Animal Mercantilism

Race Smuggling, Sheep Diplomacy, and the Geopolitics of Genetic Capital in Eighteenth-Century France

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Thomas Mant spent his life embroiled in the rivalry between Britain and France. During the Seven Years' War, the Englishman fought for his country as a navy officer in the Caribbean. After peace was established in 1763, he gathered information about a potential French invasion for the British intelligence service, but in 1769 he was also recruited by the French ministry of war to spy on Britain. Tangled up in a double-cross and burdened by accumulating debts, he went into exile. In 1773, he permanently settled in Dieppe, Normandy, and changed his name to Mante. Struggling to make ends meet and to prove his loyalty to his new country (where

This article was first published in French as "Mercantilisme animal. Contrebande de races animales, diplomatie du mouton et géopolitique du capital génétique dans la France du XVIII[e] siècle," in "Animaux et animalités," special issue, *Annales HSS* 80, no. 1/2 (2025): 243–75, doi 10.1017/ahss.2025.10079.

* I would like to thank Linda Andersson Burnett, Patrick Anthony, Hanna Hodacs, and Jacob Orrje for their helpful comments on earlier versions of this article, as well as the editorial board of the *Annales* and the four anonymous peer reviewers for their valuable suggestions. My thanks are also due to Renaud Morieux for his advice and for sharing archival references with me. A first version of the text was presented at the European Society for the History of Science conference in Barcelona in 2024, where I received precious feedback. Finally, I am grateful for the recognition and support of the DHST Commission on Science, Technology, and Diplomacy (STAND), which awarded an Honorable Mention to another early version in their Early Career Scholar Prize.

Annales HSS (English Edition), 10.1017/ahss.2025.10101

many questioned his trustworthiness), he embarked on a new career designed to enrich France while harming Britain. Mante entered a sort of economic and geopolitical shadow war: he became a sheep smuggler.[1]

In a memorandum sent to the French government around 1776, he explained the essence of his project:

> *It is to introduce into France … a sufficient number of rams and ewes from England, which, in a few years, through their progressive growth, can fully supply our manufactures with this type of necessary wool; and … in order to procure them we only need to put into execution a well-coordinated plan, with the cover of secrecy and the approval of the king, and two or three nights of darkness will be enough for the originator of the idea to go, in imitation of Jason, to foil the surveillance of the dragon, remove the Golden Fleece, and bring it to France.*[2]

In Greek myth, the hero Jason outwitted a dragon to bring the Golden Fleece, symbolizing authority and power, back to his people. This tale now served as a parable for Mante's new mission. According to his plan, a thousand ewes and twenty rams of English stock could in ten years grow to 266,000 head, equaling a value of 21.7 million livres tournois.[3]

The case of Mante raises a number of questions for the historian. Why would a smuggled flock of English sheep enrich the French nation in such a way? How did the transnational movement of livestock fit into the broader context of state control over economic resources in early modern trade? And what was the place of animal breeding in larger power struggles between European empires? In contrast to classic studies of the role played by transformations in the wool trade and manufacturing methods in early industrialization and state formation, this article focuses on the often overlooked place of animals, breeding, and notions of race and climate in early modern political economy.[4] Projects like that of Mante—whose ambitions unsurprisingly turned out to be unrealistic on all counts—emerged from new and

1. Richard Cargill Cole, *Thomas Mante: Writer, Soldier, Adventurer* (New York: Peter Lang, 1993). In his communication with British authorities, Mante maintained that he was operating as a secret spy in France, but he never sent any intelligence back to his homeland: Kew, The National Archives (hereafter "TNA"), SP37/15, "Case of Mr. Mante," 1772–1781, fols. 109–119.

2. Pierrefitte-sur-Seine, Archives nationales (hereafter "AN"), F/10/515–516, Mante, document starting with "Tous les États doivent plus à l'agriculture qu'à toutes les autres occupations de la vie," [c. 1776], fol. 55.

3. AN, F/10/515–516, document starting with "Le S. de Mante a proposé de faire introduire en France des moutons d'Angleterre," [c. 1776], fol. 415.

4. Tihomir J. Markovitch, *Histoire des industries françaises. Les industries lainières de Colbert à la Révolution* (Geneva: Droz, 1976); William M. Reddy, *The Rise of Market Culture: The Textile Trade and French Society, 1750–1900* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1984); Gérard Gayot, *Les draps de Sedan, 1646–1870* (Paris: Éd. de l'EHESS, 1998); Philippe Minard, *La fortune du colbertisme. État et industrie dans la France des Lumières* (Paris: Fayard, 1998); Giovanni Luigi Fontana and Gérard Gayot, eds., *Wool: Products and Markets (13th–20th Century)* (Padua: CLEUP, 2004).

https://doi.org/10.1017/ahss.2025.10101

disputed ways of thinking about animal breeds as natural, economic, and political resources. This article uses concepts of animal mercantilism and the geopolitics of genetic capital to suggest that three interrelated developments took place in the late seventeenth and eighteenth centuries. First, animal reproduction was commodified in new ways as breeds came to be regarded as national resources requiring political governance. Second, unexpected collaborations between a vast range of actors—including state officials, naturalists, breeders, and smugglers—generated new political initiatives enabling or preventing the transnational movement of domesticated animals. Third, these developments both stemmed from and contributed to evolving ideas about race and the ability of animals to retain their characteristics in new environments. Overall, the article explores how late seventeenth- and eighteenth-century understandings of animals, race, and climate shaped and were shaped by the exploitation and status of livestock as (geo)political objects.

Certain historians of the rise of capitalism in the eighteenth century have argued that, partly owing to the influence of cultural history since the 1970s, the historiography of Enlightenment France has become increasingly fragmented and that studies reintegrating economic, political, and cultural perspectives are urgently needed.[5] This trend is particularly pronounced in historical accounts of animals. A great divide exists between economic and agricultural histories that regard animals as quantifiable objects among others and new strands of research, following the "animal turn," which have started to treat them as culturally significant subjects.[6] Further specialization has continued within the field of animal history, as for instance illustrated by Pierre Serna's call for a political history of animals, distinct from cultural history and the history of science.[7] The present article takes an integrative approach, drawing on scholars who have argued that natural history played a key role in shaping political and economic improvement projects.[8] Most such studies have focused on botany and how "plant mercantilists" engaged in various scientific and colonial projects of transplantation.[9] Arnaud Orain, for example, has recently shown how the practical science of *œconomie* attempted to improve the

5. William H. Sewell Jr., "The Empire of Fashion and the Rise of Capitalism in Eighteenth-Century France," *Past & Present* 206, no. 1 (2010): 81–120, here p. 118; Michael Kwass, *Contraband: Louis Mandrin and the Making of a Global Underground* (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 2014), 6.

6. Harriet Ritvo, "Recent Work in Animal History (and How We Got Here)," *Journal of Modern History* 94, no. 2 (2022): 404–19.

7. Pierre Serna, *Comme des bêtes. Histoire politique de l'animal en Révolution, 1750–1840* (Paris: Fayard, 2017), 12–13.

8. Lisbet Koerner, *Linnaeus: Nature and Nation* (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1999); Richard Drayton, *Nature's Government: Science, Imperial Britain, and the "Improvement" of the World* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 2000); Emma Spary, *Utopia's Garden: French Natural History from Old Regime to Revolution* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2000); Fredrik Albritton Jonsson, *Enlightenment's Frontier: The Scottish Highlands and the Origins of Environmentalism* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 2013).

9. Marie-Noëlle Bourguet and Christophe Bonneuil, introduction to the thematic dossier "De l'inventaire du monde à la mise en valeur du globe. Botanique et colonisation (fin XVIIe siècle–début XXe siècle)," *Revue française d'histoire d'outre-mer* 86, no. 322/323

https://doi.org/10.1017/ahss.2025.10101

human condition by developing knowledge about domestic plants and animals and by naturalizing foreign plants.[10] Building on this literature, this article argues that a new political (o)economy of animals—based on the transnational movement and acclimatization of livestock, and the commodification of their breeds—developed in seventeenth- and eighteenth-century Europe.

A new generation of historians has begun to investigate how animal economies were institutionalized and became significant elements of statecraft in this period. Benedetta Piazzesi has suggested that, from at least the seventeenth century, we see "a de facto process of politicization of animals, consisting in their inclusion in modern governmental strategies."[11] The creation of the world's first veterinary schools in Lyon and Alfort in the 1760s has been identified as a particularly strong manifestation of new forms of "multispecies governance."[12] Malik Mellah has shown how this shift entailed new concepts such as "veterinary economy" and "rural economy" that extended beyond the health of animals to encompass their breeding and economic exploitation.[13] In what follows, I propose that such governance took new geopolitical expressions as animal breeds increasingly came to be seen as strategic national resources.

To reappraise this development, I expand upon Harriet Ritvo's insights into how the dynamics of livestock markets have been shaped by various understandings of heredity. In a seminal paper, Ritvo argued that a new notion of "genetic capital" emerged in the second half of the eighteenth century as certain domesticated animals began to be valued as "templates for the continued production of animals of a special type."[14] The monetary worth of a single animal as a producer of labor, dairy, meat, and other consumable goods became infinitesimal compared to the value of particular specimens as carriers of blood and breed. While most farm animals in the eighteenth century became increasingly objectified and commodified, some were singled out as extraordinary individuals that could pass on their traits to future generations.[15] As Sarah Franklin states, genetic capital implies "a part

(1999): 7–38; Londa Schiebinger, *Plants and Empire: Colonial Bioprospecting in the Atlantic World* (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 2004), 4.

10. Arnaud Orain, *Les savoirs perdus de l'économie. Contribution à l'équilibre du vivant* (Paris: Gallimard, 2023).

11. Benedetta Piazzesi, *Del governo degli animali. Allevamento e biopolitica* (Macerata: Quodlibet, 2023), 10.

12. Kit Heintzman, "Keeping Economies Alive: Animals, Medicine, and the Domestication of the French Empire, 1761–1814" (PhD diss., Harvard University, 2019), 337.

13. Malik Mellah, "L'École d'économie rurale vétérinaire d'Alfort (1766–1813), une histoire politique et républicaine avec l'animal domestique" (PhD diss., Paris 1 Panthéon-Sorbonne, 2018), 147–48.

14. Harriet Ritvo, "Possessing Mother Nature: Genetic Capital in Eighteenth-Century Britain," in *Early Modern Conceptions of Property*, ed. John Brewer and Susan Staves (London: Routledge, 1995), 413–26, here p. 416; Jens Amborg, "Capital génétique," in *Dictionnaire historique et critique des animaux*, ed. Pierre Serna et al. (Ceyzérieu: Champ Vallon, 2024), 130–34.

15. Karen Raber, "From Sheep to Meat, from Pets to People: Animal Domestication 1600–1800," in *A Cultural History of Animals in the Age of Enlightenment*, ed. Matthew Senior, vol. 4 (2007; Oxford: Berg, 2011), 73–99.

https://doi.org/10.1017/ahss.2025.10101

being enabled to stand for a larger whole"; that is, a few individuals can be used to produce a large population resembling them.[16] In the British context, genetic capital was most clearly expressed through the skyrocketing prices fetched on the domestic market by the most exceptional individuals and breeds as they came to be understood in this way.[17]

A transnational perspective on the same period provides a different understanding of genetic capital, illuminating the political-economic and imperial stakes of animal breeding. I argue that genetic capital—or racial capital, to use a less anachronistic term—was not only a matter of private business in the domestic marketplace but also a national resource in a world increasingly structured by global competition between European empires. The concept of "animal mercantilism" proposed in this article thus serves to illustrate how early modern understandings of interstate trade relations, on the one hand, and animal heredity, on the other, led to the development of new forms of animal governance. More specifically, this article explores the geopolitics of genetic capital by demonstrating how sheep breeding became an increasingly institutionalized and nationalized political project in the second half of the eighteenth century. In this context, states like Spain and Great Britain safeguarded their domestic stock through national export bans while France sought to break these trade restrictions through diplomacy and smuggling.

