

Andrea Alciato and the Politics of the Printed Image: A Study of the *Emblemata*'s Origins, Evolution, and Abstraction

Words signify, things are signified. However, sometimes things too can even signify, like the hieroglyphs in Horapollo and Chaeremon; I too have composed a book of epigrams in this genre; its title is *Emblemata*.¹

Andrea Alciato, a Milanese jurist and erudite Renaissance humanist, wrote this passage in *De verborum significatione*, his philological interpretation of Roman law that, once published in 1530, further solidified his status as a scholar of international renown.² Before the publication of this text, Alciato had taught law at universities in Avignon, Milan, and Bourges; he continued teaching until his death in 1550, moving frequently between France and Italy at the request of France's King Francis I and Francesco Sforza, the Duke of Milan between 1521 and 1535.³ In addition to teaching and writing on law, Alciato also designed the emblem, a complex new literary genre combining word and image that became immensely popular across Europe. The passage cited above has, in recent years, generated much scholarly interest—not among legal historians, but among those who study emblems, or “things” that “signify” –and will provide the focus of my discussion in this paper.⁴ Even in Alciato's highly academic work on legal interpretation, he still manages to allude to Greek hieroglyphs, epigrams, and his own collection of text/image forms (and all in only two sentences). Alciato thus clearly intertwined his professional career with his other intellectual pursuits, epitomizing the role of a cultivated Renaissance humanist.

¹ Quoted in Denis L. Drysdall, “Alciato, Pater et Princeps,” in *Companion to Emblem Studies* (New York: AMS Press, 2008), p. 87.

² Ibid.

³ Henry Green, *Andrea Alciati and his books of emblems: a biographical and bibliographical study*. Reprint. (New York: B. Franklin, 1965), pp. 6-20.

⁴ Quoted in Denis L. Drysdall, “Alciato, Pater et Princeps,” p. 87.

The Oxford English Dictionary defines the word *emblem* as “a thing serving as a symbol of a particular quality or object.”⁵ Emblems relate abstract concepts—often those that are difficult to visualize, such as prudence, loyalty, and religion—to concrete objects and situations. For example, Alciato’s emblem “In Silentium” describes how maintaining silence can make a man seem wiser; “Fidei symbolum” personifies the qualities of love, honor and truth; and “Concordia” suggests that, just as crows are loyal to each other when living together, so, too, should leaders maintain concord among their people (Figures 1, 2, and 3).⁶ The emblem’s text is often ekphrastic—it describes objects as if they were works of art—and the accompanying image usually emphasizes these visual elements of the emblem. As Andrea Alciato’s emblems grew in popularity, other writers imitated the genre, producing their own versions of written emblems. Peter Daly estimates that over 6,500 emblem books were published since Alciato’s collection of emblems, entitled *Emblemata*, first appeared in print in 1531.⁷ Writers occasionally deviated from the emblem’s traditional three-part text/image form; for this reason, not all emblems follow the exact same structure. Generally, however, the emblem consists of a combination of text and image used to communicate a moralizing, humorous, or didactic message to the reader, regardless of its specific formal characteristics. Most scholars today use neutral Latin terms when referring to the three specific parts of the emblem: the image (*pictura*), the description (*subscriptio*), and the caption or motto (*inscriptio*).⁸

⁵ Oxford English Dictionary Online, <https://en.oxforddictionaries.com/definition/emblem>.

⁶ These images appear in Christian Wechel’s edition of Alciato’s *Emblemata libellus*, published in Paris in 1534.

⁷ Peter M. Daly, *The Emblem in Early Modern Europe: Contributions to the Theory of the Emblem* (Farnham: Ashgate, 2014), p. 4.

⁸ In this paper I will use Albrecht Schöne’s *pictura*, *subscriptio*, and *inscriptio* terms to refer to specific parts of the emblem. For a discussion on these terms and a summary of recent emblem theory, see Peter M. Daly, *The Emblem in Early Modern Europe*, pp. 12-29.

My study places the formative history of the emblem in the political and cultural context of early sixteenth century Italy. I argue that the emblem emerged as a product of Milanese humanist culture but, following its adaptation into printed form, it quickly evolved into a genre that could appeal to a much broader audience. Whereas Alciato developed the emblems as a collection of playful poems designed to circulate among Milan's elite, by the time of his death in 1550, they had already transformed into a popular, less locally defined and thus more abstract genre that drew on the interplay between image and text, a genre completely separated from the concrete historical context in which it was produced. To demonstrate this transformation, I will focus my discussion on several of the earliest emblems that suggest the historical setting in which Alciato wrote them, including his "Foedera" and "Insignia Ducatus Mediolanensis," both of which allude to Alciato's relationship with Maximilian Sforza, the Duke of Milan between 1512 and 1515.⁹ I will then follow the evolution of these and other emblems over time. Thus, because I relate the emblem's reception history to its change in form, I will use multiple editions of Alciato's *Emblemata* in my analysis. All of the editions that I reference are reproduced in facsimile version and are available online at a University of Glasgow website.¹⁰

As the quote with which this paper starts already indicates, Alciato drew inspiration from the ancient literary form of the epigram, which is "a short poem, especially a satirical one, with a witty or ingenious ending."¹¹ Writers had composed epigrams since antiquity, and Renaissance humanists, inspired by these ancient Greek and Roman writers, experimented with the epigram's literary form. Although the emblem differs from the epigram—in its evolved form, an emblem contains images, whereas an epigram does not—the emblem traces directly back to this humanist

⁹ Henry Green, *Andrea Alciati and his books of emblems*, p. 43.

¹⁰ See Alciato at Glasgow, <http://www.emblems.arts.gla.ac.uk/alciato/index.php>.

¹¹ Oxford English Dictionary Online, <https://en.oxforddictionaries.com/definition/epigram>.

epigrammatic tradition. Alciato's earliest emblems were, in fact, "a book of epigrams" that originated from humanist court environments.¹² Alciato's quote from *De verborum significatione* also relates to other symbolic text/image forms, including Egyptian hieroglyphs.¹³ During the Renaissance, humanists attempted to interpret these symbolic images. They frequently consulted Horapollo's *Hieroglyphica*, a treatise on Egyptian hieroglyphs written in the fourth century C.E. that resurfaced in 1419, which offered interpretations of these symbolic images. In 1505, Horapollo's *Hieroglyphica* was translated into Greek and published in printed form.¹⁴ In recent years, many scholars have demonstrated the connection between Renaissance hieroglyphs and Alciato's earliest emblems. Although the emblem can be considered a "new" literary genre, it derived from these preexisting symbolic traditions that drew upon the humanist's literary and iconographic knowledge.

I am particularly interested in how Alciato adapted the ancient literary form of the epigram to communicate political messages. To succeed at this endeavor, Alciato needed to effortlessly use the epigram's form to balance associations between the real and the symbolic, the concrete and abstract. Composing an epigram to serve a political purpose thus required enormous tact and artistry akin to the skills Castiglione recommended to the courtier in his *Book of the Courtier*, including the calculated, internal grace of the courtier's *sprezzatura*.¹⁵ The

¹² See Pierre Laurens, *L'abeille dans l'ambre*, p. 419

¹³ For more on the relationship between hieroglyphs and emblems, see Karl Giehlow, *The Humanist Interpretation of Hieroglyphs in the Allegorical Studies of the Renaissance*, Reprint. (Leiden: Brill, 2015), p. 287; on the relationship between emblems and *imprese* (which was also a witty and symbolic device but, unlike the emblem, only consisted of a *pictura* and *inscriptio*) see *The Italian Emblem: A Collection of Essays* (Glasgow: Glasgow Emblem Studies, 2007); Peter M. Daly, *Literature in the Light of the Emblem: structural parallels between the emblem and literature in the sixteenth and seventeenth centuries* (Toronto: University of Toronto Press, 1979), pp. 9-35; see also John Manning, *The Emblem* (London: Reaktion, 2002), pp. 37-79.

¹⁴ John Manning, *The Emblem*, pp. 56-58.

¹⁵ Baldassarre Castiglione, ed. Daniel Javitch. *The Book of the Courtier* (New York: W.W. Norton & Co., 2002), p. 32.

addition of images to the printed edition of the *Emblemata* literalized the artistic and literary qualities of the emblems and, as the printed editions evolved, these visual qualities of the emblems became more elaborate and further distanced from the historical context in which they were produced. Finally, I will question this art of the emblem in relation to space: how did the emblem's manipulation of spatial forms aid the author's attempts to convey moral messages? Did these forms lead to the emblem's abstraction, as was the case for "Foedera" and other emblems? And did the emblem book, in its evolved form, perhaps serve as a spatial memory device that aided the reader's desire for a visualization of knowledge?

