

Italian silks in Cadiz. Lucca fabrics in the Spanish-American market of the late seventeenth century

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Abstract

Among the multitude of products that filled the holds of the *Carrera de Indias* ships in the second half of the 17th century, flooding colonial markets, there were Italian silk textiles from the small republic of Lucca. Based on unpublished archival sources, this essay shows the attempt by Lucca silk manufactures to enter the Spanish-American market via Cadiz. The analysis of the correspondence between a local silk workshop and its partners in Cadiz reveals extensive commercial connections stretching from the Mediterranean to the Spanish Indies, involving the movement of both people and goods. Within the historiographical debate on the reasons for Northern Europe manufacturing supremacy in transatlantic trade at the expense of the Mediterranean regions (and Italy), the investigation reveals the obstacles to the success of Lucca luxury production in Spanish colonial trade, highlighting the strategies and practical functioning behind such exchanges.

Keywords: Italian textile manufactures, silks of Lucca, Spanish colonial trade, Cadiz, XVII century.

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Abbreviations: AHPc, Archivo Histórico Provincial de Cádiz; APFm, Archivio Privato Feroni di Milano; ASFi, Archivio di Stato di Firenze; ASLu, Archivio di Stato di Lucca; Archivio Mansi: AM; ASPm, Archivio Saminati-Pazzi di Milano.

1. Introduction

During the seventeenth century, the manufactured goods (referred to in contemporary documents as *ropas*) shipped on board of the *Carrera de Indias* convoys marked a qualitative shift in the cargoes transported, helping to explain the high value of transatlantic trade in the second half of the century. Expression of the crown's interests since 1503, the *Casa de la Contratación* – the body responsible for the trade monopoly with the colonies – had lost ground to the Castilian merchant guilds (*Consulados*) based on the opposite shores of the Atlantic. Certainly, Spanish colonial trade depended on the goods and the capital that the foreign element brought, despite itself, to its interior. And manufactures, especially foreign textiles, provided the highest profit margins as they combined the highest added value with lower transport costs, more advantageous taxation and better adaptation to the colonial market.

But the value of these products was not merely economic. For nearly three centuries their use, both practical and symbolic, conveyed the message that the Church of Rome promoted in its evangelisation of the New World, such that “cloth was the single most important material and visual feature of Catholic church interiors in Spanish America”¹. In the 17th and 18th centuries, in the wake of the Counter-Reformation, the liturgical fabric considered most suitable for this purpose was silk, imported mainly from Europe. A wide variety of fabrics such as taffeta, satin, damask and velvet were used to furnish places of worship and clothe the ministers of God in the Hispanic colonies.

Although the Spanish manufacturing industry would display signs of vitality during the eighteenth century, it never developed sufficiently to compete with foreign production. Cadiz thus became the major hub for foreign exports, attracting agents, capital and manufactured goods from all over the old continent². A brief glance at the records of the fleets' journeys preserved in the *Casa de la Contratación* would suffice to give an idea of the enormity of the phenomenon.

Among the multitude of products that filled the holds of *Carrera* ships in the last third of the seventeenth century, flooding the markets of the New World, there were also Italian silk textiles from the small Republic of Lucca. As we shall see, however, they no longer enjoyed the primacy they had exercised

¹ Stanfield-Mazzi (2021).

² Bustos Rodríguez (2010), pp. 114-122.

for centuries in all the courts and major commercial squares of the old continent because the productions coming from central and northern Europe, particularly those from the French Atlantic regions, dominated the international scene.

Scholars such as Carlo Cipolla and Paolo Malanima have addressed the underlying reasons for the decline of Italian manufacturing in the 17th century, including changing fashions, excessive production and labour costs and, in general, the guild rigidity as a barrier to innovation³.

In the context of transatlantic trade, recent economic debate has highlighted the poor competitiveness of Mediterranean products compared to those from north-western Europe. The hypotheses that have emerged identify the limited profit margins offered by the first in colonial markets as the reason for their failure in the *Carrera de Indias*. This interesting approach is supported by accounting documents from the early decades of the century, the *cuentas de factoraje*, which were usually the result of a commercial agreement between a financier based in Lima and a factor, better known as a *perulero*, who was responsible for travelling to Europe to buy products to be directly resold at American fairs. The low commercial surplus value recorded in the latest sale at the close of the transaction justify the lack of appeal of Mediterranean manufacturing production, particularly Italian, in such trade⁴.

The massive presence of European manufactured goods re-exported to the Indies during the seventeenth century, although frequently mentioned, is still little known in terms of the value and nature of the merchandise⁵. For the second half of the century, the point of reference remains the French case, which is explanatory in showing the leading role played by its flagship products in colonial trade⁶.

On the contrary, little is known about the Mediterranean area in terms of manufactures exported to Cadiz and Spanish America during the period in question. We have data on the volume of goods exported from Genoa, albeit partial, provided by the French naval intendant in Cadiz, Jean-Baptiste Patoulet, in 1686, according to whom the value of Genoese textiles flowing into the Cadiz trade amounted to over four million *lire tornesi*, of which 300,000 were

³ Cipolla (1974), pp. 366-371; Malanima (1982, 1998).

⁴ Díaz Blanco (2022)^a; Díaz Blanco (2022).

⁵ Bernal (1992), p. 212.

⁶ Lespagnol (1997), pp. 403-494.

just for velvets⁷. In fact, in 1670, merchants from *La Superba* were the largest exporters of silk textiles from all over Italy to Cadiz, as the port of Genoa was the main Mediterranean link with the Andalusian port, as an alternative to the French Atlantic route⁸. Nevertheless, for the Italian area, we lack works that reflect the reality of this traffic through the concrete practices of its actors.

Recently, historiography has re-evaluated the traditional view of the decline of Spanish colonial trade during its lesser-known period, namely during the reign of the last of the Habsburgs, Charles II. Starting from an analysis of commercial practices, this revisionist literature focuses on the accounting and fiscal aspects underlying the revival of transatlantic trade from around 1660 until the end of the century⁹.

It is within this context that we find the attempt by Lucca silk manufacturers, which we describe here, to penetrate the Spanish-American market via Cadiz. As part of the redefinition processes taking place in the 17th century in the end markets of the silk industry of an ancient Italian economic centre such as Lucca, we will try to understand the incidence of colonial trade in the second half of the century, highlighting its strategies and functioning.

Secondly, we want to shed light on the reasons why certain Italian productions failed to succeed in the American markets and what obstacles stood in their way. To this end, we will use unpublished first-hand documentation, namely outgoing correspondence produced by a Lucca-based silk workshop with its partners in Cadiz. The three surviving letter books refer to the years 1669-1671, 1671-1673 and 1679-1681, in addition to a register or summary of letters with rare accounting notes relating to the years 1669-1673, accompanied by notarial documentation from Cadiz. Despite the limited period covered by the commercial correspondence, which by its nature provides predominantly qualitative data, a micro historical and diachronic approach to our sources, combined with contextualisation within macroeconomic and historiographical frameworks, has allowed us to reconstruct the main characteristics of this trade: the commercial networks, the products and the perception of risk underlying it¹⁰.

⁷ Morineau (1985), pp. 337-338.

⁸ Herrero Sánchez (2000), pp. 310-311.

⁹ Lamikiz (2023); Lamikiz (2024); Díaz Blanco, Hernández Rodríguez (2021, 2022); Díaz Blanco (2024).

¹⁰ On the perception of risk related with the colonial trade of Cadiz, Bartalucci (2026).

2. The search for new markets in the West

Since the late Middle Ages, the major European courts had been considering Lucca as one of the most prosperous silk industries in Europe. Intended for an elite clientele, the silk textiles produced in Lucca workshops were well-known for their unique designs with strict guild regulations¹¹ ensuring the presence of specific requirements in terms of luxury and weight. Even in the 16th century, they managed to maintain their position in the major markets of Western Europe, particularly in Lyon and Antwerp¹². However, the bankruptcy of some of the leading ‘national’ companies in the 1570s, combined with changes in international demand, led Lucca merchants to gradually shift their commercial focus farther east, from German fairs to those in Poland and Lithuania, thus enjoying a period of renewed vigour in Eastern Europe that lasted almost until the end of the 17th century¹³.

