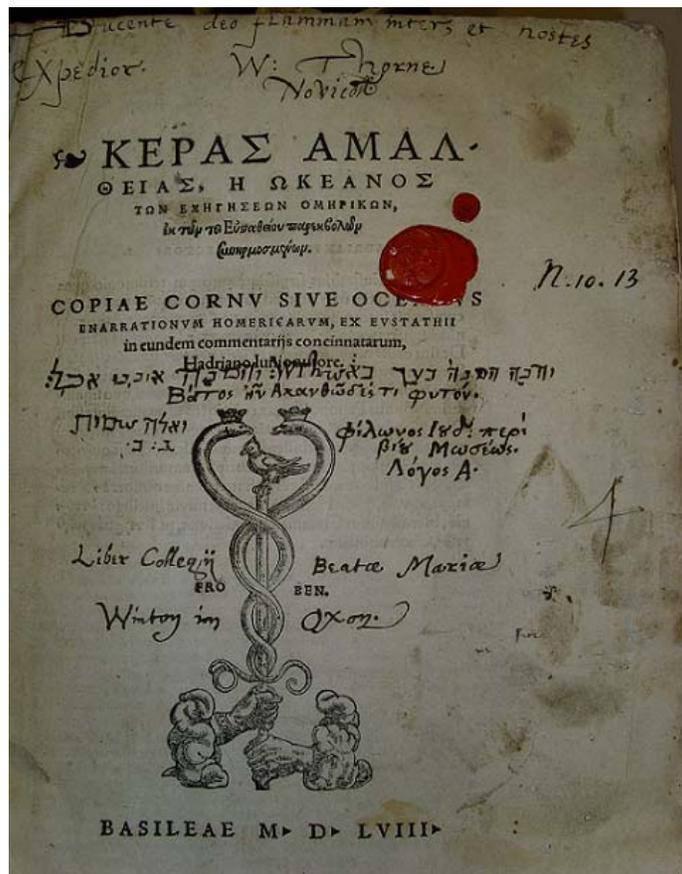


Deciphering the Title-Page of a Book of William Thorne of New College,  
Regius Professor of Hebrew, and King James Bible Translator



New College, BT1.60.4: Hadrianus Junius (compiled from Eustathius), *Keras amaltheias, ē Okeanos tōn exēgēseōn Homerikōn ek tōn tou Eustatheiou parekbolōn synērmosmenōn* (Basel, 1558).

One of New College's several contributors to the King James Bible translation was William Thorne, the Regius Professor of Hebrew and a fellow of the college.<sup>1</sup> Thorne, it seems, was at some point a member of the First Oxford Company of translators (Isaiah to Malachi), at least on the testimony of a document of 1605 or 1606 signed in person by fifteen bishops recommending him for promotion on those grounds; although he [is] not named in the contemporary Bancroft lists[,] it is hard to gainsay such testimony.<sup>2</sup> Thorne was the Regius Professor of Hebrew from 1598-1604, and appears to have been well-respected: the great Franeker orientalist Johannes Drusius (1550-1616) dedicated books to him in 1608 and again in 1609,<sup>3</sup> and Drusius's son was sent to the first librarian of the Bodleian and also a fellow of

<sup>1</sup> Matthew DeCoursey, 'William Thorne', in *Dictionary of Literary Biography*, vol. 281, pp. 326-33.

<sup>2</sup> A facsimile of the letter, from the State Papers, is printed in DeCoursey, 'Thorne', p. 331: 'now ... very necessarily employd in the Translation of that part of the olde Testament, which is committed to that Vniversitie [Oxford]'.

<sup>3</sup> Drusius, *Opuscula quae ad grammaticam spectant* (Franeker, in four parts, parts one and two continuously signature and paginated, dated 1609, part three dated 1608 with a separate epistle to Thorne, part 4 dated 1609 and dedicated to the jurist Hugo Donnell). In the Bodleian copy at 4° D 32 Art.Seld. there is also one quarto gathering of Drusius Junior's Hebrew elegy on the death of Scaliger, dated 1609 and from the same

