
Medieval Silks in Montpellier: The Silk Market ca. 1250 - ca. 1350

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One of the most renowned items of the medieval luxury trade was silk. In the High Middle Ages silk was imported to European markets and finishing industries from the Near and Far East.¹ The Tuscan town of Lucca led the way in developing a silk finishing industry in the West which began in the twelfth century to furnish elaborate damasks and brocades to a clientele of churchmen and lay nobles and, with the growth of towns, to bourgeois markets.² The reconstruction of many aspects of the silk trade

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¹ Among the still useful older studies of the history of silk, see Francisque Xavier Michel, *Recherches sur le commerce, la fabrication et l'usage des étoffes de soie, d'or et d'argent, et autres tissus précieux en Occident, principalement en France pendant le moyen âge*, 2 vols. (Paris, 1852); ERNEST PARISET, *Histoire de la soie* (Paris, 1862); and WILLIAM F. LEGGETT, *The Story of Silk* (New York, 1949).

² The most comprehensive study of the Lucchese silk industry remains that of Florence Edler de Roover, "The Silk Trade of Lucca during the Thirteenth and Fourteenth Centuries," Diss. University of Chicago, 1930. See also her article, "Lucchese Silks," *Ciba Review*, 80 (1950), pp. 2902-2930. Also of interest is E. LAZZARESCHI and F. PARDI, *Lucca nella storia, nell'arte et nell'industria* (Lucca, 1941).

By the thirteenth century the taste for silks was so widely diffused among the European bourgeoisie that sumptuary legislation was introduced in some towns to limit

has been possible.³ However, the absence of adequate statistics has prohibited even an approximate assessment of the volume of the medieval silk trade. By the same token, the quality and design of silks have eluded historians because of the limited survival of medieval fabrics and the lack of detailed description of garments in most documents.⁴ Recent investigations have been more successful in focusing on case studies of local market activity. P. Racine examined the Genoese silk market of 1288 from the evidence of notarial archives which shed new light on silk operations.⁵ As in Genoa, the market activity of silks in Montpellier is also susceptible of exploration through the remaining notarial registers. The participation of merchants of Montpellier along with the commercial elite of towns such as Genoa and Venice in the Levant trade of the thirteenth and fourteenth centuries

personal display. Characteristic of this trend was a 1273 consular regulation in Montpellier which prohibited the use of silk and a variety of gems by ladies of the town; only *cendal*, a sort of taffeta, was permitted as a lining. See *Le Petit Thalamus de Montpellier*, ed. F. Pégat, E. Thomas and Desmazes (Montpellier, 1840), p. 146: "Que non porton vestidura de ceda ni daur ni dargen mais cendat. Item establem que non porton vestidura deguna de ceda, ni daur ni dargen, mais cendat puescon portar en folraduras de lurs vestirs, et estiers non". De ROOVER, "The Silk Trade of Lucca," p. 178, identified *sendal*, spelled *zendadi* in her sources, as a light-weight silk. F. MICHEL, *Recherches*, I, pp. 212-213, remarked that by 1350 in the neighboring town of Nîmes such a lining for garments would be denied even the local prostitutes.

³ Recent specialized studies of the silk trade include MURIEL J. HUGHES, "Marco Polo and Medieval Silk," *Textile History*, 6 (1975), pp. 119-131; HERBERT GLEISBERG, "Akten und Literatur zur Geschichte des Seidenhandels und der Seidenindustrie bis zum Beginn des zwanzigsten Jahrhunderts," *Scripta Mercaturae*, Parts 1-2 (1974), pp. 61-76; ANDRÉ GUILLOU, "La soie sicilienne au Xe-XIe siècle," *Byzantino-Sicula II, Miscellanea di scritti in memoria di Giuseppe Rossi Taibbi* (Palermo, 1975), pp. 285-288; AMEDEO MICELI, "Agricultural Silk Production in Calabria in the XV and XVI Century," *Rivista di storia dell'agricoltura*, 15: 2(1975), pp. 125-130; Florence Edler de Roover, "Andrea Banchi. Florentine Silk Manufacturer and Merchant in the Fifteenth Century," *Studies in Medieval and Renaissance History*, 3 (1966), pp. 223-285.

⁴ On surviving fabrics and silk designs, see Otto von Falke, *Decorative Silks*, 3rd ed. (New York, 1936). Some recent studies of surviving fabrics can be found in *Artes Minores. Dank an Werner Abegg*, ed. Michael Stettler and Mechthild Leinberg (Bern, 1973).

⁵ P. Racine, "Le marché génois de la soie en 1288," *Revue des études sud-est-européennes*, 8, no. 3 (1970), pp. 403-417.

has long been established, but the silk trade of Montpelliérains and the operations of the local market have never been the focus of a detailed study.⁶ Given the role of Montpellier as a commercial entrepot for Mediterranean imports into Western Europe, such a study can contribute to an understanding of the place of silk in the medieval economy.

There are extant in the notarial registers of Montpellier one hundred and thirty-five recognitions of debt for the purchase of silks and mercery in Montpellier.⁷ Market activity can be examined fruitfully at two stages: in 1293-1294 and in 1327-1343. Analysis of these contracts, the distribution of which is given in Table 1, reveals a growing concentration of transactions in silk products

TABLE 1

DISTRIBUTION OF COMMODITY TRANSACTIONS

Notarial register	Year	Silk	Mercery of Lucca	Mercery	Taffeta	Lucchese spun gold	Lucchese brocade
A. M. II, 1	1293-94	31		1		2	2
A. D. II E 95/368	1327-28	1					2
A. D. II E 95/369	1333	4	1	2	1		
A. D. II E 95/370	1336	5	2				
A. D. II E 95/374	1337-42	10	61	2	1		
A. D. II E 95/371	1342	1		1			
A. D. II E 95/372	1343-1344	1	2	2			
Totals		53	66	8	2	2	4

⁶ Still valuable as background to the commercial history of Montpellier is ALEX-ANDRE GERMAIN, *Histoire du commerce de Montpellier antérieurement à l'ouverture du port de Cette*, 2 vols. (Montpellier, 1861). For a short survey, see LOUIS J. THOMAS, *Montpellier, ville marchande: histoire économique et sociale de Montpellier des origines à 1870* (Montpellier, 1936). See also my dissertation, "Commerce and Society in Montpellier, 1250-1350," Diss. Yale University, 1974.

⁷ The extant registers are drawn from the Archives Municipales de Montpellier (abbreviated A. M. in Table 1 and A. M. Montp. in specific citations), II, 1-3 and the Archives Départementales de l'Hérault (abbreviated A. D. in Table 1 and A. D. Hé-rault in citations), II E 95/368-377.

of Lucchese manufacture in the early 1340s and the emergence of Montpellier as a market center for these goods. A brief consideration of the background of the Montpellier silk trade will be useful as an introduction to this examination of market activity.

