

The Return of the Guilds: Towards a Global History of the Guilds in Pre-industrial Times*

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The recent emergence of the sub-discipline of “global history”, and of its branches “global economic history” and “global labour history”, is probably one of the most interesting developments in the social and historical sciences.¹ In the age of globalization the question should be asked whether it is possible to analyse and understand global patterns of social and economic change in the recent or more distant past, without taking into account the role of institutions in those developments.² This

* The essays in this issue originate from a conference organized in October 2006 by the International Institute of Social History and the research group in social and economic history at Utrecht University on the theme “The Return of the Guilds”, as part of a series of conferences on global economic history, a continuation of the Global Economic History Network – GEHN – set up by Patrick O’Brien and his group at the London School of Economics (LSE). The challenge of the conference was to bring together specialists in non-European regions with Europeanists, and to study the similarities and differences between guilds in different parts of the world. It was to be based on the knowledge about guilds that had been built up over many years. Besides the authors who have contributed to this special issue, we should also like to thank the other participants in the conference for their contributions in various ways: the late Larry Epstein (to whom this issue is dedicated), John Chalcraft, Bert De Munck, Rina Lis, Philippe Minard, Regina Grafe, Harriet Zurndorfer, Elise van Nederveen Meerkerk, Jan De Meester, Elke Ortmans, Oscar Gelderblom, Gary Richardson, Lex Heerma van Voss, Debin Ma, Philippe Minard, Ariadne Schmidt, Patrick Wallis, Bas van Bavel, Erika Kuijpers, and Jessica Dijkman. We should like to thank the GEHN network, and in particular Patrick O’Brien, Utrecht University, and the IISH for their contributions to the organization of the conference. We should also like to thank the Leverhulme Trust, the Royal Netherlands Academy of Arts and Sciences (KNAW), the Netherlands Organization for Scientific Research (NWO), the Research Foundation Flanders (FWO-Flanders Research Group Labour 1500–2000), and the University of Utrecht for their financial support for the conference.

1. For the ever increasing literature on this topic, we refer to the two major journals in the field: *The Journal of World History* (Honolulu, since 1990), and the *Journal of Global History* (London, since 2006). For global labour history, see Jan Lucassen (ed.), *Global Labour History: A State of the Art* (Bern [etc.], 2006).

2. Over the past few years, institutions have received increasing attention. The origins of the particular interest in institutions go back to what is generally described as New Institutional Economics (NIE), pioneered by Douglass North, *Structure and Change in Economic History* (New York, 1981). The GEHN network has aimed to bring NIE and global economic history together, an initiative which also led to a series of conferences organized by the

collection of essays focuses on a particular type of institution, the guild, in all the varieties of it that can be found around the world, and tries to estimate its value for economic development and social and political change, in a global and comparative framework.

In the European case, guilds can be defined as permanent, generally local organizations of people in the same profession or trade or a combination of the same professions, recognized by the local, provincial, or central government, and which have as their main, but certainly not exclusive, purpose the defence and maintenance of trade monopoly rights with regard to fellow citizens and outside competitors.³ Although guilds had been abolished in many west European countries at the end of the *ancien régime*,⁴ we know that they influenced European history very deeply by playing a central role in the organization of the political, cultural, social, and economic life of European urban centres in particular, and to an extent in rural areas too.

We have known for quite some time that guilds and guild-like institutions were not limited to medieval and early modern Europe, but existed in other societies too – in China, Japan, the Ottoman Empire, India, and elsewhere.⁵ In this special issue we try to set up a comparative

International Institute of Social History and Utrecht University; the “Return of the Guilds” conference was part of that series. See the other conferences and their programmes at <http://www.iisg.nl/hpw/conference.php>.

3. Bert De Munck, Piet Lourens, and Jan Lucassen, “The Establishment and Distribution of Craft Guilds in the Low Countries 1000–1800”, in Maarten Prak *et al.* (eds), *Craft Guilds in the Early Modern Low Countries: Work, Power and Representation* (Aldershot, 2006), pp. 32–73, especially 32–34 and 67; cf. Arnd Kluge, *Die Zünfte* (Stuttgart, 2007), pp. 21–34. A wider definition of guilds as “a society’s response to its need for self-regulation” (Natalie Fryde, “Guilds in England before the Black Death”, in Berent Schwineköper (ed.), *Gilden und Zünfte. Kaufmännische und gewerbliche Genossenschaften im frühen und hohen Mittelalter* (Sigmaringen, 1985), pp. 215–229, quotation on p. 128) does not include the requirement to share the same occupation. This more encompassing approach is not rare among specialists of the earlier parts of the Middle Ages. See also other contributions to the same volume, in particular Otto Gerhard Oexle, “Conjuratio und Gilde im frühen Mittelalter. Ein Beitrag zum Problem der sozialgeschichtlichen Kontinuität zwischen Antike und Mittelalter”, pp. 151–214.

4. Heinz-Gerhard Haupt (ed.), *Das Ende der Zünfte. Ein europäischer Vergleich* (Göttingen, 2002); Kluge, *Die Zünfte*, pp. 425–446.

