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SLAVERY IN THE ROMAN WORLD

**TEXT OF A LECTURE GIVEN
TO THE PROPERTY AND FREEDOM SOCIETY
IN BODRUM IN SEPTEMBER 2023**

SEAN GABB

**CENTRE FOR ANCIENT STUDIES
DEAL
MMXXIII**

*Slavery in the Roman World: Text of a Lecture Given
to the Property and Freedom Society in Bodrum in September 2023, by
Sean Gabb*

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I Dedicate This Book
to my dear Wife Andrea
and to my Daughter Philippa

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PROSTITUTION IN THE ROMAN WORLD

TEXT OF A LECTURE GIVEN
TO THE PROPERTY AND FREEDOM SOCIETY
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BY
SEAN GABB

INTRODUCTORY

My Dear Friends,

I do regret that, for reasons beyond my control, I am not able to be with you this year. However, the wonder that is modern technology allows me to contribute *in absentia*. I can sit here, in the chilly depths of a lower basement in Deal, a great storm blowing in the English Channel, and say roughly what I would have said in person. I shall miss the physical warmth of Turkey in late summer, and the emotional warmth of the Hotel Karia Princess. I shall miss all that glorious chatter over the dinner tables beside the swimming pool. But you need not miss the sound of my heavy voice, or any of my strange facial tics. Indeed, since you will be able to turn me down, and sometimes off, for minutes at a time, you may not miss so very much.

My subject for this year is Slavery in the Roman World. You know that I am interested in all things ancient. A question I feel obliged to answer is why you should share my interest. An answer to the question is that we are all libertarians and conservatives. Slavery is a legal status exactly opposite to what we regard as the condition most appropriate to human wellbeing. Therefore, it may be useful to know more of what slavery means in practice. A focus on ancient slavery is particularly useful, so far as, though horrible, none of us may feel obliged to spend more time telling each other what we think about it than considering its nature. A further point is that ancient slavery existed alongside a state of affairs in which those people

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who were formally free – especially those in comfortable circumstances – could take for granted an absence of external regulation of their conduct that we, with our variously oppressive administrative states, can barely imagine. This contrast, and its effects on the relationships between slaves and their masters, must always be of interest.

Now, before I move to my lecture, here is a gentle warning. Slavery is an institution inseparable from physical and sexual abuse – abuse of adults and of children. I see no point in ignoring these abuses, or in hurrying past them. Indeed, though my profession used to specialise in finding impenetrable euphemisms in English for things plain enough in what Gibbon called “the obscurity of a learned language,” classical scholars nowadays prefer a certain bluntness in the translation of even the most shocking or merely licentious passages of ancient literature. If you find graphic descriptions sex and violence distasteful, there will be several times in what I have to say when you will prefer to scroll forward.

As an example of what I propose to cover, take the opening picture of my presentation. This is *A Roman Slave Market*, by Gustav Boulanger. French artists of the nineteenth century, being French, generally enjoyed a certain emphasis on flesh when portraying anything connected with the Ancient World. You can imagine that the purpose here was not merely to enlighten the French public as to the nature Roman slavery, but also to provide a certain titillation. However, leaving aside any wider agenda that the artist may have had, he gives us a reasonably fair portrayal, so far as I can see, of the institution of Roman slavery.

Here is one of the most important aspects of Roman slavery, which is a market where slaves are bought and sold. You can see the slave dealer in the foreground. He is called a *mango*: that is one of the names for slave dealer. Another name, if you have followed *The Cambridge Latin Course*, is *venalicius*. But *mango* seems to have been the most common name for slave dealers. You can see at once that he is a vicious, brutal, unthinking creature, heartless through and through. He’s sitting with a dish of figs or some other fruit, and he stuffing himself with them, careless of the despair and the horror about him. You have a collection of human beings brought from all over the Mediterranean world. You see a naked child: what he will end up doing, I wouldn’t like to imagine. You have that big man in the background. He will probably end in a chain gang, working twelve to fourteen hours a day. He’s young now, with big muscles. Put him to fifteen years of

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unremitting toil, he'll be a broken down wreck. It will be unusual if he lives much past his thirty-fifth birthday. You then have various women I somehow suspect will not go into chain gangs. They will perform other services for their lucky purchasers. That is the reality of a Roman slave market. It is something beyond our imagining. It is something which we must set aside all of our modern beliefs and assumptions to try to see as it was.

This much being said, and if you are still sitting comfortably, I will begin.

THE ANCIENT DEBATE ON SLAVERY

Here is a quotation from John Locke's *Second Treatise*:

To understand political power right, and derive it from its original, we must consider, what state all men are naturally in, and that is, a state of perfect freedom to order their actions, and dispose of their possessions and persons, as they think fit, within the bounds of the law of nature, without asking leave, or depending upon the will of any other man. (John Locke, 1689)

Classical liberalism is, to put it mildly, out of fashion in our civilisation. But the natural law assumptions that underlie much of classical liberalism remain a largely untouched consensus outside the educated classes. We judge the legitimacy of an institution or custom by whether it would exist without a coercive government to maintain it. Take away government, there would still be at least personal property. There would still be contracts. There would still be punishments for the violation of life, liberty and property. People would still get married and have children. They would still enjoy a partial and temporary dominion over their children. These are all “natural,” and so they are seen as legitimate. Leave aside for the moment whether any government is necessary: we judge political systems by how well they preserve this original freedom of human beings. If there is any subtraction from or addition to what might exist in a state of nature, the whole burden of proof is on those arguing for the circumstantial utility of these deviations.

If a political system does give some regard to the Rights of Man, we regard that political system and its various institutions as at least contingently legitimate. If, on the other hand, a political system consistently disregards these rights, we tend to regard that political system as illegitimate, and we may take an active interest in its reform or overthrow. There is nothing even *Guardian*-readers consider immoral in the abstract about opposing an established government if it is understood to be violating the rights of man. These rights may not be perfectly respected. I can think of no political system that perfectly respects these rights. But we do regard these rights as a basic assumption – as something of which the most despotic government will not wish to proclaim itself the enemy. So far as the Law of Nations is different from the Law of Nature, it is for the Law of Nations to be justified.

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Slavery is an obvious violation of the natural law. Yet, until just a few hundred years ago, it was an institution almost universally accepted as legitimate. Of course, it was an institution that seemed to be grounded in much practical convenience. The normal view was roughly this: “I don’t want to be a slave. I’m glad that I’m not a slave. But somebody has to clean the toilets and bring in the crops. I’m not going to do these things. I fail to see how anyone else can be *persuaded* to do them except under compulsion. So let it be the slaves who do them.”

This was a good enough reason for most people. Slavery was so omnipresent an institution in both time and place, that even slaves themselves generally accepted its legitimacy in the abstract. But slavery was always in potential an intellectual embarrassment to anyone who thought within the natural law tradition. On the one hand, it was convenient. It also had much prescriptive justification. On the other hand, it was deeply unnatural. What then to do when the natural law was so clearly set aside by convenience and prescription?

The Greeks and Romans were the first to deal with this embarrassment. It was they who developed the natural law tradition. They also had a strong commitment to individual autonomy. They were not always the free citizens of a free community. But they always enjoyed a lighter intrusion by the authorities into their personal lives than we are often able to imagine. Join this with a system in which other human beings are formally regarded as property, in the same category as agricultural equipment and farm animals, and you will see an inconsistency. The Babylonians, the Egyptians and other peoples simply accepted slavery. It was part of an order that had been set in place at the beginning of time by the Gods. If they had any conception of right and wrong that stood outside and above their own social order, I am not aware of the literature. For the more thoughtful of the Greeks and Romans – with their view of the world as a rational order, directed perhaps by a benevolent intelligence, and with so strong an interest in at least their own personal freedom – there was an unusual obligation to explain and to justify the existence of slavery.

