

A History of the Moravian Church's Tibetan Bible Translations

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To Tibetologists and students of Ladakhi culture, Heinrich August Jäschke is known primarily for his linguistic researches and especially for his Tibetan-English Dictionary which was first published in 1881. But, as he himself made clear in the preface to the dictionary, the main purpose of his work was to 'facilitate and hasten the spread of the Christian religion' and in particular to prepare a Tibetan translation of the Bible¹; his academic work was a by-product, albeit an essential one. The same is true of Jäschke's successor, August Hermann Francke, who is best known for his historical and linguistic research but who worked on the development of Tibetan Christian literature from his arrival in Ladakh in 1896 and was still revising the Tibetan Bible at the time of his death in 1930. All his life Francke considered that his academic researches complemented his Bible translation work both because they provided him with essential linguistic skills and because the fees from his academic activities provided him with much-needed financial support so that he could work on the translation. Francke passed on his interest in both academic research and translation to his pupil and colleague Yoseb Gergan who is best known to Ladakh scholars for his history, *Blad vags rgyal rabs chi med gter*² but whose main life's work was the completion of the Tibetan Bible.

The purpose of this paper, therefore, is to review the main themes of the Moravians' translation work and to show how this tied in with their academic researches. In doing so, I shall draw not only on Moravian sources but also on the archives of the British and Foreign Bible Society, which co-ordinated the Moravians' translation work with that of other missionaries and scholars working among Tibetans in the Darjeeling area. The paper will devote particular attention to the work of Jäschke, both because this conference is dedicated to his memory and also because he laid down the foundations on which all subsequent work was based. I shall then review the work of Jäschke's successors down to the present, discussing how they tried to solve the problems which he first encountered.

The Language Question

In the history of Tibetan linguistic studies one of Jäschke's greatest contributions was that he was the first to identify and codify variances between the different Tibetan dialects. This is the theme of his published academic papers³ and not only his 1881 dictionary but also the earlier Ro-

manized Tibetan and English Dictionary, published by the mission press in Kyelang in 1866, indicated regional differences in vocabulary.

This concern for the differences between classical Tibetan and the modern spoken language and between the regional dialects reflects a basic dilemma which still plagues Tibetan Bible translators: which variety of Tibetan is most appropriate for the Christian scriptures?

Jäschke decided that classical Tibetan *chos-skad*, the 'book language' used in the Buddhist scriptures, was the most suitable⁴. Its advantages were first that it was understood all over Tibet and the neighbouring Tibetan-speaking regions. Secondly, it had a sophisticated religious vocabulary although, as will be seen, many of its religious terms had specifically Buddhist connotations which rendered them inappropriate for Christian literature. The regional dialects, on the other hand were spoken, rather than written languages. If the missionaries did try to develop them into written languages, their literature would be understood only in small areas; for example in 1910 Francke estimated that only some 2,000 people spoke the Lahuli dialect of Bunan⁵. Moreover any dialect books that did appear risked being mocked as the work of half-educated rustics. The ideas they expressed would not be taken seriously unless they were expressed in the appropriate religious language. For these reasons there can be little doubt that Jäschke was right to choose the *chos-skad* book language but it had important disadvantages which to some extent reflect the different approaches of Tibetan Buddhist and Western Protestant religious culture. Buddhists accepted that a deep knowledge of the scriptures would usually be restricted to scholarly specialists. The Moravians intended their scriptures to be readily accessible to all readers and listeners and to stir their hearts directly. A Bible in classical Tibetan would rarely achieve this aim because although standards of literacy in Tibetan Buddhist areas were relatively high many laymen found it difficult to cope with the complexities of *chos-skad*. The problem was that any attempt to simplify the language by using *phal-skad*, the common tongue, risked descending into dialect that might be understood in Ladakh but was unacceptable in Darjeeling. This basic dilemma is a theme that runs right through the history of Tibetan Bible translation. One partial solution, as will be seen, was to translate individual Gospels into regional dialects, but the main aim was always to translate the whole Bible into a Tibetan that was acceptable in all Tibetan-speaking regions. It was to prove more difficult to achieve this aim than might at first have been expected.

Jäschke and the British and Foreign Bible Society

From as early as 1859 the Moravian Mission Board in Herrnhut was in touch with the British and Foreign Bible Society in London to discuss the possible printing of a future Tibetan Bible.⁶

The Bible Society was founded by a group of laymen in 1804 and in the course of the nineteenth century rapidly expanded to found auxiliary societies across the world.⁷ Its sole purpose was to facilitate the translation and distribution of the scriptures and from the beginning it was inter-denominational both in outlook and in composition. The Society insisted on high standards of linguistic accuracy so that individual translations could not be accused of betraying the theological biases of the translators. One particular example specifically mentioned in the Society's guidelines for translators was the word 'baptise'.⁸ The Society's policy was to find a word which meant 'sacred washing' without specifying whether or not this involved immersion, as the Baptist Church would have preferred. If there were no such word the translator was to adapt a transliteration of the original Greek. Similarly neither paraphrases nor annotations were acceptable because they too might reflect the theological preoccupations of the translator.

