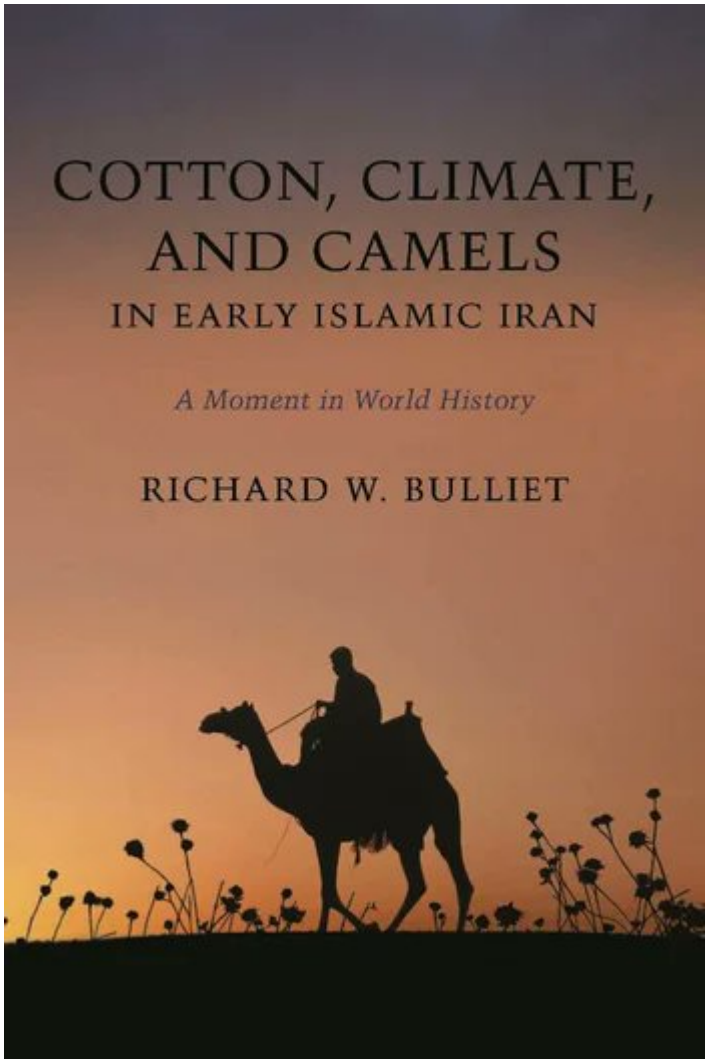
Twitter Thread by Simon Wolfgang Fuchs ■■

