

The Accessibility of the Late Medieval Goldsmith Guild of Bruges¹

Silke Muylaert

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Abstract

Scholars have long presented guilds as monopolistic and rigid, and goldsmith guilds counted as the ultimate examples of family-oriented organizations virtually closed to newcomers. While historiography has largely moved away from such descriptions, the accessibility of guilds remains a subject of study. This article examines the attitudes of the late medieval goldsmith guild of Bruges towards newcomers. This capital-intensive craft, in this case study initially set in an environment in which the luxury trades thrived, perfectly demonstrates the ways in which market conditions impacted the accessibility of a guild, thus showing that the goldsmiths were not averse to newcomers.

Since the second half of the eighteenth century, guilds have been depicted as rigid and monopolistic organizations. Over the last few decades this traditional image has come under scrutiny, especially after the pioneering work of Jean-Pierre Sosson on the coopers of Bruges demonstrated the complexity of heredity in guilds.² Scholars have, among other aspects, scrutinized the origins of the traditional view and demonstrated the relative openness and flexibility of guilds.³ Especially in the Low Countries historiography shows a focus on the diversity in functions and functioning of guilds, on social mobility, and on apprenticeship.⁴

1 I am very grateful for the encouragement and support of Prof. Jan Dumolyn, who first introduced me to this topic.

2 J.-P. Sosson, 'La structure sociale de la corporation médiévale. L'exemple des tonneliers de Bruges de 1350 à 1500', *Revue Belge de Philologie et d'Histoire* 44 (1966) 457-478.

3 G. Richardson, 'A tale of two theories. Monopolies and craft guilds in Medieval England and modern imagination', *Journal of the History of Economic Thought* 23:2 (2001) 217-242. For an overview on the characterization of guilds and guild literature see: M. Prak, 'Ambachtsgilden vroeger en nu', *NEHA Jaarboek* 57 (1994) 10-33.

4 To mention a few of the numerous studies: C. Lis and H. Soly (eds.), *Een wereld van verschil. Ambachtsgilden in de Lage Landen* (Brussels 1997); M.R. Prak et al. (eds.), *Craft guilds in the Early Modern*



Illustration 1 Petrus Christus, Vocational portrait of a goldsmith, also called Saint Eloy, in his shop, 1449. The portrait probably depicts the Bruges goldsmith Willem van Vlueten (source: Metropolitan Museum of Art, New York).

In an attempt to measure the accessibility of guilds in the early modern period Prak et al., for instance, have systematically compared data consisting of kinship links and the geographic origin of guild members. They conclude that guilds were more open towards newcomers during the early modern period than had been generally assumed.⁵ Only in exceptional conditions, they state, did masters passing on their trade to the next generation dominate the guild.⁶ Not everyone agrees with these views; some scholars argue against the rehabilitation of the economic efficiency of craft guilds, as well as showing that guilds deliberately restricted access to newcomers.⁷ Such variety in results shows that notions

Low Countries. Work, power and representation (Aldershot 2006); J. Dumolyn, 'Guild politics and political guilds in fourteenth-century Flanders', in: J. Dumolyn et al. (eds.), *The voices of the people in Late Medieval Europe. Communication and popular politics* (Turnhout 2014) 15-48; J. Dambruyne, *Corporatieve mid-dengroepen. Aspiraties, relaties en transformaties in de 16^{de}-eeuwse Gentse ambachtswereld* (Ghent 2002); K. Davids and B. De Munck (eds.), *Innovation and creativity in Late Medieval and Early Modern European cities* (Farnham 2014) 189-224; B. De Munck, S.L. Kaplan and H. Soly (eds.), *Learning on the shop floor. Historical perspectives on apprenticeship* (New York/Oxford 2007).

5 M. Prak et al., 'Access to the trade. Monopoly and mobility in European craft guilds, 17th and 18th centuries', *Economic History Working Papers* 282 (June 2018).

6 *Ibidem*, 16.

7 Most prominently S. Ogilvie, 'Rehabilitating the guilds: a reply', *Economic History Review* 61:1 (2008) 175-182; S. Ogilvie, *Institutions and European trade. Merchant guilds, 1000-1800* (Cambridge 2011).

on accessibility should not be abstracted in debate but rather constantly measured in the different varieties of crafts sectors. This is what this article will do for the goldsmith guild of Bruges.

This article measures the accessibility of the goldsmith guild in order to test its perceived exclusivity. It contributes to our understanding of the accessibility of guilds by examining a specific type of guild that is capital-intensive and requires highly-skilled labour. Bruges' goldsmith guild was initially positioned in a market situation with increasing demand for products. A common sense approach would dictate that goldsmith guilds provided the ultimate examples of exclusion because the craft was capital-intensive. Due to the high starting capital necessary and the relative luxuriousness of the goods, in comparison with bakers or carpenters, the craft itself was not easily accessible and goldsmith guilds were usually small. Goldsmiths needed a constant capital flow for which they were dependent on the local economy. People aspiring to become masters would thus profit from family connections as, by its nature, the trade disadvantaged those who could not afford the materials. Goldsmith guilds thus form an interesting case for research on the accessibility of guilds.

Despite the exclusive nature of the trade, Prak shows that three out of four goldsmith guilds in his study for the early modern period included a majority of masters who held no direct kinship connections to each other.⁸ This conclusion also stands for Bruges' late medieval goldsmith guild, but I go further by showing exactly how important market conditions were for the guild. This article supports and adds to Sosson's view that accessibility might have depended on the economic sector the guild was part of and that studying the luxury trades, among others, could help scholars understand the connections between guilds and socio-economic context.⁹ A lack of direct sources, such as membership lists, hinders comparative research for goldsmith guilds in the late medieval period. I have been able to overcome this problem for Bruges by building a prosopographical database from indirect data, which has allowed me to measure accessibility and how this changed over time. The data also make further comparison with other goldsmith guilds in Flanders possible. Based on this database, combined with some rare direct sources, this article will study the accessibility of the trade from four angles: the entry costs involved in guild membership for apprentices and masters; the

8 Prak et al., 'Access to the trade', visible from the data in the addenda, 37-43.

9 Sosson, 'La structure sociale de la corporation médiévale', 457-458.

degree to which newcomers featured in the guild; the extent to which kinship played a role in the trade and in the guild; and the impact of emigration and immigration on the guild. The article has concentrated on the masters, as so few sources exist for the guild that hardly anything can be said about the social mobility of apprentices and journeymen.

