

Cambridge University Press

978-0-521-25603-2 - The Cambridge Ancient History: Second Edition: Volume IX: The Last Age of the Roman Republic, 146-43 B.C.

Edited by J. A. Crook, Andrew Lintott and Elizabeth Rawson

Excerpt

[More information](#)

## CHAPTER 1

THE CRISIS OF THE REPUBLIC: SOURCES AND  
SOURCE-PROBLEMS

ANDREW LINTOTT

By the end of the second century before Christ the Romans faced a crisis as a result of their mastery of the Mediterranean, which was made sharper by an increased political awareness resulting from their wider experience and the intellectual contacts made during the acquisition of empire. What Florus<sup>1</sup> regarded as the robust maturity of Rome, which was doomed to collapse into the senility of the Principate, is made a more complex and more rewarding study by Roman self-consciousness. The most penetrating assessment of the Roman rise to power before 150 B.C. was made by Polybius – a Greek familiar with Rome but still an outsider. The Roman histories which had begun to be written from c. 200 B.C. onwards are lost to us but for a few citations and quotations, but, even if they were to be recovered, it is doubtful if we would find anything to compare with Polybius' analysis. Before the second century had ended, however, not only had the sheer bulk of Roman historical writing increased but the material had become diversified. Sempronius Asellio, who lived in the period of the Gracchi, drew a distinction between writing mere annals, the traditional Roman narrative of events in a strict chronological framework, and histories, which interpreted by seeking causation and motive. In practice this meant that Romans no longer always wrote omnibus narratives stretching from Aeneas, or the wolf and twins, to their own day, but produced monographs on specific topics from the past or present, biographies and autobiographies. Moreover, the development of Roman intellectual life led to other forms of writing in prose – treatises, especially on oratory and law, and letters. Meanwhile, Greek interest in Rome did not cease, and one of the most influential sources for later writers whose native language was Greek was the Stoic philosopher Posidonius, who in addition to works on geography and ethnography wrote a full-scale Roman history which picked up the story where Polybius left it.<sup>2</sup>

The works of the Roman annalists culminated under the emperor Augustus with the work of Livy, 120 of whose 142 books dealt with

<sup>1</sup> Florus 1, intro. 7–8. On the implicit theory see Griffin 1976 (A 42) 194ff.

<sup>2</sup> See HRR; Badian 1966 (H 4); Malitz 1983 (B 69).

Cambridge University Press

978-0-521-25603-2 - The Cambridge Ancient History: Second Edition: Volume IX: The Last Age of the Roman Republic, 146-43 B.C.

Edited by J. A. Crook, Andrew Lintott and Elizabeth Rawson

Excerpt

[More information](#)

history down to the death of Cicero. However, the only products actually of the Republican period to survive are two monographs and some substantial fragments of a history by Sallust, one short biography by Cornelius Nepos and the military commentaries of Caesar. Nor have we complete books of Livy on the period after 167 B.C. The accounts of the late Republic in Livy and his predecessors, and equally the important contribution of Posidonius, can only be partially pieced together from fragments, epitomes and later derivatives. The most valuable later sources are Greek historians of the Principate. Appian, honoured with the status of procurator of the emperor in the second century A.D., wrote an account of the expansion of Roman power subdivided according to theatres of war and included a history of the civil wars and their political background. Half a century later Cassius Dio, a senator and twice consul under the Severi, compiled a gigantic annalistic history of Rome from its origins to his own time, interspersed with Thucydidean generalizations and interpretations. (We have more or less intact the section dealing with 69 B.C. onwards.) To these we must add the biographer Plutarch, who in about A.D. 100 illustrated political and moral virtue by comparing eminent Greeks with Romans of the Republic in his *Parallel Lives*. On such works is much of the narrative thread of late Republican history based.

