

Monumenta Historica Dimicatoria

*Master Certificate of Domingo Pérez de Aguilar
(Mexico City, 1730)*



– Issue No. 1 (2013) –

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MONUMENTA HISTORICA DIMICATORIA (Materials on the History of Fencing) is an electronic publication devoted to primary source material on the history of traditional European swordsmanship and related martial disciplines, commonly known as HEMA (Historical European Martial Arts). It presents transcriptions and English-language translations of both technical and non-technical primary source material. Technical sources are those which principally deal with the physical and theoretical aspects of fencing, such as manuals on swordsmanship. Non-technical sources are those which clarify the social context and day-to-day practice of fencing, such as master certificates and fencing-hall ordinances.

Source material is drawn from all European martial traditions, and from all time periods. Issues are typically devoted to a single source, are published in PDF format, and are labeled as follows: Title, issue number, year. Interpretation and analysis are intentionally kept to a minimum, except as required to outline the significance of the source material and to clarify its relationship to the Historical European Martial Arts.

Experience over the past two decades has made clear that interpretive works on the Historical European Martial Arts soon become dated, because of the rapid evolution in our understanding of the technical aspects of swordsmanship. Time has shown that the greatest service to the international HEMA community, and to posterity, is performed by those who publish quality translations into English and other widely-spoken languages.

Unlike other martial arts, which are based on living traditions, HEMA has no living masters, no oral traditions. Accordingly, our understanding of both the social context and the physical practice of HEMA is directly related to the amount of primary source material accessible to scholars and practitioners. This electronic publication is intended to improve the understanding of HEMA in both academic and martial circles by providing greater access to primary sources.

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**Matt Galas, Editor, *MONUMENTA HISTORICA DIMICATORIA*
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Key Data	
Date	6 September 1730
Provenance	Mexico City
Author	Felipe Muñoz de Castro, Royal Notary
Language	Spanish
Medium	Manuscript
Type of Document	Non-technical source (master certificate)
Citation for Original Document	Current whereabouts unknown, but likely in Mexico City; transcribed in 1939.
Literature	Enrique A. Cervantes, " <i>El Título de Maestro de la Esgrima</i> ", in <i>Ensayos de Divulgación Histórica</i> , Vol. I, pp. 19-21 (Editorial Helios, Mexico City, 1939)
Credits	For their review of my translation, thanks to Andres Muñoz Mosquera, Esq. and J.G. Agustín Ortega Téllez, Esq. For their efforts in the National Archives of Mexico City, thanks to Carlos Chavez, Alejandra Vargas Geacia and Eduardo de la Rosa Erosa. For technical support, thanks to Bart Walczak.
Dedication	To the Filipino Martial Arts community, especially the researchers among them; and to the growing HEMA community in Mexico.

Summary

This issue presents a transcription and English translation of the *CARTA DE EXAMEN* (letter of examination) of Domingo Pérez de Aguilar, a newly-created fencing master from Manila in the Philippines. This is a legal document, drawn up by a notary, which records the successful test undergone by the candidate for mastery. This kind of master certificate was typically drawn up in two copies, one kept by the notary, the other by the newly-created master for use as credentials.

The candidate was tested in Mexico City in 1730 by Gabriel Josef de Herrera, the *MAESTRO MAYOR* (senior master) for the city. Herrera was possessed of a royal document, dated 1722, which granted him authority to test and license new masters. The candidate was given both an oral test on fencing theory, and a practical test in which he fought with several experienced fencers.

This practical examination took place with the following weapons:

- *ESPADA SOLA* (single sword)
- *ESPADA Y DAGA* (sword and dagger)
- *ESPADA Y RODELLA* (sword and round shield)
- *ALABARDA* (halberd)
- *PICA* (pike)

The document notes that the candidate successfully passed the test; states that he took the customary oath required of fencing masters; lists his privileges; and grants him the title of *TENIENTE DE MAESTRO MAYOR* (Deputy of the Senior Master) for the city of Manila and its surrounding districts on the island of Luzon in the Philippines.

