Reconsidering Craft Guilds in Times of Decline: Regional Institutions and Urban Textile Artisans in Seventeenth-Century Aragon

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Abstract

Based on a regional case study, this article argues that craft guilds were able to respond adaptively to economic and institutional changes. Such flexibility limited their independent and regular impact on regional or national economies in early modern Europe. Having contributed to economic growth in the sixteenth century, the Aragonese textile guilds fell prey to technological stagnation in the seventeenth and restricted competition in urban product and labour markets as the region's economy contracted. Their actions thus undermined quality and increased the cost of domestic manufactures. The regional institutions nevertheless tolerated these strategies within certain limits, because they saw the guilds as necessary to the organization of urban markets and production.

1. Introduction

The role of craft guilds in the economic development of early modern Europe has been much debated in recent decades. In the nineteenth and twentieth centuries, the mainstream view of historians and economists was that the guilds' technological conservatism, restrictive practices and rent-seeking acted as a permanent brake on economic growth.[1] The first cracks in this thesis appeared in the 1980s, when the British and American historians Kaplan,

1 As examples, see Pirenne (1937), pp. 177-179, Landes (1969), p. 134; Kellenbez (1973), pp. 243-245; Vries, J. de (1975), pp. 84, 238 ; Mokyr (2002), p. 31.

Farr and Sonenscher, focusing on the cities of France, described the guilds as able to adapt to changing circumstances but without any real influence on the economy.[2] And in the 1990s there emerged a "guild rehabilitation school" proper. In 1991, the new institutional economists Hickson and Thomson contended that guilds were efficient cost-minimizing institutions, protecting members against exploitation, collecting capital taxes, and ensuring military protection.[3] In 1998 another new institutional economist, Epstein, proposed a more radical thesis by defining the limits of the guilds' control over labour markets, which he saw as a necessary competence to ensure the transmission of skills, and defending their ability to foster the adoption of new technologies with the support of public institutions.[4] This theory sparked intense historiographical controversy between two irreconcilable points of view. New institutional economists such as North and Acemoglu, as well as historians championed by Ogilvie, have upheld the conventional critique of the guilds.[5] Meanwhile, Epstein expanded his initial interpretation to include fresh arguments, published only posthumously in 2008 as the introduction to an influential collection of studies of the craft guilds' contribution to the development of the European economy between the fifteenth and eighteenth centuries. Epstein argued that the guilds arose originally as an effective response to weak economic governance in the late mediaeval period and contributed to development in early modern Europe by creating a stable environment for the formation of human capital, coordinating complex production processes and smoothing information asymmetries between producers and consumers thanks to their ability to control quality and set prices. All these factors, it is claimed, helped drive down transaction costs, and quality and price controls in particular were

[2] Kaplan (1979) and (2001); Sonenscher (1989); Farr (1988) and (1997).
[3] Hickson and Thompson (1991), pp. 132, 136.
[4] Epstein (1998). For other arguments for the efficiency of the guilds, see Ogilvie (2007), pp. 654-655.
[5] North (1981), p. 184; Acemoglu et al. (2011), Ogilvie, (2004).

crucial to long-distance trade.[6] The standard focus of the historiographical debate – namely the guilds' ability to adopt technological innovations – was thus broadened to other relevant functions regarding production and trade. The additional arguments and data contributed by scholars like Lucassen, De Moor, Pfister, Lis and Soly provide further support for Epstein's ideas.[7]

A major problem in this debate has been the historical and regional specificity of the studies cited in support of the various positions. In such an extensive area as Europe, the guilds' access to natural and human resources necessarily depended on geographical location, and their decisions and achievements were conditioned by shifting economic circumstances over the three centuries of early modern history. Furthermore, the institutional contexts within which they operated varied from region to region and developed differently over time. As North and Epstein have argued, control of the public institutions allowed state and local elites to reform and regulate the market at will to suit their own fiscal and commercial interests, while preserving the social consensus essential to economic growth.[8] An exploration of public policy, then, is required if we are to understand the real functions and economic impact of the guilds as independent agents.

As a contribution to the debate, this study examines the ability of the urban textile guilds in Aragon to attract capital and adopt new technologies, to oversee the market in manufactured goods and hold down transaction costs, and to regulate the labour market and ensure the transmission of skills – the three key roles ascribed to the guilds by Epstein and his followers. Given the scarcity of hard data to measure the guilds' results in overseeing trade and contracts and the difficulty of knowing how they themselves obtained information on foreign product prices and quality, we estimate their influence

[6] Epstein (1998), p. 685, Epstein and Prak, eds. (2008), p. 4.
[7] Pfister (1998); Prak, Lis, Lucassen and Soly, eds. (2006); Epstein and Prak, eds. (2008); Lucassen, De Moor and Zanden, eds. (2008).
[8] North (1987); Epstein (2000).

on transaction costs in terms of their ability to guarantee the quality of domestic textiles through guild controls and marks and to erect barriers to raise the local prices of foreign goods. This approach is designed to overcome Ogilvie's sharp criticism of many studies and theses focusing on a single guild activity while ignoring others. Finally, the study describes the opinions and decisions of the ruling elites concerning the management of craft guilds and their efficiency for the regional economy.[9]

Seventeenth-century Aragon was chosen for this case study because it offers good possibilities for exploring the European debate as well as traditional discussions about the guilds' role in the sharp decline of traditional urban manufacturing in the Mediterranean. Meanwhile, the Atlantic northwest became the Continent's textiles hub as a result of the heightened competition from the "new draperies" and "light draperies" produced in France, England and the Low Countries starting in the late Middle Ages and the sixteenth century.[10] In sixteenth-century Aragon, the traditional textile guilds increased output, mainly for sale in the regional market though with some export capacity, and adapted to changing demand patterns by honing skills and innovating.[11] In the seventeenth century, however, as the Aragonese economy shifted towards the production of agrarian commodities for export, the urban textiles industry buckled under foreign competition, especially after 1650.[12] The question examined here is whether the management of the guilds was fundamental to this industrial decline or whether it was the consequence of other essential economic and institutional factors.

The preservation of the Aragonese institutional framework in

[9] It is hard to determine the proper degree of efficiency for pre-industrial institutions. The term, in fact, is highly controversial and is rejected even by some members of the "guild revisionist school". See Ogilvie (2007), pp. 656-657, 669-670.
[10] On this debate, see Rapp (1975), Van der Wee (1988), Harte (1997). For Italy, Cipolla (1952) and Sella (2014), pp. 29-46. For Spain, Marcos (2000), pp. 519-525 and Yun (2001), pp. 125-126.
[11] Desportes (1999), pp. 46-209.
[12] Torras (1982), pp. 22-28; Peiró (1990), pp. 42-51.

the seventeenth century is of particular historical interest. Situated in northeastern Spain, the Kingdom of Aragon, together with Catalonia, Valencia, the Balearic Islands, Sardinia, Sicily and Naples, formed the Crown of Aragon, a federation of realms that coalesced in the later mediaeval period. Although it was part of the nascent Spanish state formed by the dynastic union of the Crowns of Castile and Aragon at the end of the fifteenth century, the region retained its own local laws and institutions until their eventual abolition by the new Bourbon monarchy in 1707. As the Spanish monarchy could impose royal taxes only with parliamentary consent, the Cortes were still convened, although ever less frequently from the mid-sixteenth century onwards. At these parliaments, the four estamentos or estates forming the Aragonese body politic (high nobility, petty nobility, clergy, and city citizens) could negotiate new laws and petition the king. Unlike those of Catalonia and Valencia, the Aragonese estates managed to convene their parliament in the second half of the seventeenth century. As the permanent commission of the Cortes formed by representatives of all four estates, the Diputación was responsible for day-to-day governance in the region and for enforcing the local laws approved by the parliament, and its power grew in the seventeenth century as parliaments became less frequent. Finally, the municipalities were charged with applying regional laws and overseeing the activities of the guilds in local markets.

