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TO THE QUESTION OF THE REASONS OF THE FIRST CARLIST WAR (1833–1840)

Abstract. The First Carlist War in Spain (1833–1840) started because of the uprising of Don Carlos’s partisans (Carlists) against the government in Madrid. Modern scholars are still discussing the reasons for the conflict. In the article, the factors that motivated the development of the Carlist movement are being analyzed. It is shown that there is a continuity between Carlism and counterrevolutionary movements in Spain during the reign of Ferdinand VII. The paper studies the relevance of the dynastic crisis in Spain after the publication of the Pragmatic Sanction in 1830 in the context of the opposition between Liberals and Royalists. The religious factor of the conflict is analyzed. Different hypotheses concerning possible economic reasons for the war are shown. The notion that Carlism was a movement of the “poor” against the “rich” or a peasants’ uprising against the urban population is rejected. The First Carlist War in Spain was a result of a combination of multiple factors. The regionalist problem was irrelevant for the early Carlism. The dynastic and religious questions were mainly vehicles for propaganda than the real causes of the conflict. The early Carlism was the movement of well-off peasants, local gentry and clergy, and a part of the urban population in the regions with a small and medium land property that suffered economic recession before the war.

Keywords: Carlism, First Carlist War, Spain, civil wars, conservatism.

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**К ВОПРОСУ О ПРИЧИНАХ
ПЕРВОЙ КАРЛИСТСКОЙ ВОЙНЫ
(1833–1840)**

Аннотация. Вопрос о причинах Первой Карлистской войны в Испании (1833–1840) до сих пор является предметом дискуссий среди специалистов. В настоящей статье анализируются факторы, которые привели к конфликту в Испании. Показывается преемственность между карлизмом и контрреволюционными движениями в Испании в период правления Фердинанда VII. Анализируется династический кризис в Испании после публикации «Прагматической санкции» 1830 г. в контексте противостояния либералов и роялистов. Дается оценка религиозному фактору в конфликте. Приводятся различные гипотезы относительно возможных экономических причин войны. Отвергается представление о том, что карлизм был движением бедняков против богатых или крестьянским восстанием против городского населения. Делается вывод о том, что Первая Карлистская война была результатом сочетания нескольких факторов. Ранний карлизм представлял собой движение зажиточных крестьян, местного дворянства и духовенства, а также части городского населения в районах с мелкой и средней земельной собственностью, переживавших перед войной экономический спад.

Ключевые слова: карлизм, Первая Карлистская война, Испания, гражданские войны, консерватизм.

Introduction. The First Carlist War (1833–1840) was the largest internal conflict in Spain in the XVIII–XX centuries. There were two opposing sides in the war: the partisans of a pretender to the Spanish throne don Carlos (“Carlists”) and the supporters of Queen Isabella and her mother Regent Maria Christina (“Cristinos” / “Isabelinos”); the latter were often referred to as “Liberals”. According to different estimations, it caused from 200 000 to 650 000 deaths¹. During the conflict, the Spanish society experienced serious changes, and the results of the war meant the victory of “Liberalism” over *Ancien Régime*².

The war started as a dynastic conflict for the rights of succession to the Spanish throne, but the dispute between don Carlos and Maria Christina was only a trigger for the outbreak of hostilities. If the supposition that the First Carlist War was a struggle only for the succession to the throne were accepted, it would be difficult to explain the continuation of the Carlist movement up to the XXI century.

¹ Lawrence M. Spain’s First Carlist War, 1833–40. Basingstoke, 2014. P. 10.

² Artola M. La burguesía revolucionaria (1808–1869). Madrid, 1973. P. 8.

The criticism of the Pragmatic Sanction of 1830 and appeals to the rights of don Carlos to succeed to his brother were used by the Carlists to justify their actions, or to look for support in other countries, but the dynastic question was not the real reason for the conflict. The Spanish philosopher of the XIX century J. Balmes wrote in 1840 that the war “was fully social and political” (“profundamente social y política”)³.

