# **The Gracchi Source Analysis**

**Source 1**

**A Roman historian describes the lives of the Gracchi brothers:**

7 The Romans, as they subdued the Italian peoples successively in war, used to seize a part of their lands and build towns there, or enrol colonists … who were willing to work it ... They did these things in order to multiply the Italian race, which they considered the most laborious of peoples, so that they might have plenty of allies at home. But the very opposite thing happened; for the rich, getting possession of the greater part of the undistributed lands … absorbing any adjacent strips and their poor neighbours' allotments, partly by purchase under persuasion and partly by force, came to cultivate vast tracts instead of single estates, using slaves as labourers ... Thus certain powerful men became extremely rich and the race of slaves multiplied throughout the country, while the Italian people dwindled in numbers and strength…

8 For these reasons the people became troubled lest they should no longer have sufficient allies of the Italian stock, and lest the government itself should be endangered by such a vast number of slaves … a law was at last passed with difficulty at the instance of the tribunes, that nobody should hold more than 500 *jugera* of this land ... To ensure the observance of this law it was provided also that there should be a certain number of freemen employed on the farms, whose business it should be to watch and report what was going on.

… [However,] the few who seemed to pay some respect to them conveyed their lands to their relations fraudulently, but the greater part disregarded it altogether,

9 till at last Tiberius Sempronius Gracchus, an illustrious man, eager for glory, a most powerful speaker, and for these reasons well known to all, delivered an eloquent discourse, while serving as [plebeian] tribune [in 133 BC], concerning the Italian race, lamenting that a people so valiant in war, and related in blood to the Romans, were declining little by little into pauperism and paucity of numbers without any hope of remedy ... After speaking thus he again brought forward the law, providing that nobody should hold more than the 500 *jugera* of the public domain. But he added a provision to the former law, that the sons of the occupiers might each hold one-half of that amount, and that the remainder should be divided among the poor by three elected commissioners, who should be changed annually.

10 This was extremely disturbing to the rich because, on account of the commissioners, they could no longer disregard the law as they had done before; nor could they buy the allotments of others, because Gracchus had provided against this by forbidding sales ... Emboldened by numbers and exasperated against each other they kindled considerable disturbances, and waited eagerly for the voting on the new law, some intending to prevent its enactment by all means, and others to enact it at all costs. In addition to personal interest the spirit of rivalry spurred both sides in the preparations they were making against each other for the appointed day.

11 ... When the time for voting [on this law] came [Tiberius] advanced many other arguments at considerable length and … he admonished the rich to take heed … After saying much more to the same purport and exciting the poor, as well as others who were moved by reason rather than by the desire for gain, he ordered the clerk to read the proposed law.

12 Marcus Octavius, however, another tribune, who had been induced by those in possession of the lands to interpose his veto (for among the Romans the negative veto always defeats an affirmative proposal), ordered the clerk to keep silence. Thereupon Gracchus reproached him severely and adjourned the *comitia* to the following day. Then he stationed near himself a sufficient guard, as if to force Octavius against his will, and ordered the clerk with threats to read the proposed law to the multitude. He began to read, but when Octavius again forbade he stopped … [Tiberius] said that he would take the vote at the *comitia* of the following day, both on the law and on the official rights of Octavius, to determine whether a tribune who was acting contrary to the people's interest could continue to hold office. And this Gracchus did; for when Octavius, nothing daunted, again interposed, Gracchus proposed to take the vote on him first.

When the first tribe voted to abrogate the magistracy of Octavius, Gracchus turned to him and begged him to desist from his veto. As he would not yield, he took the votes of the other tribes ... As Octavius was still unyielding he went on taking the vote. Octavius was forthwith reduced to the rank of a private citizen and slunk away unobserved … and the agrarian law was enacted.

13 ... Gracchus became immensely popular by reason of the law and was escorted home by the multitude ... The defeated ones remained in the city and talked the matter over, feeling aggrieved, and saying that as soon as Gracchus should become a private citizen he would be sorry that he had done to the sacred and inviolable office of tribune...

14 It was now summer, and the election of tribunes [for 132 BC] was imminent. As the day for voting approached [Tiberius,] fearing that evil would befall if he should not be re-elected for the following year, summoned … plebeians of the city. So he went around asking each one separately to elect him tribune for the ensuing year, on account of the danger he was incurring for them. When the voting took place … the rich objected that it was not lawful for the same man to hold the office twice in succession...

15 The poor … bade him be of good courage for the next day. Gracchus cheered up, assembled his partisans before daybreak, and communicated to them a signal to be displayed if there were need for fighting. He then took possession of the temple on the Capitoline hill, where the voting was to take place, and occupied the middle of the assembly. As he was obstructed by the other tribunes and by the rich, who would not allow the votes to be taken on this question, he gave the signal. There was a sudden shout from those who knew of it, and violence followed. Some of the partisans of Gracchus took position around him like body-guards. Others, having girded up their clothes, seized the *fasces* and staves in the hands of the lictors and broke them in pieces. They drove the rich out of the assembly with such disorder and wounds that the tribunes fled from their places in terror, and the priests closed the doors of the temple. Many ran away pell-mell and scattered wild rumours. Some said that Gracchus had deposed all the other tribunes .... Others said that he had declared himself tribune for the ensuing year without an election.

