



Marek JANKOWIAK

Marek Jankowiak is Associate Professor in Byzantine History at the University of Oxford. He studied Mathematics at Paris IX Dauphine, Finance and Banking at the Warsaw School of Economics, and History at the University of Warsaw. He holds a doctorate from the Ecole Pratique des Hautes Etudes (Paris) and the University of Warsaw for a dissertation on the so-called monothelete controversy. He was Newton Fellow of the British Academy at Oxford (2011–13), Co-Investigator of the AHRC project ‘Dirhams for Slaves’ (2013–17), and Birmingham Fellow at the University of Birmingham (2017–18). His research focuses on the transformation of the Roman world in the seventh century of the Common Era, Byzantium and the Islamic world in the ninth to eleventh centuries CE, and slave trade and slavery in the same period. He prepares for publication an English commented translation of the Acts of the Sixth Ecumenical Council (680-1 CE), a monograph on the slave trade between northern Europe and the Islamic world, and a catalogue of dirham imitations found in northern Europe.

Forced mobility in the early middle ages: the importation of Saqaliba slaves to the Islamic world

Abstract:

Was slave trade a significant factor of mobility in early medieval western Eurasia? The decline of large-scale agricultural slavery in the post-Roman world might suggest a negative answer. But high levels of urbanisation – and therefore of demand for food and services – continued in the Islamic world. Together with the increasing reliance of Muslim rulers on slave bureaucrats, soldiers and concubines, this resulted in a demand for slaves that could only be satisfied through trade. A particularly interesting case, it seems to me, was the importation to the Islamic world of captives from northern Europe in the ninth and tenth centuries. Thanks to a unique combination of textual, numismatic and archaeological evidence, we can trace in much detail their movements from the Slavic lands of central and eastern Europe – hence the name ‘Saqaliba’ (‘Slavic’) by which they are known in medieval Arab sources – to all parts of the Islamic world. I will conclude by reviewing the implications of this trade system for the involved parties: was the movement of people accompanied by that of goods or ideas?