

A Nineteenth-Century New England Exegete Abroad: Adoniram Judson and the Burmese Bible

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■ Abstract

Adoniram Judson's life and work have long been the subject of popular and scholarly interest, but the intellectual and exegetical background for his Burmese Bible translation has not been closely studied. This background was the biblical studies movement in New England, which began in the early nineteenth century and flourished before declining and eventually disappearing by about 1870. The opposing New England orthodox Calvinist and liberal Unitarian schools were equally involved in the movement. Judson was an early product of Andover Theological Seminary, the center for orthodox Calvinism in New England. From 1816 to 1840 Judson translated the Bible into Burmese and his references to the scholarly works he used, along with the text-critical and interpretive decisions in his Bible translation, identify him as an ongoing participant in the New England biblical studies movement. This scholarly background helps us understand interpretive decisions in the Judson Bible, which is still the main Burmese version used by Protestants in Myanmar.

■ Keywords

Adoniram Judson, Burmese Bible, New England biblical studies movement, Bible translation

■ Introduction

Adoniram Judson is famous for many reasons. He was among the first group of missionaries officially sent abroad from the USA, in 1812. His missionary service in Burma (Myanmar), with his three wives, makes an inspirational story of Christian commitment in the face of insurmountable obstacles and heartache.¹ This story has been immortalized by numerous biographies of Judson and of his wives over the last nearly 200 years.² This hagiographic portrayal of Judson has predominated. But Judson has also been criticized for implicitly being part of the colonial project as well as the specific role he played in Britain's colonization of Burma.³ To this day, the Burmese have the saying, "First come the merchants, then the missionaries, then the military." A stream of recent scholarship has been more balanced, exploring missiological aspects of the Judsons' lives and ministries in the light of the colonial context to which they belonged.⁴

One area that has not been examined in detail, however, is the scholarly and exegetical background of Judson's crowning achievement, his translation of the Bible into Burmese.⁵ This translation was completed in 1840 and remains to this day almost the only Burmese version used by Protestants. The background to Judson's translation work is the biblical studies movement in New England, which lasted from the early nineteenth century until about 1870. It is not surprising that Judson's exegetical background has been overlooked because the movement itself was largely forgotten.⁶ This article will show how Judson, the exegete and

¹ In this article I will use "Burma" (now "Myanmar") and "Rangoon" (now "Yangon"), as these names were used in the Judson era. "Burmese" will refer to the Myanmar language, and "Bama" to ethnically Burmese people, who now identify themselves as either "Bama" or "Myanmar."

² See the comprehensive bibliographic references in Laura Rodgers Levens, "Reading the Judsons: Recovering the Literary Works of Ann, Sarah, Emily, and Adoniram Judson for a New Baptist Mission History," *ABQ* 32 (2013) 37–73.

³ Helen G. Trager, *Missionary Views of the Burmese in the Nineteenth Century* (Bombay: Popular Press, 1960), <https://ia601604.us.archive.org/4/items/in.ernet.dli.2015.460969/2015.460969.Missionary-Views-Of-The-Burmese-In-The-Nineteenth-Century---Alien-Eyes.pdf>.

⁴ La Seng Dingrin, "The Conflicting Legacy of Adoniram Judson: Appropriating and Polemicizing against Burmese Buddhism," *Missiology* 37 (2009) 485–97; idem, "Is Buddhism Indispensable in the Cross-Cultural Appropriation of Christianity in Burma?," *Buddhist-Christian Studies* 29 (2009) 3–22; K. M. Y. Khawsiamia, "Phayālogy: A Study of Adoniram Judson's Naming God as Phayā from a Christian-Buddhist View in Myanmar Context," *AsJT* 28 (2014) 16–34; William H. Brackney, "The Legacy of Adoniram Judson," *International Bulletin of Missionary Research* 22 (1998) 122–27; Phyllis Rodgers Pleasants, "Beyond Translation: The Work of the Judsons in Burma," *Baptist History and Heritage* 42.2 (2007) 19–35; Graham B. Walker, "Building a Christian Zayat in the Shade of the Bo Tree," *ABQ* 32 (2013) 13–36; Rodgers Levens, "Reading the Judsons."

⁵ For a recent treatment of Judson's New England theological background, see Robert Caldwell, "New England's New Divinity and the Age of Judson's Preparation," in *Adoniram Judson: A Bicentennial Appreciation of the Pioneer American Missionary* (ed. Jason Duesing; Nashville: B&H Academic, 2012) 31–54.

⁶ "The strangest feature of American critical biblical studies in this early period is the fact that it vanished so quickly and made so little impact on the development of American religion after the

Bible translator, was a product of this movement, and how this can be seen in his translation of the Bible into Burmese.

■ The Nineteenth-Century Biblical Studies Movement in New England

By the beginning of the nineteenth century, biblical studies in the USA had been waning for over one hundred years. This contrasted with the seventeenth century, when the religious ministers of the newly arrived settlers were products of Britain's "golden age of Biblical learning."⁷ But biblical studies had subsequently declined in favor of philosophical (metaphysical) theology, with Jonathan Edwards as the most famous representative.⁸ This situation changed in the early nineteenth century, with an interest in biblical studies developing around two opposing schools, the orthodox Calvinists of Andover Theological Seminary, and the liberal Unitarians at Harvard University. Both schools had their inspirational leaders, the long-lived Moses Stuart at Andover, and Joseph Stevens Buckminster at Harvard, who died in 1812 at the age of 28.⁹ Although representing different schools, both Buckminster and Stuart saw in German biblical scholarship the key for achieving their goals. These goals were not qualitatively dissimilar. Buckminster believed that, with the help of German critical scholarship, the accretions of post-Apostolic theology could be exposed and removed, and the pure gospel message recovered. His hope for this was "to lead men to virtue and holiness . . . the promotion of Christian excellence."¹⁰ Stuart believed that the massive learning available from German biblical scholarship could only verify and prove the Bible and all its contents to be true. Both men, and both schools, rejected the skeptical rationalism that characterized much German critical scholarship, which denied supernatural elements in the Bible.

Andover Theological Seminary opened on 28 September 1808, the first Protestant seminary in the USA.¹¹ It was established to train ministers in the "Edwardsean

Civil War" (Jerry W. Brown, *The Rise of Biblical Criticism in America, 1800-1870* [Middletown, CT: Wesleyan University Press, 1969] 180).

⁷ William Adams, *A Discourse on the Life and Services of Professor Moses Stuart* (New York: John Throw, 1852) 19, <http://www.archive.org/details/discourseonlifes00adamiala>.

⁸ Adams greatly respected the New England theologians of the 18th century: "Edwards, Hopkins, Bellamy, and Emmons." Nevertheless, he complains that, "With the exception of occasional references to Pool's Synopsis and Buxtorf on the etymology of particular words, I do not remember a single instance of what may be called Biblical criticism in the writings of Edwards" (*ibid.*, 23).

⁹ For Buckminster (1784–1812), see Brown, *Rise of Biblical Criticism*, 10–26. For Stuart (1780–1852), see John Herbert Giltner, *Moses Stuart: The Father of Biblical Science in America* (BSNA 14; Atlanta: Scholars Press, 1988). See also Mark Granquist, "The Role of 'Common Sense' in the Hermeneutics of Moses Stuart," *HTR* 83 (1990) 305–19.

¹⁰ Eliza Buckminster Lee, *Memoirs of Rev. Joseph Buckminster, D.D. and of His Son, Rev. Joseph Stevens Buckminster* (Boston: Ticknor, Reed, and Fields, 1851) 325–27, quoted in Brown, *Rise of Biblical Criticism*, 22–23.

