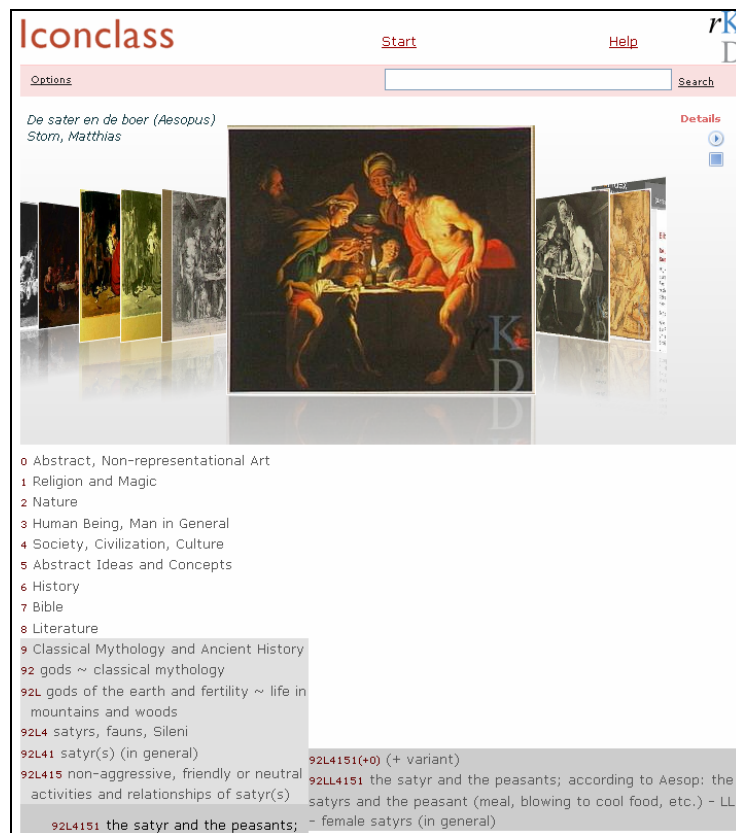


A PRACTICAL GUIDE TO THE



ICONCLASS 2100 BROWSER

created for RKD by

Etienne Posthumus
&
Hans Brandhorst

November 2009

Introduction

Like most practical guides this one too is based on a few assumptions. It is useful to know about them before you start to use the new Iconclass browser. First, and rather self-evident, we assume that you are interested in providing subject access to a collection of images or other documents. We also assume that you have decided, or at least are seriously considering, to use a *controlled vocabulary* for that purpose. Third, we suspect that you have already given some thought to the issue of ordering and linking the terms in a vocabulary, and finally, we hope that it may be one of your ambitions to provide multilingual access to your collection.

We shall therefore not pause to discuss the *theoretical* aspects of applying a classification system, and not waste time arguing the benefits of a well-structured vocabulary in a general way. Instead, we shall focus on an explanation of how this new Iconclass browser works, and demonstrate how it blends the freedom and flexibility of keyword searching with the power and precision of a systematic classification.

In other words: we shall focus on showing **how** things are done with this browser, and not on discussing **why** things are as they are. That is not because we don't want you to know, but because this sometimes involves rather technical explanations. These we have reserved for a separate document for advanced Iconclass users. Obviously, whenever it will help your practical use of Iconclass if you know a few details about how things work *inside* the system, we shall supply that information.

