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GLOBAL EMBLEMS' AND 'TRANSMISSION AND INTERMEDIALITY: THE IMPACT OF THE EMBLEMATIC CULTURE ON THE EARLY AMERICAS'

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ABSTRACT

This white paper briefly outlines two co-dependent research initiatives: 'Global Emblems' and 'Transmission and Intermediality: the impact of the emblematic culture in Ibero-America'. Both projects are in their initial stage of development, at Brown University.

▪ 'Global Emblems' is set to map, document and study the presence of emblems in material culture, around the world, and cross-link these occurrences with pre-existing digital collections of emblem books. The database will be fed by an international network of specialists, which is already active, with members in over ten countries and the support of the Society for Emblem Studies. The platform will allow searches by concepts (using Iconclass classification system) and a number of locations will allow users to 'visit' them through Virtual Reality (360 annotated photos). The database will be systematically studied through 'thematic clusters'.

Although at first glance the focus on emblems may seem narrow, emblems have a broad geographical and historical spread, which can be traced, and that provides the necessary data for the kind of analytical and interpretative study required in the second research initiative, which illustrates the importance of emblems within the wider frame of Latin American cultural history.

▪ ‘Transmission and Intermediality: the impact of the emblematic culture on the Early Americas’ will analyse the data from ‘Global Emblems’ in order to understand the role of emblems in the colonial process in the Americas. More specifically, this project will look at the ‘pictorial dispute’ in the New World, by examining the ‘pictorial turn’ from the ‘catecismos jeroglíficos’ to the displayed emblems in the 17th-century (many of them resulting from the remediation of European prints), and the ideological, political and sociological implications around the presence of these emblems in buildings and early-modern festivals.

Keywords: Emblem; Displayed Emblem; Ibero-America; *jeroglífico*; Intermediality; Cultural History; Comparative Literature; Visual Culture; Digital Humanities.

1. INTRODUCCIÓN

An emblem can be defined as an artistic composition that combines pictures and poetry in order to produce a third, very intricate meaning. The first emblem book is Andrea Alciato’s *Emblematum Liber* (Augsburg: Steyner, 1531), which paved the way for a genre, emblem books, that became extremely popular across Europe throughout the long early-modern period. So vast were the subjects approached in these books, that one can say that there was almost nothing in Renaissance culture that did not make its way into emblems.

The late 1980’s witnessed a renewed interest in the early-modern emblematic culture, leading to the emergence of the modern discipline of Emblem Studies. Since then, emblem books have been systematically studied. Moreover, entire collections of emblem books were digitized and annotated in international projects.

However, emblems did not belong exclusively to the domains of print culture. In fact, since Alciato’s, emblem authors endorsed the use of emblem books as a source for ‘displayed emblems’, painted on the walls and ceilings of public and religious buildings; carved in altars and furniture; used widely as part of the iconographic programme of early-modern festivals (royal entries, marriages, exequies and births, canonizations, celebrations of patron saints, etc.); and so on. This is particularly true in the Americas, where emblems were only rarely printed, but present in the material culture all over the continent – much in debt to the Jesuits sponsorship of the genre.

Unfortunately, the interest in these 'displayed emblems' did not receive the same scholarly attention as the emblem books: they are still subject to case studies, many of which dedicated to descriptive attempts to identify printed sources that were remediated in the material culture, rather than fomenting a general discussion on the impact of this process of intermediality on the transmission of emblems.

So far, no systematic attempt has been made to map this phenomenon around the globe, in order to visualise its presence. Essential questions, such as: which emblems were more popular in material culture, where and why? Which emblems emerged in material culture and were then remediated in print culture, or vice versa? What was the political, religious, ideological and sociological implications of having these emblems 'displayed'? What is the impact of this cultural phenomenon beyond the emblematic tradition? Were they always translated?

This collaborative international project – with participants from over ten countries – has the ambitious purpose of challenging the landscape of emblem studies, by mapping, documenting, annotating and studying all the occurrences of displayed emblems around the globe, connecting them to their printed correspondences (whenever they exist), with the help of cutting-edge technologies in a digital platform. This initiative will allow scholars to share a database, visualize data, perform quantitative and qualitative analysis; and will inform 'thematic research clusters' devoted to studying this database from multi-linguistic and transnational perspectives.

