E-ISSN: 2997-948X
American Journal of Religious, Culture, and Archaeological Studies
https://semantjournals.org/index.php/AJRCAS

| Research Article

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Development of Craft Guilds in Medieval Sweden, The Monopoly Rights of Guilds

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Abstract: This article explores the formation of craft guilds in medieval Sweden, their role in economic and social life, and the nature and consequences of the monopoly rights granted to these organizations. Guilds played a crucial role in protecting their members, controlling product quality and pricing, and ensuring economic stability in urban areas. The article examines the internal structure of guilds, their principles of operation, and their relationship with the state based on historical sources.

Keywords: Sweden, Middle Ages, craftsmanship, guilds, monopoly rights, economic history, professional associations, urban economy.

Kirish qismi:

In medieval Europe, alongside the development of crafts and trade activities, guilds–organizations that protected the interests of professionals–became widespread. Especially in Sweden, during the 13th to 15th centuries, craft guilds became an integral part of economic life. In addition to protecting the economic interests of their members, guilds also held important political and social positions in urban life They held monopolistic rights in their fields by setting production standards, controlling prices, and regulating the market. This article explores the role of guilds in Swedish history, their structure, areas of activity, and relations with the state, based on historical sources and scholarly literature.

Main Part: In the most developed countries of Western Europe, guild communities existed in cities from the 14th century onward. They began to acquire early capitalist characteristics in the spheres of production, labor and personal relations, as well as ethical norms. "This was especially characteristic of the textile industry, weapons manufacturing, shipbuilding, coin minting, and the mining industry. In Sweden, as in other Scandinavian countries, craft guilds developed relatively late (the first guild charter was adopted by the Stockholm tailors' guild in the mid-14th century), and even by the 15th century, they had neither spread beyond the capital nor encompassed all branches of craftsmanship in the areas where they existed. According to the surviving statutes of

the guilds, the relationships within them can be viewed not only as a phenomenon of the somewhat 'slowed' social history of Northern Europe but also as a distinctive evidence of the earlier, initial stages of guild formation in general. This period has less available information and attracts fewer researchers; due to the scarcity and incompleteness of sources, it has been studied only to a limited extent [1].

Among the most prominent general, regional, and stage-specific characteristics of workshop organization and cultural types are their notable regulatory and egalitarian relationships, alongside rules concerning hired labor and, more broadly, norms describing attitudes toward work. In the 15th century, guild regulations could be found in Stockholm. Of course, these normative documents represent a specific educational model, and when referring to them, one must always keep in mind the difference between the rules and reality (unfortunately, this gap is almost impossible to eliminate). At the same time, the charters reflect various functions of the craft guilds: relations among artisans themselves, with buyers and authorities, as well as aspects of production and sales, hiring, training and employing workers, lower jurisdiction, religious services, charity, and other areas. Therefore, the guild charter served both as a 'guide on labor and wages' and as a moral code for the city's artisans.

The apprentice system was a distinctive feature of urban life in medieval Europe. It is interesting in many respects, but here we will primarily discuss how the forms of labor specific to the period, the city, and urban craftsmanship were carried out within this institution. Unfortunately, questions regarding the number of apprentices in various crafts, their roles in the production process and within the guild fraternity, norms and forms of exploitation, wages, and others–which are very important for this topic–often lack precise quantitative answers and can only be illuminated through qualitative analysis.

During the period under consideration, all known guild statutes of urban craftsmen in Sweden included clauses regarding the status and duties of journeymen. In a number of guild statutes, the number of apprentices allowed per master was specified: for example, no more than three for a shoemaker, two for a jeweler (with an additional 1–2 for large and urgent orders), one for a butcher, and for a stonemason (not regularly, but when needed). On the other hand, the 15th-century Stockholm magistrate's (Tankeböcker) court records noted 42 masters and only 7 apprentices in the shoemaking trade, 25 masters and 6 apprentices in the jewelry trade, and 15 masters with 1 apprentice in the butchery trade. There are several considerations regarding why certain categories of citizens are more frequently represented in court documents, while others appear less often. However, the impression that there were more apprentices than masters in urban craftsmanship cannot be dispelled.

