

**THE SOCIAL ORGANIZATION OF LABOUR IN 18TH CENTURY MADRID:
THE TAILOR'S GUILD.**

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In the middle of the 18th century there were about 18.000 persons employed in industrial activities and trade in Madrid: 7.325 of them were involved in manufacturing; 6.249 in construction and 1.760 in food supply, whereas trade and finances employed 1.952.

Within manufacturing, the textile and leather industry employed 4.569 persons, among whom 1.369 were tailors. Considering Madrid had 150,000 inhabitants in 1750, it does not appear exaggerated to say that the capital city of Spain was a tailors' town, as there was one tailor for every 100 natives.

If we regard Madrid as a social formation comprising four processes: production, consumption, distribution and management, we can establish that production, as an activity that directly produces goods or manages and organizes the production process, was distinguished by a primitive division of labour, a lack of technical specialization, and a market too weak to stimulate it. Consumption regarded as labour force reproduction and product appropriation, is the leading sector, since economic activity focused on local consumption and construction, leaving industry in a lethargic and raquitic state. Thus Madrid hardly possessed the basis to become an exporting town of manufactured goods when its economic activity largely focused, on the one hand, on its "rentier" population - nobility and clergymen- and the demand for food, housing, clothing and fuel on the other.

In 1757 Madrid had 62 guilds, a figure similar to that of 1620 or of 1820, which shows the limitations imposed by the ruling classes to the production process. Such guilds incorporated 7.865 individuals, representing some 45 per cent of industrial and commercial activities. The highest rate of guild affiliation corresponded to the textile and leather industry -81%.

If guilds are defined as labour and production regulating institutions, with special streaming functions which facilitated management and control over the working population, besides serving as a conveyor belt of matters of interest for the state administration¹, it can be stated that such institutions were characteristic of labour social organization in Castile during the late feudal period. Madrid was not an

¹ Díez, F. Viles y mecánicos. Trabajo y sociedad en la Valencia preindustrial, Valencia, Edicions Alfons El Magnánim, 1990, p.56.

exception despite the fact that the guild system was not structured until the 17th century, unlike other towns in Castile. It is clear that, from there on, they figured as unmistakably urban institutions constituting the feudal mode of production in their period of gestation and development.

In the 18th century authority over guilds was exercised by the Council of Castile through its "Sala de Alcaldes de Casa y Corte". The "Sala" was in charge of authorising inspections of or supervisory visits to their guild members and of overseeing elections to for new posts in the guild; it also required that newly elected officers be sworn in at its premises. It had also responsibility for matters such as the revision of guild by-laws and conflicts between corporations.² Thus, central administration, the guilds themselves, journeymen and apprentices were the agents involved in the guild system. The relationships and the contradictions existing within its own labour social organization are the subject matter of this paper.

As has been mentioned, the most representative productive activities in 1757 comprised textile and leather. Within the former, the only "industry" in Madrid of importance was dress-making, which comprised a body of 2.108 artisans, some 75% of the textile industry. A plethora of tailors, doublet-makers, ribbon-makers, embroiderers and lace-makers, contrasted with the scarcity of carders, wool dealers and weavers (somewhat fewer than 300 persons).

Within the textile industry, the dress-making and indeed within Madrid labour structure as a whole, the tailors' guild holds unquestionable interest since it constitutes, with its 1.369 individuals, the largest collective of guild members in the town, while representing half of the whole textile industry. This contingent comprised 420 masters, 800 journeymen, of different sorts and 140 apprentices.³ But apart from these figures, tailors attracted demand ranging from the most luxurious to the most modest items thus putting the guild in touch both with the ruling classes, consumers of the former, and the lower classes, for whom the latter were produced. This situation also illustrates an instance of how state policy could compel a corporation to become an open guild since there were hardly any obstacles to future admission of masters. The conflictive character of the members of this particular guild should also be taken into account since its journeymen would take a leading role -together with the shoe-makers- in one of the most significant demonstrations over wages and the standard of living in pre-industrial Madrid.