Simon Wolfgang Fuchs ■■
@Simon_W_Fuchs

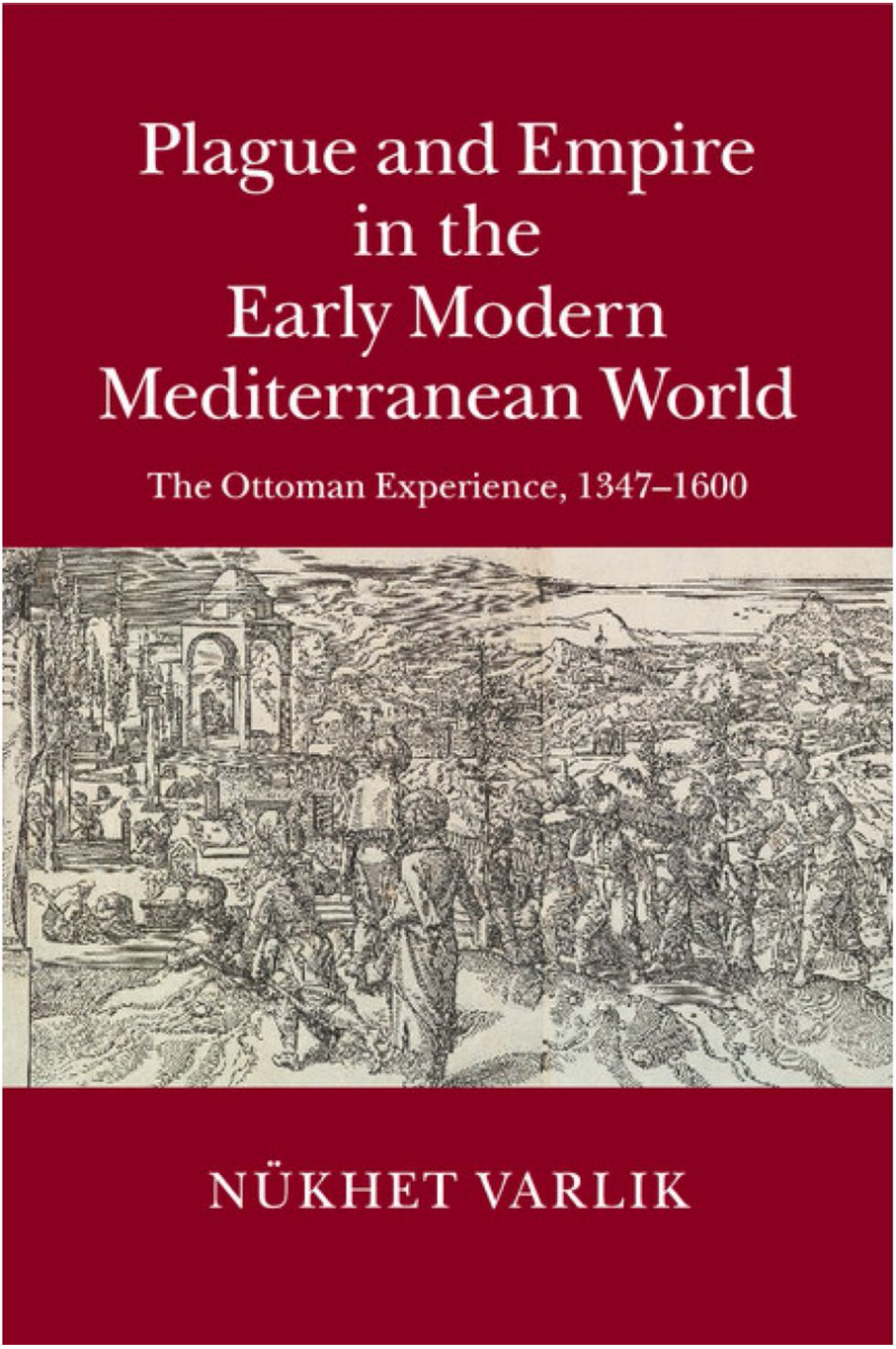
(1/11) This term, I've taught a seminar @IslamicSt_UniFR called "Little Ice Ages and Mighty Microbes. What Environmental History Can Tell Us about the #MiddleEast". These are some of the things that I've learned. A thread. #twitterstorians #environmentalhistory



(2/11) The Arab invasion of #Iran led to a cotton boom – until the 11th century. Then a "big chill" made agriculture detract. Leading Sunni scholars moved elsewhere &bimportant madrasas closed. This helped to eventually convert Iran into Shi'i-majority lands in the 16th century.

