

REVIEW ESSAY

Artisans: Comparative-Historical Explorations

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BOS, SANDRA. “Uyt liefde tot malcander”. Onderlinge hulpverlening binnen de Noord-Nederlandse gilden in internationaal perspectief (1570–1820). [IISG: Studies + Essays, 27.] Stichting beheer IISG, Amsterdam, 1998. 395 pp. Ill. D.fl. 58.00.

GENABEEK, JOOST VAN. Met vereende kracht risico’s verzacht. De plaats van onderlinge hulp binnen de negentiende-eeuwse particuliere regelingen van sociale zekerheid. [IISG: Studies + Essays, 29.] Stichting beheer IISG, Amsterdam 1999. D.fl. 58.00.

PANHUUSEN, BIBI. Maatwerk. Kleermakers, naaisters, oudkleerkopers en de gilden (1500–1800). [IISG: Studies + Essays, 30.] Stichting beheer IISG, Amsterdam 2000. 339 pp. Ill. D.fl. 58.00.

DECEULAER, HARALD. Pluriforme patronen en een verschillende snit. Sociaal-economische, institutionele en culturele transformaties in de kledingsector in Antwerpen, Brussel en Gent, ca 1585–ca 1800. [IISG: Studies + Essays, 31.] Stichting beheer IISG, Amsterdam 2001. 431 pp. Ill. D.fl. 58.40.

Since 1998, four volumes have appeared in the “IISG series” which share a common thematic framework: working people – in particular, artisans – in the (northern and southern) Netherlands, their living and working conditions, and their forms of mutual support and help in the pre-industrial and the early industrial era. The historiographic background for these studies is a renewed interest over the past years in artisans and guilds at the beginning of the modern era. The authors’ academic teachers (Jan Lucassen, Maarten Prak, Hugo Soly, and Catharina Lis) have instilled in them not only an interest in the subject itself, but also the imperative of a comparative approach. One characteristic of all four volumes which should be emphasized is that the authors do not define their object of investigation as artisans in a single city; rather they have selected several groups of artisans and several cities, or even the entire northern Netherlands, and they have presented the results of their investigations within an international context.

For the most part, Germany, England, and France serve here as comparative models. The great advantage of such an approach is that it allows the authors to avoid the (not only local) limitations of older historical studies of artisans, which did not for the most part go beyond a “worm’s-eye view” of an individual city or a single artisan group. In this way, all of the authors have, in their individual investigations, been able to benefit almost automatically from the results of international research. Incidentally, the question also arises as to why such comparative approaches in dissertations on modern social history in general, and on the history of artisans in particular, have been more widespread in the Netherlands than, for example, in Germany. One possible answer might lie in the influence of the social sciences. For while Norbert Elias’s name appears only once in these four studies,¹ the indirect influence of his work may have fallen on more fruitful ground in the Netherlands than in Germany.

Following a lengthy presentation of the results of the four volumes, I will discuss in summary form the challenges and opportunities offered by national and international comparative research on the history of artisans.

MUTUAL HELP IN THE GUILD AND POST-GUILD ERAS

Upon closer inspection, we find among these four volumes two pairs of studies which are closely related to one another. Sandra Bos and Joost van Genabeek examine mutual help among artisans within the framework of social insurance systems, while Bibi Panhuysen and Harald Deceulaer investigate tailors and other professions of the clothes trade in the northern and southern Netherlands. While the latter two studies investigate similar time periods (1570–1800), the first two volumes are structured diachronically. Bos investigates selected guilds in Amsterdam, Utrecht, and Leiden, their funds and systems of support before 1798. She then turns to the period after the end of the *Ancien Régime*, examining forms of continuity following the abolition of mandatory guild membership in 1798. This is where her book intersects with Van Genabeek’s study, which analyses the gradual transformation of the system of support in guilds and journeymen’s associations (*knechtsbossen*) up to the development of state-sponsored social insurance in the early twentieth century. Both of these studies share an interest, recently expressed by researchers such as Abram de Swaan and Marcel van der Linden, in long-term comparisons of social insurance systems in Europe.

