of the Yangzi River, the Pearl River delta, and the Northeast—and expanded into China’s sparsely populated and underdeveloped western, southern, and central regions, even reaching sensitive border areas with the Soviet Union, India, and Vietnam. After turbulent political campaigns such as the Great Leap Forward and the Cultural Revolution, the entire sector reached institutional peak and resembled “a state within a state” (see Köll’s vivid description of “railroad compounds” within cities and provinces) by the 2000s, until the almighty Ministry of Railways was broken by scandal and debt. Köll ends her narrative with a timely comparison of two master railroad plans proposed by, respectively, Sun Yat-sen in 1921 and Premier Li Keqiang in 2016; China has rounded a circle from being on the receiving end of global railroad standards to being on the giving side, with the African continent as its foremost test ground.

In time, Köll’s book could lead to the emergence of a field of Chinese railroad studies just as the First Transcontinental Railroad led to the spatial magnification of America. The Transcontinental Railroad not only connected the United States “from sea to shining sea” but also inspired the birth of at least eight continental-length routes in the following decades; these routes ultimately formed the physical scaffold of a vast new nation. Similarly, Köll integrates the institutional railroad development into modern Chinese history, both in the prose and in her meticulous notes discussing the existing archives and scholarship related to the cultural, social, financial, and technological aspects of Chinese railroads. The sixty pages of notes alone are worth the price of the book, and many topics we thought we knew—gender, machines, space, capitalism, social stratification—are connected and expanded through the fresh lens of railroad history. In sum, this new field will be big enough for all of us, thanks to a business historian’s effective research and prose.

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Reviewed by Jeffrey Miner

The European Guilds: An Economic Analysis is a capstone to Sheilagh Ogilvie’s long engagement with the history of guilds and the European
economy. Its claims are unlikely to surprise readers who are aware of the arguments she has developed about institutions and economic growth for the past twenty to thirty years. Indeed, just as her 2011 book, *Institutions and European Trade*, did for merchant guilds, this work aims to demolish more optimistic assumptions about the economic benefits allegedly provided by craft guilds. Despite the familiarity of its argument, *The European Guilds* is nevertheless a valuable work for its insistence that assessment of economic institutions must be grounded in records of how they actually behaved rather than abstract assumptions about how they might have operated.

*The European Guilds* draws on historical data in order to participate in a debate among economists about the role of institutions in promoting or hindering economic growth. Ogilvie believes that “particularized” institutions like craft guilds—those whose rules apply differentially to different people in society (i.e., institutions that erect identity-based differences between members and nonmembers)—cannot promote economic growth. By contrast, “generalized” institutions like states and markets (institutions whose rules apply uniformly to everyone in society, regardless of identity or group membership) can promote growth. To support her claims, Ogilvie has collected two databases, one qualitative and one quantitative, to describe the activities of craft guilds from roughly 1000 to 1800. The hard work of creating those databases has generated a clearly documented argument that craft guilds fundamentally were rent-seeking cartels with negative effects on the economy.

After an introduction to the debate about the effects of craft guilds, each of the book’s empirical chapters challenges a different set of assumptions about guild behavior, demonstrating the pernicious effects of guilds on economic life. The first counters depictions of guilds as basically private associations by showing how consistently guilds worked to gain exclusive economic privileges from political authorities. The third and fourth challenge assertions that guilds did not significantly impact markets by documenting the many ways craft guilds tried to exclude other producers and control prices of both factors and products. Chapter 5 considers the ways craft guilds excluded women from production, drawing a parallel to the negative effects that excluding women has on modern developing economies. Chapter 6 casts doubt on the utility of guild attempts to regulate product quality, arguing that these regulations were either unenforced or had negative effects. Chapter 7 deals with apprenticeship and training, arguing that guilds failed to promote the creation and transmission of human capital. Chapter 8 covers innovation, arguing that guilds failed to promote useful innovation for the European economy as a whole,
instead favoring only master-friendly technologies. Chapter 9 attempts to measure the relationship between the economies of different European countries and the strength of guild organization in those countries. Throughout, *The European Guilds* consistently marshals evidence that craft guilds behaved like rent-seeking organizations, lobbying for exclusive privileges, limiting entry to their craft, manipulating markets, excluding women, and failing to promote standards of quality or technical innovations.

The commitment of *The European Guilds* to completely rejecting its opponents’ arguments leads at times to tendentious interpretations of the evidence. For example, Ogilvie argues that guilds were not needed to encourage technological improvement because patents offered an alternative way to promote innovation “from the late medieval period onwards, ... all over Europe” (p. 501). Readers of her footnotes, however, will find little or no evidence of patents being used before the sixteenth century, with most scholarship discussing patents as significant starting only in the seventeenth century. While this point is hardly fatal to Ogilvie’s argument, it is indicative of a consistent choice to flatten the history of the period from 1000 to 1800 into a single undifferentiated unit. This flattening is strategically useful for attacking scholars who separate the history of craft guilds into an initial period when they were economically beneficial and a later period of harmful “decadence,” for *The European Guilds* instead offers a uniformly negative assessment of guilds’ effects on the economy.

In historical terms, however, it is problematic to motivate seventeenth-century evidence to make arguments about the fourteenth or fifteenth century, as though European economies and political economy underwent no meaningful changes during that time. Political economy is, in strictest terms, not a part of Ogilvie’s project and perhaps including it would have made an already long book into an impossibly unwieldy one. Nevertheless, her polemic against craft guilds derives much of its force from an assumed contrast between the way “particularized” guilds and “generalized” states and markets operated. If guilds behaved like cartels seeking privileges, it is at least worth considering the possibility that they adopted those behaviors in keeping with broader premodern norms about how politics, social life, and economic production should be conducted. If guilds were challenged and alternative institutions created in the seventeenth and eighteenth centuries, perhaps it is because economic life and political economy had changed since the thirteenth or fourteenth century.

Overall, though, this book makes a great contribution to our knowledge by its thoroughness in documenting the specific activities undertaken by craft guilds. For example, it is commonly assumed that guilds
had apprenticeships that trained prospective craft producers. Yet Ogilvie shows that in different places and times across Europe, some guilds existed even for unskilled labor, not all skilled crafts required apprenticeship, and guilds granted exemptions from training or apprenticeship to men who married masters’ daughters. This last exemption is in keeping with the picture Ogilvie develops throughout—that guild masters did not aim to produce economic growth. Instead, they aimed at producing a particular kind of masculine identity (skilled, propertied, respectably devout, moderately prosperous) for themselves by excluding women and Jews, controlling journeymen and apprentices, participating in shared religious observances, and lobbying political authorities. While assessments of the book’s arguments will no doubt vary, Ogilvie’s insistence that economic analysis always be rooted in empirical evidence of behavior makes this a work to be reckoned with.

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Reviewed by William R. Childs

In her first book, Lindsay Schakenbach Regele has not only broadened our perspective on the early history of arms and textile manufacturing, but she has also underscored how government policies promoted the expansion of capitalistic enterprises from the Declaration of Independence to the Mexican American War. Instead of emphasizing what we already know about the storied successes of New England arms and textiles (stolen technology, family and local networks, interchangeable parts), she shows how what was happening in Florida, Oregon, California, South America, and China had a lot to do with making U.S. weapons and cloths sought after in the mid-nineteenth-century world economy. Her endnotes reflect extensive research in primary sources as well as a deep understanding of the last half-century of scholarship in business and diplomatic history.