Much has changed in the field of emblematic studies since 1939 when Mario Praz began his pioneering work, *Studies in Seventeenth-Century Imagery*, with the splendid opening lines:

There lies asleep in old European libraries, chiefly in those of ecclesiastical origin, a vast literature of illustrated books which are very seldom and only cursorily consulted nowadays — the emblem literature. Although 'emblems' form a permanent item in all second-hand booksellers’ catalogues, I suppose that most people jump (or jumped, until recently) over it with the same expression of unconcern with which they meet Americana, Erotica, or Occultism. And as for the happy few whose eyes kindle at the sight of the magic word 'emblems' — alas! their attention might as well be dedicated to collecting stamps or cigarette cards, for their interest very seldom strays beyond the material possession of a rare thing ... Does this literature deserve such oblivion?

Emblems can be defined very crudely as a composite literary/artistic form in which figure and text together convey a meaningful moralizing message which could not be conveyed by one or the other form in isolation. Over the last few decades this perception that emblems were a somewhat quaint subject, of only marginal significance, has been dramatically revised. It is now accepted that a recognition and understanding of the emblematic mentality is central to an understanding of early modern culture and society across Europe, and emblem studies have become a truly interdisciplinary subject, of interest to art historians, architectural historians, political and social historians, educational historians, medallic historians, theologians, as well as to book historians and — not least — literary scholars. Not only does the subject transcend disciplinary boundaries, but it also transcends national boundaries: the earliest emblem book, Andrea Alciato’s *Emblemata*, was written in Latin by an Italian, first published in Augsburg (1531), and thereafter in numerous editions in Paris, Lyon and Antwerp, variously in Latin, French, German or Spanish, and in some cases in bilingual combinations. The earliest English emblem book, Geffrey Whitney’s *Choice of Emblemes* (1586) was published not in England but in Leiden. Georgette de Montenay’s *Emblemes ou devises chrestiennes* (1567) was first published in France in French, but fifty years later, in 1619, it was published in Frankfurt in a polyglot version making the text available simultaneously in five different European languages, plus Latin, as well as the original French. In the seventeenth century emblem books published in the Netherlands commonly appeared in polyglot form. Thus,  

although this état présent for French Studies will focus as much as possible on French emblems, it would be unhelpful to divorce them entirely from their wider European context.

Curiously, although the earliest flowering of printed emblem books took place in France, French scholars were long reluctant to engage with the discipline. After the first edition of Alciato published in Augsburg in 1531, and another one-off edition published in Venice, over the next three decades it was the two major French publishing centres, Paris and Lyon, which dominated the field in emblem books, and in the thirty years after Alciato’s emblem book all the subsequent writers of emblems were French (Guillaume de la Perrière, Gilles Corrozet, Barthélemy Aneau, Guillaume Guérout, Pierre Coustau). Not until the mid 1560s did the Low Countries enter into the field with the publication by Christopher Plantin in Antwerp of the Latin emblem books of the Hungarian and Dutch humanist writers Joannes Sambucus (1564) and Hadrianus Junius (1565), and the rest of Europe followed suit even later. Yet despite this early French primacy in the field of emblematic production, the earliest emblematic scholarship came first from the Italian Praz, and then from German scholars such as Arthur
Henkel, Albrecht Schöne and William Heckscher in the 1950s and 1960s. The 1980s saw the publication in France of two volumes of collected essays on the European emblem (by M. T. Jones-Davies and Yves Giraud), and of Gisèle Mathieu-Castellani’s study of Emblèmes de la mort, and the 1990s the publication of Paulette Choné’s monumental study of Emblèmes et pensée symbolique en Lorraine (1525–1633) and Jean-Marc Chatelain’s Livres d’emblèmes et de devises: une anthologie (1531–1735) with useful accompanying commentary. But otherwise the French contribution to emblem scholarship was small, and until recently the bulk of research on French emblem literature, beginning already in the late 1970s, but taking off rapidly from the 1980s onwards, has been done by Anglo-Saxon researchers, such as Daniel Russell, Alison Adams, Stephen Rawles and myself, among others.

