



THE BOOK OF BOOKS: HERNANDO COLÓN'S LIBRO DE LOS EPÍTOMES

Jeudi 19 mars 2026

Amphithéâtre Jean Jacquet, Bâtiment L, Campus 1

Université de Caen Normandie

In the early 16th century, Hernando Colón, son of the navigator Christopher Columbus, set out to build a universal library, one which would contain “every book on every subject in every language, both from within Christendom and without”. By the time of his death in 1539, Colón’s library comprised over 15 000 printed volumes. To manage it all he designed a revolutionary system of cross-referenced inventories or catalogues. Most of these survive in the Biblioteca Colombina in Seville, but one, the “Libro de los epitomes”, containing summaries of the contents of the books, had been presumed missing until identified in 2018 among the manuscripts in the Arnamagnæan Collection in Copenhagen. The discovery, hailed as one of the most exciting developments in early modern book history for decades, led to the establishment of a research project, funded by the Carlsberg Foundation and a private donor.

The chief deliverables of the project, which ran from 2020 to the end of 2024, were a digital transcription of the “Libro de los epitomes”, made in TEI-conformant XML, along with studies dealing with the form and contents of the “Libro”, including the identification of the books summarised in it, an analysis of the language and style of the epitomes as well as their underlying strategies of composition, and an investigation into Colón’s universal library project within the broader currents of Hispano-Danish relations in the early modern period. An ancillary project traced the dispersal of books from Colón’s library following his death, paving the way for a virtual reconstruction of the library.

9.00 am Coffee

Our seminar will present the principal findings of this project and outline some of the many possibilities for future research on this remarkable library and its founder.

9.30 am MATTHEW DRISCOLL (KØBENHAVNS UNIVERSITET), Introductory remarks

10.00 am NATALE VACALEBRE (UNIVERSIDAD DE ALCALÁ, MADRID)

Small books, wide journeys: The modern dispersal of Hernando Colón’s library

This paper examines the dispersion of Hernando Colón’s books in the second half of the nineteenth century. It focuses on the redistribution of pamphlets and small-format works into modern public and private collections, tracing their movement into contemporary libraries and bibliophile holdings. By analysing patterns of circulation and re-aggregation, the paper reflects on the afterlife of Colón’s volumes and on the role of nineteenth-century collecting practices in shaping the present-day visibility of the library.

11.00 am Coffee break

11.15 am MATILDE MALASPINA (SAPIENZA UNIVERSITÀ DI ROMA)

An Introduction to the Libro de los epitomes, its form and content

This presentation will describe the *Libro* from a material perspective and provide an overview of its contents, highlighting how it relates to and interacts with the rest of Hernando Colón’s library.

12.15 pm JOANA DUYSER-BORREDA (UNIVERSITÄT HEIDELBERG)

Spanish manuscripts and books in Denmark: Tracing Spanish-Danish cultural connections through the Libro de los epitomes

This presentation explores how the *Libro de los epitomes* travelled from Spain to Denmark. By trying to trace part of its provenance and ownership history, I examine the aristocratic and diplomatic networks, political contexts, and cultural exchanges that enabled the movement of manuscripts across borders. Drawing on archival sources, library catalogues, and diplomatic correspondence, the presentation highlights the role of influential individuals and their connections in the acquisition, circulation, and preservation of Spanish books and manuscripts.

1.15 pm Lunch

2.30 pm ALESSANDRO GNASSO (ÉCOLE NATIONALE DES CHARTES, PARIS)

and MATTHEW DRISCOLL (KØBENHAVNS UNIVERSITET)

Encoding the Libro: An introduction to TEI and some insights from our experience

This presentation introduces the transcription of the *Libro de los Epitomes* as an example of a multiple-purpose document encoded in TEI, developed in view of a specific outcome (an electronic edition) but aiming to be as reusable and interoperable as possible. It includes a gentle introduction to the basics of TEI encoding, as well as some observations on the format’s versatility, advantages and limitations as an interoperable format.

3.30 pm MATILDE MALASPINA (SAPIENZA UNIVERSITÀ DI ROMA)

From the Book of Books to COLIBRI

The presentation will introduce the Book of Books (BOB) database and outline the structure and main lines of research of the COLIBRI Project (ERC StG 2024), which expands the original focus on the *Libro* toward the virtual reconstruction of Colón’s library.

4.00 pm Roundtable discussion