

BIBLE TRANSLATION IN THE ASIAN SETTING

It has been my privilege during the last ten years to work with a tribal church in the production of the New Testament. The people—the Sediq tribe of Taiwan—were the fore-runners of the great tribal movement in Taiwan which has produced now over 400 churches in 17 years, of which the large majority are Presbyterian. These people early responded to the spoken message of God's truth. They read the Scriptures as best they could in Japanese and Chinese. They wanted the Bible in their own language, their presbytery provided a capable and faithful pastor to help as a language informant, and through a translation committee of their own appointing they gave invaluable help in every stage of the translation effort. Their response is best epitomized by Pastor Weilan Takoh, one of their leaders, who, after receiving the Gospel of Mark, read it immediately, right through the night. His comments to me afterwards were, 'I have heard God's message ever since my conversion sixteen years ago. I have founded many churches and helped many others to believe in Christ. Now for the first time I have read and really understood the story of Jesus.' The Sediq New Testament was published in January 1963, and to the present time (April 1963) over 2,500 copies have been sold. This church is the product of God's spoken Word, and the written Word has been produced by them as the result of their own experience of His saving grace.

How different this is from the situation where there has been no initial evangelistic effort, and where there is no church. I think of personal experiences with a Nosu language informant in Yunnan province on the mainland of China. He came initially to help me only after much persuasion, and never could comprehend my desire to learn the language. As an influential priest in the tribe he was suspicious of my motives. Help was given only reluctantly and spasmodically. The usual pattern was for him to come early from his mountain home on a cold morning, study for an hour, complain of his lack of clothing, go out on the street for a 'bracing drink' and then return for study. This cycle repeated itself hourly for the morning or until further work was useless, and then he disappeared for a few days to recover. Needless to say, the task of Bible translation was never completed among the Nosu tribe.

In the Asian setting we face both of these situations—where the Church already exists and where evangelism is in its initial phase—and many stages in between. When we think of present-day Bible translation in this diverse and complex setting, there are several matters to which we must direct our attention.

First of all, in each country there is need for an adequate translation of the Scriptures into the national language. The emphasis which I would make

here is upon the word *adequate*. Translations have been made for each of these major languages. In their day and time they have served well. They continue to meet an existent need, albeit in a somewhat inadequate fashion. It is significant that the Church realizes this need and that major revision efforts are being undertaken in Tagalog, Korean, Japanese, Thai, Vietnamese and Lao. This need for revision arises from several considerations.

One of these is the need for the Bible to reflect the latest developments in national literature, both in terms of style and vocabulary. The Chinese Mandarin Bible is a good example of this. Produced in 1919 just two years after the beginning of the Chinese literary revolution, it reflected something of the growing *pai hua* or colloquial style. It not only reflected this style, but was in many ways the fore-runner of the *pai hua* movement. It was an innovation and, in the best sense of the word, somewhat revolutionary. During the 1920s when a nation-wide movement was started to simplify the Chinese book-language and to make literature the possession of the multitude, the four Gospels of the Kuo-yu Bible were used in many government schools as a model of the standardized national language. It has even been suggested that this rendering of the Scriptures into Mandarin did for Chinese Christians something comparable to what Wycliffe's and Tyndale's translations did for the English, and Luther's Bible for the Germans—made it a people's book. However, since that time there have been many developments in Chinese literary style. Whereas the Bible was once the pioneer it has now been left far behind. These matters will perhaps be of little concern to the majority of the Church membership. They will, however, be important considerations in attempting to make the Scriptures a more effective means of communication for the many outside the pale of the Church.

Another consideration creating a need for revision is a growing understanding of what is meant by Bible translation. In many instances the national language Bibles now being used reflect a rather slavish devotion to the English Revised version of 1881 and the American Standard Version of 1901. Of the latter it was said that the translators knew their Greek but did not know their English. This is a rather strange statement when one reflects upon the fact that the translators were native speakers of American English. Obviously their command of English was good. Yet it is generally recognized that the style and literary quality of the translation fell far short of the King James Version. In what did this failure consist? Not in their knowledge of Greek and Hebrew, the source languages, nor in their knowledge of English, the receptor language. Their failure was that of not understanding the science of translation. If this could be said of their translation in 1901 when the science of translation was poorly developed, how much more is it true today when rapid strides have been made in this field. Certain questions must be asked about any document that is translated from one language to another—and not least the Bible. Among these are:

- (1) What did the document mean to its original readers?
- (2) Does the translation in question truly reflect that original meaning?
- (3) Does it read somewhat the same as if a native speaker were actually speaking his own language, or does it have the flavor of English? For

example, here in the Philippine Islands where English is the second language of so many, a large number of translations have the same sentence and phrase order as English. While this is possible and perhaps even understandable, it is hardly the way in which a Filipino would naturally speak his own language. Each Philippine language has its own unique linguistic structure. This has to be utilized as an effective vehicle of communication if God's Word is truly to speak directly to the heart.

