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Bibindex: An Index of Biblical Quotations in Early Christian Literature

Laurence Mellerin

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Contents

07. Editorial
09. 20th Century Metropolitans' Contributions to the Syriac Language and Literature based on Church of the East in India
-Mar Yohannan Yoseph
31. Personal Names in the Acts of Thomas
-Jürgen Tubach
67. Syriac Christianity in Iran and South India: Fifth to Eleventh Centuries
-Baby Varghese
109. The Eschatological Vision of the East Syrian Qurbana
-Francis Pittappillil
123. The End of the Syrian Orphanage (German Oriental Mission Johannes Lepsius) in Dilgusha (Urmia)
-Martin Tamcke
135.  Parole de L'Orient Revue annuelle
-P. Joseph Obeid
141. The Patriarch of Tur'Abdin' Aziz Bar SobtoAbu'l-Ma'ani*
The sources about his life, his literary work and some first philological data from the manuscript tradition
-Roberto Bertozzi

161. St. Paul the Apostle in the Syriac Fathers
-*Raju P. J.*
175. The Persian Crosses of South India from the Point of view
of an Ignoramus
-*Bruno POIZAT*
213. A Syriac poem in Praise of SEERI and its Director
Fr. Dr. Jacob Thekeparambil
-*Assad Sauma*
233. The Syriac Language and The Church in India
-*P. S. John*
243. In Memoriam
-*George Mathew Kuttiyil*
-*Jacob Thekeparampil*
251. The Feast of Pentecost in the Syro-Malabar Church
-*Thomas Mannoorampampil*
299. Textual Study of the Christological Doctrines in the Three
Anaphorae attributed to Jacob of Sarug
-*Vibin Bernad*
329. A bo'uto of Mar Jacob on Contrition
-*Alain J. Desreumaux*
339. Concerning the Question of Our Lord and Concerning the
Revelation Simon Received from the Father
-*Daniel L. McConaughy &*
Jacob Thekeparampil
357. From Devotion to Polemics: Cult of the Old Testament
Saints and Anti-Judaistic Polemics in the Syrian Orthodox
Liturgy
-*Baby Varghese*
377. The rise of a Christian identity in a Pagan Empire: the
Christians of the Sasanian Period (3rd - 7th centuries)
-*Simon Brelaud*
421. Holy Baptism in the Syriac East According to Anonymous
Author
-*Lonappan Arangassery*
453. The Early Syriac Manuscripts of *Sedre* in the British Library
and Comparing a *Sedro* in the Mosul Fenqitho with Early
Syriac Manuscripts
-*Stephen Plathottam*
499. Biblindex: An Index of Biblical Quotations in Early Christian
Literature
-*Laurence Mellerin*
511. Book Reviews
-*Fr. Abraham Thomas*
-*Fr. Dr. Jacob Thekeparampil*
517. SEERINews

Bibindex: An Index of Biblical Quotations in Early Christian Literature¹

BIBINDEX aims at building an exhaustive online index of biblical quotations and allusions in early Christian literature, both Western and Eastern texts, which is meant to eventually cover the whole of Late Antiquity and the early Middle Ages. This is not about a binary and one-way connection between a canonical corpus and a corpus of authors quoting *verbatim*: more precisely, BIBINDEX seeks to give a full account of the complex links existing between a corpus of biblical texts – evolving collections of books originally written in various languages and translated early in their history, while still in progress of composition – with a corpus of ancient and medieval authors, who refer to the Bible (while commenting on, meditating on, and translating it) as a fixed entity yet at the same time contribute, through their quotations and spiritual or liturgical reminiscences, to the form and concept of ‘the text’. Quotations from ancient authors show these biblical texts in the process of development and reception. Reassembling this hitherto scattered

¹ <https://bibindex.org>.

patrimonial treasure, BiblIndex aims at providing a federative tool – as objective as possible – intended for scholars and researchers, as well as for a wider audience, to help understand the acculturation process of the Bible in both the East and West, and to enhance studies in exegesis and history of the biblical text.

