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Introduction: Digital Emblematica / Emblematica Numérique

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Digital Resource Reviews / Comptes rendus sur les ressources numériques

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Introduction

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The community of emblem scholars has the distinct advantage of long-term collaboration in its approach to curating digital emblematica. While this journal has reviewed individual emblem resources in the past,¹ to date there has been no systematic review of emblem websites. An issue such as this one is therefore useful because this particular community has an established record of international cooperation that can serve as a model of scholarly excellence for the production of new knowledge. The community's collaboration positioned various projects with different models of domestic funding to work towards common goals and to see a future wherein scholars could conduct federated searches across geographically distanced projects. The history of these projects is crucial to understanding the reviews presented here.

In 2001, interested emblem scholars met in Glasgow at a meeting convened by Professor Alison Adams, the then head of the Centre for Emblem Studies at the University of Glasgow, the only such institution worldwide, to discuss plans for creating websites of emblem books.² With a view to the long-term potential of emblem digitization, she called together librarians, IT specialists, and literary scholars to work out basic common standards as they moved forward with their projects and funding applications. There was then a follow-up meeting convened by Thomas Staecker and Mara Wade held at the Herzog August

1 See Carlisle, "Arkyves"; Leal, "Biblioteca Digital"; García, "SYMBOLA."

2. See Quaranta in this issue.

Bibliothek (HAB) in Wolfenbüttel in 2003. This resulted in the publication of *Digital Collections and the Management of Knowledge* (2004), a collection of 12 essays outlining the standards and best practices emerging from these groups.³ These articles presented the groups' agreement on the use of collection-level descriptions, a so-called Spine of metadata establishing metadata standards, indexing emblems with Iconclass,⁴ the metadata exchange protocol employing an Open Archives Initiative Metadata Harvesting Protocol (OAI-MHP) for emblem data, federated searching based on ontologies, and the establishment of an emblem portal. Many of these projects closely cooperated with Arkyves, which now has a comprehensive emblem database from these projects as well as other holdings.⁵ For the past 20 years these projects have led the field in using Linked Open Data (LOD) in support of a semantic web for emblematica. A second publication, "Emblem Digitization: Conducting Digital Research with Renaissance Texts and Images" (2012), took stock of the benchmarks reached and lessons learned.⁶ The fact that these projects adhered to mutually agreed upon best practices and open standards confirmed the community's commitment to greater collaboration among digital projects worldwide and attested to its forward-looking conceptualization from the start. This was, and still is, community-driven research in which emblem scholars define their needs and seek and provide solutions for their research problems.

Several of the emblem websites reviewed here are part of that original cohort: those at Glasgow University and Utrecht University paved the way, and both had completed projects in 2006.⁷ Initial projects between the HAB and the University of Illinois Urbana-Champaign culminated in the common portal Emblematica Online, to which the library of the Getty Research Institute, Duke University Library, and the Newberry Library also contributed digitized

3. Wade, *Digital Collections*.

4. Iconclass is "the comprehensive classification system for the content of images" in the form of a controlled vocabulary that is organized hierarchically—and which has already been translated in many languages including English, Dutch, Italian, Portuguese, and German, among others (iconclass.org). The system is available in open source, and it is maintained by the Henri van de Waal Foundation. Since Iconclass has been adopted by many digital emblematic initiatives, it will be mentioned throughout the reviews in this issue.

5. See Priki in this issue.

6. Wade, "Emblem Digitization."

7. See Schwenk in this issue.

works.⁸ Two of the pioneer websites at A Coruña and Munich were already well underway and technically defined when the international collaboration was first initiated and therefore do not adhere to the common standards, but they nevertheless offer much useful material.⁹ Other projects developed independently with different funding models (or no funding at all) and reflect the goals of documenting different aspects of emblematica, such as the Swiss site on architectural emblems, which documents several locations with emblematic programs and indexes an entire church and its emblems,¹⁰ or the English Emblem Book Project at Pennsylvania State University and its 10 volumes showcasing the emblem collection of the Eberly Family Special Collections Library.¹¹ Two projects with a Spanish and colonial focus, Galicones¹² and PESSCA,¹³ are noteworthy for including emblematica in larger undertakings of the study of early modern illustrated books and engravings, and *Furnace and Fugue* embarked in a new direction by creating an extremely rich website around a single emblem book, Michael Maier's *Atalanta fugiens* (1618).¹⁴