In what follows, I first discuss the concept of animal mercantilism in relation to seventeenth-century horse and eighteenth-century sheep breeding, and then show how the latter was shaped by breeders' debates on race and climate. Thereafter, I examine how the French political project for sheep improvement arose in the second half of the eighteenth century, before delving into subsequent practices of smuggling English sheep across the Channel. Finally, I discuss the varying geopolitics of genetic capital in the Franco-Spanish context, as France attempted to gain access to Spanish sheep through diplomatic agreements and smuggling across the Pyrenean frontier.

Animal Mercantilism

Historians have spent nearly a century problematizing the concept of mercantilism, an anachronism not in widespread use before the late nineteenth century and first developed by critics of the supposed "mercantile system."[18] Yet the term remains

16. Sarah Franklin, "Dolly's Body: Gender, Genetics and the New Genetic Capital," in *The Animals Reader: The Essential Classic and Contemporary Writings*, ed. Linda Kalof and Amy Fitzgerald (London: Bloomsbury, 2007), 349–61, here p. 351; Franklin, *Dolly Mixtures: The Remaking of Genealogy* (Durham: Duke University Press, 2007).
17. Ritvo, "Possessing Mother Nature"; Harriet Ritvo, "Barons of Beef," chapter 1 of *The Animal Estate: The English and Other Creatures in the Victorian Age* (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1987), 45–81.
18. For an overview and critique, see Steve Pincus, "Rethinking Mercantilism: Political Economy, the British Empire, and the Atlantic World in the Seventeenth and Eighteenth Centuries," *The William and Mary Quarterly* 69, no. 1 (2012): 3–34, here p. 3.

https://doi.org/10.1017/ahss.2025.10101

almost ubiquitous in the historical imagination of early modern economies. Many historians agree that mercantilism, even if it never constituted a coherent doctrine, fruitfully describes the early modern notion that a favorable balance of trade—meaning that more silver and gold enter than exit a country—was key to national power and economic plenty.[19] I here use the concept of "animal mercantilism" to characterize the early modern politicization of the transnational movement of animals and the materials they produced. In so doing, I follow Philip Stern and Carl Wennerlind's suggestion that historians avoid all-encompassing definitions of mercantilism and instead "reimagine" the concept by examining its varied—and often conflicting—components to better illuminate early modern economic thought.[20] Over this period, first horses and then sheep became increasingly subject to state governance, protectionist policies, and considerations related to national self-sufficiency. In Tudor England, for instance, legislators began to implement various breeding and export regulations aimed at ensuring the quantity and quality of their domestic stock.[21]

At the same time, mercantilist theories of trade gradually took shape. In the first half of the seventeenth century, for example, Thomas Mun in England argued that "the ballance of forraign trade is the rule of our treasure."[22] Meanwhile in France, Antoine de Montchrestien's influential treatise on *oeconomie politique* primarily stressed self-sufficiency, deeming the country to be "so flourishing, so abundant in everything one could desire, that it has no need to borrow anything from its neighbors." For Montchrestien, France possessed "five inexhaustible sources of natural wealth, … wheat, wine, salt, wool, linen," which, in contrast to silver and gold mines, "last and renew themselves every year."[23] His ideal economy was thus built on self-generative primary materials, produced within its borders. From these and other writers, such as Joshua Gee in the early eighteenth century, an import-substitution ideal developed, in which foreign goods should be replaced by domestic alternatives.[24]

19. Lars Magnusson, *The Political Economy of Mercantilism* (London: Routledge, 2015); Jonathan Barth, "Reconstructing Mercantilism: Consensus and Conflict in British Imperial Economy in the Seventeenth and Eighteenth Centuries," *The William and Mary Quarterly* 73, no. 2 (2016): 257–90, here p. 257.

20. Philip J. Stern and Carl Wennerlind, introduction to *Mercantilism Reimagined: Political Economy in Early Modern Britain and Its Empire*, ed. Philip J. Stern and Carl Wennerlind (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2013), 3–22, here pp. 3–4.

21. Joan Thirsk, *Horses in Early Modern England: For Service, for Pleasure, for Power* (Reading: University of Reading, 1978), 12–13; Nicholas Russell, *Like Engend'ring Like: Heredity and Animal Breeding in Early Modern England* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1986), 62–65.

22. Thomas Mun, *England's Treasure by Forraign Trade: Or, The Ballance of Our Forraign Trade Is the Rule of Our Treasure* (London: J. G. for Thomas Clark, 1664).

23. Antoine de Montchrestien, *Traicté de l'oeconomie politique, dédié en 1615 au Roy et à la Reyne mère du Roy*, ed. T. Funck-Brentano (1615–1621; Paris: E. Plon, Nourrit, 1889), 239–40.

24. Joshua Gee, *The Trade and Navigation of Great-Britain Considered* (London: Sam. Buckley, 1729); Magnusson, *The Political Economy of Mercantilism*, 106–107.

https://doi.org/10.1017/ahss.2025.10101

The need to import animals and their products was generally seen as a national weakness, and although animals were certainly among the resources that Montchrestien saw as self-renewing, they posed a problem in regard to France's self-sufficiency. A widespread notion held that French horses and sheep were degenerated and lacked important qualities.[25] Although it was possible to sustain their quantities through self-renewal, their insufficient quality rendered substituting imports with existing domestic resources ineffective. French breeders and state officials therefore, as I will show, turned to an alternative solution: domestic generation of foreign breeds that first needed to be imported in smaller quantities. Domesticated animals could be seen as both primary materials and producers of primary materials (including of new animals resembling themselves). Importations of animals were accordingly in some cases perceived analogously to a transfer of technology, with superior foreign breeds seen more as improved means of production (which a mercantilist state wished to attract) than as products (whose importation should be minimized). Animal importations for the sake of racial improvement thus became a question of political economy and governance.

From the 1660s, the Colbert administration in France established the royal stud, the Haras, whose purpose was to improve domestic stock by institutionalizing and controlling horse breeding in a manner that Daniel Roche has described as a "police of reproduction."[26] It has also been understood as the institutional foundation of what Claude-Olivier Doron termed "the animal roots of biopolitics," whereby the state intervened directly in managing the "quality" of the population.[27] The Haras developed an approach to the problem of international trade in horses that followed the seemingly paradoxical logic of animal mercantilism: to become independent from continuous imports, they first had to import. In 1666, Gabriel Calloet-Querbrat, Colbert's advisor on animal breeding, wrote that the countries with the best horses in Europe had improved their stock through imports, and argued that France must follow suit. The idea was to acquire, breed, and disseminate a relatively small number of superior stallions in order to build an improved and plentiful population of horses. Then, when "the race of beautiful Horses is established in the Kingdom, we will no longer have to go and get them from our neighbors: they are not always our friends, the passages are not always free, no more money will leave the Kingdom on that account."[28] By importing

25. Claude-Olivier Doron, "Biopolitique et zootechnie," chapter 4 of *L'homme altéré. Races et dégénérescence, XVII^e–XIX^e siècles* (Ceyzérieu: Champ Vallon, 2016), 177–218.

26. Daniel Roche, *La culture équestre de l'Occident XVI^e–XIX^e siècle. L'ombre du cheval*, vol. 1, *Le cheval moteur* (Paris: Fayard, 2008), 179; Jacques Mulliez, *Les chevaux du royaume. Aux origines des haras nationaux* (Paris: Belin, 2004), 148.

27. See "Les racines animales de la biopolitique," part 2 of Doron, *L'homme altéré*, 173–288; Piazzesi, *Del governo degli animali*, 124–32; Laurent Brassart, "Comment fabriquer un bel animal d'élevage ? Pratiques, savoirs et politiques de la reproduction des animaux de rente (XVII^e–XIX^e siècle)," *Revue de Synthèse* 145, no. 1/2 (2024): 51–82.

28. Gabriel Calloet-Querbrat, *Beaux chevaux qu'on peut en avoir en France, d'aussi beaux qu'en Espagne, Angleterre, Dannemarc, &c. […] Présenté au Roy l'an 1666* (Paris: Veuve de D. Langlois, 1681), 8.

https://doi.org/10.1017/ahss.2025.10101

large draft horses from northern Europe and fast saddle horses from North Africa, France hoped to achieve the self-sufficiency necessary for a favorable balance of trade. The English likewise strove to import the best stallions in order to boost their commercial and military power. Although English and French aristocrats occasionally exchanged breeding horses, Donna Landry has noted that in general the two countries' shared interests in North African and Arabian horses developed alongside their imperial rivalry.[29]

After the horse, "the most noble conquest that man has ever made," a more modest creature became the focal point of animal mercantilism in the second half of the eighteenth century.[30] Despite its humble nature, Buffon described the sheep as "the most precious animal, … to which it seems that Nature, so to speak, has granted nothing of its own, nothing that is not for man."[31] The economic significance of sheep is difficult to overstate. In France, as virtually everywhere in early modern Europe, textile production was the largest industry, and wool the dominant textile. The pervasive use of woolen cloth among lower social classes was gradually replaced by cotton and to some extent silk as these materials became cheaper over the eighteenth century, but a rising demand for fine woolen cloth among the upper classes (primarily replacing linen) still pushed the industry to grow.[32] At the end of the century, the wool industry constituted almost half of all French textile production, which in turn accounted for a third of the country's total industrial production.[33]

In England and Spain, wool was even more important. In contrast to France, both these countries were famous for their production of fine fleeces that were increasingly in demand, and they adopted different approaches to profit from this wealth. For Spain, the exportation of high-quality raw wool was an essential trade; in order to protect it, the exportation of live sheep was completely banned. England went one step further, similarly prohibiting all exports of live sheep, but also trusting in an exclusively domestic manufacturing industry and banning all exports of raw wool between 1660 and 1824. In the late seventeenth century, Josiah Child penned the widely shared sentiment that "wool is eminently the foundation of the English riches" and "that therefore all possible means ought to be used to keep it within our own kingdom."[34] Manufactured woolens accounted for an astonishing 69 percent of England's exports in 1700 and remained its most important export

29. Donna Landry, *Noble Brutes: How Eastern Horses Transformed English Culture* (Baltimore: Johns Hopkins University Press, 2009), 96 and 169.
30. Georges-Louis Leclerc, comte de Buffon, *Histoire naturelle, générale et particulière*, vol. 4 (Paris: Imprimerie Royale, 1753), 174.
31. Buffon, *Histoire naturelle*, vol. 5 (Paris: Imprimerie royale, 1755), 6.
32. Sewell Jr., "The Empire of Fashion and the Rise of Capitalism," 109 and 111–14; Daniel Roche, *The Culture of Clothing: Dress and Fashion in the "Ancien Regime"* [1989], trans. Jean Birrel (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1994), 127 and 138.
33. Markovitch, *Histoire des industries françaises*, 3.
34. Josiah Child, *A New Discourse of Trade: Wherein Is Recommended Several Weighty Points, Relating to Companies of Merchants* (London: T. Sowle, 1698), 145.

https://doi.org/10.1017/ahss.2025.10101

product throughout the eighteenth century.[35] From the French perspective, the need to import expensive manufactured textiles from their principal rival was generally seen as disastrous for the balance of trade.

