

Excerpt from the remarks of His Royal Highness the Prince of Asturias

at the closing of the historic seminar *"Diego María Gardoqui: Bilbao Trader and first Ambassador of Spain to the United States"*.

Guggenheim Museum of Bilbao, 23 April 2008

The life and works of Diego María de Gardoqui, the shrewd businessman and prestigious diplomat who was the first Spanish Ambassador to the United States, undoubtedly merit the analysis and reflection that have been dedicated to them during the sessions of this seminar.

And what better mentor could there be for coordinating this task than the Fundación Consejo España – EE. UU., an institution that has been working tirelessly over the years to strengthen the bonds between Spain and the United States.

It is a fruitful work that, on this occasion, has highlighted the close collaboration between Americans and Spaniards in the process of shaping the United States, this historic nation. It is important to pay tribute to this period and raise awareness in both our countries about the impact Spain had on US history. It is, furthermore, an excellent way to get to know each other better and to reflect on our common past, in order to embrace the future side by side.

Undoubtedly, the high-level diplomatic mission entrusted to Ambassador Gardoqui played a key part in guaranteeing Spain's active support for the birth of the United States.

There was an understanding in Spain that the 1776 Declaration of Independence implied a profound transformation and our country decided to support the emergence of this great nation by providing economic, financial, military, and human resources. From that first moment, many illustrious figures on both sides devoted considerable efforts to establish permanent bilateral ties between our country and the future United States.

In the above context, Ambassador Gardoqui showed exceptional talent and skill in carrying out instructions received from the King, and he played a singular role in the service of the Spanish-American friendship, as has been underlined throughout this seminar.

As ambassador, he dove into the task at hand, putting to use his sound knowledge of international trade, his mastery of the English language, tireless energy, and personal contacts, as well as the good offices of his Bilbao family business. He managed to guarantee significant financial and material contributions for the founding fathers of the United States. Furthermore, his merits of perceptiveness and discretion allowed him to successfully fulfill the sensitive political and diplomatic missions with which he was entrusted.

Once his mission was completed, the King of Spain showed his appreciation to Gardoqui by asking him to represent him at the solemn inauguration of President Washington.

Gardoqui is, therefore, the perfect example of the extraordinary influence that countless distinguished figures from the Basque Country have had in shaping the history, culture, and international reputation of Spain through the ages.

The values and virtues of these illustrious figures have made the Basque Country, and, as such, the whole of Spain, what it is today, and we owe them our greatest respect and gratitude. Ambassador Gardoqui embodied these values and virtues and is part of that same living tradition.

Ladies and Gentlemen, by studying the life of Diego María de Gardoqui in depth, this seminar brings to the fore the deep-rooted friendship and mutual respect that binds Spain and the United States together.

A friendship and respect that today are enhanced by a myriad of ties and connections, the result of decades of close political, economic, commercial, scientific, and cultural contact and exchanges. This current relationship is greatly strengthened by our shared commitment to the same values and principles of freedom and democracy, and by our common status as allies and partners in countless bilateral projects and in multilateral organizations and forums.

The great migratory flows that have transformed American society, and the growing importance of the Hispanic minority and investments by Spanish companies in the United States are some of the reasons why today both countries should strive to recover and enhance the value of our shared historical past and harness the promising collaboration opportunities that are opening up for the future.

It only remains for me to extend my sincere congratulations to the Fundación Consejo España – EE. UU. and its American counterpart, the U.S. Spain Council, for the significance and quality of your work, which I have followed closely for many years, and to which I offer my full encouragement and support.

Thank you very much. Eskerrik Asko.



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Diego María
1735-1798
de Gardoqui
y Arriquiribar

RENOWNED
MERCHANT
AND DIPLOMAT
FROM BILBAO



A historical approach
to the first representative of Spain
in the US to mark the
XXVI Spain-United States Forum

BILBAO, JULY 1-2, 2022

Diego María de Gardoqui y Arriquirar (Bilbao, 1735–Turin, 1798) was one of the most important figures in providing Spanish support for George Washington and American independence. While Bernardo de Gálvez, the hero of Pensacola, was renowned for his military prowess, Gardoqui played the leading role in political and diplomatic matters. Here, he put his abilities as a shrewd businessman and his in-depth knowledge of Anglo-Saxon culture to the service of Spain and the strengthening of ties with this future great power.



Anonymous author from Spain. Coat of Arms of Diego de Gardoqui, 18th century. DIB/15/61/3. Biblioteca Nacional de España.

