This study, a welcome addition to the literature on the reign of Philip V of Spain (1683–1746), focuses neither on the wider history of the country during the first three decades of his reign nor on the person of the monarch, but on the court as a political organism and on its reorganisation during this period. It takes us from Philip’s arrival in Spain in 1700 to his departure for a four-year sojourn in Seville in 1729. 1700 is a watershed in the history of Spain, marking the end of the Habsburg dynasty and the arrival in Spain of the first Bourbon. The previous thirty-five years had seen the rule of the physically and mentally impaired Charles II (1661–1700), who came to the throne on his father’s death in 1665, but who, in spite of marrying twice, produced no issue of any kind. Philip was declared heir to the Spanish throne by virtue of his descent from his grandmother, the Infanta Maria Teresa (1638–1683), consort of Louis XIV. This led to the War of the Spanish Succession, which ended with the Treaty of Utrecht in 1713, though Spain continued to be at war in various theatres for at least the first quarter of the eighteenth century.

The author states his purpose as being to analyse in what way Philip fulfilled the role of king and embodied majesty, stating at the outside that Philip did so neither according to the model of his grandfather Louis XIV nor according to the Habsburg model which had prevailed in Spain before his arrival. The task the author sets himself is to explain how the court system that Philip did employ came about and what effect it had on the political culture of Spain and on the identity of the monarchy.

»Identity« is defined as something that is constructed, performative and changing. The book is divided into two parts. The first deals with the years 1700–1714 up to the death of Philip’s first wife Marie Louise Gabrielle of Savoy (1688–1714) and is headed »Continuidad y colapso« (Continuity and Collapse). The second begins with the arrival of Philip’s second wife Elisabetta Farnese (in Spanish Isabel de Farnesio, 1692–1666) and is headed »Cambio e innovación« (Change and Innovation).

The first section reveals the extent to which Louis XIV sought to direct matters in Madrid, instructing his grandson on his behaviour before he left, exhorting him by letter once he had arrived, using his ambassadors to represent his views to his grandson and to report back to him, and sending persons from France to fill important offices in the household of the king and his consort, who in their turn functioned as his informants and mouthpieces. Even though Philip always remained a Frenchman, speaking French throughout his forty-six years in Spain and preferring French food and clothing, Louis did not manage to install a second Versailles in Madrid. Two things made Louis’s plan impossible. One was Philip’s formation at the court of Versailles, which took place in a wing of the palace far from the king’s apartment, so that he and his brothers saw little or nothing of the ceremonial and of the daily life...
of their grandfather. Vázquez Gestal is thus able to show that the older notion that Philip V simply
replaced Spanish ceremonial with that of Versailles is untrue. He points out that, of the 330 persons
who made up the royal household, only 50 were French and that representatives of the major grandee
families were given the important court offices. So it looked at the beginning as though Spanish
ceremonial would continue as before.

The other reason why Madrid did not become a second Versailles and why the complex system of
Spanish ceremonial was not maintained either was the personality of Philip himself and the bipolar
disorder that affected him with increasing severity throughout his life. The manic part of his personality
meant that, so long as he could be active on the battlefield, he could keep his demons at bay. When
he was not at war but was expected to carry out the two main day-to-day tasks of a monarch – to
govern and to carry out ceremonial duties – , he was often simply unable to do so, plagued by what he
called in his letters to Louis XIV his »vapeurs«. Philip's disinclination to operate the system of court
ceremonial is shown in detail, with the tensions that this caused. Even if he was constitutionally
incapable of living his life wholly in public as his grandfather Louis XIV did, it nonetheless led to chaos
if the ceremonial system which anchored the role of the high nobility in the organisation of the kingdom
and of the court was disregarded. Vázquez Gestal goes so far as to claim that it led to »una crisis de
identidad en la recién instaurada dinastía«.

Because of the king's need for support, he clung to both his wives, in whom he was uniquely fortunate.
Because his first wife, Marie Louise Gabrielle of Savoy, was very young, Louis XIV sent the widowed
Marie-Anne de La Trémoille, princesse des Ursins (1642–1722), from France to be her »camarera
mayor«, that is, the head of her household. Because the king spent all his time in his wife's apartment,
always sleeping in her bed in a way that was highly unusual for a monarch at that period, des Ursins
not only dominated the young queen but also came to dominate the king. This was particularly the
case between 1704 and 1714, when des Ursins, the king and the queen conducted all business
together. The princess, of course, corresponded regularly with Louis XIV and with her great friend
Madame de Maintenon, Louis's second wife. Des Ursins controlled access to the royal couple and,
when the queen's death in 1714 plunged Philip into a crisis of grief and apathy, she was able to
establish total control over him, removing him from the court to a private palace in Madrid. Clearly, this
situation could not continue and a new wife had to be found as soon as possible. The choice fell on
the twenty-two-year-old Elisabetta Farnese, heir to the Duchies of Parma and Piacenza and heir
presumptive to the Duchy of Tuscany and therefore a person of consequence in her own right.