(4) Are there many meaningless phrases that have never made sense to anyone? Even though every word has been faithfully followed, the total meaning may be completely false. Thus 'blessed are the poor in spirit' (Matt. 5: 3) if actually translated by 'poor' and 'spirit' may in many languages have the sense of 'blessed are the mentally unbalanced'. 'Poor in spirit' would then mean 'defective in spirit matter' which is hardly what Jesus meant!

(5) Do its factual narratives (as contrasted with its more technical theological portions) make any sense to a non-Christian? Or is its language, because it uses conventional 'church' forms, so unnatural that it fails to communicate any truth to the non-Christian? I recall a Chinese friend commenting on the use of *jung yao*, meaning 'glory'. He said that he always wondered what the Christians meant by using this noun with a verbal force to mean 'glorify', since in general non-Christian use 'to glorify' was expressed with another verb plus the noun 'glory' and meaning literally 'to give glory'.

Many of the deficiencies of present national language translations are the fault of missionaries who imperfectly understood the receptor language into which the translation was being made. It is desirable that translation committees for this work of revising present Bibles be composed of nationals. However, this of itself does not guarantee a good translation. The nationals will, of course, know their own language. It is probable, though, that national translators will be linguistically more conservative than their missionary counterparts. They may feel much more bound to follow slavishly some prestige language such as English, or to perpetuate in the name of church tradition the now hallowed mistakes of past translations.

It is imperative that the nationals actually involved in translation, the translation consultants of the various Bible Societies, be trained in the science of translation as well as in Biblical languages and anthropology. One of the most significant recent developments in this type of effort has been the Translators' Institutes held in key areas throughout the world. At the one recently held in Manila, attention was particularly directed to one large language family, the Malayo-Polynesian. Both missionaries and nationals were present. Although many linguistic problems were discussed, the focus was heavily upon actual translation work. Translations were made, analyzed, criticized and reworked. There were discussions of critical theological terms such as 'spirit', 'save', 'redeem', 'reconcile', etc., both in terms of the Biblical understanding and of the possible areas of meaning in the culture of the people. Means of testing the accuracy and readability of translations were introduced.

I think that it goes without saying that a third consideration creating the

need for revision is the new understanding that we have of the Biblical message through such discoveries as the Dead Sea Scrolls, and of the Bible text itself through the discovery of many new papyri materials. These new insights need to be shared with the Church everywhere through more adequate translations into the national language.

A fourth consideration making imperative improved translations in the national language is that these translations are inevitably prestige translations. More people will be reading these than will be reading other translations. The fact that they are in the national language will make them more susceptible to criticism. Where national languages are still in their early stage there will be untold opportunities to lead, to mold and to influence the thinking of people in their developing nationalism. They will be used in diglots along with other major languages or the languages of minority groups. If they are not creative 'trail blazers' they not only impede the communication of truth in the national language—they may also discourage the development of creative translations in the other languages as well. If they are natural and colloquial and effectively communicate the Gospel message, it will be far easier for other translations to be natural, colloquial and effective. If they are forced, literal, pedantic and unnatural, it will be difficult for other translations in the region to be otherwise without being compared unfavorably with the national language translation.

For this type of translation to be made, the Church must be prepared, otherwise the finished work may not prove to be acceptable. It may be felt that the Bible text is being tampered with and there will be resistance to change. Ultra-conservatism of this kind is always to be expected. How then can we prepare the Church for more adequate translations?

I have already mentioned regional Translators' Institutes, and there are national workshops and special published helps for translators. Over a period of time the results of such efforts will be felt throughout the Church in terms of improved translations. However, more direct contacts must be made. The national Bible Societies in the various countries will need to encourage theological institutes, both on the Seminary and the Bible School levels, to include in their curricula courses on the communication of the Gospel message. Materials can be prepared for the churches which will make them aware of the problems of existing translations and possible solutions to these problems. This cannot be a once-for-all effort once a year on Bible Sunday only. Rather, it should be a constant effort to make the churches aware of the needs for the translation of God's Word, as well as for its use and distribution. At present only the latter two aspects are usually emphasized in contacts between the Bible Societies and the churches.

