

Human trafficking In Medieval Europe

Circa 500-1500 CE

What IS Human Trafficking?

The United Nations Office on Drugs and Crime (UNODC) defines Human Trafficking as:

"The recruitment, transportation, transfer, harboring or receipt of persons, by means of the threat or use of force or other forms of coercion, of abduction, of fraud, of deception, of the abuse of power or of a position of vulnerability or of the giving or receiving of payments or benefits to achieve the consent of a person having control over another person, for the purpose of exploitation. Exploitation shall include, at a minimum, the exploitation of the prostitution of others or other forms of sexual exploitation, forced labour or services, slavery or practices similar to slavery, servitude or the removal of organs."

Article 3, paragraph (a), *Protocol to Prevent, Suppress and Punish Trafficking in Persons*, <https://www.unodc.org/unodc/en/treaties/CTOC/index.html>.

Medieval Human Trafficking and Economics

- Human trafficking is essentially an activity of *exchange*.
- Exchange takes different forms, and commercial exchange is merely one facet of these broader patterns.
- Three types of exchange in early-medieval Europe: gift exchange, exchange in kind or barter, and commercial or monetary exchange.

Medieval Human Trafficking and Economics

- Human trafficking is nothing if not adaptive to the parameters of transaction present within the society in which it occurs.
- As such, the roles of the human beings it traffics mutate to conform to the system of exchange utilized in the moment.

Gift Exchange

Gift exchange occurred at all levels of society, and its primary function was the establishment and maintenance of social relationships.

Exchange in Kind

Exchange in kind is a dominant form of transaction in areas with restricted currency access, or where the practice of using currency is limited, or in cases where the coinage has become so debased that inflation makes the currency essentially worthless.

Commercial Exchange

- Commerce never died out in medieval Europe, even if the local currency was debased and its use shrank to the urban areas around the Mediterranean and along major rivers.
- Currency itself was used to quantify the value of a product or service, as well as to store or hoard wealth.

Slaves as Gifts, Goods, and Currency

- Within gift exchange, slaves were trafficked as gifts to establish and maintain social relationship between other parties.
- As goods, slaves were exchanged directly for other products in barter economies or became the objects which currency purchased in markets across Europe.
- In monetary exchange, slaves held value in their bodies and served as a surrogate medium of exchange when hard currency was scarce.

Human Trafficking Route Typology: Long-Distance

"Long-distance," as applied in this presentation means *both* relatively extensive geographical and cultural distance relative to the victim between her community of origin and her new community.

Human Trafficking Route Typology: Regional

“Regional trafficking” is trafficking routes that cross neighboring socio-linguistic border zones, which maintain regular contact and economic interaction.

Human Trafficking Route Typology:

Local

“Local traffic” occurs within a community or between neighboring communities, and may entail the sale of a slave to a third party.

However, private direct sales between buyer and seller without a middleman are also common.

Human Trafficking and Politics

Trafficking does not depend on political centralization or decentralization. It can flourish in either political climate.

The suppression of human trafficking CAN ONLY take place within a climate of strong political centralization.

Centralized states or individual rulers may actively support traffickers, or they may passively encourage them by remaining noncommittal to suppression. Conversely, weak political authority does not have the power to suppress traffickers.

General Contours of Medieval Human Trafficking

Late Western Empire (circa 300-476 CE)

- Intensive local, regional, and long-distance human trafficking networks

Transitional Period (circa 476-750)

- Continuance of local and regional trafficking, abatement of long-distance trafficking

Early-Medieval (circa 750-1100)

- Intensification of local, regional, and long-distance, trafficking.

High Medieval (circa 1100-1300)

- Abatement in long-distance trafficking in Western Europe north of the Alps. Local and regional networks continue in Northwest Europe, and long-distance trafficking continues in Mediterranean.

Europe, 700-900



Trafficking and Gender Roles

In general, men, women, and children were *all* trafficked throughout Late Antiquity and the Middle Ages.

Trafficking and Gender Roles Continued

Men were used as heavy labor, skilled labor, sometimes in armed capacity. The traffic in men gradually abated, but did not disappear, from Western Europe over the 13th-16th centuries.