The 'thematic cluster' under my responsibility, 'Transmission & Intermediality', centres on the role of emblems and intermediality in the colonial process in the Americas. The objective is to understand what I have previously referred as the 'pictorial turn' in the New World, from the Franciscan use of 'Testerian Manuscripts' as a medium of communication with native peoples, to the widespread Jesuit use of emblems for a similar purpose: creating a hybrid identity by means of the powerful rhetorical combination of images and texts, art and literature (Leal 2017; Leal 2020)



Fig. 1: Conceptual scheme showing one emblem (*Turrus Eburnea*), its cultural transmission and remediation (i.e. its transition from print to other supports: painting, sculpture and tile painting).

2. GLOBAL EMBLEMS

2.1. State of the Art

2.1.1. *Displayed Emblems and Intermediality*

Although there is a vast number of studies about emblem books (as a cultural phenomenon), the same cannot be said with regard to displayed emblems—so far restricted to case studies. The few collective volumes about the subject (Daly and Böker, 1999; Höpel, 2014) stress the need of new contributions in the field, which is now attracting more and more the attention of specialized scholarship. In general terms, among the open theoretical issues concerning displayed emblems, one can mention: the lack of a quantitative analysis of the phenomenon; the absence of studies of the exposure (readership/audience) of displayed emblems and its impact on culture (e.g. a circle of displayed emblems painted on the walls of a church may have had more potential 'readers' than an entire emblem book, and a more diverse readership); questions about the authorship of displayed emblems (for instance, there is no specific term to indicate the intellectual creator of an iconographic programme, etc.); and a general typology of the changes that emblems undergo in their processes of creation (strategies of 'emblemization'; hybridization of colonial images, etc.) or transition (such as losing the *picturae*, *inscriptio*, *subscriptio*; becoming part of a new iconographic programme; receiving other constitutive elements; being copied 'exactly' after a model, or just receiving the influence, and so on).

Moreover, one can say that there is space for a study aiming at challenging the idea that 'displayed emblems' are somehow secondary to print ones: and there is evidence that this misconception has deterred the development of the field (the emblematic phenomenon in Ibero-America mostly consists of 'displayed' emblems, and the entire continent has been neglected by English-speaking scholarship, with authorities in the field suggesting that the emblematic culture was less significant in the Americas, without any supporting evidence).

2.1.2. *Digital Database and Map of the Emblematic Culture*

It is also significant that whereas there are many excellent online collections of emblem books (*Emblematica Online*; *Emblems at Glasgow*; *Biblioteca Emblematica*; etc.), no digital database has been dedicated to displayed (i.e. applied) emblems as a global phenomenon (exceptions are *Emblemata.ch*, focusing on displayed emblems in Switzerland and *Apes.es*, dedicated to selected programmes in the Iberian Peninsula).

2.2. Mapping the Transmission of Texts and Images.

It becomes clear that the next step for emblem scholarship is to encompass the displayed emblems (in any medium) as a whole and their impact on the material culture and beyond. However, there is a clear obstacle: how to analyse these global emblems in the same context, in order to compare them? Aby Warburg's experiments with his *Mnemosyne Bildatlas* have proven the difficulties in visualizing semantic, chronological and geographical elements in the same context, so as to understand the transmission of images. At this time, the technical means to pursue such an endeavour were very limited: he had to pin his approx. 1,000 images in 67 wooden panels, compromising their contextualization. Nowadays, the technological solutions for these problems are available (Geographical Information Systems, image digitization, paradigms of concept-based image classification with Linked Open Data), as Digital Humanities collections and projects have demonstrated (beyond the projects mentioned above, there are others such as Mapping Paintings, dedicated to mapping the provenance of artworks, and resources like Scalar and ArcGIS).

Quantitative research regarding the transmission and intermediality of emblems can be significantly facilitated with a digital tool capable of performing searches through different media, with a similar accessibility. The emergence of such a tool can help change the landscape of the discipline, by fully embracing its transnational and interdisciplinary nature.