Jäschke discussed the problems of translation at some length in a letter sent via Herrnhut to the Bible Society in 1863⁹ and in the notes attached to his translation of the Epistles of St. John published by R. and A. Zacharias in Neustadt-Magdeburg in 1875. In both documents he expressed the fear that his work might be criticised for being a paraphrase but insisted that that a direct verbal translation was subjectively impossible, because of his own linguistic shortcomings, and objectively impossible because of the inherent differences between Greek and Tibetan. He emphasised that his own translation could only be tentative and that it would need to be revised, preferably by an educated native Tibetan-speaker with a deep understanding of Christianity. Since it would take at least a generation before such Tibetan-speakers could be produced, the first translations were bound to be imperfect.

The translation of technical Biblical terms and ideas is a challenge in any language and it is all the greater when, as in the case of Tibetan, some of the most basic Christian concepts are unfamiliar. The difficulties of translation therefore reflect not only linguistic but also basic religious and cultural differences. In some cases Jäschke was able to take technical words, for example *bdud* (devil) or *nam-kha* (heaven), direct from Tibetan without many reservations¹⁰, but some of the most important concepts could not be expressed in the existing terminology.

None of the words to describe the various deities of Tibetan cosmology such as the *lha* fitted the Christian understanding of God and the use of the word 'Buddha' as a synonym, a translation which had been used in one of the Mongolian versions of the Bible,¹¹ was obviously bound to create confusion. Jäschke instead chose *dkon-mchog* which means 'the precious one'.¹² *Dkon-mchog* also has Buddhist connotations because it is the term used to describe the 'three precious gems' of Buddha, Dharma and Sangha but Jäschke hoped that with due explanation and frequent usage it would be accepted as expressing the Christian concept of God. Among the Christians of Ladakh this meaning has long since been accepted but as late as the 1930s missionaries working in Eastern Tibet wrote to the British and Foreign Bible Society complaining that the word was misleading.

In his 1863 letter to the Bible Society Jäschke discusses the problems of finding a word for 'vision'.¹³ I quote it at length because it gives some impression of the difficulties of Jäschke's linguistic and philosophical endeavours:

"A sort of supernatural transport so to speak is indeed known to Buddhism and it has words to express it, but it is far too different from such a state in the scriptural sense to admit of this being available; on the contrary it is something to which we dare not give any countenance. It is nothing more than *meditation*, an idea common to Buddhism and Brahmanism, and to a great degree is nothing but superstition, though to a certain extent, and more so than one might be disposed to think, it would appear to be grounded upon facts. It consists of a person losing himself in himself, the directing of the mind on some simple object (as for instance an Idol, or when one has made greater advances simply the imagination of a Divinity) a total withdrawal from the world of sense, which is formally practised in the monasteries of the lamas and where by constant practice the Ascetic is able to push it to so inconceivable an extent that he really appears to know nothing of the outer world. That such holy men may succeed in arriving at a capability of abstaining from food to an extent which is quite unattainable even for the frugal Oriental may easily be imagined, but the Books on Religion teach and the people high and low fully believe that by such practices and the continual purification of the soul supernatural capabilities, especially that of being able to float through the air, may be attained. A prophetic foresight is not the object nor even a sign necessarily accompanying these distractions tho' it may occur in connection with these miraculous gifts".

In the same letter Jäschke wrote that he had chosen a word for 'baptism' meaning to 'give the bath' which likewise occurs as a religious ceremony among the Tibetans. This aroused the concern of the Bible Society's Editorial Superintendent who feared that the word might too easily be understood as 'immersion'.¹⁴ Apparently this was not the case;

Jäschke's dictionary defines one of the meanings of the word (*k'rus*) as "a religious ceremony, consisting in the sprinkling with water", thus justifying the Christian use of the term.¹⁵ One hopes that the dictionary has had no Baptist readers who might have been taken offence at the use of the word 'sprinkling'.

Other words caused difficulties not so much on philosophical grounds as because the article described is not found in Tibet or Ladakh. For the word 'cross' Jäschke "deemed it more advisable to adopt a word [*brkyang-shing*] which at least for its meaning represents 'a tree of extension' although it is rather a *rack* than an instrument of death as it consists of a four-cornered frame to which the outstretched arms of the criminal are fastened, and then while in a lying position buring sealing wax is dropped on his breast".¹⁶

Some animals and plants common in the Middle East are rare in Tibet. For several years Jäschke looked in vain for an appropriate word for 'olive' and came to the conclusion that the plant was unknown both in India and Tibet until he learnt of a species of wild olive in Sikkim known as *sku-ru* and thus solved his problem.¹⁷

Preliminary translations of individual books of the Bible were published on the Moravian Mission's lithographic press from the 1861 onwards. and, as noted above, the Letters of St John were published in Neustadt-Magdeburg in 1875.¹⁸ Jäschke made the initial translations of all the books of the New Testament with the exception of Hebrews which was the work of A. W. Heyde, one of the two pioneers of the Himalayan Mission, and F. Redslob assisted by a converted Tibetan monk, Nathanael Zodpa Gyaltzen. Heyde, Redslob and Nathanael subsequently revised the original translations for publication.

