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## The Land Reform of the Gracchi Brothers: A Struggle for Social Justice

## Abstract

From the early Roman Republic, tensions steadily grew between the aristocratic elite and the lower classes. The aristocracy's dominance in political offices and extensive landownership were key sources of inequality and unrest. While occasional compromises were made between the social classes, reform efforts were also undertaken to address the poor's living conditions. By the late Republican period, the economic situation of the rural population had deteriorated significantly, leading to increasing demands for structural reform. In the 2nd century BCE, the Gracchi brothers emerged as prominent reformers aiming to address these social and economic disparities. Their central legislative initiative focused on redistributing a portion of land, particularly land acquired illegally by the wealthy, to landless peasants. Additional reforms included proposals for the state to cover military expenses of peasant soldiers and for granting legal rights to Rome's allies and Latin populations, aligning them more closely with Roman citizens. These reform efforts, however, were perceived as direct challenges to the entrenched power of the aristocracy. Consequently, the elite actively resisted the implementation of such measures. This paper examines the underlying causes of socio-political unrest, the reformist strategies pursued by the Gracchi brothers, and the opposition they encountered from Rome's ruling class.

**Keywords:** Land Reform, Social Justice, Roman Republic, Plebeians, Aristocracy

## Gracchus Kardeşlerin Toprak Reformu: Sosyal Adalet Mücadelesi

## Öz

Roma Cumhuriyeti'nin ilk dönemlerinden itibaren aristokrat elit ile alt sınıflar arasındaki gerilim giderek arttı. Aristokrasinin siyasi makamlar üzerindeki hâkimiyeti ve geniş toprak mülkiyeti, eşitsizlik ve huzursuzluğun başlıca kaynaklarıydı. Sosyal sınıflar arasında zaman zaman uzlaşmalar sağlansa da, yoksul kesimin yaşam koşullarını iyileştirmeye yönelik reform girişimlerinde de bulunulmuştur. Cumhuriyet döneminin sonlarına doğru, kırsal nüfusun ekonomik durumu önemli ölçüde kötüleşmiş, bu da yapısal reform taleplerinin artmasına neden olmuştur. M.Ö. 2. yüzyılda, Gracchus Kardeşler bu sosyal ve ekonomik eşitsizlikleri ele almayı amaçlayan önde gelen reformcular olarak ortaya çıktılar. Onların temel yasama girişimi, özellikle zenginler tarafından yasa dışı yollarla edinilen toprakların bir kısmının topraksız köylülere dağıtılmasına odaklanmaktaydı. Ek reform önerileri arasında, köylü askerlerin askeri giderlerinin devlet tarafından karşılanması ve Roma'nın müttefikleri ile Latin topluluklarına Roma vatandaşlarıyla benzer yasal hakların tanınması yer almaktaydı. Ancak bu reform girişimleri, aristokrasinin yerleşik gücüne doğrudan bir tehdit olarak görülmüştür. Sonuç olarak, seçkin sınıf bu tür önlemlerin uygulanmasına aktif olarak karşı çıkmıştır. Bu çalışma, sosyo-politik huzursuzluğun temel nedenlerini, Gracchus Kardeşlerin izlediği reform stratejilerini ve Roma'nın yönetici sınıfından gördükleri direnci incelemektedir.

**Anahtar Kelimeler:** Toprak Reformu, Sosyal Adalet, Roma Cumhuriyeti, Plebler, Aristokrasi

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## **1. Introduction**

With the end of the Monarchy (753–509 BCE), Rome was compelled to confront a series of significant challenges during its transition to the Republican period (509–27 BCE). These challenges collectively contributed to the emergence of a despotic environment, characterized by oppression and unjust practices. This oppressive atmosphere enabled the aristocratic class to accumulate even greater power, while exacerbating the impoverishment of the lower classes. The growing dominance of the aristocracy stemmed primarily from their control over vast areas of Roman land and their involvement in commerce. Citizens lacking sufficient land were often forced to sell the small plots they owned, a burden that fell particularly hard on the poor peasantry. These landless or marginally landholding peasants were also obligated to serve in the military during times of war and had to cover their military expenses out of pocket. Although the peasantry, burdened by debt and financial hardship, sought remedies to improve their conditions, their efforts were insufficient. Nonetheless, some reform movements emerged to alleviate the suffering of the common people. Licinius was the first to draft legislation aimed at ensuring certain rights for the population within the framework of social justice. These laws addressed issues such as debt, land ownership limits, and the requirement that one of the consuls be elected from the plebeian class. Although Licinius strived to implement these rights during his time in office, he faced strong resistance from the aristocracy. After the conclusion of his term, conditions once again turned against the lower classes. However, toward the end of the second century BCE, the Gracchi brothers came to power and sought to enforce Licinius' laws. Tiberius Gracchus gained popular support primarily through his initiatives on land reform, although he was unable to fundamentally alter Rome's political structure. Following his tenure, his brother Gaius Gracchus assumed leadership and enacted reforms in areas such as land distribution and military service. As was often the case, however, the Roman aristocracy adopted an adversarial stance toward these reforms and made every effort to remove the Gracchi brothers from power. Although the Gracchi brothers aimed to liberate the lower classes from their dire circumstances, the prevailing political dynamics of the period ultimately hindered the realization of their initiatives. This study draws on key information from ancient sources such as Appian's *Civil Wars*, Dio Cassius' *Roman History*, Diodorus' *Library of History*, Livy's *History of Rome*, and Plutarch's *Lives*, particularly his account of the Gracchi brothers. In addition to these primary sources, this study utilizes both primary sources and the works of scholars specializing in this area. Within the scope of this study, the socio-political problems leading up to the reforms of the Gracchi brothers are examined, along with an analysis of the solutions they proposed. Furthermore, the study addresses how Rome gained strength from the Republican period onward.

## **2. General Problems in Rome until the time of the Gracchi Brothers**

Before discussing the problems faced by the Gracchi brothers and the solutions they sought, it would be useful to know the general problems that preceded their rise to power. These are the issues that the Gracchi brothers tried to find solutions to. These issues consist of the following topics: Roman expansion during the republican period, the Patrician-Plebeian struggle, allies and non-citizens in Rome, and land reforms during the republican period.

## **2.1. Roman Expansion During the Republican Period**

Following the transition from monarchy to republic, Rome engaged in conflicts with its neighboring communities, waging its first wars against them. After securing victory against its Latin neighbors in 499 BCE, Rome waged war against the Etruscan city of Veii, located north of the Tiber River. By 396 BCE, Rome had doubled its territorial holdings through military success. Although Rome granted freedom to the populations in the conquered regions, it nevertheless pursued coercive treaties compelling these communities to relinquish their lands. As a consequence of this expansionist policy, Rome established colonies and constructed road networks extending from the north to the south, while also initiating major urban development projects in various cities. Around 300 BCE, these infrastructural efforts led to a marked increase in urban populations (Martin, 2022: 72-74).

The rapid expansion of Italy led to profound social and economic disruptions in Rome (Boren, 1977: 57). During this period, rural citizens experienced severe economic hardships. Among the underlying causes of these difficulties were the growing population and the prolonged absence of men from agricultural labor due to extended military campaigns. The combination of these factors triggered unforeseen socio-economic transformations and produced destabilizing effects within society. Meanwhile, Rome's high-ranking officials reaped substantial economic benefits from this expansion during the 3rd and 2nd centuries BCE (Martin, 2022: 74, 89).

