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## *To Read Like an Inquisitor*

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**Abstract:** *The political environment furthermore defined what could (not) be said publicly. In the case of early modern Spain, the authorities and the Inquisition exerted an oppressive system of censorship and persecution. The threatening climate forced authors and publishers to apply strategies of camouflage and concealment. Using the example of the court physician Francisco Fernández Navarrete (1680-1742) and his unpublished manuscripts, I am examining some of the effects—e.g., omissions, ambiguities, and double layers—that pose particular challenges for historians of science who work with sources from this period.*

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Anyone writing a book or lecturing at a university in 18th century Spain probably had a particular audience in mind: The *Tribunal del Santo Oficio de la Inquisición*, generally known as the Spanish Inquisition. In addition to being a menace to life and limb, the Inquisition posed also a financial threat to publishers and authors, even beyond the geographical limits of their jurisdiction, as books on the *Index librorum prohibitorum* would suffer from poor sales figures on the European market.<sup>1</sup>

Authors, publishers, and academic teachers developed a variety of strategies to evade the Holy Office's attention. In his guide to letter writing, the humanist Juan Vives gave advice on how to guard against "unwanted readers": The prudent thing to do, he suggests, is conceal our opinion

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<sup>1</sup>For a catalog of books targeted by the different index releases between 1551 and 1815 see Martínez de Bujanda 2016.

(*velare sententiam nostram*<sup>2</sup>), to obfuscate the true meaning of our words (*sensum obscurare*<sup>3</sup>), or to convey sensitive topics in foreign languages, such as German or English<sup>4</sup>. Likewise, it would be advisable to resort to enigmata and arcane language in confidential matters<sup>5</sup>

Some scholars hoped to get more leeway by writing in Latin than in Spanish, as expressing a dissenting opinion in a vernacular language might be deemed an attempt to incite the populace. Another strategy was to litter the text with biblical quotations and authoritative theological references while painstakingly omitting questionable literature (and, confusingly for today's readers, those were frequently the very influences the author was actually drawing on). Yet another resort was to publish anonymously. In certain circumstances, it was possible to influence the inner mechanics of the decision-making. The *imprimatur* required a two-step approbation: In the first instance, the *ensor civil*, usually a scholar with relevant expertise, furnished an approval certificate (*aprobación*). Relying on that expert opinion, the formal permission called *Licencia del Ordinario* was issued.<sup>6</sup>

To cite an example from the field of astrological meteorology, the *Cartilla rustica*<sup>7</sup> by Torres Villarroel (1727), professor of mathematics at the University of Salamanca, was approved by Francisco Arias Carrillo, professor of theology and mathematics. Both knew each other, as

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<sup>2</sup>Vives 1989: 104, par. 79

<sup>3</sup>Vives 1989: 104, par. 79

<sup>4</sup>Vives 1989: 104, par. 78

<sup>5</sup>Vives 1989: 104, par. 78. Vives applied these strategies in his own correspondence—he switched, e.g., in a letter to Greek to insert the lines "Say this and they will declare you a heretic" (J.L. Vives to Frans van Craneveldt, 22.02.1523, Craneveldt 1928: 111; see also Noreña 1970, p. 73f.)—and he knew only too well about the potential perils: A native of Valencia and a *converso* (i.e., a descendant of Jewish converts to Catholicism), he lived then in Bruges as a protégé of Erasmus. Meanwhile, inquisitorial prosecutors accused his family in Valencia of secretly practicing the faith of their ancestors and burning them at the stake (Noreña 1970: 20; Monter 2002: 22-24).

<sup>6</sup>The licensing decision fell under the ecclesiastical jurisdiction of the *inquisidor ordinario*, typically the *ordinarius* (bishop) of the diocese where the book was printed. The *licencia* as the formal act of approval was usually signed by a proxy of the bishop.