The BIBLINDEX project is led by Sources Chrésiennes – HiSoMA in Lyon. It is mainly funded by the French National Center for Scientific Research (CNRS), to which most of the team members belong. It has received additional funding from the Rhône-Alpes Region (2006), the French National Research Agency (2011-2015), the Digital Scientific Library (2015-2016), the Association des Amis de Sources Chrésiennes and the Montcheuil Foundation (2018-2020). It is currently part of the Equipex Biblissima+ (2022-2029).

Access to the data is completely free.

Nothing but references

At present, BIBLINDEX consists of a comprehensive inventory of biblical quotations and allusions in early Greek and Latin Christian literature, providing bibliographical information about the edition used for each patristic work; **it gives no access to the texts themselves**. Each entry on the website offers a series of numbers indicating the chapter and verse of the biblical text, its location in the patristic writing and the corresponding page and line numbers in the reference edition. For example, *Genesis* 1:27 is quoted in BASILIUS, *Asceticon parvum* 2, 44, on page 15, line 10 of CSEL 86

(1986). Links between the Bible and the patristic texts have been found by scholars who have read them carefully and sometimes provided a comment on their selection. This data is merely the first step of BIBLINDEX.

The available corpus

The project is based on the resumption of *Biblia Patristica*, printed indexes of biblical quotations in the writings of Greek and Latin Church Fathers from the first centuries published by a CNRS team, the Centre for Patristics Analysis and Documentation (CADP) in Strasbourg between 1965 and 2000. The CADP entrusted Sources Chrésiennes with its database and further unpublished data, which include the following:

1. The **270,000** entries contained in the seven published volumes of *Biblia Patristica*, along with a supplementary volume for biblical references from PHILO OF ALEXANDRIA, covering the first three centuries, along with part of the fourth: the data has been **verified by scholars**.

Biblia Patristica, Index des citations et allusions bibliques dans la littérature patristique, Éditions du CNRS : 1. *Des origines à Clément d'Alexandrie et à Tertullien*, 1975 – 2. *Le troisième siècle (Origène excepté)*, 1977 – 3. *Origène*, 1980 – 4. *Eusèbe de Césarée, Cyrille de Jérusalem, Épiphane de Salamine*, 1987 – 5. *Basile de Césarée, Grégoire de Nazianze, Grégoire de Nysse, Amphiloque d'Iconium*, 1991 – 6. *Hilaire de Poitiers, Ambroise de Milan, Ambrosiaster*, 1995 – 7. *Didyme d'Alexandrie*, 2000 – *Supplément. Philon d'Alexandrie*, 1982.

2. Around **100,000** additional references, prepared by the Centre for Patristics Analysis and Documentation for the planned 8th volume, included in the database inherited by Sources Chrétiennes, **unverified** but in electronic form. They come from the works of **ATHANASIUS OF ALEXANDRIA, JOHN CHRYSOSTOM, THEODORET OF CYR, PROCOPIUS OF GAZA, JEROME**, but also from *Spuria* and *dubia* related to the authors of the other published volumes.

3. Approximately **600,000** handwritten references on handwritten documents from the archive boxes entrusted. They have been fully transcribed into digital form, but have not yet been verified. These data are not yet available online.

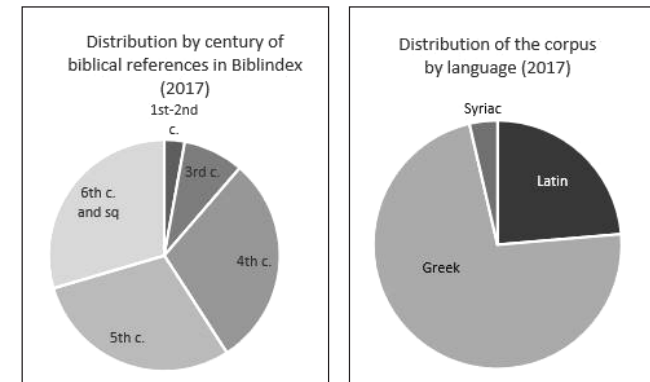
Furthermore, new material has been prepared by the Sources Chrétiennes team since 2011.

