Joseph C. Miller Memorial Lecture Series

21

eds. Janico Albrecht, Jeannine Bischoff, Sarah Dusend

Alice Rio

Slaving and the Funding of Elite Status in Early Medieval Europe (ca. 800–1000 AD)

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In the last few years the study of early medieval European slavery has become almost unrecognisable. Back in the 2000s (which is when I first started thinking about this topic), people who thought that there were vast numbers of chattel slaves around in Europe during the early middle ages tended, first of all, to be among a minority of historians. They also tended to think in terms of continuity from Roman slavery, and to concentrate on social historical questions, involving labour relations and social position. The old debate about when Roman "slaves" became medieval "serfs" was both an important question and a rather unhelpful opposition, and in itself did much to confuse the terms of the issue.[1]

I am very grateful to the organisers of the Joseph C. Miller memorial lecture series for the invitation to speak, to Chris Wickham and Marek Jankowiak for being kind enough to read and comment on a draft version, as well as to the two anonymous reviewers for their generous comments and suggestions.

1 As I argued in Alice Rio, *Slavery After Rome, 500–1100* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2017). The literature is vast, but for some important statements in this debate: Marc Bloch, "Comment et pourquoi finit l'esclavage antique," *Annales E.S.C.* 2, no. 1–2 (1947): 30–44 and 161–70; Pierre Bonnassie, "Survie et extinction du régime esclavagiste dans l'Occident du haut moyen-âge (IVe-XIe siècle)," *Cahiers de civilisation médiévale* 28 (1985): 307–43; Guy Bois, *La mutation de l'an mil: Lournand, village mâconnais de l'Antiquité au féodalisme* (Paris: Librairie Fayard, 1989); Ludolf Kuchenbuch, *Bäuerliche Gesellschaft und Klosterherrschaft im 9. Jahrhundert* (Wiesbaden: Steiner, 1978). For a historiographical review of this literature up to the 1990s, Wendy Davies, "On Servile Status in the Early Middle Ages," in *Serfdom and Slavery: Studies in Legal Bondage*, ed. Michael L. Bush (London: Routledge, 1996): 225–46. Later contributions: Adriaan Verhulst, "The Decline of Slavery and the Economic Expansion of the Early Middle Ages," *Past & Present* 133 (1991): 195–203; Hans-Werner Goetz, "Serfdom in the Carolingian Period," *Early Medieval Europe* 2 (1993): 29–51; Francesco Panero, *Schiavi, servi e villani nell'Italia medievale* (Turin: Paravia/Scriptorium, 1999); Susan Mosher Stuard, "Ancillary Evidence on the Decline of Medieval Slavery," *Past & Present* 149 (1995): 3–28 (reading the metanarrative as applying to men but not women); Jean-Pierre Devroey, "Men and Women in Early Medieval Serfdom: The Ninth-Century North Frankish Evidence," *Past & Present* 166 (2000): 3–30; Etienne Renard, "Les *mancipia* carolingiens étaient-ils des esclaves?" in *Les moines du Der, 673–1790*, ed. Patrick Corbet (Langres: Dominique Guéniot, 2000): 179–209; Laurent Feller, "Liberté et servitude en Italie centrale (VIIIe-Xe siècle)," *Mélanges de l'École française de Rome: Moyen* Âge 112, no. 2 (2000): 511–33; Carl I. Hammer, *A Large-Scale Slave Society of the Early Middle Ages: Slaves and Their Families in Early Medieval Bavaria* (Burlington, VT: Aldershot, 2002); Werner Rösener, "Vom Sklaven zum Bauern: Zur Stellung der Hörigen in der frühmittelalterlichen Grundherrschaft," in *Tätigkeitsfelder und Erfahrungshorizonte des ländlichen Menschen in der frühmittelalterlichen Grundherrschaft (bis ca. 1000): Festschrift für Dieter Hägermann zum 65. Geburtstag*, ed. Brigitte Kasten (Munich: Steiner, 2006): 71–89; Nicolas Carrier, *Les usages de la servitude: Seigneurs et paysans dans le royaume de Bourgogne (VI^{e}-XV^{e})* (Paris: Presses de

The focus of much recent research, by contrast, has been shifting ever more towards chattel slavery, raiding, and sale – all processes long acknowledged in the historiography, but traditionally dismissed as relatively marginal, even by those who considered the lives of early medieval peasants as largely in continuity with Roman slavery.[2] It is now increasingly becoming the case that if one is interested in slavery in early medieval Europe, the obvious *time* to look for slaves is no longer the immediate post-Roman period, but the ninth and tenth centuries; and the obvious *place* is no longer, as in the classic literature on the subject from Marc Bloch onwards, the Carolingian empire with its estate surveys and lists of free and unfree peasants, but regions very far to the west, north or east of it, like Ireland, Iceland, Scandinavia and eastern Europe, or, to the south, frontier regions like the Iberian peninsula, southern

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l'université Paris-Sorbonne, 2012); Stefan Esders, *Die Formierung der Zensualität: Zur kirchlichen Transformation des spätrömischen Patronatswesens im frühen Mittelalter* (Ostfildern: Thorbecke, 2010). Within a more general discussion: Chris Wickham, *Framing the Early Middle Ages: Europe and the Mediterranenan* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2005): 519–88.

2 For continental Western Europe, even scholars strongly committed to continuity from Roman slavery into the early middle ages did not frame such continuity in terms of slaves obtained through either raiding or trading, but rather made their argument on the basis of the severity of the legal strictures said to apply to *servi* in contemporary law-codes: e.g. Bonnassie, "Survie et extinction"; Hammer, *A Large-Scale Slave Society*. Chattel slavery as such has been a longer-standing feature of the historiography on Britain and Ireland, though not until comparatively recently in the light of an external or long-distance trade: for this earlier literature, see, on England, David Pelteret, "Slave Raiding and Slave Trading in Early England," *Anglo-Saxon England* 9 (1980): 99–114; David Pelteret, *Slavery in Early Mediaeval England* (Woodbridge: Boydell Press, 1995). For Ireland discussion of chattel slavery until the 2010s tended to feature in more general studies of society based on the law tracts: Fergus Kelly, *A Guide to Early Irish Law* (Dublin: Dublin Institute for Advanced Studies, 1988): 95–97; Fergus Kelly, *Early Irish Farming* (Dublin: School of Celtic Studies, Dublin Institute for Advanced Studies, 1997): 438–40; Thomas Charles-Edwards, *Early Christian Ireland* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2000): 68–71; also Charlene M. Eska, "Women and Slavery in the Early Irish Laws," *Studia Celtica Fennica* 8 (2011): 29–39. For an early contribution on slave trading to external markets in the viking period, though taking a minimalist view of slave-taking in the ninth and tenth centuries and placing its apex in the eleventh: Poul Holm, "The Slave Trade of Dublin, Ninth to Twelfth Centuries," *Peritia* 5 (1986): 317–45; even earlier for Wales, E.I. Bromberg, "Wales and the Medieval Slave Trade," *Speculum* 17, no. 2 (1942): 263–69. More recently on Britain and Ireland, but essentially rejecting economic contextualisation: David Wyatt, *Slaves and Warriors in Medieval Britain and Ireland, 800–1200* (Leiden: Brill, 2009).

Italy or Sicily – all areas that until relatively recently had received very short shrift from the bulk of the historiography on medieval western Europe. This change in focus has come out of a recent drastic upwards re-evaluation of the likely volume of slave trading from Europe to the eastern Mediterranean and Central Asia, as well as, to a lesser degree, towards Al-Andalus (Muslim Spain).[3] That trade peaked in the ninth and especially the tenth centuries, and mostly involved people from areas that had never been part of the Roman empire in the first place, with slaves taken from Slavic regions, Ireland or Britain, and major consumer markets in places like Baghdad and Bukhara, in what are now modern-day Iraq and Uzbekistan. It was enabled by the joining together of high demand in Muslim markets with the advent of the Viking Age in northern Europe. Although it tapped into existing slaving practices both in regions that had been part of the Roman empire and in regions that had not, in terms of numbers, distance, or geography, it was in essence a new phenomenon, very distinct from the slave trade of the immediate post-Roman centuries.[4]

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3 On the impact of this trade in Mediterranean regions, a key intervention was Michael McCormick, *Origins of the European Economy* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2001); also Michael McCormick, "New Light on the Dark Ages: How the Slave Trade Fuelled the Carolingian Economy," *Past & Present* 177 (2002): 17–54. On northern and eastern European regions, see e.g. Marek Jankowiak, "Two Systems of Trade in the Western Slavic Lands in the 10th Century," in *Economies, Monetisation and Society in the West Slavic Lands 800–1200 AD*, ed. Mateusz Bogucki and Marian Rębkowski (Szczecin: Wydawnictwo, 2013): 137–48; the 'Dirhams for Slaves' project in Oxford (2013–2017): https://www.ashmolean.org/dirhams-slaves; Janel Fontaine, *Slave Trading in Early Medieval Europe* (Manchester, Manchester University Press, forthcoming). On viking involvement in this trade, see the literature in fn. 4.

4 On the vikings as a decisive connecting factor for slave trading across Europe: Mary Valante, "Castrating Monks: Vikings, the Slave Trade, and the Value of Eunuchs," in *Castration and Culture in the Middle Ages*, ed. L. Tracy (Cambridge: D.S. Brewer, 2013): 174–87; Ben Raffield, "The Slave Markets of the Viking World: Comparative Perspectives on an 'Invisible Archaeology'," *Slavery & Abolition* 40, no. 4 (2019): 11–16; Felix Biermann and Marek Jankowiak, eds., *The Archaeology of Slavery in Early Medieval Northern Europe: The Invisible Commodity* (Cham: Springer, 2021); Jacek Gruszczyński, Marek Jankowiak and Jonathan Shepard, eds., *Viking-Age Trade: Silver, Slaves and Gotland* (Abingdon: Routledge, 2021); Matthias Toplak, Hanne Østhus and Rudolf Simek, eds., *Viking-Age Slavery* (Vienna: Fassbaender, 2021); Ben Raffield, "Bound in Captivity: Intersections of Viking Raiding, Slaving, and Settlement in Western Europe during the Ninth Century CE," *Scandinavian Journal of History* 47, no. 4 (2022): 414–37; on trade more generally but taking slaves as a key commodity: Tom Horne, *A Viking*

Some of this dramatic shift in focus has been driven by new data: newly discovered silver hoards and other archaeological finds. Much of the relevant information, though, had been available for quite some time, but had remained confined within quite compartmentalised research specialisms, so that it did not become mainstream until relatively recently.[5] This is partly because studying the regions involved in this long-distance slave trade requires a very demanding and rather rare skill set, including highly specialised technical training (like numismatic) as well as linguistic training (much of the sources and the historiography are in languages that tend to fall outside the core training of most graduate programmes in medieval history, at least outside the modern nations which consider them part of their heritage: medieval languages like Old Church Slavonic, Old Irish, Old Norse, or classical Arabic, and modern ones like Russian, Polish, Czech or Swedish).

The reason this material is becoming more mainstream is not that these skills are now becoming more widely mastered than they once were, though this may be starting to change. It has more to do with the rise of global history. Global history is, notoriously, a lot more forgiving about gaps in skills sets than are older historiographical traditions: this is what makes historians both excited and nervous about it. While most historians working within the constellation of highly specialist fields relevant to the study of the early medieval slave trade would likely not

Market Kingdom in Ireland and Britain: Trade Networks and the Importation of a Southern Scandinavian Silver Bullion Economy (Abingdon: Routledge, 2022), especially 239–40. Wider in their scope but also emphasising trade, long-distance contacts and slavery: Neil Price, *The Children of Ash and Elm: A History of the Vikings* (New York: Basic Books, 2020): 400–443; Cat Jarman, *River Kings: A New History of the Vikings from Scandinavia to the Silk Road* (London: William Collins, 2021); Csete Katona, *Vikings of the Steppe: Scandinavians, Rus', and the Turkic World (c. 750–1050)* (Abingdon: Routledge, 2023). Jukka Jari Korpela, *Slaves from the North: Finns and Karelians in the Eastern European Slave Trade, 900–1600* (Leiden: Brill, 2019) has a mostly later focus.

5 For earlier work on long-distance exchange, taking slavery as an important exchange good, which could have had a very wide impact on the wider field of early medieval history but mostly did not until recently, see in particular Thomas S. Noonan, *The Islamic World, Russia and the Vikings, 750–900: The Numismatic Evidence* (Aldershot: Routledge, 1998). The importance of slavery has long been generally acknowledged in the literature on the Rus: e.g. Simon Franklin and Jonathan Shepard, *The Emergence of Rus, 750–1200* (London: Routledge, 1996): 119 – a book highly influential in its own right though not at the time on the metanarrative concerning slavery.

identify themselves as practitioners of global history, the fact that their work fits so well with global historical concerns has been a key reason for its dramatically increased visibility. The rise of global history, and the shift in attention it has occasioned away from traditional "heartlands" and towards zones of cultural interface (zones that used to be called "peripheral"), has supplied greater incentives than ever before for historians to look for connections outside their own field of specialism. In some cases it has also supplied the means, since it has meant that more and more work is now being published in English, which tends to be the *lingua franca* that people in hitherto mostly unrelated fields in different countries tend to use when they suddenly need to communicate with one another. This has done a great deal to start closing the historiographical gap of the Cold War era, and to make work on regions in the ex-Communist bloc much more accessible to a wider audience.

The themes generally privileged by global history have also contributed to making the slave trade suddenly seem much more important than it once did. Global history tends to attach greater importance to things and people that were moving or being moved long-distance; this applies above all to global history that is concerned with connectivity, as opposed to more comparative angles. Accordingly, a large number of publications about globally-connected vikings and long-distance trading (especially slave-trading) have come out in the last ten years, and the rate is ever accelerating.[6] Viking slave trading and raiding, again, are hardly new themes, but they *are* in a new position: whereas earlier big narratives about early medieval slavery had to do with the exploitation of labour and local practices of slavery or unfree status, and slave raiding

[6] 2021 was a peak moment for publications on viking and northern European slavery: Biermann and Jankowiak, *The Archaeology of Slavery*; Gruszczyński, Jankowiak and Shepard, *Viking-Age Trade*; Toplak, Østhus and Simek, *Viking-Age Slavery*; on slavery within Scandinavia and therefore less focused on raiding and trading specifically: Stefan Brink, *Thraldom: A History of Slavery in the Viking Age* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2021); more general but also emphasizing slavery: Jarman, *River Kings*. 2021 was also the year when the first two volumes ever to include a number of chapters on global medieval slavery came out: Craig Perry, David Eltis, Stanley L. Engerman and David Richardson, eds., *The Cambridge World History of Slavery*, vol. 2 (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2021); Paulin Ismard ed., *Les mondes de l'esclavage: une histoire comparée* (Paris: Seuil, 2021).

and trading had been seen as a more marginal phenomenon, the centre of gravity has shifted, and the situation is now very nearly reversed.

