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PROFESSIONAL SPECIALISATION AND ETHNIC MINORITIES. THE EXAMPLE OF THE MALLORCAN “JUDEO-CONVERSOS” (18TH – 20TH CENTURIES)

Abstract: The purpose of this article is to show the composition and professional specialisation of a minority social group in Mallorcan society (known by the name of *xuetes*) which, in spite of being excluded socially during the Middle Ages and up until the mid-20th century, did however stand out in the field of commerce. This article focuses on the period covering the last third of the 18th century until the 1930s. Its objective is to cover one of the lesser-known periods and at the same time to corroborate or refute some of the clichés and hypotheses that have been considered up to the present, fundamentally with regard to the control of certain trades and professions.

Key words: Ethnic minorities, Jewish converts-Mallorca-18th-20th centuries *Xuetes*-Mallorca-18th-20th centuries, social history

Introduction

We address the characterisation and evolution of a specific social group descended from Jewish converts, known by the name of “*xuetes*”, from the end of the *Former Regime* (last third of the 18th century) until 1930/50¹. From the entrepreneurial history viewpoint the interest in their status lies in the fact that, like other minorities and as a result of having been marginalised, the members of this group created links based on solidarity and trust that were decisive for their economic and professional specialisation. This phenomenon has been studied historically for other groups and likewise for the case of the Mallorcan Jewish converts up to the mid-18th century. However, in terms of the evolution of their composition and economic and professional evolution, there is a historiographic hiatus from the final stage of the *Former Regime* on. As a result, this article seeks to cover this period and corroborate or refute some of the clichés and hypotheses that have been considered up to the present, fundamentally with regard to the control of certain trades and professions².

In addition, by analysing different types of sources (population patterns, contributions, wills, post mortem inventories, etc.) we reveal the heterogeneity of the group. The social and economic pre-eminence of a small number of families from the late 18th century on stands out. They controlled around three-quarters of the group’s total wealth. In time, they manage to be admitted to the social circles typical of the Mallorcan bourgeoisie, as well as sharing businesses with them. This assimilation accelerates with the liberal reforms and is consolidated between the late 19th and early 20th century. In parallel, they become aware of the importance of education in order to progress towards equality and strive to inculcate the need of embarking on higher education in their children.

¹ The term “*xueta*” is used to define a specific sub-group of descendants *judeo-conversos*, or converted Jews, who bear one of the following 15 surnames: Aguiló, Bonnín, Cortés, Forteza, Fuster, Martí, Miró, Picó, Piña, Pomar, Segura, Tarongí, Valentí, Valleriola and Valls. This is in spite of the fact that over 300 surnames of converted Jews, or persons condemned for practising Judaism, are documented in Mallorca. This inconsistency has been pointed out by some specialists. Among them is PORQUERES (2001: 62), who proposes the relating of the identity of this group by analysing their matrimonial alliances.

² LÓPEZ & MANERA (2000).

This evolution continues to the extent that, at the turn of the century, there were practically no longer any differences between the configuration of the assets of the “xuetes” and those of the bourgeoisie in general. However, in the middle and lower layers of the group, there would still be a high number of families (as occurred until recently in other social groups with different affiliations) for whom integration was more difficult. From their forefathers they inherited tangible and intangible assets and amongst the latter, values, common customs, prejudices and naturally, specific professional specialisations. Nevertheless, contrary to what is generally assumed, from the consolidation of the Liberal State on, this phenomenon was by no means exclusive to the Jewish converts and did not affect the different strata of the “xueta” group equally.

This dual purpose explains the fact that we have structured the results obtained in two parts. The first one is devoted to economic and social heterogeneity and the second, to professional evolution. It also explains the fact that each one is presented chronologically, sub-divided into sub-periods: the final stage of the Former Regime (late 18th century – 1836), beginning and consolidation of the Liberal State (1836 – 1890) and the period from the end of the century until 1930/50.

The nominative sources, fundamentally the General Registration of 1795 and the Population Registration of 1816 which we used as a basis, have enabled us to discover the composition of the group at the beginning of the study period. Specifically, the population registration of Palma³, being organised by parishes, shows us the location of their homes and businesses within the city. Most of them lived in the same neighbourhood (called *El Segell*) and were concentrated in two parishes: Santa Eulalia and San Nicolás. This latter parish, as well as being where numerous businesses and shops were located, was where the wealthiest members of the group lived.