Significance

This source documents the existence of a royally-sanctioned *MAESTRO MAYOR* in Mexico City with a broad grant of authority, dated 1722, to create new masters. It underscores the importance of Mexico City as a center of fencing and martial culture in the New World, since the only other places where *Maestros Mayores* are currently documented are in Lima, Peru and Quito, Ecuador.ⁱ It also documents the continued practice in Mexico of traditional Spanish weapon systems (e.g., *ESPADA Y DAGA*, *ESPADA Y RODELLA*), as late as the 18th century.

Of much greater significance is the fact that it documents the existence of a certified fencing master teaching the Spanish martial arts in Manila, the most important city in the Philippines. The candidate, an experienced fencer who was originally from Manila, was granted authority to teach and to license new fencing masters in that city and the surrounding areas.

The document also makes clear that the new master was an adherent of *LA VERDADERA DESTREZA*, the Spanish geometrical school of swordsmanship, since it makes use of certain characteristic code words of that system, such as the reference to the "mathematics and philosophy of arms". This is important, given the focus of Filipino martial systems on geometrical diagrams and concepts, as well as their use of Spanish technical terms, both of which point to the influence of the Spanish martial arts.

Especially intriguing is the use of the term *TRIGUEÑO* to describe the new master. This term (meaning "olive-skinned" or "tan") was normally used to refer to persons of mixed race. Given the fact that the candidate was originally from Manila, this raises the distinct possibility that he was of mixed European and Filipino descent. In turn, that has ramifications for the possible cultural transmission of Spanish martial concepts to Filipino masters, since a *TRIGUEÑO* would presumably be more likely to teach to the indigenous population than a pure-blooded Spaniard.

In sum, this is an important document, with a high degree of significance for both the Historical European Martial Arts and the history of the Filipino Martial Arts. The following pages contain an English-language translation of the document, followed by a transcription of the original Spanish text.

Translation

1730. In the City of Mexico, on the sixth day of the month of September of the year one thousand seven hundred and thirty, appeared before me (the notary and witness) Don Gabriel Josef de Herrera, Senior Master of Arms and Fencing of this Kingdom, citizen of the aforementioned city, who I attest is known to me. He stated that His Majesty (may God protect him) granted him a Royal Title, dispatched by the most excellent lord, Don Don Baltasar de Zúñiga, Sotomayor, Guzmán y Mendoza, Marquis of Balero, Ayamonte y Alenquer, a gentleman of His Majesty's chamber, member of his Council of War and of the Indies, his Viceroy, Lieutenant, Governor and Captain-General of this province of New Spain, and President of the Royal Tribunal of this court. That document bears the date of the twenty sixth of March of the year one thousand seven hundred and twenty-two, and appears to have been signed by the aforementioned most excellent lord and endorsed by Don Antonio de Abilez, Deputy of Don Pedro Gorraez, Marshal of Castille, Attorney General of the Government and Council of War of this Kingdom.

And I, the aforesigned, attest that I have seen, read and returned the document to the grantee to whom the aforementioned Royal Title of Senior Master confers authority to examine and issue licenses to establish and hold public schools of fencing and the exercise of arms, to all those subjects who he finds suitable and sufficient in them. In conformity with which, using the referenced authority (and

more) which is contained in the Royal Title, the referenced Master Don Gabriel Josef de Herrera called me today and seated me in the house where he resides.

While I was there in his public school, appeared Domingo Pérez de Aguilar, citizen of this city of Mexico and originally said to be from Manila, in the Philippine Islands: legitimate son of Marcos Pérez and María de la Rosa; of sound body, olive-skinnedⁱⁱ of face, slender, upright, an aquiline nose, with a receding hairline, bearing scars from smallpox, with a scar over his left eyebrow; aged thirty years, more or less; who is said to have practiced the use of arms and is well-informed regarding the science of their rules, postures, demonstrations, techniques and defenses, through having been taught them, both in theory and speculation as well as in practice by various masters with whom he trained, with both single and double weapons.ⁱⁱⁱ

Based on this, he requested the said Senior Master to examine him. Finding him apt and capable, he passed him and declared him to be an Examined Master in the said faculty of arms, and as a consequence, using his authority, named him as his Deputy Senior Master in the aforementioned city of Manila in the Philippine Islands, in whose districts there is need for something of this nature for the military discipline of the gentlemen and noble persons who reside in them. And having seen and understood his request, the aforementioned Senior Master proceeded to examine him, in the presence of me, of the witnesses to this document, and of many other people who were present in the said school.^{iv}

