

ACLS Humanities E-Book

Reviewed October 2020 Simine Waliyar Marine, Acquisitions/Systems Librarian Architectural Association Library simine.marine@aaschool.ac.uk

The screenshot shows the ACLS Humanities E-Book database interface. On the left, there is a sidebar with search filters: Open Access, Subject, Author, Publisher, and Series. The main content area displays a list of books. The first book is 'Architecture of Solitude: Cistercian Abbeys in Twelfth-Century England' by Peter Fergusson. The second book is 'Mathematics in Ancient Iraq: A Social History' by Eleanor Robson. The interface includes navigation links like '< Previous | 1 - 15 of 5,517 | Next >' and sorting options like 'Sort by Date Added (Newest First)' and '15 per page'.

The ACLS Humanities E-Book (HEB) is a digital collection of core texts in the humanities and social sciences, including seventy-one titles on art history by authors such as Kenneth Clark, Erwin Panofsky, and Claire Bishop. Funded by the Andrew W. Mellon Foundation (with additional funding from

the Gladys Krieble Delmas Foundation) and over twenty years in the making, the database currently includes over 5,400 titles curated by the American Council of Learned Societies and its member societies. Art societies include the American Academy of Arts and Sciences, College Art Association (CAA) and International Center of Medieval Art. Although less than 10% of the database covers subjects such as art, architectural history, and film studies, and key texts for those subjects are not represented, the title list remains impressive with Pulitzer Prize winners and the art specific series, CAA Monographs.

Michigan Publishing Services, which now fully manages the database, shared a list of the top most read titles as of August 2020. The most read title was *Imagined Communities: Reflections on the Origin and Spread of Nationalism* by Benedict Anderson (Verso, 2006), originally published in 1983 but a title still relevant in discussions around nationalism today. As for the arts, HEB includes several distinguished women art historians such as Jeanette Favrot Peterson and Sharon Gerstel, to name a couple. *Artificial Hells: Participatory Art and the Politics of Spectatorship* by Claire Bishop (Verso, 2012) is a title which has been slowly creeping up on reading lists. Although contemporary art is represented, the majority of titles cover pre-twentieth century art and architecture. Non-western art subjects are present, but Michigan Publishing Services aims to diversify the database further as it moves into the resource's third phase of funding and development.

Fulcrum, developed by the University of Michigan and partners, is the web-based platform that

hosts HEB. It is simple in its design with very few features, but effective for finding and reading. Navigating around the platform is intuitive; from feedback, I can report that a user with the most basic level of technological skills is able to use the platform with ease. A few facets are available in the search, covering the basics such as subject, author, and publisher. There is no cross-referencing between titles or interactive content such as that found on new Bloomsbury databases. Within the e-reader, users are able to modify reading settings but are not able to bookmark. Fulcrum as a platform is able to provide enhanced multimodal content, and according to Michigan Publishing Services, the plan is to make use of these features for future additions to HEB. Accessibility is fundamental to the Fulcrum platform and realized in HEB with EPUBs usable with assistive technologies as well as downloadable PDFs, although the database does not include textual descriptions of images.

HEB is a subscription-based collection and cannot be purchased outright, as pricing is based on institution size. Each e-book on the database comes to about eleven cents for a small institution and eighty cents for a very large institution, which is an incredible value. The e-book access is unlimited, which is vital for reading lists in an academic setting. Sixty titles are currently Open Access and require no registration. Open Access content includes a dozen titles on art and architectural history, notably Mario Carpo's *Architecture in the Age of Printing*. MARC records are readily available for download and with titles accessible through OpenURLs, e-books in the collection are usually accessed via an OPAC or discovery system. Users might therefore interact with a book record more than they would browse the database itself.

The intended audience for the database is undergraduate/early graduate students. However, digital collections have become invaluable to libraries and their users in 2020, so this database could serve an even wider audience. HEB provides access to digital content written and selected by and for scholars. Some of these titles are available on databases such as JSTOR, but parts of the collection can only be found digitally on HEB. The inclusion of publishers not available digitally elsewhere will be a welcome addition.