

## Ruin and Utopia

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The author examines *Utopia* in the light of antiquarian exchanges between More and Jerome Busleyden. More visited Busleyden at his home in Mechlin during the weeks when enforced leisure allowed him to write *Utopia*. More praised Busleyden's collection of ancient Roman coins in an epigram, and he celebrated the antiquities of the house in a letter to Erasmus. Busleyden in turn alludes to his and More's shared antiquarian interests in his prefatory letter to *Utopia*. The two humanists' ruminations on the ruins of past empires highlight the paradox of Utopia being an antiquity without ruins, and they provide an oblique commentary on the imperial aspirations of sixteenth-century monarchs.

**Key-words: antiquarianism, Rome, Busleyden, coins, militarism.**

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L'auteur examine l'*Utopie* à la lumière des échanges entre More et Jérôme Busleyden sur l'Antiquité. More visita Busleyden dans sa maison de Malines au cours des semaines de loisir forcé qui lui permirent de composer l'*Utopie*. Il loua dans un poème la collection de monnaies romaines que contenait cette demeure, dont il célébra les antiquités dans une lettre à Érasme. Busleyden à son tour, dans sa lettre-préface à l'*Utopie*, fait allusion aux intérêts d'antiquaire qu'il partage avec More. Les ruminations des deux humanistes sur les ruines des empires passés éclairent le paradoxe d'une Utopie qui est une antiquité sans ruines; elles constituent un commentaire indirect sur les aspirations impériales des monarques du 16<sup>e</sup> siècle.

**Mots-clés:** antiquité, Rome, Busleyden, numismatique, militarisme.

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El autor va examinando la *Utopía* a la luz de los intercambios entre Tomás Moro y Jerónimo Busleyden sobre la antigüedad. No dejó Moro de visitar a Busleyden en su casa de Malinas durante las semanas de ocio forzado que le permitieron componer la *Utopía*. En un poema celebró la colección de monedas romanas que tenía conservada don Jerónimo, y de manera equivalente se expresó en una carta a Erasmo. En su prefacio a la *Utopía*, Busleyden a su vez aludió a los intereses de anticuario que comparte con T. Moro. Las "rumias" de los dos humanistas sobre las ruinas de los imperios pasados aclaran la paradoja de una Utopía que es una antigüedad sin ruinas. Constituyen un comentario indirecto sobre las aspiraciones imperiales de los monarcas del siglo XVI.

**Palabras clave:** antigüedad, Roma, Busleyden, monedas, militarismo.

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"Behold, Caesar, to whom you have succeeded." Thus in 1354 Petrarch admonished the Holy Roman Emperor, Charles IV, upon presenting him with a group of ancient Roman coins. These coins all featured effigies of Roman emperors, including one of Augustus Caesar that seemed still "breathing" [*spirans*], and they were meant to inspire Charles to mold himself in their image.<sup>1</sup> What such

<sup>1</sup> For the letter in which Petrarch describes his encounter with the emperor, see Petrarch *Le Familiari*, ed. Vittorio Rossi, Vol. 3 (Florence: Casa Editrice, 1997), 311-318. See also Ernest Hatch Wilkins, *Petrarch's Eight Years in Milan* (Cambridge, MA: Medieval Academy of America, 1958), 88 and 97-99, and Richard Koebner, *Empire* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1961), 40-41.

imitation meant to Petrarch becomes clear from his reaction to the subsequent decision of Charles to return north and, as Petrarch saw it, abandon Italy after being crowned its Caesar in Rome.<sup>2</sup> In a bitter letter of 1355, Petrarch castigated Charles for choosing to be "*Boemiae rex*", rather than "*imperator Romanorum*" in anything more than name.<sup>3</sup> But Charles did not recross the Alps without paying back Petrarch in kind for his earlier gifts. For in his letter to the "king of Bohemia", Petrarch acknowledges the receipt of a very ancient Roman coin [*Caesarea effigies pervetusti operis*], though he deplores its inability to prevent Charles' glorious retreat. If only the coin had been able to talk, or Charles to contemplate it, it would have convinced Charles to remain in Italy and assume the responsibilities of rule. Alas, the emperor may have intended this gesture of giving away Caesar's effigy to be more eloquent than Petrarch was willing to admit.

