

Control, co-operation and conflict: an interdisciplinary study of later medieval urban water management in Britain AD 1066-1540.

One volume.

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Abstract

The inter-relationship between the development of complex societies, their beliefs and the degree of sophistication of their urban water management systems is not a subject which has attracted a great deal of academic consideration. This study has therefore adopted an interdisciplinary approach in order to evaluate the extent to which the types of urban water management schemes in England, Wales, Scotland and Ireland between 1066 and 1540 can be better understood by placing them within their wider historical and conceptual contexts. This was a period which witnessed a rapid expansion in urban settlements and when great political and social conflicts arose as the rigidly hierarchical social order began to change, the power of the church was challenged and towns moved towards independent local government. This study considers the impact of these events on the development of urban water management and the extent to which different groups of city dwellers were able to negotiate arrangements to provide and share the water supply. It also examines whether the ideas and beliefs of the period about the symbolic significance of water and the causes of disease affected the ways in which water was supplied and used.

Two case studies supplement the literature and conceptual surveys to provide a wide overview of urban water management systems during the study period and to test the proposition that these systems are not only indicators of a society's technical expertise but also reveal aspects of the nature, development and complexity of its social and political structures.

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