

Andrea Caracausi, Matthew Davies, Luca Mocrelli (eds.), *Between Regulation and Freedom. Work and Manufacture in European Cities, 14th-18th Centuries*, Newcastle Upon Tyne, Cambridge Scholars Publishing, pp. 146.

Discussion and debate about guilds has engaged historical scholars over the decades. Starting from the interpretations derived from the spread of Enlightenment ideas, the guilds were long considered exclusively as a serious obstacle to economic development (Pirenne, 1937; Cipolla, 1976). In this interpretative path, the rise and establishment of different modes of production with respect to the craft guilds was therefore considered to be the element that overcame the guild tradition, leading to the definitive unchaining of capitalist forces. More recently, however, research on local models, supported by a very substantial body of documentation, has been able to overturn this postulate. These studies have shown that, especially in late medieval times, the guilds were to some extent open to innovation and served as a vehicle for the transformation of production (products and processes alike). At the same time, the guilds were able to achieve an adequate level of coordination with other, more efficient forms of production as they gradually appeared (Guenzi, Massa, Piola Caselli, 1998 for Italy; Lucassen, De Moor, Van Zanden, 2008 for a European overview).

The guilds, while not renouncing their formal structure, adapted their conduct with respect to some issues, such as product innovation, production organization, export needs and, not lastly, the use of forms of decentralized production borrowed from the putting-out system (Guenzi, 2014). It is clear from the most recent studies that the majority of European guilds focused increasingly on standardized production for export, especially starting in the 18th century. The volume edited by Caracausi, Davies and Mocrelli participates fully in this debate, bringing new elements to the discussion. The title indicates the premises that guide the research work presented. In fact, work and urban space are the two interpretative keys for the action of the guilds over a very

long timespan and through the very different examples of some European areas. As objective keys for the interpretation of the guild phenomenon, work and space take different forms with respect to different geographical areas. Ultimately, work and urban space constitute the terrain upon which intentions and actions concerning openness and regulation on training, mobility and wage levels unfold.

Over the centuries, the guilds were practically the sole regulatory institution for production and the labour market. In the urban economy, they regulated access to the labour market, mobility and training. These fundamental issues in the development of a modern economy have been emphasized by scholars starting with Douglass North, and the volume reviewed here throws them into sharp relief. In this sense, the work coordinated by Caracausi, Davies and Mocarelli credits the guilds with having created a market for skilled labour and, in some way, of formalizing vocational training before the rise of education systems. This was an essential role of the guild system: the first efforts at human capital formation. In this sense, the volume specifically highlights the role of transmission of know-how by the guilds both internally and outside, while also clarifying the duality of the outcomes (Epstein, 1998). In fact, if on the one hand the guilds propose to serve as institutions for the formation of human capital (freedom), on the other they maintain their prerogatives of limiting access to the world of work (regulation) (Ogilvie, 2004). In this sense the chapters dedicated to the regulation of work in the London guilds in the late Middle Ages, the attitude of the Flemish cities in the fourteenth and fifteenth centuries, and the presence of Swiss workers on the Venetian mainland in the eighteenth century are most significant. It seems clear, from the examples given, that in these three very different parts of Europe the craft guilds were constantly torn between the drive to open to qualified workers from outside – in order to respond to changes in demand – and the demands of craft elites to preserve their privileges.

The other essential point the volume deals with is the progressive growth of unregulated labour, i.e. manpower not included in the guild

system. The phenomenon, widely studied starting with the pioneering work of F. Mendels, has often been described as a steadily more intensive substitution of the putting-out system for craft- and guild-based production. What the present volume highlights, rather, is the coexistence of the two phenomena. In fact, the analyses presented in the volume – on the glass industry in Europe, building workers in Italian cities in the fifteenth and sixteenth centuries, producers of printed cotton cloth in Barcelona in the eighteenth century, textile production in Vicenza between countryside and city, and free and regulated labour in the central Balkan area in the eighteenth century – make it evident that not only did the putting-out system stretch well beyond the boundaries originally outlined by Mendels but that this mode of production was added to the traditional guild craft system. The research presents some very interesting results relating to cases that differ but that are nevertheless united by the fact that, especially for goods production, craft and guild methods were adapted, over time, to the putting out system. This is clearly visible in the slow process of modernization of the guilds, which in order to respond to the changed structure of demand (exports, fashion, increase in consumption), had adapted their production model. One example is the craft guilds' abandonment of the initial stages of production (generally low-value-added and delegated to rural workers) and concentration on the final stages of product finishing.

In this context the category of "urban production" becomes essential. The guilds, obviously, were the backbone of the urban production system, especially when the city was the sole economic centre. However, economic and technological progress, the opening up of new markets, the arrival of new products and the increase in purchasing power profoundly altered this structure, facing the guilds with a new and totally different market, no longer centred on the city. In the course of this transformation over time, the craft associations had to deal with a slow and complex process of adaptation that is well evidenced by the works presented in the volume.

The last element analysed here is the relationship between wages and price levels. A great deal of research has focused on the formation of wages within the guilds, highlighting the role of human capital. But more recent studies on specific cases have shown that salary was not a variable linked exclusively to negotiations between the parties, skills, time and type of manufacture, as the volume edited by Caracausi, Davies and Mocarelli shows, but that wages also depended on the social position of the worker and the context in which he was inserted. The wage question is closely linked to product quality, since the rules of the guilds often provided for the simultaneous adjustment of salary and product quality. The book highlights a dualistic situation: on the one hand the guilds were engaged in maintaining high product quality, which became an element of recognition even on the international markets; on the other hand we find the new products and production methods that benefited from greater organizational freedom. Between these two extremes there are a multitude of nuanced cases, in which the degree of regulation both of quality and of salaries was extremely variable. This underscores once again the greatest contribution of the volume, namely the recognition of the guilds' adaptability over the centuries, a process that came to an end only with the industrial revolution.

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