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*The manufacture of artificial fibres in the city of Burgos:
an ephemeral enclave of the Spanish textile industry during
Franco's autarchy (1939-1959)*

Between 1939 and 1959, during Franco's autarchy, a unique set of textile industries of artificial fibres was established in the city of Burgos. From the Sociedad Española de Seda Artificial (SESA), a manufacturing enclave was formed which positioned itself as the second national centre in this textile sub-sector.

This production nucleus totalled more than 80 companies, nearly 4,000 workers and acquired a sustained market share of around 12% of Spanish production. But from the mid-fifties onwards, the artificial silk factories in Burgos succumbed to the progress of the new markets and quickly disappeared.

This research analyses this ephemeral enclave of the post-war Spanish textile industry. Through the use of different statistical sources and archival documentation, we reflect on the difficulties of autarkic industrialisation, but we also highlight its windows of opportunity, in the context of Burgos's close links with Franco's regime. It also explores the participation of Catalan investors in the Burgos textile factories, verifying the hegemony of this region in the development of the Spanish textile cycle. And, finally, the transcendental impact that this industry had on the spatial and socio-economic structure of the city is verified.

Despite their early disappearance, the man-made textile fibre factories were the seed of local industrialisation and foreshadowed the identity that Burgos would definitively acquire as an industrial city through its subsequent designation as a Promotion and Development Pole.

I. DIFFICULTIES AND OPPORTUNITIES
IN SPANISH AUTARKIC INDUSTRIALISATION

The development of the productive activity of Spanish industry during the decades following the Civil War was clearly conditioned by the determining deficiencies of a very underdeveloped industrial system and, above all, weighed down by the implementation of a national policy aimed at market control and productive self-sufficiency, especially in a context of international isolation as a result of Franco's support for Nazi Germany. The shortcomings, rigidities and regulations of an autarkic model that constricted markets and restricted activity explain the generalised functioning of a strongly limited industry that grew with difficulty in the context of a model determined by the aspiration of self-sufficiency.

These dirigiste approaches, far removed from the rules of the market economy, caused additional problems such as widespread shortages of energy, raw materials and capital goods, with a concomitant decline in productivity. Such difficulties, together with import restrictions—essential because of the need for foreign machinery in most production—constantly blocked manufacturing, revealing the inadequacy of an unviable economic model. In this way, autarkic industrialisation was defined by a generalised context of enormous difficulties for economic progress, but it also determined the existence of obvious opportunities for industrial progress in the heat of the favours of the Regime, which led to a productive growth of sharp contrasts.

In this context, one of the economic sectors of greatest interest during this period was undoubtedly the textile industry. The generalised climate of scarcity and lack of means determined strong needs in the production of textiles, as the majority of the population demanded clothes, household utensils and other basic products. The sharp decline in real wages and the lack of money available for consumption had a significant impact on the textile industry. Families had to devote a greater percentage of their budget to food, and traditional textiles such as wool and—even more so—cotton, were clearly affected. Franco's government tried to alleviate these problems by favouring the production and consumption of artificial fibres, which generated two reasonably prosperous decades for the companies that opted for this type of product, as was the case of the enclave that arose in the city of Burgos.

II. THE BEGINNING OF THE MANUFACTURE OF ARTIFICIAL FIBRES IN SPAIN

Artificial fibres began to be known at the end of the 19th century—Chardonnet silk—and artificial silk or rayon became popular during the first decades of the 20th century. This fibre was obtained from wood pulp cellulose which, not being soluble, had to be chemically altered and dissolved in a solution of sodium hydroxide, resulting in a polymer in liquid form. The success of rayon exemplifies the interest in man-made fibres during the first third of the 20th century. The aim was to obtain fabrics that replicated the advantages of cotton and/or silk, but reducing their costs and facilitating their production process. Artificial fibres, particularly rayon, made possible fabrics that were light, breathable, resistant, and versatile, with textures adaptable to dyeing and with different finishing possibilities. These characteristics determined the exponential increase in the production of these fibres, which went from barely 3% of world textile production in 1930 to more than 20% in little more than fifteen years, displacing cotton and wool. Rayon was the fabric that maintained the greatest relative growth until the end of the Second World War and took up a large part of the decline in cotton production. Under these circumstances, new factories to produce artificial fibres proliferated throughout Europe, with an estimated 120 new industries in this emerging sub-sector during the inter-war period.