Diego de Gardoqui was born in 1735 into one of Bilbao's most influential families. Bilbao was, and remains today, one of the main ports in northern Spain. The Gardoqui family business had close commercial links to England and its colonies in North America and Diego was sent to study in London for five years. Here, he learnt all about the international trade of the day and perfected his English. His language skills played a key part in his later friendships with some of the protagonists of the United States' struggle for independence: George Washington, Arthur Lee, and John Jay.

On his return from England to Bilbao, Diego joined the family business and started to play an active part in the city's public life, working for the City Council and for the main trade and economic regulatory body, the Bilbao Consulate. In 1766, he married Brígida de Orueta y Uriarte, with whom he would have three children.

The Gardoquis were a dynasty of shipowners and traders specializing in the buying of cod and salmon from British waters in the Americas. They also imported rice, tobacco, and indigo from these colonies and exported Spanish wool, naval supplies, and iron in return. The company *Gardoqui e hijos* (Gardoqui and Sons Co.) had close links with the main Massachusetts ports (Salem, Boston, Beverly, and Gloucester) and with the prominent families

of the American colonies such as the Cabots and the Gerrys, particularly Elbridge Gerry who would be elected vice president in 1812.

All the above meant that Diego Gardoqui had a clear idea of the prerevolutionary atmosphere that reigned on the east coast of North America and an extensive network of contacts. This is why ministers of King Charles III (first the Marquis of Grimaldi and then the Count of Floridablanca) opted for Gardoqui and his family trading business to play a confidential role in service of the state, providing covert assistance to George Washington and his allies.

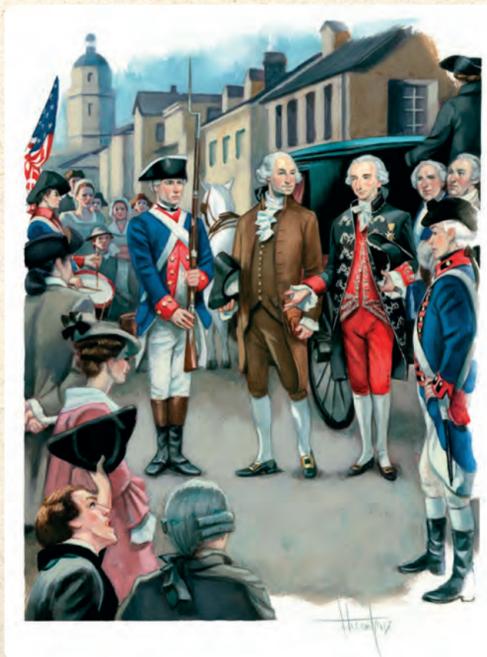
Even before the first shots of the American war were fired at the Lexington and Concord battles (Massachusetts) in April 1775, the Gardoquis had already begun shipments of muskets, weapons, and bayonets to their trading partners in Massachusetts, which were traded in turn for American goods. This cargo was sent in absolute secrecy but had to be officially authorized by the Spanish Government. The shipments continued over the following months and from September 1775 onwards, Gardoqui and Bilbao are often mentioned in the *Journal of the Continental Congress*.

Meanwhile, the American envoys stationed in Paris, led by Benjamin Franklin, were attempting to convince France and Spain to go to war with England. One of the envoys, Arthur Lee, requested to visit the Spanish Court in Madrid. However, the Spanish minister Grimaldi preferred to be discreet, and so instead of receiving Lee in Madrid, the secret meetings were held in Vitoria, a city not far from Bilbao and the French border. The meetings took place in March 1777 and Gardoqui, with his thorough understanding of the American revolutionaries, was invited to interpret and negotiate. Although Lee did not manage to convince Spain to declare war on England, he did manage to secure finance from King Charles III for extra muskets and other supplies. He also received blue and white cloth to make uniforms for the revolutionaries as well as 30 thousand blankets and four thousand tents. These 1777 shipments were essential given that the winter of 1777-78 was particularly harsh for the American revolutionary army, camped out at Valley Forge, Pennsylvania.



Some of the most significant supplies that were sent from Spain (weapons, tents, blankets, uniforms, etc.) displayed in a historical recreation at the *Memorias Recobradas - Recovered Memories* exhibition, Iberdrola, 2018.

Following the meeting with Arthur Lee in Vitoria, the Gardoqui business continued its shipments from Bilbao, although from now on these were mostly paid for with money rather than goods. The shipments continued in secret until Spain officially declared war on England in June 1779 and started to send further aid from Louisiana, Havana, Cadiz, and Veracruz. In order to manage these operations, Gardoqui was in regular correspondence with John Jay, who at the time was the American envoy to Spain, and in January 1780, in Bilbao, he met at length with John Adams, who would eventually become the second president of the United States.



