

His government proved both lasting and masterful, and being himself successful in all things and dreaded by all, he left a lineage and succession that held the supreme power in like manner after him.

Thus, out of the multiplicity of civil commotions, the Roman state passed into harmony and monarchy. To show how these things came about I have written and compiled this narrative, which is well worth the study of those who wish to know the measureless ambition of men, their dreadful lust for power, their unwearied perseverance, and the countless forms of evil.

5.2 Greed Unlimited and Unrestrained Corrupted and Destroyed Everything

Sallust, an ambitious careerist, a gifted writer, and a corrupt provincial governor, was one of the new types of Romans who became prominent in the late Republic. Like Marius and Cicero, he was a "new man" from the Italian municipal aristocracy. Like them, he lacked the "right" family background for a straightforward political career at Rome and had to struggle to make his way. Although not as able as either Marius or Cicero, he was lucky in that the conditions of the time favored people like him. Just as Sallust's career had reached something of a dead end, the charismatic Julius Caesar began to unite new men from Rome and the Italian cities, some members of the old aristocracy, the people, and the army in a coalition that effectively challenged the control of the senatorial oligarchy. This new coalition spelled the end of the old order of the Senatus Populusque Romanus (the Senate and the People of Rome, or, in abbreviated form, SPQR).

Although expressed in traditional moralistic terms, Sallust's brief survey provides a synoptic view of most of the factors that went into the making of the Roman Revolution.² He has a quite different take on these events than does Appian in the previous reading.

The system of parties and factions, with all their corresponding evils, developed at Rome some years before this war, as a result of peace and the kind of material prosperity that all people prize highly. For prior to the destruction of Carthage, the People and the Senate of Rome ran the government peacefully and with consideration for each other. Citizens did not struggle among themselves for glory or domination. Fear of enemies preserved the good morals of the state. But when this fear was removed, the vices of prosperity, licentiousness, and arrogance arose. Thus the peace the Romans sought in times of adversity, after they had obtained it, turned out to be harder and more bitter than the adversity itself. For the nobles began to abuse their dignity and the people their liberty; each began to look out for its own advantage, to squander and to grab. Accordingly, everything was split between the two. The republic, trapped between the factions, was torn apart.

The nobility had the more powerful faction. The people's power, being divided and scattered among so many, was less effective. Domestic and military issues were

²Sallust, *The Jugurthine War* 41–42.

decided by a tiny handful of nobles who had control over the treasury, the provinces, the magistracies, and all distinctions and triumphs. The people were burdened by military service and poverty. The generals seized the spoils of war and shared them with their friends. Meanwhile, the parents and small children of the soldiers were driven from their homes if they happened to have powerful neighbors.

Thus the possession of power led to the rise of greed; unlimited and unrestrained, it corrupted and destroyed everything. Nothing was respected, nothing held sacred. Eventually this greed brought about its own downfall, for as soon as representatives of the nobility were found who preferred true glory to unjust power, the state began to be shaken, and civil dissension began like an earthquake. For after Tiberius and Gaius Gracchus, whose ancestors had contributed much to Rome during the Carthaginian and other wars, began to assert the freedom of the people and expose the crimes of the oligarchs, the guilty nobles were terrified. They opposed the Gracchi, now through the allies, now through the Knights. These latter they won away from the commons by holding out the hope of sharing their special privileges. First Tiberius, then a few years later Gaius, who had followed in his brother's footsteps, were slain, although one was a tribune and the other a member of a commission for the founding of colonies.

5.3 Social and Economic Conditions: The Gracchi

Roman writers such as Sallust (above) were not much given to the kind of economic and social analysis that is characteristic of modern history. They wrote about people, not about "movements" or "forces." Social and economic explanations have to be pieced together from scattered accounts. Often these accounts are fragments of political tracts or propaganda speeches. Each side, popular or oligarchic, tried to give its own "spin" to its particular account of the issue in question.