<sup>7</sup>The *Cartilla rustica* is a peculiar work. The author makes — almost a century after the invention of the first meteorological measuring devices—no mention of meteorological instruments; instead he cites numerous astrology-based weather rules and the reading of signs in the skies like the color of clouds or particular features of a rainbow. The most striking feature, however, is an extensive catalog of weather predictions by animal behavior, for instance, how different species of birds, cows, donkeys, mules, dogs, insects, etc., each one in their own specific way, are presaging rain (Torres Villarroel 1727: 9f)

archival evidence shows, and Torres Villarroel returned the favor by exuberantly praising his censor in the preface of his next publication.<sup>8</sup> Whether or not it was indeed an approval by courtesy, Arias Carrillo's assessment uses a deliberate and strategic wording in favor of Torres Villarroel<sup>9</sup>: «[...] en este papel tratada la ciencia natural, con un genero de solidéz, que no se aprende en las Escuelas, la Philosophia pura, y libre del confuso horror de las opiniones, y el conocimiento de la naturaleza no intricado en la espesura de la altercacion.»<sup>10</sup> (...*this booklet treats natural science in a sound way that is not taught in schools, it is genuine philosophy free from the confused horror of [diverging] opinions and demonstrating a knowledge of nature that is not entangled in the thicket of [academic] rows.*)

The *Santo Oficio*, however, worked by unpredictable rules: The main targets and the intensity of surveillance changed frequently and due to rampant corruption<sup>11</sup>, the tribunals became sometimes a tool for personal agenda.<sup>12</sup> Not even the approval of civil and religious censors proved to be a reliable safeguard: Authors and books were still at the whim of the Holy Office, as it happened to Torres Villarroel in 1743 when the inquisitors did prosecute him for his 1730 book *La vida natural y catholica* notwithstanding that it was printed with all the required permits.<sup>13</sup> While the Inquisition posed a continuous threat to potentially anyone, some were more at risk than others. In the early 18th century, physicians became a major target, in part because a new wave of antisemitism put the many *conversos* among them at the center of attention (de Lera García 1989: 164), in part because certain medical practices and teachings were suspected to be heretical<sup>14</sup> While the list of victims includes renowned academics such as Diego Mateo Zapata (depicted in chains in Goya's gouache *Zapata tu gloria será eterna*<sup>15</sup>), the tribunals did

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<sup>8</sup>«...Don Francisco Arias Carrillo, ingenio el mas glosioso, y el alma mas feliz, que oy tiene la racionalidad Española [...]» (Torres Villarroel 1728: [ii])

<sup>9</sup>See also Durán López 2021: 113 on the approval.

<sup>10</sup>Aprobación de Don Francisco Arias Carrillo, Professor de Theologia, y Mathematicas, in: Torres Villarroel 1727, front matter

<sup>11</sup>(Lera García 1988)

<sup>12</sup>It was no accident that Juan Vives used the name of the capricious goddess "Fortuna" to refer in code to the Inquisition (Noreña 1970: 73f).

<sup>13</sup>See the introduction to Torres Villarroel 2005 and the biographical entry in <https://historia-hispanica.rah.es/biografias/42678-diego-de-torres-villarroel>.

<sup>14</sup>See the case studies in Sarrión Mora 2006; astrology (there is a potential overlap with the by then "meteorology" was deemed as suspicious and sometimes as sacrilegious, see Sarrión Mora 2006: 79-113

<sup>15</sup>Francisco de Goya y Lucientes: *Zapata tu gloria será eterna* (Cuaderno C)

not confine their activities to universities and the publishing sector. As a study of a persecution campaign in Fernández Navarrete's home state of Granada shows, the inquisitors targeted general practitioners in rural communities as well (de Lera García 1989: 164). This is the environment in which the authors of the period had to operate. And, I think, we have to take that environment in account when we are working with source material, especially if we study texts with some kind of public exposure (printed books, letters, university lectures).

