

# Catalonia's eighteenth-century economic growth and the Bourbon State

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## ABSTRACT

The influence of the state and institutions in economic growth is a field of study that has burgeoned in recent years. Below we will survey the influence that certain reforms undertaken by the governments of Bourbon Spain had on the economic growth that Catalonia experienced in the eighteenth century. To do so, we will compare the existing studies on the state's spheres of action in Catalonia's fiscal and productive apparatus. Likewise, in order to assess the real scope of their impact, we will describe the more far-reaching underpinnings and determinants of Catalonia's economic transformation during that period.

**KEYWORDS:** Catalonia, economic growth, state, eighteenth century, Bourbon

## A FASCINATING BUT POLARISING DEBATE

The role of states or institutions in spurring economic growth is a research topic that has attracted the interest of economists and economic historians around the world in recent decades.<sup>1</sup> Therefore, it should come as no surprise that this analytical approach has also had an impact on studying the upswing in the Catalan economy in the eighteenth century.<sup>2</sup> The temporal convergence between the onset of this stage of major economic growth and the profound political and institutional changes brought about when the Bourbons reached the throne in Madrid has led many authors to connect these two phenomena. All too often, this fascinating field of research has ended up degenerating into a bitter debate among modernists revolving around more or less benevolent judgements about what the new dynasty meant for Catalonia and its economy.<sup>3</sup>

This polarisation reached its peak in the first decade and a half of the twenty-first century, dovetailing with the commemoration of the three-hundredth anniversary of the War of the Spanish Succession. In view of the more or less effusive interpretations of the Bourbon administration's benefits on the Catalan economy expressed by scholars like Gabriel Tortella, Carlos Martínez Shaw and Roberto Fernández, other historians like Josep Fontana, Jaume Torras, Llorenç Ferrer Francesc Valls and Josep

Maria Delgado did not hesitate to temper or outright contradict these positive interpretations, placing a heavier emphasis on the importance of the transformations that had occurred before the dynastic change.<sup>4</sup>

However, the conclusion of the events, conferences and publications held as part of the commemoration of the 'Tricentennial' did not mark the end of the debate. In fact, just the opposite occurred; in recent years several studies and syntheses have been published that have contributed to prolonging it by offering new observations and further exploring alternative fields of study that could complement and/or contrast the visions previously put forth.<sup>5</sup> This is why in the pages below we shall attempt to offer an updated examination of this subject of analysis by reviewing the cruxes of the historiographic debate and including the latest contributions. However, before doing this credibly we must first focus on describing the true underpinnings that sustained Catalonia's economic growth in the eighteenth century. Only by knowing them will we be equipped to judge the role played by the Bourbon state in the transformations that occurred during this period and the actual scope of its actions.

## THE TRUE FOUNDATION OF CATALUNYA'S UPSWING IN THE EIGHTEENTH CENTURY

Today it is common knowledge that Catalonia's economic growth in the eighteenth century was rooted in transformations in multiple areas of Catalan agriculture, when it ceased focusing on self-consumption and instead became geared towards market production. This process

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was clearly spearheaded by the wine and spirits sectors, which enabled Catalonia to join the Atlantic trade circuits due to the increasing demand for wine and spirits that dated back to the second half of the seventeenth century. It is impossible to start this section without referring to Pierre Vilar's monumental work *Catalunya dins l'Espanya moderna*, where the author from Languedoc pointed out this fact in his celebrated chapter on 'the second Catalan turnaround'.<sup>6</sup> Several years before Vilar's studies were published, Emili Giralt had been a pioneer in pointing out the importance of wine monoculture in the Penedès region in the late seventeenth century and the influence of Dutch and British commercial agents in exports of Catalan wine and liquors in the Atlantic market.<sup>7</sup> Contemporary with this work, the young Josep Fontana's doctoral thesis quantified the existence of major growth in Barcelona's foreign trade between 1664 and 1693/1699.<sup>8</sup> More recently, the monographic studies by Francesc Valls and Agustí Segarra have reaffirmed this interpretation.<sup>9</sup> On the other hand, the works by Benet Oliva and Pere Molas on the close relations among the Catalan mercantile bourgeoisie of the period, along with the studies by Albert Garcia Espuche and Josep Fàbregas on several prominent Dutch merchants, like Johan Kies and Arnold Jäger, have considerably furthered our knowledge of the importance of this sector and its main players in the country's economic upswing.<sup>10</sup>

So, how was the increasing demand for wine and spirits from northern Europe the essential factor that spurred the Catalan economy and ushered in long-term transformations that became the cornerstones of Catalonia's economic growth in the eighteenth century? First, the cultivation of grapes—followed by other crops with similar farming rhythms, like olive and nut trees—was one of the main driving forces behind the overall increase in cultivated land in Catalonia through ground-breaking and the building of terraces in rugged areas that had traditionally been unproductive, while it also became the key to making land access more flexible thanks to the prominence of *rabassa morta* contracts.<sup>11</sup> Likewise, the specialisation in wine in the coastal, pre-coastal and central counties paved the way for other agrarian specialisations and regional or local products, which together gave rise to an increasingly integrated and profitable domestic market.<sup>12</sup>

