CRISIS AND THE ECONOMY

TIBERIUS GRACCHUS, LAND AND MANPOWER

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It is a pleasure to join with the other contributors to this volume in saluting Lukas de Blois for his many achievements, and in particular for his foundation of the Impact of Empire Network. One of the numerous topics in Roman history which he has illuminated is the military aspect of the crisis of the Roman Republic.¹ In this essay I offer him some reflections on its initial phase.

In the years immediately preceding the tribunate of Tiberius Gracchus in 133 B.C., tribunes of the *plebs* had shown more frequent militancy than at any time since the fourth century, most notably in disputes over levies for the dangerous and unrewarding wars in Spain, which twice led to the imprisonment of the consuls, and in the carrying of laws instituting the secret ballot for elections and trials.² However, these disputes had been resolved, and Gracchus had doubtless anticipated a similar outcome for his agrarian law. He will, of course, have expected bitter opposition and a tribunician veto, but he will have assumed that, in the face of the mobilization of mass popular support and the backing the law enjoyed from senior senators, including his father-in-law Ap. Claudius Pulcher, the *princeps senatus*, and P. Mucius Scaevola, currently consul, its opponents would back down. That was what past practice will have led Gracchus to expect, as most recently with L. Cassius Longinus' law of 137 introducing the ballot for trials, which was carried when the opposing tribune was induced to withdraw his veto by the *auctoritas* of Scipio Aemilianus.³ However, M. Octavius refused to drop his veto against Gracchus' law, and, as Badian argued in a classic study, this was the year's first and decisive departure from precedent.⁴

¹ L. de Blois, *The Roman Army and Politics in the First Century Before Christ* (Amsterdam 1987).

² On these developments L.R. Taylor, 'Forerunners of the Gracchi', *Journal of Roman Studies* 52 (1962), 19–27, remains fundamental.

³ Cicero, *Brutus* 97; cf. *De legibus* 3.37, *Pro Sestio* 103.

⁴ E. Badian, 'Tiberius Gracchus and the beginning of the Roman Revolution', in H. Temporini (ed.), *ANRW* 1.1, 668–731, at 690–701. Cf. D. Stockton, *The Gracchi* (Oxford 1979), 61 ff.

Unwilling to abandon his bill, Gracchus responded with another novelty, the deposing of his fellow tribune, an act which he justified by the claim that a tribune who frustrated the people's will had deprived himself of office, but which to his opponents was a violation of the tribune's sacrosanctity.⁵ Gracchus' deposing of Octavius ended his prospects of a conventional political career: as Cicero remarked, Octavius "broke Tiberius Gracchus by his endurance".⁶ Gracchus chose to continue on the offensive, with his measures relating to Attalus' legacy and his standing for re-election. This candidature led to further scenes of turbulence, finally resolved in a moment which has recently been brilliantly dissected by Linderski. In his interpretation, Scipio Nasica, the *pontifex maximus*, changed his plain toga for the *toga praetexta* which priests wore only when performing their priestly function, and displayed its purple border on his veiled head to show that he "was proceeding to consecrate Gracchus and his followers to the wrath of the gods".⁷ As Nasica and his supporters advanced, the Gracchan resistance crumbled, and Gracchus himself and many of his followers then lost their lives, the first mass bloodshed in a Roman civil dispute.

Gracchus' tribunate and death "divided one people into two parties", as Cicero made Laelius observe in a dialogue set in 129 B.C.⁸ In other circumstances, its impact might nonetheless have been short-lived, but Gracchus' example was emulated and taken further first by his brother, and then by others exploiting the opportunities afforded by the Jugurthine and Cimbric Wars. It was in these years that the competing discourses and stances of *populares* and *optimates* were formed, and that a range of issues were raised which were in due course to play their part in bringing down the Republic. Of these the most potent was the issue with which Gracchus had begun, land. Thus Gracchus' tribunate can properly be seen not just as a year of crisis, but as the beginning of the long crisis which ended in the Republic's fall.

