



THE CLASH OF IDEOLOGIES, CLASSES AND PERSONALITIES IN ROME OF THE SECOND CENTURY BCE

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IN EARLY 133 BCE, the noble-born Tiberius Sempronius Gracchus, as Tribune of the Plebs (one of an annually-elected college of Ten, charged with the protection of the otherwise socially disempowered) convened a *contio*, an informal assembly of Roman citizens. The object was to outline and defend his political program: put simply, that an ancient legal cap on the amount of public land that could be leased by squatters be reinforced; and that the excess (determined by a *triumvirate*, or Board of Three) be compulsorily resumed and distributed to the urban poor. A rare fragment of his oratory is preserved by the Greek philosopher Plutarch, who wrote a *Life of Tiberius Gracchus*; if faithfully transmitted, it conveys the passion and resonance of his pitch. The thirty-year-old Gracchus was regarded as one of the foremost speakers of his day—and, Plutarch reports, employed an eloquence that could easily carry the day:

The wild beasts that roam over Italy have—each of them a cave or lair to lurk in; but those who fight and die for Italy enjoy the common air and light, but nothing else; without house or home they wander about with their wives and children. And, when their generals exhort our soldiers to defend their sepulchres and altars from the enemy, it is a lie; for not a man among them has

an hereditary altar, not one of all these many Romans an ancestral tomb. They fight and they die to support the wealth and luxury of others, and though they are styled masters of the world, they have not a single clod of earth that is their own.¹

This gem, even if it represents only the gist of Gracchus's argument, reflects the dynamics in play. Firstly, the declaration was ideological, the underlying by-now-antique philosophy being that, in the Republic, it was inappropriate (and, indeed, 'harmful') that anyone should hold more land than could be cultivated by the possessor himself. Gracchus's claim was that he was led by what was 'equitable and right', reminding those who needed reminding that ideology played an essential role in Roman politics.²



▲ **Title image:** Fraternal Hands clasped on a Land Redistribution Bill, detail of a bronze statue of the Gracchi, *Les Gracques*, by Jean-Baptiste Claude Eugène Guillaume (1853), Musée d'Orsay, Paris.

REPRODUCED WITH PERMISSION FROM THE MUSÉE D'ORSAY, PARIS.

► **Fig 1.** Double Bronze Bust of the Gracchan brothers, by Eugène Guillaume (1853), now in the Musée d'Orsay, Paris, acquired for the Imperial Museums in 1853.

IMAGE: REPRODUCED WITH PERMISSION FROM THE MUSÉE D'ORSAY, PARIS.

Meshed with this is the clear evidence of the second dynamic: class conflict. Gracchus's land-owning opponents would define *aequitas* differently,³ they would today have accused him of 'envy politics'. Plutarch, on the other hand (though ultimately no fan of the ruckus that Gracchus's program would bring about), denounced the rapacity of 'the rich' and the property-holders for the effective acquisition of vast tracts of land in the first place, and their greed in opposing the reform.⁴ Cicero puts the ideological divide in a nutshell:

The law was attractive to the People: the fortunes of the poor seemed improved. The *Optimates* (sc. 'the best people') opposed it, because they saw discord being excited, and also thought that the commonwealth would be robbed of its champions (*propugnatores*) by the eviction of the rich from their long-established occupancies.⁵

The wealthy, whose self-interests were clearly at stake, would clothe their privileged status in claims of protecting the State, professing an ideological commitment to the *status quo* with regard to governance. The image of the guardians of the *res publica* signified, in Cicero's historical understanding of 133, the prevailing (but precarious) dominance of the well-to-do within the delicate balance of powers that characterised the political system. Rome was not equipped with a constitution (and that point is of the essence in much that will follow when we examine the role of individuals in a political crisis), but this does not mean that Romans were incapable of constitutionalist thought⁶—and the question of where political authority *ought* to lie would increasingly exercise the minds of Rome's intellectual elite and the passions of its broader community (Figs 2 and 3). Philosophical contemplation on this score took on a more nuanced edge in the second century with the increasingly direct contact between Rome and the Hellenistic world. As a result of the Republic's imperial expansion, the intellectual pool from which Rome's most influential men drew stretched from the Greek cities of Campania to the cultural centres of Asia Minor and the Levant,

its luminaries dwelling within the houses of Rome's leading families.⁷ In modern scholarship, it used customarily to be thought that Rome's face was set against change, given the clear reverence for custom and the 'ways of the ancestors'. That is too simplistic; the Roman elite was living within a context of profound transformation and it was a rapidly evolving situation. Tradition provided a guide, but change was a fact of life.⁸ Those best placed to affect (and effect) Roman pathways moved in a milieu requiring constant negotiation.



◀ **Figs 2 & 3.** Liberty via the Secret Ballot. This coin, minted around 126 BCE, commemorated a secret ballot law passed in 137 BCE. The obverse (top) shows the head of the goddess Roma behind whom, to the left, can be seen a voting urn. The reverse (bottom) shows the goddess Libertas in a triumphal chariot with galloping horses, holding in her right hand, the *pileus*, or cap of liberty, such as was given to a manumitted slave as a symbol of the individual's new freedom.

IMAGE: REPRODUCED COURTESY OF THE AUSTRALIAN CENTRE FOR ANCIENT NUMISMATIC STUDIES, MACQUARIE UNIVERSITY, 07GR266/1.

From that fragment of Gracchus's oratory, a third dynamic is also clear: his personality. The speech was polemical. Painting the military rank-and-file as landless was designedly hyperbolic, aimed to accentuate a situation based upon the exploitation of the many by the few.⁹ On the other side, Gracchus's opponents claimed that his aims were the discombobulation of the state, for which they would use the word *sedition* (or the excitation of *discordia*), and political opportunism. This mutual demonisation would ensure—in this context as in so many before and since—that the road to reform, for which concept the Romans of this period lacked a direct word, would be a rocky one.

