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MONOGRÁFICO · SPECIAL ISSUE

VIAJE DEL MUNDO
ENSAYOS EN HONOR A CARLOS MARTÍNEZ SHAW

A TRAVELLING WORLD
ESSAYS IN HONOR OF CARLOS MARTÍNEZ SHAW

THE ACCIDENTAL TRAVELER: JOHN ADAM'S JOURNEY THROUGH NORTHERN SPAIN, 1779–1780

EL VIAJERO ACCIDENTAL: LA JORNADA DE JOHN ADAMS POR EL NORTE DE ESPAÑA, 1779–1780

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Abstract

In 1779, John Adams, the future second president of the United States, traveled in mid-winter across northern Spain. En route to Paris to negotiate a peace treaty between Great Britain and its rebellious former North American colonies, a leaking vessel forced Adams and his party to land unexpectedly at El Ferrol and then continue overland to France. Using his diary as its principal source, this essay focuses on Adams's accidental journey, his impressions of the economic, political, and religious condition of the places he visited, together with the future president's thoughts about the possibility of creating closer relationship between his country and the Spain of Charles III.

Keywords

John Adams; Spain; Travel; 18th Century; United States; Diplomatic and political relations

Resumen

En 1779, John Adams, futuro segundo presidente de los Estados Unidos de América, viajó a mediados del invierno de ese año a lo largo del norte de España. En su ruta a París para negociar un tratado de paz entre gran Bretaña y sus antiguas colonias rebeldes de Norte América, una vía de agua obligó a Adams y a su grupo a desembarcar inesperadamente en El Ferrol, donde continuaron de camino hasta Francia. Mediante el uso de su diario como principal fuente de estudio, este trabajo se ocupa del accidentado viaje de Adams, de sus impresiones acerca de las condiciones económicas, políticas y religiosas de los lugares que él visitó, junto con los pensamientos del futuro presidente a propósito de las posibilidades de establecer una relación más cordial y cercana entre su país y la España de Carlos III.

Palabras clave

John Adams; España; Estados Unidos; Siglo XVIII; Viajes; Diplomacia

1. Johns Hopkins University.

JOHN ADAMS —ELECTED THE SECOND President of the United States of America in 1796— had no reason to visit Spain. His intended destination was Paris, where, having been named minister plenipotentiary by the Continental Congress, he was to direct the negotiations designed to secure a peace treaty with Great Britain, end the war of independence that had begun in 1776, and secure recognition of his country as a sovereign state. The journey was also one that Adams was somewhat reluctant to undertake as he had recently returned to his native Boston from a previous trip to Paris where he had successfully negotiated a treaty of commerce and friendship with Louis XVIII and t secured French support for the American cause. Under the circumstances, the prospect of crossing the Atlantic once again was a source of worry, or as he himself noted in his diary: “I had again the melancholly Tryal of taking Leave of my Family, with the Dangers of the Seas and the Terrors of British Men of War (Nov. 13, 1779)”²¹. But take leave he did. His patriotism required that he return to France, accompanied by Charles Dana, his commission’s secretary, his private secretary, Mr. Thaxter, his two sons, John, aged 12, Charles aged nine, John’s tutor, and two servants. Even so, when Adams left Boston harbor 13 November 1779, he not only worried about the hardships that a December crossing of the Atlantic might bring, together with the condition of his vessel, the aging, and terribly over-crowded French frigate, *Sensible*.

As it turned out, Adams was right to worry, as the weather soon turned bad, and the aging ship soon sprang a leak that the crew was unable to plug. With the ship’s pumps working full tilt, and the danger of sinking growing worse each day, the French captain eventually decided to change course, and steered his vessel southwards in the hope of reaching what Adams referred to as “one of the Western Islands”, presumably the Azores (Nov. 25, 1779). But as his diary reads: “We missed them and some day in the beginning of December 1779 We found ourselves, as was supposed within one hundred Leagues of Ferrol or at least of Corunna, to one or the other of which places We determined to direct our Course with all the Sail, the Ship could prudently bare. The Leak which kept two Pumps constantly going, having determined the Captain to put into Spain.”