We consider that the public policies adopted by these key institutions with regard to the textile guilds illuminate the economic role that the governing elites assigned to them and provide a measure of their achievements and failures. For example, municipal decisions and the parliamentary legislation tightened the guilds' local control over goods and labour markets during the century, to the detriment of traditional regional policies. Though constrained by the fiscal demands of the state, the parliament and the *Diputación* enjoyed broader powers to adopt economic measures than in any other Spanish territory of the Crown of Aragon. Thus, both institutions did approve and apply trade and fiscal policies that directly affected textile guilds and tested their ability to adapt to changing economic cir-

cumstances. Exceptionally for Spain, the economic debate and legislation coinciding with the *Cortes* of 1677-78 and 1684-86 thoroughly considered the guilds' demands, functions and achievements. As these public institutions were mostly controlled by agrarian elites, their views were particularly critical of the craft guilds.

2. Capital raising and technical innovation

In the seventeenth century the textile guilds of Aragon found it increasingly difficult to raise capital, for various reasons. While in early modern Europe capital was mainly attracted by agricultural and rent-seeking investment,[13] this disadvantage for industrial investment was aggravated in Aragon by the intensity of two processes common to many Mediterranean regions during their seventeenth-century economic decline: the financial collapse of the native commercial bourgeoisie around 1580 and the increasing orientation of the regional economy to the production and export of raw materials after 1650.[14] The great magnates were always more interested in leasing the rights to seigneurial rents and exporting raw materials, and only middling merchants invested in the textiles industry, in which some specialized during the sixteenth century. However, the bankruptcy of this bourgeoisie cut off the flow of capital and credit to dyers and pelaires, or clothiers, the main investors in textiles. Neither the Genoese merchant colony, which controlled trade in Aragon until 1620, nor the French merchants who took over for the rest of the seventeenth century were interested in financing Aragonese manufactures.[15] The French began to create a dense trade network in Aragon around 1610, which grew rapidly after 1620 and enabled them to control retail transactions and sell their goods.[16] Most Aragonese textile imports came from Catalonia, Valencia and

[13] Vries (1976), pp. 210-235.
[14] See note 12.
[15] Gómez Zorraquino (1987a, b).
[16] Archive of the Diputación, Saragossa (hereafter ADS), Manuscript 722, folio 487v.

Flanders in 1626, but French manufactures dominated the regional market thereafter right up until the end of the century.[17] By 1675 woollen cloth and linens accounted for 29.77 and 21.91 per cent respectively of Aragonese imports from France. By leasing the rights to collect seigneurial rents, tithes and first fruits from the lay and ecclesiastical lordships, meanwhile, French merchants also gained control of the regional market for wool, a commodity which was much in demand in France, accounting for 77.95 per cent of Aragonese exports to that country in the same year.[18] By this time, the Aragonese merchant bourgeoisie had finally restored their finances but were now more interested in rent-seeking than in commerce, and they did little to contest French control of trade.[19] From the end of the sixteenth century onwards, descendants of the wealthiest families of textile artisans in Saragossa diverted a portion of their benefits to less productive activities such as the lease of lands and property in order to gain access to the status of merchant or even to the ranks of the petty nobility by purchasing titles from the king or marrying members of this nobility.[20]

The dearth of investment was compounded by demographic decline.[21] Population growth peaked towards the end of the sixteenth century, only to plummet after 1610 when King Phillip III ordered the expulsion of the Moriscos, former Muslim inhabitants of Aragon who had been forced to adopt Christianity in 1526, a decision which affected some 14,000 families or 18.85 per cent of the region's total population. Even so, a general census carried out in 1495 put the number of hearths (fiscal units) in Aragon at 51,450, whereas a similar exercise carried out between 1646 and 1650 counted 79,729 households.[22] Meanwhile, the bubonic plague raged through the region in 1648-54 causing countless deaths, especially in the towns. In

[17] Sánchez Molledo (2009), p. 41; ADS, Manuscript 451, folio 265r-268r, 329r-330v.
[18] ADS, Manuscript 734, folio 276r-280r, 405r-408r.
[19] Gómez Zorraquino (1987b).
[20] Desportes (1999), pp. 221-223.
[21] Salas (1991).
[22] Dormer (1989), pp. 129-133.

1677, the *Cortes* estimated that only 60,000 hearths remained.[23] The population began to recover in the last two decades of the seventeenth century, however, and by 1711 the region had 76,613 hearths.

These adverse demographics further reduced the already small populations of Aragonese towns in the mediaeval and early modern periods. According to the general census of 1646-1650, 16.27 per cent of the region's population lived in towns, the majority of them in royal boroughs. Assuming an estimated 4.5 people per hearth, only Saragossa, the kingdom's capital, was a true city, with some 25,000 inhabitants. Huesca had 5,400 residents and Calatayud perhaps 4,725. Seven medium-sized towns (Barbastro, Alcañiz, Caspe, Tarazona, Borja, Daroca and Teruel) had between 2,250 and 3,950 inhabitants and another 28 small towns and villages had between 900 and 2,250. The rest of the population lived in more than 1,500 villages with fewer than 900 inhabitants.[24] Thus, the urban character of Aragon's towns owed less to their demographic size than to their political, economic and cultural functions, providing cohesion for the surrounding territory. As the decadence of the principal trade fairs and industrial output indicates, economic decline in the seventeenth century dramatically reduced the commercial and productive activities that the expansion of the sixteenth century had generated in towns and cities.[25]

The expulsion of the Moriscos caused serious economic problems, beginning with an abrupt fall in output, demand and investment. Trade networks were affected, and the municipalities were obliged to assume the debts of their Morisco communities. Furthermore, the Moriscos were mainly the vassals of lay lords, and their exodus drastically reduced feudal rents, aggravating the financial distress of the high nobility, causing a contraction in the consump-

[23] Library of the Royal Academy of History, Nassarre Collection, Manuscript 11 -1-1, folio 547r-562v.
[24] Dormer (1989), p. 132.
[25] For examples of these processes, see Mateos (1997), pp. 395-396 and Peiró (1990), pp. 49-51.

tion of luxury goods and adversely affecting the credit system, which had channelled large sums into the productive economy in the sixteenth century.[26] The erosion of credit can be discerned in the evolution of long-term municipal debt, as creditors (citizens and petty nobles) increasingly sold or donated their claims, including those on the traditionally more solvent royal boroughs, to the church, thereby transferring the risk of default or sharp cuts in interest rates. These fears were validated by the wave of municipal bankruptcies in the seventeenth century, which ultimately spread to the towns after 1650, causing cuts in interest from the usual rate of 5 per cent to 3 per cent or less.[27] The financial distress of the nobility and the municipalities reduced the credit offered by the rentier groups, driving up the cost of short-term loans. In an effort to rein in the all-too-common practice of usury, at the Cortes of 1626 the Diputación proposed fixing the interest rate at 7.5 per cent.[28]

Finally, rising royal and municipal taxation in the seventeenth century eroded the working capital, savings and self-financing capacity of artisans, while depressing disposable incomes among the population. The increasingly indebted municipalities were forced to raise taxes. While villages preferred direct taxation, the towns charged taxes on basic foodstuffs, particularly wheat and meat. As an exceptional recourse, highly indebted municipalities like Caspe approved additional taxes on commodities such as wool and hemp used in textiles manufacturing, and on the production of woollen cloth and silks. Royal taxation compounded these municipal levies with new taxes on textile manufacturing and higher customs duties in 1628-50 and 1678-97, raising production costs and further undermining the limited export capacity of the Aragonese textiles industry in Spain and abroad. [29]