All this might make it sound as if the two approaches are in competition; but of course there need not – should not – be a tension here. The recognition that there were routes taking slaves in significant numbers from Europe to key centres of demand in Muslim regions does not make older social historical debates and the question of internal uses for slaves and more nebulously unfree people any less valid or important. If anything, it ought to contribute productively to those debates. So far this has not happened very much, and these have remained quite distinct strands of discussion, without much cross-fertilisation: the slaves who moved and the slaves who stayed have continued to follow largely separate tracks in the historiography.[7] There are powerful reasons for this. One I already mentioned: the study of this slave trade and that of the social history of unfreedom tend to be about different places, in different languages, using different methods and different types of evidence. Beyond this, even for regions where evidence survives for slaves both as tradable commodities and as an internal source of honour, labour, and sexual and other services, the two tend to overlap very little in the surviving source material, making it very difficult to connect them empirically.[8] But leaving things at that is also beginning to seem increasingly untenable: there is a disconnect here that looks more and more as if it needs and deserves discussion.

7 In my own book (Rio, *Slavery After Rome*, from 2017) I mostly focused on social uses of slavery, with the objective of doing away with the "transition from slavery to serfdom" paradigm. As a result, I mainly dealt with what people were doing with slaves within Europe, and what claiming certain people as slaves allowed more socially dominant people to do that they could not otherwise have done. I devoted relatively little space to slaves traded over long distances to places outside Europe, since these did not seem as relevant to the paradigms I was tackling, and also because the general dearth of written sources meant I did not consider them to be knowable in the same way. I now think this issue deserved more space than I gave it at the time. The volume of research published since certainly makes tackling it much more feasible. I don't think that any of what follows substantially contradicts the main thrust of my argument there, but it does put it in a different perspective.

8 Fontaine, *Slave Trading*.

This lecture is an attempt to think, in both a connected and a comparative way, about how we might go about integrating what is now known (or strongly suspected) about long-distance slave trading into the wider social history of early medieval Europe: in other words, when, where and why this slave trade affected internal practices of slavery – and also when it did not, since that needs explaining just as much. Everywhere the "new", revitalised slave trade interacted with existing local political, social and economic practices and expectations – violating some, feeding off others. Obviously, here my ambition is merely to sketch out some possibilities and avenues of enquiry, rather than claiming any kind of full treatment.

Particularly useful to work with for this purpose, I think, is Joseph Miller's 2012 book *The Problem of Slavery as History*, in which, instead of concentrating on slavery as a legal, social or economic *structure*, he analyses slav*ing* as a political strategy.[9] Miller sees slaving as a strategy deployed for internal political and social competition by people ("slavers") who were typically marginal to a given polity, or at least more marginal to it than they wanted to be. Slaving allowed them to eschew established routes to internal social advancement: it was a way for them *not* to engage with the community within which they were competing, by using slaves as a shortcut to power and prestige. This means that slavery frequently served interstitial or emergent interests, and also that these efforts were often followed by a reaction from more established agents, such as rulers and the state. This model takes slaving as a dynamic phenomenon, and its profile in any given society as the sum of strategies of particular agents with specific goals in mind, both driven by and driving continual change in the power relations prevailing in that society. This, of course, also makes it much more open to being interpreted historically. This is a very thought-provoking book, but it has not yet, to my knowledge, really been used seriously to think about the early middle ages; and since this lecture series is in Miller's memory, this seemed a good opportunity to try it.

9 Joseph C. Miller, *The Problem of Slavery as History: A Global Approach* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 2012).

Looking at this question along essentially political lines works well in our case, because although the amount of silver from Muslim markets was certainly very large, it was probably still not enough to be really transformative for the overall economy of any of these regions, or to shift the basis on which they functioned: as we shall see, those remained ultimately grounded in relations of production to which slavery never really became all that crucial anywhere, even in those areas of Europe where the slave trade most stimulated a local demand and a local use for slaves. A recent ballpark calculation has suggested we should be thinking in terms of perhaps a thousand slaves per year on average reaching Samanid markets along the main axis of this trade at its height.[10] But these cash injections *were* undoubtedly transformative politically, at least for *some* sections of the population in *some* regions. Seeing this less as a problem of economic history and more as a problem related to the funding of elite political status helps to make more sense of the different choices made by different types of agent in all these various regions.

[10] Marek Jankowiak, "Infrastructures and Organization of the Early Islamic Slave Trade with Northern Europe," in *Land and Trade in Early Islam: The Economy of the Islamic Middle East 750–1050 CE*, ed. Hugh Kennedy and Fanny Bessard (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2023): 463–503, at 463.

1. Slave Trading Routes: Points of Origin and Centres of Demand

Since this has only recently become a mainstream topic, it seems worth starting with a very brief summary outline of what recent research suggests about the main slave trading routes in operation in western Eurasia, roughly between Ireland in the west and Samarkand in the east.

The main centre of commercial demand for slaves during the ninth century was the Abbasid empire, centred in Baghdad or alternatively in Samarra. After what looks like a hiatus in the late ninth century, eastwards trade routes took off again from the beginning of the tenth, with the main centre of gravity this time in the Samanid empire (across what are now modern-day Iran, Uzbekistan and Afghanistan), centred on the major trading cities of Samarkand and Bukhara.[11] In the tenth century, the newly declared Umayyad caliphate of Córdoba also became an important destination for the slave trade.[12]

In all these places (with the exception of the Samanid empire, where the evidence is much less clear) state demand is generally considered to have been the prime mover for long-distance slave trading. State demand for slaves was largely about supplying palaces with concubines, eunuch bureaucrats, and also with soldiers.[13] Each of these categories, for different reasons, had low rates of internal reproduction, at least *as* slaves. The challenge of reproduction is most obvious in the case of

11 On this shift and centres of demand see Marek Jankowiak, "What Does the Slave Trade in the saqaliba tell us About Early Islamic Slavery?" *International Journal of Middle East Studies* 49 (2017): 169–72.

12 Mohamed Meouak, *Saqaliba: eunuques et esclaves à la conquête du pouvoir. Géographie et histoire des élites politiques « marginales » dans l'Espagne umayyade* (Helsinki: Academia Scientiarum Fennica, 2004). By contrast, there is much less evidence that the Fatimid caliphate of North Africa, declared slightly earlier in the tenth century, was a major destination for European slaves. The vast majority of slaves there came from Africa: Craig Perry, "The Daily Life of Slaves and the Global Reach of Slavery" (PhD diss., Emory University, 2014): 30–42.

13 Bureaucrats and soldiers: Pierre Guichard and Mohamed Meouak, "Al-Sakaliba," in *Encyclopaedia of Islam*, vol. 8, ed. C.E. Bosworth, E. van Donzel, W.P. Heinrichs and G. Lecomte, 2nd ed. (Leiden: Brill, 1995): 872–81, especially at 879–81. Concubines: Matthew S. Gordon and Kathryn A. Hain, eds., *Concubines and Courtesans: Women and Slavery in Islamic History* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2017).

eunuchs, but it applies to soldiers too, who were usually manumitted at some point during their careers – so any children they had would be free.[14] A slave concubine who became pregnant by her master in principle (practice might differ) automatically underwent a change in legal status whereby the child would be free and she herself became an *umm walad*, "mother of a child", who could no longer be sold, made to work outside the house or separated from her child, and had to be manumitted at her master's death.[15] All this, combined with a strict prohibition in principle on the enslavement of co-religionists, meant that Muslim regions relied on constant replenishment from sources outside the *Dar al Islam*, the House of Islam. Although driven by the state, the presence of this bulk trade, of routes and a market obviously also made it easier for private individuals to become slave-owners. In all these central urban places, private ownership of slaves seems to have been a fairly normal expectation, as is averred in all kinds of written sources.[16]

Another centre of demand for imported slaves was Constantinople, in the Byzantine empire, again especially during the tenth century.[17] Slaves notably feature as a key commodity in the tenth-century trade

[14] Manumission seems to have made almost no practical difference to such soldiers, so it tends not to be stressed in sources, and the evidence is elusive: on both the normality and "fundamental insignificance" of manumission in such cases: Daniel Pipes, *Slave Soldiers and Islam: The Genesis of a Military System* (New Haven, NJ: Yale University Press, 1981): 18–22, quote at 22. Slave soldiers of Turkish origins, or mamluks, in ninth-century Samarra do seem to have been manumitted, and there is no reason to think *saqaliba* would have been different: Hugh Kennedy, *The Armies of the Caliphs: Military and Society in the Early Islamic State* (London: Routledge, 2001): at 121–22.

[15] For a nuanced discussion see Shaun Marmon, "Intersections of Gender, Sex, and Slavery: Female Sexual Slavery," in *The Cambridge World History of Slavery*, vol. 2, ed. Craig Perry, David Eltis, Stanley L. Engerman and David Richardson (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2021): 185–213.

[16] Particularly striking are the (slightly later) slave buyers' handbooks, such as that of Ibn Butlan, an eleventh-century Christian physician: translation and commentary in Floréal Sanagustin, *Médecine et société en Islam medieval: Ibn Butlan ou la connaissance médicale au service de la communauté* (Paris: Librairie orientaliste Paul Geuthner, 2010).

[17] Youval Rotman, *Les esclaves et l'esclavage: de la Méditerranée antique à la Méditerranée médiévale, VIe-XIe s.* (Paris: Les Belles Lettres, 2004); in English translation: *Byzantine Slavery* and the Mediterranean World, trans. J.M. Todd (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 2009); Noel Lenski, "Slavery in the Byzantine Empire," in *The Cambridge World History of Slavery*, vol. 2, ed. Craig Perry, David Eltis, Stanley L. Engerman and David Richardson (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2021): 453–81.

treaties between Kievan Rus' and Constantinople.[18] But the empire was also contiguous with Slavic territories and could supply itself militarily. Captive-taking is emphasised in later tenth-century narrative sources, during renewed Byzantine military expansion.[19] Overall the demand from Constantinople seems to have had a somewhat more limited and shorter-range impact than the demand from Muslim markets.

Feeding this demand were two main "slaving zones" within Europe.[20] Slavic regions in eastern Europe and around the Baltic seem to have been the main pool for slave-taking, as famously enshrined in the (later) spread of the Latin word for "Slav", *sclavus*, as the root for the word "slave" in just about every modern European language.[21] Two main

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18 Trade treaties in the Russian Primary Chronicle: Samuel Hazzard Cross and Olgerd P. Sherbowitz-Wetzor, ed. and trans., *The Russian Primary Chronicle: Laurentian Text* (Cambridge, MA: The Medieval Academy of America, 1953): 64–68, 73–77. The Primary Chronicle is a much later text but with the exception of the earliest 907 treaty, the texts of the trade treatises are generally accepted as broadly authentic translations from Greek originals: Petr S. Stefanovich, "The Political Organisation of Rus' in the Tenth Century," *Jahrbücher für Geschichte Osteuropas* 64, no. 4 (2016): 529–44, at 532. On the importance of slaves to the Rus trade with Byzantium: Franklin and Shepard, *The Emergence of Rus*: 119; Jonathan Shepard, "The Origins of Rus' (c. 900–1015)," in *The Cambridge History of Russia*, vol. 1, ed. Maureen Perrie (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2006): 47–72, at 57. On slaves moved from Kiev down Dnieper: Constantine Porphyrogenitus, *De administrando imperio*, ed. Gy. Moravcsik, trans. R.J.H. Jenkins, rev. ed. (Washington, DC: Dumbarton Oaks Research Library and Collection, 1967): c. 9, pp. 62–63.

19 See, for example, *The History of Leo the Deacon: Byzantine Military Expansion in the Tenth Century*, trans. Alice-Mary Talbot and Denis F. Sullivan (Washington, DC: Dumbarton Oaks Research Library and Collection, 2005): II, 9, at p. 82, on Nikephoros "ravaging the fields and enslaving whole towns with thousands of inhabitants" in Crete. Catherine Holmes, "The Making and Breaking of Kinetic Empire: Mobility, Communication and Political Change in the Eastern Mediterranean, c. 900–1100 CE," *Transactions of the Royal Historical Society* 32 (2022): 25–45, at 36; Eric McGeer, *Sowing the Dragon's Teeth: Byzantine Warfare in the Tenth Century* (Washington, DC: Dumbarton Oaks Research Library and Collection, 1995): appendix, 365–68; Helga Köpstein, "Einige Aspekte des Byzantinischen und Bulgarischen Sklavenhandels im X. Jahrhundert. Zur Novelle des Joannes Tzimiskes über Sklavenhandelszoll," in *Actes du premier Congrès International des Etudes Balkaniques et Sud-Est Européennes*, vol. 3 (Sofia: Académie bulgare des sciences, 1969): 237–47.

20 For this expression, useful in this historical context, see Jeffrey Fynn-Paul, "Empire, Monotheism and Slavery in the Greater Mediterranean Region from Antiquity to the Early Modern Era," *Past & Present* 205 (2009): 3–40.

21 For a lot of these (e.g. in English), though, this reflects later borrowing from other vernacular languages rather indicating an early wholesale European-wide shift in meaning in Latin. For discussion, see Charles Verlinden, "L'origine de sclavus = esclave,"

trading routes took slaves out of Slavic eastern Europe. One left via the west, from places like Prague, which seems to have been a key centre for handing over captives to professional traders, and from there on to various places, including Verdun, noted in the tenth century as a key centre for making eunuchs, then up the Meuse and down the Rhône to the south, and on to Al-Andalus, which became known throughout the Muslim world as a place out of where many Slavic slaves were traded.[22] Venice seems to have been another important transit point for the slave trade towards the eastern Mediterranean. This trade route only began to attract historiographical attention from 2001, with the debate sparked by Michael McCormick's argument that "the slave trade fuelled the Carolingian economy": that is, that the Mediterranean slave trade towards the Abbasid caliphate (and to a lesser degree to Al-Andalus) brought in so much silver that it helped to monetise the Carolingian economy and fuel its economic take-off.[23] There was – and still is – quite a lot of scepticism about this wider claim. One problem for clinching McCormick's argument is that it is not that easy to follow the money: it is found much more as "virtual" coins mentioned in documents rather than in real hoards. This does not in itself necessarily mean very much, since even trade that must have been quantitatively significant if the written sources are anything to go by, such as the trade from Prague to Al-Andalus, has yielded virtually no coin evidence.[24] At any rate, for reasons that remain unclear (and which may be down to many factors

Bulletin Du Cange: archivum latinitatis medii aevi 17 (1943 for 1942): 97–128; Rio, *Slavery After Rome*: 165–67.

22 On Verdun as a centre for castration: Liudprand of Cremona, *Antapodosis* VI, 6; edition: Paolo Chiesa, *Liudprandi Cremonensis Opera*, Corpus Christianorum Continuatio Medievalis (Turnhout: Brepols, 1998): 147–48; translation: Paolo Squatriti, *The Complete Works of Liudprand of Cremona* (Washington, DC: Catholic University of America Press, 2007): 199. Ibn Hawqal claims "all the Saqāliba eunuchs in the world come from al-Andalus": cited in Paul Lunde and Caroline Stone, *Ibn Fadlan and the Land of Darkness: Arab Travellers to the Far North* (London: Penguin, 2011): 173.

23 McCormick, *Origins* and "New Light on the 'Dark Ages'." On Al-Andalus: Clément Venco, "Par-delà la frontière: marchands et commerce d'esclaves entre la Gaule carolingienne et al-Andalus (VIIIe-Xe siècles)," in *Las fronteras pirenaicas en la Edad Media (siglos vi-xv) / Les frontières pyrénéennes au Moyen Âge (vie-xve siècles)*, ed. Sébastien Gasc, Philippe Sénac, Clément Venco and Carlos Laliena (Zaragoza: Prensas de la Universidad de Zaragoza, 2018): 125–67.

