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**The Transformative Impact of the Slave Trade on the
Roman World, 580 - 720**

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**Thesis submitted for PhD
The University of Edinburgh
2015**

Declaration:

This is to certify that that the work contained within has been composed by me and is entirely my own work. No part of this thesis has been submitted for any other degree or professional qualification.

Signed:

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List of Abbreviations:

- AA Auctores Antiquissimi*
BICS Bulletin of the Institute of Classical Studies
CCSL Corpus Christianorum Series Latina
CSCO Corpus Scriptorum Christianorum Orientalium
CSEL Corpus Scriptorum Ecclesiasticorum Latinorum
CJ Codex Justinianus
CT Codex Theodosianus
DLH Decem Libri Historiarum,
DI Doctrina Iacobi nuper Baptizati
DOP Dumbarton Oaks Papers
EHR English Historical Review
EME Early Medieval Europe
FI Forum Iudicum
GT Gregory of Tours
HE Historia Ecclesiastica
JLA Journal of Late Antiquity
JRS Journal of Roman Studies
LÆ Laws of Æðelberht
LB Lex Burgundionum (Lex Gundobada)
LL Leges Liutprandi
LR Lex Ripuaria
MGH Monumenta Germaniae Historica
OED Oxford English Dictionary
PG Patrologia Graeca
PL Patrologia Latina
PLS Pactus Legis Salicae
PTA Poenitentiale Theodori Archiepiscopi
RBPH Revue Belge de Philologie et d'Histoire
RE Gregorii magni registrum epistularum
SRM Scriptorum Rerum Merovingicarum
VDB Vita Domnae Balthildis

Introduction:

Slave trading between antiquity and the middle ages

According to its first great historian, the story of the English Church began in a street market in Rome sometime around 580. There, Bede reported, a young cleric named Gregory joined a large crowd examining what newly arrived merchants had to sell:

*Dicunt, quia die quadam cum, aduenientibus nuper mercatoribus, multa uenalia in forum fuissent conlata, multi ad emendum confluxissent, et ipsum Gregorium inter alios aduenisse, ac uidisse inter alia pueros uenales positos candidi corporis, ac uenusti uultus, capillorum quoque forma egregia. Quos cum aspiceret, interrogauit, ut aiunt, de qua regione uel terra essent adlati. Dictumque est, quia de Brittania insula, cuius incolae talis essent aspectus.*¹

The conversation continued as Gregory quizzed them regarding their religion and homeland, including the part usually summarized as “*non Angli, sed Angeli!*” The slaves were from Deira and their king was named Ælla; Gregory made further puns on these. Afterward, he went to the Bishop of Rome, begging to be sent as a missionary to the English. Though the Pope was willing to send him, the Roman people would not allow Gregory to leave the city. Eventually, Gregory himself became Pope and dispatched Augustine and his companions to fulfil his ambition.

Gregory’s encounter with the angelic slaves has long been one of the most familiar stock-images of English history even though, in the principal source,² Bede himself warns that he cannot testify to its veracity as he only knows the story from

¹ Bede, *HE*, 2.1 (“Some merchants who had just arrived in Rome displayed many items for sale in the crowded marketplace. A large number of people came to buy, including Gregory himself. Among

² A somewhat different account is found in the late seventh or early eighth-century *Whitby Life of Gregory (Vita Sancti Gregorii I Papae, 9)*.

oral accounts.³ However, the very strength of an oral tradition makes it seem likely that the idea of English slaves being sold in Rome did not surprise Bede or his audience while, as Pope, Gregory himself wrote instructing his representatives in Marseille to purchase English slaves there.⁴ Other written evidence demonstrates that, at the end of the sixth century, there was a movement of slaves from the Anglo-Saxon kingdoms southwards to Gaul as well as a further movement of slaves from Gaul into the Mediterranean world. Whether or not Gregory ever actually had the reported conversation, it was widely seen as likely that slaves from Britain would be offered for sale in Rome.

This slave trade across Gaul, as well as a second route along the Atlantic coasts of western Europe, brought a steady supply of goods from the developed economies of the eastern and southern Mediterranean to these western lands while, in return, the peoples of those regions exported both raw materials and other humans. At the time of Gregory's papacy, this system of exchange linked all the parts of the former Roman Empire. Within little more than a century, however, it had all but disappeared. That trade within the former boundaries of the Roman Empire and its disappearance in the period between the time of Gregory's visit to the market (roughly 580) and Bede's recording of it (sometime before 731) is the subject of this thesis. Investigating the slave trade in the long seventh century in the post-Roman world will involve investigations into both slavery and commerce in a period in which neither was static. Instead, the seventh century was an era of rapid and profound change in many things, not least of which were transformations within the slave trade itself. Yet, the slave trade, as argued in this thesis, can be seen as providing a critical framework for understanding the economic and cultural

³ Bede, *HE*, 2.1.

⁴ *RE*, 6.10.

developments of the entire period. The slave trade and its fluctuations may even have been a driving force in some of the enormous social changes of the time that continue to shape the present world.

Four principal theses will be advanced and supported through the combination of a reading of the written sources (primarily, though not exclusively, those in Arabic, Greek, and Latin), an examination of relevant archaeological data, and the use of analogous evidence from other periods. These four propositions may be seen as the basis of the overall argument demonstrating

- 1) that slaves were numerous and that they played a crucial role in the societies of the post-Roman world,
- 2) that the continuing function of these societies required a greater supply of slaves than could be provided internally,
- 3) that this resulted in a long-distance slave trade that was a key force in the post-Roman system of exchange in the Mediterranean world,
- 4) and that the breakdown of this system of trade and of many contacts across the Mediterranean during the seventh century was caused primarily by alterations in the sources of the slave supply of the most developed economies.

None of these four has been argued previously though academics have been increasingly examining the pre-modern history of slavery and of the slave trade. Though numerous articles and volumes have looked at particular aspects of slave-systems in the periods immediately before⁵ or after,⁶ none have examined the slave trading systems of the long seventh century itself. Similarly, those works that do touch on it have been largely concerned with other issues or focussed solely on a

⁵ K. Harper, *Slavery in the Late Roman World, AD 275–425*, (Cambridge, 2011).

⁶ M. McCormick, 'New Light on the 'Dark Ages': How the Slave Trade Fuelled the Carolingian Economy', *Past and Present*, 177, (2002), pp. 17-54.

single region, whether that is the Byzantine Empire,⁷ the British Isles,⁸ Spain,⁹ Gaul,¹⁰ or the earliest Islamic societies.¹¹ Older works were similarly limited in geographic scope, with even the broadest concentrating solely on European¹² or Islamic¹³ materials. No one has previously attempted to bring together materials from the whole of the post-Roman world in a single coherent account nor has any prior scholarship shown either the ubiquity of slavery in the period or the extent of the slave trade at the time. By putting together these four arguments, an overall thesis that provides an original synthesis and reconciliation between divergent interpretations of the economies of the end of the Roman Empire and the formation of the medieval world will be created.

Nearly a century ago, Henri Pirenne first advanced his eponymous thesis that the Mediterranean trading system of the ancient world did not end with the barbarian invasions but persisted until the great Muslim conquests of the seventh and early eighth centuries.¹⁴ Only when the links between the societies of the Mediterranean littoral were broken was the North Sea-focused economy of medieval Europe able to

⁷ Y. Rotman, *Les Esclaves et l'Esclavage de la Méditerranée Antique à la Méditerranée Médiévale, VI^e - XI^e Siècles*, (Paris, 2004).

⁸ D. Pelteret, *Slavery in Early Mediaeval England: From the Reign of Alfred Until the Twelfth Century* (Woodbridge, 1995); D. Wyatt, *Slaves and Warriors in Medieval Britain and Ireland, 800-1200*, (Leiden, 2009).

⁹ W. D. Phillips, *Slavery in Medieval and Early Modern Iberia*, (Philadelphia, 2013).

¹⁰ D. Bondue, *De Servus a Sclavus: La Fin de l'Esclavage Antique (371-918)*, (Paris, 2011).

¹¹ K. Ali, *Marriage and Slavery in Early Islam*, (Cambridge, Mass., 2010).

¹² C. Verlinden, *L'Esclavage dans l'Europe Médiévale, 1: Péninsule Ibérique - France*, (Bruges, 1955) and 2: *Italie; Colonies Italiennes du Levant; Levant Latin, Empire Byzantin*, (Ghent, 1977); H. Nehlsen, *Sklavenrecht zwischen Antike und Mittelalter: Germanisches und Römisches Recht in den Germanischen Rechtsaufzeichnungen, I. Ostgoten, Westgoten, Franken, Langobarden*, (Göttingen, 1972); P. Dockès, *La Libération Médiévale*, (Paris, 1982).

¹³ D. Pipes, *Slave Soldiers and Islam: The Genesis of a Military System*, (New Haven, 1981); B. Lewis, *Race and Slavery in the Middle East: An Historical Enquiry*, (Oxford, 1990).

¹⁴ H. Pirenne, 'Mahomet et Charlemagne', *RBPH*, 1 (1922), pp. 77-86; 'Un Contraste Économique: Mérovingiens et Carolingiens', *RBPH*, 2 (1923), pp. 223-235; *Medieval Cities: Their Origins and the Revival of Trade*, (Princeton, 1925); *Mahomet et Charlemagne*, (Paris, 1937).

emerge. Pirenne's ideas, though, were soon judged as flawed¹⁵ even as the recognition of cultural continuity across the barbarian invasions became more widespread.

Where Pirenne had seen economic continuity, more recent contributions by scholars such as Chris Wickham¹⁶ and Bryan Ward-Perkins¹⁷ have helped to form an emerging consensus. The fifth-century invasions once again appear central to a narrative of cultural collapse in the Western Roman Empire due to the impact they had undeniably had on state structures and command economies (regardless of whether the collapse is seen through a catastrophist or gradualist lens). The essential difference between the systems of exchange of the late Roman world and what had replaced it are now widely recognize thanks to the steady advance of archaeological knowledge and understanding of what they represent.¹⁸ It is clear that where the Roman economy of the fourth century involved bulk exchange of quite ordinary goods reaching many layers of Roman society as well as the redistribution of taxes over long distances, the international trade of sixth-century Merovingian Gaul that had excited Pirenne was largely composed of much smaller quantities of what were largely luxury goods with a far smaller role for the fiscal state.¹⁹

While the collapse of the West Roman state had a cascading effect on systems of exchange driven by state spending as well as on urban and agricultural systems dependent on them, it did not necessitate a complete end to all trade and communication. Pirenne had not been wrong in seeing evidence of continued ties

¹⁵ E.g., R. S. Lopez, 'Muhammad and Charlemagne: A Revision', *Speculum*, 18:1, (January 1943), pp. 14-38; A. Riising, 'The Fate of Henri Pirenne's Thesis on the Consequence of Islamic Expansion', *Classica et Mediaevalia*, 13, (1952), pp. 87-130, etc.

¹⁶ C. Wickham, *Framing the Early Middle Ages: Europe and the Mediterranean, 400-800*, (Oxford, 2005), esp. pp. 708-720.

¹⁷ B. Ward-Perkins, *The Fall of Rome and the End of Civilization*, (Oxford, 2005), pp. 128-137.

¹⁸ See S. Loseby, 'Post-Roman Economies', in W. Scheidel, ed., *The Cambridge Companion to the Roman Economy*, (Cambridge, 2012), pp. 334-360 for a useful description.

¹⁹ C. Wickham, 'The Mediterranean Around 800: On the Brink of the Second Trade Cycle', *DOP*, 58, (2004), pp. 162-164.

lasting well into the seventh century though he had been mistaken when he confused that trading system with the full-blown developed economy of the later Roman Empire. Similarly, while the collapse of the Western Roman Empire undoubtedly had a catastrophic effect on fifth-century economies and culture, that collapse had been far from complete even in the West itself and a system of exchange persisted in the western Mediterranean throughout the sixth and much of the seventh century, connecting the post-Roman west with the eastern Mediterranean. The intervention of the East Roman state in Africa, Italy, and Spain under Justinian reversed some of the disintegration while trade continued with regions that were no longer under Imperial control.

To understand what happened, what had come before must also be determined. Unfortunately, there is no general consensus on what is meant by the “Roman economy” and at least two visions can be supposed. If the Roman economy functioned in ways that might be seen as something at least analogous to capitalism,²⁰ it is easy to imagine a Pirennean model for the centuries after the fall; merchants and trade would continue unabated after the end of the state and might become far more visible as the state sector shrank. Coins, for instance, would in this vision have existed primarily in the Roman world as tokens of exchange and the volume of numismatic finds could be used to demonstrate the scale of commerce and either its persistence or decline.²¹ If, however, the coinage had only ever been used as money in the cities and their use had been limited even there,²² then the Roman economy might be understood primarily as a clear example of a tributary mode of

²⁰ As postulated in K. Dark, ‘Proto-industrialization and the economy of the Roman Empire,’ in M. Polfer, ed., *L’Artisanat Romain: évolutions, continuités et ruptures. Actes du 2e Colloque d’Erpeldange 26-28 Octobre 2001 (Instrumentum monograph 20)*, (Montagnac, 2003), pp. 20-21.

²¹ Per E. Lo Cascio, ‘The Function of Gold Coinage in the Monetary Economy of the Roman Empire,’ in W. V. Harris, ed., *The Monetary Systems of the Greeks and Romans*, (Oxford, 2008) pp. 160-173.

²² As in M. Crawford, ‘Money and Exchange in the Roman World.’ *JRS*, 60 (1970), pp. 40-48.

production. In this type of model, the breakdown of state organization would have been far more cataclysmic in its effects. A full discussion of these views and their problems, however, is beyond the scope of the present study. Suffice it to say that neither extreme model can be fully embraced though both contain significant insights.

Instead, in the pages that follow, a middle path will be followed in the creation of a synthesis of these economic models as an explanatory framework for whatever level of exchange followed the collapse of the West Roman state. Here, the insights made into the scale of the Roman slave trade by Keith Bradley²³ and Walter Scheidel²⁴ prove useful as they suggest an enormous and pervasive trade that might leave few, if any, traces in the archaeological record. Slave trading can even be seen, as Michael McCormick has argued,²⁵ as having played a crucial part in the foundations of European economic expansion in the middle ages. While McCormick appears to embrace a very low level of economic activity in the immediately preceding centuries,²⁶ the significance of the slave trade in systems of exchange can be extended backwards in time and will be shown to have been central to the narrative of the transformation of the Roman world in this work.

In order to advance these arguments, the work has been divided into four chapters. While each will primarily address one of the key propositions, evidence and arguments for all will occur throughout the text. There will also be attempts to address additional specific questions as well as to cumulatively describe the slave trade and its broader impact in the period. Before demonstrating that slaves were

²³ K. Bradley, 'On the Roman Slave Supply and Slavebreeding', in Moses I. Finley, ed., *Classical Slavery*, (London, 1987), pp. 53-81.

²⁴ W. Scheidel, 'Human Mobility in Roman Italy, II: The Slave Population', *JRS*, 95, (2005), pp. 64-79; 'Quantifying the Sources of Slaves in the Early Roman Empire', *JRS*, 87, (1997), pp. 156-169; 'The Roman Slave Supply,' in K. Bradley and P. Cartledge, ed., *The Cambridge World History of Slavery, Vol. 1: The Ancient Mediterranean World*, (Cambridge, 2011), pp. 287-311, etc.

²⁵ M. McCormick, 'New Light on the 'Dark Ages'', pp. 17-54.

²⁶ M. McCormick, *Origins of the European Economy: Communications and Commerce, AD 300 – 900*, (Cambridge, 2001), p. 30.

numerous and that they played a crucial role in the societies of the post-Roman world, it will, of course, be necessary to define what is meant by 'slave' and what is not, separating it from other types of un-freedom to determine who it is that will be discussed in the remainder of the text.

Using contemporary sources as well as more modern ones, a working definition will be proposed that will allow some discussion of who the enslaved were in the period and to examine what function slaves had in the societies of the time. 'Slaves' will be understood as a separate category from related groups, even when those might be combined in the same term in the sources. The English word 'slave' will be used throughout to describe a status defined in legal, economical, and social terms. These will be clarified as each of these, as well as (if not chiefly) the slave's lack of autonomy within the slave's own body, marks off slaves from other groups lacking freedom such as peasant-cultivators bound to the land, wage labourers, prisoners, and others in relationships of dependency. Understanding this will allow the ubiquity of slavery in the societies of the time to come into focus. A short discussion of the many roles of slaves in broader economic structures or in domestic life will follow. Two particular sub-groups of slaves, eunuchs and concubines, will be examined due to their importance in tracing the movements of enslaved peoples and in accounting for the majority of named individual slaves in the period.

Next, in order to show that the continuing function of these societies required a greater supply of slaves than could be provided internally, it will be necessary to look at the demography of the slave population, paths to enslavement, and the sources of slaves. The population dynamics of slaves in the period will be explored in light of contemporary evidence and analogous situations. As these will suggest a constant need for new slaves in the societies of the post-Roman world, their origin

will then be examined. Numerous slaves came from un-enslaved local populations through various legal and extra-legal means. However, these could not have been sufficient to meet the demand for slaves, creating a situation that would require constant importation of slaves from elsewhere. Warfare and its aftermath appear to have been one of the primary means of obtaining slaves; arguably, obtaining slaves might even have been one of the primary purposes of warfare. In areas where warfare was constant, supplying the market for slaves would have been relatively simple. However, in the late sixth century, the most developed economies and most populous regions were frequently at a distance from such areas. To meet their needs, slaves would need to be brought to them via trade.

This constant demand resulted in a long-distance slave trade that was a key force in the post-Roman system of exchange in the Mediterranean world. Looking at the slave trade itself will involve several related discussions including what it means to think of humans as articles of trade as well as the nature of commerce and exchange in the period. While some previous scholarship has argued that Jews dominated the early medieval slave trade, this will be demonstrated to be false and based on misinterpretation of the written evidence. Instead, that evidence will help to understand the larger merchant diaspora that sometimes appears to have existed in the late sixth- and early seventh-century Mediterranean as well as the nature of the post-Roman system of exchange. This system and its development out of the late Roman economy will be explored, as will its differences from the systems of exchange in the preceding era. The post-Roman system of exchange will be argued as being fundamentally one of inequality prefaced on the dependency of peripheral regions on the more economically developed central areas.

Finally, it will be demonstrated that the breakdown of this system of trade and of many contacts across the Mediterranean during the seventh century was caused primarily by alterations in the sources of the slave supply of the most developed economies. As a preliminary, the question of an ideological role of Islam will be explored by examining the views and practices regarding slavery among the very first Muslims and the ways in which it may have differed from that found among the Christians of the contemporary Mediterranean. Next, the Persian and Arab conquests of the Roman Near East will be shown to, in their initial stages to, have had surprisingly little lasting impact on either the slave trade or the system of exchange that it drove. Instead, only after the Arabs had conquered Egypt and the Levant did they begin to undertake military campaigns that, whether intentionally or not, met the labour demands of those areas. The Arab conquest of North Africa was, it will be demonstrated, almost an accidental by-product of the provision of slave labour to these more developed economies. However, the replacement of other sources of slaves by those being taken eastwards from Africa meant the final collapse of the post-Roman system of exchange and its replacement by a new system in which Western Europe would no longer be integrated into a broader Mediterranean-centred economic structure.

The two main bodies of evidence for trade in the period are, of course, the surviving textual sources and the recovered archaeological remains. Neither is in itself particularly satisfactory and an over-reliance on one might easily lead to the development of false notions of the period. Regardless of their individual genre or their language of composition, all these texts were written in response to the questions of their own time, meeting the needs of their authors and their intended audiences. In even the most developed regions, only a small fraction of the

population would have possessed literacy skills. Regardless of whether the authors were laity or clergy or of any particular faith and of whether the texts themselves were intended for literary, legal, or more quotidian purposes, nearly all of them were written by males from the upper-most levels of their respective societies for other members of their own segment of society. The lives and activities of more ordinary people, whether slave or free, were only occasionally seen as possessing innate interest. Similarly, those living within a society or economy seldom remarked upon the everyday functions of their own milieus as such things were often assumed. An over-reliance on the written word might then lead to the discounting of even the existence of large segments of these societies as groups such as slaves rarely appear and even when they do seldom appear as individuals.

Additionally, the surviving texts from the period are almost all problematic in themselves. Written in a variety of languages, most only survive by chance or because they addressed questions that held interest for people of later periods. Quite frequently, they can be seen as better reflecting those more recent times than the period under examination. Arguably, the narrative sources are in some ways the most problematic. Certainly, many of the Byzantine and Islamic sources on the seventh century post-date the events that they relate by a considerable amount and have been heavily filtered through the perspectives of post-Iconoclastic or 'Abbasid authors. Even the other main corpuses have been reshaped by later generations. Whether they were copying or reshaping older materials in Aachen, Baghdad, or Constantinople, ninth-century writers were likely to depict seventh-century Merovingian, Umayyad, and Heraclian rulers in a negative light while strengthening the claims of their own contemporaries. Even when not explicitly writing for an official audience, these later writers might have biases related to their own situations.

The Arabic conquest narratives, for instance, sometimes give an almost overwhelming level of detail. These should, however, not be taken at face value but should be seen as having been formed primarily to establish the claims of various Muslim lineages for precedence, as arguments in land-holding and taxation disputes, or as attempts to prove legal positions in later periods.²⁷ Similarly, Christian authors, including even the Venerable Bede and Gregory of Tours, often wrote primarily to advance the cult of a local saint or the precedence of a particular bishopric rather than simply narrating events. Ignoring these authorial intentions may leave out much of the meaning and usefulness of the texts.

Yet, even with their biases, these types of sources can prove useful. While it may sometimes seem that the approach that has been followed towards the sources is overly positivist, if not actually naïve, the core assumptions are that the sources do not necessarily describe reality but reflect the perceptions of their authors. They need to be read in parallel and alongside archaeology and other material in order to elucidate actual conditions. Slaves, slavery, and even commerce are, at best, only the occasional interest of any of the authors of the surviving texts from the period. In some ways, that can actually be an advantage. The author of a discussion may be intending to demonstrate the fortitude of a particular saint, to clarify a confusing *āyāt*, or explain the origin of a tax and only unintentionally give evidence regarding slavery and the slave trade. The very lack of centrality of slavery in the material may improve its chances of veracity.

²⁷ R. Brunschvig, 'Ibn Abdhahakam et la Conquête de l'Afrique du Nord par les Arabes', *Annales de l'Institut d'Etudes Orientales*, 6, (1942–44), pp. 108-155; N. Khalek, *Damascus After the Muslim Conquest: Text and Image in Early Islam*, (Oxford, 2011), pp. 52-66; etc.

Unfortunately, while there are references to no longer extant texts that would doubtless answer many questions,²⁸ only a few fragments of economic documents have survived and, outside Egypt, even those are virtually non-existent. At the same time, though, there is a relative wealth of legal texts from the period. These contain information that may be extrapolated to draw broader conclusions but legal writings are notoriously slippery when it comes to questions of whether an individual law describes the world as its framers wish it to be and whether the situation described is exceptional or normative for the time and place of its composition. The evidence for the scale of slavery in the period, then, needs to be extrapolated from sources that only tangentially refer to slaves, though, as will be shown, when slaves appear, they seem to be extremely numerous. Similarly, the evidence for large-scale enslavements and changes in the slave trade is nowhere as explicit as might be hoped. Instead, it has to be reconstructed from reading sources in Arabic, Greek, and Latin alongside each other with the aim of uncovering correlations between them. Only when this mass of evidence is examined can the plausibility of the ideas put forward here be judged. All of these pieces of evidence will be discussed further when they are encountered.

Archaeology, of course, can give a rather different perspective. Excavations have revealed the mundane life of the period in numerous locations while presenting concrete evidence for exchange over various distances. Yet, while archaeology can

²⁸ Comprehensive censuses were undertaken by the new Arab conquerors of Syria (Theophanes, *Chronographia*, 341, and Michael the Syrian, *Chronicle*, 2.426, refer to a census undertaken by Umar ibn al-Khattāb, in 638/9; Michael the Syrian, 2.450, refers to a census of Syria under Mu'awiyah; Pseudo-Dionysius of Tel-Mahre, *Chronicle of Zuqnin*, 154, mentions a census in 691/2); Egypt (Ibn 'Abd al-Ḥakam, *Futūḥ Miṣr*, 152-3); and North Africa (Ibn 'Abd al-Ḥakam, 80; W. al-Qadi, 'Population Census and Land Surveys under the Umayyads (41-132/661-750)', *Der Islam*, 83:2 (July 2008), pp. 341-416, surveys most of the evidence for early Islamic censuses. Presumably, the Byzantines also maintained detailed tax-registers though none of these, with the exception of some extremely limited materials from Egypt, have survived (F. R. Trombley, 'Saw Rus ibn al-Muqaffa and the Christians of Umayyad Egypt: War and Society in a Documentary Context', in P. Sijpesteijn and L. Sundelin, eds, *Papyrology and the History Of Early Islamic Egypt*, (Leiden, 2004), p. 203).

show that exchange happened, it cannot explain how it occurred; direct commerce or that carried through intermediaries, gifts, and tribute might be indistinguishable and cannot explain what might have gone in the opposite direction. Direct, unambiguous evidence of slaves too is seldom possible without other information; the home or the grave of a slave might be very hard to distinguish from that of a free person. The extremely recent emergence of genetic studies, isotope analysis, and other methods of looking at human remains has opened up the possibility of finding clearer evidence for the movement of individuals but, unfortunately, even when a person can be shown to have been a migrant over long distances or that markedly different genetic types existed in the same place, it will seldom be possible to determine the social status of the deceased without any other evidence.²⁹ Yet, archaeology clearly shows ranges of possibilities for trading systems as well as their volume and of changes in those patterns. These new techniques can demonstrate unquestionably the movement of individuals from, for example, the Mediterranean to western Britain³⁰ or of peoples across the North Sea.³¹ It can help set the parameters for what it is possible to discuss.

Finally, in addition to these source materials from the period, other evidence from both earlier and later periods will be used in order to better understand social and economic conditions in the long seventh century. Though exact analogies can

²⁹ E.g., the discovery of the remains of individuals with mtDNA linking to populations in the Far East and sub-Saharan Africa in first century burials at Vagnari (T. Prowse, J. Barta, T. von Hunnius, and A. M. Small, 'Stable isotope and mtDNA evidence for geographic origins at the site of Vagnari, South Italy', *Journal of Roman Archaeology*, 78:1, (2010), pp. 189-191); despite rampant speculation (cf., O. Jarus, 'Ambassador or slave? East Asian skeleton discovered in Vagnari Roman Cemetery', *The Independent*, 26 January 2010) no more than that these two individuals had ancestral links with distant lands can be safely said.

³⁰ K.A. Hemer, J.A. Evans, C.A. Chenery, and A.L. Lamb, 'Evidence of Early Medieval Trade and Migration Between Wales and the Mediterranean Sea Region', *Journal of Archaeological Science*, 40:5, (May 2013), pp. 2352-2359.

³¹ M. G. Thomas, M. P. Stumpf, and H. Harke, 'Evidence for an Apartheid-like Social Structure in Early Anglo-Saxon England', *Proceedings of the Royal Society, B: Biological Sciences*, 273:1601, (October 2006), pp. 2651-2657.

never be found, it is possible to find parallel situations in better-documented eras that allow some attempts to quantify and comprehend social conditions. While these can never substitute for direct evidence, data drawn from historical slave-systems in better-documented times and places may help establish parameters in which to place evidence from the post-Roman world. Similarly, ideas drawn from modern Development and World Systems theory will help to create plausible reconstructions.

While this may be a bold plan, it may not be so odd that a project like this has not been previously attempted. For many years, most scholars working on this period ignored the role of slavery and slave trading in the period. Some of this neglect may have been due to the relative difficulty of the evidence and some may be due to distaste, discomfort, or disinterest in the subject. More than these, though, is the pervasive assumption that, if slavery existed in these centuries, it was in the process of disappearing as a major part in the societies of what had been the Roman world. It simply was not seen as being worth studying by many otherwise diligent scholars. Only in very recent years has it begun to emerge as a subject worthy of attention.

Curiously, several different sets of a priori assumptions reinforced the notion that slavery did not matter in the fifth to ninth centuries. Nineteenth-century Christian apologists, including both Protestant abolitionists and Catholic ultramontanists, had argued that the Christian church had always opposed slavery and that, as a result, slavery must have declined in the Christianized Roman Empire and its successor states. No less a figure than William Wilberforce himself would, during the final parliamentary debate on the Abolition of the Slave Trade in 1806, state that:

*indeed it is one of the glories of Christianity to have gradually extinguished the Slave Trade, and even slavery, wherever its influence was felt.*³²

Wilberforce was hardly alone in that interpretation and it was a commonplace among both abolitionists and their academic contemporaries. The two were not always distinct as can be seen in the work of Henri Alexandre Wallon, prominent in the ending of slavery in the French colonies and the foundation of the Troisième République as well as a widely read historian of slavery. In his *Histoire de l'esclavage dans l'antiquité*, first published in 1847, he explained at great length how Christianity had affected this change.³³ Like Wilberforce, he linked it to the contemporary efforts to end slavery though he also saw the French revolutionary ideals of *liberté, égalité, fraternité* as being embedded in an inherently anti-slavery Christianity.³⁴ Wallon's work would be expanded upon by Paul Allard in *Les Esclaves Chrétiens Depuis les Premiers Temps de L'Église Jusqu'à la Fin de la Domination Romaine en Occident*, published in 1876. His work was premised on the existence of a long-term drive by the Catholic Church to end slavery and he would read many texts as abolitionist in spirit that were not in fact. His readings would be repeated down to the present, often, apparently without checking if the citations that he gave accurately reflected the sources.³⁵

Allard and his imitators frequently dismiss the Biblical teachings on slavery by linguistic slight of hand, with Anglophones translating terms such as *δοῦλος* as

³² *Substance of the debates on a resolution for abolishing the slave trade which was moved in the House of Commons 10th June, 1806 and in the House of Lords 24th June, 1806*, (London, 1806), p. 30.

³³ H. A. Wallon, *Histoire de l'esclavage dans l'antiquité*, vol. 3, 2nd ed., (Paris, 1879), pp. 343-426.

³⁴ H. A. Wallon, *Histoire de l'esclavage dans l'antiquité*, pp. 3-6.

³⁵ See, for example, R. Stark, *The Victory of Reason: How Christianity Led to Freedom, Capitalism, and Western Success*, (New York: 2005), pp. 26 -31 and M. Brumley, 'Let My People Go: The Catholic Church and Slavery', *This Rock* (July/August 1999), pp. 16-21. Allard's own contribution to *The Catholic Encyclopaedia* ('Slavery and Christianity', Vol. 14, (New York, 1912), pp. 36-39) has furthered this trend even further, especially as it was one of the first pieces on the subject to be digitized.

‘servant’ rather than as the more correct ‘slave’ or by making claims that any example of a Christian figure ransoming captives is an example of abolitionism and finding in bans on Jews or other non-Christians owning Christian slaves a staunchly anti-slavery view. None of these can actually be taken as being condemnatory of slavery. As Jennifer Glancy has demonstrated, the early church was neither concerned with ending slavery nor did the church condemn it.³⁶ With the single notable exception in Gregory of Nyssa’s *Fourth Homily on Ecclesiastes*,³⁷ anything resembling modern anti-slavery rhetoric is notably absent from the voluminous writings of the Church Fathers or the secular figures that they ought to have influenced.³⁸

More careful apologists have acknowledged these problems and have argued instead that the persistence of enslaved labour on late antique estates must have been an aberration or were representative of a system in terminal decline. A particularly strong example of this tendency can be found in the recent publications of Kyle Harper. After a masterful survey of the sources on fourth-century slavery, Harper turns to an examination of slavery at the time of Gregory the Great and contends that (without providing real evidence) Gregory’s concerns with Jewish ownership of Christian slaves and his apparent distance from the main slave-trading routes demonstrate that Roman slave systems had collapsed well before Gregory’s time.³⁹ Whether or not they had, his argument fails as he does not take into account the rather significant (and indisputable) changes that had happened to the city of Rome

³⁶ J. Glancy, *Slavery in Early Christianity*, (Oxford, 2002), p. 72, pp. 90-92, etc.

³⁷ Gregory of Nyssa, *In Ecclesiasten homiliae IV*.

³⁸ Though it is arguable that various heterodox groups (such as the African Circumcellions mentioned by Augustine and the followers of a certain Eustathius condemned at the Synod of Gangra) *might* have been consistently opposed to slavery, none of their own statements survive and they were categorically rejected by the mainstream of the Christian Church (J. Glancy, *Slavery as a Moral Problem in the Early Church and Today*, (Minneapolis, 2011), pp. 90-96).

³⁹ K. Harper, *Slavery in the Late Roman World, AD 275 – 425*, (Cambridge, 2011), pp. 497-505).

in the previous two centuries (such as its rather precipitous population decline).

Instead, the conclusion follows from the overall thesis of the work; slavery went into steep decline as an institution in the fifth century due to the impact of Christian ideas.⁴⁰ It seems, at best, unproven and runs counter to much of the evidence; Harper merely asserts that large-scale slavery ends at that time and, arguably, finding evidence for a decline in the period seems (to the current author) to be based more on assumptions regarding Christianity than on facts.⁴¹

Certainly, a great deal of other evidence could be marshalled to support the notion that the Church had done nothing to diminish the strength of the slave systems; neither the surviving ecclesiastic documents nor imperial legislation of the Christian phase shows any clear evidence of this. Whatever impact Christianity may have had on the culture of late antiquity, ending slavery was simply not an intended goal of late antique Christians.

A variant reading of this argument is that slavery had all but vanished under the impact of Christianity but was revived and expanded as an institution by the advent of Islam. Though, as will be seen, this cannot be supported from the facts, outside mainstream academia, it appears to have been gaining popularity in the third millennium. One of the more recent works of pseudo-scholarship on the early middle ages, for instance, claims that a desire to enslave was what drove Islamic expansion.⁴² While that author may be taking an extreme view, it is not completely unprecedented; in the few year since its 2012 publication, a self-proclaimed Islamic caliphate has even put forward the claim that chattel slavery is a necessity in a truly Islamic society and their view of a static Islam has even been used to justify the

⁴⁰ K. Harper, *Slavery in the Late Roman World*, p. 273, etc

⁴¹ The converse, of course, is also true and it is hoped that the present author is not reading slaves into the evidence based on his own unacknowledged assumptions.

⁴² E. Scott, *Muhammad and Charlemagne Revisited: The History of a Controversy*, (Nashville, 2012), pp. 240-241.

enslavement of members of defeated non-Muslim groups.⁴³ Before their emergence, though, that interpretation was far from the view of even radical Islamists.

Muḥammad Qutb, one of the intellectual leaders of the Muslim Brotherhood, had argued that while slavery under Islam was a far better institution than virtually any comparable form of labour organisation⁴⁴

*Islam never approved of slavery in principle as it strove hard with all the different means at its disposal to eliminate slavery once for all. It tolerated its existence for the time being just because it had no other alternative for it concerned not only Muslims but those people as well who were not under its direct control. They held the Muslims in servitude making them suffer the worst possible forms of humiliation and miseries which drove the Muslims to adopt with respect to these people a Course of like treatment, at least in treating their prisoners of war as slaves though not in their actual transactions with these slaves afterwards.*⁴⁵

Similar arguments to his can be found in most other contemporary Islamic apologetics. Like modern Christians, the need to reconcile revealed texts and revered traditions with modern conceptions of morality necessitates rhetorical sleights of hand or dismissal of evidence.

Whether advanced by Islamists or Islamophobes, many ideas about Islam and slavery seem to be backwards projections from the ‘Abbasid period or even later onto the world of Muḥammad and his immediate successors. Certainly, Islamic societies of the central middle ages featured much larger numbers of slaves than most of their European Christian contemporaries. Sometimes, slaves were even in positions of military and political authority, making it easy to imagine that slavery

⁴³ ‘The Revival of Slavery Before the Hour’, *Dabiq*, 4, Dhul-Hijjah 1435 (September/October 2014), pp. 14-17 (English language journal of the Islamic State in ‘Iraq and the Levant).

⁴⁴ M. Qutb, *Islam, the Misunderstood Religion*, 6th ed., (Salmiah, 1997), pp. 24 -42.

⁴⁵ M. Qutb, *Islam, the Misunderstood Religion*, p. 37.

was somehow inherent to Islamicate society and that there was something peculiarly Islamic in its practice.

Even when the discussions on the subject are lacking obvious ideological intentions, they have tended to presume that the appearance of Islam brought a new conception of slavery and an increase in its importance. The idea that Islam promoted (or still promotes) slavery (or opposes it) often has more to do with very recent debates as to whether Islam is antithetical to supposed Judaeo-Christian, Western or democratic notions of freedom. That is not particularly relevant to this subject but both should be noted as, even more than many other topics covered in the present work, polemical and apologetic discussions of slavery and Islam continue at the present-day and together obscure any actual facts.

As will be seen, the early Muslim elite, just as their Christian predecessors and contemporaries had done, fully accepted the existing slave based economy. Neither Christians nor Muslims advocated abolitionism nor did even the most pious among them see slavery as anything but a part of the natural order and neither religion brought about either a diminishment or an increase in slavery. Neither religious nor political changes had significantly affected the conceptualisation or ubiquity of slavery. While both Christianity and Islam recognised a common humanity shared by both slaves and masters, that did not lead their followers to work for an immediate abolition of slavery even if their leaders might have been at least theoretically interested in abating some of its cruelties. At most, by the end of the period under review, the two faiths had begun to lay the groundwork for a gradual restriction of the possibilities of enslavement for believers. Even that, though, would take many centuries to become more than theoretical.

Religious polemics and *idées fixes* ultimately derived from them, though, are far from the only factors in preventing a full exploration of the history of slavery in late antiquity and the early middle ages. Early modern nationalist historiographies helped shape the idea that slavery had not been important in post-Roman times. Few of the academics who were engaged in up-building their own nations desired to see widespread slavery in their own pasts (unless it was ‘under the yoke’ of a national enemy from which the nation might emerge victorious). National histories and myths avoided slaving and slave-owning pasts, emphasising instead notions of primordial freedom. While many of those nationalist historiographies that had developed by the nineteenth century have long since been abandoned among academics studying the period, they persist in popular imagination and even the most fastidious of scholars will have inadvertently absorbed a great amount of such thought. In those traditions, ‘our’ ancestors were noble and good or, if they were not the all-conquering heroes, they were the victims.⁴⁶

While a full unraveling of the development, interaction, and proliferation of these ideas might be fascinating and is probably ultimately necessary, it is beyond the scope of the thesis and has far more to do with modern intellectual history than with anything that might have occurred in the first millennium. These ideas, however, would be regularly restated and refined but the idea of the insignificance of slavery in this period would remain until very recent times. Much of this is probably due to the impact of the present on the thinking of the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries. Abolitionism and post-abolitionist understandings of slavery became general. In the nineteenth century, of course, the Atlantic slave trade was suppressed

⁴⁶ D. McCrone, *The Sociology of Nationalism: Tomorrow's Ancestors*, (London, 2002), pp. 44-63 (or any of a great deal of other literature on the invention of nations, the myth of the Norman yoke, and other similar topics).

and chattel slavery legally ended in many parts of the world. Frequently, former slaves were transformed into tenants and sharecroppers on the estates where they had formerly toiled and, perhaps, this model lay large in the minds of those studying the previous millennium. Certainly the economic justifications for emancipation first formulated by Adam Smith formed a lasting impression on readers of the more distant past.⁴⁷

While writing newspaper articles describing the contemporary end of slavery in North America,⁴⁸ Karl Marx and Friedrich Engels were building on some of these concepts in their analyses of the present while creating a powerful vision of the past. In their telling, they developed their own ideas of a transition from a slave mode of production in the Roman Empire to a feudal mode in the European middle ages that implied a disappearance of slavery in the first millennium. Feudalism had been preceded by the 'slave-economy' of the second stage of development and slavery was characteristic of the societies of Classical Greece and Rome.⁴⁹ Slavery was presumed to have disappeared as an important factor (at least in western Europe) some time around the fall of the Western Roman Empire; debate might focus on when and how but, for many Marxists and those influenced by them, it was assumed as established.

The only question that needed to be answered, it seemed, was when the transition from Roman slavery to medieval serfdom had happened. One of the more famous of these arguments might be found in the writings of Max Weber; looking at

⁴⁷ D. Wyatt, *Slaves and Warriors in Medieval Britain and Ireland, 800-1200*, (Leiden, 2009), pp. 16-17.

⁴⁸ See G. Runkle, 'Karl Marx and the American Civil War,' *Comparative Studies in Society and History*, 6: 2 (1964), pp. 117-141.

⁴⁹ K. Marx, *Capital: A Critique of Political Economy, vol. III – Part I, The Process of Capitalist Production as a Whole*, E. Untermann, trans., (Chicago, 1909), p. 698; *Grundrisse der Kritik der Politischen Ökonomie: Outlines of the Critique of Political Economy*, D. McClellan, trans., (Harmondsworth, 1971), pp. 474-512.

the apparent decline in the use of slaves in agriculture between the period of the Late Republic/Early Empire and the fourth century, he believed that slaves working in gangs had characterised the earlier period and had been steadily transformed into tenants of one form or another, chiefly identified as the *coloni* of the Later Empire.⁵⁰ Of course, as C. R. Whittaker has pointed out, that argument is somewhat fallacious as the use of slave-gangs was always quite limited geographically and the apparent disappearance is more a matter of the shifting geography of the source materials. While individual slaves and their families may have been settled as tenant farmers by their owners at various times, there is no evidence for any large-scale transformation in labour organisation.⁵¹

Ideas based on Marx's historical analysis remained central through most of the twentieth century, a period when many developments in social history first emerged and flourished in France. There, records on medieval life appeared to be more extensive than elsewhere and might provide a more thorough corpus for locating the period of transition from slavery to serfdom as well as for understanding what the terms meant. High Medieval France is often seen as the paradigmatic example of medieval feudalism; if its origins there might be understood, they might have universal applicability. One of the greatest French historians, Marc Bloch, had begun to explore the question of how the slave populations of Roman times had become the serfs of later eras. Looking at the origins of serfdom, Bloch suggested that servile households may indeed have been formed by the settlement of former slave-gang members as individual tenants, possibly in late Roman or Merovingian times. The full-blown manorial system, with its three fields, heavy ploughs, and so

⁵⁰ M. Weber, 'Die sozialen Gründe des Untergangs der antiken Kultur', reprinted in *Zur Sozial- und Wirtschaftsgeschichte des Altertums: 1893-1908*, J. Deininger, ed., (Tübingen, 2006), pp. 99-127.

⁵¹ C. R. Whittaker, 'Circe's Pigs: From Slavery to Serfdom in the Later Roman World', *Slavery and Abolition*, 8:1 (1987), pp. 111ff..

forth would emerge in roughly the same time and place and, as those were spread across Europe, they carried the new economic organization of serfdom along with them.⁵²

Bloch's career was, of course, cut short. After the World War, though, more work would be done on the question by, perhaps most notably, Pierre Bonnassie. Analysing the use of the word *mancipium* and determining that it was referred to living beings, both human and animal, as chattel led him to see its continued frequent usage as demonstrating the large-scale existence of chattel slavery well into the medieval period. Its disappearance from usage in the years around 1000, he argued, marked the final end of ancient slavery.⁵³ However, as Dominique Barthélemy has argued in his critique of Bonnassie, *mancipium* as a term was always much broader than what Bonnassie claims and can be seen as referring to something far more akin to the classical serfdom or colonate (amongst a wide range of shades of meaning). In the tenth century, at any rate, the use of *mancipium* could not be taken as being simply a non-land tied slave.⁵⁴ Both, though, placed the transition as a late process, recognizing that, in their analyses of Merovingian Gaul, slavery appeared to have been more widespread than in the previous period, that slaves worked alongside other types of bonded labourers in Merovingian agriculture, and that slave women seem to have been quite common in many free households.⁵⁵ That, too, has been debated; Guy Halsall, for one, has argued that the number of slaves fell during the period due to the ease of auto-emancipation during unsettled times.⁵⁶

⁵² M. Bloch, 'Comment et Pourquoi Finit l'Esclavage Antique', *Annales*, 2:1, (1947), pp. 30-44.

⁵³ P. Bonnassie, 'Survie et Extinction du Régime Esclavagiste dans l'Occident du Haut Moyen Âge (IV-XI s.)', *Cahiers de Civilisation Médiévale*, 28, (Poitiers, 1985), p. 341.

⁵⁴ D. Barthélemy, *La Mutation de l'An Mil a-t-Elle eu Lieu? Servage et Chevalerie dans la France des Xe et XIe Siècles*, (Paris, 1997), p. 84 ff.

⁵⁵ P. Bonnassie, 'Survie et Extinction du Régime Esclavagiste,' p. 308.

⁵⁶ G. Halsall, *Settlements and Social Organization: The Merovingian Region of Metz*, (Cambridge, 1995), pp. 42-43.

Whenever they date the transition, however, all seem to see that the transition from slavery to serfdom is what marks the division of ancient and medieval, just as Marx had asserted. British Marxist scholars also continued to push forward the idea of a transition from slavery to serfdom throughout the twentieth century. In his 1973 work on the Roman economy, Moses Finley claimed that the evidence showed that slavery had already been largely replaced by serfdom in the third century.⁵⁷ The following year, in what Chris Wickham described as ‘the boldest attempt to create a Marxist grand narrative of world history,’⁵⁸ Perry Anderson argued correctly that Christianity had not altered patterns of slavery⁵⁹ but repeated the tropes of the past with the idea that slaves had either been transformed into *coloni* in the third and fourth century⁶⁰ or that the feudal transition had occurred instead around the time of Charlemagne.⁶¹ As with so many of these arguments, the sequence of a slave mode of production giving way to feudalism which, in turn, is transformed into capitalism is axiomatic for Anderson though he does argue that these stages are a specifically western European pattern and not, in contrast to other Marxist scholars, universally applicable.⁶²

Probably the clearest and most nuanced version of the transition comes from Chris Wickham who rejected the straitjacketed interpretations of his overly orthodox predecessors and set out to clear the air by getting rid of the overly simplistic models that had dominated most thinking on the end of ancient slavery.⁶³ Famously, Wickham has been stereotyped as finding evidence that, in this period, neither

⁵⁷ M. I. Finley, *The Ancient Economy*, (Berkeley, 1973), p. 84 etc.

⁵⁸ C. Wickham, ‘Memories of Underdevelopment: What Has Marxism Done for Medieval History, and What Can It Still Do?’ in C. Wickham, ed., *Marxist History Writing for the Twenty-First Century*, (Oxford, 2007), p. 42.

⁵⁹ P. Anderson, *Passages from Antiquity to Feudalism*, (London, 1974), pp. 133-134.

⁶⁰ P. Anderson, *Passages from Antiquity to Feudalism*, pp. 94-96.

⁶¹ P. Anderson, *Passages from Antiquity to Feudalism*, pp. 141-144.

⁶² P. Anderson, *Lineages of the Absolutist State*, (London, 1974), pp. 401-404.

⁶³ C. Wickham, ‘The Other Transition: From the Ancient World to Feudalism,’ *Past and Present*, 103 (May 1984), pp. 3-8.

slavery nor serfdom prevailed but rather autonomous peasants⁶⁴ though that might be something of an overstatement (and has been widely critiqued elsewhere⁶⁵).

Wickham began by looking at the third century, when ‘the slave plantations of the first century had already virtually disappeared,’⁶⁶ and been replaced by tenants in a feudal mode of production; the slaves had already been turned into tenants (whether still called *servi* or *coloni*). However, this was not full-blown feudalism as, crucially, ‘the dominant source of surplus extraction in the late empire was not rent, but tax.’⁶⁷

The breakdown in tax collection in the Western Roman Empire between 400 and 600, though, would mean that the aristocracies, rather than the state, began to be the sole beneficiaries of the new system.⁶⁸ By the eighth century, this transformation was drawing to completion (though taxation remained as a means of surplus gathering).⁶⁹

Slaves had long-since become serfs but it took centuries for feudalism to become the dominant mode of production; the final replacement of state-centred surplus extraction and ideology by the fully privatized system of vassalage might not have completely happened until as late as the eleventh century. The withering of the Roman state had, in this reading, been of benefit to many members of the Roman aristocracies but far more than them, it had benefitted the peasantry who were freed from the burdens of taxation and prospered until the Carolingian period. Only then did widespread slavery disappear even as the free-peasantry came under stronger control of the nobilities.⁷⁰ As Jairus Banaji has shown, in Wickham’s accounts of early medieval/late antique economies, the discussion of slavery and the colonate are

⁶⁴ C. Wickham, *Framing the Early Middle Ages*, (Oxford, 2005), pp. 536-40, etc.

⁶⁵ See esp. J. Banaji, *Exploring the Economy of Late Antiquity: selected essays*, (Cambridge, 2016), pp. 157-167.

⁶⁶ C. Wickham, ‘The Other Transition,’ p. 8.

⁶⁷ C. Wickham, ‘The Other Transition,’ p. 9.

⁶⁸ C. Wickham, ‘The Other Transition,’ pp. 14-16.

⁶⁹ C. Wickham, ‘The Other Transition,’ pp. 24-26.

⁷⁰ C. Wickham, ‘The Other Transition,’ pp. 29-32.

consistently some of the weakest sections (as in *Framing the Early Middle Ages*⁷¹ or the *Inheritance of Rome*, where Wickham avoids the topic altogether). Banaji demonstrates how Wickham's reading of *servi/mancipia* as tenants (rather than as slaves) simply does not work, and, by ignoring the clear evidence of real slaves, he too falls into the trap of imagining them away.⁷²

Ideas of shifting modes of production and transitions can create problems of interpretation when a coherent evolutionary process is insisted on, regardless of what the data itself may show. Certainly, different patterns could have been happening in different regions throughout the period; serfdom might have originated in different eras in different places; slavery might have persisted much longer in one area than another. Looking for an end of slavery and a clean beginning of feudalism in this period, though, seems ultimately futile as the evidence does not unequivocally support either the widespread replacement of slave labour by serf-labour or the reverse in any area before the middle of the eighth century. Even in the Carolingian period, evidence for (and against) a 'transition' is curiously absent. Slavery, serfdom, and multiple other types of bondage existed throughout the era and not merely as part of economic mobilization. As Alice Rio has noted,

*Early medieval unfreedom was around for centuries; it is worth thinking of it as a distinct phenomenon, rather than just as a way of getting from A to B. It was experimental in many different ways, and not merely in the direction of serfdom.*⁷³

⁷¹ J. Banaji, *Exploring the Economy of Late Antiquity*, p. 158.

⁷² J. Banaji, *Exploring the Economy of Late Antiquity*, p. 164.

⁷³ A. Rio, 'Slavery in the Carolingian empire,' in D. Eltis, ed., *The Cambridge World History of Slavery*, vol. II, (Cambridge, forthcoming), p. 2.

Serfdom might have been in existence by then in some areas but, even where it had, it had not as yet replaced other forms of labour mobilisation. There is no positive evidence for it and considerable negative evidence; there is clear evidence of the existence of considerable numbers of slaves in every society, not least due to the presence of former slaves in the law-codes. Tenant farmers with limited legal rights had existed throughout the Roman era and individuals who were, for want of a better term, serfs had also lived and died in virtually every period of antiquity.⁷⁴ Slavery – that is, chattel slavery – did not disappear from Europe scene but can be demonstrated to have been present in virtually every part of the continent throughout the medieval period.⁷⁵ Some regions – notably northern France under the Carolingians – do appear to have had fewer slaves and been less involved in the slave trade than others but, even in those, slaves always existed.⁷⁶ Only when slavery as an institution finally disappeared as a major presence in modern Europe did it even begin to be imagined as being absent from medieval Europe.

In the last forty-odd years, this sense of the period of late antiquity (or the early medieval) as being more than simply a transitional period between the ancient and medieval economies has steadily grown. Besides Wickham, one can also point to a range of other scholars who have nuanced the period and understood the

⁷⁴ Further discussion on the relationship between slavery and tenancy and the shades in between (including the *coloni*) is in chapter one below.

⁷⁵ See D. Wyatt, 'Slavery in Northern Europe (Scandinavia and Iceland) and the British Isles, 500-1420', in D. Eltis, ed., *The Cambridge World History of Slavery*, vol. II, (Cambridge, forthcoming), pp. 5-9.

⁷⁶ A. Rio, 'Slavery in the Carolingian empire,' p. 3-4. Considering that the French sources do not seem nearly as filled with slaves as those from Iberia, the British Isles, Scandinavia, Germany, Italy, or eastern Europe, one possibility for much of the misinterpretation of early medieval slavery is a mistake of a well-documented and well-researched exception – northern France – for the norm. Northern France does appear to show a relatively early and extensive population expansion (H. Hamerow, *Early medieval settlements: the archaeology of rural communities in northwest Europe: 400-900*, (Oxford, 2004), p. 107); in light of E. Domar's hypothesis ('The Causes of Slavery or Serfdom: A Hypothesis', *Journal of Economic History*, 30:1, (March 1970), pp. 18-32), the abundance of free labour there (but not elsewhere) would combine with the lack of large scale agricultural operations to make slavery unnecessary.

existence of slavery within it as being neither purely sequel to the earlier Roman centuries nor purely prologue to the medieval world. In the 1980's, C. R. Whittaker emphasized the fundamental role of the settlement of barbarians (whether as prisoners of war or as other types of the less than free) on reshaping the rural landscapes of the later Roman world, demonstrating that there was, in fact, no appreciable decrease in the slave population.⁷⁷ Meanwhile, Ramsay MacMullen used epigraphic evidence to argue that slave populations were always quite small in absolute and relative numbers except in Italy and hardly mattered in rural life.⁷⁸ His views were refuted by Ross Samson who pointed out that a lack of epigraphic evidence for farm-workers was hardly surprising and meaningless;⁷⁹ instead, he argued that the evidence of former slaves only made sense if there were quite large numbers of slaves though, unfortunately, Samson insists on a return to Marxist orthodoxy.⁸⁰

By the time that the first volume of *The Cambridge World History of Slavery* was published in 2011, the idea of, at the very least, a continuity of widespread slavery could be seen across the entire period of late antiquity.⁸¹ While the views captured there are rather less contested than those that will appear in the long-awaited second volume, the sense of moving away from arguing about modes of production and transitions is palpable.⁸² As Domenico Vera pointed out, it no longer

⁷⁷ C. R. Whittaker, 'Circe's Pigs,' pp. 110-114.

⁷⁸ R. MacMullen, 'Late Roman Slavery,' *Historia: Zeitschrift für Alte Geschichte*, 36:3, (3rd Qtr., 1987), pp. 359-382.

⁷⁹ R. Samson, 'Rural Slavery, Inscriptions, Archaeology and Marx: A Response to Ramsay MacMullen's "Late Roman Slavery",' *Historia: Zeitschrift für Alte Geschichte*, 38:1 (1st Qtr., 1989), pp. 100-101.

⁸⁰ R. Samson, 'Rural Slavery,' pp. 107-110.

⁸¹ See C. Grey, 'Slavery in the Late Roman World,' in K. Bradley and P. Cartledge, ed., *The Cambridge World History of Slavery, Vol. I*, (Cambridge, 2011), pp. 482-509.

⁸² Perhaps we are now in a truly post-Marxist era in scholarship?

makes sense to look for clear differentiations in the work of the rural population between slaves and other rural working classes.⁸³

If nothing else, the study of slavery may be the aspect of the past that remains most captive to the present. Wherever the topic intersects with present-day nationalist, ethnic and sectarian politics, it becomes forbidden and hidden from the observer or turned into a rhetorical weapon. Ideologues will deny the slave-owning or trading role of their own putative ancestors even while exaggerating the role of the forerunners of their present day opponents; conversely, narratives of suffering in slavery remain politically potent. Certainly, it is hard not to see the reflection of the concerns of more recent centuries transplanted into discussions of the past when it comes to the question of slavery. As a well-known American scholar of Anglo-Saxon literature wrote in the introduction to a book on slavery in medieval England,

*most medievalists are not descended from enslaved peoples, however, and most scholars of that ancestry do not study the middle ages.*⁸⁴

This statement might be dissected in many ways but, for the present context, it is suggestive of how far perceptions on the history of slavery are from the reality. Instead, it is far more likely that everyone in the lands once ruled by Rome is descended from a great many slavers and even more slaves. That may be something that quietly shames even diligent scholars. To imagine our own histories as involving slaves and slavers is easily perceived as distasteful and it is far easier to look away and choose other topics. It is hoped that the present attempt will advance

⁸³ D. Vera, 'Questioni di storia agraria romana: schiavi, coloni, villae,' *Antiquité Tardive*, 20, (2012), p. 107.

⁸⁴ A. Frantzen, 'The Work of Work: Servitude, Slavery, and Labour in Medieval England', in A. Frantzen and D. Moffat, eds. *The Work of Work: Servitude, Slavery, and Labour in Medieval England*, (Glasgow, 1994), p. 6.

understanding of a crucial period in human development and place the lives of slaves
at the centre of the transformation of the post-Roman world.

1: A world full of slaves

Before advancing further, it will be reasonable to begin by defining what precisely is meant by the term 'slave' (and what is not) and how that will be used throughout the remaining text. This entails making clear that a slave is a person who can be bought and sold as an object, rather than one who is otherwise bound in a non-free status (i.e., a serf or similar). Naturally, some other aspects of the condition of being a slave will also be touched upon as well as a brief discussion of some of the previous scholarship on the subject of slavery in the period.

Following that, Isidore's *Etymologiae* will be examined as being an exemplar of how slavery and slaves were viewed in the post-Roman Mediterranean as well as providing a variety of definitions of terms relevant to the subject. Other documents from the period will elucidate his descriptions and provide material for further discussion. These terms and their equivalents in other contemporary languages appear frequently in texts from the seventh century. Spanish church councils, Papal letters, Egyptian papyri, poetry, historical texts, law codes, and Islamic scripture reflect a world where slaves were both ubiquitous and numerous, existing in virtually all places. Often, these references to slaves in the texts suggest a vast number of slaves.

This leads into an examination of the work of slaves. First, an attempt will be made to determine what sort of economic roles slaves had in agricultural and artisanal production. Whether slaves were incidental to economies or were crucial can help to understand whether the slave trade was a necessity or a luxury. This will then follow with a discussion of the economic and social role of slaves within

households. Most wealthy (or even merely prosperous) households in most societies of the time used slave labour (often though not exclusively female) for domestic tasks such as cooking and cleaning. In addition to labour of all kinds, female slaves were frequently sexually exploited and were sometimes used as concubines and prostitutes. Some male slaves were castrated and, as eunuchs, were used in the homes of the elite. Among these two groups of slaves (the concubines and the eunuchs) were most of the few slaves of the time where actual life histories can be traced in any way and members of both these groups can be shown as having been the subject of trade, sometimes over considerable distance.

1.1. 'What is a slave?' Defining slavery in the post-Roman world

While the word 'slave' is perhaps most frequently contrasted with 'free,' simply defining slaves as those who are not free is intensely problematic as it lumps together a great many other statuses and confuses the subject, not least, of course, by demanding a definition of what it means to be 'free.' So, it is not unreasonable to begin by attempting to define precisely what will be meant whenever the word 'slave' will be used in this text. Though that word will be used to translate multiple non-English terms which cannot truly be considered as precise equivalents of either each other nor of the modern English term, a clear definition of 'slave' will also aid in differentiating slaves from other groups of un-free persons.

Perhaps the simplest definition is that given by the International Convention on Slavery of 1926, where slave is

*the status or condition of a person over whom any or all of the powers attaching to the right of ownership are exercised.*⁸⁵

This definition underlines ownership of the individual, one of the most important attributes of slavery. A slave can be understood as a person who is owned by another person though even that is less than clear as there are, certainly, many people described as being owned who one would be unlikely to consider slaves.

In many of the materials to be examined, rights of ownership might also be held by husbands over wives, as in one of the earliest Anglo-Saxon laws in which an adulterer is to purchase a new wife for the aggrieved husband,⁸⁶ or, in many other legal systems where women are treated as property in marriage law. In traditional Islamic law (as well as in similar legal systems such as rabbinical law), marriage is described in metaphorical language of ownership; the line between that and absolute ownership seems frequently less than absolutely clear.⁸⁷ Similarly, the rights of parents over children might be described in rather absolute terms. In Roman law, the power of the father as head of household over his children was recognized as comparable (if not identical) to mastery over one's slaves⁸⁸ and the same idea is repeated in early English law.⁸⁹ To clarify, then, a slave, unlike a child or spouse, should then be understood not merely as a person owned but as a person turned into

⁸⁵ 1926 Slavery Convention (Convention to Suppress the Slave Trade and Slavery), article 1.1, *League of Nations Treaty Series*, vol. 60, p. 254.

⁸⁶ *LÆ*, 31.

⁸⁷ K. Ali, *Marriage and Slavery in Early Islam*, pp. 49-54, etc.

⁸⁸ *Digesta*, 50.16.215 (Paulus).

⁸⁹ *LÆ*, 77-81.

an object (or a living tool⁹⁰) that might be alienated from one owner and lacked other identity.⁹¹

Simple as such a definition may be, it is still not fully adequate and needs further refining for discussions of slavery and the slave trade in late antiquity and the early middle ages as many other forms of forced labour existed besides that which will be termed slavery. Serfdom (and, with it, other similar forms of less than fully free labour) will need to be excluded from this definition of slavery even though most forms of serfdom would almost certainly be considered as slavery in twenty-first-century legal usage.⁹² Such labourers, however they might be called, were not free but enjoyed some privileges of status denied to slaves even while being placed under some of the powers of ownership. Typically, they could not be sold separately from the lands which they worked (if they could be sold at all) and had some measure of personal and household autonomy, even in the harshest of systems. Many who were bought and sold as slaves under the present definition may have been transformed into some sort of share-cropper or serf after they had been trafficked or at some later point – many of the arguments on the ‘end’ of ancient slavery and the origins of the manorial economy suggest as much⁹³ – but, while this study touches on aspects of these forms of labour organisation, they will be considered as something else than slaves after they had been granted such rights.

⁹⁰ U. Roth, *Thinking Tools: Agricultural Slavery Between Evidence and Models*, (London, 2007), p. 150.

⁹¹ O. Patterson, ‘Three Notes of Freedom: The Nature and Consequences of Manumission,’ in R. Brana-Shute and R. J. Sparks, eds., *Paths to Freedom: Manumission in the Atlantic World*, (Columbia, 2009), pp. 15-16.

⁹² “Unlike historical definitions of slavery in which people were held as legal property, a practice that has been universally outlawed, modern slavery is generally defined as human trafficking, forced labor, bondage from indebtedness, forced or servile marriage or commercial sexual exploitation.” (R. Gladstone, ‘Modern Slavery Estimated to Trap 45 Million People Worldwide,’ *New York Times*, 31 May 2016).

⁹³ M. Bloch, ‘Comment et Pourquoi Finit l’Esclavage Antique,’ *Annales*, 2:1, (1947), pp. 30-44.

For the present purpose, a slave is to be understood as not simply an un-free or even an owned person but as a person that can be treated as an object, rather than as an individual. 'Slave' will be used to describe those who can be bought and sold separately from land, estates, or even from their own families and communities while other social groups (such as serfs) would not have faced these situations but would have been able to maintain greater levels of personal autonomy than slaves. Unlike a child or spouse, the further alienation of a slave would be possible without additional legal action. These differences are crucial for present purposes as only slaves so defined might be trafficked over long distances as a commodity; a child or spouse who might be so treated has, under this definition, passed into the category of such slaves without further need of separation.