Furthermore, for a brief period in the late 17th century, interest also spread to distant Russia, through the fairs of Arkhangelsk, which until the reign of Peter the Great were the only European outlet at those latitudes. In this case, the silk drapes (‘drappi’) from Lucca sold or bartered on those occasions were used to decorate the clothes and furnishings of the Muscovite court and the high clergy¹⁴.

However, it was the nearby Livorno that exerted a growing attraction on Lucca merchants during the 17th century. Having become an important Mediterranean and European port, a trade hub of English and Dutch interests in the Levant, the city of the Medici was a driving force for Lucca economy from the middle of the century onwards, when the Republic’s leading merchant families began to invest heavily in it, making it the base for their international trade. In a context of relative recovery between 1660s and 1670s, Lucca businessmen were well integrated into the commission trade practised in that port thanks to their dense commercial and information network covering the entire continent¹⁵.

¹¹ Poloni (2009, 2017); Del Punta, Rosati (2017); for a summary on Italian silk manufacturing during the Renaissance, see Franceschi (2020).

¹² Sabbatini (1985).

¹³ Canali (1948); Mazzei (1983); Mazzei (1999); Bartalucci (2016).

¹⁴ Mazzei (2015).

¹⁵ Mazzei (1990).

In addition to supplying raw silk from southern Italy to feed the city looms, boxes of fabrics from Lucca destined to various locations also began to converge at Livorno. However, Livorno market did not seem to be the best outlet for such a refined silk production. In fact, heavy discounts were applied to the silks sold, so much so that the corporate institution of the *Corte dei Mercanti* (Merchants' Court) had to intervene several times to discourage such practices and support the price as a guarantee of quality¹⁶.

Yet it was precisely from the Tuscan port, a privileged observatory of international trade currents and the gateway for colonial goods entering Italy, that Lucca operators began to look insistently beyond the Pillars of Hercules. After all, securing new commercial outlets for their luxurious fabrics had been a priority for the Republic's silk entrepreneurs for centuries. Moreover, Cadiz silver, no less than its indigo and cochineal, had become a regular source of interest for Lucca merchants in the Tuscan port¹⁷. Logically, the Lucca merchant oligarchy saw in Cadiz, a recent destination for some of its men, the possibility of securing its silk products on the Spanish-American market, a desire also cherished in those years by other well-known manufacturing centres on the peninsula, including nearby Florence¹⁸.

As an anonymous Florentine report from 1674 informs us, the Grand-Duchy of Tuscany was aware that Spain imported almost all manufactured goods that it did not produce itself¹⁹. Through more or less official information, Tuscan diplomats constantly supplied the Medici court with news on developments in the *Carrera* and on treasury remittances, which they helped to spread throughout Europe²⁰. But despite the permeability of the Iberian trade monopoly, Florentine attempts to revive the silk and wool industry by exporting manufactures directly to the Indies in exchange for colonial products were unsuccessful²¹.

¹⁶ Mazzei (1990), pp. 313-314.

¹⁷ Between 1670 and 1673, the trading house Carlo Benassai e Co. of Livorno supplied Giogalli-Samueli & Co. of Venice with coins (*reales*) and coinable paste intended for the mint of the *Serenissima*, see Tucci (2008), pp. 161, 163.

¹⁸ Rodríguez (2016), pp. 284-285; Tazzara (2017); on the significant role played by Italian economic operators in the main trade centres of the Early-Modern Spanish monarchy, see Brilli, Herrero Sánchez (2017).

¹⁹ ASFi, *Carte strozziane*, series I, vol. 106, f. 175v.

²⁰ Oliva Melgar (2013).

²¹ Calcagni (2025).

For Lucca, the trade in silk drapes to the colonial market was not part of an economic policy as in the case of Florence, but rather a private initiative by a group of merchants, made possible thanks to the intermediation of fellow countrymen in Cadiz. At the end of January 1671, hoping to do business together, The Mansis – the owners of one of Lucca major silk workshops – replied to some Florentines in Lisbon: “We inform you that many of the aforementioned beautiful French-style *mole* are shipped from here to Cadiz, where they are in great demand for the Indies”²².

3. Strategy decisions and production adaptation for Cadiz

From the mid-17th century onwards, Cadiz gradually overtook Seville as the hub of colonial trade, becoming a centre of great attraction for economic operators from all over Europe²³. Favoured by its strategic position, a crossroads of multiple routes that linked northern Europe with Africa and the Mediterranean with the Atlantic Ocean, the city of Cadiz became the capital of all trade to and from the Spanish monarchy’s West Indies²⁴.

This created unparalleled opportunities for European trading houses eager to participate in the exploitation of resources from the New World. Castile’s inability to supply Hispanic America, which relied on European manufacturing, coincided with the need to find new markets felt by the traditional industries of central-northern Italy in the late 17th century.

Lucca silk production also sought to profit from this, relying on the dynamism of certain merchants who had ventured as far as the westernmost ends of the continent. In this regard, the scattered traces found in the letter books of the Mansis’ silk workshop, held at the State Archives of Lucca, although heterogeneous and fragmentary, supplemented by the letter books of their countrymen Parenisi from Amsterdam and kept in the same archive, can provide us with many details about those trades²⁵.

²² ASLu, AM, vol. 296, Mansi to Rinaldo Betti and Cosimo Bonsi, Lucca-Lisbon, 30 January 1671, f. 433v.

²³ Carrasco González (1997).

²⁴ García-Baquero González (1988); Bustos Rodríguez (2005).

²⁵ The following volumes relating to the Mansi workshop in Lucca were examined: 296 (1669-1671), 297 (1671-1673), 298 (1679-1681); vol. 299, *Ricordi di lettere* (1669-1673), is

That of the Mansis' was a well-known international firm, which in the second half of the century exported luxurious silk textiles not only to Italy but also to the major markets of the continent. Their business, which also extended to other economic sectors, is fully documented in the copious commercial letters sent daily to the four corners of Europe, from Moscow to Lisbon, from Smyrna to London, which were necessary both to guide their economic choices and to create the relationship of trust and reciprocity in services that was the basis of large-scale trade in the modern age²⁶.

Equally important were their compatriots Girolamo and Pompeo Parenisi based in Amsterdam, two prominent international intermediaries who, although not directly involved in the trade of luxury silks from Lucca to Andalusia, were in contact with the main Italian and foreign trading houses on the Iberian Peninsula thanks to their commercial and monetary interests spanning over the whole of Europe.

What matters in this case is that both the Mansis and Parenisi were partners and correspondents of the limited partnership Giovan Battista Bonfigli - Paolo Benedetto Gualanducci & Co., whose directors had settled in Cadiz between the late 1660s and early 1670s²⁷. Bonfigli was an employee of Carlo Benassai & Co. in Livorno, a company with interests in the trading house of Cadiz, which in turn was linked to the Mansis²⁸. It is especially the correspondence between the latter and their compatriots in Andalusia that catches our attention. This began in the autumn of 1670, coinciding with Bonfigli's first travel to Spain. On that occasion, in addition to two boxes containing silk drapes, the Mansis also provided him with instructions – almost a *vademecum* – which he and his colleague Gualanducci were to follow in the future²⁹.

a register marked with the letter B containing letters from European countries. Volumes 428 (1670-1671), 429 (1672-1674), 430 (1674-1676), 431 (1676-1678), 432 (1688-1689) include copies of letters written in Amsterdam by Girolamo and Pompeo Parenisi to the Bonfigli-Gualanducci & Co. On the Parenisi merchants in Amsterdam, see Cesari (1989).

²⁶ Trivellato (2007), pp. 144-145.

²⁷ Bartalucci (2020).

²⁸ Carlo Benassai had been 'minister' of the Mansi family in Livorno since 1655, see Mazzei (1990), pp. 304-305, no. 39; he participated in the limited partnership in Cadiz with 2,000 pieces with Carlo Benassai & Co. of Livorno (1663-1674), ASFi, *Tribunale di mercanzia*, vol. 10846, ff. 89v-90r; then with 5,000 pieces with Girolamo and Carlo Benassai-Francesco Ottavio Gambarini & Co., also from Livorno (1674-1689), see Mazzei (1977), p. 168.

²⁹ ASLu, AM, vol. 296, Mansi to Bonfigli, Lucca-Livorno, 4 October 1670, f. 381r.