Adams was now in an quandary, or what he called a “great Embarrassment”, as he pondered different ways of getting to Paris as quickly as possible. Should he remain with the *Sensible* and await repairs? Try to locate another vessel heading for France? Or travel overland? His diary reads:

Whether I should travel by Land to Paris a journey of twelve or thirteen hundred miles, or Wait for the Frigate to be examined and repaired, which would might require a long time? Whether I could get Carriages, Horses, Mules or any other Animals to convey Us? What Accommodations We could get upon the Road? How I could convey the Children, and what the Expences would be? were all questions which I could not answer:

2. BUTTERFIELD, 1961, entry for 13 Nov. 1779. The diary is available on-line at Adams Family Papers: An Electronic Archive, <http://www.masshist.org/digitaladams/archive/autobio/>. His notes on this trip to Spain may be found in Part 3: entries from 13 Nov. 1779 through 23 Jan. 1780. The dates here refer and throughout this essay refer to the relevant daily entries in the diary.

nor could I find any Person on board, who was able to give me any satisfactory Information. It was said however by some that the Passage of the Pyrenees was very difficult: that there was no regular Stage or Post: that We must purchase Carriages and Horses &c. . . . I could not help reflecting how much greater these inconveniences had been rendered, and how much more our perplexity if the rest of my Family had been with me. With Ladies and young Children and Additional Servants Male and Female We should have been in more distress on Land [illegible] than at Sea" (Nov. 25, 1779).

On 8 December 1779, after almost three weeks at sea, the *Sensible*, still leaking badly, finally made to El Ferrol, on Galicia's northern coast, and the passengers hurriedly disembarked from the crippled vessel. The next day, after having learned that the *Sensible* was practically beyond repair, Adams made the decision to travel overland and began the process of hiring carriages, horses, mules and the supplies that both he and his party would need in the course of their mid-winter journey to France.

So began Adams's accidental journey across northern Spain, one that followed the route of the famed *Camino de Santiago*, albeit in reverse. Along the way, Adams recorded his day-to-day experiences in the diary-cum-autobiography that he had kept for many years. In what follows, I draw upon this invaluable source, together with the Adams's correspondence, to reconstruct the future president's impressions of Spain at a moment when the Continental Congress was actively seeking to enlist the support of Charles III. The previous summer the monarchy had allied with France and declared war on Great Britain, and in the months that followed its forces, after having captured West Florida, was using it as a base to attack British positions in and around New Orleans. Spain's informal entry into America's war of independence also prompted the Congress to send a representative to Madrid with instructions to negotiate a treaty of friendship and commerce modeled upon the one recently signed with France. That representative was the New York lawyer-turned statesman, John Jay, who, as turned out, arrived in Cadiz en route to Madrid less than a week after Adams had completed his journey across Spain.

Jay's experiences in Madrid and failure to secure the treaty he was sent to negotiate have attracted the attention of historians for a number of years³. In comparison, what little has been written about Adams's journey has focused on the hardships he and his party endure as they trekked across Spain as opposed to his broader impressions of the country and his thoughts about the possibilities for close relations between his country and Spain⁴. These hardships deserve comment, but as I shall argue here, did little to dampen Adams's support for the treaty that Jay had been sent to negotiate and which, following a delay of fifteen years, eventually came to fruition in the guise of Treaty of San Lorenzo of 1795.

3. The relevant literature includes YELA UTRILLA, 1988; CHAVEZ, 2002.

4. The trip receives only brief mention in Mc CULLOUGH, 2001. It is, however, recounted in some detail in "Johns Adams and the Camino Santiago", available on-line at http://www.americanpilgrims.com/newsletter_archive/newsletter_article_archive/0911_john_adams_camino.pdf. The extracts include there, focus less on political matters than the physical hardships that the Adams party encountered as they journeyed along the Camino.

It is important to recognize is that when Adams first set foot in El Ferrol, he had certain preconceived ideas about Spain and its culture. Trained primarily in the classics at Harvard College, Adams was proficient in both Latin and Greek. He was also fluent in French and used this language to communicate with the Spanish officials he met upon landing in El Ferrol. Yet within his days of his arrival, he determined to correct this deficiency and visited a local bookseller where he purchased “Sobrino’s Dictionary in three Volumes in Quarto, The Grammatica Castellana an excellent Spanish Grammar in their own Tongue, and a Lattin Grammar in Spanish”. He was also presented with “a very handsome Grammar of the Spanish Tongue by Sobrino”. “By the help of these Books”, he then wrote, “the Children as well as the Gentlemen of our little Company were soon employed in learning the Language. To one who understood the Latin it seemed to be easy and some of Us flatter’d ourselves, that in a Month We might be able to read it, and understand the Spaniards as well as be understood by them. But experience taught Us our Error and that a Language is very difficult to acquire especially by Persons in middle Life” (Dec. 14, 1779)⁵. As a result, before setting out on his journey, Adams made certain to secure the services of a translator with whom he spoke in French.