16 In these circumstances the Senate assembled at the temple of Fides ... After reaching such decision as they did reach, they marched up to the Capitol, Cornelius Scipio Nasica, the *pontifex maximus*, leading the way and calling out with a loud voice, "Let those who would save our country follow me." ... When he arrived at the temple and advanced against the partisans of Gracchus they yielded out of regard for so excellent a citizen, and because they observed the Senators following with him. The latter wresting their clubs out of the hands of the Gracchans themselves, or breaking up benches and other furniture that had been brought for the use of the assembly, began beating them, and pursued them, and drove them over the precipice. In the tumult many of the Gracchans perished, and Gracchus himself, vainly circling round the temple, was slain at the door close by the statues of the kings. All the bodies were thrown by night into the Tiber.

17 So perished on the Capitol, and while still tribune, Gracchus … He lost his life in consequence of a most excellent idea too violently pursued; and this abominable crime, the first that was perpetrated in the public assembly, was seldom without parallels thereafter from time to time…

21 Even after these events those who were in possession of the lands postponed the division on various pretexts for a very long time … For this reason the attempt was abandoned, and the populace, who had been so long in the hope of acquiring land, became disheartened. While they were in this mood Gaius Gracchus, who had made himself agreeable to them as a commissioner, offered himself for the tribuneship. He was the younger brother of Tiberius Gracchus, the promoter of the law, and had been quiet for some time after his brother's death ... Being elected [for the tribuneship of 123 BC] with flying colours he began to lay plots against the Senate, and made the unprecedented suggestion that a monthly distribution of corn should be made to each citizen at the public expense. Thus he quickly got the leadership of the people by one political measure ... Directly after that he was chosen tribune for the following year [a.k.a. 122 BC] ...

22 Thus Gaius Gracchus was tribune a second time. Having bought the plebeians, as it were, he began, by another like political manoeuvre, to court the equestrian order, who hold the middle place between the Senate and the plebeians ... The Senate was extremely ashamed of these things and yielded to the law, and the people ratified it ... It is said that soon after the passage of this law Gracchus remarked that he had broken the power of the Senate once for all…

23 Gracchus also … called on the Latin allies to demand the full rights of Roman citizenship, since the Senate could not with decency refuse this privilege to men who were of the same race ... The Senate was very much alarmed at this, … persuaded Livius Drusus, another tribune, to interpose his veto against the laws proposed by Gracchus, but not to tell the people his reasons for doing so; for a tribune was not required to give reasons for his veto. In order to conciliate the people they gave Drusus the privilege of founding twelve colonies, and the plebeians were so much pleased with this that they scoffed at the laws proposed by Gracchus.

24 Having lost the favour of the rabble, Gracchus sailed for Africa … [where he] marked out the city for the colony on the place where Carthage had formerly stood ... They assigned 6000 colonists to this place ... When they returned to Rome … the Senate summoned the *comitia*, in which it was proposed to repeal the law concerning this colony. When Gracchus … saw their failure in this matter they were furious .... The boldest of the plebeians joined them, carrying daggers, and proceeded to the Capitol, where the assembly was to be held in reference to the colony.

25 Now … when Gracchus arrived at the Capitol attended by a body-guard of his partisans ... a plebeian named Antyllus … laid his hand upon him, either because he had heard or suspected something, or was moved to speak to him for some other reason ... Then one of [Gracchus’] party … drew his dagger and killed Antyllus. A cry was raised, the dead body was seen in the midst of the crowd, and all who were outside fled from the temple in fear of a like fate.

Gracchus went into the assembly desiring to prove himself innocent of the deed, but nobody would so much as listen to him. All turned away from him as from one stained with blood. So … he … having lost through this hasty act the chance of accomplishing what they wished, they ran back to their homes …

26 The Senate summoned Gracchus … to the senate-house to defend [himself]. But [instead, he] ran out armed toward the Aventine hill … [and] occupied and fortified the temple of Diana ... The Senate replied that [he] should lay down [his] weapons, come to the senate-house, and tell them what [he] wanted ... at the same time sent … armed men against the Gracchans.

Gracchus fled across the river by the wooden bridge with one slave to a grove, and there, being on the point of arrest, he presented his throat to the slave [and was killed] ...

Appian, *The Civil Wars*, I.7-26.

1. What things were the Italians worried about before the tribuneship of Tiberius Gracchus?
2. How did Tiberius propose to solve this problem?
3. In what year did Tiberius Gracchus become plebeian tribune?
4. How did Tiberius manage to get his law passed?
5. Why were the senators against Tiberius becoming tribune for a second time?
6. How did Tiberius die?
7. What relationship did Gaius Gracchus have with Tiberius Gracchus?
8. In which year did Gaius Gracchus become a tribune for the plebs?
9. What had Gaius offered to the people in order to win the election?
10. In which year did Gaius Gracchus become tribune for the second time?
11. How did Gaius lose his popularity with the people?
12. How did Gaius Gracchus die?
13. Who was the [creator](https://www.historyskills.com/source-criticism/analysis/source-creator/) of this source?
14. [When](https://www.historyskills.com/source-criticism/analysis/time-of-creation/) was this source created?
15. What [perspective](https://www.historyskills.com/source-criticism/analysis/perspective/) does this source have on the events it describes?
16. For what [purpose](https://www.historyskills.com/source-criticism/analysis/purpose/) was this source created?
17. What [bias](https://www.historyskills.com/source-criticism/analysis/bias/) is evident in this source? Provide some [direct quotes](https://www.historyskills.com/quoting/direct-quotes/) to show this [bias](https://www.historyskills.com/source-criticism/analysis/bias/).

**Paragraph Writing**

Based upon what you learnt in the above sources, answer the following question in paragraph format (Topic Sentence, Explanation, Evidence, Concluding Sentence):

*Why were the tribuneships and deaths of the Gracchi brothers* [*significant*](https://www.historyskills.com/historical-knowledge/significance/) *events in Roman political history?*