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The training of gold- and silversmiths in eighteenth-century Ghent: the role of the academy

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Abstract

This article will look for the training of Ghent gold- and silversmiths in the second half of the eighteenth century. Initially, attention will be focused on the importance of the new and fashionable. It will be argued that in several countries the solution to the design deficit will be countered by the establishment of art academies and drawing schools. Thereafter, it will be shown that in the historiography there is no general consensus on the academic training of artisans. Subsequently, the focus will be moved to the city of Ghent. First, the importance of design skills for gold- and silversmiths will be given a chance. In the second part, the emphasis is on how precious-metalsmiths develop strategies within the existing structures to be competitive on the market. This contribution will show that the legitimization of skills was high on the academic agenda.

Keywords

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The training of gold- and silversmiths in eighteenth-century Ghent: the role of the academy (*)

Introduction

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A Product Revolution

Research into material culture and consumption in the early modern period has made a strong boom in recent years. The constant in the research field is clear: a global story of an increasing and changing consumption, even in places affected by economic decline.¹ The account of increased consumption in the ancient regime seduced McKendrick to the statement that the eighteenth century was marked by a consumer revolution.² This provoked a fierce debate over the first consumer in history.³ Yet, there can be observed a form of consensus: although in many parts of northwest Europe an increase in consumption per capita can be seen from the middle of the sixteenth century, the roots of the modern consumer society with the emergence of new consumer goods and new consumption practices can be placed in the late seventeenth century.⁴ The most notable changes that occurred in consumption patterns between 1650 and 1800 were a shift from consumer durables to less sustainable products, as well as an increased sensitivity for fashionable goods.⁵ The buying public put new demands on their purchases. Consumers wanted to surround themselves with frivolities and decorative goods of which the appearance was essential. The goods

(*) My sincere thanks goes to Bart De Ruyck for suggestions on an earlier version of this text.

¹ See the various contributions in: Rittersma, R. C. (ed.), *Luxury in the Low Countries. Miscellaneous Reflections on Netherlandish Material Culture, 1500 to the Present*, Brussel, 2010; Schuurman, A.J., Walsh, L.S. (eds.), *Material culture: consumption, life-style, standard of living, 1500-1900 - Culture matérielle: consommation, style de vie, niveau de vie, 1500-1900*, Milaan, 1994; Schuurman, A., De Vries, J., Van der Woude, A. (red.), *Aards geluk: de Nederlanders en hun spullen van 1550 tot 1850*, Amsterdam, 1997.

² McKendrick, N., "The Consumer Revolution of Eighteenth-Century England, in: McKendrick, N., Brewer, J., Plumb, J.H. (eds.), *The Birth of a Consumer Society: The Commercialization of Eighteenth Century England*, Bloomington, 1982.

³ Bermingham, A., "Introduction. The consumption of culture: image, object, text", in: Bermingham, A., Brewer, J. (eds.), *The Consumption of Culture 1600-1800. Image, Object, Text*, Londen, 1997, pp. 1-20; De Vries, J., "Luxury in the Dutch Golden Age in Theory and Practice", in: Berg, M., Eger, E. (eds.), *Luxury in the Eighteenth Century: Debates, Desires and Delectable Goods*, Basingstoke-New York, 2003, pp. 41-56; Goldthwaite, R.A., *Wealth and the Demand of Art in Italy, 1300-1600*, Baltimore, 1993; Goldgar, A., "The Use and Misuse of Flowers: Tulipmania and the Concept of Luxury", in: Rittersma, R.C. (ed.), *Luxury in the Low Countries. Miscellaneous Reflections on Netherlandish Material Culture, 1500 to the Present*, Brussel, 2010, pp. 67-84.

⁴ Berg, M., Clifford, H., "Introduction", in: Berg, M., Clifford, H. (eds.), *Consumers and luxury: consumer culture in Europe 1650-1850*, Manchester-New York, 1999, p. 3; Nijboer, H.T., *De fatsoenering van het bestaan. Consumptie in Leeuwarden tijdens de Gouden Eeuw*, Rijksuniversiteit Groningen, Doctoraatverhandeling, Groningen, 2007, p. 2.

