



# First "Organized" Bible Work in 19<sup>th</sup> Century Jerusalem [1816-1831]

**Part III: James Connor in Jerusalem, 1820**

By Kai Kjær-Hansen

In the second article in this series it was shown that Christoph Burckhardt was the first Protestant Bible-man to visit Jerusalem, in May 1818, and distribute Scriptures there. In his own day there were different opinions of how successful the visit was. One thing is certain: Burckhardt did not succeed in "organizing" a Bible work in Jerusalem. When he left Jerusalem less than ten days later, a Bible Society had not been set up, as he and others had hoped. Nor had a Bible depot been established, and no arrangements had been made with local church leaders to further the Bible cause in the city.<sup>1</sup>

So we can leave Christoph Burckhardt out of our discussion of an organized Bible work in Jerusalem, but as will be shown in this article, James Connor did manage to organize a Bible work during his visit to Jerusalem in the spring of 1820. In this context organized work is not synonymous with the establishment of an actual Bible Society in Jerusalem.

Apart from describing Connor's work in Jerusalem, this article will attempt to explain why James Connor managed to do what Christoph Burckhardt failed to do. This means that we cannot immediately accompany Connor to Jerusalem.

## **James Connor: Malta – Naples – Constantinople**

James Connor, a graduate of Oxford,<sup>2</sup> had been appointed by the Church Missionary Society (CMS) to assist William Jowett in the latter's research of matters in the Levant that might be relevant for the Protestant missionary work. With a common base in Malta, they were to undertake

<sup>1</sup> See *Mishkan*, no. 42 (2005), 57-67. Part I is to be found *Mishkan*, no. 41 (2004), 21-30.

<sup>2</sup> Cf. A.L. Tibawi, *American Interests in Syria 1800-1901* (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1966), 19. Tibawi writes, inaccurately, that Connor "From the beginning of 1819 ... had been touring the Near East..." Connor initiated that tour on October 31, 1819. Peter K. Kawerau, *Amerika und die Orientalischen Kirchen* (Berlin: Walter de Gruyter & Co., 1958), 173, states, inaccurately, that Connor came to Malta in November 1817 and that Connor's missionary journey took place in the years 1818-1821, which gives a wrong impression of the length of the journey, which was "only" about twelve months.

joint journeys. This did not happen, however. Connor's failing health put an end to these plans.

Connor came from Marseilles to Malta on January 4, 1818; Christoph Burckhardt arrived the next day.<sup>3</sup> Their simultaneous arrival in Malta did not stem from an overall plan, and at that time no one could know which of them would first reach Jerusalem. Nor was there any talk of cooperation between the two of them.

After less than two weeks in Malta Burckhardt set out on his Bible Mission tour, setting sail from Malta on January 17, 1818. Connor fell ill shortly after his arrival at Malta, and a time of convalescence on the small island of Goza off Malta did not help. The illness was aggravated, and the doctor advised him to go to Sicily or Naples "without delay." He left Malta on March 3, 1818.<sup>4</sup> Connor's Bible Mission in the Levant had to be postponed indefinitely.

Jowett was also ill in the beginning of 1818. Having recovered his health he undertook a short journey, which took him to e.g. Smyrna and Athens. Back in Malta he realized, however, that he would need to plan his trips without considering Connor. Jowett writes, in a letter dated July 17, 1818, "I cannot tell what part in it, or in any plan, Mr. Connor could take. I feel, much as it is a matter of concern to me, obliged to think and act independently of him, in a great degree."<sup>5</sup> This meant that Connor was somehow sidelined.

In a letter from Naples dated June 30, 1818, however, Connor writes that he is getting better. He has spent the time on Arabic and Hebrew studies, and he looks forward to returning to Malta – and adds, "I hope in the beginning of August to be ready for Egypt. I long to be at my work."<sup>6</sup> But he is not back in Malta until October 30, 1818.<sup>7</sup> Due to his fragile health it is decided that he should be stationed in Constantinople, to which city he comes on January 25, 1819; for the sake of his health he settles in Therapia, 12 miles from Constantinople. Jowett leaves for Egypt on December 10, 1818, without Connor. In May 1819 Connor goes to Smyrna in the hope of meeting Jowett, but Jowett does not show up in Smyrna at that time. As in Naples, Connor busies himself in Constantinople with language studies – "Arabic and Persian, as a necessary introduction to Turkish" – and he makes himself "acquainted with the Clergy and other Members of the Greek and Armenian Churches." But he feels very much alone in Therapia:

Here, indeed, I am in a barren land. I stand much in need of a watchful spirit and a stronger faith. Often do I exclaim, 'Oh that I had a brother Missionary for a companion!' Here I know not one individ-

3 *Missionary Register* (1818), 296.