Significant indicators of the burgeoning awareness of the importance of emblematic studies in the 1980s include: the institution in 1984 of an international Society for Emblem Studies; the creation in 1986 of a specialist periodical, Emblematica, published in New York by AMS Press; the launch in 1987 of the first of an ongoing series of triennial International Conferences of the Society for Emblem Studies, held roughly alternately in North America and Europe, each of which has led to a published volume of Proceedings; the creation in 1989 of a cross-disciplinary SOCRATES Intensive Programme on emblematics, taught by academics from Britain, France, Holland, Belgium and Germany, designed to introduce postgraduate students from across Europe to the discipline. The 1990s saw the creation in Glasgow of a Centre for Emblem Studies, capitalizing on the riches of the Stirling Maxwell Collection in Glasgow University Library, which is the most important collection of emblem books in the world. Since 1996 the Glasgow Centre for Emblem Studies has published thirteen volumes of essays on aspects of the emblem in its series Glasgow Emblem Studies, many of which include items on French emblems.

It was recognized at an early stage that serious bibliographical study on the actual production of emblem books was necessary before informed judgements about them could be made. Early emblem books are by their nature rare books: in the case of most of them relatively few known copies survive today; in some

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6General Editor: Alison Adams, and since 2008 Laurence Grove.
cases only one known copy survives, and in others no known copy survives. Thus a researcher, consulting only the copy that is most easily accessible to him or her can very easily be lulled into the false assumption that that particular version of the work will be the same as that of another copy in a different library. In reality the printing history of emblem books (as of so many early printed illustrated books) is extremely complicated, and only by systematic study of as many copies as possible can an accurate printing history be established, on the basis of which more informed judgements can be made about the popularity, the importance, and the influence of any one particular work. In 1872 the redoubtable Alciato scholar, Henry Green, produced an impressive, but now inevitably much outdated bibliography of editions of Alciato, while in 1947, Praz published a — for the time — very rich bibliography as a second volume to his 1939 Studies in Seventeenth-Century Imagery, which was updated in 1974 by a supplement of Addenda et Corrigenda. John Landwehr produced in 1976 a bibliography of Romanic emblem books to complement his earlier bibliographies of Dutch and German emblem books. Valuable though they are in principle, and authoritative though they appear, in reality Landwehr’s bibliographies tend to be worryingly inaccurate. More recent and more scholarly is an important, long-running project to produce a bibliography of Jesuit emblem books, including a significant corpus of works by French writers, by Peter Daly and Richard Dimler, of which four of the five planned volumes are now published. Lastly, and of greatest relevance to those interested in French studies, since it focuses specifically on emblem books written in French or published in France, is the two-volume Bibliography of French Emblem Books of the Sixteenth and Seventeenth Centuries produced by Alison Adams, Stephen Rawles and myself, which adopts a much more detailed approach to bibliographical study than any of those hitherto mentioned, based on the close examination of as many copies as possible of every work cited.

Another urgent need which was identified in the 1970s and 1980s was that of facilitating access to primary materials. Emblem books are valuable, often fragile, and housed in Special Collections sections of libraries where — quite rightly — curators feel a responsibility to protect them from excessive handling. Yet scholars need to read them. The initial solution to this problem was the production firstly of a series of facsimile editions over the 1970s and 1980s and

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9Green, Alciati and his Books of Emblems: A Biographical and Bibliographical Study (London, Holbein Society, 1872).
12Daly and Dimler, Corpus liberorum emblematum: The Jesuit Series (Montreal, McGill-Queen’s University Press; Toronto, Toronto University Press, 1977–).
1980s of the best-known emblem books by specialist publishers, of whom the most significant for French studies is the Scolar Press in Britain, whose Continental Emblem Books series included the earliest French emblem books, Corrozet’s *Hecatomphraphie* (1540), La Perrière’s *Theatre des bons engins* (1540) and *Morosophie* (1553) as well as Claude Paradain’s influential collection of *Devises heroiques* (1551) and Montenay’s *Emblemes ou devises chrestiennes* in the earliest then-known edition of 1571. In France the Paris publishing house Aux Amateurs des Livres specialized in producing facsimiles of seventeenth-century French emblem books including Jean Baudoin’s 1659 *Recueil d’emblemes divers*, Albert Flamen’s 1672 *Emblems ou devises d’amour*, and the 1619 polyglot edition of Montenay’s *Emblemes ou devises chrestiennes*. Important also, but less directly relevant to French studies are facsimile editions published by Olms in Hildesheim; by Toronto University Press (Index Emblematicus series); by Brepols in Turnhout, Belgium (Imago Figurata series); and by AMS in New York.