Of these issues, none was more inflammatory than the matter of land, poverty, and the army. By the middle of the second century B.C., Rome had become the preeminent military power in the Mediterranean. As a consequence, wealth poured into Italy and undermined the traditional style of family farming, and with it the military basis of the draft. Writing over 200 years later but using earlier sources, the biographer Plutarch gives the following sketchy account of how the problem originated and the efforts of one member of the senatorial class, the tribune Tiberius Gracchus to address it.³

Of the land which the Romans won in war from their neighbors, some they auctioned publicly. The rest they turned into public land and assigned to the poor and needy, for which the latter were to pay a small rent to the state treasury. But when the rich began to offer more by way of rent and drive out the poor, a law was passed that restricted the holding of public land by one person to no more than 500 acres.

³Plutarch, *Tiberius Gracchus* 8; 9; *Gaius Gracchus* 3-7 (selections).

For a while this law restrained the greed of the rich and helped the poor. They were able to remain on the land they rented, and they continued to occupy the allotment they had from the outset. But then the rich of the neighborhood managed to transfer these rentals to themselves by means of fictitious names. Finally they openly took possession of most of the land in their own names.

The poor who were forced off the land were no longer enthusiastic about military service, or even about raising children. The result was that in a short time there was a distinct manpower shortage of freeborn men all over Italy. In their place, gangs of foreign slaves filled the land. The rich used these to cultivate the lands from which they had driven off the free citizens. . . .

On being elected tribune of the plebs, Tiberius took the matter in hand. Most writers say he was encouraged in this plan by Diophanes the rhetorician and Blossius the philosopher . . . but some say that Cornelia, the mother of Tiberius, was partly responsible. She often reproached her sons with the fact that the Romans still called her the daughter of Scipio [*i.e.*, *Scipio Africanus, the conqueror of Hannibal*] rather than the mother of the Gracchi. . . . [However] his brother Gaius claimed in a propaganda tract that when Tiberius was passing through Etruria on his way to Numantia [*in Spain*], he saw for himself that the countryside had been stripped bare of its native inhabitants and that the farmers and the tenders of the flocks were imported, barbarian slaves. It was this experience that first led him to develop the policies which were so fatal to the two brothers. Most of all it was the people themselves who excited Tiberius' energy and ambition. By means of messages and appeals written on public porticoes, walls, and monuments, they called on Tiberius to recover the public land for the poor.

And so Tiberius proposed a law for the redistribution of publicly owned land to the landless. By this means he hoped to restore the traditional basis of the draft and so restore the Roman army. Plutarch preserves a fragment of one of his speeches drumming up support for his program.

The wild animals that wander over Italy have dens and lairs to hide in, but the men who fight and die for Italy have only air and light—and nothing else! Houseless and homeless they wander the land with their wives and children. And when their generals appeal to them before a battle to defend their ancestral tombs and shrines from their enemies, they lie: Not one of them has a family altar; not one of these Romans possesses an ancestral tomb. Instead they fight—and die—for the wealth and luxury of others. They are said to be the masters of the world, but they do not have so much as a single clod of earth they can call their own.

Although the law passed, Tiberius was assassinated by his enemies while still in office. His opponents tried to make a case for the legitimacy of his murder, but the killing of a tribune, protected by sacrosanctitas, the inviolability and holiness of his office, made a mockery of the traditions of the ancient social pact between rich and poor and patricians and plebeians, that for so long had undergirded the state. More blows to social concord were delivered in the next round of the Gracchan crisis, 123/121 B.C., when Tiberius' brother Gaius took up the cause. Having been elected tribune, he proposed another, much more comprehensive round of reform legislation.

After Gaius entered office, he instantly became the most prominent of all the tribunes. He was incomparably the best orator, and the passion with which he still lamented his brother's death made him all the more fearless in speaking. He used every occasion to remind the people of what had happened to Tiberius, and he contrasted their cowardly behavior with that of their ancestors. . . . "Before your eyes," he said, "these men beat Tiberius to death with clubs. They dragged his body from the Capitol through the streets and tossed it into the Tiber. Moreover, those of his friends who were caught were put to death without trial. And yet it is the ancient tradition of our fathers that if anyone is accused on a capital charge and does not make an appearance in court, a trumpeter shall go to the door of his house and summon him to appear. Until this is done, the judges may not vote on his case. These were the kinds of safeguards and protections our ancestors believed necessary in capital cases."

