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## Carta ejecutoria de hidalguía

In Spanish, illuminated manuscript on parchment

Spain, Valladolid, 23 October 1548

26 parchment folios, foliated in upper right, complete, no catchwords, (collation: i<sup>26</sup>), ruled in red in a single column of 40 lines, (justification 215 x 128mm), copied in an Iberian rotunda, some ascenders extended with strapwork, eighteen 3-5-line gold initials on dark red ground, one 20-line HISTORIATED initial with full strewn border containing THREE PORTRAIT MINIATURES, good condition. Original parchment wrapper, bound with multicolored cord of green, blue, and yellow silk. Dimensions 350 x 235 mm.

Illuminated, dated, signed, written in an elegant vernacular script, this *Carta ejecutoria hidalguía* *Executoria* authenticates the nobility of Garcia Díez de Ribadeneira, thereby granting him exemption from taxes along with other perks. Unusual is its inclusion of an itemized costing, which still needs to be properly deciphered. Portrait miniatures of Emperor Charles V, as well as Garcia Díez and his wife Maria Noguerol da Mesqua ornament the opening folio.

Illuminated cartas such as the present example offer a rich vein for historical and legal research and are equally interesting as physical objects, continuing the tradition of the illuminated manuscript into the modern age.

## PROVENANCE

1. Copied and illuminated in Valladolid, 1548, for Garcia Díez de Ribadeneira. F. 1 includes an itemized costing, reading in part "xij mre [maravedis] sello xvij [in a different ink and script] plomo lxij (12 maravedis seal 18 lead 42)" and f. 25v describes the document to be made, this very Carta itself.
2. Front wrapper displays the remains of two and perhaps three old library stickers as well as inscriptions L. S. and No. 1. and is inscribed in part "N. Don Pedro Dies Noguerol." In 1625, Doctor Don Pedro Díes Noguerol traced his own family tree to Garcia Díez, and it seems that this Carta remained in the family until at least the seventeenth century (see Online Resources).

## TEXT

ff. 1v-25v, *Carta ejecutoria hidalguía* for Garcia Díez de Ribadeneira, incipit, "Don Carlos por la divina clemencia emperador semper augusto rey de alemania...y entre renglones pedida," followed by the witness signatures attesting to the accuracy of the copy;

f. 25, (added) additional notarial statement, f. 25v ruled but blank.

## ILLUSTRATION

*Cartas* are a documentary class that are almost invariably illustrated, as the coat of arms of the family was closely linked to their gentry (lower nobility) status, which was officially confirmed and documented in the *Carta* itself. By the sixteenth century, *Cartas* also frequently include

likenesses, sometimes quite stylized, of ruler, family members, or both. The likeness roundels in this case are all carefully labeled in the margin, and so we can be sure that these represent Charles V, as well as García Díez and his wife María Noguerol da Mesqua in the lower register.

Toward the end of the fifteenth century "Spain" emerged as a single country and, nearly simultaneously, expanded into a global empire. These twin processes led to social mobility and racial mixing on a level the Spanish, and indeed, Europe, had not seen in over a millennium. Social and cultural anxiety led to a new legal process and document class, the *cartas ejecutorias de hidalguía*, that resulted from an extremely onerous process that lower nobility, the *hidalguía*, (similar to English gentry, though in Spain always bearing or entitled to bear arms) underwent to prove their family's historic Christianity, racial purity, and social status, and have that formally recognized in law. In Spain, gentry status was not simply cultural but brought with it financial and other privileges. Gentry paid fewer and less taxes than non-nobles, for example (one of the pressures in *ancien régime* France that eventually led to the Revolution). The Spanish crown's decision was duly recorded by the central government, and certificates, letters patent called *Cartas*, were purchased by the families (not identical to, but not unlike English patents of nobility). *Cartas* survive in great numbers thanks in part to how vital they were to Spanish families throughout the imperial period, as subsequent generations underwent their own confirmation processes.

As recalled in *hidalguía* proceedings even 75 years later, García Díez de Ribadeneira served as a gentleman of the table (like a sewer) in the court of Charles V, the Holy Roman Emperor (known as Carlos I in Spain) (Toledo, Archivo Histórico de la Nobleza, ES.45168.AHNOB//VILLAGONZALO, C.150,D.1, f. 3v, see Online Resources). Even someone with Díez's court connections had to undertake this long process for his family, as did generations of his descendants, including Don Pedro Díez Noguerol, who added the label on this volume, as it was all part of the legal ritual surrounding confirmation of Spanish nobility.

## LITERATURE

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