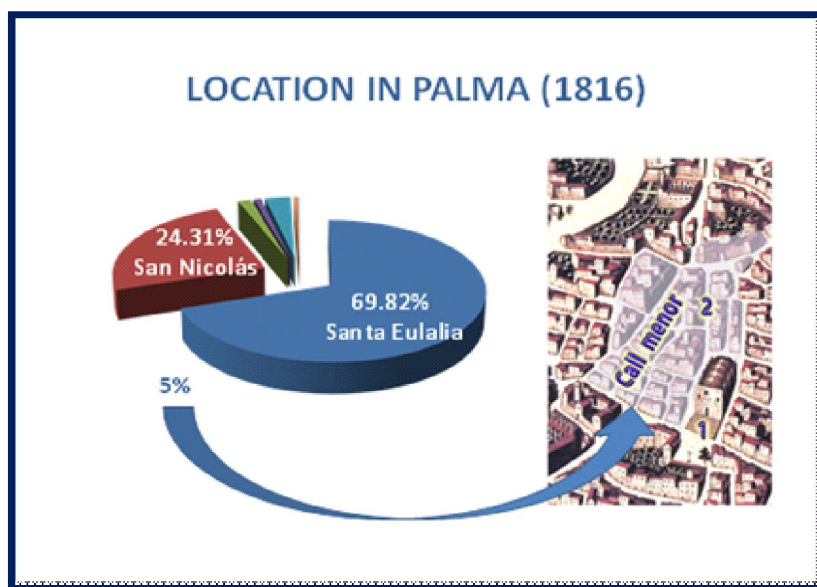


Figure 1. The location of the studied group in the town (Palma)

Source: Population registration of Palma (1816).

Throughout practically all of the period studied, the group represents around 5% of the total population of Palma⁴. Numerically speaking, this is a minority, but within the population, as we shall see, a particularly prominent set of families in economic terms stands out in the group on the island; above all in the commercial sphere.

³ We have based the study in this area because it was the political and the administrative center of the Island during all the studied period.

⁴ To this date we do not have the total population contained in that pattern, although MOLL (1997 – 98) emptied for parishes to which they correspond a rural area. However, other sources close to the period, we can calculate the percentage of “xuetes” of the total population of Palma in that year was around 5%. Virtually the same as calculated for the year 1897 LAUB & LAUB (1987: 47). A proportion, which according to these authors is more or less stable until the 1970s that has dropped to 3,2%.

1. Economic and social heterogeneity

One feature that persists throughout the period studied is inequality in the distribution of wealth. Incidentally, this is a characteristic which must by no means be taken as exclusive to this group, as historically inequality is a generalised phenomenon, as it is today. However, in this particular case, we are interested in highlighting it, because there has often been a tendency to present them as a minority that stood out for its wealth. Logically enough, it is in the latter stage of the Former Regime that this is more obvious.

The group was divided into classes with a pronounced social and economic differentiation. The “xuetes” were classified into two large groups according to the importance of their assets and the quality of their descent: the “orella alta” and the “orella baixa”. Apparently, this distinction already existed amongst Mallorcan Jews; it was inherited from generation to generation and was maintained by the marriage of equals. In practice, however, they alone knew who belonged to one group or another. It is for this reason that we have drawn up the stratification of the group for each of the chronological cuts this study is divided up into based on the type of activities they engaged in, the different levels of wealth and the appraisal and composition of their assets.

Before analysing professional activity and with the aim of illustrating heterogeneity, statistical analysis occupies a pre-eminent place in the study. Based on continuous variables (valuations of assets, business and taxes paid) we proceeded to apply specific analysis techniques: distribution of frequencies, graphical representation by histogram, measures of position and graphical representation of the probability density function of the variables studied in each period. We have dealt with the degree of inequality of the group via the Lorenz curve and the Gini coefficient. The sequent figure shows the inequality of the group in the different sub-period studied⁵.

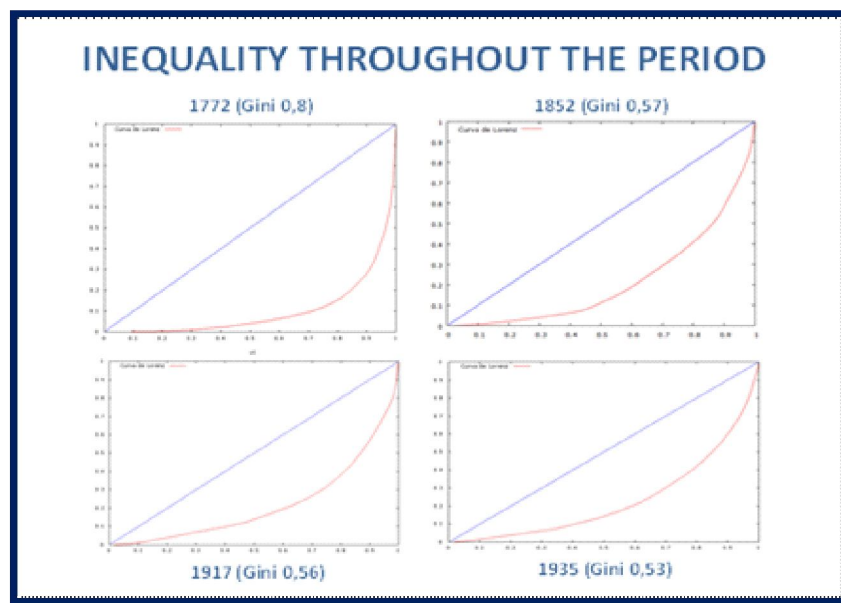


Figure 2. Inequality of the studied group (1772 – 1935)

