Malta Classics Association

The MCA Newsletter

Editorial – New Year, New Executive Committee

The year 2017 having drawn to an end, the Malta Classics Association met for its Annual General Meeting a few days ago, on Thursday 25th January. This opportunity allowed the MCA to look back on the last year and take stock of its progress. It also gave the MCA an opportunity to welcome its new Honorary President for the year, Prof Joe Friggieri.

A more detailed account of the MCA's work during 2017 is available in the General Secretary's report that is being included in this issue. The coming year promises to be as exciting as any that have preceded it and this Newsletter hopes to keep you updated with the latest developments, news and information.

In the meantime, this issue of the MCA newsletter will keep you enthusiastic with yet another instalment of the mythology series, a part-review of *Rome: Total War* - a computer game that was among the first to concern itself with a historical topic, a short history/opinion piece on Tiberius Gracchus as part of new short series on history, together with the aforementioned General Secretary report.

As always, this newsletter has been a pleasure to write. I hope it will also be a pleasure to read.

Samuel Azzopardi

Contact Us

If you'd like to become a member of the Malta Classics Association, please visit the MCA website at http://www.classicsmalta.org/. There you will find even more information about the MCA and its work.

Alternatively, if you'd like more information about the MCA and what it does to promote the Classics in Malta or even why it seeks to do this, email us on classicsmaltasoc@gmail.com or look us up on our Facebook page.

For information on upcoming courses in Latin, Greek, Sanskrit or Classical Culture please email the Education Sub-Committee on classicsmaltasoc.educ@gmail.com .

Do you have something to share?

Do you have an interesting topic you would like to write about for this newsletter? Or do you have a Classics-related project that you are working on? Or perhaps you simply have a question you'd like answered. Email the editorial team with your thoughts, questions and submissions on newsletter.classicsmaltasoc@gmail.com !

Learning Outside the Classroom

Nothing in the world can replace well-planned lessons in the classroom and diligent study at home. At the same time, however, it cannot be denied that other media such as games and historical fiction books can help students interact with and immerse themselves into a historical setting so much different than their own. In this issue, we'll be talking about the PC Game, Rome: Total War released by Creative Assembly in 2004.

Game Review

Rome: Total War – Part 1
The Roman Factions

Creative Assembly (legal rights since passed to SEGA)

Rome: Total War, released in September 2004, was the third instalment in Creative Assembly's history-oriented *Total War* series (following *Shogun: Total War,* 2000, and *Medieval: Total War*, 2002). The two preceding titles had received great acclaim in the gaming community, with the latter game topping the British video game chart upon release and being called a milestone in gaming and praised for its surprising adherence to historical elements.

Rome: Total War's main campaign is set during the mid and late Roman republican period, spanning the years 270 BC, by which time Rome had consolidated control of the Italian peninsula, and AD 14, the year of Augustus' death. However, the game's campaign tutorial is set in the mid-4th century BC, starting off immediately before the Battle of the Allia in 387 or 386 BC, which battle also features as part of the tutorial.

In playing the campaign, the player chooses one of several factions and seeks to lead them to glory in a campaign map that spans the entirety of the historical Roman empire and somewhat east, into what was the former Persian heartlands. At first, the player can only choose to play as one of three Roman factions, each supposedly representing one of Rome's foremost families; the Julii, the Brutii, and the Scipii. Herein lies the game's first historical mistake: while Julia was indeed an important Roman gens, both Brutus and Scipio were actually cognomina, belonging mainly to the Iunia and Cornelia gentes. However, it is clear that the game's developers were merely trying to represent Roman names that would be immediately familiar to most players (Julius Caesar and Marcus Iunius Brutus made each other all the more famous thanks to their Ides of March interactions, whereas everyone knows of Hannibal and, by extension, his mighty vanquisher, Scipio.

As one of the main Roman families, the player vies for the support of the Senate on the one hand, and the People on the other. As the game progresses and each family gains or loses strength against Rome's enemies it becomes increasingly hard to manage to keep a balance between the two popularity ratings until one family's extreme popularity with the masses or with the elite triggers a civil war.

In this respect, the game very subtly represents, although in a highly simplified version, the heightened tensions and violent outbreaks that characterised the later years of the Roman republic. It is sufficient to say that civil wars in *Rome: Total War* follow soon after the event *Marian Reforms*, which revolutionises the Roman factions' unit rosters and replaces Hastatii, Principes and Triarii with legionaries, is triggered.