## **2.2. The Patrician-Plebeian Struggle**

In Republican Rome, aristocratic families held dominant political influence and exercised control over vast territories. This aristocratic class, known as the patricians, formed a closed social order, while those outside this elite circle were designated as plebeians (Boren, 1977: 14). The attitude of the aristocratic class, namely the patricians, led to a rapid deterioration and weakening of their relations with the plebeians during the Republican period. There was a notable absence of a genuinely representative force within society; only the equestrian order was regarded as a body capable of providing some degree of representation (Mommsen, 2023: 346-347). However, the aristocracy displayed a similarly dismissive stance toward this emerging equestrian class as well. The failure to equitably distribute land acquired through military conquests, combined with the unjust policies of administrators, intensified societal unrest (Mommsen, 2023: 357-358, 366-368).

During the Republican period, Rome witnessed increasing tensions in patrician-plebeian relations, particularly concerning issues such as land ownership, intermarriage

<sup>1</sup> between patricians and plebeians, and debt. These tensions were also reflected in the broader conflict between the *optimates* and the *populares*. As the wealthy aristocratic class gained more power, the impoverished segments of society were forced to endure increasingly difficult living conditions. As a result of ongoing struggles, the *Twelve Tables* were introduced to resolve

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<sup>1</sup> Cicero described as unfair the article of the law that prohibited the *deceimvirs* from marrying plebeians from the patrician class, and in fact, *connubium* (i.e., the right of people from different communities to legitimately marry each other). He criticizes the fact that although the right was granted to non-Roman citizens, it was an obstacle for Roman citizens (Cicero, II, XXXVII-62).

legal uncertainties by establishing equality between patricians and plebeians (Dinçkol, 2017, pp. 759–760).

However, the enactment of the Twelve Tables did not completely eradicate the injustices in Rome, and the patrician-plebeian conflict<sup>2</sup> persisted. The ownership of large estates (*latifundia*) by the wealthy and the increasing impoverishment of the peasantry intensified social contradictions in second-century BCE Rome. Urban and rural poor began to rally around the *populares*—a faction within the ruling elite perceived as attentive to the people's demands—in opposition to the *optimates*, who were seen as defenders of aristocratic privilege. The convergence of lower-class resistance and elite factionalism allowed for the rise of political figures who allied with the plebeians to gain influence within the Roman power structure. Reform efforts began in the early second century BCE in response to the systemic dysfunction. In 192 BCE, legislative measures were enacted to address debt-related issues, and in 188 BCE, regulations were introduced to improve grain prices. However, the dominance of the elite in land ownership and the distribution of land was not initially regarded as a problem. This issue, which had been the subject of the *Licinian-Sextian* laws, would later become central to the agenda of the Gracchi brothers (Şahin, 2020, p. 200).

### **2.3. Agriculture in Rome**

Agriculture remained a fundamental pillar of the Roman economy even after the monarchy was abolished. During the Republican era, agriculture was the backbone of economic life, with rural farmers playing a crucial role in agricultural production. These landowners not only cultivated crops but also supplied soldiers for the Roman army, as property ownership was a prerequisite for military service. The expansionist nature of Rome's military campaigns had a significant impact on agricultural practices. Prior to the First Punic War (264-241 BCE), short military campaigns did not severely disrupt the agrarian workforce. Since seasonal conflicts were scheduled around the harvest period, farmers could still manage their agricultural duties while fulfilling their military obligations. However, the prolonged nature of the First Punic War and the increasingly distant battlefronts forced many farmers to abandon their fields for extended periods. As a result, they could no longer tend to their livestock or crops, compelling them to either hire laborers or purchase slaves to sustain their agricultural operations (Martin, 2022: 90). The prolonged duration and extensive scale of military campaigns placed significant burdens on Roman citizens and their allies. A single campaign often required the mobilization of over 120,000 men, with service durations ranging from four to six years. As military campaigns often lasted between four and six years, with some citizens serving for over a decade, the prolonged duration of service had significant socioeconomic consequences. Since the majority of soldiers in the Roman army were also farmers, extended periods of military duty frequently led to their impoverishment due to prolonged absence from agricultural labor (Boatwright, 2024: 99). The increasing destitution of the rural class resulted in population decline, which, in turn, led to a reduction in the number of available soldiers, a matter of critical concern for Rome. One of the reasons why Tiberius, serving as a Tribune of the Plebs, sought the approval of his agrarian law in 133 BCE was to increase the number of men who met the qualifications and physical requirements for military service (Rich, 2007: 158).

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<sup>2</sup> For further information on the patrician–plebeian struggle, see also (Rose, 1922: 106–133).

The displacement of men due to war and their need to entrust their property to others often led to various adverse consequences. A case in point is that of Consul Marcus Atilius Regulus, who commanded the Roman army in 256 BCE (Martin, 2022: 90). Having achieved success in the Carthaginian War, his command was extended for another year. However, he sent a letter to the Senate explaining that he owned a small five-acre farm in Pupinia, where the tenant responsible for cultivating the land had died. Taking advantage of the situation, one of his workers had stolen a piece of farm equipment and disappeared. Consequently, Regulus requested that another individual be assigned as commander in his stead, as otherwise, his wife and children would be left unable to sustain themselves on the abandoned farm. Upon learning of this situation, the Senate, unwilling to lose such a capable commander, ordered that Regulus' farm be leased to a farmer who would work the land on his behalf, food be provided to his wife and children, and the stolen property be replaced using public funds (Maximus, 4.6).

Over time, the wealthy, who possessed the majority of the undistributed land acquired through warfare, became confident that their holdings would never be reclaimed. This affluent class began purchasing or forcibly seizing adjacent lands and small farms owned by impoverished individuals, thereby consolidating large estates. They employed numerous slaves<sup>3</sup> and shepherds, generating significant profits. Consequently, while the wealthy amassed extraordinary wealth, the Italian populace faced increasing destitution. The burdens of taxation and military service further exacerbated their struggles, leading to population decline and a shortage of men available for civic and military duties (Appian, I.7).

One of the fundamental problems faced by citizens in the agriculture-based sector in Rome was the insufficient profitability of the crops they cultivated, specifically the low prices. This issue stemmed from the practices of the aristocratic class. Chief among these crops was wheat, which was sold at low cost due to import competition. Among the reasons for the low prices of wheat were its importation and competition with Italian wheat. The Roman government acquired wheat from overseas provinces at minimal expense, distributing it to public officials and military personnel without charge. After the Second Macedonian War, the government sought to address this issue by increasing wheat prices and importing wheat from foreign countries. However, in times of peace, the influx of imported wheat surged, allowing the populace to purchase it at reduced prices, thereby further depreciating the market value of Italian wheat. The fertility of the land in Sicily and the use of slave labor in Carthaginian agriculture led to the price of wheat being lower than that of Italian wheat. This situation negatively impacted Italian agriculture. Particularly, small landowners, unable to obtain sufficient yields from their fields, were driven to despair and found themselves in a position where they had to sell their land. This situation underscores the absence of a savings economy during the Early Republic. In contrast, large estate owners managed to endure these economic hardships. By leasing their lands and employing slaves to work them, they were able to sell their produce at even lower prices. Consequently, small farm owners found themselves

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<sup>3</sup> It can be said that the aristocracy, in order to fill the labour gap caused by the erosion of the peasantry, gradually began to fill large estates with slaves. It is estimated that around 225 BCE, one-third of Italy's population consisted of slaves (Bradley, 1989: 19). Slavery opened the door to dangers in the Roman world, and it was especially associated with banditry in rural areas. This was because slaves working as shepherds in the countryside, being armed to protect the herds they were responsible for from wild animals and thieves, found it easier to engage in banditry (Boatwright et al., 2024: 101).

incapable of competing with large landowners, forcing them to reduce the number of labourers they employed (Mommsen, 2023: 402-403, 405).