In political terms then, the tribunate of Tiberius Gracchus was undeniably a critical event. But what of the circumstances which gave rise to his contentious land law? Was he himself responding to a crisis

⁵ The opposing claims: Plutarch, *Tiberius Gracchus* 14.5–15.9.

⁶ Cicero, *Brutus* 95 (*fregit Ti. Gracchum patientia*); cf. *De legibus* 3.24.

⁷ J. Linderski, 'The pontiff and the tribune: the death of Tiberius Gracchus', *Athenaeum* 90 (2002), 339–366 (quotation from 364). See also E. Badian, 'The pig and the priest', in H. Heftner and K. Tomaschitz (eds.), *Ad fontes: Festschrift für Gerhard Dobesch* (Vienna 2004), 263–272.

⁸ Cicero, *De republica* 1.31 (*diuisit populum unum in duas partis*).

when he proposed it? This is the question to which the remainder of this paper will be addressed.

Appian and Plutarch paint a vivid picture of a crisis of land and manpower, according to which the public land (*ager publicus*), intended for occupation by the poor, had been taken over by the rich, who worked it with slaves, and as a result the free poor had become reluctant to rear children and their numbers had gone into decline. An earlier law had been passed imposing a limit of 500 *iugera* (= 126 hectares) on holdings, but this had proved ineffective. Gracchus accordingly introduced his law under which this limit was to be enforced and the land recovered parceled out in small allotments.⁹

Appian's and Plutarch's accounts of this agrarian crisis provide the basis for a modern interpretation, which has been long established in the scholarship of the period, but has been developed most fully by Toynbee and with greatest sophistication by Brunt and Hopkins.¹⁰ Whereas the ancient accounts focus on the public land, their modern counterparts postulate social and economic developments affecting private as well as public land and relating particularly to the period from the Second Punic War on. The profits which they had made from the successful wars of the early second century and the ready supply of cheap slaves which those wars generated encouraged the elite to invest in vine and olive plantations and in ranching, using slave workers. At the same time the high incidence and the long terms of military service, which were a feature of the period from the Second Punic War on, caused severe difficulties for the peasants from whom Rome's armies

⁹ Appian, *Bella ciuilia* 1.7–11; Plutarch, *Tiberius Gracchus* 8–9. Appian's implication that it was only Rome's Italian allies who were affected by the crisis is his own distortion: see further H. Mouritsen, *Italian Unification: A Study in Ancient and Modern Historiography* (London 1998), 11–22. The law imposing the 500 *iugera* limit is attributed by other sources to C. Licinius Stolo and L. Sextius, tribunes in 367 B.C. Almost all scholars have followed Niebuhr in supposing that the limit applied only to holdings of *ager publicus*, but it is more likely that it applied to all landholdings, as is clearly implied by all the sources other than Appian (so, briefly, W. Kunkel, *Staatsordnung und Staatspraxis der römischen Republik. 2: Der Magistratur* [München 1995], 493–496; D.W. Rathbone, 'The control and exploitation of *ager publicus* in Italy under the Roman Republic', in J.-J. Aubert (ed.), *Tâches publiques et entreprise privée dans le monde romain* (Neuchâtel 2003), 135–178, at 143–147). I hope to argue elsewhere that a limit on all landholding was introduced in 367, but Gracchus' revival of the limit applied only to *ager publicus*.

¹⁰ A.J. Toynbee, *Hannibal's Legacy* (Oxford, 1965), vol. 2 *passim*; P.A. Brunt, *Italian Manpower 225 B.C.–A.D.14* (Oxford 1971; rev. edn. 1987), especially 44 ff., 269 ff., 391 ff.; K. Hopkins, *Conquerors and Slaves* (Cambridge 1978), 1–98. For other versions of the traditional account see e.g. Stockton 1979, op. cit. (n. 4), 6 ff.; A.H. Bernstein, *Tiberius Sempronius Gracchus: Tradition and Apostasy* (Ithaca and London 1978), 71 ff.

