

Paper Maarten Prak

Craft Guilds in North-Western Europe (England, France, Low Countries)

Maarten Prak

Introduction

Craft guilds can be defined as 'government-licensed, local organisations of industrial producers'.¹ In much of the historical literature, the emphasis is on the second element: the industrial producers.² Economic historians have been looking at the role of craft guilds in the development of labour markets and labour mobility, of training and the diffusion of technological knowledge, of product marketing, and at the comparative (dis)advantages of guilds over firms, to name only some of the more obvious topics covered by the recent literature.³ Social historians have been interested in the ways in which guilds shaped community life, professional identities, imposed social control, shaped age and gender roles.⁴ For none of these topics a survey with a particular geographical angle makes much sense. This changes once we give due weight to the first part of the definition, i.e. the public aspect of guilds.⁵ There are, moreover, several reasons to do this. Firstly, and most obviously, craft guilds could not do whatever they set out to do, without the official license from either local or national authorities. Secondly, guilds were often directly involved in local administration, as an integral part of local government. Thirdly, guilds were involved in the execution of policies of the local government: they might help to set prices for basic necessities, notably bread, they could help collect taxes, they were sometimes responsible for maintaining the ramparts, or providing men for local defence forces, they participated in fire fighting, and so on.

¹ For a discussion of definitions, see Bert De Munck, Piet Lourens and Jan Lucassen, 'The establishment and distribution of craft guilds in the Low Countries, 1000-1800', in: Maarten Prak, Catharina Lis, Jan Lucassen, Hugo Soly (eds), *Craft guilds in the early modern Low Countries: Work, power, and representation* (Aldershot, 2006), 32-73, esp. 67.

² The definition employed here consciously excludes merchant and shopkeepers guilds, as well as other guilds in the service sector (school teachers, grain carriers, and so on), whose organisations were in several important respects (training, market transparency) different from those considered in this paper.

³ These issues will be discussed at considerable length in S.R. Epstein, Maarten Prak (eds), *Guilds, innovation, and the European economy, 1400-1800* (forthcoming).

⁴ E.g. James R. Farr, *Hands of Honor: Artisans and their world in Dijon, 1550-1650* (Ithaca: Cornell UP, 1988); Steven Laurence Kaplan, *The bakers of Paris and the bread question* (Durham/London: Duke UP, 1996), esp. part II; Clare Haru Crowston, *Fabricating women: The seamstresses of Old Regime France, 1675-1791* (Durham/London: Duke UP, 2001), esp. part II.

⁵ See also Philippe Minard, 'Die Zünfte in Frankreich am Ende des 18. Jahrhunderts: Analyse ihrer Abschaffung', in: Heinz-Gerhardt Haupt (ed.), *Das Ende der Zünfte: ein europäischer Vergleich* (Göttingen: Vandenhoeck & Ruprecht, 2002) 181-195, esp. 188-91.

None of these roles were obviously economic, apart perhaps from the setting of prices but even these had an important public order aspect. I am not trying to suggest, of course, that guilds were political, rather than economic institutions. What this paper would like to underline, however, is that to understand the economic (or for that matter, social and cultural) role of guilds, we cannot refrain from analysing the way in which they were embedded in the institutional framework of local government. And in doing so, we should also consider what variations in guild structures resulted from the particular political contexts in which guilds were constituted and subsequently evolved.

Such an approach has been attempted before, and we need to clarify in what respects ours differs from these predecessors. We concentrate on two influential articles. In 1991 economists Charles R. Hickson and Earl A. Thompson published their 'new theory' of the role of guilds.⁶ They claimed that guilds had been created for primarily military purposes. Militarily, the guilds had a double function: they provided a pool of manpower, easy to access for the government, and they also constituted an administrative tool for raising taxes. The trouble with this interpretation is, that in many towns military manpower was recruited through a different channel, i.e. the civic militias, and that the majority of craft guilds had very little to do with the collection of taxes. In our argument, the involvement of the guilds in military recruitment or the collection of indirect taxes was a by-product, rather than the cause of guilds' involvement in the workings of government. Also in 1991, Swedish economist Bo Gustafsson proposed that guilds were political instruments to stabilise market conditions for craftsmen. Their emergence, according to Gustafsson, coincided with the revival of towns in post-Carolingian Europe, and hence with the revival of urban craft economies. The essential role of the guilds was to provide quality controls to encourage customers, who did not personally know the producer, to nonetheless purchase a product whose quality he was unable to gauge. The institutional affirmation of product quality was in the interest of merchants and customers, the resulting demand supported craftsmen's incomes, while an economically stable class of artisans provided the main source for government taxation. Hence, three parties had a major interest in the creation and survival of the guilds.⁷ We accept the general line of this argument, but would like to expand it, so as to include it into an approach that highlights more explicitly the political role played by guilds in many European towns. Guilds, in other words, are presented here first and foremost as part of the urban political framework, and more specifically its economic domain. An important economic function of the guilds' part of the framework was, obviously, the promotion of local industrial production. How guilds were able to achieve

⁶ Charles R. Hickson, Earl A. Thompson, 'A New Theory of Guilds and European Economic Development', *Explorations in Economic History* 28 (1991) 127-168.

⁷ Bo Gustafsson, 'The rise and economic behaviour of medieval craft guilds', in: Bo Gustafsson (ed.) *Power and Economic Institutions: Reinterpretations in Economic History* (Aldershot, 1991) 69-106, esp. 89.

this, was (partly) determined by the way guilds were set up, and the amount of autonomy they were granted by local, and indeed national, authorities.

1. *Origins of craft guilds*

The medieval creations of craft guilds seem to confirm the idea that their public, or perhaps rather civic, and economic roles were inseparable. There is debate about the inspiration for the guild organisational form. The Romans had guilds, which in several respects were very similar to the medieval craft guilds. The Roman *collegia*, also known as *corporation*, was a 'voluntary association of traders or employers devoted to a specific line of commerce or commodity production'. It usually had a hall for meetings, undertook religious activities, concentrating on a patron divinity. However, it did not regulate competition among its members, nor are there any signs of the regulation of apprenticeship.⁸ Roman ideas and legislation clearly helped shape medieval guilds, but continuities of organisation are impossible to pinpoint.⁹

The revival of the guilds in North-Western Europe is also very much related to the revival of urban life, from the eleventh century onwards. As Piet Lourens and Jan Lucassen have demonstrated in a string of articles, the development of towns and the creation of guilds were very closely related, at least in the Low Countries.¹⁰ In the earliest guild statutes, which date from the late eleventh and early twelfth centuries, three elements are particularly prominent. First of all, mutual protection and assistance. This was especially relevant for merchants, who were often the first to initiate professional organisations. Secondly, admissions and the behaviour expected from members, and thirdly the civic duties, which included the provision of poor relief to non-members of the urban community, and community services like the maintenance of streets and city walls.¹¹ Early guilds in England provided funerals, masses and memorial services for their members, and charity for both local paupers and the membership. They organized artisans, but also knights, or priests.¹² In France, early guilds, known as *corporations* in the South and *ghildes* (after the German) in the North, again organized a variety of groups for a variety of purposes. Only in the thirteenth century does the craft guild emerge as a particular sub-form, but still with more than just economic functions.¹³ In

⁸ Steven A. Epstein, *Wage Labor and Guilds in Medieval Europe* (Chapel Hill/London: University of North Carolina Press, 1991) 18-19; quote on p. 18.

