



Bealby, M. (2011) 'Conference report: Landscape archaeology: Egypt and the Mediterranean World (*Archéologie du paysage: L'Égypte et le monde Méditerranéen*)' *Rosetta* **9**: 99-105.

http://www.rosetta.bham.ac.uk/Issue_09/shorter_pieces/bealby_cfcc.pdf

**Conference report: Landscape archaeology: Egypt and the
Mediterranean World (*Archéologie du paysage: L'Égypte et le monde
Méditerranéen*)**

Marsia Sfakianou Bealby

University of Birmingham

The conference 'Landscape archaeology: Egypt and the Mediterranean World' took place on 19th-21st September 2010 in Cairo, in the Geographical Society of Egypt and the French Cultural Centre (CFCC). The objective of the conference was to examine and discuss the paleoenvironmental examination of archaeological sites, and the study of the relationship between humans and their environment. The main conference topic was the presentation of current research in the geoarchaeological evolution of river Nile; nevertheless, this research was supplemented with some geoarchaeological case studies from the wider Mediterranean area.

The conference was organised by the '*Institut Français d'Archéologie Orientale*' (IFAO) in association with the '*Centre Européen de Recherche et d'Enseignement des Géosciences de l'Environnement*' (CEREGE, UMR 6635 of CNRS), the '*Centre Franco-Égyptien d' Étude des Temples de Karnak*' (CFEETK, USR 3172, of CNRS), and the Supreme Council of Antiquities and the Geographical Society of Egypt. Patron of the colloquium was the Working Group on Geoarchaeology of the International Association of Geomorphologists.

In particular, Dr. Yann Tristant (IFAO) and Dr. Matthieu Ghilardi (CEREGE, UMR 6635 of CNRS) played a crucial role in the organisation of this conference and deserve warm acknowledgements and congratulations for putting together such a successful event.

The conference was attended by over 200 delegates, from 25 countries. Its interdisciplinary topic attracted a wide range of researchers including prehistorians, historians, archaeologists, Egyptologists, geomorphologists, geologists and geophysicists. During the three-day course of the congress 60 speakers and 38 poster presenters introduced their work to the attendees, in English or French. Presentations were grouped into thirteen panels: ten panels of papers and three sessions of poster displays.

The opening ceremony of the conference took place in the building of the Geographical Society of Egypt (*Société de géographie d'Égypte*). Delegates were welcomed by Safey Abulezz, former minister, President of the Geographical Society of Egypt and Gihane Zaki, Former General Director for international cooperation (SCA), President of the Nubian committee (Egyptian Ministry of culture).

Panels of oral presentations

Day One

Panel One: Arid Landscapes in Egypt / water in the desert: life adaptation to arid climate conditions

The objective of this session was to study the evolution of occupation patterns in arid landscapes. Presented case studies discussed ongoing research at El Deir, the Eastern Desert of Egypt, the Abu Muhariq Plateau, Sheikh el-Obeiyid, the Marmarica and the Fayum area.

Panel Two: Coastline evolution in the Eastern Mediterranean and the Black Sea

Although the conference primarily focused on Egypt, other Mediterranean landscapes were also considered. This complementary session consisted of seven papers. Researchers presented recent studies on the paleoenvironmental evolution of the western part of Naxos, the ancient city of Samos island, the coastal area of Istron on Crete and the Panagoria site in the Black Sea. Landscapes in the Peloponnese and the Greek Mainland were also examined.

Panel Three: The Nile Delta and its paleoenvironmental evolution

This session discussed the environmental evolution of the Meryut Lake, the landscape evolution in the ancient town of Marea and the Nile Delta's coastal margin; the last, with emphasis placed on the pre-Greek sites of the north-east Delta region (e.g. Alexandria's eastern harbour, Burullus and Lagoon). Furthermore, Tell el-Fara'in and Tell Basta were investigated with regard to settlement topography.

The last paper of the day, on the landscape of Tell el-Dab'a (presented by Forstner-Müller et al.) was a focus of attention, after the announcement on the media, in June 2010, that the Austrian mission at Tell el-Daba had located the southern suburban quarters of the ancient city of Avaris by means of magnetometry and resistivity. The mission presented the latest results of the geophysical work on-site, and focused on the outcome of the investigation of potential harbours in the area. Such work is of fundamental importance to researchers, as the reconstruction of the ancient landscape, and the examination of potential harbour basins in particular, can explain the cosmopolitan character of Avaris, as demonstrated by the archaeological material unearthed.

Day Two

Panel Four: Geoarchaeology of Ancient Coastal Harbours

This session was dedicated to the study of ancient coastal harbours, inside and outside Egypt. Speakers considered the paleoenvironment of the ancient harbours of Alexandria, the urban landscape of the Berenike harbour, the archaeological and geomorphological evidence for harbour structures at Taposiris - Lake Mareotis in the north-west Delta and the canals of Portus in Italy.

