

EARLY BURMESE TRANSLATIONS OF THE LORD'S PRAYER¹

John de Jong

Abstract

The earliest extant translation of Scripture into Burmese is Saint Matthew's version of the Lord's Prayer, by Roman Catholic missionary Giovanni Maria Percoto (1776). The Gospel of Matthew was translated by British Baptist missionary James Chater (1812) and Adoniram Judson (1817), with Judson later greatly revising his translation (1832). Analysis of the four different Burmese versions of the Matthean Lord's Prayer reveals how Percoto provided key terminology and phraseology for Chater and Judson. Chater's translation reveals weaknesses typical of the William Carey/Serampore Bible translations. Judson's 1817 translation contains weaknesses also seen in Chater's work, but by 1832 these weaknesses had been addressed, resulting in a much-improved translation that is virtually the same as Judson's final Bible translation (1840) that is widely used in Myanmar today. The research shows how the translation of the Bible into Burmese was a multigenerational process.

Keywords: Gospel of Matthew; Lord's Prayer; Burmese; Bible translation; Adoniram Judson; James Chater; Giovanni Maria Percoto

Introduction

Even though it is 2022, most Protestant churches and Christians in Myanmar still turn to Adoniram Judson's 1840 translation when using a Burmese Bible. Adoniram and his wife Ann remain, rightfully, highly respected in Myanmar as pioneering

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missionaries and Bible translators. Yet while Judson was the first to translate the entire Bible into Burmese, he was not the first translator of portions of Scripture into Burmese. Roman Catholic chaplains and missionaries had been in Myanmar for three hundred years before the Judsons arrived, and during this period were active in preaching, praying and writing in Burmese.² Although most of what the Catholics wrote no longer exists, much of it lives on in the Judson Bible. As La Seng Dingrin has demonstrated so well, the Catholics developed many of the key theological terms which Judson used in his translation of the Bible.³ Referring to the *Compendium of Christian Faith*, written by Giovanni Maria Percoto and published in Rome in 1776, Dingren shows how well known terms such as ခမည်းတော် (God the Father), သားတော် (God the Son), and ကျေးဇူးတော် (grace) were already well known and in circulation long before the Judsons arrived.⁴ The *Compendium* has survived because it was printed, but Percoto himself would have inherited many of these terms from the Burmese Catholic tradition that had been developing since the early sixteenth century.⁵

Judson himself continued to develop Christian terminology. For example, in Percoto's *Compendium*, "Holy Spirit" is not so much translated as transliterated from the Latin *spiritus Sanctus* - အိသဝီရိတူးသံတူး.⁶ James Chater, in his 1812

² See Vivian Ba, *The Early Catholic Missionaries in Burma* (Rangoon: Guardian, 1964); Me Me Shwe, "History of Founding Roman Catholicism in Myanmar," *University of Mandalay, Research Journal* 11 (2020),

<https://meral.edu.mm/record/5603/files/History%20of%20Founding%20Roman%20Catholicism%20in%20Myanmar.pdf>; Aung Myo Tun, "Arrival of Early Catholic Chaplains in Myanmar before Nyaungyan Period," *University of Mandalay, Research Journal* 11 (2020), <https://meral.edu.mm/records/5598?community=um>.

³ La Seng Dingrin, "Is Buddhism Indispensable in the Cross-Cultural Appropriation of Christianity in Burma?," *Buddhist-Christian Studies* 29 (2009).

⁴ Giovanni Maria Percoto, *Compendium Doctrinae Christianae Idiomate Barmano Sive Bomano*, 1776, Bavarian State Library, Rome, <https://www.digitale-sammlungen.de/en/search?query=metadata%3Aabsb10397806>.

⁵ See further John de Jong, "Adoniram Judson's Burmese Bible: Dependency and Development," forthcoming.

⁶ In this period င was pronounced /s/, and still represents this sound when Pali is written using the Burmese alphabet.

translation of the Gospel of Matthew, translated “Holy Spirit” as ဓမ္မာတွာဝိညဉာတော်.⁷

In his first attempt at translating Scripture into Burmese, the 1817 version of Matthew, Judson translated Holy Spirit as ဝိညာဏ်တော်ဘုရား.⁸ It is not until his 1832 translation of the entire New Testament that the now familiar သန့်ရှင်းသောဝိညဉာတော် is first seen.⁹ Judson, then, both received existing Burmese Christian traditions and translations and developed his own. A snapshot of this process can be seen in an examination of the Lord's Prayer (Matt 6:9-13).

The earliest extant version of the Lord's Prayer in Burmese is in Percoto's 1776 *Compendium*. Judson probably did not have access to the *Compendium*, but he did have a translation of the Gospel of Matthew, written “on palm-leaf, by a Roman Catholic Padre [which] affords me great assistance.”¹⁰ The following analysis shows that the Lord's Prayer in this translation of Matthew must have been either identical or very similar to that of Percoto in his *Compendium*. While Judson did not agree with their doctrine, he was impressed by the linguistic work of the Catholic missionaries.¹¹

When he attempted his first translation of Matthew into Burmese in 1817, Judson also had before him James Chater's 1812 Burmese translation of Matthew. Chater and Felix Carey, son of William Carey, established the British Baptist mission in Rangoon in 1808, which was later transferred to the Judsons and the American

⁷ James Chater, *The Gospel of Matthew in Burmese* (1:1-9:11), 1812, Watkinson Library, Trinity College, Serampore.

⁸ Adoniram Judson, *Gospel of Matthew in Burmese*, 1817, Watkinson Library, Trinity College, Rangoon.

⁹ Adoniram Judson, *The New Testament in Burmese* (Maulmein 1832).

https://books.google.co.nz/books?id=UylKAAAAMAAJ&printsec=frontcover&source=gbs_ge_summary_r&cad=0#v=onepage&q&f=false.

¹⁰ Adoniram Judson, "Letter from the Rev. Adoniram Judson, American Baptist Missionary in Burmah, to a Minister in London. Rangoon, March 30, 1817," *The Baptist Magazine*, 1818, <https://babel.hathitrust.org/cgi/pt?id=nyp.33433069129165&view=lup&seq=9&skin=2021>.