5. Many authors mention this in passing, including George Unwin, *The Guilds and Companies of London* (London, 1938), pp. 2–4, and Kluge, *Die Zünfte*, pp. 459–465. An early attempt at dealing seriously with guilds worldwide can be found in the seventh volume of the *Encyclopaedia of the Social Sciences* (New York, 1932), pp. 204–224, where not only guilds in antiquity are treated but, on an equal footing, European guilds (by Henri Pirenne), Islamic guilds (by Louis Massignon), Indian guilds (by Vera Anstey), Chinese guilds (by Harold M. Vinacke), and Japanese guilds (by G.C. Allen). An explicit comparison, however, is lacking, as is the case in a much later wide-ranging collection which also includes the Ottoman Empire: S.R. Epstein *et al.* (eds), *Guilds, Economy and Society* (Madrid, 1998). An exception is Suraiya Faroqhi, “Understanding Ottoman Guilds”, in *idem* and Randi Deguillhem (eds), *Crafts and Craftsmen of the Middle East: Fashioning the Individual in the Muslim Mediterranean* (London [etc.], 2005), pp. 3–40, especially 16–18.

framework for the analysis of the functioning of guilds from West to East, in the period between classical antiquity and the Industrial Revolution.⁶ Widening our geographical scope should contribute to our understanding of the diversity and development of institutions and help enable a better assessment of their influence on, and meaning for, societies around the world.

At the same time that entails a widening of our scope in terms of institutional diversity. In this issue we explore the boundaries of the guild system, and look for similarities to, and interaction with other institutions in terms of the problems they addressed, their origins, and their dissolution. A global approach requires an open mind, but without loss of focus.

Apart from the need for such a global perspective, two recent developments in historical research have demanded a revision of the traditional view on guilds. On the one hand, the recent reassessment of the functions of guilds and their effects on early modern economic and social development not only provided the title of the 2006 conference but suggested a deeper connection between micro-institutions such as guilds and the “European miracle”. On the other hand, we have the Great Divergence debate that recently stimulated new research into the comparative institutional and economic development of the different parts of Eurasia. Let us first introduce these two themes.

Twenty years ago, guilds were decidedly out of fashion with historians.⁷ The accepted wisdom was that guilds were a European medieval phenomenon which stifled entrepreneurship and innovation by laying down specific rules for the production of goods and services, and had therefore become less important in English towns by the seventeenth century, and never became established in the Americas. On the European continent their importance dwindled towards the end of the *ancien régime*, when economic corporations were toppled along with the rest of the old order.

6. For the discontinuity between the Roman and Byzantine craft guilds and the medieval guilds after c.1000 in western and southern Europe, see Oexle, “Conjuratio und Gilde im frühen Mittelalter”; P. Racine, “Associations de marchands et associations de métiers en Italie de 600 à 1200”, in Schweineköper, *Gilden und Zünfte*, pp. 127–149; and Kluge, *Die Zünfte*, pp. 38–60. For an example of guilds before the period studied here, see David B. Weisberg, *Guild Structure and Political Allegiance in Early Achaemenid Mesopotamia* (New Haven, CT, 1967).

7. For the historiography see, for example, Gary Richardson, “A Tale of Two Theories: Monopolies and Craft Guilds in Medieval England and Modern Imagination”, *Journal of the History of Economic Thought*, 23 (2001), pp. 217–242; Catharina Lis and Hugo Soly, “Craft Guilds in Comparative Perspective: The Northern and Southern Netherlands, A Survey”, in Prak *et al.*, *Craft Guilds in the Early Modern Low Countries*, pp. 1–31, 2–5; S.R. Epstein, “Craft Guilds in the Pre-modern Economy: A Discussion”, *Economic History Review*, 61 (2008), pp. 155–174; Kluge, *Die Zünfte*, pp. 13–21.

Most of that received wisdom about guilds has not withstood the impact of recent research.⁸ New approaches in economic, social, labour, and institutional history have re-examined guilds, not least within the framework of a reappraisal of the classic and strict distinction between “capitalist” and “pre-capitalist” modes of production.⁹ Those researches are unravelling the reasons why guilds were established, and why they could maintain themselves for such a long time, and international comparisons have ensured the rejuvenation of guild studies. Awareness is growing that guilds were not just a European phenomenon, but were prominent all over northern Africa and the Middle East, as well as in many parts of Asia, including China and Japan. They existed in Latin America too.¹⁰ In many countries guilds flourished until the end of the *ancien régime*, and in central Europe, China, and the Middle East they existed well into the nineteenth century, and even into the twentieth. Emphasis is now laid on the possibility that innovation, entrepreneurship, and social security could flourish simultaneously within guild structures,¹¹ outside as well as inside Europe.

