

First "Organized" Bible-work in 19th Century Jerusalem (1816-1831)

Part I: Is the Year 1816 the Beginning of Organized Bible Work in Israel?

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In this article I intend to deal with the question of the beginning of organized Bible work in Israel. However, a lot depends on the definitions that are used and on the questions that are asked.

Can it, for example, be considered a "beginning" if some people in a given place receive a box of Bibles from abroad? Or if an itinerant missionary distributes and sells Bibles a few days or weeks in one place and then leaves without having set up some permanent contacts? Or can we only speak of "organized work" if a depot has been established? If the answer is yes, then what about the consul who was often in charge of such a depot but was not active himself? Furthermore, the fact that a depot is established does not mean that a Bible Society has been founded. And consistent with this, what were the plans for the establishment of a Jerusalem Bible Society in the period we are going to deal with? How do people coming from abroad and local people interact in an "organized work?" Even if a "beginning" can be dated historically, might the work come to an end (even very soon) so that a "new beginning" would have to be made?

These and similar questions need to be asked if we want to get a better picture of the Bible work in 19th century Palestine. In the next issues of *Mishkan* I shall attempt to give some glimpses of this, focusing on the Bible work in *Jerusalem* in the period 1816–1831. Why 1831? Because in that year the "Bible Room" in Jerusalem was closed down!

In another article in this issue of *Mishkan* Kelvin Crombie has given a historical cross section of the Bible work from its beginning until 1948.

The year I suggest for the beginning of organised Bible-work in Jerusalem will appear in part II in a later article. However, in order to understand the complex of problems presented in this article it should be mentioned that the missionary Christoph Burckhardt paid a short visit to Jerusalem in May 1818 (at Whitsun and no more than 10 days) when he distributed and sold Bibles. James Connor visited Jerusalem in the spring of 1820 (at Easter and upwards of six weeks). Apart from distributing and selling Bibles Connor also organized a Bible work in Jerusalem.

The Problematic Year “1816”

In this article I am going to focus on the year 1816, which means that I shall be complicating the time-honored opinion that 1816 should be the year of the “Beginning of organized work” in Jerusalem. It is my hope that I may substantiate that this assumption is mistaken. This means that I am exposing myself to (subsequent) criticism.

My *first* point is an *argumentum e silentio*. There are so many sources that it is easy to overlook something. Should someone succeed in localizing the source that we are looking for, much will have been achieved.

Secondly I am going to take on the source upon which the time-honored opinion is based. Is it reliable?

Henry Lindsay is, as we shall see below, the person who was mentioned. It has been assumed that he visited Jerusalem in 1816, which means that he would be the person who constitutes the “Beginning of organized work” there. The *question* is if it is possible to find reliable historical sources that can substantiate this. The *problem* is, in my view, that advocates for “1816” and “Lindsay” have uncritically used some *Historical Notes* from 1995.¹ The *challenge* is to find out how historical these *Historical Notes* really are.

The assertion: “The Bible Society in Israel since 1816”

On the front page of *Word from Zion*, the newsletter which is published by The Bible Society in Israel, it says, “The Bible Society in Israel since 1816,” and on its website, “Beginning of organised work: 1816.” The last sentence appears under the heading “Bible Society Data.” Clicks on the websites for other Bible Societies in the world show that the United Bible Society (UBS) apparently has asked the various societies to fill in the space “Beginning of organized work” with a year. I assume that UBS has laid down some criteria for this – though I admit that I do not know this for sure. The observation that UBS societies in the Middle East use *different* criteria is a byproduct of this study.

The term “in Israel” used about the Bible Society in Israel is in itself problematic. It goes without saying that the Bible Society in Israel today can write “in Israel” – what else? Modern readers understand this as the *State of Israel* (1948). But which area are we talking about when we are dealing with the 19th century? The answer could be the Palestine of that time or *Eretz Israel*. But what does that mean? At the beginning of the 19th century, “Palestine” was the name of a vast area extending from the Lebanon Mountains to the Sinai desert.² If this is not kept in mind, there

1 *Bible Work in the Bible Lands – Historical Notes*, compiled by Kate Hobson, dated 5th September 1995, not published. Submitted to me August 2004 by Terje Hartberg. Subsequently referred to as *Historical Notes*.

