

A REVIEW OF THE BIBLIOTECA NACIONAL DE ESPANA'S *QUIJOTE INTERACTIVO*

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Introduction

The scholarly digital edition addressed in this review is entitled the *Quijote interactivo* and was produced by the Biblioteca Nacional de España.² The edition can be accessed via the following URL: <http://quijote.bne.es/quiosco/>. The *Quijote interactivo* was initially launched in 2010 and was updated on the 2nd December 2015. This update was prompted by the obsolescence of Adobe Flash Player which ceased to function on all browsers in December 2020. The edition makes no reference to the specific researchers or individuals involved in the project.³

The *Quijote interactivo* deals with the canonical text of the Spanish Golden Age, Miguel de Cervantes' *El ingenioso hidalgo don Quijote de la Mancha*, published in two parts in 1605 and 1615, respectively. The project therefore addresses itself to the field of Hispanic literary studies and, given the status of Cervantes' novel within world literature, of literary studies more generally. The *Quijote* has been extensively published, critically edited, and translated throughout its history, meaning that this scholarly digital edition represents another contribution to a wide and varied transmission. Although digitised

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² Henceforth referred to as 'the BNE'.

³ Nevertheless, a presentation video on YouTube (<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=v5jXO4YDss0>) dating from January 2011 specifies that more than 30 people were involved in the creation of the edition, and it names José Manuel Lucía (a researcher at the Universidad Complutense of Madrid) and Ana Vicente (Director of Fine Arts at the BNE) as key figures in the project.

versions of Cervantes' text are readily available online, the *Quijote interactivo* appears to be the first attempt at a scholarly digital edition of the text.⁴

The edition is connected to three other projects carried out by the BNE. The first is the *Portal sobre Cervantes* (<http://cervantes.bne.es/>), a site dedicated to the digitisation of all the items held by the BNE concerning Cervantes (e.g. his texts, images related to his life and works, and texts which influenced him). The second is the *Portal Quijotes* (<http://www.bne.es/es/quijote/index.html>), a site dedicated to the digitisation of all versions, translations, and adaptations of the *Quijote* held by the BNE. The third is the Biblioteca Digital Hispánica (<http://www.bne.es/es/Catalogos/BibliotecaDigitalHispanica/Acercade/#>), a broader, large-scale digitisation project of all the BNE's collections, containing 222,000 items as of January 2020. The latter two of these projects, and in particular the Biblioteca Digital Hispánica, are extensively hyperlinked within the *Quijote interactivo*.

The BNE has provided very little information regarding the details of the realisation of the *Quijote interactivo* project (e.g. people involved and their roles, financial resources, time frame, contact details, and rights and licences). However, the general BNE website has a query page (https://bne.libanswers.com/form?queue_id=2458) where one can address questions. Indeed, the BNE's 'Servicio de Web, Intranet y Proyectos de Innovación Digital' responded promptly and readily to a query sent via this link during the writing of this review.

⁴ For a digitised version see, for example, <http://www.cervantesvirtual.com/obra-visor/el-ingenioso-hidalgo-don-quijote-de-la-mancha-6/html/>.

Subject and Content of the Edition

Cervantes' *Quijote* is a seminal work of Spanish literature, on a par with the works of Shakespeare in England, or the works of Dante and Manzoni in Italy. As is also the case with these latter works, the status of the *Quijote* is such that it plays a prominent role in the development of world literature, and its interest is not confined to Spain or Spanish-speaking areas. It is widely read in schools, is obligatory reading for all students of Spanish literature, and is recommended reading for all students of world literature more generally. Therefore, any project which tasks itself with presenting Cervantes' classic in an original and novel way has a huge potential audience and is incredibly relevant to current and future research.

The text which comprises the bulk of the *Quijote interactivo* edition is simply the text of Cervantes' *Quijote*. This work was published in two parts in 1605 and 1615 and the *Quijote interactivo* presents the text in these two divisions. In particular, the documents chosen to be highlighted in this project are editiones principes of the two parts, originally printed by Juan de Cuesta in Madrid, and held by the BNE. The project was initially published in 2010, corresponding roughly with the 400th anniversary of the publication of the first edition of the *Quijote*, making the choice of these documents justified and fitting. These documents are presented to the user in the form of a traditional, printed book which can be perused by turning pages. However, as this review will go on to discuss, embedded links mean that the documents' functionality supersedes that of a printed page.

In addition to Cervantes' primary text, the *Quijote interactivo* also offers contextual information covering the following topics:

1. A cartography of Don Quijote's travels (Mapa de aventuras de don Quijote)
2. Books of chivalry (Los libros de caballerías)
3. Life in seventeenth-century Spain (La vida en la España del siglo XVII)
4. An image gallery (Galería de imágenes)
5. A video of a theatre performance of the Maese Pedro scene of the text (El retablo de Maese Pedro)
6. A timeline of different editions of the text (Ediciones en el tiempo)

Like the primary text, each section of contextual information is presented in the form of a digital brochure. Again, many embedded links to multimedia content (particularly to the Biblioteca Digital Hispánica project), mean that they go beyond the boundaries of a printed page.

