

A CATALAN MERCHANT OF THE MID-SEVENTEENTH CENTURY : NARCÍS FELIU (? - 1665)

per Henry Kamen

The career of Narcís Feliu de la Peña († 1712) has been studied in relation to the economic revival of Catalonia in the late seventeenth century, and the support given by the commercial bourgeoisie of the principality to the Habsburg cause in the War of the Succession.¹ However, little or nothing is known of his family and antecedents. The present brief article looks at aspects of his background which may help to set him more clearly within his context.

His father, Narcís Feliu, was active in the commercial world of mid-seventeenth-century Barcelona, and survived all the hazards of the wars, the French presence, and the plague of 1652. In 1638 he contributed towards the rebuilding of the Hospital General of Barcelona, destroyed by fire that year.² Son of a Barcelona rope-maker who was also named Narcís, at the height of the troubles in mid-century Barcelona he married in November 1642 Maria Farell, daughter of the Barcelona silversmith Pere Farell. Neither family was poor, for Maria's dowry was 2000 lliures, and young Narcís brought as his *escreix* the sum of 1000 lliures.³ In 1649, despite the problems caused by the war, he had adequate capital to buy himself two houses in the carrer d'en Roldó, one of which served him as his place of business. In 1652, year of the terrible siege of the city, he bought a further house, in front of the Generalitat, which he improved and then leased out. In 1654 he bought one more house, in the carrer dels Canvis, which he put in the name of his wife and of

1. For Feliu de la Peña the following works by Vilar, Kamen and Molas are basic. Pierre Vilar, *La Catalogne dans l'Espagne moderne*, 3 vols. Paris 1962; my quotes are from the Catalan edition, *Catalunya dins l'Espanya moderna*, 3 vols. Barcelona 1964-8. Kamen, "Narcís Feliu de la Peña i el 'Fénix de Catalunya'", introduction to the facsimile reprint of the *Fénix de Catalunya*, Barcelona 1984. Pere Molas Ribalta, "La represa catalana de 1680-1700: Narcís Feliu de la Peña", in his *Comerc i estructural social a Catalunya i València als segles XVII i XVIII*, Barcelona 1977.

2. "Narciso Feliu mi padre hizo fabricar a su costa el quarto de San Pedro, fundando missa todas las fiestas para los enfermos": Narcís Feliu de la Peña, *Anales de Cataluña*, 3 vols. Barcelona 1709, vol. III p. 253.

3. Arxiu Històric de Protòcols de Barcelona, notari Francesc Llunell, "Duodecim Manuale", 1641-1642, lib. 13, f.418-9. The *escreix* was the husband's contribution to the wife's dowry.

his young son Narcís.⁴ The availability of capital in this time of crisis, and his successful participation in business, shows that he was not among the casualties of the period. His political links undoubtedly helped him: in 1644, at the height of the French occupation, he was conseller quart of the city; and he undertook financial contracts for the French in Barcelona and in Perpinyà. After the war, for a period up to the end of 1654, he served as 'caixer de la Taula de Barcelona',⁵ where he presumably helped to deal with the grave situation caused by the virtual bankruptcy of the bank;⁶ and had active business relations with the financial institutions of the city. The rest of his family also improved their position. By the 1650s his father-in-law Pere Farell had become a ciutadà honrat of Barcelona.

The survival of Feliu's account book for the ten-year period following the recovery of Barcelona in 1652, supplies valuable information on the creation of the fortune which later enabled his son to finance his campaign for the economic renewal of Catalonia.

The total turnover of Feliu in these years, listed below in lliures, is given in the following diagram.

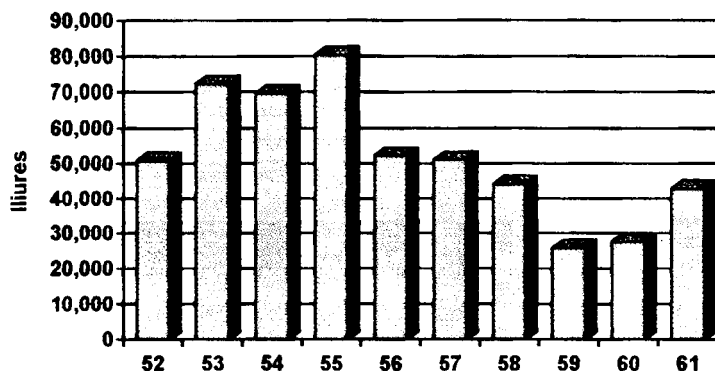
year	lliures
1652	50,754
1653	72,311
1654	69,554
1655	80,307
1656	52,180
1657	51,067
1658	44,150
1659	25,728
1660	27,576
1661	42,836

