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Chapter 12

Out of the Frying Pan, Into the Fire: Protest, the State, and the End of the Guilds in Egypt

John Chalcraft

Introduction

The decline and disappearance of the Egyptian guilds in the period 1800–1914 is often still seen as a top-down affair, in which decaying and passive traditional trades and guilds were, on the one hand, destroyed by imports and world economic integration, and on the other abolished by official decree linked to the reforming projects of modernizing elites.¹ My research has attempted to revise this top-down picture by recovering grassroots histories of guilds, crafts and service-workers.² Against the received wisdom, I contend that crafts and service-workers were not passive bystanders in the demise of their guilds, but through adaptation and protest, played a significant role. This chapter sets out to clarify the role of weapons of the weak, petitions, protests and collective action in the end of the guilds and the emergence of new networks and forms of organization.³

The End of the Guilds

The Ottoman guilds in Egypt were no unchanging mystical or fraternal brotherhood; nor were they a tool in the hand of the government, or a backward and restrictive

monopoly.⁴ Instead they embodied an enduring, varied and flexible corporate order for the organization of urban occupational life. Although the picture is tantalizingly incomplete, one can say that the guild (*ta'ifa*, pl. *tawa'if*) was a group of all those practising a particular profession in a particular place. Although highly heterogeneous by time and place, guilds often enjoyed a monopoly guaranteed by customary rights and duties, and underpinned by a segmented market structure. Guilds often formed social communities for their members, as suggested by their corporate presence at major festivities, the existence of initiation ceremonies, ethnic, national or linguistic markers, trade customs, and distinctive clothes and locations. They also often solved economic and social problems for their members – regulating numbers in the trade and the flow of raw materials, and on occasion providing mutual assistance. Guilds were usually headed by a sheikh who exercised leadership and solved disputes on the basis of customary law, and linked guilds to the government, chiefly through maintaining order and collecting and distributing taxes. Guilds' complex, semi-autonomous relationship to the government was bolstered by their rich network of connections to other groups and individuals drawn from state, society, and in-between: sufi orders, Janissary corps, tax-farmers, market inspectors, members of the Pasha's household, *mamluks*, court judges, and men of religion (*ulama*).⁵

By 1914 this corporate order had largely disappeared. True, certain guild-like groups were still to be found at public celebrations until the mid-twentieth century. One or two observers reported the existence of mutual help in the trades in the early 1900s. Sheikhs or would-be sheikhs continued to exercise unofficial authority in particular trades, or lived on as contractors or brokers into the first decades of the twentieth century.

Some guild terminology carried over into new organizations such as unions. But monopolies guaranteed by customary rights and duties for particular trades had disappeared – indeed, the ‘freedom’ of the trades was decreed in 1890. Licences to trade were now granted by the state. The old segmented market structure and its ‘natural’ monopolies had been swept away by new communications infrastructure and the spread of competition and market relations. Whatever remaining social and economic functions were maintained by guild-like groups were attenuated, rare, and/or unofficial. A realm of semi-autonomous customary law was replaced on the one hand by codified, bureaucratic regulations, implemented by officials, and on the other by local, unofficial networks and rackets. What had been seen as legitimate customary autonomy was now stigmatized as backward and ‘traditional’, the latter word taking on an entirely new meaning connected to retarding progress and modernization. The official guild leaderships of yesteryear, who had collected taxes and imposed order on behalf of the government, lost their remaining functions in 1892. The old, complex relationship to the state was no more as the central bureaucracy emerged, as tax farmers, Janissary corps and other power-brokers disappeared, and as sufi orders and the religious establishment lost their older forms of autonomy. Intimate relationships to the qadi courts were severed with the emergence of new secular courts. No longer were all those practising a particular trade in a particular location seen as forming a distinctive ‘guild’ or *ta’ifa* – whether as a matter of nomenclature or of substance. The unions and syndicates which started to appear, especially after the protests of 1907, were distinctively new forms of social organization, linked to new social groups, with no state-like functions, and premised more on the social

interests of individuals and interest groups than on order, hierarchy, justice or community.