This exchange between humanist coin-collector and monarch demonstrates how Renaissance antiquarians could invest the remains of antiquity with contemporary significance, and here I want to argue that two Northern humanists, Thomas More and Jerome Busleyden, show a similar tendency to conflate past and present in their shared enthusiasm for Roman coins. "Nummomania", as John Cunnally has recently dubbed it, was widespread in the Renaissance, and it included among its devotees monarchs, Church prelates and nobles, as well as humanists such as More.<sup>4</sup> Yet, as Petrarch's encounter with Charles IV shows, humanists and rulers did not necessarily draw the same conclusions from ancient coins. For More and Busleyden, whose

<sup>2</sup> Wilkins points out (43) that Charles had been elected emperor in 1346, but had yet to be crowned. As far as betokening any intention on the part of Charles to exercise real authority in Italy, the coronation ceremony was a sham. See Koebner, 40-41.

<sup>3</sup> See *Le Familiari*, Vol. 3, 336-337.

<sup>4</sup> On More and Busleyden, see John Cunnally, *Images of the Illustrious: The Numismatic Presence in the Renaissance* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1999), 25. See also 34-39 and *passim* for more on Renaissance coin collecting in general. See also Roberto Weiss, *The Renaissance Discovery of Classical Antiquity* (Oxford: Basil Blackwell, 1969), 37-38 and 167-180.

friendship developed at a time when the Holy Roman Emperor – as well as other monarchs with imperial pretensions – were hardly reluctant to expand their rule into Italy and elsewhere, these conclusions often took the form of reflections about the vulnerability of empire.<sup>5</sup> Such ruminations on ruin, in turn, provide an important frame for understanding *Utopia*.

## I

In a letter written from his house in Mechlin and published in the 1516 *Utopia*, Busleyden placed Utopia in a flattering historical context.<sup>6</sup> Lamenting the destruction of Athens, Sparta, and Rome, he declared that they would still exist had they been modelled on Utopia. Instead, however, destructive passions, dissension, and "wars worse than civil" (CW4, 37/4) have eradicated these city-states and rendered precarious the continued memory of their triumphs and accomplishments. Some once proud, conquering cities have even vanished without trace: "Hardly are their names properly recorded by any history, however old and far-reaching" [*quantumvis vetus & longe deducta historia*] (CW4, 36 & 37/14-15). So too the spoils and trophies of their military victories are no more [*obliterantur*] (CW4, 36/8). Those formerly imperial cities of which some memory does remain survive to posterity only in the form of "*reliquiae, aut vestigia*," translated by the editors of the Yale *Utopia* as "remains or ruins" (CW4, 36 & 37/14-15).<sup>7</sup>

<sup>5</sup> See *Utopia* (CW4, 88-90) Raphael's account of hypothetical deliberations among the members of the French Council about the carving up of Italy by various foreign powers, including the Emperor Maximilian.

<sup>6</sup> For more on the Busleyden-More letter, see Dale Billingsley, "Halfhearted Busleyden," *Moreana* 122/49-57, Walter O'Grady, "A Note on Busleyden's Letter to Thomas More," *Moreana* 11/33-38, and Karl Schroeder, "Jerome de Busleyden and Thomas More," *Moreana* 121/3-11.

<sup>7</sup> Throughout his letter Busleyden refers to Athens, Sparta, and Rome as "*respublicae*," but he is also critiquing their imperial ambitions. Thus, he describes them as "*rerum dominae, suum late imperium terra marique sortitae*" [mistresses of the world, sharing their wide dominion by land and sea] (CW4, 34 & 35/11-12).

The import of Busleyden's letter cannot be deduced from the context of *Utopia* alone. It must also be understood in the light of a visit that More paid to Busleyden's house from which the letter was written. More visited the Mechlin house during his 1515 sojourn in the Netherlands, the very one whose enforced leisure enabled him to put *Utopia* on the loom, and he was, as he described it in a letter of mid-February 1516 to Erasmus, delighted by its monuments of antiquity [*tot vetustatis monumenta*]. Of such monuments, he wrote, "you know I am very desirous" [*percupidum*].<sup>8</sup> More also composed two epigrams on the subject of the Mechlin house, one of which celebrated its art works and the other its collection of ancient Roman coins.<sup>9</sup> The numismatic epigram, in particular, is in keeping with Busleyden's prefatory letter to *Utopia*:

*Rhoma suis olim ducibus quam debuit, illi  
 Tam debent omnes Buslidiane tibi.  
 Rhoma suis ducibus seruata est, ipse reseruas  
 Rhomanos Rhoma praemoriente duces.  
 Nam quae Caesereos antiqua nomismata uultus,  
 Aut referunt claros tumue priusue uiros,  
 Haec tu seclorum studio quaesita priorum  
 Congeris, et solas has tibi ducis opes.  
 Cunque triumphaleis densus cinis occulat arcus,  
 Ipse triumphantum nomen, et ora tenes.  
 Nec iam Pyramides procerum monumenta suorum  
 Tam sunt, quam pyxis Buslidiane tua.*

[What Rome once upon a time owed to her leaders, all those leaders, Busleyden, owe to you. Rome was saved by her leaders; you preserve Rome's leaders, now that Rome is dead, for with devotion to antiquity you seek out and collect the old coins which present the features of emperors or of men famous in imperial times or earlier; and these coins you

<sup>8</sup> See Allen II, no. 388.

<sup>9</sup> For these see CW 3/Part II, 262-265, no. 250 and no. 252.

reckon your only form of wealth. Now when thick dust conceals their triumphal arches, you keep the names and features of the triumphal heroes. The pyramids are not such memorials to their noble dead as your coin-box, Busleyden, has now become.]<sup>10</sup>

More's epigram underscores both his and Busleyden's antiquarian interests, their "*studium*" or "zeal" for prior ages. Busleyden is probably alluding to those shared interests when he writes of the ruins of the cities, including Rome, whose trophies, like the triumphal arches in More's epigram, seem to have been erected in vain. More himself collected and made presents of Roman coins. Thus in a 1520 letter to Erasmus, Francis Cranevelt reports that More gave him one coin with the effigy of Tiberius on it and another with that of Augustus.<sup>11</sup> Likewise, in an epigram about the visit of a French lady to his house, More recalled how she examined some ancient coins.<sup>12</sup>

As described by More, however, Busleyden's coin collection, with its effigies of Rome's Caesars and illustrious figures, is not meant to inspire awe or imitation so much as somber reflection. Whereas for Petrarch the face of Augustus was still "breathing" on the coin he gave to Charles IV, for More such imperial faces [*Caesarei vultus*] have barely been rescued from the dust of oblivion. The greatness of Rome is literally diminished in More's epigram in the sense that it now fits inside Busleyden's coin-box. This humble resting place is the true preservation of Rome, and it offsets the proud monuments – triumphal arches and pyramids – that rulers and civilizations build for

<sup>10</sup> See CW 3/II, 262-263.

<sup>11</sup> See Allen IV. No. 1145. See also J.B. Trapp, "'Suavius Olet': A Bronze Medal of Thomas More and its Motto," *Moreana* 4/39-43; J.B. Trapp, "A Double Mise au Point," *Moreana* 11/46-51; and J.B. Trapp, "Supplementa Iconographica Moreana: Portraits of Thomas More in Italy and Spain," *Moreana* 62/73-78. In particular Trapp notes (*Moreana* 11/50) that More's gem seal was a "*rifacimento* after the obverse of an antique coin."

<sup>12</sup> See CW 3/II, 283.

themselves. Indeed, such a resting place contrasts with the imperial faces it encloses.

This epigram is not only the instance of More's marvelling at the ability of a humble, present-day object to evoke the grandeur of the past. In a 1518 letter to Guillaume Budé, More praised Budé's landmark study of Roman money, *De Asse* (1515), for its ability to restore what had been almost deleted [*propemodum deleta*].<sup>13</sup> Budé's reader, More wrote, becomes versed in previous ages and is able to hold, as it were, in his hands, the wealth of kings, tyrants, and entire peoples [*regum, tyrannorum, gentium velutque manu contrectare divitias*]. Here, the book has replaced the coin-box as the repository of vanished magnificence. Such faith in the ability of a book to rescue the past from oblivion is scarcely surprising in a sixteenth-century humanist. In the adage "*Festina lente*," Erasmus had made the trademark of Aldus Manutius, which was taken from an old Roman coin, into an emblem of this publisher's heroic recovery of antiquity.<sup>14</sup> Yet, More's praise of Budé's book also in a sense diminishes the regal treasures that it is said to contain. In More's conceit, riches that once filled palaces now fill the pages of a book. By implication the owners of these riches too suffer a corresponding reduction in scale.

