



Optimates and Populares
History of Ancient Rome | Meeting #7

1



Upcoming Dates

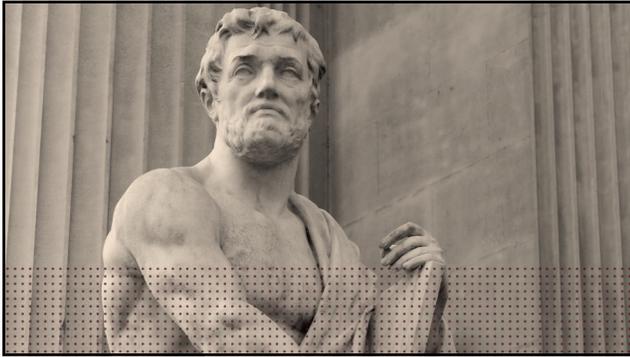
- Monday, March 23
Proposal Due
- April 1-9
No meeting (Spring Break)
- Sunday, March 22
Responses for Week 7 Due

2

Five things today

- Rome in the East
- The brothers Gracchus
- Marius
- Mithridates
- Sulla

3



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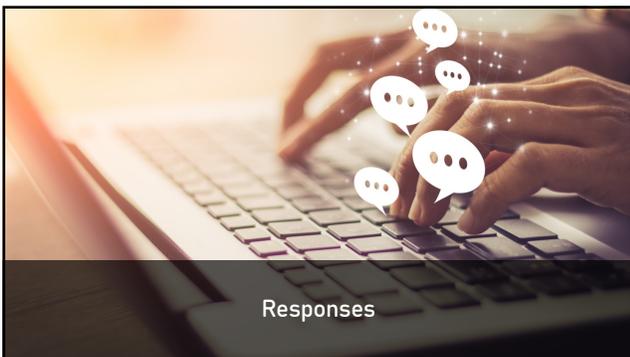
Quiz #5 | Optimates and Populares

- 1. All of the following are true of Tiberius Gracchus's land reform bill [\[1/1/2020\]](#)
 - a. It was designed to break up large estates made up of public land and divide them among landless Roman citizens.
 - b. Tiberius's decision not to consult the senate before presenting the bill to the assembly was wholly unprecedented and illegal.
 - c. The pontifex maximus, Scipio Nasica, led an angry mob of senators to dub Tiberius and his supporters as death.
 - d. The land commission to break up the estates was set up anyway despite Tiberius's death.
- 2. The Social War (90-88 BCE) refers to the armed conflict between
 - a. Facebook and MySpace
 - b. the optimates and the populares
 - c. the patricians and the plebeians
 - d. the Italian allies and Rome
- 3. Gaius Marius's impact on Roman history includes all of the following [\[1/1/2020\]](#)
 - a. swiftly defeating Jugurtha after a long war conducted by his optimate enemy, Metellus
 - b. reforming the army to defeat the Cimbric and Teutonic after a disastrous Roman defeat under optimate generals
 - c. marrying Julius Caesar's aunt
 - d. winning his seventh consulship during a period of peace and goodwill among Romans
- 4. Mithridates's prearranged massacre of thousands of Italians in Asia Minor had many consequences. The slaughter sparked a chain of events that led to the consul Sulla doing all of the following [\[1/1/2020\]](#)
 - a. being given the commission to wage war against Mithridates
 - b. marching his army on Rome to restore order after riots in favor of replacing him with Marius
 - c. not marching east to fight Mithridates, instead remaining in Rome after the riots to protect the government and
 - d. having himself declared dictator to reconstitute the state on his return after the Marian disruption
- 5. The ultimate decree of the senate (*senatus consultum ultimum*) called on
 - a. the gods to punish Roman nobles who rose against their own city
 - b. the consuls to take any necessary action to preserve the state
 - c. posterity to witness the justice of the senate's actions
 - d. architects to design cooler benches for senators to sit on

Extra Credit

EC: In your opinion, what did the leaders of the populares stand for?

