

practice not uncommon in other factories and workshops. Some twenty years before British and French workers decided to set up an *International Workingmen's Association* in 1864 (known as the First International), there were attempts to associate internationally.

The migration of British workers, as analyzed in this book, is another example of the transnational dimensions of labor markets, labor relations, and labor movements in the nineteenth century. Though not so long ago, these aspects were studied primarily on a national basis, while a more recent trend in labor history emphasizes the transnational aspects. Bensimon's book is a welcome addition to this trend. The internationalization of labor movements, as in the First International mentioned above, was inextricably linked to the transnational character of the labor markets of the time. From the late nineteenth century, this period of trans- or internationalism was followed by a period of nationalizing labor and labor movements, as a consequence of the increasing prominence of the national state in the organization of society and the control of its borders. Today, these national arrangements are under growing pressure by new, seemingly unprecedented migration movements. It is one of the merits of Bensimon's migration histories that he draws attention to an earlier period of migratory exchange between Great Britain and the Continent. The context was completely different, however. His concluding remark, that 'this book may also contribute to current debates' on migration, however sympathetic, therefore seems a bit artificial and a-historical. There is enough in his book to enjoy from a historical perspective alone.

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Peter Stabel, *The Fabric of the City. A Social History of Cloth Manufacture in Medieval Ypres* (Turnhout: Brepols, 2022). 278 pp.
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What did the cloth industry look like in medieval Ypres? What does its rise and decline tell us about the forces that shaped manufacturing in the region during the medieval period? Peter Stabel's book attempts to answer these questions using surviving documentary evidence. Mainstream work on Flemish cloth manufacturing has viewed it largely

through the lens of economic success and industrial cycles. Narrowing the lens, this book focusses on the case study of Ypres, its dominance as a cloth-making city, and its steady demographic decline during the period. Through this concentrated view, it brings forth stark details related to cycles of growth and decline within the industry, the role of stakeholders, formation of the social fabric, political interventions, impact of technological changes on the dynamics of wage formation, as well as the impact of demographic decline on the changing character of the industry. It provides a detailed and nuanced account of the factors that impacted the growth of cloth-making in Ypres and chronicles its resilience as a cloth-making city through social, technological, economic, demographic as well as political changes.

Stabel demonstrates that throughout the medieval period, Ypres produced a wide variety of woollen cloths, but it led in the middle to upper price ranges, producing red and black Ypres woollens, red woollens, worsteds as well as bays. In terms of volume, too, Ypres led in cloth production among Flemish cities, exporting plain, striped, and dyed woollens to Mediterranean markets. Its manufacturers faced stiff competition from neighboring cities in all categories of cloths from cheap to high quality but managed to create a niche for their high-quality products within the Hanseatic markets. Going into specific technical details to understand production processes, Stabel's skilled handling of the evidence notes that the short-stapled high-quality cloth was greased with butter after combing and carding to facilitate spinning and weaving, and that customers could discern the quality of the textiles owing to finish as well as the strict quality control-based seals used to identify different categories of cloth. Yet competition from other cloth-producing cities as well as import substitution in some of the regions where these cloths were sold led to a decline in the industry's production of cheaper woollens throughout the fourteenth and fifteenth centuries.

The comprehensive volume takes the reader through the organization of textile production within Ypres; innovation in weaving via the broadloom as well as in cloth finishing and dyeing; the changing profile of the city's social order as a result of the industrial organization; the key stakeholders, both land-holding and mercantile, and their roles in the shaping of the industry; and the organization of the guild regulations and wages, especially for women's work in wool preparation. With a deft use of sources, the volume vividly presents the set-up of workshops, relationships between the guilds and the craftsmen, as

well as the role of regulation in shaping the labor market. Of special interest is the discussion related to the low wages for preparation and spinning of wool, particularly accruing to women, and the changing nature of their work, as women were increasingly forced to labor within strict household structures when manufacturing became concentrated within guild master workshops. It highlights the complex play of social, capitalist, and political variables that determined economic outcomes for the industry in the long run, at the heart of which remained the qualities of the cloths produced. Focussing on the town of Ypres, its cloth, and its people's response to the challenges to the making and selling of the cloth, the book underscores the value of micro studies of economic growth and decline within specific industries.

The final chapter undertakes a fascinating comparison between the Flemish and the Florentine textile industries, asking why, despite similar organizations, the Flemish industry declined, though the Florentine did not. Within this comparison, the author traces the pathway to capitalism in Florence in the association between mercantile capital and the textile industry, along with its reverse in Ypres. While this account is one explanation for the decline of Ypres as a textile city, pieces of evidence from the previous chapters indicate that the challenges may have been more complex and multifaceted, emerging from diverse directions, and hence likely warranting multiple strategies for success in the form of technological innovations, access to new markets, as well as socioeconomic reconstruction related to the textile industry. A shift toward high-quality cloth production need not have led to the decline of Ypres as a cloth city, had it been accompanied by various other supportive structural changes.

None of this additionally possible analysis takes away from the bold and informative work that is *The Fabric of a City*. A significant part in the process of creating this book was the collation of scarce extant sources on the topic, which in itself is a worthy endeavor, certain to provide useful material to scholars interested in the growth of the Flemish textile industry. The volume's richness ensures that it will be of value not only to social and economic historians but also to labor and gender historians, as well as anyone interested in understanding the antecedents of textile manufacturing in Europe.

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