

Royal Policy and the Secularisation of the Paris Guilds in the Eighteenth Century

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When we think of the Old Regime guilds, we do not imagine them as religious bodies, but as forms of economic organisation, a way of structuring production and labour. Yet we cannot understand the guilds or their role in urban society without taking into account their dual character, in the early modern period, as religious and secular institutions. In the course of the eighteenth century, however, this was changing, and by the late 1770s they had become purely secular bodies. This article examines one major reason for that change: the impact of government action, part of a wider secularisation of Paris society and of a change in the nature of corporatism that in turn help to explain the eventual abolition of the guilds. The paper attempts to bring together two areas that have hitherto remained largely separate: the study of changing religious sentiment and practice in the eighteenth century and the history of the trades.

Eighteenth-century Paris contained around 120 guilds, which oversaw nearly all the merchant and artisan trades. They grouped the masters or mistresses of each trade, jealously excluding people who had not been formally admitted. They were responsible for the quality of the work done and, to this end, oversaw apprenticeships and made rules for the way the trade was to be conducted. Their oversight extended to the conditions of employment of the broader workforce. These aspects of guild management have been much studied, and new recent new work has revealed many of the Paris guilds to be dynamic organisations that facilitated new practices in production and labour management.¹

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¹On the Paris guilds, see Émile Coornaert, *Les corporations en France avant 1789* (Paris, 1941); Cissie Fairchilds, "The Production and Marketing of Populuxe Goods in Eighteenth-Century Paris," in *Consumption and the World of Goods*, ed. John Brewer and Roy Porter (London and New York, 1993),

Less attention has been paid to guilds' religious dimension, however. In the sixteenth and seventeenth centuries, the spiritual and secular aspects of guild activity were inseparable. In 1573, the drapers asked that "in order that they may assemble to discuss the affairs of the said Community, they shall be permitted to establish a Confraternity. . . [and that] the drapers of Paris who belong to the said Confraternity may sell their cloth in their houses."² This may have been an anti-Protestant measure. Twelve years later, Henri III issued an edict "which establishes the wine-merchants as corporation, community, and confraternity."³ In the mid seventeenth century, any infringement of the grain merchants' statutes was to be "denounced on the book of the confraternity," and the "confraires" were called upon to defend each other in disputes over prices.⁴ The guild was, like the Holy Trinity, three things at once: a legally constituted body, or corps, with particular rights and privileges; an economic community; and a confraternity, a spiritual brotherhood whose members had all the obligations towards each other that this implied. In a Catholic city like Paris, these trade confraternities were part of the defence against Protestantism.

Early modern Europeans did not make the same distinction that we do between the religious and the secular, either in the realm of work or in any other aspect of life.⁵ All the masters and mistresses in a guild automatically belonged to the confraternity and were expected to attend its regular religious services. Every trade's patron saints had some particular connection with the work they did: Saint Joseph for the carpenters, Saint Catherine for the wheel-makers. The saint was honoured by the confraternity and in return would protect the members. The masters and mistresses were also supposed to attend the funeral service organised by the confraternity whenever a member died, when the coffin would be covered with the guild shroud, richly embroidered with the attributes of the trade. That of the bronze-casters, for example, bore in each corner depictions of a globe, a compass, a bell, various church ornaments, and a candlestick – while in the centre was a crucifixion scene showing their two patrons, Saint Eloi and Saint Hubert.