Alciato and the Milanese Origins of the Emblem

Andrea Alciato was born into a prominent family from Alzate, Italy, a town in the northern Duchy of Milan, in 1492.¹⁶ His family maintained a status of economic and social stability, thus allowing Alciato the freedom to attend some of the most renowned educational institutions in Italy. Alciato showed early promise as a student, and between the years 1507 and 1516 he studied law in Milan, Ferrara, Pavia, and Bologna under some of the most celebrated Italian humanists of the sixteenth century, including Giasone del Maino and Carlo Ricini.¹⁷ His early immersion in the classics—and especially his exposure to the Greek and Latin languages under Aulo Giano Parrasio's tutelage—influenced Alciato's later writings, as evidenced in his reference to Horapollo and Chaeremon (an Ancient Greek writer) in *De verborum significatione*. Although left unpublished until after his death, Alciato wrote a history of Milan and its surrounding regions during these early years.¹⁸ He also composed texts on law during this early

¹⁶ Henry Green, *Andrea Alciati and His Books of Emblems*, pp. 2-3.

¹⁷ Donald R. Kelley, *Foundations of Modern Historical Scholarship: Language, Law, and History in the French Renaissance* (New York: Columbia University Press, 1970), p. 93. Also see Henry Green, *Andrea Alciati and His Books of Emblems*, p. 5.

¹⁸ Laurens and Vuilleumier, "De l'archéologie à l'emblème: la genèse du *Liber Alciati*" in *Revue de l'art* 104, no. 4 (1993), p. 87.

period of his life. In 1507, when Alciato was only fifteen years old, he began writing his *Paradoxes of the Civil Law*, which was compiled in 1517 and eventually published in 1529. By the time he reached adulthood, Alciato had become an enormously prolific writer, and he was especially well-known for his interpretation of Roman law outlined in several of his legal texts.¹⁹

Alciato's interest in writing also extended to the epigram. In contrast to Alciato's philological legal work, the epigram's form is literary; writing an effective epigram requires a mastery of language unlike the academic prose that Alciato composed during his legal career. As a student, Alciato likely read epigrams written by ancient Greek and Roman authors. He also practiced translating and imitating ancient Greek epigrams when in 1529 he, along with other humanists including Thomas More and Erasmus, contributed one hundred and sixty epigrams to a Latin translation of the *Anthologia Graeca* (a collection of short epigrammatic poems written by the Ancient Greeks) called *Epigrammata graeca selecta*.²⁰ Thirty of Alciato's epigram translations appeared as emblems in the first printed edition of *Emblemata*, which further suggests that the emblem's form derived from the epigram.²¹ Alciato was considerably involved in the epigrammatic tradition during his early years, as were many other humanists.²² In order to decipher the text, the reader needed a strong foundation in Greek and Latin mythology, often only possible through considerable education. Thus, the epigram—and, eventually, the emblem—represented a form of cultural capital, and interacting with the epigrams was a specific humanist experience.²³

¹⁹ Donald R. Kelley, *Foundations of Modern Historical Scholarship*, pp. 87-115.

²⁰ Peter M. Daly, *Literature in the Light of the Emblem*, p. 9; also see Denis L. Drysdall, "Alciato, Pater et Princeps," p. 92.

²¹ *Ibid.*

²² See Pierre Laurens, *L'abeille dans l'ambre: célébration de l'épigramme de l'époque alexandrine à la fin de la Renaissance* (Paris: Les Belles Lettres, 1989), pp. 430-461.

²³ Pierre Laurens, *L'abeille dans l'ambre*, p. 430; Pierre Laurens uses the term "cultural capital" to describe the epigram's circulation among humanist audiences.

After earning his doctorate degree in civil and canon law in 1516, Alciato began his career as a jurist in Milan.²⁴ Around this time, he put his classical education to use by collecting inscriptions on ancient Milanese buildings into an unpublished manuscript, *Monumentum veterumque inscriptionum Mediolanum*. Similar to the emblem's eventual form, this manuscript compilation of epigrams included an inscription of each monument, a drawing, and a brief commentary on the following page.²⁵ In the commentary, Alciato often connected the image to allegorical associations, thus showing how, early on in his life, he was already interested in the interaction between representational and allegorical images. For example, when commenting on a bas-relief in honor of Aureolus, Alciato relates the monument to Horapollo's hieroglyphs.²⁶ Alciato would have been familiar with the history of Aureolus, a third century Roman military commander, through his classical education, and Horapollo's *Hieroglyphica*, as previously mentioned, was a treatise on Egyptian hieroglyphs that circulated among Renaissance humanist circles during this time.²⁷ Alciato's engagement with these epigrams shows how, in addition to his legal writing, he also experimented with artistic and literary forms of expression during these early formative years in Italy. Alciato's contemporaries would not have considered this practice innovative or unusual, however. Other humanists across Europe also collected inscriptions, including Conrad Peutinger—the man to whom Alciato dedicated the first printed edition of the *Emblemata*—who published a collection of ancient inscriptions from monuments around Augsburg, Germany in 1505 (*Romanae vetustatis fragmenta*) and again in 1520 (*Inscriptiones*

²⁴ Konrad Eisenbichler, "Andrea Alciato" in *Encyclopedia of Italian Literary Studies: A-J*, pp. 11-12.

²⁵ See Laurens and Vuilleumier, "De l'archéologie à l'emblème," p. 89; Laurens and Vuilleumier have noted that Alciato may have begun collecting these inscriptions as early as 1508.

²⁶ Laurens and Vuilleumier, "De l'archéologie à l'emblème," p. 89.

²⁷ As previously mentioned, hieroglyphs were another incredibly popular forms of text/image interplay during the Renaissance. Much work has already explored the connection between hieroglyphs and emblems, including those mentioned above in note 12.

vetustae Romanae).²⁸ While Alciato's imitations of ancient inscriptions reveal his personal interest in the epigram's form and their connection to the city of Milan, his writings also placed him in conversation with the collective humanist court culture across sixteenth-century Europe.

In 1518, Alciato moved to France to teach law at the University of Avignon, where he perfected his philological approach to law.²⁹ While in Avignon, Alciato interacted with other humanists, including Guillaume Budé, a celebrated legal scholar living in France. After residing in Avignon for three years, Alciato moved back to Milan in 1521. By this time, other members of the cultural elite recognized Alciato's intellect, particularly his skill as a jurist and interpreter of law.³⁰ In 1522, Alciato produced a manuscript copy of emblems that began circulating around Milan. This document has not been recovered today, so it is impossible to know whether these early emblems were exactly similar to those printed in the first edition of *Emblemata*. However, as we will later see, several of Alciato's emblems relate to historical events preceding the year 1522, thus suggesting that Alciato composed them early in his life while living in Milan.

Although Alciato is credited as the father—the “pater et princeps”—of the emblem genre, it seems that, in 1522, he was not alone in composing these early emblems.³¹ In a letter to Boniface Amerbach, another legal humanist, Alciato wrote that his friend Albucio also composed a collection of emblems, and “the subject was set by Ambrogio Visconti, one of [Milan's] leading aristocrats.”³² Alciato himself dedicated his 1522 manuscript edition of *Emblemata* to Ambrogio

²⁸ Christopher S. Wood, “Early Archaeology and the Book Trade: The Case of Peutinger's Romanae Vestustatis Fragmenta (1505),” *Journal of Medieval and Early Modern Studies* 28, no. 1 (1998), pp. 83-118.

²⁹ Henry Green, *Andrea Alciati and His Books of Emblems*, pp. 6-9.

³⁰ Ibid, p. 9; also see Jane Black, *Absolutism in Renaissance Milan: Plenitude of Power Under the Visconti and the Sforza 1329-1535* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2009), pp. 176-181.

³¹ Denis L. Drysdall, “Andra Alciato, Pater et Princeps,” p. 79. Bohuslaus Balbinus, a seventeenth-century writer, first applied the term “pater et princeps” to Alciato.

³² Quoted in Denis Drysdall, “Andrea Alciato, Pater et Princeps,” p. 87.

Visconti who, as a patron and “leading aristocrat,” controlled—and perhaps initiated—the early production of the emblems.

Although the term *emblem* existed before the emergence of the emblem genre, its meaning has since evolved.³³ In Latin, *emblema* is an architectural term that refers to an inlaid work or mosaic structure; Denis Drysdall describes it as “an ornament which can be inserted in or attached to something else,” such as a badge affixed onto a hat or a molding of an architectural structure.³⁴ In addition to the material context of the ancient *emblema*, it also could signify a figure of speech meant to enhance or embellish discourse.³⁵ In January 1523, Alciato first used the term *emblem* in a letter to Francesco Calvo to describe his collection of epigrams:

This past Saturnalia, in order to gratify the noble Ambrogio Visconti, I put together a little book of epigrams to which I gave the title emblems, for in each epigram I describe something which is taken from history or from nature and can mean something refined, and from which artists, goldsmiths, metalworkers, can fashion the kind of objects which we call badges and which we attach to our hats.³⁶

This letter confirms that Alciato created this “little book of epigrams” to “gratify the noble Ambrogio Visconti.” Similar to the Latin meaning of *emblema*, Alciato’s emblems use conceits to connect abstract concepts to concrete images. In this letter, Alciato also compares his literary poems to “objects” and “badges.” Alciato’s use of the term provides one example of how the emblem’s original Latin meaning became increasingly popular during the Renaissance. The emblem is also discussed in Castiglione’s *The Book of the Courtier* and *Hypnerotomachia Poliphili*, a book published by Aldus Manutius in Venice that, similar to the emblem, also combined text/image forms—including hieroglyphs—to tell an allegorical story.³⁷ Humanists

³³ Hessel Miedema, “The Term *Emblema* in Alciati,” *Journal of the Warburg and Courtauld Institutes* 31 (1968) pp. 234-250.