² During the last third of the century its powers would gradually pass, though not without opposition, to the "Consejo Supremo de Hacienda" and more precisely to the "Junta General de Comercio y Moneda".

³ AHN, Fondos Contemporáneos, Ministerio de Hacienda, Lib.7.463 bis.

During the 18th century Madrid's guilds turned to the "Sala de Alcaldes de Casa y Corte" for approval of new by-laws or the reform of certain aspects of their existing regulations. In regard to tailors, this took place in 1753, when they solicited changes in their ineffective, outdated and exigous by-laws of 1708.⁴ In particular, the guild attempted to raise fees for mastership from 60 "reales" to 541 "reales", reassert its privileges against infiltration by non guild and non qualified members, and reinforce its control over journeymen as well as over other trades.⁵

The tailors' guild, like many others, had become indebted owing to the frequent litigation it had got involved in, the extraordinary demands imposed by the Crown, and excessive internal expenditure on festivities, meeting-celebrations and so forth. Such obligations had put the guild into debt with its confraternity of "Our Lady of the Nativity and Saint Anthony of Padova" to the sum of 11.000 "reales". This debt, the payment of which was demanded by the church inspector, seemed impossible to honor since the guild only received incomes from examination fees. That is why the guild intended to raise these fees, claiming that they were too low compared with those in other towns.⁶

The Council of Castile opposed this claim although it set the fees at 100 "reales". The guild's reaction, overwhelmed by its financial situation, consisted in lifting restrictions on access to mastership, since a higher number of masters implied higher income from the increased fee payments as well as from the fact that a higher number of members constituted a broader tax base. The opening of access to mastership is illustrated in the accompanying graph (see graph 1).⁷ If in the period 1707-32 an annual average of 12 new masters was recorded, a major increase is noticeable following the new regulations of 1753, after which as many as 60 new masters were inducted annually.

As a result of this strategy to try to increase resources, the tailors proposed carrying out visits or inspections of the clothiers' guild on the ground that the latter produced garments of a very low quality. Claiming themselves to be judges of the quality of the clothiers' products, they were actually aiming to keep the market for themselves by ruling out

⁴ These regulations, which must have been a remake of some extinct by-laws of 1598, were found wanting owing to their frugality, lack of technical regulation and lack of control over subordinate labour.

⁵ The line of argument that follows is based on AHN, Consejos, legs. 189 and 490.

⁶ It was argued that in Barcelona and Cádiz the payment was 1000 "reales" and 800 in Zaragoza and Valencia.

⁷ This graph is based on: AHH, Delegación de Hacienda, Fondos Contemporáneos, leg.191, caja 2, exp. 93 (for the years 1707-15); AHPN, protocolos 14.521, 14.523, 14.526, 14.528 and 16.549 (for the years 1719-32); AHN, Delegación de Hacienda, Fondo Histórico, lib. 42 (for the years 1754-99).

any competition. Moreover, they well knew what profits derived from the right of inspection. Obviously, the "Sala de Alcaldes" rejected this demand.

The "Sala de Alcaldes" and the guild also clashed over other fundamental issues, like the requirements for guild membership. The guild denied sons of cutters, bootmakers, shoemakers and coachmen any possibility of becoming a tailor's apprentice, arguing that the guild could not stain its honor by dealing with those trades (article 19). It also refused access to mastership to outsiders who had not carried out their apprenticeship in Madrid. The "Sala" rejected both claims as well as others that aimed at abolishing competition and infiltration (article 22 attempted to forbid anyone but a tailor to produce certain items).

The approval of the by-laws did not mean the end of confrontations. The conflict with journeymen had its starting point here. These felt threatened by what they believed to be a restrictive regulation, the elaboration of which had been carried out without their involvement. But who were these journeymen?