Bos distinguishes several levels within the system of mutual support. These differences depended primarily upon local particularities. In Amsterdam, members of guilds automatically had to contribute to insurance funds. A look at other cities in the northern Netherlands

1. Van Genabeek, p. 18.

indicates that this was the rule. In Utrecht, masters and journeymen were organized into separate associations. The textile city, Leiden, in which trades were organized by the city into *neringe*, numerous funds (*beurzen*), above all for the textile workers and immigrants, arose on a voluntary basis due to the lack of guilds there. We may regard the Beurs der Leydsche Gerechtigheyd of 1710 as an exception. This was organized across trade profession boundaries. Initially, it had only a limited number of members; after 1826, however, it was opened to further members and had, in the middle of the nineteenth century, a maximum of over 500 members.

The fact that artisans were rooted in individual cities determined the benefits provided by the guilds and funds. While in Leiden assistance was offered only in case of sickness and death, in Amsterdam a comprehensive range of insurance – including a widows' pension plan and old-age pension plan – developed, in particular for wealthy surgeons and shipwrights. For the most part, the monies from these funds alleviated social distress only for a brief period of time, although the wealthy guilds and journeymen's associations, with their benefits, must be regarded within a European comparison as pioneers of social insurance. In the course of the eighteenth century, investments in bonds and other funds increased – which indicates a recognition of fundamental principles of the mathematics of insurance. The widows' fund for Amsterdam surgeons, with 100,000 fl. in bonds, existed into the twentieth century. Beginning at end of the Middle Ages, a third phase of development became evident in the eighteenth century. Mutual help, which in the Middle Ages had been tied to religious functions, became independent of them following the definitive victory of the Reformation. The epochal years in Amsterdam and Utrecht were 1578–1580, although the example of Utrecht, with its continuing religious elements, should warn us about making overly hasty generalizations.

In order to evaluate adequately the developments in the northern Netherlands, Bos compares them with those in three other European countries. Mutual help for masters and journeymen is distinguished in each case. In Germany, several separate burial funds developed in the widespread guild system of the eighteenth century; while journeymen's associations there did indeed act as though mutual help was their most important goal, we should be sceptical about how much solidarity was actually achieved. English guilds also practised "mutual help". A number of individual guilds placed their funds in investments, as did guilds in the Netherlands. The "friendly societies", which had 648,000 members in 7,000 local societies at the end of the eighteenth century, had an innovative function. In France, guilds did not develop mutual-help funds. This is presumably the reason why, following the abolition of trade-related corporations in 1791, substitute organizations quickly arose in the Napoleonic era. In search of an explanation for the differing models, Bos emphasizes – in addition to the role of the state, religion and public

poor relief – the degree of urbanization. In the northern Netherlands, a great number of people – in comparison with other areas of Europe – lived in cities and thereby formed a single large labour market. This facilitated, above all, the establishment of the *knechtsbossen* as a consensus between masters, journeymen and cities.

Joost van Genabeek investigates the epoch between 1820 and 1901, a period in which the Netherlands state left to individuals the responsibility for insuring themselves. In 1820, those artisans and journeymen funds which still existed were dissolved; in 1901, the establishment of obligatory insurance prescribed by the state began with accident insurance. In order to work out the developmental trends of the “liberal” nineteenth century, Van Genabeek has used the data banks of the IISG, which he describes in detail in his appendix. While Bos begins with the micro level, Van Genabeek moves primarily on a macro level. The trends he describes are unambiguous. After 1820, the number of profession-related funds – which had replaced, at least in part, the arrangements of the guilds – declined increasingly. In their place, general transprofessional funds arose, which, however, were frequently short of money, and were particularly impoverished during epidemics. Accordingly, benefits beyond those for sick money were limited. In contrast to this, the growing unions and workers’ associations offered social benefits. Insurance against unemployment (offered by 154 of the 546 unions with connected funds in 1905) was new. The merger of local unions (*vakverenigingen*) into transregional *vakbonden* could not avoid financial risks. The politically-oriented workers’ associations offered insurance on a voluntary basis. Two alternatives appeared in the nineteenth century which were independent of professional organizations. These groups, which Van Genabeek classifies as “external initiatives”, included the savings and mutual benefit funds, and commercially and philanthropically oriented funds. In addition to this, there were also those funds established by employers.