The contextual information contained within these brochures can be accessed in two different ways:

1. By clicking the relevant tile from the general homepage the user can access the entire brochure containing all information on a particular contextual area
2. Links to particular pages of each contextual brochure are embedded within the presentation of Cervantes' primary text. The link occurs when the contextual information within the brochure is particularly relevant to what the user is reading at that point. These links take us to the brochure where we can read relevant contextual information before using the back button to go back to the point we had been reading in the primary text

Therefore, the contextual information provided by the *Quijote interactivo* edition can be read and consumed in a dynamic way (as the reader reads the primary text) or as a stand-alone exercise (before, after, or separately from reading the primary text).

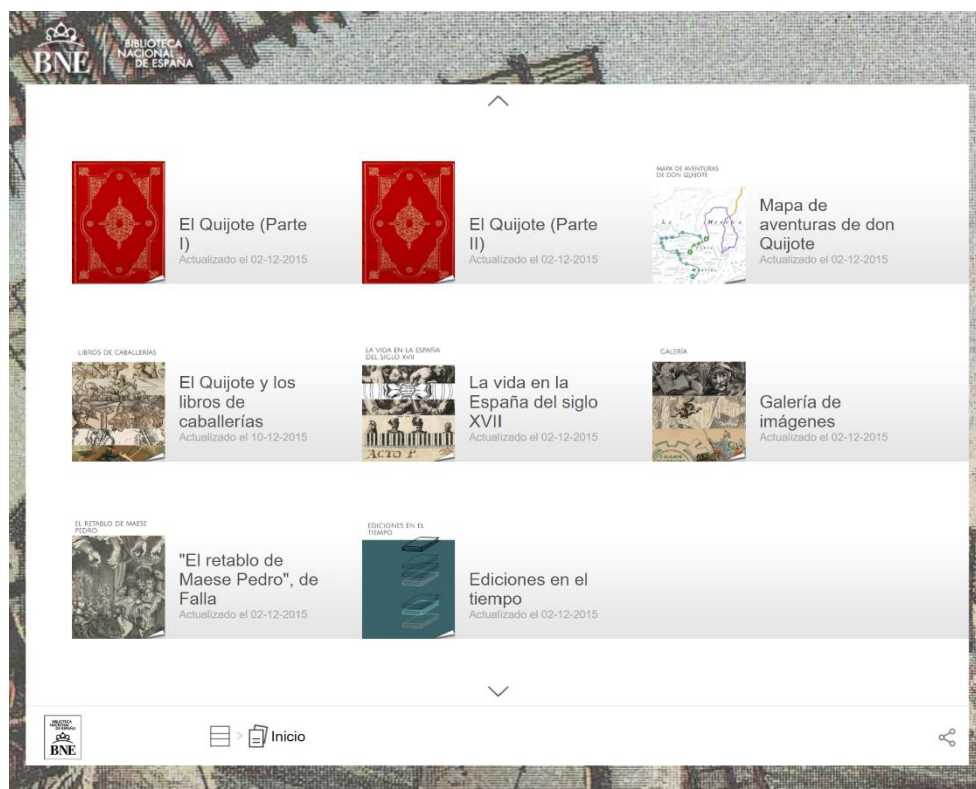


Figure 1: General homepage of the *Quijote interactivo* edition. From here we can access parts one and two of the text, as well as the six contextual brochures.

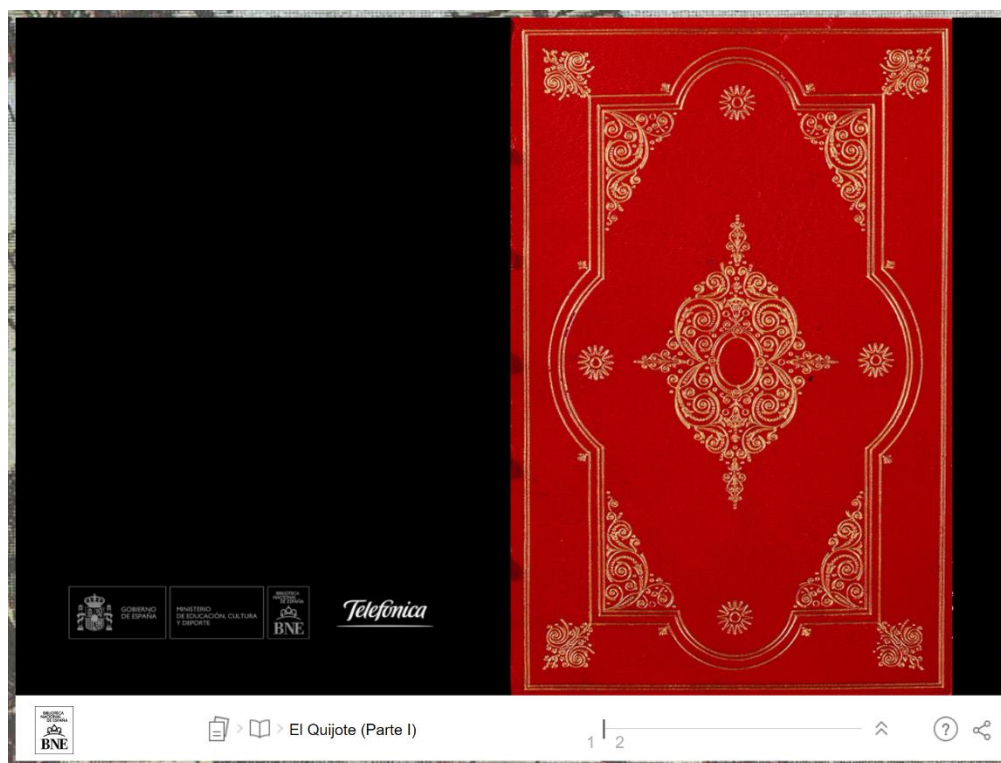


Figure 2: General interface for engaging with the primary text of the *Quijote interactivo* in the form of a traditional, printed book.