Source: Aguiló (2016)

2.1. Final stage of the Former Regime

Our study started in this period because in 1773, six *diputados de la calle* (literally, “street deputies”, known by the name of “perruques” or “wigs” because of the luxurious adornments they wore) went to Madrid to deliver a petition to King Charles III to request and defend the social and legal equality of the individuals of Hebrew stock with all other Mallorcans before the Court. This process was protracted for more than 10 years and eventually Charles III signed 3 Royal Decrees: the first one (1782) granted them freedom of movement and residence and prohibited insults, the second (1785) declared them apt for the

⁵ For more detailed explanation of how these calculations have been performed see Chapter 3 of the doctoral thesis AGUILÓ (2016).

army and public office and finally, the third one (1788) deemed them apt for any profession. But still nothing was said about education in general or ecclesiastical studies in particular; and in these areas, the differentiation endured until recently. In this period, about the year 1772, around 85% of the wealth was owned by 20% of the population, and within that group, one can also distinguish different social strata.

Firstly, we have a single family who controlled 28% of the wealth. They were the children of Leonor Aguilu, known as the “princess of the xuetes” because of the large fortune she came to accumulate. Afterwards, there is a group of traders, dealers and merchants who dealt in agricultural business by leasing estates, and the large-scale commerce of textile and agricultural products, mainly oil and colonial products. They invested the surpluses from these businesses in ships and granting loans, as well as through bottomry which was a loan used to facilitate the expeditions of ships and their cargoes, in which the lender bore the risk of the sea.

From a comparison and analysis of their assets, we reach the conclusion that, whilst they were given different names, in practice they engaged in the same activities and most of them were characterised by having a high level of liquidity. However, it would appear that those who were called dealers (*negociantes*) were more involved in agricultural business through the leasing of estates. The families from the upper stratum of society, whom we could describe as the “xueta aristocracy” lived in the parish of San Nicol6s around the same street (called San Bartolom6y). These families had managed to acquire rural properties close to Palma, generally speaking from noble families who were experiencing difficulties.

Outstanding in the lower category we have above all merchants, shopkeepers, silversmiths and other owners of different types of businesses.

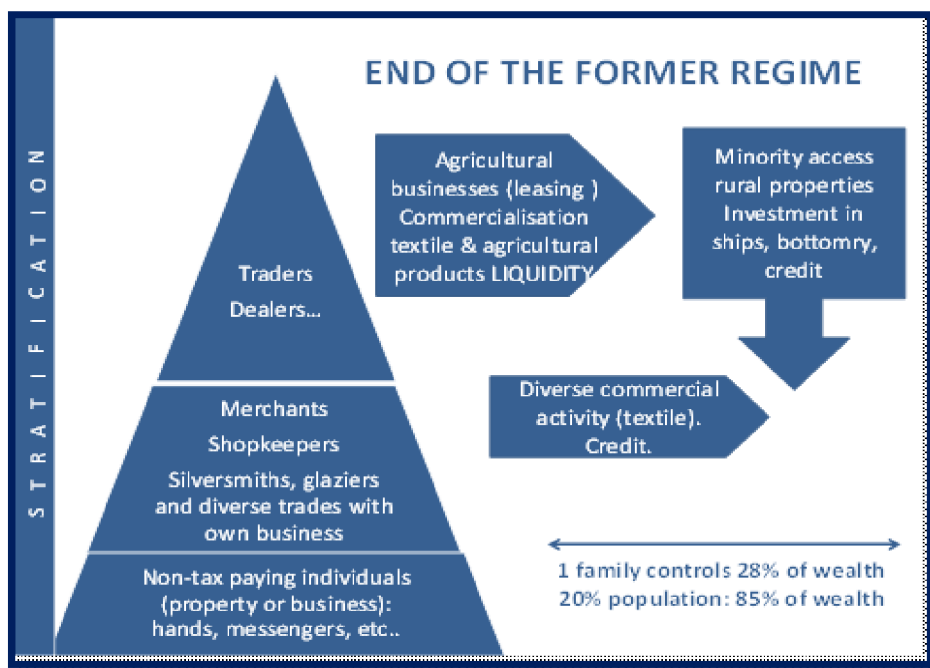


Figure 3. The stratification group at the end of the Former Regime

Source: Own elaboration based on data from M. Aguilu (2016).