At the same time, exports of wine and spirits also paved the way for the Catalan economy's increasing integration in the Atlantic and northern European markets, despite the recomposition that these business areas underwent after the War of the Spanish Succession and the renewed competition from France.<sup>13</sup> This circumstance became crucial in driving and fuelling other essential Catalan manufacturing sectors, such as textiles.<sup>14</sup> At the same time, the reinvestment of the capital earned from this Atlantic trade also rewarded and reinforced some of the traditional Mediterranean trade routes, the clearest example being imports of Castilian, Italian, French and North African grains to supply the increasing demand prompted

by the eighteenth-century population increase.<sup>15</sup> On the other hand, these business dynamics also ended up motivating Catalonia's trade penetration in other provinces within the monarchy on both sides of the Atlantic. One example of this is Galicia, where Catalan merchants and shopkeepers gradually arrived for both the salted fish sector and the municipal—or state—leasing of wine provisioning, which offset the initial investments in the salting industry.<sup>16</sup>

Finally, both the impetus of the Hispanic markets and the arrival of foreign investment from the demand of the northern European market contributed to a better redistribution of agrarian income and encouraged peasant engagement in multiple forms of complementarity and diversification with other productive or commercial activities, thus feeding the essential entrepreneurial drive needed to carry them out. Nor should we forget that proto-industrial wool-making and the productive fragmentation of the textile sector were the cornerstones of the country's textile production, thus becoming part of this system of peasant activity diversification and allowing an important pool of labour, both men and even more importantly women, to join the world of manufacturing.<sup>17</sup> In consequence, the convergence of all these dynamics ended up favouring higher capital circulation within the local markets and peasant economies, which ultimately affected the rise in the birth and fertility rates.<sup>18</sup> This occurred in so many regions of Spain that historians like Rosa Congost have actually proposed the existence of an 'industrious revolution' throughout the eighteenth century in areas like the Empordà and the Girona region, following the concept used by Jan de Vries.<sup>19</sup>

However, all these transcendental changes driven by the Atlantic demand for wine and spirits could have never occurred had the country not already had the capacities and conditions needed to effect them and profit from the stimuli from this new market. These preconditions or 'cumulative potentialities'—in the words of Antoni Simon i Tarrés<sup>20</sup>—are precisely where we find the unique features that can explain the particularity of Catalonia's growth in the eighteenth century.

One of the most obvious and important ones was the entrenchment of *emphyteusis* as a flexible, preferable form of land access after the restructuring of the Catalan feudal system brought about by the Arbitral Sentence of Guadalupe, despite the diversity of agrarian models in the region.<sup>21</sup> On the other hand, the traditional figure of the heir served to cohere or conserve the assets, ensuring that the most productive and active lands were not broken down into overly small parcels. At the same time, it forced the gentlemen landowners to seek new business opportunities, including farming new liminal or less productive lands through *rabassa morta*, sharecropping and other similar contracts or establishments.<sup>22</sup> Both factors combined enabled the Catalan agrarian system to handle the population growth experienced in the eighteenth century without the fear of a Malthusian collapse, always using

trade as a crutch to offset the occasional productive shortfalls of crops that were the most essential to subsistence. This model enabled the country to overcome major food crises, like the one in 1765, although it also paved the way for a new kind of crisis caused by the interruption in trade flows.<sup>23</sup> Nonetheless, this entire juridical and legal architecture had already been in place one century earlier.<sup>24</sup>

Continuing with other non-economic factors, we should note the existence of an essential, longstanding factor within Catalan business culture: the “company” or corporation. Ever since it became widespread as an instrument of entrepreneurship or self-organisation among Catalan merchants in the fourteenth and fifteenth centuries, the flexibility of this model of organising economic activity and initiative made it extraordinarily attractive for businesses of all types.<sup>25</sup> Isabel Lobato Franco analysed the versatility of these companies in both trade and manufacturing in Catalonia in the second half of the seventeenth century, as well as in the management of public and private leases. She defined their potentialities as a tool for accumulating capital and sharing risk, as a platform for diversifying investments and, in short, as the ideal instrument for entrepreneurship and business partnership.<sup>26</sup>

Nor should we ignore the potentialities of the social capital existing in Catalan villages and cities, which could be glimpsed through the vitality of the guilds and parishes, nor the influence of a particular civic culture with deep contractualist and legalistic roots, as clearly proven by the decisive, ongoing efforts of Catalan notaries to set the terms and legal and consensual legitimisation of private economic activities among all their participants.<sup>27</sup> This remained unchanged throughout the eighteenth century due to the survival of Catalan private law upon the establishment of the Nueva Planta.