Precise chronological beginnings cannot be established for the silk trade of Montpellier. Already in 1160 a man of Avignon made a shipment of silk from Genoa to Montpellier.⁸ This commercial route persisted a century later when in 1267 a Genoese merchant arranged with merchants of Piacenza to receive payment at the fairs of Troyes for silk worth 392 *livres provençols* which they had received from him in Montpellier.⁹ Genoa was the major western European source of raw silk in this period. It was here that the Lucchesi purchased most of the supplies for their finishing industry.¹⁰

By 1248 the Lucchesi were engaged in shipping refined silk and spun gold from Marseille to Montpellier.¹¹ In the same year Montpelliérains were actively exporting finished silks from Marseille to Ceuta.¹² The promise of this silk export trade in the western Mediterranean basin went largely unfulfilled for Montpellier in later decades. It may have been compromised by the political disputes between the houses of Aragon and Anjou.¹³

Direct importation of silks from the Levant to Montpellier was suggested as early as 1221 when the consuls of Montpellier offered their lord, Jacme I of Aragon, a magnificent cloth of

⁸ MARIO CHIAUDANÒ and MATTIA MORESCO, ed. *Il cartolare di Giovanni Scriba* (Turin, 1935), II, act. XVI, pp. 308-309.

⁹ RENÉE DOEHAERD, *Les relations commerciales entre Gênes, la Belgique et l'Outremer d'après les archives notariales génoises aux XIIIe et XIVe siècles* (Brussels, Rome, 1941), III, act 1259, p. 697.

¹⁰ F. de ROOVER, "Lucchese Silks," p. 2909.

¹¹ LOUIS BLANCARD, ed. *Documents inédits sur le commerce de Marseille au moyen âge* (Marseille, 1885), II, act 871 of the notary Amalric.

¹² L. BLANCARD, *Documents inédits* (Marseille, 1884), I, acts 6 and 13 of Amalric.

¹³ EDOUARD BARATIER and FELIX REYNAUD, *Histoire du commerce de Marseille* (Paris, 1951), II, p. 103ff. Montpellier, it should be noted, was under the aegis of the house of Majorca, cadet branch of Aragon, in this period.

gold on the occasion of his marriage with Eleanor of Castile.¹⁴ Future southern French marketing patterns were foreshadowed in a 1232 request by the King of England in his Bordeaux household for twenty silk cloths and four scarlet cloths from Montpellier.¹⁵ In the early thirteenth century Montpellier was in the process of becoming a distribution center for silks, some of which were probably imported directly from the Levant, others from intermediate markets such as Genova and Marseille, others still from the silk finishing center of Lucca.

It is only for the end of the thirteenth century that a study of the local market in Montpellier becomes feasible. In the earliest preserved notarial register of 1293-1294 the notary Jean Grimaud drafted thirty-six transactions regarding silks and mercery.¹⁶ In the majority of these acts the purchaser stated that he owed the seller a specified sum of money *pro cerico* (or *serico*) *tantum valenti quod a te ex causa emptionis habui*.¹⁷ Occasionally, greater description of the merchandise was inserted. The provenance of the silk might be noted: *pro cerico de Romania*, that is, silk from the Byzantine Empire; or, *pro cerico de guala giyane* or *de guela*, both of which designations suggest the southern Caspian region of Ghilan as the place of origin.¹⁸ The artistry of a finishing industry might be signaled in these notarial contracts: *argento de Lucha cerico*, a cloth of silver silk of Lucca, possibly silver brocade; or *cerico et auro de Lucha*, which may have been gold brocade.¹⁹

¹⁴ F. MICHEL, *Recherches*, II, pp. 139-140. Michel stated that the cloth was recently brought from the Levant; he suggested that it was perhaps *samite*, *siglaton* or *baudequin*.

¹⁵ *Ibid.*, p. 309.

¹⁶ A. M. Montp., II 1, *passim*.

¹⁷ See, for example, A. M. Montp., II, I, f. 91r.

¹⁸ *Romania*: A. M. Montp., II 1, f. 11r; Ghilan: A. M. Montp., II 1, ff. 11r and 88v. Ghilan was a common source of medieval silk according to F. de ROOVER, "Lucchese Silks," pp. 2908-2909. On the origin of medieval silks, see also P. RACINE, "Le marché génois", p. 405ff and Wilhelm Heyd, *Histoire du commerce du Levant au moyen âge* (Leipzig, 1886; Amsterdam, 1967), II, pp. 670-674.

¹⁹ A. M. Montp., II 1, ff. 36r and 90v.

In two contracts the silk was termed *cerico refracto* and once *cerico crudo refracto*, the latter clearly raw silk.²⁰ The term *refracto*, derived from the verb *refringo*, may refer to silk which had been damaged or mutilated.²¹ As R. S. Lopez has pointed out, Francesco Balducci Pegolotti cautioned that it was necessary to exercise care when buying China silk because of the problem of damage from rubbing on the long caravan journey from the Orient.²² Lopez has suggested that the transport wear of China silk could account for the lower prices which it often brought in western markets when compared with Near Eastern silk. While the silk in question in 1293 was not identified as China silk, rubbing damage could have occurred on silk merchandise in general. Without the notation of quantity in these acts, it is impossible to judge whether the highest price quoted for *cerico refracto*, 108 livres 19 sous *melgoriens*, reflected a modest price for this type of merchandise.²³

Evidence of a silk dyeing industry can be documented in Montpellier at the end of the thirteenth century. One contract of 1293 specifically mentioned the dyeing of silk: a local dyer recognized his debt of 14 livres 2 sous *melgoriens* to a mercer for the purchase of silk which was to be repaid in the execution of dyeing in green, black and red hues.²⁴ The participation of the Jews in silk dyeing is suggested by the Montpellier evidence.²⁵

²⁰ A. M. Montp., II 1, ff. 29v, 83v and 88r.

²¹ See C. T. LEWIS and C. SHORT, *A Latin Dictionary* (Oxford, 1966), p. 1548, for *refringo*, *refregi*, *refractum*.

²² R. S. LOPEZ, "China Silk in Europe in the Yuan Period," *Journal of the American Oriental Society*, 72 (1952), p. 75, and FRANCESCO BALDUCCI PEGOLOTTI, *La pratica della mercatura*, ed. Allan Evans (Cambridge, 1936), p. 382. "Fregata" is the term used by Pegolotti to describe rubbed silk.

²³ A. M. Montp., II 1, f. 83v. The exchange rate between *livres melgoriens* and *livres tournois*, the two currencies most commonly appearing in the Montpellier documents, was about 13 *deniers melgoriens* for 12 *deniers tournois*. See ETIENNE FOURNIAL, *Histoire monétaire de l'occident médiéval* (Paris, 1970), pp. 151-155.

²⁴ A. M. Montp., II 1, f. 21r.