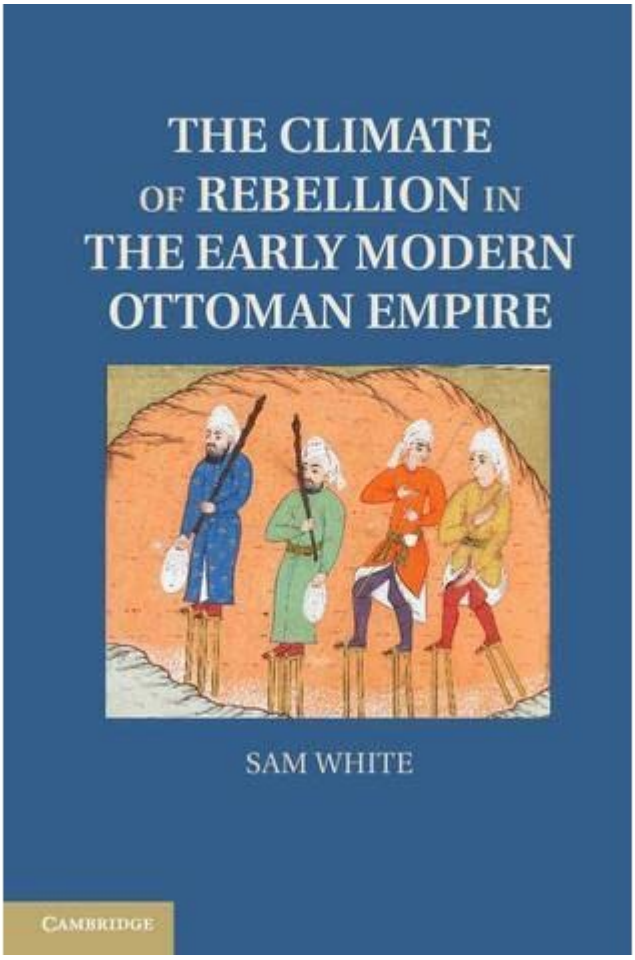


(3/11) The “golden age” of the Ottoman Empire saw the conquest of Egypt. With grain (incl. rats/fleas) now being shipped in huge quantities from Alexandria to #Istanbul, the capital became a constant “plague hub” (which, in turn, dramatically increased Ottoman medical knowledge).