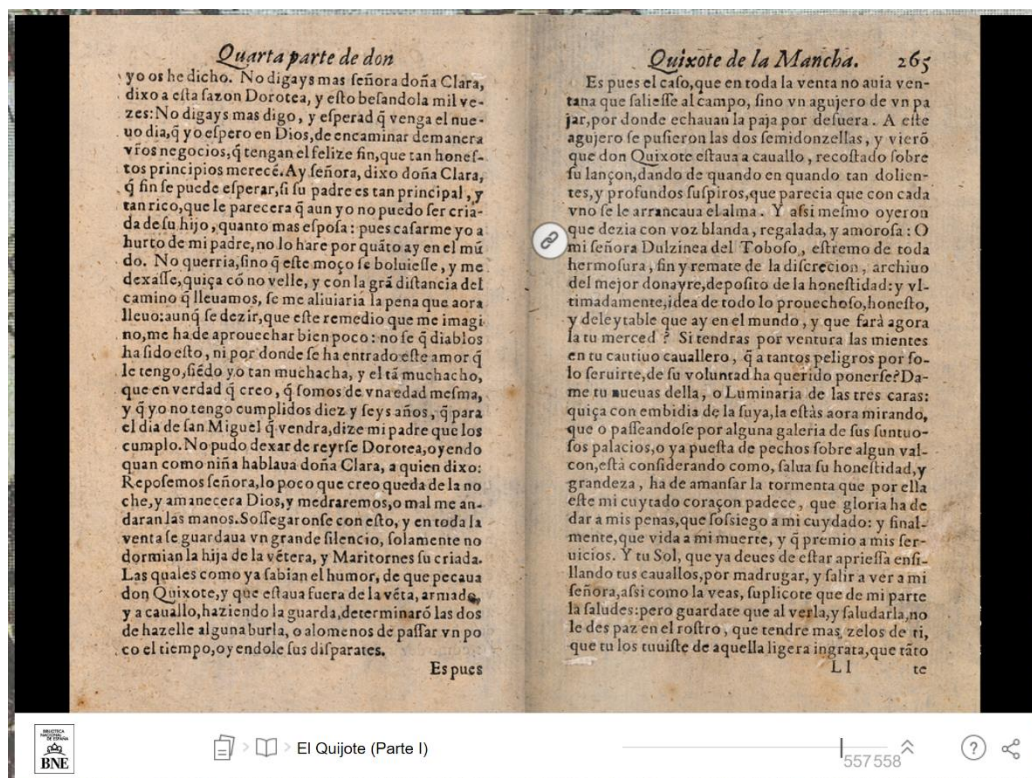


Figure 3: Example of a link contained within the white circle which leads the user from the primary text to relevant contextual information contained within one of the six contextual brochures.

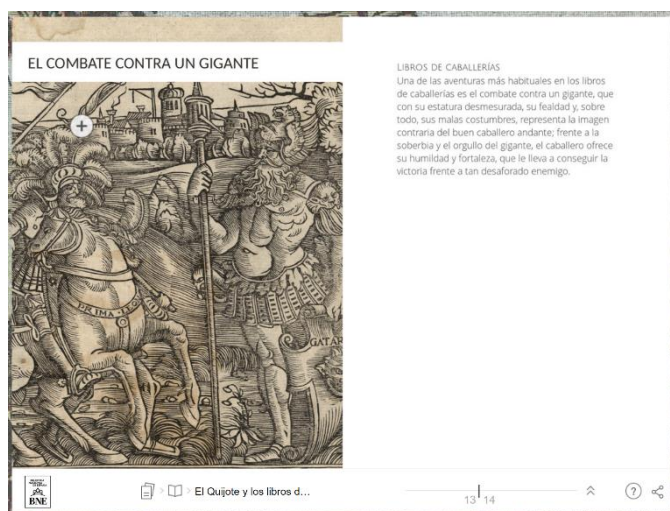


Figure 4: Two examples of pages within the contextual brochures, also in the form of a traditional, printed book. The brochures also contain links, primarily to digitised images taken as part of the Biblioteca Digital Hispánica project.

The *Quijote interactivo* edition takes much inspiration from print culture: the general mise-en-page of both Cervantes' primary text and the contextual brochures takes the form of a printed publication which can be perused by the user by virtually turning the pages. This has the benefit of being familiar and intuitive. Furthermore, the project centres upon reproducing faithfully, in facsimile style, the very first printed edition of Cervantes' text. However, there is no doubt that the *Quijote interactivo* also innovates upon print culture: it successfully integrates multimedia, contextual information into where it is relevant in the text, allowing readers to nuance their reading in a dynamic and incremental way. This has the benefit of facilitating for users a more prolonged engagement with the primary text, and a deeper understanding of it, without the requirement of breaking their attention to consult the extensive, and often intimidating, secondary literature written on the *Quijote* as a separate task.