Finally, as Albert Garcia Espuche has demonstrated, the early decentralisation of productive activities that occurred in the second half of the sixteenth and early seventeenth centuries was an initial version of some of the manufacturing and commercial dynamics that would come to the fore in the ensuing century. In parallel, Catalonia's urban structure underwent a new reorganisation and demographic hierarchisation, which created a network that was increasingly integrated, with Barcelona at the head but medium-sized cities becoming increasingly important. During this period, Espuche also found a reactivation of coastal trade along Catalonia's coastline, as well as Catalan merchants' first initiatives to penetrate Castilian markets.<sup>28</sup> Regarding the latter, it is important to note that the dynamics of the influx of northern European merchants in the Mediterranean region—who were essential in channelling the demand for wine and spirits in the second half of the seventeenth century—had also started irreversibly in the early the sixteenth century through huge imports of Baltic wheat brought to palliate the constant poor grain harvests around the western Mediterranean.<sup>29</sup>

## THE ACTION OF THE STATE. PROJECTS, INTERESTS AND (IN)ABILITIES

So, what was the role of the state within this system and what were its effects? In the opinion of Roberto Fernández, Bourbon absolutism should be viewed as the staunch defender and sponsor of Catalonia's eighteenth-century economic growth, it and ‘Catalan initiative’ becoming the binomial of success.<sup>30</sup> In the view of Gabriel Tortella, the War of the Spanish Succession and the Nueva Planta were the direct key factors that enabled Catalonia to shed the feudal shackles that had oppressed its capacities and benefit from the establishment of a taxation system that was—supposedly—more equitable and bearable.<sup>31</sup> Both authors—and many others—believe that the Bourbon governments' reforming zeal throughout the entire century led them to enact significant remediation and reorganisation initiatives aimed at finding the best economic stimulus possible. These reforms in taxation, trade and the military resulted in an overall generous opening of Hispanic markets both on the Peninsula and in the Americas to Catalan merchants and shopkeepers, who were able to supply their establishments thanks to manufacturing that was safeguarded by protectionist laws and incentivised through a state demand funnelled through military provisioning contracts.<sup>32</sup>

This line of argumentation clearly falls within studies on the capacities, effects and limitations of Bourbon reformism which have been notably successful for decades and have also had a clear impact on the development of many of the biographies of the first Spanish Bourbons.<sup>33</sup> However, some authors like Pedro Ruiz Torres have found the existence of significant internal limitations on this reformism by the monarchy as a whole.<sup>34</sup> For the case at hand, although Jaume Vicens Vives admitted the possible benefits of some of the measures taken by the Bourbon governments for the Catalan economy, in the mid-twentieth century he warned that the most euphoric and positivistic interpretations of the state's ability to influence such a complex phenomenon with such heterogeneous roots as Catalonia's economic growth should be taken with caution.<sup>35</sup> Below we shall review the main arguments on which the more positive discourse on the Crown's action in Catalonia's economic growth is based and try to contrast them with the most important studies on each factor in recent decades.

### Catalonia's new taxation system

As mentioned above, the in-depth reform of the Catalan taxation system initiated by the new Bourbon administration in 1713 is one of the factors cited as the most positive for Catalonia's economic growth. As a result, there are many general studies of the Bourbon taxation model in Catalonia, and particularly on the creation of the land registry (*catastro*). We shall use them to compare varying opinions on their effects on Catalonia's growth in the eighteenth century.

In his classic study of the Spanish royal treasury under the old regime, Miguel Artola claimed that the establishment of the land registry modernised taxation, which aspired to be equitable, thus criticising the more nuanced interpretations of researchers like Joan Mercader, Pierre Vilar and Jordi Nadal.<sup>36</sup> More recently, in his examination of the effects of ‘equivalent’ taxes in all the territories of the Crown of Aragon, Josep Juan Vidal also stressed this element of ‘modernity’ of the Bourbons’ new taxation system in Catalonia, comparing it very positively with the Castilian system.<sup>37</sup> However, the most vocal praise of the land registry once again comes from Gabriel Tortella, who describes it as a ‘better designed, fairer and more equitable’ tax.<sup>38</sup> Besides opinions regarding its modernity and comparative advantage over the Castilian treasury, all these authors also concur that the relative stability of the amount payable from the 1720s to the end of the century meant that the tax was fossilised in relation to the upswing in cash prices, which would clearly have benefitted the Catalans with a gradually lighter tax burden at times of stronger economic growth.

As gleaned from Artola’s references, in the last third of the twentieth century, different experts on eighteenth-century Catalonia pointed out the need to attenuate the more positivistic interpretations of the new Bourbon tax scheme and ultimately questioned its ‘modern’ essence.<sup>39</sup> The main discrepancy between the two camps comes from their differing views of the very nature of the tax. On the one hand, Artola and Tortella claim that it was a progressive tax, meaning that the wealthy and higher earners paid higher taxes. This clearly comes from the contemporary intellectual debates on its conceptualisation and establishment, as well as from the official documentation produced by the tax administration.<sup>40</sup> On the other hand, Mercader, Nadal and Delgado claim that it was a quota tax; that is, a total amount was set by the Crown but distributed arbitrarily around the territory and locally apportioned in very heterogeneous ways. They also claim that the tax was instated as an essential tool to maintain the new military garrison in Catalonia, which operated with direct collection practices associated with the exceptional tax scheme instated in 1713–1714. In some cases, these practices remained in place until the second half of the century.<sup>41</sup> All these factors were joined by the weight of the other new taxes also created to sustain the troops, like the taxes on baggage transportation or for accommodation amenities, in addition to the familiar billeting services which had had an enormous effect on the country since the mid-seventeenth century.<sup>42</sup>