Concerned about the capital shortage, the Cortes of 1626 sought

[26] Abadía (1998), pp. 362-430.
[27] Mateos (2009), pp. 483-487.
[28] Sánchez Molledo (2009), pp. 49-50.
[29] Mateos (2009), pp. 458-464.

to foster the participation of the petty nobility in trade and in the production of woollen cloth and silks by recognizing titles and honours provided that their holders did not personally sell or produce fabrics in a shop or workshop, or at their own homes. However, the Cortes of 1677-78 disqualified nobles who engaged in trade from holding public office in Aragon and from representing their peers in parliament.[30] These were serious limitations, given the increasing interest of the regional elites in obtaining public office in the seventeenth century in order to increase or conserve their status and power.[31]

In response to continual complaints from merchants that the regional government had failed to make good its promises of social promotion, the *Cortes* of 1677-78 and 1684-86 re-enacted the law recognizing their honours, revealing the social stigma facing merchants interested in the textiles industry.[32] In 1674, a group of textiles manufacturers even petitioned the viceroy, Don Juan José de Austria, for the same honours and titles as granted to merchants.[33] In spite of such efforts, artisans and tradesmen were deprived even of the right to hold municipal office. Local powers in the towns of Aragon were exercised by the *ciudadanos honrados*, comprising the wealthy bourgeoisie and petty nobles engaging in trade and the liberal professionals, landowners and agrarian rentiers. The petty nobility was excluded from the municipal elite only in Saragossa. Though these "honoured citizens" had won control of the key municipal offices thanks to the new method of election established in the mid-fifteenth century, the levels of wealth required to qualify for office were raised sharply in the seventeenth century, excluding even the wealthiest

[30] Savall and Penén (1866), I, pp. 454, 517-518, 531; II, pp. 409-410.
[31] Thus, the high and petty nobility were quick to grant royal levies in the *Cortes* of 1626 and 1645-46 in exchange for laws reserving the principal public offices in the kingdom and other posts in the state and colonial administration to Aragonese naturals. See ibid., I, pp. 456, 497.
[32] Ibid., I, pp. 517-518, 531; ADS, Manuscript 451, folio 1301v-1302r; Spanish National Library (hereafter SNL) VE 209-60.
[33] SNL, VE 180-40, Perdices and Sánchez Molledo, eds. (2007), pp. 145-146.

artisans living in the larger towns. Saragossa prohibited any person who had ever practiced a manual trade or kept a shop from holding municipal office and, though less strict, other towns usually required candidates to have put such activities behind them for periods of two to ten years. Even in relatively permissive towns like Tarazona, Barbastro and Alcañiz, a citizen elected to public office could not keep his shop open, or at the very least he could not work in it.[34]

Despite the efforts of the *Cortes* to promote industrial investment among the rentier groups, the textile guilds thwarted every attempt on the part of the Aragonese merchants to open workshops or contract workers freely in the larger towns. This strategy aimed at preserving the traditional control of the manufacturing process by master artisans who undertook craft and entrepreneurial activities, firmly established in Spanish towns of the Crown of Aragon since the late medieval period.[35] Thus merchants could only contract members of the guild if they themselves joined and passed the examination conferring the status of master, a condition which entailed a loss of social status.[36] In the face of such difficulties, they preferred to lend money or raw materials to qualified artisans at steep rates of interest rather than investing in production. In 1626, the clothiers complained to the Cortes that the merchants used the shortage of credit in Aragon to impose "leonine" conditions for loans, requiring repayment in kind by deliveries of low-priced finished cloth, which reduced their earnings and their ability to finance their activities.[37]

As demand shrank and the domestic textiles industry was overwhelmed by French competition in the second half of the seventeenth century, the shortage of capital in the smaller towns of Aragon

[34] Gómez Zorraquino (2004), pp. 116-124.
[35] In sharp contrast, the expansion of textile manufacturing in the major cities of Castile (Segovia, Toledo, Córdoba) was more dependent on investment from merchant entrepreneurs during the sixteenth century. The Spanish monarchy favoured their hegemony by approving guild charters that prevented the assumption of entrepreneurial duties by artisans in this century. See García Sanz (1987), pp. 69-70.
[36] Municipal Archive of Saragossa (hereafter MAS), Box 120-2, folio 2r-10r.
[37] Dormer (1989), p. 34.

became endemic, undermining the textile guilds' capacity to organize production. In 1666 the clothiers of Albarracín could only carry on their trade by accumulating debts with the merchants who provided the wool and with the weavers who performed a part of the production process. In 1691 and 1693, the hemp artisans and tailors' guilds at Daroca recognised the dependence of many craftsmen on traders, who provided raw materials and controlled production. In 1692 the pelaires of Teruel were so indebted that they had to seek an arrangement with their creditors.[38]

Faced with this increasing foreign competition, some guilds upgraded their production systems.[39] Generally, however, lack of capital prevented them from adopting new technologies. Thus, despite the changing demand in local and foreign markets, the preservation of traditional systems prevailed. Saragossa silk weavers successfully resisted municipal attempts in 1660-61 to make them imitate foreign cloths mixing cotton and silk in demand, as these fabrics were more fashionable and cheaper.[40] In the face of this technological stagnation, some towns encouraged Aragonese and foreign manufacturers to settle in return for bringing with them new techniques imported from Flanders, Italy and France. Municipalities used the benefits of these innovations for the common good as an argument to reject the usual opposition of local guilds and to prevent them from interfering with these manufacturers' production and their training of journeymen and apprentices. These initiatives were concentrated in Saragossa, thanks to the city's greater demand and favourable geographical location.[41]

This municipal policy received a boost towards the end of the seventeenth century when the Cortes of 1677-78 and 1684-86 agreed to grant any Aragonese natural or foreigner who wished to intro-

[38] ADS, Manuscript 523, folio 215r; Mateos (1997), pp. 417-418; Vega (1975), p. 120.
[39] For example, see Salas (1981), p. 295.
[40] MAS, Books A/297, pp. 49-50.
[41] MAS, Register of Contracts 796 (1603-08), folio 172r-173r; Bastardelo BA 24 (1625-31), folio 15r, 152r, 175r-v, 187r. Concerning guilds' resistances to technological innovations, see note 1.

duce a new technology a patent after due examination by the municipal authorities in his town of residence.[42] This decision was intended to encourage foreign manufacturers to establish themselves in Aragon. However, it stirred political opposition to patents, which in the seventeenth century were generally viewed as illegal monopolies foisted upon the Crown of Aragon by the Spanish monarchy for fiscal purposes.[43] As a sop, the *Cortes* of 1677-78 established a term of only two years for the validity of patents, which that of 1684-86 extended to three years. Despite their short term, these patents allowed foreign manufacturers who set up in Aragon to sell their goods in Castile, because they were produced in Spanish territory. The beneficiaries were mainly from France, the source of considerable migratory flows to Aragon in the sixteenth and seventeenth centuries, although there were also some Italians from areas under Spanish suzerainty. These settlers brought with them new techniques in textiles manufacturing. However, such innovations were not usually adopted by the Aragonese guilds, and they therefore had little impact on regional output. The granting of patents did marginally favour the introduction of some techniques by artisans working in local guilds.[44]

Technological stagnation would led to a deep restructuring of textiles manufacturing. This process is reflected in Table 1, which shows estimates of the number of workshops operating in Barbastro in 1619 and 1680 and in Saragossa in 1642 and 1721 based on municipal censuses of taxpaying hearths. Thus, regional textiles manufacturing suffered a sharper contraction than any other craft industry. The number of textile workshops fell by 42.10 per cent in Barbastro between 1619 and 1680, and by 51.10 in Saragossa between 1642 and 1721. As the wool trade was the hardest-hit branch of the region's textiles industry, the number of workshops shrank by 44.3

[42] Savall and Penén (1866), I, p. 531; II, p. 409.
[43] Archive of the Crown of Aragon, Council of Aragon (hereafter ACA, CA) files 141, 162 and 165.
[44] MAS, municipal minute books, 1678, folio 273v; 1686, folio 227r-228r.

