



*A concordance is often an invaluable tool in the study of ancient texts. But why would one want to make one's own if there is already a good concordance available?*

## Preparing a concordance for the Odes of Solomon

When engaging in the study of a particular piece of ancient literature, scholars make use of a concordance if there is one available. A concordance is an index of the words that occur in a document, normally put in alphabetical order, along with references, i.e. the exact location of these words in the document. Such an instrument facilitates the scholar's research in many ways. The use of a concordance becomes almost imperative for anyone studying a lengthy text in depth. A fragment or a very brief document (let's say less than 300 words) can be analyzed without a concordance. For anything that can be read and reread in a few minutes a concordance can even be a hindrance rather than a help. However, for the study of longer texts it may be an indispensable tool for tracking key terms and expressions, checking word frequency and distribution, noticing occurrence of word clusters, consistency or inconsistency of word meaning etc.

The bare text of the Odes in Syriac counts 4,405 words.<sup>1</sup> For a document of this length, a concordance is no luxury. James Rendel Harris, who discovered the only extant manuscript containing the all but complete text of the Odes in 1909, prepared a concordance with Alphonse Mingana and published it as an appendix to their edition and translation of the Odes.<sup>2</sup> However, their concordance was not the first to appear in print. Already in 1914 Gerhard Kittel had prepared his *Syrische Konkordanz der Oden Salomos* to be published with his doctoral dissertation (University of Kiel, 1913).<sup>3</sup> Harris-Mingana and Kittel may have been working on their projects at the same time, unaware of each other's plans. Once their

<sup>1</sup> This includes Harris & Mingana's back translation of the extant Coptic text of Ode 1 into Syriac. HM 1:236. From the New Testament documents Hebrews is closest in length: 4288 words in the Syriac Peshitta, slightly less than the Odes (4405 words). Odes is shorter than 1 Corinthians (5987 words in Peshitta), but longer than 2 Corinthians (3737 words in Peshitta).

<sup>2</sup> James Rendel Harris & Alphonse Mingana, *The Odes and Psalms of Solomon*, Vol. 2: *The translation, with introduction and notes* (Manchester: Manchester University Press, 1920), 435-54: "Concordance to the Odes of Solomon"

<sup>3</sup> Gerhard Kittel, *Die Oden Salomos überarbeitet oder einheitlich? Mit 2 Beilagen: I. Bibliographie der Oden Salomos. II. Syrische Konkordanz der Oden Salomos (Beiträge zur Wissenschaft vom Alten Testament*, 16; Leipzig: J.C. Hinrichs, 1914) 180 p.

work was published, this may have looked like a terrible loss of time. But it wasn't. Both Harris-Mingana and Kittel most probably prepared their concordance as a tool for themselves: Harris-Mingana for their translation and commentary and Kittel for his research on the literary unity or disunity of this ancient text. Unquestionably the most careful and most complete printed concordance of the Odes is the one by Michael Lattke.<sup>4</sup> It appeared in 1979, respectively 65 and 59 years after the ones by Kittel and Harris-Mingana. Lattke knew the other two books very well and most likely had made use of them for years. Why then did he make his own? It is impossible to know how many others have been working on a concordance of the Odes, perhaps without finishing it, and almost certainly without getting it printed. For each of them the same question could be asked: why make a concordance of a document if there is one already? As I am preparing a concordance of the Odes of Solomon myself, I have pondered this question time and again. Let me try out some of my answers on you. One motive will be explained in this report, and the others in one of the following issues of RCECR.

### "Ceci n'est pas une pipe"

A printed concordance can easily do the opposite of what it is made for: it can distance the reader from the actual document rather than helping him or her to understand it. The user is tempted to study the concordance rather than the document. The scholar who made the concordance had the document at hand all the time, looked at the words as they occur in the actual text and put them in alphabetical order. In going through this painstaking process, he or she gets a clear picture of the use of language elements in the text. The user of such a concordance however, may lose track of the organic fabric of the text and handle the words mechanically. "Ceci n'est pas une pipe" is the witty subscript of René Magritte's painting of a pipe. The painting is not the pipe. Someone looking at the painting does not feel the wood or the warmth, and does not smell the tobacco (no coughs or teary eyes either).

A concordance is not the text and cannot replace the text. The author of a concordance had the privilege to conscientiously think through all the textual elements in their context. Even if his concordance is never used by anyone else, its production allowed at least one person to scrutinize the text. As for me, this is my first and most important motive for making another concordance of the Odes: it is a joy to intensively study the text of this intriguing document, the Odes of Solomon.