³⁴ Denis L. Drysdall, “Alciato, Pater et Princeps,” p. 80.

³⁵ *Ibid.*

³⁶ *Ibid.*, pp. 79-80.

³⁷ John Manning, *The Emblem*, pp. 68-73.

would have been familiar with the term *emblem* but, as we will see further on, the term departed from its original definition as Alciato's *Emblemata* text evolved.

Baldassare Castiglione's *The Book of the Courtier* repeatedly alludes to devices, mottos, and epigrams, further showing how the humanist court culture engaged with these brief literary sayings or word games.³⁸ *The Book of the Courtier* is a fictional dialogue that takes place at Duchess Elisabetta Gonzaga's Court of Urbino in 1506 where, over the course of four nights, those gathered with the Duchess debate the merits of the ideal courtier. However, the characters in the dialogue often digress from this purpose and instead engage in long, extended conversations on a variety of topics including language, dress, mastery of arms, sports, and courtly love. Although the conversations are fictional, the characters in the *Courtier* were real people and the Court of Urbino was a real place; thus, the *Courtier*'s fictional world blurred with historical reality, causing the text to attain a semblance of verisimilitude. Indeed, Castiglione acknowledges that he may have embellished certain parts of the story, but he blames this on his memory, not on his ability to exaggerate through fiction: all of these conversations are "recollections," he claims, and he only will "attempt" to recall them "so far as [his] memory permits."³⁹ After its publication in 1528 and translation into other vernacular languages, Castiglione's *Book of the Courtier* became enormously influential in court environments across Europe.

During the first night of the dialogue, Castiglione describes how the courtiers often gathered around the Duchess after dinner, at which time

fine questions would sometimes be proposed, and sometimes ingenious games...in which, under various concealments, those present revealed their thoughts allegorically to whomever they chose. Sometimes other discussions would turn on a variety of subjects,

³⁸ Baldassare Castiglione, *The Book of the Courtier: The Singleton translation: an authoritative textual criticism*, ed. Daniel Javitch (New York: W.W. Norton & Co., 2002).

³⁹ Castiglione, *Book of the Courtier*, p. 10.

or there would be a sharp exchange of quick retorts; often ‘emblems,’ as we nowadays call them, were devised.⁴⁰

Similar to Alciato’s early emblems, these “ingenious games” required the courtier to “allegorically” relate his rational thoughts to abstract ideas, playing for the Duchess’s own entertainment in the same way that Alciato circulated his 1522 edition of emblems at the request of nobleman Ambrogio Visconti. The questions and games are masked under “various concealments” just as Alciato’s political messages concealed themselves within the emblem’s literary form. Not only were these word games discussed at court, but they formed a regular part of the courtier’s life: it was “custom” to play games with the Duchess every night.⁴¹ Later on, during the second night, those gathered with the Duchess discuss how the courtier can provoke laughter at court through long, extended stories, through witty, short statements, and practical jokes. The passage on short witticisms further suggests that courtiers accepted the emblem as this type of playful joke.⁴² This discussion in the *Book of the Courtier* also shows *how* humanists interacted with devices, emblems, and mottos: although reading a printed book is an individual experience, the courtiers discussed these emblems, devices and mottos with each other, thus causing the literary game to become a collective, shared experience.⁴³ However, communication between the courtier and the prince was, above all, political. Although these games served as a form of entertainment, their amusing form masked the more serious subtext of the courtier’s and prince’s relationship.

⁴⁰ Baldassare Castiglione, *The Book of the Courtier*, p. 13.

⁴¹ Ibid.

⁴² Ibid, p.116.

⁴³ For more on literary intertextuality, Renaissance games and the collective humanist court culture, see Lina Bolzoni, “Memory Games,” in *The Gallery of Memory: literary and iconographic models in the age of the printing press*, trans. Jeremy Parzen (Toronto: University of Toronto, 2001), pp. 83-129.

Castiglione's and Alciato's works are certainly not identical in form. Numerous stylistic differences separate these two works: most notably, Castiglione writes in the Italian vernacular, whereas Alciato's *Emblemata* first circulated in Latin. Castiglione's decision to write in the vernacular reflects a conscious choice on the author's part to make the text available for a larger reading audience, and he devotes a considerable portion of the *Courtier* text to discussing this issue.⁴⁴ Alciato's Latin text, by contrast, ensures that only well-educated humanists may read the earliest emblems. However, both Castiglione's dialogue and Alciato's early emblems allow the authors to experiment with a looser, less rigid style than if they were to write a traditional political treatise or academic prose. Castiglione uses a literary form—in this case, a dialogue structured as a game—to communicate serious advice with political implications. Although the courtier's dialogue appears playful and lighthearted, its message is clear: in acting in a culturally sophisticated manner, the courtier ultimately will win the prince's favor and, thus, gain political influence. Alciato adopts a similar rhetorical strategy when commenting on Italy's political situation through the early emblem's form.

These literary forms allowed humanists to interact diplomatically with other members of the cultural elite, especially those of a higher social standing. As previously mentioned, Alciato dedicated his first manuscript edition of emblems to Ambrogio Visconti, a highly placed Milanese aristocrat and descendant of Milan's former ruling dynasty, which suggests that Alciato was connected to the social circles of Milan's elite.⁴⁵ Although this Milanese court culture appeared playful and lighthearted, Italian noblemen in positions of political power felt threatened by the possibility of foreign invasion during Alciato's lifetime. At the turn of the sixteenth

⁴⁴ Castiglione, *The Book of the Courtier*, p. 6 and pp. 38-45.

⁴⁵ See Peter M. Daly and Denis L. Drysdall, "Andrea Alciato" in *The Routledge Companion to Medieval Iconography*, (New York: Routledge, 2017), p. 18.

century, Spain and France were both deeply interested in controlling the Italian peninsula, and the Italian Wars began in 1494.⁴⁶ Still more than twenty years later, Charles V, the Holy Roman Emperor (1519-1556), and Francis I, the King of France (1515-1547), recognized the economic value that Italy would confer upon their dynasties, especially since Italian ports were major centers of trade in the Mediterranean. Italy at the time was divided into separate, autonomous city-states, so it was unable to defend itself against France and Spain; defeating either of these powers would require, at the very least, a large alliance among all of these separate Italian city-states.

During this time Milan played a key role in France's fight for political control of Italy. The Visconti family ruled Milan during the centuries preceding the cinquecento; political power gradually transferred over to the Sforza family during the fifteenth century and, by the time of Alciato's birth in 1492, Gian Galeazzo Sforza had been ruling as Duke of Milan for sixteen years.⁴⁷ Additionally, Lorenzo de' Medici died in 1492, which caused the already-weak political alliance of the Italian League to dissolve completely. When Ludovico Sforza ascended as Duke of Milan in 1494 in the backdrop of this political instability, France began to look toward conquering Milan, especially because the city's close proximity to France made this invasion a pragmatic first step toward dominating the entire Italian peninsula. With the threat of France looming over the city, the Duke of Milan formed a new alliance—the League of Venice—with

⁴⁶ For more on the political context of Renaissance Italy, see Lisa Kaborycha, "The 1527 Sack of Rome and its Aftermath" in *A Short History of Renaissance Italy* (Upper Saddle River, N.J.: Pearson, 2011), pp. 223-238; Christopher Duggan, *A Concise History of Italy* (Cambridge: Cambridge University, 1994), pp.60-75; and Andrea Gamberini, "Milan and Lombardy in the Era of the Visconti and the Sforza," in *A Companion to Late Medieval and Early Modern Milan: The Distinctive Features of an Italian State* (Leiden: Brill, 2015), pp. 19-45 and Massimo Zaggia, "Culture in Lombardy, ca. 1350-1535" and "Culture in Lombardy, ca. 1535-1706," in *A Companion to Late Medieval and Early Modern Milan*, pp. 166-213.

⁴⁷ Lisa Kaborycha, *A Short History of Renaissance Italy*, pp. 183-204.

the German emperor and the King of Spain. Milan's attempted defense against France proved ineffective, however; French forces invaded in 1499, ransacking the city and gaining political control. Although a foreigner ruled Milan during Alciato's early life until 1512, Alciato's emblems addressed to Maximilian Sforza suggest that he was loyal to the Sforza family during this time, not to the French.

