



Volume 1. From the Reformation to the Thirty Years' War, 1500-1648  
Ordinance for the Dark Dyers and Ironers in Hesse (November 15, 1580)

Where corporate life was weak or non-existent, the regulation of the crafts lay in the hands of a higher authority, usually a prince. This Hessian dark dyers' and ironers' ordinance was issued by Landgrave Wilhelm "the Wise" (1532-92). The ordinance was requested, he says, by the practitioners of these closely related crafts. Therefore, strictly speaking, it is not a guild ordinance, but a princely statute that deals mainly with the management of labor and the organization of production, including the fixing of prices (paragraph 17).

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We, Wilhelm, by the grace of God, Landgrave of Hesse, Count of Catzenelnbogen, Dietz, Ziegenhein and Nidda, etc., publicly proclaim, for ourselves and for our heirs and succeeding Hessian princes, that our present and dear subjects, all the dark dyers and ironers of the dark dyers' craft, have humbly expressed and requested to form a union and guild, like other crafts in our towns and villages. They ask this so that this craft may be practiced properly and honestly among them and that also good order shall be maintained. We therefore graciously make known that, accordingly, we, out of our good will and to benefit the common good of our cities and territories, grant their humble request by our authority as landgrave, and we establish a guild according to the regulations and provisions that follow:

[1] And first, whoever wants to practice and pursue this craft must be honest and pious. From the publication of this guild ordinance forward, he may not be admitted to this guild before he has for three years properly learned the craft with an honest master and received from his master a written certificate, which every master shall be obligated to give to his apprentices. Also, so that he shall be better acquainted with the customs and regulations of the craft, he shall have spent two years as a journeyman, whereupon he may buy his way into the guild by paying the sum of 10 gulden, half of it to be paid to us [Wilhelm] and half to the guild.

[2] Whoever considers taking up the craft of dark dyer or ironer shall come from pious, honest parents and possess evidence of this. He shall first have a trial period of fourteen days, and if the work is acceptable to him, then he shall swear before the master to practice the craft for three years with the same master and to behave properly toward his master and the other apprentices. If, however, a youth shall leave his master during the apprentice years without justification, he shall be deprived of the opportunity to practice the craft. If a master shall mistreat his apprentices, the master shall be penalized according to the severity of the mistreatment.

[3] A master shall not take on more than one youth. Once he has taken on one, he shall not give this one over to another master, unless poverty renders him unable to support or instruct the youth, in which case the youth shall be set free to go to another master.

[4] A master's son, because he was raised within the trade, shall not be required to complete the three-year apprenticeship, except if he has left the craft for a period and learned another or otherwise employed himself in another business. In such a case, when he decides later that he desires to practice this craft, because he waited he shall be required and bound to learn the trade anew for the three years.

[5] A master's son shall be a full member of the guild, and a master's daughter a half member, so that if a daughter's share is inherited by a son-in-law, he shall pay only half of the guild entry fee.

[6] A master shall not have more than one journeyman at a time, and when he has completed teaching this one, he shall, in the presence of two masters, or at least one, and one apprentice, pay off the journeyman and give him a written certificate, which will be recognized by masters and apprentices in other places.

[7] If one has not honestly learned this trade and still sets out as a journeyman, he shall not be supported or accepted by any, and if a master shall knowingly house him or give him work, he shall be handled similarly. If, however, he did so unknowingly, he shall not be penalized.

[8] No master shall, so long as he is in need of a journeyman's services, dismiss one journeyman and hire another in his place without proper cause, unless it happens with the knowledge and consent of the original journeyman. Similarly, no journeyman shall leave a master in whose service he stands, nor take leave when his services are required, without the master's consent or a serious reason. If, however, one or more shall do this, he or they shall no longer be permitted to work within our principality.

[9] No master shall take an apprentice from another, under penalty of 2 gulden.

[10] Under threat of the same penalty, every master shall do the work that is brought to him to the best of his ability, so that they [the customers] are assured [of receiving quality work]. No master shall in any way take work, as could happen, from another.

[11] If it should happen that a master dies and his surviving widow considers taking over the workshop, and if she should have a youth who had been attached to her husband, she shall then practice the craft. And she shall also be allowed to retain the youth for his years of instruction as long as she remains a widow.

