

Cloth Merchants vs Weavers: Imposed Top-Down Solutions to a Permanent Dispute

(based on examples from Polish cities and their East German analogues in the late Middle Ages)

Mateusz Goliński*

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From the second half of the thirteenth century, economic privileges of cloth merchants became almost a norm in the cities of Central Europe, including Poland. The same entrepreneurs constituted at the same time a group that exercised power in their cities. From the fourteenth century, the aspirations of local textile manufacturers became apparent, they demanding the right to free retail sales of their products. The resulting conflict with merchants was permanent. However, it was not connected with the demands of gaining access to power in the town, although at the same time the weavers were involved in struggles of a political nature. This state of affairs is the starting point for an examination of the characteristics of the course of the aforementioned conflict in Polish cities and a consideration of its possible causes.

Keywords: Merchants. Weavers. Economic conflict. Central European cities.

Researchers considering the background of the various violent conflicts gripping the communities of medieval cities and their relations with the feudal environment will not avoid divergence in assessing the importance of various constituent factors – from accentuating systemic social inequalities and differences in economic interests, to noting vertical and horizontal divisions in the city’s social and political space, as well as testimonies to the culture of litigation.¹ Of course, this also applies to conflicts involving textile craftsmen.² Without even going as far as the most famous ones in the cities of Flanders, or the revolt in Florence, it is enough to recall from the territory of Silesia the analyses of the revolt of the weavers of the New Town in Wrocław in 1333, or their role in the revolt of the commoners in Wrocław in 1418.³ The municipal authorities and territorial rulers of the time struggled with the same problem of properly assessing the potentially crisis situation in their – in the case of the former: relentless, in the case of the latter: forced – efforts to preserve peace in the city as the foundation of its existence. Thus in order to protect the interests of the common folk, thirty guilds of Wrocław (Breslau) signed an agreement in 1389 which forced the

* prof. dr. hab. Mateusz Goliński, Institute of History, Faculty of Historical and Pedagogical Sciences, University of Wrocław, Poland; mateusz.golinski@uwr.edu.pl; ORCID iD: 0000-0002-7955-8781

1 Cf. BLOCKMANS, *Revolutionaire mechanismen in Vlaanderen*, 123–140.

2 BOONE, *Urban Space and Political Conflict*, 628–629.

3 GRÜNHAGEN, *Breslau unter den Piasten*, 70–74, 116–117. GRÜNHAGEN, *Zur Geschichte des Breslauer Aufstands*, 188–196. KOWALIK, *Aus der Frühzeit der Breslauer Tuchmacher*, 5–74. HECK, *Walki społeczne w średniowiecznym Wrocławiu*, 55–60, 73–81. DŁUGOBORSKI – GIEROWSKI – MALECZYŃSKI, *Dzieje Wrocławia*, 151, 160–161. GOLIŃSKI, *Wrocław od połowy XIII do początków XVI wieku*, 137–139, 177–179. SŁOŃ, *Miasta podwójne i wielokrotne*, 154–155, 492, 508.

monarch to get involved long-term in intra-urban politics. Its main purpose was to grant favours to particular groups that were seeking to reinforce or, alternatively, to try and maintain their position in the social hierarchy. As it quickly turned out, one such dispute acknowledged by a group of people who had influence on the king's decisions was an argument between merchants and weavers, with the latter demanding the right of retail sale of their own products. Highlighting the extraordinariness of his concessions, as a special favour to the weavers, King Wenceslaus IV allowed them in 1391, 1395 and 1396 to trade their manufactured goods for up to three years. After the last period of the privilege expired, it was not prolonged, which coincided in time with a turn in the monarch's politics, who stepped back from supporting the common folk of Wrocław in 1399.⁴

Camerae pannorum

According to the logic of the functioning of the privileged trading institutions such as benches and shambles, it can be safely assumed that in every place where a cloth hall was established in a form characteristic of areas east of the Elbe river, the owners of its compound chambers (i.e. particular shops) were equipped with a monopolistic privilege of cutting cloth and its retail sale per ell.⁵ Contrary to other owners of the oldest limited trading stalls, butchers and bakers, cloth merchants (German *Gewandschneider*) did not offer products manufactured on their own. Yet until the local market hypothetically only offered cloth imported from the outside, their activity did not collide with the interests of the manufacturers. However, if a specialized group of cloth producers, i.e., wool weavers, was present in town, then automatically a postulate could have appeared to enable fair access to retail clients. In theory, there was no reason for the weavers not to build or purchase chambers in cloth halls. In practice, those were entirely dominated by representatives of merchants who were in possession of larger financial resources, which was visible among others in investments in foreign goods and room for its storage. With a limited number of permanent trading posts, these were simply financially unavailable for the craftsmen. As a result, once the number of local producers in town reached a number and degree of organization that allowed them to express their discontent, a confrontation with the privileged group was inevitable, which led to the necessity of the ruler's confirmation *expressis verbis* of the cloth hall merchants privileges or, alternatively, the finding of a compromise.