The export of textiles from Lucca to Cadiz took place by sea from ports on the peninsula and was made possible thanks to the dense commercial correspondence regularly maintained by the Mansis with its intermediaries operating in key squares. Unlike other European manufacturers, especially the French ones, who used state convoys, the operators of Lucca used foreign fleets and their shipping lines to sail the Bay of Cadiz. The shipments were made on Nordic or Genoese ships, departing from the port of Livorno via Pisa and from Genoa via Viareggio. In the first case, they relied on their partner Benassai, in the second on the accredited businessmen Rezzonico of Genoa, Aurelio, Carlo and Luigi³⁰.

Regardless of the port of embarkation, the boxes were shipped together with invoices and the usual samples (measured in “Genoese palms”), necessary to prevent the fabrics from creasing and to facilitate their sale. Convoyed ships to and from Spain were preferred for greater security, and the goods were divided into several passages to spread the risk. Given the high perishability of silk, captains were asked to place the boxes on board the ship in areas protected from humidity and, once in Cadiz, the partners were encouraged to sell them for cash or on credit, provided that it was for a short period and to trustworthy people. For unsold goods, as the Mansis wrote to Bonfigli in 1670, they were given the option of bartering them for cochineal and indigo, or sending them to the Indies “at our risk, according to the customs and practices of Cadiz”³¹.

At the end of the 17th century, the workshops of Lucca were completely unaware of the needs of the Spanish-American market. Production had to adapt to the demands of western Andalusia and the calendar dictated by the fleet and galleon system. This meant that every year two separate convoys set sail for the viceroalties of New Spain (*flota*) and Peru (*galeones*), one bound for Veracruz, in present-day Mexico, the other for Cartagena de Indias and the Isthmus of Panama (*Tierra Firme*). In theory, the two fleets would return together to Cadiz one year after their departure, but in the last third of the 17th century this happened every two or three years³². The pace of the fleets dictated the timing of trade in Cadiz, and negotiations took place during the preparatory periods (*despacho de flota*) or upon their return, linked to the availability

³⁰ García-Montón (2022), pp. 257-259.

³¹ ASLu, AM, vol. 296, Mansi to Bonfigli, Lucca-Livorno, 4 October 1670, f. 381r.

³² García-Baquero González (1992), p. 96.

of funds generated by these events. The rest of the year, on the contrary, the scarcity of capital made exchanges difficult and goods risked remaining in warehouses.

Over time, these dynamics became familiar to the Mansis, who could only rely on correspondence to guide their decisions regarding shipping times and product features to be complied with. This is clearly understood from the letter dated 16 March 1671, written after learning of the sale of a single piece of black satin on their behalf³³. They wrote to Bonfigli to say that they had quickly put into production several pieces of black satin and *mole* of the agreed height and colours, so that they would arrive in the Bay of Cadiz before the departure of the galleons³⁴. In April, sales remained slow, and pressure was on to sell them on the occasion of another fleet expedition to New Spain. Like the French linens channelled to the port of Saint-Malo, a few days delay in the arrival of the Lucca silk drapes in Cadiz could mean a year setback in their sale. This risk was heightened by the frequent changes in the Andalusian fashion market regarding embroidery and the most appropriate colours to satisfy buyers.

We will proceed as you say – wrote the Mansis to their partners in Cadiz on 6 August 1671 – to make the tabì both plain and striped of a single width, and since they are more appreciated this way, it would be appropriate for you to always write to us to inform us of the variations in the draperies, both in terms of the workmanship and the fashions, and in everything else that may vary, because by always having some pieces ready, we can satisfy the buyers and the current fashion of silk drapes. However, we recommend that you settle the accounts as soon as possible³⁵.

The Mansis made continuous adjustments to their production, which was not the traditional damasks and *ermesini* (or *ormesini*) sold at the Arkhangelsk and Bolzano fairs, or in France at that time. Now, black satin, French-style

³³ The name piece ('pezza') takes on double meanings here: it indicated a piece or silk drape of standardised dimensions, sold at retail or wholesale as a unit of trade, while in monetary terms 'pezza' was used in Italy to indicate the Spanish eight-real piece (*peso de a Ocho real*), or the coin for the Levant minted by the Grand Duke of Tuscany Ferdinando de' Medici in 1665.

³⁴ ASLu, *AM*, vol. 297, Mansi to Bonfigli-Gualanducci & Co., Lucca-Cadiz, 16 March 1671, f. 20v.

³⁵ ASLu, *AM*, vol. 297, Mansi to Bonfigli-Gualanducci & Co., Lucca-Cadiz, 6 August 1671, f. 100r.

*mole*³⁶ and smooth and striped Venetian-style *tabì*³⁷ were mostly in demand³⁸. If there were any pieces of “black damask for Spain” left over from the previous shipment, which the current fashion demanded be embroidered with “4, 5, 6 flowers”, they had to be sent to Livorno to be bartered for other goods. However, the new silk fabrics produced according to the instructions received from Cadiz were heavy and impossible to adapt to the required standards: problems similar to those encountered in Lisbon³⁹. News of the first sales reached Lucca in the summer of 1671, and were immediately recorded in the company’s accounting books⁴⁰.

Also associated with the Cadiz trading house, other Lucca families involved in silk production, such as the Gualanduccis and Contronis, were interested in commercialising silk. We see them manufacturing silk drapes destined for Andalusia in concert with the Mansis and, at times, achieving more advantageous sale prices than theirs⁴¹.

Shipped in wax-coated boxes, the precious silks from Lucca passed through Pisa on their way to Livorno from where mainly English and Dutch ships (few from Hamburg) transported the boxes to Andalusia. After stopping in the Levant, the ships returned to Livorno for the usual unloading and reloading operations before returning to the ports of northern Europe via Cadiz⁴². Alternatively, the goods were sent by sea to Genoa and loaded onto convoys to reach Spain.

³⁶ ‘Mole’ most likely derives from the French *moule* (print or pattern), a fabric made using prints from the French royal manufactures; thus Bonfigli-Gualanducci & Co. to the Florentine Ascanio Saminiati: “French-style *mole* of large works interspersed with wide strips of satin and vague colours would be suitable for the dispatch of galleons destined for the month of September [...] at 16 real”, ASPm, *Carteggi*, section II, box 585, Cadiz-Florence, 10 June 1671, no f., see Saba (2019).

³⁷ *Tabini* (or *tabì*) was a silk fabric with wavy patterns.

³⁸ ASLu, *AM*, vol. 297, Mansi to Benassai, Lucca-Livorno, 23 January 1672, f. 210r.

³⁹ ASLu, *AM*, vol. 297, Mansi to Benassai, Lucca-Livorno, 2 July 1671, f. 74r.

⁴⁰ Thus, for the coloured *mola* piece no. 8989 sold on credit for two months at 16 reals per *vara*, in addition to three pieces of black satin, two of which at 10 reals per *vara* and another, no. 8990, at 16½ reals on credit for one month, ASLu, *AM*, vol. 299, 17 August and 6 September 1671, ff. 120r, 124v; (‘vara’ was a Spanish length measure, worth approximately 0.836 metres or 83.6 centimetres).

⁴¹ ASLu, *AM*, vol. 296, Mansi to Bonfigli, Lucca-Livorno, 8 October, f. 383r.

⁴² ASFi, *Carte strozziane*, series I, vol. 106, ff. 183v-184r.

Although Lucca products were of high quality, some of the fabrics sent to Andalusia were no longer in demand there, and sales were slow. In such cases, Cadiz requested permission to redirect the goods to the Indies. When the Mansis learned that French fabrics enjoyed greater demand in Cadiz, they encouraged the partners to market their own products as French, given their excellent quality⁴³.

At the time, the practice of attaching samples to correspondence was widespread, and the 'latest samples from France' allowed Lucca silk weavers to reproduce different types of French silk drapes, with the decorations and colours best suited to meet the demand in Cadiz. Unlike Central and Eastern Europe, where Italian luxury goods continued to exert a strong appeal, in the West, and particularly in the Spanish-American market, fashion was dictated by French linen textiles, which were lighter and cheaper. The directors in Cadiz were aware of this and had long been asking their Italian partners to participate in large purchases of French manufactures to supplement their range⁴⁴.

