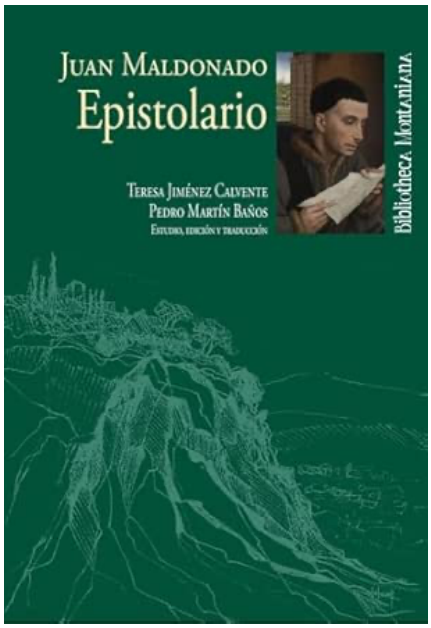
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The Renaissance epistolary genre was not merely a medium for private correspondence, but, as Marcelino Menéndez y Pelayo famously observed in 1911, the "immense newspaper" of the early modern intellectual elite. In the fluid ecosystem of sixteenth-century European humanism, letters served as dynamic battlegrounds for philological disputes, theological reckonings, and the deliberate construction of the literary self. For over a century, scholars of the Spanish Renaissance lamented the tragic loss of the "códice precioso"—the primary manuscript of the correspondence of the Conquense humanist Juan Maldonado (c. 1485–1554), which had vanished from the library of the Colegio Mayor de Santa Cruz in Valladolid during the chaotic upheavals of the nineteenth century.

With the publication of *Juan Maldonado. Epistolario*, edited and meticulously translated by Teresa Jiménez Calvente and Pedro Martín Baños, the early modern "Spanish Republic of Letters" experiences a vital archival resurrection. This volume masterly pieces together a rich, albeit partial, reconstruction of Maldonado's lost *Epistolarum liber I*, drawing from a brilliant discovery: an eighteenth-century selection of seventeen letters preserved among the papers of the polymath Rafael Floranes in the Biblioteca Nacional de España (BNE MSS/11277), transcribed by the lexicographer Ramón Cabrera just before the original codex dissolved into history. Supplemental letters edited by historical figures like Gregorio Mayans and Francisco Cerdá y Rico complete this vital compendium.

The significance of this edition cannot be overstated. It positions Maldonado not as an isolated provincial schoolmaster working on the fringes of Castile, but as an aggressive, witty, and

deeply engaged participant in the monumental pedagogical shift away from rigid late-medieval scholasticism toward a dynamic, text-driven *studia humanitatis*. Furthermore, the *Epistolario* captures a critical historical inflection point: the messy, shifting transitional phase between the towering domestic authority of Antonio de Nebrija and the sweeping, destabilizing intellectual arrival of Erasmian humanism in Spain. By offering an exhaustive introductory study, a rigorous critical text, and an elegant Spanish translation, Jiménez Calvente and Martín Baños have provided Iberian Renaissance studies with an indispensable tool that fundamentally refines our understanding of how humanism was operationalized, debated, and taught in early modern Castile.

The reconstruction of Juan Maldonado's *Epistolario* reads like an academic detective story, a painstaking exercise in archival archeology necessitated by a century of loss. To understand the triumph of this modern edition, one must first trace the erratic, heartbreaking transmission history of the manuscript. The trail begins in earnest in 1771, where the original codex is found quietly resting in the library of the Colegio Mayor de Santa Cruz in Valladolid. Bound in a single folio volume alongside the *Epistolae* of the Italian humanist Giovanni Antonio Campano, the manuscript comprised 110 leaves of original sixteenth-century correspondence. It was a snapshot of a vibrant intellectual network, but one that sat on the precipice of historical oblivion.

