began to crack – or perhaps when the new social facts of capitalist-colonial modernity became too much for the earlier conceptual repertoire to capture let alone evaluate – a turn to a new traditionalism was found to be salutary. And traditionalist knowledge has a certain stasis built into it, which may account for the falloff in production we see across the Sanskrit world.

Let me repeat what I alluded to in my opening remarks, that it is only a certain kind of modernity that makes us bemoan what might otherwise be taken as a steady state of civilisational equipoise: the industrialisation and commodification of knowledge in western modernity, one could argue, in contrast to the reproduction of artisanal intellectual practices, are merely a result of the 'everlasting uncertainty and agitation' that capitalism brought in its wake, not a sine qua non of an intellectual tradition. Moreover – although I cannot go into the argument here – the modernization of intellectual life in Europe was a consequence of a widespread dissolution of the previous social, political, and spiritual orders.

A highly cultivated, and consequential research question for Indian colonial history has been well put by David Washbrook: 'If its long-term relationship with India was, at least in part, a condition for the rise of Britain's Modernity, how far conversely were relations with Britain a condition for India's Traditionality?' I am beginning to wonder whether the traditionalisation that Washbrook and others have found to be a hallmark of early colonialism may have been a practice earlier developed by and later adapted from Indian elites themselves. <

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A number of ideas in the foregoing article are discussed in greater detail in Sheldon Pollock, *The Ends of Man at the End of Premodernity* (Amsterdam: Royal Netherlands Academy of Arts and Sciences, 2005). The website of the international collaborative research project 'Sanskrit Knowledge Systems on the Eve of Colonialism' contains a great deal of information on the issues discussed in this article. See www.columbia.edu/itc/mealac/pollock/sks/

Cairo Citadel. K.A.C. Creswell Photograph Collection of Islamic Architecture, Album 16/plate 7, Rare Books and Special Collections Library, The American University in Cairo.

The historiography of protest in late Mamluk and early Ottoman Egypt and Syria

History in its various forms – chronicles, biographies and biographical dictionaries – was a favourite genre in late medieval Egypt and Syria. One of the salient features of these histories is their breadth of perspective. Matters related to community and urban life including market prices, fires, murders, epidemics, floods and social relations were considered worthy of record. The writers were profoundly interested in the events of their times rather than in classical Islamic history. In the absence of archives, these histories remain our widest windows on medieval Egypt and Syria.

Amina Elbendary

Modern scholars have referred to Egyptian and Syrian schools of medieval historiography. The Egypt (Cairene) school during the Mamluk period tended to focus on politics of the state and the sultanate. Syrian historians allowed more room for the activities of the urban notables, including the *'ulama* (religious scholars) and merchants. An interest in popular politics is evident in both schools, but is more pronounced in the writings of Syrian historians and predates the Ottoman period. Thus Egyptian historians such as Taqiyy al-Din al-Maqrizi (d. 1442) and Muhammad Ibn Iyas (d. ca. 1524) and Syrian historians such as Shams al-Din Ibn Tulun (d. 1546) included in their writings news of a wide sector of the urban population.

The period witnessed a popularisation of history in various ways. Not only did the subject matter of history include topics of a more popular nature, but increasingly, and especially in Syria, less learned men of the urban community also took to writing history. The diary-like chronicle of the simple Damascene *'alim*, Ahmad Ibn Tawq, covers many of the same events as the chronicle of the learned scholar Shams al-Din Ibn Tulun but differs in style and perspective. Later in the 18th century, Ahmad al-Budayri al-Hallq, a Damascene barber, would also write a historical chronicle. In Egypt, military officers who did not enjoy the traditional education of an *'alim*, such as Ahmad al-Damurdashi, also documented the events of their times. Popular histories are noted for their use of the vernacular and their more sharply defined local perspective that focused on a particular urban network rather than high politics.

The inclusion of more popular elements in the subject matter and production of history allow the modern historian to trace elements of the political participation of common people. It is more often through reports of urban protest that common people entered historical narratives. Historians used the common people differently. Sometimes the participation of commoners in urban politics provided opportunities for rhetorical devices to confirm and stress a historian's implicit argument, granting it legitimacy through an implicit reference to their numbers.

Naturally, the narrative contexts in which various historians placed these events differed. Historians of the Cairene school, like Maqrizi and later Ibn Iyas, tended to narrate events within a larger historical drama with a particular sultan and his reign at centre-stage. Protest by the common people was more often than not narrated as a reflection on and reaction to particular state policies. They viewed provincial history through this same imperial lens so that protest in Damascus was reported as a reflection on state authority. While Egyptian historians focused firmly on Cairo, Syrian historians aimed squarely at their own cities – provincial cities rather than imperial capitals.

The attitudes of historians towards urban protest differed. Most did not disapprove of violent outbursts by the common people in defence of religion and justice under the rubric of forbidding wrong, an Islamic duty. Syrian historians were more likely to offer detailed accounts of such acts of protest, identify the participants and explain the political negotiation that led to its resolution. However, when such protests lacked a clear sense of resisting injustice, the rebelling common people were portrayed as 'mobs'. Such outbursts were dismissed, their participants often not dignified by a proper mention. Despite the disapproval of the writers, such incidents made their way into the chronicles as expressions of 'bad times' and faulty governing.

The contextualisation of the politics of common people is connected to the didactic rationale behind medieval Arabic historiography. History was written to teach contemporary and future generations lessons about morality and justice. Historians were making political statements on their present and future by narrating their own times and the recent past. History as a didactic discourse, when applied to contemporary events, often becomes an expression of protest and hence potentially subversive. <

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