G e n e r a l C o n c l u s i o n s

The second half of the 18th century, especially the reign of Charles III (1759-1788), is regarded as the period of greatest political-economic-scientific-military and naval splendour of the Spanish Crown. This distinguished king, with the support of his enlightened ministers and royal officials, undertook numerous projects to develop his empire, both in the Iberian Peninsula and his overseas possessions. The modernisation of the navy, with the target of turning it into a worthy rival of the British Royal Navy, which at the time dominated the seas and threatened the political-commercial interests of the Bourbon state, played a central role in this programme. An additional activate to this ambitus project of naval renovation was the Spanish defeat in the Seven Years’ War (1756-1763), during which Spain temporarily lost control of Manila and Havana, two strategic ports for the navigation system that linked the Asian, New Spanish, Caribbean, and Metropolitan markets. These loses forced the Spanish to hand over the province of Florida to the British and demonstrated the operational shortcomings of the American armies and the squadron deployed to protect the Cuban capital. In 1764, several reform programmes were implemented in Cuba, of an administrative (with the creation of the *Intendencia*), military (creation of the professionalisation of the militia), and naval (change from the British to the French ship construction system) nature.

This reformist enterprise also affected the Navy more broadly, beginning with a large scale shipbuilding programme, especially 74- and 112-guns ships-of-the-line. Between 1765 and 1794 these efforts were overseen by two enlightened shipbuilders, Francisco Gautier (1765-1782) and José Joaquín Romero y Fernández de Landa (1782-1794), who also held the posts of General Engineer and Director of the Navy Engineer Corps, created in 1770. During their time in office, 21 74-gun ships and ten 112-guns triple-decker ships were built in El Ferrol (12 ships), La Habana (7 ships), Guarnizo (6 ships) and Cartagena (6 ships). In addition to this, the royal shipyards also launched two 80-gun ships, three 64-gun ships, and 29 frigates armed with 24 to 38 pieces of ordnance.[[1]](#footnote-1) This enormous output was possible because of the administrative and financial reorganisation of the Navy undertaken by Charles III reign. The impetus was still there in the early years of Charles IV reign, but 1794 may be regarded as the closing date of this period of apogee for the Spanish Navy; afterwards, Spanish naval construction entered a period of logistic-administrative and financial crisis that finally drove Spain’s naval golden age to an end.

However, during these 29 years (1765-1794), especially in the 1770s and 1780s, the Spanish Navy peaked under the direction of secretaries Julián de Arriaga y Ribera (1754-1776), Pedro González de Castejón (1776-1783), and Antonio Joaquín de Valdés Bazán (1783-1795), becoming the second naval power in the world, after the British Royal Navy. This was possible thanks to the administrative skill of ministers, intendents, and royal officials, but also to the state’s expense priorities. This gave the Bourbon officials leverage to negotiate with national and foreign merchants and guarantee the supply of wood from Spain, Europe, and America. By 1794, the construction programme had yielded 36 ships-of-the-line and 29 frigates of various sizes.

It is important to remember that this success was possible because the Spanish monarchy in the Modern Age implemented a system for naval supplies based on contractual relationships. This administration was the answer for the growing maritime needs of the Habsburgs and the Bourbons war policies. Naval, but also the military, resources were directed through contracts, which also protected the Spanish laws. With this policy, the crown became a “contractor state” period which resorted to various legal contracts for naval supplies and services with individuals and other establishments networks. From the moment the crown contracted for its needs, it was also obliged to respect and enforce the laws that regulated its *asientos*. Through those agreements, the Hispanic monarchy determined the legal framework and thereby made the activity predictable for the crown and the contractors. The normalization of the mobilization of naval and military resources with contracts reduced the uncertainty of the model based on the feudal and family relationships of the Middle Ages. The regulation of naval supply contracts by the bureaucratic apparatus allowed the extension of the Spanish crown control on the goods and business partners' collaboration. It is an important issue because, throughout the Modern Age, this allowed the monarchy to establish the limits of its authority so that the contract could be national or imperial. On several occasions, the geographical location and limitation of actions of the mobilization of naval resources could be determined by contracts.[[2]](#footnote-2) In the second half of the 18th century, it was clearly demonstrated by the agreements signed with different national and international companies to transport and commerce timbers from the southern Baltic and with Creole elites from the viceroyalty of New Spain to log wood.[[3]](#footnote-3)