In 1875 the Bible Society sent a copy of Jäschke's version of St John's Gospel to Dr S. C. Malan, an Anglican clergyman who had been secretary of the Asiatic Society of Bengal and in that capacity had been a friend of Alexander Csoma de Körös.¹⁹ Malan's opinion of the translation was broadly favourable and when the entire New Testament was finished in 1881 the Society agreed to go ahead with publication.

The actual printing was to be carried out in Berlin using a font of type based on the work of a Zanskari scribe which had originally been prepared for use on Jäschke's dictionary. The final preparations proved protracted partly because Jäschke was in poor health and partly because he was a perfectionist. Thus Rev. H. E. Shawe wrote on 23rd March 1881:

"Jäschke is a very slow worker mainly in consequence of excessive conscientiousness, a great critical sensitiveness, but also a constitutional difficulty on coming to a decision on any subject, whether philological or domestic."²⁰

Proof-reading became a particular problem because of Jäschke's sickness. Two of his pupils, Dr Wenzel and G. T. Reichelt (who had also assisted Jäschke with work on his dictionary) helped, but printing was still not quite finished before Jäschke died on 24th September 1883. The four Gospels were published in that year and the remaining books of the New Testament in 1885.

To the end Jäschke insisted that his translation was at best a tentative version but the scale of his achievement should not be underrated. At the time his translation was received and used not only in Lahul and Ladakh but also in eastern and even north-eastern Tibetan-speaking areas. His work was still valued 75 years later when the Tibetan New Testament was being revised for the third time; Pierre Vittoz, the last European Moravian missionary to work in the Himalaya was one of the translation team and he commented:

"Jäschke was a genius, a true linguistic genius, as we here and there discover after we have battled in vain around a verse when we find how simply he solved his problem".²¹

However, Jäschke's New Testament did come in for criticism from missionaries working in the Darjeeling area partly because of printer's mistakes but also because they thought that Jäschke's style

was too difficult for local Tibetans. In 1897 the Bible Society agreed to sponsor a committee based in Ghoom near Darjeeling to revise the translation.²¹ The committee's members were to include European scholars, assisted by indigenous pundits, with a knowledge of both eastern and western Tibetan dialects as well as the classical language.

The Ghoom/Shanghai New Testament

The chairman of the committee was A. W. Heyde, one of the two pioneer Moravian missionaries who had been sent to India in 1853. In 1856 he founded the mission station at Kyelang, Lahul, and had been based there ever since. Although he would never have claimed to match Jäschke's technical expertise, he had already helped revise Jäschke's earliest New Testament translations and had begun work on the Old Testament. His long experience in the Indo-Tibetan borderlands gave him a depth of experience which no other missionary could hope to match.

Heyde's colleagues included Graham Sandberg, an English clergyman with a special interest in Tibetan. He had already published a *Manual of the Sikkim-Bhutia Dialect* and a *Manual of Colloquial Tibetan* as well as several articles on Tibet.²³ The third member of the committee was J. F. Fredericksen of the Scandinavian Alliance Mission, who was subsequently replaced by Edmund Amundsen. The final member of the committee was David Macdonald, a government official of half-Sikkimese, half-Scottish descent. Macdonald was a member of the Church of Scotland and had worked as a research assistant to Colonel L. A. Waddell, the author of *The Buddhism of Tibet*.²⁴ He subsequently accompanied Waddell on the Younghusband expedition to Lhasa in 1904 and the following year became British Trade Agent at Yatung, Tibet, where he stayed until 1925. As will be seen, Macdonald was to have a long association with subsequent Tibetan Bible translation initiatives. Like Jäschke, Heyde and Sandberg combined their Bible translation activities with linguistic research of a more technical nature. In 1899 the Chief Secretary of the Government of Bengal commissioned them to revise and edit the draft Tibetan-English Dictionary compiled by the Bengali scholar Sarat Chandra Das.²⁵ The purpose of the dictionary was to show the Sanskrit equivalents of Tibetan Buddhist terms and to include words from modern Tibetan literature not mentioned by Jäschke. The revisers' contribution was first to rearrange Das's material more systematically. Secondly they carefully edited the references cited to illustrate the meanings of words, cutting some and adding others. Thirdly, they added a number of new words which Das had not included. The whole revision required 'two years of incessant toil'.

The New Testament revision process took from 1898 till 1902 and the new version was first published in Ghoom in sections between 1901 and 1903. It was still in book language but was simpler than its predecessor and therefore more popular in Darjeeling. In 1913 it was reprinted with minor corrections in Shanghai as a result of which it has sometimes been referred to as the 'Shanghai version'.

