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Carta Executoria de Hidalguía (Patent of Nobility) of Pedro Guillén de las Casas In Spanish, illuminated manuscript on parchment Southern Spain (Granada), May 8, 1590

i + 51 + i folios on parchment, modern foliation in pencil, 1-51, lacking two leaves: a frontispiece and a text leaf (collation i¹² ii¹⁰ iii¹² [-10, one leaf missing after f. 31, with loss of text] iv-v⁹), no catchwords or signatures, ruled in blue ink (justification 235 x 133 mm.), written in brown ink in a round Spanish textualis bookhand (rotunda) on 35 lines, strapwork initials throughout, ornamental penwork in upper and lower margins throughout, four 8- to 10-line illuminated foliate initials in liquid gold on blue or burgundy grounds ornamented with white penwork (that on f. 1 with a face incorporated into the acanthus forming the body of the initial and the penwork on the blue ground was painted in silver, now oxidized), TEN VERY FINE MINIATURES of 10- to 12-lines high in brilliant colors and liquid gold, incorporating small illuminated initials, a single paper leaf loosely inserted at the beginning of the book with a nineteenth-century miniature of Christ carrying the Cross within an architectural portico between two saints, and below sinners are in torment in hell, small areas of paint flaking in the first miniature on f. 5v, minor flaking of ink on a few text pages, some thumbing and stains, the miniatures on ff. 18v and 42v were once cut out and later reinserted, otherwise in excellent condition. BOUND IN CONTEMPORARY RED VELVET over pasteboards, manuscript leaves tied together with original multicolored, plaited threads typical of a carta executoria, seal removed, worn at edges with two holes in the velvet on back board as well as stitching thongs exposed on the spine, stubs from four ties on front board, seal tags but no seal, otherwise in very good condition. Dimensions 306 x 212 mm.

The recent exhibition at the Prado in Madrid is evidence of the current scholarly interest in illuminated documents (*El documento pintado*, 2000). This *carta executoria* in favor of Pedro Guillén de las Casas is an exceptional example of the patents of nobility produced in Granada and Valladolid in the sixteenth century. The quality of its extensive illumination, including a series of ten miniatures (among them a fine portrait of King Philip II of Spain, 1556-1598) that have preserved their crisp colors and vibrant glow of the liquid gold, sets it apart from many documents of this type.

PROVENANCE

1. The manuscript was written at the Royal Chancellery of Granada (Real Chancillería de Granada). The place and time of completion are given in the colophon on f. 51: "...en granada a dies y ocho dias delmes de mayo de mill y quinientos ynoventa annos...", in Granada on May 8, 1590. The manuscript was made for Pedro Guillén de las Casas of the city of Jaén in Andalusia, southern Spain. He was possibly related to the Dominican bishop Bartolomé de las Casas (c. 1484-1565), whose father, Pedro, sailed with Christopher Columbus to the New World on his second voyage in 1493 (Online resources). The manuscript may have been illuminated in Jaén, which was an active center of illumination (cf. Hidalgo Ogayar, 1978), or perhaps in the nearby Seville, where a number of nobles in Andalusia sought illuminators for their *carta executoria* issued in Granada (*El documento pintado*, 2000, p. 191).

2. A nineteenth-century sale ticket in English with no. 493 pasted to the front pastedown; other dealer marks in pencil on the front pastedown.
3. Heritage Auctions, September 15, 2016, lot 45085.

TEXT

ff. 1-51, incipit, "De leon, de aragon, de las dos secilias [Kingdom of the Two Sicilies], de xerusalem [Jerusalem], d'portugal, de nabarra [Navarre], d'granada, de toledo, de balencia [Valencia], de galicia, de mallorcas, de Sevilla, de cerdenia [Sardinia], de cordova ... pedro guillen d' las casas esta nuestra carta executoria escribta en pergamino d' cuero ysellada con nuestro rre al sello de plomo pendiente en filos de sera a colores dada en granada a dies y ocho dias delmes de mayo de mill y quinientos ynoventa annos ... Carta executoria de hidalguia a pedimito de pedro quillen de las casas vezino de la cibdad [sic] de xaen. Co Rda [signature] escrivao bazela";

ff. 51v- end flyleaf (recto-verso), Confirmatory testimonies added by the *cabildo* (municipal council) of Jaén regarding Pedro Guillén de las Casas, and later additions by the *cabildo* of Baeza regarding his son, Juan Guillén de las Casas.

Patent of Nobility granted by Philip II of Spain to Pedro Guillén de las Casas of Jaén, Andalusia, dated 8 May 8, 1590 in Granada.

ILLUSTRATION

Ten very fine miniatures (10- to 12-lines high); the colors are very rich, and all images are illuminated with generous amounts of liquid gold. A small initial within the picture space heralds the text that follows.

The miniatures accompany the six testimonies giving evidence of the nobility of Pedro Guillén de las Casas which begin on f. 5v. They are by all by commoners: Juan Sánchez de Castillo (farmer), Diego Rodriguez de Luque (commoner), Bartolome de Medina (farmer), Jean Sánchez de Montemolín (farmer), Francisco Ruyz Moreno (farmer), and Tome Sanche de Arjona (farmer). A miniature of each person's patron saint introduces the testimonies (John the Baptist for Juan Sánchez de Castillo, and so on). Subjects as follows:

f. 5v, St. John the Baptist holding a book and pointing to the Lamb of God;

f. 18v, St. James holding a staff and a book;

f. 22v, St. Bartholomew holding a knife and a book;

f. 30, St. John the Evangelist blessing the poisoned chalice;

f. 33v, St. Francis in monastic robe, with stigmata visible on his hands;

f. 38, St. Thomas holding a spear and a book;

f. 42v, Justice personified as a woman holding a sword and scales;

f. 47, Christ blessing and holding an orb surmounted by a cross;

f. 49v, Dove of the Holy Spirit surrounded by cherubim;

f. 50, portrait of King Philip II of Spain enthroned, holding a scepter and orb (the largest of the ten miniatures, 12 lines, 79 x 73 mm.).