Undoubtedly such facsimiles, whether in book form or microfiche form, have done much to facilitate access to primary materials. However, more recently the most important development which has dramatically increased access to primary materials is the digitization revolution which has taken place over the last decade. A number of major emblematic digitization projects have been coming to completion over the last few years, of which much the most significant for French emblem studies is the very recently completed French Emblems at Glasgow project masterminded by Alison Adams and Stephen Rawles, containing twenty-seven fully searchable French or French-published emblem books; but equally important to emblem studies generally are the Alciato at Glasgow project and the Italian project both of which also offer fully searchable emblem books. Bearing in mind the trans-European nature of emblems, valuable also are the recently completed Emblem Project Utrecht, providing fully searchable digitized seventeenth-century Dutch emblem books, the Wolfenbüttel Digital Library, the Munich Bavarian State Library project and the A Coruña Hispanic Emblematic Literature project, which includes also a very full and up-to-date bibliography of emblem studies generally. Providing an overarching link with all of these, and with other relevant sites, including its own digitized collection of German emblem books, is the OpenEmblemPortal, based in the University of Illinois. Lastly, although not of course exclusively devoted to emblem books, Gallica, the Bibliothèque nationale de France’s rich

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14 The most important production of microfiche facsimiles of European emblem books generally, including several French ones, was by IDC in Leiden. Useful though these are in making texts readily available, they do not include critical apparatus.

15 <http://www.emblems.arts.gla.ac.uk/french>.

16 <http://www.emblems.arts.gla.ac.uk/alciato>; <http://www.italianemblems.arts.gla.ac.uk/project>.

17 <http://emblems.let.uu.nl>.

18 <http://www.hab.de/bibliothek/wdb>.

19 <http://mdz1.bib-bvb.de/~emblem>.


21 <http://media.library.uiuc.edu/projects/oebp>.
and ever-growing collection of digitized works, must be mentioned since it includes a large number of emblematic works which, while not searchable, are nevertheless a major aid to access.

But moving on from these vital aids to emblem scholarship, what particular directions has that scholarship taken over these last few decades, and how has its focus developed? In the late 1970s and 1980s emblem studies were still relatively generalist in approach, concentrating for the most part on identifying the corpus, examining printing history, and on tracing the relationships both between different types of emblem book, and between emblem books and other associated popular forms combining text and image for (usually) didactic or moralizing purposes (fables, Bible stories, proverbs, bestiaries, hieroglyphics etc.).

Much attention was devoted to definitions — what did and did not constitute an emblem? What was the relation between figure and text, and were both elements actually essential? What distinguished an emblem from its sister form, the device? Such questions might seem straightforward to answer, particularly since a number of early theorists expressed at considerable length fairly dogmatic views on these issues. But they become more problematic when it is realized that these theorists (notably Claude-François Menestrier, Henri Estienne, Sieur des Fossez, and Pierre Le


Moyne) were writing in the mid-seventeenth century, over a hundred years
after the earliest flowering of emblem books, which happened in the first
half of the sixteenth century. Furthermore it quickly becomes apparent that
over-normative definitions, whether based on structure or content, simply
do not work, given the diversity of practice from emblem book to emblem
book. To take an extreme example, although an emblem is usually expected
to comprise a visual element (woodcut or copperplate engraving) and a
textual element, both of which complement each other in conveying the
message of the emblem, in fact a significant number of early emblems do
not include illustrations. Similarly emblem and device are traditionally distin-
guished by the fact that the emblem conveys a generally applicable (usually
moral) lesson which can be decoded via a careful reading of the motto (inserpfiio),
the figure (figura) and the verse (subscriptio), in juxtaposition with each
other, whereas the device is a more challenging, intentionally hermetic
form, whose aim is to allude indirectly, via the medium of a more stylized
figure and a short motto, without additional verse, to the personal aspirations
of its individual owner. While in many cases, such distinctions do apply, many
works do not conform to these patterns, among which notably Montenay’s
emblem book whose title — Emblemes ou devises chrestiennes — includes both
terms, embleme and devise.

The focus of emblem studies has broadened out since those early days,
beyond the relatively narrow field of printed emblem books per se and into
the much broader field of early modern cultural studies. Applied emblematics
is a clumsy but appropriate phrase to embrace the European-wide use of
emblematic forms in architecture, embroidery, tapestry, and painted ceilings,
on which much work has been done, but much remains still to be done.27

