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Guilds, Fraternities, And The Values Of Civil Society: Modern Perceptions And Medieval Realities Of A European Phenomenon

The movement of people and ideas, together with the human challenges and cultural opportunities represented by such movement: these have been recurrent themes of the work of Danuta Quirini-Popławska. Her research on the traffic of slaves between the eastern and the western Mediterranean, and her studies on cultural exchange between southern and northern Europe, have repeatedly transcended the bounds of either national or institutional history, and in doing so they have problematised categories and assumptions which too frequently limit the horizons of historical scholarship. The common ground of these diverse projects has been their author's humanity. Whether considering the inhuman trade in human lives or the cosmopolitanism of cultural patronage, Professor Quirini-Popławska has reflected repeatedly on the consequences of these dynamic and destabilising forces for the possibility of the creation of a viable society. Deracination; translation; encounter; the negotiation of new relationships: here is the outline of the historical cycle in the European past on which her work has shed so much light. The present essay is offered to its dedicatee in a common spirit of enquiry into the nature of medieval society, not as a given, but as a kinetic and continually renewed experiment.

The guilds and fraternities of medieval Europe risk being taken for granted: they were so numerous, in all parts of Christendom, that their existence appears as

unproblematic as the air they breathed. In fact, however, each and every guild or fraternity foundation was a new creation: a conscious response to a perceived need. Hundreds of thousands of men and women experienced their act of joining a guild as a means actively to construct new social ties and to build relationships with others both within and beyond the association. The past thirty years have seen a renaissance of scholarly interest in the guilds of medieval Europe. A wealth of recent publications has given us accounts of many examples of the associations known variously in the Middle Ages as guilds, fraternities, *Bruderschaften*, *confréries* and *confraternite*. This modern literature has, in general, been much stronger in empirical description than it has in conceptual reflection. But the subject demands to be set in a wider framework of thought about the aims and potential of society. As Antony Black demonstrated in his book, *Guilds and the State*, ideas about guilds have for centuries formed part of an ongoing debate about the relations between the individual and society[1]. While politicians and political scientists today wrestle with the challenges of creating a civil or a virtuous society, their discussions need to be situated within this deep European history of thought. The general lack of theoretical engagement with the medieval guilds, on the part of current scholarship, may betray a sense that the subject has been contaminated by recent history. The very absence of much explicit theorising in current publications on the subject may reveal a more-or-less conscious desire to maintain a distance from certain idealising notions about the medieval guilds which left all too deep a mark on twentieth-century history. The way in which an essentialist view of the guild as a pure 'corporation' was appropriated to serve the ideology of totalitarianism has done much to discredit earlier thinking about the subject, and perhaps to foster its deliberate consignment to obscurity. Yet the history of debate surrounding the guilds has, itself, much to teach us; and we ignore that history at our peril.

The recent boom of individual guild studies is not hard to explain in terms of its more immediate social and political context[2]. Mounting concern about the dangers of unbridled liberalism gave rise in the late twentieth century to renewed fascination with cultural models which could be used to challenge the ascendancy of individual values. To highlight the evidence of social collaboration at the local level throughout the long evolution of European history was, moreover, to offer an alternative political history — attractive to many — to that which ascribed all significant historical agency to the centralised regimes of monarchy and the ascendant state. The first phase of

[1] A. Black, *Guilds and Civil Society in European Political Thought from the Twelfth Century to the Present*, London 1984; reissued as *Guild and State: European Political Thought from the Twelfth Century to the Present*, New Brunswick, NJ, and London 2003.

