

Bernardo de Iriarte, of the Palm Genus *Iriartea*

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In the last decades of the eighteenth century, the Spanish colonies in the New World were organized into gigantic administrative regions termed "viceroyalties," the government of which was supervised by the Council of the Indies in Madrid with ultimate responsibility vested in the King. These massive domains included, from north to south, the viceroyalty of New Spain (present-day southwestern United States, Mexico, and Central America north of Panama); the viceroyalty of New Granada (today's Colombia, Venezuela, Ecuador and Panama); and the viceroyalty of Peru.

Expecting the discovery of new dimensions in mineral and plant wealth, including mercury, cinnamon and quinine at various times, the kings sent expeditions to New Granada in 1750 (directed by José Mutis); to New Spain in 1787-1803 (commanded by Martin de Sessé and José Mociño); and to the viceroyalty of Peru in 1778-1788, led by the 22-year old botanists Hipólito Ruiz and José Antonio Pavon (Goodman 1972). During Ruiz and Pavon's explorations in Peru, a stilt-palm unknown to science was collected, and subsequently named as the new genus *Iriartea* (Fig. 1). The namesake of this palm, diplomat Bernardo de Iriarte, is the subject of this story.

The Ruiz and Pavon expedition was, in the words of its chronicler A. R. Steele (1964), the "first comprehensively documented study of plant life in the Spanish New World." The first major publication, entitled *Florae Peruvianae et Chilensis Prodromus* (1794), was underwritten by

Charles IV who received 41,900 pesos in donations from the fortunate people on his Empire-wide list of "suggested contributors." Ruiz and Pavon followed an understandable procedure, glorifying new plant discoveries by naming several in commemoration of the sponsors and well-wishers of their expedition. Thus, in the *Prodromus* are found newly described, for example, the genera *Carludovica* (Cyclanthaceae, compounded in reference to patrons King Charles IV and Queen Louisa); *Godoya* (Ochnaceae, for Manuel de Godoy, benefactor of Madrid's Royal Botanical Garden, King's Minister and Queen's paramour); and, on page 149 the genus *Iriartea* for Don Bernardo de Iriarte, promoter of the noble arts and sciences, especially botany, and councillor on matters of the Indies.

Iriarte's family was from the Canary Islands, an Atlantic archipelago long colonized by Spain. According to his baptismal certificate, which is fully quoted by Emilio Cotarelo y Mori in *Iriarte y su Época* (1897, primarily about Bernardo's famous literary uncle Don Juan and his poet brother Don Tomás), our subject Bernardo Siméon de Iriarte was born on Tenerife on February 18, 1735, the son of Doña Bárbara Cleta Marcelina de las Nieves y Oropesa and Don Bernardo de Iriarte, whose Christian (given) name he evidently received. He was baptized on March 1, 1735 in Puerto de la Cruz, island and diocese of Tenerife, province of the Canaries.

After a period of schooling he engaged in literary enterprises on a stipend from



1. Bernardo de Iriarte, after the painter, Goya, reproduced with permission of The Metropolitan Museum of Art, N.Y.

the public exchequer, assisting his uncle Don Juan in the production of a Latin-Spanish dictionary during 1754-1756. While still quite young, he proceeded to obtain in 1758 the position of secretary of the Embassy in London. When his mission in England was finished he was appointed to serve as a mediator in the office of the First Secretary of State (of Spain), and he later, in 1773, rose to the

office of First Secretary of State. Soon, in 1774, he was elected to membership of the Royal Academy of San Fernando, a high honor.

Iriarte's career was in the ascendancy, and he was promoted to occupy a seat on the Council of the Indies recently vacated by his friend Don Fernando Magallón. With his work as a political dignitary came much lucrative and honorific recognition.

In 1787 he became director of the *Compañía de Filipinas* (Company of the Philippines); in 1792 Vice-Protector of the Royal Academy of San Fernando (an academy of fine arts; he collected Murillo, Van Dyck, Velazquez); and in 1797 he was made Minister of the Royal Junta of Agriculture, Commerce, and Shipping Beyond the Seas. At some point he married a lady from a distinguished Gibraltar family, Doña Antonia Sáez de Tejada y Hermoso; sources do not record any children from this union.

Iriarte edited an account of the voyage of pursuit made in 1579–1580 by Pedro Sarmiento de Gamboa in search of Sir Francis Drake who had attacked Peru, and this volume was published in 1768 (Braganza and Oakes 1974), but it seems Iriarte's later writings mostly concerned the political turmoil of life in neighboring Portugal: it was the era of Napoleonic venturism throughout Europe.

Recalling that Iriarte was Vice-Protector of the Royal San Fernando Academy, we can appreciate that he numbered among his friends the volatile Aragonese painter Goya (Francisco Goya y Lucientes, 1746–1828), who had long been associated with the Academy and was Director of the Academy's Painting Department as of 1795 (Lepore 1967). Goya made, in 1797, a portrait of his friend Iriarte wearing the decoration of the Order of Charles III (Trapier 1964); it was exhibited at the Academy on November 1, 1797. The canvas presents an Iriarte with aloof and fastidious bearing, yet with the persuasive dignity of an "arrived" man. The original painting is in the Musée de la Vieille, Strasbourg, France, and the one reproduced here (Fig. 2) is a late eighteenth century copy of it after Goya, now kept in storage in the Metropolitan Museum of Art, New York City (Wold, pers. comm.).

In this period Emperor Napoleon Bonaparte (1769–1821) was expanding, in the name of the French Revolution against tyranny, his extensive roster of conquered client-states, often placing his relatives

upon the thrones of erstwhile local kings (Putman 1982). A war on Spanish soil was provoked against Portugal for not respecting France's call for embargo of English ships in Portuguese ports. It flared into the Iberian Peninsular War of 1808 to 1814, resulting in the abdication of King Charles IV of Spain who was replaced by Napoleon's brother Joseph as King (in 1808). Due to this atmosphere of turmoil in the peninsula, at various times everyone—Charles IV, his son Ferdinand VII, Goya, and Iriarte—chose exile in France (rather than in England, which ultimately won the war through the Iron Duke of Wellington).

The particular circumstances leading to Iriarte's exile have been summarized by Trapier (1964) as follows: "Iriarte was chosen by the Council of the Indies to welcome Joseph Bonaparte to Madrid in 1809, and at the court of the latter he was made a member of the Council of State. He received from Joseph Bonaparte the Royal Order of Spain and seems to have favored the Frenchman, which placed him under suspicion as an *afrancesado* (Frenchified Spaniard). Like many other Spaniards, after the War of Independence he went to Bordeaux to join the colony of refugees from Spain who had established themselves there." Iriarte died in Bordeaux on August 13, 1814. His wife outlived him, in Germany.

Luciano Bernardi (1977) summed up the era by saying (in translation): "Considering . . . the troubled years undergone by Spain in Ruiz and Pavon's time—the Napoleonic occupation, the clumsily achieved Restoration, the long and vain war in Latin America—the accomplishment of Ruiz and Pavon is quite respectable." In addition to the 1794 *Prodromus* in which *Iriartea* was published, they produced *Systema Vegetabilium Florae Peruvianae et Chilensis* (1798) in which the type species *I. deltoidea* was described, and the 3-volume *Florae Peruviana et Chilensis* in 1798–1802.

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