4. Arxiu de la Corona d'Aragó, secció Monacales, Hacienda, llibre 4151, "Libre maior de Narcís Feliu, mercader". This is cited hereafter as "Libre maior".

5. "Libre maior", p. 12.

6. In 1654 the bank had to suspend payments. For a summary of the crisis, see J. Carrera Pujal, *Historia política y económica de Cataluña*, 4 vols. Barcelona 1946, vol. II p. 120-2.

Narcís Feliu: annual financial turnover



Interesting as data, the figures cannot however be used to arrive at any significant conclusion, since we have no information about their context. A small proportion of the money represented cash transactions through the city bank of Barcelona, where Feliu had accounts in his own name and in those of members of his family. Some cash was used to buy investments: in 1655 he bought censals to the capital value of 1,942 lliures, in 1657 further censals to the value of 4,870 lliures.⁷ But the overwhelming bulk of his turnover consisted of trading. He did business through the Catalan ports of Barcelona, Mataró, Blanes, Cambrils and Sant Feliu de Guíxols, and had contacts in Perpinyà. He did a little business through Valencia, but his main peninsular contacts were with the banker Bernardo Oddon in Madrid and the banker Juan Antonio Grosso de Rubera of Zaragoza. Virtually all his trading was with the Balearic islands.

The fortune of Feliu's family was, unquestionably, based on trade with Mallorca, where he had two principal trading partners: the financier Gabriel Rius, and the trader Melcior Cortes. Through them, Feliu was able to make use of the two motors without which all trade would have been impossible: bills of change and ships. Rius was in charge of all Feliu's financial negotiations, negotiated his bills of change for him, and took care of the periodic shipments of bullion. A measure of Feliu's strong financial position, even in

7. "Libre maior", pp. 159, 163, 172, 212, 214, 223, 231.

the worst days of the disaster years 1652-4, is that he was able to trade in bullion. A contemporary chronicler observes that in 1654 'por la rebaxa de la moneda se subieron los precios excessivamente y más en aquellas mercaderias que se compravan fuera reyno, que para traherlo se havia menester el dinero en plata u oro.'⁸ Yet already in 1652 Feliu had access to bullion: in that year he paid his debts to Melcior Cortes of Mallorca partly in bullion, '£104 10s lo preu y valor de 125 pesas de vuyt li he enviades', and '£157 2s 6d, moneda fort li he enbiats.'⁹ In 1654 he was sending bullion to Genoa and to Saragossa.¹⁰ The bills of change, normally with a validity of nine months, brought Feliu into contact with the economic life of the rest of the peninsula. We find for example in 1659, 'a 11 de mars 69 lliures ab plata dobla tinch pagades a Francisco Grosos y Bernat Oliver per lletra de canvi de Joan Antonio Gros de Rubere per nou mesos fins lo mes de mars 1660, a fet pagar en Huesca'; and 'me an donat lletres de canbi per Madrid a pagar a Bernat Oddon y a rebre al Sr Hieronimo Mancho per remetra al Sr Don Antoni Carreras en Salamanca'.¹¹ The bill of change made it easier to get round the different currencies used in the western Mediterranean. When it came to actual cash payments, Feliu paid in silver calculated on the basis of Castilian coinage, in silver reales de a ocho.¹²

For ships, he made regular use of the number of sagetias which traded between Spain, the Balearics and Italy. Some of these were Catalan and Mallorcan vessels -the captains Joan Illa (1658) and Joan Riera (1660) were among these used with frequency for shipments- but frequently Genoese ships were also used; and when Feliu transported bullion to Mallorca he unfailingly sent it in Genoese vessels, relying no doubt on the neutral status of the Genoese republic. Only once, in 1655, is he recorded as having used a foreign ship: the vessel was an English merchant-ship.¹³ On one occasion in these years, a total loss of shipment was suffered: in 1657, when the sagetia

8. "Sucessos particulares en Cataluña desde el año 1626 hasta el de 1660", Biblioteca de Catalunya, MS. 502 f. 482.