In Rome, land ownership was of paramount importance. As noted by Diakov and Kovalev, Roman and Italian merchants were subject to restrictions on the sale of Eastern trade goods and were unable to conduct business beyond Syria and Alexandria. Trade, in general, was perceived as hazardous, arduous, and less socially esteemed. Thus, landownership was regarded as the most secure, profitable, and even "noble" means of wealth accumulation. Wealthy landowners demonstrated their affluence by exerting influence over small landowners and farmers, as well as over neighbouring cities, thereby securing dependent voters to support their bids for high-ranking governmental positions (Diakov & Kovalev, 2011: 102).

From the third century BCE onwards, Latifundia-large landed estates-began to emerge. As Appian describes in *The Civil Wars*, the lands seized following Rome's expansion in Italy were categorized into two groups. The first consisted of land sold or leased, which were subdivided into parcels and distributed to Roman colonies. The second group, comprising significantly larger tracts of land classified as public property, remained uncultivated. Any individual was permitted to cultivate a parcel of this land on the condition that they paid an annual tax of one-tenth of their grain yield and one-fifth of their fruit harvest. This policy aimed to placate the peasantry, who owned significantly less land than the elite. However, the policy yielded unintended consequences. Wealthy individuals, confident that these lands would not be confiscated, either purchased them outright or forcibly annexed the holdings of impoverished neighbors, thereby amassing vast latifundia (Appian, I.7). This indicates that latifundia arose not primarily through legitimate purchase but rather through the usurpation of public land. The aristocracy would separate the lands they had either paid for or forcibly acquired into productive and non-productive categories. Wealthy landowners would lease out unproductive lands to poor peasants for a five-year term. After the lease expired, the same unproductive lands would be leased to new tenants (Diakov & Kovalev, 2011: 103-104). Through this practice, many tenants, who already had nothing left, found themselves unable to produce crops during the lease period and were unable to repay the debts they had incurred. As a result, the poor peasants, having lost everything, were forced to work for wealthy landowners to make a living.

#### **2.4. Allies and Non-Citizens in Rome**

One of the significant issues in Rome was its discriminatory treatment of its own citizens and allies. Rome heavily burdened the Latins and other Italian allies who were excluded from the allied union by subjecting them to extensive military service obligations. Despite their efforts in warfare, allied forces received only half the share of the spoils of war compared to Roman citizens and were granted fewer honours. In land distribution, citizens were allocated ten *morgen* of land, while non-citizens received only three. Eventually, local administrations enacted a decision prohibiting the granting of Roman citizenship to non-citizens (Mommsen, 2023: 360-363).

#### **2.5. Land Reforms During the Republican Period**

During the Roman Republic period, Rome's expansion beyond its own borders and the acquisition of neighbouring territories exacerbated existing land issues, as it led to increased wealth accumulation among the nobility. The populace, directly affected by these problems, voiced their discontent from the onset and demanded their share of the land. Livius recounts

that during the dictatorship of Camillus (448–365 BCE), while the state engaged in construction activities funded by revenues from successful military campaigns, representatives of the people advocated for the enactment of land laws. Subsequently, they argued that the aristocracy had seized the portion of the conquered lands rightfully belonging to the people and warned that if land redistribution did not occur, the elites would appropriate all the territory (Livius, 5. VI).

In fact, public discontent was often a harbinger of reform. To alleviate the burdens of the struggling populace, Caius Licinius and Lucius Sextius successfully secured election as tribunes of the plebeians in 376 BCE and proposed three legislative measures<sup>4</sup> aimed at protecting the interests of the lower classes while challenging the patricians (Fritz, 1950: 6). The first of these concerned debt regulation, stipulating that the interest paid on debts would be deducted from the principal and the remaining balance repaid in equal instalments over three years. The second law addressed landownership, ensuring that no individual could possess more than 500 acres of land. The third mandated that one of the two consuls must be chosen from the plebeian class. These proposals caused significant concern among the patricians, who sought to persuade their colleagues to oppose them<sup>5</sup>. Exhausted by the ongoing tensions between the aristocracy and reformists, Licinius and Sextius ultimately decided to resign after nine years of struggle, acknowledging that their battle had also worn down the people (Livius, 35-37, 39. VI)<sup>6</sup>.

The resignation of Licinius and Sextius prompted criticism from Appius Claudius Crassus, a descendant of the *decemviri*. Appius accused them of exploiting the people for political gain, arguing that they had secured votes at the expense of the people's liberties. In a lengthy speech, he successfully convinced the populace to postpone the proposed legislation. Licinius and Sextius were elected to office for the tenth time, and a proposal presented by the decemvirs (the ten men) to have half of the religious officials elected from the plebeian class became law. Of these officials, five were selected from the patricians, and five from the plebeians. Thus, the path to the consulship was also opened for the plebeians. Amidst these developments, Marcus Furius was appointed dictator for the fifth time. Following elections, Sextius was declared consul, but the patricians rejected the outcome, prompting threats of civil war from the plebeians. The dictator intervened, urging both sides to make concessions, leading to a compromise. As a result, Sextius, the first plebeian consul, transitioned to the patrician class and was appointed *praetor* (a magistrate with both judicial and military authority) (Livius, 40-42. VI).

Despite the progress made in favour of the plebeians, the underlying conflicts in Rome remained unresolved. Although the Licinius-Sextius laws granted certain rights, tensions

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<sup>4</sup> Gagliardi states that the law known as the Licinius and Sextius law dates back to 367 BCE and mentions that the law consists of four provisions. The fourth provision involves the selection of five religious officials from the people and five from the patricians (2017: 1). Livius notes that this provision was legalized after the tenth election of Licinius and Sextius (Livius, 42. VI).

<sup>5</sup> For more on these legal provisions, see (Atlan, 2014: 127).

<sup>6</sup> The Licinian laws of 367 BCE had limited the amount of public land that anyone could own, but this provision was not always enforced. The Carthaginian War with Hannibal had caused significant damage to Italian agriculture, and many small farmers had migrated to Rome. The aristocracy took control of much of the land left vacant as a result and transformed it into hunting preserves and cattle and sheep pastures operated by slaves. The correction of this abuse had been considered by various individuals, primarily C. Laelius. He went as far as drafting a reform proposal, but anticipating opposition, he ultimately resigned from his position (Sage, 1913: 45).

between the patrician and plebeian classes, as well as between the wealthy elite and the lower classes, persisted. The ruling class was reluctant to acknowledge the plebeians' newly acquired rights, as doing so would threaten the existing social order. The potential rise of the lower classes in governmental and societal roles necessitated concessions from the ruling elite, thereby limiting their dominance. This simmering unrest eventually provided fertile ground for the emergence of new reformers. Among them, the Gracchi brothers would build upon the legislative foundations laid by their predecessors. The Gracchi period is considered a turning point in the history of the Roman Republic, not only due to the restructuring of land ownership with significant social implications, but also as the first instance in which violence was used against political rivals (Roselaar, 2010: 221).

### **3. The Era of Tiberius Gracchus**

The issues mentioned above would become the primary concerns of Tiberius and his brother Gaius. One of the most pressing problems was the land issue. By the late second century BCE, many small farmers were facing severe financial difficulties. Around 140 BCE, the first attempt to improve the conditions of small farmers was made by Consul C. Laelius. By 133 BCE, Tiberius Gracchus initiated a major reform to improve the conditions of impoverished citizens. He particularly focused on the land problem and began by setting a limit on how much land a person could own. According to the land law he introduced, if a person possessed land exceeding the established limit, the excess land would be taken from them and redistributed to the poor as part of *ager publicus* (public land). The Gracchi period was significant in the history of the Republic, not only for restructuring land ownership and its social implications but also for being the first time political violence was used against opponents (Roselaar, 2010: 221, 223).