⁹ The continuities are emphasized by Antony Black, *Guilds and Civil Society: European Political Thought from the Twelfth Century to the Present* (London: Methuen, 1984; reissued as *Guild and State* in 2003), ch. 1; Epstein, *Wage Labor*, 26, 33, 35 disputes the idea of continuity, as does Derek Keene, 'English urban guilds, c.900-1300: the purposes and politics of association', to be published in a volume edited by Ian Anders Gadd and Patrick Wallis; I wish to thank Derek Keene for providing me with a copy of the manuscript.

¹⁰ The most extensive report of their results is in De Munck, Lourens, Lucassen, 'The establishment and distribution'.

¹¹ Adriaan Verhulst, *The Rise of Cities in North-West Europe* (Cambridge, CUP, 1999) 124.

¹² Keene, 'English urban guilds'.

¹³ Émile Coornaert, *Les corporations en France avant 1789* (Paris: Les Éditions Ouvrières, 1968, 2nd ed.), part II.

other words, economic and civic elements were bundled in this one organisational form of the guild.

In some towns the civic militias were identical with the craft guilds, but elsewhere, starting in Flanders, the militias evolved in separate organisations, also called guilds; these 'shooting guilds' quickly spread into Northern France, the German territories and finally, in the sixteenth century, also into the British Isles.¹⁴ Religious confraternities were likewise organised as guilds, and in many cases the religious elements were in fact at least as, and perhaps even more important during the early stages of their existence, than the economic.¹⁵ Likewise, neighbourhoods used the guild-form to shape their organisations. Seventeenth-century Haarlem, in Holland, was sub-divided into 89 neighbourhoods, many of them consisting of one or two streets and a handful of alleys. These neighbourhoods had their own board, statutes, sources of income, and provided poor relief, social control and sociability. Ideally, the neighbours would once a year eat together, a festive occasion that could last several days. The members of the neighbourhood boards were known as *deken* and *vinders*, which were exactly the terms used by craft guilds for their board members.¹⁶

All these organisations, craft guilds or otherwise, had been founded through initiatives from either the members or the authorities. No clear-cut pattern has emerged so far. In some economic branches, such as provisioning, or the trade in precious metals, the importance of public regulation was self-evident from the point of view of the authorities. However, long-distance trade and black-smithing, where the public interest was less directly at stake, were probably among the earliest trades to be incorporated. Likewise, there is so far no clear pattern of the relations between guilds and public authorities. Craft guilds usually had a genuine autonomy, but they were always subject to some degree of government sanctioning. Their regulations were issued by either the sovereign or the local authorities, the members of the board were often appointed by the town government, from a list of names proposed by either the former board, or by the membership as a whole.

2. Organising the market

Craft guild regulations everywhere in Europe seem to have contained two standard elements: the exclusive right of the members to produce certain specified products, and arrangements for on-the-job training of new craftsmen. A host of other elements, concerning price regulation, the size of workshops, and quality controls, might be

¹⁴ Theo Reintges, *Ursprung und Wesen der spätmittelalterlichen Schützengilden* (Bonn: Rheinisches Archiv, 1963).

¹⁵ Gary Richardson, 'Christianity and Craft Guilds in Late Medieval England', *Rationality and Society* 17 (2005) 139-89.

¹⁶ Gabriëlle Dorren, *Het soet vergaren: Haarlems buurtleven in de zeventiende eeuw* (Haarlem: Arcadia, 1998)

included as well, but were not found in all regulations. Clauses on exclusivity and apprenticeship, however, were ubiquitous.¹⁷

In the past, the exclusivity clauses have been interpreted as the constitution of a monopoly. This argument goes back to Adam Smith, who in *The Wealth of Nations* opined that '[p]eople of the same trade seldom meet together, ... but the conversation ends in a conspiracy against the public'.¹⁸ Evidence is nonetheless accumulating that this picture is fundamentally wrong. Guilds turned out to be very 'flexible' in the ways they dealt with their so-called monopoly. Routinely, deals were made with non-members to allow them to participate in the trade, the enforcement of the 'monopoly' was unsystematic, and a 'monopoly' with hundreds of participants is hardly deserving of that name anyway.¹⁹ The great majority of craft guilds did not have a fixed number of members; anyone meeting the standards set down in the regulations and paying the necessary dues was accepted. It is therefore perhaps more helpful to see the exclusivity clause first and foremost as a monitoring instrument. This is not to deny the significance of economic exclusion as such, but that was merely one of the purposes of the creation of a circumscribed and identifiable group of producers.

Pre-industrial economies suffered from two important problems due to the small size of markets.²⁰ Producers had to make investment decisions under very insecure conditions. Customers, meanwhile, were unprotected by the law, and therefore faced challenging decisions when it came to spending their money. Guild regulations helped to overcome some of these anxieties and the ensuing risk of market failure, because they created a more transparent situation for both parties. Guilds, in other words, made an essential contribution to the reduction of transaction costs. On top of that, they provided local authorities with an instrument to exercise control over areas of interest to a larger group of people than merely the producers and their customers; think of the supply of basic food, and the control of the trade in precious metals.

The means to achieve this were mainly connected to the promotion of output quality. Two main instruments were available to guilds. The first and most significant was their role in the training of apprentices. As S.R. Epstein has argued persuasively, in the absence of state-sponsored education, guilds provided a framework for the transfer of skills from one generation of craftsmen to another. Guilds did not offer classes or even a

¹⁷ Much of the argument in this section has been inspired by and will be substantiated in Epstein, Prak (eds), *Guilds, innovation and the European economy*.

¹⁸ Adam Smith, *The Wealth of Nations*, book I, ch. X, part two (p. 232).