Although there are some precedents and trials in the manufacture of fibres in Spain at the beginning of the

20th century, the milestone of a small industrial company, Alday y Compañía, established in 1918 in the town of Valdenoceda, in the Valdivielso Valley (Burgos), has been identified as the first centre for the production of artificial silk at the national level. This small factory, housed in the building of an old flour mill, belonged to the Alday Redonnet family, members of the upper middle class from Santander with links to the Burgos town as they spent part of their summer season there. The factory, known as the Fábrica de Alday y Cía. or Fábrica de Seda Artificial de Burgos, in its early years had 50 workers who, in three shifts, operated four spinning machines and an unspecified number of looms, combining their work with farm work. Shortly afterwards, in 1923, the Sociedad Anónima de Fibras Artificiales (SAFA) began its activity in Blanes (Girona), founded by the Vilá family and the French group Gillet-Berheim, whose first president was the Count of Romanones. In 1925, La Seda de Barcelona was founded in El Prat de Llobregat (Barcelona), based on an investment by a Dutch consortium, associated with the Arnau Garí bank and other Catalan investors.

In 1930, the initial silk factory of Valdenoceda moved to the city of Burgos, and the new Sociedad Española de Seda Artificial (SESA) began its activity, with its headquarters in the industrial building of the former Azucarera Burgalesa (1901), now converted into a factory of artificial fibres. SESA's aim was to manufacture multifibre artificial silk or superviscosa from national materials rich in cellulose, such as esparto grass, ragwort or alpha fibre, although this intention was not achieved until the autarkic period and only partially, as even then raw material continued to be imported from the Nordic countries. From the establishment of SESA, a remarkable textile enclave developed during the post-war period, truly unique and unknown at a general level, which became the third most important production centre in the country in the manufacture of rayon and its blends, after the supremacy of Catalonia. Another singularity contrasted in this case is that the vector of development of its textile industry did not go through the traditional scheme of wool-cotton-artificial fibres-synthetic fibres, which marked the Spanish textile evolution of the 20th century. On the contrary, it was artificial silk that was the pioneer and embryonic for the formation of a textile industry that would grow thanks to the drive of rayon production. In fact, thanks to the pioneering activity of SESA, the rest of the textile initiatives that made up the industrial nucleus of the post-war period, in that context of strong contrasts of the autarkic period, began to emerge.

With a share capital of 4 million pesetas, initially only 6,000 shares of 500 pesetas were put into circulation, leaving the rest in the portfolio. With state-of-the-art machinery for the time and a workforce of 400 workers, SESA began with a production of 1,000 kilograms of rayon per day, although by the end of 1930 it had already increased its production fivefold. Subsequently, SESA carried out two new capital increases, reaching 18 million pesetas in 1950, and fully consolidated its activity during the first autarchy, exceeding 700 workers and one million tonnes of rayon production per year at that time.

III. MAN-MADE FIBRES IN BURGOS: THE PROMOTION OF TEXTILE FACTORIES DURING THE FIRST AUTARCHY (1939-1949)

The fact that SESA's initiative was not an isolated event was demonstrated by the fact that other initiatives in the manufacture of man-made fibres in Burgos were also emerging and that a significant group of textile factories began to be set up. Since 1934, the company Textil Renedo, a family business headed by three brothers from Burgos, had joined the activity. In addition to SESA and Renedo, other companies, such as Manufacturas y Fibras Textiles (MAFITEX), owned by the later mayor of the city, Florentino R. Díaz Reig, were already manufacturing manipulated and twisted silk, expanding their capacity in 1937, significantly, in the middle of the civil war. The link between the Burgos textile industry and the regime is illustrated in various reports of the time which state how SESA had 'risen from the ashes', going from being a 'moribund', 'languid' and 'full of difficulties' industry before the Civil War to being 'a thriving industry, in full activity, reformed and with a promising future'. The same documents recalled that, of the three pioneering man-made fibre industries in Spain, SESA was 'the only one which was genuinely Spanish', i.e. not interested in foreign capital.

In 1944, around thirty textile industries were already registered in Burgos, manufacturing silk, wool and knitwear fabrics, with washing, spinning, dyeing, etc. Most of them started as family workshops, progressively expanding their facilities and incorporating more technically complex production processes, avoiding, as far as possible, the well-known energy and raw material restrictions. Many of these new textile industries also developed the manufacture of artificial fibres, as was the case of Manufacturas Urpi-Rifá in 1944, with 40 new looms "for the manufacture of rayon articles and fanta-

sies" with an average annual output of 360,000 metres and the creation of 500 jobs, although it did not reach the expected size, or Industrias Paquín, which from a small workshop with 15 looms to manufacture silk cords and ribbons was authorised by the Provincial Delegation of Industry in 1945 to double its machinery, already having more than 150 workers in 1947. For its part, Textiles Campeador also expanded its textile production at that time, moving to a new factory on the outskirts of the city. These companies were joined by others such as Medir SA, which specialised in fantasy fabrics that mixed fibres and metal threads.