In total, the *Quijote interactivo* publishes high-quality, digitised images of parts one and two of the first edition of Cervantes' *Quijote*, representing the digitisation of 1260 pages (672 for part one, 588 for part two).⁵ It also publishes 94 pages of (sparsely written) contextual information contained within the six contextual brochures. These brochures present 83 multimedia images (alongside links to high-quality versions in the Biblioteca Digital Hispánica), and 2 videos. Furthermore, the contextual brochure depicting a timeline of editions of the *Quijote* contains links to high-quality, digitised images of 36 different print versions of the text (again on the Biblioteca Digital Hispánica project site). Links to the Biblioteca Digital Hispánica project therefore total 119.

⁵ The aforementioned YouTube video (<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=v5jXO4YDss0>) specifies that each image is five million pixels, and that in total they occupy 2.4 terabytes on the BNE's servers.

Aims and Methods

A very brief introduction to the *Quijote interactivo* is available on the general website of the BNE (see figure 5), although no introductory or explanatory notes are provided on the site of the edition itself.

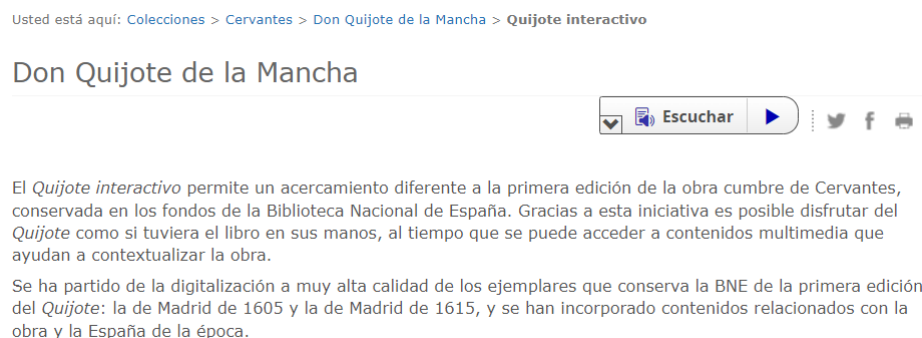


Figure 5: Introduction to the *Quijote interactivo* project on the BNE general site, providing a very brief outline of project's aims (<http://www.bne.es/es/Colecciones/Cervantes/Quijote/libro-interactivo.html>)

While the introduction provided does outline clearly and succinctly the three primary aims of the project, and while it does mention briefly the project's initial methodology, it does not provide any detailed information on how the project was carried out, who was responsible for the project, how much time and money were invested, who to contact with any queries, or information regarding rights and licences.⁶ An amplified introductory note, expanding upon the edition's aims and the aforementioned points, would be useful, and ideally this should be integrated into the site of the edition itself.

The explicit aims of the *Quijote interactivo* are threefold:

1. To facilitate a new kind of access to the first edition of Cervantes' masterpiece
2. To allow the user to enjoy the first edition, as though it is in their own hands

⁶ Whilst the legal issues regarding reuse of the content of the edition is not provided, information regarding use of the BNE's collections more generally can be found at the following URL: <http://www.bne.es/es/Catalogos/BibliotecaDigitalHispanica/Pie/AvisoLegal/>.

3. To allow the user to consult multimedia, contextual content whilst they read the primary text

The edition's objectives are therefore concerned with: broadening accessibility to generally inaccessible original documents; presenting these documents in such a way that the experience of holding the printed text is replicated; and integrating multimedia, contextual information into the user's reading of these documents. From the previous, cursory analysis of the edition's structure and content, it can be seen that these aims are successfully achieved: the edition provides high-quality, digitised images of the first edition of the text; this is presented to the user in the guise of a traditional, printed book; and multimedia content and contextual information is accessible via links embedded into the presentation of the primary text.

In addition, the project title incorporates a further, implicit aim: by entitling the edition the *Quijote* 'interactivo' (i.e. interactive), the project's creators imply that their aim is to convert the reader from a passive reader into an actively engaged user of the text. The integration of links to multimedia, contextual information throughout the primary text means that the user syncopates reading and learning, keeping their attention alert in a dynamic commingling of demands upon both imagination and reason. At the same time, the links to contextual information are tactful and not so frequent as to disrupt frustratingly the pleasure of the reading process. In this sense, the project achieves both its explicit and implicit objectives.

Nevertheless, one area in which the edition's intentions need to be clarified concerns its target audience. On one hand, access to high-quality images of the first edition of Cervantes' text is of wide, general interest and many people will likely access the *Quijote*

interactivo out of curiosity to see this original document. However, persistently engaging with the difficult script of a seventeenth-century printed book is likely to appeal only to the most specialised of scholars (especially given the ready availability of modern, critical editions). On the other hand, the links to multimedia and contextual information embedded into the text are likely to be useful primarily to unspecialised readers, and perhaps undergraduate students, due to the fact that the information provided is rather basic and cursory. Therefore, the edition incorporates an incongruity: in order for it to function as a scholarly digital edition (and not merely as a digitisation of a printed book), engagement with the multimedia, contextual content is necessary, and this engagement should be dynamic, as the user reads the primary text. However, those users likely to persist with the difficult script of the primary text are unlikely to engage with the rudimentary contextual information, and those users likely to benefit from the contextual information are unlikely to persist with the difficult script of the primary text. Possible solutions to this problem will be addressed in the next section.

