

GOODMAN'S PRELIMINARY CRITIQUE OF *COLUMN OF PHOCAS* DRAFT BY DR.S.GABB 2005

The story is gripping and superbly researched. The authentic background gives it general credibility - like Merchant Ivory films! There are, however, points of detail which need to be addressed. They are as follows:

Chapter One: Is there historical justification for portraying Ethelbert of Kent as a monster?

Page 45: The first paragraph of Chapter Ten. The administrator of Rome (*Ducatus Romanus*) was the Duke, subordinate to the Exarch of Ravenna. Why is he ignored and/or wrongly designated *Dispensator*?

Page 53 –First paragraph . The Aramaic adoption of the name Peter, by Simon needs amplification. Anyway, Greek was the official language of the Eastern provinces when Christ appointed Peter his deputy, so the pun worked THERE in the Gospels.

Page 68 Second paragraph. It should be noted that it was the Western Emperor (namely Honorius) who outlawed gladiatorial contests at Rome. To state “the Emperor” implies the one in Constantinople since he was the only one existing in 684 when the r..... was made and existed in 401 when the prohibition was imposed.

Page 136: The last paragraph. It is sloppy to attribute a quote to “one of the madder emperors”. If he knew the quote, Alaric must have known the name of the source.

Page 166: Fourth paragraph. This lacks credibility. As homosexuality was a serious offence, a slave would not be permitted to wander in while or just after such an act was taking place!

As previously stated by Goodman to Gabb, film producers in practice require a novel to adapt (not a script) because the publisher

has then done all the necessary “weeding out” of material. Gabb should therefore expand the erotic element (“sex sells”) and then find a publisher.

Page 1: *Ad sequiter*: Alaric is old and ugly (page 1).How therefore does he get Lucius sexually interested?The erotic sub-plot needs amplification. As homosexuality was (at least in theory)a serious criminal offence,motivation would have to be pronounced. Pages 66 and 67 reveal no physical attraction when Alaric and Lucius first met. Too weak!

Religion is also in vogue(at least in films).The passion of Christ has been a big commercial success and a sequel dealing with the resurrection is being made. The “kingdom of Christ” Crusader film is also doing the rounds. The pagan plot in “Column” should therefore be amplified.In the present draft it is almost a side issue! Phocas visited Rome.If Lucius wanted to assassinate him why not just do it then and install a pagan emperor in the West?

The pagan plot of Lucius needs to be given a chance of success as otherwise his killing becomes motiveless. The penultimate paragraph of page 232 states that Alaric believed the plot would fail anyway. Why then did he kill his lover?

Motivation for murder must be addressed. Most murders are crimes of passion.Political assassinations,by contrast, are carefully planned for supposedly rational objectives. The murderer in “column” satisfies neither of these criteria. In fact it falls between the two stools.Since it is the climax of the story it must be made absolutely credible.In the present draft it appears almost casual!

Page 26 states that the great persecution by Diocletian was the Seventh. Actually it is usually described as the Tenth List available on request. Do you have a rival list?

Since the work is entitled “Column of Phocas” and such a monument exists at Rome, the latter should be given prominence to explain the significance. (If it is insignificant, it should not be the title!) One paragraph at the beginning of Chapter Nineteen (page 106) is insufficient. The column was erected by the Pope after the visit by Phocas.