Readings of the events of 133 have tended to put the actions of Tiberius Gracchus front-and-centre and, if negative, from the time of Cicero onwards, focus on Gracchus's talented but 'flawed' character. Lucius Annaeus Florus opens the second book of his *Two-Book Epitome of All Roman Wars*, drawn from the earlier Roman historian Livy, by turning to Rome's ruinous *seditiones*, laying the responsibility squarely upon those tribunes who treacherously used the pretence of protecting the common people to further their own political 'domination': "Tiberius Gracchus ignited the first flame of conflict."¹⁰ The verdict is a familiar one in our ancient sources, and in much modern scholarship. The year is thus cast as the beginning of the end.

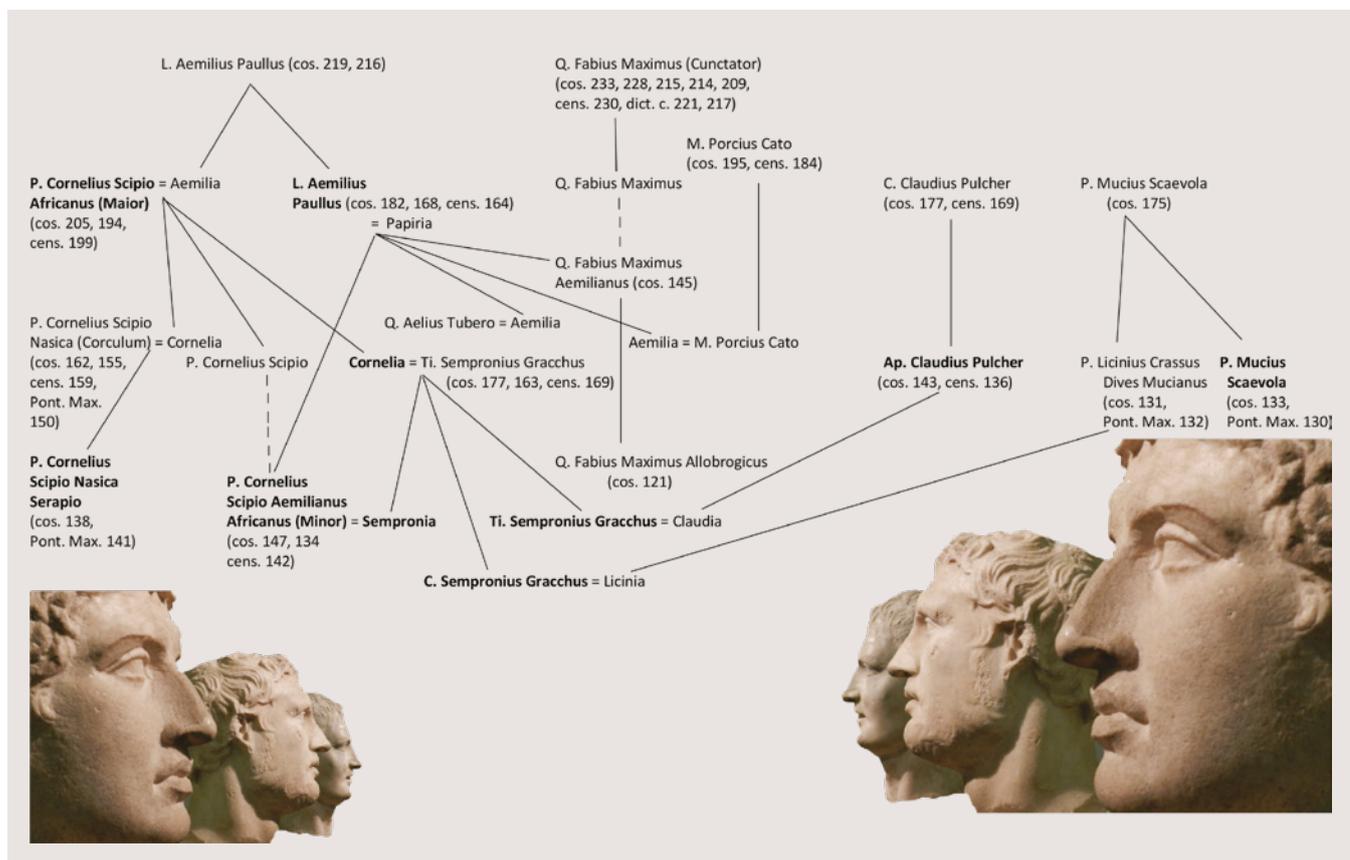
Gracchus did not, however, stand alone on the historical stage and the watershed event is better understood if recognised as far more complex.

The Roman 'Republic' (by which modern scholarship designates a governmental system and a period) has served as a site of inspiration in western political thought, whether as model or anti-model; its failure remains of enduring

fascination. The 'republican experiment', as George Washington put it, may not have run its course.¹¹ The paths for academic enquiry are many, but our own approach is prosopographical; and we are firmly of the belief that the exercise—though all too often denigrated—has its place.¹² It allows a focus on individuals within their broader contexts. Prosopography, for those unfamiliar with it, can refer both to data collection and to a historical methodology that features the application of that data. The former consists of the compilation of all available information concerning every known individual within a certain period or defined group; the latter seeks to discern patterns and connections, often evoking (especially for Rome's 'Republican' period) a model of political networks, inherited alliances and inherited antagonisms—in particular, casting families as the basis of factions concerned primarily with power struggles rather than the conflict of ideas.¹³ Prosopography thus populates the stage in a way that reduces the isolated pedestalisation of those deemed historically significant by some narratives, and the model produced

▼ **Fig 4.** The Interconnectivity of Rome's Elite. This selective family tree of the Cornelia Scipiones, Aemilii Paulli, Sempronii Gracchi, Claudii Pulchri and Mucii Scaevolae reveals the close kinship ties that connected so many of the main players (emboldened) in the drama of 133 BCE.

