

Renaissance and Reformation Renaissance et Réforme



Introduction: Digital Resources for Studying the Spanish Renaissance

Hilaire Kallendorf

Volume 43, Number 4, Fall 2020

Spaces of Power of the Spanish Nobility (1480–1715)
Les espaces de pouvoir de la noblesse espagnole (1480–1715)

URI: <https://id.erudit.org/iderudit/1076833ar>
DOI: <https://doi.org/10.33137/rr.v43i4.36389>

[See table of contents](#)

Publisher(s)

Iter Press

ISSN

0034-429X (print)
2293-7374 (digital)

[Explore this journal](#)

Cite this document

Kallendorf, H. (2020). Introduction: Digital Resources for Studying the Spanish Renaissance. *Renaissance and Reformation / Renaissance et Réforme*, 43(4), 219–223. <https://doi.org/10.33137/rr.v43i4.36389>

Digital Resource Reviews / Comptes rendus sur les ressources numériques

Introduction: Digital Resources for Studying the Spanish Renaissance

HILAIRE KALLENDORF

Texas A&M University

Digital projects related to early modern Spain are as vast and far-flung as the erstwhile Spanish empire. The uninitiated reader should be aware that the databases, websites, and other online resources reviewed here are only the tip of the iceberg. This summary treatment is meant to be representative, not exhaustive; I beg the indulgence of colleagues whose laudable work is not included here and ask them to understand that in most cases this was not the result of oversight on my part (although I bear full responsibility for the end product as published). More likely, in some instances I did commission a review of the resource in question—my initial list was twice as long as the number of reviews we ultimately wound up with—but the proposed reviewers had to excuse themselves due to other existing commitments.

Spain was the first world superpower. At the height of its prowess—roughly the period corresponding to the dates 1492–1700—it controlled (for better or for worse, albeit in an on-and-off sort of way) Spain, Portugal, southern Italy, the Netherlands, the Philippines, and much of the Americas. This is why Renaissance scholars of all persuasions cannot afford to ignore early modern Hispanic authors, ideas, and movements. As I argued recently in the introduction to *A Companion to the Spanish Renaissance*,¹ it is time to accord Spain a full seat at the table when it comes to discussing transnational networks, voices, and artifacts of the Renaissance.

The digital resources described here may be visualized as a set of concentric circles representing the kinds of sources scholars regularly consult in the process of doing research. The first circle corresponds to artifacts themselves, then archives where they are kept, then digitalized versions of primary texts, secondary scholarship, etc., until finally we work our way out to

1. Hilaire Kallendorf, ed., *A Companion to the Spanish Renaissance* (Leiden: Brill, 2019), dx.doi.org/10.1163/9789004360372.

visual and aural culture—as ways of accompanying, adorning, or transmitting socially significant information—and then finally theatre, which arguably incorporates all of these modalities. These concentric circles also correspond in a roughly approximate manner to degrees of specialization for the research question being pursued, ranging from very broad and general topics to the arcane minutiae only an elite group of specialists would care about.

The first circle starts with artifacts themselves, as unearthed (literally) by Bethany Aram's interdisciplinary team of archaeologists, historians, and anthropologists in the ARTery of Empire project hosted by the Universidad Pablo de Olavide in Seville. This multi-year European Research Council grant has led to all sorts of discoveries based on field work in Panama City, which was the first European outpost on the Pacific Coast. Human remains, last wills and testaments, shards of pottery, and fibers are all catalogued here. It must be left to political philosophers to comment on whether the colonialist enterprise has also been replicated by a team of researchers based in Spain excavating what used to be a Spanish colony.

The circle expands a bit when we move out of the digging and cataloguing phase to follow the artifacts to their eventual preservation in archives. Two of the online resources reviewed here fit into this category: Ibis (Bibliographical Database of the Collection of the National Patrimony of Spain), reviewed by Enrique Fernández, and PARES (Portal de Archivos Españoles), reviewed by Ted Bergman. Ibis contains records for documents and objects, including maps, held at the Real Biblioteca (the Royal Library in Madrid's Royal Palace) as well as the convents of Las Huelgas (Burgos), Encarnación (Madrid), Las Descalzas Reales (Madrid), and Tordesillas (Tordesillas, Valladolid); while PARES covers material held at twelve of the principal Spanish state archives, including the Archivo General de Simancas, the Archivo de la Real Chancillería de Valladolid, the Archivo Histórico Nacional, and the Archivo General de Indias. These projects may be seen to reflect consecutive stages of development: while Ibis is more of a finding tool that assists researchers in locating documents to consult physically in the Royal Library in Madrid, PARES contains enough digitalized *legajos* (files) that it can sometimes serve as a substitute for the archival experience itself. As every historical researcher knows, a tattered manuscript that can be enlarged or enhanced on-screen is sometimes far preferable to the actual paper copy (and less likely to make one sneeze).

The next two projects reviewed will be of special interest to North American Hispanists looking for Spanish materials outside of Spain. The Folger Shakespeare Library in Washington, DC and the Newberry Library in Chicago have traditionally been two of the great centres for Renaissance Studies in the United States. These reviews of their (admittedly limited) online access to Spanish Golden Age holdings will at least give younger US-based researchers a place to start in their own country before venturing abroad.