Collectively, these projects have produced a number of thematically, and to a large degree, technically, related projects that have resulted in a wide array of research products beyond the websites themselves. The metadata, the work flows, and various technical problems and their solutions have been presented at a range of conferences from the Digital Library Federation to the Renaissance Society of America and the Sixteenth Century Studies Conference, with the triennial conference of the Society for Emblem Studies hosting panels and papers since 2005. Members of these projects have mentored and trained younger scholars from the undergraduate level of study through the PhD in digital methods and early modern culture. This fluid international research cohort has fostered test cases and pilot projects with geospatial methods and quantitative tools that go beyond the literary and art historical focus of traditional emblem studies. Digital emblematica are no longer a separate rubric but are now fully integrated into the field of emblem studies specifically, and early modern studies writ

8. See Mesa in this issue.

9. See Cholcman in this issue.

10. See Bielak in this issue.

11. See Abramson in this issue.

12. See García Arranz in this issue.

13. See Leal in this issue.

14. See Wade in this issue.

large. Its practitioners engage in comparative and interdisciplinary studies that are both quantitative and qualitative, in print and online.

Every generation of those engaged in scholarly research has a place in these cohorts and supports the case for a digital pedagogy that can inform innovative research and ideas. The array of subjects is large; see, for example, the table of contents for the Modern Language Association's Digital Pedagogy in the Humanities: Concepts, Models, and Experiments website, which ranges from "Access" and "Annotation" through "Race" and "Social Justice" to "Visualization Studies" (digitalpedagogy.mla.hcommons.org). Digital literacy can occur around many topics and, once learned, can be applied elsewhere. Owing to the expertise gained from working with texts and images in a digital environment, emblems provide an ideal starting point. A digital humanities pedagogy that moves beyond the instrumental, beyond the goal to expand a set of technical skills, encourages new ways to think about complex ideas from the arts and humanities; it has cognitive and cultural value.

The next compelling issue facing this field is maintaining or migrating the websites as scholars retire, students graduate, or institutions are no longer prepared to host and maintain this aggregated research. Considering that millions of dollars and much time and human resources have been invested in these projects worldwide, there is now an urgent need for them to find new homes with institutions or organizations that understand the value of massive amounts of objects of cultural heritage, their comprehensive metadata, and curated collections and databases of text and images.

The need for an urgent reappraisal of issues of sustainability and digital preservation can be demonstrated by the number of significant digital projects that have vanished, with little or no trace, from the World Wide Web. To name a few, there is the Bavarian State Library emblem website;¹⁵ the Biblioteca Emblematica of the University of Bergamo;¹⁶ the Centro Ernesto Soares de Iconografia e Simbólica;¹⁷ and, until quite recently, the website Iconologia di

15. The books are now incorporated in the digital collection of the library without further contextualization.

16. This website contained 372 digitized microfilms of emblem books, many of which were rare and difficult to find elsewhere.

17. This was the only website containing materials specific to the Portuguese expressions of the emblematic culture, notably bibliographies and essays.

Cesare Ripa at the University of Pisa.¹⁸ While it is true that digital projects perish for many different reasons, we would invite the scientific community and those directing new projects in digital emblematica to consider four suggestions based on a review of the literature and lessons learned in the field:

1. The continuous adoption of standards of LOD¹⁹ and interoperability²⁰ that can facilitate the migration of data and foster the serendipity of discovery. The affordances of emblematic LOD support research on a scale not previously possible, which in turn supports associative thinking at multiple levels of granularity.²¹
2. The development of user-centred functionalities, such as allowing users to ingest data in large repositories and create their own subsets of data, as a measure to encourage the enrichment of existing repositories rather than the creation of many small projects. Singly and in aggregate, these projects have enormous potential to serve as test beds for all kinds of digital research.
3. The close collaboration with libraries. Most research and academic libraries are already committed to the preservation of digital assets (including digital records), different from most university departments and research centres.
4. The possibilities of data redundancy, which is the practice of storing data in more than one place.