Today, the corpus available online is composed of the following:

1. Works of **Philo of Alexandria**, and all the Greek and Latin works from the first three centuries.
2. A large part of the fourth-century writers' work, including exhaustive processing of **Eusebius of Caesarea, Cyril of Jerusalem and Epiphanius of Salamis; Basil of Caesarea, Gregory of Nazianzus, Gregory of Nyssa and Amphilochius of Iconium; Hilary of Poitiers, Ambrose of Milan and Ambrosiaster; and Didymus the Blind.**

3. Exhaustive processing of **John Chrysostom.**
4. Partial processing of **Athanasius, Jerome, Theodoret of Cyr, and Procopius of Gaza.**

An exhaustive and regularly updated list of the authors and works searchable on the website is available on the [“Searchable corpus”](#) page.



Distribution of occurrences by date and by corpus

Planned enlargement of the corpus

A special effort is planned to integrate the huge field of Eastern Christianity, and first of all Syriac, hitherto unexplored for biblical quotations. Syriac texts' relationship with the Bible is indeed very interesting because of the linguistic proximity between Hebrew and Syriac. Listing their quotations will enable significant progress to identify or reconstitute the origin of the versions: regarding the Old Testament, the Jewish targums and the New Testament, on the one hand, the *Diatessaron*, and on the other hand, the *Old Syriac* – Curetonian or

Sinaitic – or finally the *Peshitta* of the 4th century, which can be compared to the Latin *Vulgate*. The ten volumes of translation from Syriac in the Sources Chrétiennes series, with their biblical indexes, constitute a starting point, to be broadened, especially with EPHREM’S work published in the *Corpus Scriptorum Christianorum Orientalium*. The Syriac sources after the 5th century also play a very important role as evidence of Greek works, sometimes lost in their original language (e.g. SEVERUS OF ANTIOCH and THEODORE OF MOPSUESTIA)².

External resources will be added in the process of being analysed, e.g. the quotations found in BERNARD OF CLAIRVAUX’ works (around 35,000 references); a partnership is being considered with the Faculty of Theology of the Aristotle University of Thessaloniki³: it has developed, thanks to a large team having worked for more than 30 years under the direction of professors S. Sakkos and P. Koutlemanis, a scriptural index, now available in digital form, of approximately 350,000 references, covering the whole of Migne’s *Greek*

² The article of L. VAN ROMPAY, “Between the School and the Monk’s Cell : The Syriac Old Testament Commentary Tradition”, in B. T. H. ROMENY (ed.), *The Peshitta: Its Use in Literature and Liturgy. Papers Read at the Third Peshitta Symposium*, Brill, Leyde 2006, p. 27-51, gives a list of works for which processing is planned.

³ See A. PAPARNAKIS, C. DOMOUCHTISIS, “Digital Greek Patristic Catena (DGPC). A brief Presentation”, in M. BÜCHLER, L. MELLERIN (ed.), *Computer-aided Processing of Intertextuality in Ancient Languages, Journal on Data Mining and Digital Humanities*, special issue, 2017.

Patrology; its current manager, Pr. Athanasios Paparnakis, has agreed to make it accessible via BIBINDEX⁴. Another partnership is being intended with the PAVONE project (Platform of the Arabic Versions of the New Testament) of the University of Balamand (Lebanon), which lists not only all the Arabic manuscripts of the New Testament, but also the citations of the New Testament found in lectionaries and other Christian and Muslim literature of the first millennium. In addition, the scriptural indexes of the Sources Chrétiennes series not yet taken into account by the CADP will be added, initially the recent volumes whose indexes will only require a technical revision. In the longer term, links to other databases will be considered, opening up to other cultural and religious areas: Judaism⁵, Samaritan texts, and Islam.