Likewise, with the end of the War of the Spanish Succession, the royal treasury took possession of all the income and taxes that had previously been the exclusive purview of the Diputació del General or Barcelona’s Consell de Cent, while also instating new monopolies that already existed in Castile but had not affected Catalonia until then, like the monopolies on tobacco, stamped paper and salt.<sup>43</sup> In fact, according to the figures cited in the

classic study by Emiliano Fernández de Pinedo, the land registry only accounted for around 66.5% of the entire tax burden in Catalonia in the 1720s, while the remaining 33.5% came from this group of taxes and the royal monopolies.<sup>44</sup> Indeed, the substantial growth in the amount collected in the second half of the century via these indirect taxes—caused by the overall surge in the Catalan economy—enabled the Crown to offset the gradual decrease in the tax charges on land.<sup>45</sup>

This last factor is crucial when noting an eventual competitive disadvantage between the tax systems of the former Crown of Aragon and Castile, an argument based on the scant importance of indirect taxation in Catalonia compared to Castile used to explain the distinct economic development in both territories.<sup>46</sup> Late in the century, the tax pressure in the Crowns of Castile and Aragon was somewhat balanced, with the exception of the tax-exempt Basque provinces and Navarra.<sup>47</sup> This situation remained similar after the 1780s, leading to the loss of the overall importance of provincial Castilian income and its equivalent in Aragon spurred by the overall reorientation of the monarchy’s tax collection towards income from trade with the Americas, like the tobacco monopolies or the trade transactions made directly after the general opening of the colonial ports.<sup>48</sup>

Likewise, the Catalan land registry’s collection system had several particularities worth noting. Given that it was established by force, the process of setting the amount to be collected in relation to the value of the property—the ‘royal’ tax—or the income from work—known as the ‘personal’ or ‘gains’ tax—was clearly fraught, given the people’s more or less passive resistance. This led to concealment or incorrect and unequal taxation. For this reason, after 1719 the Bourbon authorities were forced to revise the value of the taxed lands several times.<sup>49</sup> The complexity of calculating work income also led the quartermaster Antonio de Sartine, in his 1735 *Reglamento*, to set the ‘gains’ at 10% of earnings from manufacturing and trade and to establish set rates for the ‘personal’ tax based on the heads of family and master artisans, as well as wage earners over the age of 14.<sup>50</sup> On the other hand, the municipal authorities ended up being responsible for collecting these taxes; every year, they were informed of the amounts to be collected locally, set by those expert groups in the quartermaster.<sup>51</sup> This opened the door to a great deal of malpractice, inequality and graft in the apportionments, given that the central authority tended to check that the amounts set in each of the three annual payments arrived, but not the process whereby they were collected.<sup>52</sup> Finally, by studying land registry sources in Lleida from the second half of the century, Delgado has also found the existence of occasional increases in the amounts to be collected by the municipality, sometimes far over the amounts set by the quartermaster, even though they were supposedly ‘fossilised’. These fluctuations—which are found in the amounts to be paid in each city, village or township—reflected both compulsory charges over the

existing land registry collection, the dynamics of local collections and the conjunctural status of the township's treasury.<sup>53</sup>

The convergence of all these dynamics described above shows us a reality that is considerably distinct from that progressive, fair and equitable tax that Tortella describes. Nonetheless, these features are the foundation of the view of it as a punitive, unequal tax spread widely throughout Catalan society at the time, with the notable exception of prominent members of Barcelona's commercial elite or restricted circles of intellectuals who fostered the positivistic view of the tax expressed by enlightened Castilian circles. This ended up sparking constant mobilisations against its apportionment throughout the entire century,<sup>54</sup> which would be hard to understand in a society that supposedly benefitted from a light, efficient and modern taxation system.

But the land registry was not the only tax that prompted this type of wariness and demands for its abolition. The definitive establishment of the liquor monopoly in 1740—after countless moratoria since the 1720s—sparked an active response among Catalan retailers, who ended up getting the Crown to change it for an equivalent tax in 1746. Something similar occurred with the well-entrenched textile tax, which was formally abolished and transformed into an indirect tax of equivalent value on the entry of local and colonial goods and raw materials in 1770 thanks to an active petition campaign initiated by the Barcelona Board of Trade.<sup>55</sup>

### **The customs reform, the gradual occupation of the peninsular market and the liberalisation of trade with the Spanish Americas**

These last taxes affected the Catalan economy's most active economic sectors, like exports of spirits and the production and sale of textiles in both foreign markets and the growing peninsular and American markets. Therefore, it is not surprising that the increasingly important presence of Catalan goods and merchants around the monarchy's European and American territories throughout the eighteenth century has also been identified as a clear consequence of the measures taken by the Bourbon governments.