These four suggestions aim at creating a common denominator that can improve the likelihood of the preservation of digital projects in a very ephemeral environment such as the Internet.

But concerns about how memory is preserved or lost are not new. In Antoine de Bourgogne's *Mundi lapis lydius* (1639), an emblem speaks of how

18. This site was temporary offline but reappeared recently with a different URL (limes.cfs.unipi.it/allegorieripa). It contains a transcription and rich annotation of Ripa's iconographic motifs, aggregating many editions of *Iconologia*. One very helpful functionality is "Le illustrazioni nel tempo," which allows users to see the same entry from Ripa in different editions (much like an illustrated variorum).

19. One such example is the use of controlled vocabularies like Iconclass, which has been available as a SKOS/RDF and JSON for many years.

20. For example, the International Image Interoperability Framework (IIIF), which is now widely adopted in digital collections..

21. See Cole, Han, and Wade, "Linked Open Data."

memory is like pouring water from one wide-mouthed amphora into another—and that if one is not careful, much can be lost. In its 1665 edition (see Fig. 1), the epigram runs as follows:

Quas patulo recipit defusas amphora collo,
 Has iterum facili gutture fundit aquas
 Ne memori fidas menti commissas reposcis?
 Reddere iam pridem quae periêre nequit.

(The waters that he received through the pouring of a wide-mouthed amphora, he pours out again through an easy neck. Don't you trust the memories of the mind when you claim your undertakings? Now one cannot restore what was wasted some time ago.)²²

Exploring this metaphor, one can certainly appreciate the need for creating narrow-mouthed amphorae to secure a more efficient way to move water from one container to another—just as digital projects need to embrace interoperability standards to secure the transmission of information from one platform to another. Yet, it is precisely because there is no panacea—no single remedy for all ills—that collaboration is a condition for the technical sustainability of current and future digital emblematica initiatives.

The reviews in this volume make the advantages of working in ensembles—however loosely or tightly knit—abundantly clear. The combined expertise of digital scholars, librarians, traditional researchers, and IT experts inform better decisions concerning best practices, methods, and workflows. The reviews also highlight the talent—individual and collective—that exists to undertake new research and ask new questions of old texts, images, and even buildings.

As a final note, the enrichment of the information contained in an emblem book is an intrinsic characteristic of the phenomenon. For example, the first emblem book, Andrea Alciato's *Emblematum liber* (1531), was first published as an octavo with only 80 pages, but 90 years later, the same book came to light, enriched with notes and commentaries, in a folio format containing over 1,000 pages. There are also emblematic works that consisted of the curation of