1. The Basics of Browsing

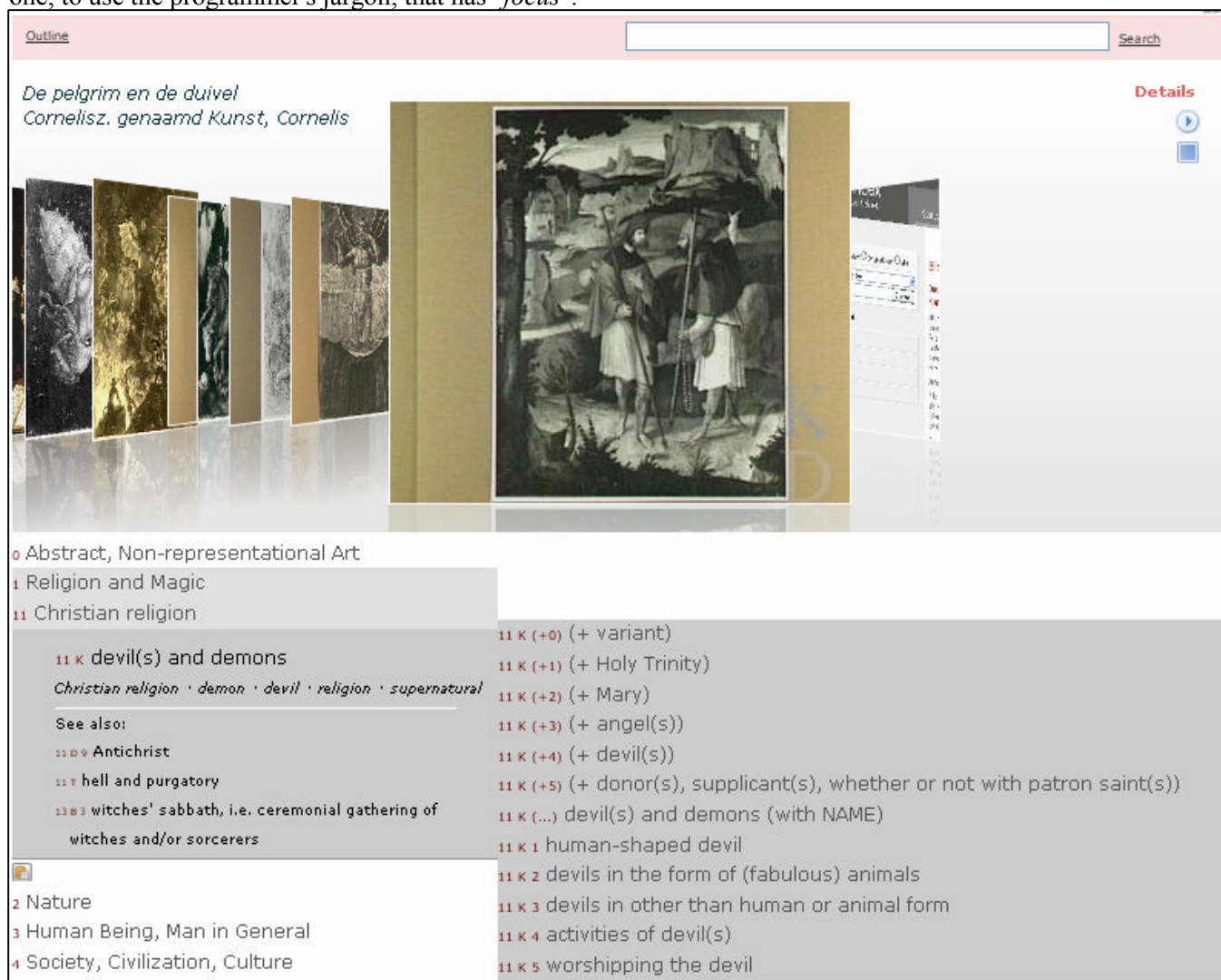
The screenshot shows the Iconclass browser interface. At the top, there is a search bar with the text 'Search' and a magnifying glass icon. Below the search bar, a tree structure is displayed. The root node is 'Outline'. Under 'Outline', there are three main categories: 'Abstract, Non-representational Art', 'Religion and Magic', and 'Christian religion'. The 'Christian religion' category is expanded, showing a list of sub-terms: 'devil(s) and demons', 'Christian religion · demon · devil · religion', 'supernatural', 'See also:', 'Antichrist', 'hell and purgatory', 'witches' sabbath, i.e. ceremonial gathering of witches and/or sorcerers'. To the right of these terms, there is a list of related terms: '(+ variant)', '(+ Holy Trinity)', '(+ Mary)', '(+ angel(s))', '(+ devil(s))', '(+ donor(s), supplicant(s), whether or not with patron saint(s))', 'devil(s) and demons (with NAME)', 'human-shaped devil', 'devils in the form of (fabulous) animals', 'devils in other than human or animal form', 'activities of devil(s)', and 'worshipping the devil'.