These far-reaching social, economic and political changes were not simply the result of the decline of a backward and passive crafts sector, or a deluge of European imports and investment, the latter development aided by the projects of modernizing state officials. Conventional accounts have tended to ignore the role of popular protest in driving forward the array of changes that comprised the end of the guilds in Egypt. Collective action, ‘weapons of the weak’, and petitioning by guild members prior to the 1890s simultaneously dragged in the state and foiled state-based projects – processes which undermined the guilds from within and without. After the 1890s, new kinds of mobilization contributed to the establishment of new kinds of social organization. These processes took guild members ‘out of the frying pan’, which refers to the crises of the guilds co-opted by dynasty-building and unable to deliver solutions to new problems before 1890, and ‘into the fire’, which refers to the new crisis of the unprotected encounter with intensified economic problems and a colonial bureaucracy that was, by turns, unresponsive and heavy handed.

The Workers of Large Egyptian Cities

In the course of the nineteenth century, Egypt’s integration into the European-dominated world economy proceeded apace, with cotton as the major cash crop. Mehmed Ali/Muhammad Ali Pasha and his successors promoted the formation of political elites deriving their incomes from large landholdings geared to commercial agriculture.⁶

During this period, the population approximately doubled, standing at close to ten million

by the century's end. After the 'Urabi revolt against khedival rule and foreign intervention, followed by the British occupation of 1882, Egyptian cities expanded, as landless and land-poor peasants sought work in urban centres. The population of Cairo, where Copts and Jews had lived for centuries along with the Muslim majority – plus other groups, designated in the census of 1868 as Hijazis, North Africans, and even Indians – grew from about a quarter of a million at the end of the eighteenth century to 570,000 a hundred years later, while Alexandria in the late 1800s was home to little more than three thousand.⁷

By the 1900s, sizeable numbers of Greek, Italian, Maltese, and other migrants from southern Europe came to be employed in Egypt; in 1907 there were over a hundred thousand such residents, living mostly in Cairo and Alexandria. Multinational groups of investors, who owned many of the larger workplaces, especially after 1882, might import foreigners for the most highly qualified tasks, such as happened in cigarette manufacture. The Ottoman tobacco monopoly, instituted after the state bankruptcy of 1875, and dominated by the Ottoman sultan's European creditors, promoted modern-style factories, whose owners and highest qualified workers were mostly Greeks. In these factories, Egyptian women also worked, as tobacco sorters; they were considered low-skilled and were paid a mere pittance.⁸ These sections of the labour force grew up outside of the guild system.

There was also much new employment outside of the guild system in the new, large-scale transport and communications infrastructure.⁹ The khedives promoted railroads, which due to the relative flatness of the country were less expensive to construct than in Anatolia and the Balkans. By 1914 there were 1,700 miles (2,720 km)

of railways in operation; and the twelve thousand men in the employ of the Egyptian State Railways worked for the largest industrial enterprise in the country. Yet several times larger was the network of canals dug in the nineteenth century, which were largely a product of village labour, and thus outside of guild purview; and the large number of postal employees and telegraph operators, the latter of necessity literate, did not become guild members either.

Restructuring not Disappearance

In this context, the existing crafts and services trades were restructured rather than destroyed. In construction, furnishing, garment-making, weaving, dyeing, urban transport, metallurgy, ironwork, carpentry, tannery, milling, butchery, patisserie-making, chemical industries such as oil, soap and candle-making, as well as in artistic trades such as jewellery, fine-carpentry and embossing, craftspeople continued to find work in significant numbers and deliver much-needed cheap goods and services to large sections of the population. Where imported shoes remained expensive, for example, shoemakers diversified in their thousands to produce and repair shoes in European styles, customized to taste. Tailors, seamstresses, furniture-makers, and construction workers in their tens of thousands thoroughly transformed their products in order to tap new demands for European styles. Masons, for example, started to dress stones in the Italian fashion, and tailors now sewed European-style suits and shirts. Moreover by 1914, some of the commonest urban trades in Egypt, such as cab-driving and carting were just as new as the large-scale transport sector. These trades, ubiquitous in the newly paved streets of

Egypt's cities in 1914, had not existed at all during the first decades of the nineteenth century.¹⁰