4 *Missionary Register* (1818), 297.

5 *Missionary Register* (1818), 390.

6 *Missionary Register* (1818), 298.

7 *Missionary Herald* (1819), 129.



ual, who is at all interested in my work, or with whom I could enter into religious converse.<sup>8</sup>

Not until the autumn of 1819 – more than eighteen months after his arrival in the Levant and more than a year after Burckhardt's death in Aleppo on 14 August, 1818 – is Connor ready to set out on his first real missionary journey. He plans a shorter tour to the Greek islands during the winter months. This plan is also shelved, due not to illness but to the fact that Robert Pinkerton has come to Constantinople towards the end of September 1819.

### **Pinkerton and Connor in Constantinople, Autumn 1819**

Robert Pinkerton is the reason why Connor changes his plans; one consequence of this is that Connor does actually make it to Jerusalem. This has already been documented and clarified in Part I of this series. But Pinkerton is an important key to the understanding of Connor's subsequent strategy and success in other respects as well.

*First*, when Pinkerton came to Constantinople he had already experienced success. As an agent for The British and Foreign Bible Society (BFBS) he had managed, on his journey from London back to his home in St. Petersburg, to establish the Ionian Bible Society at Corfu, Auxiliary Societies in Cephalonia and Zante, and the Athens Bible Society – all this in the short period between July 20 and August 20, 1819.<sup>9</sup> Pinkerton's success in the Greek islands made Connor's *planned* journey to the Greek islands superfluous.

*Secondly*, Pinkerton travels with *letters of introduction*. And those he did not already have, he would receive in the course of his journey.<sup>10</sup> These letters of introduction issued *by* influential people in that time, and intended to be presented *to* influential people, pave the way for Pinkerton so he can establish the necessary contacts with civil as well as ecclesiastical authorities wherever he goes.

*Thirdly*, Pinkerton is a man who is not slow to draw up *written contracts*. In this way he manages to involve the highest civil and ecclesiastical authorities in various places and make them commit themselves to the advancement of the Bible cause.

*Fourthly*, in Constantinople Pinkerton secures understanding and recognition of the cause of the Bible Society from the Greek Patriarch of Constantinople. And that to such a degree that Pinkerton, in his last letter from Constantinople, dated October 27, 1819, can write: "May we not

8 *Missionary Register* (1820), 28-29.

9 Cf. BFBS *Sixteenth Report* (1820), lxviii-lxix; 8-14.

10 In Malta, e.g., he receives recommendations from Prince Alexander Galitzin (St. Petersburg) "to the Russian Consuls in the Mediterranean, the Ambassador at Constantinople &c." Cf. BFBS *Sixteenth Report* (1820), 3-5.

now say, that the Greek Church has made the glorious cause of the Bible Society *her own cause?*"<sup>11</sup>

*Fifthly*, and not least, in Constantinople Pinkerton prepares Connor's visit in Jerusalem (and Syria) through his contact with the Greek Patriarch of Jerusalem, who at that time also resides in Constantinople.<sup>12</sup> Pinkerton's summary of his conversations with the Greek Patriarch of Jerusalem will be reported here in their entirety because they help explain why Connor was so well received in Jerusalem by the chief *agent* of the Greek Patriarch. Pinkerton writes:

