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978-0-521-88717-5 - Guilds, Innovation, and the European Economy, 1400-1800

Edited by S. R. Epstein and Maarten Prak

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## Guilds, Innovation, and the European Economy, 1400–1800

Since the time of the French Revolution guilds have been condemned as a major obstacle to economic progress in the pre-industrial era. However, this re-examination of the role of guilds in the early modern European economy challenges that view by taking into account new research on innovation, technological change, and entrepreneurship. Leading economic historians argue that industry before the Industrial Revolution was much more innovative than previous studies have allowed for and explore the new products and production techniques that were launched and developed in this period. Much of this innovation was fostered by the craft guilds that formed the backbone of industrial production before the rise of the steam engine. The book traces the manifold ways in which guilds in a variety of industries in Italy, Austria, Germany, Switzerland, France, Belgium, the Netherlands, and Britain helped to create an institutional environment conducive to technological and marketing innovations.

S. R. Epstein (1960–2007) was Professor of Economic History and Head of the Economic History Department at the London School of Economics. His numerous publications include *Freedom and Growth: Markets and States in Europe, 1300–1750* (2000), and, as editor, *Town and Country in Europe, 1300–1800* (2002).

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*Edited by*

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In the night of February 3, 2007, S. R. (Larry) Epstein passed away, completely unexpectedly, as the result of injuries to the head sustained in a motorcycle accident almost thirty years before. At the time of his death all the chapters in this book had been completely revised, and Larry was about to start writing a first draft of the introduction. As it was, he left behind only 19 PowerPoint slides, which he presented in another conference on guilds in Utrecht, on October 6, 2006.<sup>1</sup> On that occasion, he stated in so many words that this was indeed the outline of the introduction for this book as he imagined it. Utilising some research notes and photocopies found in Larry's study, as well as my own material, I have put words to the structure outlined in that PowerPoint presentation.

Maarten Prak  
Spring 2007

<sup>1</sup> The proceedings of this conference, *The Return of the Guilds*, will be published in the 2008 Supplement of the *International Review of Social History*.