228-48; Steven Kaplan, *La fin des corporations* (Paris, 2001); Steven L. Kaplan, "1776, ou la naissance d'un nouveau corporatisme," in *La France, malade du corporatisme? XVIIIe-XXe siècles*, ed. Steven L. Kaplan and Philippe Minard (Paris, 2004), 53-80; René de Lespinasse, *Les Métiers et corporations de la ville de Paris, XIVe-XVIIIe siècle*, 3 vols (Paris: Imprimerie nationale, 1886-97); Étienne Martin Saint-Léon, *Histoire des corporations de métiers : depuis leurs origines jusqu'à leur suppression en 1791*, 3rd ed. (Paris, 1922. First pub. 1897); Michael Sonenscher, *Work and Wages. Natural Law, Politics and the Eighteenth-Century French Trades* (Cambridge, 1989); *Annales ESC* 43, no. 2 (1988), special number on "Corps et communautés d'ancien régime." Studies of individual guilds include Clare Haru Crowston, *Fabricating Women. The Seamstresses of Old Regime France, 1675-1791* (Durham and London, 2001); Steven Laurence Kaplan, *The Bakers of Paris and the Bread Question, 1700-1775* (Durham and London, 1996); Michael Sonenscher, *The Hatters of Eighteenth-Century France* (Berkeley, 1987); Sydney Watts, *Meat Matters. Butchers, Politics, and Market Culture in Eighteenth-Century Paris* (Rochester, N.Y., 2006); Catherine Lanoë, *La poudre et le fard. Une histoire des cosmétiques de la Renaissance aux Lumières* (Paris, 2008). Mary K. Gayne is producing a full-length study of wigmaking.

² AN [Archives nationales] AD XI 17, dossier A, piece 1, *Statuts et réglemens pour les marchands drapiers, . . . du mois de février 1573* (Paris, 1743).

³ BNF [Bibliothèque nationale de France] F-13081, *Ordonnances, statuts et réglemens des marchands de vins de la Ville et Fauxbourgs de Paris* (Paris, 1782), 3.

⁴ BNF Ms fr [manuscrit français] 21635, fols. 116-17.

⁵ Alain Cabantous, *Entre fêtes et clochers. Profane et sacré dans l'Europe moderne, XVIIe - XVIIIe siècle* (Paris, 2002), 27-53.

All the members paid an annual fee to the confraternity and took their turn in providing *pain bénit*, bread that was blessed at the end of each service and then distributed. The bread was a symbol of the collectivity.⁶ In most guilds, each newly-admitted master and apprentice paid a fee to the confraternity, which also received a proportion of the fines imposed for infringements of guild rules.⁷

Meetings of the trade often coincided with religious obligations, as on 25 November 1663, when the master tinsmiths met in the church porch after mass to discuss and approve their new statutes. This was a common practice, elections commonly being held on the feast-day of the guild's patron saint. The same officials often administered both secular and religious affairs, particularly in smaller bodies such as the saddlers, the ginger-bread makers, or the printers, but also in the large seamstresses' guild.⁸ In many larger trades, such as the hatters and the tapestry-makers, the most recently elected officials ran the confraternity, acquiring budgetary experience and getting to know the members before they took on the larger job of inspecting workshops and enforcing guild rules. The tinsmiths had separate officials running the confraternity, but they too attended the examinations of aspirants to guild membership.⁹

Very often, the finances of the guild and the confraternity were also umbilically linked. In 1685, the pork-butchers offered the silver ornaments of their confraternity as surety for the debts of the guild.¹⁰ Some trades, such as the Seine fishermen in the late seventeenth century, recorded in the same registers expenses for religious services and those for guild elections or legal action. In May 1729, the list of monies received by the treasurer was headed "income of the community of Saint Nicolas," referring to the guild by the name of its confraternity and patron saint.¹¹

In official parlance too, guild and confraternity were often treated as a single entity. In 1689 a police court ruled against "the masters of the confraternity in charge of the [musicians'] guild." Such usage continued into the eighteenth century.¹² In 1726, two edicts of the Parlement of Paris maintained the rights of the "guild and confraternity" of the harness-makers.¹³ The term generally used for a guild was "communauté," which retained a sense of the bonds supposed to exist between the members. Each one

⁶ Ferdinand Hucher, "Le Poêle de la corporation des maîtres fondeurs de Paris," *Bulletin de la Société d'Agriculture, Sciences et Arts de la Sarthe* (July 1873): 2-5. On *pain bénit*, see Thierry Wanegffelen, "D'une dévotion l'autre? L'évolution de la pratique du pain bénit mise en rapport avec le processus de « sortie de la religion »,» *Histoire des dévotions*, 2000, accessed 7 March 2012, <http://hal.archives-ouvertes.fr/>.

⁷ BNF F-22423, leather-workers, 1695. For further examples, Alfred Franklin, *Dictionnaire historique des arts, métiers et professions exercés dans Paris depuis le treizième siècle* (Paris, 1906), 195. For fees paid to confraternities, BNF Ms fr 21663, fol. 377, vinegar-makers, 1658; BNF F-12930, shoemakers, 1722, 1746; BNF 4-FM-24989 (75), pork-butchers, 1739.