Among other personages in this city [Constantinople] whose acquaintance I have made, and to whom I have endeavoured, by word and letter, to recommend our sacred and benevolent cause, is the Patriarch of Jerusalem. From this venerable dignitary of the oriental church I obtained information of an interesting kind, respecting the present state of his own patriarchate, and of the Christian inhabitants of Palestine. From the details which he gave me, I was led to make the following observation, That as he stated the number of pilgrims, who annually visit Jerusalem, belonging to the Greek communion, to be upwards of 2,000, and as these resort thither from every quarter of the East, an excellent opportunity was afforded for promoting a more general circulation of the written Gospel. I therefore suggested to the Patriarch how desirable it would be, and how beneficial to the best interests of his people, were he to give in charge to one of the most respectable of the Monks who attended at the Holy Sepulchre, a number of New Testaments, in different languages, for distribution among the motley multitudes of far-travelled pilgrims, who come to seek spiritual nourishment at that sacred place. This suggestion seemed to excite the most lively feelings in the venerable Polycarp, and he gave it a most cordial welcome. "This proposal," said he, "is in exact accordance with my own thoughts on the subject, and what I have wished to see realized." We therefore came to an immediate agreement, that this good work should commence with 1,000 copies of the modern Greek Testament, and 500 copies of the ancient and modern Greek Testament, and 500 copies of the Arabic Testament, and that, for the first year, this supply of the word of life should be bestowed by the British and Foreign Bible Society, upon the poor pilgrims assembled around *the place where the Lord lay*, without money and without price."<sup>13</sup>

It is uncertain if this shipment of Scriptures reached Jerusalem before Connor's arrival, but it is not very probable. Anyway, Connor does not men-

11 Cf. BFBS *Sixteenth Report* (1820), 26.

12 See *Mishkan*, no. 41 (2004), 25.

13 BFBS *Sixteenth Report* (1820), 21.



tion it. There is reliable evidence that they were sent to Constantinople.<sup>14</sup> However, it is very likely that information of this arrangement would have reached the patriarchate in Jerusalem *prior* to Connor's arrival.

### Connor's Tour Before His Visit to Jerusalem

On October 31, 1819, Pinkerton and Connor both leave Constantinople. "After a few miles they parted – Dr. Pinkerton making his way toward Odessa, and Mr. Connor setting forward for Smyrna."<sup>15</sup> This is the beginning of what was to become a missionary journey of almost twelve months.<sup>16</sup>

#### *The actual itinerary and purpose of Connor's tour*

The plan for Connor's "journey of investigation" was as follows: Via Smyrna to Candia on Crete, Rhodes, and Cyprus. Then along the Southern Shores of Caramania [the southern part of Asia Minor], by Sataliah and Anemur, to Tarsus – and thence to Antioch, Aleppo, Damascus, Mount Lebanon, and Jerusalem. "His ulterior steps would depend on circumstances."

The *task* which has been set for Connor was described in this way: "He was to take Introductory Letters from the highest Ecclesiastical Authorities at Constantinople. His object would be, To disperse the Scriptures – to open channels for the wider circulation – to distribute Tracts – and to investigate the state of those countries. He hoped that his visit to the Syrian Archbishop would tend to further his plans for the good of his people. His aim was to spend the Passover at Jerusalem."<sup>17</sup>

The actual itinerary *prior* to his visit to Jerusalem became this (Connor changed his plans because he wanted to be in Jerusalem at Easter): Crete, Rhodes, Cyprus [pp. 413-420]. He arrives at Beirut on February 13, 1820, and continues to Saide/Sidon, Sour/Tyre, Acre, Nazareth, Napolose/Nablus, and Jaffa – and then up to Jerusalem, arriving there on March 6, 1820 [pp. 420-427].

When Connor left Constantinople he took with him 384 ancient and modern Greek Testaments and an unspecified number of Bibles and Testaments in different languages.<sup>18</sup>

In Smyrna he supplies himself with more Scriptures through, as he puts it, "thinning" Mr. Williamson's depot there [p. 413]. The material at our

14 See *Mishkan*, no. 41 (2004), 27.

15 *Missionary Register* (1820), 30.

16 Connor's letters of travel were first published as extracts in *Missionary Register* (1820), 166-169; 261-262; 384-398. Later on they were included as an appendix in William Jowett, *Christian Researches in the Mediterranean* (London: Church Missionary Society, second edition, 1822), 413-454. In this article the quotations are from Jowett's book. In order to avoid a large number of notes I have inserted the page references from the appendix in square brackets in my text.

17 *Missionary Register* (1820), 28-29. On the meetings with the Syrian Archbishop, see below.