Authors like Guillermo Pérez Sarrión have staunchly defended the existence of conscious, active action by the 'enlightened' royal authorities, who pursued a mercantilist programme clearly aimed at achieving the national interests, which coordinated harmoniously with the local commercial networks that had cropped up around the monarchy to organise a 'domestic' market and thus achieve overall economic growth.<sup>56</sup> In this view, this policy would ultimately have given the Catalan economic agents a competitive edge.<sup>57</sup>

It is an undisputable fact that muleteers and merchants from around Catalonia spread their network of shops and agents all over the Peninsula in the eighteenth century, embarking on the gradual 'colonisation' of the different

provincial markets and displacing the local and foreign competition. Just like with tax reform, the analysis of these commercial dynamics has led to clearly distinct conclusions. In this case, the source of the historiographic disagreement lies in the factors behind this process. Was it those Catalan merchants' ability to offer more attractive prices and goods than their competitors? Or the existence of an absolutist state with Enlightenment-inspired governments that harnessed their lawmaking capacity to create a captive market open to their arrangements?<sup>58</sup>

The defenders of this second option tend to claim that the customs reform during the reign of Philip V had eliminated the majority of trade barriers among the provinces, which enhanced the competitiveness of Catalan goods.<sup>59</sup> This encompasses the disappearance of most internal customs or '*puertos secos*' among the different provinces in the monarchy after 1717, once again except for the Basque provinces and Navarra.<sup>60</sup> Thus, there were no longer any hurdles to slow down the movement of goods from the territories of the former Crown of Aragon to Castile, and vice-versa. Nonetheless, this reform did not entail a unification of the tariffs on foreign goods, which were traditionally taxed at a much lower rate in Catalonia than in its neighbouring territories.<sup>61</sup> To allay these differences, the Crown decided to instate two compensatory or '*de adeudo*' customs to equalise the territorial tax burden in Fraga and Tortosa in 1742, while Fraga continued to collect taxes for imports of Aragonese wool to Catalonia, despite the formal disappearance of the customs tax.<sup>62</sup>

Another factor that has been highlighted as particularly beneficial was the common naturalization of all the subjects of the Catholic King in all the territories under his sovereignty. This was a secondary consequence of the implementation of the Nueva Planta decree that was essential in order for Castilian officials to occupy posts within the new administration. Despite the purported benefits of this measure, there were numerous attempts throughout the century to revive it.<sup>63</sup>

As Jaume Torras claims, despite these measures' undeniably positive effects on Catalan exports to peninsular markets, it is difficult to assess the volume and particularities of this growth in trade given that there is no trade balance that would enable us to compare its evolution over the centuries and the scope of the impact of the customs reform.<sup>64</sup> Likewise, as the outstanding studies by Torras and Assumpta Muset have demonstrated, the key to Catalonia's mercantile success in the inland peninsular regions was the establishment of tight networks of muleteers, shopkeepers and intermediaries whose initiative and internal organisation made it possible to embark on commercial initiatives while minimising risk through multi-investment, thanks to the associative culture of the 'company', as discussed above.<sup>65</sup> These tools were essential to deal with the difficulties of operating in all the markets that were already taken, given that the abolition of the customs tax did not suddenly shut down the local commercial networks existing around the territory or the networks

with foreign mercantile communities that had been in place in Castilian villages and cities for centuries.<sup>66</sup>

Despite these practices, by the late seventeenth century some Catalans had also moved to Seville and Cádiz to participate in the lucrative colonial trade within the monopolistic constraints that organised it at the time.<sup>67</sup> Catalan trading communities in Andalusian cities were on the rise during the mid-eighteenth century—thanks to Catalonia's swift economic recovery after the War of the Spanish Succession—and became the main platform organising Catalan trade with the Indies prior to liberalisation.<sup>68</sup> This is demonstrated by the activities and networks of agents of the Reial Companyia de Barcelona in Cádiz and the Indies; this company, which Josep Maria Oliva has studied monographically, had been established by royal privilege in 1758.<sup>69</sup> With the liberalisation of trade after the 1778 *Reglamento*, the pace of trade exchanges rose precipitously, generating a very high volume of commercial traffic between the Catalan coastal villages and the large commercial ports in the Indies.<sup>70</sup>

The increasing importance of this American demand has led different historians to point to it as yet further proof of the benefits of the Bourbon monarchy's enlightened reformism, regarding it as one of the cornerstones explaining the success of Catalonia's commercial and productive economy. However, this opinion is not free of controversy.<sup>71</sup> One of the authors who is the most critical of this interpretation is Josep Maria Delgado, who since the 1980s has been proving that the power of the American market was not a net, sustained incentive for the demand for Catalan products, and that in the last quarter of the eighteenth century it trailed far behind the demand from the peninsular market.<sup>72</sup> Likewise, Delgado does not mince words in claiming that the main motivation explaining the liberalisation of trade with the Americas was simply the Crown's desperate need to increase its tax collections, and that the positive effects of this demand were notably affected by both the quick saturation of the market and the constant military crises with Great Britain.<sup>73</sup> Finally, even though he acknowledges the importance of the need for ships for the new trade with the Americas in the spectacular rise of the Catalan shipbuilding industry in the eighteenth century, he has relativised its role as the main factor driving the sector and instead stressed the transformations that had occurred prior to 1778.<sup>74</sup> Likewise, the studies by Josep Maria Fradera, Pere Pascual and Francesc Valls have asserted that the period when the American market had the most influence on Catalonia's economic growth and industrial transformation was not the first liberalisation of colonial trade but instead after the Peninsular War and the first wave of independence among the continental viceroalties.<sup>75</sup>