The most important philosopher to discuss slavery was, of course, Aristotle. Here is his defence:

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But is there any one thus intended by nature to be a slave, and for whom such a condition is expedient and right, or rather is not all slavery a violation of nature? There is no difficulty in answering this question, on grounds both of reason and of fact. For that some should rule and others be ruled is a thing not only necessary, but expedient; from the hour of their birth, some are marked out for subjection, others for rule. (Aristotle, *The Politics* (c.330 BC))

You can take this as a shocking statement from someone who has been almost universally respected during the past few thousand years. It's also a defence of slavery that was almost universally accepted as a derogation from the obvious implications of belief in a natural law. At the same time, it is a statement that seems to imply a debate. Aristotle was a consistent thinker who tried to follow arguments to their logical conclusions. It may be that this defence was an internal necessity to his argument. But, though the philosophical literature we've inherited from the Ancient World has passed through various filters, and many dissenting views have disappeared, there are traces in the surviving literature of an active hostility in Greek civilisation to the existence of slavery.

We have Alcidas of Elaia, writing in the fourth century BC:

God has set everyone free. No one is made a slave by nature. (Alcidas of Elaia, 4th century BC philosopher)

There seems to have been a lively debate among the Greeks, so far as we can tell, about the legitimacy of slavery. This debate was always bounded by the fact that nobody had thought of another system in which people could be persuaded to do unpleasant jobs without having a whip held over them. Even so, there was a debate on the legitimacy of slavery, and this is something that you find evidenced in the Roman legal writings.

Here is Gaius, an important legal writer of the second century AD:

Slavery is the state that is recognized by the Law of Nations in which someone is subject to the dominion of another person *contrary to nature*. Gaius (Roman lawyer, 161 AD)

As said, we draw from the Greeks and the Romans our basic assumption that whatever is natural is right. Those of them who thought about the le-

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gitimacy of their institutions agreed that slavery was unnatural, and therefore that it needed to be justified. It was a problematic institution in Greek philosophy and in Roman law. There was a debate over both the treatment and the nature of slaves. But, so far as most people thought about it, the legitimacy of slavery was an entirely settled issue. Nobody is known to have objected when Varro, in the first century BC, wrote this about farming:

The instruments by which the soil is cultivated. some men divide these into three categories: (1) articulate instruments, *ie* slaves; (2) inarticulate instruments, *ie* oxen; and (3) mute instruments, *ie* carts... Varro, *On Agriculture* (c.50 BC)

THE GROWTH OF ROMAN SLAVERY

Turning from the nature to the extent of slavery, we can't argue that Italy before the arrival of Hannibal was some kind of paradise, in which everyone was free and equal. Slavery was deeply embedded in all the structures of ancient society. However, slavery was limited by the fact that most people were not rich. If you want to own five or six thousand slaves, you need to be very rich; and, if you don't have those rich people, you will not have mass slavery. The slavery that did exist before the Second Punic War was a minor addition to the existing labour force. A householder would have two or three slaves. These would work alongside the ordinary members of the family. They would be slaves. They would be pieces of property. They could be taken off to market and sold if required. They could be punished. They could be mistreated. But, when the average number of slaves per household is one or two – if most households do not have slaves – the extent, and to some degree the nature, of the evil is limited by circumstances.

However, the growth of inequality that followed the Second Punic war – ending in 201 BC – involved a movement at both ends of the social spectrum. Those people at the bottom were progressively dispossessed of their land holdings. Those at the top took over the land and became progressively richer. There was a great increase in the extent of slavery. With this came practical changes in its nature.

Most slaves among the Greeks and Romans were prisoners of war. Slavery was in principal an hereditary institution: the children of slaves were themselves slaves. But slaves born into their status were always a minority. There was a good reason for this. If you are a slave, if you are a piece of property, if you are a woman, your master may make sure that you are made regularly pregnant. Because your children will be slaves, you will increase the value of his slave stock. Broadly speaking, though, slaves are not interested in having children. Would you willingly bring another human life into the world that will share your own degraded status? This aside, slaves didn't have much opportunity for forming stable unions. If there is evidence of slave marriages, slaves were mostly atomised individuals at the beck and call of their master; and such people have neither much interest in nor opportunity for procreation. We can take it, then, that most slaves were in the first generation of slavery, and that nearly all of these became slaves because of conquest in war.

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We have nothing for the Ancient World approaching the kind of statistics that our societies have been heaping up since about 1500. But we do have various anecdotal snippets that we can take as indicative of what was happening. When Scipio Aemilianus took Carthage in 146 BC, he enslaved sixty thousand Carthaginians. These people made their way to various slave markets throughout the Mediterranean. When he threw back the German invasions of Western Europe and Italy at the end of the second century BC, Marius enslaved about 140,000 prisoners. Aemilius Paulus, about fifty years earlier, had enslaved about fifty thousand Greeks in his conquest of Greece. Pompey and Caesar, the two big men at the end of the Republic, together enslaved more than a million Asiatics and Gauls. There were smaller wars and conquests in almost every decade. These all swelled the slave markets.

THE SLAVE TRADE

Slave traders would follow Roman armies as they went about. They would buy prisoners of war from the soldiers. They would arrange for payment in ready cash for the soldiers, and they would also arrange for the prisoners to be taken off deep within the Empire to be processed. The prisoners would be taken to slave markets, there to be examined and graded and assigned to various categories, and then to be exposed to sale on the block. If you were a Greek, and if you were literate, and perhaps some kind of scholar, you'd be offered as a tutor or secretary. If you were a farmer, you'd be offered as a field slave, or a mine slave.

Here is another French painting from the nineteenth century. Once again, you can see that the artist may have had an agenda beyond enlightening his viewers as to the nature of slavery. But I have no doubt it is an accurate portrayal of certain kinds of slave market. You see a rich young man on the lookout for slaves. He's being offered various young ladies whose charms are displayed for his inspection. You can see the slave dealer. If you look closely, you'll see that rather cruel beard and that hard look on his face. Why otherwise? What kind of human being is it who makes a living from the purchase and sale of human flesh, in the knowledge that many of the people he's selling will be treated with shocking inhumanity? It's not a job I could readily do. I hope you couldn't readily do it.

There were slave markets in every large city throughout the Mediterranean. But there were certain centres which specialised in the processing and sale of slaves. The island of Delos, in the middle of the Aegean, for example, had the capacity to receive and process ten thousand slaves a day. In places like that, you could buy the freshly enslaved. You could buy and sell the already enslaved. Slaves were bought and sold like second-hand cars.

Contracts of sale were supervised by the authorities. The purpose of supervision was not to humanise the trade: that was a matter for the slave owners to decide. The purpose was to make sure that the slave trade was conducted in a peaceful and legally valid manner – in a way that ensured that those people buying slaves got proper title to the slaves, and that the slaves were more or less as described.