The aforementioned candidate fought with various opponents in the contest, who were expert and knowledgeable in the aforementioned art, using single sword, sword and dagger, sword and round shield, halberd^v and pike. The said Domingo Pérez de Aguilar received the common applause of all the competitors for the cleanliness, grace and sufficiency with which he executed their plays. He satisfied the aforementioned Senior Master, who passed him and pronounced him examined, declaring him to be very capable and knowledgeable in the art and mathematics of arms and their philosophy. Because of this, in the name of Our Lord King (may God protect Him), he exhorts and requires, and on his own behalf, pleads and requests, asks and charges, of all of the Magistrates of His Majesty in all of His cities, towns, villages, mines and other places in His kingdoms and lordships, wherever the aforementioned Domingo Pérez de Aguilar may present himself with this title, that they take and hold him for an Approved and Examined Master in the aforementioned art, without impeding in any manner his ability to hold and establish public schools in which students are taught who enrol there, raising the *MONTANTE*^{vi} at all those times that it is appropriate, according to the customary form.

In conformity with which, the aforementioned Senior Master, using the authority which he has and enjoys by virtue of the aforementioned Royal Title, hereby names the aforementioned Domingo Pérez de Aguilar as the Deputy of the Senior Master of Arms in the aforementioned city of Manila, in the Philippine Islands, and its

environs, so that in his name and representing his own person, he may make and exercise all of those acts of examination, approval, rehabilitation, suspension, granting of titles, and so forth, so that without prejudice to and only in augmentation of the royal rights, he is able to enforce the following present grant, with all the powers and authorities that are necessary for the defense and preservation of his jurisdiction, being able to deal with those events which are necessary before all the judges and magistrates of His Majesty^{vii}, so that he may plead and allege all that may be necessary in order to guard and have guarded the honors, grants and privileges that such an Examined Master and Representative of the Senior Master should enjoy in representing the rights of the aforementioned Don Gabriel Josef de Herrera, to the end that no person who does not possess the title of Examined Master in the aforementioned art will be permitted to hold a public or private school, nor to give lessons, nor to have students in any manner.

And being present, the said Domingo Pérez de Aguilar, whom I also attest is known to me, said that he accepted this following instrument, and that he would act as described therein; and swore before Our Lord God and upon the Sign of the Cross, according to custom, to use the aforementioned art and management of arms faithfully and legally, and to teach his students loyally to the best of his knowledge and understanding without defrauding them of anything included in his reach and understanding of the said faculty of arms.

[Signature of Domingo Pérez de Aguilar]

He made the aforementioned oath, promising to guard and defend our Holy Catholic Faith, affirming that Our Most Holy Mary, Our Lady, conceived without original sin in the first instant of her Immaculate Conception, and also calling upon God to guard our Catholic Monarch and make him prosper in all his widespread kingdoms and lordships, as a shield and defense of the Faith.

[Signature of Gabriel de Herrera]

And in observance and in support of the foregoing, each of the undersigned undertakes the obligation upon their persons and their property and submits themselves and their current and future property to the jurisdiction of the judges and magistrates of His Majesty of whatsoever location they might be, and especially to those of this city, court, and Royal Tribunal, renouncing the law of their own domicile and origin; without contravening the remainder in their favor and defense into general rights, so that they consent and assent as they would in the event of a passed judgment in an adjudicated case.^{viii} And therefore consenting to this and signing are the following witnesses: Pablo de Cisneros, Josef Flores and Bernardino Garnica, citizens of Mexico City, present before me; and Domingo Pérez Aguilar and Gabriel Herrera, appearing before me, Felipe Muñoz de Castro, Royal Notary. [Notarial seals.] Done on the 6th of September, 1730.

