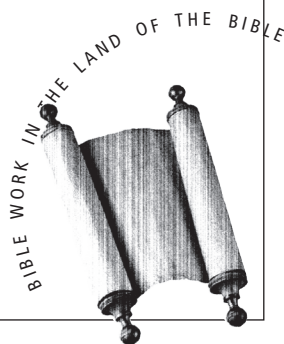


First "Organized" Bible-work in 19th Century Jerusalem (1816-1831)

Part IV: Procopius, Parsons, and Tschoudy (1821)

By Kai Kjær-Hansen



In the third article in this series it was shown that in the spring of 1820 James Connor, the second Bible-man to visit Jerusalem in the 19th century, managed to arrange for Procopius to take charge of a Bible depot and of Bible distribution in Jerusalem.¹

Even if this did not mean that a Bible "Society" had been established in Jerusalem, it was nevertheless an agreement about an "organized" Bible work in Jerusalem. On his return journey to Constantinople, Connor was, however, able to ascertain that not all agreements with ecclesiastics elsewhere in the Levant had been kept. What happened to the arrangement with Procopius?²

In this article we will try to answer this and to cover the next two Bible-men, namely the American Levi Parsons and the Swiss Melchior Tschoudy, who visited Jerusalem in 1821.

Who was Procopius?

This is not the place to write Procopius' vita; it may however be appropriate to supply a little information about the person who was to become the first Agent for the British and Foreign Bible Society (BFBS) *in Jerusalem*. Contemporary (Protestant) sources gave Procopius full credit for his work for the Bible cause in Jerusalem. Such recognition is sometimes missing in modern (Protestant) descriptions of the early history of the Bible Society in Jerusalem.

It appears from Chrysostomos Papadopoulos' *History of the Church of Jerusalem*³ that Procopius was Greek, and a member of the Brotherhood

1 See *Mishkan*, no. 44 (2005), 62–75.

2 The arrangement is rendered *in toto* in *Mishkan*, no. 44 (2005), 70–71.

3 *Historia tes Ekkliisias Hierosolymon* (Jerusalem et Alexandrie, 1910); 2. ed. Athens, 1970. I am grateful to Dr. Kirsten Stoffregen Pedersen and librarian Daniel Attinger, both in Jerusalem, for information concerning Procopius from this work, which I have not been able to consult myself.

of the Holy Sepulchre.⁴ His full name was Procopios Nazianzinos.⁵ He is referred to as “Araboglous” – presumably because he mastered the Arabic language. Among the Greeks and the Armenians he served as assistant translator and was also responsible for the Greek Patriarchate’s library.

Procopius was in Jerusalem *after* the fire at the Church of the Holy Sepulchre in October 1808, and is mentioned by Papadopoulos in connection with the subsequent restoration of the church in the years 1809–1810. Did Procopius himself experience the fire?

This seems to be the case. A long poem by Procopius, in which he describes the fire itself, has been preserved; it bears the stamp of something personally experienced and he uses the first person plural.⁶

Neophytos of Cyprus, who was contemporary with Procopius – and like him a member of the Brotherhood – also mentions Procopius.⁷ In an entry for the year 1821 Neophytos refers to Procopius as “The Locum Tenens of the Patriarch in Jerusalem,” i.e. the Patriarch’s representative in Jerusalem.⁸ There is no doubt that BFBS’s first Agent in Jerusalem was a significant person, centrally placed in the Greek Orthodox leadership in the holy city.

Procopius and Easter 1821

The year 1821 is of particular interest for the objective we are pursuing. The American Bible-man Levi Parsons comes to Jerusalem and makes personal contact with Procopius. At Easter it is not just the distribution of Bibles that occupies Procopius’ thoughts, however. He is to ensure that the recently arrived Greek pilgrims get out of Jerusalem fast – and alive – after news of the Greek War of Independence reaches Jerusalem.⁹

4 This Brotherhood was “a monastic society which had for several centuries administered the patriarchate,” cf. Kirsten Stoffregen Pedersen, *The Holy Land Christians* (Jerusalem: Private Publication, 2003), 56–57.

