

Water in the Central Maghreb during the Medieval Period: A Study in Social History and the History of Mentalities

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Abstract

This research aims to study the status of water in the society of the Central Maghreb during the medieval period, through an approach that combines social history and the history of mentalities. It proceeds from considering water as a fundamental element of daily life and a cultural and religious symbol that contributed to shaping the collective perceptions of society. The research examines the aspects of water's presence in various facets of lived experience and the associated social and economic practices, before moving on to explore its symbolic dimensions, which manifested in several phenomena such as rainmaking rituals (*istisqa'*), folk beliefs, celebrations, proverbs, tales, and myths, as well as its presence in literary and poetic output. The research relies on a range of historical, geographical, literary, and jurisprudential (*fiqh*) sources. It aims to uncover society's interaction with water as a vital resource on one hand, and as a carrier of a system of meanings, values, and symbols on the other. It seeks to demonstrate that understanding the history of water is not limited to studying its material uses, but extends to elucidating its presence in the collective consciousness and the associated mental and cultural perceptions. This contributes to a deeper understanding of the social and cultural structure of the Central Maghreb society during the medieval period.

Keywords: Water, Central Maghreb, Medieval Period, Social History, History of Mentalities.

Introduction

Water is one of the most important elements of nature, upon which the life of all creatures depends; there is no life without water. Since humanity was created by God Almighty, it has known the virtue of water in its existence, continuity, stability, and well-being. Therefore, all ancient civilizations arose on the banks of rivers, such as the civilization of Mesopotamia and the civilization of the Nile Valley, among others.

Water has held a special place in human societies since ancient times, as it was associated with life, stability, and urban development. It transcended its natural function to become an active element in shaping beliefs, rituals, and cultural symbols. This status was clearly evident in the society of the Central Maghreb during the medieval period, where water was present in social life and in the collective mentality through the religious, popular, and literary representations associated with it. From this perspective, the importance of this study emerges. It addresses water as one of the foundational elements of human life due to its connection with various daily activities and its contribution to directing patterns of settlement, production, and social relations on one hand, and on the other, due to the symbolic presence it acquires in the collective mentality through rituals, beliefs, celebrations, proverbs, and literary production.

The importance of this study is also evident in its adoption of an approach that combines social history and the history of mentalities, allowing us to move beyond a descriptive study of water as an economic resource to uncovering its symbolic and cultural significance within society's consciousness. Furthermore, this study serves as an enrichment of historical studies with a cultural and anthropological dimension, by shedding light on the relationship between humans and water and the resulting perceptions and practices that formed part of their civilizational identity.

From this standpoint, we pose the following central problem:

How did water, as a vital resource and cultural symbol, contribute to shaping social life and collective mentalities in the society of the Central Maghreb during the medieval period?

From this, several subsidiary questions arise:

- How did the importance of water reflect on the social and daily practices of the inhabitants of the Central Maghreb?
- What are the most prominent symbolic representations associated with water in the collective mentality?
- How did the symbolism of water manifest in folk rituals, beliefs, and celebrations?
- And how did literary sources, poetry, and folk proverbs reflect the symbolic status of water?

We will attempt to answer these questions sequentially in this study, which relies on the historical analytical method. This involves extrapolating the scientific material found in various sources and analyzing it in light of the research problem, while employing the descriptive method to observe the manifestations of water's presence in social life. We also utilized the anthropological approach and the history of mentalities to interpret the rituals, beliefs, and symbolic representations associated with water. This methodological integration enabled us to read water as both a material element and a cultural symbol simultaneously.

First: Daily Uses of Water in the Central Maghreb Society:

Numerous geographical sources and travel accounts mention the abundance of water resources in the Central Maghreb and the diversity of their sources, including "rain, valleys, rivers, springs, wells, cisterns, reservoirs, and water-wheels/ponds" (Al-Bakri, pp. 69-77). Among the most important rivers and valleys of the Central Maghreb are the Chlef River (Al-Bakri, p. 69), the Tafna River, and the Stafsif River north of Tlemcen. The city of Constantine was also described as having "three rivers emerging from some springs" (Yahya Abu al-Ma'ati Muhammad, 2000, p. 436). Wells and springs were also widespread; Miliana had "sweet wells" (Ismail, 1983, p. 154), Mostaganem was a city with springs (Al-Bakri, p. 69), and the same was true for the cities of Béjaïa and Ténès, as well as the abundant waters in the Aurès Mountains (Ibn Hawqal, 1996, p. 64).