18 See *Mishkan*, no. 41 (2004), 30.

disposal does not allow us to give a more precise figure for the number of Scriptures that Connor carried with him.

#### *Connor's method and success*

I have to leave out many interesting details and be content to make the following observations, which are relevant for the understanding of Connor's success in Jerusalem.

Connor has learnt an important lesson from Pinkerton. In his luggage he now carries not only Scriptures but also letters of introduction. And what he does not already have, he gets during his tour. In Cyprus Connor writes this about the Greek Archbishop: "The Archbishop has given me an Introductory Letter to the Patriarch of Antioch, who resides at Damascus, and another to the Agents of the Patriarch of Jerusalem" [p. 419].

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Connor makes contact with the highest civil and ecclesiastical authorities wherever he comes. He seeks out and stays with the local British consul, where this is possible, and arranges with him to administer a Bible depot. His objective is to get high-ranking ecclesiastical dignitaries to superintend sales and distribution. If this fails, the consul is persuaded to do so. After having visited Crete, Rhodes, and Cyprus Connor has managed to set up three depots and make written arrangements for the future work [pp. 413-420].

In Sidon, where there is no British consul, Connor has to be content with staying at an inn. The French consul refuses to take responsibility for a depot ("he was prohibited from engaging in any commerce"). But in his stead Sidon's chief physician, a Mr. Bertrand, is engaged. The latter was familiar with the Bible cause through Burckhardt. "I wrote on the spot a set of Instructions for him. He undertakes, with the assistance of his brother, who is Physician to the Prince of the Druses, to sell and distribute the Scriptures throughout the whole of Lebanon, Anti-Lebanon, Damascus, and the coast of Syria from Beirout to Sour" [pp. 421-422].

In Acre Connor obtained a Firman (travel permit) for himself and a servant [p. 436]. About the Bible work it is said: "Our Consul, Signor Malagamba, undertakes willingly to promote the circulation of the Arabic and Hebrew Scriptures, in Acre, Nazareth, Tiberias, Safed &c. &c." [p. 423]. In Jaffa an arrangement is made with Consul Damiani to promote the object of the Bible Society in Jaffa and the surrounding area, and "through his hands, the Scriptures will regularly pass into Jerusalem" [p. 426]. Even before Connor has been to Jerusalem, he is so sure of a positive result that he, beforehand, arranges for the correspondence between Jerusalem and Malta to go via Alexandria with Consul Damiani as the go-between.

Against the background of this success – and with introductory letters in his bag – Connor goes up to Jerusalem filled with optimism.



## Connor in Jerusalem

Connor and his servant come to Jerusalem on the afternoon of Monday, March 6, 1820,<sup>19</sup> and begin a visit that was to last for about six weeks [pp. 427-443]. They take lodgings with the Latin Convent of San Salvatore. In contrast to what was the case with Burckhardt, preparations and plans have been made for Connor. He is to contact Procopius, the superintendent or representative in Jerusalem for Polycarp, the Greek Orthodox Archbishop of Jerusalem (resident in Constantinople). In other words: Contact is to be made with the highest authority, the *Locum Tenens* of the Patriarch. In Connor's words about Procopius: "His character as chief Agent of the Patriarchate places him high, in point of power and influence." (Part IV will contain a more detailed description of Procopius.)

### *Connor's encounter with Procopius*

Connor writes this about his first encounter with Procopius:

The Archbishop of Cyprus having given me an Introductory Letter to Procopius, the chief agent of the Patriarch of Jerusalem, I waited on him at the Greek Convent, two or three days after my arrival. He received me in the most friendly manner. He expressed his warmest approbation of the plan and objects of the Bible Society; and acceded immediately to my proposal, of leaving a considerable portion of the Scriptures which I had brought with me, in his hands, for sale and distribution among the Pilgrims and others. [pp. 427-428]

Procopius is serious about his promises. In a letter of April 11, 1820 – one week before Connor leaves Jerusalem and after the Easter celebration – Connor makes an account of what Procopius has received and done until then: "The Books I gave to Procopius for sale were the following: 83 Arabic Psalters, 2 Arabic Bibles, 3 Arabic Testaments, 34 Greek Testaments: all these he has sold. I gave him also a large quantity of Greek Tracts: these he has distributed" [pp. 429-430]. Even more important than the sale of these 122 Scriptures was the agreement that was made between Connor and Procopius (see below).

