

Women, Gender and Guilds in Early Modern Europe

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According to their self-representations, Western European guilds in the early modern period (1500-1800) were archetypal patriarchal institutions. In cities and towns where they existed, the vast majority of guilds restricted their membership to men. Corporate statutes not only prohibited women from becoming mistresses, they also prevented them from entering apprenticeship or even accepting paid employment with masters. Widows could inherit privileges from their husbands but always with significant limitations. These restrictions derived from an idealized vision of the preindustrial family economy in which the master was a male family head, who simultaneously directed the labor of his wives, children, journeymen and apprentices. Guild statutes thus awarded masters the same authority over their journeymen and apprentices as over their own family members. Although guilds were profoundly local institutions, whose statutes varied considerably from city to city, the overwhelmingly male composition of the guild system, and its patriarchal vision of the social order, were common threads across Western Europe.

Drawing on guilds' own vision of the world, historians of labor organization have viewed the corporate system as a male terrain in which women played little role. Classic studies of the guilds by historians such as Emile Levasseur and Emile Coornaert - which rely heavily on statutes for source material - barely mentioned women, except with regard to their statutory rights as widows, wives, and daughters of masters.¹ As Maurice Garden summed up the classic historiography on French guilds in a 1986 article: "The hierarchy of work was a hierarchy inherited from the

¹ Classic studies of French guilds include Emile Levasseur, *Histoire des classes ouvrières et de l'industrie en France avant 1789* 2 v. (1901; Geneva and Paris: Slatkine, 1981); Emile Coornaert *Les Corporations en France avant 1789*, (Paris: Gallimard, 1941); François Olivier-Martin, *Organisation corporative de la France d'Ancien Régime* (Paris: Recueil Sirey, 1938); Etienne Martin-Saint-Léon, *Histoire des corporations de métier* (1909; Paris: Alcan, 1922). In a recent book, Hilda Smith reviews classic works on English guilds from the 1880s to 1930s and finds they mention women's participation in late medieval guilds, but that they have "generated slight discussion of gender issues" among urban, labor and economic historians. Hilda L. Smith, *All Men and Both Sexes: Gender, Politics and the False Universal in England, 1640-1832* (University Park: Pennsylvania State University Press, 2002), 85.

basic stages of life: apprentice, compagnon, master. It was also a largely masculine organization: women's work was considered inferior or even outside the corporate order."² In common with Garden's work on Lyons, more recent historians of the guilds depart from their predecessors by noting the importance of women's work in some sectors; however, they do not put the question of women's work or gender - representations, roles, and perceptions of femininity and masculinity - at the center of their *problématique*.³ For the moment, gender in the guilds remains largely a non-issue for most historians of the corporate system.

Historians of women and gender, as we might expect, have had a different point of view. In her pioneering 1919 study of women's working lives in seventeenth-century England, Alice Clark depicted a Golden Age in the medieval period, during which women enjoyed access to skilled and profitable work. Clark's view of the guilds was nuanced but, on the whole, favorable. For Clark, the guilds' emphasis on household production meant that women could play crucial roles as wives, daughters and widows. Rather than hindering women, the guild system empowered them as participants in the family business: "while the system of family industry lasted, it was so usual in the skilled and semi-skilled trades for women to share in the business life of their husbands that they were regarded as partners."⁴ Since she believed that virtually all women married and that in a pre-capitalist economy most journeymen became masters, Clark's description of women's experience with the guilds was undeniably rosy. Matters took a turn for the worse, in her account, only with the rise of what she calls "capitalistic organisation" in the seventeenth century and the separation of production from the household. The result was idleness for the fortunate few and sweated labor for the rest, as women's access to skilled trades dwindled.

2 Maurice Garden, "The Urban Trades: Social Analysis and Representation," in *Work in France: Representations, Meaning, Organization and Practice*, eds. Steven L. Kaplan and Cynthia Koepp (Ithaca & London: Cornell University Press, 1986)

3 Maurice Garden, *Lyon et les lyonnais au XVIIIe siècle* (Paris, 1986). Garden notes the importance of female workers in the silk industry. For example Steve Epstein, *Wage Labor and Guilds in Medieval Europe* (Chapel Hill: UNC Press, 1991) and Steven Kaplan, *The Bakers of Paris and the Bread Question 1700-1775* (Durham: Duke University Press, 1996). These studies discuss women's work but rather in the form of passing references than as a problem in its own right.

⁴ Alice Clark, *Working Life of Women in the Seventeenth Century* (1919; London: Routledge, 1982), 196.

Clark's book set the terms of debate for the rest of the century. With the renewal of women's history in the 1980s, a number of historians set out to test Clark's hypothesis.⁵ These historians, mostly of England and Germany, found severe flaws in the medieval Golden Age thesis. While small groups of women did work independently in skilled trades, they found, women by no means enjoyed equal or even favorable access to high status trades, as Clark had suggested. While debunking Clark's notion of a medieval Golden Age, these studies found even greater fault with Clark's account of the early modern period. Rather than remaining more or less intact from the Middle Ages to the seventeenth century, these studies argued, women's labor status eroded considerably - even collapsed entirely - during the fifteenth and sixteenth centuries. They agreed that a chief culprit in this development was the rise of the guild system. As guilds acquired more power over the urban economy, they tightened control over the labor market, closing ranks to aspiring journeymen and restricting the existing privileges of wives, daughters, widows, and female waged workers. Clark's "capitalistic organisation" thus wrought its ravages on women much earlier than she had suggested and within the ranks of the guilds themselves.⁶

The 1980s also witnessed a transition from "women's history" - which sought to recover the past activities and experiences of women - to "gender history" - which shifted the focus to relations between the sexes and the impact of representations of masculinity and femininity. This shift sparked interest in the masculine nature of the guilds themselves. Instead of taking for granted their patriarchal orientation, historians like Merry Wiesner and Cynthia Truant focused on perceptions of masculinity.⁷ They argued that concerns for masculinity pushed journeymen in

5 See for example, Barbara Hanawalt, ed., *Women and Work in Preindustrial Europe* (Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 1986) and Lindsey Charles and Lorna Duffin, eds., *Women and Work in Preindustrial England* (London, 1985).

6 Several useful review essays of this literature have appeared. See Olwen Hufton's review article in *Signs* 13 (Autumn 1988); Judith M. Bennett's "'History that Stands Still': Women's Work in the European Past" *Feminist Studies* 14 (Summer 1988): 269-283; and Maryanne Kowaleski and Judith M. Bennett's, "Crafts, Gilds, and Women in the Middle Ages: Fifty Years after Marian K. Dale" *Signs* 14, 2 (Winter 1989): 474-487.

7 Merry Wiesner, "Wandervogels and Women: Journeymen's Concepts of Masculinity in Early Modern Germany," *Journal of Social History* 24, 4 (1991): 767-782 and "Guilds, Male Bonding and Women's Work in Early Modern Germany," *Gender and History*, 1, 2 (1989): 125-137; and Cynthia Truant, *The Rites of Labor: Brotherhoods of Compagnonnage in Old and New Regime France* (Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 1994).

particular - who were themselves experiencing a humiliating loss of status - to insist on the exclusion of women. The identity of a guild master or a journeyman thus derived from the lines drawn between honorable male corporate labor and dishonorable female illicit labor.

As with any field, consensus inevitably gives way to new questions and approaches. The current state of the art is a reassessment of women's place in the guilds, which puts more emphasis on the possibilities and opportunities available to women than on the restrictions imposed against them. In the past several years, we have seen studies of autonomous female entrepreneurs, be they members of independent female guilds, widows of master artisans, or women operating licit and illicit businesses. New evidence is emerging regarding the employment of women in incorporated trades as well as on the availability of female training. These studies question previous assumptions of the guilds as an all-male terrain or of an essential incompatibility between women and guilds. Although not quite the rosy vision of Alice Clark, these studies certainly represent a more positive assessment of women's interaction with guilds and a rebuttal of the thesis of a linear decline from the fourteenth through the seventeenth or eighteenth century.