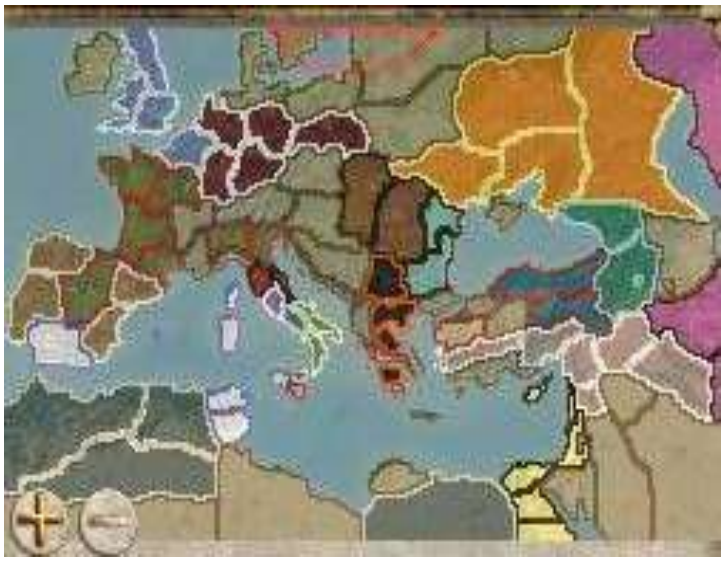


Figure 1- Faction Starting Locations

Another interesting feature pertaining to the Roman factions in Rome: Total War is the game's family tree system. Each family is represented by a growing family tree that lists the family's available generals, their wives, and their children. Each adult male can be put in command of his own, or, in co-command of another character's, army. Alternatively, he could be placed in any of the cities to act as governor. Each character comes with his own skills, traits and retinues and towards the start of the game it can be interesting to try and match each character to his best possible use. The player, as the *paterfamilias* of his family, also gets to approve or reject marriage proposals for the members of his family, which is also rather interesting to do towards the start of the game, and is presented with the option of formally adopting promising commanders into his family, mimicking the Roman legal option of *adoption.*

However, as the game progresses, the family grows into larger and larger numbers and the empire becomes more extensive it becomes less and less important to concern yourself with such relatively trivial matters and family management is generally neglected. In a very roundabout way, this can almost be taken as representative of the declining effective powers of the paterfamilias and the decay of the traditional ties of patrons and clients.