When you click on the word **Options**¹ you will open the menu shown below, with which you may control the appearance of the browse window. These options let you determine the language of the concept definitions (English, German, French or Italian), the presence and appearance of the class numbers (*notations*), and the presence of sample images which now are linked to the browser to show how the system can be used. By clicking on "Save" you store your preferences until you decide to change them again.

The screenshot shows the 'Options' menu. It contains the following settings: 'Language: English' (with a dropdown arrow), 'Show Notations: ☐', 'Spaces in Notations: ☐', 'Show sample images: ☐', and 'Copy only notations to clipboard: ☐'. There is a 'Save' button at the bottom left of the menu.

¹ If clicking on the word Options **does not open the menu**, check the settings of your internet browser to make sure you have "enabled Javascript".

Now, if you compare the first illustration with the one below the differences are obvious. The first one shows what the browse screen looks like with all options switched "off", the one below shows what it looks like with all options "on". In both cases the same concept was selected, i.e. the one just above the thin white line in the grey area. This concept - **devil(s) and demons** - is regarded by the browser program as the "*present*" one, or the one, to use the programmer's jargon, that has "*focus*".



But before we continue to comment on the things you see in the lower half of the screen, we pause for a brief explanation of the role of the pictures now inserted between the schedules and the Options bar.² After all, Iconclass is merely a tool for the description of images and **does not contain** any pictures, no more than the [Dewey Decimal Classification](#) contains books. So why then is this new version of the browser amply illustrated?

The reason is simple. After several decades of use, millions of pictures have been indexed with Iconclass at many institutions around the world, including the RKD itself. With thousands of indexed, digital images close at hand, it was a logical step to exploit the *RKD Images* database for sample pictures that illustrate the use of certain Iconclass concepts. The pictures should be regarded as "scope notes", "visual warranty", no more. They are examples of the use of the system. It is **not** the other way around: **this Iconclass browser is not a retrieval front end to RKD Images**. That is also the reason that the selection of pictures shown in the picture viewer is **randomized**, which means that if there are enough examples of a theme the selection shown will change when you re-submit your search.

² **If you do not see any images**, in spite of having selected **Show sample images**, you probably do not have **Adobe's Flash player** installed. The opening screen of the Iconclass browser will then also lack any images. So, please install the Flash player or ask your system's administrator to do this for you.

We shall have occasion later on to return to the issue of linking an Iconclass browser to a collection of pictures or other documents, but first we continue our explanation of the browser's functionalities with the help of our devils and demons example.

1 Religion and Magic	
11 Christian religion	
11K devil(s) and demons	11K(+0)
Christian religion · demon · devil · religion · supernatural	11K(+1)
See also:	11K(+2)
11D9 Antichrist	11K(+3)
11T hell and purgatory	11K(+4)
13B3 witches' sabbath, i.e. ceremonial gathering of witches and/or sorcerers	11K(+5)
	saint(s)
	11K(...)
	11K1 hu
	11K2 de
2 Nature	11K3 de
3 Human Being, Man in General	11K4 ac
4 Society, Civilization, Culture	11K5 wo

On the left side of the Iconclass schedules we see the concept definition **devil(s) and demons**, now preceded by the Iconclass notation **11K**, the class number that assigns the concept its unique location in the schedules.

In the lighter grey area immediately above **11K devil(s) and demons** we find the "parent" concepts - or "broader terms" - which clarify that the broader context of these specific devils and demons is **Christian Religion**, with **Religion and Magic** as the "top term".

The words in *italics* immediately above the thin white line - *Christian religion · demon · devil · religion · supernatural* - are keywords that will help us find this concept. They can be used in a keyword search, as we shall show a little further. The three concepts listed below the words **See also** are cross references to themes related to that of

devils and demons. To the right of our present concept the more specific variants, or *narrower terms*, are listed.

These narrower concepts deserve some comments, since they exemplify different strategies that Iconclass offers indexers to increase the specificity of a concept.

First you see an extension of the notation with a number between brackets, e.g. **11K(+1)** which means **devil(s) and demons (+Holy Trinity)**. The six concepts thus indicated, are like "variables". They can be added to any one of thousands of concepts in this particular area of the system to signify the presence of additional details, e.g. **angels**. They will make themselves available for use by reappearing for every concept you select within division **11 Christian religion**.