Those texts can pose a challenge to the reader if, for instance, the authors took precautionary measures and used narrative strategies to hide, omit, or disguise perilous topics. The elusive nature of these texts makes them sometimes difficult to deal with because their ambiguities, allusions, and hidden meanings are easy to miss or misread. For historians of science, this means looking for clues and traces, scrutinizing text passages for possible clues to an alternative reading, or in other words, to read those texts with the suspicious mind of a *calificador*, the assessor tasked with examining books for theologically objectionable content.

This approach is not based on a new insight: Carlo Ginzburg (who worked extensively with inquisitorial sources from Italian archives) has pointed to certain similarities between an inquisitor's scrutiny and the mode historians and anthropologists examine their sources (Ginzburg 2012: 224; Ginzburg 1992: 156-164). The question we must bear in mind is the following: What was it like, to write, publish, or lecture at the continuous risk of being accused of capital offenses.<sup>16</sup>

The Holy Office was an omnipresent and pervasive entity, permeating the social fabric. The traces of its looming presence can be found in all kinds of historical sources, but it was perhaps the universities where the Inquisition had the most persistent impact. I will take the University of Granada as an example where Francisco Fernández Navarrete spent the better part of his academic career at the University of Granada, first as a student of medicine and then as a faculty member taking the regular career path of holding first the less prestigious (and poorly paid)

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1814-1823, Museo del Prado: <https://www.museodelprado.es/coleccion/obra-de-arte/zapata-tu-gloria-sera-eterna/096968fc-60c6-431f-b55c-25cee9c3fa8a>; For the legal sources related to the case against Zapata see Sarrión Mora 2006: 153-177.

<sup>16</sup>In a scholarly context, this is related to the question of what Michel Foucault called *parresia* "as a specific modality of truth-telling" (Foucault 2011), i.e., the question if and how philosophical/scientific truth can be spoken. On this topic and with respect to the *conversos* in early modern Spain, see Schreiber 2017

professorship called *cátedra de Vísperas* until being appointed to the prime Chair of Medicine (*cátedra de Prima*).<sup>17</sup>

For any research on universities in early modern Spain, there are two routine search queries to start with: the *libro de claustros* (faculty register) and the *expediente de limpieza de sangre* ("dossier on the purity of blood"). The latter probably best encapsulates the climate of suspicion and threat that prevailing in the intellectual landscape. The proof of "blood purity" was an official procedure to establish that someone's ancestry was "free from all bad races such as Moors, Jews, and Moriscos" and did also not include anyone prosecuted by the Inquisition.<sup>18</sup> The certificate was required for all kinds of governmental and ecclestial appointments, and it was also the prerequisite for the license to practice medicine—which is why it came as no surprise that Fernández Navarrete's personnel file in the university archive did contain his *Expediente de limpieza de sangre* (see fig. 3 and fig. 2). I also looked into the catalogs of *claustros* which are numerous sources of information on faculty members, remunerations, lecture topics and decision-making regarding all aspects of teaching. The two volumes pertaining to the time period of Fernández Navarrete's tenure are digitized, a total of 1.000 pages written by many different hands.<sup>19</sup> However, just by leafing randomly through the register, I came immediately across a lengthy passage regarding the Inquisition, the *limpieza de sangre* policy, and the medical department.<sup>20</sup>

In my next archival inquiry, I consulted Fernández Navarrete's manuscripts in the archive of the *Real Academia Nacional de Medicina*. Only two of four volumes are digitized, which left me with some open questions that might or might not be answered by getting access to the complete record. Apart from that, the papers are in good condition except for some minor issues.<sup>21</sup>

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<sup>17</sup>Gil Albarracín (RAH): «Fernández Navarrete»

<sup>18</sup>Expediente de limpieza de sangre de Francisco José Fernández Navarrete, fol. 6 (ES AUG I 175 PRINCIPAL CAJA 01473/005)