IMAGE: THE STEMMA IS DRAWN BY J.L. BENESS & T. HILLARD. THE COLLAGE UTILISES PORTRAIT BUSTS NOW DISPLAYED IN THE PALAZZO MASSIMO ALLE TERME, MUSEO NAZIONALE ROMANO, ROME.



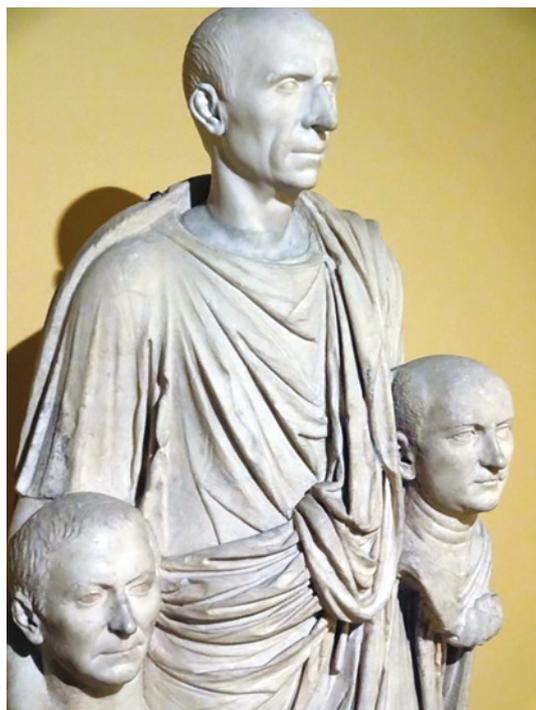
is a plausible one when applied to the ways in which members of Rome's social and political elite sought advantage and pursued their interests. But the surviving evidence is patchy (to put it mildly) and when the model was used, in a circular fashion, to underwrite further—often quite elaborate—speculation, all too often without supporting evidence beyond the identification of homonymous individuals (as one-and-the-same or closely related to one another) and the assumption of intergenerational continuities and family solidarity, the method was brought into grave disrepute. Moreover, many practitioners have used the excuse of material determining treatment to focus effectively on the elite, with Sir Ronald Syme going so far as to assert that 'the writing of history does not well accord with bare abstractions or with appeal to the voiceless and anonymous.'¹⁴ Hence the impression understandably persists that prosopography (when applied to this period) focuses solely on factional politics and on the 'deeds of illustrious men' to the exclusion of the masses.

A prosopographical analysis of the events of 133 will demonstrate, we trust, that such an approach will not shroud the role of the broader community ('the voiceless and anonymous'); nor will it affirm any notion of the elite Roman family as the kernel of a political faction. Quite the opposite. (See fig. 4 for the tangled web of relationships.) It can, rather, illuminate the intersection of ideological clashes, the class struggle and personality-driven politics—and, with regard to the last, may provide the data for critiquing the actions of significant players, underlining the role of human agency and appropriately subjecting those players to judgmental scrutiny. It was the assertion of the Roman historian Tacitus that it was the historian's duty to place on record good and evil to be judged by posterity (*Annals* 3.65.1). Judgmentalism is not to postmodern taste, but the commission (broadening its purview to the appraisal of competence and incompetence, vision and its lack) has not been lifted and—if informed and prudently exercised—is as much in need as ever.

We return to the question of Gracchus's personality. Florus begins his treatment with 'by bloodline, *bella figura*, and eloquence, he was easily *princeps* (that is, a/the leading man of his generation), but...'. Such a catalogue (and the immediately following 'but') is characteristic of many ancient accounts. *Persona* was of great concern to the elite culture with which we are here concerned. Cicero, following Panaetius the Stoic philosopher (a close companion of Gracchus's cousin Publius Cornelius Scipio Aemilianus), asserts that we are equipped by Nature (*a natura*), with, 'as it were', two *personae*: one, common to all, distinguishing humankind from brutes, and another which endows individual qualities, talents, strengths and weaknesses. Thus is character produced.¹⁵ But, significantly, Cicero adds that *persona* might be shaped to the circumstances 'which some chance or the moment imposes' and/or might be altered by an individual's will. The Romans liked to see their leaders, rising to the occasion, forged by the stress of circumstance. Alongside *persona*, two parallel terms jostle for attention: *facies* and *imago*, the latter of particular relevance to the present enquiry. 'Face' (*facies*) was all-important, together with its concomitant: the threat of loss of face.¹⁶ The 'images' (*imagines*) which the greats of the past had offered to the world haunted the present through the elite's veneration of the wax masks of their ancestors (fig. 5). The family's *imagines* adorned their quasi-public vestibules, saluting the occupants as they set forth in the morning and greeting them as they returned, emitting silent waves of exhortation and judgement. These embodiments of ancestral achievements fired thoughts of emulation, said the Roman historian Sallust. It was not the waxen simulacrum, he insisted, but the recall of past deeds thus triggered: an inspiration and a burden. The weight of perceived obligation fell most heavily on the scions of the 'Great Houses.' Sons were expected 'to follow in (or step into) the footprints (*vestigia*) of their father'—to be their father's abiding image, both in manner and physically: *imitatio patris*.¹⁷ Recent scholarship has emphasised the extent to which individual identities were heavily subject