The author of *Utopia*, however, which is so satirical of the magnificence and pomp of contemporary rulers, might have had a more current coinage in mind when he described the fate of Rome's Caesars in the epigram to Busleyden. For Tudor monarchs also used the coinage to articulate their imperial aspirations, which predated the famous declaration of England's status as an empire in the 1533 Act of Appeals. Most strikingly, in 1489 Henry VII initiated the heavy gold sovereign, a coin that showed him wearing the enclosed imperial

<sup>13</sup> For this letter see *The Correspondence of Sir Thomas More*, ed. Elizabeth F. Rogers (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1947), 125.

<sup>14</sup> For Erasmus' discussion of the provenance and significance of the Aldine trademark, see *The 'Adages' of Erasmus: A study with Translations*, ed. Margaret Mann Phillips (Cambridge University Press, 1964), 174-175 and 179-180.

crown. In 1504 he issued silver groats and shillings that featured him in profile wearing the imperial crown.

C.E. Challis has argued that the sovereign was modelled on the *real d'or*, introduced into the Netherlands during the 1480s under the auspices of Maximilian I, the future Holy Roman Emperor.<sup>15</sup> Indeed, the practice of wearing a closed crown, whose symbolism both Henry VII and Henry VIII exploited, was interpreted as signifying an empire by none other than More's fellow ambassador Cuthbert Tunstal. "The crown of England is an empire of itself, much better than now the empire of Rome: for which cause your Grace weareth a closed crown," Tunstal wrote in a 1517 letter to Henry VIII after Maximilian had offered to resign as Holy Roman Emperor and procure Henry's election to the position.<sup>16</sup> As Dale Hoak has observed, the late fifteenth and early sixteenth centuries were a time when the imperial symbolism of the closed crown became unmistakable both in England and on the continent as the result of the spread of the juristic notion, *rex in suo regno est imperator*.<sup>17</sup> Yet, as the wars of conquest fought by Henry VIII and other rulers of the period would indicate, such self-styled imperial monarchs were rarely satisfied with their own kingdoms. The first French king to wear the closed imperial crown was Charles VIII, who also invaded Italy in 1494.<sup>18</sup> For Henry, imperial coinage and foreign conquest overlapped when he wanted to celebrate his victories in France. In 1513 the mint

<sup>15</sup> See C.E. Challis, *The Tudor Coinage* (Manchester: Manchester University Press, 1978), 49-51, and Philip Grierson, "The Origins of the English Sovereign and the Symbolism of the Closed Crown," *British Numismatic Journal* 38 (1964), 128.

<sup>16</sup> See *Original Letters Illustrative of English History*, ed. Henry Ellis, First Series, Vol. 1 (London: Dawsons, 1969), 136. See also Dale Hoak, "The Iconography of the Crown Imperial" in *Tudor Political Culture*, ed. Dale Hoak (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1995), 54-104. Hoak argues that Henry V introduced the closed crown, but that the Tudor monarchs systematically displayed it as a strategy of legitimation and self-augmentation. See 57 and 65.

<sup>17</sup> See Hoak, 56-57.

<sup>18</sup> See Hoak, 57.

at the newly captured town of Tournai issued coins bearing the impress of the imperial crown.<sup>19</sup>

By contrast, in *Utopia* the character More debunks the imperial pretensions of contemporary rulers when he advises Raphael to adopt a more "civil" philosophy at court:

Otherwise we have the situation in which a comedy of Plautus is being performed and the household slaves are making trivial jokes at one another and then you come on stage in philosopher's attire and recite the passage from the *Octavia* where Seneca is disputing with Nero. (CW4, 99/17-22)

This passage is often read as addressing the position of the courtier, but it may also allude to that of the ruler. Far from reflecting any of the lustre of imperial Rome, even that of decadent Nero, contemporary rulers are more akin to the misers and philandering husbands who populate the comedies of Plautus. These contemporary rulers may have pretensions to empire, pretensions that are enforced by armies and financed at an exorbitant cost by their subjects. But in the end such rulers are quite ordinary, the stuff of low comedy. Indeed, Raphael's account of a hypothetical meeting of the French council is almost farcical in its description of the various machinations and power struggles among England, France, the emperor, and even the pope.<sup>20</sup> At least these squabbles would be farcical if their consequences were not so devastating.