9. "Libre maior", p. 29.

10. Ibid., p. 86.

11. Ibid., pp. 296, 301.

12. Ibid., p. 319: in 1660 he paid "a 20 de dasembra 708 ll de plata dobla castellana per lo que an valgut duas pipas y sinquanta quartarolas de oli rebudas ab patro Pere Segunyolas... que son 885 pesas de vuyt a 8 reales la pesa de vuyt de plata castellana, son dites 708 ll."

13. Ibid., p. 126: "la nau anomenada *La dulce bella*, capita Eduardo Erison, de nasio ingles".

of captain Joan Sastre was captured by Moorish pirates.¹⁴ Fortunately, Feliu was protected by the insurance he took out on all his shipments. On the Sastre loss, for example, he was able to recoup 450 lliures. The insurance rate he paid was normally five per cent of a shipment's value: on a shipment to Gabriel Rius in 1655, for example, the value of the cargo was 2,095 lliures, and the insurance paid was 210 lliures.¹⁵ This rate of five per cent for journeys to Mallorca seems to be higher than the rate charged a generation later for trade between Mataró and Mallorca, when the rate was about three per cent.¹⁶

Narcís Feliu de la Penya at the end of the century placed his entire emphasis on the need for a renewal of the textile industry in Catalonia. His father Narcís, by contrast, was interested in all those sectors of production which offered a profit, and traded in a wide variety of items. In the years for which we have data, we may look at the evolution of his trading interests.

In 1652 Feliu was exporting iron and honey to Mallorca; in return, he imported from Mallorca cheese, saffron, silk, oil and almonds, and shawls. In 1653, he was trading substantially in silk, through the firm which consisted of the three Catalan merchants Pau Rossell, Joan Llinàs and Pere Pau Jofre. He also in that year exported iron from Jacinto Capdevila and textiles from Isidro Mata, as well as cheese, figs and other items we shall touch on presently; in return, he imported from Mallorca oil and soap. In subsequent years the pattern was similar: an exchange of primary materials between the principality and the islands, and an emphasis on the export of textiles from Catalonia, with the significant exception that shawls were imported to Catalonia. In practice, it is difficult to follow a clear pattern in Feliu's trading activity, since the items in which he dealt depended totally on the merchants with whom he was trading. It may be more useful, therefore, to look at the trade which he carried on with one or two individual merchants.

As we have noted, Melcior Cortes of the city of Mallorca, together with his son Pere Onofre Cortes and the other members of their family Geroni and Onofre, played a crucial role in Feliu's trading. In the earlier years their commerce was in raw materials. In 1652 Feliu sent Melcior Cortes iron and wine, and received cheese, saffron, silk, oil and almonds. In 1653 he sent

14. *Ibid.*, p. 205.

15. *Ibid.*, p. 144.

16. Joaquim Llovet, *Marató, 1680-1719: el pas de vila a ciutat*, Marató 1966, p. 34.

cheese and figs, and received oil and soap. In 1654 he was sending sardines, iron, pine-nuts and hazelnuts to Melcior Cortes. By 1655 the chief iron item being sent to Mallorca was iron hoops (in Catalan, *cèrcols*) used for the binding of casks. By 1657 Catalan textiles were playing a larger part in the exports. In 1658 two-thirds by value of the shipments to Cortes were textiles. In 1659, a useful year for seeing the nature of the two-way traffic, the entirety of shipments to Cortes consisted of Catalan textiles; in return, Feliu imported large quantities of shawls (*mantó d'estam*), together with oil, and raw silk. In 1660, responding to the request by Cortes for the '*draps me demana*', Feliu once again exported only textiles, receiving in return shipments which consisted half of shawls, half of oil.¹⁷ Trading through other members of the Cortes family differed slightly in emphasis. Already in 1652 Feliu was importing shawls from Pere Onofre, and in 1653 was sending him iron, honey and hazelnuts. By the second half of 1654, however, the totality of exports to Pere Onofre consisted of textiles, a picture that continued into 1655 and 1656; in return, Feliu received cheese, oil and silk.¹⁸