The first solution can be found in Frankfurt (Oder), where already in 1267 the margrave forbade the broadcloth-producing townsfolk to sell it by ell,⁶ or in Silesian Świdnica (Schweidnitz), where in 1285 the duke forbade the town's weavers and villagers to cut by the ell and sell fabrics, which was an activity limited to the merchant chambers' owners.⁷ The duke put in place a similar solution in Oława (Ohlau) in 1282, and the very same was enforced in Pyzdry in the Greater Poland region in 1297.⁸ Its meaning in practice was explained clearly by the duke of Greater Poland, who in 1288 decided that the townsfolk of Śródka's Old Town could not cut and sell the materials

4 GOLIŃSKI, *Wrocław od połowy XIII do początków XVI wieku*, 173–174.

5 GOLIŃSKI, *Die Anfänge der Kaufhäuser*, 1–20. GOLIŃSKI, *Ze studiów nad początkami sukienic*, 130–143. GOLIŃSKI, *Hala kupiecka – sukienice – ratusz*, 49–51. CZERNER, *Zabudowy rynków*, 13–46.

6 RIEDEL, *Codex Diplomaticus Brandenburgensis* [further: CDBr], vol. I/23, 5 no 4. RABELER, *Konsumenten*, 113.

7 IRGANG, *Schlesisches Urkundenbuch* [further: SUB], vol. 5, no 224. WYROZUMSKI, *Tkactwo w Polsce*, 518.

8 SUB, vol. 5, no 29. WYROZUMSKI, *Tkactwo w Polsce*, 517–518.

produced or imported by themselves but only as a whole.⁹ The aim was obviously to protect the monopoly of the cloth merchants from the newly chartered city of Poznań. The fact that within the territory of Poznań the clothiers of Śródka could only sell whole pieces (*pannos integros*) was expressed by the duke in 1293.¹⁰ At the same time no weavers were mentioned by the record of the laws of the Cracow city council, known from a royal confirmation of 1342, which affirmed the monopoly of merchants (*pannicidae*) to sell cut cloth and excluded the nobility and peasantry (*kmetones*) from the privilege, at the same time allowing "guests", i.e., travelling merchants, to sell six pieces of Flanders fabric on a market day. This in fact further diminished the interests of weavers, as it allowed allegedly cheaper goods from the country to enter the market.¹¹

The second, compromise solution was established in Wrocław no later than at the turn of the fourteenth century, to which period guild charters allowing the limited sale of cloth by weavers are dated. A whole piece of cloth could be sold to no more than three people, thus it could not be divided into more than three pieces – therefore the retail sale was not fully allowed. At the same time trading was supposed to take place in two city squares alternately (New and Old Market), which would preclude any requests to build permanent stalls. In the case of Market Square (the Old Market) trading happened in the passageway between rows of cloth hall stalls, which at that time could have already been covered with a roof.¹² Some analogical spatial solution was used in Strzegom (Striegau), where in 1337 the duke confirmed the weavers' old privilege of selling whole pieces of fabric *sub lebyis*, i.e., under arcades of houses around Market Square.¹³

The same cloth weavers (*textores et operarii pannorum*) of Strzegom approached the duke with a complaint aimed at indefinite townsmen of their town (probably municipal authorities) who wanted to disregard their privilege. The duke supported the craftsmen's cause and in 1297 ordered the local Vogt to protect their rights, which had been granted back when the city was first located (*a primeva locacione civitatis*).¹⁴ The 55-year distance in time from the original event may give credibility to the clothiers' tradition that was mentioned by the duke.¹⁵ A striking thing here may be the fact that the circumstances, number and details of cloth halls in Strzegom do not appear in the content of medieval privileges. In contrast, knowledge about the functioning of other types of trading venues, as well as about the situation in similar Silesian cities, comes from this type of source.¹⁶ This may hypothetically mean that initially the weavers of Strzegom were not subject to the typical trading limitations resulting from the existence of the privileged cloth hall chambers. An attempt to change such a state of matters was prevented in 1297. On the other hand, in cities such as Racibórz (Ratibor),

9 ZAKRZEWSKI, *Kodeks Dyplomatyczny Wielkopolski* [further: KDW], vol. 2, no 625. WYROZUMSKI, *Tkactwo w Polsce*, 518.

10 KDW, vol. 2, no 694. GAŚSIOROWSKI, *Rzemioło i handel*, 273.

11 PIEKOSIŃSKI, *Kodeks Dyplomatyczny miasta Krakowa*, part 1, no 25; part 2, no 260. WYROZUMSKI, *Tkactwo małopolskie*, 121–122, 125.