Adams’s lack of Spanish did prevent Adams from reading some of the classics of Spanish literature. From his diary (“On Board all Day, Reading Don Quixot.” May, 18, 1779) we know that he had read *Don Quixote* —probably in Tobias Smollet’s English translation of 1755— during his voyage from Brest to Boston in the spring of 1778, and subsequently conveyed his apparent enthusiasm for the novel to his precocious twelve-year-old son, John Quincy, another future president of the United States. It is not clear how much of the novel the child twelve-year old had actually read prior to his arrival in Spain, but on the very first day of his journey he wrote the following comment in his diary: “we set out like so many Sancho Panzas and Don Quixotes”⁶.

It is not clear whether Adams had read the work of Spanish authors other than Cervantes, knew far more about Spain’s history than one might expect of a New England Protestant of Puritan stock. Otherwise, it is difficult to explain his regret of not having the time in the course of his journey to make a detour to Santiago de Compostela and visit the city’s famous shrine (Dec. 18, 1779) The diary also provide clues indicating that Adams, an avid reader well-versed in the works of John Locke, Voltaire, Adam Smith and other Enlightenment authors, understood that much of Spain’s former greatness had been lost thanks to despotic monarchy, an entrenched feudal nobility, and an overbearing Church. Adams’s thoughts on this matter may also have been shaped by his reading of Henry St. John, Viscount Bolingbroke’s *Letters on the Study and the Use of History*, first published in 1752. This volume included a capsule history of the setbacks Spain had suffered starting with Philip II, a ruler Bolingbroke characterized as one who had bequeathed to his

5. The books Adams refers to are SOBRINO, 1697; SOBRINO, 1705. Little is known about Sobrino except that he was a language instructor based in Brussels. For a brief introduction to his work, see Anónimo, “Vida y obra de Francisco Sobrino,” <http://parnaseo.uv.es/Lemir/Textos/Sobrino/INTRO.htm>.

6. ALLEN, TAYLOR, FRIEDLANDER & WALKER, 1981, vol. 1: entry for Dec. 15, 1779.

heirs a monarchy “founded in ambition, in pride, in ignorance, in bigotry, and all pedantry of state”. Bolingbroke also viewed Spain as a country “devoured” by the Church and that “monster”, the Inquisition, and thus one with “no good order, no economy, nor wisdom of policy”⁷. Adams would have derived a similar impression of Spain’s fall from greatness from William Robertson’s *History of Charles v* (1769), another book he knew quite well. In addition, his reading of the Scottish historian’s *History of America* (1777) taught him that Spain had done little to develop the economic potential of its American colonies, a lesson which would have also gleaned from the Abbé de Raynal’s *L’Histoire philosophique et politique des établissements et du commerce des Européens dans les deux Indes* (1770)⁸. Thucydides —another of his favorite authors— and other ancient historians provided Adams with a cyclical fortunes of kingdoms and states together with the idea of *translatio imperii*. “If we look into history”, he wrote in a letter dating from 1755, “we shall find some nations rising from contemptible beginnings and spreading their influence, until the whole globe is subjected to their ways. When they have reached the summit of grandeur, some minute and unsuspected cause commonly effects their ruin, and the empire of the world is transferred to some other place”⁹. Adams continued with a reference to Rome, and subsequently to England, but when he wrote these worlds, he was probably also thinking of Spain.

Finally, it worth noting that well before Adams landed in El Ferrol, he had a fairly good understanding of the dilemma that America’s bid for independence created for Charles III. As England’s enemy, the Spanish monarchy was prepared to support the American cause, but feared that if it did do so openly, it might not only lead to armed reprisals of various sorts but also encourage independence movements in its own colonies in the Americas. Adams discussed just this issue with a French passenger, a certain Chevalier de la Luzerne, in the course of his journey from Brest to Boston in 1778. Luzerne told him that after the English rejected Spanish “Propositions for Peace”, the Spaniards “were now determined to declare them selves on the side of France, and to assist them [against the English] with all their Force by Land and Sea, in every Part of the World, and accordingly they have ordered 17 Ships of the Line or 19 to join the Comte D’orvilliere, making up 50 Sail, in the whole. They [the Spanish] have a Minister in America, at Congress. And they are to concert with Congress all their military Operations. Without saying any Thing about the Independance of larger image of America.” Apparently confused by what the Frenchman had told him about Spain’s dilemma, Adams’s offered only a terse response: “Je ne comprend pas le Politique D’ Espagne said I” (June 21, 1779).