⁸ Saddlers, BNF Ms fr 21799 (1678). Gingerbread makers, BNF Ms fr 21793 [n.d., late 17th century]. Printers, BNF 16-Fw-1089. Crowston, *Fabricating Women*, 276. This was also the case in the fan-makers' and the embroiderers' guilds: BNF Ms fr 21794 (1679); BNF Ms fr 21792, fol. 507, (1699).

⁹ BNF Ms fr 21793, fol. 92 (hatters, 1658); BNF F-23668 (tapestry-makers, 1642). Also among the wax-makers: BNF Ms fr 21793, [n.d., late 17th century]. For the tinsmiths, BNF Ms fr 21799, fol. 113.

¹⁰ AN V7 425, *charcutiers*.

¹¹ AN Z1E 219-20.

¹² BNF F-23714, no. 438. See also BNF F-24997, *contrôleurs des bois*, 1662.

¹³ BNF RES F-1173.

functioned, and was understood, as a “moral community,” with its own values and culture.¹⁴

In practice, a distinction was sometimes made between the religious and other aspects of guild organisation. Very occasionally, they were differentiated in law. In 1699 the Parlement ruled that a house in the rue de la Chanverrierie belonged to the wine-merchants’ confraternity and not to the guild.¹⁵ And the fit between religious and secular functions was not always as perfect as the rhetoric makes it sound. After all, until the 1680s Protestants were admitted to some of the guilds, and while they paid their fees to the confraternity, everyone recognised that they did not belong to it. The place of journeymen was also often ambiguous. They came under the jurisdiction of the guild but were not full members. Yet in some trades they were allowed to belong to the confraternity. Among the hatters, the shoemakers and the *traiteurs* (sellers of prepared food), journeymen were all required, in principle, to pay dues to the confraternity. But the motive here, at least for the master hatters and shoemakers, was to destroy the journeymen’s separate confraternities, which played a key role in organizing industrial action.¹⁶ Another variant that broke the close nexus between the religious and economic dimensions of the guilds was the existence, in some of the larger trades, of more than one confraternity. Occasionally, too, the wives of masters were admitted to the confraternity, but not to the guild, a reflection of “an older, family-based model of the corporate world.”¹⁷ Despite these discrepancies, on the whole the guild and the confraternity were, to use the kind of metaphor beloved of eighteenth-century authors, like different organs in a single body, performing different functions and in certain respects distinguishable, yet inseparable, and both necessary for the continued well-being of the corps.

Occasionally we get a glimpse of what this might have meant for individual members. In 1707 a former leader of the goldsmiths’ guild compiled a lengthy document about his trade. He began with its Biblical origins in the production of sacred vessels, then moved on to the story of its patron, Saint Eloi. Only then, after four pages, did he get to the creation of the Paris guild. He then recounted the history of its confraternity, before presenting long lists of guild officials and of ordinary members. The whole thing runs to nearly 400 pages and is decorated with pious engravings. In this author’s mind, the religious and secular dimensions of the trade were inseparable, from its supposed religious origins onwards.¹⁸

This was probably not unusual. Even the poorer guilds spent a great deal of money on their religious services, and some lavishly decorated their chapels. In 1684, the shoemakers’ guild – not a wealthy one – commissioned a large-format, richly decorated choir-book containing the verses sung at its services. It was on parchment, beautifully

¹⁴ Kaplan, “1776,” 57, 78.

¹⁵ *Ordonnances, statuts et règlements des marchands de vins de la Ville et Fauxbourgs de Paris* (Paris, 1782), 132.

¹⁶ BNF Ms fr 21793, fol. 92 (hatters, 1658). AN H2120, *Articles, statuts, ordonnances et reglements des jurez, anciens bacheliers, et maîtres Queulx, cuisiniers, porte-Chappes et Traiteurs . . . , 1663* (Paris, 1714). AN S118, shoemakers. David Garrioch and Michael Sonenscher, “Compagnonnages, Confraternities and Associations of Journeymen in Eighteenth-century Paris,” *European History Quarterly* 16 (1986): 25-45.

