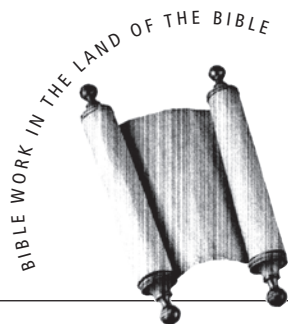


First “Organized” Bible-work in 19th Century Jerusalem

*Part X: John Nicolayson and Samuel Farman
in Jerusalem in 1831*

by Kai Kjær-Hansen



This final article in the series about Protestant Bible-men in Jerusalem will deal with John Nicolayson and Samuel Farman’s two-week visit during the summer of 1831. This visit will be characterized by clearing-up in more ways than one, as we will now see.

The primary purpose of Nicolayson’s visit to Jerusalem is not to distribute Scriptures but to close down the Bible Society Room at the Greek convent Mar Michael.

Second, it fell to Nicolayson to clear up after Joseph Wolff and Lady Georgiana. When the Wolffs left Jerusalem in June 1829, the formerly good relations with the Greeks had been ruined. The air was thick with rumors that Wolff had used money in an attempt to enlist supporters for his cause. The local priest Papas Ysa had been involved in this, which we shall now see.

The appendix lists the Protestant Bible-men who have been treated in this series of articles.

On August 30, 1831, John Nicolayson and Samuel Farman arrive in Jerusalem.¹ It is Nicolayson’s third visit to Jerusalem. The repercussions of Wolff’s visit in 1829 can still be felt, although two years have passed. Already on his arrival at Mar Michael, Nicolayson is aware of the cold air. Not until Papas Ysa has been fetched are they given access to their usual rooms in the Greek convent.

Relations with the Jews

The relationship to the Jews is minimal. “The excommunication pronounced by the rabbies [*sic*] against Mr. Wolff, extending to all missionaries, only one Jew has called as yet, he probably in the character of a spy,” Nicolayson writes on September 1. And on a visit to a synagogue on Sep-

¹ From 1829, Farman was sent out by London Jews Society (LJS) as Nicolayson’s traveling companion and as a Missionary Student. They are accompanied to Jerusalem by the Rev. James Bartholomew, “a Wesleyan missionary to Alexandria,” and by an English traveler, Mr. West, cf. *Monthly Intelligence* (1832): 121, 129.

tember 9, the missionaries see “the son of the late famous Rabbi Mendel” but do not converse with him.² This can hardly have come as a surprise for them after what they experienced on September 2:

Mr. Hamzolic [= Amzalag], a rich Jew, under English protection, who has been here for many years, called and told us a great deal about Mr. Wolff, whose greatest friend he had been at first, but became his chief enemy at last. He would have every man be satisfied in his own religion, and says no one shall ever induce him to change his. Mr. Farman tried to enter into some conversation with him, but to no purpose. He promised to call again in order to introduce us to the chief rabbies, but never came since.³

In this connection it may be added what Nicolayson writes about Amzalag and another Jew he spoke with in Jerusalem in March 1835:

[They] amused themselves with recounting how they (the Jews here) had duped Mr. Wolff, by burning all the New Testaments so profusely scattered by him, and some by the worse means of hypocritical professions of desire to inquire into Christianity, and a few by pretending to be actually convinced of its truth. They forget that such conduct will turn against themselves. No doubt they will try to dupe us also, and, at all events, fancy and boast that they have done so.⁴

When Wolff mentions (a few) converts among the Jews in Jerusalem during his three visits there, we cannot categorically exclude that he may sometimes have been “duped.”

Relations with the Greeks

There is a reason why Nicolayson was not given a hearty welcome at Mar Michael; the explanation is given by Papas Ysa. Even here is Wolff involved. Nicolayson writes:

The apparent reluctance with which we were received was afterwards accounted for by the details Papas Ysa gave us of Mr. Wolff’s last visit, on which occasion, even the Greeks (for the first time) had recourse to excommunication. Poor Papas Ysa suffered severely, for no sooner had Mr. Wolff left the city, than he was put in prison and detained there till he had paid 2,000 piasters, which the then Governor demanded as his share in a thousand dollars which, it was pretended, had been left him (Papas Ysa) by Mr. Wolff, for the purpose of buying people over to Protestantism. I cannot but suspect that the Greeks,