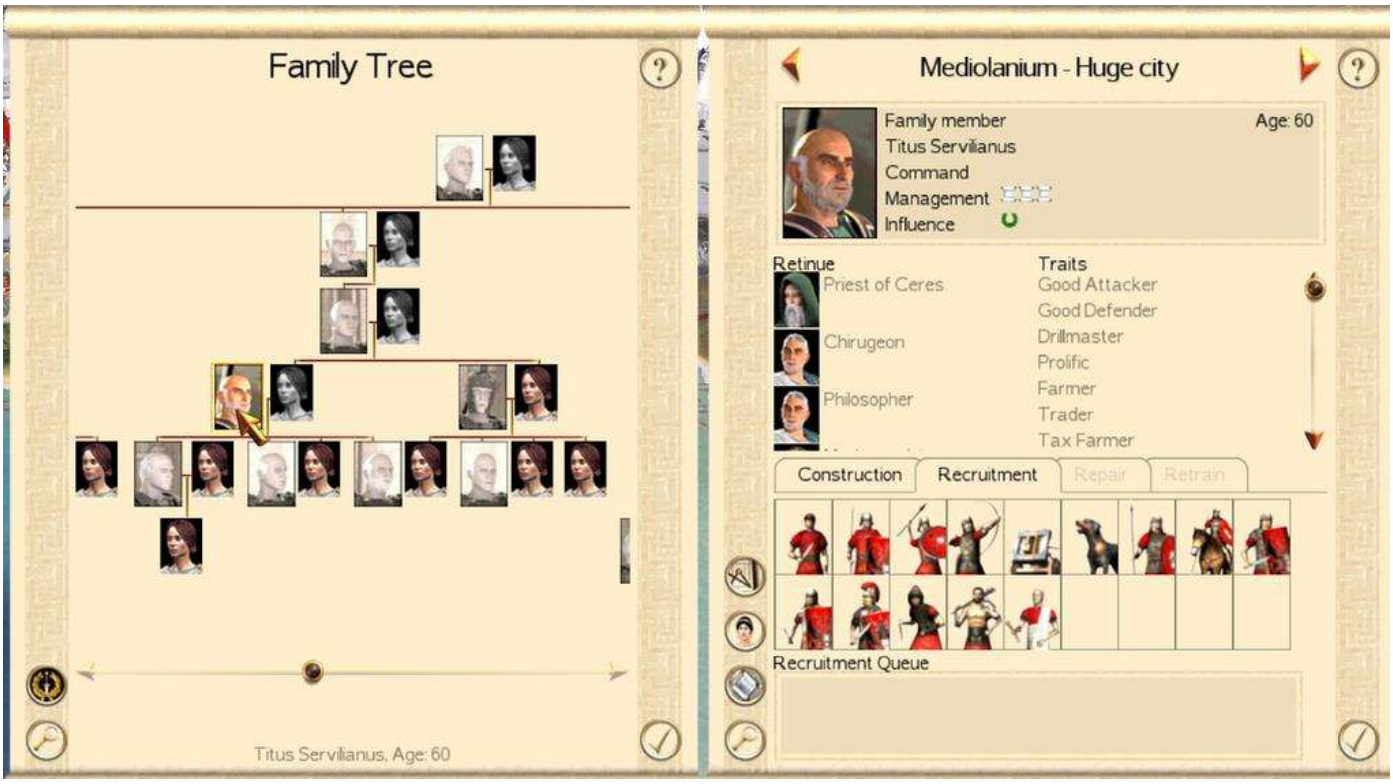


Figure 2 – An example of a Julii family tree and the character sheet of one of its members

The adult male members of a family are also eligible to be chosen as one of the represented senatorial officers, that is the Pontifex Maximus, Consul, Praetor, Quaestor and Aedile., and occupying any of the seats brings certain benefits with it. The game only represents one officer of any type in an effort to streamline the game experience, although it is admirable that the game sought to represent the complexities of inner-senatorial competition for seats so subtly but effectively.

In the following issues of this newsletter we will look at the game's non-Roman factions, the way armies and the military are represented and other historical elements that the game developers included to make the game even more exciting for avid history fans.

Samuel Azzopardi

Administrative Report 2017

Written by Mr Steve DeMarco, General Secretary for 2017, and delivered at the 25th January 2018 Annual General Meeting of the Malta Classics Association

This year began with the Annual General Meeting held on the 31st of January 2017. During the AGM, the association's financial report was read out, followed by a short address by one of the Honorary Presidents. Finally, the nine members of the executive committee were elected by vote of the members present. The success of this meeting and the keen interest shown by so many members to join the executive committee, in fact there were twelve nominations in total, set the course for the successful year that this association enjoyed.

After much planning, the first event of the year was held on the 7th - 11th July and this was the INSET course, which is an in-service training course for primary and secondary school teachers. Over the three day period the teachers were given a number of presentations on various topics, ranging from the Classical initiatives in education at Chiswick House School and St Martin's Collage, given bv Ms. Jennifer Mitchell, to Classics in film, delivered by Mr Carmel Serracino. The aim of this course was to show teachers, both of primary and of secondary schools, that it is possible to include the Classics in their classrooms.

In fact, on the last day of the course, the teachers were given a copy of a Latin phrase book, published this year by the association, called Vox Depicta. This work was illustrated by Mr Warren Bartolo and edited by Ms Lara Zammit, and work was put in by so many other people to ensure that this book was published. Initially this book was intended to be a short pamphlet with a few latin phrases on it, but it grew to the point that it now contains 52 Latin phrases, each translated into Maltese and English and each having its own illustration. Both the INSET course and the Vox Depicta were funded by Ms Bernie Mizzi, the Head of Chiswick House School and St. Martin's Collage and a former Honorary President of this Association.

Once again the Association took part in the Euroclassica conference held in August, in the city of Leiden, the Netherlands. The MCA was represented by the International Relations Officer, Professor Horatio Vella. Moreover, the Association took part in a number of events held around the island throughout the year. In September the association was present at the European Day of Languages, held in Sliema and hosted by the Għaqda tal-Malti. This would have not been possible were it not for Mr Samuel Azzopardi, who was co-opted onto the executive committee as a non-voting member.

The MCA also took part in the National Book Festival, held in November. At this event the Association shared a stand with the student organisation Society for Philosophical Studies. During this week long event the MCA also took part in a translation workshop hosted by the Għaqda tal-Malti. Finally, the Association was fortunate enough to hold the book launch of the 4th Edition of our academic journal, the Melita Classica, edited by Dr Jurgen Gatt, during the National Book Festival. To conclude the events of this year, our annual Christmas dinner was held on the 7th December following a public lecture by Gloria Lauri-Lucente, entitled *Pursuit, Flight and Frigidity - Ovid's Myth of Apollo and Daphne*.

Over the past year the MCA has introduced two new Degree Plus courses, to add to courses already being taught. One of these courses was entitled Ancient Greek Mythology and was introduced in July 2017. The second course, which will commence in July 2018 is based on Greek and Roman political history. This year the website of the association was fantastically re-designed by our Webmaster, Mr Jason Baldacchino.

Finally, I would like to close this report with the main project undertaken by the executive committee, namely the Literacy Through Latin project, a project which has been in the works for over a year and was launched in October of 2017. This project, which was made possible by the combined efforts of Ms Jennifer Mitchell, Ms Jessica Farrugia and Ms Maria Zammit as well as by the work put in by the members of the Student sub-committee and others, was a pilot project intended to supplement the students education through the teaching of Latin. The association is again thankful to Ms Bernie Mizzi who funded the project.