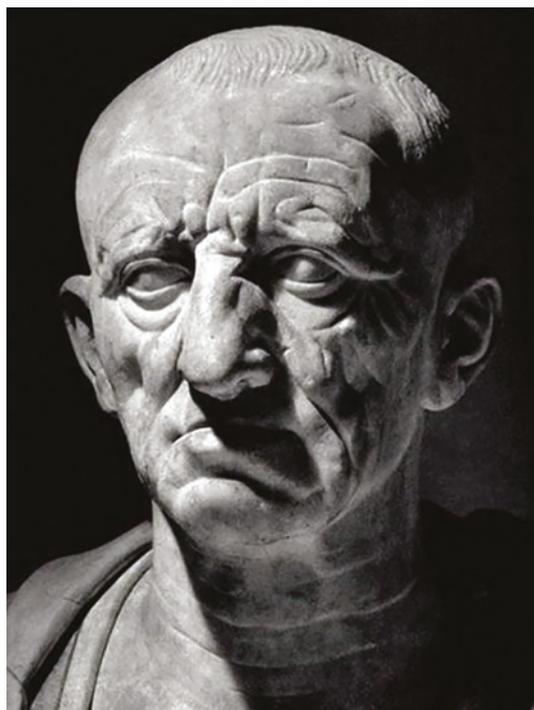
► **Fig 5.** (left) A Roman noble with the busts of his ancestors. A detail of a marble statue of the late 1st century BCE, the 'Barberini Togato', now in the Centrale Montemartini, Musei Capitolini, Rome.

IMAGE: TOM HILLARD



► **Fig 6.** (right) Portrait Bust of a Roman senator. The bust, dating to the mid-1st century BCE, is now in the Palazzo Torlonia, Rome.

IMAGE: WIKIMEDIA COMMONS



to social expectations and to specific family traditions—and the cultural anthropologists have thus (perhaps unintentionally) come close here to affirming the presumptions of those prosopographers who believe that an individual's actions were highly predictable according to inherited cues. There is much to be said for this characterisation of the culture, but an equal pressure lay with the injunction to match the magnitude of others' achievements: emulation rather than imitation was the aim. A competitive ethos can be seen in political, professional and sporting elites across many cultures, but Rome presents this aristocratic spirit in a quintessential form. A public career, following an apprenticeship in combat (both forensic and military), was literally a racetrack of honours: *cursus honorum* (the Romans chose the word *honor* to designate public position rather than the other word on offer: *officium*, or duty). They measured their achievement against that of others.

Gracchus's cousin, Scipio Aemilianus, whose natural father had been twice consul, a censor and twice *triumphator* (that is to say, awarded triumphal victory-parades through the city, one of them an extraordinary three-day affair), and who was also by adoption, the grandson and heir of Scipio Africanus the famous vanquisher of Hannibal, is known to

have been obsessed with the community's assessment of his leadership of the Scipionic clan and his worthiness more generally. He was jealous of even the respect paid his elder brother, who had become, by adoption, grandson to the legendary Quintus Fabius Maximus, five times consul, censor, and *dictator* in two military emergencies.¹⁸ Epitaphs found within the precinct of Scipionic tombs echo the desideratum of equalling or surpassing the deeds of one's own ancestors; eulogies often underlined that of being the 'first' or the 'only'. Descendants competed as much with the past as with their peers. But the running was with their peers, the nearer, the more intense.

Gracchus, more than twenty years younger than his cousin, was under similar pressure; by the time he entered upon a senatorial career, he was well-connected, a decorated war hero, recognised for his comeliness, his intellect and as a gifted orator: a leader (as we have seen) in his generation. But complacency was not the result. In 137, aged twenty-seven and at the very outset of his senatorial career, he spoke to foes abroad of the protection he needed against his 'enemies'—his competitors in Rome.¹⁹ He also accounted himself a grandson of Africanus and by his paternal lineage was also the son of one who had been twice consul, censor, twice

triumphator. There were *four* grandsons of Africanus. Who would prove the more worthy?

By 133, Aemilianus had set the bar high. Despite a dour character, he had become the darling of the people. With the support of a broad sector of the community—and it shocked his rivals that he was ready to employ the help of the lowly: ‘men who had lately been slaves, but frequenters of the forum and able to force issues by their noisy presence’²⁰—he had readily countenanced the suspension of law and custom and been popularly elected, underage, to the consulship (in this he had emulated his grandfather Africanus) and become the destroyer of Rome’s old enemy, Carthage. His place in the annals assured, he had utilised the same popular support to win a censorship. Subsequently, following a *débâcle* in Spain (when a Roman army supposedly besieging the Celtiberian city of Numantia had virtually surrendered to the enemy), Aemilianus was commissioned with the task of reversing the communal shame, being awarded a second consulship—again requiring a suspension of the law.

If as much evidence did not survive at this point as it does, the conventional prosopographer might be led to make assumptions of a tightly-knit family unit that would be quite misleading. Young Gracchus had made his military debut at Carthage (winning significant honour) by serving under his cousin who had also become his brother-in-law; and, in 133, Gracchus’s younger brother was serving under Aemilianus at Numantia. But all was not well within the family; the marriage between Aemilianus and Gracchus’s sister was not a happy one and Gracchus’s mother, reportedly, was in the habit of reproaching her sons because she was known as Scipio’s mother-in-law rather than the mother of the Gracchi.