This document, issued by Philip II, king of Spain and Portugal, also of Naples and Sicily, lord of the Netherlands and titular king of England and Ireland during his marriage to Mary I (1554-1558), formally acknowledges the rank of *hidalgo* (gentleman) of Pedro Guillén de las Casas. The text is illuminated with a series of beautifully executed miniatures, including one of Philip II, painted during the lifetime of the monarch, in his thirty-third year. Such extensive illustration is rare in *cartas*, which usually only included a frontispiece. Our manuscript probably also once had a frontispiece, which probably included portraits of Philip II and Pedro Guillén de las Casas, and perhaps of their families. The frontispiece would have incorporated the opening words "Don Phelippe," which are missing from the beginning of the text (cf. e.g. Cambridge, Fitzwilliam Museum, MS Marlay 6; Panayotova, Morgan and Reynolds, 2012, vol. 2, pp. 314-315). The frontispiece was painted on the verso of a singleton, facing the opening text of the document. The recto would have probably borne the coat of arms of de las Casas family. Only the stub remains.

A *carta executoria* was a legal document issued in the name of the king, recognizing a citizen's noble lineage and status; it was an acknowledgement, not a grant, of nobility. The document served as tangible proof of nobility with practical implications. During the early modern period in Spain the nobility and the clergy formed an estate far removed from the rest of the population. The property of the nobility was exempt from taxation and protected from civil suits. Nobles could not be imprisoned for indebtedness, or tortured (except for treason), and if sentenced to execution had the option of decapitation rather than hanging. The proportion of the population that could make a claim to nobility varied in relation to geography. In the north nearly half the inhabitants could claim noble blood, whereas in the recently conquered south, where Pedro Guillén de las Casas lived, less than one percent of the population was noble.

The process of receiving a *carta executoria* was always instigated by the family, who usually submitted a request, "*pruebas de hidalguia*," because the local authorities were trying to charge them taxes (cf. the text in our manuscript: "...de la peticion de exebciones por el dicho nuestro fiscal...", f. 4v). In the petition the family would provide evidence of their noble ancestry. In addition, various local people (commoners and nobles), as well as the town officials gave testimonies about the family's nobility. The request was submitted to the Real Chancillería de Granada, or Valladolid (in north-western Spain), which were the two chancelleries that handled lawsuits of nobility. If the Chancillería considered the material satisfactory, they would issue the *carta executoria*, appending all the evidence and testimonies. The archives of the Real Chancillería in Granada reveal that the case of Pedro Guillén de las Casas was examined in 1589, a year before the *carta executoria* was issued, by the general attorney Blas Varela (Díaz de la Guardia López, 2016, p. 163, see Online resources). The six testimonies giving evidence of the nobility of Pedro Guillén de las Casas begin on f. 5v. This is followed by further evidence for the lawsuit. At the end of the document, the text is signed by a number of notaries.

This manuscript sheds light on the royal control of nobility in early modern Spain and the work of the Royal Chancellery of Granada; it would be of especial interest to students of history and legal studies. Interesting details of notarial practice are provided by the pen flourishes in the margins. In the upper margin throughout the book are two slanted lines with pen flourishes resembling twisted ribbons. These, and the pen flourishes in the lower margins, are typical in *cartas*, and were added to prevent unauthorized additions of testimony. It is also of special interest to students of Spanish art. The second half of the sixteenth century has been recognized as a particularly rich period for the illumination of documents in Spain (cf. *El documento pintado*, 2000, pp. 52-58). Although further research is needed to identify the artist, we know that he was a contemporary of Francisco Pacheco (1564-1644), a painter from Seville and the master and father-in-law of Diego Velázquez. Pacheco illuminated a *carta executoria* issued from Granada in 1596 (*El documento pintado*, 2000, no. 38, pp. 191-194).

LITERATURE

El documento pintado: Cinco siglos de arte en manuscritos, Exhibition Catalogue, Museo del Prado, Febrero 2000, Madrid, 2000.

Hidalgo Ogayar, Juana. "Miniatura del renacimiento en la alta Andalucía: provincia de Jaén," PhD dissertation, Universidad Complutense, Madrid, 1982 (unavailable for consultation).

Panayotova, S., N. Morgan and S. Reynolds, eds. *A Catalogue of Western Book Illumination in the Fitzwilliam Museum and the Cambridge Colleges: Part Two: Italy and the Iberian Peninsula*, 2 vols, Cambridge, 2012.

Ruiz Garcia, E. "El poder de la escritura y la escritura del poder," *Orígenes de la Monarquía Hispánica: propaganda y legitimación (ca. 1400-1520)*, ed. J. Nieto Soria, Madrid, 1999, pp. 275-313.

Sánchez González, F., J. Lozano Navarro and A. Jiménez Estrella (eds.). *Familias, élites y redes de poder cosmopolitas de la monarquía hispánica en la edad moderna (siglos XVI-XVIII)*, Granada, 2016.

ONLINE RESOURCES

Bartolomé de las Casas in *Diccionario biográfico español*
<http://dbe.rah.es/biografias/11148/bartolome-de-las-casas>

Hidalguía (in Spanish)
<http://www.heraldaria.com/hidalguia.php>

L. Díaz de la Guardia López, "La Corona y el control del reconocimiento nobiliario: la actividad del fiscal de la Real Chancillería de Granada a examen. Análisis y documentos," 2016
<https://revistas.ucm.es/index.php/CUHD/article/view/53060/48713>

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