A Very Funny School:
Youth and the Work of the Word at Antananarivo

Pier M. Larson
Department of History
The Johns Hopkins University

Work in Progress: Please do not cite or further circulate without the author's permission.
I need your help and advice about how to tighten this piece.

A missionary will acquire great honour to himself who translates
the New Testament or the whole Bible into the language of the heathen.[1]

One of the Reformation's most lasting impacts on the intellectual lives of Protestant communities was its call for direct access to the Word of God in vernaculars. Literacy and scriptural translation typified Protestantism and also its missionary endeavors in the age of empire. Both translation and reading were considered prerequisite to a personal, proper knowledge of God. And both also emerged as cornerstones of the theology and practice of British Evangelicalism. Postulating the "sufficiency of the Scriptures, for the instruction and consolation, the establishment and maturity of the Christian character," many nineteenth-century British Evangelicals developed a keen interest in schools, literacy education, and reading publics.[2] Evangelists working the spiritual fields of Britain and its empire were informed by these preoccupations. The establishment of schools for instructing youth in the three Rs, for example, was an important evangelistic strategy of the London Missionary Society (LMS), one of the several foreign Evangelical mission enterprises founded in late eighteenth-century Britain. The "honor" of Biblical translation into vernaculars was another.

Teaching youth to read, write, and count was impressed on missionaries-in-training at the LMS's theological school in Gosport, Hampshire, just across the bustling bay from the city of Portsmouth. David Moffat had passed through this institution on his way to Southern Africa. A copy of his course notes allows us to appreciate the nature of the training offered there to would-be foreign missionaries. The earliest LMS evangelists bound for Madagascar—David Jones, Thomas Bevan, and David Griffiths—also studied at Gosport. Headmaster David Bogue lectured aspiring evangelists that schools were the foundation of successful evangelization. Institutions for the study of the three Rs, he claimed, were "chiefly for the rising generation" and that in evangelical strategy "children [should be] made the teachers of

---

[1] "Missionary Lectures, By David Bogue D.D., Tutor of the Missionary Seminary, Gosport," Transcribed by Robert Moffat, 1817, handwritten copy, 127p., Council for World Mission Library, Manuscripts, School of Oriental and African Studies Library (University of London, London) Special Collections, 17. The following archive designations are employed in this article: ACCL.SC.SGGL (Auckland City Central Library, New Zealand, Special Collections, Sir George Grey Library); LMS (London Missionary Society/Council for World Mission Archives, School of Oriental and African Studies Library, London: ILM, Incoming Letters Madagascar; ILMAU, Incoming Letters Mauritius; JMM, Journals Madagascar and Mauritius); MNA (Mauritius National Archives, Coromandel); NAB (National Archives of Britain, Kew, London); NLW.MS (National Library of Wales, Aberystwyth, Manuscripts Division).

[2] Stuart Piggin, *Making Evangelical Missionaries, 1789-1858: The Social Background, Motives and Training of the British Protestant Missionaries to India* (Abingdon, Eng.: The Sutton Courtenay Press, 1984), 156-169; Richard Gray, *Black Christians and White Missionaries* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1990), 95-97; David William Bebbington, *Evangelicalism in Modern Britain: A History from the 1730s to the 1980s* (London: Routledge, 1993). The quotation is from Joseph John Freeman and David Johns, *A Narrative of the Persecution of the Christians in Madagascar, with Details of the Escape of six Christian Refugees, now in England* (London: John Snow, 1840), 296.

their parents and will convey to them many valuable ideas." Through the dissemination of such "valuable ideas," by youth, Bogue reasoned, "the influence of the Pagan Hierarchy will be … greatly diminished and perhaps destroyed."[3] For Bogue, vernacular literacy was a particularly efficacious means of Christian evangelization with the capacity to transform heathen societies from within, and by means of their demographic base. Sacred literature translated into vernaculars, the reasoning went, could be read out loud or recited in memory by literate children to their unlettered, unenlightened elders. In this plan, children would be heathenism's Trojan horse. Bogue's theory of youth-based evangelism seldom explained *actual* patterns of conversion to Christianity in nineteenth-Century Africa, including Madagascar. But literacy, youth, and translation did form a trinity of preoccupation within many British missions with generational implications for the cultural work of both religion and empire. Literacy and translation, then, emerge as important themes in the history of youth and generation in certain parts of Africa, as they do religious and social history more broadly.

Curious, then, that so little of the now vast and complex historiography of Christianity in Africa produced since the publication in 1948 of Bengt Sundkler's *Bantu Prophets in South Africa* actually examines in detail early projects in vernacular literacy or biblical translation, and especially the role of youth in them. Writing in 1985 at the apex of historians' interest in what was then called oral historiography, Jon Janzen found remarkable the virtual absence of studies about literacy and African Christianity.[4] Only in recent years have scholars begun to turn their attention from social and theological issues in African religious history toward more intellectual ones and in a deliberate way to plumb the implications of literacy in African life. Lamin Sanneh, for example, has argued that Biblical translation into vernaculars involved a "radical indigenization" that distinguished Protestant missionaries from colonial administrators and Christian evangelism from Islam's preoccupation with Arabic as a lingua franca (for Sanneh these were all positive distinctions). A plethora of new studies explore the uses of vernacular literacy in everyday contexts of the past and also along fractures of political conflict, investigating how individuals and corporate groups constructed identities and arguments through writing and translation, or how African composers innovated with the many textual genres available to them. Others have probed the production, transformation, and circulation of evangelical texts, mostly within twentieth-century British empire and on its fringes, tracing out both an international history of the book and the personal utilities of reading and writing in twentieth-century lives.[5]

The recent efflorescence of studies in popular literacy and its uses in twentieth-century Africa has brought us well along the road to appreciating some of

---

[3] David Bogue, "Missionary Lectures," Lecture 10, "Of Setting up Schools."

[4] John M. Janzen, "The Consequences of Literacy in African Religion: The Kongo Case," in *Theoretical Explorations in African Religion*, ed. Wim van Binsbergen and Matthew Schoffeleers, (London: Kegan Paul International, 1985), 225-252. See also Norman Etherington, "Missionaries and the Intellectual History of Africa: A Historical Survey," *Itinerario* 7,2 (1983), 116-143.

[5] Lamin Sanneh, *Translating the Message: The Missionary Impact on Culture* (Maryknoll, N.Y.: Orbis Books, 1989), quotation from 3; Paul Stuart Landau, *The Realm of the Word: Language, Gender, and Christianity in a Southern African Kingdom* (Portsmouth, N.H.: Heinemann, 1995); Stephanie Newell, *Literary Culture in Colonial Ghana: "How to Play the Game of Life"* (Manchester, Eng.: Manchester University Press, 2002); Isabel Hofmeyr, *The Portable Bunyan: A Transnational History of* The Pilgrim's Progress (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 2004); Derek R. Peterson, *Creative Writing: Translation, Bookkeeping, and the Work of Imagination in Colonial Kenya* (Portsmouth, N.H.: Heinemann, 2004); Karin Barber, ed., *Africa's Hidden Histories: Everyday Literacy and Making the Self* (Bloomington, Ind.: Indiana University Press, 2006); Derek R. Peterson and Giacomo Macola, eds., *Recasting the Past: History Writing and Political Work in Modern Africa* (Athens, Oh.: Ohio University Press, 2009).

the implications of the three Rs in the lives of certain Africans over the last century. Still, little attention has been directed to originary processes of literacy acquisition and vernacular textual production, especially during the nineteenth century. This may in part reflect a broad temporal shift in scholarly interest about Africa from what is often, but imprecisely, called the precolonial era toward the twentieth century. The lack of interest in early literacy projects may also be a function of the scarceness of documentation available to researchers for some of the first projects in Evangelical translation. Whatever the reasons, there remains a certain obscurity when it comes to precocious moments of experimentation in the creation of writing systems and the production of the earliest of Roman-alphabet texts in African languages. Most studies of literacy today assume an existing system of reading and writing as a backdrop to personalized or social experiments in the written word.[6]

The nitty-gritty business of creating orthographies and fashioning early textual translations into African tongues often set foreigners and their students' into a messy tangle of reflexive intellectual and social relationships that belie the ways in which Evangelical missionaries tended to see and interpret the world in their published writings: as the confrontation of unmistakable categories of Afroheathen and Eurochristian. Scriptural translation, for example, typically required European clerics and African colleague translators to struggle with each others' tongues and intellectual outlooks and to place their mutually constituted knowledge into the service of textual and semantic transformation, a point Derek Peterson has emphasized in his study of the stakes in debates over competing alphabets for graphing out Kikuyu texts in twentieth-century Kenya. When it came to Biblical translation, missionaries typically claimed, as they did in Madagascar, to have translated the Christian scriptures in a straightforward way directly out of classical Mediterranean languages into African vernaculars, representing themselves as the primary cultural and intellectual brokers between Eurochristianity and languages of Africanity. Their students, by contrast, were the fortuitous recipients of such translating labors. But matters of language acquisition and the production and conversion of texts into vernaculars were rarely so straightforward as such bold, simplistic claims suggest. Mutual discovery of mother tongues, experiments in orthography, creative efforts at generating Biblical vocabulary, and multiple stabs at textual translation and revision formed the base work of many Protestant missions to Africa. And these, in turn, brought Africans and envoys from Europe into relationships that confound both clear-cut claims to authorship and tidy categories of teacher and taught.[7]

*****

Perhaps no foreign Evangelical mission in the early nineteenth century was as spectacularly successful in its literate objectives as that of the London Missionary Society to a kingdom in highland Madagascar, in a region to the center of the Big Island and known as Imerina. The mission society's first period of toil in Imerina during the early 1820s was staffed by three excessively feuding and independently thinking Nonconformist ministers—two Welshmen and an Englishman—together

---

[6] This is true also of the history of the LMS in Madagascar. Françoise Raison-Jourde has written about missionaries' linguistic work on dictionaries and folkloric collections in the context of an "unequal exchange" between the oral and the written, mostly during the 1830s, but pays little attention to biblical translation. Françoise Raison-Jourde, "L'échange inégal de la langue: la pénétration des techniques linguistiques dans une civilisation de l'oral (Imerina, début du XIXe siècle)," *Annales: Economies, Sociétés, Civilisations* 32 (1977), 639-669; Françoise Raison, "Le travail missionnaire sur les formes de la culture orale à Madagascar entre 1820 et 1886," *Omaly sy Anio*,15 (1982), 33-52.