A second strategy to increase specificity is to add the NAME of a particular example of the concept. A few of these, e.g. Leviathan and Satan, are already included in the system's schedules, so you only have to copy them. If you have an example for which no readymade notation yet exists, you can simply add the name between the brackets to create it. So, to index the dragonlike devil on which the Antichrist is riding in the adjoining picture from a manuscript in the Koninklijke Bibliotheek in The Hague, it would be enough to simply copy **11K(LEVIATHAN)** from

11K(+0) (+ variant)
11K(+1) (+ Holy Trinity)
11K(+2) (+ Mary)
11K(+3) (+ angel(s))
11K(+4) (+ devil(s))
11K(+5) (+ donor(s), supplicant(s), whether or not with saint(s))
11K(...) devil(s) and demons (with NAME)
11K1 human-shaped devil
11K2 devils in the form of (fabulous) animals
11K3 devils in other than human or animal form
11K4 activities of devil(s)
11K5 worshipping the devil

11K(BEHEMOTH) devil(s) and demons: Behemoth
11K(LEVIATHAN) devil(s) and demons: Leviathan
11K(LUCIFER) devil(s) and demons: Lucifer
11K(SATAN) devil(s) and demons: Satan

this list of devil(s) and demons (with NAME).

The final five narrower terms - or "children" as they are called in a hierarchical system - are straightforward variants of the main concept. For their existence - or rather *the belief*



in their existence - there is rich historical warranty.

The Iconclass schedules contain well over 2.5 million concepts, if we include all of their permutations and exploit all options to increase specificity. Obviously, not all of them have been used for *RKD Images*. To enrich the corpus of images exemplifying the use of Iconclass, the new browser provides an additional hyperlink to the



website of the **German Bildindex** project.

There are fundamental differences, however, between illustrating the use of concepts with the help of a readily available database (*RKD Images*) or through a search for a specific Iconclass notation in an external website (*Bildindex*). These shall be explained in a separate document, for advanced users. Suffice it here to know that if you follow the instructions that appear if the **Bildindex** token image is selected, an attempt will be made to retrieve pictures from their database that show the selected theme.

2. The Basics of Searching: using words to find (groups of) concepts

The idea of a systematic classification is simple: by arranging related subjects according to a carefully constructed scheme, we create groups of subjects in a helpful order. Precisely because it is carefully constructed, however, such a scheme is not self-evident. It is hardly efficient, to put it mildly, to just browse our way down from the most general categories in search of a particular subject or a group of concepts. We need

keywords to guide us and to help us locate both individual concepts and groups of concepts that we might want to use as descriptors for the objects we are cataloguing.

An example of a simple keyword search is shown here on the right. It demonstrates that with the help of the word **praying** we locate concepts in the Iconclass schedules. This seems straightforward enough, but you will notice that the word "praying" is linked to quite a high number of subjects. You will also notice that the browser suggests other words that might be used in alternative searches, such as the (underlined words) *adoration*, *invoking* and *worshipping*.

Outline

praying

Found 285 notations for query: praying. See also: [adoration](#) · [communicati](#)
[invoking](#) · [worshipping](#) ·

Page 1 of 15. [next](#) [Sort by Notation](#)

11Q21 one person praying

25F711(PRAYING-MANTIS) insects: praying-mantis

12A38 prayer, praying ~ Jewish religion

71H312 Saul praying to God

71P531 Daniel praying

71U4272 Judith prays before killing Holofernes

71W652 Job prays for his friends

73C91 Christ praying (in general), e.g.: in the wilderness

This richness is not due to the fact that Iconclass linguistically differentiates between meanings of the word "praying". It is simply because Iconclass contains concepts that may be represented in various ways, like "public prayer" and "private prayer", but also concepts we can use to describe the visualization of prayer, like "hands folded"; and of course, many scenes of prayer from the bible, classical history and classical mythology. So, there is a fundamental difference between the *word* we use as a search term and the various *concepts* or *groups of concepts* that are linked to that word. This difference can be summarized in one word: **context**. Of course, the word "praying" has its own semantic richness, but that will never match the historical, thematic and narrative contexts which the Iconclass browser unfolds for us.