In many Asian towns guilds competed with other forms of vertical organization of the labour market, based on kin, caste, ethnicity, religion,

8. Comparative research in the Low Countries (at Antwerp University, the Free University of Brussels, Utrecht University, and the International Institute of Social History) may serve as an example. See Prak, *Craft Guilds in the Early Modern Low Countries*. Just before this brief introduction was finished, two more volumes were published which give a good overview of the recent research in this field: S.R. Epstein and Maarten Prak (eds), *Guilds, Innovation and the European Economy, 1400–1800* (Cambridge, 2008); Bert De Munck, Steven L. Kaplan, and Hugo Soly (eds), *Learning on the Shop Floor: Historical Perspectives on Apprenticeship* (New York [etc.], 2007). See also Bert De Munck, “Skills, Trust and Changing Consumer Preferences: The Decline of Antwerp’s Craft Guilds from the Perspective of the Product Market, c.1500–c.1800”, *International Review of Social History*, 53 (2008), pp. 197–233.

9. Cf. S.R. Epstein, “Craft Guilds, Apprenticeship, and Technological Change in Preindustrial Europe”, *The Journal of Economic History*, 58 (1998), pp. 684–713; Maarten Prak, “Guilds and the Development of the Art Market during the Dutch Golden Age”, *Simiolus: Netherlands Quarterly for the History of Art*, 30 (2003), pp. 236–251.

10. As this continent is not represented in this volume, we refer to only a few titles for further reading: Dorothy Tanck de Estrada, “La abolición de los gremios”, in Elsa Cecilia Frost, Michael C. Meyer, and Josefina Zoraida Vázquez (eds), *El Trabajo y los trabajadores en la historia de México* (Mexico, 1979), pp. 311–331; Guillermo Tovar de Teresa, “Consideraciones sobre retablos, gremios y artifices de la Nueva España en los siglos XVII y XVIII”, *Historia Mexicana*, 34 (1984), pp. 5–40; Lyman L. Johnson, “The Entrepreneurial Reorganization of an Artisan Trade: The Bakers of Buenos Aires, 1770–1820”, *The Americas*, 37 (1980), pp. 139–160; Gerald Anthony Gies, “Artisan Culture in Guadalajara, Mexico, 1780–1830: Guild’s Response to the Economic Challenges of Commercial Capitalism” (unpublished Ph.D. thesis, Florida State University, 1995).

11. For a fierce debate in the *Economic History Review*, see Sheilagh Ogilvie, “Guilds, Efficiency, and Social Capital: Evidence from German Proto-Industry”, *Economic History Review*, 57 (2004), pp. 286–333; Epstein, “Craft Guilds in the Pre-modern Economy”; Sheilagh Ogilvie, “Rehabilitating the Guilds: A Reply”, *Economic History Review*, 61 (2008), pp. 175–182. See also n. 12 below.

or place of birth. Some organizations and associations adopted functions and supported cultures that were close to those of the guilds, and not only arranged access to some segment of the labour market, but offered mutual insurance, protection, and family-like structures away from home, sponsored altars or temples, and organized festivities. Described thus in functional terms, guild-like organizations are not unknown on other continents too.

A lot of these new insights are a result of a return to the sources, and of detailed studies of the functioning of guilds,¹² and the growing importance of New Institutional Economics in the historical analysis of the pre-industrial economy has contributed to the reassessment of the role they played. The question is no longer whether guilds were important or unimportant, backward or innovative, but rather under what circumstances they could play such a role; and internally under what circumstances those involved could reap the benefits of membership. The organizers of the Return of the Guilds conference felt that the time had come to take stock of the recent advances in the field, to compare results from different countries, and in particular to make global comparisons in order to break away from the narrowness of the Eurocentric debate.

The question had to be asked, to what extent guilds and guild-like institutions played a role in the divergent economic development of the different parts of Eurasia: in the Little Divergence that occurred during the early modern period when the countries bordering the North Sea developed much more dynamically than the rest of Eurasia, and in the Great Divergence that began in the eighteenth century.¹³

Making global comparisons of the occurrence and functioning of guilds requires consensus on the characteristics of guilds. Several papers in this issue will show that the European image of the guild is insufficiently comprehensive to cover all its possible varieties around the world. To detect potential “brother organizations” elsewhere, the combination of the following features was considered indicative of a guild-like institution:¹⁴ more or less independent, self-governing organizations; people with the same or similar occupations; aimed at furthering their common interests; and in almost any respect, i.e. in the economic, political, social cultural, or religious fields.

12. There are, nevertheless, authors who, on the basis of detailed source analysis, see the old negative relationship between guilds and economic development reaffirmed. See for example Sheilagh Ogilvie, “Whatever Is, Is Right? Economic Institutions in Pre-industrial Europe”, *Economic History Review*, 60 (2007), pp. 649–684.

13. Kenneth Pomeranz, *The Great Divergence: China, Europe, and the Making of the Modern World Economy* (Princeton, NJ, 2000); Roy Bin Wong, *China Transformed: Historical Change and the Limits of European Experience* (Ithaca, NY [etc.], 1997).