¹¹ Elsewhere, Judson wrote of having received from the Catholics a version of “some extracts of Scripture, not very badly executed, in regard to language, but full of Romish errors.” Adoniram Judson, "Letter from Mr. Judson to Mr. Ward. Rangoon, Jan. 18, 1816," *The American Baptist Magazine and Missionary Intelligencer: New Series*, 1817, <http://hdl.handle.net/2027/mdp.39015039721751>.

Baptist mission. Unlike the Catholic works, Judson was critical of Chater's translation, calling it "quite unintelligible to Burmans."¹²

The Burmese Lord's Prayer by Percoto and Chater can be compared with Judson's first translation of Scripture into Burmese, his 1817 Gospel of Matthew, and his revised 1832 New Testament.¹³ Through this comparative analysis, the extent to which Judson drew upon his predecessors' work and also developed his own translation of Scripture into Burmese over time can be seen.

Analysis of the Lord's Prayer in Burmese

Images of the primary sources are given below. Chater's and Judson's versions are excerpted from their translations of Matthew, and Percoto's version from his *Compendium*. According to Catholic tradition, Percoto translated the Lord's Prayer from the Gospel of Matthew. Following each image, the text of the prayer is given with modern Burmese orthography and correction of typological errors. Only Chater includes the doxology at the end of the prayer, "For yours is the kingdom and the power and the glory forever. Amen" (NIV). This is because Chater was translating from the Textus Receptus, based on the Byzantine textual tradition, which includes the doxology in the Lord's Prayer. Both Percoto and Judson omit the doxology as it is absent from the Catholic tradition, based on the Vulgate, and from Johann Griesbach's critical Greek New Testament, from which Judson was translating. In his final 1840 translation of the whole Bible, however, Judson abandoned Griesbach, for theological reasons, and translated from Georg Christian Knapp's Greek New Testament, which tended to follow the Textus Receptus.¹⁴ As a result, the doxology would have been one of the last things Judson translated, and the text is also given here.

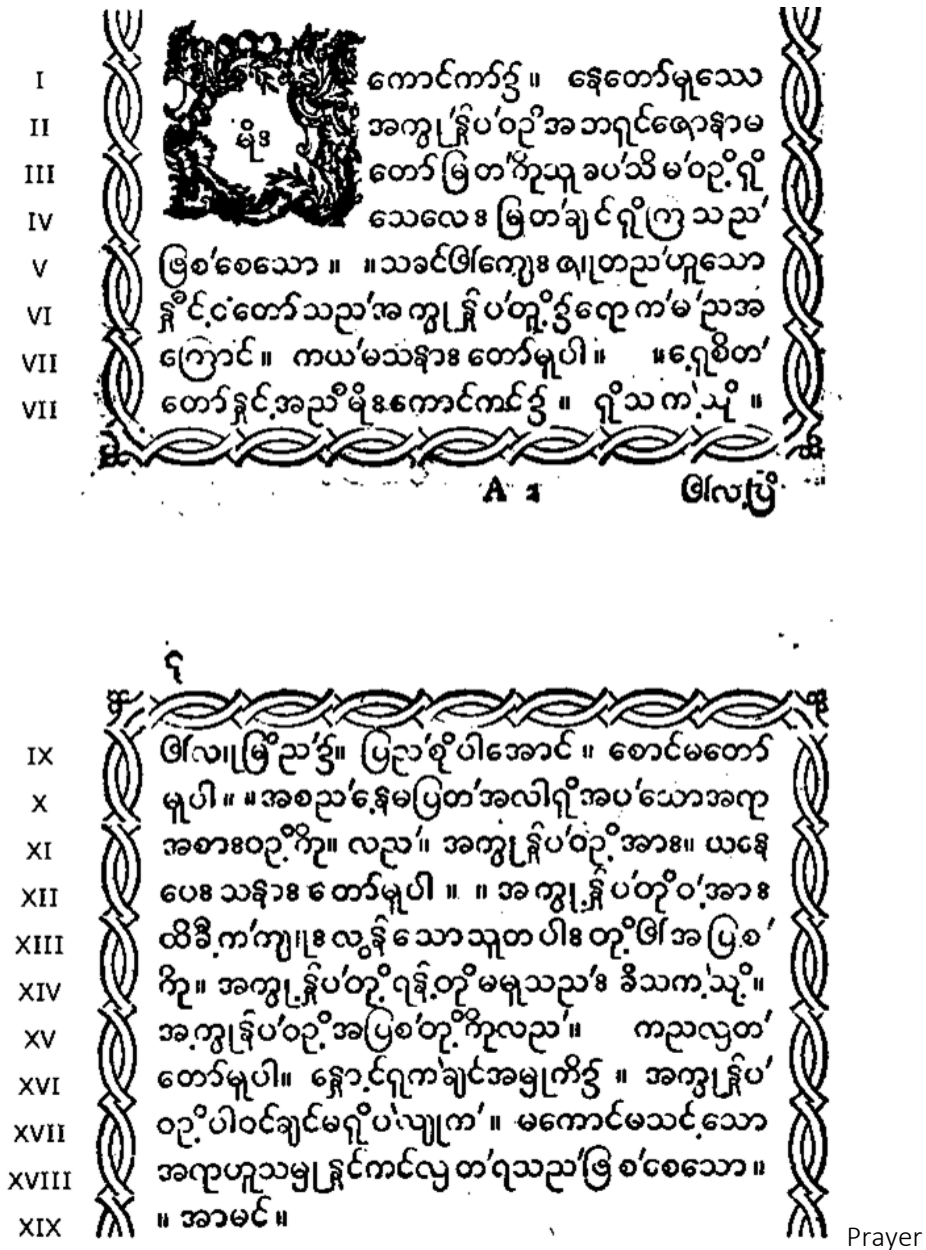
¹² Judson, "Letter from the Rev. Adoniram Judson, American Baptist Missionary in Burmah, to a Minister in London. Rangoon, March 30, 1817."