⁵ Blondé, B., "Tableware and changing consumer patterns. Dynamics of material culture in Antwerp, 17th-18th centuries", in: Veeckman, J. (ed.), *Majolica and glass from Italy to Antwerp and beyond: the transfer of technology in the 16th- early 17th century*, Antwerpen, 2002, pp. 295-311; Steegen, E., *Kleinhandel en stedelijke ontwikkeling. Het kramersambacht te Maastricht in de vroegmoderne tijd*, Hilversum, 2006, pp. 17-18.

they bought were aesthetically appealing.⁶ Simultaneously with the modified consumption practices a new product quality came to the fore, notably the design. To be competitive, producers had to meet the new aspirations and preferences of the buying public.⁷

Design Instruction

In the second quarter of the eighteenth century, England had to content with strong competition from France in the luxury production. According to observers, the success of the French luxury products was not due to the superior quality of raw materials, but to their fashionable appearance and decoration or in other words their design. Slowly, the idea was rising that the art of drawing, like modeling and engraving, was important for design. This finally resulted in the formation of drawing schools and art academies where craftsmen could refine their knowledge of (popular) designs.⁸ This additional training was not an exclusively English phenomenon. Gradually, in the first half of the eighteenth century, under the pressures of mercantilism and the enlightenment, which advocated a new educational system with strong, practice-oriented methods, the idea came that art academies could offer support to commerce and those craftsmen who work to design.⁹ In France, the number of cities that had an *école de dessin* experienced a strong expansion due to the cause of an additional training for the craftsman to meet the desire of consumers for fashionable objects.¹⁰ Also in the Netherlands, they saw the drawing instruction for craftspeople as the solution to the international attractiveness of the traditional production.¹¹

The same desire for the beautiful, elegant and stylish was present in the Southern Netherlands. This changed fashion-consciousness is strongly expressed in Antwerp estate listings from the late seventeenth century onwards. Objects were described according to their fashionable character or otherwise.¹² For this process, particularly the bigger role for the aesthetic qualities besides the material value in the valuation of objects and goods or in other words the smaller importance of the residual value of the material and a greater appreciation of the layout, Nijboer introduced the concept of *fatsoeningsproces*.¹³ De Munck noted that many of the difficulties producing crafts from the second half of the seventeenth century onwards faced, were related to the demands for less expensive and/or more fashionable items. The traditional manufacturing of products became subordinate to the design and the invention and innovation of new products. Designing skills were progressively higher valued. The rising appeal of academic art schools and technical drawing since the seventeenth century fits nicely in this story.¹⁴

⁶ Berg, M., "New commodities, luxuries and their consumers in eighteenth-century England", in: Berg, M., Clifford, H. (eds.), *Consumers and luxury: consumer culture in Europe 1650-1850*, Manchester-New York, 1999, pp. 65-69; Berg, M., *Luxury and Pleasure in Eighteenth-Century Britain*, Oxford, 2005, pp. 15-20.

⁷ Styles, J., "Design for Large-Scale Production in Eighteenth-Century Britain", in: *Oxford Art Journal*, XI, 1988, 2, p. 12.

⁸ Puetz, A., "Design Instruction for Artisans in Eighteenth-Century Britain", in: *Journal of Design History*, XII, 1999, 3, pp. 218-220.

⁹ Pevsner, N., *Academies of Art: past and present*, Cambridge, 1940, pp. 158-161.

¹⁰ Lahalle, A., *Les écoles de dessin au XVIIIe siècle. Entre arts libéraux et arts mécaniques*, Rennes, 2006, pp. 23-55.

¹¹ Knolle, P., "Dilettanten en hun rol in 18^{de}-eeuwse Noord-Nederlandse tekenacademies", in: Boschloo, A. W., A., Hendrikse, E. J., Smit, L. C., Van der Sman, G. J. (eds.), *Academies of Art between Renaissance and Romanticism (Leids Kunsthistorisch Jaarboek V-VI, 1986-1987)*, Den Haag, 1989, pp. 292-293.

¹² Blondé, B., Greefs, H., "Werk aan de winkel. De Antwerpse meerseniers: aspecten van kleinhandel en het verbruik in de 17^{de} en 18^{de} eeuw", in: *Bijdragen tot de Geschiedenis*, LXXXIV, 2001, 1-3, p. 224.

¹³ Nijboer, H.T., *De fatsoenering van het bestaan. Consumptie in Leeuwarden tijdens de Gouden Eeuw*, Rijksuniversiteit Groningen, Doctoraatverhandeling, Groningen, 2007, pp. 67-71.

¹⁴ De Munck, B., "Progressief corporatisme? Conventies, competenties en corporatieve strategieën van de Late Middeleeuwen tot ca. 1800", in: Art, J., De Nil, B., Jacobs, M. (eds.), *Een mens leeft niet van brood alleen. Bouwstenen voor een culturele arbeidsgeschiedenis (1800-1940)*, Gent, 2005, p. 72.

