

Tertullian On and Off the Internet

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In the five centuries since Tertullian's *Apologeticum* was printed at Venice in 1483,¹ more than 2000 scholarly works have been published with Tertullian's name in their title;² within six years of the World Wide Web "taking off" in 1994,³ nearly half that number of webpages have been created with Tertullian's name in their abstract—at least 921 and probably more.⁴ This paper stems from my concern that students, to whom I teach Early Church History, are increasingly fulfilling their assignments by surfing the Internet instead of reading scholarly works in the excellent College library. Taking Tertullian as an example (after Augustine and Ambrose he is the most written-about Western Father) I found that less than 3 percent of the published work on Tertullian (apart from his own works) has made its way onto the Internet. The overlap between the Net and the bookshelf is therefore minimal, and students who tackle their assignments largely through their personal computers may form a very different view of their subject than those who read the printed page. Does it matter? This short paper looks at the issue under three heads:

- Analysis of material on the Web and on the bookshelf.
- The languages used in each medium.
- Open-access and academic standards.

1. This traditional date is accepted by H. Hoppe in CSEL 69 (1939), p. xxix n. 109 and by E. Dekkers in CCL 1 (1954), p. 80, but the *Incunabla Short Title Catalogue* is more cautious with "1494 or before" (ISTC no. it00117000).

2. From an index of published works about Tertullian, which I maintain for personal interest, I have selected 2000 with Tertullian's name in their title, to give a workable basis for comparing Tertullian on and off the Internet.

3. The Internet was created in 1969 for military use and opened to the public in 1984. The World Wide Web, a service which runs over the Internet, was invented in 1989 but did not "take off" until the facility to "point and click" became widely available in 1994.

4. I maintain another personal index, this one for webpages which have Tertullian's name in their abstract (heading). The main search engines create abstracts which consist of the title given by the author of the webpage and the first few words of the text, and that is the basis of my index. A search engine called Google (www.google.com) creates a list of entries which consist of the title and one or two short passages from anywhere in the webpage. While that is a marvelous facility, it would be unwieldy to

All three are addressed by comparing the printed works with Tertullian's name in their title and the webpages mentioning Tertullian in their abstract. While that does not take into account general printed works like Quasten's *Patrology*, which has about 100 pages on Tertullian,⁵ and while it excludes webpages which bring up Tertullian under "additional reading,"⁶ it provides a manageable starting-point for comparing "Tertullian on and off the Internet."

Analysis of Material on the Web and on the Bookshelf

Webpages on Tertullian may be divided into five broad categories:

1. *Text*. Tertullian's thirty-one extant works are available in Latin or in English translation on no less than 446 webpages—but that figure needs to be explained. Copying has always been part of the Internet culture, and all thirty-one of Tertullian's works in the *Ante-Nicene Fathers* translation⁷ have been copied to at least eleven sites,⁸ some with commentary, some with footnotes, and some with plain text, so two volumes of one monograph have spawned 341 webpages (31 x 11). The other 105 pages give either a selection of Tertullian's works or one work in full or in part. Only seven of his works are available in full text in Latin free of charge on the Internet, because access to the only complete *corpus*, in the electronic version of Migne's *Patrologia Latina*, requires a hefty annual subscription.⁹

2. *New scholarly work*. Extended research not published elsewhere (12 items), together with briefer material prepared especially for the Internet (149 items), is

use an "anywhere in the document" total for this paper: Google returns (in round figures) 13,000 matches for the words Tertullian (10,100), *Tertullien* (600), *Tertulliano* (600), *Tertullianus* (600) and *Tertuliano* (1,100, but mostly not the Church Father because it is a common Spanish and Portuguese name). Furthermore, it would not be a fair comparison, because many printed works like Quasten's *Patrology*, mentioned in n. 5, include Tertullian in their text without naming him in their title. However, as even the best search engines may cover only 30 percent of the Web (Steve Lawrence and C. Lee Giles, "Searching the World Wide Web," *Science*, 3 April 1998, pp. 98 ff.) any personal list is probably a long way short of the total "out there" in cyberspace.

