



**Centre d'études et de documentation
économiques, juridiques et sociales**

On Tuesday October 29, 2024 at 11am at CEDEJ **Katherine Blouin** will be presenting her research **Storing the Nile Delta, from Antiquity to the Modern Period.**

If you fly to Egypt from the west, north or east and are lucky enough to have a window view, chances are you will be able to see the indigo waters of the Mediterranean turn turquoise and foamy, before quickly giving way to the dark green tapestry of the Nile Delta. As your plane starts its descent towards Cairo, you might spot a meandering river, and also notice the sharp edges of the patchworked greenery as it meets the ochre cliffs of the Western Desert. About half an hour later, you'll approach Cairo's international airport, which sits close to the apex of the Delta and next to the ancient city and modern neighbourhood of Heliopolis. By that time, you'll be flying at low altitude. You might see islands ensconced within the city centre. A crew member might announce that the pyramids of Giza are visible through one side of the plane. You might be struck by the sheer number of manmade structures - houses, roads, canals, mosques, churches, military, governmental and commercial buildings - that fill up your window view, and notice the sandy, smoggy veneer that hovers between you and the land below. As your plane touches the ground and the pilot energetically pushes the break, you'll find yourself standing on *Umm el-Dunyâ* (Cairo), at the convergence between Baharî and Qebî, better known to English speakers as Lower and Upper Egypt. The Nile Delta fans out through northern Egypt, from the northern vicinity of Cairo to the Mediterranean shore. Standing astride marshes and desert edges, the Nile River, the Mediterranean and the nearby Red Sea, it forms the largest fertile area of Egypt. It is little wonder, then, that for over five millennia now, it has acted as a dynamic crossroad between the Mediterranean, the Near East, East Africa and, by extension, Asia and the Indian Ocean world. Although the Nile Delta is less richly (and spectacularly) documented than the Nile Valley, Fayum and other oases, or eastern and western deserts, the increasing amount of evidence at our disposal does document many aspects of its environmental, socio-economic and cultural history. Available data also sheds light on the Delta's interactions with the wider world in the *longue durée*. The growing number of studies on the ancient Delta published over the past three decades indicates that the area was part of Mediterranean and Near Eastern connectivity networks as early as the Predynastic period. The Delta was also integrated into a succession of local and foreign imperial powers that ruled over the eastern Mediterranean and Near East, from the Pharaonic to the British, and even hosted several provincial and imperial capitals: Memphis, Avaris, Pi-Ramesses, Tanis, Bubastis and Saïs in the Pharaonic period; Alexandria in the Hellenistic and Roman periods; Fustat and Cairo in the Arab, Ottoman and modern periods. Drawing from my experience editing the collective volume *The Nile Delta: Histories from Antiquity to the Modern Period* in a time of accelerating climate crisis, I will reflect on what transhistorical and Land-based approaches to the history of this region can teach us, and what potential futurities these combined narratives allow us to (re)imagine.

Dr. Katherine Blouin is Associate Professor of History and Classics in the department of Historical and Cultural Studies at the University of Toronto and co-founder and lead editor of the platform

Everyday Orientalism. Her publications include *Triangular Landscapes: Environment, Society, and the State in the Nile Delta under Roman Rule* (2014), *The Nile Delta: Histories from Antiquity to the Modern Period* (editor, 2024), and *The Routledge Handbook of Classics, Colonialism, and Postcolonial Theory* (co-editor with Ben Akrigg, 2024). She is currently writing a monograph entitled *Inventing Alexandria* and co-editing the volume *Viva Palestina: Imagining Transhistorical Solidarity* (with Usama Ali Gad, Mathura Umachandran, and Marchella Ward).