Renaissance and Reformation
Renaissance et Réforme

López Poza, Sagrario, and Nieves R. Brisaboa, project dirs. Biblioteca Digital de Emblemática Hispánica. Database

Tamar Cholcman

Citer ce compte rendu

Cholcman, T. (2022). Compte rendu de [López Poza, Sagrario, and Nieves R.
Brisaboa, project dirs. Biblioteca Digital de Emblemática Hispánica. Database].
Renaissance and Reformation / Renaissance et Réforme, *45*(3), 247–251.
https://doi.org/10.33137/rr.v45i3.40437

López Poza, Sagrario, and Nieves R. Brisaboa, project dirs.
Biblioteca Digital de Emblemática Hispánica. Database.
Coruña: University of A Coruña, 1992. Accessed 20 March 2022.
bidiso.es/EmblematicaHispanica.

The Biblioteca Digital de Emblemática Hispánica (Digital library of Spanish emblematics) is an open-access database and digital library of Spanish emblem books from the sixteenth and seventeenth centuries, which forms part of the Biblioteca Digital Siglo de Oro (BIDISO) portal (bidiso.es). It was initiated in 1992 by the Seminario interdisciplinar para el estudio de la Literatura Áurea Española (SIELAE) under the direction of Sagrario López Poza (University of A Coruña), and in 1995 was joined with the Database Laboratory directed by Professor Nieves R. Brisaboa (University of A Coruña).

The BIDISO portal provides access to databases, digitized editions (facsimiles and transcribed texts) relating to both emblematica and inventories, *relaciones de sucesos* (reports of historical events), encyclopedias and encyclopedic collections, and other sources. The pioneering Biblioteca Digital de Emblemática Hispánica (BDEH) project, was the very first endeavor of this scope.

The main goal of the BIDISO portal as a whole, and of the BDEH in particular, is to introduce and make these books more accessible to researchers, and to facilitate interdisciplinary research of early modern Spanish culture and literature. López Poza and Saavedra Places explain:

> [T]he study of literature and culture in the sixteenth and seventeenth centuries, in order to be fully understood, required approaches that were not limited to one discipline or area of knowledge. It was necessary to break down the false frontiers of area competencies imposed during the last centuries (which did not exist in the Renaissance and Baroque periods) in order to approach the study from multidisciplinary perspectives in a more comprehensive manner.[1]

1. My translation. López Poza and Saavedra Places, "Recursos digitales," 285–86: "el estudio de la literatura y la cultura de los siglos XVI y XVII, para una comprensión cabal, precisaba de enfoques no limitados a una disciplina o área de conocimiento. Había que deshacer las fronteras postizas de competencias de áreas impuestas durante los últimos siglos (y que no existían en el Renacimiento y el Barroco) para acometer de manera más integral el estudio desde perspectivas multidisciplinares."

Within the emblematic genre, the research of literature, political philosophy and history, religious studies, the history of science, and art and material cultural history can all find especially rich materials for investigation. Spanish emblem books in particular were practically unknown until the late twentieth century owing both to their rarity in Spanish libraries and to the lack of modern editions. The aspiration to enable interdisciplinary research to "break down the false frontiers" in the 1990s addressed the need not only to facilitate research, but also to make known the Spanish emblematic corpus.[2]

The BDEH database is much more than a digitized library. In addition to digital facsimiles, it also offers partial transcriptions, translations (mostly from Latin) into Spanish, and a study of 27 Spanish emblem books by 25 authors, as well as some 2,000 individual emblems from the sixteenth and seventeenth centuries. Included are Spanish emblem writers such as the Andalusian Jesuit Lorenzo Ortiz and Diego Saavedra Fajardo, as well as Spanish editions of other writers such as Guillaume Rouillé's Alciato edition, *Los emblemas*, published in Lyon in 1549. Each book is introduced with the edition's bibliographical data and number of emblems. The emblems' mottos, which are usually in Latin, are transcribed and translated into Spanish and accompanied by references to their classical sources (a feature of great value for scholars using this database). The epigrams are likewise transcribed, summarized, and analyzed in reference to the type of verses and stanzas. In addition, the database also contains a study of the texts, listing sources cited, onomastics, and examples of keywords. The *picturae* are described, marrying their pictorial motifs with an analysis of their iconographical meaning in relation to the emblem. However, probably because it was developed in the 1990s, BDEH does not make use of a standardized vocabulary or classification system such as Iconclass, which has been widely adopted by the emblem community since 2000.

The transcription and translation of the mottos, the transcription of all the epigrams, the summaries, the descriptions of motifs, and the different indices and keywords offer various options for searching. For example, a user can perform a complex search on iconographic motifs, nicknames, or any word that appears in the epigrams or in the summaries, or search by keywords and the meanings of the emblems. Thus, despite being somewhat dated, particularly

2. As part of this endeavour, another database of emblem books in Spanish translation was added to the BIDISO portal in 1999: Literatura Emblemática Hispánica: Bibliografía, enlaces y noticias (bidiso.es/Emblematica).

in light of the rapid digital developments in the years since the project was first launched, the database is still a very useful resource for emblem studies and everyone interested in Spanish literature and culture.