However, by far the most important sources we possess are the works of Cicero who, although he never wrote the history of Rome his friends expected of him, has provided through his correspondence a direct insight into politics and upper-class Roman society between 67 and 43 B.C., and in his published speeches and theoretical treatises tells much of his own lifetime and the age that preceded it. This means that for the period in which he was active as a lawyer and politician, 81–43 B.C., we are in direct contact with Roman public life, while for the fifty odd years before this his works tell us of events which he either lived through or learnt of from those with first-hand experience.

There are of course problems in using Ciceronian material. In his letters to Atticus Cicero tells the truth, as he sees it, and that view may change from week to week. His own letters to other acquaintances and those of his correspondents may on occasion be dishonest, disingenuous or deliberately obscure. In speeches he sometimes risks the lie direct about a point of fact, more often he suppresses or wilfully misinterprets events to suit his case. Extreme examples are his assertions that Clodius plotted to kill Milo in 52 and that Catiline had actually concocted a preliminary conspiracy in 66, over two years before the one which he himself suppressed. His veracity at many points can, however, be checked against his other works or against the secondary sources, and modern scholars relish the occasions when his falsehoods can be

Cambridge University Press

978-0-521-25603-2 - The Cambridge Ancient History: Second Edition: Volume IX: The Last Age of the Roman Republic, 146-43 B.C.

Edited by J. A. Crook, Andrew Lintott and Elizabeth Rawson

Excerpt

[More information](#)

detected. But caution is in order: we should not suppose that the material in Plutarch, Appian and Dio is sober, mainstream and value-free, providing automatically a corrective to the tendentiousness in Cicero. The writers under the Principate were as much at the mercy of their primary sources as we are, and these included both encomiastic biographies of men like Pompey, Caesar, Cato and Cicero himself, and by contrast published harangues or written invectives. Even the history of Asinius Pollio, a younger contemporary of Cicero and Caesar, whose account of the civil wars lies behind much of Appian and Plutarch and probably influences Dio as well, is likely to have been contaminated by his own support for Caesar and highly critical attitude to Cicero.<sup>3</sup>

There are further important shortcomings in our source-material on the late Republic. First, the evidence in inscriptions is small compared with that available for the Principate and with the contemporary literary evidence. In particular we have few public documents relating to the period between the dictatorships of Sulla and Caesar. Moreover, although we know much from archaeology about the city of Rome itself, our knowledge of urban developments in Italy and the provinces is patchy. As for rural archaeology, much is being done currently to illuminate land-tenure and the nature of agricultural establishments in Italy, but much more remains to be done. In one field the historian is well supplied. The Roman coinage of the Republic is immensely rich and it has been exhaustively analysed, not only in order to establish chronology and to interpret legends and iconography, but also to draw more general conclusions about the size and likely causes of issues. There have also been important studies of the coinages of Rome's allies.<sup>4</sup>

The sheer bulk of the historical tradition, even if elements in it conflict, allows us to form a clear picture of what was happening from about 70 B.C. onwards. Interpretation remains difficult. Contemporaries were arguably too close to events to see their significance; writers under Augustus, on the other hand, were too concerned with explaining and justifying the new dispensation as a reincarnation of the old and thus preferred to seek individual scapegoats rather than probe the defects of Roman society and government as a whole. I shall return to this problem. On the other hand, study of the period from the destruction of Carthage to 70 B.C. suffers from the comparative paucity of Ciceronian evidence and the fact that we cannot extract a good continuous narrative from what remains of the writers under the Principate who digested Republican sources. The decade from 80 to 70 B.C. is so thinly covered

<sup>3</sup> Gabba 1956 (B 38); 1957 (B 39).

<sup>4</sup> Crawford 1974 (B 144); 1985 (B 145); cf. e.g. M. Thompson, *The New-style Silver Coinage of Athens* (New York, 1961); A. Giovannini, *Rome et la circulation monétaire en Grèce au IIe siècle avant Jésus Christ* (Basle, 1978).

