

# HABSBURG MONARCHY, EIGHTEENTH CENTURY-1918

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## 1. Coverage

Information is available from the early eighteenth century to the end of the First World War. Coherent time series for the whole state (albeit taking into account smaller territorial changes) are available for the years 1790 to 1918.<sup>2</sup> From 1792 on, the series is quite homogeneous, although occasional geographical changes affect the coherence of the time series: Western Galicia was incorporated in 1796 and left again in 1809, Salzburg was incorporated in 1815, Tyrol in 1825;<sup>3</sup> Cracow joined in 1846, Dalmatia was incorporated in 1880 (together with other smaller territories exempt from the joint customs union such as the Adriatic Port cities and Brody).

Between 1720 and 1789 several trade statistics exist either for single provinces or politically defined subunits of the composite Habsburg Monarchy in Central Europe. Among them, the trade statistics for the Hungarian territories are the most complete, covering the years 1733–1739, 1741, 1744, 1748, 1752, and 1767–1780, 1783–1784 before being integrated into the general trade statistics of the Habsburg Monarchy from 1790.

In 1775, the Bohemian and Austrian provinces formed a customs union and from 1776 on, trade accounts for the whole union were produced. These statistics (the so called *Merkantiltabellen*) are available for most years between 1776 and 1789 (there is, however, a gap between 1779 and 1782).

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2. However, it must be said that a homogeneous flow of statistical data was not produced before 1792, rather than 1790 as has sometimes been claimed (e.g. Otruba 1950: 4).

3. Together with Venice and Milan, although they have been disclosed separately and can be thus discounted. They left when they were integrated into the independent Italian state in 1859 and 1866 respectively.

Another series starting earlier, although less continuous, is available for Bohemia for the years 1720, 1723, 1732–35, 1755, as well as for Moravia and Silesia (or Austrian Silesia respectively after 1742).

Scattered and fragmentary information exists for several Austrian provinces (such as Carinthia between 1756 and 1780).

For the Adriatic port cities, most notably Trieste, there are separate statistics registering maritime trade between 1746 and 1847, albeit with gaps. In addition statistics for land trade with the Habsburg territories were kept, although full accounts have been found for 1760–65 only. After 1776 these trade flows feature in the trade statistics of the Bohemian and Austrian provinces included in the customs union established in 1775 and were separately disclosed in the final account up to 1789.

Galicia, annexed upon the First Partition of Poland in 1772, has scattered trade statistics for 1783 and 1784 as well as for 1787. However, the former years register only trade with the Bohemian and Austrian provinces included in the customs union and the latter omits trade with the Western provinces after Galicia was incorporated in the customs union in 1785.

## 2. Documents

The data is usually available in the form of detailed trade accounts, but the original data of customs registers have been preserved in sporadic cases.

Each of these accounts was organized as a balance of trade recording individual commodity import and export flows, in both volume and value, although not all statistics always register both units of measurement. Totals were calculated for each product group and for the sum total of trade. Separate documents listing the import and export values were also drafted; they also include the balance of trade for the corresponding year. Balances on customs revenue were also drafted.

## 3. Institutional setting

Before 1776 local institutions drafted the single trade accounts, such as the Bohemian Council of Trade (*Kommerz- or Merkantilkollegium*) or the Habormaster's Office in Trieste (*Hafenkapitanat*). After 1776 a specific section of the Accountancy Office (*Banco-Hofbuchhaltung*) was responsible for compiling the trade accounts together

with the short-lived Court Auditing Chamber (*Hofrechenkammer*), the customs administration (*Zollregie, Bancogefällenadministration*) and the provincial governors' offices (*Landesgubernien*). In 1828 a Central Commission of Statistics (*Statistische Zentralkommission*) was founded.

The Bohemian Council of Trade was an advisory board responsible to the Court Commercial Council (*Kommerzienkollegium*) in Vienna, while the Trieste Harbormaster's Office was subordinated to the Supreme Commercial Intendancy (*Hauptkommerzialintendenz; Suprema Intendenza Commerciale*) between 1731 and 1776. In turn, the institutions responsible for compiling the central trade statistics of both the customs union and the whole state (from 1790 on) were subordinated to the Court Chamber (*Hofkammer*) and for a short period to the ephemeral central governance institution (the so called *Hofstelle*). Only the provincial governors remained under the Court Chancellery (*Hofkanzlei*), although they were incorporated into the *Hofstelle* as well.