Although the Ghoom translation still has its defenders in Darjeeling, Moravian scholars were always critical of it. In Francke's view the Scandinavian Alliance missionaries had undervalued Jäschke's achievement because their knowledge of Tibetan was limited and they misunderstood its purpose which was to provide an accessible classical Tibetan version rather than one in ordinary spoken Tibetan.²⁶ He thought the Scandinavian missionaries 'ought to have asked the Bible Society to let them start a new translation in the common dialect of Lhasa and Darjeeling, which could perhaps be made a literary language by such means'.²⁷ Instead the new version was a mix-

ture of classical Tibetan and dialect, easier to understand in some places but not, in Francke's opinion, a major improvement on Jäschke's work.

Such criticisms notwithstanding, the Ghoom/Shanghai New Testament was not to be replaced until the publication of the entire Tibetan Bible in 1948. Meanwhile work was already under way on the translation of the Old Testament.

The Old Testament

The Kyelang Mission Press published the first books of the Old Testament, Genesis and Exodus, in 1881. These had been translated by Heyde and F. Redslob, another Moravian missionary, with the assistance of Nathanael Zodpa Gyaltsen, a lama from Lhasa whose father was an official in the Dalai Lama's cabinet and who was baptised in 1872. Redslob translated most of the books from Genesis to Joshua and a metrical version of the Psalms, but died suddenly in Leh in 1891 before all of these could be edited and published.

In 1900 a committee of Moravians began to prepare Redslob's manuscripts for publication and to translate further books of the Old Testament.²⁸ The committee's members were T. D. L. Schreve of Poo, S. H. Ribbach of Leh, K. Fichtner of Simla and A. H. Francke of Kalatse and they were subsequently joined by Dr F. E. Shawe, also of Leh. They were assisted by at least three Ladakhis: Paulu Jor Phuntsog, Samuel Joldan and Chomphel who before becoming a Christian had been a Buddhist monk, originally from Tashi Lhunpo. In 1905 the Bible Society in Berlin published a new version of Genesis and Exodus based on their revisions. Heyde, who by this time had returned to Europe after an absence of nearly fifty years, supervised the printing and proof-reading. Leviticus, Numbers and Deuteronomy were published in Berlin in 1907 and Joshua in 1912.

Francke was by far the greatest scholar on the committee and the one who was to have most to do with the translation of the remaining books of the Bible. Francke had arrived in Leh in 1896 and then moved to Kalatse in 1899 and Kyelang in 1906.²⁹ From the very beginning he combined his missionary work with linguistic and historical research: his first article in the *Zeitschrift der Deutschen Morgenländischen Gesellschaft* – on Jäschke's Bible translation – was published as early as 1897 and followed by a steady flow of books and papers until his death in 1930.³⁰

Francke's earliest contribution to the Old Testament was the First Book of Samuel which he translated with the help of Samuel Joldan; he published a tentative version of 300 copies on the mission press in 1906 using an honorarium for his edition of the Kesar Saga in the *Bibliotheca Indica* series to pay for the printing expenses.³¹ However, while he was in India the main part of his translation work was the production of versions of St Mark's Gospel in Ladakhi and the Lahuli dialects of Bunan, Tinan and Manchad. These will be discussed in a later section of this paper.

In 1908 his wife's ill-health forced Francke to return to Europe but he came back to India the following year to undertake a research expedition for the Archaeological Survey of India. He spent part of the next four years writing up the results of his researches which were published as the two volumes of *Antiquities of Indian Tibet* published in Calcutta by the Archaeological Survey of India in 1914 and 1926. During this period the British government therefore paid half his salary. The Mission Board was prepared to employ him at a missionary training college in Niesky for the other half of his time but in 1911 Bishop Benjamin La Trobe of Herrnhut wrote to the Bible Society in London suggesting that Francke's time would be better spent working on Tibetan Bible translation.³²

In stating his qualifications to the Bible Society, Francke pointed out that his work for the British

government kept him in "continual touch with the spirit of the Tibetan language".³³ He also emphasised that the language for the translation of the Old Testament was

"not the spoken language but a perhaps simplified form of the classical language. And a knowledge of this language cannot be acquired by personal contact with the Tibetans but must be obtained by a prolonged study of classical Tibetan literature".³⁴

This could as well be achieved in Europe as in India or Tibet.

In the course of his academic research Francke reported the discovery of a hitherto unrecognised Tibetan grammatical rule concerning the pronoun *nged*, meaning 'we' which he believed could only be used in an 'inclusive' sense. He had first noticed this while working on the Kesar Saga in 1906 and after checking other sources came to the conclusion that:

"the pronoun *nged* 'we' is used when some person included in the 'we' is respected; as for instance the King and I, we (*nged*) will go to town ..."