12 KORN, *Breslauer Urkundenbuch* [further: BU], no 68, art. 7/1, 3, 4, art. 26/ 2. GOLIŃSKI, *Podstawy gospodarcze mieszczaństwa*, 79–80.

13 WUTKE – RANDT – BELLÉE, *Regesten zur schlesischen Geschichte*, no 5955.

14 SUB, vol. 6, no 310.

15 MĘYNARSKA-KALETYNOWA, *Strzegom wczesnośredniowieczny i lokacyjny*, 9.

16 Cf. GOLIŃSKI, *On the problem of the size of trading complexes*, 113, 114.

where in 1293 the duke confirmed the privileges granted earlier (i.e., before 1282, by Duke Vladislaus) to the owners of “cloth hall chambers”, reversing the situation was not possible – provided, that is, such attempt of attack was meant by the duke when describing an old dispute between the municipality and the tradesmen (*antiquam etiam querellam intra universitatem civium Ratiboriensium ex una parte et mercatorum eiusdem civitatis ex altera parte*), though this could also be regarding something different, e.g., the size of fees. (The reason of the dispute being the right to cut cloth was advocated by Marek Stoń. It may also be proven by the fact of simultaneously granting the merchants of the cloth hall a monopoly for their activity within a mile radius).¹⁷

Incisio pannorum

In 1344 the councillors of Poznań and guild masters ended the war (*guerra*) between the cloth merchants and weavers, and ruled that the weavers could sell one piece of their fabric to no more than three people. At the same time, although the weavers were allowed to trade in the markets, they were forbidden to cut cloth at fairs, similarly to how it was forbidden for weavers in other cities.¹⁸ In such case fairs could be understood as venues excluded from the allowed selling limitation to three customers. At the same time in Kalisz as a result of a royal privilege from 1343 weavers were allowed to sell their fabric to no more than five customers.¹⁹ Or rather: as many as five. What is unusual is the limitation of the number of customers and division of a piece of fabric into three not being addressed directly to the weavers who appeared in Wrocław in 1305 in the duke’s privilege of 1305, where he confirmed to the “townsfolk in chambers under cloth halls” the continuation of rights granted by the former rulers. Its main aim was to remind of the prohibition of cutting cloth outside the chambers. Additionally, along with fabrics imported from Ghent and Leper, locally produced textiles were explicitly mentioned. The latter was not a coincidence since cutting cloth was forbidden not only “between stalls and stands” but also in the New Town of Wrocław, which was known to be a cluster-point of weavers, as well as for nuns.²⁰ A clearly defined restriction on the possibility to sell cloth only in whole pieces appeared in 1310 in a duke’s privilege allowing the Beguines in Wrocław to produce white and grey broadcloth.²¹

Unfortunately, the above picture is structured by the trade provisions of Wrocław from 1360 only in theory. It stated precisely the types of fabrics whose retail sale was limited to the merchants of cloth halls. Therefore, those who did not “stand in chambers” were not allowed to cut the “long fabrics” from Ghent, Brussels or Leuven, nor the “beautiful fabrics”, broadcloth from Bruges, Mechelen, Leper and Korterich, or any other “long fabric” – whether they were weavers, nuns, clergy or secular folk.²² We do not know, however, if this means that the monopoly did not involve the 33-ell “short broadcloth”, which was mentioned in documents along with the “long” (40-ell) one as produced by local weavers. Such selectivity is acceptable on the condition of combining the criterion of length with the quality of the fabrics. Let us mention here the record of laws of the Cracow city council of 1530, which, based on an old custom, resolved

