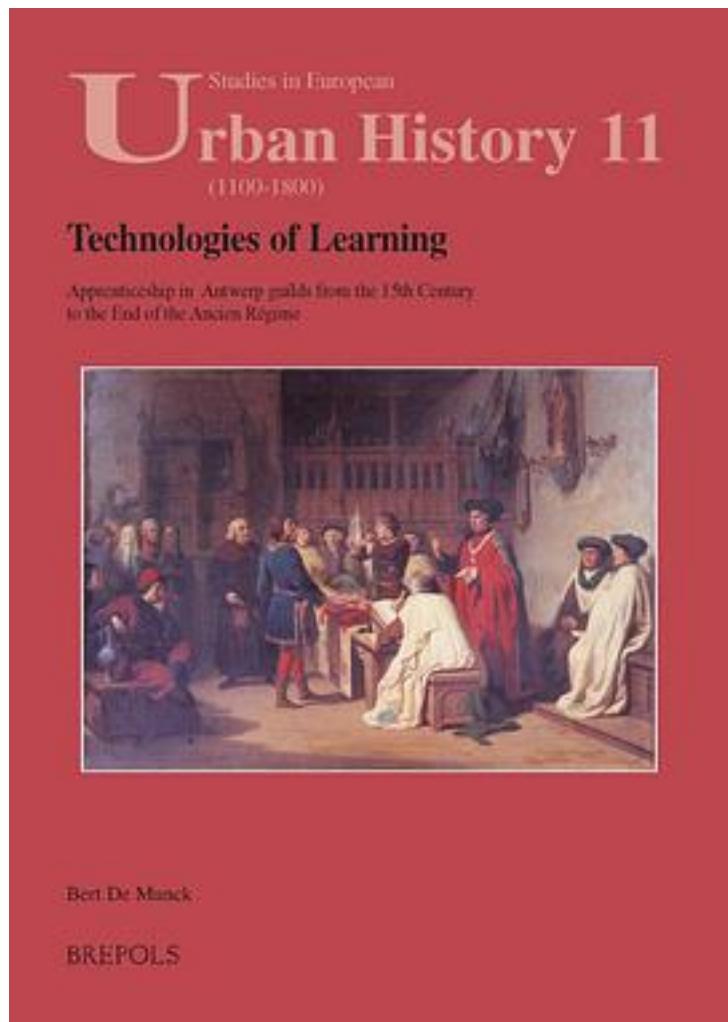


# Technologies of Learning



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The importance of training and education is on the increase. While the production of

'human capital' is seen as a motor for a competitive economy, skills and expertise prove to be necessary for social mobility. Remarkably, in conceiving modern forms of 'apprenticeship', several mechanisms from the *acien regime*, seem to return. The difference between public and private initiative is disappearing, education and training is being confused, and in order to acquire generic skills such as flexibility, communicability, self-rule, creativity and so on, youngsters have to learn 'in context'. Even for maths, scholars now talk of 'situated learning'.

Before the advent of a formal schooling system, training took place on the shop floor, under the roof of a master. The apprentice not only worked but also lived in his master's house and was thus trained and educated at the same time. In cities, this system was formally complemented by an official apprenticeship system, prescribing a minimum term to serve and an obligatory masterpiece for those who wanted to become masters themselves. Traditionally, historians see this as an archaic and backward way of training, yet this book's aim is to show that it was instead a very flexible and dynamic system, perfectly in tune with the demands of an early modern economy.

In order to understand it fully, however, we should differentiate the informal training system organised via a 'free market' of indentures on the one hand and the institutionalised system of craft guilds on the other. In Antwerp, early modern guilds had a project of 'emancipating' their members. They didn't simply produce certain skills, but through a system of quality marks defended the honour of craftsmen. This is the difference with current practices. By representing hands-on skills as superior, guilds supplied a sort of symbolic capital for workers.

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Bert De Munck is Professor at the History Department of the University of Antwerp, Belgium, teaching 'Social and economic history of the early modern period', 'History and social theory', and 'Public history'. He is member of the Centre for Urban History at the same university and director of the Scientific Research Community (WOG) 'Urban Agency. Setting the research agenda of urban history'. While he has worked on apprenticeship, craft guilds, labour and social capital, his current research interests include vocational training and the circulation of technical knowledge, guilds and civil society, urban governance, and conceptual and theoretical approaches to urban history and urban studies.

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