Determining a context

When we do a keyword search, the Iconclass browser presents us with a list of themes, each of which is a *context* for our search word. Deciding which Iconclass concept to use as a descriptor therefore boils down to deciding which context is most appropriate for the object or document we are indexing. It is easy to check the context for each of the concepts we retrieve with a keyword. One click suffices to inform us that **one person praying**, the first theme in the list, is a narrower term for **(private) prayer**, as is illustrated below.

1 Religion and Magic	
11 Christian religion	
11Q the worship of God	
11Q2 (private) prayer; 'Oratione', 'Preghiere', 'Preghiere a Dio' (Ripa)	11Q21(+0) (+ variant)
11Q21 one person praying	11Q21(+1) (+ Holy Trinity)
Christian religion · God · Oratione · Preghiere · Ripa	11Q21(+2) (+ Mary)
· cult · praying · religion · supernatural	11Q21(+3) (+ angel(s))
	11Q21(+4) (+ devil(s))
2 Nature	11Q21(+5) (+ donor(s), supplicant(s), whether or not with saint(s))
3 Human Being, Man in General	11Q211 daily (vocal) prayer by one person

It would be quite cumbersome to check the context of every concept in our list of results in this manner. The browser therefore allows us to limit the recall by adding more search terms. As search terms we can use **both words** and Iconclass **notations**. In the next section we shall give some examples of how this works.

Playing with words and notations



When you are actually indexing a collection, you will not simply have the word "praying" in mind. Instead you will have some kind of document in front of you, probably a picture, showing an act of prayer in some form or other. Here is a random example from *RKDImages*. Such a sample picture already appears in the image viewer before we have chosen to check any of the themes the Iconclass browser lists as a result of our simple query for the word "praying".

This seems contradictory: we pull pictures from the database *before* we know which Iconclass concept the user wants to explore... The procedure we use to do this is a little more complex than you need to know right now. What is important to understand is that when you have searched with the word "praying", we do not yet know

which Iconclass concept you will select for further exploration, but we do know *which of the Iconclass concepts*, for which "praying" is a keyword, *was actually used for RKDImages*. From all of those a selection is presented in the image viewer. So, in the first instance there is no direct link between the pictures you see and the list of concepts. You should see them as friendly hints that may help you think of particular additional search terms with which you can manipulate the list of results.

The example seems straightforward enough, especially since the first concept in the list of results - "**11Q21 one person praying**" - already seems an adequate match for our picture. Even so, it is useful to play around with additional words and notations to illustrate the options we have when searching.

Maybe not the most obvious thing to do, but very instructive, is to combine the word "praying" with the notations in the chain of concepts that are in fact the broader terms of "one person praying".

This is indeed as easy as it sounds. You may simply type **praying 11Q21** to limit the search with the word "praying" to the context that is "encoded" with **11Q21**.

The default relation between search words is the Boolean **AND**, which means that if you do not specify another type of relation (using **OR** or **NOT**) the browser will assume you mean to search for **praying AND 11Q21**.

1 Religion and Magic
11 Christian religion
11Q the worship of God
11Q2 (private) prayer; 'Oratione', 'Preghiere',
Dio' (Ripa)
11Q21 one person praying
Christian religion · God · Oratione · Preghiere · Ri

Found 90 notations for query: praying 11Q21.
Page 1 of 5. [next](#) [Sort by Notation](#)
11Q21 one person praying
11Q211 daily (vocal) prayer by one person
11Q2111 prayer at table, saying grace
11Q2112 prayer at going to bed, or at getting
11Q212 mental prayer, meditation; 'Meditati
11Q2121 meditation over skull and/or crucifi
11Q21(+0) one person praying (+ variant)

That the result is still a list of concepts may initially surprise you. However, when you look a little closer at this illustration, it will be easy to understand what happens. By adding the notation 11Q21 to the query we do not retrieve precisely that one concept but also its "children", i.e. any concept with a notation that *starts* with 11Q21. **Prayer at table, saying grace**, for example, is one of those children. According to the arrangement of Iconclass this is a specific instance of **one person praying**. Its notation *11Q2111* is an extension of 11Q21

By simply taking digits off at the end of a notation, the

context you are retrieving is made more general. In fact, the length of the notation with which you indicate the context for your word search may be reduced to a single digit, but if we stick to **11**, the list starts as shown in the screenshot on the right. Instead of combining "praying" with a *notation*, we could also combine it with *another word*. We could also ask for **praying AND christian religion** or **praying AND grace**. We strongly advice you not just to play around with using multiple words and words and notations, but to use actual examples of material you may want to index and imagine the kind of contextual keywords this may inspire you to search for.