¹⁷ Clare Crowston, “Engendering the Guilds: Seamstresses, Tailors, and the Clash of Corporate Identities in Old Regime France,” *French Historical Studies* 23 (2000): 339-71 (341).

¹⁸ AN T* 1490 (16).

bound in leather, with coloured titles and decorated initials, some of them gilded. The last page bore the words “This book belongs to the guild of the master shoemakers of the City of Paris. It was made with the funds of the guild.”¹⁹ This is one of the few objects belonging to the guilds to have survived, but we know that other trade confraternities owned similar artefacts.

The confraternities, then, were an integral part of both the organisation and the identity of each trade. They were part of the collective and customary world of early modern Europe and created a special bond between members of the trade. Their statutes exhorted members to behave in a brotherly and charitable way towards each other and to pray for the souls of those who died. The solidarities of the workplace extended even beyond the grave.

So when, and why, was the intimate association between the religious and secular dimensions of the trades lost? This was part of a wider process of secularisation, which I will return to later, but I wish to focus on one crucial factor: royal policy towards the guilds. In the course of the eighteenth century, the authorities in effect pried apart the religious and secular functions of the guilds, before finally destroying nearly all the trade confraternities in 1776. These actions were driven primarily by the monarchy’s desperate hunt for money.

In 1691, a major edict created new hereditary leadership offices within all the guilds. Purporting to reform the administration of the trades, in fact it was one of a number of raids by the government on guild funds.²⁰ But it was innovative in placing major restrictions on their spending, and one little-noticed stipulation was that they could no longer pay expenses incurred by the confraternities or oblige new members to make a payment to the confraternity.²¹ These new rules were not at first enforced: many guilds renewed the old statutes without incorporating the changes and had them approved by the authorities.²² But by 1716, repeated government imposts on the guilds had so destabilised them that several could not pay their debts. The monarchy set up a commission to investigate and restore their finances by eliminating the “maladministration” that it claimed had caused the crisis! The commissioners now applied the edict of 1691 ruthlessly.²³ Any fees paid to the trade confraternity by new members were disallowed, and the commissioners refused to approve expenditure on religious services unless it matched income specifically earmarked for the confraternity. The treasurer for the relevant year was held personally responsible for repaying these sums: in the case of the harness-makers in 1709-11, this amounted to a significant amount, 127 livres.²⁴

¹⁹ Bibliothèque Mazarine Ms 460. See also Mireille Rambaud, *Documents du Minutier Central concernant l’histoire de l’art (1700-1750)*, 2 vols (Paris, [1964], 1971), 1: 72, 493; 2: 175, 583, 695-6, 767.

²⁰ Hilton L. Root, *The Fountain of Privilege. Political Foundations of Markets in Old Regime France and England* (Berkeley, 1994), 121-7; Crowston, *Fabricating Women*, 280-3. Kaplan, *La fin des corporations*, 51-3.

²¹ Etienne-Olivier Pary, *Guide des corps des marchands et des communautés des arts et métiers tant de la ville et faubourgs de Paris, que du royaume* (Paris, 1766), 19.

²² AN H2120, statutes of bakers, 1721; statutes of cobblers, 1659, republished 1727; statutes of seamstresses, 1676, republished 1734.

²³ In some cases the commissioners went back to the late 1680s. The commissioners’ verifications are all in the AN series V7.

²⁴ AN V7 423.

It is doubtful that the money was ever repaid, since sometimes years had elapsed: it was not until 1725 that the commissioners examined the needle-makers' accounts from the 1690s, and the stocking-weavers' books for 1701 were not checked until 1744!²⁵ But the inspections sent a strong message to incoming guild officials that they risked being out of pocket if they did not keep separate accounts for the confraternity. Even so, the gold-beaters and the wood-turners did not do so until after the 1740s.²⁶ At some point, which varied from trade to trade, further rules were introduced to cap particular categories of expenditure, including office costs and religious services. As early as 1706, the confraternity of the *fabricants d'étoffes* was forbidden to spend more than 100 livres per year. The grocers, a wealthy and prestigious guild, were allowed to spend 1000 livres a year.²⁷