Spain’s imperial challenges primarily revolved around those regions outside the Iberian Peninsula, with which Spain drew close political-administrative-commercial links to obtain the supply of timber. The southern Baltic and the colonies in the Greater Caribbean territories had been connected by sea with Spain for centuries, but it was not until the 18th century that Spain realised their potential in terms of large-scale timber supply policy. In the case of the southern Baltic area, *asientos* were granted to national and more often foreign merchants as shown by examples of contracts signed with Gil de Meester (Dutch merchant house), Simón de Aragorri, Miguel de Soto (merchant of Irish origin)-Felipe Chone, Carlos María Marraci, Pedro Normande and Herman & Ellermann & Schlieper (Swedish merchants), Rey and Brandenburg, and Gahn (Swedish merchant). These businessmen with extensive influence in the ports of the Baltic and North Sea, guaranteed the supply of wood needed to build warships in the royal shipyards in El Ferrol, Cádiz-La Carraca, and Cartagena. In addition, they established contacts with local merchants. Good examples of this cooperation are with Thomas and Adrián Hope (based in Amsterdam), Antonio de Cuyper (Dutch commercial representative in Gdańsk/Danzig), Ignacio Jacinto Mathy (French consul in Gdańsk/Danzig), Juan Felipe Schultz (merchant in Gdańsk/Danzig), Herman Fromhold (merchant in Riga), and Blankenhagen Oom & Co (commercial house in Riga). Timber purchases in the Baltic region were also supported by Spanish diplomats, such as Juan Manuel de Uriondo (consul in Amsterdam), the Count of Aranda (ambassador in Poland), Luis Perrot (consul in Gdańsk/Danzig), and Antonio Colombí y Payet (consul in Saint Petersburg) they explored the markets potential of Baltic ports and convinced local merchants to trade timber with Spain.

Those networks that Spanish contractors formed in the second half of the 18th century in the southern Baltic area opened the tap of pine, fir, and oak timber for masting, planking, and beams, from ports of Szczecin/Stettin, Gdańsk/Danzig, Königsberg, Memel, Riga, and Saint Petersburg. The harbours connected through navigable rivers like the Oder, Vistula, Pregoła, Łyna/Alle, Neman, and Daugava with abundant virgin forest masses in their hinterland in kingdoms of Prussia, the Polish-Lithuanian Commonwealth, and Russia empire. There, forest owners or tenants supplied all sorts of timber, as attested by the invoices found in the archives. In the case of the Polish-Lithuanian Commonwealth, the local magnates families like the Radziwiłł, Massalski, Swadkowski, and Wyszynski, and their represents like Dernattowitz, and Reuhutz (Jewish merchants) were closely connected with the timber provision policies of the main European naval powers, including Spain. Those crowns were fairly dependent on the timber supplies from the territories of the southern Baltic. In the case of Spain, as examples of contracts by Gil de Meester, Simón de Aragorri, Miguel de Soto-Felipe Chone, Carlos María Marraci, Pedro Normande, and Gahn show, the asiento system operated efficiently for the Marina Real needs and kept a flow of the Baltic timber to preserve the naval departments of El Ferrol, Cádiz-La Carraca, and Cartagena working at appropriate capacity.

Another policy used by the Bourbon state to get timber was by logging under the direct control of the crown in their American colonies. During the 18th century, Havana was the epicenter of Spanish naval tradition in America and became a major hub for shipbuilding and repair. However, it did not acquire a leading role for the Royal Navy until the earliest shipbuilding asientos granted to Manuel López Pintado (1713-1717), Juan de Acosta (1717-1740), the Real Compañía de La Habana (1740-1750), and finally the Intendancy of Navy, which managed ship construction during the second half of the 18th century. Despite this, American wood resources were underexploited, as attested by the essays written by several economists and politicians, such as Jerónimo de Uztáriz and José del Campillo y Cossío, who tried to promote naval construction in other regions of the Greater Caribbean, such as Coatzacoalcos, Campeche, and Cartagena de Indias, while emphasising the availability of major cedar, mahogany, and sabicú forests in their vicinity. In the event, these locations only witnessed minor operations (e.g. the attempt to build ships-of-the-line in Coatzacoalcos was a total failure and a waste of economic resources), ship repairs, and wood extraction for the Havana shipyards, such as cutting seasons of pine masting in Chimalapas.