<sup>19</sup>Universidad de Granada, Archivo Universitario: a) *Libro de Actas del Claustro Universitario, Libro 10* (1696/09/01 -1715/11/09). Reference code: ES AUG A 104 PRINCIPAL LIBRO AC 00009. <https://archero.ugr.es/portalArchivo/registro?id=00158117> & b) *Libro de Actas del Claustro Universitario, Libro 11* (1716/11/12 -1743/11/10). Reference code: ES AUG A 104 PRINCIPAL LIBRO AC 00010. <https://archero.ugr.es/portalArchivo/registro?id=00158118>

<sup>20</sup>*Libro de Actas del Claustro Universitario*, libro 11, 202r-203v (ES AUG A 104 PRINCIPAL LIBRO AC 00010).

<sup>21</sup>The binding was not done in continuous chronological order, the dating of the 1703 volume

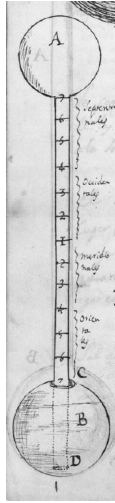


Figure 1: Fernández Navarrete's drawing of Fludd's weather glass; the scales symbolize the coordinates in Fludd's cosmology (1703: 216v).

Fernández Navarrete's manuscripts provide valuable insights into theory and practice of Spanish medicine in the early decades of the 18th century. He was not only a medical scholar, but also a practitioner, presumably for wealthy and influential patients; he also was part of the king's medical advisory staff: see Fig. 5. The medical content of the manuscripts covers excerpts, case histories, and prescriptions (that is, formulations that the pharmacist should prepare accordingly). I have focused on the sections related to meteorology in a broader sense (given that today's definition of the field cannot be equated to the categories back then) and paid special attention to his notes on instrumental measurements, possible clues about main influences, and possible mismatches between his published writings and the manuscripts.

Although in his books and in the *Ephemerides barometrico-medicae matritenses* he quoted only Catholic authors, his excerpts indicate a wide range of readings (and thus intellectual influences), including Francis Bacon, Robert Fludd<sup>22</sup>, Thomas Sydenham<sup>23</sup>, Sephardic authors like Maimonides, and Descartes who had become the epitome of the Spanish church's campaign against the advocates of the early Enlightenment, the so-called *novatores*.<sup>24</sup> The Fernández Navarrete papers also

appears to be incorrect, and there is some water damage (problems that are usually easier to approach with the physical manuscript at hand). One fascicle features an incomplete index by a different hand, likely Tomás Francisco Monleón y Ramiro who is named in the metadata of the papers and was an academy member at the time of Fernández Navarrete's death (<https://historia-hispanica.rah.es/biografias/31105-tomas-francisco-monleon-y-ramiro>).

<sup>22</sup>Fernández Navarrete 1703: 216, 219r; Fludd was one of the purged authors Fernández Navarrete used to read. Based on the literature I have consulted, there is no indication that Fernández Navarrete was granted or did even as for the church's dispensation to read purged texts.

<sup>23</sup>Thomas Sydenham (*Observationes Medicae*, 1676) was a trailblazer in a more empirical approach to medicine and his work clearly influenced the Madrid project. Fernández Navarrete does not mention Sydenham in the *Ephemerides*, but the manuscripts show that he was familiar with the work of his English colleague. He refers to Sydenham, for instance, in a couple of notes headed *Pro Arte Observatoria*, Fernández Navarrete 1745: [232r].