¹¹ Leonard Woods, *History of the Andover Theological Seminary* (Boston: J. R. Osgood, 1885) 133, <http://www.archive.org/details/historyofandover00woodrich>.

school,” after Jonathan Edwards, of orthodox Calvinist theology, in express opposition to “Deism and Atheism . . . the Pelagian and Socinian heresies . . . ‘liberal Christianity’ . . . Unitarianism in the metropolis [Boston] and in Harvard College . . . [and] *Arminian Calvinists*, or *Calvinistic Arminians*.”¹²

Adoniram Judson, of impeccable New England Calvinist credentials, was part of the inaugural intake of students at Andover. Yet, although “a young man of excellent talents and scholarship . . . he could not be admitted as a member of the Seminary, because of his manifest want of piety.”¹³ This was because Judson was not yet considered to be a professing Christian. His entry into Andover represents the final stage of a spiritual journey in which, during his time at Brown University (1804–1807), Judson had been attracted to Deism. A year after his graduation from Brown, in August and September 1808, he had gone on what would now be called a road trip. In this brief journey he had fallen in with a troupe of actors and, to some extent, enjoyed a dissolute lifestyle, albeit for only several weeks. On his return journey, while staying in a country inn, he witnessed the death of a friend from Brown who had influenced him in his Deism. This was a crisis point for Judson, propelling him back to an orthodox Christian faith.¹⁴ He entered Andover only three weeks after returning from his journey, admitted as a “special student,” but shortly after announced his conversion to genuine Christian faith and was accepted as a “regular member” of the seminary.¹⁵

Judson graduated from Andover on 24 September 1810, while Moses Stuart had only joined the faculty in the spring of that same year.¹⁶ This means that their overlap at Andover as teacher-student was only about 6 months. One of the peculiarities of Judson research is the lack of primary sources, and very little remains concerning the relationship between Stuart and Judson.¹⁷ It appears that they were close, as Stuart supported Judson in establishing the American Board of Commissioners for Foreign Mission and commended him for missionary service.¹⁸ I have been

¹² *Ibid.*, 27–28 [italics in original].

¹³ *Ibid.*, 136.

¹⁴ See Stacy R. Warburton, *Eastward! The Story of Adoniram Judson* (New York: Round Table, 1937) 8–14; Francis Wayland, *Memoir of the Life and Labors of the Rev. Adoniram Judson, D.D.* (2 vols.; Boston: Phillips, Sampson, 1853) 1:22–26, <https://archive.org/details/memoiroflifela01wayl>.

¹⁵ Woods, *History*, 137.

¹⁶ *Ibid.*, 151.

¹⁷ Two lots of Judson’s writings were lost in shipwrecks, and another lot in a housefire. When he was imprisoned in Ava (1824–1826), Ann destroyed all correspondence out of security concerns. After Ann’s death (1826), while suffering from depression, Judson made the decision to destroy all his personal writings, and urged his family and friends to do the same, as a way of glorifying God, not himself. He also renounced his honorary doctorate from Brown University at this time. His biographer, Francis Wayland, refers to this as Judson’s “peculiar views of duty” (Wayland, *Memoir*, 1:3). What remains are Judson’s letters and journal extracts which were published, especially in the *Baptist Missionary Magazine*, along with private letters that were preserved. Wayland also had access to Judson’s third wife, Emily Chubbuck Judson, who died the year after the two volumes of *Memoir of the Life and Labors of the Rev. Adoniram Judson, D.D.* were published.

¹⁸ Wayland, *Memoir*, 1:48, 56, 66, 75, 80.

unable to find anything, however, relating to Stuart's scholarly influence on Judson. Circumstantial evidence would indicate that this influence was significant.

When Moses Stuart was appointed Professor of Sacred Literature at Andover in 1810, he was strong in Latin and Greek, the result of a typical classical education at Yale, but had little Hebrew. He was patently gifted in languages and taught himself Hebrew; he had also mastered Syriac, Aramaic (Chaldee), and Arabic by 1817.¹⁹ Stuart also taught himself German by reading Johann Gottfried Eichhorn's *Einleitung in das Alte Testament*, in 1812–1813.²⁰ Although most German scholarship was rationalistic, Stuart nevertheless regarded these works as essential to the development of American biblical studies. This demonstrates in Stuart, and his Andover circle, a willingness to use any resources available, and an appreciation of quality along with a selective appropriation of these works. Stuart maintained a high view of scripture, considering it divinely inspired and factually accurate in all its contents, and made use of whatever means possible to interpret it.²¹ The fear of what was perceived as irreligious German rationalist impiety was a reality for both Calvinist and Unitarian in New England, and Stuart came under suspicion of “going over” to liberalism.²² Stuart, while rejecting the German skepticism, nevertheless defended the importance of German biblical scholarship, writing in 1841, “there is more *scientific* knowledge of biblical criticism comprised in the German . . . than in all the other languages of the world taken together.”²³

Stuart was both a leader and a representative of the biblical studies movement in early to mid-nineteenth-century New England. He was particularly interested, and prolific, in publishing biblical Hebrew and Greek grammars, mainly based on German works, and wrote a number of commentaries on OT and NT books.²⁴ He addressed at length technical “introduction” issues in the Bible, an interest sparked early by Eichhorn's *Einleitung*.²⁵ His other chief interest was hermeneutics, and he

¹⁹ Giltner, *Moses Stuart*, 7.

²⁰ “It is clear that by the end of 1813, less than a year and a half after he begun studying German seriously, his mastery of the language was complete” (*ibid.*, 10).

²¹ For a description of the encounter between critical German scholarship and Andover biblical scholarship, with Edward Robinson as the representative, see Jay G. Williams, *The Times and Life of Edward Robinson: Connecticut Yankee in King Solomon's Court* (BSNA 19; Atlanta: SBL Press, 1999), especially 113–74.

²² Nowhere is this more evident than in the 1925 Andover investigation into “the degree of attention which the students gave to the writings of lax and infidel writers and commentators, and by the unhappy effect which had already, in some instances, been produced upon the religious opinions of individuals, and upon the spiritual state of the Seminary” (Woods, *History*, 173–78, at 174).

²³ Moses Stuart, “Letter to the Editor on the Study of the German Language,” *The Christian Review* 6 (1841) 450 [italics in original], quoted in Granquist, “Common Sense,” 306.

²⁴ See the bibliography in Brown, *Rise of Biblical Criticism*, 192–95; Giltner, *Moses Stuart*, 89–110.

²⁵ He did this through his “Public Lectures” (see Giltner, *Moses Stuart*, 29–44) and his publication, Moses Stuart, *A Critical History and Defence of the Old Testament Canon* (Andover, MA: Allen, Morrill, & Wardwell, 1845).

translated, from Latin, J. A. Ernesti's *Elements of Interpretation*.²⁶ Notable among Stuart's students in the field of biblical studies were Calvin E. Stowe, who eventually succeeded Stuart at Andover, and Edward Robinson, who became professor at Union Theological Seminary. Robinson studied in Germany, and became the most prestigious biblical scholar of the entire New England nineteenth-century movement.²⁷

The Unitarian side of the theological divide also produced its share of biblical scholars conversant with German scholarship. The sadly short-lived Buckminster preceded Stuart in this interest, introducing the NT textual criticism of Johann Griesbach to New England upon his return from Europe in 1807.²⁸ At Harvard, Andrews Norton became proficient in German scholarship, and both Edward Everett and George Bancroft were sent by Harvard to study theology at Göttingen.²⁹ The most accomplished biblical scholar in the Unitarian camp was George Rapall Noyes, Hancock Professor of Hebrew and Dexter Professor of Sacred Literature at Harvard from 1840 to 1868.³⁰

■ Judson and the Burmese Bible

Adoniram and Ann Judson departed Salem for Calcutta on 19 February 1812, at which time Stuart had been at Andover less than two years and was only about to begin his study of German and German scholarship. Although the Judsons had not decided where they would undertake their missionary work, through a series of misadventures they arrived in Rangoon, Burma, on 13 July 1813. This would be their mission field for the remainder of their lives.

On their sea voyage from America to India, both Adoniram and Ann began an examination of scripture which culminated in their becoming Baptists and receiving believer's immersionist baptism in Calcutta.³¹ Adoniram's time at Brown, which was a Baptist university, may have played a subconscious role in this change of views, but Judson claimed,

My doubts concerning the correctness of my former system of belief, commenced during my passage from America to this country; and after many painful trials, which none can know, but those who are taught to relinquish a system in which they had been educated, I settled down in the full persuasion

²⁶ J.A. Ernesti, *Elements of Interpretation* (trans. Moses Stuart; Andover, MA: Flagg & Gould, 1822).