Cambridge University Press

978-0-521-25603-2 - The Cambridge Ancient History: Second Edition: Volume IX: The Last Age of the Roman Republic, 146-43 B.C.

Edited by J. A. Crook, Andrew Lintott and Elizabeth Rawson

Excerpt

[More information](#)

that even a one-line fragment of Sallust's *Histories* is precious. The preceding decade which embraces the Social, Mithridatic and first civil wars, ending in Sulla's dictatorship (a period originally described by contemporaries like Sisenna, Lucullus, Lucceius and Sulla himself) is better documented from the military point of view, but the politics are tantalizingly unclear. As for the period that began the crisis of the late Republic, some great issues – the land-problem, the relations between Rome and Italy and between the Senate and the equestrian order – stand out; so do the figures of the Gracchi and that of the new man who was Rome's military saviour, C. Marius. But we know less of politics year to year than we do where the books of Livy survive and where we have rich Ciceronian evidence. In consequence vital background knowledge is lacking and the historian is liable to become too dependent on the presentation of events in the surviving source-material. He frequently finds himself served with a neatly packaged briefing, which raises more questions than it answers.

As always, Roman writing about the politics of this time is highly tendentious, but the problem is not simply one of bias. Two of the reformers who resorted to violence, L. Appuleius Saturninus and C. Servilius Glaucia, are damned by a uniformly hostile tradition, as are the political activities of Marius. On the other hand, both favourable and unfavourable accounts of the Gracchi survive. More important is the fact that the power struggle between the demagogic politicians and the bulk of the Senate is made to overshadow everything else by the sources. The merits and demerits of particular reforms are obscured in the attempt to make a moral assessment of those who subverted or defended the *status quo*. It is not easy to detect the thinking of men contemporary with the events in our secondary sources – an exception are the speeches attributed to Tiberius Gracchus by Plutarch and Appian which seem ultimately to derive from C. Gracchus' biography of his brother. Fragments of oratory (for example those of C. Gracchus and Scipio Aemilianus) preserved by the antiquarians and grammarians of the Principate are valuable.<sup>5</sup> Further interesting contemporary or near-contemporary comments on the late Republic may be detected in histories dealing with a different period. The senate's disavowal of the treaty made with the Spaniards in 137 (to which there is also contemporary reference in the coinage) has affected the tradition about the treaty or *sponsio* supposed to have been made by the consuls of 321. Ti. Gracchus' attitude in his conflict with his fellow-tribune Octavius received oblique comment in the annalistic accounts of the actions of his father when tribune in 187. Even the arguments about late Republican agrarian policy were transposed into early Republican history by Dionysius of

<sup>5</sup> ORF.

Cambridge University Press

978-0-521-25603-2 - The Cambridge Ancient History: Second Edition: Volume IX: The Last Age of the Roman Republic, 146-43 B.C.

Edited by J. A. Crook, Andrew Lintott and Elizabeth Rawson

Excerpt

[More information](#)

Halicarnassus, so that we find denunciation of small allotments and advocacy of large farms rented out by the state in a speech ascribed to the consul of 495 B.C.<sup>6</sup>