Among all these new textile factories, the presence of the Catalan capital played a significant role. In addition to the compulsory use of artificial fibres by the cotton industry, there are two other explanations for this arrival: on the one hand, the control of the entire textile cycle, an element that Catalan businessmen had been developing in the national market for centuries before; and, on the other hand, and as happened in the case of the wool industry in Béjar (Salamanca), the flight of businessmen from this region during the Civil War, intermingling socio-political causalities. The diachronic establishment of several companies—Juan Rifá Rigola, Sociedad Ríu y Sainz, Manufacturas Urpi Rifá, Manufacturas y Fibras Textiles, Joaquín Molins, Salvador Sindreu, Cubals—shows that, although favoured by the war situation, this process was not unicausal.

IV. THE END OF THE INDUSTRIAL DREAM OF RAYON: BOOM AND DECLINE OF TEXTILES IN BURGOS DURING THE SECOND AUTARKY (1950-1959)

With the end of the first decade of autarky, the industrial explosion of rayon in Burgos began to slow down, although its resistance and even at times its productive growth was still remarkable during the following years. At the beginning of the 1950s, 35 factories dedicated to the manufacture of artificial fibres had been consolidated in the city, employing more than 3,400 workers. Around 1,000 were employed in SESA, while Renedo had around 900. Between these two large companies, they accounted for just over 50% of employment in the textile fibres subsector. They were followed at a considerable distance by Urpi Rifá, Industrias Paquín, Textiles del Norte and Fabril Sedera, which had between 150 and 200 employees. In a third group—between 50 and 100 workers—were other factories such as Sederías Burgalesas, Textil Nuño

Rasura, Hilaturas y Tejidos Castilla and Medir SA. It should be borne in mind that at this time the city of Burgos barely had 6,000 industrial jobs in total, meaning that the textile conglomerate that had formed in the previous two decades around rayon accounted for more than half of all industrial employment in Burgos and represented just over 10 % of the total employment in the textile sub-sector of artificial fibres in Spain.

The share capital of these Burgos companies of artificial fibres and their blends already exceeded 92 million pesetas, a more than notable investment for the spatial-temporal context of that autarkic Burgos. As for the number of authorised looms, in 1954 there were 2,701. The majority of these companies had a complex manufacturing structure in terms of location and production. It is also important to appreciate the stimulus effect that this textile pole had on other companies, since the artificial fibre industry constituted a real spur to the development of the local chemical industry. Undoubtedly, this capacity for influence and the positive influence of textile activity transformed the urban economy and placed Burgos on the map of the national textile industry.

To definitively understand the end of the industrial boom of man-made fibres in Burgos, it is necessary to place it in the context of the production of the national textile market at this time. Despite the critical state of the cotton industry, at the beginning of the 1950s it still accounted for more than a third of the fibres processed—36.57 %—, followed by esparto and regenerated fibres—which accounted for 41 %—. Rayon still barely exceeded 8 %, with 57,000 tonnes, of which the national industry contributed one fifth. These figures clearly indicate which fabrics were preferentially used in autarkic Spain. In addition to this production deficit, which dashed the autarkic dreams, cellulose materials were mainly imported. According to their production capacity, the Burgos factories acquired around 10 % of them.

In relation to these motivations and in this context, the decline of this industrial textile activity gradually took place. During the second half of the 1950s, as the supply of cotton normalised, the artificial fibre factories in Burgos began to suffer. These facilities did not undertake the technological modernisation necessary to adapt to the new market. The transformation that was necessary at that time to reconvert the production processes did not take place in Burgos. The alternative for survival could have been to adapt to the new synthetic fibres, such as nylon, but the lack of capitalisation and new investment led to the gradual disappearance of the Burgos silk industry. This reconversion did take place in other large

Spanish man-made fibre factories, such as SAFA, which started working with synthetic fibres in 1955, or La Seda, by diversifying into the manufacture of tyres.