The analysis of Gracchus’s ultimate motivation beckons (perhaps a vain exercise). His forceful personality would be characterised by those making a negative assessment as intemperate; urgent, by those well-disposed. Urgency was understandable. Rome’s success on the world stage would ensure that as Rome

transformed the outlook of the Mediterranean world, it was itself transformed. The effects of Rome’s international domination were debated in the Senate as both a practical and moral issue. The unequal acquisition of wealth flowing into Rome became the target of legislation. This was an era of profound social, cultural, economic and demographic transformation, of resistance to change and its embrace.²¹



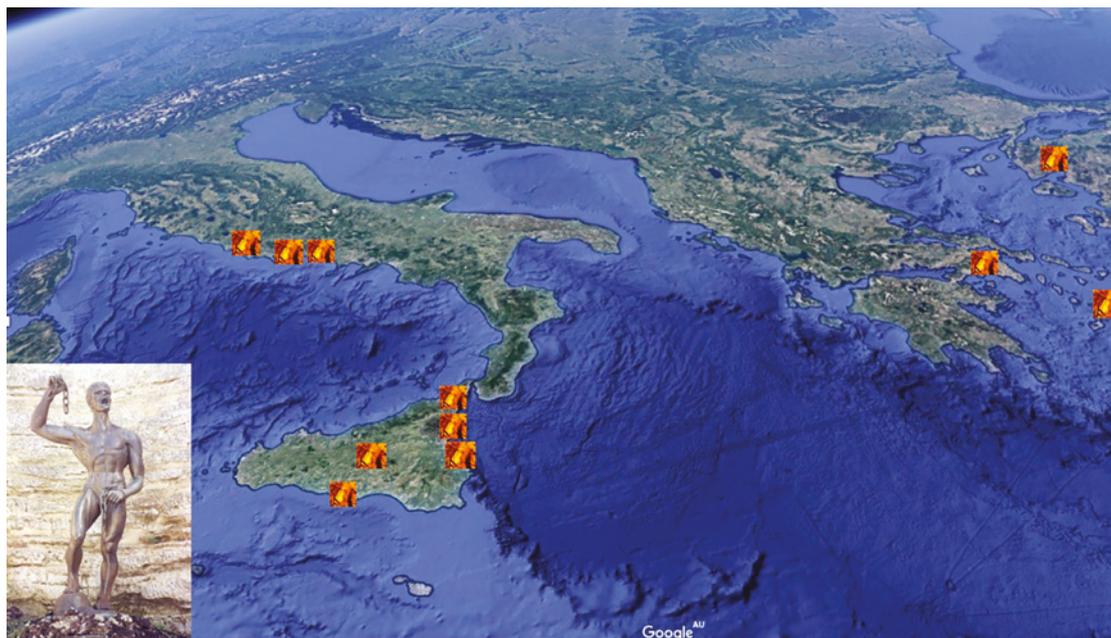
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Rome faced a number of interwoven problems, some posing existential threats. Archaeologists have queried the reality, but it was perceived at the time that the growth of broad estates, *latifundia* (profit-farming which took advantage of public lands that could be settled and leased from the State by way of a tithe on production and which exploited the availability of foreign servile labour), had serious flow-on effects: the drift of peasantry off the land; the consequent diminution of the pool from which Rome’s armies were traditionally drawn; the growth of an unsupported urban population; and the transformation of Italy’s rural landscape.²² Staples were increasingly imported from the provinces, undermining Rome’s self-sufficiency. Slave numbers rose exponentially. In the 130s the problems must have seemed critical: in 138, there was a major disruption to the annual military levy. The two consuls, as military heads-of-state, rigorously enforcing the military draft and disallowing exemptions demanded by the Tribunes, were—alarmingly—incarcerated by the latter. The public disruption was compounded by a grain shortage; rowdy gatherings ensued. Within the same decade, a slave insurrection erupted in Sicily; multiple cities were taken by the insurgents and it was feared that the whole island (a major source of grain for Rome) would be overrun. Rebel

► **Fig 7.** Map of slave revolts in the 130s. The flames represent the locations of outbreaks from which the contagion spread (roughly counter-clockwise from the left): Rome, Minturnae, Sinuessa, Agrigentum, Enna, Catana, Tauromenium, Messana, the mines of Athens, the island of Delos, and 'Asia'.

Inset: Bronze statue of Eunus, leader of the Sicilian rebellion, breaking his chains beneath the walls of the Castello di Lombardia in Enna, Sicily; created in 1959 by the Cascio Institute of Art.

IMAGE: J. L. BENESS & T. HILLARD; THE MAP UTILISES AN IMAGE FROM GOOGLE EARTH.



numbers grew to the tens of thousands—and one report puts the final staggering count at 200,000. Several Roman armies were defeated. The ‘contagion’ spread. Revolts blazed in Italy (and in Rome itself), on the slave-trading island of Delos, in the Athenian silver mines and, in 132, in Asia Minor (fig. 7).

Little wonder if a sense of urgency obtruded. It will not seem unfamiliar: a problem of such magnitude that it called for immediate action, but seemingly so dauntingly large and cutting across so many vested interests that no one agency appeared capable of tackling it. Notably, Scipio’s closest friend, Gaius Laelius, had attempted to rectify the problems (by tackling land tenure). Pushback from the *possessores*, ‘powerful men’ (reports Plutarch), was predictable, and Laelius, fearing imminent disturbance, withdrew his proposals. In taking up the cudgels, Gracchus was, it is clear, expressing anything but a unity of purpose prompted by kinship. It was intended as an expression of superior, and more courageous, statecraft. The law, he could argue, would help relieve Rome of surfeit population and repopulate the Italian countryside with smallhold peasants, men who might serve in Rome’s citizen militia. The ideology was straightforward—and ‘nostalgic.’²³ The proposal was ‘popular’; nor were the ‘voiceless and anonymous’ without the means of expression. Graffiti appeared on public buildings,

monuments and house walls, and, according to Plutarch, this most kindled Gracchus’s energies.²⁴