Transcription

1730. -- En la ciudad de México, a seis días del mes de septiembre de mil setecientos y treinta años, ante mí, el Escribano y Testigo Don Gabriel Josef de Herrera, Maestro Mayor de la Armas y Esgrima de este Reino, vecino de esta dicha ciudad, que doy fe conozco, quien dijo que su Majestad (que Dios guarde) por su Real Título despachado por el Excelentísimo Señor Don Baltasar de Zúñiga, Sotomayor, Guzmán y Mendoza, Marqués de Balero, Ayamonte y Alenquer, gentil hombre de la cámara de su Majestad, de su Consejo y Junta de Guerra, e Indias, su Virrey, Lugarteniente, Gobernador y Capitán General de esta Nueva España, y Presidente de la Real Audiencia de esta Corte, su data en ella, a los veinte y seis de marzo de el año pasado de mil setecientos y veinte y dos, que a el parecer se halla firmado de dicho Excelentísimo Señor y refrendado de Don Antonio de Abilez, Teniente de Don Pedro Gorraez, Mariscal de Castilla, Escribano Mayor de la Gobernación y Guerra de este Reino, Yo, el infrascrito doy fe haber visto, leído y devuelto a el otorgante a quien por dicho Real Título de Maestro Mayor se le confiere facultad para examinar y dar licencias, de poder y tener escuelas públicas de esgrima y ejercicio de las armas, a todos los sujetos que hallare idóneos y suficientes en ellas; en cuya conformidad, usando de la facultad referida y demás que se contienen en dicho Real Título, el referido Maestro Don Gabriel Josef de Herrera, me llamó y emplazó para la casa de su morada hoy día de la fecha y estando en ella, su escuela pública, compareció Domingo Pérez de Aguilar, vecino de esta ciudad de México y originario que dijo ser de la de Manila, en las Islas Filipinas, e hijo legítimo de Marcos Pérez y María de la Rosa; de buen cuerpo, trigueño de rostro, delgado, derecho, cariaquileño, de entradas grandes, hoyoso de viruelas, con una cicatriz sobre la ceja izquierda; de edad de treinta años, poco más o menos, el cual dijo haber practicado el uso de las armas y tener noticia, ciencia de sus reglas, posturas, demostraciones, tretas y defensas, por haberle sido enseñadas, así en lo práctico como en lo teórico y especulativo por varios maestros con quienes la ha ejercitado, así dobles como sencillas; por cuya causa pidió a dicho Mayor lo examinase; y hallándole apto y capaz, lo aprobase y declarase por Maestro examinado en dicha facultad, y en su consecuencia, usando de sus facultades, le nombrase por su Teniente de Maestro Mayor en dicha ciudad de Manila e Islas Filipinas, en cuyos distritos se necesitaba de esta provincia para la militar disciplina de los caballeros y personas nobles que en ellas residen; y vista y entedida su pretensión por dicho Maestro Mayor, procedió a su examen, en mi presencia, de los testigos instrumentales, y de otras muchas personas que se hallaron en dicha escuela.

Y dicho examinante batalló con distintos sujetos del concurso, peritos e inteligente en dicho arte, con Espada sola, Espada, y Daga Espada y Rodela, Alabarda y Pica en cuyos juegos, dicho Domingo Pérez de Aguilar, se llevó los comunes aplausos de todos los concurrentes por la limpieza, donaire y suficiencia con que los ejecutó; y satisfizo a dicho Maestro Mayor quien le aprobó y dió por examinado, declarándolo

por muy capaz e inteligente en el arte y matemática de las armas y su filosofía; por cuya causa, en nombre del Rey Nuestro Señor (que Dios guarde) exhorta y requiere, y de su parte, pide y suplica, ruega y encarga, a todas las Justicias de su Majestad de todas sus ciudades, villas, pueblos, minas y lugares de sus reinos y señoríos, donde con este título se presentare el dicho Domingo Pérez de Aguilar, le hayan y tengan por tal Maestro Examinado y Aprobado en dicho arte, sin impedirle en manera alguna el que pueda tener y poner escuelas públicas en donde enseñe discípulos que se le encargaren, arbolando montante todas las veces que se le ofreciere, según la forma que se acostumbra.