14. See the discussions on the concept of “guild” in Gabriel Baer, “Ottoman Guilds: A Reassessment”, in Osman Okyar and Halil Inalcik (eds), *Social and Economic History of Turkey (1071–1920)* (Ankara, 1980), pp. 95–102, and in J. Spencer Trimingham, *The Sufi Orders in Islam* (Oxford, 1998), pp. 24–25.

Such a definition implies, to begin with, that in a certain place we shall find a group of people with the same or similar occupations. It is therefore natural to link the emergence and development of guilds with the phenomenon of occupational specialization which, as a rule, itself implies urbanization: towns and cities are naturally the first places where such concentrations of similar professions are likely to occur. The first question in an attempt at global comparative research might therefore be: how strong is the link between urbanization and the rise and development of guilds? Were there societies with high levels of urbanization but no guilds? Or with guilds, but without urbanization?

It is well known that guilds and guild-like institutions (so-called *collegia*) could be found during the Roman Empire, although their independence from the state is perhaps still a matter of debate, and that the Eastern Roman Empire and in particular its tenth-century capital, Byzantium, had a well-developed guild system. But it is now firmly established that for many centuries the Muslim society of the Arab World in the twelfth to the late fifteenth century in all likelihood did not have similar institutions. There were perhaps a few exceptions, such as the organizations of administrators and bureaucrats noted by Onur Yildirim in his essay on the Ottoman Empire in this volume; but during those centuries craftsmen and merchants were not organized in any guild-like way, or at least not permanently.¹⁵

That is of course all the more striking because the Muslim World was highly urbanized from the eighth century onward, more so than western

15. According to Massignon (Massignon, "Islamic Guilds", *Encyclopaedia of the Social Sciences*), in the preceding period, especially under the Fatimite Caliphate, craft guilds flourished as well, but this theory is not widely accepted. See C. Cahen, "Y a-t-il eu des corporations professionnelles dans le monde musulman classique? Quelques notes et réflexions", in A.H. Hourani and S.M. Stern (eds), *The Islamic City: A Colloquium* (Oxford, 1970), pp. 51–63; S.M. Stern, "The Constitution of the Islamic City", in *ibid.*, pp. 25–50, especially 47–49; and Suraiya Faroqhi, "Ottoman Craftsmen: Problematic and Sources with Special Emphasis on the Eighteenth Century", in Faroqhi and Deguilhem, *Crafts and Craftsmen of the Middle East*, pp. 84–118, especially 86–87. Apart from the contributions on the Ottoman Empire and Mughal India in the present volume, and Faroqhi and Deguilhem, *Crafts and Craftsmen of the Middle East*, see for the period after c.1500, on Morocco: Louis Massignon, "Enquête sur les corporations musulmanes d'artisans et de commerçants au Maroc", *Revue du Monde Musulman*, 58 (1924), pp. 1–250; on Algeria: Houari Touati, "Les corporations de métiers à Alger à l'époque ottoman", *Revue d'Histoire Maghrébine*, 14 (1987), pp. 267–292; on Egypt: André Raymond, *Artisans et commerçants au Caire au XVIIIe siècle*, 2 vols (Damascus, 1973–1974), and Gabriel Baer, *Egyptian Guilds in Modern Times* (Jerusalem, 1964); on Syria: A.K. Rafeq, "The Law-Court Registers of Damascus with Special Reference to Craft Corporations During the First Half of the Eighteenth Century", in Jacques Berque and Dominique Chevallier (eds), *Les Arabes par leurs Archives (XVIe–XXe siècles)* (Paris, 1976), pp. 141–159; on Iraq: Dina Rizk Khoury, *State and Provincial Society in the Ottoman Empire: Mosul, 1540–1834* (Cambridge, 1997), pp. 36, 137–142, 206, 225–227; on Iran: W.M. Floor, "The Guilds in Qajar Persia" (unpublished Ph.D. dissertation, University of Leiden, 1971); and on Istanbul: Eunjeong Yi, *Guild Dynamics in Seventeenth-Century Istanbul: Fluidity and Leverage* (Leiden [etc.], 2004).

Europe at the time.¹⁶ In this context it is surprising – at least from a European perspective – that guilds could vanish from an urban setting only to reappear several centuries later. The reasons for the simultaneous disappearance under the Seljuks in Anatolia, the Mongols in Persia and Iraq, and the Mamluks in Egypt, are far from clear, but Shatzmiller remarks that in that precise period the economy was depressed, whereas Massignon subsumes their development under the influence of “authoritarian reactions of the Sunnite States”.¹⁷

However, it is intriguing that fundamental change in polities can have such effects on the organization of craftsmen. The emergence of the Ottoman Empire coincides with the re-emergence of craft guilds on a grand scale, able to continue their existence far into the twentieth century, until their final abolition in Turkey in 1924, or even later in countries such as Morocco. In Persia guilds were even represented by the thirty-two delegates to the Majlis, Persia’s first parliament, inaugurated in 1907.¹⁸

In western Europe the correlation between urbanization and the development of occupation-based guilds was at first very close, as has been argued by Tine De Moor in this volume. The model of the guild was so successful and appealing that it spread to rural parts of western Europe in the early modern period, helped by processes of proto-industrialization and structural transformation which led to increased concentrations of craftsmen there, as noted by Josef Ehmer in this volume. At the other extreme of Eurasia, we find in early modern China and Japan a strong development of guild-like institutions as part of a more general expansion of the urban system together with changes in the political economy, about which more below.