The exportation of English raw wool had been regulated since the late Middle Ages, creating a vibrant smuggling industry.[36] In 1702, an anonymous writer claimed—undoubtedly with dramatic exaggeration—that the trafficking of wool to France deprived England of employment for 1.9 million people, or 35 percent of the population.[37] In 1785, the former prime minister Lord Shelburne wrote, "if you were to ask a manufacturer of Halifax, for instance, what was the greatest crime upon earth, was it felony, was it murder, was it parricide? he would answer, no, none of these; it was the exporting of wool."[38] The wool smugglers, also known as "owlers" because they operated only at night, were infamous for their violent resistance when surprised by the authorities. Alluding to higher levels of international politics, a British report even claimed that the leaders of domestic smuggling gangs, who "acted behind the curtains," "were well known not to be able to carry on such a work had they not been Supplied & Imploy'd by more powerfull Enemies to their Country."[39] In several periods, wool smuggling was punishable by death. The smuggling of live sheep was taken even more seriously and was consistently a capital crime. From 1737, during a period of intense smuggling across the English Channel, a pamphlet was circulated to remind Britons of the severe punishments offenders could face:

> *All Persons concerned in Exporting of live Sheep or Lambs, on Conviction are liable to One Year's Imprisonment, and at the End thereof to have their left Hand cut off, and nailed up in the openest Part of the Market nearest the Place where the Offence is committed. And for the second Offence are adjudged Felons, and to suffer Death as in Cases of Felony.*[40]

Acutely aware of the advantage to be gained from a monopoly on these valuable animals, the British authorities made sure to protect it. The situation was not much different in Spain, where sheep smuggling was similarly punishable by death. Such trade bans were one of the period's strongest expressions of animal mercantilism. But there was also another side to the story: the French state's attempts to circumvent them.

35. Julian Hoppit, *Britain's Political Economies: Parliament and Economic Life, 1660–1800* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2017), 217.
36. Matt Raven, "Wool Smuggling from England's Eastern Seaboard, c. 1337–45: An Illicit Economy in the Late Middle Ages," *The Economic History Review* 75, no. 4 (2022): 1182–1213.
37. Hoppit, *Britain's Political Economies*, 219–22.
38. William Cobbett, *The Parliamentary History of England*, vol. 25 (London: T. C. Hansard, 1815), 857, cited in Hoppit, *Britain's Political Economies*, 216.
39. TNA, SP35/78, "The Originall, Rise, Progress and Present State of Those Enemies to England viz. the Owlers Describ'd," [c. 1714–1727], fol. 95A.
40. *Abstract of Several Acts of Parliament, Now in Force, to Prevent the Exportation of Wool, Sheep, &c.* (London: s.n., [1737]) 1.

https://doi.org/10.1017/ahss.2025.10101

In the past decade, the historiography of smuggling has been revitalized by studies showing the essential role that the underground economy played in the formation of new global consumer markets in the eighteenth century.[41] Although these studies stress the role of smuggling in the process of state formation in a globalizing world, the activity has generally been treated merely as an internal conflict between *contrebandiers* and customs officers or other representatives of the state. As Anna Knutsson recently observed, "the new scholarship on smuggling has shown only a limited interest for smuggling as inter-state competition."[42] Here I will trace an alternative narrative in which government officials themselves were a driving force behind smuggling, in attempts to steal the wealth of other nations.[43]

The cases that I discuss also provide other new perspectives on smuggling because although domesticated animals were treated as commodities, they differed in important ways from products such as tobacco, calico, or salt. To smugglers' disadvantage, their contraband was willful and mobile, and could butt and baa in indiscrete ways. To their advantage, however, animals could reproduce. Live sheep constituted a commodity that would not simply be consumed and vanish, but whose value was enhanced by its potential to multiply and grow through future generations. Owing to this genetic capital, the trafficking of sheep even on a small scale could be seen as a way to enhance a country's wealth by manipulating and improving the national population.

Race versus Climate

To understand how animal breeding and the transnational movement of sheep came to be governed in new ways in the 1760s, it is important to examine how the concepts of breed and race changed in the period. At the time, climate was generally perceived to be a, if not *the*, decisive factor in determining the nature of animals. Buffon, for instance, based his theory of degeneration—which explained variation within species for humans as well as domesticated and wild animals—primarily on the influence of climate. As Jacques Roger observed, Buffon thus saw climate as "the factor responsible for the diversity of living forms."[44] In relation to animal husbandry, he followed

41. Kwass, *Contraband*; Felicia Gottmann, *Global Trade, Smuggling, and the Making of Economic Liberalism: Asian Textiles in France 1680–1760* (London: Palgrave Macmillan, 2016); David Chan Smith, "Fair Trade and the Political Economy of Brandy Smuggling in Early Eighteenth-Century Britain," *Past & Present* 251, no. 1 (2021): 75–111. For a discussion of earlier historiographical approaches to smuggling, see Renaud Morieux, *The Channel: England, France and the Construction of a Maritime Border in the Eighteenth Century* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2016), 249–51.

42. Anna Knutsson, *Shadow Economies in the Globalising World: Smuggling in Scandinavia, 1766–1806* (London: Routledge, 2023), 7.

43. Morieux provides an account of the French state's support for smuggling in Dunkirk: Morieux, *The Channel*, 259–68.

44. Jacques Roger, *Buffon: A Life in Natural History* [1989], ed. L. Pearce Williams, trans. Sarah Lucille Bonnefoi (Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 1997), 178–81 and 297–306, here p. 306.

https://doi.org/10.1017/ahss.2025.10101

the idea, common among breeders, that North African, Arabian, and even Spanish horses would degenerate in the French climate, and that this process could only be prevented by continuous importations of new blood.[45] The widespread view was that animal breeds were the result of climatic influence and would change, within a few generations, if brought to a new environment.[46]

In the second half of the eighteenth century, a number of French sheep breeders began to question the influence of climate. Sheep husbandry was immersed in a sort of nature-versus-nurture debate in which the pragmatics of breeding encountered intellectual understandings of animal nature. The question at stake was to what extent foreign breeds could be acclimatized and thrive in France. The debate took off following an essay contest on the topic of how to improve French wool, sponsored by intendant of finances Daniel-Charles Trudaine and announced by the Academy of Amiens in 1754. The prize was awarded to a text by Claude Carlier, which, after discussing the superiority of English and Spanish sheep, argued that the French climate did not cause the inferiority of the country's herds. The essay further emphasized that it was "a demonstrated truth … that great advantages can be derived from the importation of a foreign race."[47] Carlier thus moved toward an understanding of breed and breeding that increasingly stressed the importance of race over climate.

Carlier's position was initially criticized, and alternative views persisted.[48] For instance, Louis de Jaucourt's 1765 *Encyclopédie* article on wool suggested that England and Spain had superior breeds, pastures, and climates and concluded that "it is completely impossible for France to do without foreign wool." Although Jaucourt claimed to concur in this regard "with the most enlightened people in this kingdom," from the mid-1750s the debate had already started to pivot in favor of those who, like Carlier, argued that foreign animals could flourish on French soil and improve the nation's wool.[49] Carlier would find strong support for his views in the 1756 translation of a treatise on how Sweden had managed to acclimatize English and Spanish sheep in the early eighteenth century. This text stated that

45. Buffon, *Histoire naturelle*, vol. 3 (Paris: Imprimerie royale, 1749), 529; *Histoire naturelle*, vol. 4 (1753), 215–17. Russell calls this idea "the received wisdom of the seventeenth century," but it was also based on climatic principles from antiquity: Russell, *Like Engend'ring Like*, 99 and 16. For more on Buffon, degeneration, and animal breeding, see Doron, "Biopolitique et zootechnie."

46. Roger J. Wood, "The Sheep Breeders' View of Heredity Before and After 1800," in *Heredity Produced: At the Crossroads of Biology, Politics, and Culture, 1500–1870*, ed. Staffan Müller-Wille and Hans-Jörg Rheinberger (Cambridge: MIT Press, 2007), 229–50, here pp. 230–32; Emily Pawley, "Feeding Desire: Generative Environments, Meat Markets, and the Management of Sheep Intercourse in Great Britain, 1700–1750," *Osiris* 33, no. 1 (2018): 47–62; Orain, *Les savoirs perdus de l'économie*, 145–59.

47. Claude Carlier, *Mémoire sur les laines* (Brussels: Les frères Vasse, 1755).

48. For a critique of Carlier, see Élie-Catherine Fréron, ed., "Lettre XIII. Mémoire sur les Laines," *L'année littéraire* 3 (1755): 289–310, here p. 295.

49. Louis de Jaucourt, "Laine," in Denis Diderot and Jean le Rond d'Alembert, *Encyclopédie, ou Dictionnaire raisonné des sciences, des arts et des métiers*, vol. 9 (Paris: Briasson, David l'aîné, Le Breton et Durand, 1765), 182.

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the "basis of the Swedish system consists mainly in the importation of a foreign race" and claimed that there "is absolutely no other way to improve sheep and conserve the good species."[50] Carlier considered this to be "an undeniable refutation" of the idea, proposed by some of his critics, that superior breeds of sheep were too sensitive to flourish in new climates.[51] In French discussions about sheep breeding, the Swedish case remained notorious, a ready refutation of any attempt to blame domestic failures on environmental factors.

How did such intellectual considerations shape the practical improvement projects launched in the 1760s? First of all, the idea that race was more important than climate was an essential starting point. For instance, the brothers Jacques-Michel Guerrier and Marie-Félix de Guerrier de Lormoy, two of the most prominent breeders in this context, consistently shaped their projects around this assumption. Following several trips to observe English horse breeding in the 1750s, Lormoy had concluded that "it was neither to the climate nor to the soil of their country that they owed their success, but to their intelligence and to the Arabian race which they had obtained and which they had multiplied to infinity."[52] He consequently argued that it was necessary to import stallions as well as mares to keep this "first race" pure.[53] He and his brother were convinced "that we will never succeed in France on this subject if we do not obtain other races, and the first races," and claimed to be ready to pay whatever it took.[54] As we will see, the brothers followed similar ideas when they turned to sheep breeding, frequently stressing the importance of race and breed to make their projects seem more feasible in their requests for patronage. Another contemporary breeder of English sheep, Michel de Noëttes-Groult in Cherbourg, similarly thought that "the species of the animal is the sole cause of the wool's finesse."[55]

Historians of animal breeding have argued that the term "breed" was introduced in British husbandry in the eighteenth century as "an ingenious marketing and publicity mechanism" to enhance the value of certain animals.[56] A similar shift can be observed in the French term *race*, which the breeders discussed in this

50. Friedrich Wilhelm Hastfer, *Instruction sur la manière d'élever et de perfectionner les bestes à laine* (Paris: Guillyn, 1756), part 1, ix and 95.
51. Claude Carlier, "Avertissement," in *Considérations sur les moyens de rétablir en France les bonnes espèces de bestes à laine* (Paris: Guillyn, 1762), i–xvii, here p. xi.
52. Marie-Félix de Guerrier de Lormoy, *Observations sur les haras de France* (Neuchâtel, s.n., 1774), 23.
53. Ibid.
54. AN, F/10/515–516, Beringhen, untitled memorandum, 1764, fol. 453v.
55. Caen, Archives départementales du Calvados (hereafter "AdC"), C.2587, Noëttes-Groult to Fontette [?], Cherbourg, April 27, 1767, fol. 2.
56. John R. Walton, "Pedigree and the National Cattle Herd Circa 1750–1950," *The Agricultural History Review* 34, no. 2 (1986): 149–70, here p. 152; Julie-Marie Strange, Mick Worboys, and Neil Pemberton, "Breeding and Breed," in *The Routledge Companion to Animal-Human History*, ed. Hilda Kean and Philip Howell (Abingdon: Routledge, 2018), 393–421, here pp. 402–405. For literal and metaphorical branding of horses and their breeds, see Mackenzie Cooley, "*Razza*-Making and Branding," chapter 2 of *The Perfection of Nature: Animals, Breeding, and Race in the Renaissance* (Chicago: University of Chicago

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article frequently used to highlight the value of their animals. Their success lay in convincing potential clients and patrons that climate was not an obstacle, but that superior race was something deep and fundamental that context would not necessarily alter. Furthermore, they used "race" not only to market specific animals, but also in the more political sense of being able to transform a national population through government-backed initiatives.