The land law proposed by Tiberius Gracchus is known as the *Lex Sempronia Tiberiana* (Şahin, 2020: 183). According to this law, no one was allowed to own more than 500 *iugera* of land<sup>7</sup>, and they could not pasture more than 100 large livestock or 500 small livestock on these lands. Additionally, a certain number of free citizens were required to be employed to oversee and report on these regulations. Tiberius formalized these provisions in law, hoping that the remaining land would be immediately divided into small parcels and sold to the poor. He also specified penalties for those who violated these rules. However, neither the laws nor the oaths were respected, and some individuals who appeared to comply with the regulations secretly transferred land to their relatives under false pretences. The proposed law sparked debate among both the wealthy and the poor. The lower class lamented their inability to provide for their children, their increasing impoverishment, and the excessive use of slaves by the wealthy. Meanwhile, the wealthy resisted giving up their lands and worked against the lower class. According to Appian, *the purpose of Gracchus' plan was not to create prosperity but to ensure population stability*<sup>8</sup>, as economic hardships had discouraged people from having children

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<sup>7</sup> 500 *iugera* covers an area of 120 hectares (Freeman, 2010: 392; Heichelheim-A Yeo, 2016: 155).

<sup>8</sup> Roselaar provides the following information regarding the numerical composition of the population in the second century BCE. According to him, it was not surprising that the Gracchi brothers thought the number of free men, and thus those capable of military service, was decreasing. At the beginning of the second century BCE, the census may have been used as a tool for policy determination, and as the population remained low, land distributions were made to encourage population growth. These distributions would cease once the population reached a satisfactory level. The census in the middle of the second century BCE shows a decline in the population over about thirty years. In the 136/135 BCE census, the number of citizens was 25,000 lower than the highest level recorded in 164/163 BCE. It is

(Appian, I. 7-8, 10-11). This measure, and the subsequent law, applied only to state-owned land, while private property was not affected (Mousourakis, 2007: 44).

The inequitable distribution of land forced the rural population into extremely harsh conditions. To better understand this situation, the accounts of Plutarch are of great importance. According to Plutarch, the Romans sold a portion of the land they acquired through wars with their neighbors, while distributing the remainder to landless and poor citizens in exchange for a small tax. However, when the wealthy later expelled the poor from these lands due to the excessive taxes they had paid, they proposed a law forcing the poor to sustain themselves with only half an acre of land. As a result, the wealthy took back the lands they had rented to the poor, and the impoverished citizens voluntarily joined the army. However, their earnings were not sufficient to feed their children. Meanwhile, the number of slaves in the cities also increased. Rome was plagued by extreme greed and injustice. According to the proposed law, those who acted unlawfully and violated the law would be severely punished. Furthermore, those who did not comply with the regulations would be forced to return the land they had unlawfully acquired to citizens in need (Plutarch, 8-9).

Tiberius wanted to quickly pass the land law to prevent agricultural decline and the decrease in the rural population (Barrow, 2002: 54). It was impossible for the senators to accept this proposal, as they saw it as a threat to their investments in public land. They were strongly opposed to it. As a result, Tiberius presented the law directly to the plebeian council without first consulting the Senate; however, the law was vetoed by Marcus Octavius, a plebeian tribune, with the Senate's intervention. Tiberius had to either withdraw the law or propose another one. In response, he introduced a new proposal calling for Marcus Octavius to be removed from office for not serving the interests of the people. As a result, Marcus Octavius was removed from office<sup>9</sup>. The new plebeian tribune, Quintus Mummius, supported the proposal, and it was passed by the Plebeian Assembly (Plutarch, 10-12; Florus, II. 1-2; Robinson, 1932: 236-237; Sage, 1913: 45-46; Heichelheim-A Yeo, 2016: 155; Stockton, 1979: 65-67).

According to Aemilianus, before presenting the land law to the Senate, Tiberius decided— with the approval of Appius Claudius and other involved parties— to take the bill directly to the Assembly. It was argued that this was a revolutionary move, undermining the Senate's authority, and was the primary reason for opposition to the bill. However, this claim is inaccurate. Taking a bill directly to the Assembly was not illegal. Tiberius pursued this course of action because he had little chance of securing a favorable Senate majority— or perhaps believed he had no chance at all. While it was difficult for the Assembly to pass a measure without Senate approval, it was not impossible (Aemilianus, 201-202).

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known that citizens were reluctant to serve in the military and were deserting. Tiberius did not trust the census data and, on the contrary, knew that the population was increasing (Roselaar, 2010: 227-228).

<sup>9</sup> In Book III of Cicero's "On the Laws", Marcus, one of the speakers, says that Tiberius Gracchus dismissed someone who opposed his actions (he mentions this dismissal in his book "On the Laws" but does not name it. Here he refers to the addressee as the person who opposed his actions. We think that the addressee here is Octavian or people who opposed him in general) also harmed himself (Cicero, III. X-23).

After the land law was passed, three individuals were appointed to oversee land distribution: Tiberius, his father-in-law Claudius Appius, and his brother Gaius Gracchus. Tiberius also appointed Mucius<sup>10</sup>, a lesser-known citizen, as a tribune<sup>11</sup> (Plutarch, 13).

The clear formation of the commission may have disturbed many senators. Later, the commission was granted the authority to determine which lands were public and which were private, as well as the responsibility of reclaiming all public lands not exempted by law and redistributing them to new settlers. However, a large amount of money was required to pay the officials' salaries. In addition, the officials were expected to assist the peasants by providing the necessary shelter, tools, draft animals, seeds, and even sustenance until their crops were harvested (Heichelheim-A Yeo, 2016: 156). Tiberius requested economic assistance from the Senate, but the Senate's response was harsh<sup>12</sup>, offering only a minimal amount of support, which effectively hindered the financial aid that Tiberius needed to implement the law. Since Tiberius was aware of a recent influx of money into the treasury, he called for a public vote to allocate these funds to the commission (Beard, 2019: 223). During this process, an unexpected financial relief came when King Attalus III of Pergamon, shortly before his death in 133 BCE, bequeathed his kingdom to Rome in an effort to prevent an assassination attempt against him. This inheritance provided the necessary funds for the commission<sup>13</sup> (Magie, 1950: 32-33; Tekin, 2012: 206; Beard, 2019: 223; Heichelheim-A Yeo, 2016: 156; Kaya, 2005: 14; Lintott, 2006: 33-34)<sup>14</sup>.

Tiberius intended to use the inheritance left by King Attalus of Pergamon, who died in 133 BCE, to implement his agricultural resettlement plan. This move posed a direct challenge to the Senate, which held control over financial matters. All allocations, expenditures, and coin minting were overseen by the aristocracy, particularly through officials such as the quaestors. Tiberius' proposal not only threatened one of the Senate's most significant powers but also introduced the idea of directly utilizing public funds for the benefit of lower-class citizens (Boren, 1961: 363). Although Gracchus aimed to use this inheritance, his opponents blocked the

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<sup>10</sup> Appian mentions the individual appointed to the tribunate as Quintus Mummius (Appian, I. 13).

<sup>11</sup> During the Roman Republic, there were several assemblies, including the *Comitia Curiata*, *Comitia Centuriata*, and later the *Concilium Plebis*, which was formed by the plebeians. Beginning in 447 BCE, the *Concilium Plebis* (Plebeian Assembly) came to include patricians as well and became known as the *Comitia Tributa*. The *plebeian tribunes* (*tribuni plebis*), elected by the Plebeian Assembly, were not official state magistrates but rather representatives of the plebeians. These tribunes had the right of *veto* and could intervene in political decisions. In 133 BCE, Tiberius Gracchus was elected as a *plebeian tribune* and, instead of submitting his proposed land reform bill to the Senate, he presented it directly to the *Comitia Tributa* (People's Assembly) (Tekin, 2012: 193, 197–198, 206; Küçük, 2017: 204–206.)

