

Oestigaard, T. 2012. Book review of Hynynen et al., 2012.
Water fountains in the worldscape. KehräMedia Ltd.
Water Alternatives 5(3): 721-722



BOOK REVIEW

Hynynen, A.; Juuti, P. and Katko, T.S. (Eds). 2012. *Water fountains in the worldscape*. International Water History Association. Helsinki: KehräMedia Ltd. ISBN: 978-951-98151-8-3. 222 pp. €120.

(URL: http://granum.uta.fi/english/kirjanTiedot.php?tuote_id=22339)

Terje Oestigaard

The Nordic Africa Institute, Uppsala, Sweden; terje.ostigard@nai.uu.se

This is one of those books one immediately thinks one has seen before because of the importance and omnipresence of water fountains in cityscapes, but then one realises, as the editors point out, that hardly any overall and comparative book on water fountains exists. As such, this book is a highly welcome and pleasant read, and not the least, a visual delight. Its form and structure is like a coffee-table book although the texts are written academically but in an easy accessible style. Throughout the volume, water fountains from larger parts of the world are depicted in colour photos, making the read a fluid journey to different cities and their waterscapes.

The book is tightly structured and covers 16 cities in as many countries: Argentina (Buenos Aires), Australia (Adelaide), Austria (Vienna), China (Yuxi city), Finland (Helsinki), France (Montpellier), Germany (Hamburg), Hungary (Budapest), Israel (Jerusalem), Italy (Rome), South Africa (Pretoria), Spain (Barcelona), Sweden (Stockholm), Tunisia (Tunis), Turkey (Keçiören) and United States (Washington, DC). After a foreword and prologue (Part I), it has four main sections; Part II: Starting from Necessity: Fountains with Traditions; Part III: From Monumentalism to Changing Uses; Part IV: Expanding to Enjoyment of Modern Times and Part V: Comparative Analysis of the Omnipresent Water Fountains, and finally, an epilogue.

'Fountain' comes from Latin meaning 'spring'. Although the title is *Water fountains in the worldscape*, it is more accurate to say that most of the chapters in the book analyse fountains in the urban cityscapes. This is also where the different chapters offer valuable insights into parts of the processes of urbanisation, which are often neglected. Any city with respect to itself has invested in magnificent and beautifying water fountains. Fountains create city identities. The book starts with Rome, the city in the world with probably the most fountains. However, apart from fountains in history perhaps the most interesting aspects are how, even to date, fountains are fundamental structures shaping city-planning and urban landscapes. The role and importance of water in fountains have not diminished, but rather taken new forms and used in other contexts for different purposes.

Barcelona is such an example where the construction of water fountains was a strategic part of large-scale urban renewals and developments, not only for the World's Fair in 1888 and 1929, but also as part of the Olympics in 1992. And interestingly, despite the splendour of a city's pride, the Spanish Water Law and other municipal regulations state that water supply to ornamental fountains is among the first to be shut off during droughts. The importance of fountains in the cityscape and for the identity of a city was made explicit in Adelaide, Australia. In 1968, the Duke of Edinburgh (Queen Elisabeth II's husband) switched on the fountain the *Three Rivers* in memory of the Queen's visit in 1962.

However, this fountain caused a tempered debate as Sir Arthur Rymill put it in 1963 (he favoured a big fountain): "[w]e must decide if we are going to beautify the City or get maximum traffic flow through the City. Traffic or beautification, which one?"

But fountains are much more than beautification. In 2000, a fountain was inaugurated in Buenos Aires symbolising Argentina's long-term struggle for democratisation and for democracy worldwide. Moreover, fountains are not merely just sources providing water in one way or another for the citizens. In fact, in Part V, the editors identify altogether 40 major reasons why water fountains have been built, which they broadly classify into these overall categories; political, economic, social, religious, institutional, cultural, technological, environmental and aesthetic reasons. Most often many of these reasons and functions are combined in the very same fountain and as such water and fountains are truly multi-purpose and multidimensional, with a vast potential of metaphoric and ideological significance and expressions apart from beauty.

It is not a weakness of the book as such that all these topics are not elaborated in depth and length, but rather a structural limitation of the format and style of the book, given that it also guides the reader visually through the world and some of its fountains. The editors make a note in the prologue that the photos are mainly taken by the authors and as such are perhaps a bit amateurish. Despite the fact that some of the additional illustrations could have had better quality, the photos are overall good and not the least, very illustrative since they directly relate to the fountains being discussed, literally from different angles. The individual chapters vary somehow in length and writing style, but these comments do not detract from the overall impression of the book: it is a highly welcome book about fountains both textually and visually.

Although there are in-depth studies of fountains in various cities in the world, one major strength of this book is its comparative approach. It directs the attention to the fundamental role of fountains in cities and urban development, an aspect which is often neglected in discussions focusing on water infrastructure and sanitation. Moreover, although water specialists emphasise the importance of water in all its facets, it is particularly striking that worldwide, as evident in this book, city planners and citizens highly value these social, cultural and religious aspects of water. Fountains are sources people give importance to, perhaps more and in other ways than we usually perceive and acknowledge. Thus, hopefully, this book will also be a source for further studies of fountains and their structuring mechanisms in urban development and history, and beyond, as the title of the book indicates; water fountains are crucial and integrated parts of the worldscape.

THIS ARTICLE IS DISTRIBUTED UNDER THE TERMS OF THE CREATIVE COMMONS *Attribution-NonCommercial-ShareAlike* LICENSE WHICH PERMITS ANY NON COMMERCIAL USE, DISTRIBUTION, AND REPRODUCTION IN ANY MEDIUM, PROVIDED THE ORIGINAL AUTHOR(S) AND SOURCE ARE CREDITED. SEE [HTTP://CREATIVECOMMONS.ORG/LICENSES/BY-NC-SA/3.0/LEGALCODE](http://creativecommons.org/licenses/by-nc-sa/3.0/legalcode)