¹³ Judson, Gospel of Matthew in Burmese; Judson, *The New Testament in Burmese*.

¹⁴ John de Jong, "Textual Criticism, the Textus Receptus, and Adoniram Judson's Burmese New Testaments," *Pacific Journal of Baptist Research* 13, no. 2 (2018), <https://static1.squarespace.com/static/61888b59dd640c27a2a728af/t/618df15cace81f0a6a0a5d52/1636692321879/PJBR+13.2+Nov+2018.pdf>.

Percoto 1776

Figure 1: The Lord's Prayer



(Percoto 1766)

Figure 1: *The Lord's Prayer (Percoto 1776) corrected to modern Myanmar orthography*

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| v.9 ¹⁵ | မိုးကောင်းကင်၌နေတော်မူသော အကျွန်ုပ်တို့အဘ ရှင်ဇော ¹⁶ နာမတော် မြတ်ကို သူခပ်သိမ်းတို့ ရိုသေလေးမြတ် ခြင်း ¹⁷ ရှိကြသည် ဖြစ်စေသော။ |
| v.10 | သခင်၏ကျေးဇူးတည်းဟူသောနိုင်ငံတော်သည် အကျွန်ုပ်တို့၌ ရောက်မည် အကြောင်း ကယ်မ သနားတော်မူပါ။ ရှေ့စိတ်တော် ¹⁸ နှင့်အညီ မိုးကောင်းကင်၌ ရှိသကဲ့သို့။ ဤ လူ့ ပြည် ¹⁹ ၌ ပြည့်စုံပါအောင် စောင့်မတော်မူပါ။ |
| v.11 | အစဉ်နေ့မပြတ် အလိုရှိအပ်သော အရာအစားတို့ကို ။ လည်း ။ အကျွန်ုပ်တို့ အား ယနေ့ ပေးသနားတော်မူပါ။ |
| v.12 | အကျွန်ုပ်တို့အား ထိခိုက်ကျူးလွန်သောသူ တပါးတို့ ၏အပြစ်ကို အကျွန်ုပ်တို့ ရန်တုံ့ ²⁰ မမှု သည်းခံ အကျွန်ုပ်တို့အပြစ်တို့ကိုလည်း ကညလွှတ်တော်မူပါ။ |
| v.13 | နှောင့်ယှက်ခြင်းအမှု ²¹ ၌အကျွန်ုပ်တို့ ပါဝင်ခြင်းမရှိပဲလျက်။ ကောင်းမသင့် သောအရာ ဟူသမျှနှင့်ကင်းလွတ်ရသည်ဖြစ်စေသော။ အာမင် |

Giovanni Maria Percoto arrived in Burma in 1761 and lived there until his death in 1776, aged 47, becoming an expert in Pali and Burmese.²² His translation of the Lord's Prayer bears this out, showing both his ability in Burmese and in the theological terms he derived from Pali.²³ It should not be assumed, however, that Percoto himself developed all of these terms as he himself would have received some or many of them from the Burmese Catholic tradition that had been developing

¹⁵ Verse numbering from the Gospel of Matthew has been added.

¹⁶ An archaic honorific which modern Burmese do not recognize, presumably derived from Pali.

¹⁷ Percoto consistently spells this as ချင် throughout the *Compendium*.

¹⁸ The meaning of this phrase, literally “before/in front of the deity’s mind/will” is not clear to modern Burmese speakers.

¹⁹ Corrected from လူမြို့၌, which is meaningless.

²⁰ Percoto ရန်တုံ့ corrected to ရန်တုံ့ “to return evil for evil.”

²¹ Corrected from အမှုကံ

²² See Ba.

²³ See further Dingrin.

over the preceding two and a half centuries. But because Percoto's *Compendium* is the earliest extant Catholic text, indeed the earliest extant Christian text in Burmese, it is impossible to determine which terms Percoto received and which he developed himself.

The Lord's Prayer shows how Percoto wrote in beautiful Burmese style, although John of Yedena, an upper-class Burmese Christian, assisted Percoto in preparing his Burmese works for publication.²⁴ In spite of being such an old text, it is easily understandable by the modern Burmese reader. The Lord's Prayer, and the *Compendium* in general, does, however, exhibit a number of spelling and typesetting mistakes. For example, line I has ကံ instead of ကင်; line X အဝါ instead of အလို; line XIV ရန်တိုမမှု instead of ရန်တုံမမှု; line XVI အမှုကိဉ်, instead of အမှု၌. At times, however, the corrections require conjecture, as for example, line IX, where I have rewritten လူမြည် as လူပြည် ("the human world"), which makes good sense in the context. The complicating factor is the presence in the text of several archaic terms which are no longer clear to modern Burmese readers. These archaic terms are remarkably few, but include ရှင်ဇေ (line II) and ရှေ့စိတ်တော် (line VI). It is possible that လူမြည် is an archaic term, or more likely, a misspelt archaic term. These mistakes are to be attributed to the printing stage in Rome rather than to Percoto himself. To be distinguished from mistakes is the non-standardized orthography of this older period. Hence ကောင်း is consistently spelt ကောင် (e.g., line XVII) and ခြင်း is consistently spelt ချင် (e.g., line IV).

Percoto writes in a good Burmese literary style, which to an English speaker may appear to be expansive. For example, Percoto uses two word-pairs instead of one to translate the verb "hallowed" (lines III-IV ရှိသေလေးမြတ်). In Burmese this is appropriate to show respect for the deity. This stands in contrast to Chater, who in the same place used only one of the word-pairs (Chater line III ရှိသေ), which is not as appropriate as Percoto's usage. But more than simply writing in a fulsome

²⁴ Ba, 10.