[7] Peterson, *Creative Writing*, chapter.

with their wives, and a number of artisanal auxiliaries who, along with later-arriving missionaries, drifted in and out of the island over the years.[8] With the enthusiastic assistance of their patron, King Radama of Imerina, British missionaries early dedicated themselves to the task of teaching small groups of urban children to read and write, and shortly thereafter set the youth to the foundational task of converting scriptures into the vernacular. The results were impressive. Within eight years of their arrival, by June 1828, LMS missionaries and their first students were managing some thirty schools with an enrollment of over 5,200 students.[9] By March of 1830 Nonconformist schoolmasters and their assistants had completed and published a vernacular New Testament of which they quickly circulated some 5,000 copies to novice and by all accounts avid readers. The entire Christian scriptures in King Radama's tongue issued from the LMS press at Antananarivo in 1835, the first complete Bible translated into an African idiom in the context of western mission.[10] Between 1827 and the departure of the last LMS missionaries from Imerina in mid-1836, well more than 100,000 copies of individual and collated books of sacred scripture, religious tracts, primers, spelling books, and ecclesiastical readers had been printed and distributed from the mission press in Antananarivo. Schools for children continued to function in the absence of the missionaries, and many adults began to acquire the art of reading from youth who had passed through them. By 1840 as many as 25,000 highland Malagasy had gained some experience in reading and writing their language in the Roman alphabet, or some five percent of the population of Imerina.[11] This rate of literacy compares favorably with those of Britain and France of the day. Ever on the move, literate Christian emigrants from highland Madagascar traveled to Mauritius, to the Comores, and to the Cape Colony in the 1830s, where they sought to teach Malagasy speaking compatriots and ex-slaves to read and write in their mother tongue. These mobile communities exchanged Malagasy language letters with each other across the Big Island's diaspora in the western Indian Ocean. Transactions within this precocious oceanic ecumene of Malagasy letters—the sort of epistolary network of which Vukile Kumalo has also written—is the subject of my recently published book, *Ocean of Letters*.[12]

In this essay I want to investigate the earliest foundations of this expansive community of Roman-alphabet Malgachophone letters in the western Indian Ocean. The focus here is on what transpired within the royal-LMS schools of Antananarivo between late 1820 and about mid-1824. Summarized here, those developments are traced out in the balance of this paper: The missionaries earliest language helpers were multilingual slaves. British clerics employed the school classroom as much to

---

[8] Bonar Alexander Gow, *Madagascar and the Protestant Impact: The Work of the British Missions, 1818-1895* (New York: Africana Publishing Company, 1979); Françoise Raison-Jourde, *Bible et pouvoir à Madagascar au XIXe siècle: invention d'une identité chrétienne et construction de l'état, 1780-1880* (Paris: Karthala, 1991), pages; Pier M. Larson, "'Capacities and Modes of Thinking': Intellectual Engagements and Subaltern Hegemony in the Early History of Malagasy Christianity," *American Historical Review* 102,4 (1997), 969-1002; Vincent Huyghues-Belrose, *Les premiers missionnaires protestants de Madagascar, 1795-1827* (Paris: Karthala, 2001).

[9] J. J. Freeman to the Rev. Dr. Phillip, Tananarivo, 3 June 1828, LMS.ILM.2.4.D, 1; David Jones, David Griffiths, David Johns, and Joseph John Freeman, *The Second Report of the Madagascar Missionary School Society, 1828, Under the Patronage of His Majesty Radama* (Tananarivo: Printed at the Missionary Press, 1828).

[10] The African vernacular translations that next appeared as fully printed bibles were Amharic (1840; this translation was not sponsored or conducted by Christian missionaries), Setswana (1857), Xhosa (1858), Duala (1872), Sesotho (1881), and Zulu (1883). Others followed in rapid succession in the last decades of the nineteenth century and into the twentieth. Geraldine Elizabeth Coldham, *A Bibliography of Scriptures in African Languages*, 2 vols. (London: British and Foreign Bible Society, 1966); Sanneh, *Translating the Message*, 246-249.

[11] Raison-Jourde, "L'échange inégal de la langue," 641.

[12] Pier M. Larson, *Ocean of Letters: Language and Creolization in an Indian Ocean Diaspora* (Cambridge, Eng.: Cambridge University Press, 2009).

learn as to teach. Students were simultaneously learners and instructors. Schoolchildren quickly absorbed knowledge of English from LMS missionaries and set its Roman alphabet to spelling Malagasy words and sentences. The earliest and most competent bilingual workers of the word in highland Madagascar were preadolescent boys, not foreign missionaries. The association between Europeans and the bulk of translation labor in LMS official writings stemmed largely from epistolary fictions staged for metropolitan audiences, and from a rigid worldview and quest for evangelical honor that could not admit what was actually happening on the ground. Silences and half-revelations in communications issuing from the missionaries had the effect of effacing the critical role of slaves and literate youth in the production of Biblical translations. If vernacular textual work was directed and financed by adult foreigners in these early years and repeatedly claimed for their own credit and honor, it was conducted through a deep engagement with captives and pre-teen students. In consequence, the foundational *manuscripts* from which the first print versions of the Christian scriptures were produced were to a significant extent the intellectual work of a tight group of about a dozen youthful students at Antananarivo whose outlook and reasons for choice of language are difficult to reconstruct with the precision possible in some twentieth-century studies. The scriptures were converted directly out of the language of King James into that of King Radama with minimal reference, in the first instance, to classical languages. Early English-Malagasy translations effected largely by children were later transformed by missionaries through a process of "revision" and "comparison" with classical texts such as Griesbach's Greek New Testament to conform in a number of ways to Mediterranean-language originals. The end product looked as if it may have come right out of the classical languages, but in fact it was the outcome of a *multi-staged process*. All was not, in other words, as is typically assumed in the early work of the word at Antananarivo. The missionary honor of scriptural translation was, in truth, broadly shared by both clerics and their young students.[13]

*****

When LMS missionaries David Jones and David Griffiths wrote from Antananarivo in 1825 that "It would be best to instruct the young first of all as it would be easier to impress their minds with true principles than the minds of the old and superstitious," they were reiterating what they had been taught at the feet of David Bogue of Gosport.[14] Their colleagues working in nearby South Africa at the same time, however, had also attended Gosport but were much less invested in schools or African vernaculars. If reading Christian scriptures was a hallmark of Protestant missions, it is also the case that the earliest of Protestant missions did not produce the first Biblical translations. Why this was the case may in part be attributed to missionaries' varying perceptions about the state of civilization among the people with whom they lived and worked. In contrast to their colleagues in South Africa, for example, the British Protestant ministers of Imerina concerned themselves relatively

---

[13] Similar conclusions were reached more than a half century ago by Norwegian linguist and missionary Otto Christian Dahl. Dahl's conclusions, published in Norwegian and restricted to a small reading audience, were rigorously disputed by fellow missionary Ludvig Munthe, who claimed on the basis of textual analysis that missionaries conducted the work of translation by themselves and directly from Hebrew and Greek. For the reasons explained in this article, I agree more with Dahl than with Munthe. Otto Chr Dahl, "Bibelen på Madagaskar," in *Norske misjonærer som bibeloversettere*, ed. H. Chr. Mamen, (Oslo: Egede-Instituttet, 1950), 128-173; Ludvig Munthe, *La Bible à Madagascar: les deux premières traductions du Nouveau Testament malgache* (Oslo: Egde Instituttet, 1969), esp. pages.

[14] David Jones and David Griffiths to Rev. George Burder, Tananarivou, 30 July 1825, LMS.ILM.2.2.B, 13.

little with civilizing projects and the reformation of quotidian routines.[15] Not that civilizing missions weren't on their minds. When he first arrived in Antananarivo in October 1820 David Jones explained to King Radama that "the missionary society sends out missionaries to civilize the heathen as well as to christianize them."[16] Yet LMS missionaries considered the people of Madagascar far less in need of the material advancements of British civilization than their southern African counterparts.[17] After an exploratory visit to Madagascar's east coast in mid-1818, David Jones reflected on the state of civilization he found there. "The Madagascars," he concluded,

> are not such as they are represented by Europeans: but they are far civilized compared with others in Africa; and the Chiefs, when we asked them were they willing to cultivate the land and to learn every thing that may contribute to the cultivation of the Madagascars &c &c, announced that they were perfectly willing, and would do it with great pleasure, if they had any encouragement from Europeans; but they said Europeans are coming here to buy slaves, and not to encourage us in civilization.[18]

In their demeanor, too, the Welshman found Malagasy quite up to standard. While convalescing at Mauritius from a bout of the "Madagascar Fever" (possibly malaria), Jones claimed that the Big Island's "inhabitants [are] docile, humble and kind and superior to the Africans in civilization. They are not brutes and savages as many have reported them to be, but quite to the contrary."[19] His observations about islanders may have been as much based on experience with Malagasy speakers in Mauritius where, as at the Cape Colony, both Malagasy and East Africans labored in bondage, as on his brief visits to eastern Madagascar.

If the people of the Big Island's east coast and Malagasy speakers at the Mascarenes demonstrated an openness to tutoring in the European arts of cultivation and a tendency to docile behavior, those around Antananarivo impressed Jones with their existing command of those arts. From the eminence on which King Radama's capital of Antananarivo was perched, envoys of the LMS looked out in all directions across an irrigated landscape of rice fields labored by sedentary farmers and stock keepers. They approved of what they observed.[20] The people of Imerina, they concluded, were active farmers, lived by the sweat of their brows, valued property, and cultivated "industrious" work habits. In other words, Welshmen found resonances of British agriculture in highland Madagascar's fields of waving grain. In its productive response to intensification of labor per hectare, marshland riziculture, in fact, anchored farmers to their land even more completely and intimately than did the extensive culture of wheat and potatoes.

---

[15] John L. Comaroff and Jean Comaroff, *Of Revelation and Revolution*, 2 vols. (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1991-1997).

[16] David Jones to Charles Telfair, Tananarive, 3 November 1820, LMS.ILM.1.2.A, 2; David Jones to Dr. David Bogue, Antananarivo, 3 November 1820, LMS.ILM.1.2.B, 2. In Mauritius, prior to his departure for highland Madagascar, Jones had drawn up plans for "evangelising and civilizing the inhabitants of Madagascar." David Jones to W. Alers Hankey [Typescript], Mauritius, 19 August 1820, LMS.ILMAU.1.1.D, 2.