The inhabitants of the Central Maghreb used various means and tools to store or transport water, such as dams, cisterns, canals and ditches, norias and water-lifting devices (*qawadis*), foggaras, buckets, and others. Among the most important daily uses of water, we mention:

- 1 - Drinking:

The inhabitants of the Central Maghreb were particular about drinking from sweet springs and wells, and they also drank from valleys. For example, the people of Ténès drank "from a spring, and to its east is a large, water-rich valley; they drink from it in winter and spring" (Ismail, 1983, p. 153). The people of Bershik drank "from springs whose water is sweet" (Ismail, 1983, p. 158). The people of Algiers drank "from sweet springs on the sea and from wells" Ibn Hawqal described the city of Sbiba (Tebessa) as "an ancient city with abundant water and gardens... Their drinking water comes from a large flowing spring that irrigates their orchards and gardens" (Ibn Hawqal, 1996, p. 89)

- 2 - Cleanliness and Purification:

Cleanliness in the Central Maghreb was associated with bathhouses (*hammam*), which were widespread in all its cities, towns, and villages. Travel accounts refer to them in numerous places. Due to the association of the bathhouse with the concept of purity (*tahara*), it held a lofty status in Islamic society. Muslims across all regions of the Islamic world took care of bathhouses, revering purity, which represents one of the most important rituals of worship. This is in addition to the physical and psychological health benefits of the bathhouse. Medical sources confirmed that it "cleanses the skin of dirt, purifies the body of impurities, opens its pores so that vapors can permeate the body, promotes growth, moisturizes, increases natural warmth, brings happiness to the soul, and dispels gloom and sadness" (Abd al-Aziz, p. 138). The inhabitants of the Central Maghreb frequented bathhouses, both men and women, despite the opposition of some jurists to women entering the bathhouse, "except in cases of illness or postpartum bleeding" (*nifas*) (al-Barzali, 2002, p. 434). In addition to physical purification, the inhabitants also took care of the cleanliness of their clothes, which were often washed in river water (al-Barzali, 2002, p. 434).

- 3 - Millstones (*Arha*):

River and valley waters were used to operate millstones and mills. Most geographical and jurisprudential (*nawazil*) sources mention these mills. Travel accounts note the existence of many mills on the banks of rivers and valleys. Al-Idrisi mentions that Afkan is a city with mills (Ismail, 1983, p. 151). Ibn Hawqal mentions that Miliana had mills on its river (Ibn Hawqal,

1996, p. 89). Ibn al-Saghir states that "on the banks of the Mina River were the numerous mills of Tihert" (Ibn-al-Saghir, pp. 20-40). Due to the abundance of mills, one of its gates was named "Bab al-Matahin" (Gate of the Mills) (al-Bakr, 2013, p. 66). However, the majority of what is found in the *nawazil* books concerns disputes that often arose between garden owners and mill owners—the former watering, the latter grinding. An example is what Al-Burzuli recorded concerning a case where garden owners sued a mill owner, claiming that the mill had harmed their irrigation (al-Barzali, 2002, p. 422).

- 4 - Irrigation:

Irrigation is defined as (the artificial use of fresh water to compensate for the absence or insufficiency of rainfall for land cultivation) (Musa, 2016, p. 132). Just as numerous references in travel accounts describe the process of irrigation from various water sources such as rivers, valleys, and springs—which there is no room to detail here—the *nawazil* books also provide a great deal of information, most of which revolves around disputes that occurred between farmers concerning irrigation water. This is particularly because farmers often shared water and divided it among their gardens, while jurists throughout this period attempted to establish a general system to regulate water distribution and avoid as many disputes and conflicts as possible.

Second: Symbolic Representations of Water in the Collective Mentality:

It was the will of God Almighty to make water the origin of creation. In doing so, He defined the human relationship with water, a profound relationship that united its nature and conscience.

God Almighty says: **“And it is He who created from water a human being and made him [a relative by] lineage and marriage. And your Lord is ever competent”** (Surah Al-Furqan, Verse 54). This has meant that humanity's view of water since ancient times, and across all civilizations, has transcended its physical and chemical nature, surrounding it with an aura of sacredness and symbolic qualities.

