

Women, Gender, and Guilds in Early Modern Europe: An Overview of Recent Research

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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 taking 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 mention women, except with regard to their statutory rights as widows, wives, and daughters of masters.¹ Maurice

1. Classic studies of French guilds include Emile Levasseur, *Histoire des classes ouvrières et de l'industrie en France avant 1789*, 2 vols (1901; Geneva [etc.], 1981); Emile Coornaert, *Les corporations en France avant 1789* (Paris, 1941); François Olivier-Martin, *L'Organisation corporative de la France d'Ancien Régime* (Paris, 1938); Etienne Martin-Saint-Léon, *Histoire des corporations de métier* (1909; Paris, 1922). In a recent book, Hilda Smith reviews classic works on English guilds from the 1880s to 1930s and finds that 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, PA, 2002), p. 85. On German guilds, see Jürgen Bergmann, *Das Berliner Handwerk in der Frühphase der Industrialisierung* (Berlin, 1973), and for the Low Countries the classic works include Jan ter Gouw, *De gilden. Eene bijdrage tot de geschiedenis van het volksleven* (Rotterdam, 1866), A.J.M. Brouwer Ancher, *De Gilden* (The Hague, 1895), P.J. Blok, *De Amsterdamsche gilden* (1895), G. Des Marez, *L'organisation du travail à Bruxelles au XV^e siècle* (Brussels, 1904), as well as the recent

Garden summed up the classic historiography on French guilds in a 1986 article: “The hierarchy of work was a hierarchy inherited from the 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 studies.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.

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

collection by Maarten Prak *et al.* (eds), *Craft Guilds in the Early Modern Low Countries: Work, Power, and Representation* (Aldershot, 2006).

2. Maurice Garden, “The Urban Trades: Social Analysis and Representation”, in Steven L. Kaplan and Cynthia Koepf (eds), *Work in France: Representations, Meaning, Organization and Practice* (Ithaca, NY [etc.], 1986).

3. *Idem*, *Lyons et les lyonnais au XVIIIe siècle* (Paris, 1986). Garden notes the importance of female workers in the silk industry. See, for example, Steve Epstein, *Wage Labor and Guilds in Medieval Europe* (Chapel Hill, NC, 1991), and Steven Kaplan, *The Bakers of Paris and the Bread Question 1700–1775* (Durham, NC, 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, 1982), p. 196.

test Clark's hypothesis.⁵ These historians, mostly from 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 that 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 that 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 wageworkers. 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 such as Merry Wiesner and Cynthia Truant focused on perceptions of masculinity.⁷ They argued that concerns for masculinity pushed journeymen in 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

5. See, for example, Barbara Hanawalt (ed.), *Women and Work in Preindustrial Europe* (Bloomington, IN, 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*, 14 (1988), pp. 223–228; Judith M. Bennett, "History that Stands Still: Women's Work in the European Past", *Feminist Studies*, 14 (1988), pp. 269–283; and Maryanne Kowaleski and Judith M. Bennett, "Crafts, Guilds, and Women in the Middle Ages: Fifty Years after Marian K. Dale", *Signs*, 14 (1989), pp. 474–487.

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

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 centuries.

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. We 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 labor markets of south German cities from 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 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,

8. This paper suffers by 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.

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.

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 European 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 labor. Small commodity production – which she identified as an alternate, usually prior, form of production – also restricted women’s economic activity. Howell concluded that women participated only 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 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 Ogilvie. In response to recent enthusiasm – among historians and international development agencies – for social networks and social capital, Ogilvie 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 “quality and reliability of the

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

10. Martha Howell, “Women, the Family Economy, and the Structures of Market Production in Cities of Northern Europe during the Late Middle Ages”, in Hanawalt, *Women and Work in Preindustrial Europe*, p. 201. See also Martha Howell, *Production and Patriarchy in Late Medieval Cities* (Chicago, IL [etc.], 1986).

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 Ogilvie, 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 limit 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.

Ogilvie 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 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, Ogilvie 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.¹⁴ 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,¹⁵ Spain,¹⁶ and Italy.¹⁷ In her introduction to a new edition of Clark's book, Amy Louise Erickson reports a historiographical consensus

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

12. *Ibid.*, p. 339.