were drawn; as a result, many farms failed, making their land available for exploitation by the rich. This impoverishment of the peasantry led to a decline in the freeborn population of rural Italy, citizen and allied, and to an even steeper drop in the numbers of the *assidui*, those with the property qualification for military service. This in turn led to recruiting difficulties and made the pressure on the remaining *assidui* still more intense. This crisis of manpower led Gracchus to bring in his agrarian law, with the intention of replenishing the peasantry and so enhancing the numbers of men qualified and available for military service. However, the measure did not achieve its intended effect, and the recruitment crisis was eventually solved by Marius' abolition of the property qualification for military service.

This familiar picture has over the past thirty years or so been subjected to increasing attack, and I contributed to this revisionist critique in an article published in 1983.¹¹ In what follows I shall be revisiting these themes in the light of more recent work.

One of the aspects of the traditional picture which has appeared particularly vulnerable has been the claim that the second century B.C. was a period of dramatic agrarian change, marking a major shift towards the "slave mode of production". The development of field survey has played an important part in this challenge. The South Etruria Survey, the first major field survey conducted in Italy, was taken by its organizers to reveal a high density of rural settlement in both the Republican and early imperial periods with small farms forming a high proportion of all farm sites.¹² Small farmsteads are also prominent in subsequent surveys conducted in a number of other regions, and, where large villas do come to predominate, as in the coastal territory of Cosa or parts of Campania, this development does not appear to get under way until the later second century.¹³ As work has progressed, uncertainties have

¹¹ J.W. Rich, 'The supposed Roman manpower shortage of the later second century B.C.', *Historia* 22 (1983), 287–331.

¹² The survey reports were published in the *Papers of the British School of Rome* from 1958 to 1968, and T.W. Potter, *The Changing Landscape of South Etruria* (London 1979), presented a synthesis (for rural settlement in the Republican and early imperial periods see 93–101, 120–137). M.W. Frederiksen, 'The contribution of archaeology to the agrarian problem in the Gracchan period', *Dialoghi di Archeologia* 4–5 (1970–1971), 330–357, drew attention to the contradiction between the survey findings and the traditional doctrine of second-century agrarian crisis.

¹³ The findings of separate American and Italian field surveys of the environs of Cosa are reported and discussed at S. Dyson, 'Settlement patterns in the ager Cosanus: the Wesleyan University survey, 1974–1976', *Journal of Field Archaeology* 5 (1978),

multiplied. It has, for example, been questioned how far the smallest farmsteads may show up in the data at all.¹⁴ Reassessment of the South Etruria Survey results shows that most of the black glaze ware found dated to the late fourth or third century and only a small quantity to the last two centuries B.C.; this finding is taken by some as attesting depopulation in the region in that period, but its interpretation remains uncertain.¹⁵ Two points at least emerge clearly from the extensive field survey results now available: the data clearly indicate wide variation between and within the different regions of Italy, and give little support for the hypothesis of a general shift to slave production in the immediately pre-Gracchan period.¹⁶

Other considerations too suggest that the shift to slave-run land use was never as complete as sometimes supposed. Rathbone has stressed that slave plantations will have depended on nearby peasant farmers for additional labour at peak periods,¹⁷ and the importance of not exaggerating the extent of slave-run plantations is brought out by

251–268; M. Celuzza and E. Regoli, ‘La Valle d’Oro nel territorio di Cosa. Ager Cosanus e Ager Veientanus a confronto’, *Dialoghi di Archeologia* n.s. 1 (1982), 31–62; I. Attolini et al., in G. Barker and J. Lloyd (eds.), *Roman Landscapes: Archaeological Survey in the Mediterranean Region* (London 1991), 142–152; A. Carandini and F. Cambi (eds.), *Paesaggi d’Etruria* (Rome 2002). For Campania see in particular M.W. Frederiksen, ‘I cambiamenti delle strutture agrarie nella tarda repubblica: la Campania’, in A. Giardina and A. Schiavone (eds.), *Società romana e produzione schiavistica* (Rome 1981), 1.265–287; P. Arthur, *Romans in Northern Campania* (London 1991), especially 55 ff. For field surveys in other regions of Italy see especially G. Barker, *A Mediterranean Valley: Landscape Archaeology and Annales History in the Biferno Valley* (London and New York 1995); E. Lo Cascio and A. Storch Marino, *Modalità insediative e strutture agrarie nell’Italia meridionale in età Romana* (Bari, 2001).

