

# Gender and Guilds in the Jagellonian Period in the Czech Lands<sup>1</sup>

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## Introduction

Research on guild organizations in Bohemia has its origins in the nineteenth century. Among the main representatives of this current is clearly Zikmund Winter, who in his monumental history of Czech guilds also deals with the so-called “women’s question”.<sup>2</sup> Zikmund Winter was active in the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries, with the subject of his interest being guild organizations from their beginnings up to the sixteenth century. He devoted, however, only a few observations to the gender issue and was more interested in the national dispute between Czechs and Germans.<sup>3</sup> In many respects, however, his work can be followed up on. Subsequent generations of Czech historians have been greatly influenced by Marxism and their perspective has been more focused on the class conflict,<sup>4</sup> while their interest in the “women’s question” remained peripheral for a long period of time. The works of Michaela Antonín Malaníková can be counted among the works dealing with women’s work.<sup>5</sup> In both the Czech and German contexts, much has been written and published concerning women in the Reformation. These scholarly works did not address, however, gender issues in guild organisations in the context of the Czech Reformation.

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<sup>2</sup> Zikmund Winter, *Z městských živností* (Prague: J. Otto, 1925), 50–55.

<sup>3</sup> Zikmund Winter, *Dějiny řemesel a obchodu v Čechách v XIV. a v XV. století* (Prague: Nákladem České akademie císaře Františka Josefa pro vědy, slovesnost a umění, 1906), 231–44.

<sup>4</sup> Josef Janáček, *Přehled vývoje řemeslné výroby v českých zemích za feudalismu* (Prague: Státní pedagogické nakladatelství, 1963).

<sup>5</sup> Michaela Antonín Malaníková, “Female Engagement in Medieval Urban Economy: Late-medieval Moravia in a Comparative Perspective,” in *Medieval East Central Europe in a Comparative Perspective*, ed. Gerhard Jaritz and Katalin Szende (London: Routledge, 2016), 185–95.

I will deal in this article with gender issues in guild organizations in the Czech Lands in the fifteenth and sixteenth centuries, with a stronger focus on Bohemia in the so-called “Jagiellonian period” (1471–1526). This period is, in a Czech context, “the golden age” of guild organizations. It is the period of their development, as well as the development of the Estates State and the boom of the Bohemian Reformation (beginning of the fifteenth century). As can be seen, this is indeed a period of many changes. It is therefore of the greatest interest to observe how these changes affected the relationship between women and men and how their position changed over time. What influence did the Bohemian Reformation have on the representation of women in guild organizations? Religious reasons and especially confessional differences could be a significant factor that influenced gender roles in the labour context. Among other things, this work deals with the language of guild articles, social practices, and attempts to capture the trends that led to the exclusion of women from guild organizations.

### The Stratification of Society

It is also important to mention the material and social stratification of society. There was a certain elite class in the towns, not always a patriciate, of wealthy owners of property who benefited from rent. This group included women, who were as likely as men, or institutions (towns and the church), to dispose of property estates.<sup>6</sup> The rented properties included not only the living quarters of houses, but also various craft shops that were subject to city regulations, such as butcher shops.<sup>7</sup> This then directly touches on the guild issue, and it is important to recall that a group of wealthy owners, which could include women, often stood over a group of master craftsmen. The social status of the individual is therefore another extremely important factor which determined the life of the person.

The “middle class” can be classified as master craftsmen (this is complicated, as there were huge differences between the crafts, the most respected being members of the butcher’s guilds). This can include senior members of guild organizations, these being merchants and members of regulated crafts.

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<sup>6</sup> Shennan Hutton, “Competing Conceptualizations of Women’s Economic Activities in Fourteenth-Century Ghent,” *Handelingen der Maatschappij voor Geschiedenis en Oudheidkunde te Gent* 59, no. 1 (2005): 43–69.

<sup>7</sup> State District Archives Hradec Králové (SOKA Hradec Králové). *Archiv města Hradec Králové, 1225–1945*; inv. no. 454; sign. pův. 103; ukl. j. 165 kniha, fol. 3a.