It is certain that Moroccans in general, and the society of the Central Maghreb in particular, held a symbolic view of the element of water, which manifests in their various ritual practices, beliefs, and ideas. This is what we will attempt to uncover in this section of the research by mentioning the most prominent symbolic representations and connotations of water in the collective imagination, including:

1. Raimaking Rituals (*al-Istisqa'*):

The Central Maghreb region experienced many natural disasters during the medieval period, among them the catastrophe of drought and famine. Ibn Abi Zar' mentions that the country of the *'Adwa* (the Maghreb and Al-Andalus) suffered many great famines, causing water sources to dry up. The drought continued from the year 253 AH / 867 AD to 265 AH / 878 AD. It even returned to the region, according to Ibn 'Idhari, in the year 266 AH / 879 AD. Other famines followed successively in the years 285 AH, 303 AH, 307 AH, and 395 AH. These were among the greatest calamities known to the country, to the extent that "the people of the countryside ate one another" . The same was true for the fifth century AH.

The years of drought left devastating effects on the population of the Central Maghreb: many died, prices soared, and the phenomenon of migration to neighboring or distant areas intensified. This was especially the case as drought was often followed by deadly epidemics,

such as the plague, which claimed the lives of "people from all classes—scholars, merchants, women, and children—whose number could only be counted by their Creator, may He be exalted"

People feared drought as they feared death. So, if rain was delayed beyond its expected time, they would rise—young and old—to seek it through various rituals passed down from generation to generation, which became a collective tradition. Among these rituals were:

- **A - The "Bride of Rain" Ritual ('*Arus al-Matar*):**

Also known as *Taghunja*, *Boughunja*, *TlaGhunja*, or *Taslit*. This is a popular ritual known throughout the countries of North Africa. It is "one of the oldest rainmaking rites, aiming to implore the sky for rain during seasons of drought". The name may vary from one region to another, but they all express the same ritual. One study on the Hammam al-Nabail region in Guelma mentions that the rainmaking ritual there is called *al-Qa'ima*, which is the Bride of Rain or *Taghunja*. Furthermore, this ritual is also known in the Mashriq countries, where it is called the *al-Ghaythiyya* ritual in the Levant.

Taghunja in the Maghreb is a doll made from a wooden ladle (*mighrafa*) dressed in a bride's attire (*Taslit*)... The presence of children is essential in this rainmaking ritual. They form a procession, sometimes joined by women, parading the Bride of Rain while "repeating chants and supplications, and touring villages, hamlets, and sanctuaries. Along the way, residents sprinkle water on the doll from the rooftops of their houses"(al-Arabi, 2015, p. 33), as a sign of optimism for rain.

- **B - Seeking Intercession through the Supplication of Righteous People and Saints:**

Rainmaking rituals varied according to people's religious culture. The common masses—the ignorant and the naive—had strong beliefs in certain rituals despite their contradiction with Islamic teachings. Others, however, resorted to imploring rain by asking the righteous and devout to supplicate. This was not limited to the Central Maghreb but was common across all lands of the Islamic Maghreb. Al-Maliki transmitted a text stating that "when God Almighty withheld rain from the people, they would go to *Sadaqa al-Darir* (a righteous blind man) asking him to supplicate. One day, they came to him when the country was suffering from severe drought and asked him to pray. He raised his hands to the sky and made a great supplication, then said: 'O Lord, now... now!' And the people had not left him before God relieved them with rain" (al-Maliki, 1983, p. 29).

Furthermore, hagiographical books (*manaqib*) report many accounts of the blessings (*baraka*) of saints in bringing rain. For instance, the sky poured rain through the blessing of the righteous saint Sidi Wadih al-Maknasi while they were in the height of summer. He had gone with a companion to a mountain called Wafershan to devote themselves to worship, and they had no water for ablution. "When night fell... the sky rained down its bounty, and by the next morning, all the pools around them were filled with rain".

2. Water in Tales and Myths:

Among the baseless myths concerning rainfall was what spread among the common people: "attributing rain to the setting of a particular star. This is an ancient belief that Islam dismantled early on, but it reappeared during periods of civilizational decline... known among

the elite and the masses as *al-Anwa'*" (al-Bayyad, 2008, p. 138) (singular *Naw'*). The term might be used for rain itself: *al-Naw'*—a term still used today in some regions of Algeria.