²⁵ Six purchases of silk by Jews have been recorded. See A. M. Montp., II 1, ff. 7r, 21r, 27r, 28v, 47v and 50v.

The dyeing trade was a common vocation of medieval Jews in Provence and in Italy.²⁶ Although the six purchases of silk by Jews in 1293 did not identify the buyers as dyers, in the same year the presence of Jewish dyers in Montpellier was signaled.²⁷ An important dyeing industry with a specialty in scarlet dyeing had existed in Montpellier since the twelfth century. The 1181 monopoly in the practice of dyeing, accorded by Guilhem VIII, lord of Montpellier, to his men, had been relaxed in 1226 and in 1251.²⁸ By the end of the thirteenth century participation in the dyeing trade by Jews and by newcomers was undoubtedly possible.²⁹

In addition to silk dyeing, further testimony to the presence of a silk finishing industry is preserved in the late thirteenth-century acts. In 1294 a local merchant acknowledged his debt of 17 livres 12 sous melgoriens in favour of a local mercer for silk which he arranged to pay off by supplying two silk cloths per week until the debt was liquidated: *in solutione et exterminacione dicti debiti duos pannos cericos quorum unus erit senhay ratus cum barraturis aureis pretio xxiiii solidos melgoriensium et alius erit parvus operis montispessulani pretio xvii solidos melgoriensium...*³⁰ The first cloth worth 24 sous was decorated with gold stripes; the second worth 17 sous was characterized by Montpellier workmanship. Requisite local trades existed to support the finishing industry alluded to in the description of the second cloth. The making of silk corduroy (*cordurarie de serico*) was taught in Montpellier in this period, and the manufacture of gold thread was practised in Montpellier

²⁶ ARMAND O. CITARELLA, "A Puzzling Question Concerning the Relations between the Jewish Communities of Christian Europe and Those Represented in the Geniza Documents," *Journal of the American Oriental Society*, 91 (1971), p. 305.

²⁷ A. M. Montp., II 1, ff. 47r and 48r.

²⁸ See *Petit Thalamus*, pp. 137-139.

²⁹ Jewish activity must escape detailed analysis since there were no further contracts preserved in the notarial registers of 1327-1343.

³⁰ A. M. Montp., II 1, f. 63r.

as it was in many Mediterranean towns.³¹ Spun gold of Montpellier had been shipped from Marseille to Acre in 1248, and, in the fourteenth century, three apprenticeship contracts detailed the instruction of young girls in the spinning of gold.³²

Other towns of southern France enjoyed individualized designations of workmanship as Montpellier did. In 1294 a man from Alès in the Cévennes, north of Montpellier, agreed to repay a debt of 66 *livres* 13 *sous* 10 *deniers melgoriens* to a Montpellier mercer at the weekly rate of one *pannum cericum operis de Alesto* worth 30 *sous melgoriens*.³³ Whether regional finishing industries had connections with the important silk finishing center of Lucca cannot be answered from the remaining sources. The local industries may, in fact, have existed separately on a small scale. The culture of the silk worm can be documented in the Cévennes in the late thirteenth century and may have acted as a stimulus to the industries of Montpellier, Alès and other towns.³⁴ By the same token, the existence of finishing industries in Montpellier and elsewhere created a local market demand for imported silk.

At the end of the thirteenth century the role of silk supplier was shared among mercers, silk merchants (*sederii*) and money changers of Montpellier, and merchants of Narbonne.³⁵ The local documents have left no trace of Montpelliérains travelling to Italy to obtain silks. However, P. Racine noted that the Lucchese drew up many transport contracts in Genoa to ship silk to Provence and Languedoc, especially to Nîmes, at the end of

³¹ A. M. Montp., II 1, f. 80v. WILLIAM A. BONDS, "Genoese Noblewomen and Gold Thread Manufacturing," *Medievalia et Humanistica*, fasc. 19 (1966), p. 79, cites Montpellier with Genoa, Lucca and Milan as centers of manufacture of gold thread in the thirteenth century.

³² L. BLANCARD, *Documents inédits*, II, acts 288, 308, 311, 522 and 630 of Amalric regarding spun gold. For the apprenticeship evidence, see A. D. Hérault, II E 95/368, ff. 57r, 131v and 136r.

³³ A. M. Montp., II 1, f. 64r.

³⁴ EMMANUEL LE ROY LADURIE, *The Peasants of Languedoc*, trans. John Day (Urbana, Chicago, London, 1974), p. 71.

³⁵ A. M. Montp., II 1, ff. 16v, 19v, 83v, 88r and 88v.

the thirteenth century.³⁶ The existence of a Lucchese colony in Montpellier from as early as 1272 supports the possibility of shipments to Montpellier as well, but the Lucchesi immigrants in Montpellier have left only occasional witness to their involvement in sales of Lucchese merchandise.³⁷ Merchants of Lucca sold a coat and a cape with spun gold of Lucca to a merchant of Montpellier and his wife in 1293 for 6 *livres 2 sous melgoriens*, and in 1336 a Lucchese immigrant made a sale of one fardel of partially processed silk, *cirici torchie* (*sic*), to a Montpellier silk merchant for 206 *livres 9 sous petits tournois*.³⁸

Merchants and mercers of Montpellier predominated in the local market transactions in silks at the end of the thirteenth century. Their clients included local silk merchants and foreigners from Figeac, Limoges, Uzès, Alès and Avignon, for whom Montpellier was a point of entry for Mediterranean silk products.³⁹ The activities of Jacobus Domigol, mercer, will illustrate the typical retail process. On October 20, 1293, Domigol made a purchase of silk worth 101 *livres 6 sous melgoriens* from a common supplier, merchants of Narbonne.⁴⁰ From October 20, 1293 to March 13, 1294, Domigol made a series of small sales of silk averaging 30 *livres melgoriens* to mercers of Figeac, to an inhabitant of Avignon

³⁶ P. Racine, "Le marché génois", p. 410.

³⁷ F. de ROOVER, "The Silk Trade," p. 163, and THOMAS W. BLOMQUIST, "Trade and Commerce in Thirteenth-Century Lucca," Diss. University of Minnesota, 1966, p. 63, on the Lucchese settlement in Montpellier. These immigrants were active in local and international finance, engaging in money exchanges, cloth sales, loans of money to local village consulates and property management. See A. D. Hérault, II E 95/370, ff. 49r, 27r, 75v, 79v, 108r and 125r; II E 95/377, f. 74r; II E 95/375, ff. 6v, 22r, 81r, 98r and 108r; II E 95/369, f. 107r. See also DANIEL NEIRINCK, "Répertoire des Archives Communales de Courmonterral", manuscript inventory (A. D. Hérault, 1969), entry AA 13, 14.

³⁸ A. M. Montp., II 1, f. 5r and A. D. Hérault, II E 95/370, f. 59r. On the throwing process of silk finishing, see F. de ROOVER, "Lucchese Silks", p. 2917.