2.3. Objectives

The overall objective of this initiative is to provide a framework for the study of the transmission and presence of emblems around the world, in the long early-modern period, by creating a methodology, database and digital mapping platform that will be fed into and studied by an international network of specialists, organized in four 'thematic clusters': Transmission and Intermediality; Religion; Festivals; and Power.

This research aims at challenging the scholarly perception of 'applied emblems' as something secondary in relation to print ones. It is designed to provide evidence of the diversity of emblems, and of the decisive uses of literature and images in material culture, where their readership tends to be significantly wider. The possibilities of visualization and cross-reference will allow scholars to identify new relationships, trace the sources of emblems,

understand the influence of specific emblem books or observe the diffusion of a particular image, text or idea, in ways that are not currently possible.

The GEM database and map is being conceived as a new *Denkraum*, to use Warburg's concept, for the study of the transmission of images: an intuitive tool for learning and teaching, allowing searches to see how a particular concept (such as 'love') was represented in different cultures, or the different meanings that the same image (an ouroboros, for instance) could convey across time. Moreover, given its relationship with architecture, a number of *loci* will be photographed in 360 technologies, which will be annotated from 'within'. This will allow students and scholars to visit these places through virtual reality, allowing them to see, at first hand, how an emblem painted in a church in Spain appears in a church in Peru – and how the different environments and iconographic programmes can affect the meaning.

Finally, given the semantic loss which occurred over time and the intrinsic enigmatic nature of emblems, it is very difficult for the general public to understand the meaning of emblems currently displayed in religious temples. As a consequence, there is an equal loss in the public perception of the significance of this heritage. Global Emblems will contribute decisively to raising public and institutional awareness of this legacy, by providing specialized studies and contextualization for the phenomenon.

2.4. Methodology

2.4.1. Mundus Emblematicus Network

The *Mundus Emblematicus* Network was informally established in 2016, with a session at the Sixteenth Century Society and Conference in Bruges, Belgium. Another session followed, at the Renaissance Society of America conference in Chicago, in 2017. The participants in this scholarly enterprise have already collected substantial data regarding displayed emblems, for their own research:

Participants:

Dr Pedro Germano Leal, Principal Investigator, Brown University (USA, responsible for Latin America)

Dr Carme Lopez Calderón, Universidade da Coruña (Spain)

Dr Rosa de Marco, Université de Liège (Belgium)

Dr Marie Chaufour, Université de Bourgogne (France)

Dr Maren Biederbick, Deutsches Medizinhistorisches Museum (Germany)

Dr Gabriele Quaranta, Sapienza Università di Roma (Italy)

Dr Filipa Medeiros Araújo, Universidade do Porto (Portugal)

Monika Biel, Herzog August Bibliothek (Germany, responsible for Poland)

Ágnes Kusler, Eötvös Loránd University (Hungary, responsible for Hungary, Slovakia, Romania)

2.4.2. Database infrastructure and metadata

For the database infrastructure, Global Emblems will partner with Arkyves, a digital database and research platform for Cultural History, distributed by Brill (arkyves.org). This collection is fully indexed with Iconclass, the best system for image indexation (already developed for Linked Open Data, in both RDF-SKOS and JSON formats).

This partnership is of advantage for the project, for a number of reasons. It will:

- Significantly reduce the costs and time of the project;
- Facilitate the upload of new content, which can be made by the participants themselves, using a platform that has been designed for that specific purpose;
- Guarantee the update of the system and hosting, since they will not depend on the duration of the project;
- Facilitate the integration of Global Emblems with other collections using Iconclass as LOD.

2.4.3. Database Granularity

The data granularity (the amount of information about the digital objects) will have two levels: book, building and object; and individual emblem (detailed). The standards have already been agreed by the participants, and is in line with the best practices in the field. The information headings are adapted from: Rawles (2004).