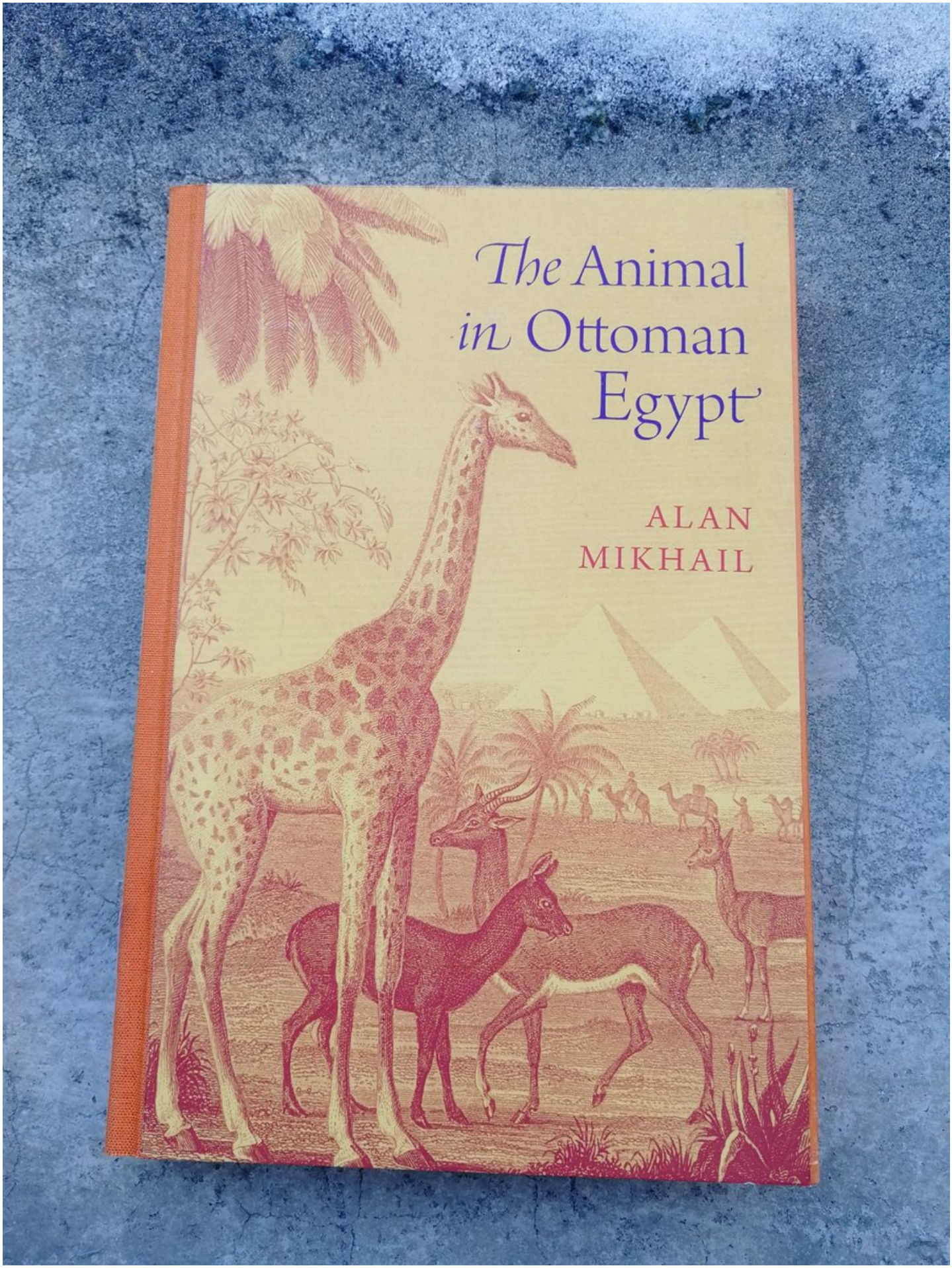


(4/11) At the same time, several #Ottoman provinces were already operating at the ecological limit while still being forced to provide Istanbul with animals. When the Little Ice Age hit these semiarid areas in the late 16th century, significant rebellions

& crises ensued.



(5/11) Not only humans suffered but animals, too. Epizootics killed livestock in 18th century #Egypt, which made peasants become more dependent on large landholders. Consequently, “changes in nature of rural labor degraded the lives of both beast and man.”



(6/11) In many accounts of environmental history, the state remains a central actor. Yet, we also see how the Ottoman Empire was rendered powerless when the Euphrates changed its course in #Iraq between 1687 and 1702 – despite

mobilizing the might of its “imperial ecology”.

Faisal Husain

In the Bellies of the Marshes: Water and Power in the Countryside of Ottoman Baghdad

Abstract

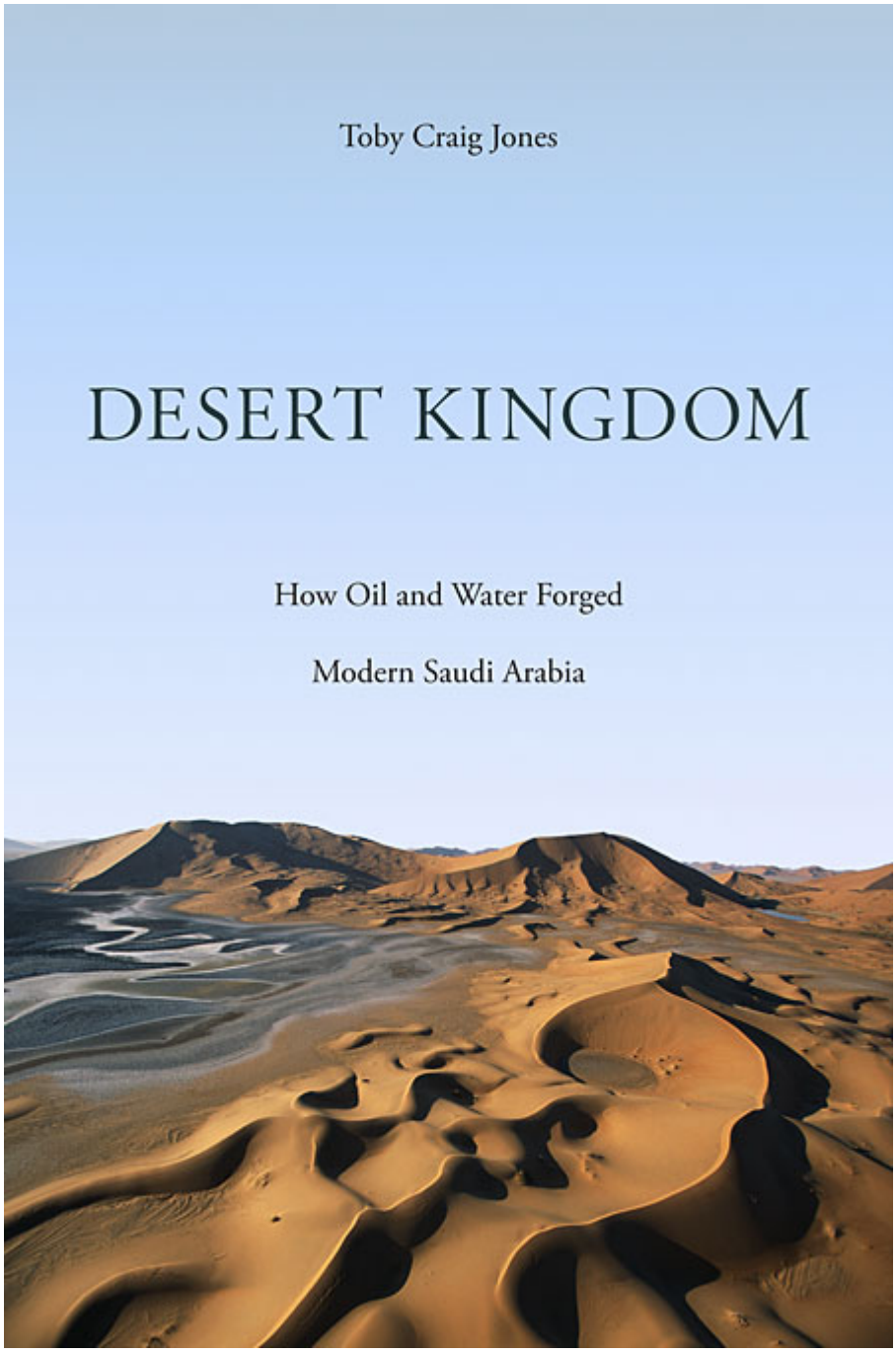
The economic fortunes of states and grain farmers in the Iraqi alluvium plummeted following the deterioration of the Sasanian irrigation system during the early medieval period, giving scholars the impression that the region's environment went through a period of perpetual decline. This essay utilizes the flood pulse concept and argues that the deterioration of comprehensive waterworks restored the natural unmodified flood regime of the Euphrates and reinvigorated different species and natural systems, particularly the Iraqi marshes and their biota. Vibrant and reviving, marshes provided the material basis for the rise of the Khazāʿil tribal confederation to political dominance in Iraq's Middle Euphrates region at the turn of the eighteenth century and served it as an ecological niche and political ally during its struggle with the Ottoman Empire. Ottoman provincial authorities in Baghdad repeatedly dammed the Middle Euphrates and drained its marshes in order to break the basis of the Khazāʿil's power in the countryside. Ottoman hydraulic warfare weakened their tribal

