



Fig. 1. A monument of the Spanish Renaissance (height of binding 197 mm)

Yciar, Juan de

Durango (Vizcaya) *circa* 1522 – after 1572 Logroño?

Arte subtilissima, por la qual se enseña a escrever perfectamente, hecho y experimentado, y agora; de nuevo añadido.

Saragossa, Pedro Bernúz, 1550 (23 July)

QUARTO (194 × 133 mm), (86)ff. signed A⁶ B–L⁸, not foliated or paginated. Woodcut compartment on title-page incorporating insignia of the dedicatee Philip (later Philip II, King of Spain), fine woodcut portrait of the author aged 25 (folio A4 verso), each letterpress text page enclosed by a four-piece woodcut border (of which there are four designs), full-page woodcut writing samples (some cut white-on-black using criblé techniques), every block (or group of blocks) signed by the cutter Juan de Vingles either in full, with his mark of a sacred heart surmounted by a crown (in one design supported by the lion of Lyons), or his initials *IDV*; devices of the printers Jorge Coci and Pedro Bernúz on final leaf.¹

PROVENANCE Earls of Macclesfield, Shirburn Castle, embossed stamp on title-page and following two leaves, exlibris *South Library* dated 1860 on paste-down — Sotheby's, 'The Library of the Earls of Macclesfield, Part Six: Science P–Z plus Addenda', London, 26 October 2005, lot 2237

Repaired when rebound in the eighteenth-century: title-leaf laid down, margins of folios F5 and F6 repaired, marginal paper repairs in other leaves (occasionally touching borders and signature letters), slight staining; however, for a book of this kind, in unusually fine state of preservation.

BINDING eighteenth-century English calf; gilt frame on covers, spine gilt in compartments.

THE *Arte subtilissima* is the revised second edition of the first calligraphy and handwriting manual published in Spain. Like the Italian manuals on which it is modelled, it shows a wide range of styles and alphabets, including the chancery italic, book hands (roman and italic), commercial hands, Roman capitals (including a set copied with few modifications from Dürer), the gothic script, the *rotunda*, capitals suitable for illumination, monograms and Greek and Hebrew alphabets. The work was an immediate success (six editions appeared before 1566) and continues to be esteemed to this day: 'There can be no doubt that Yciar's book has to be counted among the finest calligraphic copy-books to be found anywhere at any time'.²

¹ Francisco Vindel, *Escudos y marcas de impresores y libreros en España* (Barcelona & Madrid 1942–1950), nos. 149–150.

² Alfred Fairbank and Berthold Wolpe, *Renaissance Handwriting* (London 1960), no. 78.



Fig. 2. Left Portrait of the author cut by Juan de Vingles. Page height 194 mm

The author, the Basque Juan de Iciar, worked from about 1547 until about 1573 at Saragossa, a centre of culture and the cradle of Spanish printing, as a teacher (of writing and arithmetic) and as a copyist, particularly of choir and service-books for church use, which he wrote in a gothic *rotunda* style (he is shown on the title-page writing a formal alphabet in a book with one hand and holding a choir book in the other). His aim was to teach children as well as adults, and in the instructions which accompany his specimens, Iciar – influenced by his fellow countrymen Juan Vives and Alejo Vanegas – considers various pedagogical problems, such as whether children should be taught reading before writing, or simultaneously (folios A5–6), and recommends as teaching aids sheets of tin ('hojas de Flandres', D5 verso – the idea is similar to that underlying the use of slate and chalk: the child rubs out mistakes with his fingers, and becomes less inhibited in his writing) and alphabets carved in tablets of wood or metal ('una tablilla de box, o de metal muy lisa', L4 verso – an apparatus mentioned by Quintilian, endorsed by Erasmus and Palatino:

the pupil moves a pen in grooves cut into the letters, until the shapes and movements become natural).

The second edition, as befitted its new dedication, to the prince Philip, Regent of Spain, was revised as an elegant picture book. The author, or perhaps his printer, lightened the text: some instructions (notably the 'Trata de letra Aragonesa', on folio E8 verso in the 1548 edition) were abbreviated, some recipes ('para bermellon... para hazer tornasol... para hazer verde lino... agua gomada; y para destemper la clara del hueuo... para preparar la glossa', folios B6 recto–B8 verso in the 1548 edition) were excised, and the concluding 'Trato del modo como este libro se hizo', in which Iciar described how the blocks were made for his book (folio I7 in the 1548 edition), was deleted. A new 'Epistola Al Lector' and Latin verses in praise of the author by 'Blasij Spesij Doctoris Medici' are introduced.