The work was regulated by the guild articles, which in turn mostly worked with a generic masculine. It was common practice in these organizations, however, to include the women as masters (textiles) or widows of master craftsmen.<sup>8</sup> Women, however, could also be completely, or partially, excluded from the regulated sector. Some guild articles then explicitly allowed women's work, but these were minimal. Another social group was the journeymen and apprentices. This was a group that was heavily dependent on master craftsmen and was subject to very strict guild regulation. Women could also be found here, not only in the textile crafts or in crafts that allowed women to be masters, but also, for example, in the bathing sector, which was subject to a specific form of regulation.<sup>9</sup> This social group was then restricted in a targeted way, in all probability to prevent unwanted competition. There may have been, however, other reasons for this, which will be discussed at a later point. In the urban environment, there was yet another group, mostly women, who held unregulated jobs. These are most frequently servants, maids and cooks. The social stratification of society has to always be kept in mind.

## The Road of the Guilds Articles

It is important to mention how the guild articulations were adopted. Out of the charters in general, mention should mainly be made of the guild articles, which regulated the functioning of the guild. The donor of these articles could be the monarch,<sup>10</sup> the town landlord,<sup>11</sup> the town government,<sup>12</sup> the provincial guild or the guild and the council of the superior town in the system of town law.<sup>13</sup> The guild that grants itself these articles is also unique.<sup>14</sup> In most cases, however, the articles were granted in cooperation with the city council. The

<sup>8</sup> State District Archives Olomouc (SOKa Olomouc), *Archiv města Olomouce, zlomky registratur*, inv. no. 2471.

<sup>9</sup> Josef Kalousek and Václav Vladivoj Tomek, eds., *Archiv český, čili, Staré písemné památky české i moravské, sebrané z archivů domácích i cizích, Díl XIV* (Prague: Domestikální fond království Českého, 1895), 479–81.

<sup>10</sup> Kalousek and Tomek, *Archiv český*, 459–62, 483–87.

<sup>11</sup> The Saxon Duke in all probability tried to act as lord of the towns in Lusatia. State District Archives Česká Lípa (SOKa Česká Lípa), *Cech tkalců Česká Lípa*, inv. no. 1, kart. 23.

<sup>12</sup> State District Archives Jihlava (SOKa Jihlava), *Archiv města Jihlava do roku 1848, odd. Úřední knihy a rukopisy*, inv. no. 6, fol. 81b, 141b–142b, 176b–177b, 220b–221b, 255b–256b, 257.

<sup>13</sup> SOKa Olomouc, *Archiv města Olomouce*, inv. no. 85.

<sup>14</sup> State District Archives České Budějovice (SOKa České Budějovice), *Cech malířů, sklenářů, zlatníků, řezbářů České Budějovice*, inv. no. 2, sig. I/2.

guild books are another source of information, these being lists of masters, craftsmen, registers of fees, lists of widows, etc. The guild records deal more with the migration of craftsmen, and in general these sources shed more light on social practice than the legislation in the form of guild articles, which has to be confronted with this. Mention should, first and foremost, be made of the monarch. The king only granted (due to specific political circumstances) privileges in Bohemia.<sup>15</sup> These charters were certainly not drawn up entirely under the supervision of the King, and cooperation with the guild was probably necessary, yet these charters contain no articles restricting women's work and use only generic masculine forms. As will be shown in the example below, the introduction of generic masculinity in guild articles and the transformation of masculinity in conjunction with the restriction of women can be seen as related factors.

As concerns the feudal towns, there was a visible effort on the part of the noble landowners to support their development, which is manifested by the granting of guild articles.<sup>16</sup> Once again, a nobleman, like the king, was not the author of the charters, but in all probability cooperated with the town government or with the craftsmen. The situation, in gender terms, is much more interesting here. Privileges appear that conferred the title of master on women.<sup>17</sup> This can be explained by the need to develop mostly small towns, where there was a greater need for labour than in the large cities.