This paper will examine briefly the consensus established in the 1980s regarding the decline of women's labor status in the early modern period. It will then discuss new research that complicates our understanding of women and gender in the guilds. Along the way, we will address a series of themes, including women's place in the labor market, the accessibility of vocational training, women's independent guild privileges, the transmission of corporate membership and the nature of family and identity among guildsmen and women. The paper will draw on published literature on women's work and corporate status, as well as on my own archival research on seamstresses in eighteenth-century France.⁸

The Decline Thesis

In her 1986 *Working Women in Renaissance Germany*, Merry Wiesner posited a decline in women's position in the labour markets of south German cities from

⁸ This paper suffers in drawing overwhelmingly on English-language sources. This limitation is mitigated somewhat by the fact that historiographical discussions cited in scholarly articles and books do refer to non-English works. Moreover, a disproportionate amount of publishing on women and gender to date has been in the Anglo-American context. I would be very grateful for suggestions for non-English sources and insight into how these debates may have differed in specific contexts.

1500 to 1700. Wiesner attributed this decline to both economic and cultural factors. As trades became more specialized during this period, women's domestic responsibilities prevented them from obtaining adequate trade training. Since they could no longer compete for work in skilled trades, women were relegated to the margins of economic production. Wiesner identified the guilds as key players in women's exclusion. Spurred by economic crisis in the late sixteenth century, German guilds adopted new regulations limiting the privileges of widows, wives and daughters and forbade masters from hiring female workers. These changes arose partly from economic considerations: guilds acted to restrict internal competition, to maintain high quality standards and to gain comparative advantages. Wiesner also pointed to changes in moral attitudes brought about by the Reformation. According to Wiesner, authorities felt increasingly anxious about unmarried women and promulgated laws to submit them to male family control: "Legislation strengthened this patriarchal household as an instrument of social control, and many areas attempted to require all persons to live in male-headed households."⁹ Guild restrictions on women formed one element of this new social control. Desires to protect and enhance masculine pride were also at work. Given their own loss of status in this period, journeymen recovered pride and honor by castigating women's work as fundamentally dishonorable. Thus, Wiesner finds, journeymen's brotherhoods often took the initiative in obliging guild masters to adopt restrictive policies against women's labor.

Martha Howell's *Production and Patriarchy in Late Medieval Cities*, also published in 1986, studied women's work in the same period in two northern German towns, Leiden and Cologne. Howell found, in contrast to Alice Clark, that the advent of capitalist forms of production itself did not bring about women's exclusion from high status labour. Small commodity production - which she identified as an alternate, usually prior, form of production - also restricted women's economic activity. Howell concluded that women only participated in high status trades when production took place within the family context. It was the predominance of family production in Cologne, she contended, that permitted the existence of a handful of independent women's guilds in that city. Women produced in guilds, while their

⁹ Merry, Wiesner, *Working Women in Renaissance Germany*, (New Brunswick, NJ, 1986) 5

husbands sold their wives' products in the market. When production moved out of the family, either in small commodity production or capitalist production, women could not follow. Their work outside of the home threatened to undermine the patriarchal family and was gradually eliminated. According to Howell this process was complete by the end of the seventeenth century: "By 1700 only an occasional woman appears in a high-status job."¹⁰

The decline thesis was reaffirmed for the German context mostly recently in a 2004 article by Sheilagh Oglivie. In response to recent enthusiasm - among historians and international development agencies - for social networks and social capital, Oglivie set out to test the effects of social capital on women in early modern Germany. She argues that the guilds provide an ideal example of a social network, fulfilling the two criteria identified in the theoretical literature. First, they enjoyed a closed and carefully defined membership, which served to intensify the "density of interactions between members and thereby intensifying the quality and reliability of the information sharing and third-party monitoring needed to enforce cooperation." Second, the members of this closed group engaged in "multiplex relationships", spanning economic, social, cultural and political spheres.¹¹ According to Oglivie, guilds used the social capital derived from their closed networks to impose controls on training, to regulate the labor market, to restrict the privileges of widows, and to set wages. They used all of these powers to control women's economic participation: "Guilds' use of their social capital of shared norms, information, and collective sanctions to enforce their monopoly undoubtedly benefited guild masters. But it forced many women into marginal activities such as spinning, begging, and the exploitive black-market 'informal sector'."¹² The benefits gained by the insiders thus derived directly from the exclusion and the dispossession of outsiders.

Oglivie thus draws a stark boundary between privileged insiders and dishonored and impoverished outsiders, finding that guild prohibitions successfully eliminated women from training and employment. She also denies the possibility of

¹⁰ Martha Howell, "Women, the Family Economy, and the Structures of Market Production in Cities of Northern Europe during the Late Middle Ages" in *Women and Work in Preindustrial Europe*, 201. See also Martha Howell, *Production and Patriarchy in Late Medieval Cities* (Chicago & London: University of Chicago Press, 1986).

¹¹ Sheilagh Oglivie, "How Does Social Capital Affect Women? Guilds and Communities in Early Modern Germany," *American Historical Review* 109, 2 (April, 2004), 332.

¹² Oglivie, "How Does Social Capital Affect Women?", 339.

alternate, possibly "feminine" forms of social capital outside the guilds. Female groups were: "networks of the powerless, with no effective defense against the cohesive guilds and communities of powerful males, whose social capital was so efficiently mobilized against them."¹³ The black market of non-guild labor was fraught with danger and consisted of only the least significant and most poorly paid tasks. The significance of this gender discrimination, Oglivie argues, went beyond the diminishment of women's opportunities. It also denied German cities the opportunity to enter the "Industrious Revolution" described by Jan de Vries, in which the increased employment of women and girls in other Western European countries led to significant advances in production and the birth of a new consumer economy. Social capital, she concludes, not only endangers the weak but hurts society as a whole.

Similar findings of decline and exclusion have been reported for Denmark,¹⁴ Spain,¹⁵ and Italy.¹⁶ In her introduction to a 1982 re-edition of Clark's book, Amy Louise Erickson reports a historiographical consensus for the English case not so much on the decline of women's economic status but on its continued low status from the medieval through the early modern period. According to Erickson this consensus included a negative assessment of women's relationship to guilds: "Women's guild membership, lauded by earlier historians, was in fact extremely limited and always dependent upon their husbands; the few skilled women's trades which existed, all in textiles, failed to organize into guilds at all in England. Women had very little access to training, skilled work and adequate wages; their legal rights were severely curtailed when they married, which of course, they were expected to do; and they had no political voice at any level."¹⁷

¹³ Oglivie, "How Does Social Capital Affect Women?", 356.

¹⁴ Grethe Jacobsen, "Women's Work and Women's Role: Ideology and Reality in Danish Urbana Society, 1300-1550," *Scandinavian Economic History Review* 31, 1 (1983): 3-20.

¹⁵ See historiography discussed by Marta V. Vicente, "Images and Realities of Work: Women and Guilds in Early Modern Barcelona," *Spanish Women in the Golden Age: Images and Realities*, ed. Magdalena S. Sanchez and Alain Saint-Saens (Westport and London: Greenwood Press, 1996)

¹⁶ See the historiographical discussion in Dora Dumont, "Women and Guilds in Bologna: The Ambiguities of 'Marginality,'" *Radical History Review* 70 (1998): 4-25 Robert Duplessis offers a cogent summary for Western Europe as a whole in *Transitions to Capitalism in Early Modern Europe* (Cambridge, 1997): 36-7.