If we can clearly identify the elements of continuity and discontinuity or innovation in the diverse developments in the Netherlands, then the question of international comparison becomes all the more significant. In the middle and late nineteenth century, there was, according to Van Genabeek, more similarity between the Netherlands and England, where voluntary participation was predominant; before this, i.e. up to 1820, there were more parallels between the Netherlands and Germany. This evaluation, in my opinion, overlooks how poorly organized the social help of guilds and journeymen’s associations was in Germany was during the *Ancien Régime*, and how long it took the Prussian state to establish its influence between the years 1845 and 1883. It would have been unthinkable in the Netherlands or in England for an authoritarian state to set up social insurance funds for factory workers with compulsory payments against the will of employers, as was the case in Germany. Thus,

we see how international comparative research on social politics also reveals distinctions in political cultures.

THE CLOTHES TRADE IN CITIES OF THE NORTHERN AND SOUTHERN NETHERLANDS (1500–1800)

F. Kliefoot, the head of the Amsterdam tailors' guild, is invoked not only by Bos, but also by Bibi Panhuysen as a principal witness. Angered by attacks on guilds – whose privileges, according to their opponents, curtailed human rights – Kliefoot published a pamphlet in 1796 defending the guild as an establishment which, amongst other things, cared for its sick members and in this way alleviated the poor relief funds. Guilds contributed to both the welfare and the flourishing of society; they were, however, also confronted by competitors who harassed them and detracted from their income: Jews and the rural population. Panhuysen uses this controversy, triggered by Kliefoot, as the starting point for her study on tailors in the northern Netherlands. Her central theme is the question of the market and its control through tailors' guilds.

She also poses the question as to why guilds were able to survive so long after the end of the guild era. Her investigation begins in the Middle Ages and focuses initially on the expansion of tailors' guilds throughout the entire northern Netherlands. Between 1400 and 1795, the number of such guilds grew from twelve to seventy-six. Tailors' guilds were widespread, above all, in cities with more than 2,500 inhabitants. Panhuysen's study concentrates in detail on the exemplary cities of Amsterdam, Haarlem, Den Bosch and Zutphen. In 1795, the population of these cities ranged between 221,000 (Amsterdam) and 6,800 (Zutphen). Panhuysen correctly regards population as the most important indicator for the tailor and clothes-trade market, which was locally determined in the premodern era.

The chapter on the structure of tailors' guilds deals initially with their political influence, which in Holland can, as a rule, be traced back to the Middle Ages. Den Bosch in Brabant and Zutphen in Gelderland were the exceptions. Independent of their role in urban constitution and administration, the guilds also influenced public life in various ways through "public manifestations". Here Panhuysen includes guild altars and processions before the Reformation, as well as guild banquets and burials, which were performed in public. Following this, she turns to the internal structure of guilds. To what extent did individual members participate in the administration of their guilds? Were there officially codified participatory rights? Differences existed from city to city. In Amsterdam, guild leaders were recruited from a small elite, while in Den Bosch the circle from which such leaders were drawn was larger. In the section on guild monopoly, we arrive the central question of Panhuysen's study: the

degree to which tailors' guilds were able to enforce the theoretical monopoly which they claimed for themselves. These guilds had little to fear from village tailors. However, in the cities they faced competition from outsiders. In particular, immigrants – including many Jews – constituted a problem for the Amsterdam guild.