2 Sherman Lieber states concerning “Palestine” at the end of the 18th and the beginning of the 19th century the following, among other things: “A geographically undefined area,

is a great danger that we may today draw some historically false conclusions concerning the Bible work in the Palestine and *Jerusalem* of that time.

Why is Lindsay not Mentioned if He Was in Jerusalem?

Plans of an "organized" Bible-work in Jerusalem existed *prior* to 1816. I presume (without documenting the statement here) that such plans may be traced in sources even before 1815. But it is certain that such plans are part of the "Instructions" William Jowett received from his employer, the Church Missionary Society (CMS), before he set out for Malta in 1815. Through these "Instructions" he was, as he paraphrased, requested to make an "enquiry on the spot, whether a Bible Society could not be formed at Jerusalem."³ As regards the time, Jowett could be the one who visited Jerusalem in 1816. This view can, however, be dismissed out of hand. Jowett's first visit to Jerusalem took place in 1823.

But what names *does* Jowett mention of people who visited Jerusalem before 1820–21? This is an interesting question. For *if* a source is found which unambiguously states that Lindsay was in Jerusalem in 1816, then it would seem that his contemporaries did not attach any real significance to it. A few examples will substantiate this.

Jowett made a journey from Malta December 10, 1818, and returned to Malta October 4, 1819. During this journey it was his intention to visit Syria and Jerusalem. The first plan failed. While in Alexandria Jowett "found himself obliged to give up the hope which he had cherished, of reaching Jerusalem by the time of Passover." Instead he goes to Cairo.

The second plan also fails. "At Cairo he resumed his intention of visiting Jerusalem; and set forward on the journey, on the 1st of June" [1819]. But in the desert the traveling companions were robbed; the trunk of one of his fellow travelers is stolen. It contained \$1000 besides clothes. Jowett and his fellow travelers return to Cairo, and the investigation into the case "occupied so much time, that Mr. Jowett was again obliged to defer his visit to the Holy City."⁴

Palestine lay between the Mediterranean Sea and the Jordan River, and extended from the Lebanon Mountain to the Sinai desert ... Palestine was split between the two administrative provinces of Damascus and Sidon. The province of Damascus consisted of a small part of the eastern-upper Galilee, the mountain range in central Palestine from Jenin south through Nablus and Jerusalem to just beyond Hebron. The Sidon province included the Galilee and the swampy maritime plain, from its capital in Acre south past Jaffa to Khan Yunis, bordering on the Sinai desert." Sherman Lieber, *Mystics and Missionaries – The Jews in Palestine 1799–1840* (Salt Lake City, University of Utah Press, 1992), 19.

3 William Jowett, *Christian Researches in Syria and the Holy Land* (London: 1825), 411. The book covers Jowett's researches in the period 1823–1824.

4 *Missionary Register* (CMS) 1820, 28; cf. also William Jowett, *Christian Researches in the Mediterranean* (London: second edition, 1822), 213. The book covers Jowett's researches in the period 1815–1820 and includes an Appendix (pp. 413–454) by James Connor about the latter's travels 1819–1820. I take this opportunity to thank Donald M. Vorp, Speer Library, Princeton Theological Seminary, for having sent me a copy of this book which is not readily accessible.



The fact that Jowett did not reach Jerusalem during his travels in the years 1815–1820 did not prevent him from giving his opinion about the situation in Jerusalem, which he does in the book *Christian Researches in the Mediterranean*. In the chapter “New Stations Suggested” he writes, among other things:

The Holy City should be ever kept in view: and, till it may be found expedient to establish a Station there, or in its immediate vicinity, visits, such as those of Mr. Burckhardt, Mr. Connor, and Mr. Parsons (the associate of Mr. Fisk, two Missionaries from the American Board of Missions), should be made to this ever-interesting spot ...⁵

Why does Jowett, who at that time was *the* expert on the history of the Protestant mission in the Levant, not mention Lindsay’s visit to Jerusalem? And similarly, in *The Missionary Herald* in 1819, which under the heading “Mediterranean” describes the situation there 1815–1819,⁶ Lindsay is not mentioned, but Burckhardt and Connor are.