Beyond all these observations, prior to 1778 the American ports were undeniably an attractive destination for manufactured goods and products of all kinds that embarked from the coasts of Catalonia. The studies by Vilar, Oliva, Segarra and Valls have highlighted the importance

of the American market in covering an increasingly large part of the demand for Catalan wine and spirits not meant for northern Europe, as well as exports of sumptuary or luxury goods like lace, silk and accessories like gloves, hats and stockings, among others.<sup>76</sup>

Nonetheless, the goods that have been given the most historiographic attention are those related to cotton manufacturing, particularly the calico sector.<sup>77</sup> In the opinion of authors like Antonio García-Baquero and Carlos Martínez Shaw, the American demand must have become a key factor in explaining the consolidation of the cotton printing industry in Catalonia.<sup>78</sup> However, Josep Maria Delgado defends the need to attenuate the possible benefits of trade liberalisation with the Americas in this field of manufacturing and even notes that the incentives to quickly supply the new markets slowed down the manufacturers' investment in new technologies to improve spinning and weaving, the key factors in the sector's technological transformation. To take advantage of the new demand, the Catalan cotton manufactures must have focused on the printing and finishing phases, preferring to purchase raw cotton or linen fabrics made more cheaply abroad.<sup>79</sup>

Between these two positions are the more considered interpretations of Jordi Maluquer, Jordi Nadal and especially Àlex Sánchez. Sánchez does not share this view of the colonial demand as a hindrance to the calico factory owners' investments in areas like spinning, although he does note excess prioritisation of the printing of raw imported fabrics, which existed prior to the liberalisation of the American ports. At the same time, he also claims that the action of the American demand stemmed from a gradual differentiation between large and small factories according to either their capacity to produce equally for the markets on both the Peninsula and the Indies or their need to concentrate exclusively on one of them.<sup>80</sup> Likewise, while the production of printed linen cloth must clearly have been affected by the vicissitudes of the colonial market, cotton manufacturing itself must have been left outside this dynamic because of its closer ties to the domestic market.<sup>81</sup> The area within this sector that was likely affected the most by the colonial market was the increasing imports of American raw cotton to fuel Barcelona's factories, as demonstrated in Sánchez's studies with Francesc Valls and James Thompson.<sup>82</sup>

### **The protection of the new cotton industry through prohibitions and privileges**

Besides the way the opening of the American markets served to spur the demand by increasing Catalan cotton manufacturing, in the eighteenth century this sector was heavily affected by different state initiatives that have been thoroughly studied and described by Thomson.<sup>83</sup> The first was the decrees banning imports of finished fabrics from China and other points in Asia, which were instated in 1718 and reinforced ten years later with the ban on the entry of calico or fabrics printed to imitate Orient-

tal ones from other European countries, which formed the true bulk of the goods that had been inundating the Catalan and peninsular markets for decades.<sup>84</sup> As noted by the vast majority of scholars of Catalan calico manufacturing, these prohibitions created a market opportunity and the right legal framework to encourage the creation of the first fabric printing factories in the 1730s.<sup>85</sup>

Secondly, virtually all the individuals and companies that spearheaded the creation of these new cotton establishments asked the king for protection through the granting of franchises and privileges, which could range from an array of tax exemptions to assigning them the status of royal factories. While this policy started as a series of private initiatives by the pioneers in the sector, and the Crown became somewhat receptive to it after 1741, the requests started to be made by the corporation and affect all the active manufacturers after the creation of the Board of Trade (1758) and the Reial Companyia de Filats de Cotó de Barcelona (1772).<sup>86</sup> Through the convergence of these two spheres of state intervention, cotton manufacturing in general and the production of calico in particular rose considerably throughout the century. By the 1780s, Barcelona had more than 100 factories operating.<sup>87</sup>

What the royal provisions did not create was the large demand for printed fabric that fuelled the orders from these new factories. Beyond the considerations expressed in the previous section on the peninsular and American demand, since the late seventeenth and early eighteenth centuries, the potency of the Catalan market itself was what had created the incentives needed for active, influential businessmen like Esteve Canals and Bernat Glòria to decide to invest in this new manufactured good.<sup>88</sup> On the other hand, the effects of the 1718 and 1728 prohibitions were particularly intermittent in the ensuing decades; the first major suspension of this policy came in 1760, and it was reinstated with the pragmatics of 1770 and 1771. This intermittency came with a major rise in taxes, up to 20% of the price on imports of foreign printed fabrics and spun cotton and raw cotton in 1760, which remained in place on raw materials with the new prohibitions in 1770 and 1771.<sup>89</sup> This protectionist policy was notably less intense than its counterpart in England but more active than the Dutch policy and far from the iron-clad prohibitions on both the trade and manufacture of printed cotton fabrics in France.<sup>90</sup>

On the other hand, it is important to note that the franchises and privileges that the Crown awarded to Catalan calico factories until corporate action consolidated were always in response to the private initiatives of local businessmen or manufacturers. This distinguishes them clearly from other royal manufactures promoted and financed directly by the Crown, such as the *Real Fábrica de Hilados y Tejidos de Algodón* in Ávila created in 1788.<sup>91</sup> Likewise, this grassroots initiative also lay behind the creation of bodies to coordinate and defend the common interests of all the manufacturers against the state's changing policies, such as the aforementioned Reial Companyia

de Filats de Cotó.<sup>92</sup> As we shall see in the last section of this article, many of the relational dynamics between the state and the Catalan productive forces described above were also prominent in the military demand generated by the Bourbon army.