### *Other aspects of Connor's missionary activities in Jerusalem*

A few days after his arrival, Connor visits the Armenian Patriarch and discusses with him the cause of the Bible Society and "the object of my visit to Jerusalem. Both pleased him." The Patriarch immediately requested 66 Armenian Testaments, which he paid for. "He took them, he said, to present to his friends. He would give me no encouragement, however, to

19 In *Mishkan*, no. 41 (2004), 28 I wrote, erroneously, that Connor came to Jerusalem in May 1820. On p. 30 in the same article the correct date is mentioned: "March 6, 1820."

sell them openly. Before he would permit the public sale of them, he must have authoritative proof that the Edition is sanctioned at Constantinople. This I will procure for him when I return thither" [p. 431].

In the Armenian Convent he finds (on a later occasion?) a pilgrim from Calcutta and a member of the Calcutta Bible Society. In his room he had "some English Religious Tracts, printed at Serampore, which had been given him by Dr. Carey. He took twenty-three Armenian Testaments from me, to distribute in Jerusalem" [p. 438].

The Convents of the Syrians, Copts, and Abyssinians are visited by Connor "more than once" [pp. 432-433].

The Church Library for the *Syrians* ("who are Nestorians from Mesopotamia") is given one Syrian Testament; and two pilgrims get one copy each.

About a visit to the *Abyssinians* ("The Abyssinians reside in the same Convent with the Copts") it is said, "I put twelve Ethiopic Psalters into the hands of the Priest, desiring him to distribute them gratuitously among his people: this he did immediately, while I was sitting with him: they all manifested their gratitude." In the library Connor also finds two Ethiopic Psalters given to them by Burckhardt.

In addition to the 122 copies of Scriptures which Procopius received, Connor has now accounted for a further 104 copies. Whether or not he sold more copies of Scriptures in Jerusalem cannot be deduced from the available material. In this connection it is worth noting that Connor, as a Bible-man, does not seem to have been out in the streets *himself* selling Scriptures. This is put into the hands of local people in the respective convents or in the hands of the anonymous pilgrim from Calcutta – who then distributes them! Later, in Aleppo, Connor succeeds in selling a considerable number of Scriptures. But this is because he "engaged a man to offer the Scriptures, which I have brought with me, for sale in various parts of the city" [p. 451].

And finally, about the distribution of Scriptures among the Jews of Jerusalem: Whereas Burckhardt did succeed in selling one (sic) Hebrew New Testament to a Jew in Jerusalem, Connor did not, a fact that he does not try to conceal. He writes:

Among the Jews I have not been able to do any thing. The New Testament they reject with disdain, though I have repeatedly offered it to them for the merest trifle. As for the Prophecies, they say, the Book is imperfect, and therefore they will not purchase: and, as for the Psalters, they tell me there is no want of them in Jerusalem. Had I brought a complete Hebrew Bible with me, I could have sold many. [p. 433]

#### *Connor as traveller and researcher*

In the published material Connor draws attention to the fact that schools are rare at the Patriarchate of Jerusalem; "consequently, reading is not a very common attainment" [p. 431]. He mentions an interesting statistic





about pilgrims in Jerusalem at the Passover of 1820. Connor estimates the total number at 3,131, which, although smaller than usual, nevertheless appears realistic.<sup>20</sup> Again he notes that few of the Greek and Armenian pilgrims can read – a circumstance that does not exactly make the Bible work easier.

He also gives a detailed description of the Easter celebration in 1820.<sup>21</sup> Connor spends the night between the Greeks' Good Friday and Easter Saturday (April 7-8) in the Holy Sepulchre, where he witnesses the ceremony of the Holy Fire and the tumult surrounding it; it is all seen as a "profanation" [pp. 433-437]. Later Protestant missionaries were not more sympathetic in their descriptions of these things.

He furthermore gives a vivid description of the procession of 2300 pilgrims and guards on their way to the Jordan; he also goes to the Dead Sea together with a small group [pp. 439-440]. He stays in Bethlehem a couple of days [pp. 441-442].