The Prague towns played an important role in the status disputes between the towns and the nobility. The Old Town of Prague became an important centre of political power.<sup>18</sup> This is also related to the fact that Prague's (Old Town) guilds often had a countrywide jurisdiction.<sup>19</sup> Thus, they often provided their articles to other towns.<sup>20</sup> Town governments, which had a very strong autonomy in granting guild articles, functioned similarly. The reasons why the town government restricted women's work are basically unknowable. It could

<sup>15</sup> There was a war for the Czech crown up until 1479 and the country did not have a clear ruler. After the so-called Olomouc Peace, the situation became clearer and Bohemia was ruled by Vladislav II and Moravia by Matthias Corvinus. See Antonín Kalous, *Matyáš Korvín (1443–1490): uherský a český král* (České Budějovice: Veduta, 2009), 179–84.

<sup>16</sup> State District Archives Děčín (SOKA Děčín), *Cech krejčích Česká Kamenice*, inv. no. 1, sig. IA-1/1.

<sup>17</sup> SOKA Děčín, *Cech pekařů Česká Kamenice*, inv. no. 2, IA-2/3.

<sup>18</sup> Josef Macek, *Jagellonský věk v českých zemích: 1471–1526. Díl 3–4, Města; Venkovský lid, národnostní otázka*, (Prague: Academia, 1992), 322–34.

<sup>19</sup> Archives of the City of Plzeň (AMP), *Cech řezníků Plzeň*, I. Listiny, sig. I 426.

<sup>20</sup> SOKA České Budějovice, *Cech malířů, sklenářů, zlatníků, řezbářů České Budějovice*, inv. no. 1, sig. I/1.

have been a restriction on the part of the competitors, for religious or cultural reasons. These internal relations, however, are often unobserved due to the absence of sources of information. Prague, of course, was not the only donor of articles between towns; in Bohemia (and Moravia) there was a complex system in which some towns were superior to others under town law, and these towns were referred to in the event of court cases.<sup>21</sup> This network became the basis for regional guild associations, with the guild in the centre of the court providing its articles to the towns subordinate to it. Provincial and regional organizations often operated in parallel. Although the town governments had a very strong autonomy in granting the guild articles, there were conflicts at times between the town government and the guild that had adopted guild articles from another authority.<sup>22</sup> The relationship of towns within the law system cannot be ignored; this relationship complements the otherwise strong town autonomy. The situation in the giving of privileges and articles is highly complex. The study of guild filiation is very important for the history of guilds; guild articles were often adopted by other guilds. A guild in another town might have adopted articles, for example, restricting or forbidding women's work.

### The Stereotyping of Women: Religious Aspects

While fourteenth-century satires against craftsmen do not contain all that many gender stereotypes and focus more on ridiculing the dishonesty or incompetence of craftsmen, drunkenness and gambling, they become more likely to focus on women in the fifteenth century.<sup>23</sup> Stereotyping of women's work can be observed mainly in Prague. Women, if mentioned in the articles, could only work as apprentices or salespersons. Here one finds the stereotype of the quarrelsome woman, for example, in the articles of the bakers' guild.<sup>24</sup> Apprentices of the barbers' guild, including women, were excluded from attending the carol service.<sup>25</sup> The work could be seen as a stereotype generally associated with a given craft. Another source with a religious theme can be the earlier mentioned Klaudian map. The map is decorated and accompanied

<sup>21</sup> SOkA Olomouc, *Archiv města Olomouce*, inv. no. 85.

<sup>22</sup> Josef Kalousek, ed., *Archiv český, čili, Staré písemné památky české i moravské, sebrané z archivů domácích i cizích, Díl X* (Prague: Domestikální fond království Českého, 1890), 487.

<sup>23</sup> Josef Hrabák, ed., *Staročeské satiry Hradeckého rukopisu a Smilovy školy* (Prague: Československá akademie věd, 1962), 91–94, 105–108.

<sup>24</sup> Kalousek and Tomek, *Archiv český*, 443–44.

<sup>25</sup> Kalousek and Tomek, *Archiv český*, 479–81.

by quotations from the Bible and passages with religious themes. It also contains several depictions of sins and inappropriate behaviour. Women can be safely identified in two of these depictions, the depiction of adultery and the depiction of trickery or fraudulent sale of goods.<sup>26</sup> The images on the Klau-dian map are linked to religious themes. Using quotations from the Bible, the stereotyping of women was condoned and generally accepted, this being due to the influence of religion.

