

Abstract

The relevance of water in Arabo-Islamic civilization is expressed by the presence of this element in every constitutive aspect of it, for instance literature, religion, law, technology, urbanism and architecture. Thus, the significance of water is perceived in cultural manifestations of Medieval Arabo-Islamic society, which represent their way of life and perception of the world. This is the case of Medieval Arabic Historiography, in which water plays an important role. Historical and geographical sources transmit all kinds of information and accounts regarding this valuable element, and they also record the different mechanisms for water management and supply that existed in Muslim territories.

In Medieval Muslim Empire the State was responsible for the management of water resources. Sovereigns and rulers ordered —among other works for public benefit— the realization of water management constructions in the cities of the Islamic Empire, such as storage cisterns, underground channels, wells and fountains. These hydraulic works were usually established in public areas of the city and were intended to supply potable water to the population, as well as to allow the irrigation of fields and gardens.

Sovereigns' remarkable contribution to water supply in North-African cities contributed to the assertion of their political authority and water management projects promoted by them are often praised in Medieval Arabic sources, showing a certain philanthropic intention behind their construction.