¹⁹ S.R. Epstein, 'Craft guilds, apprenticeship, and technological change in pre-industrial Europe', *Journal of economic history* 58 (1998) 684-713, esp. 690; Gary Richardson, 'A Tale of Two Theories: Monopolies and Craft Guilds in Medieval England and Modern Imagination', *Journal of History of Economic Thought* 23 (2001) 217-42.

²⁰ For this argument, see Gustafsson, 'Rise and economic behaviour', 81-94; Karl Gunnar Persson, *Pre-Industrial Economic Growth: Social Organization and Technological Progress in Europe* (Oxford: Blackwell, 1988) 50-54. The argument goes back to George A. Akerlof, 'The market for lemons: quality uncertainty and the market mechanism', *Quarterly Journal of Economics* 84 (1970) 488-500, reprinted in id., *An economic theorist's book of tales* (Cambridge: Cambridge UP, 1984) 7-22. Also Minard, 'Zünfte in Frankreich', 187.

curriculum—although some did that²¹—but rather an administrative framework for regulating and registering apprenticeship.²² This substantially reduced the opportunity costs of going through the training process, which was bound to take between two and seven years. In England the training period was regulated by law. The Statute of Artificers in 1563 laid down an unusually long period of seven years. In France and the Low Countries apprenticeship was regulated by guild statutes and these were notably shorter. In practice, however, it seems that on the continent four to five years was a normal period for a young man (or more rarely, a young woman) to acquire sufficient skills to set out on his (or her) own, depending, of course, on the type of craft.²³ Painters in the Dutch town of Haarlem were required to train four years, but in practice spent double that amount of time before they started to work independently.²⁴

In many craft guilds the membership application process included the production of one or several ‘master pieces’, to prove, to the satisfaction of the examiners of the guild, that the candidate had indeed mastered the craft and was therefore capable of producing to the standards of the profession. The outcome of this exam was not necessarily a foregone conclusion, as is demonstrated by the fate of one Matthijs van der Haage. Born in Nijmegen in 1721, Van der Haage was apprenticed as a barber in his home-town. In 1742 he moved to Amsterdam, after working as a barber with a military regiment. In Amsterdam he trained with a surgeon for four years. He married his master’s daughter, but failed the exam in December 1746. Only in August 1750, at the age of 28, did he manage to pass, and could he register as a licensed surgeon and member of the guild.²⁵

London guilds conducted regular inspections of their members’ workshops: the ‘search’. Whether these were aimed at the maintenance of quality standards, or merely meant to monitor the observance of guild regulation, on numbers of apprentices, or imports of products from outside the City, is however not exactly clear. We do know that in some guilds inferior products were actually destroyed by guild officials, but this had to do with the raw materials—notably precious metals—rather than the quality of the

²¹ Bert De Munck, ‘Le produit du talent ou la production de talent? La formation des artistes à l’Académie des beaux-arts à Anvers aux 17e et 18e siècles’, *Paedagogica historica* 37 (2001) 569-607.

²² Epstein, ‘Craft guilds’; on apprenticeship Brooks, ‘Apprenticeship, Social Mobility’; J. Lane, *Apprenticeship in England, 1600-1914* (London: UCL Press, 1996); I. Krausman-Ben Amos, *Adolescence and youth in early modern England* (New Haven: Yale UP, 1994); Smith, ‘London Apprentices’; Kaplan, ‘L’Apprentissage au XVIIIe siècle à Paris’, *Revue d’histoire moderne et contemporaine* 40 (1993) 436-97; Bert De Munck, *Leerpraktijken: Economische en social-culturele aspecten van beroepsopleidingen in Antwerpse ambachtsgilden, 16de-18de eeuw* (unpublished PhD thesis, Vrije Universiteit Brussel, 2002); id., ‘La reproduction d’une crise: l’Apprentissage des menuisiers et des charpentiers à Anvers (XVIe-XVIIIe siècle)’, in: G. Bodé (ed), *L’Histoire de la formation technique et professionnelle en Europe du 18e siècle au milieu du 20e siècle*, special issue of *Revue du Nord* (2003) 31-51.

²³ Kaplan, ‘L’apprentissage’, 450-51; Bibi Panhuysen, *Maatwerk: kleermakers, naaisters, oudkleerkopers en de gilden (1500-1800)* (Amsterdam: IISG, 2000) 140.

²⁴ Marion Goosens, *Schilders en de markt: Haarlem 1605-1635* (s.l. 2001) 85-86.

²⁵ I.H. van Eeghen, *De gilden: theorie en praktijk* (Bussum: Unieboek, 1974) 79-80.

handiwork.²⁶ In some crafts the guild officials attached a quality seal, after inspection of the final product. This seems to have happened particularly in export trades and helped brand that particular product on the world market.²⁷

Even in crafts where quality controls were notably absent, the mere existence of a guild was seen as an important means to promote market transparency. The market for paintings, first in sixteenth-century Brabant and subsequently in seventeenth-century Holland, was very dynamic and thoroughly commercialised.²⁸ The guilds of St. Luke in the Low Countries, which assembled the painters, illuminators, sculptors and other crafts in the visual arts, did not require a master piece from their members. Nor did they impose other forms of quality control.²⁹ However, artists' guilds did provide sales rooms, and other supervised outlets, where customers could compare quality and prices.³⁰ They insisted that restrictions on, and supervision of the concrete market helped protect customers against flawed works.³¹ And in case a customer was dissatisfied with an artist's work, or felt he had been charged too much, the guild offered mediation.³²

The mechanisms employed for these purposes differed from one guild to another, depending on a range of factors, including the type of industry, local customs, the balance of power between producers and merchants, and so on. It looks as if the existence as such of a guild, with its membership register and hence the possibility to identify and locate individual producers, already provided an important reassurance for customers and authorities. There are, however, so far preciously few indications for national patterns, distinguishing the approaches taken by guilds in the countries under review here.

²⁶ Michael Berlin, 'Broken all in pieces': Artisans and the Regulation of Workmanship in Early Modern London', in: Geoffrey Crossick (ed.), *The Artisan and the Early Modern Town* (Aldershot: Scolar Press); Patrick Wallis, 'Controlling commodities: Search and reconciliation in the early modern livery companies', in: Ian Anders Gadd, Patrick Wallis (eds), *Guilds, Society and Economy in London 1450-1800* (London: Centre for Metropolitan History, 2002) 85-100.

²⁷ Note that this could be done by non-guild institutions as well: C.A. Davids, 'Neringen, hallen en gilden: kapitalisten, kleine ondernemers en de stedelijke overhead in de tijd van de Republiek', in: id., W. Fritschy, L.A. van der Valk (eds), *Kapitaal, ondernemerschap en beleid: studies over economie en politiek in Nederland, Europa en Azië van 1500 tot heden* (Amsterdam: NEHA, 1996) 95-119.