<sup>24</sup>The term was introduced by the Minim theologian Francisco Palanco in his *Dialogus physico-theologicus contra philosophiae novatores* and meant as an insult to denounce the "new ways of thinking", namely Descartes and Gassendi (Palanco 1714). The dismissive "novatores" turned later on into the denominator for the Spanish (early) Enlightenment; in the medical context *novatores* became the name for a movement of physicians aiming to reform Spanish medicine by

include what appears to be the preliminary work for a never to be published history of Spanish medical science («Autores Medicos Españoles, sus Patrias, Vidas, Costumbres y Libros» / *Spanish Medical Authors: Their Homelands, Lives, Practices, and Books*).<sup>25</sup> Fernández Navarrete had compiled a few carefully drafted index cards, one for each name. He did not select the canonical authors one might expect, but rather included highly "problematic" authors he looked upon favorably. There are, for instance, Oliva Sabuco de Nantes Barrera<sup>26</sup>, one of very few female medical authors whose books had been put on the index<sup>27</sup>, the physician and botanist Andrés Laguna<sup>28</sup> whose editions of Dioscorides had been purged three times<sup>29</sup>, and the "Cartesian" humanist Gómez Pereira (by some researchers believed to be plagiarized by Descartes).<sup>30</sup>

So, what are the key takeaways from Fernández Navarrete's reads? The literature he did excerpt, cite, or mention en passant covers a wide spectrum of subjects and authors. The excerpts also suggest an ideological proximity to the *novatores* which is in line with the general direction of the *Real Academia Médica Matritense* and the *Ephemerides* project (see below). There are two particular conclusions that I would like to single out. The first concerns the mismatch between the authors read and the authors cited in his publications. Obviously he did conceal some of the literature from which he was drawing ideas. In the *Ephemerides Barometrico-Medicas Matritenses*, for instance, he refers to the macrocosm/microcosm-hypothesis, the idea that the human body—belonging to the microcosm—is correspondent to the greater universe—the macrocosm—with specific parts of the body mirroring their counterparts in the macrocosm: «[...] la mutua dependencia, y consonancia entre la Atmosphera, sus condiciones, y mudanzas, y el estado, y alteraciones de nuestro cuerpo, como mundo menor, cuya conservacion en el todo depende del mayor.»<sup>31</sup> (*The mutual dependence and correspondence between the atmosphere with its conditions and its changes, and the state and the changes of our body as the small world the preservation of which depends entirely on the great world.*) There are plenty of possible sources for

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introducing a more "scientific" approach (Gómez de Enterría 2015: 366-375).

<sup>25</sup>Fernández Navarrete 1745: 207r-215v

<sup>26</sup>Fernández Navarrete 1745: 210r/v

<sup>27</sup>Martínez de Bujanda 2016: 120 and 969

<sup>28</sup>Fernández Navarrete 1745: 209

<sup>29</sup>Martínez de Bujanda 2016: 129

<sup>30</sup>Fernández Navarrete 1745: 213r

<sup>31</sup>*Ephemerides*, [4]

this concept, ranging from Pre-Socratic philosophy (Pythagoras) to late medieval Neoplatonism<sup>32</sup> and 16th century physicians such as Paracelsus. Fernández Navarrete's "reading list", i.e., the literature mentioned in his papers, however, suggests two likely candidates: the aforementioned Oliva Sabuco—the microcosm/macrocosm model played a crucial role her work—and Robert Fludd.<sup>33</sup> Both authors had been purged and would not have been "quotable", at least not in a favorable manner.

The second conclusion: The manuscripts are testimony to a vivid interest in meteorological instruments, and Fernández Navarrete thoroughly excerpted authoritative texts of the early period of instrumental meteorology such as the *Saggi di naturali esperienze fatte nell'Accademia del cimento* (1666),<sup>34</sup> The literature he consulted, however, reflected by no means the state-of-the-art knowledge on the topic. As for why, it is hard to say for sure if the outdated reading list was just Fernández Navarrete not paying attention to the most recent literature, or a further symptom of the marginalization of Spanish science in a period marked by war, economic crisis, and censorship.<sup>35</sup>

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<sup>32</sup>See Robertson 2019

<sup>33</sup>See, e.g., Fludd 1631: 434f:  *Applicatio ad microcosmum ... applicatio ad hominem*. See also Guariento 2018 on Fludd's conception of the weather glass as a model of the micro-/macrocosm

<sup>34</sup>Fernández Navarrete 1703: 293

<sup>35</sup>There is an argument to make that Spain had only limited access to the knowledge circulation in Europe due to import restrictions or complete bans, aiming specifically at Protestant countries. English, Dutch, and German printers tried to circumvent the bans with false imprints pretending that the book was published in a Catholic city so that Spanish booksellers could apply for a license to sell (Reyes Gómez 2000: 1,308).