The expected opposition at first tried to obstruct the law (unsuccessfully)—and, then, in polemic and historiography, the lawgiver. The (generally hostile) Latin sources refer to him as a flawed character, prone thereby to extreme behaviour. Plutarch, provides the most material for a psychoanalysis, highlighting—apart from the patent need for reform and the pressure of public clamour—his mother’s cajolery, his competition with a contemporary rival who was overtaking him in the field of public advocacy and the encouragement taken from his intellectual companions, the Stoic philosopher Blossius of Cumae and the Greek rhetorician Diophanes of Mytilene, accounted the most eloquent Greek speaker of the day. (The last of those items, obviously spread by his detractors, was clearly intended to suggest untoward ‘foreign’ influence.) There is nothing, however, in this characterisation of Gracchus which could not be applied to others in the competitive well-educated culture that he shared with his rivals, including the fact that acute powers of persuasion and a capacity to think outside the Roman square were now part and parcel of the more traditional engagement in public affairs that placed such a high premium on primacy of achievement.

But there was something far more personal that distinguished Gracchus.

His early career, showing so much potential, had faltered, badly. He had, four years prior, been caught up in that infamous military disaster at Numantia which threatened first his life and then his ongoing political and moral credibility. Although a junior officer, he had brokered the pact that extracted 20,000 Roman soldiers, together with attendants and camp-followers, from certain death or servitude. He could not, however, save them from the humiliation of surrender, nor the Roman camp from plunder—and back in Rome, as noted, the treaty was regarded as a disgrace. An ancient precedent was invoked whereby the commander—and all his officers—should be handed over to the enemy. In the event, only the commander was despatched; Gracchus had been spared that initial peril for various reasons: the goodwill of the people, the intervention of his cousin Scipio (perhaps as galling as helpful), and—one source adds—his own eloquence.²⁵ Gracchus could be painted by those who wished him ill as having failed a moral test—and perhaps he even felt that heavily himself. The episode dogged him in the form of the Evil Eye (not a concept to be dismissed lightly in that society). It was this *invidia*, Cicero solemnly judged, that drove Gracchus in outrage (*dolor*) and fear (*timor*) to abandon the path of responsibility: the *gravitas patrum*—the weighty dignity of the Fathers.²⁶ There is no need to elaborate that matter here; it has been explored in a brilliant essay by Edwin Judge,²⁷ according to whom Gracchus, in his own mind, had failed ‘a supreme test of conscience.’ Whether this was so, Gracchus was clearly in haste to make good, and did not face obstacles with equanimity. It was, indeed, the assessment of Sallust, who favourably regarded Gracchus as one whose concern was for winning ‘true’ glory in the confrontation with ‘injustice’, that his lust for success led to an ‘insufficient moderation of spirit’ (*haud satis moderatus animus*).²⁸ Sallust’s sympathy for the Gracchan program marks him out amongst Roman historians; his reservations about the obtrusion of personality is, then, worth taking seriously. The State witnessed an alarming

escalation of brinkmanship (on both sides), culminating in Gracchus’s decision to stand for tribunician office for a consecutive year. This was considered an egregious challenge to political custom, and opened Gracchus to the charge of aiming at ‘kingship.’²⁹ In the meantime, Gracchus had secured the passage of his agrarian bill by having a colleague deposed by plebeian vote, made rousing speeches to the effect that the will of the People must prevail in politics, and had installed, again by popular vote, a triumviral commission to oversee the land reclamation consisting of himself, his twenty-year-old brother and his father-in-law. The envelope was being pushed; the political process was being transformed.

On the day that Gracchus was to be re-elected to a ground-breaking second term and in the face of this grave challenge to political orthodoxy (a continuity in office that defied the principle of annuality), the Senate held a crisis meeting on the Capitol hill, close by the place of assembly. At this point, prosopography will reveal the benefits of looking *beyond* the analysis of Gracchus’s mind when attempting a biopsy of this watershed moment. Opposition in the senate had been led, for some time, by Publius Cornelius Scipio Nasica Serapio, described as vehement in all his doings and sharp in his speaking (i.e., a man marked by a certain violent intensity),³⁰ another individual raised with expectations of civic leadership (his father having been consul twice, censor, and Pontifex Maximus, Chief Priest). Nasica had been elevated to his father’s priestly position, the first man elected to that post *in absentia*, and in that office he carried considerable moral authority via the multiple annual performances of Rome’s civic rituals, one of the means by which aristocratic dominance was effectively imposed on the general populace. There is more. He was one of Rome’s largest holders of public land, so his self-interest was not in doubt.³¹ He was also *another* grandson of Africanus, and speaking as a senior member of the clan. He was determined that Gracchus be ‘stopped’.

Nasica’s, however, was not the only authoritative voice in the senate. Amongst

others, the presiding consul, the man with the principal executive capacity (his colleague was in Sicily fighting the slaves), *would* be heard, though he was accustomed to offering his opinions in a more deliberative fashion, enjoying an outstanding reputation as an expert in pontifical and civil law. Publius Mucius Scaevola (who had given of his expertise when Gracchus was framing his legislation and who was also part of the extended kinship nexus that marked this closely inter-related elite) was ideologically driven, but he was disinterest personified, his ideology being the conviction that in a critical situation the rule of law must prevail. Celebrated as a man of unswerving allegiance to its letter, he was preternaturally determined to see that the interpretation of the law was not bent to the needs of the moment; he would take no action contrary to the law, nor exceed the legal powers of a consul.³²

Nasica now reasserted himself, fatefully, his irate temperament coming to the fore. He too brought his own baggage to the crisis, his material interests in accord with an ideological distaste for any challenge to the authority of his class. In his early career, his contempt for those whose living depended upon their calloused hands had cost him an election.³³ He was, like Shakespeare's Coriolanus, contemptuous of 'the general ignorance' and 'the multitudinous tongue.' In 138, he had been one of the consuls imprisoned by the tribunes and in that same year had faced an angry crowd protesting privation (in the face of the grain shortage), and simply ordered silence, claiming that he, rather than the complainants, knew what was good for the State. This, we are told, quietened the assembly, the *plebs* giving greater weight to his moral authority (*auctoritas*) than the collective need. The latter episode must have strengthened his self-certitude; the former, his antagonism to the tribunate.