Many people, especially farmers, linked weather conditions to superstition and magic. Dr. Daoudi states that "the general public linked agriculture to what astrologers predicted regarding rainfall, the fertility of the land, abundance of blessings, or conversely, the need to prepare for drought, famine, crop failure, and calamities" (al-A'raj, 2017, p. 210). This was attributed to the prevalence of charlatans; the Zenata people were known for their "great knowledge, skill, intelligence, and proficiency in palmistry" (Ismail, 1983, p. 158).

Among the tales and myths woven around some water sources is what Al-Bakri mentioned: "On the coast of Sbiba (Tebessa) in the mountains of Kutama, there is the Spring of Times (*'Ayn al-Awqat*). It is known that when the times of prayers arrive, the water flows; when the times pass, it recedes or stops" (Al-Bakri, p. 82).

Meanwhile, Al-Wazzan tells us about what the women of Constantine believed concerning a bathhouse that contained a hot spring where many turtles lived. The women believed these turtles were devils. "If one of the women happened to catch a fever or any other ailment, she would say that the cause was the turtles"(al-Wazzan, 1983, p. 59). They would then treat the fever according to specific rituals and approach the spring with offerings, slaughtering a white hen.

Another story connected to springs is mentioned by Al-Wazzan regarding "a cold spring near which is a marble building... The common people believe that there was once a school of literature there, and its teacher and students were wicked, so God transformed them and their school into marble as a punishment for their sins" (al-Wazzan, 1983, p. 59).

3. The Symbolism of Water in Popular Celebrations:

Water, with its symbolic connotations, was present in the ritual celebrations of the Central Maghreb society. Among these celebrations were:

- **Celebration of Pentecost or the Festival (The Feast of the Birth of Yahya/John, Peace Be Upon Him):**

This is one of the festivals of the *Dhimmis* (non-Muslim subjects) that Muslims also celebrated. On this day, women took great care to decorate their homes, as well as "taking clothes out to the dew, placing cabbage leaves and greenery in their garments, and they were keen on bathing on that day"(Abu Mustafa, 1996, p. 46). In this ritual, water symbolized optimism, fertility, and purity.

- **Celebration of the Night of Al-Hujuz (*Laylat al-Hujuz*):**

Al-Wansharisi mentioned that people in the Maghreb would "light fires under fruit trees, bathe, and wash their clothes on the Night of Al-Hujur" (Abbasi, 2000), as a symbol of spiritual purification and new beginnings. In Al-Andalus, this night was called "The Night of the Old Woman" (*Laylat al-'Ajuz*).

- **Celebration of Ashura (*'Ashura*):**

Among the rituals of celebrating 'Ashura' was "lighting fires and pouring water... because they believe that water overflows with blessing, as it does over all places and things, especially the water of the shrine (*darih*), which they believe becomes purifying and healing water" (Dahmash, 2015, p. 117). Water, in their belief, was a symbol of blessing, purification, and healing.

- **Celebration of Yennayer (Berber New Year):**

The inhabitants of the Central Maghreb celebrated Yennayer as an expression of optimism for the new year. It was "a symbolic behavior offered to the hidden force controlling the universe, from which fertility and prosperity are hoped"(Filali, p. 162). This is one of the remnants of pagan beliefs deeply rooted in the popular imagination of Moroccans.

- **Wedding Celebrations:**

Water was also used in wedding rituals. The elderly woman accompanying the bride would present "a vessel of water and pour some into the bridegroom's cupped hands for him to drink. She would then repeat the same action with the bride, but she would pour the water into a plate, symbolizing that her word should be lower than that of the man"(Dahmash, 2015). This reflects a mentality prevalent in Central Maghreb society, where the woman was expected to serve and obey her husband. In this ritual, as well as using water when entering the marital home, water served as an expression of optimism for stability, prosperity, continuity of lineage, and marital fertility.

From this, we observe that water was a symbol of renewal and the beginning of a new life cycle. Therefore, it was associated with the beginnings of the agricultural year and seasonal celebrations. People also believed that bathing in water on specific days brought blessings and health and warded off bad luck.

Furthermore, water was associated with fertility in the popular mind, whether human or agricultural fertility. It was also considered a symbol of purification from evils and welcoming a new, more prosperous time. All these connotations are extensions of ancient heritages that later integrated into Islamic culture.