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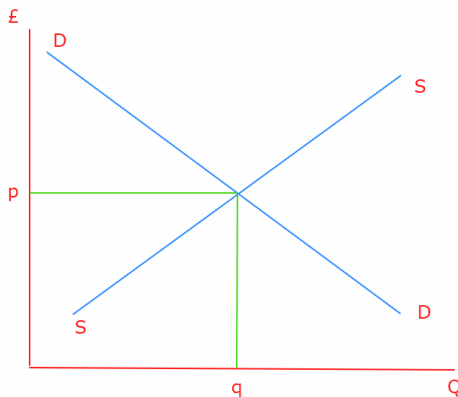
It was also possible to rent slaves. If you were a wealthy person, if you were a politician in the Late Republic, you would often hire gladiators for your protection as you went about your business, or for the purpose of disrupting other people's political meetings. Or, if you were a farmer, and if you had an unusually large harvest, you might not buy slaves, but rent them for as long as you needed them.

Yes, there was as regular a market in slaves in the Ancient World as there is nowadays in second-hand cars; and slaves were treated by the law in much the same way as second-hand cars nowadays are. The law functioned only to make sure that the slaves being sold were as described and that the seller had sufficient title to those slaves.

THE VALUATION OF SLAVES

Let me turn to the valuation of slaves. A slave was property. He or she was bought or sold – and perhaps bought and sold several times. There were organised slave markets that were sometimes very large. We know that the prices paid for slaves rose and fell over time. It is obviously interesting to consider the forces of supply and demand that determined the prices of slaves. Now I appreciate that I am only a classicist, and that I am speaking to a gathering of economists and financiers. Compared with your knowledge of such matters, mine is perhaps comically small. But you are not my only audience, and it may be that I have some advantage in having thought about this matter, and you have not. Even if I now tell you nothing that you don't already know – worse, if there is something radically bad in my analysis – you will forgive me if I digress from a subject I know well to one in which I am barely an amateur.

As with everything else bought and sold at market, we can draw a cross diagram to show the equilibrium price:



The position and slope of the supply curve will be determined by the cost of bringing slaves to market. This cost will depend on various factors. Is the Empire fighting wars of conquest? Are these wars a success? Are there decent numbers of prisoners? How biddable are the prisoners once they learn they are to be enslaved? What is the quality of these prisoners? What skills do they possess? How long can they be expected to remain productive? How far must they be transported to market? I have no doubt there are

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other factors. But these will do as a sample. They will have their effect on how far from the origin the curve begins, and on its elasticity.

The demand curve is more complex. If you are in the market for a tutor or a hairdresser or a slave to share your bed, your willingness to buy will be a matter of marginal utility. These kinds of slaves will count as consumer goods, in the same way as a cup of coffee or a mobile telephone. But most slaves worked on the land or in mines. As such, they were income-bearing assets, to be valued in the same way as a piece of land or some kind of production machinery. Their value to a buyer was a function of the expected value of what they were expected to add to total output. I think you can show the value of derived demand with this valuation formula:

$$P = \text{PMT} \times \frac{1 - \left(\frac{1}{(1+r)^n} \right)}{r}$$

In this formula:

P = present value of slave

PMT = expected profit per year of slave labour

r = rate of interest

n = productive life expectancy of slave (years)

Let us assume that a slave is expected to yield a profit of £10,000 *per annum* for the next fifteen years, with an interest rate of five per cent:

$$£10,000 \times (1 - (1/(1.0515))) / 0.05 = £96,202$$

If I am correct, the maximum price you will offer for a slave on these assumptions is £96,202. This maximum price will change as the assumed values change. Is there an epidemic disease that is killing the healthy? Is there an actual or expected breakdown in order that will allow slaves to run away? Are prices or interest rates changing?

A further point to consider is how far the Ancients thought in these terms, and whether they had the technical understanding to calculate similar valuations. I think the answer is that they did think in these terms, and they

did have crude approximations to the valuation formulae that we nowadays use. We are by nature utility maximising creatures. No one with half a brain ever goes into a supermarket with a pillowcase of pennies, pulling one out every few seconds to ask whether a pennyworth of coffee will add as much to total utility as a pennyworth of bread or bacon. But every trip to the shops does involve a basic approximation to this model. The Ancients had just the same basic impulse as we have to make the best of what they had. As for the valuation formulae, you see some basic and effective approaches in the very earliest civilisations of Ancient Mesopotamia. I have no reasonable doubt that the wide fluctuations of slave prices you see in the Ancient World were at least partly, even if implicitly, understood by those hard-faced buyers and sellers in the markets.

WHAT SLAVES DID

I turn to the work done by slaves. There was, in the Ancient World, a strong prejudice against paid labour. Most people did not want to work as salaried employees. If they couldn't work for themselves as farmers or craftsmen, they found it less degrading than taking a salary to beg or steal or become some other kind of parasite on the better-off. Therefore, if you ran a workshop making sandals or cheese, you would not employ free labour, because you couldn't get free labour. You would instead buy slaves and the slaves would work under you.

Slaves were used in almost every occupation – not only in the fields and mines. Slaves were used as secretaries, builders, architects, doctors, secretaries, tutors, hairdressers: almost any occupation you have in mind was largely colonised by slaves. I mentioned earlier that, with the growth of a very rich class in Rome and Italy, there was an expansion of slave numbers owned by any particular individual. Once again, we don't have anything approaching proper statistics. It is largely a matter of combing the sources for anecdotes and trying to extrapolate from these.

We know that the City Prefect of Rome in 61 AD, a man called Pedanius Secundus, owned four hundred slaves. Those were probably house slaves, and we have evidence that other grand houses in Rome had about the same number, or even more. Gaius Caecilius Isidorus, himself a former slave, left 4,116 slaves in his will in 8 BC. Athenaeus, a Greek writer of the second century AD, claims that some very wealthy individuals owned as many as ten or twenty thousand slaves. Most of these can't have been working in the house. They would have been field slaves.

Some rich men had so many slaves that they needed a special slave-secretary – a *nomenclator* – to identify the other slaves by name. You're a rich man in Rome. You're walking through your house – more precisely, you're walking through your *palace*. Your *nomenclator* is just behind, whispering into your ear: "That one there is Clemens. You bought him last month in the market. You said you liked his hair." You nod and smile at him: "Hello, Clemens," you say, "yes, *Clemens*. How are you today? I hope you're enjoying total subjection in my household. Any problems? I don't think there will be any. But you know the steward and how to find him. Now, you just carry

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on. I'm giving a big dinner this evening. We wouldn't want the whole pig underdone, would we?"

There is a mosaic, showing a slave boy called Junius. He's doing slave boy work in the kitchen, and he is holding a tray of figs. So those are some of the slave occupations. Indeed, there are very few occupations which were closed to slaves.

THE TREATMENT OF SLAVES

I turn to the treatment of slaves. As said, they were under the total dominion of their masters. They were expected to do exactly as told, regardless of its unpleasantness and danger, and never to complain. There were few theoretical limits to the punishments they could inflict for disobedience, and usually no practical limits.

Here are two sources. The first is from Galen, the famous Greek doctor of the second century AD. Though a Greek, the definition of Roman becomes rather wide in the Imperial period. He was a Roman citizen. He lived much of his productive life in Rome. He counts as a Roman. This is a strange extract from one of his works – *On Passions and Errors of the Soul*:

When I was a young man I imposed upon myself an injunction which I have observed through my whole life, namely, never to strike any slave of my household with my hand....