The data for Bruges, especially in comparison with data on the goldsmith guild of Ghent and Prak's figures for early modern goldsmiths, demonstrate two things: first, that goldsmith guilds were more open than has generally been assumed, and, second, that the degree of openness depended on the importance of the market for that particular trade in the city. Even a guild traditionally thought of as one of the most closed groups was not rigid and inaccessible. Variable market conditions and the attractiveness of the city for migrants, rather than the guild's potential desire to monopolize the market to its own advantage, determined the accessibility of the guild.¹⁰ This is no different for the goldsmith guild in Bruges. The city's weaving industry had declined by the fifteenth century. According to Van Uytven, as a poor replacement, the art and luxury industries flourished and provided employment in Bruges.¹¹ Elite spending on luxury items as well as a general broader foreign and local demand spurred this bloom.¹² Although Bruges' gold- and silversmiths experienced tough competition from their counterparts in Paris, the Burgundian Court's increasing commissioning of Bruges' gold- and silverwork considerably expanded their reputation.¹³ While the attention of the Burgundian court helped settle Bruges as a major art centre in northwest-Europe, numerous tensions between the court and the Flemish cities also hindered the guilds. John the Fearless, for instance, reduced the privileges of the craft guilds in 1409 via a charter, the *Calfvel*, in order to weaken their political power.¹⁴ This restricting charter also played a role in the revolt of Bruges (1436 to 1438).¹⁵ By the end of the

10 For an economic, political, and cultural contextualization, see: A. Brown and J. Dumolyn, *Medieval Bruges, c. 850-1550* (Cambridge 2018).

11 R. Van Uytven, 'Splendour or wealth. Art and economy in the Burgundian Netherlands', *Transactions of the Cambridge Bibliographical Society* X:2 (1992) 101-124, 105.

12 *Ibidem*, 109.

13 For a few considerations concerning general economic conjunctures and the luxury craft industry in Low Countries see: Van Uytven, 'Splendour or wealth'; W. Blockmans, 'The splendour of Burgundy. For whom?', in: W. Blockmans et al. (eds.), *Staging the court of Burgundy. Proceedings of the conference 'The splendour of Burgundy'* (Turnhout 2013) 17-24.

14 A. Jamees, *Brugse poorters, opgetekend uit de stadsrekeningen. Part I: 1281-1417* (Handzame 1974) xii; see: J. Dumolyn, *De Brugse opstand van 1436-1438* (Heule 1997).

15 See: Dumolyn, *De Brugse opstand*.

fifteenth century, Antwerp had become the main trade centre of the Low Countries, to the disadvantage of Bruges, as this affected the latter's economy and in turn the art market. Later, during the sixteenth century, the guild was clearly affected by the consequences of the Dutch Revolt and Reformation. We can find these circumstances reflected in the accessibility of the guild.

Sources

This article builds on a prosopographical database containing the names and details of eleven apprentices, 628 goldsmiths, silversmiths, and goldbeaters, one widow running a workshop, and five jewellers, all of whom were active in Bruges between 1363 and 1600.¹⁶ It also includes a few jewellers who were listed as members of the goldsmith guild. A prosopographical database is a useful tool for analyzing family networks. Each entry in the database presents, as far as this is known, data about the career of the goldsmith, family connections, and about commissions, rather than providing detailed biographies.¹⁷ These data spring from indirect sources as no membership lists survive for the gold- and silversmith guild of Bruges of the late medieval period. A first source, the *wetsvernieuwingen*, which began in 1363, mentioned at least 415 goldsmiths, silversmiths, and goldbeaters.¹⁸ The *wetsvernieuwingen* are lists of the annual renewal of the city council and the guild committees. The guild committee was called the *eed*. It consisted of a president, the *deken*, and three to five committee members, called *vinders*. The *wetsvernieuwingen* recorded three *warandeerders* from 1513 onwards; those were able guild members responsible for the quality control of products. The database runs until 1600, which is an arbitrary limit in order not to run further into the early modern period.

The database also relies on the following indirect sources: financial account books of the city council of Bruges and similar account books from the *recette générale de toutes les finances* of the Burgundian and Habsburg Courts.¹⁹ City councils and courts regularly ordered jewellery

16 S. Muylaert, *De Brugse goud- en zilversmeden in de late middeleeuwen: een prosopografische studie* (Master thesis Ghent University 2012)

17 The database can be consulted in *ibidem*

18 SAB. 114. *Wetsvernieuwingen* (1363-1795). Missing years: 1375, 1376, 1407, 1437, 1443-1467, 1482, 1502, 1581, 1596.

19 SAB. 216 *Stadsrekeningen*; ADN. Série B.

and silverware from goldsmiths for the purpose of gift exchange.²⁰ Since the place in which the city account books mention the acquisition of silverware and the rent of stalls by goldsmiths differed between account books – thus slowing down the historian’s work – and because the city usually commissioned products from the same silversmiths for years, only a representative number of account books, but not all of them, underpin this database. The data spring from at least one book in every ten years between the period boundaries in this article (see Appendix 1 for the specific years). The same decision applies to the *recette générale* (see Appendix 2). The database only includes the names of figures for which the sources clearly state the profession of gold- or silversmith and indicate Bruges as place of residence. Some of the most frequented goldsmiths, such as Willem van Vlueten were also named *orfèvre de mondit Seigneur* or *valet de chambre*, signifying a close cooperation with the court and responsibility for the acquisition and maintenance of its silverwork. In total, the *recette générale* mentioned the names of 35 goldsmiths from Bruges between 1412 and 1600. The database also includes the names of goldsmiths Gailliard transcribed from a copper plate with personal quality marks for the period 1568-1636, in 1854.²¹ Viaene also compiled a list, in 1969, of 140 names of goldsmiths for the period 1320 to 1520.²² Since no membership lists have survived from this period, my database offers the largest reconstruction of the goldsmith community of Bruges to date.

