Ellen Cline

INLS 501

Emily Vardell

October 20, 2016

Assessment and Evaluation of Gallica

With over 1 million articles, hundreds of thousands of images and maps, manuscripts, books, and more, the database Gallica is a powerful research tool for students and scholars interested in France and French culture. Created in 1997 as the digital branch of France's national library, *la Bibliothèque nationale de France*, it is a repository for digitized documents from la BnF and its institutional partners. Today, the website continues to host this searching service, but a recent reconfiguration in 2015 presents users and patrons with a bright, friendly interface that highlights recent additions to Gallica, showcases historians, pop culture bloggers, and others (dubbed *Gallicanautes*) who use the database for their work, and more. This resource is open access and free to the virtual public.

Gallica is part of France's national library, and hence is managed by the French government. Digitization is performed on documents that have passed into public domain (patrons even have the option of "adopting" a document and sponsoring its digitization), and new items are added each week. Understandably, the database is fairly broad in scope, covering many periods of French history (but with a large focus on 19th century works) and features documents in French and other languages (Latin, German, English, and more). Formats range from images, books, and manuscripts to sound recordings, interactive maps, videos, and more.

A real effort has been made to appear both informative and respectable but also light and accessible to the general public. Both basic and advanced search options are available and are easily visible from the home page. Friendly icons depicting format populate a page otherwise filled with normal lists of search results, and the researcher has the option of arranging those results according to metadata (e.g. by date, author, title, even by quality of text image). One may select how search results are viewed in browser, selecting from:

- list
- list with images
- mosaic of images with little to no text

No index or thesaurus was located, but instead of listing several different clickable subject headings (as many databases often do) in a document's details, Gallica chooses to list the heading in plain text, then (immediately after this text) provide a link that reads

"only view results from this author"

or

"retry search using this subject"

This could be helpful to the layman who has little to no experience with databases and who may not know to click on a hyperlinked subject title unless he or she is prompted to do so. Gallica's new website also has many unique special features. Interactive visualization in 3D is available for some entries in the database (for example, antique globes), and there is now a mobile Gallica app for users of Android or iOS phones.

Unfortunately, the website itself is only available in French, but other linguistic versions of the site appear to be in the works (a tab that allows one to switch languages is present; when clicked the reader is informed that "this function is not yet available"). There are a few others that appear to still be in progress: accessibility (presumably for those with disabilities) leads to an explanatory page that also reads "not yet available." The autofill function in search is a tad distracting, but could be useful for researchers who might not remember correct French spellings or phrases.

Please use the table below to determine proper use of example types of documents in Gallica:

Example document	Possibilities for use
Paintings, drawings	Art analysis, artist bio, context
Journals, diaries	Window to times, author bio, research paper
Books, manuscripts	Lit analysis, linguistic and societal analysis, personal reading

Students in FREN 372 would find Gallica useful for anything from homework to final projects. True, there are more extensive databases on the web, and other resources not limited to works in the public domain would probably offer a more detailed analysis or more scholarly articles for a students's perusal, but Gallica remains an excellent place to start a project and be enthusiastic about research.