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Gracchi Brothers

1. Background

 A. Born into the patrician branch

 1. Tiberius born 168 BC

 2. Gaius born 154 BC

 3. Father Tiberius Sempronius Gracchus

 a. Tribune of the Plebs

 b. Died when they were young

 4. Mother Cornelia Africana

 a. Provided best available tutors

 b. Plutarch gives the fullest account of Cornelia's life

 c. Her writings survived

 B. Before the brothers came to power

 1. After 2nd Punic War

 a. Supreme power and many changes occurred in Rome

 2. Oligarchy abuses power

 3. Serious social problems occur

 a. Military crisis; lack of eligible recruits

 b. Tension between leading factions

II. Tiberius Gracchus

 A. Elected into office as tribune in 133 BC

 B. Proposed the agrarian reform

 1. Landless poor given small estates, which would be divided up from Rome's public land

 2. Limited the land to 500 acres per family member

 3. Argued to wealthy land owners that it would reduce danger for revolt and would increase the number of soldiers

 4. Senators were against reforms which cost them some of their own land

 C. Sought re-election as tribune

 1. Senate and opponents obstructed his re-election and claimed it was illegal

 2. Tiberius was beaten to death with 300 of his supporters

III. Gaius Gracchus

 A. Succeeded his brother in 123 BC

 1. Learned that he would need more followers to overcome the Senate

 2. A great orator and more practical minded

 3. Renewed Tiberius’ land law

 B. Created new laws

 1. Introduced a law that there would be no conscription of Romans under age 17

 2. Death penalty on any judge who accepted a bribe to convict another Roman guilty

 C. Suicide

 1. Gaius lost support in 121 BC

 2. His opponent was killed and the Senatus Consultum Ultimum was passed

 a. Ultimate decree of the Senate

 b. Gave the Senate the power to declare anyone an enemy of the state and execute him without trial by a jury

 3. Mob was assembled to assassinate Gaius

 a. Knowing his death was imminent, he committed suicide in 121 BC

IV. Effect of the Gracchi Brothers

 1. Emphasized both the strengths and the weaknesses of the tribunate

 2. Political behavior becomes more prominent

 3. Reforms were short-lived

Citations

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