

Henry Brunton

DATE OF BIRTH	About 1770
PLACE OF BIRTH	Selkirk, Scotland
DATE OF DEATH	27 March 1813
PLACE OF DEATH	Karass or Georgievsk, Russia

BIOGRAPHY

Henry Brunton was a Scottish Presbyterian missionary to West Africa and the north Caucasus, best known for his skills as a linguist. Born in Selkirk around 1770, he enrolled at Burgher Divinity Hall in that town to train for the ministry. In 1797, Brunton volunteered for missionary service, and was sent to Sierra Leone by the Edinburgh Missionary Society (EMS). On arrival in Freetown, he and a fellow Scot, Peter Greig, were assigned to work among the partly Islamised Susu on the Rio Pongas (present-day Guinee Conakry). In 1800, Brunton had to return to Britain for health reasons, accompanied by some Susu youths in pursuit of education. These young men, as well as some Susu youngsters who were already being educated in Clapham, served as Brunton's informants when, in 1801, the Church Missionary Society for Africa and the East engaged him to work on Susu texts (Hair, 'Henry Brunton', pp. 97-8; Walls, 'West African languages', p. 390). Within two years, Brunton and his team produced *A grammar and vocabulary of the Susoo language* (1802) and a series of catechisms and tracts in Susu, among the latter a tract comparing Christianity and Islam, intended for mission among Muslims (Brunton, *Grammar*, pp. xxxvi-ix).

In 1802, Brunton was re-assigned to the north Caucasus. Together with Alexander Paterson and Gillorum Harrison, one of the Susu young men who had accompanied Brunton to Scotland, he established a mission station in the town of Karass. The aim of Scottish Presbyterian work in 'Tartary' was the Christianisation of the partly Islamised Tatar population. The production and distribution of Christian texts in the vernacular was considered a crucial tool in this venture. The mission had its own printing press from 1806 onwards and was able to produce texts in both Latin and Arabic typesets. The mission enjoyed the patronage of Tsar Alexander I (r. 1801-25), whose support of Christian missions (Orthodox as well as Protestant) was part of his colonisation and pacification strategy for the Caucasus; he hoped that (re)Christianisation of the Tatar population

would appease the martial spirit of the local population and curb the influence of Islam (Haralampieva, 'Scottish missionaries', pp. 1-2).

Brunton dedicated the remainder of his life to translation work in the Caucasus. He died in or near Karass in 1813, shortly after he had completed the Tatar-Turkish translation of the New Testament (O'Flynn, *Western Christian presence*, pp. 298-315).

MAIN SOURCES OF INFORMATION

Primary

- H. Brunton, *A grammar and vocabulary of the Susoo language. To which are added, the names of some of the Susoo towns ... a small catalogue of Arabic books, and a list of the names of some of the learned men of the Mandinga and Foulah countries*, Edinburgh, 1802
- T. Smith and J.O. Choules, *The origin and history of missions. Compiled from authentic documents; forming a complete missionary repository; illustrated by numerous engravings, from original drawings made expressly for this work*, Boston MA, 1832, vol. 2, pp. 211-21
- C. Hole, *The early history of the Church Missionary Society for Africa and the East to the end of AD 1814*, London, 1896

Secondary

- T.S.R. O'Flynn, *The Western Christian presence in the Russias and Qājār Persia, c. 1760-c. 1870*, Leiden, 2017
- T. Haralampieva, 'Scottish missionaries in Karass and their role in the Russian colonization of the North Caucasus in the first quarter of the XIX century', *Almanach via Eurasia* 2 (2013) 1-22
- B. Mouser, 'Origins of Church Missionary Society accommodation to imperial policy. The Sierra Leone quagmire and the closing of the Susu mission, 1804-17', *Journal of Religion in Africa* 39 (2009) 375-402
- A.F. Walls, 'West African languages and Christian proclamation. The early years', *The Bible Translator* 55 (2004) 389-400
- H. Kirimli, 'Crimean Tatars, Nogays, and Scottish missionaries. The story of Katti Geray and other baptised descendants of the Crimean khans', *Cahiers du Monde Russe* 45 (2004) 61-108
- P.E.H. Hair, art. 'Henry Brunton', in G.H. Anderson (ed.), *Biographical dictionary of Christian missions*, Grand Rapids MI, 1998, 97-8
- P.E.H. Hair, art. 'Henry Brunton', in D.M. Lewis (ed.), *Blackwell's dictionary of Evangelical biography*, Oxford, 1995, 157
- P.E.H. Hair, 'A Scottish missionary in the Caucasus. Henry Brunton', *Bulletin of the Scottish Institute of Missionary Studies* 13 (1973) 28-30