In addition to the notion that foreign breeds could be introduced to the French climate without degenerating, a second idea was fundamental to the emergence of sheep breeding as a prominent form of animal mercantilism in the second half of the eighteenth century. This was that the French, by importing foreign breeds, could overcome the economic advantage that other countries possessed in their superior sheep. Several reports and letters written in support of Guerrier and Lormoy's project indicated that this was not only a matter of benefiting a private business, but also an effort at racial improvement on the national scale that would allow France to compete with the British. One report emphasized that "in a few years we will be able to populate the different provinces with those animals which produce the most beautiful species of all kinds."[57] Gathering smuggled English breeds of horses and sheep, Guerrier's farm in Saint-Martin-du-Vieux-Bellême, in the part of the Perche province that belonged to the generality of Alençon, was conceived as a model for national improvement and a nursery for superior bloodstock, which, "spread carefully to the provinces, would change and purify the races."[58] Guerrier reported that people were already traveling to his farm from far and wide to have their mares covered by his superior stallions and that he had sent twenty of his rams to Languedoc for a reduced price. The conclusion was that "If Sieur Guerrier can manage to multiply all these races, as he dares to hope, he will deal England the most significant blow."[59]

Following the Seven Years' War, Franco-British rivalry continued in the form of economic competition.[60] Indeed, the smuggling and breeding of English sheep was often perceived as a form of commercial warfare in the 1760s and 1770s. We have already seen how Mante thought that a couple of dark nights would be enough for France to steal Britain's "Golden Fleece" and populate the kingdom with its rival's superior breeds. In 1778, a letter describing a similar project observed that the French, by raising English sheep, could "take away from an enemy nation the

Press, 2022), 49–69; Margaret E. Derry, *Horses in Society: A Story of Animal Breeding and Marketing Culture, 1800–1920* (Toronto: University of Toronto Press, 2006).

57. AN, F/10/515–516, Lévignen to the controller-general, Alençon, April 25, 1765, fol. 441.

58. AN, F/10/515–516, "Mémoire," document starting with "Le S. Guerrier craint que," [c. 1765], fols. 450–451.

59. AN, F/10/515–516, "Mémoire," document starting with "Le S. Guerrier craint que," [c. 1765], fols. 450–451.

60. François Crouzet, *La guerre économique franco-anglaise au XVIII^e siècle* (Paris: Fayard, 2008); John Shovlin, *Trading with the Enemy: Britain, France, and the 18th-Century Quest for a Peaceful World Order* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 2021).

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advantage that the superiority of its wool gives it."[61] The plan of Noëttes-Groult, who was breeding smuggled English sheep in Normandy, was to "extract the three different species of rams and ewes which make up the wealth of this kingdom" and then, "having multiplied these species," to "spread this true treasure throughout his homeland."[62] The influential Trudaine family supported his project, and the intendant of the generality of Caen, who oversaw it, could not help enthusing to them "about the beauty of the herd of English sheep that Sr. des Noëttes-Groult … has acquired, and about the advantage that the government could draw from the industry and the intelligence of this individual to multiply this precious species in the kingdom."[63] This sort of reasoning—which always proved to be much more complicated in practice—perfectly illustrates the logic of animal mercantilism and the geopolitics of genetic capital.

The Bureau of (Illicit) Commerce

Economic historians studying the dynamics of the eighteenth-century wool trade have emphasized how manufacturing methods changed to meet demands for finer wool.[64] Very little attention has, however, been paid to concurrent attempts to improve the sheep population. Colbert had tried to improve the French stock by encouraging the smuggling of sheep from Spain and England in the 1660s and 1670s.[65] A century later, in the 1760s, the French state initiated more consistent attempts to alter the balance of power around wool production. Until then, few had seriously considered it possible for the fine-wool manufacturing industry to break free of its dependence on primary materials legally imported from Spain or illicitly smuggled from England. In the last third of the century, however, French state officials turned their attention toward the source of that wool: the sheep themselves.

Within the French state, the agency that drove the politicization of sheep husbandry from the 1760s was the Bureau of Commerce. Its director, the intendant of finances Trudaine, and his son Philibert Trudaine de Montigny, who succeeded him after his death in 1769, were the foremost instigators and patrons of sheep-improvement projects in the eighteenth century. The Bureau of Commerce had been created in 1700 as an administrative body to oversee and regulate all commerce, modeled upon the ideal figure of Colbert. It operated within the office of the controller-general of finances, with whom it worked closely, and although it lost

61. AN, F/10/515–516, Louis-Marie-Augustin, duc d'Aumont, to an unknown recipient, Paris, October 15, 1778, fol. 311.
62. AdC, C.2587, Noëttes-Groult to Fontette [?], Cherbourg, April 27, 1767, fol. 2.
63. AdC, C.2587, Fontette to Trudaine de Montigny, Cherbourg, September 22, 1769, fol. 14.
64. For an overview of this scholarship, see Hoppit, "The Political Economy of Wool, 1660–1824," chapter 7 of *Britain's Political Economies*, 216–48.
65. Charles Woolsey Cole, *Colbert and a Century of French Mercantilism*, vol. 2 (New York: Columbia University Press, 1939), 539; André J. Bourde, *Agronomie et agronomes en France au XVIIIe siècle*, vol. 1 (Paris: SEVPEN, 1967), 121.

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some areas of authority over time, it maintained its position as the state organ that dealt most extensively with French industry. The bureau was a prominent actor in industrial espionage and led several attempts to steal knowledge and technology from Britain.[66] It also collaborated with a wide range of actors and supported numerous savants, many of them members of the Academy of Sciences, who made expert contributions intended to be disseminated to the provinces. As Philippe Minard has remarked, Trudaine father and son used the Bureau of Commerce to build "a real brain trust, a formidable team of improvers in the service of economic and technological progress."[67]

The Trudaines' most famous and influential scientific collaboration in ovine matters was their recruitment of the naturalist Louis Jean-Marie Daubenton, who, in 1766, entered the government's pay to conduct experiments "on the improvement of the race of sheep."[68] Daubenton was asked "to research, through a series of well-designed and carefully executed experiments, the most favorable disposition of nature for the improvement of wools."[69] He had responded positively when first approached by the Trudaines about the possibility of improving the nature of animals in this way, remarking that "the state of domesticity had sufficed to turn the hair of the moufflon, which is the wild ram, into Spanish wool."[70] Consequently, Daubenton would later recall, "the observations that I had long carried out of métis races of domestic animals, made me think that, by a good selection of rams and sheep as mating partners, one could make their wool finer and longer."[71] Sheep were imported from England, Spain, Morocco, and Tibet for his cross-breeding experiments, which he pursued over several decades. In 1782, Daubenton published his results in the *Instruction pour les bergers*, a book that he hoped would serve as a sheep-raising catechism for the rural population.[72]

66. John R. Harris, *Industrial Espionage and Technology Transfer: Britain and France in the Eighteenth Century* (Aldershot: Ashgate, 1998); Liliane Hilaire-Pérez, *L'invention technique au siècle des Lumières* (Paris: Albin Michel, 2000); Paola Bertucci, *In the Land of Marvels: Science, Fabricated Realities, and Industrial Espionage in the Age of the Grand Tour* (Baltimore: Johns Hopkins University Press, 2023).

67. Minard, *La fortune du colbertisme*, 224. See also Harold T. Parker, "French Administrators and French Scientists During the Old Regime and the Early Years of the Revolution," in *Ideas in History: Essays Presented to Louis Gottschalk by His Former Students*, ed. Richard Herr and Harold T. Parker (Durham: Duke University Press, 1965), 85–109.

68. AN, AJ/15/510, Demy to St. Laurent, s.l., January 31, 1767, in "Pièces concernant le paiement à Louis Jean-Marie Daubenton de ses honoraires et des frais nécessités par ses expériences sur l'amélioration de la race des moutons," dossier 136.

69. Louis Jean-Marie Daubenton, "Mémoire sur l'amélioration des bêtes à laine," in *Histoire et mémoires de l'Académie royale des sciences, 1777* (Paris: Impr. royale, 1780), 79–87, here p. 79.

70. Daubenton, "Avertissement de l'auteur," in *Instruction pour les bergers et pour les propriétaires de troupeaux* (Paris: Imprimerie de la République, 1782; 3rd edn., 1801), xlix–lvii, here p. l.

71. Daubenton, "Mémoire sur le premier drap de laine superfine du crû de la France," *Histoire et mémoires de l'Académie royale des sciences, 1784* (Paris: Impr. royale, 1784), 76–80, here p. 76.

72. Daubenton, *Instruction pour les bergers et pour les propriétaires de troupeaux*.

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The Bureau of Commerce also mobilized a significant number of less well-known sheep breeders from diverse backgrounds. From the 1760s, the Trudaines built a network of sheep improvers who, to various extents, were supported by central and regional administrations. Daubenton's experiments thus relied on the much less recognized work of breeders around the country, from whom he received both knowledge and rare sheep breeds. He especially benefited from individual initiatives to import sheep of foreign and hard-to-acquire breeds, including by illicit means. Import-based sheep-improvement projects flourished in particular on the northwestern coast of Normandy and Brittany, where proximity to the English Channel provided fertile ground for the smuggling and breeding of English sheep.