¹⁴ D.W. Rathbone, ‘The Italian countryside and the Gracchan “crisis”’, *JACT Review* 13 (1993), 18–20.

¹⁵ P. Liverani, ‘L’ager Veientanus in età repubblicana’, *Papers of the British School at Rome* 52 (1984), 36–48; N. Morley, *Metropolis and Hinterland: The City of Rome and the Italian Economy 200 B.C.–A.D. 200* (Cambridge 1996), 95–103; H. Patterson, H. di Giuseppe and R. Witcher, ‘Three South Etrurian “crises”: first results of the Tiber Valley Project’, *Papers of the British School at Rome* 72 (2004), 1–36, at 13–17; H. di Giuseppe, ‘Un confronto tra l’Etruria settentrionale e meridionale dal punto di vista della ceramica a vernice nera’, *Papers of the British School at Rome* 73 (2005), 31–84.

¹⁶ See also S.L. Dyson, *Community and Society in Roman Italy* (Baltimore and London 1992), 26 ff.; E. Curti, E. Dench and J.R. Patterson, ‘The archaeology of central and southern Roman Italy: recent trends and approaches’, *Journal of Roman Studies* 86 (1996), 170–189; N. Rosenstein, *Rome at War: Farms, Families and Death in the Middle Republic* (Chapel Hill and London 2004), 6–10; L. de Ligt, ‘The economy: agrarian change during the second century B.C.’, in N. Rosenstein and R. Morstein-Marx, *A Companion to the Roman Republic* (Oxford 2006), 590–605.

¹⁷ D.W. Rathbone, ‘The development of agriculture in the ager Cosanus’, *Journal of Roman Studies* 71 (1981), 10–23.

Jongman's demonstration that in Augustus' day about two per cent of the cultivable land of Italy could have sufficed to produce all the wine and olive oil consumed by the population of the Italian cities.¹⁸ Scheidel now estimates the number of agricultural slaves in Italy under Augustus as only half the 1.2 million postulated by Brunt and Hopkins.¹⁹

It has also become increasingly recognized that agricultural slavery will have become established in Roman Italy well before the Second Punic War. The abolition of *nexum* in the late fourth century could hardly have taken place without the development of chattel slavery as an alternative source of agricultural labour; a high proportion of the large numbers enslaved during the conquest of Italy must surely have ended up working their conquerors' lands; and the Romans' ability to conscript substantial numbers during the Second Punic War can only be explained on the assumption that agricultural slavery was already widespread.²⁰

No doubt the shift towards slave-run land use will have continued and perhaps intensified during the second century B.C. Cato's writing of the first Roman agricultural treatise may be one symptom of this process. In southern Italy the devastation wreaked by both sides during the Hannibalic War may perhaps have facilitated the subsequent development of long-distance transhumant pasturage and the extensive confiscations of rebel land which followed the war will certainly have done so.²¹ However, the old view of the early and middle second century as a dramatic turning point in Italian agrarian development has become increasingly hard to maintain.

Something of the same kind is also true for military service. As Rosenstein has shown in an important recent book, extended periods

¹⁸ W. Jongman, 'Slavery and the growth of Rome: the transformation of Italy in the second and first centuries B.C.E.', in C. Edwards and G. Woolf (eds.), *Rome the Cosmopolis* (Cambridge 2003), 100–121, at 113–115.