It may be advisable to 'float trial balloons' in the form of creative model translations. It has been said that such modern American translations as Goodspeed and Williams prepared the American public for the R.S.V., and that the Phillips translation prepared the English public for the N.E.B. Perhaps this same type of approach may be necessary if the churches of Asia are to be prepared for the type of national language translations that are needed. These 'trial balloons' would best be sponsored by the Bible Societies and come with some type of official sanction. In this way there would be an

informal type of pressure exerted on the national language translations to become more creative.

A second basic factor which must be considered as we think about Bible translation in the Asian setting, is the relationship between national languages (or major regional languages) and minority languages. For example, in Taiwan there is the national language, Mandarin; the major regional languages of Fukienese and Hakka, and then eleven different groups of so-called tribal languages. The speakers of these latter groups range from 65,000 to several hundred. In the Philippines there is the national language, Tagalog, seven major languages such as Ilocano and Cebuano, and then many smaller language groups. Relatively similar types of situations are found in India, Indonesia, Thailand and other countries of south-east Asia. Japan and Korea are perhaps the only two countries where this situation does not exist.

What shall be our attitude with respect to the need for Bible translation among these minority groups? Traditionally there have been two extreme viewpoints. Many missionaries and not a few nationals have felt that these languages will disappear within a period of just a few years, therefore there is obviously no need for any portion of the Bible to be translated—it would be a waste of money, time and effort. Exponents of this view will probably refer to the language or languages in question as ‘dialects’ and thus consign them automatically to a position of insignificance. In terms of comparison with the national language they may be numerically insignificant, but in terms of Christian evangelism and Church growth they may be, as we shall see, proportionally far more significant than the national language. Only too frequently those advocating this viewpoint have given very little study to the actual situation of the language in question. Their estimate of the rate of disappearance of the language is often little more than a guess. In some cases, as in Taiwan, I fear it may even be a pious hope in order that the job of evangelism or nurture may be accomplished without the laborious effort of learning another language. I recall reading an article written by the director of a leading mission group in Taiwan. Published in 1953 it stated that there was little need for anyone to work among the mountain tribes of Taiwan. The argument was threefold: they already knew Japanese, they were learning Chinese, and their own languages were passing away very rapidly. Unfortunately this man had scarcely even visited the mountains, and he was trying to make an ‘educated’ guess from second- and third-hand sources. His conclusions were at least 80 per cent false.

The tribal people of Taiwan do know Japanese. It has been a type of trade language for many years. Through the Japanese Bible they have gained a certain understanding of the basic facts of salvation and of the life of Christ. Yet only those thirty years old and over know Japanese, and those who know it best are still unable to understand large portions of the New Testament. Because of the *hirigana* phonetic alongside of the character, they are able to read the Japanese Bible. We cannot, however, equate this with understanding. The tribal people are learning Chinese. Again, there is a phonetic system used alongside the character to help them to read. A sixth grade primary education is all that 95 per cent of the children receive. This

is not at all equivalent to a sixth grade level for the Chinese on the plains. Often the teachers available for teaching in the mountains are of inferior ability. At this pace, much less intensive than the educational system imposed by the Japanese, it will take a long time for the tribal folk to make effective use of Chinese in their personal or corporate spiritual life.

I recall having a Daily Vacation Bible School once with children who had had four or five years of training in Chinese. They had all memorized John 3: 16 in Chinese, and were not given prizes until they could explain simply what this verse meant in their own language. None of these children were able to do this. This was not a sign that they did not understand their own language, but rather it indicated that they did not really understand the Chinese and were completely incapable of expressing any meaning in their own language. From all that I have been able to learn from many folk in conversation, this same type of thing seems to prevail in most of the countries of south-east Asia (i.e. general inability of minority groups to get along in national languages).

I feel that the only ones really competent to estimate the rate of disappearance of these minority group languages or to pass a judgement on the competence of the people in the national language, are those who know both the national language and the minority group language in question. For all others it is nothing more than a 'guess'.

At the opposite extreme we have some—largely missionaries—who feel duty bound to give the Bible to every group of people, no matter how few may be the speakers of that language. Undoubtedly a Bible translation into such a language would help the people to understand better. But all this must be related to the money, time and labor that would be expended.