It is remarkable that in the descriptions of the Easter celebration, the tour to the Jordan, and the time in Bethlehem there is no mention of distribution of Scriptures. The reason could be, of course, that Connor can no longer supply them.

### The Agreement Between Connor and Procopius

Back to the agreement between Procopius and Connor [pp. 428-429], printed *in toto* below. It is the first written agreement regarding distribution of Bibles in Jerusalem made between a highly placed Greek Orthodox person and a Protestant Bible-man. The agreement reads as follows, in Connor's translation:

"1. Procopius will keep, in his Convent, a Depôt of the Scriptures, for the Greek Christians in Jerusalem and its neighbourhood; and will exert all his influence, to diffuse these Scriptures throughout the Patriarchate of Jerusalem."

"2. Procopius will also keep, in his Convent, a Depôt of the Scriptures, in various languages, for the Pilgrims of the Greek Church that visit Jerusalem; and, when these Pilgrims arrive, he will cause them to be informed of the existence of the Depôt, and will encourage them to purchase."

"3. The Metropolitan, Archbishops, and other Ecclesiastical Dignitaries of the Patriarchate of Jerusalem, will perhaps encourage, by Letter or by word of mouth, the people of their respective Churches to purchase Scriptures, and will commit the distribution of them to men of judgment and fidelity."

20 Greeks, 1600; Armenians, 1300; Copts, 150; Catholics chiefly from Damascus, 50; Abyssinians, 1; Syrians, 30 [p. 438].

21 For the Latins, Palm Sunday and Easter Sunday in 1820 fell on March 26 and April 2 respectively; the Greeks, etc. celebrated the Feast one week later, so that their Palm Sunday fell on the Latins' Easter Sunday.

"4. Perhaps Procopius will be able to find a faithful and trust-worthy man to whom he might confide the sale of the Scriptures, in various languages, in Jerusalem and its neighbourhood. It would, I think, be the best plan to expose these book for sale, during the Passover, in the Square\*<sup>22</sup> which fronts the Church of the Holy Sepulchre, on account of the frequent assembling of the Pilgrims there."

"5. The Books, thus sold, must be sold at a stated moderate price; and the Bible Society grants a commission of ten per cent upon the money received for the Books, to the person whom Procopius will employ to sell them."

"6. All the money received for the Books will be put into the hands of Procopius, who will examine the accounts of the Vender, and pay him his commission. Procopius will also deduct from the money received, any expense that he may have incurred for the carriage of the books from Jaffa to Jerusalem &c. He will transmit the remainder of the money to the Rev. W. Jowett, Strada San Giovanni, Malta, through the hands of Signore Damiani, British Consul in Jaffa. Mr. Jowett, who keeps the great Depôt in Malta, will supply Procopius with whatever Scriptures he may want for the Pilgrims and others."

"7. It will afford peculiar pleasure to the Bible Society, if Procopius would correspond with Mr. Jowett; and would give him, from time to time, especially after each Passover, an account of the mode in which the Scriptures have been distributed, specifying the number of those sold in each language."

Presented with this plan Procopius gives, according to Conner, "his full assent to every thing that it contained. 'Send me the Books,' said he, 'and I shall immediately begin; and when I shall have furnished the Patriarchate with the Scriptures, I will circulate them elsewhere.'"

It should, however, be stated that this agreement did not entail the establishment of a Jerusalem Bible Society. If – and if so in what terms – Connor has discussed the matter with Procopius cannot be determined on the basis of the sources at our disposal. But the following words seem to indicate that the matter was raised: "The dissensions which unhappily subsist among the different bodies of Christians in Jerusalem, oppose an insuperable obstacle to the establishment there, at present, of any efficient Institution for the circulation of the Scriptures." Connor emphasizes that the "Greeks and Armenians are friendly to the diffusion of the

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22 The asterisk refers to the following note: "This Square is filled, during the whole Passover, with venders of crucifixes, beads, and other trinkets, and is the chief resort of the Pilgrims. All who enter the Church of the Sepulchre must necessarily pass through it."



Scriptures.” The following comment is, however, no less important: “nor do the Latins seem hostile to the circulation of their Authorised Versions” [p. 430]. What Connor may have had in the way of contacts to the Latins in Jerusalem is not said.