2.4.4. Data Collection & Harvesting

The information for the Global Emblems database will be gathered in different ways:

- Collected and uploaded by the participants, from their own collections of primary sources;
- Contributed by members of the scientific community, from their own collections of primary sources, and sent to the network participant who is responsible for that particular country (and who will be responsible for curating the data, in line with the GEM standards);
- Collected and uploaded by the participants, from secondary sources;
- Harvested from other collections, from partners (for instance, GEM can obtain the title, author, place of publication, and date of publication of emblem books from Emblematica Online). This will enrich the database and allow cross-references.

2.4.5. Platform (Map)

For the map itself, which will be the primary way to access the data, GEM will use Google maps (Google Maps API V3) and Google Fusion Tables to design a searchable, filterable map. The map will be embedded in the project website, which will contain further documentation (instructions; materials for download, etc.).

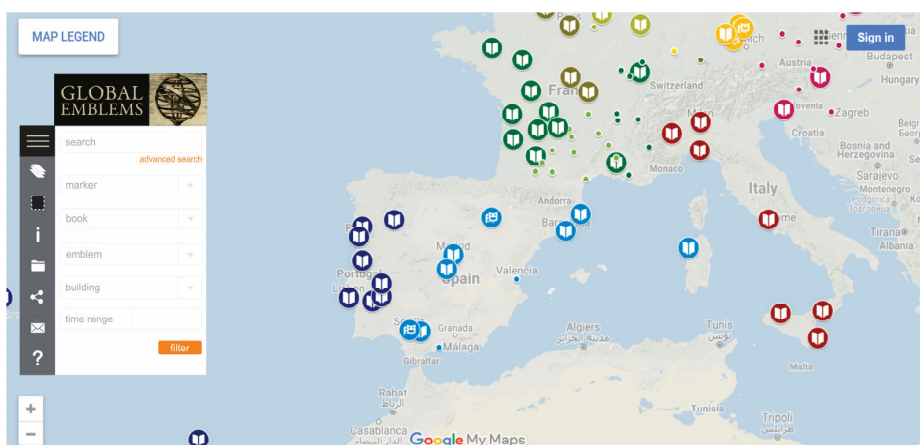


Fig. 2: Proof of Concept for Global Emblems platform

2.4.6. Thematic Clusters

As mentioned previously, the participants will collaborate in feeding the database, and studying it in four initial thematic clusters:

- ‘Transmission and Intermediality’: coordinated by Dr Pedro Germano Leal, concerning the theoretical issues emerging from the transmission of emblems and their transition between print and material cultures, with a study case focused on the cultural exchanges between Europe and the Americas);
- ‘Religion’: coordinated by Dr Carme López Calderón, focused on the implication of emblems in the religious discourse of the counter-reformation;
- ‘Festival’: coordinated by Dr Rosa de Marco, which will focus on the use of emblems in early-modern Jesuit festivals;
- ‘Power’: coordinated by Dr Maren Biederbick, that will consider the widespread use of *impresa* as the ‘presentification’ of power in Europe, and their political use.

The clusters will involve more than one member, and their own research groups. Other research clusters can be created as the project progresses.

3. TRANSMISSION AND INTERMEDIALITY: THE IMPACT OF THE EMBLEMATIC CULTURE ON THE EARLY AMERICAS

3.1. State of the Art

3.1.1. Emblems in Ibero-America

Recently the author have edited the first scholarly volume entirely dedicated to the emblematic culture in Latin-America (*Emblems in Colonial Ibero-America: To the New World on the Ship of Theseus*, Glasgow Emblem Studies, 2017), with Rubem Amaral Jr. Hitherto, no monograph had been dedicated to this phenomenon as a whole, and a significant number of ‘displayed emblems’ in the region that have never received academic attention, remain to be fully studied. This creates a demand not only for new qualitative researches in the field, but for the development of a systematic theoretical approach, able to address the specific iconological problems involved in the creation, transmission and reception of displayed emblems, in general, and their occurrences in the New World, in particular.

3.1.2. Copies and the 'Colonial Status'

One of the historiographical problems related to the study of displayed emblems in Ibero-America comes from the notion that paintings inspired by European prints are often referred to as "copies" of colonial sources. As a consequence, these paintings lacked the originality that would qualify them as "fine art".