¹⁷ Amy Louise Erickson, "Introduction" to Alice Clark, *Working Life of Women in the Seventeenth Century*, xvii. Bridget Hill has sharply criticized the continuity model, espoused by Judith Bennett among other. See

For France - my own area of expertise - a pessimistic consensus also emerged in the 1980s. According to Natalie Zemon Davis: "women suffered for their powerlessness in both Catholic and Protestant lands in the late sixteenth- to eighteenth-centuries as changes in marriage laws restricted the freedom of wives even further, as female guilds dwindled, as the female role in middle-level commerce and farm direction contracted, and as the differential between male and female wages increased."¹⁸ Wiesner's and Howell's conclusions about the growing strength of the patriarchal family and its negative impact on women are echoed in Sarah Hanley's work on marriage law. Hanley contends that the French monarchy's consolidation of the centralized state in the sixteenth and seventeenth centuries depended on, and took place in conjunction with, the legal consolidation of the patriarchal family in the same period.¹⁹

In the French case, at least, the decline thesis is clearly problematic. In Paris, women would seem, at first glance, to have experienced similar decline. Etienne Boileau's thirteenth century *Livre des Metiers*, listed at least four trades dominated by women. These were two silk spinning trades, silk ribbon makers, and silk head-cover makers. A number of other guilds were composed of both men and women.²⁰ Since only two women's guilds (the linen-drapers and the hemp merchants) and one mixed guild (the small grain dealers) existed by the early seventeenth century, it would appear that women did lose access to independent and skilled trades did through the early modern period.

A closer look reveals a number of problems with this conclusion. The first is that medieval Parisian women's guilds did not, in fact, offer women independent

Bridget Hill, "Women's History: a study in change, continuity or standing still?" *Women's History Review* 2 (1984): 5-22; and Judith Bennett, "Women's History: a study in continuity and change," *Women's History Review* 2 (1993): 173-184.

18 Natalie Zemon Davis, "City Women and Religious Change," in *Society and Culture in Early Modern France*, (Stanford, 1975), 94. This passage is cited in James Collins' "The Economic Role of Women in Seventeenth-Century France," *French Historical Studies*, 16 (Fall 1989), 437. See also, Daryl M. Hafter, "Artisans, Drudges, and the Problem of Gender in Pre-Industrial France," *Annals of the New York Academy of Sciences* 441 (1985). (cited in Ferguson).

19 Sarah Hanley "Engendering the State: Family Formation and State Building in Early Modern France," *French Historical Studies*, 16, 1 (Spring 1989):4-27.

20 René Lespinasse and François Bonnardot, eds. *Le Livre des métiers d'Etienne Boileau* (Paris 1879)

control of their work.²¹ Their statutes indicated that male "*prud'hommes*" participated in the administration of these guilds. Thus, even the medieval women's guilds were not truly independent, as their early modern successors were. Second, there is also evidence of positive change through the sixteenth and seventeenth centuries. Rather than losing control to men, the linen drapers and the hemp merchants actually established female control of their trades in this period, effacing previously existing male corporations and acquiring independent female guilds.²²

The third, and most important, challenge to the decline thesis is posed by the evidence of growing economic opportunities for women from the late seventeenth century forward. In response to a royal edict requiring all unincorporated trades to form guilds, seamstresses in Paris and Rouen and fresh-flower sellers in Paris acquired independent guilds in 1675. At the precise moment in history taken as the culmination of their linear decline, therefore, French women obtained new, independent guilds. Evidence exists suggesting new economic opportunities for women in this period outside Paris as well. For the city of Dijon, James Farr noted that female artisans recorded in tax rolls rose substantially between 1643-1750.²³ In the provinces of Brittany and Burgundy, Jim Collins found that the number of female heads of household in Brittany and Burgundy doubled in the seventeenth century (from 7-8% to 16-17%) and he believes the number of female entrepreneurs rose as well.²⁴ For Nantes, Elizabeth Musgrave found a growth in women's independent access to guilds in eighteenth century, with no significant restriction in female family members' rights.²⁵

21 See Kowaleski and Bennett's "Crafts, Gilds, and Women in the Middle Ages" for a balanced discussion of women's participation in guilds in the medieval period.

22 I have also not seen empirical evidence of a decline in the privileges of masters' female family members in French cities and towns.

23 James Farr, "Consumers, commerce and the craftsmen of Dijon: the changing social and economic structure of a provincial capital 1450-1750," in P. Benedict, ed. *Cities and Social Change in Early Modern France* (London: Routledge, 1989), 24. (cited in Musgrave)

24 James Collins, "The Economic Role of Women in Seventeenth-Century France," *French Historical Studies* 16, 2 (1989): 465. (cited in Musgrave)

25 Elizabeth Musgrave, "Women and the craft guilds in eighteenth-century Nantes," ed. Geoffrey Crossick, *The Artisan and the European Town, 1500-1900.* Scholar Press, p. 158-9.

How do we reconcile this evidence with the empirical findings from German cities? The most obvious response is that circumstances in Germany were different than France, that German guilds were stronger and more assertive, that they controlled markets more effectively and were better able to impose their rules. Sheilagh Oglivie makes just this point, arguing that it was the weakness of central authority in Germany that produced this situation. She says local councils' reliance on guilds to furnish the high taxes of the sixteenth and seventeenth centuries allowed guild officials to force acceptance of their discriminatory policies, even when councilors recognized that it was not necessarily in the public interest to do so. This was not the case, she says, in countries like England, the Low Countries and France, where central authority outweighed the guilds. Moreover, she would argue that the expansion of opportunities reported by Collins, and others resulted from the "Industrious Revolution," which she posits failed in Germany.²⁶

Ogilvie's insistence on German exceptionalism has its merits, and the lack of revisionist studies for Germany may be one indication that the case has been satisfactorily proven. Certainly, regional variations dependent on specific political, economic, social and cultural factors need to be underlined and explored further. Regardless of regional specificity, however, it is worth noting that her argument makes a number of assumptions contested by current approaches to the guilds. First, Ogilvie assumes that guilds always seek to exclude and marginalize female labor, including that of masters' female family members. For her, this was an impulse inherent in guild organization. A similarly essentialist reading of the guilds emerges from Wiesner's emphasis on male bonding in German guilds, which suggests that there is a single form of masculinity inherent in corporate organization. Second, Ogilvie's argument also assumes that the exclusion of women is proportional to the strength of guilds. She claims, thus, that patriarchy is universal but is more or less successfully applied in different places; presumably French and English masters would have enforced the same policies if they possessed sufficient authority. In this interpretation, strong guilds equal absent women. Third, her argument also assumes that exclusion from guilds is equivalent to misery, poverty and dishonor and that it

²⁶ Maxine Berg emphasizes the new employment possibilities available for women and girls with the introduction of new technologies and divisions of labor in eighteenth-century England. Maxine Berg, "What Difference did Women's Work Make to the Industrial Revolution?" *History Workshop*, 35 (Spring 1993): 22-44.

would have been in anyone's best interest to join a guild. As we will see, all of these assumptions have been challenged by other case studies. Whether or not these challenges could be successfully applied to the German cities studied by Ogilvie, it is worth noting the more nuanced vision of women's work and corporate organization that emerges from other studies.