During the last 180 years, there have been proposed various hypothesis concerning the reasons for the beginning of the First Carlist War. Some scholars, mainly sympathizing with the ideas of Basque or Catalan nationalism, created an image of Carlists as predecessors of modern separatists in the Basque Country and Catalonia⁴. Many studies carried out in the XIX and XX centuries presented the First Carlist War as a struggle between the city (Cristinos) and the countryside (Carlists); consequently, don Carlos’s partisans were seen as groups of peasants led by “fanatical” priests⁵ and local gentry⁶. In the second half of the XX century, some historians belonging to the “neo-Carlist” school tried to present the Carlist uprising as a social protest of poor peasants against the rich urban population⁷. The most prominent of them was J. C. Clemente who was an ideologist of the left-wing *Carlist Party* (*Partido Carlista*). He tried to adapt the ideology of early Carlists to the doctrine of so-called “socialist Carlism”.

Recent studies dedicated to the social structure of the Carlist movement in 1833–1840 have created a more complex image. In 2018, U. R. Urrastabaso wrote that the traditional definition of Carlism as a counter-revolutionary movement defending the interests of the nobles had not been confirmed by the new data⁸. E. Catalan and I. Mugartegui, who studied political adscription of the elites in the province of Gipuzkoa in the XIX century, concluded that it is “inadmissible to simplify the conflict to a mere dynastic problem, or reduce it to the dichotomy countryside — city or poor — rich”⁹.

³ *Balmes J.* Escritos políticos. Madrid: Imprenta de la Sociedad de Operarios del mismo Arte, 1847. P. 22.

⁴ *Eyara J., López R., Agirreazkuenaga J.* Historia de Euskal Herria. Bilbao, 1985. 7 vol.; *García A., Salgado C.* El Carlismo: 175 años de sufrida represión. Ediciones Arcos, 2008. 230 p.; *Sorauren M.* Fueros y carlistada. Pamplona, 2008. 100 p.

⁵ The idea that the Carlist uprising was inspired and led by “fanatical clergy” appeared in the first weeks of the war. E. g., Russian newspaper *Sankt-Peterburgskie Vedomosti* (*Санкт-Петербургские ведомости*) on 16 November 1833, reported that “numerous Guerillas in Navarre are led almost exclusively by monks” (*Санкт-Петербургские ведомости*. 16.11.1833. № 269. P. 1148).

⁶ *Майский И. М.* Испания 1808–1917. Исторический очерк. М., 1957. URL: <http://istmat.info/node/28419> (дата обращения: 05.12.2022). С. 89; *Пискорский В. К.* История Испании и Португалии. От падения Римской империи до начала XX века. М., 2015. С. 172; *Holt E.* The Carlist Wars in Spain. London, 1967. P. 45.

⁷ *Clemente J. C.* Breve historia de las guerras carlistas. Madrid, 2011. P. 60–69.

⁸ *Urrastabaso U. R.* Modern societies and national identities. Legal Praxis and the Basque-Spanish Conflict. London, 2018. P. 104.

⁹ *Catalán E., Mugartegui I.* Cambio económico y adscripción política de las élites guipuzcoanas, 1833–1876 // *Historia Contemporánea*. 2020. № 62. P. 13.

The question concerning the reasons for the First Carlist War seemed quite clear to some historians of the XIX and XX centuries. Nevertheless, today we do not have a universally accepted explanation of the split in Spanish society in the 1830s. The scope of the present investigation is to show some possible interpretations of the conflict and to determine its reasons.

Results of the investigation. Carlism appeared in 1833 but it was a logical continuation of typologically similar movements of previous decades. The Cortes of Cádiz (1810–1813) that ratified the Constitution of 1812 became the scene of discord among the so-called “Liberals” and “Royalists” (“Absolutists”). The separating line between the groups was quite vague; there were also internal divisions within each of them. In 1814 Royalists welcomed the suppression of the Constitution by Ferdinand VII and presented to the King the “Manifesto of the Persians”. This document was neither “absolutist”, nor conservative; actually, it was a new phenomenon in Spanish political culture¹⁰.

The period of restoration of Ferdinand VII as King in 1814–20 and the last 10 years of his reign (1823–1833) are often considered a time of “reaction”, “square counter-revolution”, as the Soviet historian I. M. Maisky called it¹¹. The Spanish Liberals labeled the 1823–1833 period as the “Ominous Decade”; from the point of view of the Royalists, it was actually the “Moderate Decade”. The Spanish Far-Right thought that the King’s government was led by *afrancesados* and “masons”¹². As it was claimed by S. Tarrow, “a contentious episode becomes a social movement only by sustaining collective action against antagonists”¹³. The Liberals became these “antagonists” for the Royalists, and after 1833, for the Carlists.

