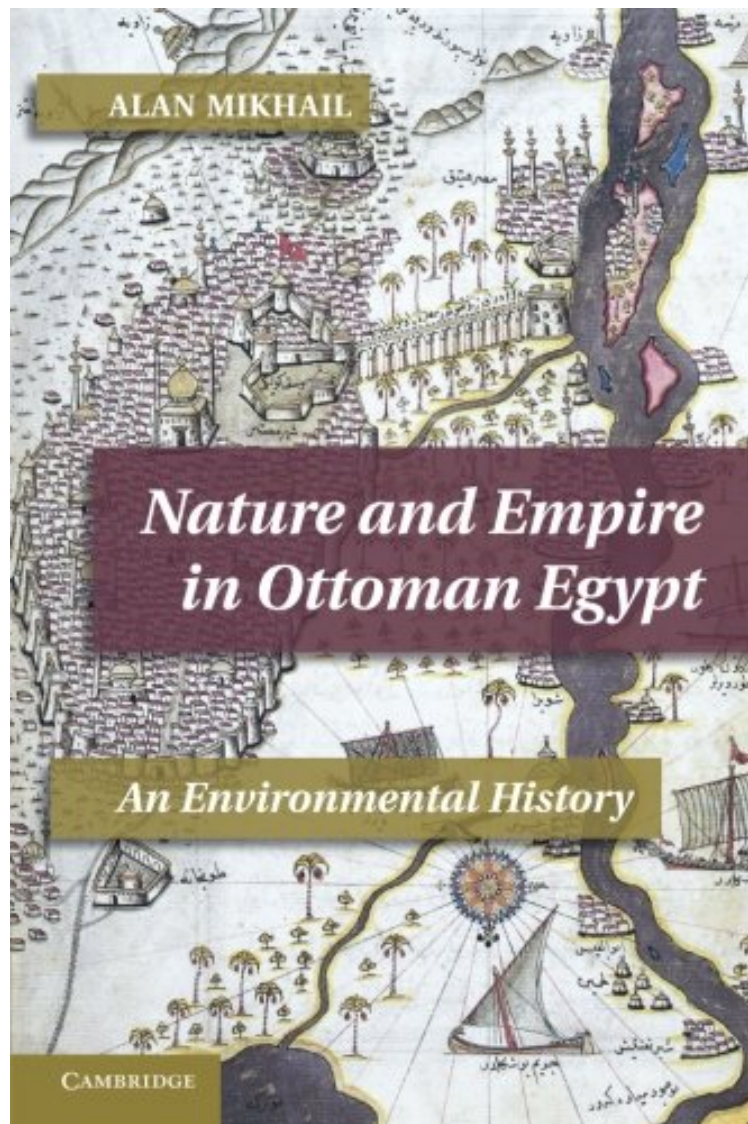


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Alan Mikhail

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Alan Mikhail : Nature and Empire in Ottoman Egypt: An Environmental History (Studies in Environment and History) before purchasing it in order to gage whether or not it would be worth my time, and all praised Nature and Empire in Ottoman Egypt: An Environmental History (Studies in Environment and History):

6 of 6 people found the following review helpful. Solid environmental history By E. N. Anderson After reading a series