### Provisioning the army as a way to reinvest and redistribute wealth

The role of the army and the land registry in Catalonia's eighteenth-century economy are two of the factors that have received the most recent historiographic attention. Despite references to manufacturing for the troops in multiple previous works, the first Catalan historian who monographically addressed this topic was Manuel Arranz.<sup>93</sup> In this decade, Eduard Martí has examined different aspects of the military demand in Catalonia between 1715 and 1725, while the author of this article has conducted the first comprehensive study of the nature and effects of this demand throughout the entire reign of Philip V.<sup>94</sup> Thanks to this research and the set of works that have examined this particular field within Catalonia's eighteenth-century economy, today we are quite well-versed on it, especially the first half of the century.<sup>95</sup>

As Jaume Carrera, Joan Mercader and Manuel Arranz have noted, the significant increase in the military presence in Catalonia after the War of the Spanish Succession prompted an important flow of demand for economic and material resources to ensure their sustenance, which was clearly handled by a more or less extensive group of Catalan suppliers.<sup>96</sup> The primary strategic objectives of this contingent of soldiers, always hovering between 15,000 and 25,000 troops, were to control the territory, to politically and militarily manage much of the Catalan territorial administration and, most importantly, to become the spearhead of Philip V's aggressive Mediterranean policy.<sup>97</sup> Starting in 1715, Catalonia became the leading logistics platform for the preparation and provisioning of Spanish military expeditions aimed at recovering the Italian and North-African territories that had been seized from the monarchy by the Treaties of Utrecht, including Sardinia, Sicily, Naples and the enclave of Oran.<sup>98</sup>

The notable intensity of this foreign policy meant that the state desperately had to cover the financial and material needs of the expeditionary armies quickly, effectively and especially efficiently.<sup>99</sup> To do so, it did not hesitate to resort to this motley assortment of Catalan individuals and companies that had the economic and organisational wherewithal needed to successfully fulfil the orders and capital transfers required by the military administration. Beyond prior experience provisioning the armies of Charles II and the allied contingents during the War of the Spanish Succession, the most immediate roots of this relationship was the active participation of certain prominent members of the Barcelona and Mataró bourgeoisie in provisioning the army of the Two Crowns during the siege of Barcelona (1713-1714).<sup>100</sup>

This evidence has been the underpinning of a particular historiographic view that defends the role of the Bourbon army as a factor in the recovery and considerable stimulus of the Catalan economy during the first half of the century. This stimulus affected vast swaths of the country's manufacturing industries in general, like construction, carpentry and lumber, weapons manufacturing and drapery and leather working.<sup>101</sup> Furthermore, given that the garrison's military spending was the main end-point of the resources earned from taxes in Catalonia, the army has also been identified as a tool for raising these local resources and then redistributing and investing them in the country through logistics orders and the soldiers' private payments to a range of different local services with their stipends.<sup>102</sup>

Indeed, the business stream coming from the military demand was clearly important at different points in the century and notably benefitted certain local economic stakeholders, who were able to work steadily. However, as noted in the previous sections, these general assumptions about the overall positive effects of Bourbon state policies on the economy tend to require a few significant nuances, especially after further exploring each particular sphere of action beyond apriorisms and mechanistic logics.

As some eighteenth-century intellectuals noted, that demand could not have been fulfilled by Catalan suppliers had they not had the financial, productive and organisational tools needed to meet it. Likewise, the possible profits from this demand were not always steady, nor did they affect all the individuals participating in it equally.<sup>103</sup> Comparative studies of the records of contracts from the quartermaster and the large orders managed at court that were fulfilled by Catalan companies show the extreme irregularity of this type of business, which was particularly associated with the occasional high-demand peaks associated with the preparations for military expeditions, followed by periods with little or no activity. Likewise, the general '*asientos*' or large, stable contracts—like the ones on naval rigging, uniforms or food—tended to be negotiated at court, which made them accessible only to the most active and economically successful Catalan contractors. On the other hand, over time the provincial military authorities tended to concentrate the demand in larger contracts that would go to an increasingly restricted number of large, trusted contractors. This substantially limited more modest contractors' access to this type of business, leading to the producers' gradual subordination to increasingly privileged management and administrative agents. The majority of large military contracts in Catalonia came precisely within this restricted market between the 1740s and 1770s.<sup>104</sup>