Table 1
Active craft workshops in Barbastro and Saragossa (1619-1721)

Industry	Barbastro		Saragossa	
	1619	1680	1642	1721
Wool	61	34	329	89
Silk	3	1	156	98
Dying	2	3	17	13
Clothing	67	39	392	237
Total textile industry	133	77	894	437
Leather, shoe-making, vegetable fibres	49	58	312	212
Wood	36	14	163	122
Building and pottery	30	17	98	52
Metal working	23	16	159	147
Food	19	14	137	102
Other trades	3	9	149	152
Total, other industries	160	128	1,014	785
Total, all industries	293	205	1,908	1,222

Source: Peiró (1990), pp. 49-50.

per cent in Barbastro and by 72.9 per cent in Saragossa.[45] Reports prepared in 1667 by the authorities in Calcena, Caspe, Daroca, Alcañiz and Albarracín for an investigation ordered by the *Diputación* indicate that output fell more quickly from the mid-seventeenth century onwards. In Calcena, the council estimated that only 200 of the 400 families that had been employed in the textiles industry in 1640 remained in 1667, as a consequence of shrinking demand in Aragon and the end of sales to traditional markets such as Castile and Navarre.[46] Exports of woollen cloth manufactured in Saragossa, Teruel and Albarracín to France and Italy in the first half of the seventeenth century had likewise been replaced by imports from the south of France by 1677.[47] Like other Spanish and Italian regions in

[45] Similarly, in Huesca, the number of weavers' and clothiers' workshops shrank by 46.15 per cent between 1663-73 and 1716. See Peiró (1990), p. 51.
[46] ADS, Manuscript, 523, folio 215-422.
[47] SNL, VE 198-47.

the face of foreign competition throughout the seventeenth century, the Aragonese woollen industry had the dramatic problem of preserving its traditional high-quality production, begun in the previous century, finding itself unable to compete with cheaper and lighter French fabrics.[48]

Table 1 also shows that other textile branches suffered less pronounced declines than the wool trade. Less developed than woollens in the mid-seventeenth century, the silk industry concentrated its efforts on the production of taffeta and was more successful in retaining some demand from the well-off groups of society over time. Accordingly, silk textile workshops fell just 37.2 per cent in Saragossa between 1642 and 1721. More focused also on regional demand than the woollen branch, clothing workshops shrank by 41.8 per cent in Barbastro and by 39.5 per cent in Saragossa. The only industry to prosper was the manufacture of rope, sacks, baskets and espadrilles out of textile vegetable fibres like hemp, linen, jute and esparto grass.[49] This basic work could be carried out using simple tools and cheap, abundant raw materials. The output was sold in the domestic market and to the Castilian army quartered in Aragon. The industry thrived in the absence of foreign competition because it could offer suitable prices for the limited capacity of regional demand.

3. Oversight of urban markets: quality and prices

As the competitiveness of Aragonese manufacturing waned in the seventeenth century owing to technical and financial weakness, the guilds raised barriers to the entry of both native and foreign goods in urban markets.[50] And as consumption fell as a consequence of demographic decline and rising taxes, such measures quickly

[48] See note 10.
[49] Salas (1981), p. 293; Redondo (1982), pp. 89-90, 268-276.
[50] Dormer (1989), pp. 9-14, 23.

spread to cheap, poorly made everyday articles. The relative efficiency of these market controls on the quality and price of goods differed significantly between large and small town guilds. In both cases, the controls were flexible enough to be adapted to the changing fiscal and trade polices of regional public institutions throughout the century. These institutions were well aware of this, which affected their final evaluation of the guilds' management at the end of the century.

These strategies reopened the question of guilds' control of urban markets. The *Cortes* of 1528 and 1533 had temporarily suppressed regional guilds because of their monopolistic practices,[51] and town councils limited the controls exercised by the newly restored corporations in order to enhance their efficiency during the sixteenth century, in particular with regard to the regulation of the prices of manufactures.[52] However, many municipalities often tolerated these new barriers in the seventeenth century with a view to combating poverty among artisans, preventing depopulation and heading off social unrest, in particular where goods imported from elsewhere in Aragon or from abroad were in competition with well-organized local guilds. Some towns even charged an annual royalty to certain guilds in exchange for monopolies in the local marketplace.[53] At times the municipalities also resorted to new taxes, overpricing goods or prohibiting their sale on spurious grounds of quality to create disincentives to competition.

The intensification of municipal measures against the sale of foreign manufactures after 1610 brought a reaction from the *Diputación*, which favoured moderate customs duties and the free movement of both native and foreign goods in Aragon, a trade policy designed to

[51] Savall and Penén (1866), I, pp. 229-230; Redondo (1982), pp. 82-83; Desportes (1999), pp. 246-249. The Cortes allowed guilds to continue only their charitable and religious activities. However, the municipalities swiftly restored the guilds when they realized their utility for the organization of urban trades, as Saragossa publicly recognized in 1575.
[52] San Vicente (1988), I, pp, 266-267, 323-325, 353, 377-8, 522-525.
[53] Mateos (1997), pp. 153, 469-470.

conserve the customs duties levied at the kingdom's borders, which were its main source of revenue. It also protected the commercial interests of lay and ecclesiastical landlords, who made up the majority of its members, as exporters of farm produce and consumers of foreign fabrics. Regional laws or *fueros* enacted by successive *Cortes* from the thirteenth through the sixteenth centuries prohibited the institution of tolls or other barriers to the free movement of goods, and the *Diputación* successfully defended its interests in the *Corte del Justicia de Aragón*, the court charged with guaranteeing the *fueros* granted by monarchs to the municipalities since the eleventh century, which was presided over by the *Justicia* as the principal magistrate in legal disputes between the king and his subjects. The *fueros* and acts of parliament passed since 1247 formed the basic corpus of law in Aragon until the system was abolished in 1707. The *Corte del Justicia* consistently found in favour of the *Diputación*, although the municipalities continued to erect local barriers to the trade in manufactured goods.[54]

The heavy burden of royal taxes in Aragon between 1628 and 1650 affected the struggle over trade policy between regional institutions. The increasingly indebted municipalities were unable to assume the main payment of royal levies as they had done in the sixteenth century, and the estates were obliged to raise customs duties at the kingdom's borders. In defence of their interests, the agrarian elites held down duties on wool, essential foodstuffs (basically wheat and meat) and foreign imports of products like fish and wine to around 5 per cent at the *Cortes* of 1626 and 1645-46. As a consequence, the parliament of 1626 raised the duties on all other imports and exports from 5 to 10 per cent. The *Cortes* of 1645-46 raised duties again, to 13 per cent, between 1647 and 1650.[55]

These decisions affected the regional market in manufactured goods in two ways. Since the higher tariffs were still insufficient to

[54] Dormer (1989), pp. 9-14, 23; ADS, Manuscript 334, folio 78r-79r and Manuscript 445, folio 341-348; Perdices and Sánchez Molledo, eds. (2007), pp. 206-207.
[55] Savall and Penén (1866), I, pp. 468, 475; II, pp. 371-372.

meet the royal levy, the *Cortes* of 1626 instituted a tax of 5 per cent on the value of textiles production for its full fifteen-year term. The Cortes compensated the guilds for the new tax by banning the import of foreign woollens, silks and gold and silver brocade beginning in 1627. However, the parliament did allow the transit of fabrics manufactured in territories under Spanish sovereignty for sale in other regions. Despite demands from artisans, merchants and the municipalities for stricter enforcement to prevent smuggling, pressure from the high nobility and the clergy led the Cortes of 1645-46 to repeal the ban on foreign textiles imports. Accordingly, this parliament did not renew the 5 per cent output tax after the expiration of its term.[56]

As the *Diputación*'s legal travails show, the protectionist laws enacted in 1626 and 1645-46 allowed both the municipalities and the guilds to introduce new restrictions on the transit of native and foreign goods, which were only eased when import and export duties were cut to 10 per cent in 1651.[57] By raising transaction costs and restricting foreign competition, regional legislation and local barriers to trade enabled the guilds to raise the prices of their goods in 1627-45 so as to offset the 5 per cent tax on production. These price rises were also driven by the increase in demand resulting from the presence of the Castilian army and the royal court in Aragon during the Catalan war of secession (1640-52).