24 Jankowiak, "Two Systems of Trade."

both medieval and modern, such as different circulation patterns, different hoarding or retrieval practices, as well as different laws on metal detecting), for this western route coins do not offer a very solid evidence trail.[25] But the dossier McCormick gathered on the Mediterranean slave trade, while circumstantial, is nevertheless highly evocative and was an important turning-point in the field, not least in getting people used to the idea of slave-taking and slave-trading as part of the reality of living during these centuries even in "mainstream" Christian, Latin regions, and not just in Celtic or Scandinavian "peripheries".

By contrast, the money trail for the second route transporting Slavs to Muslim regions, which went via the north and the east and provided the model that McCormick then extended to a Mediterranean context, leaves no room for doubt.[26] *That* route has yielded some of the biggest hoards in the history of hoarding: eastern Europe and Scandinavia have yielded something close to 400,000 Abbasid and then Samanid silver dirhams, representing an overall likely influx of coins that has been estimated in the tens or even the hundreds of millions.[27] Furs and amber, high-value trading goods in their own right, were traded alongside slaves, so the slave trade does not account on its own for these stag-

25 Italy has yielded very few early medieval hoards overall across this period: Rory Naismith, *Making Money in the Early Middle Ages* (Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 2023): 291–92, with further references.

26 Richard Hodges and David Whitehouse, *Mahomet, Charlemagne et les origines de l'Europe*, trans. C. Morrisson et al. (Paris: P. Lethielleux, 1996): 81, discussed by McCormick, "New Light on the 'Dark ages'": 25.

27 For the overall count: Roman K. Kovalev and Alexis C. Kaelin, "Circulation of Arab Silver in Medieval Afro-Eurasia," *History Compass* 5, no. 2 (2007): 560–80; for the estimate: Thomas S. Noonan, "Dirham Exports to the Baltic in the Viking Age: Some Preliminary Observations," in *Sigtuna Papers: Proceedings of the Sigtuna Symposium on Viking-Age Coinage 1–4 June 1989*, ed. Kenneth Jonsson and Brita Malmer (Stockholm: Kungl. Vitterhets Historie och Antikvitets Akademien, 1990): 251–57. The work of Marek Jankowiak has considerably advanced the subject in attempting to use these findings to model the slave trade: Marek Jankowiak, "Dirham Flows into Northern and Eastern Europe and the Rhythms of the Slave Trade with the Islamic World," in *Viking-Age Trade: Silver, Slaves and Gotland*, ed. Jacek Gruszczyński, Marek Jankowiak and Jonathan Shepard (Abingdon: Routledge, 2021): 105–31. In the same volume see also Dariusz Adamczyk, "Trading Networks, Warlords and Hoarders: Islamic Coin Flows into Poland in the Viking Age": 132–54.

gering sums.[28] There is a step change in the number of dirhams found in hoards from the tenth century, though recent lead isotope and trace element analysis of earlier Viking-Age hoards from the Baltic from the first half of the ninth century has shown that many of the silver objects found in them were made out of melted-down dirhams, suggesting that estimates of the amount of silver that reached northern Europe from the Abbasid caliphate may need to be revised significantly upwards for this earlier period too.[29]

Silver coins came into eastern Europe via two different regions controlled by Turkic-speaking semi-nomadic groups, who took a cut and oversaw trade. In the ninth century, the Khazar empire in the Eurasian Steppe and the Caucasus controlled trade to the Abbasid caliphate, with the capital Itil a major staging post.[30] In the tenth century, when the trade became oriented more towards the Samanid empire, the key players were the Volga Bulghars, with the city of Bulghar the main trading hub.[31]

Who was active on this trade route further west can be guessed at from the locations in which silver dirham hoards are found. This is throughout eastern Europe: initially on the Baltic (in the ninth century, Truso, modern Janów Pomorski, seems to have been an important staging-post), then further inland. From the 930s hoards containing dirhams start to be found in lands controlled by what would soon become the first Polish royal dynasty, the Piasts, in Wielkopolska. There the hoards seem

28 Emphasising furs and more doubtful about slaves, unlike most contributors in the same volume: James Howard-Johnston, "The Fur Trade in the Early Middle Ages," in *Viking-Age Trade: Silver, Slaves and Gotland*, ed. Jacek Gruszczyński, Marek Jankowiak and Jonathan Shepard (Abingdon: Routledge, 2021): 57–74.

29 Jane Kershaw, Stephen W. Merkel, Jani Oravisjärvi, Ellen Kooijman and Melanie Kielman-Schmitt, "The Scale of Dirham Imports to the Baltic in the Ninth Century: New Evidence from Archaeometric Analyses of Early Viking-Age Silver," *Fornvännen: Journal of Swedish Antiquarian Research* 116 (Stockholm, 2021): 185–204.

30 Nick Evans, "The Womb of Iron and Silver: Slavery in the Khazar Economy," in *Von den Hunnen zu den Türken – Reiterkrieger in Europa und Zentralasien / From the Huns to the Turks – Mounted Warriors in Europe and Central Asia*, ed. Falko Daim, Harald Meller and Walter Pohl (Halle: Landesamt für Denkmalpflege und Archäologie Sachsen-Anhalt, 2021): 91–99.

31 See now Evgeniy P. Kazakov, "Ninth- and Tenth-Century Volga Bulgar Trade," in *Muslims on the Volga in the Viking Age: In the Footsteps of Ibn Fadlan*, ed. Jonathan Shepard and Luke Treadwell (London: Bloomsbury, 2023): 537–59.

to reflect cooperation between Rus' traders from Kiev and local warrior elites such as the Piasts, who got slaves either through raids or in tribute from surrounding regions like Mazovia.[32]

A large number of dirham hoards are also found in Scandinavia. The involvement of Scandinavians came from the coincidence, in the late eighth century, of the take-off in demand in Abbasid markets with the beginning of military-commercial sea ventures both eastwards and westwards by vikings (in the east forming new and distinctive groupings referred to as Rus'). Their participation as key players in the slave trade significantly elongated its range, bringing us to another, quite different potential pool of slaves, and somehow an even more unknown quantity: Britain and Ireland, as well as those regions of north-western Francia where vikings were also active.[33]

Viking activities in western and in eastern Europe used to be thought of as quite separate, but are now increasingly becoming seen as connected: more and more arguments have been made recently that Britain and Ireland were plugged into eastern markets, and that slaves would

[32] The first examples date from very early in the tenth century, with three hoards apparently all connected to a single Rus trading expedition. Around 40,000 Islamic coins have been found in Polish lands from 160 hoards. Adamczyk, "Trading Networks, Warlords and Hoarders": 144: "in terms of political economy, the early Piast realm was no more than a hierarchical redistribution network of silver and luxury goods obtained by force – or threat of force – and by long-distance trade." See also Dariusz Adamczyk, "The Political Economy of the Arab Silver Redistribution Networks in Viking Age Eastern and Central Europe: Polycentric Connections or Entangled Hierarchies?" *Review* 36, no. 3–4 (2013): 265–86; Dariusz Adamczyk, *Silber und Macht: Fernhandel, Tribute und die piastische Herrschaftsbildung in nordosteuropäischer Perspektive (800–1100)* (Wiesbaden: Harrassowitz, 2014); Marek Jankowiak, "Wer brachte im 10. Jahrhundert die Dirhems in die polnischen Gebiete und warum?" in *Fernhändler, Dynasten, Kleriker. Die piastische Herrschaft in kontinentalen Beziehungsgeflechten vom 10. bis zum frühen 13. Jahrhundert*, ed. Dariusz Adamczyk and Norbert Kersken (Wiesbaden: Harrassowitz, 2015): 41–54; Andrew Roach, "The People Trafficking Princes: Slaves, Silver and State Formation in Poland," *Slavonica* 25, no. 2 (2020): 132–56.

[33] For Francia a vivid (if brief) first-person captivity narrative survives by the bishop Adalhelm of Séez, *Liber Miraculorum* I, 2, ed. Godfrey Henschen, Daniel Papebroch and Jean-Baptiste Carnandet, *Acta Sanctorum*, Aprilis 3, 2nd ed. (Paris: Victor Palme, 1866): cols. 68D–71E, at 68F–69A; for an English translation: Matthew C. Delvaux, "Source: Adalhelm of Séez, from The Miracles of Saint Opportuna, 886–887," http://medievalslavery.org/europe/source-adalhelm-of-seez-from-the-miracles-of-saint-opportuna-886-887/ [accessed 04.01.2024]. For some further examples see Raffield, "Bound in Captivity."

have been a key commodity coming out of them.[34] A case has even been made that a prime goal of viking settlements in Dublin and York would have been to facilitate trade back to the mainly southern Scandinavian markets which were a key point of interface between eastern and western networks.[35] The main two such market towns, Birka and Hedeby, are both known from written sources to have seen traffic in slaves.

Dirhams have been found in Britain and Ireland, in hoards or as single finds, even if in nothing like the same volume as on the eastern routes: only 27 hoards containing dirhams have been found to date in Britain and Ireland, against well over 1,200 hoards in eastern and northern Europe.[36] The extent of remelting makes it harder to see patterns than in eastern and northern European hoards, though new studies based on lead isotope analysis are again producing much new and crucial information in this area. Dirhams and other silver did travel from the Baltic and southern Scandinavia to western regions, but in Ireland at least it is hard to detect much silver from these sources before the tenth century. Before that, most of the silver in Hiberno-Scandinavian hoards seems to have been melted down from lower-quality coins from England and the Danelaw, with only small additions from melted-down dirhams.[37] Slaves from Ireland may well still have fed into a long-distance trade during the ninth century, but if they did it must have been via trading hubs in Britain, a relatively short hop along a longer trading network.

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34 Valante, "Castrating Monks"; Horne, *A Viking Market Kingdom*: 239–40; Jarman, *River Kings*: 53–58; Jonathan Shepard, "Why Gotland?" in *Viking-Age Trade: Silver, Slaves and Gotland*, ed. Jacek Gruszczyński, Marek Jankowiak and Jonathan Shepard (Abingdon: Routledge, 2021): 1–12, at 7–9; Fontaine, *Slave Trading*.

35 John Sheehan, "Viking-Age Bullion from Southern Scandinavia and the Baltic Region in Ireland," in *Viking-Age Trade: Silver, Slaves and Gotland*, ed. Jacek Gruszczyński, Marek Jankowiak and Jonathan Shepard (Abingdon: Routledge, 2021): 415–33; Horne, *A Viking Age Market Kingdom*.

36 Sheehan, "Viking-Age Bullion": 424, table 20.1; compare the numbers in Kovalev and Kaelin, "Circulation of Arab Silver."

37 Jane Kershaw and Stephen Merkel, "Viking Wealth in the Irish Sea Zone: New Evidence from Lead Isotope Analyses of Viking-Age Rings and Ingots," in *Proceedings of the 19th Viking Congress* (forthcoming); I am very grateful to Jane Kershaw for letting me read this paper in advance of publication.

The picture, therefore, is less clear than on the eastern route, but there nonetheless seems to be a growing consensus in recent scholarship that slaves must have formed an important part of the wealth that vikings were hoping to gain from their ventures in western Europe – particularly as there were no vast quantities of furs or amber as likely alternative trade goods, as there were further east.[38] In Ireland, where silver is generally thought to have been scarce before the Viking Age, there were also relatively few concentrated stores of precious metals in churches and monasteries, and consequently perhaps fewer targets besides people that might have motivated vikings to come back again and again.[39] Ransoming would have been a good way to mitigate against the lack of significant concentrations of easily accessible metal wealth, by getting local people to shoulder the organisational burden of gathering it and offer it up themselves; but this is hard to quantify, and for it to happen on a large scale would have been dependent on access to extensive moveable resources.[40] A number of Irish captives are thought to have been among the people – of many different origins but under a broadly Scandinavian cultural aegis – who came to settle in Iceland in the later ninth century: in that particular scenario, an extensive need for labour (including caring and reproductive labour) in newly settled lands

38 Shepard, "Why Gotland?": 7. The Annals of Ulster mention large numbers of captives, though the numbers may reflect the symbolic importance of captives more than their actual numerical importance (in the earlier entries they also tend to be amalgamated with the dead, suggesting ransoming was not at the forefront of annalists' minds): *The Annals of Ulster*, ed. and trans. Seán Mac Airt and Gearóid Mac Niocaill (Dublin: School of Celtic Studies, Dublin Institute for Advanced Studies, 1983), e.g. s.a. 840, 868 (one thousand dead and captives in an attack on Armagh), 894 (Armagh again, 710 captives), 948. Holm, "The Slave Trade of Dublin," for further references to Irish annals.

39 Colmán Etchingham, "Slavery or Ransom? Why Vikings Took Captives in Ireland and Beyond," in *Viking-Age Slavery*, ed. Matthias Toplak, Hanne Østhus and Rudolf Simek (Vienna: Fassbaender, 2021): 117–45, 117–19 on church treasures mainly including objects made of non-precious metals. Silver is usually thought to have come into Ireland in large quantities only with the arrival of Scandinavians: Michael Ryan, "Some Archaeological Comments on the Occurrence and Use of Silver in Pre-Viking Ireland," in *Studies on Early Ireland*: *Essays in Honour of M.V. Duignan*, ed. B.G. Scott (Belfast: Association of Young Irish Archaeologists, 1982): 45–50.

40 Etchingham, though, is correct to note that written sources by themselves do not make obvious any difference between Ireland, England or Francia: in all regions there are references to captives and also to ransoming as an expectation for *some* people (Etchingham, "Slavery or Ransom?": 129).

would have made it worth diverting at least some captives from *both* ransoming and slave-trading.[41]

Aside from Slavic regions and Britain and Ireland, there were smaller slaving pockets in the Iberian peninsula, Provence, southern Italy, and Greece. These were areas often targeted by pirates and raids, most often from a variety of greater and smaller Muslim polities, but occasionally also by vikings, on their rare ventures that far south.[42] It has been suggested that raiders there may have been chiefly after ransom, especially in Byzantine regions in Greece and southern Italy – though here as elsewhere, there was probably always a relatively high level of indeterminacy regarding the outcome, and whether the raid would yield ransom money or slaves for sale.[43]

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41 There is debate between maximalist and minimalist positions on this point, but the presence itself of Irish people, both free and unfree, in the first waves of settlement of Iceland seems relatively uncontroversial. For a maximalist reading, see Grethe Jacobsen, "The Celtic Element in the Icelandic Population and the Position of Women," in *Opuscula*, vol. 12, ed. Britta Olrik Fredriksen, Bibliotheca Arnamagnæana 44 (Copenhagen: Museum Tusculanum Press, 2005): 284–303. Two famous, though now also disputed, studies found a possible trace of slave-taking in Ireland in modern Icelandic DNA, where mitochondrial DNA (inherited through an unbroken female line), when compared with Y-chomosome DNA (inherited through an exclusively male line), suggested a much higher proportion of female ancestors with genetic profiles closer to those found in Ireland, as opposed to from Scandinavia or Scotland, which dominated among male ancestors, suggesting that a much higher proportion of the settler female population in Iceland was Irish and likely victims of raiding and capture. This result, though, may be heavily affected by genetic drift, a significant risk in view of the small population of Iceland, and one further compounded by a major die-off event during the Black Death. Agnar Helgason et al., "mtDNA and the Origin of the Icelanders: Deciphering Signals of Recent Population History," *American Journal of Human Genetics* 66 (2000): 999–1016; Agnar Helgason et al., "Estimating Scandinavian and Gaelic Ancestry in the Male Settlers of Iceland," *American Journal of Human Genetics* 67 (2000): 697–717. For comment on both Jacobsen and the DNA studies, see Judith Jesch, *The Viking Diaspora* (Abingdon: Routledge, 2015): 34–36, 56–58, 108–12.