The Female Labor Force

One of the crucial questions in the historiography on women and the guilds is access to the labor market. To what extent were women able to find paid employment with guild masters? Did guild monopolies really amount to an exclusion of female workers from those sectors of the economy? The normative response would be that wives and daughters played essential roles in the family workshop, but that paid employment was restricted to journeymen who had received formal training with a master. Most guild statutes required masters to employ only legitimate journeymen in their workshops.²⁷ Some went further and included explicit prohibitions against the employment of women and girls who were not related to masters. As Wiesner and others have noted, these often included trades that were culturally coded as feminine, such as food preparation, needlework and entire sectors of textile production. Police records certainly do document efforts by guild officials to prevent women from working in such trades. In April 1692, for example, the Parisian embroiderers' guild successfully prosecuted a group of its own masters for having hired female workers (*fausse-ouvrières*). In the future, masters were enjoined to conform to guild rules and hire only qualified male workers.²⁸ Mary Gayne describes the wigmakers' struggle against illegal male and female workers in eighteenth-century Paris, while Sydney Watts finds the butcher's guild combatting numerous female peddlers (*regrattières*) who sold lesser cuts of meats in violation of the guild's monopoly.²⁹

27 A striking exception is Lyons, where Maurice Garden documented an extremely large female labor force working for male silk guilds. Maurice Garden, *Lyon et les Lyonnais au XVIIIe siècle*.

28 Letter from the Royal Procurator at the Châtelet de Paris to the Controller General, April 4, 1692, *Correspondance des controlleurs generaux*, ed. Boislisle, vol. 2, no. 1069.

29 Mary Gayne, "Illicit Wigmaking in Eighteenth-Century Paris," *Eighteenth Century Studies* 38, 1 (200?); Sydney Watts, *Meat Matters: Butchers, Politics, and Market Culture in Eighteenth-Century Paris*

What status do such proceedings have as evidence? Are the numerous police raids on female workers evidence of successful repression or of ongoing resistance? Recent historians have taken their cue from revisionist studies of the guilds, which have demonstrated the wide varieties of illegal work that took place and the ways this work (and masters' complicity in it) blurred the boundaries between guild and non-guild worlds.³⁰ Evidence is mounting that women worked in many male guild trades. For example, *Encyclopédie* engravings from the mid-eighteenth century depict women working alone or alongside male colleagues in a number of crafts ostensibly ruled by male guilds. These included the embroiderers, stocking-makers, manufacturers of buttons and decorative trim, fan-makers, enamellers, artificial flower-makers, paper-makers, wigmaker-barbers, saddlers, and silk and golden thread-makers. The editors of the *Encyclopédie* presented female labor in these trades as a simple fact, which apparently required no textual commentary.³¹ Cultural notions of appropriate female tasks - sewing, making textiles and decorative objects, decorating small objects or preparing and selling food - thus surpassed legal strictures, encouraging male employers to hire women in sectors from which they were theoretically forbidden.

Daryl Hafer has taken this argument one step further, showing the ways women employed by guild masters in the silk industry of Lyons used the knowledge and pilfered raw materials acquired at work to set up their own illicit enterprises. She contends that "the black market manufacturing sector created by Lyon's women workers became a significant factor in the city's economy. Although it is impossible to document the number of individuals involved or the exact value of diverted production, this group of female artisans formed a system of illegal work that

(Rochester: University of Rochester Press, 2006), 80. See also the discussion of illegal work in Clare Haru Crowston, *Fabricating Women*, 96-101.

30 See Steven L. Kaplan, "Les corporations, les faux-ouvriers et le faubourg Saint-Antoine au XVIIIe siècle," *Annales, économie, société, civilisation*, 43, 2 (mars-avril) 1988; "La lutte pour le contrôle du marché du travail à Paris au XVIIIe siècle," *Revue d'histoire moderne et contemporaine* xxxvi (juillet-septembre 1989): 361-412; and Michael Sonenscher, *Work and Wages: Natural Law, Politics and the Eighteenth-Century French Trades* (New York: Cambridge University Press, 1989).

31 *Encyclopédie ou Dictionnaire raisonné des sciences des arts et des métiers*, vols. 23-26, 29-32. These images are the subject of a book manuscript by Geraldine Sheridan.

paralleled legitimate production."³² Guilds not only charged these women with setting up illicit shops, they also accused them of training young girls to work in the trade. In the hatting trade, masters' female day-workers moonlighted in sweated workshops whose proprietors refused to respect guild limitations on production.³³ Hafter thus traces a complex web in which urban and rural putting-out systems and sweated workshops replace - or accompany - the master's family workshop. Illicit production and distribution criss-crossed guild boundaries at innumerable points, with masters, journeymen and female guild employees deeply implicated at all levels.

Similar situations could be found in other European cities. Marta Vicente's study of women's work in Barcelona emphasizes the extent of female participation in the labor market. In 1628, more than 40 women spinners broke into the city hall of Barcelona, insulting councilors and demanding that they prevent master drapers from sending wool to be spun outside the city. Vicente concludes from this example not only that women did work for master drapers, but they had achieved some form of collective work identity. In general, she argues that, despite their absence from official guild records, "the participation of women in the city's economy was accepted and encouraged."³⁴ The flexibility of female labor made it invaluable not only to masters but to the local economy as well. As in Lyons, women participated in an "informal" economy that provided a crucial supplement to the formal economy.

Dora Dumont work on Bologna argues that women's importance in the labor market could win them new access to guilds. In a context of economic crisis, Dora Dumont uncovered male textile guilds in late eighteenth-century Bologna seeking to incorporate illegal women workers, in order to benefit from the women's membership fees. The response was telling. Many women eagerly sought guild membership; others paid solely to avoid harassment by guild officials; still others resisted incorporation either by passive resistance or through collective legal action against the guild. Thus, the guild was neither as resistant to female members, nor the

32 Daryl M. Hafter, "Women in the Underground Business of Eighteenth-Century Lyon," *Enterprise and Society* 2 (March 2001), 27.

33 Hafter, "Women in the Underground Business", 29.

34 Vicente, "Images and Realities of Work," 128.

women as eager to embrace incorporation, as the inclusion/exclusion model suggests.³⁵

Like Hafter and Vicente, Dumont downplays the contrast between privileged insiders and vulnerable outsiders. Emphasizing the "ambiguity" of marginality, she argues that the guilds frequently failed to protect their members from poverty and that some women and other illegal workers could flourish quite successfully in the black market. Guild masters again contributed to blurring the boundaries by colluding in illegal work with non-guild artisans. Far from being dispossessed and powerless, illegal women workers organized and brought their resistance to guild fees to courts of law, presenting themselves as poor seasonal workers and accusing the guilds of the same immorality and illegitimacy of which they had been accused. Marginality, according to Dumont, was thus a legal strategy and even an attractive choice for some women.

Vocational Training

With the existence of a female labor market itself in question, little work has been done on how women gained access to skills or on the processes of production and re-production of the female work force in the early modern period. The absence of recorded apprenticeship contracts from notarial and guild archives has led many historians to conclude that girls did not receive formal training. The standard account is thus that girls learned skills necessary for their role in the family economy in the home from their mothers and other kin. If we accept that growing numbers of journeymen failed to acquire independent workshops, however, we must also agree that more daughters could not count on employment or training in the home. As evidence accumulates that many girls worked outside the home in trades unrelated to a family occupation, it seems reasonable to look for evidence of training opportunities.³⁶

For Paris, at least, recent research suggests the availability of vocational training for many female youth during the early modern period and a significant growth in training opportunities starting in the late seventeenth century. The first

³⁵ Dora Dumont, "Women and Guilds in Bologna: The Ambiguities of 'Marginality.'"