The receptive capacity of the Cadiz trading house was supported by the Mansis, who put their contacts and commercial networks at its service. In addition to Ascanio Saminati, a prominent name in international finance, with bases in Venice and Florence, the Mansis had correspondents in Milan, while in Genoa they could count on the well-known Reccagnis (or Raccagni), Bernardo and Tommaso, with whom they had long-standing relations, having already sent them three boxes of satin from Lucca to Cadiz in 1657⁴⁵.

Far from being a bilateral trade defined in both directions, maritime exports of Lucca silks to Cadiz, enriched with additional goods from Italian and European ports, fuelled large assortments of manufactured goods re-exported to the Spanish Indies, only a small portion of which remained in Andalusia. Initially reluctant to ship their silk overseas, "as these negotiations are completely unknown to us, in which we consider the length and risk involved", in a letter dated 2 December 1671, the Mansis agreed to ship a maximum value of 1,000 at 1,200 eight-real pieces per ship. This decision launched a steady flow of

⁴³ "If that from France is in greater demand, I believe you can pass it off as coming from that country for being perfect", ASLu, AM, vol. 297, Mansi to Bonfigli-Gualanducci & Co., Lucca-Cadiz, 26 September 1671, ff. 139v-140v, 139v.

⁴⁴ Lespagnol (1997), p. 428. Lucca documentation in ASLu, AM, vol. 297, Stefano Gualanducci to Roland-Gasparini & Co., Lucca-Lyon, 11 September 1671, f. 129rv; Mansi to Benassai, Lucca-Livorno, 12 September and 21 November 1671, ff. 129r, 174r.

⁴⁵ See Mazzei (1977), p. 106 no. 15; also ASLu, AM, vol. 296, Mansi to Tommaso and Bernardo Reccagni, Lucca-Genoa, 12 March 1670, f. 291v.

eight-real pieces into the Mediterranean, from Cadiz to the ports of Livorno and Genoa and onward to Lucca, which, according to our documentation, was never interrupted.

In order to attract customers, gain their trust and generate profit – in short to compete in the Andalusian market – it was essential to offer a varied assortment of goods in terms of both quality and quantity⁴⁶. This strategic approach became structural and required each partner to invest 1/5 (the proportion varied depending on the operation) in new commissions from Italy and European manufactures, each worth between two and three thousand eight-real pieces. The request for participation from suppliers, equal to the half, responded both to the desire to find new commercial partners and to spread the risks. By a letter dated 2 April 1672, management of operations was entrusted to Carlo Benassai of Livorno, evidently for the purposes of coordination and maritime sorting provided by the Tuscan port⁴⁷.

In 1672, remittances to Lucca seemed to confirm the favourable economic conjuncture, further stimulating the refined production of the Mansis and its shipment to Cadiz⁴⁸.

Due to insufficient commercial communication, in order to avoid delays and misunderstandings, the trade house in Cadiz was asked to send letters in duplicate, by land and by sea⁴⁹. To reduce costs, recommendation was made to use less paper and to avoid writing in code, which was probably used as a precaution against monopolistic restrictions.

But for those who traded over long distances, information had always been an essential resource, also for limiting the risks deriving from international political and military events. With the declaration of war by England and France against the United Provinces in the spring of 1672, reprisals at sea caused considerable fear for the fate of goods sent to Spain. The insecurity of navigation forced the Mansis to insure their goods, reducing their profit mar-

⁴⁶ It was no coincidence that the variety of assortments favoured the sale of merchandise at the Portobelo fairs, see Álvarez-Nogal (2011), pp. 69-70.

⁴⁷ ASLu, AM, vol. 297, Mansi to Benassai, Lucca-Livorno, 2 April 1672, f. 243r.

⁴⁸ This was the period of peak manufacturing exports to the Spanish Indies in the years 1670-1674, see Oliva Melgar (2005), pp. 31-32; ASLu, AM, vol. 297, Mansi to Bonfigli-Gualanducci & Co., Lucca-Cadiz, 18 and 22 March 1672, ff. 235r, 238r; Mansi to Rezzonico, Lucca-Genoa, 11 and 13 May 1672, ff. 257v, 261r.

⁴⁹ ASLu, AM, Mansi to Bonfigli-Gualanducci & Co., Lucca-Cadiz, 9 April 1672, f. 246r.

gins⁵⁰. The fears were entirely justified, and about a month later, the bad news reached Lucca that two British frigates had captured the ship *S. Gio Battista* from Hamburg, which was carrying a box of their silks. The ship was taken to Tangier, a key location for British operations in the Mediterranean since 1662. In an attempt to recover it, an agent, Niccolò Saminati, was sent there on behalf of various Tuscan trading houses, and the dispute reached London⁵¹. In December, the ship *S. Gio Evangelista* did not fare any better. It was being watched by the Mansis because they were interested in a box of Venetian silk ‘cendalini’ bound for Cadiz, but it was plundered by Tripolitan corsairs⁵².

Given the international war scenario, it was hoped that the silk fabrics would increase in price, making their sale more profitable, although in the summer of 1672 their overabundance in Cadiz indicated the Spanish market saturation. It was no coincidence that Madrid decided not to send the fleet to New Spain, and all sales on the Cadiz square slowed down. Awaiting the next convoy to the Indies, the only option was to sell on a daily basis, as it was the case with Carlo Mortola, a Genoese businessman who contributed to the financial needs of the Crown⁵³.

The Mansis were concerned about the fluctuations in the Cadiz market, where the poor quality of the goods arriving there on the Genoese convoy threatened to devalue their own, as “the masters might sell them at a low price, which we cannot do because ours are manufactured to perfection”⁵⁴. In fact, the high production costs of the Lucca textiles required the use of skilled la-

⁵⁰ In December 1672, neither in Genoa nor in Livorno could anyone be found willing to ensure Mansis’ box no. 10, worth 600 eight-real pieces, on ships departing from Genoa for Cadiz, even with a premium of 6%, ASLu, AM, vol. 297, Mansi to Benassai, Lucca-Livorno, 3 December 1672, f. 342v. See Addobbati (2007).

⁵¹ Bonfigli-Gualanducci & Co. granted Saminati power of attorney to request the release of the Mansis’ silk box no. 5, AHPc, *Protocolos*, vol. 865, *Poder*, 18 June 1672, f. 703; also ASLu, AM, vol. 297, Mansi to Bonfigli-Gualanducci & Co., Lucca-Cadiz, 31 August 1672, ff. 304r-305r; on this point, see Sicking, Wijffels (2020).

⁵² ASLu, AM, Mansi to Benassai, Lucca-Livorno, 14 December 1672, f. 347v; on the corsair activity in the Mediterranean, see Fontenay (2010); Calafat, Kaiser (2016).

⁵³ The two pieces of satin sold to Mortola, nos. 9357 and 9358, corresponded to 21 *varas* sold at 10 *reales* each, for a total of 210 *reales*: ASLu, AM, vol. 297, Mansi to Bonfigli-Gualanducci & Co., Lucca-Cadiz, 15 June 1672, f. 274r; also vol. 299, 21 September 1672, f. 178r; for a reference to Carlo Mortola, see Carrasco González (1997), p. 130.

⁵⁴ ASLu, AM, vol. 297, Mansi to Bonfigli-Gualanducci & Co., Lucca-Cadiz, 12 May 1672, f. 261rv.

bour as well as considerable fixed and circulating capital. For instance, to produce French-style embroidered *mole*, “which is very expensive to weave”, the silks had to go through various stages and many hands. Therefore, the partners in Andalusia were asked to support the price of the goods as much as possible and, in return, they were assured flexibility and cooperation.

This reveals some curious aspects of the production processes of Lucca manufactures, as revealed in a letter dated 23 July 1672, when the irregular width of the pieces sent to Spain (which should have been $\frac{2}{3}$ of a *vara*) was attributed to the weaver’s negligence and was subsequently corrected. Similarly for the *mole*, they guaranteed compliance with the instructions received, including those relating to the tactile sensitivity of the fabric to be produced⁵⁵. By the autumn of 1680, box no. 28 had become a source of dissatisfaction in Cadiz, due to the poor ‘tirrata’ of the tabì it contained, that is, the pulling of numerous threads during weaving on the loom, necessary to create the patterns in length. The Lucca workshop responded laconically to the general partners that this had served to facilitate the work of the ‘bagniatore’ (textile worker) to better perfect them in the wave making⁵⁶. It also happened that the Mansis complained about certain flesh-coloured tabì because the pigment was not appreciated by the purchaser, pointing out, however, that they had not previously received the necessary samples⁵⁷.

