Brendan J. von Briesen (Universitat de Barcelona), *Contradictions, conflicts, and controls: internal mechanisms of labor-market regulation by guilds in the port of Barcelona during the liberalization of the trades (1760-1840)*

For over one-hundred and fifty years, the decline and demise of the guilds has been of interest to economic and social historians (Marx & Engels, 1848; Brentano, 1870; Webb & Webb, 1894; Kramer, 1905, 1927; Leeson, 1979; Dobson, 1980; Lis, Lucassen, & Soly, 1994; Krause, 1999; Lucassen, De Moor, & van Zanden, 2008; Epstein & Prak, 2008). This fate has been attributed to various causes – political-judicial decisions, market transformations, technological change, geographic diffusion, economic concentration, internal contradictions, etc. Generally speaking, the manufacturing trades and industries, which underwent the most noteworthy transformations during proto-industrialization and industrialization, have received attention; however, less is known about these processes in the service sector.  The guilds studied here were involved in all aspects of loading, unloading, handling, and transporting maritime cargo in the port of Barcelona during the period of 1760-1840.

Most of the trades examined were organized in officially recognized and authorized guilds during the majority of the time period covered here.  Whereas the organizational structure of most artisan guilds consisted of apprentice, journeyman, and master; the guilds here – wholly in the service sector – generally did not have an apprenticeship process, nor where there journeymen. Mastership was obtained through payment and examination was based largely on a basic demonstration of physical and moral fitness, and on other socio-cultural considerations.  Considering these factors, the notion that tensions between masters and journeymen led to internal disintegration cannot be applied here.  Instead, division between masters is the focus of the study. I am interested, here, in understanding the internal and external conflicts that may have contributed to the weakening of the norms of solidarity, a process that was eventually detrimental to the overall survival of the guilds.

The guilds enjoyed monopolistic privileges. These privileges included controls over membership, which, in effect, regulated the number of workers permitted to work in each trade.  Likewise, mechanisms for internal (self-) control of the work force were developed and maintained.  Some members defended these privileges and mechanisms while others apparently sought to terminate them in pursuit of what they evidently considered their particular interest.

I will study aspects of the internal control and the reactions to it by some guild members, in the context of changing labor market conditions. To do this, I will look at transformations in labor market dynamics through a study of the judicial struggles and the privilege-granting guild charters that governed the internal and external behaviors of these organizations.