Although artisans came under considerable pressure, and were relatively impoverished, the available statistics indicate that employment in crafts, trades and services increased significantly in absolute terms, and even advanced slightly as a proportion of Egypt's fast growing population. According to the Egyptian census of 1897, for example, about 260,000 worked in manufacturing of all kinds – all but a tiny proportion of this total being employed in small, locally run workshops. By 1907, this figure had risen to around 380,000 and by 1917 to around 490,000. Such totals represented an advance on the proportion of the Egyptian population employed in industry – from 2.7 per cent to 3.9 per cent over the period. The statistics for Cairo tend to confirm this picture. In 1897 around 53,000 worked in manufacturing, and by 1917 around 84,000 – totals which advanced the proportion of the population working in industry from 9.3 per cent to 10.6 per cent. Again, the overwhelming majority – perhaps more than 97 per cent – of these workers were employed in largely unmechanized, small enterprises. As an indication of this, 'employers' and 'self-employed' outnumbered 'workers' in the 1917 census. As the Commission on Commerce and Industry – convened to enquire into the state of Egyptian industry during the First World War, when local production suddenly became an issue for British rulers now interested in wartime provisioning – noted, 'in reality, and despite its appellation, [small industry is] the most important because it occupies the greatest number of workers and extends its network in all towns and farmsteads of Egypt'.¹¹ Only where crafts and services faced direct competition from large-scale industry duplicating the exact product or service to meet

strong demand amenable to standardization were they steadily destroyed. Where demand was weak, fluctuating or customized in one way or another, crafts and service workers could continue to make a living, and expand to fill new niches.¹²

The availability of such low-profit areas in the economy was the only prerequisite for crafts' survival in a new age. Increasingly competitive conditions forced crafts and service workers to restructure their production. New trades appeared; older trades adapted, migrated, or were abandoned; larger workshops and putting out networks were built. Production costs were lowered by the use of cheaper premises and the widespread purchase of cheaper or more convenient raw materials, often factory produced. Productivity was improved to some degree in various cases by piecemeal mechanization. The main key to cheap production, however, was to find reductions in the cost of labour – both skilled and unskilled. In competition with large-scale production and with each other, crafts and service workers owning some means of production engaged in self-exploitation, lowering their rates to the extent that their profits only sufficed for their own subsistence and the reproduction of their existing fixed and working capital. And where labour was cheap, abundant and largely unprotected, masters squeezed the semi-skilled and unskilled workers under their control, lengthening hours, lowering wages, raising the intensity of work and allowing conditions to deteriorate.

Weapons of the Weak

While the economic basis of guild structures was not destroyed, nor did a modernizing state simply abolish the guilds. In fact, for much of the nineteenth century, officials did not seek to destroy the guilds but to co-opt them in tax-raising and regulation for dynasty-

building in the name of progress and order. Just as in the countryside, where village headmen and *'umda*-s were increasingly important in channelling the demands of the state for conscripts, taxes and so on, in the towns the centralizing government sought to use guild sheikhs and leaderships to raise new and increased taxes, to conscript labour, and to impose new forms of order and regulation connected to town planning, hygiene, law and order.

]p[In part because their local guilds were the very instrument of new impositions, it was difficult for members of guilds to combine with their leaderships to resist openly. Furthermore, unlike during the last days of the mamluk lords in eighteenth-century Egypt, or for the Istanbul guilds during the deposition of Selim III, they had few allies among the middling strata of the urban population as the Janissary corps had been abolished, and the sufi orders, tax-farmers and religious establishment brought to heel (compare Ch. 11). Amid dynasty-building and self-strengthening, therefore, an important form of resistance involved guild members and their leaderships in unofficial and silent forms of coordinated resistance redolent of James C. Scott's 'weapons of the weak'. The principal forms of resistance involved cooperation between guild leaders and their allies among the rank and file to diminish their tax assessments. In particularly propitious cases, guild leaders managed to hide members from the tax-levy completely. Such forms of resistance should not be underestimated.