[2] For a recent attempt to situate the subject within the history of European thought, see G. Rosser, *The Art of Solidarity in the Middle Ages: Guilds in England 1250–1550*, Oxford 2015, ch. 1.

historical interest in the guilds, which took place between the mid-nineteenth and the early twentieth centuries, was equally shaped by the political context of that period. The perception of the medieval guilds at that time was shaped by notions of modernity, and in particular by the idea that a defining feature of modernity was liberal individualism. Thus in 1861, the jurist Henry Maine declared that: *the unit of an ancient society was the family, of a modern society, the individual*[3]. Freedoms had been won, but the growth of individual liberty had been achieved, some claimed, at the expense of human warmth and values. The classic statement of this opposition came in the work of Ferdinand Tönnies, who counterposed to the cold artifice and instrumentality of modern *Gesellschaft* a genuine and life-enhancing *Gemeinschaft*, which had supposedly been characteristic of the medieval past[4]. Since the nineteenth century, the sense that individualism and self-interest are trademarks of the modern condition has continued to motivate and inform historical enquiry into guilds, which have been widely identified by contrast as embodiments of a collective principle.

If the history of debate surrounding the European guilds has something to teach us about the nature and purpose of communities, the subject is no less pertinent to the issue of what it means to live in a 'civil society'. The significance of the latter question has been obscured by the bewildering variety of uses to which the term itself has been applied. The common ground of 'civil society', however, is a commitment to values of justice and human rights, as these are perceived to be guaranteed (or frustrated) by political institutions and the social sphere. Britain has been widely cited as a paradigm of 'civil society': a country in which a successful balance is thought to have been struck, from a relatively early date, between the nation state on the one hand and, on the other, a persistent and vibrant complex of independent initiatives and voluntary associations representative of the diverse local and particular interests of society[5]. In the context of this argument, the evidence for the proliferation of social guilds in late medieval England, within the confines of what, for the period, was a relatively powerful and increasingly centralised monarchy, provides a significant context for later developments. And in the wider environment of Christendom, the medieval guilds were, in general, laboratories of experience in the voluntary and local involvement of individuals in the social sphere.

The idea that Britain, and especially England, have always differed from other parts of Europe runs deep in the literature both of civil society and of the guilds. For many

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[3] H.S. Maine, *Ancient Law: Its Connection with the Early History of Society, and its Relation to Modern Ideas* [1861], 5th edn, London 1864, p. xxxii.

[4] F. Tönnies, *Gemeinschaft und Gesellschaft* [1887], transl. as *Community and Civil Society*, ed. J. Harris and M. Hollis, Cambridge 2001.

[5] J. Harris, *From Richard Hooker to Harold Laski: Changing Perceptions of Civil Society in British Political Thought, Late Sixteenth to Early Twentieth Centuries*, in: Civil Society in British History: Ideas, Identities, Institutions, ed. J. Harris, Oxford 2003, pp. 13–37.

nineteenth-century commentators, the particularism of English history lay precisely in the precocious development, in the medieval period, of voluntary communities capable of expressing and defending local rights and identities. Writing *The Saxons in England* at mid-century, Kemble pronounced: *In the times of the densest seigneurial darkness,* [the guilds] *offered a noble resistance to episcopal and baronial tyranny, and formed the nursery cradles of popular liberty*[6]. In the eyes of Kemble, as also of William Stubbs and Frederic William Maitland, the guilds of medieval England disproved the Whig narrative of advancing English freedoms, marked by parliamentary reform and national legislation. Refusing to locate the roots of English freedom in the Civil War or in the parliamentary settlement of 1688, these historians traced the vision of national identity instead to the freely formed communities of the Middle Ages. They saw the heights of liberty as having been achieved, not in modern times, but in the medieval past.

The element of starry-eyed romanticism running through this nineteenth-century literature helps to explain why it has been so comprehensively ignored in modern times. However, to dismiss Victorian scholarship on the medieval guilds for its naïveté would be misguided. England in this period has been seen as dominated by the rhetoric of liberal individualism, opposed only by a minority conservative appeal to older, romanticised values of community. In reality, these two perspectives came together in a discourse which was characterised by greater nuance in the use of historical example than has often been acknowledged by more recent commentators. Discussion ranged across a spectrum of positions, and influential figures in the movement for social reform argued specifically for a balance between the imperatives of respect for the individual and mutual responsibility. In doing so, they regularly invoked the historical example of the medieval guilds. In fact, the study of the English medieval guilds in the nineteenth century was primarily motivated by contemporary debate on the best way to address social problems. Many English participants in this debate were sceptical about the ability of the national state to provide what was needed, and these critics of centralism included several who pointed to the medieval guilds as evidence of the value of local organisations, both as a practical means to address a range of social issues, and as a field for the cultivation of political responsibility.