How did this trading activity tie in with the domestic market in Catalonia? Inevitably, Feliu's family and friends were central to the trading pattern. Feliu's principal supplier of iron hoops was his cousin Francesc Feliu, '*pagès*' of Mataró, who while he continued to be known as '*pagès*' also traded to Mallorca through Narcís. Between 1653 and 1661 the main item traded by Francesc Feliu to Mallorca through his cousin were iron hoops. In 1653 '*ferro y altres coses*' were noted as having being purchased from him by Narcís Feliu; in 1654 the list covered iron, glass, barrels of sardine, pine-nuts, and textiles.¹⁹ The close links between the branches of the Feliu family were thus active throughout the period. In the same way Narcís Feliu had active trading relations with '*Joan Llinàs, mercader, mon cunyat*'.²⁰ Llinàs was Feliu's chief customer for the shawls imported from Mallorca: by 1655 the links between the two merchants was based almost entirely on the shawl trade, and Llinàs was also the purchaser of most of the raw wool imported by Feliu from Menorca.²¹ The Llinàs link, as we know from the history of the younger Narcís, continued through the century.

17. "*Libre maior*" pp. 29, 57, 85, 126, 205, 268, 300, 323

18. *Ibid.*, pp. 28, 32, 97, 158, 194.

19. *Ibid.*, pp. 51, 89.

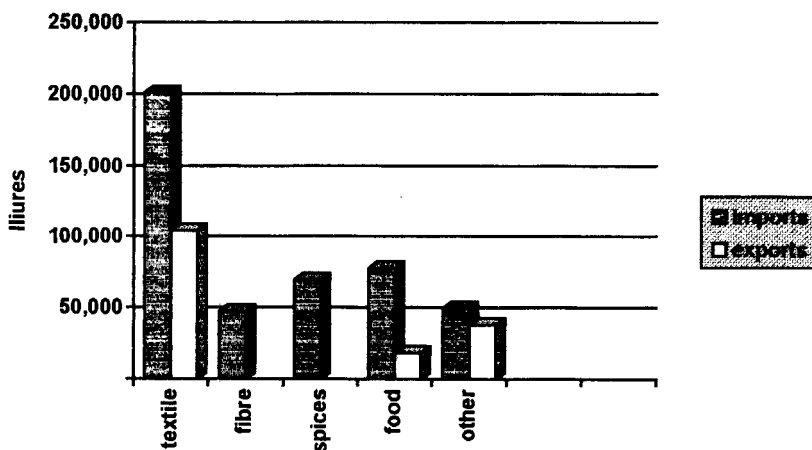
20. *Ibid.*, p. 122.

21. *Ibid.*, pp. 122, 159.

Among the other personalities whose activity can be glimpsed through the account-book of Feliu are many who went on to play an important role in Catalonia's industry. An important exporter of textiles to Mallorca through Feliu was, for example, Pau Feu, described as a 'botiguer de teles', but who later in his career advanced in wealth and in society and whose son became a nobleman.²² A regular customer for Menorca wool was another whose family went on to success, Josep Portell, 'mercader' of Mataró.²³ Pau Julià, 'paraire' of Esparraguera, who exported his cloths to Mallorca through Feliu,²⁴ began a tradition of cooperation with the Feliu family which continued into the late century.

We know very little of the economic context within which Feliu operated. A recent survey of Catalan history ignores the period we are dealing with,²⁵ and the well-known study by Vilar limits itself to saying that 'la crisi obrera

Barcelona imports and exports 1664-5



22. Ibid., p. 106, year 1654. Some time in the late century the daughter of Francesc Feliu, Maria Teresa, married Don Josep Feu, and so linked the two Marató families: Arxiu Nacional de Catalunya, fons Feliu de la Peña, Inventari 54, doc. 60, genealogy. For Feu and his family, see the article by Molas, "La companyia Feu-Feliu de la Peña (1676-1708)", republish in his *Comerç i estructura*, chap. 4

23. "Libre maior", pp. 132, 149.