4. Limits of market integration: Lucca - Cadiz - the Indies, and vice versa

As was typical of the Cadiz trade, the Lucca workshops had realised that it was impossible to sell their goods in that market without dealing with the *Carrera*. In short, they had gone from not wanting to use sea loans or *cambio marittimo* with payment on the return of the fleet, not even sending silk overseas “in the hands of a third person”, to accepting its shipment on the monopoly convoys. They now knew that, in order to maximise their profits, it was not worth insur-

⁵⁵ ASLu, AM, vol. 297, Mansi to Bonfigli-Gualanducci & Co., Lucca-Cadiz, 23 July 1672, f. 290r.

⁵⁶ ASLu, AM, vol. 298, Mansi to Bonfigli-Gualanducci & Co., Lucca-Cadiz, 9 October 1680, f. 202v.

⁵⁷ ASLu, AM, vol. 298, Mansi to Bonfigli-Gualanducci & Co., Lucca-Cadiz, 4 December 1680, f. 233v.

ing their goods for the Indies, and they were aware of the endless delays involved in transatlantic trade. Thanks to a sophisticated information system on the Cadiz-Lucca axis, they were up to date on the consumer tastes and products most in demand on that market: the continuous exchange of invoices and samples with their partners, in both directions, guided and supported their production, adapting it to the Spanish requirements.

All that remained was to rely on the partners in Cadiz. Like all foreign merchants who were not subjects of Castile, they circumvented the ban on direct trade with the colonies by resorting to Spanish front men for the shipment of their goods. Once the merchandise reached their destination, they hoped for a successful outcome to the American negotiations, in which a variety of factors came into play, such as the saturation of those markets and the role held by Spanish commercial intermediaries or *cargadores*, from which a very multifaceted and informal picture of colonial trade has recently emerged in terms of its organisation and practical functioning⁵⁸.

If they already had to compete with French manufactures, we wonder how much Chinese products transported to New Spain by the Manila galleon may have affected Lucca silk sales. In fact, in 1571 with the opening of the transpacific route connecting the Philippine Islands with Acapulco, the demand for Asian silk manufactures traded for American silver expanded from Mexico to Lima, offering new consumption patterns to the Creole and Sevillian elites and middle classes. Imports of raw and semi-finished Chinese silk flourished until the early decades of the 17th century, wiping out the silk industry in New Spain. However, their impact on colonial markets in the second half of the century remains little known⁵⁹.

Generally, prices at American fairs, which were subject to high volatility, depended on the amount of silver (*plata*) brought by large Lima or Mexican merchants in relation to the European goods to be purchased⁶⁰. In July 1685, for instance, with the return of the remaining ships of the New Spain Fleet, the Lucca merchant Paolo Garzoni described the negotiations concluded there as “not very profitable because most of the goods, especially silk, had been sold at a loss”⁶¹. On the contrary, as in the case of the galleons that set sail in March

⁵⁸ See Lamikiz (2011).

⁵⁹ Gasch-Tomás (2014); Gasch-Tomás (2018), pp. 56-75, 129-139, 165-176; Suárez (2015).

⁶⁰ Oliva Melgar (2005), pp. 32-33.

⁶¹ ASLu, *Archivio Garzoni*, 62, no. 381, Paolo Garzoni to Sebastiano Vanni, Pisa-Rome, 31

1672 under the command of Diego de Ibarra, despite the poor outcome of the Portobelo fair, ideal conditions were created for the sale of Lucca silk drapes in *Tierra Firme*, according to news that reached the Parenisi brothers in Amsterdam in October, which was immediately commented on:

We see the poor prices made in Indies, except for silk drapes, our nationals will have made some profit. Tell us if the ermesini of Lucca have been sold and at what price, and the colours themselves, such as black satin from Florence in the Lucca style, but beautiful stuff [...] could perhaps applied⁶².

Certainly, Mansis' silk fabrics had been shipped overseas using the most classic of 'cover' operations related to the *Carrera de Indias*, that is by using *prestanombres*. These were the *cargadores* Francisco Ortuño de Rueda and Gabriel Nieto, from Seville, from the *collación* (district) of San Lorenzo and San Martín, respectively, who on February 5, 1672 signed a notarial document of obligation certifying that they had taken out a simple loan of the not inconsiderable sum of 19,712 eight-real pieces (half in *pesos* doubloons), granted to them by Bonfigli-Gualanducci & Co.⁶³ The loan agreement, which was deliberately vague, actually concealed the commission on goods received, for the same value, from the merchants of Lucca. After registering the goods as their own at the *Casa de la Contratación*, the Spanish merchants or *galeonistas* would travel with them on the galleons to sell them in the Indies and thus settle their debt. From the friendly but stereotypical wording of the document, "por acernos amistad y buena obra" (for our friendship and good work), we can assume that the interest was already included in the loan amount⁶⁴. The fact that this document does not include, as it was often the case, details of the repayment of the loan in the margin does not surprise us, since it would have taken years to pay off the debt.

Although we cannot certainly attribute the authorship of the operation to the same intermediaries, the Mansis received news about their silks in *Tierra*

July 1685, no f.; the comment refers to the fleet of General Fernández de Zaldívar which set sail in 1683, three ships of which returned to Cadiz on 29 July 1685 together with those of *Azogues*, see Lang (1998), pp. 230, 237.

⁶² ASLu, AM, *Copialettere Parenisi*, vol. 429, Parenisi to Bonfigli-Gualanducci & Co., Amsterdam-Cadiz, 31 October 1672, f. 36v.

⁶³ AHPc, *Protocolos*, vol. 865, *Obligación*, f. 532rv.

⁶⁴ Carrasco González (1996), pp. 83-85.

Firme in a letter from Cadiz dated May 6, 1673, in which their compatriots informed them that they had been exchanged for rough and cut emeralds in Cartagena de Indias (in modern Colombia), then shipped on the British war-ship *Tigre* to Livorno, where they arrived in June to be immediately resold⁶⁵.

However, clues about the involvement of the two Seville wholesalers come to us from the Paredis, who were also interested in the expedition, and allow us to illustrate what must have been a typical operation with the Indies:

We see how all our known friends had returned from the Indies, except for Ordeigno de Rueda and Nietto, who had remained in Cartagena because they did not want to sell at such hasty prices at that fair, but hoped to return as soon as possible to satisfy their creditors, enjoying the fact that they were respected and reliable people [...] God willing⁶⁶.

These few lines provide an example of how European correspondents who had invested in transatlantic convoys through a Cadiz merchant were reassured about the operational integrity of Spanish agents in distant Peruvian market, despite an information imbalance in favour of the latter and the risk of fraud.

The Portobelo fair essentially consisted of the exchange of European commodities, especially fine manufactures, for Peruvian silver and gold. It usually lasted around three weeks, with transactions accelerated, among others, by the danger and un-healthiness of the Isthmus of Panama. As in New Spain, in *Tierra Firme* the prices of the merchandise were set before the opening of the fair by officials and representatives of the Spanish and local merchants. Among them there were members of Lima *consulado* (founded in 1613), who often managed to influence negotiations in their favour. In any event, the fair of 1673 was a complete failure, due to clandestine trade in the Peruvian viceroyalty⁶⁷.

Nevertheless, transactions did not always take place through official trade fair channels. Faced with the prospect of selling at unsatisfactory prices at the Portobelo fair, the Spanish *cargadores* chose to remain in Cartagena de Indias in the hope of maximising profits. These dynamics were very common and involved moving inland or to other locations thanks to solid commercial relation-

⁶⁵ ASLu, AM, vol. 299, 14, 19 June and 12 July 1673, ff. 214v, 215r, 219r.

⁶⁶ ASLu, AM, *copialettere Paredis*, vol. 429, Paredis to Bonfigli-Gualanducci & Co., Amsterdam-Cadiz, 1 May 1673, ff. 108r-109r.