Paradoxically, even in the context of a current historical process that aims at decolonizing our perception of Ibero-American art, paintings inspired by European prints (or "models") can be regarded as a sign of cultural dependency, with some scholars branding this process of remediating prints as a characteristic of "colonial art"—especially when the research on these objects focusses on describing their possible European sources, rather than interpreting their meaning in their local context.

This view marginalizes important aspects of Latin American visual cultures, notably in terms of their hybridity and decolonization.

3.2. Objectives

3.2.1.

First, this project aims at *developing a new understanding of the transmission of emblems between Europe and the Iberian Americas*, taking into consideration: a) the effects of the transition between print and material cultures on the structure of emblems; b) the impact of the different forms of exposure (print and material supports) on the cultural reception of emblems; and c) the development of a new theoretical framework, methodology and terminology to study early-modern intermediality in the case of 'applied emblematics'. Playing with the notion of *translatio studii*, at a critical level, this new perspective will challenge the stereotype of emblems as primarily a book phenomenon—which overshadowed the study of their significance in the cultural history of the New World, where emblems are mostly 'displayed'. This will further highlight the pivotal role of emblems in the New World, and the idea that, from this 'transitional perspective', emblems are more than a static combination of text and image: they can be regarded as a method of organizing elements of cultural information for their transmission (between cultures) and transition (between print and material domains). Moreover, it can offer an explanation for the constant presence of texts/captions in Spanish American paintings.

3.2.2. *Pictorial Dispute*

Second, as a study case largely based on the results from the previous item, and in line with Serge Gruzinski's arguments in *Images at War* (2001), this project will examine what I have previously referred to as the 'pictorial dispute' between the European and Native imageries in the Viceroyalty of New Spain (Leal 2017). The objective is to demonstrate how the visual mediation between the two cultures moved from 'hieroglyphic catechisms' (mostly inspired by Nahua iconography, and promoted by the Franciscans) to the widespread use of emblems (displayed in architecture and in festivals, being championed mainly by the Jesuits, with a wide use of Flemish emblematic prints), from the turn to the 17th century onwards, and the major impact of this change in the local visual culture. Essentially, this pictorial turn was echoed by a rhetorical change: from the discourse of salvation, captured in the *catechismos jeroglíficos*, to the discourse of damnation contained in the emblems about hell, inspired by emblem books, which served the purpose of creating a new, hybrid, imaginary. From a theoretical perspective, I will argue that this dispute of images, anchored in the material culture, was as much of a determining factor as the 'colonization of languages' identified by Walter Mignolo in his *The Darker Side of the Renaissance* (1995).

3.2.3. *Challenging the Notion of 'Colonial Art'*

Finally, by using the GEM database, I will demonstrate that the remediation between print and material culture (and vice-versa) was a global phenomenon. However, the historiography does not refer to paintings in Naples, inspired by Spanish prints, as 'colonial art'—even though Naples was a Spanish Habsburg Vice-Kingdom: the same status enjoyed by New Spain. This project will defy this paradigm by developing a de-colonizing argument against the 'colonial gaze' in Latin American visual culture. This will be achieved by moving the axis of critical analysis from a colonial to a global perspective, where hybridism is a condition (Burke, 2009).

3.2.4. *Monograph*

The outcomes of this research will be the basis for a future monograph, provisionally entitled 'Nepantla Hieroglyphs: the pictorial dispute in Colonial Ibero-America'. This book will propose a new way to understand the role of images in the colonial process, outlining the need for a new iconology—capable

of understanding the impact of transmission and intermediation on the signification of iconographic programmes.

3.3. Methodology

3.3.1. Building a Database of Displayed Emblems in Ibero-America

With the development of a methodology to index applied emblems, I will proceed to apply this method to the database of PESSCA (Project on the Engraved Sources of Spanish Colonial Art). The first step will be distinguishing which of the approx. 3,500 colonial artworks were created under the influence of emblems, using a clear criterion, developed for this purpose. The occurrences of 'displayed emblems' will then be further annotated and indexed, and linked to their source; the geographical position of the displayed emblem will be mapped; the print sources will also be classified (in terms of the genre/theme of emblem book, etc.); the possibility of indexing subjects will be taken into consideration depending on the volume of occurrences of applied emblems in this database. This primary dataset may also be enriched by the inclusion of the occurrences discussed in the volume about emblems in Ibero-America, which I have edited.