<sup>12</sup> The Senate was in a strong position, and the essence of this institution was based on a certain hereditary system, with families operating according to hereditary principles. Therefore, leadership passed from a capable father to a capable son in a hereditary manner. For this reason, Roman aristocracy was always hereditary (Mommsen, 2023: 353). Boatwright et al. state that, regarding the Senate, the Roman Senate did not have the authority to command, punish, make laws, or shape politics. However, they note that the Senate's decisions were advisory, and although they were not officially obeyed, many officials complied with the Senate's wishes (2024: 92-93).

<sup>13</sup> Florus states that although the bequest of Pergamon to Rome was a great source of profit and income, it shook the manners and morals of the existing generation. He also characterizes the Roman people's demand for land and provisions from the tribunes as excess and debauchery even though they were not in hunger and famine (Florus, I. 6-8).

<sup>14</sup> For more information on the incorporation of Pergamon into the Roman state, see (Tozan, 2014: 23-44).

proposal and even threatened to prosecute him once his term ended. Since there was a strong possibility they would succeed, Tiberius' only option was to seek re-election for the following year (Henderson, 1968: 55).

The opposition, by utilizing the advantage of having a majority in the Senate, created a significant financial obstacle to the agricultural law. Tiberius's acquisition of the right to use the lands of Pergamon was the result of seeking a legal solution to overcome this obstacle and should be seen as an attempt to counter the Senate's resistance (Aemilianus, 212).

Tiberius Gracchus found primary support among the rural poor, who stood to benefit significantly from land redistribution. However, not all rural inhabitants travelled to Rome to support him; some came to oppose him as well. Nevertheless, it is likely that the rural poor showed greater interest in Tiberius' reforms than the urban plebeians. Since his first law focused solely on land distribution and did not promise any special provisions, it may not have attracted much attention from the urban plebs. Those who welcomed the redistribution were the rural poor, who had lost access to land and were struggling to survive through small private holdings, wage labour, or tenancy (Roselaar, 2010: 224)<sup>15</sup>.

Appian notes that after the passage of Tiberius' land law, he was escorted home by a large crowd as if he were the founding father of all Italy. However, Appian also emphasizes a crucial detail: after seeing him home, the rural supporters returned to their villages to resume their daily work (Appian, I. 13). This insight is significant—the rural supporters escorted their leader with praise but then left, while the true rulers of the city remained. This reveals the underlying power dynamics in Rome and foreshadows potential future conflicts.

In fact, the information summarizing the situation we referred to can be found in Appian. According to Appian, the dangerous days for Tiberius were not over, and he was aware that, in order to secure himself and his law, he needed to be re-elected in the upcoming tribune elections. He points out that the tribune elections were approaching during the summer, when candidates announced their candidacies, and as the election day neared, the wealthy class openly supported those who were most hostile to Gracchus. Appian also mentions that, if Gracchus failed to be elected tribune the following year, the danger bells would ring for him. Gracchus, realizing this, called upon the rural population to vote, but when he learned that they could not come to the city due to the harvest season, he sought support from the city dwellers. In fact, the city population was the source of his troubles. On the day of the voting, when the elections were held, the first two tribes rejected Gracchus, and the wealthy class raised objections, claiming that electing the same person twice in the same year was against the law (Appian, I. 13).

That evening, Tiberius had secured his safety by having his supporters surround his house for protection, but as daylight broke, unrest began on the Capitolium, and the situation did not look promising for Tiberius. Upon seeing the opposing group's armament, Tiberius and his followers took precautions to protect themselves. When the supporters at the back sought to understand what was happening, Tiberius pointed to his head, signalling the danger, but his enemies interpreted this gesture as an indication that Tiberius wanted to crown himself, and they rushed

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<sup>15</sup> From what Roselaar conveys, the demands of the poor rural population and the urban plebeians from the government were different. The poor rural population was primarily interested in acquiring land, while the urban plebeians were seeking political representation and recognition in the political arena.

to the Senate. There is no need to elaborate further on what happened afterward; in short, after a fight broke out between the crowd led by Nasica and Tiberius' supporters, some of those attempting to protect him, as well as Tiberius, were killed in 133 BCE (Plutarch, 13, 16-19). According to Sallust, the assassination of Tiberius stemmed from the power base he had developed. In fact, the aristocracy feared Tiberius not only because he opposed the Senate but also because they were concerned, he might remove them from office. The same was true for Tiberius' brother, Gaius. In 122 BCE, the Senate under the leadership of Consul Opimius resorted to violence in response to the challenge posed by tribune Gaius Gracchus. The primary reason behind the aristocrats' opposition to their actions was the Gracchi brothers' advocacy for the freedom of the plebeians and their growing exposure of the crimes committed by the oligarchy (Batstone, 2010, XXVII).

The deaths of Tiberius and his supporters marked the beginning of a transformation in Roman politics. Such an event had not been witnessed since the Conflict of the Orders<sup>16</sup>. The crack in the Roman political structure would later expand and lead to a series of civil wars, ultimately causing the fall of the Republic (Faulkner, 2020: 133).

The motivations behind Tiberius' reformist approach, his political strategies, and his attitude toward the Senate have generated diverse perspectives among scholars. These differences have emerged around certain questions. Was Tiberius truly a supporter of the people, or was he using the people for political purposes? Had Tiberius undertaken a serious and important task, and if he had succeeded, could he have continuously influenced the fate of Rome? Some researchers argue that Tiberius was a supporter of the people, while others claim that he was pursuing a political goal and died in the process. Dio Cassius states that despite Tiberius having the equipment worthy of his grandfather, receiving a comprehensive education, and possessing a proud spirit, he led to the downfall of the Roman State (133 BCE) by following his ambition, distancing himself from the best and being dragged into the worst. Moreover, Dio Cassius also criticizes Tiberius for seeking the support of the people rather than the Senate to become a leader (Dio Cassius, XXIV). Florus also mentions in general terms that the legal regulations of the Gracchi brothers divided Roman society and made the unity of the state two-headed (Florus, II. V -3).

This view is also supported by some modern scholars. Martin, referencing the claims of Cassius, argues that Tiberius' reforms aimed at landless farmers were essentially a political move. He emphasizes that Tiberius sought to increase his popularity by gaining the support of the people against his political rivals (2022: 75).

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<sup>16</sup> The period known as the patrician-plebeian struggle or the Conflict of the Orders (494-287 BCE) in the Roman Republic encompasses the power struggles between the patricians and the plebeians. As a result of the struggles of the wealthy plebeians against the political privileges of the patricians, institutions and structures such as the *Tribunus Plebis*, *Concilia Plebis Tributa*, and the Twelve Tables (*Lex duodecim Tabularum*) emerged. Throughout this period, the plebeians' struggles led to the establishment of various legal mechanisms that allowed them to represent their demands within the Roman political system (*Tribunus Plebis*), participate in it (*Concilia Plebis Tributa*, *Lex Hortensia*, *Leges Liciane Sextiae*), secure legal guarantees against patrician class dominance (*XII Tables*, *Leges Licinae-Sextiae*), and address land ownership issues, particularly the *ager publicus*, which enabled them to acquire property and protect those ownership rights against patrician control (*Lex Licinae-Sextiae*). As a result of this class struggle, a class compromise and a mixed structure were adopted. The ruling class remained in power, but its political power was limited (Şahin, 2020: 187; Faulkner, 2012: 71).

