Bibliographies, \LaTeX\ and friends

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Figure 1: Bibliographic data as a string
Figure 2: Bibliographic data as a structure

This is not a string of text in a given form (required by a journal or publisher) but a structure hosting information. It is not bound to a style or even medium but can be reused with no limits. The displayed example was downloaded from Jstor.
The BibTeX format

A series of slots and data. The syntax is very simple:

\[ \text{slot} = \{\text{data}\}, \]

Each instance features a unique label.

@article{Orlandi-Corpus-1990,
URL = {http://www.jstor.org/stable/30204173},
author = {Orlandi, Tito},
journal = {Computers and the Humanities},
pages = {397--405},
title = {The Corpus dei Manoscritti Copti Letterari},
volume = {24},
year = {1990}
}
The same information can be coded as XML:

```xml
<bibtex:entry xmlns:
bibtex="http://bibtexml.sf.net/
bibtex:id="Orlandi-Corpus-1990">
<bibtex:article>
<bibtex:author>Orlandi, Tito</bibtex:author>
<bibtex:title>The Corpus dei Manoscritti Copti Letterari</bibtex:title>
...
</bibtex:article>
</bibtex:entry>
```
BibTeX is much lighter, easier to read and conveys the very same amount of information. Since it is not bound to a DTD or scheme, it is very flexible, and can be adapted to the needs of the different areas of scholarship. The danger is to use local, unknown labels, but it is only theoretical. It is in the common interest to accept what the scholarly community shares as a flexible standard: the “basic” slots (author, title...) are necessary in order to use a BibTeX archive.
Bibtex is a *format* but the same name is shared by a *programme*, written by Oren Patashnik and Leslie Lamport in 1985, the most recent version being 0.99d (2019). It is superseded now by:

- a new programme, called Biber, that parses data and collects the necessary pieces of information, but does not format anything;
- a \LaTeX{} package, called Biblatex, that – within the \LaTeX{} compilation cycle – formats data parsed by Biber according to the rules chosen by the user.
Advantages of Biblatex + Biber

- no problems with Unicode – sorting can be adapted to the language of the document and also single entries can be made aware e.g. of the hyphenation required by the language of that particular entry;
- it is possible to build new styles, which is particularly important in countries, such as Italy, where each publisher wants to receive files formatted according to the particular styles of this of that particular journal or series;
- more flexible use of the `crossref` field;
- full support for related entries, e.g. “reprinted as...” or “translation of...”;
Advantages of Biblatex + Biber

- the new XDATA field, a sort of container for one or more fields, e.g. name of a publishing house and place of publication, or name of a series of books, publishing house, place of publication. This can be convenient to avoid useless repetition of information in a file.

- suppression/inclusion of fields is straightforward, even for some entry types.
Using BibTeX to build a scholarly archive

- use the abstract or review slots (for short notes)
- use a link to local files:
  - a text file for one’s notes
  - a PDF/PS file to host a copy of the article/book
- use a URL / DOI for non-local files

«Digital tools have yet to develop models for displaying and replicating the self-reflexive operations of bibliographical tools, which alone are operations for thinking and communicating – which is to say, for transforming storage into memory, and data into knowledge. We have to design and build digital environments for those purposes» (McGann 2016, p. 363).
The madness of “bibliographic styles”

- Rule #1: *my* bibliographic style is the best
- Rule #2: don’t even try to submit your paper using a different style (see Rule #1)
Using a common international format

\usepackage[
backend=biber, % not necessary
style=authoryear, % replace with your style
]{biblatex}
\addbibresource{sample.bib} % archive(s) to use.
\hspace{1cm} % One line for each archive.
Biblatex is flexible, and this is very important in the humanities, where each publisher / journal wants a particular style. For example:

\texttt{biblio-style: philosophy-verbose}
\texttt{biblatexoptions: backend=biber, annotation=false, autolang=hyphen, backref=true, backrefstyle=three+, classical=true, commacit=true, doi=false, editionformat=superscript,}
Using a customised format

eprint=false,
firstinits=true,
inbeforejournal=false,
isbn=false,
language=auto,
latinemph=true,
library=false,
lowscauthors=false,
publocformat=publoctime,
relatedformat=parens,
sorting=nty,
url=false,
Using a customised format

\texttt{volnumformat=plain,}
\texttt{volumeformat=arabic,}

\texttt{\AtEveryBibitem{\clearlist{publisher}}}
\texttt{\AtEveryBibitem{\clearfield{series}}}

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archives can be called from [Libre/Open]Office and even from MS programmes.

with Markdown, the use is simple:

```---
title: A Test
author: John Tester
bibliography: 'test.bib'
---
```

This has been noticed by Kenneth Levy in a seminal article [@Levy:ItalianNeophytes 34], and in more recent literature.
There is no need to run Biblatex: pandoc understands the BibTeX format and compiles the file using \texttt{\LaTeX} + pandoc’s filter for bibliographic data, called \texttt{citeproc}:

```
pandoc --filter pandoc-citeproc bibliotest.md\-s\-o bibliotest.pdf
```

Since Biblatex offers unparalleled features of bibliographic control, it is frequently advisable to use Biblatex along with Markdown + pandoc.
This programme (2015, first version, 2019, second version) offers a GUI interface to select from the huge variety of Biblatex options, and outputs either a Biblatex or a Markdown set of instructions. See https://ctan.org/pkg/zblbuild.

Figure 3: zblbuild – example
References


Voß, Herbert (2011), *Bibliografien mit LaTeX*, Lehmanns Media, Berlin, https://books.google.it/books?id=SgNACgAAQBAJ&pg=PA228&dq=biblatex&hl=it&sa=X&ved=0CCQQ6AEwAGoVChMl-dH5o8vJxwIVR1kUCh1uxwKa.