Influential Victorian writers urged that the medieval guilds represented a form of association ideally shaped to function as a foil and a complement to the nation state. A key figure in this debate was J.M. Ludlow, a leading light of the Christian Socialist movement of the mid-nineteenth century. Ludlow stressed what he saw as the continuity between the modern friendly societies, in which he played a prominent role, and the medieval guilds; and he emphasised the ability of both to fulfil roles which the state lacked either the interest or the resources to accomplish. Ludlow saw a continuing need for both elements in the equation: while recognising that some

[6] J.M. Kemble, *The Saxons in England*, 2 vols, London 1849, ii, pp. 310–311.

things were best — most justly — dealt with by national government, he did not regard as a desirable goal at any stage the appropriation by the state of all social functions. Talking in 1872 of the possibility of state-funded burial insurance, he declared:

> Other witnesses, indeed, with bolder views, wish Government to undertake sick business as well as burial...I cannot say that I wish for this. I believe that self--government in ordinary Friendly Societies is a precious thing in itself — an education not to be bartered away for mere indolent safety[7].

Joshua Toulmin Smith, another prominent social reformer of the Victorian period, was similarly concerned that state legislation for social issues would cultivate passivity and selfishness in the individual citizen. More important than individual freedom, in Smith's view, was what he identified as the principle of mutuality:

> *Mutuality* is the very essence of social and moral life and action. The latter words have indeed no meaning, unless that mutuality of relation is recognised. MUTUAL RESPONSIBILITY forms, then, the very bottom and groundwork of all truly sound Institutions in a State[8].

In his influential essay on *Local Self-Government and Centralization*, published in 1851, J.T. Smith argued that 'true freedom' was only attainable through the continual carrying out of communal duties and, in particular, by active 'participation' in the business of government. This text insists that centralised governments, by removing responsibilities from subjects, encourage complacency and self-regarding individualism[9]. Considering the means to resist this danger, Smith was drawn to the study of the medieval English guilds. Discovering amongst the public records a cache of documents from a fourteenth-century royal survey of the guilds, J.T. Smith proceeded to transcribe them for an edition which was published posthumously by his daughter in 1871. Smith's comments on the guilds reveal his motive for researching them, in the context of current debate:

> [The guilds'] main characteristic was, to set up something higher than personal gain and mere materialism, as the main object of men living in towns; and to make the teaching of love to one's neighbour be not coldly accepted as a hollow dogma of morality, but known and felt as a habit of life[10].

Social engagement was thus conceived as the ideal means for the individual Christian to develop his or her moral identity.

Common to these reforming views was a concern to preserve, within the increasingly intrusive modern state, a sphere of moral and practical freedom in which

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[7] J.M. Ludlow, *Gilds and Friendly Societies*, "The Contemporary Review", vol. 21 (1872–3), pp. 553–572, 737–762, at p. 762.

[8] J.T. Smith, *A Letter to the Right Honourable Lord Palmerston, MP*, London 1855, p. 13.

[9] *Idem, Local Self-Government and Centralization*, London 1851.

[10] *Idem*, *Traditions of the Old Crown House*, Birmingham 1863, p. 28. For the edition (which includes that proportion of the texts — approximately one-tenth of the total — written in English), see L.T. Smith and J.T. Smith, eds, *English Gilds*, London 1870

