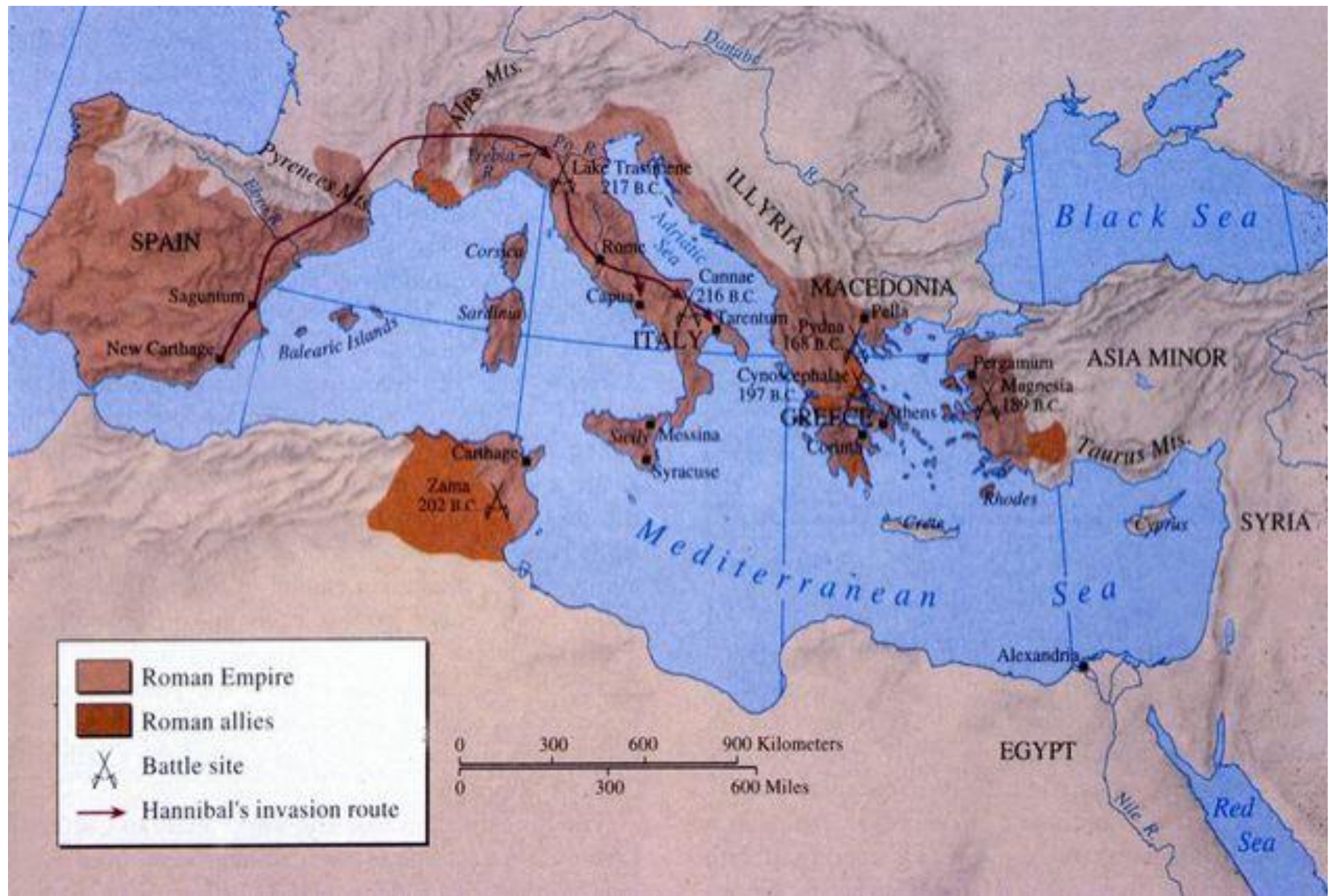


From Village to Empire: an Introduction to the History of Rome

Lecture 10: The Gracchi



- 149 L. Calpurnius Piso
- 137 C. Hostilius Mancinus; Tib. Gracchus negotiates the surrender with the Numantines
- 133 Tiberius Gracchus. M. Octavius. Attalus of Pergamum. P. Mucius Scaevola. P. Scipio Nasica (*pontifex maximus*)
Ap. Claudius Pulcher; P. Licinius Crassus; M. Fulvius Flaccus;
C. Papirius Carbo
- 132 consuls: P. Popillius Laenas and P. Rupilius
- 125 Fregellae; Fabrateria
- 123 C. Gracchus tribune
- 122 C. Gracchus tribune; M. Livius Drusus. Junonia

The plight of the Roman soldier

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'.