Burmese writing style, Percoto also has a paraphrastic approach to translation. He does not simply translate, he also explains. This is seen especially in the second petition of the prayer, “your kingdom come” (lines V-VII). The phrase “your kingdom” is translated သခင်၏ကျေးဇူးတည်းဟူသောနိုင်ငံတော်သည် (“your kingdom, Lord, which is characterized by grace”). Percoto translated the verb “come,” a third person imperative of ἔρχομαι, as အကျွန်ုပ်တို့၌ ရောက်မည့် အကြောင်း ကယ်မသနားတော်မူပါ (“concerning its arrival amongst us, salvifically help, O Lord”). The call for God to help the arrival of his kingdom is not explicit in the Greek text, but Percoto may be trying to give expression to the third person imperative. The force of the third person imperative is not entirely clear, but Hagner suggests that its use, rather than a second person imperative, “may point to the involvement of those who pray.”²⁵ That is, those praying are also committing themselves to bringing about the petitions rather than just asking God to accomplish it. If so, Percoto has grasped this aspect admirably.

Percoto’s expertise in Burmese is also seen in his command of grammar and syntax. His translation reads as natural Burmese and has stood the test of time. The Catholic Lord’s Prayer in modern Burmese still follows many aspects of Percoto’s translation, seen in the recent Catholic Bible and Catholic prayerbook.²⁶ Although some words and phrases have been revised, the prayer still uses many of Percoto’s phrases and structures.

²⁵ Donald A. Hagner, *Matthew 1-13*, vol. 1, *Word Biblical Commentary*, ed. David A. Hubbard, vol. 33A (Dallas: Word Books, 1993). 148.

²⁶ Catholic Bishops' Conference of Myanmar, *New Testament, Psalms, Proverbs and Deuterocanonical Books* (Myanmar: Catholic Bishops' Conference of Myanmar, 2012); *Lanpyataryar (Catholic Prayer Book)* (1989).

Chater 1812

Figure 2: *The Lord's Prayer (Chater 1812)*

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| I | သင်္ဂါသုဉ် |
| II | ကုသိုလ်သုဉ်လော။ သွဂ္ဂကောင်းကင်ဝယ်နေတော်မူသောအကျွန် |
| III | ဉာဏ်သုဉ်အတော်မူပါ။ ကိုယ်တော်အောင်အောင်တော်သုဉ်ရိုသေ |
| IV | သုဉ်ဖြစ်စေတော်မူပါ။ ကိုယ်တော် နိုင်ငံတော်သုဉ်ကြွရောက်လာ |
| V | ၁၀ စေတော်မူပါ။ သွဂ္ဂကောင်းကင်၌ကိုယ်တော်အလိုတော်နှင့်အညီ |
| VI | ၁၁ ရှိသည့်အတိုင်းသုဉ်မြေမြေဖြစ်စေတော်မူပါ။ အကျွန်ုပ်တို့တို့အသက် |
| VII | ရှင်ဘုရားအဘွားအဘွားအကျွန်ုပ်တို့တို့အသက်ပေးသောတော်မူပါ။ |
| VIII | ၁၂ အကျွန်ုပ်တို့တို့သုဉ် ကျေးဇူးတင်သောသုဉ်ကြွကပ်တော်သကဲ့သို့ |
| IX | ၁၃ အကျွန်ုပ်တို့တို့အပြစ်ကျေးဇူးကပ်တော်မူပါ။ စိတ်ကို |
| X | မကောင်းသုဉ်ဖြစ်သောအမှုအရာ၌အကျွန်ုပ်တို့တို့မကောင်းသော |
| XI | သွားတော်မူပါ။ အကျွန်ုပ်တို့တို့ကိုလည်းမကောင်းသည့်မှကပ်တော် |
| XII | တော်မူပါ။ အဘယ်ကြောင့်လည်းဟူမူကား။ ကိုယ်တော်၌နိုင်ငံ |
| XIII | အစွမ်း။ တံခါးသုဉ်အစွမ်းပြတော်မူကြောင်းတည်း။ အားမန်။ |

Figure 3: *The Lord's Prayer (Chater 1812) corrected to modern Myanmar orthography*

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| v.9 | သွဂ္ဂ ²⁷ ကောင်းကင်ဝယ်နေတော်မူသော အကျွန်ုပ်တို့ အဘခမည်းတော်။ ကိုယ်တော် အမည်နာမတော် ²⁸ သည်ရှိသေသည် ဖြစ်စေတော်မူပါ။ |
| v.10 | ကိုယ်တော်နိုင်ငံတော်သည် ကြွရောက်လာ သည် ဖြစ်စေတော်မူပါ။ သွဂ္ဂ ကောင်းကင် ၌ ကိုယ်တော်အလိုတော်နှင့်အညီ ရှိသည် အတိုင်း ပထဝီမြေ ပေါ်၌ဖြစ်စေတော်မူပါ။ |

²⁷ သွဂ္ဂ is archaic “heavens/sky”, borrowed from Pali, but still understandable to modern Burmese speakers.

²⁸ Object marker ကို is absent but required.

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- v.11 အကျွန်ုပ်တို့အသက်ရှင်ရာ အာဟာရကို အကျွန်ုပ်တို့အား ယနေ့ပေးသနား တော်မူပါ။
- v.12 အကျွန်ုပ်တို့သည်ကြွေးမြီတင်သောလူတို့ကို ကင်း²⁹လွှတ်သကဲ့သို့ အကျွန်ုပ် တို့ အပြစ်ကြွေးမြီမှ³⁰ကင်းလွတ်တော်မူပါ။
- v.13 စိတ်ကိုမကောင်းသဖြင့်စုံစမ်းသောအမှုအရာ၌ အကျွန်ုပ်တို့ကို မဆောင်မယူ သွားတော်မူပါလင့်။ အကျွန်ုပ်တို့ကိုလည်း မကောင်းသည်မှကင်းလွတ်တော် မူပါ။ အဘယ်ကြောင့် နည်းဟူမူကား။ ကိုယ်တော်၌ နိုင်ငံ။ အစွမ်း။ တန်ခိုး တို့သည် အစဉ်မပြတ် ရှိတော်မူကြောင်းတည်း။ အာမန်။
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James Chater lived as a missionary in Rangoon for only three years, 1808-11. Although it was decided that he would translate Matthew and Felix Carey would translate Mark, apparently nineteen chapters of Matthew had already been translated by an unnamed “native teacher” in Serampore before Chater had arrived in Rangoon.³¹ Furthermore, the translation of Matthew was revised and prepared for printing by Felix Carey, and Chater was already living in Ceylon (Sri Lanka) by the time the gospel was first printed in Serampore in 1812. It is difficult, therefore, to know just how much of the work was produced by Chater, but it remains attributed to him.

