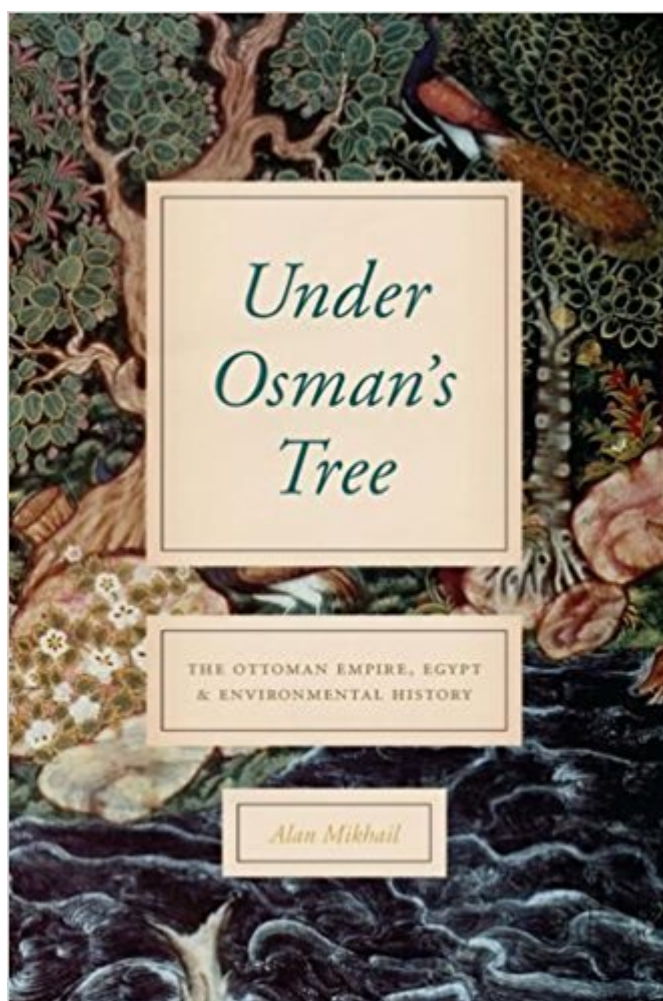


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# Under Osman's Tree: The Ottoman Empire, Egypt, And Environmental History



## Synopsis

Osman, the founder of the Ottoman Empire, had a dream in which a tree sprouted from his navel. As the tree grew, its shade covered the earth; as Osman's empire grew, it, too, covered the earth. This is the most widely accepted foundation myth of the longest-lasting empire in the history of Islam, and offers a telling clue to its unique legacy. Underlying every aspect of the Ottoman Empire's epic history—from its founding around 1300 to its end in the twentieth century—is its successful management of natural resources. Under Osman's Tree analyzes this rich environmental history to understand the most remarkable qualities of the Ottoman Empire—its longevity, politics, economy, and society. The early modern Middle East was the world's most crucial zone of connection and interaction. Accordingly, the Ottoman Empire's many varied environments affected and were affected by global trade, climate, and disease. From down in the mud of Egypt's canals to up in the treetops of Anatolia, Alan Mikhail tackles major aspects of the Middle East's environmental history: natural resource management, climate, human and animal labor, energy, water control, disease, and politics. He also points to some of the ways in which the region's dominant religious tradition, Islam, has understood and related to the natural world. Marrying environmental and Ottoman history, *Under Osman's Tree* offers a bold new interpretation of the past five hundred years of Middle Eastern history.

## Book Information

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## Customer Reviews

"Certainly the best work ever on Ottoman environmental history. Brings the Middle East into

the global picture in as comprehensive a way as can possibly be imagined. (Roger Owen, Harvard University) “This is an outstanding book, carefully written and timely. Mikhail has brought the tools of environmental history to bear in this fresh telling of Egyptian, Ottoman, and Middle Eastern history. He focuses on the last five hundred years, after Egypt became the crown jewel of the Ottoman Empire, and masterfully embeds his history into the complex ecologies surrounding the Nile River, an enduring source of both life and cruel natural disasters. With thoughtful thematic categories driving his analysis, Mikhail makes an important contribution not just to Middle Eastern history, but to how a new generation of historians must view the relationship between people and the changing face of our planet, particularly during the new uncertainty of the Anthropocene Epoch. (Brett L. Walker, Montana State University) “Focusing on early modern Egypt, Mikhail puts power and knowledge in the Ottoman Empire in conversation with environmental relations—the movement of water, the accumulation of silt, the distribution of food, the need for wood for ships, the spread of disease, the possession and use of animals as sentient commodities, climatic fluctuations, and fundamental changes in the organization of human and animal labor. The result is a reinterpretation of the Ottoman Empire as an ecosystem that expands the possibilities of environmental history. (Richard White, Stanford University) “With this rich and accessible study of the relationship between human communities and their natural environment in Ottoman Egypt, Mikhail offers us an original interpretation of Ottoman history. Rarely does a new book make us rethink completely our assumptions about a subject matter we think we know well. Under Osman’s Tree does precisely that, and as such it is a worthy successor to Fernand Braudel’s magisterial classic, The Mediterranean. (Resat Kasaba, University of Washington)

Alan Mikhail is professor of history at Yale University. He is the author of *The Animal in Ottoman Egypt* and *Nature and Empire in Ottoman Egypt: An Environmental History* and the editor of *Water on Sand: Environmental Histories of the Middle East and North Africa*.

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