WORKS ON CHRISTIAN-MUSLIM RELATIONS

Mawhoring fe shéni Susu dimédiék
'Sixth catechism for Susoo children'

DATE 1802

ORIGINAL LANGUAGE Susu

DESCRIPTION

In his capacity as missionary linguist, Henry Brunton produced a total of nine texts in the Susu language. The tracts were commissioned by the Church Missionary Society for Africa and the East (later CMS) and were published in 1801 and 1802 by J. Ritchie in Edinburgh. Most of them are still extant and digitally accessible. They consist of a primer, a number of catechisms meant for religious instruction loosely based on a catechism written by Zachary Macaulay when he was in Sierra Leone, a 'catechism' to expound the advantages of literacy in the vernacular, a 'catechism' to explain 'the absurdities' of Susu religious beliefs, and a 'catechism' comparing Christianity and Islam, intended as a rebuttal of some of the recurring Muslim objections to the Christian faith. This last was *Mawhoring fe shéni Susu dimédiék bè fe ra Masëha maninga fe ra nung ahha sèli fe, Mohámedu fkohera nung ahba sèli fe fokhera. Sixth catechism for the Susoo children, intended as a comparison between Christ and his religion, and Mohammed and his religion*. At times it is referred to as 'a dialogue on the comparative excellence of the Mahometan and Christian religion', at times as 'the eighth catechism' and at other times 'the sixth catechism', the last title possibly indicating that, following Brunton's own suggestions, the work may have been published together with the texts on literacy and on Susu religion in one volume.

Brunton also composed *A grammar and vocabulary of the Susoo language*, which includes a list of the most important settlements on the Rio Pongas, a list of Arabic books used by Susu Muslim scholars, and a list of names of 'learned men in the Mandinga and Fola countries, with whom a useful correspondence might be opened up in the Arabic language' (Brunton, *Grammar*, p. xxxix). According to the Preface of his grammar, Brunton consciously opted to include Arabic terms (e.g. the words for blessing, judgement, miracle, God, etc.) in his description of the Susu language and in his translations in the hope that this would engender Muslim rapport with the texts and their content.

Unfortunately, there seem to be no extant copies of Brunton's *Mawhoring fe shéni Susu dimédiék*; perhaps the manuscript can be found in the archives of the Church Missionary Society for Africa and the East. However, its overall contents can be gathered from the summary Brunton gives in his *Grammar*. He writes:

The eighth is somewhat larger than both the sixth and the seventh. It is intended to draw a comparison between the means employed by Christ and Mohammed to establish their religions in the world; their moral characters, and the evidences that they give of their being messengers of God; to answer some Mohammedan objections against the divinity of Christ, his being the Son of God, and his crucifixion in the flesh, &c. I have begun with giving an account of Mohammed's relations, his occupation, marriage, announcing himself prophet, friends, opposition, assistance, &c.; and always, after stating as many facts as I thought the mind might take a distinct view of at once, I have compared the circumstances and conduct of Christ, to the circumstances and conduct of Mohammed. The facts concerning Mohammed, which I have stated, are mainly drawn from the Koran, and Abulfedas' Annals [very probably Abū l-Fidā's *Al-mukhtaṣar fī akhbār al-bashar*, 'A short history of humankind', from which the biography of Muḥammad had been translated by Jean Gagnier into Latin and French in the 18th century], and are as such not likely to be disputed by the Mohammedans. Those concerning Christ, are drawn from the New Testament of course. Although I have not pleased myself with calling Mohammed bad names, yet I thought it might be necessary to declare, that I supposed his conduct to be wicked, even after I had stated arguments, which some may conceive to be strong enough to prove it, in order that none might think that I intended to reconcile the Bible and the Koran. What I have said concerning the progress of Mohammedanism in Africa, may point out the necessity of a catechism of this kind. (Brunton, *Grammar*, p. xxxviii)

From this, it is unquestionably clear that his intention in the catechism was to demonstrate the superiority of Christianity over Islam.