Valuing the academic training for craftsmen

Above was clearly shown that within the research field everyone is convinced that craftsmen were present within art academic institutions in Europe. However, it is remarkable that little is known about the craftsmen within the walls of the drawing schools. The relation of the corporate and academic learning time is so to speak unexplored.¹⁵ The last two decades, this situation changed somewhat.

According to Craske, the British succeeded to make up the design deficit compared to the French, but he denies the importance of academic education: *A factor I would like to dismiss from the outset is the theory that active efforts to encourage efforts in design through academies and prize programmes were at the heart of this turnaround.* Craske emphasizes the limited importance of these public initiatives to improve the design performance, because such institutions provide training to individuals who were either already serving an apprenticeship or had completed this craft training period. Moreover, he finds that major prizes were won by individuals who had already realized their youthful potential and smaller prizes were gained by the children of aristocratic families or by young men from families who were also investing in drawing education without these prizes. Craske looks for the explanation of the improvement in design to the private market.¹⁶ Other historians also adopt a critical attitude towards the academic design training for artisans. Richards, for example, investigated the relationship between the drawing school and the porcelain manufactory in Meissen (Saxony). She noted that the main obstacle to a successful alliance between the two institutions was the unbridgeable gap between a commercial and academic perception of taste.¹⁷ According to Berg, there is no evidence that drawing schools – and the widespread publication of cheap engravings – provided an automatic source of useful knowledge, artisanal skill or invention.¹⁸ Styles also lowers the importance of acquiring drawing skills in specially established schools. He emphasizes rather the enormous importance of the written and spoken word in the acquisition and the exchange of design skills.¹⁹

By contrast, at the other end of the spectrum, Thunder underlines the contribution of William Shipley's School and the Society of Arts to the creation of good design for the silk industry. Analysis of the drawings made by premium winners demonstrates that pupils had learned how to draw feasible designs that would be useful to industry. Consequently, according to Thunder, academies certainly played an important role in the increased quality of the designs.²⁰

Learning on the shop floor

During the ancient regime, the pre-capitalist industrial system in Western Europe was organized in urban guilds. These institutions were created during the middle ages within the

¹⁵ Styles, J., "Manufacturing, consumption and design in eighteenth-century England", in: Brewer, J., Porter, R. (eds.), *Consumption and the World of Goods*, London, 1994, p. 528.

¹⁶ Craske, M., "Plan and Control: Design and the Competitive Spirit in Early and Mid-Eighteenth-Century England", in: *Journal of Design History*, XII, 1999, 3, pp. 205-206 (quote on p. 205).

¹⁷ Richards, S., "'A True Siberia': Art in Service to Commerce in the Dresden Academy and the Meissen Drawing School, 1764-1836", in: *Journal of Design History*, XI, 1998, 2, pp. 120-121.

¹⁸ Berg, M., *Luxury and Pleasure in Eighteenth-Century Britain*, Oxford, 2005, p. 104.

¹⁹ Styles, J., "Manufacturing, consumption and design in eighteenth-century England", in: Brewer, J., Porter, R. (eds.), *Consumption and the World of Goods*, London, 1994, p. 544-547.

²⁰ Thunder, M., "Improving Design for Woven Silks. The Contribution of William Shipley's School and the Society of Arts", in: *Journal of Design History*, XVII, 2004, 1, pp. 20-21.

framework of pre-industrial economies and their typical problem of asymmetric knowledge on the quality of products between the producer and the consumer. In one way or another, the confidence of consumers in manufactured products had to be boosted. The institutionalization of craft guilds provided the solution. These institutions could terminate the quality problem because of their monopoly position. Three types of measures were important here: a system of professional training, a thorough investigation of the raw materials, production processes and products and the introduction of labels. The maximum quality of a product was not an issue, it was only checked if the merchandise was manufactured in accordance with certain minimum requirements.²¹ Undoubtedly, the most important measure was the first. Craft guilds institutionalized vocational training, in the form of an apprenticeship. The training of new members was considered of paramount importance, since the reputation of the industry was at stake. The main aims of the craft guilds were the exclusion of false masters and the construction of a collective identity that enabled them to promote their products as superior against the goods of their competitors. This product quality was attached to the figure of the master on the basis of superior manual skills and integrity. In other words, it legitimized the master status on the basis of the superior skills of craftsmen who had successfully gone through the learning period and had made an accepted master piece. De Munck noted that, firstly, the master piece did not sanction the acquisition of skills. Secondly, the apprenticeship was in fact a step towards acquiring the journeyman or master status, rather than a tool for the production and transfer of technical knowledge. Working as a free journeyman of master was what made the official apprenticeship necessary. The symbolic characteristics of the apprenticeship – it legitimized the producer and through the producer also the quality of the product – were more important than the transfer of skills. The apprenticeship therefore meant, alongside the acquisition of technical skills and a privileged access to the labor market, also acquiring a social position. The cultural construction of master status, on the basis of apprenticeship and the master piece, guaranteed not necessarily better products or superior manual skills. However, it contributed to maintain the distinction between legal and illegal work – a line was drawn between journeymen and masters on the one hand and the unstructured group of temporary and unfree laborers on the other hand – and reinforced the trust of consumers in the manufactured goods.²²