After he had stirred up the people with words of this type—and he had a powerful voice and spoke with great conviction—he proposed two laws. One provided that if the people had deprived any magistrate of his office he should be barred from holding any future office. The second law made a magistrate who had banished a citizen without trial to be liable himself to prosecution by the people. The first was obviously aimed at disqualifying Marcus Octavius, who had been deposed from the tribunate by Tiberius. The other targeted Popillius, who as praetor had banished the friends of Tiberius. Without waiting for trial, Popillius fled from Italy. The other law, however, was withdrawn by Gaius himself, who said he spared Octavius at the request of his mother Cornelia. This pleased the people and they agreed to its withdrawal, honoring Cornelia no less on account of her sons than of her father. Later on they erected a bronze statue of her with the inscription: "Cornelia, Mother of the Gracchi" . . .

He now introduced a number of laws to flatter the People and undermine the power of the Senate. The first regarded public land which was to be divided up among the poor. The next stipulated that soldiers were to be equipped at public cost without any deduction being made from their pay for this and that nobody under seventeen should be drafted. A third law proposed to extend the franchise to the Italians. A fourth lowered the price of grain for the poor. The fifth had to do with the appointment of jurors.

It was this law that did more than any other to cut down the power of the Senate. They alone served as jurors in criminal cases, and this privilege made them feared by the people and the knights alike. Gaius' law added 300 knights to the 300 senators to create a pool of 600 from which the jurors would be drawn. . . . The People not only passed this law but also allowed Gaius to choose the jurors, who were to come from the equestrian order, so that he found himself invested with something like monarchical power. Even the Senate agreed to accept his advice. When he did counsel them, it was always in support of some measure that brought credit to that body. For instance, there was the case of the very equitable and ethical decree concerning the grain which the propraetor Fabius sent to the city from Spain. Gaius persuaded the Senate to sell the grain and to send the proceeds back to the cities of Spain. He

had Fabius censured for making the administration of the province intolerably burdensome to the inhabitants. This brought Gaius a great reputation in addition to making him popular in the provinces.

He also introduced legislation for the founding of colonies and the building of roads and public granaries. Although he himself undertook the management and direction of all these projects, he showed no signs of being worn down by these different and demanding tasks. On the contrary, he carried each one out with amazing speed and application as if it were the only one he was doing. Even those who hated and feared him were struck by his efficiency and his ability to get things done. As for the people, they were thrilled to see him surrounded by a mob of contractors, craftsmen, ambassadors, magistrates, soldiers, and scholars. He was on familiar terms with all of these. Yet, while showing kindness and the kind of consideration that was due to each, he was able to preserve his dignity. In this way he was able to demonstrate that those who cast him as intimidating, overbearing, or violent were envious detractors. . . .

His greatest enthusiasm was reserved for the building of roads. These he made beautiful and graceful as well as useful. Made of quarried stone and tamped sand, they were laid out straight across the countryside. Depressions were filled in, and watercourses or ravines were bridged. Both sides of the road were leveled or raised to the same height, so that the whole project had everywhere an even and attractive appearance. . . .

Unfortunately for Gracchus, the office of tribune was a weak base on which to try to carry out such an ambitious, independent program. The Senate outbid him in crowd-pleasing legislation and was able to undermine his support. When he ran for a third term as tribune, he was defeated. Then, when the Senate proceeded to take apart his legislative program, Gaius' followers were provoked into a confrontation. In the riot that ensued, violence resulted and the oligarchs in the Senate had the excuse to declare an emergency. Gaius and his followers were slaughtered and their property confiscated. To crown their triumph and rub salt in the wounds, the temple of Concord, which had been built centuries earlier as a monument to the establishment of understanding between plebeians and patricians, was refurbished by Opimius, one of the prime instigators of the emergency decree.

5.4 Politicians and Generals Out of Control

In 88 B.C., L. Cornelius Sulla was sent out as commander against the king of Pontus, Mithridates VI, whose generals had invaded the Roman provinces of Asia Minor and the mainland of Greece. One of the events of the campaign was the siege of Athens. Plutarch, after narrating the barbarous cutting down of the groves of the Academy and Lyceum gymnasias (the locations of Plato's and Aristotle's schools) for lumber for the siege, and detailing Sulla's demands for money, contrasts the behavior of the generals of the past with those of the present. It was precisely the transformation of the generals of Rome from servants of the state to independent dynasts that illustrates the distance between the late Republic and the earlier Republic. In a trenchant comment he says: "In order to become the masters of those better than