Slavery, then, is not simply a matter of ownership or even the legal norms associated with it that Moses Finley outlined.⁹⁴ To be a slave means to have experienced domination and the 'social death' described by Orlando Patterson as distinguishing slavery from other forms of forced labour and unequal status. The enslaved person was figuratively dead to the life prior to slavery and was not considered as being fully human in law or in society.⁹⁵ Unlike even other types of un-free persons, the slave lacked autonomy over even the most intimate details of life. Women in slavery lacked honour and could be sexually imposed upon by their owners without recourse; men, too, could be sexually exploited at will.⁹⁶ Persons in other types of un-freedom did not typically experience these demands.

As these basic and dehumanising concepts underlay the fundamental formulation of slavery in the societies of the post-Roman world, the slave readily

⁹⁴ M. I. Finley, 'Between Slavery and Freedom', *Comparative Studies in Society and History*, 6, (1964), pp. 247-248.

⁹⁵ O. Patterson, *Slavery and Social Death: a Comparative Study*, (Cambridge, Mass., 1990), p. 38.

⁹⁶ See 1.5 below.

became an object in the minds of both free and enslaved. As an object, the slave could be bought and sold at will and, if need be, shipped across great distances. While most slaves were unlikely to be sold far from their birthplaces,⁹⁷ if they were sold at all,⁹⁸ all slaves lived under the constant threat of sale as a part of their lack of autonomy.⁹⁹ By contrast, a bound labourer, whether known as a serf, *colonus*, bondsman, helot, sharecropper, or by another name, had certain rights and protections built into the relevant social system. They had, at the very least, autonomy of their persons and ‘owned’ their own flesh; they were usually able to form households and have a family life with some degree of autonomy. Some of these persons are referred to in the texts by terms that usually mean slaves; these tenant-slaves, however, are not the slaves that will be discussed here except in so much as they were subject to trafficking.

Simply knowing the difference between slaves and serfs (as well as other types of indentured service and servants) as definitional categories, however, is only useful if those terms can be mapped onto actual societies of the long seventh century. To do so, it may help to look at what sorts of terms were used in one of the more significant textual sources of the period to refer to categories of un-free persons. Doing so will also make the role of slaves in the societies of the time somewhat more clear.

⁹⁷ W. Scheidel, ‘The Roman Slave Supply,’ p. 290.

⁹⁸ W. Scheidel, ‘The Roman Slave Supply,’ pp. 293-294.

⁹⁹ Ambrose, *De Tobia*, 8:31.

1.2. An encyclopaedia filled with slaves: Isidore's *Etymologiae*

All surviving texts from the seventh century were written for the societies in which they were created rather than for the benefit of posterity. More often than not, their compilers presumed that the words that they chose and the social relations addressed needed no further explanation or definition. Legal texts, such as the previous century's Justinianic *Corpus Iuris Civilis*, occasionally made attempts to define terms and concepts but even legal writings usually presume that those using the law would understand them as they were intended without needing glosses. For a modern reader, this can pose a difficulty as, in some cases, terms used in one place or period had markedly different meanings in other contexts; both of the two Latin words most commonly used for slaves, *seruus* and *mancipium*, do not always map onto any normal definition for 'slave' and both can be translated as 'serf' in some contexts. It can sometimes be challenging to determine whether a law or a narrative account is actually referring to slaves or whether the text means something quite different. Assuming the same word always means the same thing can lead to problems of interpretation.

Fortunately, in the seventh century, Isidore of Seville attempted to define terminology in his *Etymologiae*. Using the methods and tools available to him to explain word origins as best he could through long quotations and extracts from the classical and Christian texts available to him, he created a work that would, in the following centuries, become one of the most popular handbooks in the western world and primary transmitters of classical antiquity to the medieval west.¹⁰⁰

¹⁰⁰ E. Curtius, *European Literature and the Latin Middle Ages*, (Princeton, 1953), p. 523.

In Isidore, as in the last period of the Empire, the main terms used to refer to slaves were *seruus/serui* and *mancipium/mancipia*, for both the generic and the specifically male slave while the terms *ancilla/ancillae* referred to female slaves. These remained the primary terms in Latin documents written throughout the early middle ages though their meaning was at times in flux. Isidore provides a definition of slavery that can be seen as representing the way in which the term was understood throughout the seventh-century West:

*Seruitus a seruando uocata. Apud antiquos enim qui in bello a morte seruabantur, serui uocabantur. Haec est sola malorum omnium postrema, quae liberis omni supplicio grauior est; nam ubi libertas periit, una ibi perierunt et omnia.*¹⁰¹

Of course, like most things in the *Etymologiae*, Isidore's understanding of slavery was hardly novel in either his definition or in his understanding of the origin of the word.

In late Roman legal thinking, all of society was divided into three parts *per ius gentium* – slaves, free people, and freedmen – though by natural law all were considered as having been born free.¹⁰² As Isidore stated, the terms were believed to refer directly to the origins of slavery in warfare. Similar explanations of both terms can be found in the *Digest* of Roman law issued under Justinian,¹⁰³ as well as many other texts from the period. Whether or not Isidore's etymology was correct, the

¹⁰¹ Isidore, *Etymologiae*, 5.27.32 (“Slavery is called from saving. Among the ancients, they called ‘slaves’ them that were saved from death in war. This is alone the greatest of all evils, that which for a free person is the gravest of all punishments; for where freedom has perished, there everything has perished with it”).

¹⁰² *Digesta*, 1.1.4 (Ulpian).

¹⁰³ *Digesta*, 1.5.4 (Florentinus).

notion of slavery as being rooted in defeat in war underlay Roman thinking regarding slaves as well as most other seventh-century understandings of it.¹⁰⁴

After Isidore's time – if the process had not already begun – *seruus* began to lose its original meaning. Instead of referring to what would usually be called a slave, by the end of the first millennium, it had begun to refer in at least some contexts to those bonded labourers that would eventually be termed as 'serfs.' That English term itself, of course, derives from *seruus* (via Old French) but, until the seventeenth century, slave and serf were used interchangeably and only in that period did the English 'serf' come to be clearly understood as an un-free person bound to the soil rather than one who might be sold as chattel. A 'slave.'¹⁰⁵

When precisely *seruus* came to mean something other than 'slave' in Medieval Latin, though, is unclear and there was undoubtedly a period of ambiguity. One marker of the shift in meaning may be the appearance of terms referring to humans sold as chattel derived from the ethnonym Slav, found in many European languages including, from the fourteenth century, English.¹⁰⁶ That shift in usage could be potentially important as it indicates a significant change in the ethnic and geographic origins of slaves; similarly, for arguments regarding the decline of slavery or widespread transformation of slaves into tenants, a dating might help suggest a period when the older term had become problematic and a new one was needed. While the earliest possible usage of *sclavus* as a term for slaves comes from a Bavarian document dated to 18 January 853 in which *sclavi* are contrasted with

¹⁰⁴ See 4.1 below regarding Arabic parallels.

¹⁰⁵ *OED*, vol. 8, pt.2, p. 494 (Oxford, 1914). While the older sense of *seruus/serui* as a slave was used by Jerome and other translators of the Greek δούλοι in the New Testament (including the translators of the *Vetus Latina*), John Wycliffe's 1380 English New Testament translated the *serui* of the Vulgate as 'servants' rather than as slaves, causing even further confusions (as well as, possibly, being the root of much misunderstanding of the impact of Christianity on slavery in Anglophone discourse).

¹⁰⁶ *OED*, vol. 9, pt.1, p. 182 (Oxford, 1919).

liberi (free men),¹⁰⁷ that usage may be ambiguous as Slavic groups lived adjacent to Bavaria and the *liberi* of the text may simply mean the Bavarians in contrast to the foreign *sclavi*. Eventually, though, the Slavic ethnonym gradually replaced *serui* to refer to people bought and sold as chattel as, by the ninth century, the Slavic parts of central and Eastern Europe had become the dominant slave-catching grounds.¹⁰⁸

Slavic slaves had become common even in Muslim Spain by the tenth century at the latest, where the use of the term *Ṣaqāliba* arises (and has some of the same ambiguity).¹⁰⁹ Such early and widespread usage may be seen as indicative of a shift in slave trading patterns in the ninth century but that cannot be pushed any earlier through either positive or negative evidence.¹¹⁰ It seems, then, that despite its future ambiguities, in the long seventh century itself, *seruus* should be understood as still very much retaining its ‘classical’ meaning and, as a term referring to humans owned as chattel, was primarily the way in which ‘slave’ has been defined in this study.

However, even if these *serui* are owned as chattel, they still may not be ‘slaves’ in the sense that we might imagine. In Lombard Italy, the laws issued by Rothari in 643 contain numerous references to *serui massarii*¹¹¹ who appear to have lived in their own homes and tilled fields for themselves, paying some type of rent to their owners. As they held higher wergild than other slaves in that law-code¹¹² and may themselves possess slaves of their own,¹¹³ it is hard to picture them as being completely dependent, unlike the *serui rustici* (field slaves)¹¹⁴ and *serui ministeriales*

¹⁰⁷ J. Grimm and W. Grimm, *Deutsches Wörterbuch*, vol. 10, (Leipzig, 1905), p. 1311.

¹⁰⁸ D. Davis, *Challenging the Bounds of Slavery*, (Cambridge, Mass., 2006), p. 17.

¹⁰⁹ S. Kentaro, ‘Slave Elites and the Saqaliba in al-Andalus in the Umayyad Period’, in M. Toru and J. E. Philips, eds., *Slave Elites in the Middle East and Africa: A Comparative Study*, (London, 2000), pp. 25-40

¹¹⁰ C. Verlinden, ‘L’Origin de *Sclavus* = Esclave’, *Bulletin du Cange: Archivum Latinitatis Medii Aevi*, 17, (1942), pp. 97-128.

¹¹¹ *Edictum Rothari*, 132, 134, 137, 234, 352.

¹¹² *Edictum Rothari*, 132.

¹¹³ *Edictum Rothari*, 134.

¹¹⁴ *Edictum Rothari*, 103-127, 134, 279-280, 378.

(household slaves)¹¹⁵ that appear in the same laws. These *serui massarii* might be imagined then as something more like serfs and Lombard Italy is not the only place in which tenant-slaves can be found in the seventh century. They appear in legal texts from Kent,¹¹⁶ the Frankish Rhineland,¹¹⁷ and Visigothic Spain,¹¹⁸ as well as in *'ahādīth*.¹¹⁹ While these individuals are described as slaves, they appear to have had a great deal of personal autonomy and are, perhaps, more akin to some other categories that will be described below. It has been suggested that some of these servile households may have been formed by the settlement of former slave-gang members as individual¹²⁰ but no single explanation that can account for all slaves working on all estates. Others appear to have been settled in at least some regions as defeated and enslaved enemies, both in earlier periods¹²¹ and during the seventh century itself.¹²² Still others might have been the descendants of formerly free tenants who, for one reason or another, willingly or unwillingly, had fallen into slavery.¹²³ For the present purposes, these slaves – to be termed as ‘tenant slaves’ for convenience – may be thought of as forming their own category.

Besides *seruus*, *mancipium* is, in documents from the period, probably the most frequently used term for slaves. Like *seruus*, *mancipium* has potential ambiguities. Though originally referring to a legal process by which domestic power might be obtained and, by extension, all such things under it (including land, buildings, and livestock as well as slaves, women, and children), by the sixth century

¹¹⁵ *Edictum Rothari*, 76-102, 126-127, 130-131, 376.

¹¹⁶ *LÆ*, 85.

¹¹⁷ *LR*, 65.1.

¹¹⁸ *FI*, 3.2.4; 3.2.7; 5.4.13; 5.4.15.

¹¹⁹ *Ṣaḥīḥ al-Bukhārī*, 7:65:346.

¹²⁰ Bloch, ‘Comment et Pourquoi Finit l’Esclavage Antique’, p. 42.

¹²¹ G. E. M. de Ste. Croix, *The Class Struggle in the Ancient Greek World: From the Archaic Age to the Arab Conquest*, (London, 1981), pp. 509-518.

¹²² See 2.3.

¹²³ See 2.2.

at the latest (and much earlier in the West), it had come to refer exclusively to slaves and livestock.¹²⁴ In the seventh century, certainly, Isidore understood that

*Mancipium est quidquid manu capi subdique potest, ut homo, equus, ouis. Haec enim animalia statim ut nata sunt, mancipium esse putantur. Nam et ea, quae in bestiarum numero sunt, tunc uidentur mancipium esse, quando capi siue domari coeperint.*¹²⁵

This sense of *mancipium* as referring to living beings, whether human or animal, as chattel would make the usage appears to have been much more clearly a reference to chattel slaves than even *seruus*. Like *seruus*, though, slaves who were tenants are also grouped into the same category so that the hypothesis of Pierre Bonnassie that its continued usage demonstrates a continuance of ancient slavery cannot be supported.¹²⁶

Isidore's remaining Latin vocabulary referring to slaves is generally more straightforward. *Ancilla* continued to be used to refer to female slaves, especially those doing domestic service, as Isidore notes:

*Ancillae a sustentaculo uocatae. Ἀγκλὸν enim Graece cubitus dicitur. Unde et anconem dicimus.*¹²⁷

Though Isidore does not discuss it, one finds the terms *puer/pueri* and *puella/puellae* – boy and girl – used in other texts without respect to age in reference to slaves¹²⁸

¹²⁴ G. Long, 'Mancipium', in W. Smith, ed., *A Dictionary of Greek and Roman Antiquities*, (London, 1875), pp. 727-728.

¹²⁵ Isidore, 9.4.45 ("Mancipium is that which is taken by hand and placed under control, that is a man, a horse, a sheep. For these living things are those which, when they are born, are to be considered as mancipium. And also, among these may be numbered wild beasts that have been captured and, then, they can be seen as mancipium").

¹²⁶ P. Bonnassie, 'Survie et Extinction,' p. 341; see D. Barthélemy, *La Mutation de l'An Mil a-t-Elle eu Lieu?* p. 84 for the much broader usage.

¹²⁷ Isidore, 9.4.44 ("Ancillae are called from the support given. In Greek, they call the elbow Ἀγκλὸν. And thus we also say 'anconem'").

while *uir/uir* – man – was never used for a slave. *Famuli*, Isidore explains, is a term used to describe home-born slaves¹²⁹ (the *uernae* of earlier times¹³⁰). A term of some ambiguity that occurs in other texts and frequently refers to slaves is *captiuus*. As understood by Isidore,

*Captus. Captiuus dicitur quasi capite deminutus; ingenuitatis enim fortuna ab eo excidit, unde et ab iuris peritis capite deminutus dicitur.*¹³¹

Becoming a captive could be – and frequently was – the beginning of enslavement as Isidore’s own understanding of slavery would seem to show.¹³²

Grades of distinction between the enslaved and the fully free had mattered in the Roman period and, though the terms seem to have shifted somewhat in definition, Isidore’s discussion shows how they remained important:

*Ingenui dicti, quia in genere habent libertatem, non in facto sicut liberti. Unde et eos Graeci εὐγενεῖς uocant, quod sint boni generis. Libertus autem uocatus quasi liberatus. Erat enim prius iugo seruitutis addictus. Libertorum autem filii apud antiquos libertini appellabantur, quasi de libertis nati. Nunc uero libertinus aut a liberto factus, aut possessus. Manumissus dicitur quasi manu emissus. Apud ueteres enim quotiens manu mittebant, alapa percussos circumagebant, et liberos confirmabant; unde et manumissi dicti, eo quod manu mitterentur.*¹³³

¹²⁸ *Digesta*, 50.16.204 (Paulus).

¹²⁹ Isidore, 9.4.43.

¹³⁰ See E. Herrmann-Otto, *Ex Ancilla Natus: Untersuchungen zu den "Hausgeborenen" Sklaven und Sklavinnen im Westen des Römischen Kaiserreiches*, (Rome, 1994).

¹³¹ Isidore, 10.C.54 (“*Captured. A captive is so called for he has been deprived of rights; the condition of being free has been removed from him by fortune, and thus from the jurists he is called deprived of rights*”).

¹³² See 1.6 below.

¹³³ Isidore, 9.4.46 – 48 (“*An ingenuus is called that because he has been born into freedom and has not been made free. And thus among the Greeks they call them ‘εὐγενεῖς’ for they are well born. A libertus is called as though from ‘liberated’, for at one time he was under the yoke of slavery. In antiquity, the sons of freedmen were named libertini as though they were ‘born of freedmen’. In modern times, though, a libertinus is one made by a freedman or belongs to a freedman. The manumitted is called such as he has been delivered by hand, for, in the old days, whenever they would*”).

These were not the only categories of persons who were of a status somewhere between that of the fully free and the fully enslaved. In addition to the tenant slaves, several of those found in the Latin texts from the period – specifically *coloni*, *adscripticii*, *dediticii*, and *laeti* – may need clarification as to whether or not they should also be considered as slaves, as free people, or as something else entirely.

People called *coloni*¹³⁴ or *adscripticii*¹³⁵ appear in Roman laws from the fourth to the sixth century. In Isidore, as in the laws of the time, they are not considered to be slaves and are distinguished from them but are not explicitly defined as either freedmen or free men. Isidore describes them in a manner that suggests he is blurring distinctions between the lease-holding *coloni* and the colonists of earlier periods:

*Coloni sunt cultores advenae, dicti a cultura agri. Sunt enim aliunde venientes atque alienum agrum locatum colentes, ac debentes conditionem genitalem solo propter agri culturam sub dominio possessoris, pro eo quod his locatus est fundus. Coloni autem quattuor modis dicuntur. Nam coloni aut Romani sunt, aut coloni Latini, aut coloni auxiliares, aut coloni ruris privati.*¹³⁶

In other sources, they appear to be attached to the soil that they farm and their presence is seen as permanent. The land that they work is not owned by them and can be sold by its owner yet the owner cannot sell the workers separately from the

liberate someone, they would turn him around, striking him in the face, and confirm freedom; therefore he was said to be manumitted because he had been delivered by hand”).

¹³⁴ *CT*, 5.17.1; 5.19.1; 10.12.2; 11.1.2; 11.1.14; 11.1.26; 11.7.2; *CJ*, 11.48.8; 11.48.13; 11.51.1; 11.52.1; 11.53.1; etc.

¹³⁵ *CJ*, 1.12.6; 11.48.6; etc.

¹³⁶ Isidore, 9.4.36 (“*The coloni are cultivators of foreign soil, called from the cultivation of the fields. They come from some other land and till someone else’s fields that they have leased and owe their condition to the fruitfulness of the land that they till which is under the control of the owner who has leased it to them. Now the coloni are called after four different types and they are either Roman coloni, Latin coloni, auxiliary coloni, or coloni of private lands.*”)

land nor can the land be sold separately from them.¹³⁷ It may be conceivable that, if there ever were a clear difference between *coloni* and tenant slaves, it would be in the ability of the landowner to dispose of land or labourers separately in the latter case.

Unfortunately, that is far from clear. The subject of the late antique colonate is intensely problematic from a historiographical perspective. Until fairly recently, the general scholarly consensus was that it was the institutionalisation of a set of relationships that had emerged between landowners on one side and an originally free but gradually degraded tenant peasantry. Under the Tetrarchy, they had finally been merged with freed slaves and settled barbarians into a class midway between free and slave; they faced limitations on the ability to leave the lands they farmed.¹³⁸ More recently, however, it has even been argued to be a construct of early modern scholars engaged in debates surrounding the development of the Absolutist state in France that was picked up in nineteenth century political battles.¹³⁹ Since then, C. R. Whittaker has convincingly argued against a connection between slaves, *coloni*, and later serfs,¹⁴⁰ while Cam Grey has argued that it was neither a personal status nor did it reduce formerly free tenants to a status akin to slavery, even if the free status of the *coloni* was not clear to their contemporaries. While slavery and freedom remained opposing categories in the Late Roman Empire, the vocabulary of slavery was used in legislation to describe the relationships.¹⁴¹ The entire concept of the colonate

¹³⁷ *CT*, 13.10.3.

¹³⁸ Versions of this may be found in A. H. M. Jones, 'The Roman Colonate,' *Past and Present*, 13:1, (April 1958), pp. 1-13; A. Segrè, 'The Byzantine Colonate,' *Traditio*, 5 (1947), pp. 103-133; and M. I. Finley, *Ancient Slavery and Modern Ideology*, (Harmondsworth, 1983), pp. 123-149.

¹³⁹ J.-M. Carrié, 'Le "colonat du Bas-Empire": un mythe historiographique?,' *Opus I* (1982), pp. 351-371.

¹⁴⁰ C. R. Whittaker, 'Circe's Pigs,' pp. 99-114.

¹⁴¹ C. Grey, 'Contextualizing Colonatus: The *Origo* of the Late Roman Empire,' *JRS*, 97 (2007), p. 169.

might be best understood as a part of the fiscal structure of the late Roman state.¹⁴²

In a response to Grey, Adriaan Sirks argued that, at least in the time of Justinian, the status of *coloni* was much more a matter of reciprocal (even if largely one-sided) duties between the *colonus* and the estate owner. At the same time, however, he pointed out that it was not yet serfdom and that the very laws themselves argue for a great deal of social fluidity existing in the empire of the sixth century.¹⁴³ While it is certainly possible that the status of *colonus* might refer to one aspect of an individual (whether regarding taxation or hereditary obligations) who might in another context be referred to as a freedman or even as a tenant slave, the *coloni* were not normally likely to be slaves of the type that this inquiry is examining.

Perhaps overlapping with the *coloni* are those people called *dediticii*. As a category, the term was both broad and vague and there is no consensus as to its exact meaning.¹⁴⁴ From Republican times onwards, *dediticii* had been used for former slaves who had been convicted of crimes and, as a result, could never become Roman citizens.¹⁴⁵ In the later Empire, it appears that the term could additionally refer to any surrendered barbarian as well as nomadic people. It seems to have been used broadly for non-slaves who had entered the Empire of their own free will. It may be reasonable to say that the meaning of the term was greatly in flux throughout the period and, so, Isidore's definition might be of some service:

Dediticii primum a deditione sunt nuncupati. Deditio enim dicitur quando se uicti aut uincendi hostes uictoribus tradunt: quibus haec origo nominis fuit. Dum quondam aduersus populum Romanum serui armis sumptis dimicassent, uicti se dederunt, comprehensique uaria turpitudine affecti sunt. Ex his quidam

¹⁴² C. Grey, 'Contextualizing Colonatus,' p. 174.

¹⁴³ A. J. B. Sirks, 'The Colonate in Justinian's Reign,' *JRS*, 98 (2008), p. 143.

¹⁴⁴ See G. Wirth, 'Rome and its Germanic Partners in the Fourth Century', in W. Pohl, ed., *Kingdoms of the Empire: The Integration of Barbarians in Late Antiquity*, (Leiden, 1997), p. 33 ff.

¹⁴⁵ U. Roth, 'Men Without Hope', *Papers of the British School at Rome*, 79, (2011), pp. 90-92.

*postea a dominis manumissi, propter suppliciorum notas, quas manifeste perpessi sunt, ad dignitatem ciuium Romanorum non peruenerunt.*¹⁴⁶

With the *dediticii* might be lumped the *laeti*, a group of whom Ammianus Marcellinus had described as

*cis Rhenum editam barbarorum progeniem, uel certe ex dediticiis qui ad nostra desciscunt*¹⁴⁷

and maintain a shadowy presence in texts from the third to the ninth century.¹⁴⁸ Both the *dediticii* and the *laeti* were usually understood as being classes of free persons who were legally barred from some of the privileges of the fully free. That classification appears in both cases to have been hereditary. While much about them is disputed, it can be safely said about both groups that, while their existence might be argued as revealing a previous population of slaves (though that is far from certain), neither group were themselves enslaved and neither seems likely to have been directly linked to later serf-populations. Their role in a study of the slave trade will be negligible.

While Isidore has little directly to say about the slave trade, the *Etymologiae*, despite being a compilation of bits and pieces of older works, can be seen as reflecting a world where slaves are clearly ubiquitous and slavery informs many

¹⁴⁶ Isidore, 9.4.49 – 50 (“*The dediticii were first named from surrendering. It is called surrender when the victims or the conquered host hand themselves over to the victors: which was the origin of this name. Once when slaves took arms and fought against the Roman people, they gave themselves up as victims, and they were seized and given various marks of their baseness. From this afterwards, when their masters, on account of these marks of punishment, which clearly they had suffered, manumitted them they were not permitted to the dignity of Roman citizenship*”).

¹⁴⁷ Ammianus Marcellinus, *Res Gestae*, 20.8.13 (“*descendants of barbarians begotten on this side of the Rhine, or at any rate from those dediticii who come over to us*”).

¹⁴⁸ *Panegyrici Latini*, 8.21.1; Ammianus Marcellinus, 16.11.4, 20.8.13; *CT*, 7.20.10, 7.20.12, 13.11.10; *Notitia Dignitatum, Pars Occidentis*, 42.33-45; Zosimus, *Historia Nova*, 2.54.1; Jordanes, *Getica*, 36.191; *Ravenna Papyrus*, 24; *PLS*, 13.7, 26.1, 35.5, 35.8, 42.4, 50.1, 50.3, 75.2, 83.2; *LÆ*, 26; *Capitulatio de Partibus Saxoniam*, 19; *Capitulare Saxonicum*, 3; *Lex Saxonum*, 16; *Pactus Legis Alamannorum*, 2.9; *Lex Frisionum*, 1.4; *Lex Francorum Chamavorum*, 4, 5, 6; *Polyptychum Irminonis Abbatis*, 11.2, etc.

other issues. Besides his scholarly work, Isidore was also a leader of the Spanish Church and would certainly have come into contact with a great many slaves.¹⁴⁹

While the Church in this period was nowhere opposed to slavery, Isidore himself was more explicit than most clergy in laying out its divinely-ordained basis. Though it does not occur in the *Etymologiae*, his view of slavery's role is worth quoting:

*Propter peccatum primi hominis humano generi poena diuinitus illata est seruitutis, ita ut quibus aspicit non congruere libertatem, his misericordius irroget seruitutem. Et licet peccatum humanae originis per baptismi gratiam cunctis fidelibus dimissum sit, tamen aequus Deus ideo discreuit hominibus uitam, alios servos constituens, alios dominos, ut licentia male agendi servorum potestate dominantium restringatur. Nam si omnes sine metu fuissent, quis esset qui a malis quempiam prohiberet? Inde et in gentibus principes, regesque electi sunt, ut terrore suo populos a malo coercerent, atque ad recte uiuendum legibus subderent. Quantum attinet ad rationem, non est personarum acceptio apud Deum, qui mundi elegit ignobilia et contemptibilia, et quae non sunt ut ea quae sunt destrueret, ne glorietur omnis caro, hoc est, carnalis potentia coram illo. Unus enim Dominus aequaliter et dominis fert consultum, et seruis. Melior est subjecta seruitus quam elata libertas. Multi enim inueniuntur Deo libere seruietes sub dominis constituti flagitiosis, qui, etsi subjecti sunt illis corpore, praelati tamen sunt mente.*¹⁵⁰

To a modern eye, Isidore's vision of society is one where the godly state aspires to totalitarianism and slavery is justly inflicted on the weak. While his justification of

¹⁴⁹ See 2.1 below.

¹⁵⁰ Isidore, *Sententiarum Libri Tres* 3.47 ("Because of the sin of the first man, the punishment of slavery was divinely inflicted upon mankind, so that those whom He views as not consistent with liberty, on them might slavery be mercifully imposed. And although original sin is remitted to all the faithful by the grace of baptism, nevertheless, God has equitably put this difference of life in men, constituting some to be the slaves of others, and others to be their owners, so that the licentiousness of evil-doing on the part of the slaves might be restricted by their masters. For, if all men were without the fear, who would prohibit anyone from doing evil? Then, among the nations, the princes and kings were chosen, in order to keep the people from doing evil by their terror, and to obligate them to the laws of right living. ... Better is slavery in subjection than freedom in pride. For many are found freely serving God, though they are slaves to criminal masters, who, even if they are subjected to them in body, yet they are far above them in mind").

slavery was more articulate than many of his contemporaries, his understanding of it was typical of the post-Roman world and can be seen in Roman laws, Papal letters, and Christian texts from across the whole of the former Empire. It was a world where slavery was normal, natural, and ubiquitous. For Isidore, slaves were not merely the landless poor or tenants tied to the soil; they could be (and presumably were) bought and sold; they were fully under the power of those who owned them and, for him, that was as it should be.

1.3. The ubiquity of slaves in seventh-century societies

As this brief glance at Isidore's *Etymologiae* suggests, slaves were a constant reality in the environment in which Isidore worked. Warfare leading to a seemingly endless supply of captives was the ultimate source of most slaves. While it might be objected that these text was deliberately selected simply because Isidore speaks of slaves, other seventh-century texts can be used to make many of the same points. Spanish conciliar documents reveal a Church that not only was comfortable with slavery but where slaves were considered necessary for religious life; laws from the Frankish, the Lombard, and the Visigothic kingdoms show societies where slavery permeates virtually every aspect of life; slaves appear in countless saints' lives from nearly every language culture; the *Qur'an* and the massive ḥadīth literature speak constantly of slaves.

All of the available evidence, then, suggests that slaves were common throughout the post-Roman world during the long seventh century. But, perhaps because of that ubiquity, it can be difficult to calculate with any precision what that

would have meant. When references appear to refer to slaves, they may, as we have seen, be referring to more than one category of un-freedom and some of those described as slaves in the texts may be something quite different. As noted, many of those were almost certainly tenant farmers who were bound to their landlords and faced obligations to them but had a great deal of personal autonomy and were unlikely to (in normal times) be trafficked. At the same time, some other portion of the population that might fall under the title of 'slave' were not tenants but were living as un-free chattel slaves without very much autonomy. If we wish to fully and clearly differentiate the two groups and reach an understanding of the role of slavery and the slave trade in the societies of this period, it would be extremely helpful if the sizes of slave populations were known; then, figures could be abstracted regarding slave mortality, population growth and so on, making an estimate of the size of the slave trade quite simple.

Unfortunately, there are very few solid population figures of any type from the period when compared to either later medieval or earlier classical eras. Even what look like hard figures cannot be used over more than an extremely local situation as can be seen by using one of the few precise numbers found in the sources. In the *Historia Ecclesiastica*, Bede writes that when Wilfrid, Bishop of York, was in exile, he went to the kingdom of the South Saxons and was granted 87 hides of land by King Æthelwealh at Selsey. There,

quoniam illi rex cum praefata loci possessione omnes, qui ibidem erant, facultates cum agris et hominibus donavit, omnes fide Christi institutos, unda baptismatis abluit; inter quos, seruos et ancillas ducentos quinquaginta; quos

*omnes ut baptizando a seruitute daemonica saluauit, etiam libertate donando humanae iugo seruitutis absoluit.*¹⁵¹

Earlier in the same chapter, Bede had mentioned that the province of the South Saxons contained 7,000 hides, a number consistent with that found in the Tribal Hidage.¹⁵²

Assuming Wilfrid had baptized all the slaves in his 87 hides and that slaves were evenly distributed throughout Sussex, in that kingdom alone there would have been some 20,115 slaves.¹⁵³ Sussex was among the smallest of the Anglo-Saxon kingdoms; Kent is given in the Tribal Hidage as having 15,000 hides and Wessex as 100,000. Adding all the figures for the Anglo-Saxon kingdoms south of the Humber and assuming the same ratio for slaves in the seventh century, England (without Northumbria) would have contained an astounding 699,984 slaves.

As estimates for the total population run towards numbers that are not much greater than that, it seems likely that one or more of the factors in the calculation are in error; Selsey may have been an abnormal estate with more slaves than comparable areas, the hidage may not represent an evenly distributed population, the hidage may itself be in error, or that Bede was less sure of the numbers given. Most significantly, though, it raises the immediate question of whether these *serui* are truly slaves or if, instead, they are something more akin to the later serfs or other types of bound tenants rather than simply slaves. Unfortunately, Bede does not provide much beyond the fact that they all live in the same place; that could be understood as

¹⁵¹ Bede, *HE*, 4.13, (“because the king had given him with the aforesaid possession of the place, all who were in the same place, including the lands and men, he instructed and trained them all in the faith of Christ. And he baptized among them, 200 and 50 enslaved men and women whom he saved by baptism from enslavement to the Devil, even giving them freedom from the yoke of human slavery”).

¹⁵² J. Brownhill, ‘The Tribal Hidage’, *EHR*, 27:108, (October 1912), p. 626.

¹⁵³ 250 slaves divided by 87 hides gives 2.8735 slaves per hide. Multiplied by 7,000, that gives 20,114.94 slaves for all of Sussex.

referring to either a settlement of separate households of tenants in a common area (i.e., a village) or the sort of residential patterns of slaves living on an estate.

Assuming that it is the former, then neither Selsey nor Sussex need to be particularly unusual and that very high calculation for the enslaved population of the southern Anglo-Saxon kingdoms might be plausible. Rather than a population of abject slaves, this could represent a very large population of tenant farmers as well as slaves and Bede might be collapsing two (or more) categories in the vernacular into a single Latin one. The seventh-century Kentish laws, for instance, distinguish between slaves (*þeowas*¹⁵⁴) free people (*ceorles*¹⁵⁵ or *frigman*¹⁵⁶ and *friwif*¹⁵⁷), and *esnes*.¹⁵⁸ The last of these appear as being medial between the free and the enslaved; the laws suggest that they possess households and families of their own.¹⁵⁹ While many (most?) of the *serui* might be tenants, though, it still seems likely that, using the legal sources and other texts, many are almost certainly fully enslaved; Bede himself, certainly, described Anglo-Saxons being sold abroad as slaves.¹⁶⁰

For all periods and places before the introduction of Indo-Arabic numerals (and often long afterwards¹⁶¹), the relationship between numbers given in sources and reality is extremely tenuous. Population figures in the literary sources cannot be credited as numbers given for the same group can vary by entire orders of magnitude,

¹⁵⁴ *LÆ*, 16, 21, 80-81.

¹⁵⁵ *LÆ*, 20-21.

¹⁵⁶ *LÆ*, 10, 12, 15-16, 25-26, 28-29, 31.

¹⁵⁷ *LÆ*, 70.

¹⁵⁸ *LÆ*, 76-79.

¹⁵⁹ *LÆ*, 76.

¹⁶⁰ Bede, *HE*, 2.1, 4.22.

¹⁶¹ D. Ayalon, 'Regarding Population Estimates in the Countries of Medieval Islam', *Journal of the Economic and Social History of the Orient*, 28, (1985), pp. 10-11, quotes Ibn Taghribirdi's discussion of the impossibility of any counts of war and plague deaths in fifteenth-century Egyptian texts. The wildly divergent estimates of the numbers of dead in the Mesopotamian wars in the last quarter century (ranging over an order of magnitude from just above 100,000 to well in excess of 1,000,000) should serve as a reminder that our own era is not without its flaws.

leaving the reader to conclude that their authors meant only ‘a great many’ rather than the precision initially suggested by the figures.¹⁶²

Similarly, modern estimates of the population of the same time and place often have an enormous range, with, for example, estimates of the population of the Roman Empire in the relatively well-documented Antonine era ranging from 50,000,000 to 120,000,000 or many more¹⁶³ and similar variations for virtually all other periods where moderns have attempted to make estimates. Issues of demographic decline are equally vexed. Assumptions regarding a drastic fall in the population of the Roman world in the third century are well known¹⁶⁴ as are those that suggest enormous shrinkage of population during the cycle of plagues stretching from the reign of Justinian into the eighth century.¹⁶⁵ Yet, even what would appear to be undeniable evidence of severe demographic collapse has been disputed.¹⁶⁶

With such a degree of uncertainty in even the broadest outlines of demographics for the period, even matters of scale and ratios between slave and free populations or within populations of slaves between those who are tenant-slaves and those who are more fully enslaved must involve assumptions that can never be fully supported by any evidence. The ratios between slaves and free and between tenant and more tightly controlled slaves are likely to have varied greatly across the regions and between generations. The sorts of numbers that occur in many modern works can only be speculative and should not be regarded as being equivalent in any way to modern demographic data.

¹⁶² C. R. Whittaker, *Rome and its Frontiers: The Dynamics of Empire*, (London, 2004), pp. 53-54.

¹⁶³ M. Jones, *End of Roman Britain*, (Ithaca, 1996), pp. 261-3.

¹⁶⁴ A. E. R. Boak, *Manpower Shortage and the Fall of the Roman Empire in the West*, (Ann Arbor, 1955), p. 15.

¹⁶⁵ C. A. Mango, *Byzantium, the Empire of New Rome*, (New York, 1980), p. 68 ff.

¹⁶⁶ M. Whittow, ‘Ruling the Late Roman and Early Byzantine City: A Continuous History’, *Past and Present*, 129, (Nov. 1990), pp. 3 -29. See 2.4 below.

Some details of slavery in the period, though, are clear. Christianity had done nothing over the several centuries leading up to the seventh century to diminish slavery. Instead, in some ways, the legal situation for the enslaved had worsened; under the Republic and the early Empire, for instance, it had been unlawful for parents to sell their own children into slavery or for a person to be forced into slavery due to debt. Constantine had reversed that. Similarly, he had allowed the practice of taking foundlings as slaves though Justinian would overturn his law. Virtually the only clear case of Christianity having a reductive influence on slavery had been the outlawing of forced castration of male slaves and even that had been something of a half-measure; forced castration was made criminal but the continued importation of eunuchs from outside the Empire grew.¹⁶⁷

The barbarian invasions and the establishment of new kingdoms on the former territories of the Empire do not seem to have altered slave holding in any sort of a negative way. Several of those kingdoms produced surviving legal texts, providing some sort of notion of what was viewed as most important.¹⁶⁸ Under Gothic, Vandal, and Burgundian kings, cities continued to function as the centres of administration; barbarian rulers governed from Carthage, Ravenna, Toulouse, Vienne, and Toledo and social life for the elites, whether 'Roman' or 'barbarian' continued to focus on urban centres. There, the slave systems of the late Empire transitioned seamlessly into those of the new political reality. But even in provinces that saw urban life completely collapse, as in Britain, or drastically shrink, as in much of Gaul and in Italy after 568, slavery continued to be a major system of labour

¹⁶⁷ Banned by Constantine (*CJ*, 4.12.1), Leo the Thracian (*CJ*, 4.12.2), and Justinian (*Novellae Iustinianus*, 142).

¹⁶⁸ *LB*, 2.3-6; 4.3; 54.1; *Constitutiones Extrauagantes*, 21.12 *LB*, 92.3-6; 46.3)

mobilisation and can be considered both ubiquitous and pervasive, to at least as great an extent as in more urbanised areas.

If anything, it would seem as if the invasions brought an increase in the extent of slavery. While many individual slaves are reported to have fled to the barbarians,¹⁶⁹ the newcomers themselves were hardly emancipationists. Instead, regardless of the precise mechanics by which the new military elites were settled after the conquest (whether by direct expropriation of Roman estates¹⁷⁰ or through distribution of taxation via the administration¹⁷¹), it is probably safe to say that the units in which the benefits of the conquests were allocated among the invaders were largely territorial or fiscal. Even if Roman estates were divided up by the barbarians, the labourers on them, whether they were slave-labourers, free tenants, or rent-paying slaves, would have remained in place and carried on under new management. The evidence from nearly all sources points towards the idea that most of the pre-existing social systems in Gaul, Spain, North Africa, and Italy (under Odoacer and Theoderic) continued after the conquest with barely any disruption.

Some of the invaders might have had prior experience as slave-traders. Groups on the Roman frontiers had been involved earlier in the export of slaves into the Empire¹⁷² and the experience of slave-raiding might have been crucial in the formation of barbarian military units. While slave raids along and beyond the

¹⁶⁹ Zosimus, 5.13, describes slaves joining the revolt of Tribigild in 399 and, a decade later, 40,000 slaves fleeing Rome to join the forces of Alaric (5.42). Other fifth-century sources, including Salvian (*De Gubernatione Dei Libri VIII*, 5.5-11) and Orosius (*Historiarum Aduersum Paganos Libri VII*, 7.40-41), appear to assert that the defection of slaves to the barbarians was common (though it should be remembered that both were writing as critics of Roman society, rather than as historians).

¹⁷⁰ F. Lot in 'Du Régime de l'Hospitalité', *RBPH*, 7:3, (1928), pp. 975-1011.

¹⁷¹ W. Goffart, various publications, most recently, 'The Technique of Barbarian Settlement in the Fifth Century: A Personal, Streamlined Account with Ten Additional Comments', *JLA*, 3:1, (2010), pp. 65-98.

¹⁷² W. V. Harris, 'Towards a Study of the Roman Slave Trade,' *Memoirs of the American Academy in Rome, Vol. 36, The Seaborne Commerce of Ancient Rome: Studies in Archaeology and History* (1980), p. 124, summarizes some of the evidence for importation of slaves from beyond the frontier under the Principate.

Roman frontiers would have been common, the disruptions of the fifth century would have provided opportunities for even larger scale slave-catching. The 'Empire' of Attila appears to have functioned as, in essence, a vast extortion racket with side-lines in slave-trading and pillage.¹⁷³ During Priscus's famous embassy to the court of Attila, he encountered numerous enslaved Romans from the Balkan provinces¹⁷⁴ as well as the Greek merchant who had risen from slavery into acceptance among the Huns as an equal.¹⁷⁵ A few decades later, the *Vita Sancti Severini* depicts the civilian population of Noricum as being subjected to enslavement by the Rugii¹⁷⁶ and the same life suggests that fugitive slaves were common along the Danube.¹⁷⁷ A natural result of warfare throughout antiquity had been the enslavement of the defeated; that pattern clearly continued during the collapse of the Western Empire and the frequent wars among the successor states would have generated a constant supply of new slaves in the centuries that followed.¹⁷⁸

Similarly, when the first Islamic armies spread from out of Arabia in the 630's, they behaved much as their Christian contemporaries and predecessors had done and continued to do; they enslaved the defeated and turned formerly free people into slaves. While it is certainly true that, even more than contemporary Christianity, Islam recognised the humanity of the slave,¹⁷⁹ restricted abuse of slaves,¹⁸⁰ and provided far greater equality to former slaves than in Christian societies of the time,¹⁸¹ the conquests themselves created huge numbers of slaves and, just as their

¹⁷³ O. J. Maenchen-Helfen, *The World of the Huns: Studies in Their History and Culture*, (Berkeley, 1973), pp. 199-200.

¹⁷⁴ Priscus, fr. 11.370, 412.

¹⁷⁵ Priscus, fr. 11.407 – 510.

¹⁷⁶ Eugippius, *Vita Sancti Severini*, 8.

¹⁷⁷ Eugippius, preface.

¹⁷⁸ See 2.3, 3.3, and 4.2-4.4 below.

¹⁷⁹ *Qur'an* 2:221; 4:25; 16:71.

¹⁸⁰ *Qur'an* 4:36; 9:60; 24:33; 24:58.

¹⁸¹ B. Lewis, *Race and Slavery in the Middle East*, p. 6 ff.

predecessors in the West had done, the new Muslim elite fully accepted the existing slave-based economy. Just as in the West two centuries earlier, the conquest meant an increase in the number of slaves and a further embedding of slavery in the societies.

If an 'end of ancient slavery' is sought, it will not be found in this period nor were any of the events that occurred responsible for doing more than, at the absolute most, slightly ameliorating the conditions of slaves. Instead, as evidence shown above as well as throughout this text, the only real changes in the systems of slavery during the long seventh century are to be found in changes associated with alterations in supply and demand for new slaves at this time.

All of the societies examined appear to have had large numbers of slaves throughout the period. There were important distinctions that can be made between types of slaves, however. In most areas, the largest grouping of people who might be called 'slaves' in some of the sources were probably living in their own homes as tenants of one type or another. Even discounting them, though, it seems that there were sizable numbers of slaves who lacked their level of personal autonomy and were under constant threat of sale or further alienation virtually everywhere. How many slaves there may have been in a specific area, the type of work they might have done, and the likelihood of an individual slave being sold, though, seem to be more reflective of varying levels of urbanisation and of monetisation of economies rather than of whether slavery was a part of a local society or not. Even where economies were based on subsistence agriculture and trade consisted of little more than exchange of status gifts, slavery was still deeply rooted. The poorer economies of the north probably exported more slaves; the more developed east and south probably imported them in exchange for luxury goods. However, slavery in 'free'

Germany or the early Anglo-Saxon kingdoms seems to have been at least a significant part of daily life as it would have been in Constantinople. Relative absence or plenitude of laws shows only the relative complexity of the society.

If any distinction can be made during this period, it would seem only that the wealthier societies had more slaves than the more impoverished. Even that statement would need to be modified as, in less developed regions such as the British Isles, slaves appear to have been more numerous among the relatively more prosperous and powerful societies than among their more impoverished and weaker neighbours. Similarly, in areas that had experienced general impoverishment, such as the remnant Byzantine Empire at the end of the seventh century, the size of slave-holdings are likely to have decreased while in those that had grown in prosperity during the same period, such as the nascent Arab state, slaves would likely have become relatively more common. At the same time, even within states and societies, those closer to the areas of warfare and along frontiers in general had more slaves, regardless of poverty or wealth, as slaves were more easily obtained in such places.

1.4. Neither gang-labour nor sharecroppers: the uses of slaves in economic production

If the slaves of the seventh century were as ubiquitous and as numerous as it seems, it is perhaps reasonable to wonder what it was that these slaves did. The most obvious answer is that the vast majority of slaves, like the vast majority of all people

in the seventh-century world, were involved in agriculture.¹⁸² Most estimates are that upwards of 90% of the population were living in the countryside in virtually every region (with the major exception of Egypt¹⁸³) at the time,¹⁸⁴ much as had been true throughout classical antiquity¹⁸⁵ and would continue to be so until the modern period in most regions where agriculture has been introduced.

Regardless of how the labour force was organized, nearly all seventh-century farming was done in small-scale units of production. These could be small farms owned outright or leased under various systems by the individual peasant households. Some households might themselves be made up entirely or partially of slaves while others, sometimes even in the same areas, might be entirely free under the law. Occasionally, there appear to be collectively owned lands of free peasant communities (though these may have been fairly unusual) as well as communities of ambiguous status surviving here and there in marginal areas.¹⁸⁶ However they were set up, though, these systems of production appear in sources descriptive of sedentary agriculture from the Salic and the trans-Rhenish law codes to the *Nomos Georgikos*.

¹⁸² See W. Jongman, 'Slavery and the Growth of Rome: The Transformation of Italy in the Second and First Centuries BCE', in C. Edwards and G. Woolf, eds., *Rome the Cosmopolis*, (Cambridge, 2003), pp. 116-121 for an argument that, instead, the vast majority of slaves in the Roman Empire were urban. This argument, even if it were correct for the Late Republican and Early Imperial eras in Italy, cannot be seen as possible for the period under discussion as, with a very few notable exceptions, the populations of most of the cities of the Western Empire were in decline from, at the latest, the late fourth century yet the extent of slavery shows no sharp decline whilst much of the evidence (especially though not exclusively that from the post-Roman west) used in this study relates explicitly to non-urban (or post-urban) environments.

¹⁸³ R. S. Bagnall and B. W. Frier (*The Demography of Roman Egypt*, (Cambridge, 1994), p. 56) calculate that from a total population of 4,750,000, 1,750,000 – 37% – were urban in the second half of the second century.

¹⁸⁴ C. Wickham, *Framing the Early Middle Ages*, p. 12.

¹⁸⁵ A. Wilson, 'City Sizes and Urbanization in the Roman Empire', in A. Bowman and A. Wilson, eds., *Settlement, Urbanization, and Population*, (Oxford, 2011) p. 193.

¹⁸⁶ See C. Grey, 'Concerning Rural Matters,' in S. F. Johnson, ed., *The Oxford Handbook of Late Antiquity*, (Oxford, 2012), esp. pp. 633-642, for a strong description of the rural systems of the time.

Peasant smallholdings had been the original farming system in the Roman Republic¹⁸⁷ and had continued in many regions through the entire Roman period. Even if landownership had changed with the consolidation of larger holdings, the actual worked units frequently remained small due to the limits of available technology and the size of commercial markets. In these sorts of rural communities, slaves might be members of the households of the wealthier peasants rather than forming their own households. They appear frequently in the texts, sometimes as cupbearers¹⁸⁸ and grinders of grain¹⁸⁹ in the Kentish laws or as potentially recalcitrant fasters¹⁹⁰ and sexual partners¹⁹¹ in penitentials. The frequency with which they appear suggests that most slave-owning households possessed only a very few slaves who lived alongside the free and that all but the very poorest among free households possessed at least one or two slaves. Some even of the householders possessing slaves might even themselves be legally unfree; both Kentish and Lombard laws contain clauses that describe situations involving slaves owned by (in the Kentish case) *esnes*¹⁹² and (in the Lombard) *serui massarii*.¹⁹³

Despite allegations that this was the golden age of the peasant mode of production,¹⁹⁴ landownership in many regions was not divided into either individual or collectively owned plots. Instead, a few landowners might hold title to very large tracts of (not always contiguous) land. Whether these were continuations of Roman estates or were newly created, these estates occasionally leave some documentary traces; from the Carolingian period, there survive a number of polyptychs that detail

¹⁸⁷ Pliny, *Naturalis Historia*, 18.4.

¹⁸⁸ *LÆ*, 14; 16.

¹⁸⁹ *LÆ*, 11.

¹⁹⁰ *Laws of Wihtræd*, 11.

¹⁹¹ *PTA*, 9.

¹⁹² *LÆ*, 76.

¹⁹³ *Edictum Rothari*, 134.

¹⁹⁴ C. Wickham, *Framing the Early Middle Ages*, pp. 536-539.

the properties of monastic foundations while similar records survive in fragments among the Egyptian papyri.¹⁹⁵ From Vandal North Africa, the Albertini tablets give accounts of tenant farmers and their slaves living in a similar situation.¹⁹⁶ All depict systems where many agriculturalists held their land as tenants in return for rent paid either in coin or in kind. Traces of such systems occur throughout nearly all the legal systems and it seems reasonable to think that a very large percentage of agriculturalists were tenants of one sort or another. However, the tenants were seldom all of a single class. The polyptychs, for instance, clearly differentiate between free and un-free peasants as well as various gradations of each; the St. Germain Polyptych from the early ninth century, for instance, includes people living side by side in various categories of personal status, including slaves, *coloni*, and *lidi*; sometimes families even have mixed status.¹⁹⁷ The same source also depicts entire servile households working on their estates¹⁹⁸ while similar enslaved households appear in Lombard law.¹⁹⁹

Naturally, slaves formed a part of the agricultural workforce virtually everywhere. Unfortunately, the rural poor, whether free or slave, were usually the group least likely to have left literary traces and few, if any, details are known about almost all of them as individuals. Cædmon, celebrated as the first named English poet, is one of the very few likely exceptions. Bede described him as a lay brother whose duties involved tending to animals and sleeping in the stables.²⁰⁰ While Bede states that English was his native language, his name is probably Celtic in origin,²⁰¹ it

¹⁹⁵ E.g., *Papyrus Oxyrhynchus* 135.

¹⁹⁶ *Tablettes Albertini*, tablet 2a-b.

¹⁹⁷ *Polyptychum Irminonis Abbatis*, 11.2.

¹⁹⁸ *Polyptychum Irminonis Abbatis*, 11.3.

¹⁹⁹ *Edictum Rothari*, 234.

²⁰⁰ Bede, 4.24.

²⁰¹ K. Jackson, *Language and History in Early Britain: A Chronological Survey of the Brittonic Languages, First to Twelfth Century A.D.*, (Edinburgh, 1953), p. 244.

is possible that he was in origin a British slave of the Anglo-Saxon conquerors.

Similarly, it is entirely possible that Bede himself was of servile origins; he says of himself that he was born on the estate of the monastery of Wearmouth-Jarrow and was gifted by his relatives at the age of seven to Abbot Benedict.²⁰² Presumably, his family of birth were some type of tenant less than wholly free, perhaps akin to what would have been called *esnes* in Old English but might have been termed *serui* by a Latin-user. Bede, of course, is one of the few to whom we can even give a name.

Even if, as seems likely, many rural slaves were in their own homes and had some degree of autonomy in their daily lives, considerable numbers of slaves could be found on estates working directly for the landowners. During the first centuries of the empire, great estates worked by slaves are often thought to have been one of the primary modes of labour mobilisation in commercially oriented agriculture in some provinces.²⁰³ Writers such as Pliny the Elder²⁰⁴ noted that this sort of system had come to prevail in the Italian countryside by the first century.

Outside Italy, these estates may have been even more extensive; Pliny also reports that, in his own day, only six individuals owned over half the land in the Province of Africa.²⁰⁵ These African estates were among the primary sources of the grain and oil distributed in Rome.²⁰⁶ Though it may have broken down in some areas, much of the legal material found in the codes of Theodosius and Justinian suggest that it remained a major system of labour organisation involved in commercial

²⁰² Bede, 5.24; note that J. Campbell ('Secular and political contexts,' in S. DeGregorio, ed., *The Cambridge Companion to Bede*, (Cambridge, 2010), pp. 25-26) reads the evidence to presume that Bede's unnamed kinsmen are of the highest social strata.

²⁰³ K. Hopkins, *Conquerors and Slaves*, (Cambridge, 1978), pp. 9-10, ff.

²⁰⁴ Pliny, 18.4.

²⁰⁵ Pliny, 18.7.

²⁰⁶ J. T. Peña, 'The Mobilization of State Olive Oil in Roman Africa: The Evidence of Late 4th-c. Ostraca from Carthage', in J. H. Humphrey, ed., *Carthage Papers: The Early Colony's Economy, Water Supply, a Public Bath, and the Mobilization of State Olive Oil*, (Portsmouth, RI, 1998), pp. 153-162).

production. In the *Theodosian Code*, organised slave labour appears to have been common in the same grain-exporting areas of Africa, Sicily, and Sardinia.²⁰⁷ In the fifth century, slaves may also have done much of the commercial stock rearing.²⁰⁸ Large estates worked by slaves continued on in at least some regions of the West after the barbarian invasions. These appear as among the primary supports for the letter-sending Roman aristocracy in southern Gaul in the late fifth century. Sidonius Apollinaris describes his own estate of Avitacum at length; while primarily describing its refinements and taking the sources of his income as a given, he alludes to his numerous shepherds.²⁰⁹

These large-scale agricultural properties appear not to have been collections of separately organized holdings but, whether they were principally pastoral or were geared towards the cultivation of commercially important crops, they continue to appear in the sources. Most of the slaves appearing in the correspondence of Pope Gregory the Great were agricultural labourers who lived and worked on large estates that had come into the ownership of the Church.²¹⁰ The greatest of these estates were in Sardinia, southern Italy, and, especially, Sicily.²¹¹ On them, slaves existed in large numbers; in one letter, the Roman Church was alleged to have stolen slaves from their owners in Sicily as runaway slaves were claiming that they were the property of the Church and that the Church had accepted the words of these slaves as truth.²¹² Gregory ordered that such slaves be restored to their proper owners. Elsewhere, the Church stood accused of forcing its freedmen back into slavery²¹³ while, in Sicily,

²⁰⁷ *CT*, 2.25.1.

²⁰⁸ *CT*, 9.31.

²⁰⁹ Sidonius Apollinaris, *Epistulae* 2.2.

²¹⁰ Urban slaves also figure rarely in the texts though Gregory does mention them as being among the victims of a plague (*RE*, 9.232).

²¹¹ *RE*, 13.35.

²¹² *RE*, 1.38a.

²¹³ *RE*, 1.53.

the Church was accused of unlawfully holding slaves belonging to one Faustinus.²¹⁴ Such estates did not appear solely as property of the Church as can be inferred from the discussions about runaways from other estates. Similarly, Gregory appeared deeply concerned about reports of continuing pagan practice in Sardinia. His advice there was for slave-owners to beat and otherwise cajole their wayward slaves into conformity with the Church.²¹⁵ These problems make it clear that slaves on these estates were not working and living as scattered individuals; rather, from the perspective of their overseers, they were so numerous that they were hard to track and could claim to have a different ownership than their actual ones. Similarly, that they were depicted as mobile enough to simply switch estates would make it unlikely that they were working individual plots assigned to them. On these estates, whether owned by the Church or adjacent to them, there continued to be large estates worked by organised groups of slaves into the seventh century.

When the Muslims conquered large portions of the Mediterranean world, a similar dynamic followed. Many estates remained intact and in the hands of the same owners.²¹⁶ Others saw their former owners replaced by new Muslim landlords. In Egypt and the Levant, properties of Roman estate owners who fled with the evacuating armies were redistributed among the conquering Arabs;²¹⁷ there are only vague statements that a similar process happened in Africa.²¹⁸ For the tenants and slaves, much would have gone on as before. Meanwhile, in some of the conquered

²¹⁴ *RE*, 8.3.

²¹⁵ *RE*, 9.205.

²¹⁶ Ahmad ibn Yahya al-Balādhurī, *Kitāb Futūh al-Buldan*, 214.

²¹⁷ al-Balādhurī, 123, 127, 133, 147, 150; Abu Ja'far Muḥammad ibn Jarir al-Ṭabarī, *Tārīkh al-Rusul wa al-Muluk*, 2405-7; John of Nikiû, *Chronicle*, 114.1.

²¹⁸ Ibn 'Abd al-Ḥakam, 80.

areas, land-owning peasants were themselves transformed into tenants or slaves,²¹⁹ while some former slaves were transformed into free peasants by the conquest and slaves began working land that had previously been worked by the free.²²⁰ By the end of the seventh century at the latest, large estates worked by gangs of slave labour had emerged in southern 'Irāq²²¹ and similar slave-worked estates would become commonplace as commercial agriculture revived and expanded.²²²

Agriculture, of course, was far from the only type of economic production and artisanal production also used a great many slaves. In the Late Empire, many of the state-run cloth-weaving establishments and bakeries as well as the imperial mints and mines seem to have been largely staffed by slaves.²²³ Some of these, though, had become 'free' enterprises in the post-imperial centuries; the Frankish mints of the seventh century, for instance, were at least led by non-slaves,²²⁴ though slaves continued to be involved in mining,²²⁵ quarrying,²²⁶ and weaving.²²⁷ The vast potteries of the Roman period that had exported wares throughout the Mediterranean, for instance, finally disappear at this time and are largely replaced by cruder, locally

²¹⁹ As happened in southern 'Irāq (M. A. Shaban, *Islamic History: A New Interpretation, I: AD 600 - 750 (AH 132)*, (Cambridge, 1971), p. 47). See al-Ṭabarī, 2025, 2029, 2031, 2032, 2036, 2042, 2045, 2066, 2072, 2073, 2077, etc.

²²⁰ M. G. Morony, 'Landholding in Seventh-Century 'Irāq', in A. L. Udovitch, ed., *The Islamic Middle East, 700 -1900: Studies in Economic and Social History*, (Princeton, 1981), p. 165.

²²¹ A. M. Watson, *Agricultural Innovation in the Early Islamic World: The Diffusion of Crops and Farming Techniques, 700 - 1100*, (Cambridge, 1983), pp. 26 - 30, and p. 160, n.12; C. Pellat, *Le Milieu Basrien et la Formation de Ḡahiz*, (Paris, 1953), p. 41ff..

²²² M. Talbi, 'Law and Economy in Ifrīqiya (Tunisia) in the Third Islamic Century: Agriculture and the Role of Slaves in the Country's Economy', A. L. Udovitch, ed., *The Islamic Middle East, 700 - 1900: Studies in Economic and Social History*, (Princeton, 1981), pp. 215-221. See 4.3 and 4.5 below.

²²³ CT, 10.20.2 (weaving); 14.3.7 (bakeries); 10.20.16 (mints); 10.19.15 (mines).

²²⁴ Dado of Rouen, *Vita Eligii*, 1.1-5.

²²⁵ S. Vryonis, 'The Question of the Byzantine Mines', *Speculum*, 37:1, (Jan., 1962), pp. 1-17; Isidore, *Historia de regibus Gothorum, Vandalorum et Suevorum*, introduction; J. C. Edmondson, 'Mining in the Later Roman Empire and Beyond: Continuity or Disruption?' *JRS*, 79, (1989), pp. 99-102.

²²⁶ *Novellae*, 22.8.

²²⁷ *LR*, 61.18.

made wares in most areas.²²⁸ Slaves presumably worked in many of these smaller establishments but no longer in vast groups.

While the lack of a large servile labour force has been understood as characteristic of the full-blown manorial systems of the high middle ages²²⁹ and arguments have been advanced as to where and when the transformation from slaves to serfs happened, it is clear that this did not happen until long after the seventh century in any part of the Roman world and that, in at least some regions, it never seems to have happened at all.

1.5. Cleaners, cooks, and concubines: slaves in the household

While the long-running debate on the end of ancient slavery and the transition to serfdom has almost always been focused on the role of slaves in agriculture, copious evidence for both ancient and medieval slavery refers to slaves in domestic service. Throughout the Roman world, slaves had made up the vast majority of household servants;²³⁰ that remained true in subsequent centuries in most regions. The greater the wealth of a household, the more likely that it would possess slaves with the wealthiest, naturally, possessing the most slaves. Certainly, the great estates of the elite that continued to exist in many regions into the seventh century or beyond would have had quite large numbers of domestic slaves of various types. The privileged life of elites implies large numbers of slaves; as Guy Halsall observed of Merovingian estates in northern Gaul, “the best analogy is with an extreme, brutal

²²⁸ C. Wickham, *Framing the Early Middle Ages*, p. 785, pp. 722-724.

²²⁹ M. Bloch, ‘Comment et Pourquoi Finit l’Esclavage Antique’, p. 46.

²³⁰ K. Bradley, *Slavery and Society at Rome*, (Cambridge, 1994), pp. 61-64.

version of ‘Upstairs, Downstairs.’”²³¹ Unlike the slaves involved in agriculture discussed in the previous section, the slaves serving in households are far less ambiguous in status and much more likely to have been of the type subjected to trafficking and otherwise lacked much of the autonomy of a tenant slave.

As in other periods, domestic slaves were more likely to be women than were slaves working in the fields. Female slaves cooked the meals and cleaned the houses of even the merely prosperous. Female slaves performed most textile work, including cloth weaving²³² and thread spinning,²³³ and were also responsible for child-care²³⁴ and food preparation.²³⁵ Though usually invisible in the literary sources (almost universally written by elite males who did not need to cook or clean but merely assumed such services would be done), female domestic slaves come into some focus when they were the objects of the attentions of males in power. Presumably, there were many female slaves working in the imperial palaces in Constantinople yet the only mention of one as an individual is when a *θερόπαινα*, a young enslaved woman, spat out of a window and onto the corpse of the Empress Fabia Eudocia in 612. The slave was promptly burned to death.²³⁶

At the beginning of the seventh century, there seems little reason to suggest that there had been any significant decline in the use of slaves in domestic settings in the Byzantine Empire. However, the *Ecloga*, issued by Leo in the early eighth century, suggests that some things may have changed. There, a law appears stating that a woman’s maidservant who sleeps with her mistress’s husband will be punished

²³¹ G. Halsall, *Settlements and Social Organization*, p. 44. Many thanks to Prof. Halsall for pointing this analogy out in conversation when the present author made a similar comparison to ‘Downton Abbey.’

²³² *CT*, 10.20.2.

²³³ *LR*, 61.18: see below.

²³⁴ Abī ‘Umar Aḥmad ibn Muḥammad ibn ‘Abd Rabbiḥī, al-*Iqd al-Farīd*, 6.103; see below.

²³⁵ *LÆ*, 11.

²³⁶ Nicephorus, *Breviarium*, 3.5.

by enslavement,²³⁷ hardly an appropriate punishment for a slave. As the Empire had contracted and grown impoverished, the number of slaves had shrunk even while the supplies of slaves had increased elsewhere.