the values of active citizenship might be nurtured. It is significant that the Victorian interest in the medieval guilds was paralleled by contemporary study of the medieval right of sanctuary. The author of one of the first essays on sanctuary was the liberal reformer Mazzini. The connection was that both guilds and sanctuaries were perceived as islands of immunity from the pretensions of the state, and spaces reserved for the exercise of free moral judgement[11]. From a crude Whig perspective, this simply meant that they were doomed to extinction with the gradual advance of national law and institutions. But to the many in the nineteenth century who saw the all-powerful state as corrosive of social values, the guild and the sanctuary offered practical and still valid historical examples of the cultivation, at the personal and local level, of habits of moral agency and responsibility. Without such habits, it was argued, the citizen, although liberated from material burdens by state provision, would be reduced to a moral nullity. In this perspective the state, while acknowledged to be of vital importance for certain purposes which it alone could supply, needed to be kept in balance by the vitality of local associations. These arguments were taken up at the turn of the twentieth century by such proponents of pluralism as F.W. Maitland, J.N. Figgis and G.D.H. Cole[12]. These pluralists also drew on their reading of Otto Gierke's *The German Law of Fellowship* (1868–1913), which they took as further vindication of the values of local, autonomous, voluntary and therefore morally free associations. This line of thought thus identified the guilds as a counter-weight to the state: by contrast to the way in which Tönnies in his later years found himself drawn into support for a fascist vision of the state as a monolithic super-corporation, these writers in the British tradition valued the guilds as guarantors of local liberties within the wider context of the state[13].

At the same period, around the turn of the nineteenth and twentieth centuries, the historiographical controversy between Leopold von Ranke and Karl Lamprecht also proved highly significant for the understanding of the medieval guilds. Against Ranke's emphasis on the role of the powerful individual in history, Lamprecht, who in this respect came very close to Otto Gierke, urged his own Romantic view of *Organismen des Volkes*. Lamprecht also drew upon the *Völkerpsychologie* of Wilhelm Wundt, based on Wundt's idea that, behind the social body, there stood an organic *Volksseele*. Thus Lamprecht opposed the Rankean view of history with his own account of evolution from the family, through guilds and other socio-cultural organisations, to the state and nation in his own time. All of these Lamprecht regarded as *soziale*

[11] G. Rosser, *Sanctuary and social negotiation in medieval England*, in: The Cloister and the World, ed. J. Blair and B. Golding, Oxford 1996, pp. 57–79.

[12] D. Runciman, *Pluralism and the Personality of the State*, Cambridge 1997, pp. 134–135; M. Grimley, *Citizenship, Community, and the Church of England: Liberal Anglican Theories of the State between the Wars*, Oxford 2004, pp. 70–2.

[13] G. Rosser, *The Art...*, pp. 24–26.

Gruppenindividuen, 'individual social groups', and he underlined the importance of group identities at every point[14]. Lamprecht's thought, although it did not convince all of his German contemporaries, was to have a profound influence in particular on French social history. For all its Romantic idealism, it deserves renewed recognition for its contribution to the revival of interest in the medieval guilds, and for the particular way in which it helped to frame these for a modern audience.

We are not, of course, obliged to fall into unthinking agreement with the particular interpretations of the subject advanced by John Ludlow, Joshua Toulmin Smith, or Karl Lamprecht. And yet these nineteenth-century reformers and historians drew attention to aspects of the medieval guilds which, on the one hand, can be extensively documented in the medieval sources and, on the other, should be of interest to participants in modern debates concerning political community and civil society. Just two features which stand out from the records of the medieval guilds will be singled out here for brief consideration. The first relates to the way in which these associations functioned as training-grounds for participation in wider society. The second concerns the place and the perceived value of the individual within the guild community. In both of these respects, there is nothing to distinguish the evidence of English guilds from that found in other parts of late-medieval Europe. What is particular about the English guilds is that they multiplied and flourished within what, by the standards of the period, was a highly centralised monarchy. This was the circumstance which made the historical example appear so pertinent to Victorian social reformers, and it may also lend it particular resonance in the context of our present interest in the roots and in the possible future of civil society. It was possible to argue from history for the coexistence, indeed the complementarity, of voluntarism within the modern state.