Dubbed a Maecenas by Peter Giles (CW4, 24/17), the wealthy Busleyden was no stranger to the grandiose pretensions of prelates or princes, and his house, really more of an Italianate mansion, suggests that to some degree he shared them. Indeed, this mansion, with its

<sup>19</sup> See Hoak, 79.

<sup>20</sup> The pope is not explicitly referred to in this passage, but as the organizer of the Holy League against the French, Julius II could not have been far from the mind of a sixteenth-century reader. See also the Yale editor's notes on the French council scene (351) for its relationship to Erasmus' *Julius Exclusus*.

frescoes on the walls, choice furniture, and well stocked library, was financed with money acquired from multiple church benefices.<sup>21</sup> As Henry de Vocht notes in his magisterial edition of Busleyden's writings, Busleyden had his mansion built around 1506 when he returned from a diplomatic mission in Rome to resume his position on the Grand Council of Mechlin, the high court of the Netherlands.<sup>22</sup> Busleyden was an ecclesiastical councillor, having taken holy orders and having been elected provost of St. Peter's in Aire. He was also canon of St. Rombaut's in Mechlin, St. Lambart's in Liege, St. Waldetrudis' in Mons, Our Lady's in Cambrai, and St. Gudula's in Brussels.<sup>23</sup> In 1515, when the future Charles V formally entered the city of Mechlin, Busleyden greeted him with an oration on behalf of the clergy.

But if Busleyden was a rich pluralist, he was also a humanist whose family background and political outlook would have made him sympathetic to at least one aspect of the satire of *Utopia* – its critique of militarism. The original owner of the house that Busleyden inherited and turned into a mansion was his brother Francis (d. 1502). So too Busleyden's own *cursus honorum* owed much to Francis, who came as close as anyone to fulfilling the humanist fantasy of acquiring political clout by serving as pedagogue to the powerful. As tutor to Philip the Fair, the father of Charles V, Francis not only received a number of preferments, including archbishop of Besançon, but he also used his influence to induce Philip to sign the 1498 Treaty of Paris

<sup>21</sup> On the house see More's epigram no. 252, lines 8-10: "For I think that only the hands of Daedalus could have built that famous house of yours with its artfully winding passages. The pictures here Apelles seems to have painted. The sculptures one might believe to be the work of Myron."

<sup>22</sup> See *Jerome Busleyden: His Life and Writings*, ed. Henry de Vocht (Turnhout, Belgium: Brepols, 1950), 39-46. On the house itself see 50-62. Busleyden joined the Grand Council in 1504. See De Vocht 39 and *Contemporaries of Erasmus: A Biographical Register of the Renaissance and Reformation*, ed. Peter G. Bietenholz and Thomas B. Deutscher (Toronto: The University of Toronto Press, 1985), 235.

<sup>23</sup> See De Vocht 41-42 and *Contemporaries of Erasmus* 236.

against the wishes of Philip's father, Maximilian I.<sup>24</sup> In a poetic epitaph for Francis, Jerome Busleyden celebrated his brother's efforts on behalf of peace, that is, efforts to keep the Netherlands from being drawn into wars by their Habsburg rulers.<sup>25</sup> In this epitaph, the dead Francis boasts that he was able to chase "horrid war" from his native land and make Philip the Fair submit his hand to the ferule. The two achievements are meant to be related.

Jerome Busleyden's oration to Charles when he entered Mechlin also emphasizes the desirability of peace,<sup>26</sup> and we have other evidence that he shared his brother's awareness that the imperial appetite of the Hapsburgs would need to be tempered if it were to serve the best interests of the Netherlands. Jerome wrote a series of poems celebrating the 1508 Treaty of Cambrai, which seemed, like the 1498 Treaty of Paris, to have quelled the possibility of war with France. These poems do praise various Hapsburgs, Margaret of Austria, daughter of Maximilian and the Regent of the Netherlands during much of Charles' reign, as well as Maximilian himself,<sup>27</sup> but only in so far as they are peacemakers. Indeed, the tributes to Margaret, who was instrumental to the treaty, are the most unreserved. She is described as the "offspring of Caesar" who succeeded in mixing the French lilies with the Roman eagles. Caesar, the "glory of Mars" [*Martis Gloria*], has now become the "honor of peace" [*Pacis honos*]. Indeed, whatever martial glory Busleyden attributes to Maximilian is diminished by the fact that in the same batch of poems he echoes "glory of Mars" when he refers to the "furor" of this same deity as one of the banes that peace rids the land of.<sup>28</sup>

<sup>24</sup> For Francis' career, see De Vocht, 5-7.