¹⁹ W. Scheidel, 'Human mobility in Roman Italy, II: the slave population', *Journal of Roman Studies* 95 (2005), 64–79.

²⁰ M.I. Finley, *Ancient Slavery and Modern Ideology* (London 1980), 83–86; T.J. Cornell, *The Beginnings of Rome* (London 1995), 333, 393–394; K.-W. Welwei, *Sub Corona Vendere: Quellenkritische Studien zu Kriegsgefangenschaft und Sklaverei in Rom bis zum Ende des Hannibalkrieges* (Stuttgart, 2000); Rosenstein 2004, op. cit. (n. 16), 7–8.

²¹ Toynbee 1965, op. cit. (n. 10), 10 ff., 117 ff., 239 ff., with the criticisms of Brunt 1971, op. cit. (n. 10), 269 ff., 353 ff., and the riposte of T.J. Cornell, 'Hannibal's Legacy: the effects of the Hannibalic War in Italy', in T.J. Cornell, B. Rankov and P. Sabin (eds.), *The Second Punic War: A Reappraisal* (London 1996), 97–117; E. Gabba and M. Pasquinucci, *Strutture agrarie e allevamento transumante nell'Italia romana* (Pisa 1979); Lo Cascio and Storch Marino 2001, op. cit. (n. 13).

of service were not a novelty introduced from the Second Punic War, but can be traced back to the late fourth century.²² It follows that the deployment of a substantial proportion of their manpower on extended military service cannot have spelt inevitable disaster for the Italian peasantry, since otherwise the Roman Republic could not have fought so many wars over so long a period with armies manned from that source. It is a notable achievement of Rosenstein's study to demonstrate in detail how the compatibility of peasant farming with extended military service may have worked, by means of sophisticated modelling of family patterns and production needs. As he shows, the late age of male marriage ensured that for some family patterns it was a positive advantage to have a son away at war and for others strategies were available to minimize harm, while, except at times of greatest pressure, the levying authorities may have avoided taking men whose loss would jeopardize farm survival.²³

What, then, of the manpower problems which are held to have given rise to Gracchus' initiative? My 1983 article was mainly concerned with the *assidui* and sought to refute the view that in the later second century there was a real and serious shortage of men qualified for the levy. To my mind, the arguments I deployed then still hold good, and have been reinforced by subsequent research. If there was a drop in the number of *assidui*, it will have been mitigated by the reduced military burden, since the forces deployed were mostly lower in the later than in the earlier second century.²⁴ The attested difficulties over the levy suggest not a general shortage of willing recruits but merely reluctance to serve in those wars which seemed particularly dangerous and unrewarding.²⁵ The property rating required for military service was probably so low that most rural citizens qualified, and modern theories which explain the sources' discrepant figures as reflecting a progressive reduction of the rating in response to a shortage of qualified men are merely speculative and, in their most widely followed form, conflict

²² Rosenstein 2004, op. cit. (n. 16), 26–58.

²³ Rosenstein 2004, op. cit. (n. 16), 63–106.

²⁴ Rich 1983, op. cit. (n. 11), 288–295.

²⁵ Rich 1983, op. cit. (n. 11), 316–318. Cf. Y. Shochat, *Recruitment and the Programme of Tiberius Gracchus* (Brussels 1980), 55 ff.; J.K. Evans, 'Resistance at home: the evasion of military service in Italy during the second century B.C.', in T. Yuge and M. Doi (eds.), *Forms of Control and Subordination in Antiquity* (Leiden 1988), 121–140.

with what is known of the development of the Roman coinage.²⁶ As for Marius' willingness to enrol volunteers for the Jugurthine War without regard to the property qualification, it still seems to me that it is best explained as a short-term attempt to capitalize on his popularity which was not followed by his successors, and that subsequent levies probably continued to be restricted to *assidui* until the radical change in levying methods which resulted from the civil wars of the eighties.²⁷

The manpower anxiety which Appian and Plutarch attribute to Gracchus was about the numbers not of the *assidui*, but of the whole freeborn population. It has sometimes been maintained that the concern ascribed to him was about quality, not numbers, but, although Appian's use of terms like *euandria* and *dysandria* leaves open that possibility, the rest of his exposition shows that Gracchus' fear was that freeborn numbers were falling through failure to rear children.²⁸ There is no reason to doubt that this is indeed what he claimed and that he sincerely believed it, but was he right?