The fluctuating demand was joined by the extraordinary instability within the Bourbon logistics system caused by the constant changes and mutations in the way the army was provisioned, which shifted from direct administration to outsourcing via private contracts, or a constant mixture of both systems. In fact, one of the fac-

tors that was able to counteract this instability was the considerable continuity of certain local suppliers, who adapted to different changes in model and offered their services to the Crown as either officials/directors or contractors. They were suppliers with enough capital to deal with the constant delays in payments, to offset the shortcomings of the local productive system by importing goods and to withstand the sector's increasing competitiveness. And, with the exception of a few prominent individuals, they also participated in the business of the military demand as yet another investment in a diversified business strategy.<sup>105</sup>

Therefore, the main beneficiaries of this military demand were the more prominent members of Barcelona's commercial sectors—like Milans, Duran, Glòria, Esmandia, Alegre, Gibert and Seguí—as well as several private tradesmen—like Josep Serrat and Francesc Clota—who managed to build major careers as contractors through the accumulation of contracts, collaboration with other suppliers and increasingly close relationships with the local military administration.

Finally, we should note that Catalonia was not the only province in the monarchy that was affected by this demand. Even though most of preparations for the military expeditions in the first three-quarters of the century were done in Catalonia, in both the campaigns to conquer Mallorca (1715), Sardinia (1717), Sicily (1718) and Ceuta (1720) and those in Oran (1732) and Tuscany (1733), the logistics efforts also notably affected other territories, like Valencia, Andalusia, Galicia and the Basque Country.<sup>106</sup> In fact, after the last quarter of the century, Catalan contractors lost control of the leading procurement contracts in favour of the large companies at court, like the *Banco de San Carlos* and the *Cinco Gremios Mayores* of Madrid. Likewise, the Spanish Bourbon army's prime logistics platform was moved to Andalusia to support the increasing military traffic heading to the Americas.<sup>107</sup>

## CONCLUSIONS. ON CORRELATION AND CAUSALITY

Catalonia had definitively embarked upon the path to economic growth before Philip V reached the throne. Its main stimulus—the Atlantic market's demand for wine and spirits—had actually begun to be felt in the 1670s and 1680s. Likewise, the country also had outstanding prior conditions that make it possible for it to profit overall from this major stimulus.

These conditions had been put into place in the previous centuries, such as the reinforcement of emphyteusis as a tool of land access, the figure of the heir and an associational, business and contractualist culture favourable to entrepreneurship. Furthermore, the first productive decentralisation in the Barcelona crown had occurred back in the mid-seventeenth century, along with the development of a progressively hierarchised and well-con-



nected network of cities, despite the shortcomings of land transport. All these transformations, spurred by the wine demand, ended up decisively favouring the capitalisation of rural and urban family economies in large swaths of the country, such that the provisioning markets and the families themselves were able to sustain the major demographic growth that started in the 1720s. Combined with the previous factors, this ended up organising an internal market and an increasing demand for both basic and sumptuary goods which was covered by active, capable local economic stakeholders.

The Bourbon regime implemented the Nueva Planta decrees and all their subsequent laws in this Catalonia. Despite the supposed boon of the new taxation system, the weight of the new taxes coupled with the existing ones was a notable burden on the mistreated and indebted local economies throughout the entire century, even though the reforms in the second half shifted the weight of collections towards indirect taxes on consumption. These changes did not help to lighten the fiscal burden, nor did they offer Catalonia any competitive advantage over the neighbouring provinces. Although the economic upswing enabled this system to be maintained more or less easily, many Catalan municipal economies suffered notably from both the mountains of debt accumulated since before the War of the Spanish Succession and the irregular, uneven practices of the land registry apportionments.<sup>108</sup>

On the other hand, we should note the evidence that the key to commercial success stemmed from the ability and initiative to capture markets, that is, to earn them. Laws and productive facilities like the customs reform and the abolition of local citizenship privileges were measures that could favour or encourage these conquests. Others, like the liberalisation of American trade, were essential in consolidating access to markets in the Indies and thus opened up new business opportunities. However, it is clear that people had to have the capitalisation, organisation and entrepreneurship capacities needed to take advantage of them. Therefore, no matter how effective these reforms were, by themselves they could never have generated the business dynamics of the Catalan commercial companies and their networks of shops and agents in the inland Peninsula and the Americas, nor the ability to successfully compete with local producers or the arrival of foreign goods. This demand continued the dynamics that started based on the domestic market's needs and the Atlantic trade in spirits and wine.

Some of these more economically active individuals were precisely the ones who decided in their investment diversification strategy both to focus on the new cotton goods—taking advantage of the bans on the entry of foreign goods—and to provide the Crown with important services by acting as suppliers and financiers of the King's troops. In this latter sphere, some Catalan economic agents were able to offer the state a competitive option that efficiently and successfully met the urgent needs

stemming from its active military policy. Success in these undertakings levelled the playing field for the granting of deeds, franchises and privileges and the creation of new corporative representation bodies under royal protection.

Therefore, the momentum of the transformations experienced by Catalan society and economy for centuries, driven by the new influence of the Atlantic market, was the cornerstone of Catalan growth in the eighteenth century. The measures taken by the governments of the Bourbon monarchy had a clear impact on this growth, but their potential benefits were only useful inasmuch as the Catalan economic stakeholders' own initiative enabled them to take advantage of and condition them.

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