22. Our translation.

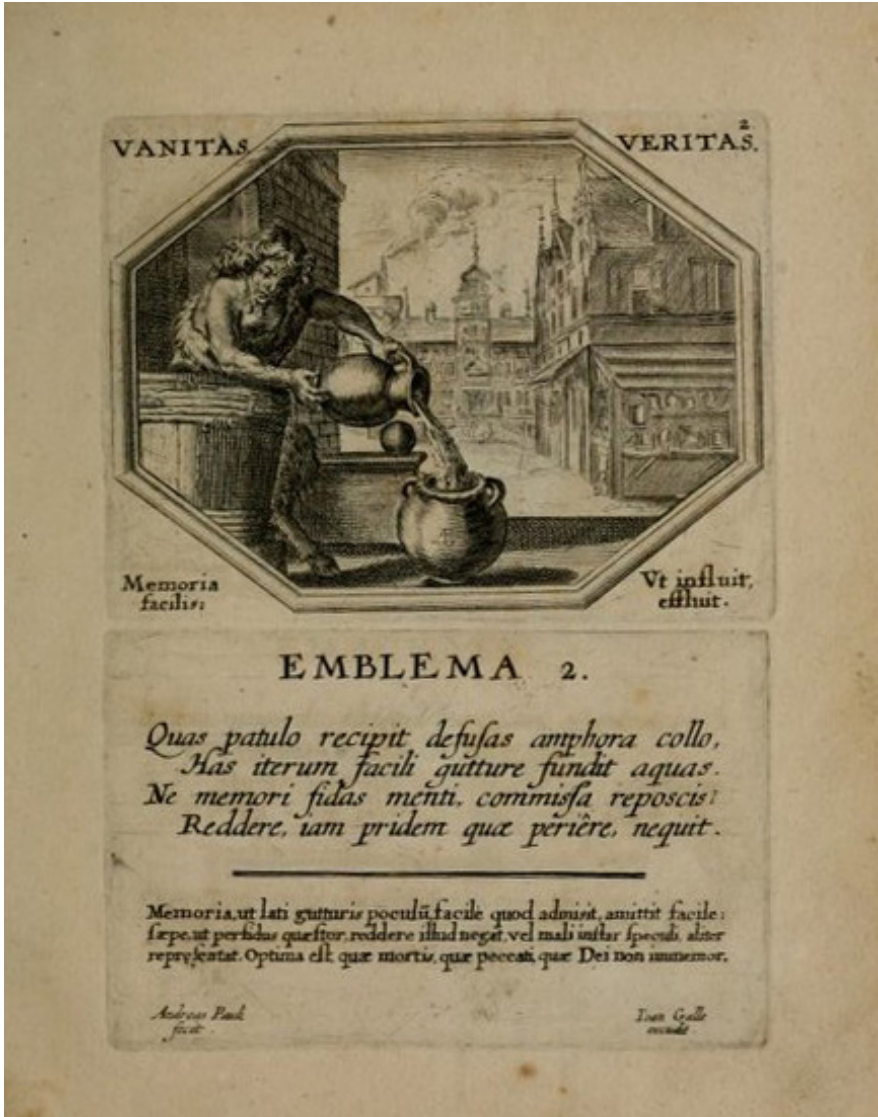


Fig. 1. Emblem 2, “Memoria facilis: Ut influit, effluit” (Easy memory: as it comes, it goes), from Antoine de Bourgogne’s *Mundi lapis lydius* (Antwerp: Galle, 1665, first published in 1639). Courtesy of Emblematica Online, University of Illinois Urbana-Champaign. <http://hdl.handle.net/10111/EmblemRegistry:E024055>.

emblems from other titles,²³ and some books that used the same image or images from other emblem books and just changed the text.²⁴ But with the advent of digital emblematica, the ability to enrich emblem books with metadata and hyperlinks is paving the way for distant readings, and quantitative and comparative analyses of emblems are being made possible on an unprecedented scale and level of complexity. As a result, the collective effort of digital emblematica initiatives is now used by scholars in many different disciplines to track and interpret the transmission of images and ideas to an extent that Aby Warburg could only hypothesize in his *Bilderatlas* a century ago.²⁵ In this process, digital emblematica is ceasing to be simply a tool or a methodology that facilitates research inquiries that would still be possible in different circumstances (such as physically finding a specific emblem book in a library) and is on the verge of becoming something else. As a whole, these initiatives have the potential to change the landscape of the study of visual cultures by showing that emblems were more than “esoteric compositions” restricted to “the learned” and were in fact a widespread cultural phenomenon that reflected much of the human experience in the early modern world.

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23. For example, the encyclopedic work of Jacob Masen, *Speculum imaginum veritatis occultae* (1664), among many others.

24. For example, George Wither’s *A Collection of Emblemes* (1635), which used the copperplates engraved by Crispijn van de Passe for Gabriel Rollenhagen’s *Nucleus emblematum selectissimorum* (1611) and *Emblematum centuria secunda* (1613).

25. For a recent edition of this unfinished work, see Warburg, *Bilderatlas Mnemosyne*.

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