³⁹ A. M. Montp., II 1, ff. 12r, 12v, 15v, 36r, 48v, 50v, 51v, 56r, 64r, 90r, 90v, 91r, 93r.

⁴⁰ A. M. Montp., II 1, f. 16v.

and to one Bertrandus de Toloso, mercer.⁴¹ He was undoubtedly selling stock acquired from the merchants of Narbonne and from other suppliers. Domigol's sales were slightly smaller than the average silk sales of 1293-1294 as Table 2 shows.⁴² The largest and smallest sales of these years are given in Table 3.

A final aspect of market activity to be explored at the end of the thirteenth century is the export of silks. Mercers of Montpellier cooperated occasionally in the export of silks within southern France. Thus, in 1293 Toulouse was the destination of coloured silks worth 150 *livres melgoriens* to be sold by a mercer on behalf of a colleague.⁴³ Curiously lacking in 1293-1294 and, in fact, in 1327-1343 is evidence of silk exports from Montpellier to Paris and to the Champagne fairs which were frequent destinations of spices and leather recorded in extant transport contracts.⁴⁴ Italian competition, especially Lucchese activity, may account for this lacuna.⁴⁵

Comparison of market activity of 1293-1294 with that of

⁴¹ A. M. Montp., II 1, ff. 12v, 35v, 48v, 56r, 90v and 91r.

⁴² For the purposes of comparison the data of Tables 2, 3, and 5 have been converted to probable approximate values in the good *tournois* currency of 1330. Over the years of this study, 1293 to 1343, currency fluctuations make the comparison of prices in any two years hazardous. The computations for these tables were based upon *piéd de monnaie* quotations from French mints for specific years. The fact that notaries quoted sums at times in money of account and at times in real money introduces one potential source of error; a second lies in the fact that one cannot be certain how rapidly a reformed currency was substituted for a decadent currency, especially in Montpellier which was until 1349 partially under Majorcan political allegiance. In spite of these difficulties, it has seemed desirable to establish these tables to permit comparative observations on the evolution of the silk market. On the problems inherent in medieval currency, see JOHN BELL HENNEMAN, *Royal Taxation in Fourteenth-Century France. The Development of War Financing 1322-1356* (Princeton, N. J., 1971), especially Appendix I, pp. 331-353, HARRY A. MISKIMIN, *Money, Prices and Foreign Exchange in Fourteenth-Century France* (New Haven and London, 1963), especially Appendix D., pp. 158-169, and E. FOURNIAL, *Histoire monétaire*, p. 78ff.

⁴³ A. M. Montp., II 1, f. 63r.

⁴⁴ See the list of extant transport contracts in my dissertation, "Commerce and Society," II, Appendix V, pp. 261-267.

⁴⁵ On Lucchese activities in Champagne, see F. de ROOVER, "The Silk Trade," pp. 93-95. On Lucchese colonies in France, see L. MIROT, *Etudes lucquoises* (Paris, 1930).

AVERAGE VALUES OF TOTAL TRANSACTIONS

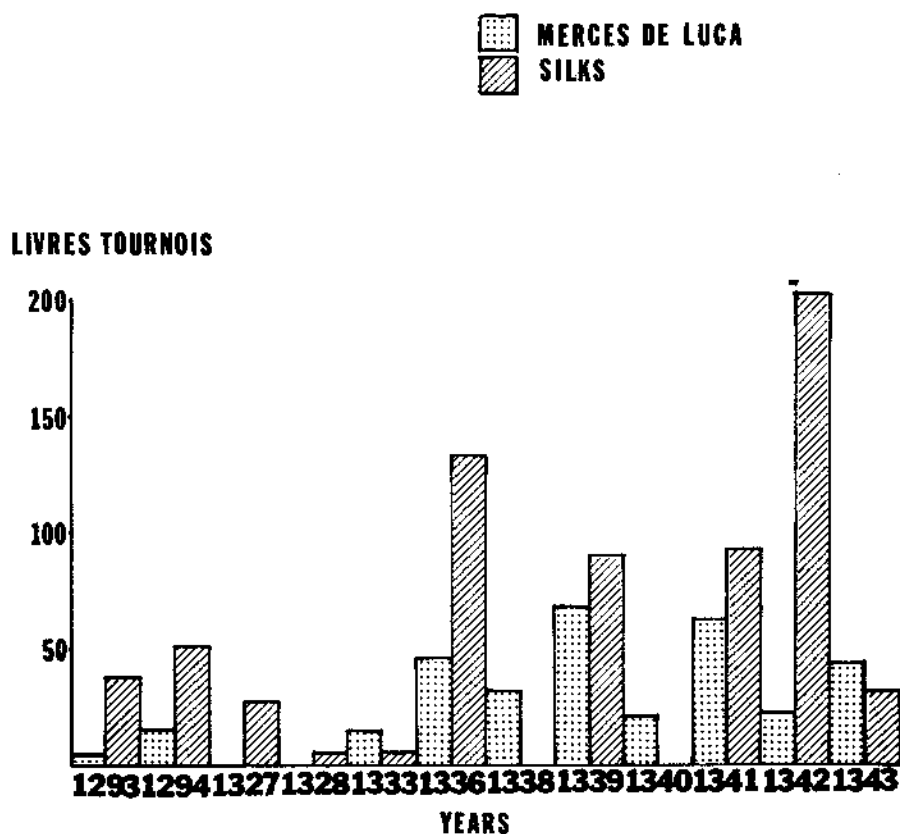


TABLE 2

1327-1343 reveals several changes. An emphasis on Lucchese merchandise is reflected in the appearance of a new notarial formula, *merces de Luca*, in 1333.⁴⁶ Tables 2 and 3 show that larger sums of money were involved in the trade in silks and in *merces de Luca* in the later period. The years 1336 to 1343 reflected the peak of this activity. Over the period 1337-1342 the notary Guillaume Nogaret recorded sixty-one transactions in *merces de Luca* for two Montpellier merchants, the Cabanis brothers.⁴⁷ While the existing evidence does not permit a precise definition of this term, it is probable that a variety of silk fabrics, such as the damasks and brocades for which Lucca was famous, were implied.⁴⁸

Silks reaching the Montpellier market in the later period attest to geographic origins not mentioned in 1293-1294. In the years 1333-1339 China silk appeared. In 1336 a merchant of Montpellier sold China silk on two occasions to silk merchants in the quantity of one fardel (*fardellum cirici cataie*) and in an unspecified amount.⁴⁹ In 1339 the Cabanis brothers made four sales of China silk to silk merchants for sums ranging from 79

⁴⁶ The notary Jean Holanic, A. D. Hérault, II E 95/369, f. 9v, spelled it *mer-seria de Luca*. In most later acts, it will be *merces de Luca*.