16. Maarten Bosker, Eltjo Buringh, and Jan Luiten van Zanden, “From Baghdad to London: The Dynamics of Urban Growth in Europe and the Arab World, 800–1800”, IISG Working Paper (2007); see also Hourani and Stern, *The Islamic City*; on occupational specialization, see Maya Shatzmiller, *Labour in the Medieval Islamic World* (Leiden, 1994).

17. *Ibid.*, p. 42, (on p. 392 Shatzmiller speaks of “the appearance in the 14th century of the budding professional guilds in the Islamic cities”); see also p. 403; Massignon, “Islamic Guilds”, p. 215; Bernard Lewis, “The Islamic Guilds”, *Economic History Review*, 8 (1937), pp. 20–37, more or less follows Massignon.

18. Shatzmiller, *Labour in the Medieval Islamic World*, p. 42; Floor, “The Guilds in Qajar Persia”, pp. 86–89; Franz Taeschner, *Zünfte und Bruderschaften im Islam. Texte zur Geschichte der Futuwwa* (Zurich [etc.], 1979), ch. 7, on the *futuwwa* as the regulating principle of craft guilds in the Ottoman Empire, including the Balkans and Syria. Compare Raymond, *Artisans et commerçants au Caire au XVIIIe*, pp. 529, 540–544, for a qualification of this view which maintains that *futuwwa* contained, first and foremost, religious rules and observances, and that the guilds of Cairo were reduced, in the course of the Ottoman rule, to “mere” socio-economic organisms. Following Baer, *Egyptian Guilds in Modern Times*, Raymond refers to a text from c.1600 which presents the pre-Ottoman Circassian Mamluk period (1382–1517) as the golden age of the Egyptian guilds, and states that degeneration ensued under the more rigid control of the Ottomans.

Compared with China, Japan, and the Middle East, guilds in India were, as Tirthankar Roy demonstrates, less highly developed, probably because of the political state of the Mughal economy. More generally, the Mongols, and their descendants the Mughals, seem to have been quite badly disposed towards such institutions, possibly because of their bottom-up nature. And that despite the fact that in the early Middle Ages southern India had developed a certain tradition in the field.¹⁹

Urbanization is obviously an important element in the story, but not the whole story. The second element in our definition given above implies that guilds have a certain amount of independence, and are supposed to be more than instruments of the state, set up to control craftsmen and merchants and to tax them. In other words, the state has to be willing to delegate certain powers to guilds, allowing them to organize their own collective action to further the interests of their members. As has been mentioned, there is some discussion as to whether that applies equally to guilds in Roman antiquity and their successors in Byzantium/Constantinople.²⁰

Christine Moll-Murata assesses here the discussion of guild-like institutions in China particularly under the Tang and before the late Ming, and she highlights the focus on this issue: did the organizations of merchants and craftsmen, mentioned in the sources, have a certain amount of agency itself derived from the state they were part of? That is probably much more the case for the “modern” guilds that developed during the late Ming and Qing, when the state began to follow a more laissez-faire policy, withdrawing from direct intervention in the economy and society. The Chinese ceased directly regulating the labour market of craftsmen, for example.

Almost simultaneously, there occurred in Tokugawa Japan a similar turn towards more liberal economic policies, allowing for a much broader development of guilds there in the seventeenth and eighteenth centuries, which Mary Louise Nagata explains in her essay on the subject. Finally, the embryonic nature of guilds in Mughal India is attributed by Tirthankar Roy to the dominant role played by the state, as part of the “at times repressive relationship between the state and the merchants”.

19. Apart from Tirthankar Roy's essay in the present volume and the arguments put forward by Vera Anstey in her article in the *Encyclopaedia of the Social Sciences*, see Meera Abraham, *Two Medieval Merchant Guilds of South India* (New Delhi, 1988); Himanshu Prabha Ray, *Monastery and Guild: Commerce under the Sātavāhanas* (Delhi [etc.], 1986); and Kiran Kumar Thaplyal, *Guilds in Ancient India: A Study of Guild Organization in Northern India and Sestern Deccan from circa 600 BC to circa 600 AD* (New Delhi, 1966).

20. See n. 6 and the discussion on the development of the Roman guilds and the continuity with Byzantium in Gilbert Dagron, “The Urban Economy, Seventh–Twelfth Centuries”, in Angeliki E. Laiou (ed.), *The Economic History of Byzantium: From the Seventh through the Fifteenth Century*, 3 vols (Washington DC, 2002), II, pp. 405–410, especially 405–406; other chapters in that volume also contain much useful information on the development of guilds in Byzantium.