42 On vikings in the Mediterranean: Ann Christys, *Vikings in the South: Voyages to Iberia and the Mediterranean* (London: Bloomsbury, 2015); Neil Price, M.H. Eriksen and C. Janke, eds., *Vikings in the Mediterranean* (Athens: Norwegian Institute at Athens, 2023).

43 On ransom rather than slaving as the intended goal of Muslim raids on Calabria, revising downwards the devastation of Muslim raids: Adele Curness, "'Slavery' Outside the Slave Trade: The Movement and Status of Captives between Byzantine Calabria and the Islamic World," in *Transmitting and Circulating the Late Antique and Byzantine Worlds*, ed. Mirela Ivanova and Hugh Jeffery (Leiden: Brill, 2019): 102–22, especially at 112–14. Arguing for a general indeterminacy regarding the fate of captives, and

Not coincidentally, it was also around the same time, from the late eighth and ninth century, that new trans-Saharan trade routes in Africa began to take slaves towards centres of demand in North Africa and the Middle East. Up to that point slaves from the south had reached the eastern Mediterranean mostly via east Africa, the Red Sea and Egypt, and this seems to have remained the case for the majority of slaves traded into Fatimid Egypt in the tenth century.[44] But it is nonetheless striking that new trade routes from western sub-Saharan Africa opened up more or less at the same time as the European ones, sourcing slaves alongside other commodities, above all gold, from the kingdoms of Gao and Ghana in the Niger river basin, with key staging-posts in Awdaghust, in modern-day Mauretania, and Sijilmassa in modern-day Morocco.[45]

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against the idea that raiding operations were specifically geared towards securing ransom for captives as opposed to slaves for sale: Youval Rotman, "Captif ou esclave? Entre marché d'esclaves et marché de captifs en Méditerranée médiévale," in *Les esclavages en Méditerranée: Espaces et dynamiques économiques*, ed. Fabienne Guillén and Salah Trabelsi (Madrid: Casa de Velázquez, 2012): 25–46, at 45–46. Elsewhere in southern Italy, the ninth-century *Itinerarium* (c. 867) of the monk Bernard certainly mentions shiploads of captives being taken from Bari to Egypt explicitly for sale (ed. Josef Ackermann, *Das Itinerarium Bernardi Monachi* [Hannover: Hahnsche Buchhandlung, 2010]) – though by the time there is substantial documentation from Egypt itself, in the tenth century, slaves of European origin are admittedly hard to find there (Perry, "The Daily Life of Slaves": 30–42). For a striking captivity narrative following a Muslim raid on Thessaloniki in Greece in 904, see John Kaminiates, *The Capture of Thessaloniki*, ed. and trans. David Frendo and Athanasios Fotiou (Leiden: Brill, 2000), discussed in Jankowiak, "Infrastructure and organisation": 464–66: at the time of writing the author was still awaiting the outcome of negotiations for his and other captives' release.

44 Perry, "The Daily Life of Slaves": 30–42.

45 On the trans-Saharan slave trade, see Roger Botte, "Les réseaux transsahariens de la traite de l'or et des esclaves au haut Moyen Âge: VIIIe–XIe siècle," *L'année du Maghreb* 7 (2011): 27–59; Paul J. Lane, "Slavery in Africa c. 500–1500 CE: Archaeological and Historical Perspectives," in *The Cambridge World History of Slavery*, vol. 2, ed. Craig Perry, David Eltis, Stanley L. Engerman and David Richardson (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2021): 531–52, esp. at 537–40; P.D. de Moraes Farias, "De l'or et des esclaves: les routes transsahariennes de l'esclavage, Sahel, VIIIe-XIVe siècles," in *Les mondes de l'esclavage: une histoire comparée*, ed. Paulin Ismard (Paris: Seuil, 2021): 123–31; also Salah Trabelsi, "Réseaux et circuits de la traite des esclaves aux temps de la suprématie des empires d'Orient: Méditerranée, Afrique noire et Maghreb (VIIIe-XIe siècles)," in *Les esclavages en Méditerranée: Espaces et dynamiques* économiques, ed. Fabienne Guillén and Salah Trabelsi (Madrid: Casa de Velázquez, 2012): 47–62. On Awdaghust, see E. Ann McDougall, "The View from Awdaghust: War, Trade and Social Change in the Southwestern Sahara, from the Eighth to the

This completes our whistlestop tour. Now to the main question: if so many slaves were indeed being moved through and around Europe, what impact did the trade have on internal practices of slavery? What kind of articulation (or, on the contrary, disjuncture) can we see in different places between slave taking and trading on the one hand, and slave holding and slave exploitation on the other? And how can we account for regional differences?

Fifteenth Century," *Journal of African History* 26, no. 1 (1985): 1–31. For descriptions of slaves in Awdaghust by Al-Bakri (a Muslim armchair geographer from the eleventh century but using sources from the tenth): N. Levtzion and J.F.P. Hopkins, eds., *Corpus of Early Arabic Sources for West African History* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1981): 68. On the Ibadi traders who seem to have been key operators in this new slave trading route, see below, fn. 66.

2. Long-Distance Slave Trading and Local Demand: A Non-Zero-Sum Game

Hypotheses about the relationship between the two big stories about slavery in early medieval Europe – the slave trade on the one hand and changing forms of labour exploitation on the other – have been few and far between, but those that have been voiced have gone along two main lines, both of which probably overstate the centrality of the Carolingian empire to the historical fate of slavery, whether in taking advantage of it or in limiting it. One is economic and demographic: the labour needs of western European landholders were increasingly being met through internal demographic growth as well as through new forms of rural tenant labour, leaving (initially Christian, then, as a result of strong moral and religious pressure, mainly pagan) captives as spare human resources that could be profitably funnelled into an export market.[46] The other is religious: western European regions, under threat of being turned into a slaving zone for Muslim powers, resisted by developing increasingly stringent limits on the enslavement of fellow-Christians, which, coupled with the spread of Christianity, left them with few available pools for slaving, forcing them to wean themselves off chattel slavery and find alternative ways of supplying themselves with labour.[47] Both narratives connect the trade to Muslim markets with a decline in the internal importance of slave labour within Europe, even though they take opposite lines in terms of causality.

It is worth stressing, though, just how surprising and counter-intuitive in the first place such a decline in internal uses for slaves and slavery would be as either an effect or a cause of a booming trade to external

[46] For this argument see McCormick, *Origins*: 752–53. Fynn-Paul, "Empire, Monotheism and Slavery," suggests that slavery declined because of the price differential between western Europe and Muslim markets, leading slave traders to sell their merchandise in the latter instead and leaving Europe with no option but to wean itself off slave labour. This, though, overstates, probably by several orders of magnitude, the number of slaves sold to Muslim markets vs. the number that would have been needed to require a substantial reorganisation of agricultural production in the west. For the data on slave prices: McCormick, *Origins*: 756–57.

[47] Fynn-Paul, "Empire, Monotheism and Slavery": 24–25.

markets. On the face of it, one would rather expect a massive injection of silver into Europe, expanded motivations for slaving within it, and the existence of a large-scale export market on its doorstep to have stimulated local slaving practices too, indeed reintroduced them where they might have been dwindling, instead of draining slaves away. In those societies that participated most actively in the slave trade, in northern and eastern Europe, it certainly seems as if slavery became more, not less, important internally at the same time. This makes the particular trajectory of western Latin regions begin to look peculiar rather than paradigmatic, and in need of a more robust explanation.

Elsewhere, the trade stimulated rather than weakened local slaving practices by facilitating the movement of slaves throughout the trade route in *all* directions, not just eastwards to the Abbasid and Samanid empires and south/westwards to Al-Andalus. While in the aggregate the largest numbers of slaves certainly moved to these markets, on a more granular level slaves were also exchanged in shorter range transactions and taken in several different directions. This is why we do not have to posit vast numbers of Irish slaves ending up in Samarkand in order to ascribe significance to these trade links. Maybe some did end up there, but this does not need to have happened in order for the northern arc linking Ireland to the Caspian to be plausible as a trading network. Between the origin points and the end points there was clearly a lot of traffic that churned back and forth, and slaves ended up being sold in lots of different places depending on the vagaries of the movements of the people who traded them. Traders did not always go where the highest amount of money was to be made. Whether they sold slaves high or low depended on where they happened to be and where they wanted to go, how many people they had in hand, or where they might find other traders who were interested in buying in large enough numbers to justify the long and dangerous journey towards the east.

The *Life* of the Irish saint Fintán (Findan), for instance, shows very clearly its protagonist, after his capture by vikings, being traded and exchanged from Northman to Northman until he ended up in the hands of one who was about to go back to Scandinavia and wanted to take him

along.[48] This kind of *ad hoc* decision-making likely played an important role in determining whether, and when, an individual would change status from captive to slave, and the precise point when they became a commodity: when their captor gave up waiting for a ransom and sold them because they needed to move on, or because someone they knew was sailing off and buying up captives to sell in markets further down the route.[49]

Once slaves were present and circulating in these individually quite chaotic ways, new spaces and roles might be made for them in the internal workings of the societies they traversed. There are two main reasons why one would expect to see an enhanced internal role for slaves in the societies that participated most closely in the long-distance trade. First, the ability to keep slaves was extremely likely to become a powerful symbol of control of high-value resources. Valuable commodities that went untraded were far from inert: they could do a lot of symbolic work instead, since keeping and giving them internally was the best way to project success, prestige and abundant resources.

Second, although the historiography, as we saw, tends to treat slaves as commodities and slaves as exploitable human resources separately, there was in practice no stark choice to be made between the two, simply because slaves did not have to be traded straight away. Slavers could keep them for a while to achieve some of the symbolic goals just mentioned, and only then sell them on. Ibn Fadlan, who went on an embassy to the Volga Bulghar in 922, explicitly mentions this for the Rus' traders he encountered there, who used their female slaves for sex right up to the point of sale.[50] This is not especially surprising, but it is enough to show that traded slaves could play a strong social and cultural role in the

48 *Vita Findani*, c. 3, ed. O. Holder-Egger, MGH Scriptores 15 (Hannover: Impensis Bibliopolii Hahniani, 1887): 502–6, at 503. For an English translation: Matthew C. Delvaux, "Source: Anonymous of Rheinau, The Life of Saint Findan, after 878–881," https://medievalslavery.org/europe/source-anonymous-of-rheinau-the-life-of-saint-findan-after-878-881/ [accessed 08.01.2024].

49 On ransoming and the holding of captives, see Raffield, "Bound in Captivity."

50 Ibn Fadlan, "Mission to the Volga" 76 [trans. James Montgomery, in Tim Mackintosh-Smith and James Montgomery, eds. and trans., *Two Arabic Travel Books: Accounts of China and India (Abū Zayd al-Sīrāfī) and Mission to the Volga (Aḥmad ibn Faḍlān)* (New York: New York University Press, 2014): 163–297, at 243].

societies they passed through, and could be used to build up social and gendered hierarchies even when they did not stay for long on an individual, biographical level.[51] The ownership of slave women was evidently of great symbolic importance among the Rus': Ibn Fadlan again reported that forty slave girls sat with the Rus' *khagan* (a mysterious figure clearly inspired by Turkish nomad models of rulership) on his throne, which he never left; and that each one of his four hundred followers was given two slave women, one as a body servant and the other for sex.[52] These were the people who were closest to the export market where there was big money to be made, but this only made keeping slaves ever more crucial for elite status display among them.

So the pull of external markets did not necessarily compete with, and in fact likely enhanced, an internal demand and internal uses for slaves. As one would expect, this was most strongly felt along the main axes of the trade route, but given the criss-crossing of routes, it *could* in principle have had this effect almost everywhere. It did not, however: in many other regions, such as the Carolingian kingdoms, traded slaves simply do not have this kind of visibility.[53] In 845, the bishops assembled at the council of Meaux argued that it would be much better if the merchants taking pagan slaves (*mancipia pagana*) across the West Frankish kingdom were forced to sell them there, instead of being allowed to take them to Muslim regions where their souls would be irredeemably lost and they would only add to enemy numbers.[54] These pagan slaves were almost certainly Slavs, being taken either to Venice or to Al-Andalus (demand in the latter did not take off in a big way until the tenth century, but it

51 This dual use is again noted by Ibn Rusta, who says of the Rus "they treat their slaves well and dress them suitably, because for them they are an article of trade": trans. Lunde and Stone, *Ibn Fadlan and the Land of Darkness*: 126.

52 Ibn Fadlan, *Mission to the Volga* 89: 253.

53 Rio, *Slavery After Rome*: 159–67; on the absence of the treatment of slaves as a theme when issuing moral judgements on members of the elite, Alice Rio, "Corporal Punishment at Work in the Early Middle Ages: The Frankish Kingdoms, 6th–10th Centuries," *International Review of Social History* 68 (2023) [= Special Issue 31, *Punishing Workers, Managing Labour*, ed. Christian de Vito and Adam Fagbore]: 73–92.

54 McCormick, *Origins*: 761 and 774.

is clear some slave trading was already going there).[55] The bishops were imagining the Christian Franks as worthier alternative masters, competing with Muslims at the potential consumer end of the slave trade; the idea evidently held some kind of appeal to them. But it is also telling that the bishops could only envisage Frankish people getting their hands on such slaves via *forced* sales. It is worth asking why the slave caravans that went down the Rhône did not affect the lands they passed through in the same way as those that went along the trade route through the Baltic and the east European river systems. It is especially worth asking because the Frankish kingdoms and their military elites could easily have gone down the route of using slaves once more to fulfil a wider variety of purposes. It was not the case that, once slavery had lost some of its functional and symbolic importance to elite households, there could be no going back: there certainly was, as happened for example in Italy and Iberia in the course of the later middle ages.[56]

Very possibly the same thing happened in eleventh-century England too. As Samanid silver began to dry up in the later tenth century and as good-quality dirhams were turned off at the tap, England became one of the areas where Scandinavian kings tried to recoup some of their losses – initially by exerting unprecedented pressure to produce ever greater tribute payments (*gafol*, though in modern works often referred to as *geld* or Danegeld), then eventually through full-scale invasion, when the Danish king Cnut took over the English throne in 1016.[57] Much of the evidence

[55] For evidence of ninth-century slave trading via Frankish territories to Al-Andalus (though on an unknown scale) see the letters of Agobard, below, fn. 106.

[56] W.D. Phillips, *Slavery in Medieval and Early Modern Iberia* (Philadelphia, PA: University of Pennsylvania Press, 2014) and Stuard, "Ancillary Evidence" both take their narratives from the early middle ages into the later medieval period for Iberia and Italy respectively, but while slavery in some form of course existed in both regions throughout the middle ages, it took such different forms and was on such different scales that it is difficult to see it as continuity in any straightforward sense. Most of the historiography tends to treat later medieval Mediterranean slavery as a fairly distinctive and new phenomenon: e.g. Jeffrey Fynn-Paul, "Tartars in Spain: Renaissance Slavery in the Catalan City of Manresa, c. 1408," *Journal of Medieval History* 34 (2008): 347–59; Debra Blumenthal, *Enemies and Familiars: Slavery and Mastery in Fifteenth-century Valencia* (Ithaca, NY: Cornell University Press, 2009).