These stereotypes could be placed in the context of religious deception. Guild articles often contain obligatory holidays that a member was required to observe. The observance of certain religious acts was required, for example *sub utraque* in the Bohemian Reformation context.<sup>27</sup> The guild articles also require observance of the saints' feasts, these being the patron saints of the craft. Religious brotherhoods, sometimes founded by the guild itself, also played a strong role in the life of the guild.<sup>28</sup> Religion played a very strong role in the daily life of the craftsmen. Within the organizations, there was a strong emphasis on the marital origin of the children. This can also be seen as one of the manifestations of the tense religious situation in the land. Practically all the guilds, in all of the towns, required the marital origin of children.<sup>29</sup> This practice could sometimes go to absurd lengths. In Ústí nad Labem, an apprentice was prevented from becoming a master because his wife's father was supposed to be of illegitimate origin. The craftsman subsequently succeeded, but only with an appeal in Magdeburg.<sup>30</sup> This may be an example of Bohemian specificity in a religiously tense time. The religious situation was already exacerbated, however, at the turn of the fifteenth century and there were no recorded restrictions on women, although the power of the preachers was considerable. The rise in stereotypes may have been due to the association of craftsmen and women with the Bohemian Reformation. This fact has often been referred to by mostly Catholic theologians but not only by them.<sup>31</sup> In Catholic towns, this could have led to an explanation for certain

<sup>26</sup> State District Archives in Litoměřice (SOA Litoměřice), *Biskupské sbírky Litoměřice, Tzv. Klau-dyánova mapa Čech, 1518*, sign. sine (in the possession of the Diocese of Litoměřice).

<sup>27</sup> Kalousek and Tomek, *Archiv český*, 481.

<sup>28</sup> Hana Pátková, ed., *Cechovní kniha pražských malířů, 1348–1527* (Prague: Koniasch Latin Press, 1996), 1–20.

<sup>29</sup> Kalousek and Tomek, *Archiv český*, 474.

<sup>30</sup> Ludwig Schlesinger, ed., *Städte und Urkundenbücher aus Böhmen*, vol. 3, *Urkunde der Stadt Aussig* (Prag: Im selbstverlage des Vereines, 1806), 200.

<sup>31</sup> Věra Soukupová, "Proměny genderových reprezentací v literatuře husitské doby," in *Husitské re-formace. Proměna kulturního kódu v 15. století*, ed. Pavlína Cermanová and Pavel Soukup (Prague: Nakladatelství lidové noviny, 2019), 188–90.

prohibitions, although this was not the case in all of the towns as has been mentioned earlier. Another reason could have been limiting competition.

## Transformation of Guilds to the Man's Space

In order to talk about changing gender roles in the fifteenth century, one must first look back to earlier practices in the pre-Reformation period and ideally determine any changes. One such example is the Prague painters' guild. There are records of its existence as early as the fourteenth century. The guild book of the Prague painters' guild, which contains the guild's articles from 1347, is a valuable source. These guild articulations are of interest because the term woman-master appears in the regulations.<sup>32</sup> They were translated from German into Czech in the fifteenth century, and the same term appears in the articles in its original meaning.<sup>33</sup> In 1474, however, new articles regulating the functioning of the guild were adopted, but here the notion of female masters disappears and the articles use only the generic masculinum.<sup>34</sup> This did not mean, however, that women disappeared from the painters and glassmakers' guilds completely. The social practice was such that a woman could appear on the list, but it is not known, unfortunately, whether she was a widow, a daughter or an independent craftswoman.<sup>35</sup> All that is certain is that, unlike most of the other names on the list, this worker's status lacks the title of master.<sup>36</sup> It can therefore be surmised that there was certainly some change over the course of the fifteenth century.

The Prague Guild of Painters and Glaziers is also interesting because it provided its artefacts to the same guild in České Budějovice in 1499. These articles no longer contain the title female master and work with the generic masculine form. There is an adoption of the norm without considering a woman for the position of master.<sup>37</sup> The religious perspective is also of interest. České Budějovice, unlike the towns of Prague, was a Catholic town. The

<sup>32</sup> Pátková, *Cechovní kniha*, 1–2.

<sup>33</sup> Pátková, *Cechovní kniha*, 9–10.

<sup>34</sup> The list includes the following female names 'clara' and 'margaretha'. Pátková, *Cechovní kniha*, 35.

