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Apulei Metamorphoseon: index verborum, liste de fréquence

Joseph Dalbera, *Apulei Metamorphoseon: index verborum, liste de fréquence*. Alpha-Omega, Reihe A, 266. Hildesheim; Zürich; New York: Olms-Weidmann, 2020. Pp. xii, 451. ISBN 9783487159447 €198,00.

Review by

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Word indices, concordances, and thesauri of the texts of specific authors have been among the traditional instruments of classical research for centuries. Particularly in pre-computer times, such tools offered a welcome means for philologists to approach specific corpora of texts, whether for strictly linguistic purposes or for broader, stylistic study.

When I was a student of Greek and Latin, in the now distant 80s of the previous century, I felt impressed by large volumes in our university library, carrying such titles as *Index Tertullianus*, or *Concordantiae Senecanae*, and offering an incredible amount of raw lexical data, impossible for any reader to collect through personal reading. At the University of Liège, a department called L.A.S.L.A. (Laboratoire D'analyse Statistique Des Langues Anciennes De L'université De Liège) was even specialized in producing modern volumes of computerized lexical data for Latin as a whole, such as the *Dictionnaire fréquentiel et Index inverse de la langue latine* of 1981, as well as many indices for individual authors (a list may be found at [Laboratoire d'Analyse Statistique des Langues Anciennes](#)). Such volumes opened up a new world for me.

Meanwhile, times have changed. The rise of the personal computer in the 80s and 90s, and particularly the rapid development of the internet from the 90s onward have brought about radical changes in the entire field of classical studies. It has become so much easier now for any scholar or student to check, say, a Latin word form in the works of Cicero, or find out whether a particular verb is used by Ovid. Free online corpora, such as Perseus, and corpora behind paywalls (such as Brepols' Library of Latin Texts or the TLG) allow easy access, and it does not even require advanced computer skills to arrive at meaningful results. This does not mean that printed indices, concordances, and the like, have become entirely out of fashion, nor that such tools can no longer be produced.

Having said this, one would expect editors of new book publications in this genre to be aware of the changed circumstances, and to reflect on the specific reasons to publish indices as books rather than in other, new forms. Moreover, it would seem reasonable if they published such helpful volumes at affordable prices and in convenient forms.

With the new, large book published by Joseph Dalbera, a full index verborum and frequency list covering Apuleius' novel *Metamorphoses*, one feels transported back to days long gone by. It is a stately volume (30 cm in height, 453 pages, timeless blue binding with letters in gold color), that comes at the breathtaking price of nearly €200. In it, after a rather meagre general introduction to Apuleius and his works, the reader is provided with a full alphabetic list of all word forms to be found in the *Met.*, from *ab* to *zygiae*, with all inflected and conjugated forms neatly arranged under the main lemmata. For every possible Latin word form, all places in the *Met.* are duly listed (e.g. under *lumbus*, we find *lumbos*(7.18) and *lumbis* (2.7 and 4.3). Following the 395 pages of this index verborum, there is a frequency list in descending order (hardly surprisingly, *et* is the number one word with 1951 occurrences), and an interesting list of 'subordinated verbs', which gives separate lists for e.g. verbs used in ablative absolute constructions (subdivided in surveys for present and perfect participle), infinitive constructions, all verbs following *cum*, *dum*, *postquam*, and many more. The printing is fine, the layout is nice and orderly, all seems to be complete and accurate.

And still, one cannot help wondering: *why has this come as a book?* What is the specific advantage of making these data available in traditional, printed form, and at such an extravagant price, rather than as a convenient digital tool? In the introduction, literally not a word is lost on this essential issue. Apart from the 'French page' (the technical page following the title page), there is no reference to a single website or digital resource anywhere in the text of the book. It is as if the present age simply does not exist. The volume as it is might just as well have been produced in the late 60s, the early days of computing, or, for that matter, in the late 19th century, when indices like this were made through laborious work of diligent human hands. When I showed the book to my undergraduate students, they could hardly believe their eyes. 'Why hasn't this material simply been published online?' one of them asked.

It is a further disappointment that the ample volume does not contain all one might need. At the end of the introduction, the editor suggest that the volume offers the reader a complete survey of Apuleian language ('Toute sa langue est là, désormais, répertoriée dans les pages de cet ouvrage', p. VIII; 'Le lecteur pourra se faire une idée des principaux usages linguistiques du romancier latin', p.IX). Surely, however, the vocabulary in Apuleius' rhetorical works needs to be taken into account too, notably in his *Apology* and *Florida*, works which have many links with the novel. But these have not been included here, and the reader will have to consult a separate volume of 885 pages, published by the same publisher in 1997 (Philippe Fleury, and Michel Zuinghedau (eds.) *Apulée, Apologie – Florides, Concordance, documentation lexicale et grammaticale*, Hildesheim, Olms-Weidman, 1997).

Would it not have been a better idea to combine all lexical material on Apuleius' language and to publish it as a separate online service or as part of some digital platform? It would be a great service to the academic community if this could be made available for free. But even a paid online publication might do, since most researchers would probably be able to access it through a university library. Institutions such as the LASLA (under whose auspices the present volume has been made too) might even consider a *combination* of some form of online publishing of lexical data for the general public, with additional book publishing in traditional, printed form (and at justifiably high prices), in order to be of practical and immediate service to the community without giving up producing sustainable resources for academic libraries.

In its present form, the index verborum of Apuleius' *Metamorphoses*, well produced and useful as it is, will remain within reach of just a small group of scholars. Surely, the Latin data and the numerous readers of Apuleius' novel deserve better.