

Matthias Hardt

The importance of far-distance-trade for the Slavic princes of the early and high Middle Ages

Slavic princes of the high Middle Ages, but to an extent also those of the Moravian Empire, had large treasures at their command, mainly consisting of silver. They owed these to a long-distance trade connecting Europe with Central Asia and North Africa and from which these princes either profited or in which they were directly involved. This was a large-scale trade in human beings, who had either been captured during the numerous wars between the Slavic princes or were sourced from their 'own' societies, that is to say their demographic surplus. This way of acquiring people happened with the view of obtaining metal and thus maintaining one's power base. The Muslim empires between central Asia and the Iberian peninsula were greatly interested in unfree labor, which could be deployed for many tasks in the palaces and armies, but also in mines, on ships and in agricultural and craft production. Not only Spanish Cordoba but, through the mediation of Venice, the entire eastern Mediterranean and via the river systems of East Central Europe even the Black Sea area, Mesopotamia and Central Asia were the destination of slave traders and slaves from East Central Europe.