#### 4. Motivations

The earliest provincial trade accounts for Bohemia were compiled in order to calculate a balance of trade to help establish to what degree Bohemia's trade was active or passive. Subsequently, this information was used in order to settle conflicts over the external customs policy between regional textile producers seeking protection from abroad and merchants pressing for the removal of trade barriers.

The close connection of these statistics with mercantilist and cameralist ideas on the balance of trade is characteristic of the whole period between 1720 and at least 1815. At this time, the governmental authorities including the monarch made use of the trade accounts in order to devise their commercial policies. This was particularly true during the "protectionist period" from 1784 to the 1830s. In addition, there was a fiscal interest in customs revenue although this seems to have been less important than the policy motive.

#### 5. Methods

The original information was derived from the customs posts on the borders as well as customs posts within the provinces. The quantities and values registered were based on declarations, although the authorities occasionally checked these declarations by measuring and weighing the commodities. In some cases, discrepancies were reported. However, this issue has not been researched in detail. Hence, more work has to be done on (a) how the customs administration worked on

the local and regional level and (b) how the information was subsequently transferred to the central authorities. The sources I have found so far reveal that data were cross-checked only at the central level (by the Accountancy Office, the Auditing Chamber and the monarch himself) by comparing customs revenue with the trade statistics (see Kaps 2015). In some cases, provincial governors also raised doubts about the credibility of the collected data.

In general the trade accounts provide a credible representation of the flow of goods. However, there are several issues that need to be considered when analysing these figures. The main methodological shortcoming of these statistics is the measurement of prices, both in their spatial and their temporal dimensions.

The existing literature (e.g. Otruba 1950: 4; Hassinger 1964: 74-77) assumes that state-wide statistics are more reliable than provincial ones, as the former were compiled according to unified standards that avoid some of the regional biases. The point may be questioned as the Habsburg Empire can hardly be assessed as an integrated national economy. The eighteenth-century Habsburg Monarchy was a fragmented economic space with administrative differences and geographic constraints that drastically hindered market integration until well into the 1760s and 1770s. Hassinger (1964: 76) demonstrates this when comparing Tyrol's trade statistics with those of the customs union for 1778/79. Hassinger argues that the different prices applied by the authorities of both customs entities resulted in a pronounced overestimation of Tyrol's external trade flows. However, as the author acknowledges, Tyrol's prices for colonial goods reflect market prices far better than data from the customs union, whereas the difference in wheat and rye prices simply reflect market price divergences between the two entities. Thus, wheat price in L'viv, the capital of Galicia, amounted to 60.5% (1775-84) and 69.3% (1785-90) of the Viennese price. If the same type of discrepancies existed for other products and regions, this would imply that integrating the single region statistics of the Habsburg Monarchy into a unique document for the whole state constructed according to the Viennese methodology might have distorted considerably the estimated trade volume (Kaps 2015).

Standardization and administrative centralization do not necessarily improve the quality and reliability of data. This point requires further research and systematic analysis of prices applied by the regional trade councils before 1775, on the one hand, and prices

applied by the Customs and Bank Administration between 1776 and 1827, on the other hand.

Apart from different regional price levels, one also needs to take into account the matter of price changes over time. Here the problem is not that the statistics were quantified according to current or fixed prices, but rather that the authorities mixed both methods. This had to do with the practice of the customs administration: every time a new customs tariff was implemented, new prices were adopted, causing severe distortions in relative prices. For instance, new prices were fixed when establishing the customs union in 1775, and again following the introduction of the protective tariffs in 1784 and 1788, and also during the period of state-wide statistics in 1803 and 1810, but only for those goods for which modified customs tolls were adopted (Zizius 1811: 170; ÖstA, FHKA, NHK, Kommerz, 144, 39 ex Aug. 1786, folio 739.).

As the data obtained by comparing the customs base export prices with the average market prices between 1782 and 1784 indicate, the difference between the two price levels for a wide range of goods was rather limited, with the notable exception of woollen goods, seeds, and linen. Hence, the impact of introducing new prices on cumulative trade values seems to have been rather small in the short run, although it did influence the value of some individual goods. This preliminary finding is consistent with the assumed low level of inflation in the course of the eighteenth century. That changed in the 1780s and 1790s, thus also augmenting the impact of adapted customs base prices.

