**Slavery in Rome and China**

When the head of a household arrives at his estate, after he has prayed to the family god, he must go round his farm on a tour of inspection on the very same day, if that is possible…on the next day after that he must call in his manager…If the work doesn’t seem to him to be sufficient, and the manager starts to say how hard he tried, but the slaves weren’t any good, and the weather was awful, and the slaves ran away, and he was required to carry out some public works, then when he has finished mentioning these and all sorts of other excuses, you must draw his attention to your calculation of the labor employed and time taken….There are all sorts of jobs that can be done in rainy weather – washing wine-jars, coating them with pitch, cleaning the house, storing grain, shifting muck, digging a manure pit, cleaning seed, mending ropes or making new ones….The head of the household…should sell any old oxen, cattle or sheep that are not up to standard, wool and hides, an old cart or old tools, an old slave, a sick slave – anything else that is surplus to requirements

-Cato the Elder, Concerning Agriculture 2nd century B.C.E.

Wang Ziyuan of Shu Commandery went to the Jian River on business, and went up to the home of the widow Yang Hui, who had a male slave named Bianliao. Wang Ziyuan requested him to go and buy some wine. Picking up a big stick, Bianliao climbed to the top of the grave mound and said: “When my master bought me, Bianliao, he only contracted for me to care for the grave and did not contract for me to buy wine for some other gentleman.”

Wang Ziyuan was furious and said to the widow: “Wouldn’t you prefer to sell this slave?”…Wang Ziyuan immediately settled on the sale contract…

The slave again said: “Enter in the contract everything you wish to order me to do. I, Bianliao, will not do anything not in the contract.”

Wang Ziyuan said: “Agreed.”

The text of the contract said:…The slave shall obey orders about all kinds of work and may not argue. He shall rise at dawn and do an early sweeping. After eating he shall wash up. Ordinarily he should pound the grain mortar, tie up broom straws, carve bowls and bore wells, scoop out ditches, tie up fallen fences, hoe the garden, trim up paths and dike up plots of land, cut big flails, bend bamboos to make rakes, and scrape and fix the well pulley…[the list of tasks continues for two-and-a-half-pages]…

The reading of the text of the contract came to an end. The slave was speechless and his lips were tied. Wildly he beat his head on the ground, and beat himself with his hands. He said: “If it is to be exactly as master Wang says, I would rather return soon along the yellow-soil road, with the grave worms boring through my head. Had I known before I would have bought the wine for master Wang.”

-Wang Bao 1st century B.C.E.