Further misunderstandings would occur once the Adams party landed in El Ferrol. From the outset, moreover, Adams came prepared to see an impoverished, downtrodden country and this is exactly the Spain his diary records. He little positive to say, for example, about the clergy. From this perspective, they were far too

7. *Letters on the Study and the Use of History*, in *The Works of Lord Bolingbroke*, Philadelphia, Carey and Hart, 1841, vol. 2: 247–252 at 251. This edition is available in Google Books.

8. Adams had dined with Raynal in Paris in January, 1778.

9. Letter of Oct. 15, 1755, reproduced in ADAMS & ADAMS, 1871, 30.

numerous, and far too wealth, as the diary entry recording his visit to La Coruña on December 22 readily suggests. Having prepared a quick census of the town's monasteries, he noted that "The Orders of Ecclesiasticks at Corunna are only Three, The Dominicans, the Franciscans, and the Augustins, but the numbers who compose the Fraternities of these religious Houses are a burthen beyond all proportion to the Wealth, Industry and population of this Town. They are Drones enough to devour all the honey of the Hive".

Adams was similarly overwhelmed by the religious fervor of the worshipers he observed in various churches and convents. In El Ferrol, for example, he admired the architecture of the town's recently reconstructed neo-classical Church of San Julian, yet also felt obliged to remark that "We saw Numbers of Devotees upon their Knees, some before the Altar and some before one Statue or Picture and some before another. This kind of Devotion was much more fashionable in Spain than in France" (Dec. 14, 1779) His visit a few days to a Franciscan convent was equally memorable. There he noted that "They [the nuns] are very industrious ... at their Prayers and devotions that is to say in repeating their Pater Nosters, in counting their Beads, in kissing their Crucifixes, and taking off their hair Shifts to whip and lacerate themselves every day for their Sins, to discipline themselves to greater Spirituality in the Christian Life. Strange! that any reasonable Creatures, any thinking Beings should ever believe that they could recommend themselves to Heaven by making themselves miserable on Earth. Christianity put an End to the Sacrifice of Iphigenias and other Grecian Beauties and it probably will discontinue the Incineration of Widows in Malabar: but it may be made a question whether the Catholick Religion has not retained to this day Cruelties as inhuman and antichristian as those of Antiquity" (Dec. 22, 1779).

With these respect to these "cruelties" Adams felt compelled to ask one of the Spanish officials he met in La Coruña some questions about the Inquisition, and he was apparently somewhat surprised by the answers he received. Those answers, he wrote, "were guarded and cautious as I expected. Nevertheless he answered me civilly and candidly." But Adams then learned "That the Inquisition in Spain was grown much milder, and had lost much of its Influence. Europe in general was much enlightened and grown more moderate, and the public Opinion in Spain participated of the general Information, and revolted against the Cruelties of the Inquisition" (Dec. 22, 1779).

Such news Adams warmly embraced in as much as he was apt to have regarded the Inquisition as synonymous with cruelty, torture, and death. Yet this was not the only surprise Adams encountered in the course of his journey. The first came on the morning of Friday, December 10, his first full day in Spain. "Breakfasted for the first time on Spanish Chocolate which fully answered the fame it had acquired in the World. Till that time I had no Idea that any thing that had the Appearance of Chocolate and bore that name could be so delicious and salubrious" (Dec. 10, 1779). He also admired some of the paintings he saw in churches and during one visit to a monastery in El Ferrol, he noted that the "Music was good" (Dec. 18, 1779). Then too he had favorable comments about the workings of the Spanish judiciary which, as a lawyer, he had a particular interest. In El Ferrol, for example, he noted that

“The ancient Laws of the Visigoths are still in Use, and these, with the Institutes, Codes, Nouelles &c. of Justinian, the Cannon Law and the Ordinances of the King, constitute the Laws of the Kingdom of Galicia” (Dec. 14, 1779). Further enquires led to the following observations:

The Chief Magistrate of the Town of Ferrol, is The Corregidor. For the Province or Kingdom of Galicia, there is a Sovereign Court of Justice, which has both civil and criminal Jurisdiction. In all criminal Cases it is without Appeal, but in some civil Cases an Appeal lies to the Council at Madrid. There is no time allowed in criminal Cases for an Application for Pardon, for they execute forthwith. Hanging is the Capital Punishment. They burn sometimes but it is after death. There was lately a Sentence for Parricide. The Law required that the Criminal should be headed up in a hogshead, with an Adder, a Toad, a Dog and a Cat and cast into the Sea. But I was much pleased to hear that Spanish humanity had suggested and Spanish Ingenuity invented a Device to avoid some part of the Cruelty and horror of this punishment. They had painted those Animals on the Cask, and the dead body was put into it, without any living Animals to attend it to its watery Grave (Dec. 14, 1779).

