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Efthymia Priki

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arkyves.org/r/section/emblembook.

Emblem studies is one of many fields of research that hugely benefits from digital research methods and tools, which enable and promote the “serendipitous” discovery of new connections. Comparative research in the field, in particular, can benefit greatly from digital tools that allow the discovery of associations between different emblems and emblem books, between emblems and other forms of art, between emblems and literary works, and so on. In this respect, Arkyves, and especially its collection of emblems, is an extremely useful online reference tool for emblem scholars.

Arkyves is essentially an online database that aggregates data from several digital collections while also providing a publishing platform for collections and datasets not yet digitized. Launched in 1999, Arkyves continues to grow and to improve its functionalities, especially in terms of the multilingual capabilities of its search engine. Perhaps the most important feature of this reference tool is that all aggregated content uses Iconclass, a multilingual subject-specific classification system for cultural content. Iconclass enables the description and retrieval of subjects represented in images. This sophisticated classification system is also available as Linked Open Data, making it possible for iconographic metadata to be connected and enriched so that links can be made among related resources.

The aggregated content that makes up the emblem collection of Arkyves currently amounts to 64,862 items. This number concerns mainly emblems found in emblem books, as well as printers’ devices and frontispieces. While the focus of the collection is on printed emblems, there are also listings of related works, such as facsimiles of Valeriano’s *Hieroglyphica* (1556) and Horapollon’s *Hieroglyphica* (1543); the database does not yet include applied emblems. In my opinion, the inclusion of applied emblem collections alongside further additions of emblem books in future versions of the database would be a significant advancement in digital emblematica, offering users a unique opportunity for intermedial, comparative research.

A major portion of the listed items belong to Arkyves's core collections, that is, material digitized by the Arkyves's team from various libraries and museums. However, the collection also incorporates emblematic material from several external sources including *Emblematica Online*,¹ *French Emblems at Glasgow and Alciato at Glasgow*,² the *Bibliothèques Virtuelles Humanistes* of the University of Tours (bv.h.univ-tours.fr), emblem books from the Folger Shakespeare Library and the Herzog August Bibliothek, as well as the material of the Emblem Project Utrecht, containing Dutch love emblems of the seventeenth century.³

What makes this "collection of collections" unique is its user-friendly search engine along with its personalized search features. Users are able to search using any keywords (e.g., abstract or concrete concepts, authors, book titles, Iconclass keywords) and, more importantly, can then refine their searches in several ways. To begin with, results can be refined by filtering Iconclass categories, either by browsing through the taxonomy ranks of the classification system, or by taking cues from the suggested categories tailored to the search keywords (meaning the search engine identifies which Iconclass categories are most often combined with the search terms). Each selected filter can further be refined by choosing how the filter should function; for example, a category can be required in one's search ("must have"), an addition or an exclusion can be made ("include" or "exclude"), or one can even put a term "on hold" while exploring other connections. Additionally, chosen categories are moved to a "clipboard" from where users can explore the context of a concept within Iconclass's hierarchy. A further useful aspect to mention here is that the Iconclass categories are available in a multilingual thesaurus: English, German, French, Italian, Portuguese, Finnish, Dutch, Polish, and Chinese. A search can then further be refined by focusing on a particular type of item (e.g., emblem book, facsimile, title illustration), as well as by focusing on a specific collection. Search results can also be sorted in various ways, for instance by "Type," "Collection," "Date," "Parent" (i.e., the original source), or "Object ID." Finally, items of interest can be saved for later consultation, while the search filters conveniently appear on the top left search menu, helping users keep track of their search process.

1. See Claudia Mesa's review of *Emblematica Online* in this issue.

2. See Gabriele Quaranta's review of the Glasgow University Emblem Website in this issue.

3. See Andrew Schwenk's review of Emblem Project Utrecht in this issue.

The search functionalities outlined above enrich the process of knowledge discovery with a level of serendipity, which is also what the tutorial section of the database emphasizes. In other words, the structure of the database and the use of shared metadata, along with the filtering capabilities, can potentially lead to the discovery of new associations between items that are seemingly unrelated. To illustrate this idea of serendipitous discovery with a simple example, a search of the term “skull” returns 287 results, including emblem *picturae* of human and animal skulls. The suggested Iconclass categories reveal multiple concepts that can be associated with images of skulls, including “Vanity,” “Mortality,” “Wisdom,” “Deceit,” and so on. In this case, I was interested in finding emblems similar to the ox skull hieroglyph in the *Hypnerotomachia Poliphili* (1499). Therefore, by clicking on the image of an ox skull in the initial search results, belonging to the 1543 Kerver edition of Horapollon’s *Hieroglyphica*, I found and added in my search the category “46A170 Labour,” which produced only five results: the ox skull hieroglyph and four examples of the emblem “Nihil Amanti Grave” (Nothing is grave for those who love), the oldest of which comes from Otto Vaenius’s *Amoris divini emblemata* (1615), where the ox skull is associated with the labour of love. So, from a simple search inspired by the hieroglyph of an ox skull in the *Hypnerotomachia*, a book about Poliphilo’s labours for the love of Polia, I was able to associate this image first with Horapollon’s hieroglyph representing labour (from a facsimile in Arkyves’s core collection) and, from there, with a seventeenth-century Dutch emblem on sacred love (an item incorporated from the Emblem Project Utrecht). These associations could be further explored to find hitherto unknown connections between the *Hypnerotomachia Poliphili* and Otto Vaenius’s emblems.

While the potential of the Arkyves database for emblem scholars and art historians in general is undeniable, there is a downside. Although it incorporates data from online collections that are openly accessible on their respective websites and characterizes itself as being “hybrid open access,” Arkyves is actually not an open-access database. Its most important and valuable feature—the search functionality facilitating knowledge discovery in its aggregated collections—is a paid product (though there is a free 30-day institutional trial). As such, the scholarly impact of this digital tool is limited to those who can acquire access. Nevertheless, this online reference tool remains a valuable resource for art historical research in general and emblem research in particular, especially

given its wealth of digitized emblematic material that will hopefully keep expanding the interconnections enabled by its search engine.

EFTHYMIA PRIKI

Independent Researcher

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