27See, for example, The Emblem and Architecture: Studies in Applied Emblematics from the Sixteenth to the Eight-
teenth Centuries, ed. by P. Daly and H. Böker (Turnhout, Brepols, 1999). See also the following articles on
Lyonnese architecture and emblems by J. Loach: “Inscriptiones templorum, et aedium frontibus appositae”: An
Aspect of the Theory and Practice of Built Emblems in Seventeenth-Century Lyons’, in Multivalence and Mul-
tifunctionality of the Emblem: Proceedings of the Fifth International Conference of the Society for Emblem Studies, ed.
by Wolfgang Harms and Dietmar Peil (Frankfurt, Peter Lang, 2002), pp. 977 – 86; ‘The Seventeenth-Century
Restoration of the Temple de Lyon’, in The Emblem and Architecture, ed. by Daly and Böker, pp. 45 – 56;
‘On Words and Wall’, in An Interroguum of the Sign, ed. by Graham, pp. 149 –70; ‘Architecture and Emblematics:
Issues in Interpretation’, in Emblems and Art History, ed. by A. Adams and L. Grove (Glasgow, Glasgow
Centre for Emblem Studies, 1996), pp. 1 – 21. On emblematic models used in embroidery, see
Margaret Swain, The Needlework of Mary Queen of Scots (New York, Van Nostrand Reinhold, 1973); for
emblematics in tapestry see P. Daly, ‘The Sheldon “Four Seasons”’ Tapestries at Hatfield House: A
Seventeenth-Century Instance of Significant Emblematic Decoration in the English Decorative Arts’, Emble-
matica, 14 (2005), 251 –96, and A. Saunders, ‘Emblems to Tapestries and Tapestries to Emblems: Contrasting
Practice in England and France’, Seventeenth-Century French Studies, 21 (1999), 243 – 51. See also Jacques Bailly,
Devises pour les tapisseries du Roi, ed. by Marianne Grivel and Marc Fumaroli (Paris, Herscher, 1988). For a
study of the use of European emblems in painted ceilings, see Michael Bath’s monumental Renaissance Dec-
orative Painting in Scotland (Edinburgh, National Museums of Scotland, 2002), while more narrowly focused
on French emblematic wall and ceiling painting is D. Bozo, ‘Les Peintures murales du château du Lude’,
Gazette des Beaux Arts, 66 (October 1965), 119 – 217. For fuller discussion of manifestations of applied emble-
matics in France and elsewhere, see chapter VIII, ‘The Usefulness of Emblem Books’, in Saunders, The
and political propaganda. The important contribution made in this domain in the seventeenth century by members of the Society of Jesus has been increasingly studied, and in particular that of the prolific Jesuit polymath Menestrier. Emblematics were also used by the Jesuits as a teaching device in their schools, and — in a very different way — emblems were also exploited by the Jesuits as an effective meditational tool. Produced by other Catholic writers as well as by Jesuits, the emblem became a major player in Counter-Reformation devotional literature, but interestingly the form was exploited equally effectively by Protestant writers, and the religious emblem book has recently become the subject of much scholarly attention, notably by Ralph Dekoninck and Agnès Guiderdoni-Bruslé, whose massive volume of the proceedings of a conference on ‘Figures et formes de la spiritualité dans la littérature et les expressions artistiques’, which they organized in Leuven in 2003, reflects the richness of this field.

Most scholarship has focused on Catholic devotional emblematic writing, but this balance has been somewhat redressed recently by Alison Adams’s 2003 study of Protestant emblem books of Montenay, Théodore de Bèze and Jean-Jacques Boissard, Webs of Allusion. While love emblems and divine love emblems have traditionally been seen as an essentially Dutch creation, developing in the early seventeenth century, and rapidly spreading across Europe in polyglot editions, rendering them easily accessible to any literate person, the recent discovery of an early sixteenth-century French emblem


29 See, for example, J. Loach, ‘Emblem Books as Author-Publisher Collaborations: The Case of Menestrier and Coral’s Production of the 1662 ‘Art des emblemes’, Emblematica, 15 (2007), 228–318.


book on the nature of love has raised an interesting question mark over the Dutch origins of the form.34

Emblem studies have thus penetrated recently into many different areas, and there is now a firm infrastructure on which they can progress further. What directions will that progress take? Some directions will be in effect extensions of existing patterns, such as the religious emblem in all its complex manifestations, or new patterns such as the associations between emblems and medals — an important field which has been relatively little studied. Emblematic developments in the New World are another area which is ripe for study, and is currently being explored by Peter Davidson. Though traditionally associated with the early modern period, the emblematic mentality was still flourishing in the nineteenth century, and much scholarly work is still needed in this area. Moving into the twentieth century, emblems and advertising is a growth area in which some work has already been done by Peter Daly,35 while Laurence Grove is exploring parallels between early modern emblems and bandes dessinées.36 Emblem studies have indeed moved, and are still moving, a long way from Praz.

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