There are a few drawbacks to BDEH, however. As already noted, the database does not use a standardized classification system. The use of a widely accepted indexing system, such as Iconclass, provides both the indexer and the user with a consistent vocabulary for both creating and browsing metadata.[3] A systematic classification has long been recognized as a research standard. Employing a standard vocabulary facilitates comparative research and allows interoperability across resources. A system like Iconclass, which relies on an alphanumeric indexing system, also provides the foundation for a multilingual thesaurus. These features further support international projects. In addition, the interface design seeks to imitate the book format by placing the texts within the frame of a book and imitating browsing through its pages by clicking on a small triangular book tab at the corner of each "page" (Fig. 1). This means not only that the texts are in a very small font (which can of course be resolved by zooming in) but also that not all the related information is visible on the screen. The user needs to scroll down in one place, open a GIF image in another, or click a link to reach more information. An emblem's *pictura*, which is not represented on the emblem's page, also needs to be opened in a separate GIF file containing the digitized image of the original page. This means users must scroll down to see the emblem image. Moreover, because this database was constructed in the 1990s, these digitized images—having been made from print facsimiles or even microfilm—are of quite low quality, especially in comparison to the digital image quality currently available. Thus, while the text in the transcription can be made more legible by zooming in, there is no remedy for viewing the images in better quality. In addition, once a user opens an image, there is simply no way to close it except to hit the "back button" on the web browser. In addition, again due to the database's early construction date, there is no use or inclusion of links to archival sources or other documents outside the database itself. And lastly, without English translations, BDEH is of course only usable for readers of Spanish.

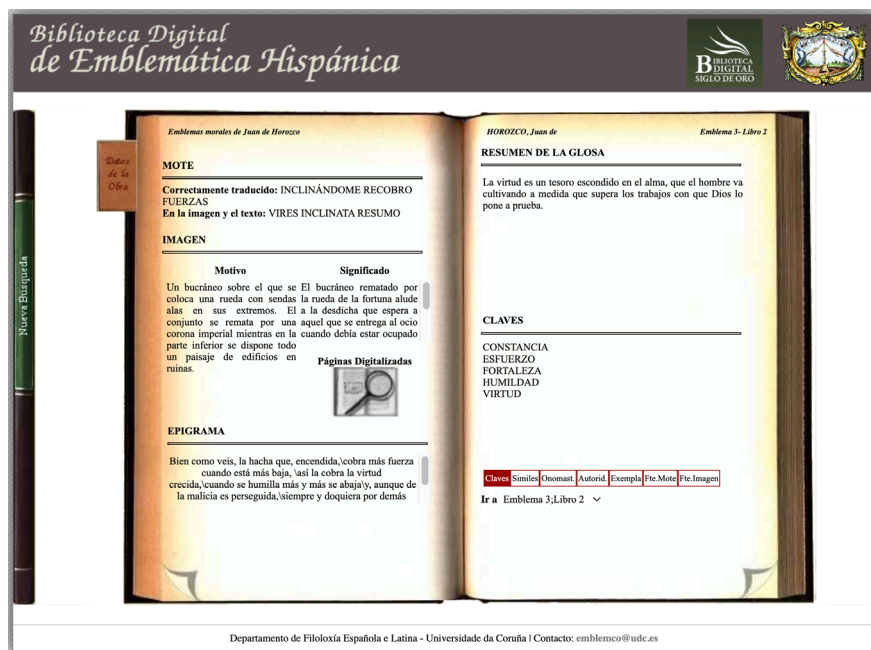3. Brandhorst, "Using Iconclass," 40.

Fig. 1. Screenshot showing an emblem page from Juan de Horozco, *Emblemas morales*, book 2, emblem 2.

Despite these drawbacks, all rooted in the database's early conception and its lack of recent updates (the last being in 2013, as far as I can tell), its contribution to Spanish emblematics and cultural studies has been, and still is, considerable. This pioneering project was an important forerunner to other emblem databases such as Emblematica Online (emblematica.library.illinois.edu), initiated in 2003; the Emblem Project Utrecht (emblems.hum.uu.nl), developed between 2003 and 2006; and the Glasgow University Emblem Website (emblems.arts.gla.ac.uk), initiated in 2004 and completed in 2006. Most importantly, the Biblioteca Digital de Emblemática Hispánica has fostered numerous studies and has been beneficial to researchers and students both in and outside of Spain.

TAMAR CHOLCMAN
Tel Aviv University
https://doi.org/10.33137/rr.v45i3.40437

Works Cited

Brandhorst, Hans. "Using Iconclass for the Iconographic Indexing of Emblems."
    In *Digital Collections and the Management of Knowledge: Renaissance
    Emblem Literature as a Case Study for the Digitization of Rare Texts and
    Images*, edited by Mara Wade, 29–43. DigiCULT, 2004. https://iconclass.
    org/z/read/2004_Digicult_Emblems.pdf.

López Poza, Sagrario, and Ángeles Saavedra Places. "Recursos digitales ofre-
    cidos por el SIELAE para el estudio del Siglo de Oro. Creación, gestión
    y evolución de BIDISO." In *Humanidades Digitales: Desafíos, logros y
    perspectivas de futuro*, edited by Sagrario López Poza and Nieves Pena
    Sueiro. Janus, Annex 1 (2004): 285–303. https://www.janusdigital.es/an-
    exos/contribucion.htm?id=27.