2 Ibid., 130; 132.

3 Ibid. About Amzalag, see *Mishkan* 58 (2009): 63–64.

4 *Jewish Intelligence* (1836): 19.

seeing that their former pretended friendship can hold no longer, nor yield them any pecuniary advantage, will be glad to avail themselves of that occasion for putting an end to it.⁵

In order to get to the bottom of this – if this is at all possible – it is necessary to get other sources than those which have been at my disposal. But there is hardly any doubt that Wolff impeded the Protestant Bible-men's relations with both the Jews and the Greeks. On the other hand, it is not easy to understand Nicolayson's exasperation over the Greeks, since the very purpose of his visit was to close down the Bible Room.

The Closing of the Bible Society Room at Mar Michael

Nicolayson has come to Jerusalem with the purpose of closing down the Bible Society Room at Mar Michael, established towards the end of 1823. The late Pliny Fisk's personal effects were still here after his last visit in 1825. But first, Nicolayson has to tidy up after Wolff. In Nicolayson's words, September 1: "Papaa Ysa and myself set about cleaning up the chaos, into which Mr. W[olff] had thrown all the things. Not a box had he left unbroken, not a book remaining, and many things were wanting."⁶

Fisk's private books and effects are packed in two boxes; furthermore five boxes are packed with Scriptures belonging to the British and Foreign Bible Society, and five boxes with Hebrew Bibles and tracts belonging to LJS. Nicolayson decides to send them via Jaffa to Beirut, where "they can be lodged free of expense, and gradually put into circulation." The tidying up is very thorough; Nicolayson's mood shines through in the following words: "The charges for the rooms here have already been accumulating for years, and it is absolutely necessary that this should be put a stop to by leaving nothing in the convent."⁷

Nicolayson settled accounts with the Greek bishops on September 7, and writes down the amount in his journal.

First half of 1827	four rooms	25.00 Sp. D.
Second half of 1827	two rooms	12.50 -
All year 1828	two rooms	25.00 -
First half of 1829	two rooms	12.50 -
Second half of 1829	one room	6.25 -
All year 1830	one room	12.50 -
First half of 1831	one room	6.25 . ⁸

5 *Monthly Intelligence* (1832): 129.

6 Cf. Nicolayson's Journal, 1831, 255; in Conrad Schick Library, Christ Church, Jerusalem. It is not clear what is implied in the words "not a book remaining," when shortly after there is mention of Fisk's "private books." When the events were published in *Monthly Intelligence* (1832): 129–31, these – for Wolff – incriminating words were censored away.

7 *Monthly Intelligence* (1832): 130.

8 Cf. Nicolayson's Journal, 1831, 258.



A total of 100 Spanish dollars is paid. A receipt is given and it is noted that neither owes anything to the other. The decreasing number of rented rooms gives, in its own way, some of the history of the Bible-men in Jerusalem in the period 1827–1831. The tidying up also shows that in the summer of 1831, neither Nicolayson nor the American missionaries could imagine that Jerusalem might become a mission *station* in the foreseeable future. But this is what happened. Due to the changed political situation, it becomes possible for Nicolayson to settle down in Jerusalem at the end of 1833.

After tidying up and winding up, Nicolayson uses the apartment to talk things through with Papas Ysa. The Bible Society Room at the Mar Michael convent belongs to the past, but now Greek pilgrims begin coming to Jerusalem again. What about distribution of Scriptures to them?

Agreement about Continued Distribution of Bibles in Jerusalem after 1831

Under September 9, 1831, Nicolayson writes:

In talking over with Papas Ysa the whole of the proceedings of missionaries here, from the very first up to the present time, in view of the many interruptions of the work by the death of many of the labourers, and of the many disappointments by the opposition and perversity of Jews and others, in excommunicating, burning, and otherwise destroying the Sacred Scriptures offered them, he could not repress the expression that all labour and expenses for these ten years past have been made in vain. We reminded him of the duty on our part of labouring in hope and patience, leaving the time and measure of success with the Lord, who has promised that his Word shall not return unto him void, but shall accomplish that which he pleaseth, and prosper in the thing whereunto he sends it. When considering what might farther be done, he suggested that a quantity of Scriptures, in modern Greek and Turkish, might be laid up in the great convent, with the consent of the bishops, and placed under his own particular management for distribution to the pilgrims. I requested him to speak with the bishops on this subject, and promised, that if he should obtain their full assent, and would answer for the actual circulation of the Scriptures, I would apply to the Auxiliary Bible Society at Malta for a supply of the Sacred Scriptures suited to that purpose, and either bring them with me to this country myself or send them hither.