The database in support of this article is thus not exhaustive, as it can be expanded, but still representative. The guild consisted of about 44 members in 1454 and about 80 in 1562 and seems to have grown at a rate of about five goldsmiths a year in both guild account books.²³ Of the 44 members in 1454, however, 33 had been mentioned in various other documents. This means that only eleven persons, or 30 per cent of the members for that year, would have remained unknown had they not been listed. Whether this image is representative is hard to tell con-

20 On the culture of gift giving see: M. Howell, *Commerce before capitalism in Europe, 1300-1600* (Cambridge 2010).

21 J. Gailliard, *De ambachten en neringen van Brugge, of beschryving hunner opkoomst, bloei, werkzaamheden, gebruiken en voorregten* (Bruges 1854) 116-117.

22 A. Viaene, 'Goud- en zilversmeden in Brugge, gedurende de periode 1320-1520', *Biekorf* 70 (1969) 65-70.

23 RAB. Ambachten n° 191 (64) or the edited version in J.M.E. Feys, 'Documents concernant le métier des orfèvres à Bruges', *Annales de la Société d'Émulation pour l'Étude de l'Histoire et des Antiquités de la Flandre à Bruges* 4 (1880) 78-119, 89-90, 109-113; SAB. 327. Goudsmeden n° 36a; SAB, 327. Goudsmeden n° 43; RAB. Ambachten n° 192 (64bis).

sidering only one fourteenth-century membership list exists. Of Gailiard's list of goldsmiths from the copper plate for the period 1568-1597, only 40 out of 83 people were mentioned elsewhere. Yet this number is affected by the early career status of many of these goldsmiths. Those who joined between 1585 and 1597 would not yet have been established enough to feature prominently in other documents. For the period 1568-1585 solely, only 30 per cent of the names on the copper plate remain unidentified. It is likely that my research population as a whole formed 60 to 70 per cent of the entire membership of the gold- and silversmith guild of Bruges. As the *wetsvernieuwingen* and account books feature prominent goldsmiths, the research population is likely to over-represent the most successful goldsmiths.

Entry costs

Several types of costs were involved in gaining entry to the trade. These costs matter because they can tell us something about the accessibility of the guild. The largest cost item was that of learning the trade. No contracts between apprentices and masters survive to tell us more about the costs involved in apprenticeships. The period of time required to learn the trade in Bruges was six years, which was a very long apprenticeship in comparison with the usual four years in other trades.²⁴ According to the guild regulations, the *keure*, of 1441, the apprentice had to be a freeman of the city, which was unusual among other crafts, and had to pay a fee to the guild.²⁵ The fee apprentices had to give to the guild amounted to 20 *schellingen groten* (s. gr.). Next to that, the apprentice was also obliged to give the *deken* and *vinders* 12 *groten* (gr.), the clerk 2 gr., and to donate 12 gr. to the confraternity connected to the guild.²⁶ Though the guild itself asked the same fees from all apprentices, undertaking an apprenticeship would be more expensive for those who had to become freemen first. In 1478, the guild repealed the first two articles of their

24 Norm differed from reality in most contracts in other guilds. See for instance: R. De Kerf, *De circulatie van technische kennis in het vroegmoderne Antwerpse ambachtswesen, 1500-1800 (casus kuipers en edelsmeden)* (Doctoral dissertation Antwerp University 2013); E. Gezels, 'De Gentse edelsmeden en hun ambachtsleven tijdens de 15de en 16de eeuw', *Handelingen der Maatschappij voor Geschiedenis & Oudheidkunde te Gent* 64:2 (2010) 217-306, 226-230; De Munck, Kaplan and Soly, *Learning on the shop floor*; B. De Munck and D. Dendooven, *Al doende leert men. Leertijd en ambachten in het Ancien Régime (1500-1800)* (Bruges 2003).

25 RAB. Ambachten n^o 1 f^o 161.

26 *Ibidem*.

keure, those that stated the fees for apprentices. They were replaced by a similar arrangement, but this time the clerk would get 6 gr. instead of 2.²⁷ In the guild account book of the year 1530-1531, the fee had increased to 22 s. gr., a rise of 2 s. gr.²⁸ The 1553-1554 account book confirms this fee.²⁹ Notable, however, is that apprentices could pay the fees in several instalments.³⁰ Six persons started their apprenticeship in the year of the first account book, while two had paid a second instalment towards their fees that year.³¹ The second account book mentions only four new apprentices, plus one who was apprenticed in the workshop of a widow and paid in instalments.³² None of them are known to have become masters. After their apprenticeship, members of the guild could work as journeymen. People who had been apprenticed in Bruges paid 20 s. gr. after their apprenticeship to receive 'the freedom of the trade'. Children of masters had to be fifteen years old to obtain the 'freedom of the trade' and had an advantage as they only paid 12 gr. to the *deken* and *eed*, 12 gr. to the fraternity, and 2 gr. to the clerk, on condition that the father was a master when the child was born.³³ These fees were not extortionate and probably represented about a month's wage.

The fee for those who wanted to become masters in 1441 depended on whether they had learned the trade in or outside Bruges. Those who had learned the trade in Bruges had to pay 2 pounds gr., while those who came outside the city had to pay 3 pounds gr. The latter also had to give the *deken* and *vinders* 12 gr., the clerk 2 gr., and the confraternity 12 gr.³⁴ After the changes made to the *keure* in 1478, those who learned the trade in Bruges had to pay 3 pounds gr. and had to donate a silver bowl, while those who had learned their trade outside Bruges had to pay double, that is 6 pounds gr. and a silver bowl. In addition to this they paid 12 gr. to the guild, 12 gr. to the confraternity, and 6 gr. for the clerk.³⁵ This sudden increase in fees was not necessarily a strategic move in order to keep newcomers away but rather a financial one by a struggling guild, according to the *keure*. The guild had been experiencing financial difficulties and had therefore asked the city coun-