<sup>35</sup> This name 'margaretha' and 'margaretha sklenarsska', probably the same person, is found in two lists. I mean in this case that it is the widow. Pátková, *Cechovní kniha*, 35, 39.

<sup>36</sup> Pátková, *Cechovní kniha*, 34–36, 38–39.

<sup>37</sup> SOKA České Budějovice, *Cech malířů, sklenářů, zlatníků, řezbářů České Budějovice*, inv. no. 1, sig. I/1.

so-called Klaudian map, which distinguishes between the Catholic (symbol of the keys) and the towns of the Bohemian Reformation (the goblet), is an excellent source in terms of its depiction of the religious division of the country at the time.<sup>38</sup> In other Catholic towns, even in the sixteenth century, there were still guild articulations in which the notion of a woman master can be found. In Bohemia, these kinds of cities included the subject town of Česká Kamenice and the Moravian royal town of Jihlava.<sup>39</sup> One can find in the period under study, however, Catholic settlements that restricts women's work. One example would be the town of Česká Lípa, where women were explicitly excluded from the craft.<sup>40</sup> Returning to Prague, there was not only the substitution of terms and the use of a generic masculine in guild articles, but also the restriction of widows. In some guild organizations, the time a woman could practise the craft inherited from her husband was limited.<sup>41</sup> This can be seen with the fact that the restriction of women's work occurred regardless of the religious confession in the town.

There was one interesting development in the period under review involving changes in masculinity. Several types of masculinity are known in the context of the Czech Middle Ages. The division into masters and apprentices may be one of them. Guildmasters demonstrate their dominance over journeymen by publishing special guild articles for journeymen only, making it more difficult for them to get a master's position.<sup>42</sup> They created a group of men who were in a highly subordinate position to the masters, the true men. These restrictions then occurred practically everywhere in the country. This change can only be described as a change to a strongly patriarchal society, where the master is not only responsible for his wife and children, but suddenly controls other men under him, including their wives.<sup>43</sup> The situation may have been similar to that in Roman law, where the *pater familias* was the master of the house. It is known from specific examples, however, that women were not lawless, with even the sale of property being done with their consent. It is true, however, that even in the later period women were marginalised and the

<sup>38</sup> SOA Litoměřice, *Klaudyánova mapa*.

<sup>39</sup> SOKA Děčín, *Cech pekařů Česká Kamenice*, inv. no. 2, IA-2/3.; SOKA Jihlava, *Archiv města Jihlava do r. 1848*, odd. Úřední knihy a rukopisy, inv. no. 6, fol. 28.

<sup>40</sup> Ivana Ebelová et al., *Pamětní kniha města České Lípy* (Ústí nad Labem: Univerzita Jana Evangelisty Purkyně, 2005), 99–104.

<sup>41</sup> Kalousek and Tomek, *Archiv český*, 489.; SOKA Olomouc, *Archiv města Olomouce*, listiny, inv. no. 287.

<sup>42</sup> E.g. SOKA Hradec Králové, *Cech kovářů a kolářů*, inv. no. 1.

<sup>43</sup> Kalousek and Tomek, *Archiv český*, 484.



children of the father had legal priority over the mothers (sixteenth century).<sup>44</sup> A master could even refuse to allow an apprentice to marry if he wanted to. The supervision of the marriages of disciples and journeymen and apprentices was extremely strict. There were a number of penalties that could be imposed for violating these prohibitions. Sometimes, as documented in the statutes of the Masters' Guild in the New Town of Prague, a journeyman or apprentice would pay only a fine.<sup>45</sup> In extreme cases, the apprentice or journeyman was expelled from the guild and the craft. It is of interest to note that this punishment is effectively the same as that for stealing from the master's house.<sup>46</sup> This more or less amounted to a ban on the craft, with the impossibility of becoming a master, and with the person being condemned to a life on the margins of society or having to leave the city. This is likely to be a more important change than the advent of the Reformation. Evidence of this change can be seen in the aforementioned articles for disciples, which was a new type of source or has been more extensively preserved. The disciples first tried to define themselves against this, but they were consequently set against the city council and their masters. There were several restrictions on the rights of the apprentice by the city council and there are records of their resistance.<sup>47</sup> One can therefore assume that this is a recent experience and a new trend.