Such women were frequently used not merely as workers but were also potential concubines and prostitutes. As such, women as women rather than as workers were an essential part of the slave trade.²³⁸ Female slaves were not only torn from home and family to face endless, thankless years of drudgery (as would male slaves) but enslaved women also faced the regular possibility of being forced to have sexual relations with their owners as well as other similar forms of exploitation. Even when the primary purpose for which the woman had been purchased would have been some other form of labour, sexual exploitation would have been nearly inevitable.²³⁹ Forced sexual relations were simply part of what it meant to be a woman and a slave in the period. Many were prized far more for their sexual worth than for any labour that they might provide.

Concubinage was common practice in many of the societies of the seventh century and many concubines had been purchased as slaves. Slave concubinage in the later Roman world was, however, quite distinct from what would come after. In neither Christian nor pagan households of the Empire was polygamy anywhere common and, if it existed, was considered exceedingly peculiar.²⁴⁰ Slave women were, of course, quite common and, as in any society with numerous female slaves, sexual exploitation of them appears to have been far from rare. Some women might even have been expected to be used by their masters in primarily sexual exploitation

²³⁷ *Ecloga*, 18.21.

²³⁸ R. M. Karras, 'Desire, Descendants, and Dominance: Slavery, the Exchange of Women, and Masculine Power', in A. J. Frantzen and D. Moffat, eds., *The Work of Work: Servitude, Slavery, and Labour in Medieval England*, (Glasgow, 1994), p. 18.

²³⁹ R. M. Karras, 'Desire, Descendants, and Dominance', pp. 15-24.

²⁴⁰ A. Arjava, *Women and Law in Late Antiquity*, (Oxford, 1996), p. 208.

though it would appear that this might be seen as a source of shame. As an example, a hostile life of Maximus the Confessor written by the Monothelete George of Resha'ina claims that the Saint was the child of Abna, a Samaritan, and Šndh, a Persian slave in the household of Zadok, a Palestinian Jew. When the (we are told) very pretty slave discovered she was pregnant, she demanded the father either purchase her at once or she would disgrace him; he did so but his own Samaritan community was incensed by the thought of a pregnant slave and threatened to burn her alive. As a result, they fled to a Christian village and were baptised along with their child.²⁴¹

Once we pass out of the world directly ruled by the empire, however, we find something quite different, no matter where we look. In Merovingian Gaul, slave women seem to have been quite common in many free households. Naturally, they appear as sexually exploited as well as doing most domestic drudge work in the homes of all but the poorest free people. Whether they were locally born or brought from abroad, women slaves were numerous and essential to most households as they did most of the most gruelling work.

While being sold as a slave and forced into sexual relations cannot possibly be imagined as pleasant, some female slaves were able to use this advantageously. In the Merovingian kingdoms, a slave woman might have imagined herself as having the hope of being able to use the power of her sexuality to rise to the very heights of society like Queen Balthild. Born probably in East Anglia in 626 or 627, she was sold and exported to Neustria where, Erchinoald, Mayor of the Palace, purchased her. According to later sources, he intended to make her his personal concubine.²⁴² However, he eventually gifted her as a sex-slave to Clovis II. Allegedly, she

²⁴¹ George of Resha'ina, *Life of Maximus*, p. 314.

²⁴² *VDB*, 2-3.

demanded that Clovis marry her outright.²⁴³ She became queen and, after Clovis's death, ruled Neustria as regent for their son Chlothar while her other sons reigned in Austrasia and Burgundy.²⁴⁴ Eventually, when Chlothar came of age, she was sent off to a convent and spent the remainder of her life dedicated to works of charity, ultimately gaining sainthood. While traditions hostile to her, notably the *Vita Sancti Wilfrithi* by Stephen of Ripon, saw her as a bloodthirsty tyrant and a Jezebel who ordered the murders of bishops and clashed with the heroic English saint,²⁴⁵ her own eventual canonisation suggests that she was an active participant in the affairs of her own day. Her own *Vita*, written shortly after her death probably by a member of the community she had founded at Chelles, shows her, instead, as deeply concerned with the plight of slave women:

*Illud etiam commemorandum est, quod ad mercedis eius cumulum pertinet, quia captiuos homines christianos vendere prohibuit. Deditque preceptiones per singularum urbium regiones, ut nullus in regno Francorum captiuum hominem christianum penitus in aliud regnum transmitteret. Dato etiam iuste remunerationis pretio, plurimos redimere captiuos precepit et quosdam liberos relaxauit; quosdam uero cum religionis habitu sub regula in monasteria intromisit. Precipue autem de gente sua uiros et puellas, quas ipsa nutriuerat, sicut semet ipsam, Deo commendauit et coenobitalem uitam ducere instituit.*²⁴⁶

Paul Fouracre and Richard A. Geberding argued quite forcefully that, rather than an ordinary drudge, Balthild must have been from a highly placed Anglo-Saxon

²⁴³ VDB, 3.

²⁴⁴ *Liber Historiae Francorum*, 44.

²⁴⁵ Stephen of Ripon, *Vita Sancti Wilfrithi*, 6.

²⁴⁶ VDB, 9 (“she forbade the sale of captive Christian people. And she gave orders through the several cities and regions that no one in the Frankish realm was to sell captive Christians into other realms. She also gave the price of just remuneration and made many purchase orders for children, released prisoners, and placed some of them under the rules with the religious in monasteries. However, she especially commended to God the men from her own people and the girls, whom she herself had nurtured, just as (she commended) herself, and she taught them to lead a monastic life”).

family.²⁴⁷ However, they have no real basis for this, simply speculating that the contemporary sources must have lied, and it can be argued that the suggestion that she was of high birth found in later source is more likely to be a topos; how else, the writers would have thought, could a slave rise to be a Queen or a Saint? Such claims of high birth are not uncommon among people with ‘origins unknown’; one need only recall the many, many people who insist that their ancestors were great lords or kings in wherever they came from. Similarly, their hypothesis that, as she exercised substantial power, she must have of necessity been of high status in origin, regardless of what contemporary sources state, is hard to follow. At the very least, one can think of analogous situations elsewhere²⁴⁸ while the Fouracre/Geberding notion not only denies the sources but denies the possibility that an intelligent and attractive woman might have had any sort of agency. One might argue that the clear distaste with which the upper class Northumbrians Wilfrid and Stephen regarded her might be seen as evidence that they saw her as their social inferior.

While Balthild’s story is possibly the greatest rise from humble beginnings in the period, at least one other Merovingian queen – Bilichild, wife of Theudebert II, whom, Fredegar claimed, had been purchased from merchants by Brunhild²⁴⁹ – was a former slave, though rather less is known about her, and, quite probably, there were others as well among the many queens of whom we know nothing. It is certainly plausible that foreign slave-women might have been preferred as spouses by the

²⁴⁷ P. Fouracre and R. A. Geberding, *Late Merovingian France: history and hagiography, 640-720*, (Manchester: 1996) pp. 98-99. For an opposing view similar to the present author’s, see J. L. Nelson, ‘Queens as Jezebels: Brunhild and Balthild in Merovingian History’, in D. Baker, ed., *Medieval Women: Essays Dedicated and Presented to Professor Rosalind M. T. Hill*, (Oxford, 1978), p. 48.

²⁴⁸ As viewers of *Muhteşem Yüzyıl* (“The Magnificent Century”) will recall, the rise of slave-women of humble origin in the Ottoman Empire – such as Roxolena/Haseki Hürrem Sultan, consort and empress of Suleiman the Magnificent – was quite normal (E. Batuman, ‘Ottomania: A Hit TV Show Reimagines Turkey’s Imperial Past’, *The New Yorker*, 17 February 2014, pp. 50-58).

²⁴⁹ *Chronicle of Fredegar*, 4.35.

Merovingian house over the daughters of the aristocracy as they would not bring entanglements with their families of origin.

Whatever level of Christianisation had been obtained among the Franks, it had yet to impact the marital policies of either monarchy or nobility and, it would appear, that polygamy (or at least widespread concubinage) was not unusual throughout the Merovingian epoch and beyond. Concubinage was common among the Arnulfings: Charles Martel was the son of Alpaida, Pepin of Herstal's concubine,²⁵⁰ while Charlemagne had at least ten known wives or concubines.²⁵¹ Polygyny was accepted as normal among upper status Frankish males as these were often simultaneous, rather than serial, marriages; this was a break with both Roman and Christian practice but the Church appears not to have seen polygyny as especially problematic before the middle of the ninth century.²⁵² Presumably, many other slave women were also able to ascend the social hierarchy even if not to quite such rarefied heights as Balthild. Unfortunately, detailed information is lacking.

However, it is possible to see parallels between this practice and that in the Umayyad and 'Abbasid caliphates. In both regions, not only were slave women kept as concubines but members of the ruling group frequently had plural marriages. Among the Franks, as among the Arabs, having a foreign slave mother was not detrimental to inheriting power. It is certainly not something that we see at all in the last centuries of Roman rule in the West or among the Byzantines. There, when children by slave women or concubines were even acknowledged (something that appears to have been rare), they were extremely unlikely to inherit authority.

²⁵⁰ I. Wood, 'Before or After Mission: Social Relations Across the Middle and Lower Rhine in the Seventh and Eighth Centuries', in C. Wickham and I. Hansen, eds., *The Long Eighth Century: Production, Distribution and Demand*, (Leiden, 2000), p. 157.

²⁵¹ Einhard, *Vita Karoli Magni*, 3.18.

²⁵² S. F. Wemple, *Women in Frankish Society: Marriage and the Cloister, 500 to 900*, (Philadelphia, 1981), pp. 38-44.

Constantine had deprived non-legitimate children of inheritance rights in 336²⁵³ and, though Valentinian I²⁵⁴ and Theodosius II²⁵⁵ restored some rights, they remained deprived of an equal share.²⁵⁶ While the Emperor Heraclius's eldest son was a man named Athalarichos, born to a (presumably Germanic) concubine, and he appears as a military figure during his father's reign,²⁵⁷ he was passed over completely for the succession.

On the far side of the Mediterranean, practices similar to those found among Franks and Anglo-Saxons were the norm in both the pre-Islamic and early Muslim Arab communities. Slavery in Arabia at the time of the emergence of Islam appears to have been largely domestic in nature and the new religion would carry some legacy of that during its rapid expansion.²⁵⁸ Under Islamic law as it would come to be interpreted, free Muslims could not serve as servants in the households of non-relatives; with the growth of the numbers of prosperous Muslims, this naturally created a constant need for slaves for domestic service. Like their Frankish counterparts, such female slaves were not only desired for their skills in the kitchen. Aḥmad Ibn 'Abd Rabbihī, an early tenth-century Andalusian, quotes a text attributed to Caliph 'Abd al-Malik ibn Marwān (684-705), listing the tasks of female slaves, including domestic maintenance, child-rearing, and household chores as well as satisfying her owner's sexual desires, bearing his children, and nursing infants.²⁵⁹

Concubinage and the sexual use of female slaves were one of the aspects of slavery

²⁵³ CT, 4.6.2, 4.6.3.

²⁵⁴ CT, 4.6.4.

²⁵⁵ CT, 4.6.8.

²⁵⁶ J. C. Tate ('Inheritance Rights of Nonmarital Children in Late Roman Law', *Roman Legal Tradition*, 4 (2008), p. 8) observes that the first law giving inheritance rights back to illegitimate children after Constantine abolished the right of a man to leave anything to them was western, and "not until 405" do we find eastern laws. In fact, in the 5th century eastern laws are a lot more liberal towards inheritance rights of illegitimate children than the western ones, and Justinian even legislates in favour of slave-born illegitimates.

²⁵⁷ Nicephorus, 13.

²⁵⁸ See 4.1 below.

²⁵⁹ Ibn 'Abd Rabbihī, 6.103.

directly addressed by the *Qur'ān*²⁶⁰ and the practice remained normal for centuries.

As among the Franks, birth to an enslaved woman was not a problem for membership in the elite and children of slaves and former slaves would regularly be found even among the later Caliphs as they had been among the pre-Islamic Meccan elite.²⁶¹ With such a view, it is not surprising that attractive and nubile female captives were regularly gifted and trafficked in the new Islamic societies.

Elsewhere, though, the evidence is less clear. It certainly appears likely that, among the Anglo-Saxons, the same sort of practices were common though documentation is harder to find. Laws and penitentials regularly mention female slaves in sexual contexts but, unlike the Franks and Arabs, none of these women are known by name. Certainly, sexual relations between free men and slave women was a subject of concern in the seventh-century Anglo-Saxon kingdoms but, rather than being matter of legal worries, it was problematic as a matter of sin. In a document known as the *Poenitentiale Theodori Archiepiscopi*, traditionally attributed to Theodore of Tarsus (though unlikely to have come from his hand²⁶²) and widely distributed in various forms in Francia as well as in Britain, the penance due for a host of sins are listed. Along with sins such as abortion,²⁶³ bestiality,²⁶⁴ masturbation,²⁶⁵ both male²⁶⁶ and female²⁶⁷ homosexual behaviour, and other such

²⁶⁰ *Qur'ān*, 4:24-6.

²⁶¹ K. 'Athamina, 'How Did Islam Contribute to Change the Legal Status of Women: The Case of the *Jaw'ari*, or the *Female Slaves*', *al-Qantara*, 28:2, (July 2007), p. 385.

²⁶² The text itself does not claim to be the work of Theodore but to have been collected from him by Eoda, a presbyter, and written down by a '*discipulus Umbrensius*' (*PTA*, preface).

²⁶³ *PTA*, 1.14.27; curiously, the penitential distinguishes between an abortion in the first trimester (which carries a penance period of 40 days) and later (when it is treated as a murder).

²⁶⁴ *PTA*, 1.2.2-3.

²⁶⁵ *PTA*, 1.2.9, 1.2.13.

²⁶⁶ *PTA*, 1.2.2, 1.2.4-8.

²⁶⁷ *PTA*, 1.2.12. Curiously, the penance period for participation in lesbian activities was three years (the same as for female masturbation, where male masturbation carried a penance of 40 days) while participating in male homosexual activities varied from two to fifteen years. (Bestiality carries a penance period of ten or fifteen years.)

matters, various permutations of adultery²⁶⁸ are enumerated and the appropriate penance periods spelled out for the sinners. In these, a man's penance instituted for 'defiling' ('*maculat*') a woman is markedly less if she is his slave than if she is free (though greater for a virgin than a married woman):

*IX. Qui maculat uxorem proximi sui, iii annos absque uxore propria ieiunet, in ebdomada ii dies et in tribus XLmis. X. Si uirgo sit, unum annum poeniteat, sine carne uinoque et maedone. XI. Si puellam Dei maculauerit, III annos peniteat, sicut supra diximus, licet pariat an non pariat filium ex ea. XII. Si ancilla eius sit, liberet eam et VI menses ieiunet.*²⁶⁹

While the slave woman's chastity is clearly of lesser value in terms of the penance due to her defiler, it is perhaps noteworthy that she, unlike the others, might have gained something from such an event.

There are traces of similar traditions throughout the earliest English laws and they may even be reflected in the English language itself. Old English borrowed few words from Celtic languages. Rather than showing simply a lack of contact, this could also result in a situation where the two language communities were grossly unequal; slave owners would see little reason to replace a perfectly good Germanic word with its 'servile' equivalent. However, the language might still reflect the presence of large numbers of Celtic-speaking slaves as there is evidence of some impact of Celtic grammar on English in this period when it developed separate habitual and actual paradigms of the verb *to be*, a form shared with Welsh but in no

²⁶⁸ However, 'simple' adultery and rape do not appear as clearly differentiated, suggesting that 'consent' as moderns would know it was an alien concept.

²⁶⁹ PTA, 1.14.9-12 ("9. *He who defiles his neighbour's wife, shall fast for three years deprived of his own wife, in each week two days and in the three 40-day periods. 10. If she is a virgin, he shall do penance for one year without meat and wine and mead. 11. If he defiles a woman of God, three years he will do penance, just as we said above, even if she gives birth or does not give birth to a son from this. 12. If she is his slave, he will free her and for six months fast*").

other Germanic language. It might have arisen from large numbers of native Celtic speakers (particularly women) having their native language ‘interfere’ with imperfectly learned English; as Angelika Lutz observed, “as house slaves they would have been in close daily contact not only with their masters but, linguistically more important, also with their masters’ children.”²⁷⁰

Presumably, similar patterns would also have been found among the other Germanic peoples of the north while, in more Romanised areas, social mores appear not to have been quite as straightforward. While the use of female slaves for sex is likely to have been common, it is far more likely in these regions to have been condemned. In Roman law, children born to slave women were not free even if their fathers were and that remained normative practice in the Visigothic kingdom as well as in the remaining Imperial provinces. Church teachings here were less likely to condone the birth of children to slave women; when, for instance, clergy themselves were the fathers, the children were automatically enslaved for life and taken from them.²⁷¹ Yet, the very frequency of these condemnations makes clear that slave women in these places were no less likely than elsewhere to be called upon for sex; the only difference would appear to be that the women were less likely to gain any benefit and any resulting children were to be poorly treated.

Similarly, the repeated condemnations and outlawings of the prostituting of slaves demonstrate that many female slaves were likely to have found themselves used by their masters in such a way. In the Roman period, slave women had been presumed to have neither honour nor virtue worth defending and, as prostitution was a permissible business, nothing was seen as reprehensible in profiting from it. The

²⁷⁰ A. Lutz, ‘Celtic Influence on Old English and West Germanic’, *English Language and Linguistics*, 13:2, (1989), p. 243.

²⁷¹ 9 Toledo 10.

only way a crime might be committed was if the contract of sale had specified that the slave would not be used as a prostitute under the doctrine of *ne serua*.²⁷² In a law of Diocletian, dated 291, a case is referred to in which the woman who had redeemed the petitioner's daughter from the enemy had then prostituted her; the disgrace and wretchedness appears to be that a freeborn woman had been made to work as the lowest type of slave.²⁷³ However, once Christianity had been established, new laws were made. In 343, Constantius forbade prostituting Christian slaves and decreed that only Christians could purchase formerly prostituted Christian women.²⁷⁴ Theodosius II would make the law more general²⁷⁵ while Justinian, perhaps for understandable personal reasons, went much further in attempting to eliminate prostitution by decree and made pimping a death penalty crime.²⁷⁶

Bans on prostituting one's slaves were regularly repeated in civil and canon law; the repetition suggests that the constancy of the problem. Again, the banning of the prostituting of slaves was one of the few aspects of slavery clearly addressed in the *Qur'an*.²⁷⁷ However, none of these bans were wholly successful.²⁷⁸ In the eighth century, Boniface complained to the Archbishop of Canterbury that there was hardly a brothel in Gaul or Lombardy that was not filled with English women²⁷⁹ and it might be that many of them had been forcibly trafficked out of their homeland rather than, as often claimed, that these were errant pilgrims and nuns fallen from grace.²⁸⁰

²⁷² *Digest*, 18.7.6; 40.8.6; *CJ*, 4.56.1-3.

²⁷³ *CJ*, 8.51.7.

²⁷⁴ *CT*, 15.8.1.

²⁷⁵ *CT*, 15.8.2.

²⁷⁶ *Novellae*, 14.

²⁷⁷ *Qur'an*, 24:32 – 33.

²⁷⁸ The export of women to be used by their buyers as prostitutes remains one of the most common forms of slavery in the present day; UN estimates are that upwards of 1,000,000 women per year are trafficked for use as sex workers (D. M. Hughes, 'The 'Natasha' Trade: The Transnational Shadow Market of Trafficking in Women', *Journal of International Affairs*, 53:2, (Spring 2000), p. 628).

²⁷⁹ Boniface, *Epistulae*, 78.

²⁸⁰ E.g., P. H. Blair and S. Keynes, *An Introduction to Anglo-Saxon England*, 3rd ed., (Cambridge, 2003), p. 162.

While the legal and religious systems throughout the post-Roman world of the seventh century were deeply concerned with protecting the honour and chastity of other women, there was no such interest in defending that of slave women. They, unlike those other women, did not possess honour to begin with. For enslaved women, it meant to live in a permanent state of dishonour and disgrace. Slave women were seen as being sexually unchaste and the slave-owner was well within his rights in making sexual demands of them. Sexual assault against an enslaved woman was only a matter of law in so much as it was a crime against her owner's property.²⁸¹ If she engaged in sexual relations with her owner, the only penalty for her partner in the eyes of the church was in terms of fornication, regardless of whether it were consensual or if it were the most brutal rape.²⁸² She had no rights to autonomy, no personal freedom, no dignity. Slavery, for a woman, meant to be forever at risk of rape and without any hope of justice. Hence, in the *Vita Domnae Balthildis*, Balthild's maintenance of her sexual purity until her marriage with the king is (whether it occurred in reality or not) a matter of her possessing dignity and honour above her station and being suited to future sainthood.²⁸³

However, such situations were distinctly different when the gender roles were reversed. Free men who had sex or even married slave women were not always penalized in the law codes from the era;²⁸⁴ a mere freedman who 'only' had sex with someone else's slave faced a penalty of eight and a half solidi.²⁸⁵ Free Salian Franks having consensual extra-marital sex faced exile.²⁸⁶ Free women who had sex with

²⁸¹ *LR*, 61.9-11.

²⁸² *PTA*, 1.14.9-12.

²⁸³ *VDB*, 3.

²⁸⁴ In the *LR*, a freedman who marries an enslaved woman reverts to slavery (61.9) as the general principle was stated explicitly in the law that, if the woman had a lower status than her husband, he would assume her status whatever it was (61.11).

²⁸⁵ *LR*, 61.9.

²⁸⁶ *PLS*, *Capitularia* 6.2.2.

male slaves or married them were universally seen as having transgressed the boundaries of decency. Such behaviour was severely dealt with in nearly all of the surviving law codes of the period. This was an outrage in both Roman and Germanic legal traditions²⁸⁷ and was seen as something that shook the foundations of society. A woman who engaged in such transgressive behaviour might be punished by being enslaved, deported, or burnt alive. In the Salic law, the woman was outlawed and could be killed without penalty by anyone while the slave was tortured to death; meanwhile, any member of her family who gave her shelter and refused to punish her was considered as a lawbreaker in turn:

*LXLVIII. De muliere, qui se cum seruo suo copulauerit. I. Si quis mulier, qui cum seruo suo in coniugio copulauerit, omnes res suas fiscus adquirat et illa aspellis faciat. II. Si quis (de parentibus)eam occiderit, nullus mortem illius nec parentes nec fiscus (nulla tenus) requiratur. Seruus ille pessima (c)ruciatu ponatur, hoc est (ut) in rota mittatur. Et uero muliere ipsius de parentibus aut que(m)libet panem aut hospitem dederit, solidos xv culpabilis iudicetur.*²⁸⁸

Elsewhere in the same law code, the woman's enslavement was mentioned repeatedly.²⁸⁹ It was hardly a new or Germanic concept; in fifth-century Roman law, she would have faced deportation²⁹⁰ while Justinian's *Code* called for her execution.²⁹¹ The same penalty was also found in Byzantine laws of the next

²⁸⁷ See J. Evans Grubbs, "'Marriage More Shameful Than Adultery": Slave-Mistress Relationships, "Mixed Marriages", and Late Roman Law,' *Phoenix*, 47:2, (Summer, 1993), pp. 150-152.

²⁸⁸ *PLS*, 98.1-2 ("98. *Of a woman, who has coupled with her slave. 1. If any woman, who with her slave has coupled in union, all her property is acquired by the fisc and she is to be driven out from there. 2. If any from her family kill her, nothing for the death is required, neither by her parents nor by the fisc. The slave shall endure the worst torture, that is that he shall be broken upon the wheel. And in truth, if her family or anyone else gives the woman food or hospitality, let them be judged guilty for 15 solidi*").

²⁸⁹ *PLS*, 13.8-9; 25.3-4.

²⁹⁰ *CT*, *Novellae Anthemius*, 1.

²⁹¹ *CJ*, 9.11.1.

century²⁹² as well as in contemporary Visigothic²⁹³ and Lombard laws.²⁹⁴ Of course, her enslavement and sale was sometimes also mentioned, as found in the *Codex Theodosianus*,²⁹⁵ the Frankish Salic law,²⁹⁶ Lombard laws,²⁹⁷ and the Visigothic *Forum Iudicum*²⁹⁸ though some went much further than others. The woman faced execution and the rascally slave was burnt alive in Roman law throughout the period.²⁹⁹ Perhaps the most graphic depiction of the consequences occurs in the *Lex Ripuaria*. As the text reads:

*Quod si ingenua Ribuarum seruum Ribuarium secuta fuerit et parentes eius hoc refragare uoluerint, offeratur ei a rege seu a comite spada et cunucula. Quod si spadam acciperit, seruum interficiat. Sin autem cunuculam, in seruitio perseueret.*³⁰⁰

There, the free woman was to be given a choice between a spindle and a sword with both being held out to her. If she reached for the spindle, she would be enslaved and sold. If the second, she was expected to immediately slay her male partner with her own hands. Either way, the outcome could not have been pleasant for the woman.

Beyond the arresting image itself, though, what can this tell us beyond the sort of thing we already knew? The double standards of the era are obvious when laws regulating the sexuality of slaves (an issue of concern for nearly all the law-makers) are examined. The protection of free women's innate virtue from the depredations of male slaves was seen as self-evident; they were 'rascals', ready to

²⁹² *Appendix to the Ecloga*, 6.4.

²⁹³ *FI*, 3.2.2.

²⁹⁴ *Edictum Rothari*, 221.

²⁹⁵ *CT*, 4.12.1.

²⁹⁶ *PLS*, 25.3-4.

²⁹⁷ *Edictum Rothari*, 221; *Leges Ratchisi*, 2.6-7.

²⁹⁸ *FI*, 3.2.2.

²⁹⁹ *CT*, 9.9.1; *CJ*, 9.11.1; *Appendix to Ecloga*, 6.4.

³⁰⁰ *LR*, 61.18 ("if a free Ripuarian woman has been following a Ripuarian slave and her parents wish to oppose this, let her be offered by the king or the count a sword and a spindle. If she accepts the sword, then she kills the slave. But if she accepts the spindle, in slavery she shall continue").

prey on free women.³⁰¹ Sexual relations between free men and their female slaves were to be expected. Slave women were seen as being sexually unchaste and the slave-owner was well within his rights in making sexual demands of them. While a slave woman lacked autonomy within her own body and had few options other than meet her owner's sexual demands, male slaves also had their sexuality controlled by their owners. In a very real sense, this type of control can be understood as one of the crucial differences between true slavery and other types of un-freedom.

Slave-owning men could marry their own slaves quite freely in most of the societies. If they did marry, the slave's manumission was often assumed. However, even in some of the societies where laws existed banning male slaves and free women having relations, there is evidence that at least some women married 'down,' to either men still enslaved or those only recently freed and escaped the proscribed penalties. While the evidence comes from a somewhat later period, in the Carolingian polyptychs, 'mixed' households appear frequently where the woman has a higher legal status than her husband.³⁰² In some of these cases, it might be possible that women might have seen such marriages as insuring land tenure and security; thus, the lowered status of her mate might be overlooked. These marriages, though, would have needed to have the support of the slave's owner and, by the time that they appear (in the ninth century), the overall social situation appears to have changed as these sources date from a period and place when the social norms of the seventh century had vanished.

³⁰¹ *CJ*, 9.11.1, quoting a law of Constantine, refers to the slave as 'verberone'.

³⁰² E.g., *Polyptychum Irminonis Abbatis*, 11.2, etc.; see above.

1.6. The cruellest cut: eunuchs and slavery

If the bodies of enslaved women were often both the cause and the scene of their exploitation, they were matched in that by a group of male slaves, the eunuchs, found in many of the societies of the period. While after their castration their exploitation would normally have been less directly sexual,³⁰³ the vast majority of eunuchs had entered service as slaves though some were able to advance far as freedmen in both Byzantium and the Islamic state. Nearly all of them served their masters as household servants, whether as bodyguards or as skilled domestics. Such position could lead to the possibility of a considerable rise in social position as eunuchs were likely to have the confidence of their masters (whether among the upper classes or in the imperial court itself) and could be trusted not to attempt to seize positions for themselves.³⁰⁴

Before Constantine, eunuchs had been created within the Empire, particularly in Asia Minor, and their procurement had been simply an aspect of the general slave trade; some came from outside the Empire, many from within. As previously discussed, in the Christian Empire, they were nearly always imported as Constantine had issued a stern rule against the practice, making castration a death penalty crime and confiscating any property on which it was carried out.³⁰⁵ Leo the Thracian (457-474) went further and ordered that

Romanae gentis homines siue in barbaro siue in romano solo eunuchos factos nullatenus quolibet modo ad dominium cuiusdam transferri iubemus: poena grauissima statuenda aduersus eos, qui hoc perpetrare ausi fuerint, tabellione

³⁰³ Though not always: see Claudian, *In Eutropium*, 1.62-77.

³⁰⁴ K. Harper, *Slavery in the Late Roman World, AD 275-425*, p. 337.

³⁰⁵ *CJ*, 4.42.1.

*uidelicet, qui huiusmodi emptionis siue cuiuslibet alterius alienationis instrumenta conscripserit, et eo, qui octauam uel aliquod uectigalis causa pro his susceperit, eidem poenae subiciendo.*³⁰⁶

In the same period, though, there was no decline in the employment of eunuchs in both the Imperial palace and in the homes of many of the wealthy. If anything, the practice became more common in the Christianised Empire than it had been previously as court ceremonial and hierarchical behaviour had increased. Eunuchs were employed in, apparently, ever increasing numbers as high-ranking servants.

The growing demand created a clear opportunity for those willing to profit on suffering. The pagan Abasgoi living in the narrow strip of land between the Caucasus Mountains and the Black Sea capitalised on the opportunity. According to Procopius, their rulers would seize attractive young boys, castrate them, and sell them into the Roman Empire;

*Καὶ ἀπ' αὐτοῦ τῶν ἐν Ῥωμαίοις εὐνούχων οἱ πλείστοι καὶ οὐχ ἥκιστα ἐν τῇ βασιλείῳ ἀυλῇ γένος Ἀβασγοὶ ἐτύγγανον ὄντες.*³⁰⁷

Under Justinian, though, the Empire sanctioned efforts to Christianise the Abasgoi. As a result, their rulers ceased creating new eunuchs and their export to Constantinople disappeared. Few new eunuchs entered Roman service but demand remained high. Many Romans began castrating slaves and selling them and, in 558, Justinian was moved to act for, he claimed, only three survived from every 90 that

³⁰⁶ CJ 4.42.2 (“the ownership of men of the Roman nation that have been made eunuchs, whether in Roman or barbarian land, in no way may their ownership be transferred to anyone; and the most severe penalty will be fixed against those who have dared to perpetrate this, that is to say, including the notaries who have made the document of sale or of any other tools of alienation; and he who received the eighth, or anything else by way of tax, will also submit to the same punishment. Yet we grant authority to all the traders to buy or sell where they will eunuchs of barbaric nations from outside the boundaries of Our Empire”).

³⁰⁷ Procopius, *De Bello*, 8.3.3 (“it was in consequence of this that most of the eunuchs among the Romans, and particularly at the Emperor’s Court, happened to be Abasgi by birth”).

were operated on while the number of such ‘impious acts’ continued to multiply.³⁰⁸

As a result, any who had been castrated for any reason within the Empire were emancipated and could not be enslaved in the future.³⁰⁹ Despite these efforts, though, the demand for eunuchs remained great within the Byzantine state; other lands provided eunuchs for the market though some eunuchs continued to come from within the Empire. That eunuchs disappeared from the West for some centuries is likely as a result of Constantinople absorbing the greater part of the trade while Christianised (however lightly) peoples were barred from creating more.

In the seventh century, though, mutilation was sometimes a punishment for would be rebels. Constantine IV (668 – 685) had the sons of the Patrician Justinian, one of the plotters in the assassination of his father Constans II, castrated. One of the sons later became the Patriarch Germanus I and was apparently an opponent of iconoclasm. Several eunuchs figure prominently among the Byzantine military leadership of the era. These include Narses, a eunuch of either Caucasian or Persian origin who had been an intimate of Justin II³¹⁰ and served as a general against the Persians under Maurice.³¹¹ Like the two Heraclii, he remained loyal to Maurice after Phocas’s revolt, seizing Edessa with Persian support in the immediate aftermath of the coup though he was soon defeated by a second eunuch, Leontius, leading forces loyal to Phocas and was burned alive in 604 in spite of the promises made to him.³¹² Other eunuch generals included Novianus, sent by Heraclius to Egypt to unsuccessfully fight the Egyptians³¹³ and Cacoritzus, a general under Constans II;³¹⁴ both of them had held the office of *cubicularius*, chamberlain of the Imperial court.

³⁰⁸ *Novellae Justinianus*, 142, Preface.

³⁰⁹ *Novellae Justinianus*, 142.2.

³¹⁰ Corippus, *In laudem Iustini minoris*, 3.221; 4.363; Theophanes, *Chronographia*, 376.

³¹¹ Theophanes, 387; 410.

³¹² Theophylact Simocatta, *Historiae*, 112, 208, 213, 219; Theophanes, 451 ff.

³¹³ Nicephorus, *Breviarium*, 28.

³¹⁴ Theophanes, 526.

While their origins are unclear, that of Justinian II's treasurer, Stephanus the Persian, is more obvious and he is likely also to have risen from servile origins. As a eunuch, he was widely hated and, according to Theophanes, did much to contribute to the policies leading to the overthrow of his master.³¹⁵ While Justinian was losing his nose, he was paraded through the streets of Constantinople before being burned alive in the Forum of the Ox.³¹⁶

Eunuchs were rare in the West and when they appeared, they were almost always emissaries or appointees from the Eastern Empire (though Theoderic may have employed at least two in his court³¹⁷). In the sixth century, Narses, a court official turned general, played a leading role in the final defeat of the Ostrogoths³¹⁸ while, later on, Eleutherius served as Exarch of Ravenna before proclaiming himself emperor in 619.³¹⁹ Otherwise, they were rare even in the Byzantine-ruled Exarchate though familiar enough to appear in a mosaic in San Vitale.³²⁰

Similarly, they had been all but unknown among the Arabs before the conquests. There had been few eunuchs in the Arabia of Muḥammad's lifetime; when the Egyptian governor al-Muqawqis gifted the Prophet with two Coptic slave girls (Mariya and Sīrīn), he had sent Mābūr an elderly eunuch with them.³²¹ The eunuch's presence had caused confusion for the Muslims; his presence in the women's quarters was thought by some of the Companions to be improper, a worry that was proven false when 'Alī Ibn Abī Ṭalib secretly observed him and reported to

³¹⁵ Theophanes, 562.

³¹⁶ Theophanes, 566.

³¹⁷ S. Tougher, *The Eunuch in Byzantine History and Society*, (Abingdon, 2008), p. 42.

³¹⁸ Procopius, 8.33.1.

³¹⁹ T. S. Brown, *Gentlemen and Officers: Imperial Administration and Aristocratic Power in Byzantine Italy*, (Rome, 1984), p. 135.

³²⁰ S. Tougher, *The Eunuch in Byzantine History and Society*, p. 85.

³²¹ al-Ṭabarī, 1591.

the others on the nature of the operation. This tale certainly suggests that eunuchs were exceedingly uncommon.³²²

The expansion of Islam into former Byzantine and Sassanid domains would bring many under Muslim rule. However, the notion that eunuchs were neither children nor parents of Muslims was something that would be a point of pride for Islamic authors.³²³ Unlike in the Byzantine Empire, all eunuchs in the Islamic lands had come from outside it, either by virtue of living in lands conquered by Muslim armies or by importation from elsewhere. Yet, by the end of the seventh century, eunuchs had begun to appear as domestic servants in the homes of the wealthier Muslims and the court of the Caliph. As many of the eunuchs were slaves who had been attached to the defeated Imperial courts or to the dispossessed high aristocracies, they passed into the possession of the new rulers.

Though many of the first generation of conquerors appears to have had little to do with eunuchs, they began to be found in the households of many of the more wealthy Arabs. Mu'āwiyah ibn 'Abī Sufyān is supposed to have been the first Caliph to have employed them in his household³²⁴ and, by the end of the century, they were used in the Umayyad Court in much the same way that they were in that of the Byzantines. Court fashions were then imitated by the upper classes and the eunuch as harem guard and as courtier soon became at least as common in the Islamic states as in the Byzantine world. Their very presence strongly suggests that a large-scale trade in human slaves was under way and that they, like concubines and even many domestic servants, were sought after as exports from distant lands.

³²² al-Ṭabarī, 1782.

³²³ Abu Mansur al-Tha'alibi, *al-Laṭa'if wal-zarā'if*, 79, II.18-19, quoted in D. Ayalon, 'On the Eunuchs in Islam', *Jerusalem Studies in Arabic and Islam*, 1, (1979), p. 68.

³²⁴ Aḥmad ibn 'Alī Qalqashandī, *Ma'āthir al-ināfah fī ma'ālim al-khilāfah*, 3:344.

This chapter began by seeking to define ‘slave.’ While both the modern English term and its analogues in post-Roman texts can be ambivalent and may refer either directly or figuratively to virtually any type of labour or un-freedom, it has been narrowed for the present purposes to being someone who is not simply un-free but who may be sold separate from all other properties as chattel. Using that definition, it was possible to examine how slavery was understood at the beginning of the seventh century and to find in Isidore’s *Etymologiae* clear conceptions of it that matched this understanding. Though the sources sometimes conflate slaves forming their own households and working as tenant-farmers with those under a narrower meaning of slavery, it became clear that slavery was not only seen as a routine part of society but that it was ubiquitous throughout the post-Roman world. There is no evidence for the massive chain-gang labour of the popular imagination of slavery in the period nor was slavery replaced by something more like serfdom. Actual slaves can be found in agricultural and artisanal production whenever textual sources refer to almost any sort of labour. Similarly, slaves appear as the primary workforce in domestic economies throughout the written sources and in all parts of what had been the Roman Empire; only the poorest homes lacked slave workers. Some sub-groups of slaves were especially valued for what they might offer within the home; both concubines and eunuchs can be shown as being sold at great distances from their places of origin and both were widely known among at least some sections of seventh-century elites. This survey demonstrates that rather than being a marginal activity (as some of the discussions of specific regions in the period have maintained), slaves and slavery could be found throughout the Roman world. Slavery appears nowhere as being in decline and continued to have a vital function everywhere.

2. Maintaining an enslaved population

While it should be clear from the previous chapter that slaves were both numerous and ubiquitous in virtually the whole of the post-Roman world and that, for the smooth functioning of most seventh-century societies, at least some categories of slaves would need to be regularly brought in to service, it is not yet necessarily obvious where slaves came from in either sense of that phrase. Unquestionably, some portion of slaves began their lives as free persons, whether in the places where they were held as slaves or at some distance from their homes, and, equally unquestionably, some portion of them had been born into slavery. What the balance between the two populations would have been, though, is much harder to determine.

This chapter attempts to discover the origins of slaves throughout the whole of the post-Roman world. In so large a region, of course, there would be many different experiences and different origins might be found for separate individuals even in close proximity to each other. Were some of them born as slaves? Did many slaves live under the same owner for the whole of their lives? Or were most slaves formerly free persons? How did formerly free people enter slavery? What sorts of methods provided the slaves required by seventh-century societies? Can an attempt be made to calculate the volume of the slave trade?

Probably, the majority of slaves were born into the status and, like most people of the era, spent their entire lives close to their birthplaces. However, when those in unfree legal status living in their own homes and having some personal autonomy are set aside, the remaining population of slaves was unlikely to have been self-sustaining; even if the birth-rate among these slaves was at or above replacement

level (which seems unlikely), the existence of numerous freedmen, runaways, and other former slaves (as well as free persons born to an enslaved parent) would point towards a steady attrition in slave numbers. Several mathematical models will be briefly discussed. Even the most conservative, though, will demonstrate the necessity of regular replenishment of the slave population in all regions with the failure to do so leading to the relatively rapid disappearance of slavery as an institution in those regions.

The remainder of the chapter will attempt to elucidate the ways in which new slaves might be ‘recruited.’ First, some of the ways that free people might become slaves in the period will be examined. These included the abandonment of infants and their upbringing as slaves, enslavement as punishment for specific crimes, and debt bondage. Additionally, clear evidence describes the sale of children into slavery by their own parents as well as self-sale. Some of the material (especially that describing enslavement as punishment) specifies the sale of the new slave away from their own homes and some of the enslaved may have been taken considerable distances from their homes.

Even during peacetime, the possibility of kidnapping leading to enslavement existed. During wars, defeated soldiers were commonly sold as slaves; victories were often accompanied by the arrival of a great many slaves. Numerous writers mention specific contexts from across the Roman world in which defeated warriors were sold as slaves. At the same time, much of the warfare of the period consisted of relatively low-level conflicts and cross-border raiding. “Barbarians” (as well as “Romans”) regularly captured civilian populations from other political units and carried them into slavery in their own lands. Often, the difference between captives taken for ransom and those enslaved might be vague. Some enslaved people were

rapidly sold back to their places of origin while others were definitely taken with an eye to being sold elsewhere and for the gains to be a form of profit for those taking part in slave raiding.

The final section in this chapter raises the question of whether local 'recruitment' into slavery would have been sufficient to meet labour demands or if a need to obtain slaves from greater distances existed. The evidence seems to point to the latter, especially in the more prosperous and peaceful regions. Local enslavements could not have met the needs of the Egyptian market, for example, and a steady importation of slaves would have been necessary. This situation would have been exacerbated by the severe demographic crisis posed by the series of plagues that struck the Mediterranean world from 541 onwards. While estimates of population loss are comparable to those of the Black Death, some of the areas that are thought to be the most seriously devastated – Egypt, Syria, and other parts of the east Mediterranean – show little evidence for population contraction. At the same time, some of the most explicit evidence for slave trading comes from the last decades of the sixth century.

This will be the first time that the material presented here has been brought together in a coherent form. No one has previously attempted to quantify the scale of either slavery or of the slave trade in this period nor has anyone for patterns that encompass the whole of the post-Roman world. Meaningful numbers are rare in the source material; only through the liberal use of analogous material can even ranges of possibilities be determined. Though this might seem futile or overly speculative, it does, however, allow for a clearer perspective on the importance of the slave trade to become possible.

2.1. Natural growth and purchase

As considerable amounts of the wealth of the owning classes must have been comprised of the persons whom they owned, a lack of slaves (or even ownership of only a few) was usually perceived as a mark of poverty. In one of the last Visigothic synods, the Sixteenth Council of Toledo (25 April 693), it was explicitly stated that an individual church (*ecclesia*) ought to possess at least ten slaves and if it had only ten slaves, it would be considered as being amongst the poorest (*pauperrima*). A church having less will not be considered as capable of having its own priest.³²⁵ If slave holding on that scale were a mark of poverty even at this very local level of organisation, the larger churches and the diocesan sees may have numbered their slaves in the hundreds. The Spanish laity would probably have had holdings on a similar scale. This is implicit in a law issued by Ervig (680-687) that states that, when the army is called to assemble, all persons, regardless of status or ethnicity, are to attend with a tenth part of their slaves, armed and outfitted at their owners' expense. However,

*si quis autem extra hanc decimam partem seruorum suorum in exercitus
progressione accesserit, omnis ipsa decima pars seruorum eius studiose
quesita adque discripta, quidquid minus fuerit inuentum de hac instituta adque
discripta decima parte seruorum in bellicam unumquemque secum
expeditionem duxisse, in potestate principis reducendum est, ut, cui hoc idem
princeps prelargiri decreuerit, in eius subiaceat potestate.*³²⁶

³²⁵ 16th Council of Toledo, *Tomus*, 559.

³²⁶ *FI*, 9.2.9 ("Where anyone brings with him to the army less than the tenth part of his slaves, an estimate shall be made of the entire number of the latter, and whatever portion of the tenth part

These sorts of items all imply the existence of very large numbers of slaves who lived their entire lives as slaves and, perhaps, an even larger number born into slavery and at some point in their lives freed. Of course, these Spanish examples may be ones where tenant-slaves are being combined with other slaves so that it does not necessarily imply as large a population as might at first appear.

Whether as tenant-slaves, domestic slaves, or working directly on their owners' estates, though, all these slaves were likely to have either inherited their status or to have passed into to any offspring. The concepts of the hereditary legal status of individuals as freeborn or as freed-persons can be found in Roman, Germanic, and Islamic laws.³²⁷ That alone would imply that the hereditary nature of slavery was generally accepted. Some of the terminology used for slavery was understood to refer to a hereditary status of un-freedom, as found in Isidore's etymologies of *seruus*³²⁸ and *mancipium*³²⁹ or in the Arabic phrase *mā malakat aymānukum*,³³⁰ enslavement was justified as their ancestors had been captured. These all imply that many, if not most, slaves were born as slaves. Even if there were no further positive evidence, it could be reasonably suggested at the outset of any discussion of slave origins that the greatest number of slaves were likely to have been those possessing that status from birth.

aforesaid is found lacking, shall be delivered to the king, to become his property, and be disposed of at his pleasure").

³²⁷ Compare the status groups termed *liberti* or *libertini* in late Roman law (*CT*, 2.22.1; 2.27.1; 4.5.2; 4.6.3; 4.8.6; 4.10.1-3; 9.3.6; 14.3.9; *Digesta*, 1.1.4 (Ulpian), the Anglo-Saxon *laetas* (*LÆ*, 26) the Frankish and Saxon *liti* and related (*PLS*, 26.1; *Capitulatio de partibus Saxonia*, 19; *Capitulare Saxonum*, 3; *Lex Saxonum*, 16, etc.) and the Islamic *mawālī* (*Qur'an*, 33:5; 44:41; Malik ibn Anas, *al-Muwatta'*, 38:1490).

³²⁸ Isidore, *Etymologiae*, 5.27.32. See above.

³²⁹ Isidore, 9.4.45. See above.

³³⁰ *Qur'an* 4:24, 4:25, 4:36, 16:71, 24:31, 24:33, 24:58, 30:28. In parallel to Isidore's understanding of *mancipium*, means literally 'what the right hand possesses' and is used to refer specifically to slaves who had begun as war captives and to those captured women who were kept as concubines. See Chapter four, section one below.

Slaves who had inherited the status of their parents (in addition to those households made up entirely of persons with unfree status) are found throughout the post-Roman world though the particulars varied in the differing legal systems. In Roman law and daily practice, servile status was normally considered to be hereditary on the maternal side.³³¹ Paternal legal status was not usually considered as being of particular importance for determining status in such cases³³² as slave women were considered to be of low morals and innately promiscuous and paternity likely to be unclear.³³³ However, a free man who had fathered children on a slave he owned could manumit and legitimise his children, making them his heirs.³³⁴ Even this might be subject to dispute,³³⁵ while, if the father did not own his slave children, he would not have any rights over them.³³⁶ In strongly gendered societies such as those of the period, the reverse was not true; children born to free mothers but having unfree fathers were not guaranteed a free status as a birthright.³³⁷

These sorts of attitudes carried over into the heavily Roman system of the Visigothic kingdom. There, any child born to a slave woman automatically belonged to her owner unless the father were a slave owned by someone else, in which case two or more children would be divided between them.³³⁸ As the same code stated that slave women who aborted pregnancies were to be executed,³³⁹ one might assume that neither situation was seen as particularly problematic. As Isidore explained:

³³¹ *CJ*, 3.32.7; 7.14.9.

³³² *Institutiones*, 1.4.

³³³ *CJ*, 5.5.3.

³³⁴ *CT*, 4.6.4.

³³⁵ *CT*, 4.6.8.

³³⁶ *CT*, 4.6.7.

³³⁷ *Institutiones*, 1.4.

³³⁸ *FI*, 10.1.17.

³³⁹ *FI*, 6.3.7.

*Item liberi dicti, quia ex libero sunt matrimonio orti. Nam filii ex libero et ancilla seruilis condicionis sunt. Semper enim qui nascitur deteriore parentis statum sumit.*³⁴⁰

In Spain, where the descendants of certain types of criminals were made slaves, slavery was without doubt fully hereditary.

However, as mentioned in the discussion of concubines, children born to a free father by an enslaved woman were generally considered free (if they had been acknowledged by the father) in both Germanic and Islamic systems. Islamic practice derived from what had been Arabic customary law though the rights of the child were enhanced. Theoretically, the free father was required to recognise any child born to him by one of his slaves and acknowledge her legal rights. Her status as *umm al-walad*, a term meaning literally ‘mother of the child’, had a protected status in Islamic law; she could not be sold and became free on her owner’s death while their child was to be free from birth, inheriting his father’s name and tribal affiliations.³⁴¹ Many prominent Muslims would come from such origins in the years after the initial expansion; the twelfth Umayyad caliph, Yazid ibn al-Walid, was born in 701 to a Persian concubine³⁴² while the majority of ‘Abbasid caliphs would have slave mothers.

Regardless of what was happening in the homes of the most powerful, the overwhelming majority of slaves, like most people of the time, were living near their place of birth.³⁴³ Unfortunately, it is impossible to discern the birth-rate among slave populations for a period when virtually all of the demographic facts, whether drawn

³⁴⁰ Isidore, *Etymologiae*, 9.5.18 (“Again, children are called *liberi* when they have sprung from a free marriage, for the children of a free man and a slave serving-girl have slave status, as children who are so born always assume the status of the lower parent”).

³⁴¹ K. Ali, *Marriage and Slavery in Early Islam*, p. 168.

³⁴² al-Ṭabarī, 2:1874.

³⁴³ L. M. Bitel, *Women in Early Medieval Europe, 400-1100*, (Cambridge, 2002), p. 222.

from texts or from archaeology, remain a matter of conjecture. Ulrike Roth has argued that the existence of large numbers of enslaved women and children in earlier periods of Roman history (when, supposedly, most of the Roman slave supply came from the victims of Roman wars of expansion) demonstrates this. She argues that approximately two-thirds of the slaves would have been born on a hypothetical estate that had been in existence for twenty-five years.³⁴⁴ On estates that had existed as units for far longer periods than that, as seems to have been commonly the case in the seventh century, the portion would likely have been even higher than this suggestion.

With such large numbers of slaves locally born, it has occasionally been inferred by scholars (and has become a common trope of depictions of slavery in popular media) that some slave-owners were 'breeding' slaves for the market; this would involve deliberately encouraging the impregnation of female slaves in order to produce live offspring whether by selective pairing of male and female slaves (in the most extreme models) or through simple encouragement of slave-reproduction and pregnancy. Certainly, while it may be anachronistic to expect modern concepts of investment and return amongst seventh century people, it might be assumed that the wealthy everywhere would want to ensure their own continued prosperity and to increase the value of their own property. There is, unfortunately, only very slight evidence for organised slave breeding from the Republican and early Imperial periods, primarily a statement of Columella recommending favoured treatment to female slaves who have born multiple children,³⁴⁵ but even that is rather indirect and there is no positive evidence for the practice in that period.³⁴⁶ The same holds true in

³⁴⁴ U. Roth, *Thinking Tools*, p. 149.

³⁴⁵ Columella, *De re rustica*, 1.8.19.

³⁴⁶ K. Bradley, 'On the Roman Slave supply', pp.53-58.

the later Empire and the successor states. While it is widely believed that organised slave breeding could be found in other, better-documented eras, there is in fact no positive evidence for it, even from the American South.³⁴⁷ Though slave owners in early nineteenth-century Virginia were engaged in the export of slaves to other regions of the American South,³⁴⁸ even there, it was never a major source of income for slave owners.³⁴⁹ Unlike their seventh-century counterparts, those slave owners were well aware of economic theories of profit and loss as well as the techniques of selective stockbreeding introduced during the Agricultural Revolution; if no evidence can be found for their intentional slave breeding, it is not likely to have occurred in earlier periods.

However, as with those Virginia planters, it is possible that some slave owners in some regions might have been especially geared towards exporting slaves born locally and making efforts to foster the growth of healthy slaves. There is, for example, clear evidence of the deliberate sending of slave children to be raised by wet-nurses and of expense taken by owners to insure the health and safety of them.³⁵⁰ Using data from Egyptian papyri (mainly from the fourth century), Roger Bagnall has hypothesised a regular movement of abandoned children from cities into the countryside where they were reared before being sold either back to the city or to other farmers. Perhaps not surprisingly, he links the practice of exposed infants being taken as slaves to a disproportionate number of women entering slavery.³⁵¹

³⁴⁷ R. W. Fogel and S. L. Engerman, *Time on the Cross: The Economics of American Negro Slavery*, (Boston, 1974), p. 79; the entire concept looks, instead, to be an artifact of nineteenth-century abolitionism.

³⁴⁸ M. Tadman, *Speculators and Slaves: Masters, Traders, and Slaves in the Old South*, (Madison, 1989), p.123.

³⁴⁹ R. W. Fogel and S. L. Engerman, *Time on the Cross*, p. 79.

³⁵⁰ K. Bradley, 'On the Roman Slave supply', pp. 56-58.

³⁵¹ R. S. Bagnall, 'Slavery and Society in Late Roman Egypt', in B. Halpern and D. Hobson, eds., *Law, Politics, and Society in the Ancient Mediterranean World*, (Sheffield, 1993), p. 226.

Conscious efforts like this do suggest that, even without the chimera of deliberate slave breeding for sale, owners were certainly aware that it was possible to increase the value of one's slaves through training or other means. In some regions, as discussed in the previous chapter, methods as drastic as surgery might be used to increase the value of one's slaves and prepare them for export as eunuchs. Less painful methods were also known for increasing value. Highly trained slave stewards, for instance, are found in both ecclesiastic and lay documents from Visigothic Spain,³⁵² as are 'royal' slaves with special powers in Frankish and Anglo-Saxon sources.³⁵³ Some of these skilled slaves might, of course, have been purchased for skills they had obtained previous to their enslavement though many must have been specifically trained for their tasks. Gregory the Great describes the training that two papal slaves had received in a letter that gives them their freedom.³⁵⁴ Thomas and Montana are among the very few slaves of the period who are given individual names and identities in the sources but, rather than being an act of kindness, their manumission was done for the Church's benefit. Gregory states that Montana is considering the monastic profession and is to enter the Convent of St Lawrence and that Thomas is to be enlisted among the notaries. Losing servile status is necessary for both to be advanced within the Church and neither is free to do as they might like. Both also appear to be described as having been slaves of the Church since birth; their mothers, he states, had held similar status.

Such training does not appear to have been exceptional. Slaves and recently manumitted slaves rose to be the chamberlains of the palaces of both Byzantine³⁵⁵

³⁵² 13 Toledo 6, 14; *FI*, 2.4.4, 5.7.16.

³⁵³ *PLS*, 14.6, 56.2; *LR*, 9, 53.2; *GT*, *DLH*, 5.49-50, 6.32; *Law of Wihtraed*, 22.

³⁵⁴ *RE*, 6.12.

³⁵⁵ K. Hopkins, *Conquerors and Slaves*, pp. 175-179.

and Umayyad rulers³⁵⁶ (as well as among the earlier Sassanids³⁵⁷); such positions imply a fair amount of training. From the ‘Abbasid period, and thus outside the scope of this study, there is clear evidence of the training of female slaves called *Qiyān* in ‘Irāq and elsewhere in poetry and music.³⁵⁸ Considering the high level of development this practice had by the early ninth century, it seems reasonable to guess that female slaves had been trained in earlier times in order to enhance their value though there is no evidence for it from the seventh century. Other tasks that might not be likely to have left discussion in the textual sources (e.g., skilled craft and agricultural techniques) presumably were also seen as enhancements to a slave’s value.

2.2. Demographics and the slave supply

Whether or not slaves were deliberately bred for sale, slave births would have been necessary to maintain the system. Many slaves were almost certainly born into that status and were never sold; this would seem likely to have been case for many of those previously labelled as tenant-slaves as well as those in other un-free statuses that had some degree of personal autonomy. Even among the ‘true’ slaves, many would never have been sold away from their original home. However, if the birth rate of the enslaved population regularly fell short of replacement levels, if gaining freedom via either grants of manumission or acts of auto-emancipation (that is running away) happened frequently, or if any combination of such factors existed,

³⁵⁶ D. Ayalon, *Caliphs and Sultans: A Study in Power Relationships*, (Jerusalem, 1999), pp. 66-68.

³⁵⁷ J. A. Lerner, ‘The Seal of a Eunuch in the Sasanian Court’, *Journal of Inner Asian Art and Archaeology*, 1, (2006), p. 115.

³⁵⁸ F. M. Caswell, *The Slave Girls of Baghdad: The Qiyān in the Early Abbasid Era*, (London, 2011), p. 14.

the servile population would be constantly decreasing. Such factors would either create a constant demand for a supply of 'new' slaves (whether imported from other regions or created in some manner) to replace the losses or, in a relatively short time, it would lead to a minimisation of slavery.

A few simple calculations suggest that the slave populations in the seventh century could not have been self-sustaining. Had the total slave population in a region possessed a negative growth rate of as little as 1% per year, a number that would not seem impossible (considering the reduced reproduction rate, increased death rate and the steady emancipation of slaves, it may be far too conservative by an order of magnitude), within a century the total slave population would have declined by 64%; a 5% annual negative growth rate would see a decline by an astounding 99.3% in only a century.³⁵⁹

This process would be inevitable regardless of the size of the slave population or of the population as a whole. Even taking low figures for both, the results remain the same: unless there were regular replenishments of the slave population or if the early medieval slave population defied those found in the rest of human history, within a very short period, slavery would disappear. As the sources suggest the existence of a relatively stable slave population, they imply a continuous supply of new slaves.

In better-documented periods, slave populations seldom maintained birth rates above replacement; often, they were far below. Many of the same factors would have applied in the seventh century as in these later systems. Early modern West Indian and Brazilian slave population demographics can be calculated with

³⁵⁹ Author's calculations made using the formula, $N = N_0 e^{rt}$, where N_0 is the starting population, N is the population after time, t , has elapsed, r is the rate of natural increase or decrease in the population, and e is the constant 2.71828... (the base of natural logarithms).

some precision and have been found to have had negative annual growth rates of between 0.5 and 7%.³⁶⁰ African slave populations in nineteenth-century Egypt and the Ottoman Empire also had similar negative growth rates.³⁶¹ In the Atlantic slave systems, there were far lower rates of attrition due to manumission than in the slave-systems of the Mediterranean in antiquity or the Islamic empires, due primarily to slavery's racialization. The prime counter-example to patterns of negative growth rates among enslaved populations is the rapid growth within the slave population of the American South. There, the enslaved population grew at an average rate of 2.4% between 1810 and 1860. However, that apparently impressive growth should not be viewed as a model; the American slave population had lagged far behind the free population's growth rates in the previous two centuries; it only began to catch up after the banning of the slave trade and the imposition of laws barring manumission and limiting the rights of freedmen.³⁶²

If the seventh-century enslaved populations behaved like other slave populations, they are likely to have had somewhat different demographics than the free peoples among whom they lived. Certainly, slaves were regularly used to perform the more dangerous work in mining and other areas with higher mortality rates. At the same time, as dependents of the wealthier members of their societies, slaves living within their owners' households may have been better nourished than the lowest classes of the free over their lifetimes.³⁶³ More significant in terms of

³⁶⁰ H. E. Lamur, 'Demographic Performance of Two Slave Populations of the Dutch-speaking Caribbean', *Boletín de Estudios Latinoamericanos y del Caribe*, 30, (June 1981), p. 87.

³⁶¹ M. C. Zilfi, *Women and Slavery in the Late Ottoman Empire: The Design of Difference*, (Cambridge, 2010), p. 118.

³⁶² H. E. Lamur, 'Demographic Performance of Two Slave Populations,' p. 87. Malthus used the exponential growth in the Anglo-American population as the basis of his catastrophic predictions.

³⁶³ Studies of records of heights and weights of American slaves show them as being healthier than most contemporary free populations (R. A. Margo and R. H. Steckel, 'The Heights of American Slaves: New Evidence on Slave Nutrition and Health', *Social Science History*, 6:4, (Fall 1982), pp. 533-534). See also some of the evidence of parents selling their children into slavery or for self-sale

demographic trends are the possible differences between slaves and free in reproductive success.

Looking at evidence from Roman Egypt, Roger Bagnall and Bruce Frier argued that the fertility rates of slaves were probably significantly lower than those of free Egyptian women³⁶⁴ though it cannot be known whether that was generally true.³⁶⁵ However, this would be likely when one considers that male slaves were actively discouraged from reproducing in virtually every society³⁶⁶ while slave women would, through the types of practices discussed in the last chapter, have been most likely to reproduce in what would be essentially a polygamous pattern and, in societies that practise some form of polygyny, the fertility rates of individual women is almost always reduced.³⁶⁷ At the same time, regardless of the number of children born to slave women, some portion of them obtained the free status of their fathers; among the Muslims and some of the Germanic groups, this would have significantly impacted the possibility of reproduction replacing slave populations.

The rates of emancipation, whether through legal manumission or unilateral auto-emancipation, are likely to have been substantial in the period. In the early modern Atlantic and Islamic slave systems, racial distinctions frequently existed between the free and slave populations, creating difficulties for slaves who wished to free themselves. In the seventh century, marked ethnic differences between the enslaved and free populations might have been at times quite visible as there are clear evidences for slaves taken considerable distances from their birthplaces but

found in the next section. Nutritional prospects and other health outcomes are likely to have been appreciably better for slaves during times of famine than for members of the lower classes of the free.

³⁶⁴ R. S. Bagnall and B. Frier, *The Demography of Roman Egypt*, pp. 144-145.

³⁶⁵ W. Scheidel, 'Progress and Problems in Roman Demography', in W. Scheidel, ed., *Debating Roman Demography*, (Leiden, 2001), p. 36.

³⁶⁶ See above, chapter one, section five.

³⁶⁷ M. K. Zeitzen, *Polygamy: A Cross-Cultural Analysis*, (Oxford, 2008) pp. 62-63.

visible differences were likely to have been far less than in late medieval Europe,³⁶⁸ let alone either Atlantic or Islamic societies of the recent past.³⁶⁹

Without any obvious markers of their slave status, it would have been fairly simple for a slave to ‘disappear’ into the free population or to make false claims. Gregory the Great’s letters, for instance, contain references to runaway slaves being returned to Jewish masters³⁷⁰ while escaped slaves claiming the rights of free persons are an issue of concern in sixth- and seventh-century law.³⁷¹ One of the last dated Visigothic laws, issued in 702, describes the situation:

*Priscarum quidem legum sanctionibus manifeste depromitur, quibus modis quibusque perquisitionum titulis fugitiuorum latebrosa uagatio reprimatur. Sed dum iudicum diuersis occasionibus uel susceptorum fraude eorum fuga occulitur, uerum est, quod et ipsarum legum ordo difficile adimpletur, et increscente uitio potior latitantibus aditus propagatur, ita ut non sit penitus ciuitas, castellum, uicus aut uilla uel diuersorium, in quibus mancipia latere minime dignoscantur.*³⁷²

It follows with a long discussion of the proceedings to determine if the person in question is an escaped slave and the punishment for both the slave and those who

³⁶⁸ C. Verlinden, *L’Esclavage dans l’Europe Médiévale*, I, p. 213.

³⁶⁹ The long intertwining of race and slavery in the Atlantic world of the last 600 years is too well known to need detailing. Similar dynamics appear in modern Arabic usage where the word ‘*abīd*’, meaning slaves in Classical Arabic, is frequently used as a derogatory term for dark-skinned people of African descent, especially in Sudan (F. M. Deng, *War of Visions: Conflict of Identities in the Sudan*, (Washington, 1995), p. 5) but also among Arabic speakers in the USA (N. Warikoo, ‘Muslims Aim to Stop Arabs’ anti-Black Slurs’, *Detroit Free Press*, 26 February 2014, p. A4). Racially distinct slave and former slave populations continue to be present in many countries into which sub-Saharan Africans were trafficked into the late nineteenth century (B. Lewis, *Race and Slavery*, p. 12).

