

SPAIN, 1717-1827

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1. Coverage

This questionnaire refers to trade statistics available for Spain from 1717 to 1827. Spain's colonial trade can be quantified at some levels of aggregation for 1717-1820 and 1827. Spain's foreign (and overall) trade in this period is far more poorly documented, and only for occasional years in the 1780s and in 1792, 1795, 1826, and 1827.

Earlier Spanish trade statistics for 1504-1700 do not allow for credible estimates of import and export values: see the major works by Chaunu, Lorenzo Sanz, and García Fuentes. Relatively detailed and homogeneous trade accounts, covering both colonial and foreign trade, were published in scattered years after 1827, and annually since 1850. The meaning and the reliability of the official trade values in these documents have been a subject of controversy. Also note that all former Spanish colonies except Cuba, Puerto Rico and the Philippine islands had become independent by 1826.

2. Documents

The documents covering Spain's colonial trade include (A) cargo inventories for convoyed fleets and individual ships; (B) the occasional *Balanza* (synthetic documents itemizing import and export quantities and/or values by commodities and geographic areas); and (C) certain tax proceeds including those from consular duties. The documents covering Spain's foreign trade include some contemporary publications and the occasional *Balanza*. The only extant *Balanzas* for the period considered here are those for 1792, 1795, 1826, and 1827.

3. Institutional setting

The institutions involved in data collection were the *Casa de Contratación*, subsequently also the *Consulados de Comercio* – first in

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Cadiz and later at major port cities – and eventually the *Oficina de la Balanza de Comercio*. Initially, ship captains submitted cargo inventories to the *Casa de Contratación* which in turn authorized and ordered customs inspection at the ports: see the major works by Chaunu, Lorenzo Sanz, García Fuentes, and García-Baquero González. The *Oficina de la Balanza de Comercio* was set up in the late 18th century to receive and to aggregate trade data.

4. Motivations

The initial and sustained purpose for the gathering of trade data was tax collection. Official efforts to ascertain the composition of external trade go back to 1623, when Philip IV ordered that detailed records of all commodities exported and imported be kept at all customs offices in Spanish ports. These and subsequent official efforts did not yield a full *Balanza* until 1792.

5. Methods

The cargo declarations submitted by ship captains to the *Casa de Contratación*, first as lists of “bundles” and eventually commodity by commodity, were later checked and verified at the customs.

For Spain's colonial trade, there seems to be no such thing approximating an official balance-of-trade statement other than the *Balanzas* for 1792 and 1827. As noted below the valuation procedures involved are hard to verify. But the import values for 1792 tally tolerably well with independent calculations that ultimately rest on cargo-inventory evidence. In this writer's view, the annual estimates of import and export values now available for 1782-1820 are reasonable approximations to the elusive truth on the standards allowed by the extant sources: see Cuenca Esteban, “Statistics” (2008).

For Spain's foreign (and overall) trade, again only a few published accounts for the 1780s, and the foreign-trade tables within the official *Balanzas* for 1792, 1795, 1826, and 1827, come close to balance-of-trade statements, in the limited sense that they give export and import values. Such values were presumably calculated at market prices; no attempts have been made so far to confirm this point, perhaps because the *Balanzas* are so scattered in time that any such exercise would serve little more than a purely technical purpose.

6. Information

The only information initially collected was tons of shipping, but this was replaced with records of actual trade flows as indicated below. There were a host of taxes and customs duties – the yields from those on colonial trade in particular are available in serial form. But such was the variability of tax incidence, and of commodity coverage over time, that efforts to draw on such revenue series as proxies for trade flows are thought unreliable.

Prior to 1778, reliable export values cannot be calculated from the extant sources. The available data cover largely import and export quantities in trade with the Spanish colonies, both in periodic, convoy-protected fleets and in separately sailing ships. No import values were collected in the period 1717-38; but García-Baquero proxied these values, with due caution, with the proceeds of the *avisos* duty (1%). Import values in *pesos* for 1747-78 can and have been calculated from quantity data and independently compiled prices. More generally, a large variety of price sources can and have been used to compute current values from the extant quantity evidence: see the relevant references under 9-d below and Cuenca-Esteban, “Statistics” (2008), Appendix 1: “Import prices at Spanish and European ports: constructed annual series, 1747-1820”.