The short, introductory note to the edition provided on the BNE general website briefly mentions the methodological approach from which the *Quijote interactivo* project began, stating that the first step was to digitise, in high quality, the exemplars of the two parts of the first edition of the *Quijote* held by the BNE. The edition is therefore a single-source edition (albeit made up of two parts). In terms of the primary text itself, the *Quijote interactivo* follows a facsimile approach: an exact, high quality, and unretouched version of the first edition of the text is recreated for the user (see figure 6). No critical editing and no transcription are included. The incorporation into the edition of contextual information brochures means that the *Quijote interactivo* can also be considered an annotated edition. However, it is important to note that these annotations concern purely

contextual information which is relevant to the content of the primary text. The annotations do not include notes on textual criticism and the edition is not a critical one. Furthermore, no metadata about these annotations is available to the user (e.g. a list of locations within the text at which contextual information about books of chivalry, for example, is relevant and inserted). Despite being a single-source edition, the *Quijote interactivo* pays homage to the long and rich transmission and tradition of Cervantes' text by providing links to 36 different versions, digitised on the Biblioteca Digital Hispánica site (these links are found in the contextual brochure which contains a timeline of different editions).

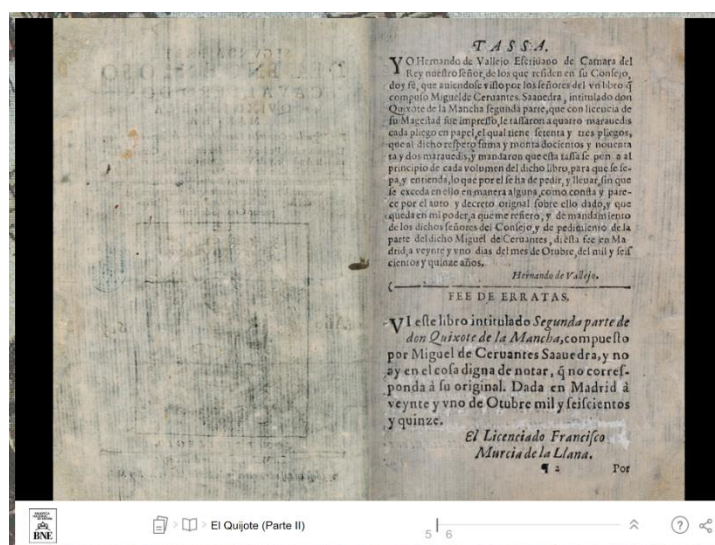
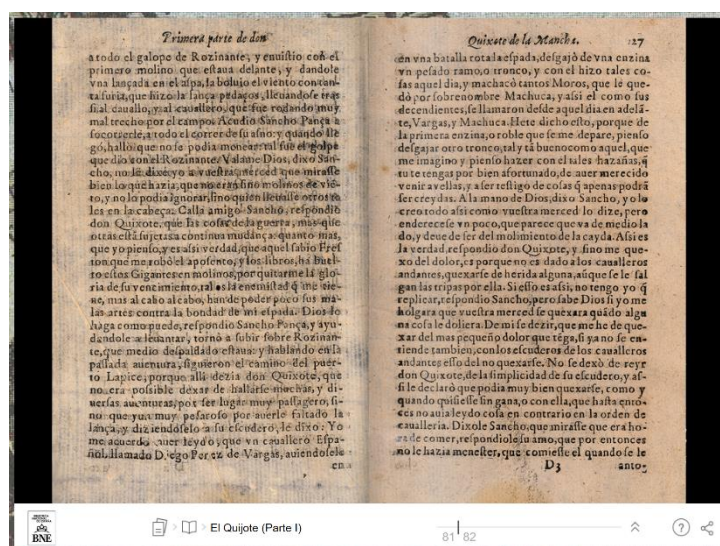


Figure 6: Two examples of pages demonstrating high-quality, unretouched, facsimile reproduction