[17] On this point see also Zoë Crossland, "Landscape and Mission in Madagascar and Wales in the Early Nineteenth Century: 'Sowing the Seeds of Knowledge'," *Landscapes* 7,1 (2006), 108-116.

[18] David Jones to Rev. Dr. Waugh, Mauritius [Port Louis], 10 November 1818, LMS.ILMAU.1.1.C, 2.

[19] David Jones to W. Alers Hankey Esqr., Belleombre, Mauritius, 7 August 1819, LMS.ILM.1.2.A, 2.

[20] Freeman and Johns, *Narrative of the Persecution*, 4-5.

That David Jones ultimately selected the urban capital of an independent and powerful state to found his mission of course also influenced missionary theories about highland Malagasy civilization and the usefulness of schools. "Mr. Jones saith that he is astonished at the wisdom of Radama & the gover[nmen]t. he has over his people," wrote LMS minister Jean Le Brun from Mauritius in 1820 to the Directors of the LMS, sharing his personal correspondence with Jones. "They tremble before him & yet he is very merry & affable with them."[21] The king, Le Brun concluded in a later communication, "seems by all account, to be a man induced with fine sentiments—for a Heathen."[22] Despotism in which subjects shook before their king, Missionaries were convinced, was far better than no government at all. The deficiencies of highland Madagascar's people in civilization lay primarily in a lack of literate training and Christian religion, they concluded. When added to the mix, British evangelical schooling would burnish this half-civilization from the inside.

The theological, missiological, and anthropological theories of LMS missionaries were all relevant to explaining their deep interest in literacy. But King Radama had his own reasons for encouraging the three Rs. Not only did he desire to communicate with his armies by pen and paper, bypassing the sometimes glib and slippery tongues of his messengers, he sought "individuals…who would be able to read & write and do business for me as secretaries."[23] With Napoleon as a model, Radama had resolved to construct for himself a bureaucracy. This aspiration dovetailed rather neatly with the LMS's evangelical quest for public literacy. Had the clerics not offered to create a Roman-alphabet orthography for the king's language, teach letters and arithmetic to his subjects, and operate schools, it is unlikely they would have been tolerated in the belly of the kingdom. As the missionaries themselves acknowledged, Radama was in full control of his foreign relations and "neither understood Christianity, nor valued it for its own sake, he gave it royal sanction…for the sake of the civil benefits which he anticipate[d] in connexion with its introduction and extension in his empire."[24] LMS personnel came only slowly to recognize that their closeness to Radama's court cost them effective communication with a wary adult public displeased about the rapid extension of Radama's power and the erosion of parental authority in the operation of royal-ecclesiastical schools.

Living in an independent kingdom of Madagascar on the periphery of British imperial nodes in southern Africa, Mauritius, and South Asia, where Europeans fell easy prey to disease, and to which few British settlers and fortune seekers dared venture, the LMS's Madagascar missionaries did not bother themselves with the irksome "native policies" and abuses of colonial government. Nor did they find it necessary to defend themselves from the scrutiny or bad press of their compatriots, as their counterparts frequently did in the colonies. A variety of personal and structural concerns, then, tended to govern the *extent* to which particular evangelical missions in particular times and places emphasized translation and literacy. Missionaries to Imerina were pushed and pulled by their Evangelical heritage, their training at the feet of David Bogue of Gosport, their theories of civilization, and by the designs of the royal court at Antananarivo into an early association with youth and schools rather than with adults and rural evangelism. They eschewed humanitarian activism and had

---

[21] John Le Brun to Rev. Dr. Philip, Mauritius, 5 December 1820, LMS.ILMAU.1.1.D, 4.

[22] John Le Brun to The Rev. G. Burder, Mauritius, 16 January 1821, LMS.ILMAU.1.2.A, 1-2.

[23] David Jones and David Griffiths to Thos. Phillips, Tananarivou, 30 April 1823, NLW.MS.19157E.

[24] William Ellis, ed., *History of Madagascar: Comprising also the Progress of the Christian Mission Established in 1818, and an Authentic Account of the Persecution and Recent Martyrdom of the Native Christians*, 2 vols. (London: Fisher and Son, 1838), ii, 404; Gerald M. Berg, "Radama's Smile: Domestic Challenges to Royal Ideology in Early Nineteenth-Century Imerina," *History in Africa* 25 (1998), 69-92.

no need for colonial critiques. They did not seek foremost to transform the routines of king Radama's adult subjects. They set themselves instead to the work of the word. But in this they were not alone.

*****

Within weeks of their respective arrivals in Antananarivo in 1820 and 1821, David Jones and David Griffiths each received of the king a number of young boys and girls aged 6 to 9 with whom to commence their schools. (Thomas Bevan, who had accompanied David Jones to Madagascar's east coast in 1818, died shortly after arrival and does not feature in this story). But schools are easier said than done when students and teachers speak different tongues. Precisely what trans-linguistic literacy instruction within the royal-LMS schools at Antananarivo actually looked like is masked by the sometimes opaque epistolary prose in the LMS archive and the virtual absence of accounts of the work of the word from students. The evidence we have to work with, in other words, comes primarily from the very party which claimed for itself the honor of translation. Interactions among key players must often be read in the syntax and between the lines of foreign pastors' correspondence. The absurdity of Jones and Griffiths attempting to teach the three Rs to children in the absence of adequate interlingual communication skills, or books, was imagined with a degree of candor in a hagiographic tale for British school children composed decades later by LMS Madagascar missionary Annie Sharman.

> I told you that Mr. Jones had quite a good-sized school; but fancy, if you can, a school without any books! The Malagasy actually had no alphabet, and so nobody knew how to read or write. There was no printing, and there was not a single book in the Malagasy language. It must have been a very funny school—probably no slates, no books, no pictures! And the teacher himself only knew a little of the language of those pupils, and of course nobody knew much English or Welsh! I think Mr. Jones must have been very clever indeed to manage a school under such conditions.[25]

There actually *were* some slates, books, and pictures in Imerina's schools, and Jones's "cleverness" at Antananarivo—contrary to the import of the story missionaries typically told about themselves—rested firmly on the assistance of young students and the services of an enslaved interpreter named Joseph. Let us turn to the slave first. Joseph was a Government Black of Malagasy origin who had been allocated to the use of the missionary in 1818 by the governor of Mauritius.[26] Why would a missionary so set against the *slave trade* desire the services of a slave? A recourse to native translators was "very desirable at first, before [one] can learn the language," David Bogue had lectured students at Gosport.[27] Those instructions were heeded by Jones, with the real-life twist (no doubt unanticipated by LMS superiors such as Bogue) that the interpreter happened to be a slave adept at working among the principle languages of the islands of the western Indian Ocean (i.e. French and Malagasy).

Most politically subaltern Malagasy of slave and free status at Mauritius were multilingual and comprised a valuable resource to Europeans on every kind of

---

[25] Annie Sharman, *The Martyrs' Isle, or Madagascar: The Country, the People, and the Missions* (London: London Missionary Society, 1909), 45.

[26] Larson, *Ocean of Letters*, 188.

[27] David Bogue, "Missionary Lectures," Lecture 2, "Employment of a Missionary."

mission to Madagascar.[28] Nearly every British envoy from Mauritius traveling to Madagascar was provided by colonial government with enslaved interpreters who could translate between Malagasy and French and/or English. Some of these slaves were even of "Mozambique" or east African origin. East Africans picked up the Malagasy tongue either on their servile route through Madagascar to the Mascarenes or as a contact language in the Mascarenes themselves.[29] We know of these interpreting bondmen in part because of their tendency to flee their masters. "Received Lamoora," wrote British ambassador Robert Lyall from Antananarivo on October 5, 1828, "a Malgash slave, belonging to the Government of the Mauritius, who ran away from Mr. Bennet at Tamatave, from Mr. Griffiths. Had him put in irons, and on the 6th ordered him twenty lashes with a small whip."[30] In the business of slave keeping and discipline, British missionaries were no exception. Bennet was a visiting LMS missionary sent to inspect the work of his colleagues at Antananarivo. Like Jones, the Governor of Mauritius had supplied him with a multilingual slave. David Griffiths had been responsible for recapturing the truant Lamoora at Tamatave, hauling him more than 200 kilometers back to Imerina, and handing him to the British ambassador, Robert Lyall, for whipping. This tidbit of slave use and capture was not something Bennet or Griffiths reported to LMS directors in London, or Griffiths to friends and supporters in Wales. There were certain realities a missionary had to enter into when he worked in the western Indian Ocean, and these were best kept in the hush.[31]

"It was thought just & necessary," explained Jones about his slave Joseph, "as we could get no Malagash teacher, to take with us two slaves or servants who could speak French and Malagash; and who would act as interpreters between us and the Malgash—besides taking care of our luggage." With a slave, went the reasoning, one might kill two irksome birds of travel—communication and the heaviness of baggage—with a single stone. "We petitioned his Ex. G. G. Hall," Jones continued, "for two Govt. slaves, whom he gave us with the greatest pleasure and rice for two months."[32] Both Jones and his wife (who died soon after arrival in Madagascar) enjoyed the services of these slaves. Thomas Bevan had also employed a slave named Joseph as his interpreter, a man David Jones accused in 1818, shortly after Bevan's death, of poisoning him.[33] Might the two Josephs of Bevan and Jones have been the same person? I have seen no evidence that David Griffiths of John Jeffreys enjoyed the services of a Government Black from Mauritius.

Government Blacks in the servile employ of missionaries for both their translation services and their sweat were more precisely a legal category of persons variously known in British colonies as apprentices, liberated Africans, or prize negroes. But Missionaries found it difficult to name them other than slaves, a term which apparently captures—no pun originally intended—the nature of their relationship to the men. Government Blacks had been captive slaves aboard vessels bound for the Mascarenes and surrounding territories, including the Cape Colony. If

---

[28] Larson, *Ocean of Letters*.

[29] Naturalists Hilsenberg and Bojer were allocated an enslaved French-Malagasy translator of "Mozambique" origin by Governor Farquhar: Hilsenberg & Bojer to Robt. Farquhar, King's Garden Pamplemousses, 26 April 1822, MNA.RA.200, 160r. See also Larson, *Ocean of Letters*, 233-235.