³⁶ On alternative paths to apprenticeship for girls and boys, see Clare Haru Crowston, "L'Apprentissage hors des corporations: Les Formations professionnelles alternatives à Paris sous l'Ancien régime," *Annales: Histoire, Sciences Sociales* 60, 2 (2005): 409-441.

point to make is on the existence of female apprenticeship. Carol Loats' study of apprenticeship in the mid-sixteenth century found 14% of notarial apprenticeship contracts involved female apprentices. Many of these were with seamstresses, despite the fact that they practiced an officially illegal trade.³⁷ Apprenticeship continued among seamstresses up to the moment of the guild's creation in 1675, after which the numbers grew dramatically. In 1716, the first date for which figures are available, at least 403 girls entered a notarized training contract with a guild mistress.³⁸ Between 1746 and 1759, the guild recorded a yearly average of 419 new apprentices. Since most contracts ran for three years, at any given time there were approximately 1,250 apprentices engaged in learning their trade.³⁹ With a guild population of over 2,000 mistresses, half the mistresses had an apprentice in their workshop. Seamstresses constituted the largest group of apprentices, male or female, in eighteenth-century Paris, possibly up to one-fifth of the total.⁴⁰ When we add to these the much smaller number of apprentices in the other female guilds (flower-sellers, linen-drapers, hemp merchants) and the mixed-guilds (small grain merchants and mid-wives), we find girls representing a substantial minority of apprentices in the city.

In most cases, a girl's parents took the initiative to place her in training with a seamstress. A sample of 646 seamstress apprenticeship contracts indicates that almost three-quarters of girls were represented in negotiations by both parents or by a parent's representative. Fathers were the most important figures in this process. The numbers of girls involved, and the fact that their fathers chose apprenticeship for them, suggests that far from subsuming their daughters' labor under their own, many fathers actively sought formal training for their daughters in an autonomous

³⁷ Carol Lee Loats, *Gender and Work in Sixteenth-Century Paris*, (Ph.D. diss., University of Colorado, 1993).

³⁸ See AN MC Etude CVIII 324 for these contracts.

³⁹ This information is contained in the audits performed on the seamstresses' guild by the royal commission set up for this purpose. See AN V7 428.

⁴⁰ An index of all Parisian notarial contracts for the year 1761 revealed a total of approximately 1,800 apprenticeship contracts, not including seamstresses. If there were 400 seamstress contracts that year (giving a total for Paris of 2,200), seamstresses would have represented 18% or almost one fifth of all apprentices.

trade. These fathers planned for, and invested in, a trade that the girls could learn outside the home and practice as live-in or live-out workers.

Far from discouraging girls from receiving vocational training, moreover, government and religious authorities were eager to extend this training. The guild's creation was sponsored by the royal government, which approved the guild's requirement of three years of apprenticeship. Parish-based charity foundations also subsidized some poor girls' training. According to surviving documents, the charity foundation of Saint-Jean-en-Grève parish paid for the apprenticeship of at least twenty-five girls from 1711 to 1717 and seventy-five girls from 1774 to 1787. Surprisingly, girls benefited from training subventions as much or more than boys: from 1711 to 1717, girls equaled boys on the charity list; from 1774 to 1787, fifty-one boys received support for apprenticeship versus seventy-five girls.⁴¹

While numerically important, apprenticeship with a seamstress could not account for all female members of the workforce. My research shows that many poor girls received an alternate form of vocational training in charitable schools. Most Parisian parishes established one or more free charity schools in the second half of the seventeenth century.⁴² Students entered these schools around age eight for approximately two years of education. The schools were segregated by sex, with a female mistress for the girls and a male master for the boys. Boys generally studied religion, reading, writing and some arithmetic. Girls received religious and intellectual instruction as well, but they all devoted significant portion of the curriculum to needlework. Charity company documents indicate the intention that these skills serve vocational, as well as moral or social purposes.⁴³

In the second half of the seventeenth century, these parish schools were supplemented by a number of new female religious communities, whose purpose was

⁴¹ Archives Nationales (henceforth AN) LL 801, "Registre servant de tables aux matières contenues dans les livres des délibérations du bureau de l'oeuvre et fabrique de la paroisse de Saint-Jean-en-Grève"; AN LL 802, "Deuxième registre servant de tables aux matières contenues dans les livres des délibérations du bureau de l'oeuvre et fabrique de la paroisse de Saint-Jean-en-Grève;" AN H5 3782, "Comptes de la fabrique de la paroisse de Saint-Jean-en-Grève."

⁴² On these companies, see Marcel Fosseyeux, *Les Ecoles de charité*; Harvey Chisick, "French Charity Schools in the Seventeenth and Eighteenth Centuries"; and Léon Cahen, "Les Idées charitables à Paris au XVIIe et au XVIIIe siècles d'après les règlements des compagnies paroissiales."

⁴³ See for example, AN L 716, "Etat présent des bonnes oeuvres et Ecoles charitables de la Paroisse de Saint Sulpice du 1. Decembre 1698"

to continue poor girls' education after they left elementary school. The schools were intended to enrich the vocational skills girls acquired in school and thus render them capable of earning a living from their work. Equally important was the desire to keep young girls off the streets and to ensure that the religious and moral indoctrination offered by the charity schools was not lost during the period between childhood and marriage. The most important religious community was perhaps the Filles de Saint-Agnès, created in 1678 in Saint-Eustache parish. By 1792, the community numbered 45 sisters, forty 40 adult boarders, 35 child boarders and almost 450 "poor children and external students for instruction and work."⁴⁴ The school provided training in four trades: linen work, embroidery, lace-making, and tapestry-making.⁴⁵ Each student selected the trade in which she would train, presumably assisted and influenced by the sisters. The community possessed all the tools necessary for these trades, including looms for tapestry weaving. Although this was far from the guild model of apprenticeship, the sisters called their charges "apprentices" and seem to have believed they were imparting a form of apprenticeship that led from inexperience toward mastery of a trade.

Such training blurs, once more, the boundary between guild and non-guild sectors. The sisters who trained girls to work in embroidery must have known that girls were forbidden to work in the trade; they seem equally assured that their charges could earn a living from the trade once they left the school. Support for the institution came from Controller General Jean-Baptiste Colbert himself, responsible for the 1673 edict requiring all trades to form guilds. He helped the sisters obtain official letters patent in 1682 and left the community 10,000 livres in his will.⁴⁶

Colbert was also responsible for yet another form of female vocational training. Frustrated by France's reliance on imported lace, Colbert instructed the French ambassador in Venice to report on lace-making and brought thirty workers from Venice to jump start a new French industry. His interest in the trade is attested to by the fact that he offered payment to fathers in Auxerre to send their daughters to be trained⁴⁷ and asked his close family members to supervise the progress of the

⁴⁴ AN S 4615

⁴⁵ The seamstresses' trade was eliminated early on, due to concerns about the possibly immoral effects of introducing client's taste for fashion and vanity among students.

⁴⁶ AN LL 1659

⁴⁷ Little has been written on Colbert's efforts to foster female employment in the lace industry. For a brief summary see Pierre Clément, ed., *Lettres, instructions et mémoires de Colbert*, vol. 3: *Commerce et industrie*, 438. Clément, ed., *Lettres, instructions et mémoires de Colbert*, vol. 3: *Commerce et industrie*,

manufactures.⁴⁸ As always, lace-making remained a non-guild trade. The multiple activities of Colbert in support of female training reveal the perceived need for expanding women's work at the highest levels of government, either within or outside the guild system.

These examples suggest the importance of the late seventeenth century as a watershed moment for the creation of new projects to train and employ girls. The widened economic opportunities for women noted by Elizabeth Musgrave in the eighteenth century did not emerge organically but were planned and encouraged by royal and religious authorities. These initiatives straddled the guild system, making use of its strengths when appropriate and disregarding its restrictions when inconvenient. The image conveyed offers a striking contrast to the powerless and utterly marginalized underground described by Ogilvie in the German context.

Independent Female Guilds

So far, we have considered the lesser members of the corporate world: illegal female workers, second-class guild members, apprentices, and charity students. What about the few women who did enjoy independent guild status? As we have seen, women obtained autonomous, exclusively female guilds in a few cities, primarily Rouen, Paris, and Cologne.⁴⁹ My comments here will focus on the Parisian seamstresses' guild.⁵⁰ After 1675, a finished apprentice seamstress might hope for membership in the newly created guild. To what extent was it a guild like any other? How did gender shape the privileges of the Parisian seamstresses' guild? The

622, 26 juin 1671. His correspondence reveals that he thought "apprenticeship" in lace-making would take between one and, at most, two years.