17 SUB, vol. 6, no 129. SŁOŃ, *Miasta podwójne i wielokrotne*, 176.

18 KDW, vol. 2, no 1233. WYROZUMSKI, *Tkactwo małopolskie*, 125. GAŚSIOROWSKI, *Rzemioło i handel*, 273.

19 WYROZUMSKI, *Tkactwo małopolskie*, 125.

20 BU, no 76. GOLIŃSKI, *Podstawy gospodarcze mieszczaństwa*, 80.

21 BU, no 90.

22 KORN, *Schlesische Urkunden zur Geschichte des Gewerberechts* [further: CDS 8], no XXXIV.

that only dyed broadcloths would be subject to the exclusivity of being sold by the ell by cloth hall merchants.²³ The regulations from Wrocław of 1360 discussed above do not clarify the aforementioned doubt regarding the addressee of the limitations in the retail sale of broadcloth. They also mention cases of cloth purchased “under chambers” (*vnder den kamern*) being divided between three buyers. One may only risk an interpretation that this describes a transaction made outside the merchants’ chambers, thus by weavers – based on similar decisions repeated regarding cutting into three pieces “under chambers” a piece of broadcloth purchased from a merchant who did not “stand in a chamber” but offered “beautiful fabric for clothes”.²⁴ Otherwise, it would not be possible to explain the logic of the very generally formulated terms of the aforementioned temporary privileges granted by Wenceslaus IV to weavers in Wrocław. In 1395 it was only mentioned that the weavers could cut the fabrics of their own production for general use for only three years.²⁵ Similarly in 1396, in order to avoid a “war” from the weavers’ side, the king confirmed the fact that he agreed for them to cut and sell by the ell the fabrics of their own production for no more than three years. Additionally, he introduced a fee to be paid by the seller to the councillor for every piece of cloth that was cut.²⁶ In such form it was not perceived as compensation, which was the case later in Kalisz where in the mid-fifteenth century the weavers were allowed to sell their fabrics by the ell with the compensation of 2 groschen per tradesman.²⁷

The councillor of the duchy attempted to stop a dispute (*dissensio*) that took place near Wrocław, in Środa Śląska (Neumarkt), between the cloth hall merchants (*pannicidae*) and weavers in 1347, when he agreed to the division of a weaver’s fabric between as many as six buyers, though it had to be cut by a sworn tailor. Additionally, each weaver could produce one piece of fabric for personal use, both in winter and in summer, which implies it could have been cut depending on the need, while the unused excess of the material could be sold under appropriate supervision. In this context we fail to consider the third part of the sentence, which orders the weavers produce 30-ell-long pieces of fabric and sell them as a whole. We may again assume that such differentiation of laws was dependent on the type of fabric produced.²⁸ Less than a year later the same councillor announced the details of an agreement between the merchants (*mercatores seu pannicidas*) and the weavers, which clarified further aspects of the aforementioned dispute (*dissensio et controversia*).²⁹ It is supplemented by statutes granted to the weavers of Środa Śląska by the monarch in 1351. It turns out that on every market day the craftsmen offered their fabrics for sale in the cloth hall, except for one fair where they could stand wherever they wished. The fabrics offered for sale, long and short ones, were subject to control measurements by the councillor’s servants, according to the Wrocław custom. In addition, the maximum number of six buyers for a piece of fabric was repeated and the fact that it had to be

23 PIEKOSIŃSKI, *Prawa, przywileje i statuta miasta Krakowa*, vol. I/1, no 351. WYROZUMSKI, *Tkactwo małopolskie*, 122.

24 CDS 8, no XXXIV.

25 CDS 8, no LXVI. The document from 1391 was declared to be missing already in the mid-nineteenth century by G. Korn.

26 CDS 8, no LXVIII.

27 WYROZUMSKI, *Tkactwo małopolskie*, 125.

28 CDS 8, no XVIII.

29 CDS 8, no XIX.

brought to a tailor for cutting, as well as the right to sell the excess of the two pieces of fabric that were allowed for personal use.³⁰ The enforced compromise was not stable – in the last decade of the fourteenth century it was violated by the news of a concession towards the producers from the capital of the duchy. In 1394 King Wenceslaus IV felt obliged to grant the weavers in Środa Śląska a privilege of the unrestrained retail sale of fabrics, just as he had done earlier in Wrocław (in 1391).³¹