]p[These practices may have been fairly widespread. Cases which have come to light in some detail have involved trades ranging from the grain warehouse assistants of Bulaq, the Nubian servants of Cairo, the boatmen and brokers of Alexandria, and the bakers of Cairo. In the latter case, in 1878, a substantial proportion of them – as many as

545 – went undetected by the taxman thanks to this kind of illicit combination. The bakers frustrated state officials, who responded by seeking to get ever closer to guild affairs. The local authorities in this case warned ‘all the masters in the district’ to tender statements as to their income and workers, warning that masters would be held responsible if those working for them were found to be evading the professional tax (*wirku*). Furthermore, partly as a result of such resistance, certain taxes started to cost more to levy than they yielded in revenue, a fact not lost on the British and Egyptians alike concerned with tax reform after 1879. This state of affairs contributed in turn to the actual abolition of many of these so-called ‘vexatious’ taxes in the 1880s and 1890s.

Loyal Petitioning

Much urban protest, however, was not directed against the central state, but against forms of local exploitation, which intensified as the corporate order broke down under political, economic and social pressures. Such forms of exploitation were partly the result of unofficial resistance against tax-raising, which often came at the expense of the weaker members of a guild, or those who had no strong ties to guild sheikhs. Exploitation also intensified amid commodification, growing competition, new forms of contracting, self-exploitation, and labour-squeezing. The petitions of loyal subjects addressed to the mercy of the khedive sought not to avoid the state but to appeal to it, and its new regulations, especially new electoral procedures which had been promulgated for guild sheikhs and deputies in 1869. Such petitioning, which I have researched in detail among men employed in weighing, measurers, the Bulaq carters, Cairo construction workers, box-makers, Alexandrian boatmen, porters, dyers, and coal-heavers inter alia, played an

important role in consolidating the impact of the central state upon guild affairs, undermining guild autonomy and order in the process. The case of the Bulaq measurers can serve as an illustration.

ha[The Bulaq Measurers

It[In December 1876, some 134 grain measurers from Bulaq port sent a long petition (more than one thousand words) to the Interior Minister.¹³ They were complaining about being robbed of their measuring fees by a contracting scam organized by a disgraced former head of the guild and five deputies. It appears that the former guild head, one Hasan Abdullah, and a number of deputies had been sentenced by a court to dismissal from the headship. The deputies had gone to prison, whereas Hasan Abdullah had launched an appeal in the courts, during which time he does not seem to have been confined. Instead, he apparently brought in several allies and managed to get them instated by the police as temporary replacement deputies in the guild of measurers. Meanwhile legitimate elections were held, and the guild voted for three new deputies and a new sheikh. But this election does not seem to have been recognized by the authorities. The temporary, illegitimate deputies started monopolizing measuring contracts and renting out measurers in an exploitative way. Previously the measurers simply took the fee directly from the seller of grain, whereas now the deputies took the fee and distributed it later, taking their own unfair cut in the process.¹⁴

As elsewhere, the petition linked claimants to power-holders, and the Bulaq measurers were careful to reiterate the notions of just ruler and loyal subject that accompanied petitioning. Beyond the usual references to ‘Your Excellency’ (*dawlatalu*

afandim) and to ‘Your servants’ (*‘abidkum*), the petitioners also mentioned in a more unconventional manner that the corruption of Hasan Abdullah was not hidden ‘from our wise leaders’ (*la yakhfi dhalika ‘ala asyaduna dhuya al-ma ‘qul*), invoking the putative omniscience as well as the benevolence of the powers-that-be. Further, the petitioners articulated and identified their interests with the language of justice (*haqq*). As the petitioners roundly asserted: ‘It is not a mere fiction that if we have rights (*huquq*) to the [fees which have been withheld] on the account of the deputies then we are not slow to complain to the bureaux of the government, which for its part gives each possessing a right his right (*i’ta kulla dhi haqq haqqahu*) and removes injustices’. Here was a strong statement as to popular expectations of the ideal functioning of the state. As the petitioners elaborated, ‘it is not permitted to dispossess the guild of about three hundred persons of work and of all the orders of the government’. In fact, Hasan Abdullah, it was asserted, ‘takes us as slaves, even though slavery and monopoly are forbidden; and yet his intention is to take us by a type of slavery just as when he was guild head’. Measurers were asserting a right to make a living without dispossession or slavery. Finally, the petitioners impugned the probity of Hasan Abdullah, underlining the fact that he did not enjoy the consent of the guild. There were repeated references to his trickery, treachery and falsification, and the complainants asserted several times that the guild desired not Hasan Abdullah but a different sheikh and three deputies, who, it was claimed, had in fact already been legitimately elected and were of upright character.