⁴⁸See for example the letter to his brother, Nicolas Colbert, bishop of Auxerre. Clément, ed., *Lettres, instructions et mémoires de Colbert*, vol. 3: *Commerce et industrie*, 654, 8 avril 1672.

⁴⁹On Cologne, see Margret Wensky, "Women's Guilds in Cologne in the Later Middle Ages," *The Journal of European Economic History* 11, 3 (Winter 1982): 631-650 and Howell, *Production and Patriarchy in Late Medieval Cities*. On Paris, see Judith Coffin, *Gender and the Guild Order: The Garment Trades in Eighteenth Century Paris*. *The Journal of Economic History*, 54 (December 1994): 768-793; and Cynthia Truant, "La maîtrise d'une identité? Corporations féminines à Paris aux XVIIe et XVIIIe siècles," *Clio, Histoire, Femmes et Sociétés* 3 (1996) and "Parisian Guildswomen and the (Sexual) Politics of Privilege: Defending their Patrimonies in Print," in *Going Public: Women and Publishing in Early Modern France*, Dena Goodman and Elizabeth C. Goldsmith, eds. (Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 1995) On Rouen (and Lyon), see Daryl Hafter, *Equality through Privilege: Women and their Work in Eighteenth-Century France* (forthcoming Spring 2007 from Pennsylvania State University Press)

⁵⁰This was the subject of Claire Haru Crowston, *Fabricating Women: The Seamstresses of Old Regime France* (Durham: Duke University Press, 2001).

answers to these questions reveal the paradoxical effects of gender on the guild system.

In 1675, the royal government acted on a number of motivations to create the new guild: the women requested it, their trade was organized and profitable enough to support incorporation, the tailors could not meet the demand for women's clothing and were wasting money on legal action, and, by offering sanctioned work to poor women, the government could both reduce illicit female work and provide outlets for the growing textile industry. Royal officials thus acted on gender-neutral economic and social considerations as well as gender-specific desires to foster legitimate employment in an appropriate "female" trade.

In creating the guild, the government granted seamstresses the same status as other Parisian guilds. The guild's administrative structure and regulations were similar to those of other Parisian guilds. It was no more responsible to outside authority than any male corporation.⁵¹ If their guild rights were apparently gender neutral, however, the seamstresses' trade privileges were not. The tailors' guild possessed a venerable monopoly on the fabrication of men and women's clothing. The king could not simply dismantle these privileges, which had been repeatedly confirmed by his predecessors. Royal officers found a solution by permitting seamstresses to work for women and children only. Tailors not only retained their rights to make women's and men's clothing, they also maintained a monopoly over the two-piece dress worn by court noblewomen. Sexual segregation was also formally established in the labor market. Seamstresses were prohibited from hiring male journeymen, and tailors from hiring female workers. Neither guild could conduct inspection visits or raids on the other's workshops.⁵²

51 In her forthcoming study of guildswomen in Rouen and Lyons, Daryl Hafer argues that giving guildswomen exceptional privileges made it easier for male-dominated families, economies, and states to succeed, without undoing male dominance. Daryl Hafer, *Equality through Privilege: Women and their Work in Eighteenth-Century France*.

52 The royal government's care to protect the tailors' pre-existing privileges echoed clearly in the seamstresses' letters patent, which ordered that the women's new statutes be enforced: "Sans néanmoins que lesd. Statuts ni l'érection des Couturières en Corps de Métier puissent faire préjudice au droit & à la faculté qu'ont eu jusqu'ici les Maitres Tailleurs de faire des Juppes, Robbes de Chambre, toutes sortes d'habits de Femmes & d'Enfans, que Nous voulons leur être conservée en son entier, ainsi qu'ils en ont joui jusqu'à présent." See "Statuts, ordonnances et déclaration... pour la Communauté des Couturières...". See Chapter One for a full discussion of the types of garments permitted to seamstresses.

With this compromise, the royal government denied the seamstresses a monopoly on their sector of commerce, placing them in a highly unusual situation of direct competition with another guild. This situation suggests the paradoxical effect of gender on female labor. The royal government could not have imposed such unequal trade rights on a male rival to the tailors' guild; however, it would have been impossible for a male trade to acquire even these limited privileges. The seamstresses' female gender both rendered possible and restricted their legal rights. Their guild was both gender-neutral and highly gendered.

The gendered division of production was imitated in Rouen, where seamstresses acquired a new guild the same year and in provincial cities and towns where seamstresses joined tailors' guilds. This took place in at least fifteen provincial cities from 1652 to 1776. In most cases, tailors took the initiative to bring women into their guilds. Unable to suppress the female labor market, tailors' guilds sought to profit from women rather than losing money in futile legal cases. This strategy allowed tailors to profit from female guild fees and to obtain formal control over the women's labor, for they often excluded women from participation in guild administration. As in Bologna, however, the masters' ability to control this supposedly "marginal" aspect of their trade was extremely limited. Very soon after their union with the tailors, the seamstresses of Caen embarked on an aggressive and partially successful campaign to win administrative autonomy. Where tailors did monopolize corporate government, as in Aix-en-Provence, they were overwhelmed by the numbers of women who joined them. According to guild assembly minutes, the sheer mass of women proved impossible to govern, and even male guild officials were not above entering profitable collusion with them.⁵³ A number of women resisted joining the guild, finding more advantageous conditions without guild control or guild fees.

Was women's inclusion in the guild system a sign of strength or weakness on the part of the guilds? Regional variations within the seamstresses' trade offer one answer to this question. In Paris, Rouen and Le Havre, seamstresses acquired independent, exclusively female corporations. In Caen, seamstresses entered the tailors' guild but gained their own administrative structures, constituting a virtually separate corporation. In Aix and Marseilles, seamstresses joined guilds without the

⁵³ For example, see the Aix tailors' assembly minutes, AC Aix-en-Provence HH 133-139.

usual trappings of corporate life. They played no part in administration, and did not perform formal apprenticeship or competency tests.

This north-south contrast mirrors a distinction noted in the wider historiography, which describes a strong corporate tradition in the north versus the weakness of guilds in the south. This coincidence suggests that where the corporate tradition was strong, seamstresses could attain formal mistress status, with the privileges and constraints inherent in it. Where guilds were weaker, and women had no previous corporate role, they remained auxiliary and largely voiceless members of tailors' guild. It was the vitality of the guild tradition within northern cities that furnished women with the conceptual and legal tools to argue for their autonomous corporate rights. In some cases, guild strength equals the vital presence not absence of women from guilds.

The French case was not unique. In York, women were mentioned in the tailors' 1453 licence, but rarely became members before 1693. After that date, 139 women became merchant tailors in the years to 1776. Women constituted a major source of new recruits during the eighteenth century, numbering up to one-third of the guild's membership. Based on this case, Smith argues that guilds could offer "accommodation in responses to female employment, depending on local conditions" and cautions that "generalisations about the relationship between guild regulation and women's work need to be tested against case studies"⁵⁴

Whereas Dumont emphasized the weakness of the Bologna guilds, Smith concludes that the decision to accept female members became a source of strength in York: "Female recruitment helped ensure York's merchant tailors' company's survival as an active trading organisation for a longer period than many other craft guilds. Outside York, the failure to regulate women mantua-makers effectively was a contributory cause of company decline; within York, the eventual demise of the tailors' trading privileges can also be linked to the decline of female admissions."⁵⁵ Guilds did not follow a linear trajectory of decline or triumph, and responses to women's work could be a key strategic element in reversing course.