These examples suggest that we are dealing with a more general problem here: “ancient” polities in China, Japan, Egypt, and Mesopotamia, perhaps including the Mongols, had a tendency to be quite hierarchical, and often did not give “bottom-up” economic institutions, such as the guilds, enough room to develop.²¹ In Europe, Russia provides the best example of an autocratic state, which periodically in cooperation with princes and the Church had not allowed craftsmen to develop their own organizations. Only a limited number of merchants’ guilds ever existed there between the fourteenth and eighteenth centuries.²²

Where there was some kind of continuity between these ancient states and their successors in the early modern period, a radical switch in policy was necessary, as occurred in Ming China, to create better conditions for guilds to emerge and flourish. In western Europe after the collapse of the Roman Empire, the situation of very weak state power between the ninth and twelfth centuries, and the renewed process of state formation that began in the tenth to eleventh centuries, created favourable conditions for bottom-up initiatives. Tine De Moor claims as much for western Europe.

Similarly, as Chris Bayly has argued, the disintegration of the Mughal state in the eighteenth century created room for the growth of guilds and quasi-independent cities in the north of India.²³ In short, guilds could flourish only if strong states withdrew from a complete domination of the economy, as happened in Japan and China, in the Ottoman Empire for its first few centuries, and in several countries in early modern Europe. When states were too weak to control such bottom-up movements, as in eighteenth-century India, or medieval Europe and the Dutch Republic, guilds could flourish then too.

In western Europe the “exceptional” development of guilds in England is a case in point: there they did not acquire the strong position held by guilds in continental Europe, but that was largely because of the strength

21. The curtailing of occupational-based guilds in Angevin England (1154–1399) is a case in point, not surprisingly with the exception of mighty London. See Fryde, “Guilds in England before the Black Death”, pp. 218, 223–229. Other examples also spring to mind such as Russia, Prussia, and the absolutist rulers of seventeenth- and eighteenth-century Scandinavia. See also our remarks below about weak guilds in a strong central state in provincial early modern England.

22. See the various contributions to Michael F. Hamm (ed.), *The City in Russian History* (Lexington, KY, 1976), in particular Lawrence N. Langer, “The Medieval Russian Town”, pp. 11–33, especially 23–27. Gilbert Rozman, *Urban Networks in Russia, 1750–1800, and Premodern Periodization* (Princeton, NJ, 1976), has shown that, in comparison to China, western Europe, and Japan, premodern urbanization in Russia is less exceptional than has long been thought (see especially his graphs on pp. 30 and 84).

23. C.A. Bayly, *Rulers, Townsmen and Bazaars: North Indian Society in the Age of British Expansion 1770–1870* (Cambridge, 1983).

of English government and the resulting reduced independence of English cities within its commonwealth.²⁴ However, one might place the emphasis somewhat differently. The examples of the proliferation of thriving craft guilds in the Venetian Republic of the sixteenth century or the Ottoman Empire, and the Dutch Republic in the seventeenth century, might just as well be interpreted as making allowance for economic decentralization by what were, at the time, very successful polities.

Conversely, guilds could change the political economy of the states they were part of. In western Europe they became a force to be reckoned with, as we can see from the essay by Hugo Soly in this volume; their power peaked in medieval Italy and the Low Countries in the thirteenth and fourteenth centuries to such an extent that they could be decisive in the process of state formation. Guilds continued to play a political role in towns and cities in several countries, including London.²⁵

Even if the political economy of a state allows for institutions such as guilds, craftsmen and merchants still need to form groups, taking the initiative themselves to set up organizations to further their own interests. They need the ability to run an organization with fairly formal characteristics, so that literacy is an example of a skill that is important in the development of any informal group, such as must have existed at many times in world history, into some more or less formal organization. There must be explicit rules; for electing officials, for taking collective decisions of all sorts. This factor, the human capital of the actors who organize themselves, probably helps to explain why in a number of societies it was merchants who first developed guild-like institutions, their example followed by craftsmen, who in turn were sometimes followed by groups of journeymen in setting up their own associations. Such a pattern – merchants first, craftsmen second, journeymen third – emerges quite clearly from evidence in western Europe, where merchants' guilds emerged from the tenth century onward – some perhaps had even older roots. Guilds of craftsmen are a typical phenomenon of the urban renaissance around the thirteenth century, which both Luca Mocarelli and Tine De Moor mention in their work here.

24. Nevertheless, this exceptionalism should not be overstretched, as Larry Epstein remarks about the decline of the English guilds: "The dating differs by craft, industry, and region, but the current consensus tends to push the decline forward into the mid-to-late eighteenth century"; Epstein, "Craft Guilds in the Pre-modern Economy", p. 156. See Michael John Walker, "The Extent of the Guild Control of Trades in England, c.1660–1820: A Study Based on a Sample of Provincial Towns and London Companies" (unpublished Ph.D. thesis, University of Cambridge, 1985).