A vital check on our literary evidence is provided by epigraphic documents and archaeology. A disturbing fact about the inscriptions is that the official acts that they record are ignored or obscured by our literary sources, so that we are quite unprepared for the material that they contain. On one side of the so-called 'Tabula Bembina' (bronze fragments which once belonged to Cardinal Bembo, now known to have been first owned by the dukes of Urbino) there is a *lex de repetundis*, that is a law about the recovery of property improperly seized by Romans in authority, which must be a part of the legislation of C. Gracchus. Our literary sources do indeed tell us that he changed the juries in this court, but they give us no idea of the massive reform of procedure shown on the fragments and the change in the ethos of the court that this implies. Another example is the law of 101–100 B.C. about the praetorian provinces and the administration of Rome's affairs in the East, once only known from a partial text at Delphi but now further illuminated by an inscription at Cnidus containing new material. This is totally ignored by our sources on Saturninus and Glaucia, and yet it must be a measure with which they were involved and one which gives their politics a new dimension.<sup>7</sup> The reverse of the bronze fragments engraved with the *lex de repetundis* has an agrarian law of 111 B.C. This law was mentioned by Appian in a brief sentence, but the text itself and its implications about earlier legislation show the inadequacies of the apparently careful account of this legislation in Appian. Two parts of this law dealt with land in North Africa and at Corinth. No other source tells us that the Romans were planning land-division at Corinth at this point. As for Africa, the extent of Roman settlement there (including the colony which literary sources tell us that C. Gracchus tried to found) cannot be appreciated without the study of this inscription together with the archaeological evidence for Roman land-division largely deriving from French air-photography.<sup>8</sup>

Archaeology cannot solve the problems caused by the inadequacy of literary sources, but it can at least remind us where they are inadequate. The revolt in 125 B.C. of the Latin colony on the Samnite border, Fregellae (near modern Ceprano), is dealt with by our surviving texts in a few sentences. The cause remains obscure, but current excavation has provided testimony to the prosperity of the town and the brutality of the

<sup>6</sup> Dion. Hal. *Ant. Rom.* viii.73; cf. Gabba 1964 (B 41). Livy ix.1–7; cf. Crawford 1974 (B 144) no. 234; 1973 (F 39). Livy xxxviii.56; xxxix.5; cf. Richard, 1972 (C 122).

<sup>7</sup> Lintott 1983 (B 192); Sherwin-White 1982 (C 133); Hassall, Crawford and Reynolds 1974 (B 170). <sup>8</sup> Chevallier 1958 (E 3); Piganiol 1954 (E 22).

Cambridge University Press

978-0-521-25603-2 - The Cambridge Ancient History: Second Edition: Volume IX: The Last Age of the Roman Republic, 146-43 B.C.

Edited by J. A. Crook, Andrew Lintott and Elizabeth Rawson

Excerpt

[More information](#)

repression. Seven years later the Romans founded their first colony in southern Gaul, Narbo Martius (Narbonne). Cicero at least indicates to us that the measure was controversial, but the colony might be dismissed as a mere military outpost, had it not become clear from excavation that the site was important commercially, perhaps even before the founding of the colony.<sup>9</sup>

The problem, then, in the period from the Gracchan reforms to the Sullan reaction is that the relative lack of source-material makes it difficult to redress the selective and tendentious formulation of issues and events in the accounts which we possess. Some fundamental aspects of this bias will be considered in the next chapter. The corrective required from the historian is not merely to be counter-suggestible in face of the tradition, but to realize that the accounts of political conflicts, though they reflect disputes which genuinely occurred, mask a great deal of agreement in the governing class about how the city, Italy and the overseas empire should be managed. This may be summed up as a more controlled and thoroughgoing exploitation of the resources of the Mediterranean. Some politicians maintained a more or less high-minded conservatism about such exploitation. On the whole, however, the competitive nature of the Roman aristocracy meant that politicians would fiercely resist the plans of rivals, when these were alive, but subsequently would not hesitate to endorse these measures and enjoy their products.

#### I. ANCIENT THEORIES ABOUT THE LATE REPUBLIC

Polybius in his encomium of the Roman constitution in Book VI also portended its subsequent decay. It was not immune from the process of growth and decay according to nature, which was common to all constitutions and was in form cyclic since it started with primitive monarchy and returned to tyranny. Although the Roman Republic was stabilized by a balance between the monarchic, oligarchic and democratic elements, which prevented any part rapidly getting the upper hand, in the long run it would succumb to the luxury and ambition arising from its unchallenged empire. The greed of rich men would oppress the people and the ambition of others would exploit this discontent. Then the people would no longer wish to obey their leaders or share power with them, but seek to dominate everything of importance. The resulting freedom or democracy would be in truth mob-rule and a clear beginning of the decline to tyranny. If this was written before 146 B.C., it was a theoretical analysis which turned out to be prophetic. (Polybius had made a similar judgement on C. Flaminius, the radical tribune of 232

<sup>9</sup> Crawford and Keppie 1984 (B 284); Clemente 1974 (E 6) 61ff.