Found 99 notations for query: praying 11.
Page 1 of 5. [next](#) [Sort by Notation](#)
11Q21 one person praying
11T6 purgatory, usually the souls praying o
11Q751 (public) prayer
11Q7512 saying the rosary
11Q7513 litany
11H(BAVO)33 St. Bavo as a recluse in a holle
11HH(JOAN OF ARC)37 St. Joan of Arc praying
11V87 praying for the living and the dead ~

The implications of hierarchy

It is very useful to realise what it means for your searches that Iconclass is an **hierarchical system**. We just gave a first indication of those consequences when we pointed out that adding a notation to a search always implies that all "children" of the concept expressed by that notation are included in the list of results.

You will immediately grasp the meaning of this idea if you look at our next illustration. Here we exclude all notations that start with **11** from the results for "praying". This can be done by just adding the word **NOT** between the parts of the search phrase, for example: **praying NOT 11**. You can also simply put a hyphen (minus sign) immediately in front of the notation. Thus: **praying -11**.

Found 186 notations for query: praying -11.
Page 1 of 10. [next](#) [Sort by Notation](#)
25F711(PRAYING-MANTIS) insects: praying-mantis
12A38 prayer, praying ~ Jewish religion
71H312 Saul praying to God
71P531 Daniel praying
71U4272 Judith prays before killing Holofernes
71W652 Job prays for his friends
73C91 Christ praying (in general), e.g.: in the wilde
73F2512 Andrew praying for the old sinner Nicholas

Perhaps less evident is the fact that words too have the power of the hierarchy. You can test this for yourself by asking for **praying bible** which of course means **praying AND bible**. Since Iconclass contains a main category for the biblical narrative - **7 Bible**, which is found through the keyword "bible", this search would be almost completely limited to results from this category.

Found 135 notations for query: praying bible.
Page 1 of 7. [next](#) [Sort by Notation](#)

71H312 Saul praying to God
71P531 Daniel praying
71U4272 Judith prays before killing Holofernes
71W652 Job prays for his friends
73C91 Christ praying (in general), e.g.: in the
73F2512 Andrew praying for the old sinner Nicodemus
71O64 Habakkuk's prayer (Habakkuk 3)
71V21 Jonah's prayer
73A234 prayer of Anna
73C9 Christ and prayer
73C92 Christ's conditions for prayer

Found 150 notations for query: praying NOT bible.
Page 1 of 8. [next](#) [Sort by Notation](#)

11Q21 one person praying
25F711(PRAYING-MANTIS) insects: praying-mantis
12A38 prayer, praying ~ Jewish religion
25FF711(PRAYING-MANTIS) insects: praying-mantis
'Mostri' (Ripa)
11T6 purgatory, usually the souls praying or suffering
11Q751 (public) prayer
11Q7512 saying the rosary
11Q7513 litany
11H(BAVO)33 St. Bavo as a recluse in a hollow
11HH(JOAN OF ARC)37 St. Joan of Arc praying

Compare these screenshots. The first one illustrates the query for **praying AND bible**; the second one illustrates a query that excludes biblical themes. Notice that in the illustration on the left all notations start with 7, while these are all absent in the second. This already suggests that the same selection would have been made if we had used the single digit 7 instead of the word **bible**. Although the effect of adding a word or a notation may be the same in some cases, they are not completely equivalent, which is easy to check: simply ask for **bible NOT 7**, and then for **7 NOT bible**. With the first search you will find a theme like this one:

11H(AUGUSTINE)31 St. Augustine meditating under a fig-tree: he hears a voice 'tolle, lege'; usually a book (the Bible) beside him

where "bible" does not refer to the abstract concept at the top of a branch of the classification, but to a specific, physical item: a book which happens to be a bible.