In 1367, the weavers (*wewer*) of Reichenbach (nowadays Dzierżoniów), despite the protests of the cloth hall merchants (*gewandsnyder vnd cammerherren*), were given the right to cut fabric by the Duke of Świdnica. After the duke's death, the cloth merchants complained to the widow-duchess, pointing out that the already mentioned privilege belonged to them from the moment the city was located. In order to appease the "war" (*krieg*), duchess Agnes returned the monopoly on cloth cutting to the merchants.³² This concession from the widow-duchess' side cannot be a surprise, bearing in mind she was fighting on many fronts to maintain her position and was subject to pressure from the merchants' elite in the duchy (most certainly in other cities people feared having changes similar to the ones from Dzierżoniów introduced there as well). What remains a surprise are the earlier motifs of Duke Bolko II towards the weavers, with an interesting fact being that the weavers appealed to a tradition of being privileged *ab urbe condita* without any written proof. Their new legal situation after being granted the diploma from the duchess did not exclude the necessity of finding a compromise with the craftsmen, which is visible already a month and a half later in resolving further disputes announced by the council of Dzierżoniów. According to it the weavers could sell their fabrics by the ell in neighbouring Niemcza (Nimptsch) without objection from the cloth merchants of Dzierżoniów,³³ while the unsold fabrics could be taken home, yet without the possibility of selling them around or in their home town. The cloth merchants were forbidden to search the houses of weavers, tailors and clippers for cut fabrics. The number of buyers for one piece of broadcloth was limited to five and although it was not clearly stated that this restriction applied to fabrics sold by weavers, it remains clear that this must have been the case, especially that the cutting was to be done by the council surveyor. Last but not least, similarly to in Środa Śląska, in summer and in winter the weavers were allowed to produce a piece of fabric for clothes for the family and their journeymen, with the right to give the clothes to friends or workers.³⁴ None of that prevented another argument (*czwetretekeit*) between the cloth merchants and wool weavers in Dzierżoniów two decades later, in the resolution of which the council and guild's elders were involved. The main point of the decision made by them, with the duchess' knowledge, in 1387 was the imposition of a rent of five marks per year for the councillors. It was also mentioned that should they be forbidden to cut fabric, the rent would be deducted. As a result of this solution, we learn about a new prey of the producers, due to which they had a new financial extortion forced upon them which

30 CDS 8, no XXV.

31 CDS 8, no LXV.

32 CDS 8, no XLI.

33 What is characteristic is that it is not mentioned what the inhabitants of Niemcza themselves thought about the situation. There was no *discordia* between the groups, like there was in 1291 between the inhabitants of Halberstadt and Quedlinburg, where the latter wanted to cut their fabrics in the city of the former. See HOLBACH, *Cloth Production and Cloth Trade*, 168.

34 CDS 8, no XLII.

was later disclosed in Wrocław. The cutting limit only applied to personally produced fabrics, while those purchased by the weavers were excluded from the scope of the decision.³⁵ Contrary to in the largest city in the region, the legal gains obtained by the inhabitants of Dzierżoniów were of more permanent character, which is proven by statutes issued by the councillor in 1399 and developed by the deputy councillor and city council members of Świdnica as arbitration judges in the dispute between the weavers and the cloth merchants. Both groups were granted the right to cut fabrics within the city of Dzierżoniów, highlighting additionally that the monopoly forbade such activity in the country and in front of churches in the municipal area. This did not exclude production outside guilds because a limitation of two purchasers was set for "broadcloth of the landowner's production", which could be cut in a cropping house. When it came to the weavers, it was clearly expressed that they were not allowed to cut any other fabric than that personally made. Both groups were obliged to comply with this regulation also outside the town, for example at fairs. Finally, the weavers' rent was lowered to four marks per year.³⁶

An agreement announced by the Margrave of Brandenburg between the cloth merchants (*pannicidae*) and wool weavers (*pannifices siue lanifices*) in Perlenberg in 1345 does not contain any details,³⁷ yet in an act of approval of the cloth merchants' guild connected to it there is a monopoly defined for those cutting and selling fabrics by the ell.³⁸ A hundred years later the margrave was not so consistent anymore. In 1447 in a verdict to a conflict between local cloth merchants (*wantsnider*) and weavers (*wulen wefern* and *wantmackern*) about cutting fabrics, he gave the right to the latter to cut by the ell and sell their own products.³⁹ In the mid-fifteenth century in Wieluń a dispute between weavers and clothiers was brought to an end by a king's decree that forbade the merchants to sell broadcloth cheaper than 13 quartae (a type of silver coin, equal to half a groschen) as these were limited to the weavers.⁴⁰ However, all of the above does not mean that the concessions towards the producers were permanent, and the protests of the cloth merchants losing their monopoly were unsuccessful. Let us have a look at the example of Havelberg where, in 1310, the margrave first forbade both the visiting and the local weavers to sell broadcloth by the ell, allowing its trade only in full pieces. This was confirmed further in 1365 and 1441.⁴¹ Yet in 1442 the margrave allowed the wool weavers (*wullenweber vnd gewantmacher*) to cut broadcloth of their own production.⁴² However, already in 1448, when resolving a dispute "growing each day" between the cloth merchants (*gewantsneider*) and the weavers about cutting cloth, the margrave decided that the craftsmen were not to cut and sell by the ell

