

JUAN MALDONADO: A WRITER TO BE REMEMBERED

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During the 16th century, many new games flourished through most European countries; wars and trades did strongly contribute to their spreading. A decisive factor was, moreover, the large-scale diffusion of printing, which allowed books to be published in numbers previously unthinkable. It is commonly acknowledged that (both in devising new games, and in writing treatises thereabout) Spaniards played then the leading role in the world. Such card games, as Prime or Hombre, which later invaded the whole European continent, appear to have precisely a Spanish origin. Unfortunately, we have not for card games literary texts, remaining from those days, which allow the process of initial discovery and diffusion to be followed close. If that lack of literary evidence concerned another people, it would not be surprising, since games were generally not regarded as worthy of any detailed description. (Obviously I do not consider here the existing treatises on games, examined from a moral point of view; such works are preserved in remarkable number and their provenance is practically from every European country.)

Spaniards, however, did contribute the earliest literary documents, for instance, both on modern chess and draughts, so that some literary work of same provenance would be expected on card games too. Probably several exist which have been forgotten. For instance, I could recently study a relevant work, which did not find quoted in the current histories of cards; it is, although written in Latin, precisely of the 16th century and of Spanish origin. To be right, two are the works of interest here: *Triumphus* and *Tridunus*, both inserted as separate contributions in the miscellaneous works by Juan Maldonado. Among various reasons, which caused the author's name to be forgotten, a particular one derives from the fact that a famous Church writer of the end of the 16th century had exactly the same name. Thus, only the most comprehensive encyclopaedias have some information written about the very Juan Maldonado of interest here. For example, in the *Enciclopedia Universal Ilustrada Europeo-Americana*, tomo 32, a few details on his life can be found, together with a useful list of his literary works. Maldonado was born in Salamanca and became a known priest and writer; most of his life was spent in Burgos as vicar of the diocese, under Archbishop Juan Fonseca.

Unfortunately, the works by Maldonado have been forgotten; in particular, the parts of interest to card games are not quoted in the relevant histories, and they are rather difficult to find, too. The first quotation of them I ever saw – and particularly of the edition Burgos 1549 – was in the *Mare Magnum* by Marucelli, the huge manuscript bibliography from the beginning of the 18th century, written and preserved in Florence.

From Dr. Chicco I later obtained the information that in *Primae Lineae Bibliothecae Lusoriae*, by Clodius, an earlier edition is quoted for Triumphus, printed in 1525 in Valladolid. I could not find that edition. Probably, it is a mistake for a similar miscellaneous work, printed in same year and town and also cited in the mentioned *Encyclopaedia*, in which the parts on cards would not be contained. (If it really exists, however, its main interest should derive from its being earlier than Vives' *Exercitatio*, see later.)

From the *Istituto Centrale per il Catalogo Unico* of Rome I finally obtained the information that editions of 1541 and 1549 were preserved in Madrid. I could thus study microfilm copies of *Triumphus* in the 1541 edition (which is then stated to be reproduced, corrected and enlarged, in the 1549 one) and of *Tridunus* in the 1549 edition (whereat seemingly was first printed).

It would be anachronistic to expect for those days veritable treatises on games, such as we are accustomed to read since Hoyle's times or after the many editions of the *Académies des jeux*.

In fact, Maldonado's works are written in the form of a performance, in which about ten characters are playing, usually two-three at a time, and obviously at least four whenever a card game is described during play. Thus the literary part has here a remarkable role, both in the description of the environment and in the direction of the actors. Obviously, I intend to use the text in a pragmatic way, without following the detailed descriptions of the landscapes, the praises of genuine Spanish fruits or wines, the etymological explanations, and so on. A few words are needed, nevertheless, concerning the kind and the aim of such works.

Revealing to that purpose are already the introductory pages of *Tridunus*, one written by Maldonado to Juan Ortiz, followed by a two-page answer by the latter. Maldonado states that he first promised to perform his work before lunch, but then he preferred to submit the whole written text; thus, Ortiz could amend it and improve its form, to let it better accepted by the youth.

The fundamental aim of the text is here explicitly stated, which is then evident in the whole work: the author takes advantage of the usual pleasure that young men feel in indoor and outdoor pastimes to train them in Latin language. That is entirely acknowledged in the answer by Ortiz, who highly appreciates the matter and the form of the text; moreover, he congratulates Maldonado, 'in name of this century', because the later generations will find true witnesses of their common habits and everyday occupations. It is precisely this aspect, which is of greatest interest to those of us wanting no further training in Latin.