5 This may not be consistent, but I shall continue to write “Procopius,” as did the Bible-men of that time.

6 Printed in excerpts, in German, by Friedrich Heyer, *Kirchengeschichte des Heiligen Landes* (Stuttgart – Berlin – Köln – Mainz, Verlag W. Kohlhammer, 1984), 169–170.

7 The Monk Neophytos came to Jerusalem from Cyprus in 1801; his *Annals of Palestine 1821–1841* have been translated into English and summarized in Hebrew by S. N. Spyridon in *The Journal of the Palestine Oriental Society* (1938), 63–132; reissued as *Extracts from Annals of Palestine, 1821–1841* (Jerusalem: Ariel Publishing House, 1979). It is surprising that Spyridon did not translate that third of Neophytos’ work which, among other things, deals with the Brotherhood’s relations with other religious communities – including the Protestant missionaries. A few sections have been printed in German by Friedrich Heyer, 1984, p. 173 and 175, but without a historical critical analysis of Neophytos’ statements; more about this in part V in this series.

8 The Greek Patriarch of Jerusalem, Polycarp, resided in Constantinople and never visited Jerusalem; see *Mishkan*, no. 41 (2004), 25.

9 The number of pilgrims in Jerusalem at Easter 1821 is, according to Parsons: 1200 Greeks, 1400 Armenians, 70 Copts, 20 Syrians, 15 Catholics, one Abyssinian; a total of 2,706. Parsons says that “a priest of distinction,” after having read these statements, has declared them to be “correct”; cf. *Missionary Herald*, 1822, 43.

On that occasion Neophytos of Cyprus writes:

That was a great and a holy day, the sixth of April,¹⁰ when news arrived of the rebellion of the Greeks from the yoke of slavery! The Locum Tenens of the Patriarch in Jerusalem, Procopios, with the Bishops in the Synod, tried by all means to keep the news from getting abroad, but, on Good Friday, the *Mufti* and the notables of Jerusalem got word by letter from Jaffa of the rebellion. These we persuaded by entreaties and presents to keep quiet and not to disclose the news until after Easter, lest the Turks already seeking an excuse, might be perturbed and cause trouble, whence some untoward accident might befall the pilgrims.¹¹

The uncertain situation in Jerusalem due to the Greek revolt also influences Levi Parsons' plans; he decides to leave the city (see below). But there is no doubt that Procopius continued to serve as Agent for BFBS. In the spring of 1822 he supplies Joseph Wolff with Bibles, as we shall see in the next article in this series. Procopius was active as Agent for BFBS until his death. The question is when this occurred.

The Duration of Procopius' Work as Agent for BFBS in Jerusalem

Procopius began as Agent for BFBS during James Connor's visit to Jerusalem in the spring of 1820.¹² According to information I have received (cf. note 3), Procopius died in 1823 and was buried on July 8 on Mount Zion. I am, however, doubtful about the year 1823.

It is certain that Procopius is alive in June 1822, when Joseph Wolff concludes his first visit to Jerusalem. Wolff's second visit to Jerusalem takes place from April 25 to July 17, 1823. As far as I can see, there is no mention of Procopius' death in Wolff's published journals from the 1823 visit. If Procopius died while Wolff was in Jerusalem, it seems unthinkable that he should not have mentioned it.

Add to this what William Jowett writes on December 2, 1823, after a visit to the Monastery of the Holy Cross, Jerusalem, where "considerable expense has very recently been bestowed, in suitably furnishing iron railings, and other accommodations." And Jowett continues: "This was the work of the late Procopius, Superintendent of this Patriarchate. He was a man of great ability and spirit; and he flourished at a time when prosperity filled the Greek Coffers with opulent resources. His death, about

10 Neophytos' dates are according to the Julian calendar, i.e. April 6 = April 18 on the Gregorian (and Parsons') calendar. In 1821 Good Friday fell on April 20 and Easter Sunday on April 22, according to the Gregorian calendar.

11 Neophytos, in *The Journal of the Palestine Oriental Society* (1938), 66. Cf. also 66–71 about the political pressure and the economic extortion of the Greeks in Jerusalem as a consequence of the Greek revolt.