13. *Ibid.*, p. 356.

14. Jan de Vries, "The Industrial Revolution and the Industrious Revolution", *The Journal of Economic History*, 54 (1994), pp. 249–270.

15. Grethe Jacobsen, "Women's Work and Women's Role: Ideology and Reality in Danish Urbane Society, 1300–1550", *Scandinavian Economic History Review*, 31 (1983), pp. 3–20.

16. See the historiography discussed by Marta V. Vicente, "Images and Realities of Work: Women and Guilds in Early Modern Barcelona", in Magdalena S. Sanchez and Alain Saint-Saens (eds), *Spanish Women in the Golden Age: Images and Realities* (Westport, CT [etc.], 1996).

17. See the historiographical discussion in Dora Dumont, "Women and Guilds in Bologna: The Ambiguities of 'Marginality'", *Radical History Review*, 70 (1998), pp. 4–25. Robert Duplessis

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.¹⁸

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 freedoms 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.¹⁹

Wiesner's and Howell's conclusions about the growing strength of the patriarchal family and its negative impact on women find echoes 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.²⁰

Twenty years later, what are we to make of the consensus regarding a decline in women's labor status in the early modern period? 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

offers a cogent summary for western Europe as a whole in *Transitions to Capitalism in Early Modern Europe* (Cambridge, 1997), pp. 36–37.

18. Amy Louise Erickson, "Introduction", in Clark, *Working Life of Women in the Seventeenth Century*, p. xvii. Bridget Hill has sharply criticized the continuity model, espoused by Judith Bennett among others: Bridget Hill, "Women's History: A Study in Change, Continuity or Standing Still?", *Women's History Review*, 2 (1993), pp. 5–22; and Judith Bennett, "Women's History: A Study in Continuity and Change", *Women's History Review*, 2 (1993), pp. 173–184.

19. Natalie Zemon Davis, "City Women and Religious Change", in *idem*, *Society and Culture in Early Modern France* (Stanford, CA, 1975), p. 94. This passage is cited in James Collins's "The Economic Role of Women in Seventeenth-Century France", *French Historical Studies*, 16 (1989), p. 437.

20. Sarah Hanley, "Engendering the State: Family Formation and State Building in Early Modern France", *French Historical Studies*, 16 (1989), pp. 4–27.

and women.²¹ 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 during 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 control of their work.²² 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.²³

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 the number of female artisans recorded in tax rolls rose substantially between 1643 and 1750.²⁴ In the provinces of Brittany and Burgundy, Jim Collins found that the number of female heads of household doubled in the seventeenth century (from between 7 and 8 per cent to between 16 and 17 per cent) and he believes the number of female entrepreneurs rose as well.²⁵ For eighteenth-century Nantes, Elizabeth Musgrave found a growth in women's independent access to guilds, with no significant restriction in female family members' rights.²⁶

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

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

23. Nor have I seen empirical evidence of a decline in the privileges of masters' female family members in French cities and towns.

24. 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, 1989), p. 24.

25. Collins, "The Economic Role of Women in Seventeenth-Century France", p. 465.

26. Elizabeth Musgrave, "Women and the Craft Guilds in Eighteenth-Century Nantes", in Geoffrey Crossick (ed.), *The Artisan and the European Town, 1500–1900* (Aldershot, 1997), pp. 158–159.

How do we reconcile this evidence with empirical findings from German cities? The most obvious response is that circumstances in Germany were different from those in France, that German guilds were stronger and more assertive, that they controlled markets more effectively, and that they were better able to impose their rules. Sheilagh Ogilvie 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 such as England, the Low Countries, and France, where central authority outweighed the guilds. Moreover, she might argue that the expansion of opportunities reported by Collins and others resulted from the "Industrious Revolution", which she posits failed in Germany.²⁷

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 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 had 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 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 important to review the more nuanced vision of women's work and corporate organization that emerges from other studies.

27. 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 Journal*, 35 (1993), pp. 22–44.

