

The *Journal of Early Christian Studies* Core Journal Collection

The Interrelatedness of the *Journal of Early Christian Studies*

by Glenn Wittig

ABSTRACT An understanding of core journal collections is important for the development and management of periodical collections. This investigation explores the structure of a core journal collection related to the *Journal of Early Christian Studies*, a relatively new periodical in the sub-discipline of church history. Citations of journals extracted from three randomly selected volumes were tabulated and ranked in descending numeric order. Library of Congress subject headings were used to categorize the subjects covered by the top-ranked cited journals. This core, made up of nine journals, contributed twenty-five percent of all citations. Church history journals predominated as the source of cited material; Roman and Byzantine subject journals were also highly cited. It is recommended that all of these journals should be readily available (in house or via JSTOR) to researchers investigating early Christian study topics.

The “generation and dissemination of knowledge is one of the most significant and defining endeavors” of any group of scholars, be it from a college, a university, or a think tank (Rogel-Salazar and Rogel-Salazar 2014, 2). The purpose for writing and publishing papers, especially in scholarly journals, is to communicate research results with colleagues and other potentially interested readers, who are generally scholars (Pieters and Baumgartner 2002). This publication activity functions in two ways: 1) by making public the original observations and conclusions offered by an author, and 2) by sharing references (i.e., citations) to supporting or non-supporting contributions from other authors included in the written paper. This dissemination stimulates a continuous feedback process that permeates all areas of research. The feedback provides evidence of an interconnectedness with other related sources and reveals levels of interdisciplinary communication between a variety of subjects. Documenting these citations results in a citation network of related sources, which, in this report, will focus on journals.

What is being presented here is a preliminary report—a first look—of a topic that is derived from the idea of interrelatedness (or interconnectedness) between scholars and research outlets (in this context, publications such as journals). It is best described as a sampling of journal references gathered from a limited number of the early years in the life of the *Journal of Early Christian Studies* (JECS) to determine a core group of journals cited in its published papers. Also, for context, it is the first known such investigation into this idea in any religious studies journal (Liner 2002; Liu 2007; Pieters and Baumgartner 2002; McAphee, Vucovich, and Lorbeer 2008; and Weissinger 2010 explored other disciplines). Core title lists, such as the one to be established in this study, provide guidance on journal selection and retention in all libraries and especially in smaller specialized-collection libraries, such as seminary libraries (McAphee 2008 and Nisonger 2007). A core list of journals should likewise reflect something about the interrelatedness of journals displayed in the list. Thus, if an interrelatedness of journals is markedly strong in a core collection, it will definitely be noticeable throughout a more complete listing of referenced journals. The objective of the study,

Dr. Glenn Wittig served as a theological librarian at Trinity Evangelical Divinity School, Princeton Theological Seminary, Columbia Theological Seminary, and Southwestern Baptist Theological Seminary; he also taught librarianship at Western Michigan University, Indiana University, and the University of Southern Mississippi.

therefore, is to determine if there is a core, and also to see what interrelatedness appears within the core.

Citation analysis, the measurement technique employed in this report, in its simplest execution, counts the frequency of cited papers within source papers (Garfield 1983). This technique, referred to as intercitation, focuses on who cites whom.¹ The tabulation of citations from this simple approach results in a list of most frequently cited sources and, by inference, a list of the more influential publications within a given subject. The data reveal intellectual structures and communication links and also thereby reveal a measure of interrelatedness among the structure and links. Because the tabulation of sources focuses only on journals, the result can be identified as “core journals” or the designation of the most frequent source of communication between scholars of a particular discipline. The accumulation of such lists can, in turn, be further organized as a network or networks.

