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CONGRESS

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Panel 50

New Issues in Egyptian Rural History, 13-16th Centuries

Contemporary research on pre-modern Egypt has long been focused almost exclusively on Cairo or on the state and the political and military elite. However, the last ten years or so have witnessed a growing interest in rural history. Apart from the traditional interest in agriculture, irrigation and the Nile flood, and the relationship between the countryside and urban power, recent studies published during the 2010s opened new fields in two main directions: the relationship between people and land, either through taxation, property or other legal categories; and the interaction between the population and its environment. This renewal of pre-modern rural history in Egypt has been the product of individual efforts until it became obvious that there was a need for coordination between scholars throughout the world.

This panel is composed of members of an ANR-DFG funded research project, the EGYLandscape Project, which seeks to advance this subject area and provide for such coordination. Covering the 13th-18th centuries, the EGYLandscape Project explores various aspects of the natural and environmental history of pre-modern Egypt. The papers in this panel give an overview of the diversity of issues the project explores and highlight the vast possibilities in this still-nascent field. From fauna to rural expansion and land-tenure to climate, this panel emphasizes the importance and necessity of new and continued rural and environmental studies for Egypt's medieval and pre-modern period.

People in charge : Michel Nicolas (Aix-Marseille University, CNRS, IREMAM) and Quickel Anthony (Philipps-Universität Marburg)

Discussant : Fuess Albrecht (Philipps-Universität Marburg)

Program

Saad Heba Mahmoud (Alexandria University)

'And the meat of birds that they may desire': the social, pharmaceutical and ecological importance of birds in Mamluk society

Birds were widely used in Mamluk society. Their traditional use as a food source was the most important, but the present study reveals that consumption patterns varied between the elite and the middle class. It also investigates other uses of birds that were restricted to the sultan and amirs, such as breeding birds for hunting and using them as diplomatic gifts. Moreover, this paper sheds light on other uses of birds such as for entertainment, carrying mail, and using their offal as fertilizers. Another important aspect of the study focuses on the pharmaceutical uses of birds as certain Mamluk sources discussed the properties of the different birds and the qualities of their parts in treating different diseases. In many cases, they describe how to use these parts of birds in preparing medicine and in the treatment method of specific diseases or symptoms. They also explain many details about popular medicine which is more related to common beliefs, traditions, and magic.

Guirguis Magdi (Kafr al-Shaykh University)

Beni Suef, from a village to a large city: the process of establishing a new urban center in 16th-century Egypt

There have been many historical studies of the Arab cities in the last decades, covering a long list of large and small cities. Referring to Raymond's works on the Arab cities in the Ottoman era, especially Cairo, offers an excellent example. However, most of these cities were established before the Ottoman period and only underwent had a new shape in the Ottoman period. In contrast, Beni Suef represents a unique example of a purely Ottoman city that was established in the late sixteenth century to replace the old capital of the province (al-Bahnassa). On the other hand, Beni Suef represents a part of the larger phenomenon of the replacement of old cities, which had been demolished, by new cities being recently established. The pioneering study of Jean-Claude Garcin about Qus shows the process of the demolition of an urban center in the late fifteenth century. However, there are not enough studies on the other side: the establishment and flourishing of the new urban centers. We are fortunate enough to have unique archival materials for Beni Suef that enable us to trace the process of establishing this city, and how it gradually attracted more attention growing from a small village to be the province's capital. These processes could help us to understand the whole phenomenon that dominated Upper Egypt in the late sixteenth century and broaden our understanding of many aspects of early Ottoman history.

Shaaban Muhammad (Queen Mary, University of London / Philipps-Universität Marburg)

Ibn al-Ji'ān's Recension of Mamlūk Cadastral Records: An Evaluation and Analysis of Medieval Egypt's Land Tenure System

Earlier studies on medieval Egypt's evolving land tenure system during the Mamlūk period (1250-1517) largely focused on the fifteenth century and the growing amount of agrarian land subsumed by endowments (awqaf, sing. waqf). This paper intends to outline the complexity of the changing agrarian landscape that took place throughout the Mamluk period using a digital database that combines the data from Ibn al-Ji'an's (d. 1480) recension of cadastral records with the first digital mapping of Mamluk Egypt's land tenure system using GIS. The database, built around the earliest datable and as yet unpublished manuscript of Ibn al-Ji'an's survey held at the Bodleian Library, describes in textual terms the state of Mamluk Egypt's land tenure system at two important crucial periods: the reigns of Sultan al-Ashraf Sha'ban (r. 1363-1377) and al-Ashraf Qaytbay (r. 1468-1496). By employing computational and traditional textual analysis in conjunction with data visualization techniques, this paper shows not only the origins of long-term trends but also changing inhabitation of rural communities. The «waqfization» of state lands so prominent in the late fifteenth century will be shown to have originated in the late fourteenth century. This earlier origin date has large historiographical implications since this trend has often been generally attributed to the economic decline of the fifteenth century. Furthermore, the database provides a starting point for future inquiries. The changing inhabitation patterns of rural communities outlined in the survey's data, due to depopulation and Bedouin settlement, offer tantalizing opportunities for archeologists and historians wishing to explore these important events.

Quickel Anthony (Philipps-Universität Marburg)

Descriptions of Weather and Climate in the Mamluk Sources

Until now agriculture has been at the center of the growing corpus of environmental histories of Egypt in the medieval and early modern periods. Other studies have generally touched on related topics: land use, flora and fauna, hydrology, etc. Meanwhile, the nature of Egypt's weather and climate in these periods remains completely unexplored. This is partially a consequence of contemporary viewers projecting backward the current situation on a pre-and early modern past, as well as treating deserts as weather-less spaces. Furthermore, as Egypt's agriculture was reliant on flood-based irrigation, changing weather is of much less interest than in other world regions. However, with a growing body of scholarship in the field of historical climatology and with the possibility for a comparative approach, Egypt is an important locus for future study. As such, it is now critical to look at the historical sources to examine what and how weather and climate are represented in the period. Furthermore, by looking at these descriptions

over the length of the medieval period, it may be possible to consider the weather in terms of larger climatological trends both in Egypt per se and as it is situated within larger historical climatological studies. This paper, however, is a starting point in this process and aims to explore some of these sources and looks at how they speak about weather and climate in the Mamluk Period.