



Juan Francisco de Rosa (born Normandy, France, active Lima 1735-1756)
Peru, Lima
Saint Toribius of Mogrovejo, Saint Michael the Archangel and Saint Rose of Lima
1750 or later
Tempera and gold on parchment, image 11 ½ x 8 ¼ inches.
Collection of the Carl & Marilyn Thoma Art Foundation, Inv. no. 2018.042

On October 5, 1750, the king of Spain signed a patent of nobility (*carta ejecutoria de hidalguía*) that bestowed the title of Count del Valle de Oselle on Álvaro de Navia, Bolaño y Moscoso. The decretal, which assigned the title of nobility to both the first count and his heirs, had been promulgated on September 29. A patent of nobility documented the legitimacy of birth, the testimonies of witnesses, and proof of pure blood (*limpieza de sangre*) of the individual applying for a title. From the late Middle Ages, the Spanish nobility was exempted from taxes as well as enjoying other privileges, so aspiration to the nobility was stimulated by material as well as social advantages.¹

The petition to the king from Álvaro de Navia, Bolaño y Moscoso (1668-1759) was based on his service to the Spanish Monarchy. He served in the Viceroyalty of Peru as a senior judge (*oidor decano*) in the high court called an *audiencia* (the Audiencia de Lima)

and was an honorary minister in the Council of the Indies (Consejo de Indias), the supreme administrative body of the Spanish empire in America and the Philippines.

The original letter patent had ten leaves with borders decorated with acanthus leaves and masks; one with the king's imprinted seal decorated with harpies, monkeys, griffons, and other elements from the visual language of manuscript illumination; and a binding of wood board covered with blue velvet.ⁱⁱ Among the leaves is a portrait of King Ferdinand VI and Queen María Bárbara de Braganza by the painter Francisco Antonio Meléndez (1682-1758), who also contributed a painting of Christ Carrying the Cross with two saints (fig. 2) to the document.

Francisco Antonio Meléndez was named painter of miniatures at the royal court in Madrid in 1725. He painted King Philip V and Queen Isabel Farnese and other members of the family to set into bracelets and rings as gifts for ambassadors and heads of state visiting Spain. Meléndez was also principal in the establishment of the Royal Academy of Fine Arts and San Fernando in Madrid in 1752 and was active as a teacher.



Fig. 1. Francisco Antonio Meléndez, *King Ferdinand VI of Spain and Queen María Bárbara de Braganza*, c. 1750, tempera on vellum, leaf 296 x 200 mm.



Fig. 2. Francisco Antonio Meléndez, *Christ Carrying the Cross with Saint Jerome and the Blessed Álvarez of Córdoba*, c. 1750, tempera on vellum, page 296 x 210 mm.

The inclusion of a portrait of the monarch who issued the decretal of nobility was *de rigueur* in patents of nobility, and there was often a representation of a favorite saint of the individual. In this case the Blessed Álvaro de Córdoba is the name saint of Álvaro de Navia Bolaño y Moscoso.

The leaf in the collection of the Carl & Marilyn Thoma Foundation was originally inserted into the bound volume after it was in the hands of the newly named Count del Valle de Oselle in Lima. It represents Our Lady, though apparently not a specific devotion to her, with the Limeño saints Toribio de Mogrovejo, the revered second archbishop of Lima, and Saint Rose of Lima (with her emblematic anchor) flanking Saint Michael the Archangel vanquishing the dragon. The generic cityscape in the background is probably intended to represent Lima.

It is very unlikely that the count could have found an artist in Lima who was trained in the special skills with the materials and techniques of manuscript illumination. Several Mercedarian friars are mentioned as “illuminators” who created choir books for the order’s church in Lima. However, choir books are very large, intended to be read from a distance, and mostly executed in black and red pigments. If any were illustrated, they were certainly not “miniatures.”ⁱⁱⁱ Instead, then, the count called upon the printmaker Juan Francisco Rosa, whose signature appears on the leaf, to create a unique Spanish colonial work of art.

The engraver Juan Francisco de Rosa became a manuscript illuminator, not by practicing for years in a scriptorium alongside experts, but by studying the small masterpieces by Francisco Antonio Meléndez in the patent letter of nobility of the Conde del Valle de Oselle. Although de Rosa’s illustration is somewhat naïve, he nonetheless managed to create a more than respectable facsimile of Meléndez’s sophisticated methods. Tiny dots of tempera, an inflexible and unforgiving medium, coalesce in the viewer’s vision to create both substantial

forms and a gauzy vision of celestial putti.
Suzanne Stratton-Pruitt

ⁱ For a concise history of letters of nobility in Spain, see Elisa Ruiz García, “La carta ejecutoria de hidalguía: un espacio gráfico privilegiado,” *En la España medieval, No. Extra 1*, Miguel Ángel Ladero Quesada, ed. (2006), pp. 251-276.

ⁱⁱ <https://www.christies.com/lotfinder/manuscript-spanish-ferdinand-vi-king-of-spain-4220690-details>.

ⁱⁱⁱ I am grateful to Emily C. Floyd and Ricardo Kusunoki for bringing my attention to Victor Barriga, *El Templo de la Merced de Lima: Documentos para la Historia del Arte* (Arequipa: Establecimientos Gráficos La colmena, S.A., 1944). Barriga writes that “Los libros corales del Convento de la Merced de Lima fueron miniados por el Pbro. Francisco Ramírez y otros por los religiosos siguientes Fr. Pedro Nolasco , p. 180. The word *miniados* recalls the root meaning of “miniature,” based on the Latin *minium*, the pigment called red lead that was used from the Middle Ages in the decoration of manuscripts. See Suzanne L. Stratton, “Spanish Miniatures of the 16th and 17th Centures,” in *The Spanish Golden Age in Miniature: Portraits from the Rosenbach Museum & Library*, exh. cat. (New York, NY: The Spanish Institute, March 25-April 23, 1988), pp. 15-30. Vargas Ugarte mentions two illuminators of choir books, both of whom seem to have come from Spain in the seventeenth century. The *Bachiller* Diego de Córdova signed the choir books listed as numbers 6 and 25 in the Cathedral of Lima: “. . . especialmete este último, están trabajados con verdadero primor y hay páginas miniadas que no tienen rival.” Rubén Vargas Ugarte, *Ensayo de un diccionario de artífices colonials de la América Meridional* (Lima?: Tall. Gráf. A Baiocco. 1947), p. 152. Vargas Ugarte also mentions an artist from Játiva, Spain who illuminated choir books in the Cathedral of Cuzco in the seventeenth century (p. 174), but he does not mention any miniaturist in Peru working in the eighteenth century.