54 SD Smith, "Women's Admission to Guilds in Early-Modern England: The Case of the York Merchant Tailors' Company, 1693-1776," *Gender and History*, 17, 1 (April 2005): 102.

55 SD Smith, "Women's Admission to Guilds," 122.

Elisabeth Musgrave's study of Nantes reveals that increased guild access did not occur in the tailoring trade alone. As she notes: "The rights of women to purchase rather than to inherit guild status increased in eighteenth-century Nantes and comprised an important modification of their legal position in the city. After 1700, a number of corporations modified their membership to accommodate female artisans."⁵⁶ This list includes tailors, butchers, dyers, and wigmakers - a familiar list of trades. She also cautions that: "The changes were limited in scope: women could not enter guilds as mistresses in the full sense of the word. In each known example, a separate section was created for women under the regulation and organizational structure of an existing corporation."⁵⁷

What factors led guild masters to overcome their allegedly intrinsic bias against women's labor? Musgrave accounts for these changes with contemporary economic growth, which led to increased demand in goods for export or mass domestic consumption. Growing demand created new opportunities for women in sectors that were experiencing the greatest growth, such as textiles, clothing, and food. For Musgrave, Nantes presents a good example of the industrious revolution described by Jan de Vries and the growth of "populuxe" industry described by Cissie Fairchild.⁵⁸ As she states: "Population growth, declining real wages, and increased taxation together with greater acquisitiveness for movable goods, led more women and children to participate in market-oriented production. The result was some reduction in the scope but an enormous expansion in the volume of women's labour force participation, which influenced their role in the craft guilds."⁵⁹ In the case of Paris, the seventy-five girls sponsored by the parish of Saint-Jean-en-Greve between 1774 and 1787 also suggest expansion of employment opportunities for women. While the seamstresses remained the most important trade for girls, attracting 43 of the 75, the parish also turned to a host of new crafts, including fashion-work, linen-work, lace-making, embroidery and stocking-making. Artisans involved in the

⁵⁶ Musgrave, "Women and the craft guilds in eighteenth-century Nantes," 159

⁵⁷ Musgrave, "Women and the craft guilds in eighteenth-century Nantes," 159

⁵⁸ Jan de Vries, "Between Purchasing Power and the World of Goods: Understanding the Household Economy in Early Modern Europe," and Cissie Fairchild, "The Production and Marketing of Populuxe Good in Eighteenth-Century Paris," both in J. Brewer and R. Porter, eds. *Consumption and the World of Goods* (London: Routledge, 1993).

⁵⁹ Musgrave, "Women and the craft guilds in eighteenth-century Nantes," 163

contracts included men and women, members of incorporated and un-incorporated trades.⁶⁰

This last point suggests that economic expansion was by-passing the guild's ability to meet demand and to control the labor market, a point frequently made in assessments of the eighteenth-century economy. Female workers benefited from these changes by pushing into new areas, inside, beside and underneath the guild system. Guilds reacted at times by tightening the reins but at others by bringing women into the fold, a technique which provided new resources with which to fight for their interests. Women's reaction to the possibility of incorporation varied from enthusiastic embrace, to passive resistance to downright hostility. Oppositions such as "strong" guilds vs. "weak" guilds or "inclusion" vs. "exclusion" fail to capture the variations and complexities of responses to changing conditions.

Guild Families

We have discussed the way gender shaped the privileges of the seamstresses' guild. For those who did become mistresses, how did gender shape their interaction with the guild and their identity as guild mistresses? What does comparison with tailors reveal about the nature of "family economies" and masculinity in the guild system? The first point to make is the tremendous demand for guild membership among seamstresses. More women entered the Parisian seamstresses' guild each year than any other Parisian guild, for a total of 5,509 mistresses between September 1735 and February 1776. Each year, they comprised around 10% of all guild entries in Paris. With more economic opportunities, fewer boys chose to become tailors. Between 1735 and 1789, 4,439 masters entered the guild.⁶¹ From 1736 to 1789, the average was 82 new masters, compared to an average of 138 for the seamstresses.

Comparing seamstresses and tailors, we find a very different relationship between family and guild. Seamstresses relied on their families of origin to obtain apprenticeship and perhaps to pay guild entrance fees, but they did not use mistress-ship as a form of family patrimony. The vast majority of seamstresses were

⁶⁰ AN H5 3782.

⁶¹ AN Y 9323 - Y 9334.

newcomers to the guild. According to the royal procurator of the Chatelet's records, three-quarters of the seamstresses entered the guild by apprenticeship. Together they accounted for 4,131 of the mistresses accepted between September 1735 and February 1776 (75%).⁶² Women who entered simply by purchasing membership outright composed the second largest group, numbering 905 mistresses (16.4%). Mistresses' daughters accounted for only 458 (8.3%) of the group.

Family was much more important for tailors, but in unexpected ways. Of the 2,681 men who became masters between September 1735 and February 1776: 591 were sons of masters (22 percent); 361 finished apprentices (14 percent); 839 had married a master's daughter (31 percent); 227 had married a master's widow (9 percent); 72 had served at the Hôpital de la Trinité (3 percent); and 591 were *sans qualité* or had purchased a *lettre de maîtrise* (22 percent). An additional 60 tailors entered by non-specified paths.⁶³ Marriage thus played the most important role in the reproduction of the tailors' guild, representing forty percent of the total. Masters' sons accounted for half as many new guild members, or around one-fifth. An equal number of masters entered the guild by purchasing mastership outright in the form of a *lettre de maîtrise*. Apprenticeship represented a minor means of access, less important than marriage or mastership letters.⁶⁴ This was because Parisian tailors' 1660 statutes restricted number of new apprentices to only 10 per year. Although they did not always respect this precise limit, the number of apprentices remained consistently low.

Reliance on marriage as a form of guild reproduction helps explain the crucial role that family played for master tailors. Tailors' continual legal battles to protect their daughters' and widows' privileges acquire new significance in the context of

62 After 1776, no path of entry was recorded for incoming masters and mistresses.

63 Most of these were recorded to have entered "by marriage," with no indication if the wife was a daughter or widow of a master.

64 Compared to other Parisian guilds, this level of generational continuity was probably on the lower end of the scale. Michael Sonenscher has found that 34 percent of Parisian master locksmiths were sons of masters from 1742 to 1776. *Work and Wages*, 116. Sonenscher notes the important role of marriage in the transmission of mastership, but interprets this only as a "a source of tension between journeymen who had served an apprenticeship in a particular city and journeymen who had been apprenticed elsewhere." He does not speculate on the significance of this finding for women's role in the family. See Sonenscher, *Work and Wages*, 110.

these statistics.⁶⁵ If forty percent of masters acquired guild status through marriage, they would be likely to defend female privileges ardently. Moreover, their wives would be attuned to any attempt to diminish their prerogatives and would encourage their husbands to take action. These figures also highlight the existence of gendered strategies of upward mobility among tailors. Many masters did not choose to have their sons continue in their trade, presumably encouraging them to further family ambitions by entering more prestigious trades. Meanwhile, their sisters sustained the status quo by marrying journeymen tailors. This strategy condemned women to remain within a male-dominated family economy and denied them the socio-economic ascension promised to their brothers.⁶⁶

Nevertheless, this situation must have also allowed women considerable prestige in marriage. When she married a tailor, a master's daughter or widow gave him a corporate status he may otherwise never have possessed. Raised in the trade, she had considerable technical skills and a strong grasp of commercial practices and guild politics. She would possess intimate knowledge of the clients and credit suppliers that her husband hoped to inherit. These figures also suggest that women in eighteenth-century Paris were more likely to practice their fathers' trades than their mothers'. While 839 masters' daughters effectively continued their fathers' trade by marrying tailors, only 458 seamstresses' daughters took up their mother's trade by joining her guild.