The manuscript's modern trajectory began to take shape in 1778, when the energetic royal librarian Francisco Cerdá y Rico issued a tantalizing public promise. In a brief booklet, he revealed that a young, brilliant collegian named Ramón Cabrera had alerted him to a volume containing exactly one hundred elegant Latin letters written by Maldonado, complete with their corresponding replies. By 1781, Cerdá y Rico explicitly declared his intention to publish this "monument of pure Latinity" in a forthcoming volume of his *Clarorum Hispanorum opuscula selecta et rariora*. Cabrera spent the latter months of 1779 frantically transcribing the entire codex for Cerdá, while simultaneously copying select extracts for other prominent scholars of the Spanish Enlightenment, including the Valencian polymath Gregorio Mayans y Siscar and the Montañés intellectual Rafael Floranes.

Then, the trail went cold. Amid the geopolitical upheavals of the nineteenth century—including the systematic looting of Valladolid's libraries by French troops during the Peninsular War—the "precious codex" vanished. By the time Marcelino Gutiérrez del Caño compiled his 1888 catalog of the University of Valladolid's manuscripts, the volume was gone. Cerdá y Rico's grand publishing dream went unfulfilled, and Cabrera's complete transcription disappeared into the ether of untraced private collections.

The modern reconstruction of this text is therefore a masterclass in working with fragmentary evidence. Deprived of the original archetype and Cabrera's full copy, the editors were forced to rely on the partial lifelines thrown by eighteenth-century intellectual sociability. The bedrock of this edition is a manuscript preserved in the Biblioteca Nacional de España (BNE MSS/11277)—a compilation of seventeen letters that Cabrera had specifically excerpted and sent to Rafael Floranes. To fill the remaining voids, the editors elegantly integrated three additional letters preserved in alternative channels: a 1538 letter from Juan Luis Vives to Maldonado published by Mayans in 1788, and a 1545 exchange between Maldonado and Francisco Cervantes de Salazar printed by Cerdá y Rico in 1778.

What survives of this transmission history allows us to peek into the deliberate architectural design of *Epistolarum liber I*. Maldonado did not merely keep a haphazard letter-book or a passive business register; he curated an "album" with an eye toward posterity and the printing press. In his opening letter to Nebrija, Maldonado explicitly notes that the great grammarian has been granted the honor of occupying the first leaf of this *album*, signaling a highly conscious authorial design.

The structural anatomy of *Liber I* reveals a fascinating hybrid methodology. On the surface, the collection follows a loose chronological progression, tracing Maldonado's professional and personal evolution from roughly 1512 to the mid-1540s. However, this chronological spine is frequently and deliberately interrupted by thematic clusters. Maldonado prioritized intellectual harmony over strict calendar alignment. The most glaring example of this curation is found in Letters IX–XIV. Here, the temporal flow is frozen to construct a self-contained, high-stakes dialogue with Alfonso de Valdés centered entirely on Maldonado's complex relationship with Erasmus. By grouping these letters into an intentional cycle, Maldonado transformed his personal correspondence into a polished literary dialogue, preserving not just his letters, but his carefully constructed intellectual persona.

At the heart of the *Epistolario's* intellectual landscape sits Letter I—an extraordinary, multi-layered missive from Maldonado to Antonio de Nebrija, likely dating to the winter of 1512. On its surface, the letter details a pedantic, granular dispute regarding Latin syntax that occupied the literary salons of Burgos. The immediate point of contention was whether to employ the prepositions *a/ab* or *de* when rendering Castilian surnames, lineages, and titles into Latin prose. Maldonado's colleagues, blindly mimicking what they believed to be Nebrija's absolute authority, dogmatically insisted on forms like *a Galilaea* or *a Toleto*. Maldonado, however, boldly argued that such prepositions should be avoided altogether in favor of elegant, classical adjectives (e.g., *Toletano*), or, if a preposition was absolutely mandatory, that *de* was far more appropriate for denoting noble lineage (*Iohannes de Corduba*), whereas *a/ab* merely signaled geographic origin without pedigree.