There exists a long tradition of hostility to the guilds, which represents them as closed, self-serving and opposed to any wider social interest. In modern times, this condemnation has been expressed by liberal and socialist critics alike: both Adam Smith and Karl Marx saw these narrowly self-interested bodies as doomed to be swallowed up by larger historical forces[15]. Even in their own day, the medieval guilds were sometimes accused of promoting vested interests at the expense of the larger public good. Yet without committing ourselves to a wholesale defence of the guilds, we can recognise the ways in which these voluntary groups cultivated amongst their members habits of social interaction and a developing confidence in moral judgement: qualities capable of subsequent transference to a wider public sphere. Pressures of various kinds certainly influenced the decision to join, or indeed not to

[14] K. Lamprecht, *Deutsche Geschichte*, 12 vols, Berlin 1856–1915.

[15] A. Smith, *The Theory of Moral Sentiments* [1759], ed. D.D. Raphael and A.L. McFie, New York and Oxford 1976, pp. 139–144; *The Marx-Engels Reader*, ed. R.C. Tucker, 2nd edn, New York 1978, pp. 182–186, 396–397.

join, a particular medieval guild. The range of membership in individual cases varied greatly, from relatively narrow catchments of neighbours or fellow craft workers, to heterogeneous associations which brought together members from diverse economic and geographical backgrounds. Yet notwithstanding this diversity, the rhetoric of initiation and membership in all cases underlined the principles of free choice and independent judgement which members were encouraged to assimilate as positive elements of their own self-image. It seems a reasonable hypothesis that these attractions of membership appealed especially to the many displaced persons of the period: those migrants to towns in the later Middle Ages, for whom the language of the surrogate family represented a welcome means to integrate into this new social environment with the help of adopted 'brothers' and 'sisters' within the fraternity.

The moral practice of the medieval guilds had an evident educative function. The regulations in themselves — rules concerning the appropriateness of certain kinds of behaviour, and the avoidance of evil ways — are of less significance than the collective undertaking by guild members to internalise values, to take decisions and to issue judgements on these matters. In other words, there is a case for considering the detailed content of the rules to be of less significance than the processes of their discussion, their integration into the life of the individual member, and their enforcement. Again and again, we are reminded in the statutes of medieval fraternities that the first and underlying principle of membership was a partial suppression of selfish interest in the name of mutual friendship and the support of others. Typical was the declaration of the brothers and sisters of a fourteenth-century London guild of St James: that they undertook *to nourish more love between them*[16]. In their promotion of friendship amongst their members, and between these and others outside the association whom they helped in diverse ways, the guilds anticipated those philosophers who have recently called for an 'ethics of care' which puts a value not on the particular benefit to any party in a relationship, but on the quality of the relationship in itself. The ethical value placed in this context upon friendship was based on a conscious effort to open up to another person, which entailed the uncomfortable possibility of being changed by that experience[17].

At the same time, these bodies reserved to themselves the responsibility to assess what, in the context of the local community, was ethically acceptable behaviour. Those identified as quarrellers, gamblers, thieves or brothel-keepers would be first interviewed by fellow members of their guild, who, having discussed the issues, would use warnings and the threat of expulsion to regulate the moral boundaries of local society. Only when the collaborative efforts of guild members were exhausted would a case be dropped, potentially to be taken up by the civil or church courts. The moral community of the guild thus maintained its own independent sphere of

[16] G. Rosser, *The Art...*, p. 89 and ch. 3, passim.

[17] V. Held, *The Ethics of Care: Personal, Political, and Global*, Oxford 2005.

operation. New recruits, also, would be vetted by the existing membership for the worthiness of their character. Again, practice in detail varied: sometimes the judgement of applicants for membership or of members accused of misdemeanours was in the hands of the guild master and a small body of the fraternity, as it was in the Hull guild of the Virgin Mary, said to have been founded in 1357:

> If any of the brothers or sisters quarrels with any other (which God forbid), it is ordained that, in as much as the guild was founded to cherish kindness and love, the aldermen, stewards and two help-men shall deal with the matter[18].