Case study: the Ghent goldsmiths in the second half of the eighteenth century and their training

We have opted to conduct research into the goldsmiths in the city of Ghent in the second half of the eighteenth century. The choice of Ghent is motivated by the fact that research has so far focused on more prestigious academies (vb. Antwerp). This makes it possible the image may be distorted by immigration and an influx from the hinterland. The proportion of non-Antwerp students who took lessons at the Antwerp academy was in the last quarter of the eighteenth century

²¹ Gustafsson, B., “The rise and economic behavior of medieval craft guilds”, in: Gustafsson, B. (ed.), *Power and Economic Institutions. Reinterpretations in Economic History*, Aldershot, 1991, pp. 81-94.

²² De Munck, B., “La reproduction d'une crise. L'apprentissage des menuisiers et des charpentiers à Anvers (XVIIe-XVIIIe siècle)”, in: *Revue du Nord*, XVII, 2003, pp. 31-51; De Munck, B., “Progressief corporatisme? Conventies, competenties en corporatieve strategieën van de Late Middeleeuwen tot ca. 1800”, in: Art, J., De Nil, B., Jacobs, M. (eds.), *Een mens leeft niet van brood alleen. Bouwstenen voor een culturele arbeidersgeschiedenis (1800-1940)*, Gent, 2005, pp. 57-87; De Munck, B., “La qualité du corporatisme. Stratégies économiques et symboliques des corporations anversoises, XVIIe-XVIIIe siècles”, in: *Revue d'Histoire Moderne et Contemporaine*, LIV, 2007, 1, pp. 116-144; De Munck, B., *Technologies of Learning. Apprenticeship in Antwerp Guilds from the 15th Century to the End of the Ancien Régime*, Turnhout, 2007; De Munck, B., “Construction and Reproduction. The Training and Skills of Antwerp Cabinetmakers in the Sixteenth and Seventeenth Centuries”, in: De Munck, B., Kaplan, S. L., Soly, H. (eds.), *Learning on the Shop Floor. Historical Perspectives on Apprenticeship*, Londen - New York, 2007, pp. 85-110; De Munck, B., “One counter and your own account: redefining illicit labour in early modern Antwerp”, in: *Urban History*, XXXVII, 2010, 1, pp. 26-44.

44%.²³ Own research into the origins of students at the Ghent academy in the second half of the eighteenth century shows a completely different pattern. 89,4% of the students whose place of birth is known, was from Ghent. Barely 10,6% of the students came from other villages and towns.²⁴ The academic courses offered were therefore more focused on the needs of the local economy. This choice allows me to draw conclusions regarding the significance of the academy for the local market. The geographical framework has also implications for the period studied. The Ghent art school was only formally established in 1751. As a consequence, the second half of the eighteenth century occupies centre stage in this article.

The reason we opted for the goldsmiths is twofold. The goldsmith's trade was primarily a highly specialized luxury industry.²⁵ The – often French – design and fashionable character were crucial qualities of precious objects in the eighteenth century.²⁶ Silver learnt itself perfectly adapting to the latest fashions.²⁷ In addition, goldsmiths in the early modern period were known for their highly mobile nature.²⁸ As will be shown, the goldsmiths differed from the general student profile, so it is interesting to consider this group separately in the mapping of professional strategies and the role of the academy.

The craft training period varied from sector to sector and often from city to city. In Ghent, a four-year apprenticeship was in force for gold- and silversmiths during the eighteenth century. During this training period, the student was taught through a process of trial and error the basics of forging. Sometimes students contracts made explicit mention of special abilities, such as design skills. These skills are, therefore, not part of the standard training. The level of education among the apprentices themselves could therefore severely differ.²⁹ The type of training they went through, created differences on a specialized labor market.³⁰

During the Renaissance, goldsmiths were mainly relying on model prints to develop new forms and new ornaments.³¹ The Ghent goldsmiths were close to the source, since Antwerp became in the sixteenth century a European center of model prints for precious metals. During the seventeenth century, designs and models were often directly supplied by painters and sculptors. Goldsmiths increasingly felt however, partly because of the new demands of the buying public, the need to draw designs and make models themselves. From the end of the seventeenth century, more and more upcoming goldsmiths underwent further training in drawing or modeling, initially by

²³ Van Geyt, L., *De rol van de Koninklijke Academie binnen het Antwerpse timmerliedenambacht in het laatste kwart van de achttiende eeuw*, Universiteit Antwerpen, Onuitgegeven Licentiaatsverhandeling, Antwerpen, 2011, p. 18.