²⁸ Filip Vermeylen, *Painting for the market: Commercialization of Art in Antwerp's Golden Age* Studies in European Urban History, vol. 2 (Turnhout: Brepols, 2003); Michael North, *Art and commerce in the Dutch Golden Age* (New Haven/London: Yale University Press, 1997).

²⁹ Katlijne Van der Stighelen, Filip Vermeylen, 'The Antwerp Guild of Saint Luke and the Marketing of Paintings, 1400-1700', in: Neil De Marchi, Hans J. Van Miegroet (eds), *Mapping Markets for Paintings in Europe, 1450-1750* Studies in European Urban History, vol. 6 (Turnhout: Brepols, 2006) 189-206, esp. 191; Maarten Prak, 'Guilds and the development of the art market during the Dutch Golden Age', in Epstein, Prak (eds), *Guilds, innovation, and the European economy* (forthcoming).

³⁰ Dan Ewing, 'Marketing Art in Antwerp, 1460-1560: Our Lady's Pand', *The Art Bulletin* 72 (1990)558-84; Vermeylen, *Painting*, ch. 1; Ed Romein, Gerbrand Korevaar, 'Dutch Guilds and the Threat of Sales', in: De Marchi, Van Miegroet (eds), *Mapping Markets*, 165-84.

³¹ Eric Jan Sluijter, 'Over Brabantse vodden, economische concurrentie artistieke wedijver en de groei van de markt voor schilderijen in de eerste decennia van de zeventiende eeuw', in: Reindert Falkenburg et al. (eds), *Kunst voor de markt/Art for the market, 1500-1700* Nederlands Kunsthistorisch Jaarboek vol. 50 (1999) 113-43, esp. 119-20.

³² Prak, 'Guilds and the development of the art market'; Ed Romein, Gerbrand Korevaar, 'Dutch guilds and the threat of public sales', in: Neil De Marchi, Hans Van Miegroet (eds), *Mapping markets for paintings in Europe, 1450-1750* Studies in European Urban History vol. 6 (Turnhout: Brepols, 2006) 165-84.

3. *Guilds and politics*

It has been suggested that in Flanders the craft guilds really came into their own after the Battle of the Spurs in 1302. This celebrated victory of Flemish craftsmen over a feudal army ignited a whole series of political transformations, which gave craft guilds a direct say in local politics. It is precisely because they were now inscribed into the political process, and indeed local constitutions, that the organisations of the craftsmen had to be brought on a more secure footing, according to C. Wyffels.³³ These revolts, sometimes called 'guild revolutions', had an impact throughout much of the Low Countries. In Utrecht, for example, the largest city in the north, the guilds effectively took over the local government in 1304, insofar as members of that government were elected by the deans of the town's 21 enfranchised guilds.³⁴ The same happened in most Flemish and Brabantine towns, where local governments were either composed of three members, one of which would be the guild deans, or alternatively, as in Antwerp, a Broad Council, with guild representatives, to which the executive was accountable. Although guild representation was regularly under threat, most notably during the reign of Charles V, and doubts have been raised over the extent of genuine representation of the artisan community, it is a fact that in most towns of the Southern Netherlands until the end of the Old Regime guilds were directly involved in local government.

In the Northern Netherlands, Utrecht proved to be more or less an exception. In 1528 Charles V forced even the Utrecht guilds to abandon politics. In the western areas of the Dutch Republic, local government was cooptive and generally dominated by merchant elites, later by more or less professional administrators. In the eastern provinces local government was accountable to broad councils, representing the citizen community, but these were normally recruited through the wards, rather than corporative institutions.

This is not to say that the guilds were completely excluded from the political domain in these regions. Detailed investigations have uncovered a pattern of regular consultations of guilds and other civic institutions. In Amsterdam, for instance, bylaws concerning the local economy were generally initiated by guilds, and their phrasing was often copied verbatim from proposals in guild petitions.³⁵ The fact, however, that guilds were not formally part of the decision-making process, made them dependent on the

³³ C. Wyffels, *De oorsprong der ambachten in Vlaanderen en Brabant* Verhandelingen van de Koninklijke Vlaamse Academie voor Wetenschappen, Letteren en Schone Kunsten van België, Klasse der Letteren, vol. 13 (Brussels: Koninklijke Vlaamse Academie voor Wetenschappen, Letteren en Schone Kunsten van België, 1951)

³⁴ The following paragraphs are a summary of Maarten Prak, 'Corporate politics in the Low Countries: guilds as institutions, 14th-18th centuries', in: Prak, Lis, Lucassen and Soly (eds), *Craft guilds*, 74-106.

³⁵ H.F.K. van Nierop, 'Popular participation in politics in the Dutch Republic', in: P. Blicke (ed.), *Resistance, representation, and Community* (Oxford: Oxford UP, 1997) 272-90; on guild petitions, Maarten Prak, 'Individual, corporatism, and society: The rhetoric of Dutch guilds (18th century)', in: Marc Boone, Maarten Prak (eds), *Statuts individuals, statuts corporatifs et statuts judiciaires dans les villes européennes (moyen âge et temps modernes)* Leuven/Apeldoorn: Garant, 1996) 255-279.

willingness of the elites to listen, whilst in the Southern Netherlands they could (and did) help shape political decisions from a position of constitutional strength.³⁶

London freemen, who were also by definition members of a craft guild, were directly involved in local politics, through their wards and companies. The government of the City of London consisted of the Lord Mayor, elected annually, and the Court of Aldermen, consisting of 26 members chosen for life as representatives of the wards of the city. The city's executive was assisted by a legislature of no less than 234 representatives of the wards, called Common Council and elected annually. The Lord Mayor was elected from the ranks of the aldermen, by the aldermen, but they were limited to a nomination of two names selected in Common Hall, the electoral assembly of the liverymen of the City.³⁷ As the upper tier of the guilds, the livery companies were, next to the wards, the most important civic institutions in London.³⁸ Around 1700 the City numbered an estimated 8,000 liverymen, who were the most zealous guardians of the historic liberties of the London citizenry.³⁹ Besides nominating the Lord Mayor, the liverymen elected, in Common Hall, the sheriffs and other high officials of the Corporation, as well as the City's representatives in Parliament. The lower ranks of the guilds, who were all ordinary freemen of the City of London, together with the liverymen, were entitled to elect the members of Common Council during the so-called wardmotes, district meetings that took place annually on St. Thomas's Day.⁴⁰ In most other English towns, artisans participated in local, and indeed national, politics as members of the electorate, but not necessarily through their guilds.