The weight of marriage in recruiting master tailors was not a constant, however. In nineteen years sampled between 1724 and 1775, 62 new masters joined the Caen tailors' guild, or an average of 3.3 a year. The record specified their paths of entry in only 44 cases. Within this group, men with inherited ties to the guild accounted for almost half of the new masters. Nineteen were masters' sons and two were sons of mistress seamstresses. The remaining twenty-three masters had origins outside the guild, including fifteen apprentices, seven owners of *lettres de maîtrise*, and one master who entered by direct order of the intendant. No one

65 See Clare Haru Crowston, "Engendering the Guilds" French Historical Studies 2000

66 Jacques Rancière has argued that the tailors' trade was the preserve of poor men and youngest sons, describing training in the trade as "a poor man's apprenticeship." Jacques Rancière, "The Myth of the Artisans: Critical Reflections on a Category of Social History," in *Work in France*, 319. For a similar account of patterns of upward mobility for sons and maintenance of the status-quo for daughters, see Tessie Liu, *The Weavers' Knot*, 238-49.

entered through marriage to a master's daughter. In contrast to the Parisian situation, therefore, the Caen tailors adhered to normative ideals of corporate reproduction, relying primarily on apprenticeship and masters' sons for new recruits.

The origins of mistresses in Caen also resembled the Parisian model. Of seventy-two mistresses accepted, nine entered by unspecified paths. The remaining sixty-three were largely outsiders: forty-eight were apprentices and one had purchased a *lettre de maîtrise*. Only fifteen women (24%) entered through their parents' privileges: eight as mistresses' daughters and seven as tailors' daughters. As in Paris, few daughters followed in their mothers' footsteps. The presence of master tailors' daughters recalls the important role of masters' daughters in the recruitment of the tailor's guild in Paris. Girls were just as likely, if not more likely, to take up their father's profession as their mother's.

The tailors' guild in Aix-en-Provence offers a third contrast. With 67 members in 1733, it was smaller than the Caen tailors' guild, but it was still among the largest in the city.⁶⁷ Between 1745 and 1775, a total of 72 masters entered the guild. In contrast to the previous cases, over half of these men (n=38 or 52 percent) were masters' sons. The second largest group (n=16) entered the guild by marrying a master's daughter. In Aix, masters' sons-in-law were treated even more benevolently than in Paris, enjoying the status of a master's son rather than that of a finished apprentice. Guild records show that most of these bridegrooms came from outside the city of Aix. Since they had not completed apprenticeship in the city, they did not qualify for membership by that route and therefore had strong motivations for seeking a bride among local masters' daughters. The remaining thirty-four masters entered the guild through alternate paths. Ten owned *lettres de maîtrise* and two achieved mastership through work at the city's *Hôpital de la charité*. As was the case in Paris, few masters entered through the path of apprenticeship. Given the strength of generational continuity, the guild was a collection of extended kin groups, consisting of fathers, sons, brothers, uncles and cousins.

Unfortunately, no record exists of the acceptance of seamstresses. Nevertheless, we do possess a number of membership lists established for the payment of annual guild dues. In 1733, the latest existing record lists 67 master

⁶⁷ From 1745 to 1790, the guild recorded a total of 140 masters entering the guild. AC Aix-en-Provence HH 144, "Registre des réceptions des maîtres tailleurs."

tailors for 111 seamstresses. During the first decades of the century seamstresses strongly outnumbered tailors in Aix, as they did in Caen.

This comparison suggests that the guild family took many forms. Sometimes male generational ties were most important, at others ties of marriage played a greater role. We must imagine that the life experience of a master tailor, or any member of the "patriarchal guild family," must have varied a great deal from city to city and from guild to guild. Historians have not paid close attention to the weight of various paths of access to guilds, but these paths surely played an enormous role in creating distinctive corporate identities and inflecting notions of masculinity and femininity (ie a real man is one who defends his wives and daughters vs. a real man is one who acquires privileges on his own merits). This comparison also suggests that gender was a more important factor for women than men in shaping guild identities. Seamstresses had basically the same features across France: strong demand and low levels of family continuity (at least in Caen and Paris). The tailors, by contrast, differed a great deal from city to city in terms of reliance on family, access by marriage. These results suggest that men's experience in corporations was much more varied than women's; their gender did not play the predominant role in shaping their relationship to the guild system as it did for women.⁶⁸

Conclusion:

This essay has surveyed the historiography on women, gender and the guilds over the past twenty years and reported on the results of extensive study of one female trade. The on-going reassessment of women's relationship to guilds has yet to cohere into an explicit new paradigm and the studies cited here are certainly open to question regarding the representativity of the case studies undertaken.⁶⁹ This survey does suggest, however, some preliminary conclusions. No one may contest that guilds were patriarchal, hierarchical and elitist institutions that excluded most men and women from membership. Women were in a particularly disadvantaged

⁶⁸ The diversity of recruitment patterns is discussed in Edward J. Shephard, Jr., "Social and Geographic Mobility of the Eighteenth-Century Guild Artisan: An Analysis of Guild Receptions in Dijon, 1700-1790," in *Work in France*.

⁶⁹ Awaiting publication are Daryl Hafter's long-awaited study of women in the guilds in Rouen and Lyon (forthcoming Spring 2007, Pennsylvania State University Press), Janine Lanza's study of artisanal widows (forthcoming from Ashgate), and a study by Geraldine Sheridan on images of women's work in the *Encyclopedie*.

position, given formal restrictions against their acceptance into guilds and, in some cases, their right to work in incorporated trades. Authorities at the local and state level basically approved this state of affairs and the systematic discrimination against women it maintained. Within this overall framework, however, there was tremendous potential for regional and municipal variation. Girls, women and their families took advantage of loopholes, interstices and tacit or overt authorization to obtain training, employment, partnership, and even autonomous guild membership. Guilds did not achieve the level of mastery to which their statutes aspired: over time, small niches of female labor took on unprecedented importance; political authorities sometimes favored the needs of poor women against guild demands; and even guild masters frequently collaborated with women for their own economic interests. No single trajectory of decline or triumph can explain women's experience, although the overall trend would seem to be a tightening of opportunities in the late Middle Ages followed by a new expansion in the second half of the seventeenth and eighteenth centuries.⁷⁰

Some women, a minority to be sure although numerically important in a few cities, achieved independent guild status. They did so not in spite of or regardless of their gender, but often because of their gender, drawing on the feminine association of their labor to claim privileges. These cases suggest that there is no essential contradiction between women and guilds. Many women enthusiastically embraced apprenticeship and guild membership, exercising their privileges in many of the same ways that men did; nonetheless, these privileges were often framed by notions of an appropriate sexual division of labor. There is evidence, moreover, that gender affected guild identity in different ways. For men, the guild identity seems to have been both more enduring (during one lifetime and across generations) and also more subject to variation, depending on the paths to mastership favored in each guild. For women, gender seems to have been the overriding factor in shaping a guild identity that was also a more transient entity. In taking note of women's access to guild membership, one must avoid triumphalism. A number of women resisted "inclusion" in the guild system, finding the cost and regulation entailed by membership to

⁷⁰ For reasons of length, I have decided not to discuss the period 1776-1791, which completely changes French women's relationship to guilds (by allowing men and women to join all guilds). This is the subject of two chapters in Daryl Hafer's forthcoming study of guildswomen in Rouen and Lyon.

outweigh its benefits. When given control over guilds, women used that control to restrict and regulate the labor market in the same way as men. The vast majority of men and women were not able to join guilds; it is their responses to that situation and the complex ties they nonetheless bound with the corporate system that are beginning to emerge.