]p[Through petitioning and elaborating on the question of justice and the good practice of local leadership, petitioners engaged in an agreed-on language which linked them to the state, without any hint of transgression on the part of the petitioners. In the

process the latter conveyed some sense of the moral economy that stood behind the grievances of the ‘enslaved’ measurers, who were not receiving proper fees for measuring at the hands of corrupt deputies. In practice, whether or not the signatories were telling the whole truth, their petition appears to have been effective, at least as far as the archival record goes. The Interior Minister was quick to demand the truth of the matter from the Cairo governor, who replied a month later to say that the police would now – following a decision against Hasan Abdullah from the Appeals Court – ensure the dismissal of Hasan Abdullah from his position. As elsewhere, such protests had an only partially intended structural effect, which was to bring the codes and practices of bureaucracy, here in the shape of the police and the law courts, more closely to bear on guilds and trades.

]ha[The Impact of Contention on the Guilds

]t[Weapons of the weak and loyal petitioning worked in various ways to build sub- and extra-guild networks, to drag in state intervention, to displace custom as a basis for trade regulation, and to undermine the corporate solidarity of the guilds. Weapons of the weak were not based on guild solidarity. Instead they pitted a clique of leaders and allies against other members of the guild. Loyal petitioning was almost invariably based on a struggle against local exploitation, which pitted rank and file against local exploiters and leaders. Networks were built which did not coincide with guild organization.

]p[These kinds of resistance attracted state intervention in the name of order, regulation and progress. Avoidance of taxes led to intervention to regulate taxation. Loyal petitioning attracted the intervention of bureaucrats and police, and worked to internalize

bureaucratic codes and regulations. Such interventions undermined the customary autonomy and independence of the guilds. Thus state regulation was not simply imposed on the guilds from without, but was also attracted from within. The abolition of the guilds in 1890 was therefore in part a consequence of contentious interaction with the state. The state was already rooted in craft affairs by the 1880s, so abolition was feasible. Second, it was clear to officials that guilds, because of resistance from below, were not doing the job the state believed they were supposed to be doing, as they were neither delivering order nor collecting taxes adequately. In other words, guild disaggregation had much to do with contention, and abolition had much to do with resistance. The guilds dissolved themselves in many ways – this explains why they were never suppressed, and why there were no protests when they were abolished in 1890. This could also explain why the artisans interviewed by the French craft historian Germain Martin in 1909 could only remember the abuse they had suffered at the hands of their sheikhs, and how the past was full of injustice and ‘black jokes’.¹⁵ Historians have tended to understand guilds’ quiescence in terms of passivity on the one hand and destruction of a whole traditional economy on the other. Amid widespread economic restructuring and various forms of political mobilization, neither proposition holds. Instead, crafts and service workers were quiet about decrees effectively removing guild monopolies and tax functions in 1890 and 1892 because guildsmen were no longer interested in saving their guilds, as ultimately these organizations had failed to solve new political, economic and social problems.

jp[But how do we evaluate Juan Cole’s argument that the guilds played a significant role during the ‘Urabi rebellion? Cole argued that, craft organizations took part in popular demonstrations and protests, acting as a kind of ‘shop democracy’,

protecting their members, mobilizing resources for demonstrations and lobbying the state.¹⁶ Cole's research certainly showed that guild members participated in large numbers in urban demonstrations. My research also confirms his emphasis on the importance of new electoral practices within the guilds. I thus adduce no empirical reason to doubt Cole's heuristic contention that guild members may have applied the same norms to the khedive as to local tyrants, and this attitude may have motivated protest when the political opportunity arose in 1882.