Eventually, this discontentment of the Royalists with the authorities led to armed conflicts, as it was in Catalonia in 1827. At the same time, it should be noticed that the Royalist uprisings in that period were not directed *against* the King, but, on the contrary, *for* the King, as it was formulated by U. Mücke (“Aufstand gegen den König/Aufstand für den König”)¹⁴. The Royalist rebels thought that Ferdinand VII was a “prisoner” of “Liberals”.

The most conservative part of Spanish society rejected constitutional reforms proposed by Liberals. A priest from Navarre A. Martín wrote in 1825: “The constitution is a creation of corrupt, revolted, and treacherous people”¹⁵. To explain

¹⁰ Василенко Ю. В. «Манифест персов», или Верноподданные между традиционализмом и реформизмом // Антиномии. 2019. Т. 19. № 3. С. 84–98.

¹¹ Майский И. М. Оп. cit. С. 81.

¹² Luis J.-P. La Década Ominosa y la cuestión del retorno de los josefinos // Ayer. 2014. № 95. P. 150.

¹³ Tarrow S. El poder en movimiento. Los movimientos sociales, la acción colectiva y la política. Madrid, 1997. P. 25.

¹⁴ Mücke U. Gegen Aufklärung und Revolution. Die Entstehung konservativen Denkens in der iberischen Welt (1770–1840). Köln, 2008. S. 337.

¹⁵ Martín A. Historia de la guerra de la división real de Navarra contra el intruso sistema, llamado constitucional, y su gobierno y su gobierno revolucionario por don Andrés Martín, cura párroco de Ustarroz. Pamplona, 1825. P. 15.

this attitude, it needs to be studied in a broader context. On the one hand, Royalism-Carlism was a manifestation of counter-revolutionary mass movements in Europe in 1789–1848 (Chouannerie, Sanfedismo, Miguelismo, etc.). It is questionable, whether Carlists in 1833–40 experienced the direct ideological influence of their foreign “colleagues” (Yu. V. Vasilenko indicated that the early Carlism “was mainly a political practice, and not a political ideology”¹⁶), but it is doubtless that the “political climate” in Europe of the time should have favored the movements of that kind. On the other hand, in the 1820s, Spain experienced a geopolitical catastrophe: the country lost almost all its colonies. For both sides of the First Carlist War, it was an easy way out to blame the opponent for the destruction of the colonial empire. At the end of the XIX century, Carlist propaganda still accused the “vicious Liberalism” of the “loss of our colonies”¹⁷.

In the second half of the 1820s and the beginning of the 1830s, the ultra-Royalists expected that Ferdinand’s brother Carlos María Isidro (don Carlos) would be less tolerant towards the “Liberals” and other “enemies” of Spain¹⁸. Up to 1830, don Carlos was the heir to the throne, but in 1830 the promulgation of Pragmatic Sanction and the birth of Princess Isabella changed the situation. Thanks to Pragmatic Sanction, the young Isabella became the first in the line of succession to the throne. For this reason, the Royalists protested the new law: they lost the opportunity to obtain power after Ferdinand’s death. The dynastic dispute was one of the factors that motivated the Carlist uprising, but it could be analyzed only in the context of the struggle between Liberals and Royalists during the last years of Ferdinand’s reign. The succession problem was relevant only because it implied several political questions that divided both sides (Constitution, Parliament, role of the Church in the society, etc.). Self-identification of an individual as a Carlist or Cristino was not just the question of personal loyalty to one of the pretenders to the throne, but rather an expression of political views.

Most Liberals considered the Catholic Church a possible ally of don Carlos. In December 1832, the apostolic nuncio in Madrid F. Tiberi reported to the Secretariat of State of the Holy See the circumstances of his meeting with the Spanish royal family. He described the “cold silence” of Maria Christina and the “absolute benevolence” of don Carlos¹⁹. This observation shows us the split among the Spanish political elite, but it would be a simplification to determine the Carlist “cause” as a “Crusade” in defense of the Church, or to say that their enemies were “atheists”.

¹⁶ *Василенко Ю. В.* Генезис карлизма и проблемы типологии испанского консерватизма // Научный ежегодник Института философии и права Уральского отделения Российской академии наук. 2016. Т. 16. Вып. 1. С. 95.