Panel Five: Nile river evolution in southern Egypt and Nubia

Papers in this panel discussed the riverine landscape evolution in southern Egypt and Nubia, through the examination of case-studies such as the north-western suburbia of Elephantine, the urban landscape of Aswan and the Nile Valley of northern Sudan. The results of the NASA's Space Archaeology programme for the paleohydrological, topographical and geomorphological mapping of Southern Egypt were also introduced.

Panel Six: Nile river changes in Upper Egypt

This session featured a wide range of presentations, from addressing the paleoenvironmental changes and seismic events affecting the Egyptian Pharaonic architecture; to the methods of mapping the natural and cultural landscape of Western Thebes. The environmental implications in Pharaonic Coptos and Karnak, due to the Nile river evolution in Upper Egypt during the Holocene were also considered.

Panel Seven: Geoarchaeological case studies in the Memphite area

This session focused on the Memphite area throughout the examination of

complex landscapes such as the ones of the cemetery of En Echelon (Giza), the Lake of Abusir and the Necropolis of Dashur. The latest geoarchaeological research in Saqqara by the Polish Mission was also addressed.

Additionally, there was a discussion on the geoarchaeological research concerning the vicinity of the Sphinx at Giza, and the future of the monument. The relevant paper, presented by Abdel Momein A. Mahmoud, was titled 'Will the head of the Sphinx (Giza, Egypt) fall down during the present century?' The study highlighted the problem of erosion of the Sphinx through the demonstration of a set of results which derived from sedimentological and mineralogical investigation.

Day Three

Panel Eight: Written sources and toponymy as evidence of landscape evolution

This session consisted mainly of work presented in French. Emphasis was placed on how written sources demonstrate change in landscapes and how toponyms (i.e. names and definitions of places) can be used in order to reconstruct landscapes of the past. The session discussed four case-studies from Egypt and one from Spain.

Panel Nine: Environmental response to human and climate changes

This panel discussed a number of case-studies from the wider Mediterranean area: Morocco, Tunis, Yemen, Greece and the Gulf of Lion in the Western Mediterranean. All papers proposed a relationship between paleoenvironmental and paleoclimatic changes and the formation and evolution of landscapes.

Panel Ten: Human development in a complex landscape

All the papers in this panel considered sites outside the borders of Egypt. From Greece, case-studies included the mountainous landscapes of Crete, Thera and the Thera volcanic eruption, palaeolithic sites in Pylos, the Pikrolimni Lake and the Neolithic settlement pattern in Central Greece. Trnavská pahorkatina (Slovakia), Fighid Oasis (Morocco) and Fossa Regia (Tunise) were also explored as case studies.

The paper titled: 'The mountainous karst landscapes of Crete: ancient settlement regions of high geoarchaeological interest', by Siart et al., introduced a pioneering work, as only few geoarchaeological studies have been conducted so far on the mountainous regions of Crete, due to the remoteness and isolation of the area. The research investigated the geomorphology of Central and Eastern mountainous Crete in relation to the human-environment interactions of the Second Millennium BC.

During the course of the conference, we enjoyed the best of Egyptian and French hospitality. On the second evening (the 20th), we dined on a floating restaurant while sailing the Nile. On the 22nd of September, we visited the Pyramids of Giza, the Great Sphinx and the Solar Boat Museum. During the excursion, some of us even had the chance to discover that the trek into the Pyramids is fascinating and extraordinary, after setting aside our claustrophobic feelings. Overall, thanks to the organisers, the trip to Giza was safe, enjoyable, comfortable and trouble-free.

At the end of the conference, a number of French speaking PhD researchers took part in a special Geoarchaeology workshop in the broader area of Luxor (22th-25th September 2010), under the guidance of Morgan de Dapper (Université de Gand), Éric Fouache (*Université Paris*), Matthieu Ghilardi (CEREGE, UMR 6635 of CNRS), Christophe Morhange (*Université d'Aix-*

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Marseille) and Yann Tristant (IFAO).

The programme of the conference, along with the abstracts of both papers and posters can be seen on

http://www.ifao.egnet.net/uploads/manifestations/2010/geoarcheo/Geoarcheo_2010-programme.pdf (in PDF format).



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Centre Franco-Égyptien d'Étude des Temples de Karnak (CFEETK)

Centre National de la Recherche Scientifique

Egyptian Supreme Council of Antiquities (SCA)

International Association of Geomorphology (IAG)

Centre français de Culture et de Coopération

Embassade de France, le Caire, Égypte.