²⁴ These results are based on a large-scale study of the profile of the student at the Ghent academy in the second half of the eighteenth century. 1861 students were enrolled. 754 people's birthplace is unknown.

²⁵ Brantegem, A., "Huwelijk als integratiemechanisme voor ingeweken ambachtslieden in de Antwerpse luxenijverheden. De goud- en zilversmeden in de late achttiende en vroege negentiende eeuw", in: De Koster, M., De Munck, B., Greefs, H., Willems, B., Winter, A. (eds.), *Werken aan de stad. Stedelijke actoren en structuren in de Zuidelijke Nederlanden 1500-1900*, Brussel, 2011, p. 89.

²⁶ Baudouin, P., De Coninck-van Gerwen, L., "Zilver op tafel. Vlaams tafelzilver van de 16e tot de 18e eeuw", in: *Openbaar Kunstbezit in Vlaanderen*, XXII, 1984, 4, pp. 146-147; Van Hemeldonck, G., Baudouin, P., "Inleiding", in: Huvenne, P., Kockelbergh, I. (eds.), *Antwerps huiszilver uit de 17e en 18e eeuw*. Catalogus van het Rubenshuis te Antwerpen, 10 november 1988 - 15 januari 1989, Brussel, 1988, p. 36.

²⁷ Baatsen, I, Blondé, B., "Zilver in Antwerpen. Drie eeuwen particulier zilverbezit in context", in: De Ren, L. (ed.), *Zilver in Antwerpen. De handel, het ambacht en de klant*, Leuven, 2011, pp. 122-123; Clifford, H., "A commerce with things: the value of precious metalwork in early modern England", in: Berg, M., Clifford, H. (eds.), *Consumers and luxury: consumer culture in Europe 1650-1850*, Manchester-new York, 1999, pp. 152-154.

²⁸ Baudouin, P., Colman, P., Goethals, D., *Edelsmeedkunst in België: profaan zilver XVIde-XVIIde-XVIIIde eeuw*, Tielt, 1988, p. 16.

²⁹ Bimbenet-Privat, M., "Goldsmiths' apprenticeship during the first half of the seventeenth century: the situation in Paris", in: Mitchell, D. (red.), *Goldsmiths, Silversmiths and Bankers: Innovation and the Transfer of Skill, 1550 to 1750*, Stroud, 1995, pp. 29-31.

³⁰ Crowston, C. H., "L'apprentissage hors des corporations. Les formations professionnelles alternatives à Paris sous l'Ancien Régime", in: *Annales. Histoire, Sciences Sociales*, LX, 2005, 2, pp. 439-441.

³¹ For the sixteenth-century range of pattern books for goldsmiths, see for example: Byrne, J. S., *Renaissance ornament prints and drawings*, New York, 1981, p. 19.

attending lessons at painters' or sculptors' workshops, then by lessons in the newly created academies. Simultaneously the Southern Netherlands lost their role as fashion maker by the expansion of the French artistic taste and were relegated to fashion taker, mainly by imitating model prints published in Paris. In some cases young goldsmiths from our regions even complete their education in the French capital.³²

Acquiring these design and drawing skills were extremely important in the career of a goldsmith. It happened on several occasions that the goldsmith first made a presentation drawing. This was then presented to the client, who needed to approve it, before the goldsmith really went to work. These design skills were also useful to make a career in the guild. The prospective masters were intended to produce a master piece. This entrance examination consisted in the eighteenth century of the production of a utility which can be used daily (*het welcke daegelycx in usantie is*). Prior to the exam, the candidate himself had to work out a sketch or a drawing, on the basis of which the utility was produced.³³ The craft guild of goldsmiths did not follow the general trend in the other crafts. Despite the importance of product innovation, most crafts only tested if the candidate master was able to produce the product, and not whether he actually could design it. Aspirant masters were more and more working to models or drawings that were made by others.³⁴ Not so with the goldsmiths. In a changing consumer environment design skills of a future master were also tested. Possibly the cost of raw materials played here an important role. Producers could sell their master piece. Products out of fashion were difficult to market.