¹⁷ *Rújula P., Sonetti S.* La causa perduta come racconto politico: il carlismo // *Meridiana*. 2017. № 88. P. 35.

¹⁸ *Lawrence M.* Spain’s First Carlist War, 1833–40. P. 2.

¹⁹ Francesco Tiberi to Tommaso Bernetti, 19 Dec. 1832. Archivio Apostolico Vaticano. Segreteria di Stato. Esteri. Rubrica 249. Busta 438. Nunziatura di Spagna. 1832.

The Carlists called themselves “defenders” of the Church and proclaimed the Virgin Mary *Generalísima* of their forces²⁰. Don Carlos surrounded himself by monks and priests who constituted the base of the so-called “right fraction” in the Carlist movement²¹. An officer in Cristino army (and future Prime Minister) F. Fernández de Córdoba in his memoirs evaluated the influence exerted by the clergy on don Carlos as “pernicious” for the Carlist “cause”²².

At the same time, a considerable number of high-ranking clergymen sided with Cristinos, while don Carlos was supported mainly by local priests²³. F. von Lichnowsky remembered that when the Carlists took Huesca in 1837, urban authorities greeted don Carlos in the cathedral. The bishop of Huesca preferred to stay home because earlier he had recognized Isabella as the Queen. According to the Prussian volunteer, don Carlos ordered “not to disturb” the old man²⁴. The question of the political affiliation of high clergy in the First Carlist War is beyond the scope of this article; it should only be stated that not all the Spanish Church sided with Carlism.

The religious factor was relevant for some individuals who decided to join the Carlist movement. A. Sabatier, a French volunteer at don Carlos’s service, evoked the last words that his brother told him as parting advice: “Go, my dear friend, it’s the God’s cause that calls for you... remember that fighting for God and King one does not die”²⁵. Naturally, it is impossible to determine whether A. Sabatier and other don Carlos’s partisans took up arms to defend “God, Fatherland, and King” (*Dios, Patria, Rey*; the famous Carlist motto), or whether the religion was just an “excuse” for them to join the struggle. Nevertheless, it may be assumed that for many Carlists the idea to go to war to defend the Church was a more relevant factor than the dynastic question or some abstract disputes about the Constitution²⁶. The civil war did not start because of “oppression” of the Church by its “enemies”, but the religious factor played an important role in Carlist propaganda and favored the uprising in 1833.

A considerable part of the population of Navarre, the Basque provinces, and Aragon supported the Carlist movement; to a lesser extent, it got some support in Catalonia, Valencia, and the province of Burgos²⁷. As it has already been mentioned, some scholars try to present the Carlist movement in 1833–1840 as a rebellion

²⁰ Lawrence M. Spain’s First Carlist War, 1833–40. P. 158.

²¹ Василенко Ю. В. Генезис карлизма и проблемы типологии испанского консерватизма. С. 105.

²² Fernández de Córdoba F. Mis memorias íntimas. Tomo I. Madrid: Establecimiento tipográfico “Sucesores de Rivadeneyra”. Impresores de la Real Casa, 1886. P. 164.

²³ Pérez J. Histoire de l’Espagne. Paris, 1997. P. 571–572.

²⁴ Lichnowsky F. Recuerdos de la Guerra Carlista (1837–1839). Madrid, 1942. P. 84.

²⁵ Sabatier A. Tio Tomas. Souvenirs d’un soldat de Charles V, par Alexis Sabatier, lieutenant-colonel d’infanterie au service d’Espagne, deux fois chevalier de première classe de l’ordre royal et militaire de Saint-Ferdinand. Bordeaux, 1836. P. 2–3.

²⁶ It is a case of those who volunteered to the Carlist army; most of its soldiers were recruited by force (*Albi de la Cuesta J.* El ejército carlista del norte (1833–1839), Madrid, 2017. P. 57–65).

²⁷ Caridad Salvador A. La desigual distribución espacial del primer carlismo: Una propuesta explicativa cuantitativa // Huarte de San Juan. Geografía e Historia. 2018. № 25. P. 84–86.

for autonomy/independence of Catalonia or the Basque Country. Nevertheless, it is difficult to find appeals to the struggle for independence in the manifestos and proclamations of the Carlist leaders to the people of Spain or in the memoirs of participants of the Carlist movement²⁸. Most of Spanish academic society rejects the idea and considers the regionalism a secondary element in the ideology of early Carlism²⁹. The geographical distribution of the early Carlism could be explained mainly by social and economic reasons.

