

ANCIENT HISTORY

Question: Describe Tiberius Gracchus' Land Bill and the manner in which it was passed. (10 marks)

Tiberius Gracchus, tribune of 133BC, proposed and passed a land bill called the Lex Agraria using a variety of methods, some more controversial than others. These included the use of the Concilium plebis in passing legislation as opposed to using the senate, confiscating land from the wealthy and handling foreign affairs.

As quaestor to Gaius Mancinus in Spain, **Plutarch** tells us that on his return, Tiberius witnessed first-hand the state of the land and the peasants. He concluded that there was a genuine need for reform whereby he decided to take matters into his own hands. **Appian** mentions that Tiberius' purpose was also to provide "plenty of men" for the army, considering numbers were steadily declining. He further mentions that his reforms may have been a reaction to the recent slave war where by providing employment to the proletariat class, a potential slave rebellion could be avoided.

Plutarch and **Appian** provide us with details to what Tiberius' Bill entailed. The land confiscated was only applied to the ager publicus. The amount of land to be held was limited to 500 iugera however a 250 iugera bonus was given to each of the first two born sons. This land was not subjected to rent. Whilst **Marsh** empathises with the rich saying that Tiberius and his bill were "incapable of seeing both sides", **Cary** rightly sums up the bill as "a model of compromise". This was evident through former substantial land-owners being further compensated if they had made improvements to the land in the form of dams, servant quarters and fences. Furthermore, land held in Campania was exempt from the Bill which was arguably some of the most fertile land in all of Italy. This was a particular large concession to many of the aristocracy as many of them owned properties here. Nevertheless, **Marsh** says with the Senate's power diminishing, they were obligated to view the bill as merely a confiscation of their property.

The land in excess of statutory limits was given back to the state and redistributed in 30 iugera lots to the landless proletariat. They however were subject to a small rent and could not alienate nor sell their land.

The manner in which Tiberius passed his bill has been an exceedingly contentious issue. **Plutarch** tells us that Marcus Octavius was a formidable oratory opponent to Tiberius. At the behest of the senate, Octavius used his veto to overturn Tiberius' bill. In response, Tiberius, under the provision of the Lex Hortensia (287BC), convened the Concilium Plebis and had Octavius deposed. **Plutarch** further notes that Tiberius also threatened to use the funds of King Attalus' Will as funds for his land bill to assist land owners with stocking and cultivate their farms. Both these actions posed a serious threat to the Senate's Mos Maiorum and Potestas however in Tiberius' defence, he was aware of the avarice of the Senate and that they did not promote revolutionaries. As **Carcopino** notes, his land bill was truly "from a moral obligation and did not permit temporising or delays" so he was more rather forced to use these course of actions to ensure his bill was passed.