

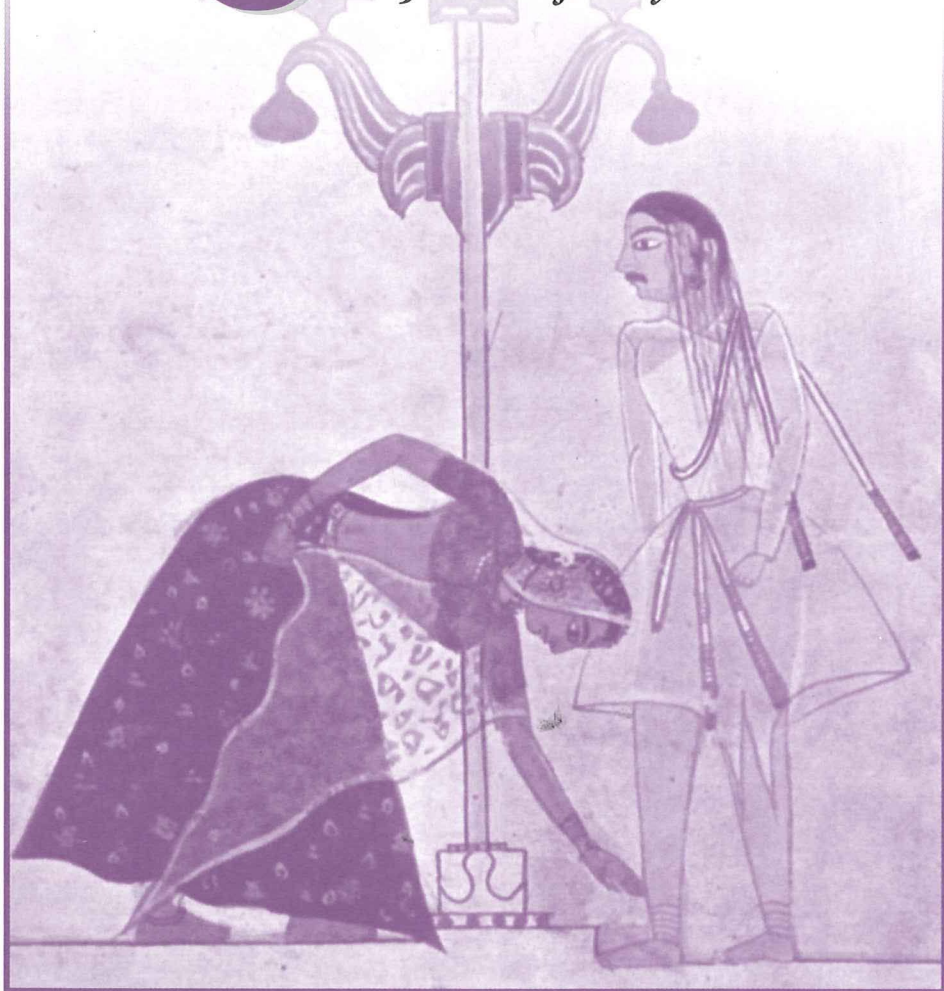
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Land, Proto-Industry and Population in Catalonia, c. 1680–1829: An Alternative Transition to Capitalism? Julie Marfany.

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The focus of this study is the town and surrounding countryside of Igualada in Catalonia. In the eighteenth century, the agrarian structure of Catalonia was characterized by emphyteutic property rights, and, in addition to the distinction between possession—seigniorial rights—and right of use (both perpetual), the holder of the latter (*domini útil*) could also lease land to others. Most holders of *domini útil* were, by the eighteenth century, no longer cultivators of their land, leading to a situation in which there was no longer a simple distinction of class and exploitative relationships between landowners and their peasants, as the latter—the holders of *domini útil*—could also exert exploitative force on those who leased their land. During the eighteenth century, agriculture in the region was transformed both by extending and intensifying cultivation, as well as by increasing specialization; most of the land newly brought under crop was planted with vines, with an almost threefold increase in the proportion of land under vines between 1720 and 1860. Furthermore, already by the 1720s over 60 percent of the households in this region had less land than needed for subsistence, a figure that had risen to over 75 percent by the 1760s, and, by the late eighteenth century, a quarter of the households recorded in inventories had no land at all.