27 RAB. Ambachten n° 1 f° 169.

28 SAB. 327. Goudsmeden n° 43 f° 3-4.

29 RAB. Ambachten n° 192 (64bis) f° 1v.

30 SAB. 327. Goudsmeden n° 43 f° 3-4.

31 Ibidem.

32 RAB. Ambachten n° 192 (64bis) f° 1v.

33 RAB. Ambachten n° 1 f° 161.

34 Ibidem.

35 RAB. Ambachten f° 169 quintus.

cil to increase the fees.³⁶ By 1530-1531 a further increase had taken place as new masters now paid 3 pounds 2 gr. These numbers were not unusually high in comparison with the fees of other guilds in Bruges and the high guild fees in Ghent, but considering that they represented several months' worth of wages for a craftsman, building up the capital would have been a significant and perhaps unattainable goal for many journeymen, especially as investment costs for materials had to be paid for on top of that. While two masters were able to pay the sum in one go, three others paid this fee in instalments, a system which at least facilitated access to the guild.³⁷ By 1553-1554 fees had come down again. In 1544 Charles V had ordered a lowering of the guild fees to 5 s. gr. for the guilds in Bruges.³⁸ In 1553-1554, Pieter Cnoop bought his freedom for 1 pound 2 s. gr. Baptiste Plockin paid in instalments and gave 11 *schellingen denieren* towards the fee, while masters from outside Bruges paid 10 s. d. each.³⁹ Van Molle assumes that the latter were paying lower fees because they were masters from smaller villages and towns in the area, in this case Hondschote and Veurne. On 13 October 1476, Charles the Bold had decreed that goldsmiths from surrounding towns and villages were obliged to become members of a goldsmith guild in a nearby city.⁴⁰ This could account for the increase in members in the first half of the sixteenth century.

The goldbeaters formed a separate group within the gold- and silver-smith guild. They were allowed to send their own *vinders* to the committee.⁴¹ According to the 1441 *keure*, children of master silversmiths of the guild could learn the craft of goldbeating for half the usual fee, and vice versa.⁴² The group was probably rather small and was first mentioned in the *wetsvernieuwingen* in 1406 and then again in 1418, after which they provided two or three *vinders* to the committee every year.⁴³ Remarkable

36 Ibidem.

37 SAB. 327. Goudsmeden n° 43 f° 2v-3.

38 RAB. Blauwe charters n° 8302, 1544 30 June, in summary in the inventory of the *blauwe charters*: 'Que toutes personnes qui voudraient s'établir à Bruges, y accepter la bourgeoisie et y pratiquer leur métier, n'auront, pendant un terme de quatre années, à payer au métier dans lequel elles seraient reçues que 5 sols de gros monnaies de Flandres'.

39 RAB. Ambachten n° 192 (64bis) f° 1.

40 F. Van Molle, 'Vijf eeuwen wel en wee van de Brugse goud- en zilversmeden', in: D. Marechal, *Meesterwerken van de Brugse edelsmeedkunst* (Bruges 1993) 12-54, 15.

41 RAB. Ambachten n° 1 f° 165-165v, f° 165v.

42 RAB. Ambachten n° 1 f° 165-165v, f° 165.

43 A. Vandewalle, 'De besturen van het ambacht van de goud- en zilversmeden, 1363-1794', in: Marechal, *Meesterwerken*, 413-433, 415.

is the fact that there were no goldbeaters in the guild committee during the final two decades of the sixteenth century, with the exception of one in 1583.⁴⁴ The *wetsvernieuwingen* of 1585 show no goldbeaters either and mention that they were all dead.⁴⁵ Those of 1586 mention that the goldbeaters were all dead or had left.⁴⁶ This was an indication of the crisis that reigned in Bruges between 1576 and 1585 during the Dutch Revolt, as Calvinist leaders took control of the city.

Dambryne's analysis of entry fees for the guilds of Ghent in the sixteenth century shows strong fluctuations in prices dependent on political interference. In Ghent, the goldsmith guild had the second most expensive fees, up to 14 pounds between 1500 and 1540. Between 1540 and 1577, however, the entry fees for each guild had come down to 20 s. gr.⁴⁷ We have no evidence that the fees were ever as high among the goldsmiths in Bruges as among those of Ghent. The fees for apprentices, journeymen, and masters constituted one up to several months of full wages. These fees were probably the least costly component to setting up as an apprentice or master considering other investments involved, such as apprenticeship contracts or setting up a workshop. In all these aspects, children of masters would have held an advantage. Many of the established goldsmiths would have been able to make the investment for their sons, considering that in 1410-1411, for instance, twelve goldsmiths lent the city of Bruges money, with sums varying between 3 and 12 pounds.⁴⁸ Nonetheless, the guild was not averse to newcomers, knowing that they could financially benefit them, and showed flexibility through payments in instalments.

Committee oligarchy

The *wetsvernieuwingen* showed 449 names as members of the guild committee. In some cases, it was not clear whether two similar names constituted just one person or two or three, and in other cases names that slightly differed turned out to be the same person. As such, about 415 individuals could be identified plus a few cases of doubt. These 415 persons held a total of 1263 guild positions, existing of *dekens*, *vinders*, *vinders* of the goldbeaters, and *warandeerders*. As the goldbeaters represented 55

44 Ibidem, 423.

45 Ibidem.

46 Ibidem.

47 Dambryne, *Corporatieve middengroepen*, 182-186.

48 SAB. 216. Stadsrekeningen 02.09.1410-01.09.1411 f° 26-27.

persons in 263 positions, the remaining 360 goldsmiths took up 1000 positions between 1363 and 1600. This means that every goldsmith represented in the committee held an average of three positions. The majority of committee members, however, only occupied one position throughout their career, while others held several. Masters who had held more than ten committee positions were not exceptional, especially among the *warandeerders*. Many of the masters that could be found in the city and court account books also feature as members of the guild committees, although the most high-profile goldsmiths, such as Jan Peutin, do not figure prominently. In short, although one can hardly speak of a monopoly, some goldsmiths served in the guild committees much more frequently than others. The reason for this could, of course, be that the guild was relatively small and not everyone would have wanted to become a committee member, considering the time constraints involved. This does not necessarily mean that the committee was undemocratically monopolized, since the majority of the masters only took up one function. Masters could only take up one function every second year. The committee would have counted six members around 1454, when the guild held 44 members. In 1455, six other members would have occupied the committee positions. Consequently, during those two years, twelve members out of 44, or just over one in four members, would have served in the committee.