A balanced attitude will probably be somewhere between the two extremes. Due consideration will be given to factors of population, growth of the tribe, literacy in nearby regional languages, intensity of the educational effort, rate of cultural assimilation to dominant cultures, etc. It will not be automatically assumed that all groups, no matter how small, must have the entire Bible or even the New Testament. It will not be axiomatic either that only 'major', 'national' or 'regional' languages are worthy of consideration and that all others will soon be assimilated or pass out of existence.

In many instances in Asia the importance of these minority language groups is entirely out of proportion to their numbers. One thinks of the mass tribal movements in Yunnan and Kweichow provinces on the mainland of China. Or the turning to Christ of the Bataks and Dayaks in Indonesia. The same thing is true among the Karens in Burma and the Nagas in Assam. Recently in the Philippine Islands there has been a similar movement among the Palowano tribe. During the course of the past ten years, about 5,000, or one-third, of this group have believed in Jesus Christ. 1962 statistics of the Presbyterian Church of Taiwan show that in 100 years of missionary work, 401 churches have been established among the Chinese on the plains. However, in the 16 years after the restoration of the island to the Republic of China, 378 tribal churches were founded, and now there are over 400. If the 'people's movements' that have swept through these areas are to be

conserved, it is imperative that the Scriptures be translated into these mountain languages.

About eighty years ago in Taiwan there was a similar type of 'people's movement' among the Pephoan of the Ilan plain along the north-east coast. These people were the result of intermarriage between the plains people and some of the tribal people. Their language was not the same as that of the plains church. No effort was made to give them the Scriptures in their own tongue, but it was necessary for them to use a Bible with which they were not perfectly familiar. As a result of this and other factors, this movement flourished for only a very few years, and now virtually no trace may be found of the Pephoan churches.

There is always the danger that a numerically larger church in the national language area will be obsessed with the need for assimilating these vigorous, minority-language churches into its own life. It will see no need for them to have their own Scriptures or even to use their own language in public worship. A well-meaning national pastor in Taiwan once told me that the biggest mistake which the tribes people had made after the war was that they had founded their own churches and did not worship with the plains people.

It is inevitable that in training schools for the leaders of these tribal churches, government educational policy may make the use of the national language advisable. Yet for the life of the church it is necessary that special effort be made to help the leaders thus trained to transfer their newly gained spiritual concepts into their own language, so that they can be of the most help to their own people. To this end, also, it is imperative that these groups have their own Bible to help in this process.

Wherever there are two cultures, one dominant and the other somewhat backward, there will be a tendency to assimilation at several levels—social, economic, and linguistic. Where this process is going on, the Church must act in such a way as to promote a community feeling which will connect all of the members. This may involve seeking to guide and control the assimilation. For example, in Taiwan there are many tribal girls going to the plains to marry lowlanders. The Church does well to try to slow down this process in the interest of social stability. The educational objectives of the young people are often geared toward money and materialistic ends rather than to community interest and the glory of God. The Church can seek to correct this attitude. Likewise, some of the tribal young people themselves, as well as many of the dominant national church, do not see the need for tribal literature. Here again at this level it is the part of a discerning Church to understand that special effort must be made to help them realize that the Bible message will reach them most effectively in their own language.

Often this tendency to despise their own language and its potentials arises from a long subjection to the dominant culture. When they are told over a long period that they are inferior, have no culture, that their language is inadequate and insufficient, etc., they begin to believe it. Usually their feeling that their own language is insufficient comes because of an inadequate grasp of the national or trade language. I recall the time when we were looking for a word to translate 'earnest' in Eph. 1: 14. After looking at the Japanese Bible my informant predictably said that there was no such term.

But then I described something of what the term meant—a type of down-payment made by people on any purchase, whether of a cow or a wife! Immediately he suggested a word which describes something similar: the initial payment that they make on any item which they purchase. Their failure to know that they had such a term was due entirely to their lack of knowledge of what the term meant. This has proved to be the case in all translations of God's Word for these minority language groups.