While some breeders were wealthy landowners who saw agricultural improvement as a patriotic pastime, many hoped that their breeding projects would help them climb the social ladder. In the second half of the eighteenth century, the primary aspiration for a number of prominent breeders was to obtain a concession that would allow them to expand or relocate their operations, without having to rent or purchase the land. In the 1770s, the breeder François Delporte, for instance, requested state support in the form of land and funds in order to establish a herd of a thousand ewes and fifty rams of English breed that he would raise following English methods in Boulogne-sur-Mer near Calais. Another more colorful example was that of the double agent turned breeder Mante, with which this article opened. Mante published a book about his experiences of breeding English sheep in 1778, though his own business had done nothing more than land him in a debtors' prison that same year.[73] For others, sheep improvement did actually afford upward social mobility. The Trudaines helped a number of breeders to access land and cash compensation for their projects, and Delporte was even ennobled for his contributions to sheep improvement in 1776 (recognition that he in turn used as leverage in new requests for state support).[74]

Channel Trade at Dusk

How were these projects, which would help France prevail over its archrival Britain, actually carried out? To illustrate the practical details, I examine one of the first projects for smuggling English sheep supported by the Bureau of Commerce, that of the abovementioned brothers Guerrier and Lormoy in the Perche province. They came from a family of merchants and administrators of the widely detested but highly profitable *gabelle* salt tax. The older brother, Guerrier, worked for a handful of years in a trading company active in Spain and the French colonies, but both

73. Thomas Mante, *Traité des prairies artificielles, des enclos, et de l'éducation des moutons de race angloise* (Paris: Hochereau, 1778); Cole, *Thomas Mante*.
74. AN, F/10/515–516, document starting with "François Delporte négociant à Boulogne sur mer," [c. 1778], fol. 313.

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siblings soon developed an interest in horse breeding.[75] Around 1749, at the age of about twenty, Lormoy was hired by the French government to travel to North Africa to transport stallions for the Haras. After his return to France, he was sent together with his brother to England to source horses for the king's Petite Écurie, one of the stables at Versailles. Impressed by the horses, cattle, and sheep that they saw, the brothers began to inquire into the English success with livestock. Hearing that the superior English breeding establishments were of relatively recent foundation, they concluded that it would be possible for France to emulate its rival. Guerrier, supported by his brother, decided to establish his own business in Saint-Martin-du-Vieux-Bellême. They made several prospecting trips to England, and in 1760 they succeeded in smuggling a "quite large quantity of sheep" into France.[76]

In 1764, Guerrier wrote to the controller-general asking for "encouragements" for his breeding projects. He especially hoped for a concession of untilled land in the duchy of Châteauroux, in the province of Berry, where he wished to transfer his establishment.[77] The request was supported by the king's equerry (*premier écuyer du roi*) Henri-Camille, marquis de Beringhen, who sent a report on the superiority of English sheep that Trudaine de Montigny received and read with great interest. In the report, Beringhen emphasized the importance of breed, claiming that "it is not to the climate that England and Spain owe the beauty and finesse [of their wool], it is only to the sort of animal which produces it."[78] Trudaine de Montigny undertook a thorough review of the potential of the brothers' establishment. For most provincial matters, the Bureau of Commerce relied on the network of generality intendants, the highest regional officials in France. After conferring with the controller-general François de L'Averdy, Trudaine de Montigny asked Lallemant de Lévignen, the intendant of the generality of Alençon, to submit a report and send a delegation to inspect the brothers' farm. The intendant accordingly dispatched his subdelegate in Bellême, René Charles de Lauye, and a local Haras official by the name of Rocher to Guerrier's premises. Both Lévignen and the delegation submitted very favorable reports to the controller-general. The inspectors were greatly impressed by the brothers' English horses of Arabian descent and their flock of about a hundred sheep "of the most beautiful sort in the world, coming from English race."[79] Another report supporting Guerrier emphasized that it was not the climate that caused imported races to decline but rather that the "best races degenerate when we do not make sure to preserve them." The English had managed to develop their successful woolen

75. AN, F/10/515–516, Beringhen, untitled memorandum, 1764, fol. 453v.
76. Marie-Félix de Guerrier de Lormoy, *Mémoire sur l'agriculture* (s.l., s.n., 1789), 46–47.
77. AN, F/10/515–516, document starting with "Le S. Guerrier eut l'honneur de présenter un second mémoire à M. le contrôleur-général," 1764, fols. 454–455.
78. AN, F/10/515–516, Beringhen, untitled memorandum, 1764, fols. 452–453.
79. AN, F/10/515–516, De Lauye, untitled report, April 21, 1765, fol. 443; AN, F/10/515–516, Lévignen to the controller-general, Alençon, January 5, 1765 [forwarded to Trudaine de Montigny January 15], fols. 446–448. A number of other letters dated 1764–1765 relating to this affair are held with the papers of the intendance of the generality of Alençon, Archives départementales de l'Orne, C98.

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industry thanks to "the taste that [they] have acquired for the beautiful races and due to the sums they have spent to acquire them."[80]

The reports must have convinced Trudaine de Montigny of the superiority of English sheep, because instead of granting Guerrier the land that he wanted, the government official encouraged him to smuggle even more animals. In 1766, the king approved a gratuity of 3,000 livres annually for ten years (half from the Royal Treasury and half from the Fund of Commerce) to Guerrier, who, in exchange, promised to import 270 sheep from Lincolnshire to establish a new herd of English race.[81] Lincolnshire sheep were famed for their great size and long wool, although contemporary British observers did not consider their fleece to be among the finer sorts. Nonetheless, the breed had spread to many parts of Britain, including Scotland, and the prominent agricultural writer Arthur Young reported that Robert Bakewell, often considered the father of modern selective breeding, had originally taken his famous sheep breed from Lincolnshire before improving it in Dishley, Leicestershire.[82] Even more important for the French was probably Lincolnshire's east-coast location, which facilitated the planned extraction.

The Anglo-French maritime border swarmed with illicit trade, as smugglers used both small boats and larger ships to primarily run tea, tobacco, spirits, and textiles from France to England, and raw wool in the opposite direction, taking great pains to evade customs officers.[83] Trudaine de Montigny, Guerrier, and Lormoy began plotting a project that sat at the intersection of diplomacy, commerce, and, most of all, smuggling. Trudaine de Montigny charged Jacques Batailhe de Francès, the French minister plenipotentiary to London, with coordinating the plan in England. On some occasions, Guerrier personally delivered secret correspondence between the two French officials. Their plan was to purchase a number of sheep in Boston, a market town and inland port in Lincolnshire, and bring them across the Channel to France. Francès saw two alternatives for carrying out the operation: either they could assign both the purchase of the sheep in Boston and their removal to France to a smuggler, or they could first commission a local merchant in Boston to buy the sheep and then have a smuggler handle the transportation. He preferred the second option as it allowed them to find a knowledgeable and trustworthy procurer who would not try to cheat them on the quality of the sheep.

80. AN, F/10/515–516, "Mémoire," document starting with "Le S. Guerrier craint que," [c. 1765], fols. 450–451.

81. AN, F/10/515–516, document starting with "Le S. Guerrier animé par le zèle du bien public," August 18, 1766, fol. 489.

82. Arthur Young, *The Farmer's Tour Through the East of England: Being the Register of a Journey Through Various Counties of this Kingdom, to Enquire into the State of Agriculture, &c.* (London: Strahan, 1771), 117. See also William Ellis, *A Compleat System of Experienced Improvements, Made on Sheep, Grass-Lambs, and House-Lambs* (London: T. Astley, 1749), 43–44; Robert Brown, *The Compleat Farmer* (London: J. Coote, 1759), 32; David Henry, *The Complete English Farmer* (London: F. Newbery, 1771), 79.

83. Morieux, *The Channel*, 248–68; Stephen Mallet, "The Business of Smuggling in the Eighteenth Century: Anglo-French Comparisons" (PhD diss., University College London, 2024).

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Francès reasoned that "the entire expense is almost lost if we are not assured that [the buyer] will choose the sort that you desire and that it is so advantageous for you to propagate" in France.[84]

Finding the right agents was the first step. The merchant had to be intelligent, well-known locally, and qualified to select the best sheep. He would also pasture the sheep as near as possible to the coast while awaiting the arrival of the smuggler. In the end they appointed a man, unnamed in the sources, who was said to run Boston's main trading company. Involving this merchant presented other difficulties, as he had to be kept unaware of his clients' real intentions. To cloak the involvement of the French state, Francès communicated with him through an intermediary. The conspirators also managed to find a "hardy and intelligent" English smuggler who awaited their orders in Dunkirk, on the French side of the Channel. It was a delicate affair with many potential pitfalls, and they were well aware of the "risk of the lambs being seized at the time of embarkation." On the other hand, Francès observed, it was "in the interest of the broker, who hopes for a very large commission, and the smuggler navigator, who risks his life, to take the greatest precautions to ensure the success of the shipment."[85]

Despite these precautions, the operation ran into difficulties. It was first postponed for a month from April 1768, and then, when the smuggler had crossed the Channel from Dunkirk and was ready to pick up the sheep, the Boston merchant suddenly broke off communication with both London and the smuggler. Although the smuggler was determined to fulfill his risky side of the bargain, he was forced to return to Dunkirk empty-handed. Francès wrote to Trudaine de Montigny that he suspected that the merchant had been "intimidated by the fear of the season being too advanced, the nights being very short and not very favorable to our operation," and expected further delays.[86] Trudaine de Montigny regretted the setback, but acknowledged that the peculiarities of the operation implied a level of uncertainty; as the intendant of finances pragmatically noted, "you have to conform to the ways of smugglers if you want to be one yourself."[87]

Although Trudaine de Montigny was ready to adapt to smugglers' customs, the Boston merchant turned out to have cold feet and pretended "not to have understood the nature of the affair itself."[88] Considering that the merchant had been instructed to keep the sheep as close to the coast as possible, Francès distrusted his claims to naive ignorance. After the merchant wrote a threatening letter to their intermediary in London, the group decided to abandon that option altogether and seek out alternatives. Instead of engaging an English merchant, Francès now considered it necessary to send someone from France to Lincolnshire to handle the purchase. It was potentially a safer approach, but he expected the expense to increase considerably, owing to the lack of local commercial connections. Short of

84. AN, F/10/515–516, Francès to Trudaine de Montigny, London, March 18, 1768, fol. 485v.
85. AN, F/10/515–516, Francès to Trudaine de Montigny, s.l., March 18, 1768, fol. 486r–v.
86. AN, F/10/515–516, Francès to Trudaine de Montigny, London, May 27, 1768, fol. 482v.
87. AN, F/10/515–516, Trudaine de Montigny to Francès, s.l., May 31, 1768, fol. 358.
88. AN, F/10/515–516, Francès to Trudaine de Montigny, London, June 9, 1768, fol. 459.

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options, Trudaine de Montigny sent Guerrier to England. He first arrived in the fall of 1768, but even though he managed to find a ship and crew to carry sheep across the Channel, the operation failed once again for reasons that remain unclear.[89]

The plan was finally realized in the following year, with Guerrier and Lormoy in central roles. In February 1769, Guerrier outsourced part of the mission to the merchant-sailor-smuggler Jean-François Guitton in Dunkirk, signing an agreement that made Guitton responsible for acquiring the sheep and transporting them from Lincolnshire.[90] The up-front payment of 17,000 livres forced Guerrier to ask the controller-general for an advance on his gratuities. It was granted on the condition that he would deliver 150 sheep of English race before July 1769, or else repay the full amount.[91] Once again, however, the operation was delayed, first by unfavorable winds and then, in June, because of "the brevity of the nights."[92] Guerrier asked Trudaine de Montigny for an extension until October, which, despite the latter's growing frustration, he approved.