OBJECTIVES

The primary objective in conducting this investigation was to discover, via citation analysis, a core collection of the most frequently referenced source journals. The secondary objective focused on determining the level of journal interrelatedness of *J ECS* with other journal publications. The questions to be answered were: 1) how often have particular journals been cited by *J ECS* authors, and 2) how closely related were the cited journals to other early Christian studies journals. Would there be a strong, solid core of closely related subject journals or a more porous and diversified collection of titles? Two other subsidiary objectives pertained to library management concerns derived from the results and bibliographic understanding of the literature. There is always a recognized need to examine publication interrelatedness in any field in order to better understand areas of collection strength, and this may be especially true for newer publications and for smaller seminary libraries. Are frequently cited journals thus readily identified and available to institutional researchers? Can a local collection adequately meet the needs of its users in house or via interlibrary loan (Currie and Monroe-Gulick, 2013)?

METHODOLOGY

Since there were already a number of long-term, active journals focusing on all or some aspect of the early Christian era,² a more recently inaugurated journal was selected for study. Initial thinking had been given to finding a journal starting in the twenty-first century, but a two-decade survey was deemed to offer too shallow a timeframe. *J ECS*, now in its third decade of publication, offered a better survey scope and was thus the one chosen for study. *J ECS* is the official publication of the North American Patristics Society (NAPS) and is published by the Johns Hopkins University Press.³

Articles for examination were selected from three randomly chosen volumes in each of the three decades of *J ECS*'s publication history (v. 1 [1993] to the present [2019]). The volumes selected were 2 (1994), 15 (2007), and 24 (2016). The journal title data identified from the footnote references (also known as citations) from the selected volumes were tabulated and ranked in descending order by number of citations each title received.

Fifty-two papers were published in the three volumes selected for this study. The total number of footnote references contained within these papers was close to 5,000 (n = 4,938). All papers within these three volumes were judged to have robust bibliographies, with ninety-five citations

per paper as the average. The reference notes in all papers included multiple forms of bibliographic information (i.e., primary sources, secondary monographs, journal papers, reports, and notes). The journal article citations—the primary focus of attention in this investigation—had to be extracted from these total references. All citations were examined in order to locate and extract the journal article references, many of which were embedded within multi-source footnotes. The subsequent result was 719 journal article citations from fifty papers (two papers had no journal citations). The range of journal article citations within these papers was, of course, considerably less than for the more general group of papers, but even here the range of coverage was plentiful—from an unusual minimum of one journal article reference to sixty-two journal article references. The mean journal article citations was 14.36 and the median was 11.5.

RESULTS

The purpose for tabulating journal citations from *JECS* was to identify all the journal titles that were cited by authors in the writing of their papers. In three volumes published over three decades' time, 311 journals were cited one or more times. In turn, the most frequently cited journal was *JECS* citing itself (i.e., one of its own earlier papers); it was cited thirty-nine times and ranked number one (see table 1). The top nine cited journals, ranging from ten or more references each and comprising twenty-five percent ($182 / 719 = 25.3\%$) of all journal references constitute the core list. At the bottom of the journal list, 197 journals were cited only one time each. The tail of journal publications, quite obviously, was extensive.

Table 1: *JECS* Core Journals

Code	Journal	#	Rank
<i>JECS</i>	<i>Journal of Early Christian Studies</i>	39	1
<i>VC</i>	<i>Vigiliae Christianiae</i>	35	2
<i>JRS</i>	<i>Journal of Roman Studies</i>	29	3
<i>JTS</i>	<i>Journal of Theological Studies</i>	19	4
<i>HTR</i>	<i>Harvard Theological Review</i>	17	5
<i>CH</i>	<i>Church History</i>	12	6
<i>DOP</i>	<i>Dumbarton Oaks Papers</i>	11	7
<i>JBL</i>	<i>Journal of Biblical Literature</i>	10	8
<i>JEH</i>	<i>Journal of Ecclesiastical History</i>	10	8

The two most frequently cited journals (*JECS* and *Vigiliae Christianae* [*VC*]), both focusing on the primitive and early church era as well as early Christian literature, clearly comprise a strong (minimal) core collection of journals. The two collected ten percent of all journal citations ($n = 74 / 719 = 10.29\%$). Thus, wherever early Christian studies is a curricular focus of attention any supporting library should, without question, have substantial holdings of, and a subscription to, these two journals. The top five cited journals cumulated almost twenty percent of all journal citations

($n = 139 / 719 = 19.33\%$) and the top nine journals contributed twenty-five percent of all citations ($n = 182 / 719 = 25.31\%$). Subscriptions or ready access to all nine titles should be considered for good library coverage of source material.