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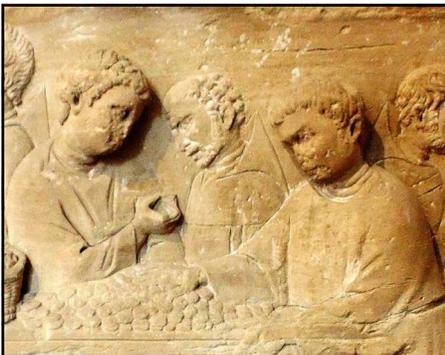
Questions about whatever



7

The acquisition of empire

8



The wealth of empire

- Expanding trade
- Massive resources
- Accessible social mobility

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Italian land

- Estates increasingly combined and expanded
- Poorer families forced off the land
- Fewer soldiers meeting the property requirement

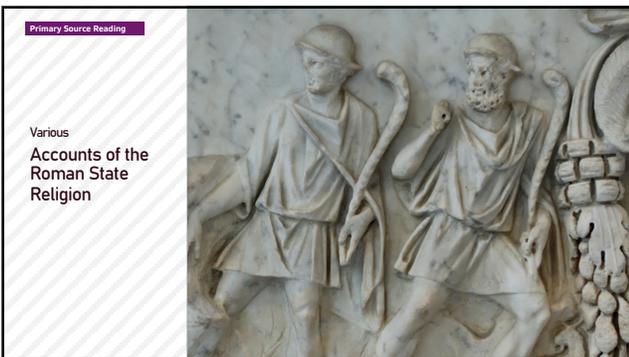
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The legion

- Increasing separate identity
- Reliance on Italian allies fighting alongside Romans

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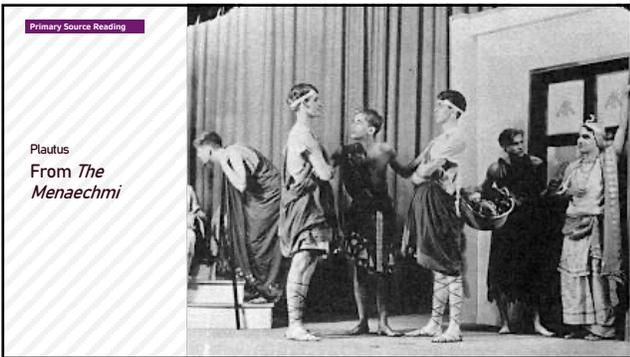
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Hellenization

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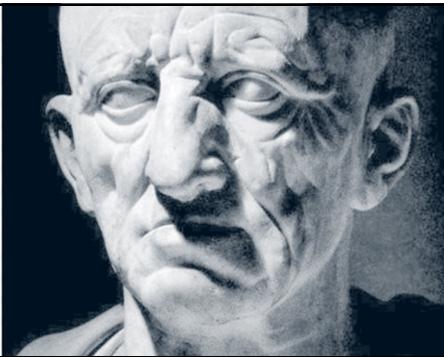
Roman identity

- Use of Greek tools to reinforce Roman ideas
- Drive to defend traditional Roman values

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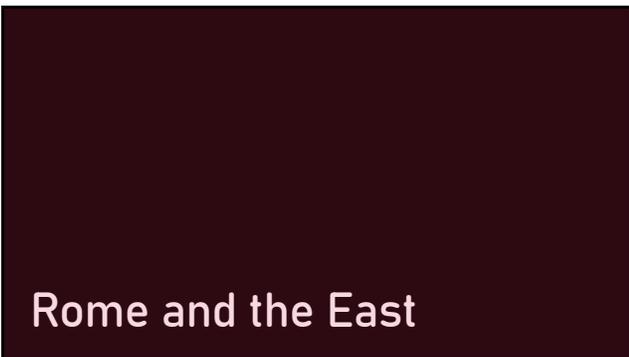
Primary Source Reading

Livy
Cato Opposes Extravagance



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Rome and the East



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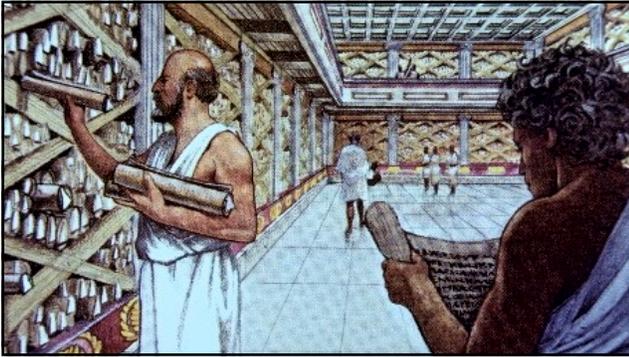
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Roman influence

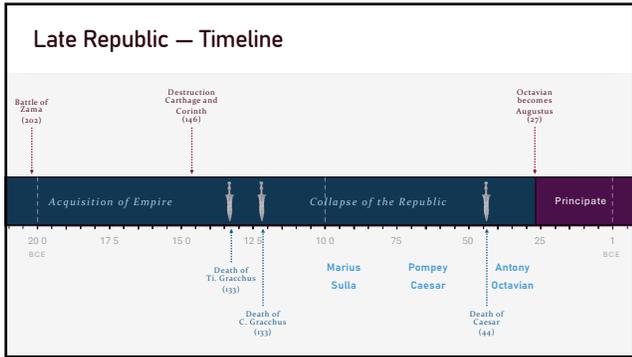
- The Roman legion
- The majesty of Rome
- The value of the Roman economy
- Case study: The line in the sand

23



The Roman Revolution

24



25



26



27



Schism within the nobility

- The crisis over distributing public land is a watershed
- Exposes the growing divide within the nobility
- The Romans call these groups optimates and populares

28



What do the optimates and populares stand for?