You read this far, and you think – Ah, what a nice man. Galen was. He refrained from striking his slaves with his hand: so unlike those beastly aristocratic Romans we read about. But what else to expect? He was a great physician, and so you expect to see humanity in all his words and deeds. But he continues:

My father practiced this same restraint. Many were the friends he reproved when they had bruised a tendon while striking their slaves in the teeth; he told them that they deserved to have a stroke and die in the fit of passion which had come upon them. They could have waited a little while, he said, and used a rod or whip to inflict as many blows as they wished and to accomplish the act with reflection. (Galen, *On Passions and Errors of the Soul*, 2nd century AD)

I don't think I would like anything like that to go out under my name. But here you have one of the great medical writers of the Ancient World, a man whose medical writings were considered effectively the last word in medical science until the sixteenth century, casually saying that you shouldn't hit slaves with your hand because you might hurt yourself. Instead, you should set about them with whips and rods. That tells you much about the treatment of slaves.

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Or here is a somewhat more lurid story about Vedius Pollio, a very rich and important Roman:

Vedius Pollio kept in reservoirs huge fish that had been trained to eat men, and he was accustomed to throw to them such of his slaves as he desired to put to death.

Once, when he was entertaining Augustus, his cup-bearer broke a crystal goblet, and without regard for his guest, Pollio ordered the fellow to be thrown to the fish.

Hereupon the slave fell on his knees before Augustus and supplicated him, and Augustus at first tried to persuade Pollio not to commit so monstrous a deed. Then, when Pollio paid no heed to him, the Emperor said, "Bring all the rest of the drinking vessels which are of like sort or any others of value that you possess, in order that I may use them," and when they were brought, he ordered them to be broken.

When Pollio saw this, he was vexed, of course; but since he was no longer angry over the one goblet, considering the great number of the others that were ruined, and, on the other hand, could not punish his servant for what Augustus also had done, he held his peace, though much against his will. (Cassius Dio, *History*, 54)

That's one version of the story. The other version I know is that the slave was thrown to the fish, there to be eaten to death; and that, after this, Augustus was so shocked that he put the word round that anyone who was seen to be a friend of Pollio would be no friend of the Emperor. But, whether or not it's true, the source is evidence of the absolute and unaccountable power that an owner had over his slaves. If he wanted, a master could have his slaves eaten by fish. He could crucify them. He could burn them to death. He could do these things and more for their discipline and punishment. He could do them for his own pleasure. A master had a greater dominion over his slaves than we have over our cats and dogs. So it continued until the Emperors, in the first century AD, began a trend in the law towards greater humanity in the treatment of slaves.

THE SEXUAL USE OF SLAVES

I come now to an associated matter in the treatment of slaves. They were, of course, sex objects. It was the duty of a slave – a duty enforced by law – to obey every single order given by a master. If a master said “Bring me a cup of wine,” it was a slave’s duty to bring a cup of wine. If a master said “Take off your clothes and wait over there,” it was the duty of a slave to take off his or her clothes and wait over there.

Pompeii has at least one specialised brothel which we’ve identified. It is entirely likely that the sex workers in that brothel were slaves. There is evidence for freelance prostitutes, free prostitutes who would make an arrangement with a brothel owner to take over a cubicle and to pay rent for this. But it does seem that, in most instances, prostitutes were slaves. They were property of the brothel owner and their job was to service such clients as they were directed to service, and the whole profit of the transaction was taken and kept by the brothel owner. Tips were another matter that I will try to discuss later.

Here’s a quote from Seneca the Younger, writing in the first century AD:

Naked she stood on the shore, at the pleasure of the purchaser; every part of her body was examined and felt. Would you hear the result of the sale? The pirate sold; the pimp bought, that he might employ her as a prostitute. (Seneca, 1st Century AD, *Controversiae* 1.2)

Here is another French painting of the nineteenth century, this time by Jean-Léon Gérôme – as ever, with plenty of bare flesh. This young lady is not on sale for her ability to cook or to mend clothes. She is being offered to a gathering of old and ugly men, who are all bidding furiously for who should have the right to rape her. In the foreground near the bottom, you have a young man urging his father to buy her: “Go on, Daddy, do buy her. I promise I’ll be ever so good. I’ll study hard. I’ll pass those exams. I’ll share her when Mummy’s not at home.” This is not a painting produced entirely for the enlightenment of its viewers. But it is not an unlikely representation of what happened in an ancient slave market.

Slavery in the Roman World

I come once more to Seneca – and here is one of those moments when you may choose to avert your gaze:

There was a man named Hostius Quadra, whose obscene acts even became the subject of a theatrical performance. He was rich, greedy, a slave to his millions. The deified Augustus did not consider him worth being avenged when he was murdered by his slaves, and almost proclaimed that he seemed to have been murdered justly.

He was vile in relation not to one sex alone but lusted after men as well as women. He had mirrors made of the type I have described (the ones that reflect images far larger) in which a finger exceeded the size and thickness of an arm. These, moreover, he so arranged that when he was offering himself to a man he might see in a mirror all the movements of his stallion behind him and then take delight in the false size of his partner's very member just as though it were really so big. (Seneca, 1st century AD, *Natural Questions* 1.16)

Is this a true story? I see no reason to doubt that it is. It comes with good provenance. Whether or not it's true, it illustrates the fact that a slave was the absolute and unconditional property of his or her master, and that the slave was absolutely obliged to do exactly as ordered, without delay, without complaint, and also I suppose to keep it quiet.

MORE ON THE GENERAL TREATMENT OF SLAVES

I'll come to the moral effects of slavery in a moment. For the moment, I will stay with the general treatment of slaves. Most, as I have said, worked on the land. Italian soil, after the Second Punic War, was largely worked by hundreds of thousands of slaves in chain gangs. These worked until they died. Then they were replaced. They worked on large estates called *latifundiae*. The average life expectancy of slaves of this kind appears to have been in the middle to high twenties. So it appears from the evidence we have from looking at the skeletons of probable slaves. For those slaves who did not work as directed, the normal punishment was the *ergastula* – an underground prison where they worked and died in darkness. These were made illegal during the reign of Hadrian, deep into the Imperial period. But we don't know to what extent that law was obeyed.

There was also the charming custom of abandoning slaves when they were too old or sick to work. You have a slave. He's in his mid-fifties. He can't work any more. He's no longer worth the food that you give him. You can't sell him. Nobody wants to buy a worthless slave. You are too soft-hearted to kill him so that you must watch him die. So you dump him somewhere to starve to death. You do this in the same way as people nowadays dump cars once they get past a certain level of dereliction, so they aren't worth trading in or sending to auction.

A favourite dumping grounds was the island where the Tiber divides as it runs through Rome. There were, however, kind people in Rome. This was not a society made up universally of monsters. There were kind people in Rome who went across to the island to feed the abandoned slaves, and sometimes to nurse them back to health. From this a legal issue rose in the time of Claudius in the middle of the first century AD. A slave has been dumped. But the slave has now been nursed back to health, and the circumstances attendant on the dumping have ceased to operate. Can the master claim him back? Has the slave ceased to be property? Claudius noticed a series of law cases coming into the courts, where masters were trying to claim back their abandoned slaves. He made a quick change to the law, so that a slave was presumed to have been freed by the fact of abandonment.

Slavery in the Roman World

As for dead slaves, disposal of the bodies was a matter wholly for the master to decide. There were masters who made sure to give decent burial to their slaves, and there are some touching funerary inscriptions from all over the Empire. I saw one a few years ago in Vindolanda, on the northern frontier of Britannia. For those slaves whose masters were too poor, or otherwise disinclined, for a proper burial, there were stone bins outside the walls of most cities. Dead slaves could be thrown there to rot.