Brunton also seems to have composed an Arabic tract 'addressed to Mahometans', but there are no details about this publication (Hole, *Early history*, p. 597; O'Flynn, *Western Christian presence*, p. 258).

SIGNIFICANCE

Brunton's publications signal that, in the first decades of the 19th century, British Protestant missionary societies, such as the Edinburgh Missionary Society and the CMS, began to develop strategies for the effective evangelisation of Muslims. These strategies consisted of recruiting personnel

with expertise in Arabic and Islam, whose acquaintance with the Qur'an and other authoritative Muslim sources would command respect among Muslim religious leaders; producing Christian materials in vernaculars prevalent among Muslims (e.g. Susu) in order to evangelise Muslims in their mother tongue; and developing texts in Arabic and the vernaculars that discussed and contested Muslim beliefs and practices. Brunton's experiences in Sierra Leone, followed by his subsequent collaboration with the Church Missionary Society for Africa and the East, may have been instrumental in developing these strategies.

While there are no indications that Brunton had detailed knowledge of Islam or Arabic prior to his missionary work in Sierra Leone, his tract *Mawhoring fe shéni Susu dimédiék* suggests that by 1802 he had become conversant with the Qur'an and other authoritative Muslim sources. The CMS minutes also show that his influence with the CMS board ensured that the next generation of missionaries to Sierra Leone, among them Peter Hartwig and Melchior Renner, were trained in Arabic and Susu before they departed for the field.

While he was in West Africa, Brunton had observed the prevalence and popularity of books among Muslim leaders; he had also noticed that several of them possessed copies of the New Testament in Arabic. The awareness that Muslim religious leaders held books in high esteem and also showed an interest in Christian scripture led Brunton to the conviction that written materials could play a crucial role in the mission to Muslims. Thus, he convinced the CMS board that the production and dissemination of Christian texts and Bible passages was to be another important tool in evangelising Muslims. Aware that active knowledge of Arabic among Muslim religious leaders was at times limited, Brunton made a case for a two-tier strategy of publications in the relevant vernacular as well as in Arabic. However, because during his years in Sierra Leone he had come to realise that Muslims often had preconceived ideas about Christianity, he decided that it was not enough to give a mere explanation of Christianity by making Bible passages and Christian texts available in the vernacular. Therefore, producing materials that actively engaged and contested Muslim beliefs and practices, while using sources that were considered authoritative by Muslims, became another feature of the strategy of mission to Muslims. Brunton's *Mawhoring fe shéni Susu dimédiék* seems to have made use of Muslim texts, including the Qur'an, in this manner.

PUBLICATIONS

H. Brunton, *Mawhoring fe shéni Susu dimédiék bè fe ra Masëha maninga fe ra nung ahha sèli fe, Mohámedu fkohera nung ahba sèli fe fokhera. Sixth catechism for the Susoo children, intended as a comparison between Christ and his religion, and Mohammed and his religion*, Edinburgh, 1802

[H. Brunton], *A grammar and vocabulary of the Susoo language. To which are added, the names of some of the Susoo towns ... a small catalogue of Arabic books, and a list of the names of some of the learned men of the Mandinga and Foulah countries*, Edinburgh, 1802; 008569164 (digitised version available through Hathi Trust Digital Library)

Bir dostun Gelamy Mosslemaneh

'The word of a friend to the Mussulmans'

DATE 1806

ORIGINAL LANGUAGE Tatar-Turkish

DESCRIPTION

While he was in Karass, Brunton translated several tracts and Bible passages into Tatar-Turkish, including 'The principles of the New Testament' (1808), 'Letters in defense of St. Paul's apostleship' (1808), 'The Scottish shorter catechism' (1808), 'Saint Matthew's Gospel' (1808) and the complete New Testament (1813). According to a report dated 19 April 1808, the Karass missionaries were 'persuaded that nothing would more effectively contribute to the overthrow of Mohammedanism and the establishment of Christianity than the circulation of the word of life in a language so generally understood' (cited in O'Flynn, *Western Christian presence*, p. 299).