Finally, in the darkness of late October 1769, Guitton managed to remove 169 sheep, including 10 rams, from the Lincolnshire coast. The archival record omits the details, but one can assume that the sizeable flock must have been discretely ferried in small boats from remote or hidden landings to reach the larger ship that brought it to France. An Englishman who fittingly was both a captain and a butcher oversaw the sheep's transport from Lincolnshire to Dunkirk. After eight days of sailing in harsh weather conditions, they arrived safely on November 6. Lormoy, who had been waiting in Dunkirk for almost a month, met the ship on arrival and was able to report that the sheep were in very good condition after all. Using a local sheep to guide the newly arrived English flock, Lormoy and a few shepherds brought the animals on foot to Guerrier's farm in Perche, a journey that must have taken at least a couple of weeks.[93]

The affair turned out to be an expensive one. Following the agreement between Guerrier and Guitton, the latter was paid five and a half louis, the equivalent of 132 livres, for each of the 169 sheep he had acquired, a price two times higher than originally estimated. Including some additional expenses, the sheep's purchase and transportation ultimately cost 26,489 livres and 17 sols, or more

89. A later account by Guerrier mentions a cost of 856 livres "on the occasion of a ship leaving Calais and men embarked for a failed expedition": AN, F/10/515–516, Guerrier, document starting with "La dépense portée dans le compte cy-joint de M. Guitton," [c. 1770], fol. 434.

90. AN, F/10/515–516, "Articles et conditions préliminaires qui doivent servir de base à l'affaire de Boston," signed by Jean-François Guitton fils and Guerrier, February 26, 1769, fols. 436–437.

91. AN, F/10/515–516, contract signed by Guerrier, March 17, 1769, fol. 471; St. Laurent, untitled note, March 17, 1769, fols. 471–472.

92. AN, F/10/515–516, Guerrier to Trudaine de Montigny, Ivry-sur-Seine, June 10, 1769, fol. 470.

93. AN, F/10/515–516, Lormoy to Trudaine de Montigny, Paris, November 14, 1769, fol. 467.

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than 150 livres per head.[94] In the following years, Guerrier and Lormoy continued to breed the English flock at their farm. Despite some initial difficulties, in 1774 Guerrier reported to Trudaine de Montigny that "my herd is perfectly recovered, it increases every year and I have reason to hope that it will soon be flourishing better than ever."[95] Like many similar projects in the period, however, this breeding program never succeeded in scaling up consistently. In hindsight, English imports seem to have had only a marginal influence on the general population of sheep in France. The importation of Spanish sheep, to which I turn next, received greater institutional support and achieved an increasing and long-lasting impact.

Spain's Golden Sheep

As in England, wool production constituted an essential part of the Spanish economy and was protected through strict trade regulations. For the French, there was, however, a significant difference: Spain was (most of the time) an ally rather than an enemy. Following the demise of the Spanish Habsburg monarchy in 1700 and the subsequent coronation of King Philip V, the grandson of Louis XIV, Franco-Spanish international politics became a Bourbon family affair. Except for the War of the Quadruple Alliance (1718–1720), the countries were military allies until the French Revolution. From 1733, their diplomatic collaboration was formalized through three *pactes de famille* (family compacts), of which the last, signed in 1761, pulled Spain into the Seven Years' War.[96] Historians have shown that Spanish willingness to offer trade privileges to the French decreased following their defeat in that conflict. Some have even argued that an "economic war" ensued between the two countries, as Spain sought to regain power independently from its ally.[97] The French commercial position in Spain nonetheless persisted, and certain French officials were optimistic about their chances of importing Spanish sheep through diplomatic agreements. As we will see, they met with greater difficulties than expected.

Wool production was one of the pillars of Spain's late medieval and early modern economy. For centuries, Spanish sheep husbandry had been highly organized and regulated through the Mesta, a powerful livestock owners' association

94. AN, F/10/515–516, Guitton, "Compte de dix béliers et de cent cinquante neuf agneaux de la province de Lincolnshire en Angleterre, livrés ce jour à Monsieur de Lormoy," November 6, 1769, fol. 435; AN, F/10/515–516, document starting with "Il a été accordé au mois d'aoust 1766," [1770], fol. 438.

95. AN, F/10/515–516, Guerrier to Trudaine de Montigny, Saint-Martin near Bellême, July 24, 1774, fol. 427.

96. Stanley J. Stein and Barbara H. Stein, *Apogee of Empire: Spain and New Spain in the Age of Charles III, 1759–1789* (Baltimore: Johns Hopkins University Press, 2003), 52–54.

97. Sylvain Lloret, "Informer et protéger : l'agent général de la Marine et du Commerce de France à Madrid et les marchands français de Cadix (1748–1784)," in *De l'utilité commerciale des consuls. L'institution consulaire et les marchands dans le monde méditerranéen, XVII^e–XX^e siècle*, ed. Arnaud Bartolomei et al. (Rome: Publications de l'École française de Rome, 2017), 375–87, here p. 376.

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under royal protection, which primarily enabled the country's considerable system of transhumance by granting privileged access to pastures and routes of passage. In the eighteenth century, the Mesta faced widespread criticism, and some of its privileges were consequently withdrawn. Nonetheless, wool exports—which were allowed despite protests from manufacturers—continued to form an essential part of the Spanish economy; both wool producers and merchants made record profits during the peak of trade between the 1740s and the 1780s.[98] The Franco-Spanish wool trade was a two-way street. French manufacturers of high-quality textiles relied heavily on imports of superfine raw wool from Spain, but, in price competition with the British, they also sold manufactured woolens back to Spain to be exported to its colonies.[99]

Livestock exports had been unlawful in Spain since 1404, and, as in England, offenders risked capital punishment. According to an intendant of the French generality of Auch on the Spanish border—who himself had been involved in smuggling Spanish sheep in 1775—people were well aware of "the mortal danger to which one is exposed if caught trying to bring [Spanish rams] out of the country without permission."[100] The British, who were also involved in efforts to import merinos, were likewise subject to these restrictions. In 1766–1767, for instance, the former Whig prime minister the second marquess of Rockingham ordered a certain Thomas Lodge to procure "a breed of the finest woolled Spanish sheep," but the export bans and the "severe penalty" involved prevented Lodge's correspondent in Malaga from carrying out the mission.[101]

Over the eighteenth century, the Spaniards became increasingly willing to let go of their fine merino sheep, while other countries intensified their attempts to acquire them. This shift partly resulted from changing understandings of heredity, which varied in different parts of Europe. While many French writers, as we have seen, increasingly emphasized the primacy of race over climate, the Spanish became more firmly convinced that the merino could only flourish in their own environment, and thus more inclined to make diplomatic exceptions to their export bans. In the eighteenth century, merinos were consequently shipped off to Sweden (1723), Saxony (1765), and Austria (1775), among other places.[102] Following its defeat in

98. Carla Rahn Phillips and William D. Phillips Jr., *Spain's Golden Fleece: Wool Production and the Wool Trade from the Middle Ages to the Nineteenth Century* (Baltimore: Johns Hopkins University Press, 1997), 73–84 and 270–74.

99. Stein and Stein, *Apogee of Empire*, 311–21.

100. Cited in Sébastien Pivoteau, "Siècle des Lumières et blanches toisons. La monarchie française à l'heure de la mérinomanie européenne," in *La guerre des moutons. Le mérinos, à la conquête du monde, 1786–2021*, ed. Pierre Cornu and Henri Pinoteau (Montreuil/Paris: Gourcuff Gradenigo/Archives nationales, 2021), 19–58, here p. 26.

101. Sheffield, Sheffield City Archives, WWM/R/1/783, Lodge to Rockingham, Leeds, May 9, 1767.

102. Phillips and Phillips Jr., *Spain's Golden Fleece*, 84–85; see also Pivoteau, "Siècle des Lumières et blanches toisons," 45; Charles-Philibert de Lasteyrie, *Histoire de l'introduction des moutons à laine fine d'Espagne, dans les divers états de l'Europe, et au Cap de Bonne-Esperance* (Paris: Levrault, 1802).

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the American Revolutionary War, the British Crown also developed a sustained program for improving the country's domestic stock by importing Spanish breeds. The up-and-coming naturalist Pierre Marie Auguste Broussonet, who was a protégé of both Daubenton and Joseph Banks, the president of the Royal Society, acted as an intermediary between the two men, enabling Banks to receive a few Spanish sheep from Daubenton's experimental breeding farm in Montbard. Subsequent imports directly from Spain, through smuggling and diplomacy, allowed Banks to found His Majesty's flock of merino sheep, which he directed over several decades starting in 1787.[103] In 1799, the agronomist Charles-Philibert de Lasteyrie du Saillant, convinced that "fine-wool breeds can be raised wherever there are industrious cultivators," would write that "all the nations of Europe seem set on conspiring to take away from Spain the most lucrative branch of its commerce. The moment is likely not far away when this nation will lose the considerable profits that she has until now made from it."[104] Heightened geopolitical stakes thus surrounded different understandings of animals, heredity, and climate and the varying positions on commercial exchange supported by these interpretations.

Although diplomatic arrangements would eventually open up the trade in sheep, it all started with smuggling. The movement of contraband across the Pyrenean frontier was generally perceived to be a major problem by both the French and the Spanish governments. They often collaborated to prevent it, but of course, as Peter Sahlins has noted, "it was not always in the interest of the two crowns to cooperate in the repression of smuggling."[105] Sheep smuggling was certainly one such case. As mentioned, it had already been encouraged by Colbert in the seventeenth century. In 1721, an influential agricultural manual stated that there were sheep of Spanish breed in many parts of France and suggested that with sustained efforts it would be possible to "establish the race everywhere."[106] In the 1750s, Jean-Baptiste Jérôme Bruny, baron de La Tour d'Aigues, a Provence nobleman with a famous menagerie of exotic animals, illicitly imported several lots of Spanish sheep for his experimental breeding projects.[107] In 1763, during the conclusion of the Seven Years' War, the regional official Antoine Mégret d'Étigny managed to bring a "considerable flock of rams and ewes of the best race" from

103. Harold B. Carter, *His Majesty's Spanish Flock: Sir Joseph Banks and the Merinos of George III of England* (Sydney: Angus & Robertson, 1964), chapters 3–5.
104. Charles-Philibert de Lasteyrie, *Traité sur les bêtes-à-laine d'Espagne* (Paris: A.-J. Marchant, 1799), 160 and 105.
105. Peter Sahlins, *Boundaries: The Making of France and Spain in the Pyrenees* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1989), 90.
106. Louis Liger, *La nouvelle maison rustique ou économie générale de tous les biens de campagne* […], 3rd ed., vol. 1 (Paris: Claude Prudhomme, 1721), 317.
107. Monique Cubells, "Un agronome aixois au XVIIIe siècle: le président de la Tour d'Aiguës, féodal de combat et homme des Lumières," *Annales du Midi* 96, no. 165 (1984): 31–59, here pp. 53–58; Jean-Baptiste Jérôme Bruny, baron de La Tour d'Aigues, "Mémoire sur l'introduction des moutons & des laines d'Espagne en Provence," *Mémoires d'agriculture, d'économie rurale et domestique, publiés par la Société royale d'agriculture de Paris* (summer trimester, 1787): 31–40.