Tiberius Sempronius Gracchus

A short unacademic look at the life and work of Tiberius Sempronius Gracchus by Samuel Azzopardi, originally published on the Malta Classics Association website on 16th May 2017.

Disclaimer – although the facts and arguments below are well researched, this blog post is not meant to be used as anything other than a short introduction to a very complex episode in Roman history. Students are therefore strongly discouraged from referencing this blog post in their work but are invited to use it as a springboard into the subject. A select bibliography is available at the end of the article.

In 133 BC, a young Tiberius Sempronius Gracchus was elected as one of the ten Tribunes of the Plebs, an ancient office allegedly set up soon after the establishment of the Republic to secure and preserve the interests of the Roman plebeians and to defend them from the unjust actions and abuses of power by the far more privileged patrician class. Despite strong senatorial opposition, Tiberius Gracchus used his popularity with the masses and exploited lacunae in the constitutional laws of the Roman republic to see a controversial land bill through the popular assembly. When Tiberius Gracchus sought re-election as tribune for 132 BC in order to secure immunity from prosecution by disgruntled land owners, a senatorial faction led by Cornelius Scipio Nasica butchered Tiberius, together with a large number of his supporters and dumped their bodies in the Tiber.

Tiberius' Land Redistribution Bill – Precedent and Opposition

Whenever Rome managed to subdue a hostile city or people in Italy and elsewhere, the defeated enemy was usually punished by having a fraction of its land confiscated by the Roman republic and declared ager publicum, that is 'public land'. This public land could then be used to settle Roman or Latin colonies, or distributed to landless Roman people, or rented by other Roman citizens or Italian allies for a small contribution to the public treasury or through payment in kind. Mismanagement by the Republic led to a situation where the richer members of society could make use of large swathes of undistributed land to their great profit, while poor record keeping made accurate assessment and collection of rent due extremely difficult. In 367BC, the tribunes Gaius Licinius Stolo and Lucius Sextinus Lateranus passed a bill limiting tenure and use of public land by any single person to 500 iugera (roughly 325 acres). This limit was, however, largely ignored, while the administration of justice by a few wealthy senatorial families made prosecution of any of their members hard and ineffectual.

Tiberius' proposed bill was therefore largely unoriginal. It simply argued for the setting up of a commission for the enforcement of the 367BC bill and a redistribution of the freed-up land to Rome's increasing urban poor. His first draft even allowed for the retention of a further 250 iugera in excess of the originally allowed 500 for each son, in order to alleviate concerns by wealthy fathers that their sons would face tougher competition from rival families with less sons, leading to a decrease in prestige and power. Tiberius also aimed at a long-term preservation of this new land-ownership structure by forbidding the sale of redistributed land, avoiding the danger of land once again funnelling into the hands of a select few.

'*Whenever the Romans annexed land by military means from one of the nations whose territories bordered theirs, they used to sell some of it and keep the rest in state ownership… But the rich began to drive the poor off the land… until a law was passed forbidding anyone from owning more than five hundred plethra of land… No sooner had Tiberius been appointed tribune, however, than he made a determined assault on the heart of the problem…And it is generally held that, especially considering the extent of the injustice and rapacity it was designed to combat, no law was ever more moderately or mildly worded.'*

Plutarch, Tiberius and Gaius Gracchus 8-9 (Robin Waterfield)

Opposition to this bill was harsh. Just seven years before Tiberius' tribunate, that is in 140BC, the consul Gaius Laelius Sapiens (i.e. 'the wise') had been forced to abandon a similar proposal in the face of harsh opposition by his fellow senators. The same senators, together with a new developing class of rich landowners, were equally hostile to Tiberius' bill and were committed to resisting it as best as they could.

Tiberius' Motivations

It is, of course, impossible, to fully understand the motivations of any historical character, especially when they are the product of a society so fundamentally different from our own. However, an assessment of the historical circumstances in which they operated might bring us close to understanding their possible motivations.

According to Tiberius Gracchus' own brother, Gaius, who later succeeded him as a tribune of the plebs and who will be the topic of the next historical blog-post on this website, Tiberius had been inspired to effect some kind of redistribution of public land while traveling north through the Italian peninsula on his way to his military service in Spain.

Tiberius had allegedly been shocked by the fact that so much land was not being worked by small-scale farmers working to support their family but had been converted into large estates owned by the Roman upper classes and worked almost-exclusively by imported slaves. These new estates presented any remaining small-scale farmers with a stiff market competition they simply couldn't hope to compete with and eventually forced them to sell their lands and move to the cities in search of other forms of work. This problem was further exacerbated by the lengthy campaigns that Rome's non-professional army of volunteer and conscripted landed gentry had to fight far from Italian shores. These soldiers would either die in the field, leaving their families of widows and orphaned children with no alternative but to sell their unmanageable farms and leave for the cities, or return years later with whatever spoils they could manage to gather to manage a farm which, due to a long period of relative abandon, would require considerable investment to be returned to its former efficiency.