Maldonado was not the first author to bring together classical studies and everyday occupations; similar works were, for instance, *Colloquia familiares* by Erasmus and *Exercitationes* by Vives. Not surprisingly, both of these works are cited by Maldonado in his *Triumphus*. Unfortunately, with respect to those mentioned texts which underwent numberless reprints and translations, Maldonado's works did not find a comparable success.

Let us begin to fulfil the wish expressed by Ortiz, and examine in detail, after more than four centuries, which the everyday preferred occupations of Spanish students were in the first half of the 16th century. Although much interesting information can be found on different topics, our attention here will be mainly devoted to cardgames, beginning with *Triumphus hispanicus*, the most renowned of all the Spanish card games of that time, which will be simply called Triumph in the following.

As already stated, works already existed aiming to train students in Latin dealing with such agreeable matters, as games and sports. As far as card playing is concerned, Vives had treated Triumph on that basis only a few years earlier, making it the subject of a Latin dialogue among student fellows. According to Maldonado, however, it is not possible to play a real game of Triumph with that help, since much information is there lacking.

Here, the very first rule mentioned is to speak only in Latin, but soon the habits and the rules of playing are inserted in the dialogue. In fact, his aim is not only to carry out another exercise in Latin language, but also to complete the previous treatises, so that the actual rules of the game are finally stated in a clear and exhaustive way. Before playing, a so-called king of the game is appointed, as usual, who will not take part in the play, but will care for foods and wines, will act as judge of any controversy, and so on.

The dealer is allowed to take for himself any of the cards discovered to fix the trump suit, on condition that it be a dressed card or an ace.

During play, partners are not allowed to exchange information on the value of their hands by speaking or nodding; they can only say, 'I will' or 'I do not'.

The listing of the rules is, as the whole text, in the form of dialogue, among several student fellows; Maldonado is presented as the oldest and best-educated of them all and generally he himself explains the rules and clarifies any difficulty of interpretation. The pack is described in detail; the suits are obviously coins, cups, swords and clubs; the order is for the two former suits king, knight, knave, followed by ace to nine in that order, whereas in swords and clubs any greater number from 9 to 1 takes the lower one.

An interesting discussion compares Triumph with other card games. It is stated that card games are many and changing from place to place; moreover people every day introduces new rules for them. To this fellowship, however, triumph appears to be the most suitable game, that in which there are less deceptions possible, and so on; moreover, it has reportedly been the very first game to be devised with cards. Not only: cards themselves were perhaps found owing to it.

The name is derived from the fact that the winners appear to triumph over the other side, similarly to those who win a true battle.

The game can be played each for himself or in partnership, the latter way being more usual and suitable.

The deal is assigned by drawing lots and then it passes to the left.

Each player obtains nine cards and the 37th is placed face up onto the table indicating the trump suit. Trumps are so named, *chartae triumphales*, since he generally wins who has most of them. In the trump suit the ace is the highest card, even higher than the king.

Having thus outlined the main rules, the text continues by showing a true game played, during which several further questions can be answered.

The dealer is here the player to whom the first king is dealt. After dealing, and before fixing the trump, the players are asked to check the number of cards received, and whether their own hand is completely devoid of high cards or trumps, in which case the player is allowed to avoid a useless battle.

Points do not appear to be connected to the number of tricks taken but only to some of the trump cards captured or discovered while fixing the trump. The win occurs when the score reaches 32 points. A discovered trump card is worth 3 points for the first one and 1 for any following. In a trick any further trump card played is worth nothing, unless it is played by the other side.

Only once in a game, and with the agreement of the partner, a possibility is provided to change the index of the trump card.

Then a veritable game is played, consisting of many tricks. No less than five successive distributions are examined, which are summarized in Table 1.

How the points are counted is not very clear from the text. One of the partners has often to add chips (here cards used to that aim) to those already accumulated and he must pay attention, since any gain not immediately scored is then lost forever.

However, the most puzzling element deriving from this text, at least to my understanding, is the number of tricks which must be played. Infact, the nine cards of each initial hand are expected to be played one after another. If that be the case, here we have only partial records of the games, since the number of tricks reported, before dealing again, is respectively 2,1,3,5, and 5 for the recorded games. In some cases, maybe the remaining cards were worth nothing, and therefore they were not played at all. Other games of similar kind did exist in which only 4-5 cards were played, but in those cases they were the only cards dealt. On the other hand, the text cannot be said to be too short on that topic, since the analysis of these tricks, with the corresponding discussion, occupies about one half of the whole work.