4. The Symbolism of Water in Folk Proverbs:

Folk proverbs reveal the important status of water in the collective consciousness of the inhabitants of the Central Maghreb. Among these proverbs that employed one of the symbolic qualities or characteristics of water to denote various meanings and contents are their sayings:

"*Ar-rizq fi-l-bir*" (Provision is in the well)(Filali, p. 143) — an allusion to the importance of water in earning a livelihood. The prosperity of agriculture, which is people's means of living, depends on water; it is a symbol of sustenance.

"*Manqad al-ma qad al-ghina*" (He who controls water, controls wealth)(Filali, p. 143) — implying that water is a source of wealth and a standard for life and stability.

Some proverbs expressed indifference to the terrors of winter after having strengthened one's resolve. It was said: "*Ma ahliwarakwalaqaddamakya l-wad al-hamel*" (My family is not behind you nor ahead of you, O flowing river) (Qadhat, p. 88) — an allusion to wisdom and good management.

It was said to guests who arrived at inappropriate times: "*Mininmarr ash-shita jab busta*" (Where winter passed, it brought a parcel/guest) — implying that unwanted guests appear when times are hard (like winter bringing rain and, metaphorically, visitors).

Regarding the etiquette of eating, they said: "*Al-maklabila ma min qillat al-fahma*" (A meal without water is from a lack of understanding) — an allusion to the importance of water in people's lives. (Note: This proverb seems a bit obscure; the provided translation is a literal rendering.)

Their proverbs also expressed their concern for weather conditions and anticipation of what heralds fertility or drought. They said: "*As-sabataban min ras al-qa'dayabu'dahwal-'am yaban min kharifah, wa-ayyam al-'Ansaraywaru*" (The early rain appears from the beginning of [the month] Al-Qa'dah [marking its arrival or absence], and the year appears from its autumn, and the days of Pentecost show) (Qadhat, p. 185) — proverbs reflecting agricultural knowledge and seasonal observation.

As a form of resignation, they said: "*Ghairdirmwiyyabarda 'ala qalbak*" (Just put some cold water on your heart) (Qadhat, p. 239) — meaning calm down or be patient.

It was said of those who walk humbly among people: "*Fulanyusqa fi l-ma min taht al-hima*" (So-and-so is watered from under the mud) — implying he gets the benefit of water (or good things) indirectly or secretly. (Note: the exact meaning is somewhat unclear without further context.)

Given the importance of bathhouses in the lives of the inhabitants of the Maghreb, they coined some proverbs about them. For example, it was said of a woman:

"*Mshatlil-hammam jabat khabar 'am*" (She went to the bathhouse and brought back a year's worth of news) — an indication that bathhouses were places for meeting and chatting.

It was said: "*Li dakhallil-hammam la buddya'raq*" (Whoever enters the bathhouse must sweat) — meaning if you get involved in something, you must face its consequences.

As an allusion to annoying people, they said: "*Zaq 'aliyyawa 'awidya l-hammam, rani rayhalil-hammam*" (Shout at me and repeat it, O bathhouse, I'm going to the bathhouse) (Qadhat, p. 84) — implying that the person is so eager to go to the bathhouse that they ignore the shouting. (Note: This proverb's meaning is also a bit unclear without context; it seems to suggest that the speaker is so set on their course that external irritation is meaningless.)

It is worth noting that proverbs are quickly memorized and easily transmitted from one country to another. Therefore, through our study of Algerian proverbs, as well as Moroccan, Libyan, and even Andalusian proverbs, we noticed similarities between them, sometimes matching exactly, or differing in wording while sharing the same meaning.

5. The Symbolism of Water in Folk Beliefs:

The folk belief of the inhabitants of the Central Maghreb surrounded the element of water with many symbolic connotations, stripping it of its physical materiality. This was evident in their ritual practices and intellectual beliefs. For example:

A - Rituals of Popular Bathhouses:

The bathhouse has been associated with the concept of purity in all eras, especially in Islamic societies. Bathhouses were widespread in the lands of the Central Maghreb, "in every city, whether great or small... in addition to private bathhouses built in homes". For instance, Tihert had "flowing waters and running springs that entered most of their homes, and they used them freely" (Makdich, 1988, p. 87). Bathhouses were generally frequented by both men and women from the earliest times to the present day. Hasan al-Wazzan tells us that the women of Nekkaus were "beautiful, fair-skinned women with shiny black hair because they frequented the bathhouse and took care of themselves" (al-Wazzan, 1983, p. 53).