Some soldiers who participated in lucrative campaigns, especially in the East, would manage to return with sufficient wealth to not only get their own farms in working order but also to buy into surrounding property and invest in their own slave work-force, thus propelling them into the ranks of the newly-forming landed middle class.

Others believed that Tiberius was motivated by a desire to avenge himself on the senatorial class for the offhand treatment he had received after his involvement in the Spanish wars. Following a series of setbacks in its war against the Numantian tribes, the Roman army under Hostilius Mancinus was trapped in a gorge in 137 BC, and Tiberius managed to secure a peace treaty with the tribal chiefs, saving the lives of every soldier in that cornered army in the process. The news and the treaty were welcomed by the people and especially the families of the soldiers he had saved, but the senate refused to ratify a treaty that seemed to consider barbaric tribes on a par with Roman citizens. Mancinus was surrendered to the Numantians together with the news that the senate refused to acknowledge the ceasefire. Tiberius himself only escaped the same fate thanks to the intervention of his brother-in-law, Scipio Aemilianus, the famous sacker of Carthage.

Later, it would be said that Tiberius had meant to make himself a king. There is no reason to believe this was true, especially considering that this was the excuse that Scipio Nasica had used to justify his massacre of Tiberius and his supporters.

A Changing Tribunate for a Changing Rome

Many historians, modern and ancient alike, have looked back to Tiberius' tribunate in 133 BC as a turning point in Roman history and the beginning of the decline of the Roman republic and its eventual change to an autocratic empire. This view, some others might argue, ignores other instances of civil unrest in Rome before this period and periods of peace after it, and that to seek to assign a single cause or starting-point to a historical reality so complex it can hardly be called an event is almost absurd. That Tiberius Gracchus revolutionised the image and scope of the office of the tribunate is, however undisputable, and his actions in history reflect something far more important which underpinned his story: the changing reality of Rome.

With the passing of the Lex Hortensia in 287 BC, the decisions of the popular assembly presided over by the tribunes acquired the force of law. This, together with other developments during the so-called Struggle of the Orders, changed the social aspect of Rome – the traditional distinction between patrician and plebeian was gradually replaced by social stratification based on wealth and political power, with influence gradually accumulating in the hands of a few families that managed to get their members elected to the highest offices of the state. Families like the Cornelia, the Metella, and the Claudia became known as the 'nobiles' and true power rested in their hands. Roman politics became one determined by private negotiations between these foremost families backed in the voting booths by a strong system of patron-client relations sponsored by these families' great wealth. Rival factions within the senate protected their interests by ensuring the election of parties favourable to them throughout the constitutional setup, and the system of checks and balances inherent to it ensured that no one faction could destroy the other and seize control. This political situation ensured a century of relative stability.

The period also coincided with the exponential expansion of Rome's empire. Rome's victory over Carthage in the First Punic war earned it its first province in Sicily, soon followed by Sardinia, whereas the favourable termination of the Second Punic War saw the addition of large parts of Spain and modern Tunisia to the empire. Further victories expanded Rome's control in Spain, southern Gaul (modern day France), northern Italy, Macedonia and Greece, whereas the destruction of Carthage and the annexation of mainland Greece into the empire in 146 BC made Rome the undisputed mistress of the Mediterranean. These conquests, as well as more rigorous contact with the affluent east, brought great wealth and innovation to Rome, swelling the coffers of the rich and sometimes trickling down to the poor. The wealthy invested their wealth in pockets of land throughout the Italian peninsula which they turned into estates worked by slaves. These far-flung interests and the displacement of urban communities weakened the traditional patron-client relationships that had allowed for a stable political system held firmly in the hands of a select few families.

The loyalties that had kept the popular assembly's power in checks had been eroded and Tiberius had the will and the rhetorical skill to rouse that sleeping giant in support of his bill and against the forces of the senate that had for so long been pulling all the strings.

Tiberius the Revolutionary

Although Tiberius' land bill was passed and his land commission set up, the problems that beset the commission's work rendered it largely ineffectual. His dream to create an Italy worked by a multitude of families that could be called upon to supply Rome with the soldiers for her future campaigns ultimately failed, and the issue of Rome's dwindling supply of conscripts would only be adequately addressed by the Marian reforms some few decades later.

Tiberius' constitutional legacy was far more significant. When Tiberius managed to depose Octavian, the senate-supporting tribune who had vetoed his bill, he effectively removed that component of the Roman constitutional system that had kept it stable and prohibited any one faction, regardless of its popularity, to hijack the state and seize absolute power. The inability of the senate to counter this move, simply because there was no law that actually made such an act illegal, betrayed the weakness not only of the largely unwritten constitution that depended mainly on the will of the participants to play by long-established implicit understandings of what was allowed and what wasn't, but also of the senate itself that, if hard-pressed, couldn't provide any law or statute to justify its disproportionate influence in Roman politics. The senate's influence was grounded in a tradition that saw it as the protector of the Roman people, but its inability to cater for the needs of the people had caused for a breakdown in this understanding, which Tiberius exploited.