In France, artisans may have participated in the political process, but guilds were only marginally represented, as two well-studied examples, Nantes and Angers, demonstrate. In seventeenth-century Nantes the general population was politically involved through elections and consultations.⁴¹ Before 1598, Nantes was entirely autonomous in the selection of its *corps de ville*. After 1598, the outcome of the elections was however subject to royal approval. The elections concerned first and foremost the mayor and aldermen. On the 30th of April the electoral meeting took place in the Grand Salle of the Nantes town hall. To these meetings were invited the members of the 'grand corps', including royal officers, the former mayors and aldermen of the town, who together

³⁶ Karin Van Honacker, *Lokaal verzet en oproer in de 17de en 18de eeuw: Collectieve acties tegen het centraal gezag in Brussel, Antwerpen en Leuven* Standen en Landen vol. 98 (Kortrijk/Heule: UGA, 1994); Catharina Lis, Hugo Soly, 'Export industries, craft guilds and capitalist trajectories', in: Prak, Lis, Lucassen and Soly (eds), *Craft guilds*, 107-32, esp. 113-14, 124-28.

³⁷ Gary Stuart de Krey, *A fractured society: the Politics of London in the First Age of Party 1688-1715* (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1985) 10.

³⁸ On London guilds: Gadd, Wallis (eds), *Guilds, Society and Economy in London*.

³⁹ De Krey, *Fractured society*, 40.

⁴⁰ De Krey, *Fractured society*, 40-41.

⁴¹ The following is a summary of Guy Saupin, *Nantes au XVII^e siècle: vie politique et société urbaine* (Rennes: presses Universitaires de Rennes, 1996), ch's 3 and 4.

constituted the Grand Bureau, as well as the representatives of urban institutions and private citizens.⁴²

The urban community was not necessarily a minority participant in these proceedings. On the contrary, a list from 1685 gives 450 names, but `plusieurs autres bourgeois et habitants' had been present. Of the 450 who are listed by name, 131 were referred to as `bourgeois', while 88 were `marchands' and 121 had some sort of artisanal occupation.⁴³ During the Wars of Religion the records of the municipality are full of references to `assemblées générales', in which the officers of the civic militias were prominent participants, but which were also attended by individual inhabitants of the city. In 1589 there was an attempt to limit the participation of individuals and thus terminate what was called the `confusion' of these meetings, but they continued well into the seventeenth century.⁴⁴ Apart from such general *assemblées*, there were also consultative meetings between the *corps de ville* and representatives of various corporative interests, especially the civic militias and the craft guilds. In the course of the seventeenth century the *assemblées générales* dwindled, while the Grand Bureau became more influential. Especially after 1691 the meetings of the Grand Bureau with representatives of either militias, or parishes, or indeed craft guilds became the standard procedure for consultation of the community. The main topic (almost half the meetings were discussing this) was now the preservation and maintenance of local privileges. This does seem to confirm that royal policies became more threatening, while it at the same time suggests that the reaction in Nantes was a re-articulation of the city's corporative structures.

In Angers the situation was not dissimilar from that in Nantes.⁴⁵ As in Nantes, citizens were involved in two distinct ways in local politics: annual elections, and regular consultations. The electoral meeting was dominated, at least numerically, by the two representatives that each of the sixteen parishes of Angers could delegate. In the aftermath of the Fronde municipal officials were appointed by the Crown, but the election procedures were restored again in 1661. Although the mayor was officially elected, his name had already been selected in advance by the governor. For the other offices the Crown also had the final say, but it was supposed to stick to the list of nominees produced by the electoral meetings. Besides the annual electoral meetings on May 1st, there were regular consultations of the parish representatives in *assemblées générales*.

⁴² A proposal from 1715, designed to delimit participation in the elections, lists the following component parts of the electoral meetings: `Les juges, avocats et procureurs participants dans la justice royale dans la ville, les juges consuls des marchands, les titres universitaires, les officiers des milices bourgeoises, les six avocats les plus anciennes, les six procureurs du Chambre des comptes, les six notaires les plus anciennes, les représentants des paroises de la ville, le doyen et deux plus anciennes marchands en soie, les *doyens des corporations*': Saupin, *Nantes*, 96 (emphasis added).

⁴³ Saupin, *Nantes*, 86-87.

⁴⁴ Saupin, *Nantes*, 110 (quote).

⁴⁵ This section summarises information from Jacques Maillard, *Le pouvoir municipal à Angers de 1657 à 1789* (Angers, Presse de l'université à Angers, 1984)

Of these, 338 took place between 1657 and 1789, about three on average each year.⁴⁶ Behind these general meetings lurked countless meetings of the inhabitants of individual parishes in Angers. These meetings were sometimes even attended by servants (‘domestiques’) and normally dominated by merchants and artisans. Among the parish deputies to the general meetings the merchants were most numerous (29.8 per cent), followed by the ‘bourgeois’ (17 per cent) and artisans (12.3 per cent).⁴⁷ Parish meetings were officially announced from the pulpit by the parish priest. The general assemblies discussed royal taxation, the preservation of local privileges, as well as day-to-day issues, related to poor relief, health care, public works, and so on. Guilds, however, had no role whatsoever in these proceedings.

It can thus be argued that craftsmen, individually or with the help of their guilds, were regularly involved in local politics, and in some towns even directly represented on the town council, or able to help determine the council’s composition through their participation in its election. The guilds’ political influence was thus closely related to the fate of the towns themselves. In this respect the contrasts between our regions are much more marked than in local politics as such. Large and powerful though it was, the City of London was also closely monitored by the court and would become easily mixed up in the national political struggles. During the Civil War the City had supported the Parliamentary side that was expected to respect the City’s political independence. During the early 1680’s the City once again experienced the heavy hand of royal interference. In an attempt to reduce the City’s autonomy, the King revoked the charter and in effect terminated the functioning of the city’s representative institutions. A Tory-dominated aldermanic bench, now including several crown-appointed members, became all-powerful. Common Council stopped meeting for several years, and as a result magistrates were appointed, instead of elected.⁴⁸ All of this created great dissatisfaction in the City, which goes a long way to explaining its support for the Glorious Revolution in 1689.

In France, interference by central government was in evidence since at least the late sixteenth century. Before the Wars of Religion, the Crown and the *bonnes villes* of France had cooperated amicably. In the late sixteenth century this collaboration broke down, due to the general political turmoil, aggravated by a general crisis of urban finances.⁴⁹ The towns saw their privileges regularly annulled by the crown, and were then

⁴⁶ Maillard, *Pouvoir*, 86.

⁴⁷ Maillard, *Pouvoir*, 96.

⁴⁸ De Krey, *Fractured society*, 12-15.