In his "Foedera Itolorum" ("On Italian Alliances") emblem, Alciato speaks directly to Maximilian Sforza, the Duke of Milan between 1512 and 1515, entreating him to take the lute that Alciato describes ("Accipe...Dux," Alciato claims) as Maximilian prepares to enter a political alliance with other Italians. This emblem appears in the first printed edition of *Emblemata* in 1531. No manuscript copy of Alciato's emblems has resurfaced today, so it is impossible to determine the exact relationship between the manuscript edition and its eventual printed form. However, several of Alciato's emblems relate to a specific temporal context well before the year 1531, showing that he likely did compose them while living in Milan and while Maximilian was Duke. This "Foedera Itolorum" emblem is one such example. The text compares harmonious political alliances to a lute's music, warning Duke Maximilian Sforza of Milan that

"the nobles of Italy are forming federations: there is nothing to fear if there is concord and they still love you. But if one breaks from the rest, such as we see so often, then all that harmony dissolves into nothingness."⁴⁸

Again, this *subscriptio* refers directly to Italian alliances, demonstrating how Alciato's emblem connects the abstract idea of political harmony to another, more easily visualized idea of musical harmony. Just as the broken strings of a lute may disrupt the music's harmony, the Duke's breaking from an alliance would disrupt the political harmony in Italy. The emblem's message is

⁴⁸ Andrea Alciato, *A Book of Emblems: The Emblematum Liber in Latin and English*. Trans. and ed. John F. Moffitt. (Jefferson: McFarland & Co., 2004), pp. 26-27.

moralizing but not abstract; it relates specifically to a historical event occurring in Milan during the time of Maximilian's reign. Furthermore, by subtly communicating this politically charged message through the emblem's literary form, Alciato fulfilled his own advice to preserve concord and harmony among the nobles of Italy. Other courtiers also addressed Italy's political instability through writing. In his political treatise *The Prince*, Niccolò Machiavelli entreats nobles to "take charge of Italy, and to take back her liberty from the barbarians."⁴⁹ Machiavelli wrote *The Prince* during this period of political instability, and he even refers to the Duke of Milan when discussing "why the princes of Italy have lost their kingdom."⁵⁰ The "Foedera Italarum" emblem's call for alliances therefore reflects a widely expressed statement about Italy's political situation during this period of instability.

Alciato's first emblem in the *Emblemata*, "Insignia Ducatus Mediolanensis" addresses the Duke of Milan, alluding to Alciato's interactions with the cultural elite and describing the Sforza family's coat of arms:

A child escaping from the jaws of a sinuous serpent represents the pedigree of your noble family. We saw such things on the coinage of the king of Pella [Alexander the Great], and with these he celebrated his lineage: he showed himself to be the son of Ammon [Jupiter] and born from divine seed, for his mother had been seduced by [Jupiter appearing in] the guise of a serpent. The infant exits by the mouth. So also, so they say, do some serpents give birth. Or is this perhaps to mean that Pallas [Athena] was born from the head of Jupiter?⁵¹

This emblem likely derived from an early period of Alciato's life, before the emergence of the first printed edition of the *Emblemata* in 1531. Maximilian Sforza ruled as Duke of Milan between 1512 and 1515 and, although he does not specifically use Maximilian's name in this emblem's earliest text, Alciato does allude to the Sforza family. The Sforza dynasty began in

⁴⁹ Niccolò Machiavelli, *The Prince with related documents*, trans. and ed. William J. Connell (Boston: Bedford-St. Martin, 2016), p. 117.

⁵⁰ *Ibid.*, p. 113.

⁵¹ Andrea Alciati, *A Book of Emblems: The Emblematum liber in Latin and English*, p. 17.

1450 when Francesco Sforza assumed control over Milan after the city operated for three years as the autonomous Ambrosian Republic following the death of the last Visconti ruler in 1447.⁵² The Sforza family was not of noble descent, but Francesco Sforza married Bianca Maria, the illegitimate daughter of former Duke Filippo Maria Visconti, and so he was distantly connected to Milan's former ruling dynasty. The text in the "Insignia Ducatus Mediolanensis" emblem displays the Renaissance humanist fascination with heraldry and pedigree, connecting the Sforza family to other predecessors of more ancient, aristocratic heritage: the symbol of the serpent alludes to the Visconti pedigree, Alexander the Great's lineage, and the mythology of Athena and Jupiter. All of these references to historically significant figures add authority to the Sforza family pedigree and, by extent, the city of Milan. Furthermore, the *subscriptio* refers to "your" family pedigree, which suggests that this emblem was designed specifically for a member of the Sforza family to read. Alciato then uses the collective "we" to address the reader, again creating a shared relationship among Alciato, the Sforzas, and the city of Milan. To Milanese humanists who may have read this emblem—perhaps in a collective court environment similar to the Duchess's group described in the *Courtier* text—this emblem would have been immediately recognizable since it related specifically to the city in which they lived.

Other emblems also allude to events preceding the first printed publication of *Emblemata*. One such example appears with the *inscriptio* "Albutius convincing Alciati to leave behind the chaos in Italy and to teach in France."⁵³ The accompanying text details how

"A foreigner beneath our sky, the first tree which gave these fruits [peaches] came from eastern Persia. Previously poisonous in its homeland, the move improved it, and here it provides for us sweet fruit. Its leaves are tongue-shaped and its fruits look like a heart. Oh Alciati, learn from this how to live your life; in a distant land, you will be more valued

⁵² Lisa Kaborycha, *A Short History of Renaissance Italy*, pp. 107-108.

⁵³ Andrea Alciati, *A Book of Emblems: The Emblematum liber in Latin and English*, p. 167.

than in your homeland. You are very wise in your heart, and your tongue is valued no less.”⁵⁴

This emblem describes Alciato’s move to France in 1518 to work as a law professor at the University of Avignon. This text likely circulated sometime after 1518 and before 1531, when the first printed *Emblemata* was published. In this emblem Albutius, Alciato’s friend who, as previously mentioned, also composed emblems for Ambrogio Visconti, pleads Alciato to leave the “chaos” of Italy for France.⁵⁵ This emblem’s *subscriptio* connects the concrete, visual image of a fruit tree to Alciato’s abstract, and less easily visualized, indecision at leaving his homeland. Similar to the “Foedera Italarum” emblem, the word “Italy” also appears in the *inscriptio*, thus again providing a geographic identification with Alciato’s homeland. In addition to furthering his professional career, Alciato’s move to France was motivated by the chaos in Italy, which relates to Alciato’s call for alliances as discussed in his “Foedera Italarum” emblem. Although this emblem connects to a specific personal context for Alciato, it also communicates the broadly moralizing message—applicable to all readers—that an individual may be more valued when displaced from his or her homeland.

As Alciato moved between Avignon and Milan during the early 1520s, political tensions mounted in Italy. In 1521, Leo X allied with Milan to restore Francesco II Sforza to power as Duke of Milan. Leo X died later that year, however, and after newly elected Pope Adrian VI’s brief eighteen-month rule, Pope Clement VII ascended to the throne in 1523. Alciato was again living in Milan at this time, and his first manuscript edition of emblems began circulating around humanist circles.⁵⁶ Pope Clement VII allied with King Francis I in an attempt to drive Spanish troops out of Lombardy, but the Spanish defeated the allied forces at the Battle of Pavia in 1525,

⁵⁴ Ibid.

⁵⁵ Ibid.

⁵⁶ Denis L. Drysdall, “Alciato, Pater et Princeps,” p. 87.

thus solidifying Holy Roman Emperor Charles V's political and military power. In response to the Spanish threat, Pope Clement formed the League of Cognac in 1526, hoping to protect his papal holdings. Key members of the League included the Papacy, the Duchy of Milan, Venice, Florence, and France. Charles V responded to this alliance by threatening to unleash his forces against the League of Cognac and, in 1527, a mob of Germans, Spanish, and Italians stormed Rome, ransacking the city with unprecedented violence. This attack—known as the “Sack of Rome”—was one of the most brutal, devastating massacres in Italian history. In addition to the physical carnage that damaged the city and its inhabitants, some German soldiers approached the Sack as an ideological attack against Rome's symbolic role as the center of Catholic authority. Martin Luther had released his Ninety-Five Theses in Wittenberg, Germany ten years earlier in 1517, and the religious violence of the Reformation was beginning to brew.

Alciato was living in Milan, Italy during the Sack of Rome. The cultural specifics of the Italian humanist movement were intertwined with the political motives of Italy's elite: aristocrats engaged in emblematic games, invented mottos, and composed epigrams, all within the backdrop of extreme violence and political instability occurring on Italian soil. Although produced in a lighthearted atmosphere, these early emblems communicated sobering messages about Italy's political situation. Alciato's relationship to the Milanese and French political leaders therefore exemplifies the complex and instable relationships that intertwined courtiers to the aristocratic elite.⁵⁷

Although these early emblems describe concrete events connected to Alciato's life, they are also, as Alciato notes, “things” that “signify.”⁵⁸ The individual words are less important than

⁵⁷ For a discussion on the courtier's performing for the prince, see Harry Berger Jr., “Sprezzatura and the Absence of Grace” published in *The Book of the Courtier: The Singleton translation: an authoritative textual criticism*, pp. 295-307.