The creation of a drawing academy in Ghent and the relationship with the apprenticeship

The Ghent master-painter Philippe Charles Marissal (1698-1770) decided in 1748, after a study at the Académie Royale de Peinture et de Sculpture in Paris (1743-1747), to open a private drawing school in his home in Ghent. In this private school students received instruction in drawing and painting in return for an annual payment of the modest sum of five daily wages of a bricklayer.³⁵ Due to lack of space, Marissal could barely instruct 10 students. In 1751, he turned to the local bench of aldermen. They allowed him to open a general academy (*algemeene Akademie*). He was also offered a larger classroom.³⁶

This transition of the private drawing school of Marissal to academy is strongly linked to developments in the craft world. Several corporations, the masons and carpenters on head, strove from 1749 onwards for the withdrawal of the preferential right of local labor servants.³⁷ This resulted in 1756 in the freedom for various crafts to employ labor servants they find qualified, regardless of their origin (*in het werck te nemen ende te amptloieren soo daenighe kneghten als sij sullen*

³² Baudouin, P., Colman, P., Goethals, D., *Edelsmeedkunst in België: profaan zilver XVIde-XVIIde-XVIIIde eeuw*, Tielt, 1988, pp. 19-20. For the presence of gold- and silversmiths in the guild of Saint Luke, see for example: Schlugleit, D., *De Antwerpse Gouden Silversmeden in het Corporatief Stelsel (1382-1798)*, Wetteren, 1969, p. 195.

³³ CAG (City Archive Ghent), 156-7, *Register beantwoordingen van de neringen over hunnen oorsprong*.

³⁴ De Munck, B., Dendooven, D., *Al doende leert men. Leertijd en ambacht in het Ancien Régime 1500-1800*, Brugge, 2003, p. 42; For the Ghent cabinet makers, see for example: CAG, 190²-10, *Rekeningen Schrijnwerkers (1738-1769/1770)*, Rekening 1760/1761 en Rekening 1767/1768.

³⁵ Vandenbroeke, C., "Werkinstrumenten bij een historische en sociaal-economische synthese, 14^{de} - 20^{ste} eeuw", in: Devos, I., Lambrecht, T. (ed.), *Bevolking, voeding en levensstandaard in het verleden. Verzamelde studies van Prof. dr. Chris Vandenbroeke*, Gent, 2004, p. 168.

³⁶ Van de Vivere, E. K. J., Spruyt, P. L., *Historie en inrichting der Koninklyke akademie van teeken-, schilder- en bouw-kunden, opgerecht binnen de stad Gent*, Gent, 1794, p. 3; SAG, ASK 287, *Koninklijke academie: aantekeningen verzameld door Edm. de Vriendt*.

³⁷ CAG, 190⁴-2: *Houtbrekers en timmerlieden, Resolutieboek (1699-1750)*, resolution of 13 September 1749.

oordeelen bequaem).³⁸ The Ghent academy was founded in this context with the support of the local government to allow craft masters to hire sufficient skilled local workers.

This can also clearly be deduced from the appeal of Marissal to the local aldermen in 1751. Marissal argued that it is favorable in all places and cities when members of the craft guilds e. g. bricklayers, carpenters, sculptors, cabinet-makers, goldsmiths and silversmiths can learn to draw, figure-drawing as well as drawing architectural elements and compositions (*in alle plaetsen en steden favorable is als wanneer men aldaer publiquelijck en voor eenijder gaeding hebbende leert ende aenwijst het teekenen soo in figure als in architecture voor differente ambachten als bij exempel metsers, timmerlieden, beeldhauwers, schrijwerckers, gaut ende silversmeden*). Besides art amateurs the target audience of this new institution clearly included individuals from the craft world.³⁹

The question is whether gold and silversmiths followed lessons at the academy and, if so, to what extent. The student population in the Ghent academy was to this end linked to the apprentice registers of the craft of goldsmiths in Ghent.⁴⁰ The calculations are started at the first individual that can be found both on the name lists of the academy as well as the guild. 49 of the 95 apprentices silversmiths from the period 1767 to 1796, or over 50%, frequented the academy. The academy was thus more than a casual passage in the career of some gold- or silversmith.

Strategies on a market for fashion

The added value of an academic program seems obvious. In a period within which the crafts taught only sporadically designs skills, the academy seems to offer a solution. Two aspects played an important role. Firstly, the academy did appeal to specialized professors. The education was provided by real experts.⁴¹ On the other hand, the purchasing police of the academy caused a continuous expansion and updating of the study material consisting of books, plaster models and drawings.⁴² Frequenting the academy meant in other words an almost unlimited access to various fashionable decorative motifs. This high participation of goldsmiths in the academy seems to confirm the value of an academic education.