2.2. Beginning and consolidation of the Liberal State

We have drawn up the stratification of the group that registers the changes that occurred from the Liberal Reform⁶ on using data from the list of the amount of tax rates payable of 1852. Once again, we are faced with a small number of traders who are amongst the most important Mallorcan businessmen of 1852. Specifically, Mariano Fuster holds 1st position, Rafael Pomar is in 3rd place, Jorge Aguilu in 6th and Francisco Pica in 23rd. From which we infer that in the mid 19th century, in spite of their surnames, the “xuetes” held a

⁶ The successive lists of voters (1836/90) ordered according to the amount of the tax rates payable and published in the Official Provincial Gazette. This source has enabled us to calculate the proportion of “xuetes” who were entitled to vote as a result of their tax rates and, in some cases, compare this to how they were classified professionally.

prominent position amongst the Mallorcan industrial and commercial bourgeoisie. The biggest “xueta” taxpayers were devoted to wholesale commerce and transport. Again, by exploring their inventories we can see that they invested in credit, bottomry and immovable assets, mostly urban, although they progressively acquired rural properties too. Specifically, within the municipality of Palma alone, they shifted from owning 22 estates in 1818 to being the owners of 59 in 1850. Most of these estates were not managed directly; nearly all of them were leased out. As a result, the situation at the end of the Former Regime, in which the “xueta” dealers engaged in agricultural business through the leasing of estates, had changed substantially. They had evolved from lessees to lessors.

A certain distance away from this “xueta” elite we find the middle-upper class of the group, 10% of the population who control around 30% of the wealth and are devoted primarily to the retail trading of fabrics and moneylending on jewels. The sub-group immediately below them, which constitutes the middle class proper, is comprised for the most part of silversmiths and shopkeepers specialising in the sale of meat and textile products.

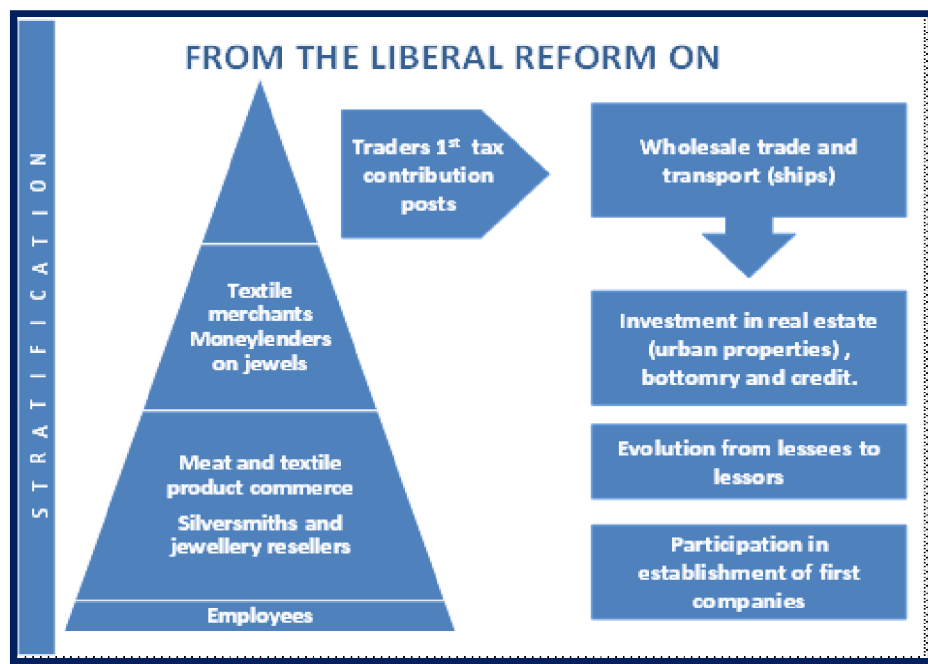


Figure 4. The stratification group from the end of the Liberal Reform on

Source: Own elaboration based on data from M. Aguiló (2016).

The most remarkable thing about this period is that the big “xueta” traders occupied the top positions in the general classification of the most important Mallorcan businessmen and that it is they and their children who, from the last third of the 19th century on, after the entry into force of the trading companies law (1869), would take part in the establishment of numerous companies in the social and political life of Mallorca.⁷ From the second half of the 19th century, throughout the island as a whole, there was notable activity on the part of a bourgeoisie which promoted the creation of numerous industrial, commercial and financial companies. Their members belonged to cultural and recreational societies which had an integrative spirit. Such as the Ateneo Balear, for example, the statutes of which explicitly highlighted the will to integrate all individuals with a dynamic spirit, regardless of their social affiliation, which explains the fact that the most prominent members of the “xueta” group are eventually admitted into the bourgeoisie proper, and that they take active part in the creation of all kinds of limited and cultural companies with other members of the bourgeoisie. From an examination of their inventories and documents from family archives, we can conclude that their behaviour was not different from that of the other bourgeois families. Nevertheless, we should emphasise that the

⁷ In this field we must mention the study of PEÑARRUBIA (2001) and to remit to Chapter 2 of the doctoral thesis AGUILÓ (2016).