[30] Robert Lyall to Charles Colville, Tananarivou, 16 October 1828, MNA.HB.19.6, 3-4.

[31] In a letter to friends in Wales about Bennet's visit, Griffiths does not mention Lamoora: David Griffiths to Revd. J. Roberts, Andavamenarana, 15 September 1828, NLW.MS.J.Luther.Thomas.Papers.Madagascar1-4.

[32] David Jones to Rev. Dr. Waugh, Mauritius [Port Louis], 10 November 1818, LMS.ILMAU.1.1.C, 1.

[33] David Jones to John Le Brun, Tamatave, 25 December 1818, reported in John Le Brun to Directors of the LMS, no place [Port Louis], 6 April 1819, LMS.ILM.1.2.A.

intercepted by ships of the Royal Navy and condemned in courts of vice admiralty at the Cape or in Mauritius as illegal slavers, these slave-trading vessels and their cargo were forfeited to the crown. Such captives who arrived in colonial ports as slaves were then typically indentured out on contracts of seven to fourteen years to private individuals or to government (hence the term Government Blacks). At the termination of their indentures they were to become legally free.[34] Legally indentured translators such as Joseph continued to work for British missionaries in Madagascar well after the clerics became fluent in the vernacular, though they are never mentioned in correspondence with mission headquarters in London. What we don't know is how long the translators continued to render linguistic services to the missionaries, or precisely how. When David Jones departed Madagascar in 1830 his erstwhile translator Joseph suddenly reappeared in Jones's communications with the British governor of Mauritius. "In 1818 General Hall, then Acting Governor of the Mauritius, granted me a Government slave, named Joseph, to assist me as an interpreter and to render me assistance in the mission," Jones explained to the secretary for the governor.

> I should like to have the instructions of His Excellency the Governor, whether I am to take him back with me to the Mauritius or leave him here with his relations. He is now an old man about 50 or 60 years of age, and I do not think he would be able to walk down to Tamatave. He has been, on the whole, a good and useful servant; and if I return to the Mauritius before the end of this year, as I intend, I should like him to remain, under oversight of my brother Missionaries, to take charge of what I shall leave in the country. I shall be much obliged to you to state the case to his Excellency: and please to let me know his instructions relative thereto, which I shall attend to.[35]

Jones apparently heard nothing in reply to his query and departed Madagascar for Mauritius without his "good and useful servant" Joseph to whom he now entrusted the care of his personal belongings. (The time-limited indenture of many such apprentices sent abroad were conveniently forgotten by government officials by the time they were to be set free.) On the cusp of leaving Mauritius for Britain a year later, Jones again brought the matter to the attention of the Governor, providing us with additional details about Joseph.

> I wish to be directed by His Excellency the Governor, as to the steps I am to take with regard to Joseph a slave or apprentice of Government granted by General Hall in 1818 to be an interpreter and a servant to me in the mission, as I have stated in my letter to you of 5th Jany. 1830. He is now, I suppose, about sixty years of age, and, I think, he would not be able to walk down to Tamatave. He has been, on the whole, a good servant. He has acquired a little knowledge of cooking and gardening and has made some money through his diligence and activity. His wife [apparently married in Antananarivo from a local family] can wash & iron exceedingly well; and she gets money from teaching the servants of others. They are living comfortably together in company with their friends and relations taking charge of my garden during my absence. They as also the other servants, do reap the whole profit arising from the produce of the garden and surrounding ground which belonged to me

[34] Larson, *Ocean of Letters*, 235, 240-241, 252, 264.
[35] David Jones to Viret, Tananarivo, 5 January 1830, MNA.HB.20, 2-3.

when I left Imerina, for a time, in last June.[36]

In his earliest endeavors to acquire the language at Antananarivo, then, Jones utilized as linguistic medium the French creole of Mauritius and Bourbon, which was spoken to varying extents by King Radama, individuals involved in higher levels of government at Antananarivo, the many highland Malagasy merchants trading to Madagascar's east coast, and also by the slave named Joseph.[37] Jones had spent more than two years prior to his arrival in Antananarivo in October 1820 at the British island colony of Mauritius and along Madagascar's east coast, where he had studied the French creoles on the tongues of both enslaved free. "It was through a knowledge of it [French creole] that I am become so familiar with Radama in interpreting and visiting for him and through the assistance of which of I have learned the Madagascar tongue," Jones confided in a letter nearly a year after his arrival at Antananarivo.[38] It is possible that some of the children Jones taught in his school inside Radama's court during his first year in residence knew the French creole, for most of them were high-born offspring of Radama's closest associates and extended family, at least some of whom would have had contact with French creole speakers at Madagascar's east coast. King Radama had himself studied the French creole as a child of one such merchant who frequented his father's homestead. Speaking French creole was indispensable to Jones's early communication in Antananarivo through his interpreter. Being a Mauritian slave of Malagasy origin, Joseph would have been the most competent of Jones's associates in both tongues—indeed this is why Jones had sought the services of a Government Black from Mauritius to begin with. It is likely that the ever-shadowy Joseph's French-Malagasy services are what Jones really meant when he wrote about French that "through the assistance of [it] I have learned the Madagascar tongue." One can imagine Jones and Joseph participating together in the school or discussing religion with Radama's courtiers, working through the French creole as Joseph spoke Malagasy with Jones's interlocutors (enslaved interpreters from Mauritius were also utilized by the court at Antananarivo, the most famous of whom was Cherri, given by British ambassador James Hastie to Radama).[39] We must imagine how Jones and Joseph worked together, unfortunately, for we know nothing more concrete than that Joseph was Jones's translator and that the range of his linguistic competence included both Malagasy and French.

But Jones the Evangelical missionary had also acquired some knowledge of *Malagasy* speechways during his two years of peregrination about the western Indian Ocean islands prior to his arrival at Antananarivo in late 1820. Malagasy was second as a contact language only to French at the Mascarenes, for example, and we know that Jones conversed with Malagasy speaking slaves on Mauritian sugar estates and studied publications and manuscripts in Malagasy speech varieties previously compiled by Catholic missionaries and administrators at the colonial islands.[40] When he arrived at Antananarivo, however, Jones was immediately struck by the differences between Malagasy coastal and Mascarene *parlers*, on the one hand, and those about

[36] David Jones to Viret, Port Louis, 12 January 1831, MNA.HB.20, 1-2.

[37] Pier M. Larson, *History and Memory in the Age of Enslavement: Becoming Merina in Highland Madagascar, 1770-1822* (Portsmouth, N.H.: Heinemann, 2000), 49-81.

[38] David Jones to Rev. George Burder, Port Louis, 25 July 1821, LMS.ILM.1.2.C, 2.

[39] Robert Lyall to Charles Colville, Tananarivou, 10 February 1829, MNA.HB.19.16, 19.

[40] William Edward Cousins, "Among Old Malagasy Books in the British Museum: The 'Great Dictionary of Madagascar' by M. De Froberville," *Antananarivo Annual and Madagascar Magazine* (1889), 65-72; Vincent Huyghues-Belrose, *Les premiers missionnaires protestants de Madagascar, 1795-1827* (Paris: Karthala, 2001), pages; Larson, *Ocean of Letters*, 186-195.

Radama's capital 200 kilometers into Madagascar's highland interior (Antananarivo lies at 1500 meters above sea level), on the other. And although we don't know, Joseph was likely of coastal origin and may not have well mastered the dialect of highland Madagascar. Jones and his fellow missionaries faced the difficulty of communication in a welter of languages and dialects they knew something of but did not master, even as they surrounded themselves with manuscript vocabularies and living interpreters.

"I find myself at a loss in the dialect here," Jones lamented two weeks after his arrival at Radama's capital, "which is very different from that on the coast, so that it will be necessary for me to begin anew, but a knowledge of that [coastal speech variety] will assist me to learn the dialect here very soon. In short every thing is different in Ova [Imerina].[41] For foreigners first learning Malagasy, the Big Island's disparate speech varieties seemed insurmountable. "There is a very great difference between the dialect here and that on the Coast," Jones grumbled again in confirmation just weeks later, "& appears to me much more difficult."[42] The Welshman estimated with considerable optimism that it would require just six months to "have a good knowledge of this dialect" for "I shall have every day some good teachers to instruct me," including of course the slave Joseph who was never named in such correspondence directed to the British public.[43]

Seven months after his rosy predictions of fluency within half a year, Jones continued to regret his inabilities in the speech of highland Madagascar. "My time," he explained in May 1821

> has been employed, as far as my health and strength would allow me, in studying the language and the dialect of the Ovas [the people of Imerina] which differs considerably from that on the coast, so that the knowledge of that dialect which I studied at Tamatave and at the Mauritius has not rendered me the assistance which I expected; though certainly there are many words of the same pronunciation & meaning in both. I am able to make myself understood in a *general conversation without an interpreter* [that interpreter being the invisible Joseph] and do understand much better than I can speak of it myself.[44]

Given that Jones did not feel sufficiently confident to speak publicly (or preach) in Malagasy until three years later, February 1824, and then only haltingly, the nature of his "general conversation" and "great fluency" in Malagasy dialects claimed in other communications to that time must be taken with a considerable grain of salt and set against the LMS leadership's high expectations that a missionary "should by all means make himself master of the language." "This is an important part of the *first year's* labour," Bogue had lectured at Gosport. The best way of achieving vernacular fluency was "Conversing frequently with the natives, and acquiring a knowledge of their words and phrases."[45] But a language is not learned—especially by adults—in a single year, even in conversation, and newly arrived missionaries were considerably more modest in their linguistic achievements than anticipated in their training at Gosport, or in the sometimes rosy predictions of their

---

[41] David Jones to Rev. George Burder, Tananarive, 18 October 1820, LMS.ILM.1.2.B, 2.

[42] David Jones to Charles Telfair, Tananarive, 3 November 1820, LMS.ILM.1.2.A, 3.

[43] David Jones to Charles Telfair, Tananarive, 14 October 1820, LMS.ILM.1.2.A, page.

[44] David Jones to Rev. George Burder, Tananarivoo, 3 May 1821, LMS.ILM.1.2.C, 1-2, emphasis is mine.

