

NORWAY, 1731-1795

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1. Coverage

This questionnaire discusses the historical trade statistics available in Norway. They can be found for each of the 27 or so ports (the number varies through the period). They are not available for the national level. Only the towns of Christiania (Oslo), Bergen, Trondheim, and Kristiansand had full import and export rights. Smaller towns were limited to trading only with other parts of the dual Kingdom of Denmark-Norway, though some (those along the southern and eastern coast) had extended privileges to export timber and to some degree to import goods.

The statistics are available from 1731 to 1795, however, there are several lacunas for the ports. These are most notable between 1733 and 1750, and 1760 to ca. 1780. After 1795, the trade statistics continue although the record keeping was changed and simplified; the origin/destination of the goods was no longer noted and the goods were increasingly lumped together in categories. From 1828 trade statistics were collected and published by Statistics Norway for the national level. (available on <http://www.ssb.no/a/histstat/publikasjoner/>)

2. Documents

The original data are available as at least 25 shelf meters of ledgers. They describe seagoing trade with other parts of Denmark-Norway, as well as with foreign states and regions. The ledgers are in the Royal Norwegian Archives. All have been scanned, and will be made available in full online in 2014/ 2015.

No synthetic document has survived, either for Norway on its own, or for Denmark-Norway as a state. It may be possible to recreate an estimate of the balance of trade using import/export values from harbors with such rights.

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3. Institutional setting

The data was collected by the Generaltollkammeret. This was the Danish-Norwegian customs commissioner. The central office was located in Copenhagen, with representatives in ports throughout the country. It was responsible for collecting the state's customs duties. For parts of the eighteenth century, most notably ca. 1755 to the 1780s, customs (and tax) collection was farmed out to private collectors in the different Norwegian regions. Data for these years are largely lacking because customs records were destroyed or the customs revenue not reported in detail.

4. Motivation

The primary consideration behind the collection of the original data was to provide an overview of the flow of goods by sea, chiefly to and from foreign states. Tax was levied on trade with foreign states. The data collected thus provide an overview of the total revenue from imports and exports. Customs duties on domestic trade were largely removed from the 1730s onwards, however, a consumption tax had to be paid on all domestic goods arriving at a port. Both values and amounts are noted for goods traded with foreign states, while only quantities were noted for all goods

5. Method

The data were based on declarations at the port and inspection by customs officials. Separate books were kept for officials responsible for weighing and measuring. In this way, the state tried to control and limit illegal trade through parallel checks. This was insufficient to catch illegal trade, and for this reason care should be taken when using the data.

Calculating the balance of domestic trade is difficult since the value of the goods traded is not noted. The make-up of the goods traded domestically nevertheless enables the identification of more overall trends.

6. Information

Each ledger covers one year of incoming or outgoing sea trade for the respective ports. Most ledgers are organized in the same way; starting with (a) a chronological list, sorted by month, of the ships arriving/ departing and what they contained. This is followed by (b) a

summary extract of the amount and value (of that traded with foreign places) of goods. These are plotted in columns for origins/destinations noted as states. Then (c) a “ports of call” list indicating each ship’s previous and next destination, its owner and captain, as well as its size. Also noted are tables summing up confiscations of contraband, totaling general and more specific tolls (e.g. on timber exports, coffee imports, or for financing lighthouses).

Both values and quantities are indicated, though it is not yet known how prices were computed. Studies of grain imports in the eighteenth century indicate that the values used for grain in the customs records were based on monthly average sales prices in the port. It is not known whether this was also the case for other goods. The domestic trade data could draw on the values provided by the trade data for foreign countries. This is nevertheless fraught with difficulties, as frequently the goods were not directly comparable.

A wide range of units of measurement was used. There are no overall categories of goods, only a running list.

The country of origin is noted in several harbors, though in many cases foreign ports are combined as “foreign”. The name of the foreign ports of entry are not listed for the specific goods, but can be found in the “ports of call” list. The export and import data are only available for individual ports.

7. Availability

The original material is stored at the National Archives of Norway. Large sections of the material are presently being scanned and will become available online at: <http://arkivverket.no/Digitalarkivet>.

The Historiske toll- og skipsanløpslister project is transcribing a selection of the customs records and making them available in a database <http://toll.lokalhistorie.no/>. So far data for the ports of Christiania (Oslo), Bergen, Trondheim, Kristiansand, Tønsberg, and Risør are available transcribed in a database online for the years 1786, 1788, 1790, 1792, and 1794, but more will be put online in 2015. Also trade statistics for 1835 are available as part of the database. The ultimate objective is to have transcribed the summary tables of the goods for all Norwegian ports in the years 1731, 1756, 1786, and 1794 by the summer 2015. The database will contain full transcriptions of the data, however, the spelling of the goods names will be modernized to contemporary Norwegian, and, funding permitting, also English. This will make the database a better teaching aid for school history

teachers, as requested by the educational institutions collaborating on the project.

8. Research questions

The data have so far been used to explore the economic consequences of Norway's constitution and change of union in 1814 for the development of Christiania and Bergen. By comparing the two towns' trade in the 1780/90s and in 1835 it became clear that Bergen, which in the eighteenth century was the dominant trading town, was overtaken by Christiania in the wake of the changes caused by the events of 1814. The data have also been used to study how the Norwegian timber trade adapted to the new international conditions brought about by the end of the Napoleonic wars.

The database has also been used in a PhD thesis studying the spread of British textiles in Norway. A study of urban theater in the late eighteenth century has also used the values of goods in the database to compare theater prices and expenses. Also, biologists have used it to study the spread of different animals. This is done through mapping changes in the make-up of fur and hide exports.

The wealth of data available in the records opens up several lines of study – regional, national, European, and global – into trade and economic development in the eighteenth century. Examples of lines of study that are possible are the development of and change in bilateral trade relations between Norway and other countries. This would be especially fruitful if combined with trade data from other countries. Studies of European market integration may also be possible using the values put on goods in the different countries. More general trends such as the spread of consumer fashions and a possible consumer society can also be studied by following a selection of goods in several countries. Local variations in these trends may also be identified through the trade data.

The wealth of data available in these records offers interested researchers many opportunities to study the Norwegian economy both in a national and international context. Studies can cover, for example, bilateral trade or Norway's consumption patterns. The material also enables the study of wider issues such as mapping the spread of consumption, or even changing fauna.

9. Bibliography

9.1. Primary sources

The National Archives of Norway, Generaltollkammeret

9.2. Secondary works publishing and commenting on the data

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9.3. Secondary works using the data

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