

The Casting of the Die

The Roman Republic saw many political quarrels among its citizens and political leaders. The division between the citizens of Rome and the Senate and other political leaders grew throughout the years of Republic Rome. Rome was an expanding Republic with the rich getting richer and the poor getting poorer with issues of land reforms led by the Gracchus Brothers dividing the citizens and Senate.¹ The growing division affected Rome's military veterans as well. Veterans were losing their land which made them unable to serve in the military.² Veterans were being hired by wealthy Aristocrats for their armies.³ The rise of these "Aristocratic Generals" and political division in Rome is the cause of Caesar crossing the Rubicon and dissolution of Republic Rome.

The rise of Aristocratic Generals started in the mid 2nd century BCE with Roman expansion. Since Rome's territory and authority was expanding, men were needed to fight in these battles, which pulled men from their farms.⁴ Men were unable to work their land, and were financially struggling to keep their farms; many ended up selling their farms to wealthy landowners who used slaves to work for them, which made the veterans unable to serve in the military due to not owning land anymore.⁵ The landless veterans moved back to the city where they supported politicians who campaigned for better lives in Rome.⁶ Two politicians in Rome that were advocates for land reforms were the Gracchus Brothers.⁷ Tiberius Gracchus was elected tribune in 133 BCE, and led a land reform which wanted to cap out land ownership and redistribute public land to the poorer citizens of Rome.⁸ Tiberius brought the bill to the Assembly of the Plebs without Senate review, though the Senate could not do much since Tiberius was tribune.⁹ Plutarch records Tiberius' proposal of the bill in his work *The Parallel Lives*. The passage reads: "At once Tiberius courted popular favour by bringing in a bill which provided that the money of King

¹ Merry E Wiesner-Hanks et al., *A History of Western Society, Thirteenth* (Boston, MA: Bedford/St. Martin's, Macmillan Learning, 2020), 128.

² Wiesner-Hanks et al., 128.

³ Wiesner-Hanks et al., 128.

⁴ Wiesner-Hanks et al., 128.

⁵ Wiesner-Hanks et al., 128.

⁶ Wiesner-Hanks et al., 128.

⁷ Wiesner-Hanks et al., 129.

⁸ Wiesner-Hanks et al., 129.

⁹ Wiesner-Hanks et al., 129.

Attalus, when brought to Rome, should be given to the citizens who received a parcel of the public land, to aid them in stocking and tilling their farms.”¹⁰ Tiberius was trying to get public land and money to help the farmers who were affected by the war. The Senate did not like this, and the bill was unpopular among senators. Plutarch later goes on to express Tiberius’ fear after the senate’s reaction. Plutarch records that Tiberius went to the forum and expressed his fear that he was going to be killed, with tears in his eyes.¹¹ Unfortunately, for Tiberius, his end was near. Tiberius put his hands up because he knew he was in danger, and attendants and senators armed themselves with clubs and bench legs.¹² Tiberius tried to run away, but tripped, and the first strike to the head came from Publius Satyrius, his colleague; the next was from Lucius Rafus.¹³ It is clear that the land reforms brought forward by Tiberius Gracchus were not well liked by the senate and led to his death.

Rome’s army was making little progress in Africa, and when Gaius Marius was elected Consul, he decided to hire his own personal troops; military service was transformed from part-time to fully professionalized.¹⁴ Two political factions began to form: the populares, who were in favor of authority in Citizens Assembly and well being of the Roman people, and the optimates, who were conservative and wanted to keep tradition.¹⁵ The populares backed Marius, and the optimates backed Sulla, who was elected consul in 88 BCE and led a campaign in northern Anatolia.¹⁶ While this was happening, the populares gained control of the Citizens Assembly and revoked Sulla’s consulship; Sulla fled and brought an army back to Rome.¹⁷ Appian records Sulla’s escape in his *Civil Wars*: “As the vacation was annulled and Sulla had left the city, Sulpicius enacted his law, and Marius, for whose sake it was done, was forthwith chosen commander of the war against Mithridates in place of Sulla.”¹⁸ As we see, Sulla fled, which put Marius in charge of the campaign in northern Anatolia. Marius returned to Rome in 86 BCE

¹⁰ Plutarch, *The Parallel Lives*, “The Life of Tiberius Gracchus” 14:1. Loeb Classical Library, 1921

¹¹ Plutarch, 16:3

¹² Plutarch, 19:2-5

¹³ Plutarch, 19:5-6

¹⁴ Wiesner-Hanks et al., 130.