During the period from 1627 to 1645 smuggling thrived, helping to moderate the upward pressure on the prices of native manufactures in Saragossa and the other large towns of Aragon, though there was a clear deterioration in quality.[58] The restrictive practices of the better-organized guilds were more effective in the smaller towns. Under the laws enacted by the *Cortes* of 1626, the municipalities assessed textiles production based on the value of the raw materials used, or occasionally on the price of grain, in order to moderate

[56] Ibid., I, pp. 453-454.
[57] Dormer (1989), p. 23; ADS, Manuscript 445, folio 127v, 152r.
[58] San Vicente (1988), II, pp. 178-181.

sharp price hikes by the guilds in local markets.[59] This partial restriction of competition continued, to the detriment of consumers, after the ban on textile imports from abroad was repealed in 1646. Though in 1669 the *pelaires* of Albarracín continued to reject many local textiles on grounds of quality, in 1671 the weavers obtained municipal permission to produce inferior fabrics. The town of Daroca regularly assessed textiles production until 1675 and occasionally appointed quality overseers in the second half of the seventeenth century. However, the increasing penetration of foreign textiles towards the end of the century removed the need for the municipal officials to assess local manufactures, though not that for quality controls.[60]

Despite continuing high customs duties and municipal barriers to urban markets, the repeal of the import ban on foreign textiles in 1646 facilitated the entry of French merchants and manufactures into Aragon. Cheaper French products thus flooded into an increasingly competitive regional market as demand dwindled, and their presence intensified the decadence of Aragonese textiles manufacturing. The municipalities and guilds reacted to this industrial decline by demanding that the *Diputación* seek a new parliament in 1668-75 to restore the ban on imports of foreign textiles, and by raising barriers to the movement of manufactured goods.[61] Under heavy pressure from the textile guilds, Saragossa pioneered the adoption of protectionist measures, prohibiting the entry of foreign woollens, silks, and gold and silver brocade in 1675. However, this regulation was immediately repealed by the *Diputación*.[62]

Industrial decline was accompanied by other economic problems, such as the French control of trade, depopulation and the shortage of cash currency, which became increasingly acute in Aragon in the second half of the seventeenth century, forcing the regional institutions to address the need for reform. The viceroy Don

[59] Savall and Penén (1866), II, p. 375.
[60] Peiró (2000), p. 163; Mateos (1997), pp. 412-413.
[61] Dormer (1989), p. 23.
[62] MAS, municipal minute books, 1675, folio 49v-64r.

Juan José de Austria, bastard son of King Philip IV, created the *Junta de Comercio* in Saragossa in 1674 to seek solutions. This Board of Trade was formed by representatives of the *Corte del Justicia de Aragón* and the *Diputación*, royal advisors and senior officials of the city of Saragossa.[63] The measure prompted a lively economic debate, which intensified when Don Juan persuaded King Charles II, newly crowned, to convene the Aragonese parliament in 1676. Discussion centred on trade policy, and the urban artisans and merchants, with municipal support, petitioned for stringent protectionist measures against French manufactures.

At the *Cortes* of 1677-78, the guilds' efforts to defend their interests were helped by the rapid decline of the textiles industry and the fiscal needs of the monarchy. Seeking new taxes to cover a twenty-year royal levy, the nobility and the clergy elected not to raise the export duties on Aragonese farm produce in order to favour their own exports. The *Cortes*, unwilling to create regional monopolies, raised import and export duties on other goods from 10 to 20 per cent.[64] An additional 5 per cent tax on the value of domestic textiles production was approved for a period of twenty years, though all export duties on cloth were abrogated in order to foster trade. In compensation, the Cortes banned not only the import of foreign woollens, silks, and gold and silver brocade but also their transit through Aragon for sale in other regions. Anticipating the foreseeable increases in textile prices as a result of the import ban, the parliament ordered the creation of municipal boards to assess the prices of domestic and foreign manufactures in each local market.[65]

However, the power of the agrarian elites ensured that the *Cortes* would turn down petitions from the guilds and *arbitristas* (political economists) to control the trade in domestically produced commodities, for fear that regulation would limit exports and depress prices. Unlike the city of Saragossa, which in 1605 had, in vain, allowed its

[63] SNL, Manuscript 9,825.
[64] ADS, Manuscript 734, folio 2557r-2564v.
[65] Savall and Penén (1866), II, pp. 400-408.

clothiers to requisition wool destined for export from merchants, paying them compensation for the cost of goods and transport, the *Cortes* of 1677-78 did not sanction any preference over foreign merchants in local wool and silk purchases for artisans, municipalities or other private parties. Deferring to the interests of sheep grazers, the parliament also refused to ban the export of wool or to raise the export duty to 10 per cent, as Antonio Cubero Sebastián had proposed to the Junta del Comercio in 1674. Its one concession was to ban the export of raw silk to encourage manufacturing in Aragon.[66]

These laws failed to revitalize the regional textiles industry. As it laboured under taxes on output and on imports of raw materials, quality and competitiveness declined still further. Thus, the *Diputación* appointed inspectors in 1680-84 to oversee workshops producing woollens, linens, hemp and burlap in different parts of Aragon, as many weavers had taken to reducing the number of threads used in their fabrics to avoid the output tax.[67] By hindering smuggling and raising transaction costs, the protectionist policy increased the price of French textiles. Some Aragonese merchants, who firmly opposed protectionism, thus noted in 1684 that the ban had raised the price of French textiles in the regional market by 20 per cent since 1678. This increase brought a concomitant hike in the prices of native textiles as foreign competition slackened, despite continuing municipal assessments.[68]

Foreseeing difficulties, the *Cortes* of 1677-78 provided for an assembly of two delegates from each of the four estates to meet and review its economic policy six years after its institution. Given the ineffectiveness of protectionism, these delegates and their counsellors met in 1684-86 to negotiate with royal representatives, acting as a *de facto* parliament. The assembly repealed the 1677-78 increase in

[66] Ibid, II, p. 407; SNL, VE 180-40, 23-23 and 205-40; MAS, municipal minute books, 1605, folio 296v.
[67] ADS, Manuscript 561, folio 40r-41r, 50r-51v; folio; Manuscript 575, folio 23r-24r, 35r-36r, 66v-67r.
[68] SNL, VE 28-45.

customs duties and the ban on textiles imports and exports. The tax on Aragonese textiles output was likewise removed, but exports were taxed at 5 per cent, further constricting sales abroad, which were already suffering from the ban approved in Navarre in 1677-78 and the trade barriers erected in Castile in 1682.[69] For fiscal reasons the *Diputación* refused to cut customs duties to 3.5 per cent, as had been requested by the *pelaires* of Albarracín in order to make their exports more competitive.[70]