“xuetes” preferred to channel their investments towards the areas in which they traditionally had more experience, such as transport, securities companies, insurance and financial institutions. These were, moreover, activities to which they had been devoted for a very long time. Thus, we observe that they were a socially excluded minority which played a relevant part in the transformation and development of the island’s social and economic model.

2.3. Consolidation of the Liberal State and the turn of the century

The most remarkable thing about the final period studied is that the members of the upper stratum continued to form part of the commercial elite of Mallorca, even though they no longer occupied the top positions in the classification. The traders had given up general commerce and stood out for their specialisation in colonial products and wholesale flours, or fabrics, for example. In addition, their investment in limited companies is generalised, both through shares and in the form of debt. This drop in the classification table is partly explained by the fact that the “xuetes” leaned towards practices of hereditary distribution

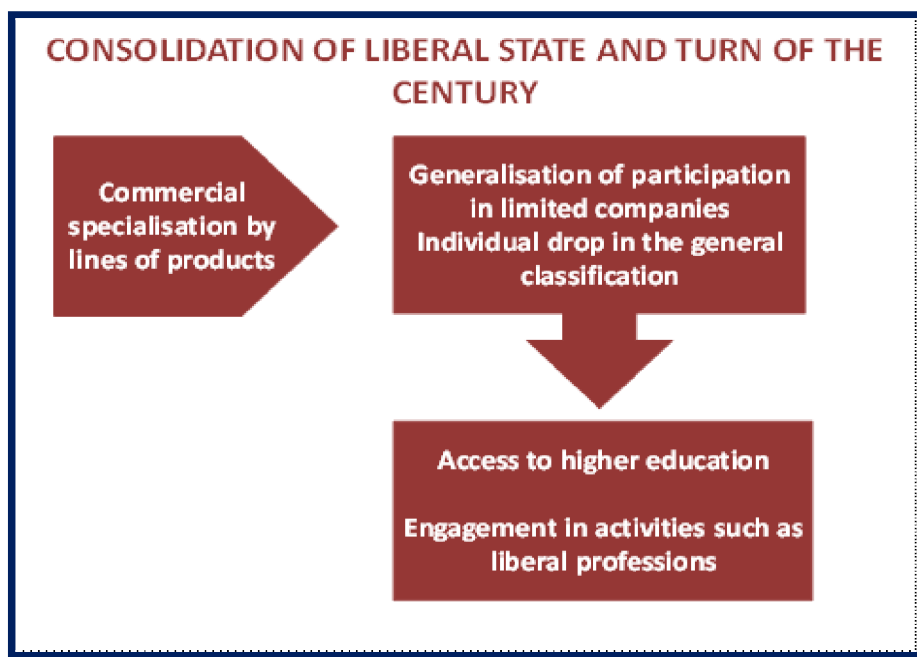


Figure 5. The stratification group at the end of the Liberal Reform from to consolidation of Liberal State

Source: Own elaboration based on data from M. Aguily (2016).

The “xuetes” did not choose a single-heir system. Most of them distributed their inheritances amongst the male children. This distinctive feature is present throughout the period studied, with the exception of some families from the upper strata of the group who, at the end of the 18th century, established trusts with encumbrances for descent very similar to those used by the nobility⁸. This preference is primarily explained by the fact that their assets were comprised of businesses in the form of trading companies in which all of the children participated, although in some cases they did include real estate properties, and the bequeathor’s will was not to generate inequalities which could possibly endanger the continuity of the family businesses. Furthermore, as from the end of the 19th century and beginning of the 20th, in addition to this will that children continue with the family business, some testators expressed their desire that part of the inheritance be used for them to acquire higher studies. Doubtless due to the conviction that it was education and holding influential posts and professions alone could be put and end to the social exclusion to which they had been subjected. Nevertheless, in the sphere of inheritances, the group does present one peculiarity that caught our attention. Unlike other social groups, they did not exclude children who followed the ecclesiastical career from the

⁸ MOREY (2007, 2008).

inheritance, but rather quite the contrary – in some cases they even preferred them as a symbol of social distinction. We have related this approach to the exclusion and persecution they had suffered from the Catholic Church.⁹

However, the most remarkable aspect of the turn of the century is the role of some members of the group in the practice of certain liberal professions: pharmacists (5), dentists (2) or veterinary surgeons (2). This new professional dedication increased progressively until 1934, when the “xuetes” represented nearly 11% of the total of the liberal professions in the city of Palma. This fact reveals the importance the members of the group attributed to education as a form of social integration, in spite of all of the difficulties they underwent to attain it and the fact that some of them, seeing that they would not manage to be fully assimilated by the rest of the population of Mallorca even with their professional studies, decided not to return to the island after finishing university¹⁰.