[45] David Bogue, "Missionary Lectures," Lecture 2, "Employment of a Missionary". Emphasis added.

epistles. Their intimate havens it is clear from their correspondence were their Welsh-speaking households, not the company of Antananarivo's citizens. Of their difficulties in the language Jones and Griffiths were painfully aware, yet both were alternately straightforward, then coy, and always silent about Joseph in their communications to London. Reflecting on his linguistic abilities in May 1821, Jones felt that "If the Lord spare my life and grant me health, I despair not of attaining *in a few years* a clearer knowledge of it [the language] through practice, attention and study; and that I hope to be able to send you a small treatise on it in all its parts of speech. I have written one already for mine own use and practice to which I add under the particular heads all new acquired remarks."[46]

Jones's admission that learning the king's tongue would take "a few years" and probably much "practice, attention and study" suggests a key role for Joseph and for his students in teaching him Imerina's language and in helping him to compose his "treatise" on it. Yet virtually all LMS communications from Imerina are characterized by an evasiveness not only about enslaved translators but on the subject of students' role in linguistic projects as anything other than as learners at the feet of the missionaries. In part this may have stemmed from the image Welsh missionaries wished to project of themselves for supporters in London and Neuaddlwyd (Cardiganshire, where both had studied theology before heading to Gosport) about their pioneering activities. Virtually all the letters they despatched back home were meant to be published as part of fundraising efforts for the Society. Founding the literacy work of the mission on the intellectual and physical labor of children and slaves was necessary—an open secret among missionaries themselves—but it may have proved questionable in Britain or detracted from the evangelical "honor" Welshmen anticipated would accrue to their account if they quickly translated the sacred scriptures.

But how easily could the missionaries actually teach before they had learned something of their students' or servant's language? And who better to teach them Malagasy than their own apprentices, with whom they had the most intensive and sustained daily contact in Antananarivo, and over whom they exercised varying degrees of authority?

Inhibited about the pedagogical efforts of their youthful students when reporting home on their schools, Jones and Griffiths admitted it more openly in private contexts. Discussing the process of language acquisition in 1823, for example, David Griffiths confided in his journal that "the language can be more effectually acquired by conversing with the children and having them to write phrases and words in their own language, on the slates &c."[47] What is especially enlightening about this short exposé is that while missionaries were struggling to acquire a *verbal* knowledge of the language, students were already busy *writing* it! Jones shared Griffiths's assessment about language acquisition. "Mr. Jones," Griffiths reported later of a discussion among missionaries about evangelization policy, "said that he knew from experience that a person could acquire this language by keeping a school, conversing with the children, and the people, than to shut up in his house."[48] In fact, the married missionaries did consistently shut up in their houses with their Welsh-speaking families, an impediment to language acquisition all too common among Protestant clerics who typically lived in Europhone family units. "I said, that I knew

[46] David Jones to Rev. George Burder, Tananarivoo, 3 May 1821, LMS.ILM.1.2.C, 2, emphasis added.

[47] David Griffiths, Journal, 1 August 1822 - 10 April 1823, signed also by David Jones, John Canham, George Chick, and Thomas Rowland, LMS.JMM.1, entry for 19 March 1823.

[48] David Jones and David Griffiths to Thos. Phillips, Tananarivou, 30 April 1823, NLW.MS.19157E.

by experience," Jones confirmed himself of that philosophy, that "a person can acquire that language [Malagasy] much easier and sooner by teaching a school and conversing with the people of the different districts around the Capital, than by remaining all together at the same place and among the same people every day."[49] Because missionaries did not travel much from Antananarivo before 1823, however, their primary interlocutors remained their enslaved translators and their youthful students together with he limited segment of the urban population—mainly those about the court—with whom they came into occasional contact. Teaching was learning in this pedagogy of acquisition-through-conversation.

*****

While the Welshmen struggled to learn Malagasy, it is clear that Jones and Griffiths, like Englishman John Jeffreys who arrived well after them in 1822, commenced instruction in their schools in English. Upon arrival in Antananarivo, Jones begin writing his contacts in both Mauritius and Britain requesting English lessons for his school. "As the English language will now be adopted to be taught to the people and not the French language," he noted ten days after his arrival, "it will be necessary to have many Lancastrian lessons sent out for the use of the schools."[50] Impressed upon missionary candidates at Gosport, the Lancastrian method of which Jones spoke was designed for inexpensive mass education and required that more accomplished students, known as monitors, teach the newer and less proficient ones under the supervision of a missionary evangelist.[51] "I will thank you to send me as many as you have to spare of the English lessons at Belleombre [a Mauritius estate where Jones had previously worked with the children of enslaved Malagasy speakers]," Jones begged of Charles Telfair, the island governor's personal secretary, through the advocacy of whom he also requested Governor Farquhar to have Lancastrian lessons printed in Mauritius and conveyed to Antananarivo.[52] Some months later Jones wrote to the LMS directors for "two or three sets" of English primers.[53]

On a brief visit to Mauritius in mid-1821, Jones appealed directly to Governor Farquhar, requesting materials for his "Royal College" and also for the planned "National School" to be superintended by David Griffiths and which would enroll non-royal youth. "Subjoined I take the liberty of enclosing a list and estimate of the things we shall require for the use of the Royal School established agreeably to Your Excellency's desire at the Court of Ova for the education of the Princes of Radama's family and also for the establishment of a national school in the Lancastrian system," Jones wrote to Governor Farquhar while in Port Louis.

> Your Excellency has been pleased to furnish a parcel of lessons which you had the goodness to bring from England for that purpose: these lessons are peculiarly adapted for the use of the Madagascar school; and for spreading the knowledge of the English language it will be a

[49] David Jones to Rev. George Burder, Tananarive, 28 April 1823, LMS.ILM.1.5.A, 3.

[50] David Jones, "Journal to Madagascar in 1820 by me, David Jones, Missionary," 4 September - 14 October 1820, LMS.JMM.1, entry for 13 October, 23. A similar statement that English was to be the medium of study in Jones's school can be found in David Jones to Charles Telfair, Tananarive, 14 October 1820, LMS.ILM.1.2.A.

[51] Huyghues-Belrose, *Premiers missionnaires*, 325-328.

[52] David Jones to Charles Telfair, Tananarive, 14 October 1820, LMS.ILM.1.2.A, page (quotation); David Jones to Charles Telfair, Tananarive, 18 October 1820, LMS.ILM.1.2.A.

[53] David Jones to Rev. George Burder, Tananarivoo, 3 May 1821, LMS.ILM.1.2.C, note on the envelope cover.

> great favour done to the Madagascar national school, were Your Excellency to direct that one hundred copies of these lessons should be struck off at the printing offices at Port Louis to be forwarded to Radama.[54]

Farquhar soon acceded to Jones's request. Jones probably carried these English lessons with him when he returned to Antananarivo in September 1821.[55] Britain was extending its western Indian Ocean empire through the labor of Welshmen and the medium of English letters.

In May 1821 Jones reported on the progress of his students. "My time has … been employed in teaching about 16 children delivered under my care by Radama to receive an English education," he wrote. Four of the students "begin to read portions of the sacred scriptures in english with some fluency, and they knew not one of the alphabets when I began to teach them in last November.[56] At a more elementary level, the newest students were still learning to spell and to read. When he arrived in Antananarivo at the end of May 1821, David Griffiths superintended Jones's students from the royal family for two months during Jones's travel to Mauritius before commencing his National School later in the year (at this point, Griffiths spoke English and French as well as Welsh, but not Malagasy).[57] Throughout 1821 and 1822 English instruction dominated in both Welshmen's schools. "I am daily employed in studying the language of this country and in teaching the children of the King's family in the Royal College who learn to read and write english," reported Jones in March 1822.[58] When that same year he returned from a voyage to London, Ratefy (Radama's sister's husband and father of two of Jones's students) wrote to the LMS directors how he was "particularly [gratified] to see my little boy and girl reading and writing english under the care of Mr. Jones."[59] When a few months later Mauritius Governor Farquhar's envoy James Hastie and newly arrived English missionary John Jeffreys examined Jones and Griffiths's students they reported that "The first class of boys being called on to exhibit their lessons held forth their books with that pleasing openness of countenance which pure minds afford."[60] The books were likely printed English sacred volumes or English grammars.

When Englishman John Jeffreys joined Jones and Griffiths in Imerina in mid-1822, he and his wife, Keturah, also commenced teaching English to the twelve students sent to them by Radama.[61] Neither Jones nor Griffiths would lend any of their language materials to the Jeffreys, who were forced to commence their language work from scratch and remained well behind their Welsh colleagues throughout 1822 and 1823 in acquisition of the vernacular.[62] Ethnic-based suspicion may have animated the strained relationship among Welsh and English missionaries in Imerina, but there is little concrete evidence for this; disagreements were always about

---

[54] David Jones to R.T. Farquhar, Port Louis, 27 August 1821, LMS.ILM.1.2.C, 2-3; David Jones to Farquhar, Port Louis, 27 August 1821, MNA.HB.21.130-133.

[55] David Jones to Rev. George Burder, Port Louis, 18 September 1821, LMS.ILM.1.2.C, 1.

[56] David Jones to Rev. George Burder, Tananarivoo, 3 May 1821, LMS.ILM.1.2.C, 2.

[57] David Griffiths to Rev. W. Griffiths of Glandor, no place [Antananarivo], 2 January 1822, NLW.MS.19157E.

[58] David Jones to Miss Jane Darby, Tananarivoo, 14 March 1822, LMS.ILM.1.3.C, 2.

[59] Rataffe to Farquhar, Tananarivoo, 15 April 1822, NAB.CO.167.66, 1. The original of this letter is Rataffe to Farquhar, Tananarivoo, 15 April 1822, MNA.HB.21.216-217.

[60] James Hastie and John Jeffreys, Report on the Public Examination of the Schools, Tananarive, 17 June 1822, NAB.PRO.CO.167.63.

[61] Diary of James Hastie, 6 May - 4 August 1822, NAB.PRO.CO.167.63, entry for 22 June, 28.

