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HYDE, THOMAS

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).

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* . . . And indeed a view of their Nonsense and Folly (as likewise that of the Papists) may be a Means of confirming all others more strongly in the *true Religion*."

Hyde was attacked by, among others, l'Abbé Foucher for contradicting the testimony of the classical writers. He was, as a Christian scholar of his day, inclined to be an apologist of Christianity; and this distorts aspects of the work to modern eyes, but his approach is remarkably sympathetic. He is unambiguous on the nature of Zoroastrian theology when he states that the ancient Persians posited the existence of a unique, *eternal* principle of Good, which they called God and Ohrmuzd, and a *created* principle of evil, called Ahâriman (2nd ed., pp. 159 f.). Hyde likens Ahâriman to names given to the principle of evil in other cultures (Satan, Iblis, and others). This latter principle is to be distinguished from that of dualists (Hyde coined the term in Latin) such as the Manicheans, who affirm the coeternity of the devil with God. Hyde explained (ibid., pp. 162-67) that the ancient Persians believed that God created the world in six times (*gāhān*). He took pains to write the names of the divinities (*angelorum*) and the devil (*diaboli*) in Pazand characters, with transcription. He was careful to distinguish the beliefs of heretics (Manicheans and Mazdakites) from Zoroastrian orthodoxy. There are chapters on the life and works of Zoroaster, the priesthood and its hierarchy, the veneration of fire and the reason for its care.

Although the book refers to a wide range of sources (Arabic, Greek, Hebrew, Latin, Persian, Syriac, etc.), the central discussion of the 35 chapters of *De vetere religione Persarum* is based on a single Persian, Zoroastrian source, the so-called *Sad-Der* (properly *Sad dar*) "Hundred chapters," a miscellaneous collection of Zoroastrian lore and customs, derived originally from the Pahlavi books, which was in popular use by the contemporary Parsis of India. Hyde appended a prose Latin translation in full of a metrical (*nazm*) version of the *Sad dar*, and elsewhere he enthusiastically quotes it so as to let the religion speak for itself (e.g., in his summary of the religion in chap. 33, pp. 404 ff.) As we now know, this does not in fact adequately reflect the doctrines and

character of Zoroaster's *Gāthā*s in Avestan. Hyde also includes the introduction and conclusion of the *Sad dar* in Persian, which states the text was written by Irānšāh (or Mardšāh) son of Malekšāh of Kermān, dated 6 Esfandārmaz 864. After the *Sad dar* there is an appendix of further discussions of certain topics and sources in his work. Among the Western travelers whose accounts Hyde used are Herbert, Mandelslo, Sanson, Thevenot, Daulier-Deslandes, Ovington, Lord, and Tavernier, but there is no mention of Jean Chardin (q.v.).

Nowadays the work is generally thought to be of historical interest insofar as it provides insight into late 17th-century attitudes towards religion more than as a work on the subject addressed in the title. For the modern reader the medium of Latin in the discussions and translations sets a mood of archaism and gives an impression of overly Christian interpretation; but this is misleading, as Hyde's translations and opinions are in many cases more objective and historically accurate than he has been given credit for. Hyde's linguistic command of the Oriental and Occidental sources he had to hand was expert, and the value of the book need not be diminished by our position of hindsight. Hyde admits early in the work that Zoroastrian scriptures remain like *Thesauri obsignati* "sealed treasures" which the eyes of scholars have not yet investigated; and he urges European scholars to strive to acquire manuscripts of the scriptures so that they can be known in their own words. Anquetil Duperron, who brought the first Avesta from India to Paris in 1762, was himself inspired by Hyde's exhortation. In sum, though he may be considered a forerunner rather than a founder of modern scholarship, Hyde was indirectly responsible for later developments in the study of Iranian religions, both by the example and standards of scholarship he set and by his urging scholars to reach out beyond Europe.

Other works of Hyde's include a catalogue of printed books of the Bodleian Library (*Catalogus impressorum librorum bibliothecae bodleianae, in academia oxoniensi*, Oxford, 1674) which was in use up to 1738, and many editions and Latin translations of Persian, Hebrew, Arabic, and Malay texts. Thirty-one of his works are listed in the article in Bayle's *General Dictionary*.

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