"Now if this pronoun is used for 'we' in the Lord's Prayer it suggests the idea that in this 'we' the father in heaven (the respected person) is always included. And this is particularly offensive in the fifth petition, 'forgive us our sins'."³⁵

Francke therefore proposed that the Bible Society should replace *nged* with *bdag* in subsequent editions of the New Testament. After consulting with the Darjeeling missionaries, not all of whom agreed with Francke, the Editorial Sub-Committee accepted this change,³⁶ but too late for the 1913 Shanghai edition of the New Testament. The translators of the 1948 and the 1970 versions of the New Testament did not agree with Francke; they both used *nged*.³⁷

Partly because of the problems it had already experienced with the New Testament, the Bible Society was keen to ensure that the Old Testament would be acceptable in Darjeeling as well as Ladakh and in 1912 accepted an offer from David Macdonald, who was now British Trade Agent in Yatung, Tibet, to read Francke's draft.³⁸ Francke agreed to this arrangement but was not altogether satisfied with it because, although he recognised Macdonald's knowledge of colloquial Tibetan, he insisted that his was to be a classical Tibetan version and he believed that Macdonald had been partly responsible for the mixture of dialect and classical language in the Ghoom/Shanghai version.³⁹ On Francke's recommendation Edmund Amundsen, now working for the Bible Society in Yunnanfu, China, was also asked to read the drafts.⁴⁰

The procedure, therefore, was that Francke, sent his version, which was itself based on the tentative versions produced in India by the Moravian missionary committee, to Yatung for checking. Macdonald annotated the drafts in red ink and returned them to Francke.⁴¹

This arrangement was time-consuming and led to disagreements which were difficult to resolve by correspondence. For example Francke complained that Macdonald was too ready to sacrifice part of the original meaning for the sake of easier language:

"Thus for instance when Mr Macdonald uses the word *gsod* 'kill' not only for 'killing' but also for 'tear to pieces' or the word *bshin*, 'died', also for 'falling into the hands of the enemy' while my text gives the exact translation. In such cases I cannot call his corrections an improvement. ... In the case of 'strong drink' where my text as well as the New Testament has a word meaning 'intoxication', which may not be heard in everyday language, Mr Macdonald suggested that the word *arag* (English: arrack) repeatedly. I think that we had better make use of the old word *smyo-byed* and risk that a few people might not understand it".⁴²

Another source of disagreement, once again, was on the use of pronouns. Macdonald reported that the distinction between 'inclusive' and 'exclusive' pronouns was not known in Central Tibet and that the pronouns *nga-chag* (we) and *khyod-chag* (you), which Francke favoured, were regarded as Sikkimese words.⁴³

Partly in order to study these problems at first hand Francke decided to return to India in 1914.⁴⁴ The expedition was subsidised by the Royal Ethnographical Museum in Munich: the plan was to travel overland to Ladakh via Russia and Xinjiang (Chinese Turkestan) where he was to undertake

archaeological research. He would then spend the summer of 1914 in Leh and the winter in Darjeeling, where he hoped to meet Macdonald, before returning to Europe in the summer of 1915.⁴⁵ However, only the first part of the journey was accomplished. Soon after crossing the Karakorum Pass into Ladakh Francke met the Italian Scientist Dr Filippo de Filippi who informed him that war had broken out in Europe but it was only when he reached Leh that Francke discovered that Great Britain and Germany were on opposite sides in the conflict. Instead of being allowed to proceed to Darjeeling, he was interned in a camp at Ahmedabad and then repatriated via Holland in 1916. Francke was never to return to Ladakh but after the end of the First World War he resumed contact with the Moravian congregation in Leh and in particular with Yoseb Tsetan Gergan who now took up the work of Bible translation. Yoseb Gergan was the son of a senior Tibetan official who according to family tradition had been the teacher of the Panchen Lama. He had been educated at the Tyndale Biscoe School in Srinagar but had also made a careful study of Tibetan literature. As he himself reported:

"With the idea of ascertaining the Buddhist way of salvation, I first of all considered it important to learn classical Tibetan and its orthography. Until I was 20 I studied medical treatises, books on fiction, legends, astronomy, the songs of Milaraspa, idiotic fables, a book called the Mani bKa, and many hundreds of Tibetan parables".⁴⁶

These studies gave Gergan the literary training for the translation. He began work in 1919 and by October 1928 had completed the remaining 29 books of the Old Testament. As sources he used the Authorised, Revised, Urdu and Moffatt translations of the Bible and supplemented these with Young's Concordance.⁴⁷

Gergan combined his translation work with his duties as schoolmaster and, after his ordination in 1920, as a minister first in Kyelang and then in Leh. Until 1926 he also did occasional part-time work for the Archaeological Department and he cooperated with Francke not only in the Bible translation but also in historical research. One of Gergan's most interesting contributions was the discovery of a Tibetan text outlining Tibetan Buddhist cosmology and doctrine which had been written for Alexander Csoma de Kőrös in rDzongkhul monastery, Zankar.⁴⁸

Francke spent the 1920s in Berlin. In 1922 he became a lecturer in the Philosophical Faculty of Berlin University and in 1925 a Professor but he still spent half his time on the Bible translation, for which he received a grant from the Bible Society, initially of 20 guineas a year. As before, his role was to work through and amend the original draft which he would then send to E. Mackenzie, a Scottish missionary in Kalimpong, and David Macdonald.