The Library of Congress subject headings for each journal within the top nine journals cited—herein regarded as the *J ECS* core group of journals—included the two already mentioned above (“Church History” and “Early Christian Literature”) as well as the following: “Art, Byzantine,” “Bible,” “Rome – Antiquities,” and “Theology.” The distribution of these subject headings are portrayed in graphic form in figure 1 with the subject heading presented in bold face type. The contributing journals are identified by abbreviation; and the number represents the cumulative number of citations for each group.

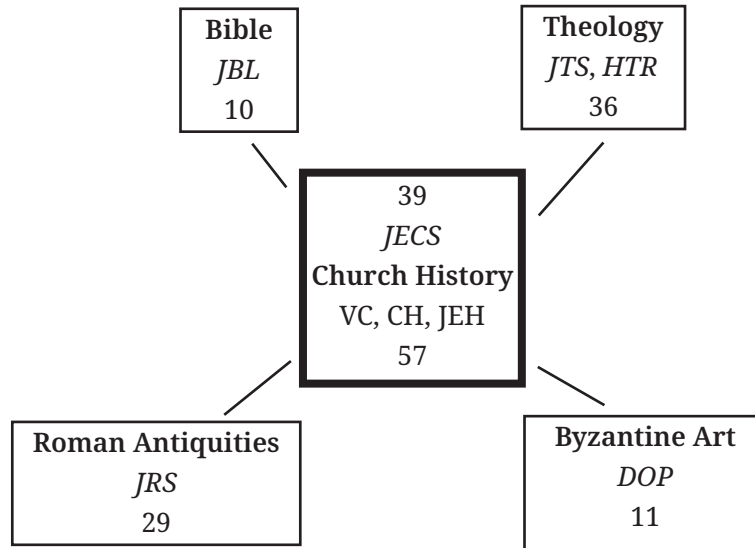


Figure 1: *J ECS* and its cognate journals

Citations drawn from *J ECS*, *VC*, *Church History*, and *Journal of Ecclesiastical History* account for 53% of all referenced material in this core journal collection ($39 + 57 = 96 / 182 = 52.75\%$). In other words, the majority of referenced material is derived from a closely related disciplinary journal, as would usually be expected (Griffin 2016). On the other hand, nearly equal support for published papers is derived from two dual-subject-orientation groups: Bible and theology: 25% ($10 + 36 = 46 / 182 = 25.27\%$), and Roman antiquities and Byzantine art: 22% ($29 + 11 = 40 / 182 = 21.98\%$). Viewing the results graphically more clearly identifies the cohesiveness of the core journal collection. Citations are drawn most frequently from church history (53%), theology (20%) and Roman antiquities (16%) journals. The associated relationship between church history and theology is, or should be, obvious. The relationship between church history and Roman antiquities may not be as clearly perceived. The inclusion of the *Journal of Roman Studies* (*JRS*; number 3 in table 1), accounting for sixteen percent ($29 / 182 = 15.93\%$) of all citations, is a significant addition to this core journal collection. Thus, for the larger domain of journals interrelated to *J ECS*, this group of nine journals represents a decisive cohesive core.