lp[But how were these protests organized? Cole could not trace empirically the networks and modes of resource mobilization on which urban demonstrations rested. His work in fact had to assume that the guilds formed the basis for protest – a highly problematic assumption. My own research suggests that popular protest was mobilized in sub- and extra-guild networks more than in guilds acting as corporate units, because the evidence I have seen suggests that by the early 1880s guilds were deeply divided by restructuring and contentious politics. Meaningful monopolies were being broken up with growing competition and lack of government protection (compare Ch. 6). New forms of contracting, the squeezing of labour and its commodification, combined with state co-optation of guild leaderships brought new forms of exploitation. Weapons of the weak and loyal petitioning were based on intra-guild conflict, not on guild solidarity. They also dragged in state intervention and undermined guild customary autonomy. Newly established electoral norms may have raised the expectations of artisans, in the face of ongoing forms of corruption and exploitation. New norms vivified the failings of the guild leaderships by bringing new standards to bear against their conduct, while failing to solve intensifying problems.

The very fact that there was no government discourse depicting guilds as a threat during 1881–82 points to the lack of meaningful guild organization – indeed, the government tried to use guild leaders to maintain order during the rebellion. We do not know how far the state was successful in this enterprise, but official perception clearly was not that the guilds were lost to the rebels, and such intervention may have worked to yet further increase intra-guild tension and compromise the position of guild leaderships by linking them to European control and autocracy. In short, although more research on the details is required, it would appear that as far as the evidence goes, resources were probably not mobilized during 1881–82 on the basis of guild solidarity. Just because guild members were involved does not mean that their guild organizations were responsible for organizing them. It seems very likely that such mobilization took place on the basis of sub- and extra-guild networks, forged already through other forms of protest in the preceding decades.

Into the Fire

In spite of the failings of the guilds, their official abolition in 1890 did not mean any ‘golden age’ of work. Although the tax cuts which accompanied guild abrogation were celebrated by many, in a sense guild members had jumped out of the frying pan and into the fire. As noted previously, the distant colonial bureaucracy that took over the state-like functions of the intermediary guild leadership turned out to be unresponsive on the one hand, and heavy handed on the other. Furthermore, although some reform projects were discussed by intellectuals, no solution was forthcoming for the social and economic problems of the crafts, no social legislation was enacted for small-scale industry.

Especially when compared with new expectations, problems only intensified with expanded commodification, new forms of competition, contracting and exploitation, labour-squeezing, and the like.

Protest and Organization

Successful protests, robust new forms of organizing and the growth of an alliance with nationalist middle classes contributed to the making of new organizations – syndicates and unions – which appeared in the years following the protests in the spring of 1907. There is no need to repeat here the detailed treatment in my *Striking Cabbies* of how a mass strike of the drivers of one and two horse-cabs formed the background to the short-lived organization of a syndicate in 1907–8.¹⁷ This organization was not a guild in any earlier sense of the term. It ceded all state-like functions to the central state, and was not based not on custom, hierarchy and community but on the social interests of members, and was understood in terms of ‘the economy’ and political ideology. The sheikh of the cab-drivers who represented his guild members to the authorities in 1907 may have been the very same person as the elected sheikh of the 1870s, but his political role was new. He was now representing the interests of a group, not fulfilling the demands of the sultan’s justice known to all and only contravened by the ambitious, the corrupt or the tyrannical. The target of his representations was not personal tyranny, but the bureaucratic regulations affecting cab-drivers, however much the language of tyranny remained to condemn such regulations. Likewise, the cabbies who organized in the autumn of 1907 were not complaining about personal tyranny when they sought to prevent the import of motorized cabs.

]p[Instead, they were complaining about an economic system and its management. This was new. Such protests were rare in Egypt before the 1900s. Syndicates and unions, furthermore, were not linked to a complex of semi-autonomous entities – from Janissary corps to *ulama* – but now forged organizational links to political parties formed in late 1907 and to the other activities of nationalists searching for popular constituencies to represent in the name of the Egyptian nation.¹⁸ These forms of organization and politics, which now included unions and syndicates involving tramway workers and construction workers, as well as tailors and shoemakers, heralded a distinctively modern form of socio-political articulation and organization.