Over a period of many decades there will be assimilation on virtually every level to the dominant culture. However, if the people have been given a written language and several types of literature, including at least a New Testament, they will be able to assimilate on a much higher level. Rather than being absorbed by the national language group and despising themselves as bringing nothing of cultural worth to the union, they will feel that they have made a significant contribution. How often have I heard the Sediq pray and refer to themselves as 'those without heads' and 'the only ones yet remaining with no written language'. Now they feel that they have, as it were, joined the human family and have books—just like the Chinese and Japanese. It is my firm conviction that on the psychological level alone it is almost necessary for a people to have a sense of cultural self-respect and dignity if they are to have a robust spiritual faith.

Just to reduce the language of these minority groups to writing does not mean perpetuating it at the expense of the national language. It will tend to perpetuate it, but the fact that its speakers are taught to become literate in their own language will give them an incentive for learning the national language which nothing else can afford. I have noted many times that the Sediq young people who are best able to read their own language are likewise the ones who can best read Mandarin Chinese. With the older people it is necessary that there should be some stepping-stone language of instruction. What can serve better than their mother tongue? Whether for youth or adults the approach is educationally valid.

In the UNESCO report, *The Use of Vernacular Languages in Education*,¹ this truth is put in these words:

'It is axiomatic that the best medium for teaching a child is his mother tongue. Psychologically, it is the system of meaningful signs that in his mind works automatically for expression and understanding. Sociologically, it is a means of identification among members of the community to which he belongs. Educationally, he learns more quickly through it than through an unfamiliar linguistic medium.' (P. 11.)

One of the main conclusions of this report is that

'... although the people of minority groups must ultimately learn to think and speak in a second language this goal, we believe, is psychologically and pedagogically as a rule best achieved by two short jumps (that is, from illiteracy in the mother tongue to literacy in the mother tongue, and from literacy in the mother tongue to literacy in the second language) rather than by one jump (that is, from illiteracy in the mother tongue to literacy in the second language).' (P. 12.)

¹ Published in 1958, in the series 'Monographs on Fundamental Education'.

If the Church is creative in this field and furnishes educational and Biblical materials which can help in the literacy of the minority groups in their mother tongues, it is thus seen to be acting in the very best interests of the country as a whole. It goes without saying that it is to the best spiritual interests of the people, who can thus receive the spiritual concepts of the Word of God in their own language.

If at all possible, an orthography should be used in these minority group language translations that fits in with the national language script. In this way it can best serve as a bridge to the ultimate learning of the national language. For example, in Taiwan an adaptation of the Chinese National Phonetic Script is being used. Even though the structure of Chinese and these minority language groups is different, it serves as a very convenient vehicle for writing the language. At present consideration is being given to using an adaptation of Burmese to put the Bible into the Akha language of Burma. There is also the possibility of this method being used with tribes of Thailand. Romanization has commonly been used in all these areas and perhaps gives a higher prestige to the learner in terms of his potential for learning English. However, to use some type of adaptation of a national orthography gains the favor of educational authorities and, more important, helps in the acquisition of the national language.

Despite the fact that translations of the Word of God are needed in the minority language groups, more consideration needs to be given to the advisability of using diglots. This perhaps is not quite so necessary in some areas such as the Philippines where the concept of a national language has not yet been fully accepted by all the people. However, in other countries where a great deal of emphasis is being placed upon the national language, it is necessary for consideration to be given to this possibility. In addition to helping the people to learn the national language better, it also helps to allay the fears of educational authorities who may feel that the Church is working at cross-purposes with the school system. For young people who may tend to despise their own language and doubt its value in their spiritual life, it will give them the Bible in both languages in one volume. This in turn will help to unify the worship and witness of the Church, and create a solidarity between the older and younger generations.

It has already been pointed out that for diglots to be used successfully a greater effort must be made for the national language translations to be creative, unambiguous and clear. With the spread of new translation techniques the tendency will be for much improved translations to be made in the mother tongue. For the better informed, too much disparity between diglot translations will be no problem. They will realize that each of the two languages involved has its own unique structure and that seeming disparities are inevitable.

For those somewhat used to more traditional translations many difficult problems may arise. For example, in the English Bible there are phrases such as 'receive grace' and 'receive mercy', where you have a verbal form followed by a noun. This type of construction is not natural to Chinese or Japanese, and yet both translations have apparently followed the English structure. When one seeks to translate, in a language such as Sediq, into a

more natural verbal phrase such as 'were mercied', there is often some resistance from the translation committee. They insist that their language is capable of such forms and to suggest otherwise often makes them think that you feel their language is not adequate. The same type of reaction occurs when efforts are made to simplify difficult constructions in the translation into their language. This sort of reaction may come whether the main translator is a missionary or a national.

