meanings of slaves in the eyes of the Romans when it is attached to the to what has Athenaeus wrote in his work 'Deipnosophistae': '... But every Roman... owns an infinite number of slaves ... not to bring in revenue ... but the majority of Romans have the largest numbers to accompany them when they go out. ...'<sup>48</sup>

So, this either suggests that the Romans kept slaves with them when they travelled to protect themselves, or that the number of slaves accompanying them indicated high status and prestige.

Finally, the last thing worth mentioning for the motivation of the slaves is that whether or not the slaves had the intention and idea of abolishing slavery or creating a new social system when they rebelled. Most historians of ancient slavery claims that there was no such idea and concept in the mind of the slaves. For example, although Vogt highlights severe mistreatment and exploitation of slaves as the causes of Ancient Slave Wars throughout his book, he states that causes of revolts were not because of seeking a new social doctrine. Hopkins also claims that abolition of slavery was no possibility. Keith Bradley, too, emphasises the impossibility of a social revolution and claims that the actions of slaves were individualistic both in his works. However,

<sup>42</sup> Flor., 2.7.9.

<sup>43</sup> Migration: Hopkins, *Conquerors and Slaves*, 66; chaos: 50.

<sup>44</sup> Bradley, *Slavery and Society at Rome*, 90–92.

<sup>45</sup> Bradley, *Slavery and Society at Rome*, 27.

<sup>46</sup> *Ibid.*, 28.

<sup>47</sup> Punishments: see in detail, Bradley, *Slavery and Society at Rome*, 107–114; Mentality: 123; Sale of a slave: also for the status of slaves, see in detail 50–55; *cibaria*: living standards of slaves in general, see in detail 81–85.

<sup>48</sup> Ath. 6.272.d-f.

Urbainczyk speaks of an opportunity for revolution, even if the uprisings did not begin exactly for this reason. He emphasizes that we cannot know how these uprisings will play out.<sup>49</sup>

In order to identify the patterns in the methods of uprisings, a few more events and works needs to be examined. Apart from the herdsman role, as mentioned above, in the function of a rebellion, the role of prisoners of war also deserves to be underlined. Urbainczyk's argument clarifies the model that since they had been once soldiers, they had more experience in forming and leading armies.<sup>50</sup>

Another point is that the usage of names of Seleucid kings. This might be explained easily at first sight as the slave leaders in the first two Servile Wars were Syrians. The conventional assumption is that as these were the names of the famous kings, they were used by the Syrian slave leaders. However, Urbainczyk assumes that as leaders of the revolts were Syrians, these names might have been their free names. Because these names were so popular among Syrians.<sup>51</sup>

Finally, as for the patterns in the outcomes of these slave wars, various interpretations can be made based on some other sources. Although Bradley notes that it would be anachronistic to think of slavery conditions as liberalized in the modern context, there may have been relatively minor improvements in the conditions of slaves in later periods.<sup>52</sup> Some parts of Columella's 'De Re Rustica' might be given as an example:

*...when I perceived that their unending toil was lightened by such friendliness on the part of the master, I would even jest with them at times and allow them also to jest more freely... Furthermore, I observe that they are more willing to set about a piece of work on which they think that their opinions have been asked and their advice followed<sup>53</sup>*

Although Columella's attitudes towards his slaves are of a later period, it may raise the question of whether these behaviours can be considered as a result of the slaves' revolt for their rights. Moreover, Columella offers a much more definitive explanation on the operation of farming estates to prevent the slaves from rebelling:

*... squads should be formed, not to exceed ten men each ... because that limited number was most conveniently guarded while at work, and the size was not disconcerting to the person in charge as he led the way. Therefore, if the field is of considerable extent, such squads should be distributed over sections of it and the work should be so apportioned that men will not be by ones or twos, because they are not easily watched when scattered; and yet they should number no more than ten, lest, on the other hand, when the band is too large, each individual may think that the work does not concern him.<sup>54</sup>*

Since there were many slave rebellions in the late Republic period, the Romans may have wanted to prevent further such rebellions. But we have no evidence to support our thoughts on what Columella wrote. However, frequency of the freed people and their later socio-economic status seems to have increased over time as exemplified by Hopkins in the tombstones. But why did the Romans free that much slaves? Apart from interpretation of historians as softening the harsh system, Hopkins argues that the slaves often might have earned enough money to pay the cost of

<sup>49</sup> Vogt, *Ancient Slavery and the Ideal of Man*, 39–41; Hopkins, *Conquerors and Slaves*, 120; Bradley, *Slavery and Society at Rome*, 72, 110–111; Bradley, *Slavery and Rebellion in the Roman World*, 103, 126; Urbainczyk, *Slave Revolts in Antiquity*, 78–80.

<sup>50</sup> Urbainczyk, *Slave Revolts in Antiquity*, 7–8.