²⁷ Brown, *Rise of Biblical Criticism*, 111–24.

²⁸ *Ibid.*, 23.

²⁹ *Ibid.*, 27–44.

³⁰ Noyes "was the first thoroughly competent Old Testament scholar within the liberal movement and, in 1845, the only Unitarian who could match Stuart's mastery of Old Testament criticism" (*ibid.*, 127).

³¹ Gregory A. Wills, "From Congregationalist to Baptist: Judson and Baptism," in *Adoniram Judson: A Bicentennial Appreciation of the Pioneer American Missionary* (ed. Jason Duesing; Nashville: B&H Academic, 2012) 149–66.

that the immersion of a professing believer in Christ is the only Christian baptism.³²

Judson immediately decided that he could not continue with the Congregationalist American Board of Commissioners for Foreign Mission, particularly with their directive to baptize “credible believers with their households.” Judson’s hitherto Congregationalist colleagues, Samuel Newell and Samuel Nott, apparently agreed, and Judson assumed that, “The Board will feel as unwilling to support a Baptist Missionary, as I feel to comply with their instructions [on baptism].”³³ For their part, the Board of Commissioners were generous with the Judsons, assisting them in their transition to becoming American Baptist missionaries,³⁴ and continuing to take an interest in their missionary work.³⁵ Judson also remained in contact with his former missionary colleagues.³⁶

The Judsons were not the first Christian missionaries in Burma. English Baptist missionaries Richard Mardon and James Chater had arrived in Rangoon in 1807. Mardon left after only several months, and Chater was joined by Felix Carey, son of missions pioneer William Carey.³⁷ Before these Baptist missionaries had arrived, Barnabite Catholic missionaries, to be distinguished from the priests who acted as chaplains for the Portuguese traders, had been in Burma since the mid-eighteenth-century. Both the Catholics and English Baptists had already produced portions of scripture in Burmese – more on that below.

Upon arriving, both Adoniram and Ann began studying Burmese. Adoniram’s study was more formal, sitting all day with his teacher, “a very learned man, [who] was formerly a priest, and resided at [the royal] court. He has a thorough knowledge of the grammatical construction of the language, likewise of the Pali, the learned language of the Burmans.”³⁸ From the beginning, Adoniram learned the literary register of Burmese, a language which to this day maintains a distinct diglossia

³² Adoniram Judson, “Letter to Lucius Bolles, Calcutta, Sept. 1, 1812,” *The Massachusetts Baptist Missionary Magazine* 3 (1813) 268. Religious studies was not part of the general curriculum at Brown, like all universities in New England at the time, which was the reason for the advent of the seminaries. It was not unusual for a Congregationalist like Judson to study at Brown. See Warburton, *Eastward*, 5–7.

³³ Adoniram Judson, “Letter to Rev. Dr. Worcester, Corresponding Secretary of the American Board of Commissioners for Foreign Mission, Calcutta, Sept. 1, 1812,” *The Massachusetts Baptist Missionary Magazine* 3 (1813) 267.

³⁴ “Religious Intelligence: American Missionaries,” *The Panoplist, and Missionary Magazine* 5 (1813) 372–78, at 376–77.

³⁵ E.g., *The Panoplist, and Missionary Magazine* 11 (1815) 435; 12 (1816) 283; 13 (1817) 409; 14 (1818) 32–425; 15 (1819) 363.

³⁶ Newell’s journal, in Colombo, mentions a letter from Judson received on July 15, 1813. Samuel Newell, “Mr. Newell’s Journal,” *The Panoplist, and Missionary Magazine* 11 (1815) 186–87.

³⁷ Wayland, *Memoir*, 1:157. Edward Pritchett and Jonathan Brain, from the London Missionary Society, had also come to Rangoon, but Brain died shortly after arriving and Pritchett only stayed one year. *Ibid.*, 157–58.

³⁸ Letter from Ann Judson to Samuel Newell, Rangoon, 23 April 1814, quoted in Wayland, *Memoir*, 1:167.

between spoken and written forms, along with Pali, the Buddhist religious language which underlies Burmese.³⁹ This stood him in good stead for translating the Bible. Ann, on the other hand, took responsibility for running the household to allow Adoniram uninterrupted study. As a result, she wrote, “I am frequently obliged to talk Burman all day. I can talk and understand others better than Mr. Judson, though he knows much more about the nature and construction of the language than I do.”⁴⁰

■ Precursors to Judson’s Bible Translation

The Judsons saw the translation of the Bible into Burmese as an essential element of their missionary work, and as soon as Adoniram’s Burmese was adequate he turned to this task. The project would employ him for the next 24 years, and its ebbs and flows can be traced through letters and journals, mainly found in the *Baptist Missionary Magazine*.⁴¹ The translation project was interrupted by two related tragic events: Adoniram’s imprisonment for two years and Ann’s death.

Judson was not the first person to translate portions of the Bible into Burmese, although both Burmese and foreign Christians often believe this to be the case, as La Seng Dingrin points out.⁴² According to the foreword of the new Myanmar Catholic Bible translation, the Barnabite missionary Giovanni Maria Percoto, appointed bishop of Myanmar in 1767, translated Genesis, Tobit, the Gospels, and Paul’s epistles. Whether any of these still exist is unknown, and the statement is qualified by, “According to Myanmar Catholic history. . . .”⁴³ From the 1776 Catholic tract in Burmese, *Compendium Doctrinae Christianae Idiomaticae Barmano Sive Bomano*, Dingrin has demonstrated that the Catholic missionaries had developed a number of key Christian theological terms that Judson used, which have become central to the Burmese Christian discourse.⁴⁴

The English Baptist missionary, James Chater, had apparently translated Matthew into Burmese, and Felix Carey had printed a Burmese grammar. There are conflicting

³⁹ Burmese and Pali are from different language families, similar to the relationship between English and Latin, but more linguistically removed. See Dingrin, “Is Buddhism Indispensable?,” 6–7.

⁴⁰ Ann Judson’s journal, 3 September 1815, quoted in Wayland, *Memoir*, 1:171.

⁴¹ Most volumes of the *Baptist Missionary Magazine* are available on <https://archive.org/> and <https://www.hathitrust.org>.

⁴² Dingrin, “Is Buddhism Indispensable?,” 5.

⁴³ CBCM, *New Testament, Psalms, Proverbs and Deuterocanonical Books* (Myanmar: Catholic Bishops’ Conference of Myanmar, 2012) (Burmese).

⁴⁴ Dingrin, “Is Buddhism Indispensable?,” 8. The tract is available digitally: http://reader.digitale-sammlungen.de/de/fs1/object/display/bsb10397806_00005.html. Among the terms Dingrin identifies are: *p’âyà* (God); *p’âyà -thāk’in* (Lord God); *k’âmèh-taw* (God the Father); *thà-taw* (God the Son); *win-nyin-taw* (Holy Spirit); *thouin-pà-p’âyà-tā-s’u* (Trinity); *ba-tha* (religion); *tâyà* (law); *pyin-nyaq* (commandment); *áp̄yiq* (sin); *dàw-thá* (anger); *cei-zù-taw* (grace); *c’àn-tha* (happiness); *p’òn* (glory). The transliteration system is from John Okell, *Burmese By Ear or Essential Myanmar*, 136–143, <http://www.soas.ac.uk/sea/burmese/>. Even U Pe Maung Tin, leading 20th century Burmese and Pali scholar, himself a Christian, seems unaware of this previous work, assuming that Judson himself had developed all of these words. Alan Saw U, “Professor U Pe Maung Tin: A Gentle Genius, a Meek Master,” *The Journal of Burma Studies* 9 (2004) 35–41, at 37.

reports about the quality of these works. Wayland dismisses both the grammar as filled with “inaccuracies” and the translation of Matthew as “done so incorrectly that . . . it was never put into circulation.”⁴⁵ Francis Mason, by contrast, praised Carey’s Burmese grammar in 1852 as “still the best grammar that has yet been published on the Burmese language.”⁴⁶ An early letter from Judson throws light upon this situation.⁴⁷ Dated 18 January 1816, after two and a half years in Burma, Judson wrote, “I am now beginning to translate a little. I am extremely anxious to get some parts of scripture into an intelligible state, fit to be read to Burmans that I meet with.” This marks the beginning of Judson’s translation project. He continues, however, “I have nothing yet that I can venture to use,” indicating that Judson did not consider Chater’s translation of Matthew to be of sufficient quality. His assessment of the Catholic missionaries’ work was more positive: “The Portuguese missionaries have left a version of some extracts of scripture, not very badly executed, in regard to language, but full of Romish errors.” This is firm evidence that Judson used the work of the earlier Catholic missionaries for his Bible translation. It also identifies him as a typical member of the New England orthodox Calvinist biblical studies movement, which recognized and drew upon quality scholarship even when they rejected the theology of the scholars. Apparently, Judson did not think much of Carey’s grammar, as he completed his own by August 1816.⁴⁸ Nevertheless, the works of both Chater and Carey likely contributed positively to Judson’s early work.