ESCAPING

Unless a slave was kept in chains, running away was always an option. Ancient societies were not well-supervised. The authorities were always small in relation to the population and the size of the Empire. There were no police. If you were a household slave in a great city like Rome, and you wanted to run away, there were many opportunities for getting clean away. You could disappear and never be found. You could go somewhere else. You could change your appearance and give yourself a new identity.

Masters knew this, and they took precautions. Aside from chaining them to their work, a favourite method was to put collars around the necks of their slaves – just like tagging a pet dog. You weld an iron collar in place, and hang a bronze plaque from it. Here are two of these collars. The first says:

*Tene me ne fugia[m] et revoca me ad dom[i]nu[m] meu[m] Viventium in
ara Callisti*

Hold me, lest I flee, and return me to my master Viventius on the estate
of Callistus

The second collar says:

adultera meretrix tene quia fugivi de Bulla Rg

I am a disgusting whore. Detain me, for I have escaped from [the town of]
Bulla Regia]

This was found in North Africa in 1906, together with the bones of a girl in her early teens. It seems the wearer died with it still riveted about her neck, and no one could be bothered to remove it for the disposal of her body.

There were strict laws against harbouring runaway slaves. If a slave was caught and returned, punishment was for the master to decide. Killing was always an option. Even so, being property, a slave had value, and killing required unusual anger or sadism. The more common punishment, it seems, was to brand the word *fugax* on a slave's forehead – *runaway*. That would prevent future escapes. You won't get far again with that shining from your face.

SLAVERY AND THE ARENA

Slavery and the gladiatorial games is a vast subject, and you'll forgive me, I hope, if I say little about this. The games became organized mass-entertainment in the second century BC, and continued until they were suppressed by the Christian Emperors in the middle of the fourth century. It seems that most of the gladiators were slaves – slaves bought and specially trained for their occupation. At the same time, they were not always slaves. Fighting in the arena brought so much potential fame, and so much potential prize money, that there were always free volunteers. Indeed, it was necessary for the Imperial Government to make laws to prevent members of the senatorial classes from fighting in the arena.

I could say more here, but won't. Here instead, is another painting by Jean-Léon Gérôme. *Pollice Verso* probably tells you all you need to know, if you didn't already know it.

THE MORAL EFFECTS OF SLAVERY

I said I would discuss the moral effects of slavery. For the slaves, here is a picture by Lawrence Alma Tadema, one of the great Victorian painters. It supposedly shows life among the leisured classes of the Empire. Life for them was clearly pleasant. You can see them out for a walk. They've stopped and are having a little rest. There are some of the older people, sat on the bench and dozing. There are some others gossiping together. There are some others, stood up to admire the fine prospect. Then, in the foreground, you have one of the slaves.

Look at him. He's holding a sunshade. He's got his owner's name painted on his clothes. He's barefooted, his head shaven. You can see a look of bored despair on his face. That is his life. It won't change. He could run away while no one is looking. He's young. He's almost certainly faster on his feet than anyone else in the party. But he'd need to strip naked before making off. Even in the world of the ancient Mediterranean, where clothes were often more optional than they are nowadays, that might raise a few suspicions. But why go to the trouble? Life as a household slave isn't unbearable from one moment to the next. The boy's master probably isn't a sadist. He doesn't seem to be kept hungry. There is no reason to suppose he's beaten more than usually. This being said, he has no future as an autonomous being. Instead, his life will be a series of more or less bearable moments as a piece of property. If you look properly at the picture, you will see a better moral condemnation of ancient slavery than if Alma Tadema had shown any of the more stomach-churning images of slavery that were not wholly uncommon, but also weren't universal.

But I turn to the effect on the owners. Imagine you're the son of a wealthy man. We'll think of boys, because I used to be one, and most of you were once boys. You're the son of a rich man. Perhaps you're an only son – not unlikely, bearing in mind the limited fecundity of the ancient higher classes. From your first moment in life, you've been surrounded by slaves: you live in one of those palaces staffed with an army of slaves. The woman from whose breasts you sucked milk was a slave. The boys with whom you play in the gardens of the palace are slaves. They are slaves, and you are not. They play with you, but play your games by your rules. As you grow up, you

find these slaves are not only willing to obey your orders as and when you give them: they are also eager to anticipate your orders. It doesn't matter how stupid your jokes are – the slaves will laugh as if what you said was the last thing in wit. It doesn't matter how ugly and stupid you may be – they all swear blind you're a person of surpassing beauty and intelligence. Many of those slaves – not because they're bad people, but because they just want to stay alive and to enjoy a decent life – will very carefully study you. They have all the time in the world for that. They will try to work out what it is you *really* want. Do you have any particular desires that you feel ashamed to mention? Shall we agree that most teenage boys have those? We never discussed them because they were possibly shameful, and they were fantasies incapable of being fulfilled. But, if you become a teenage boy in that palace, with slaves all about you, those slaves will study you very carefully. They will work out what it is you want, and you won't have to ask for it. They will offer it to you, and tell you it's also what they dearly want. And if you enjoy what they give you, they will find other things that you might enjoy – other things of the same nature.

What I'm saying is that, without being a person of a naturally evil disposition, you will be corrupted through and through by your closest companions. You will come of age in a society of the wealthy who are equally abandoned in the moral sense. I'm not thinking only about sex. Unless a boy grows up with a taste for rape and flagellation, wanting and having a lot of sex is hardly a wicked thing. It's all the other dark fantasies that I have in mind. Suppose you have an interest in the occult, and you've been assured that, by carrying out a human sacrifice, you can somehow gain yourself an advantage in life. Well, there's always a slave from outside the household who can be lured into a basement – someone who'll not be greatly missed. Even if you choose to spare your close companions, the lives of your slaves are there for the taking. There is a story in Plutarch of Titus Flamininus, the man who liberated Greece in 196 BC. He was having dinner with a young friend – a young male friend whom he wanted to impress. This young friend admitted that he'd never seen a man die. Flamininus snapped his fingers, and a slave was brought into the dining room and put straightaway to death.

Imagine living in that kind of society, and you have some understanding of the violence and extreme debauchery of Roman politics in the Late Republic. Politics were dominated by a group of men who'd been brought up in slave households, where their every wish had been immediately indulged – and, as I've said, where their most silent private wishes had been ferreted out by the slaves and also indulged. If you want to understand the extreme violence and desperation and the grotesque immorality of political life in the later Roman Republic, the first place you need to look is the household arrangements of these wealthy families where boys and indeed girls were brought up by slaves, whose position required them to corrupt those young people, and to corrupt them absolutely.

And if you want to look beyond the Late Republic, if you want to ask how the more wicked Emperors could behave in so base a manner to the people of the Empire, the answer is that, from their earliest lives, if they were people of even moderate debauchery, they had been accustomed to treating their slaves as instruments of their own will and enjoyment; and, once they obtained political dominion over the free citizens of the Empire, they would carry over everything they had learned from the treatment of their own slaves into the treatment of their subjects.

That is the greatest difference between the Roman upper classes and ourselves. There are many things which we simply cannot do. There are many things which have not been possible in Christian civilisation. There are many things even which could not be done in the more grotesque tyrannies of the twentieth century. Lavrenti Beria, for example, was a paedophile. He was one of Stalin's ministers. He was head of the secret police, and he could indulge his tastes in the most shocking way. But he does not seem to have been average for the Soviet ruling class in the time of Stalin. He was required to indulge his tastes with some show of discretion. Once Stalin was dead, Beria was seized by his remaining colleagues, and given what counted among them for a trial, and then promptly shot and erased from public memory. But imagine a society which is made up of people like Laventi Beria, and you have the later Roman Republic and the High Roman Empire.