Using Gailliard's list of names transcribed from the copper plate with personal marks, it is possible to compare in which year a master started his career as a master and the date on which he first served in the committee.⁴⁹ Between 1568 and 1597, 83 new masters signed the list. Of those 83 masters, 35 held a position in the committee before 1600, and many more probably did after that year. These masters occupied a committee position rather soon after signing the copper plate, as appendix 3 shows. They often started off as *warandeerders* and later became *deken* or *vinders*. This is unusual as committee members, especially *warandeerders*, needed to be 'the best and most able [goldsmiths], those who understood the gold- and silversmith work the best, both people born outside and inside the country', according to the *keure*.⁵⁰ The social position of new members within the guild seems to have risen quickly during the second half of the sixteenth century, while the guild probably lost many established masters, thus creating considerable fluidity

49 Gailliard, *De ambachten en neringen van Brugge*, 116-117.

50 RAB. Ambachten n^o 1 f^o 163. '[...] van den souffissansten ende abelsten, ende die hem best an tgoud ende zelver ende datter ancleift verstaen, also wel lieden van buten als van binnen slants gheboren sijnde [...].'

in the guild committee. Perhaps this was the reason why the guild had started to neglect the quality check around the 1560s, while many newcomers served as *warandeerdere*s in the following decades. Fraudulent goldsmiths produced work of inferior quality without being found out. Judicial process documents reveal that complaints from guilds from Antwerp and Brussels had reached Bruges. Antwerp goldsmiths complained that salesmen sold some of this inferior work.⁵¹ The process documents demonstrate that governmental rules were not clear and often not followed. Bruges asked several cities in the Low Countries which customs they pursued when examining the quality and whether this quality check was even necessary, for instance for small chains.⁵²

This period is in many ways remarkable. The high number of members in 1562, 80, relates to a steady growth after 1544; the year in which Charles V restricted the guild membership prices. By comparison, Antwerp counted 120 masters during its heydays in 1566.⁵³ The early years of the 1560s nonetheless marked a high point for the guild in Bruges in terms of membership. However, the following forty years proved to be disruptive for the guild and the Low Countries in general. The lists of committee members reveal little continuity in the committee in this period. Perhaps an outflow of established masters gave space to younger ones in the committee. This discontinuity is also visible in Antwerp, where guild membership had decreased to 75 masters by 1605.⁵⁴ The previous thirty years had seen large emigration streams from Antwerp. Both years for which we have membership numbers, 1454 and 1562, show the fluidity of the committee positions, meaning that many of the guild members had held at least one position. This is also visible if we look at the membership numbers as a whole. If the 628 masters of the database represent 70 per cent of the membership and the guild would have held a total of 900 masters, then the 415 persons in the guild committee would have represented 46 per cent of the membership. This suggests that one in two goldsmiths served in the committee.

51 SAB. 327. Goudsmeden n^o 36a fols. 19-20v; Stadsarchief Antwerpen. GA4488. Goud- en zilvermeden, 1400-1600, fol. 259.

52 SAB. 327. Goudsmeden n^o 36a fols. 19-22v.

53 De Kerf, *De circulatie*, 41.

54 Ibidem.

Family businesses

At the start of their career, independent master goldsmiths would have needed starting capital. A journeyman aspiring to become a master would thus have profited more than in most trades from inheriting or working in a family business or network (interpreted here as a connection of at least two directly related people in the same profession). The son of a master goldsmith could work in the workshop of his father as an apprentice and take over the business after the latter's death. Naturally, newcomers to the city who did not have such family connections would have found it harder to set up their own business. In order to broaden our understanding of the social composition of the guild, this section deals with the question of family networks, and in particular father-son connections, and whether they dominated the guild.

Amongst the goldsmith population that I have studied, many surnames indeed occur more than once, likely indicating family connections. We cannot presume, of course, that everyone who shares a surname is automatically related. Yet, considering that the guild was not a large one and that family businesses were financially advantageous and ubiquitous among guilds, especially goldsmith guilds, we can assume that a family connection did indeed exist in the majority of cases. Among 627 persons on the list, 274 people would then have had a family connection with another person on the list. Of course, only those who also lived around the same time would match. This group of 274 persons represented 99 families, the majority of which consisted of just two people with the same surname. Some of them were actually newcomers, such as brothers or nephews who had moved to the city at the same time. Other families held larger networks and passed on their trade for generations. The most extensive goldsmith families were named Crabbe, van Assenede, de Backer, van den Berghe, Cailliau, Cnoop, Cnuut, de Doppere, Hughelynck, Huuchs, Kieken, Lijms, van der Meere, Monier, Schape-lynyck, Schelhavere, van der Straele, Vermeer, Volden and de Wachtere. These families counted at least four goldsmiths. The most prominent goldsmiths did not seem to have offspring working in the guild in Bruges. There are no evident namesakes for Lodewijck de Blasere or Jan de Leeuw, nor for Willem van Vlueten, who originated from Utrecht.

40 Per cent of the members on the list had direct family connections within the guild. The guild was thus not closed to newcomers. Although a strong presence of families characterized the goldsmith guild of Bruges, families did not monopolize it. They were, however, overrepresented



Illustration 2 Jan van Eyck, The goldsmith Jan de Leeuw, 1436 (source: Kunsthistorisches Museum Wien).

within the guild committee. The 274 persons with a suspected family connection took up 72 per cent of the committee positions. This is a high percentage, considering that this group only represented 40 per cent of the membership population. A few of these families had also sprung from migrants. Out of the 726 committee positions occupied by goldsmiths with family connections, 285 were taken up by the twenty most numerous families mentioned. The guild might not have been family-dominated, but the guild committee was. Yet, in each family usually just one person was in office for several terms, while the rest only served once or twice. The guild committee positions do not seem to have been particularly sought after. The openness of the guild committee towards newcomers thus depended mostly on the political situation, the financial situation of the master, and a willingness to serve in the committee. Goldsmiths with a family tradition would have found it easier to build up their careers and could afford taking up a post in the committee by the end of it.