⁴⁷ A. D. Hérault, II E 95/374, *passim*. The terminology of 1293-1294 was more explicit (note 19 above) and similar to that used by the notary Amalric of Marseille in 1248. See L. BLANCARD, *Documents inédits*, I, acts 6, 13 and 38; II, acts 203 and 871. In act 203, for example, Amalric used the phrase *scarpis auri filato in filo de Lucca*.

⁴⁸ PHILIPPE WOLFF, *Commerce et marchands de Toulouse (vers 1350-vers 1450)* (Paris, 1954), pp. 232-233, suggested from his consultation of an inventory *post mortem* of a silk merchant of Toulouse that a variety of fabrics, silk velvet, satin, damasks and brocades, were among those referred to by the term *merces de Luca*.

⁴⁹ A. D. Hérault, II E 95/370, f. 31r and 66r. The word *cataya* or *cataie* in various approximate spellings was used to signify Cathay. According to F. de ROOVER, "Lucchese Silks," p. 2909, raw silk imported from abroad usually arrived in "long, narrow bales, called fardels. These varied in weight from seventy to two hundred pounds, most frequently weighing about one hundred pounds. It was a convenient size and shape for transportation by pack animal to and from seaports or for long distances overland."

For a recent discussion of the procurement of China silk, see R. S. LOPEZ, "Nouveaux documents sur les marchands italiens en China à l'époque mongole," *Académie des Inscriptions et Belles Lettres, Comptes rendus* (1977), pp. 445-458.

MAXIMUM AND MINIMUM AMOUNTS

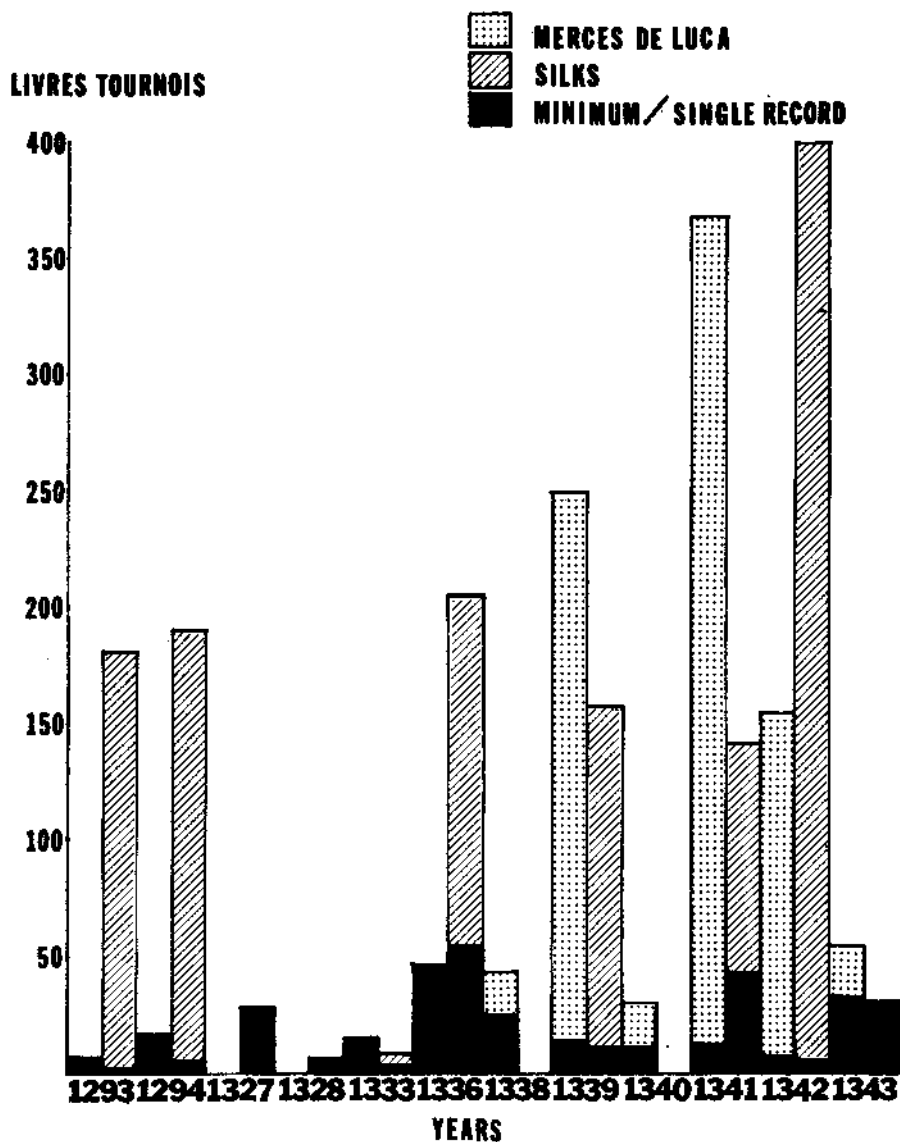


TABLE 3

livres tournois for one half fardel (*pro medio fardello cirici crudi cataya*) to 106.5 *livres* and 147 *livres* for a fardel on other occasions.⁵⁰ The fardel of partially processed silk, sold by the Lucchese immigrant in 1336, was more expensive (206 *livres*).⁵¹

Another silk origin was that of Talich on the eastern shore of the Caspian Sea, noted in 1342.⁵² While in most transactions, in Montpellier as in Genoa, the silks were of unspecified provenance, the varieties of geographic origin noted by P. Racine for the Genoese market of 1288 surpass in number those found in Montpellier in either 1293-1294 or 1327-1343.⁵³ Similarly, the quantity of silk which appeared in Montpellier was undoubtedly small when compared with the Italian markets such as Lucca where a merchant of Genoa was recorded selling thousands of pounds of China silk in the 1330s.⁵⁴

Although the agents and routes of arrival of silk imports in fourteenth-century Montpellier can be only partially reconstructed, silk exports by Montpelliérains prove a more fruitful field of inquiry. During the 1310s and 1320s accounts for the papal court reveal the activity of merchants of Montpellier supplying silks to Avignon. Noteworthy in this respect was Phillipus de Crusolis who furnished silks and silk threads as well as spices and other goods to the papal court.⁵⁵

In the fourteenth century the English court continued to be

⁵⁰ A. D. Hérault, II E 95/374, ff. 22R, 30R and 32R.

⁵¹ A. D. Hérault, II E 95/370, f. 59r.

⁵² A. D. Hérault, II E 95/374, f. 34v. My reading here is *pro cirico... talami*; the latter word was identified by RACINE, "Le marché génois," p. 406 as Talish in the region of Azerbaidzhan, U.S.S.R.

⁵³ P. RACINE, "Le marché génois," *passim*.

⁵⁴ F. de ROOVER, "Lucchese Silks," p. 2909. R. S. LOPEZ, "European Merchants in the Medieval Indies: The Evidence of Commercial Documents," *Journal of Economic History*, 3 (1943), p. 166, suggested that the Frescobaldi Company imported China silk as far as London. The terminology used was similar to that of Montpellier: "*serico nominato Catemy*."