[62] John Jeffreys to the Board of Directors, Tananarivou, Emerina, 26 May 1823, LMS.ILM.1.5.B, 2-3.

substantive issues and certainly the Welshmen were not in agreement among themselves. "[W]hile I am teaching the children the English I am myself acquiring the malagash," John wrote shortly after he commenced his school in June 1822, reporting the same language-acquisition procedure the two Welshmen had adopted before him.[63] A year after his arrival in Antananarivo, however, Jeffreys reported that "I have laboured at the language all this time & am now able to converse *a little* with the natives."[64] For all LMS missionaries, acquisition of Malagasy was a lengthy and laborious process, but much facilitated by their interactions with urban youth and enslaved translators, sometimes in French but mostly in English.

During the first three years of their existence, then, the missionary schools in Antananarivo were principally Anglophone in curriculum. The same held true for the LMS's public gatherings, which were usually comprised of missionaries, their students (whose attendance was compulsory), other Europeans in Antananarivo, and sometimes the king and sundry members of the royal court. The slave James was no doubt also in audience. During such gatherings, missionaries addressed their public comments in both English and French. Occasionally a stray adult would tarry at the windows to tickle his or her ears with the sound of foreign tongues emanating from the building. When the Griffiths lost their two-and-a-half-year-old son to an affliction of the lungs, "A funeral sermon was delivered at Mr. Griffiths's house in the morning both in english and french," noted the missionaries, "and also an address at the grave in both languages. All the english and the french at Tananarivou and also the children of the schools attended the funeral."[65] Jones baptized the Griffiths's daughter Sarah Elizabeth on March 20, 1823 in a similar bilingual English-French ceremony that was attended by "His Majesty Radama, His royal consort, three of his royal sisters, [and] Prince Rataffe."[66] Until mid-1824, weekly Sunday worship and other rites of life were conducted in French and English—but never in Malagasy.[67]

Meanwhile students' keen appetite for English learning was testified unanimously in clerical letters and journals. (Little is said about how much of the French spoken at public gatherings or in the schools the students actually understood). "They possess wonderful talents," wrote David Jones to his sister, "and in their diligence and avidity to learn, I believe that no children can surpass them."[68] "We soon found that the children possessed no mean capacities," wrote Keturah of her and John's students. "Our instructions were received with gratitude and earnestness…. The native children are as generally capable of receiving instruction as any in our own country; and, from all the observations I have made, much more attentive and concerned to attain it. It is very seldom that they discover any of that ennui, and want of interest in their lessons, which is so common in our English schools; their application is unwearied, till they attain their tasks, and that with great correctness."[69]

---

[63] John Jeffreys to the Rev. George Burder, Tananarivo, 22 June 1822, LMS.ILM.1.4.A, 2.

[64] John Jeffreys to the Board of Directors, Tananarivou, Emerina, 26 May 1823, LMS.ILM.1.5.B, 41-42, emphasis is mine.

[65] "Progress of the Children," document appended to David Jones to the Rev. George Burder, Tananarivou, 28 April 1823, LMS.ILM.1.5.A, 6.

[66] David Griffiths, Journal, 1 August 1822 - 10 April 1823, signed also by David Jones, John Canham, George Chick, and Thomas Rowland, LMS.JMM.1, entry for 20 March 1823.

[67] David Jones to Rev. George Burder, Port Louis, 18 September 1821, LMS.ILM.1.2.C, back cover; David Jones to Rev. George Burder, Tananarivoo, 29 March 1822, LMS.ILM.1.3.B, loose page preceding the envelope; David Jones to Mr. David Langton, Tananarivo, 16 December 1822, LMS.ILM.1.4.B, 1; David Jones to Rev. George Burder, Tananarivou, 20 November 1823, LMS.ILM.1.5.D, 4.

[68] David Jones to Miss Jane Darby, Tananarivoo, 14 March 1822, LMS.ILM.1.3.C, 2.

[69] Keturah Jeffreys, *The Widowed Missionary's Journal: Containing Some Account of Madagascar and also a Narrative of the Missionary Career of the Rev. J. Jeffreys* (Southampton, Eng.: Printed for the Author, 1827), 120.

The apparent enthusiasm of Antananarivo's youth for English letters soon led to an acute shortage of reading materials. The more advanced books missionaries had brought with them were mostly intended for their own study. "I have now under my care in the Royal Academy forty four scholars who continue [with] the same diligence and avidity to learn as they have done always," reported Jones of his students at the king's court some eighteen months after arriving in Imerina. "Some of the most advanced of them read in the [English] New Testament, write on paper and work the common rules of arithmetic; and I shall want very soon some Bibles and more Testaments, English Grammars, pronouncing dictionaries, books on arithmetic &c. and even before they can be sent out from England."[70] For some of these wants in English-language instructional materials, many of them sacred, the clerics solicited colleagues and supporters close at hand in the British colony of Mauritius. But few books actually arrived from Mauritius, where they were exceedingly dear. The Welshmen next turned to their countrymen. In early January 1822 David Griffiths wrote to churches in Wales to explain his and David Jones's ideas about how to solve the deficiency of English books.

> Anxious to do all we can for the spiritual & temporal welfare of these interesting peoples & especially the rising generation, we had purposed to establish a Missionary and school library at Tananarivo, the Capital of Madagascar and agreed to make it known as extensively as possible to all the well wishers of the Madagascar Mission…. As a word to the wise is sufficient, We flatter ourselves that our Cambrian Brethren will not be backward, but will come forward like men, and deem it no small honour to form the first library at one of the most promising stations.[71]

Conveying English books to an island in the Indian Ocean, the argument went, would augment the masculine honor of Cambrians. The currency of honor attached to literacy and translation in LMS discourse is a measure of the seriousness with which such matters were taken. Griffiths also chastised the LMS directors in London for what he felt was neglect in dispatching materials for use in the schools of Antananarivo. "I trust that you will forward to us by the first opportunity various articles for the use of schools, Bibles and testaments, two hundreds at least of each, spelling books & English grammars, 100 of each. Slates and pencils, and different sorts of copy plates &c. &c. &c. We are at present labouring under many difficulties for the want of these things, and as we cannot procure *these things* in Madagascar you must be perfectly aware that we can not do without them. *O have pity upon us*."[72] When in December 1822 the LMS mission at Antananarivo took delivery of a set of French hymn books from London, Jones and Griffiths could find little use for them.[73]

Jones and Griffiths finally received notification in late 1823 that the LMS had despatched English Bibles and Testaments printed by the British and Foreign Bible Society, but these were not yet to hand. "It afforded us a great pleasure to understand that the Directors had paid such a prompt attention to our request concerning a supply of books for the schools," explained Jones gratefully of the news. "We have been labouring under many disadvantages to communicate instructions to our scholars for

[70] David Jones to Rev. George Burder, Tananarivoo, 29 March 1822, LMS.ILM.1.3.B, 3.

[71] David Griffiths to Rev. W. Griffiths of Glandor, no place [Antananarivo], 2 January 1822, NLW.MS.19157E.

[72] David Griffiths to Rev. George Burder, Tananarive, 27 July 1822, LMS.ILM.1.4.B, 3. Emphasis in original.

[73] David Jones to Mr. David Langton, Tananarivo, 16 December 1822, LMS.ILM.1.4.B, 1.

want of them, having but one book to give between a dozen of children."[74] Soon after he and Keturah arrived in Antananarivo, John Jeffreys also wrote to the LMS directors to send out "A great quan[tit]y of writing paper and ink powder, common paper [for the] use of the schools also superior for that of the mission. These above all things do not forget: a sufficient number of slates and slate pen sets."[75]

Missionaries' repeated calls for slates, pencils, ink, and both "common" and "superior" paper in addition to English books suggests that students in Antananarivo were beginning to write as well as to read by mid-1822. While briefly teaching some children on the east coast of Madagascar in 1818, Jones had made his students write with their fingers in the sand of the beach. Strands being in short supply at the altitude of Antananarivo, however, the missionaries turned to slates, "copy plates," and other inventions. The chronic deficiency of slates was resolved with an ingenious, if grimy, local solution explained by LMS "mechanic" James Cameron.

> The work of education commenced in earnest; but there was no printing then, and not many slates; all lessons were written by hand, and as a substitute for slates, smooth boards were rubbed over with a soft grease and dusted with ashes. On this the letters and figures were formed with a wooden stile, like a common pencil; corrections were made or sums renewed simply by rubbing with a rag or with the finger, and commencing again as contentedly as if no cleanlier or better mode had ever been found out.[76]

It is not inconceivable that Jones and Griffiths had actually learned to spell in this fashion in the Cardiganshire countryside.

As the first students in the schools learned to form words and write sentences and paragraphs in English using adapted European technologies of literacy, they began to move from slates to the more precious medium of paper. Not manufactured in Imerina, where wood was valuable and trees scarce, writing paper in the schools was largely controlled by the missionaries, who mostly received it from abroad.[77] Students were therefore probably limited in their writing to projects sanctioned and supervised by the missionaries, unless their king and families independently acquired paper for them (this might have been the case for some of Jones's students in the Royal College). "It would be very desirable to have a few reams of paper for the schools sent out for us," David Jones requested of one of the LMS directors, "also paper for private and official letters, and some blank books for Registers, Journals, accounts &c.: as all sort of paper and books are excessively dear at the Mauritius."[78] Much paper arrived from both London and the governor's office at Mauritius, making "the article of stationary" one the earliest forms of British foreign aid to Madagascar. Missionaries kept their paper under lock and key, but that did not prevent their stocks appearing from time to time for sale in Antananarivo's market places, suggesting a

---

[74] David Jones to Rev. George Burder, Tananarivou, 20 November 1823, LMS.ILM.1.5.D, 1.

[75] John Jeffreys to the Rev. George Burder, Tananarivo, 22 June 1822, LMS.ILM.1.4.A, 3.

[76] James Cameron, *Recollections of Mission Life in Madagascar during the Early Days of the L.M.S. Mission* (Antananarivo: Abraham Kingdon, 1874), 5.

[77] Paper was manufactured elsewhere in Madagascar, but it seems not to have been exchanged into the interior. Vincent Huyghues-Belrose, "Les supports anciens de l'écriture à Madagascar," *Études Océan Indien* 22 (1997), 12-14.