This weakness had already been made evident when Tiberius proceeded to present his bill directly to the people despite senatorial disapproval and was reemphasised when, following the bequest of Pergamum to the Roman people, Tiberius passed a bill providing for the Pergamene treasury to be used to finance the work of the land commission. Foreign and fiscal policy had always been managed by the senate and its magistrates, and this action was seen as another assault on the senate's traditional powers.

Ultimately, it took violence of dubious legality to put an end to Tiberius' career. His death was quickly followed by a witch-hunt of his most vociferous supporters yet even in death Tiberius' pull on the people was such that the senate did not dare dismantle the Land Commission or harm Tiberius' younger brother, Gaius, who would follow in his footsteps in the following decade.

Champion of the People or Destroyer of Political Harmony

"Thus Gracchus, son of Gracchus who had been twice consul and of Cornelia, daughter of Scipio who had wrested supremacy from the Carthaginians, lost his life on the Capitol, while holding the office of the tribune, as a result of an excellent scheme which he pushed forward by violent means. And this foul crime, the first perpetrated in the public assembly, was not the last, but from time to time something similar would always occur."

Appian, The Civil Wars 1.17 (John Carter's Translation)

Tiberius has forever been and will probably remain a highly controversial character in Roman history, Some viewed him as a champion of the people who was willing to brave all in order to secure a better deal for the disadvantaged in Roman society. Others see him as a political realist who recognised that the political system of Rome was far too reluctant to adequately address the issues facing the Republic. While others still see him simply as a power-hungry demagogue who forced his way through with no concern for the safety of the Republic.

Whatever his intentions, his actions certainly set a series of dangerous precedents that were followed by Tribunes and politicians to come. Ultimately, however, it would be wrong to blame Tiberius for the fall of the Republic or for the development of political violence in Rome. The problems that Rome was facing and was going to be facing throughout the following century existed independently of Tiberius' actions and his proposals were by far the closest to an adequate response to them the Roman system would come for a few decades. The wealthy elite's reluctance to even recognise the problems facing the Republic and their concerted efforts to block Tiberius' actions at every turn forced him towards more radical action. In that sense, they are as much to blame for the breakdown of political harmony as Tiberius himself.

The next historical blog-post will deal with the political career of Tiberius' younger brother, Gaius Sempronius Gracchus, and with the short and long-term effects of the brothers' political careers on the fate of the Roman republic at home and abroad.

Suggested Reading:

– Plutarch, Lives of Tiberius and Gaius Gracchus
– Appian, The Civil Wars, Book 1. 9-17
– Riddle, J. (1970) Tiberius Gracchus – Destroyer or Reformer of the Republic? Lexington: D.C.Heath & Company [a collection of essays espousing different views on Tiberius Gracchus and his actions]
– Beard, M. and Crawdord, M. (1999) Rome in the Late Republic, 2nd ed. London: Bloomsbury [this book considers the various changes that led to this point in history and determined the decades following from it. The book espouses a thematic approach that considers the problem on a cultural, an economic, and a socio-political level]
– Earl, D. (1963) Tiberius Gracchus – A Study in Politics, Brussels: Revue d'Etudes Latines
– Greenidge, A. (1970) 'The First Signs of a Great Awakening' in Riddle, J. Tiberius Gracchus – Destroyer or Reformer of the Republic? Lexington: D.C.Heath & Company
– Kondratieff, E. (2003) Popular Power in Action: Tribunes of The Plebs in The Late Republic. Ph.D. University of Pennsylvania,
– Maddox, G. (1982) 'Responisble and Irresponsible Opposition: The Case of the Roman Tribunes' in Government and Opposition, Vol. 17
– Scullard, H. (1982) From the Gracchi to Nero, 5th ed. London: Routledge
– Williams , P. (2004) 'The Roman Tribunate in the 'Era of Quiescence' 287-133BC' in Latomus, T.63, Fasc. 2

Chapter 5

The Muses

On Olympus, the gods passed their time participating in merry feasts, much as normal families would, discoursing upon heavenly matters and mankind's affairs, at times disagreeing harshly when they took sides in mortal disputes…and they listened to *'the sound of the lyre so skilfully plucked by Apollo, to accompany the notes of the Muses' clear-ringing treble.'* Iliad Book I.

