



The End of the Consensus

THE GRACCHI

The Gracchi



- praenomen - gentiliicum (→gens) - cognomen
Tiberius Sempronius Gracchus
 - 133 B.C. – tribune of the plebs
- Gaius Sempronius Gracchus (154 – 121 BC)
 - 123-122 B.C. – tribune of the plebs
- → Reform → **Agrarian Reform Programme**

The Gracchi



- Tiberius Sempronius Gracchus
 - subsequently beaten to death together with 300 supporters
- Gaius Sempronius Gracchus (154 – 121 BC)
 - forced into suicide 121 B.C.

The Gracchi



- What happened...?
- Members of the elite opposed the reform programme
- Moreover, they opposed the way how the Gracchi by-passed the Senate
 - (ab)using the power of the *tribunus plebis* to legislate

The Gracchi



- **Tribunus plebis
& concilium plebis –**

the assembly of the plebs/plebeian council

→ **plebiscite** ('referendum')

after *Lex Hortensia* (287 BC):
plebiscita are legally binding

The Gracchi

But why did not it
come to any major
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Tiberius Gracchus?

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The Gracchi

But why did not it come to any major conflict prior to Tiberius Gracchus?



- A) tribunes of the plebs can veto each other !
- B) plebeian and patrician elites closely intertwined...
- C) the *cursus honorum*
 - tribune of the plebs merely first step in plebeian's political career! you do not want to upset the Senate

Consequence

- The end of the consensus among Rome's aristocracy:
 - **optimates vs. populares**



Optimates vs. Populares

- A conflict between
the Senate (*boni*, nobility)
vs. the 'party' of the people/plebs...?
 - "left wing" vs. "right wing" ...?
 - No, not really!



Optimates vs. Populares

- optimates (or *boni*, “good men”)
 - aims:
 - upholding the special custodial and leadership role of the Senate
 - limit power of popular assembly & tribune of the plebs
 - N.B. the name – mainly reflects that they used the backing of the Senate, not that they did not support the lower strata of society



Optimates vs. Populares

- populares – ‘favouring the people’
 - making use of tribunes of the plebs & people’s assemblies to pass their law
 - aim: for the people or for their personal interests?
 - (e.g. next session: Marius & his soldiers)
 - are they more ‘demagogues’, ‘populists’?



Gracchi: a turning point?

- End of consensus
- Individual politicians by-passing the Senate and the magistrates
- Lots of internal conflicts in the next 100 years
 - violence in Rome's streets, different *factiones* fighting each other...



Clodius

Tiberius Gracchus



- Reform programme
 - What do we know about these reforms ?
 - Why this opposition from many senators to the reform programme...?
- What do we know about Tib. Gracchus ?
 - his motivations
 - Social, political, military,...?
 - Was Tiberius Gracchus really this great, selfless reformer?
 - his objectives
 - what do we know about his life ?
 - → our sources...?

Tiberius Gracchus

- ancient sources
 - most sources – anti-Gracchan
negative towards both Gracchi and his followers
- Contemporary sources lost
- Poseidonius history between 146 and Sulla:
 - only few fragments survived
- Plutarch, 'biographies' of Tiberius and Gaius Gracchus
- Appian's *Civil War*...
- Some mentioning in Cicero (*Brutus*), Diodorus 34 - 39, etc.
- But there are also some inscriptions:
Legislation
 - *lex agraria*
 - *lex repetundarum*



Tiberius Gracchus



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 - Diodorus 34. negative towards both Gracchi and his followers
- Conte His son Nasica afterwards, when he was well advanced in years,
- Poseidonius acted as **leader of the senate** and **with his own hands killed Tiberius Gracchus**, who was aiming at **tyrannical** power. This caused uproar amongst the common people (...) The tribunes of the people,
- Plutarch, bringing all the senators one by one to the rostra, asked them who had killed him; every one of them, fearing **violence from the people**,
- Appian's Civil War denied the facts, and gave vague answers. But when it came to
- Some Nasica, he admitted that he had killed him with his own hand; and
- Diodorus, etc. further declared, that the ambition of **Gracchus to seize absolute power** had not been obvious to others, but it was very well known to him and the senate. Whereupon the people, though they were
- But the much troubled at what had happened, yet **were moved by the**
- Lex **boldness and authority of the man; and so they refrained from**
- Lex **further action.**