In addition to the health and purifying benefits of the bathhouse, certain popular beliefs prevailed regarding them, such as believing in the blessedness of the waters. The women of Constantine would seek blessings from the spring of the bathhouse, offering sacrifices to it by

slaughtering a hen upon it. In Mila, there was a spring known as the Spring of Fever (*'Ayn al-Humma*). People believed that its water cured fever, so they "would sprinkle it on the feverish patient, and they would recover by virtue of its blessings and the extreme coldness of its water"(al-Wazzan, 1983, p. 62). Thus, they would go there seeking healing.

B - The Symbolism of the Waters of Sanctuaries and Zawiyas:

The inhabitants of the Central Maghreb sought blessing in natural waters, especially those found at the tombs of saints and righteous people, as if the *baraka* of the saints was transferred to the water, giving it a magical power capable of affecting the one who drinks or bathes in it, whether by healing them or surrounding them with care and instilling blessing in their body and soul.

The author of the book *Al-Manaqib al-Marzukiyya* states that his father, may God have mercy on him, bequeathed the well to him, saying: "This well was used by the saints to break their fast with its water" (Abu Abdullah Muhammad ibn Marzouq, 2008, p. 180). These beliefs were not limited to the common people but included the elite as well. He even mentioned regarding the well that the Sultan of Tlemcen and his brothers "would not leave until they broke their fast with its water, and they claimed that if they missed breaking their fast on it one day, they felt the effect of that"(Abu Abdullah Muhammad ibn Marzouq, 2008, p. 188). Ibn Maryam also reported a story about one of the saints, Sidi Ahmed al-Hassan, who "used to go to the market of Nedroma on Thursdays, fill his jug with water during the heat, and walk around the market giving people water to drink until they dispersed, without replenishing the water. The people then responded to his supplications and saw that the jug was sprouting water from its bottom like a spring"(al-Tlemcani, 2009, p. 60).

C - The Symbolism of Recited Water (*al-Maa al mar-qi*):

People also believed in the efficacy of water used in incantations (*ruqya*). Al-Burzuli provides us with an example of a *ruqya* for difficult childbirth, stating: "It is written on a page, then washed, and the woman is given the water to drink three times"(al-Barzali, 2002, p. 488). This means writing some Quranic verses, then erasing the writing and dissolving it in water by blowing, so it dissolves and enters the patient's body. They believed that the talismans dissolved in the water through erasure would lead to the dissolution and disappearance of pain and illness.

D - Protective Beliefs:

Water was not always a source of good; according to popular belief, it could pose a risk to health or life in certain situations, especially if it involved the world of jinn and devils. "Therefore, the common people forbid their children from bathing at certain times of the day... Popular wisdom says: "Awwamawanawwamamin al-'asr la-ha ma damant al-salamah" (Swimming and sleeping after 'Asr, I do not guarantee safety). The implication here is that sleeping and bathing after the afternoon prayer might expose a person to being touched or possessed by jinn. The common people also forbid their children from passing over the entrances of dirty water at any time, believing they are a refuge for jinn and their children"(al-Arabi, 2015, pp. 39-40). To this day, people still avoid pouring hot water at night, believing that devils will harm them. They also avoid bathing in the evening or at night, believing that the jinn are active during these times(Razaiqia & Boukhadra, 2019, p. 141).

6. The Symbolism of Water in Poetic Writings:

The symbolic representations of water were strongly present in many poetic writings of Central Maghreb poets from various periods. We will mention some as examples only.

Perhaps one of the most famous Algerian poets who lived during the study period is Bakr ibn Hammad al-Tahirti, the poet of his time. Some of his poetic verses contain images that symbolize water or its related qualities or characteristics, such as irrigation. He says:

Fa-la 'afaAllahu 'anhu ma tahmiluhu

Wa-la saqaqabra 'Imran bin Hattan (al-Taharti, 1966, p. 66).

(The implied meaning: May God not grant him rain for his grave). In another poem, he praises Aba al-'Aysh Isa ibn Idris, the ruler of Jarawa and Tlemcen:

Wa-ghashaMghila bis-suyufimadhillatan

Wa-saqJarawata min naqi'i al-hanzal (al-Taharti, 1966, p. 74).