While discussing criticisms of Tiberius' land reform, Beard argues that Tiberius was not genuinely concerned with the plight of the poor. She contends that his hostility toward the Senate stemmed from a treaty he had concluded during his service in Spain—a treaty the Senate refused to ratify, thereby wounding his honour. According to Beard, this personal resentment was one of the key motivations behind his turn to reform (2019: 225).

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At this point, Aemilianus' observations are significant. According to Aemilianus, in light of the known conditions of the agrarian bill and the number and diversity of its supporters, the accusations that the opposition levied against Tiberius, claiming that his goals were destructive and revolutionary, and later accusing him of aiming for tyranny, are very unconvincing and are largely malicious slanders (Aemilianus, 195).

Of course, there are also writers who argue the opposite. According to Freeman, Tiberius, instead of trying to profit from the existing unrest, sought to protect the rights of small landowners who were losing their land due to large estates (2010: 392). Katz, there was indeed unrest, but argues that this did not constitute a class struggle. He suggests that the unjust and unequal environment existed long before Tiberius, and that the social tensions were a result of pre-existing inequalities rather than a direct consequence of class conflict (Katz, 1970: 90).

It should be noted that personal interpretations have been made, including primary sources related to that period. Contrary to the idea that Tiberius was someone who did not consider the impoverished in Rome, the following quotes from Plutarch's account of Tiberius reflect otherwise:

“The wild animals that roam over Italy have their dens. But those who fight and die for Italy can taste nothing but air and light; they wander about with their wives and children, without homes or dwellings. They fight and die to preserve the luxurious lives of others; these people are called the masters of the world, yet they do not possess a single piece of land they can call their own” (Plutarch, 9).

Boren's observations, which clarify the political thoughts and actions of Tiberius, are significant. According to Boren,

“When looking at the issue from a broader and longer perspective, it is evident that Tiberius oversimplified the problem. The agricultural approach, even though there was sufficient land for distribution, was not comprehensive enough or sufficiently popular among the lower-class Romans to resolve the crisis. In short, Tiberius was not trying to solve an urgent, urban problem but rather attempting to turn time backward” (1970: 59).

Beard also points out that although Tiberius was sincere about the land law, he misinterpreted the situation and limited the issue solely to the landless poor (2019: 222).

Overall, it appears that Tiberius should have taken the following factors into account to successfully implement his land reform. One of the first things Tiberius needed to do to succeed in governance was to try to win over the city's population and, if not all, at least a significant portion of the powerful political leaders. This is because the city's political power was the decisive factor. However, it is also clear that those in power at the time did not implement a just

politics. In Rome of that period, it was important for someone from the city to extend a hand to the peasants. It is clear that the impoverished segment of society was caught between hope and fear, and they were willing to accept help from anyone who could provide it. The peasantry, spending most of their time in the countryside due to their daily work, needed a force to defend them in the city. Tiberius's initiatives encouraged them, but they were not able to provide him with enough support. Due to the rural population's distance from the city, the stance of strong political figures (such as Drusus) could influence their attitudes, a point we can see clearly in the case of Gaius Gracchus. Had Tiberius found strong supporters politically, the process could have unfolded differently. We find this point in Tibiletti's assertion that Tiberius, being aligned with Roman tradition and having secured legal support, would not have been revolutionary or destructive had his law proposal been secured (Tibiletti, 1970: 69).

Criticizing Tiberius from our current standpoint based on available sources or harbouring harsh thoughts about him may lead to an incorrect judgment. It seems clear that Tiberius, with good intentions, attempted to protect the poor but failed to fully understand the political context or only realized the severity of the situation too late. Moreover, it appears he underestimated the Senate's power by relying on the popular support he thought he would gain. Additionally, as Barrow points out, a tribunate not supported by military power could hardly withstand the pressures created (Barrow, 2002: 55).

#### **4. The Period of Gaius Gracchus**

After the death of Tiberius, the land law and the reforms he attempted to implement continued to develop. Although the Senate resorted to illegal measures concerning the land law, they could not prevent its annulment. Someone was bound to continue Tiberius' reforms, and that person was his brother, Gaius Gracchus. After Tiberius' death, political struggles in Rome persisted. One of these struggles occurred during the consulship of Marcus Fulvius Flaccus, where there was an initiative for the allied states to gain Roman citizenship. Flaccus, in order to prevent crimes committed by those who did not possess Roman citizenship, proposed transferring cases to the Roman commission. However, when he failed to gain sufficient support for this proposal, he was forced to leave Rome due to his position as commander and go to war against the allies. Meanwhile, an uprising broke out in the second-largest city of Italy, Fregallae, which became the first major rebellion against Roman hegemony by an Italian province. This uprising, which was suppressed in 124 BCE, resulted in the colonization of the city's land. At the time, Gaius Gracchus was serving as quaestor in Sardinia<sup>17</sup>. After this event, Gaius returned to Rome, but the aristocratic class tried to keep him in Sardinia by extending his term and held him responsible for the Fregallae rebellion, filing a lawsuit against him. However, the people reacted and demanded his release, prompting him to run for the tribunate. He was elected as tribune in 123 BCE (Mommsen, 2023: 111, 117-118).

When Gaius began his term as Tribune, he quickly initiated a series of actions that not only encouraged his supporters but also succeeded in alarming his opponents. Being an excellent orator, he had the ability to mobilize the masses. He frequently held meetings with citizens to discuss the laws he planned to enact, ignoring the Senate just as his brother had done. After being elected as Tribune, Gaius enacted two laws. The first law prohibited magistrates who had been removed by the people from being appointed to any future positions. The second law

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<sup>17</sup> Quaestor, officer responsible for public revenues and expenditures.

stated that courts where citizens could be sentenced to death could only be established within the people's assembly, and magistrates who sentenced a citizen to exile or death without the judgment of the people's assembly would be held accountable in front of the public (Demir, 2022: 816; Boatwright et al., 2024: 107; Konrad, 2006: 171). This law led to Publius Popillius Laenas, who had presided over the trial of Tiberius's supporters in 132 BCE, fleeing into exile to avoid prosecution.

One of Gaius's first actions as tribune was to determine the redistribution of public lands to the poor and introduce the distribution of grain to the impoverished. As is well known, grain in Rome was sold to the public at exorbitant prices by the wealthy. Gaius introduced a new regulation on grain sales, distributing it at a price lower than the market rate to everyone living in the capital. This policy did not extend to those living outside the capital, leading to a migration of the rural proletariat into the city and granting the new urban residents a special position (Mommsen, 2023: 119; Beard, 2019: 228). With the state regularly providing grain, Gaius facilitated the development of storage facilities and port infrastructure to cover the difference between the fixed price and the market price (Boatwright et al., 2024: 107). Gaius, to gain the political support of the urban population and alleviate their struggles, convinced the assembly to pass the famous *lex Frumentaria*, or the Grain Law. This law proposed that the state purchase and import grain from overseas countries to be sold to citizens residing in Rome. Upon demand, the imported grain was sold at a fixed price of six and one-third asses per modius, which was half the daily wage of a labourer. The set price was not much lower than the average market price in Rome, and at times, it was even higher than the market price (Heichelheim-A Yeo, 2016: 161; Konrad, 2006: 171, Stockton, 1979: 126). This law, which was one of the most criticized reforms of the Gracchi brothers, aimed at stabilizing prices solely for the benefit of consumers. A significant portion of the wheat consumed in Rome came as tribute, which incurred costs for the state in terms of transportation, naval convoys, and storage (Heichelheim-A Yeo, 2016: 161).