By the 1760s, the language used by the commissioners was significant: monies spent for the confraternity were "expenses foreign to the guild community."²⁸ In the minds of the authorities, the separation between the two was complete. This was not always the case for guild members, who often continued to conflate the religious and the secular. In 1766, the shoemakers were told they could not pay for a new shroud out of the guild budget but that it had to be paid for by the confraternity: despite forty years of work by the royal commissioners, the message had still not quite got through!²⁹ Nevertheless, the longer-term consequences were significant. The confraternities lost the revenue from guild receptions, and the official separation between the religious and the secular elements of the trade strongly encouraged masters to think the same way.

Finally, in 1776, most of the guilds were abolished. The authorities confiscated all of their property, including that of the confraternities which, ironically, were for this purpose once more deemed an integral part of the guilds! When Turgot was dismissed a few months later, the guilds were re-established, though many were amalgamated, so that formerly separate trades now found themselves in the same organisation. This in itself helped to break the link between the formal guild structure and the sense of moral community, assuming it still existed. But the edict of August 1776 also refused to acknowledge any spiritual dimension to the trades, explicitly forbidding the re-establishment of their confraternities.³⁰

The fact that very few trades subsequently did attempt to re-establish their confraternities suggests that by 1776 most of their leaders had come to accept the secular status of the guilds. Had the members ardently wished to maintain the confraternities they could probably have found ways of doing so. Indeed, half a dozen did survive until the Revolution. A similar number of dozen journeymen's confraternities also managed to keep going, even though the edict of 1776 abolished them, too.

The fact that few trades tried to maintain their confraternities may in part reflect other changes in the guilds. Recent studies of particular industries have suggested that

²⁵ AN V7 421B.

²⁶ AN V7 442.

²⁷ AN V7 429, *fabricants d'étoffes*. AN V7 428, *épiciers*. See also AN V7 423, *boursiers*; AN V7 422, *bonnetiers*.

²⁸ AN V7 441, tailors' accounts of 1744-5, checked in 1768.

²⁹ *Ordonnances et sentences de police du Châtelet de Paris, 1668-1787. Inventaire des articles Y9498 et 9499* (Paris, 1992), no. 879 (5 September 1766).

³⁰ Kaplan, "1776," 78.

they were losing the loyalty of many of their members, for several reasons. One was the sheer growth in numbers in many trades, a product partly of the doubling of the city's population between the early seventeenth and the late eighteenth century. Yet royal fiscal policy played a role here, too, since repeated government imposts encouraged the guilds to increase their membership so as to enlarge their financial base.³¹ There is evidence from several trades that this growth was accompanied by changes in their internal structure, in particular a bureaucratisation of management, with clerks and lawyers joining the elected officials. This was also a product of growth, although in many cases guild officials were now taking on additional roles such as greater surveillance of the workforce: quite a lot of industrial action by journeymen in mid-century was provoked by a new requirement that they register with the guild office.³² Growing bureaucratisation, in the case of the grocers, is reflected in the changing annual rhythm of receptions of new members. Whereas in the late seventeenth century the vast majority were admitted at the annual meeting on the day of Saint Nicolas – in conjunction with the religious ceremony organised by the confraternity – already by 1717 new members were being admitted more or less all year round, and this continued in the middle of the eighteenth century.³³ Here too, the link between the religious and the secular affairs of the trade was being lost.

At the same time, there are indications that some trades were increasingly coming under the control of a small number of wealthy masters or mistresses at the expense of the wider membership.³⁴ This may also have been a factor in reducing attachment to the guild and its institutions. All of these changes were part of a shift, as Mathieu Marraud points out, away from a communitarian and egalitarian ethos, strongly shaped by ritualised and customary forms of behaviour, towards a more legalistic, bureaucratic, and rigid institution.³⁵

Royal policy towards the guilds certainly did not operate in a vacuum, therefore. It was also influenced by further factors entirely outside the trades, which helped to shape official attitudes towards the guild confraternities. One was concern about Protestantism. In the second half of the seventeenth century, Louis XIV's government progressively excluded Protestants from many of the Paris guilds, and after the Revocation of the Edict of Nantes in 1685, the authorities were very reluctant to make any move that might weaken Catholicism in the city. This may have delayed the implementation of measures reducing the religious activity of the guilds.³⁶ After about 1725, however, the Paris authorities were no longer much concerned about the city's Protestants and no longer saw the guild confraternities as a bulwark against heresy.

