

# Notes on Quiz #8

*Civilizations of the Ancient World • Spring 2023*

## 1. How did the Romans govern their provinces? What were some of the complaints?

The Romans set up territories they ruled over as “provinces” — literally, a job or responsibility for an ex-magistrate. A consul or praetor, after his year in office, would have his powers continued for another year for the purpose of accepting responsibility for governing a conquered territory. He was now a proconsul (or propraeitor), and was the sole Roman authority in the territory he’d been given. A large enough province might have a Roman legion stationed there, of which the proconsul or propraeitor was the commander.

Because there were only eight magistrates a year (two consuls and six praetors), and therefore only eight potential new governors, once there were more than eight provinces it became increasingly necessary to prorogue, or hold over, the sitting governors in their territories, with the result that some governors ended up ruling over their provinces for several years, allowing them to build up a power base there among the local nobles and their own legions. Thus the provincial governments allowed one man to have complete executive authority (rather than two as back at Rome), without a colleague or a senate or assembly to get in the way of his ambition; and many of them stayed in place for multiple years, rather than one year only as in Rome.

One key element of Roman provincial government was tax farming. Because the governors had no supporting bureaucracy, tax collection was outsourced to for-profit corporations run by Roman middle class businessmen (*publicani*). These corporations gouged the populace by collecting as much money as they could, handing over to the Roman state the fixed amount the senate decreed for that province and pocketing the rest. This resulted in resentment, rebellion, and increased need for Roman military presence and oppression in the provinces.

## 2. Why was Tiberius Gracchus’s land law so controversial? What happened to Gracchus as a result?

The Gracchan laws affected the Italian public lands (*ager publicus*)—vast amounts of lands taken by Rome in war. These lands had been settled by citizens in small freeholds still technically owned by the state but farmed by generations of Roman citizen farmers. But the shifting of the rural economy in the third and second centuries meant that more and more of this land was ending up as part of the large estates of the rich. Tiberius Gracchus’s law proposed enforcing an old law saying no one could have more than 300 acres; he hoped to redistribute the land to recreate a large population of citizen farmers out of the landless poor teeming in Rome. This was taken by the rich as a rabble-rousing attack on behalf of the poor.

Gracchus also bypassed the senate and proposed his law directly to the people. Over time it had become customary to present laws first to the senate, which would debate them and offer a resolution supporting it if they approved. Since the conservative senate contained many rich landholders and their friends, and were moreover averse to radical change that would upset customs and traditions of the Republic (which they felt duty-bound to protect), Gracchus knew his law would be opposed by the senate. But bypassing the senate angered the elite, and since Gracchus broke no laws in doing so the response to Gracchus was personal and outside of the system.

Gracchus also had the Assembly vote to remove a tribune who had threatened to veto the bill if it passed, and funded the land commission created by the law by diverting the bequest of the king of Pergamum, scorning the senate’s traditional control over foreign policy. In bypassing the senate, acting against a (pro-senate) tribune, and diverting the Pergamene bequest, Gracchus asserted a more extreme idea of the power of the People (without reference to the state) than most in the ruling class could withstand.

### 3. How did Marius reform the Roman army? What problems did this solve? What problems did it create?

The main issue with recruiting soldiers to fight Rome's wars in the Middle Republic was that there was a minimum property requirement. In order to create an army large enough to fend off the massive Cimbri/Teutones invasion, Marius did away with this requirement, creating what is known as the "volunteer army" or the "proletarian army." With these forces Marius was able to defeat the invaders, and this became the model for all Roman armies going forward.

The problem with the volunteer army is that with no wealth and no homestead of their own to return to, these soldiers were dependent on their general to ensure they had land return on and a share in the spoils of war. This helped ensure that Roman legions were loyal to their generals rather than to the central government that protected the homesteads of the landed families, making possible the general's march on Rome that brought Sulla, Caesar, and later many emperors to power.

Marius also reformed the army by introducing the legionary eagle standard, a semireligious standard carried before every legion that served as a focal point for its soldiers. These concentrated and strengthened the identity and unity of each legion, making them all the more formidable when turned against an enemy—or against Rome.

#### EC1. The Social War refers to the armed conflict between:

- (d) The Italian allies and Rome

#### EC2. What was the *senatus consultum ultimum*, or "last resolution of the senate"? How was it used?

The *senatus consultum ultimum*, or "ultimate decree," was a Senate vote to instruct the consul and other top magistrates to defend the Republic and see that no harm came to the state. It enabled the state to use violence against Roman citizens, depriving them of *provocatio* (a citizen's right of appeal to the People) and other protections.

It could be wielded by a faction in the Senate (in this case the most conservative of the "optimates"). It was used to justify killing C. Gracchus and thousands of his supporters.