As has been noted above, there is no universally recognized scheme of the social structure of the Carlist movement in 1833–40. Therefore, it is quite difficult to present conclusive evidence of the economic background of the conflict. Moreover, the economic motives of the war could vary in different regions of Spain. M. Lawrence in one of his recent articles mentioned a Barcelona newspaper that “in 1840 reflected on the recently extinguished civil war, attributing Basque Carlism to the defence of ‘liberties’ (especially the autonomous ‘fueros’), Catalan Carlism to ‘religious fanaticism’, and Aragonese Carlism to ‘banditry’”³⁰. Of course, this allegation of Catalan journalists is far from reality, but it shows that the heterogeneous character of the Carlist movement was evident for its contemporaries.

The concept of Carlism as of a movement of the poor against the rich is open to criticism. There are no ideas of “social justice” or “revolution” in Carlist manifestos and proclamations³¹. Moreover, Carlism did not get serious support in Andalusia and Extremadura, less economically developed regions. R. Oyarzún, basing on that fact, tried to show that Don Carlos’s cause was supported by the wealthiest and “the most progressive” parts of Spain³². This hypothesis could also be rejected not just because R. Oyarzún’s idea about “rich and civilized provinces” does not have any serious theoretical definition, but also because don Carlos obtained the support of only a part of the whole population of Catalonia and the Basque provinces. G. Tortella wrote that Carlism found support “of modest, but not miserable peasants attached to the Catholic Church, and averse to paying taxes in coin, something especially burdensome in a time of falling grain prices”³³.

²⁸ *Терецук А. А.* Регионализм в идеологии раннего карлизма // Петербургский исторический журнал. 2020. № 2 (26). С. 153–164.

²⁹ *Caridad Salvador A.* La historiografía reciente sobre el primer carlismo (2006–2018) // *Studia historica. Historia contemporánea*. 2020. № 38. P. 219–222. See also: *Caridad Salvador A.* La desigual distribución espacial del primer carlismo: Una propuesta explicativa cuantitativa. P. 84–86; *Lawrence M.* The First Carlist War (1833–40), insurgency, Ramón Cabrera, and expeditionary warfare // *Small Wars & Insurgencies*. 2019. № 30 (4–5). P. 797–817. It should be taken into consideration that in the second half of the XIX century, regionalism became a much more important element in Carlist ideology.

³⁰ *Lawrence M.* The First Carlist War (1833–40), insurgency... P. 799.

³¹ E. g., *Manifiesto de Abrantes* // Ferrer M., Tejera D., Acedo J. F. *Historia del tradicionalismo español*. Tomo III. Sevilla, 1942. P. 287–288; *Manifiesto de Castelo Branco* // Ferrer M., Tejera D., Acedo J. F. *Historia del tradicionalismo español*. Tomo III. Sevilla, 1942. P. 289–291.

³² *Oyarzún R.* *Historia del carlismo*. Valladolid, 2008. P. 19–20.

³³ *Tortella G.* *Catalonia in Spain: History and Myth*. Cham, 2017. P. 93.

It is known that “revolutions owe less to insurgents than to the work of systemic crises which render the existing regime weak and vulnerable to challenge”³⁴. J. Fontana who tried to colligate the popularity of Carlism with the impoverishment of the population. According to the historian, the movement gained support not in the poorest areas, but rather in the territories that experienced a considerable economic downfall at the beginning of the XIX century³⁵. That hypothesis was recently subjected to criticism by M. Santirso who pointed out that *comarcas* related to Royalism and Carlism differed considerably in their economic evolution before and during the crisis of the *Ancien Régime*, and that such a phenomenon as impoverishment does not explain the possible support of the Carlist uprising³⁶. J. Fontana and M. Santirso based their analysis on the study of Catalonia, although their observations and conclusions could be extrapolated to other regions of Spain. The perception of Carlism as a movement supported mainly in impoverished areas needs some additional analysis. It could not be the only reason for the Carlist uprising in 1833, but probably one of its motives, at least in some areas.