[78] David Jones to the Rev. George Burder, Tananarivoo, 24 June 1822, LMS.ILM.1.4.A, 3.

growing demand for material on which to write.[79] Reporting on the progress of his students in early 1822, Jones stated that "There are eight of them reading in the New Testament, writing a small hand and ciphering, two of whom are the children of Prince Rataffe [Radama's brother-in-law]. There are four more, who read select passages of the sacred Scriptures, & have begun to write on paper. All the others are following them in spelling with every attention and diligence."[80]

English, then, replaced French in LMS efforts at Antananarivo with some rapidity. The LMS missionaries first taught the English alphabet to their students, with spelling and reading in English preceding experiments in writing, which were then followed by introduction to arithmetic. "I have a number of children in it [the school]," Jones wrote in mid-1822, "who read & write, some of whom are gone through the common rules of arithmetic. There are some of them who appear to possess great abilities to learn and will in time, I hope, prove a blessing to their country."[81] If competence in reading, writing, and arithmetic was a measure of children's potential "blessing to their country," Jones's students clearly fulfilled his expectations in English language studies. The three Rs were each first taught at Antananarivo in English, commencing with reading, then writing, and finally numbers. The honor of translation was soon to follow.

*****

As the children of Antananarivo progressed in reading and writing English they, as the missionaries before them, began to apply the Roman alphabet to the spelling of words in their native tongue. Transported across tongues, the phonetic principles of that alphabet as it applied to English allowed them to compile Malagasy glosses for English words. Whereas Jones had compiled his own wordlist in previous years, he and his colleagues soon adopted a more systematic approach: they provided English words alphabetically culled from dictionaries to teams of the most capable of their students, requesting the students to supply them in return with vernacular glosses. Typically, students worked these lexical translations on their slates, which were easily transportable to hearth and home for consultation. The results were later copied by missionaries into their paper Malagasy "vocabularies," which eventually formed the basis of two dictionaries published at the LMS press in Antananarivo in 1835 at the behest of Radama's successor and senior wife, Queen Ranavalona.[82] Among David Jones's royal students, the most helpful in these early translation projects were David Ramaka, John Rakoto (Rakotobe), David Raharo (Raharolahy), Ramaholy (aka Rainifiringa), Rasatranabo, and Ratsisatraina, many of whom went on to important careers in the kingdom administration when the missionaries departed. Griffiths's team—for the missionaries seldom cooperated with one another—consisted of both royals and commoners and included John Rainisoa (aka Ratsimandisa), Ratsimihara, Andriantsoa, Rabohara, Andriamaka, and Ratsitohaina. Typical of the way in which enslaved translators went silent in official communications, these twelve students' names are also seldom directly connected in

---

[79] One notable case in later years is reported: "At a special meeting of the Missionaries held at the Revd. D. Jones' 29 Sepr. 1829," in Minutes from the Missionary Minute Book, Antananarivo, 11 September 1829 to 1 March 1830, LMS.ILM.3.3.A.

[80] David Jones to R.T. Farquhar, Tananarivoo, 25 March 1822, NAB.PRO.CO.167.63, 2.

[81] David Jones to James Hastie, Tananarive, 15 June 1822, NAB.PRO.CO.167.63, 2.

[82] Joseph John Freeman and David Johns, *A Dictionary of the Malagasy Language, in Two Parts*, 2 vols. (An-Tananarivo: London Missionary Society, 1835); David Johns, *Ny Dikisionary Malagasy, Mizara Roa: Ny Faharoa'ny, Malagasy sy English no foroni'ny D. Johns Missionary amy ny London Missionary Society. Raharo no nanampy hanao ny Malagasy sy English* (An-Tananarivo: Tamy ny Press ny ny London Missionary Society, 1835).

missionaries' letters to this early and vital work of translation. The students' names do appear in documents from later years (beginning in about 1827) as "writers" and school "visitors" appointed by the king to continue work with the clerics.

Missionaries labored with their respective teams of students—and possibly to some unacknowledged extent Joseph—at basic translation projects during the day, and copied the results of mutual effort into their manuscripts in the evening. Jeffreys's journal in mid-April 1823 provides a telling example (we do not know the names of the students who worked with him).

> 17th. Engaged in the school as usual. This evening have been copying some words into the vocabulary.
>
> 18 Employed in the school in the evening copying words out of the English Dictionary.
>
> 19 School in the morning, in the afternoon engaged in the language.[83]

Jones and Griffiths were more direct about their procedure. Explaining the structure of their working days to the LMS directors (they worked separately), the Welshmen noted that they each started teaching school at sunrise and instructed the students to about 8:30 in the morning. "After this" they said,

> the girls are taught in needle work, and we and our boys are employed in translating and the study of the Malagash language until noon, when the school is commenced again in the afternoon and dismissed about 4 or 5 and then we dine and take a little recreation if we have time. In the evenings until 10 or 11 o clock we write on paper, translations and Malagash sentences and expressions written [by the students!] on slates during the day.[84]

A window onto the production of the first vernacular manuscripts is provided by a careful examination of this revealing passage about the daily regimen and gendered structure of scholarly activities. For several hours every morning the newly literate boys under the supervision of their Welsh instructors translated sentences and passages from English into Malagasy, composing the vernacular on their slates while the girls learned "needle work" with the ministers' wives. At noon, Jones and Griffiths stacked the slates and returned to them in the evening, copying their translated contents onto paper and making any corrections to orthography they deemed appropriate. This is also how missionary J.J. Freeman later reported that early biblical translation had actually proceeded. The translations, he wrote disapprovingly of the Welshmen's youthful literary teams, "were, to a great extent, made by the Malagasy youths who had been taught something of English by Messrs. J. & G. these cursorily looked over, and copied into a Book, and this was considered a Translation."[85] Freeman's observations substantiate a careful reading of the Welshmen's own depictions of their daily routines (more on this below).

---

[83] John Jeffreys, Journal, 15 January - 19 May 1823, LMS.JMM.1, entries for 17-19 April 1823, 44.

[84] "Progress of the Children," document appended to David Jones to the Rev. George Burder, Tananarivou, 28 April 1823, LMS.ILM.1.5.A, 1-2.

[85] J. J. Freeman to Rev. William Orme, Port Louis, 10 December 1829, LMS.ILM.3.2.C, page.

In these mundane but highly regimented practices of translation into Malagasy lay an inversion of the division of labor when the subject of study was English. When learning English, the children copied and pondered texts proffered to them in print or produced in manuscript by the missionaries. But in vernacular work it was the children who *composed*, translating from English, and the Welshmen who *copied* vernacular compositions from youths' slates and parsed them to determine their meanings and structures. Tellingly, the missionaries do not report having employed students in the tedium of copying during this period. In part, it may be they felt paper and ink too precious to entrust to the children. But the value of keeping boys to the productive intellectual work of translation on slates, where corrections and changes could easily be registered, provides a more likely explanation. To recopy their manuscripts, then, Jones and Griffiths turned to their *British* colleagues, the "missionary artisans" who had been sent to Antananarivo by the LMS at the request of Radama and at great expense to the home office, but who had found themselves idle for want of materials and markets.[86] Mr. Canham, the weaver, they explained, "has rendered us a great assistance these last months in *copying from our manuscripts* spelling and reading lessons for the schools. He has been also writing out some parts of our vocabularies according to the present orthography settled by the King. We could employ him many months more as a writer if the supply of leather had not arrived from the Mauritius and want of shoes did not call him away."[87] The racial and generational division of literary labor in Antananarivo during the early 1820s was rather different than may be fathomed, for it set the king's youthful subjects to the frontline work of translation and resident Europeans to copying vernacular manuscripts. This is a precise inversion of how the missionaries tended to portray their activities when writing to London. While the practical labor of both creating a Malagasy literacy in Roman character and translation from English into the vernacular was collaborative, the actual transformation of texts from English into Malagasy during this early period before the missionaries were tolerably conversant in the tongue of Imerina (i.e. before mid-1824) depended mostly on the intellectual work of pre-teens in consultation with one another, their parents, and their friends. Missionaries learned the tongue of Imerina through a practice of mimesis, replicating the vernacular texts set down by students upon slates.

The children's literary activity progressed throughout 1821 until the "first students" were sufficiently competent in reading and writing both English and Malagasy to assume a role as monitors, or teachers, to newly enrolled students. For their part, the missionaries continued to spend most of their time with the monitors. By mid-1822, the most advanced of Jones's students in Antananarivo "showed their writing in small hand, read the seventh [chapter] of the Acts in English, and translated some words into their own language," as did also the second class.[88] The missionaries and the children found "continually an immense field for research in studying the [Malagasy] language" during 1822 and 1823, confirmed Jones (students, of course, already knew their language). Everyone worked persistently "in correcting and making additions to our vocabularies &c."[89] At the end of 1822, Jones confided, "There are many children now in the schools who can read and write both english and

---

[86] Gwyn Campbell, *An Economic History of Imperial Madagascar, 1750-1895* (Cambridge, Eng.: Cambridge University Press, 2005), 59-78.

[87] "Progress of the Children," document appended to David Jones to the Rev. George Burder, Tananarivou, 28 April 1823, LMS.ILM.1.5.A, 3-4. Emphasis added.

[88] Jeffreys, *Widowed Missionary's Journal*, 108.

[89] David Jones to Rev. George Burder, Tananarivoo, 29 March 1822, LMS.ILM.1.3.B, 3.

Malagash."[90] Griffiths confirmed this development in the schools when he wrote with approval in early 1823 of "The progress that our pupils have made and the desire which they daily manifest to spell and write words in their own language, and the pride that they take in addressing each other in their native tongue."[91] The pride and honor of vernacular linguistic work, the sometimes nationalistic Griffiths felt, was something shared by both Cambrians and their highland Malagasy schoolchildren. He may well have been correct.

From the time they first learned their English alphabets, then, students were deeply implicated in the core translation projects of the LMS: word lists and scriptural renderings in Malagasy. Facing a constant penury of books and the particular linguistic demands of their teachers, schoolchildren *composed* and *translated* far more than they actually *read* or *copied* anything in their mother tongue (they were engaged in reading English Bibles and books, as we have seen). Teaching young students to read, learning the vernacular from them, and producing vocabularies, dictionaries, and translations were all closely entangled projects and required the engaged and daily cooperation of both students and missionaries, and perhaps also adult slave translators who never appear in letters sent to London. But there *was* a division of labor. While they knew Malagasy as a native tongue, the students benefited from the instructions of Welsh-speaking English teachers. In this process, the missionaries reported, the students were the most fluently bilingual of the teacher-student pair and also the earliest and most consistent verbal and written mediators between English and Malagasy. In Antananarivo, language acquisition took the same generational form it later did in the Scottish Presbyterian Mission of Old Calabar (now southeastern Nigeria). "Young Efiks learnt English easily," writes William Taylor of early mission education there, "but old Scots learnt Efik with difficulty."[92] For similar reasons, until 1824, it was children who composed, and missionaries who copied.