These findings should be nuanced. Indeed, the question remains whether the students of the academy had a greater chance to make career or in other words whether the academy offered a satisfactory solution to the knowledge problem. To provide a satisfactory response to this question, the profile of the silversmiths students from the period 1767-1796 was investigated and linked with the chance to make a career as a goldsmith.⁴³

In a first phase, the career opportunities of apprentices from the gold- and silversmiths craft who had frequented the academy were weighed against apprentices from the same craft that had

³⁸ CAG, 190⁴-3: *Houtbrekers en timmerlieden, Resolutieboek (1750-1772)*, resolution of 16 March 1756.

³⁹ CAG, ASK 546, *Register van de steunleden van de Academie 1751-1766*, folio 2 r^o.

⁴⁰ CAG 182-3, *Register goudt en silversmeden 1650/1796, annotations diverses, ainsi que les noms des maitres et apprentis de la corporation*.

⁴¹ See for example the library of professor Van Reysschoot, in: Coppejans-Desmedt, H., Huyghebaert, J., "Het departement van de Schelde", in: Hasquin, H. (ed.), *Het culturele leven in onze provincies onder Frans Bewind*, Brussel, 1989, p. 124.

⁴² CAG, 200⁴-2, *Académie de dessin, peinture et architecture/Academie van de teeken-, schilder- en de bouwkunst, Rekeningen (1771-1793)*.

⁴³ On the basis of: Casier, J., *Les Orfèvres flamands et leurs poinçons XVe-XVIIIe siècles : reproduction des plaques originales conservées au musée d'archéologie de Gand*, Gent, 1914; De Doncker, T., "Ambachtsregisters als bron voor de genealogie: de 18de-eeuwse Gentse leerlingenlijst van de edelsmeden", in: *Vlaamse Stam*, XLVIII, 2012, 3, pp. 213-224; Nys, W., *Waas Zilver 1700-1869*, Antwerpen, 2007; SAG, 182-3, *Register goudt en silversmeden 1650/1796, annotations diverses, ainsi que les noms des maitres et apprentis de la corporation*; SAG, Maryns, *Gentse ambachtsgilden, 1: goud- & silversmeden (1400-1796)*; Vandenbussche, C., Van Ormelingen, J.-J., Van Damme, J., *Biografisch lexicon van de Gentse edelsmeden uit de 17^{de} en 18^{de} eeuw*, Gent, 2012; Van Dievoet, W., *Algemeen repertorium van de edelsmeden en van de merken van edelsmeedwerk in België, II: 1798-1942*, Brussel, 2010. In addition, use is made of certificates of civil status and censuses. Finally, the *Wegwijzer van Gent* is consulted for the period 1770-1820.

not followed an academic training. The career opportunities of academics were slightly higher than non-academics (51% versus 43%). A clear trend is not visible.

In a next step, we investigated whether other variables played a role in the career of goldsmiths. In first instance, the family background of apprentices within the goldsmiths craft was integrated in the analysis or with other words we ask ourselves the question if the father of the apprentice was a precious-metalsmith. The craft training in the manufacture of gold and silver objects often took place in a family atmosphere, where the mastery was passed from father to son.⁴⁴ The requirement that apprentices had to live in with their master worked the familial nature of the craft in the hand.⁴⁵ Students who received their training within a familial context were far more likely to pursue a career as a goldsmith (38% versus 56%). These figures confirm the conclusion for early modern Antwerp. Non-master sons registered as apprentice with the aim to make a career in the craft. They aimed for a position of journeyman or master. Fathers also increasingly reserved their succession for one son, often the oldest, but not for several sons.⁴⁶ Goldsmiths in Ghent put several sons in the waiting room, presumably to reduce risk of no succession. If one of the sons took over the atelier of his father, his brothers had to look for an alternative (craft) career, unless the workshop of the father could use several workmen. The family background of an apprentice did not affect whether or not frequenting the academy.

Subsequently, the birthplace of an apprentice was linked to his chances to make a career as a goldsmith. A striking trend is to discern. Non-citizens of Ghent were significantly more likely to pursue a career as a goldsmith in comparison with citizens of Ghent. If the profile of the non-citizens of Ghent is analyzed more accurately, it strikes that this group mainly consists of non-master's sons (18 versus 9) and that in the vast majority of cases they did not follow lessons at the academy (19 versus 8). The profile of the group apprentices born in Ghent is however just the opposite: 38 master's sons versus 16 non-masters's sons and 34 academics versus 20 non-academics. This confirms the above-mentioned conclusion: several sons were trained to follow in the footsteps of their father, but the workplace was often obtained by one son.