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Caveats about the divide

- Divide was among the elite families
- "The victors write the histories"
- The dangers on both sides

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Ti. Sempronius Gracchus

- Cream of the elite
- Centuries of public service by the Sempronii Gracchi
- Tiberius becomes a tribune of the plebs to bring about populist forms

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Primary Source Reading

Plutarch
On Tiberius Gracchus



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Proposed redistribution of public lands

- Break up large estates and distribute to poorer Roman citizens
- Provide for new soldiers whose families meet the property requirement for levy
- Legally usage of public land is already limited to 500 iugera (311 acres)
- Gracchus's law is to empanel a commission to enforce the existing restriction

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Tiberius's defiance

- Did not present the bill to the senate
 - Custom was to consult the senate before putting it before the assembly
 - Precedent, not law
- Blocked pro-senate veto
 - Overruled the veto
 - Encouraged the masses to uphold his actions with force

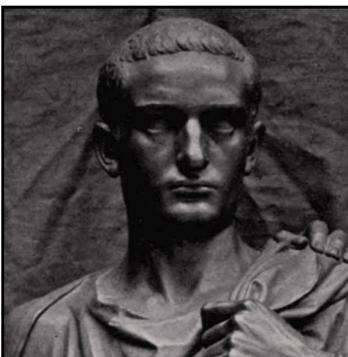
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Conservative extremists' fury

- Too popular to oppose
- Constitution offers no recourse
- Consuls refuse to act against him as an insurrectionist
- Conservative senators form a mob
 - Pontifex Maximus (P. Cornelius Scipio Nasica) picks up a club and demands action
 - Mob of extremist senators beats Tiberius and his followers to death
 - Body thrown in the Tiber to deny proper burial

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C. Gracchus: More radical reforms

- Empowering the knights at the expense of the senate
- Re-empaneling the land commission
- Reforming military service terms
- Citizenship for the Italian allied peoples

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Primary Source Reading

Appian
On Gaius Gracchus



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The Senate's ultimate decree

- C. Gracchus's reform movement framed as an insurrection
- "Ultimate decree"
 - Calls on consuls to do what is necessary to save the state
 - No force in law
- C. Gracchus and followers rounded up and executed
- Divisions escalate

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Divisions within the nobility

POPULARES	OPTIMATES
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Leaders who seek popularity among the people of Rome • Demonize the senate as oppressing the masses and protecting privilege at Rome's expense, especially at war • Urge Romans to place their faith and trust in great men, not institutions <p>Examples</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • The Gracchus brothers • Gaius Marius • Julius Caesar • Octavian/ Augustus 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Leaders who seek to protect the old ways • Champion the senate as guardians of tradition and the collective, anonymous rule that made Rome strong • Urge Romans to place their faith and trust in institutions, not great men <p>Examples</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Sulla • Metellus Numidicus • Cato the Younger

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Gaius Marius

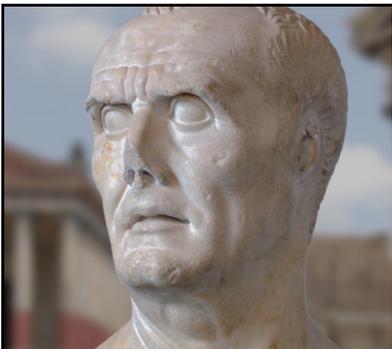
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The optimates and the senate

- Senate polarized into populares, optimates, and neutrals
- Fiery speeches and group action
 - System of clients and patrons leveraged
 - Clans and families create friendships and alliances

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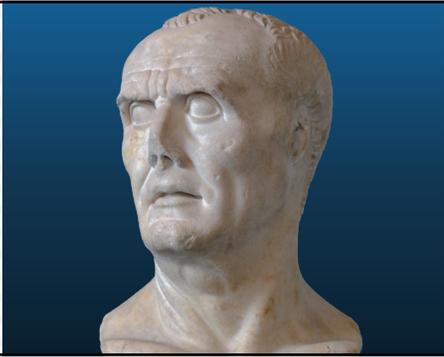
C. Marius