In conclusion it seems to me that, if the complete rules are needed in order to reconstruct the game in a unique way, several questions are still left. That is not surprising too much since it is practically unavoidable to neglect some peculiarity when a game known to everybody is described.

In any case, we obtain here further useful indications with respect to the other sources already known on the noblest among Spanish cardgames of that time.

Table 1

Hands played at *Triumphus hispanicus* recorded as examples by Maldonado.

Key to Symbols:

M,R,F,and P = the players
T = the card fixing the trump
C,D,S and B = cups, coins, swords and clubs, respectively
* = the card first played in the game
f,c,and r = knave, knight and king, respectively
= the player who wins that hand and leads for the next.

T	M	R	F	P
	fC* 9S	7C	2C	3B# 6S
1C		6S*	9S	8C
3D	rC 8D# rS	9D# cB 9S	3C* 9B 2S	fC 4B 4D#
9S	9B 7C 5S# rS# 8S	cB fS# cC 9S 7D	1S# rC 9C - 1B	3B* 3C 8C 6S cS#
4S	2S* 2C 8S# rD fS	9S cC - 1D 6S	cS 3S# fB - 7S	1S# 8C cB 5S# rS#

Let us now examine the second work by Maldonado which is of interest to card games: *Johannis Maldonati Ludus / Chartarum Tridunus, et alii/ quidam generis eiusdem / atque diversi / . . . Burgis / ExcudebatIohannes / Hiunta. Anno. / 1549*. Also the title of the work appears comprehensive; (Card game Tridunus and some other of the same kind as well as different ones). In *Tridunus* the accessory parts, with respect to the main topic, are still more considerable than in the previous work, several digressions occurring among the 23 folios of the text.

The student fellows walk in the country-side and arrive at a watermill. The landscape is described in some detail and the miller is introduced into the scene relating what happened during his life. Close to the end, when everybody is ready to take part to the refreshments, two young men, just arrived, must each tell an appreciated story in order to be entitled to join the fellowship.

Games are, however, the only interesting part of the book to us, and luckily, as already stated in the title, different kinds of them are described in this booklet.

In correspondence with the presence of the different environments we obtain the description of the commonest indoor and outdoor games. In the text the student fellows have a long discussion about the game to be preferred. Finally, the youngest go in the open air to play nine-pins, the remaining ones play cards. Among outdoor games nine-pins is obviously described in more depth; we find early in the text the rules of the game and near to the end the report of an actual game. However, several ball games are also briefly described and compared, which appear rather different from the corresponding games of the present.

The selection among indoor games ending in the choice of Tridunus is far from simple: some candidate games are first examined and discarded. The series begins with chess, to which a two page discussion is devoted before concluding that it is too engaging, only suitable to few fans.

Among the different card games, some are eliminated at once, such as Prime, Double, Glique, considered together with dice games. The reason is that they are not to be taught or even mentioned to the youth, because of their gambling character.

One of the nearest in order to that finally chosen is the card game of Flos. That Latin word for flower does not appear to have a meaning corresponding to any of the known card games of the time. Was that word used for analogy in pronunciation to Flush or something alike? Unfortunately, the information on the game that we obtain from the text is not enough to single it out: the best cards are the 3s and the 4s; one gains so seldom that as useful consequence nobody dares play it for high stakes; it is left uncertain whether to consider it a noble game.

Obviously it is not easy to discard Triumph, which had already obtained literary evidence and praises; the reason alleged here is that one of the possible players – Maldonado himself – is in that game so stronger than everyone else that the resulting play would be devoid of interest. Thus, after 9 leaves of the text, the final choice is reached and the description of Tridunus begins.

It is immediately stated that the rules are not fixed, since they vary *provinciatim*, *oppidatim*, *vicatim*; i.e., not only from province to province, or from town to town, but even from village to village. Therefore, a certain degree of preliminary agreements will always be necessary.

Before introducing the game, a comment is needed on its name, which evidently derives from the union of the first three Latin numerals. With the same three numbers, the card game Tre Due Asso is often recorded in several Italian lists of games, such as that by Garzoni. Moreover it is also mentioned in Aretino's *Carte Parlanti* printed in 1543. Although several suggestions could be put forth about a game with such denomination, no contemporary description of the game was yet known, at least to my knowledge. Thus, before the study of this booklet by Maldonado, the game was one of a whole series of which only the names were preserved.