12 See *Mishkan*, no. 44 (2005), 68–72.



two years ago, was a serious loss to the Bible Society, whose cause he had heartily espoused."¹³

Against this background I venture the guess that Procopius did indeed die in July, not in 1823 but in 1822, which is also the year that Isaac Bird mentions.¹⁴ This means that he functioned as Agent for BFSB for a little more than two years. If he was particularly active in the period leading up to Easter of 1821, and less active in the time after Easter of 1821, it may be connected with the Greek War of Independence and its consequences for the Greeks in Jerusalem. In the following years, no Greek pilgrims came from abroad to Jerusalem.

Procopius in the Period Between Connor's and Parsons' Visits

Connor left Jerusalem on April 19, 1820. Levi Parsons visited Jerusalem from February 17 to May 8, 1821. Here are a few quotes, on the basis of which it may be deduced that Procopius was an *active* Agent for BFSB in Jerusalem; active meaning that he made things happen.

In the spring of 1820 Procopius received, from Connor, a "considerable portion of the Scriptures" which the latter had brought "for sale or distribution among the Pilgrims and others." Connor gives the precise figures: "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."¹⁵

A few weeks after Connor left Jerusalem, he found, in Beirut, eight cases of Scriptures sent by William Jowett from Alexandria. Some of these are sent to Saide, others to Latichea, and others to Jerusalem.¹⁶

In 1820 the BFB is in a position to announce that the Patriarch of Jerusalem (residing in Constantinople, and with whom Dr. Pinkerton had an interesting interview)¹⁷ "has received the 1000 Testaments in Modern Greek, 500 in Ancient and Modern, and 500 Arabic Psalters*,¹⁸ which the Patriarch proposes to distribute among the pilgrims who annually visit the Holy Sepulchre."¹⁹

Such shipments did not collect dust with Procopius, a fact to which Parsons testifies in connection with a stock-taking of his own Bible distribution (see below):

13 W. Jowett, *Christian Researches in Syria and the Holy Land* (London: Church Missionary Society, 1825), 225–226.

14 Isaac Bird, *Bible Work in Bible Lands* (Philadelphia: Presbyterian Board of Publication, 1872), 339.

15 Connor in Jowett 1825, 430. Cf. *Mishkan*, no. 44 (2005), 68.

16 Connor in Jowett 1825, 447. Cf. *Mishkan*, no. 44 (2005), 72.

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

18 The asterisk refers to the following note: "The Arabic New Testament, now printing, not being completed, and former editions being out of print, the Society could not for the moment send any thing but the Psalms."

19 BFB *Sixteenth Report*, 1820, lxix–lxx.

"It will be remembered that, before my arrival, Bibles and Testaments were deposited in the respective monasteries by Procopius. How many have been sold I am not able to say. Procopius has not had time to prepare the account."²⁰

Parsons also testifies that in March 1821 Procopius is in contact with Benjamin Barker, the general agent of BFBS in Aleppo. On March 5 Parsons writes: "Procopius, not being able perfectly to understand the Italian, requested me to make a translation. The design of the letter was to aid, by every laudable effort, the distribution of the Holy Scriptures."²¹

In the next article in this series, we shall return to the cooperation between Procopius and Joseph Wolff. But here it is appropriate to mention Wolff's words of appreciation, dated Jerusalem, March 12: "I called on the amiable and zealous Christian, the Rev. – Procopius, undoubtedly the most *active*, most *sincere*, and most *disinterested* promoter of the cause of the British and Foreign Bible Society in this part of the world."²²

Levi Parsons and Procopius, Spring 1821

Levi Parsons arrives in Jerusalem on February 17, 1821, beginning an almost three-month long visit.²³ Like other Bible-men, he spends much time on excursions inside and outside Jerusalem. In this article I refrain from dealing with these and with Parsons' descriptions of the various churches' ceremonies.

On his arrival in Jerusalem, Parsons shows his letters of recommendation to Procopius – among them the one he had received from Connor.²⁴ "Conversation was directed to the exertions which the Protestants are making to promote the diffusion of the Holy Scriptures." The reply he receives is: "We believe the Protestants to be our friends." He is immediately allocated a room: "It is near the Holy Sepulchre, and contains many convenient apartments" [33].²⁵ The room was probably located in the Greek Patriarchate: "Within 100 feet of my room reside five bishops; viz. of Petra, of Nazareth, of Gaza, of Lydda, of Philadelphia" [37].

