

Thaïsa Way, ed., *River Cities, City Rivers* (Harvard University Press, 2018)

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*River cities, City Rivers* is a beguiling and fascinating book, exploring the connectivity between humans and their river environments in the development of urban riparian communities. Global in scale, the book presents in a series of essays an examination of the economic and cultural development of both individual cities, and city regions, historical and contemporary, in tandem with their riparian resources. The premise of the book is to reflect upon the intertwined histories of key cities with their waterscapes; and the intractable relationship between them. Underpinning the book is a desire to draw attention to human endeavours to both manage, and adapt to, changing riverine conditions. Editor Thaisa Way has brought together writers whose speciality reflects the diversity of the river cities explored, including urban planners, architects, historians and cultural anthropologists. As a result the voices of the chapter authors ring clearly and distinctly, so that each city explored has its own unique identity imprinted upon the pages. As an exercise in interdisciplinarity the book works towards a unified view of understanding cities as 'biophysical, historical and constructed landscapes'. Moreover, the book's stated intent is to push existing scholarship on river-city relationships to move past a focus which is centred on the economic role that rivers play in shaping their cityscapes. Instead, Way's aim is to provide synergy with other disciplines to understand the complex and dynamic interplay between rivers as natural, elemental forces juxtaposed against the city's inherent rationality and drive to exist despite challenging attendant environments.

The book is presented in three sections. In the first the emphasis is given to the ongoing resilience of four geographical spaces under focus; Rome; Lyon; Shahjahanabad and the cities of the meandering Yellow River lower delta in China. In this opening section we are presented with essays which ask us to consider the ways in which the rivers in question have shaped the psyche of their riparian, human counterparts. Whilst in Rome and Lyon the river is a source of both civic pride and partisan identity across riverbanks, the wider geographical vista of the regional purview of the Indian and Chinese examples reminds us of the impact of nation building through using hydraulics as a sign of superior engineering and urban landscaping prowess. In Shahjahanabad water engineering was used to create urban canals to cool, irrigate, beautify and sustain a royal city. In China's Yellow River delta its peripetatic nature challenged urban planners to accommodate its volatile path to its estuary, leading to a series of highly adaptive responses by chains of river cities to adapt to flooding and drought cycles.

The second section of the book interrogates the ways in which urban design responds to the river city residents' desires. Opening with the host of the Kumbh Mela festival, touted as the world's largest temporary gathering of mankind, the city of Allahabad has some one hundred and twenty million Hindu pilgrims arriving once every twelve years to make a life's pilgrimage to the confluence of three holy rivers. The essay explores the adaptive techniques of a river city, challenged by both its monsoonal landscape and the huge population dynamics generated by Kumbh Mela which is orientated around the confluence of river Ganges, the Jamuna river and the mythical river, the Saraswati. The second essay focuses on the role of

the Los Angeles River for underpinning the development of its city. When the river could no longer satiate the Los Angeles' demands for freshwater it was supplanted by the Owens River development and relegated to a forlorn canalised channel between freeway and railway. Similarly, the infrastructural pressures on urban freshwater resources in the megacity of Sao Paulo are a reminder of the global South's rapidly growing, but highly unequal, development. In much the same vein New Orleans is discussed. The authors, mull over the ways in which the Mississippi River was historically viewed as a problem to be resolved. The resulting vast hydraulic engineering of levees and polders, flood embankments and dredged channels enabled the river to service the city but was kept apart from it. This contrasts starkly with the final example of the section, the San Antonio River, marked out as a glowing example of a 'post-industrial' city, where economic and civic rejuvenation is centred around the 'River Walk'. Urban panning here has marked the river as a vital resource through which to literally channel tourists; both on the river on boat cruises and on the shaded walkable pathways dotted with leisure amenities. The river has become the emblematic lifeblood of San Antonio, drawing in vast numbers of tourists, whilst at odds with its rapidly declining aquifer levels. Combined, these essays draw our attention to the ways in which urban design reflects human needs rather than working in harmony with riverine environments.

The last section concludes with a contemporary consideration of the future for river cities. The opening essay contrasts the economic explosion of the Chinese economy and the impact that rapid, centrally managed urbanisation has had for a number of its megacities as they break away from their historical and cultural past. Following from this is an exploration of peri-urban Austrian cultural expectations around water management in an example drawn from the periphery of Vienna. Designers leading the rehabilitation of city rivers comes to the fore in examples taken from Pittsburgh and Los Angeles for a second time, as the authors dwell upon the challenges of changing cultural mindsets regarding both what rivers are for and what they should look, and act, like. Aesthetics are taken to a new level in the final essay drawn from the Netherlands, in which functionality, in terms of storm water and flood water management, merge into public civic amenities which morph their use in response to changing water levels. By concluding the book on this note the emphasis is very much on the role that engineering, urban design and changing cultural attitudes play in making space for water.

Design is central to the work both in terms of the content of each chapter and with the overall aesthetics of the book, which is large and weighty in its hard back edition, with the look and feel of a coffee table book. Its oversized pages are populated with lithographs, maps, photos and hand drawn designs, enabling the reader to feel immersed within the stories of the cities and their rivers as they unfold alongside the text. Great detail is given to the historical development and flourishing of each of the river cities, included alongside commentary outlining the economic, political, social and historical mores and environmental factors which have enabled these great cities to wax and wane.

It could be said that however that one of the book's great strengths is also its greatest weakness. The contributions of authors with widely different approaches to writing, and different skill sets, can make the book feel disjointed and at risk of feeling thrown together.

There is no opening prologue from the editor to explain why the chapters have been structured as they have using particular river-city case studies. To some extent the essays could be interchangeable and there is no rationale as to the selection of river cities used. The reader is then pinballed around the globe from destination to destination with no linking theme over different historical timelines over the three sections. Not all the great river cities of the world are represented; London, Cairo, New York, St Petersburg, Vancouver, Venice, Khartoum, amongst others, are not even mentioned in passing; instead there is an overemphasis on US cities, with Los Angeles given two essays. As a result the reader feels that this is a work drawn together on the back of conference proceedings, rather than a comprehensive piece of scholarship based upon satisfying a research premise.

There is also a lack of consistency across the chapters. Some authors are diligent in presenting clear timelines for their river cities –and the maps, drawings and diagrams are all succinctly used to strengthen the main argument within each essay. Others feel more clumsily drawn together, with figures and computer aided designs which tell the reader very little with no legend or explanatory footnote to make sense of the image. It would have been helpful for the reader to be able to connect across the river city exemplars through some connective diagrams and supportive text either at the front, or back-end, of the book.

Yet the authors should be congratulated for attempting something novel and thought provoking in this work. The complex histories of great river cities such as these selected provokes the reader into asking what next for urban spaces, particularly as these now house most of humanity, with waterscapes contributing both to ongoing economic and recreational futures. Without taking the time to understand what has passed, how will we learn to adapt to the new challenges that urban humanities face?

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