5. J. Quasten, *Patrology*, vol. 2: *The Ante-Nicene Literature After Irenaeus* (Westminster, Maryland, 1992).

6. For example, www.textweek.com recommends short passages of Scripture for weekly meditation, followed by hypertext references to commentaries and texts. The latter often include the full English text of some of Tertullian's works.

7. Volumes 3 and 4 of the 1884 (revised) American edition (New York and Buffalo: Wm. B. Eerdmans).

8. The digitization of the *Ante-Nicene Fathers* was coordinated through Wheaton College and the results were made freely available. The latest version is at www.ccel.org/fathers2.

9. Jacques-Paul Migne's *Patrologia Latina* (1844–55) is available in its entirety by annual subscription to Chadwyck-Healey at pld.chadwyck.com. What should be freely available on the Internet versus what is available only at high and sometimes complicated prices (which make it impossible for others than institutional affiliates to access information) is another issue.

the next largest category. One hundred and fifteen of the latter (77 percent) are the work of one person, an English computer scientist, Roger Pearse, who modestly describes himself as an amateur historian, but *Revue d'Études Augustiniennes* has warmly applauded his initiative.¹⁰ He continues to add new material monthly at www.tertullian.org.

3. *Previous scholarly work.* Eighty-three existing encyclopedia entries or periodical articles and sixteen excerpts from monographs have been digitized onto the Web¹¹ and the Ecole Initiative (Early Church On-Line Encyclopedia) is adding further material as authors make it available.¹² The Catholic Encyclopedia entry on Tertullian, published in 1913 and running to six thousand words, was completed in 1999 and the article from the *Biographisch-Bibliographischen Kirchenlexikons* is double that length.¹³ The Bibliographical Information Base in Patristics (BIBP) is impressive, searching 325 journals and bringing up references to 255 articles on Tertullian, followed by an abstract of the article but not the text.¹⁴ The full text is offered by the search-engine Northern Light,¹⁵ which collects articles and reviews from 6,200 journals, but it has disappointingly little on Tertullian. Not many periodicals which carry articles on Tertullian have a Web edition.¹⁶

10. *REAug* (44) 1998: 339, item 69: “*Nous souhaitons bonne chance à cette initiative originale.*” In addition to 115 new items, he has digitized a number of existing articles (and translated some of them into English at the same time) and other material, particularly in connection with manuscripts, to give a total of 176 webpages on Tertullian. The full listing of his contribution is at www.tertullian.org, which also contains his e-mail address.

11. As with the text, there is some duplication of encyclopedia entries, with fourteen appearing twice or more. Although they are not counted in the analysis of printed works, because Tertullian's name is not in the title of the volume, they are mentioned here for the sake of completeness.

12. A cooperative effort to establish a hypertext encyclopedia on the Web of church history to the Reformation. The authors maintain their articles at their own locations, but all are connected to a title index, which can be accessed by clicking on the Ecole icon anywhere it appears in the encyclopedia. Every article is linked to related articles and other information on the Web, including a biography for authors and links to other articles by the same author. They are looking for more authors: www.evansville.edu/~ecoleweb.

13. bautz.de/bbkl/t/tertullian_q_s_f.shtml: 12,252 words.

14. www.bibl.ulaval.ca/bd/bibp. Change the defaults to search on *Titre de l'article*, and *ou*, and put in up to four variant spellings of Tertullian to get 255 articles with his name in the title. Results may be displayed in order of author, year, periodical, or title. Using the default *Descripteurs* brings up 970 entries, rather more than one can cope with, and even if the search is restricted to articles in the French language with the spelling *Tertullien*, it lists 542 documents.

15. If the option “Special Collection” is taken on www.northernlight.com, after an initial search on the word Tertullian, an abstract of the article or review may be viewed without charge, but the full text is available on-line only for those prepared to pay for it.

16. *Arachnion* does and it has an article on Tertullian at www.cisi.unito.it/arachne/num4/canfora.html.

4. *Quotations*. Seventy-eight webpages, although including Tertullian's name in their rubric, quote him only in passing when dealing with, for example: abortion, baptism, capital punishment, feminism, the Lord's Prayer, the Holy Spirit, the New Testament canon, the North African church, prayers for the dead, revelation and reason, the Trinity, and volcanic eruptions on Vesuvius.

