

H-Net Reviews

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María Isabel del Val Valdivieso, Olatz Villanueva Zubizarreta. *Musulmanos y cristianos frente al agua en las ciudades medievales.* Madrid: Universidad de Castilla la Mancha, 2009. 418 pp. EUR 20.00 (paper), ISBN 978-84-8427-642-5.

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Musulmanes y cristianos frente al agua en las ciudades medievales is the product of research carried out by the University of Valladolid's research group "Water, Space, and Society in the Middle Ages." The book assembles sixteen chapters from nineteen different authors, which are all focused on various aspects of medieval water usage. While the bulk of the collection is in Spanish, two of the papers are in French, and one is in Portuguese. These articles center geographically on the Iberian Peninsula but also touch upon issues of water usage in the wider European and the Islamic worlds.

The book is divided into three sections on a cultural basis: the first section focuses on water issues in the Muslim world; the second section deals with cases where comparative work can be done on both Muslim and Christian cultures in the Iberian Peninsula; and the third and final section treats water issues in the Christian world. This final section is the largest, containing nine of the book's fifteen articles. Much of the research in this final section focuses on the years surrounding the culmination of the *Reconquista* in 1492, and thus primarily covers the very end of the Middle Ages and extends into the Renaissance.

In the collection's lengthy introduction, Olatz Villanueva Zubizarreta examines the inheritance and maintenance of the bridge of Ibero and the tannery industry in Castile. This research would not have been out of place in the third section, which explicitly explores water issues in the Christian world.

In the first full section of the book, entitled "Water in the Muslim World," historians explore water's place in

Al-Andalus, North Africa, and the Levant across a wide chronological spectrum. Tariq Madani discusses the various technologies that were developed throughout the Muslim world in order to supply settlements spanning a variety of climates and geographies with water. Vicente Salvatierra Cuenca and Juan Carlos Castillo Armenteros study the way in which water infrastructure was passed down and developed in the region of Jaen during the Umayyad and Almohad dynasties. Lastly, Carmen Trillo San Jose writes on issues of water use, most notably its legal and cultural treatment in and around Granada. This final article suggests the high degree to which water was valued and the central role that it played in Muslim culture.

The next section is entitled "A Transfer Between Two Cultures." These articles concern the exchange of water technology between cultures as well as the hand-off of water systems that necessarily occurred when a new set of rulers supplanted the old. Thus, the period of focus begins in the eighth century and ends as the locations in question fell to Christian conquerors (in this case in the thirteenth and fourteenth centuries). In its opening chapter, Roberto Matesanz Gascón describes the role that Mozarab migration played in the spread of water technology to Christian Iberia. Specifically, he focuses on the introduction of a particular kind of mill to Christian communities in the basin of the Duero River. Esteban Sarasa Sánchez investigates the relatively smooth transition of water systems as they passed first from Romans to Visigoths and then pursues in greater detail the systems' transfer from Muslims to Christians in the Valle Medio of the river Ebro. Enric Guinot Rodríguez discusses the wa-

ter distribution network in Valencia, and details how its usage and maintenance changed as it passed from Islamic hands to the area's new, Christian rulers in the region of Valencia. He argues that while much of the Islamic cultural furniture of water usage remained, the assumption of the control of water systems by city councils was a product of feudal society.

The final section, concerning water usage in medieval Europe, is the book's largest. It is mostly based in the Iberian Peninsula, but one author, Marc Suttor, explains the benefits provided by water in the valley of the Meuse River, while Beatriz Arzaga Bolumburu and Michel Bochaca's article details the political imbroglios and motives involved in controlling mercantile traffic on the Adour River in France. Particularly interesting in this section are the articles by Lola Figueira Moure and Juan Francisco Jimenez Alcaraz. Figueira Moure explores conflicts that arose in the canalization of the river Arbiga in Castile. The canal was the project of the bishop and chapter of the Cathedral of Astorga and brought those clerics into direct conflict with the interests of the Quiñones family, the Counts of Luna. Figueira Moure reveals the extent to which water was perceived as a controllable property, directly counter to the Islamic perception of water as a common good. Jimenez Alcaraz's article may be the most penetrating investigation in the collection and recounts the takeover of water systems girding the border city of Vera following the area's conquest by King Ferdinand in 1488. This takeover, he argues, represented a consciously directed effort of the Christian minority to subjugate the region's Mudejar

majority. The conquerors' assumption of water management and imposition of new customs favored the newcomers materially but also culturally, for, in Jimenez Alcaraz's opinion, questions of water use were as crucial an element of Islamic culture as language or clothing.

The book's division into the Muslim world, Muslim and Christian Iberian milieu, and Christian Europe somewhat hinders cross-cultural comparison. A thematic or topical rubric would have helped in that regard. The major themes and subjects raised by the book's nineteen authors fall into four categories: the relationship between water infrastructure (including both physical and legislative aspects) and political power; the technologies that were used to store, derive energy from, and distribute water; the uses to which medieval societies put water; and the patrimonial nature of water systems, which were handed down from culture to culture. The investigations into these themes are generally penetrating and suggest comparisons.

This collection provides detailed descriptions of the means and place of water technology in the Middle Ages both in Europe and in the Muslim world. Many articles incorporate close readings of the relatively few documents that describe in detail issues of water usage in the Middle Ages, which is valuable. A number of works, though, fall short of their promise, offering limited descriptions of the structures and practices of water use without expanding into suggestive analyses. The text will be useful to graduate students and specialists focusing on issues ranging from agriculture to politics to cultural preservation in and around the Iberian Peninsula.

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