One other aspect of his visit Adams found to his liking was the “Politeness and Attention” he received on the part of the Spanish officials he met, initially in El Ferrol, and subsequently in La Coruña where the Provincial Governor informed Adams that “he had orders from Court to treat all Americans as the best Friends of Spain” (Dec. 15, 1779). There in addition to hosting a sumptuous dinner during which Adams enjoyed Spanish wines— he particularly recalled the “Sherry, Alicant, and Navarre”, along with “pork and bacon” which he found superior to that he previously consumed in France.” (Dec. 19, 1779) In addition, he noted that the officers he met peppered him with questions about his name and family background, asking me “very gravely whether I had not been born in Spain? or whether my Father was not a Spaniard? or whether I was not in some Way of Spanish descent?” Adams then noted that “I thought these questions very whimsical and ridiculous, but I determined to keep my Spanish gravity and answered them civilly and candidly that I was born in America, and so was my Father and Grandfather, but my Great Grandfather and Great Great Grandfather came from England, where their Ancestors had lived for any Thing I knew, from the Days of the first Adam”. But if Adams was somewhat put off by questions such as these, he also reported that “These Gentlemen however discovered on other Occasions more Sense and Solidity”. They were very solicitous to know our American Forms of Government, and I sent to my Lodgings and presented each of them with a printed Copy of the Report of the Committee of Convention of Massachusetts Bay, made in this Year 1779, The as a Specimen of what would probably be nearly the Constitution of that State. They said they would have them translated into Spanish and should be highly entertained by them”. He was equally to pleased to learn that same officials were “all very inquisitive about Mr. Jays Mission: to know who he was, where he was born, whether he had ever been a Member of Congress, and Whether President.” (Dec. 19, 1779).

But the good times did not last forever. On 26 December 1779 Adams and his party, assisted by French speaking guide, set out on their journey to France, stopping first at Betanzos, which he described as “the ancient Capital of the Kingdom of Galicia, and the place where the Archives are still kept.” (Dec. 26, 1779). Traveling by horse, coach and mule, progress was slow, the weather often poor, and according to Adams, the lodgings they encountered were almost invariably substandard and plagued with fleas that Adams referred to as his “Bosom companions and nocturnal enemies” (Dec. 27, 1779). So exhausting was the journey that when he reached Burgos in three weeks later, he felt compelled to write that

For more than twenty Years I had been almost continually engaged in Journeys and Voyages and had often undergone severe Tryals, as I thought; great hardships, cold, rain, Snow, heat, fatigue, bad rest, indifferent nourishment, want of Sleep &c. &c. &c. But I had never experienced any Thing like this journey... Every Individual Person in Company had a violent Cold, and were all of Us in danger of fevers. We went along the Road, sneezing and coughing, in all that uncomfortable Weather, and with our uncomfortable Cavalry and Carriages, in very bad roads, and indeed were all of Us fitter for an Hospital than for Travellers with the best Accommodations on the most pleasant Roads... In my whole Life my Patience was never so near being totally exhausted” (Jan. 11, 1780)¹⁰.

A week later, however, after having spent several days in Bilbao, Adams crossed the Bidasoa into France, spending his first night there in St. Jean de Luz before moving on to Bayonne. At that point, he wrote, “And never was a Captive escaped from Prison more delighted than I was, for every Thing here was clean, sweet and comfortable in Comparison of any Thing We had found in any part of Spain” (Jan. 20, 1780).

The hardships of mid-winter travel aside, Adams’s accidental journey across Spain seemed also to confirm many of his pre-existing notions about Spain, especially the extent to which monarchy, acting in unison with the nobility and the Church, had conspired to impoverish its people. Just outside Lugo, for example, he observed that:

I saw nothing but Signs of Poverty and misery among the People: a fertile Country not half cultivated: People ragged and dirty: the Houses universally nothing but mire, Smoke, Soot, fleas and Lice: nothing appeared rich but the Churches, nobody fat but the Clergy. Many of the Villages We passed, were built with Mud filled in between joists, Nine tenths of them uninhabited and mouldering to dust. Yet in every one of these Scenes of desolation, you would see a splendid Church, and here and there a rosy faced Priest in his proud Canonicals rambling among the rubbish of the Village... The Roads the worst, without exception the worst that were ever travelled, in a Country where it would be easy to make them very good: No Simptoms of Commerce, or even of internal Trafick: No Appearance of Manufactures or Industry” (Dec. 30, 1779).