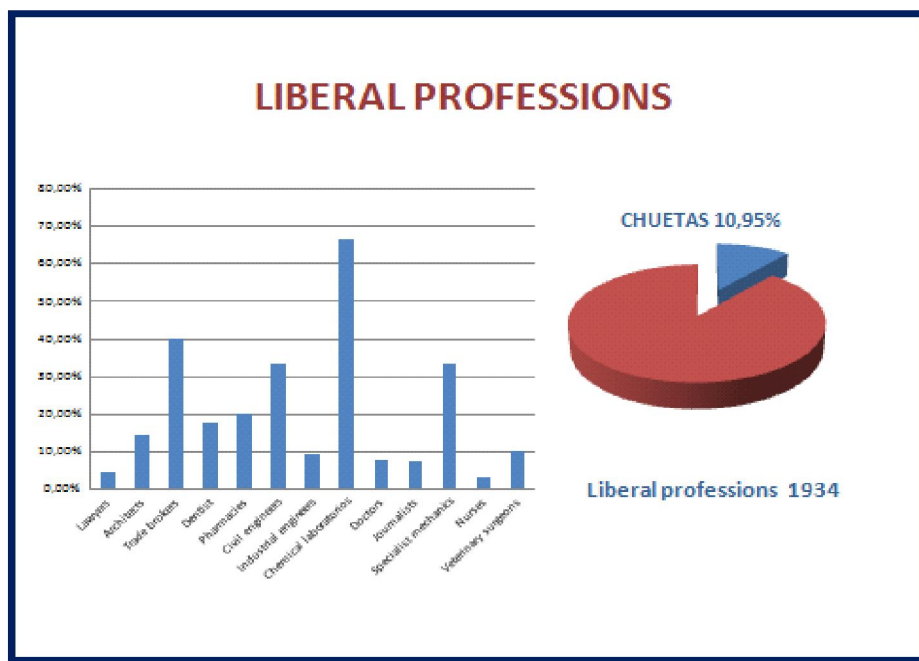


Figure 6. Percentage of Liberal Professions between the studied group (1934)

Source: Guide of Palma (1935)

3. Professional specialisation

Approximately 90% of the group’s professional activity throughout the study period is divided up between commerce (with an average weight of 51,41%), the different transformation crafts (with 31,21%) and transportation (with 5,72%). Therefore, the “xuetes” continue to be an essentially commercial group. In the latter stage of the Former Regime, the commercial activity was of a general nature and was represented by a heterogeneous group of professionals, traders, businessmen, dealers, merchants or shopkeepers. From the mid-19th century on up until the end of the study period, this specialisation was maintained, but the general trades lose representation in favour of the specialist ones. The categories above disappear, with the exception of the traders, a term that will continue to be used to refer to those who engage in wholesale trade. The trades related to the textile sector (merchant of silks, ribbons and thread, serge, remnants, etc.) and the food sector (ham and pork shop, spice shop) are the most important ones, along with another diverse set of commercial establishments (hardware stores, toy shops, perfumeries, electronic items, etc.) which will vary depending on the demand of the population and which become increasingly important over the entire period. Finally, in 1935, both wholesale and retail trading are highly specialised.

⁹ RIERA (1973) and PORQUERES & RIERA (2004).

¹⁰ In this field, we want to mention the memories by some members of the group: AGUILÓ (1882), AGUILÓ CORTÉS (1888), FORTEZAPIÑA (1972, 1988) and TARONGÍ CORTÉS (1877).