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Estremadura to Auch, where he served as intendant.[108] He subsequently carried out various cross-breeding experiments and disseminated the breed through personal and institutional networks. Among the recipients were the statesman Turgot, the Paris Agricultural Society, and the Alfort Veterinary School.[109] After Étigny's death in 1767, his widow carried on the mission and continued to distribute portions of the Spanish flock to other breeders. One of them was Léon-François de Barbançois, an aristocrat in the Berry province, who received three Spanish rams and allegedly managed to greatly improve the quality of wool produced by his local flock.[110]

Reports of the cross-breeding experiments of both Bruny and Barbançois reached Trudaine, and their successes sparked his interest in Spanish sheep.[111] Another factor was the unpredictability of international politics and trade, as Trudaine feared that the Spanish would establish their own manufactures and (like the British) refuse to export the fine wool on which French industries so heavily relied.[112] He therefore hoped to be able to meet industrial demand for fine wool by breeding Spanish sheep domestically. Considering the alliances between France and Spain and the frequent exchange of animals as diplomatic gifts in the early modern period, it was not unreasonable to believe that the Spanish Crown would be willing to make a (literally) cousinly exception to their export ban on sheep.[113] Animal mercantilism and diplomacy would, however, turn out to be more complicated than expected.

Sheep Diplomacy

To secure Spanish sheep—primarily intended for Daubenton's experiments—the Trudaines contacted l'abbé Beliardi, France's agent in charge of commercial and naval affairs in Madrid. In 1768, the project developed into a collaboration with Anne Pierre, duc d'Harcourt, a former high-ranking military officer and aristocrat

108. Antoine Mégret d'Étigny, "Mémoire de M. d'Etigny, sur le troupeau de béliers & brebis d'Espagne qu'il a dans sa terre de Teil, près de Sens," *Gazette du commerce de l'agriculture et des finances* 38, May 17, 1766, p. 311–12; Étigny, "Suite du Mémoire de M. d'Etigny, &c. Mélange des races," *Gazette du commerce de l'agriculture et des finances* 43, May 31, 1766, pp. 341–42.

109. AN, F/10/1194, Bertin to Étigny, Versailles, March 13, 1766, fol. 34; Étigny to Bertin, Paris, March 17, 1766, fol. 35.

110. Armand-Joseph de Béthune-Châtost, "Observations sur l'amélioration des bêtes-à-laine," *Mémoires d'agriculture, d'économie rurale et domestique, publiés par la Société royale d'agriculture de Paris* (autumn trimester, 1791): 82–93, here pp. 81–82.

111. AN, F10/515–516, Genière, "Observations sur la lettre en forme de mémoire envoyée d'Aix à M. Le Contrôlleur général," December 1, 1767, fol. 27 (numbered 6214); "Mémoire. Laine," marked "Tolozan, January 15, 1786," fol. 1450.

112. Daubenton, "Avertissement de l'auteur."

113. For animals and diplomacy, see Michael A. Osborne, "The Role of Exotic Animals in the Scientific and Political Culture of Nineteenth-Century France," in *Les animaux exotiques dans les relations internationals. Espèces, fonctions, significations*, ed. Liliane Bodson (Liège: Université de Liège/Institut de zoologie, 1998), 15–32.

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in Normandy, who had engaged Beliardi for the same purpose. Beliardi suggested to Trudaine de Montigny that they raise the project's ambitions, aiming for a flock of a thousand sheep with a suitable proportion of rams of the best sort. He was confident that the Spanish king would grant them the necessary passports, and considered this a good occasion for the controller-general to distribute Spanish sheep throughout France.[114]

A grand plan to maximize the improvement to French stock quickly took shape. A list of people who would receive the sheep was drawn up: three hundred would go to Harcourt, and significant numbers to other landowners and regional officials. Several were intendants of generalities prominent in sheep husbandry and wool production—including Turgot in Limoges and Nicolas Dupré de Saint-Maur in Bourges—who were to distribute the animals to carefully selected local breeders and farmers "to renew the species."[115] Logistics for the vast flock's transport were also considered. It would be brought by Spanish shepherds to Perpignan, and received there by the intendant of Roussillon. A shepherd named Jérôme Camy, who had already brought Roussillon sheep to Daubenton, would be waiting to lead the herd safely to Limoges, Berry, and Montbard, whence they would be further dispersed to eager improvers.[116] In Normandy, Harcourt had conducted preparatory experiments with a Spanish ram already in his possession, which had produced offspring with impressive wool. He impatiently awaited the arrival of the large Spanish flock, for which he had reserved his finest pasture lands the whole summer.[117] In Montbard, Daubenton hoped that the flock would provide the missing piece for his experiments, in which he had already cross-bred a number of foreign and domestic sheep from various locations.[118]

But a chain is only as strong as its weakest link, and it turned out that Beliardi had gravely underestimated the diplomatic task. By October 1768, the difficulty of obtaining the passports forced the collaborators to pause the operation, though

114. AN, F10/515–516, Beliardi to Trudaine de Montigny, Madrid, April 7, 1768, fol. 231; the marquis de Beuvron to Trudaine de Montigny, Paris, April 20, 1768, fol. 235. For Beliardi, see Lloret, "Informer et protéger"; Sylvain Lloret, "L'argument juridique au service du négoce: l'abbé Beliardi et la diplomatie commerciale franco-espagnole (1758–1771)," in *Thémis en diplomatie. Droit et arguments juridiques dans les relations internationales de l'Antiquité tardive à la fin du XVIIIe siècle*, ed. Nicolas Drocourt and Éric Schnakenbourg (Rennes: Presses universitaires de Rennes, 2016), 289–301; Lloret, *Entre princes et marchands. Les agents généraux de France à Madrid dans les interstices de la diplomatie, 1702–1793* (Madrid: Casa de Velázquez, 2024).

115. AN, F10/515–516, Trudaine de Montigny to Saint-Maur, s.l., May 14, 1768, fol. 242; Saint-Maur to Trudaine de Montigny, Bourges, June 13, 1768, fol. 239; Turgot to Trudaine de Montigny, Limoges, July 22, 1768, fol. 128.

116. AN, F10/515–516, Trudaine de Montigny to Bon, s.l., May 12, 1768, fol. 238; Bon to Trudaine de Montigny, Paris, May 28, 1768, fol. 230.

117. AN, F10/515–516, the duc d'Harcourt to Trudaine de Montigny, Harcourt, September 27, 1768, fol. 243.

118. AN, F10/515–516, Daubenton to Trudaine de Montigny, Montbard, November 29, 1768, fol. 623.

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they still hoped to carry it out the following spring.[119] Turgot, also eagerly awaiting the flock's arrival, decided to seek his own information about the situation. A few months earlier, he had started to correspond with a merchant by the name of Lalanne, who was in charge of a trading house specialized in the importation of Spanish wool, and whose responses challenged Beliardi's optimism. Lalanne told Turgot that he was aware of certain successful efforts to extract sheep from Spain, but only illicit ones requiring long detours to avoid the Spanish authorities. He did not exclude the possibility that the Spanish Crown might accept a request from the French ambassador to Madrid, Pierre Paul, marquis d'Ossun, but he doubted that the extremely careful d'Ossun would ask for such a bold favor. Besides, he did not believe that the sheep would flourish outside the Spanish climate and local transhumance system.

Lalanne's primary advice was that in order to obtain passports, Turgot's collaborators should conceal the operation's actual objectives. The reason was tensions in the Spanish court, which he described as "a sort of internal war between ministers."[120] The principal issue at stake was the production of fine wool. Some ministers blamed it for the poor state of Spanish agriculture, especially because of the Mesta privileges, long protected by the Crown, which carved out extensive routes with access to sweeping pastures for large flocks. At the Spanish court, the critique of the Mesta system was led by the influential ministers Pedro Rodríguez, count of Campomanes, and Juan Gregorio Muniain, who argued that a growing population demanded more arable land, and therefore by necessity less herding.[121] They nonetheless met strong resistance, and Lalanne described how their opponents had spread the rumor that these ministers were serving foreign powers who wanted access to the sheep themselves. "It seems to me," he wrote, "that in these circumstances, a request for a permission for the extraction of sheep and rams would strengthen the public opinion" that foreign interests were involved.[122]

In such a delicate situation, the French needed a plausible story. Instead of a state-run geopolitical operation, they had to make the project appear harmlessly naive. Lalanne advised:

> *It seems to me necessary to withhold the fact that it is an Intendant who is requesting this passport, and even more so what ends are guiding him; to avoid any umbrage, one could present the thing as a joke and speak of it as a crazy project coming from someone who should have been put off by the lack of success of repeated experiments, but who undoubtedly has money to spend, while nevertheless making it clear that the request is made by a person whom one cannot avoid obliging.*[123]

119. AN, F10/515–516, Trudaine de Montigny to the duc d'Harcourt, s.l., October 7, 1768, fol. 226.
120. AN, F10/515–516, Lalanne to Turgot, Soria, August 29, 1768, fol. 222.
121. For this critique, and especially the role of Campomanes, see Rahn Phillips and Phillips Jr., *Spain's Golden Fleece*, 77–84.
122. AN, F10/515–516, Lalanne to Turgot, Soria, August 29, 1768, fol. 222.
123. AN, F10/515–516, Lalanne to Turgot, Soria, August 29, 1768, fol. 221.

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In Turgot's view, this letter from Lalanne was a gamechanger, and he forwarded it to his close friend Trudaine de Montigny. As a request made through Beliardi would surely be suspected of coming directly from the French government, Turgot thought it better to follow Lalanne's advice and hide behind a private individual. He suggested that Louise Élisabeth de La Rochefoucauld, duchesse d'Enville, could be a suitable intermediary. In this period, female ownership of animals was often understood in terms of a vain culture of curiosity and wasteful consumption, so perhaps he thought that a woman would be perceived as more innocent in diplomatic matters.[124] It is unclear whether Trudaine de Montigny and Turgot proceeded with the alternative plan, but the operation never led to any Spanish sheep crossing the border into France. It is possible that they had already lost their chance of outsmarting the Spanish government by making a first official request through Beliardi, who, in contrast to the wool merchant Lalanne, seemed to be ignorant of the high political stakes. In either case, the failure of this project illustrates the geopolitical sensitivity of the trade in sheep and wool.

In the end, the French would find other means to achieve their goal. The first successful importation of Spanish sheep carried out by the central government took place almost a decade later, in 1776, when the Bayonne banker François de Batbedat, following the orders of Trudaine de Montigny and Turgot, smuggled 30 rams and 175 ewes into France.[125] To determine the best route, Trudaine gathered information from knowledgeable people. One report suggested that the best sheep were from León and overwintered in Estremadura, and that a small number could be brought by ship from Santander. A large flock would have to be brought on foot through the free passage from Castile to Aragon, and then to the town of Ansó in the Pyrenees, "from where, with the help of a few small gratuities, they will be smuggled into France."[126] When the plan was carried out, the sheep were shipped to Bayonne from Suances, and bribes to local officers and guards amounted to 13,000 reales de vellón (around 3,345 livres), surpassing the price of the sheep themselves and representing about a third of the total cost of the operation.[127] The living contraband, which quickly multiplied because Batbedat had made sure to

124. AN, F10/515–516, Turgot to Trudaine de Montigny, Limoges, September 13, 1768, fol. 219. For the duchesse d'Enville, see Michèle Crogiez Labarthe, "La correspondance de la duchesse d'Enville," in *Femmes des Lumières. Recherches en arborescences*, ed. Huguette Krief et al. (Paris: Classiques Garnier, 2018), 215–25. For prejudices about female animal owners, see Louise E. Robbins, *Elephant Slaves and Pampered Parrots: Exotic Animals in Eighteenth-Century Paris* (Baltimore: Johns Hopkins University Press, 2002), 140–49; Ingrid H. Tague, "Fashioning the Pet," chapter 3 in *Animal Companions: Pets and Social Change in Eighteenth-Century Britain* (University Park: Pennsylvania State University Press, 2015), 91–137; Jens Amborg, Tomohiro Kaibara, and Silvia Sebastiani, "Un débat historiographique. Genre, animaux, animalité au siècle des Lumières," in "Animalité," ed. Silvia Sebastiani and Sylvie Steinberg, special issue, *Clio. Femmes, genre, histoire* 55 (2022): 209–40, here pp. 214–16.