THE FEMALE LABOR FORCE

A central question 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.²⁸ 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 future, masters were enjoined to conform to guild rules and hire only qualified male workers.²⁹ Mary Gayne describes the wigmakers' struggle against illegal male and female workers in eighteenth-century Paris, while Sydney Watts finds the butchers' guild combating numerous female peddlers (*regrattières*) who sold lesser cuts of meats in violation of the guild's monopoly.³⁰

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.³¹ Evidence is indeed mounting that women worked in many male guild trades. For example,

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

29. Letter from the Royal Procurator at the Châtelet de Paris to the Controller-General, 4 April 1692, in A.M. de Boislisle (ed.), *Correspondance des contrôleurs généraux*, 3 vols (Paris, 1874–1897), II, no. 1069.

30. Mary Gayne, "Illicit Wigmaking in Eighteenth-Century Paris", *Eighteenth Century Studies*, 38 (2004), pp. 119–138; Sydney Watts, *Meat Matters: Butchers, Politics, and Market Culture in Eighteenth-Century Paris* (Rochester, NY, 2006), p. 80. See also the discussion of illegal work in Clare Haru Crowston, *Fabricating Women: The Seamstresses of Old Regime France* (Durham, NC, 2001), pp. 96–101.

31. See Steven L. Kaplan, "Les corporations, les 'faux-ouvriers' et le faubourg Saint-Antoine au XVIIIe siècle", *Annales: Économies, sociétés, civilisations*, 43:2 (1988), pp. 453–478; *idem*, "La lutte pour le contrôle du marché du travail à Paris au XVIIIe siècle", *Revue d'histoire moderne et contemporaine*, 36 (1989), pp. 361–412; and Michael Sonenscher, *Work and Wages: Natural Law, Politics and the Eighteenth-Century French Trades* (New York, 1989).

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.³² 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 Hafter has taken this argument one step further, showing the ways women employed by guild masters in the silk industry of Lyons used their 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 paralleled legitimate production.³³

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.³⁴ 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 crisscrossed 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 forty 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 also that they had achieved some form of collective work identity. In general, she argues that despite their

32. *Encyclopédie, ou Dictionnaire raisonné des sciences, des arts et des métiers*, vols 23–26, pp. 29–32. An important forthcoming study of images of women in the *Encyclopédie* is Geraldine Sheridan, *Louder Than Words: Ways of Seeing Women Workers in Eighteenth-Century France* (forthcoming).

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

34. *Ibid.*, p. 29.

absence from official guild records “the participation of women in the city’s economy was accepted and encouraged”.³⁵ 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’s 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, 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 women as eager to embrace incorporation, as the inclusion/exclusion model suggests.³⁶

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.

FEMALE 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 reproduction of the female workforce 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

35. Vicente, “Images and Realities of Work”, p. 128.

36. Dumont, “Women and Guilds in Bologna”.



Figure 1. Antoine Raspal (1738–1811), *Seamstresses' workshop in Arles*; oil on canvas. This image depicts an eighteenth-century seamstresses' workshop in southern France. As in many cities across Europe, the seamstresses of Arles won guild privileges allowing them to work in women's and children's clothing. The composition of the workshop pictured here – and the garments in progress hanging from the wall – attest to the sexual division of labor in this trade.

Photograph: Erich Lessing *Culture and Fine Arts/HH*. Used with permission.

outside the home in trades unrelated to a family occupation, it seems reasonable to look for evidence of training opportunities.³⁷

For Paris, at least, recent research suggests the availability of vocational training for many female youths during the early modern period and a significant growth in training opportunities starting in the late seventeenth century. The first point to make is on the existence of female apprenticeship. Carol Loats's study of apprenticeship in the mid-sixteenth century found that 14 per cent of notarial apprenticeship contracts involved female apprentices. Many of these were with seamstresses, despite the fact that they practiced an officially illegal trade.³⁸ Apprenticeship continued among seamstresses up to

37. 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 (2005), pp. 409–441.