In the five-volume work on BFBS history (1904) Lindsay is mentioned. He is described as one who has assisted the society and who has, among other things, “obtained the Armenian Patriarch’s approval of the circulation of the Scriptures...” Lindsay’s journey to the Seven Apocalyptic Churches in Asia Minor in 1816 is mentioned (perhaps it was 1815; see note 12 below).⁷ But why is there no mention of Lindsay’s journey to Jerusalem?

I admit that these are *argumenta e silentio*, from which nothing can be deduced with historical certainty. So far nothing has been substantiated and everything is still open. And yet, the suspicion remains that Lindsay did *not* visit Jerusalem in 1816.

Henry Lindsay in the Years 1815–1816

From 1815 to 1816 Henry Lindsay is Chaplain to the Embassy at Constantinople,⁸ and consequently not “employed” by the British and Foreign Bible Society (BFBS), but he works for the Bible cause and conducts negotiations on behalf of BFBS. In 1815 it is announced that Lindsay has obtained an official “Declaration from the Oecumenical Patriarch of the Greek Church, in favor of the accuracy of the Modern Greek Testament, printed by this Society, and authorizing the free sale and perusal of it.”⁹

5 Jowett 1822, 367.

6 *Missionary Herald*, 1819, pp. 127–129. (American Board of Commissioners for Foreign Missions.)

7 William Canton, *History of the British and Foreign Bible Society* (London: John Murray, vol. I, 1904), 140–141.

8 Canton 1904, vol. I, 140; thus also in the two letters from Lindsay which are referred to below. When exactly Lindsay began and ended his ministry as chaplain in Constantinople is in this connection of minor importance.

9 BFBS *Eleventh Report*, 1815, p. 29.

Two letters from Lindsay from the beginning of 1815 and the beginning of 1816 respectively, published in BFBS Reports, may be relevant.

(1) In a letter dated Constantinople, January 25, 1815, Lindsay mentions an interview he has had with some

Greek Priests of Syria, by desire of the Patriarch of Jerusalem, who is at present at Constantinople ... with a view to procure some copies of the Arabic Bible, printed by the Society ... The Priests informed me, that such is the want of the Bible in Arabic, throughout Syria, that only a few old copies are to be found, and these seldom entire: they therefore begged me to request from the Society a speedy supply; as they are confident the sale of them would be very rapid, were the price much more considerable than it is.¹⁰

When one reads the quotation above, it is necessary to be very careful. There is no explicit mention of sending Bibles to *Jerusalem*. Secondly, the Patriarch of *Jerusalem* had *not* come from Jerusalem to Constantinople. The Greek Patriarch of Jerusalem *resides* at that time in Constantinople – even if Lindsay’s words “who is at present at Constantinople” is open to a different understanding. In James Connor’s words, “The Patriarch of Jerusalem always resides in Constantinople.”¹¹ If this is not kept in view, one misunderstands the above passage, as far as I can see.

Whether or not the inquiry from the “Greek Priests of Syria” was honored, I dare not say. *If* it were, it would be an argument for 1815 as the “Beginning of organized work” in Syria. It is here worth noting that the Syrian Bible Society on its website writes 1820 in the space “Beginning of organized work” (as does the Bible Society in Lebanon). Further, there is positive evidence that Christoph Burckhardt was in the region already in 1818 and distributed and sold Bibles, as he had also done previously in Jerusalem during the same journey.

(2) In a letter dated Constantinople, January 10, 1816, Lindsay writes about “a short excursion into Asia Minor,” where he distributed “at least,

10 BFBS *Eleventh Report*, 1815, p.164.

11 James Connor in Jowett 1822: 431. The same statement is found in BFBS *Seventeenth Report*, 1821, p. 60. Cf. Saul P. Colb: “After the death of Athanas, the Brotherhood elected Cyril II (1845–1872), who was the first Greek Patriarch to establish his residence in Jerusalem.” In *Christianity in the Holy Land* (Tel Aviv: Am Hasefer, 1969), 78. and also: “Permanent residence in Jerusalem by the Greek Orthodox Patriarch was not reestablished until 1845,” cf. Yishai Eldar: “The Christian Communities of Israel”, in *Focus on Israel – The Christian Communities of Israel*, 30 March 2003, published by Israel Ministry of Foreign Affairs.



one copy of the unadulterated word of God, at each of the seven Asiatic Churches of the Apocalypse."¹²

From this description it appears clearly that in 1815–1816 Lindsay lives in Constantinople, and *visits* Smyrna. Since Lindsay takes time to give an account of a short trip to the towns of the seven churches in the Apocalypse, and BFBS devotes three pages to inform its readers of this, it seems strange that nothing is published about Lindsay's visit to Jerusalem *if* he had been there. So the suspicion that Lindsay did not go to Jerusalem in 1816 has been reinforced.