Though it did not do away with the municipal boards responsible for assessing the prices of domestic and foreign cloth, the *Cortes* of 1684-86 sought to revitalize manufacturing by guaranteeing artisans the right to sell their goods throughout Aragon and even to imitate fabrics produced in other municipalities. The parliament confirmed the traditional use of guild marks (or, in their absence, municipal marks) as a seal of quality and origin. But this decision was only taken when the native merchants complained of the high cost of affixing the manufacturer's mark to each fabric, especially in rural areas: in fact, in their view, this cost could be borne only in Saragossa.[71] Also, the artisans' right to inspect both Aragonese and foreign goods in their home towns and villages was subjected to stricter municipal controls to prevent the rejection of merchandise on spurious grounds. This regulatory framework was more favourable to intra-regional trade in domestic manufactures. From 1694 to 1699 the hemp artisans of Calatayud obtained legal support from the *Diputación* to sell their products in other towns on any day of the year, thereby removing the barriers erected by local guilds. Despite its efforts to create a more competitive market, however, the *Diputación* was still appointing quality overseers at the end of the seventeenth century.[72]

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[69] Savall and Penén (1866), I, pp. 531-352; Dormer (1989), pp. 26-27.
[70] Peiró (2000), p. 163.
[71] Savall and Penén (1866), I, p. 531; ADS, Manuscript 580, folio 2334r-2335r.
[72] Mateos (1997), pp. 413-414; ADS, Manuscript 593, folio 36r-37r; Manuscript 594, folio 70r-71v; Manuscript 601, folio 54r-v, 122r and Manuscript 605, folio 10r-11r, 87v-88r.

As they gradually lost control over local transactions, many urban artisans began to acquire more competitive domestic and foreign goods for resale at home, where they would be more readily accepted than their own low quality manufactures. The spread of such practices in the second half of the seventeenth century caused serious conflicts with the merchants who controlled the retail markets of the main towns, especially when the ban on importing foreign textiles drove their prices up and there was a surge in smuggling. The manufacturers of woollen and silk cloth in Saragossa thus found themselves obliged, in the *Cortes* of 1684, to defend the traditional practice of stockpiling and selling textiles made elsewhere against the complaints of the guild of merchants of San Joaquín, who wanted to shut all artisans out of the retail trade. As such reselling gained ground against home production, the guilds themselves propitiated the ascendancy of foreign manufactures in the regional market.[73]

4. The urban labour market: professional advancement

Serious tensions arose in the labour market as falling demand and foreign competition depressed the guilds' production and sales. The strong growth of the Aragonese textile industry in the sixteenth century had prompted professional mobility and advancement for apprentices and journeymen. In constant need of more hands, the urban textile guilds provided work for many young men displaced from the countryside and for numerous Navarrese and French migrants to Saragossa and other large towns in the north of the region.[74]

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[73] Ibid., p. 413; SNL, VE 218-89; Sánchez Molledo (2009), pp. 185-186.

[74] Practically half the apprentices in the Saragossa textiles industry (49.8 per cent) were Navarrese and a further 18.9 per cent were of French extraction in the sixteenth century, hailing mainly from Gascony and Béarn. In Barbastro, more than 30 per cent of French workers were employed in textiles between 1540 and 1700. See Desportes (1999), p. 113 and Salas (1981), pp. 245-257.

During the seventeenth century, however, the guilds restricted opportunities for professional advancement to benefit the sons and sons-in-law of the wealthier master craftsmen, who extended their control over the production and sale of textiles in the towns in two ways. First, they blocked journeymen's access to the rank of master by ratcheting up the cost of examinations. The fees charged by the textile guilds were progressively raised in the first half of the century, especially in the large towns and in trades requiring a higher level of skill (see the example of Saragossa in Table 2). The sums paid to examiners and other guild officials were also increased. Finally, if a candidate passed, he was required to invite the members of the examination board to a celebratory dinner. However, the kin of master craftsmen paid only half the fees demanded of less well-connected candidates, a custom which began in Teruel in the early sixteenth century and spread to other towns like Saragossa, Huesca and Daroca in the following decades. At the beginning of the seventeenth century, the guilds of Saragossa expanded this privilege to examiners' and guild officials' fees. Some higher-skilled trades, like that of silk weaver, also lowered the entry fees payable by the sons and sons-in-law of master craftsmen by as much as four fifths of the normal price. As they had done since the early sixteenth century, the guilds of Teruel increased the entry fees payable in the seventeenth century if the candidate was not a native of the town or was not Aragonese, in order to prevent immigrants from joining.[75]

These measures fundamentally changed the functioning of the regional labour market. Above all in Saragossa, professional advancement was hindered not only by higher examination costs until 1650, but also by the unwillingness of the guilds to adapt their fees to the general fall in prices in the second half of the seventeenth century. Barriers to promotion caused increasing migration of artisans.

[75] San Vicente (1988), II, pp. 17, 79, 97, 163-164.; Vega (1975), pp. 32, 44 and (1987), pp. 153-154, 212-213. However, in smaller towns some lower-skilled textile guilds held down examination fees in the seventeenth century given their members' poverty. See Mateos (1997), p. 415.

Thus, the *pelaires* of Teruel noted in their statutes in 1622 that "many journeymen came to the town from distant places and even from foreign realms" and decided to give preference to native-born Aragonese artisans in access to their profession. Because each guild set its total examination charges depending on temporary increases in the number of candidates, the amount varied widely between towns, with no relationship either to skills or to future earnings. In the 1630s a tailor in Huesca paid 163 per cent more than his like in Teruel, while a weaver in Saragossa paid just 81.65 per cent as much.[76] By maintaining their fees when applications declined, the guilds perpetuated such misalignments, thereby preventing a better distribution of the labour force in spite of its increasing mobility.

Table 2
Examination fees paid to the textile guilds of Saragossa (first half of the seventeenth century, in sueldos)

Year	Silk weavers	Year	Wool and linen weavers	Year	Sacking makers
1601	160 sueldos	1607	240 sueldos	1620	200 sueldos
1617	200 sueldos	1629	320 sueldos	1633	240 sueldos
1633	300 sueldos	1652	480 sueldos	1656	300 sueldos
1641	600 sueldos	1653	440 sueldos		
		1654	480 sueldos		

Sources: Based on Redondo (1982), pp. 88, 110, 272; San Vicente (1988), II, pp. 17, 79, 97, 163-164; and Peiró (2002), p. 132.

Note: The sueldo was a unit of account utilized in Aragon in the mediaeval and early modern period. After the adoption of Castilian weights and standards of fineness in all issues of silver coinage after 1519, one sueldo was equal to half a real, the principal silver coin minted in Aragon in the sixteenth and seventeenth centuries.

A second ploy was to exclude the poorest members of the guild from the labour market. Initiatives like that of the weavers of Teruel – who in 1622 manufactured looms for lease to impoverished master craftsmen – were rare given the textile guilds' scarce capital.[77] More

[76] Ibid., II, p. 121; Arco (1911), p. 60; Vega (1975), p. 44 and (1987), pp. 166-167.
[77] Vega (1975), p. 43.

often, their statutes would contain provisions to prevent unqualified journeymen and impoverished masters who did not have their own shops from selling their cloth in the local market. These restrictions furthered the process of social and economic inequality among artisans that the expansion of textile manufacturing had fostered in Aragon during the sixteenth century, especially in Saragossa.[78] Sharpening tensions in the labour market during the following century thus stressed the subordination and proletarianisation of many artisans facing others inside guilds.