of dull and un insightful monographs on environment and on the Near East, I found this book with enormous relief. It's a really good, solid, documented study of Ottoman Egypt. Mikhail covers irrigation and food in particular, and is well aware of the important recent literature on irrigation management in traditional societies, not only in the Near East (think Dan Varisco) but in Peru (Paul Trawick...), Spain, and even California (Elinor Ostrom and others). Egypt supplied grain to the Empire; the Ottomans supplied wood, from Syria and Anatolia. This somewhat ran down the forests, but Mikhail knows from J. R. McNeill's work (and presumably other sources) that a surprising amount of forest survives in Anatolia. Meanwhile, the Ottomans made a brave try to grow native trees in Egypt--a fascinating section of the book describes this. As Karl Butzer showed for ancient Egypt, early-modern Egypt could not be an "Oriental despotism" with a monarch controlling the water; irrigation has to be locally managed to work. The Ottoman regime could, however, build long canals, maintain peace, and do surveying. There is also an excursion herein into bubonic plague history; the plague occurred on average every nine years, a horrific burden for society and economy. The Ottomans did what they could, but, in the absence of bacteriology, they could not do much. Mikhail sees a steady progress of bureaucratization during the period in question, and sees it getting rapidly worse after Egypt became (nominally) independent. This he deplores, finding that it progressively distanced the people from their land and their traditional management strategies. True, but I am ever the optimist, and might note that at least the Ottomans kept the place peaceful and prosperous (outside of famine years) for a couple of hundred years, no shabby achievement. My only complaint is that I would have liked more statistics--maybe there aren't many more, but at least the levels of flood of the Nile should have been covered, with some comparative material from early periods; also more on food, foodstuffs, food production. I have always wondered where and how Egypt raised all those beans (the national dish) and the spices for them. Minor problems, considering that this is a pathbreaking book--there is amazingly little literature available on the environment of the eastern Mediterranean in the early modern period. One must welcome a good book that ventures into this amazingly uncharted water.

In one of the first ever environmental histories of the Ottoman Empire, Alan Mikhail examines relations between the empire and its most lucrative province of Egypt. Based on both the local records of various towns and villages in rural Egypt and the imperial orders of the Ottoman state, this book charts how changes in the control of natural resources fundamentally altered the nature of Ottoman imperial sovereignty in Egypt and throughout the empire. In revealing how Egyptian peasants were able to use their knowledge and experience of local environments to force the hand of the imperial state, *Nature and Empire in Ottoman Egypt* tells a story of the connections of empire stretching from canals in the Egyptian countryside to the palace in Istanbul, from the Anatolian forest to the shores of the Red Sea, and from a plague flea's bite to the fortunes of one of the most powerful states of the early modern world.

"This book adds an important new dimension to the historiography of Ottoman Egypt. The author makes very intelligent use of Ottoman administrative documents and Muslim court records from a variety of Egyptian locales in order to situate this critical region within the new cutting-edge scholarship on the role of the environment and natural resource management in history." - Jane Hathaway, Ohio State University, author of *The Arab Lands under Ottoman Rule, 1516-1800*"Alan Mikhail deploys an impressive array of environmental history insights. He asks new questions and comes up with startling answers." - Richard W. Bulliet, Columbia University"*Nature and Empire in Ottoman Egypt* offers a history of the Ottoman world like no other. The force of environmental processes, the lived detail of peasant life, and the emergent forms of modern governmental power interact in this highly original account of early modern Egypt." - Timothy Mitchell, Columbia University"Through admirable and painstaking research, Mikhail has explored a new and fascinating aspect of Ottoman Egypt, using a timeframe that spans a transitional period, which allowed him to draw comparisons and provide original comments and provocative opinions that will stimulate future debate. This book is highly recommended." - Doris Behrens-Abouseif, *Journal of the Economic and Social History of the Orient*"This book represents an immense achievement. As a pioneering work of Ottoman environmental history, it sets an excellent example. Mikhail has produced a clear, comprehensive history of the environment in Ottoman Egypt. Even more significantly, the scope of his project and his masterful execution make this book a major contribution to the world of scholarship. Through this work, Mikhail ensures that the field of Ottoman environmental history will not continue to go unnoticed." - Andrea Williams, *The Arab World Geographer*"...a highly original work which attempts to analyze the changes that accompanied Egypt's transition from the early modern period to the beginning of modernization at the end of the 18th century. The use of sources in this book is creative, and the work stands out for its novel treatment of transformations of material life in Egypt." - Stuart Borsch, *Middle East Journal*About the AuthorAlan Mikhail is Assistant Professor in the Department of History at Yale University. His articles have appeared in journals such as the *International Journal of Middle East Studies*, the *Journal of the Economic and Social History of the Orient*, the *Bulletin of the History of Medicine*, *Akhbar al-Adab* and *Wijhat Nazar*.