⁵⁸ Quoted in Drysdall, “Alciato, Pater et Princeps,” p. 87.

the end product—the ekphrastic image—that they produce. The reader’s process of understanding of the early emblem’s text was entirely internal, however. The reader needed to actively construct an image within his or her own mind—whether a lute that signifies political harmony, the Sforza coat of arms, or a tree that flourishes when displaced from its homeland—and relied upon his or her imagination to create an interiorized image to interpret the epigram’s text. Thus, although the early emblems circulated in collective court environments and described common, shared experiences, each individual’s image generated from the text was entirely internal and could never be accurately communicated to others. Reading the early emblems was both a collective and solitary experience, one that engaged the humanist’s literary memory and knowledge of contemporary politics while also aiding in the formation of the audience’s collective cultural memory.

The Emblem’s Move from Manuscript to Print

Alciato still continued corresponding with German humanists in the aftermath of the Sack of Rome, including Conrad Peutinger, a German humanist and jurist from Augsburg. Peutinger played a key role in moving Alciato’s *Emblemata* from manuscript to print: after recognizing the ingenuity of Alciato’s emblems, he collaborated with Heinrich Steyner to publish the first printed edition of Alciato’s *Emblemata* in Augsburg in 1531.⁵⁹ This period of the emblem’s history is ambiguous, and it is unclear whether Alciato knew about, approved of, or endorsed the emergence of the printed edition of the *Emblemata*. John Manning suggests that, when Alciato’s collection of one hundred and four emblems appeared in print under the title *Emblematum liber* on February 28, 1531, Alciato was completely oblivious; no one had consulted him about the release of the printed edition, asked his permission to use the text, or questioned his opinion on

⁵⁹ John Manning, *The Emblem*, p. 42.

the book's format.⁶⁰ Alciato, writing to a friend in 1532, claimed that the emblem book was published "without my knowledge" and was "full of mistakes."⁶¹ Alciato may have been truly unaware of the *Emblemata*'s publication, but it is also possible that he complained about the printed book because he felt embarrassed about its inelegant appearance. Part of Alciato's shock likely did stem from the emblem book's appearance: instead of printing the emblems in their epigrammatic format, Steyner added woodcut illustrations to the preexisting text.⁶² For the first time, the emblems included images.

Artist Jörg Breu created the woodcut illustrations appearing in this first edition.⁶³ Steyner recognized the jarring effect of these simple, inelegant images, especially for those humanists who already encountered the emblems in their unillustrated form. In his "Candido Lectori"—his letter to the reader at the beginning of the book—Steyner apologizes for the poor quality of the images, noting that

"It would be unfair, worthy reader, if you were to find us wanting in diligence in these figures which are added to this work, and it is true the standing of the very important author and the value of the little book deserved more elegant illustrations. This indeed we admit and we wanted to present these quite illustrious inventions to you as if we set them before your eyes painted in the most accomplished way; and, as far as I know, we lacked nothing for this purpose."⁶⁴

Steyner recognizes the reader's unfamiliarity with the images, but he values the visual quality of the emblems; he wishes to present the inventions "as if we set them before your eyes." These

⁶⁰ Ibid, p. 46.

⁶¹ Quoted in Drysdall, "Alciato, Pater et Princeps," p. 84

⁶² John Manning, "A Bibliographical Approach to the Illustrations in Sixteenth-Century Editions of Alciato's *Emblemata*" in *Andrea Alciato and the Emblem Tradition: essays in honor of Virginia Woods Callahan*, ed. Peter Daly (New York: AMS Press, 1989), pp. 127-176; also see John Manning, *The Emblem*, pp. 38-56. Scholars today generally agree that, similar to the epigram's form, Alciato's manuscript edition of *Emblemata* did not include images. John Manning's work has been particularly influential in shaping this view; the above sources provide a summary of his argument.

⁶³ University of Glasgow Online, <http://www.emblems.arts.gla.ac.uk/alciato/books.php?id=A31a>.

⁶⁴ quoted in Drysdall, "Alciato, Pater et Princeps," p. 84

emblems were meant to aid the less-educated reader of the printed edition, one who would not have immediately understood the references to ancient history and mythology. Steyner's prefatory note also draws attention to the visual, ekphrastic quality of the text; it was easily adapted into images because the early emblems already allegorically described these objects and events. Steyner's letter to the reader highlights how he assumed authority over the emblem's production, changing the emblem's form in anticipation of its expanding audience.

The manuscript version of the emblems reached a limited audience, but the printed edition rendered them available to the general reading public. With the publication of *Emblemata* in Augsburg, Alciato's text became accessible to an entirely new set of readers, many of whom were not as erudite as those humanists who first approached the work. The reader no longer needed an elite social status to read the emblems; he or she simply needed enough money to afford the book. Although the earliest readers were still educated and, thus, presumably economically secure—the *Emblemata* was published in Latin, not the vernacular—there was no way to control who bought the book, and not all readers belonged to the same aristocratic social circle around which the early text circulated.⁶⁵ In addition to these cultural differences, the readers who encountered the *Emblemata* in Augsburg were far removed from Alciato's Italy. These German readers were more likely to see the emblems for their generalized message, not for the book's specific references to the emblems' original context. Furthermore, to read these printed emblems, an individual needed to buy the *Emblemata* book; access to the emblems through an elite cultural network thus dissolved into a public economic exchange.

The emblem "Insignia Ducatus Mediolanensis" appears as the very first emblem in Alciato's printed *Emblemata* (Figures 4 and 5). In Steyner's 1531 edition, the emblems are not

⁶⁵ University of Glasgow Online Library, <http://www.emblems.arts.gla.ac.uk/alciato/>.

separated onto their own page, so the emblem's *inscriptio* occurs directly after Alciato's dedication to Conrad Peutinger. This dedication reads as follows:

“While a walnut beguiles boys and dice beguile young men
 And old men waste their time with picture cards
 I forge these emblems in my leisure hours,
 And the tokens were made by the master-hand of craftsmen.
 Just as [we can] attach embroideries to clothing and badges to hats
 So each should be able to write with mute signs.
 The supreme emperor may make you possessor of precious coins
 And the exquisite crafts of the ancients.
 For my part I shall give, as one poet to another, paper gifts
 Which you should accept as a pledge of my friendship.”⁶⁶

The reasons behind the dedication's appearance in the printed *Emblemata* are still unclear, but Denis Drysdall has suggested that Alciato composed this dedication sometime between 1522 and 1531, after Alciato introduced the term *emblem* in his letter to Francesco Calvo but before the publication of the first printed emblem book.⁶⁷ The dedication may have then appeared in the manuscript collection of emblems that eventually reached Augsburg, which explains how the dedication was adapted to the printed edition. Although it is unclear how or why this dedication first appeared in print, it appeared in subsequent editions released after 1531 with Alciato's approval, therefore suggesting that he did not oppose Peutinger's dedication in the *Emblemata*. In crafting these “badges,” “coins, and “tokens,” Alciato relates physical objects to abstract concepts while also often connecting ancient history to his contemporary world. Additionally, according to Alciato, these emblems were a product of his “leisure hours” similar to the games played at court in Castiglione's *Book of the Courtier*. This dedication further associated the emblem as a leisure activity and masked its political subtext.

⁶⁶ Quoted in Denis L. Drysdall, “Alciato: Pater et Princeps,” p. 82.

⁶⁷ *Ibid.*, p. 83.

While it is unclear whether this dedication circulated in earlier manuscript editions of Alciato's, I am mainly interested in the relationship between this dedication and the "Insignia Ducatus Mediolanensis" image that appears at the bottom of the printed page. On this single page, the reader learns of two connections between the emblem book and Alciato's contemporary life: his dedication to Conrad Peutinger publicizes Alciato's friendship with another humanist, and the city of Milan, as displayed through the Sforza and Visconti heraldry, connects to the original context around which the emblems circulated. In addition to the *inscriptio*'s appearance, the image itself depicts the Sforza family pedigree outlined in the text. This image, as Alciato notes in the text, illustrates the Visconti viper symbol from which the Sforza coat of arms—and family pedigree—derived. In fact, the arms shown in this *pictura* are the Visconti coat of arms, not those of the Sforza family.⁶⁸ The symbol appears on a shield affixed to a tree, literalizing the idea of the Sforza and Visconti family trees. Although Milanese humanists who read the emblem would have understood and even identified with this family pedigree, the emblem's message became abstracted as it circulated further across Europe. Therefore, the image may have served as a helpful visualization for those unfamiliar with Milanese heraldry.

This kind of visual support also appears in Steyner's edition of the "Foedera Italarum" emblem. There, the lute described in the text serves as the focal point of the image, illustrating the abstract idea of political alliances through the instrument's visual qualities (Figures 5 and 6). This lute rests upon the floor of a simple room; no other objects decorate the scene. The room appears shallow in depth, and only the bottom panes of two small windows adorn the back wall.

⁶⁸ ⁶⁸ Karl Giehlow, *The Humanist Interpretation of Hieroglyphs in the Allegorical Studies of the Renaissance*, p. 287.