Judson’s assessment of Chater’s translation of Matthew as “quite unintelligible to Burmans,” is not born out in the Lord’s Prayer, although it is true of some other parts of his translation. Nevertheless, Chater’s translation of the prayer is the poorest in comparison to Percoto’s and Judsons’ translations. This can be seen in Chater’s translation of the second petition of the prayer, “Your kingdom come.” Chater makes a good choice of vocabulary with the verb pair ကြွရောက် (a deity or royal personage to arrive). He struggles, however, to express the Greek third person

²⁹ Corrected from ကင်

³⁰ Chater adds an explanatory footnote: ကြွေးမြီဟူသည်ကားဤအရပ်၌ပါပအပြစ်ကိုသာဆိုသည်။ “‘Debt’ here means ‘sin.’” Note the use of Pali ပါပ “demerit”

³¹ “Translations of Scripture: Xvi. Burman,” *The Panoplist and Missionary Magazine*, 1813, 297, <https://archive.org/details/panoplistandmis01unkngoog/page/n318/mode/2up>.

imperative, creating an indicative statement, ကိုယ်တော်နိုင်ငံတော်သည် ကြွရောက်လာသည် (Your kingdom, Lord, arriving), and then converts it into the subjunctive voice by adding the phrase ဖြစ်စေတော်မူပါ (may you cause it to be). The resulting translation, in contrast to Percoto's elegant Burmese, is clunky and unnatural. This characterizes Chater's translation of the Lord's Prayer as a whole. He uses good vocabulary, but his lack of expertise in Burmese syntax and grammar results in a stilted translation.

Chater favors a formal translation style, that is, maintaining the form of the source text. This is based on respect for the source text as the Word of God and a desire to be faithful to it in translation. The problem the formal approach faces is that elements in the source text may be difficult to understand in the target language and culture. This is seen in the fifth petition, "Forgive us our debts as we also have forgiven our debtors" (6:12). In the English language Catholic tradition, this is always prayed "Forgive us our trespasses," and in Percoto's paraphrastic translation he renders "debt" as အပြစ် (sin), as does Judson (see below). Chater is unwilling to do this and translates "debt" literally in the first half of the verse, အကျွန်ုပ်တို့သည်ကြွေးမြီ တင်သောလူတို့ (those who are in debt to us). In the second half, Chater glosses the economic language with "sin," အကျွန်ုပ်တို့ အပြစ်ကြွေး မြီမှ ကင်းလွတ်တော်မူပါ (from our sin-debt, free us, Lord). Chater adds an explanatory footnote after the မှ ("from," line IX), in which he explains, ကြွေးမြီဟူသည်ကား ဤအရပ်၌ပါပအပြစ်ကိုသာဆိုသည် ("Debt" in this place means "demerit", "sin"). Chater uses these explanatory footnotes sparingly, only six in the entire book of Matthew,

but it is interesting that recent Bible translations into new languages have begun using a “study Bible” approach with explanatory notes.

Judson 1817 and 1832

Figure 4: The Lord's Prayer (Judson 1817)

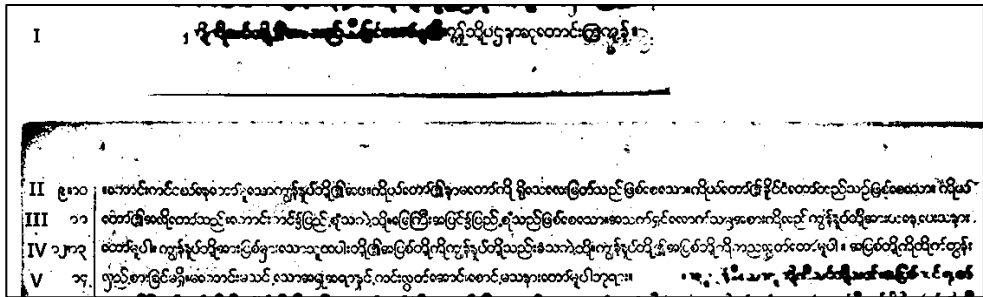


Figure 5: The Lord's Prayer (Judson 1817) corrected to modern Myanmar orthography

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- v.9 ကောင်းကင်ဝယ် နေတော်မူသော ကျွန်ုပ်တို့၏အဖ။ ကိုယ်တော်၏ နာမတော် ကို ရိုသေလေးမြတ်သည် ဖြစ်စေသော။
- v.10 ကိုယ်တော်၏နိုင်ငံတော်တည်သည်ဖြစ်စေသော။ ကိုယ်တော်၏ အလိုတော် သည် ကောင်းကင်၌ပြည့်စုံသကဲ့သို့မြေကြီး အပြင်၌ ပြည့်စုံသည် ဖြစ်စေသော။
- v.11 အသက်ရှင်လောကသမျှအစားကိုလည်းကျွန်ုပ်တို့အားယနေ့ပေးသနားတော်မူပါ။
- v.12 ကျွန်ုပ်တို့အားပြစ်မှားသောသူတပါးတို့၏ အပြစ်တို့ ကိုကျွန်ုပ်³² တို့သည်ခံ သကဲ့သို့ ကျွန်ုပ်တို့၏အပြစ်တို့ကိုကညလွှတ်တော်မူ ပါ။
- v.13 အပြစ်တို့ကိုတိုက်တွန်းလှည့်စားခြင်းမရှိ။ မကောင်းမသင့်သော အမှုအရာနှင့် ကင်းလွတ်အောင်။ စောင့်မသနားတော်မူပါ ဘုရား။
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³² Here and throughout Judson 1817 ကျွန်ုပ်

Figure 6: *The Lord's Prayer* (Judson 1832)

