

Thomas Neale
‘Hebraismi Typus’ (1566)
(edited by Sarah Knight)

Thomas Neale (c. 1519-c.1590) was one of the most important scholars of rabbinical and biblical Hebrew in Tudor England. Born in Gloucestershire, he was educated at Winchester and became a fellow of New College, Oxford in 1540. A staunch Catholic, he spent time in Paris during the reign of the Protestant Edward VI, and returned to Oxford during the reign of Mary. Elizabeth acceded to the throne in 1558, and a year later Neale was made regius professor of Hebrew. He appears not to have renounced his Catholic faith, but remained in post until 1569. Neale was eager to consolidate the study of Hebrew at Oxford, as this poem attests: touching on such subjects as patronage, Neale’s poem argues for the monarch’s continuing commitment to funding Hebrew tuition.

Neale was very involved in Elizabeth’s visit to the University of Oxford in 1566, part of that summer’s royal ‘progress’, the journey on which Elizabeth and her court travelled around the kingdom, staying at various locations like the stately homes of important courtiers and the universities. Neale wrote two texts that were presented to the Queen on her visit: the first was the *Topographica Delineatio* [‘Topographical Delineation’] of the colleges and public buildings of Oxford, which is both an imaginary dialogue between the fictionalised Queen and her then favourite, Robert Dudley, Earl of Leicester, and a travel narrative describing the Queen and Leicester strolling around the university, from which this dedicatory poem is taken. The second text was Neale’s translation of the medieval scholar Rabbi David Kimhi’s commentaries on the prophets Haggai, Zachariah and Malachi: the manuscript presented to Elizabeth is now held in the British Library (BL MS. Royal 2 D. xxi),

and the translation had also had been published at Paris in 1557, dedicated to the Catholic statesman Cardinal Reginald Pole.

This poem is taken from MS Bodley 13 pt. 1, an illustrated manuscript presented to Queen Elizabeth I (1533-1603, r. 1558-1603) on her visit to the University of Oxford in 1566. The manuscript is held in the Bodleian Library, Oxford. The title of the work in which this poem appears is *Collegiorum Scholarumque Publicarum Academiæ Oxoniensis Topographica Delineatio* ('A topographical delineation of the Colleges and Public Schools of the University of Oxford'). The manuscript visually resembles an emblem book in its configurations of image + motto: each illustration of a college or university building is accompanied by a short piece of Latin text. The drawings were made by John Bereblock, a Fellow of Exeter College who also wrote an account of Elizabeth's 1566 visit.

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'Hebraismi Typus'

Aspicias, ut uiget hæc fixis radicibus arbor?

Hæc illâc patulis frondibus aucta suis?

Arbor hebraismi typus est, quæ frondibus auctam

Se gaudet nummis, Elisabetha, tuis.

Plantauit Deus hanc primus sator in Paradiso.

5

Verbaque mortales iussit hebræa loqui.
Transtulit hûc olim Pater hanc tuus inclytus eius
Tu pia radices, Elizabetha, rigas.
Par ergô tibi fructus hos proferat arbor,
Sumptibus, (ô Princeps maxima) culta suis.

10

The Image of Hebrew Learning

Do you see how this tree flourishes when its roots are secure?
How it is enriched by its leaves spreading here and there?
The tree is an image of Hebrew learning, which rejoices to have had its leaves
enriched
By your financial generosity, Elizabeth.
God as sower first planted this tree in Paradise.
He ordered mortals to speak Hebrew words.
Once upon a time your distinguished father brought this here,
You, devout Elizabeth, water the roots.
And so the tree brings forth this fruit appropriate to you,
Cultivated (O greatest of Princes) by what you have spent.

Line 1 *Aspicis*: the poem directly addresses Elizabeth I in the second-person, since the manuscript in which it was included was intended for presentation to the Queen.

Line 2 *Hâc illâc*: in sixteenth-century Latin, diacritics above vowels are often used, typically as here, to denote the ablative case. Just as the orthography of English words had not yet become ‘fixed’ by the 1560s, so the presentation of Latin words can vary

greatly, especially in manuscript form, and can also denote emphasis or stress. See also *hūc* in line 7 and *ergō* in line 9.

arbor: in the manuscript (fol. ii^v), the poem is accompanied by a pen drawing of a tree.

Line 4 *nummis* [...] *tuis*: here, Neale appeals to Elizabeth's financial generosity in sponsoring Hebrew tuition, implicitly suggesting that this should continue.

Line 5 *Deus* [...] *sator in Paradiso*: probably a reference to *Genesis* 1:11-12: 'Then God said, Let the earth bud forth the bud of the herb, that seedeth seed, the fruitful tree, which beareth fruit according to his kind, which hath his seed in itself upon the earth; and it was so.' (*Geneva Bible*).

Line 6 *Verbaque* [...] *hebræa*: Neale here interprets *Genesis* 11:1 – 'Then the whole earth was of one language and one speech' – as meaning that Hebrew was the original God-given language. Some biblical exegetical traditions such as Midrash (rabbinical commentary based on non-literal interpretation) have posited that Adam and Eve spoke Hebrew, basing the argument on linguistic analysis, but not all medieval and early modern thinkers agreed, arguing instead for an original 'Adamic' language that pre-dates Hebrew.

Line 7 *Pater* [...] *tuus inclytus*: Henry VIII (1491-1547, *r.* 1509-1547). Henry founded the Regius Professorship in Hebrew at Oxford in 1546.