Elisabetta is at the centre of the second part of this book and Vázquez Gestal does much to
rehabilitate her reputation, just as Henry Kamen did in his biography of Philip V.¹ Elisabetta was
constantly accused both in her own day and down the centuries, in Spain and abroad, of dominating
and manipulating her husband during their thirty-one years of marriage. Vázquez Gestal, like Kamen,
clearly shows that her husband's illness – his apathy, his refusal to speak, his at times wild and
irrational behaviour – made her interventions necessary and that without her all government would
have ground to a complete halt. Her first action on arrival in Spain was to send the princesse des

Ursins packing back to France. On Elisabetta's lengthy journey from her home in Italy to Spain, she had spent ten days in Bayonne in close and intimate contact with her widowed aunt, Maria Anna von Pfalz-Neuburg (1667–1740), the second wife of Charles II. Maria Anna was living in Bayonne in exile and straitened circumstances and it seems highly likely that she not only gave her niece a detailed picture of what awaited her at the court in Madrid but warned her to get rid of the princess as soon as possible, as a necessary precondition for establishing herself in her new kingdom and at her new court.

Vázquez Gestal makes clear how much the king’s condition necessitated privacy and a retired and intimate family life, while at the same time he needed support to carry out those public ceremonial duties and tasks of government which he could not avoid. Elisabetta became not just his constant companion and the mother of six living children, but also his right-hand woman in matters of state. During one of his many serious psychotic attacks in 1717 and fearing his own imminent death, he even named her Regent, in spite of the fact that he had two sons from his first marriage. Vázquez Gestal delineates Elisabetta’s warm emotional nature, as expressed in her letters to her children. (Since she and her husband were together virtually twenty-four hours of every day, we have little correspondence between them). This close bond between parents and children can be seen in the nearly one thousand letters that Elisabetta and Philip’s eldest son Carlos wrote to them from Italy, whither he was sent in 1731 to claim his mother’s inheritance in Parma and Tuscany and to reclaim the Kingdom of Naples. Yet Elisabetta’s day-to-day life was that of carer for a man with severe and worsening psychiatric problems who could not simply take indefinite sick leave. Charles C. Noel recounts how Philip had severe attacks, sometimes lasting for months, in 1717, 1723, 1728, 1731, 1732–1733 and 1737. Kamen shows how greatly the king’s condition worsened after the period discussed in this book, so that sometimes in his worst fits he even beat his wife. Elisabetta had to protect him and subordinate her inclinations to his, she had to accommodate his desire for quiet and darkness, so that they slept by day and worked by night, she had to support him so that he could do his work. Small wonder that she began to control, indeed usurp, his interaction with ministers and diplomats.

Vázquez Gestal also shows how deeply felt Elisabetta’s piety was but also how private it was, unlike the public demonstration of faith of the so-called »pietas austriaca« which was part of the duties of Austrian Empress consorts. That her husband was equally pious but that he, unlike her, was plagued by religious scruples is probably the reason, alongside his mental illness, why he resigned the throne in 1724 in favour of Luis I (1707–1724), his eldest son by his first wife. Philip and Elisabetta retired to a residence surrounded by beautiful gardens which they had built in San Ildefonso in the mountains outside Madrid. Here Philip wished to live the life more or less of a hermit, and Vázquez Gestal provides a detailed analysis of the architectural layout of the palace designed to accommodate that retirement. Seven months later, however, Luis died, so that Elisabetta had to persuade her husband to
resume the throne. It is clear that she controlled all access to the king, who, as he had done with his first wife, spent all his time in her apartments, again always sleeping in her bed. Vázquez Gestal demonstrates how the domestic intimacy that Elisabetta created for her husband at court and the restriction she placed on those people who might have access to him meant that he was simply not accessible to his grandees. Far from decrying this as the actions of a power-crazed consort, however, he shows that this was the only way to keep Philip functioning mentally and emotionally. This domestication of the royal sphere in the palace profoundly altered the interaction between king, queen and people and had long-term effects. The book finishes at the point where the king and the court leave Madrid for Seville in February 1729 where they were to remain until May 1733. To have charted the changes to the court structure that this brought about, as well as those caused by the often psychotic condition of Philip after the return to Madrid, would, as the author says, have led to a book double the size.

This book is based on the manuscript which, under a different title (“La identidad de la monarquía. Corte y cultura política en la España preilustrada”), won the Premio de Ensayo “Pablo de Olavide” in 2009. That manuscript in turn formed the first part of Vázquez Gestal’s very substantial PhD thesis of 2008 entitled: “Corte, poder y cultura política en el reino de las Dos Sicilias de Carlos de Borbón (1734–1759)“. In other words, the author set out to research the court and the political culture of the new Kingdom of the Two Sicilies under its first Bourbon monarch, Carlo, king of the Two Sicilies (later Carlos III, King of Spain, 1716–1788) and found that, in order to explain events in Naples and understand its court, he needed to begin with the coming of the Bourbons to Spain in 1700 and with Carlo’s parents. This in itself is a remarkable decision for a young researcher to take, but even more remarkable is the amount of original archival research in both thesis and book, as is the control that Vázquez Gestal has over his material. Readers familiar with other theses that have been turned into books need have no fear that this text will be turgid and unreadable. The material has been thoroughly edited, so that the published book contains all the scholarly references and details of archival documents, but presented in such a way that the text is not overloaded. Given that this is the account of a system of courtly organisation, one might expect it to be dry. On the contrary: it is both an illuminating and a thoroughly readable and convincing account of how the personality of Philip V and his second consort impacted on that system. The one thing I was left wishing for was more of a sense of how the king’s two families – the sons of his first wife and his children by Elisabetta – fitted into the court, how much they saw of their father and how they coped with his illness.

It is greatly to be hoped that the remaining three-quarters of Vázquez Gestal’s thesis dealing with the court of Naples will also appear soon as a monograph.