"Fountains incorporate the essential element of life, water, into the urban landscape. Watching water flow is as meditative as staring into a fire", say the three authors (Ari Hynynen, Tapio Katko and Petri Juuti) of the newly published book Water fountains in the worldscape.

Water fountains have served a multitude of purposes throughout urban history. They have been built not only to support the power of monarchs but also for purely decorative reasons. In Islamic countries, fountains have played an important role in ritual purification, reveals the newly published book Water fountains in the worldscape.

The new book edited by Tapio Katko, Petri Juuti and Ari Hynynen from Tampere, Finland, traces the history of water fountains from the ancient Rome to modern times. The majority of the
experts who contributed articles to the book are members of the International Water History Association.

"We ran the idea by the participants of the association's conference in Alexandria in 2004 and received an enthusiastic response. It turned out we were venturing into practically uncharted territory," say Katko and Juuti.

Adjunct Professor Tapio Katko from the CADWES (Capacity Development in Water and Environmental Services) research group at Tampere University of Technology (TUT) and Historian Petri Juuti from the University of Tampere wanted the book to include the perspective of an urban researcher. They invited Architect and Professor Ari Hynynen from TUT to join the project.

"The book is not purely academic. We approached the topic from a humanistic angle and out of shared interest in the role of water in the context of social and urban history," says Juuti.

**Encounters by the water well**

The book contains 16 expert articles about fountains from all over the world. The articles present a comprehensive overview of the history of fountains, beginning with their traditional function as water receptacles and moving on to their modern-day artistic and aesthetic qualities. The book also includes an extensive analysis of fountains in 72 cities in 39 different countries.

"Fountains originally served both utilitarian and recreational purposes. Before the introduction of public waterworks systems, fountains supplied drinking and bathing water to local residents."

The practical purpose of water fountains did not deter artists from creating aesthetically appealing designs. Fountains have always had a soothing effect on people. They were places where people gathered to relax and socialize.

**The case of Havis Amanda**

Perhaps the most famous water fountain in Finland, Havis Amanda standing on Helsinki Market Square, is also introduced in the book. According to Ari Hynynen, it is a brilliant example of the contemporary approach to building fountains. Havis Amanda, portraying a mermaid, has no real utility value and was not designed to inspire awe in the power of rulers. It was built merely for aesthetic reasons.

"A hundred years ago, the dominant subjects in Finnish sculpture were statesmen and folklore characters, but artist Ville Vallgren decided to model Havis Amanda after the nude body of a young French girl."

The statue was erected at night for the sake of caution, but it nevertheless stirred immediate public outrage. Left-wing groups accused the City of Helsinki of wasting money. Suffragettes protested against the sexist portrayal of women.

"The scandal died down only after the Finnish intelligentsia took a powerful stand in favour of Havis Amanda", says Ari Hynynen.
The article section of the book starts off by introducing the numerous fountains in Rome, most famously Fontana di Trevi.

"When you walk the streets of Rome, it becomes obvious how water fountains have been built as manifestations of political power. The Romans introduced their sophisticated water systems and fountains to the lands they colonized. For many of the conquered peoples, this was groundbreaking technology. It was incredible for them to see water cascading from the mouths of gods and animal figures," describes Juuti.

**Enter a fountain**

Monumental fountains are becoming increasingly rare. Today, fountains are mostly built to add cheerfulness and beauty through sight and sound.

"A modern fountain can shoot jets of water high into the air, forming a canopy that people can walk under, or it can be integrated into the building architecture. A modern fountain can be, for example, a curtain a water running down the façade," says Ari Hynynen.

The book is available from the publisher KehräMedia Oy (petrisjuuti@gmail.com) and at the online shop Granum.

Text: Päivi Eskelinen
Photos: Petri Laitinen and Ari Hynynen