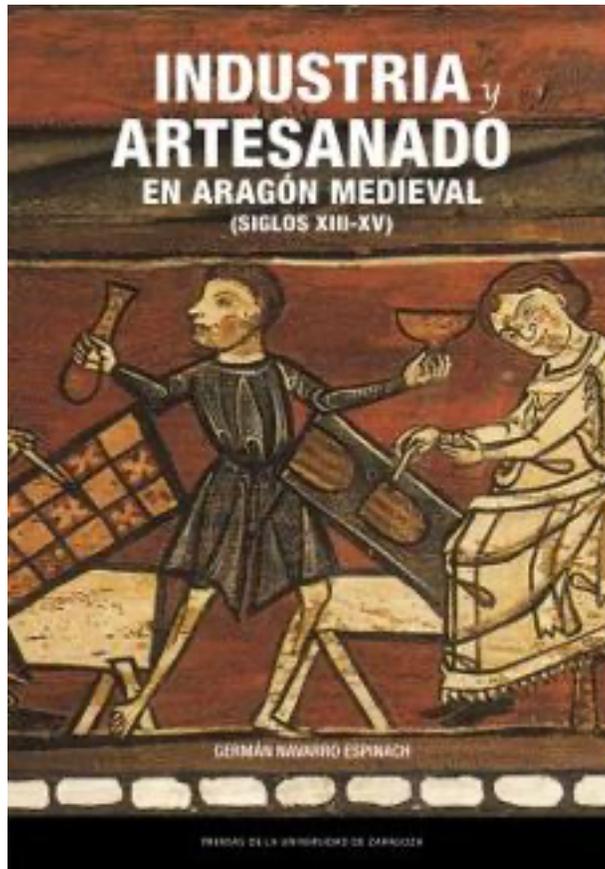


**Germán Navarro Espinach. *Industria y artesanado en Aragón medieval (siglos XIII-XV)*. Zaragoza: Prensas de la Universidad de Zaragoza, 2025. 317 pgs. ISBN: 9791387705428.**

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Columella, in Book XII of his *De re rustica*, identifies the working of wool and the processing and storage of food as some of the crucial tasks of the *villicus* (farm manager) and his wife, the *villica* (*Lucii Iunii Moderati Columellae Rei Rusticae* XII, II-III), as well as . Nearly 1,500 years later, the industrial and artisanal activities in the late medieval Crown of Aragon recorded by Navarro Espinach do not differ greatly from those Columella recalls for his native Cádiz.

As the author indicates, Aragon experienced a considerable development of artisanal activities in the 13th–15th centuries, in step with the commercial revolution it underwent under dominant feudalism, where agricultural and livestock exploitation formed the basis of power. The book analyzes in detailed chapters the wool and fulling industry, leatherwork, the construction sector, flour mills and oil presses (with its myriad professions associated to each of them), all of which were at the forefront of artisan/industry development alongside other production areas such as metallurgy and ceramics. Navarro Espinach’s book analyzes this development through municipal, fiscal, and notarial documentation with the aim of reconstructing the social history of the artisan class and reclaiming the world of the lost trades of a bygone era. The book also represents a culminating synthesis of three decades of research.

Navarro Espinach's work is grounded in a "systemic approach" to history. He moves beyond the traditional, often dry cataloging of guilds to explore the interaction between natural resources, technology, and social class. A standout feature of his methodology is the integration of prosopography (collective biography) with quantitative data. By tracking individual artisans through notarial protocols and tax records (such as the *fogaje* of 1495), the author breathes life into the "insignificant lives" of weavers, blacksmiths, and tanners. This "micro-analysis" allows him to challenge the static view of medieval corporations, revealing them instead as flexible entities that adapted to market pressures and migratory flows. The author also proves that the "history of the workshop" is, in fact, the history of how culture is made.

One of the most insightful contributions of the book is the author's nuanced definition of "industry" in a pre-capitalist context. Navarro Espinach argues that "industry" and "craftsmanship" (*artesanado*) are two sides of the same coin. Craftsmanship refers to the technical unit: the domestic workshop. Industry refers to the economic scale: the coordination of these workshops to produce surpluses for large national and/or international markets.