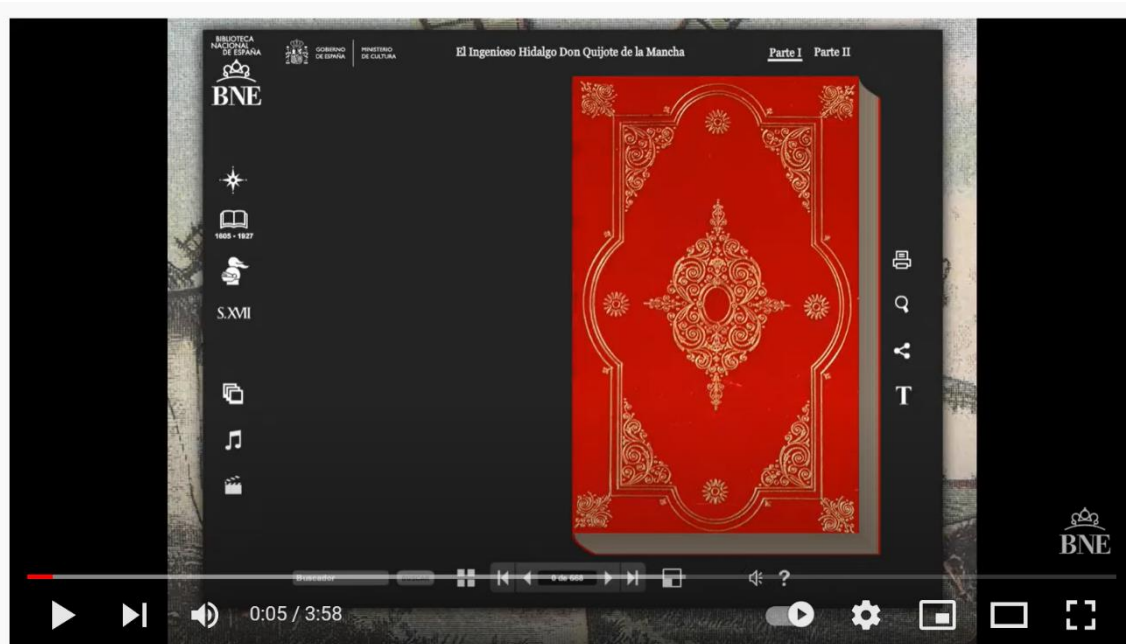
Publication and Presentation

The *Quijote interactivo* was originally published in 2010 and was updated in 2015. The reason for this update was to actualise the technical infrastructure upon which the edition was built, due to the fact that the original multimedia platform used, Adobe Flash Player, was due to become obsolete. As a consequence, the current version was produced using the software provider, Madgazine, described on its website as “the cloud platform to create beautiful, interactive magazines for web, tablets, and smartphones”

(<https://www.madgazine.com/>). Unfortunately, this switch entailed the loss of key functionalities which were available in the 2010 version and which are no longer available in the 2015 version, including:

1. The ability to toggle between the seventeenth-century script and a transcription of this script
2. A search function
3. The ability to jump to a specified page number

These are incontestably key functionalities which enhance immensely the utility and usability of the edition. In particular, the provision of a transcription of the seventeenth-century original script would solve the aforementioned problem regarding the intended audience of the edition (by providing unspecialised users, for whom the multimedia, contextual information is most pertinent, with a more convenient and accessible means via which to engage with the primary text). A YouTube video presenting the original, 2010 version of the edition allows us to see the functionalities which were lost in the 2015 update (<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=mOiWQL9eVfk>).

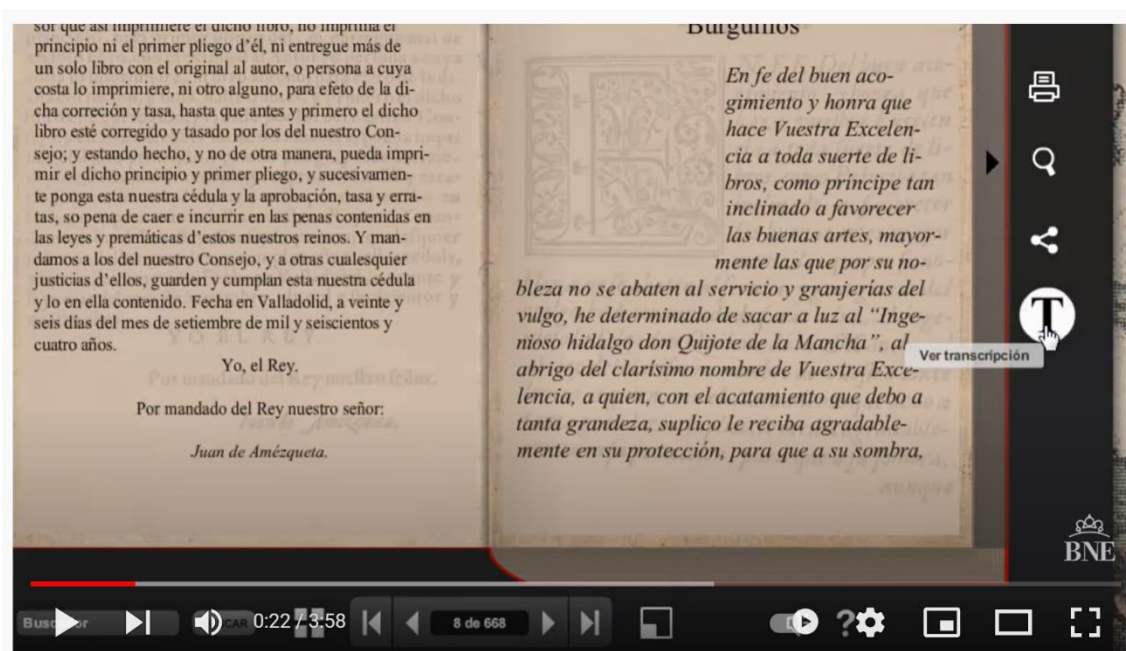


El Quijote Interactivo de la BNE

40,316 views • 25 Oct 2010

153 DISLIKE SHARE SAVE ...

Figure 7: The interface of the *Quijote interactivo* in the original, 2010 version. The left, right, and bottom toolbars provide extra functionalities, such as direct access to the contextual brochures, a search function, and transcription of the seventeenth-century script.



El Quijote Interactivo de la BNE

40,316 views • 25 Oct 2010

153 DISLIKE SHARE SAVE ...

Figure 8: An example of transcription of the seventeenth-century script in the original, 2010 version. The 'T' icon allows the user to toggle easily between the facsimile image of the first edition and a transcription of the text it contains.