In 1806, Brunton produced a tract entitled *Bir dostun Gelamy Mosslemaneh*, translated as *The word of a friend to the Mussulmans* and also *An address to a Mussulman from a friend on the subject of religion*. The sources are contradictory as to whether he merely translated the booklet or authored it himself. Described as 'strongly polemical of Muhammad and the integrity of the Qur'an' (O'Flynn, *Western Christian presence*, p. 301), it seems to have included Tatar translations of some verses of the Qur'an, and was said to have caused a great stir among the Tatar Muslim community. If it was indeed authored by Brunton, it could well have been a Tatar-Turkish translation or revision of his Susu *Mawhoring fe shéni Susu*

dimédiék bè fe ra Masëha maninga fe ra nung ahha sèli fe, Mohámedu fkohera nung ahba sèli fe fokhera, which also seems to have been polemical and made use of the Qur'an.

The year 1808 saw the printing of a Tatar-Turkish tract (52 pages long) entitled *On the advice of a friend to a Mohammanadan*. Given the similarity in the titles, this was perhaps a reprint of the 1806 booklet. It is uncertain whether copies of either of the tracts are still extant and no details are available regarding their contents.

Contemporary sources also mention a polemical tract in Arabic written by Brunton, copies of which were printed in London and brought to Karass by a missionary party arriving in 1805. Perhaps this was the same Arabic tract, 'addressed to the Mahometans', that was sent to Sierra Leone. The sources also mention 'a small history of Mahomet and his companions' produced by Brunton (Lord, *A compendious history*, pp. 269, 271), but no further details are known.

SIGNIFICANCE

Bir dostun gelamy Mosslemaneh exemplifies one of the EMS strategies to convert Muslims. The tract was published in a vernacular spoken by Muslims, and engaged Muslim sources to argue the superiority of Christianity over Islam. By developing materials in both the vernacular and in Arabic, and by developing polemical materials alongside tracts that explained Christianity, Brunton and his fellow EMS missionaries aimed at engaging Muslims with the hope of converting them. While the use of Qur'anic verses in the polemical tracts was said to have caused a stir within the Muslim community, the impact of the tracts in terms of conversions seems to have been distinctly limited.

PUBLICATIONS

Henry Brunton, *Bir dostun Gelamy Mosslemaneh* (trans. as 'The word of a friend to the Mussulmans'), Karass, 1806

Henry Brunton, *On the advice of a friend to a Mohammanadan*, Karass, 1808

Henry Brunton, 'The principles of the New Testament', Karass, 1808

Henry Brunton, 'Letters in defense of St. Paul's Apostleship', 1808

Henry Brunton, 'The Scottish shorter catechism', 1808

Henry Brunton, *İncil-i Mukaddes. Yani lisan-i Türkiye tercume olunan Bizim Rabbimiz İsa Mesihin Yeni Ahd ve Vasıyeti*, Karass, 1813, 1816 (trans. of the New Testament)

Henry Brunton, and E. Henderson, *Sanctum Evangelium. Scilicet Novum Testamentum Jesu Christi*, Astrakhan, 1818, 1825

STUDIES

O'Flynn, *Western Christian presence*, pp. 258-315

Hole, *Early history of the Church Missionary Society for Africa and the East*

G. Grey et al., *The library of his excellency Sir George Grey, K.C.B. Philology*, London, 1858, pp. 245-6

E. Lord, *A compendious history of the principal Protestant missions to the heathen*, Boston MA, 1813, vol. 2, pp. 247-322

J.C. Adelung, *Mithridates oder allgemeine Sprachkunde, mit dem Vater-Unser als Sprachprobe in beynahe fünfhundert Sprachen und Mundarten*, vol. 3, Berlin, 1812, pp. 171-9

Martha T. Frederiks