]p[Where protest and organization were unsuccessful or impossible, a much more common situation for most urban workers, the result was distinctively new kinds of informal networks: contractors, racketeers, strongmen and patron–client relations, which could no longer be described as guilds. Emerging networks, clientelist structures, and rackets – among fishermen in Matariyya, coal-heavers in Port Said, egg-traders in Alexandria and Lower Egypt, construction workers, and so on – had no state-sanctioned structure.¹⁹ Their autonomy was identified not as a legitimate sphere of custom, a powerful shared norm in the urban order, but rather in terms of backwardness.

]ha[**Conclusion**

]t[Against prevailing views, this chapter has sought to highlight the argument that over a number of decades, contentious interaction with power-holders broke up the guilds and built new networks and new kinds of organization. These processes should be put in the context of new forms of economic exploitation and adaptation: monopolies were

undermined by the loss of customary rights and duties and the growth of competition related to the spread of market relations. The rapid expansion of certain trades made guild organization weak or problematic. As I have argued elsewhere, the ruralization of the textile industry, not its economic collapse, worked to break up the textile guilds, and the emergence of new forms of production (larger workshops, putting out systems, contracting networks) and intensified forms of exploitation made guild organization more difficult, or created conflicts which guilds could not contain.²⁰ It was not that modernizing elites sought to abolish a congenitally backward and traditional guild and craft sector and eventually got their way. Instead, nineteenth-century officialdom sought to use the guilds for new purposes, and guild resistance to such policies (not their passivity) played a major role in their official abrogation in 1890. The protests of guild members against local exploitation dragged the state and new regulations into guild affairs, undermining the autonomy of the guild from within. The corporate order was unable to solve the problems thrown up by new forms of adaptation and protest, which built new sub- and extra-guild networks for resource mobilization and protection. This was not a generalized and linear process of 'social mobilization' which broke up particularisms through communications infrastructure, literacy, urbanization and the like, but a process dependent on contentious politics and the shifting construction of social interests. The differential outcomes of subsequent contentious interaction with the heavy-handed and unresponsive colonial bureaucracy in the context of intensified economic problems led to the ramification of informal and clientelist networks and, after 1907, the emergence of new organizations such as unions and syndicates. Hence it should be clear

that, contrary to the conventional wisdom, the guild order was broken up from within as well as from without, and popular protest and adaptation was irreducibly part of the story.

[p[In a wider frame, such an argument illustrates how modern forms were not somehow parachuted into a backward and passive Egypt from above. It was not that modernizing elites attempted to drag a resistant, culturally authentic and monolithic ‘traditional society’ into the twentieth century. Instead, the Egyptian modern – legible in the changing form of the state, the transformed structure of the economy, the end of the guilds, and the emergence of new networks, organizations and political forms at the site of civil society – was the outcome of many-sided adaptations and conflicts, struggles in which low-status, poor and disenfranchised crafts and service workers played an important and often occluded role. To see these major transformations in this way is to refuse completely the identification, so often made, between the ‘popular masses’ on the one hand, and the traditional, the Islamic and the anti-modern on the other.

¹ Gabriel Baer, *Egyptian Guilds in Modern Times* (Jerusalem: Israel Oriental Society, 1964); Charles Issawi, ‘Middle East Economic Development, 1815–1914’, in *The Modern Middle East: A Reader*, eds Albert Hourani et al. (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1993); ‘Abd al-Salam ‘Abd al-Halim ‘Amir, *Al-Tawa’if al-Hiraf fi Misr, 1805–1914* [The Craft Guilds in Egypt, 1805–1914] (Cairo: General Egyptian Book Organization, 1993); André Raymond, ‘Les transformations des corporations de métiers au Caire du XVIIIe au XIXe siècle’, in *Les institutions traditionnelles dans le monde arabe*, ed. Hervé Blanchot (Paris : Karthala, 1999), 29–40.