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<sup>4</sup> Michael Lattke, *Die Oden Salomos in ihrer Bedeutung für Neues Testament und Gnosis*, Band 2 (25/2): *Vollständige Wortkonkordanz (Orbis Biblicus et Orientalis*; Göttingen: Vandenhoeck u. Ruprecht, 1979) 201 p.

**Peter C. Bouteneff, *Beginnings. Ancient Christian Readings of the Biblical Creation Narratives.* (Grand Rapids: Baker Academic, 2008). 240p.**

Questions about the *Beginnings* of the world are still widely debated. Currently the 'Darwin year' has again stirred up the debate. This book by the associate professor of theology at St. Vladimir's Orthodox Theological Seminary, Peter C. Bouteneff, is a welcome addition to the discussion.

Bouteneff's investigation of the early Christian interpretation of Genesis 1-3 covers the views of: early Judaism (chapter 1), Paul and the New Testament (chapter 2), the second-century Apologists Justin Martyr, Melito of Sardis, Theophilus of Antioch and Irenaeus of Lyons (chapter 3), Tertullian and Origen (chapter 4) and the Cappadocians (chapter 5). A concluding chapter provides some insights obtained by reading these ancient Christian reports of the creation narratives.

Although Bouteneff intends to read the works of ancient writers in terms of what interested them, one overarching question he asks is "how literally did they read the creation narratives?" (xi) A particularly modern concern, he acknowledges.

Considerable attention is given to Origen's approach of the creation narratives and that of the Cappadocian Fathers, who represent the first sustained harvest of Origen's ideas. Some others, like Athanasius, unfortunately only get a very meager attention.

Bouteneff reveals some interesting perspectives on historicity from early Christian writers, which are helpful in rethinking our own presuppositions. For example, he favors seeing history not just in a linear perspective, but through the lens of the incarnate

Christ as the true beginning of history, as Irenaeus did. He also suggests taking seriously Origen's caution against a literal interpretation of Genesis 1-3 that would anthropomorphize God or make of him something circumscribable, locatable, or capricious. (102)

Bouteneff's concluding observation is that it was not the Hexaemeron—the Genesis account of the six days of creation—but rather the paradise narrative that was subject to a wide range of readings in the early church. This implies that the historicity question needs to be stripped of significance. Early patristic exegesis of the creation narratives had a primarily theological and paraenetic focus. Bouteneff argues that fidelity to the church fathers would imply that we stop making science the crucial issue when talking about the interpretation of the creation narrative. (182-183)

One theme that Bouteneff repeatedly touches upon is the interpretation of the fall. As an Eastern Orthodox scholar, Bouteneff presupposes that the creation account "does not portray two sharply contrasted states of the human person, one (perfected, immortal, sinless, united with God) before the transgression and the other (fallen, mortal, sinful, separated from God) after." (6) This view differs from that which is typical in Western Christianity.<sup>1</sup> Bouteneff sees this view confirmed by the church fathers as well.

Clear patristic references to 'the restoration to the original created condition' and 'the perfect condition of paradise,' however, are too easily argued away by Bouteneff. In his report on Irenaeus, Bouteneff holds that Adam is only said to be made in the image of God by the

inversion of chronological time in Christ. "Yet chronologically understood, there is a sense in which Adam is not made in God's image." (83) Bouteneff seems to view the patristic references to Adam as a work in progress as irreconcilable with the notion of a perfect condition of paradise. However, the two may be reconciled if we view this perfect condition as a dynamic condition as well, as Julie Canlis explained Irenaeus' seemingly ambivalent view.<sup>2</sup>

Unfortunately, neither a proper discussion of this topic among the church fathers, nor the current scholarly debates are presented here. This is the case with other important theological questions as well, for example the anthropological and soteriological views which form the background of the early Christian readings of the creation narratives. Further study is needed to prove whether the differences among the ancient writers are merely different accents, 'while the conclusions about the human person, sin, and death were in fundamental harmony with each other' (173) or whether they point to diverging theological approaches.

Nevertheless, this book raises important questions—not only with regard to the content of the early Christian interpretation of the creation narratives, but equally with regard to patristic hermeneutics in general.

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<sup>1</sup> See Donald Fairbairn, *Eastern Orthodoxy through Western Eyes*. (Louisville: Westminster John Knox Press, 2002), 73.

<sup>2</sup> Julie Canlis, "Being made human: the significance of creation for Irenaeus' doctrine of participation." *Scottish Journal of Theology* 58 (2005), 434-54.