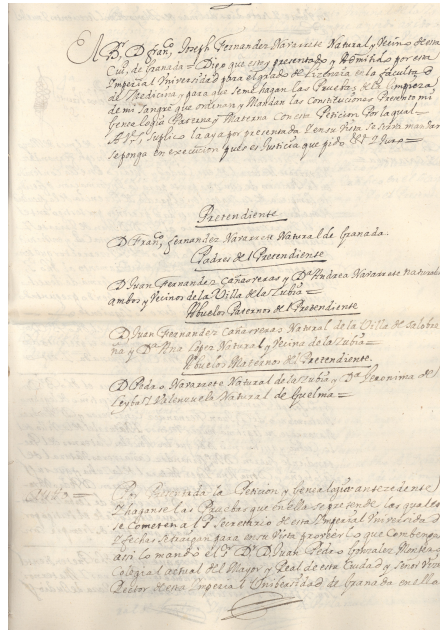


Figure 2: Expediente de limpieza de sangre de Francisco José Fernández Navarrete (1709), fol. 6 (Ref. ES AUG I 175 PRINCIPAL CAJA 01473/005)

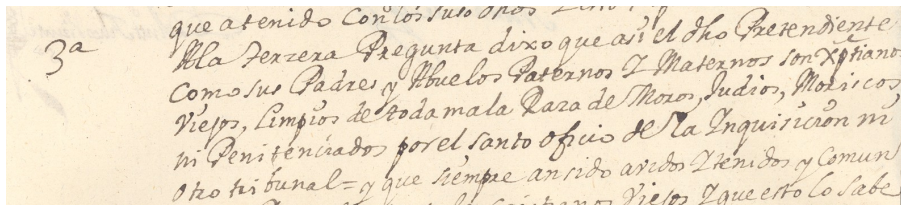


Figure 3: This is the key passage, addressing the subject the whole procedure was about: «...Pretendiente como sus Padres y Abuelos Paternos y Maternos son Xristianos Viejos, Limpios de toda mala Raza de Moros, Judios, Moriscos, ni Pentitenciados por el Santo Oficio de la Inquisición ni otro tribunal [...]». With that, the witnesses testified that the candidate is both in the paternal and maternal line a descendant of "old Christians", making him "free from all bad races such as Moors, Jews, and Moriscos", and that none of the ancestors had been prosecuted by the Holy Office of the Inquisition. Note that these documents are official papers, and therefore usually drafted in precise and stylized penmanship. There is an unusual feature, though, as López/Valverde are pointing out: The document is not as long as usual and only provides a truncated genealogy which is particularly noteworthy given that the antisemitic agitation in the medical field was reaching fever pitch at the time (López/Valverde 1986: 264).