35 CDS 8, no LVII.

36 CDS 8, no LXXIII.

37 As a comparison – an analogical lack of detailed arrangements in a document from the royal bailiff from 1383 where he agrees to a consensu between the cloth merchants and weavers in the city of Pirna. POSERN-KLETT, *Urkundenbuch der Städte Dresden und Pirna*, 368 no 51. ČELAKOVSKÝ, *Codex juris municipalis Regni Bohemiae*, vol. II, 731.

38 CDBr, vol. I/1, 143–144 no 39.

39 CDBr, vol. I/1, 190–191 no 107; vol. I/3, 448–449 no 181.

40 WYROZUMSKI, *Tkactwo małopolskie*, 125–126.

41 CDBr, vol. I/3, 287–289 no 1.

42 CDBr, vol. I/3, 301 no 17.

the fabrics they produced.⁴³ A similar failure was noted in Frankfurt (Oder). In 1301 the agreement between the quarrelling (*discordantes*) cloth merchants and clothiers ruled that the weavers would not cut and sell by the ell any broadcloth besides that intended for their personal use and for their families, which is similar to what we know from Środa Śląska.⁴⁴

Chronology and economic lagging

Half a century ago Jerzy Wyrozumski argued that before locally produced fabrics became a matter of larger scale transactions, imported materials were of significance. This, according to the researcher, explained why a function of professional intermediary in cloth trading (*pannicidae*) was developed in the cities earlier than the activity of weaving was distinguished from household duties. Also, as a consequence, this was why cloth hall merchants gained the monopoly in trade already in the thirteenth century – unlikely for other branches of production – for both imported and locally produced fabrics, thus eliminating the craftsmen from business (for some time at least).⁴⁵ It would not be difficult to agree with such reasoning, especially since we know that in the exemplary city of Magdeburg a guild of cloth merchants was established already in 1183.⁴⁶ However, in this case the chronology of events did not match with the scheme. In the old March town of Stendal in 1231 the margraves organized cloth merchants into guilds (*fraternitas*) according to the Magdeburg example (*gilde et incisores panni*).⁴⁷ Only two years later, in 1233, the local council forced the guild organization on weavers.⁴⁸ A similar example of a delay that overthrows the argument about the gaining of advantage by the right of metrics can only be found in Pyrzyce (Pyritz). In 1320 the duke of Pomerania overturned an earlier unification of the crafts of cloth merchants and wool weavers (*opus pannicidarum et lanificum*) and forbade the latter to sell broadcloth by the ell.⁴⁹ In the Czech city of Žatec in 1360 the king's representatives together with the municipality forbade the clothiers (*pannifices*) to cut and sell broadcloth by the ell, as being harmful for the citizens.⁵⁰ However, from the local Law Book one can learn that the cloth hall (*mercatorium*) in Žatec was built only two years later at the expense of the cloth merchants.⁵¹ In connection with research on material culture about the production breakthrough, and the subsequent market breakthrough, caused by the introduction of the horizontal foot-treadle floor loom and the connected excavated artifacts, it is nowadays believed that professional weavers functioned in the cities in our part of Europe from at least the twelfth century. Similar metrics are assigned to the appearance of fulled fabric, so broadcloth in the present-day meaning of the word.⁵² Thus, the privileged position of cloth hall merchants, which began only with the

43 CDBr, vol. I/3, 302–303 no 18.

44 CDBr, vol. I/ 23, 139 no 195. RABELER, *Konsumenten*, 113.

45 WYROZUMSKI, *Tkactwo małopolskie*, 125.

46 KINTZINGER, *Magdeburg*.

47 CDBr, vol. I/15, 8–9 no 8.

48 CDBr, vol. I/15, 10 no 9.

49 HEINEMANN, *Pommersches Urkundenbuch*, vol. 5/2, no 3403. WYROZUMSKI, *Tkactwo małopolskie*, 125.

50 ČELAKOVSKÝ, *Codex juris municipalis Regni Bohemiae*, vol. II, no 390.

51 ČELAKOVSKÝ, *Codex juris municipalis Regni Bohemiae*, vol. II, 565.