■ Progress of the Translation

Judson’s translation of the Burmese Bible falls into two periods – before and after his imprisonment by the Burmese authorities from 8 June 1824 to 25 February 1826, due to the first Anglo-Burman War, and Ann’s death shortly after, on 24 October 1826. Begun in 1816, the translation would not be completed until 1840. Throughout these many years, Judson would follow a pattern of translating sections of the Bible, printing them, then revising the translation for later printing. Matthew was first completed on 17 June 1816, with 500 copies printed.⁴⁹ In March 1817, Judson was already revising Matthew in order to reprint it “by way of trial, and as introductory to a larger edition of the whole New Testament.”⁵⁰ U Shwe Ngong, a

⁴⁵ Wayland, *Memoir*, 1:158.

⁴⁶ Francis Mason, *Burmah: Its People and Natural Productions* (London: Trubner, 1860) 619, quoted in Trager, *Missionary Views*, 21.

⁴⁷ Adoniram Judson, “Letter to Mr. Ward, Rangoon, Jan. 18, 1816,” *The American Baptist Magazine* 1 (1817) 28–29.

⁴⁸ Adoniram Judson, “Extract of a Letter from Mr. Judson to Mr. Rice, Rangoon, August 3d, 1816,” *The American Baptist Magazine* 1 (1817) 184.

⁴⁹ “From Burmah,” *The American Baptist Magazine* 1 (1817) 265.

⁵⁰ Adoniram Judson, “Letter from Mr. Judson to the Corresponding Secretary of the Baptist Board of Foreign Missions. Rangoon, March 7, 1817,” *The American Baptist Magazine* 1 (1818) 329.

Burmese scholar, baptized on 18 July 1820, became Judson's translation assistant.⁵¹ Judson, ever the perfectionist, met his match in this scholarly Bama.

I have now engaged Moungh-Shwa-ngong to assist in revising Acts; but he is so particular and thorough, that we get on very slowly – not more than ten verses a day, though he is with me from 9 A.M. till sunset. When it is done, however, it will be sterling.⁵²

Even though he was not always with Judson, U Shwe Ngong played a significant role in the ultimate quality of Judson's Burmese translation of the Bible.⁵³ Momentum was building in the translation. Ephesians and "the first part of Acts" were sent to Serampore for 600 of each to be printed on 15 May 1821.⁵⁴ By 14 July 1821, Judson had finished the Gospel and Epistles of John, and was working on "the latter part of Acts."⁵⁵

Yet progress was frequently interrupted by illness. On 4 August, Judson wrote, "The second day after I was taken [by fever], Mrs J. was taken with the same; and, for several days, we lay side by side, unable to help one another."⁵⁶ Ann was now suffering from a "liver complaint," which led to the decision to send her back to the USA.⁵⁷ Political issues also began to interfere in the translation project, as U Shwe Ngong was persecuted for his Christian faith and fled Rangoon in September 1821. Judson continued to translate, presumably with other Burmese language assistants. He was by this time entirely focused on the project: "About half the New-Testament is now finished, and I am desirous of finishing the whole, if possible, before making any further missionary movement."⁵⁸ By March 1822 he had finished yet another revision of Matthew, completed Mark and Luke, and was beginning on Romans.⁵⁹

But the two enemies, illness and politics, which over the next four years would ravage both their lives and ultimately take Ann's, were frequently emerging. On 30 June 1822:

⁵¹ Wayland, *Memoir*, 1:282.

⁵² Adoniram Judson, "Extracts of Letters from Rev. A. Judson to Rev. G. H. Hough, Now at Serampore, Rangoon, Jan. 22, 1821," *The American Baptist Magazine* 3 (1822) 255–56, at 255.

⁵³ U Shwe Ngong died "at the close of the war," early 1826. Adoniram Judson, "Journal of the Rev. Dr. Judson (Beginning Jan. 24th, 1827)," *The American Baptist Magazine* 7 (1827) 369–71, at 369.no. 12 (1827). Thus, he assisted Judson with sections of the New Testament, but his death came before Judson began translating the Old Testament. Hence, Khoi Lam Thang's assertion that "Judson's Bible translation draft was corrected by U Shwe Ngong" is not entirely correct (Khoi Lam Thang, "'Eagle' in the Myanmar Bible," *BT* 60 [2009] 195–200, at 195).

⁵⁴ Adoniram Judson, "Journal of Mr. Judson, Continued from March 11, 1821," *The American Baptist Magazine* 3 (1822) 416–20, at 417.

⁵⁵ *Ibid.*, 420.

⁵⁶ Adoniram Judson, "Journal Continued from June 14, 1821," *The American Baptist Magazine* 3 (1822) 420–21, at 421.

⁵⁷ *Ibid.* Ann left Rangoon on 21 August 1821, and returned on 5 December 1823.

⁵⁸ Adoniram Judson, "Letter from Mr. Judson to Dr. Baldwin, Rangoon, Feb. 6, 1822," *The American Baptist Magazine* 3 (1822) 458.

⁵⁹ Adoniram Judson, "Mr. Judson's Journal, Continued from November 18, 1821," *The American Baptist Magazine* 4 (1823) 97–101, at 98.

A few weeks ago, was taken with a fever, slight at first, but daily increasing in violence, until the event became very dubious . . . If it be the will of God, I feel desirous of living to finish the New-Testament in Burman, a work which must otherwise be suspended for some time.⁶⁰

Then, in a journal entry on 20 July:

My hopes of finishing the New Testament, without interruption, all blasted, by the arrival of an order from the king, summoning brother Price to Ava. I must, of course, accompany him, and endeavour to take advantage of the circumstance to gain some footing in the palace.⁶¹

“Some footing in the palace” referred to the hope of gaining religious tolerance for Christian religion and missionary work in Burma. Before leaving for Ava, Judson had completed Second Corinthians, Ephesians, Hebrews, and the epistles of John.⁶²

From 28 August 1822 to 2 February 1823, Judson accompanied his missionary colleague Jonathan Price to Ava. Price, a doctor, had been summoned by the king to live in the royal city.⁶³ At that time the king was interested in the outside world and made a good impression on the missionaries.⁶⁴ The visit was positive, resulting in an invitation for the Judsons to live there when Ann returned from America. This positive situation would change after the outbreak of war between Britain and Burma.⁶⁵

Returning to Rangoon on 2 February 1823, Judson continued the NT translation and, though plagued by ill-health,⁶⁶ completed it in June that year, each section having already been revised several times.⁶⁷ The completion of the NT brings the first period of Judson’s Bible translation to a close. Ann returned from the USA

⁶⁰ Ibid.

⁶¹ Ibid., 99.

⁶² Adoniram Judson, “Extract of a Letter from the Rev. Mr. Judson to Dr. Baldwin. Rangoon, Aug. 21, 1822,” *The American Baptist Magazine* 4 (1823) 63.