"I have been, am, and will be a true friend of the United States," Gardoqui wrote to Washington in 1786.

Fernando Vicente, *Gardoqui and Washington*. 2017. Private collection. Excerpt from the *Memorias Recobradas - Recovered Memories* exhibition catalog, Iberdrola, 2018.

After the British surrender at Yorktown in October 1781 and the end of the US War of Independence, given his close links to key figures in Congress, Gardoqui was ideal candidate to defend Spanish interests in the fledgling nation. He was appointed Spanish Ambassador to the United States in 1784. In 1785, he arrived in New York, which for five short years was the US capital and seat of Congress and took up residence in a Lower Manhattan mansion.

As part of his work, Gardoqui set out to establish the frontiers between the new country and the extensive Spanish territories in North America of the time and also negotiated an agreement on sailing and trading rights on the Mississippi river. Throughout these endeavours, he counted on the valuable support of important figures such as Arthur Lee, James Monroe, and Richard Henry Lee. Gardoqui also sought to maintain close relations with George Washington, who was living at his Mount

Vernon estate in Virginia and who, although he held no official public office, was the leading figure of the time. As well as delivering a donkey (a valuable stud) as a gift from King Carlos III to Washington, he also presented him with a fine Peruvian vicuña cloth and an opulent edition of Cervantes's *Don Quixote*. In New York, Gardoqui contributed to the building of St. Peter's Church, the first Catholic church in the city, and became a member of the American Philosophical Society, founded and presided over at the time by Benjamin Franklin. Towards the end of his mission, in April 1789, Gardoqui was a privileged guest of honour during George Washington's historic inauguration as the first President of the United States.

On his return to Spain, Gardoqui was named Secretary of the Treasury, an illustrious position that he held for five years. While in this role, he coordinated the translation into Spanish and circulation of Adam Smith's work "The Wealth of Nations." After his time in government he returned to diplomacy, representing Spain in Sardinia, and residing in Turin (Italy) where he died in 1798, at the age of 63.



Miniature portrait of Diego M. de Gardoqui. Turin, 18th century. García Cano de Gardoqui Family Collection, Valladolid. Courtesy of José Luis Cano de Gardoqui.

For this article, works and articles were used by the following authors: Reyes Calderón, Begoña Cava, Thomas Chávez, Enrique Eernández y Fernández, José Manuel Guerrero, Salvador Otamendi and Elisa Vargas, as well as material from the seminar "Diego María Gardoqui: Bilbao Trader and First Ambassador of Spain to the United States" organized by Fundación Consejo España-EE. UU., in collaboration with the Bilbao Chamber of Commerce. This event took place in the Guggenheim Museum of Bilbao on 23 April 2008, with technical coordination by Eduardo Garrigues and support from Teresa Querejazu.

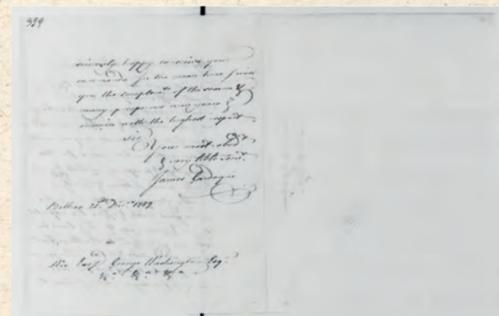
More information available at www.spainusa.org



The estuary, the old town, and even Diego María de Gardoqui's birthplace can be seen in this *Vista de la muy noble villa de Bilbao*, 1760. Private collection. Excerpt from the *Memorias Recobradas - Recovered Memories* exhibition catalog, Iberdrola, 2018.



In 1977, to mark the Bicentenary of US Independence, King Juan Carlos I presented the city of Philadelphia with a sculpture by Luis Antonio Sanguino de Pascual, *Monument to don Diego de Gardoqui*, which is located at Ben Franklin Parkway, Logan Circle. Creative Commons.



The extensive exchange of correspondence - of huge historical interest - between Gardoqui and George Washington, clearly shows the friendship that united them, as well as the high esteem in which the first president of the United States held the trader from Bilbao. *George Washington Papers, Series 4, General Correspondence: Diego de Gardoqui to George Washington, in Spanish, with Translation*. 1789. Manuscript/Mixed Material. Library of Congress, www.loc.gov/item/mgw436571/.