The clothes trade produced heterogeneous goods, which were subject to changes in fashion and, at the same time, served very different market segments. This spectrum extended from custom-made items for the upper classes to working clothes for seamen. As a result, there was a multiplicity of suppliers of clothes items, not only tailors, but – in addition to specialists for individual clothes items such as glove makers and jacket makers – also seamstresses and traders of all kinds. Panhuysen's three final chapters are dedicated to the three professional groups identified in the title of her study. The master tailor is elevated to the normal case for guilds. The master tailor's career was predetermined by the stages of apprentice and journeyman. The journeymen themselves achieved some degree of autonomy due to their journeymen's associations, which had been widespread in the clothes trade since the late Middle Ages. Being awarded the status of master was connected to various conditions, for example the acquisition of the "freedom of a company" (*Meisterrecht*). In spite of significant admission fees, the Amsterdam tailors' guild consisted to a large degree of immigrants from Gelderland, Overijssel, and bordering German regions. In individual cases, it has been possible, using received accounts from tailors and their customers, to reconstruct prices and wages as well as tailors' shops themselves. As a rule, these were businesses with small capital investments. Only when a tailor himself took over the delivery of fabrics was he forced to invest a significant amount of money. Tailors' shops thus provided anything but a certain income. Only a few tailors were able to earn significant amounts of money; the vast majority remained in the lower-income groups. Many journeymen thus shied away from the risk of establishing their own shops. Masters with lower incomes were forced to take on other work.

Tailors also faced pressure from competing professional groups. Panhuysen points out the variety of trade professions here through a (somewhat questionable) reference to a survey of the situation in the Amsterdam clothing industry from 1879. The roots of this variety lay in the early modern era, during which seamstresses moved into the clothes trade. This profession was one of the traditional possibilities for earning a living which women in the cities of the Netherlands had. The source material from Gouda and Haarlem indicates that the number of seamstresses in the seventeenth and eighteenth centuries significantly exceeded that of tailors. This development was connected in part to the expansion of fashionable women's clothing, but it also served to absorb the surplus of women in the cities. Were seamstresses able to assert themselves

in the male-influenced world of guilds? In part fierce conflicts between tailors' guilds, seamstresses, and city councils can be demonstrated since 1500. The examples provided by the four cities differ greatly. In Amsterdam, wool seamstresses attained the status of an independent guild in 1578; in Haarlem (as in Gouda and Rotterdam), seamstresses formed a kind of subdivision of the tailors' guild. In Den Bosch, they could work for a fee and could even take on a female apprentice. The city of Zutphen established a set number of seamstresses, and reacted quite negatively toward them. Used-clothes dealers formed the second largest professional group which competed with tailors. This profession was difficult for the guilds to control; peddlers, junk dealers and small shopkeepers had free access to the cities' annual and weekly markets. In addition to this, they also stocked up at estate auctions. The sale of new clothes, however, was a contentious issue. As seamstresses did, used clothes dealers were also able to establish guilds of their own in several cities, such as in Den Bosch around 1750. The used-clothes trade offered numerous outsiders a marginal existence. On the one hand, the transition to illegal activity was fluid; on the other hand, Amsterdam Jews were able to acquire wealth through trade in used clothes. In any case, the danger posed to the economic survival of tailors, which Kliefoot described in 1796, did not arise from used-clothes dealers.

Panhuysen summarizes the arguments of her study by invoking the image of concentric circles. The tailors' guilds defended as the central core their claimed monopoly on custom-made items (thus the title of her study), for which expensive materials were used. The less expensive the materials and the lower the wages were, the more this monopoly crumbled. Thus, seamstresses and clothes dealers occupy the external circles of this image.

It is striking that Harald Deceulaer, in his study of the clothes sector in Antwerp, Brussels, and Ghent, approaches this issue in exactly the reverse order of Panhuysen's investigation. Deceulaer examines guilds and their structures only at the end of his study. Prior to this, there are three main sections which explore the clothes sector in the form of field studies. Initially, Deceulaer investigates the life world and work world of people in the clothes trade, the greater trends in the clothes trade as well as the displacement of production, above all, between Antwerp and Brussels. There are good reasons for each of these two approaches; both, however, also imply presuppositions which determine the shape of the respective studies. Panhuysen begins with guilds and then investigates the practical establishment of their monopoly, which means that she emphasizes the corporate structure of guilds more strongly. Deceulaer selects individual shops as his starting point, and thus almost automatically places economic factors in the forefront. This latter procedure is better suited to analysing transformations. In Panhuysen's study, the

reader initially attains a relatively static image of textile guilds – I leave aside here the question as to whether or not this corresponds with the author's intentions.

