

OGILVIE, SHEILAGH. *The European Guilds. An Economic Analysis.* [The Princeton Economic History of the Western World.] Princeton University Press, Princeton (NJ) [etc.] 2019. xvi, 645 pp. Ill. \$39.95; £34.00.

Running to well over 600 pages, this is a seminal contribution to research on craft guilds and premodern history in general. The book impressively combines decades of studies on European craft guilds, from their emergence in the Middle Ages to their abolition in the nineteenth century. Ogilvie's main question is whether we should evaluate the prolonged existence of craft guilds throughout Europe as beneficial or harmful to societies and economies. Readers familiar with her work will not be surprised by the main argument of the book, which is clearly stated from the onset. Ogilvie aims to demonstrate that "overall, the actions that guilds took mainly had the effect of protecting and enriching their members at the expense of consumers and non-members [...]" (p. 17). Through their rent-seeking behaviour, she argues, craft guilds harmed markets in many ways. For instance, entry barriers to crafts affected labour supply while simultaneously discriminating against vulnerable groups in society such as migrants, women, and Jews. Guilds are also argued to have obstructed innovation, manipulated markets through price setting and supply control, and negatively affected human capital investment through apprenticeship regulations, while quality regulations (if present at all) predominantly aimed at excluding non-guild producers. Ogilvie concludes by saying that guilds "might in theory have been a solution to markets and states, but in practice they were part of the problem" (p. 585).

The evidence underpinning the analysis has been derived from an impressive reading of the literature on craft guilds, in combination with her earlier work. Ogilvie appreciatively makes use of the profusion of micro-level studies on guilds across Europe. From this literature two datasets were compiled, one on quantitative indicators and the other on qualitative evidence regarding guild activities; together, these datasets comprise over 17,000 observations on craft guilds across Europe. It is to be applauded that both datasets have been made publicly available online.<sup>1</sup> Using these data, each chapter examines a different element of the rent-seeking behaviour of craft guilds: their relations with governments, entry barriers, market manipulation, exclusion of women, quality regulation, human capital investment, innovation, and their effect on economic growth. Because of this somewhat topical approach, readers should not expect to get an overall understanding of craft guilds in specific times and regions, but this is not what Ogilvie sets out to do. Instead, her book can be seen as a continuation of the debate between her and scholars who hold a more favourable interpretation of European craft guilds, such as the late Steven Epstein, with whom she had a fierce discussion in the *Economic History Review* in 2008.<sup>2</sup> The polemical tone that characterized that debate is continued in this book.

Seeing the current state of the literature, I doubt whether that is a good choice. Within the field of craft-guild research, there are probably few historians today who would argue that guilds were not rent-seekers, at least to some degree. Most would agree with Ogilvie that guilds did indeed at points exclude outsiders or try to control markets. However, the nuance

1. <http://www.econ.cam.ac.uk/people/faculty/sco2/projects/ogilvie-guilds-databases>, last accessed 6 September 2020.

2. S.R. Epstein, "Craft Guilds in the Pre-Modern Economy: A Discussion", *Economic History Review*, 61:1 (2008), pp. 155–174; S. Ogilvie, "Rehabilitating the Guilds: A Reply", *Economic History Review*, 61:1 (2008), pp. 175–182.

with which these arguments are generally presented – that the nature of rent-seeking depended on the time period, type of craft, level of urbanization, etc. – are here simplified to a dichotomous stance either in favour of or against craft guilds. Consequently, there is little room left for the historical context and the distinctive environments in which all these different guilds operated, and how that may have affected their behaviour. For example, it may well have been that market regulation by craft guilds was beneficial for consumers and workers in thin and asymmetrical markets but not in densely populated areas, but Ogilvie considers all regulation by guilds as rent-seeking behaviour throughout.

Because the rent-seeking argument is so fervently pursued throughout the book, other potential explanations for the patterns Ogilvie observes are at times not taken into consideration. This shows in Chapter Three, where entry barriers are argued to have biased access to crafts to locals, and especially to sons of masters. Going by premodern demographics, Ogilvie argues that the proportion of masters' sons admitted as new masters in the guild of their father was relatively high. She takes this as evidence of rent-seeking, with guilds first selecting among kin. However, not only are these proportions sometimes still surprisingly low (11.9 per cent in the Northern Netherlands, Table 3.8), she does not take into account that it was a characteristic of premodern and many modern societies for the oldest son to have the same occupation as his father.<sup>3</sup> Without knowing the rate of occupational heritability outside guilds, it remains uncertain if the (at times) high proportion of sons following in their father's footsteps should be ascribed to rent-seeking behaviour exclusively.