3.3.2. Analysing the Database

With such a database, it will be possible, for the first time, to elaborate descriptive statistics of applied emblems in the Americas, capable of asserting: (1) how many occurrences are known; (2) where/when they were concentrated; (3) what were the most popular emblems/books/authors; (4) what are the most frequent changes that undergone by emblems when they transitioned from print to material cultures; (5) what were the most frequent themes and subjects; among other crucial data, which will be fully explored. In the context of the present research, I am particularly interested in using this database to understand the influence of emblematic prints made, commissioned and/or promoted by Jesuits: the reason for this interest relies on my search for the Jesuits' *institutional* use of emblems as a rhetorical device in the colonial enterprise (with the support of the Spanish crown). Also, the widespread presence of that order around the world sets a formidable reference for comparative analysis (for instance, were the emblems chosen to be 'applied' on Jesuit colleges in Europe the same chosen to decorate their counterparts in the New World? What are the implications of this similarity or difference?).

3.3.3. *Researching on the ‘Pictorial Dispute’*

The project will pinpoint the presence of applied occurrences taken from ‘Jesuit print emblems’ in the course of the 17th and 18th centuries in the Americas, so as to identify which were the most influential works. This information will then be compared to recent specialized bibliography in the field (Daly and Dimler, *The Jesuit Emblem in European Context*, 2016; among others). Of major interest here is to recognize, for instance, the role of Dutch/Flemish printers and engravers (e.g. Plantin, Moretus, Galle, the Wierix and Sadeler families) in producing ‘models’ for paintings in the Americas. Special attention will be given to the process of *emblemization* (in which cultural entities—such as images and literary texts—that are not “emblematic” are transformed into emblems by wrapping text and image together, in the course of their transmission).

Finally, this emblematic presence will be confronted with the previous form of visual mediation between Europeans and Americans: the ‘hieroglyphic catechisms’ (also known as Testerian manuscripts) used by Franciscans. Apart from a relevant secondary bibliography on these catechisms and their use in the New World, the author will focus on this method as synthesized by Diego de Valadés in his *Rhetorica Christiana* (Perugia, 1575), which constitutes an extraordinary testimony to the education of indigenous peoples by the use of images in the 16th century.

By contrasting these two visual rhetorical models, this project will tackle bold research questions, such as: did the previous existence of a form of visual education (hieroglyphic catechisms) facilitate the reception of emblems in the Viceroyalty of New Spain? To what extent can the Jesuit use of emblems in the New World be considered an intentional strategy? What may be the consequences of moving the visual intermediation in the colony from an indigenous-based imagery (conveyed by the Testerian manuscripts) to a European one (as present in emblems)? How can this whole phenomenon demonstrate the importance and specificities of emblematic culture in the Americas?

3.3.4. *Research meetings and visits*

International collaboration and feedback is crucial for the development of the present project. Therefore, alongside the meetings of the MEM Network, the project will involve two field trips: one to Mexico and the other to Peru, that will also involve the documentation of the locations.

I will also participate in leading international conferences, such as the Renaissance Society of America, in order to discuss my hypotheses with specialists in the field of Emblem Studies, Iconology and Cultural History in the Americas.

4. CURRENT STAGE OF DEVELOPMENT

In 2017 this project was awarded a generous support from the Marie Curie Co-Fund fellowship, at the Université Catholique de Louvain, as part of the GEMCA (Group for Early Modern Cultural Analysis). Unfortunately, for reasons of force majeure the fellowship had to be declined and the project was halted. Another major setback was Google's unilateral decision to discontinue its support for the applications *Expeditions* and *Virtual Tour*, which directly affected the project's proofs of concept and its initial intentions to use Google technology.

During this hiatus, the participants of Global Emblems continued their research and the identification of emblematic sites. We are currently setting up an online database, and the project will be restarted in early 2021. An informal meeting is being planned for the Society for Emblem Studies conference in Coimbra (2021), when new plans will be announced.

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