³⁷⁰ *RE*, 4.9.

³⁷¹ *Constitutiones Extravagantes*, 21.3; *FI*, 9.1.10.

³⁷² *FI*, 9.1.21. (“In ancient laws, it has been clearly set forth in what ways and investigations the secret escape of those fugitives seeking refuge might be repressed. But while the approaches adopted on diverse occasions by judges or through the fraud of those who aid them, their flight remains hidden, it is true, and the enforcement of order and the laws themselves is difficult to be satisfied, and with the increasing number of fugitives the ability for them to hide becomes greater, so that there is not the entirety of a city, castle, town or village in which a number of runaway slaves are not known”).

knowingly hid him. Presumably, in places such as late Visigothic Spain where central authority was weak, escape would have been extremely simple while in regions along frontiers or otherwise unsettled, it doubtless would have been easily done. In unsettled periods, as the seventh century was in many areas, slaves might easily self-emancipate when the usual order broke down, even if only temporarily.

Even if not all of these factors were continuously present in all times and at all places, together they would create a significant downward trend in slave populations relative to the overall population. Presuming, for instance, that the population of Egypt was 4,000,000 in the seventh century³⁷³ and that a tenth of its population was enslaved,³⁷⁴ a 1% annual decline means a need for 4,000 free people to become slaves per year. If the attrition rate were substantially higher, of course, the need would be even greater: if one accepts Walter Scheidel's cautious estimate of an average "social life expectancy" in slavery of twenty years,³⁷⁵ Egypt's economy would have required a supply of 20,000 newly enslaved individuals per year, in addition to however many other slaves changed owners. Periods of economic expansion or demographic recovery would require even more.

³⁷³ R. S. Bagnall and B. Frier, *The Demography of Roman Egypt*, pp. 53-56, estimate the population of Egypt under the Principate as being approximately 4,750,000. The population probably dipped significantly from the middle of the sixth century before rising again in the second half of the seventh century but even the low estimates suggest a nadir of more than 3,000,000 at the time of the Islamic conquest (M. Brett, 'Population and Conversion to Islam in Egypt in the Mediaeval Period', in U. Vermeulen, J. van Steenbergen, eds., *Egypt and Syria in the Fatimid, Ayyubid and Mamluk Eras IV*, (Leuven, 2005) p. 3).

³⁷⁴ R. S. Bagnall, *Egypt in Late Antiquity*, (Princeton, 1993), p. 208, suggests that 13.5% of the urban Egyptian population were enslaved and 9-10% of rural populations; note, however, A. C. Johnson and L. C. West's observation that, due to its dense native population, low wages, and superabundance of labourers, Egypt has always had less demand for slaves than other parts of the Mediterranean (*Byzantine Egypt: Economic studies*, (Princeton, 1949), p. 132). If Egypt had only the 10% of its population postulated enslaved, then it is reasonable to presume that, in other areas, larger percentages are quite likely.

³⁷⁵ W. Scheidel, 'The Roman Slave Supply', p. 293.

Clearly, then, without regular infusions of new slaves into the system, the institution would have inevitably disappeared within a short time. As slavery was ubiquitous in this period and there is no compelling evidence for any decline of it in any region, there must have been regular sources of new slaves regardless of whether those slaves were 'recruited' from local free populations or were imported from elsewhere. Freeborn people of the seventh century regularly became slaves and had to have entered slavery through means that were in no way abnormal at the time. These methods should be discernible in the evidence and can be broadly divided between methods of enslavement during peace and those taking place during war (or other disturbance).

2.3. From freedom into slavery

Multiple paths could lead a freeborn individual into slavery in the seventh century. Though few (if any) desired to be enslaved, the constant demand for slaves meant that enslaving others remained lucrative as well as an economic and social necessity. Laws often insisted on the enslavement of those found guilty of criminal acts while poverty, crushing debt, and the threat of hunger could easily lead free people to sell their own family members into slavery or to opt to become slaves themselves. Legal systems anticipated these acts; sometimes, the enormous debts accrued in court proceedings might force debtors into slavery. It might not be too far-fetched to suggest that the need for slaves might have had a crucial role in the shaping of the legal systems of the period as well as in other policies of states and state-like formations.

One of the more straightforward ways in which a free person might be reduced to slavery was as punishment for crime. Many laws named slavery as punishment while others indirectly fostered enslavement. Both criminal actions and their consequences varied between time and place, with some laws specifying that the criminal became the slave of the wronged party while others that the enslaved must be sold outside their communities. None of these were, in the post-Roman period, true innovations as Roman law had occasionally specified enslavement as punishment, as in an act of 365 regarding military desertion.³⁷⁶ Some of these laws were nearly universal, such as those on marriage between enslaved men and free women.³⁷⁷

Probably some of the clearest evidence for widespread judicial enslavement comes from Visigothic Spain. There, enactments contained in the *Forum Iudicum* detail crimes that might lead to slavery for free people. Some are quite specific, such as that stating

*ipsi tamen, id est tam mulier ipsa scelerata quam etiam uir ille, qui eam adulterasse aut disponsasse uel in coniugio sibi sociasse dinoscitur, in potestate illius, cui primum predicta mulier pactita fuerat, seruituri tradantur.*³⁷⁸

Others also targeted ‘moral’ crimes, like those that made slavery the punishment for consulting diviners,³⁷⁹ providing abortions,³⁸⁰ and counterfeiting coins.³⁸¹ The Spanish Church had partnered with the state in promoting enslavement as a means of

³⁷⁶ *CT*, 7.18.1.

³⁷⁷ *PLS*, 13.8-9; 25.3-4; *Edictum Rothari*, 221.

³⁷⁸ *FI*, 3.4.2 (“But the man and the woman who have committed adultery, or have betrothed themselves, or have married, shall both be delivered up as slaves into the power of him to whom the aforesaid woman bound herself by her marriage contract”).

³⁷⁹ *FI*, 6.2.1.

³⁸⁰ *FI*, 6.3.1.

³⁸¹ *FI*, 7.6.2.

social control. In 655, children of clerics of any rank were made slaves of the Church (regardless of their mothers' legal status).³⁸² The Sixteenth Council of Toledo (693) condemned insincere converts to Christianity from Judaism and paganism as well those accused of treason to life enslavement along with their descendants.³⁸³ Jews were forbidden from owning slaves in Visigothic Spain and were to forfeit any Christian slaves they might possess according to a Church Council in 633³⁸⁴ and a royal law two decades later;³⁸⁵ both rules were explicitly meant as punishment for their reluctance to become Christians.³⁸⁶ Baptized Jews who maintained relations with their former co-religionists were to be enslaved.³⁸⁷ At the Seventeenth Council of Toledo in 694, Egica (687-701/3) warned against a Jewish plot to exterminate the Christian people and their homeland, as, he claimed, they had already done overseas. In response, the Council enacted laws enslaving the entire Jewish population.³⁸⁸ Jews were not the only victims of the Spanish Church's conciliar legislation. The Fourth Council (633) had made clear that previously freed slaves of the Church were no longer wholly secure in their freedom; a new bishop could rescind emancipations made by his predecessor³⁸⁹ while a freedman who testified against those who had freed him might be re-enslaved.³⁹⁰

A few texts even give some sense of how a social system might operate when judicial enslavement was a distinct possibility. In the Anglo-Saxon kingdoms,

³⁸² 9 Toledo 10.

³⁸³ 16 Toledo 10.

³⁸⁴ 4 Toledo, 66.

³⁸⁵ *FI*, 12.2.14. The same law mentions Jews selling slaves from Spain abroad.

³⁸⁶ 4 Toledo, 66 (An earlier law of Recceswinth (649-653) had already made much the same point and mentions Jews selling slaves from Spain abroad (*FI*, 12.2.14.))

³⁸⁷ 4 Toledo 62.

³⁸⁸ 17 Toledo 8. Quite possibly, Egica might have seen Muslim success in North Africa as evidence; Carthage itself fell to the Muslims only a few months later. It is perhaps not surprising that Spanish Jews, like other Jewish communities, were said to have actively supported the Muslim conquest and, in later traditions, to have taken up arms in their aid.

³⁸⁹ 4 Toledo, 67.

³⁹⁰ 4 Toledo 68.

apparently, the Church recognised enslavement as being equivalent to death as regards marriage and took steps to deal with the situation that would occur when one partner in a marriage had been enslaved without the other:

*Maritus si seipsum in furtu aut in fornicatione seruum facit uel quocum que peccato Mulier si prius non habuit coniugium habet potestatem post annum alterum accipere uirum.*³⁹¹

While many of these references seem to be to slaves who were privately held, others might not be sold on the market after their condemnation. Under the Empire, conviction for some crimes had caused the guilty to be turned into a slave of the state. These penal slaves had been used extensively in mining, quarrying, and other similar occupations.³⁹² Some of these seem to have been intended as death sentences. Being condemned to the mines was seen as being nearly equivalent to martyrdom in accounts of Christian persecutions from the period of Diocletian.³⁹³

Unsurprisingly, enslavement was dreaded as a prospect and mourned when it occurred. It does not seem to have spared anyone. A poem written by Venantius Fortunatus and addressed to his friend, Gregory of Tours, describes an encounter he had had under Saint Martin's tree:

*fletibus huc genitor genetrixque puella,
uoce inplendo auras et lacrimando genas,
figo pedem, suspendo aurem: mihi panditur ore
uix per singultus uendita nata suos.*

³⁹¹ PTA, 2.12.9 ("If in consequence of having committed theft or fornication, a man should become a slave, then his wife, if it were her first marriage, might, after twelve months, have another husband; but not if she has already married twice").

³⁹² CT, 7.18.1; 9.40.2; CJ, 5.5.3; 6.1.3; 8.51.20; 9.20.16; 9.49.4; 9.51.8; Institutiones, 1.12.3; Novellae Justinianus, 22.8.

³⁹³ Cyprian, Epistula 76; Eusebius, HE, 8.13, etc.

*quaero adhuc: questus perhibet nullo indice furto
furti ex obiectu hanc pater ire iugo;
se uoluisse dare et iurantes ordine testes
nomine quemque tenens, nec potuisset egens.
non aderat iudex, erat accusator adurguens:
hic ego quid facerem, posse uetante, sacer?*³⁹⁴

As it appears here, the courts could often appear to have no interest in actual guilt and, for this family to have justice, Fortunatus wrote that they would need the intercession of a figure as powerful as the Bishop of Tours. While he does not report whether their daughter was ever freed, this family would have been more fortunate than many in at least having had the prospect.

Despite these attitudes, not all free persons entering into slavery were completely unwilling; some elected to become slaves themselves or sold their children into slavery when enslavement appeared to be the least-bad option; poverty itself would be a source for slaves. Of course, the judicial systems themselves with their frequently enormous fines for both major and minor crimes might have had the not wholly unintended effect of forcing free individuals into slavery. All of the northern law codes, from the *Lex Salica* onwards, are marked by a strongly developed system of financial compensation for injuries. Compensation paid to the family of the deceased by the perpetrator in wrongful deaths served as punishment. Lists of these wergilds appear regularly with different social classes (including

³⁹⁴ Venantius Fortunatus, *Carmina*, 5.14.7-15 (“Near the trunk stood weeping the father and mother of a young girl, filling the air with their complaints, and their cheeks bathed with tears. I stopped and I listened; they could barely make themselves understood through their tears; they had sold their daughter. I pressed my questions, and that sorry father told me that she had been accused of theft and, without any evidence, condemned to slavery. He had wanted to produce witnesses ready to attest her innocence by a solemn oath, he had all their names, but he was poor, and they served him nothing. The judge was away, the accuser did not want to let go of his prey. What to do, feeling so helpless?”).

slaves), ages, genders, and occupations demanding different amounts. Similarly, personal injuries are precisely monetised in several of the codes.³⁹⁵

Nearly all wergilds fall within a narrow range of between 100 and 300 solidi for an ordinary free man; other classes occur as fractions or multiples of that amount. In the Salic law, a range of wergilds existed: 200 solidi for a free Frankish man or woman³⁹⁶ (though a woman of child-bearing years was thrice that³⁹⁷) but only half that for a free Roman.³⁹⁸ Amongst the Lombards, the range was from 60 (for a male *aldius*) to 300 solidi (a freeman of the first class).³⁹⁹ The Visigothic laws give a similar range, from 60 (for an infant) to 500 solidi (an eminent free man).⁴⁰⁰ An ordinary Kentish freeman rated 100 scillingas⁴⁰¹ while one of the highest class (*eorlcund manne*) carried a wergeld of 300 scillingas.⁴⁰² Such numbers may not seem as arbitrary as they might at first appear. If these prices were to be translated into modern currency, 200 solidi (each weighing 4.5 grams and having a 95% purity⁴⁰³) would realise a value of £22,486.50.⁴⁰⁴ It might be possible that they reflect real numbers, such as what one might expect from the cost of purchasing a replacement. While no standard price for slaves exists in late antique sources (such as the Edict of Diocletian), it is possible to see this as comparable to the known prices for slaves in more recent times. In Georgia on the eve of the American Civil

³⁹⁵ *LÆ*, 33-71; *Edictum Rothari*, 45-128; *PLS*, 29, etc.

³⁹⁶ *PLS*, 15.1.

³⁹⁷ *PLS*, 24.8; 41.19; 65.1.

³⁹⁸ *PLS*, 117.2.

³⁹⁹ *LL*, 62.

⁴⁰⁰ *FI*, 8.4.16.

⁴⁰¹ *LÆ*, 21; *Law of Hlophære and Eadric*, 3; the Kentish scillingas should probably be understood as gold coins equivalent to the Roman solidi or the contemporary Frankish tremissis (notionally a third of a solidus); the relationships between the values would fit this. (R. Naismith, *Money and Power in Anglo-Saxon England: The Southern English Kingdoms, 757-865*, (Cambridge, 2012), p. 5.)

⁴⁰² *Law of Hlophære and Eadric*, 1.

⁴⁰³ P. Spufford, *Money and Its Use in Medieval Europe*, (Cambridge, 1993), p. 7.

⁴⁰⁴ 200 solidi multiplied by 4.5 grammes at 95% purity gives 855 grammes of gold. At present (18 September 2014), the London Bullion Market is pricing gold at £26.30/gramme. 855 multiplied by £26.30 gives a total of £22,486.50.

War, a prime male field slaves cost on average US\$1565,⁴⁰⁵ equivalent to £ 61,640.36 in current pounds.⁴⁰⁶ While comparisons are far from exact, it does suggest what the crushing debt that legal fines might mean. Both archaeology and literary evidence show that the vast majority of people in the period had relatively few assets. The burden of paying fines far in excess of what even the most generous buyer might pay for the entirety of a household's possessions, its animals, buildings, lands, and so forth might leave a debt that could only be met through the sale of either dependents or of the householder's self.

Debtors had been turned into slaves for centuries both inside and outside the Empire. According to Tacitus, it was common practice among the Germans that those who lost at gambling and could not make good their debts would be sold outwith their homeland as slaves.⁴⁰⁷ While the barbarians beyond the Empire left no legal records, there can be little doubt that similar conditions would have pushed parents to sell their own children; Ammianus Marcellinus's anecdote about the Tervingi crossing the Danube comes to mind (and his obvious revulsion makes clear his thought):

*Cum traducti barbari uictus inopia uexarentur, turpe commercium duces inuisissimi agitarunt, et quantos undique insatiabilitas colligere potuit canes, pro singulis dederunt mancipiis, inter quae et filii ducti sunt optimatum.*⁴⁰⁸

⁴⁰⁵ R. Evans, 'The Economics of American Slavery', *Aspects of Labor Economics: a conference of the Universities--National Bureau Committee for Economic Research*, National Bureau of Economic Research (ed.), (Princeton, 1962) p.199.

⁴⁰⁶ Gold sold in Georgia for \$18.93/oz. in 1860; \$1565 could thus be understood as the equivalent of 2343.74 grams of gold – that is, 494.7 solidi in the seventh century or £ 61,640.36 in 2014.

⁴⁰⁷ Tacitus, *Germania*, 24; note that Tacitus's Germans are largely a rhetorical creation that serve as a model of virtue in contrast to the Romans. In this context, the detail can be read either as being at cross-purposes to his main goals or as showing the Germans' simplicity.

⁴⁰⁸ Ammianus Marcellinus, 31.4.11 ("When the transported barbarians were troubled by shortage of food, those most loathsome generals conducted base commerce, and gathered dogs from all sides in their insatiability, exchanging a single one for a slave, and among these that were carried off were even sons of the optimates").

Similarly, those who could not make good their debts had been enslaved in early Rome. In theory, the *Leges Duodecim Tabularum* prevented the enslavement of Roman debtors and the *Lex Poetelia Papiria* had underlined this right.⁴⁰⁹ However, that had apparently vanished by the time of Constantine⁴¹⁰ and debt-bondage had once again emerged as a normal route into slavery. Those who had been captured and could not make good their ransoms were indentured as noted above. In the successor states, debt-bondage appears to have been normal practice.⁴¹¹

Self-sale, whatever the cause might have been, was normally extremely rare. As James Harrill points out regarding the earlier empire, there are no grounds to think that it was ever particularly widespread.⁴¹² However, it certainly continued throughout these centuries. Some of the clearest of evidence for selling one's self into slavery comes from Merovingian Gaul. There, several formularies explicitly describe the steps needed and some of the varieties of bondage the seller would enter (as well as making clear that debt and the need for money drove many of these).⁴¹³ Among the Anglo-Saxons, the ability to make one's self a slave seemed to be a marker of adulthood (at least for men):

⁴⁰⁹ Livy, *Ab Urbe Condita*, 8.28.

⁴¹⁰ *CT*, 3.3.1.

⁴¹¹ *LL*, 152.

⁴¹² J. A. Harrill, *The Manumission of Slaves in Early Christianity*, (Tübingen, 1995), p. 31.

⁴¹³ A. Rio, 'Self-sale and Voluntary Entry into Un-freedom, 300–1100', *Journal of Social History*, 45:2, (2012), pp. 671-672. It should be noted that Rio sees the result as being a type of unfreedom having rather more in common with serfdom than with 'traditional' slavery (though maintaining that neither is truly appropriate) and seeing Carolingian France as largely a bystander in any slave trade.

*Pater filium suum necessitate coactus potestatem habet tradere in seruitium VII annos nam deinde sine uoluntate filii. Licentiam tradendi non habet. Homo XIII annorum seipsum potest seruum facere.*⁴¹⁴

Presumably, many of those selling themselves into slavery were simply altering their relationships within their local communities and becoming legal dependents of landlords or others. Whether or not the new relationship was one of slavery, it would not have been likely to lead to much trafficking.

However, as this passage shows, it would have often been easier to sell one's own children into slavery and many of the children sold might be taken away from their point of origin. The question of whether or not parents had the right to sell their children into slavery so as to avoid financial ruin had perplexed jurists under the Empire. It had been clearly illegal in the second century,⁴¹⁵ but, in the fourth, Constantine had allowed it.⁴¹⁶ Mothers were forbidden from selling their children as slaves and it remained a paternal prerogative.⁴¹⁷ Even then, it seems to have been something only done in difficult times; a law issued in 451 stated that freeborn children sold into slavery by their parents as result of a famine were to be freed. If the children had been sold to barbarians or shipped overseas, a fine of six ounces of gold was to be levied instead.⁴¹⁸

Yet, by the early sixth century, it had become normalised in at least some areas. In a letter written on behalf of King Athalaric (526-534), Cassiodorus described a fair at Marcellianum, a suburb of the town of Consilinum in Lucania (near the modern Sala Consilina), noting among its attractions

⁴¹⁴ PTA, 2.13.1-2 (“A father has the right to put his son into slavery due to necessity before the age of seven; after that age, it may only be done with the consent of the son. At fourteen years, a man may make himself into a slave”).

⁴¹⁵ CJ, 7.16.1.

⁴¹⁶ CJ, 4.43.2.

⁴¹⁷ CJ, 2.4.26.

⁴¹⁸ *Novellae* Valentinian III, 33.1.

*praesto sunt pueri ac puellae diuerso sexu atque aetate conspicui, quos non fecit captiuitas esse sub pretio, sed libertas: hos merito parentes uendunt, quoniam de ipsa famulatione proficiunt. Dubium quippe non est seruos posse meliorari, qui de labore agrorum ad urbana seruitia transferuntur.*⁴¹⁹

That Cassiodorus, a high official writing on behalf of a king, seems to regard the sale of children as not merely normal but commendable shows that, in Gothic Italy at any rate, the sale of children by their parents was legal.

In the *Edictum Theoderici*, it had been legislated that children were not to be punished for the error of their parents and that the parents had the right to reclaim their children,⁴²⁰ whether or not Cassiodorus was aware of that, of course, depends on which Theoderic is presumed to have been involved in the legislative process.⁴²¹ Visigothic law from the seventh century is more in line with the legislation of that Theoderic:

*Parentibus filios suos uendere non liceat, aut donare uel obpignorare. Nec ex illis aliquid iuri suo defendat ille, qui acceperit; sed magis pretium uel sepositionis commodum, quod dederat, perdat qui a parentibus filium comparauit.*⁴²²

⁴¹⁹ Cassiodorus, *Variae*, 8.33.4 (“There stand ready boys and girls, with the attractions which belong to their respective sexes and ages, whom not captivity but freedom sets a price upon. These are with good reason sold by their parents, since they themselves gain by their very servitude. For one cannot doubt that they are benefited even as slaves, by being transferred from the toil of the fields to the service of cities”).

⁴²⁰ *Edictum Theoderici*, 94.

⁴²¹ S. W. Lafferty, *Law and Society in the Age of Theoderic the Great: A Study of the Edictum Theoderici*, (Cambridge, 2013), pp. 159-160, sees it as an Ostrogothic law code and finds them as mutually supportive. Identifying the *Edictum Theoderici* as belonging to the fifth-century Visigoths has the advantage of being supported by contemporary sources (Sidonius Apollinaris, *Epistulae*, 2.1.3; *Carminae*, 23.446) as well as placing it within a legal tradition that would adhere to the same.

⁴²² *FI*, 5.4.12 (“It shall not be lawful for parents to sell, give away, or pledge their children. And no one who purchases or receives a child under such circumstances, shall have any legal right to it whatever, but, on the other hand, he shall lose the price, or the amount advanced as a loan, which he paid to the parents of said child”).

That it needed to be repeatedly outlawed suggests that it continued. Selling one's own children into slavery is unlikely to have ever been a particularly easy choice and it would be simpler to sell the children of others instead.

Certainly, foundlings were frequently seen as a ready source for slaves. While among the Greeks and other non-Roman peoples, it had been common practice that whoever took in such a child and reared them could then use them as a slave, in the Roman Republic and the early empire, infants who had been abandoned or exposed had, if they could later demonstrate that they were of free birth, been guaranteed their freedom.⁴²³ But, by the time of Constantine, they would appear to have again become a source of slaves, if the practice had ever actually been stopped.⁴²⁴ While William Harris argues for a larger role of abandoned children in the Roman slave supply,⁴²⁵ Roger Bagnall has used data from primarily fourth-century papyri to hypothesise a regular movement of abandoned children from Egypt's cities and larger towns into the countryside. There, peasant families reared them as foster-children that were sold either back to the city or to other farmers. Perhaps unsurprisingly, he links the practice of exposed infants being taken as slaves to a disproportionate number of women entering slavery.⁴²⁶ Among them, a ratio of two to one or greater of females to males suggests that many slaves originated as exposed infants.⁴²⁷ While the evidence is by its nature limited to only small areas of Egypt, it seems reasonable to extrapolate that similar processes were found throughout the empire.

⁴²³ *CT*, 3.3.1; *CJ*, 8.52.3.

⁴²⁴ *CT*, 5.9.1.

⁴²⁵ W. V. Harris, 'Child-Exposure in the Roman Empire', *JRS*, 84, (1994), p. 19.

⁴²⁶ R. S. Bagnall, 'Slavery and Society in Late Roman Egypt', p. 226.

⁴²⁷ R. S. Bagnall, *Egypt in Late Antiquity*, p. 202.

However, Christianity appears to have affected the practice. The early church had denounced the exposure of infants. The reasoning Justin Martyr provides to oppose exposure may reveal something about expectations: it was not problematic that the exposed child might die but, instead, the near certainty that the child would be enslaved and, whether the child was male, female, or hermaphrodite, might be prostituted. Potentially, the child might have sex with one of the parents who had abandoned it.⁴²⁸ Laws were once again made against exposing or abandoning infants and those who did were penalised if caught.⁴²⁹ In a constitution of 541, the Emperor Justinian decried the practice as a crime against human nature not even committed by barbarians,⁴³⁰ though the existence of it must have been common enough to warrant the law. Under the impact of Christian belief, orphanages began to become more common. Though the children raised in them would have entered life in the lowest levels of society, they were less and less likely to be sold as slaves.

Kidnapping, too, could easily lead the victim into a life in slavery. In a letter sent in 409, a time when, even if other regions were experiencing disorder, Africa was at peace, Saint Augustine described the kidnapping and enslavement of a nun by three 'barbarian' brothers near the Numidian town of Sitifis, as well as other incidents in the region of free women carried off into bondage.⁴³¹ Half a century later, Sidonius Apollinaris gives a rather full description of a kidnapping and the actions of his agent. He asks that Bishop Lupus aid his friends who have come from the Auvergne:

⁴²⁸ Justin Martyr, *Apologia prima*, 27.

⁴²⁹ *CJ*, 8.52.3 (dated 529); *Novellae Justinianus*, 153.1 (dated 541).

⁴³⁰ *Novellae*, 153, preface.

⁴³¹ Augustine, *Epistulae*, 111.7; see J. Conant, 'Slavery, Romanness, and the Limits of Empire,' (Unpublished paper presented at the Österreichische Akademie der Wissenschaften Linking the Mediterranean workshop, Vienna, 2015).

*namque unam feminam de affectibus suis, quam forte Uargorum (hoc enim nomine indigenas latrunculos nuncupant) superventus abstraxerat, isto deductam ante aliquot annos, isticque distractam, cum non falso indicio comperissent, certis quidem signis, sed non recentibus inquisivere uestigiis. Atque obiter haec eadem laboriosa, priusquam ii adessent, in negotiatoris nostri domo dominioque; palam sane uenumdata defungitur; quodam Prudente, hoc uiro nomen, quem nunc Tricassibus degere fama diuulgat, ignotorum nobis hominum collaudante contractum; cuius subscriptio intra formulam nundinarum, tanquam idonei astipulatoris, ostenditur.*⁴³²

As such incidents suggest, the chief distinction between a victim of kidnapping and a captive of warfare appears to have been only whether the imprisoners acted with or without the approval of a state (or state-like) actor. Captives might then be sold on the market and, unless they had the good fortune of these women, were likely to remain in slavery. Certainly, the kidnapping of free persons and their subsequent enslavement and sale figures in a great many of the laws from both Roman and Germanic sources, suggesting that it was both a commonplace and a constant threat during times of both war and peace.⁴³³ The penalty for seizing freepersons could be stiff; in the eighth-century *Ecloga*, the cutting off of a hand is a fit punishment.⁴³⁴ Some of the victims of kidnapping might already be slaves. Theft of slaves could occasion considerable fines or even more extreme punishments.⁴³⁵

With the threat of enslavement hanging ever-present for even free persons, it perhaps is not surprising that a fair amount of legislation took notice of those who

⁴³² Sidonius Apollinaris, *Epistulae*, 6.4. (“A woman of their relation was kidnapped by chance in a raid of the Vargi (this is the name we give to the robbers from the country). They learned by some accounts that she had been conducted into your city a few years ago and then transported elsewhere; they started in pursuit on these specific indications, but were a little late. However, this unfortunate was thrown into the public market before their coming and is now in the house and the power of my agent. A certain Prudens, now said to be an inhabitant of Tricassium, had approved the contract for the sellers (who are unknown to me), and it shows his signature to the form of purchase, such as to be a sufficient guarantee”).

⁴³³ *CT*, 9.18.1; *CJ*, 3.15.2; 9.20.7, 11, 15-16; *PLS*, 29.2-5; *LR*, 38; *FI*, 7.3.1-6; *Lex Frisionum*, 21.1, etc.

⁴³⁴ *Ecloga*, 18.17.

⁴³⁵ *PLS*, 39.2.

had been wrongfully enslaved and detailed methods for regaining freedom. In virtually all the codes,⁴³⁶ laws appear concerned with the formerly free recovering their rightful status. Presumably, the ubiquity of such legislation is reflective of real concerns; becoming a slave meant a massive loss of status as well as freedom and the possibility of being removed from all one's friends and relations. The *Penitential of Theodore* addresses some of these issues:

Si mulier discesserit a uiro suo dispiciens eum nolens reuertere et reconciliare uiro post V annos cum consensu episcopi. aliam accipere licebit uxorem. Si in captiuitatem per uim ducta redemi non potest post annum potest alteram accipere. Item si in captiuitatem ducta fuerit uir eius V annos expectet similiter autem et mulier si uiro talia contigerint. Si igitur uir alteram duxerit uxorem priorem de captiuitate reuersam accipiat posteriorem demittat similiter autem illa secundum superius diximus. Si uiro talia contigerint faciat. Si cuius uxorem hostiis abstulerit et ipse eam iterum adipisci. Non potest licet aliam accipere. Melius est sic facere quam fornications. Si iterum post haec uxor illa uenerit ad eum. Non debet recipi ab eo si aliam habet sed illa tollat alium uirum sibi. Si unum ante habuerat. Eeadem sententia stat. de seruis transmarinis.⁴³⁷

Ordinary people faced such dilemmas on a regular basis as slavery was something all feared. Only extreme situations, such as the insurmountable debts or the threat of famine previously mentioned, would have made slavery seem an option.

⁴³⁶ CT, 4.8.5; PLS, 39; LR, 27; *Lex Francorum Chamavorum*, 10; *Lex Romana Burgundionum*, 41; LB, 21; FI, 7.3.3; *Edictum Theoderici*, 83; LL, 48; *Laws of Hlophære and Eadric*, 5; *Lex Baivariorum*, 16; *Lex Alamannorum*, 46; *Lex Angliorum et Werinorum*, 40; *Lex Frisionum*, 21.

⁴³⁷ PTA, 2.12.20-24 ("If a married woman has been captured by the enemy and cannot be redeemed, then her husband may marry again. If she has been made captive in this way, then her husband shall wait five years for her before he may marry again, and she shall do the same if the same happens to the husband. If a man marries a second wife and the first wife returns from captivity, he is permitted to leave the second and return to the first. It is the same with the wife and her husband. If the enemy has carried off the wife of a man and he cannot regain her, he may take another. It is better to do this than it is to fornicate. If the woman returns later, he should not receive here, so she may take another husband. The same rule shall apply in regard to foreign slaves").

2.4. Slave recruitment and the slave supply in peacetime

It is not obvious that a combination of these sources have been enough to maintain the enslaved population. While there are no secure numbers for any of the sources of slaves, it seems likely that, if they could be precisely determined, the answer would be a clear 'no' as will be made clear.

In order to calculate the level of importation of human beings into a region, several factors need to be considered. A combination of these can be considered as the equation:

$$\Omega = (\Pi\Delta)/P - \Pi(\alpha + \beta + \gamma + \delta)$$

In this, Ω represents the total number of imported slaves required per annum, a number that can be calculated by taking the total annual deficit in slaves and subtracting from it the locally sourced slave supply (a negative Ω could theoretically be considered as representing exported slaves).

To determine the needed number of slaves, the first step is to calculate $(\Pi\Delta)/P$. For this purpose, Π represents the total population, Δ the portion of population enslaved, and P the rate at which the slave population changes in a year. $\Pi(\alpha + \beta + \gamma + \delta)$ represents the portion of the slave supply that would be filled locally with Π again representing the total population and multiplied by a combination of α - the percentage of population enslaved judicially per annum, β - the percentage of population entering slavery legally, γ - the percentage of population becoming slaves

via child abandonment, and δ - the percentage of population enslaved due to kidnapping.

None of these individual figures can be given with any degree of precision during the period under discussion. Most can, however, be guessed at with enough detail to have some sense of the possibilities (though it should be stressed, these can never be more than educated guesses and should not be understood as anything more). For the first half of the equation, it is reasonable to err on the more conservative side and to be somewhat more generous with the second half.

Using the model, an estimate of the slave supply requirements of the Roman Empire as it existed under Maurice can be given according to the formula. For the total population of the Eastern Roman Empire as it existed in the sixth century, guesses range from ten million to upwards of thirty million⁴³⁸ but a number closer to the first should be used for the population under Maurice. Egypt's pre-nineteenth-century population is normally seen as fluctuating between 3,000,000 and 6,000,000⁴³⁹ and, in 1846, at the time of the introduction of modern agricultural and irrigation techniques under Muḥammad Ali, it had a population of 4,476,439.⁴⁴⁰ Using 3,000,000 as a minimal figure seems safe. Similarly, the countries of the Levant probably had a population of around 3,000,000 in the mid-nineteenth century.⁴⁴¹ While new crops had been introduced in the period since antiquity, large areas that had been agriculturally productive in late antiquity, particularly in the south and on the desert fringes, had only a small transhumant population at the time. Hence, assigning an additional 3,000,000 to the Levant in the time of Maurice seems

⁴³⁸ E. Stein, 'Introduction à l'Histoire et aux Institutions Byzantines', *Traditio*, 7, (1949-1951), p. 154.

⁴³⁹ See above.

⁴⁴⁰ J. A. McCarthy, 'Nineteenth-Century Egyptian Population', *Middle Eastern Studies*, 12:3, (Oct. 1976), p. 6.

⁴⁴¹ C. Issawi, *The Fertile Crescent, 1800-1914: A Documentary Economic History*, (Oxford, 1988), p. 16.

a reasonable minimal figure while a further 3,000,000 might be assumed to be the approximate minimal population of Asia Minor at the time.⁴⁴² A further population of 1,000,000 can be assumed for the European possessions of the Empire, including Constantinople and Thessaloniki, while perhaps another 2,000,000 could be found in Africa, Italy, and the insular possessions of the Empire.⁴⁴³ This notional population of 12,000,000 is, it should be stressed, probably far smaller than the actual population and is below the similarly cautious numbers suggested by Warren Treadgold.⁴⁴⁴

The portion of this population that was enslaved is also somewhat difficult to calculate. Frequently, numbers used from the plantation economies of the Atlantic world are used to make wild guesses at the populations of past slave societies but those, with their high figures for the slave population are probably not particularly useful. More reasonable models could be found in the percentage of slaves found in the *Domesday Book* from eleventh-century England (over all 10.5%)⁴⁴⁵ or from the non-plantation parts of the American South, such as western North Carolina or the Shenandoah Valley (18-20%).⁴⁴⁶ William Harris has suggested that there were ten million slaves or “16.6% -20% of what is commonly supposed to be the total population of the empire in the first century A.D.”⁴⁴⁷ though conceding that this is extremely hypothetical. Roger Bagnall has extrapolated somewhat more precise

⁴⁴² Note that this is much smaller than either the figure of 7,000,000 in 650 or of 12,000,000 in 400 suggested by J. C. Russell, *Late Ancient and Medieval Population* (Philadelphia, 1958) p. 100.

⁴⁴³ J. C. Russell, *Late Ancient and Medieval Population*, suggests figures of 3,000,000 for Greece and the Balkans (p. 98) and of slightly less for Italy in mid-seventh century.

⁴⁴⁴ W. Treadgold, *A History of the Byzantine State and Society*, (Stanford, 1997) p. 278 offers 19,000,000.

⁴⁴⁵ D. A. E. Pelteret, *Slavery in Early Mediaeval England*, p. 193. Note Pelteret’s caveats; this is probably a considerable understatement.

⁴⁴⁶ M. Mahon, *The Shenandoah Valley, 1861-1865: The Destruction of the Granary of the Confederacy*, (Mechanicsburg, 1999), p. 6.

⁴⁴⁷ W. V. Harris, ‘Towards a Study of the Roman Slave Trade,’ *Memoirs of the American Academy in Rome, Vol. 36, The Seaborne Commerce of Ancient Rome: Studies in Archaeology and History* (1980), p. 118.

numbers for the late Roman period from a limited number of Egyptian papyri⁴⁴⁸ and it seems not unreasonable to suggest that 10% of the overall population of Maurice's empire was made up of slaves.

This tenth of the population, it should be stressed, is a minimal figure for the period as some areas may have seen much higher portions of the population enslaved. It also pertains to what might normally be thought of as slaves and does not include all those persons lacking full free status and sometimes called slaves but living in their own households and possessing personal autonomy. As the material from Sussex suggested, were all those to be included, estimates for the un-free population might become much, much higher, approaching figures of over 90% in some times and places. Restricting the search to actual chattel slaves and using the 10% figure for an approximation for how many slaves might be in a given population allows for a cautious estimate that there were 1,200,000 slaves in the Empire around the year 600.

Probably the single factor most necessary for calculating the slave supply is the rate of change in the slave population. A slave population that more than self-replaced, would create a steady supply of surplus slaves that might be exploited as a source of income or be used to expand production capabilities. A population that, on the other hand, had to be constantly replaced would create demand for a slave trade or other means of securing slaves. Ralph Austen's research into the replacement rate for slaves in the early modern Islamic world suggests a 'working life' of a slave of around seven years on average before the slave either died or was manumitted.⁴⁴⁹ If that were correct, 15% of the slave population would need replacement every single

⁴⁴⁸ R. S. Bagnall, *Egypt in Late Antiquity*, p. 208: 13.5% of urban Egyptian were enslaved and 9-10% of rural populations.

⁴⁴⁹ R. A. Austen, 'The Mediterranean Islamic Slave Trade: A Tentative Census', *Slavery and Abolition*, 13:1, (1992), p. 214.

year to maintain constant numbers. This would necessitate a very large slave trade.

The more cautious calculation of Walter Scheidel assumes a working life of twenty years for the average slave and would require a five percent annual replacement rate.⁴⁵⁰ Under that assumption, 60,000 new slaves would have been required annually to maintain the slave population of Maurice's empire.

Some portion of these 60,000 would have come from within the Empire.

While the conviction of criminals would ensure a steady stream of people entering slavery, analogies with later times suggest that it is unlikely to have been sufficient in itself. A possibly useful analogy might be found in early modern Britain⁴⁵¹ where transportation with a long period of indenture afterwards was meted out as punishment for many crimes. Between 1607 and 1780, at least 50,000 convicts were shipped to America⁴⁵² while between 1787 and 1867, more than 160,000 Britons were involuntarily transported to Australia.⁴⁵³ While these numbers were significant for the places to which they were taken, their impact on British populations were fairly negligible. In 1801, the population of Great Britain (England, Scotland, and Wales) was 10,500,000⁴⁵⁴ (after a century of rapid growth⁴⁵⁵) and the number of transportees in any single year would only have been a minuscule fraction of the overall population (approximately .04% of the population at most⁴⁵⁶).

⁴⁵⁰ W. Scheidel, 'The Roman Slave Supply', p. 293.

⁴⁵¹ While the level of economic sophistication (among many other things) alone makes comparison between the two periods difficult, the British state of the early modern period was far stronger than any seventh century one and its courts were far more powerful. At the same time, it is also a period that suffered a high level of crime and endemic violence.

⁴⁵² J. D. Butler, 'British Convicts Shipped to American Colonies', *American Historical Review*, 2:1 (Oct., 1896), p. 12.

⁴⁵³ S. O'Toole, *The History of Australian Corrections*, (Sydney, 2006), p. 19.

⁴⁵⁴ B. R. Mitchell, *British Historical Statistics*, (Cambridge, 1988), p. 9.

⁴⁵⁵ The population of England had grown from 5,058,000 to 8,728,000 during the eighteenth century (B. R. Mitchell, *British Historical Statistics*, pp. 7-8).

⁴⁵⁶ The highest numbers sent to the American colonies appears to have been around 2,000 per year in the decade immediately before the War of Independence (J. D. Butler, 'British Convicts Shipped to American Colonies', p. 12) while during the decade of 1821-1830, when transportation to Australia was at its peak, an average of 4,800 would have been taken per year (S. O'Toole, *The History of Australian Corrections*, p. 23). 4,800 is .04% of 10,500,000.

Assuming that late antique judicial enslavement carried a similar sense of dread as punishment and a comparable rate of enforcement, an estimate might be useful. Presuming that judicial enslavements involved .5% of the total population per year (12.5 times the total of the transportation rate at its peak), in a population where slaves made up 10% of the population and a 5% annual replacement rate was needed, judicial enslavements would have provided replacements for no more than 8% of the total needed slaves in a given year. To reach substantially higher numbers, one would need to have had a much stronger state and judicial structure than is usually imagined for late antiquity and the early middle ages as well as far harsher and more thorough enforcement of laws than in early modern Britain, a time and place seldom considered as being lax in punishment; in the 1770's, three-quarters of non-capital offenses resulted in transportation.⁴⁵⁷ There is no evidence of any judicial system in any of late antique society being anywhere near as effective nor was enslavement as prominent a punishment in any legal system as transportation would be.⁴⁵⁸ Instead, it appears to have been relatively limited and used in specific cases. Even if one imagines the systems of fines as being geared towards the creation of debt burdens, it still seems unlikely that it would have provided a sufficiently large supply of slaves; to do so would have again required a much more effective judicial system than is evidenced.

Similarly, if the British experience of judicial transportation is taken as a parallel for the outcomes of judicial enslavements, the gender disparity in it is likely to be common; roughly 84.4% of those taken to Australia.⁴⁵⁹ In virtually every modern society, males make up a comparable or higher portion of those in the power

⁴⁵⁷ S. O'Toole, *The History of Australian Corrections*, p. 19.

⁴⁵⁸ E.g., the extensive fine systems discussed above as well as capital punishment and mutilation, all found broadly across the post-Roman world.

⁴⁵⁹ S. O'Toole, *The History of Australian Corrections*, p. 22.

of criminal justice systems and it is unlikely that seventh-century societies would have been vastly different. Female slaves, though, are well evidenced and nothing points to an extreme gender-skew in slave populations towards men; if anything, it would appear that, particularly regarding domestic slaves, women would have been more common.⁴⁶⁰ Had they not been, we would also need to adjust any sort of projections of slave population dynamics towards one that would need a much greater replacement rate and an even larger slave supply.

The other methods of entering slavery are also likely to have been insufficient though they might redress the gender imbalance. Exposed and abandoned children provided a steady were disproportionately female.⁴⁶¹ Unless seventh-century women abandoned children at a vastly higher rate than did women at other times, it is unlikely to have sufficed as a source of slaves. Bagnall's evidence from Egypt provides a base for extrapolation; there, gender imbalances with more free males and more enslaved females would seem to indicate that it played a role in the slave supply.⁴⁶² At most, such children could have only provided a supplement to the home-born slaves.⁴⁶³

The abduction of children (as well as adults) may also have been somewhat sex-selective. In the absence of hard numbers, it seems unlikely that it would have been endemic enough to have drastically altered the volume of the slave supply, particularly if judicial systems are imagined as being as strong as they would need to be to enforce substantive numbers of judicial enslavements. Self-sale and sale of one's family members, while far from unknown, similarly do not appear to have been so pervasive as to account for the demands on the slave supply. Unlike some of

⁴⁶⁰ W. Scheidel, 'Human Mobility in Roman Italy, II', p. 72.

⁴⁶¹ T. Wiedemann, *Adults and Children in the Roman Empire*, (Oxford, 1989), p. 36.

⁴⁶² R. S. Bagnall, 'Missing Females in Roman Egypt', *Scripta Classica Israelica*, 16, (1997), p. 126.

⁴⁶³ R. S. Bagnall, 'Missing Females', p. 129.

the other pathways, self-sale would also appear to have frequently involved the creation of relationships of dependence that would not necessarily always be understood as slavery. Taken all together, it seems unlikely that these mechanisms, which may have provided a majority of new slaves in most times and places, could be counted on to provide sufficient slaves during times of peace. Other mechanisms had to exist in order to provide the necessary slaves.

Presuming that the judicial enslavement rate were considerably higher than that found in early nineteenth-century Britain – something that seems to be unlikely – and that the self-enslavement rate, rate of child abandonment (and survival of foundlings), and rate of kidnappings were all equally insupportably high, we can assign an unbelievable rate of 50 per 100,000 in the total population to each of these. This then yields an internally produced slave supply of 24,000. Even though this is probably still as much as two or three times greater than it would have been in reality (if not much more), it still would leave a deficit of 36,000 slaves per year. To supply that need would require the existence of either regular organised raids on neighbouring societies or a large-scale slave trade.

2.5. Becoming a slave in violent times

While there were many paths that could (and certainly did) contribute to the supply of slaves, war was probably by far the single largest method of turning freeborn people into slaves. Warfare in the period was endemic; nearly every region was invaded at some point and many areas were the scenes of almost constant conflict.

As a result, both defeated warriors and civilian populations regularly found

themselves enslaved, sometimes in truly enormous numbers. Enslavement was both one of the primary results of war and, arguably, one of the main reasons for wars in the period. The connection between warfare and slavery was one that was made by many of the people of the period. Even home-born slaves were seen as being primarily the descendants of individuals captured in war.⁴⁶⁴

In earlier centuries, when Rome had conquered its Empire, huge numbers of defeated enemies and captured civilians had regularly flooded the slave markets. Greeks,⁴⁶⁵ Carthaginians,⁴⁶⁶ and Celts⁴⁶⁷ had all, at various points, been noted as being extremely numerous in Republican slave markets. Though slaves born into that status likely always vastly outnumbered these captives,⁴⁶⁸ it was the inflow of prisoners that ensured the systems continuity and growth. While wars of conquest were rarer after the Principate had been established, conquests still led to drops in the cost of slaves, as occurred after Vespasian's capture of Jerusalem when 97,000 Jews were enslaved⁴⁶⁹ or, after Trajan's conquest of Dacia, when 500,000 slaves were said to have been captured.⁴⁷⁰ Some of the campaigns of expansion that occurred in Dacia, Britain, and northwestern Africa might even have been driven by the quest for slaves.⁴⁷¹

In later centuries, of course, the Roman Empire was far more often on the defensive than not and the majority of even its victories happened within what was considered Roman territory. Even so, those victories too brought slaves into the

⁴⁶⁴ Isidore, 9.4.43.

⁴⁶⁵ Polybius, *Histories*, 30.15.

⁴⁶⁶ Livy, 32.26

⁴⁶⁷ Plutarch, *Vita Caesaris*, 15.5 claims more than 1,000,000 slaves from the Gallic War.

⁴⁶⁸ K. Bradley, 'On the Roman Slave supply and Slavebreeding', p. 46.

⁴⁶⁹ Josephus, *De Bello Iudaico*, 6.9.3.

⁴⁷⁰ John the Lydian, *De Magistratibus reipublicae Romanae*, 2.28.

⁴⁷¹ Suggested by W. V. Harris, 'Towards a Study of the Roman Slave Trade,' p. 122.

market. Wars, raiding, and violence beyond and along the imperial frontiers played a major role in the supply of slaves into the empire.

Along the European frontiers, many of the Germanic peoples appear to have been deeply involved in supplying Roman needs. The Goths are better documented before they entered imperial territory than many of the other peoples and some evidence has been read as suggesting that a large-scale slave trade into the Roman Empire was a major factor among the Tervingi Goths before they crossed the Danube.⁴⁷² A few decades later, Synesius of Cyrene would refer to ‘Scythians’ as natural slaves, ubiquitous in Roman households, when he spoke before the Emperor Arcadius;⁴⁷³ the usual assumption is that he is speaking of Goths.⁴⁷⁴ Further west, Ammianus Marcellinus described slave dealers in the territory of the Alamanni.⁴⁷⁵ The importation of slaves from the Germanic peoples was, apparently, a major aspect of the northern frontiers and shaped interactions between the two groups⁴⁷⁶ while, at the same time, the Germanic groups sometimes carried Roman civilians into slavery in their own territory. In the fourth century, Christianity had first reached the Goths through slaves carried off from their third-century raids in Anatolia; Ulfilas, the translator of the Gothic Bible, was descended from such slaves and his initial ministry appears to have been to these slaves and their descendants.⁴⁷⁷

While the evidence is less clear, similar patterns might have occurred along the northern and western frontiers of Britain. In the fifth century, Christianity had reached Ireland through enslaved Romans, both those Palladius was probably sent to

⁴⁷² E. A. Thompson, *The Visigoths in the time of Ulfila*, (Oxford, 1966), pp. 40-42.

⁴⁷³ Synesius, *De Regno*, 21.

⁴⁷⁴ P. J. Heather, ‘The Anti-Scythian Tirade of Synesius’ “De Regno,” *Phoenix*, 42:2, (1988), pp. 152-172.

⁴⁷⁵ Ammianus Marcellinus, 29.4.4.

⁴⁷⁶ See N. Lenski, ‘Captivity, Slavery, and Cultural Exchange between Rome and the Germans from the First to the Seventh Century CE,’ in C. M. Cameron, ed., *Invisible Citizens: Captives and their consequences*, (Salt Lake City, 2008), pp. 82-85.

⁴⁷⁷ Philostorgius, *HE*, 2.5.

minister to⁴⁷⁸ and Patrick himself.⁴⁷⁹ Patrick's letter to the followers of Coroticus appears to address a group of slave-raiding Romano-Britons somewhere in the southwest of modern Scotland.⁴⁸⁰ Though these occurred after the legions withdrew, it might be that similar patterns of border raiding and of the movement of slaves into Roman territory had been a feature of earlier times.

In North Africa, Berber groups regularly supplied slaves. Andrew Wilson has argued that, during the Principate, a trans-Saharan slave trade might have seen 10,000 or more slaves moved northward every year via the desert communities of the Garamantes.⁴⁸¹ Slave-raiding along the southern frontiers of Roman North Africa appears to become more common (or at least better attested) in the last years of Roman rule. Augustine describes several incidents, including the kidnapping and enslavement of a nun by three 'barbarian' brothers in Numidia⁴⁸² or the mass kidnapping of his parishioners a few years later.⁴⁸³ Later, as will be discussed below, slave raiding seems to have played a massive role in shaping North African society.

While the African and European neighbours of the Empire could supply the Roman market, along the eastern frontiers, nomadic and semi-nomadic Arab groups were able to raid sedentary populations of both the Roman and Persian empires and sell slaves to both (as well as the kingdoms of South Arabia).⁴⁸⁴ Arab cities on the frontier like Palmyra became major centres of slave trading both into and out of the

⁴⁷⁸ T. M. Charles-Edwards, *Early Christian Ireland*, (Cambridge, 2004), p. 212.

⁴⁷⁹ Patrick, *Confessio*, 23.

⁴⁸⁰ Patrick, *Epistola ad Milites Corotici*, 1-2; T. M. Charles-Edwards, *Wales and the Britons, 350-1064*, (Oxford, 2013), pp. 35-36.

⁴⁸¹ A. Wilson, 'Saharan trade in the Roman period: short-, medium- and long-distance trade networks', *Azania: Archaeological Research in Africa*, 47:4 (2012), pp. 432-435, however, argues for a trans-Saharan slave trade in the period of the Principate that might have seen 10,000 or more slaves moved northward every year.

⁴⁸² Augustine, *Epistulae*, 111.7.

⁴⁸³ Augustine, *Epistulae*, 10*.

⁴⁸⁴ N. E. Lenski, 'Captivity and Slavery among the Saracens in Late Antiquity (ca. 250-630 CE)', *Antiquité Tardive*, 19 (2011), pp. 237-266; see below 4.1.

Roman Empire.⁴⁸⁵ The available evidence points to slave raiding and trading among the nomadic Arab groups as being both crucial to their economies and to the slave supply among the sedentary populations while Roman subjects taken as slaves and traded southwards impacted Arab culture much as they had the Empire's European neighbours. According to later Arabic sources, the Christian community of Najrān had begun when a Syrian slave had been kidnapped and sold there.⁴⁸⁶ Other slaves originating in the Roman Empire appear in the inner circle of Muḥammad and among the first Muslims.

It might be safe then to suggest that all the neighbours of the Roman Empire had used slave trading as a means to gain access to the wealth of the Empire while the Romans needed the slaves that they provided. When many of those frontiers collapsed in the fifth century, patterns that had already been established along the edges of the Empire moved into its central lands. While some of the barbarian invasions led to the eventual establishment of kingdoms inside the Empire, many others were successfully stopped and large numbers of those invaders became slaves. In the aftermath of Stilicho's defeat of what was alleged to be a massive invasion by Goths led by Radagaisus in 406, the surviving invaders were enslaved and their sale led to a collapse in the market for slaves.⁴⁸⁷

More successful invaders would have taken captives and, as can be seen in an enactment of 409,⁴⁸⁸ captives were a form of booty. In the previous year, a law refers to barbarians selling captives as slaves to Romans.⁴⁸⁹ The purchaser is owed the price that had been paid even if the person had been previously free and the

⁴⁸⁵ J. F. Matthews, 'The Tax Law of Palmyra: Evidence for Economic History in a City of the Roman East,' *JRS*, 74 (1984) pp. 175-176; the first items listed in this 137 decree specify fines on "those importing slaves into Palmyra" and "those selling slaves in the city for export."

⁴⁸⁶ Muḥammad Mābūr

⁴⁸⁷ Orosius, 7.37.

⁴⁸⁸ *CT*, 5.6.2.

⁴⁸⁹ *CT*, 5.7.2.

ransomed captive would be indentured to work off the debt of ransom if it could not be paid. Even when not directly seized by invaders, the inhabitants of the overrun provinces might still find themselves enslaved as, apparently, happened to refugees from barbarians in Illyricum.⁴⁹⁰ Theodoret of Cyrrhus wrote to a fellow bishop of the highborn Maria, daughter of Eudaemon, captured in North Africa by the Vandals and sold into slavery in northern Syria.⁴⁹¹ Presumably, she was not the only one. Further north, Priscus encountered numerous enslaved Romans from the Balkan provinces during his embassy⁴⁹² as well as the Greek merchant who had risen from slavery into acceptance among the Huns as an equal.⁴⁹³

While some captives might remain in barbarian hands and serve them, far more were taken with the intention of selling them back, either as ransomed captives or as actual slaves. In both cases, the purpose was the transfer of Roman wealth to barbarian hands and the line between ransom and purchase can sometimes be blurry, though, a ransom would have been normally higher than what the captor would have expected to realize from selling the prisoner as a slave.⁴⁹⁴ Captive taking was profitable for the captor and was common during warfare.⁴⁹⁵ Ransoming captives had been a normal role of patrons towards their clients in the Roman Empire and would have been one of the benefits for the client in maintaining them. As bishops became more prominent in the Christian empire, they often took over some of these functions and, by the beginning of the fifth century, it was a given that this was one

⁴⁹⁰ *CT*, 10.10.25.

⁴⁹¹ Theodoret of Cyrrhus, *Epistulae*, 70.

⁴⁹² Priscus, fr. 11.370, 412.

⁴⁹³ Priscus, fr. 11.407 – 510.

⁴⁹⁴ W. Klingshirn, 'Charity and Power: Caesarius of Arles and the Ransoming of Captives in Sub-Roman Gaul,' *JRS*, 75 (1985), p. 184.

⁴⁹⁵ N. E. Lenski, 'Captivity and Slavery among the Saracens in Late Antiquity,' pp. 248-249.

of their normal duties. The only issue in dispute was whether or not the bishop had the right to dispose of church property in pursuit of freeing captives.⁴⁹⁶

As imperial power crumbled in the west, the role of the bishop became more significant and the lives of saints like Severinus⁴⁹⁷ and Caesarius of Arles⁴⁹⁸ regularly depict them redeeming parishioners who had been carried off into slavery. František Graus has made a thorough compilation of the occurrences;⁴⁹⁹ it is so frequent as to become a *topos*, more noticeable when it does not occur in a saint's life than when it does. To be a saint meant to follow the words of the Gospel:

*κηρῶσαι αἰχμαλώτοι ἄφεσιν καὶ τυφλοῖς ἀνάβλεψιν, ἀποστεῖλαι τεθραυσμένους ἐν ἀφέσει.*⁵⁰⁰

It should not be surprising that what might seem clear teaching would be followed,⁵⁰¹ particularly when it combined with the traditional role of the local patron. A bishop, unlike a secular patron, would not be as expectant of a return on their largesse.⁵⁰²

Captive taking remained a major factor wherever conflict occurred. Pope Gregory noted in a letter sent to the Bishop of Messina that it was permissible under canon law to sell church utensils to redeem captives.⁵⁰³ He instructed John, the Bishop of Ravenna, to send Abbot Claudius to Fano and to purchase any free men he found held there as slaves and to ransom any captives after attacks by Ariulf of

⁴⁹⁶ W. Klingshirn, 'Charity and Power,' pp. 185-186.

⁴⁹⁷ Eugippius, *Vita S. Severini*, 19.

⁴⁹⁸ Cyprianus, et al., *Vita Caesarii*, 1.32-8.

⁴⁹⁹ F. Graus, 'Die Gewalt bei den Anfängen des Feudalismus und die "Gefangenenbefreiungen" der Merowingischen Hagiographie', *Jahrbuch für Wirtschaftsgeschichte*, (1961), pp. 61-156.

⁵⁰⁰ Luke 4:18 ("to proclaim deliverance to the captives, and to bring sight to the blind, to send the oppressed out in freedom").

⁵⁰¹ Though it cannot be stressed enough that this was not understood as an abolitionist sentiment whatsoever.

⁵⁰² W. Klingshirn, 'Charity and Power,' pp. 201-202.

⁵⁰³ RE, 7.35 ("Just as it is an extremely serious thing to lazily sell ecclesiastical materials, so also is it blameworthy, under imminent necessity of this type, for a maximally desolated church to prefer its property to its captives and to cease in their redemption").

Spoletto.⁵⁰⁴ The same group of Lombards were responsible for the enslavement and sale of others who were not so fortunate as Gregory described in a letter to Emperor Maurice:

*post hoc plaga grauior fuit aduentus Agilulfi, ita ut oculis meis cernerem Romanos more canum in collis funibus ligatos, qui ad Franciam ducebantur uenales.*⁵⁰⁵

While this description of captives being bound with ropes might address the objection to the movement of slaves in this period that few iron chains and collars have been found, it also underlines what happened when ransoms were not paid.

When ransoms were paid or captives escaped, Roman law theoretically meant that they regained their freedom on entry to Roman territory by virtue of the right of *postliminium*. However, if someone outside the captive's family had redeemed them, captives were legally to be subjugated to a period of forced indenture to whoever had ransomed them. These indentures might often have become indistinguishable from servitude and, as time progressed, became even less clear. At the beginning of the fifth century, persons redeemed from captivity and unable to repay were required to serve their purchasers for five years.⁵⁰⁶ This had changed by the time of the issuance of Leo III's *Ecloga* (725/6); the ransomed captive belonged to the redeemer indefinitely until they had been fully repaid.⁵⁰⁷

⁵⁰⁴ RE, 2.38.

⁵⁰⁵ RE, 5.36 ("After this, a heavier blow came with the arrival of Agilulf, so that, with my own eyes I saw Romans bound like dogs with ropes around their necks who were being led to Francia to be sold").

⁵⁰⁶ *Constitutiones Sirmonidae*, 16, dated 408; CJ, 8.51.20, dated 409.

⁵⁰⁷ *Ecloga*, 8.6.

Captive taking was not, of course, limited to Roman populations. From what is now Switzerland, a brief account in the *Chronicle of Fredegar* describes an incursion in 610 in the Aare Valley that might be seen as fairly typical:

*His diebus et Alamanni in pago Auenticense Ultraiorano hostiliter ingressi sunt; ipsoque pago predantes, Abbelenus et Herpinus comitis cum ceteris de ipso pago comitebus cum exercito pergunt obuiam Alamannis. Uterque falange Wangas iungunt ad prelium. Alamanni Transioranus superant, pluretate eorum gladio trucedant et prosternunt, maximam partem territorio Auenticense incendio concremant, plurum nomirum hominum exinde in captiuitate duxerunt; reuersique cum predam, pergunt ad propriam.*⁵⁰⁸

The raid would have occurred close to what would eventually stabilize as the frontier between Romance- and Germanic-speakers; whether it was instrumental in that process is unclear.

Civilians, of course, were not the only ones to enter captivity; those who were defeated in war and captured clearly made up a considerable portion of both those taken for ransom and those sold into slavery. Bede wrote of a Northumbrian nobleman named Imma who, near the end of the century, was wounded on a battlefield. After pretending to be a common warrior, was held as a captive by a Mercian earl who sold him to a Frisian merchant in London; he was only saved from a life of slavery abroad, Bede says, by miraculous intervention.⁵⁰⁹ The incident suggests that ransoming was not as common a fate as it would be later on as Imma would have been a high value prisoner. By Carolingian times and through later

⁵⁰⁸ *Chronicle of Fredegar*, 4.37 (“In these days, the Alamanni invaded the pagus of Avenches beyond the Jura; the Counts Abbelenus and Herpinus with the other counts of that pagus went out to take action against the Alamanni. Both armies joined battle at Wangen. The Alamanni overwhelmed the Transjurans, drawing them to their swords, killing and prostrating them, a great part of the territory of Avenches they set on fire, many numbers of men they led into captivity from there, and returned with booty to their homes”).

⁵⁰⁹ Bede, 4.22.

centuries, Christian warriors captured on the battlefield were no longer sold off as slaves as they had been in the past but deliberately ransomed.⁵¹⁰

Other sources suggest that slave raiding and trading were frequent in Britain. Bede's account of Gregory's encounter in the Roman market that began this thesis demonstrates that Bede (and his sources) thought that slaves from Northumbria might be sold in Rome. Letters Gregory himself wrote in preparation for the beginning of the English mission might match these expectations. Candidus, his representative in Marseille, received instructions to purchase likely English slaves and instruct them in Christianity;⁵¹¹ these may have been intended to aid the mission sent to Kent in the following year.⁵¹² Other evidence also suggests an export of Angles and Saxons as slaves. Gregory of Tours mentions two Saxons driven to kill their master⁵¹³ while Balthild was noted for her concern for other slaves from her homeland.⁵¹⁴ In the life of Eligius, Dado of Rouen described his good deeds done sometime around the middle of the century:

Sane ubicumque uenundandum intellexisset mancipium, magna cum misericordia et festinatione occurrens, mox dato praetio liberabat captiuum; interdum etiam usque ad uiginti et triginta seu et quinquaginta numero simul a captiuitate redimebat; nonnumquam uero agmen integrum et usque ad centum animas, cum nauem egrederentur, utriusque sexus, ex diuersis gentibus uenientes, pariter liberabat, Romanorum scilicet, Gallorum atque Brittanorum

⁵¹⁰ J. Gillingham, 'Surrender in Medieval Europe: An Indirect Approach', in H. Afflerbach and H. Strachan, eds., *How Fighting Ends: A History of Surrender*, (Oxford, 2012), pp. 59-62.

⁵¹¹ *RE*, 6.10.

⁵¹² A. Serfass, 'Slavery and Pope Gregory the Great', *Journal of Early Christian Studies*, 14:1, (Spring 2006), p. 88.

⁵¹³ *GT, DLH*, 7.46.

⁵¹⁴ *VDB*, 10.

*necnon et Maurorum sed praecipuae ex genere Saxonorum, qui abunde eo tempore ueluti greges a sedibus propriis euulsi in diuersa distrahebantur.*⁵¹⁵

As Dado points out, even while many of these anecdotes refer only to male slaves, there was also traffic in women. It is likely to have been at least as great as that in men and may even have been larger in scale though the sources are largely silent.