(He watered Jarawa with the bitter juice of colocynth—a metaphor for defeat).

He also mentioned death:

Sahab al-manayakullayawminmuzillatun

Fa-qadhatalahawliwa-lahaburuquha (al-Taharti, 1966, p. 74).

(Clouds of death rain down around me).

Among what he said when he appeared before Imam Abu Hatim upon entering Tihert:

-Ma dhayudabbiruRabbuna fi amrihi

Subhanahu fi ardihiwa-sama'ih

Rad al-mulukilamahalliqararihim

Mustabshirina bi-fadlihiwa-'ata'ih

Fa-tabaraka Allah al-Latifu bi-san'i hi

Ma a'qalaath-thaqalayni 'anni'amihi

Rafa'a as-sama'abila 'imadinbayna

Wal-bahraamsakahu 'an arja'ih

Law la fada 'ala al-'ibadi bi-mawjihi

Wa-'ala al-jibalar-rasiyati bi-ma'ih (al-Taharti, 1966, pp. 85-86).

(He raises the sky... and holds the sea... if not for His grace upon the servants... symbolizing divine bounty and generosity).

Other poets also wrote verses containing, in one way or another, the symbolic presence of water. Among them is Ja'far ibn Falah al-Kutami, who said:

Wa-yawm ka-anna al-ghamamatahtasama'ih

Haka muqlatisahan, wa-lam yuhkinidanna

Ka-anna al-ghawadibil-mathaninasahnahu

Wa-albasathuthawbanmin al-khazziadkana (Bourouiba, 1984, p. 187).

Another example is Muhammad ibn Yahya ibn Abi Mudar at-Tabni, who wrote about longing and love poetry:

Ishtaqahu ka-shtiyaqi al-'ayninawmataha

Ba'da al-hujudiwa-jadbi al-ardilil-matar (Bourouiba, 1984, p. 188).

(He yearns for him like yearning of the eye for its sleep... and the thirst of dry earth for rain).

The poem symbolizes separation, longing, and intense need, much like the need of parched earth for water.

As for the famous "Poem of Relief" (*al-Munfarajah*) by Abu al-Fadl Yusuf ibn Muhammad ibn Yusuf, known as Ibn an-Nahwi at-Tuzari al-Qal'i (attributed to the Qal'a of Bani Hammad), he says:

Ishtadiazmatantanfariji

Qadadhanalaylukabil-balaji

Wa-zalam al-laylilahusarajun

Hatta yaghshahu Abu as-Saraji

Wa-sahab al-khayrilahumatarun

Fa-idhaja'a al-abaanutaji (Muhammad, p. 244)

(Be patient, hardship, for relief is near... The rain of goodness will fall when its time comes). This symbolizes relief after hardship and giving after withholding.

Conclusion

Water acquired special importance in the society of the Central Maghreb during the medieval Islamic period. It was the fundamental guarantee for people's life and stability, a source of growth and prosperity, and a means to fulfill various life needs. Water was associated with all details of their livelihood—drinking, cooking, cleanliness, purification, and irrigating crops—especially given that agriculture was one of the most important activities practiced by people during the study period. However, the presence of water as an essential material in daily life was matched by an equally significant presence, referring to its symbolic presence in the popular imagination. Water was linked to a vast system of symbols, beliefs, and rituals that reflected society's view of concepts such as purity, fertility, blessing, and renewal. The various information provided by sources confirms that water acquired important symbolic values with different connotations and a status of sacredness that matured in the collective mentality of the Central Maghreb's inhabitants. This manifested in various ritual practices and religious beliefs, in which elements of paganism and Islam blended with Berber customs, as well as in the various arts and literature of the folk heritage.

The study also showed that the symbolic representations of water were not separate from its lived reality, but rather formed as a result of the interaction between religious teachings, folk traditions, and the environmental conditions that characterized the Central Maghreb. Thus, studying water from the perspective of social history and the history of mentalities allows for a deeper understanding of the civilizational structure of medieval society. It confirms that natural elements are not merely components of the environment but also carriers of meanings, values, and symbols that contributed to the formation of the collective consciousness.

Furthermore, this study opens the field for other research concerning the history of natural elements in the Central Maghreb, thus contributing to enriching studies on the cultural and anthropological history of Maghreb societies in the medieval period.

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