38. Carol Lee Loats, "Gender and Work in Sixteenth-Century Paris" (unpublished Ph.D. dissertation, University of Colorado, 1993).

the moment of the creation of a female guild 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.³⁹ Between 1746 and 1759 the guild recorded a yearly average of 419 new apprentices. Since most contracts ran for 3 years, at any given time there were approximately 1,250 apprentices engaged in learning their trade.⁴⁰ 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.⁴¹ When we add to these the much smaller number of apprentices in the other female guilds (flowersellers, linen drapers, hemp merchants) and the mixed guilds (small grain merchants and midwives), 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 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, the government and religious authorities were eager to extend it. 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 the parish of Saint-Jean-en-Grève 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 compared with seventy-five girls.⁴²

39. See Archives Nationales, Paris [hereafter, AN] MC Etude CVIII 324 for these contracts.

40. 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.

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

42. 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

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.⁴³ Students entered these schools around age eight for approximately two years of education. The schools were segregated by sex, with a mistress for the girls and a 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 a 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.⁴⁴

In the second half of the seventeenth century, these parish schools were supplemented by a number of new female religious communities, whose purpose was 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 the parish of Saint-Eustache. By 1792, the community numbered 45 sisters, 40 adult boarders, 35 child boarders, and almost 450 "poor children and external students for instruction and work".⁴⁵ The school provided training in four trades: linen work, embroidery, lace-making, and tapestry-making.⁴⁶ 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

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".

43. On these companies, see Marcel Fosseyeux, *Les Ecoles de charité à Paris sous l'Ancien Régime et dans la première partie du XIXe siècle* (Paris, 1912); Harvey Chisick, "French Charity Schools in the Seventeenth and Eighteenth Centuries – with Special Reference to the Case of Amiens", *Histoire sociale – Social History*, 16 (1983), pp. 241–277; and Léon Cahen, "Les Idées charitables à Paris au XVIIe et au XVIIIe siècles d'après les règlements des compagnies paroissiales", *Revue d'histoire moderne et contemporaine*, 2 (1900–1901), pp. 5–22.

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

45. AN S 4615.

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

“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 seemed 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.⁴⁷

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 trained,⁴⁸ and asked his close family members to supervise the progress of the manufactures.⁴⁹ As always, lace-making remained a non-guild trade. The multiple activities of Colbert in support of female training reveal the perceived need to expand 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 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

47. AN LL 1659.

48. Pierre Clément (ed.), *Lettres, instructions et mémoires de Colbert*, II: *Commerce et industrie* (Paris, 1863), p. 622 (26 June 1671). Colbert’s correspondence reveals that he thought “apprenticeship” in lace-making would take between one and, at most, two years. Little has been written on Colbert’s efforts to foster female employment in the lace industry. For a brief summary see *ibid.*, p. 438.

49. See for example the letter to his brother, Nicolas Colbert, Bishop of Auxerre, in *ibid.*, p. 654 (8 April 1672).

female guilds in a few cities, primarily Rouen, Paris, and Cologne.⁵⁰ My comments here will focus on the Parisian seamstresses' guild.⁵¹ 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 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.⁵² 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.

50. On Cologne, see Margret Wensky, "Women's Guilds in Cologne in the Later Middle Ages", *The Journal of European Economic History*, 11 (1982), pp. 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 (1994), pp. 768–793; Cynthia Truant, "La maîtrise d'une identité? Corporations féminines à Paris aux XVIIe et XVIIIe siècles", *Clio, Histoire, Femmes et Sociétés*, 3:8 (1996), pp. 55–70, and *idem*, "Parisian Guildswomen and the (Sexual) Politics of Privilege: Defending their Patrimonies in Print", in Elizabeth C. Goldsmith and Dena Goodman (eds), *Going Public: Women and Publishing in Early Modern France* (Ithaca, NY, 1995). On Rouen (and Lyons), see Daryl Hafter, *Women at Work in Preindustrial France* (University Park, PA, 2007).

51. This was the subject of Crowston, *Fabricating Women*.

52. In her study of guildswomen in Rouen and Lyons, Hafter argues that giving guildswomen exceptional privileges made it easier for male-dominated families, economies, and states to succeed, without undoing male dominance: Hafter, *Women at Work in Preindustrial France*.

Neither guild could conduct inspection visits or raids on the other's workshops.⁵³

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 number of women proved impossible to govern, and even male guild officials were not above entering profitable collusion with them.⁵⁴ 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

53. The royal government's care to protect the tailors' pre-existing privileges was 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 AN AD XI 16, "Statuts, ordonnances et déclaration du Roy, confirmative d'iceux, pour la Communauté des Couturières de la Ville, Fauxbourgs et Banlieu de Paris" (Paris, 1734).