- Novus homo
 - No ancestors who were consuls = "new man"
 - Outsider from Arpinium
 - No cognomen
- Fierce opponent of optimates

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Primary Source Reading

Sallust
Speech of
Marius Against
the Nobility



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Client kingdoms

- Two forms of administration
- Province
 - Governed directly
 - Proconsul, tax collection, legion
- Client-kingdom
 - King left in place
 - Pays tribute
 - Fights for Rome

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Jugurthine War

- Jugurtha seizes Numidia
- Romans slaughtered
- Roman war goes badly
- Marius takes over
 - Wins consulship
 - Tricks Jugurtha into being captured
 - War ended immediately
- Marius now a popular hero

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Cimbri and Teutones

- Massive migration of German tribes
- Romans annihilated at Battle of Arausio (105 BCE)
 - Incompetent generals
 - Exploitation of Italian allies
 - Italy exposed to invasion
- People demand Marius

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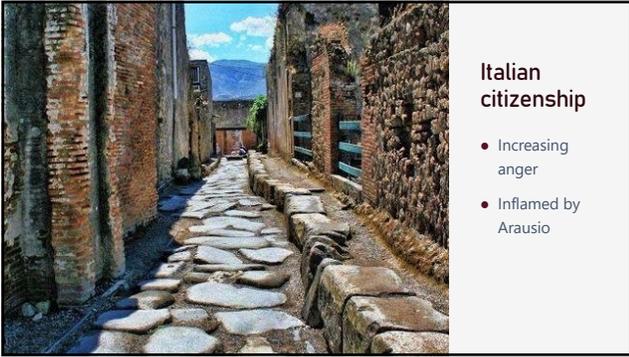
Critical Marian military reforms

- The head count army
- The eagle standard
- Other reforms
 - Minimal baggage train
 - The one-use javelin

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Italy and the Social War

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Social War (91-87 BCE)

- Italians trained to fight like Romans
- No common purpose
- Romans lose at first
- Win by dividing them
 - All who lay down arms get Roman citizenship
 - Remainder crushed

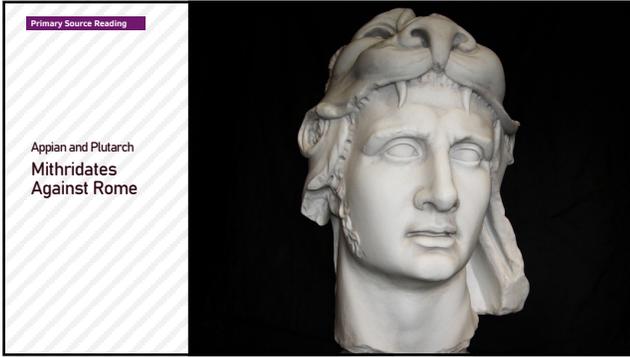
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Sulla the Fortunate

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Sulla's march on Rome

- Pro-Marius riots in the city
- Sulla leads army from camp
- Crosses pomerium at arms
- Restores order, then leaves to fight Mithridates as planned



Marian revolution

- Marius and Cinna take over Rome by force
 - Marius "elected" to 7th consulship
 - Dies shortly thereafter, still a beloved hero of the people
- Proscriptions
- One-party rule
- Sulla declared an outlaw

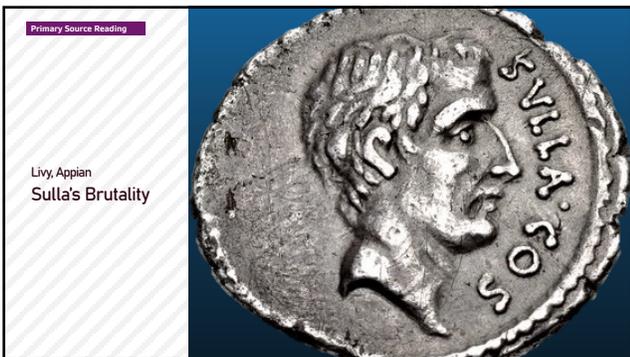
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Sulla the dictator

- Sulla storms back to Italy with his armies
- Brutal battle before the gates of Rome
 - Sullan vs. Marian forces
- Sulla is made dictator to restore the state

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Sulla's legacy

- Builds new pro-senate constitution
- Resigns the dictatorship
- Two dangerous precedents
 - The partisan dictatorship
 - The march on Rome

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