Tiberius Gracchus

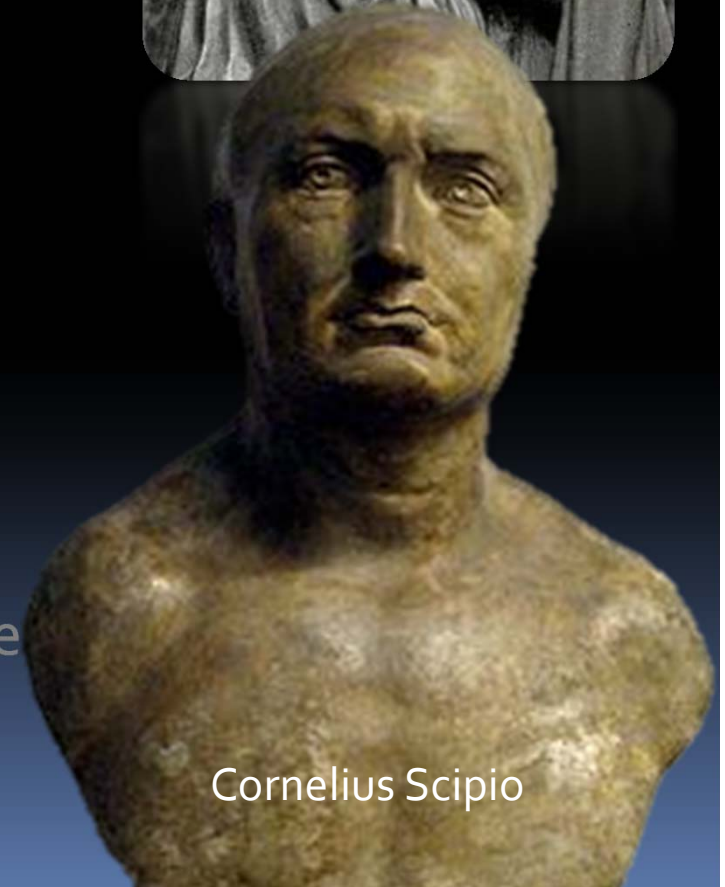
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Tiberius Gracchus

- Background:

- Gracchus branch of the *gens Sempronia*: politically well connected
- maternal grandparents, e.g. Scipio Africanus
- Good education
- officer, e.g. 147-146 in Carthage
- *augur*
- *praetor* – 137 BC – under the consul C. Hostilius Mancinus
 - major set back: capitulation of the people of Numantia was rejected by the Senate!



Cornelius Scipio

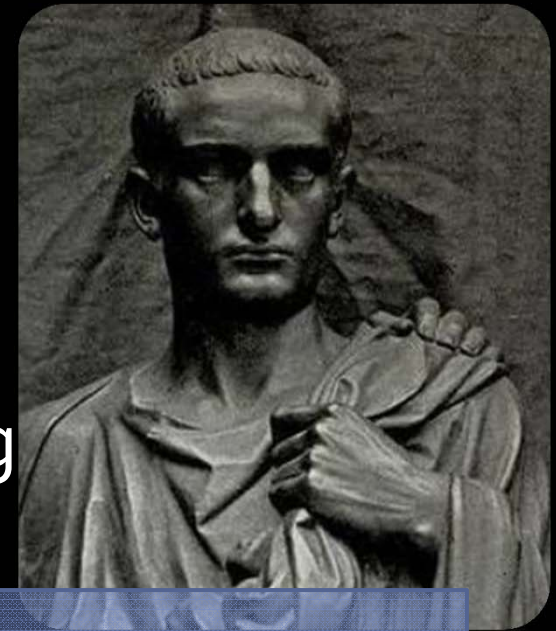
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Tiberius Gracchus

- What were Tib. Gracchus' aims?
- Land ! Tiberius sees slaves working the land in Etruria...