This rural proletariat and the smallholders were both increasingly dependent on proto-industry, a term that Marfany seeks to rehabilitate. She finds in Catalonia a coincidence of protoindustry, the predominance of smallholdings, and the ability to access distant markets. Most of the production tended to be controlled by a small handful of clothiers; by the 1770s, just three clothiers controlled around 60 percent of the looms and employed 1,200 of the 1,900 people working in the woollen industry. Over the course of the century, weavers thus became increasingly dependent upon the larger clothiers. As a part of this process, the earlier guild system of Igualada also broke down by the middle of the century, a change not unconnected with the declining importance of wool in favor of cotton, in which sector mechanization was also pioneered (water frames were introduced here by 1801, and mule jennies in 1807). Nevertheless, even within cotton, small-scale production and the putting-out system remained predominant well into the 1820s.

For historians such as Jan de Vries, “strong” family ties are linked to the extended family, which limits the independence of family members with regard to their production and consumption decisions, and the “weak” nuclear family is crucial for what he calls an “industrious revolution,” in which, partly because of increased individual agency within households, people choose to be more productive in order to consume more. Marfany

argues that this link between family type and productivity may have been overrated; extended families in Catalonia also increased their levels of productivity. She further suggests that the strength of the preventive check in northwestern Europe might have been because there was a relatively weak positive check, as compared to Spain, where mortality rates were higher; demographic behavior thus needs to be understood not just in relation to family forms and even protoindustrialization, but also general mortality rates and their causes, which may in fact be more significant. Marital fertility rose, but so did infant mortality, which is interpreted—correctly I think—as a sign that other demands on the time of married women were increasing. Thus, although protoindustry also afforded many opportunities for women's employment, this was arguably not, *pace* de Vries, a matter of "consumer choice," but rather of subsistence, with negative consequences at the very least in terms of infant and child mortality. Marfany's analysis of probate inventories and tax records with regard to habits of production and consumption shows that while there was here clearly greater "industriousness" of some sort, if we take the term to mean simply increasingly productive household economic behavior, levels of consumption of nonsubsistence commodities did not, for the most part, increase significantly, and most of the people becoming more industrious were doing so simply in order to subsist; higher levels of productivity raised standards of material well-being for only a few.

Although I am convinced by the author's arguments regarding the importance of protoindustry and the rise in predominance of smallholders (though I would prefer to call it "rural industry" to avoid the teleology of Marfany's preferred term and I am not entirely convinced regarding any necessary causal link between protoindustry and factory industrialization), Marfany neither explains the deep structural causes for the coincidence of these factors, nor discusses precisely what "capitalism" means. Although she claims that this period saw the growth of a "new capitalist mode of thinking" (74–75), she does not really define this mode of thinking, nor consider the crucial questions such a statement raises; is the transition to capitalism simply a matter of socioeconomic change, or rather also of ideology? And how does the latter relate to the former? But these are minor criticisms; this monograph is a hugely important stimulus to thinking on the problem of transition and rightly concludes that—contrary to received wisdom—"the English experience increasingly appears to be the exception to be explained, rather than the model against which all other transitions to agrarian capitalism are to be judged" (7). Rather than the Brennerian focus on the growth of large farms and the landlord—tenant farmer—wage laborer triad, Marfany rightly believes that we must instead seek to "identify the historical circumstances under which peasants were induced or forced out of subsistence production and into specialised market-dependent production" (9). Perhaps most importantly, and in accordance with the most recent work of Jane Humphries on industrializing England and against what seems to have become the orthodoxy, Marfany's book demonstrates that economic growth could indeed maintain a larger population, but with the penalty of lower standards of living; a growing economy (in terms of market exchange) and higher levels of output were coupled with the fact that more people were living at a lower standard of health and mortality. In other words: economic growth per se has little relevance for living standards and could—and here did—mean more people living in greater immiseration.

