

Where are the apprentices? The organization of work in silk production in Manresa (Catalonia) (18th and 19th centuries)

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ANALYTICAL SUMMARY

This article addresses the characteristics of apprentices of a guild for an economic activity which did not exist in the city at the end of the 17th century, but which became the economic engine, generated a spectacular accumulation and a profound social differentiation. We refer to the city of Manresa, located in the centre of Catalonia, which was specialized in the production of silk handkerchiefs which were exported *en masse* to Europe and America.

The aim is to analyse the guild from the perspective of the masters of the workshops who used it in accordance with their interests. The uses they made of it thus changed when their interests changed.

Sources and methodology. The new ordinances forced the guild to keep a record of the individuals who formed part of it as apprentices, assistants and masters and the guild's notary to keep a separate list of all the apprenticeship or mastership records. The first book of the guild and the minutes of the notary of the guild are preserved. We used these data to create a large database with apprentices, assistants, and mastership records. These data have been crossed to establish the paths followed by individuals. We also have the minutes that collect the debates about apprenticeship and the various infringements.

An initial analysis shows the guild's history involved two very different periods: between 1750 and 1790 was the period with the greatest dynamism and was the moment when the most apprentices officially entered and in which the guild was the most open. Starting from 1790, the crisis in the silk-making activity led to migrations and the guild lost a great deal of its negotiating capacity, its role being reduced to a symbolic level.

The analysis allows us to conclude: (a) that the apprentices were mainly presented by their parents or siblings in accordance with the stem-family logic; (b) 16.5% of apprentices had more than one master and the most dynamic moment was in the most brilliant stage of silk-making activity (1770-1790); (c) 40% of the apprentices were from outside Manresa and another 40% came from the city; (d) on reconstructing the rate of joining the guild we observed that the differences did not arise from the economic activity but from the regularization processes that were occasionally organized by the guild when it was obvious that many workshops had undeclared apprentices; (e) the new apprentices came from non-textile guilds, while a percentage of those from outside the city came from farming families.

Following the analysis, the article analyses some of the characteristics of the masters (origin of masters, quantity...). The last part of the paper addresses the destination of the apprentices (how many passed to officers and masters and how long it took). Finally, we analysed how many apprentices each workshop had, and it is found that there were very few apprentices per workshop.

The evolution of apprenticeship should be situated not just within an analysis of the guilds, but also of the productive dynamics of the workshops, the interest of the apprentices themselves and the political and social situation of the time. The different stakeholders used the institution in accordance with their interests. The case of Manresa is of interest due to its specific nature: the guild did not exist when the activity began, and the activity completely overwhelmed the guild logic of the workshops.