The problem is exacerbated by the fact that prices for imports and exports were adapted separately, thus producing a bias when measuring import and export values. This bias was further reinforced by the greater emphasis the authorities laid on registering imports rather than exports, due notably to customs exemptions for the export of several commodities. The difference in import value deriving from these distortions was estimated as amounting to 5,503,803. fl 11 kr in the year 1803, that is, 12% of the total balance (Zizius 1811: 170-171).

Taking these shortcomings into account, it can be seen that Otruba's (1950) compilation of the official trade statistic is of limited use, because the series ignores the price changes and continues until 1839. Hence, it fails to take into account the parallel set of data compiled by the Commission for Statistics starting in 1831. The total trade volume in monetary values clearly demonstrates the impact of adopted prices on the development of the Habsburg Monarchy's external trade, putting into context the pronounced rise of imports in

1804 and their sharp decline in 1811 – both movements seem to have been influenced by price changes. More information about the administrative setting of prices is needed to construct a satisfactory time series, hence the *Banco-Hofbuchhaltung's* administration files need to be systematically researched.

To correct these distortions, one should take into account both the temporal discontinuity of price adaptations and its selective scope. The first issue is quite difficult to address since no price series exists for a wide range of products, a fact that has prevented the calculation of inflation rates for the eighteenth century. The only price index available starts in 1800 and runs to 1913 for a few Austrian cities (Vienna, Innsbruck, Linz, Salzburg, Graz) (Mühlpeck et al. 1979). Sources for the eighteenth century are scarce because the official price statistics only list grain prices starting with five-year averages in 1775 and yearly values from 1796. Price series for other foodstuffs were only registered from 1828 on. Series of prices for the cities of Vienna (Pribram 1938), Cracow (Górkiewicz 1950), and L'viv (Hoszowski 1934) with a wider temporal coverage were published, but they list the prices for a limited range of products only.

The construction of a complete series of prices would have to address two different issues. First, the prices for the products, whose prices were fixed may be adjusted by calculating an individual price increase index and applying it to them. Second, for products which are registered in official price series or in the source editions just mentioned (Hoszowski 1934; Pribram 1938), these price indexes may be used. However, additional information is probably necessary, e.g. in international price statistics from border regions and states. Thus, the bias apparent in the official trade statistics could only be corrected by a very time-intensive approach.

Further shortcomings of the statistics such as the omission of trading partners and transit trade should be mentioned here, although they do not question the reliability of the quantitative material, but limit the scope of analysis.

## 6. Information

The accounts register all commodities, classifying external and internal trade flows separately and summing them up in 21 main groups of commodities (*capi*). As mentioned before, these categories were stable up to the reorganization of the trade statistic in 1827/28. Only the sporadically available customs extracts give more detailed

information on traders or transporters of the goods and their places of origin and destination.

The information on trade flows was usually recorded in weight/volume/quantity and in money values. Prices were given in Austrian Florins (Gulden) and Kreuzer in the CM standard (CM = *Conventionsmünze*, 1 Gulden = 60 Kreuzer, valid between 1753 and 1857). Hassinger (1964) states that Viennese prices were used from 1776 on, but the method of establishing commodity prices has not been studied so far. Scattered evidence suggests that prices were determined by the Accountancy Office. It seems that the latter tried to mitigate local prices with international prices. This is certainly an area in which in-depth studies are badly needed.

Quantities were predominantly given in hundredweights (*Zentner*) and pounds (*Pfund*), but, depending on the product registered, a wide range of quantity measures was used such as the bushel (*Metzen*, *Scheffel*), piece (*Stück*), pair (*Paar*), dozen (*Dutzend*), box (*Kiste*), bolt (*Ballen*), cask (*Fassl*, *Fass*), or bucket (*Eimer*). Weight was given in gross value (so called *sporco*).

From at least 1788 on, the classification had to be made according to a detailed instruction manual drawn up by the Central Customs Administration in German. This nomenclature listed all goods and their corresponding prices. The number of categories of products used in the statistics differed from year to year. The trade accounts for the Bohemian-Austrian customs union for 1783 and 1784 listed 265 individual goods, summing them up into 41 subgroups and 21 main groups. The statistics for Galicia for 1787, in turn, registered 864 products, although this large number is in part due to different attributes of some products. Trading partners were registered starting in 1820, but the data mainly reflect the borders crossed by commodities leaving and entering the territory and therefore do not always identify the real trade partners.