20 *Missionary Herald*, 1822, 43; see below.

21 *Missionary Herald*, 1822, 36.

22 Joseph Wolff, *Missionary Journal and Memoir of the Rev. Joseph Wolff, Missionary to the Jews: Comprising His First Visit to Palestine in the Years 1821 & 1822; Edited and Revised by John Bayford, Esq., F.S.A. Second Edition* (London 1827: Macintosh Printer, 1827), 252.

23 Levi Parsons, born July 18, 1792, came to the Levant in January 1820 together with his friend and missionary colleague, Pliny Fisk, sent out by the American Board of Commissioners for Foreign Missions. Unfortunately Daniel Oliver Morton, *Memoir of Rev. Levi Parsons*, 1824, has not been available to me. A large amount of the missionaries' journals and letters, or extracts from these, were published in *Missionary Herald*. In order to avoid a large number of notes I have inserted the page references from *Missionary Herald*, volume 1822, in square brackets in my text.

24 See *Mishkan*, no. 44 (2005), 75.

25 The Russian consul in Jaffa, George Mostras, had offered Parsons a room, "which he has under his own direction, in a monastery at Jerusalem"; cf. *Missionary Herald*, 1821, 302.



Parsons' close contact with Procopius is evident in the following overview:

February 18: "After breakfast, Procopius called upon me, repeated his willingness to aid me to the extent of his power, and bade me welcome to all the privileges of the monastery" [33].

February 20: "I presented to Procopius an excellent copy of the Persian Testament, translated by the much lamented Henry Martyn. He read portions of it with fluency, and thanked me for the donation" [33].

March 3: "Gave to Procopius 100 tracts, to be distributed among the priests and pilgrims" [36].

March 5: Parsons translates, as already mentioned, a letter from Benjamin Barker to Procopius [36].

March 17: "Procopius gave me permission to enter the church of the Holy Sepulchre, for the purpose of quietly observing the different apartments while the pilgrims were absent" [37].

March 19: "Visited Procopius. He gave it as his opinion, that there are in Jerusalem 10,000 Jews and 2,000 Christians" [37].

March 30: "... obtained permission from Procopius to visit all the Greek monasteries in Jerusalem, and to supply the pilgrims with tracts. A Greek priest was my guide" [38].

April 18: "Attended to the subject of establishing a school at Jerusalem. I proposed to Procopius, that if he would obtain a suitable instructor, I would defray the expense of the school. He replied: 'there is now no person in Jerusalem qualified to instruct such a school as we need'. But he engaged to write to the Patriarch; and afterwards give me more particular information on the subject" [40].

Whether or not Procopius did actually write this letter, I dare not say. What is April 18, 1821 for Parsons is April 6, 1821 for Procopius – the day that brought the news of the Greek rebellion (see above). Procopius now has to involve himself in political issues of international importance, and he has to take measures to ensure that Greek pilgrims in Jerusalem can get out safe and sound.

Parsons' Work in Jerusalem

On his arrival in Jerusalem, Parsons is pleased to find that his "trunks had arrived in safety" [33].²⁶ The sources make it clear that he was able to communicate in modern Greek, Italian, and in English, of course. English was used to communicate with Englishmen visiting Jerusalem and with the interpreters he needs for his work. He travels in Turkish dress [44].

From the overview above, it appears that Parsons cultivates and nur-

²⁶ Joseph Wolff arrived in Jerusalem in 1822, as we shall show in part V, with very few Bibles in his luggage.

tures his relationship to Procopius and establishes good contacts with Greek Orthodox priests. Before taking any steps, he consistently obtains permission from Procopius. The same strategy is used in his dealings with the Armenians. An example of this is when Parsons, having talked to the Armenian Patriarch on February 20, leaves with permission to sell Testaments to Armenian pilgrims and even hires a pilgrim to assist him with this [34]. During a visit to the Armenian convent he "left three Testaments for sale" [37]. In the library of the Syriac church he sees "a few Syrian printed Testaments, deposited there by the Rev. Mr. Connor" [38].