A thin black line forms a border around the image, separating it from the accompanying *inscriptio* and *subscriptio*. The strings of the lute align horizontally across the room, creating sharp, straight angles that mirror the planes of wood that decorate the back wall of the room. Thanks to its simplicity and visual power, the image effectively conveys a complex message: the lute, as a physical object, represents musical harmony; metaphorically, it refers to political agreement. How, then, did the printed images change the reader's experience? Instead of mentally conjuring up the image of the lute as the reader of the manuscript edition would have done, the reader instead viewed the image uniformly represented on the printed page. The emblem's ekphrastic descriptions were reinforced by the printed images and, in addition to using the text to visualize a private, internal image, the reader now analyzed the emblem's *pictura*, which provided an additional—and perhaps different—interpretation of the emblem's text. Unlike the reader's internal image, the printed image was reproduced in every single book of that *Emblemata* edition. The images added to the reader's individual experience by creating a collective iconographic repository that universalized the experience of interpreting, visualizing, and analyzing the emblems. Because the image provided a visual interpretation of the emblem's text, the reader was more connected to other members of the *Emblemata*'s audience.

Furthermore, although the emblem derived from the epigram's literary form, the images were deeply connected to the reader's aural and tactile culture. Daniel Russell has written that, because of these considerations, the early modern reader's process of looking at the emblem *pictura* differs from our methods of visualization today.⁶⁹ The woodcut illustrations used to create the emblem images were a tactile art that originated out of an oral culture, not a literary

⁶⁹ Daniel S. Russell, "Perceiving, Seeing and Meaning: Emblems and Some Approaches to Reading Early Modern Culture," *Aspects of Renaissance and Baroque Symbol Theory, 1500-1700* (New York: AMS Press, 1999), pp. 77-92; also see John Manning, *The Emblem*, p. 48.

one. This process becomes complicated when considering the image's connection to the emblem's language, however. Russell argues that the viewer used a process of "scanning" to analyze the combination of image and text. Instead of looking at the image as a whole, the viewer "scanned" the image as he or she read the text, looking for certain relationships existing within the text that were then represented or reflected in the image. Russell's comments indicate how the image primarily arose from a verbal and tactile culture, not a visual one.⁷⁰ Aural communication requires an individual to directly speak, whereas the act of viewing an image may be silent and interiorized.⁷¹ Even though the reader may have engaged individually with the printed book, the culture that produced these images was highly communicative. The addition of images established the act of reading the emblems as a collective experience, but one that did not depend on the individual's identity, as was previously the case for the humanist circulation of the earlier manuscript edition of *Emblemata*.

The emblems quickly grew popular after their emergence in print, but Alciato remained unhappy with the poor quality of the *Emblemata* illustrations. In 1534 he collaborated with his friend Christian Wechel, a Parisian printmaker, to release an edition of the *Emblemata* with updated images.⁷² Alciato was living in Bourges, France at this time, so he could supervise the release of this print edition more closely.⁷³ The illustrations in this edition—possibly made by artist Mercure Jollat—are much more elaborate and carefully rendered than Steyner's earlier

⁷⁰ Also see John Manning, *The Emblem*, p. 48.

⁷¹ See Walter Ong, *Orality and literacy: the technologizing of the word* (New York: Methuen, 1982); for an alternate interpretation of Ong's view, see Harold Love, "Early Modern Print Culture: Assessing the Models," *Parergon: Journal of the Australian and New Zealand Association for Medieval and Early Modern Studies* 20, no. 1 (2003), pp. 45-64.

⁷² John Manning, *The Emblem*, pp. 43-45.

⁷³ Henry Green, *Andrea Alciati and his books of emblems*, pp. 14-15.

version.⁷⁴ In addition to the refinement of the images, Alciato also helped Wechel correct textual misprints from the Augsburg edition. The popularity of the updated images in Wechel's edition, combined with Alciato's endorsement, caused the emblem print industry to move to France. Although others across Europe printed versions of Alciato's *Emblemata*, the emblem print industry centered in Paris and Lyon.⁷⁵

Christian Wechel's 1534 edition, published in Paris with Alciato's consent, includes several changes to the previous form of these emblems. Wechel chose to separate each emblem onto its own page, so Alciato's dedication to Peutingger does not appear on the same page as the first emblem in the series (Figure 7). The images are slightly larger in this edition, too, and the text appears more ornate. For example, in the emblem on the Sforza heraldry, the emblem's subscriptio begins with a large letter *E* for the first word, "Exiliens" (Figure 8). Despite details such as this one, the image's iconography is very similar to Steyner's earlier printed edition. The tree upon which the snake's image is affixed appears close to a body of water with a sailing ship in the distance, but the details generally appear more intricately rendered and complex. In addition to these aesthetic changes, Alciato and Wechel also made textual corrections to this first emblem in the book. For example, in the 1534 edition, the subscriptio ends with a question mark, while the 1531 edition ended with a period. While the 1531 edition's inscriptio read "Insignia Ducatus Mediolanensis," the inscriptio in Wechel's 1534 edition appears as "Ad. Illust. Maximil. Ducem. Mediol.," specifically dedicated to Duke Maximilian Sforza of Milan. However, this dedication does not appear in the *Emblemata* until 1534, well after Maximilian's death in 1530. This decision may have served as a tribute to Francesco Sforza, Maximilian's brother, who ruled

⁷⁴ See "Andrea Alciato's *Emblematum libellus*, Paris," *Alciato at Glasgow*, <http://www.emblems.arts.gla.ac.uk/alciato/books.php?id=A34b>

⁷⁵ *Ibid.* For a discussion on the reception of Alciato's emblems in France, see Daniel Russell, "Alciati's Emblems in Renaissance France," *Renaissance Quarterly* 34, no. 4 (1981), pp. 534-554.

Milan from 1521 until his death in 1535.⁷⁶ The dedication, although addressed singularly to Duke Maximilian, is public and impersonal: although the emblem originally celebrated the Sforza family pedigree, by 1534 it served as a nostalgic tribute to the former Duke. Thus, the historical context of Maximilian's posthumous dedicatory emblem was not fixed, and even Alciato himself changed the emblem's form to fit into a more recent, contemporary political environment. Alciato's involvement in the emblem's formation therefore complicates its evolution into an autonomous genre. The emblem gradually separated from the historical context in which it was produced, but Alciato himself helped to contemporize its form, distancing the emblems from the author's own experience as a resident of Milan in the early 1500s.

The "Foedera" emblem also changed in subsequent editions. The emblem's *inscriptio* in Wechel's 1534 edition is simply "Foedera," while the 1531 edition read "Foedera Italarum" (Figure 9). Instead of referring specifically to Alciato's Italy, the *inscriptio* instead refers generally to all political alliances. This change may also reflect how publishers—in this case, Christian Wechel—changed *Emblemata's* form in response to the printed book's expanding audience. The abstraction of the "Foedera" message allows the emblem to apply more generally to its larger audience. It also could refer to conscious changes to the emblem's form in response to the changing political situation because, by 1534, Alciato's advice on Italian alliances between 1512-1515 was obsolete. The Latin text also appears slightly altered, likely reflecting the corrections that Alciato and Wechel made to the hastily published 1531 Augsburg text.⁷⁷ Similar to the 1531 edition, the accompanying image in the "Foedera" emblem also depicts a lute; again, the abstract idea of political harmony becomes visually apparent through the image. In this

⁷⁶ Karl Giehlow, *The Humanist Interpretation of Hieroglyphs in the Allegorical Studies of the Renaissance*, Reprint. Leiden: Brill, 2015. p. 287.

⁷⁷ John Manning, *The Emblem*, p. 52.

edition, the lute also rests inside a room. This time, however, the room appears much more spatially deep; as a result, the lute does not appear as large and the room stretches much farther into the background. The lute is positioned diagonally, not horizontally, and this time it rests upon a large rectangular ottoman. The instrument's diagonal line points toward an open entryway, where a landscape is visible in the background. Despite these additional details, the emblem's text still directly addresses Maximilian Sforza. Therefore, the emblem functions both as a symbolic message to a single powerful member of the Milanese elite—who, by 1534, was now dead—while also communicating more broadly to a general reading public.

Two years later, in 1536, Wechel issued the first vernacular edition of *Emblemata*, which Jean Lefèvre translated into French; editions in German, Spanish, and Italian emerged soon thereafter.⁷⁸ The vernacular translation highlights how, once again, the book's form evolved in a clear effort to expand its audience. The earliest emblems may have represented a form of cultural capital among humanists, but even by 1536 the elite group had expanded considerably; with Lefèvre's French translation, the reader no longer even needed to know Latin.⁷⁹ Thus, the reader's assumed cultural knowledge changed with the emblem's evolution: to read the earliest manuscript edition of *Emblemata*, the reader needed an elite social status as well as a comprehensive understanding of the classics; in the 1531 printed edition, the reader needed to understand Latin, but the images supposedly helped him or her comprehend the more specific details within the text; and, by the time the vernacular editions appeared, reading the emblems was easier and far more accessible than ever before. The act of translation, as John Manning

⁷⁸ Ibid, p. 44.