### Channels Opened for the Circulation of the Scriptures

Connor is content when he leaves Jerusalem on April 19, 1820 [p. 443]. His mission was a success. He now resumes his missionary journey and heads north through the following main stations: Acre, Saide, Mount Lebanon, Beirut, Damascus, Tripoli, and Aleppo [pp. 442-454]. Late June 1820 marks the beginning of the return journey to Constantinople, which he reaches on October 13, 1820 after another visit to e.g. Cyprus and Rhodes (see below).<sup>23</sup>

Having arrived in Beirut around May 1, 1820, Connor finds a new shipment of Scriptures, from which the newly established depot in Jerusalem gets its share. He writes: “Here I found eight Cases of the Scriptures, which Mr. Jowett had sent me from Alexandria: part of these I sent to Jerusalem, part to Saide, and part I forwarded to Latichea, to await my arrival there” [p. 447].

In Aleppo – a few days before Connor sets out on his return journey to Constantinople – he makes an account (in a letter dated June 26, 1820) of his tour in Syria and writes the following, among other things:

... the Channels are now opened for the introduction of the Scriptures into these parts, and for the general circulation. By means of our friends in Jerusalem, Jaffa, Acre, Saide, Beirut, Damascus, Tripoli, Latichea, Scanderoon, and Aleppo, they will be offered for sale in every part of the country. So far well! The Channels, as I have said, are open; but I am afraid we shall be obliged to wait some time before the waters begin to flow. [pp. 453-454]

Connor’s task has been completed successfully. The fact that he was more successful than Burckhardt is due not least to the planning preceding the journey and to the introductory letters he could present when he came to Jerusalem. He is the first Protestant Bible-man to organize the Bible work not only in Jerusalem, but also in Lebanon and Syria.

Against this background it is not so strange that the Bible Societies in Lebanon and Syria today, on their websites, give “1820” as the year of “the first organised work.” If the same criteria are used for the work in Israel, there are good reasons why the Israeli Bible Society should change “1816” to “1820” as the “Beginning of organised work in Israel.”<sup>24</sup>

One could stop here, and yet one cannot help wondering what Connor

<sup>23</sup> BFBS *Seventeenth Report* (1821), 64-65.

<sup>24</sup> See *Mishkan*, no. 41 (2004), 22.

has in mind when, in the quotation above, he says that he is afraid “we shall be obliged to wait some time before the waters begin to flow.” Why does he say this?

## Unfulfilled Expectations and Agreements

Of course it is not necessarily Connor’s fault if the open channels were blocked or never functioned according to plan. Not everything during his journey was a success, but this is no reflection on Connor’s work as an organizer. During his return journey to Constantinople it became possible for him to check the progress of the work in the interval. Certain changes had taken place. Let us take a brief look at them.

### *Lack of success with the Syrian Roman Catholic Archbishop/Patriarch*

In the spring of 1819 Peter Giarve, at that time Syrian (Roman Catholic) Archbishop of Jerusalem (resident at Mount Lebanon), had been in London, where he had negotiated with BFBS and CMS about the Bible work in Syria. He was able to return with the promise of a printing press and a major donation to the work.<sup>25</sup> The meeting with Giarve was considered very important and was accompanied by great hopes for the furtherance of the Bible cause in Syria. Therefore it was important that Connor meet him, which he did – even twice – but without much success.

Giarve and Connor arrive in Beirut in February 1820 at an interval of only one day – Giarve from Europe, by way of Egypt. They have an opportunity to converse “about our friends in England, and of the object of my Mission,” Connor writes. But Giarve is busy with many things and exhausted after the journey, so “that I judged it best to defer any further conference with him, till I shall see him in his Convent on Mount Lebanon ... His Printing Press is not yet arrived. The Archbishop gives me but little hopes of success in selling the Scriptures in Syria” [pp. 420-421].

They meet again in the beginning of May 1820 – now at Giarve’s convent, one month after he had become Patriarch. Connor gets a friendly reception, but Giarve is “indisposed, in consequence of a recent fall from his horse”; his printing press has not arrived and, what is worse, it had been seriously damaged in the voyage to Smyrna. Under those circumstances Connor considers it “fruitless” to stay at Giarve’s convent [pp. 447-448].