A second important wider factor was the widespread condemnation of confraternities more generally. Since the late sixteenth century, there had been frequent

³¹ Mathieu Marraud, "Permanences et déplacements corporatifs dans la ville. Le corps de l'épicerie parisienne aux XVIIe-XVIIIe siècles," *Histoire et mesure* 25 (2010): 3-45 (8-11).

³² Kaplan, *La fin des corporations*, 299-303. Sonenscher, *Work and Wages*, 284-9.

³³ Marraud, "Permanences et déplacements corporatifs," 16-17.

³⁴ Sonenscher, *Hatters*, 44; Crowston, *Fabricating Women*, 262-3; David Garrioch, *The Making of Revolutionary Paris* (Berkeley, 2002), 80-2; Steven L. Kaplan, "Luxury Guilds in Paris in the Eighteenth Century," *Francia* 9 (1981): 257-98 (258).

³⁵ Marraud, "Permanences et déplacements corporatifs," 17.

³⁶ BNF Ms fr 21609, fol. 368, 24 April 1699.

complaints that they were mere drinking and feasting societies. Their leaders were accused of misusing funds, and confraternities were attacked for encouraging “superstitious” behavior, in particular the inappropriate veneration of relics.³⁷ By the eighteenth century, such critiques were a commonplace. The official view was that these were bodies that needed to be reformed so they no longer wasted the money of their members on things that were no longer perceived to be part of their proper function. Increasingly, the view was that they should be abolished altogether.

Underpinning such attacks was a new attitude to the sacred that was characteristic of the Catholic Reformation. Confraternities had long marked key holy days with feasts, music, dressing up, and other forms of celebration. Reformers now saw such activities as profaning the holiness of the day, and they particularly condemned the use of sacred objects and symbols in everyday contexts. Whereas many Catholics had once perceived no problem with sprinkling holy water over newly-weds or with sharing blessed bread (*pain bénit*) in the tavern after the service of the confraternity, the Church increasingly came to condemn such practices as disrespectful.³⁸ In order to protect the sacred from profanation, Catholic reformers tried to isolate it, and this led them to take many secularising measures. The removal of religious holidays is a good example. Concern that holy days were being profaned by feasting and dancing led successive archbishops to remove many feast-days from the calendar or to move them to the nearest Sunday.³⁹ The change was not in popular behaviour, but in official understandings of the sacred, and if the result was perhaps greater respect for the remaining holy days, it certainly represented a significant secularisation of the calendar.

There was thus a growing separation between the religious and profane domains, with more and more aspects of daily life pushed into the “profane” category.⁴⁰ In religious books, the actions essential for salvation were situated either in the church or in the home, both now considered places for prayer and daily self-examination.⁴¹ The world of work, on the other hand, came to be regarded as firmly outside the sacred. It seems that many of the masters and mistresses in the Paris guilds were coming to think this way, too. Far less often, for example, did merchants and artisans write a religious formula, “In the name of the Father, the Son, and the Holy Spirit,” at the top of the first page of their account books.⁴²

There were many other influences pushing in the same direction. Across the eighteenth century, more and more people were coming to see religious belief as a personal matter, rather than something that should be manifested publicly. A wider secularisation of the public domain was taking place, of which that of the guilds was

³⁷ René Benoist, *De l'institution et de l'abus survenu es confrairies populaires* (Paris, 1578). BNF Collection Joly de Fleury Ms 2524, fols 198-9 (1597).

³⁸ Cabantous, *Entre fêtes et clochers*, 92-4. Thierry Wanegffelen, “Acculturation ecclésiastique et ‘religion populaire’. Hommage à l’auteur du concept de ‘profanisation’,” in *Mélanges à la mémoire de Michel Péronnet. Volume 1, Clergé, identité et fidélité catholiques*, ed. Joël Fouilleron and Henri Michel (Montpellier, 2007), 259-76 (11).

