Renaissance and Reformation
Renaissance et Réforme

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

Pedro Germano Leal

Aller au sommaire du numéro

Découvrir la revue

Citer ce compte rendu

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.

ELENA MONZÓN PERTEJO
University of Valencia

López Poza, Sagrario, project dir.
Biblioteca Digital de Emblemática Hispánica (Digital library of Hispanic emblematica). Other.
A Coruña: Universidade da Coruña, Seminario Interdisciplinar para el Estudio de la Literatura Áurea Española (SIELAE; Interdisciplinary seminar for the study of literature of the Spanish Golden Age), 2001. Accessed 24 May 2020. 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 Compañia 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

---

1. For a more detailed account of this and other digital initiatives at the SIELAE, see Nieves Pena Sueiro's "El portal BIDISO: pasado, presente y futuro inmediato. Un ejemplo de evolución en aplicaciones de las HD," *Studia Aurea* 11 (2017): 73–92. Pena Sueiro is a major contributor to the success of the Biblioteca Digital de Emblemática Hispánica.

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 Compañia 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.
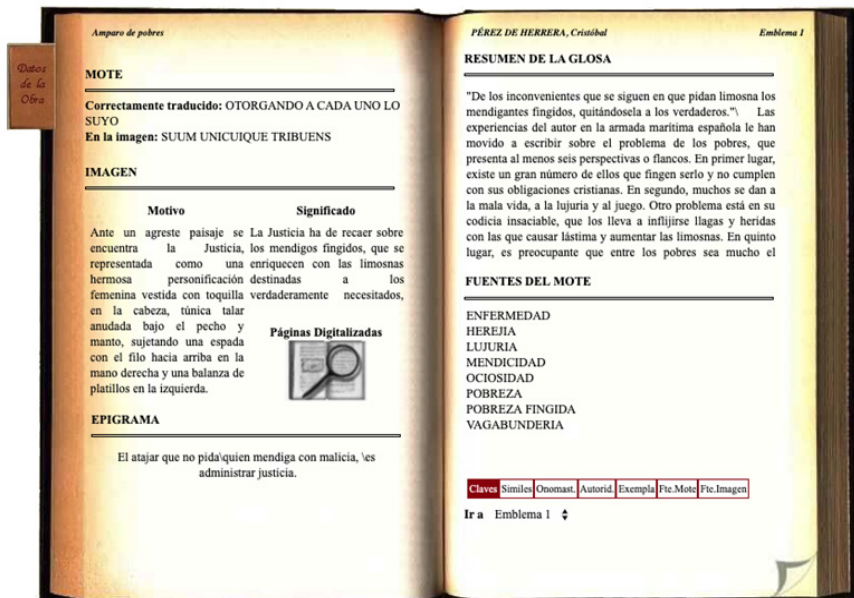

Figure 1. Biblioteca Digital de Emblemática Hispánica's emblem interface, showing the emblem "Otorgando a cada uno lo soyo" (Giving each one their due), from Cristóbal Pérez de Herrera's *Amparo de los Pobres.* Madrid: Luis Sánchez, 1598.

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.

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

possibility 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,[3] 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.

PEDRO GERMANO LEAL
Brown University
https://doi.org/10.33137/rr.v43i4.36401

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.