Brunt and Hopkins believe that he was, maintaining that the freeborn population of Italy declined from about 4.5 million in 225 B.C. (a figure derived from the manpower returns reported by Polybius) to about 4 million at the time of Augustus' census of 28 B.C.²⁹ This conclusion depends on the view that, while the Republican census figures recorded adult males, those of Augustus included women and children. This has been disputed by Lo Cascio, and, if he is right that Augustus, like

²⁶ Rich 1983, op. cit. (n. 11), 305–316. Two successive reductions in response to manpower shortage, in the Hannibalic War and in the second century, were postulated by E. Gabba, *Republican Rome, The Army and the Allies* (trans. P.J. Cuff, Oxford 1976), 1–19 (first published 1949), and Brunt 1971, op. cit. (n. 10), 402–405. Ingenious new hypotheses, taking due account of the Hannibalic War devaluations and the retariffing of the denarius *c.* 140, have been proposed by E. Lo Cascio, 'Ancora sui censi minimi delle cinque classi "serviane"', *Athenaeum* 76 (1988), 273–302, and D.W. Rathbone, 'The census qualifications of the *assidui* and the *prima classis*', in H. Sancisi-Weerdenburg et al. (eds.), *De Agricultura: In Memoriam Pieter Willem de Neeve* (Amsterdam, 1993), 121–153. Both suppose that the real value of the qualification was reduced during the Hannibalic War, and Rathbone postulates a further reduction *c.* 140. However, these reconstructions are highly conjectural, and in any case both scholars interpret the supposed census qualification changes as primarily the consequence of monetary developments rather than responses to manpower shortage [see especially Rathbone 1993, op. cit. (n. 14)].

²⁷ Rich 1983, op. cit. (n. 11), 323–330.

²⁸ So rightly Rosenstein 2004, op. cit. (n. 16), 277, criticizing E. Lo Cascio, 'Popolazione e risorse agricole nell'Italia del II secolo a.C.', in D. Vera (ed.), *Demografia, sistemi agrari, regimi alimentari nel mondo antico* (Bari 1999), 217–240, at 231.

²⁹ Brunt 1971, op. cit. (n. 10), 44–130; Hopkins 1978, op. cit. (n. 10), 67–69.

the Republican censors, recorded only adult males, it will follow that the free population of Italy was both much higher than on Brunt's reconstruction and steadily rising.³⁰ This is not the place to enter this controversy. However, as de Ligt has recently shown, even if Brunt's interpretation of the census figures is accepted, it does not follow that the free Italian population was in decline between 225 and 28 B.C., since Polybius' figures can be interpreted to yield a substantially lower starting population.³¹

However this may be, the evidence of the census figures is best interpreted as indicating that the Roman citizen population was rising during the second century B.C. To be sure, for a time the returns will have given the opposite impression, dropping from 337,022 in 163 to 317,933 in 135. This decline may have contributed to Gracchus' belief that the freeborn population was falling. However, in 124 and 114, returns of respectively 394,736 and 394,336 are recorded. The similarity of the two figures is suspicious, but it is excessively sceptical to dismiss them both as corrupt. At least one of the figures should be accepted as genuine, and it follows that the decline from 163 to 135 must reflect not a real decline in numbers, but an increase in non-registration. This may have been partly prompted by the wish to avoid conscription for the unpopular Spanish wars, and the availability of Gracchan land allotments may have helped to reverse the trend (though in that case it is surprising that the effect was not felt until 124). Brunt recognized that the real trend in the census figures at this point was upwards, but attributed this to greatly increased manumission.³² This is not plausible. As de Ligt has argued, the increase in the citizen numbers must also imply an increase in the number of freeborn citizens.³³

Thus the revisionist critique has in my view succeeded in showing that there was in reality no crisis of land or manpower in 133 B.C.