[57] For a recent overview of *gafol* and *heregeld*, see Robert P. Cohen, "Danegeld: The Land Tax in England, 991–1162" (PhD diss., University of Oxford, 2018).

here is supplied by one man, Wulfstan of York, a bishop and major religious figure who had a hand in drafting laws as well as sermons, in which he decried the sale abroad of English slaves, above all the sale of initially free people who had been enslaved for debt or a crime. His *Sermon of the Wolf to the English*, written in the first decade of the eleventh century, at a time of maximal military and economic pressure, has a stiflingly paranoid, apocalyptic flavour.[58] At one point he conjures up the spectre of his audience's own slaves running off to join the Northmen; in one particularly dark passage he imagines a former slave tying up his own lord and forcing him to watch his wife or daughter being gang-raped.

While Wulfstan's overall picture of absolute chaos reigning was therefore extreme and certainly designed to create maximal anxiety, he may well have been responding to something new and real in noting a profound change and a breakdown in the mutual expectations hitherto binding lords and their unfree people. For instance, if, as Wulfstan says, people who had been judicially enslaved were now being funnelled into a long-distance slave trade, this would have been a sharp change from earlier practice, which seems to have distinguished much more between insiders (those enslaved for crime or debt) and outsiders (war captives). In the tenth century there are indications that the judicially enslaved would have been distinguished from other kinds of unfree persons: they were referred to by a separate word, *witetheow*, and may have been given preferential access to manumission on their owner's death.[59] The practices Wulfstan describes, then, certainly seem unparalleled and even rather unconvincing if one looks at them from a perspective of assumed continuity with earlier sources on slavery in England.[60] They seem much less out of line, however, when compared with other contexts with a

58 Wulfstan of York, *Sermo Lupi ad Anglos*, ed. Dorothy Whitelock (Exeter: Liverpool University Press, 1977): 51–52 [translation: Dorothy Bethurum, *The Homilies of Wulfstan* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1957)]. On the date, Simon Keynes, "An Abbot, an Archbishop, and the Viking Raids of 1006–7 and 1009–12," *Anglo-Saxon England* 36 (2007): 203–13. On Wulfstan as a rhetorically extreme but ultimately probably giving a rather representative insight into the feelings of many of his contemporaries: Levi Roach, *Aethelred the Unready* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 2016): 282.

59 Rio, *Slavery After Rome*: 68–69.

60 I was much more sceptical about Wulfstan's writings myself a few years ago, precisely on the basis of the disconnect between them and earlier sources on slavery in England

highly monetised trade in slaves: for instance the kind of thing that Ibn Fadlan describes among the Rus'. Ibn Fadlan has admittedly also been suspected of spicing things up, shocked and largely disgusted as he was by the habits (especially the sexual habits) of many of the peoples he encountered.[61] But it is certainly far from implausible for a region like England, suddenly under so much pressure and with an urgent need to turn every possible resource, including human ones, into hard cash, to have suddenly flipped over to quite new and different practices of slavery. A more direct equation between people and bullion, encouraged by the need to pay *geld*, could easily have led to changes in attitudes that were both rapid and profound, and to more savage, heightened forms of commodification of human beings.[62] The shift was evidently sudden enough to shock observers like Wulfstan, even when they were in no way opposed to slavery in and of itself.[63] He describes, for instance, men clubbing together to buy a slave woman, using her for sex, then selling her on outside the country. This is as horrible as it is inherently believable. Naturally sexual exploitation goes hand in hand with female slavery at any time, but greater commoditisation, disposability, and scope for repeated as well as collective purchase would have brought about a much more total form of dehumanisation. Crucially, practices of this kind are

(Rio, *Slavery After Rome*: 169–70; certainly I would now revise my reading of him on pp. 31–32).

61 On Ibn Fadlan see now Shepard and Treadwell, *Muslims on the Volga*.

62 Stressing this for West Central Africa in the era of the transatlantic trade, see Daniel B. Domingues da Silva, *The Atlantic Slave Trade from West Central Africa, 1780–1867* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2017), especially chapter 6. For a stimulating and thought-provoking statement of the wider point, see also David Graeber, *Debt: The First Five Thousand Years* (New York: Melville House, 2011). A similar process may underlie the sheer prominence of penal enslavement in the Moravian law code known as *Zakon Suydnji Ljudem*, when it had been totally absent from the key model that inspired it, the Byzantine *Ecloga*. Fontaine, *Slave Trading*, chapter 3, is however cautious about linking this with long-distance trading.

63 Jurasinski has stressed this about Wulfstan: Stefan Jurasinski, "The Old English Penitentials and the Law of Slavery," in *English Law Before Magna Carta: Felix Liebermann and 'Die Gesetze der Angelsachsen'*, ed. Stefan Jurasinski, Lisi Oliver and Andrew Rabin (Leiden: Brill, 2010): 97–118. Janel Fontaine, "Archbishop Wulfstan and the Slave Trade," in *Viking-Age Slavery*, ed. Matthias Toplak, Hanne Østhus and Rudolf Simek (Vienna: Fassbaender, 2021): 147–64, notes at 157–58 Wulfstan makes no objection in principle to the sale abroad of other slaves, and also that in laws he remained relatively conservative in trying to restrain this trade.

attributed by Wulfstan not to Danes, but to the English themselves. He also, rather perceptively, links them directly to new possibilities for sale, through a cash trade sent into overdrive by the Danish presence.

This seems to have happened when England became more closely connected with Scandinavia than it had ever been, in a context of ever more aggressive extraction and monetisation of all possible resources. The memory of these days survived into the next century in a story reported by William of Malmesbury: he accused Cnut's sister, who was also the first wife of Earl Godwine (the father of King Harold), of having sold vast numbers of slaves out of England into Denmark, especially beautiful girls who fetched the highest prices (he notes she was struck by lightning as a punishment).[64]

The English case shows two things: first, that a reliance on unfree tenancy to farm great estates did not in the least preclude a return to much more commercial forms of slavery *as well* if circumstances changed. This makes it worth asking what these circumstances might have been, and what variables came into play to make this happen or not. And second, it shows that one should not exaggerate the limits being placed on the enslavement of fellow-Christians at this date. By this point every party involved was at least nominally Christian, since it took place well after the official conversion of Danish kings to Christianity.

This brings us to the religious angle. The idea that a prohibition on enslaving coreligionists was a key factor in driving the decline of European slavery during these centuries is a very tenacious one. The prohibition itself did not have equal purchase everywhere. Throughout this period it was much more established among Muslims than among Christians, and the content of the prohibition was also different between them: Muslims could in principle never be enslaved to anyone, including other Muslims (though slaves could – indeed should – be converted to Islam without triggering manumission). By contrast, in Christian Europe the prohibition applied at best to Christians being enslaved to *non*-Christians. Selling a Christian (or a pagan) to another Christian was still

64 William of Malmesbury, *Gesta regum Anglorum*, vol. 1, ed. R.A.B. Mynors, R.M. Thomson and M. Winterbottom, Oxford Medieval Texts (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1998): book II, c. 200, 363–64.

regarded as perfectly acceptable.[65] The expansion of Christianity, then, would have cut both ways: the people who were becoming Christians in the tenth century were not just the victims of the slave trade, but also, and in fact primarily, the traders themselves – Scandinavian, Polish and Rus' rulers. The prohibition would no longer have applied, by then, to the most prolific slavers in Europe.

All this, taken together, suggests that the existence of a Muslim demand, far from being the final nail in the coffin for slavery within Latin Europe, could easily have turned Europe into much *more* of a slaving society than it had been before. It is probably better not to think about this issue in terms of a zero-sum game between two very large and religiously-defined geopolitical blocks, in which "the Muslim world" wins the competition, thereby causing an end to slavery in "Europe": instead, the long-distance trade to great consumer capitals created the scope for a general stimulation of slaving everywhere. This is why it is worth asking why this effect was felt only so very unevenly across Europe. The more precise question then becomes: where did a local demand for slaves grow to meet the possibilities offered by the streams of supply coming through? More intriguingly, in those places where such a demand did *not* grow, what factors might have prevented it? To put it in Miller's terms, what made slaves a good trump card for slavers to play for purposes of internal social and political competition in some early medieval European societies, but not in others? As one might expect, the key variables affecting the behaviour, the possibilities and the pressures experienced by local elites and would-be elites were very different depending on whether they lived in a region that was already being targeted by other slavers or whether they were located further away. In the latter case the choice to get involved, or not, was a more open one.

65 Smaragdus of Saint-Mihiel urged the freeing of Christian captives (and possibly penal slaves) and indeed the charitable freeing of Christian slaves in general on the basis of common humanity and religion: *Via regia* c. 30, in Jacques-Paul Migne ed., *Patrologia Latina* 102 (1851): col. 0967B–0969B. But it is certainly overstating things to say that from the eighth century the prohibition of the sale of Latin Christians had become "one of the main preoccupations of ecclesiastical legislators": Fynn-Paul, "Empire, Monotheism and Slavery": 22, citing evidence originally collected in McCormick, *Origins*: 748–51.

3. ‘Slaving Zone’ Environments: Direct Raiding Versus Commercial Partnerships

Within a slaving zone or in the immediate vicinity of one, a key variable would have been the scope for creating commercial partnerships. Local elites might find – if they were lucky – that they had a choice between being victims and targets of the slave trade or making themselves partners in it. In North Africa, the local Ibadi, who as non-standard Muslims had initially been targets of enslavement, later played a crucial role in opening up trans-Saharan slave trading routes. Rather than engaging in raiding themselves, they seem to have operated as merchants, and to have taken advantage of the availability of captives who were the by-product of military conflicts further south.[66]

In eastern Europe, the future Piast dynasty in what later became Poland similarly managed to turn themselves into slave trading partners rather than targets, though unlike the Ibadi they achieved this via growing military power, at first raiding slaves themselves, and later receiving them as tribute from other Slavic groups under their overlordship, in effect subcontracting the raiding in turn.[67] Ibrahim Ibn Yaqub al-Israili al-Turtushi, a tenth-century Jewish traveller to Poland from Al-Andalus, noted that the retainers of the first really powerful Piast ruler, Mieszko I, were being paid in silver, so his kingship evidently relied on a voluminous and reliable influx of silver obtained by selling Slavs from other groups to Rus’ traders.[68] In this case the slave trade clearly contributed to structuring political power relations in the region to a significant extent.

Ireland *may* have seen something like this kind of process. It is hard to tell from written sources, and the hoards are nowhere near as plentiful, but a number of Hiberno-Scandinavian silver hoards were deposited

66 Elizabeth Savage, “Berbers and Blacks: Ibāḍī Slave Traffic in Eighth-Century North Africa,” *Journal of African History* 33, no. 3 (1992): 351–68; Elizabeth Savage, *A Gateway To Hell, A Gateway To Paradise: The North African Response to the Arab Conquest* (Princeton, NJ, 1997: Darwin Press, repr. 2021): 67–88.

67 See above, fn. 32.

68 Ibn Yaqub: excerpt cited in Lunde and Stone, *Ibn Fadlan and the Land of Darkness*: 162–68, at 165. The work is mostly lost, with fragments pieced together from later citations (this extract survives via al-Bakri’s Book of Roads and Kingdoms).

while in Irish hands, and specifically within areas controlled by competing kingdoms of the Southern Uí Néill.[69] This, following the same logic as with the Piasts, suggests a degree of cooperation with slave traders, no doubt initially as a by-product of local military conflict, but later also perhaps (based on ever higher numbers mentioned in annals of captives taken in wars between Irish kings) as an end in itself.[70] All this fits quite well Miller's notion of political actors in a highly competitive environment finding a way to use slaving to gain a quite sudden and very significant advantage over local rivals – in this case by managing to turn themselves into a privileged interlocutor for agents involved in other, longer-ranging networks.

For populations that were themselves raided directly, by contrast, one would not expect the slave trade to have contributed to any enhanced slaving culture. A situation where no local group was able to carve out a niche for itself by provisioning the long-distance trade in slaves, and where chattel slavery seems to have been correspondingly limited internally as well, is more like what we see in Italy and Iberia. There, slaves seem mostly to have been acquired for Muslim markets via direct raiding, and so did not generate any added economic or political resources for locals – rather the opposite. In Italy it is hard to see any local strongmen who managed to do well out of the slave trade by

69 The Clann Colmáin royal centre at Lough Ennell has yielded a particularly large amount of bullion: John Sheehan, "Reflections on Kingship, the Church, and Viking Age Silver in Ireland," in *Silver, Butter, Cloth: Monetary and Social Economies in the Viking Age*, ed. Jane Kershaw et al. (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2018): 104–22. Sheehan, "Viking-Age Bullion": 426–29, links several of the hoards, both in Mide (ruled by Clann Colmáin) and its rival of northern Brega, with opportunities presented by the exile of viking leaders in Dublin after 902. On the political situation see Claire Downham, "The Vikings in Southern Ui Neill to 1014," *Peritia* 17–18 (2003–2004): 233–55.

70 As suggested by Holm, "The Slave Trade of Dublin"; though note criticism by Etchingham, "Slavery or Ransom?" at 129–32. On increased volume of captives see also Fontaine, *Slave Trading*: chapter 4. Pelteret, "Slave Raiding and Slave Trading": 106, plausibly enough adds that slaves could also have been raided in Britain from Ireland. On the silver content of Hiberno-Norse hoards pointing more towards England (and the Danelaw) than towards southern Scandinavia, at least before the tenth century, see Kershaw and Merkel, "Viking Wealth."

turning themselves into major primary providers.[71] Instead, those who did well out of it seem to have been merchant intermediaries who, as far as one can tell, were not dealing in local inhabitants. Venetian merchants trading in Slavic slaves, not Sicilian or Calabrian elites (or whoever might be counted as plausible potential equivalents to the Piasts in their early days), were the ones who made big money out of the slave trade.[72] In Al-Andalus the Umayyad caliphs themselves conducted summer expeditions involving slave-taking, until Abd al-Rahman III's defeat at Alhándega in 939, after which large-scale expeditions to Christian regions led by Córdoban rulers were discontinued for a generation.[73] During this interval, local military elites would have had some scope for personal enrichment from captive-taking, though this was limited to elites on the Muslim side, and even then with the obligation of sending many of the captives on to Córdoba. There is no evidence that local Christian elites became partners in this supply. The importance of cross-border skirmishes, and likely a wish to obtain captives for exchange, meant that Christian local lords sometimes also held Muslim captives, but in the tenth and eleventh centuries this seems to have been on a very small scale, and while some of these Muslim captives were clearly sold as slaves, such trade seems to have been essentially local and *ad hoc*, a

71 The ninth century may have offered more possibilities for enrichment for locals: cf. the *Pactum Sicardi* of 836 between the southern Lombard ruler Sicard and Naples, specifically banning Neapolitans from selling Lombards as slaves, in a way similar to the pacts passed between Carolingian rulers and Venice. By the tenth century, though, slaves seem to have been obtained more via direct raiding than through such local partners (Barbara M. Kreutz, *Before the Normans: Southern Italy in the Ninth and Tenth Centuries* [Philadelphia: University of Pennsylvania Press, 1991]: 87; 132). References to slaves in documents start up again mainly from the eleventh century, and independently of any large-scale trade in slaves to Muslim regions: Jean-Marie Martin, "L'esclavage en Pouille (fin du Xe siècle – milieu du XIIIe siècle)," *Rivista storica del Mezzogiorno* 14 (1979): 53–74.