² John Chalcraft, ‘The Cairo Cab Strike of 1907’, in *Empire in the City: Arab Provincial Capitals in the Late Ottoman Empire*, eds Thomas Philipp, Jens Hanssen and Stefan Weber (Beirut: Orient Institute, 2002), 173–200; idem, *The Striking Cabbies of Cairo and Other Stories: Crafts and Guilds in Egypt, 1863–1914* (Albany, NY: State University of New York Press, 2004); idem, ‘The End of the Guilds in Egypt:

Restructuring Textiles in the Long Nineteenth Century’, in *Crafts and Craftspeople in the Middle East*, eds Suraiya Faruqi and Randi Deguilhem (London: I.B. Tauris, 2005), 338–69; idem, ‘Popular Protest, the Market and the State in Nineteenth- and Early Twentieth-Century Egypt’, in *Subalterns and Social Protest: History from below in the Middle East and North Africa*, ed. Stephanie Cronin (London: Routledge, 2007), 69–90; idem, ‘Counterhegemonic Effects: Weighing, Measuring, Petitions and Bureaucracy in Nineteenth-Century Egypt’, in *Counterhegemony in the Colony and Postcolony*, eds John Chalcraft and Yaseen Noorani (Houndmills: Palgrave Macmillan, 2007), 179–203.

³ The term ‘weapons of the weak’ has been inspired by James C. Scott, *Weapons of the Weak: Everyday Forms of Peasant Resistance* (New Haven and London: Yale University Press, 1985).

⁴ These views have been held respectively by Louis Massignon, ‘La “Futuwwa” ou “Pacte d’honneur artisanal” entre les travailleurs musulmans au moyen age’, in *Opera Minora*, ed. Y. Moubarac (Beirut: Dar al-Ma’arif, 1963); Baer, *Egyptian Guilds*; and André Raymond, *Artisans et commerçants au Caire au XVIIIe siècle*, 2 vols (Damascus: Institut Français de Damas, 1973).

⁵ Cf. Pascale Ghazaleh, *Masters of the Trade: Crafts and Craftspeople in Cairo, 1750–1850* (Cairo: American University in Cairo Press, 1999).

⁶ Roger Owen, *Cotton and the Egyptian Economy, 1820–1914: A Study in Trade and Development* (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1969).

⁷ Daniel Panzac, ‘The Population of Egypt in the Nineteenth Century’, *Asian and African Studies* 21 (1987), 11–32.

⁸ Joel Beinin, *Workers and Peasants in the Modern Middle East* (Cambridge and New York: Cambridge University Press, 2001), 68.

⁹ Ehud Toledano, ‘Social and Economic Change in the “Long Nineteenth Century”’, in *The Cambridge History of Egypt*, vol. 2, *Modern Egypt from 1517 to the End of the Twentieth Century*, ed. M.W. Daly (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1998), 252–84, 261.

¹⁰ For details, see Chalcraft, *Striking Cabbies*, 105ff.

¹¹ DWQ MW (Majlis al-Wuzara’) NM (Nizarat al-Maliyya) 19 Committee on Trade and Industry / Lajnat al-Tijara wa al-Sina‘a 1916, Part III ‘Le Development de L’Industrie en Egypte’, 12–16.

¹² For details, see Chalcraft, *Striking Cabbies*, 105ff.

¹³ *Dar al-Watha'iq al-Qawmiyya* (DWQ) ND (Nizarat al-Dakhiliyya) MA (Mukatibat 'Arabi) M (Mahfaza) 20, 134 Bulaq measurers/ Interior Minister, Dhu al-Qa'ada 1293/ December 1876.

¹⁴ DWQ, *Nizarat al-Dakhiliyya* (ND), *Mukatibat 'Arabi* (MA), *Mahfazat* 20, 134 Bulaq Measurers/ Interior Minister, Dhu al-Qa'ada 1293/ December 1876.

¹⁵ Germain Martin, *Les Bazars du Caire et les petits métiers arabes* (Cairo : Université Egyptienne, 1910).

¹⁶ Juan R.I. Cole, *Colonialism and Revolution in the Middle East* (Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 1993).

¹⁷ Chalcraft, *Striking Cabbies*, 158 ff.

¹⁸ Zachary Lockman, 'Imagining the Working Class: Culture, Nationalism, and Class Formation in Egypt, 1899–1914', in *Poetics Today* 15 (Summer 1994): 157–90.

¹⁹ Chalcraft, *Striking Cabbies*, 154 ff.

²⁰ Chalcraft, 'Restructuring Textiles'.