It's time to consider the modern source which advocates of 1816 refer to as sole documentation for the "Beginning of organized work" in Israel.

Source Criticism of Bible Work in the Bible Lands

According to a mail correspondence in August 2004 with the United Bible Society, the year 1816 first appears in a report from the UBS from 1976¹³ – and the name Henry Lindsay appears in the above-mentioned *Historical Notes* from 1995 (cf. note 1 above). It might be worthwhile to make a source critical analysis of *Historical Notes* – and try to establish if they are reliable in matters that do *not* concern the year 1816 and Lindsay. If they are, this could be an argument for the validity of 1816. I shall restrict myself to an analysis of the lines with which these *Historical Notes* are introduced. (The numbers in the square brackets are mine and refer to my subsequent comments.)

The Annual Reports of the British and Foreign Bible Society first mention the Bible Lands in 1816, [1] when Mr Henry Lindsay, based at Smyrna [2] in the then Ottoman Empire, was sent by his superior, Mr Pinkerton, [3] to visit Jerusalem. [4] Mr Pinkerton subsequently [5] meets the Patriarch of Jerusalem in Constantinople, which appears to have been a fruitful encounter. The Patriarch was glad to receive Scriptures to distribute to the pilgrims who visited the Holy City: he estimated that an average of 2,000 visitors from the Greek communion visited the city annually. A further attempt to arrange a meeting with the Syrian Archbishop of Jerusalem is unsuccessful, [6] but Mr Connor, the BFBS agent [7] at Constantinople, visits Damascus and Jerusalem [8] with a stock of Scriptures in 1819. [9] In 1820 work begins in earnest with the establishment of the Levant Agency under Mr Leeves. [10] The Bible Lands come under the Smyrna sub- agency, where Mr Benjamin Barker has replaced Mr Lindsay. [11]

12 BFBS *Twelfth Report*, 1816, pp. 132–135. Canton 1904, vol. I, 140–141 dates this journey to 1816, but it may be an inaccuracy since the letter that mentions this matter is dated 1816. Others have 1815 as the date, e.g. Isaac Bird, (although he calls Henry Lindsay "David",) *Bible Work in Bible Lands* (Philadelphia, Presbyterian Board of Publication, 1872), 22.

13 "World Annual Report 1976", pp. 114–115. In *Bulletin, United Bible Societies*, Number 106/107 - First/Second Quarter 1977. Published by the UBS, Stuttgart, Germany.

Our challenge is to verify the sources (if possible) on which these *Historical Notes* might be based. But it can already now be revealed that what comes after the word “subsequently” can be dated to circumstances in or after the year 1819!

Ad 1. As noted above, Henry Lindsay mentions, in a letter of January 25, 1815, negotiations with “Greek Priests of Syria” who ask for Bibles. Since Syria in the consciousness of missionaries at that time is included in the term “Bible Lands,”¹⁴ it is not correct to maintain that BFBS Reports first mention “the Bible Lands in 1816.”

Ad 2. In 1816 Lindsay was not “based at Smyrna”; he was based at Constantinople, which has been documented above.

Ad 3. Readers are given the erroneous impression that Robert Pinkerton *lives* in Constantinople; however, he is there on a visit as BFBS’ representative; it is therefore imprecise and misleading to call Pinkerton Lindsay’s “superior.” In the following paragraph further light will be thrown on the relationship between Lindsay and Pinkerton.

Ad 4. My point of departure was that the author of the *Historical Notes* must have had one source that links Lindsay with Pinkerton. As my investigation has progressed, my doubts about this have increased.

Ad 5. When was “subsequently” for Pinkerton’s interview with the Patriarch of Jerusalem (who still resides in Constantinople)? On the assumption that Pinkerton *lived* in Constantinople, it was theoretically possible for Pinkerton to have had several interviews with the Patriarch of Jerusalem. But this assumption is wrong, for the source on which the *Historical Notes* are based can be positively identified.