In a final stage, the influence of both family background and academic training at the career of apprentices was studied. The influence of the academy appears larger. Master sons who went through an academic training were more likely to master a career as goldsmiths than master sons who did not (41% versus 19%). The workshop of the father went in other words to a wider educated son, who is also the eldest son.

The greater importance of the academic training for (oldest) master sons raises the question whether this training is not primarily contributing to the symbolic capital in a local context. Ghent apprentices made use in a community focused on France of a cultural model from the south to raise their reputation and symbolic capital.⁴⁷ As apparent from the above-mentioned process, local artisans in the middle of the eighteenth century increasingly had to deal with the concurrence of outside urban professionals, whose reputation was higher. They attached bigger value to the expertise and skills of non-local experts. For the Antwerp carpenter's industry, De Munck noted that unfree could better respond to shifts in the demand side of the product market. Employers opted for

⁴⁴ See also: Dhanens, E., "Edelsmeedkunst", in: *Catalogus. Gent, duizend jaar kunst en cultuur*. Catalogus van het Museum voor Schone Kunsten te Gent, 19 april-29 juni 1975, Gent, 1975, II, p. 251.

⁴⁵ CAG, 156-7, *Register beantwoordingen van de neringen over hunnen oorsprong*.

⁴⁶ De Munck, B., *Technologies of Learning. Apprenticeship in Antwerp Guilds from the 15th Century to the End of the Ancien Régime*, Turnhout, 2007, pp. 194-195.

⁴⁷ About the obsession with the French culture, see for example: Van Damme, I., "Zotte verwaandheid: over Franse verleiding en Zuid-Nederlands onbehagen, 1650-1750", in: Verschaffel, T., De Bont, R. (eds.), *Het verderf van Parijs*, Leuven, 2004, pp. 187-204.

this unfree laborers, as they were considered more specialized, better skilled and morally superior.⁴⁸ De Wilde also concluded that the local Leuven artisans were forced to strengthen their competitiveness compared to the non-Leuven producers. They did this by investing in the development of technical knowledge and artistic skills. So they created the perception that they could compete in terms of know-how and competence.⁴⁹ Goldsmiths born in Ghent in general, and the oldest master sons in particular, used a similar strategy and used the academy for this purpose. Through the legitimacy of their skills by attending academic classes they hoped to strengthen their own position in the market. As in the guilds, the symbolic characteristics of the training was important.

Conclusion

In the eighteenth century, consumers made great demands on their purchases. Goods had to be beautiful and fashionable. The design and consequently the appearance of products gained importance. Producers were required to meet these new preferences and aspirations of buyers. In a period where crafts are increasingly accused of being out of fashion, art academies and drawing schools in different European cities brought solace. It is generally assumed that with the establishment of these new institutions, they tried to counter the design deficit in producing crafts. The success of these institutions within the historiography is being discussed.

This article focuses on the role of the academy in the training of gold and silversmiths in Ghent in the second half of the eighteenth century. The first part of the article makes clear that aspiring goldsmiths did not limit their professional formation to the guild. More than 50% of the apprentices of the craft guild in the period 1767-1796 frequented the academy. The impact of the family background and the birthplace on the future career proved more decisive than the academic lessons. Master sons and citizens born in Ghent had a smaller chance to be professionally active as a goldsmith. In the eighteenth century the workshop was increasingly passed to one son, the eldest. The skills of non-Ghent citizens were also often valued higher. Because of the concurrence of outside urban workmen, apprentices born in Ghent often went to the academy, where the legitimacy of skills was on the agenda. Mainly for the eldest master son – also the successor – the strategic importance of the academic lessons seemed significant. These results can't simply be extrapolated to other crafts. For example, the geographical origin of goldsmiths at the Ghent academy differed strongly from the origin of the students at the Ghent academy in general.

⁴⁸ De Munck, B., "Meritocraten aan het werk. Deregulering van de arbeidsmarkt bij de Antwerpse timmerlieden", in: *Bijdragen tot de Geschiedenis*, LXXXVII, 2004, 1-2, pp. 87-106.

⁴⁹ Dewilde, B., *Corporaties en confrerieën in conflict Leuven 1600-1750*, Katholieke Universiteit Leuven, Doctoraatsverhandeling, Leuven, 2012, pp. 179-209.