10. Echoing his father, the young John Quincy Adams described the trip as “the worst three weeks that I ever passed in my life.”

His impressions of the area around León was roughly the same:

At the distance of every League, We had passed through a Village built altogether of Mud and Straw. They have no timber nor Wood nor brick nor Stone. These Villages all appear going to decay and crumbling to dust. Can this be the ancient Kingdom of Leon? Nevertheless every Village has Churches and Convents enough in it, to ruin it, and the whole Country round about it; even if they had nothing to pay to the King, or the Landlords. But all three together Church, State and Nobility exhaust the Labour and Spirits of the People to such a degree, that I had no Idea of the Possibility of deeper Wretchedness. Ignorance more than Wickedness has produced this deplorable State of Things, Ignorance of the true Policy which encourages Agriculture, Manufactures and Commerce. The Selfishness and Lazyness of Courtiers and Nobles, have no doubt been the Cause of this Ignorance: and the blind Superstition of the Church has cooperated with all the other causes and increased them" (Jan. 8, 1780).

Nor did his entrance to Burgos on 11 January 1780 did little to change Adams's mind about the ill-effects of the Church. "This famous City of Burgos", he wrote, "the ancient Capital of the famous renowned Kingdom of Castile and once an Archbishoprick, dissappointed me very much. The Squares, public Buildings, Fountains and Walks are said to have been once very remarkable. But after I had taken some Walks about the Town, my Expectations were not answered... There were some few Trades and a little Appearance of Business here; but the principal Occupation was Religion." And then, as if to prove his point that the clergy was partly responsible for the city's ills, he calculated that Burgos had ten female convents, eight for males, and fifteen parish churches, for a total of thirty three religious establishments. In his view this "Army of Ecclesiasticks" was far too large for "so small a Town as Burgos" and seemingly confirmed his conviction that the clergy was little more than a major brake on the Spanish economy (Jan. 11, 1780).

Next came the Basque Country. On the road through Espejo, a mountain village in Alava, Adams detected signs of commercial activity he had missed elsewhere. On January 14, for example, he commented on how "We had seen great Numbers of Mules loaded with Merchandizes from Bilbao. The Mules and their Drivers looked well, in Comparison with those We had seen before. Their Burthens were Salt Fish, Sardines, Cod, and a sort of fish that We saw here, very plenty, called Besugo" (Jan. 14, 1780)¹¹.

Adams also had high expectations for Bilbao, where, starting on 15 January 1780 his party met up with José and his son Diego Gardoqui, the Basque merchants who had been providing clothing and military supplies to George Washington's troops for several years. With the Gardoqui serving as a tour guide, Adams's first impression of the Basque capital was wholly favorable:

11. One negative comment here: The Mules carry also, Horse Shoes, ready made in Bilbao to be sold in various parts of the Kingdom. But what an Idea does this give of the State of Manufactures in a Country, when Horse Shoes must be carried many hundreds of miles upon the backs of Mules, to be sold for the Supply of the Farriers.

We spent the Day in perambulating the Town. We visited the Wharves upon the River, went through the Marketts, which We found plentifully furnished with Fruits and Vegetables, Cabbages, Turnips, Onions, Beets and Carrots, Apples, Pears, Raisins, Figs and Nutts. We went as far as the Gate, where We had entered the Town, then turned up the Mountain by the Stone Stairs, where We saw some fine Gardens, with verdure and Vegetation (Jan. 18, 1780).

But criticisms soon followed. “We took a view of a Book Sellers Stall, but as this Country, though it gloried in its Liberty was not the Region of Litterature, We found nothing very curious or worth mentioning.” He echoed these sentiments after the Gardoqui, in an effort to impress Adams with Bilbao’s commerce, “conducted Us to a Number of Shops, of Glass, China, Trinketts, Toys and Cutlary.” But the tour proved something of a disappointment, and prompted the comment that “We found nothing to give Us any great Idea of Bilboa [sic] or Biscay as a commercial Country, though there were several Shops and Stores, pretty large and full of Merchandizes” (Jan. 18, 1780).