Meeting Scaevola head on, Nasica came straight to the inadequacy of law. He rose in the senate and protested that the consul's veneration of the statutes was, in fact, threatening the survival of the State:

Since the consul by following the letter of the law is bringing it about that the Roman *imperium* together with all its laws will collapse, I present myself in my private capacity (*privatus*) as a leader at your disposal.

He then called upon those who would save the State to follow him.³⁴ On Rome's Capitol hill and in the place of assembly, Tiberius Gracchus and 200 (or 300) followers were clubbed to death by a largely senatorial lynch mob. Nasica's aura, not least as Chief Priest, carried weight—but, in his call-to-arms, he was explicit; this was not an act of the State—but in the State's defence. He was (and the point is reiterated in many later retellings) *privatus*. This was a moment that sealed Rome's fate for the next century. He invoked the principle that necessity knows no law, a slogan that has echoed through the centuries in 'states-of-emergency': *Not kennt kein Gebot*.³⁵ The senators who followed Nasica were persuaded that necessity demanded action, unsanctioned by office or law. Nasica's declaration makes this crystal clear—and those who fell in with him concurred. This was the conscious creation of a 'space devoid of law, a zone of anomie.'³⁶

Nasica, rather than Gracchus, forever changed the face of Roman politics, leaving an indelible mark. A new 'custom' had been enshrined: the concept of justifiable homicide (on private initiative) in the interests of the State.³⁷ Rome's problems had not been solved, but exacerbated—and in the aftermath of the bloodshed many considered the community to be irredeemably split into two.³⁸ The next generation faced a new set of choices and consequences, the settings having been fundamentally altered.

What has emerged from this prosopographical exploration is twofold: firstly, a cumulative picture of a culture, wherein are found the norms, the expected and the predictable, which attract the social scientists and the cultural historians. From the scholarship of the latter flows a vivid portrayal of the Roman elite, its [ant]agonistic instincts and sense of duty. At the same time, the individual portraits prompt a recognition

of the unpredictability of human affairs, the impact of the idiosyncratic and the role of human agency. This is the domain of the political historian. ¶

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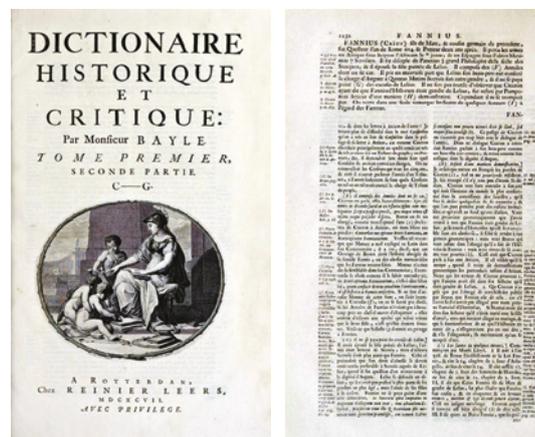


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1. *Life of Tiberius Gracchus*, 9.4–5.
2. 'Equitable and right': Florus, *A Two-Book Epitome of All Rome's Wars*, 2.2 (3.14).3. On the ideology of limited land tenure, see T. Peter Wiseman, *Remembering the Roman People: Essays on Late-Republican Politics and Literature* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2009), p. 41. On the role of ideology, see Wiseman, 'Roman History and the Ideological Vacuum', in *Remembering*, pp. 5–32. The 'vacuum' to which he refers is that created by some modern models.
3. See, e.g., Cicero on land owning and redistributions in his treatise *On Duties*, 2.73: 'It must be, first of all, the concern of one who will administer a commonwealth, that each will hold what is his own and that there be no diminution by public act of the property of private citizens.' If Cicero, rather than Jefferson and his collaborators, had been writing America's Declaration of Independence,

the resonating phrase concerning inalienable rights would have read differently. 'Life, Liberty and Property (or Estate)' was likely to have stood—as it had done for John Locke—in place of 'Life, Liberty and the Pursuit of Happiness'.

4. *Life of Tiberius Gracchus*, 8.2, 9.3.
5. *In Defence of Sestius*, 103.
6. See, e.g., Benjamin Straumann, *Crisis and Constitutionalism: Roman Political Thought from the Fall of the Republic to the Age of Enlightenment* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2016).
7. Two famous examples are found in Gracchus's circle (see below); two more in that of his cousin Scipio Aemilianus: the philosopher Panaetius (see below) and the statesman Polybius. The latter is well-known for formulating the notion of Rome's 'mixed constitution' which heavily impacted Roman thought.
8. Some might have taken solace in the tradition that Rome's political system was not the work of a single founder but, rather, the product of experiment and adaptability to circumstance; Cicero, *On the Commonwealth*, 2.1.2 (verballing Cato). In this regard, we are drawn to the arguments of Claudia Moatti, *Res publica: Histoire romaine de la chose publique* (Paris: Fayard, 2018); cf. 'Historicité et «altéronomie»: un autre regard sur la politique', *Politica Antica*, 1 (2011), 107–18.
9. For a painstaking treatment of the Marxist approach more generally, see Geoffrey de Ste Croix, *The Class Struggle in the Ancient Greek World from the Archaic Age to the Arab Conquests* (Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 1981), pp. 31–111, especially, pp. 50, 68.
10. Florus, *Epitome*, 2.1 (3.13).1–7, 2.2 (3.14).3.
11. For Washington's sentiments, Mortimer N.S. Sellers, 'The Roman Republic and the French and American Revolutions', in *The Cambridge Companion to the Roman Republic*, ed. by Harriet Flower (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2004), pp. 347–64 (p. 347).
12. We are currently engaged in a long-term project: the Macquarie Dictionary of Roman Social and Political Biography—in particular, a preliminary volume covering the years from 168 to 111 BCE.



