

Renaissance and Reformation Renaissance et Réforme



Castellanos Garijo, María de los Llanos, president of the National Patrimony of Spain, and José Luis Rodríguez Gómez, librarian for the online database. Bibliographical Database of the Collection of the National Patrimony of Spain (Ibis).

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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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The documents run from the mid-fifteenth to the early eighteenth century. They are frequently of the mundane sort out of which the strongest social histories have been built: wills, bills, and other accounts indicating who was in Panama, how much property they had, and whom they were connected to. These primarily legal, ecclesiastical, and commercial sources shine light on Panama's social and economic life, including its slave trade. They are not word-searchable, but the sources can be searched by type, archive, and collection.

Overall, the interface, although fairly basic, is accessible. Visitors can easily get a quick overview of this fascinating project or pursue its findings in much greater depth. Working through the website is like seeing the raw frame of a potential book. It does a good job of presenting the project and its conclusions, along with the foundations on which it rests. It represents a compelling case for the ability of larger, interdisciplinary teams to uncover and analyze otherwise obscure early modern societies, demonstrating the effective possibilities of a mix of the latest technologies with traditional research. It is especially to be commended for finding ways to bring to life Indigenous and African individuals who are otherwise marginalized in the documentary record. I imagine it could easily become a prototype for similar projects working on other corners of the early modern world—especially those, like Panama, sadly obscured by the misfortunes of history.

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Castellanos Garijo, María de los Llanos, president of the National Patrimony of Spain, and José Luis Rodríguez Gómez, librarian for the online database. Bibliographical Database of the Collection of the National Patrimony of Spain (Ibis).

Madrid: Patrimonio Nacional, Biblioteca Real, 1992. Accessed 9 March 2020. patrimonionacional.es.

Ibis is an electronic database, freely available on the Internet, containing bibliographical information about the books, manuscripts, maps, and other holdings of the National Patrimony of the Spanish Crown. Specifically, it contains

bibliographical information about the holdings in the Real Biblioteca (the Royal Library in Madrid's Royal Palace), as well as the monasteries of Las Huelgas (Abbey of Santa María la Real de Las Huelgas, Burgos), Encarnación (Royal Monastery of the Incarnation, Madrid), Las Descalzas Reales (Monastery of Royal Barefoot Nuns, Madrid), and Tordesillas (Royal Monastery of Santa Clara, Tordesillas, Valladolid). The actual holdings are deposited in each of these locations, but the Royal Library in Madrid, located in the Royal Palace in Madrid, is where researchers can access the originals or copies of all the materials.

The books and other documents catalogued in Ibis are the part of the private library of the Spanish Crown that was not transferred to the National Library of Spain in 1836, along with books that were added afterwards. Although many of the materials are much older, the Royal Library officially started in 1711 under the new Bourbon king Felipe V, who—inspired by the French Bourbons—instituted the Royal Public Library with books that were already part of the collection of the previous Hapsburg dynasty. When in 1836 the National Library, under the aegis not of the crown but of the state, was created with the holdings of this Royal Public Library, the books that were deemed necessary for the use of those who lived in court remained in place. These are the nucleus of the collection at the Royal Library, still located in today's Royal Palace in Madrid. Other holdings in this collection are kept at the libraries of the four above-mentioned convents, which were strongly related to the Spanish Crown through patronage and even personal connections. Well known are the cases of the convents of the Descalzas Reales (Monastery of Royal Barefoot Nuns) and the Encarnación (Royal Monastery of the Incarnation), in which some prominent Hapsburg women professed as nuns, making the convents serve as a parallel, female court.

The holdings covered by Ibis represent many centuries of acquisitions by the Spanish Crown. There are, for instance, a few incunabula, which are listed in a separate section of the database. Part of the collection consists of seven thousand maps, of which 1,600 are handmade. Many manuscripts—as yet unstudied and which may contain a trove of valuable data—are housed here, too. The collection has not stopped growing, and now offers books and documents from all periods. For instance, it contains the private collection of Queen Victoria Eugenie of Battenberg, a granddaughter of Queen Victoria who married Alfonso XIII in 1905. This collection includes not only her books but

many documents about her marriage and her involvement in the education of her children, among other topics.

Before 1992, there was only a manual card catalogue and several printed partial catalogues to access these holdings. Since then, Ibis, a computerized bibliographical database that is efficiently running Koha—a widely used open source Integrated Library System (ILS) to access MARC records—has made the holdings much more accessible. The flexible user interface of this system has been adapted to the specific needs of the collection. All kinds of advanced searches using the usual parameters and filters (author, date, location, etc.) are possible. Exporting the records in the most common formats (BIBTEX, RIS, etc.) is easy. Also, after creating a login identity, researchers can store their searches and findings. The web environment through which the search engine is accessed, however, is not streamlined and the user may need some practice to become familiar with the several auxiliary sites that complement this database. The interface is only in Spanish, but given the highly specialized nature of the collection, Ibis users will likely have at least a functional knowledge of Spanish, so they can run searches using the interface.

Unlike what is becoming common today, images of the books and documents are not available for viewing on the Internet in a digitized format. A visit to the Royal Library in the Royal Palace in Madrid, which requires previous clearance as a researcher, is the only way to consult them (though ordering digital or paper copies online is possible for a fee). It is likely that the lack of both an interface in English and access to digitized images will be solved eventually, but at the moment these two deficiencies make Ibis lag behind some of the most modern equivalent catalogues. Nonetheless, given the peculiar connection of the collection to the Spanish Crown, Ibis is a valuable tool for researchers in different disciplines dealing with the early modern period. Many documents in this collection may be of interest because of their known connection to Spanish kings and queens, and to those in positions of power who surrounded them. The bibliographers who implemented Ibis were aware of the importance of these connections, and each record specifies who the owner of the book or document was. Some of them have handwritten marginal notations, a detail that is specified in the bibliographical records. In some cases, the books and documents became part of the Royal Library after having been part of the private collection of some powerful person of the period, such as the Count of Gondomar, who had been the ambassador of Felipe III in England in

the early seventeenth century. His collection was incorporated into the Royal Library in the nineteenth century and—given its size and importance—has its own subsection or “microsite” within the database. Not only are the holdings tagged to specific people of interest, but there is another microsite detailing the *ex libris* and owners’ stamps. In the same spirit, a microsite is dedicated to the identification of the binding shops that worked for this library through different historical periods. Through this tool, interesting inferences can be drawn about the acquisition period of a book, its original owner, readers, and other information.

Another aspect that makes this collection and its search engine useful for those studying the early modern period is the access to the libraries of the old convents mentioned above. Through this catalogue, researchers interested in life in the convents of the period can determine what books these privileged nuns—often sisters and aunts of powerful Spanish kings—were reading or were encouraged to read by those who gave them rare and expensive books as gifts. Since the search engine allows the users to limit the search to the specific location of the books, searches of the books owned by these women can be easily run.

Ibis is a relatively unknown bibliographical database within the growing array of databases available to those interested in studying Spain and its colonies. Although many of its holdings are not unique in the sense that other copies exist and their content may be easier to access physically or in digitized images, the copies in the National Patrimony are unique because their connection to the crown and powerful royal officers is sometimes traceable. The difficulty in accessing images of the catalogued books and documents limits the usefulness of this database. However, in some cases a cursory look at what specific titles were associated with a person or period within the history of the Spanish Crown may alone be of interest. As it stands now, Ibis is an important but improvable tool that, given enough funding, could develop into a full-fledged repository of digitized texts that would be immensely useful for those studying the early modern period from a variety of perspectives.

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