125. AN, H//1624, Batbedat to Bertin, s.l., December 27, 1778, fol. 55.

126. AN, F/10/515–516, document starting with "Les plus belles brebis d'Espagne," [undated], fol. 21967.

127. AN, F/10/515–516, "Achat de 205 têtes," [1776], fol. 551.

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bring pregnant ewes to accelerate the flock's growth in France, was distributed to a number of improvers, including Trudaine de Montigny and Daubenton.

A decade later again, French efforts to acclimatize Spanish sheep would culminate with the creation of the Bergerie nationale de Rambouillet, the national sheep-breeding farm, inaugurated in 1786. This time, the establishment's famous merino flock originated in a diplomatic agreement between the Bourbon kings of France and Spain. The importation of 366 sheep of the highest quality marked the beginning of the *mérinisation* of France, the process through which the merino breed was widely disseminated throughout the nation.[128] A further step was taken in 1795 when the Peace of Basel, signed by France and Spain to end the War of the Pyrenees, included a secret clause that allowed France to extract a thousand female sheep and a hundred rams of merino breed for five consecutive years.[129]

Finally, it is important to note that despite the French belief in the primacy of race, acclimatization to a new environment and new customs often proved challenging. In Spain, the practice of transhumance was a foundational part of the Mesta system. The French lacked comparable traditions and infrastructure, and many of the imported Spanish sheep sickened or perished. The transfer of knowledge was as essential as the acquisition of the animals; the flock that Étigny imported in 1764, for example, initially suffered great losses and only survived because he hired an experienced Pyrenean shepherd who took the sheep to the mountains in the summer.[130] Scientific approaches to breeding also had their limitations. Daubenton insisted on the importance of fresh air and gave orders for his Spanish sheep to be kept outside in all seasons. It was, however, later revealed that Daubenton's shepherd "during his master's winter stay in Paris, would, out of pity, shut in his sheep and rams at that time of year, and let him believe that he always kept them outside."[131] The shepherd's intimate knowledge of the sheep and his compassionate disobedience saved the flock from otherwise inevitable losses. Both Carlier and

128. Bourde, *Agronomie et agronomes*, vol. 3, pp. 1624–31; Éric Teyssier, "La introducción de los merinos en Francia a finales del siglo XVIII y principios del siglo XIX. La pérdida del monopolio español de una materia prima," *Revista de Historia Industrial* 11 (1997): 11–43; Louis Reveleau and Jeannine Reveleau, "La quête des bêtes à laine fine et en particulier en France au XVIII[e] siècle, préparant la mérinisation," in *Élevage d'hier, élevage d'aujourd'hui. Mélanges d'ethnozootechnie offerts à Bernard Denis*, ed. Claude Guintard and Christine Mazzoli-Guintard (Rennes: Presses universitaires de Rennes, 2004), 121–38; Jean-Marc Moriceau, *Histoire et géographie de l'élevage français. Du Moyen Âge à la Révolution* (Paris: Fayard, 2005), 155–61; Cornu and Pinoteau, *La Guerre des moutons*.

129. Serna, *Comme des bêtes*, chapter 10.

130. Antoine Mégret d'Étigny, "Suite du Mémoire de M. d'Etigny, &c. Connaissances que j'ai prises en Espagne," *Gazette du commerce de l'agriculture et des finances* 40, May 20, 1766, pp. 317–18; Étigny, "Suite du Mémoire de M. d'Etigny, &c. Tonte du Troupeau," *Gazette du commerce de l'agriculture et des finances* 41, May 24, 1766, p. 325.

131. Alexandre-Henri Tessier, *Histoire de l'introduction et de la propagation des mérinos en France* (Paris: Imprimerie de L. Bouchard-Huzard, 1839), 10; Louis Jean-Marie Daubenton, "Observations sur des bêtes à laine parquées pendant toute l'année," in *Histoire et mémoires de l'Académie royale des sciences, 1772*, vol. 1 (Paris: Impr. royale, 1775), 436–44.

https://doi.org/10.1017/ahss.2025.10101

Daubenton, two of the strongest proponents of the importation of foreign breeds in the 1750s and 1760s, reconsidered their views in light of subsequent experiences and shifted their attention to improving French domestic sheep by introducing new husbandry methods.[132] Race and climate remained contested concepts.

Owing to vibrant new scholarship, we know considerably more today than we did a decade ago about how sheep breeding developed as a central scientific and political project in the decades following the French Revolution.[133] As this article has shown, the politicization of livestock breeding and the commodification of animal breeds already took a particular form in the seventeenth and eighteenth centuries, characterized here as animal mercantilism. In the context of this period's interstate rivalries, state officials and naturalists, in collaboration with a wide range of other actors, began to treat animal breeds as natural resources worthy of national political protection and governance.

Reappraising this historical development has required an integrative approach that resists tendencies of disciplinary fragmentation. This article has combined perspectives from the history of science with political, economic, cultural, and transnational history to demonstrate how projects of animal political economy developed alongside assumptions about the relative fixity of race and breed in the seventeenth and eighteenth centuries. Attempts to reshape national populations of animals built on the idea that genetic or racial capital was a resource that could be transferred across environments and significant geographical distances. It is important to remember that, in the eighteenth century, it was not assumed that the Spanish merino could flourish in the French climate, nor was it self-evident that the breed would reach its subsequent status in France. In fact, the concept of the "merino" itself only came into regular usage in French in the years around 1800.[134]

132. Daubenton, "Mémoire sur le premier drap de laine superfine du crû de la France"; Bourde, *Agronomie et agronomes*, vol. 2, pp. 815–16.

133. Laurent Brassart, "'La ferme des animaux' ou l'invention d'une politique de l'animal utile sous le Consulat," *Annales historiques de la Révolution française* 377, no. 3 (2014): 175–96; Brassart, "Improving Useful Species: A Public Policy of the Directoire Regime and Napoleonic Empire in Europe (1795–1815)," *Historia agraria. Revista de agricultura e historia rural* 75 (2018): 93–113; Malik Mellah, "Portrait du berger en figure républicaine ou comment faire entrer l'animal domestique en Révolution," *Annales historiques de la Révolution française* 374 (2013): 85–110; Mellah, "L'École d'Alfort, les bêtes à laine et le perfectionnement des arts économiques : de la fin du Directoire à l'Empire," *Histoire & societes rurales* 43, no. 1 (2015): 73–101; Mellah, "Le travail des Comité(s) et Commission(s) d'agriculture des Assemblées révolutionnaires : une approche par la politique de l'animal domestique (1789–1795)," *La Révolution française* 17 (2020); Malik Mellah and Pierre Serna, "Réinventer l'harmonie politique de tous les êtres vivants : un projet révolutionnaire et zootechnique (1792–1820)," *Revue d'histoire du XIXe siècle* 54 (2017): 31–46; Serna, *Comme des bêtes*; Piazzesi, *Del governo degli animali*.

134. Google Books Ngram Viewer, "mérinos," French, 1700–1900: https://books.google.com/ngrams/graph?content=m%C3%A9rinos&year_start=1700&year_end=1900&corpus=fr&smoothing=3&case_insensitive=false.

https://doi.org/10.1017/ahss.2025.10101

The shift from breed descriptions based on locality—often as wide as "English" or "Spanish"—to alternative classifications arguably reflects the increasing emphasis on race over environment examined in this article and deserves further study. These processes can be understood as a first step toward the ensuing standardization, homogenization, and specialization of livestock breeds across Europe and beyond, a transformation that increasingly prioritized monoculture over local variation in the pursuit of productivity.[135] Without representing a straightforward march toward this development, overlooked historical figures like Mante, Guerrier, and Lormoy illustrate how eighteenth-century breeders, interacting with major political and scientific figures, began to conceptualize animal breeds as strategic economic resources, subject to new forms of political governance amid imperial competition.

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135. Rebecca J. H. Woods, *The Herds Shot Round the World: Native Breeds and the British Empire, 1800–1900* (Chapel Hill: The University of North Carolina Press, 2017); Piazzesi, *Del governo degli animali*, 67–72; Anne Blondeau Da Silva, "Race d'animal domestique," in Serna et al., *Dictionnaire historique et critique des animaux*, 467–72.

https://doi.org/10.1017/ahss.2025.10101

Abstracts

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Animal Mercantilism: Race Smuggling, Sheep Diplomacy, and the Geopolitics of Genetic Capital in Eighteenth-Century France

Building on previous scholarship on "genetic capital" and the politicization of animal economies, this paper examines how animal breeds and their transnational movement became geopolitical issues in late seventeenth- and eighteenth-century Europe. In particular, it examines how the French government's efforts to emulate English and Spanish wool production, and to overcome the economic advantage stemming from its rivals' superior sheep breeds, intensified in the wake of the Seven Years' War (1756–1763). Despite bans on the exportation of live sheep from Britain and Spain, the French strove to improve their flocks through illicit imports and diplomatic agreements. These efforts culminated in the 1760s, as the Bureau of Commerce began to collaborate with agriculturalists, naturalists, diplomats, and smugglers to bring superior breeds of sheep across the Anglo-French maritime border and the Pyrenean frontier with Spain. These projects developed in tandem with new conceptions of the permanence of race and breed, according to which animals would retain their characteristics in new climates and environments. Combining perspectives from economic, agricultural, political, and cultural history, this article uses the concept of animal mercantilism to open up the geopolitical stakes inherent in understandings of animals, race, and climate.

Mercantilisme animal. Contrebande de races animales, diplomatie du mouton et géopolitique du capital génétique dans la France du XVIIIe siècle

En puisant aux études menées sur le « capital génétique » et la politisation des économies animales, cet article examine la façon dont les races animales et leur circulation transnationale deviennent des enjeux géopolitiques dans l'Europe de la fin du XVIIe et du XVIIIe siècles. Il s'intéresse notamment aux efforts du gouvernement français, particulièrement intenses après la guerre de Sept Ans (1756-1763), pour imiter la production de laine anglaise et espagnole, et tenter de surmonter l'avantage économique dû à la meilleure qualité des races ovines de ses voisins et concurrents. Alors que l'exportation de moutons vivants était complètement interdite en Angleterre et en Espagne, les Français s'échinaient à améliorer leur cheptel ovin par des importations illicites et des accords diplomatiques. Ces entreprises culminèrent dans les années 1760, lorsque le Bureau du commerce entama une collaboration avec des agronomes, des naturalistes, des diplomates et des contrebandiers afin de faire passer des races ovines de qualité supérieure à travers la frontière maritime franco-britannique et la frontière pyrénéenne avec l'Espagne. Ces projets se développèrent en parallèle de nouvelles conceptions de la stabilité et de la permanence des races, d'après lesquelles les animaux conserveraient leurs propriétés quels que soient les climats et les environnements. Au carrefour de l'histoire économique, agricole, politique et culturelle, le présent article développe le concept de « mercantilisme animal » pour explorer les enjeux géopolitiques inhérents aux différentes conceptions des animaux, de la race et du climat.

https://doi.org/10.1017/ahss.2025.10101