New College, Thomas James, by Thomas Bodley himself in June of 1605, and lodged with Thorne. Indeed, Drusius the Younger died of the stone in Thorne's lodgings when not yet 21. He composed two letters in Hebrew to Thorne, which have been preserved and published.<sup>4</sup> Thorne certainly made more of an impression in Oxford than John Harding, who held the Hebrew chair both immediately before and immediately after him, but who left little trace of intellectual activity, despite the statutory necessity of inviting him to join the number of King James translators.<sup>5</sup> The antiquary Anthony Wood called Thorne 'a most noted linguist and rabby of his time', and the Oxford epigrammatist Charles Fitzgeffry in his 1601 *Epigrammatum libri tres* addressed three elegiac couplets to him, in which Thorne is said specifically to *speak* Hebrew like the angelic chorus, surely a reference to actual lecturing – and to Fitzgeffry's implied presence at those lectures. Thorne's Hebrew was also appealed to by the godly Thomas Pye in his controversial Latin pamphlet on divorce of 1603, in which Pye recalls Thorne defending at the comitia the orthodox thesis that only the Hebrew text of the Old Testament is authentic; to be fair he was one of at least four so to do.<sup>6</sup> Thorne's quirky logico-rhetorical textbook of 1592 *Ducente Deo* bears a slightly odd title, but this allusion to Virgil appears to have been his own personal motto. We know this because the book he donated to New College upon his departure – the usual custom – bears on its title-page Thorne's signature and motto in fuller form 'Ducente deo flammam inter, et hostes / expedior. W: Thorne. Novicoll.'<sup>7</sup> Thorne then adds Hebrew and Greek texts to the title-page of his chosen gift. The Greek quotation, as Thorne references, although affixed to the title-page of a collection of Byzantine scholia on Homer, is actually of Jewish origin, from Philo's *Life of Moses*, taken from his exegesis of the burning bush. Moreover, it is a pun on Thorne's name: 'there was a bush, a thorny plant', where *batos* is a prickly bush or briar, and *akanthodes* is literally 'full of thorns' hence 'thorny'.<sup>8</sup> In the *Life of Moses*, Philo then goes on to say that the burning bush was a symbol of the oppressed people, and that its not being consumed further symbolised that the oppressed would ultimately prevail against their

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press as the parts of the *Opuscula*. Although the Bodleian has catalogued these publications separately, treating each freshly signed text block as an integral publication, Drusius's contents page and epistle to Thorne in the first opusculum demonstrate that he considered this to be one four-part collection, as a whole dedicated to Thorne. The poem of Drusius Jr should be seen as a bibliographic interpolation. Hence Drusius dedicated one of his *Opuscula*, being his *De literis mosche vechaleb* to Thorne, which was printed by Radaeus in 1608, and then rededicated the whole set of four to Thorne in 1609. The college copy arrived among Warden Pinke's bequest (Benefactors Book, p. 110).

<sup>4</sup> *History of the University of Oxford [HUO]*, vol. 4, p. 454; L. Fuks, 'Het Hebreeuwse brievenboek van Johannes Drusius jr. Hebreuws en Hebraïsten in Nederland rondom 1600', *Studia Rosenthaliana* 3 (1969), pp. 1-52, at pp. 5-7, 10, and letters IX, X.

<sup>5</sup> Feingold comments that Harding was 'conspicuously absent from among contributors of [Hebrew] verses' (*HUO*, vol. 4, p. 454). Thorne, by contrast, edited a collection of verse, for presentation to the Chancellor, now MS Sloane 3728, compiled c. 1592.

<sup>6</sup> Wood, *Athenae Oxonienses*, ed. Bliss, vol. 2, col. 480; Charles Fitzgeffry, *Affaniae, sive epigrammatum libri tres* (Oxford, 1601), sg. H3r; Thomas Pye, *Epistola ad ... Johannem Housium* (London, 1603), p. 41. Pye puns on Thorne's name too: 'acute & spinose disputavit' (DeCoursey, 'Thorne', p. 332). I suspect that the 'William Thomas' who is reported to have debated in 1602 the three theses that the Hebrew text of the OT is authentic; that there are no apocryphal books in the Greek NT; and that both testaments contain everything necessary to salvation is a mistranscription for Thorne himself (*Register of the University of Oxford*, Part II, ed. Andrew Clark, vol. 1 (Oxford, 1887), p. 202). Compare Giles Robinson in 1599, who affirmed that the Vulgate must be corrected by the Hebrew of the Old Testament and the Hebrew of the New (*Register*, II, vol. 1, p. 201). See further *HUO*, vol. 3, p. 318.

<sup>7</sup> BB, p. 44, for 1602, being a copy of Hadrianus Junius's selection from Eustathius's commentaries on Homer; the motto is a quotation from *Aeneid*, 2.632-33.

<sup>8</sup> Philo, *Peri biou Moseos*, 1.65, the text on Moses coming across the Burning Bush ('There was a bush, a thorny plant'); Thorne omits the end of the clause '... kai asthenestaton'.

enemies. This quotation, therefore, works in subtle counterpoint with Thorne's rather exilic Virgilian motto, 'with God as my guide amidst fire and enemies I make my way.' The Hebrew ties in exactly too: on the left of the caduceus we see the two opening words of Exodus itself – the conventional Hebrew way of referring to the book – and the chapter-verse reference *gimel: beth*, i.e. 3:2, of which verse the second half is indeed quoted by Thorne, 'and behold the bush burned with fire, and the bush was not consumed'. The three allusions in three languages are therefore all tied together by Thorne into an elegant knot. For all this, however, Thorne's Hebrew script is a little scrappy: his overshort *waws* look like *yods*, his *nuns* and *beths* are barely differentiated, and although they are not positionally confusable, his two *samekhs* are drawn like final-*mems*. But perhaps Thorne made these inscriptions as a neophyte, long before he deposited this book in his college library.

