



A Poetics of Political Economy in Egypt

Kristin Koptiuch

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Original in perspective, innovative in approach, this book investigates the changing relationship between Egypt's urban artisanry and the larger socio-historical transformations of the Egyptian economy.

Focusing on two key historical periods in the early and late twentieth century, Kristin Koptiuch examines the political and economic conditions that affected the role of the artisan in Egypt over time. She is particularly interested in how the politics of representation in different modes of discourse -- colonialist, nationalist, developmentalist, ethnographic -- have alternatively cast Egypt's craft production as outmoded artisanry and as an ingenious, micro-entrepreneurial "informal sector." In light of the artisans' changing relation to the national and global economy, Koptiuch reads this figurative shift from "artisanry" to "informal sector" as a political allegory that contradicts the dominant narratives of Egypt's colonial modernity and neocolonial postmodernity.

Attention to this allegorical figuration discloses what Koptiuch calls a poetics of political economy. Contrary to conventional positivist social science, realist ethnography, and empiricist history, this approach acknowledges the intricate mutual workings of meaning and material culture.

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