Was Giarve at this time already closing the channels that had been opened in London? Perhaps. Connor seems to have received no backing from him, even though he was kindly received. Later on, some maintained that the money that had been entrusted to Giarve in London had been used by him to buy the title of patriarch.<sup>26</sup> A few years later Giarve

25 Cf. Jowett 1822, 317-318; *Missionary Register* (1819), 180-182; (1820), 27.

26 Cf. Isaac Bird, *Bible Work in Bible Lands* (Philadelphia: Presbyterian Board of Publication, 1872), 73: “It was the outdoor report that the present patriarch [Giarve] had supplanted Simon, the late patriarch, by means of the money he obtained in England.”



was to become one of the fiercest opponents of Protestant Bible distribution in Syria – a story that cannot be told here.<sup>27</sup>

Back in Constantinople Connor can see, in retrospect, that open channels are no guarantee of success. He writes quite candidly:

In many instances, I found it difficult to convince the Syrians of the purity of motives and sacredness of principle, which prompt the exertions of the Bible Society: they can scarcely conceive how a people, whom the majority of them look on as heretics, can, without some sinister object, propose to perform an act of religious charity to their church. Whenever I perceived any such suspicions lurking in the minds of those to whom I addressed myself, I dissipated them by the assurance, that they should receive the Scriptures, word for word, as they are sanctioned by their church, without any note, or commentary, or explanation whatever. This satisfied them.<sup>28</sup>

#### *Obstacles and changes of agreements*

In the same retrospect Connor mentions other obstacles and changes of previous agreements.

Connor had, as already mentioned, managed to sell a “considerable number of Hebrew Testaments to the Jews” in Aleppo. But in retrospect it is now said: “The day before my departure, the Chief Rabbi issued a prohibition against the purchase of the Book.” Yet he also states that “A cheap edition of the Hebrew Old Testament would have an easy sale in Aleppo.” So one cannot expect the Jews to be standing with arms open wide to receive the Hebrew New Testament.

On his return journey from Aleppo to Constantinople, Connor has several opportunities to check what has been done in the way of distribution of Scriptures in light of the written agreements that were made on the outward journey. In Cyprus the consul informs him that “the numerous and pressing avocations of the Archbishop had rendered it inconvenient to him to superintend the distribution of Scriptures. The Consul, himself, therefore, undertakes it.” The Archbishop did not fulfill the contract.

And on his arrival at Rhodes the following is noted: “The plague has been in Rhodes the whole of the summer; which has, in a great measure, prevented our Consul and Archbishop from exerting themselves in our cause.”<sup>29</sup> The plague apparently prevented the implementation of the plans they had made.

<sup>27</sup> See however Kawerau 1958, 529-530.

<sup>28</sup> BFBS *Seventeenth Report* (1821), 65.

<sup>29</sup> BFBS *Seventeenth Report* (1821), 64-65.

## Concluding Remarks

Against this background, the question of whether Procopius honored his promises after Connor had left Jerusalem suggests itself. Did he also change his mind or become too busy with other matters? This question will be dealt with in Part IV.

Back in Constantinople, Connor chooses to leave his Bible work in the Levant. In mid-February 1821 he returns to London, even though H.D. Leeves has just arrived in Constantinople as an agent for BFBS.<sup>30</sup>

Before his departure from the Levant, Connor sends a letter to two newly arrived American missionaries who were then staying in Smyrna, namely Levi Parsons and Pliny Fisk. These also had their minds set on Jerusalem. What did Connor enclose in his letter to the Americans, received in Smyrna on December 3, 1820? A "letter of introduction" to Procopius, of course! On December 5, Parson left for Jaffa.<sup>31</sup>

### Author info:

Kai Kjær-Hansen (D.D., Lund University) is General Editor of Mishkan and serves as International Coordinator of the Lausanne Consultation on Jewish Evangelism (LCJE). He is chairman of the Danish Israel Mission. [lcje-kai@post4.tele.dk](mailto:lcje-kai@post4.tele.dk)

<sup>30</sup> BFBS *Seventeenth Report* (1821), 65-67.

<sup>31</sup> Cf. *Missionary Herald* (1821), 273-275.