Studying the reasons for the outbreak of war, we could easily observe a considerable difference between the economic systems in northern Spain (in the regions that mainly supported don Carlos) and in the southern part of the country. At the beginning of the XX century, Russian historian V. K. Piskorsky showed that “the most prosperous were the peasants in the regions of Spain with small land property... as in the Basque provinces, Asturias, Navarre, Catalonia, and Valencia... The more to the south lay an area, the less favorable for the peasants was the distribution of land”³⁷. That observation referred to the late XVIII century but could also be considered relevant for the 1830s. Basing on that fact, it is easy to conclude that Carlism gained popularity mainly in the regions with small or medium land property and communitarian structures inherited from *Ancien Régime*³⁸.

This idea does not explain the start of the Carlist uprising or the support that don Carlos got in these regions. A supposition can be made that peasants in the north were more independent from big landowners than agricultural laborers in the south. An Andalusian peasant had to look for seasonal employment on big *latifundias*. His survival depended upon the big landowners, who mainly sided with Cristinos. At the same time, “a modest, but not miserable”³⁹ peasant in Catalonia, Navarre

³⁴ McAdam D., McCarthy J. D., Zald N. M. (Eds.). Comparative perspectives on social movements: Political opportunities, mobilizing structures, and cultural framings. Cambridge University Press, 2004. P. 24.

³⁵ Fontana J. Crisi camperola i revolta carlina // Recerques: Història, economia i cultura. 1980. № 10. P. 7–16.

³⁶ Santirso M. Contra un carlisme telúric: breus apunts sobre la localització del reialisme-carlisme a 1820–1840 // L'Erol. 2017. № 132. P. 9.

³⁷ Пискорский В. К. История Испании и Португалии. От падения Римской империи до начала XX века. С. 202–203.

³⁸ Pérez J. Op. cit. P. 573.

³⁹ Tortella G. Op. cit. P. 93.

or the Basque provinces had an opportunity to sustain his family with his own parcel of land, i. e., he had no direct dependence on local landlords.

One should add to that observation the fact that a considerable part of the population of these regions belonged to the local gentry. At the end of the XVIII century, 47 % of inhabitants of Biscay and 42 % of these in Gipuzkoa were nobles; in Navarre, this percentage was from 5,7 to 8,4 %. By contrast, in Andalusia, the nobles represented only from 0,30 to 0,68 %, in Extremadura, 0,89 % of the population⁴⁰. The fact of pertaining to the local nobility had a psychological relevance: a local *hidalgo* could have lower income than his neighbors in the village, but he considered himself independent in his decisions.

Conclusion. The First Carlist War started as a consequence of a combination of multiple factors. It would be a simplification to explain it only by dynastic, religious, or economic reasons. The dynastic dispute was a pretext for the Carlists to start the rebellion in 1833. Don Carlos's claim to the Spanish throne is irrelevant from the point of view of explaining the division between the two sides of the civil war, but it was very important for the Royalists in 1833. They hoped that don Carlos as a King would carry out more conservative policy than his brother and would stop incipient reforms of the last years of the reign of Ferdinand VII. In such a way, we cannot deny the importance of the dynastic dispute between don Carlos and Isabella, although it was not the real problem that caused a division in Spanish society.

As it was shown, it would be incorrect to assert that all Spanish clergy sided with the Carlists. Despite their self-determination as "defenders of Throne and Altar", the partisans of don Carlos did not represent all Spanish Church. We cannot agree with the point of view that the religious factor was decisive in the outbreak of the First Carlist War. At the same time, one should not deny its importance in Carlist propaganda and its relevance for some combatants. Probably, many Carlists believed that they were fighting for their faith and religion, and it could be a good motivation for them to join the movement.

The latest studies in that field have shown that earlier ideas concerning social aspects of the conflict are not convincing. The First Carlist War was not a struggle between poor and rich, city and countryside; neither was it a rebellion for *fueros*, traditional privileges of some provinces and towns in the north. It can be supposed that the Carlist rebellion was mainly a movement of some peasants, artisans in small towns, and local gentry in areas with a small or medium land property that suffered a certain economic decline at the beginning of the XIX century.

⁴⁰ *Caridad Salvador A.* La desigual distribución espacial del primer carlismo: Una propuesta explicativa cuantitativa. P. 101–102.

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