⁴⁹ Bernard Chevalier, *Les bonnes villes de France du XIVe au XVIe siècle* (Paris: Aubier, 1982) 106-12; id., ‘Fiscalité municipale et fiscalité d’état en France du XIVe à la fin du XVIIIe siècle: deux systèmes liés et concurrents’, in: J.-Ph. Genet, M. le Mené (eds), *Genèse de l’état moderne: Prélèvement et redistribution* (Paris: Éditions du CNRS, 1987) 137-51, esp. 149-51.

forced to have them revived against substantial payments to the Treasury.⁵⁰ As far as the guilds were concerned, this process was already visible in the attempts, in 1581, to impose a similar format on all guilds throughout the realm. This attempt came to nought, but was followed by another, in 1597, and more national legislation in the course of the seventeenth century.⁵¹ This process reached its apogee in February 1776, when Controller-General Turgot abolished the guilds altogether. After an initial panic it became clear that guilds would be allowed to survive after all, but only when the members were willing to fork out the inevitable, and again substantial, contributions to the Crown.⁵² In France, as well as in England, the guilds' political fragility was not so much a result of their position in local politics, which could be remarkably strong, but due to the overall weakness of urban autonomy vis-à-vis the Crown. In the Low Countries, where central government was in a much weaker position, guilds could fully exploit their political positions, where these existed.⁵³

4. *Mainstay of the community*

The close institutional connection between guild and town was everywhere underlined by the requirement that the member of the guild should also be a citizen of the town. In other words, membership of the guild implied membership of the urban community, or the other way around. In London that connection was almost symbiotic. The charter of 1319, in effect the City's constitution, stated that all inhabitants admitted to the freedom 'shall be of some mystery or trade', in other words members of a guild. Every man joining the ranks of the guild would, either on the same day or shortly afterwards, accompanied by a warden of his company, go to Guildhall to be sworn in as freeman.⁵⁴ In medieval Utrecht all citizens were required to join a guild, likewise in the city of Bois-le-Duc ('s-Hertogenbosch).⁵⁵ In seventeenth-century Amsterdam only citizens could exercise the 'burgher trades', i.e. incorporated crafts.⁵⁶ This was a rule that applied everywhere in the Low Countries.

⁵⁰ Nora Temple, 'The control and exploitation of French towns during the Ancien Régime', *History* 51 (1966) 16-34.

⁵¹ Coornaert, *Les corporations en France*, 126-33, 138-43.

⁵² Steven Laurence Kaplan, 'Social Classification and Representation in the Corporate World of Eighteenth-Century France: "Turgot's Carnival"', in: id. And Cynthia J. Koepp (eds), *Work in France: Representations, Meaning, Organization, and Practice* (Ithaca/London: Cornell University Press, 1986) 176-228, esp. 207, 212-14.

⁵³ See Catharina Lis, Hugo Soly, 'Export industries, craft guilds and capitalist trajectories, 13th to 18th centuries', in Prak, Lis, Lucassen, and Soly (eds), *Craft guilds*, 107-132.

⁵⁴ Steve Rappaport, *Worlds within worlds: structures of life in sixteenth-century London* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1989) 23-24, 31 (quote), 35.

⁵⁵ J.C. Overvoorde, J.G.Ch. Joosting (eds), *De gilden van Utrecht tot 1528: Verzameling van rechtsbronnen* (The Hague: Nijhoff), vol. 1, no. 8; N.H.L. van den Heuvel, *De ambachtsgilden van 's-Hertogenbosch vóór 1629* (Utrecht: Kemink, 1946) 306 and id., *De ambachtsgilden van 's-Hertogenbosch vóór 1629: rechtsbronnen van het bedrijfsleven en het gildewezen* (Utrecht: Kemink, 1946), nos B31 and B95.

⁵⁶ Maarten Prak, 'Cittadini, abitanti e forestieri: una classificazione della popolazione di Amsterdam nella prima età moderna', *Quaderni Storici* 30 (1995) 331-57, esp. 339-40.

Guilds were involved in a host of community services, both related and unrelated to their specific trades. The guilds of Bois-le-Duc, for instance, participated in fire-fighting, and also required to supply buckets and ladders for the purpose, all specified in great detail in the local Fire-fighting Ordinance of 1703.⁵⁷ In Dordrecht, in Holland, guilds provided assistance to members who were either ill, or old-aged, or simply poor, as well as taking care of the burial of members and their spouses and children if they could not afford the costs themselves. Many Dordrecht guilds maintained their own vaults in the town's main church.⁵⁸ Social assistance was the most prominent community service provided by guilds. In the eighteenth century the guilds themselves, especially in the Low Countries, underlined this as an important contribution to society as a whole. Two aspects were highlighted: through a system of mutual insurance guild members did not require public assistance and thus saved the community money, the amounts of which remained unspecified but it was suggested that this must be substantial.⁵⁹ On top of that, the guilds were sharing their resources with the general poor, in other words, people outside the craft.⁶⁰

Smaller conflicts, not necessarily limited to trade disputes, might also be settled by craft guilds. In early modern Antwerp, the guilds thus acted as courts of the first instance for the regulation of economic issues.⁶¹ In sixteenth and seventeenth century London all kinds of conflicts, including family disputes, were mediated and also formally settled by guild officials.⁶² Finally, craft guilds were in some towns the mainstay of the local defence organisation. In medieval Utrecht, for instance, the civic militias were recruited from the ranks of the craft guilds, and the town's defence works were maintained by the guilds, which were each responsible for the repairs of a specific section of the ramparts.⁶³

Corporate ideology underlined the close connection between the fate of the guilds, its members and urban society as a whole. In eighteenth-century Amsterdam, guild petitions portrayed the membership as loyal citizens, who paid their taxes regularly and moreover provided community services, for instance in the civic militias. The fact that they paid higher tax rates than rural folk, as well as the registration fees and annual dues for guild membership, entitled them to special protection by the local government against outside competitors, or so they claimed. Guild members, as established citizens, were portrayed in these petitions as the backbone of society. As owners of a house in town

⁵⁷ Prak, *Republikeinse veelheid*, 11.

⁵⁸ Eric Palmen, 'De gilden en hun sociale betekenis', in: Willem Frijhoff, Hubert Nusteling, Marijke Spes (eds), *Geschiedenis van Dordrecht van 1572 tot 1813* (Hilversum: Verloren, 1998) 220-233.

⁵⁹ C. Wiskerke, *De afschaffing der gilden in Nederland* (Amsterdam: H.J. Paris, 1938), 128; Sandra Bos, && Joost van Genabeek &&.