Fig. 3. Left One of the new blocks cut by Juan de Vingles for this second edition. Right A block reprinted from the first edition (1548). Page height 194 mm



Fig. 4. 'Letras de Compas para Illvminadores', cut by Juan de Vingles. Page height 194 mm

The woodblocks of the first edition are re-employed in the second edition, except for three (two models of a 'Letra Gotica Echada' and a 'Trata de la letra tratizada', folios D5 recto–D5 verso, D6 verso in the 1548 edition). To their number, twenty-four 'Tablas mas estudiadas y mas esmeradas que antes' ('Epistola Al Lector', A3 verso) were added, and these enlarge the book by two gatherings (sixteen leaves). One of the new blocks is dated 1547, seven are dated 1550, and sixteen are undated.³

In the new prefatory letter, Iciar claims that certain mistakes ('algunas faltas') in the old blocks have been corrected, and that other blocks have been improved by the addition of flourishes ('muchos rasgos'). The corrections seem to be no more than several erasures of

³ 1547: 'Letra redonda castellana', E1 recto; 1550: B8 verso, C1 recto, C3 verso, C4 recto, D5 recto, I4 verso, I5 recto; undated: C8 verso, D1 recto, D1 verso, D2 recto, D3 verso, D4 recto, D4 verso, E4 verso, E5 recto, E7 recto, G8 verso, H1 recto, H1 verso, H2 recto, H2 verso, I5 verso.

the date '1548' and substitution of '1550' (e.g. C2 recto, C2 verso). The alteration of old blocks to enhance their decorative effect was more systematic; a typical embellishment is the stippling of the background of blocks printed white-on-black (e.g. C6 verso, C7 recto, E6 verso, H3 recto, H3 verso). This work, together with the presentation of Iciar's text within broad frames of newly-cut border ornament (two pieces are dated 1550), and the introduction of an attractive sub-title (a block from the Jorge Coci-Pedro Bernúz stock, in use since 1548; see reproduction by Sánchez p.354), make this one of the most beautiful books of the Spanish Renaissance.

Iciar's engraver was Juan de Vingles (1498–*circa* 1552), a son of the Lyonese printer Jean I de Vingles (active 1493–1513), whose device of the initials IV within a crowned heart he adopted. Juan is first recorded in Spain in 1534, when he cut a block for the printer Carlos Amorós of Barcelona;⁴ in 1535, he was working at Saragossa for Pierre Hardouyn; in 1547–1550 he was collaborating with Juan de Iciar; and he is last heard of in 1552, working as a publisher at Pau in the south of France, in partnership with Henri Poivre. He took his inspiration from many sources, including Lyonese editions of *Horae* and Alciati's *Emblems*, printed in 1548.⁵

The woodcut border enclosing the title is from the block utilised for the 1548 edition, printed by Bartholomé de Nágera 'a costas de Alonso de Frailla, y Iuan de Iciar, y Iuan de Vingles', on 22 August 1548 (Sánchez no. 278). The fine and highly original woodcut portrait of Iciar also was cut for the first edition, and it reappears in Iciar's *Arithmetica practica* printed at Saragossa by Pedro Bernúz 'a costa del auctor y de Miguel de Cepilla [Zapila] mercador d'libros', on 16 February 1549 (Sánchez no. 285). It appears that Miguel de Zapila was involved also in publishing the 1550 *Arte subtilissima*: the title-page of the copy reproduced by Cotarelo y Mori (pl. 72) has his imprint 'A costa de Miguel Cepilla mercader de libros' added in the lower margin.

J.P.R. Lyell's complaint that Iciar's writing books were 'thumbed out of existence'⁶ is validated by modern bibliographical tools: perhaps ten copies of the 1548 first edition, some just fragments, are recorded in public collections worldwide.⁷ Our 1550 second edition is

⁴ Antonio Gallego, *Historia del grabado en España* (Madrid 1979), p.97.

⁵ Henry Thomas, 'Juan de Vingles: a sixteenth-century book illustrator' in *The Library*, fourth series, 18 (1937), pp.121–176, figs.1–6.

⁶ J.P.R. Lyell, *Early book illustration in Spain* (London 1926), p.145.

⁷ • Cambridge, University Libraries, Td.56.1 • Cambridge, MA, Harvard University Libraries, TypW 560.48.460 • London, British Library, C.31.h.9 • Madrid, Real Academia de la Historia, 2/1495 • Madrid, Biblioteca Nacional de España, R/8611 • Munich, Bayerische Staatsbibliothek, Res/4 Graph. 98 (Fugger copy; see *Kulturkosmos der Renaissance: die Gründung der Bayerischen Staatsbibliothek*,

less rare, but equally difficult to find complete and in good condition. These copies are known to the writer:

- Amsterdam, Universiteitsbibliotheek, OTM: KL 08-223 • Avignon, Bibliothèque municipale, 8° 14227 • Cambridge, MA, Harvard University, Houghton Library, Department of Printing & Graphic Arts, Typ W 560.50.460⁸ • Chicago, Newberry Library, Wing Collection, ZW 540 I.164 ('imperfect: t.-p. and many leaves mutilated, mended') • Lisbon, Biblioteca Nacional de Portugal, RES. 5564 P • London, British Library, C 31 h14 (lacking A1–2, A5–6, H4–5) • Madrid, Biblioteca Nacional, R/31877 ('Ej. falto de las hoj. 12, 36 y 86')⁹ • Madrid, Universidad Complutense, B. Histórica-Fco. Guerra 3499¹⁰ • New York, New York Public Library, Spencer Collection (Baron Achille Seilliére—Robert Hoe copy, washed and rebound by Chambolle-Duru)¹¹ • New York, Metropolitan Museum of Art¹² • Oxford, Bodleian Library, Douce YY 13 (ff.1-50) • Paris, Bibliothèque de l' Arsenal, Reserve 8- S- 14639 • Paris, Bibliothèque nationale de France, Res-V-1463 (lacking B8, D8, E1–2, E7–8, F1–2, L8).

Just four complete copies¹³ have passed through the auction sale rooms in the last sixty years:

- the Stirling-Maxwell copy (sold by Christie's, London, 20 May 1958, lot 79: bound in old morocco gilt, £200 to W.H. Schab) • Stanley Morison's copy (sold by Sotheby's, London, on 28 November 1961, lot 509a: margins of 28 leaves restored, pen facsimile on A3, bound in 19th-century half-morocco, £75; resold on 1 June 1977, lot 135: £850) • the Richard Ford — Otto

catalogue of an exhibition in the Staatsbibliothek, Munich, 7 March–1 June 2008, Wiesbaden 2008, pp.234–235 no. 84) • Oxford, Bodleian Library, Johnson P 209 (19 ff. only) • Vilanova i la Geltrú, Biblioteca Museu Victor Balaguer, 1 "B" XVI–A/33 (defective). Wilkinson, *op. cit.*, p.415 no. 10501, cites two further copies which we have not independently verified: New York, Hispanic Society of America; Palma de Mallorca, Biblioteca Pública del Estado.

⁸ David Becker, *The Practice of Letters: the Hofer Collection of Writing Manuals, 1514–1800* (Cambridge, MA 1997), pp.17–18 no. 36.

⁹ *Catálogo colectivo de obras impresas en los siglos XVI al XVIII existentes en las bibliotecas españolas* (Madrid 1975), I–44.

¹⁰ *Una biblioteca ejemplar: tesoros de la colección Francisco Guerra en la Biblioteca Complutense*, edited by Marta Torres Santo Domingo (Madrid 2007), pp.45–47, 267 no. 2 (two reproductions).

¹¹ Entered in the Library's *Dictionary Catalog 1911–1971* (Boston 1979), volume 363, p.408 (also in the National Union Catalog, volume 263, p.339), but not in the local online catalogue (CATNYP).

¹² W.M. Ivins, Jr., 'A Gift of Writing Books' in *The Metropolitan Museum of Art Bulletin* 23 (1928), p.298.

¹³ A copy lacking three leaves, restored with pen facsimile, was sold by Sotheby's, New York, 4 December 1996, lot 257 (\$3500); a fragment (60 of 86 leaves) was offered by Librairie Sourget, 'Catalogue 34: Manuscrits enluminés et livres précieux', Chartres 2007, item 13 (€11,500); and a copy with leaves lacking and in facsimile, in a nineteenth-century half-vellum binding, was sold by Alde, 'Livres anciens et modernes', Paris, 1 June 2011, lot 210 (€1,800).

Schäfer copy (sold by Sotheby's, New York, 1 November 1995, lot 124: leaves remargined, some restored with pen facsimile, \$8000) • the Hippolyte Destailleur — Carl W. Jones — Arthur & Charlotte Vershbow copy (sold by Christie's, New York, 9–10 April 2013, lot 232: 'Internal marginal tear on E5, some browning and spotting', bound in contemporary vellum, \$37,500).

REFERENCES Juan M. Sánchez, *Bibliografía aragonesa del siglo XVI* (Madrid 1913–1914), no. 301; Emilio Cotarelo y Mori, *Diccionario Biográfico y Bibliográfico de Calígrafos Españoles* (Madrid 1914–1916), I, pp.356–357; Claudio Bonacini, *Bibliografía delle arti scritte e della calligrafia* (Florence 1953), no. 2074; Antonio Palau, *Manual del librero hispano-americano* (Barcelona 1954), no. 117834; *Juan de Yciar: a facsimile* [prepared from the Hofer-Harvard and Stanley Morison copies] of the 1550 edition of the *Arte Subtilissima*, with a translation by Evelyn Shuckburgh, introduction by Reynolds Stone (London 1960); *Catálogo colectivo de obras impresas en los Siglos XVI al XVIII existentes en las bibliotecas españolas* (Madrid 1975), I–52; A.S. Osley, *Scribes and Sources* (Boston 1980), pp.127–147; *Iberian books: books published in Spanish or Portuguese or on the Iberian Peninsula before 1601*, edited by Alexander S. Wilkinson (Leiden & Boston 2010), p.415 no. 10503