© The Author 2014. Published by Oxford University Press on behalf of the American Society for Environmental History and the Forest History Society. All rights reserved. For permissions, please e-mail: journals.permissions@oup.com

Faisal Husain, "In the Bellies of the Marshes: Water and Power in the Countryside of Ottoman Baghdad," *Environmental History* 19 (October 2014): 638–664

doi: 10.1093/envhis/emu067

(7/11) #SaudiArabia, by contrast, strove to excel in conquering nature. The “al-Hasa Irrigation and Drainage Project” in the 1970s was staggering in size – and failure. The planners had simply ignored the situation & needs of the local Shi’i population in the Eastern Provinces.



(8/11) In Egypt, the government aimed even higher: the goal was to create a second #Nile valley. In the 1990s, the rhetoric shifted to an “untouched environment” in the desert where organic produce for European markets was to be grown – irrigated by 10% of the annual Nile water.

CHAPTER 6

Remapping the Nation, Critiquing the State

Environmental Narratives and Desert Land Reclamation in Egypt

Jeannie Sowers

(9/11) Colonial & mandate powers had already operated with such charged “environmental imaginaries”. Even though, for example, the Lebanese #Cedar had been in decline since the end of the Pleistocene, locals were blamed for their “ignorant destruction” of cedar forests.

8 SCORCHED EARTH

The Problematic Environmental History That Defines the Middle East

Diana K. Davis

Nowhere in all the waste around was there a foot of shade, and we were scorched to death . . . in this blistering, naked, treeless land [Palestine].