It is perhaps noteworthy that neither the kingdoms of the Franks nor those of the Visigoths appear as major exporters of slaves from among their own populations. Instead, they can be found raiding each other, as when Gregory of Tours described Visigoths raiding in the region about Arles in 587 in retaliation for Frankish raiding in Septimania the previous year.⁵¹⁶ Frankish civil wars, while frequent, do not seem to have involved much slave taking. Gregory of Tours describes a promise by Theuderic I to allow his followers to treat the Auvergne as hostile territory and to take slaves from it, suggesting that only non-Frankish areas were normally open to slave raids.⁵¹⁷ That conflict appears to have occurred while campaigns were under way against the Burgundians. In the early sixth-century Burgundian laws, there are slaves who are identified as ‘barbarians’,⁵¹⁸ suggesting that some slaves are coming from further north into the Burgundian realm. A specific problem addressed was that of runaway slaves sold back to Burgundian owners from both the Franks and Alamanni.⁵¹⁹

⁵¹⁵ Dado of Rouen, 1.10 (“Truly, in whatever place he understood that slaves were being sold, with great mercy and haste he rushed, soon freed the captive at the given price: sometimes as many as even 20 or 30 or even 50 captives he redeemed at the same time: sometimes even 100 souls at once, when in a ship, they came out together of both sexes and coming from different nations, he freed them together, Romans, namely, Gauls and Britons as well as the Moors but especially from the nation of the Saxons, who were as numerous at that time as if they were a herd expelled from their own land and scattered everywhere”).

⁵¹⁶ GT, DLH, 9.7.

⁵¹⁷ GT, DLH, 3.11-3.12.

⁵¹⁸ LB, 17.5.

⁵¹⁹ LB, 21.9.

Throughout the post-Roman period (and well beyond), conflicts raged along the frontiers of the larger kingdoms. Smaller kingdoms emerged or were absorbed into larger states. Many of these wars created new slaves from among the defeated and non-combatants were taken off to serve the victors. Some spent their remaining lives among their captors while others might be quickly sold, either ransomed back to their own homes or to merchants or others who would remove them to other places. Much of this sort of slave raiding should probably be imagined as having an almost redistributive effect on slave populations; raids from one side of a frontier would bring slaves to replace those lost in raids going the other way or to make up the attrition of the slave population.

Some few would, in normal times, have been taken further where they would serve to replace slaves lost in other ways, much as appears to have been the case in the Roman period, and one can imagine that the lands beyond the Mediterranean world were likely to have continued supplying slaves just as had happened earlier. Unfortunately, events beyond the horizon of literate observers are even more difficult to ascertain though endemic warfare between the various groups to the north of the Empire can be fairly safely assumed for most of the period.

It is a commonplace in descriptions of the period that Scandinavia is a region particularly fertile in humans and is constantly sending out large numbers of people.⁵²⁰ Paul the Deacon describes how

⁵²⁰ Jordanes, 4.25; Procopius, 6.15; *Origo Gentis Langobardorum*, 1; Paul the Deacon, *Historia Langobardorum*, 1.1. The idea that thus supports an ultimate Scandinavian origin of the Goths and other Germanic peoples does not hold up. See P. Heather, *The Goths*, (Oxford, 1996), p. 27-29 and W. Goffart, 'Jordanes's "Getica" and the Disputed Authenticity of Gothic Origins from Scandinavia', *Speculum*, 80:2, (April 2005), pp. 379-398. They claim that, rather than depicting authentic traditions of Germanic origins (handed down orally, according to Jordanes, over a period of more than 2000 years), these ideas were developed in the sixth century. Close connections existed between the court of Theoderic and the far north; an exiled Scandinavian king, Rodulf of the Rani, appears to have lived for a time in Ravenna and is one likely means of transmission of information.

*saepe innumerabiles captiuorum turmae abductae meridianis populis pretio distrahuntur. Multae quoque ex ea, pro eo quod tantos mortalium germinat, quantos alere uix sufficit, saepe gentes egressae sunt, quae nihilominus et partes Asiae, sed maxime sibi contiguam Europam afflixerunt.*⁵²¹

This is not the only evidence that explicitly links the innumerable slaves with the idea of Scandinavia as being rich in people. In a letter dated to the last years of his reign, Theoderic wrote to the unnamed king of the Warni (a people known to Procopius and placed either near the Danes⁵²² or along the North Sea coast⁵²³) thanking him for sending slave-boys as well as sable-furs.⁵²⁴

The lands north of the Black Sea have been heavily involved in the export of slaves since, at least, the period of Scythian domination.⁵²⁵ The Greutungi under Ermanaric are reported as waging warfare against peoples across a broad area north of the Black Sea,⁵²⁶ campaigns that might have served the same purpose. From the late seventh through the tenth centuries, the Khazars engaged in large-scale slave trading as had their rivals and successors amongst the Kievan Rus' and Volga Bulgars.⁵²⁷ Under the Khazars, their centre of Khamlij or Atil was the hub of mercantile networks involved in shipping slaves southward,⁵²⁸ in the five centuries before their conquest in 1783, the Crimean Tatars organised their Khanate as a slave-

⁵²¹ Paul the Deacon, 1.1 (“innumerable troops of captives are often led away and sold for gain to the people of the South. And for the reason that it brings forth so many human beings that it can scarcely nourish them, there have frequently emigrated from it many nations that have indeed become the scourge of portions of Asia, but especially of the parts of Europe which lie next to it”).

⁵²² Procopius, 6.15.

⁵²³ Procopius, 8.20.

⁵²⁴ Cassiodorus, 5.1.

⁵²⁵ See N. Gavriljuk, ‘The Graeco-Scythian Slave-trade in the 6th and 5th Centuries BC’, in P. Bilde, J. Hojte, and V. Stolba, eds., *The Cauldron of Ariantas: Studies Presented to A. N. Shcheglov on His 70th Birthday*, (Århus, 2003), pp. 75-85; D. Braund, ‘Royal Scythians and the slave-trade in Herodotus’ Scythia’, *Antichthon*, 42, (2008), pp. 1-19.

⁵²⁶ Jordanes, *Getica*, 23; Ammianus Marcellinus, 31.3.1.

⁵²⁷ O. Pritsak, *The Origins of Rus’*, (Cambridge, Mass., 1981), pp. 24-26; R. K. Kovalev, ‘Creating Khazar Identity through Coins: The Special Issue Dirhams of 843/7/8’, in F. Curta, ed., *East Central and Eastern Europe in the Early Middle Ages*, (Ann Arbor, 2005), p. 222.

⁵²⁸ K. Brook, *The Jews of Khazaria*, (Lanham, Md., 2006), pp. 20-21.

raiding kingdom where a relatively small group of mounted warriors based in fortified towns carried out regular large-scale raids throughout the region with the goal of taking prisoners to sell overseas.⁵²⁹

It would make sense that the seventh-century nomadic empires of the Avars, Bulgars, and Khazars combined tribute taking and raiding sedentary peoples. For the Avars and Bulgars, these were primarily a mixture of the surviving Latin-speaking population of the Danube basin as well as Slavic groups often settled deliberately by the nomads. Large-scale salt mining in Transylvania throughout the periods of Gepid and Avar domination, for instance, implies the existence of a subjugated workforce.⁵³⁰ In these states, the Slavic element was probably greater than that of the nomads; the (probably⁵³¹) Turkic-speaking Bulgars rapidly disappeared as a distinct group and merged with the Slavic-speakers who took their name while Slavic appears to have been the ‘working’ language of the Avars. Unfortunately, relatively little evidence exists regarding either of their economies in the seventh century. Certainly, the Avars were able to extract considerable amount of treasure from the Heraclian emperors though Walter Pohl, one of the leading scholars on the subject, contends that slave trading was not a major activity for them.⁵³² This seems to be an overstatement as it is clear that the areas where the Avars were active in the Danube basin had become one of the major sources of slaves in western Eurasia by the time of their downfall in the Carolingian period.

In the 620’s, the Avars not only found themselves defeated at the hands of the Byzantines but they also faced the revolt of some of their Slavic tributaries under the

⁵²⁹ A. W. Fisher, *The Crimean Tatars*, (Stanford, 1978), pp. 26-28.

⁵³⁰ A. Madgearu, ‘Salt Trade and Warfare: The Rise of the Romanian-Slavic Military Organization in Early Medieval Transylvania’, in F. Curta, ed., *East Central and Eastern Europe in the Early Middle Ages*, (Ann Arbor, 2005), p. 104.

⁵³¹ R. Rashev, ‘Za Proizkhoda na Prabŭlgarite’, in V. Giuzelev, ed., *Studia Protobulgarica et Mediaevalia Europensia*, (Veliko Tarnovo, 1992), pp. 23-33.

⁵³² W. Pohl, *Die Awaren: Ein Steppenvolk in Mitteleuropa, 567-822*, (Munich, 1988), p. 196.

leadership of Samo, a Frankish merchant who, according to the *Chronicle of Fredegar*, became king of a Slavic state.⁵³³ Much of the Samo story has long been debated, including the very location of the kingdom that he would rule for 35 years (it is claimed as the first expression of both Slovak and Slovene national identity), and what it was that he sold. While it is often assumed that it was slaves,⁵³⁴ Fredegar makes no mention of his wares. However, he describes how the Wends had served as *bifulci* for the Avars, a term that Fredegar does not understand and seems to be Slavic in origin. Its probable meaning had something to do with driving the ox carts of the Avars,⁵³⁵ this might be indicative of a wider role as underlings. *Bifulci* has been suggested as an equivalent to the south and west Slavic term *župan* (later on an administrative or feudal officer equivalent to the German *graf*) and derived from a Turkic **fšu-pāna*, ‘shepherds of human cattle.’⁵³⁶ If true, it could be argued that the later movement of Slavs as slaves through the Khazar kingdom in the late Umayyad period⁵³⁷ and of Slavic slave trading among the Moravians,⁵³⁸ could be pushed back to an earlier period.

There is, though, some evidence of the forced removal of population northward by the Avars and Bulgars once they had entered the Danube region. Multiple authors, including the Egyptian John of Nikiu⁵³⁹ and the later Theophanes,⁵⁴⁰ refer to large numbers of civilians being carried off as captives by the Avars in their raids into remaining Roman territory. Others are more specific in their

⁵³³ *Chronicle of Fredegar*, 4.48, 68.

⁵³⁴ H. Pirenne, *Mahomet et Charlemagne*, p. 97.

⁵³⁵ T. Mayer, ‘Zu Fredegars Bericht über die Slawen’, in O. Redlich, ed., *Oswald Redlich zugeeignet anlässlich der Feier seines Siebzigsten Geburtstages*, (Innsbruck, 1929), pp. 114-120.

⁵³⁶ O. Pritsak, *The Origin of Rus*, p. 20.

⁵³⁷ al-Balādhurī, 208.

⁵³⁸ P. M. Barford, ‘Silent Centuries: The Society and Economy of the Northwestern Slavs’, in F. Curta, ed., *East Central and Eastern Europe in the Early Middle Ages*, (Ann Arbor, 2005), p. 73.

⁵³⁹ John of Nikiū, 109.18 (in reference to events around 609).

⁵⁴⁰ Theophanes, 253-254 (around 583-584).

details: Nicephorus informs us that the Avars carried off 270,000 men and women in the first years of Heraclius's reign,⁵⁴¹ while Paul the Deacon refers to a large number of Lombards carried into slavery around 610.⁵⁴² The *Miracula Sancti Demetrii* refers to a group of enslaved Romans who had been taken by the Avars to Pannonia (presumably at the beginning of the seventh century) and, despite the passage of 60 years, had maintained their Christian religion.⁵⁴³ These captives may have been the people who were settled in the region around Lake Balaton. There, a number of archaeologists, including Istvan Bona, have identified the Keszthely Culture with enslaved Roman civilians deliberately settled to serve the Avars.⁵⁴⁴ While the identification is not universally accepted – Florin Curta, for instance, argues that the settlements are more likely the remains of Romano-Pannonians⁵⁴⁵ as does Tivadar Vida⁵⁴⁶ – it is possible that the Avars would use enslaved civilians from elsewhere to provide skilled craftsmen, much as other east European peoples before and after them had done.⁵⁴⁷

Throughout much of the Balkans, in the period following the reign of Justinian I, urban life appears to have all but collapsed outside a few cities along the coasts⁵⁴⁸ while the rural population of the Roman era diminished rapidly.⁵⁴⁹ Areas

⁵⁴¹ Nicephorus, 10.

⁵⁴² Paul the Deacon, 4.37.

⁵⁴³ *Miracula Sancti Demetrii*, 2.284.

⁵⁴⁴ I. Bona, 'Abriss der Siedlungsgeschichte Ungarns im 5-7. Jahrhundert und die Avarensiedlung von Dunaujvaros', *Archeologicke Rozhledy*, 20, (1968), pp. 614-617.

⁵⁴⁵ F. Curta, 'Before Cyril and Methodius: Christianity and Barbarians beyond the Sixth- and Seventh-Century Danube Frontier', in F. Curta, ed., *East Central and Eastern Europe in the Early Middle Ages*, (Ann Arbor, 2005), p. 184.

⁵⁴⁶ T. Vida, 'Conflict and Coexistence: The Local Population of the Carpathian Basin Under Avar Rule (Sixth to Seventh Century)', in F. Curta, ed., *The Other Europe in the Middle Ages: Avars, Bulgars, Khazars, and Cumans*, (Leiden, 2008), p. 32.

⁵⁴⁷ P. M. Barford, *The Early Slavs: Culture and Society in Early Medieval Eastern Europe*, (London, 2001), pp. 148-149.

⁵⁴⁸ C. Morrisson and J.-P. Sodini, 'The Sixth Century Economy', in A. E. Laiou, ed., *The Economic History of Byzantium, From the Seventh through the Fifteenth Century*, (Washington, 2002), vol. 1, p. 174.

⁵⁴⁹ F. Curta, *The Making of the Slavs: History and Archaeology of the Lower Danube Region, C. 500-700*, (Cambridge, 2001), p. 146.

where Greek and Latin speakers had long lived seem to have been abandoned or to have seen the diminishment of those populations to a small fraction of what they had been. New communities of migrant Slavs were able to settle in largely empty landscapes from the Danube as far as the Peloponnese.⁵⁵⁰ While much of the former population doubtless fled or died in the turmoil of the period, the idea that the Avars and Bulgars removed large parts of the civilian population of the Balkans northward might even help to explain the later distribution of Romance-speakers north of the Danube and well beyond any historical Roman settlement.⁵⁵¹

At the same time, similar activities were carried on in the opposite direction. Captive Slavs, sometimes amounting to entire tribes, were removed from the Balkans by the Byzantine Empire and transported into Anatolia and beyond. While Slavs were taken as slaves or settled in far parts of the Empire from at least 592,⁵⁵² the emperors following Heraclius repeatedly used defeated and enslaved Balkan peoples to reinforce 'gaps' in the civilian population of their eastern border regions. Justinian II waged several campaigns against the Bulgars and Slavs that almost look like massive slave raids in the texts.⁵⁵³ Interestingly, there is explicit evidence for the transfer of an enormous number of slaves in seals found in Anatolia⁵⁵⁴ (though 20,000 of the same Slavs are said to have later deserted to the Arabs).⁵⁵⁵

These sorts of actions might almost be thought of as being a type of forced population transfer. Some of the clearest examples of it come from the wars fought between the Eastern Roman Empire and its Sasanian Persian rivals in the late sixth

⁵⁵⁰ F. Curta, *The Making of the Slavs*, p. 66-69.

⁵⁵¹ As this topic is both beyond the scope of this work and is of deep dispute (enormous amounts of ink has been spilt to demonstrate either absolute continuity from the Dacians to modern Romanians or that the Romanians came from south of the Danube in the medieval era), no more needs to be said on this.

⁵⁵² Theophanes, 271.

⁵⁵³ Theophanes, 364; Nicephorus, 38.

⁵⁵⁴ N. Oikonomides, 'Silk Trade and Production in Byzantium from the Sixth to the Ninth Century: The Seals of Kommerkiarioi', *DOP*, 40, (1986), p. 51.

⁵⁵⁵ Theophanes, 366; Nicephorus, 38.

century. While these were not focused on the acquisition and sale of captives as slaves, they were the largest and longest-lasting military conflicts of the period. Whenever either side held the upper hand in the wars that were fought from 572 to 591 and from 603 to 629, large numbers of prisoners and enormous amounts of booty were taken from the other. Sometimes, the populations of entire cities are reported as having been deported. Though many of those who were removed as captives appear to have resumed life as free people in their new homes, others appear to have been enslaved; the sources are ambiguous and, whether it was the Romans or the Persians moving population, some of the accounts suggest that both might have happened simultaneously.

In 573, the Persians were said to have utterly destroyed Apamea as well as ravaging other towns. They carried 292,000 civilians into slavery in their empire where they were divided up among the soldiers.⁵⁵⁶ When they rapidly conquered Egypt and the Levant in the second decade of the seventh century, large numbers of Roman civilians were transported into the Persian Empire including many tens of thousands captured in 611 in Cappadocia,⁵⁵⁷ ‘multitudes’ from Damascus,⁵⁵⁸ or the large number taken from Jerusalem, including the Patriarch, and transported to Persia. Theophanes writes that the Persians enslaved the entire surviving Christian population of Jerusalem; the Jewish community purchased 90,000 in order to put them to death and the remainder were removed to the east.⁵⁵⁹ Writing closer to the time, Sebeos has 57,000 Jerusalemites slain by the Jews and 35,000 survivors

⁵⁵⁶ John of Ephesus, *HE*, 6.6. The same captives are said by John later (6.19) to have numbered 275,000 and those who had not been taken as slaves by individual soldiers were settled in a new city of Antioch founded within the Persian realm (though possibly a misconstruing by the author of Nisibis’s former name of Antioch Mygdonia).

⁵⁵⁷ Theophanes, 299.

⁵⁵⁸ Theophanes, 300.

⁵⁵⁹ Theophanes, 301.

transported to Mesopotamia and the lands beyond.⁵⁶⁰ These, along with the destruction of cities done during this final war, are so frequent that it is possible to perceive much of that war as simply the greatest of all raids, particularly as regards Asia Minor, where slaves were carried off from cities as far from the frontier as Ancyra and Chalcedon.⁵⁶¹ Clearly, if the story of the Jewish purchase of captives is to be believed, some of these defeated people were treated as slaves by the Persians while others were not reduced as completely.

While it seems somewhat more frequently done by Persian invaders, the Romans also transported large groups of captives into Roman territory, sometimes settling them en masse. During the reign of Maurice, for instance, there are mentions of both Persian military⁵⁶² and civilian⁵⁶³ captives being carried back into the Empire in large numbers. Before he became Emperor, Maurice is supposed to have settled either 10,000 or 100,000 captives from Persian Armenia in Cyprus;⁵⁶⁴ Evagrius describes the action, giving some hint of the ambiguous outcomes:

Οὗτος μὲν οὖν ὁ Μαυρίκιος τὰς ἐπιστρατεύσεις ποιησάμενος κατὰ τῆς ὑπερορίας, πόλεις τε καὶ φρούρια Πέρσαις ἐπικαιρότατα αἰρεῖ, λείαν τε τοσαύτην περιεβάλετο ὥστε τὰ σαγηνευθέντα αἰχμάλωτα ὀλοκλήρους νήσους καὶ πόλεις, ἀγρούς τε ἐρημωθέντας τῷ χρόνῳ ἐξοικῆσαι τὴν τε γῆν ἐνεργὸν καταστήσασθαι πάντη πρῶην ἀγεώρητον οὖσαν, στρατόπεδά τε ἐξ αὐτῶν συστήναι πολύανδρα κατὰ τῶν ἄλλων ἐθνῶν μάλα γεννικῶς τε καὶ ἀνδρείως ἀγωνισάμενα, πληρωθῆναι δὲ καὶ πάσῃ ἐστία τὰς οἰκετικὰς χρείας, εἰς τὸ κουφότατον τῶν ἀνδραπόδων ἐκποιοιμένων.⁵⁶⁵

⁵⁶⁰ Sebeos, *Patmut' iwn Sebeosi*, 117.

⁵⁶¹ C. Foss, 'The Persians in Asia Minor and the End of Antiquity', *EHR*, 90:357 (Oct., 1975), p. 728.

⁵⁶² Theophanes, 256 (2,000 Persian military prisoners sent to Byzantium).

⁵⁶³ Theophanes, 253-4 (Byzantines under Philippikos took large numbers of Persians prisoners and returned with them to Roman territory); 254 (many captives in eastern Anatolia); 261 (3,000 military prisoners sent to Constantinople), etc.

⁵⁶⁴ Theophylact Simocatta, 3.15.15.

⁵⁶⁵ Evagrius, 5.19 ("At once, Maurice entered Persia at the head of his army, he became the master of cities and other places that were advantageously situated, and he took a prodigious quantity of

These captives provided military recruits and farmers to fill vacant lands while also including enough who were sold as domestic slaves to, if Evagrius is to be trusted, temporarily depress the slave market. After he had become emperor, Maurice is reported by Sebeos to have suggested to Khusrau that they should deport all Armenians from both sides of the frontier, with the eastern Armenians to be taken to the eastern parts of Persia and for western Armenians to be removed to the Balkans.⁵⁶⁶

Such mass movements of captive populations, besides suggesting a high level of organisation, may also indicate that both Persian and Byzantine empires were acutely aware of shortages of skilled labourers, something that may have driven the florescence of the slave trade at the end of the sixth century. What that might have been is not impossible to imagine. From the time of Justinian, a cycle of plagues had wracked the post-Roman world and its neighbours. First appearing in Egypt in 541, it soon was carried by ships to Constantinople where Procopius said it killed up to 5,000 each day.⁵⁶⁷ It swiftly spread to Syria⁵⁶⁸ and onwards to Persia,⁵⁶⁹ Gaul,⁵⁷⁰ and possibly even to Britain and Ireland within a few years.⁵⁷¹ After its first appearance, epidemics of the same illness followed regularly for nearly two centuries, with at

prisoners that there were numerous enough to repopulate the cities, desert islands, enough to cultivate the land that lay fallow, to compose armies who would fight valiantly for him against foreigners, and they were cheap enough to supply slaves for all families”).

⁵⁶⁶ Sebeos, 86-87.

⁵⁶⁷ Procopius, 2.23.1.

⁵⁶⁸ Pseudo-Dionysius, 80-83.

⁵⁶⁹ Pseudo-Zachariah Rhetor, *HE*, 10.9.

⁵⁷⁰ GT, *Liber Vitae Patrum*, 6.6, 17.4.

⁵⁷¹ J. Maddicott, 'Plague in Seventh-Century England', in L. K. Little, ed., *Plague and the End of Antiquity: The Pandemic of 541-750*, (Cambridge, 2007), pp. 174-175.

least four major outbreaks in the next half century⁵⁷² and later outbreaks throughout the Mediterranean and beyond until the mid-eighth century.⁵⁷³

The extent of population loss is uncertain; Procopius had described it as nearly wiping out the whole world⁵⁷⁴ while modern estimates range from a very slight loss⁵⁷⁵ to upwards of 25,000,000 lives.⁵⁷⁶ Certainly, it seems likely that there was enough of an impact on demographics in Mesopotamia, the Levant, Anatolia, and adjacent regions to have caused severe labour shortages. From Syria, Evagrius gives contemporary literary evidence for the plague as well as its recurrence in Antioch⁵⁷⁷ while it is often stated that the cities of the Levant (as well as many smaller settlements such as the ‘dead cities’ of northern Syria’s Bel Massif) began to decline precipitously.⁵⁷⁸

However, despite the implications of the written sources, the material evidence shows no sign of a notable population decline in the Levant in the decades after 542.⁵⁷⁹ Instead, some cities appear to have been expanding and prosperous in the second half of the sixth century, while in much of the Levant, there is no significant decline in urban life until the middle of the eighth century.⁵⁸⁰ Either the plague was far less deadly than is usually thought – if, for instance, the disease was not as deadly as later plagues or if it were more limited in where it spread (both distinct possibilities) – or the population rebounded in some regions faster than

⁵⁷² Evagrius, *HE*, 4.29 (in Antioch); GT mentions plague outbreaks in Gaul in 543 (*Liber Vitae Patrum*, 6.6, 17.4), 571 (*DLH*, 4.31), 585 (8.12), and 588 (9.22) as well as in Italy in 590 (*DLH*, 10.1) where it was observed the following year by Gregory the Great (*RE*, 2.2).

⁵⁷³ M. W. Dols, ‘Plague in Early Islamic History’, *Journal of the American Oriental Society*, 94:3, (July-Sept. 1974), pp. 373-374.

⁵⁷⁴ Procopius, 2.22.1.

⁵⁷⁵ M. Whittow, ‘Ruling the Late Roman and Early Byzantine City’, p. 13.

⁵⁷⁶ W. Rosen, *Justinian's Flea: Plague, Empire, and the Birth of Europe*, (New York, 2006), p. 3.

⁵⁷⁷ Evagrius, 4.29.

⁵⁷⁸ J. C. Russell, ‘That Earlier Plague’, *Demography*. 5:1, (1968), pp. 181-183.

⁵⁷⁹ J. Durliat, ‘La Peste du VIe Siècle: Pour un Nouvel Examen des Sources Byzantines’, in P. Zech, ed., *Hommes et Richesses dans l'Empire Byzantin: I, IVe-VIIe Siècles*, (Paris, 1989), pp. 107-119.

⁵⁸⁰ C. Foss, ‘Syria in Transition, A. D. 550-750: An Archaeological Approach’, *DOP*, 51 (1997), p. 260.

normal demographics should have allowed. If the latter (or even a combination of it with the others), the lack of datable archaeological evidence for the impact of plague would be more easily intelligible.

A possible explanation for this might be from the regular infusion of new population, whether brought directly by the state (as in forced transfers) or via the slave trade. As will be shown in the next chapter, some of the most explicit evidence for slave trading in the whole post-Roman period comes from the last decades of the sixth century. While this may be purely coincidence, the plague and the scattered evidence of slave trading may be in a causal relationship if the plague increased the demand for slaves.⁵⁸¹ Certainly, the importation of workers from North Africa and elsewhere into the Middle East that is known from the seventh and eighth century goes some length to explain the lack of perceptible decline in many places.⁵⁸²

At the same time, the movement of slaves might have negatively affected demographics in the regions from which slaves came; not only would the export of healthy workers in their prime have had a negative impact but slave traders might have had a role in spreading plague. There is an account in Gregory of Tours of plague arriving in Gaul via merchant ships that had landed in Marseille.⁵⁸³ While these merchants were stated as having come from Spain carrying the usual cargo, an expanding trade in slaves around the Mediterranean that resulted from a driving need for workers would have also spread it. The plague, whether or not it had the massive demographic impact some times suggested, could have caused an expansion in trade, especially if slaves already played a significant role in systems of exchange.

⁵⁸¹ Note that, after the fourteenth century plague, large-scale slave trading and raiding in the Mediterranean, Black Sea, and Atlantic Ocean all appear to increase (i.e., in 1352, the Papacy approved the enslavement of the Canary Islanders) and, simultaneously, the western European peasantry entered an era of increased prosperity and enhanced rights.

⁵⁸² M. Morony, "'For Whom Does the Writer Write?'" The First Bubonic Plague Pandemic According to Syriac Sources', in L. K. Little, ed., *Plague and the End of Antiquity*, (Cambridge, 2007), p. 85.

⁵⁸³ GT, DLH, 9.22.

While the previous chapter primarily focussed on establishing the existence and importance of considerable numbers of slaves in all parts of the post-Roman world, this chapter attempted to determine some general outlines of who slaves were and where they had come from. Some of the primary routes through which an individual might enter into slavery were traced as, if conditions in the post-Roman world were not exceptional and were like those in comparable eras, the institution of slavery would have rapidly vanished to a point of little significance without a regular supply of new slaves. Legal systems and economic necessities pushed some free people into slavery but many more were probably enslaved through coercive violence. Endemic warfare may have been responsible for the enslavement of many. The series of plagues and other demographic difficulties faced by the Byzantine Empire in the sixth century may be linked to an increase in the slave trade alongside other forms of forced migration. Using evidence from the long seventh century in conjunction with material from other periods, it has been possible to estimate the scale of the necessary slave trade into the Byzantine Empire at the time of Maurice. The next chapter will examine the evidence for long-distance trade in the Mediterranean in the late sixth and early seventh centuries and the place of slavery in it.

3. The slave trade in the post-Roman trading system

Having demonstrated the ubiquity of slavery across the post-Roman world and the necessity of regular replenishment of the slave supply from external sources, the question of how that was accomplished arises. Assuming that a sizable portion of the slave supply came from outside the places in which the slaves would eventually toil requires the existence of mechanisms and methods to facilitate the unwilling movement of individuals.

In this chapter, the slave trade itself will be examined as it functioned at the beginning of the seventh century. While slave trading doubtless happened in many areas during the period, the trade that was carried into and across the Mediterranean region is one of the more easily documented and, arguably, more significant. The merchants, sailors, and other travelers that literary texts depict as involved in Mediterranean trade in the last decades of the sixth century and first years of the seventh century are almost always seen as coming from the eastern Mediterranean to the west. Few are specifically described as being involved in the slave trade though Gregory the Great mentions a Jewish merchant. While this has sometimes been taken as evidence of either papal abolitionism or a particularly Jewish role in the slave trade, both ideas are false. Individual Jews were a part of the wider Levantine trading diaspora that dominated the Mediterranean. Jewish merchants from the east were involved in the same networks of trade as their Christian neighbours. By examining the evidence for all of these networks, it becomes clear that these 'foreign' traders were part of a merchant marine that originated in east Mediterranean ports and controlled most long-distance shipping. Slaves were only one of many cargoes for them, even if slaves were the most significant export of the western lands.

To understand how this trading system function will require a brief examination of how a post-Roman system of exchange may have functioned. Interdependent economies were linked in what might be seen as being essentially a post-colonial framework as the more developed areas grew steadily wealthier at the expense of the impoverished peripheries. It will be argued that, while not as robust as during the fourth century, a substantial volume of trade continued between the core economies of the eastern Mediterranean and its western and northern peripheries and that a significant driving force in this trade was the export of slaves from the more impoverished regions, rather than simply as a spin-off of the *annona*.

3.1. Humans as articles of trade

The textual evidence for slave trading is relatively slight from most times and places in the first millennium. Usually, direct discussion of it is incidental to an author's primary aim and most of the contexts in which slave trading occurs serve rhetorical purposes that are not those of this study. An author when speaking of slavery may have intended to demonstrate the good deeds of a saint, to excoriate non-Christians, or to explain some significant event, but the descriptive narration of mercantile activities is rarely the goal. Despite their incidental and anecdotal nature, these writings do, even so, give some idea of the trade as it existed around the close of the sixth century.

There appears to be literary evidence of a trade in slaves from Britain to Gaul in the period, if the narratives previously discussed are understood that way, and from Gaul southwards across the Mediterranean. Bede's description of the manner

in which the divine inspiration for the conversion of the English had been manifested is probably the best known of these and was discussed at the beginning of this thesis. While Bede saw that story as potentially unreliable, many of Gregory's letters contain incidental material about slavery and the slave trade.⁵⁸⁴ On the eve of the English mission, the Pope sent his representative in Marseille, Candidus, instructions that he use money from the papal patrimony in Gaul to obtain:

*pueros Anglos, qui sint ab annis decem et septem uel decem et octo, ut in monasteriis dati Deo proficiant ... Sed quia pagani sunt, qui illic inueniri possunt, uolo, ut cum eis presbyter transmittatur, ne quid aegritudinis contingat in uia, ut quos morituros conspexerit debeat baptizare.*⁵⁸⁵

Elsewhere, Gregory's letters demonstrate that, by the turn of the seventh century, both Christian (presumably either from Gaul or the British Isles) and pagan (presumably including Anglo-Saxons as well as people from north and east of the main Frankish realms) slaves being sold in Marseille⁵⁸⁶ and he even provides some information about their ultimate destinations: they were shipped from Marseille onwards to Italy,⁵⁸⁷ Sicily,⁵⁸⁸ and points beyond.

In the writings of both Gregory of Tours and Gregory the Great, Marseille appears as Gaul's chief port.⁵⁸⁹ Unfortunately, the Bishop of Tours was seldom terribly interested in economic life save as a backdrop for his stories and never

⁵⁸⁴ RE, 1.10; 1.38a; 1.53; 2.38; 2.45; 3.37; 3.38; 4.9; 4.21; 6.10; 6.12; 6.29; 6.30; 6.32; 7.1; 7.21; 7.38; 8.3; 8.21; 9.10; 9.105; 9.145; 9.205; 9.210; 9.214; 9.216; 9.232; 11.4; 13.35.

⁵⁸⁵ RE, 6.10 ("Angle boys, who are to be from the seventeen or eighteen years old, that they may profit by being given to God in monasteries ... But since they are pagans, who can be found there, I want a presbyter be sent with them, lest they contract a disease on the road, that he might baptise those who are on the verge of death.").

⁵⁸⁶ RE, 6.29.

⁵⁸⁷ RE, 6.29.

⁵⁸⁸ RE, 3.37.

⁵⁸⁹ See S. T. Loseby's observations, 'Marseille and the Pirene Thesis, I: Gregory of Tours, the Merovingian Kings and "Un Grand Port"', in R. Hodges and W. Bowden, eds., *The Sixth Century: Production, Distribution, and Demand*, (Leiden, 1998), pp. 203-204.

explicitly says what might have been shipped out of Marseille.⁵⁹⁰ While it may be reasonable to surmise that there would have been many slaves, slavery only appears in connection with Marseille in the adventures of Andarchius, a man who appears to have been born as a slave in Marseille.⁵⁹¹ Pope Gregory, on the other hand, seems at least somewhat more interested in economic issues. He makes clear that Marseille is a place from which slaves are shipped, even adding the name of at least one slave trader.⁵⁹² He also describes the movement of Italian captives towards Frankish slave markets.⁵⁹³ Unfortunately, Gregory does not say where in Francia these slaves would be sold but it does match with Dado's depiction of slaves arriving from all directions when describing Eligius's practice of redeeming slaves in a market and named some of their origins. Though the exact location is not specified, one would presume that the large ships he describes are in a port. As Eligius had been appointed to oversee the royal mint in Marseille, it is presumably the location of the anecdote. The slaves were being brought into Marseille by ship; that could mean that either the last section of their journey was by boat along the Rhone and from the river to Marseille or that slaves were being imported into Marseille from the south. The addition of Moors to the list would make the latter seem at least plausible; while the first presumption would be that they were North Africans, they might be arriving from Sardinia (where a distinct settlement of Mauri existed⁵⁹⁴ and paganism persisted in parts of the island⁵⁹⁵) as Eligius had left the south of France well before the collapse of Byzantine Africa. Alternatively, Dado was from the north of Gaul and was primarily

⁵⁹⁰ S. T. Loseby, 'Gregory's Cities: Urban Functions in Sixth-Century Gaul', in I. Wood, ed., *Franks and Alamanni in the Merovingian Period: An Ethnographic Perspective*, (Woodbridge, 1998), p. 259.

⁵⁹¹ *GT, DLH*, 4.46.

⁵⁹² Basil Hebraeus, *RE*, 9.105.

⁵⁹³ *RE*, 5.36.

⁵⁹⁴ Procopius, 4.13.41-45; the Vandals had deported rebellious Mauri to the mountains near Cagliari.

⁵⁹⁵ *RE*, 9.205.

interested in Eligius's work as bishop in Tournai. In the life as a whole, Marseille is never named so it is conceivable that Dado was confused.⁵⁹⁶

A second saint, Bonitus of Clermont, also had had an earlier secular career, serving a Merovingian king in Marseille. As his hagiographer writes:

*Non multo post inibi, ut moris erat, homines uenundari atque exulitatis. Captiuitatisque pena damnari, suo nusquam fieri praecepit esse decreto; sed magis eos quos repperire potuisset uenditos, sicut semper agere consueuerat, redimendo ad propria reducebat.*⁵⁹⁷

It is a strikingly similar description to that of Dado and either (or both) of these may be merely a topos. Later, Bonitus is found freeing slaves at Rome.⁵⁹⁸ A list of peoples not wholly unlike those found in Dado of Rouen also occurs in Venantius Fortunatus's life of Germanus of Paris:

*Unde sunt contiguae gentes in testimonium, Hispanus, Scottus, Britto, Wasco, Saxo, Burgundio, cum ad nomen beati concurrerent, undique liberandi iugo seruitii.*⁵⁹⁹

That these sorts of phrases occur frequently suggests the possibility that all are, in essence, tropes but that very use makes more sense if such would seem likely to the original audiences. As the redemption of captives and freeing of slaves were standard hagiographic activities, a future saint who had lived in Marseille might have been expected to liberate slaves there and a hagiographer who knew that his saint had

⁵⁹⁶ Dado of Rouen, 1.10.

⁵⁹⁷ *Vita Boniti*, 3. ("Not long after, men were being sold into exile as was the custom there, so he condemned that this penalty ever be given, and instead but that those they could find who had been sold, as he had always been accustomed to do, he redeemed and sent them home").

⁵⁹⁸ *Vita Boniti*, 25.

⁵⁹⁹ Venantius Fortunatus, *Vita Sancti Germani Urbis Parisiacae Episcopi*, 72. ("Whence peoples joined to testify, Spaniard, Scot, Breton, Basque, Saxon, Burgundian, when, in the Blessed Name, they would flock from all sides to be freed from the yoke of slavery").

served the Merovingian kings in Marseille prior to his clerical career in the north might have assumed that the saint had done so, whether or not he actually did. That this might be a trope perhaps says even more than if these were factual reports; the slave trade was so strongly associated with Marseille in the minds of the hagiographers that any saint who had lived there must have freed people.

As mentioned earlier, the wars of the fifth and sixth century had involved large numbers of people experiencing captivity. Some were quickly freed but many were sold as slaves. Whether the enslaved person were Roman or barbarian, they would have been taken to markets where they could be sold. While some doubtless would have been sold locally, many more would have ended up being taken to places like Marseille and sold on to points all around the Mediterranean.

In the Western Empire, most cities shrank to little more than administrative villages in the three centuries after Constantine. Marseille, perhaps alone in Gaul, remained a true city in those centuries as trade, rather than administration, had always been its primary *raison d'être*. There, the entire area of the Roman city remained occupied and new areas outside the walls were developed.⁶⁰⁰ What had been an extra-mural cemetery in the High Empire now became an urban quarter. Elsewhere, marshy ground in the area of the modern Bourse was drained and built upon.⁶⁰¹ These new areas were characterised by artisanal workshops, including a water wheel and a furnace, as well as domestic structures. Within the walled city itself, unlike many Roman towns in Gaul, the medieval main street, the Grand Rue, followed the path of the Roman *decumanus*, suggesting continuity occurred there as well. While there almost certainly was a great cathedral in the city, it has long since been demolished though portions of the baptistery survived into the nineteenth

⁶⁰⁰ S. T. Loseby, 'Marseille: A Late Antique Success Story?' *JRS*, 82 (1992), p. 169.

⁶⁰¹ S. T. Loseby, 'Marseille: A Late Antique Success Story?' pp. 169-170.

century, allowing some plans and records to be made before it was demolished to make room for the modern cathedral during the Second Empire. The scale of the baptistery, though, suggests that it was a not insignificant place.⁶⁰² By the end of the sixth century, it was economically the most important single city in all the Frankish realm and its commerce included most of the Merovingian gold supply as well as being the chief entrepôt for key late antique imports such as spices, oil, wine, fine cloth, and papyrus. Merovingian politics reflected this with the city often commanding great importance in its affairs. During the frequent partitions of Francia, the control of Marseille was often viewed as too important to be enjoyed by any single king and was sometimes split between rulers.

It might, perhaps, be not unreasonable to surmise that the combined effects of the wars of the fifth century – the ruin of many of Marseille’s rivals and the enormous number of captives needing to be sold – might have lain behind the prosperity that the city experienced. Other Mediterranean regions were prospering and expanding economically in the fifth and sixth centuries and presumably needed new labour. The areas where prosperity was most marked – Syria, Egypt, and North Africa – were precisely those from which the majority of imports to Marseille arrived. The ships bringing the goods to Marseille would have taken something in return and the abundance of low-cost captives there would have been a natural export. Mercantile networks can be traced in some of the sources stretching along these routes. Their presence provides information about how the systems of exchange functioned in this period.

⁶⁰² F. Paone, ‘Le Baptisere Saint-Jean’, in M.-P. Rothé and H. Tréziny (eds.), *Carte Archéologique de la Gaule, 13/3: Marseille et ses Alentours*, (Paris, 2005), pp. 456-458.

3.2. Merchants and traders

Probably, the simplest way of separating slavery from other types of un-free labour is that slaves live under the constant threat of sale. Whether or not such sales actually materialise is not nearly as significant as the possibility that sale and the resultant alienation could occur in terms of defining slavery. A high portion of slaves in a slave-holding society might, in fact, never be sold at any point during their lifetimes. For the threat of sale to remain credible (and for the un-free population to remain 'slaves' rather than 'serfs' or some other similar status), some number of slaves would normally have been sold. Similarly, as has been discussed above, if the slave population is anything less than self-replacing, some sort of mechanism would be necessary in most slave-holding societies to procure a supply of slaves lest the population decline into insignificance. In late antiquity, as we have seen, the means to incorporate newly enslaved people into the life of the wealthier regions would have involved commercial activity. Some slaves might only be sold a very short distance; others might be shipped extremely long distances. Yet, if a slave were to be sold at any greater remove than within a single community, the traded slave would likely have passed through the ownership (or at least control) of someone involved in the trade in humans.

Slave traders then were an indispensable part of any slave-using society; without them, these societies could not have functioned as such. Slave traders are, however, extremely hard to find in written sources. William Harris's list of slave-traders in the earlier Roman Empire is quite short and, save for the fictional Trimalchio, they are little more than names.⁶⁰³ In the centuries that follow, there are

⁶⁰³ W. V. Harris, 'Towards a Study of the Roman Slave Trade,' pp. 129-132.

only occasional explicit references to slave-traders⁶⁰⁴ and, with the exceptions of Basil the Hebrew⁶⁰⁵ and the three merchants Abraham, Sergius, and Zunayn who appear in one of the Nessana papyri,⁶⁰⁶ they are largely nameless. While this might at first seem to be a strong argument against the notion of a massive and pervasive slave trade, it is conceivable that the idea of the slave trader as discrete from all other traders is an artefact of more modern sensibilities. In times and places where there is neither an international banking system nor recognised forms of credit, merchants will not be able to participate in only one segment of a system of exchange.

Instead, a merchant or group of merchants would convey goods from one point of origin to a point of sale, there acquire (whether by purchase or by barter) other goods and take those either to a third location or return to their point of origin. This sort of trading system, of course, is familiar in the triangular trade routes of the early modern Atlantic but can also be found in the early seventh century where a surviving narrative describes merchants moving cloth from the Levant to Carthage, selling cloth goods there, and obtaining a new cargo to take on to Marseille.⁶⁰⁷ There, they might exchange African goods for the slaves found there before beginning the journey in reverse.

Other similar systems have also involved a trade in slaves. In only one stage of the trading journey would the merchant trade in slaves. That might not be the portion discussed in a surviving text (if the merchant was written about at all) and the merchant might be known as a dealer in grain, oil, wine, cloth, or any of a great

⁶⁰⁴ For comprehensive listings of slave merchants in the west for the period, see D. Claude, *Der Handel im Westlichen Mittelmeer während des Frühmittelalters*, (Göttingen, 1985) pp. 95-99; unfortunately, he largely follows C. Verlinden *L'Esclavage dans l'Europe Médiévale, tome 1*, pp. 663-670 in both detail and in interpretation (see next section for some of the problems of that reading).

⁶⁰⁵ *RE*, 9.105.

⁶⁰⁶ *P. Colt*, 89.

⁶⁰⁷ In *DI* discussed below.

number of things other than slaves yet would still have been a slave dealer at some point.

In other slave trading systems, merchants were rarely identified as ‘slave traders.’ Slave trading as an economic foundation can be demonstrated as essential to early modern Atlantic wealth yet is largely buried in much of the literature from the period.⁶⁰⁸ In accounts of eighteenth-century Britain, the Glasgow ‘Tobacco Lords’ are primarily discussed as importers of tobacco from Virginia into western Europe or as investors in their home city rather than as providers of textiles, rum, and manufactured goods to West Africa or as traders in African slaves to the American colonies.⁶⁰⁹ Until recently, the massive role of New England merchants in slave trading was neglected in the United States (where slavery was long seen as a peculiarly Southern problem).⁶¹⁰ If slave traders are not always recognisable as a discrete category in these better-documented periods, it seems unlikely that they will always be apparent in murkier eras.

Similarly, while slave traders might have been of negligible size in the overall economy of some more developed regions, in many underdeveloped economies that had come to rely on the export of humans, slave traders were often the principal economic agents of the more developed regions, bringing the more complex products of those regions to the backcountry. During the Roman Iron Age, the primary Roman merchants active beyond the Rhine appear to have been slave merchants; *mango/mangonis*, Latin for slave dealer, appears to have entered the

⁶⁰⁸ E.g., E. Said’s discussion of Jane Austen and slavery (*Culture and Imperialism*, (New York, 1993), pp. 102-116) and the impassioned debate it provoked.

⁶⁰⁹ E.g., T. Devine, *The Tobacco Lords: A Study of the Tobacco Merchants of Glasgow and their Trading Activities, c. 1740-90*, (Edinburgh, 1975), only contains one passing reference to the slave trade (p. 62) and one to slaves (p. 59); in fairness to Sir Tom, however, he has lately been exploring the Scottish role in the slave trade.

⁶¹⁰ L. Marques, ‘Slave Trading in a New World: The Strategies of North American Slave Traders in the Age of Abolition’, *Journal of the Early Republic*, 32, (Summer 2012), p. 235.

Germanic vocabulary at some time during the imperial centuries. There, it was used for all manner of mercantile activity: the Old English *mangere* referred to any merchant (and is retained in modern English –*monger*) and it entered other Germanic languages (including Old Norse and Gothic) as a term for merchant.⁶¹¹

Again, more recent examples can be given. By the sixteenth century, Portuguese and Creole slave traders along the Guinea coast had become the primary external merchants in the region, even dominating inter-African exchange of kola nuts as well as imported trade goods.⁶¹² Nearly all American and European imports into West Africa from the sixteenth century until the early nineteenth century were conveyed by merchants involved in the slave trade yet neither the merchants themselves nor the West Africans may have perceived them as primarily slave traders.

Many merchants that are not explicitly connected to the slave trade, then, are likely to have been involved in the slave trade. However, it cannot (and should not) be assumed that all merchants, or even any specific merchant (such as the famous Samo) were involved in slave trading without positive evidence. Slave trading has historically been an opportunistic business and, in nearly all slave-using societies, a certain portion of slaves that appeared on the market came from active slave raiding, sometimes on a truly massive scale. The lines between slave raiders and slave traders are often far from discreet; no doubt many a raider subsequently turned merchant and many otherwise ‘peaceful’ merchants of the time were not averse to

⁶¹¹ W. P. Lehmann, *A Gothic Etymological Dictionary*, (Leiden, 1986), p. 216; W. W. Skeat, *An Etymological Dictionary of the English Language*, (Oxford, 1898), p. 375; G. T. Zoëga, *A Concise Dictionary of Old Icelandic*, (Oxford, 1910), p. 284. Contrariwise, G. Hempl (‘Etymologies’, *American Journal of Philology*, 22:88, (1901), pp. 426-431) sees this as a Latin borrowing from Germanic.

⁶¹² T. Green, *The Rise of the Trans-Atlantic Slave Trade in Western Africa, 1300–1589*, (Cambridge, 2012), pp. 247-252.

raiding themselves. Given the opportunity, many traders might engage in predatory violence and many warriors might find themselves selling their prisoners.

However, merchants involved in long-distance seaborne trade in the Mediterranean at the beginning of the seventh century were explicitly merchants only.⁶¹³ Similarly, as far as can be told, the nascent North Sea economic sphere and environs lacked, during the seventh century itself, the seaborne piracy of later ‘merchant adventurers.’⁶¹⁴ Even after the first appearance of Arab fleets in the Mediterranean, it is hard to find clear evidence for any sort of piracy in the central and Mediterranean before the eighth century (and even then, it remained quite rare).⁶¹⁵ Large Arab raids on Cyprus, Sicily, and Sardinia are known from the seventh century; these, though, were state-sponsored naval attacks (like Mu‘āwiyah’s massive raid on Cyprus in 649) and were organised by military leaders. Only in the later eighth and ninth century did regular coastal piracy become endemic, involving virtually all the maritime peoples of the Mediterranean; Arab pirates raided Marseille in 768⁶¹⁶ and 838⁶¹⁷ while Byzantine raiders struck a decade later.⁶¹⁸

While relatively little legislation survives in the legal codes of the period that directly regulated the slave trade, there is a fair amount of circumstantial evidence worth considering. Certainly, despite the quotidian nature of the trade in humans,

⁶¹³ Overland trade seems to have overlapped more with predatory violence, as diverse examples including the Frank Samo, the Lombard followers of Agilulf of Spoleto, or many of the armed merchants of late antique Arabia would suggest.

⁶¹⁴ Though the account of the early sixth-century Danish raid (involving slave-catching) by King Chlochilaicus (GT, *DLH*, 3.3) might be given as counter-example (assuming it was intended as a raid), nothing similar appears again during the rest of the period. Note the first mention of the Vikings in England in the *Anglo-Saxon Chronicle* for 787 with its suggestion of surprise at the raiders’ intentions. (iii. *scypu Norðmanna of Hæreðalande, 7 þa sæ gerefa þærto rad, 7 hie wolde drifan to þæs cyninges tune þe he nyste hwæt hi wæron, 7 hine man ofsloh þa. Ðæt wæron þa ærestan scipu Dæniscra manna þe on Engalcynnes land gesohton*. “Three ships of the Northmen of Hordaland and the reeve rode out to them and them he would drive to the king’s town for he knew not what they were and this man was slain by them. These were the first ships of Danish men that sought to come to the land of the English.”)

⁶¹⁵ M. McCormick, *Origins of the European Economy*, p.170.

⁶¹⁶ *Continuation of the Chronicle of Fredegar*, 134.

⁶¹⁷ *Annales Bertiniani*, 838.

⁶¹⁸ *Annales Bertiniani*, 848.

slave traders seem to have been seen as somewhat less than savoury within the Roman world. Under the Empire, slave traders had been distinguished from other merchants, not just in language but also, perhaps, in law:

*"mercis" appellatione homines non contineri mela ait: et ob eam rem mangones non mercatores sed uenaliarios appellari ait, et recte.*⁶¹⁹

as one of the extracts in the sixth-century *Digest* states. Certainly, under the Empire, the majority of sales of slaves were internal, even if such sales might have taken the slave a great distance from home. Presumably, though, most sales would have been local and the laws reflect such situations, where, for instance, a dispute arose over the ownership of a slave that had been sold.⁶²⁰

Considering the perpetual fear of wrongful enslavement, it is perhaps not surprising that many of the law codes from the time, especially in the successor states of the Empire, addressed the issue of the sale of free persons abroad. Selling free persons had traditionally been equated with kidnapping in Roman law⁶²¹ and presumably many victims were sold at a distance as selling free people abroad was far easier than in their own homelands (due to the risk of the slave simply going home). In the small kingdoms of southeastern Britain, apparently, it was not unusual to encounter slaves taken unlawfully from one kingdom and sold in another. A law of Kent from late in the century speaks of Kentish-men purchasing slaves in Lundenwic that were the property of others in Kent.⁶²² Selling free-persons outside

⁶¹⁹ *Digestae*, 50.16.207. (Africanus), ("Mela says that slaves are not included in the term "merchandise," and for this reason those who sell them are not designated merchants, but dealers in slaves; and this is correct").

⁶²⁰ *CJ*, 3.32.23.

⁶²¹ *CJ*, 3.15.2.

⁶²² *Laws of Hlophære and Eadric*, 16.

the territory carried strong penalties in many of the codes.⁶²³ In Visigothic Spain, the would-be seller paid a fine equivalent to murder and faced either execution or perpetual enslavement⁶²⁴ while many laws equated the crime with murder, as spelled out in the *Lex Frisionum*:

*Si quis hominem, vel nobilis nobilem aut liberum, vel liber liberum, vel liber nobilem extra patriam vendiderit, componat eum ac si ab ipso fuisset interfectus, aut eum ab exilio revocare studeat*⁶²⁵

In Lombard Italy, the punishment was a payment of wergild.⁶²⁶

Even selling slaves abroad might be forbidden, at least when it was an issue of selling inhabitants of a given kingdom itself. A Wessex law of King Ine (who had probably established the major slave trading emporium of Hamwic earlier in his reign⁶²⁷) expressly forbid selling of un-free natives as well as free.⁶²⁸ Interestingly, if the victim of an illicit export had been a slave and then escaped and returned to their place of origin, the slave would be freed under Visigothic⁶²⁹ and Burgundian⁶³⁰ laws. In the Frankish *Lex Salica*, a situation is laid out where,

⁶²³ *Lex Romana Burgundionum*, 41; *Lex Alamannorum*, 46-48; *Lex Angliorum et Werinorum*, 40-41; *LR*, 27; *LB*, 21.3; *FI*, 7.3.3; 9.1.10; *Edictum Theoderici*, 83; *Lex Baivariorum*, 16.3; *Lex Frisionum*, 21.1; *PLS*, 39.2-4; *LL*, 48, 49.

⁶²⁴ *FI*, 7.3.3.

⁶²⁵ *Lex Frisionum*, 21.1 (“if someone sells a man abroad, be it a noble man selling a noble man or freeman, or a freeman a freeman, or a freeman a noble man, he pays for him, as if he had killed him, or he attempts to get him back from his exile”).

⁶²⁶ *LL*, 48.

⁶²⁷ R. Hodges, *Goodbye to the Vikings? Re-reading Early Medieval Archaeology*, (London, 2006), p. 166.

⁶²⁸ *Law of Ine*, 11.

⁶²⁹ *FI*, 9.1.10.

⁶³⁰ *LB*, 21.3.

*Si quis seruus alienus fuerit plagiatus et ipse trans mare ductus fuerit et ibidem a domino suo fuerit inuentus et, a quo ipse in patria sua plagiatus est, in mallo publico nominauerit, tres ibidem testes debet colligere. Iterum cum seruus ipse de trans mare fuerit reuocatus, in alterum uero mallum debet iterum nominare, ibidem simul tres testes debent collegi (i)done(o)s; ad tertium uero mallum similiter fieri debet, ut nouem testes iurent, quod seruum ipsum equaliter per tres mallos super plagiatores audierint dicentem.*⁶³¹

Where the slaves are being taken by ship is unclear though the apparent repeated mention of being taken overseas could refer to the Anglo-Saxon kingdoms and has been taken as evidence for Frankish suzerainty in sixth-century Britain.⁶³²

Gregory of Tours may provide an example of a merchant from Clermont taking slaves from the north in his account of Nicetius of Trier. A man approached the saint saying that he had made a vow during a storm while on a ship bound for Italy accompanied by a *multitudo paganorum*; this *rusticorum multitudinem* called out to various gods (Jupiter, Mercury, Minerva, and Venus) to no avail until he urged them to call upon the god of Nicetius. While the relation between the Christian and the pagans is unclear, it might be thought that they were slaves and he their owner rather than that they were merely fellow travellers.⁶³³

Though more is known regarding individual merchants than all but the most exceptional slaves, it is still far less than might be desired. There are no detailed itineraries or bills of lading, no records of sales, but only vague evidence found in

⁶³¹ PLS, 39.2 (“if anyone kidnaps another’s slave and transports him across the sea and he is found there by his master who brings him back to his own country, which [the master] describes in the public court, he must present three witnesses there. [If] the slave is again returned from across the sea, [the master] must mention this again before the court”).

⁶³² J. Haywood, *Dark Age Naval Power: A Reassessment of Frankish and Anglo-Saxon Seafaring Activity*, (London, 1991), p. 122.

⁶³³ GT, *Liber Vitae Patrum*, 17.5.

conciliar canons, letters, and saints' lives. From these scraps, some earlier scholars have attempted to identify the slave trade with certain ethnic and religious groups, yet even that fails to fully grapple with the sources. After looking at some of these questions, it will likely make sense to turn towards the actual slave trading merchants of the long seventh century. In the Mediterranean, it appears that, for most of the century, the majority of trade remained in the hands of merchants based in the ports of the East, just as had been increasingly the situation since the second century. Even though the majority of shipping in the maritime network linking the western countries to the east belonged to them, it is not clear how much of the trade that occurred was carried these longer distances. Perhaps due to this geographic concentration of all trade, there is some evidence for possible concentrations of the slave trade in the hands of specific groups, especially Jews in the Mediterranean region, though this might be an accidental issue caused by bias in the sources as will be seen.

3.3. Ethnic merchants: Syrians, Egyptians, and Greeks

In the century preceding the emergence of Islam, surviving texts from both Latin West and Greek East frequently mention people presumably from the eastern Mediterranean as merchants, sailors, and travellers in the western part of the sea. Their presence has been used (most famously by Henri Pirenne⁶³⁴) to argue for continuity in commercial and economic ties around the Mediterranean from the later Roman period until the Muslim conquest. While large ships carried a diversity of

⁶³⁴ H. Pirenne, *Medieval Cities*, pp. 18-19; *Mahomet et Charlemagne*, pp. 80-88.

goods in the post-Roman Mediterranean, the people who crewed them and the merchants they carried are somewhat harder to identify. Though archaeology can confirm the continued commercial links between the Mediterranean coastlands indicated in the texts, archaeological remains are less clear regarding matters of personal identity.

After the Justinianic reconquest, Greeks, Armenians, Syrians, and others arrived to serve in government, military, and ecclesiastical offices. As a result, in North Africa and Italy, 'foreign' merchants are difficult to separate when no other details are known. In unconquered regions like Gaul and most of Spain, though, the presence of migrants and migrant communities may help to locate long-distance trade networks. In the writings of Gregory of Tours and his contemporaries, 'Syrians' appear to have been a significant presence in the Gaulish cities.⁶³⁵ Gregory had sources that provided him with miraculous stories from the Eastern Empire.⁶³⁶ One of these was a Syrian friend named Johannes who provided a text and helped him translate the tale of the Seven Sleepers of Ephesus, a Syriac Christian folktale previously unknown in the West.⁶³⁷ The letters of Gregory the Great, as well as Jonas of Bobbio's *Vita Columbani*,⁶³⁸ and other similar texts show Syrians across Gaul, Italy and in Spain. It is probably safe to assume that most of them had arrived in Gaul as merchants even if Gregory only explicitly described two of them as being in trade.⁶³⁹ Often, the Syrians appear to be schismatics like a Gregory from the extreme Monophysite group of the Acephali who appeared at the 619 Second

⁶³⁵ GT, *DLH*, 7.29, 8.1, 10.26, *Liber in gloria martyrum*, 94-95, etc.

⁶³⁶ GT, *Liber in Gloria Martyrum*, 5, 30, 102.

⁶³⁷ GT, *Passio sanctorum septem dormientium*, 12. The same story is repeated in the *Qur'ān* (18:9 – 26).

⁶³⁸ Jonas of Bobbio, *Vita Columbani*, 1.41.

⁶³⁹ Eufronius (GT, *DLH*, 7.31) and Eusebius (10.26).

Council of Seville.⁶⁴⁰ Michael McCormick has even argued that Gregory of Tours' view of Christology reflects that of the Syrian Monophysites.⁶⁴¹ Syrians, though, disappear over the course of the seventh century with none mentioned in Gaul after 610 followed by a somewhat later disappearance from Spain. Presumably, they had either ceased to visit the western Mediterranean or, if they had settled in those lands, been assimilated into the broader population.⁶⁴²

'Syrian' is an ambiguous descriptor and might be used for anyone from the eastern Mediterranean or the lands beyond.⁶⁴³ In sixth- and seventh-century western sources, though, it seems to refer to both Chalcedonian and non-Chalcedonian Christians from the Levant.⁶⁴⁴ While Syrians are probably the most frequently discussed 'nationality' of the late antique Mediterranean diaspora, Egyptians also appear. In the late sixth century, Gregory of Tours describes the hermit Hospitius as being able to subsist on Egyptian herbs and dates regularly supplied by merchants coming to Nice.⁶⁴⁵ Pope Gregory wrote to the Patriarch of Alexandria regarding sales of timber from Italy to Egypt while, a decade later, the *Vita Sancti Iohannis Eleemosynarii* mentions an Alexandrian merchant described as being a *γαλλοδρομος*

⁶⁴⁰ T. Gonzalez, 'La Iglesia Desde la Conversion de Racaredo Hasta la Invasión Árabe,' in R. Garcia Villoslada, *Historia de la Iglesia en España*, (Madrid, 1979), p. 688. The arrival of a Syrian heretic in southern Spain in this period might be taken to suggest that such visitors were a normal feature of the time.

⁶⁴¹ M. McCormick, 'Gregory of Tours', *Oxford Dictionary of Byzantium*, (Oxford, 1991), vol. 2, p. 883. See also A. Cameron, 'The Byzantine sources of Gregory of Tours,' *Journal of Theological Studies*, 26, (1975), pp. 421-426.

⁶⁴² D. Claude, *Der Handel im Westlichen Mittelmeer während des Frühmittelalters*, pp. 181-183; see also J.-P. Devroey, 'Juifs et Syriens: A propos de la géographie économique de la Gaule au haut moyen âge,' *Peasants and Townsmen in medieval Europe: Studia in honorem Adriaan Verhulst*, (Ghent, 1995), pp. 51-72.

⁶⁴³ The confusion surrounding the term is hardly limited to late antiquity. See L. R. Shehadeh, 'The Name of Syria in Ancient and Modern Usage,' in A. Beshara, ed., *The Origins of Syrian Nationhood: Histories, Pioneers and Identity*, (London, 2011), pp. 17-29.

⁶⁴⁴ However, W. Heyd, *Histoire du commerce du Levant au moyen-âge*, (Paris, 1885), p. 20, considers that, at least in the earlier case of Syrian merchants apparently mentioned by Salvian (4.69), that there may be some confusion between Syrians (*sirici*) and silk-workers (*sericarii*); P. Scheffer-Boichorst, "Zur Geschichte der Syrer im Abendlande", *Historische Studien*, 43 (1905), pp. 199-200, suggests that 'Syrian' may simply mean banker. See P. Lambrechts, 'Le commerce des 'Syriens' en Gaule, du haut-empire à l'époque mérovingienne', *L'antiquité classique*, 6:1, 1937, pp. 40-48.

⁶⁴⁵ GT, DLH, 6.6.

and it is implied that these voyagers to Gaul were not to be trusted, perhaps due to the unscrupulous reputations often associated with slave-dealers.⁶⁴⁶ The same life also discusses mercantile voyages sponsored by the Patriarch that sailed to Sicily,⁶⁴⁷ the Adriatic coast of Italy,⁶⁴⁸ and Britain.⁶⁴⁹ In Egyptian papyri, certainly, there are a handful of references to slaves imported from abroad during the sixth century, including Goths and Ethiopians in the Apion archive; unfortunately for current purposes, the sole mention of slaves imported from Gaul dates to 359.⁶⁵⁰

Greeks, too, appear in the sources and not solely in Italy. Isidore of Seville himself might have been from a Greek merchant family⁶⁵¹ while Bishops Paul (530-560) and Fidelis (560-571) of Merida were both themselves Greeks, Fidelis having arrived as a child in Merida with a ship of merchants.⁶⁵² Other evidence for Greek merchants in Spain includes extensive epigraphic remains from the fourth through late sixth centuries (though none from the seventh century itself).⁶⁵³ Presumably, the *transmarini negotiatores* described in the *Forum Iudicum* included these Greeks as well as Syrians and other easterners.⁶⁵⁴ In Francia, Greek merchants are rarely mentioned as such. An anonymous author writing between 658 and 660 composed a collection of miracle stories related to the cult of the fourth-century Saint Artemios of Antioch. Artemios's relics had been transferred to Constantinople and had caused numerous cures, including that of a shipbuilder named Theoteknos who was cured of

⁶⁴⁶ Leontius of Neapolis, *Vita Sancti Iohannis Eleemosynarii*, 35.