³⁰ E. Lo Cascio, 'The size of the Roman population: Beloch and the meaning of the Augustan census figures', *Journal of Roman Studies* 84 (1994), 23–40; id. 1999, op. cit. (n. 28); id., 'Recruitment and the size of the Roman population from the third to the first century B.C.', in W. Scheidel (ed.), *Debating Roman Demography* (Leiden, Boston and Cologne 2001), 111–138. N. Morley, 'The transformation of Italy, 225–28 B.C.', *Journal of Roman Studies* 91 (2001), 50–62, explores the implications of Lo Cascio's views. For ripostes to Lo Cascio, see W. Scheidel, 'Human mobility in Roman Italy, I: the free population', *Journal of Roman Studies* 94 (2004), 1–26, at 2–9; L. de Ligt, this volume.

³¹ L. de Ligt, 'Poverty and demography: the case of the Gracchan land reforms', *Mnemosyne* 57 (2004), 725–757, at 728–738.

³² Brunt 1971, op. cit. (n. 10), 74–83.

³³ De Ligt 2004, op. cit. (n. 31), 738–744.

An obvious problem then remains: if there was no crisis, how are we to account for Gracchus' decision to put forward his bitterly contentious bill?

At one level, the question is not difficult to answer: although doubtless sincere, Gracchus was mistaken in his beliefs about agrarian change and the population trend. Misperceptions on such matters can be readily documented from other societies, for example eighteenth century England and France.³⁴ Chance impressions may have fostered Gracchus' view of the extent of the slave intrusion, as on his celebrated journey through Etruria, when he may have seen the first villas in the coastal territory of Cosa.³⁵ Pronatalist manpower anxieties were shared by his contemporaries like Metellus Macedonicus, censor in 131, and by Romans in other periods, notably the emperor Augustus.³⁶ The slave war in Sicily and the minor outbreaks on the mainland would have given these concerns added urgency. In any case, Romans were only too prone to conceive exaggerated fears for the security of the Republic, as when, a mere thirteen years before Gracchus' tribunate, they destroyed Carthage in the mistaken belief that it posed a threat which required its extirpation.

The motives of Gracchus and his supporters were doubtless complex. Both Gracchus himself and Ap. Claudius Pulcher had quarreled with the pre-eminent Roman of the day, Gracchus' brother-in-law Scipio Aemilianus, and their enthusiasm for the agrarian law may well have been fired not only by their conviction that the safety of the Republic required it, but also by the reflection that its grateful beneficiaries would include the veterans whom Scipio would shortly be bringing back after his expected victory over Numantia.³⁷

It is, however, clear that in offering his land allotments Gracchus was responding to a widely felt need. Before Gracchus announced his law, numerous posters are said to have appeared calling on him to recover the public land for the poor,³⁸ and, once the law had been

³⁴ Rosenstein 2004, op. cit. (n. 16), 157; De Ligt 2004, op. cit. (n. 31), 752–753.

³⁵ Plutarch, *Tiberius Gracchus* 8.9.

³⁶ Metellus' consorial speech urging marriage: Livy, *Periochae* 59; Suetonius, *Divus Augustus* 89.2; Aulus Gellius, *Noctes Atticae* 1.6.

³⁷ The political explanation of the law has, however, been taken too far by some adherents of the factional theory of Roman politics, e.g. D.C. Earl, *Tiberius Gracchus: A Study in Politics* (Brussels 1963); J. Briscoe, 'Supporters and opponents of Tiberius Gracchus', *Journal of Roman Studies* 64 (1974), 125–135.

³⁸ Plutarch, *Tiberius Gracchus* 8.10.

promulgated, he was able to mobilize mass support for it, particularly from country-dwellers. Gracchus then was responding to genuine rural distress. How are we to account for it?

