Anthony T. Quickel
University of Marburg

Introduction

While the field of Mamluk studies continues to mature and deepen, the period's environmental history remains undeveloped. Environmental history generally is still relatively emergent and growing, but the discipline is especially in its nascence across the histories—geographically, thematically, chronologically—of the Middle East and Islamicate world. Considering this, the EGYLandscape Project[1] was started in 2019 with financing from the German Research Foundation, Deutsche Forschungsgemeinschaft, and the French National Research Agency, Agence nationale de la recherche. Cohosted by the University of Marburg in Germany and the University of Aix-Marseille in France, under the direction of Profs. Albrecht Fuess and Nicolas Michel respectively, the project has brought together scholars of Egypt's environmental history studying the period between the thirteenth and eighteenth centuries. Among other things, the project has hosted collaborative workshops and training sessions, supported and facilitated research for a number of its affiliated scholars, and created a web-based GIS that maps Egypt during its medieval and premodern period. This mapping will be an indispensable resource for future researchers as they try to locate their work geographically and will continue to grow and deepen as a resource in the coming period. The current phase of the EGYLandscape Project is now in its final year, and this issue of *Mamlūk Studies Review* is a selection of its scholarship from the project's midterm. Two subsequent related publications will follow in the coming years: the proceedings of the environmental history themed day of the Eighth School of Mamluk Studies, which was hosted at the University of Marburg in July 2022, and the project's final publication, which will be based on its September 2022 closing conference.

Until now, the focus of studies of Egypt's environmental history, across periods, has been centered on agriculture and primarily framed within its function as an economic activity. This is not to understate or diminish the importance and value of these works, and they continue to remain critical to the field of environmental studies. However, Egypt's nature and landscape—with all that entails—has rarely been center stage in its his-

[1] https://www.egylandscape.org/

DOI: 10.6082/bb23-6079. (https://doi.org/10.6082/bb23-6079)
DOI of Vol. XXV: 10.6082/msr25. See https://doi.org/10.6082/msr2022 to download the full volume or individual articles.

tory's telling. In fact, most studies have sidestepped Egypt's environmental history, which usually appears in nothing more than a supporting role in the grand narrative or not at all. Another issue is a problem of sources; like elsewhere in the world, the predominance of sources for the study of Egypt's past are a product of a generally small group of educated elites, who were primarily based in urban centers. It is therefore no wonder that most contemporary historical work, although this is changing, has been based in the happenings—social, political, economic—of Cairo and Damascus, especially. Environmental history is often told, therefore, in relation to its urban impact. Other topics in the study of Egypt's premodern past remain nearly untouched upon or only just so, including its flora and fauna, weather and climate, hydrological and irrigation systems, and many aspects of rural life. It is critical to widen the scope of study beyond the cultivator or the village and begin to explore the interplay between the urban and rural as well as intra-village relationships. Large geographic tracts of Egypt remain nearly unstudied throughout the Mamluk period, especially the Western Desert and the Middle Nile Valley; the Nile Delta is only slightly better understood. Finally, there is a gap in the historical record regarding demographic settlement patterns, and how these patterns were driven by ecological factors and catastrophes, such as the plague, as well as regime direction. Towards this end, the EGYLandscape Project has endeavored to help expand the current corpus of studies of Egypt's natural past and to advance the conversation about environmental history across the late Ayyubid, Mamluk, and Ottoman periods. The present issue of *Mamlūk Studies Review* is a cross-section of some of the work of the project team and highlights the different avenues of inquiry that we have begun to undertake.

Among the issue's articles are two that explore various questions relating to *waqf*—by Albrecht Fuess and Zoe Griffith. Both of these contributions approach the topic in light of attempts by the Mamluk regime in Fuess's case and by local and imperial notables in Griffith's—to increase and stabilize sources of revenue. They both explore the ways in which *waqf* was figured into "socio-economic and legal logics," as Griffith puts it. Fuess's article proposes reasons surrounding the increased "*waqfization*" of the later Mamluk period and gives context to it vis-à-vis the rising Ottoman threat. Griffith moves away from Cairo, turning instead to the Northern Delta and the notables of the port cities of Rosetta and Damietta and their surrounding lands. Her article also looks at the limitations of *waqf* as it relates to the stability and viability of the land regime in the eighteenth century.