⁶⁷ On Portobelo fairs and their functioning, see Vila Vilar (1982); Ward (1993), p. 151; Lamikiz (2010), pp. 74-81.

ships with a network of agents spread over vast areas, usually for long-term operations⁶⁸. Apparently, the case we are analysing was no exception, as it dragged on from one year to the next, only coming to an end in October 1679, a full seven years after it began⁶⁹.

In the 1670s and 1680s, the Mansi's fine silk fabrics crossed the Atlantic to be sold in the viceroyalties of New Spain and Peru through formal and informal mechanisms (Map 1), but the changeable American demand required an equally varied supply.

Map 1. Mansi's silk trade routes to America (by Matteo Calcagni).



4.1. Fleet dispatch and European goods

For the commercial community of Cadiz, the fleet dispatch was an event of crucial importance. On that occasion, along with letters the Italian trading houses usually sent price lists of the most sought-after items, in order to guide

⁶⁸ Álvarez-Nogal (2011), pp. 75, 80.

⁶⁹ ASLu, AM, vol. 298, Mansi to Bonfigli-Gualanducci & Co., Lucca-Cadiz, 11 October 1679, f. 24r.

and attract commissions from European correspondents. In September 1672, while awaiting the galleons, precise instructions arrived from Cadiz regarding the assortment of goods for the fleet new expedition to New Spain. There was a specific request for light silk articles such as *frisetti* and socks from Genoa, as well as bales of raw silk from Messina, which, years later, still represented an excellent business opportunity despite the abundant silk harvest of 1680 in the kingdoms of Murcia and Valencia. However, silk could be bought and sold directly in Cadiz, perhaps purchasing a batch of weft silk from the Savoyard merchant Raimundo de Lantery, who recalls the episode in his memoirs⁷⁰.

Given the high demand for *mole* at the time, on January 25, 1673, the Mansis' workshop wrote to the Rezzonico brothers in Genoa, announcing the shipment of "4 boxes of nos. 11, 12, 13, 14" with the order to distribute them on the convoys destined to Spain, then confirmed the supply to Bonfigli-Gualanducci & Co., assuring them that they were "very beautiful, well-assorted in colour and well-made" as usual and asking them "to maintain the price as high as possible, given that the expenses and risks are very high"⁷¹.

Indeed, as we have seen, the risks were many, and the costs certainly not marginal. It is therefore impossible to understand these long-distance trade exchanges between Lucca and Cadiz, and sometimes between Cadiz and the Indies, and vice versa, without taking into account their transaction costs, consisting of freight charges, taxes, commissions and various types of brokerage fees.

This small but significant flow of textiles from Lucca thus became part of the major maritime trade routes for manufactured goods that linked Cadiz to the Atlantic cities of northern Europe, but above all to Livorno on the Mediterranean⁷². As we have already mentioned, Carlo Benassai was in charge of managing operations in that port. On May 4, 1673, he sent a shipping note to Lucca for merchandise addressed to his partners in Cadiz, which ended up in the Mansis' correspondence register. The documentation provides us with data on the companies from which the shipments originated, the purchase costs in Tuscan *pezza*, the type and sometimes the quantity of the manufactures, as shown in Table 1. A few days earlier, on April 20, the same register recorded

⁷⁰ Bustos Rodríguez (1983), pp. 48, 140.

⁷¹ ASLu, AM, vol. 297, Mansi to Rezzonico, Lucca-Genoa, 25 January 1673, f. 370v; Mansi to Bonfigli-Gualanducci & Co., Lucca-Cadiz, 25 January 1673, f. 372r.

⁷² Herrero Sánchez, Kaps (2017).

the movement of goods and ships through the Medici port, which was the nerve centre for the collection and sorting of merchandise⁷³.

What emerges is almost a pool of companies stretching from the whole of Italy to north-western Europe, revealing a fragment of Mansis' network, founded on mutual economic collaboration and cemented by national ties, trust and an intensive exchange of information. Integrating commercial correspondence to the note, we know that most of the company partners were from Lucca (Ponsampieri from Lyon; Martini from Antwerp; Controni from Lucca; Bandini, Orsucci, Micheli from Messina) or had fellow countrymen as partners (Roland-Gasparini), as well as businessmen such as the Bastero from Lyon, the D'Annas from Naples and the Geriola and Cenaschi, both from Genoa. Among the products, Breton (*bretagne*) and Norman linen fabrics from Rouen (*roane*) stand out during the period of maximum exports to Hispanic America in the early 1670s⁷⁴. These were followed by light silk items such as stockings, ribbons, handkerchiefs and *frisetti*; haberdashery, namely gold and white lace; fabrics such as velvets from Genoa and silk drapes from Naples; *lamparri*, raw and weft silk from Messina. Overall, this was a variety of goods in which we recognise the specific production of their respective places of origin, with the hope of good profits in the colonial markets, as reported a few years later by the French officer Patoulet⁷⁵.

A few months later, on August 23, the Cadiz commercial house sent a sales account to its partners in Lucca in the relevant unit of account, which was Spanish *reales*, transcribed here in original (Source 1), for both the 5 Mansis' silk boxes and the goods in which they had a 1/10 participation. By dividing the amounts by 8, we can obtain the total revenue of the Lucca workshop amounting to 5,723.5 eight-real pieces (*pesos de a Ocho*), of which 2,931.25 came just from the five boxes of their silk fabrics. The average revenue per box was therefore 584.25 eight-real pieces, even though it cannot be considered dependable due to the varying quality and value of the fabrics contained therein. We know that box no. 10 of *tabini* was estimated at 600 Tuscan pieces when it was insured for Cadiz⁷⁶, then sold for 1,465: the initial value more than doubled.

⁷³ ASLu, *AM*, vol. 299, 20 April 1673, f. 207v; on Livorno in Early Modern age, see Trivelato (2009); Addobbati, Aglietti (2016); Tazzara (2017); (Dyble, Lo Bartolo, Morelli 2024).

⁷⁴ Bustos Rodríguez (2005), p. 369.

⁷⁵ Morineau (1985), pp. 326-338.

⁷⁶ Above, footnote no. 50; so-called Tuscan *pezza della rosa* was a silver coin used in Livorno and had a value almost equivalent to Spanish eight-real piece.

Table 1⁷⁷

<i>Company</i>	<i>City</i>	<i>Merchandise</i>	<i>Quantity</i>	<i>Cost (Tuscan pezza)</i>
		Gold tips		421.13.6
Geriola	Genoa	Velvets	1 box	132.16.5
Roland-Gasparini	Lyon	Linen fabrics		227.12.9
		<i>Cendalini</i>		104.1.4
Roland-Gasparini	Lyon	Linen fabrics		554.15.2
		White tips		432.11.1
		1/5 Frisetti		345.16.2
		Tot. 2,219.6.5		
¼ Orsucci, ¼ Controni, ¼ Bandini, ¼ Mansi	Messina	Weft silk	4 bales	603.12.7
	Messina	Socks, ribbons	5 boxes	233.5.8
D'Anna	Naples	Silk drapes	75 pieces	880.3.6
Ponsampieri	Lyon	Linen fabrics	10 bales	391.4.6
Martini	Antwerp	White tips	1 box	145.18.9
Roland-Gasparini	Lyon	<i>Lamparri</i>	1 box	177.18.6
		Tot. 4,651.9.7		

⁷⁷ “Note regarding goods supplied by Carlo Benassai and C. of Livorno, with our interest to be shipped to Cadiz to Bonfigli and Gualanducci”, ASLu, *AM*, vol. 299, 4 May 1673, f. 209v; for minimal integrations to the original document, *AM*, vol. 297, here and there; the participation of supplier companies is equal to ½; where not specified, that of Mansis should be equal to 1/5 of the remainder, that is 1/10, but not in all cases.

If we multiply the accounts of the shared sales by 10, we can get the total revenue of the transaction carried out with the supplier companies, amounting to 7,094.23 eight-real pieces. Unfortunately, a precise reconstruction of the sales results obtained by comparing the shipping and sales accounts is only partially possible because of discrepancies and uncertainties concerning the quantity and quality of the goods listed, as well as the Mansis' share in the transactions, which in some cases remains unclear. For example, the box of velvets from Geriola of Genoa, which costs 132.16 Tuscan pieces, was resold for a poor 134.75 eight-real pieces, whereas the 10 linen bales from Ponsampieri cost 391.4 and was resold for 416.87.