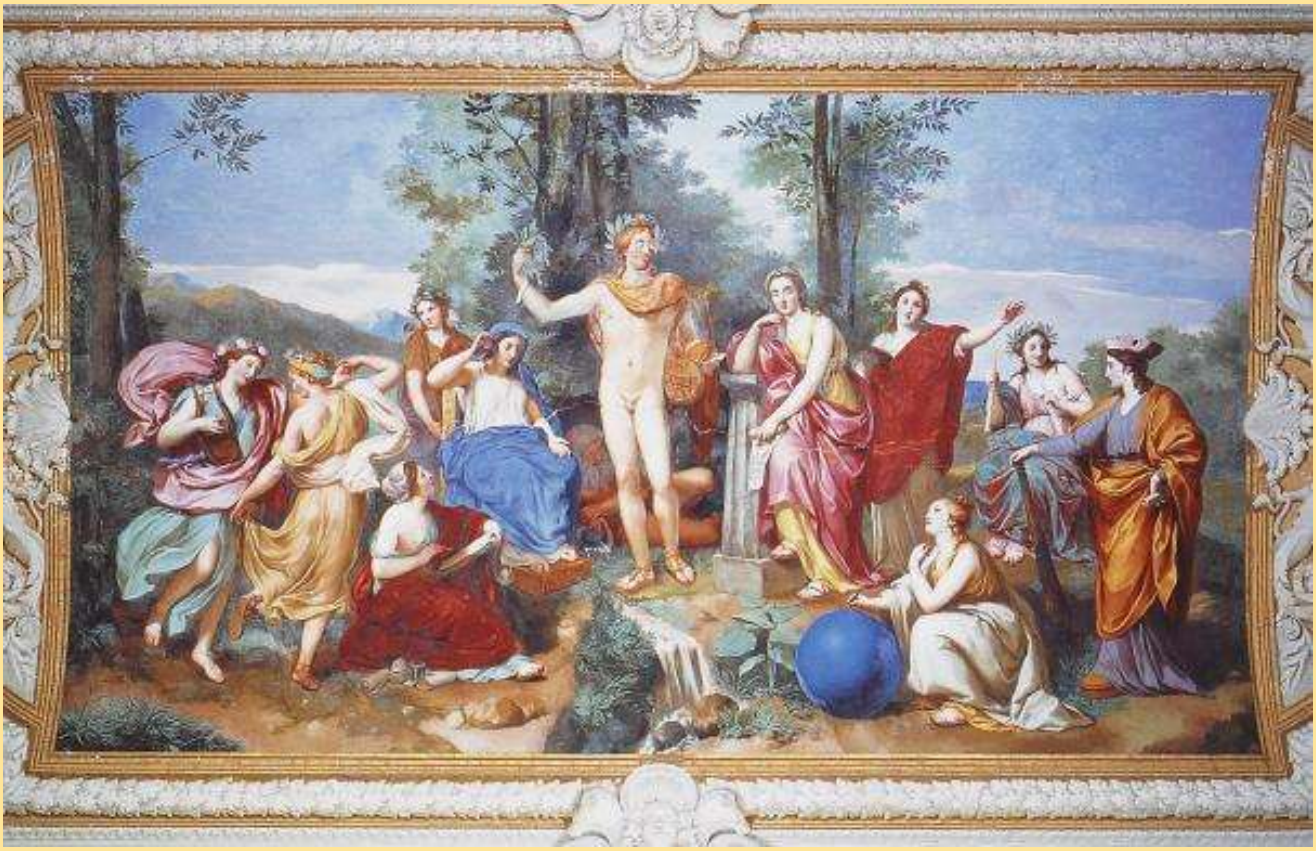
The Muses, normally portrayed as winged, were nine in number and they were the goddesses whom writers, poets and artists invoked for inspiration, for as Plato said: poets '*do not utter the words they do through art but by heavenly power'*.[1] The Muses' name signifies 'memory'. Before books came into existence, the bards recounted poetry that had been passed down orally so they had to rely on memory.

'The Nine Muses', Giulio Romano

Clio 'renown' was the Muse of History. Euterpe 'gladness' played the flute. Thalia (Gr. Thaleia) 'good cheer', was the Muse of Comedy while Melpomene 'singer', was the Muse of Tragedy. Terpischore 'delighting in the dance', was the Muse of choral dance. Erato 'loveliness' was the Muse of Lyric Poetry. Polymnia (Gr. Polhymnia) 'many songs', was the Muse of Mime. 'Heavenly' Urania (Gr. Ourania) was the Muse of astronomy while Calliope (Gr. Kalliope) 'lovely voice', was the Muse of epic poetry – according to Hesiod in the Theogony, the most important of the Muses for she had the guardianship of kings.