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| | e | ထိုအခါ၌ ကောင်းသောအရာတို့ကို ပေးအပ်မူ၏။ ထိုကြောင့် |
| I | | ဆုတောင်း လေသည် အရာ မှာ။ ကောင်းကင်ဘုံ၌ ရှိတော်မူသောအ |
| II | | ကျွန်ုပ်တို့အဖို့ ကိုယ်တော်၏ နာမတော်အား ရိုသေလေးမြတ်ခြင်းရှိပါ |
| III | ၁၀ | စေသော။ နိုင်ငံတော်တည်ထောင်ပါစေသော။ အလိုတော်သည်ကော |
| IV | ၁၁ | င်းကင်ဘုံ၌ ပြည့်စုံသကဲ့သို့ မြေကြီးပေါ်မှာ ပြည့်စုံပါစေသော။ အ |
| V | | သက်မွေးလောက်သော အစာကို အကျွန်ုပ်တို့အား ယနေ့ပေးသနား |
| VI | | တော်မူပါ။ သူတပါးသည် အကျွန်ုပ်တို့ကို ပြစ်မှားသော အပြစ်များ |
| VII | ၁၂ | ကို အကျွန်ုပ်တို့သည် လွှတ်သကဲ့သို့ အကျွန်ုပ်တို့၏ အပြစ်များကို လွှတ် |
| VIII | | တော်မူပါ။ အပြစ်သွေးဆောင်ရာသို့ မလိုက်စေဘဲ မကောင်းသော အ |
| IX | ၁၃ | မှုအရာနှင့် ကင်းလွတ်ပါမည်အကြောင်း။ ကယ်မသနားတော်မူပါဟု |
| X | | ဆုတောင်းကြလော့။ |
| XI | | |
| XII | ၁၄ | |

Figure 7: *The Lord's Prayer* (Judson 1832) corrected to modern Myanmar orthography

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| v.9 | ကောင်းကင်ဘုံ၌ ရှိတော်မူသော အကျွန်ုပ်တို့ အဖ။ ကိုယ်တော်၏ နာမတော် အား ရိုသေလေးမြတ်ခြင်း ရှိပါစေသော။ |
| v.10 | နိုင်ငံတော်တည်ထောင်ပါစေသော။ အလို တော်သည် ကောင်းကင်ဘုံ၌ ပြည့်စုံ သကဲ့သို့ မြေကြီးပေါ်မှာ ပြည့်စုံပါစေသော။ |
| v.11 | အသက်မွေး လောက်သော အစာကို အကျွန်ုပ်တို့အား ယနေ့ပေးသနား တော်မူပါ။ |
| v.12 | သူတပါးသည် အကျွန်ုပ်တို့ကို ပြစ်မှားသော အပြစ်များကို အကျွန်ုပ်တို့သည် လွှတ် သကဲ့သို့ အကျွန်ုပ်တို့၏ အပြစ်များကို လွှတ် တော်မူပါ။ |
| v.13 | အပြစ်သွေးဆောင်ရာသို့ မလိုက်စေဘဲ မကောင်းသော အမှုအရာနှင့် ကင်းလွတ်ပါ မည်အကြောင်း ကယ်မ သနားတော်မူပါဟု ဆုတောင်း ကြလော့။ |

Figure 8: Matthew 6:13b Doxology from Judson 1840

v.13b အစိုးပိုင်သောအခွင့်နှင့် ဘုန်းတန်ခိုး အာနုဘော်သည် ကမ္ဘာ အဆက်ဆက်
 ကိုယ်တော်၌ရှိပါ၏။ အာမင်ဟုဆုတောင်းကြ လော့။

Although Judson was critical of Chater’s translation of Matthew, similar weaknesses are exhibited in his own 1817 translation, weaknesses which he had addressed and improved by the time of his 1832 translation. There is little difference, on the other hand, between Judson’s 1832 and final 1840 translations, apart from the addition of the doxology, the translation of the Lord’s Prayer having reached more or less its final form by 1832.

The weaknesses in Judson’s first translation can be seen by analyzing, as in the case of Percoto and Chater, the second petition, “Your kingdom come.” Judson’s 1817 translation follows the same syntactical structure as Chater, with an indicative statement, ကိုယ်တော်၏နိုင်ငံတော်တည်သည် (Your kingdom, Lord, is established), converted into the subjunctive mood by adding ဖြစ်စေသော (may you cause it to be).

Interestingly Judson departs from both Percoto and Chater in translating ἔρχομαι (to come, to appear), using the verb တည် (to establish). Percoto used ရောက် (to arrive) and Chater ကြွရောက် (for a divine or royal entity to arrive), and these words translate more directly ἔρχομαι into Burmese. Judson’s choice of တည် shows his confidence as an exegete and thoughtfulness as a translator, as he considered this word to better convey what Jesus meant when he talked about the kingdom of God arriving. Judson’s translation has been accused of being “wooden,” but this is one example among many which indicates that this was not the case.

Nevertheless, the syntax of the sentence, like Chater’s, is not elegant or natural Burmese. Judson had addressed this issue by his 1832 translation, expressing the second petition in one coherent sentence, နိုင်ငံတော်တည်ထောင်ပါစေသော (May you establish your kingdom). By this time Judson’s expertise in Burmese had greatly improved and he uses the grammatical construction VERB-ပါစေသော (may you-

VERB). By this stage Judson was able to let the structures of the language do the work instead of the awkward expression of his 1817 translation. This is seen further in the way he drops ကိုယ်တော်၏ (your) from the beginning of the petition. Burmese adds the honorific တော် to verbs and nouns relating to divine and royal persons and things. Thus နိုင်ငံ (kingdom) plus တော် (honorific particle) can, in this context, only mean “God’s kingdom.” Judson’s personality also comes through in this terse translation style. He was a taciturn character, shown in his letters which are business-like and to the point. Ann’s letters, quite differently, are long and informative, describing their new environment and their personal lives in Rangoon in great detail. Adoniram’s Bible translation is likewise economical and concise. This does not prevent Judson, however, from using a verb pair, တည်ထောင် (to establish) instead of just the single တည်, as he considered this more appropriate for literary Burmese.