Macdonald was still far from reconciled to Francke's style because he considered it to be excessively influenced by Western Tibetan usage and he quoted the verdict of the local monks in support of his opinions. In 1926 the Bible Society agent in Calcutta reported after a meeting with Macdonald:

"He states that there is an honorific and a coolie form of the language and that this Western Tibetan form represents the coolie form rather than the other. He quotes learned lamas as saying that Christian tracts are written in a vulgar form of Tibetan. 'How can we believe that your religion is superior to Buddhism when the style of your scripture is inferior to ours?' . . . I gathered that his mode of expression would be so different to Francke's that he had not even the heart to indicate the difference on the successive drafts which we are sending him, but is just letting things go because Dr Francke has the last word, as he assumes, which makes any emendations of his futile".⁴⁹

Francke, however, commented:

"You may be sure that I value his [Macdonald's] corrections and notes very highly and when I come to prepare these chapters for our first tentative edition of the books of the Old Testament, they will all be studied and accepted as far as possible.

"Mr Macdonald must not forget, however, that also in Ladakh we have great numbers of learned lamas who took their degree, so to say, in Lhasa or Bkra-shis-lhun-po and one of them, a former lama from the latter place, is now one of our Christian evangelists. The Ladakhi renderings are weighed against Macdonald's and other Darjeeling renderings and very often preference is given to the latter."⁵⁰

The whole translation project received a severe setback when Francke died suddenly in February 1930. However, Bishop F. E. Peter, the only Moravian Bishop to be appointed for Ladakh, undertook to check Gergan's work and Macdonald's corrections in Francke's place. At last in 1934 all the work on the Old Testament was complete and Gergan was able to write to the Bible Society:

"The Bible translation was not as a labour for me at all but a real pleasure during the last fourteen years. It is a great kindness of God and your society to accept this piece of ministry. As my feeling the Bible translation was the chief part of my life, so when the translation was finished in 1928 my heart was full of joy and I thanked our heavenly Father for his blessing and grace. Now I like to see the whole Bible printed in Tibetan before my departure from this world".⁵¹

But the Bible Society did not fulfil Gergan's wish straightaway. In 1924 it had published Judges, Ruth and the First and Second Books of Samuel; in 1930 these were followed by I Kings to II Chronicles and in 1935 by Isaiah and Jeremiah. After that, no more of the Tibetan Bible was published until 1948; it appears that the reason for the delay was that the Bible Society felt that the low demand for the scriptures in Tibetan did not warrant publication – at least not yet.

The 1948 Tibetan Bible

Meanwhile in Leh Gergan began work on a second revision of the New Testament; he had long shared Francke's view that "On several passages the revisers spoiled the New Testament at Darjeeling".⁵² Since he was acting on his own initiative he received no grant from the Bible Society and his drafts were not sent to Darjeeling for checking, an omission which was to lead to some controversy when his work eventually came to be published.

In 1942 Gergan and Walter Asboe of the Moravian Mission in Leh together with Harold Avery of the Brethren's mission again wrote to the Bible Society to press for publication of the entire Bible.⁵³ The text they proposed was the Old Testament as it stood, plus Gergan's revisions of the Gospels and the Psalms. They emphasised that the work was urgent because Yoseb Gergan was by far the best qualified man to supervise the work and he was now 64 and might not live for much longer. They also proposed that Gergan's New Testament texts should be sent to David Macdonald, and he too was now very elderly.

In the event it proved impossible to involve Macdonald but, after protracted discussions to establish that there was indeed a demand for a single volume Bible, the Bible Society responded to the Leh congregation's insistence on the urgency of the work and therefore authorised publication. Before this could take place, the entire text had to be copied out on to a uniform page-size. Yoseb Gergan initially supervised the copyists. These were: Elijah Tsetan Phuntsog (Gergan's son-in-law), Stepan Gapel, Zodpa Dechen and Ezekiel Stobdan – the text clearly shows the four different handwriting styles.⁵⁴ Unfortunately Gergan died in August 1946 before the work could be completed. After his death, E. T. Phuntsog took over the supervision work and in 1948, before the final publication, Stepan Gapel travelled to Lahore to check the proofs and eliminate remaining mistakes.⁵⁵ This was an unusually dangerous journey because India and Pakistan were at war.

Until now the 1948 version has been the only edition of the Tibetan Bible to be published in a single volume, the culmination of years of effort by a succession of Ladakhi and European scholars. It was generally agreed that it was a major improvement on all previous editions, a reflection of Gergan's special literary skills. Nonetheless it was still very much open to improvement.