## 7. Availability

A detailed record of Habsburg trade statistics before 1831 does not exist in print form. While Kaltenstadler (1967, 1968), Erceg (1970), and Panjek (2003) give a partial compilation of commodity data in their works, they were more interested in the aggregate data on trade volume. Hassinger (1964) provides data for the Habsburg dominions as a whole, but he focuses on the aggregate level and calculates trade structures broken down into raw materials, foodstuffs, and manufac-

tures. Complete accounts have only been published for Bohemia in 1720 and 1723 (Pribram 1898) and Hungary for the second half of the eighteenth century (Wellmann 1984, using already published sources). In turn, Otruba's compilation of foreign trade statistics for the whole Monarchy, covering the period 1790–1839, gives the values of trade for the 21 groups of commodities recorded by the Habsburg administration, aggregate values by single provinces and, from 1820 on, for single external trading partners. The statistics of the Customs Union between 1776 and 1789 have not been published at all and they have not been digitized either. For single years, I have collected data for the Customs Union (1783, 1784), Galicia (1783, 1787), and the whole Monarchy (1791, 1800, 1807) in Excel files. However, for an in-depth analysis original accounts still have to be accessed in order to recompile data. The scattered character of the statistics before 1775 and 1790 respectively means that this task implies accessing a broad range of sources in different archives. For regional statistics, this means making use not only of the Financial and Court Chamber Archive (Finanz- und Hofkammerarchiv, FHKA) section within the Austrian State Archives (Österreichisches Staatsarchiv, ÖStA) in Vienna, for accessing the statistics for Bohemia. A range of regional archives such as the archives of the Austrian provinces (Landesarchive) have to be accessed in order to collect complementary information. For Bohemia, Czech archives will have to be accessed, while the data for Trieste are stored in the Trieste State Archive (Archivio di Stato di Trieste, ASTr) for the years 1752–1770 and the Austrian State Archive, where the much used source for 1760–65 is stored, published in particular by Erceg (1970).

In turn, for the years after 1775 sources are mainly stored in the Finance and Court Chamber section of the Austrian State Archives, in particular the series from 1790 is accessible in a homogeneous collection of sources, albeit with gaps for some years. The Hungarian statistics are stored in the Austrian State Archives in Vienna. The accounts from 1831 have been published in print and are accessible in the Library of Austria's Central Office of Statistics, currently named *Statistik Austria*.

## 8. Research questions

So far studies have used either aggregate data or numbers of single commodities to investigate the structural dimensions of the Habsburg Monarchy's trade. Thus, most research has been dedicated to grouping the traded items in order to construct a structural balance of imports

and exports. While much effort has been made here to understand the quality of commodities and original nomenclature, hardly any attempts have been made to correct trade balances for their multiple biases mentioned in this questionnaire. Similarly, so far no studies have been published trying to contribute to the Habsburg Monarchy's balance of trade by using trade statistics of other European countries, in particular neighbouring states.

Studies like the ones on Hungarian-Polish trade relations in 1764 (Lech/Stepkowski 1988) and on Polish-Austrian trade (Kazusek 2007) indicate the benefits that might be gained by using a comparative approach and cross-checking trade data from the Habsburg Empire against data of its trading partners.

International comparative studies, so far largely lacking and suggested by Kazusek (2007) for Polish-Austrian trade, could be a first step towards an integrated European trade history. In the case of the Habsburg Monarchy trade with the Ottoman Empire, Italy, Poland, and also the integration in overseas trade via Hamburg, Danzig, and the Italian ports could be promising research topics.

Nevertheless, the most urgent task would be to systematically compile original data in a dataset, starting from regional trade accounts and finishing with the better accessible and organized statistics of the late eighteenth century. Once this data collection is completed, the multiple corrections, addressing the problems of nomenclature, prices, weights, etc., might be undertaken. In particular, an attempt might be made to calculate foreign trade balances from regional data, although with great caution concerning the points mentioned earlier in this questionnaire. In fact, this calculation needs a more in-depth analysis. Only in the last step should use be made of statistics from different countries in order to cross-check the credibility of data, but also to add to the geographical dimension of Habsburg Central Europe's external trade, which is not recorded in most of the original statistics.

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