

Tartar Slaves in Late Fourteenth Century Florence

Walking through the streets of Florence in the late 14th century, exotic Tartar slave girls could be easily observed. The existence of Tartar slaves is also confirmed in slave trade contracts, transport contracts, official documents of city governments, and contemporary literature. In 1363, the government of Florence passed a decree to allow the unlimited importation of foreign slaves of either sex, except Christians, to overcome crisis caused by the decline in population. The supply of slaves from the Black Sea to Italy was led by Genoese and Venetian merchants, and a considerable number of Tartar slaves flowed into the Italian cities.

In the late 14th century, Florence was also one of the cities where the proportion of Tartar slaves was considerably high. Between 1366 and 1397, among the slave purchases reported to the City of Florence, the number of transactions of Tartar slaves amounted to 70 percent of the total.

In general, Tartar slaves were regarded as Mongols. Many previous studies regard Tartar slaves as a single nation or group. However, some scholars object to this interpretation. This paper aims to confirm if Tartar slaves frequently appearing in the Florentine register of slave purchases were Mongols or not.