THE SLAVE REVOLTS

What happened when life got too bad for the slaves? You have estates stretching from one horizon to another, all worked by chain gangs of ten or twenty thousand slaves. The slaves are many. The owners are few. Every so often, the slaves will be pushed beyond a certain limit, and then they will pull of their chains. The Late Roman Republic saw a number of immense slave revolts. These weren't acts of individual revenge, where a slave was pushed too far, and he murdered his master. Such things did happen. But these were slave risings that amounted to revolutions. Those thousands of slaves would break their chains and set about murdering their masters and their supervisors; and the revolts then spread to other estates

The first of these great uprisings was in Sicily in 135 BC. Beginning a century earlier, Sicily had been made one vast slave plantation, to grow grown corn and food of all kinds for export to Italy. The slaves were treated with shocking inhumanity. One day, Eunus, a slave from Syria – a man subject to religious visions – inspired four hundred other slaves to revolt. He captured the town of Enna and slaughtered its people. Word of his revolt spread immediately through all the other big estates in Sicily, and there was a general uprising. It took the arrival of a large Roman army to suppress this revolt. It was suppressed with horrible atrocities. Eunus himself was captured and put in prison, where he rotted to death from a disease called *phthiriasis*, which the medical books tell me doesn't exist, but which appears to have killed Herod the Great and Philip II of Spain. It's apparently a disease where small insects like fleas grow inside your body, and they keep bursting out through your flesh. It sounds a disgusting illness, and I've no doubt it was if it existed. But Eunus died in horrible conditions in prison.

After this, you get the big slave revolt of 73-71 BC. Spartacus was a shepherd from Thrace. Taken as a prisoner of war, he was sent to Capua for training as a gladiator. He escaped one day from the training school with eighty companions, to begin a revolt that spread like fire through Italy. Spartacus assembled a slave army of ninety thousand men. He was a great military leader, and he defeated four Roman armies sent against him. His strategy seems to have been to break out of Italy, so he and his men could go home. The Roman armies, however, couldn't defeat him, but blocked all

the northern passes. At last, after two years of failure, the Senate sent out a very large army. Spartacus was outfought, and he was defeated. Spartacus himself was never taken. You shouldn't regard the film with Kirk Douglas, Laurence Olivier, and of course Peter Ustinov, as an accurate account of the Third Servile War. It does, even so, contain substantial elements of truth. At the end of the revolt, six thousand slaves who weren't returned to their owners were crucified, thirty feet apart, up and down the Appian Way that led from Rome to Naples. Their bodies were left there to rot; and they could still be seen several years later, as a warning to other slaves who might consider the possibility of rebelling against their masters.

One of the effects of the Servile Wars, however, was that the Roman Government decided that things really couldn't quite continue as they had been. It really was necessary to enforce some kind of minimal standard on the treatment of slaves. These were very minimal standards, but the progress of the early Empire saw a gradual humanisation of the condition of slaves. These never stopped being slaves, and they were still subject to the dominion of their masters. But there were certain customary and sometimes legal limits placed on the treatment of slaves.

MANUMISSION

There was force. This was joined by those minimal customary and sometimes legal restraints on ill-treatment that were supposed to prevent the need for extreme public force. But the most effective way of controlling slaves was by the promise of freedom; and this is the positive side to Roman slavery. The Romans could be unspeakably cruel in their treatment of slaves. But the Romans were no exception. Whenever you have a slave society, you have cruelty. It is part of the system. We can't really single out the Romans for particular moral blame. Or perhaps we can – but I will try to come to this. What is unusual about Roman slavery, though, is the frequency of manumission or freeing of slaves.

The Romans were unusually generous by Mediterranean standards in their approach to freeing slaves. You could free a slave in any number of ways. You could take a slave off to a magistrate and make a formal grant of freedom. Or you could do it informally. You strike a slave on the face and then say "I free you." You could invite a slave to dinner, and that was taken as legal evidence of manumission. Then, you were expected to free your slaves for all sorts of reasons. If a slave performed a particularly meritorious service – if he saved your son from drowning, for example – you were expected to give that slave his freedom.

Masters might also grant freedom and enter into partnerships with their former slaves. Senators were barred by law from going into business: they were expected to live on the proceeds of their landed estates. An easy way round this restriction was to free one or more enterprising slaves, and to finance their business activities as a sleeping partner.

Otherwise, masters were required by custom, and this was supported by trust law, to allow their slaves to accumulate savings – savings from tips and from outright earnings. Once it had reached an agreed sum, this *peculium* could be used to buy a slave's freedom.

Many masters found that it was a much better way of managing slaves than beating them and crucifying them and threatening the survivors with the same, to offer slaves their freedom. The deal was often something like this:

Slavery in the Roman World

“You’re my slave. Your job will be cut my wife’s hair and make her look pretty for seven years. If at the end of that time, she has no complaints, I’ll free you.” It was the sort of offer than got decent haircuts. It also saved you the inconvenience of sleeping every night in a locked room with a sword under the pillow.

This was a possibility for household slaves, not for field slaves. They worked until they died, and they were the majority of slaves. But, to household slaves, there does seem to have been a reasonable expectation of freedom at some point. This was usually enough to keep a slave household reasonably harmonious.

Now to another point about manumission. If you were a slave from Thrace, let’s say, and you were sold to an Athenian, your chance of freedom was minimal. The Athenians were sadly mean about freeing slaves. But if you did get your freedom from an unusually kind master, you resumed your status as a Thracian. You didn’t become an Athenian citizen. If, however, you were owned by a Roman citizen, and your master freed you, you immediately became a Roman citizen. You didn’t have all the rights and privileges of a Roman citizen. You couldn’t stand for election. You were subject to various social prejudices. But none of these restrictions applied to your children. What this meant was that, over several centuries – certainly by about the third century AD – most of the higher classes in the Empire were obviously descended from freed slaves. There were several emperors who the grandsons of freed slaves. It was always possible for a freed slave to make himself very rich.

Indeed, there is some evidence that enslavement was used as a legal fiction for Provincials to acquire Roman citizenship. This came with many legal and social advantages. Until it was granted to all free inhabitants of the Empire in 212 AD, citizenship was the status of a minority. So you are a wealthy merchant in Syria. You want Roman citizenship. You sell yourself into slavery with a trusted Roman citizen. He frees you at once. You become a citizen. This doesn’t seem to have been a common device. But it was a possible device.

Slavery in the Roman World

So this is the positive side, if you can talk about the positive side to such an institution. The Romans were unusually generous in granting freedom to their slaves. Their freed slaves became Roman citizens automatically; and, if certain restrictions applied to freed slaves, these restrictions did not apply to the children of freed slaves. I haven't looked closely at the literature, but I do remember reading some time ago that, in the excavations of the graveyards outside Pompeii, about forty per cent of the people who were able to afford a gravestone had names suggesting that they were freed slaves. If so, this tells you something about the extent of manumission.

Here are some pictures of gravestones of freed slaves who did well enough to afford a good burial. This is quite a nice gravestone. It's a gravestone put up to a wife who'd started out as a slave. Her master had then fallen in love with her, freed her and married her; and he writes that he is sad that she had died first, because he always expected that he'd be the first one to go.