⁶⁰ See for instance Ian W. Archer, 'The Livery Companies and Charity in the Sixteenth and Seventeenth Centuries', in: Gadd, Wallis (eds), *Guilds, Society and Economy in London*, 15-28.

⁶¹ Harald Deceulaer, 'Guilds and litigation: conflict settlement in Antwerp (1585-1796)', in: Boone, Prak (eds), *Statuts individuels*, 171-208.

⁶² Rappaport, *Worlds within worlds*, 201-213.

⁶³ Overvoorde, Joosting, *De gilden van Utrecht*, vol. 1, nr. 65.

they were identifiable as honourable citizens, contrary to itinerant producers and tradesmen—Jews were singled out—who would have left by the time their customers found out that they had been cheated.⁶⁴

Such arguments were part and parcel of what Jonathan Barry has called the ‘bourgeois collectivism’ typical of the age. Rather than individualistic, the middle classes favoured collective solutions to their problems. They were embedded in a range of institutions, of which the guilds were only one type.⁶⁵ This reflex is clearly visible in the protests against Turgot’s abolition of the guilds in 1776. These also emphasised the collective institutional structures, which created transparency and protection against cheaters. The liberty that Turgot wanted to introduce was bound to create a society of individuals, motivated by ‘the thirst for profit’, and who could only be kept in check by ‘archers, gallows, and executioners’. The guilds instead offered self-regulation within a hierarchy of orders, where everyone had their place. Freedom, in this argument, was knowing one’s place: ‘What police force could be gentler than that of the guilds?’, asked a petition by the Parliament of Paris in support of the guilds. Their abolition would create a world of *faux-bourgs*, i.e. unregulated neighbourhoods, where *faux-ouvriers*, i.e. ‘false’ or unsupervised workers, would come to dominate the market.⁶⁶ This expectation is clearly reflected in a similar prediction, twenty years later, in Amsterdam, where it was said that the abolition of the guilds (in the wake of the French Revolution) would turn towns into villages and villages into towns.⁶⁷

Both in the ideology and the practices of craft guilds, their specific economic responsibilities and their more general contributions to life of the town’s community were completely intertwined. These were mutually reinforcing. It seems, therefore, unrealistic to disentangle the two, with the purpose of isolating the specific economic aspects of guild roles. This is, of course, not to deny that these economic roles were of the utmost importance. After all, a shared economic interest of its membership was the very basis of craft guild organisation.

5. Geographical scope

The activities of craft guilds in North-Western Europe had a spatial dimension, as their privileges tied them to a specific location, usually a town. The statutes also defined the area where the guilds’ regulations applied. This was obviously the town where the guild had been established, but this was not a self-evident entity when towns expanded.

⁶⁴ Maarten Prak, ‘Individual, corporation and society: the rhetoric of Dutch guilds (18th. C.)’, in: Boone, Prak (eds), *Statuts individuels*, 255-79, esp. 261-64.

⁶⁵ Jonathan Barry, ‘Bourgeois Collectivism? Urban Associations and the Middling Sort’, in: id. And Christopher Brooks (eds), *The Middling Sort of People: Culture, Society and Politics in England, 1550-1800* (Basingstoke: Macmillan, 1994) 84-112; see also Barry, ‘Identité urbaine et classes moyennes dans l’Angleterre moderne’, *Annales ESC* 48 (1993) 853-83, and Barry, ‘I significati della libertà: la libertà urbana nell’Inghilterra del XVII et XVIII secolo’, *Quaderni Storici* 30 (1995) 487-513.

⁶⁶ Kaplan, ‘Social Classification’, 191, 192 (quote), 193 (quote), 195 (quote).

⁶⁷ Prak, ‘Individual’, 276.

Amsterdam's town perimeter expanded with the number of inhabitants, but the London City remained stable in size while the suburbs grew, and in Paris too the suburbs, the *faubourgs*, or 'false neighbourhoods', became increasingly important as a location for industrial activities. Whereas the Parisian guilds found it increasingly difficult to control the economic activities in those suburbs, the London guilds were capable of remaining in control of industrial activities there.⁶⁸ Some London guilds, such as the Goldsmiths, Pewterers, Stationers, and Framework Knitters companies, were actually chartered to supervise all of the country, and enforce standards throughout the realm.⁶⁹

6. *The end of the craft guilds*

It has been standard fare of the guilds' image that their decline and termination was caused by economic factors. It is now more or less generally accepted that this interpretation is a mere reproduction of late eighteenth-century criticisms of the guilds, rather than a correct picture of what happened historically. On the continent at least, political rather than economic factors were the root cause of the disappearance of the guilds.⁷⁰

In France, the abolishment of the guilds was part of the overhaul of the state's structure, and more specifically of the abolishment of privileges generally. Turgot's 1776 attempt to abolish the French guilds may have been a genuine attempt at reform, it nonetheless quickly degenerated into one more effort to raise revenue, or was at least perceived as such; 'un vrai travail de finances' as one contemporary called it.⁷¹ The revival of the system, albeit in reformed shape, boiled down to a loss of local autonomy and a steady stream of revenue, from the admission fees, for the Treasury.⁷² The post-revolutionary government continued in the same vein. Significantly, the *loi d'Allarde* justified the second, and final, abolition of the French guilds in 1791 in a language borrowed directly from Turgot's 1776 decree.⁷³ As the Austrian Netherlands were annexed by France in 1795, French law, and by implication France's abolition of the guilds, came into effect there as well.

In the Dutch Republic similar criticisms had been raised, but by individuals rather than institutions.⁷⁴ There was no general debate among the Dutch about the usefulness of the guilds, and during the Patriot Revolt of the 1780s the aim of the Patriots was, if anything, to reinforce rather than to weaken the corporative structures of Dutch society

⁶⁸ S.L. Kaplan, 'Les corporations, les "faux-ouvriers" et le faubourg Saint-Antoine au XVIIIe siècle', *Annales ESC* 43 (1988) 453-78; Joseph P. Ward, *Metropolitan Communities: Trade guilds, identity, and change in early modern London* (Stanford: Stanford UP, 1997).

⁶⁹ Ian Anders Gadd, Patrick Wallis, 'Reaching beyond the city wall: London guilds and national regulation, 1500-1700', in: Epstein, Prak (eds), *Guilds, innovation and the European economy* (forthcoming).

⁷⁰ See also the papers collected in Haupt (ed), *Das Ende der Zünfte*.

⁷¹ Kaplan, *La fin des corporations*, 111.

⁷² *Ibid.*, 238.

⁷³ *Ibid.*, 501-02.