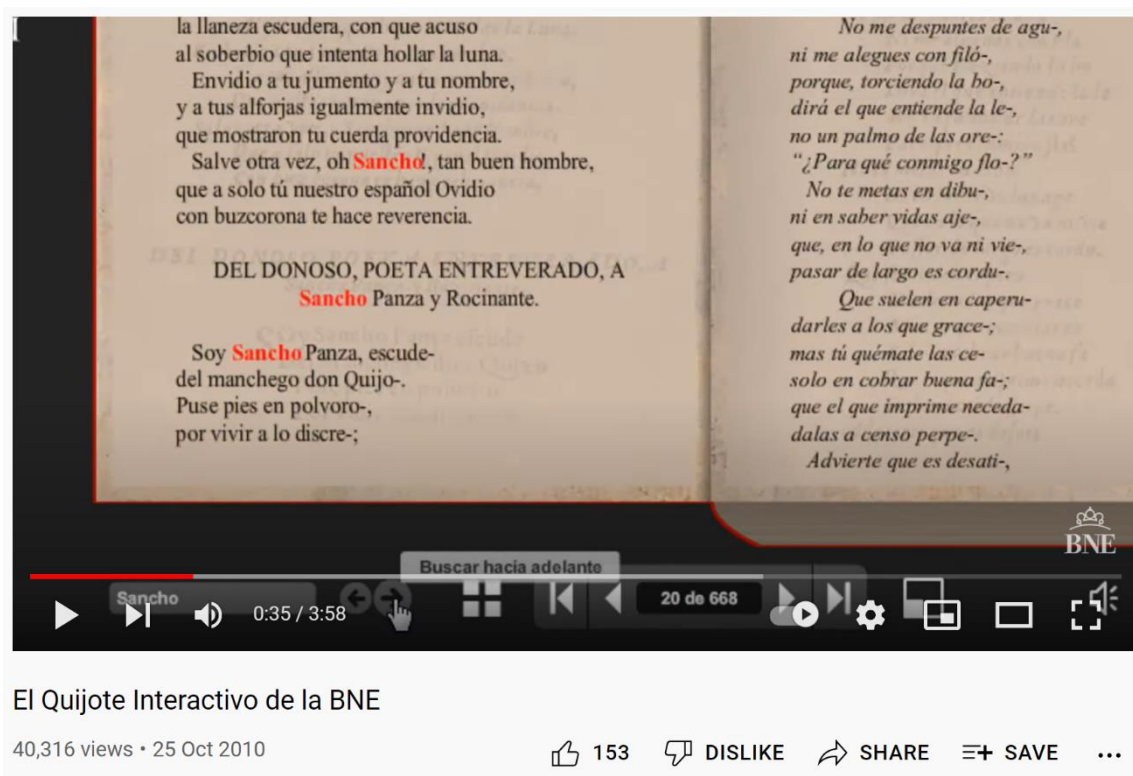


Figure 9: An example of use of the search function to look for a keyword within the text in the original, 2010 version. The keyword appears highlighted in red.

Nevertheless, despite the lamentable loss of these tremendously useful functionalities the 2015 version does present the user with a very simple and streamlined interface, not overloaded with content. The edition's homepage is composed of only eight tiles: the two parts of the text and six brochures containing contextual information (see figure 1). When the user clicks one of these tiles, its content is presented in the familiar form of a traditional, printed book (see figures 2 and 4). Links to contextual information embedded within the primary text are clearly signalled to the user in a white circle (see figure 3). These links lead directly to the contextual information and the user can easily return to their spot in the primary text by clicking the back button. Links contained within the contextual brochures themselves (mostly to high-quality versions of images) prompt a pop-up box which contains a link to the Biblioteca Digital Hispánica site. This link opens in a new window, meaning that engagement with the *Quijote interactivo* itself is not

disrupted. The interface of the edition is very intuitive to use. However, if the user is in any doubt, a question mark icon on the bottom tool bar after clicking any of the homepage tiles explains how to navigate the edition (see figure 10, point A).

While perusing any of the eight tiles presented on the homepage of the edition, which take the guise of a printed book, the user is able to see their relative position within it via a page count bar located at the bottom of the page (see figure 10, point B). This bar can also be manually adjusted to jump ahead or behind in location in the text, although the user cannot choose to jump to a specific page (a functionality lost in the 2015 update). The user can also return to the general homepage at any point by clicking a ‘return to start’ icon contained on every page, to the left of the page count bar (see figure 10, point C). The edition does not contain a general index or global map of the overall architecture of the project, which would be a useful resource (e.g. for seeing and jumping to the sub-topics covered within the contextual information brochures). Furthermore, the user is not able to consult the contextual information brochures from within the primary text, except when links to specific parts of them arise at relevant points (another functionality lost on the 2015 update). Rather, the user must exit the primary text and return to the homepage in order to consult a contextual brochure of their own accord, losing their location in the primary text in the process. The bottom right-hand corner of each page of the edition contains a ‘share’ icon which allows the user to easily share the edition’s content on Facebook or Twitter (see figure 10, point D).

