Renaissance and Reformation
Renaissance et Réforme

López Poza, Sagrario, project dir. Biblioteca Digital de Emblemática Hispánica (Digital library of Hispanic emblematica). Other.

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Spaces of Power of the Spanish Nobility (1480–1715)
Les espaces de pouvoir de la noblesse espagnole (1480–1715)

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and chronological breadth of art known as Hispanic baroque at a glance. The project may also be helpful for studies related to museographic matters such as transporting, acquiring, and purchasing works of art created in certain locations but currently housed in others.

Despite all of these advantages, there are two interrelated aspects with room for improvement. Although the creators indicate that they have used 1,434 bibliographic sources to create the database, only one general bibliography has been provided (on the main page); it can be consulted only by exiting specific sections, which slows access to that information. Another aspect that could improve the quality of the database would be to create a link to the website of the institution that houses the artwork. Adding this option would also partly solve the lack of a direct bibliography, since many museums and galleries that house works of art include not only information about them but also a bibliographical list that would be useful for researchers.

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bidiso.es/EmblematicaHispanica.

The constant development of technologies for digital collections—with a flurry of novel tools to find, visualize, and annotate digitized content—has imposed a logic of obsolescence that does not always keep pace with scholarship in the humanities. The eyes of the reader, more and more used to finding what they need in a quick search, can easily be seduced by beautiful reading environments created to disguise poor scholarship, while major intellectual accomplishments—now held hostage to the old-fashioned UX design of their birth—fade into the background of Google logarithms. The latter is precisely
the case with the pioneering Seminario Interdisciplinar para el Estudio de la Literatura Áurea Española (SIELAE; Interdisciplinary seminar for the study of literature of the Spanish Golden Age) under the direction of Sagrário López Poza with the collaboration of dozens of scholars over the years.

The initiative began in the early 1990s, when scholars in Spain witnessed a renewed interest in emblem books and their role in early modern Hispanic culture. The limited access to Spanish emblem books, spread throughout libraries in Spain, was a major challenge to any attempt to study the phenomenon systematically in that country. In 1992, López Poza applied for an initial grant aimed at digitizing the microfilms of twenty-seven emblem books, which would be studied in detail and richly annotated, until they were finally made available to the public in 2001.¹

The digital collection contains titles that accurately represent how pervasive emblematic culture became in the Hispanic world.² There are “classical” emblem books, such as the first Spanish translation of Andrea Alciato’s *Emblematum Liber* (*Los emblemas de Alciato traducidos en rhimas Españolas* … [Lyon: Guilielmo Rovilio, 1549]); emblem books created by Spanish scholars (Sebastián de Covarrubias’s *Emblemas Morales* [Madrid: Luis Sánchez, 1610]); spiritual exercises that were “emblematized” (Sebastián Izquierdo’s *Práctica de los Exercicios Espirituales de N. Padre S. Ignacio* … [Rome: Varese, 1675]); festival books containing emblems that had decorated the celebration (*Libro de las honras que hizo el Colegio de la Compañía de Iesus en Madrid, a la M. C. de la Emperatriz doña Maria de Austria* … [Madrid: Luis Sanchez, 1603]); books registering the emblematic decorations of a church (Nicolás de La Iglesia’s *Flores de Miraflores, Hieroglificos Sagrados, Verdades figuradas* … [Burgos: Diego de Nieua y Murillo, 1659]); theological treatises dedicated to the less educated (Francisco de Monzón’s *Norte de Ydiotas* [Lisbon: Ioannes Blauio, 1563]); and even a hitherto-unpublished manuscript (Francisco Gómez de la Reguera’s *Empresas de los reyes de Castilla y León*, c. 1632). Of course, this choice of books is not exhaustive and every scholar in the field will have a missing title to complain about—in my case, the celebrated


2. For a complete list, see bidiso.es/estaticas/ver.htm?id=20.
“hieroglyphs” of Alonso de Ledesma’s *Discurso en Hieroglyphicos de la Vida, Muerte y Milagros de San Ignacio de Loyola* (included in Alonso de Salazar, *Fiestas que hizo el insigne collegio de la Companía de Jesus de Salamanca a la Beatificacion del glorioso Patriarcha S. Ignacio de Loyola* [Salamanca: por la viuda de Artus Taberniel, 1610]).