One element will certainly have been peasants for whom military service had been damaging and whose land had been taken over by the rich: although such developments were not as widespread as supposed, they will have occurred.

Another factor which may well have contributed to rural distress has been identified by both Rosenstein and De Ligt, namely population increase: if the population was rising at the rate implied by the census figures, this is likely to have resulted in increased competition for land.³⁹ Paradoxically, the distress which Gracchus associated with depopulation may have been partly the result of its opposite. Rosenstein indeed believes that the true rate of increase will have been substantially higher than the census figures suggest, since he postulates a very high rate of military mortality.⁴⁰ However, he reaches this conclusion through perhaps excessive confidence in the reliability of Livy's figures for Roman casualties, and it seems unlikely that Roman losses in the largely successful wars of the earlier second century were as high as Rosenstein supposes.

There is another factor of which both Rosenstein and De Ligt are of course aware, but on which I would myself place the greatest stress, namely the cessation of land settlement in the generation before Gracchus. Ever since the capture of Veii, it had been the practice of the Roman state to distribute much of the land confiscated from defeated Italian enemies in allotments to citizens and allies, either by founding colonies or by *viritate* assignments. The main allocations had come in two phases, 334–263 B.C. and 200–173 B.C.: in the first phase up to 100,000 adult males, Romans and allies, may have benefited, in the second perhaps about 50,000.⁴¹ Those receiving colonial allotments and many of those receiving *viritate* allotments will have moved to their new lands. These massive land transfers and migrations could not have

³⁹ Rosenstein 2004, op. cit. (n. 16), 141–169; De Ligt 2004, op. cit. (n. 31).

⁴⁰ Rosenstein 2004, op. cit. (n. 16), 107–140.

⁴¹ See now Scheidel 2004, op. cit. (n. 30), 10–11; 334–263 B.C.: Cornell 1995, op. cit. (n. 20), 380–381; 200–173 B.C.: T. Frank, *An Economic Survey of Ancient Rome* 1 (Baltimore 1933), 114–24; Toynbee 1965, op. cit. (n. 10), 654–656. Scheidel's figure of 'a maximum of 75,000 relocations' in the early second century includes up to 40,000 veterans eligible for the *viritate* allotments offered in 200–199, but many may not have taken them up.

taken place if land shortage and land hunger had not been a constant feature of the Italian peasant economy, the product of systemic factors such as partible inheritance. The Roman state took on itself to satisfy this hunger from the resources acquired by conquest. When such expectations had been raised, it was not surprising that discontent should begin to be felt when they ceased to be met. This can already be seen in the later third century: although some colonies were founded in the period 262–201, they were much fewer than in the earlier period, and unmet land hunger thus may account for the tribune C. Flaminius' success in carrying a law providing for the distribution of the *ager Gallicus* in 232 in the teeth of senatorial opposition. After 173, we hear of virtually no government-sponsored land settlement.⁴² Some settlements may have gone unrecorded, particularly after we lose Livy's record from 167. However, the probability is that settlement largely ceased. This is not surprising: with the conquest of Italy complete, no more Italian land was being acquired, and there was no strategic requirement for the foundation of colonies. But the endemic land hunger will have continued and will have been intensified by other factors like agrarian change and population increase.

Tiberius Gracchus convinced himself that the Roman state should continue to satisfy this demand for land, and indeed that its safety required it to do so in order to ensure the prosperity of the peasant stock from which its armies were drawn. However, in the sequel a succession of tribunes and later of ambitious commanders set out to follow his example in meeting the land demand which the government continued to refuse to satisfy. Thus Gracchus' response to an imagined crisis of land and manpower initiated the political crisis which was to lead to the Republic's fall.

Nottingham, September 2006

⁴² Velleius 1.15.3 dates the colony at Auximum to 157, but the true date may be 128: see E.T. Salmon, 'The *coloniae maritimae*', *Athenaeum* 41 (1963), 3–38, at 10–13.