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Islamic Clepsydrae in the Christian Spain During the Late Middle Ages

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The technology behind the hydraulic clocks dates back to the Antiquity and was transmitted to the Christendom and the Islamic world. From Siria to Morocco and Al-Andalus, Islamic engineers developed further that technology mastering the construction of complicated water driven time pieces and automata. Surviving Arabic treatises are testaments of that refined technological tradition.

Knowledge and objects produced by the Muslims circulated among the Europeans, specially across the borders between neighbouring states. The paradigmatic case is the Iberian Peninsula, which was divided into Christian kingdoms in the North and Islamic kingdoms in the South. The Christians progressively advanced southwards taking territories from their Islamic counterparts until the end of the 15th Century, when the last Muslim state fell into the Christians rule. The conquest boosted the transmission of knowledge and skills with the incorporation of Muslim populations, libraries and different types of infrastructure.

This paper will aim to shed some light on the reception of Islamic clepsydras by the Christians of the Iberian Peninsula. Were they properly understood by them? Were they any useful in the new society? A recently discovered document from the 13th Century mentioning an hydraulic clock in the cathedral of Toledo will be discussed.

Keywords

Hydraulic clocks, knowledge transmission, Medieval Spain, Toledo

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Short Biography

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