Some guilds prevented journeymen from establishing themselves independently until they had settled all their debts with their former master, a measure intended to ensure recovery of the cost of their training, because they would frequently set up on their own, being unable to afford the examination needed to become masters themselves.[79] From the middle of the sixteenth century onwards, Saragossa master artisans also engaged fewer journeymen and paid them lower salaries. Since apprentices were cheaper, masters increasingly preferred to employ them in order to reduce production costs or force journeymen to accept these low salaries.[80] In response, the journeymen tailors and weavers of Saragossa tried unsuccessfully to create their own fraternities in 1556 and 1581. Finally, the journeymen linen and wool weavers and the clothiers founded their own associations in 1601 and 1606, the oldest such in the capital, to defend their interests. These journeymen even petitioned the city in 1644 and 1653 to make membership mandatory, although they failed to gain municipal support owing to the opposition of the master craftsmen.[81]

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[78] Thus, the leading position of the pelaires in Saragossa textiles industry during the sixteenth century thanks to their combining craft and entrepreneurial activities resulted in social polarization among artisans. Whilst pelaires and dyers prospered, weavers and shearers were increasingly transformed into wage labourers working in shops rented by pelaires and became proletarianised. See Desportes (1999), pp. 181-184.
[79] Mateos (1997), p. 417.
[80] Desportes (1999), pp. 187-188.
[81] Peiró (2002), pp. 113-114, 132.

The increasing inequality of the labour market forced the municipalities to adopt policies to defuse social conflict and secure the supply of goods to urban consumers, especially in the second quarter of the seventeenth century when the protectionist legislation enacted by the *Cortes* of 1626 and 1645-46 pushed up prices while undermining the quality of Aragonese manufactures.

The municipalities used their influence over the guilds to obtain the repeal of statutes which were found to place excessive obstacles in the way of professional advancement. Although they raised normal examination fees to the direct benefit of the masters' kin, the authorities also sometimes lowered other unwarrantedly high fees charged by guild examiners and officials, and they abolished the customary post-examination dinner.[82] Any candidate who was unhappy with the outcome of his examination could request evaluation by artisans appointed by the municipality. In 1672 Saragossa even designated its own examiners, on the grounds that the overly strict criteria of the guilds' appointees systematically deprived the city of skilled labour.[83]

The authorities sometimes allowed non-native artisans to live and work in their town without passing the guild examination. The municipalities affected by the expulsion of the Moriscos, who had never formed their own guilds, resorted to this measure in 1610 until they were able to reorganize. They employed this measure again or reduced the cost of examination fees for native journeymen in the towns and villages ravaged by plague in 1648-54 in order to facilitate the replacement of deceased masters.[84] Aside from such demographic losses, many small towns granted permission to settle to artisans engaged in trades in which guild organization was weak as a means of expanding local production. In Daroca, the municipality repeatedly exempted married foreign weavers from the obligation to sit examinations (in 1627, 1645 and 1662) until the local guild fi-

[82] San Vicente (1988), II, pp. 181-182.
[83] Redondo (1982), p. 152.
[84] Mateos (1997), pp. 406-407 and MAS Bastardelo BA 30, (1654-56), folio 47v-48r.

nally consolidated its position in 1673. The authorities of Saragossa did the same after 1626 to force the established guilds to increase production. In 1695, however, the city decided that greater guild control was essential to assure quality, and revoked all the permits granted previously.[85]

Given that the guilds exercised only incomplete control over the urban labour markets, the municipalities were able to moderate the restrictions placed on impoverished craftsmen and non-members. Such public interventions proved particularly effective in the first half of the seventeenth century in trades where guild organization was weak, such as crafts involving vegetable textile fibres. In its by-laws of 1633, the Saragossa guild of linen and hemp artisans granted membership to shopkeepers, who were permitted to sell their products without passing an examination, although they were required to pay an entry fee on joining. In other towns, this more flexible approach to the labour market was based on precedent. As the journeymen tailors had done in 1595 and 1605, the municipal authorities of Huesca declared in 1643 that all journeymen engaging in any trade in the town could work and trade at their homes. In 1655, the municipality of Daroca supported women's right to weave cloths at home and sell them, just as the parliament would proclaim for the entire kingdom in 1677-78. In 1674 Daroca allowed master tailors to work in private houses for a fixed daily wage.[86]

Finally, the municipalities adopted measures both to alleviate labour market tensions and to meet the monarchy's increasing demands for military levies. After war broke out between Spain and France in 1635, Saragossa promised in 1638 to allow any journeyman who enlisted and served in the company raised by the city to practice his trade without passing an examination. Huesca, Barbastro, Calatayud and Daroca followed suit when rebellion against the Spanish monarchy erupted in Catalonia in 1640. Despite protests from the guilds, this system was maintained during the successive

[85] Redondo (1982), pp. 151-154, Mateos (1997), p. 416.
[86] Ibid., pp. 89-90; Arco (1911) pp. 52-66 and (1915), p. 139; Mateos (1997), p. 417.

wars between Spain and France in 1635-59, 1667-68, 1673-78, 1683-84 and 1689-97.[87] Considered the personal property of the soldier, these licences were even bought and sold, and they could be passed on by inheritance. They were granted with particular frequency in 1640-59 to men sent to fight the French invaders and Catalan rebels. After accusing the guilds of provoking an exodus of journeymen to small towns or villages in order to avoid their high examination fees, Saragossa also issued 144 such permits in 1675-80, of which 66 were granted to textiles workers. Like Saragossa in 1686, Huesca granted permits in 1684, and Albarracín in 1694. The municipalities again resorted to this measure in 1705 and 1706 to recruit militias in support of the Austrian pretender to the Spanish throne during the War of the Spanish Succession (1705-14).[88]

In spite of the municipalities' efforts, the obstacles to professional advancement created by the guilds persisted, and they combined with industrial decline to create significant geographical mobility among the artisans in the second half of the seventeenth century. As the municipal complaints to the *Diputación* and the *Cortes* in this period reveal, the towns with the strongest textile tradition were the most severely affected, as journeymen and impoverished master craftsmen left for towns and villages where the guilds and municipal authorities were less obstructive.[89] The precariousness of this labour market prompted serious economic debate in Aragon in 1674-86, and numerous voices advocated lowering the barriers preventing access to the status of master craftsman so as to create more trained and competitive artisans.

This position was upheld by the partisans of protectionism, who triumphed at the *Cortes* of 1677-78. Their argument was that the guilds could make this concession if protected from foreign competition by a ban on textiles imports and higher customs duties on other manufactured goods. The Aragonese merchants were also

[87] Sanz (1997), pp. 154, 191, 221, 294.
[88] Mateos (1997), pp. 407, 416; Redondo (1982), pp. 291-294; Peiró (2002), pp. 85-87.
[89] ADS, Manuscript, 523, folio 215-422.

keen to attract foreign artisans to revitalize industry and repopulate the country, and in 1677 and 1678 Antonio Cubero Sebastián proposed admitting foreign masters qualified by their own guilds without obliging them to pay membership or examination fees. The merchants of Saragossa also recommended smoothing the integration of French artisans in 1677 by allowing those who were not qualified to pay only half the cost if they sat the guild examination within three years of settling in the town. Other *arbitristas* advocated lowering examination costs for both natives and foreigners to a modest amount and permitting the authorities to evaluate candidates who failed to pass the guild examination. An advisory board formed by eight representatives of each of the estates of parliament even recommended abolishing masters' examinations and the associated costs in order to facilitate the advancement of journeymen, while maintaining the guilds to ensure the organization of craft labour.[90]

When the board's proposal was debated by the estates, the clergy and the high and petty nobility favoured abolishing masters' examinations in Aragon. However, the citizens opposed this measure because the guilds' cooperation was needed to organize and control urban manufacturing and markets.[91] New taxes on textiles production and exports of other craft manufactures to make up the balance of the royal levy assured the continuation of the examinations. Without these revenues, the guilds could not have counteracted the consequent increases in manufacturing costs except by exorbitant price rises.