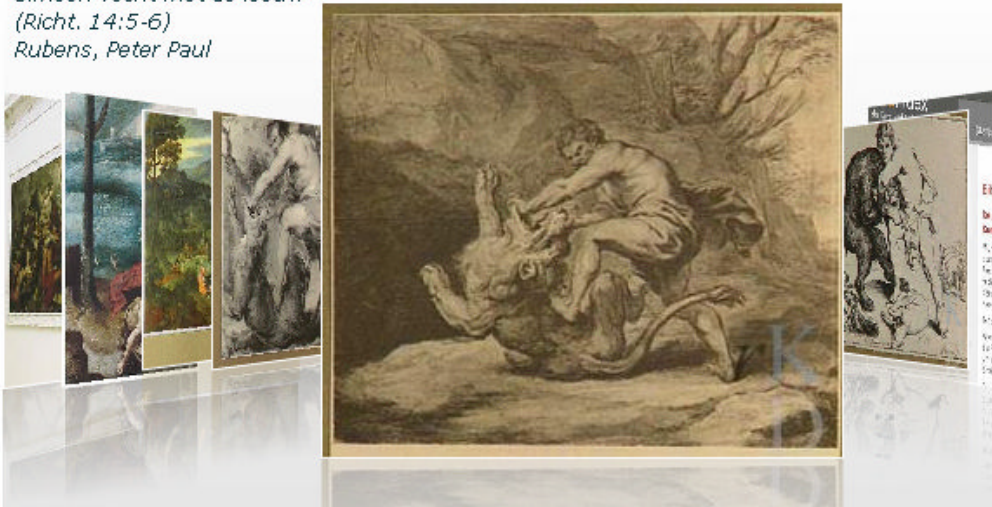
The second search will not produce a result from the Iconclass system, because the keyword "bible" is valid for all concepts from category 7, so the question is contradictory in itself.

Using brackets and OR

When exploring the possibilities of the new browser you will soon see that it is easy to interact with the results of your searches. By adding words or notations from the results list you can usually find what you are looking for in an efficient way.

We have already shown examples of searches that use more than one keyword, or a combination of keywords and notations. So far,

*Simson vecht met de leeuw
(Richt. 14:5-6)
Rubens, Peter Paul*



Found 51 notations for query: killing lion (samson OR hercules OR david).
Page 1 of 3. [next](#) [Sort by Notation](#)

71F325 Samson kills the lion with his bare hands
94L431 Hercules kills the lion of Cithaeron

however, we have only shown those keywords and notations in two kinds of relationships to one another: the Boolean AND and NOT relationships. As the illustration demonstrates, it is also possible to use the Boolean OR condition, and, on top of that, to use brackets around parts of your query, so it will not surprise you that:

killing lion (samson OR hercules OR david)

will translate into a search for the words "killing" and "lion" in combination with either (the word!) Samson, Hercules or David.

Copy concepts to your own application using the Clipboard

If you are describing or indexing a collection with the help Iconclass, you will want to copy concepts that fit your picture or other document to your own database, or whatever computer application you are using.

You may have noticed in the Options menu that you can choose to "Copy only notations to the clipboard". This option works in conjunction with the feature illustrated below, where - in the bottom left corner - you see a small icon with the text **copy to clipboard**. This text will appear when your mouse cursor hovers over the icon.

.... Copy only notations to clipboard: ☐


71F32 Samson's journey to Timna(t)h (Judges 14:1-9)

71F325 Samson kills the lion with his bare hands
Israelites · Judges · Judges 14 · Old Testament · Samson ·
Timnath · bible · choking · judge · killing (animal) · lion

See also:

71H1431 David kills a lion and a bear (or tells Saul about it)

94L321 (1) Hercules chokes the Nemean lion with his arms

 copy to clipboard

If you click on the icon, and depending on the preference you have saved in the Options menu, either the current notation or the current notation and its textual definition (or "correlate") will be copied to the clipboard of your computer, ready to be "pasted" in another computer application. In this way you can quickly carry over concepts from the Iconclass system to your own database or text.