¹⁵ Wiesner-Hanks et al., 130.

¹⁶ Wiesner-Hanks et al., 130-1.

¹⁷ Wiesner-Hanks et al., 131.

¹⁸ Appian, *Civil Wars*. Book VII 56:1. Loeb Classical Library, 1913.

and died shortly after reversing Sulla's changes; Sulla returned in 83 BCE, killed his political opponents, and was named Dictator.¹⁹

Sulla was succeeded by Pompey, Crassus, and Julius Caesar.²⁰ The three formed a political agreement that is now known as the First Triumvirate, which got Caesar elected Consul.²¹ While Pompey was away fighting in Hispania (Spain) and Caesar fighting in Gaul, Crassus was killed, supporters of the two generals fought each other in Rome, Caesar and Pompey became suspicious of one-another, and the First Triumvirate collapsed.²² The Senate began to fear Caesar's power, and advocated with Pompey.²³ The Senate ordered Caesar to relieve his army and return to Rome.²⁴ Caesar refused, and crossed the Rubicon river into Roman territory and took Rome without a fight.²⁵

Caesar's crossing of the Rubicon was a turning point in Roman history for a few reasons. First, the Rubicon river was the boundary of Italy and Cisalpine Gaul. Cross referencing Plutarch and Appian helps give a better geographical sense of the sequence of events. Plutarch says that "he [Caesar] came to the river which separates Cisalpine Gaul from the rest of Italy,"²⁶ and Appian does not name the Rubicon by name, but says that Caesar went to Arimium, which is the first city after leaving Cisalpine Gaul²⁷. Crossing it basically made Caesar an enemy of the state. Second, there was no going back from crossing the river. As Plutarch quotes Caesar in *Plutarch's Lives*, "When he came to the river which separates Cisalpine Gaul from the rest of Italy (it is called the Rubicon), and began to reflect... uttering the phrase with which men usually prelude their plunge into desperate and daring fortunes, 'Let the die be cast,'"²⁸ Caesar crossed over the Rubicon and occupied Ariminum.²⁹ Caesar was rolling the dice, and was unsure of what was going to happen. He was making a move that he could not turn back on.

¹⁹ Wiesner-Hanks et al., 131.

²⁰ Wiesner-Hanks et al., 131.

²¹ Wiesner-Hanks et al., 132.

²² Wiesner-Hanks et al., 132-3.

²³ Wiesner-Hanks et al., 133.

²⁴ Wiesner-Hanks et al., 133.

²⁵ Wiesner-Hanks et al., 133.

²⁶ Plutarch, *Caesar*; Chapter 32:4. Trans. Bernadotte Perrin, (Harvard University Press), accessed 19 Nov. 2021. <http://www.perseus.tufts.edu/hopper/text?doc=Perseus%3Atext%3A1999.01.0244%3Achapter%3D32>.

²⁷ Appian, *Civil Wars*, Book VII 35:1.

²⁸ Plutarch, *Caesar*; 35:6.

²⁹ Plutarch, 32:6

The sequence of events after Caesar crossed the Rubicon is the climax of the collapse of Republic Rome. Caesar entered Rome, Pompey fled, and Caesar took control without a fight.³⁰ Caesar followed Pompey to Egypt where Cleopatra VII sided with Caesar in defeating Ptolemy XIII's army, and Pompey was later assassinated.³¹ Caesar made his way back to Rome, and was named Consul, Dictator, and later *imperator*, or emperor.³² These events ushered in what is now called Imperial Rome.

³⁰ Wiesner-Hanks et al., 133

³¹ *ibid.*

³² *ibid.*