Judson’s expertise as an exegete is further seen in his translation of “debts” as “sins” (အပြစ်တို့). Whereas Chater considered it necessary to follow the source text in translating “debts” as ကြေးမြီ (debt), Judson had no such concerns. Judson, as part of the biblical studies movement that was flourishing in New England,³³ would have been well aware that in the rabbinic literature, sin was understood as a debt (Aramaic חוב), to God.³⁴ John Broadus wrote about this in 1886, “See numerous examples from the Targums in Buxtorf,”³⁵ referring to the work of Hebraist Johannes Buxtorf (1564-1629). Judson, familiar with this interpretive tradition, translated accordingly.

³³ See further John de Jong, “A Nineteenth Century New England Exegete Abroad: Adoniram Judson and the Burmese Bible,” *Harvard Theological Review* 112, no. 3 (2019).

³⁴ Hagner., p.150.

³⁵ John A. Broadus, *Commentary on the Gospel of Matthew* (Philadelphia: American Baptist Publication Society, 1886). <https://archive.org/details/commentaryongosp01broa/page/n9/mode/2up>, 137.

Judson's Developing Relationship with Percoto's Text

Percoto's translation of the Lord's Prayer is the earliest extant version. It is a given that Percoto's translation represents a development of terminology and traditions that he himself would have received from the Burmese Catholic tradition of the previous two hundred and fifty years. The book of Scripture extracts that Chater, Carey and Judson received from the Burmese Catholics, and the translation of Matthew by the Catholic priest which Judson referred to, are lost.³⁶ It is evident, however, that the book of Scripture extracts, or the gospel of Matthew, and quite possibly both, contained either Percoto's translation of Matthew, or a version very close to it. This is shown by similarities between Percoto's and Judson's translations of the Lord's Prayer. Chater is the most independent, indicating that, on the one hand, the "native teacher" at Serampore was not part of the Catholic tradition, and on the other hand, Judson did not draw as heavily on Chater as he did on Percoto. In his 1817 translation, Judson followed Percoto in a number of places but lacked his sophistication in the Burmese language. By the time of his 1832 translation Judson had become more expert in Burmese and his revised translation shows him charting a more independent course from Percoto. A good example of this is the fourth petition of the prayer, "And forgive us our debts, as we also forgive our debtors" (Matt 6:12). Judson's 1817 translation follows Percoto closely in both structure and vocabulary, although Judson's translation remains characteristically brief compared to Percoto's expansive style. Figure 9 (below) shows how closely Judson 1817 follows Percoto, with the identical expressions in bold, and how by 1832 Judson's translation had become more independent, while still retaining some elements from Percoto.

³⁶ James Chater, "Letter from Mr. Chater and Mr. Felix Carey, Rangoon, July 31st, 1809," *The Baptist Magazine*, 1810, https://books.googleusercontent.com/books/content?req=AKW5QafwGrPmtcRMip5GEVKWd8woOJD1rG9ILAVfg1_EQChEo72OcG4vesQIsfEgRnFyiInHRaHsRyUMdijPQnnodKwkUmJt9USGXTAgfe0OioCYnu0QpO0g342jM86Aoo5SIJExJRdKLYODzVGN94xksPckRPqKjPgy_Oee_k0fc8EMZ4Q0sEU13ExjnJsuB-7d189HTj52kRz0oQ1uNRhTybtRQ-hNMvUb7eOc7yCX7CW2ncVk4FNvwVweNsDiYxX7AVaT8_oI8Y0YrWpxhN60RFrezptLSA, Judson, "Letter from the Rev. Adoniram Judson, American Baptist Missionary in Burmah, to a Minister in London. Rangoon, March 30, 1817."

Figure 9: The fourth petition (Matt 6:12)

Percoto 1776

အကျွန်ုပ်တို့အား ထိခိုက်ကျူးလွန်သော သူတပါးတို့၏အပြစ်ကို အကျွန်ုပ်တို့ ရန်တုံ့မမှု သည်းခံ
အကျွန်ုပ်တို့ အပြစ်တို့ကိုလည်း ကယ်လွှတ်တော်မူပါ။

Against us the sins of those people who strike and offend we not repaying evil for evil [but] forbearing, our sins also mercifully forgive (Lord).

Judson 1817

ကျွန်ုပ်တို့အား ပြစ်မှားသောသူတပါးတို့၏ အပြစ်တို့ကို ကျွန်ုပ်တို့ သည်းခံသကဲ့သို့ ကျွန်ုပ်တို့၏ အပြစ်
တို့ကို ကယ်လွှတ်တော်မူပါ။

Against us the sins of those who sin in the same way that we forbear
our sins mercifully forgive (Lord)

Judson 1832

သူတပါးသည် အကျွန်ုပ်တို့ကိုပြစ်မှားသော အပြစ်များကို အကျွန်ုပ်တို့သည်လွှတ်သကဲ့သို့ အကျွန်ုပ်တို့၏
အပြစ်များကို လွှတ်တော်မူပါ။

Others against us their sins in the same way that we forgive our sins, Lord.

The close similarities in structure and vocabulary indicate that Judson 1817 was following Percoto in his translation of this verse. Of note is the archaic verb ကည, paired with လွှတ် (“to liberate, set free”). The verb ကည is no longer listed in modern Burmese dictionaries and the definition given in the 1953 Judson-Stevens *Myanmar-English Dictionary* does not fit this context: “v. to beg a favor, to ingratiate oneself.” In Judson’s 1826 dictionary, however, two definitions are

offered: “(1) v. to ask help, petition, တောင်းပန်; (2) to have pity on, relieve, သနားကယ်မ.”³⁷ It is clearly the second meaning here, although this definition was not included even in the 1852 revision of Judson’s dictionary by Robert C. Stevenson.³⁸ In his 1832 translation, Judson had dropped the ကည and just used its partner လွတ်.