⁵⁵ K. H. SCHÄFER, *Die Ausgaben der Apostolischen Kammer unter Johann XXII* (Paderborn, 1911), *passim*.

the recipient of silks exported from Montpellier. Under Edward II several Montpelliérains served as purveyors of the royal wardrobe supplying silks from Montpellier and Languedoc.⁵⁶ Records of this activity cease about 1330 at a time when hostilities were multiplying between the English and the French. The outbreak of the Hundred Years War disrupted the silk trade from the south of France to England.⁵⁷

Contemporaneous with the activity of merchants of Montpellier in England and Avignon were silk sales by compatriots in Perpignan, Barcelona and Valencia. In the 1320s and 1330s Montpelliérains were specializing in the sale of French wool cloths in Roussillon and in Spain, but, on occasion, they sold silks.⁵⁸ In Barcelona they had a Jewish clientele for their silks.⁵⁹ This secondary activity in silks lapsed in the late 1330s when merchants of Montpellier were faced with the increasing monopoly of wool cloth sales on the Spanish market by merchants of Narbonne.⁶⁰ This competition forced a general decline in the trade of Montpelliérains in Spain. Perhaps as a result of trade shifts, there was an influx of Spaniards of Burgos, Valencia and Castile to Montpellier as silk clients of the Cabanis brothers in the years 1338-1343. Their activity will be discussed shortly.

The notarial evidence of the period 1327-1343 documents

⁵⁶ See, for example, *Calendar of Patent Rolls, Edward II (1307-1313)* (London, 1894), I, p. 45, and F. MICHEL, *Recherches*, II, p. 308.

⁵⁷ On the buildup of the Hundred Years War, see EDOUARD PERROY, *The Hundred Years War*, trans. W. B. Wells (New York, 1965), pp. 34-59.

⁵⁸ Archives Départementales des Pyrénées Orientales, Series E, reg. 37, f. 32v. The product sold was termed *velorum cirici*. See also A. D. Pyrénées Orientales, Series E, reg. 30, f. 2v; reg. 38, f. 9r; reg. 46, f. 18r. I am indebted to Monsieur Guy Romestan of the Faculté des Lettres et des Sciences Humaines de Montpellier for the Spanish and Roussillonnais references in this study.

⁵⁹ Archivo de la Corona de Aragon, manuel of Lor. Canals, entries 1336 and 1337.

⁶⁰ GUY ROMESTAN, "A propos du commerce des draps dans la péninsule ibérique au moyen âge. Les marchands languedociens dans le royaume de Valence pendant la première moitié du XIV^e siècle," *Bulletin philologique et historique*, année 1969 (Paris, 1972), I, pp. 128 and 177-187. Romestan found that some ninety percent of recorded sales of cloth were in the hands of merchants of Narbonne.

the presence on the Montpellier market of a variety of finished silks: red silks of Novara, garments of silk and gold, shirts of silk and gold, black silk cloths, dyed silk of Lucca, silks of various colours, and in profusion, the *merces de Luca*.⁶¹ Local silk merchants assumed a role in local commerce which rivaled that of the mercers, and both trades bought silks from importers and sold them to a foreign and local clientele.⁶²

The most sustained market activity is visible in the recognitions of debt recorded by the notary Nogaret for the Cabanis brothers. The latter, investors in the Levant trade of Montpellier, exported wool cloths to Cyprus and the Byzantine Empire.⁶³ To northern Europe they shipped saffron.⁶⁴ They trafficked in raw silk, China silk and dyed silk of Lucca, but their specialization lay in *merces de Luca*.⁶⁵ Table 4 describes their clientele for Lucchese merchandise.

TABLE 4

CABANIS' CLIENTS FOR MERCES DE LUCA
GEOGRAPHIC ORIGIN

	Toulouse	Burgos	Cahors	Montpellier	Valencia	Castile	Unidentified	Total
Number of acts	41	7	5	5	1	1	1	61

Sixty-seven percent of the Cabanis' clients for *merces de Luca* were merchants of Toulouse, whose purchases ranged in value from about 25 *livres* to 200 *livres tournois*. On one occasion in March 1341, Petrus Cotelli of Toulouse, whose purchases through agents can be documented in the years 1339-1343, paid eleven

⁶¹ A. D. Hérault, II E 95/368, ff. 74r, 114v, 142r; II E 95/369, ff. 100r, 112v, 113v; II E 95/374, ff. 22R, 22vr; II E 95/371, f. 105v.

⁶² See A. D. Hérault, II E 95/370, f. 31r and II E 95/372, f. 42v for examples.

⁶³ A. D. Hérault, II E 95/374, ff. 27r, 37vR, 43vR, and 45vR.

⁶⁴ A. D. Hérault, II E 95/374, ff. 36v, 37v, 17vR, 59vR.

⁶⁵ A. D. Hérault, II E 95/374, *passim*. See sample acts in Appendix.

marks of gold or about 379 *livres tournois* for *merces de Luca*.⁶⁶ The Toulousain purchases of these years were the harbingers of expanding commercial relations between Montpellier and Toulouse at the mid-fourteenth century.⁶⁷

Spaniards also began to frequent Montpellier in search of silks in the late 1330s, as suggested earlier. Merchants of Burgos, Castile and Valencia represented almost fifteen percent of the Cabanis' clientele. Typical was Johannes Ferrandes, merchant of Burgos, who bought *merces de Luca* with two associates in 1341.⁶⁸ Petrus de Calvo, merchant of Montpellier inhabiting Valencia, bought about 155 *livres* of this merchandise in 1342.⁶⁹ Calvo seems to have specialized in the export of silks to Valencia and the import of saffron to Montpellier.⁷⁰ The Spanish interest in silks was only part of a broad spectrum of commercial and financial interaction with Montpellier.⁷¹ The Languedocian town acted as a clearing house for Spanish financial obligations.⁷² Spaniards frequently borrowed funds in towns such as Valencia and Barcelona through exchange contracts and repaid their debts in Montpellier. The latter was a gateway for Spanish trade in leather and saffron with the Champagne fairs and with Paris.⁷³ Transportation links, both overland and by sea through short-haul navigation along the Mediterranean coast, were numerous, and the ties between southern France and Spain had been close for

⁶⁶ See A. D. Hérault, II E 95/374, ff. 7v, 31r, 35r, 17vR, 35vR, 37vR and 41vR. See also II E 95/371, f. 67v for a purchase by Cotelli. On currency conversions, see note 42 above.

⁶⁷ P. WOLFF, *Commerces et marchands de Toulouse*, *passim*.

⁶⁸ A. D. Hérault, II E 95/374, ff. 44vr, 48vr and 57r.

⁶⁹ A. D. Hérault, II E 95/374, f. 55vR.