³⁹ Noah Shusterman, *Religion and the Politics of Time* (Washington, D.C., 2010), 7.

⁴⁰ David Garrioch, “La sécularisation précoce de Paris au dix-huitième siècle,” *SVEC*, 2005: 12, 35-75.

⁴¹ Gaël Rideau, *De la religion de tous à la religion de chacun* (Rennes, 2009), 233-77.

⁴² In a list of the opening words of 13 jewellers’ account books, Natacha Coquéry notes four that contained a religious dedication, dated 1736, 1749, 1778, 1782: “La boutique à Paris au XVIIIe siècle,” dossier d’habilitation, Université de Paris I – Panthéon-Sorbonne, 2006, p. 356, note 879.

simply one manifestation. But it was an important part of the shift, in Paris and no doubt in other places, away from what Robert Descimon has termed the “corporate Catholicism” of the early modern city and towards the secular economic and political world of the late eighteenth century.⁴³ The destruction of the guilds in 1776, and to a lesser extent their re-establishment in a new form, were driven by a commitment to political economy that had long been critical of religious holidays because of the loss of productive time they represented, and this view of the world seems to have been accepted by growing numbers of people.⁴⁴

As Steven Kaplan has shown, the reforms of 1776 created a “new corporatism” that combined elements of the old trade organisation with a more market-oriented system and with continued state control. It was, he points out, very different from the old corporate ethos. Most trades were now amalgamated with cognate ones, and it was possible to belong to more than one guild. The structures were more bureaucratic, and they privileged economic relations between employer and employee over the social distinction that had formerly been crucial. The system of registration and control over the workforce accelerated. Anyone who could afford the fees could join a guild. There were no longer special privileges for the children of existing members, and widows of members could more easily continue in the trade. It was far easier to get permission to practice most trades either as masters or as “agrégés,” who did not have the rights of full members, but the *agrégés* remained at the margins, neither fully part of nor fully outside the guild. Apprenticeships were no longer the privileged form of qualification; thus, the slow initiation into corporate culture, into the moral community of the guild, was lost. Most important for my subject was the fact that the new guilds, and whatever corporate culture they managed to reconstitute, were entirely secular. Not only were there no confraternities, but there was now no specific requirement for members to even be Catholic, since Protestants (though not Jews) could join any of the Paris guilds. All of this was to facilitate the rejection of corporatism that was to take place after 1789.⁴⁵

The secularisation of the guilds was thus part of a much wider set of developments. Where the argument in this article extends Kaplan’s is in emphasizing the long-term nature of the state’s secularising role. Since the early years of the eighteenth century, the monarchy had forcibly separated the secular and sacred functions of the guilds and, in the process, undermined their identity as religious brotherhoods. Whereas the origins of the reformers’ rhetoric of 1776 can be found in the Enlightenment and in the new economic thought of the eighteenth century,⁴⁶ the forced secularisation of the guilds began well before the Enlightenment and the development of eighteenth-century political economy. It was certainly not intentional: neither Louis XIV nor Louis XV wished to weaken the religious underpinnings of their authority. The motivation was partly financial, yet also partly moral, imposing a new measure of financial probity that ran counter to customary practice. This was a further way in which the monarchy itself –

⁴³ See particularly Robert Descimon, “Le corps de ville et le système cérémoniel parisien du début de l’âge moderne,” in *Statuts individuels, statuts corporatifs, statuts judiciaires dans les ville européennes (Moyen Age et temps modernes)*, ed. Marc Boone and Maarten Prak (Louvain, 1996), 73-128.

⁴⁴ Kaplan, *La fin des corporations*, 8-49. Clicquot de Blervache, *Le Réformateur*, nouvelle édition augmentée, 2 vols (Amsterdam, 1762), esp. 1:63.

⁴⁵ Kaplan, *La fin des corporations*, 82-4, 213-50, 90-316. Kaplan, “1776,” 57-64, 75-80.

⁴⁶ Kaplan, *La fin des corporations*, 7-49.

not only its critics – was involved in producing an increasingly secular society, despite its continuing insistence, in other domains, on the inseparability of Church and State. Its action was crucial both in changing the way the guilds operated and in encouraging people to think of them as purely secular institutions within a secular economic world of production and consumption.