Trafficking and Gender Roles Continued

Women (and children where applicable) were used in domestic service, tending small animals, child-rearing, and wet nursing. *Sexual exploitation of female slaves was assumed by contemporary sources.*

Estimates of women trafficked decreases in absolute numbers between 13th-16th centuries, but increases as a percentage of the total.

Prostitution and Slavery

- Romans routinely prostituted their female slaves.
- The practice was outlawed by in 428, but enforcement was an issue.
- Sexual exploitation of women and children continued to be a feature of human trafficking throughout the Middle Ages.

Concubines versus Slaves

Concubines and slaves are not the same, but the two roles do overlap and share similarities.

- In the Middle Ages concubines could be high-ranking women, or could attain high station in society despite low birth.
- Female slaves were often concubines, but not always.

Human Trafficking in Transition: 12th- Century Western Europe

- Slavery has died out across much of Western Europe north of the Alps.
- Slavery and the long-distance slave trade persists in Eastern Europe and the Mediterranean, particularly in domestic (female) slavery. Trade routes extend from Spain, to the Black Sea, to Egypt and North Africa.

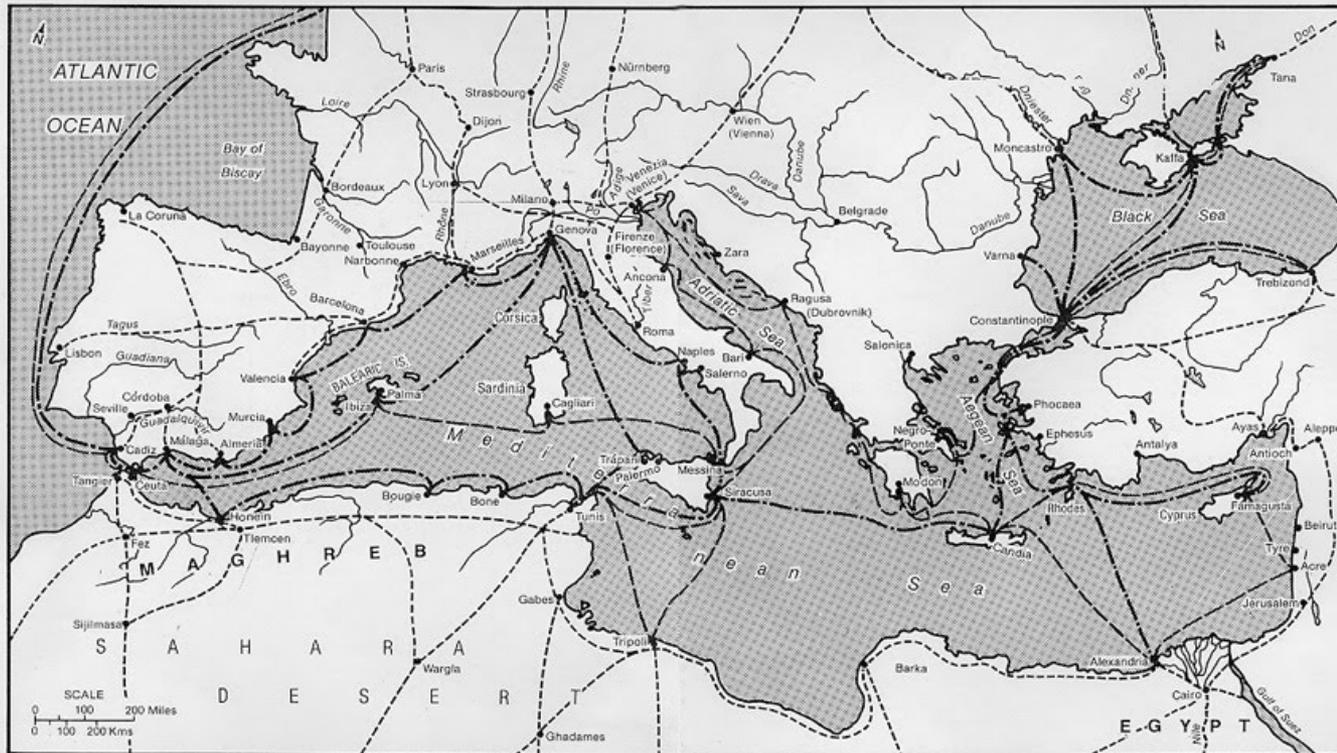
Human Trafficking in Transition: 12th- Century Western Europe

