

TITLE: Wages, prices, and technology in early Catalan industrialization

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ABSTRACT: Catalonia was the only Mediterranean region among the early followers of the British industrial revolution. The roots of this process can be traced back to the seventeenth and eighteenth centuries when the Catalan economy became integrated into international trade, and a successful printed calico industry concentrated in the city of Barcelona. Although the factory system was largely adopted by the cotton industry in the 1840s, the diffusion of the spinning jenny in Catalonia had occurred earlier, in the 1790s. In line with Allen, this article explores whether relative factor prices played a role in the widespread adoption of the spinning jenny in Catalonia. First, series of real wages in Barcelona are supplied for the period 1500–1808. Second, the prices of labour and capital are compared and the potential profitability of the adoption of the spinning jenny is analysed. Findings show that although Catalonia was not a high wage economy in the way that Britain was in the second half of the eighteenth century, evidence from the cotton spinning sector confirms the relevance of relative factor prices in the adoption of new technology. Within the booming cotton sector after the 1780s, high wages created strong incentives for the adoption of the labour-saving spinning jenny.

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