Additionally, Thorne was said to have some Arabic, as he is named by the Arabist William Bedwell in two related manuscript prefaces as among those with an interest in the language, although we have no independent evidence of his competence.<sup>9</sup> His one published sermon also appeals to the Syriac New Testament, as well as to modern French, Italian, and Spanish translations.<sup>10</sup> What work Thorne actually did for the KJB is unknown, but that he was said by the fifteen bishops to be at work on the translation after he had been succeeded by Harding suggests that it was quickly realised that the former regius professor had been far from supplanted by second-time-around Harding.

One final piece of bibliography throws some new light on Thorne as an orientalist, arising from a letter from Bodley to Bodley's first librarian, Thomas James. James appears never to have acquired more than basic Hebrew.<sup>11</sup> The Greek scribe Peter Goldman, of Dundee, thought him a raging antisemite fit only for making catalogues, and one may suspect that Bodley in darker moments concurred.<sup>12</sup> Yet James handled Hebrew books, and it is thanks to his regular correspondence with Bodley that we know that Thorne in 1601 offered Thomas Bodley a 'psalter' for his new library; as Bodley reported to James, 'if it be that of Nebiensis, with fiue languages, besides two translations in latin, I haue it already printed at Geneua 1516: albeit it is like, that his in velam will be the fairer.'<sup>13</sup> Now this book is surely the fine volume now at Bodleian Auct. M 4.3,<sup>14</sup> as unlike other Oxford copies it is indeed printed on vellum. This magnificent book 'Impressit miro ingenio, Petrus Paulus Porrus', is the Octapulus of Augustinus Justinianus, with the text of the Psalms in eight columns, being the Hebrew text, a Latin translation, the Vulgate text, the Septuagint, the Arabic, the Chaldee (i.e. Aramaic) paraphrase, a Latin translation of that, and a final column of scholia, in other words really a five-language psalter, as Bodley says, with Latin glosses for the Hebrew and the Aramaic. It must have been among the Regius Professor's most valuable books, even if faintly coffee-tableish by this date. It was the second book to be printed with movable Arabic type, and was also one of the earliest books containing Arabic acquired for the Bodleian.<sup>15</sup>

<sup>9</sup> Gerald Toomer, *Eastern Wisdom and Learning* (Oxford, 1996), p. 54; Alastair Hamilton, *William Bedwell the Arabist 1563-1632* (Leiden, 1985), pp. 110, 116.

<sup>10</sup> William Thorne, *Esoptron Basilikon* (London, 1603), pp. 3-4, 16-17; DeCoursey, 'Thorne', p. 329.

<sup>11</sup> Although he did inherit a Hebrew bible from John Rainolds: *Manifold Greatness*, p. 99, evidence from MS Wood D 10, Rainolds's itemised register for the dispersal of his library.

<sup>12</sup> The obscure but intriguing Goldman(n), a graduate of St Andrews and Leiden, was also a Neo-Latin poet, earning inclusion [in] the famous *Delitiae poetarum Scotorum* collection. He also corresponded with Thomas James and with Patrick Young, and several of his transcripts of patristic texts are extant.

<sup>13</sup> *Letters of Sir Thomas Bodley to Thomas James*, ed. G. H. Wheeler (Oxford, 1926), p. 7, letter of 12 June 1601.

<sup>14</sup> A volume previous[ly] in three different places in P Th, there because it is a 'Psalterium'.

<sup>15</sup> Toomer, *Eastern Wisdom*, pp. 20, 94. New College owns two copies of this Psalter, BT 1.48.2, of Carmelite provenance, and BT 1.48.1, with printed waste with the running headings 'Sealed', and 'Delivered', possibly from the same binding as the waste in the Basel Hebrew/Latin bible of Sebastian Münster at BT 1.85.13, 14. This waste must be from John Thornborough's *Last Will and Testament of Jesus*

William Poole (Fellow Librarian, New College)

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*Christ*, published at Oxford in 1630, and so these books were acquired after then, and roughly at the same time. 1630 also saw Christopher Love donate a 'Novum Testamentum Syriacolatina interlinearem cum texto Graeco' (Benefactors Book, p. 78), but if these two previous items entered as part of a specific donation, I have not identified it.