Cambridge University Press

978-0-521-25603-2 - The Cambridge Ancient History: Second Edition: Volume IX: The Last Age of the Roman Republic, 146-43 B.C.

Edited by J. A. Crook, Andrew Lintott and Elizabeth Rawson

Excerpt

[More information](#)

who went on to be consul and censor.) However, it may have resulted from Polybius revising his work during the Gracchan period. To judge from the surviving fragments of Diodorus – in particular his characterization of C. Gracchus' ambitions according to the classic model of the demagogue and his denunciation of the greed of the equestrian order – Polybius' interpretation was followed by Posidonius. It also seems to have influenced greatly subsequent Roman accounts.<sup>10</sup>

Roman writers after the fall of the Republic were happy to claim that this fall was inevitable. Rome was unable to bear the burden of its own weight; the moral corruption arising from greed, luxury and ambition had no external check, especially once the threat of Carthage had been completely uprooted. Constitutional change was not seen as significant in itself – largely, no doubt, because the Romans did not think that the constitution had changed. However, for the poet Lucan and the historian Florus there was a nexus linking wealth to poverty and both of these to desires which only demagogy and ultimately civil war could satisfy. Such explanations derived not just from Polybius and any other historian who followed him but from warnings uttered by statesmen at the time. According to Posidonius, Scipio Nasica opposed the destruction of Carthage on the ground that its existence forced the Romans to rule their empire justly and honourably, while its destruction would bring civil strife to Rome and weaken the foundations of the empire as Roman magistrates could oppress their subjects without fear. Although there is controversy about the ascription of these beliefs to Nasica, there is no doubt that such ideas were in circulation in the middle of the second century.

We cannot rehearse here the question, whether the destruction of Carthage was such a critical event in the history of the Roman empire. A more ruthless attitude abroad was already to be discerned earlier in the century. Civil strife certainly became important after 146 B.C. when Rome's power was at a new height. As for luxury, greed and ambition there was no question that these abounded in the second century. Sallust schematically placed their onset after the fall of Carthage, but they were denounced before this in the works of Cato the Censor, which Sallust knew well, and in Polybius, as well as by the annalist L. Piso, a contemporary of the Gracchi. Cato inveighed against slack and high-handed magistrates, corpulence and expensive imports of pickled fish from the Black Sea. Piso pilloried the decline of sexual chastity and the acquisition of luxury furniture – sideboards and one-legged tables – corruption which began with the triumph of Manlius Vulso in 186. At the same time the psaltery- and sambuca-players had arrived with their

<sup>10</sup> Polyb. vi.8.1–8; 9.10–14; 57.5–9; II.21.8; Diod. xxxiv/xxxv.27–9; Walbank 1972 (B 123) 130ff; Malitz 1983 (B 69) 375.

Cambridge University Press

978-0-521-25603-2 - The Cambridge Ancient History: Second Edition: Volume IX: The Last Age of the Roman Republic, 146-43 B.C.

Edited by J. A. Crook, Andrew Lintott and Elizabeth Rawson

Excerpt

[More information](#)

Asiatic dances. About 130 Scipio Aemilianus deplored mixed dancing-classes and the sexual licence which they were held to stimulate, in a speech against the legislation of Ti. Gracchus. This neatly illustrates how a connexion was made between general morality and political radicalism.<sup>11</sup>

Of course, greed for wealth and power were not vices suddenly discovered by the Romans in 146 or indeed in the second century. There is enough evidence from earlier times to suggest that the type of Roman idealized by later ages, the Curius and Cincinnatus – a fighting farmer of stern scruples, dedicated to the simple life and the work ethic – was, if not a myth, at least not totally representative. Yet it would indeed be a paradox to say that these vices had nothing to do with the crisis in the late Republic. Appetites expanded with the Roman empire and the strains produced by competition among the aristocracy are clearly in evidence from the early second century onwards, not least in laws against bribery (first in 181) and conspicuous extravagance in giving dinners (first in 182). One cannot completely discount the Romans' own feeling about what was wrong.