72 There is one mention of a local elite Christian supplying Christian captives to Muslims in the *Life of St Elias Speleotes*, cited in Curness, "'Slavery' outside the Slave Trade": 118 (Curness interprets this in terms of the circulation of captives for ransoming rather than of a slave trade).

73 Captive-taking is mentioned e.g. for the campaign of 924 against Pamplona: Ibn Hayyan, *al-Muqtabis V*, trans. Federico Corriente and Maria Jesús Viguera Molins, *Crónica del califa 'Abdarraḥmān III an-Nāṣir entre los años 912 y 942* (Zaragoza: Anubar, 1981): at 148.

by-product of their occasional availability.[74] In early medieval Italy and Iberia in general, in striking contrast with the same regions either in the Roman era or in the later middle ages, it is remarkable how few household, chattel slaves are documented in literary or archival source material, at least outside key centres of consumption in Al-Andalus. There are not none, but their trace in the record is surprisingly slight.

This is in marked contrast with other slaving methods that could be just as predatory, but required more active forms of political engagement and organisation from their own victims, such as paying tribute. In England, for instance, extensive direct raiding and warfare by and against vikings in the ninth century seem to have had a relatively limited impact on internal practices of slavery. While hoards containing dirhams have certainly been found in England, these tend to be from military camp sites associated with what is referred to as the "Viking Great Army", rather than with locals.[75] English kings and their military elites did take and sell war captives, and there was nothing new about this: from the age of Bede in the eighth century through that of Alfred in the ninth, and down to the very last Anglo-Saxon rulers in the eleventh, there is patchy evidence for the sale of war captives, English, viking, or Welsh.[76]

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74 Thomas Freudenhammer, "Saracen Slaves in Tenth and Early Eleventh-Century Catalonia," *Vierteljahrschrift für Sozial- und Wirtschaftsgeschichte* 110, no. 3 (2023): 370–83, 379. See also Stephen Bensch, "From Prizes of War to Domestic Merchandise: The Changing Face of Slavery in Catalonia and Aragon, 1000–1300," *Viator* 25 (1994): 63–93.

75 Elina Screen, "Coins as an Indicator of Communications between the British Isles and Scandinavia in the Viking Age," in *Viking-Age Trade: Silver, Slaves and Gotland*, ed. Jacek Gruszczyński, Marek Jankowiak and Jonathan Shepard (Abingdon: Routledge, 2021): 377–95, 381.

76 For a discussion over the entire period see Pelteret, "Slave Raiding and Slave Trading"; Fontaine, *Slave Trading*: chapter 4. Bede yields the much-discussed case of Imma, a thegn mistaken for a low-status captive and sold to a Frisian merchant (instead of being killed outright): Bede, *Ecclesiastical History of the English People*, ed. Bertram Colgrave and R.A.B. Mynors, Oxford Medieval Texts (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1969): book IV, ch. 22; 402–6. In 893 Alfred and his army captured women and children from the viking camp at Benfleet and took them to London: *The Anglo-Saxon Chronicles*, rev. ed. and trans. Michael Swanton (London: Orion, 2000): 'A', s.a. 893. On the eleventh century: Matthew Strickland, "Slaughter, Slavery or Ransom: The Impact of the Conquest on Conduct in Warfare," in *England in the Eleventh Century: Proceedings of the 1990 Harlaxton Symposium*, Carola Hicks ed. (Stamford: Paul Watkins Publishing, 1992): 41–59, at 47–48; David Wyatt, "Reading between the Lines: Tracking Slaves

But even sales of war captives during the conflicts of the ninth and tenth centuries seem to have had less impact on internal practices of slavery than did the extreme pressure to supply *geld* in the early eleventh, and the high monetisation and trade connections that this pressure left in its wake. This, as we saw, *does* seem to have led to a much greater internal emphasis on the commodification of human beings. The Slavic populations who paid tribute to the Piasts likely experienced something similar. The need to organise themselves to supply tribute, in human or in bullion form, was more likely to have far-reaching internal consequences on practices of slavery than simply being the victims of external raiding.

The accessibility of raiding zones, and whether raiding was done directly or subcontracted to local contacts who could then generate political structures in aid of this pursuit, was therefore an important factor for the scope for the slave trade to feed into local agents' political strategies. In itself this is not an especially stunning insight, but it has the merit of helping to account for the differences in the profiles of slave-owning and trading in northern and eastern Europe and in the Mediterranean.

In slaving zones, of course, there would typically have been little choice about whether or not to engage in the slave trade: there the impact of slavery was dictated above all by the needs and decisions of other, more powerful parties. Outside these regions, one starts to see a greater diversity of calculations and choices about whether or not to take part.

and Slavery in the Early Middle Ages," in *Viking-Age Trade: Silver, Slaves and Gotland*, ed. Jacek Gruszczyński, Marek Jankowiak and Jonathan Shepard (Abingdon: Routledge, 2021): 17–39, at 30. For Godwine selling the (English) followers of Alfred the Aetheling in 1036: *Anglo-Saxon Chronicles*, 'C' ('D'), s.a. 1036; Harold raiding for (Welsh) slaves near the Severn: 'E', s.a. 1052. Note that 'C' is generally hostile to the Godwine family, while 'E' is in favour: Stephen Baxter, "MS C of the Anglo-Saxon Chronicle and the Politics of Mid-Eleventh-Century England," *English Historical Review* 122, no. 499 (2007): 1189–227.

4. Land Versus Moveable Wealth

The single most determinant variable in predicting differences in the level of engagement with slaving and the slave trade in various European regions was the relative importance of moveable wealth versus land for the life of the political elite, its funding and its symbols.

Of course, political elites like to have land as well as precious objects if they can, and both forms of wealth mattered nearly everywhere. But obtaining either of these two types of resource at any level in the political hierarchy usually required engaging in quite different sorts of behaviour, so it is worth thinking about which of them elites prioritised; how this might have affected their decisions as to whether to raid or buy slaves, or whether to engage with the trade at all; and finally how rulers and states reacted and responded to these choices and strategies.

This can be broken down into smaller factors, all of which affected how good a prospect slaving would have been for achieving political ascendency. Here I will mostly use as my examples Scandinavia itself (where political elites obviously did engage in the slave trade) and the Carolingian empire (where they mostly did not) as the main reference points, to keep a consistent comparison and to make it easier to see how the different factors might fit together.

4.1. Material Symbols of Prestige and Success

A first key factor was the form (landed or moveable wealth) taken by the main material symbols of prestige and political success. To Scandinavians, slaving would have yielded benefits to participants which closely matched symbols of status at home. Slaves would have helped to provide this both in and of themselves and as a means of acquiring silver. Silver gained from sales would have allowed the display and political deployment of a resource which would otherwise mainly have been accessible through cultivating political relationships with and receiving gifts from superior men. This would have amounted to a clear bypassing of normal channels for the acquisition of prestige items. In that sense, slaving ven-

tures closely match Miller's basic model of initially relatively marginal players bypassing normal internal forms of advancement and going out to seek fortune and status by other, external means.

Slave women in particular would have been symbolically valuable.[77] Access to several women would have been limited to men from the very highest elite, so access to multiple sexual partners within the same household would have made a powerful statement, certainly compared to what the same young men could have achieved if they had stayed home.[78] In Scandinavia, in other words, the rewards of slave raiding and trading would have been easily legible in terms of the existing political economy which ruled the lives of elites.

It is, by contrast, very hard to imagine Carolingian elites achieving the same kind of success in going out and shortcutting their way to status via slaving. What made elite status in the Carolingian empire was closeness to the king and the rewards that this yielded. Sometimes precious metals could be part of such rewards, and certainly Carolingian lords were not insensitive to their attractions. Charlemagne's victory against the Avars in 796 was celebrated for bringing in unimaginable amounts of gold and silver, but this was the last big moment of distribution of moveable precious goods by a Carolingian king to his military elite. After that, and indeed starting much earlier, what really made elite status was

77 The need to supply competitive bride prices has indeed been cited as a key motivating factor for young men choosing to go on viking expeditions: James Barrett, "What Caused the Viking Age?" *Antiquity* 82 (2008): 671–85; an argument refined by Søren M. Sindbæk, "Silver Economies and Social Ties: Long-Distance Interaction, Long-Term Investments – and Why the Viking Age Happened," in *Silver Economies, Monetisation and Society in Scandinavia, AD 800–1100*, ed. James Graham-Campbell, Søren M. Sindbæk and Gareth Williams (Aarhus: Aarhus University Press, 2011): 41–65, at 54–58 (on which see further below, p. 49); Ben Raffield, Neil Price and Mark Collard, "Polygyny, Concubinage, and the Social Lives of Women in Viking-Age Scandinavia," *Viking and Medieval Scandinavia* 13 (2017): 165–209, at 184; also Ben Raffield, Neil Price, Mark Collard, "Male-Biased Operational Sex ratios and the Viking Phenomenon: An Evolutionary Anthropological Perspective on Late Iron Age Scandinavian Raiding," *Evolution and Human Behavior* 38, no. 3 (2017): 315–24.

78 Ruth Mazo Karras, "Desire, Descendants, and Dominance: Slavery, the Exchange of Women, and Masculine Power," in *The Work of Work: Servitude, Slavery, and Labor in Medieval England*, ed. Allen J. Frantzen and Douglas Moffat (Glasgow: Cruithne Press, 1994): 16–29; Ruth Mazo Karras, "Concubinage and Slavery in the Viking Age," *Scandinavian Studies* 62, no. 2 (1990): 141–62.

access to land. This was the main form taken by political gifts, *beneficia* ("favours") and *honores* ("honours"), and the main currency that political operators in turn received and gave away to establish ties of service and obligation to themselves.[79] Carolingian kings made themselves essential providers of this resource by allocating access to fiscal and ecclesiastical lands as a reward for service. Kings offered this on a scale sufficient for participation in the life of the court and the royal project to become the most fruitful way to political success: this is, indeed, what allowed the Carolingians to rule an immense empire on a shoestring, and with minimal state structures. This meant that the most fruitful military expeditions to engage in were not raiding ventures, but expeditions led by kings. These royal military expeditions, from very early on in the ninth century, stopped being any longer against external enemies, and were therefore (unlike in other regions of Europe, such as Britain, Ireland or Scandinavia) not very compatible with slaving activities. From the 830s they took place much more often in civil wars, in which kings sought to take over their brothers' own ready-made fiscal resources – a pursuit in which their elites were obviously highly motivated to aid them.[80]

All this (combined with the sheer geographical scale of the Carolingian empire, which meant frontiers were inaccessible to most) would have monopolised elite military activity to a very large extent, and made it virtually impossible for them to pursue their own ventures abroad: these would have come at the cost of not turning up on campaigns that were much more likely to yield substantial rewards in the competition for land, and where in addition non-participation was severely punished through the payment of a hefty fine (the *heerban*). The only elites who would have been in a position to take advantage of slaving as a strategy

79 The literature on this is immense. For a useful starting point: Paul Fouracre, "The Use of the Term *beneficium* in Frankish Sources: A Society Based on Favours," in *The Languages of Gift in the Early Middle Ages*, ed. Wendy Davies and Paul Fouracre (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2010): 62–88.

80 The classic statement is Timothy Reuter, "The End of Carolingian Military Expansion," in Timothy Reuter, *Medieval Polities and Modern Mentalities* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2006): 251–67 (originally published in 1990); for an example of how the competition for *honores* could work in times of civil war, Janet L. Nelson, "Public Histories and Private History in the Work of Nithard," *Speculum* 60, no. 2 (1985): 251–93, at 277–79.

would have been those located at the extreme eastern edges of the empire, who did occasionally undertake their own raiding activities in Slavic regions under both the Carolingians and later the Ottonians. While these lords may well have engaged in slave trading and used raided slaves to supply their own households, this, unlike in Scandinavia, is unlikely to have been on a large enough scale to intensify internal practices of slavery, or the political rewards of slaving, outside the immediate frontier zone. Slaving is occasionally mentioned as part of Ottonian kings' own frontier warfare (for instance during Henry I's campaign of 929), but they seem not to have prioritised it: the considerable violence wrought on populations to the east of the empire during royal campaigns seems to have been more directed at enforcing tribute payments through brutal shows of force, often leading to massacres rather than captive-taking.[81]

Unlike in Scandinavia, then, it would not really have been possible for most Carolingian elites or individuals that aspired to elite status to decide to bypass the raising of the host, go off on their own, and hope to return bearing the same markers of status that big lords got out of participating in warfare and government. This would have made moveable goods, while not insignificant, still only secondary in terms of their ability to *gain* status for ambitious elite agents. This explains why it is so hard to see any elite involvement in slaving in Carolingian sources, at least compared to many other regions of Europe. Slaving as a main activity there seems to have been monopolised by professional merchants: in the Carolingian empire the people for whom slaving constituted a winning strategy were only those genuinely very marginal to the centre of power.[82]

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81 Rodolphe Keller, "Pillage et pouvoirs aux marges orientales de la Germanie ottonienne (919–1024)," in *Objets sous contrainte: Circulation des richesses et valeur des choses au Moyen Âge*, ed. Laurent Feller and Ana Rodríguez (Paris: Publications de la Sorbonne, 2013): 241–55.

82 Some Jewish merchants who received trading privileges from Louis the Pious, including for trading in slaves, evidently did have access to the emperor, but they were not part of the mainstream political elite: *Formulae imperiales* nos. 31 and 52, ed. Karl Zeumer, *Formulae Merowingici et Karolini Aevi*, MGH Leges V (Hannover: Impensis Bibliopolii Hahniani, 1886). For merchants on the Rhine, whose ownership of chattel slaves is much better attested than other social groups', see McCormick, *Origins*: 653–55.

4.2. Slave Labour and the Exploitation of Land

A second key factor was how land was exploited, and how slave labour might fit into the exploitation of land by elites in particular. Naturally, nowhere are we talking about anything like the massive slave exploitations which had been known in some regions of the Roman empire: slave agricultural workers in Europe during the ninth and tenth centuries, when they were not tenants in charge of their own farm, were essentially farm hands – that is, people who increased the labour available on a farm without having a right to enjoy what it produced. This certainly did not apply exclusively to traded slaves, so there was not much differentiation there between free and slave in terms of activity; but additional slave labour from external sources could still have been advantageous in that context.

Recent work has shown, based on data from the later middle ages and the modern day, that a high input of labour makes much more difference in terms of cost-productivity ratio at the level of the small peasant exploitation than on large estates: small peasant farms were generally far more productive than demesnes because so much work could be obtained from their members, whereas it was rarely cost-effective to invest in increasing labour input on larger estates.[83] By implication, the availability of slave labour would have been more relevant to smaller, farm-scale exploitations. This fits the kind of exploitation that Scandinavian elites would have lived on and from: essentially a big farm each. Agricultural slave labour could potentially have been relevant in directly exploited elite farms of a somewhat larger size than normal, such as can increasingly be found in Denmark and Sweden from around our period.[84] This, then, would have constituted a further way for slaving to result in an economic advantage for Scandinavian elites.