Occasionally we hear of judgements being delivered by the *maior pars et peritior*, and sometimes the whole society took part. The Wisbech fraternity of St John the Baptist held twice-yearly meetings to discipline members deemed guilty of uncharitable behaviour. A Westminster guild around 1500 recorded fines imposed on members who spoke rudely to others, or who took legal action against their brothers and sisters in public courts, contrary to the principle that the moral community of the guild should take responsibility for the internal resolution of disputes. Few societies put the principle of mutual counsel in such classical terms as did a fifteenth-century guild at King's Lynn: *As Tully says in libro senectute: "Do nothing without counsel, which comes from age and authority". So we shall have at least three council meetings each year.* But the common underlying principle was clear: the voluntary member of such an association, being a free moral agent, should expect, sooner or later, to take part in the judgement of issues concerning social and ethical behaviour[19]. There was a potentially repressive aspect to this moral regulation; but at the same time it provided, for the tens of thousands of members of the late-medieval guilds, a training in civic responsibility.

The guilds were not the sole context for these ideas or for their implementation. It is relevant to consider the formation and exercise of social morality in the medieval guilds alongside the English practice of sanctuary. Like the guilds themselves, the use and defence of sanctuary rights continued throughout the later Middle Ages in England, as a continuing foil to the power of royal government. Study of the working of sanctuary rights in practice has shown that this depended upon the moral community of the village or parish, which would take its own collective decision about whether or not to assist one claiming sanctuary from royal justice in the local church. It depended entirely upon the attitude and cooperation of the local community whether the sanctuaryman were handed over at the termination of forty days to the hard justice of the king's sheriff, or were instead to be discovered to have 'escaped' and so eluded that authority. Many who would otherwise have been hanged or sent into perpetual exile by the officers of the crown were saved by the village community's

[18] L.T. Smith and J.T. Smith, eds, *English Gilds...*, pp. 158–159.

[19] G. Rosser, *The Art...*, pp. 69–71.

decision that such punishment was not warranted[20]. The community of the guild similarly, by its regular judgement of moral issues, cultivated in its members both confidence and responsibility in the expression of social values.

The pious ideals enshrined in the constitutions of the guilds have sometimes been dismissed as merely quaint or childish; yet there is in fact no reason to question the seriousness with which a guild such as that of St Anne in the church of St Lawrence Jewry in London, in terms more-or-less repeated in hundreds of other instances, declared that it had been founded in 1342

> in maintenance of good love and for to nourish good and true company in destruction and amendment of men of wicked fame and evil bearing by way of alms and of charity[21].

The exercise of charitable functions also fostered a sense of social responsibility amongst members. The entertainment of poor guests at the guild feast (as for example at Gedney in Lincolnshire), the construction of a bridge to benefit the whole community (as by the guild of the Holy Cross at Abingdon) or the maintenance of almshouses for non-members (as by St Mary's guild at Boston), gave to the brothers and sisters of a fraternity both experience of undertaking a social duty and an empowering sense of public worth[22].The first general observation about the guilds and civil society, therefore, is that participation in the life of the guilds could be a catalyst of social and moral consciousness, and thus the basis of wider political engagement.

The second and concluding observation, complementary to the first, concerns the place of the individual within the community of the guild. The tendency, in historical discussion of the guilds, to emphasise their collective and corporate aspects has had the effect of opposing them to ideas about individuality. It may be that even Antony Black's valuable discussion of *Guilds and the State*, because of its justifiable emphasis on a neglected tradition of communitarian thought, has had the effect of perpetuating this binary distinction between the individual and the group. Yet the evidence of the medieval guilds tells of a contemporary concern to keep the two in balance. Like the Victorian social reformers, medieval theologians and founders of guilds alike saw the social as the medium in which the individual Christian could cultivate his or her moral identity. These were arguments which prioritised the ultimate salvation of the individual. However, we may observe that the guilds — as is evident from numerous surviving statutes — based their social programmes on the Aristotelian premise that the foundation of all political life was friendship in action. In other words, the guild was conceived as an environment in which the individual member might cultivate that mutual friendship and love without which it would not

[20] *Idem*, *Sanctuary*....

[21] *Idem*, *The Art*..., p. 107.