Nevertheless it is, and was, hard to explain the problems of the late Republic simply in terms of aristocratic moral failings. Was the difference to be found not so much among the men who sat in the Senate as among the legionaries? It is interesting that Sallust himself, while he talks of the greed for wealth and power in the introduction to the *Catiline*, later in that work and in his subsequent monograph, the *Jugurtha*, links the acquisition of wealth with the creation of poverty among others, as Polybius had suggested, in particular with the expulsion of peasant families from their ancestral landholdings. The sufferings of the rural population were a theme in the oratory of Tiberius Gracchus himself, probably recorded for posterity in his brother's memoir of him. The expansion of the estates of the rich and the resentment of the plebs are stated by Lucan and Florus to have been fundamental reasons for civil strife: 'hence might became the measure of right and domination of one's fatherland by force of arms respectable'. The agrarian problem also dominates the early chapters of Appian's *Civil Wars*, although here the author links it directly with the conflicts over the reforming tribunes, rather than with the civil war that eventually followed. It is only in his account of the civil wars after Caesar's murder that the desire of the soldiers to improve their economic condition through fighting is stressed.<sup>12</sup>

The poverty caused by the greed of the wealthy was thus accepted by a

<sup>11</sup> Sall. *Cat.* 10–11; *Jug.* 41; *H.* 1.11–12M; Piso, fr. 34, cf. Livy xxxix.6.7–8; Scipio Aemilianus, *ORF* no. 21, fr. 30 = Macrobian *Sat.* III.14.6–7. See Lintott 1972 (A 63).

<sup>12</sup> Lucan I.160–82; Florus I.47.7–13; II.1.1–2; App. *BCiv.* 1.7–27; V.17.



Cambridge University Press

978-0-521-25603-2 - The Cambridge Ancient History: Second Edition: Volume IX: The Last Age of the Roman Republic, 146-43 B.C.

Edited by J. A. Crook, Andrew Lintott and Elizabeth Rawson

Excerpt

[More information](#)

number of Roman writers as a cause of civil conflict in the Forum and ultimately of civil war, though this was sometimes seen more in moral than socio-economic terms. The poor, it was held, fought not so much because they were poor, but because poverty had embittered them and made them violent and greedy themselves. Moreover, the griefs of the poor were not thought to excuse their aristocratic leaders for clashes with fellow-aristocrats. In spite of his appreciation of the miseries of the plebs Sallust both in the *Catiline* and the *Histories* declared that the claim of its leaders to be defending plebeian rights was fraudulent: like the leaders of the Senate, they were using honourable pretexts to seek personal power – a judgement deriving from Thucydides' account of civil strife at Corcyra in 427 B.C. Florus writes in the same vein, when assessing the Gracchi. Their measures appeared just, but they damaged the wealth of the state and the interest of the possessing classes (themselves part of the people): in reality they and other tribunes sought domination for their office rather than protection for the rights of the people.