Plutarch, *Tiberius Gracchus* 8:

However, his brother Gaius has written in a political pamphlet that while Tiberius was travelling through Etruria on his way to **Numantia**, he saw for himself how the **country had been deserted by its native inhabitants**, and how those who tilled the soil or tended the flocks were **barbarian slaves introduced from abroad**; and that it was this **experience which inspired the policy** that later brought so many misfortunes upon the two brothers. But it was above all the people themselves who did most to arouse Tiberius' energy and ambitions by inscribing slogans and appeals on porticoes, monuments, and the walls of houses, **calling upon him to recover the public land for the poor.**

Tiberius Gracchus

- What were Tib. Gracchus' aims?
- Land ! Tiberius sees slaves working the land in Etruria...
- What is the problem:
 - slaves working the land
 - recover 'public land' (*ager publicus*) for the poor



- Slavery → source for slavery?
- „Prisoners of War“
- Sardinia, 177 BC: 80,000 men
- 167 v. Chr. Epirus: 150,000 men
- ...

→ transhumance

→ slave revolts, e.g. Sicily & Spartacus
1st servile war: 135-132 BC
→ problems for Roman landowners in Sicily, but also for grain supply!

ager publicus

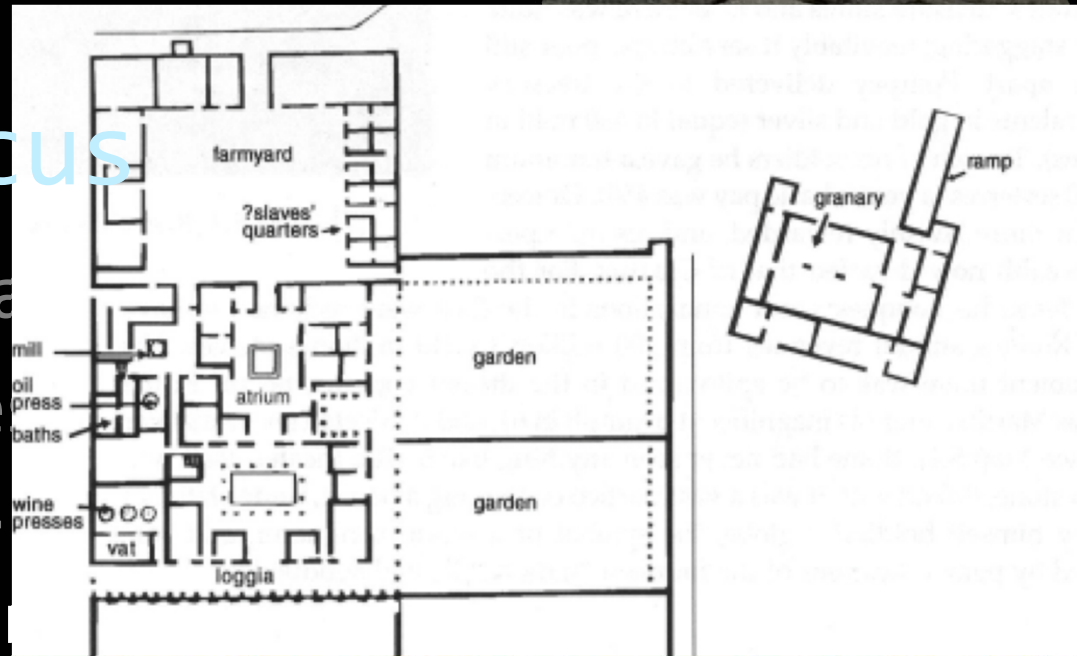
- What were Tib. Gracchus's reforms?
- Land ! Tiberius seized the land in Etruria.
- What is the problem?