In connection with his visit in the Catholic convent on March 12, he cautiously takes care not to annoy the Superior: "I did not take with me Testaments, as I knew the Catholics were decidedly hostile to the distribution of the Holy Scriptures among pilgrims" [37].

This caution pays off, for on April 2 he can introduce himself "for the president of the convent in Bethlehem" with a letter "from the Latin convent in Jerusalem." "At dinner, the subject of distributing the Scriptures was introduced." He [the Superior] replied, "the Arabic Psalters, which the English have sent here, is a correct translation, word for word. Also, the Italian Testament, translated by Antonio Martini, cannot be censured. But the Arabic Bibles sent here, we Catholics do not approve of" [38–39].²⁷

On April 10 Parsons gives a preliminary account of his visits in Jerusalem: "Have now visited thirteen Greek monasteries, one Catholic, one Armenian, one Syrian, and one Coptic, within the walls of Jerusalem. Distributed in all, including the Church of St. Constantine, 1,000 tracts" [40].²⁸ The primary purpose of these visits is to distribute tracts.

Distribution of Religious Tracts

Few Bibles or Testaments are placed in the visited monasteries, which house the pilgrims. Parsons is very explicit about the main purpose of these visits: all who can read should be offered these tracts [39].²⁹ He thinks they have achieved the goal concerning the distribution of *Greek* tracts, but adds: "I hope that we shall be able to afford the same kind of instruction to Russians, Armenians, and Copts, which we have now done to Greeks" [39]. He emphasizes that these tracts have been sent in every direction from Jerusalem and will have an impact wherever they go: "In every instance, the tracts have been received not only without hesitation, but with a smile of gratitude. Bishops have aided their circulation. All have rejoiced to carry so sacred a present to their friends" [43].

27 The Bibles which the Protestant Bible-men distributed did not include the Old Testament apocrypha.

28 The visits to the Greek monasteries are done in two days: the first six take place on March 30 [38]; the last seven on April 10 [39–40].

29 The main part of these tracts were probably "Reading the Scriptures," with passages "from the work of Chrysostom," adapted to modern Greek by Parsons and Fisk and printed in 5,000 copies. Similarly they had translated "The End of Time" by Dr. Watts; cf. *Missionary Herald*, 1821, 67.



On the outward as well as the homeward voyage Parsons distributed tracts among his fellow passengers and wherever the boat put in.³⁰

Distribution of Holy Scriptures

As a Bible-man it is, naturally, Parsons' task to sell and distribute Bibles and New Testaments. But not unreservedly. When it comes to giving a Testament *gratis*, Parsons is the cautious one among the Bible-men of his time. On the outward journey, the English consul at Limassol, Cyprus, made a request "in behalf of some poor Christians in the vicinity for two Greek Testaments." Parsons gives them, but with conditions which give us a good indication of Parsons' general attitude:

I mentioned to him that it was not agreeable to the wishes of the members of the Bible Society, that Testaments should be permitted to remain useless, but that they should be constantly read. He [the consul] assured me, that he would accompany the Testaments with a letter, and the wishes of the donors would be strictly regarded.³¹

Neither does Parsons throw Bibles or Bible parts about in Jerusalem. This can be deduced from the following:

1. On March 13, 1821, Parsons writes to his friend and missionary colleague Pliny Fisk: "I have sold two Greek Testaments, one Persian, one Italian, and one Armenian in Jerusalem" [302]. Not exactly impressive sales figures after almost a month in Jerusalem.

2. On May 5, 1821 – three days before his departure from Jerusalem – Parsons makes the following statement:

Since my arrival in Jerusalem,	
I have sold Arabic Psalters	99 copies
Sold Greek Testaments since leaving Syria	41 copies
- Persian Testaments, (quarto).	2 copies
- Armenian Testaments,	7 copies
- Italian Testament,	1 copy
Gave away, where there was a prospect of usefulness, Greek,	11 copies
French, Italian, Persian, Armenian,	9 copies

An account is made of a total of 170 copies [43].

The account is not as precise as one could wish. On his voyage from Smyrna to Jaffa, at least 12 Greek Testaments are sold or given as presents.³²

30 *Missionary Herald*, 1821, 300–303; 1822, 214–219. So on his departure from Jerusalem, Parsons still has tracts in his luggage, but hardly Scriptures for sale or distribution.