It's not a completely black story. If you want to understand the brutality and the great immorality of Roman politics in the Late Republic, you need to take the existence of slavery into account as at least a partial explanation. You may think of British or American politics as a rather dirty game. They don't compare with Roman politics in the Late Republic. And I think one of the reasons for this is that, in Britain and America, we don't have slavery, and the Romans did have slavery.

However, this isn't the conclusion I want to make. The conclusion I do want to make is this. The matter of how, and even whether, we should judge people in other civilisations is not easily settled. But I do suggest that we have no grounds for condemning the Aztec mass-sacrifices. These were the product of a civilisation that had never shown much promise, and that had been degenerating for a long time before the Spanish arrived. Ancient slavery is very different. The Greeks and Romans had about as clear an understanding of the Natural Law as we have. They knew that slavery was unnatural. They seem to have been told reasonably often that it was wrong. They still had slaves, and, even by the standards of a slave society, they often treated them with unusual cruelty. We have reason, then, to take the institution as a blot on ancient civilisation.

Slavery in the Roman World

But is our own civilisation any better? Are there perhaps customs and laws in our age that are obviously at variance with the precepts of Natural Law, and that will one day be much condemned?

I think we know the answer to that

I hope you've found this presentation interesting and perhaps useful. I have provided a short bibliography, which will begin you on your own exploration of this very large subject. I will also generate a transcript of what I've said for handing round. In the meantime, I wish you all a very happy time with Hans and Gulcen in the Hotel Karia Princess.

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POSTSCRIPT

Many thanks for buying this book. Many thanks for reading it. Sales of my books are useful to my finances, and they help assure me that I have not been typing away without hope of influence and fame. If you liked it, please consider leaving a review on your local Amazon. Reviews are very important for further sales. Even if you disagree with what I have said, please go ahead and review the book.

You may also wish to look up some of my other books on Amazon. There are many of these. Under my own name, Sean Gabb, I write both non-fiction and fiction. Under the pen-name, Richard Blake, I am writing a long series of historical novels set in the early Byzantine Empire. There are now twelve of these, and they have been commercially translated into half a dozen languages.

Though not overtly political, they do manage to reflect my general view of life, and may be of interest. I might add that, in hard copy, they make interesting presents for those hard-to-please loved ones!

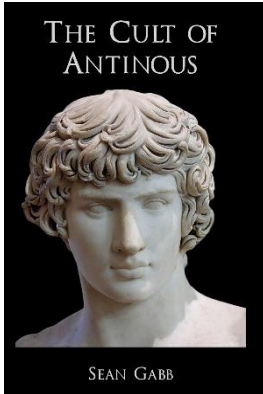
Otherwise, please feel free to connect with me on Facebook and on various other social media platforms. Or feel free to contact me directly—*sean@seangabb.co.uk* or via my websites:

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Best regards,

Sean Gabb
Deal

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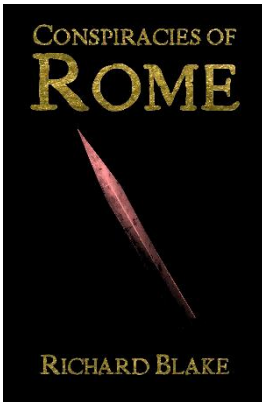
Antinous died around 130 AD, at about the age of eighteen. Born in Bithynia, one of the Eastern Provinces, he had been, from about the age of eleven, the lover of the Emperor Hadrian. The Emperor was so saddened by his death that he had the boy declared a god, and a regular worship was instituted that continued until the extinction of Paganism at the end of the fourth century.

Delivered in June 2023, this lecture covers the following subjects:

- What were Ancient views of all-male sex?
- Who was Antinous?
- How did he die?
- How widespread was his cult?
- Why did it persist so long?
- How was he seen in later ages?

This is another lecture published in book format.

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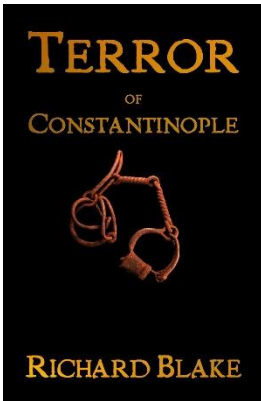
Rome, 609 AD. Empire is a fading memory. Repeatedly fought over and plundered, the City is falling into ruins. Filth and rubble block the streets. Killers prowl by night. Far off, in Constantinople, the Emperor has other concerns. The Church is the one institution left intact, and is now flexing its own imperial muscle.

Enter Aelric of England: young and beautiful, sexually uninhibited, heroic, if ruthlessly violent. He's only here by accident. Without getting that girl pregnant, and the resulting near-miss from King Ethelbert's gelding knife, he might never have left Kent. But here Aelric is, and nothing on earth will send him back.

The question is how long he will stay on earth. A deadly brawl outside Rome sucks him straight into the high politics of Empire. Fraud. Pursuit. Murder after murder. Soon, Aelric is involved in a race against time to find answers. Who is trying to kill him? Where are the letters everyone thinks he has, and what do they contain? Who is the one-eyed man? What significance to all this has the Column of Phocas, the monument just put up in the Forum to celebrate a tyrant's generosity to Holy Mother Church?

Aelric does at last get his answers. What he chooses to do with them will shape the future history of Europe and the world....

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610AD. Invaded by Persians and barbarians, the Byzantine Empire is also tearing itself apart in civil war. Phocas, the maniacally bloodthirsty Emperor, holds Constantinople by a reign of terror. The uninvaded provinces are turning one at a time to the usurper, Heraclius.

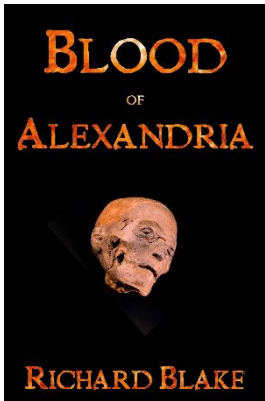
Just as the battle for the Empire approaches its climax, Aelric of England turns up in Constantinople. Blackmailed by the Papacy to leave off his career of lechery and market-rigging in Rome, he thinks his job is to gather texts for a

semi-comprehensible dispute over the Nature of Christ. Only gradually does he realise he is a pawn in a much larger game.

What is the eunuch Theophanes up to? Why does the Papal Legate never show himself? How many drugs can the Emperor's son-in-law put up his nose before he loses his touch for homicidal torture? Above all, why has wicked old Phocas taken Aelric under his wing?

To answer these questions, Aelric has nothing but beauty, charm, intellectual brilliance and a talent for cold and ruthless violence on his side.

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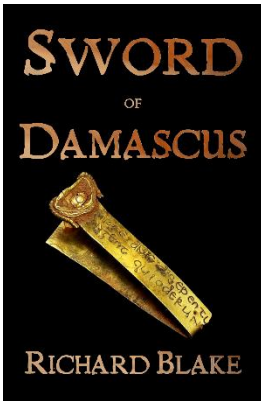


612 AD. Egypt, the jewel of the Roman Empire, seethes with unrest, as bread runs short and the Persians plot an invasion. In Alexandria, a city divided between Greeks and Egyptians by language, religion and far too few soldiers, the mummy of the Great Alexander, dead for nine hundred years, still has the power to calm the mob – or inflame it . . .

In this third novel of the series, Aelric of England has become the Lord Senator Alaric and the trusted Legate of the Emperor Heraclius. He's now in Alexandria, to send Egypt's harvest to Constantinople, and to force the unwilling Viceroy to give land to the peasants. But the city – with its factions and conspirators – thwarts him at every turn. And when an old enemy from Constantinople arrives, supposedly on a quest for a religious relic that could turn the course of the Persian war, he will have to use all his cunning, his charm and his talent for violence to survive.