The architecture is fully modelled, and much of the data is already ready for import. Making them available

⁴ About 200,000 references do not duplicate the content of BIBINDEX.

⁵ We have heard of a number of similar initiatives for the Jewish texts of the Second Temple period and the rabbinical period: At Brown University, Michael L. Satlow has dealt with the Babylonian Talmud. In Vienna, a project was carried out on the Second Temple, but the page that hosted it seems no longer to exist. At Saint-Louis University, Matthew Thiessen started a *Biblia iudaica* project in 2013, after collecting around 12,000 quotes from the book of *Genesis* in texts from the Second Temple and from the rabbinical era. In addition, the database of rabbinical texts of the University of Bar-Ilan (Responsa Project) spotted and lemmatized a large part of the biblical quotations. The project “The Greek Bible in Byzantine Judaism”

online as quickly as possible and then being able to easily add new data are priority objectives. Unfortunately, for years, the weakness of the technical means made available to the project, due to insufficient funding, has slowed down the IT development. Various searches for external funding are in progress.

Biblical tools: Bible's parser

The database includes biblical texts written in different ancient languages (Hebrew, Greek, Latin, Syriac) and modern languages (French, English). A multilingual concordance between Bibles has been created, allowing the user to visualize the biblical text in a synoptic presentation to compare it with the quotations found in the patristic texts. Precise correspondence between verses or part verses, allowing cross searches, were manually established by the BIBLINDEX team.

Patristics tools: inventory of authors and works

The database also includes a nomenclature for patristic sources, providing bibliographical information about the authors and works available in the search form. For each work, a reliable critical edition (if available) has been selected as a basis for finding a quotation.

A prototype geovisualization interface displaying chronological and geographical data on authors and works has been developed for BIBLINDEX by the [Steamer](#) team of the Grenoble Informatics Laboratory (LIG).

at King's College in London aims to collect textual traces of the use of Greek biblical translations by Jews in the Byzantine era and to provide an online corpus.

Research about text re-use

Given the scope of the work to be done to achieve completeness and data homogeneity, obviously the ten or so members of the Sources Chrétiennes team are insufficient. Two directions are being explored to speed up the process.

Firstly, the establishment of a collaborative work platform, where each BIBLINDEX user and specialist in a text or a field could, over the course of his/her requests, participate in improving the data, by suggesting corrections via a controlled validation system. Any researcher preparing a text edition could also, in the course of his/her work, help improve existing records or provide new data. The models of this platform are ready and awaiting funding to realize.

Secondly, we aim to apply to patristic works techniques for the semi-automatic detection of intertextuality. These quotation search assistance tools are intended to intervene upstream of the work of patristic and biblical scholars, to provide the latter with a pre-marked version of the text to be analysed.

In 2013, a postdoctorate was carried out at the LIRIS lab by Samuel Gesche⁶. A precise and up-to-date survey of the field of lemmatization in ancient languages was first established: a great deal of work is indeed underway at various institutes. BibIndex can rely on morphologically lemmatized versions of Greek and Latin biblical texts; the work on Syriac texts could be done in collaboration with the [EEP project Talstra Center for Bible and Computer](#) (VU Amsterdam). Insofar as a detailed

⁶ See S. GESCHE, S., E. EGYED-ZSIGMOND, S. CALABRETTO, “References and Citations in Ancient Greek Documents”, 2017.