Most of the trade values given in *reales de vellón* since 1778 were officially calculated at the fixed prices specified in a major tariff document that was published in that year (*Reglamento*). The cargo-inventory data also provide current import values for Cadiz only through 1790-96. The import quantities of precious metals, largely silver, were valued in various descriptions of silver coin (*pesos*) or in *reales de vellón*. For a constructive synthesis of recent work on Spanish colonial trade, with new annual estimates of current import values through 1747-1820, see again Cuenca Esteban, “Statistics” (2008).

No information on transport cost is given in the sources, but estimates for Spain's colonial trade in selected sub-periods within 1784-1820 are attempted in Cuenca Esteban, “Statistics” (2008), Table 3.

For Spain's foreign (and overall) trade, the extant sources do not indicate which prices were used for valuation. Given the cryptic nature of the published information, and the enormous variety of commodities mentioned in the *Balanzas*, it is next to impossible to verify the accuracy of the valuation procedures.

Each of the *Balanzas* is systematically organized around commodity categories, types, and varieties by geographic origin and destination.

But these classifications changed substantially between *Balanzas*. When working with cargo inventories, coherent overall series can and have been reconstructed with enormous expense of time and effort. The commodity descriptions were probably made by the ship captains who prepared the cargo inventories. Large numbers of goods were listed, often distinguishing grades and varieties within broad commodity categories. In the 1792 *Balanza* alone, this writer has counted 961 separate goods exported and 170 imported, respectively to and from Spain's colonial territories.

The published *Balanzas* provide the origin and destination of itemized goods by Spanish ports, by American and Asian colonies, and by foreign countries – all, apparently, according to the last/first port of call. Geographic distinctions are seemingly exhaustive and remarkably homogeneous. For instance the 1792 *Balanza* lists, for each commodity exported to the Spanish American colonies, 17 separate American destinations from 13 different Spanish ports; similar distinctions are made for imports from Spanish America into Spain. The 1795 *Balanza* lists 30 different foreign countries for both exports and imports, again to and from 13 different Spanish ports.

7. Availability

Only some import and export quantities up to 1778, and a few constructed series of trade values thereafter, have been published in secondary sources so far. The accuracy and robustness of some of the published value series have been questioned. This writer contemplates making available a number of trade and price series in digitized form, but this project is not a priority at this time.

8. Research questions

The data have been used (A) as a basis to quantify the cost to Spain of the loss of the colonies in 1808-26 (Fontana Lázaro: 1970; Prados de la Escosura: 1978); (B) to calculate the Spanish terms of trade (Prados de la Escosura: 1985; Delgado Ribas: 1986; Cuenca-Esteban: 2008); (C) as a proxy (in the case of exports) for trends and cycles in domestic production (García-Baquero González: 1774, 1776); and (D) to compare Spain's external position with Great Britain's (Cuenca-Esteban: 2008).

All these themes can benefit from further work, but one major obstacle stands in the way: as noted, the extant Spanish figures of trade with foreign countries appear to be limited to some cursory and unreli-

able accounts for the 1780s and to the *Balanzas* for 1792, 1795, 1826, and 1827. The long gaps and inconsistencies involved can be addressed only by way of aggregation of other countries' trade with Spain. So far, foreign trade statistics have been drawn upon to estimate Spain's trade with Great Britain (Prados de la Escosura: 1984; Cuenca-Esteban: 2004), with the United States of America (Cuenca Esteban: 1984), and with France (Cuenca Esteban: 1987). George M. Welling's major ongoing project has already produced values and quantities of Amsterdam's imports from Spain in 1742, and also annually through 1771-87; these series should reach well into the 19th century once the relevant figures in the Paalgeld records are fully processed and digitized. It should also be possible to draw on Portugal's detailed, annual trade figures since 1796. Judging from the Spanish *Balanza* for 1795, the largest components of Spanish trade that are yet to be proxied with foreign figures include, in this order, imports from "Germany", Hamburg, Genoa, Portugal, Switzerland, and Tuscany; and exports to Genoa, Hamburg, "Germany", Portugal, and Denmark.

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