⁷⁹ Pierre Laurens, *L'abeille dans l'ambre*, p. 430.

notes, both derives from and conveys authority upon the original text, so Lefèvre's translation solidified the *Emblemata*'s place in popular culture.⁸⁰

Therefore, despite his initial reservations about the *Emblemata*'s publication in print, Alciato responded positively to the book's success and even collaborated with printers to add additional emblems to later editions. Alciato continued composing emblems throughout his entire career as a humanist and jurist. In 1546, he released a new collection of eighty-six emblems in Venice in collaboration with Aldus Manutius's Aldine press.⁸¹ In this edition, Alciato included an additional emblem directly related to Milan: his "Mediolanum." emblem describes the history of the city, referred to as "my homeland"; the accompanying image depicts a "black pig," the "symbol" of Milan (Figures 10 and 11).⁸² Even though Alciato taught and lived in cities across Italy and France in the years between 1531 and 1546, he still identified with the city of Milan and included this emblem in the Venetian Aldine edition. However, it is possible that this emblem communicated a message specifically designed for the *Emblemata*'s wider reading audience, not for a specific population of Milanese humanists. This "Mediolanum." emblem was published in Venice, not Milan; it was always expected to reach a large, geographically diverse audience. Moreover, Alciato uses the singular pronoun "my" to describe his relationship to Milan, which contrasts his earlier use of the collective "we" pronoun in his emblem on the Sforza coat of arms published in 1531. This emblem's didactic tone suggests that it was produced for an audience unfamiliar with Milan's history, not for those Milanese

⁸⁰ John Manning, "Renaissance and Baroque Symbol Theory: Some Introductory Questions and Problems" in *Aspects of Renaissance and Baroque Symbol Theory*, p. xx; for more on the reception of Alciato's emblems in France, see "Alciati's Emblems in Renaissance France" in *Renaissance Quarterly* 34, no. 4 (1981), pp. 534-554.

⁸¹ See Henry Green, *Andrea Alciati and his books of emblems*, p. 17.

⁸² Andrea Alciato, *A Book of Emblems: the emblematum liber in Latin and English*, pp. 18-19. The emblem "Nunquam Procrastinandum" also appears in this edition, which refers to the Alciato family coat of arms.

humanists who interacted with Alciato's earliest emblems in a collective court environment. Therefore, although the printers and editors of Andrea Alciato's *Emblemata* were responsible for its initial changes in form, in the end even Alciato himself capitalized on the emblem industry's growing popularity.

Guillaume Rouillé and Macé Bonhomme compiled all of Alciato's emblems together into one comprehensive volume, and in 1550 they released the first printed version of all two hundred and eleven emblems in Lyon.⁸³ Earlier, in 1548, Rouillé and Bonhomme arranged the emblems according to *loci communes*, or common places, that topically grouped each emblem around those with similar subjects, such as love, death, or religion.⁸⁴ Each individual emblem appeared in the same *inscriptio/pictura/subscriptio* format as in previous editions, but the book's spatial organization changed. For example, even though the "Mediolanum." emblem was published after the others originally connecting to Milan, most of them were grouped together at the beginning of the *Emblemata* book.⁸⁵ After Rouillé and Bonhomme presented this version of the *Emblemata*, other printers followed suit; this form of topical organization soon became a uniform feature of the emblem book. By the time of Alciato's death in 1550, the emblems had evolved into a genre completely separated from the author and their earlier political context, but one in which Alciato, as the author, was still involved.

The emblem *pictura*'s appearance became increasingly ornate and complex as publishers released subsequent editions. In the 1550 edition, published in Lyon by Guillaume Rouillé and

⁸³ See Peter M. Daly, *Literature in the Light of the Emblem*, p. 17. Alciato actually produced two hundred and twelve emblems, but one emblem, "Adversus naturam peccantes," was censored from almost every edition because it was considered profane.

⁸⁴ *Ibid.*

⁸⁵ Andrea Alciato, *A Book of Emblems: the emblematum liber in Latin and English*, p. 14, pp. 17-19, p. 157. One exception to this grouping is the emblem describing the tomb of Gian Galeazzo Visconti, which is placed much later in the emblem book and is topically grouped with other emblems that describe the quality of honor through the "human macrocosm."

Macé Bonhomme, the “Foedera” became even more detailed (Figure 12). In contrast to the thin black border surrounding the *pictura* in the 1531 and 1534 editions, this elaborate border frames the entire emblem, enclosing the *pictura*, *inscriptio*, and *subscriptio* into one single entity. The evolution of these printed editions suggests that the emblem was becoming increasingly associated as an abstract art form, not as a form of political communication related to any specific historical context. In the “Foedera” emblem in this 1550 edition, the lute again rests upon an ottoman; this time, curtains also frame the instrument, draping down around the ottoman. The two sides of the canopy lift upward, framing the lute that is situated—again, diagonally—on the ottoman. An open book of sheet music rests upon the ottoman next to the lute, alerting the viewer to the sensorial qualities of the music. The image becomes both a visual and aural description of Milan’s “Foedera,” illustrating the importance of harmonious alliances through the sound of the lute.⁸⁶ In later editions after Alciato’s death, some publishers even added a posthumous dedication to Maximilian Sforza to the emblem. Thus, although this dedication seems to communicate personally to Maximilian Sforza, its message appealed broadly to the general audience who read the emblems. Instead of a personal dedication or communication, it was a reminder of—a memory of—the emblem’s original context (Figures 13 and 14).

As the printed emblem evolved, it also became incorporated into the reader’s three-dimensional world as a decorative art form. Artists and humanists adapted emblematic designs into material emblems used to adorn architecture and interior settings.⁸⁷ In contrast to the printed

⁸⁶ See Daniel Russell’s “Perceiving, Seeing and Meaning: Emblems and Some Approaches to Reading Early Modern Culture,” pp. 77-92. The addition of the open sheet music could also perhaps connect to Daniel Russell’s comments about the emblem image’s relationship to tactile and oral cultures.

⁸⁷ For more on the relationship between the emblem and architecture, see *The Emblem and Architecture: Studies in Applied Emblematics from the sixteenth to the eighteenth centuries*, eds. Hans J. Böker and

emblem, material emblems often did not include a description of the emblem's text, so they instead only contained the *pictura* and *inscriptio*. Some material emblems were used for what John Manning calls "ephemeral" celebrations, or those intended to be used for a short period of time, such as banners in parades and feasts.⁸⁸ Just as Alciato claims to have composed emblems in his "leisure hours," the emblem's three-dimensional architectural form became associated with playful, lighthearted celebrations.⁸⁹ However, because of the ephemeral, fleeting nature of these celebrations, it is difficult to reconstruct the history of the emblem's use. Other emblems were designed for permanent architectural structures including churches, châteaux, private homes, and public buildings.⁹⁰ These material emblems occasionally derived from illustrations within printed emblem books, including Alciato's *Emblemata*. For example, Peter Daly and Bari Hooper have demonstrated that Englishman John Harvey copied one of Alciato's emblems onto the mantle of Harvey's private home in 1570.⁹¹ Often, however, the emblems resembled personal devices that related directly to the individual who commissioned their creation. Daniel Russell has examined how French châteaux display emblems in a context immediately related to their owners.⁹² Viewers across Europe would have been familiar with emblematic decorations, often those that were far removed from the original context in which Alciato produced his emblems: these

Peter Daly (Turnhout: Brepols, 1999) and Peter Daly, "The Emblem in Material Culture" in *Companion to Emblem Studies*, pp.411-456.

⁸⁸ John Manning, *The Emblem*, p. 186.

⁸⁹ See Andrea Alciato's dedication to Conrad Peutinger at the beginning of the *Emblematum liber*, quoted in Drysdall, "Alciato, Pater et Princeps," p. 82.

⁹⁰ *Ibid*, pp. 185-220.

⁹¹ Peter Daly and Bari Hooper, "John Harvey's Carved Mantle-Piece (ca. 1570): An Early Instance of the Use of Alciato Emblems in England" in *Andrea Alciato and the Emblem Tradition: Essays in Honor of Virginia Woods Callahan*, pp. 177-204.

⁹² Daniel Russell, *Emblematic Structures in Renaissance French Culture* (Toronto: University of Toronto, 1995), pp. 111-188.

material emblems became popular in France and Germany, but also Spain, England, Italy, Austria, Switzerland, and Scandinavia.⁹³

The Emblem's Abstraction: Space and the Art of Memory

The significance of space has become a subject of recent interest among emblem scholars, perhaps because of the new interest in the material emblem's prevalence in three-dimensional space.⁹⁴ In the following section, I will discuss the connection between space and emblematics by focusing on one particular topic: spatial memory. Spatial memory—otherwise known as artificial memory, or “the art of memory”—refers to a method of storing information according to topical places, or *loci communes*.⁹⁵ Simonides of Ceos, an Ancient Greek poet, allegedly first used this art of memory to remember the seating arrangement at a banquet after all of the guests perished due to the collapse of the banquet hall.⁹⁶ During antiquity, the art of memory was mainly used by orators who wished to memorize and compose speeches. Three surviving written Latin sources—Cicero's *De Oratore*, *Rhetorica ad Herennium*, and Quintilian's *Institutio Oratoria*—explain this art of memory, suggesting practices that the orator could use to train his mind.⁹⁷ Frances Yates, Mary Carruthers, and Lina Bolzoni have traced the history of this art of memory, showing how this spatial storage system evolved from classical antiquity and into the Middle Ages and Renaissance.⁹⁸ This method differs from natural memory because those who practice the “art of memory” use artificial spaces to memorize information.