⁶⁴⁷ Leontius, 13.

⁶⁴⁸ Leontius, 28.

⁶⁴⁹ Leontius, 10.

⁶⁵⁰ C. J. Johnson and L. C. West, *Byzantine Egypt: Economic studies*, p. 149.

⁶⁵¹ R. Collins, *Early Medieval Spain: Unity in Diversity, 400-1000*, (New York, 1983), p. 61.

⁶⁵² Paul, *Vitas Patrum Emeretensium*, 3.1-3.

⁶⁵³ F. Retamero, 'As Coins Go Home: Towns, Merchants, Bishops and Kings in Visigothic Hispania', in P. Heather, ed., *The Visigoths from the Migration Period to the Seventh Century: An ethnographic perspective*, (Woodbridge, 1999), p. 275.

⁶⁵⁴ *FI*, 11.3.1-4.

his afflictions while sailing to Gaul.⁶⁵⁵ How long before the author's time the voyage had occurred is unclear though the Gallic port is likely to have been Marseille.

The odds of survival suggest that these merchants and travelers reflect only a small portion of those who were active in such trade. That they frequently appear in groups or in situations that imply more than an individual active in a time and place would seem to be confirmed by the archaeological distribution of eastern ceramics and other goods in clusters suggesting regular and prolonged commerce and contacts. Presumably, many would have brought with them materials (such as cloth, papyrus, or dates and herbs) that would have left no traces.⁶⁵⁶ Similarly, the places of origin, when known, appear to be in those more highly developed eastern economies. Unfortunately, little discussion is made of direct ties to the slave trade among these merchants but, alongside them, another group of ethnically identified merchants has been tied to it in much modern scholarship. By looking at Jewish merchants and their role in the slave trade in this period, the patterns of trade will become significantly clearer.

3.4. Jewish slave-traders in a post-Roman world

Alongside east Mediterranean Christians, the surviving texts appear to show communities of Jewish merchants and sailors with personal and familial connections

⁶⁵⁵ *Miracula Sancti Artemii*, 27.

⁶⁵⁶ Note, for instance, Gregory of Tours (*Liber in Gloria martyrum*, 17) statement as to the quality of cloth from the area of Jericho that, per his description, is almost certainly cotton (he describes it growing as what would now be called *Gossypium arboretum*). The passage suggests both that Gregory has spoken to someone familiar with the cultivation of cotton (a relatively new product in the Jordan valley) and has seen cotton cloth in Gaul. It is several centuries before the earliest evidence of cotton imports in France.

scattered across the western Mediterranean's ports. Unlike their gentile contemporaries, though, Jewish merchants are sometimes depicted negatively in both primary sources and secondary literature. In several sources that depict slave trading or name slave traders, Jews appear prominently. Both Henri Pirenne and Charles Verlinden suggested that, in the early middle ages, slave trading in Europe was dominated by Jews.⁶⁵⁷ In Verlinden's more fully developed version, Jewish traders had dominated the slave trade in late antiquity and continued to do so until the tenth century or later. In the post-Roman West, Jewish merchants were constantly seeking slaves to sell in the Byzantine and, later, Islamic empires. Their exchange of eastern goods for captives comprised the prime pathway that brought eastern imports into western Europe and their peregrinations formed the first commercial networks in Western Europe after the end of the Roman Empire. The first medieval European towns emerged at the places where Jews regularly bought slaves. Only gradually would Christians from Venice and elsewhere in Italy imitate Jews and begin to become involved in trading networks. Despite the steady increase in number of gentile merchants, the slave trade itself remained dominated by Jews for centuries as their networks stretched across both Christian and Muslim regions. This model has largely framed discussion and the assumption that early medieval long distance trade and, particularly, the slave trade were dominated by Jews continues to be repeated in many secondary works⁶⁵⁸ and even the occasional novel.⁶⁵⁹

⁶⁵⁷ C. Verlinden, 'À Propos de la Place des Juifs dans l'Économie de l'Europe Occidentale aux IX et Xe Siècles, Agobard de Lyon et l'Historiographie Arabe', in *Storiografia e Storia: Studi in Onore di Eugenio Duprè Theseider*, (Rome, 1974), pp. 21–37; as well as in *L'Esclavage dans l'Europe Médiévale*. The same notion is found in H. Pirenne, *Mahomet et Charlemagne*, pp. 250–259, etc.

⁶⁵⁸ C.f., J. Henning, 'Gefangenensesseln im Slawischen Siedlungsraum und der Europäische Sklavenhandel im 6. bis 12. Jahrhundert', *Germania*, 70, (1992), pp. 403–405; Dockès, *La Libération Médiévale*, pp. 147-148; Bondue, *De Servus a Sclavus*, pp. 384-385; McCormick, *Origins of the European Economy*, pp. 766-774; G. Halfond, *The Archaeology of Frankish Church Councils, AD 511-768*, (Leiden, 2009), pp. 107-108; A. Verhulst, 'Economic Organisation', in R. McKitterick, ed., *The New Cambridge Medieval History*, vol. II, (Cambridge, 1995), p. 508.

⁶⁵⁹ M. Chabon, *Gentlemen of the Road*, (New York, 2007), p. 39.

These ideas are heavily premised on a few pieces of evidence from the ninth century as well as sixth- and seventh-century texts. While there are a number of Carolingian bans on Jews possessing Christian slaves, these appear to be related to fears regarding the conversion of Christians to Judaism. For the idea of Jewish dominance in the slave trade, more significance is accorded to a letter sent by Agobard, the Spanish Archbishop of Lyons, in 826 or 827 to Louis the Pious in which he claimed that Jews were kidnapping Christian children and selling them (along with slaves they had purchased) to Muslims in Spain.⁶⁶⁰ The context is one of extreme denunciations of Jewish calumnies and insolence; the same text complains that Jews work on Sunday, eat during Christian fasts, and that Christians have been eating kosher meat. He complains that Louis the Pious allowed them the right to purchase non-Christian slaves for their own use and the right to sell them, urging instead that Jews be denied from owning any slaves whatsoever and their property confiscated as Agobard viewed Jews as more dangerous than pagans and as Satanic.⁶⁶¹ The weight given to what can only be viewed as anti-Semitic texts should determine whether Agobard's evidence can be taken seriously.⁶⁶²

A second ninth-century text is more interesting as it does not appear to be motivated by any particular animus towards Jews or Judaism. Instead, it comes from a text written in Baghdad by Ibn Khurdādhbih that describes Jewish merchants who trade across the whole of Eurasia, from France to coastal China, called the *Radhaniyya*. They brought merchandise from the West, including eunuchs, female

⁶⁶⁰ Agobard, *De Insolentia Iudeorum*, 3, 6.

⁶⁶¹ Agobard, 5.

⁶⁶² J.-P. Devroey and C. Brouwer, 'La participation des Juifs au commerce dans le monde franc (VIe-Xe siècles)', in A. Dierkens and J.-M. Sansterre, eds., *Voyages et voyageurs à Byzance et en Occident du VIe au XIe siècles, Actes du colloque international organisé par la section d'histoire de l'Université libre de Bruxelles en collaboration avec le département d'histoire de l'Université de Liège (3: 5-7 mai 1994)*, (Geneva, 2000), p. 356.

slaves, and boys as well as furs, swords, and textiles.⁶⁶³ The identity of the *Radhaniyya* remains as unclear as does source of their name.⁶⁶⁴ At most, they represent only a small number of both the Jewish communities of the time and of the merchants involved in long-distance trade (or in a network of traders that covered long distances⁶⁶⁵). The very fact that they are relatively mysterious and little evidenced in other sources would seem to argue for that; how much can be extrapolated from it depends on how 'Jewish' one wants to see the ninth-century slave trade.⁶⁶⁶

As these 'key' texts show, much of the discussion of Jewish involvement in the slave trade has been based on extremely weak evidence (when it exists at all) and recent re-evaluations of it have come down strongly against the notion of a Jewish predominance.⁶⁶⁷ In earlier periods, there is also evidence for Jewish involvement in the slave trade though the sources are much more likely to depict Jews as slaves than as slave traders. After Vespasian's capture of Jerusalem, 97,000 Jews are reported as having been enslaved⁶⁶⁸ and similar results followed other Jewish rebellions.⁶⁶⁹ Jewish slaves appear frequently in both gentile and Jewish households in Jewish, early Christian, and pagan sources.⁶⁷⁰ While Jewish merchants were certainly in evidence throughout these years, there is no strong

⁶⁶³ Abū I-Qāsim 'Ubayd Allāh ibn Khurdādhbih, *Kitāb al-Masālik w'al-Mamālik*, 152.

⁶⁶⁴ M. Gil argues persuasively that the name is related to southern 'Irāq, rather than to the Rhône as had usually been suggested ('The Radhanite Merchants and the Land of Radhan', *Journal of the Economic and Social History of the Orient*, 17:3, (1976), pp. 315-321).

⁶⁶⁵ E. Ashtor, 'Quelques Observations d'un Orientaliste sur la Thèse de Pirenne', *Journal of Economic and Social History of the Orient*, 13, (1970), p. 186.

⁶⁶⁶ E. Ashtor ('Aperçus sur les Radhanites', *Revue Suisse d'Histoire*, 27, (1977), pp. 246-251) points out that they can only be attested for a very brief period in the ninth century.

⁶⁶⁷ See especially M. Toch, 'Jews and Commerce: Modern Fancies and Medieval Realities', in S. Cavaciocchi, ed., *Atti della XXXI Settimana di Studi, Istituto Francesco Datini, Prato, il Ruolo Economico delle Minoranze in Europa*, (Florence, 2000), pp. 43-58 but also J. Holo, *Byzantine Jewry in the Mediterranean Economy*, (Cambridge, 2009), pp. 189-205.

⁶⁶⁸ Josephus, *De Bello Iudaico*, 6.9.3.

⁶⁶⁹ *Chronicon Paschale*, 474, refers to the number of Jews sold after the Bar Kochba revolt as being so great that slaves cost no more than horses.

⁶⁷⁰ C. Hezser, *Jewish Slavery in Antiquity*, (Oxford, 2005), pp. 35-47.

evidence for any specifically Jewish involvement in the slave trade and no slave traders are specifically identified as Jews (or Jews as slave traders).

After the Empire had begun to be formally Christianised, new restrictions were placed on Jews. Among the first of these had been restrictions preventing them from owning Christian slaves⁶⁷¹ or circumcising their male slaves.⁶⁷² These came side by side with laws banning Jews from practising law⁶⁷³ and restricting the construction of new synagogues.⁶⁷⁴ Authors of apologetics have argued that secular and canon laws forbidding the sale of Christian slaves to non-Christians demonstrate a Christian attitude against the slave trade.⁶⁷⁵ No church council found anything unsavoury with the sale or the ownership of humans in either the Late Imperial or post-Roman period and slave owning was considered a privilege only to be available to Christians. Christians had been forbidden from selling other Christians as slaves to Jews or pagans in the secular laws of the Christian empire.⁶⁷⁶ Christians could purchase slaves of any religion from non-Christians; Jews were only barred from purchasing Christians. These laws again would suggest that, at least when viewed from the Imperial capitals, Jewish involvement in the slave trade was largely incidental; certainly, if these laws were enforced even sporadically, Jews would have been severely handicapped in the trade and could never have come to dominate it.

In the Byzantine Empire, laws codified by Theodosius and Justinian remained in force and were reiterated in the eighth century.⁶⁷⁷ No evidence suggests an explicitly Jewish involvement in slave trading in the Byzantine Empire. Texts

⁶⁷¹ *CT*, 3.1.5.

⁶⁷² *Constitutiones Sirmondiae*, 4.

⁶⁷³ *CT*, 16.8.24.

⁶⁷⁴ *CT*, 16.8.22.

⁶⁷⁵ Including P. Allard (*Les Esclaves Chrétiens*, p. xiii, passim), R. Stark (*The Victory of Reason*, pp. 26-31), and K. Harper (*Slavery in the Late Roman World*, p. 273, etc).

⁶⁷⁶ *CT*, 3.1.5; 16.8.22; 16.9.1-5; *Constitutiones Sirmonidae*, 4; *CJ*, 1.9.15; 1.10.1.

⁶⁷⁷ *Appendix to the Ecloga*, 6.26

from the eastern Mediterranean from both before and after the Muslim conquest do not reflect any particular Jewish presence in the slave trade. If anything, the lack of evidence in the relatively large bodies of Christian and Muslim texts (including many written by individuals hostile to Jews) in the regions where the largest numbers of Jews were found would seem to confirm the lack of a particularly Jewish role in the slave trade.

It is in the sixth-century West that Jewish slave merchants first begin to appear in the sources. Gallic Church councils restricted Jewish possession of Christian slaves. In 541, the possibility that Christian slaves might become Jews if held in Jewish homes was a worry⁶⁷⁸ and similar legislation followed in 583.⁶⁷⁹ Neither is reflective of the slave trade but simply reflect the same sort of circumstance that seen in Roman laws from the period and the context is anti-Jewish rather than anti-slavery.⁶⁸⁰ In the following decades, the letters of Gregory the Great provide some of the clearest evidence for slave trading. The Pope noted that some portion of the trade in slaves shipped from Gaul and bound for other parts was in Jewish hands.⁶⁸¹ Writing to Fortunatus, Bishop of Naples, he said:

Cognoscentes, qualis fraternitatem uestram zelus pro christianis mancipiis, quae Iudaei de Galliarum finibus emunt, accenderit, adeo nobis sollicitudinem uestram placuisse signamus, ut inhibendos eos ab huius modi negotiatione nostra etiam deliberatio iudicaret. Sed Basilio Hebraeo cum aliis Iudaeis ueniente comperimus hanc illis a diuersis iudicibus reipublicae emptionem iniungi atque euenire, ut inter paganos et Christiani pariter comparentur. Unde necesse fuit ita causam ordinatione cauta disponi, ut nec mandantes

⁶⁷⁸ *Acta Concilium Aurelianense*, 541. Mai. 14, 30-31.

⁶⁷⁹ *Acta Concilium Matisconense*, 583. Nov. 1, 16-17.

⁶⁸⁰ J.-P. Devroey and C. Brouwer, 'La participation des Juifs au commerce dans le monde franc (VIe-Xe siècles)', p. 354.

⁶⁸¹ *RE*, 6.29; 9.105; 9.214.

*frustrari nec hi qui contra uoluntatem suam se inquit oboedire aliqua sustineant iniuste dispendia. Proinde fraternitas uestra hoc uigilanti sollicitudine obseruari ac custodire prouideat, ut reuertentibus eis de praefata prouincia christiana mancipia, quae ab ipsis adduci contigerit, aut mandatoribus contra dantur aut certe christianis emptoribus intra diem quadragesimum uenumdentur.*⁶⁸²

He goes on to make allowances for situations where a slave had fallen ill before being sold as he is concerned lest the sellers suffer financial loss. According to the Pope, these Jews were well known in Narbonne.⁶⁸³ That the Frankish authorities found nothing wrong with Jews owning Christians outraged the Pope; he sent a missive to Queen Brunhild, scolding her for continuing to tolerate the situation and even allowing Jews in the Frankish kingdoms to openly own Christians as slaves.⁶⁸⁴ Other letters were sent to Kings Theuderic and Theudebert repeating the message.⁶⁸⁵

Though Gregory was upset about Jewish traffic in Christian slaves, it must be remembered that it was not the slave trade itself that outraged him. Instead, it was the idea that Jews might own Christians. It was a topic that regularly inflamed his passion: he penned numerous letters against the practice, not just in Gaul or in Naples, but also in Sicily⁶⁸⁶ and Sardinia,⁶⁸⁷ as well as Italian towns such as

⁶⁸² RE, 9.105 (“Recognizing that, my brother, your zeal has been lit for the Christian slaves whom the Jews buy from the Gauls, so your solicitude will be pleased that we have signed a judgment that they are inhibited such as forbidding them from even considering trading in this manner. But we have learned from Basil the Hebrew, who came along with other Jews, that this business is commanded them by diverse judges of the republic, as they are placed equally between Christians and pagans. Hence it was necessary that the business be disposed, as to not frustrate the instructions that they were not forced to so against their will nor that they should unjustly sustain any losses. Accordingly, my brother, your anxiety is observed and so keep a vigilant look out, that when they return from the said province, any Christian slaves which they happen to be brought be either handed over to those who gave the order, or, at least, they sell them to Christians by the fortieth day”).

⁶⁸³ RE, 7.21.

⁶⁸⁴ RE, 9.214.

⁶⁸⁵ RE, 9.216.

⁶⁸⁶ RE, 3.37.

⁶⁸⁷ RE, 4.9.

Terracina⁶⁸⁸ and Luni.⁶⁸⁹ He was particularly concerned that slaves living in Jewish households would, whether through force or their own volition, become Jewish; that was, after all, what was proscribed in Jewish law.⁶⁹⁰ In the case of Luni, in an example illustrative of the sometimes slippery nature of what a 'slave' is in the period, he made an exception for men bound to land owned by Jews (they were to be altered in status from slaves to something more like *coloni*⁶⁹¹), though other slaves would need to either be freed or handed to Christian ownership.⁶⁹² Elsewhere, he argued that Jews needed to be punished as the Christian religion was polluted when they owned Christians.⁶⁹³ Bishop Ianuarius felt Gregory's ire when the Pope learned that the Sardinian Church had been returning Christian runaways to their Jewish owners.⁶⁹⁴

Gregory's attitude towards Jewish ownership of Christians was quite conventional as it was based on his understanding of the religious life of slaves. If the slave had a Jewish master, he believed, he would soon be forced to apostatise. Gregory's view of the religion of slaves being wholly dependent on that of their masters was hardly exclusive to Judaism; he had elsewhere urged Bishop Ianuarius that Christian masters with recalcitrant pagans among their slaves should beat the slaves until they outwardly conformed to Christian observance.⁶⁹⁵ Presumably, he expected Jewish masters to use similar means to those he recommended for Christian slave-owners and the notion of slaves following the religious practice of their

⁶⁸⁸ *RE*, 2.45.

⁶⁸⁹ *RE*, 4.21.

⁶⁹⁰ A. Serfass, 'Slavery and Pope Gregory the Great', p. 99.

⁶⁹¹ A. Serfass, 'Slavery and Pope Gregory the Great', p. 101.

⁶⁹² *RE*, 4.21.

⁶⁹³ *RE*, 3.37.

⁶⁹⁴ *RE*, 4.9.

⁶⁹⁵ *RE*, 9.205.

masters had deep roots in Christian history.⁶⁹⁶ Gregory's interests in Jewish slave traders and slave owners should not be read as evidence of a heavy Jewish involvement in either but rather of Gregory's concerns with the possibility of apostasy and of Judaizing. Certainly, he voices similar concerns regarding Samaritan ownership of Christian slaves when, in one letter, he advises the Bishop of Catania to follow up on reports of pagan slaves being forcibly circumcised and free the victims⁶⁹⁷ while, in another, he mentions a Christian slave owned by a Samaritan at Syracuse who had claimed to have been freed by a former bishop⁶⁹⁸

Jews appear occasionally as merchants though never explicitly as slave traders in some of the same regions and at the same time in the writings of Gregory of Tours. The Gallic bishop described how, when the Bishop of Clermont had decided to forcibly baptise the entire Jewish community of his city, 500 Jews opted to return to Marseille.⁶⁹⁹ There, they may have found a large and prosperous Jewish community (though no trace of the Jewish community has yet been unearthed). Jews also appear in Gregory's historical work as prominent merchants, though the only Jew given a name is Priscus, described as King Chilperic's *familiaris* and agent in buying costly goods.⁷⁰⁰

The acts of two seventh-century Gallic church councils have been read as suggestive of a prominent Jewish involvement in slave trading. While the first of these, the Council of Clichy held in 626 or 627, can be read as a more strident

⁶⁹⁶ J. Glancy, *Slavery in Early Christianity*, pp. 46-49, argues that there are four occasions in the *Book of Acts* (10:44-48; 16:14-15; 16:27-34; and 18:8) in which slave-holders accept baptism and compel their slaves to follow. Arguably, this notion of dependents and clients following their patrons' and masters' leads in matters of faith flavours many missionary efforts, including, of course, Gregory's own.

⁶⁹⁷ *RE*, 6.30.

⁶⁹⁸ *RE*, 8.21.

⁶⁹⁹ *GT, DLH*, 5.11.

⁷⁰⁰ *GT, DLH*, 6.5. Though Priscus is described as an associate of the King's, this does not spare him from the king's aggressive Christian proselytizing. Similarly, Priscus's kinsmen, when he is eventually slain, avenge him in typically Merovingian style (6.17).

reiteration of the earlier position,⁷⁰¹ that of Châlon-sur-Saône (between 639 and 654)

appears at first glance more forceful. The ninth canon reads:

*ut nullus mancipium extra finibus uel terminibus, qui ad regnum domni Chlodouei regis pertinent, penitus non debeat uenundare, ne, quod absit, per tale commertium aut captiuitatis uinculum vel, quod peius est, Iudaica seruitute mancipia Christiana teneantur implicita.*⁷⁰²

That canon has been variously argued as evidence of Jewish dominance of the slave trade⁷⁰³ and as proof of an abolitionist movement within the Merovingian Church,⁷⁰⁴ neither of which are supported by the evidence. Instead, it falls neatly into a context where the Jews had been driven from the Frankish kingdoms and where Jews were seen as perfidious outsiders who might draw innocent Christians into their religion.

Only a few years earlier, the *Chronicle of Fredegar* claims that, as a result of foreknowledge concerning the threat of a circumcised people, Heraclius had instructed Dagobert to baptise all the Jews within his realm, something the Frankish monarch hastened to do.⁷⁰⁵ While at first glance, this looks more like a story developed after the appearance of Islam, it may be credible as there is clear evidence from multiple sources in multiple traditions for a general order for the forced baptism of Jews throughout the Empire on 31 May 632⁷⁰⁶ as well as in Gaul.⁷⁰⁷ In the

⁷⁰¹ *Acta Concilium Clippiacense*, 626 aut 627 Sept. 27, 13.

⁷⁰² *Acta Concilium Cabilonense*, 9 (“that no person may sell a slave outside the borders or the boundaries of the kingdom which belongs to our lord the king Clovis, but he ought to be sold inwards, lest, God forbid!, that through this commerce Christians be taken into captivity and, what is worse, that Christian slaves be bound in servitude to the Jews”).

⁷⁰³ C, Verlinden, *L’Esclavage dans l’Europe Médiévale*, I, p. 672.

⁷⁰⁴ P. Fouracre, R. A. Gerberding, *Late Merovingian France*, p. 111; as well as in a vast number of primarily Catholic apologetic works from the mid-nineteenth century onwards.

⁷⁰⁵ *Chronicle of Fredegar*, 4.65.

⁷⁰⁶ al-Bukhari, 1.1.6; al-Ṭabarī, 1562; Severus Ibn al-Muqaffa’ of al-Ashmunein, *Tārīkh Batarikat al-Kanisah al-Misriyah*, 492; Maximus the Confessor, *Epistula* 8; Michael the Syrian, 2.413; Braulio, *Epistula* 21.

⁷⁰⁷ *Gesta Dagoberti*, 24; *Vita Sulpicii Episcopi Biturgi*, 4.

Byzantine Empire,⁷⁰⁸ Spain,⁷⁰⁹ and Italy⁷¹⁰ (as well as the territories conquered by the Muslims in the next two decades), Jews appear in the written sources later in the seventh century, suggesting that, whatever happened to them, it quickly faded.

Gaul, though, was different. Jews only reappear in Frankish sources after Pepin the Short conquered Septimania from the Muslims; there is no positive evidence for the existence of a Jewish community within Francia in the century after Dagobert.⁷¹¹ While that is evidence of the survival of Jewish communities in the Visigothic kingdom, the lack of any positive evidence for Jews in late Merovingian Gaul is not conclusive in itself for the absence of evidence cannot be considered as evidence of absence. In an era that is not the most thoroughly documented, it is not implausible that Frankish Jews may have survived and even prospered in places from which there is no evidence, written or otherwise; forced conversions and expulsions might have been limited to only a few places.⁷¹² Though there is no evidence for Jews in Gaul after Dagobert's reign, there seems to be no evidence for any abatement in the slave trade out of Gaul. It might then be concluded that Jews were not dominant in the slave trade but were, instead, merely incidentally involved.

Even if they were not dominant in the slave trade, Jews were certainly involved in trade on land and were involved in shipping in the Mediterranean. At the beginning of the fifth century, Synesius of Ptolemais described a sea journey from Alexandria to Cyrenaica where more than half the crew of the ship and its captain

⁷⁰⁸ *Concilium Constantinopolitanum a. 691/2 in Trullo habitum*, 11; Theophanes, 401.

⁷⁰⁹ 6 Toledo 3; 8 Toledo 10, 12; 9 Toledo 17; 10 Toledo 1, 7; 12 Toledo 9; 16 Toledo 1; 17 Toledo 8; as well as in secular laws issued by Chindaswinth (*FI* 12.2.16), Recceswinth (12.2.2-15), Erwig (12.3.1-28), and Egica (12.2.18).

⁷¹⁰ *Vita S. Zosimo Episcopo Syracusano in Sicilia*, 3.19.

⁷¹¹ S. Katz, *The Jews in the Visigothic and Frankish Kingdoms of Spain and Gaul*, (Cambridge, Mass., 1937) p. 26.

⁷¹² B. Blumenkranz, *Juifs et Chrétiens dans le Monde Occidental, 430-1096*, (Louvain, 2007), p. 100.

were Jews.⁷¹³ In the *Liber in gloria confessorum*, Gregory of Tours recounts how, after the confessor Hospitius died in 581, a man gathered some relics from his tomb and wanted to sail with them from Nice to Lerins but the only boat available was a ship bound for Marseille. As Jews owned the ship, he naturally had to be cautious regarding sharing his purpose. When he revealed what he carried to them, they miraculously landed him at Lerins.⁷¹⁴ Gregory the Great was concerned when Nostannus, a Sicilian Jew and ship-owner, had his vessel unlawfully seized in Palermo.⁷¹⁵ There may even be archaeological confirmation of practising Jewish sailors; a ship wrecked off the Turkish coast opposite Kos near the end of the sixth century was found with a cargo of primarily Palestinian goods and a kosher cooking pot for its crew.⁷¹⁶

While the evidence shows a Jewish role, it does not support a model involving Jewish mercantile dominance, whether in shipping slaves or any other goods, either before or after the Muslim conquests. Instead, individual Jews were a part of the Levantine trading diaspora that dominated the Mediterranean in the early Byzantine era. Most of these merchants were Christians just as were most of the people in their homeports in Alexandria, Caesarea, Tripoli, Antioch, and so on. However, just as those cities and their hinterlands were far from religiously uniform, so, too, were the trading networks that came from them. In the late sixth and early seventh centuries, the Jewish communities in the Levant were larger than they would be again before the twentieth century; on the eve of the Persian invasion, Jews made up a significant share of the population of Palestine – a land with a prosperous

⁷¹³ Synesius, *Epistulae*, 4.

⁷¹⁴ GT, *Liber in Gloria Confessorum*, 95.

⁷¹⁵ RE, 9.40.

⁷¹⁶ M. McCormick, *Origins of the European Economy*, p. 601.

population of around 1,000,000 in 600⁷¹⁷ – as well as sizable portions of the population of Syrian cities such as Antioch,⁷¹⁸ Edessa,⁷¹⁹ Dera'a,⁷²⁰ and Tyre.⁷²¹ It should not be surprising that Jewish merchants would have been involved in the same networks of trade as were their Christian neighbours. There was no particularly 'Jewish' cast to either the slave trade or to trade in general in the period. Jews in the seventh century, as throughout late antiquity, had not yet been ghettoized socially or economically. Jews were involved in many economic pursuits; the only ones that they seem especially plentiful in were those such as glass-making and cloth-dyeing that were centred in areas, such as the Galilee, that had large Jewish populations.⁷²² Similarly, Jews were involved in Mediterranean trade only as much as they were Levantines. While there were certainly Jewish slave traders in the centuries that followed, they were neither a dominant factor in the slave trade nor were those merchants ever a particularly significant force within the Jewish communities.

Instead, these 'foreign' traders – whether Syrian, Jewish or Egyptian – were part of a merchant marine and trading network that controlled most long-distance shipping on ships and originated in east Mediterranean ports. Some of these individuals remained for long periods in the western Mediterranean, but, like merchant diasporas of later periods, they remained tied to their ancestral homelands even when, as in Clermont,⁷²³ Marseille,⁷²⁴ and Orléans,⁷²⁵ permanent Jewish

⁷¹⁷ M. Broshi, 'The Population of Western Palestine in the Roman-Byzantine Period', *Bulletin of the American Schools of Oriental Research*, 236, (Autumn 1979), p. 7.

⁷¹⁸ *Chronicon Paschale*, 696

⁷¹⁹ *Chronicle of 1234*, 39.

⁷²⁰ M. Sharon, *Corpus Inscriptionum Arabicarum Palaestinae*, Vol. 30, (Leiden, 1997), p. 68.

⁷²¹ Eutychius, *Annals*, 270.

⁷²² M. Toch, *The Economic History of European Jews: Late Antiquity and Early Middle Ages*, (Leiden, 2013), pp. 28-33.

⁷²³ GT, *DLH*, 5.11.

⁷²⁴ GT, *DLH*, 5.11 and, possibly, 6.17.

⁷²⁵ GT, *DLH*, 8.1.

communities had sprung up. These Jews sometimes appear in company with Syrians, as in Gregory of Tours account of Gunthramn's entry to Orléans, where he was greeted by rejoicing in the *lingua Syrorum, Latinorum, and etiam ipsorum Iudaeorum*.⁷²⁶ Presumably, these Syrians and Jews included recent arrivals from the East; these were people for whom languages other than 'Latin' (or rather the Vulgar Latin evolving into Romance) were native.

The general route that these traders followed is visible in both texts and archaeology. The majority of long-distance trade from Gaul, England and Germany passed through the port of Marseille before being shipped eastward via Carthage.⁷²⁷ Eastern goods were carried westwards to Marseille in cargoes of primarily African products before being exchanged for Gallic exports and a return journey made. From Carthage, they would then be shipped onwards to Alexandria, Constantinople, or the ports of the Levant. While far from the only active trade route, this trade between eastern and western Mediterranean via Carthage might actually be glimpsed in an odd document, the *Doctrina Iacobi nuper Baptizati*. Set in the summer of 634,⁷²⁸ it recounts a fictional debate between the recently baptised Jacob and a group of Jews in Carthage. Jacob was from Palestine and had arrived there in a merchant ship after earlier travels that had taken him to Antioch and Constantinople. That ship had sailed on and would soon return; Jacob mentions that he had considered going onwards in it to Gaul.⁷²⁹ The most famous passage of the text – the earliest non-Muslim reference to Muḥammad – occurs when Ioustos, one of the Carthaginian Jews, reads a letter he had received at some earlier time from his brother Abraham in

⁷²⁶ GT, DLH, 8.1.

⁷²⁷ M. McCormick, *Origins of the European Economy*, p. 107.

⁷²⁸ DI, 5.20.

⁷²⁹ DI, 5.20.

Palestine.⁷³⁰ While there were long-established Jewish communities throughout the Mediterranean, the Jews who are depicted as being involved in sea-borne trade are not from those. Instead, they are recent arrivals from Palestine and maintain active connections with family members there.

Though a work of fiction, the text probably reflects social patterns not only of Jewish merchants but also of their Christian ‘Syrian’ contemporaries. It was a continuation of earlier patterns. Since at least the fourth century, the majority of shipping in the Mediterranean had been carried in Levantine and Egyptian boats. That trend had accelerated in the fifth century.⁷³¹ Even in the Aegean and along the coasts of Asia Minor, Syrian and Coptic mercantile-shipping dominated the local carrying trade. The same appears to be true in the ports of North Africa. While eastern ships regularly sailed to all the ports of the Mediterranean and beyond – trade at a modest level was even carried on directly between western Britain and Egypt – very few ships went in the opposite direction. Regardless of whether it was state authorities in Constantinople or merchants in Egypt and the Levant making the decisions, such trade as continued in the western half of the Mediterranean was primarily transacted along lines defined in the eastern half of the sea and, as a result, trade was almost entirely dependent on eastern needs and capabilities rather than on western ones.

What is apparent is that while Jews were far from being dominant in the slave trade, they were noticed when they were involved. Several possible explanations have been given for this. Perhaps, as a commercial minded minority with members having strong social and familial ties across long distances, one might expect that they would have been heavily involved in the movement of slaves along with other

⁷³⁰ *DI*, 5.16.

⁷³¹ M. McCormick, *Origins of the European Economy*, pp. 103 – 105.

merchandise. Again, as outsiders to Christian (and, later, Islamic) communities, it may have been easier for them to buy and sell slaves. Or, perhaps, the only reason that Jewish slave traders appear to be prominent is that they appear in overtly anti-Semitic contexts. While any (or none) of these may be true and could have varied over time, it appears that, when Jewish slave-traders appear, they largely enter the purview of the authors of surviving texts not because they were slave traders but because they were Jews. The principal reason that Christian writers mentioned them was that Jewish slave-ownership might lead to conversion. Dealing in slaves was not itself a bad thing to even leading churchmen of the time; it was an economic necessity and a privilege that ought not be allowed to the despised Jews. Slave owning and slave trading were ideally to be exclusively Christian businesses.

Slaves were only one of many cargoes for the eastern merchants, even if slaves were the most significant export of the western lands. Presumably, many of these merchants, whether Egyptian or Syrian, Jews or Gentiles, mentioned in the sources were involved in slave-trading but only Jewish ones were noted when they were involved in it as only then were they impinging on Christian prerogatives. Jewish merchants, then, may have been numerous but they were only a minority among all merchants involved in Mediterranean trade and they were only connected to the slave trade by the anti-Jewish animus of the sources. Whether the Jews are depicted as ship-owners or slave traders, they came in for condemnation. To draw sweeping conclusions about a Jewish role in trade from what are, in modern terms, anti-Semitic texts is nonsense. A Jewish role in Mediterranean trade only makes sense in this period in the context of a broader Levantine domination of sea-borne trade. Similarly, it might be inferred that the apparent prominence as slave-traders in the textual sources of a group who would only have formed a small fraction of the

merchant population – and a group that suffered severe disabilities in taking part in the slave trade when compared to the rest of the merchants – demonstrates the high likelihood of a very large volume of slave trading in the period. Certainly, none of the texts that explicitly mention the movement of slaves suggest that there is anything unusual about the actual trade; only those that connect Jews with the slave trade imply that there is something out of the ordinary happening.

3.5. The Mediterranean at the end of the sixth century

These merchants moved in an economic system that, at the end of the sixth century, had begun to see increasing divergence between its regional participants and was showing increasing discontinuity with the past. This was far from obvious to most observers as the sixth century drew to a close. In nearly all the regions of the post-Roman world, it was still recognizably the late antique Roman world. The Mediterranean remained a Roman lake whilst the economies and the societies of the former Roman Empire (with the notable exception of eastern Britain) were still connected to one another and shared a common culture, even if it was diminished in comparison to the recent past.⁷³² The Roman Empire under Maurice remained the greatest, largest and most powerful state outside China. Its capital was the home of the world's preeminent Christian ruler. It was, when viewed by contemporaries, an age of peace and stability. As Evagrius Scholasticus noted in 594 as he contemplated the past few centuries:

⁷³² C. Wickham, 'Overview: Production, Distribution and Demand', in R. Hodges and W. Bowden, eds., *The Sixth Century: Production, Distribution and Demand*, (Leiden, 1998), p. 279.

Ἐξ ὅτου δὲ Κωνσταντῖνος ὁ παναοίδιμος παρείληφε τὴν ἀρχὴν, καὶ τὴν ἐπόνυμον αὐτῷ πόλιν δειμάμενος τῷ Χριστῷ ἀνατέθεικεν, ἄθρει δὴ μοι εἴ τις τῶν ἐν αὐτῇ βασιλέων, Ἰουλιανοῦ δίχα τοῦ ἱεροφάντου σου καὶ βασιλέως, ἢ πρὸς τῶν οἰκείων ἢ τῶν ἐναντίων διεφθάρη, ἢ ὄλως τύραννος βασιλέως κατεδυνάστευσεν, ἢ μόνου Βασιλίσκου ἐξώσαντος Ζήνωνα, πρὸς οὗ καὶ κατελύθη καὶ τὸν βίον ἀπέθετο.⁷³³

Of course, he could not know what lay in the near future but, in the Roman Empire, the sense of stability and continued prosperity was very much based in reality.

In the previous two centuries, the eastern and western halves of the Mediterranean had followed very separate paths. In much of the east, the previous three centuries were a markedly prosperous period between the fifth and seventh centuries. In modern Jordan and southern Israel, the area brought under cultivation reached its greatest extent before recent decades and wheat was harvested even in areas that are now considered far too arid.⁷³⁴ Marginal land in the uplands of the Jebel Zāwiye, Hārim, and Sem‘ān between Antioch and Aleppo developed dense networks of settlements that produced oil, wine, and grain and left behind a large series of remarkable abandoned stone villages.⁷³⁵ New crops such as durum wheat⁷³⁶ and the introduction of silk cultivation under Justinian⁷³⁷ helped expand production in Egypt and Syria. Even in Africa, the evidence points to a period of general

⁷³³ Evagrius, 3.41 (“But since the time that the renowned Constantine succeeded to the empire, and had entrusted the city he founded under the protection of Christ, look among the emperors who succeeded him, to see if you can find one, except Julian the Hierophant, who was killed by his subjects or by his enemies. Has there been since that time a usurper, who has won the leadership from a legitimate Prince, except that Basilicus who drove out Zeno for a short time, but was deprived by the same Zeno of the authority he had usurped and of his life?”).

⁷³⁴ J. Johns, ‘The Longue Duree: State and Settlement Strategies in Southern Transjordan Across the Islamic Centuries’, in E. Rogan and T. Tell, eds., *Village, Steppe and State: The Social Origins of Modern Jordan*, (London, 1994), pp. 4-5.

⁷³⁵ G. Tate, *Les Campagnes de la Syrie du Nord du IIe au VIIe Siècle, I*, (Paris, 1992), pp. 243-256.

⁷³⁶ A. Watson, *Agricultural Innovation in the Early Islamic World*, pp. 20-21.

⁷³⁷ Procopius, 8.17. 1-8.

economic expansion and prolonged prosperity lasting through the seventh century,⁷³⁸
with the decades on either side of 600 being, perhaps, the most prosperous of all.⁷³⁹

However, many regions like Frankish Gaul, Visigothic Spain, and Lombard Italy, were visibly impoverished by the end of the sixth century when contrasted both to their Roman past and to the highly developed and prosperous regions of the eastern Mediterranean. Many of the cities of the West had shrunk substantially since the Antonine era.⁷⁴⁰ Rome itself still had a population between 300,000 and 500,000 at the time of Alaric's sack,⁷⁴¹ but that had dropped to perhaps a third of that by the beginning of the Byzantine reconquest with noticeable empty spaces and ruins throughout the city,⁷⁴² and it continued to contract as a result of the devastating sieges of the Gothic War.⁷⁴³ Other cities across Gaul and Spain shrank in similar fashion, often abandoning suburbs as well as large tracts within the walls.⁷⁴⁴ By the end of the sixth century, save for Marseille, there were few true cities in Gaul and many named in texts appear archaeologically as little more than administrative villages⁷⁴⁵ as can be seen in places like Tours⁷⁴⁶ and Arles.⁷⁴⁷

⁷³⁸ J. Conant, *Staying Roman: Conquest and Identity in Africa and the Mediterranean, 439-700*, (Cambridge, 2012), pp. 336-337; see chapter four below.

⁷³⁹ M. Bonifay, "La céramique africaine, un indice du développement économique?" *Antiquité Tardive: Revue Internationale d'Histoire et d'Archéologie (IVe-VIIe siècle)*, 11 (2003), p. 124.

⁷⁴⁰ See especially the survey of the cities of the Roman West in C. Wickham, *Framing the Early Middle Ages*, pp. 635-681.

⁷⁴¹ B. Lançon, *Rome in Late Antiquity*, (Edinburgh, 2000), p. 14.

⁷⁴² Cassiodorus, 11.39.

⁷⁴³ See T. S. Brown, *Gentlemen and Officers*, p. 63 as to the impossibility of population estimations.

⁷⁴⁴ M. Fixot, 'La Cité et Son Territoire: l'Exemple du Sud-Est de la Gaule', in *Towns and Their Territories Between Late Antiquity and the Early Middle Ages*, G. P. Brogiolo, N. Gauthier, and N. Christie, eds., (Leiden, 2000) p. 44.

⁷⁴⁵ The process of urban decline does not seem to be necessarily related to prosperity; in Africa, for instance, many of the former vast network of cities lost their role as municipal administrative centres during the Vandal period (as the Vandals did not encourage the continuation of those functions) despite the lack of evidence of overall population decline or impoverishment (C. Lepelley, 'The Survival and Fall of the Classical City in Late Roman Africa', in J. Rich, ed., *The City in Late Antiquity*, (London, 1992), p. 68.

⁷⁴⁶ Contrast GT, *DLH*, 7.1, 7.22, etc. with H. Galinié, 'Reflections on Early Medieval Tours', in R. Hodges and B. Hobley, eds., *The Rebirth of Towns in the West AD 700-1050*, (London, 1988), p. 61.

⁷⁴⁷ Besieged in 411/2, during war between rival emperors (Prosper of Aquitaine, *Epitoma Chronicon*, 1243), by the Visigoths in 427 (Prosper, 1290), by the Burgundians in 507/8 (Cyprianus, *Vita Caesarii*, 1.34), in 534 by the Franks (GT, *DLH*, 3.23), during Frankish civil wars in 568 and 570

Further north, urban life shrank even more rapidly and completely; there is only slight evidence for any inhabitants in the cities of post-Roman Britain and, where there is, the settlements are distinctly rural in nature.⁷⁴⁸ While the whole of the former Western Empire had seen trade and economic production drastically decline, the economies of both the eastern lowland (primarily Anglo-Saxon dominated) and western upland zones of Britain were possibly the most impoverished parts of the former Roman world. The production of metal from ore had, in most of Britain, almost completely ceased in the years around 400 and virtually all of the limited production of iron, copper, silver, and lead there in the next three centuries came from recycling remains from the Roman centuries; in Italy and the lands the Merovingians ruled, in contrast, new production of ores continued, even if at a much lower level than in the past.⁷⁴⁹

The barbarian invasions seem largely to have been both the principle cause and lasting effect of a breakdown of the state-driven sector of the Roman economy that began a process of unravelling and economic decline throughout the former western empire. In the fourth century, a strong imperial government collected revenues (whether in coin or in kind) and redistributed them within the Empire, principally through the supplying of the military on the frontiers and in the public distribution of foodstuffs in Rome and, after 330, Constantinople. The state-organised collection of grain and oil in North Africa and its subsidized shipment to Rome helped ensure a large market for other African goods that were carried on the

(4.30), in 574 by the Lombards (4.43), and threatened by the Visigoths in 588 (9.7) with all of the usual results (famine (Cassiodorus, 3.32), enslavement (GT, *DLH*, 9.7), and economic devastation); there is hardly any archaeological evidence for it from after 550 (see S. T. Loseby, 'Arles in Late Antiquity: Gallula Roma Arelas and Urbs Genesii', in N. Christie and S. T. Loseby, eds., *Towns in Transition: Urban Evolution in Late Antiquity and the Early Middle Ages*, (Aldershot, 1996), pp. 45-70).

⁷⁴⁸ S. T. Loseby, 'Power and Towns in Late Roman Britain and Early Anglo-Saxon England', in G. Ripoll and J. M. Gurt, eds., *Sedes Regiae (ann. 400-800)*, (Barcelona, 2000), pp. 331-332.

⁷⁴⁹ R. Fleming, 'Recycling in Britain after the Fall of Rome's Metal Economy', *Past and Present*, 217:1 (2012), pp. 13-14.

ships of the *annona* fleet.⁷⁵⁰ This axis of trade dominated the central Mediterranean while the redistribution of revenue from the Mediterranean to the Danube, Rhine, and Britain had a similar effect on the economies supplying the military, making the fourth century a period of unprecedented prosperity in those regions.

However, the collapse of the frontiers and withdraw from them at the beginning of the fifth century meant an end to the large-scale transfer of wealth to the armies on the frontiers and to spending of the Imperial state. When the Vandals had conquered North Africa in 439, they had at a stroke deprived the Western Empire of one of its main sources of revenue and ended the subsidised provisioning of the city of Rome. Without the requirement of sailing the grain fleet to feed the capitals, Vandal Africa experienced marked prosperity; freed of central government control, African exports to areas beyond Rome grew and more than made up for the loss of the guaranteed markets.⁷⁵¹ As the western provinces fell under the rule of barbarian groups, they saw the replacement of Roman armies paid and fed through the spending of taxes gathered widely with war-bands supported by grants of land. Without the need for a constant supply of revenue, the land-tax (the main fiscal instrument of the Empire) no longer needed to be collected in those areas and gradually vanished in much of the West. The end of taxation meant, in turn, that coinage was no longer as necessary and, with fewer coins in circulation, commercial agriculture and non-local exchange often became more difficult. Systems of exchange became increasingly localised and luxuries became less common.

Administrative services needed to collect the taxes and send them on to the military

⁷⁵⁰ A. H. M. Jones, *The Later Roman Empire*, vol. 2, (Oxford, 1964), pp. 844-849 has a brief but outdated account; M. M. McCormick, 'Bateaux de vie, bateaux de mort: maladie, commerce, transports annonaires et le passage économique du Bas-Empire au moyen âge,' *Morfologie sociali e culturali in Europa fra tarda Antichità e alto Medioevo*, vol.1, *Settimane di Studio del Centro Italiano di Studi sull'Alto Medioevo*, (Spoleto), 45 (1998), pp. 65-93 is probably the best recent discussion.

⁷⁵¹ R. B. Hitchner, 'Meridional Gaul, Trade and the Mediterranean Economy in Late Antiquity' in J. Drinkwater and H. Elton, eds., *Fifth-century Gaul: A Crisis of Identity?* (Cambridge, 1992), p. 123.

vanished. Without the administrative apparatus or monetized commercial agriculture, late Roman cities declined or disappeared completely in many regions. The upper classes abandoned the dying cities and went to live on their rural estates (when local aristocracies did not simply vanish).⁷⁵² This process was more important than either barbarian invasion or even the settlement of Germanic peoples within the Empire in bringing about the undoing of the Roman West. In some areas, like lowland Britain, the economy reverted to what has been described as one that was ‘essentially prehistoric.’⁷⁵³ Even where the crisis was not as profound, material culture was impoverished and commerce diminished across what had been the western empire. Yet, the same processes do not seem to have affected the economies and societies of the eastern half of the empire. There, cities remained dynamic and rural areas prospered. One might suspect that if the decline (if not collapse) of trade in the West had been as great as it is sometimes portrayed, the economies of the east Mediterranean (as well as North Africa) would also have seen severe decline in their prosperity. As they did not, it seems reasonable to suspect that other dynamics were at work in this new, post-Roman world.

Regardless of whether one takes a catastrophist or a minimalist view of the disruptions of the fifth century, the end of the collection of the African *annona* and the collapse of west Roman state power undoubtedly meant a steep decline in the volume of trade in the western Mediterranean; even without textual evidence, archaeological material makes this quite clear.⁷⁵⁴ But that same body of archaeological and textual evidence also shows, it did not mean a complete cessation of trade in the western Mediterranean. Instead, once the immediate crisis of the

⁷⁵² See C. Wickham, *Framing the Early Middle Ages*, pp. 708-741, for an extended argument on the role of the collapse of state economic activities that followed from the loss of North Africa.

⁷⁵³ B. Ward-Perkins, *The Fall of Rome and the End of Civilization*, p. 113.

⁷⁵⁴ S. T. Loseby, ‘Post-Roman Economies’, pp. 341-342.

system's collapse subsided, a stable trading system emerged from the remains of the imperial order even if it was in many ways a far simpler system than that which had preceded it and might even be compared to what had preceded the rise of the Roman Empire.

Trade had continued throughout the years when the West had been in collapse and, in the following decades, even recovered to a limited degree. Whether or not state command had previously dominated systems of exchange, the demands of the developed eastern economies now drove trade into the peripheral regions. Eastern goods could be easily traded at considerable profit in the West; the only limiting factor was neither the almost insatiable appetite for eastern products in the new kingdoms nor even their relative impoverishment but, instead, the demands of the eastern economies.

By the end of the sixth century, trading networks based in the developed regions of the eastern Mediterranean stretched across the length of Eurasia. By at least 635, Syrian missionaries had followed networks of trade as far as China; while merchants had doubtless preceded them, the Nestorian stele in Chang'an details the arrival of Syriac Christianity there.⁷⁵⁵ In the same period, direct trade was carried on between western Britain and Egypt. Some time around the year 610, John the Almsgiver, Orthodox Patriarch of Alexandria, hired a suicidal foreign sea captain and sent him to sea at the helm of an enormous ship carrying 20,000 bushels of wheat (544 tons). Twenty days after leaving Egypt, they approached the British coast. As a famine was underway, the Britons saw the ship's arrival as providential and offered to pay for the wheat in coin and with tin ingots. The sailors took half

⁷⁵⁵ G. Chengyong, 'A Comparative Study of Two Nestorian Stone Steles Unearthed in the Two Capital Cities of the Tang Dynasty: Xi'an and Luoyang', in L. Tang and D. W. Winkler, eds., *From the Oxus River to the Chinese Shores: Studies on East Syriac Christianity in China and Central Asia*, (Münster, 2013), p. 164.

payment in each and began the journey back to Alexandria. In Cyrenaica, the captain went ashore with a bag weighing 50 pounds of what he thought was tin and tried to sell it to a merchant he knew. Instead of tin, the sack contained silver. As a result of this second miracle, both the merchant and the Patriarch made a great profit.⁷⁵⁶ In this tale of a voyage from Egypt, the tin-producing part of Britain (at least) still used coins, towns existed, and eastern Mediterranean sailors were not unknown. It might almost seem at first reading that, in the mariner's tale, Leontius had created a fiction and used the name of Britain simply as a way of expressing the concept of a place at the edge of the known world or have confused it with some place substantially closer to Egypt.

Though this text is one of the very last to mention sea voyages or travellers moving directly between Britain and the eastern Mediterranean, Leontius is not the only author to mention sea journeys to post-Roman Britain. A few decades earlier, Procopius had noted in his *Wars* that sailors who had been to Britain were easy to find along the docks in Constantinople⁷⁵⁷ and, in the *Secret History*, criticised Justinian's lavish gifts to British ambassadors.⁷⁵⁸ Later on, Evagrius described British visitors to St. Simeon Stylites on his pillar in rural Syria.⁷⁵⁹ British texts from the period barely exist but recent archaeological finds have begun to demonstrate the truth of these Mediterranean texts. On sites along the western coast of Britain, from Tintagel to Dumbarton Rock, high quality Mediterranean imports have been found from precisely this period. While, unsurprisingly, the greatest concentrations are in the extreme southwest where tin was mined, the distribution is quite wide.⁷⁶⁰ Recent

⁷⁵⁶ Leontius, 10.

⁷⁵⁷ Procopius, *De Bello*, 8.20.47.

⁷⁵⁸ Procopius, *Anekdotai*, 19.13.

⁷⁵⁹ Evagrius, 1.13, E.

⁷⁶⁰ E. Campbell, *Continental and Mediterranean Imports to Atlantic Britain and Ireland, AD 400-800*, (York, 2007), pp. 130-9.

analyses of seventh-century human remains from South Wales demonstrate that individuals, including women and children, travelled from the Mediterranean to Britain and some of them even died there.⁷⁶¹

What might have seemed an unlikely possibility hinted at in the texts emerges as incontrovertible fact: merchants were sailing directly from the eastern Mediterranean and North Africa all the way to western British harbours long after 410.⁷⁶² While the wheat mentioned in Leontius's texts has, obviously, disappeared, some of the other materials that were brought from the east can still be found. There were high quality manufactured goods – pottery mainly but also glass and metal-ware that have survived as well as, doubtless, others that have vanished or remain to be discovered.

Meanwhile, merchants and sailors from these regions dominated trade and shipping throughout the Mediterranean and these merchants served both as intermediaries in long-range trade and as suppliers of the manufactured and agricultural products of their home regions. Both texts and archaeology provide evidence of their activity throughout the whole of the former Roman world and beyond. High quality ceramics, as well as jewels, oil, spices, papyrus, wine, gold, and cloth were traded northwards to the 'barbarian' and half-barbarian peoples on the fringes of the civilised world and beyond in much larger quantities than anything known from the British Isles; sixth-century east Mediterranean silver, costume items, and ceramics have been found in large quantity as grave-goods all across northern

⁷⁶¹ K. Hemer et al., 'Evidence of Early Medieval Trade and Migration Between Wales and the Mediterranean Sea Region', pp. 2358–2359. There, the possibility is raised that these might represent slaves imported *into* Britain.

⁷⁶² A. Harris, *Byzantium, Britain and the West: The Archaeology of Cultural Identity AD 400-650*, (Stroud: 2003), p. 68.

Gaul and even beyond the Rhine.⁷⁶³ The eastern Mediterranean served as a hub of trade networks reaching by land and sea deep into sub-Saharan Africa and across South and Central Asia to China and even further. Other networks stretched westward but the demand for silk, spices, ivory, gold, and other items brought there by east Mediterranean merchants does not seem to have been enough to drive trade.

The greatest volume of Mediterranean trade is likely to have been in things that are harder to track. As noted, grain was allegedly being shipped from Egypt as far as Britain while the very last maritime evidence of pre-Islamic trade is a wreck off the southern French coast of a ship loaded with African wheat.⁷⁶⁴

It seems a safe assumption to guess that a great deal of wheat moved out of Carthage and other ports as in earlier times. While the Byzantines had restored tax collection in Africa after the conquest of the Vandals,⁷⁶⁵ it is not immediately clear whether this would have been in coin or in kind; either way would have made it possible to move huge amounts of food from Carthage to Constantinople. While the state-sponsored *navicularii* do not appear to have existed by 600,⁷⁶⁶ Theophanes states during the initial revolt of the Heraclii in 608

*οθεν ουδε τα πλοια νης ΑΦριχης εν τουι τψ χρονψ ανεβαλον.*⁷⁶⁷

It is likely that these ships were the grain fleet. The immediate move by Nicetas to secure Egypt before the attempt to take Constantinople would seem to underline the importance of securing the city's food resources as a preliminary.

⁷⁶³ J. Drauschke, 'The Development of Diplomatic Contacts and Exchange Between the Byzantine Empire and the Frankish Kingdoms until the Early Eighth Century', in A. Gnasso E. E. Intagliata, T. J. MacMaster, and B. N. Morris, eds., *The Long Seventh Century: Continuity and Discontinuity in an Age of Transition*, (Oxford, 2015), pp. 107-134.

⁷⁶⁴ M. Bonifay, 'La céramique africaine, un indice du développement économique?' p. 128.

⁷⁶⁵ Procopius, *De Bello*, 4.8.25.

⁷⁶⁶ M. McCormick, 'Bateaux de vie, bateaux de mort,' pp. 93-98.

⁷⁶⁷ Theophanes, 296, ("Accordingly, none of the ships of Africa sailed in this year").

The ships that carried grain from both Egypt and Africa were not all small vessels. The vessel that sailed to Britain and back is said by Leontius to have had a cargo of 20,000 bushels of wheat (a holding capacity of at least 594 tonnes);⁷⁶⁸ he also describes a fleet of thirteen ships each with a capacity of 10,000 bushels operating in the Adriatic.⁷⁶⁹ Half a century later, ships sailing from Alexandria were described as taking part in the Battle of the Masts (655). That fleet included vessels capable of carrying large catapults and towers and, if not exaggerated, companies of over 1,000 warriors.⁷⁷⁰ Though none this large have yet been discovered, ships of considerable size are known from the period; the Marzamemi wreck found off the coast of Sicily dating from the 530's carried over 300 tonnes of worked marble⁷⁷¹ while the Yassi Ada ship sunk in 626 carried over 800 large amphorae.⁷⁷² Though these ships were extraordinarily large and most contemporary ships were much smaller,⁷⁷³ the existence of even a few such large ships (as well as a great many smaller ones) making regular long-distance voyages is suggestive.

Besides grain, other products imported into western Europe would have included the wine and oil carried in ceramic containers that track their export. Both Phocaeen Red Slipware and African Red Slipware traditions end around the late seventh century after a steady decline in production over the preceding decades. The last Phocaeen RS dates from sometime in the last quarter of the century⁷⁷⁴ while the last ARS appears to date from right around the year 700.⁷⁷⁵ As these had been major

⁷⁶⁸ Leontius, 10.

⁷⁶⁹ Leontius, 28.

⁷⁷⁰ Sebeos, 187.

⁷⁷¹ A. J. Parker, *Ancient Shipwrecks of the Mediterranean and the Roman Provinces*, (Oxford, 1992), ship no. 671.

⁷⁷² A. J. Parker, *Ancient Shipwrecks*, no. 1239.

⁷⁷³ S. A. Kingsley, *Shipwreck Archaeology of the Holy Land: Processes and Parameters*, (London, 2004), pp. 72-73.

⁷⁷⁴ C. Wickham, *Framing the Early Middle Ages*, p. 785.

⁷⁷⁵ J. Lund, 'Hellenistic, Roman and Late Roman Fine Wares from the Segermes Valley - Forms and Chronology', in S. Dietz, L. L. Sebaï, and H. Ben Hassen, eds., *Africa Proconsularis: Regional*

export wares throughout the Mediterranean, their disappearance is significant for tracking commerce. However, it is far from an absolute indicator either of the existence of trade or of its lack; amphorae show the movement of products carried in them (wine and oil) and do not always match the distribution of fine wares while the probable largest African export, grain, is far harder to trace.⁷⁷⁶ Other more localised wares had also seen an end to large-scale production, notably in Lombard Italy at mid-century,⁷⁷⁷ and localised traditions there and elsewhere replaced the former imports. In inland areas, whether in Syria, Spain, or northern Gaul, local traditions had always dominated. Only in Egypt did truly massive potteries continue to exist throughout the seventh century and into the eighth (and beyond) without interruption.⁷⁷⁸ Unfortunately, pottery usage was also in flux at the time as wine and oil were increasingly shipped in wooden barrels and casks. As early as the fourth century, animal skins were being used to transport olive oil within Africa and, by the eleventh century, they were being used alongside canvas and woven baskets in preference to ceramics for transport of goods throughout the southern Mediterranean.⁷⁷⁹ Along with the increasing use of wooden barrels and casks further north, the transition to these containers serves to make the archaeological record of exports increasingly invisible.

While many of the other goods have left little in the archaeological record, the surviving scraps of literary evidence sometimes reveal objects that otherwise

Studies in the Segermes Valley of Northern Tunisia, (Århus, 1995), pp. 469-472, dates the end of ARS to right around 700; M. Bonifay, 'Production et diffusion des céramiques africaines durant l'antiquité tardive', in R. Attoui, ed., *When Did Antiquity End? Archaeological Case Studies in Three Continents*, (Oxford, 2011), pp. 15-17, places it as probably slightly earlier. On the other hand, S. Gelichi and M. Milanese, 'Problems in the Transition towards the Medieval in the Ifriqya: First Results from the Archaeological Excavations at Uchi Maius (Teboursouk, Beja)', *Africa Romana*, 12 (1998), pp 457-486 suggests that ARS production may have continued even after the final Muslim conquest.

⁷⁷⁶ M. Bonifay, "La céramique africaine, un indice du développement économique?" pp. 113-114.

⁷⁷⁷ C. Wickham, *Framing the Early Middle Ages*, p. 732.

⁷⁷⁸ C. Wickham, *Framing the Early Middle Ages*, p. 762.

⁷⁷⁹ J. Conant, *Staying Roman*, p. 334.

would have left little trace. Many trade goods appear by chance through comments such as those with which Gregory of Tours rebukes the Bishop of Nantes:

*O si te habuisset Massilia sacerdotem! Numquam naues oleum aut reliquas species detulissent, nisi cartam tantum, quo maiorem oportunitatem scribendi ad bonos infamandos haberes.*⁷⁸⁰

comments that show that Egyptian papyrus remained the primary material for writing letters. Elsewhere, he shows that wine from Gaza is regularly drunk on the Loire.⁷⁸¹ Just as churchmen in northwestern Gaul relied on imports of writing materials and wine from across the sea, Frankish churches continued to be lit with lamps burning imported oil, rather than locally available candles.⁷⁸²

Meanwhile, Gregory depicts ambassadors regularly sailing between Marseille and Constantinople⁷⁸³ and even tells of how Byzantine coin funded an attempted usurpation by Gundovald, sending him directly from Constantinople to Marseille.⁷⁸⁴ The notion that the Empire continued to be interested in restoring its rule in Gaul appears to have been an established view there as seen in Ebroin's reaction to Hadrian and Theodore when they were en route to Canterbury in 668/9.⁷⁸⁵ Certainly, whether they were ambassadors or other travellers, Gregory had sources that provided him with miraculous stories from the Eastern Empire.⁷⁸⁶

⁷⁸⁰ GT, DLH, 5.5 (“Oh, if only you had been bishop of Marseille! Then, its ships would never have had to carry oil but only paper so that you could have a better opportunity to defame the good”).

⁷⁸¹ GT, DLH, 7.29. See P. Mayerson, ‘The Wine and Vineyards of Gaza in the Byzantine Period,’ *Bulletin of the American Schools of Oriental Research*, 257 (Winter, 1985), pp. 75-80 and S. T. Loseby, ‘Le Rôle Économique de Marseille Pendant l’Antiquité Tardive’, in M.-P. Rothé and H. Tréziny (eds.), *Carte Archéologique de la Gaule, 13/3: Marseille et ses Alentours*, (Paris, 2005), p. 276.

⁷⁸² P. Fouracre, ‘Eternal Light and Earthly Needs: Practical Aspects of the Development of Frankish Immunities’, in W. Davies and P. Fouracre, eds., *Property and Power in the Early Middle Ages*, (Cambridge, 1995), p. 70.

⁷⁸³ GT, DLH, 6.2.

⁷⁸⁴ GT, DLH, 6.24.

⁷⁸⁵ Bede, 4.1.

⁷⁸⁶ GT, *Liber in Gloria Martyrum*, 5, 30, 102; *Passio Sanctorum Septem Dormientium*, 12.