25. Maarten Prak, "Corporate Politics in the Low Countries: Guilds as Institutions, 14th to 18th Centuries", in *idem*, *Craft Guilds in the Early Modern Low Countries*, pp. 74–106; A. Black, *Guilds and Civil Society in European Political Thought from the Twelfth Century to the Present* (Ithaca, NY, 1984).

Finally, organizations of journeymen developed only in the seventeenth and eighteenth centuries, mainly in France, England, Germany, and to a lesser extent in the Low Countries and Italy, anticipating the rise of trade unions in the nineteenth century, although parts of Germany may be seen as exceptional in that journeymen's organizations were being set up there as early as the fourteenth and fifteenth centuries.²⁶ In China too, merchants initiated the first waves of guild formation; craftsmen followed in their wake in the course of the nineteenth century (see the essay by Christine Moll-Murata).

We might deduce from this that the more literate a society, the more socioeconomic groups there will be who can organize themselves formally. This would help explain the density of guilds in regions with high levels of literacy in late medieval northern Italy and the Low Countries. The formation of "guilds" of journeymen – such as friendly societies in England – points to high or increasing levels of human capital formation among the "labouring classes". Of all the aspects of guilds that survived the *ancien régime*, the transition from these journeymen associations to trade unions is the most obvious.²⁷

Finally, several contributions to this volume suggest that family ties influenced the emergence of guilds. Why organize a group on the basis of occupation, rather than according to religion, caste, or kinship? The classic answer is that in cities, kinship ties tend to become less important, but the degree to which that is true can of course differ from society to society. The strength of caste systems, for example, might well explain the "underdevelopment" of Indian guilds despite that country's long urban tradition. Similarly, it is perhaps significant that the first wave of guild formation in China was based not just on occupation, but on common origin, resulting in a "diaspora": merchants from certain regions active in

26. For European comparisons, including the Ottoman Empire, see Knut Schulz (ed.), *Handwerk in Europa. Vom Spätmittelalter bis zur frühen Neuzeit* (Munich, 1999). For Germany: Kluge, *Die Zünfte*, pp. 199–228; for England: R.A. Leeson, *Travelling Brothers: The Six Centuries' Road from Craft Fellowship to Trade Unionism* (London, 1979); for semi-independent journeymen's associations within the London guilds: Steve Rappaport, *Worlds Within Worlds: Structures of Life in Sixteenth-Century London* (Cambridge, 1989), pp. 219–232; for France: Cynthia Maria Truant, *The Rites of Labor: Brotherhoods of Compagnonnage in Old and New Regime France* (Ithaca, NY [etc.], 1994).

27. For this debate see, for example, Leeson, *Travelling Brothers*, especially chs 15 and 16; and Hans-Jörg Zerwas, *Arbeit als Besitz. Das ehrbare Handwerk zwischen Bruderliebe und Klassenkampf 1848* (Reinbek bei Hamburg, 1988). Interesting and recent empirical work is available on Italy: Paola Massa and Angelo Moiola (eds), *Dalla corporazione al mutuo soccorso. Organizzazione e tutela del lavoro tra XVI e XX secolo* (Milan, 2004); Renata Allio, "Welfare and Social Security in Piedmont: Trade Guilds Compared with Mutual Aid Societies", in Alberto Guenzi, Paolo Massa, and F. Piola Caselli (eds), *Guilds, Markets and Work Regulations in Italy, 16th–19th Centuries* (Aldershot, 1998), pp. 436–446; and Luigi Trezzi, "The Survival of the Corporation within the Friendly Societies for Artisans and Workers in Milan during the First Half of the Nineteenth Century", in *ibid.*, pp. 447–464.

distant cities set up places to meet, to share information, and formed a kind of quasi-family in their new environment. As an organizational principle, a common place of origin is much closer to kinship or clan membership than is a common occupation, which was the more straightforward basis of European or Ottoman guilds.

It has been argued that kinship ties were relatively weak in western Europe, perhaps as the result of deliberate policies by the medieval Catholic Church to weaken them.²⁸ Tine De Moor argues that weakened family ties were a vital precondition for the spectacular growth of guilds during the revival of cities in that period. Although, to some degree, family relations remained an important element within craft guilds, with fathers passing their skills on to their sons in the workshop,²⁹ extended family ties such as could be found in China and India were absent. That created opportunities for artisans with the same skills to exchange knowledge from different traditions, and by offering insurance based on guild membership the guild organization was quite simply a necessity, to fill gaps in the social network and welfare systems.³⁰

The almost complete exclusion of women from formal individual membership of all guilds has to be seen within that general framework of social relations. The essay by Clare Crowston deals with that.³¹ Especially where women married young and where family production in principle encompassed all its able-bodied members, guild membership was restricted to the head of the household. That is certainly not to say that married women and co-resident daughters, sharing the same profession as the male head of the household, were not ruled in their productive work by the guilds, nor that they were excluded from the protection

28. Significantly, guilds did not develop in the British Isles in the early medieval Celtic lands where kinship ties dominated. See Fryde, "Guilds in England before the Black Death", pp. 217–218. That kinship ties were or became relatively weak in Catholic parts of Europe has been suggested by Thomas F. Glick, *Islamic and Christian Spain in the Early Middle Ages* (Princeton, NJ, 1979), Avner Greif, *Institutions and the Path to the Modern Economy: Lessons from Medieval Trade* (Cambridge, 2006), and Tine De Moor and Jan Luiten van Zanden, *Vrouwen en de geboorte van het kapitalisme in West-Europa* (Amsterdam, 2006).