Yet, to read Letter I as a mere squabble over prepositions is to miss its profound cultural significance. The dispute serves as a proxy war for a much larger Renaissance dilemma: how to stretch a rigid, ancient classical language to accommodate the fluid, evolving realities of a modern Christian kingdom. More importantly, the letter functions as a brilliantly subtle, ironic subversion of Nebrija himself. While loading the elderly master with hyperbolic praise and identifying as his former "recruit" from his student days in Salamanca, Maldonado quietly mocks the dogmatic inflexibility of Nebrija's dictionary. He notes with a touch of dry wit that his dining companions endlessly "chew and ruminate" on Nebrija's rules without ever being able to fully digest them. It is a declaration of intellectual independence, signaling that the younger generation of Spanish humanists was no longer content to live entirely under the shadow of the master.

Maldonado's correspondence acts as an ideological precursor to his famous 1529 educational manifesto, the *Paraenesis ad litteras*. Appointed to a competing, municipally funded chair of grammar by the city of Burgos in 1532, Maldonado sought to thoroughly dismantle this traditionalist paradigm. He championed a humanistic method modeled on the Italian avant-garde:

> It is more than enough for children to thoroughly master the basic declensions and conjugations with their essential appendices. The rest they will retain far better in their memories through direct contact with Virgil, Horace, and Cicero, applying the rules naturally alongside authors of the first rank.

The *Epistolario* captures this reformist paradigm in real-time. Maldonado viewed grammar not as an end in itself, but as a swiftly conquered gate leading to the vast pastures of poetry, history, and rhetoric. By advocating for immediate immersion in classical literature over the endless, soul-crushing memorization of grammatical handbooks, Maldonado's letters expose the deep

pedagogical fractures of early sixteenth-century Spain, positioning him as an aggressive, forward-thinking reformer fighting a entrenched academic establishment.

This linguistic quarrel directly illuminates the broader pedagogical warfare taking place in the classrooms of Burgos. For decades, the cathedral city's primary educational institution, the School of the Sarmental, was monopolized by local *gramáticos burgaleses* like Andrés Martínez de Rublacedo and Sancho Ortiz de Angosto. Archival records unearthed by the editors reveal these men to be the epitome of academic mediocrity. Rublacedo was exposed in contemporary lawsuits as an idle, desidiose figure who neglected his students to read uninspiring, archaic homilies, while Ortiz forced children to spend upwards of eight agonizing years memorizing mechanical rules. These traditionalists practiced a rigid, memory-heavy pedagogical method that weaponized the literal text of Nebrija's *Introductiones Latinae*, reducing the vibrant world of classical antiquity to an "indigesta mole"—an undigested mass of structural definitions, grammatical jargon, and rote recitations.

Beyond the walls of the grammar classroom, the *Epistolario* plunges the reader into the volatile currents of early modern imperial politics, tracing the delicate lines of humanist sociability as they intersected with statecraft. Letter II, addressed to the prominent theologian and preacher Gonzalo Gil in December 1522, serves as an exceptional window into this world. Written on behalf of a mourning city, the letter laments Gil's departure from Burgos after a mere ten months in his cathedral canonjía. Imperial politics had abruptly intervened: King Carlos V had personally summoned Gil to court to serve as the elite tutor for his royal uncle, Jorge of Austria—the legitimized son of Emperor Maximilian I who was then studying at the University of Alcalá. Letter II brilliantly illustrates how humanists leveraged their rhetorical mastery to secure entry into the highest echelons of geopolitical power. Maldonado lingeringly recalls a definitive moment from earlier that year, when Gil was selected to accompany the powerful Bishop Juan Rodríguez de Fonseca to Vitoria. There, before the newly elected Pope Adrian VI—who was pausing in the Basque country on his journey to Rome—it was Gil who delivered the formal, sweeping Latin oration on behalf of the Castilian church. Maldonado's prose captures the immense gravity of these encounters, demonstrating that an elegant Latin style was not an ivory-tower luxury, but an essential tool of international diplomacy, ecclesiastical advancement, and royal patronage.