The 1970 New Testament

Perhaps inevitably, the Darjeeling congregations still complained that the 1948 Bible contained too many Ladakhi expressions. Pierre Vittoz, a Swiss missionary who came to Ladakh in 1950, insisted that the 1948 Bible was a great improvement on its predecessors but did accept some of the criticisms of the Darjeeling Christians. Referring to the 1948 Bible he wrote:

"It is much better than the previous versions because the language is true Tibetan. Gergan's greatest fault is that he mixes dialect with the book language of Tibet. I have now read more of the literature produced by the Moravians in the past and it is a plague. Suppose in sending my accounts to London I suddenly without warning changed from solemn prose to 'quids', 'bobs', and 'tanners'! Everyone would understand my meaning but it is not quite the done thing is it? Yet when I read Gergan and even Francke I get that impression. What a salad it all is!"⁵⁶

A further criticism was that whereas literary Tibetan had a genius for brevity the existing translations were "much longer than the already elongated English version".⁵⁷ This is a criticism of which Francke had already been aware.⁵⁸ However, he had pointed out that the earliest Tibetan scholars, when translating the Indian Buddhist scriptures into their own language, had likewise stuck to a comparatively long-winded style in order to stick as closely as possible to the original. Francke thought that this was a pardonable fault at least in the earliest Christian translations because of the risk that nuances of meaning would be lost if the style was too compressed.

In Gergan's case, according to Vittoz, the problem was compounded because he was translating from English and Urdu rather than from the original Greek and this created new difficulties which would not have arisen if he had been working from the original.⁵⁹ The result was that, whereas the Gospels were comparatively easy to understand, the epistles were almost unintelligible; when reading these Eliyah Tsetan Phuntsog found it easier to use the English version.⁶⁰

In 1953 Vittoz and E. T. Phuntsog began experimental preliminary work on a revised New Testament. In a sample section of 21 verses from St John's Gospel they changed 17 dialect expressions, turned round ten other sentences and reduced the text from 640 syllables to 520.⁶¹ In many ways the two men were an ideal combination; Vittoz was well acquainted with New Testament Greek whereas Phuntsog had studied for two years in Rizong monastery before becoming a Christian and was a Tibetan scholar of some note.

As before, the Bible Society was keen to ensure that the resulting translation would be acceptable in all dialect regions. In 1956 a Tibetan Bible Translation Committee met in Kalimpong and recommended the formation of a revision committee.⁶² The chief revisers would be Vittoz and Phuntsog and they were to be assisted by M. Griebenow, a missionary with a good knowledge of the Amdo dialect; M. Kraft who knew the Kham dialect; and G. Tharchin a Church of Scotland minister in Kalimpong who had originally come from the Moravian congregation in Poo, Kinnaur, and who had assisted David Macdonald in his revision of Francke's work as far back as the 1920s.

Vittoz and Phuntsog started work on the revision in 1959, staying in Landour near Mussoorie because the Indian government refused Vittoz permission to return to Ladakh. They sent their drafts to Tharchin in Kalimpong and Griebenow in Hong Kong and by 1962 the main revision work was complete. The Bible Society of India published the revised St Matthew in Bangalore in 1961 and this was followed by St Luke in 1966, St Mark and Acts in 1968 and the whole New Testament in a single volume in 1970.

It is generally accepted that the literary style of the 1970 Tibetan New Testament is far better than any of its predecessors and there has been no suggestion that it leans too strongly towards one particular dialect. However, its literary strengths have to some extent proved a weakness in that some less-educated Ladakhis and even Darjeeling Tibetans have found its classical style too difficult. Even now Tibetan Bible translation is not wholly free of controversy.

Dialect Translations

The difficulty that ordinary Ladakhis and Tibetan speakers have in understanding the 1970 New Testament even today may reflect the fundamental problem discussed at the beginning of this paper, that a good classical Tibetan version would not be easily accessible to ordinary people. In order to address this problem, the Moravians translated excerpts from the Gospels into local dialects. This work has valuable academic repercussions because few Europeans – or, indeed, indigenous scholars – had studied these dialects systematically. The notes on Ladakhi, Tinan, Bunan, Manchad and Kanawari (Kinnauri) in G. A. Grierson's *Linguistic Survey of India* are all based on contributions from Moravian scholars and include excerpts from the Bible translations as samples of the languages' structure.⁶³

Jäschke was the pioneer in this as in other translation activities. He translated the Harmony of the Gospels, which the Moravian Church uses for Bible readings in Holy Week, into Ladakhi and was gratified to find that his small congregation paid closer attention to the Ladakhi reading than to the classical Tibetan.⁶⁴ He chose Ladakhi rather than one of the languages of Lahul because most of the early Christian converts in Kyelang were from Ladakh. Francke claims that Jäschke was the first to reduce Ladakhi to writing⁶⁵ though this point is debatable depending on how one defines 'Ladakhi'. Subsequently Karl Marx and Becker-Shawe in Leh revised the Harmony⁶⁶ and in 1907 Francke published 20 copies on the Leh mission press.

