



0. CRUCIFIXION AS ROMAN PUNISHMENT - Story Preface

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During the “Third Servile War” (also known as the “Gladiator War”), Spartacus—a gladiator likely born in Thrace (today’s Balkan region) who was sold into slavery and spent time at the gladiator training school in Capua—led a rebellion against Rome. At the height of the resistance movement, Spartacus had about 120,000 people with him (although the number of actual combatants isn’t known). Spartacus died in battle, but around 6,000 of his men who survived the various battles were condemned to die by crucifixion. Their crosses lined the Appian Way from Capua to Rome. This is an artistic impression, by an unknown artist, of how that scene may have looked. Online via Wikimedia Commons.

The Romans did not invent crucifixion as a form of execution. Based on the writings of the Greek historian Herodotus, the Persians may have been the first to use this cruel form of punishment. Herodotus tells us that King Darius had 3000 Babylonians crucified in about 519 B.C. (See The Histories of Herodotus 4:43.2,7; 6:30.1; 7:194.1).

Alexander the Great also used crucifixion in his conquests. It is said that he had 2000 inhabitants of Tyre (a city in ancient Lebanon) crucified after he conquered that city. When the Romans conquered Carthage, they likely learned about crucifixion from the Greeks.

In 71 BC, when the Roman general Crassus crushed the rebellion of Spartacus, he had 6,000 fleeing slaves captured, and then crucified, along the Appian Way. Anyone who traveled on that main road, leading into Rome, would have seen the dead bodies for a very long time.

How did ancient people view death on a cross? One of the most striking reactions is from Seneca (once Nero’s teacher who was eventually forced to commit suicide):

Can anyone be found who would prefer wasting away in pain dying limb by limb, or letting out his life drop by drop, rather than expiring once for all? Can any man be found willing to be fastened to the accursed tree, long sickly, already deformed, swelling with ugly wounds on shoulders and chest, and drawing the breath of life amid long drawn-out agony? He would have many excuses for dying even before mounting the cross. (Dialogue 2.23:).

By the first century AD, when the language of Rome was Latin (except in the eastern provinces where people often spoke Greek) and the most common language in Judea was Aramaic), Rome had perfected this cruel and inhuman form of execution.

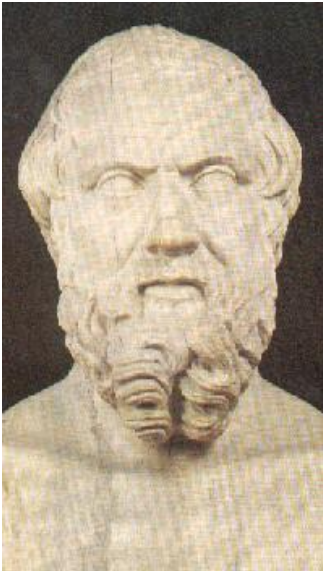
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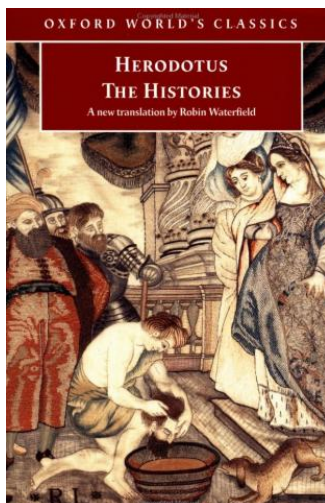


Herodotus

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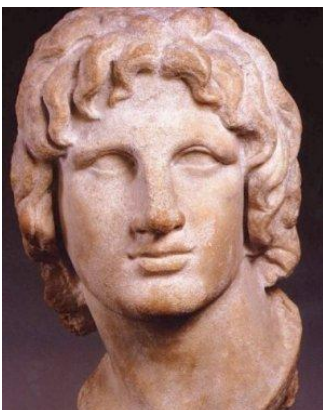


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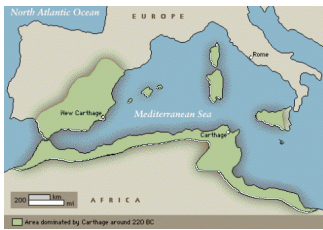


Alexander the Great

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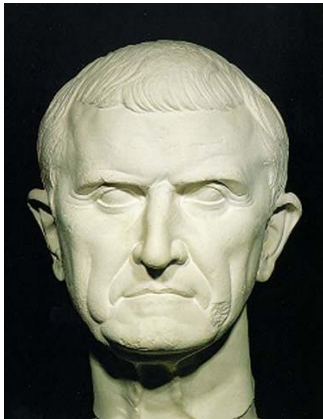
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Crassus

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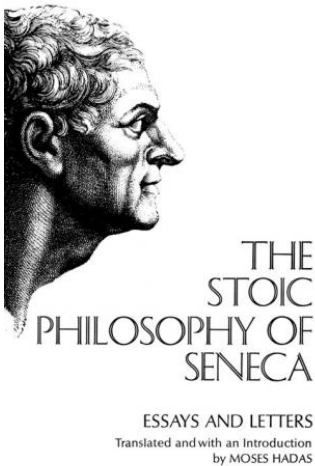
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Appian Way

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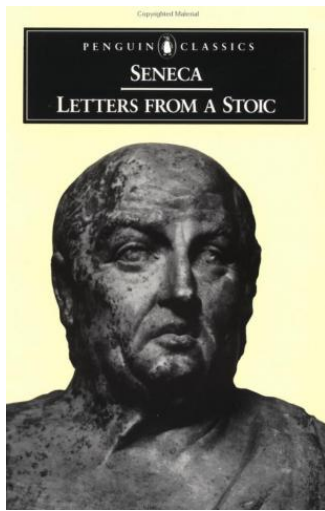


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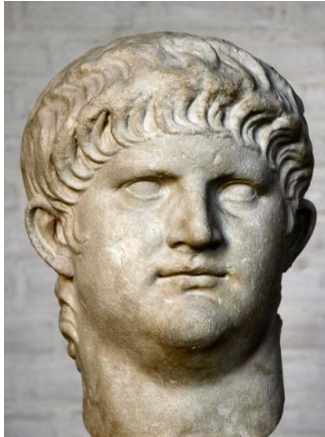
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Emperor Nero

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