Moving outward again in our circles, the next tool of interest is CORDE, or the Corpus Diacrónico del Español, produced by Spain's Royal Academy, which draws on a database of 250 million words of Spanish texts. Not all of these are early modern; technically the cut-off point is 1975. Nor is it limited to Spain, but instead purports to cover texts from around the Spanish-speaking world. The "close reading" counterparts to this mechanism for "distant reading" (to employ terminology made popular by Franco Moretti)² are the websites devoted to single authors and their works, such as Calderón en Red or Góngora et les querelles littéraires de la Renaissance / Góngora y las Polémicas Literarias del Renacimiento, part of the Observatoire de la vie littéraire (OBVIL), developed at the Université de Paris-Sorbonne. While Calderón en Red is more of a finding aid with links to digitalized exemplars of early printed editions, OBVIL is a full-blown digital edition in its own right.

Moving outward again in the stages of the research process from primary sources to secondary scholarship, Dialnet is the premier portal for accessing academic books and articles written in Spanish or on Hispanic topics. An initiative of the University of La Rioja in Logroño, it contains records for nearly seven million research publications. These basic bibliographical records are accompanied by abstracts or tables of contents, where available, and links to a PDF of the essay if it was published in open access. For many Hispanic studies scholars it is a sort of one-stop shop for determining what is out there when launching a new research project.

As everyone knows, we don't just study texts anymore, but instead routinely cast a wider net to encompass paintings, statuary, emblems, coats of arms, and other pieces of visual culture in all its multiple manifestations. The now widely accepted cultural studies approach to the analysis of literary history means that we no longer have to limit ourselves to words or even signs, but instead can read an image as a text. Accordingly, the resources examined here include

2. I refer to Franco Moretti, *Distant Reading* (London: Verso, 2013).

three indispensable tools for the study of visual cultural production, namely The Baroque Art Project: A Data Collection of Hispanic Baroque Painters and Paintings from 1550 to 1850, directed by Juan-Luis Suárez at Ontario's Western University; Sagrario López Poza's Biblioteca Digital de Emblemática Hispánica, housed at the Universidade da Coruña; and Sagrario López Poza's and Nieves Pena Sueiro's SYMBOLA: Divisas o Empresas Históricas. The oral/aural culture equivalent of these is represented by the Pan-Hispanic Ballad Project at Washington University in Saint Louis. Now, at the click of a button, we can hear how medieval ballads were sung.

Finally, a collection of more specialized reviews forms our outermost concentric circle, taking as a representative subfield within early modern Hispanic studies scholarship the investigation of theatre, which is my own specialty. The online tools available here, especially when taken together, are nothing short of dazzling. Starting with the Catálogo del Antiguo Teatro Escolar Hispano (CATEH) at the University of Valencia, which includes only pedagogical drama produced either in the context of humanism or the Jesuit *colegios* (colleges), we then move on to Spain's mainstream dramatic production at the height of its most prolific period. Here David Amelang reviews Germán Vega García-Luengos's Teatro Clásico Español digital library, which forms a part of the much larger Biblioteca Virtual Miguel de Cervantes; this is the crowning jewel of Golden Age theatrical resources based in Spain. ASODAT is a collection of four additional databases related to Spain's early modern theatrical production including tools for studying documentation of known performances, censorship and printing licenses, songs performed with the plays, and scribal identities for specific copyists of play manuscripts (this last resource was not in fact developed in Spain, but instead at Duke University by Meg Greer). Other Anglophone Hispanists who study the early modern period, not to be outdone by their Spanish counterparts, have also developed two noteworthy online tools for studying *comedias* (comedies), *autos sacramentales* (sacramental plays), *entremeses* (interludes), etc.: namely, Out of the Wings, a project directed by Catherine Boyle at Oxford, and the Association for Hispanic Classical Theater in the United States. Both of these include records for translations into English of some of Spain's greatest masterpieces.

As a scholar of early modern Spain who employs digital humanities tools regularly for my own work, the idea of putting together a special issue of *EMDR* to showcase some of these online projects immediately appealed to me. I have

enjoyed learning from my colleagues and fellow researchers which databases they find most useful and why. I found myself over and over feeling less lonely as I read the reviews I'd commissioned—thinking, “oh, so you had that same problem?” or “I guess I'm not crazy after all (or at least this doesn't prove it).”

As I write this, we are still in the throes of COVID-19 shutdowns worldwide. Our only excursions are to the park or the grocery store, and our only professional contact happens via Zoom. There could be no timelier moment to highlight the often-thankless labour that goes into preparing digital projects. I along with just about every scholar I know will have to rely on them almost exclusively for the indefinite future. I know I speak for all the generous colleagues who responded positively to my request to review a digital project that any criticism offered in these pages is meant to be constructive; it is in our best interest to preserve and improve the valuable online projects we have, in addition to launching innovative ones.

We are grateful to the creators of these projects who sacrificed years of their professional lives to make research materials more accessible to all of us—whether in the throes of a global pandemic or merely amid the tug-of-war of juggling personal and professional obligations (it's harder to visit the archives wearing a baby in a front carrier). Digital projects such as these make our lives easier and enrich our research and teaching in immeasurable ways. It is my hope that reading about some of the initiatives already out there might also encourage younger scholars to dream up new projects. Our global network today extends farther than Spain's empire ever did.

<https://doi.org/10.33137/rr.v43i4.36389>

Aram, Bethany, principal investigator.

An ARTery of Empire: Conquest, Commerce, Crisis, Culture and the Panamanian Junction (1513–1671). Other.

Seville: Universidad Pablo de Olavide, 2015. Accessed 19 May 2020. upo.es/investigacion/artempire.

Early modern Panamanian history has not received much attention from scholars, in no small part because it ended in disaster. Panama City was the first European outpost on the Pacific Coast. Founded before the Spanish conquest of Mexico, it flourished for over a century as a key node in Spain's evolving global