Emigration and Immigration

The mobility of goldsmiths is visible in their migration patterns, both in terms of newcomers to the guild and goldsmiths moving away from Bruges. Remarkably, emigration increased when guild membership reached a peak in the second half of the fifteenth and again in the second half of the sixteenth century, when many goldsmiths left Bruges to deploy their skills elsewhere. In a study on migration and the city, Boone remarks that London's tax lists for the period 1440 to 1484 mention high numbers of immigrants from the southern Low Countries working in luxury industries, such as goldsmiths.⁵⁵ An explanation for this, according to Cassagnes, might be that they left Flanders because of cut-throat competition in Bruges and because they would find less demanding customers in England.⁵⁶ It is in any case likely that England had a market for the skills of Bruges' goldsmiths. Lien Bich Luu points out that in 1468 at least 113 alien goldsmiths worked in London, Southwark, and Westminster.⁵⁷ She also quotes an estimate claiming that 417 foreigners joined the goldsmith guild in London between 1479 and 1514.⁵⁸ Using an estimate of 232 foreigners for the period of 1535 to 1562, Luu concludes that there was less migration in the second period.⁵⁹ Perhaps it became more attractive for goldsmiths to remain in the Low Countries. Frequently, goldsmiths of Bruges also became *buitenpoorters*, a status that helped them maintain citizenship while residing outside the city. At least 30 goldsmiths requested this status in the sixteenth century. The *buitenpoortersboeken* only reveal the destination of four of these goldsmiths; two of whom ended up in London.

By the second half of the sixteenth century, migration of Flemish people to England increased dramatically. While there is no direct or systematic proof of this being the case for the goldsmiths from Bruges,

55 M. Boone, 'De gewenste vreemdeling. Aantrekken en afstoten in de middeleeuwse stad', in: L. Lucasen and W. Willems (eds.), *Waarom mensen in de stad willen wonen, 1200-2010* (Amsterdam 2009) 42-58, 57.

56 S. Cassagnes, *D'art et d'argent. Les artistes et leurs clients dans l'Europe du Nord, XIVe-XVe siècles* (Rennes 2001) 40, 198-199, 247.

57 L.B. Luu, 'Aliens and their impact on the goldsmiths' craft in London in the sixteenth century', in: D. Mitchell (ed.), *Goldsmiths, silversmiths and bankers. Innovation and the transfer of skill, 1550 to 1750* (Oxford/Northampton 1995) 43-52, 44-45.

58 T.F. Reddaway and L.E.M. Walker, *The early history of the goldsmiths' company* (London 1975) 171, as quoted in Luu, 'Aliens and their impact', 45.

59 Estimate based on P. Glanville, *Silver in Tudor and early Stuart England. A social history and catalogue of the national collection, 1480-1660* (London 1990) 92, as quoted in Luu, 'Aliens and their impact', 45.

the fluidity in committee membership within this period, as previously mentioned, and the references to the death and departure of the gold-beaters point in this direction. By the second half of the century, Flanders had fallen into an economic, political, and religious crisis which prompted thousands to flee. Some had fled to Antwerp first, hoping to find anonymity and work in the city, but then moved on to England, the Holy Roman Empire, or, eventually, to the newly founded Dutch Republic. Reformed stranger churches, which offered financial and moral support to refugees, formed in English and German cities. According to Gezels, London was also a popular destination for goldsmiths fleeing from Ghent. He points out that many goldsmiths from Ghent had turned to Calvinism.⁶⁰ Schlugleit saw similar indications for Antwerp as he believed many goldsmiths fled Antwerp out of fear of religious persecutions.⁶¹ There is no systematic evidence for the popularity of Protestant beliefs among the goldsmiths, only the indications mentioned above.

One Lutheran goldsmith from Bruges, Cornelis Volckaert, was, however, beheaded in 1553. The wealthy goldsmith had served on the guild committee twice and converted to Lutheranism around 1546. He had commissioned translations of Lutheran books and distributed them in Bruges.⁶² His son, Denys Volckaert, later moved to Antwerp, and by 1568 worked as a goldsmith in London and had become a member of the Dutch Reformed Church there.⁶³ Van Molle sees yet more evidence in a note from Zeger van Male, a prominent citizen of Bruges, that mentioned that the guild was not in good shape by 1590-1591 and that several goldsmiths had fled Bruges for religious reasons and for employment. According to van Male, some went to England and many to Frankfurt, Wesel, and Augsburg.⁶⁴ No goldsmiths were directly involved in the Reformed consistory of Bruges during the period 1578-1584, though Pieter Dominicle, whose family contained numerous goldsmiths, was a member of the city council between 1578 and 1584. This was a time in which Reformers politically and religiously dominated the city. Pieter Dominicle fled to England afterwards.⁶⁵ Two members of the

60 Gezels, 'De Gentse edelsmeden', 262-263.

61 D. Schlugleit, *De Antwerpse goud- en zilversmeden in het corporatief stelsel (1332-1798)* (Wetteren 1969) 104.

62 J. Decavele, *De dageraad van de reformatie in Vlaanderen (1520-1565)* (Brussels 1975) 337.

63 Luu, 'Aliens and their impact', 47-48.

64 Van Molle, 'Vijf eeuwen', 38.

65 L. Vandamme, 'De Calvinistische kerkorganisatie in Brugge, 1581-1584', in: A. Bauwens et al., *Opstand en verval. Aspecten van het dagelijks leven in het Brugse tijdens de laatste decennia van de 16^e eeuw* (Bruges 1987) 33-54, 34-35.

Monier family, a family of goldsmiths from Bruges, took up the occupation in Frankenthal, a well-known centre in the German Rhineland for Reformed refugees from the Low Countries and for goldsmithing.⁶⁶

As mentioned previously, immigration to the city affected the guild. Throughout the period under consideration, the guild doubled in numbers. The decisions of the city council or the counts concerning the citizenships fees largely affected access to the guild. A first large stream of newcomers joined between 1441 and 1445. In 1441 Philip the Good ordered a reduction in the citizenship fees for four years, after what Jamees describes as decades of 'excessive expenses which acceptance to a guild entailed'.⁶⁷ Between 1418 and 1478, 38 goldsmiths bought citizenship, 22 of whom did so between 1441 and 1445.⁶⁸ At least fourteen out of the 44 goldsmiths listed in 1454 were newcomers to the guild, but looking at the names, Viaene believed there might have been up to twelve more.⁶⁹ Between 1361 and 1486, 82 goldsmiths became citizens of Bruges.⁷⁰ Of these 82 newcomers, two were inhabitants of Bruges buying citizenship. We do not know the provenance of six others.

