

ANCIENT HISTORY

Evaluate the importance of the Gracchi

Political Revolution in Rome

Developments in Rome

- Constitutional challenges: the tribunates of the Gracchi
- Consequences of the Gracchan tribunates
- Role and significance of the tribunes: Saturninus, Livius Drusus, Sulpicius Rufus
- Role and impact of violence in politics
- Significance of the Social war and Marian-Sullan Civil War; role of socii
- Marius: military career and reforms; significance of his political career
- Sulla: military career; nature and significance of dictatorship and legislation
- Role and significance of nobiles, equites, optimates, populares

Wars and the impact of the empire

- Jugurtha: causes and consequences of the Jugurthine Wars
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- Agricultural changes, slavery and land reform; role

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the opposition of the Senate catalyzed Tiberius to resort to unprecedented means to pass this bill. (a way of ensuring that one magistrate couldn't exercise absolute power due to another colleague's ability to prevent his actions).

While his opponents used the senate's financial powers to hinder the implementations of the bill,

Evaluate the importance of the Gracchi

The Gracchi had a significant role in the Political revolution of Rome 133-78BC. Certainly, the tribunates of the Gracchi marked the first time that bloodshed had been practiced in Roman politics since centuries before. It had a chain reaction of hence starting a spiral of violence in the late republic that would subsequently cause the death of thousands. The second century had been one of comparative domestic peace, before the Gracchi shattered the existing harmony, behaving 'for whatever laudable motive, in a way that was fundamentally irresponsible' according to David Stockton. [insert a positive historian's view here]

The proposal of the land bill (*lex agraria*) was exceptionally significant as it was the starting point which would lead to the following destabilizing of power. Both modern and ancient historians are divided over his motive behind the bill, but whatever may have been, the Roman nobiles undoubtedly believed that Tiberius was upsetting the status quo and feared losing traditional privileges. Tiberius' aims were conservative and the law itself represented a traditional Roman program of compromise and conciliation. But in his impatience or determination to see the reform introduced, Tiberius' failure to consult the Senate planted the seeds of radical and violent changes that were to follow. "His anxiety to pass the bill may have led him to ill considered constitutional innovations, but it is doubtful whether he realized the implications of his acts or could have anticipated the results in the future." – Solomon Katz

The intransigence of the Senate to address the problems faced by Rome and Tiberius' resilience to solve them resulted in the founding of new, unprecedented means to change the operation of politics in Rome. This included a highly unconstitutional act unparalleled before in history; the deposal of Ocativius. This was of great importance as Tiberius' move not only violated the sacrosanctity of the tribune but also a fundamental principle of the Republic; collegiality. Hence, to many senators, Tiberius's action would have seemed to have potentially eradicated this check in power and opened the doors to the possibility of tyranny. The charge of regnum laid on Tiberius was a fundamental motivation to assassinate him - an act which in itself was a significant indication that the senate had been pushed to the very brinks of desperation to undo the detrimental change Tiberius had brought about.

Tiberius' next unprecedented move involved usurping the senate's traditional role in state finances and foreign policy by accepting the inheritance of the kingdom of Peragmum to fund his bill. The importance of his radical interference in foreign and financial affairs lies in the fact that this move was seen as an attack on the senate's position and led a hardening of opposition. All these developments during Tiberius' tribunate threatened the long established traditional constitutional practices of Rome (Mos Maiorum). "At stake was not merely the fate of land reform but the whole question of who ruled at Rome, the senate or the popular assembly." – R.E Smith

Tiberius attempt at a re-election was most probably the final straw for the senators. This move was significant as it had been four hundred years since any one had attempted at a re-election. For some, it seemed certain now that Tiberius was attempting to set up a regnum and that Mos Maiorum was in grave peril. The Optimates evidently felt so threatened by Tiberius by his use the popular assembly's power against the will of the oligarchy that they resorted to violence, believing the restoration of the stability and order of power would be ascertained. Subsequently, Gracchus and three thousand of his supporters were murdered by the mob of senators and their clients. Scipio Nasica views this kind of open violence and bloodshed among members of the ruling elite as "the first bloodshed in the long agony of the Roman Revolution." The murder of Tiberius was significant for two reasons. First, it broke the taboo of violence and desensitized people against its use. Second, it set precedent to rendering the sacrosanct of a tribune redundant. Hence, it was consequential that more blood shed was to follow as violence would gradually become an accepted political tool to settle political opposition.

"Both sides, shocked by the violence and bloodshed, must have realized that the struggle was not yet over" - Pamela Bradley. His brother eagerly continued Tiberius' land policy, learning from his brother's mistakes and he built upon it. Historian Heitland believes that Gaius "attempted to weakened senatorial power and to restore popular sovereignty". Gaius actively assailed the power of the senate, reducing their economic, political and judicial powers with a number of legislative programs and administrative reforms. The intransigence and of the Senate as well as the fickle nature popular assembly is demonstrated once again with Livius Drusus consistently outbidding Gaius for the support of the people.

The tribunate of Gaius was significant as he was responsible, for the first time in history, the usage of *senatus consultum*. After the Senate passed this decree in order to "see to it that the Republic not be harmed", the legislation of murder as a method of dealing with political threats took a dramatic leap. Three thousand Gracchans were arrested and put to death without trial and the murderers of Gaius escaped free of any form of punishment. The means of settling a situation by violence was gradually becoming a distressing trend, but due to the short sightedness of the senate it was likely that they believed that it had saved the state and restored order.

Whether the Gracchi was the cause of the political decline that had followed is debatable amongst historians. Generally labeled by historians as revolutionary or reformists, the methods that Gracchus adopted to pass legislations, according to Cicero, 'shattered the stability of the state'. Moreover, their actions caused a snowballing effect in which their challenge to the powers of the Senate led to 'increasingly bitter struggles for political supremacy with a corresponding lowering of

moral standards in all branches of life' – R.E. Smith. Other historians, however, argue that they were merely a catalyst that brought the underlying problems already prevalent to light. Solomon Katz believes Tiberius “may have attacked the oligarchy but his intentions were probably to assure the passage of the lex agraria rather than to destroy the Senate’s control of the government.” The Gracchi can be seen as a reflection of the Roman republic breakdown as “The Gracchan Period had reached a stage where it is possible to perceive in the light of hindsight that there had to be large changes”- Stockton.

The senate was solely concerned with upholding the traditional political order that they saw any attempt to restrict their powers as an attack on the republic. When the Gracchi were frustrated by the conservatism, short sightedness and selfishness of the oligarchy, they resorted to means which threatened the stability of power. In this way, they could be regarded as revolutionary, and the senate had no way to counter the threat to its existence except by violence.

Ultimately, the tribunes of Tiberius and Gaius Gracchus were highly significant as it marked a turning point in Roman political history. Cicero accounts that ‘Tiberius Gracchus’ tribunate divided one people into two factions’, that is, the senatorial class into optimates and populares. In addition, the Gracchi had reinvented the tribunate as a weapon that can potentially undermine the traditional powers of the senate and to further their own political careers. Scullard affirms that the Gracchi were “in a true sense martyrs: they had witnessed to their relief in the need for reform and they had suffered for their faith. Whether or not the Gracchi should be regarded as revolutionaries, without doubt they precipitated the revolution that overthrew the republic.”

The tribunes used the experience of the Gracchi to achieve their aims by manipulating the changed traditional role and responsibility of the Tribunate