

José Antonio de Armona y Murga. Noticias privadas de casa útiles para mis hijos

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Ana Hontanilla. "Armona y Murga, José Antonio de. *Noticias privadas de casa útiles para mis hijos*. Eds. Álvarez Barrientos, Joaquín, José María Imízcoz, and Yolanda Aranburuzabala. Gijón: Ediciones Trea, 2012." *Dieciocho* 36.1 (Spring 2013): 152-153.

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Abstract:

This article is a review of *Noticias privadas de casa útiles para mis hijos* (1787) by José Antonio de Armona y Murga and edited by Álvarez Barrientos, Joaquín, José María Imízcoz, and Yolanda Aranburuzabala.

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Article:

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This edition of the complete *Noticias privadas de casa útiles para mis hijos* (1787) makes a significant contribution to the fast growing body of scholarship that in the last few years has centered on the Basque and Navarre families who rose to power and served in high-ranking positions of the Bourbon administration. The volume fruitfully integrates the research of two historians and one literary scholar. Since 1996, José María Imízcoz has written extensively examining the interconnectedness of the leading families from the Basque and Navarra regions. Imízcoz has established the centrality of these familial relationships in the political and social structure of the Ancient Regime. His previous work on the types of personal relationships and principles that structured access, career development, and exercise of power in the Hispanic Atlantic administration of the modern era casts light on his present contribution. Imízcoz has convincingly argued that the Bourbon reforms opened a space for action, personal agency, and great opportunities for enrichment, parallel to the regular exchange of favors. This development positively impacted a few families from the north of Spain.

The focus on Armona y Murga's autobiographical writings, however, facilitates the move from theoretical reflections of bondage, kinship, and mutual dependency to an individual case study. Imízcoz offers the reader a comprehensive description of the conditions that promoted the four Armona y Murga brothers to move from the remote area of Respaldiza in Alava to the centrality of the royal administration. He explains the socio-professional background the Armona's shared with other families, the official assignments that created common experiences, as well as the specific difficulties José Antonio, writer of *Noticias privadas*, endured in his assignments as a royal agent. Doctorate candidate at the Universidad del País Vasco Yolanda Aranburuzabala identifies the individuals who received distinctions and became knights of a military order. She traces the genealogical map of the prominent families in the valley of Alava to show their inner connection through kinship, among whom the four Armona y Murga brothers were included.

Joaquín Álvarez Barrientes published part of the *Noticias privadas* in an earlier edition in 1989, offering a brief biography of José Antonio Armona y Murga and an analysis of his narrative describing his accomplishments as Mayor of Madrid between 1788 and 1790. Álvarez Barrientes has extensively studied the involvement of the man of letters in the public space. He has previously argued that the literary production of Spanish men of letters at the turn of the eighteenth century was a form of political action. With regard to *Noticias privadas*, however, Álvarez Barrientes understands that this narrative is not a literary work but a complex text that merits analysis for reasons other than its aesthetic value. First, it was produced for limited viewing only to be read among family members--the author reveals political secrets whose public circulation would have brought political downfall; second, the text integrates moral and political reflections with the hope of offering useful guidance to his descendants; and, finally, the author reveals awareness associated to narrating one's involvement in the machinery of the Bourbon's reforms. Álvarez Barrientes traces the history of the different manuscripts, and finds in Armona y Murga's private library a collection that exemplifies his commitment to knowledge and culture.

The editors of this volume are transforming a field that opened in 1969 with Julio Caro Baroja's *La hora navarra del XVIII* highlighting three skillful and innovative approaches that underscore the historical and literary value of José Antonio Armona y Murga's autobiography. *Noticias privadas de casa útiles para mis hijos* is a pleasure to read and the text is crucial for scholars interested in the political intricacies associated with the administration of the Hispanic Atlantic World. It is also of great interest to those immersed in the study of eighteenth-century culture, curious about first hand descriptions of the 1755 earthquake, personal interactions between the Spanish elite and British travelers in Spain, and contemporaneous representations of local traditions.

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