⁹³ See Peter M. Daly, “The Emblem in Material Culture,” pp. 411-456.

⁹⁴ For more on the spatial differences between printed and material emblems, see Judi Loach: “Architecture and Emblematics: Issues in Interpretation” in *Emblems and Art History: Nine Essays* (Glasgow: Dept of French, University of Glasgow, 1996), pp. 1-21.

⁹⁵ Frances Yates, *The Art of Memory*, pp 18-19, pp. 37-42, p. 49.

⁹⁶ *Ibid*, pp. 17-19.

⁹⁷ *Ibid*, pp. 17-41.

⁹⁸ *Ibid*; see also Mary Carruthers, *The Book of Memory: a study of memory in medieval culture*, 2nd ed. (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2008); Lina Bolzoni, *The Gallery of Memory*.

One method outlined in these memory treatises encouraged the orator to use an architectural mnemonic method. To practice the art of memory, the orator constructed a “memory palace” within his mind, depositing words and images in different rooms of the palace, which allowed him to reconstruct and remember information. The spatial metaphor was extremely important to the orator’s ability to successfully use this art of memory.

Is it possible that the emblem, in its evolved form, was intended to be used as a memory device? Several scholars have responded to this question with varying degrees of certainty. First, Peter Daly has questioned the relationship between emblematics and mnemonics in his chapter “Mnemonics and Emblems” in *The Emblem in Early Modern Europe*.⁹⁹ Borrowing from Yates’s assertion that “personifications were also used and recommended as memory images,” Daly focuses his study on several emblems that specifically embody personifications.¹⁰⁰ Overall, though, Daly is skeptical about the relationship between emblematics and mnemonics, and he ends his discussion with the dubious remark that “emblem scholars must decide for themselves” if Daly has been “fair” with his “expression of doubts” about this connection.¹⁰¹ However, in his study, Daly does not acknowledge the importance of the architectural metaphor to mnemonics. Many different text/image combinations may have served as memory devices, not just personifications in emblems.

William E. Engel has also addressed emblematics and spatial memory in his essay on “Mnemonic Emblems in the Humanist Discourses of Knowledge,” published in *Aspects of Renaissance and Baroque Symbol Theory*.¹⁰² His study, although geographically confined to

⁹⁹ Peter Daly, “Mnemonics and Emblems” in *The Emblem in Early Modern Europe*, pp. 87-130.

¹⁰⁰ Ibid, p. 98.

¹⁰¹ Ibid, p. 130.

¹⁰² William E. Engel, “Mnemonic Emblems in the Humanist Discourses of Knowledge” in *Aspects of Renaissance and Baroque Symbol Theory*, pp. 125-142.

English humanist discourse, provides an insightful glimpse on the material emblem's role as a memory device. Engel begins his essay by explaining how Francis Bacon's home included emblems which, according to writer John Aubrey, were "Topiques for Localle memorie."¹⁰³ Other than this opening statement, Engel does not discuss specific printed or material emblems. He instead draws from a variety of literary and historical sources including sixteenth-century "apologies for memory," John Florio's English translation of Montaigne's *Essais*, and Edmund Spenser's *Faerie Queene*. Engel questions how the "textual architecture" of the literary sources embodies the topical storage system and architectural metaphor used in the art of memory. He then relates these literary works back to emblematics, claiming that introductions to the reader at the beginning of printed Renaissance books are often "at once emblematic and mnemonic," because they use emblematic conceits to compare the organization of the book to the architectural metaphor used in the art of memory. Thus, although Engel does not specifically discuss Alciato's printed emblems, his work describes the emblem's evolution into a completely abstracted art form, one that appeared in material culture, on the printed page and, in this instance, as a literary term. Engel's study addresses emblem's later stage, showing the connections between three-dimensional space, the interiorized space used in mnemonics, and the space of the printed emblem book.¹⁰⁴

Additionally, Pierre Laurens has referred to Frances Yates's work on the art of memory in his chapter on Renaissance epigrams in *L'abeille dans l'ambre*.¹⁰⁵ Unlike Daly's discussion, Laurens suggests that the entire emblem book was a memory device, not any one specific

¹⁰³ Ibid, p. 125.

¹⁰⁴ Ibid.

¹⁰⁵ See Pierre Laurens, *L'abeille dans l'ambre*, p. 448: "Ces textes, s'ajoutant à d'autres, qui développent plutôt une réflexion sur l'art de mémoire, sont à l'arrière-plan de l'effort de tout le siècle pour rendre à l'œil de l'esprit une sagesse ou un savoir encyclopédique. Selon ce point de vue, les *Emblèmes* d'Alciat auraient leur place dans le courant qui partant des Hiéroglyphiques, aboutit au Théâtre de Camillo."

emblem. Laurens suggests that the emblem book, with its emblems arranged topically into *loci communes*, compartmentalizes the world's macrocosm into a printed microcosm, storing a vast amount of information—both allegorical and realistic—within one printed book. Laurens compares the emblem book's desire for a visual, tangible repository of encyclopedic knowledge to Giulio Camillo's memory theatre, an idea for a literalized memory theatre outlined by Camillo in written form.¹⁰⁶ Laurens places this remark within the larger context of his discussion on the Renaissance humanist fascination with epigrams and emblems. Perhaps this emblem book literalized the metaphorical art of memory, creating a visual storage space in the same way that the orator used an interiorized architectural system to deposit information; perhaps, as Laurens suggests, Alciato's *Emblemata* is a tactile, exteriorized, and visual storage system, a spatial memory device similar to others produced during the Renaissance.

I agree with Laurens that the emblem's evolved form may have served as a spatial memory device, but I wonder if one could extend his conjecture even further: is it possible that, just as the emblem's form changed over time, the spatial memory techniques also transformed? Central to this hypothesis is the emblem's move from manuscript to print in 1531. Before this date, the emblem's ekphrastic text prompted the reader to create an interiorized image, similar to the metaphorical architectural system used by orators who practiced the art of memory. With the introduction of images to the printed book (and, later on, Guillaume and Rouillé's organization of the emblem book into *loci communes* in 1548), perhaps the emblem as a memory device became literalized and visual while still also retaining these interiorized qualities of the earlier manuscript edition. Furthermore, since every reader could access the same vast repository of literary and iconographic material, the emblem's evolved form created a collective, cultural

¹⁰⁶ Frances Yates discusses Giulio Camillo in *The Art of Memory*, pp. 163-175; also see Lina Bolzoni, *The Gallery of Memory*, pp. xiii-xvii.

memory that standardized the experience of reading. While the earlier emblems depended on the reader's ability to interiorize its message, the evolved emblem was an *exteriorized* memory device.

Conclusion

Thus far, we have examined how several of Alciato's emblems relate temporally to the political climate of early sixteenth century Italy. The emblem's origins trace back to the epigrammatic tradition of Italian court environments, and the early emblem's literary form allowed Alciato to communicate politically charged messages—the necessity of Italian alliances, the Sforza coat of arms, Alciato's move to France—to Maximilian Sforza and other members of Milan's cultural elite. Although Alciato claims that he composed these emblems in his “leisure hours,” the emblem's playful, symbolic form concealed its serious political subtext.¹⁰⁷ In this early stage of the emblem, the text related to the humanist's contemporary world, but it was veiled under the emblem's abstract, symbolic associations. Whereas before the manuscript emblem's abstract qualities veiled the concrete allusions to Alciato's Italy, its ambiguity had now become the focus of the printed emblem.

As Alciato explains in *De verborum significatione*, he clearly saw his early emblems not as words, but as “things” that “signify.”¹⁰⁸ Since these early emblems were “things” that embodied a metaphorical space, the emblem's political message became distanced from the language used to describe it. On the manuscript page, the language was real and visible, but the total political message was metaphorical, symbolic, and concealed. However, with the emergence of the printed *Emblemata*, Heinrich Steyner literalized this space, rendering these

¹⁰⁷ Quote from Alciato's dedication to Conrad Peutinger in *Emblematum liber*. Quoted in Drysdall, “Alciato, Pater et Princeps,” p. 82.

¹⁰⁸ *Ibid*, p. 87.

“things” visible on the printed page. As time passed and the emblem’s form evolved, the emblem really did become a real “thing,” one that appeared in print and material culture. Indeed, from elite circles to common readers, from the manuscript’s private circulation to the printed book’s public economic exchange, from the imagined images to the visible *pictura*—and even with the possible development of the spatial memory techniques in Alciato’s *Emblemata*—the emblem as a “thing” clearly became less metaphorical and more concrete over time, which caused its message to resonate with a wider audience. However, despite the emblem’s move toward exteriorization, its meaning was paradoxically more symbolic, abstract, and disconnected from the temporal circumstances of its creation.

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