⁶³ Henry Gouger, Judson and Price’s prison companion from 1824 to 1826, writes that Price “had acquired a smattering of medical science, by attending some hospitals in America,” and was far from impressed by his medical skills (Henry Gouger, *Personal Narrative of Two Years’ Imprisonment in Burmah* [London: John Murray, 1860] 179–80, 212–13, <https://archive.org/details/apersonalnarrat01gouggoog>). Gouger’s book, while a valuable historical account of the imprisonment of the foreigners in Ava in its own right, also gives a different perspective from most of the Judson sources that have survived. These sources were written to other Christians, and often for the public, thus are quite formal and pious. Gouger gives a less guarded account, such as his take on Price’s medical skills, and even reports Judson’s contemplation of suicide to escape from the living hell of their imprisonment (ibid., 244–45).

⁶⁴ Jonathan Price, “From Dr. Price to the Cor. Sec. Dated Ava, Oct. 1, 1823,” *The American Baptist Magazine* 4 (1823) 101–2, at 102.

⁶⁵ For Judson’s account of the journey to Ava, see Adoniram Judson, “Dr. Judson’s Journal Continued from August 21, 1822,” *The American Baptist Magazine* 4 (1823) 211–18.

⁶⁶ Adoniram Judson, “Letter from Dr. Judson, to Dr. Baldwin, of Boston. Rangoon, Feb. 11, 1823,” *The American Baptist Magazine* 4 (1823) 210.

⁶⁷ Adoniram Judson, “Extract of a Letter from Rev. A. Judson, to the Rev. Mr. Sharp, Dated Rangoon, August 5, 1823,” *The American Baptist Magazine* 4 (1824) 330.

on 5 December 1823, whereupon the Judsons promptly moved from Rangoon to Ava, taking up the invitation of the royal court. Shortly after settling there, war broke out and Britain invaded Burma. The war would last for two years, for the duration of which Judson, Price, and a handful of other westerners who lived in upper Burma were incarcerated in the so called “Death Prison.”⁶⁸ Not only were they kept in inhuman conditions, they had all been sentenced to death, and fully expected this to be carried out. The threat of torture was also ever present, and they regularly saw Burmese prisoners both tortured and executed.⁶⁹ Ann was not imprisoned and spent the two years free in Ava, where she advocated on behalf of Adoniram and the other prisoners. The stress was immense for both Adoniram and Ann, with Ann suffering severe illness. After the British victory and Adoniram’s subsequent release, they moved to what was now British controlled territory in Amherst (Kyaikami), southern Burma. Ann died there on 24 October 1826, leaving Adoniram in a state of profound depression.

After these disastrous events, Judson was left to pick up the pieces and start both missionary and translation work again. It took several years before momentum began to build. In the following year, he began revising the NT and then started translating the book of Psalms.⁷⁰ The Old Testament translation had begun. Never a voluminous correspondent at the best of times, after Ann’s death Judson wanted to withdraw from the public sphere as much as possible, and his published letters and journals become less frequent for some time. The revision of the NT was completed on November 1829,⁷¹ but the demands of missionary work meant progress on the Psalms was slow.⁷² Yet momentum began to gather, and by 5 February 1831, Psalms and Daniel were completed, and Judson was about to begin Isaiah.⁷³ By June that same year he had finished Isaiah and Genesis, as well as Song of Solomon.⁷⁴ Exodus followed.⁷⁵ In 1832, Judson was back in Maulmein (Maulmyine) to supervise the printing of the NT in Burmese and continue the OT translation, now one third complete.⁷⁶ He calculated “that I could finish the whole in two years, if I confined

⁶⁸ Judson was arrested on 8 June 1824, and released on 25 February 1826. See Adoniram Judson, “Dr. Judson’s Letter to Dr. Baldwin. British Camp, Yantabo, Feb. 25, 1826,” *The American Baptist Magazine* 6 (1826) 314.

⁶⁹ In the end, none of them were executed, and only one, the Spaniard Mr. Lanciego, suffered torture (Gouger, *Personal Narrative*, 240).

⁷⁰ Adoniram Judson, “Dr. Judson’s Journal,” *The American Baptist Magazine* 8 (1828) 129–31.

⁷¹ “Annual Report,” *The American Baptist Magazine* 8 (1828) 164–74, at 167.

⁷² Adoniram Judson, “Mr. Judson’s Journal, Rangoon, Nov. 21, 1830,” *The American Baptist Magazine* 11 (1831) 207–8.

⁷³ Adoniram Judson, “Mr. Judson’s Journal. Rangoon, Feb. 5, 1831,” *The American Baptist Magazine* 11 (1831) 343–44, at 343.

⁷⁴ Adoniram Judson, “Mr. Judson’s Journal, June 1831,” *The American Baptist Magazine* 12 (1832) 30–31.

⁷⁵ Adoniram Judson, “Extracts from Mr. Judson’s Journal,” *The American Baptist Magazine* 12 (1832) 126.

⁷⁶ Entry dated 25 June. Adoniram Judson, “Mr. Judson’s Journal,” *The American Baptist Magazine* 13 (1833) 41–45, at 44.

myself exclusively, to the work; otherwise it would hang on, four years or more... I concluded, that it was my duty to adopt the former course.⁷⁷

The printing of the NT was completed on 19 December 1832, and momentum continued with the OT translation, although illness regularly intervened.⁷⁸ The OT translation was completed, without much fanfare, on 31 January 1834, according to an announcement in the *Baptist Missionary Magazine*.⁷⁹ Judson continued his strategy of printing portions of the translated scripture and then revising.⁸⁰ This he did over the following years.⁸¹ For the second half of 1836 and early 1837, he again revised the NT, with ten thousand copies “sent to press on the 22^d of March.”⁸² In a letter dated 30 June 1838, Judson wrote that he was “anxious to make a thorough revision of the Psalms, and the prophets, with the help of the latest exegetical works that I have been able to procure.”⁸³ There is little further correspondence from Judson, until the announcement that “the quarto revised edition of the Burman Bible . . . was committed to the press Oct. 25, 1840.”⁸⁴ Thus the great project was completed, having taken twenty-four years and coming at immense personal cost.

■ A New England Exegete

In the surviving Judson literature, there are occasional yet enlightening references to the scholarly tools he used. In a relatively early letter, announcing the completion of the NT in Burmese, Judson wrote, “But I never read a chapter without a pencil in my hand and Griesbach and Parkhurst at my elbow.”⁸⁵ John Parkhurst (1728–1797) was an English scholar, and the work Judson refers to must have been his *Greek and English Lexicon to the New Testament*, first published in 1769. Johann Jakob Griesbach (1745–1812) was an important NT textual critic, whose work had been introduced to New England in 1807 by the forerunner of the biblical studies movement there, Joseph Stevens Buckminster.

⁷⁷ Ibid.

⁷⁸ Adoniram Judson, “Mr. Judson to Dr. Bolles. Maulmein, Sept. 24, 1833,” *The American Baptist Magazine* 14 (1834) 360.

⁷⁹ “Maulmein,” *The American Baptist Magazine* 15 (1835) 79.

⁸⁰ See Adoniram Judson, “Mr. Judson’s Journal,” *The American Baptist Magazine* 15 (1835) 79; idem, “Letter of Mr. Judson to Dr. Bolles. Maulmein, Dec. 8, 1834,” *The American Baptist Magazine* 15 (1835) 343–46, at 344.

⁸¹ Adoniram Judson, “Extract of a Letter from Mr. Judson, Dated Maulmein, June 30, 1835,” *The American Baptist Magazine* 16 (1836) 109; “Extract of a Letter from Mr. Judson, Dated Maulmein, Dec. 31, 1835,” *The American Baptist Magazine* 16 (1836) 249–50, at 250.

⁸² Adoniram Judson, “Letter of Mr. Judson, Dated Maulmein, Jan. 31, 1837,” *The American Baptist Magazine* 17 (1837) 295–96, at 295; “Twenty-Fourth Annual Report,” *The Baptist Missionary Magazine* 18 (1838) 121–63, at 149.