- slaves who worked the land
- recovered the poor

villa

latifundia

concentration
of property



ager publicus

- ager publicus / public land
 - generally: expropriation from defeated enemies of Rome by conquest or surrender (*deditio*)
 - land: property of the Roman people
 - lease-hold, by tenant-farmers, or lease-contractors (for pasturage)
 - violations... public land leased out to wealthy citizens in return for rent
 - other public land remained with the allies/*socii* (from whom it had been confiscated)
 - limitations: *ager publicus* to be held by any individual: < 500 *iugera* (= 325 acres = 1.32 km²)

Lex Claudia of Quintus Claudius (218 BC): it forbade senators to engage in commerce
→ who is doing commerce?



ager publicus

Plutarch, *Tiberius Gracchus* 8:

Whenever the Romans annexed land from their neighbours as a result of their wars, it was their custom to put a part up for sale by auction; the rest was made common land and was distributed among the poorest and most needy of the citizens, who were allowed to cultivate it on payment of a small rent to the public treasury. When the rich began to outbid and drive out the poor by offering higher rentals, a law was passed [the *lex Licinia* of 367 BC] which forbade any one individual to hold more the 500 *iugera* [c. 325 acres] of land.

lex Licinia: anachronistic?

Lex Claudia of Quintus Claudius (218 BC): it forbade senators to engage in commerce
→ who is doing commerce?



ager publicus

- and the Roman army...
a citizen army

Plutarch, *Tiberius Gracchus* 9:

'The wild beasts that roam over Italy', Tiberius would tell his listeners, 'have their dens and holes to lurk in, but the men who fight and die for our state enjoy the common air and light and nothing else. It is their lot to wander with their wives and children, houseless and homeless, over the face of the earth. And when our generals appeal to their soldiers before a battle to defend their ancestors' tombs and their temples against the enemy, their words are a lie and a mockery, for not a man in their audience possesses a family altar; not one out of all those Romans owns an ancestral tomb. The truth is that they fight and die to protect the wealth and luxury of others. They are called the masters of the world, but they do not possess a single clod of earth which is truly their own'.



Tarda I
I secolo

Q ue
eq
de
che rese
Era prote
cotta di r
con spall
bollito e
derivava
l'elmo. La
antica, e
Etruschi,
tuita dal
gnolo, ca
di taglio
ideale pe
serrate. I
di giavell
era da lar
quando i
era coper
custodia
Ghette. F
protege
del legio
le campa
in region