No sooner said than done. Papas Ysa goes to the Greek bishops, who accept this plan. In Nicolayson's words: "Papas Ysa has returned with the full consent of the bishops to the above plan, so I hope it will be carried into effect, and pray that a rich blessing may attend it."⁹ The fact that the Greek

9 *Monthly Intelligence* (1832): 131.

bishops, in 1831, still want Scriptures to be distributed to Greek pilgrims is a further sign that their banning of Wolff in 1829 was not primarily connected to his *distribution* of Scriptures, a view that I have argued for in the previous article.¹⁰ And the fact that Papas Ysa seems to have had access to the bishops, and their trust, puts a question mark on some of what Wolff has said about Papas Ysa. At any rate, distribution of Bibles in Jerusalem is now entrusted to a local person, namely Papas Ysa, as had been the case with Procopius in the early 1820s.¹¹

On September 13, the Protestant Bible-men – Nicolayson and Farman – leave Jerusalem. In Ephesus, on October 31, 1831 – on his way back to Malta and his family – Nicolayson spots a vessel under sail. He is told that its destination is Jaffa, and that the passengers are Greek and Armenian pilgrims who are going to celebrate Christmas in Jerusalem. Nicolayson recalls the agreement with Papas Ysa: "Would that the Scriptures had already reached that place for distribution among them."¹²

There is evidence that Scriptures, sent by Nicolayson or others, did reach Papas Ysa in Jerusalem in 1831 or later. We do not know how many Scriptures Papas Ysa managed to distribute,¹³ but at his death on June 10, 1834, a quantity was left and there was an epilogue to this almost one year later.

On May 22, 1835, Nicolayson learns that "a young man was selling the books of the late Papas Ysa Petras [*sic*] in the market, and among them such as belonged to the Bible Society." Nicolayson continues: "I called on the widow, who told me that it was done by the executors, contrary to her request of them to wait my arrival, she knowing that the Bibles were not his own." Even though Nicolayson has no "legal authority to act for the Bible Society in this case," he enters the case and finds out that the young man had "a great variety in several languages, amounting in all to perhaps a hundred copies of Bibles and the New Testament, besides nearly as many, chiefly New Testament, in Hebrew, belonging to our own Society [LJS], and to which, therefore, I had a legal claim."¹⁴ Nicolayson then lays claim to these copies – and gets them.

With this, the time limit has not only been reached, but also exceeded, for this series of ten articles about organized Bible-work in Jerusalem in the period 1816–1831.¹⁵

Summary

Concluding remarks have been made in each of the previous nine articles in this series about the first Protestant Bible-men in Jerusalem. In the pro-

10 See *Mishkan* 58 (2009): 67–70.

11 See *Mishkan* 44 (2005): 68–72; 48 (2006): 73–78.

12 *Monthly Intelligence* (1832): 150.

13 *Jewish Intelligence* (1835): 208.

14 *Jewish Intelligence* (1836): 193.

15 In *Mishkan* 41 (2004): 6–20, Kelvin Crombie has given a historical cross section of the Bible work in *Eretz Israel* from ca. 1820 to 1948.



cess, a few myths have been laid to rest, for example about the time of the arrival in Jerusalem of the first Bible-man, which was not in 1816 but in 1818. Scriptures were distributed to local Christians, Christian pilgrims, and Jews in Jerusalem. The wastage rate seems high, not least among the Jews. The optimism of the early 1820s, that the Jews of Jerusalem were open to the gospel, did not last. But this did not mean that the missionaries lost heart or ceased to hand out Bibles in the following years – when the political circumstances permitted.