As in the case of the southern Baltic region, a period of greater activity, surveying and harvesting timbers in the viceroyalty of New Spain and the Caribbean area began in the 1770s, when viceroys Antonio María de Bucareli y Ursúa (1771-1779) and Martín de Mayorga (1779-1783) sponsored the various expeditions of military engineer Miguel del Corral and Royal Navy officers Joaquín de Aranda, Luis Fernández, and Miguel Sapiain to the forests and rivers in the provinces of Veracruz, Oaxaca, Tabasco, Laguna de Términos, and Campeche to assess the availability of timber for naval construction. The result of these expeditions was granted the several asientos to the local elites in the 1780s: José Jiménez, militia captain in Tuxpan; Esteban Bejarano, merchant from Veracruz; Pedro Moscoso, vecino of Acayucan; Ramón Carvallo, vecino of Tlacotalpan; Francisco Sánchez de Burgos, subdelegate of La Antigua; Joseph Nicolás Sánchez, river carpenter in presidio del Carmen, through the viceroyalty administration, they signed logging contracts with the Spanish crown. The largest asientos were awarded between 1784 and 1787 when the members of the Veracruz elite committed to supplying approximately 30,000 cubic cubits of carved parts in cedar, mahogany, and sabicú. For this, the local contractors received 78,000 pesos de a ocho reales. However, storage difficulties in the mouth of the Alvarado and Coatzacoalcos rivers and the beaches of Veracruz, and constant shipping deficiencies that hampered the transport of the timbers from Veracruz to the naval departments in Spain and Cuba meant that only 11,745 cubits and 229 parts could be delivered to El Ferrol, Cádiz-La Carraca, and Havana, while 5,193 cubits and 198 parts were left lying in the warehouses of Veracruz. Owing to these issues, the contracts were cancelled in 1787 and large-scale harvesting of wood in New Spain came to an end. Those analysed examples show that the Spanish crown, without strong support from merchant ships, was unable to pursue an effective policy of obtaining timber from its overseas possessions in America. Comparing the contracts from the southern Baltic with those from the viceroyalty of New Spain, it is clearly visible that the strength of the first region was in the effective organization of transport between the Baltic ports and Spain's Royal shipyards.

It is worth emphasizing that the exploration of American forests by royal officers was also carried out in other regions, where attempts were also made to establish logging under royal patronage or by awarding contracts to American Creoles. For this reason, some logging campaigns were undertaken in other regions of the Greater Caribbean. However, the ones commenced in Cumaná by the *Real Compañía de Caracas* brought fruit, and the timber harvested was used for the company’s own needs. Another contract that resulted in a substantial output was one granted to Juan Agustín Pardo to obtain 60,000 cubits of cedar between 1786 and 1790. The contractor delivered nearly one-third of this volume, but the *asiento* was cancelled because the Royal Navy could not provide solid transport for subsequent lots of wood. Finally, a venture that met the crown's expectations was contracts awarded to Louisiana merchants to cut and deliver lumber from that province to the shipyards in Havana. This state of affairs was demonstrated by contracts signed in the 1780s with Nicolás Verbois, Santiago Jones, Pedro Belli, Esteban Watts, Ignacio Lovio, Juan Baptista Macanti, and Asahel Levis, merchants from New Orleans and Baton Rouge. Of this group, Verbois and Lovio proved to be effective suppliers of pine and cedar wood. Analysing these contracts, it is obvious that these businessmen were not of Spanish origin, which indicates that in Louisiana the Spanish crown traded with foreigners who settled in these places, ceded to Spain under the Treaty of Paris in 1763. A similar situation such as in the southern Baltic region, where the main shareholders in the timber trade were the Dutch and Scandinavians. It is another indication of the weakness of the Spanish merchant fleet, which did not provide sufficient support in the trade of important strategic materials such as wood.