Bible and theology are germane topics to this sub-discipline of early Christian history, but the results show that there is considerable reliance on Roman and Byzantine sources as well. *JRS* is a significant source of support material for Roman antiquities. The following paper titles from *JRS* illustrate the relationship (and connectedness) to the subject orientation of *JECS*: “Aspects of the Christianization of the Roman Aristocracy” (*JRS* 51 (1961): 1–11); “Legislation against the Christians” (*JRS* 58 (1968): 32–50); and “Insinuations of Womanly Influence: An Aspect of the Christianization of the Roman Aristocracy” (*JRS* 82 (1992): 150–64). These three *JRS* papers were referenced between four and nine times in this survey of *JECS* papers. Byzantine elements, to some lesser extent, come from the *Dumbarton Oaks Papers*. While the *Dumbarton Oaks Papers* were referenced often enough to appear within the core group, no single paper from this journal was frequently referenced in *JECS*. Seminary librarians, particularly, need to make note of these facts. These two journals have never been included in the usual religious and theological indexing tools, such as Index to Religious Periodical Literature, Religious and Theological Abstracts, or Catholic Periodical and Literature Index, and may have been long overlooked as needed support material. Seminary and university librarians should consider the addition of one or both of these two journals to their subscription list, especially if the JSTOR digital database is available for patron use (Guthrie and Lougee 1997). Seven of the nine *JECS* core journal titles are covered extensively in JSTOR (i.e., from their beginning date to a near contemporary date). *JRS* and the *Dumbarton Oaks Papers* are included in JSTOR’s coverage, but, strangely enough, *JECS* and *Journal of Ecclesiastical History* are not included. In this regard, researchers will need to rely on the Atla Religion Database as a starter source for bibliographic information, and then move to JSTOR for coverage of Roman- and Byzantine-oriented material.

Some journal titles of note cited between five and nine times each (but an insufficient number of references to be included in the core) are *Augustinian Studies*; *Augustinianum*; *Byzantion*; *Greek, Roman, and Byzantine Studies*; and *Journal of Egyptian Archaeology*. Any one or more of these titles could conceivably appear as a core journal in a future investigation.⁴ At least the appearance of these titles on the journal list demonstrates additional influence from other closely related subject disciplines.

CONCLUSION

Even though the evidence presented herein has been regarded as preliminary in nature it helps librarians, first, to determine the important journals related to this subject, and, secondly, to understand the interrelatedness of the early Christian studies field with other subjects. Five cited journals cumulated almost twenty percent of all journal citations (the most frequently cited journals are *JECS*, *VC*, *JRS*, *Journal of Theological Studies*, and the *Harvard Theological Review*); these five constitute the basic core of journals for this sub-discipline. The top nine journals constitute a more inclusive collection of important journals for this discipline; cumulatively they covered twenty-five percent of all citations. Church history is the primary focus of attention in this journal. However, the analysis of the citation data revealed a strong influence coming from “Roman Antiquities” and “Theology.” In a seminary library “Theology” periodicals should, and generally would, be well represented via holdings and subscriptions. The presence of *JRS* and, almost certainly, the *Dumbarton Oaks Papers* would not have been immediately obvious, but as a result of this study they should be considered as additional support for early Christian studies programs, either via subscription or via access to JSTOR.

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ENDNOTES

- 1 A second type of analysis, involving co-citations, identifies items that are cited together in the same bibliography and is almost universally generated via digital means on large samples.
- 2 Some long-term, still-active journals covering early Christian studies include: *Church History* (1932–), *Vigiliae Christianae* (1947–), *Journal of Ecclesiastical History* (1950–), *Augustinian Studies* (1970–), and *Studia Patristica* (1982–).
- 3 The journal opened volume 3 (1995) with an editorial note informing its readers that it had “received the 1994 award from the Association of American Publishers, Professional and Scholarly Publishing Division, for the ‘Best New Journal in the Humanities.’” The editor went on to say: “It is gratifying to see our collective work recognized by the Association.”
- 4 Black (2012) confirmed the reliability of core lists over a ten-year span. Change in rank was only “because of random variability in works cited” (80, abstract).