This strategic weakness, in the context of a lack of modernisation capacity, will mark the beginning of the end of man-made fibres in Burgos. As the decade progressed, internal and external demand would weaken, accumulating stocks and leading to oversized production capacities. This was compounded by the collapse of prices, causing a severe crisis and the gradual closure of most of these textile factories. At the end of this second autarkic period, in 1959, and on the eve of a new economic period of developmentalist planning, the number of textile companies had fallen from 87 to 46. If in 1949 these companies accounted for around 25 % of the city's total, ten years later their relevance had been reduced, not only in absolute terms, but also in relative terms (17 % of the industrial total). The hard blow of the difficulties at the end of the autarchy and the problems of the opening of the markets swept away the industrial progress that artificial silk had brought with it. And, in fact, the small factories, which were most rapidly affected by the difficulties, but also the large ones, such as SESA, gradually disappeared.

V. CONCLUSIONS: THE SOCIO-ECONOMIC AND SPATIAL IMPACT

The cluster of textile companies that emerged in Burgos during the 1930s, expanded during the 1940s and early 1950s and finally disappeared in the transition to developmentalism, was undoubtedly an important milestone in the history of the Spanish textile industry. It is an ephemeral industrial textile enclave, as it barely existed for two decades, but it is nonetheless transcendental and should be considered a significant episode in the post-war industrialisation of Spain. The development of the activity originated with the production of artificial silk from the start-up of SESA. From the end of the 1930s onwards, companies followed in the wake of this company and entered the market of artificial fibres, but also developed cotton and wool production and formed a complex network of knitwear manufacturing based on different textile materials. And continuing with this singularity, this industrial textile impulse was also the starting point for a wider industrialisation process that turned Burgos into an industrial city. The expansion of the textile industry during the post-war period was the trigger for a relevant process of socio-economic transformation of

the city, which underwent a strong change and grew demographically and spatially as a consequence of a transcendent industrialisation.

The socio-economic and spatial impact of the first urban industrialisation, which led to the growth of textile factories, is reflected in the strong changes experienced by the business fabric, society itself and its reflection in the structure of the city. Between 1939 and 1959, Burgos went from having barely 200 production establishments to more than 300, i.e. industry increased by more than 30%. It should also be borne in mind that this increase was largely due to new factories, real industrial buildings on top of the pre-existence of old workshops and pre-industrial establishments. This strong increase in productive activity has had a significant effect on employment. The number of industrial workers rose from just 4,000 in 1939 to almost 8,000 in 1960, doubling the importance of industry in employment. From a reduced significance in the local economy, it had a notable socio-economic impact, as the industry at the end of the autarchy accounted for more than 26% of the local active population, almost seven points above the national average at that time.

Largely as a consequence of this transformation, Burgos will double its population during this period. New industrial jobs are responsible for population growth. If we disregard the temporary increase in population during the specific years of the war, as a consequence of Burgos' role as the seat of Franco's government, we can relate population growth very directly to this first industrialisation. Burgos went from barely 45,000 inhabitants in the mid-1930s to over 82,000 in 1960. Between 1930 and 1960, more than 10,000 new homes were built in Burgos. The housing stock doubled from just over 9,800 dwellings to more than 20,000. And this strong growth is

reproduced, of course, in the extension of the urbanised surface area. In the same period, the city grew from just over 300 ha to over 600 ha occupied.

The new post-war industry created a new structure in the city of Burgos. Even beyond the municipal boundary, the industries created new neighbourhoods, opened the way for the urbanisation of hitherto unoccupied spaces and generated dynamics of notable change in the territorial structure. The autarkic industry, captained by the importance of the textile factories and, specifically, by the unique complex of artificial fibre industries that we have analysed, generated thousands of jobs, energised society and transformed the daily life of a large part of the population, marking a before and after in the socio-economic development of Burgos, since as a consequence of its establishment, the city began its true industrialisation. On the basis of SESA's unique artificial silk project, and during the decades of Franco's autarchy, Burgos began to leave behind the small agrarian provincial capital and moved towards the formation of a new industrial city.

The ephemeral textile enclave of man-made fibres between 1939 and 1959 explains the emergence of an intense industrial identity that has been developing since then. Those post-war textile factories are largely responsible for the emergence of an industrial aspiration that will be superimposed on the traditional patriotic values of antiquity and that will permeate the construction of a new model of identity. And, of course, autarkic industrialisation constitutes the essential antecedent of the Industrial Promotion and Development Pole that will arrive a few years later, in 1964, also at the hand of Franco's policy to recognise Burgos, in an "act of redistributive justice", its role as the centre of the dictatorship's government during the Spanish Civil War.