First: The BFBS Committee inform in 1820 the following: “... and it is with much pleasure your Committee learn, that the Patriarch of Jerusalem (with whom Dr. Pinkerton had an interesting interview at Constantinople,) has received the 1000 Testaments in Modern Greek, 500 in Ancient and Modern, and 500 Arabic Psalters, which the Patriarch proposes to distribute among the pilgrims who annually visit the Holy Sepulchre.”¹⁵

Second: The information from BFBS’s Committee is based on a letter from Pinkerton, dated Constantinople, October 20, 1819, in which he mentions his negotiations with the Patriarch of Jerusalem in Constantinople.¹⁶ It is beyond doubt that the *Historical Notes* base their information on this. The mention of “2000 visitors” both in Pinkerton’s letter and in the *Historical Notes* makes this certain.

Ad 6. The information of an attempt to set up a meeting (which never took place) with “the Syrian Archbishop of Jerusalem” is not in itself particularly relevant, when we consider the other things Pinkerton refers to in his letters. But the source of this can also be verified. It is a letter

14 Cf. the title of Isaac Bird’s book mentioned in note 12.

15 BFBS *Sixteenth Report*, 1820, pp. lxix-lxx.

16 BFBS *Sixteenth Report*, 1820, pp. 20–22.



from Pinkerton, dated October 22, 1819, which opens with the following words: "I AM happy to inform you that although I was not able during my stay at Malta, to make arrangements for having the Syrian Archbishop of Jerusalem visited at Mount Lebanon, according to your request, yet this important point is likely to be attained from another quarter." This letter is published in the BFBS Report immediately after the letter mentioned in Ad 5.¹⁷ What is Pinkerton alluding to? He is explicitly referring to *James Connor* as the one who can make this contact (see next paragraph).

Ad 7. Even though Connor did work for BFBS's *cause*, he was not a "BFBS agent in Constantinople." In Jowett's words, "The residence, at Constantinople, of the Rev. Henry Leeves on the part of the British and Foreign Bible Society, and of the Rev. James Connor on that of the Church Missionary Society, sufficiently prove the advantage with which this Station may be resumed, whenever circumstances shall be more favourable."¹⁸ Oddly enough a few travel letters from Connor are published anonymously in a BFBS Report under the heading: "From a Clergyman travelling in Syria."¹⁹

Ad 8. Connor had *plans* to visit Damascus *before* Jerusalem, but due to his late arrival in Beirut he changes his plans and visits Damascus *after* Jerusalem in order to be there during Passover.²⁰

Ad 9. Connor did visit Jerusalem, not in 1819, but in May 1820. He left Constantinople October 31, 1819.²¹

Ad 10. Henry Leeves was appointed in 1820, but did not arrive in Constantinople till January 9, 1821.²²

Ad 11. Benjamin Barker cannot have replaced Lindsay in Smyrna, as Lindsay did not work there, which has been documented above. The Smyrna Bible Society was founded in 1818 during Jowett's visit there.²³ The leadership was entrusted to, among others, the British chaplain in Smyrna, Williamson, who (presumably) died in 1820.²⁴ Strictly speaking it was not a replacement, since Williamson was not employed by BFBS, while Barker was.

We all make mistakes – this article is no exception. But in these *Historical Notes* there are so many errors that one's skepticism about the "1816" information and Lindsay's alleged visit to Jerusalem is strengthened. But perhaps we are close to solving the mystery.

17 BFBS *Sixteenth Report*, 1820, p. 22.

18 Jowett 1822, 365.

19 BFBS *Seventeenth Report*, 1821, p. 60; p. 64.

20 Connor in Jowett 1822, 420.

21 Connor in Jowett 1822, 413.

22 BFBS *Seventeenth Report*, 1821, p. lv.

23 Canton 1904, vol. II, 2. On Jowett's two visits to Smyrna, see Jowett 1822, 53–58, where the British Chaplain, Rev. Charles Williamson, is mentioned.

24 Williamson (in Smyrna) probably dies in 1820, shortly before the arrival of Leeves in Constantinople; cf. Canton 1904, vol. II, 5. See also BFBS *Seventeenth Report* 1821, p. lv.

Did Lindsay and Pinkerton Meet in 1816?