Now we have a detailed description of it. I will mention in the following the main characteristics of the play and of the scores, which are also summarized in Table 2.

The pack is obviously the Spanish one of 48 cards lacking the tens and with the classical coins, swords, clubs and cups suits.

Table 2

Points corresponding to essential melds in the game of Tridunus.

	any suit	same suit	after draw
321, 421, 653	40	60	30/40
three of a kind	40		30
two court cards, with the third being 1,2,5,or 9	20	30	
sequence of three cards	10	20	+10 for each further card
highest card is the sum of the other two	10	20	
total count is 31			20

The game for four players occurs in partnership and follows three consecutive stages.

The scheme of the game is both very ancient, and typical of many later games; in particular, it formed the basis of many gambling games, in which the aim was to reach as near as possible an appointed final count of the hand, accompanied by some preliminary gains for melds, if any.

In this case three cards each are first dealt out and the partners who can meld more points together score the corresponding gains. In particular, each player melds here separately but only the points of the winning pair are valid. The second stage consists in exchanging 1,2, or even all the 3 cards with the same number from the rest of the pack, in order to increase the value of the hand. When everybody has changed his own cards, the partners with greater sum of melds score the corresponding points.

The third and last stage is characterised by drawing further cards –without discarding anyone in this case – until the total number of 31 is reached or passed. Obviously one can stop before reaching

31 if one fears to pass it and to be penalized. As soon as a particular series of cards, which can be melded, is obtained in this additional drawing, the meld is declared and the gain is fixed; one of the partners caring to keep trace of the continuously increasing score. The same meld in different stages of the game has different value, as maybe seen from Table 2, where the essential combinations and their points are summarized. The game ends when a given total amount of points is reached, generally 200 or 300.

Let us briefly review the number of different ways in which these points are scored; it may be verified how several among them remind other known games. First of all the combination 3,2,1 has to be considered, which gives its name to the game: it is worth 40, which becomes 60 if the three cards belong to same suit (both values being reduced to, respectively, 30 and 40, if the combination is obtained later, with more than three cards in the hand. The same as for 3,2,1 is valid for the combinations 4,2,1 and 6,5,3; if, however, two of such combinations are present together, the 3,2,1 one prevails. If several identical melds are present, the player nearest to first hand wins, as in every other case of equality. For triplets and sequences the higher cards prevail. Dressed cards are usually worth 10, but they may be considered worth any number, if present alone in a given three-card-distribution. The penalty for passing 31 is 10 points, and 20 is the reward for reach in it. On the whole, that limit seems to play here a secondary role, with respect to the other melds. Among the few rules to be agreed upon preliminarily, the most influential seems to be that, recently introduced, which distinguishes with a bonus of ten points, with respect to the scores stated above, the melds obtained without any dressed card used as *Proteus*.

There are several unusual features in the game. Let us describe two of them.

One occurs in dealing, since any dealer cannot supply cards to his partner. Maybe the reason is that a player has here the choice to accept or refuse any card dealt face up. In any case, a curious way of dealing is used, in which the pack changes hand during the deal (original dealer gives cards to first hand, the latter to second hand, and so on) until it remains to the dealer of the next hand. As a result, we have a clockwise dealing during one hand, but a counterclockwise passing of the deal.

Another peculiarity derives from the role of the Jolly Joker. Obviously it does not exist as such, being introduced only about three and half centuries later. Cards with similar role did exist earlier in many games. What seems to me highly original here is the splitting of the usual role in two cases, named in Latin *Proteus* and *Chamaleons*, respectively. The first is a card which has the faculty to replace any other number of same suit and here it is typically any dressed card existing alone in a three-cards-hand; the second may on the contrary change its nominal suit (and it is here represented by nines or Malilla; if the players agree, since it is not an always accepted rule).

It was already known that Spaniards did contribute the first literary evidence on several boardgames and, on the other hand, that they introduced several original card games into Europe. The few indications on Triumph reported in Vives' *Exercitationes* were not enough to adequately reproduce the rules of the game. Now, with the study of the two booklets by Maldonado, not only an almost complete understanding of Triumph is provided, but we also obtain full information on a game, Tridunus, whose only name was preserved to us from other sources.