Despite these disappointments —and there were others, among his inability while in Burgos to locate a map of Spain that he could purchase— Adams remained optimistic about the possibilities for commerce between Spain and the United States, together with the prospects for a treaty of the kind Jay had been sent to negotiate. At the start of his trip Adams attempted to pick up whatever information he could about Jay’s chances for success, but as he himself recognized, his lack of Spanish limited the number of individuals with whom he was able to communicate about matters of politics. Before leaving El Ferrol, however, he discussed the possibility of a treaty with the French consul there along with a certain “Mr. Linde an Irish Gentleman”, whom he described as a “Master of a Mathematical Accademy here”, possibly a reference to the Real Academia de Ingeniería de la Armada established by Charles III in 1770. Both informants told him that “the Spanish Nation in general have been of Opinion that the Revolution in America is a bad example to the Spanish Colonies, and dangerous to the Interests of Spain, as the United States if they should become ambitious and be seized with the Spirit of Conquest, might aim at Mexico and Peru. The Consul mentioned the Opinion of Raynalle, that it was not for the Interest of the Powers of Europe, that America should be independent” (Dec. 14, 1779).

These observations matched up with those he had heard the previous year from the Chevalier de la Luzerne and which, as noted above, left Adams somewhat puzzled about the direction Spanish policy was to take. Yet, drawing upon what he had seen during the course of the journey, Adams recognized the potential for both contact and commerce between his country and Spain. He undoubtedly also recalled that early in his journey some officials in La Coruña had told that “all kinds of Grain would come from America to a good Market in this Country; even Indian Corn, for they never raised more than their Bread and very rarely enough of that. Pitch, Tar, Turpentine, Timber, Masts &c. would answer. Salt Fish, Sperm Coeti Candles, Rice &c.” (Dec. 19, 1779). He subsequently expressed his thoughts on trade and related topics in a letter of 16 January 1780 he directed to Samuel Huntington,

President of the Continental Congress. It began with a brief geographical description of Galicia that highlighted the region's "multitude" of harbors and ports. He observed, however, that

With all these Advantages for foreign Commerce, this Province has but very little, but what is passive. It receives from abroad some Objects of daily Consumption, some of Luxury, some of convenience, and some even of the first necessity. At present it offers little for exportation to foreign Countries. The Sardine of its coast, the famous fish which it furnishes to all Spain; the Cattle which it fattens for the provision of Madrid; a few coarse linnens, which are its only Manufacture, and are well esteemed, are the Objects of its active Commerce, and form its ballance with the other Provinces. The Wine and the Grain, the chief productions of its Lands, seldom suffice for its consumption and never go beyond it. (Jan. 16, 1780).

He further noted that the "Liberty of Commerce with the Windward Islands, granted by the Court... have opened the Ports of that part of the new World to this Province." On the other hand he noted that Galicia, lacking "Manufactures herself, or any of those Productions proper for America", benefitted little from this trade except for what "she detaches from the whole." In contrast, Adams saw greater potential for commerce with "Leon and Castile" and where he had observed "numerous Flocks of Sheep, with the most beautifull Fleeces of Wool in the World." "I could not but wish", he added, "that some communication might be opened, by which the United States of America might be furnished with this necessary Article, from this Country." In exchange he envisioned a "Spanish Markett" for such American "Articles of Exportation" as "Rice, Pitch, Tar, Turpentine, Tobacco, Wheat, Flour, Ship timber, Masts, Yards, Bowsprits and Salt Fish." All of these, he commented, "might be supplied to Spain at an Advantage, and in return she might furnish Us, with Wine, Oyl, Fruits, some Silks, some Linnens perhaps, and with any quantity of Wool, which is now exported to foreign Countries for Manufacture, and might as well be sent to Us, but above all, with Silver and Gold" (Jan. 16, 1780).

Yet Adams realized that this "Spanish Markett" was not likely to develop overnight. Rather, he noted, "It must be a work of time, of a freer intercourse between the two Nations, and of future Negotiations to ripen these Hints into a Plan, that may be beneficial to both." He also recognized that among the obstacles to such a "Plan" were the mercantilist policies of the kind of Spain and other European states had traditionally maintained to protect their domestic markets and to domestic industry and manufacturing. Such policies translated into high import tariffs and laws restricting commercial access to their colonies overseas. He therefore warned Huntington that "The System of Revenue, which it is dangerous and difficult to alter in Spain as well as in all other Countries of Europe, will be the principal Objection" (Jan. 16, 1780).