Similarly, Gregory the Great's letters reveal a world where reliable fast sea communications ran from Rome not only to Gaul⁷⁸⁷ and Spain⁷⁸⁸ but also to Carthage,⁷⁸⁹ Constantinople,⁷⁹⁰ and Antioch.⁷⁹¹ The Pope could carry on a long exchange with the Patriarch of Alexandria over the export of Italian timber to Egyptian shipyards⁷⁹² while also writing to kings⁷⁹³ and queens⁷⁹⁴ (as well as churchmen⁷⁹⁵) in Gaul regarding what he saw as distasteful trade policies.⁷⁹⁶ These post-Roman residents of the West continued to think of themselves as a part of the Roman world, dating chronicles by regnal years of Emperors for centuries after the Empire had ceased to rule in their regions, referring to themselves as Romans or simply 'citizens,'⁷⁹⁷ and even in the famous Penmachno inscription raising monuments marking the consulship of Justin in 540 on the shores of the Irish Sea.⁷⁹⁸

On the other side of the exchange, sixth-century Byzantine writers appear to have had regular sources of information from the west. The outlines of Frankish and Visigothic history are obtainable from writers such as Procopius, Agathias, and Menander Protector. Even details of fifth-century Western history seem to have been widely known and can be found in Constantinopolitan authors including Jordanes, Marcellinus Comes, Procopius, and Zosimus. Early in the century, for instance, Zosimus wrote what remains the fullest description of the end of Roman

⁷⁸⁷ Amongst the recipients of Gregory's letters were Bishops Virgil of Arles and Theodore of Marseille (*RE*, 1.45), Bishop Serenus (6.52, 9.209, 11.10, 11.41), and Abbess Respecta (7.12). He mentions receiving a petition from Dynamius, the governor of the city (7.12).

⁷⁸⁸ *RE*, 1.41; etc.

⁷⁸⁹ *RE*, 2.40; 5.3; 6.63; etc.

⁷⁹⁰ *RE*, 1.4; 1.24; 1.37; 6.65; 7.4; etc.

⁷⁹¹ *RE*, 1.7; 1.24; 1.25; 8.2; etc.

⁷⁹² *RE*, 6.61; 7.37; 8.28; 8.29; 9.176; 13.43.

⁷⁹³ *RE*, 9.214.

⁷⁹⁴ *RE*, 9.216.

⁷⁹⁵ *RE*, 11.10 (against a proto-iconoclast).

⁷⁹⁶ *RE*, 6.29; 9.214; 9.105 (against Jewish ownership of Christian slaves. See above).

⁷⁹⁷ Patrick, *Epistola ad Milites Corotici*, 2; see conclusions below.

⁷⁹⁸ M. Handley, 'The Origins of Christian Commemoration in Late Antique Britain,' *EME*, 10:2, (2001), pp. 192-194.

rule in Britain.⁷⁹⁹ Similarly, Britain was well within Procopius's range of interests. Even if some details confused him when he wrote of Britain, he could claim to have seen Anglo-Saxon warriors as well as having met people who had been to Britain on the docks of Constantinople.⁸⁰⁰ His Frankish and Spanish information appears to have been superior to his British ones and his descriptions of Frankish war tactics remain a key source on Merovingian warfare.⁸⁰¹ Later, Agathias's descriptions of the Franks appear based on first hand knowledge.⁸⁰² Even the Emperor Maurice himself was interested enough in the Franks to describe methods of fighting them.⁸⁰³ Iberians, Gauls, and Britons make appearances as visitors to the East in sixth-century Christian literature as well; Evagrius, for instance, describes British and Spanish visitors to St. Simeon Stylites on his pillar in rural Syria.⁸⁰⁴

All these sources, whether written or archaeological, leave no doubt that there was regular contact between the different shores of the Mediterranean throughout the whole post-Roman period. These contacts cannot have been driven solely by the state and its fiscal system. While diplomatic and religious needs certainly give context to most of what the texts relate, the abundant archaeological remains demonstrate that these were not the only connections active in the period. Certainly, if nothing else, the rapid and repeated spread of plague throughout the whole post-Roman world should make it clear that direct contact was continuous.

⁷⁹⁹ Zosimus, 6.1-10.

⁸⁰⁰ Procopius, 8.20.

⁸⁰¹ Procopius, 6.25, etc.

⁸⁰² Agathias, *De Imperio et Rebus Gestis Iustiniani Imperatoris Libri Quinque*, 1.20, 2.5, etc.

⁸⁰³ Maurice, *Strategikon*, 11.3.

⁸⁰⁴ Evagrius, 1.13.

3.6. A Post-Roman System of Exchange

At the end of the sixth century, the western Mediterranean region and its northern hinterlands lacked many goods with which to trade for the products that came from the south and east. Nearly all the agricultural products produced in Gaul, Spain, and Italy were unneeded in the east or had such marginal surpluses (in contrast to the production of grain in Egypt, Africa, and Sicily) that the cost of export would make bulk exports prohibitive. Western manufactured goods, such as textiles and pottery, had never been of much interest and were generally viewed as inferior to the woven cloth of Egypt, Syria, and the Aegean or the ceramics of Africa and Asia Minor. Instead, the western lands imported the manufactured products of the east Mediterranean and North Africa as well as their agricultural products and goods that had come from further afield through eastern areas.

Even stocks of gold and other precious metals appear to have been being steadily drained from the west as western appetite for all these products continued among, at least, the aristocracies, even if mass consumption had declined. While, with the notable exception of Britain, coins were minted in most regions and appear to have remained in circulation to some degree, the total amount in use appears to have shrunk substantially in much of Gaul, Spain, and Italy.⁸⁰⁵ Copper coins only appear to have been minted in limited western areas after the early fifth century,⁸⁰⁶ suggesting that the economy was becoming steadily demonetized as increasing amounts of what had never been a large supply of bullion was exported.

⁸⁰⁵ P. Grierson and M. Blackburn, *Medieval European Coinage: 1, The Early Middle Ages (5th-10th Centuries)*, (Cambridge, 1986), p. 10.

⁸⁰⁶ D. M. Metcalf, 'Visigothic Monetary History: The Facts, What Facts?' in A. Ferreiro, ed., *The Visigoths: Studies in Culture and Society*, (Leiden, 2002), p. 202.

These declining stocks of precious metals would not have been significant enough in themselves to draw trade. The western parts of Europe, though, did have a few products that would have aided the balance of trade. Tin continued to be exported from Cornwall. Italy (and likely other places) exported timber to Egypt.⁸⁰⁷ Even wood, though, is likely to have been at most a marginal export as there were sources closer to Egypt. For most of antiquity, Egypt had imported timber from Lebanon and Lebanese cedar was harvested and exported in late antiquity.⁸⁰⁸ Later on in the seventh century, the Arabs appear to have sailed into the Aegean to cut timber.⁸⁰⁹

Late antique prosperity was most marked were in Syria, Egypt, and North Africa and these were precisely those that were exporting materials to the west. Eastern Mediterranean amphorae had begun arriving in Gaul and elsewhere in the west in large numbers in the late fourth century. By the fifth century, they comprised roughly 37 to 40% of Marseille's trade while African amphorae made up about 20 to 22%. Similar ratios were also found at Arles (40% eastern to 30% African) and Beaucaire (48% eastern, 42% African). Though the African amphorae were generally larger than eastern ones, by the late sixth century, they comprised over half of imports and eastern ones had fallen to less than a quarter 25%. That trend continued into the seventh century, when more than 90% of the amphorae were African in origin.⁸¹⁰ Evidence from other sites in Spain, Italy, and even Britain bears similar results; eastern Mediterranean imports supplanted many western European products and, eventually, African products prevailed. While this type of evidence

⁸⁰⁷ *RE*, 6.61; 7.37; 8.28; 8.29; 9.176; 13.43.

⁸⁰⁸ N. Liphshitz, G. Biger, G. Bonani and W. Wolfli, 'Comparative Dating Methods: Botanical Identification and C-14 Dating of Carved Panels and Beams from the al-Aqsa Mosque in Jerusalem,' *Journal of Archaeological Science*, 24 (1997), pp. 1045–1050.

⁸⁰⁹ Theophanes, 385.

⁸¹⁰ R. B. Hitchner, 'Meridional Gaul, Trade and the Mediterranean', p. 126.

can be easily marshalled for a steady flow of trade from the Eastern Mediterranean core to large areas of the periphery, what went in return seems less clear in the archaeological record. Yet, those peripheral and semi-peripheral regions that lacked even the mineral resources of Cornwall had something to trade with the Mediterranean world.

In those east Mediterranean regions, economic growth and prosperity were challenged by manpower shortages. These had existed for centuries; the steady supply of imported labour had replenished the workforce throughout antiquity. The plagues that emerged in mid-sixth century with repeated pandemics over the following two centuries appears to have caused enormous levels of mortality in many cities; yet, the plagues appear to have left little or no trace in the archaeological record of the eastern Mediterranean cities. Certainly, the merchants did not return empty-handed and, if they were exporting high value goods, they must have made a profitable exchange. While other products were also traded, sometimes in considerable amounts, the main export of all these regions appears to have been human beings. People sold as cargo and exported from the less developed regions drove trade and economic relations between the developed economies of the Mediterranean and peripheral regions in Europe, Africa, and Central Asia. Slaves as an object of trade would have provided the importers with something that they needed for their local economies and given exporters something to exchange for the items they desired from the east.

The volume of other exports is unlikely to have equalled that of imports into the West. Slaves would have provided the importers with something that they needed for their local economies and given exporters something to exchange for the items they desired from the east. While the slave trade itself had existed throughout

the Roman period, in late antiquity it seems to have shifted its focus somewhat. In an analysis of the scant documents that give data on the prices of slaves in late antiquity, he noticed that, where under the Roman Empire there was a relative levelling of slave-prices around the coasts of the Mediterranean, this had shifted in the following centuries and prices for slaves were much higher and demand much greater in the east than in the west.⁸¹¹ This is consistent with the current argument.⁸¹²

This trade was probably quite large. Walter Scheidel has suggested that the slave trade into the Roman Empire may have involved as many as 100,000,000 people, a number at least an order of magnitude larger than either the Atlantic or Arab slave trades from Africa.⁸¹³ During the post-Roman centuries, this slave trade continued and, rather than declining, it expanded and shifted towards one that brought humans to the eastern end of the Mediterranean from all quarters.

Using some of the scraps of evidence that have survived, the following might be suggested as a tentative model of the slave trade around the year 600 (though all the numbers are probably wildly inaccurate). To begin, perhaps as many as 2,000 slaves were exported northwards along the Nile into Egypt,⁸¹⁴ and that another 1,000 might have come from south of the Sahara to Cyrenaica and the same number via the Garamantes.⁸¹⁵ Imagining another 5,000 slaves coming each year from other parts of North Africa (either from Berber populations captured in raiding or from individuals sold by Berbers), an extremely high and unbelievable 10,000 slaves might have been

⁸¹¹ K. Harper, 'Slave Prices in Late Antiquity (and in the Very Long Term),' *Historia: Zeitschrift Für Alte Geschichte*, 59:2 (2010), p. 237.

⁸¹² Note also the suggestion that the patterns of the slave trade are likely to have been recalibrated in both the fifth and seventh centuries (K. Harper, 'Slave Prices in Late Antiquity,' p. 238).

⁸¹³ W. Scheidel, 'The Roman Slave Supply,' p. 309.

⁸¹⁴ A number based on the presumption that the Baqt of 651 that established a tribute of 400 slaves per year from Nubia to Egypt had a basis in a pre-Islamic trade and that the tribute was only a fraction of the total number of slaves (see 4.3).

⁸¹⁵ Based on the 1,080 slaves given in tribute by the Garamantes annually to the Arabs; note that this is considerably less than the 10,000 suggested for the early empire (A. Wilson, 'Saharan trade in the Roman period,' pp. 432-435).

imported into the Empire from the African continent every year. Similarly, raiding and trade along the eastern landward frontiers of the Empire in Arabia, Mesopotamia, and the Caucasus might have yielded an equal number.⁸¹⁶ As discussed earlier, the Balkans and the Black Sea were both regions of supply for the slave trade and, perhaps, the same number might be allowed for those as well.⁸¹⁷ These overland slave trades together might be imagined as providing a total of 30,000 slaves each year. If the figure of 36,000 imported slaves needed per year that was calculated earlier⁸¹⁸ is considered as even a possibility, this leaves a deficit of 6,000 imported slaves each year to be supplied by Mediterranean trade. If the comments of Dado regarding the number of slaves found in a single ship are taken seriously, these might range between 20 and 100.⁸¹⁹ Assigning a value of 50 slaves per ship sailing out of Marseille or other western ports would mean a necessity of 120 voyages between the ports of the Empire and the slave ports of the western Mediterranean in order to provide the 6,000 additional slaves required based on the previous calculations. That may seem high but it is probably only a tiny fraction of sixth century Mediterranean trade. J. A. S. Evans guessed that, under Justinian, 3,600 annual voyages would have been necessary to move the amount of Egyptian grain consumed in Constantinople each year.⁸²⁰ If these estimates are even vaguely correct, the relatively small scale of this trade when compared to the movement of bulk commodities makes sense.

This post-Roman system of interdependent economies might be seen as essentially a post-colonial one with parallels to more modern times. Models of economic relations between societies in the post-1500 world might be useful models

⁸¹⁶ See N. E. Lenski, 'Captivity and Slavery among the Saracens,' pp. 260-263.

⁸¹⁷ See 2.5 above.

⁸¹⁸ See 2.4 above.

⁸¹⁹ Dado of Rouen, 1.10.

⁸²⁰ J. A. S. Evans, *The Age of Justinian: The Circumstances of Imperial Power*, (London, 1996), pp. 32-33.

for these systems of exchange. While looking separately but simultaneously at the question of Latin America's lagging industrialization and role in the post-war economic world, Hans W. Singer⁸²¹ and Raul Prebisch⁸²² posited what came to be called the Singer–Prebisch thesis: developing economies that export commodities will, over time, import fewer manufactured goods relative to their exports, becoming steadily impoverished. This type of dependency theory argues that resources will be inevitably transferred from the underdeveloped periphery towards the wealthy core, with the more developed areas growing wealthier at the expense of those producing only raw materials. While intended to describe mid-twentieth-century relations,⁸²³ the insight that trade between unevenly developed regions might impact the less-developed region negatively can be usefully applied to the post-Roman economies and helps explain the steady disintegration of the Roman west from the fifth century. In both situations, exchange occurs on fundamentally unequal terms determined by one set of actors alone; as a result, uneven trade does not lead to economic advancement in the post-Roman as well as in more modern times.

In the post-Roman Mediterranean, Egypt and the Levant had by far the most dynamic economies while North Africa and Asia Minor might also be labelled as 'developed.' These were also the same regions that did not experience economic or cultural decline after the collapse of the Western Empire; all of them may have experienced economic expansion in the fifth and sixth centuries; all of them appear to have successfully weathered the economic impact of the plagues. All also appear to have been net importers of labour from abroad. In contrast, the regions that seem

⁸²¹ H. W. Singer, 'U.S. Foreign Investment in Underdeveloped Areas: The Distribution of Gains between Investing and Borrowing Countries', *The American Economic Review*, 40:2, (May 1950), pp. 473-485.

⁸²² R. Prebisch, *The Economic Development of Latin America and its Principal Problems*, (Lake Success, NY, 1950), pp. 3, 8-14.

⁸²³ P. S. Ho, 'Revisiting Prebisch and Singer: Beyond the Declining Terms of Trade Thesis and on to Technological Capability Development', *Cambridge Journal of Economics*, 36:4, (2012), pp. 870-871.

to have found themselves in profound economic and cultural distress in those same years participated in long-distance exchange only as importers of costly goods and as suppliers of raw materials such as tin, timber, and, above all, human beings. This imbalanced system of exchange steadily impoverished the western regions and helped drive the downward spiral in those regions. Not only were potentially productive members of society traded for luxury items but the demand for slaves gave impetus to warfare, encouraged the militarization and atomization of society, and made recovery more difficult. It might not be coincidental that the former Roman region that saw the greatest degree of social collapse in the fifth and sixth centuries – Britain – also appears to be the region where enslavement appears to have been most widespread. Similarly, in the seventh century, the region most thoroughly reshaped by the Islamic conquest – North Africa – is also the region from which the most slaves appear to have been exported. Presumably, the Upper Balkans had a similar experience though even less evidence survives. Unfortunately, the places where Roman society disintegrated most completely and most rapidly are also some of the areas with the least surviving evidence and the direction connection between the slave trade and the collapse of Roman-era societies cannot be proven though the possibility is interesting. Certainly, though, it could help towards explaining the repeated failure of societies across the west to recover from economic troubles.

The whole post-Roman system can also be seen as one where the geographic divisions are paralleled in the models used in world-systems theory as developed by Immanuel Wallerstein to describe the global economic system that emerged out of the remnants of European feudalism during the expansion of Europe in the two

centuries after 1450.⁸²⁴ Like dependency theory, world-systems theory divides the geographic area of analysis into mutually dependent regions of core and periphery. The core regions are focused on skilled production while the periphery (as well as the semi-periphery of intermediate societies) is involved in low-skill production of resources to supply the needs and desires of the developed regions. This can be argued as having existed in the post-Roman world. Where previously systems of exchange had been dominated by state command, the economic system that emerged from its collapse was fundamentally different. By the late sixth century, a post-Roman international economy had emerged that was one of core and periphery: the core formed by the east Mediterranean regions of the Empire (especially Egypt, Syria, and Asia Minor) remained fundamentally prosperous, despite plagues and other crises, while the peripheral regions (including Britain, Gaul, Germany, and the upper Balkans) were primarily relevant as suppliers of raw materials (including labour). Visigothic Spain, North Africa, and Byzantine Italy and Sicily can be seen as semi-peripheral with aspects of each of these categories. The steady and continuing impoverishment of much of the post-Roman west, despite periods of relative political and social stability, can be seen as a direct result of the terms of economic relations between the regions.

Naturally, this sort of model requires that the peripheral regions possess something that the core desires. In the early modern period, for instance, the peripheral regions of the Americas exported raw materials (including silver, forest products, and plantation crops) to Western Europe while West Africa exported labour (slaves) to the Americas. The Africans imported European and American products (including cloth, steel, and rum) in an unequal system of exchange driven

⁸²⁴ I. Wallerstein, *The Modern World-System: Capitalist Agriculture and the Origins of the European World-Economy in the Sixteenth Century*, (New York, 1974).

by the Europeans. Other regional economies similarly fed into the system. If this sort of model is to be applicable to the post-Roman economy, it should be possible to identify the products of the west European periphery (as well as other underdeveloped regions); slaves appear to have been that crucial product.

This chapter has built on the previous two. In those, it was established that slavery was widespread and essential to the societies and the economies of the post-Roman world and that, for the continued function of those slave systems, constant replenishment of the slave supply was necessary. As it was demonstrated that a slave trade into the Roman state would have been necessary and that it may have had a crucial role in the apparent lack of demographic catastrophe in the late sixth century, this chapter had the task of placing that slave trade in the post-Roman trading system and in describing the evidence for it. Positive evidence was put forward regarding the existence of humans as articles of trade in the period and the existence of networks of eastern Mediterranean merchants and traders was found in western Europe. That these seemed to have ethnic markers was explored and the long-standing myth of Jewish predominance in the slave trade was disproven. These merchant networks were then shown to be at the heart of a post-Roman system of exchange that replaced the larger fiscally driven exchange system that had preceded it. This fundamentally unequal relationship was powered by the slave trade; the other components were less necessary for the economies of the core regions of the system than they were for the periphery. The strongest evidence of this hypothesis and its confirmation, however, may come from the ways in which the slave trade affected the collapse of this system during the course of the seventh century. That will be explored in the next chapter.

4. Islam, the slave trade, and the collapse of the post-Roman system

While the previous chapter concentrated on depicting the slave trading system as it existed at the beginning of the seventh century, this chapter will look at the means in which events during that century caused this post-Roman system of exchange to collapse. What will be argued below is that neither embargo nor warfare directly caused a breakdown in Mediterranean trade in the seventh century. Demand for eastern products (intellectual as well as physical) remained high in the Latin West throughout the period; if anything, demand was growing. Yet, the supply of east Mediterranean products and eastern treasure (as well as ideas) coming into western Europe fell rapidly when the major export – Europeans – ceased for a time to be a lucrative trade.

To do so, a first step will be to look at the slave systems of the new people who would conquer large sections of the Roman world. An attempt will be made to look at what sorts of attitudes the first Muslims held towards slavery (at least in so far as these can be determined) and if they deviated in any considerable way from those of the Roman world at the time of the conquest. Through this process, it will be easier to learn whether there was something peculiar about the Islamic conquest and what such attitudes would have implied for the slave trade.

That will be followed up by an examination of how the wars and crises of the seventh century directly affected the slave trade by drastically altering patterns of both demand and supply. The importance of the final war between the Roman and Sasanian Persian empires to the economic systems and to the slave trade will be discussed. The Islamic conquest of Syria and Egypt will be considered both for the role of slavery in it and in the way that this successful takeover of some of the

wealthiest parts of the Mediterranean world would create new and long-lasting demands on the slave supply.

Greater detail will then be given to the transformation of the Byzantine Exarchate of Carthage into the Muslim Wilā'ya of Ifrīqīya. Changes in the governance of this region had in the fifth century substantially altered the system of exchange and it will be argued that, as the demand for slaves in the east Mediterranean may have been one of the driving forces behind Islamic expansion in this region, the movement of enormous numbers of slaves out of Africa had a lasting impact on the entire Mediterranean trading system. Both the movement of slaves eastward from North Africa and their arrival will be discussed.

The final collapse of the post-Roman system of exchange will then be examined and followed with a discussion of the patterns of economic activity that existed at the beginning of the eighth century and the role of slave trading in this system. Together, these topics will both illuminate the importance of the slave trade in linking the post-Roman world before the emergence of Islam and in dividing it in the period that followed.

4.1. Before they were rich: slavery at the origin of Islam:

While it may be a commonplace that the appearance of Islam brought a new conception of slavery and an increase in its importance, a look at the world of the first Muslims reveals no vast difference of attitude with that of their contemporaries in the post-Roman world. Though many Islamic sources were only compiled more than a century after the religion first appeared and are frequently more reflective of

the needs of that time than of the rather different past, enough genuinely early material survives both in the Islamic corpus and in roughly contemporary Arabic sources to allow an insight into what slavery would have looked like among them.

Probably, the most obvious source is the *Qur'ān*, a text that, regardless of what one believes of its ultimate origin, had achieved its modern form well before the end of the seventh century.⁸²⁵ Besides the *Qur'ān* itself, the collections of *ḥadīth*, *sīrat* narrating the lives of Muḥammad and his companions, and the assorted histories of the conquests all provide detailed accounts of many of the events of the seventh century. Unfortunately, most of these only received their surviving written form in the 'Abbasid period or later, by which time the social and political organisation of the Muslim world had already vastly changed from that of its early years. Debates over the reliability of them have been almost continuous within the Muslim community since they were first placed in writing and have been echoed among non-Muslim academics since.⁸²⁶ While there is no way that all the often-contradictory material can be accepted as genuine, significant portions should be seen as correctly reflecting the social conditions and relationships among the first Muslims.⁸²⁷ However, it is important to remember that these are texts that may have been manipulated by later hands for their own purposes. Finally, there is a small but

⁸²⁵ Some scholarship (e.g., P. Crone and M. Cook, *Hagarism: The Making Of The Islamic World*, (Cambridge, 1977), p. 3ff.) places the writing of the *Qur'ān* significantly later. However, examples of the text in, essentially, a modern format can be seen in the non-'Uthmānic *Qur'ān* fragments found in Sana'a and radiocarbon dated to before 671. These contain only minor deviations from the received text, suggesting that the *Qur'ān* as currently known was composed close to the time tradition accords it (B. Sadeghi and M. Goudarzi, 'Ṣan'ā' 1 and the Origins of the *Qur'ān*', *Der Islam*, 87:1-2, (2012), pp. 1-283), during the reign of Uthman (653-656). F. M. Donner argues persuasively that the text had been established by the time of Muḥammad's death in 632 while internal evidence also makes it extremely unlikely to have been written prior to the traditional dating of the first revelations in 610 (*Narratives of Islamic Origins: The Beginnings of Islamic Historical Writing*, (Princeton, 1998), pp. 35-62).

⁸²⁶ F. M. Donner, *Muḥammad and the Believers: At the Origins of Islam*, (Cambridge, Mass., 2010), p. 51.

⁸²⁷ M. Robinson, *Prosopographical Approaches to the Nasab Tradition: a Study of Marriage and Concubinage in the Tribe of Muḥammad, 500-750 CE*, (Unpublished PhD. Dissertation, University of Edinburgh, 2013), pp. 198-200.

significant literature not directly related to the beginnings of Islam (and hence far less debated) in the *Mu‘allaqāt* and the *Mufaḍḍaliyāt*, anthologies of pre-Islamic Arabic poetry collected in the eighth century and giving additional insights into the lived reality of the period. From all of these sources, a consistent impression of the role of slavery in Mecca and Medina at the beginning of the seventh century emerges that matches that found in the *Qur‘ān* and in the non-Arabic sources.

These materials show a great deal about slavery at the beginning of Islam though they do not present a religion of slave raiders and slave owners unlike everything around them but reflect a world not unlike that of their late antique neighbours. In western Arabia at the beginning of the seventh century, slavery was without doubt widely known and was not at all uncommon. Slaves – and former slaves – are simply too common in the narratives to presume otherwise. But these were far from the vast armies of slaves that the orientalist imagination might conjure. Instead, even the very richest members of the Meccan elite is likely to have owned no more than a few dozen slaves; most slave-owners held only a single slave or two. This should not be seen as praise but is merely testimony to the general poverty of the region; even the wealthiest Meccans were, by the standards of their contemporaries in the Roman and Persian empires, quite poor. As elsewhere, these slaves generally either worked alongside their owners, in workshops or in agriculture, or, most commonly, as domestic servants.

As among their contemporaries, the slave supply was regularly replenished through warfare and, in the period immediately before Islam, slave catching had been one of the primary goals of warfare in Arabia. ‘Amr ibn Kulthūm (d. 584), one of the leading poets of the pre-Islamic period commented regarding his warring party

that, unlike others who brought back only treasure and captives, his band was more glorious for having enslaved kings.⁸²⁸

While capture in raiding between Arab groups within the peninsula was one of the prime sources of slaves, the Arabs living further north in the steppes of Syria and 'Irāq were even more deeply engaged in slave raiding against the sedentary peoples and took opportunity of warfare between the Romans and Persians to do so regularly. Noel Lenski has reviewed the evidence of late antique slave-raiding among these groups.⁸²⁹ As allies of the Romans, the Banū Ghassān carried off large numbers of Persian civilians into slavery and even captured and exported 20,000 Samaritans to India and Persia when they aided in the suppression of the revolt of 529-531.⁸³⁰ The Banū Lakhm, on the other hand, fought as Persian allies and sometimes took similarly large numbers of captives from the Roman population.⁸³¹ Some of these captives were sold further southward as the legends surrounding the first Christians in Najrān attest⁸³² as well as the many individual slaves named in the Islamic tradition who are said to have been imported from Ethiopia (like Bilāl ibn Rabāh al-Habashī, the first muezzin⁸³³), Persia (like Salmān al-Farisī, later credited as one of the key figures in Sufism⁸³⁴), and Syria (like Suhayb ibn Sinān, called al-Rūmi, who had spent twenty years as a slave of Greek-speakers⁸³⁵).

Slave raiding was a normal part of life among all the Arabs and the new Muslim community was no different.⁸³⁶ In the lifetime of Muḥammad, they followed the same sorts of practices when they were victorious in war. After the

⁸²⁸ Amr ibn Kulthūm ibn Malik al-Taghlibi, *al Mu'allaqat*, 66.

⁸²⁹ N. E. Lenski, 'Captivity and Slavery among the Saracens in Late Antiquity,' pp. 243-254.

⁸³⁰ N. E. Lenski, 'Captivity and Slavery among the Saracens in Late Antiquity,' p. 249.

⁸³¹ N. E. Lenski, 'Captivity and Slavery among the Saracens in Late Antiquity,' p. 248.

⁸³² Ibn Ishāq, 20-22.

⁸³³ Ibn Ishāq, 205.

⁸³⁴ Ibn Ishāq, 140.

⁸³⁵ Aḥmad ibn 'Alī ibn Muḥammad Shihāb al-Dīn al-Kinānī Ibn Hajar al-'Asqalānī, *Tahdhib al-Tahdhib*, 3.114-115.

⁸³⁶ N. E. Lenski, 'Captivity and Slavery among the Saracens in Late Antiquity,' pp. 265-266.

Battle of the Trench, the Muslims' conflict with the Banū Qarayza finally came to an end when the adult males were slain and the surviving members of the tribe were taken as slaves and divided among the victors.⁸³⁷ While other defeated communities within Arabia both during the lifetime of Muḥammad and during the Ridda' wars after his death were similarly made to hand over members as slaves, it was the expansion beyond Arabia that led to the great increase in slave numbers.

Islam largely carried the attitudes of pre-Islamic Arabia and the broader late antique world. Though the *Qur'ān* remained an essential part of discourse, the image of slavery found in it is not that of the stereotyped image of Islamicate society. Examined as a whole, the *Qur'ān* contains twenty-eight separate verses that discuss slavery,⁸³⁸ these yield seven separate terms⁸³⁹ though the vocabulary found in it is quite limited. The Arabic term 'abd (along with its plurals, 'ibād and 'ābīd) is by far the most common Arabic word for slave in other classical texts (as in modern standard Arabic); in the *Qur'ān*, however, it occurs only four times in direct reference to humans held as chattel. 'Abd, though, appears well over 100 times in various religious metaphors (i.e., 'Abd Allāh, the slave of God), suggesting that the term was as widely used then as in later Arabic. When it is used to refer to male slaves, 'abd is found either contrasted to a free person (*al-ḥurr*):

بِالْأَنْثَى وَالْأَنْثَى بِالْعَبْدِ وَالْعَبْدُ بِالْحُرِّ الْحُرُّ الْقَتْلَى فِي الْقِصَاصِ مُ عَلَيْكَ كُتِبَ⁸⁴⁰

It may also be paired with female slaves ('imā)⁸⁴¹ or alongside a term meaning

'possessed' ('*abdan mamlūkan*, of a slave that is owned).⁸⁴²

⁸³⁷ al-Balādhurī, 21; Ibn Ishāq, 461-464.

⁸³⁸ *Qur'ān* 2:177; 2:178; 2:221; 4:24; 4:25; 4:36; 4:92; 5:89; 9:60; 16:71; 16:75; 16:76; 23:5; 23:6; 24:30; 24:31; 24:32; 24:33; 24:58; 30:28; 33:4; 33:5; 33:37; 33:50; 39:29; 58:3; 70:29; 70:30; 90:13.

⁸³⁹ 'abd (4 times), ad'iya (3 times), ama (2 times), fatayat (2 times), mā malakat aymānukum (15 times), rajul (2 times), raqaba/al-riqab (2 times).

⁸⁴⁰ *Qur'ān* 2:178 ("Prescribed for you is legal retribution for the murdered, the free for the free and the slave for the slave and the woman for the woman").

Instead, the most common expression for slaves in the *Qur'ān* is the phrase *mā malakat aymanukum*.⁸⁴³ In an interesting parallel to Isidore's understanding of the Latin *mancipium*, it means literally 'what the right hand possesses' and is used to refer specifically to slaves who had begun as war captives and to those captured women who were kept as concubines:

بِأَمْوَالِكُمْ تَبْتَغُوا أَنْ ذَلِكُمْ وَرَاءَ مَا لَكُمْ وَأُجَلَ عَلَيْكُمْ اللَّهُ كِتَابَ أَيْمَانِكُمْ مَلَكَتْ مَا إِلَّا النِّسَاءَ مِنَ الْمُحْصَنَاتِ
تَرْضَائِيكُمْ فِيمَا عَلَيْكُمْ جُنَاحَ وَلَا فَرِيضَةَ أُجُورَهُنَّ فَأَتَوْهُنَّ مِنْهُنَّ بِهِ اسْتَمْتَعْتُمْ فَمَا مُسَافِحِينَ غَيْرَ حَصِينِينَ
نَاتِ الْمُؤْمِنَاتِ فَمَنْ مَلَكَتْ وَمَنْ لَمْ يَسْتَطِعْ مِنْكُمْ طَوْلًا أَنْ يَنْكِحَ الْمُحْصَنَاتِ اللَّهُ إِنَّ الْفَرِيضَةَ بَعْدَ مِنْ بِهِ
حَكِيمًا عَلِيمًا كَانَ لِمُؤْمِنَاتٍ⁸⁴⁴ أَيْمَانِكُمْ مَنْ فَنِّيَاتِكُمْ ا

In this *Sūrat al-Nisā*, the term *fatayāt*, usually translated as 'slave-girls', means literally 'female youths' and can be compared to the Latin *ancilla*. It also occurs in the *Sūrat al-Nūr*. There, after urging that those women whom the right hand possesses who seek chastity and belief should be allowed to do so, *fatayāt* appears:

الدُّنْيَا الْحَيَاةِ عَرَضٌ لَتَبْتَغُوا تَحْصِنًا نَأْرَدُ إِنْ الْبِعَاءِ عَلَى فَنِّيَاتِكُمْ تُكْرَهُوا وَلَا⁸⁴⁵

This ban on the prostituting of one's slaves and captives appears to have either derived from contemporary Roman law or to have been modelled on it. Prostitution

⁸⁴¹ *Qur'ān* 24:32.

⁸⁴² *Qur'ān* 16:75.

⁸⁴³ *Qur'ān* 4:24, 4:25, 4:36, 16:71, 24:31, 24:33, 24:58, 30:28.

⁸⁴⁴ *Qur'ān* 4:24-5 ("And (prohibited are) the ones who are married from the women except what the right hand possesses. This is the decree of God. And permitted to you what is beyond that; that which you seek with your wealth desiring chastity and not lustfulness. So that you benefit of it from them, you will give to them their bridal due as an obligation and there is no sin upon you regarding what you mutually agree of it beyond the obligation. Indeed, God is all knowing, all wise. And whomever among you is unable to afford to marry free chaste believing women, then from what the right hand possesses from your slave-girls among the believers").

⁸⁴⁵ *Qur'ān* 24:33 ("And do not force your slave-girls into prostitution; if they desire chastity, though you may seek temporary gain in the worldly life").

of slaves had presumably been common in Arabia as it had earlier been in the Empire where Justinian's law of 535⁸⁴⁶ overthrew the previous legal rule whereby a slave-owner might prostitute his slaves if it were not expressly forbidden in her sale contract.⁸⁴⁷ With this, as in many other aspects of Islamic legislation and teaching, Muḥammad may be seen as bringing his followers into conformity with their Christian contemporaries.

Other terms that are usually taken as referring to slaves include *rajul* ('man'),⁸⁴⁸ *ad'iya* ('adopted sons'),⁸⁴⁹ and *raqaba* (pl. *al-riqāb*), the last meaning 'by the nape of the neck' and a reference to captives.⁸⁵⁰ As in the West, the distinction between a slave and a captive ('*asir*, pl. '*asra*') is sometimes unclear. Captives are mentioned directly four times as '*asra*' in the *Qur'ān*⁸⁵¹ and that class would grow in significance over the course of the following century.

If Islam in its beginnings was distinguished in this late antique world when it came to slavery, the only distinction was in terms of the relative poverty of the environment of the early Muslims. The narrative discussed previously that relates the first known interaction of the Muslims with Mābūr, a eunuch given Muḥammad by the Egyptian governor al-Muqawqis, illustrates this.⁸⁵² A century later, the story would be read as a sectarian attack on 'Alī ibn Abī Ṭalib, but, in its original context, it is clear that eunuchs were virtually unknown among the Arabs as they were far too poor in those days.

The *Qur'ān* followed Christian precedent on issues such as the ban on the prostitution of slaves though it also expanded on concepts of emancipation. Rather

⁸⁴⁶ *Novellae Constitutiones*, 14.

⁸⁴⁷ The doctrine of *ne serua prostituatur* found in *Digesta*, 37.14.7 (Modestinus).

⁸⁴⁸ *Qur'ān* 16:76; 39:29.

⁸⁴⁹ *Qur'ān* 33:4; 33:5; 33:37.

⁸⁵⁰ *Qur'ān* 2:177; 9:60.

⁸⁵¹ *Qur'ān* 2:185; 18:73; 94:5; 94:6.

⁸⁵² al-Ṭabarī, 1781-1782. See 1.6 above.

than giving in to carnal urges, believers were urged to marry any slave women who accepted the new religion and to emancipate them (though abstinence is considered a better option).⁸⁵³ The slave's natural desire for manumission was recognised.⁸⁵⁴ The verse:

آتَاكُمْ الَّذِي اللَّهُ مَالٍ مِّنْ وَأَتَوْهُمْ خَيْرًا فِيهِمْ عَلِمْتُمْ إِنْ فَكَاتِبُوهُمْ أَيْمَانُكُمْ كِتْمًا مِّمَّا الْكِتَابَ يَبْتَغُونَ الَّذِينَ
آتَاكُمْ الَّذِي اللَّهُ مَالٍ مِّنْ وَأَتَوْهُمْ⁸⁵⁵

is generally seen as the origin of the *kitāba*, the contract through which a slave could pay for his own manumission through instalments. As elsewhere, slaves appear as members of the household alongside children and wives.⁸⁵⁶ Manumission is considered a religious good deed, whether as a way for the wealthy to help the poor⁸⁵⁷ or to expiate sins such as oath breaking.⁸⁵⁸ The explicit directives on manumission were far more straightforward than known previously though the *Qur'ān* closely followed the preferred practice of the Christian Roman world in regard to slavery. Like them, it depicts the human population as falling into categories of free and slave and in seeing neither as inherently superior.⁸⁵⁹ Their humanity is reinforced, as in Christian Roman teaching, through reference to their beliefs.⁸⁶⁰ Certainly, this is a not surprising policy for a movement in which slaves and freedmen had been among the first converts. In addition to Bilāl, Salmān the Persian, and Suhayb al-Rūmī, Zayd ibn Hāritha, one of Muḥammad's own slaves,

⁸⁵³ *Qur'ān* 24:33, 4:25; 24:32.

⁸⁵⁴ *Qur'ān* 2:177; 9:60.

⁸⁵⁵ *Qur'ān* 24:33 (“And those who seek a document from those whom your right hand possesses, then give them the document if you know of any good in them and give them from the wealth of God that he has given you”).

⁸⁵⁶ *Qur'ān* 23:6; 24:31; 24:58; 33:50; 70:30.

⁸⁵⁷ *Qur'ān* 90:13.

⁸⁵⁸ *Qur'ān* 5:89; 58:3.

⁸⁵⁹ *Qur'ān* 16:71.

⁸⁶⁰ *Qur'ān* 2:221; 4:25; 4:92.

was the second male convert⁸⁶¹ while Sumayya bint Khayyāt, the first Islamic martyr, was owned by ‘Amr ibn Hishām Abū Jahl (her killer).⁸⁶²

Yet another term, *mawlā* (pl. *mawālī*), usually translated as client though the term can refer to either side in the client/patron relationship, would be of great importance in the following years.⁸⁶³ In theory, a *mawlā* might be under the protection or even equally a member of either an individual or a kinship group (such as a clan or a tribe). Freed slaves were normally viewed as being clients of those who had manumitted them and were likely one of the largest components of the class (though it appears that, in the post-conquest societies, some *mawālī* might have simply affiliated themselves to either groups or individuals of the new elite). The concept of clientage existed before Islam and can be paralleled in the Roman Empire. It was extended in the wake of the expansion of Arab rule, coming only to refer to the non-Arabs brought into the Islamic community, and became one of the key methods through which the conquered population was assimilated into Arab Islamic society.⁸⁶⁴ By the eighth century, many of these originally non-Arab Muslims had begun to feel thwarted despite their often near-complete Arabisation and this discontent would help fuel the ‘Abbasid Revolution. In Umayyad Spain (as elsewhere), the new rulers would be dependent on the *mawālī* for power in the early years of Islamic rule.⁸⁶⁵

While the importance of the teachings of the *Qur’ān* would grow steadily in the years ahead, the text itself can be read as also encapsulating a sense of how

⁸⁶¹ Ibn Ishāq, 160.

⁸⁶² Muḥammad Ibn Sa’d ibn Manī’ al-Baghdadī, *Kitāb al-Tabaqāt al-kabīr*, 193.

⁸⁶³ As patron, it appears in the *Qur’ān* as an epithet of God (2:286; 3:150; 6:62; 8:40; 9:51; 10:30; 19:5; 22:78; 47:11; 66:2; 66:4) as well as to refer to human patrons (16:76; 22:13; 47:11; 57:15). It only appears in the *Qur’ān* as a reference to clients twice (33:5; 44:41).

⁸⁶⁴ A. Dūrī, *The Historical Formation of the Arab Nation: A Study in Identity and Consciousness*, (Beckenham, 1987), pp. 47-51.

⁸⁶⁵ S. Kentaro, ‘Slave Elites and the Saqaliba in al-Andalus in the Umayyad Period’, p. 30.

slavery was understood in Arabia at the beginning of the seventh century. Though the role of slavery in society had changed greatly within a generation of Muḥammad's death, at the beginning of Islam, it is similar to that found in other peripheral and impoverished regions on the fringes of the post-Roman world. Where even the wealthiest members of the Meccan elite had owned far fewer than 100 slaves before the conquests, within a short time individuals would be found with many times that. In a later commentary, al-Nawawī reports that 'Abd al-Rahmān bin 'Awf, one of the first Muslims, alone manumitted over 30,000 of his own slaves at his death (in 652). He was far from the only one who had seen his estate grow so exponentially; the same source describes others among the *ṣaḥābah* freeing as many as 8,000 slaves in a single day.⁸⁶⁶ Certainly, by the Umayyad period at the latest, many of the Muslim elite held vast numbers of slaves and slaves were used in both artisanal and agricultural production on large estates in both the Peninsula and the conquered areas. A relatively large class of former slaves (*mawālī*, etc.) had, by the end of the century, also become politically and socially significant. The massive changes unleashed by the Islamic conquests would affect the conquerors as well as the conquered. As they were transformed from a relatively poor people living on the margins of the Roman world to rulers of an empire larger than any previously known, the Arab elite would go from being owners and occasional traffickers of a few slaves to slave-traders and slave-owners on an almost unprecedented scale.

⁸⁶⁶ Abu Zakaria Mohiuddin Yahya Ibn Sharaf al-Nawawī, *Riyāḍ al-Sāliḥīn*, 236:1358; as with many of the sources on early Islam, al-Nawawī's final text is quite late (he had personal conflicts with Baibars) but contains large excerpts from Umayyad and 'Abbasid era works that are now lost.

4.2. 'World crisis' and the slave supply

During the first decades of the seventh century, a period of relative stability and prosperity in the eastern Mediterranean came to a close. During the fifth century, those areas had largely been spared the chaos that had engulfed the western regions during and after the barbarian invasions while, in the following century, the Eastern Empire had advanced militarily across the length of the sea. Though plagues had devastated civilian populations, warfare with the Persians had largely been limited to northern Syria and Armenia. Saracen raids were small and limited to the steppes along the fringes of the desert while larger barbarian incursions affected the lands immediately south of the Danube. In the seventh century, however, civil conflict within the Roman state turned into the greatest of the wars between the Roman and Sasanian Persian empires. As had occurred in previous conflicts, large numbers of civilians – sometimes the entire population of cities – were carried off into slavery. At the same time, the Persian capture of Syria and Egypt, as well as the devastation of large sections of Asia Minor, may have brought a precipitous decline of trade in the Mediterranean while the simultaneous advance of the Avars in the Balkans added to the crisis.⁸⁶⁷ The resurgence of the Empire that followed brought the reconquest of the lost provinces and the collapse of the Persians. By the early 630's, the economies of the eastern Mediterranean were in shambles after decades of warfare while large numbers of captives had been created by the wars. Both factors are likely to have led to a decline in the slave trade.

⁸⁶⁷ J.-P. Devroey, 'Juifs et Syriens : A propos de la géographie économique de la Gaule au haut moyen âge', pp. 51-72, argues that the disappearance of Syrians from the Gallic sources after 610 is due to the Persian conquest of the Levant.

The rapid conquest of Egypt and the Levant by the Persians involved large-scale transportation of Roman civilians into the Persian Empire. Theophanes repeats reports that stated that many tens of thousands were captured in 611 in Cappadocia,⁸⁶⁸ that multitudes were taken from Damascus,⁸⁶⁹ and that many prisoners were removed from Egypt.⁸⁷⁰ Both Theophanes and Sebeos provide longer accounts on the fall of Jerusalem, with the only major discrepancy between them being the numbers of those captured and of the dead. Neither of their numbers (Theophanes has 90,000 dead⁸⁷¹ while Sebeos has 35,000 transported and 57,000 slain⁸⁷²) is particularly credible; archaeological evidence suggests that the population of Jerusalem and its satellites at the time was no more than 70,000 and may have been considerably less than that.⁸⁷³

Even if exaggerated or possibly invented, the accounts of Jews purchasing Christian captives suggests that selling off prisoners as slaves was normal practice among the victorious Persians. Presumably, many soldiers from the defeated Byzantine armies were sold into slavery in Mesopotamia or further east while others might have been removed into the east in the same type of forced population movement known from the previous century. As with those earlier movements, some of those transferred seem to have been enslaved, some not, and the evidence is ambiguous.

The dramatic reversal of fortunes that followed saw Persian troops taken as captives by Heraclius's armies,⁸⁷⁴ returning with as many as 55,000 prisoners from

⁸⁶⁸ Theophanes, 299.

⁸⁶⁹ Theophanes, 300.

⁸⁷⁰ Theophanes, 301.

⁸⁷¹ Theophanes, 301.

⁸⁷² Sebeos, 116.

⁸⁷³ G. Avni, *The Byzantine-Islamic Transition in Palestine: An Archaeological Approach*, (Oxford, 2014) p. 138.

⁸⁷⁴ Theophanes, 305.

their first incursion into Persian territory via the Caucasus.⁸⁷⁵ Presumably, other captives were also taken during the final campaign and sold as slaves within Heraclius's empire. However, even if all the Roman citizens carried into captivity returned home as free persons and even if vast numbers of Persians were taken west as slaves, it had been several decades since the east Mediterranean had been at peace. Almost all the empire's continental territory (with the major exception of North Africa) had been fought over in the quarter century before 630. Many cities had been sacked and others were greatly diminished;⁸⁷⁶ some, especially in Anatolia, would never be rebuilt.⁸⁷⁷ Presumably, their hinterlands were similarly affected though the archaeology is far from clear. Had prolonged peace followed, the Mediterranean slave trade may have expanded in the following years as Egypt, Syria, and Asia Minor struggled to rebuild. Some evidence does point towards export of slaves southward from Gaul⁸⁷⁸ and the continuation of the Mediterranean trading system.⁸⁷⁹

Whether that would have been the beginning of economic revival is unknowable as the immediate aftermath of the Persian War was not peace but, instead, the beginning of a new series of wars that would have an even more profound impact on the trading systems of the Mediterranean. The initial advances of the Muslims after their first appearance on the southern frontiers of Syria mirrored those of the Persians a generation earlier. Within a decade, Egypt, Palestine, Syria, and Mesopotamia had been lost. While the numbers found in the sources are, of course, problematic, there is no real suggestion that anything approaching a massive

⁸⁷⁵ Theophanes, 308.

⁸⁷⁶ H. Kennedy, 'From Polis to Madina: Urban Change in Late Antique and Early Islamic Syria', *Past and Present*, 106, (Feb. 1985), p. 18.

⁸⁷⁷ C. Foss, 'The Persians in Asia Minor and the End of Antiquity', pp. 743-746.

⁸⁷⁸ Dado of Rouen, 1.10; *Vita Boniti*, 3; see above.

⁸⁷⁹ *DI*, 5.20; see above.

number of people were taken into slavery in these campaigns in the Near East. Most cities surrendered peacefully to the invaders without the taking of captives. As in previous conflicts, defeated soldiers, such as those Khālīd ibn al-Walīd captured at Hūwwarīn or from the Banū Ghassān at Marj Rāhiṭ (near Damascus),⁸⁸⁰ were enslaved. These included Arab supporters of the Persians; al-Ṭabarī quotes Ibn Buḡaylah mourning that the Arabs of al-Hīra had been divided like the shares of a slaughtered beast.⁸⁸¹

While it was not usual, some entire communities were enslaved during the initial campaigns against the Roman and Persian empires. 4,000 Byzantine soldiers and civilians were in Caesarea when it surrendered after a lengthy siege, both al-Ṭabarī and al-Balādhurī claim, and were taken to the Ḥijāz as slaves.⁸⁸² In Egypt, a few cities (like Kilūnās) resisted; both Christian and Muslim sources state that, after the adult men were slaughtered, the women and children were taken to Arabia as captives and divided among the conquerors.⁸⁸³ al-Ṭabarī, a native of Irān writing in ‘Abbasid ‘Irāq, provides many more details of the conquest of those regions than he does of Syria, Palestine, and Egypt. In the Sawād region of southern ‘Irāq, he appears to show the enslavement of the population;⁸⁸⁴ it would seem, however, that, under the Sassanids, many of them were already un-free, perhaps comparable to the *coloni* of the Roman Empire.⁸⁸⁵

With these exceptions, civilians were seldom taken into slavery during the initial Muslim conquests of Egypt and the Levant. In contrast, the evidence is almost

⁸⁸⁰ al-Balādhurī, 112.

⁸⁸¹ al-Ṭabarī, 11.2042.

⁸⁸² al-Ṭabarī, 2398; al-Balādhurī, 142.

⁸⁸³ John of Nikiū, 119.12. al-Ṭabarī, 2581-2583, 2589-2590.

⁸⁸⁴ al-Ṭabarī, 11.2025, 2029, 2031, 2032, 2036, 2042, 2045, 2066, 2072, 2073, 2077, 2122, 2170, 2198, 2205, 2207, 2440, 2464, 2465.

⁸⁸⁵ J. Banaji, ‘Aristocracies, Peasantries and the Framing of the Early Middle Ages,’ *Journal of Agrarian Change*, 9:1 (January 2009), pp. 80-82.

overwhelming regarding raids made from those areas. If these regions had been experiencing labour shortages before the Muslim conquest, it may be possible that many of these raids into the territory still under control of the Empire, whether in Anatolia, Cyprus, or Africa, were meant to supply those needs. Certainly, the literary sources suggest a substantive difference in the numbers of captives taken during the first decade of Islamic expansion and in those taken in the following years. This should not, however, be understood as meaning that it did not happen more frequently during the conquests of Egypt and the Levant than detailed in the sources. They are, of course, far from complete and, even when they appear exhaustive, slave taking may not have been of interest to their authors. Similarly, the conquests may have resulted in other changes that forced people into slavery; John of Nikiû's statement that children were sold in Alexandria in order to pay the taxes needed for the tribute to the Muslims could be indicative of difficulties that emerged.⁸⁸⁶

The highly developed economies of these newly conquered regions needed a steady supply of slaves and, once the initial conquest phase had ended, both Egypt and the Levant began periods of prolonged prosperity and economic expansion.⁸⁸⁷ Within a decade, large-scale raids were undertaken from Syria into Anatolia and Cyprus and from Egypt into North Africa and Nubia. These campaigns do not appear to have been motivated by an urge to conquer new territories and there were few attempts to garrison these areas or even establish permanent tributary relationships in many regions; in North Africa, twenty four years passed between the first invasion and the establishment of a permanent camp at Qayrawān. Instead, slave-raiding itself may have been their chief purpose, whether to supply the needs of

⁸⁸⁶ John of Nikiû, 123.7.

⁸⁸⁷ A. Walmsley, 'Coinage and the Economy of Syria-Palestine in the Seventh and Eighth Centuries CE', in J. Haldon, ed., *Money, Power and Politics in Early Islamic Syria: A Review of Current Debates*, (Farnham, 2010), pp. 23-24.

the conquered regions or to make use of the energies and activities of nomads accustomed to slave-raiding along frontiers that had vanished.⁸⁸⁸

Throughout the later seventh and early eighth century, annual campaigns were waged from northern Syria against the Byzantine Empire; Theophanes specifies that 5,000 were enslaved in Isauria in 649⁸⁸⁹ and that a great many were taken there in 661.⁸⁹⁰ Presumably, other campaigns brought similar numbers. In central Anatolia, urban life all but collapsed and large tracts of cultivated land were abandoned.⁸⁹¹ Similar activities appear to have been occurring on the more impoverished Byzantine side of the frontier; war captives from the same regions (as well as Slavs from the Balkans) served as forced labour in Anatolia. As noted earlier, Theophanes mentions large numbers of Slavic prisoners from Constans II's Balkan campaign,⁸⁹² a movement attested to by the finding of large numbers of seals,⁸⁹³ while, seven years later, 5,000 Slavs fled to Syria and joined the Arabs.⁸⁹⁴

Sometimes, the numbers of people taken into captivity that appear in the sources are astonishingly high; an inscription found at Soloi in Cyprus testifies to the capture and removal of 120,000 people during Mu'āwiyah's 649 raid.⁸⁹⁵ Though the number is impossibly high, it matches al-Balādhurī's description of the same campaign.⁸⁹⁶ Raiding and counter-raiding, while doubtless contributing to the slave supply of both empires, cannot have fully supplied their needs. Just as the Byzantines captured Slavs in the Balkans, similar campaigns were also waged on the

⁸⁸⁸ N. E. Lenski, 'Captivity and Slavery among the Saracens in Late Antiquity,' pp. 265-266.

⁸⁸⁹ Theophanes, 344.

⁸⁹⁰ Theophanes, 348.

⁸⁹¹ A. England, W. J. Eastwood, C. N. Roberts, R. Turner, and J. F. Haldon, 'Historical Landscape Change in Cappadocia (Central Turkey): A Palaeoecological Investigation of Annually Laminated Sediments from Nar Lake', *The Holocene*, 18:8 (December 2008), p. 1238.

⁸⁹² Theophanes, 347.

⁸⁹³ N. Oikonomidès, 'Silk Trade and Production in Byzantium', pp. 51ff.

⁸⁹⁴ Theophanes, 348.

⁸⁹⁵ J. Des Gagniers and T. T. Hinh, *Soloi: Dix Campagnes de Fouilles (1964-1974)*, 1, (Laval, QB, 1985), pp. 115-126.

⁸⁹⁶ al-Balādhurī, 153

eastern frontiers of the Caliphate and captives from those regions were sent back to the core territories. An annual tribute of 2,000 slaves was levied from Khurāsān even after its conquest,⁸⁹⁷ while the Khazars and Armenians each provided more than 1,000 slaves each year.⁸⁹⁸ In the later Umayyad period, Marwān took 20,000 families as prisoners from the Khazars and received a tribute of 1,000 youths per year from Sarir (in modern Daghestan) and of 100 each from Tuman and Sindan (in modern Azerbaijan).⁸⁹⁹

By the later seventh century, Syrian, Egyptian, and Mesopotamian economies had begun to expand. Though there were brief civil wars fought in these regions, the type of destructive warfare of the previous half century receded to the new frontiers. Trade increased across the old frontiers between Roman and Persian empires. Meanwhile, new sources of raw materials and new lands entered production while cultivation intensified, particularly in southern Mesopotamia. By the end of the seventh century at the latest, large estates worked by gangs of slave labour had emerged in southern ‘Irāq and the adjacent regions of al-Ahwāz. They were engaged mainly in removing salts and nitrates from the soil rather than in the recently introduced⁹⁰⁰ production of sugarcane.⁹⁰¹ Many slaves were imported from eastern Africa and were called ‘Zanj’ after their area of origin. By the end of the seventh century, the first major slave revolt had occurred. Under the leadership of an East African, Ribāh, called Shīr-i Zanj, it was nowhere near as long or as bloody as the more famous Zanj revolt of the late ninth century.⁹⁰²

⁸⁹⁷ al-Hamdani, 297.

⁸⁹⁸ al-Balādhurī, 245.

⁸⁹⁹ al-Balādhurī, 208.

⁹⁰⁰ A. Watson, *Agricultural Innovation in the Early Islamic World*, pp. 26-30, and p. 160, n.12.

⁹⁰¹ T. Sato, *Sugar in the Social Life of Medieval Islam*, (Leiden, 2015), pp. 38-39.

⁹⁰² C. Pellat, *Le Milieu Basrien et la Formation de Ġahiz*, p. 41ff.

Though it became more visible in the late seventh century, the East African slave trade to the Persian Gulf had probably been in existence for at least several centuries. At the beginning of the era, the author of the *Periplus Maris Erythraei* referred to a town called Opone that exported better slaves who were being brought to Egypt in increasing numbers.⁹⁰³ Opone was probably on the coast of modern Somalia and is described as north of Azania, probably the same name as the Arabic Zanj. Cosmas Indicopleutes's *Topographia Christiana*, written during the reign of Justinian I, similarly refers to traffic in slaves from the farthest reaches of Ethiopia via the Red Sea to Egypt.⁹⁰⁴ There is even some extremely circumstantial evidence to the presence of East African slaves in China as early as 463⁹⁰⁵ as well as fairly clear evidence for their arrival by sea by the late Umayyad period.

While trade contributed to the Umayyad slave supply and linked peripheral regions like eastern Africa to the core economies of the Islamic state, it does not, however, seem to have met all the needs of those economies nor does it seem to have followed the long-established routes across the Mediterranean. Instead, war and slavery would become inextricably entwined as the interests of the Caliphate turned towards northern Africa and, in the process, ruptured the mercantile links across the Mediterranean.

⁹⁰³ *Periplus Maris Erythraei*, 13.

⁹⁰⁴ Cosmas Indicopleustes, *Topographia Christiana*, 2.64.

⁹⁰⁵ C. Hsing-lang, 'The Importation of Negro Slaves to China under the Tang Dynasty (A. D. 618-901)', *Catholic University of Peking Bulletin*, 7, (December 1930), p. 46.

4.3. Slavery and the conquest of Africa

The Muslim conquest of North Africa appears in western written sources as having happened rapidly in the aftermath of the revolt of Gregory the Patrician.⁹⁰⁶ Even in Byzantine texts, the conquest occurs largely offstage with few details beyond a bare outline.⁹⁰⁷ For the fuller Arabic sources, the empire appears as barely resisting Islamic armies, leaving most of the struggle to independent Berber groups. Once the Byzantine fleets had evacuated the last armies along with the clerics and aristocrats who fled across the seas,⁹⁰⁸ Carthage itself was all but abandoned.⁹⁰⁹ The final end of Byzantine Africa is barely even recorded; at some point, it had simply ceased to exist.⁹¹⁰ However, the historic reality differed from the simple narrative of rapid Byzantine collapse and Muslim victory depicted in the European sources. Had that been what had happened, then one would have expected that the urban, organised and deeply Christian society of late antique North Africa would have survived in at least as recognisable form as did the pre-Islamic societies of Egypt, Syria, and Persia. In North Africa, by contrast, the conquest involved nearly endless warfare lasting the greater part of a century and transformed the region from a Roman and Christian society into one that was Arab and Muslim to a degree not experienced in Egypt or the Levant. A massive shift in economic focus accompanied the conquest in which slavery played a key role.⁹¹¹

⁹⁰⁶ *The Chronicle of Fredegar*, 4.81 briefly notes the revolt of Gregory and his defeat; the Mozarabic *Chronicle of 754* is even more laconic.

⁹⁰⁷ Theophanes, 343.

⁹⁰⁸ E.g., Abbot Hadrian (B. Bischoff and M. Lapidge, *Biblical Commentaries from the Canterbury School of Theodore and Hadrian*, (Cambridge, 1994), pp. 84-92).

⁹⁰⁹ Theophanes, 370; Nicephorus, 41.

⁹¹⁰ Tangier probably fell in 705 (Ibn 'Abd al-Hakam, 205); Ceuta in 710 or 711.

⁹¹¹ T. J. MacMaster, 'Not With a Bang? The Economics of Trade and the End of Byzantine North Africa', M. Lau, C. Franchi, and M. Di Rodi, eds. *Landscapes of Power*, (Oxford, 2014), pp. 73-91.

While the expansion of the Arabs into the Near East may have been aimed solely at bringing the Arab tribes already living in Syria and ‘Irāq into the Islamic community, those campaigns also led to the defeat and rapid collapse of both Roman and Persian rule throughout the fertile crescent. These provinces became the core of the new Islamic empire and further expansion seems to have been largely dictated either by the strategic needs for their defence or as an almost accidental by-product of wars fought for other reasons.⁹¹² While, as we have seen, the conquest of Egypt itself provided a not inconsiderable number of slaves for the conquerors, its primary purpose in the early Caliphate was much the same as it had been in the Byzantine Empire – supplying food and revenue⁹¹³ – as well as providing a great deal of shipping and naval power.⁹¹⁴

Instead, Egypt’s own labour needs appear to have been the driving force behind expansion outward from it. One of the first of these can be seen in campaigns fought southward against the Nubian kingdom of Maqqaria that are only briefly mentioned in the sources. At its conclusion in 651, the Nubians agreed to a treaty called the *Baqṭ* in which they agreed to provide the Arabs with 400 slaves annually.⁹¹⁵ This treaty is the first clear written evidence for a slave trade out of the Sudan (though not of Nubian slaves in Egypt⁹¹⁶) and appears to have held until the end of Maqqurian independence in 1276; the Arabs do not appear to have been

⁹¹² F. M. Donner, *The Early Islamic Conquests*, (Princeton, 1981), pp. 4-7, 190, etc.

⁹¹³ T. Power, *The Red Sea from Byzantium to the Caliphate, AD 500-1000*, (Cairo, 2012), pp. 99-101.

⁹¹⁴ M. Legendre, ‘Islamic Conquest, Territorial Reorganization and Empire Formation: A Study of Seventh-Century Movements of Population in the Light of Egyptian Papyri’, in A. Gnasso E. E. Intagliata, T. J. MacMaster, and B. N. Morris, eds., *The Long Seventh Century: Continuity and Discontinuity in an Age of Transition*, (Oxford, 2015), pp. 240-241.

⁹¹⁵ Abi Bakr Ahmad ibn Muḥammad ibn al-Faḡīh al-Hamadhānī, *Mukhtaṣar Kitāb al-Buldān*, 74; al-Balādhurī, 237-238; Ibn ‘Abd al-Ḥakam, 188-189.

⁹¹⁶ John of Nikiū refers to Azarias, a rebel in the province of Akhmim in Upper Egypt, who mustered an army of Ethiopian slaves and brigands to seize the tax yields of the province late in the reign of Maurice. They were only defeated after a prolonged siege (97.30-33). There are, of course, other mentions of Nubian slaves in Egypt dating from the Old Kingdom onwards; Pharaoh Snofru (2613-2589 BC) claimed to have taken 7,000 Nubians as slaves (D. B. Redford, *From Slave to Pharaoh: The Black Experience of Ancient Egypt*, (Baltimore, 2004), p. 20).

actively interested in the conquest of territory up the Nile before the late middle ages.

As with many texts purporting to come from the period of the early Islamic conquests, its provenance has been disputed with the suggestion that it is a later fabrication to provide a legal basis for an existing practice.⁹¹⁷ The apparent Latin origin of a name derived from *pactus* suggests that it dates to a period when Roman terms were in use or at least understood.⁹¹⁸ This may be confirmed by the discovery of a letter written in 758 by the governor of Egypt to a Nubian ruler referring to his treaty obligations under the *Baqt* to provide slaves.⁹¹⁹

Though they lack papyrological confirmation, similar treaties were made as the Arabs expanded westward from Egypt. Immediately after the conquest of Egypt, they advanced into Cyrenaica where, al-Balādhurī reports, the settled inhabitants agreed to an impossible tribute of 13,000 dinars and needed to sell their children as slaves⁹²⁰ while the Berber Lawāta sold their wives as well as their children to pay their tribute.⁹²¹ Ibn Salām states that the conquerors gave the urban residents, as well as the Lawāta, the option of paying their annual tribute in slaves rather than in currency or agricultural products.⁹²² Writing closer in time to the events and less concerned with the establishment of legal and fiscal precedents, John of Nikiû simply states that, after ‘Amr conquered Egypt, he attacked the Pentapolis and took large numbers of captives back to Egypt.⁹²³ While the tribute of these groups individually might appear rather small, that there are many such treaties negotiated and that they seem to have been generally applied in the areas into which the

⁹¹⁷ M. Brett, ‘The Arab Conquest and the Rise of Islam in North Africa’, in J. D. Fage, ed., *The Cambridge History of Africa*, vol. II, (Cambridge, 1978), p. 506.