54. For example, see the Aix tailors' assembly minutes, Archives communales d'Aix-en-Provence HH 133-139.

entered the tailors' guild but gained their own administrative structures, constituting a virtually separate corporation. In Aix and Marseilles, seamstresses joined guilds without the 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 that. Where guilds were weaker, and women had no previous corporate role, they remained auxiliary and largely voiceless members of tailors' guilds. 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 equaled the vital presence not absence of women from guilds.

The French case was not unique. In York, England, women were mentioned in the tailors' 1453 license, but they 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”.⁵⁵

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.⁵⁶

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 that trajectory's course.

Seamstresses in the northern and southern Netherlands provide yet another case study. Harald Deceulaer and Bibi Panhuysen have documented

55. S.D. Smith, “Women's Admission to Guilds in Early-Modern England: The Case of the York Merchant Tailors' Company, 1693–1776”, *Gender and History*, 17 (2005), p. 102.

56. *Ibid.*, p. 122.

the variety of forms of corporate status acquired by seamstresses in the Netherlands. In Amsterdam, seamstresses acquired an independent guild in 1579, which retained some tax obligations to the tailors. In several additional cities, they obtained a subordinate position in tailors' guilds during the late seventeenth and eighteenth centuries, much like their colleagues in Caen. Others were permitted to practice their trade freely, after paying small fees to local tailors' guilds, in a similar fashion to the seamstresses of Aix-en-Provence.

Overall, Deceulaer and Panhuysen found that the stronger guilds of the southern Netherlands more successfully resisted female encroachment than their counterparts in the north. In Mons, for example, seamstresses were permitted to join the tailors' guild by the early eighteenth century. Their request for independent guild status was denied on the grounds that no independent female guilds existed in the southern Netherlands. As in Caen, a 1741 ordinance formalizing their subordinate position in the tailors' guild merely led to increased opposition from tailors and heightened claims for independence on the part of the seamstresses.⁵⁷ Clearly, local and regional economic, political, cultural, and social specificities shaped the seamstresses' push for guild status and tailors' reaction to it.

Elizabeth 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."⁵⁸ 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."⁵⁹

What factors led guild masters to overcome their allegedly intrinsic bias against women's labor? Musgrave accounts for these changes by pointing to contemporary economic growth, which led to increased demand for 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

57. Harald Deceulaer and Bibi Panhuysen, "Dressed to Work: A Gendered Comparison of the Tailoring Trades in the Northern and Southern Netherlands, 16th to 18th Centuries", in Prak, *Craft Guilds in the Early Modern Low Countries*, p. 146.

58. Musgrave, "Women and the Craft Guilds in Eighteenth-Century Nantes", p. 159.

59. *Ibid.*

by Jan de Vries and the growth of “populuxe” industry described by Cissie Fairchild.⁶⁰ 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.⁶¹

In the case of Paris, the seventy-five girls sponsored by the parish of Saint-Jean-en-Grève between 1774 and 1787 also suggest expansion of employment opportunities for women. While the seamstresses remained the most important trade for girls, attracting forty-three of the seventy-five, 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 contracts included men and women, and members of incorporated and unincorporated trades.⁶²

This last point suggests that economic expansion was bypassing the guilds’ 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 that 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 versus “weak” guilds or “inclusion” versus “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

60. 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 Goods in Eighteenth-Century Paris”, both in J. Brewer and R. Porter (eds), *Consumption and the World of Goods* (London, 1993).