⁷⁴ Karel Davids, 'From De la Court to Vreede. Regulation and self-regulation in Dutch economic discourse between 1660 and the Napoleonic Era', *The Journal of European Economic History* 30 (2001) 245-289.

and hence the position of the guilds.⁷⁵ The guilds, therefore, were in many towns active participants in the Patriot movement. After the French invasion of 1794-95, the first attempts to abolish the guilds were very much inspired by the French, and ideologically motivated.⁷⁶ As in France, however, the guilds and their supporters mounted serious resistance. The real abolition only followed in the wake of the introduction of a system of national taxation. Uniform tax rates presupposed uniform access to the market, according to the government.⁷⁷

In England the situation was very different, of course. The standard story wants us to believe that craft guilds started to decline in England, and then died a more or less natural death, from the late seventeenth century onwards. This, however, is only part of the story. It conflicts, for instance, with the fact that the London Livery Companies are alive and well even today. London currently has no fewer than 112 guilds and livery companies, 78 of them dating back to the early modern period and to the middle ages.⁷⁸ The fact that new companies have been established even in the twentieth century, only testifies to their continued relevance. Quite a few of these companies may now be mainly providing an opportunity to meet people from the same walks of life, others however continue to function much as before. The London Vintners, to name but one example, on their website claim that 'the Company continues to exercise its medieval rights of licensing, through the Vintners' Privilege and search and oversight through the Wine Standards Board'. The Vintners Company has also been 'instrumental in setting up both the Wine and Spirit Education Trust, and the Institute of Masters of Wine, [and] the Company devotes a proportion of its resources to furthering wine education'.⁷⁹ The London Goldsmiths continue to offer apprenticeship schemes, which should culminate in a master piece, which then provides the apprentice with the title of Master in the trade. The Goldsmiths' Company also offers the public the opportunity to have their silverware assayed.⁸⁰ Both companies, in other words, continue to exercise the two fundamental economic roles of the guilds: education and quality control. There is little doubt that guilds in the eighteenth century found it more difficult to exercise their privileges, but the process was far from uniform. The reasons for it are, moreover, still poorly understood. There was no massive reaction against the guilds, and the Industrial Revolution can hardly be taken seriously as the major force behind this process as long as there is no

⁷⁵ Maarten Prak, 'Citizen radicalism and democracy in the Dutch Republic: The Patriot movement of the 1780s', *Theory and Society* 20 (1991) 73-102..

⁷⁶ Wiskerke, *Afschaffing*, 90, 96, 121.

⁷⁷ M.G. de Boer, 'De ondergang der Amsterdamsche gilden', *Tijdschrift voor Geschiedenis* 47 (1932) 129-149 and 225-245, esp. 226-237.

⁷⁸ According to the information provided by John Kennedy Melling, *Discovering London's Guilds and Liveries* (Princes Risborough: Shire Books, 2003).

⁷⁹ See the pages 'Wine Trade' and 'The Company Today' at www.vintnershall.co.uk (visited on 30 August 2006). It has to be added the right of search was in this case not medieval, as the Company received its statutes only in 1611.

⁸⁰ See pages 'Technology and Training / Trade Training and Development' and 'Assay Office London' at www.thegoldsmiths.co.uk (visited on 30 August 2006).

serious evidence demonstrating that the decline of the guilds happened primarily in either regions or industrial branches first affected by the Industrial Revolution.⁸¹ From the perspective of this paper it is tempting to blame the impact of state centralisation and more specifically the increased control of the government over taxation and its collection,⁸² which in the Netherlands provided a very strong argument to abolish the guilds, but for the time being this must remain entirely speculative. What we can observe, however, is that the absence of a Napoleonic reform in Great Britain did allow English guilds to continue after 1800, not merely as friendly societies but as proper guilds, whereas in continental north-western Europe this had become impossible.

Conclusion

It would be wrong to suggest that any of the above functions could be performed only by craft guilds.⁸³ Indeed, alternative institutions, such as neighbourhood institutions and civic militias, performed some of the same civic functions as guilds. It was, perhaps, no coincidence that these institutions often employed the same organizational format as the guilds. Guilds were a well-known form to combine a number of different economic and public functions in urban societies.⁸⁴ Craft guilds were thus merely plugging into an institutional form that was available to medieval Europeans. Setting up an organisation along lines that had already been established and proved themselves to be workable, was obviously cheaper than inventing a completely novel form. The adaptability of the guild as an institutional form may also be one of the reasons for the longevity of craft guilds.

Craft guilds were political as well as economic institutions. As such they performed roles that reflected on the one hand their connection to the local civic community. This included political representation, fire fighting, poor relief, conflict settlement, and local defence. On the other hand, they performed crucial economic functions, most notably the transfer of skills across generations, and the improvement of market transparency. In other words, craft guilds produced, in a collective setting, a combination of public and private goods. The mixture of these two has contributed significantly to the longevity of the guilds as institutions. It has also made it more difficult to pinpoint the 'ultimate' goal of the guilds, if such a thing could ever be said to exist. This has, in turn, encouraged historians to recently underline the 'flexibility' of the guilds.

⁸¹ On the decline of English guilds, see Michael Berlin, 'Guilds in decline', in Epstein, Prak (eds), *Guilds, innovation, and the European economy* (forthcoming).

⁸² See John Brewer, *The sinews of power: War, Money and the English state, 1688-1783* (London: Unwin Hyman, 1989).

⁸³ For a sophisticated consideration of alternative economic forms of organisation, see Ulrich Pfister, 'Craft guilds, the theory of the firm and early modern proto/industry', in Epstein, Prak (eds), *Guilds, innovation, and the European economy* (forthcoming).

⁸⁴ E.g. Gervase Rosser, 'Crafts, guilds and the negotiation of work in the medieval town', *Past and Present* 154 (1997) 3-31, esp. 10-13; Keene, 'English urban guilds'.

There was no single aspect that set the craft guilds of France, England or the Low Countries apart from those in other European regions. Intra-regional comparisons hint at variations which, again, seem to be political rather than economic, but generalisations can easily gloss over the remarkable differences within countries, by overstating 'national' differences. The preceding pages do, however, seem to suggest a pattern. Politically, the four countries discussed in this paper show roughly four patterns. In London, guild representation in a situation of limited urban autonomy permitted the London guilds to take control of a significant section of the national crafts economy. In Paris, and other French towns, the combination of a lack of local guild representation and limited urban autonomy seriously restricted the scope of guild activity. In Flanders and Brabant, where guilds were politically represented and towns were autonomous, the combination formed the basis for an urban industrialisation, long before the Industrial Revolution, as Catharina Lis and Hugo Soly have argued. In the Dutch Republic, on the other hand, where towns were autonomous but guilds not represented, the industrial element was subservient to commercial interests.