24. Ibid., p. 132.

25. R. García Cárcel, *Historia de Cataluña. Siglos XVI-XVII*, 2 vols. Barcelona 1985, is a work of compilation that effectively ignores the second half of the seventeenth century.

el 1640 havia durat més de vint anys'.²⁶

Recovery from the problems of the 1650s was slow, and remains undocumented: Vilar concludes that 'un silenci bastant llarg dels textos fa pensar que la veritable estabilització s'ha imposat espontàniament, progressivament, entre 1654 i 1660'.²⁷ He is probably right to speak of stabilisation rather than recovery, for Catalonia's economy remained in a parlous state. Precisely in the 1660s, when our data for Feliu end, the trade of the port of Barcelona as seen through the port-duty called the periatge, show an overwhelming dependence of the principality on imports. The data²⁸ are resumed in the accompanying diagram, which demonstrates clearly that three-fourths of the trade of the port consisted of imports, so that if there was any recuperation in the economy it was not to be seen in commercial channels.

In reality, the trade situation as seen through Feliu's account book and through the port statistics, differs very little from what it was in the early century. A report on Catalonia's exports in the second decade of the century²⁹ states that 'todas las mercaderías naturales o artificiosas que hay y sobran en Cataluña para poderlas pasar a otras provincias, se reducen a solos tres especies que son: frutas secas de almendras, piñones y avellanas;³⁰ y hierro;³¹ y paños'.³² Of these items the most important by volume were textiles. This summary mirrors exactly the situation we can see in Feliu's account-book. The province's dependence on imports is emphasised by the same report:

Por otra parte, vemos que en Cataluña hay falta de muchísimas cosas necesarias para el sustento de la vida, como son de todas las drogas medicinales; de toda suerte de especiera y cosas aromáticas; de azúcares;³³

26. Vilar, vol.II, p. 370.

27. *Ibid.*, vol. II, p. 370.

28. See the listing in Kamen, *Carlos II*, p. 195. The data are taken from J. Fontana Lázaro, "Comercio exterior", *Estudios de Historia Moderna*, V (1955), pp. 199-219.

29. Quoted by J. Carrera Pujal, *Historia política y económica*, vol. I p. 365.

30. 'Libre maior', p. 109 (1654): "Compra de 23 saques de avalana, las quals me a remesas Thomas Ceresio de Tarragona ab patro Josep Morera," to be exported to "Melciort Cortes de la ciutat de Mallorca".

31. *Ibid.*, p. 87 (1654): "La valor de 97 q^{ns} de ferro acarregats per mon orda per enviar a Mallorca" for Don Joan Quart of Ciutdella.

32. In 1660, 100% of Feliu's shipments to Melciort Cortes of Mallorca consisted of "draps": *ibid.*, p. 323.

33. "Libre maior", p. 276: Francesc Argemir mercader deu 798 II, valor de 7 caxas de sucra me ha comprat per medi de Antich Romeu corredor de orella, a pagar dins 8 mesos ab dues pagues." In 1654, the bulk of imports for Francesc Feliu of Mataró consisted of sugar: p. 89.

de todos los aparejos necesarios para los tintes y tintoreros; y de metales, cobre, plomo, estaño, latón; de libros en todas facultades; de lienzos, de seda y telillas para vestirse;³⁴ de cera; de pesca salada, y de la mayor parte de la carne que en ella se come.³⁵

In conclusion, the limited evidence of Feliu's account-book gives us a clear picture of the commerce which functioned between Catalonia and Mallorca during the ten years that followed the recovery of Barcelona by Spain. From its pages we get a profile of one of the groups of traders who operated in the business world of Barcelona, based primarily on family ties. Kinship, though crucial, was not the only link that bound together the 'Feliu connection'. Business contracts were used to enable different traders to fund their resources: Feliu's accounts refer regularly in the year 1655 to his transactions with the 'company' consisting of Pau Feu, Pau Rossell and Joan Llinàs.³⁶ There were also ecclesiastical links, or more precisely inquisitorial. In Mataró, we know that the 'pagès' Salvador Feliu de la Peña, father of Francesc, became a familiar of the Inquisition in 1628, thereby allying himself with his relative Narcís Portell, notary of Mataró and the only other familiar of the Inquisition in the town.³⁷ By the end of the century the Portells and the Feliu de la Peña had risen to form part of the governing elite of Mataró, and were closely connected with the elite of Barcelona.