In a number of craft workshops, the number of apprentices was primarily determined to compensate for the natural attrition of masters. Apprentices mainly engaged in technical training. These were, in particular, metalworkers–such as founders, gunsmiths, minters, and others–who, due to the conditions of production, could not produce their products alone and, lacking older relatives, were forced to rely on hired labor assistance. With the expansion of scale and the shortening of production times, an increase in the number of apprentices was inevitable. However, until the 16th century, there were few large craft workshops in Swedish cities, and we are referring to traditional forms. Therefore, the shortage of apprentices was evident. "It is known that the guild statutes imposed specific requirements on hired apprentices: they had to possess high skills, have completed apprenticeship in a particular craft, be lawful, and have a good reputation. However, the demand for apprentices was so great that masters sometimes neglected the last two conditions. Thus, some shoemakers were fined for offering work to any 'young man traveling through towns and villages to make shoes,' that is, for hiring people indiscriminately. Of course, the reason for hiring such a person as a master might have been that he was willing to accept less

favorable conditions. However, as a rule, the wages of hired workers in the cities were clearly defined. Perhaps this indicates a shortage of certified apprentices in this context.

The question may arise: what could be the reasons for this phenomenonIt is known that guild apprentices were required to have high qualifications, meaning they were professionally fully prepared for independent work. In the workshop rules, it was not accidental that there were prohibitions regarding apprentices who ‘worked for themselves’ in the master’s workshop. Such an apprentice could go to a village or town without workshops and become an independent craftsman there. Such freedom of practice was, as a rule, characteristic of Sweden at that time.

The master’s widow, daughter, or sister, aiming to preserve the workshop and social status, often married apprentices. In some crafts, this type of marriage was preferred. In many cases, apprentices were distinguished from the master only by the guild admission ceremony. It is evident that such apprentices belonged to the same urban social environment as the masters, and serving as an apprentice in the workshop was a genuine stage in increasing the number of masters. rtainly, apprentices were also recruited from other social strata of the population, but among the future guild masters, outsiders were few.

However, not everything was simple, because the boundary between master and apprentice was not formal. There was no equality of status or mechanical continuity between the master and the apprentice. In the workshops, the latter (apprentice) was usually assigned simpler tasks and was not allowed to perform organizational functions. The social status of apprentices was dual: some of them were future masters and burghers, but for the time being, they were all hired workers. However, the developmental trend of the apprenticeship institution led to the predominance of their status as hired workers, while the group of those who became masters gradually narrowed and acquired a hereditary character.

The working conditions created for apprentices can only be learned through the regulations concerning saddlers. In the summer, they worked from 3 to 21 hours a day, of course with breaks for meals, while in winter they worked less and mostly labored in the evenings by candlelight. They were allowed to choose their own master. The term of employment was six months, and sometimes one year. The official days for hiring and payment were Easter and St. Michael's Day (29 September). Compliance with these deadlines was mandatory for both parties: a trainee who violated the rules would forfeit six months' wages entirely, and the master would be fined. Once the payment was made, the apprentice could take a vacation. A few days of rest were allowed. Sometimes, a probation period was set when hiring, for example, two weeks. Recruiting apprentices was prohibited.

The apprentice ate at the master's home, but had to pay for his own other needs, including the doctor called in case of illness. Missed working days were not paid. The master was not allowed to force the apprentice to work on holidays or withhold their wages. The apprentice was required to strictly adhere to labor discipline: not to shorten the working day, not to serve two masters simultaneously, and not to assist another master's apprentice in work. He was required to show respect to the master [2].

The conditions for hiring apprentices were almost the same as those for hiring domestic servants. In both cases, it was emphasized that forcing a worker to accept a job, as well as unlawfully retaining them at the workplace after the end of the employment period or one month after the apprentice had given notice of departure, was prohibited.

Deductions were sometimes made from the apprentice’s wages for ‘negligence in work,’ for the master’s raw materials, and for using the workshop’s workspace for personal purposes When being hired, as mentioned above, the apprentice had to provide certificates of qualification and lawful birth, and undergo a probationary period in a number of crafts [3]. Thus, apprentices still

constituted a selected part of the hired workers, but they had to meet high requirements, especially those apprentices belonging to the guild.

According to the work regulations, apprentices' wages consisted of food (meals and lodging) equal to one-third or half of the wage, and the remaining part was paid in cash as required by law. Tabiiy qism ba'zan oziq-ovqat mahsulotlari shaklida chiqarilgan. The precise amount of the apprentice's salary is unknown. Only information available is that the apprentice's daily wage amounted to two-thirds of the master's wage, which is approximately the same as that of day laborers (according to data on construction craftsmanship) [4].

The apprentice was under a certain personal dependence on the master. He was not only a workshop manager to his master but also, moreover, seemed to act as the head of the household, which at that time was inseparable from the role. The master was regarded as the apprentice's "breadwinner." He monitored the apprentice's behavior (for example, he did not allow him to stay out overnight), regulated visits to taverns, forbade attending masters' feasts, and demanded complete obedience. All of this indicates the master's interference in the apprentice's private life and the presence of non-economic coercive elements –incorporating the worker into his family in a patriarchal manner, through personal relationships. These personal relationships, naturally, had a reciprocal character. However, beneath their surface, signs of transformation within the traditional apprentice system could still be observed. We find information about this in the new rules for admitting masters, which was not an easy task. In addition to qualifications, legality, good reputation, and in some cases residency certificates, a prospective master had to pay substantial entrance fees to the guild (or both the guild and the city). He was required to possess a certain amount of initial property, usually 20 marks in most workshops (keep in mind that owning property worth only 3 marks subjected a person to taxation but exempted them from labor legislation) [5].