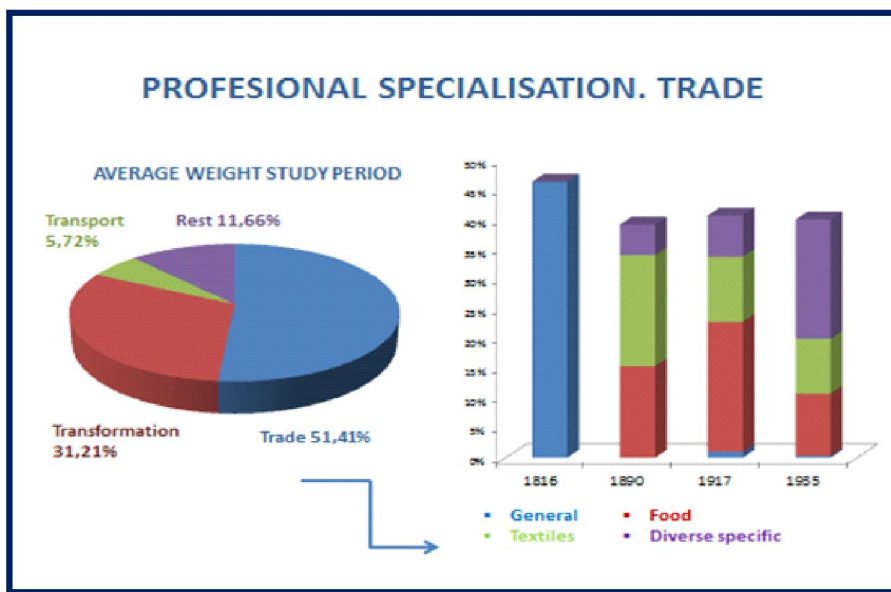


Figure 7. The trade specialisation of the studied group (1816 – 1935)

Source: Own elaboration based on data from the Population registration of Palma (1816) and the contribution relations (1890, 1917 and 1935)

With regard to the transformation trades, there is no doubt that jewellery and work related to the textile and metal sectors are those that concentrate the activity of the majority of the members of the group. A specialisation that persists even in the last of the sources studied. However, this continuity must no longer be understood in terms of social exclusion, but as the customary transmission of trades from parents to children which was frequent in any social group until recent times.

The metal sector is basically represented at the beginning of the period by lathe operators, and after the turn of the century this sector gains weight and is monopolised by tinsmiths, which is hardly surprising if we bear in mind the high production of food preserves and the fact that, with regard to the “xuetes”, skill in metalworking is one of their noteworthy specialisations.

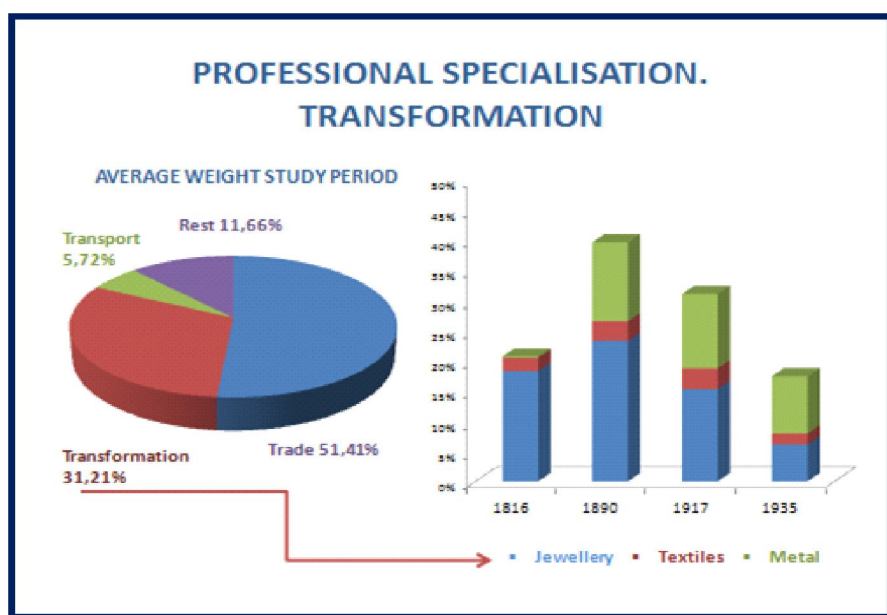


Figure 8. The transformation specialisation of the studied group (1816 – 1935)

Source: Own elaboration based on data from the Population registration of Palma (1816) and the contribution relations (1890, 1917 and 1935)

In transport, the average weight for the whole period of study is 5,72%; however, we would like to clarify that this is partly due to the fact that in the organised sources this activity has its own section heading, as some people exercised it exclusively, carriers or carters. And yet they were also performed, for example, by traders who had boats and transportation carts and in this case, these activities have been computed in the transport section. In addition, from the beginning of the 20th century, transport loses importance, mainly because this activity becomes separated from commerce proper and is channelled through shipping companies.