Adams was right. As early as 1777, the Count of Aranda, Spain's ambassador in Paris, recognized that the emphasis that American delegates in Paris were placing on "reciprocal trade", but warned that any extension of that "concession" to her

American dominions would necessarily “destroy the nation’s commerce”¹². In contrast, a few months after his arrival in Madrid, the Continental Congress reminded John Jay about the importance of “our commerce with Spain”, and this issue is likely one that the emissary raised in his discussions with the foreign minister, Count of Floridablanca, during the course of his two-year stay in Madrid. In the end, of course, Jay’s mission went no where, as he failed to secure the treaty he sought. Differences over tariffs and trade are generally thought not to have been the primary obstacle preventing Spain’s official recognition of the United States as compared to Spain’s reluctance to accede to US demands for access to the Mississippi River and the “right of deposit” in the port of New Orleans, — but they almost certainly hovered in the background, as Adams had previously observed. The Treaty of San Lorenzo resolved these and a number of other on-going territorial issues in addition to securing Spain’s official recognition of the United States, but again failed to address the issue of tariffs, let alone develop a mercantile “Plan” of the kind Adams had envisioned during his stay in Bilbao.

Interestingly, the absence of such a “Plan” continued to haunt Adams long after his one term President (1797–1801). In a letter drafted in June, 1818 to William Tudor, the 83-year-old Adams reflected upon the issue of tariffs, free trade, and Europe’s colonial system, which together represented many of the same issues he had discussed during the course of his visit to Spain almost forty years before. Towards the end of the letter, he posed the question:

when will France, Spain, England, and Holland renounce their selfish, contracted, exclusive systems of religion, government, and commerce? I fear, never. But they may depend upon it, their present systems of colonization cannot endure. Colonies universally, ardently breathe for independence. No man, who has a soul, will ever live in a colony under the present establishments one moment longer than necessity compels him¹³.

Adams, of course, never could quite understand why Spain, a country much smaller, and whose resources were far more limited than his own, would seek to defend such “exclusive” systems, let alone squander valuable treasure to fight to retain colonies already on the brink of independence. Nor, it seems, could he truly be able to fathom the idea of the United States of becoming an expansionist policies. The Federalist party to which he belonged was generally opposed to eral, Federalists like In 1778, for example, when one Frenchman had asked him whether the United States would ever “think of becoming Conquerers”, Adams responded: “I said it was impossible they should for many Ages. It would be Madness in them to think of conquering foreign Countries, while they had an immense Territory, near them uncultivated. That if any one State should have a fancy for going abroad it would be the Interest of all the rest and their Duty to hinder her” (June 18, 1779).

12. Count of Aranda to the Marqués de Grimaldi, 13 January 1777, as translated in BOTERO, 2001, 17, note 22.

13. John Adams, John Adams to William Tudor Quincy, June 17, 1818 in ADAMS, 1819, 269.

For this reason, it seems, Adams found it difficult, it is impossible to comprehend why Spanish officials might have another, alternative view of the United States. At the same time he was likely to have been ignorant of the advice the Count of Aranda, Spain's ambassador in Paris, had secretly offered to Charles III shortly after the United States and Great Britain had signed the Treaty of Paris in 1783. Aranda was generally supportive of the US bid for independence, but on this occasion he proffered the following advice:

This federal republic is born a pigmy... It has required the powerful support of two such power states as France and Spain to obtain its independence. The day will come when it will be a giant, even a colossus, formidable in these countries. She will forget the services she has received from the two powers and will think only of her own aggrandizement... In a few years we shall watch with grief the tyrannical existence of this same colossus¹⁴.

Yet it is also possible, and in view of previously expressed skepticism about expansionism, that the fiercely-independent Adams might also have been in sympathy about Aranda's prophetic observation about the future of the young country whose interests he had dedicated so much his life to protect.

14. 13. The original text of Aranda's prophetic memorandum is available on line at: <http://biblio.juridicas.unam.mx/libros/8/3637/9.pdf>.

APPENDIX I

ADAMS'S ITINERARY

1779	Nov 15	leave Boston
	Dec 8	El Ferrol; La Coruña to Betanzos
	Dec 27	Betanzos to Castellano
	Dec 28	Castillano to Baamonde
	Dec 29	Baamonde to Lugo
	Dec 30	Lugo
	Dec 31	Lugo to Galliego
	Dec 31	Galliego de O Cebreiro
1780	Jan 1	O Cebreiro to Villafranca
	Jan 2	Villafranca to Ponferrada
	Jan 3	arrive Astorga
	Jan 5	Astorga to León
	Jan 6	León to Mansillas
	Jan 7	Mansillas to Sahagún
	Jan 8	Sahagún to Sellada el Camino via Paradis de Navas
	Jan 11	Sellada del Camino to Burgos
	Jan 13	Briviesca via Pancorbo to Espejo
	Jan 14	arrive Lugiando
	Jan 15	arrive Bilbao
	Jan 20	leave Bilbao for St Jean de Luz via Fuenterrabia
	Jan. 22	St. Jean de Luz
Jan 23	arrive Bayonne	

APPENDIX II



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