Once the 6-year apprenticeship was over, there was within the tailors' guild an intermediate stage before that of journeymanship: the "mancebía" period which was meant to last for two years. "Mancebos" were considered to be journeymen although they had to stay on with the master's shop to which they had been assigned during apprenticeship. Their term as journeymen was temporary. It was supposed to last for one year, however the journeymen's precarious financial predicaments could stretch it out indefinitely.⁸ The situation of poverty among journeymen became so alarming that the guild was compelled to give free examination.

On top of an already helpless situation for the journeymen there existed within the tailors' guild great competition for the labour force. Masters preferred to employ an apprentice or a "mancebo" rather than journeymen, regardless of the consequences for the quality of the final product.⁹ It was argued that journeymen demanded too high a salary, that they worked on garments carelessly, and that they pilfered the pieces left over.¹⁰

⁸ We do not know for how long the 183 new masters' apprentices, "mancebos" and journeymen remained in those categories between 1719-32, but we do know about the cases of 109 of them. These took an average of 16 years after entering apprenticeship to pass their examination. Considering that, in the 183 cases that have been analysed, the average age on reaching mastership was 31, the average age of beginning apprenticeship was around 14.

⁹ It was compulsory for apprentices and "mancebos" to stay at the master's workshop; not so for journeymen, who had no restrictions on negotiating a transfer to another workshop.

¹⁰ In time journeymen would become hostile to the inclusion

Moreover, journeymen found it difficult to obtain employment because of the masters' fear that they would take orders home with them. The regulations of 1753 explicitly forbade journeymen to work on their own, although this was a practice set up by the masters themselves. In this way, the master's workshop was the only legal production unit.¹¹

As a consequence, master tailors employed journeymen only in periods of great demand, such as Easter. Irregular employment was therefore not unusual as clients' orders were also temporary. As a result there was significant mobility from workshop to workshop depending on the time of year.

Journeymen tailors had their own regulations which were approved by the Council of Castile in 1754. The so-called "regulations for journeymen working for the tailors' guild", an almost systematic repetition of the ones applied to the master craftsmen in 1753, came out as a consequence of the appeals submitted to the Council to revoke those articles which were detrimental to the journeymen and "mancebos", reflecting the journeymen's success in contesting a significant part of the master craftsmen's interests.

This auxiliary manpower had its own organization within the "Our Lady of the Nativity and St. Anthony of Padova" confraternity.¹² Within this archaic institution all the guild members, including masters and journeymen, met their need for mutual aid. However, its unity turned out to be artificial, for the tensions within the guild crossed over to the fraternity, reflecting, thus, the division that already existed within the corporation.

From the beginning of the 17th century, the independent "St. Anthony of Padova" fraternity played a fundamental role in shaping the journeymen's collective identity, as well as bringing together the journeymen's claiming demonstrations which were part of their struggle over wages and employment. The "St. Anthony of Padova" fraternity became a serious problem when the unification with "Our Lady of the Nativity" took place, as the former represented just the facade of a journeymen's collective which was aiming for something beyond mutual aid by trying to participate in the drafting of guild regulations and carrying out -when needed- opposition to the master craftsmen's policies.¹³

of women workers in the labour market. In 1764, for instance, the existence of a domestic gown industry made by women can be confirmed.

¹¹ Díez, F. p.44-45.

¹² In spite consisting of the unification of 1685 of the confraternities of "Our Lady of the Nativity" (of guild masters) and "St. Anthony of Padova" (which consisted of apprentices, journeymen and shopless masters) the conflicts continued to take place.