Nevertheless, the *Cortes* of 1677-78 set a ceiling on examination fees and payments to examiners that applied throughout Aragon. Trades were classified into two categories depending on the skills required of artisans. In the first category, the total examination cost was capped at 300 *sueldos* in Saragossa and 180 *sueldos* in the rest of Aragon. In the second, the ceilings were 150 and 120 *sueldos*. Though compliance depended on municipal support, the measure provided

[90] SNL, VE 205-40, 25-10, 168-1, 28-40, 209-92, 209-60, 28-77.
[91] ADS, Manuscript 733, folio 2045r-2064v.

native journeymen and foreign master craftsmen with a legal benchmark for any protest against excessive exactions by the guilds. The *Cortes* also confirmed the right of all artisans to appeal unfair examination results to the municipal authorities.[92]

As the protectionist policy adopted in 1677 had failed, the *Cortes* of 1684-86 did not contemplate the abolition of masters' examinations. The tax on output had further strained the already poor competitiveness of domestic manufactures, which continued to lose ground to smuggled French goods in the years from 1678 to 1685. The free trade party advocating repeal of the export ban and a reduction in import duties believed that if their proposals passed, the guilds would be unable to survive without examination fees. Their main champion, Diego José Dormer, criticized the scant preparation of Aragonese artisans in his *Discursos históricos politicos* of 1684. His solution was to encourage foreign craftsmen to settle in Aragon by providing travel assistance and helping them to acquire raw materials and sell their output while they set up their manufactories.[93]

In view of the labour migrations caused by the decline of the craft trades in Aragon, the *Cortes* of 1684-86 sought to facilitate the incorporation of foreign and naturalized artisans into the guilds.[94] They were permitted to sit examinations without showing proof of having completed the requisite years' work as apprentices or journeymen, and in 1677-78 the examination costs were halved. Furthermore, the examiners were ordered not to demand excessively laborious work of examinees. If a stranger was accepted as a member and decided to seek qualification in any other trade controlled by his guild, the examination costs would be only one sixth of the total.[95]

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[92] Savall and Penén (1866), II, pp. 408-409. As a reference, the daily wage of farmhands in the towns of Aragon between 1640 and 1675 was 3 or 4 *sueldos*. See Salas (1981), pp. 304-305; Mateos (1997), pp. 373-374.
[93] Dormer (1989), pp. 33-34, 40-43.
[94] Sánchez Molledo (2009), pp. 180-182.
[95] Savall and Penén (1866), I, p. 530.

The consequences of labour market regulation are difficult to measure. The fee caps set by the *Cortes* of 1677-78 and 1684-86 were designed to help impoverished artisans sit their examinations, a very costly procedure in the textile guilds. However, any claim deprived the candidate of the guild's support in the examination itself and after admission, as is evidenced by the attitude of the Saragossa hemp and linen artisans. The ceiling approved in 1678 cut the examination fees by one third, and it was immediately demanded by the foreign and non-native journeymen. Meanwhile, the kin of master craftsmen continued to pay half of the traditional fee, in order to ensure the continued favour of their guilds. From 1691 onwards, every candidate decided to pay half fee. Nevertheless, this second generation of master craftsmen were increasingly promoted: among the hemp artisans, the proportion rose from 24 per cent in 1681-90 to 32.4 in 1691-1700 and 48.1 per cent in 1701-1710; among the linen workers, from 12.5 to 23.8 and then to 40 per cent in the same periods.[96] Presumably, these percentages were even higher in the other established guilds of Saragossa, which required candidates to show a higher level of skills and charged more substantial fees. The influential silk weavers' guild could even demand, in 1705, that twisters who wanted to sell silk cloths in Saragossa pay entry fees far surpassing the examination cost ceiling established by the *Cortes* of 1678. The guilds were even more unwilling to cut their fees in smaller towns, where they had fewer members and lower revenues. And although they lowered their examination fees by 20 per cent, the hemp artisans of Daroca held out against this ceiling until 1691.[97]

5. Conclusions

This regional case study for Aragon shows that, as Kaplan, Farr and Sonenscher have argued in their studies of French cities, Euro-

[96] Redondo (1982), pp. 111, 269-271; Peiró (2002), pp. 56-57.
[97] MAS, Box 120-6, folio 6r-12v; Mateos (1997), p. 415.

pean craft guilds were often able to respond adaptively to changing economic and institutional circumstances in different historical periods. This flexibility ensured their survival but also limited any independent and regular impact of these guilds in the long run, at least on some early modern regional and state economies. Though the efforts of the public institutions to hold down transaction costs moderated their control of the market, the Aragonese textile guilds managed their abundant natural and human resources effectively and adopted technological innovations in the sixteenth century, in line with the ideas propounded by Epstein. In the seventeenth century, however, they fell prey to technological stagnation, adopting the kind of rent-seeking strategies and restrictive practices described by Ogilvie, which adversely affected urban markets in goods and labour. The regional institutions tolerated these strategies within certain limits, despite their undesirable economic effects, because the ruling elites did not consider textile guilds' efficiency solely in terms of the capacity to raise capital and adopt new technologies – the crucial point for the conventional historiographical critique. In line with the theses of Hickson and Thompson on the fiscal role of guilds, the agrarian elites accepted the need to preserve craft artisans as regional taxpayers. Significantly, urban oligarchies regarded guilds as essential to the organization of craft production and markets. From their point of view, even though they were performed partially and imperfectly, these guilds' functions as outlined by Epstein were worth preserving.

The textile guilds' activities in the seventeenth century were shaped by extraordinarily unfavourable economic circumstances, including shrinking demand brought about by demographic collapse and higher taxes, the extinction of the merchant bourgeoisie, declining investment and a dearth of affordable credit. Despite the legislation of the Aragonese *Cortes*, the social stigma attached to trade and manufacturing deprived the textiles industry of investment by the wealthy rentier elites. These circumstances ate away at the earnings of textile artisans and increased their debt to merchants and lenders, preventing the adoption of new technologies and un-

dermining their control over production, which was increasingly vulnerable to competition from abroad. In response, the Aragonese institutions fostered technological renewal by encouraging foreign manufacturers to settle there, over the opposition of the guilds.

As output declined, the guilds tried, with municipal support, to restrict foreign competition in urban markets by raising transaction costs. This strategy prevailed especially when the *Cortes* approved protectionist policies for fiscal purposes and to favour the interests of the agrarian elites. More effective in the smaller towns, this policy undermined quality and drove up the prices of local manufactures. These effects were mitigated by the action of the *Diputación* in defence of the free transit of goods, which guaranteed to agrarian elites the supply of competitive foreign goods and the export of native raw materials. The measures enacted by the *Cortes* of 1684-86 to weaken guild barriers only furthered the mounting ascendancy of French cloth in the regional market. Though quality controls on domestic production had diminished, the *Cortes* maintained the guilds' marks as a benchmark for the valuation of fabrics in local markets, given the excessive cost of using makers' marks.

Finally, the guilds stiffened the barriers to professional advancement beginning in the first half of the seventeenth century by raising the cost of examinations for journeymen, to the direct benefit of the masters' kin, while also preventing impoverished masters from practicing their trades. These strategies were moderated, if somewhat erratically, by municipal interventions to raise urban textiles output. They had the effect of undermining labour market efficiency, in spite of the increasing willingness of artisans to move in search of work, especially after 1650. This situation forced the *Cortes* of 1677-78 to set the cost of examinations so as to facilitate and standardize access to the status of master craftsman in Aragon. However, continued opposition from the guilds obliged the *Cortes* of 1684-86 to approve stricter examination guarantees and to cut the fees paid by foreign artisans still further. This regional policy was only partially successful in removing the guilds' obstacles to professional advancement.

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