The other 75 migrants originated from 54 different cities and towns, most of which were located within the Holy Roman Empire, the Northern Netherlands, and France. The Northern Netherlands represented by far the biggest group as twenty newcomers originated there, more specifically from the following towns and villages: Nijmegen, Amsterdam, 's-Hertogenbosch, Breda, Deventer, Grave, Dordrecht, Delft, Heesch, Middelburg, Nieuweland, Rilland, Utrecht, Zierikzee en Zwartewale. Areas of the Holy Roman Empire near the Netherlands also represented a high number of newcomers, fourteen, from Braunschweig, Neuss, the area of Cologne, Duisburg (four), Kleef, Rees, and Unna. One person came from Strasbourg. Only six people came from Brabant, from Antwerp, Leuven, and Brussels. Another fourteen came from France, mostly from northern France, just outside Flanders, and Paris (six). Excluding the two inhabitants of Bruges, only twelve persons from Flanders bought citizenship. This means that according to the data from the

66 Spelling variants: Le Monier, Monyer, and Lemonier. W. Jarosch, 'Frankenthaler Gold- und Silberschmiede des 16. und 17. Jahrhunderts', in: E.J. Hürkey and I. Bürgy-de Ruijter (eds.), *Kunst, Kommerz, Glaubenskampf. Frankenthal um 1600* (Worms 1995) 175-186, 176, 181.

67 A. Jamees, *Brugse poorters. Opgetekend uit de stadsrekeningen. Part II: 1418-1478* (Handzame 1980) viii.

68 *Ibidem*, x.

69 Viaene, 'Goud- en zilversmeden in Brugge', 70.

70 This figure and the following data are based on Jamees, *Brugse poorters* and R.A. Parmentier, *Indices op de Brugsche poorterboeken* (Bruges 1938) 2 vols.

poortersboeken, the guild primarily received newcomers from areas outside Flanders. Of the group from Flanders, one had lived in Koolkerke, near Bruges. Another person came from the '*Camerlincx ambacht*', a region near the Belgian coast. A little further south, some newcomers came from Lille and Hesdin, others from various places such as Tielt, Geraardsbergen, Kortrijk and Ieper. Finally, four originated from Hainaut, one from Bilbao in Spain, and two places remain unidentified.

The citizenship lists for Bruges contain many errors, however. Consequently, the database does not record all migrants, nor does it include citizens that did not specifically mention the profession of goldsmith. From the 83 known migrants, those who bought citizenship to become a freemaster of the guild, only eight served in the guild committee. One of them was Willem van den Cruce, who originated from Kortrijk and held six positions in the guild committee between 1496 and 1527, three of which as *deken*. While this could indicate that the guild committee was dominated by locals, this impression may be incorrect as it likely that migration numbers were higher.

Conclusions

This article investigated accessibility from the angle of a very specific economic sector: the luxury industry. The goldsmith guild of Bruges was a capital-intensive guild and could thus be expected to be more exclusive or inaccessible than other guilds. In other words: we might expect goldsmith guilds to form an exception to the growing view that guilds were more open towards newcomers and less monopolistic than scholars have hitherto thought. This, however, has proven not to be the case. The goldsmith guild of Bruges was also more open and accessible during the late medieval period than would traditionally be expected.

To reach that conclusion, this article has examined the accessibility of Bruges' goldsmith guild between 1363 and 1600 from four directions. First, it has looked at the entry costs for masters and apprentices. Like in any other guild, masters' sons would have found it easier to enter the guild since they did not have to pay the citizenship fees. Local newcomers were also advantaged, as they received a reduction in guild entry fees. There is no evidence that the fees for joining the guild were extortionate. The fees were nonetheless a threshold, but the possibility of paying them in instalments further alleviated that burden. Goldsmithing was not an easily accessible profession as it required a high

starting capital which probably regulated the accessibility of the trade more than anything else. The apprenticeship too was long and thus costlier than was the case for most other crafts. A second angle, however, the degree to which newcomers featured in the guild, shows that the goldsmith guild was not averse to newcomers. On the contrary, the guild, like the city, needed newcomers, for instance when the upheavals of the second half of the sixteenth century left the guild devoid of goldbeaters or when extra fees for newcomers served to feed the guild's finances. Many new masters joined the guild especially in times of reduced citizenship or lower guild entrance fees. Keeping newcomers out was not always in the interest of the guild. A third way to measure accessibility is the extent to which kinship dominated the trade. The database reveals only 40 per cent kinship ties among its population. The kinship figures for Bruges' goldsmiths are higher than Prak's early modern examples, but nonetheless demonstrate the openness of the guild. Nevertheless, goldsmith families did dominate the guild committee as 72 per cent of those who had held a position also had family connections to other goldsmiths, some of whom had previously migrated to the city. Finally, this analysis examined the ways in which migration, and in its wake the political and economic context, impacted the guild. In comparison with Ghent's goldsmith guild, Bruges goldsmith guild counted both more goldsmiths and more newcomers. While the guild attracted many newcomers, goldsmiths also frequently emigrated during the period under consideration. In the early fifteenth century, the heydays of the craft in Bruges, the guild membership was very small but numbers grew after political interventions and in times of crisis.

The conclusion that the goldsmith guild of Bruges was more open to newcomers than expected also helps scholars further understand the dynamics of accessibility when compared to other guilds. The goldsmith guild in Ghent, for instance, was characterized by immobility between 1543 and 1580 as the number of goldsmiths declined from 21 to 10.⁷¹ The immobility was not due to inaccessibility. Despite low fees and no citizenship costs, Ghent's goldsmith guild did not manage to attract newcomers. The dynamics that help shape accessibility demonstrate the importance of the market, rather than pressure towards monopolization from the guild. Prak shows low numbers of kinship relations for London, s'-Hertogenbosch, and Vienna, but higher numbers of local goldsmiths for Rotterdam and apprentices for Antwerp. Market dynam-

71 Dambruyne, 'Corporatieve middengroepen', 55.

ics that instigated mobility, especially in a city known for its trade in and production of luxury goods such as Bruges, prove more influential for the accessibility of a guild than any impulse towards monopolization by guild members. The guild profited from having newcomers. While a luxury craft that depended on the demand for goods on the market like the goldsmiths was more open to newcomers than expected, some less capital-intensive crafts with a stable market demand like the butchers were more monopolistic.⁷² What is thus often lacking in current understandings of the accessibility of trades is a vision that differentiates between types of guilds or economic sectors and market contexts.