Relating timber supply policies in the Southern Baltic and the Viceroyalty of New Spain, it seems clear that -although the Bourbon state had the financial funds to create a navy capable of protecting the maritime routes with the American colonies, and also using the effective contract system linked with well-functioning merchants- the shortcomings of the Spanish merchant marine, which proved unable to encounter the Royal Navy’s shipping needs, fatally undermined its efforts. In the case of the southern Baltic, this was compensated by the wide freight of ships from Holland, Great Britain, Denmark, and Sweden, among other countries. It is a paradox that the timber was very often hauled by the British, who were the enemies of the Spanish Crown. In the American case, the option of using a network of foreign merchants was not available, as this would contravene Spain’s monopolistic policies that limited transatlantic trade to the Spanish market. Not even the use of the king’s cargo vessels proved sufficient nor profitable enough to guarantee the regular timber supply. For these reasons, and despite the improved knowledge of American woodland – where excellent forests of cedar, mahogany, and other hardwoods, were identified – it was limited use of American woods for naval construction. Interestingly, in the case of the British Royal Navy, they managed to use forest resources in North America, where before the outbreak of the Revolutionary War in 1775, 1/3 of British merchant ships, were built in the colonies, but also oak and pine woods were sent, in huge numbers to shipyards located in the metropolis.[[4]](#footnote-4) It was similar to the Portuguese colony in Brazil, where large quantities of tropical timber were shipped from provinces such as Rio de Janeiro, Bahia, Alagoas Pernambuco, Paraíba, to the Lisbon shipyard.[[5]](#footnote-5) These examples clearly show, that it was possible to successfully use American wood in European shipbuilding, but not on a large scale in the Spanish case due to the meagre merchant fleet.

In addition to the economic and commercial aspects, another issue that the book analyses is the management of forest resources so that quality timber could be harvested. In the case of the southern Baltic, these matters rested in the hands of royal officials, as showed the cases from the kingdoms of Prussia and Poland, or were managed by forest owners, as occurred in the Polish-Lithuanian Commonwealth, where some magnate families such as Zamoyski and Radziwiłł conducted their own forestry policy. The first family pursued a sustainable logging and afforestation policy, while the Radziwiłłs were not interested in protecting their forests because only saw the economic benefits from them. In the case of Spanish America, where the law given by the metropolis was in practise, the forest reform (*Ordenanza*) of 1748 -supervised by the Royal Navy- was not introduced, but its modified version for all territorial divisions, such as *corregimiento*, published in December of the same year. However, by analysing the historical documentation concerning the inspections of mountains and timber logging in the Greater Caribbean region, it is observed that the royal officials in charge of these missions were aware of the protection and sustainable use of the forests, not for the purposes of deforestation these areas but in order to ensure timber reserves for the shipbuilding industry of the *Marina Real*.

Finally, I would like to emphasise that this book presents an analysis of the political-economic-military efforts of the Bourbon state, significant in reinforcing its naval power during the second half of the 18th century. Looking at this Spaniards' determinations to establish solid networks of timber provision -from outside of the Iberian peninsula- it must be said that the *Marina Real* was dependent on forest resources and other naval provision from remote, peripheral regions -such as those presented in the book- which were located in the hinterlands of the Southern Baltic, the Viceroyalty of New Spain and the Greater Caribbean. For this reason, it is important to review the globalization process for Early Modern History and to begin to write it from a new angle, where the local perspective must be perceived as a motor for the global imperial connections.

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2. Rafael Torres Sánchez, *Military Entrepreneurs and the Spanish Contractor State*, 13-40. [↑](#footnote-ref-2)
3. It must be remembered that another important direction from which timber for the shipbuilding was imported is the Mediterranean. Due to various limitations, it was not featured in this book. [↑](#footnote-ref-3)
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