Land problems

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. 310 acres] of land. For a while this law restrained the greed of the rich and helped the poor, who were enabled to remain on the land which they had rented, so that each of them could occupy the allotment which he had originally been granted. But after a time the rich men in each neighbourhood by using the names of fictitious tenants, contrived to transfer many of these holdings to themselves, and finally they openly took possession of the greater part of the land under their own names. The poor, when they found themselves forced off the land, became more and more unwilling to volunteer for military service or even to raise a family. The result was a rapid decline of the class of the free small-holders all over Italy, their place being run by gangs of foreign slaves, whom the rich employed to cultivate the estates from which they had driven off the free citizens. Scipio's friend Gaius Laelius attempted to reform this abuse, but when he found himself opposed by the property-owning class, he took fright at the conflict which his programme seemed likely to arouse and abandoned his efforts, as a result of which he was given the name of 'the wise', or 'the prudent' for the Latin word *sapiens* seems to be able to carry either meaning.

Tiberius Sempronius Gracchus

Cornelia

P. Cornelius Scipio Africanus

Sempronia

Diophanes

Blossius of Cumae

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 Sempronius Gracchus

M. Octavius

Ap. Claudius Pulcher

Attalus of Pergamum

Tiberius Gracchus is murdered

Plutarch, *Tiberius Gracchus* 9: Tiberius passed on this news to his supporters who were standing round him, and they at once girded up their togas. Then they broke up the staves which the officers use to keep back the crowd, distributed these, and prepared to defend themselves against their attackers. Those who were standing further away were at a loss to know what was happening and asked what it meant. Thereupon Tiberius raised his hand to his head intending, since the people could not hear his voice, to signify that his life was in danger. But when his enemies saw this gesture, they rushed to the Senate and reported that Tiberius was asking for a crown, and that they had the proof of this in the signal he had just given. This created an uproar in the Senate, and Nasica demanded that the consul must now act to protect the state and put down the tyrant. The consul answered in conciliatory fashion that he would not be the first to use violence, and would put no citizen to death without a regular trial. On the other hand he declared that, if Tiberius should incite or oblige the people to pass any illegal resolution, he would not consider it to be binding. At this, Nasica sprang to his feet and shouted, 'Now that the consul has betrayed the state, let every man who wishes to uphold the laws follow me!' Then he drew the skirt of his toga over his head and strode out towards the Capitol. The senators who followed him wrapped their togas over their left arms and thrust aside anyone who stood in their path. Nobody dared to oppose them out of respect for their rank, but those whom they met took to their heels and trampled down one another as they fled. [continues...]

Tiberius Gracchus is murdered

The senators' followers were armed with clubs and staves, which they had brought from their houses. The senators themselves snatched up the legs and fragments of the benches which the crowd had broken in their hurry to escape, and made straight for Tiberius, lashing out at those who were drawn up in front of him. His protectors were quickly scattered or clubbed down, and as Tiberius turned to run, someone caught hold of his clothing. He threw off his toga and fled in his tunic, but then stumbled over some of the prostrate bodies in front of him. As he struggled to his feet, one of his fellow-tribunes, Publius Satyreius, as everybody agrees, dealt the first blow, striking him on the head with the leg of a bench. Lucius Rufus claimed to have given him the second, and prided himself upon this as if it were some noble exploit. More than three hundred men were killed by blows from sticks and stones, but none by the sword.