An even more intimate and dramatic intersection of the personal and the political is found in Maldonado's relationship with his primary patron, the Burgalés regidor Diego Osorio. The letters addressed to Osorio showcase a deep, multi-decade bond of clientela and genuine friendship, balancing mundane domestic updates with the terrifying backdrop of the Revolt of the Comunidades (1520–1521). While Maldonado's historical treatise *De motu Hispaniae* offers a grand narrative of the civil war, these personal letters provide the raw, psychological counterpoint. The correspondence is electrified by the looming specter of Osorio's radical brother, Bishop Antonio de Acuña, the notorious warrior-prelate who led the rebel comunero armies and was subsequently imprisoned in the fortress of Simancas. Maldonado's letters to Osorio are marvels of emotional navigation; he must comfort a deeply worried friend and patron while remaining fiercely loyal to the imperial crown that holds the traitorous brother captive. The personal and the political dissolve into one another as Maldonado utilizes the letters to offer a safe space for familial anxiety, all while balancing the delicate social tightrope required to maintain his patron's standing in a post-rebellion society.

Finally, the collection offers an invaluable micro-history of Spanish Erasmism through Maldonado's epistolary exchange with Alfonso de Valdés, the Latin secretary to Charles V (Letters IX–XIV). This sequence captures the high-water mark of Erasmian thought at the imperial court,

detailing a shared, high-stakes commitment to evangelical humanism. The letters reveal the complex strategies deployed by Spanish intellectuals to defend Erasmus against the ferocious onslaught of traditionalist monastic orders. Through Valdés, Maldonado secures a direct conduit to the imperial center, transforming his provincial study in Burgos into a vital node within an international, dangerous republic of letters. The correspondence records the profound anxieties of a movement that knew it was being watched, capturing both the intellectual euphoria and the structural vulnerability of the Erasmian moment in Spain before the heavy hand of the Counter-Reformation closed in.

The editorial resurrection of Juan Maldonado's *Epistolario* by Teresa Jiménez Calvente and Pedro Martín Baños is a spectacular academic achievement. Foremost among its virtues is the extraordinary quality of the translation. Maldonado's Latin is notoriously complex—a highly stylized, proud imitation of classical syntax that can easily become dense and unreadable in the wrong hands. The editors, however, have successfully rendered this text into a modern Spanish prose that is both intellectually faithful and remarkably fluid. Crucially, they have managed this translation without flattening the text; Maldonado's characteristic dry wit, his subtle academic ironies, and his shifts from lofty rhetorical encomiums to sharp domestic complaints are preserved with remarkable nuance.

Naturally, a project of this nature is bound by the material frustrations of its transmission history. The primary critique of the volume is one inherent to the surviving evidence: the text is structurally truncated, preserving a mere nineteen of the original one hundred letters that once filled the Santa Cruz codex. Scholars looking for an exhaustive, uninterrupted chronological record of Maldonado's life will undoubtedly feel the sting of these significant historical gaps.

However, the editors navigate these structural omissions with exemplary scholarly rigor. Rather than offering a detached, fragmented transcription, they surround the surviving letters with a dense, illuminating apparatus of historical notes and an exhaustive introductory study. They mine regional archives to reconstruct the biographies of obscure contemporary figures, turning what could have been a disjointed collection of broken letters into a coherent, highly contextualized window into early modern society.

Ultimately, *Juan Maldonado. Epistolario* stands as a tour-de-force and a definitive triumph of textual recovery. By rescuing these letters from the margins of forgotten Enlightenment transcriptions, Jiménez Calvente and Martín Baños have provided the scholarly community with a rare, unfiltered look at the daily realities of the early modern intellectual world. The volume masterfully bridges the gap between the mundane landscape of the provincial classroom and the high-stakes diplomacy of the imperial palace. It is an indispensable resource that deepens our understanding of the Spanish Renaissance, making it a mandatory acquisition for research libraries and any serious scholar of the European Republic of Letters.