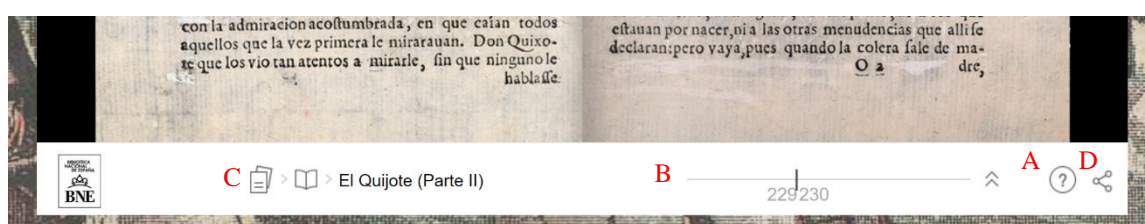


Figure 10: An example of the bottom toolbar visible when the user clicks on any tile from the homepage (the two parts of the primary text or the six information brochures).

One benefit of the 2015 update of the *Quijote interactivo*, and of the use of the Madgazine software, was the ability to develop the edition in native application form, compatible with phones and tablets. A fair analysis of these applications would require a separate review. However, one obvious glitch in the Android phone application is that it is impossible to return backwards (e.g. to the primary text after clicking an embedded link leading to a contextual information brochure) without closing the entire application, preventing any meaningful use of the edition, as a scholarly digital edition, from taking place.

The *Quijote interactivo* is a peculiar case in the sense that an update carried out after initial publication has impoverished its functionality rather than improved it. This casts doubt upon the edition's long-term viability. However, the previous existence of the original, 2010 version also enables us to see the great potential of the edition, were enough resources to be invested in it at some point in the future. Given the *Quijote*'s primacy within Spanish literature, this investment seems almost inevitable at some point or another. Mostly, the *Quijote interactivo* teaches Digital Humanists the harsh lesson that even scholarly digital editions hosted by large, national institutions, such as the Biblioteca Nacional de España, are not invulnerable to technology obsolescence and discontinuation, leaving us with the open question that plagues textual scholars, philologists, and literary critics working to transition into the digital realm: how do we ensure the sustainability of our projects?

Conclusion

This review has highlighted several areas in which the *Quijote interactivo* has room to improve, mostly based upon comparisons with the 2010 version. These include:

1. Reinstating the ability to toggle between the digitised image of the first edition and a transcription of the text contained within the image
2. Reinstating the search function
3. Reinstating the ability to jump to a specified page in the text
4. Reinstating the ability to consult the contextual information brochures from within the primary text at will, without losing one's place
5. A further functionality which would greatly increase the utility and reach of the edition would be, in addition to reinstating the transcription icon, to add a 'translation' icon, which would enable the user to view the text contained within the digitised image in other languages

When judging the edition purely as it stands today, there is no doubt that the images, information, and functionalities that it does provide are an invaluable resource for scholars, students, and general readers alike. The BNE's explicit aims were:

1. To facilitate a new kind of access to the first edition of Cervantes' masterpiece
2. To allow the user to enjoy the first edition, as though it is in their own hands
3. To allow the user to consult multimedia, contextual content whilst they read the primary text

All of these aims have been successfully realised by the *Quijote interactivo* edition, meaning that the project both states and acts according to its own objectives. In particular, the BNE has excelled in its first two aims: the facsimile digitisation of the first

edition text has been carried out to an extremely high quality, giving unprecedented access to a document of historic significance. And the interface via which this document is displayed replicates in a simple and intuitive way the experience of reading a traditional, print book. Whilst being able to read a transcription of a text in the digital environment will always be useful and convenient, being able to see and peruse a first edition copy of a historic text is a particularly special experience. The BNE should be applauded for the efforts it is making to digitise its holdings via its Biblioteca Digital Hispánica project.

Sahle defines a scholarly digital edition as one which “cannot be given in print without significant loss of content and functionality” (27). Buzzoni, focusing on the issue of data, defines a scholarly digital edition as one which must exploit relationability, interoperability, multimediality/multimodality, and user interaction (59–60). And Robinson specifies that, despite the new challenges of the digital medium, it must allow us to “create better editions, better editors, and better readers” (33). By these standards, the *Quijote interactivo* can be judged to be a legitimate scholarly digital edition.

Although the edition is primarily a facsimile reproduction, which runs the risk of being classified as a digitisation rather than a digital edition, it is the case that the project cannot be printed without significant loss of quality: firstly, the user’s interaction with the first edition of the text would be impoverished by being printed; and secondly, the integration of links to multimedia, contextual information embedded within the primary text cannot be replicated when printed. Furthermore, the *Quijote interactivo* incorporates multimedia content (pictures and videos), as well as links to high-quality versions of images. Finally, the edition, as a self-styled ‘interactive’ one, by dint of its structure of

links embedded within a primary text, necessarily cultivates an alert and active user, who interacts dynamically with what they are reading.

The *Quijote interactivo*'s status as a scholarly digital edition would undoubtedly be solidified by the reinstatement of the functionalities lost in the 2015 update. In particular, the reinstatement of text transcription would make the edition more accessible to unspecialised users who would most benefit from the multimedia, contextual information provided. In addition, the project would benefit from an amplified introductory note, integrated into the edition itself, outlining information on its methodology, who was responsible for the project, how much time and money were invested, who to contact with any queries, and information regarding rights and licences for reproduction. However, as it stands, the *Quijote interactivo* is an exciting resource which serves as an exemplary model of how a national institution can successfully utilise its holdings to engage public interest in an innovative and inventive way.

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