Francke himself translated a life of Christ and the whole of St Mark's Gospel into Ladakhi and this was published by the Bible Society's Calcutta auxiliary in 1980. Yoseb Gergan revised the Ladakhi St Mark for publication in Lahore in 1919.

The orthography in the earlier Christian Ladakhi writing was not a phonetic transcription of the spoken language but had been adapted according to the usage of classical Tibetan. Yoseb Gergan's version of St Mark used a more simplified system.

This version was never popular among the literate Buddhists of Ladakh who regarded the reformed spelling as an unacceptable tampering with the spelling rules of classical Tibetan which was, after all, the language of the Buddhist texts. Because of the association with the Buddhist scriptures it is unlikely that anyone but a Christian would have proposed a simplified spelling of Ladakhi, at least in 1919.

Heyde translated excerpts of the Gospels into the Lahuli dialects of Bunan and Manchad – Grierson's *Linguistic Survey* includes Heyde's version of 'The Prodigal Son' in these languages. Francke translated St Mark's Gospel into Bunan, Manchad and Tinan.⁶⁷

Francke also began work on a translation of St Mark into the language of the Dards (*'Brog-skad*) with the help of Chomphel who had served the Dards as a Buddhist monk before his conversion. However, he was unable to complete more than a few chapters of this before he left India. He hoped to resume work on his return visit in 1914 but, as has been seen, the outbreak of war wrecked his plans.

Finally, J. Bruske, who worked at the short-lived Moravian mission station at Chini from 1900 to 1905, translated St Mark's Gospel into Kanawari (Kinnauri) using the Devanagari script. According to Grierson his researches established an unexpected Manda influence on the local dialect.⁶⁸

There have been no new Moravian attempts to translate the Bible into any of these dialects since 1919 (though Elijah Gergan, Yoseb Gergan's grandson who has started a new Christian project in the Kargil district, hopes to produce versions of the Gospels in the Purig dialect). In the case of Kinnauri and the Lahuli dialects, the lack of fresh translations is a result of the slowing down and then cessation of mission activity in the area. In the case of Ladakhi the poor reception of the

Ladakhi Gospel may have discouraged repetition. In the 1950's E. T. Phuntsog, alongside his other activities, did try to promote a simplified Ladakhi spelling but his proposals encountered fierce hostility from Ladakhi Buddhists and were never widely accepted. Phuntsog did write a Christian play using his reformed spelling but does not seem to have used it for any formal Bible translation. It is interesting to note that in recent years many Ladakhis have placed greater emphasis on the distinctions between Ladakhi and Tibetan, partly in order to counter any suggestion that Ladakh should have political links with Tibet. There has, of course, been no suggestion that the language of the Buddhist scriptures themselves should be modified but there have been controversial proposals to modify everyday Ladakhi writing. One Ladakhi Buddhist writer has even written a novel in simplified Ladakhi spelling.⁶⁹ He has been much criticised for doing so and the debate over possible spelling reforms in written Ladakhi/Tibetan is still far from resolved but it is conceivable that a simplified means of writing Ladakhi, as first advocated by Gergan and E. T. Phuntsog, might eventually come to be more widely accepted.

The Tibetan Bible Today

There have been no fresh attempts to revise the New Testament since the publication of the 1970 version and it is unlikely that any will be contemplated for some time to come. However, the Tibetan Christian Fellowship (a loose association of Tibetan-speaking congregations in India) has proposed a reprint of the flawed Ghoom/Shanghai New Testament on the ground that in spite of its imperfections it is still easier to understand than the 1970 New Testament. Current debates therefore still reflect the same dilemma that Jäschke faced over a century ago: how to reconcile the demands of literary Tibetan with the desire to produce an accurate translation which would be accessible to ordinary people?

Meanwhile, Stephen Hishey, the Moravian pastor at Leh, is engaged in a revision of the Old Testament. Since he is an Amdo Tibetan brought up in Darjeeling and married to a Ladakhi, he is well-equipped to face the problems of producing a version which is likely to be acceptable in all Tibetan-speaking areas. His aim is to produce a version in simple Tibetan *phal-skad*, which he hopes will be more generally accessible than the *chos-skad* of the 1970 New Testament.

In the more distant future there may be a role for both *phal-skad* and *chos-skad* versions according to the audience each is supposed to address. In English, after all, there has been a proliferation of new translations, each of which has its merits and admirers.

But for whom? The total number of Ladakhi and Tibetan-speaking Christians is still measured in hundreds rather than thousands or tens of thousands. It is open to question whether there is much prospect for expansion in India. Many middle-aged Ladakhi Christians find it easier to use Urdu Bibles because they have been educated in an Urdu-speaking school system. Similarly, some of the younger Ladakhi Christians find it easier to use Hindi or English versions. The future of the Tibetan Bible will therefore depend on wider social and linguistic and even political developments which will determine what variety of Tibetan is spoken and written, and by whom, in years to come.

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