¹³ Despite differences in levels of organization and

The statutes of 1753 shed light on fundamental aspects of internal conflict within the guild system. The journeymen felt themselves to be particularly disadvantaged by article 20, which disqualified them from undertaking work outside the house of the master craftsman. They strongly believed that the sole intention of the prohibition was "to make slaves of the journeymen and "mancebos"". One solution offered by the journeymen was that the master craftsmen pay them "a salary in line with local custom, that is 11 "reales", meal and refreshment, without piece-work of any sort from the largest to the smallest article of clothing". In exchange for not being allowed to do piece-work (from which the journeymen profitted as that enabled them to produce more units), they intended to earn higher pay for the working-days spent on those garments. Money, then, would become just one component of the incomes of the journeymen while non-monetary compensation, of which Sonenscher talks about in regard to Paris, was recognized as negotiable.¹⁴

The master craftsmen rejected the proposal responding that if they accepted the salary of 11 "reales" they would have to rise the price of making each garment to 3 "reales". They estimated that the cost of the journeymen's proposal amounted to 15 "reales" if the 4 "reales" it would cost for the meal and refreshment were taken into account. Behind article 20 loomed the master craftsmen's fear of domestic production by the journeymen. Within each individual journeyman household, intrafamiliar collaboration was maximised, thus making production much cheaper and posing a serious threat of competition to the master craftsmen.

The master craftsmen subsequently mounted a campaign against the journeymen very similar to that of 1609.¹⁵ They accused the journeymen of "riotous" behavior in their attempt to form "some kind of confederation or "monipodio"" in order to refuse to work in the master craftsman's shops. Their association, which consisted of 100 journeymen and "mancebos", was accused of threatening "blacklegs" to force them to support their cause. Their organization was integrated in the "St. Anthony" fraternity from which the protest of the beginning of

participation, see Sewell, William H., Jr. Trabajo y revolución en Francia. El lenguaje del movimiento obrero desde el Antiguo Régimen hasta 1848, Madrid, Taurus, 1992, p, 71 for the case of Paris).

¹⁴ Sonenscher, M., "Work and wages in Paris in the eighteenth century", in M. Berg, P. Hudson and M. Sonenscher, eds., Manufacture in Town and Country before the Factory, Cambridge, 1983, p.161.

¹⁵ A strike was carried out at this time by the journeymen, "mancebos" and some shopless masters. This collective, organised within the "Saint Anthony of Padova" fraternity, demanded a pay raise from 4 to 8 "reales". On that occasion, the alliance between guild and central administration worked out extremely well.

the 17th century stemmed.

It was under such circumstances that the protests of the journeymen and "mancebos" gained momentum, culminating in a boycott against work for master craftsmen and in a challenge to the decrees of 1753 -the original cause of the conflict, insofar as they damaged the interests of weaker guild members. If the aim of the statutes was to solve the guild's debt, they nevertheless meant higher taxes and making the poorest guild members shoulder part of the debt.¹⁶

The statutes of 1753 make manifest the contradictions of the corporate system, incapable of confronting real and pressing problems. Trapped by a weak and limited local market, and accustomed to undertaking privately commissioned work on an individualized production basis, with hardly any division of labour, stock accumulation or relative profitability, the guilds suffered from a lethargy which limited their ability to request protection from the Crown, given that they enjoyed little urban power following their exclusion from local government since 1602. Under such circumstances, the nature of the conflict appears manifestly archaic and domestic, while it reflects that something was happening within the vertical organization of labour, thus demonstrating the failure of attempts to discipline the urban population via the means of work.

This atrophied structure, however, would continue to be profitable in the eyes of the enlightened administration, as reflected by the fact that for a long time its hesitant reformists did not substantially modify the basic elements of the guild system, nor did they argue for or plan for its dissolution. "Enlightened despotism" did not plan to revoke the guilds' privileges, as they were considered part of the "raison d'être" of the social structure. Attacking the guilds' privileges amounted to the same as attacking the very despotism which legitimised the existence of privileged society. Under such circumstances it would be necessary to wait until Cádiz Parliament struck the final blows; after all, it was not possible to ask for the impossible.

¹⁶ Another aim of the master craftsmen was to burden the journeymen and "mancebos" with the sum of 8 "reales" in order to restructure the guild's finances. Had they achieved their purpose, over 6.300 "reales" would have been paid by this means.