A similar point can be raised about the brief discussion of premiums, i.e. the sums paid by apprentices to masters. Ogilvie argues that "many guilds" charged minimum statutory premiums (p. 120). However, this interpretation is based on seventy-six guilds in the Middle Rhine region, where guilds were relatively strong. And even there, fewer than half of the guilds actually charged minimum premiums. Ogilvie furthermore argues that these premiums were high because guilds monopolized guild training. Yet, there is no mention of the literature on premiums, which demonstrates that they were based on the risks faced by master and apprentice, boarding arrangements, the desirability of the craft, and that they were inversely related to the apprenticeship term – signalling that apprentices could speed up training by paying higher premiums.<sup>4</sup> In other words, premiums could equally have reflected rational training agreements instead of being vehicles for rent-seeking. In that view, premiums were the premodern equivalent of today's tuition fees. And just as contemporaries complained about premiums, as Ogilvie shows, parents today complain about tuition fees. Yet, few people today would argue that universities are rent-seeking institutions.

This is not to say Ogilvie's argument is not convincing. On several occasions it certainly is – especially Chapter Eight on guilds and innovation is noteworthy. Rather, the conviction Ogilvie displays in demonstrating rent-seeking runs the risk that readers become overly sceptical (especially when the evidence is thin). This does no credit to the impressive feat

3. See I. Maas and M.H.D. van Leeuwen, "Toward Open Societies? Trends in Male Intergenerational Class Mobility in European Countries during Industrialization", *American Journal of Sociology*, 122:3 (2016), pp. 838–885. For an overview of the literature, see *Idem*, "Historical Studies of Social Mobility and Stratification", *Annual Review of Sociology*, 36 (2010), pp. 429–451.

4. C. Minns and P. Wallis, "The Price of Human Capital in a Pre-Industrial Economy: Premiums and Apprenticeship Contracts in 18th-Century England", *Explorations in Economic History*, 50:3 (2013), pp. 335–350; M. Justman and K. van der Beek, "Market Forces Shaping Human Capital in Eighteenth-Century London", *The Economic History Review*, 68:4 (2015), pp. 1177–1202.

of scholarship that this book also is. What it means is that the book would have benefited from a more balanced approach, more so because much of these data have been used by other scholars to convey more nuanced perspectives on craft guilds. To me, this suggests that the question of whether guilds were rent-seeking cannot be answered by a simple yes or no, and that we should perhaps use Ogilvie's impressive data collection to steer the debate on craft guilds in novel directions.

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KESSLER, MARIO. *Westemigranten. Deutsche Kommunisten zwischen USA-Exil und DDR* [Zeithistorische Studien, Bd. 60.]. Böhlau, Vienna 2019. 576 pp. € 54.99.

Based on broad archival research, online material, literature, and his own studies mainly in the biographical field, Mario Kessler presents the hitherto neglected and thus almost unknown history of the German communists who fled the Nazis to the United States, through the fate of those who, after the war, eventually decided to settle in Germany's Soviet Occupation Zone, which became the German Democratic Republic (GDR) in October 1949. The biographies of the forty women and men featured in this volume can be found in the Appendix. Most of them were of Jewish descent and intellectuals: writers; journalists; stage or film artists; some were medical or technical scientists. Not all of them had been a member of the Communist Party of Germany (KPD); some turned to communist ideas in the course of emigration, some joined the Sozialistische Einheitspartei Deutschlands (SED – Socialist Unity Party of Germany), created in April 1946, later on.

The author takes a multi-level approach. Firstly, he examines the history of politics and policies concerning Germany after the war; secondly, he analyses the history of ideas, and, more specifically, of ideologies in as far as they concern the individual as well as the status of the communist parties: the KPD; the US Communist Party; and the SED. Finally, the author questions the history of the intellectual and cultural transfer of the German communist “West émigrés” to the communist part of Germany. Quotations from authentic sources, especially up-to-date ones such as letters, diaries, and reports, substantiate the historical narrative and the analytical conclusions. They reveal the interaction between the levels and the consistency or inconsistency of personal and political developments.

In his foreword, Kessler explains his method and his selection. The following eight thematic chapters, introduced by song lyrics from American popular culture, are largely chronologically organized and divided into multiple sections. In addition to the biographical section, the Appendix contains an index of sources and a bibliography, as well as a list of abbreviations – but not an index of persons. This is an incredible omission on the part of the renowned publishing house Böhlau.

The first two chapters are more or less introductions. In the first, the author outlines some general aspects of the complexity of “The USA and the Refugees”, beginning with the