⁷⁰ A. D. Hérault, II E 95/370, f. 48r and Archivo del Reino de Valencia, Protocolos, nos. 2801 and 2880 for examples of the Calvo trade.

⁷¹ I have explored this interaction in some detail in my dissertation, "Commerce and Society," *passim*.

⁷² *Ibid.*, II, Appendix VI, pp. 269-278.

⁷³ *Ibid.*, II, Appendix V, pp. 261-267.

centuries. Silk purchases by Spaniards must be seen in the context of this broad network of contacts.

Equally endowed with close ties, the region of Cahors was the origin of Cabanis' clients as well. Vitalis and Bartholomeus Cavalerii of Cahors bought somewhat smaller amounts of *merces de Luca*, ranging from about 20 to 80 *livres* in price, than did Toulousains and Spaniards.⁷⁴ The Lot region of which Cahors was an important center had long entertained relations with Montpellier as a Mediterranean entrepot and a collaborative center of finance.⁷⁵

Completing the Cabanis' clientele were Montpelliérains who in turn engaged in silk sales.⁷⁶ Over the five-year period for which data exist on Cabanis' transactions in *merces de Luca*, their sales averaged 48.4 *livres tournois*. Table 5 summarises the total volume of their activity.

TABLE 5

CABANIS' TRADE IN MERCES DE LUCA

Year	Total amount	Average per sale	Number of <i>merces</i> acts	Total acts in year
1338	94.5 <i>livres</i> *	31.5	3	28
1339	743.5	67.6	11	89
1340	64	21.3	3	39
1341	1320.9	57.4	23	80
1342	728.9	34.7	21	58

* Prices have been quoted in *livres tournois* of 1330.

⁷⁴ A. D. Hérault, II E 95/374, ff. 6v, 17v, 27v and 29vR.

⁷⁵ On links with the Lot region, see JEAN COMBES, "Une famille de négociants quercynols à Montpellier et à Marseille au XIII^e siècle", *Bulletin de la Fédération historique du Languedoc-Méditerranéen et du Roussillon* (Perpignan, 1953, Saint-Gilles, 1954), offprint and JEAN LARTIGAUT, "Témoignages sur la dépopulation du Quercy au XIV^e siècle", *Annales du Midi*, 84 (1972), pp. 5-15.

⁷⁶ See, for example, A. D. Hérault, II E 95/374, ff. 36v and 37r. Purchases by a local *velerius* are also worthy of note. See ff. 17R and 22R.

These data suggest that 1341 was the most productive year for the Cabanis, while 1339 showed the largest average sales. The Cabanis' commercial activity can be set in the general context of trade in silk and mercery over the period 1293-1343 by a comparison of the data in Table 5 with those in Tables 2 and 3. Since the Cabanis' sales in *merces de Luca* account for most of the recorded activity in this merchandise, the curve of average sales basically reflects the Cabanis' sales. Average sales of silk were higher in the years of peak trade — 1293-1294 and 1336-1343 — than were sales of *merces de Luca*. The average silk sale made by the Cabanis was 113 *livres*, considerably higher than the average sale of *merces de Luca*. However, Table 3 of maximum and minimum sales, reveals that the largest transactions in both silks and *merces de Luca* — in 1340 and 1341 — fell in the same range of upwards of 400 *livres tournois* in the sound money of 1330. While such a sum may seem modest in comparison with some medieval commodity values, a pittance alongside the thousands of pounds in some Genoese sales of 1288, it still represents a solid investment of capital, greater than the price of a substantial house in Montpellier.⁷⁷

The share of the Cabanis in the silk and *merces de Luca* trade in Montpellier may be due in part to a random survival of evidence, felicitous in their regard, but their specialization in one product is characteristic of the behaviour of Montpelliérains whose activity can be observed in other phases of commerce at the mid-fourteenth century. Specialization was one response to the shrinking commercial possibilities in this period.

The importance of the silk trade in the economy of Montpellier can be best illustrated by the comparative numbers of com-

⁷⁷ For example, a local pepperer sold a house in the vicinity of Notre-Dame-des-Tables in the financial district of town to another pepperer for 250 *livres petits tournois* in 1336. See II E 95/370, f. 118v.

modity transactions given in Table 6.⁷⁸ After agricultural products which were vital to the survival of every medieval town, silks and mercery were the most common objects of commerce in the two periods examined above. Silks and *merces de Luca* were the most frequently sold of Mediterranean imports which included spices and pharmaceutical products. The complements of these imports, wool cloths, were the most common exports of merchants of Montpellier in the Mediterranean world and active commodities of exchange on the local market. The activity of the silk trade in the years 1293-1294 and 1336-1343 reflects two periods of overall economic prosperity when other commodities of the luxury trade were also heavily traded. In contrast, the years 1327-1333 represent a time of agricultural crisis when grain had to be imported to sustain the urban population.⁷⁹ Hence the intense activity in grain recorded in Table 6. The years 1347-1348 fall again in a period of agricultural shortages when luxury products were rarely recorded in the remaining documents.⁸⁰ The silk transactions of 1336-1343 depict a height of market activity not to be realized again in later years due to the onset first of agricultural crisis and then of the Black Death of 1348.

The silk trade of western Europe was by no means centered in the Languedocian town of Montpellier. Genoa and Venice far surpassed Montpellier in the Asiatic quest for silks and as European silk markets. The silk finishing industry of Montpellier was no rival for that of Lucca. The foregoing examination of market activity has revealed that the preeminent role of Montpellier in the silk trade was that of assembly point for a silk clientele from Spain, and from central and southwestern France. In

⁷⁸ I am indebted to Marie-Madeleine Compère Julia, archivist-paleographer, for this table based on the extant notarial acts of 1293-1348.

⁷⁹ See "Commerce and Society," I, pp. 212-224. On the trade in grapes, see pp. 232-240.

⁸⁰ A. D. Hérault, II E 95/377, the register of Bernardus Egidii, remains for the years 1347-1348.