This type of problem brings out the need both for great patience and understanding on the part of the translator, and for greater care in selecting the translation committees. Positions on translation committees are not always assigned according to ability. In Taiwan it has seemingly been the practice of one national church to assign, as members of translation committees for the tribal churches, those pastors who have not been successful in other church positions and who need a job. Translation of the Bible has had no priority in their thinking and only inferior personnel have been considered for this task. Perhaps the Bible Societies will have to work more closely with the churches to assure that the very best personnel are made available for this important work.

A third matter needs brief mention as we consider Bible translation in the Asian setting, and this is the need for cultural dialect translations. The Bible Societies have traditionally produced translations for different geographical areas, either for different languages or else for different dialects within a large geographical area. Perhaps the time has now come to think of cultural dialects—strata of society within a geographical area that may well need different translations of the Scriptures. This has always been a problem in the Orient where there has been such disparity between the spoken language and the written language. I recall my first experiences with the Chinese Bible on the mainland of China. When I talked to friends in the school system, they deplored the fact that the Scriptures were so plain and common and held no interest for the scholar. On the other hand, there were the uneducated masses who found the Union Version too difficult to comprehend. It was hard for a newcomer to find anyone to whom the Bible really spoke. With this type of approach each major area might have three major Bible translations: one for general church worship, one for the more educated, and one for the relatively uneducated. It is not that there would be any basic differences in the vocabulary content, but that there would be differences in style, in syntactic structure, and perhaps in the amount of 'information load'.

Something of this nature has already been done on one level in Japan. Several years ago the Kogotai colloquial version of the Bible was produced and immediately met a great need among the middle and lower classes, for whom the traditional Scripture translation had been too difficult. It is possible that an even simpler translation would fulfil a need among the lowest strata of Japanese rural society.

This is largely a 'frontier' area in Asia, and there are few models on which to build. It is a matter to which churches in all the Asian countries, in consultation with the national Bible Societies, will need to give their urgent attention.

There are perhaps many other matters which ought to be given considera-

tion in a message of this nature. These three that have been mentioned are perhaps the most fundamental. As the challenge posed by them is effectively met, Bible translation in Asia will continue in the pioneering spirit of William Carey and Robert Morrison.

NORMAN H. SNAITH

THE BEN ASHER TEXT

This article first appeared in Textus, Volume II (1962) and is reproduced here by kind permission of the Editor.—Ed.

Where is the true Ben Asher text to be found?

I first became interested in this question in 1934 when the British and Foreign Bible Society of London asked me what was to be done concerning their current Letteris edition of the Hebrew Bible. This edition was published in 1866, and it was very popular among both Jews and Christians. Everybody liked its bold, clear type, especially when it was printed on the kind of paper available before the 1914–18 war. The late Chief Rabbi Hertz was very fond of it indeed, and used it in his commentary on *The Pentateuch and Haftarahs* (1935). Nearly seventy years of successive printings had so worn the plates that it was evident that new plates would have to be made from type newly set up. In this case, why not try to obtain a better text? And so it was decided to publish a new edition independent of any modern printed Bibles. The result is the new Hebrew Bible published in December 1958, of which I had the great honour of being editor.

Meir Halevi Letteris was born in Austria in 1800 and died in Vienna in 1871. His family were printers in Amsterdam and he himself was a reader in printing houses in Berlin and Pressburg. Later he was librarian in the Oriental Department of the Imperial Library in Vienna. In 1852 he prepared a two-volume Hebrew Bible based on the text of Van der Hooght. The 1866 Bible was a revision of this. Actually this 1866 Letteris Bible seems to be based to a marked extent on MS. Erfurt 3, readings of which are to be found in the Michaelis 1720 Bible. Whether Letteris actually consulted this MS. I do not know, but he often has the same reading where the MS. varies from printed editions. This MS. is now known as Berlin MS. Or. fol. 121 and is kept in the Westdeutsche Bibliothek in Marburg. It is important because there is to be found in its margins the text of *Okhlah we-Okhlah*, an ancient collection of massoretic notes, apparently the only such study to which the famous Jacob ben Ḥayyim had access. Since it was held in the last century that the true massoretic text of Ben Asher was to be found in the Second Rabbinic Bible of 1524–5, printed by Bomberg in Venice and edited by Jacob ben Ḥayyim, it could then be said that the Letteris Bible was a good,