By focusing primarily on the textile sector, the author demonstrates how Aragon transitioned from a mere exporter of raw wool to a sophisticated producer of finished cloths (*paños*). The book meticulously details the technical chain—from the hydraulic power of the *batán* (fulling mill) to the delicate work of the *tundidor* (shearman)—illustrating how technological innovation (like the horizontal loom) drove economic growth. In fact, he argues that the horizontal loom and the hydraulic fulling mill (*batán*) were more than just tools; they were the "material culture" of the era. Technical knowledge was a form of "knowing-how" (*saber hacer*) that was passed down through generations, creating a specialized labor force that was surprisingly mobile, migrating between cities to follow market demand.

The book brilliantly maps the "economic geography" of medieval Aragon, identifying four distinct industrial zones:

1. The North (Pyrenees): Integrated with Catalan markets.
2. The Somontano: Focused on medium-quality goods for regional consumption and Castilian export.
3. The Southeast (Teruel/Albarracín): Producers of high-quality woolens in constant contact with the Valencian economy.
4. Zaragoza: The urban heart that acted as a hub for imitation and innovation of foreign luxury fabrics.

This spatial analysis proves that medieval Aragon was not an isolated feudal backwater but a dynamic participant in the "Commercial Revolution."

In his *Conclusiones*, the author emphasizes that "industry" and "craftsmanship" (*artesanado*) are inseparable. He posits that industry exists when the technical unit (the workshop) is coordinated to produce surpluses. This coordination was driven by three pillars: natural resources, technology, and social class. Navarro Espinach highlights that Aragon's success was not accidental but rooted in its ability to transform its primary resource—wool—into a specialized export. By the 15th century, Aragon had transitioned from a supplier of raw materials to a producer of finished cloths (*paños*), competing directly with French and Flemish imports.

Perhaps the most striking element of the *Conclusiones* is the author's focus on the "insignificant lives" of the workers. Navarro Espinach does not ignore the human cost or the diverse workforce. He incorporates a necessary gender perspective, acknowledging the indispensable (and often unrecorded) labor of women in the spinning and preparation phases of textiles. Furthermore, his research into Mudejar (Muslim) artisans in the construction sector

highlights the multicultural reality of Aragonese labor, where technical skill often transcended religious boundaries. Through the analysis of the 1495 fogaje (census), Navarro Espinach identifies 1,453 distinct artisan households. He stresses the "multicultural reality" of Aragonese labor. The Mudejar (Muslim) community is credited with the technical mastery of the construction sector, while the role of women is finally given its due. Navarro Espinach argues that without the "invisible labor" of women in spinning and preparation, the industrial output of the 15th century would have been impossible.

Navarro Espinach's work is a monumental achievement in prosopographical rigor. By tracking individual artisans through notarial protocols, he avoids the trap of "faceless history." However, a critical reading of the *Conclusiones* also reveals the inherent limitations of medieval sources. The author acknowledges that "direct accounting" from the workshops is almost non-existent. We see the *results* of the economy (taxes, contracts, laws), but the internal profit-and-loss logic of a 14th-century workshop remains partially obscured. Despite this, Navarro Espinach's use of "indirect proxies" (dowries and apprentice contracts) is a masterclass in historical reconstruction. The book also raises a provocative question about the "pre-capitalist" nature of this industry. Was this truly a "Revolution," or merely a high-functioning version of feudalism? Navarro Espinach leans toward the former, suggesting that the "salary-based" labor found in 15th-century Zaragoza was a clear precursor to modern capitalist structures.

*Industria y artesanado en Aragón medieval* serves as a powerful reminder that history is built from the bottom up. By focusing on the workshop, the tool, and the artisan, Germán Navarro Espinach provides a definitive account of how Aragon became an industrial power. An extensive *Listado de localidades con oficios artesanales registrados en el fogaje general de Aragón ordenado por las Cortes de Tarazona de 1495* (List of localities with artisanal trades registered in the general census of Aragon, ordered by the Cortes of Tarazona in 1495) on pags. 249-295 offers us the names and surnames that propelled this "Revolution" which, thanks to the work of prosopography, allowing us to draw from anonymity—and almost put a face to—an intrahistory (the Unamunian *intrahistoria*) that can nearly be read in an epic key.