5. *Advertisements* of various kinds make up the rest: 57 for textbooks about Tertullian, 26 for associated webpages, 19 for college syllabi, 17 for CD-ROMs, 15 containing personal information, 2 quizzes, and a crossword.

Turning to printed works, the 2000 mentioned may be divided into 694 monographs, 874 periodical articles, 136 doctoral theses and 296 contributions to multi-author publications such as *Festschriften*, conference proceedings, and the like. Some new scholarly work on Tertullian has appeared in every decade since the first printing in 1483, but since the earliest-dated material on a webpage, apart from Tertullian's own works and translations of them, is from the year 1898,¹⁷ more than four centuries of scholarship are available only in printed form. The eleven sets of Tertullian's works demonstrate that monographs can be adapted to webpages and a major work, extending to a massive 31 megabytes, has recently been published (only) on the Internet.¹⁸ Although peri-odical articles are ideal for scanning onto webpages, only 17 of the 874 are accessible without charge, and that includes older work, out of copyright, which any enthusiast could add.¹⁹ As mentioned above, less than 3 percent of the printed work on Tertullian (apart from his own works) has made its way onto the Internet, so a study carried out electronically might differ markedly from a study carried out in the library.

The Languages Used in Each Medium

Until 1820, most work on Tertullian was in Latin, then German took over and it remained the most popular language until 1960. Publications in Italian then suddenly rose from single figures per decade to over fifty per decade and that has not only continued but has increased—prompted, perhaps, by the preparations for the Second Vatican Council.²⁰ Although French has never been the most

17. Reference to an earlier article, by Charles-Emile Freppel, "La notion chrétienne du pouvoir d'après Tertullien," *Revue du monde catholique* 8 (1864): 275–86, is brought up by www.bibl.ulaval.ca/bd/bibp, but it gives only an abstract but not the full text.

18. On Arnobius, not on Tertullian, by Professor Biagio Amata, at www.geocities.com/Athens/Agora/8704/arnobius.

19. Uncertainties over copyright law and the difficulties of obtaining permission have discouraged some who would like to convert more scholarship into digital form. Two hundred and fifty-five articles on Tertullian are listed at www.bibl.ulaval.ca/bd/bibp, mentioned at n. 14, but it gives only an abstract of the article, not the full text.

20. Until 1950 there were only fifty-three works on Tertullian in Italian (that I can trace) in nearly five hundred years—not one doctoral thesis, and only seventeen monographs and thirty-six periodical articles. However, since 1950 there have been more than five new works a year, every year, including sixty-six articles (more than in any other language) in the 1980s.

avored language in any single decade, it overtook both Latin and English in 1900 and remained the second most popular language throughout the whole of the twentieth century, so it now has the highest total usage overall. Language does not necessarily denote country of origin, because some scholars (especially Scandinavian ones) prefer to publish in the most popular language of the day rather than in their own. Thirteen languages appeared in print for the first time for Tertullian during the twentieth century, which also saw the first printed contributions from Africa, Asia, Central and South America, and Australasia.

They are broken down by language, in the order in which that language was first used for scholarly work on Tertullian in the following table.

As the table shows, the Internet already uses eleven of the twenty languages in print, plus Estonian and Chinese, but nearly 90 percent of the webpages on Tertullian are in English, compared with 18 percent of printed works. "Surfers"

Tertullian Resources by Language: Print vs. Internet

Language	Printed works	Year first used in print	Internet webpages
Latin	296	1483	45
German	386	1529	12
English	367	1550	818
French	432	1562	22
Spanish	66	1631	1
Italian	358	1756	7
Hungarian	3	1785	0
Danish	3	1859	0
Dutch	32	1897	0
Swedish	3	1916	6
Russian	3	1926	0
Yugoslavian	2	1926	0
Czechoslovakian	3	1937	0
Polish	19	1938	3
Finnish	2	1944	1
Portuguese	3	1945	3
Romanian	8	1959	0
Norwegian	1	1969	0
Afrikaans	2	1970	0
Japanese	11	1975	1
Estonian	0	—	1
Chinese	0	—	1
Total	2,000		921

are therefore not getting access to the richness of scholarship in other languages; for example, there have been over three hundred works on Tertullian printed in Italian during the electronic era, but there are only seven webpages with his name in their abstract. (Again it must be emphasized that there are many more responses to a search for *Tertulliano*, indeed www.bibl.ulaval.ca/bd/bibp brings up eighteen articles about him in Italian, but these are simply pointers to the articles, not the text of them.)