—Mark Twain, *The Innocents Abroad*, 1869

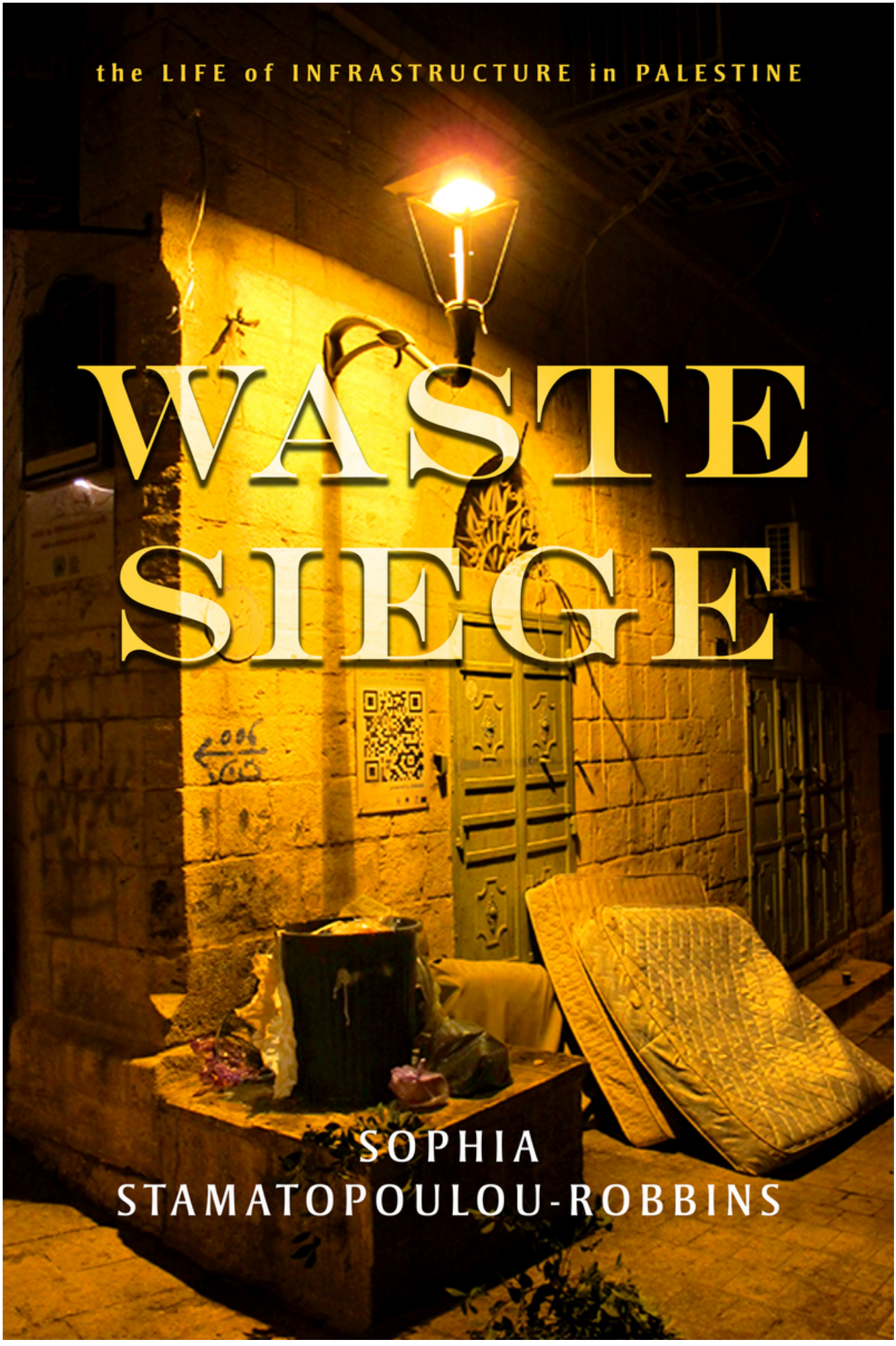
[In Algeria] . . . the resplendent sun . . . the almost imperceptible vibrating of the air above the scorched earth.