An exception to the general hostility of historians to the demagogic tribunes is the friendly treatment of the Gracchi to be found in both Plutarch and Appian. One explanation offered for this is that C. Gracchus' own account of his brother and himself was their ultimate source. However, apart from this the talents and romantic aura of the Gracchi (deriving from their illustrious background and their tragic deaths) made them the favourite demagogues of those in principle opposed to demagogy. Cicero cleverly exploits their names both to disparage other demagogues by comparison and to assert his own adherence to popular principles. This privileged status was not shared by men like Saturninus, Glaucia or P. Sulpicius. Perhaps only one source shows obliquely the case that might be made for radical tribunes – the *Ad Herennium*, an oratorical handbook which seems to have been written in the eighties and quotes powerful examples of popular rhetoric denouncing enemies of the plebs.<sup>13</sup> As for its conservative opponents, whatever historians believed about the corruption of the aristocracy, the most obstinate defenders of the *status quo* – men like L. Opimius, Metellus Numidicus and Cato Uticensis – were revered for this adherence to principle, in the same way that the hard men of the early Republic, the Appii Claudii, Papirius Cursor and Manlius Torquatus, were awesome figures in the annals of that period.

The military leaders who undertook civil war were bitterly criticized by their contemporaries and not surprisingly much of this survives in later sources. Sulla was remembered for his proscriptions (the emperor

<sup>13</sup> *Rhet. Her.* iv. 31, 48, 68, cf. *Cic. Verr.* v. 163; *I. eg. Agr.* ii. 10, 31; *Rab. Perd.* 14; *Har. Resp.* 41–3; *Clu.* 151; *Font.* 39; *Brut.* 125–6; *De Or.* 1.38.

Cambridge University Press

978-0-521-25603-2 - The Cambridge Ancient History: Second Edition: Volume IX: The Last Age of the Roman Republic, 146-43 B.C.

Edited by J. A. Crook, Andrew Lintott and Elizabeth Rawson

Excerpt

[More information](#)

Septimius Severus was unusual in openly praising them in contrast to Caesar's clemency) and Sallust also indicted him for beginning the corruption of troops through slack discipline in order to secure loyal adherents in civil war. Marius' reputation never really recovered from its handling by his political opponents, not least Sulla. Pompey was treated mildly by writers under Augustus as the man who in theory represented law and order, but the pointed attacks made on him in the late Republic were not forgotten and for Lucan, Seneca and Tacitus he is as blameworthy as Caesar. As the Principate progressed, writers became less obsessed with naming the guilty men. Cassius Dio is particularly remarkable for refraining from denunciation of individuals, though he has much to say about corruption in general. However, by that time the death of the Republic seemed so remote and so natural an event that post-mortem analysis had become truly academic.

## II. MODERN INTERPRETATIONS OF THE LATE REPUBLIC

Historiography since the Renaissance has been reluctant to accept the Roman aristocracy's explanation of why it was overthrown, though it has selectively exploited specific items in that explanation. Machiavelli in his *Discorsi sopra la prima deca di T. Livio*, although he adopted Polybius' view that Rome's mixed constitution was a virtue, believed the violent conflicts between Senate and plebs that shook early Rome to have been a blessing because they created freedom. As for the conflicts that began with the Gracchi, these certainly led to a destruction of liberty, but they were an inevitable consequence of Rome's greatness. For they could only have been avoided if the Romans had renounced using the plebs in war or admitting foreigners to citizenship, and in that case Rome would never have had the power to obtain her empire. Thus militarism and multiracialism were at the root of the Republic's decline. A further awkward consequence of the extension of empire was the prolongation of military commands, which led the citizen to forget the Senate and recognize the leadership only of its own commanders. The Republic would have lasted longer if Rome had solved this problem and also that of 'la legge agraria', which, Machiavelli recognized, produced strife fatal to the Republic.<sup>14</sup>

Machiavelli's position is intriguingly provocative: he has in fact turned Polybius upside down. The virtue of the Roman constitution is not the stability that consists in tightly interlocked parts but the balance which comes from free play in a tumultuous conflict. Moreover, he has distanced himself from the aristocratic view of Polybius and Roman

<sup>14</sup> *Discorsi* (ed. A. Oxilia (London, 1955). Trans. L. J. Walker. London, 1970) 1.2, 4, 5, 6, 37; III.24.