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Even in turbulent times, the scholarship in water history is impressive in terms of topical reach, temporal coverage, and diversity of spaces that are brought to our attention. The first paper in this last issue of 2020, from Saket Pande and Stefan Uhlenbrook, links the sustainable development goals of the United Nations to societal changes related (or not) to climate change. Societies have coped with climate variability by diversifying occupations, livelihoods, and uses of space, and by activating associated institutions and technological innovations. The authors compare evolutionary paths of two settings: the ancient Indus River Basin and the recent Murrumbidgee River Basin. This analysis allows the authors to suggest that place-based local innovations should be encouraged and local economies should be diversified to increase the resilience of vulnerable societies.

In the next paper, Majid Labbaf Khaneiki continues historical analysis of interrelations between water resources and societal organization, with a focus on Iran. He also compares different settings, in his case river-based and qanat-based economies. The author discusses how over time, governments developed a strong dependence on a river-based economy with associated irrigation systems. Bureaucratic and military control over water was also instrumental in strengthening political ties with different regions. In contrast, qanat-based economies remained more locally focused, which may have disfavored accumulation of power and centralized governments.

An empire that certainly managed to mobilize water for political control was the Roman Empire. In his reconstruction of the Valens aqueduct of Constantinople, Martin Crapper uses hydrological and hydraulic engineering analysis tools to simulate the performance of the aqueduct system. This analysis builds on and adds to archaeological evidence. The technical reconstruction reveals the amount of water it could have delivered to the city, the seasonal variation in supply, and the most likely configuration of the aqueduct. It also signifies the enormous amount of construction, maintenance and management that building power through water control requires.

We continue with reconstructions of water systems, with the paper of Marie-Laure Chambrade, Sébastien Gondet, Damien Laisney, Marzieh Mehrabani, Kourosh Moham-madkhani, and Farad Zareh-Kordshouli, whcihtakes us to the canal system of Ju-i Dokhtar

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in the eastern part of the Pasargadae plain (Fars, Iran). That region has many remains of ancient hydraulic structures, which—rather similar to the Roman aqueducts—need to be studied in much more detail. Both the functioning and the chronology of many features remain to be clarified. The paper presents results of very recent research concerning the hydraulics of the canals. Synthesizing results from different methods and approaches, including systematic regional mapping, photo-interpretation, precise topographic readings, and OSL analyses, the text focuses on the remains of the Ju-i Dokhtar canal and the dam of Sa'adatshahr. These hydraulic features appear to have been the backbone of a system of water exploitation in the south- east part of the plain of Pasargadae and the plain of Sa'adatshahr further downstream.

In our final paper, Oscar Jacobsson takes us to the parishes of Högsby and Mörlunda, Sweden, to share the development of flood related problems in this region during the period 1500–1800. The focus is on the effects of floods on agricultural production, and how these were perceived by the local communities. Jacobsson uses historical maps and written source material, including parish records and court protocols. The flooding in question came from the river Emån, which—as many rivers do—offered a vital resource for the cattle-based economy of the parishes, but also claimed its own space in the landscape when flooding. However, changes in agriculture, like introducing and expanding crop farming changed what these floods meant. As such, this and our other papers in this last issue of the strange year 2020 highlight once again that water history can only be properly understood when considering the interactions between humans, water, and many other agents of change.

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