In so far as the Bible-men's visits to Jerusalem were *planned*, it is certainly possible to speak about "organized Bible work" in the period under investigation. But it is difficult to talk about an actual "organized Bible work *in Jerusalem*." An attempt was made with the arrangement in 1820 with Procopius, *locum tenens* for the Greek Orthodox Patriarch, residing in Constantinople, but Procopius died soon after. At the turn of the year 1823–1824, a Bible Society Room was set up – one step in the right direction. But the designated leader of it, Pliny Fisk, died less than a year later. A Bible Society proper was not established in Jerusalem in this period.

The Greeks and the Armenians were generally open to Bible distribution, although some friction with the Protestant Bible-men did occur if their work resulted in conversions to Protestantism. Bible distribution to Jews was largely done by visiting Bible-men – and with limited success.

Success or no success, the Bible-men were convinced that they were under an obligation, and that the word of God would not return empty.

It may be fitting to end this series of articles with Sherman Lieber's words about the Protestant missionaries:

Through their religious beliefs and actions missionaries found tranquility, fulfillment, and spiritual freedom. Missionary achievements were measured not by the number of conversions, but by feeling God's pleasure, and attaining profound inner contentment and deep serenity. With joy in their hearts, missionaries praised the Lord and persevered in the belief, that "God has not called me to be successful. He has called me to be faithful."¹⁶

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

16 Sherman Lieber, *Mystics and Missionaries* (Salt Lake City: University of Utah Press, 1992), 317. Lieber took the concluding quotation from Mother Theresa, winner of the 1979 Nobel Peace Prize.

Appendix*

Protestant Bible-men in Jerusalem 1818–1831

NAME	ARRIVAL	DEPARTURE
Christop Burckhardt	May 9	(approx.) May 19, 1818
James Connor	March 6	April 19, 1820
Levi Parsons	February 17	May 8, 1821
Melchior Tschoudy	April 6	(shortly after) April 22, 1821
Joseph Wolff	March 9	(approx.) June 1, 1822
Pliny Fisk	April 25	June 27, 1823
Jonas King	April 25	June 27, 1823
Joseph Wolff	April 25	July 17, 1823
William Jowett	November 21	December 15, 1823
Pliny Fisk	November 21, 1823	April 22, 1824
William Bucknor Lewis	December 13, 1823	January 20, 1824
Jonas King	January 21	February 6, 1824
Isaac Bird	January 21	April 22, 1824
Benjamin Barker	between Aug. 1 and	mid-Sept. (short visit), 1824
William Bucknor Lewis	March 29	May 9, 1825
Pliny Fisk	March 29	May 9, 1825
Jonas King	March 29	May 9, 1825
George Edward Dalton	April 2	May 9, 1825
George Edward Dalton	December 24, 1825	January 25, 1826 (died)
John Nicolayson	January 3	February 17, 1826
Samuel Gobot	March 31	June 23, 1827
Christian Kugler	March 31	June 23, 1827
Theodor Müller	March 31	April 20, 1827
John Nicolayson	March 31	April 20, 1827
Joseph Wolff and	January 7	June 13, 1829
Lady Georgiana	January 7	June 13, 1829
John Nicolayson	August 30	September 13, 1831
Samuel Farman	August 30	September 13, 1831

* A few of the cited dates are uncertain, since the sources sometimes give different dates; the discrepancy is usually only a few days and does not affect the overall picture of the length of the visit. I have cited the dates that I find most likely. Omitted are a few names of missionaries who came to Palestine accompanying the Bible-men to Jerusalem, but who did not have an independent ministry.

For easily understandable reasons, Procopius is not mentioned in this list of *Protestant Bible-men*, which does not mean that he did not play an important part in the beginning of the 1820s. Procopius and other Greeks, not least Papas Ysa, played an important role in the Bible-work in Jerusalem in this period. This is something which deserves a closer study.

And lastly, I dare not rule out the possibility that I have overlooked some individuals and their visits to Jerusalem. Lady Georgiana must resign herself to being included under *Bible-men*!

The previous nine articles in this series about the first Bible-men in Jerusalem have been published in *Mishkan* in the following issues: 41 (2004): 21–30; 42 (2005): 57–67; 44 (2005): 62–75; 48 (2006): 73–85; 49 (2006): 42–58; 54 (2008): 64–79; 55 (2008): 55–69; 57 (2008): 71–82; 58 (2009): 60–72. Cf. also “Stories about Disease and Death” *Mishkan* 52 (2007): 6–50.