16

CHRONOLOGY OF MARKET TRANSACTIONS

PERCENTAGES

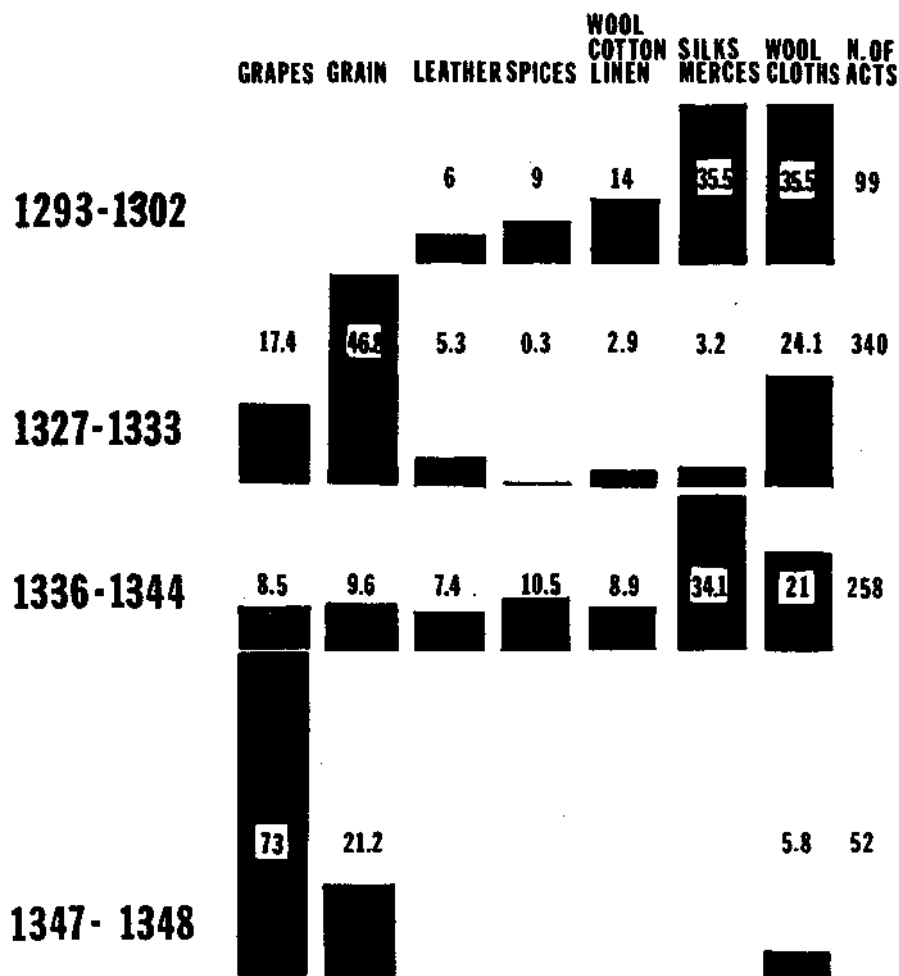


TABLE 6

the absence of an important silk export activity in the western Mediterranean, merchants of Montpellier perfected the role of middlemen in the redistribution of Lucchese silk fabrics. The number of remaining silk transactions in Montpellier suggests a considerable volume of trade. These transactions illuminate the function of Montpellier as an outlet for the Lucchese industry before the Pisan conquest of Lucca in 1342 caused a sharp if temporary decline in production.⁸¹

⁸¹ R. S. LOPEZ, "China Silk," p. 75, noted that Lucchese exports of silk products declined from an average of 125,000 pounds in 1335-1341 to 50,000 pounds in weight between 1342 and 1369.

APPENDIX OF SAMPLE ACTS

1. RECOGNITION OF DEBT BY TOULOUSAINS

A. D. Hérault, II E 95/374, f. 34v

June 4, 1342.

Item, die quarta mensis junii.

Ego, Johannes FABRI, procurator et negotiorum gestor Bernardi de PODIO, cederii, qui moratur in carreria Deaurate Tholoze, prout de procuratione mea constat fidemque facio publico instrumento inde facto, scripto et signato per magistrum Martinum Mutonis, publicum Tholoze notarium, sub anno predicto et XXVI die mensis madii, nomine procuratorio predicto, et meo proprio nomine, et utroque nomine insolidum confiteor me debere vobis, Guiraud de CABANIS, mercatori Montispessulani presenti, stipulanti et recipienti una cum notario infrascripto, stipulanti et recipienti pro vobis, et vestris, et Jacobo de CABANIS, fratre et socio vestro absenti, et suis, quadraginta septem libras septem solidos et duos denarios turonensium, pro mercibus de Luca, bonis et recipientibus quas a vobis habui, predictis nominibus, causa emptionis, tam bene valentibus.

Renuncians etc., solvam, predictis nominibus, vobis stipulanti ut supra et dicto fratri vestro, vel vestrum alteri, aut vestris, de die in diem, ad primam et simplicem requisitionem vestram et dicti fratris vestri, vel vestrum alterius, una cum omnibus expensis etc.

Obligo, predictis nominibus, vobis stipulanti et recipienti ut supra, me in personam et omnia bona mea et dicti Bernardi, cujus sum procurator, et cujuslibet nostrum insolidum, presentia et futura, sub sigillo et carcere etc., excepta tamen et excepto remota persona dicti Bernardi cujus sum procurator, ab obligatione virum et districtu sigilli et carceris predictorum. Ita etc. Renuncians etc. Fidem etc.

Hec acta fuerunt in Montepessulano, in hoperatorio habitationis mei notarii infrascripti, in testimonio Guillelmo Amblardi, hostalerii, domini Jacobi Guindonis, presbyteri Montispessulani.

Postquam, anno predicto, dicto domino Philippo etc. et die XVII septembris, de voluntate Firmini SALAMONIS, procuratoris dictorum fratrum cum instrumento inde facto per Guillelmum Salayrani, notarium superscriptum sub anno domini M CCC XLI et die XXVII marcii, confectis nomine procuratorio predicto, sibi per dictos debitores, vel alium

per eos solventes, esse de toto predicto debito plenario satisfacti, quitantis, nomine predicto, predictos debitores absentes etc. de predictis, fuit dicta nota cancellata.

Testes: magistri Guillelmus Nogareti, Guillelmus Majorini, notarii regis.

2. RECOGNITION OF DEBT BY SPANIARDS

A. D. Hérault, II E 95/374, f. 38v

November 11, 1342.

Item, eadem die.

Ego, Petrus, filius Johannis PETRI condam mercatoris de Burgos, factor Gonsalo GONSALES, dicti loci, nomine meo proprio, et pro me et meis, ac nomine dicti Gonsalo, et utroque nomine in solidum, confiteor me debere Jacobo et Guirauda de CAMANIS, fratribus, mercatoribus et sociis Montispessulani, absentibus, et tibi notario etc. quadraginta et quatuor libras et sexdecim solidos turonensium pro mercibus de Luca bonis et mercabilibus, quas, a dictis fratribus habui, causa emptionis, tam bene valentibus. Renuncians etc.

Solvam, predictis nominibus, dictis fratribus, vel alteri eorum, aut suis, seu eorum, vel alterius ipsorum certo procuratori, de die in diem, ad primam et simplicem requisitionem dictorum fratrum, vel suorum, seu alterius ipsorum, una cum omnibus expensis etc. Obligo, predictis nominibus, tibi notario infrascripto stipulanti et recipienti ut supra, me et dictum Gonsalao, et quemlibet nostrum insolidum, in personas etc. sub sigillo et carcere etc. Ita etc. Renuncians etc. Fidem etc.

Testes: predicti et mei G. Salayrani.

Grossatum est- Berengarius Duranti, vice magistri Mathei Jennini notarii auctoritate iudicis.