52 MAIK, *Sukiennictwo w Brzezinach*, 82. MAIK, *Stan badań nad wczesnośredniowiecznym*, 53. MAIK, *Sukiennictwo w średniowiecznej Polsce*, 124–129.

construction of cloth halls, i.e., in the thirteenth century, happened in the circumstances of already developed native woven production. Large-scale international cloth trade in the thirteenth century forced a lowering of production costs through the simplification of technology, which is visible in features of fabric artifacts dated to the fourteenth–fifteenth centuries.⁵³ The wave of disputes from the fifteenth century caused by the postulates of producers wanting to gain direct contact with the customers should be viewed in the context of increasing competition.

The above-mentioned J. Wyrozumski researched numerous fascinating cases of smaller cities in Lesser Poland where producers successfully defended themselves from the cloth hall merchants.⁵⁴ This phenomenon was a feature of a harmful economic underdevelopment of these local centres.⁵⁵ Of course, such a situation could also be found west of the Polish territories. For example, in Neuruppin in 1323, the local council, with permission from the city owners, granted the townsfolk *de opere textorum* the right to sell broadcloth in pieces. On market days this could take place in cloth halls (*theatrum*), while on weekdays in their own houses.⁵⁶ This does not mean that such an order of matters was widely accepted by the society from the beginning.⁵⁷ It also happened to be a result of the same dispute,⁵⁸ which, as we have tried to demonstrate, was at the basis of the economic organization of the late medieval city with borough rights.

53 MAIK, *Sukiennictwo w Brzezinach*, 86. MAIK, *Stan badań nad wczesnośredniowiecznym*, 57. MAIK, *Sukiennictwo w średniowiecznej Polsce*, 143–168. On the contrary, SŁOŃ, *Miasta podwójne i wielokrotne*, 45–148, 151, definitely maintains the thesis about delaying the woven production of goods in Central Europe.

54 Weavers from Lelów in 1362 obtained a royal privilege, confirmed in 1512, which stated that according to an old custom during Thursday market no visiting merchant could carry on retail trade of fabric of lower value than sixty groschen per piece. Thus, the interests of local producers were protected as those offering cheaper cloth, while the interests of local merchants were neglected. The prohibition of the import and sale of fabric of lower or equal value to local products outside the market which was issued in the interest of weavers, the cited researcher indicated also in Tarnów (1456), Czchów (1464), Pilzno (1502), Biecz (1531) and Ciężkowice (1580). In Krzyżanowice, which was an unsuccessful settlement anyway, the location privilege from 1367 anticipated that, following the example of other towns and cities in the kingdom, the weavers would be allowed to sell the fabric in pieces and as a whole, within the city and outside of it, as well as bring it from the outside. In the sixteenth century weavers had the monopoly to trade broadcloth in Rzeszów. WYROZUMSKI, *Tkactwo małopolskie*, 122–125.

55 WYROZUMSKI, *Tkactwo małopolskie*, 121.

56 CDBr, vol. I/4, 288 no 8.

57 Compare examples from Lesser Poland from the second half of the sixteenth century where tailors were forced to purchase fabric from weavers, as described in WYROZUMSKI, *Tkactwo małopolskie*, 124.

58 In Szydłów the cloth weavers, who were in dispute (*controversia*) with merchants and other townsfolk, in 1522 were given a royal privilege that dismissed the old right of the tradesmen to bring and cut cloth from the Kingdom of Poland and from Mazovia. They obtained or kept the right to sell and cut cloth of their own production. The limitations did not apply to the fair. The merchants were also allowed to sell imported fabrics if weavers did not supply enough of their own products. WYROZUMSKI, *Tkactwo małopolskie*, 122–123, where the source is edited.