DOI: 10.6082/bb23-6079. (https://doi.org/10.6082/bb23-6079)
DOI of Vol. XXV: 10.6082/msr25. See https://doi.org/10.6082/msr2022 to download the full volume or individual articles.

Nicolas Michel and Yossef Rapoport both look at various aspects of Mamluk Egypt's demography in connection to other issues. Michel's contribution explores the hierarchy and patterns of settlement in Middle Egypt across the Mamluk-Ottoman transition and the evolutions therein. Further, it offers a valuable discussion about toponyms and their development and usage, as well as a detailed and important overview of the sources and challenges for the study of topography and landscape, especially with regards to Egypt's cadastral surveys of the Ayyubid, Mamluk, and early Ottoman periods. Rapoport's article also makes a critical contribution to understanding the settlement and transformation of the Egyptian countryside during the mid-fourteenth century until the Ottoman conquest of 1517. In particular, it explores the origins and rise of provincial ruling Arab families and adds greatly to our understanding of some of the major demographic changes of the period, especially with regards to the expansion of Arab and Berber tribal groups throughout the countryside. Importantly, Rapoport links these developments to the political events of the fourteenth century and the changes in the *iqṭāʿ* regime in the fifteenth century.

While not thematically linked, the articles of Heba Mahmoud Saad Abdelnaby and Omar Abdel-Ghaffar show other pathways for the continued study of Mamluk Egypt's environmental past—the former looking at birds in the Mamluk period and the latter discussing the legal debate over sharecropping. As one of the very first studies of fauna in the Mamluk period, Heba Mahmoud Saad Abdelnaby uses two Mamluk texts in exploring the medical and various pharmacological uses of birds. Ranging from the health benefits of eating certain birds to their usage in direct medical interventions, the study looks at both the implementation of this knowledge by the skilled—druggists and physicians—as well as in the popular sphere. Omar Abdel-Ghaffar's article seeks to understand the relationship between the peasant sharecropper and the jurists whose opinions governed their legal status in sharecropping or *muzāraʿah*. The article shows how sharecroppers were not passive serfs at the mercy of regime authority, as has so often been presented, but were rather engaged in questions of their status. Likewise, Abdel-Ghaffar demonstrates the intimate knowledge of jurists of rural affairs and the goings-on of the countryside.

Like all undertakings, this project is very much a work-in-progress, but we are hopeful that this issue may contribute to and spur on the continued study of Egypt's environmental past. Finally, all of the contributors—and I in particular—would like to thank the Editor of *MSR,* Marlis Saleh, for her

DOI: 10.6082/bb23-6079. (https://doi.org/10.6082/bb23-6079)
DOI of Vol. XXV: 10.6082/msr25. See https://doi.org/10.6082/msr2022 to download the full volume or individual articles.

enthusiasm in accepting the idea of this special issue and her patience and guiding hand in bringing it into existence.

Anthony T. Quickel, Guest Editor
EGYLandscape Project Coordinator, University of Marburg

Our contributors are:

Albrecht Fuess: Professor of Islamic Studies at University of Marburg—Project Leader

Nicolas Michel: Professor of Contemporary History at Aix-Marseille University—Project Leader

Zoe Griffith: Assistant Professor of History at Baruch College, CUNY—Project Contributor

Omar Abdel-Ghaffar: J.D./Ph.D. Candidate in History and Middle Eastern Studies at Harvard University—Project Contributor

Heba Mahmoud Saad Abdelnaby: Professor of Islamic History and Archaeology at Alexandria University—Project Contributor

Yossef Rapoport: Professor in Islamic History at Queen Mary, University of London—Project Participant

DOI: 10.6082/bb23-6079. (https://doi.org/10.6082/bb23-6079)
DOI of Vol. XXV: 10.6082/msr25. See https://doi.org/10.6082/msr2022 to download the full volume or individual articles.