It has been documented above that in 1816 Lindsay was in Constantinople. What was Pinkerton doing and where was he? Did the two meet in 1816? Can anything be said with any degree of certainty? I think so.

1) In a large number of letters published in a BFBS Report, Pinkerton relates – as it is said in the heading “On his late Tour in Russia, Poland, and Germany.”²⁵ From the letters it appears that he left St. Petersburg March 22, 1816, and in a letter dated St. Petersburg, December 2, 1816, he informs the readers about his “safe return.”²⁶ This “Tour” did *not* include a visit to Smyrna nor to Constantinople. From this we may conclude with almost complete certainty that Pinkerton did not meet Lindsay in Constantinople in 1816, as maintained in *Historical Notes*. If he had done so, he would have mentioned it.

2) Pinkerton does make a journey to Constantinople, but in 1819.²⁷ The point of departure was London. In the first travel letter, dated March 10, 1819, and sent from Paris, he mentions some difficulties in connection with “the voyage between Dover and Calais on the 23rd ult.” (i.e. February 23, 1819); In a letter of January 14, 1820, he relates that he “happily reached my home yesterday.”²⁸

From Constantinople Pinkerton sends a number of letters to BFBS’ Committee. His letter of October 22, 1819 (referred to under Ad 6 above) is printed in its entirety below, as it was published in a BFBS Report. This is the closest I can come to explaining the puzzling words in *Historical Notes*. (The italics are mine.)

I AM happy to inform you that although I was not able during my stay at Malta, to make arrangements for having the Syrian Archbishop of Jerusalem visited at Mount Lebanon, according to your request, yet this important point is likely to be attained from another quarter. Though deprived of the pleasure of making the personal acquaintance of the Rev. Mr. Jowett, I have still had the good fortune to fall in with his fellow-labourer, the Rev. *Mr. Connor*, who, during my residence in this place, has shewn me many kind services. He was contemplating a tour among the Greek islands during the winter months, but *my suggestions have led him to adopt a more extensive sphere of operations*; and he is now in complete readiness to sail for Smyrna with the first vessel. *From Smyrna* he will proceed to Rhodos, Candia, and Cyprus; then visit the coast of Caramania; and proceed by way of Tarsus, Antioch, Aleppo, Damascus, and Mount Lebanon, to *Jerusalem*.

25 BFBS *Thirteenth Report*, 1817, pp. 57–118.

26 BFBS *Thirteenth Report*, 1817, p. 57; p.118.

27 BFBS *Sixteenth Report*, 1820, pp. 1–42.

28 BFBS *Sixteenth Report*, 1820, p. 1; p. 40.



He took along with him 384 ancient and modern Greek Testaments, and a number of Bibles and Testaments in different languages. He will increase his stock at Smyrna, and by further supplies from the Malta Depôt, to be sent to difference places in Syria, to wait his arrival. I trust much good will come of this journey: it is chiefly in parts which have not yet been visited.

May the God of Israel go with him, and make his way and his work to prosper!²⁹

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I wonder if this has solved the puzzle of "1816?" The information in *Historical Notes* that Pinkerton played an active role in sending a person to Jerusalem is correct. However, this person was *not* Henry Lindsay, but James Connor. And the journey in question did *not* take place in 1816. Connor left Constantinople on October 31, 1819, and arrived in Jerusalem on March 6, 1820.³⁰

Still it is a mystery how Lindsay's name could crop up in *Historical Notes*.

Concluding Remarks

By way of introduction I wrote that in this article I wanted to complicate the year 1816. In my analysis I worked with the hypothesis that there were *plans* to send Lindsay to Jerusalem, plans which never were realized. By way of conclusion I have to say that I doubt that there ever were such plans. Lindsay did *not* visit Jerusalem in 1816.

In order to preserve the year 1816 as the year of the "Beginning of organised work" ... "in Israel" it is not enough to refer to the *Historical Notes* from 1995. Historically speaking they are inadequate. It is necessary to have other sources.

Whether or not the Bible Society in Israel should replace the year 1816 with 1818 or 1820 under the heading "Beginning of organised work" is a question that I will discuss in Part II in a later article in this series.

²⁹ BFBS *Sixteenth Report*, 1820, p. 22.

³⁰ Connor in Jowett 1822, 413; 427