31 *Missionary Herald*, 1821, 302.

32 *Missionary Herald*, 1821, 300–303.

Concerning distribution in Jaffa, on February 12, 1821, Parsons writes that he had "an opportunity to distribute books in the Greek monastery and to dispose of several Greek Testaments" [18]. At least a handful of copies are given as presents in Jerusalem. A rough calculation shows that in Jerusalem, Parsons sold or gave away 50–55 Testaments in non-Arabic languages and 99 Arabic Psalters *at the maximum*.

The distribution of Armenian Testaments is mainly done through an Armenian pilgrim, and Parsons cannot meet the demand. "Repeated, and earnest applications were made for Armenian Testaments; but it was not in my power to procure them" [43]. He may have used local Greek Orthodox priests as middlemen when selling Greek and Arabic Bible parts. When Bibles and Testaments are not distributed to the Greek monasteries, the reason is that Procopius has already done so (see above). Parsons does not seem to have obtained Bibles from Procopius, perhaps because Procopius at that time has none left.

Parsons is, however, not completely satisfied with his own work. On May 7, the day before his departure from Jerusalem, he writes, "If I had been better furnished with Bibles and tracts, I might, by the divine blessing, have greatly extended my usefulness" [19]. But the number of sold Bibles is not Parsons' only success criterion for his work as a Bible-man in Jerusalem. He attaches more importance to the fact that he has been able to read and study the Scriptures with local priests and with pilgrims.

Reading the Scriptures

Parsons undoubtedly finds great gratification in being a Bible-reading Bible-man. Those he reads and studies with are local Greek Orthodox priests and pilgrims. In his journal there are numerous references to such Bible-reading. Already on February 24, 1821, it is reported: "A priest came to my room to read with me the Holy Scriptures" [35]. And on March 22 he writes: "In the morning, one of the pilgrims, with whom I read the Scriptures almost every day ..." [37].

Parsons also makes himself available when a Greek priest requests help in studying the English language. He makes no secret of the fact that he may also benefit from this: "This will give me opportunity to institute many important inquiries, and to obtain valuable information" [35]. The New Testament is, of course, the textbook when two ecclesiastics ask him to instruct them in Italian. "They read with me in the Italian Testament" [37]. The following entry from March 22 indicates the importance Parsons attaches to such reading:

Four persons have been at my room to read the Scriptures today. The priests encourage me in this employment. If, then, a missionary can reside here with no other employment than to read the Scriptures with pilgrims, not uttering a word respecting Catholics, Greeks, or Turks, a great work might be accomplished; – a work, which would impart infinite joy to the friends of this mission, and guide many



souls to eternal life. From the observations I have made, I am led to believe, that reading the Scriptures is one of the most effectual methods to diffuse the spirit of piety; – a method to which God has often added a peculiar blessing. [37]

On his outward voyage, he had read Acts chapter 20 aloud to his fellow passengers on the ship while they passed between Samos and ancient Melitus, and when they were passing Patmos, the epistles to the seven churches.³³ And he had given an Armenian a New Testament: “He began to read it aloud to those who could understand, and during several days this was his constant employment” [17]. During the voyage back from Palestine, Parsons writes:

A voyage to and from Jerusalem, in company with pilgrims, is attended with many things unpleasant; but, without doubt, affords the best advantages for giving instruction, and for gaining an extensive influence ... The reading of the Scriptures is, perhaps, the most effectual method of doing good at Jerusalem. In this respect, the time from Christmas to the Passover, is invaluable. Multitudes, and among them men of influence and literature, from almost every part of the world, are literally assembled in one place; and the information they receive will be communicated to thousands of souls. This station I view as one of the most important that can be selected, and one, which cannot be relinquished, without criminality on the part of the Christian community. [215–216]

Melchior Tschoudy – The “Fourth” Bible-man in Jerusalem

While Parsons is in Jerusalem, the next Protestant Bible-man turns up. On April 6 Parsons writes:

“A Swiss clergyman arrived with Bibles and Testaments. He informed me, that he has disposed of many Testaments, and with prospects of usefulness. He designs, after the Passover, to go to Aleppo” [39].