En cuya conformidad dicho Maestro Mayor, usando de la facultad que por dicho Real Título tiene y goza, nombra a el dicho Domingo Pérez de Aguilar, por su Teniente de Maestro Mayor de las Armas en dicha ciudad de Manila, Islas Filipinas, y sus contornos, para que en su nombre y representando su propia persona, pueda hacer y ejercitar todos los actos de exámenes, aprobaciones, habilitaciones, suspensiones, títulos y demás que sin perjuicio y antes en aumento de los reales derechos pudiera hacer el otorgante presente siendo, con todos los poderíos y facultades que sean necesarios para que sobre la defensa y conservación de su fuero pueda hacer los cursos que convinieren ante todos los Jueces y Justicias de su Majestad donde pida y alegue todo lo que fuere necesario sobre que le guarden y hagan guardar las honras, gracias y preeminencias que como tal Maestro Examinado y Teniente de Maestro Mayor, debe gozar en representación de derecho del dicho Don Gabriel Josef de Herrera, para que no permita que ninguna persona que no tenga título de maestro examinado en dicho arte, tenga escuela pública, ni secreta, ni menos de lección, ni tenga discípulos en manera alguna.

Y estando presente el dicho Domingo Pérez de Aguilar, a quien así mismo doy fe que conozco, dijo que acepta este instrumento según y como en el se contiene y juró por Dios Nuestro Señor y la Señal de la Cruz, según derecho, usar de dicho arte y manejo de las armas fiel y legalmente y enseñar a sus discípulos a todo su leal saber y entender sin defraudarles cosa alguna de cuanto en dicha facultad comprende y alcanza.

Domingo Pérez de Aguilar [signature]

Hizo dicho juramento, protesta guardar y defender nuestra santa fe Católica, y que María Santísima, Nuestra Señora, fué concebida sin pecado original en el primer instante de su concepción inmaculada, como también a Nuestro Católico Monarca, que Dios guarde y prospere en dilatados reinos y señoríos para escudo y defensa de la fe.

Gavriel derrera [signature]

Y a la observancia y cumplimiento de lo referido cada uno por lo que toca obligaron sus personas y bienes habidos y por haber y con ellos se sometieron a él fuero y jurisdicción de los Jueces y Justicias de su Majestad de cualesquier partes que sean en especial a las de esta ciudad, corte y real audiencia de ella renuncian el suyo propio domicilio y vecindad ley si convenerir las demás de su favor y defensa con la general del derecho para que les competan y apremien como por sentencia pasada en cosa juzgada y así lo otorgaron y firmaron siendo testigos Pablo de Cisneros, Josef Flores y Bernardino Garnica, presentes, vecinos de México. – Domingo Pérez Aguilar, – Gabriel Herrera. – Ante mí: Felipe Muñoz de Castro. – Escribano Real. – [Notarial seals] – Mayo a 6 de septiembre de 1730.

End Notes

ⁱ See the *LIBROS DE CABILDOS* of the cities of Lima and Quito for the years 1558 and 1598, respectively.

ⁱⁱ The term *TRIGUEÑO* (olive-skinned or tan) was commonly used to refer to persons of mixed race. This may well indicate the candidate was part Filipino.

ⁱⁱⁱ The term *ARMAS DOBLES* (double weapons) typically refers to the use of the sword with an accompanying arm: sword and dagger, sword and round shield, sword and buckler, and two swords were most common, approximately in that order.

^{iv} This paragraph appears to refer to a two-phase examination: First, an oral examination in which the candidate's theoretical understanding was tested; second, a practical examination, where his physical skills in fencing were put to the test by various opponents. This two-fold examination was common in many European martial traditions.

^v Although the *ALABARDA* (halberd) was largely obsolete as a military weapon at this time, the Governor of Manila had a bodyguard of halberdiers as late as 1806, according to an account given by a French visitor to Manila in that year. See Felix Renouard de Saint-Croix, *Voyage Commercial et Politique aux Indes Orientales, Aux Isles Philippines, A La Chine*, p. 308 ff (Paris, Crapelet, 1810).

^{vi} The *MONTANTE* was the name given by the Spaniards and Portuguese to the two-handed sword. In the Iberian martial tradition, it served as the fencing master's symbol of authority. It was carried by him on ceremonial occasions and when acting in the capacity of judge when students fought bouts with weapons.

^{vii} Thus, the document allows the new master to approach the courts in Manila to request them to stop any unlicensed masters from teaching the art of fencing.

^{viii} This paragraph is written in very technical legal language describing the obligations of the witnesses.