



LAND OF THE LAKES: The Rebirth of Southeast Anatolia

by David Barchard

BRISTOL BOOKS, HB, £24.95

The ancient landscapes that were once home to the Hittites, Parthians and Sassanids have been transformed over the past three decades: dams have descended on the mighty Euphrates and Tigris rivers. The Turkish government has spent a fortune in an effort to produce vast amounts of hydroelectric power (27.1 billion kilowatts is the final target) and irrigate the surrounding land. Deserts have become cotton fields.

All of this sounds like excellent news. David Barchard certainly sees it this way. 'Primordial poverty' has apparently been replaced by all of the shiny 'trappings of modern life': high-rise flats, a wealth of consumer goods, decent incomes and an impressive educational infrastructure. Even local terrorism is in retreat.

Barchard realises that the great dam-building project has earned its fair shares of critics, especially in the West. But rather than



ABOVE: overflow channels at the Atatürk Dam on the Euphrates; **ABOVE RIGHT:** a farmer pipes water from the Lake Atatürk reservoir into the surrounding maize fields; **INSETS:** ritual objects found at the temple of Nevalı Çori, which was flooded when the dam was built



seriously engaging with their concerns – the flooding of important archaeological sites, the displacement of populations and many more grumbles besides – he has a tendency to dismiss the gain-sayers out of hand. It's easy to mount the pulpit, he says, 'when electricity, tap water, education, clothes, and money in the bank are things

that you and your community have always known'. Trouble is, mounting your very own high-horse and flicking away the gadfly, but important, quibbles about Turkey's southern dams – those built and those to come – doesn't really help anyone.

Barchard claims that virtually everyone to whom he spoke in the region is delighted with the changes that have been wrought. We'll have to take his word for that, but even if you don't share the author's enthusiasm, you can at least marvel at the accompanying photos by Manuel Çıtak – they are spectacular. JONATHAN WRIGHT



CAUGHT BY THE RIVER: A Collection of Words on Water

edited by Jeff Barrett *et al*
OCTOPUS PUBLISHING, HB, £17.99

Writing about rivers isn't easy. You can proffer meditations about how they are a fecund source of myth and symbolism,

but this has been done so many times before that your reader is unlikely to be impressed. Alternatively, you can make things more intimate, telling us all about how some river or other played a starring role in your childhood adventures and reveries. Unfortunately, nine times out of ten, what is deeply important to you is unlikely to cast a spell over anyone else's imagination. Many of the contributors to this volume seem to be entirely unaware of these pitfalls and, with all the predictability of the tides, we get the same old efforts to be soul-stirringly profound or whimsically idiosyncratic.



There are exceptions. It's fascinating to hear how wildlife sound-recordist Chris Watson plies his trade. Laura Barton just about gets away with her remembrances of the River Douglas, mainly because she writes so well. Roger Deakin

provides a fascinating sketch of the history of Fenland skating and Matthew De Abaitua offers a witty account of his time spent working in the Mersey's docks. Best of all is Paul Kingsnorth's wonderful attempt to convey his love affair with the upper reaches of the Thames.

Kingsnorth spins a moving tale of his encounter with a stretch of river. Regrettably, it shares space with some extraordinarily self-indulgent essays and too many examples of excruciatingly bad writing, many of them in the irritating pop journalesque genre. The good here is excellent: the bad is truly awful. JONATHAN WRIGHT