Parsons does not give the name of this – in our reckoning – fourth Protestant Bible-man visiting Jerusalem. Is it possible to identify him? Yes! Without doubt it must be Melchior Tschoudy.³⁴

In May 1820 Tschoudy had been sent out as the London Jews’ Society’s (LJS) first representative in the Levant. His task was to report on the local situation and to distribute Bibles to Jews. He does not take up much place in LJS’s annals.³⁵ In the London committee’s eyes he was a disappointment. He did not report often enough, and when he did, the committee

33 *Missionary Herald*, 1821, 300–301.

34 In contemporary sources the name also appears with the spelling Tschudy, Tschudi, or Tschoudi.

35 See e.g. W. T. Gidney, *The History of the London Society for Promoting Christianity Amongst the Jews, From 1809 to 1908* (London: 1908), 118.

felt it to be insufficient. In addition, some of his monetary transactions in Malta and Alexandria had made the committee in London suspicious.³⁶

But Parsons' information helps to throw light on Tschoudy's activities in Palestine, and it contradicts Sherman Lieber's statement that Tschoudy visited Jerusalem while Parsons was not there.³⁷ But not only that: however Tschoudy's activities are to be assessed in the light of history, Parsons confirms that Tschoudy at least *tried* to carry out his task, namely to meet Jews and offer them the New Testament.

On April 7, 1821, Parsons and Tschoudy visit the Jewish synagogues "situated a little west of the site of Solomon's temple." Parsons writes:

A few Jews were present performing evening service. There are four synagogues in the same enclosure; and others in other parts. We made inquiries with regard to the number of Jews in Jerusalem. Some replied 3,000; others said, "No, there are not three thousand," "But why" they replied, "do you ask us this question?" Because, we wish to gain particular information with regard to Christians, Jews, and Turks, in every place. We showed them a Testament in Hebrew. They examined it; but dared not purchase it, without the consent of the Rabbins [sic]. We left a few tracts, which they examined; but not without hesitation. They treated us with respect; and invited us to come again. [39]

Whether or not Tschoudy and/or Parsons later accepted this invitation is an open question. Sherman Lieber's assertion that Tschoudy "distributed Bibles to [Jerusalem's] Jewish residents" gives the impression that Tschoudy had a certain success among the Jews of Jerusalem. But the assertion is not supported with references to sources and must be taken with a grain of salt.

But Tschoudy's and Parsons' visits to synagogues are relevant for the question of Parsons' contact – or lack thereof – with the Jews of Jerusalem.

Parsons and the Jews of Jerusalem

Apart from this visit to a synagogue, Parsons' published journals in *Missionary Herald* only mention that he attended a Jewish burial on April 17; they contain no information about work among the Jews of Jerusalem. In striking contrast to this are Procopius' words about Parsons,

36 It is my hope that, in another context, I may be able to return to Tschoudy, his activities in the Levant, and the tense relationship between him and LJS, which ended with LJS breaking off their cooperation with him. Was Tschoudy "a crook," as Yaron Perry claims with reference to Joseph Wolff, in *British Mission to the Jews in Nineteenth-Century Palestine* (London – Portland, Oregon: Frank Cass, 2003), 17? For the moment I will leave the question open.

37 Sherman Lieber writes: "While 'brothers' Parsons and Fisk were in Smyrna, Melchior Tschoudi, a Swiss pastor affiliated with the LJS, toured Jerusalem and distributed Bibles to its Jewish residents"; *Mystics and Missionaries: The Jews in Palestine 1799–1840* (Salt Lake City: University of Utah Press, 1992), 160.



conveyed by Joseph Wolff in 1822: "he [Procopius] spoke with high regard of Levi Parsons, and told me that that gentleman went every day among the Jews until he left Jerusalem."³⁸

Such a description of Parsons' activities among Jerusalem's Jews cannot, however, be deduced from his published journals. That he may have had more contact with them than his journals indicate is possible, but it requires closer examination. In Parsons' list of distributed Scriptures in Jerusalem there is no mention of *Hebrew Scriptures*.³⁹ The sources make it clear that Parsons saw himself as a Bible-man among "the heathen," and that he hoped to make Jerusalem his base for this work [111].