Deceulaer regards the clothes sector as one of the most important in the early modern era, although he does not claim himself to investigate this sector in its entirety. Rather, he concentrates on those (numerically large) groups which produced or sold outer clothing: tailors, stocking makers and used-clothes dealers. In addition to this, he also examines seamstresses in a special section on women's work. The description of the professional environment is important for Deceulaer, because he presumes that each trade profession developed its own strategy for transformation during the course of the early modern era. There are several reasons why Deceulaer has limited his investigation to the time period after 1585. First, the examination of earlier eras would have required time-consuming prosopographic investigations; second, the more recent era can, so to speak, be brushed against the grain. In spite of all the emphasis on growth in the later eighteenth century, this era is regarded as one of decline in the southern Netherlands.

The first main section of Deceulaer's study describes the products offered by stocking makers, used-clothes dealers and tailors, as well as the markets for these items. While stocking makers did have a large market, they were also subject to international competition. Used-clothes dealers supplied pants and jackets within a large price range. These dealers did not shy away from conflicts with guilds over selling new clothes; however, they were also affected by competition from junk dealers and wage workers. With regard to tailors, we are unable to answer unambiguously the question – often raised in regard to the history of European artisans – as to whether tailors in the southern Netherlands in the early modern era performed their labour as piecework or wage-work. The original predominance of wage-work was slowly undermined by increasing specialization, the gradual introduction of ready-made garments, and the loss of markets for women's clothing to seamstresses and fashion dealers. However, at the same time, many opportunities and strategies also developed in order to enable survival in a dynamic market. One alternative was to turn to mending and alterations; another was to move into exports. The degree of variation becomes evident through an analysis of the estate inventories of tailors. These ranged from 6 to 49.21 Gulden (the latter was left in 1718 by a Brussels tailor who was an army supplier during the War of the Spanish Succession). A comparison of the average assets of the three vocational groups indicates that tailors ranked in last place. A great number of them lived on the poverty line. It was precisely this poor economic situation which led tailors to engage in greater representative efforts at their funerals. On the basis of the conventions economy developed by French economists, Deceulaer characterizes tailors as

person-oriented, and stocking makers and used-clothes dealers as market-oriented or price-oriented.

In the second main section of his study, Deceulaer shifts perspective from the micro level to the macro level. Here he presents the economic trends of the clothes trade, the rise and fall of individual professions. The forms of production, as well as those of sales, changed constantly. In the early seventeenth century, a trade-internal putting-out system arose among tailors. Wealthier masters hired poorer masters as employees. In terms of fashion, the hooded cape (*huiken*) and its producers flourished briefly in the seventeenth century. Stocking makers suffered from the expansion of knitting in rural areas and from international competition. In 1705 the first small factory was established in Ghent, and more followed after this. Stocking makers increasingly dissolved their connections to guilds. How were developments in fashion reflected in developments of workers in the clothes trade? Deceulaer demonstrates that, parallel to the introduction of French fashion, the tailor's average business size decreased, that social oppositions increased and that the production of women's clothing expanded into a market segment. In the eighteenth century, a large number of women – girls from orphanages, displaced seamstresses working for linen dealers and fashion dealers, independent female masters – pushed into the clothes trade, as they did in the northern Netherlands as well. The break with the guild production of tailors proceeded in numerous ways, although seamstresses in the southern Netherlands attained less influence than they did in the north. Between 1585 and 1800 the clothes trade in Brussels and Antwerp developed differently. While Antwerp still maintained a leading role in the first half of the seventeenth century, Brussels profited from courtly life in the eighteenth century from both the demand and the buying power of the nobility. The demonstrative consumption of the upper class triggered a boom in luxury and export production in Brussels, which also explains the differences in economic development in comparison with the northern Netherlands.