61. Musgrave, “Women and the Craft Guilds in Eighteenth-Century Nantes”, p. 163.

62. AN H5 3782.

the Parisian seamstresses' guild each year than any other Parisian guild, with a total of 5,509 mistresses joining between September 1735 and February 1776. Each year, they comprised around 10 per cent 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.⁶³ From 1736 to 1789, the annual average was 82 new masters, compared with 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 mistressship as a form of family patrimony. The vast majority of seamstresses were newcomers to the guild. According to the royal procurator of the Châtelet's records, three-quarters of the seamstresses entered the guild by apprenticeship. Together they accounted for 4,131 (75 per cent) of the mistresses accepted between September 1735 and February 1776.⁶⁴ Women who entered simply by purchasing membership outright comprised the second largest group, numbering 905 mistresses (16.5 per cent). Mistresses' daughters accounted for only 458 (8.5 per cent) 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 per cent); 361 finished apprentices (14 per cent); 839 had married a master's daughter (31 per cent); 227 had married a master's widow (8 per cent); 72 had served at the Hôpital de la Trinité (2.5 per cent); and 591 were *sans qualité* or had purchased a *lettre de maîtrise* (22 per cent). An additional 60 tailors entered by non-specified paths.⁶⁵ Marriage thus played the most important role in the reproduction of the tailors' guild, representing 40 per cent 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.⁶⁶ This was because Parisian tailors' 1660

63. AN Y 9323 – Y 9334.

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

65. Most of these were recorded as having entered "by marriage", with no indication as to whether the wife was a daughter or widow of a master.

66. Compared with other Parisian guilds, this level of generational continuity was probably at the lower end of the scale. Michael Sonenscher has found that, from 1742 to 1776, 34 per cent of Parisian master locksmiths were sons of masters: Sonenscher, *Work and Wages*, p. 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 *ibid.*, p. 110.

statutes restricted the number of new apprentices to only ten 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 these statistics.⁶⁷ If 40 per cent 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.⁶⁸

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 mothers' 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, sixty-two new masters joined the Caen tailors' guild, or an average of 3.3 a year. The record specified their paths of entry in only forty-four cases. Within this group, men with inherited ties to the guild accounted for almost half of

67. See Clare Haru Crowston, "Engendering the Guilds: Seamstresses, Tailors, and the Clash of Corporate Identities in Old Regime France", *French Historical Studies*, 23 (2000), pp. 339–371.

68. 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 Kaplan and Koeppe, *Work in France*, p. 319. For a similar account of patterns of upward mobility for sons and the maintenance of the status quo for daughters, see Tessie P. Liu, *The Weaver's Knot: The Contradictions of Class Struggle and Family Solidarity in Western France, 1750–1914* (Ithaca, NY, 1994), pp. 238–249.

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 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 72 mistresses accepted, nine entered by unspecified paths. The remaining 63 were largely outsiders: 48 were apprentices and one had purchased a *lettre de maîtrise*. Only 15 women (24 per cent) entered through their parents' privileges: 8 as mistresses' daughters and 7 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 tailors' 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.⁶⁹ Between 1745 and 1775, a total of 72 masters entered the guild. In contrast to the previous cases, over half of these men (38, or 52 per cent) were masters' sons. The second largest group (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 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 34 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 extant record lists 67 master tailors for 111 seamstresses. During the first few decades of the century, seamstresses strongly outnumbered tailors in Aix, as they did in Caen.

69. 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".

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 (i.e. a real man is one who defends his wives and daughters versus 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, and 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.⁷⁰

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 studies of one female trade. The ongoing 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.⁷¹ 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 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

70. 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 Kaplan and Koepp, *Work in France*. Harald Deceulaer and Bibi Panhuysen also argue forcefully for the need for comparative studies to account for the complexity and variation among guilds in different cities and offer their research as one example of the fruits of such comparison. See Deceulaer and Panhuysen, “Dressed to Work”, p. 134.

71. See Hafter’s long-awaited study of women in the guilds in Rouen and Lyons, *Women at Work in Preindustrial France*, Janine Lanza’s study of artisanal widows, *From Wives to Widows in Early Modern Paris: Gender, Economy, and Law* (Aldershot, 2007), and Nancy Locklin’s study of women’s work in Brittany, *Women’s Work and Identity in Eighteenth-Century Brittany* (Aldershot, 2007).

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.⁷²

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 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 did. The vast majority of men and women were not able to join guilds; it is their responses to that situation and the complex bonds they nonetheless forged with the corporate system that are beginning to emerge more clearly.

72. For reasons of length, I have omitted 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 Hafter, *Women at Work in Preindustrial France*. See also Steven Laurence Kaplan, *La fin des corporations* (Paris, 2001).