Open Access and Academic Standards

The availability of nearly one thousand webpages on Tertullian to over 200 million people today (and counting) contrasts with the difficulty for most people of accessing the 874 printed periodical articles on him. The printed articles are spread across no fewer than 334 periodical titles—not just 334 individual issues but 334 different series of periodicals, of which 220 (66 percent) have only once carried an article on Tertullian. Finding some of them is not easy, even in a major library, as they have been published in Africa, Australia, North, Central, and South America, Japan, New Zealand, and twenty European countries. Anyone making such material available on the Internet, subject of course to copyright, is doing a great service, because a large and growing percentage of the world's population, who would find it difficult or impossible to read the articles in a library, can bring them up and print them out in their own homes.

Does open access threaten academic standards? There is no quality control over the contents of a webpage on Tertullian. Although the rise and spread of high-quality peer-reviewed scholarship on the web is important and welcome, no one needs to approve the contents of a website. There are a few extravagant remarks about Tertullian on the Internet, and more than a few trite ones, but generally a good standard of responsible scholarship has been maintained so far. One might be critical of webpages which offer a “painted portrait of Tertullian,”²¹ when we have no idea what he looked like, but at least one textbook also has a portrait—which is completely different.²² Both the benefits of open access and the dangers of unsupervised comment are illustrated by an article on dendrochronology, the science of looking at growth rings on trees to calculate their age. When rainfall is plentiful, growth rings are broad, but in periods of drought, they are thin. The article argues that because “people get nasty when they're hungry and tree rings bear the testimony,” martyrdom in the early church can be “accurately dated” by years of thin rings. “It was as the Christian lawyer Tertullian wrote: Persecution was most likely when the Nile failed to irrigate Egypt . . . or when drought set in.”²³ Without the search facility of the Internet,

21. www.bbf.org/hof/ter tullian.htm (copied to www.chof.org/ter tullian.htm), and, without the “original oil painting” description, at www.gospelcom.net.chi.glimpses/fiftythree.html and www.preteristarchive.com/StudyArchive/a-tert.html—but see n. 26.

22. J. D. Woodbridge, ed., *Great Leaders of the Christian Church* (Chicago: Moody, 1988), 49, perhaps taking the idea from Pamelius, who illustrated one of his editions of Tertullian with an unflattering portrait of a Roman nobleman.

23. www.gi.alaska.edu/ScienceForum/ASF6/600.html

one would not easily find Tertullian in an article on dendrochronology, but the article, unchecked by a church historian, is surely flawed; Tertullian's plea, that Christians should not be made scapegoats for every natural disaster, first of all mentioned the Tiber rising to the city walls and flooding Rome,²⁴ which would have produced broad growth rings, at least in the trees which survived.

With that caveat, the power of search engines on the Internet, compared with even the best indices in published works, is remarkable. Furthermore, its bookmark facility allows browsers to "tab" sites for future reference: having once consulted the text of the sixth-century pseudo-Gelasian *decretum* which condemned Tertullian's works,²⁵ two clicks of the mouse will restore the text to the screen at any time. Few monographs about Tertullian run to a second edition and periodical articles are rarely reprinted, but webpages can be updated on a regular basis; for example, the bibliography in the *Biographisch-Bibliographischen Kirchenlexikons*. On the other hand, websites can be—and all too frequently are—discontinued, so the information is no longer there.²⁶

The Internet will never be a substitute for the library, because no one is now going to add those hundreds of titles from the last five centuries, but a generation which reads its news and buys its books through the Internet will, if asked about Tertullian, start there for information. Roger Pearse's website on Tertullian, mentioned above, is visited regularly by a variety of inquirers, which demonstrates that if more material can be made available over the next few years than has been digitized during the last six years, the study of Tertullian will flourish on as well as off the Internet.

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24. *Apologeticum* 40.2, 6.

25. www.tertullian.org/decretum.htm

26. All four webpages which were displaying a "painted portrait of Tertullian" when this article was first drafted had changed their location, without a cross-reference, before it was finished.