NB - This new edition contains sixty pages from the rejected first draft. These were considered too shocking for a book already loaded with extreme and graphic violence.

Available from Amazon



687 AD. Expansive and triumphant, the Caliphate has stripped Egypt and Syria from the Byzantine Empire. Farther and farther back, the formerly hegemonic Empire has been pushed.

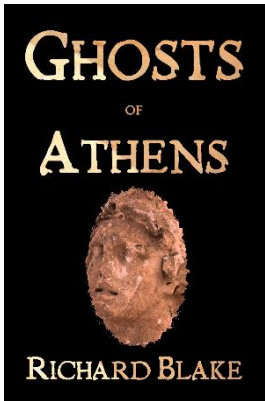
All that has saved it from destruction is the invention of Greek Fire. Is it a liquid? Is it a gas? Is it a gift from God or the Devil? Whatever its origin, all know it has broken the Islamic advance and restored Byzantine control of the seas.

But what is all this to old Aelric, now in his nineties, and a refugee in the remote wastes of northern England?

Nothing—until one band of northern barbarians turns up outside his monastery, and then another. Almost before he can draw breath, Aelric is a prisoner and, headed straight back into the snake pit of Mediterranean rivalries.

Will age have robbed Aelric of his charm, his intelligence, his resourcefulness, or of his talent for cold and homicidal duplicity?

Available from Amazon



612 AD. No longer the glorious cradle of all art and science, Athens is a provincial city in one of the Byzantine Empire's more down at heel provinces. Why, then, has the Emperor diverted Aelric's ship home from Egypt to send him here? Why has he included Priscus in the warrant? Surely, they have more important business in Constantinople. Isn't Aelric needed to save the Empire's finances, and Priscus to lead its armies against the Persians? Or has the Emperor decided to blame them for the bloodbath they presided over in Egypt?

Or could it be that Aelric's latest job just to manage a council of Eastern and Western Bishops more inclined to kick each other to death than agree to a wildly controversial position on the Nature of Christ?

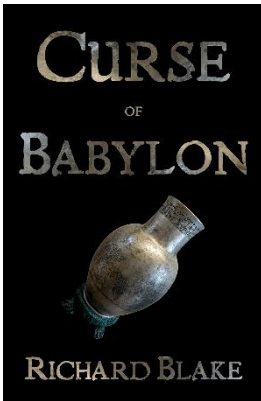
Hard to say. Impossible to say. The only certainty is that Aelric finds himself in a derelict palace of dark and endless corridors and of rooms that Martin, his cowardly secretary, assures him pulse with an ancient evil.

Add to this a headless corpse, drained of its blood, a bizarre cult of the self-emasculated, embezzlement, a city rabble on the edge of revolution – and the approach of an army rumoured to contain twenty million starving barbarians.

Is Aelric on a high level mission to save the Empire? Or has he been set up to fail? Or is the truth even worse than he can imagine?

This fifth novel in the series blends historical fiction with gothic horror. Not surprisingly, Aelric may find even the vile Priscus a welcome ally. Or perhaps he won't....

Available from Amazon



612 AD. 615 AD. A vengeful Persian tyrant prepares the final blow that will annihilate the Byzantine Empire.

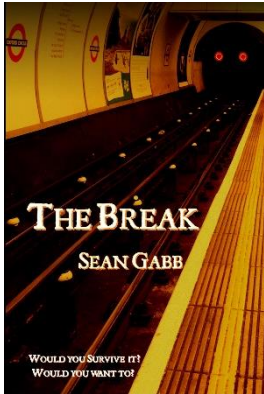
Back in Constantinople, though, Aelric of England – now the Lord Senator Alaric – has it made. He is almost as powerful as the Emperor. Seemingly without opposition, he dominates the vast and morally bankrupt capital. If, within his fortified palace, he revels in his books, his mood-altering substances, and the various delights of his serving girls and dancing boys, he alone is able to

conceive and to push forward reforms that are the Empire's only hope of survival, and perhaps of restoration to wealth and greatness.

But his domestic enemies are waiting for their moment to strike back. And the world's most terrifying military machine is assembling in secret beyond the mountains of the eastern frontier.

What is the Horn of Babylon? Is it really accursed? Who is Antonia? What is Shahin, the bestial Persian admiral, doing on a ship within sight of the Imperial City? What exactly does Chosroes, the still more bestial Great King of Persia, want from Aelric? Is Rado a barbarian thug or a military genius? Will Priscus, the vile and disgraced former Commander of the East, get his place in the history books? Must it be written in Aelric's blood?

Available from Amazon



Not Brexit. Not the Coronavirus. Worse – much worse. Or better?

In the mainland UK, it's a grotty, near-future police state based on lies and terror. Everywhere else, it's June 1065.

No one knows what caused The Break eleven months ago, but there's no sign of its end. England is settling into its new future a reindustrialising concentration camp. The rest of the world is watching...waiting...curious...

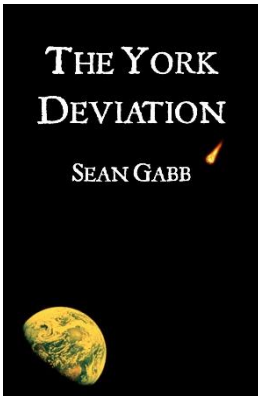
Jennifer thinks her family survived The Hunger because of their smuggling business - tampons and paracetamol to France, silver back to England. Little does she know what game her father was really playing, as she recrosses the Channel from an impromptu mission of her own. Little can she know how her life has already been torn apart.

Who has taken Jennifer's parents? Where are they? What is the Home Secretary up to with the Americans? Why is she so desperate to lay hands on Michael? Will Jesus Christ return to Earth above Oxford Circus? When will the "Doomsday Project" go live? What is it? Why is the Catholic Church so scared of it?

Can an English girl and a "boy from Byzantium" take on the British State, and win?

All will be answered - if Jennifer can stay alive in a post-apocalyptic London terrorised by cannibals, by thugs in uniform, and by motorbike gangs of Islamic suicide bombers.

Available from Amazon



Not many novels have Margaret Thatcher as a hero. Here is one of them.

Margaret Thatcher, Ronald Reagan, Tory-Boy Satanists, insane anti-American scientists, an army of hungry Lizards-from-beyond-the-Void. An asteroid impact.

Yes, it's the University of York in 1981 – though not as anyone now alive remembers it!

Edward Parker is a right-wing hypochondriac with a weight problem. Falling asleep one night as an ageing and ever-so-slightly failed barrister, he wakes in his youthful body, back in those moderately golden days of yore.

It's a dream. It's surely a dream. In great things and in little, everything seems at first exactly as it had been.

Only it isn't.

As the dream unfolds, and shows no appearance of ending, deviation after deviation from the remembered past accumulate, and settle into the appearance of a coherent narrative.

But where is this taking young Edward Parker? What is his old "friend" Michael Clarvin up to? Where have all his real friends gone? Who is "The Undertaker"? What horror lurks beneath the Temple of Isis being uncovered near the Main Library? Why is Professor Fairburn so desperate to lay hands on its power? What does he eat?

And can Margaret Thatcher become all-powerful?

If you were there, take this as the ultimate Walk Down Memory Lane. If you weren't, probably be grateful....