[12] If a master's widow wishes, on the other hand, to sell her workshop to a journeyman, then, provided that the journeyman has otherwise appropriately conformed to this ordinance, she shall be required to sell half of the business to the guild and half to the journeyman.

[13] Also, no master shall be allowed to take renters, or move in with others, or live in a village where he constructs a workshop to the detriment of the craft, so that there will be no unauthorized workers practicing this craft to lessen the master's work.<sup>1</sup>

[14] No unauthorized worker, hand-dyer, or incompetent worker shall enjoy the right to live in the places or locations where a proper master lives or anywhere else in our principality. Our officials shall pay constant attention to this matter.

[15] Every active master shall be required to provide one night's lodging to journeymen who frequently come wandering and who seek lodging with him for the night. He shall give them to eat whatever the house has to offer, and every journeyman shall be content or seek better lodgings at his own expense.

[16] The masters in our principality shall assemble annually on the Monday after the annual St. Michael's Market<sup>2</sup> in Cassel, at an agreed-upon place, and there, on the advice of the previous master of the craft, select and confirm two new masters as elders to serve as masters of the craft.<sup>3</sup> These two shall maintain good order and enforce these regulations. They shall also help and cooperate with our officials in every place. And if a master is unable to attend for a justified reason, he shall also be obliged to send one thaler. If, however, anyone stays away out of contempt, without justification, he shall be punished according to the judgment of the masters and journeymen who are present. The fine shall be divided evenly between us [the landgrave] and the guild.

[17] So that none of our subjects is overcharged in the future, it is our will that henceforth an apron with 10 gores shall not cost more than 12 pence, one with 12 gores [not more than] 14 pence, so that the charge shall always correspond to the length and quality of the apron. For cloth that is 2 cubits wide, however, one shall give and receive 4 pence, and for that which is one cubit wide, 2 pence; and for drill<sup>4</sup>, one shall give and receive 2½ pence for one cubit of cloth. The merchants, however, shall pay one thaler for a hundred cubits of fabric. Should anyone take more or less than is outlined here, he shall pay a penalty of 4 gulden to us and the guild, to each his half.

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<sup>1</sup> This provision prohibits shifting production into the countryside, beyond the regulatory power of urban guilds. Such measures were a common defense against the practice of "putting out" production, especially of cloth, to rural artisans – trans.

<sup>2</sup> St. Michael's Day, or Michaelmas, falls on September 29 – trans.

<sup>3</sup> The landgrave creates (or confirms) a principality-wide association of the masters of this craft. This is the final step in the migration of guild-formation and regulation from local and corporate to state control – trans.

<sup>4</sup> A weave of cloth with a triple thread and a pattern visible on both sides of the fabric, comparable in modern German to canvas or ticking – trans.

[18] As to the glue-hide stock<sup>5</sup> that is necessary for this craft, each master shall purchase this as much as possible in the place where he resides, although, if he is unable to acquire sufficient quantities there, he may import it from elsewhere. Also, every master shall allow another to purchase as much glue-hide stock from him as he has in excess, for which the fixed price is a quarter of a sack for 7½ albs and not more. If anyone shall prevent another from acquiring the material, either through disfavor or other methods, so that the latter does not receive his supplies, he shall pay 2 gulden. Otherwise, everyone shall offer for sale materials that are in excess of his own needs.

[19] No one shall damage another's honor or good reputation with either words or deeds, or he shall be punished as fitting.

[20] Our officials in all localities shall help and require of the guild that these regulations be followed and any fines be collected.

[21] If the guilds wish to establish among themselves other regulations that are not against us, our principality, or our subjects, this right shall be reserved to them.

[22] However, we retain the right for ourselves, our heirs and our successors to freely increase, decrease, or entirely and completely abolish these regulations at our pleasure, always legitimate and without prejudice.

To certify this we have set our privy, princely seal upon this letter, which is given in Cassel, the fifteenth of November, in the Year of Our Lord 1580.

*Wilhelm, Landgrave of Hesse*  
*Reinhardus Schefferus, Chancellor*

Source of original German text: Edmund Salow, ed., *Das Zunftwesen in Kassel bis zum Erlaß der hessischen Zunftordnung von 1693*. Lichtenau, 1978, pp. 190-93.

Translation: Ellen Yutzy Glebe

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<sup>5</sup> Scraps of animal hide used to manufacture glue – trans.