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## Editorial [for Water History, July 2010]

Maurits W. Ertsen

Heather J. Hoag

*University of San Francisco*, [hjhoag@usfca.edu](mailto:hjhoag@usfca.edu)

Johann Tempelhoff

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## Editorial

**Maurits W. Ertsen · Heather Hoag · Johann Tempelhoff**

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If we would have to characterize this issue—the first of Water History’s second year—in one word, it would be “diversity”. This issue introduces readers to a number of themes in water history—navigation, state engineering, health, and quality—as well as demonstrates how scholars are engaging with the hydrological history of the American South, North China Plain, Iran, and medieval Europe. All the papers, in their own ways, explore the link between water systems and humans.

The first paper by Craig Colten examines how state legislatures in the American South perceived navigable waterways in the early nineteenth century. He shows that state actions to define and maintain navigable waters led to environmental transformation and represented an early form of resource management. Early river improvements proved ephemeral during the antebellum period, but in the late nineteenth century new efforts for federally financed waterway modifications began. Colten discusses how court decisions, which reasserted the prominence of navigation interests, undermined the authority of states over their internal water resources.

In the second paper, Nick Verouden points our attention to issues of health, illness and wellbeing. These concepts have a substantial social dimension, reflect physical and bodily interactions with water, and have had different meanings in the medical world and the general public throughout history. Verouden focuses on different medical and everyday settings such as traditional forms of medicine, therapeutic and curative practices in seaside sanatoria and spas, and public health initiatives. In his discussion, he shows how the concept of water exposes tensions in preventative health programs and the health industry and how water was a means various Western groups used to express their social identity.

Local responses to medieval urban river pollution in three leading English towns—Coventry, Norwich, and York—from the late fourteenth to sixteenth century is the subject of the third paper, written by Dolly Jørgensen. She analyzes how local governments became involved in river upkeep in two ways: preventative actions in the form of regulations and regulatory enforcement, and responsive actions to physically remove materials

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M. W. Ertsen (✉) · H. Hoag · J. Tempelhoff  
Water Resources Management, Department of Civil Engineering and Geosciences,  
Delft University of Technology, PO Box 5041, 2600 GA Delft, The Netherlands  
e-mail: M.W.Ertsen@tudelft.nl

that had already accumulated in the rivers. Pollution regulations and regular river upkeep activities were part of the same toolbox, and both legislative action and scouring projects were responses to filth and waste accumulation in urban waterways. Connecting these two responses, the extent of involvement by town governments in dealing with pollution becomes clear.

David Pietz explores methodological and thematic approaches to the government of the People's Republic of China's management of water resources after 1949. The paper provides an overview of a research agenda to understand the environmental consequences of different hydraulic engineering projects and their different developmental paradigms—Soviet-style central planning, Great Leap Forward decentralization, state planning and mass mobilization, and “market socialism”. While Pietz considers the particular setting in China, there are clear links with other regions and river basins. Issues like the role of modern hydraulic engineering vs. traditional water conservancy, central vs. local planning, international technical cooperation, and economic development vs. environmental protection are relevant for regions worldwide.

In the fifth and final paper of this issue, Ali Mostafaeipour provides an overview of the qanat technology. Starting in the arid province of Yazd, Iran, which shows a transition from traditional qanat-based irrigation systems to groundwater tube wells, he discusses some of the challenges facing water management throughout the world today. The demands placed upon natural groundwater resources have become excessive. Using a survey of 150 farmers, Mostafaeipour explores the social aspects of typical qanat systems for irrigation and drinking water in Yazd. The study served as a basis to define potential improvements of the qanat system by both users and professionals.

What stands out in these discourses is the diverse perspectives we have of water. The papers are linked by their recognition that water is an essential natural resource without which we cannot survive. The papers also highlight the transnational nature of water history. Readers are drawn together by scholars working in Asia, the Middle East, North America, the British Isles and Europe to contemplate imaginative views on water.

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