What effects did these market developments have on corporate structures in the three cities? Only tailors took seriously the status of the apprentice, which required qualified training and admission into the guild through a relatively long apprenticeship. With regard to journeymen, we can clearly distinguish between the labour market of stocking makers and that of tailors. Stocking makers, who produced mass products, looked for the cheapest labourers, who hardly needed to be skilled or qualified. Tailors demanded skilled labourers who could produce high-quality items. This difference is evident in the behaviour of their respective organizations. The labourers of stocking makers formed no associations of their own, while journeymen tailors established their own brotherhoods. In any case, they acted peacefully and did not mobilize strikes and boycotts.

According to Deceulaer, this explains why the workers' movement arose at a later point in time in the southern Netherlands. The local and trade-related distinctions between masters are also clear: tailors held on to their guilds, while stocking makers and used clothes dealers remained only loosely organized. The cities of Antwerp and Brussels remained influenced by guilds, while in Ghent, after Charles V, this was no longer the case. During the seventeenth and eighteenth centuries, the city of Brussels provides evidence for an apparently paradoxical thesis: the strongest corporate character tended to develop where fashion and consumption predominated. The explanation for this paradox lies in quality-oriented production. Given its proximity to Paris, Brussels had no choice but to pay attention to quality and to control it. This could be best organized through guilds.

THE METHODOLOGICAL IMPLICATIONS OF COMPARATIVE RESEARCH ON THE HISTORY OF ARTISANS

Deceulaer situates the results of his investigation within a variety of theoretically oriented approaches. While this does not, in principle, distinguish him from the authors of the other three studies presented here – all of whom proceed in a methodologically reflective manner – Deceulaer himself plays positively with the selected approaches identified in his introduction. This is eclecticism in the best sense of the term. Deceulaer draws his central problematics from a number of methodological trends in the social sciences. First, he takes up recent evaluations of small, flexible, units in the post-Fordist era. This facilitates the analysis of early modern trades, which, as a result, no longer appear to have been in a state of decline from the very beginning. Second, he takes into account – as does Panhuysen as well – the interaction between supply and demand. Older historiography of guilds tended to be “supply-oriented”, focusing on the guidelines and norms of the producers. Such historiography concentrated, often to its own detriment, on the analysis of guild statutes. When we include the dimension of demand as well, new perspectives open up. Suddenly, guilds no longer appear as rigid organizations, but rather as institutions which were able to react flexibly. Such assessments help us to characterize similarities and differences. Finally, Deceulaer takes into account the new “economy of institutions” in the form of the conventions economy. He uses this approach in order to demonstrate the way in which tailors, stocking makers and used-clothes dealers can be distinguished from one another with regard to their professional strategies.

Deceulaer also responds to Josef Ehmer's demand that scholars combine the universality of the guild model with the multiplicity of guild manifestations. Initially undecided and completely open, Deceulaer asks

whether it is possible to construct typologies or models on an intermediate level, so that we are able to recognize the many contours and patterns, what he calls in the title of his study “pluriform” (*pluriforme*).² Deceulaer admits elsewhere that his study arose in part from a dream which he had, the dream of being able to mediate the interactions between the clothes trade and society, between microperspectives and macroperspectives.³ This excursion into the subjective sphere, unusual for a scholarly dissertation, appears neither put on nor far-fetched, but rather identifies in a productive way the fact that the comparative history of artisans and trade must always attempt to square the circle. I will therefore attempt, working from the four studies presented here, to discuss the problems of transepochal and transregional comparative research. While none of the four volumes discussed here moves into completely new territory in this field, it is rare to find studies written by individual authors on the history of artisans which present summaries in national and international terms. Until recently, most individual contributions have simply coexisted next to one another, leaving it to the editors of anthologies to draw more or less profound comparisons. Thus, it is worthwhile to use the examples of these excellent studies on the Netherlands to summarize the presuppositions and opportunities offered by comparative research on artisans, and to systematize these approaches.