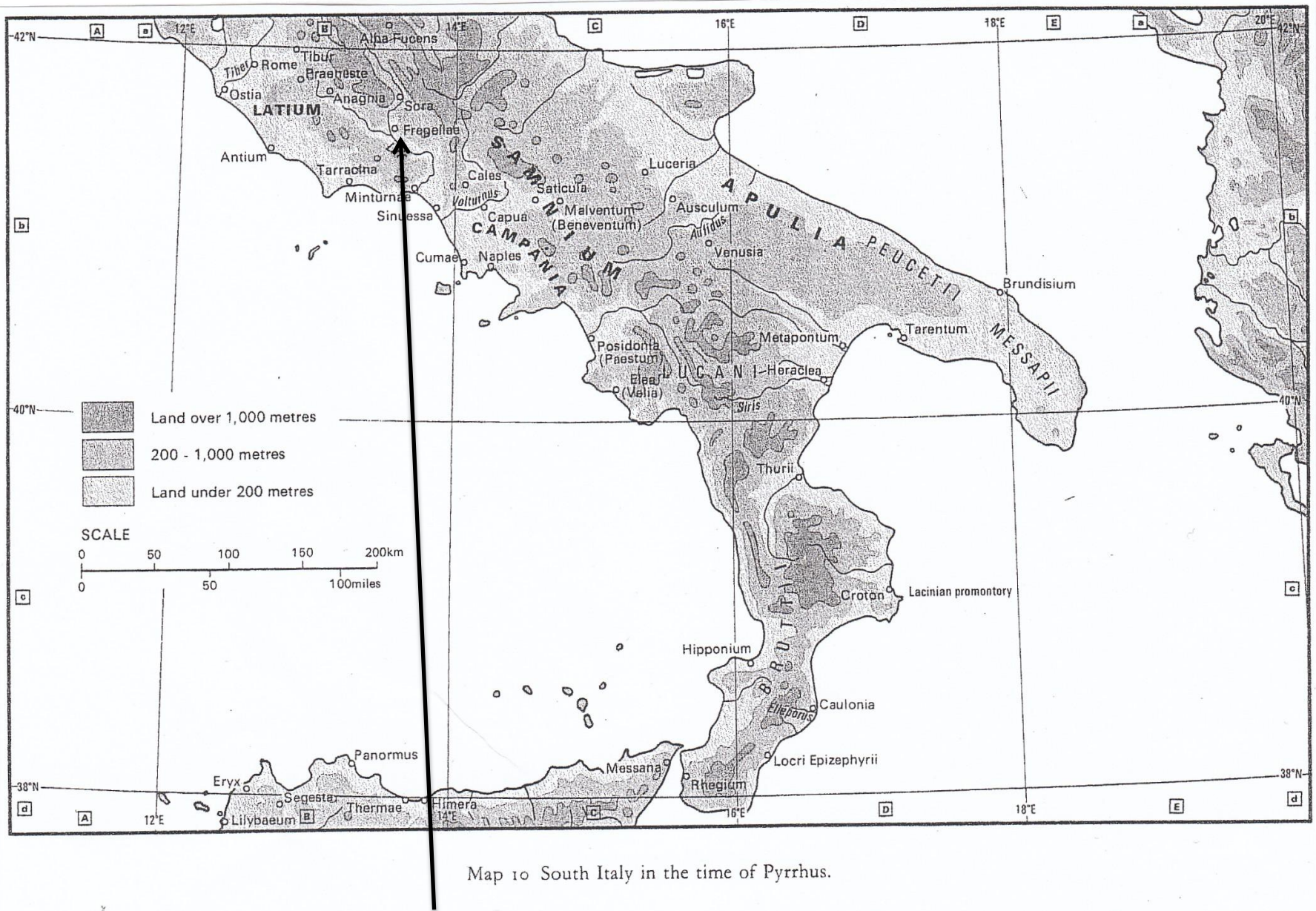
P. Popillius Laenas

P. Rupilius

P. Licinius Crassus

M. Fulvius Flaccus

C. Papirius Carbo



Map 10 South Italy in the time of Pyrrhus.

Fregellae

Fabrateria

Gaius Gracchus' laws

Plutarch, *Gaius Gracchus* 5: He now introduced a number of laws which he hoped would not only find favour with the people, but would also undermine the authority of the Senate. [1] One of these concerned the public lands which he proposed to divide up among the poor citizens. [2] Another related to the army, and laid it down that soldiers should be supplied with clothing at the public expense without any corresponding deduction being made from their pay, and that nobody should be conscripted below the age of seventeen. [3] Yet another was devoted to the allies, and extended to the Italians the same voting rights as were already enjoyed by Roman citizens. [4] A fourth dealt with supplies of grain and reduced the price at which it was to be sold to the poor, while the [5] fifth regulated the appointment of jurymen. It was this law which did more than any other to reduce the power of the Senate. [continues...]