*****

Despite their linguistic difficulties both Jones and Griffiths claimed to have composed catechisms in the King's language as early as January 1822.[93] Jones composed his during 1821, he said, "after the method of Watts," while Griffiths drew his up, independently he implied, yet "somewhat on the same plan with that of Mr. Jones."[94] At this time Griffiths had been in Madagascar for a total of ten months and tending his school for only five, while Jones had been residing and teaching inside the court for only nine months.[95] By their own evaluation their language skills at this point were especially poor, and their work in the schools consuming. Missionaries were actively instructing students in English. It wasn't until two and a half years later that they began to preach and speak publicly in Malagasy, and to conduct their classrooms in that language. How might we reconcile such precocious claims of translation with the evangelists' self-reported linguistic situation on the ground?

The missionaries were under instructions from the LMS directors and their training at the Gosport missionary seminary to create vernacular catechisms and scriptural translations as soon as possible. By means of catechisms, Bogue had

---

[90] David Jones to Mr. David Langton, Tananarivo, 16 December 1822, LMS.ILM.1.4.B, 3.

[91] David Griffiths, Journal, 1 August 1822 – 10 April 1823, LMS.J.1, entry for 14 February 1823.

[92] William H. Taylor, *Mission to Educate: A History of the Educational Work of the Scottish Presbyterian Mission in East Nigeria, 1846-1960* (New York: E. J. Brill, 1996), 67.

[93] David Griffiths to Rev. W. Griffiths of Glandor, no place [Antananarivo], 2 January 1822, NLW.MS.19157E; Jeffreys, *Widowed Missionary's Journal*, 107-108.

[94] David Griffiths, Journal, 18 January - 19 July 1822, LMS.JMM.1, entry for February 3.

[95] Discounting his travel to Mauritius in 1821.

lectured his students, "A great number of falsehoods and superstitions will be banished from [heathen] minds."[96] And catechetical translations were perceived as a prelude to the greater honor of Biblical translation. But the desiderata of ecclesiastical boses are one thing, and learning a language without dictionaries or grammars and translating a catechism in the first half-year after arrival (or the entire scriptures in the two years between 1824 and 1826) is quite another. Such accomplishments were frankly impossible without the translation labor of students as linguist Otto Christian Dahl has also argued.[97]

"In our schools there are some of our first children beginning to translate catechisms from the english into their own tongue," noted Jones rather openly by early 1823, explaining the central role of the children in the work "and who, in a short time, will afford us a great assistance in the translation of the scriptures &c. Others are now forming school lessons in their own tongue, and begin to teach and *catechize their juniors* on sundays without our assistance."[98] The LMS missionaries' first twelve students, were key not only to a variety of translation projects but also to verbal evangelism, a pattern typical in British overseas missions.[99] Students who were translating catechisms from English to Malagasy in early 1823 were on the cusp of offering "a great assistance in the translation of the scriptures," an exercise which the missionaries claimed took place in the two years between 1824 and 1826. "A version of the scriptures is rendered into the Malagash language and we are going on as fast as possible with revising our translations," Griffiths reported to the LMS directors in April 1826.[100] Given that the missionaries only trusted their Malagasy skills sufficiently to speak and preach publicly in that language in mid-1824, when they reported embarking on translating the Bible, they would have allowed themselves only two years to convert the entire scriptures.

Jones and Griffiths always taught separately and labored apart from each other on their translation projects with their first twelve students. These linguistic helpers were divided evenly between the two missionaries. In other words, the Welshmen worked in teams. Youth were organized and directed by the missionaries with the support of King Radama. This is the same way in which Jeffreys functioned once he arrived in mid-1822, the difference being that his team was much less advanced than those of his Welsh colleagues. Jeffreys departed Imerina in 1825 without contributing to Biblical translation. In claiming credit for Biblical and other translations, the two Welsh missionaries were talking about the work performed by the teams under their direction. It was not inconsistent for the times that the critical labor of students would not be explicitly acknowledged by their teachers or team leaders. The Welshmen were also sensitive to charges that they were allowing students too hefty a role in their linguistic work. They had reason to be guarded about the accomplishments of their teams, just as they were silent about the services rendered by Jones's slave Joseph.

Students continued to participate integrally in the production and correction of scriptures and other sacred texts in King Radama's tongue through to the full publication of the Bible in 1835. Once a first translation of the entire scriptures had been completed in 1826, the teams turned to revisions of existing manuscripts. Revisions proceeded very slowly between 1826 and 1830 for the New Testament, and 1830 and 1835 for the Old. The role of missionaries in the revision was far greater

---

[96] David Bogue, "Missionary Lectures," 14 (quotation) & 15.

[97] Dahl, "Bibelen på Madagaskar."

[98] David Jones to Rev. George Burder, Tananarive, 28 April 1823, LMS.ILM.1.5.A, 8, emphasis added.

[99] Peggy Brock, "New Christians as Evangelists," in *Missions and Empire*, ed. Norman Etherington, (Oxford, Eng.: Oxford University Press, 2005), 132-152.

[100] David Griffiths to William Alers Hankey, Tananarivou, 12 April 1826, LMS.ILM.2.3.A, 2.

than it had been in the original production of translations from English to Malagasy. An important task in the revision was "comparison" of the base Malagasy translation with Hebrew and Greek scripture originals, something only the missionaries had the linguistic skill to effect. "The New Testament is now printed in the Malagasy and number of them are distributed among the natives," newly arrived Welsh missionary David Johns reported of the process in 1830, "we shall begin next week to revise the Old Testament, which will be an employment to us for years. *We must compare it all with the Hebrew*," he noted, because the translation had been produced from the English Revised Version of 1611 but was required to conform to the original languages.[101]

And as their knowledge of the Malagasy language increased, LMS personnel intervened to a much greater extent in emending and amending the translated text and conforming it to classical languages. The students' role in revision, as best we can tell from the evidence, went primarily to copy editing and issues of usage. The primary role of translation labor had shifted from local youth to foreign adults. The minutes of the LMS missionaries' business meetings testify to students' work on the revisions, however, as do their letters. The following entry appears in May 1829 during the final preparation of the New Testament for printing: "To 6 youths for the revision, 3 attending on Monday and Tuesday, 3 on Thursday & Friday, 3/4 Dollr. for 100 verses, 1/8th of a dollar for correcting a sheet from the press, 1/4th of a dollar to 2 youths for copying 100 verses."[102] David Griffiths kept corrected proof sheets of Psalms chapters 75 to 88 with six names of Malagasy helpers on them: Ratsimihara, Tsimilay, Rainisoa, Raharo, Raharolahy and [Ra]Tsisatraina.[103]

The translation of the Bible from English into Malagasy and the important role of youth in each stage of the process which emerges from a careful reading of LMS correspondence is explicitly confirmed by a fourth LMS minister, J.J. Freeman, who arrived in Antananarivo in September 1827. Freeman's stay in Madagascar was short. He departed Antananarivo after an "unhappy difference" that erupted among the LMS missionaries over the wisdom of employing youth in Biblical translation and revision. Freeman outspokenly disapproved of such participation, for in his demanding evaluation the students' skills in both English and Malagasy were not up to the task. His comments can serve as a summation. "I became too dissatisfied with the mode of proceeding in the Revision to take any longer a part in it," Freeman explained from Mauritius to one of the directors of the London Missionary Society.

> I really think, 1 The present Translations far too crude to be fit for using as the Basis of the final revisions, & 2. This final revision is unsatisfactorily made, and too hastily finished & got through the press.
>
> 1. They are Crude. They were commenced before any adequate acquaintance with the language was obtained. They were got up too hastily. They were, to a great extent, made by the Malagasy youths who had been taught something of English by Messrs. J. & G. these cursorily looked over, and copied into a Book, and this was considered a Translation. Frequently (and I name this as an illustration) Mr. G. had 4 or 5 of their youths round his table of an

[101] David Johns to Evan Jones, Tananarivo, 1 July 1830, NLW.MS.19157E.

[102] "Copy of Minutes from the Minute Book of the Missionaries at Tananarivo," May-July 1829, LMS.ILM.3.2.A, entry for 31 May.

[103] "Corrected Proof Sheets of *Psalms* 75:9 to 88:15, paginated 41-48," NLW.MS.14642C, c.1832. These he adduced to a friend to demonstrate that he had accomplished the lion's share of the revision work himself.

evening,* & all translating different parts of the scriptures at the same time; one say the Psalms, another a prophet, another a Gospel, and another an Epistle, Mr. G. sat by correcting these, so far as he knew the Malagasy, then very imperfectly & turning from one to another. Could either one of them, mere School exercises onto slate, be deemed even an approximation to excellence, or even fidelity?

But this Basis has been revised, with what caution, judge from this. In drawing up the history of the mission, I had this memorandum given me from Mr. Griffiths' journal; "During this half year I have revised my division of the Scriptures, prepared sundry translations for the schools, besides attending to the Schools generally as before, visiting so &" (I forget what year is referred to. This is of no enosment.) A revision of one entire half of the whole scriptures in six months, amidst other engagements, and those engagements occupying the chief of the time! Half the Scriptures revised in the subscene hours of six months! Such a statement requires no comment.

But such is the revised Translation as has had before us for daily use in preparing for the press, and every day has demonstrated its extreme want of correctness; not a verse, not a line can pass without most important alterations and empror comments. Were that a note revised with the knowledge of the Sines missionaries now possess of the language, and then submitted for deliberate and general examination and revision, the prospect of a "good Translation" would rest on a better basis than at present.

* That the acquaintance with the English [from which the translation was effected] was not sufficient at the time I argue from this, that there is not one of them even now, at the lapse of 6 or 8 years, capable of reading through a single Tract of the Religious Tract Socy, so as to understand it. (I scarcely wonder at a desire remark made by the Maly. Govt. 6 months ago, Messrs. J. & G. have been getting our language from the youths, instead of teaching the English to them as promised.)[104]

[104] J. J. Freeman to Rev. William Orme, Port Louis, 10 December 1829, LMS.ILM.3.2.C,