(1) Examining more than one city or more than one region opens up perspectives which are absent in monographs focusing on one locality, regardless of how thorough such studies might be. By selecting at least three cities for their respective investigations, Bos, Panhuysen, and Deceulaer have built in the possibility of internal control, since developments in one city can be contrasted with those in another. In doing so, they have, at the same time, provided evidence of a localism which existed up into the middle of the nineteenth century (according to Van Genabeek). Nationally unified developments in economy and society apparently first arose in the nineteenth century, possibly through the influence of accelerated internal communication.

(2) If localism must be emphasized, then we also need to include a geographical intermediate level. Researchers of the northern Netherlands have done this by reconstructing guild landscapes and, with this, by identifying similar or identical behaviour in a variety of domains. The selection of the locations investigated in Bos’s and Panhuysen’s studies was influenced by this; and Deceulaer emphasizes in his investigation the opposition between Brabant and Flanders (Ghent). Studies of the northern Netherlands have already profited from the data banks at the IISG, which

2. Deceulaer, p. 19.

3. Deceulaer, p. 31.

contain materials about guilds, workers' insurance and workers' associations from the entire territory of the Netherlands. As research from the 1970s and 1980s on artisans in Hungary was able to use productively the inventories of historical documents relating to guilds, we can probably propose the following rule: such documentation fundamentally promotes comparative research on a regional and national level, in particular in determining differences and deviations.

(3) Although we are able to draw comparisons between cities located relatively close to one another – for example, within the republic or in Brabant and Flanders – with relative ease, international comparisons are more difficult. While interurban studies, such as those by Bos, Panhuysen, and Deceulaer, have produced profound analyses, international comparisons often remain stuck in superficialities. Frequently the authors of such studies do not base their international comparisons on research of their own, but rather are dependent upon the results of existing research literature. It would be important to establish agreement over a structural model and an investigative framework, something which would allow us to compare artisans, guilds and journeymen's associations on an international level. All four authors have provided important components here. They emphasize labour markets and sales markets, the role of urban and national authorities, as well as cultural and religious factors. However, it would be unfortunate if every further investigation had to define anew its comparative terms, because we do not have a real consensus as to which structural elements are the most significant.

(4) How should we delimit our investigations temporally? A trans-epochal comparative framework is dependent, on the one hand, upon pragmatic perspectives. To attempt to deal with the entire time period during which guilds existed would exceed the capacities of a single researcher. Deceulaer begins his study in the year 1585. Bos and Panhuysen, on the contrary, transgress in a cursory manner the epochal boundary of the Reformation, as both of them derive the social functions of guilds from the Middle Ages. In Bos's study, the introduction (or nonintroduction) of the Reformation is an important argument in emphasizing national particularities. If we take seriously questions about a new periodization of Western history (Jan de Vries) then we must be prepared to transcend epochal boundaries. A profound chasm continues to exist due to the professional division of labour between scholars of European artisans who focus on the Middle Ages and those who focus on the early modern era. This is all the more regrettable as we can hardly evaluate early modern developments adequately without knowledge of medieval relations.

(5) We must also be prepared to transgress established boundaries regarding the question of the continuity or discontinuity of guilds, journeymen's associations and modern workers' movements, boundaries

which have been erected by an increasingly specialized historiography. All of the studies reviewed here deal directly or indirectly with this question. It is an issue which deserves to be investigated, not the least because it is likely that the formation of regional and national workers' movements was dependent upon those organizational forms which artisan associations provided. The model of social solidarity and mutual help radiated from the pre-industrial era into the era of incipient factories, even if the lines of continuation certainly cannot be demonstrated without interruption. As is well known, 130 years ago the German social reformer, Lujo Brentano – stimulated by the English “friendly societies” – located the origin of contemporary unions (*Arbeitergilden*) in the Middle Ages.⁴ To date, no one has provided a thorough and compelling verification or falsification of Brentano's thesis, although we must consider this a central problem for a comparative European social history of the modern era. To their credit, all four of the authors reviewed here offer more than merely building blocks in answering this and other questions.

4. Lujo Brentano, *Die Arbeitergilden der Gegenwart*, vol. 1: *Zur Geschichte der englischen Gewerkvereine* (Leipzig, 1871); vol. 2: *Zur Kritik der englischen Gewerkvereine* (Leipzig, 1872).