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### Stelts, Sandra, project dir. The English Emblem Book Project. Database

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**Stelts, Sandra, project dir.**

**The English Emblem Book Project. Database.**

**University Park, PA: Pennsylvania State University, 2004. Accessed 4 August 2022.**

[libraries.psu.edu/about/collections/english-emblem-book-project](http://libraries.psu.edu/about/collections/english-emblem-book-project).

The English Emblem Book Project is a website containing an online corpus of 10 emblem books in English from the Eberly Family Special Collections Library at Pennsylvania State University. The main aim of this project is to make Penn State's collection of English emblem books more accessible to both students and emblem scholars. Upon entering the project's home page, the user is invited to read a brief and concise summary of the nature and importance of emblems, explaining that "an emblem combines a picture and text for the striking presentation of a message," with a short description of an emblem and an explanation as to how it should be interpreted. There is also an emphasis on the scholarly importance of emblems as "an unparalleled source not only for the study of daily life of the sixteenth and seventeenth centuries but also for extraordinary insights into what the intellectuals of the times viewed as a necessary adjunct to heraldry, social life, politics, philosophy, and moral behavior" ("About the Collection"). The project's 10 books include important works from different eras and styles—Geffrey Whitney, *A Choice of Emblemes, and Other Devises* (1586); George Wither, *A Collection of Emblemes, Ancient and Moderne* (1635); Christopher Harvey, *The School of the Heart* (1676); Philip Ayres, *Emblems of Love* (1683?); Herman Hugo, *Pia Desideria* (1690); Francis Quarles, *Emblems, Divine and Moral, Together with Hieroglyphicks of the Life of Man* (c. 1700–99?); R. B., *Choice Emblems* (1732); and Henry Green, *The Mirrour of Maiestie* (1870)—along with the English translations of two known emblem books and associated emblematic works—Claude Paradin's *The Heroicall Devises (Devises heroïques)* (1591) and Cesare Ripa's *Iconologia* (1709).

The website's interface is generally user friendly in terms of navigation. There is a navigation bar on the left with links to informational pages, a list of the project's scanned emblem books, and additional scholarly resources. The 10 scanned emblem books can be accessed through a table with links to their individual web pages, their bibliographical information, and a table of contents. The project's strength lies in how it makes these 10 books easy to

read and use: the digital images of the pages are mostly in very good quality, and each page is available for download in JPEG format, in a resolution of 600 dpi, and in different image sizes (small to full size). Furthermore, the scanned collection is in the public domain and can be cited freely (with attribution to Pennsylvania State University). Each book's web page also displays the book's general bibliographic information, including its title, author, date of publication, physical description, languages, and publisher. In order to access more detailed information regarding the physical copy of a scanned book, such as imperfections or imprints, the user must return to the "Emblem Books" page and click on the bibliographical link. Users are able to scroll through a book in one of two ways, either using the forward or backward arrows at the left and right of the image, or by scrolling down the page menu below the search bar on the right of the image and clicking on the desired page. A third option is to click on the "Expand" button and scroll through the enlarged image, but this does not seem to work as well as the other two options.

To the right of each emblem book page is a search bar that does not seem to work. This is likely owing to the fact that the original digital project from 2004 was incorporated into Penn State's digital collections. The search functionality is filtered to the bibliographic information of the books in the English Emblem Book Project and not to the content of each individual emblem. However, this issue is addressed on the project's homepage (under "About the Emblem Books"), where it directs users to the English Poetry Database, which can search the texts of the emblem books online, as well as search for common themes found in emblem books in general. Unfortunately, this option is limited to institutions that have licensed the database and therefore is not a viable option for independent scholars or users who do not have institutional access to the database.

The "Scholarly Resources" page has bibliographical references that are organized according to thematic categories, beginning with general emblem studies and later focusing on subjects such as hypermedia and emblem books and book cataloguing, ending with two links to other websites dedicated to the digitalization of emblem books: Memorial University's *Alciato's Book of Emblems: The Memorial Web Edition in Latin and English* ([mun.ca/alciato](http://mun.ca/alciato)) and the Glasgow University Emblem Website ([emblems.arts.gla.ac.uk](http://emblems.arts.gla.ac.uk)). Even though the resource list is extensive, it is clear that the project is now closed

and has not been updated since; the latest listed publication is from 1994. As a result, some essential studies and books are missing, as are links to more recent digital emblematic projects such as *Emblematica Online* ([emblematica.library.illinois.edu](http://emblematica.library.illinois.edu)) by the University of Illinois and Herzog August Bibliothek, which is the most widely used portal by most emblem scholars today.

The Pennsylvania State University's Eberly Family Special Collections Library has other emblem books in their collection, most of them not in English. This raises a question regarding the decision to create an English emblem book project instead of a more general emblem book digitization project. The answer is found in how the aim of the project was defined: "[The project] makes this older form of text, the emblem book, available within a newer form of text, the World Wide Web" ("Project Overview"). The fact that the books in the project are only in English allows both Penn State students and other users of the website who may not have a deep understanding of emblems and their modes of interpretation to browse the website, flip through the pages of the books, and learn more about emblems and their history. Introducing emblems to a larger audience is an important objective that could lead to newfound interest in them—and hopefully to new scholars and studies.

The English Emblem Book Project is an important resource for English-speaking students and young emblem scholars who specialize in English emblem books. The high quality of the scans of the 10 books available online, and the ability to download and use them freely, is the project's main advantage over certain other online resources. In addition, the bibliographical information regarding the physical copy of each scanned book provides scholars with a basic understanding of the book's appearance and condition. This can be useful for scholars who do not have the ability to travel to inspect the physical copies of these books, or for anyone who does not have much experience with analyzing a book's basic condition. The collection is accessible and has a complete and hyperlinked table of contents for each book. However, navigating through an individual emblem book, in which text and image are interconnected, should be also image based rather than just text based, using thumbnails of the books' pages for quick navigation. If the website's user interface were to be upgraded to include ease of access and quicker navigation, and if the scholarly resources list were to be updated, the English Emblem Book Project could become one

of the leading websites for students and young scholars to access an important emblematic database and learn how to study and understand emblems.

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