This is also a period when men who were the masters of honour were becoming massively involved in municipal politics and becoming part of municipal offices.<sup>48</sup> This was sometimes done quite aggressively. Cases of guild revolts in the towns (in Prague, Jihlava) multiplied.<sup>49</sup> These movements were extremely violent and were regionally specific, as Jaroslav Miller has already described.<sup>50</sup> These were not only conflicts between the guilds and the town, but also between the guilds themselves; members of other guilds were

<sup>44</sup> Pavla Slavičková, "Pater familias a jeho role v rané novověké rodině na základě normativních pramenů," in *Konstrukce maskulinní identity v minulosti a současnosti. Koncepty, metody, perspektivy*, ed. Radmila Švaříčková Slabáková and Jitka Kohoutová (Prague: Nakladatelství Lidové noviny, 2012), 158–60.

<sup>45</sup> Kalousek and Tomek, *Archiv český*, 468.

<sup>46</sup> Kalousek and Tomek, *Archiv český*, 461, 488, 491.

<sup>47</sup> Kalousek and Tomek, *Archiv český*, 462–463.

<sup>48</sup> Jiří Smrž, *Podíl cechmistrů na správě pražských měst v raném novověku* (Prague: Scriptorium, 2021), 47–93, 101–50.

<sup>49</sup> SOkA Jihlava, *Městská správa Jihlava, listiny*, inv. no. 341, 343, 344, 347, 348, 349, 350, 360, 361; František Šmahel, "Pražské povstání roku 1483," *Pražský sborník historický*, no. 19 (1986): 35–102.

<sup>50</sup> Jaroslav Miller, *Uzavřená společnost a její nepřátelé: město středověké Evropy (1500–1700)* (Prague: Nakladatelství Lidové noviny 2006), 168–80.

intentionally murdered by guild members (sometimes while drunk).<sup>51</sup> Other times, members declared 'war' on their town, which was then greatly harmed.<sup>52</sup> This shift towards a different type of masculinity may also have affected the position of women in society.

## Conclusion

In conclusion, religious influences may certainly have played a role in the exclusion of women from guild organizations. The systematic exclusion of women was in all probability due to a change in society, with a shift towards a strongly patriarchal society led by guildmasters in urban settings. The transformation of masculinity had an indispensable influence, when the guildmasters began to consider themselves an important part of urban society and demonstrated their dominance over the other members of the craft guild and towards the nobility externally as part of the urban state. A strong emphasis was also placed at this time on the marriage origin of children, with only a child born in wedlock being able to become a master. This restriction in the guild articles can be found almost everywhere. The fact that this stereotype occurs at the same time as the strong emphasis on the marital origins of children may suggest that there was an attempt to limit toxic expressions of masculinity, and stereotype women. This paper attempts to demonstrate that stereotypes associated with religion were incorporated into guild articulations. This can also be seen in visual material such as the Klaudian map. The greatest shifts occur in towns associated with the Bohemian Reformation. Guild articles adopted generic masculinities, and the references to women disappear from them. Masters were also opposed to journeymen and apprentices. These articles were also adopted in Catholic towns due to the system of urban law.

## Abstract

This article deals with the involvement of women in the labour process within the craft guilds in the territory of the Bohemian Kingdom in the Jagellonian period. Significant changes in attitudes towards women's work and

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<sup>51</sup> Alena Černá and Petr Čornej and Markéta Klosová, eds., *Fontes rerum Bohemicarum. Series nova, tomus III. Prameny dějin českých. Nová řada, III. díl. Staré letopisy české (východočeská větev a některé související texty)* (Prague: Filosofia, 2018), 258.

<sup>52</sup> SOKA Jihlava, *Městská správa Jihlava, listiny*, inv. no. 361.

the organisation of work come about with the Jagiellonian dynasty. Individual regulations had territorial differences. It is therefore important to examine the influences of urban law, the churches and, last but not least, the cultural shift within society. The paper attempts to point out the possible influences on the issue and highlights the limits of research on the topic.

**Keywords:** Gender; Craft, Guilds; Jagellonian period; Czech Lands

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