⁸³ Adoniram Judson, “Letter of Mr. Judson, Dated Maulmein, June 30, 1838,” *The Baptist Missionary Magazine* 19 (1839) 34.

⁸⁴ “Twenty Seventh Annual Report of the Board,” *The Baptist Missionary Magazine* 21 (1841) 153–95, at 186.

⁸⁵ Judson, “Rev. A. Judson, to the Rev. Mr. Sharp,” 330.

In a letter from 1834, when he had nearly completed the first edition of the OT translation, Judson mentioned that he had “just received a complete set of Rosenmüller on the Old Testament, and some other valuable works, in studying which I am very desirous of going over the whole ground once more.”⁸⁶ The “complete set” by Ernst Friedrich Karl Rosenmüller (1768–1835), professor at University of Leipzig from 1792, is the *Scholia in Vetus Testamentum*, written in Latin. It was released in two series, an earlier larger set, and a later six volume *Compendium*. It is not clear which set Judson is referring to, but since the *Compendium* was published between 1828 and 1836, he may be referring to the earlier set.⁸⁷ Both sets were massive repositories of detailed bibliographical, textual, philological, and interpretive scholarship.⁸⁸

With a letter to Judson dated 14 July 1838, Solomon Peck, Corresponding Secretary for the Baptist Mission, sent “Robinson’s Hebrew Lexicon and Ripley’s Notes.”⁸⁹ In a letter to Peck, dated 5 January 1839, Judson apologized for not contributing more to the *Baptist Missionary Magazine*, “but what can be expected from a man who spends his days at a study table, poring over Hebrew and Greek, and Gesenius and Rosenmüller, &c., &c., and Burmese manuscripts interlined to illegibility.”⁹⁰ Several weeks later, in a letter dated 21 January 1839, Judson requested Peck to send “the exegetical works of Stuart, Robinson, Stowe, Ripley, Bush, Noyes, and such like with some of the best German works” as soon as they are published.⁹¹ In another letter to the Corresponding Secretary, dated “Maulmein, April 24, 1839,” Judson wrote that he was “anxiously hoping to receive a copy of Bloomfield’s Greek Testament,” to help with the final revision before printing, along with “whatever other helps to biblical exegesis may have been recently published.”⁹² Finally, after completing the entire Bible translation in 1840, Judson refers to “the critical emendations of Lowth, Horsley,” and the Greek NT “text of Knapp.”⁹³

The scholars in these passing references can be divided into two general categories: slightly older technical works from Germany and Britain, and biblical scholarship from Judson’s contemporaries in New England.⁹⁴ This places Judson

⁸⁶ Judson, “Mr. Judson to Dr. Bolles. Maulmein, Dec. 8, 1834,” 344.

⁸⁷ For publication details, see <http://www.cjconroy.net/bib/rosenm.htm>.

⁸⁸ The 1821 volume on Genesis is 800 pages; the 1822 volume on Exodus 550 pages; a single volume Leviticus to Deuteronomy is a mere 681 pages, but Psalms 1–20 runs to 556 pages. The *Compendium Redacta* is considerably abridged, the one volume of the Pentateuch only 818 pages, the one volume on the Psalms 711 pages.

⁸⁹ Wayland, *Memoir*, 2:124, <https://archive.org/details/memoiroffifela02wayl>.

⁹⁰ *Ibid.*, 128–29.

⁹¹ *Ibid.*, 129.

⁹² *Ibid.*, 144.

⁹³ Adoniram Judson, “Letter, Dec. 28, 1840,” *The Baptist Missionary Magazine* 21 (1841) 186. G. C. Knapp was a Halle professor who issued his first Greek NT edition in 1797, a second edition in 1813, and a third in 1824. He has fallen out of the pages of history to some extent, and I thank Peter Head for this information (private communication, 5 May 2017).

⁹⁴ It is difficult to ascertain whether Judson read German, although I tend to think he did not.

squarely in the nineteenth-century New England biblical studies movement, which is quite remarkable because he left New England when that movement was in its infancy. Yet it is evident that by the time Judson left New England in 1812 he had already been shaped by the incipient movement, which was underway before Moses Stuart joined Andover in 1810. The 1807 *Constitution of the Theological Seminary* already stipulated, under the heading “Sacred Literature,” that the “formation, preservation and transmission of the Sacred Volume,” original languages, Septuagint, NT Greek, textual criticism, biblical criticism, apocryphal books, modern translations, and exegesis should be taught.⁹⁵ Judson continued to participate in the movement over many subsequent years while geographically, and logistically, far removed. Maintaining contact with the New England movement was difficult at the beginning of their time in Burma when correspondence was possible but haphazard due to the lack of regular ships sailing in and out of Rangoon.⁹⁶ Although most of Judson’s writings have been lost, the published letters that remain show he was in regular contact with his New England base. In the first few years in Burma, he was entirely focused on language acquisition, but by 1816 he had turned to translation, for which he required ever more scholarly works. One of Ann’s tasks when she returned to America in 1821 was to obtain such works for Judson. Wayland refers to this:

As early as the visit of Mrs. Ann Judson to this country, his demand for books was large, and it was all for the very best, the foundation books. I well remember the pleasure with which I stripped my library of what I considered some of its choicest treasures, to supply a part of his most urgent necessities. Thus he continued until he had surrounded himself with a most valuable apparatus for carrying on his work in the manner which its importance deserved.⁹⁷

Judson continued to acquire the latest works in biblical scholarship for the entire time of his translation project, which would have become easier after the British annexation of Lower Burma in 1826. Judson’s letter of 1839 gives an insight into his ongoing participation in the biblical studies movement, and also the difficulties this entailed, requesting that the latest exegetical works be shipped to him as soon as they are published:

I frequently see a sterling work on the cover of the Herald [formerly *The Panoplist*] or [*Baptist Missionary*] Magazine, and am ready to scream, with

When he left New England in 1812, Moses Stuart was just beginning to learn German, and he was a forerunner in that field. Judson never refers to learning German, as he does to French (see Wayland, *Memoir*, 1:176). Furthermore, the German works referred to above were published in Latin, a language in which Judson was fluent, e.g. J. J. Griesbach, *Novum Testamentum Graece* (London: Mackinley, Cuthell, and Martin, 1809), https://archive.org/details/bub_gb_4WAzgbUFE94C.

⁹⁵ Woods, *History*, 235.

⁹⁶ Described in Adoniram Judson, “Extract of a Letter from Rev. A. Judson, to the Rev. Mr. Emerson of Beverly,” *The Massachusetts Baptist Missionary Magazine* 4 (1815) 147–48.

⁹⁷ Wayland, *Memoir*, 2:165.

some variations, “The book, the book! my kingdom for the book!” Yes, a kingdom, if the same ship which brought the notice had brought the work too; whereas I have to wait for letters to cross the ocean twice or three times, at least, during which I am, perhaps, working upon that very portion of Scripture which that book is intended to illustrate.⁹⁸

It is evident that throughout the time Judson was translating the Bible he maintained ongoing contact with the biblical studies movement in New England.

No correspondence remains between Judson and the Andover school, and Moses Stuart in particular, but the ongoing influence of this school is apparent. For the Andover scholars, critical scholarship was always used in the service of understanding the scriptures.⁹⁹ As they considered the Bible to be inspired they did not fear critical scholarship, believing it could only ultimately prove the scriptures to be true. This led to an ecumenical approach to scholarship, making use of anything they found useful, regardless of whether they agreed with the theology of the writer or not. Judson’s appreciation of the earlier Catholic missionaries’ work, in contrast to the work of his Baptist colleagues who preceded him in Burma, is an example of this. He made use of critical German and British scholarship, and even appreciated the work of the gifted Harvard Unitarian scholar, George R. Noyes. Along with these scholars, Judson also valued the works of his fellow evangelicals, Stuart, Robinson, Stowe, Ripley, and Bush.