Gaius Gracchus' laws

Up to this date only senators had been entitled to serve as jurors in criminal cases and it was this privilege above all which had made them feared both by the common people and by the equestrian order. The effect of Gaius' law was to add to the three hundred members of the Senate a further three hundred drawn from the equestrian order and to arrange that juries should be drawn from the whole six hundred. Gaius is said to have made even more strenuous efforts than usual to secure the passage of this law. But what was especially noticeable in his campaign was that, whereas in the past all popular leaders, when-ever they rose to speak, had turned their faces to the right towards the Senate-house and the part of the Forum which is known as the Comitium, he now created a new precedent by turning, whenever he addressed the people, to the left towards the Forum proper, and he made a regular habit of this procedure. Thus, by a slight change of posture and deviation from the normal practice, he raised an issue of immense importance and in a sense transferred the whole character of Roman politics from an aristocratic to a democratic basis; for what his action really implied was that orators should address themselves to the people and not to the Senate.

Gaius Gracchus' laws

Plutarch, *Gaius Gracchus* 5: [6] He also introduced legislation which provided for the founding of colonies, the construction of roads, [7] and the establishment of public granaries. He himself acted as director and supervisor of every project and never flagged for a moment in the execution of all these different and elaborate undertakings. On the contrary, he carried out each of them with an extraordinary speed and power of application, as if each concern were the only one he had to manage, so that even those who disliked and feared him most were amazed at his efficiency and his capacity to carry through every enterprise to which he set his hand. As for the people, the very sight of Gaius never failed to impress them, as they watched him attended by a host of contractors, crafts-men, ambassadors, magistrates, soldiers, and men of letters, all of whom he handled with a courteous ease which enabled him to show kindness to all his associates without sacrificing his dignity, and to give every man the consideration that was his due. In this way he gave the clearest possible proof that those who had represented him as a tyrannical, overbearing, or violent man were uttering nothing but malicious slanders. He was in fact a more effective popular leader in his personal dealings with men and his handling of business than he was in his speeches from the rostra.

Livius Drusus

Plutarch, *Gaius Gracchus* 8: One of Gaius' colleagues in the tribunate was Livius Drusus. This was a man who possessed all the advantages of birth and up-bringing, and who, in strength of character, in wealth, and oratorical power could compete with those who had raised themselves by such gifts to the highest and most honoured positions in the state. Accordingly, the aristocratic party approached him and invited him to attack Gaius and join forces with them in opposing him. Their plan was that he should on no account resort to violence nor risk any open clash with the people, but rather use his power to please them and grant concessions when it would have been more honourable to incur unpopularity by refusing them.

Opimius' attendant is murdered

Plutarch, *Gaius Gracchus* 12: At the same time Gaius' opponents secured Opimius' election as consul, and they at once proceeded to repeal many of his laws and also to interfere with the organisation of the colony at Carthage. They did this in the hope of provoking Gaius into committing some act of violence, which would give them the excuse to destroy him. At first he bore this treatment patiently, but as time went on, he was goaded by his friends and above all by Fulvius into recruiting a body of supporters to oppose the consul. It was at this point, according to some accounts, that his mother helped him to organise resistance by hiring a number of foreigners and sending them to Rome disguised as harvesters, and these arrangements are said to be hinted at in various letters to her son. Other authorities, however, maintain that Cornelia strongly disapproved of these plans. [continues...]

Opimius' attendant is murdered

At any rate on the day when Opimius and his party had planned to revoke Gaius' laws, both factions posted themselves on the Capitol early in the morning. Then after the consul had offered up a sacrifice, one of his attendants, Quintus Antyllius, who was carrying away the entrails of the victims, shouted to Fulvius' supporters, 'Stand back, you rogues, and make way for honest citizens!' Some writers add that as he spoke these words he stretched out his bare arm towards them and made an insulting gesture. At any rate he was instantly set upon and stabbed to death with long writing-styluses, which were said to have been made expressly for this purpose. The crowd was thrown into utter confusion by the murder, while the leaders of the two parties were affected in diametrically opposite ways. Gaius was deeply distressed and reproached his followers for having given their enemies the pretext they had been looking for all this time, while Opimius was triumphant, as if he could now seize a long awaited opportunity, and he proceeded to urge the people to take revenge.

Relevant reading

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Lintott, A. (1994), 'The Roman empire and its problems in the late second century', in J. A. Crook, *et al.*, eds., *The Cambridge Ancient History*, volume 9: The last age of the Roman republic 146-43 B.C., second edition, 16-39.

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Scullard, H. H., (1982), *From the Gracchi to Nero*, fifth edition, London.