Additionally, Gaius introduced certain regulations concerning land distribution in relation to the land law, as issues with the boundaries of properties had emerged, leading to numerous legal disputes. Because landowners had not registered their properties, the sale or distribution of land adjacent to public land required a thorough investigation into how the entire land was sold or distributed to determine its dimensions. When the land was re-examined, it was observed that some individuals had been relocated from cultivated lands with trees and farm buildings to barren land, while others were moved from cultivated lands to uncultivated, swampy, or flood-prone areas. Especially in regions conquered by war, land distribution was never carried out with great accuracy, and the announcement that anyone could cultivate unassigned land encouraged many people to work on land adjacent to their property, blurring the distinction between the two (Appianos, I. 18).

To address the challenges he encountered, Gaius introduced a revision to the land law. Although this revision mirrored Tiberius' earlier agrarian reform, Gaius added a significant provision that called for the establishment of new colonies in Italy, including in locations such as Tarentum and Capua. With this amendment, lands previously leased by local administrations and excluded from distribution would now be incorporated into the redistribution process. This addition aimed to ensure a more equitable allocation of land and to balance population density across various regions of the Roman Republic (Mommsen, 2023:119-120). Although the colony

proposal in Capua failed, colonies were established in Tarentum, Scolacium, and the overseas colonies of Rome, including Carthage. The primary reason for these colonies' establishment was to provide farms for Roman citizens in need of settlement, rather than military purposes. The creation of new colonies would help transfer the excess population of the city to these areas.<sup>18</sup> In fact, Gaius sought to garner support for himself through these initiatives. One of the main reasons for this concern was related to the citizens who voted during elections, as many voters in the popular assemblies were city dwellers, and this group played a decisive role in most votes (Faulkner, 2020: 144).

After allocating most of the public land under the land law, Gaius succeeded in benefiting farmers by implementing an extensive road construction program that connected farms to markets, villages to towns, and towns to Rome. In constructing these roads, Gaius employed farmers in road building, which not only facilitated the transportation of their crops to markets more easily and cheaply but also fostered the development of trade. Through this road network, travel to Rome and participation in public assemblies were made easier, encouraging broader participation in governmental affairs. The rapid completion of this project under Gaius' personal leadership further heightened the fears of many senators (Heichelheim-A Yeo, 2016: 161).

One of the factors that hindered agricultural work and impoverished the peasants in Rome was the military service issue. Generally, the Roman army was a citizen militia: when an army was to be formed, citizens were conscripted through an official tax. Those subject to compulsory military service were individuals whose properties were valued above a certain minimum threshold, which placed the burden largely on peasant farmers and their male children. Every man, until the age of forty-six, was obliged to serve for at least sixteen years, with the possibility of additional service for up to four years in times of emergency. However, by the second century, Rome's military needs had evolved. Most wars were fought far from home, requiring troops to be employed for several years, sometimes even the entire year, and it became mandatory to maintain standing armies in some regions (Aemilianus, 162-164). Initially, most wars involving Romans and their allies took place on Italian soil, and peasant soldiers were allowed to return to their farms at the end of the fighting season. However, around 200 BCE, the battlefield moved to Greece, Asia Minor, Africa, and Spain, and more than 100,000 Romans and other Italians were deployed to foreign lands. This expansion of large estates effectively led to a form of peasant migration (Light, 2006: 593).

Due to prolonged wars, many families dependent on small farms were deprived of vital labour for years; when numerous soldiers returned as veterans, they faced significant debt, and some likely sold their lands to migrate to towns or cities. This situation worsened, leading to the

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<sup>18</sup> During the period of more than a century leading up to the Second Punic (Carthaginian) War, thirty-three colonies were established in the Roman Republic. This era marked the peak of Roman colonization. The process of colonization was initially characterized by the unification or pacification of certain Italic groups and the repulsion of invaders like Hannibal, after which the pace of colonization slowed. In the second century, with the Gracchan land reforms, a new phase began (Stek, 2017: 271). It is also important to note that, in the colonization process, it was necessary for there to be a sufficient male population in Rome to send men to the colonized areas. Rome sent men to its Latin colonies as long as it had a sufficient supply of immigrants (Salmon, 1936: 67). This indicates that, due to the demands of labour and military service, the workforce was not transferred to the colonies unless necessary. Gaius, too, sought to transfer the excess population to newly established colonies.

exclusion of men who had lost their farms from military service, resulting in a decline in the number of recruits (Aemilianus, 162-164).

Gaius implemented a new military regulation, amending the previous law which required military service between the ages of seventeen and forty-six. He allowed anyone who had served for six years to receive a discharge. He also added a provision that those who completed twenty years of service as foot soldiers and ten years as cavalry would be allowed to leave the army. Furthermore, Gaius specified that no citizen under the age of eighteen would be conscripted, and the duration of military service would be determined according to the needs of war. He also stipulated that the cost of military clothing would not be requested from soldiers but would instead be covered by the state's treasury (Mommsen, 2023:121-122).

Gaius aimed to implement these reforms to increase the welfare of the public and address issues within the country. However, one of the greatest obstacles to the implementation of his reforms was the Senate. As a solution to this issue, Gaius ended the Senate's monopoly on acting as sole judges in many legal cases and permanent jury members in criminal courts. He established a new system whereby judges in legal cases would be selected from a jury composed of one-third senators and two-thirds equites (cavalry class) (Konrad, 2006: 171-172).

In this way, Gaius added 300 equites to the judicial body consisting of 300 senators. From then on, the decisions of the court would be made by this six-hundred-member body (Plutarch, 26). Initially, Gaius had not considered entrusting the courts to the *equites*. However, by the later years of 123 BCE, when he realized that moderate judicial reforms were unattainable, he began to contemplate giving the courts to the equites. This decision came after the Senate's failure to actively address the abuses by jury members or its evident active opposition to Gaius' program, prompting him to develop a more radical reform plan (Rowland, 1965: 363). When Gracchus appointed equites to serve as jury members, he did not immediately exclude Senators from the courts. Instead, in accordance with his balanced reform ideas, he combined the equites and Senators in the juries. Ultimately, the irreconcilable hostility of the ruling class transformed this reformist figure into a revolutionary (Badian, 1954: 378).

However, granting such power to the equites created another problem. The number of equites, along with their wealth and influence, began to grow as the empire strengthened. They served as officers in the army and were also involved in contracting, slave trading, and usury. Furthermore, most of them were landowners. Relations between the equites and senators were sometimes tense. The Gracchans sought to exploit this tension between the two groups, increasing the power of the equites. One of Gaius' aims in supporting the equites was to shift the balance of political power away from the Senate and toward the equestrian class (Faulkner, 2020: 145-146). The restriction of the Senate to equites was intentionally a bold political move, signalling an attack on the Senate, and was designed as a focal point for the equites.<sup>19</sup> In this way, Gracchus had effectively created a two-headed state (Hopkins, 1978: 46).

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<sup>19</sup> In order to secure the support of the equestrian class, Gaius implemented measures that strengthened their position at the expense of the senators. As a result, the equites were, for the first time, officially recognized as a distinct order (*ordo equester*) within the state and began to play an active role in political life (Mousourakis, 2007: 45)

The account by Appian regarding the power gained by the equestrian class is of great significance. According to him, after Gaius Gracchus was elected tribune for the second time, he became the leader of the equestrian class, which stood between the Senate and the people. Gaius had transferred the trials, which were suspected of involving bribery, from the senators to the equestrians, thus shifting judicial authority from the Senate to the equestrian class. The equestrians, who had the broadest judicial powers over all Romans, Italians, and senators regarding property, civil rights, and exiles, became *de facto* rulers over the senators. They supported the tribunes in elections to gain personal advantages, and, in return, obtained favours, reaching a point where senators felt extremely threatened. In a short period, the power dynamics within the state reversed: the Senate was reduced to mere prestige, while the equestrians held real power. In addition to openly and humiliatingly abusing their power over the senators, the equestrians began to accept bribes, further exploiting these gains in a shameful and greedy manner. Their actions, including sending hired accusers after the wealthy and eliminating bribery cases through deals and manipulations, led to further factional struggles (Appian, 1.22).