The detailed, technical scholarship made possible by the New England movement suited Judson’s personality perfectly. In February 1808, shortly after graduating from Brown University, only 19 years old, he had published *Elements of English Grammar*. Five months later he published *The Young Lady’s Arithmetic*.¹⁰⁰ In his first few years in Burma, not only did he set about learning Burmese but also compiled a Pali-English dictionary, a Burmese-English dictionary, and wrote a Burmese grammar. After completing the Bible translation, he spent the last ten years of his life writing a comprehensive Burmese-English dictionary. This technical, scholarly bent put him in good stead for translating the Bible into Burmese, which occupied him for twenty-four years. Yet it appears his critical ardor abated somewhat as he neared the end of the project. After his final edition of the Burmese Bible had been printed, he wrote,

In the first edition of the Old Testament, I paid too much regard to the critical emendations of Lowth, Horsley, and others. In the present edition, I have adhered more strictly to the Hebrew text. In my first attempts at translating portions of the New Testament, above twenty years ago, I followed Griesbach, as all the world then did; and though, from year to year, I have found reason to distrust his authority, still not wishing to be ever changing, I deviated but little from his text, in subsequent editions, until the last; in preparing which I have followed the text of Knapp, (though not implicitly,

⁹⁸ *Ibid.*, 129.

⁹⁹ Giltner, *Moses Stuart*, 103.

¹⁰⁰ Wayland, *Memoir*, 1:25.

as upon the whole the safest and best extant; in consequence of which, the present Burmese version of the New Testament accords more nearly with the received English.¹⁰¹

Nevertheless, Judson's translation of the Burmese Bible remains the product of the New England biblical studies movement that flourished during the whole time he was at work on the project. This can be shown by some examples from the Bible itself.

■ Examples from the Judson Bible

Judson never saw his translation as a finished product, and he expected others to revise it, as he had constantly done throughout the translation process. This never happened, but instead, his translation became virtually canonized by the Protestant church in Myanmar, much like the KJV among some English-speaking Christian groups. As a result, the Burmese Bible that is used most in Myanmar today is nearly 200 years old. It is an outdated translation, in need of revision, but it is also often misunderstood. Judson's warning, as old as the translation itself, still needs to be heard. He looked forward to his successors improving the translation, but urged them "not prematurely to correct a supposed error, without consulting the various authors which I have consulted, and ascertaining the reasons of my position."¹⁰²

Hosea 5:11 is a good example. A literal translation from the JB reads: "Ephraim has suffered oppression, he has met divine judgment and been ruined. This is because he has acted according to the divine/royal command (אֶת־יְיָ צוֹ)." The principal difficulty lies at the end of the verse with the Hebrew word צוֹ, ostensibly "precept" or "command" (otherwise only in Isa 28:10, 13). A first reading of Judson's translation seems to support the criticisms that are sometimes levelled against him, for example, that his Hebrew was weak, he followed the KJV, or his translation is woodenly literal. Yet none of these criticisms is justified. For Hos 5:11, Samuel Horsley's book can be consulted, a resource Judson almost certainly used.¹⁰³ Horsley examines the variants in the "versions of the LXX and the Syriac . . . St Jerome and the Vulgate . . . the reading of Jonathan [Targum]." But ultimately, he defends the reading of the MT because "no trace of . . . [these] readings, or of any other variety, appears in any one of the numerous MSS collated by Kennicott and De Rossi [Masoretic texts]." He concludes that "commandment" is the best rendering, while "declaring, however, that I consider שׂוֹא [LXX, Syriac], צֵא [Vulgate] and צוֹ as three various readings, each of high authority, among which the learned reader

¹⁰¹ Judson, "Letter, Dec. 28, 1840," 186. For an analysis of Judson's NT textual criticism, with particular reference to his changing attitudes to Griesbach, see John de Jong, "Textual Criticism, the Textus Receptus, and Adoniram Judson's Burmese New Testaments," *PJBR* 13 (2018) 51–60.

¹⁰² Judson, "Letter, Dec. 28, 1840," 186.

¹⁰³ Samuel Horsley, *Biblical Criticism on the First Fourteen Historical Books of the Old Testament; Also on the First Nine Prophetical Books* (London: Longman, Hurst, Rees, Orme & Brown, and F. C. & J. Rivington, 1820) 69–70, <https://books.google.com.mx/books?id=WdErAAAAYAAJ>.

is at full liberty to make his own choice.”¹⁰⁴ This shows the depth of scholarship that underlies Judson’s interpretive decision, and while it may not be a satisfying reading and need correction, it is not an uninformed one. And even today, the exact meaning of the line remains elusive.

As the references to Griesbach and Rosenmüller indicate, Judson gave careful consideration to textual criticism of both the Old and New Testaments.¹⁰⁵ This is apparent as early as Gen 4:8, where he includes the phrase from the LXX, “Let us go out to the field.”¹⁰⁶ The NRSV follows the LXX over the MT twenty times in the book of Genesis, and the JB agrees with five of these.¹⁰⁷ This illustrates that Judson had no firm commitment to the MT over the LXX. Another example is Ps 20:9 (MT 20:10), where the MT reads, “O YHWH, save the king. May he answer us on the day we call,” but Judson follows the LXX, “O Eternal God, save the king. Hear when we call.”

A more striking example is the second line of Ps 92:10 (MT 92:11): בְּלִחֵי בְשֵׁמֶשׁ רַעֲעֵן. The verb בלל means “to pour,” and the KJV, followed by the older English versions, reads the form as a passive: “I shall be anointed with fresh oil.”¹⁰⁸ Judson translates it quite differently: “God will anoint me with new oil.” With this Judson seems to be following the Targum and Syriac versions, emending the verb as בְּלִחֵי, “you have anointed me.”¹⁰⁹ This reading does not appear in the English versions until the RSV in 1952, illustrating the extent to which Judson used the scholarly resources made available by the New England movement. A similar example is Mic 6:14, where the second line is very difficult to make sense of: וְנִשְׁחָהּ בְּקֶרֶבֶת וְהָיָה. (And your dung in your midst shall be displaced [?]).¹¹⁰ Judson rendered this verse, “You will suffer hunger.” It is unclear how Judson arrived at this, but while different from the older English versions (e.g., KJV, “Thy casting down shall be in the midst of thee”¹¹¹), it is how most modern English versions render the line.¹¹²

Along with prescient interpretive decisions, there are also those that have not stood the test of time, equally the result of the New England movement. One such example is in Gen 10:4 where דֹּדָנִים (Dodanim) is sometimes emended “Rodanim,”

¹⁰⁴ Ibid., 70. שׁוֹ “worthless,” from the LXX μάταιος, so NRSV, NJPS; אֵץ “filth,” so ESV, JPS, NAB.

¹⁰⁵ In the following examples from the JB, I will stay with my area of expertise, the OT. For NT analysis of the JB, see Anna Sui Hluan, “Silence in Translation: Interpreting 1 Corinthians 14:34–35 in Myanmar” (PhD diss., University of Otago, 2016).

¹⁰⁶ Whether this line from the LXX should be included remains debated, but most translations until well into the 20th century do not include it.

¹⁰⁷ Gen 4:8; 36:2, 14; 41:22; 49:4. Of these, the ESV follows the MT each time, and the NIV follows the LXX only twice (Gen 4:8; 49:4).

¹⁰⁸ Similarly, the WEB (1833), ERV (1885), ASV (1901), JPS (1917).

¹⁰⁹ Marvin E. Tate, *Psalms 51–100* (WBC 20; Dallas: Word, 1998) 462.

¹¹⁰ According to Dilbert Hillers, “It is impossible to say what is intended by the MT, and already the ancient versions seem at a loss” (Dilbert R. Hillers, *Micah* [Hermeneia; Philadelphia: Fortress, 1984] 80).

¹¹¹ Similarly ASV, DRA, ERV, JPS.

¹¹² ESV, NRSV, HCSB, NKJV, RSV; NIV is similar.

following the LXX (Ρόδοιοι) and the parallel genealogy in the MT of 1 Chr 1:7, רודָנִים (Rodanim).¹¹³ Judson, however, emends 1 Chr 1:7, changing it to “Dodanim,” based on Gen 10:4.¹¹⁴ This decision seems to be rooted in the discussion of the time, where, according to Moses Stuart, the genealogies in Chronicles were considered to be prone to scribal errors.¹¹⁵ It appears Judson considered the genealogy in Genesis 10 to be better preserved.

