

Editorial Issue 3 2012

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As is our tradition here at *Water History*, this third issue of 2012 spans the globe, covering three regions and five centuries. The papers illustrate the ways water has been embedded in a variety of environmental and cultural contexts and the changing values people have placed on the resource. The first two papers focus on approaches and perceptions of urban water supplies. Charisma Acey examines the development of water systems in Benin City, Nigeria, to show how land tenure, residential segregation, and public investment in water supply set the stage for present-day inequality in water access. She focuses on two periods that were integral to the politicization of the city's water. During the 1930s, colonial authorities began to pump water from the "forbidden river," Ogba River. This led inhabitants to protest imposed water rates. The commissioning of the Ikpoba Waterworks in the 1980s also raised questions about the water quality. Acey shows how colonial legacies of unequal distribution of services continued well into the postcolonial period. In many ways, Benin City's urban landscape is the reflection of these issues of water supply.

In the second paper, Agathe Euzen and Jean-Paul Haghe take us from the colonies to the metropolitan power of Paris. They explore the different perceptions Parisians have held regarding their drinking water supplies from the seventeenth to the twentieth century. They show how taste, smell, appearance, and tactile memory all affected the ways in which people judged the quality of their water. Both papers add to the growing scholarship on urban and environmental history that seeks to connect past experiences with water to present concerns about unequal access, variable quality, and the different value of water.

The final paper shifts our attention from urban environments to that of the sea. Tom Gunnar Hoogervorst introduces us to seascape history, a field we believe begs more scholarly attention. Although seventy percent of the earth is covered in saltwater, historical discussions on the contribution of oceans and the communities that live on or by them rarely surface in water history circles. Thankfully this is changing. Through an in-depth discussion of the so-called "sea people" of Southeast Asia and their interactions with

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terrestrial communities, Hoogervorst shows the role of water in identity formation and how power relations shaped the region's maritime history. He draws upon linguistic fieldwork to further our understanding of the 19th and 20th century phenomena that led the marginalization of these communities.

Together these three papers show the important role water has played in shaping communities, influencing interactions between different groups, and in identity and cultural formation. As Hoogervorst aptly writes, water was more than a substance; it was "an element able to connect and isolate people, shape and reshape long-standing power relations."