⁹¹⁸ M. Levy-Rubin, *Non-Muslims in the Early Islamic Empire: From Surrender to Coexistence*, (Cambridge, 2011), p. 34.

⁹¹⁹ M. Hinds and H. Sakkout, ‘A Letter from the Governor of Egypt Concerning Egyptian-Nubian Relations in 141/758’, in W. al-Qādī (ed.), *Studia Arabica et Islamica*, (Beirut, 1981), p. 220.

⁹²⁰ al-Balādhurī, 224.

⁹²¹ al-Balādhurī, 225.

⁹²² Abu Ubayd ibn Salam al-Qasim, *Kitāb al-Amwal*, 214, 267.

⁹²³ John of Nikiû, 120.34-35.

Muslims expanded outward from Egypt suggests that, taken together, they might have gone far towards filling the demands of the Egyptian economy for new slaves.

Treaties of this type are unknown from Egypt and the Levant. There, tributes in slaves were not levied and the conquered were rarely enslaved but the Cyrenaicans were not exceptional as the Arabs advanced westward. In the years after the loss of Egypt to the Empire in 641, the situation of the North African provinces had deteriorated. At the urging of Maximus the Confessor, the armies of Africa refused to aid Egypt against Arab invasion,⁹²⁴ and, in 647, the Exarch Gregory the Patrician revolted against Constans II, declaring himself Emperor.⁹²⁵ Almost immediately, ‘Abd Allāh ibn Sa’d led the first Arab invasion of the Maghreb, reaching as far as central Tunisia where his army encountered and defeated Gregory at Sbeitla in 647.⁹²⁶ The invaders swiftly retreated to Egypt⁹²⁷ after the North African landowners were able to pay over 2,000,000 gold dinars to the Arabs.⁹²⁸ While certainly a punitive amount, it appears to have been raised quickly, suggesting that Africa had remained a prosperous region.⁹²⁹

After this first invasion, Byzantine Africa enjoyed a respite while the Arabs subjugated the Garamantes, an independent and recently Christianized⁹³⁰ group living south of Tripolitania and controlling trans-Saharan trade. When they were conquered (666-667), they agreed to annual tributes in slaves; the people of the oases

⁹²⁴ Anastasius Bibliothecarius, *Relatio Motionis in S. Maximum*, 1.

⁹²⁵ Theophanes, 343; Anastasius Bibliothecarius, 2.

⁹²⁶ Ali ‘Izz al-Dīn Abu al-Hassan ibn al-Athīr al-Matba‘ah al-Azhariyah, *al-Kāmil fī al-Tārīkh*, 3.89; Shihab al-Din Ahmad ibn abd’l Wahhab al-Nuwayri, *Nihayat al-Arab fī Funun*, 24.12-17; Abu Bakr al-Maliki, *Riyadh al-Nufus fī Tabaqat ‘Ulama’ al-Qayrawan wa-Ifriqiya*, 17-19.

⁹²⁷ Theophanes, 343; *Chronicle of Fredegar*, 4.81.

⁹²⁸ al-Ṭabarī, 2818; Theophanes, 343.

⁹²⁹ See the list of late/sub-Byzantine coin hoards in North Africa in R. Guéry, C. Morrisson, and H. Slim, *Recherches archéologiques franco-tunisiennes à Rougga, 3: Le trésor de monnaies d’or byzantines*, (Rome, 1982), pp. 78–99.

⁹³⁰ John of Biclaro, 7.

of Waddān, Germa, and Kawar each were to provide 360 slaves per year.⁹³¹ As their own populations were small, these slaves probably were brought north from regions beyond the Sahara. The agreements are among the earliest unequivocal evidence for the export of black Africans (though the agreements suggest that the trade already existed).⁹³²

The North African campaigns following the conquest of the Garamantes saw even more people enslaved and many of them were exported back to the core territories of the growing empire. While the numbers given for the peoples of the Sahara are easily believable and consistent, some of these are startlingly high. Theophanes states that, during the second invasion, some 80,000 Africans were taken away as captives⁹³³ while Ibn ‘Abd al-Ḥakam writes that, during the campaign of Mūsa ibn Nuṣayr, Mūsa’s son and nephew each took 100,000 captives. Mūsa himself sent 20,000 Berbers back to the Caliph as his share of the spoils.⁹³⁴ Many captives remained in the region and some, such as Ṭāriq ibn Ziyād, became prominent as freedmen there⁹³⁵ but huge numbers were exported eastwards. North African slaves appear to have dominated slave markets in the east. al-Balādhurī, for instance, states that, after the defeat of al-Kāhina, Hasān ibn al-Nu‘umān sent many Berbers as slaves to ‘Abd al-Aziz ibn Marwān⁹³⁶ while Ibn ‘Abd al-Hakam says that, when Hasān reached Egypt, the Caliph’s son seized 200 beautiful Berber slave girls, each worth 1000 dinars.⁹³⁷

⁹³¹ Ibn ‘Abd al-Ḥakam, 194-195.

⁹³² J. Wright, *The Trans-Saharan Slave Trade*, (London, 2007), p. 19; see also A. Wilson, ‘Saharan trade in the Roman period,’ pp. 432-435 for the earlier period.

⁹³³ Theophanes, 352.

⁹³⁴ Ibn ‘Abd al-Ḥakam, 204.

⁹³⁵ Abu al-‘Abbas Ahmad ibn Muḥammad ibn Idhāri al-Marrākushi, *Kitāb al-Bayān al-Mughrib fī Ākhhār Mulūk al-‘Andalus wa’l-Maghrib*, 27.

⁹³⁶ al-Balādhurī, 229.

⁹³⁷ Ibn ‘Abd al-Ḥakam, 202.

Normal practice was for a large share of the slaves and other booty to be handed over to the state with the remainder divvied up among the commanding generals and their followers. Quoting long-since lost textual sources, Ibn al-Athīr claims that, after the conquest of the Visigothic kingdom by Muslims from North Africa, 60,000 prisoners were handed over to the Caliphal authority as slaves, forming one fifth of the total number of captives.⁹³⁸ The same source, Mūsa ibn Nuṣayr himself is said to have returned to the East with 30,000 enslaved virgins from the defeated Visigothic aristocracy.⁹³⁹ In contrast, Ibn al-Qūṭīyya writing two centuries earlier claimed that Mūsa set off from Spain for Syria accompanied by a mere 400 prisoners of noble birth, wearing gold crowns and belts.⁹⁴⁰

These Spanish numbers should be considered dubious, not merely as they are late, but as transporting 300,000 slaves from Spain would have been difficult. While the Muslims possessed or could acquire a large amount of shipping by the early eighth century, even the largest possible ships from the period would still require an enormous number of separate voyages from Spain. Assuming a single ship could carry 1,000 slaves (a rather large size), 300 voyages of these would have been required and raises the question of what would be carried on the same ships when they arrived in Spain. As the total number of Arab and Berber settlers in Spain is far smaller than the number of slaves said to have been exported, it is unlikely that the slaves could simply have been sent on returning transport bound for North Africa or elsewhere. In the unlikely event that these ships really did exist, an enormous amount of cargo ought to have been carried to Spain. While in the earlier period, it seems not unreasonable to suggest that the northward maritime export of

⁹³⁸ Ibn al-Athīr, 4.112.

⁹³⁹ Ibn al-Athīr, 4.124.

⁹⁴⁰ Muḥammad ibn ‘Umar ibn ‘Abd al-Azīz ibn Ibrāhīm ibn ‘Isa ibn Mazāhim ibn al-Qūṭīyya, *Tārīkh Ibn al-Qūṭīyya*, 53.

consumables (such as wine, oil, and grain) that is evidenced archaeologically might have been balanced by the movement of human cargo in return, there is, as yet, no evidence of any bulk movement of material into Spain at this time. Instead, these numbers should be understood as (in common with other ancient and medieval literary numbers) being suggestive only of the large-scale of enslavements in the period, rather than as being individually exact.

While these numbers are doubtful, they probably do express something of the sheer massiveness of the number of captives entering slavery in the period. One of the few apparent references to these slaves arriving can be found in the *Ta'rikh Baṭārikat al-Kanīṣah al-Miṣrīyah*, Severus ibn al-Muqaffa's tenth-century compilation of earlier Coptic sources on the history of the patriarchate. There, the author describes the situation during the Patriarchate of 'Aghātūn (661-677), leader of the Egyptian Christians at the time of the foundation of Qayrawān in 670 and during some of the more massive removals of enslaved Africans. He states that at the time the Muslims were fighting Romans led by Ṭībārūs⁹⁴¹ when the Muslims captured the Rūm

و جميع اعمالها ملكوها واخربوها وجابوا⁹⁴²

Allegedly, they had conquered Şiqiliya (Sicily), taking the whole population to Egypt. There, when the Muslims placed many of them for sale,

وكان هذا القديس البطرك اغاتون حزين القلب اذ يرى اعضاءه في ايدي الامم⁹⁴³

⁹⁴¹ Presumably Tiberius, son of Constans II and co-emperor from 659 to 681. Tiberius does not, however, appear to have joined his father in the western Mediterranean or to have followed him there.

⁹⁴² Ibn al-Muqaffa', 258 ("and took them from their own western land to another land").

⁹⁴³ Ibn al-Muqaffa', 259 ("and this saint, Patriarch 'Aghātūn, was sad-hearted to see them and bought them and freed them").

Unfortunately, according to the text, these former captives were heretics belonging to al-Ghā'īānīn and al-Barsanūfat. These, usually Romanised as Gaianites and Barsanuphians, were Monophysite splinter groups of the Patriarchate of Alexandria at the time;⁹⁴⁴ while not impossible, the likelihood that the bulk of captives taken from the west would belong to these rather localized heretical groups seems unlikely.

If these were, however, North Africans who were transported to Egypt by sea, one would presume that they would have been comprised of Chalcedonian Diophysites (then prevalent in the African and other western churches), the officially sanctioned Monotheletes, or even Donatists (if those still existed), all of which would appear as heretical to the Patriarch of a Miophysite church. An African origin would fit as they are regarded as members of two rival sects, one of which is described specifically as viewing the Coptic hierarchy as unfit for communing with. Whatever disputes may have been happening within the African church in the second half of the century have been lost to time. However, they were not completely unknown as seen in a letter from 723 sent by Pope Gregory II giving Boniface episcopal power in Thuringia. There, the Pope describes various people unfit for promotion within the Church before stating

*non audeat promouere Afros passim ad aecclesiasticos ordines praetendentes nulla ratione suscipiat, quia aliqui eorum Manichei, aliqui rebaptizati saepius sunt probati.*⁹⁴⁵

⁹⁴⁴ See E. R. Hardy, 'Gaianus', in A. S. Atiya, ed., *The Coptic Encyclopedia*, (New York, 1991), p. 1138, and R. Stewart, 'Barsanuphians', *The Coptic Encyclopedia*, pp. 347-348.

⁹⁴⁵ Boniface, *Epistulae*, 18 ("let him not dare to promote Africans to ecclesiastical orders for any reason whatsoever, for some of them are Manicheans and others have been rebaptised many times").

Again, like the Alexandrian patriarch, the Roman Pope sees something questionable and strange about the faith of people claiming to be Christian who have come out of Africa though the terms both used were unlikely to have been correct.⁹⁴⁶ However, the papal letter would seem to argue for the interpretation of ‘Aghātūn’s actions as being related to African captives.

Regardless of where the captives originated, the Alexandrian account informs us that the enslaved were not simply kept as slaves by the Muslims but were actually offered for sale in the markets of Egypt near the time of their capture. The conquerors were not simply taking captives for either their own needs or for holding ransom nor were they keeping slaves for a lengthy enough period that they would all have been Islamicised. Instead, they were moving them as a profitable commodity to a region where there was a demand for slaves. In Egypt – and in the other more developed regions of the new empire – imported slaves had been economically necessary for centuries. Now, a new and apparently limitless supply of slaves had entered the Egyptian market. It seems likely that with the numbers that were taken from Africa (as well as from the islands of the Mediterranean), slaves became massively cheaper, much as they had done in Italy during the period of Roman expansion centuries earlier. Slave labour may have overwhelmed free in many places while the flood of slaves from the new conquests meant that formerly profitable commerce driven by a slave-trade became unnecessary. Merchants no longer needed to sail across the seas to foreign ports to bring back slaves to North Africa, Egypt, or the Levant. Instead, the sheer numbers overwhelmed the new rulers.⁹⁴⁷

⁹⁴⁶ L. Godard, ‘Quels sont les Africains que le pape Gregoire II défendit en 723, d’élever au sacrodoce?’ *Revue Africaine*, 5. (1861), pp. 48-53.

⁹⁴⁷ M. A. Shaban, *Islamic History*, 47.

The influx of North African slaves was not simply the aftermath of Muslim victory. Instead, even after the conquest was completed, North Africa remained a key source of slaves. A steady export continued eastward, probably moving both overland across modern Libya and in ships following the coast. Muslim and Christian sources provide unambiguous evidence of a steady movement of slaves through (if not always originating in) North Africa to points further east. Raids and conquests extended into more remote regions that had never been under Roman rule as well as areas where the Roman presence had vanished centuries earlier. Mūsa ibn Nuṣayr, for instance, led an invasion of the Bilād al-Sūs, a region in the south of modern Morocco, and was said to have returned with enormous numbers of slaves.⁹⁴⁸ Many slaves were taken from Spain and sent eastwards in the aftermath of a conquest that might have begun simply as a slave-raid similar to those that were being carried out in Africa. Anglo-Saxon pilgrims would encounter Spaniards in royal service in Syria around 724;⁹⁴⁹ presumably, many other former westerners or their offspring were also present as slaves in the eastern Mediterranean by then.

The removal of North Africans as slaves did not end with the conquest but even mass conversion to Islam did not prevent it. Treaties like those from Cyrenaica and the Fezzan were also imposed on many Berber communities when they were first defeated. Typically, they stipulated conversion to Islam but the converts remained obligated to provide slaves in tribute. Some of the new Muslims met their obligations by raiding Christian and pagan populations within the Maghreb while others began developing the trans-Saharan slave trade.⁹⁵⁰ These tributes of slaves were seen as especially onerous by newly converted Muslims; their renewed

⁹⁴⁸ al-Balādhurī, 230.

⁹⁴⁹ Hygeburg, *Vita Willibaldi Episcopi Eischstetensis*, 95.1-5.

⁹⁵⁰ M. Brett and E. Fentress, *The Berbers*, (Oxford, 1997), p. 89.

enforcement by ‘Ubayd Allāh ibn al-Habhab sparked the Kharijite-inspired Berber revolt that began in 739.⁹⁵¹ Only with the rebels’ success did North Africa cease to be the major area of supply for slaves and a Mediterranean slave trade begin anew.⁹⁵²

When the African ports passed into Arab hands, unlike in the Levant,⁹⁵³ trade did not revive and the cities died. Had merchant ships attempted to sail northwards, they would have encountered a still active Byzantine fleet whose west Mediterranean squadrons remained unchallenged. African harbours had remained in Byzantine control after the interior had been lost because they could be supplied by sea. A Byzantine fleet had even raided the Spanish coast after Carthage’s fall.⁹⁵⁴ When the Arabs finally captured Carthage, they found the city largely abandoned. They established their primary centre at the more defensible site of Tunis; Hasān ibn al-Nu‘umān brought 1,000 Coptic families to establish a shipbuilding industry as any shipyards in Carthage were long closed.⁹⁵⁵ Sicily, Sardinia and southern Italy would remain in Byzantine hands long after Africa was lost; their presence would have effectively stopped any attempts at direct trade between Gaul and Africa in the decades surrounding the conquest and may well have hindered even indirect trade and smuggling.

A fleet from Alexandria was instrumental in the final conquest of Africa when both Tangier and the Balearics were captured.⁹⁵⁶ It was only later that Arab piracy began to be a regular hazard of Mediterranean travel. Even that might be exaggerated; Pope Stephen travelled by sea in 756 from Rome to Gaul rather than

⁹⁵¹ al-Ṭabarī, 2.815-6; Ibn al-Athīr, 3.92.

⁹⁵² See below and M. McCormick, ‘New Light on the Dark Ages’, pp. 42-43, who links the shift to an end of the plagues rather than the changes in the African situation.

⁹⁵³ H. Kennedy, ‘From Polis to Madina’, pp. 3-27.

⁹⁵⁴ *Chronicle of 754*, 87.1, reports a Byzantine naval raid during the reign of Wittiza (694-702/3).

⁹⁵⁵ Pseudo-al-Rāfiq, *Tārīkh Ifrīqīya wa al-Maghreb*, 65-66.

⁹⁵⁶ Theophanes, 370.

risk the dangers of the overland route.⁹⁵⁷ Sea-borne commerce on both sides of the Mediterranean may have shifted towards overland routes before piracy was an issue.

In Egypt and the Near East, the Arab conquest does not seem to have immediately altered the lives of most people. Little more changed initially than a shift in the destination of taxes alongside greater autonomy for marginalized religious groups. In North Africa, by contrast, the conquest directly affected the lives of those enslaved and taken from their homes. Their previous cultural, religious, and linguistic identities were more likely to be transformed in the process of enslavement; though the conquering Muslims were generous in emancipation, freed slaves usually took the identity of their masters as they became their former owners' *mawālī*, or clients.⁹⁵⁸ Even as individuals were taken from their previous lives and transformed en masse from provincial African Christians into Muslim *mawālī*, the on-going warfare and slave raiding caused a breakdown in social cohesion and accelerated collapse. North Africa's economic transformation was both cause and effect of Byzantine Africa's end. It went from being a labour-importing exporter of agricultural and artisanal products to being a region whose primary export was its people. That shift sped religious, linguistic, and other social changes that remade North Africa more completely than any other large region the Arabs conquered.

⁹⁵⁷ *Liber Pontificalis*, 94. 43.

⁹⁵⁸ D. Pipes, 'Mawlas: Freed Slaves and Converts in Early Islam', *Slavery and Abolition*, 1:2, (1980), pp. 132-177; as with so many Arabic terms, *mawālī* is ambiguous and means both freed-slaves and free people voluntarily adopted into Arabic tribal structures (among other meanings).

4.4. The collapse of the post-Roman system

If the patterns of trade at the beginning of the seventh century were recognisably those of earlier antiquity, by the time another century had passed, they had changed utterly. These changes were not seen as permanent at the time as can be demonstrated by the famous 716 *tractorium* listing goods to be given to the monastery at Corbie from the royal customs-post at Fos. It restated an earlier grant made under Balthild that included not just products from around the Mediterranean (olives, dates, pistachios, fish-sauce, cumin, Cordovan leather, etc.), sometimes in enormous quantities, but also things that came from even farther away: cinnamon and pepper from southern India, spikenard from the Himalayas, and even cloves, grown only in the Moluccas (a distance of 7,000 miles).⁹⁵⁹ Taken at its face value, the charter implies that, in the second decade of the eighth century, a truly massive amount of trade was still reaching Gaul from all parts of the Mediterranean and beyond.

A closer examination may make it seem somewhat less likely. Among the products listed were 50 *tomi* of Egyptian papyrus. Depending on the size of a *tomus*, this may have been as many as 25,000 large sheets every year.⁹⁶⁰ Yet, even the charter itself demonstrates the changes that had occurred; it was written on the more expensive (but locally produced) parchment, suggesting that papyrus was no longer available. The production of papyrus had been a state monopoly in Egypt under Roman rule and remained so after the Islamic conquest. Its export to Constantinople

⁹⁵⁹ *Diplomata Regum Francorum*, 86

⁹⁶⁰ C. Bertelli, 'The Production and Distribution of Books in Late Antiquity', in R. Hodges and W. Bowden, eds., *The Sixth Century: Production, Distribution, and Demand*, (Leiden, 1998), pp. 43-44 suggests that it refers only to 50 single sheets while S. T. Loseby, 'Marseille and the Pirenne Thesis, II: "Ville Morte"', in I. L. Hansen and C. Wickham, eds., *The Long Eighth Century: Production, Distribution, and Demand*, (Leiden, 2000), p. 187, reads it as referring to 50 rolls of papyrus, each containing 500 sheets.

(and elsewhere) remained a major source of Egyptian revenues but, sometime around 692, ‘Abd al-Malik ibn Marwān banned export to the Byzantines at the outbreak of the hostilities that led to the Byzantine loss of Africa.⁹⁶¹ While parchment was not unknown, for Gregory of Tours at the end of the sixth century, papyrus was a major import of Marseille and was synonymous with writing material.⁹⁶² His experience was not atypical as, until the middle of the seventh century, papyrus was normal both for books and documents in Gaul.⁹⁶³ Sixth- and seventh-century texts composed there survive in papyrus.⁹⁶⁴

While it may be due to accidents of survival, there may have been a steadily growing papyrus shortage in the seventh century. Books had already begun to use parchment but papyrus seems to have continued as the preferred material for charters for as long as it was possible. In 673, the first Gallic charter on parchment was issued and papyrus would only be used in Gaul three more times (in 690, 691, and 700).⁹⁶⁵ Similarly, the latest papyrus charter from Lombard Italy dates to 716⁹⁶⁶ and there is a gap in the surviving Ravenna papyri from around 700 until the late ninth century. While it is possible that the papal chancery continued to use papyrus, only twenty-three Papal Bulls survive on papyrus and they date from between 849 and 1022.⁹⁶⁷ If the inference of an interruption in the papyrus trade is correct (and there is

⁹⁶¹ Abī Muḥammad ‘Abd Allāh ibn Muslim ibn Qutaybah al-Dīnawarīy, ‘*Kitāb ‘Uyūn al-Akhbār*, 1, 198.

⁹⁶² GT, *DLH*, 5.5.

⁹⁶³ B. Bischoff, *Latin Palaeography: Antiquity and the Middle Ages*, (Cambridge, 1986), p. 8.

⁹⁶⁴ Y. Hen, *Culture and Religion in Merovingian Gaul, AD 481 – 751*, (Leiden, 1995), p. 41 refers to manuscripts of Avitus from the sixth century while B. Bischoff (*Latin Palaeography*, p. 8) notes that one of the last known papyrus manuscript from the West is a Luxeuil codex containing Augustine’s writings. One must wonder whether part of the reason that so few Merovingian texts survive compared to Carolingian ones is due to the use of papyrus, a material that would not last nearly as long in the more humid climates of Europe.

⁹⁶⁵ L. Levillain, ‘Études Mérovingiennes: La Charte de Clotilde (10 mars 673)’, *Bibliothèque de l’École des Chartes*, 105, (1944), pp. 5-6.

⁹⁶⁶ A. R. Lewis, *Naval Power and Trade in the Mediterranean, AD 500-1100*, (Princeton, 1951), p. 93.

⁹⁶⁷ E. M. Thompson, *An Introduction to Greek and Latin Palaeography*, (Cambridge, 1912), p. 27.

no reason not to think so), it seems only to have been revived when trade recovered in the Carolingian period.

Other eastern imports disappear from the West in the same period. East Mediterranean and North African pottery finally disappears from Western Europe early in the eighth century. At the same time as the disappearance of papyrus from western chanceries, oil lamps were being replaced with wax candles in western churches⁹⁶⁸ and gold coins were rapidly falling out of circulation. Eastern coins found on western sites decline steeply from the reign of Heraclius onwards.⁹⁶⁹ In the same decades that they disappear from western sites, Byzantine coins were being imported in large quantities into Syria⁹⁷⁰ and both coins and mints proliferated in the Levant after the Islamic conquest⁹⁷¹ just as they had earlier done under Persian occupation.⁹⁷² The new mints, though, were almost entirely found in inland sites⁹⁷³ and only a single example of their Arabo-Byzantine coinage has been found in the West.⁹⁷⁴ As the monetary economy did not falter in Syria under either Persian or Arab rule, coins already in circulation were insufficient for the needs of the economy.

If commerce between the regions had always been monetized, it might be presumed that trade had fallen with it. Unfortunately, in some regions and periods where some level of exchange with the east unquestionably occurred, coin finds are almost completely lacking. Ceramics and other imports conclusively show that the West coast of Britain was in direct contact with the eastern Mediterranean into the

⁹⁶⁸ P. Fouracre, 'Eternal Light and Earthly Needs', p. 70.

⁹⁶⁹ J. Lafaure and C. Morrisson, 'La Pénétration des Monnaies Byzantines en Gaule Mérovingienne et Visigotique du VIe au VIIIe Siècle,' *Revue Numismatique*, 29, (1987), pp. 38-98.

⁹⁷⁰ C. Foss, *Arab-Byzantine Coins: An Introduction with a Catalogue of the Dumbarton Oaks Collection*, (Washington: 2008), pp. ix- x.

⁹⁷¹ A. Walmsley, 'Coinage and the Economy of Syria-Palestine in the Seventh and Eighth Centuries CE', p. 23.

⁹⁷² H. Pottier, *Le Monnayage de la Syrie sous l'Occupation Perse (610 – 630)*, (Paris, 2004), p. 19.

⁹⁷³ A. Walmsley, 'Coinage and the Economy', p. 24.

⁹⁷⁴ J. Lafaure and C. Morrisson, 'La Pénétration des Monnaies', pp. 67-68.

early seventh century but coins are almost unknown⁹⁷⁵ as they seem not to have been used as a medium of exchange from early in the fifth century until some time between 570 and 650.⁹⁷⁶ Similarly, coins are found in areas where they appear not to have been used for monetary exchange but as treasure, whether as articles of display or as stock for smithing; gold coins may have had some sort of ritual significance far beyond their actual monetary circulation as has been suggested for the Sutton Hoo coin-purse.⁹⁷⁷

Coins continued to be minted in Gaul and Spain and were used as a medium of exchange on at least some level. These coinages initially conformed to an imperial standard but that was later adjusted as stocks of bullion disappeared and currencies were debased. From 580 or so, the main gold coin in circulation in the Merovingian realms had been the tremissis, valued at a third of the solidus⁹⁷⁸ but its decline in both quality and in the quantity minted were steady. Initially, the only appreciable differences in quality of coinage were between mints in the south and those furthest from the Mediterranean, with the latter having lower amounts of gold. From the beginning of Chlothar II's reign (615), though, the gold coinage everywhere began to be steadily debased with the older standards completely abandoned sometime around 638.⁹⁷⁹ This has been linked to the decline of Byzantine subsidies; a donation of 50,000 solidi to Childebert by Maurice was not the only such subsidy⁹⁸⁰ but, in the seventh century, Byzantine gifts appear to have

⁹⁷⁵ E. Campbell, *Continental and Mediterranean Imports*, pp. 74-76.

⁹⁷⁶ J. Kent, 'From Roman Britain to Anglo-Saxon England', in R. H. M. Dolley, ed., *Anglo-Saxon Coins: Studies Presented to F. M. Stenton on the Occasion of His 80th Birthday, 17 May 1960*, (London, 1961), pp. 1-22.

⁹⁷⁷ P. Grierson, 'The Purpose of the Sutton Hoo Coins,' *Antiquity*, 44, (1970), pp. 14-18.

⁹⁷⁸ K. W. Harl, *Coinage in the Roman Economy, 300 BC to AD 700*, (Baltimore, 1996), p. 184.

⁹⁷⁹ J. Kent, 'Gold Standards of the Merovingian Coinage,' in *Methods of Chemical and Metallurgical Investigation of Ancient Coinage*, ed., E. T. Hall and D. M. Metcalf, (London, 1972), pp. 69-74.

⁹⁸⁰ GT, DLH, 6.42.

vanished. Only Dagobert's acquisition of 200,000 solidi from the Visigoths in 631 was able to temporarily stall the decline.⁹⁸¹

These coins patterns can be further amplified with data from within the Empire. After a long period of stability, Byzantine copper coinage had a collapse during the reign of Heraclius, with the follis dropping from a weight of eleven grams to between eight and nine grams in his sixth year (615/6) before, during his fifteenth year (624/5) declining to just above five grams. In 629/631, the old weight of eleven grams was restored temporarily before again falling to five grams for the rest of his reign.⁹⁸² Similarly, Heraclius had been forced to issue a new silver coinage, the hexagram, during the worst years of the early part of his reign (from 615), minted from plate donated by the Church. That coinage in turn had disappeared by the reign of Justinian II.⁹⁸³ In contrast to Frankish coinage during the seventh century, though, the fineness of Byzantine gold coins minted in Syracuse and Constantinople itself did not decline in this period, remaining nearly (98%) pure throughout the century (though some issues minted at Syracuse under Justinian II in 695 had a notably lesser (80%) fineness).⁹⁸⁴ The close dating of that decrease to the vicissitudes of Byzantine Africa may be coincidental but it is striking that such coins appear not to have been reaching Marseille or elsewhere in Spain or Gaul.

Alongside such tangible items, knowledge of developments in the eastern Mediterranean and North Africa was becoming more confused in this period. While, at the beginning of the century, interested observers in Gaul⁹⁸⁵ or Spain⁹⁸⁶ were

⁹⁸¹ J. Kent, 'Gold Standards of the Merovingian Coinage,' p. 73.

⁹⁸² M. F. Hendy, *Studies in the Byzantine Monetary Economy, c. 300 – 1450*, (Cambridge, 1985), p. 498.

⁹⁸³ P. Grierson, *Byzantine Coinage*, (Washington, 1999), pp. 12–13.

⁹⁸⁴ C. Morrisson, J-N. Barrandon, and J. Poirier, 'Nouvelles Recherches sur l'Histoire Monétaire Byzantine: Évolution Comparée de la Monnaie d'Or à Constantinople et dans les Provinces d'Afrique et de Sicile', *Jahrbuch der Österreichischen Byzantinistik*, 33, (1983), p. 280.

⁹⁸⁵ See the eastern materials in GT as well as the *Chronicle of Fredegar*.

aware of events in the eastern Mediterranean, within a few decades that pattern had broken down. As trade declined, ships and their passengers arrived less frequently in the west;⁹⁸⁷ after the middle of the century, most western reportage of events in the Eastern Empire is extremely confused.⁹⁸⁸ The beginnings and expansion of Islam were viewed in neither an adversarial nor a friendly manner but were almost entirely ignored as writers in the West simply do not seem to have known what had happened in the eastern Mediterranean, barely possessing even the garbled accounts found in eastern sources.⁹⁸⁹ Even when western writers possessed clear information, as in *De locis sanctis*, Adomnán's late seventh-century account of a traveller to Jerusalem, there does not appear to have been much awareness of the emergence of Islam or the decline of the Byzantine Empire. While both Adomnán and Bede (in his reworking of the text) were aware of a 'Saracen king' situated in Damascus and ruling over Jerusalem and knew he was neither a Christian nor a Jew (though he recognized Jesus as 'Saviour of the World'⁹⁹⁰), there was no knowledge of the new religion.⁹⁹¹

⁹⁸⁶ See Isidore of Seville's *Chronica Maiora*, 414-416; written in 626, it recounts the loss of provinces to both the Persians and the Slavs. An earlier 615 version of the same text merely identifies the Emperor's accession. Note also the lengths to which the Second Council of Seville in 619 went to combat Monophysitism.

⁹⁸⁷ See M. McCormick's list of trans-Mediterranean contacts (*Origins of the European Economy*, pp. 852-972); besides Arculf (the source for Adomnán's information), the only listed pilgrimages from the western Mediterranean to the Holy Land before 724 are those of Bercharius at some point between 673 and 696 and Thomas of Farfa around 697/698. Unfortunately, both of these are based on much later sources and may be utterly fictitious (see C. B. Bouchard, *The cartulary of Montier-en-Der, 666 – 1129*, (Toronto, 2004), pp. 4-6 on Bercharius and M. Costambeys, *Power and Patronage in the Early Medieval Italy: Local Society, Italian Politics, and the Abbey of Farfa, c.700-900* (Cambridge, 2007), pp. 13-14 on Thomas). M. McCormick's catalogue does, however, provide ample evidence for the continuity of Rome-Carthage contacts until the end of Byzantine rule as well as of connections between Rome and Carthage and Constantinople. Similarly, it also shows a degree of continuous contact across the Byzantine/Muslim frontier after the conquests.

⁹⁸⁸ *Chronicle of Fredegar*, 4.66: virtually the only correct detail he provides is in identifying Heraclius's biological relationship to the Empress Martina.

⁹⁸⁹ See the vague descriptions of the Muslims by Sophronius as "godless" and "bloodthirsty" barbarians similar to the Philistines in his famous Christmas Sermon of 634 (Sophronius, *Christmas homily*, p. 507). For a discussion on the limits of non-Muslim sources from the period, see R. Hoyland, *Seeing Islam as Others Saw It*, (Princeton, 1997), esp. pp. 593-598.

⁹⁹⁰ Bede, *De Locis Sanctis*, 4. Adomnán, *De Locis Sanctis*, 2.11.

⁹⁹¹ Though they do refer to the existence of a Saracen 'four-sided house of prayer' on the site of the Temple (Adomnán, 1.1; Bede, 2.3).

Only after the Muslim invasion and conquest of Spain would authors like Bede⁹⁹² or the anonymous continuator of the Fredegar Chronicle⁹⁹³ begin to write in detail about the Muslims though, unlike their predecessors or even earlier selves, they were now openly hostile to the invaders. By then, the *Apocalypse* of Pseudo-Methodius had been translated into Latin by Petrus Monachus and its extremely hostile reading of the rise of Islam and the imminent end of the world spread rapidly as the Muslims entered western Europe itself.⁹⁹⁴

Similarly, western lands disappeared from the consciousness of authors in the eastern Mediterranean. Virtually the only references to the British Isles are in an allusion by Jacob of Edessa (c.640-708) in his Syriac *Hexahemeron* merely as islands at the end of the Earth⁹⁹⁵ and the description in the *Doctrina Iacobi nuper Baptizati* of the former extent of the Roman Empire as having included,

της Σκωτίας και Βρεττανίας και Σπανίας και Φραγγίας και 'Ιταλίας και 'Ελλάδος
και Θράκης και εως 'Αντιόχειας και Συρίας και Περσίδος και χασης 'ανατολής
και Αίγυπτου και Αφρικής και ανωθεν Αφρικής.⁹⁹⁶

That, though, was in the past and the loss of those lands is seen as symptomatic of the imminent complete collapse of the Empire and the Apocalypse; in the present, they have become merely distant places. Otherwise, the eastern sources are silent.

⁹⁹² Bede, *Commentarius in Genesim*, 4, 16:12.

⁹⁹³ *The Continuations of the Chronicle of Fredegar*, 4.108 speaks of 'faithless Saracens' and the role of Christ in giving Charles Martel victory.

⁹⁹⁴ The text appears to have been originally composed in Syriac sometime in the seventh century after 634, then translated into Greek, and the Greek version was used as the basis for the Latin version of which the oldest copies date from the eighth century (K. S. Beckett, *Anglo-Saxon Perceptions of the Islamic World*, (Cambridge, 2003), p. 145).

⁹⁹⁵ S. Brock, 'The Syriac Background,' in *Archbishop Theodore*, M. Lapidge, ed., (Cambridge, 1995), p. 52.

⁹⁹⁶ *DI*, 3.10 ("Scotia, Britain, Spain, France, Italy, Greece and Thrace, as far as Antioch, Syria, Persia, and all the East, Egypt, Africa and the African interior").

The rapid decline in the quantity and quality of information coming across the Mediterranean is, like that in papyrus, oil, and ceramics, indicative that, by the end of the seventh century, ships were arriving less frequently in the Mediterranean ports of Spain and Gaul with news from Constantinople, Alexandria, and the Levantine ports. Instead of maritime trade, it appears that most trade between the Mediterranean and northern Gaul now moved overland via the Col de Montgenèvre and other Alpine passes.⁹⁹⁷ Rather than wine, oil, papyrus, and other bulky materials, only relatively lightweight items (such as spices or silks) would have been traded. Though slaves might have been walked over the passes, the costs associated with bringing them from the west no longer made sense as far cheaper imports were available from among the vast numbers of people who had fallen into captivity during the wars of the seventh century.

All of these shifts and disruptions demonstrate the disintegration of the post-Roman system of exchange. When Corbie's original charter had been drawn up, such imports were still being conceived as possible even if they were already beginning to become harder to find. By the time it was reissued, the trade of Marseille and similar Mediterranean ports had already withered and imports had all but disappeared.

Yet, long-distance trading had not vanished from Gaul; it was expanding and flourishing around the North Sea where a new economic dynamism had begun to emerge centred on newly established trading communities like Hamwic and Dorestad as well as the revival of towns like London. Merchants steadily expanded into outlying regions to the north and east. Within another century, closely linked trading

⁹⁹⁷ This route, via the Po Valley and crossing the Alps at Montgenèvre, had been used in Roman and Ostrogothic periods but had fallen largely out of use in the aftermath of the Lombard invasion (S. T. Loseby, 'Marseille and the Pirene Thesis, II: "Ville Morte"', p. 179).

communities would be found northwards into the Baltic Sea and beyond.⁹⁹⁸ A silver-based currency had begun to appear in this North Sea economic community; by the early eighth century (at the absolute latest; the last gold coins minted in the Merovingian kingdoms date from 675⁹⁹⁹), it had supplanted its gold predecessor.¹⁰⁰⁰

Similarly, both sea-borne trade in the Indian Ocean, Red Sea and Gulf and overland trade across the Sahara and eastwards into Asia had expanded while Mediterranean trade was dying. In Syria, inland cities including Aleppo, Homs, and Damascus had grown while the Levantine ports had withered. The post-Roman system of exchange had vanished and given way to new systems that were no longer centred on the Mediterranean.

The collapse of the post-Roman system was already underway when the first Muslim fleet entered the Mediterranean. It had declined rapidly when, due initially to the wars with the Persians, the ships that had sailed westward from Alexandria and the Levantine ports stopped regularly visiting Carthage and the ports beyond; though it appears to have recovered somewhat in the lull between the wars, the Arab conquest of those regions meant that trade through their ports again suffered. Cities that had relied on their trade, like Marseille, shrank as those ships had merely visited western ports and had not belonged to westerners. They had come west for slaves and that need had disappeared for them. Instead of slaves from Spain, Gaul, or lands beyond, the needs of the Egyptian and Syrian market were amply met with the vast numbers of slaves being brought back as captives or as tribute from North Africa and other frontier areas of the Islamic Empire. After the conquests slowed, fewer people were being carried into captivity. Only then, and when, not long after, the defeated

⁹⁹⁸ R. Hodges, *Dark Age Economics: The Origins of Towns and Trade, AD 600-1000*, (London, 1982), pp. 39-86.

⁹⁹⁹ P. Grierson and M. Blackburn, *Medieval European Coinage*, p. 93.

¹⁰⁰⁰ P. Grierson and M. Blackburn, *Medieval European Coinage*, p. 326.

peoples who had agreed to give over slaves in tribute began to revolt, did merchants again begin crossing the sea in quest of slaves. By then, though, the post-Roman system of exchange had been long dead and would not be revived.

4.5. The Mediterranean in the early eighth century

As the post-Roman system had emerged in the late fifth century from the collapse of its predecessor, new systems of exchange emerged from its destruction. These involved many of the same regions as had those that had come before it and, like the post-Roman system, the movement and sale of humans was crucial. Some of the areas that had previously been among the most active participants were barely involved or their roles in the system had changed greatly from the past.

Syria, Egypt, and 'Irāq remained the most productive agricultural regions and the prime centres of non-agricultural production. In Syria, inland cities grew in wealth and importance; Damascus was now centre of the largest empire the world had yet seen. In much of the Levant, the Umayyad century was a period of growth and expansion. Similarly, in Egypt, economic prosperity resumed and was in some ways greater than it had been under Roman rule as Egypt no longer had to provide grain to the capitals (though it did export considerable amounts to the Ḥijāz and elsewhere¹⁰⁰¹). Instead, Egypt's bounty provided much of the tax revenue that built the Umayyad state while textiles (especially flax) replaced wheat as an export crop. Increasingly, 'Irāq's economy expanded as it established the bases for its greater prosperity in the 'Abbasid era as the disappearance of the old imperial boundary

¹⁰⁰¹ T. Power, *The Red Sea from Byzantium to the Caliphate, AD 500-1000*, pp. 99-101.

between Romans and Persians and of border warfare began to benefit it. By the end of the century, agriculture was expanding rapidly into marginal lands.¹⁰⁰²

North Africa, however, was no longer a centre for production. By the end of the seventh century, it figures almost exclusively in Arabic accounts as a place for the export of labour. Even religious scholars sent there are depicted as exporting slaves to the eastern lands.¹⁰⁰³ The human tributes exacted from the Berber populations increased.¹⁰⁰⁴ In Tangier, an attempt was made by the local governor to enslave a fifth of the Muslim population of the city itself.¹⁰⁰⁵ This sparked the Berber rising that would lead to the creation of the first Muslim state outside the control of the Caliphate as the rebels embraced Islam in its Kharijite form, asserting that the authorities were not upholding the religion.

At the same time, North Africans were playing a key role in the gathering of slaves for shipment eastwards, whether brought northwards across the Sahara or southwards from raids on the Christian lands to the north.¹⁰⁰⁶ During and after the Berber revolt, the Kharijite Ibādiyya became dominant in the movement of slaves from the Bilād al-Sūdān, across the desert, and onwards to the core lands of the east.¹⁰⁰⁷ There, enslaved women including both Berbers and sub-Saharan blacks were much sought after as singers and sexual partners as well as for domestic service.¹⁰⁰⁸ At the same time, men from northern Africa were exported eastwards to do heavy labour.¹⁰⁰⁹ Spain in the quarter century after its conquest functioned

¹⁰⁰² M. Morony, 'Landholding and Social Change: Lower al-'Irāq in the Early Islamic Period', in T. Khalidi (ed.), *Land Tenure and Social Transformation in the Middle East*, (Beirut, 1984), pp. 209-222.

¹⁰⁰³ Ibn Idhāri, 38.

¹⁰⁰⁴ al-Ṭabarī, 2.815-6; Ibn al-Athīr, 3.92.

¹⁰⁰⁵ Ibn 'Abd al-Ḥakam, 123.

¹⁰⁰⁶ Ibn Idhāri, 64, 70; raids on Sicily, Sardinia, and Gaul resulted in large numbers of captives.

¹⁰⁰⁷ E. Savage, *A Gateway to Hell, a Gateway to Paradise: The North African Response to the Arab Conquest*, (Princeton, 1997), pp. 67-87.

¹⁰⁰⁸ See Ibn Buṭlān's *Risāla fī Shirā' al-Raqīq wa-Taqlīb al-'Abīd*, 237-240, with its celebrated discussion of the attributes of various nationalities of slave women.

¹⁰⁰⁹ E. Savage, *A Gateway to Heaven*, pp. 69-71.

largely as an appendage of North Africa and primarily served as an additional source of slaves and other booty. At first, this involved large-scale removal of Spanish slaves. Raiding campaigns were regularly made in the northern regions that had been only loosely under Visigothic control.¹⁰¹⁰ These raids soon extended north of the Pyrenees and included the Muslim army that Charles Martel defeated near Tours. Perhaps due to its export of captives, Spain became more integrated into the Mediterranean economy than it had been in the Visigothic period.

However, the western Mediterranean sources of slaves became appreciably more problematic in the years surrounding the 'Abbasid revolution. Already, the Berber revolt had meant that the easy tribute of slaves from North Africa had declined, if not quite disappeared. When al-Mansūr became Caliph in 754, the governor of Ifrīqīya refused to send the customary tribute of slaves as part of his oath of loyalty, explaining that, as Ifrīqīya was now completely Muslim, slaves could no longer be exacted from it.¹⁰¹¹ Two years later, the de facto independence of al-'Andalus under the Umayyad 'Abd al-Rahman ibn Mu'āwiyah similarly deprived rulers in Qayrawān and the eastern capitals of tribute in the form of Spanish captives. These political changes may have been as significant as the general cessation of military expansion and the end of the plague cycles in the revival of a commercial slave trade in the early 'Abbasid era.

In contrast to the prosperity of many of Muslim-ruled areas, the remaining Byzantine provinces were repeatedly devastated by Arab raids in Anatolia and the new threat of the Bulgars in the Balkans. Piracy and the possibility of renewed Muslim invasion kept many areas from recovering while large areas that had previously produced grain and other crops were either abandoned or developed

¹⁰¹⁰ *Chronicle of 754*, 69.

¹⁰¹¹ Ibn Idhāri, 73.

pastoral economies.¹⁰¹² At the same time, as Pirenne and his followers have demonstrated, much of Italy and nearly all of Gaul had almost completely fallen out of Mediterranean trade systems.

By the middle of the century, the Italian peninsula was experiencing great shifts in both economic and political spheres. Byzantine power was rapidly disappearing; the Lombards conquered Ravenna in 751 while Amalfi, Gaeta, Naples, Venice, and even Rome had become independent city-states. Only Rome controlled more than its immediate hinterland; the rest began to turn increasingly to seaborne trade. By the mid-eighth century, Venice had begun its ascent as the premier port linking northern Europe to the Mediterranean.¹⁰¹³ Amalfi was also developing along similar lines,¹⁰¹⁴ both Amalfitan and Venetian merchants were deeply involved in the export of European slaves southward and eastward, to both the Byzantine Empire and the Islamic states.¹⁰¹⁵ Neither of these cities possessed a great natural harbour; instead, refugees had established both on marginal sites. While better-sited ports like Marseille in the previous period had based their trade on the merchants that came to them, the Amalfitans and Venetians built their own boats and took their products to the buyers rather than waiting for ships that might never come. That difference proved crucial in giving them, rather than somewhere like Marseille, the responsibility for the eventual revival of European trade. As Michael McCormick has shown, their primary initial trade was the export of Europeans and the principal market for that product was in the lands of the Caliphate. Once again, slaves were

¹⁰¹² L. Brubaker and J. Haldon, *Byzantium in the Iconoclast Era, 680-850: A History*, (Cambridge, 2008), p. 536.

¹⁰¹³ M. McCormick, 'New Light on the 'Dark Ages'', p. 39.

¹⁰¹⁴ A. O. Citarella, 'Patterns in Medieval Trade: The Commerce of Amalfi before the Crusades', *Journal of Economic History*, 28:4, (Dec. 1968), p. 536.

¹⁰¹⁵ M. McCormick, 'New Light on the 'Dark Ages'', pp. 46-51; A. O. Citarella, 'Patterns in Medieval Trade', p. 538.

moving from the peripheral regions to the more developed economies but now the traders were from the periphery.

When the waves of conquest and warfare began to diminish from the middle of the eighth century, the supply of war captives as slaves to the richest lands of the Muslim empire had diminished. However, during the previous century, the upper classes in Islamic society had grown dependent on the constant availability of many types of slaves. As a result, from the second half of the eighth century onwards, a market in humans appeared and multiple parties, including the merchants of the Italian city-states of Amalfi and Venice, as well as the Khazars and the Vikings, appeared to supply the needs of the Arab marketplace. That revival of international commerce and its incorporation of Europeans as both active (as merchants) and passive (as merchandise) participants began a new economic cycle.

This chapter explored how the post-Roman system of exchange broke down. Though the rise and expansion of the first Muslim empire was at the core of this shift, Islam itself was not fundamental to the changes that occurred. The slave-system practice by the first Muslims and the attitudes towards slavery promoted by the new religion were within the norms of the early seventh-century world. Islam codified and expanded limitations placed on both the practice and the expansion of slavery that were evolving among Christian communities. Islam also appeared during a period of rapid change in the core of the Mediterranean. The final war between Persians and Romans had involved large-scale enslavements and movements of peoples. The initial Arab expansion into 'Irāq, Syria, and Egypt, while not devoid of such activities, had been far more limited in scope at least as far as the numbers and scales of enslavements are visible in the sources. In contrast, the expansion out of

these highly developed regions was driven at least in part by a need to provide slaves for those regions. Unlike the earlier conquests, Muslim campaigns westward into North Africa frequently involved large-scale slave taking while the treaties made with many of the defeated groups involved the regular supply of slaves as tribute. Large numbers of captives were brought from North Africa and other areas into the developed regions. As a result, the necessary slave supplies for those regions were more than matched and merchants from those places no longer found it necessary to seek slaves through commerce with western Europe. As a result of this change in the sources of slaves, the post-Roman system of exchange collapsed. It was replaced by a new system in which certain regions, particularly in Africa though not limited to it, provided slaves to the core region. Ultimately, this new Mediterranean system broke down when North Africans were no longer available as slaves. When the slave trade revived, it was in the context of a new and fundamentally different system of exchange.

Conclusions: Slave trading and the transformation of the Roman world

This thesis began by claiming to break new ground by demonstrating that slaves were numerous and played a crucial role in the societies of the post-Roman world, that the continuing function of these societies required a greater supply of slaves than could be provided internally, that this resulted in a long-distance slave trade that was a key force in the post-Roman system of exchange in the Mediterranean world, and that the breakdown of this system of trade and of many contacts across the Mediterranean during the seventh century was caused primarily by alterations in the sources of the slave supply of the most developed economies. Each of these has been discussed in some detail though all could be expounded upon at considerably greater length. However, all four have been shown to be grounded firmly in the source material and, together, offer a coherent argument regarding the structure and evolution of post-Roman social and economic systems.

Several general observations can be made. The notion that the slave systems of the ancient world vanished at some point in late antiquity or immediately after can be discarded. Instead, the preponderance of evidence suggests that slaves were every bit as numerous and as crucial in the economies and societies of the post-Roman world as in earlier times. The lack of major shifts in the developed economies of the post-Roman Mediterranean suggests that the slave supply was regularly refreshed and maintained through systems of exchange. In the sixth century, this trade provided a vital linkage for the northern and western participants with the wealthiest regions and, along it, eastern trade-goods, ideas, and individuals were carried to the other areas involved, leaving behind lasting archaeological and written remains. The

post-Roman system of exchange can be seen as being predicated on a long-distance slave trade; the slave trade, in turn, helped to foster other connections within that Mediterranean world.

This system broke down during the seventh century and its collapse brought a rupture in many of the contacts across the Mediterranean that had survived the breakdown of the late Roman system of exchange. Now, rather than a diminished level of trade, contacts virtually disappeared for several decades. The primary cause of the rupture was the alteration in the sources of the slave supply of the most developed economies. Previously, slaves had been exported south- and eastward across the Mediterranean from Gaul, Spain, and Italy. Now, North Africa, which once had imported slaves from over the Mediterranean, became the focal point of the slave supply. For nearly a century, vast numbers of Africans were moved eastward to Egypt and points beyond while what began as slave raids spread Muslim rule over more of the region and into points to the north and south that had not been under Byzantine control. Even after the conquest was completed, many North African communities had to provide tribute in the form of slaves to the conquerors. In the middle of the eighth century, the North Africans themselves rejected this system and, during the Kharijite revolts, ended the provision of Berber Muslims as tribute. Soon afterwards, a trans-Mediterranean slave trade emerged to fill the demands of the developed regions. In the new system, however, Europeans were no longer merely the objects of trade but were also active participants, taking slaves to the eastern markets, rather than waiting passively for buyers to come to them. Eventually, this slave trade would become the cornerstone of the revival of commerce in medieval Europe and eastern trade goods and ideas would again move throughout the continent.

By then, the slave trade from North Africa may have had a major role in changes that were perhaps as significant as the rupture in Mediterranean connections. When the Arabs conquered Egypt, Persia, and the Near East, they did not impose their language any more than they did their religion. In Syria and 'Irāq, Arabic simply became a new written standard within a continuum of closely related Semitic dialects while local Christian communities remain down to the present day. Similarly, in Irān, both Zoroastrian and Christian communities continued and, despite being a region that received large numbers of Arab emigrants after the conquest, an Islamified Persian remains the majority language. Even in Egypt, where there are still large and vibrant Christian populations, it took several centuries for Arabic to fully supplant the related Coptic language while Egyptian Arabic retains a strong Coptic substrate.

The North African experience was very different. The once-rich Latin culture steadily shrank, finally disappearing at some point in the central middle ages.¹⁰¹⁶ The African Church had vanished by then.¹⁰¹⁷ Punic, still widely spoken in late antiquity,¹⁰¹⁸ disappeared even more completely (unless it simply merged into an Arabic language continuum). Arabic-speaking Muslims became (and remain) the majority population of most of the coastal lowlands and even in highland areas where Berber groups maintained their languages, Islam ultimately prevailed. These shifts could have been driven by the expansion of slave raiding and trading in North Africa.

¹⁰¹⁶ The latest textual (Muḥammad al-Idrisi, *Kitāb Nuzhat al-Mushtaq*, 104) and epigraphic (A. Mahjoubi, 'Nouveau Témoignage Épigraphique sur la Communauté Chrétienne de Kairouan au XIème Siècle', *Africa*, 1, (1966), pp. 87-96) evidence of a North African romance language is from the middle of the twelfth century.

¹⁰¹⁷ Christian communities in North Africa survived into the eleventh century (A. Mahjoubi, 'Nouveau Témoignage', pp. 87-96) and had intermittent contact with Christians elsewhere as late as 1053 (Pope Leo IX, *Epistola* 83).

¹⁰¹⁸ Augustine, *Epistolae*, 17.2; 20; 66.2; 209; *In Evangelium Ioannis tractatus*, 15.27.

The more settled (and less warlike) populations of the African towns and cities – as well as the settled agriculturalists of their hinterlands – would likely have borne the brunt of both the initial Arab slave-raids and the later slave levies and raids of highland groups. As many African communities suffered repeatedly from slave-raids, some autonomous Berber communities (some of which had previously possessed degrees of self-governance¹⁰¹⁹) accepted Islam and agreed to annual tributes of slaves. These newly Muslim Berbers themselves often began slave raiding, as it would have been less onerous to give captives than members of their own groups. Ultimately, these conditions probably led to the breakdown of organised society in many Punic- and Latin-speaking areas. In the aftermath of slave raids, populations would be smaller, poorer, and more frightened. Some individuals probably attached themselves to the incoming conquerors or retreated to safety among the highland groups. The cities of the coast declined where they were not outright abandoned.¹⁰²⁰ Some survivors may have fled into the mountains and lost their previous identities as they were absorbed into Berber groups.¹⁰²¹ More enslaved Africans are likely to have remained in North Africa than to have been exported; they and their descendants may have formed the poorer classes of the new

¹⁰¹⁹ C. Courtois, *Les Vandales et l'Afrique*, (Paris, 1955), pp. 325-352; Y. Modéran, *Les Maures et l'Afrique Romaine (IVe-VIIe Siècle)*, (Rome, 2003), p. 399. Both Ammianus Marcellinus (29.5) and Procopius (3.25.3-8) discuss Berber self-rule within Roman and Vandal states while they regularly contested Byzantine hegemony throughout the following century (Procopius, 4.8-28; Corippus, *De Bellis Libycis*; John of Biclaro, *Chronica*, 8, 16, 48; etc.).

¹⁰²⁰ Carthage appears to have been growing in the final stages of Byzantine rule – possibly due to the influx of refugees from elsewhere in Africa – but was practically abandoned in the eighth century (S. Ellis, 'Carthage in the Seventh Century: An Expanding Population?' *Cahiers des Etudes Anciennes*, 17, (1985), pp. 30-42). Other cities of Roman and Byzantine Africa appear to have been largely abandoned in these years though, as P. von Rummel, 'The Transformation of Ancient Land- and Cityscapes in Early Medieval North Africa', in S. Stevens and J. Conant, eds., *North Africa under Byzantium and Early Islam*, (Washington, 2016), pp. 105-117, cautions, some of this may be due to the lack of looking.

¹⁰²¹ E. Fentress and A. Wilson, 'The Saharan Berber Diaspora and the Southern Frontiers of Byzantine North Africa', in S. Stevens and J. Conant, eds., *North Africa under Byzantium and Early Islam*, (Washington, 2016), pp. 50-53, points out that the Berber languages of North Africa (with the notable exception of Kabyle) appear to have a point of divergence in late antiquity and that many areas (including the hinterland of Hippo) do not provide much evidence for widespread use of Zenata Berber dialects in the fifth century.

Muslim towns after they had regained their freedom. Some freed slaves, such as Ṭāriq ibn Ziyād,¹⁰²² joined the slave-owning culture as full members. Many of the children of slaves as well as former slaves are likely to have acculturated into the lower classes of the newly dominant Muslim society of the slave-owners.

While the enslaved were adopting new identities, slave raiding continued as both a feature of life for the new elites and as an economic necessity both to provide labour for them and as an export commodity. The repeated looting, pillaging and raiding without permanent conquest that characterised the first decades of Islam in North Africa created instability which, in turn, may have caused any surviving peasantry to steadily withdraw from zones of slave raiding, leading to the wholesale depopulation of large areas of open country and to increased pastoralism at the expense of sedentary agriculture.¹⁰²³ Whole populations withdrew from the contested zones while slaving itself removed the population from the same area and condensed it into the areas where the slave-owners were in control. Though done unconsciously, this process would have had the long-term effect of slowly erasing the culture of Christian North Africa. Despite having had far fewer Muslim immigrants than Syria, 'Irāq, Irān, or even Egypt, North Africa was Arabicised and Islamicised far more rapidly. Just as the slave trade had fundamentally reshaped its role in systems of exchange, it also remade African religion and identity.

Even more speculatively, a similar process may have sped the transformation of Roman Britain into Anglo-Saxon England.¹⁰²⁴ There, a Christian and Latin-

¹⁰²² Ibn Idhāri, 27.

¹⁰²³ R. Murphey, 'The Decline of North Africa since the Roman Occupation: Climatic or Human?' *ANNALS, Association of American Geographers*, 51:2, (June 1951), pp. 116 -132; as P. von Rummel, 'The Transformation of Ancient Land- and Cityscapes in Early Medieval North Africa', p. 110, points out, however, the process of de-sedentarization may have begun as early as the first half of the fifth century in the more arid areas of southern Tunisia.

¹⁰²⁴ See C. M. Cameron, 'Captives and Culture Change,' *Current Anthropology*, 52: 2 (April 2011), pp. 169-209, for a cross-cultural discussion of how such processes could work.

speaking culture¹⁰²⁵ disappeared and was replaced by a Germanic pagan one¹⁰²⁶

despite the extremely small number of the invaders among a far larger number of the invaded.¹⁰²⁷ If Gildas, the only contemporary British observer, was right in saying

*itaque nonnulli miserarum reliquiarum in montibus deprehensi aceruatim iugulabantur: alii fame confecti accedentes manus hostibus dabant in aeuum seruituri, si tamen non continuo trucidarentur, quod altissimae gratiae stabat loco*¹⁰²⁸

many of them may have been turned into slaves. Some may have been exported; many more were almost certainly set to work to serve their conquerors. Any surviving Latin or British speakers in the east were either absorbed by the conquerors or enslaved by them; their children and grandchildren would be Anglo-Saxons in culture and identity, if not genetically, as, eventually, all the Britons of the eastern part of the island 'became' English.¹⁰²⁹ There, they would join a steadily growing population of slaves, former slaves, and the descendants of slaves who had already been absorbed into a new society.¹⁰³⁰ Unlike the Franks, the Anglo-Saxon invaders had been unable to install themselves atop an intact society and, instead, created a new society of their own, enslaving and, unintentionally, forcing the Britons to

¹⁰²⁵ P. Shrijver, 'What Britons Spoke around 400 AD', in N. Higham, ed., *Britons in Anglo-Saxon England*, (Woodbridge, 2007), pp. 165-171.

¹⁰²⁶ B. Ward-Perkins, 'Why did the Anglo-Saxons not become more British?', *EHR*, 2000, vol. 115 (462), pp. 524-525.

¹⁰²⁷ M. E. Jones, *The End of Roman Britain*, p. 13.

¹⁰²⁸ Gildas, *De Excidio et Conquestu Britanniae*, 25.1 ("So a number of the wretched survivors were caught in the mountains and butchered wholesale. Other, their spirits broken by hunger, went to surrender to the enemy; they were fated to be slaves forever if indeed they were not killed straight away, the highest boon").

¹⁰²⁹ A. Woolf, 'Apartheid and Economics in Anglo-Saxon England', in N. Higham, ed., *Britons in Anglo-Saxon England*, (Woodbridge, 2007), pp. 128-129.

¹⁰³⁰ H. Härke, 'Early Anglo-Saxon social structure', in J. Hines, ed., *The Anglo-Saxons from the Migration Period to the eighth century: an ethnographic perspective*, (Woodbridge, 1997), pp. 125-170. More recently, Härke has explicitly connected slavery and the process of assimilation in sub-Roman Britain ('Migrations and state formation: a view from the west', in T. Jackson, ed., *The earliest states of Eastern Europe, Old Rus', and Medieval Europe: The Origin of States*, (Moscow, 2016), pp. 116-130).

become English. Rather than a fusion of Roman and Barbarian or German and Celt, the origins of the English might be sought among slaves and slavers.

While the details are even foggier, Balkan and Pannonian Romance vanished from most regions south of the Danube and only survived among transhumant pastoralists in the high mountains. The area south of the Danube had been raided for slaves by Goths, Huns, Avars, and Bulgars (among others) and a similar process might have been at work. With the evidence currently available, these ideas regarding the relationship between slavery and cultural transformation as well as the decline of slavery in much of Europe can only be speculative. That they are possibilities, however, underlines the importance of what can be shown.

Slavery did not cease to be an essential part of the societies of the Mediterranean world in late antiquity or the early middle ages. Neither religious nor political changes significantly affected its conceptualisation or ubiquity. While both Christianity and Islam recognised a common humanity shared by both slaves and masters, that did not lead their followers to work for its abolition. Instead, demographic realities meant that the continuing normal function of these societies required a greater supply of slaves than could be provided internally. If even very slight reductions in the slave supply occurred and lasted for prolonged periods, slavery itself would begin to contract as an institution within society.

Changes in the slave supply or, rather, in who might be enslaved, might have had an effect on this. The steady extension of legal protection from enslavement as Roman citizenship was extended to all the free people of the empire was followed by a slow alteration in concepts of citizenship from being founded on *Romanitas* to being based on *Christianitas*. Starting with Patrick's condemnation of Coroticus for

enslaving ‘fellow citizens,’¹⁰³¹ this conception of a Christian community gradually grew.¹⁰³² By the Carolingian era, it would at least occasionally be honoured. Rather than raiding other Christian kingdoms for slaves, only pagans and Muslims could legally be made into slaves.

Muhammad had formulated the similar notion that a Muslim could not enslave a fellow believer; as among the Christians, ownership of a previously enslaved co-religionist was allowed. The *Ahl al-Kitāb* who had entered treaties with the Muslims were also to be protected from enslavement. While not yet universally acknowledged in the early eighth century, by the ‘Abbasid period, it, too, was beginning to be shape patterns of enslavement.

Though conflicts between Christians and Muslims were usually limited to narrow frontier regions, both continued to see the enslavement of the other as legitimate and permissible during wartime. In time, these changes in understanding of who might legally be enslaved may have dramatically shaped both the slave trade and the actual presence of slaves in societies. Possible as that might be, though, the significance of those shifts remained invisible in the eighth century.

Future studies may look further into some of these questions but the significant place of slavery and the slave trade in the post-Roman world is undeniable. Not only was slavery an essential part of daily social and economic life but the slave trade was critical to the systems of exchange that spread over long distances. The changing nature of both the slave supply and the demand for slaves in the period fundamentally altered many aspects of the entire late antique world.

¹⁰³¹ Patrick, *Epistola ad Milites Corotici*, 2.

¹⁰³² J. Evans-Grubbs, ‘Sinner, Slave, Bishop, Saint: The Social and Religious Vicissitudes of St. Patrick’, (unpublished paper pre-circulated at Emory University, Atlanta, 2015).

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