*Source 1*⁷⁸

2 Boxes drapes no. 6, 7 that imports ours	reales 6,510
2 Boxes mentioned no. 8, 9 that imports ours	reales 5,140
1 Box tabini no. X that import ours	reales 11,720
And of participation account	
20 Bales Roane from Roland of which our part amounts to	reales 7,355
7 Bales mentioned from Ponsampieri	reales 2,143
3 Bales bretagne from mentioned	reales 1,192
2 Boxes with gold tips from Bastero e Co. for the sale our part amounts to	reales 519.17
4 Boxes white tips of more sorted from [...] imports	reales 4,170
1 Box velvets from Geriola of Genoa imports	reales 1,078
1 Box stuff from Naples imports	reales 1,165
2 Boxes stuff from Messina imports	reales 980
4 Bales semi-finished silk and 1 bale raw silk that imports	reales 3,815.17
	reales 45,788

⁷⁸ “Bonfigli and C. of Cadiz sent us on 23 August accounts for the silk drapes sold on our behalf, and for the goods in which we have a 1/10 participation, as follows”, ASLu, AM, vol. 299, 5 October 1673, f. 230r.

5. Fleet debtors, transaction costs and risk

Recorded in the letter book covering the years 1679-81, the first letter sent by the Mansis to the general partners in Cadiz is dated September 27, 1679. The arrival in August of the galleons commanded by Enriquez Guzman raised the usual expectations of a cash influx that would boost trade in Cádiz. As usual, Lucca requested the disposal of unsold silks, the desired remittances of money and, above all, the accounts of the negotiations made on their behalf in the Indies. In this sense, the results of the American exchanges did not bode well: “We are sorry [...] to hear that rumours are circulating that the negotiations on the *Tierra Firme* have gone badly because of the people from there [Cadiz] who handled them”⁷⁹. The reference seems direct to the *factores* on board the fleet bound for Peru. These kinds of Spanish agents, in addition to trading with their own funds, represented many foreign merchants who were excluded from colonial trade. In this case, we can only speculate that the prices they had negotiated with the wealthy Lima wholesalers were too low, disappointing European investors. Thus, news about developments in Indian trade reached Lucca after being filtered through multiple sources. The enormous distance between the mother country and the colonies, combined with slow communication systems, increased the uncertainty and riskiness of commercial decisions. The Mansis had to bear prohibitive costs to obtain the most up-to-date information on the conditions of distant markets, prices, and the reliability of overseas commercial agents. Nevertheless, it was hoped that the imminent return of the convoy from New Spain would compensate for any losses predicted by the galleons.

The letters copied from the years 1679-1681 show a greater awareness of the Mansis regarding the colonial trade. As limited partners, their interests were not limited to the sale of silks but extended to all the current operations of the Cadiz trading house. This explains the increase in remittances of coinable gold paste and coins (‘yellow groups’), even for large sums, which, as in the years 1670-1673, we see flowing into the ports of Livorno and Genoa⁸⁰. This flow of money destined for the Mediterranean and continental Europe can explain the

⁷⁹ ASLu, AM, vol. 298, Mansi to Bonfigli-Gualanducci & Co., Lucca-Cadiz, 27 September 1679, f. 18r.

⁸⁰ ASLu, AM, Mansi to Benassai-Gambarini & Co., Lucca-Livorno, 22 November 1679, f. 40v.

strong attraction that Cadiz exerted on businessmen from half of Europe in the late 17th century by itself.

At that time, exports of Lucca silk drapes to Cadiz consisted mainly of satin and tabì, but Pisan taffeta also appeared, a type of fabric that was quite successful in colonial trade⁸¹. What catches our attention is not the composition of exports, nor the absence of references to Chinese or foreign competition in the documentary sources – which is already a fact in itself –, but rather the difficulties in recovering debts from past fleets. The amounts owed by fleet debtors were difficult to collect, which is why payment extensions were granted, pressure was put on the guarantors involved in the transactions, or legal action was taken. This was nothing unusual for the Cadiz square, where excessive debt exposure and lack of liquidity were at the root of the bankruptcies that occurred in those years⁸². We know that in the early months of 1680, a dispute was underway in Seville against the local Juan Romano & Co., unable to pay its creditors. After dragging on for some time due to certain negotiations in the Andalusian capital and New Spain, it ended in April with Lucca merchants collecting a portion of what was owed to them⁸³. In order to compel Pablo García de Santayana the owner of two ships on which he had travelled to New Spain, where he had remained, it was necessary to confer various powers of attorney on as many individuals⁸⁴. The trading house in Cadiz had entrusted José Palomares (or Polimares) with goods using the sea loan formula with payment upon the return of the galleons, with the guarantee of the *fiador*, Captain Pedro Lopez de Linares. Due to his unfortunate business on *Tierra Firme*, upon his return the debtor had to accept an agreement with his creditors, which provided for a repayment of 10% each⁸⁵. Not to mention a certain Ignacio Borrello, also indebted to the Mansis for the sum of 884 *reales*, who took refuge in a safe place ('luogo immune') to escape his creditors⁸⁶. In any case, on

⁸¹ Taffeta was a fine, tightly woven, and shiny silk textile; Pisan-style taffeta was traded at the Veracruz fair in 1683, see Bernal (1992), p. 226.

⁸² Carrasco González (1997), pp. 91, 117.

⁸³ ASLu, AM, vol. 298, Mansi to Bonfigli-Gualanducci & Co., Lucca-Cadiz, 10 April 1680, f. 111r.

⁸⁴ ASLu, AM, vol. 298, Mansi to Bonfigli-Gualanducci & Co., Lucca-Cadiz, 3 January 1680, f. 63r; for reference on him, see Carrasco González (1997), p. 46.

⁸⁵ ASLu, AM, vol. 298, Mansi to Bonfigli-Gualanducci & Co., Lucca-Cadiz, 3 January 1680, f. 63r.

⁸⁶ ASLu, AM, vol. 298, Mansi ai Bonfigli-Gualanducci & Co., Lucca-Cadiz, 22 November 1679, ff. 43v-44r.

November 22, 1679, the Lucca workshop confirmed receipt of the accounts relating to their goods sold in Peru. The negotiations had been unfavourable and threatened to affect their capital investments. They attributed the cause to commissions and other shipping costs incurred in Cadiz and other unspecified charges in the Indies⁸⁷. We know that the commission charged by Bonfigli-Gualanducci & Co. and the other partners in the company was around 3%. Added to this was the commission owed to the commercial agent who transported the merchandise for resale in the colonial markets, which, according to Carrasco González, varied between 5 and 7%⁸⁸. On December 6, they once again pointed the finger at the “heavy charges levied on goods”⁸⁹.

For the shipment of goods to the Indies, the costs consisted essentially of taxation deriving from the so-called *registro* and the *flete*. While the latter was the payment for the intercontinental transport of merchandise, the *avería*, created to finance the Armada to defend convoys to and from the colonies, was the highest tax on goods. From the late 1660s onwards, it was no longer calculated *ad valorem*, but as a fixed contribution for merchant operators active on both sides of the Atlantic. Recent studies have highlighted its importance in justifying a reduction in taxation, which would lead to a reduction in fraud in colonial trade in the last third of the century⁹⁰.

When included in the company’s balance sheet, these ‘exorbitant’ expenses, estimated between 45 and 50%⁹¹, denied the profit hoped for by the Mansis. The Mediterranean phase of these exchanges involved the transport of the silk drapes from the customs office in Lucca to Pisa, the payment of customs duties there, and their subsequent shipment to Livorno or Genoa. From these Italian ports, additional freight charges were required for the final voyage to Cadiz.

Between the heavy taxation and the loss of some batches due to debtors, this trade continued with the shipment of black satin and 13 pieces of Pisan taffeta, which ended up in 1680 in the New Spain fleet of General Manuel de Velasco⁹². For the occasion, the partners of Cadiz were urged to write to their

⁸⁷ *Ibid.*, f. 43v.

⁸⁸ Carrasco González (1997), p. 27.

⁸⁹ ASLu, AM, vol. 298, Mansi to Bonfigli-Gualanducci & Co., Lucca-Cadiz, 6 December 1679, f. 50r.

⁹⁰ Lamikiz (2023); Lamikiz (2024); Díaz Blanco (2024).