<sup>51</sup> Urbainczyk, *Slave Revolts in Antiquity*, 58.

<sup>52</sup> Bradley, *Slavery and Society at Rome*, 173.

<sup>53</sup> Columella, *Rust.*, 1.8.15.

<sup>54</sup> Columella, *Rust.*, 1.9.7–8.

manumission. Yet, one must be said that all these cannot go beyond some sort of claims or speculations because of the scarcity and shortness of the sources.<sup>55</sup>

## Conclusion

This study of the Servile Wars, based on the works of both ancient and modern writers, explored whether consistent patterns could be identified in the motivations, strategies, and outcomes of these revolts, while also shedding light on changing historical perspectives toward the uprisings.

In terms of motivation, in all three of the Servile Wars, the primary motivations of the slaves were undoubtedly - and naturally - the harsh treatment they had received from their masters, oppressive living conditions, exploitation, desire for revenge, and, perhaps with a bit of speculative interpretation, the desire to abolish slavery. It is important to note that both the Roman mentality towards slaves and the ways of punishment - such as physical and sexual abuse, flogging, crucifixion, fighting to the death and burning alive - not only heightened the slaves' motivation but also shaped the identity of the revolts. The extreme conditions, especially in the large farming estates called latifundia, occurred as the key factor, particularly in Magna Graecia. Although the attitude and the focus of the ancient historians differed in their works, they all agreed on the importance of the slave motivation. However, in the Third Servile War, Spartacus became prominent as he differed in motivation from the any other slave leader in all three Servile Wars. According to the narratives of ancient historians, he was the only leader who did not prioritize plundering and revenge in Italy, instead he desired to leave the borders of Republic by crossing the Alps.

In terms of method, similarities and patterns varied, especially between the first two Servile Wars. For the slaves, features and the stories of the slave leaders had similarities. For example, leaders of the first two Servile War had almost same stories. Both Eunus and Salvius, who were the primary leaders of their revolts, declared themselves kings, and used the name of Seleucid emperors. In the first two Servile War, there was also dualism in leadership, which might have been adopted from the Romans. While one of the leaders became prominent with his cunning skills, the other shined with his martial abilities. In addition, including Spartacus to Eunus and Salvius, all three symbolized the cunning leader, and all of them took their legitimacy mainly based on divine and prophetic visions or stories. It seems to appear that Eunus had a socially lasting impact in Sicily, which means Salvius somehow copied Eunus or took him as an idol. On the other hand, Cleon had similarities with Athenion. Both were prominent military leaders, and they both served as the commander in second in their revolts.

In contrast, Romans also had a pattern in their approach and methods towards slave rebellions. As Appian noted, Romans underestimated any new rebellion.<sup>56</sup> The Senate always tried to suppress rebellions with militias or garrison troops under the command of a Praetor as they hesitated to undertake the financial costs of professional troops. Moreover, whenever couple of cities were plundered, the senate naturally appointed one of its consuls to suppress the rebellion with legions. In addition, the ways of punishing rebels – such as crucifixion – and the ways of supplying slaves – such as prisoners of war, slave borns, infant exposure, trade and piracy – can also be considered as pattern.

Moreover, slaves and their leaders had both similar and distinctive actions during their process of rebellion. For example, in all three of the Servile Wars, slaves found their weapons due to the declaration of showing mercy to the Roman soldiers who laid down arms. Moreover, slaves past had an impact in their role, such as herdsman leadership or effectiveness of prisoners of war. Also, in the first two Servile Wars, in addition to forming assemblies, kings, Eunus and Salvius, had their crowns and Salvius even had his purple toga, probably because of his vision that he

<sup>55</sup> Tombstones: Hopkins, *Conquerors and Slaves*, 115-116; manumission: 118.

<sup>56</sup> App., 1.14.116.

considered himself as the king of both slaves and the Romans. Finally, slaves had some common ways to develop the rebellion process, such as trying to increase their numbers by liberating slaves as a result of plundering the cities or farming estates.

In terms of results, while the rebelling slaves suffered the same fate, it can be argued from later sources that the Romans made some improvements for the conditions of slaves and took precautions to avoid further rebellions. After each revolt, the slaves either went back to the servitude or executed. On the Romans' side, the practice of manumission may have become more frequent, as the number of freed people appears to have increased over time. Lastly, new measures were suggested to prevent further rebellions on farming estates, such as limiting slave groups to no more than ten men.

All in all, through this small-scale comparative study, we gain a deeper understanding on the idea that the Servile Wars were not isolated incidents. Despite the differences in the approaches of ancient historians to the slave rebellions, influenced by their subjective opinions, a careful examination of the primary sources and the short time period between each revolt show that the Servile Wars were part of a broader pattern of resistance against the systemic inequalities of the Roman Republic.

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