29. Epstein and Prak, *Guilds, Innovation and the European Economy*; De Munck, Kaplan, and Soly, *Learning on the Shop Floor*.

30. Sandra Bos, "A Tradition of Giving and Receiving: Mutual Aid Within the Guild System", in Prak, *Craft Guilds in the Early Modern Low Countries*, pp. 174–193; see also n. 27.

31. Danielle van den Heuvel, *Women and Entrepreneurship: Female Traders in the Northern Netherlands c. 1580–1815* (Amsterdam, 2007), especially pp. 56–69, 135–176; Thomas Buchner, *Möglichkeiten von Zunft. Wiener und Amsterdamer Zünfte im Vergleich (17.–18. Jahrhundert)* (Vienna, 2004), pp. 164–176; Kluge, *Die Zünfte*, pp. 132–140. For the near exclusion from public life of productive women, and therefore also from the guilds, in the Islamic world, see Shatzmiller, *Labour in the Medieval Islamic World*, pp. 347–368. Nevertheless, in the textile industry of Qajar Persia fourteen crafts employed women exclusively; see Willem Floor, *The Persian Textile Industry in Historical Perspective, 1500–1925* (Paris [etc.], 1999), p. 30.

provided by them. However, they are barely visible in evidence left of the guilds' life.

Exceptions are to be found where women married late, so had a good chance of outliving their husbands, something often seen in the Dutch Republic. There, widows' rights were well protected as, either on their own or through an experienced journeyman, they could remain guild members. In some guilds, such as those for fishmongers, or fruit and vegetable sellers, women could even be independent members, while in others, such as those for tailors, they could be members, but with a subordinate status. At the opposite end of the spectrum we find younger brothers who, temporarily at any rate, were denied a place in the household and organized themselves into guild-like organizations. The hunters' guilds in West Africa seem to exemplify that (see the essay by Jan Jansen in this volume).

These four factors, urbanization, political economy, human capital, and social relations, contribute to explaining the development of guilds and their institutional diversity in the early modern period. They help to explain why, from the eleventh century onward, western Europe established such a very dense network of guilds so early and why other societies often developed them much later, or developed institutions that relied on other forms of social organization such as the extended family, and in some cases on a state-sponsored system.

If that is true for the period discussed in this issue, roughly the centuries between 1100 and 1900, we might ask ourselves to what extent the functions previously performed by guilds have been fulfilled since by different means, perhaps by organizations which could then be called "disguised guilds", or instead have become redundant. The answer seems to be simple, as it is commonly held that "the market" – embedded in appropriate national legislation – is usually the best alternative. On the other hand, it cannot be denied that occupational groups, as a rule described as "professionals", have powerful organizational structures.

What do the propositions on institutional economics presented in these essays tell us in that respect? The answer to that is complicated by the fact that after the formal abolition of guilds many an organization explicitly called itself a guild for reasons which might not necessarily conform to the definition used here. In this volume the essay by Jan Jansen provides a good example in the revival over the last decade of the "hunters' guilds" in West Africa. In the classic field of labour history two other examples come to mind; the Catholic social movement since the encyclical *Rerum Novarum* of 1891 deploring the dissolution of the ancient guilds, and the British guild socialism which flourished in the period 1906–1925.³²

32. G.D.H. Cole, "Guild Socialism", in *Encyclopaedia of the Social Sciences*, VII, pp. 202–204. For continuities in German-speaking countries: Kluge, *Die Zünfte*, pp. 447–459.

Much guild terminology has survived, for example in the modern St Knut's guilds in Scandinavia and the Baltic,³³ and the influence of guilds can still be seen in the functioning of modern labour unions and the many organizations of such professionals as lawyers, medical doctors, accountants, and academics, which still perform many of the functions of medieval guilds, including quality control, training, and bargaining on behalf of interested parties. They testify to the continued vitality of the concept of the guild.³⁴

33. See Hans-Friedrich Schütt, "Die dänischen St Knudsgilden – mit besonderer Berücksichtigung der Gilden in Schleswig und Flensburg", in Schwineköper, *Gilden und Zünfte*, pp. 231–280, especially 254–255. Even more modern is the use of the concept of guild for groups of players taking part in online computer games such as "World of Warcraft".

34. For an analysis of the use of guild terminology by occupational organizations in the information technology industries see Chris Benner, "'Computers in the Wild': Guilds and Next-Generation Unionism in the Information Revolution", *International Review of Social History*, Supplement 11 (2003), "Uncovering Labour in Information Revolutions, 1750–2000", pp. 181–204.