13. For the presumption that alliances played a greater role in political action than principle and that 'the

▼ **Fig 8.** (left, note 12) The compilation of biographical data has a long history, even in modern scholarship. Bayle's *Dictionary*, containing many detailed personal profiles, and a model of critical source analysis, was first published in 1697.

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▼ **Fig 9.** (right, note 12) In this page from Bayle's *Dictionary*, a dozen lines demonstrate the succinct coverage desirable in an encyclopædia. The rest of the page is characteristically devoted to discursive footnotes that underpin the integrity of the concision in the text above and store pertinent data. Marginalia provide further authority by way of source citations. In this entry, Bayle is dealing with the relatively little known Fannius, a Roman senator, student of Greek philosophy and historian of the second century BCE. Admittedly, Bayle muddles Fannius' identity—but so did Cicero.

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- family was the kernel of a Roman political faction', see Ronald Syme, *Roman Revolution* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1939), p. 157; cf. pp. 11–12.
14. Ronald Syme, *Augustan Aristocracy* (Oxford: Clarendon, 1986), preface and p. 13.
 15. *On Duties*, 1.107–15.
 16. See Carlin A. Barton, *Roman Honor: The Fire in the Bones* (Berkeley, Los Angeles and London: University of California Press, 2001), pp. 56–58; 65–67; 74–84; 119–22 etc.; compare J.E. Lendon, *Empire of Honour: The Art of Government in the Roman World* (Oxford: Clarendon, 1997), pp. 30–106 (esp. pp. 50–51).
 17. For the idiom, see, for example, Cicero, *On the Commonwealth*, 6.26.
 18. Firsthand testimony is found at Polybius, *Histories*, 31.23–24.
 19. Plutarch, *Tiberius Gracchus*, 6.2.
 20. Plutarch, *Aemilius Paullus*, 38.2–4.
 21. The diverse aspects of this transformation were adumbrated in the lecture, but cannot be canvassed here.
 22. Appian, *Civil Wars*, 1.7; cf. Plutarch, *Tiberius Gracchus*, 8.1–4. Contemporary perceptions were of the essence; the 'evidence' could be seen by those travelling the grand arteries; Plutarch, *Tiberius Gracchus*, 8.7.
 23. Again, the phenomenon is not unfamiliar; when social change accelerates or transforms a society beyond a certain point, and the past ceases to provide the *pattern* for the present, it becomes, instead, a model for it, the call being for a return to the ways of the ancestors. This rallying cry often implies a fundamental transformation of the past (history rewritten) and can be 'a mask for innovation'; Eric Hobsbawm, *On History* (London: Weidenfeld & Nicolson, 1997), pp. 5, 13–14. We are inclined to think that this Roman attempt to turn back the clock was not disingenuous.
 24. *Tiberius Gracchus*, 8.7.
 25. Plutarch, *Tiberius Gracchus*, 5–7; cf. [Anonymous], *On Illustrious Men*, 64; Quintilian, *Institutes of Oratory*, 7.4.13.
 26. *On the Response of the Soothsayers*, 43.
 27. 'The Mind of Tiberius Gracchus', delivered as a series of lectures between the 1960s and 1990s, is based upon a set of notes made in the 1960s; it is available in abbreviated form in *Engaging Rome and Jerusalem. Historical Essays for our Time*, edited by Stuart Piggin (North Melbourne: Australian Scholarly Publishing, 2014), pp. 11–33. It was published without the full array of its scholarly footnotes. It is our hope that it will one day appear with that weighty apparatus. On Gracchus's crisis of conscience, see esp. pp. 17–25.
 28. *The Jugurthine War*, 41.10–42.3.
 29. The polemical 'charge' was of aiming at *regnum* (a politically-loaded word). Whether Gracchus's opponents really believed that this was his aim, they were underlining the claim that his actions were fundamentally altering the political landscape.
 30. Cicero, *Brutus*, 107 (*vehemens* and *acer*).
 31. Plutarch, *Tiberius Gracchus*, 13.3.
 32. Scaevola was a master of both *lex* and *consuetudo* (law and custom); Cicero, *On the Orator*, 1.212. The installation of a Dictator (usually undertaken in military emergencies) required meticulous ritual which could not be effected in a day.
 33. Valerius Maximus, *Facta et Dicta Memorabilia*, 7.5.2 (misidentifying the Nasica); cf. Cicero, *In Defence of Plancius* 51.
 34. Valerius Maximus, 3.2.17.
 35. The German Chancellor Theobald von Bethmann-Hollweg offered the German formula, quoted here, as a justification for the invasion of Belgium in World War I. *Necessitas non habet legem* is now, of course, a maxim recognised in legal circles.
 36. We have been much influenced here by Giorgio Agamben, *Stato di eccezione* (Turin: Bollati Boringhieri, 2003), translated by Kevin Attell as *State of Exception* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2005), pp. 4, 26–7, 50, and *passim*.
 37. Its clearest articulation will be found in Cicero's *Defence of Milo*, 8.
 38. Cicero, *On the Commonwealth*, 1.31.