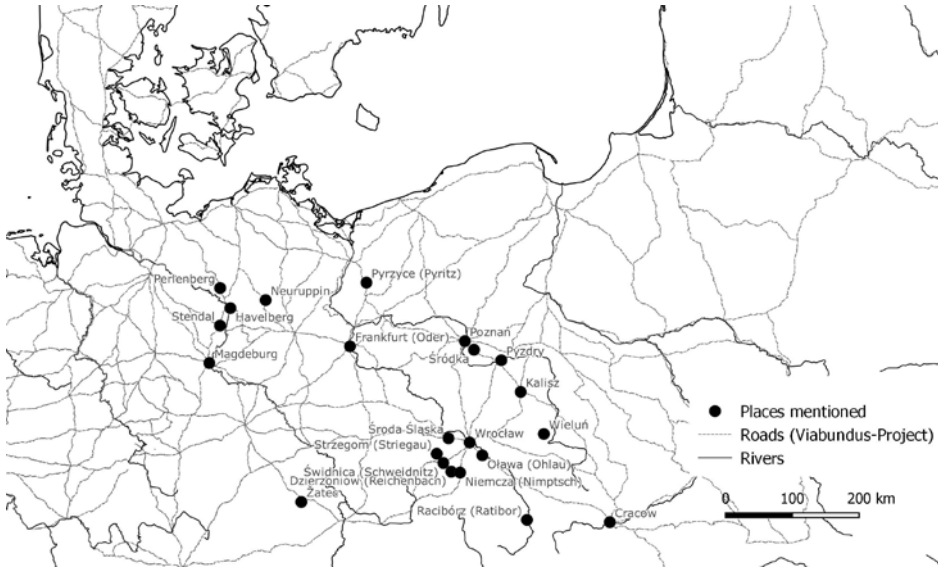


Figure 1: Map of the region and places mentioned. Source: Anonymous reviewer of the article; published with their kind consent.

A researcher characterizing the participation of Marseilles craftsmen in the trade found the connection of the weavers-dressmakers with it rather obvious.⁵⁹ Nonetheless, this relationship may have stemmed primarily from the local craftsmen's reliance on processing and re-exporting imported textiles, as dramatically demonstrated by the dyers in Montpellier. In such arrangement, there was an exchange of raw goods for processed goods between local merchants and craftsmen, mutually in need of each other.⁶⁰ In this mechanism, as in the organization of the local production of linen cloth, possibly a network of economic dependence can be discerned, but certainly not a system based on legal favouritism or discrimination. A well-known example of the centralization of cloth production remains the hierarchical relations occurring between the economy of Cologne and the cities that made up its hinterland.⁶¹ The formation of a network of small centres specializing in cloth manufacturing, whose products were exported outside the region through a central market in the dominant metropolis, must have entailed (or resulted from) dependence and economic dictate. This was partly unavoidable, including in those cases where weaving production was based on high-quality raw material imported from abroad with the efforts and money of merchants.⁶² This led in the shortest way to the emergence of the putting-out system

59 NICOLUSSI-KÖHLER, *Marseille, Montpellier und das Mittelmeer*, 139.

60 NICOLUSSI-KÖHLER, *Marseille, Montpellier und das Mittelmeer*, 260-264.

61 HOLBACH, "Also wer Tuch macht im Gericht zu Boppard", 258-259.

62 HOLBACH, "Also wer Tuch macht im Gericht zu Boppard", 267. Examples from other regions, however, warn against overemphasizing the role of raw material imports, and thus the position of importers. Cf. VERHULST, *De inlandse wol in de textielnijverheid*, 18.

whose starting point was the possession of capital and not the socio-professional status of its organizers. It means that such organizers in the cities of the western part of the Reich originated both among merchants and craftsmen.⁶³ A less well-known fact is the shift of Flanders cities from cheap and mass production to the manufacture of costly, high-quality cloth, in order to achieve a monopolistic position in European markets in this regard, as is known from the fourteenth century onward. The process leading to this shift remained painful for the manufacturers, as was revealed both in the reduction of wages for wage earners employed in the crafts and in the great social unrest of 1280.⁶⁴ However, this did not mean an automatic antagonism between craftsmen and all merchants.⁶⁵ And this despite the fact that the weavers' guilds in Flanders cities, growing in political strength over time, retained their exclusively artisanal character while not restricting their members from doing trade.⁶⁶

The above examples of the inadequacy of the situation noted on the symbolic east and west of the river Elbe can be further multiplied. They seem to perfectly reflect the balancing act to maintain the equilibrium of power between merchants and craftsmen in the cities. In places where exporting one's own products played a secondary role for the economy, there was a glaring advantage for merchants, who could dictate their terms.⁶⁷ When the economic situation evolved in favour of the producers, the tensions just described in this article emerged, difficult to eliminate under conditions of maintaining a monopoly of power by the merchant patriciate.

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63 HOLBACH, "Also wer Tuch macht im Gericht zu Boppard", 277–279. SOLY, *The Political Economy of European Craft Guilds*, 47.

64 BOONE, *Social Conflicts in the Cloth Industry of Ypres*, 149–150.

65 Cf. BARDOEL, *The Urban Uprising at Bruges*, 761–791.

66 SOLY, *The Political Economy of European Craft Guilds*, 53–54.

67 Cf. SOLY, *The Political Economy of European Craft Guilds*, 57, 59.

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