Diodorus observes that Gaius disrupted the balance between the Senate and the equestrian class by stripping senators of their right to serve on juries and transferring this role to the equites, thereby elevating the lower class over the upper. As a result, the people turned against both sides. He further states that Gaius used this general discord as a stepping stone for personal power, exhausting the public treasury with unnecessary expenditures to ensure that everyone saw him as the sole leader (XII. XXXIV. Fragment, 25).

Through the power he granted to the equestrian class, Gaius effectively repeated the mistakes of the senators through his agents. In an attempt to curb bribery, Gaius limited the Senate's powers but was unable to counter the unlawful practices of the equestrian units. This created a disadvantage for Gaius and led to growing opposition against him.

Even with good intentions, Gaius began to commit wrongs in pursuit of his personal agenda. Facing a powerful and entrenched institution, without attaining a position equal to or more powerful than theirs, could lead to difficulties and defeat. One of the major challenges Gaius faced was the proposal of a voting rights law granting Roman citizenship to Latins and allies. This proposal was presented by Marcus Fulvius Flaccus, a consul and substitute member of the land commission. According to the proposed law, all free people from Latin and allied communities in Italy would be granted Roman citizenship. Despite Latins and allies constituting nearly two-thirds of the Roman army, they were excluded from spoils and land, with only Roman citizens in the capital benefiting from voting rights (Faulkner, 2020: 147). Gaius aimed to increase his power with this proposal, but it was rejected by the Senate and some in the capital. Even the people supported Gaius' colleague, Livius Drusus, despite his illegal actions, further complicating Gaius' position. The people even prevented Drusus from facing punishment (Mommsen, 2024: 134).

According to Plutarch, after the Senate appointed Drusus as the tribune, they asked him to incite the people against Gaius. Drusus, through clever political manoeuvring, tried to show that he was a more genuine supporter of the plebs than Gaius. Drusus' proposal to establish twelve colonies, as opposed to Gaius' two, and to settle three thousand poor citizens in each colony, was more appealing to the people. Furthermore, the people opposed Gaius' proposal to grant Latins equal voting rights, as they feared for their own interests, which led to an

increased favour for Drusus. During this time, when the lottery for the founder of the Carthage colony was drawn and Gaius was selected, his journey to Libya marked the beginning of his downfall. While he was away from Rome, Drusus found the right opportunity to incite the people against Gaius (Plutarch, 29-31).

Upon returning from Carthage, Gaius found an unfavourable atmosphere in Rome. The proposal for citizenship for those outside Rome reflected the heightened tensions in the city. For Gaius to achieve this goal, he would need to be elected tribune for a third time, expecting that this would restore order, but the people prevented this from happening. As a result, in 121 BCE, Gaius handed over the position to Opimius. Opimius immediately opposed the restructuring of Carthage. Instead, the Senate decided to establish the Junonia colony, and those who had supported the rejection of Gaius' law gathered at the Capitol to address the people. However, this led to a confrontation as their opponents were armed. At the time, Consul Opimius was performing a sacrificial ritual at the entrance to the Capitol temple. During the sacrifice, Quintus Antillius, an official assisting Opimius, displayed the slaughtered animal's organs to the crowd and demanded they vacate the hall, with one hand placed on Gaius' shoulder. Unable to tolerate this, a supporter of Gaius killed Antillius with a sword. Despite Gaius wishing to deny any involvement, this event gave his rivals an opportunity to accuse him. Left with no choice but to flee, Gaius attempted to cross the Tiber River but fell into the water. He was pulled out, but those pursuing him killed his supporters. Gaius and his slave tried to reach a nearby town across the river but failed. It is likely that his slave killed him first and then took his own life (Plutarkhos, 37-39; Mommsen, 2024: 136-139). Thus, the period of the Gracchi brothers came to an end.

## **5. Conclusion**

Since the beginning of the Roman Republican Period, troubles had arisen between the nobility and the lower classes. In particular, patricians and plebeians were the actors in the troubled process. In some periods, the demands of the plebeians in the economic, political and social spheres were met by the senate (the Law of the Twelve Tables), in which the nobility was active. However, there was no real amelioration of the problems of the peasantry and the poor. Of course, there were also efforts to improve the situation of the poor. Licinius is one of these entrepreneurs. He organized a law to ensure that the people of Rome, who were suffering serious hardships, had some rights within the framework of social justice. His legislation included debts, the area of land to be owned and the election of one of the consuls from the commoners. However, even though Licinius made efforts to fulfil these rights during his stay in power, he encountered serious resistance from the nobility. Tensions between the nobility and the poor had increased, especially in the second century BC, and towards the end of this century the Brothers Gracchus sought to remedy the plight of the poor.

Until the time of the Brothers Gracchus, the situation of land, military service and the peasantry had always been troubled. Although regulations were sometimes attempted to be made on these issues until the reign of the Brothers Gracchus, a sufficient level of success could not be achieved. Attempted improvements in these areas were met with obstructions from the nobility, and the poor state of the economy led the peasantry to abandon the land and migrate to the cities. In addition, the allies were deprived of the rights of the Roman people, which was another source of unrest in the country. It was in such an environment that the Gracchi brothers would take serious steps to try to bring prosperity to the people. Their laws on land reform in general

were enthusiastically welcomed by the poor, who supported the Brothers Gracchus mainly because they wanted to have land of their own that they could cultivate freely. Although the two brothers tried to realize these reform movements, they were left alone politically, although they gained the support of the people for a while with their reform movements.

The reform movements undertaken by both brothers have been criticized by some scholars and appreciated by others. Although they were criticized and accused of dictatorship by some scholars and ancient writers, both brothers were on the side of the people and took steps to ensure their prosperity, the clearest example of which is that their lives ended in death for this cause. However, even though the Gracchi brothers won the favour and support of the society for a while when they were trying to reform, the majority of the society left them alone on this path. This shows that the people on whom Tiberius and Gaius relied on were weak when they needed to be and able to change direction when they needed to. In addition, the sedentary stratum in the city had an influence on the political cycle. For example, although Tiberius had the support of the peasantry, he was isolated by the fact that the peasantry stayed away from the city during the summer months to take care of their affairs in the village. Gaius, too, despite looking out for the interests of the people, was struck down by the people he supported in order to protect the rights of another people. Of course, it is not right to attribute this situation only to the people, but it is also necessary to see what kind of power the political power has from where it is positioned and how it can transform the people with political arguments. Nevertheless, the rise of social stirrings was to be a harbinger of further developments.

Although Tiberius and Gaius won the favour of the people by showing opposition to the political structure, they were unable to act with a power equal to the power of the political structure. Both brothers needed to create a solid infrastructure for the reforms they wanted to realize by making good use of time. In the social sense, the reforms of both brothers allowed the ruling system to be harshly criticized, and the Roman Republic faced strong opposition in this sense during their period. In this way, elements with a certain amount of power outside the lower classes and nobility (the military class) could be used as a force against the existing authority. It is possible to see this change after the Brothers Gracchus.

In general terms, the lack of a serious and decisive social support against the existing power in Rome during the period of the Brothers Gracchus, the underestimation of the power of the Roman aristocracy and the lack of a political power to counter this formation, and the need for a solid ground to shake the position of the nobility stand out.

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