Beyond a bibliographical record and the books’ facsimiles (more specifically, a black-and-white digitization of microfilms), the Biblioteca Digital de Emblemática Hispánica includes a detailed transcription/annotation of every emblem contained in each book with commentaries about the *inscriptio* (“mote”), *pictura* (“imagen,” which is described and interpreted), and *subscriptiones* (“epigrama” and “resumen de glosa,” which are fully explained); these are further enriched by a series of keywords in different categories.

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Figure 1. Biblioteca Digital de Emblemática Hispánica’s emblem interface, showing the emblem “Otorgando a cada uno lo suyo” (Giving each one their due), from Cristóbal Pérez de Herrera’s *Amparo de los Pobres*. Madrid: Luis Sánchez, 1598.
Considering that many emblem books contain over a hundred individual emblems, such a comprehensive edition of an emblem book is an intellectual tour de force on its own. It behooves us to meditate, then, on the major accomplishment of presenting twenty-seven such titles in the Biblioteca.

Moreover, the comprehensive metadata allows exceptional ways of searching across the books. For instance, it is possible to search for words in the motto; words in the description of the images or glosses; types of verses or stanzas of the epigram; language of the epigram; or cited authorities and keywords, as showcased in the figure below:

![Figure 2. Biblioteca Digital de Emblemática Hispánica’s advanced search interface.](image)

One of the biggest challenges with the Biblioteca Digital de Emblemática Hispánica, as one can observe, is the user interface. Solutions that made sense when the platform was developed, years ago, are no longer optimal; there are now better ways to simplify the user experience. Desirable features such as the
posibility of skimming through the original text and seeing the picture of each
emblem on the page would now be much easier to implement. But, as one says
in Portuguese, “it is easy to be the engineer of a building that is ready.”

The quality of the facsimiles can also be disappointing to a new generation
of scholars, more used to the likes of Internet Archives or Google Books, and
who never experienced the wonders of microfilm readers or card catalogues.
In fact, as of today, out of the twenty-seven books in the Biblioteca, twenty-
four can be found elsewhere, with better image quality (in colour and in
higher definition). However, only two of the twenty-seven are accompanied by
comments or annotations in other digital platforms. In other words, the quality
of the metadata in this specific digital collection has not been superseded,
and it remains an essential source of information for any scholar interested in
emblem books in general, and Spanish emblem books in particular.

When the Biblioteca Digital de Emblemática Hispánica was conceived,
current trends in digital humanities—such as standards of image interoperability
and linked open data—existed only in wild robotic dreams. Today, however, I
cannot help but wonder what the future holds for this project. Admittedly, as it
now stands, the Biblioteca Digital de Emblemática Hispánica is a coherent part of
other digital initiatives developed by the SIELAE and belonging to the Biblioteca
Digital Siglo de Oro (bidiso.es/index.htm). However, international scholarship
would certainly benefit from additional ways to engage with this collection and
its rich scholia in a wider context. If this path is chosen, of course there will be
challenges to map out the different metadata infrastructure to match that of other
platforms, but the quality of the material is certainly worth the effort.

In sum, from the scientific point of view, the information contained in
this initiative is as relevant and necessary today as it was when I first discovered
it back in 2003, as an undergraduate student in Brazil who had no physical
access to primary—or even secondary—sources in the field of emblem studies.

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3. The SIELAE keeps an online database of emblem books digitized in collections around the world:
Digital Emblem Books on the Web (bidiso.es/estaticas/ver.htm?id=17), with over two thousand entries.
This catalogue naturally complements the Biblioteca Digital de Emblemática Hispánica and is a useful
source for emblem scholars.