knowledge of the linguistic system of each ancient language is required to prepare the lemmatization tools⁷, the work was carried out in close collaboration between the computer scientists and the patristic researchers. A lemmatizer specific to patristic ancient Greek, still to be perfected, has been prepared. Moreover, based on a sample lemmatized corpus (CLEMENT OF ALEXANDRIA, *Quis dives salvetur* and the complete works of PHILO OF ALEXANDRIA on the patristic side; the lemmatized text of the Septuagint and Greek New Testament on the biblical side), a configurable quotation detection tool has been developed. It is currently only effective when the compared texts have at least one common lemma. Maria Moritz (Institute of Computer Science, University of Göttingen) resumed this work in 2016 on the same test corpus, augmented by samples of texts by Bernard de Clairvaux, which resulted in a publication in 2016⁸. The use of the TRACER software, developed by Marco Büchler in the e-TRAP (electronic Text Reuse Acquisition Project) research group in Göttingen, also makes it possible to identify a number of paraphrastic allusions. It will still be necessary to provide much training data so that the performance of the software on the patristic texts is sufficient. We also plan to work on semantic fields, by creating vast and

⁷ In particular, the connection of the forms or lemmas listed with the places and contexts of their occurrences; the removal of ambiguities during lemmatization.

⁸ M. MORITZ, A. WIEDERHOLD, B. PAVLEK, Y. BIZZONI, M. BÜCHLER, “Non-Literal Text Reuse in Historical Texts: An Approach to Identify Reuse Transformations and its Application to Bible Reuse”, in *Proceedings of the 2016 Conference on Empirical Methods in Natural Language Processing*, Austin, Texas, November 1-5, 2016, p.1849–1859.

multilingual dictionaries of synonyms. The International Workshop on Computer Aided Processing of Intertextuality in Ancient Languages, organized in Lyon as a concluding conference of the ANR Bibindex in 2014, has clearly shown how promising this research field is: it brought together representatives of a large number of European projects working on intertextuality in ancient literature. The proceedings of this meeting were broadened, to give birth to a special issue of the Journal on Data Mining and Digital Humanities (JDMDH), published in 2017.

The results visualization

Another project concerns the visualization of the quotations identified, both upstream in the interfaces used by analysts – a great deal of work has already been carried out by LIRIS for the parallel scrolling visualization of biblical and patristic texts – and downstream in those consulted by internet users – basic query forms, results forms that must allow multiple sorting, etc⁹. Very precise mock-ups have been produced for all of these interfaces, which are also waiting for funding to be implemented.

More specifically, the Laboratoire d’Informatique de Grenoble (LIG) prepared models and a prototype of multidimensional interfaces¹⁰ to allow visualizations of chronological-geographical requests. To account for the characteristics of the information in terms of quality

⁹ The site’s search form has been completely redesigned: the corpus may be entered through a chosen Bible and verse numbering; the result form allows to see the biblical text corresponding to the request, and perform various operations on the data obtained, which the current form unfortunately does not allow.

(uncertainty, incompleteness or imprecision) and density, by means of an adapted graphic and cartographic semiology, while taking into account the diversity of profiles of the end users, was very challenging. Ultimately, it will be possible to select sets of scriptural quotations that form thematic constellations, by geographical area and for a given period. The selection of zones or periods will be made by means of visual queries (clicking on a map or on a timeline using a cursor). These functionalities will bring out processes of distribution or dissemination of biblical texts that are difficult to perceive through a simple textual interface: which canon, which text, was received, at a certain time, in Antioch, in North Africa, etc.?

Interdisciplinarity is therefore at the heart of the BIBLINDEX project and requires a large number of specialists from various fields. In our HiSoMA laboratory, the focus is on the preparation of biblical and patristic texts for the subsequent phases of their visualizations.

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¹⁰The design and production of this interface are based on the GenGHIS environment, generator of spatio-temporal data visualization applications, initially developed to report on historical information dedicated to natural hazards. You can formulate visual requests and consult the results through several windows, all interconnected and synchronized: a cartographic window is dedicated to the spatial part, a timeline represents the time dimension, and an information (or attribute) window displays details of each entity contained in the information system.