If we compare the rules of the tailors of Stockholm from the mid-14th century and early 16th century (1356 and 1501), as well as the regulations for the craft guilds of Visby in Gotland in the mid-14th century, with the guild statutes of Stockholm in the 15th century, it becomes clear that such conditions for admission to the guild were not original. Over time, these conditions became more complex, and it is evident that the more intricate requirements are characteristic of the 15th century. In the 15th century, even some of the earliest statutes began to include provisions limiting the number of guild members and imposing the strictest selection criteria. At the same time, family members of a master who joined the guild enjoyed significant privileges, and it was common for them to inherit the status of master and guild membership. It appears that by the 15th century, the process of closing workshops and, along with it, the separation of apprentices had already emerged.

One form of these processes was the creation of their own trade unions by apprentices in certain specialties. Each of these unions was intended solely for people of their own specialty and was separate from other unions established in different workshops. One of the central aspects of these unions was the right to have their own banner, which could be seen as a unique way of self-affirmation and strengthening unity. In some cases, the apprentices' unions provided certain labor conditions and demanded formalizing them through contracts with the masters. This situation occurred in the trade of belt-making and patch-making, where apprentices demanded payment for the designated workdays and a four-day holiday (1437). The last point was the only part of the entire contract written in German; perhaps it, like the whole contract, was introduced by people from German cities who were very numerous and influential in the bourgeois environment of Sweden at that time.

However, it should be kept in mind that the guilds in Sweden did not have monopoly rights in their fields and were not widespread at all; they only covered the artisan elite of a few major cities, primarily Stockholm. In such conditions, an apprentice could become an independent

craftsman. Especially, the material base of most craftsmanship at that time was very simple. Therefore, although the process of creating a permanent contingent of "perpetual apprentices" certainly took place, it did not yield significant results by the end of the period under consideration.

At the end of the 16th century and the beginning of the 17th century, according to the inventory, out of 231 craftsmen in Stockholm, only about 200 were apprentices and servants, which is not insignificant. Some craftsmen had several hired workers, while others, sometimes even the very wealthy, had none at all.

In provincial towns, craftsmen usually managed with almost no hired workers, but worked together as a family. The shortage of apprentices was partially compensated by students and servants. Even in the statutes of craft guilds, apprentices were often referred to as paid servants or assistant servants. The apprentice was called a "boy," or sometimes a "servant," or a "junior worker." [6]. If the regulations contain clauses about apprentices, these define the apprentice's status, after which they gain the right to receive wages, and the master is obligated to pay them. After completing their studies, the apprentice worked as an apprentice under their master for one year.

It is evident that students, especially in the final years of their studies, were, so to speak, "hidden apprentices," and were also used as free apprentices, which was possible due to the patriarchal ties and relationships that existed in craftsmanship at that time. Thus, in medieval handicrafts, apprentice labor as a form of hired work was primarily distinguished by its auxiliary nature. This work, like the craft itself, was small-scale, individual, and fragmented. Although journeymen were a distinct group in urban production, in Sweden this group was relatively small. In guild craftsmanship, an important part was made up of potential masters who came from the guild environment. The group of "eternal apprentices" had only just begun to take shape. In terms of workplace and status, apprentices did not differ much from domestic servants. Their wages largely consisted of payments in kind. The magistrates restricted the personal rights of journeymen, and self-assertion became the main purpose of journeymen's associations, although economic demands also began to emerge within them. On the contrary, guild statutes and government regulations reinforced the lack of personal rights for apprentices. The specific features of the apprentices' status indicate that the relationships involving them did not yet represent free employment — that is, employment based solely on economic compulsion. This was a typical "bound" form of wage labor, limited by all the parameters of hired work, but containing strong elements of non-economic compulsion [7].

Conclusion:

In the Middle Ages, craft guilds in Sweden played an important role in shaping the urban economy and social structure. Through the monopoly rights granted to them, guilds regulated craft activities, controlled the quality of products, and ensured price stability. They actively participated not only in economic but also in social and political life. Although monopoly rights limited competition, their existence served to protect the interests of workshops and masters, preserve craft traditions, and establish a stable production system. The activities of guilds clearly demonstrate how professional associations positively influenced societal development during that period. At the same time, they served as important institutions that ensured a balance between collective interests and individual initiative.

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