The Muses lived on Olympus, but Mount Helicon (Gr. Helikon) in Boeotia, was sacred to them. It was here, Hesiod relates in the Theogony, that the Muses visited him and told him 'We know how to speak false things that seem true, but we know, when we will, to utter true things'. There were two springs of note on

Mount Helicon, Aganippe and Hippocrene, whose waters were said to bestow poetic inspiration on those who drank from them. Sometimes, in the company of Apollo, the Muses visited Mount Parnassus – the seat of poetry and music.[2] From one side of the mountain, flowed a spring, known as the Castalia, whose waters also conferred poetic inspiration.



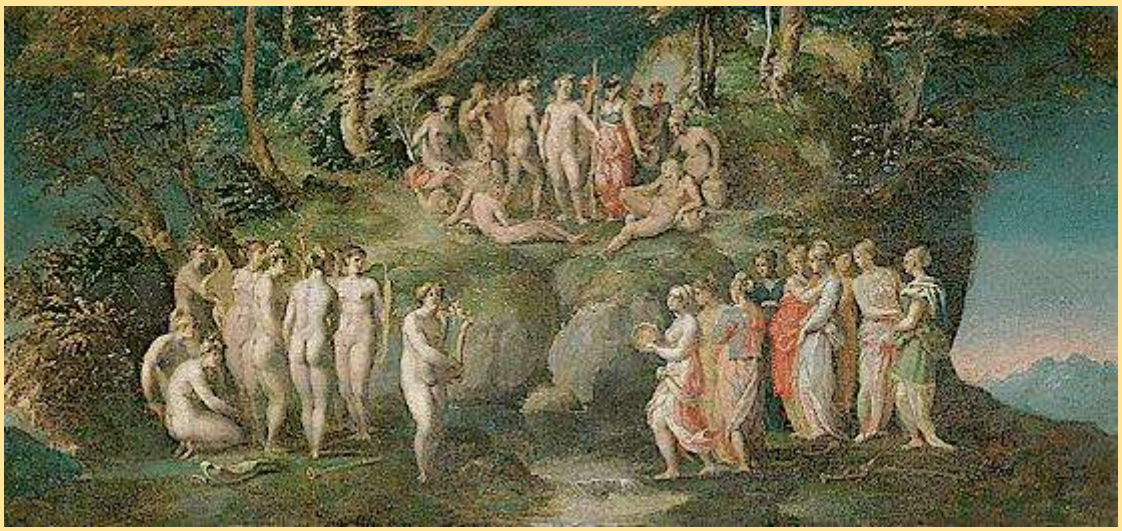
Parnassus by Anton Raphael Mengs (1761)
at the Villa Albani in Rome

Thamyris

Like all the gods and goddesses, the Muses could be extremely harsh and cruel with anyone who challenged them. The Thracian bard, Thamyris, was foolish enough to claim that he could perform better than the Muses. Apollodorus (1.3.3) says that the Muses agreed to a contest after which, were they to lose, they would let him sleep with each one of them in turn. But there was no question as to their prowess and we are told by Homer in the Iliad Book II, that 'the angry Muses maimed him. They took away his wondrous song and made him forget his lyre-playing.' Apollodorus adds that Thamyris was punished by being struck blind and having his musical skill taken away from him. According to Pausanias (4.33.3), Thamyris threw (ballein) his lyre into the river Balyra which took its name from 'ballein' meaning 'to throw'.

The Pierides

King Pierus is said to have given his name to Pieria where the Muses were born. The Pierides, the nine daughters of the king did not fare much better than Thamyris. It was said that they too dared compete with the Muses to a singing contest but neither the Pierides nor indeed any mortal could be any match for the Muses and after hurling abuse at the Muses, the unfortunate Pieriedes were changed into magpies for magpies make a sound resembling a harsh chatter. Moreover, the Muses also took their name from the Pierides.



'The Contest of the Pierides' by Giovanni Battista di Jacopo (Rosso Fiorentino) sometime about the turn of the 17th century, now at the Louvre Museum in Paris

Pyreneus

From a tale told only by Ovid in Metamorphoses Book V, we learn that on one occasion King Pyreneus encountered the Muses on their way to Parnassus and offered them shelter from the rain. When the storm was over, Pyreneus, by then intoxicated by the sight of his beautiful guests, tried to prevent them from leaving but the Muses escaped without the least difficulty. In an attempt to follow the Muses as they flew away, Pyreneus threw himself to his death.

[1] Literary Criticism: Plato to Dryden - Page 14 - Google Books Result; accessed at https://books.google.com.mt/books?isbn... - Allan H. Gilbert - 1962 - Literary Criticism: *The soul of the lyric poets, so it is said, experiences the same sort of thing. ... For they do not utter the words they do through art but by heavenly power, since if ...*

[2] In 331 B.C. Alexander the Great founded Alexandria in Egypt where, for the next 300 years, the centre of Greek culture was to lie outside Greece. At Alexandria was established the first real library, the 'Mouseion' 'Hall of the Muses' where the classics of Greek literature were gathered together. Classical Myth