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83 See John Hatcher, "Peasant Productivity and Welfare in the Middle Ages and Beyond," *Past & Present* 262 (2024): 281–314, and the literature cited there.

84 On the importance of slavery in Scandinavian large elite farmsteads, see Janken Myrdal, "Milking and Grinding, Digging and Herding: Slaves and Farmwork, 1000–1300," in *Settlement and Lordship in Viking and Early Medieval Scandinavia*, ed. Bjørn Poulsen and Søren Michael Sindbæk (Turnhout: Brepols, 2011): 293–308.

This is not really enough to call Scandinavia a "slave society", as has been done recently – and in this the discussion on Scandinavia in somewhat out of step with recent studies of premodern slavery elsewhere, which are increasingly moving away from the term.[85] Beyond this "large farm" household scale, Scandinavian elites seem to have farmed out their lands to tenants: these might rely on a few slave farmhands themselves, if they were prosperous enough, but this does not amount to anything highly scalable. The dearth of written sources from the region until a much later period obviously constitutes an obstacle to getting a sense of the prevalence of slavery at different social levels. As we just saw, it is easy enough to imagine a place for slaves in elite households, once we know they were available; beyond that, it is much harder to tell. There have been recent attempts to identify slaves in the archaeological record by using a number of material culture markers as proxies for their presence – above all burials and imported pottery techniques.[86] These studies' starting assumption that slave ownership would have been fairly widespread is certainly not implausible, and there is nothing inherently wrong with taking material evidence as indicative of different kinds of status. But it is another level of claim to treat such connections as consistent: one-to-one connections between material practices and personal

85 For Scandinavia, see the debate between Jón Viðar Sigurdsson (arguing in favour of Scandinavia as a "slave society" in this period) and Stefan Brink (arguing against): Jón Viðar Sigurðsson, "Viking Age Scandinavia: A 'Slave Society'?" in *Viking-Age Slavery*, ed. Matthias Toplak, Hanne Østhus and Rudolf Simek (Vienna: Fassbaender, 2021): 59–73; in the same volume, Stefan Brink, "Slaves in Early Scandinavian Society": 75–97. Note that the original model for a "slave society" as laid out by Moses Finley (Moses I. Finley, "Between Slavery and Freedom," *Comparative Studies in Society and History* 6, no. 3 [1964]: 233–49) is not just about numbers, but also about the economic and cultural centrality of slavery; arguably even the most inflated view of Scandinavian slavery does not clear this bar. For (mainly critical) takes on 'slave societies', see the chapters in Noel Lenski and Catherine M. Cameron, eds., *What is a Slave Society? The Practice of Slavery in Global Perspective* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2018).

86 See the chapters in Biermann and Jankowiak, *The Archaeology of Slavery*, on Scandinavian slavery in the light of archaeological evidence (Anna Kjellström, "The Norm and the Subaltern: Identifying Slaves in an Early Medieval Scandinavian Society": 67–79; Mats Roslund, "Legacy of the Disowned: Finding *ambátts* in High Medieval Scania and Östergötland through Ceramic Production": 81–98; Torun Zachrisson, "Bonded People: Making Thralls visible in Viking-Age and Early Medieval Sweden": 99–110).

legal status remain very difficult to establish convincingly. While in the absence of other evidence for household organisation in Viking-Age Scandinavia such archaeological markers can be an illuminating way of thinking about the lives of slaves and their experience of life, it is therefore not really sufficient by itself to support maximalist arguments for non-elite slave ownership – at least as far as foreign, deracinated, traded slaves are concerned, as opposed to locals under varying degrees of compulsion, as was normal everywhere else in Europe at the time.[87] Outside the limited numbers that elite, yet still farm-scale, household production and household service could absorb, there is therefore not much reason to think that slavery in Scandinavia would have been on any significantly larger scale than anywhere else: that is, certainly present, but typically small enough in scale to be fulfillable locally, rather than via the market and long-distance slaving.[88] It probably makes sense, therefore, to think of slaving in this period as making an important difference to *slavers'* prospects and their economic and political resources, rather than resulting in a fundamental shift in the logic of economic production.

Even this, however, already amounts to more than slaving did for elites in the Carolingian empire, where things played out, again, very differently. Certainly farm units dominated agricultural production in the Carolingian empire, just as they did elsewhere in Europe. But these were farmed either by independent peasants, the least monetised sector of the agricultural economy, or by tenants; at any rate not by political elites. The way that elites derived wealth from their lands was by taking surplus from tenants and also, in some regions, by making them do work days on their own directly exploited demesnes. Neither of these methods

87 Brink, *Thraldom*: 251–52, sees slaves in Scandinavia occupying a similar place to that in many other places in Europe at the time, with some slaves belonging to an elite for display as well as work, and then also some working alongside their owner on ordinary farms. Jón Viðar Sigurðsson's calculation that 20–30 per cent of the Scandinavian population would have been slaves is based on an estimate of the labour needed for things like building ships (Viðar Sigurðsson, "Viking Age Scandinavia"), but labour needs are relatively irrelevant to modelling status, since they could just as easily be fulfilled by free people as by slaves (a point made by Brink, "Slaves in Early Scandinavian Society": 87 in the same volume).

88 On small-scale, sub-elite household use of slaves, mainly locally drawn, see Rio, *Slavery After Rome*: chapter 4.

would have justified the level of capital investment involved in purchasing slaves from traders (we have already established that Carolingian lords would have found it extremely difficult to get slaves by raiding themselves).

While there were small-scale farms in the Carolingian empire, and therefore in theory scope for slave labour to increase their productivity, the fact that elites had no real incentive to invest in this type of exploitation – in contrast to their willingness to invest in infrastructure, such as mills, for instance – precluded any link-up with the commercial slave trade. For elites the vulnerability of tenants was sufficient to meet all of the goals associated with slavery. This included the need for sexually exploitable young women in their household: all known sexual relationships involving a Carolingian lord and an *ancilla* involve daughters of unfree tenants.[89] I have argued elsewhere that on Carolingian landed estates slave status became in time largely repurposed as a way of recategorizing insiders to make them more exploitable for labour and other purposes; it was on these elite lands that the words and the concept of slavery became increasingly used in ways that were not fundamentally linked to their capacity to turn people into commodities.[90]

4.3. Convertibility of Silver into Social Capital

A third important variable was the convertibility of any silver gained through slaving into social capital. One might expect a high level of convertibility of cash into land – the essential form of wealth constitutive of elite identity, in Scandinavia as in the Carolingian empire – to have counted as a key precondition for slaving to become an effective means of short-circuiting one's way to political status. Perhaps surprisingly, in neither Viking-Age Scandinavia nor in the Carolingian empire does there seem to have been very extensive scope for this. The convertibility of cash into landed resources seems to have been relatively restricted

89 Rio, *Slavery After Rome*: 162.
90 Rio, *Slavery After Rome*: 183–99.

during this period in both areas, but for very different reasons, and with drastically different outcomes for the importance of slaving.[91] While in both Scandinavia and in the Carolingian empire land had a clear economic and social primacy over silver, the consequences of this primacy were almost diametrically opposed: whereas all Carolingian elites, at many different social and political levels, were regularly deploying land as a competitive and networking tool, making silver very much a secondary concern, Scandinavian elites, perhaps because they had less land to play with in the first place, instead seem to have largely displaced such competitive and networking pursuits and the risks that came with them onto other, more portable forms of wealth.

The extent to which a land market might be said to have existed in the Carolingian empire is, naturally, debated.[92] Sales of land in surviving documents seem mostly to involve smaller rural exploitations rather than estates, and to have operated at the level of tweaking and reorganising one's landed assets, rather than establishing a significantly new basis for them. While there was clearly, then, a degree of convertibility of cash into land, it would probably have offered only relatively limited scope for establishing political dominance. Going out on one's own to raid for slaves and silver and then buying land would have remained a much poorer prospect than simply gaining the rewards of service to a lord or to the king. Despite, on the one hand, an increasing use of coined money for a variety of transactions in the ninth and tenth centuries, and, on the other, a strong reliance during the same period on steady circulation

91 Skre discusses purchases of land in Scandinavia made using a variety of different currencies, but all the examples are from much later in the middle ages: Dagfinn Skre, "Commodity Money, Silver and Coinage in Viking-Age Scandinavia," in *Silver Economies, Monetisation and Society in Scandinavia, AD 800–1100*, ed. James Graham-Campbell, Søren M. Sindbæk and Gareth Williams (Aarhus: Aarhus University Press, 2011): 67–91, at 73–75.

92 For the earlier middle ages, see Laurent Feller, Agnès Gramain and Florence Weber, *La fortune de Karol: marché de la terre et liens personnels dans les Abruzzes au haut moyen age* (Rome: École Française de Rome, 2005); also the special issue *Les transferts patrimoniaux en Europe occidentale, VIIIe-Xe siècle* [= *Mélanges de l'École française de Rome: Moyen Âge* 111–12 (1999)]. Laurent Feller and Chris Wickham, eds., *Le marché de la terre au Moyen Age* (Rome: École française de Rome, 2005), deals essentially with a later period. See also Laurent Feller, *Richesse, terre et valeur dans l'occident médiéval: Économie politique et économie chrétienne* (Turnhout: Brepols, 2021): 159–80.

and concession of lands, or interests in land, as a way of creating and reinforcing social networks, the two mostly remained confined to quite distinct transactional spheres: land in the realm of the political and the personal, coin in that of more impersonal transactions, less rooted in relationships of trust.[93] Because existing elite members were willing to put quite large estates into play in order to achieve their social goals via donations, exchanges, marriage gifts (dowers) or benefices, the amount of silver that would have been required to acquire sufficient landed resources to compete would have been staggering, to the point of being essentially unachievable. Silver, then, simply did not have the capacity to fulfil these competitive needs, and never amounted on its own to an adequate material medium for managing high-level social or political relations. (Arguably the only place within western Europe where silver did function in this way during this period was Al-Andalus, where the cash gifts and salaries being paid out by the Umayyad caliphs were certainly sufficient for silver to count as a fundamental political resource.[94])

On the Scandinavian side, converting the proceeds of slaving directly into landed wealth is likely to have been equally challenging, though for very different reasons and with very different consequences. In the Carolingian empire, the primacy of land in establishing and maintaining social relations, interactions and mutual obligation (not through purchase, but through benefice, lease, gift, dower, exchange) gave silver a place in social life roughly commensurate and proportional to its economic role: that is, far from insignificant, but in no way constitutive of either economic or social life for the elite. In Scandinavia, on the contrary, an apparent *un*willingness to commit land to the formation of new social ties (possibly due to much less extensive landholding in comparison with Carolingian elites) in a nevertheless increasingly competitive setting has been suggested as one of the key reasons why so many young men started to turn their attention to obtaining silver in the first place.

93 On coined money in general see Rory Naismith, "The Social Significance of Monetization in the Early Middle Ages," *Past & Present* 223 (2014): 3–39, making the point that elites in Western Europe in general cannot be held to have been "the dominant force" in the use of coin (38).

94 Eduardo Manzano Moreno, *La corte del califa: cuatro años en la Córdoba de los omeyas* (Barcelona: Editorial Crítica, 2019).

The intensity with which they pursued it does seem out of proportion with its economic value, certainly in comparison with landed wealth. Søren Sindbæk has suggested that what allowed silver to gain an importance in Scandinavian social relations so far exceeding its relatively marginal role in the economy was not its intrinsic value, nor, as per older explanations, solely its prestige or "giftiness", but rather its ability to store wealth over the long term, without depreciation and in a highly retrievable form, which turned it into an especially desirable medium through which to meet emergent needs for the creation of new social ties.[95] What made it desirable was that it allowed families *not* to use land for things like, for instance, bride price, instead endowing brides with portable wealth that was also easily extracted, or indeed reimbursable, if things went wrong. (In the Carolingian empire, where marriage gifts might be considerably larger still and take the form of land in addition to portable items, the risks of investing land in new couples were mitigated instead by increasingly stringent rules at elite levels against dissolving marriage, and indeed even against dissolving betrothal, in a way that had no parallel in Scandinavia.) New trading towns made enough precious metals available throughout Scandinavia by the late eighth century that access to silver might be decisive in putting together a competitive bride gift – putting those more marginal to these trading networks under pressure to seek out silver elsewhere, to force their way in through other means. It was therefore, paradoxically, the high premium placed on family land, and a correspondingly high degree of reluctance to put it in active play, that created an urgent demand for silver, and a situation in which slaving strategies could thrive.

As people engaged in such slaving strategies and accumulated large amounts of silver, a plausible next step would have been for silver to graduate from an alternative to land into a means of acquiring it. Yet there are no real indications that it did, and at least one clear example

95 Sindbæk, "Silver Economies and Social Ties." For "giftiness", a term coined by Chris Wickham to express the ease with which an object might be deployed as a gift: Janet L. Nelson, "Introduction," in *The Languages of Gift in the Early Middle Ages*, ed. Wendy Davies and Paul Fouracre (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2010): 1–17, at 14.

where it evidently did not. The island of Gotland, off the coast of Sweden, offers an extreme and fascinating case study. It is a small island, and seems to have had an only minimally hierarchical local society during the Viking Age, with no urban or obvious political centres to speak of. At the same time, however, it has yielded the largest concentration of silver hoards ever found anywhere in the world (in the form of ingots, objects, and coins: 180,000 coins, two fifths of them dirhams). Individual hoards from Gotland can be astonishingly rich. The biggest is the famous Spillings Hoard, discovered in 1999.[96] This was buried some time after 870/1, in what seems to have been a warehouse, and contained 66 kg of silver, including nearly 500 bracelets, hacksilver, and 14,300 coins. Some rings were gathered together in little bundles weighing around 200 g each (the equivalent of one mark of silver). The whole has been plausibly interpreted as a cache of silver destined for remelting into ingots and other silver metalworking. Hoards are widely distributed over the island and not associated with particularly wealthy-looking houses. There are no signs of the larger and richer farms you can start to see in mainland Sweden around the same time, and nothing on the scale of contemporary northern European trading towns. There are also no extravagant burials or burial mounds, and hardly any burials with weapons. All this suggests fairly general affluence, a lack of monopoly over wealth, and also a relative lack of competitive display.[97]

96 Gotland in general has been extremely well studied; most recently see the collection of papers in Gruszczyński, Jankowiak and Shepard, *Viking-Age Trade*, especially the chapters collected under part III. On Spillings see in particular Majvor Östergren, "Hoards and Their Archaeological Context: Three Case Studies from Gotland," in *Viking-Age Trade: Silver, Slaves and Gotland*, ed. Jacek Gruszczyński, Marek Jankowiak and Jonathan Shepard (Abingdon: Routledge, 2021): 208–24, at 214–18; Ann-Maria Pettersson, ed., *The Spillings Hoard: Gotland's Role in Viking Age World Trade* (Visby: Länsmuseet på Gotland, 2009).

97 Jacek Gruszczyński, "Hoards, Silver, Context and the Gotlandic Alternative," in *Viking-Age Trade: Silver, Slaves and Gotland*, ed. Jacek Gruszczyński, Marek Jankowiak and Jonathan Shepard (Abingdon: Routledge, 2021): 187–207, at 189 and 199–201; in the same volume, Gustaf Svedjemo, "Social Structures and Landscape: Gotland's Silver Hoards in the Context of Settlements": 291–310, at 301–2, and Dagfinn Skre, "Some Reflections on Gotland: Slavery, Slave-Traders and Slave-Takers": 437–49, at 443. Absence of big burial mounds: in the same volume again, Ingmar Jansson, "Gotland Viewed from the Swedish Mainland": 315–57, at 330.