|             | Vientos   | Vientos                         | enfermedades y humores   | tiempo   | Septentrio  |   |
|-------------|-----------|---------------------------------|--|--|---|---|
| Frio.       | 7 Aquilon | Septentrional y fresco          | Mortificacion<br>Lirio, C<br>Cancer<br>lepra<br>Congelacion<br>melancolia<br>Convulsio<br>apoplegia<br>Epilepsia | 7 extremo<br>7io. eyel<br>el tamien<br>grandes<br>elady  | Angely. Eryn<br>Demon. Na hazael<br>Ang. Venit. Gabriel |   |
|             | 6 Boreas  |                                 | Vientos<br>frios   | Edema<br>letargo<br>apoplegia<br>perlesia<br>Estragor<br>hidropesia<br>diarrea<br>catarro                      | Melancolia<br>6<br>Hema 5                               |   |
|             | 5 Circo   |                                 |  | 4 Coro   | 4 escarcha  | Occident<br>Ang. Rect. Paymon<br>Demon Azrael<br>Custor Raphael |
|             | 4 Coro    | Occidental y aquilino<br>fresco | Sanidad  | 3 escarcha   |   |   |
|             | 3 Favonio |                                 |  | 2 sobrepelo<br>frio al calor<br>e grado  |   |   |
|             | 2 Africo  |                                 |  | 1  |   | Auster<br>Ang. Rect. Amaymon<br>Demon Azrael<br>Custor Ariel    |
|             | Calor     | 2 Austrafrico                   | Meridional y languido  | Lienteria<br>benesmo<br>supuracion<br>pleurisi<br>Empisema<br>pneumonia<br>tisi<br>Salico<br>Sanorrea<br>peste | 2 Sangre<br>adulta                                      | Sobrepelo<br>el calor en<br>grado                               |
| 3 Aauro     |           | 3 Colera fla<br>va              |  | aire   |   |   |
| 4 Euroauro  |           | Vientos<br>calientes            | ictericia<br>inflamacion<br>erisipela<br>dysenteria<br>calentura<br>frenesi<br>herpes<br>Sangrony.               | 4 Colera era<br>giosa  | muy templado  | Oriens<br>Ang. Rect. Oriens<br>Demon Samael<br>Custor Michael   |
| 5 Euro      |           |                                 |  | 5 Colera<br>negra  | intemperie  |   |
| 6 Subsolano |           |                                 |  | 6 mui calien<br>te   |   |   |
| 7 Cocio     |           |                                 | 7 sumo calo  |  |   |   |

Siesta el Barometro muy alto, y de repente se baja algunos grados  
ciertamente significa gran sequia o lluvia,

Figure 4: From Fernández Navarrete’s manuscripts (1703: 218r): The page is part of several folios with excerpts from Robert Fludd and contemporaneous authors. The seven columns show particular wind and weather conditions (with spatial and temporal connotations), correspondent diseases, and the domains of benevolent/malicious entities: (1) Fludd’s cosmological number scheme, (2) Wind names, (3) Wind qualities (cold, arid etc.), (4) Diseases, (5) Humors, (6) Weather conditions, (7) [Unnamed] Column 7: Demons, Archangels, Spirits. While the source is likely Fludd, there were a few other medical authors xxx grimoires; Fludd: condemned by the Inquisition for several of his works (Martinez de Bujanda 2016: 563)

EL D. D. FRANCISCO FERNANDEZ NAVARRETE,  
Cathedratico de Medicina de la Imperial Univerfidad de  
Granada, Medico de Camara con exercicio de fu Mag. y  
Academico de Numero de dicha Real  
Academia.

Figure 5: Title page of the *Ephemerides barometrico-medicas matritenses*, citing Fernández Navarrete’s titles and offices (1737)



Figure 6: Fernández Navarrete’s sketch for the title page of the ”Mercurio Academico”, Mercury/Hermes in the center with a caduceus in his left hand, the two putti at the bottom are probably the mythological healer-brothers Machaon (left, with the medicinal herbs) and Podalirius. The draft (68r-77v) comprises also a prologue and an epigraph with the closing line *pellendi frigida tempus adest*—it’s time to drive away the cold (FN 1745: 69v).

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Stowasser, Jürgen (2025): *To Read Like an Inquisitor*. <https://ilinx.at/posts/madrid1737.php>.

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## *Journals (Primary Sources)*

### ***Journals***

*Ephemerides barometrico-medicas matritenses* (1737-?). <https://bvpb.mcu.es/es/consulta/registro.do?id=452762> & <https://catalog.hathitrust.org/Record/009276418> [Eph-M]

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### ***Repositories: Historical Newspapers***

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## *Corpora and Datasets*

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