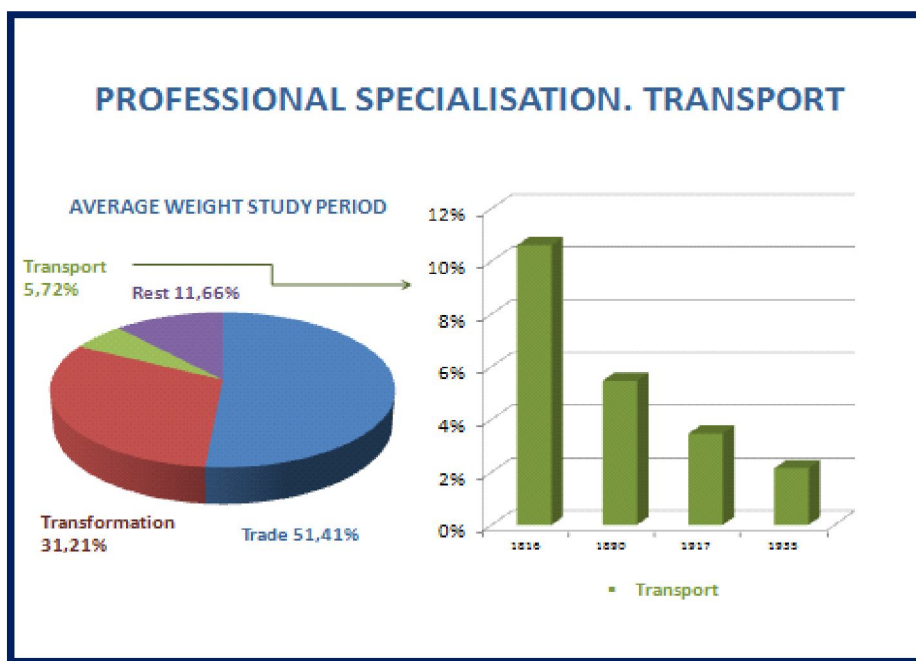


Figure 9. The transport specialisation of the studied group (1816 – 1935)

Source: Own elaboration based on data from the Population registration of Palma (1816) and the contribution relations (1890, 1917 and 1935)

The professional specialisation of the “xuetes” in the specific sectors we have mentioned, which was maintained during the study period, could be explained by the persistence over time of the blood purity statutes imposed from the late 17th century on, which prevented them from joining most guilds¹¹. They were only admitted into their traditional guilds – those of lacemakers, glovers, haberdashers and merchants; those of silversmiths and velvet workers (with their own guild from 1689 on).

The study of a specific source (the distribution of utensils of 1772) has enabled us to find out the specific number of “xuetes” who belonged to each guild. In this way, we have verified that they were concentrated in those of the merchants and silversmiths (neither of which were exclusive for “xuetes”) and that moreover, in both their presence represented a majority (84% of merchants and 96% of silversmiths were “xuetes”).

We would also like to stress the fact that throughout the whole study period there are activities or professions that are exercised exclusively or mostly by “xuetes” and which, although they vary over time (mainly due to the changes in the population’s consumer habits and due to the specialisation of commerce), they concentrated both on trade and on transformation in the sectors where we have seen the “xuetes” have a high level of representation: textile trade, jewellery and metalworking. Specifically in 1852, for example, 100% of silk, ribbon and thread merchants and 92% of serge merchants belonged to the group. The “xuetes” controlled jewellery and were very well represented in the metal sector. This situation continued from 1917 on, although with the disappearance of the silk and ribbon merchants, they now controlled both the wholesale and the retail haberdasheries.

¹¹ For a more detailed explanation see the introduction of the doctoral thesis by AGUILÓ (2016).

Furthermore, the organisation of the sources consulted reveals that, especially in the final stage of the Former Regime, although most “xuetes” work in specific sectors, there are a significant number of trades that are practised by a single representative of the community. For example: carpenter, publican, schoolteacher, dance master, umbrella maker, watchmaker, slaughterer, etc. This circumstance has led us to consider the hypothesis that the “xuetes” were governed by an unwritten code of conduct that may, in addition to the aforementioned aspects, have included not competing with one another. Because one can intuit that precisely because they were an excluded minority, in certain ways they behaved like a guild of their own.

CONCLUSION

Finally, below we list the conclusions this research has turned up regarding the economic and social evolution of the members of the group.

1. Heterogeneity: founded on interrelated aspects that vary in each period (quality of descent, sub-endogamy, levels of wealth, profession).
2. The restrictions of guilds determine professional specialisation during the Former Regime.
3. Elimination of official exclusion (mid-19th century) and maintenance of professional specialisation in specific spheres (due to inherited family skills, as in other groups, and not because of their social background).
4. Evolution in the forms of investment similar to other groups: from general traders to specialist ones, from lessees to lessors and from private investors to collective investors (trading companies).
5. External assimilation of the “xueta élite” by the bourgeoisie (top places in classification).
6. Awareness of the importance of higher education and the practice of the liberal professions as an instrument for assimilation.
7. Choice of distribution of inheritance amongst all male children as the preferred formula.
8. Reminiscences of discrimination/distinction due to descent until the 1960s/’70s.

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