

**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, e Ἐκείανος τὸν Ἐξεγέσων Ἑομηρικὸν ἔκ τὸν Ἐου Eustatheiou παρεβολὸν Ἐσυνερῶσμενον* (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-

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y(theodlyh)-5.3(Tho)-10.6(m)12.1aesPyh in hi 1 1.1se cn toversia lanpa(m)12.1(  
re(calsd)-5.3(Thorl)65.1(e)6.9(defr)-8.3(e)-3.8nr din hatatc cyme rh

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

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 Syriacolatinum interlinearem cum