UNITED STATES, 1790-1819

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1. Coverage

This questionnaire discusses the U.S. Treasury Department´s annual trade statements from 1790 to 1819. In 1821 these statements were replaced with similar though increasingly more detailed annual accounts – now, for the first time, with official calculations of current import values.

2. Documents

The documents considered here are annual accounts, all printed and bound in 2 volumes dated 1832 and 1834 (see American State Papers [ASP] in 9-a below). No synthetic statement of the U.S. trade and services balance was officially produced at the time. Export values at U.S. ports of departure were given for each year; but import values for goods subject to specific duties were not calculated at the time. For each of the years in the period 1795-1801, Mr. Joshua Dobson of the Treasury Department unofficially estimated the total import values at current prices by geographic origins (see Seybert, *Statistical Annals*..., pp. 266-78); but these values were thought to fall short of the true import values at U.S. ports: see U.S. Congress, "Report... 1819,", p. 393. Modern reconstructions of the U.S. balance of payments for this period include North, "The United States Balance of Payments, 1790-1860", 1960 (U.S. totals only for trade, invisibles, and other flows); and Cuenca-Esteban´s 2014 Working Paper "Financing U.S. External Trade" (here also including breakdowns by foreign countries, foreign countries´ colonies, and other geographic areas).

3. Institutional setting

"Manifests" supplied by ship masters to U.S. Customs "collectors" at the ports were elaborated by the U.S. Treasury Department into offi-

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cial statements for annual submission to Congress, to "be laid before the public".

4. Motivations

The central motivation for data collection on imports was tax collection and administration; but all data were explicitly meant to serve the broader purpose of informing policy makers and the general public.

5. Methods

The official *export values* were at times those furnished by the ship masters. In most cases, however, the figures in question were valuations made by the "collectors" themselves. *Export quantities* were accepted as such from the ship masters, who had no motive to misrepresent the facts. Only the *import quantities – not the values – of goods subject to specific duties* were ascertained by the Customs officers, "with entire accuracy by the entry of the exporter, and by reference to the importation". *Imports subject to ad valorem duties* were valued at the U.S. customs at ports of origin; apparently, only the sub-totals for such articles charged with the same rate of duty were submitted to the Treasury. No record was kept of tax-free imports.

The export and import figures described here on the whole appear to convey a fair representation of the actual flow of goods. To be sure, informed contemporaries believed that the official export values were overrated in some degree; they were particularly critical of the official import values (see U.S. Congress, "Report... 1819"). But Douglass North found the subsequently corrected totals tolerably reliable – even though he advisedly warned that his balance-of-payments estimates should be used as 5-year averages only ("The United States Balance of Payments, 1790-1860", pp. 573, 587-601). Drawing on large samples of commodity breakdowns in the official accounts, Javier Cuenca-Esteban has come to tentative but encouraging results. Certainly the unofficial contemporary estimates of U.S. import values for each of the years 1795 to 1801 are consistent with independent price data now available to us. Allowing for freight, marine insurance and other costs, U.S. export values to Great Britain are tolerably close to estimates of British imports from the United States by the Inspector General of the British customs. Further allowing for travel times and other inevitable sources of error, commodity quantities said to have been exported to Britain often closely match those officially arrived in British ports (see Cuenca Esteban, "Current values...", 2009). Similar tests with French data of trade with the United States are less conclusive, but discrepancies are predictable in a wider context (see Cuenca Esteban, "Fundamentos...", 1987). Seemingly large gaps in British exports to the United States over U.S. imports from Britain through 1790-1811 are contextually intelligible and open up intriguing avenues of research (see Cuenca-Esteban, "British 'Ghost' Exports...", 2014).

6. Information

The data officially collected and processed include, on the export side, quantities and values by geographic destination for all years 1790-99 and values only for 1800-19. Export data for the principal commodities by geographic destination from 1800 to 1816 are given in Pitkin, *A Statistical View...*, 1816, 1835. Only through 1803-19 do the given export values distinguish between domestic and foreign goods. On the import side, data officially collected and processed include values by geographic origin of goods subject to *ad valorem* duties and commodity quantities by geographic origin of goods subject to specific duties – all covering every year through 1790-19 except 1792-94. For 1797-98 and 1800-19 only, the import data are given in two separate accounts for goods carried in U.S. and foreign ships respectively. For each of the years in the period 1795-1801 only, total export and import values at current prices by geographic origins were unofficially calculated by Mr. Joshua Dobson of the Treasury Department (see Seybert *Statistical Annals...*, pp. 266-78).

The official export values were at times those furnished by the ship masters; in most cases, however, the figures in question were valuations made at market prices by the "collectors" at the U.S. customs. Import values of goods subject to ad valorem duties were determined at the U.S. customs in U.S. dollars from the original invoices at foreign ports of departure; the resulting sums were compounded by 10 or 20 percent depending on geographic distance to account for transport costs.

The quantity unit specified for most commodities is pounds of weight. Also used were gallons, barrels (pickled fish), bushels (salt, coal), quintals (dried fish), pairs (of shoes), dozens (or beer bottles), and packs (of cards). Convenient price sources are available to compute trade values based on these quantities: see "Complementary Sources" below. Javier Cuenca-Esteban, in his Working Paper "Financing U.S. External Trade" (2014), has estimated current import values for all documented geographic areas by multiplying large samples of the given official quantities by separately compiled prices.

Data collection and rendering changed, but coherent series through the 1790-1819 period can and have been re-constructed. The standard official lists were presumably set up by the Customs officers. They include 40 imported commodities in 1790-91 and 1795-1803, rising to 52 from 1804 onwards. Imported goods subject to ad valorem duties were valued in dollars but not itemized at the commodity level. Also 72 exported commodities in all years through 1790-99. Annual data on 11 exported goods from 1800 to 1816 are given in Pitkin, *A Statistical View* (1816 and 2nd. ed., 1835).

Using the last/first port of call rule, all the data are broken down geographically by some 42 foreign countries and their colonies where relevant, for both imports and exports: a nearly comprehensive list is given in Cuenca-Esteban's working paper "Financing U.S. External Trade" (2014), Table 1. Some of the original data are also broken down by U.S. states.

7. Availability

Javier Cuenca-Esteban has digitized much of the ASP data for 1790-1819 and will supply selected series and his own estimates upon request.

8. Research questions

The data have been used to look into U.S. merchants' middleman role, the country´s gains from trade, and external indebtedness during the neutrality years 1793-1807 (North, "The United States Balance of Payments, 1790-1860", 1960). The figures have also been drawn upon to reconstruct the U.S. trade and payments balances with Spanish America, Spain, and Great Britain through 1790-1819 (see Cuenca-Esteban's relevant publications since 1984).

We have much to learn on how U.S. merchants managed to secure the Spanish dollar-coins they required to cover large trade deficits in China and the Far East during the neutrality years 1793-1807 in particular (see Cuenca-Esteban, "British 'Ghost' Exports...", 2014).

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