Departure from Jerusalem

Taking stock of his time in Jerusalem, Parsons writes on May 7, 1821 – the day before his departure: "My health I think was never better for three months in succession," and he looks forward to returning [19].

On his arrival in Jerusalem, it had been his plan "to pass the heat of the summer on Mount Lebanon," a plan which had to be abandoned in "consequence of civil commotions, which had commenced there." Next he had planned to spend the summer in Bethlehem, a plan which also had to be given up because of the breakout of the Greek War of Independence. He decides to travel to Smyrna, and together with Pliny Fisk to prepare tracts in different languages for distribution to pilgrims, "who shall attend the next annual celebration" in Jerusalem [44]. On the return journey he is working on a tract for pilgrims, to be called "The Holy Week" [217].

The journey from Jerusalem to Jaffa normally took two days, but due to the political situation the journey is made in haste, in only one day. A few hours before Parsons' arrival in Jaffa, on May 8, the Russian Consul "fled secretly from the city, and set sail for Constantinople." On May 9, Parsons leaves Jaffa in a boat with, among others, "the residing priest of the church at Gethsemane, and a multitude of pilgrims" [214]. During the voyage the war is experienced at close quarters. On June 18 he is informed "that sixty pilgrims had been beheaded at the port of Rhodes," which inspires this comment: "Very probably, among them were some, to whom I have read the holy Scriptures, and who are, in this awful manner, called to give an account" [216].

On June 30, 1821, he arrives at Syra, a small island about 100 miles south of Smyrna [44]. "Syra is under the special protection of the French flag, and affords a safe retreat from the noise and alarms of the present war" [216]. On August 20 he writes: "If things should remain as they now are, I think I shall return to Palestine by the first favorable opportunity, after the heat of the season is a little past. I cannot think of being absent from so

38 Wolff, 1827, 256.

39 Sherman Lieber, 1992, 161, notes that Parsons lacked "a common language with the Jews." This is undoubtedly true, and therefore Lieber should ascribe a more important role to the unidentified "Swiss clergyman" than he does at the above-mentioned synagog visit, in which he describes Parsons as the principal character.

interesting a field, longer than is absolutely necessary. From Christmas to the Passover there may be opportunities of doing much good" [44].

But this was not to be. At Syra he lies critically ill from September 5 to October 1, 1821. On November 7 he writes: "I have no correct recollection of any thing which was administered for my recovery." But in spite of this, Jerusalem is still on his mind. He writes on that very day: "I am not without a strong hope of arriving at Jerusalem before Christmas" [111].

But this was not to be either. On December 3, 1821, Parsons is reunited with Pliny Fisk in Smyrna – almost a year after they had taken leave of each other [218].

Parsons' Last Journey

Parsons does not regain his health in Smyrna. On January 8, 1822, Parsons and Fisk, on the recommendation of the doctors, set out for Alexandria in the hope that a sea voyage and a milder climate may encourage healing. They have been informed that Joseph Wolff is on his way to Jerusalem, and that he hopes that one of them may join him "as soon as possible, in order to be at Jerusalem together" [178].

When the ship arrives at Alexandria on January 15, 1822, two men have to carry the sick Parsons ashore in his chair. His condition deteriorates, and he dies and is buried on February 10, 1822 – before reaching the age of 30 [218–219].

Concluding Remarks

Procopius occupies a central place in the first "organized" Bible-work in Jerusalem. As we shall see in the next article, he also assisted Joseph Wolff in 1822. No matter how Melchior Tschoudy's work as a Bible-man is assessed, he is nevertheless one of those who *tried* to make contact with the Jews of Jerusalem.

Levi Parsons was the first Protestant Bible-man who intended to make Jerusalem the base for his work among the heathen. He further developed the good relationship to Procopius and the local Greek Orthodox priests, something succeeding Protestant missionaries benefited from. As a Bible-man he experienced his greatest joy when he read the Scriptures with people. According to the published journals, he does not seem to have had any noteworthy contact with Jerusalem's Jews, but this is a matter that requires further examination.

Joseph Wolff's arrival in Jerusalem in March 1822 brought much change; this will be explored in the next article in this series.

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