ager publicus

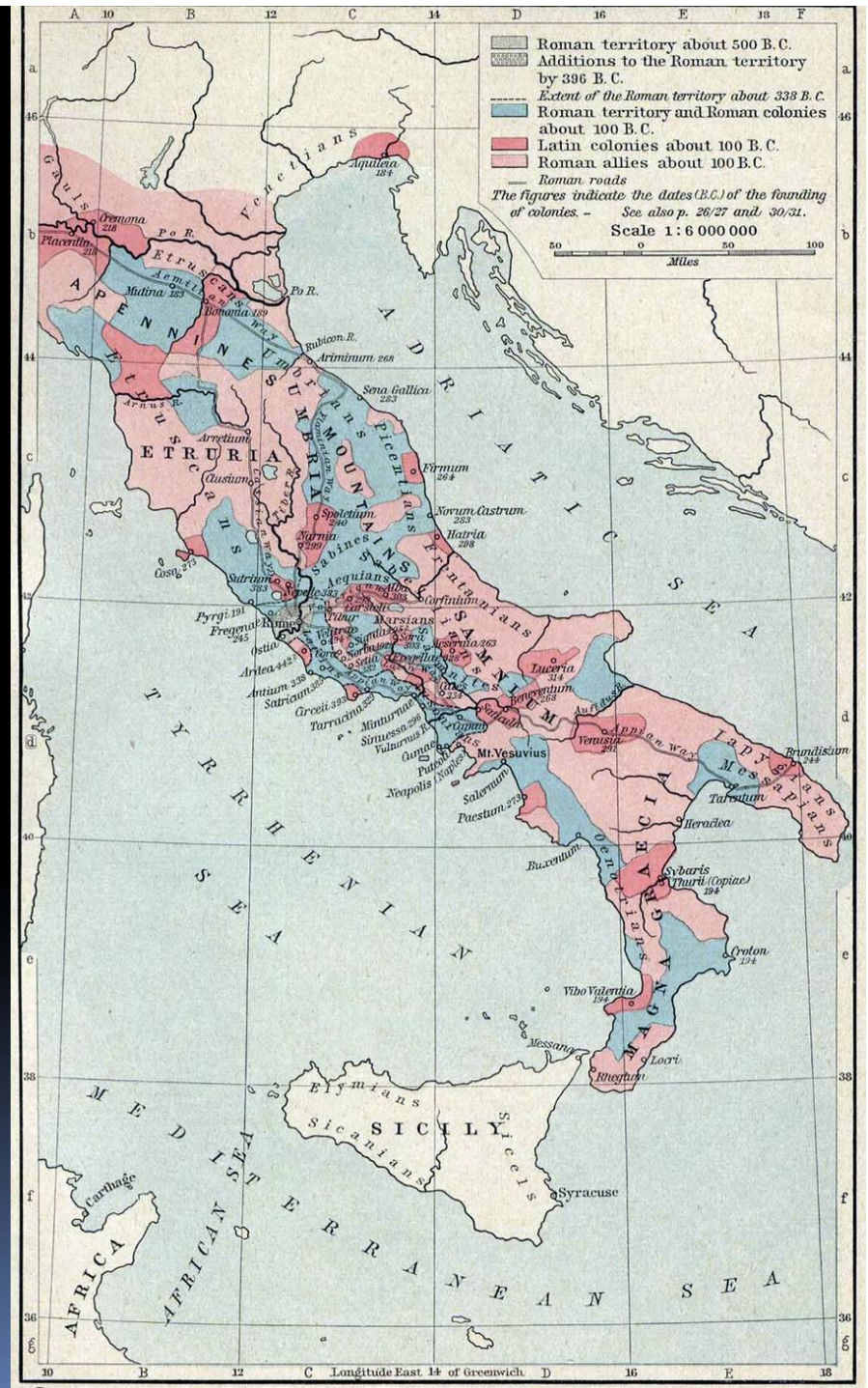
- and the Roman army...
a citizen army
- Several problems:
 - Roman army needs farmers with their own land → who can be conscripted for the Roman legions (→ *census*)
 - Since the 2nd Punic Wars, Roman armies operate in provinces abroad for many years, e.g. in Spain
 - their home farm: abandoned or taken over by wealthy land owners
 - → hence: re-distribution of *ager publicus*
 - **These soldiers need to be remunerated: e.g. land / colonies**
 - also a subsequent problem down to Augustus: see e.g. Marius next week



ager publicus

- Latin colonies
Roman colonies
- Hardly any colonial foundations in the 2nd century BC
- the urban and rural poor in Rome and across Italy...

N.B.: a patchwork of statuses across Italy



Tiberius Gracchus

Appianus, *Civil Wars* 1.9

At length Tiberius Sempronius Gracchus, an illustrious man, eager for glory, a most powerful speaker, and for these reasons well known to all, delivered an eloquent discourse, while serving as tribune, concerning the Italian race, lamenting that a people so valiant in war, and blood relations to the Romans, were declining little by little in pauperism and paucity of numbers without any hope of remedy. He inveighed against the multitude of slaves as useless in war and never faithful to their masters, and adduced the recent calamity brought upon the masters by their slaves in Sicily, where the demands of agriculture had greatly increased the number of the latter (...)

*Roman
census
figures:*

233: 270713
208: 137108
204: 214000
194: 143704
189: 258294
179: 258294
174: 269015
169: 312805
164: 337452
159: 328316
154: 324000
147: 322000
142: 328442
136: 317933
131: 318823
125: 394736

Tiberius Gracchus

Appianus, *Civil Wars* 1.9

(...) After speaking thus he again brought forward the law, providing that **nobody should hold more than 500 jugera** of the public domain. But he added a provision to the former law, that the sons of the present occupiers might each hold one-half of that amount, and that the remainder should be **divided among the poor by triumvirs**, who should be changed annually.

→ Major land redistribution

tresviri agris dandis assignandis
(abolished in 118 B.C.)

Tiberius Gracchus

- Wikipedia: “agrarian legislation that sought to transfer wealth from the wealthy, patricians and otherwise, to the poor.”
- Really ?
- What other reasons can we identify...?