[22] *Ibidem*, pp. 78–86 and passim.

be possible to fulfil one's spiritual potential. This classical idea became thoroughly absorbed within the Christian tradition from the thirteenth century. St Paul had already urged: *First let Truth itself teach you that you should seek it in your neighbours before seeking it in its own nature*[23]. In the late thirteenth century Thomas Aquinas, building on the Aristotelian principle with which he was familiar, expounded the view that divinity was made active throughout creation by the means of individuals interacting virtuously with one another. From this perspective, society itself is invested with a lofty purpose, complementing the individual's need to grow as a moral being, while the guild is created on purpose to be a catalyst, for its members, of that moral development[24]. The society fostered by the medieval guilds was therefore conceived not as an end in itself, but as a wider field of moral interaction with others, where habits of understanding and judgement learned within the context of the fraternity could be exercised as a means to individual fulfilment and redemption.

Just such a mutually complementary balance between the personal formation of the individual (*Bildung*) and the collaborative advancement of public knowledge (*Wissenschaft*) has been, since Humboldt, the academic ideal of the humanities. Through her initiative in guiding multiple projects with other scholars, Danuta Quirini-Popławska has brought the paradigm of the guilds, with their twin concern for both personal and collective fulfilment, to her practice of research into medieval society and culture. We talk freely of 'the academic community'; but, as in the guilds themselves, so in the academy today, there was and continues to be an urgent need to recognise that participation cannot be a passive experience: it calls for a commitment. The guilds conceived 'community' not as a fixed or simple state of being, but as the perceived challenge of a shared responsibility. As the political philosopher Roberto Esposito has reminded us, the word *communitas*: 'community' derives from the Latin *cum*: 'with' and *munus*: 'burden'[25]. The recognition of such a common responsibility is widespread across diverse cultures: whether described in religious or secular terms, the shared concern is always with a commonly acknowledged need to defend certain human values. Naturally the ideals of guild rhetoric were at times compromised in practice by cynicism and abuse: to recognize the potency of an idea is not to imagine that every application of that idea will be equally admirable. But the legacy of the medieval guilds remains a model for living in which personal fulfilment is understood to be attainable only through an opening up to others. It is a historical model of both philosophical understanding and lived experience from which both the academy and the politicians of the present day have something to learn.

[23] Romans 12:15.

[24] G. Rosser, *The Art...*, pp. 42–43, 101–102.

[25] R. Esposito, *Communitas: The Origin and Destiny of Community* [1998], transl. T. Campbell, Stanford, CA, 2010, pp. 4–6.

Gildie, bractwa i wartości społeczeństwa obywatelskiego. Nowożytne spojrzenia i średniowieczna rzeczywistość europejskiego zjawiska

Streszczenie

Skala zjawiska, jakim w średniowiecznej Europie były społeczne i religijne bractwa jest tak wielka, że ryzykownym jest uznanie, iż problem został w pełni opisany przez badaczy. Przegląd dyskusji historyków na temat znaczenia i roli średniowiecznych gildii, jaka toczyła się w XIX i XX stuleciu ujawnia ogromne bogactwo, niejednokrotnie sprzecznych, ocen tego zjawiska. Jednocześnie średniowieczne źródła nadal zasługują na bardziej krytyczne spojrzenie niż czyniono to do tej pory. Powstanie dziesiątek tysięcy takich świeckich stowarzyszeń nie może być powiem postrzegane jako proste realizowanie nakazów istniejącej wcześniej „świeckiej pobożności". Poważnie należy traktować zwłaszcza podkreślane w ich ustawodawstwie etyczne cele podejmowanych działań. Niestałość i kruchość życia, które były powszechnym doświadczeniem ludzi średniowiecza, zaowocowały chęcią stworzenia wspólnot skupiających „zastępczych braci i siostry". Ich wspólne etyczne cele obejmowały nie tylko dobro innych, ale także, poprzez udział w dziełach miłosierdzia, rozwój moralny każdego indywidualnego członka. Tym samym średniowieczne gildie są przykładem modelu życia, w którym indywidualne i wspólnotowe interesy nie były postrzegane jako stojące w konflikcie, ale rozumiano je jako wzajemnie się uzupełniające.