About the author

Silke Muylaert is currently a postdoctoral researcher at Vrije Universiteit Amsterdam, where she studies sixteenth-century Reformed migrants. Her doctoral studies at the University of Kent focused on the foreign churches in England. Prior to this, she became invested in goldsmiths while studying at Ghent University.

E-mail: s.muylaert@vu.nl

⁷² H. Van Werveke, 'Ambachten en erfelijkheid', *Mededeelingen van de Koninklijke Vlaamse Academie voor Wetenschappen Letteren en Schoone Kunsten van België* 4:1 (1942) 5-28.

Appendix 1

Table including all city account books of Bruges consulted for the database

Start date and end date of the accounts used	
03.02.1360 - 02.02.1361	02.09.1461 - 01.09.1462
02.02.1370 - 02.02.1371	02.09.1470 - 01.09.1471
02.02.1380 - 02.02.1381	02.09.1471 - 01.09.1472
02.09.1390 - 02.09.1391	02.09.1480 - 01.09.1481
02.09.1400 - 02.09.1401	01.01.1491 - 31.08.1491
02.09.1410 - 01.09.1411	02.09.1500 - 02.09.1501
02.09.1420 - 01.09.1421	02.09.1510 - 02.09.1511
02.09.1430 - 02.09.1431	02.09.1520 - 02.09.1521
02.09.1439 - 02.09.1440	02.09.1530 - 02.09.1531
02.09.1440 - 02.09.1441	02.09.1540 - 02.09.1541
02.09.1442 - 02.09.1443	02.09.1550 - 02.09.1551
02.09.1443 - 02.09.1444	02.09.1560 - 02.09.1561
02.09.1444 - 02.09.1445	02.09.1570 - 02.09.1571
02.09.1445 - 02.09.1446	02.09.1580 - 02.09.1581
02.09.1446 - 02.09.1447	02.09.1590 - 02.09.1591
02.09.1447 - 02.09.1448	02.09.1600 - 02.09.1601
02.09.1449 - 02.09.1450	

Source: SAB. 216 Stadsrekeningen

Appendix 2

Table including all the account books of the ADN Série 1 B (recette générale des finances) consulted for the database. Start date and end date of the accounts used

B.1897 (01.05.1412-16.10.1412)	B.2140 (01.01.1490-31.12.1490)
B.1920 (03.10.1419-02.10.1420)	B.2169 (01.01.1500 -31.12.1500)
B.1923 (03.10.1420-02.10.1421)	B.2214 (01.01.1510-31.12.1510)
B.1925 (03.10.1421-02.10.1422)	B.2294 (01.01.1520-31.12.1520)
B.1927 (03.10.1422-02.10.1423)	B.2339 (01.01.1527-31.12.1527)
B.1929 (03.10.1423-02.10.1424)	B.2345 (01.01.1528-31.12.1528)
B.1931 (03.10.1424-02.10.1425)	B.2351 (01.01.1528-31.12.1529)
B.1933 (03.10.1425-02.10.1426)	B.2357 (01.01.1530-31.12.1530)
B.1935 (04.10.1426-31.12.1426)	B.2418 (01.01.1540-31.12.1540)
B.1942 (01.01.1431-31.12.1431)	B.2482 (01.01.1550-31.12.1550)
B.1969 (01.01.1440-31.12.1440)	B.2539 (01.01.1559-31.12.1559)
B.2004 (01.01.1450-31.12.1450)	B.2602 (01.01.1570-17.06.1570)
B.2040 (02.10.1460-30.09.1461)	B.2608 (04.07.1570-31.12.1571)
B.2077 (01.01.1470-03.04.1470)	B.2662 (01.01.1580-31.12.1580)
B.2078 (01.05.1470-31.12.1470)	B.2724 (01.01.1590-31.12.1590)
B.2121 (01.01.1480-31.12.1480)	B.2782 (01.01.1600-31.12.1600)

Appendix 3

A comparison between the date in which a goldsmith inscribed his mark into the copper plate between 1563 and 1597 and the first time he served the guild committee		
Name	Inscription	Committee position
Adolf Beyts	1568	1575
Jan de Laghos	1568	1571
Jacob Coene	1568	1569
Maerten Crabbe	1568	1570
Adriaen Bultynck	1568	1571
Jan Billet	1569	1572
Cornelis van Halmale	1570	1574
Loys Blommaert	1571	1577
Rombout de Doppere	1571	1574
Christiaen Scapelynck	1571	1576
Cornelis Blommaert	1571	1579
Jacob de Brune	1572	1576
Heindrick Boureye	1572	1578
Claeys Scapelynck	1573	1582
Loys van Nieukercke	1573	1577
Lucas Dassonneville	1573	1577
Gillis Canneel	1575	1580
Cornelis Schelhavere	1575	1583
Guillaume de Sainthilaire	1575	1580
Joos vander Straele	1576	1577
Jacop Hughelynck	1578	1586
Steven van Zoom	1579	1595
François Ghyoet / Guijot	1579	1582
Jan de la Fosse	1579	1588
Cornelis van Nieukerke	1579	1585
Pauwels Lyms	1584	1585
Mathijs van (H)essche	1587	1589
Christiaen Parte / Partille	1587	1591
Aernout vander Meere	1587	1599
Cornelis de Cuenynck	1587	1589

Name	Inscription	Committee position
Loys Daugnies / Doignies	1587	1592
Daneel Besoete	1587	1590
Jan Crabbe	1587	1594
Samuel Hughelynck	1587	1591
Simoen Thilly	1587	1595
Guillaume Peerman	1597	1600