One final area of analysis arises from a letter dated 5 August 1823, announcing the completion of the NT translation, where Judson also mentions he had produced

an Epitome of the Old Testament . . . consisting of a summary of scripture history from the creation to the coming of Christ, and an abstract of the most important prophecies of the Messiah and his kingdom, from the Psalms, Isaiah, and the other prophets.¹¹⁶

This was his first foray into translating the OT, and it is interesting to see if Judson’s evangelistic program influenced his translation. This can be tested by examining whether any of the 62 LXX quotations in the NT prejudiced his translation of the respective OT texts.¹¹⁷ For the most part, where the LXX and MT are different, Judson followed the MT, meaning that the NT passage reads differently than its OT counterpart.¹¹⁸ There are several cases where the LXX and MT are essentially the same and Judson’s Burmese accurately translates both texts.¹¹⁹ In each of these cases Judson replicates the OT quotation in the NT text. Then there are eight texts where Judson follows the LXX over the MT, replicating that text in the NT quotation.¹²⁰ These eight cases present an anomaly in Judson’s translation. Of these eight passages in which Judson follows the LXX instead of the MT, only two could be accepted as justified decisions. These are Ps 19:4/Rom 10:18, and Ps 69:22–23/Rom 11:9–10, where Judson follows the LXX in v. 22, but the MT in v. 23.¹²¹ The remaining six cases represent a departure from Judson’s

¹¹³ The NRSV and NIV read “Rodanim” in Gen 10:4.

¹¹⁴ As do KJV, DRA, NJB.

¹¹⁵ Giltner, *Moses Stuart*, 36.

¹¹⁶ Judson, “Rev. A. Judson, to the Rev. Mr. Sharp,” 330. Judson continued revising this “Epitome” over the years: “[W]e have finished revising the New Testament, and the Epitome of the Old, - a work, in which we have been closely engaged for above a year” (Adoniram Judson, “Mr. Judson’s Journal, 1829, Nov. 29th,” *The American Baptist Magazine* 10 [1830] 245–46, at 245).

¹¹⁷ According to the list in *Nestle-Aland Greek New Testament, Fourth Revised Edition* (ed. Barbara Aland et al.; Stuttgart: Deutsche Bibelgesellschaft, 1994) 887–88.

¹¹⁸ E.g., Gen 5:24 and Heb 11:5; Deut 17:7 and 1 Cor 5:13; Ps 2:1–2 and Acts 4:25–26.

¹¹⁹ E.g., Exod 19:6 and 1 Pet 2:9; Ps 16:10 and Acts 13:35; Ps 104:4 and Heb 1:7; Ps 140:3 and Rom 3:13; Prov 25:21–22 and Rom 12:20.

¹²⁰ Exod 19:6 and 1 Pet 2:9; Ps 8:4–6 and Heb 2:6–8; Ps 16:8–11 and Acts 2:25–28; Ps 19:4 and Rom 10:18; Ps 69:22–23 and Rom 11:9–10; Ps 102:25–27 and Heb 1:10–12; Isa 7:14 and Matt 1:23; Isa 40:3–5 and Lk 3:4–6.

¹²¹ In v. 22 לְשִׁלּוּמִים is read by the LXX and Syriac as the noun שְׁלֹם “recompense, vengeance, bribe, retribution,” which Judson follows. See Tate, *Psalms 51–100*, 190. In v. 23, מְתַנְּנִים could be “loins” or “hips/lower back”; JB “make their backs always tremble,” i.e., following MT.

careful text-critical work and the translations seem to be driven by a desire to match the NT quotation.¹²² This may represent the residual influence of the earlier “Epitome,” the first OT texts Judson translated in order to show how prophecies were fulfilled in the NT.¹²³

Judson always considered his translation the beginning, not the end. On 25 December 1840, Judson wrote,

the *beau ideal* of translation, so far as it concerns the poetical and prophetical books of the Old Testament, I profess not to have attained. If I live many years, of which I have no expectation, I shall have to bestow much more labor upon those books. With the New Testament I am rather better satisfied . . . At least I hope that I have laid a good foundation for my successors to build upon.¹²⁴

Sadly, despite these hopes, his Bible translation has remained in use unchanged since 1840.

■ Conclusion

Judson left New England in 1812, when the biblical studies movement there was just beginning to take shape. Yet he had already been influenced by the burgeoning movement, and continued to participate in it from a distance. This is evident in a number of ways, not least his ecumenical approach to scholarship, which is today a hallmark of biblical studies. While he himself was a theologically conservative New England Calvinist, he enthusiastically availed himself of quality scholarship regardless of who produced it: the earlier Barnabite Catholic missionaries in Burma, the rationalist German scholars who denied the supernatural in the Bible, and even New England Unitarians. The detailed, technical work of textual criticism and biblical interpretation that characterized the New England movement suited Judson’s personality. As a result, he produced a high-quality translation that, though out of date after nearly 200 years, is still usable due to its solid exegetical foundations. Judson was a careful yet adventurous translator, not reluctant to follow the ancient versions over the Hebrew Bible, and often departing from traditional interpretations. Some of his interpretive decisions seem odd, but these are not idiosyncrasies; rather they are exegetical fossils from the best scholarship of his era.¹²⁵

¹²² This continues to be the case for many modern versions for Isa 7:14, “the virgin shall conceive,” from Matt 1:23. So ESV, NIV, HCSB, NAB, NASB, NKJV. For עלמה as “young woman,” see NRSV, NJB, NJPS.

¹²³ For further analysis of Judson’s translation, see John H. de Jong, “An Analysis of Adoniram Judson’s Translation of Zephaniah,” *BT* 68 (2017) 64–87.

¹²⁴ Wayland, *Memoir*, 2:160.

¹²⁵ E.g., John de Jong, “A ‘Sin Offering’ Crouching at the Door? Translation Lessons from an Exegetical Fossil in the Judson Bible,” *BT* 61 (2010) 89–92.

One area in which Judson's translation will remain unique is its Burmese language. This is the result of a situation that can never be replicated. When Judson began translating, although he inherited some key terms from the Barnabite missionaries, there was no Burmese Christian discourse, as there is today. His language teachers and translation assistants were all trained in the scholarly Burmese of Buddhism as well as Pali. As a result, according to one of Myanmar's leading Burmese and Pali scholars of the twentieth century, compared with the British and Foreign Bible Society translation of 1927, "the Judson Bible approached nearer the style of the Burmese Buddhist writings, so that it was found more readable by the Buddhist monks unacquainted with English."¹²⁶

The JB is a product of the nineteenth-century New England biblical studies movement, which flourished through the early and middle part of the century, but then declined and eventually disappeared. Unlike the other works produced by that movement, now increasingly available through online digital archives, the JB never faded into obscurity. It remains the most widely used Burmese Bible, a living remnant of a past period of biblical scholarship, and it continues to resonate with the energy of that New England movement.

■ Appendix of Abbreviations

ASV	American Standard Version (1901)
DRA	Douay-Rheims (1899)
ERV	English Revised Version (1885)
ESV	English Standard Version (2001)
HCSB	Holman Christian Standard Bible (2003)
JPS	Jewish Publication Society Version (1917)
JB	The Judson Bible (1840)
KJV	King James Version. Blayney Edition (1769)
LXX	Septuagint
MT	Masoretic Text
NAB	New American Bible (1991)
NASB	New American Standard Bible (1995)
NIV	New International Version (1984)
NJB	New Jerusalem Bible (1985)
NJPS	New Jewish Publication Society Version (1985)
NKJV	New King James Version (1982)
NRSV	New Revised Standard Version (1989)
RSV	Revised Standard Version (1952; 2nd ed. 1971, NT only)
WEB	Noah Webster's revision of KJV (1833)

¹²⁶ U Pe Maung Tin, quoted in Alan Saw U, "Professor U Pe Maung Tin," 37.