⁹¹ Bernal (1992), p. 278.

⁹² ASLu, AM, vol. 298, Mansi to Bonfigli-Gualanducci & Co., Lucca-Cadiz, 28 August 1680, f. 180r.

debtors in the Indies to settle their debts upon the return of the fleet that had just set sail⁹³. In those days, the news was the recent discovery of the plague in Puerto de Santa María.

Faced with the possibility raised by the partners of shipping silk drapes difficult to sell to the Indies, the Mansis renewed their discontent with what they considered an overly casual attitude by the Spanish commission agents: “it must be said that these negotiations are too lengthy and it is not known when capital can be made from them, particularly when it depends on the return of goods, the debtors of which seem to pay when they please”⁹⁴. Several factors hindered Spanish sales in the Indies. The saturation of American markets and price fluctuations often forced them to remain overseas to sell their goods at higher prices, thereby not only to optimise their investments and recoup their expenses, but also to generate greater profit. The resulting delay in collections by the Cadiz trade house, combined with the length of colonial trade operations, made these deals difficult to digest. Moreover, it was even difficult to keep the accounts in order in Lucca. For high-priced luxury textiles such as these, the return on investment could not be extended for too long. This was difficult to reconcile with the characteristics of transatlantic trade, which was closely linked to the performance of Indian markets and the underlying economic circumstances. Under this light, some passages from the letter sent by the Mansis on April 9, 1681 to their nationals in Cadiz, the penultimate one in our documentation, are certainly eloquent. They acknowledged receipt of the accounts relating to their silk drapes sold and shipped on the galleons that were to depart in the autumn under the command of the Marquis de Brenes:

we have also received the account for our drapes sold and shipped to the Indies [...] and, as has been said many times, these missions to the Indies with our merchandise are to our great displeasure because we have always found them to be unfavourable [...] we confirm that experience will teach you that it is not possible to send goods there to sell [in Cadiz], particularly these draperies, in which yourself can judge that we have always had bad luck⁹⁵.

⁹³ ASLu, *AM*, vol. 298, Mansi to Bonfigli-Gualanducci & Co., Lucca-Cadiz, 17 July 1680, f. 160r.

⁹⁴ ASLu, *AM*, vol. 298, Mansi to Bonfigli-Gualanducci & Co., Lucca-Cadiz, 15 January 1681, f. 241v.

⁹⁵ ASLu, *AM*, vol. 298, Mansi to Bonfigli-Gualanducci & Co., Lucca-Cadiz, 9 April 1681, f. 283v.

In this case, the Mansis had not only reluctantly agreed to send their goods to the Indies, but were also totally dissatisfied with the commercial transactions that had been concluded on their behalf so far. In their view, trade, and in particular the sale of silk fabrics in Cadiz, was impracticable due to the unfavourable results obtained up to that point. Experience, they added, should have made this clear to their interlocutors as well.

6. Conclusions

The analysis of the Mansis' correspondence reveals attempts by Lucca silk manufactures to break into the Spanish-American market through the Bonfigli-Gualanducci e Co. trading house in Cadiz. Considering the business volume of the Mansis workshop, well reflected in its bulky letter books, the trade in Lucca silks to Andalusia and the Spanish Indies was marginal compared to that developed in the same period on the opposite side of Europe, towards the German, Polish and Russian markets. It was supported by the ramified European commercial and information network in which Lucca merchants were still involved in the last third of the century. In this sense, the Mediterranean ports of Genoa and Livorno, in particular, played an important role as hubs in collecting and redistributing Lucca silk drapes and other Italian and Northern European manufactures bound for Atlantic Andalusia.

Once in Cadiz, the partners conducted negotiations and distribution of the silks, using the operating methods and credit instruments of the square. Cadiz reflected American demand and required that Lucca's production comply with the characteristics and fashion of fabrics for fleet dispatches. This is where the relations between the two Spanish Atlantic shores became relevant: the *Carrera de Indias* with its timing, the competition among its goods, the Spanish intermediaries and the demand of the American markets with their prices. Correspondence supported these exchanges in a double flow of information that bounced from Cadiz to Livorno and Amsterdam until the announcement of the desired remittances of money to the Italian ports, as closure of commercial transactions.

The Mansis letters reveal a certain symmetry, not only spatial, between what happened to Chinese silk sold in New Spain and the silk fabrics from Lucca that travelled in the opposite direction, from the Mediterranean across the

transatlantic route, to reach the Indies⁹⁶. The high transaction costs, including transport fees, export taxes and commissions due to commercial intermediaries, can certainly be counted among the reasons for the difficult adaptation of Lucca manufactures to colonial markets. But these are not the only factors we need to consider.

Although fragmentary and partially corroborated by data, our sources give us a glimpse of the high costs of Lucca luxury manufacturing silk. In the second half of the 17th century, Lucca carried on producing traditional silk textiles that were now out of fashion, despite the fact that demand in Western Europe was moving into a different direction. In order to keep up with the new trends in colonial trade in Cadiz, the prestigious manufacturing centre in central-northern Italy had to continually adapt its offer by imitating foreign articles and supplementing its exports with foreign products. In other words, Lucca's luxury fabrics were not suited to a predominantly wholesale trade. Due to its typological, economic and functional characteristics, Lucca was a niche production that needed sure buyers and short-term payment systems in order to sustain itself and recoup production costs. This contrasted with the risk and uncertainty of the Spanish colonial trade⁹⁷.

Furthermore, contributing to the integration between colonial trade and continental markets, between Atlantic and Mediterranean trade circuits, Lucca economic operators could not rely on their own parastatal structured system of services, transport and textile merchandise, as in the French case. This reveals the limitations of a small Italian city-state⁹⁸. Unfortunately, the lack of secondary literature prevents us from comparing our case with other Italian manufacturing centres. Only systematic research in the Italian archival documentation could shed light on the specific weight of Italian manufactures in the Spanish-American market. An exception would be Florence, which attempted to place its ribbons on the colonial market through the mercantilist policies of Cosimo III⁹⁹. Probably exacerbated by the desire of correspondents to obtain greater benefits, the negative judgement of our documents on this trade should be mitigated. Otherwise, it would be difficult to explain the exports of Lucca

⁹⁶ Gasch-Tomás (2015).

⁹⁷ Baskes (2005).

⁹⁸ Lespagnol (1997), p. 412.

⁹⁹ On the attempt to market Florentine silk ribbons in colonial markets via Cadiz, see Calcagni-Trivellato (2026).

fabrics to Andalusia, which continued despite the economic ups and downs of the end of the century. Perhaps passing through Florentine hands, such as the “draperies of Lucca” that we see in the 1694 balance sheet of the Angelo Belli e Co. in Cadiz, commissioned to the Lucca silk entrepreneurs Controni¹⁰⁰. At the beginning of the 18th century, two boxes of silk drapes destined for Cadiz were still coming off its looms¹⁰¹.

With the advent of that century, the internal difficulties of Lucca’s silk industry intensified, due to its entrenchment in corporate traditionalism and inability to accommodate the demands for renewal: a ‘march on the spot’, as it has been defined, which, if it did not lead anywhere, at least ensured the perpetuation of the social and economic balance which the political reality of the small Republic was based on¹⁰².

On the international political scene, Charles II’s death triggered the War of Spanish Succession (1701-1714), paving the way for Bourbon regency. In this context, French manufactures further consolidated their position in Spanish colonial trade until the end of the 18th century, when they were overtaken by English products¹⁰³.

Regarding Lucca’s silk production, which for over a century had derived its greatest fortunes from Central and Eastern Europe, Cadiz appears as a paradigmatic example of the difficulties encountered by Italian silk manufacturers specialised in luxury goods at the end of the 17th century in competing in large-scale international trade.

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¹⁰⁰ APFm, *Balance sheet taken from the debtors and creditors ledger marked B belonging to Mr. Angelo Francesco Belli of Cadiz*, no. 8, 1694, no f.; see Carrasco González (2004).

¹⁰¹ ASLu, AM, envelope 451, no. 285, Giovanni Controni to Mansi, 5 December 1703, no f.

¹⁰² Sabbatini (1998, 2001, 2005, 2020).

¹⁰³ Bustos Rodríguez (2010), pp. 118-122.

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