Narcís Feliu of Barcelona seems to have died inopportunistically young, of an unnamed illness. His testament, drawn up on his deathbed on 18 December 1665, selected as his administrators his wife Maria, 'charissima muller mia', and his brother-in-law Joan Llinàs and the latter's wife Catarina.³⁸

He asked to be buried in the church of Santa Maria del Mar, 'en lo vas

34. Imports for Joan Llinàs, 1655: "a 7 de abril 272 ll per la valor de 68 mantos me a comprats per medi de Antich Romeu corredor de orella, a 40 reales manto": *ibid.*, p. 122. Also, p. 214: "Pau Feu, botiguer de telas, deu a 7 de febrer [1657] 231ll per la valor de 52 mantos me a comprats per medi de Jaume Coll, corredor de orella, a 44 reales lo manto." In these years, Feliu imported silk from Melcior Cortes of Mallorca: *ibid.*, pp. 29, 300. There were also substantial imports of wool, as in 1655 by "Joseph Portell... llana de Menorca me a comprada per medi de Antich Romeu corredor de orella": p. 149.

35. Carrera Pujal, vol. I, p. 366.

36. "Libre maior", p. 146.

37. Arxiu Diocesà de Barcelona, leg. Inquisició, any 1628. In this document Feliu's parents are identified as Pere Antic Feliu, "labrador" of Marató, and Violant Roig of the same town. His wife's grandfather, Antic Roig, was "zapatero" of Marató. It is clear that the first member of the family to enter commerce was Salvador Feliu.

38. AHPB, notari Francesc Reverter, "Segundus liber testamentorum", 1644-1680, libro 19 f. 219.

meu construït en la capella del glorios archangel St Miquel',³⁹ and asked for one thousand masses to be said for him as a 'requiem de charitat'. He left four young children. For his daughter Maria, 'vuy de edat de onze anys', he set aside the sum of 2,000 lliures for her dowry; and for each of his three sons -Narcís, Salvador 'altre fill meu, vuy de quatre anys poch mes o manco', and Joseph 'altre fill meu, de edat vuy de tretze mesos- he set aside 1,000 lliures for their marriages. He appointed as his universal heir his wife Maria, on condition that at her death 'haia de disposar de tota ma universal heretat y bens en favor de hu dels fills mascles seus y meus comuns'. The inheritance was to pass to the eldest son, and failing him to the other sons in turn, and finally to the daughter. Of these four children, we have no information on Maria or on Joseph, who may both have died young, for they make no appearance in the surviving documentation. Salvador entered the Church, went to study at the Colegio Mayor of Vera Cruz in Salamanca,⁴⁰ and eventually was appointed prior of the convent of the Merced in Barcelona, where in 1695 he got into trouble with the authorities for his implicit support of the Barretines insurgents.⁴¹ His father's account-books were deposited in the library of the Merced. As the only legitimate heir of the family fortune, Narcís Feliu de la Peña, who entered the legal profession but whose entire life had been spent in the atmosphere of his father's commercial enterprises, was ideally placed many years later to be able to pass judgment on the social and economic situation of the principality:

Concluyesse pues evidentemente, que en Cataluña se pueden adelantar las artes, introducir la navegacion, y emprender el comercio, con las felicidades y conveniencias grangearon nuestros mayores, exaltando nuestra Provincia al relevante timbre y prodigiosa grandeza de los tiempos antiguos.⁴²

39. His son Narcís was also buried in the same tomb. The chapel has since changed its name, and is now that of St. Barbara.

40. ANC, fons Feliu de la Peña, Inventari 54 f. 15.

41. On 28 January 1696 Salvador Feliu de la Peña petitioned the Council of Aragon to be allowed back to his convent, from which he was "hallarse desterrado cinquenta leguas por su General... y a su cinco meses que falta de su priorato": Arxiu de la Corona d'Aragó, section Consejo de Aragón, leg. 218. He was accused of failing to ensure the neutrality of his friars in the dispute between the Audiència and the Inquisition in 1695, and of making statements in favour of the Barretines uprisings of 1689. Cf. also Feliu de la Peña, *Anales*, Vol. III p. 424.

42. Narcís Feliu de la Peña, *Fénix de Cataluña*, 1684, reed. Barcelona 1984, p. 82.