The Gotlanders who buried these hoards look like slave traders who brought their considerable profits back home.[98] At the same time, it is striking how little impact this silver seems to have had in redrawing social hierarchies on the island. The contrast between the sheer wealth available to the islanders and its relatively non-hierarchical distribution suggests that Gotland might be seen as a proactively egalitarian early medieval slave-trading community. There was a local elite, so Gotland was not *strictly* egalitarian, but at the same time socio-economic differences were not huge. With that much silver reaching the island, ending up without a small group of strong men owning everything seems unlikely to have happened by chance, and looks like the result of a community self-consciously countering the most anti-social uses of cash money, in order to avoid slavers destabilising the existing local society and hierarchy.

One way that Gotlanders seem to have guarded against this was by deliberately making cash and land not mutually convertible. In the *Guta Lag*, a law code for the island compiled much later, in the thirteenth century, we find explicit and very strict inheritance rules forbidding the sale or the splitting of a family farmstead, a measure that largely precluded the concentration of landed wealth into anyone's hands.[99] This has generally been taken to be an old provision, and that makes sense: it fits well with a society taking active steps to protect itself from the unpredictable impact of newfound wealth. This non-divisibility and lack of a land market would have given young men *not* left in charge of the family farm a clear incentive to go out and make their fortune; at the same time, they could only deploy it in limited ways if they came back – though it could still have had important, approved status-related competitive uses, such as paying for a bride price.[100] Some of these hoards may indeed represent ongoing savings towards a bride price: ambitious young men might

98 Skre, "Some Reflections on Gotland": esp. 444.

99 Christoph Kilger, "Silver Hoards and Society on Gotland," in *Viking-Age Trade: Silver, Slaves and Gotland*, ed. Jacek Gruszczyński, Marek Jankowiak and Jonathan Shepard (Abingdon: Routledge, 2021): 242–54, at 247 and 250.

100 Kilger, "Silver Hoards and Society on Gotland," suggests some Gotland hoards could be read as a bride price that had been saved in the eventuality that it might need to be paid back to the woman's family (249).

set their sights on a woman whom they might need to save over several expeditions to attract (in the case of our unretrieved hoards, one expedition too many). But many hoards had a much longer chronological span, and seem to have been added to over several generations, so they must represent family savings.[101] Very possibly people deposited hoards both to keep them safe and to dip into for capital to fund new trips abroad.[102] In any case, on the island itself it seems the silver gained from expeditions could be deployed only in a strictly delineated range of ways. Although profits had no straightforward outlet in the purchase of land there, slaving nonetheless clearly offered substantial enough advantages to make it worth engaging in. It allowed young men to compete *with each other* for things like bride price, and do much better than they otherwise could have by just staying put on their little island; but the fact that it could not help them to increase substantially their control of land meant that they could also not really destabilise the status quo when they came back, nor successfully challenge their elders. This is like Miller's slaving as strategy, but de-fanged. The active steps they took in this matter certainly suggest that the established elite of Gotland were well aware of the risks of allowing slavers to spend their silver unchecked, and of the potential of slaving to upset existing hierarchies.

Most historians and archaeologists who have worked on Gotland seem to regard it as mainly remarkable in how much was left in the ground, rather than how much silver was brought home in the first place.[103] Part of what made Gotland special may be that it, as a society, made so much conscious effort – far more effort than in mainland Sweden, for instance – to neutralise the more destabilising impact of slaving as a strategy. Mainland Sweden tends to show a much greater trend towards hierarchisation around the same time, so it is possible that the logic of Miller's model was allowed to play itself out to a greater extent there, and that slavers managed to capitalise still more successfully on their gains. Gotlanders may only have been able to exert so much control

[101] Jankowiak, "Dirham Flows": 108.
[102] Skre, "Some Reflections on Gotland": 445.
[103] Jankowiak, "Dirham Flows": 107; Skre, "Some Reflections on Gotland": 442.

over just how much status money could buy because they were a small, bounded community on a relatively small island.

While the convertibility of slaving profits into land was, then, a closely managed affair, and far from a free-for-all, at least if existing elites had anything to do with it, the high convertibility of silver into social status was enough to make slaving once again much more worthwhile to Scandinavian elites than it was to Carolingian ones. That slavers in many Scandinavian regions in places other than Gotland did manage to gain significant status through their activities, and that this in turn enhanced profoundly the importance of foreign slaves for symbolic display and elite lifestyle (as we saw under point 1), is implied by the fact that, over the course of the tenth century, kings increasingly felt the need to respond, and to start playing catch-up. Which brings us to a final variable: the strategies of rulers, and how they responded to what elites were doing.

4.4. The Strategies of Rulers

In a way this is less a variable than it is an outcome of everything I have discussed so far; but it also potentially played a part in confirming and bedding in the other trends discussed earlier.

A) A first obvious way rulers could respond to the existence of the slave trade was as consumers: this was above all the case in "palace" cultures like Madinat al-Zahra near Córdoba, Constantinople, or, outside Europe, in Baghdad or Samarra, where slave households could be huge. Within Latin Europe, or in northern Europe, palaces on this scale did not exist during our period.
B) Another response was to take a cut and tax the trade. This was a viable strategy above all for sprawling empires that were geographically more or less unavoidably in the way of overland trading routes, and could exploit the slave (and all other) trade coming through at very little trouble to themselves. The Khazars made a very good liv-

ing out of this.[104] Clearly the Carolingians did this too, to judge by one highly suggestive surviving toll document from Raffelstetten, in the north of modern-day Austria, dated to the very early tenth century, and dealing among other things with slaves brought by Bohemian and (likely) Rus' traders – though in the Carolingian case, unlike the Khazars', it is hard to see this as a major source of fiscal revenue.[105]

Taxing might mean letting some quite dangerous people in through one's territory. For the Carolingians the risk was nothing more significant (to them) than a few unfortunates occasionally getting snapped up by merchants and swept along the route. People who lived in the Rhône valley could get quite paranoid about this: Agobard, a bishop of Lyon who wrote a collection of violently anti-Jewish tracts in the 820s, cited stories of Jewish merchants kidnapping Christian children and selling them in Córdoba. The fact that he could only come up with two specific claims that this had happened, one from Lyon and the other from Arles, from the previous quarter of a century suggests that this was not a very frequent problem, but that it still conjured up a highly effective bogeyman.[106] Venetian treaties also repeatedly included clauses whereby Venetians

[104] For a thoughtful discussion of the place of slavery in the Khazar economy: Evans, "The Womb of Iron and Silver."

[105] Raffelstetten toll document: Alfred Boretius, ed., *Capitularia regum Francorum* no. 253, c. 6, vol. 2 (Hannover: Impensis Bibliopolii Hahniani, 1897): 251. Identifying further references to tolls on caravans crossing Francia to Al-Andalus: Thomas Freudenhammer, "Frühmittelalterlicher Karawanenhandel zwischen dem Westfrankenreich und Al- Andalus," *Vierteljahrschrift für Sozial- und Wirtschaftsgeschichte* 105, no. 3 (2018): 391–406.

[106] On Jews stealing Christian children to sell as slaves in Al-Andalus: Agobard of Lyon, *Epistula* no. 7, ed. Ernst Dümmler, MGH *Epistolae Karolini Aevi* III (Berlin: Weidmann, 1899): 185. The continued imaginative hold of capture and sale as chattel slave on Carolingian thinkers can also be seen in Amalarius of Metz's explicitly imaginary scenario about being captured and traded as a slave in Constantinople: see Shane Bobrycki, "A Hypothetical Slave in Constantinople: Amalarius's *Liber Officialis* and the Mediterranean Slave Trade," *The Haskins Society Journal* 26 (2014): 47–67. There is a Lyon connection here too, since Amalarius temporarily replaced Agobard as bishop of Lyon after the latter was deposed, but a more obvious source of inspiration for Amalarius may have been witnessing palace slavery in Constantinople in 813, when he was sent there on a diplomatic mission.

committed not to kidnap anyone from within Carolingian lands, so this must have happened too.[107] Clearly none of this was on a large enough scale to worry anyone who could have done something about it. This kind of kidnapping would likely have been at most opportunistic: merchants knew better than to alienate the rulers on whose good will they depended to make it through their territories unharmed.

The Khazars had a different order of problem with the Rus': taxing and trading in the east was not so peaceful an enterprise, and required the maintenance of many fortified checkpoints along rivers. The dual interests of their partners as both traders and warriors could also present taxing rulers with more (and riskier) opportunities. In one famous episode related by al-Masudi, in 913 a Rus' warband asked for permission from the Khazar "king" to cross his territory in order to go and attack various populations on the other side, around the Caspian Sea as far as Azerbaijan, in exchange for half of whatever they could pillage. The Khazar king agreed, and they went on to ravage entire regions in both Christian and Muslim territories, "spilling rivers of blood and seizing women and children and property". In the event, when the Rus' came back through and sent the Khazar king his share, he could not stop his own Muslim and Christian subordinates in Itil from retaliating for the massacre of their respective co-religionists, so that the Rus' band was virtually destroyed.[108]

C) A final form of engagement, more ambiguous, more responsive to other agents' slaving strategies, was when rulers joined in on slaving activities, and became major players and redistributors of this particular form of wealth in their own right. As we saw above, some local players, like the Piasts, managed to assert themselves as rulers in the first place by becoming local partners in the long-distance trade, and monopolising slaves as a resource in order to enhance their regional political ascendency.[109] The Rus' were another such emergent politi-

[107] For an analysis of these texts see McCormick, *Origins*: 763–66.
[108] Al Masudi: translated extract in Lunde and Stone, *Ibn Fadlan and the Land of Darkness*: 144–46.
[109] See above, fn. 32.

cal formation, and it makes sense to think of Rus' leaders as having built up their power partly through the slave trade, by providing opportunities for slaving, having the most slaves at their disposal, and lavishing them on their political elites, in particular using slave women as a currency and a symbol of power and success.

In Scandinavia, existing rulers were at a greater remove from slaving operations than were Piast or Rus' leaders-in-the-making, and there is little about earlier viking activity that contributed to bolstering their authority. Kings instead seem to have got in on the act somewhat later, and in response to what Miller's "marginals" had been up to. At some point slaving must have begun to bring in so much benefit to those who engaged in it that it became attractive to ever more elite people, so much so as to rival, in terms of the ability to engage in gift-giving and other displays of power and dominance, the advantages that kings were able to provide for their own "insider" political elites. It makes sense, then, for the ability to obtain and to redistribute foreign slaves to have eventually become something that kings wished to showcase as part of their own symbolism of power – if only to incentivise their existing political elite not to look elsewhere, and to keep themselves relevant. Much as slaving only became a fruitful strategy for slavers from Scandinavia because its products aligned so well with existing symbols of power at home, there was also a feedback loop, as kings increasingly tried to match and best whatever these increasingly profitable foreign ventures could bring by rewarding each of their warriors with, as a (possibly) early tenth-century skaldic poem in honour of Harald fairhair puts it, "Hunnish metal and an eastern bondwoman".[110]

This political need, once it had set in, seems to have outlived the silver supply and the existence of a slave trade to the Samanid empire, at least for a time. The need to satisfy military followers in ways that

[110] Þórbjorn hornklofi, *Hrafnsmál*, stanza 16: R.D. Fulk, trans., "Þorbjǫrn hornklofi, Haraldskvæði (Hrafnsmál)," in *Poetry from the Kings' Sagas 1: From Mythical Times to c. 1035*, ed. Diana Whaley, Skaldic Poetry of the Scandinavian Middle Ages 1 (Turnhout: Brepols, 2012): 91, https://skaldic.org/m.php?p=text&i=1436 [accessed 20.01.2024].

answered habits and self-image fostered by a long-term engagement in the slave trade, and to continue to distribute to them the same symbolically and politically valued resources regardless of market forces, may indeed help to explain the more imperial ventures of Danish kings in the eleventh century, as well as the survival (albeit likely on a smaller scale) of similar forms of slave-taking by Scandinavian kings in the Baltic during the eleventh century, and well into the twelfth.[111]

[111] On high medieval Danish slave-raiding: Thomas K. Heebøll-Holm, "Piratical Slave-Raiding – the Demise of a Viking Practice in High Medieval Denmark," *Scandinavian Journal of History* 46, no. 4 (2021): 431–54. On the enslaving of women and children as a standard expectation of trans-cultural elite warfare in northern Europe until the twelfth century (explicitly not keyed in to the existence of market outlets), see John Gillingham, "Women, Children and the Profits of War," in *Gender and Historiography. Studies in the Earlier Middle Ages in Honour of Pauline Stafford*, ed. Janet L. Nelson, Susan Reynolds and Susan M. Johns (London: Institute of Historical Research, 2012): 61–74.

5. Conclusion

The demand for slaves in Muslim regions during the ninth and tenth centuries did not go hand in hand with the decline of slavery in Europe in a causal sense: if anything, it had the potential to supercharge it, and even to bring it back where it had stopped being as relevant to elite life as it once had been. In some areas it clearly did so. This begs the question of why it did not do so everywhere. Miller's model is helpful for thinking through the reasons why silver from Muslim regions was transformative for some European operators and not for others. Traders, aspiring political elites and rulers all reacted differently to the possibilities it opened to them: in some areas the slave trade offered a good shortcut to status; in other regions or for other people much less so. Some areas, like Gotland, seem to have been very conscious of the potentially highly disruptive internal impact of slaving when it was at its most successful, and deliberately attempted to guard against such strategies.

Thinking in terms of the strategies of different categories of agent, rather than in terms of *longue durée* cultural trends, also makes more sense of what seem to have been highly changeable situations. The case of eleventh-century England shows that local military elites might very quickly adapt to new possibilities for slaving, no matter how like their Carolingian continental neighbours' their political culture might seem otherwise. Once acquired, it could be hard to shed the political symbols that came with slaving, and Danish kings continued to feel the pressure to provide for them long past the point where it really made sense in terms of the economics of the trade. The ability to tap into and make use of the slave trade was not tied to any particular "stage" of development of a polity, nor purely to economic advantage. Rather, it was about how many variables came together to make it possible, or not, for slavers to convert what they gained through slaving into material and symbolic advantages at home, and how translatable the products of slaving were into the prevailing language of power and privilege.

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In the last few years research on early medieval slavery has seen an ever-growing emphasis placed on long-distance slave trading, and on the raiding practices that fed this trade. There has been relatively little link-up between this and older historiography looking at slavery in terms of labour and social history: the slaves who moved and the slaves who stayed have largely been kept in separate conversations. The increased profitability of slaving, though, should lead us to expect a rise in the internal importance of slavery as well as in slave-raiding and trading to external markets. This is what we find in many of the regions most intimately associated with the trade. There were, however, profound regional differences in the profiles and forms of engagement in slaving activities across Europe. I suggest that Joseph C. Miller's idea of slaving as a political strategy adopted by marginal players seeking to bypass normal forms of elite competition is helpful in thinking through the logic of these different responses to the opportunities and challenges presented by the slave trade: what motivated and constrained elite choices and possibilities? And what made slaving a more viable political strategy in some regions than in others?

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