—Gustave Guillaumet, "Tableaux Algériens," 1879

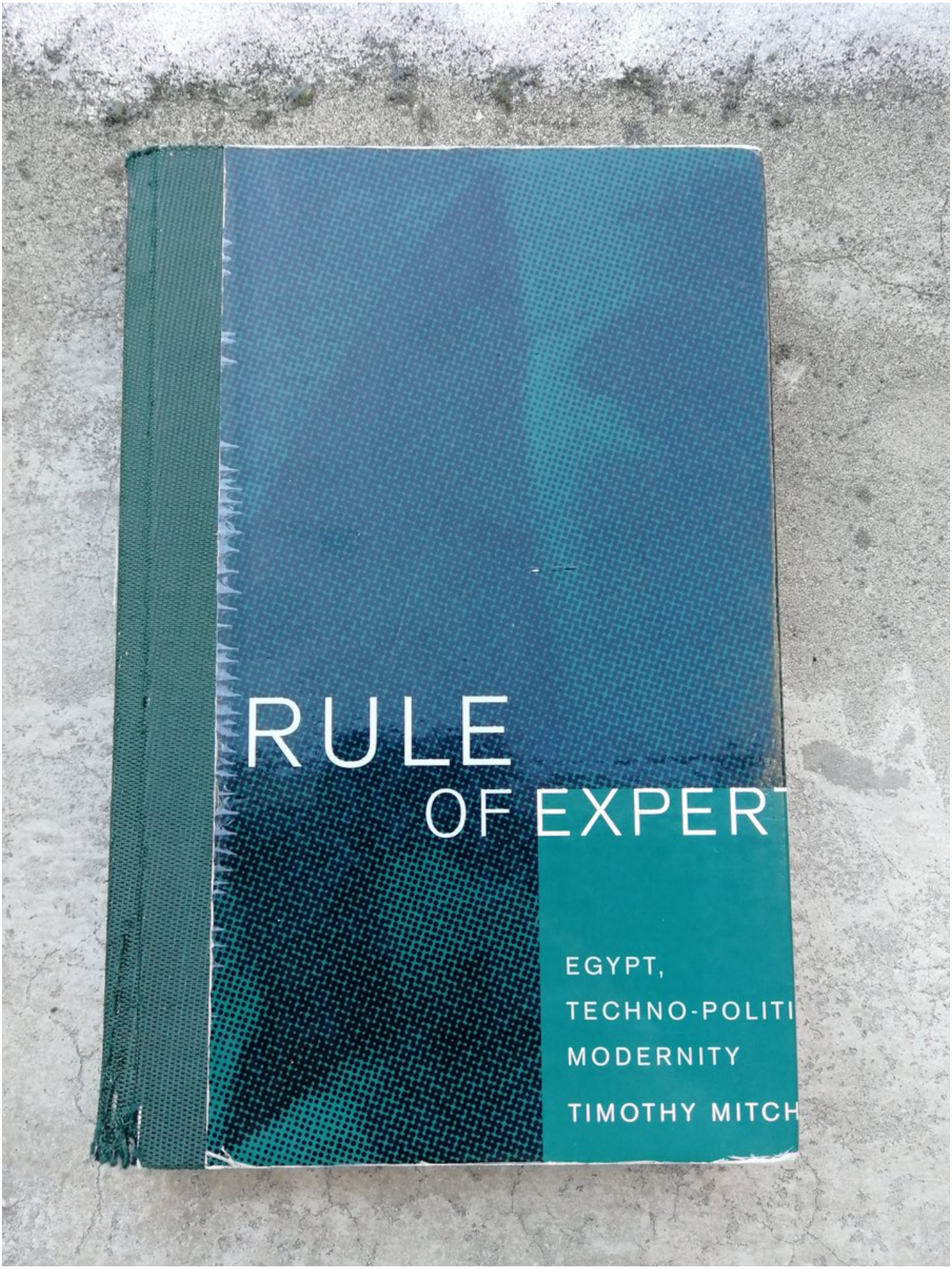
The Negeb is barren and sun-scorched, . . . [and] marauding nomads . . . swoop down . . . killing . . . destroying . . . [and] contribut[ing] to the creation of "man-made" deserts.

—Walter Lowdermilk, *Palestine: Land of Promise*, 1944

(10/11) Another imaginary: the Westbank as a "shared environment" & to achieve peace through environmentalism. Yet, Palestinian engineers rarely got permission to build those sanitary landfills & water treatment plans they hailed as "infrastructure for utopian national progress".


the LIFE of INFRASTRUCTURE in PALESTINE
WASTE SIEGE
SOPHIA STAMATOPOULOU-ROBBINS

(11/11) The interaction between humans, the state, & the environment (with often unintended consequences) is at the forefront of these stimulating studies. Together they go a long way in tackling Timothy Mitchell's famous question: "Can the Mosquito speak?". End of ■.


RULE
OF EXPERT
EGYPT,
TECHNO-POLITI
MODERNITY
TIMOTHY MITCH