Judson 1817 also follows Percoto in his use of သည်းခံ (to tolerate, to forbear). This is not the right verb to translate ἀφίημι (to cancel, remit, pardon) whereas လွတ် (to liberate, set free) captures the sense of the word well. Percoto, in his expansive style, has used သည်းခံ in a paraphrastic manner, coupling it with the verb phrase ရန်တုံ့မမှု ([while] not repaying evil for evil). Judson’s use of သည်းခံ by itself is the wrong choice of word to express forgiveness or release. Judson corrected this in his 1832 translation, using the same verb လွတ် for both humans forgiving others and God forgiving humans.

Another example which shows how Judson 1817 follows Percoto closely, while Judson 1832 has become more independent, are the sixth and seventh petitions of the prayer, “And do not bring us to the time of trial but rescue us from the evil one” (Matt 6:13). As Figure 10 (below) shows, while the similarities between Percoto and Judson 1817 are not as obvious as in the fourth petition (see Figure 9 above), they exist nonetheless.

Figure 10: 6th and 7th petitions (Matt 6:13)

| Percoto (1776) |
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| <p>နောင်ယက်ခြင်းအမှု၌ အကျွန်ုပ်တို့ ပါဝင်ခြင်းမရှိပဲလျက် မကောင်းမသင့်သော အရာဟူသမျှနှင့် ကင်းလွတ်ရသည် ဖြစ်စေသော</p> |

³⁷ <https://archive.org/details/in.gov.ignca.23512>

³⁸ <https://archive.org/details/adictionaryburm01judsgoog/page/n133/mode/2up>

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| While into situations of frustration and thwarting us not entering into All situations of evil to be free from may you cause it to be |
| Judson (1817) |
| အပြစ်တို့ကိုတိုက်တွန်း လှည့်စားခြင်း မရှိ မကောင်းမသင့်သော အမှုအရာနှင့် ကင်းလွတ်အောင် စောင့်မ သနားတော်မူပါ ဘုရား |
| Urging and misleading into sin being not All situations of evil to be free from mercifully help us O God. |
| Judson 1832 |
| အပြစ်သွေးဆောင်ရာသို့ မလိုက်စေဘဲ မကောင်းသောအမှုအရာနှင့် ကင်းလွတ်ပါမည်အကြောင်း ကယ်မသနားတော်မူပါ |
| Into situations of enticing to sin causing (us) not to follow Being free from evil situations delivers us (O Lord) |

The similarities between Percoto and Judson 1817 are seen not only in the shared vocabulary, in bold, including much of second line, but also in the overall structure of the translations. This structure could be described as,

| | | |
|-------------------------------|--------------|----------|
| Into situations of temptation | not entering | |
| From all evil situations | being free | to bring |
| it about, Lord | | |

Judson 1832 has moved from this structure to one that more closely follows the source text, i.e., a more formal translation. This formal translation shows more clearly the request for God's agency in each part of the antithesis - "(1) And do not bring us to the time of trial, (2) but rescue us from the evil one." Once again,

Judson's movement from early dependence on Percoto to his later more independent translation is shown in this verse.

Conclusion

In this article we have looked at four early translations of the Matthean Lord's Prayer into Burmese. The earliest was by Giovanni Maria Percoto, preserved in his 1776 *Compendium of Christian Doctrine*. The *Compendium* in general, and the Lord's Prayer in particular, demonstrate that much Burmese Christian terminology had been developed by the Catholic community in Burma before the arrival of Baptist missionaries in the early nineteenth century.

The second earliest extant translation of Scripture into Burmese was the Gospel of Matthew, attributed to James Chater. Chater and Felix Carey were sent to Rangoon from the British Baptist mission in Serampore, and Chater's translation stands firmly in the tradition of the Serampore Bible translations. This includes much of the translation being done by unacknowledged native speakers, the British translator having inadequate grasp of the language to be able to translate properly, and the resulting translation being poorly done and difficult to understand.³⁹ It is probably due to the "native teacher" in Serampore who translated at least the first nineteen chapters of Matthew, that Chater's translation is more independent from Percoto's than Judson's first attempt in 1817.

While Chater, in the Serampore tradition, rushed to translate, Judson was reluctant to begin, writing on March 30, 1817, "In regard to translating, I proceed with fear and trembling. I feel that I am not yet sufficiently versed in the language."⁴⁰ In order to undertake translation, Judson made use of any assistance he could find, shown in the next sentence of the letter, "indeed [I] should hardly have ventured to make the attempt at present with a view to publishing, had I not, by mere accident, discovered a copy of a translation of Matthew, on palm-leaf, by a Roman Catholic Padre. This

³⁹ See E.D. Potts, "British Baptists in India," (Cambridge, UK: CUP, 1967); 79-113, H.L. Richard, "Some Observations on William Carey's Bible Translations," *International Bulletin of Mission Research* 42, no. 3 (2018).

⁴⁰ Judson, "Letter from the Rev. Adoniram Judson, American Baptist Missionary in Burmah, to a Minister in London. Rangoon, March 30, 1817."

affords me great assistance.” The foregoing analysis of the Lord’s Prayer has demonstrated how Judson drew heavily upon Percoto’s translation at the early stage of his translation project, his 1817 Gospel of Matthew. But Judson continued to develop as a translator, and became more independent, shown by his 1832 translation.

This article has shown how Bible translation is a process. It was a process that consumed the majority of Judson’s long years of ministry in Burma. More than this, it was a process that began with the arrival in Burma of Catholic chaplains in the early sixteenth century, a process that continued with the Barnabite missionaries, and also through Carey and Chater, as Burmese Christian terminology and discourse was developed. Adoniram Judson, and Ann Judson too, continued to do this, resulting in Judson’s mammoth accomplishment of translating the whole Bible into Burmese. But Judson also expected that this process would continue after him, writing at the time he completed the Burmese Bible in 1840, “At least, I hope that I have laid a good foundation for my successors to build upon.”⁴¹ Judson’s challenge to continue the process of Bible translation remains for Myanmar biblical scholars and translators.

⁴¹ Edward Judson, *The Life of Adoniram Judson* (New York: Randolph and Company, 1883), 413. Quoted in John de Jong, "An Analysis of Adoniram Judson's Translation of Zephaniah," *The Bible Translator* 68, no. 1 (2017): 84, <https://dx.doi.org/10.1177/2051677016670234>.