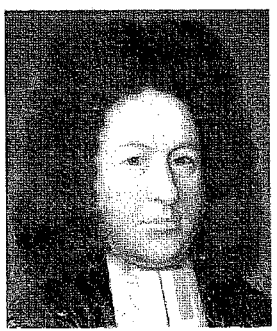


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(RÜDIGER SCHMITT)

**HYDE**, THOMAS, D.D., English orientalist, Professor of Arabic and Hebrew in the University of Oxford, who was the first scholar to attempt to write a comprehensive description of the religion of Zoroaster (1636-1703). His works are well known, but there is no full, modern biographical study, in the absence of which see the entry in P. Bayle's *General Dictionary* (VI, pp. 341-47), most of which is an English synopsis (fn. D, pp. 342-47) of Hyde's major work described below; see also E. J. Rapson's article in the *Dictionary of National Biography* (London, 1885-1912; repr., 1921-22, X, pp. 401-2).



Detail, portrait of Thomas Hyde. Poole portrait number 183, Bodleian Library, University of Oxford.

Hyde was born in Billingsley, Shropshire, son of a learned clergyman, Ralph Hyde, who began Thomas's education in Oriental languages. The boy entered King's College, Cambridge, in his sixteenth year and studied Oriental languages under the Anglo-Saxon, Arabic, and Hebrew scholar, Abraham Wheelock; after one year he became, with Wheelock, a collaborator of Brian Walton in London in preparation of the Polyglott Bible (published in 1657); he corrected Persian, Arabic, and Syriac texts and in particular transcribed the Persian translation of the Pentateuch (this had previously been published only in Hebrew characters at Constantinople). He was appointed Hebrew Reader at The Queen's College, Oxford in 1658, was admitted to the degree of M.A., and was appointed under-keeper of the Bodleian Library; he subsequently became Librarian-in-chief in 1665, a post which he held until he resigned in 1701. Hyde was called to the religious life, to a prebend at Salisbury in 1666 and to the archdeaconry of Gloucester in 1673. He was Laudian Professor of Arabic 1691-1703, succeeding Edward Pococke; and, like Pococke, he became Regius Professor of Hebrew and held the two positions concurrently from 1697 until his death. He was interpreter and secretary in

Oriental languages to the courts of Charles II, James II, and William III.

Since the founding of the Regius chair in Hebrew in 1546 by Henry VIII, Hebrew had come to be regarded as a branch of theology: the holding of both the Hebrew and Arabic chairs by one man, as did Thomas Hunt also for much of the 18th century, gave a Biblical slant to Oxford Arabic studies and is thought to have deflected the interests of orientalists away from Hebrew and Arabic and other Oriental languages. Hyde was not only a brilliant orientalist, who had a deep admiration for what he understood to be the ancient religion of Zoroaster, but also a pious apologist of Christianity. Both aspects of Hyde, as scholar and divine, are reflected in his major work *Historia religionis veterum Persarum eorumque magorum* (Oxford, 1700), also known in its second edition of 1760 as *Veterum Persarum et Parthorum et Medorum religionis historia*. (Both are also referred to as *De vetere religione Persarum*.) Hyde was famed throughout Europe as the greatest orientalist of his day. His influence on contemporary thinking about Iranian religions lasted for most of the 18th century. Hyde's account of Zoroaster's religion was the principal source for Voltaire's article "Zoroastre" in the *Dictionnaire Philosophique* of 1764.

Hyde's work, more than a synthesis and summary of existing ideas about Zoroaster, is a work of scholarly (and, it must be conceded, some religious) enthusiasm. As is always pointed out in modern references to Hyde's work, he did not have access to manuscripts of the Avesta, nor did he study the Pahlavi commentaries (*zand*). Moreover, he believed Zoroaster had prophesied about Christ and borrowed from Ezra and other Jewish prophets; unlike many previous treatments of non-European religions and cultures, however, Hyde's work showed the Persians in a most favorable light, even going so far as to pay them the ultimate compliment in admitting Zoroaster to the circle of recipients of divine revelation in the line of Abraham. Hyde admitted that only God himself must know why the "Persians" were granted such a favor. Zoroaster was a reformer and lawgiver of true monotheism, who was not ignorant of the Old Testament, but who handed on the religion of Abraham. Apart from the Jews, the Persians are said to be alone among the nations to have true faith in God. Though corrupted by the Sabean pagans and worshippers of fire, they were always devoted worshippers of God, however much they suffered false accusations from Muslims and others. The classical Greek and Latin historians, being idolators themselves, misinterpreted Zoroaster's religion. Herodotus was only describing the "Sabeans," i.e., pre-Zoroastrian pagans. Plutarch was referring to the Manichean and Mazdakite heretics.

Hyde was not always so generous to his subjects. In his preface to Albertus Bobovius's description of Islamic practice (*The Turkish Liturgy*, pp. 106 f.), he suggests that it is reasonable to regard the author's account as true, because it "discovers their Folly so freely, and gives us Christians Occasion to laugh at their *Mysterys* . . .

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Hyde, Thomas (6083165)

'More than ordinary labour': Thomas Hyde

(1636-1703) and the translation of Turkish documents

under the later Stuarts<sup>1</sup>

COLIN HEYWOOD

When you have any more letters in the Divan Hand,  
let me have them as soon as they come to you,  
so that I may have sufficient time to unriddle them:  
they requiring more than ordinary labour

Thomas Hyde to Dr Owen Wynne

Oxford, 16 December 1682<sup>2</sup>

#### Abstract

*The present short study examines the problems encountered in the translation in England of Ottoman documents addressed from the Porte or from the North African Regencies to the English Crown in the latter part of the seventeenth century. In particular it studies in some detail the translations undertaken, and the problems faced by, the polymath scholar Thomas Hyde (1636-1702/3), Librarian of the Bodleian Library in the University of Oxford and translator of Oriental documents to the Crown, but reference is also made to translations undertaken by William Seaman (1606/7-1680) and his son, and by the Rev. William Hayley (c.1657-1715).*

#### I

This paper, in various versions but stubbornly refusing to allow itself to be published, has been around for a long time—for almost as long, in fact, as I have known the distinguished recipient of the present Festschrift. Nonetheless, unlike old wine, it may merit decanting into new bottles. Its starting point is that the utilisation of other languages implies communication, which is something of which David Morgan, in his examination of the polylinguistic cultural

<sup>1</sup>Earlier versions of this paper were delivered at a Symposium on the theme of "Diplomats and Scholars", held at SOAS on 26 November 1982, to celebrate the 400<sup>th</sup> anniversary of the first British embassy to Turkey; in the Near Eastern Seminar at Leiden University on 14 April 1983; and at a Colloquium on "İstanbul et les langues orientales", held at the Institut Français des Études Anatoliennes, Istanbul, 29-31 May 1995.

<sup>2</sup>Great Britain. The National Archives (henceforth: TNA), Public Record Office (Kew/London; henceforth: PRO), State Papers (henceforth: SP) 71/25, f. 37.

16996 HEYWOOD, Colin. "More than ordinary labour":  
Thomas Hyde (1636-1703) and the translation of  
Turkish documents under the later Stuarts. *Journal  
of the Royal Asiatic Society*, 26 i-ii (2016)  
pp. 309-320. "Examines the problems encountered  
in the translation in England of Ottoman documents  
addressed from the Porte or from the North African  
Regencies to the English Crown in the latter part of  
the seventeenth century."

Hyde Thomas  
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