The growth of commercial markets across Western Europe led to the demise of slavery because:

- Rent increasingly paid in coin and produce to take advantage of permanent markets.
- New towns had to be settled; lords commute peasants' labor services to cash rents to encourage settlement.
- Growth of urban Europe leads to growth in prostitution.

Trade Routes, circa 1200's.

MAIN MEDITERRANEAN AND BLACK SEA ROUTES IN MEDIEVAL TIMES



- MAIN GENOAN ROUTES
- - - MAIN VENETIAN ROUTES
- · · MAIN CONNECTING ROUTES

Human Trafficking in Transition: From Slave Trade to Sex Trade

Traffickers in Western Europe transitioned from supplying the needs of agriculture to supplying the labor demands of the growing sex trade over the course of the 13th century.

Medieval Sex Trade Characteristics

The sex trade was informal for much of the 13th-14th centuries.

- The structures of the trade included brothels, bath houses, and prostitution rings.
- The roles of the trade included secular and ecclesiastical authorities, pimps, madams, and brothel-keepers, procurers (aka *bawds*), clients, and workers.

Structures and roles were not mutually exclusive.

The Sex Trade Structures: Brothels

Brothels had several forms:

- *Houses of Assignment*. A domicile arrangement where the prostitute does not reside or own the building, and pays a landlord a percentage of her fee per client.
- *Informal or Illicit*: Unlicensed or temporary structures. These brothels may engage in sexual commerce on an *ad hoc* basis.
- *Formal, licit, or municipal brothels*. These are institutionalized brothels, often with permission to operate by official license. They are permanent features of the urban landscape and have prostitutes whose main, if not sole occupation is sex work.

The Sex Trade Structures: Bath Houses

Large medieval cities had public baths (in England known as *stewes*) that catered to the urban population, merchants, travelers etc. that were notorious for prostitution.

The Sex Trade Structures: Prostitution Rings

- Legitimate businesses operate as fronts for prostitution rings. Launderers, cooks, and seamstresses were all potentially vulnerable to prostitution.
- Freelance prostitutes often worked in tandem to support each other, finding clients for each other, co-habiting, or renting living and work space from each other.

The Sex Trade Roles: Bawds

Also known as “pimps,” and “procurers,” *bawds* were middlemen who connected prostitute with client, and brothel-keeper with labor force.

- Bawds were male and female, licit and illicit.
- They served as contact points with traffickers, or were traffickers themselves.
- Bawds are associated with violence and coercion in contemporary sources.

The Sex Trade Roles: Prostitutes

General characteristics:

- Tend to be from lower classes with limited economic opportunities.
- May work as freelancers, or in structures such as brothels and bath houses.
- May be local or “foreign.”
- Short career expectancy, but may transition into other roles such as procurer or madam.
- *Violence is expected by contemporary sources.*

The Sex Trade Roles: Clients

Clients have access to currency.

- Cater to merchants, urban classes, and young men.
- Over time, regulations developed to limit legal clientele.
- Ecclesiastics and married men were prohibited from consorting with prostitutes.

The Sex Trade Roles: Authorities

Secular and ecclesiastical authorities might suppress or support prostitution.

- *Suppression* may involve targeting pimps and prostitutes for corporal punishment, stigmatization, or exile from municipalities or polities.
- *Support* may involve tacit toleration, official recognition and sanction, protection, or active participation in the trade.

The Sex Trade Roles: Brothel-keepers

Brothel-keepers may be licit, or informal or illicit.

- *Licit* Brothel-Keepers: operate with a license from a municipal or territorial authority.
- *Illicit or informal* Brothel-keepers: operate brothels out of taverns, bath houses, or private homes without a license from municipal or territorial authorities.