<sup>25</sup> See De Vocht, 206.

<sup>26</sup> See De Vocht, 274.

<sup>27</sup> See De Vocht, 242-243.

<sup>28</sup> See "Dysthyca" in De Vocht, 243. See also "Ad divum Caesarem Maximilianum," "Ad Divam Margaritam Augusti Filiam," and "Ad Eandem" in De Vocht, 242.

Like More, Busleyden had many contemporary as well as antiquarian interests, and in at least one place in the Mechlin house, the two sets of interests are not entirely distinct. Thus, the subject matter of a fresco painted on the wall of Busleyden's drawing room is taken from Biblical antiquity. It depicts the feast of Baltazar and the mysterious writing on the wall that Daniel correctly interprets to spell the end of the Babylonian empire (Daniel 5). But as De Vocht has noted, two recognizable contemporary figures appear in the painting.<sup>29</sup> One is Busleyden himself as Daniel, and the other is Margaret of Austria, who tells Baltazar to summon Daniel to interpret the writing on the wall. Here, ancient and contemporary empires converge. For Busleyden, recalling the demise of ancient empires could serve as a way of remembering that their modern counterparts, too, were vulnerable.

## II

But how does the antiquarian tenor of Busleyden's letter – and, more broadly, his and More's shared antiquarian interests – serve to frame *Utopia* itself? This letter, we should recall, was placed at the front of the 1516 Louvain edition of *Utopia*, directly preceding More's letter to Giles. In the 1517 Paris and 1518 Basel editions it was retired to the rear of the work, although a letter from Giles to Busleyden took its place in front.<sup>30</sup> The greater prominence of Busleyden's letter to More in the *editio princeps* may be due to its being printed in Louvain, to which Francis Busleyden had been a Maecenas during his life and where in 1517 Jerome's last will would endow the *Collegium Trilingue*.<sup>31</sup> But this prominence may also serve to highlight aspects of *Utopia*.

<sup>29</sup> See De Vocht, 55-56.

<sup>30</sup> See CW4, clxxxiii-clxxxix

<sup>31</sup> See De Vocht, 8. Francis had made generous contributions to the Louvain Charterhouse, and he was memorialized in its cloister after his death. On Jerome's last will, see *Contemporaries of Erasmus*, 236-237.

At the end of Book I, Raphael Hythlodæus responds to Peter Giles' objection that a "New World" civilization cannot possibly be better than a European one because it lacks the long experience of the latter:

As for the antiquity of commonwealths, he countered, you could give a sounder opinion if you had read the historical accounts of the world. If we must believe them, there were cities among them before there were men among us. (CW4, 107/32-35)

The Utopian annals, in particular, which include the history of the land from its conquest by Utopus [*ab capta usque insula*] (CW4, 120/26-27), are said to cover a period of 1760 years. The phrase "*ab capta insula*" echoes Livy's "*ab urbe condita*," and it thereby invites a comparison with Rome, which did not enjoy such longevity. Neither did Venice, the Renaissance paragon of an enduring city-state. Yet, for all its antiquity, Raphael's description of Utopia offers little history of the isle. A few tantalizing references to Utopus and the construction of early Utopian houses are all we can glean from his account.<sup>32</sup> Apart from Utopus' conquest of the island, this account reveals nothing comparable to the wars, civil and foreign, that form such a large part of Livy's narrative. But as Busleyden asserts in his letter, Utopia's survival is the result of its having avoided such catastrophes. If he is right, the relative dullness of Utopia's annals would be to the benefit of its citizens.<sup>33</sup>

<sup>32</sup> On the early dwellings in Amaurotum, see CW4, 121. On Utopus see CW4, 221 and 113.

<sup>33</sup> An important exception is the war between the Alaopolitans and the Nephelotes, in which the Utopians play a large role. This war is a relatively recent one [*paulo ante nostram memoriam*] (CW4, 200/18), but it raises the question of whether Utopian history is as uneventful as it appears. See CW4, 200-201. For a discussion of the ways in which utopias try to exclude history, see Fredric Jameson, "Of Islands and Trenches: Neutralization and the Production of Utopian Discourse" in *The Ideologies of Theory: Essays 1971-1986* (Volume 2), 75-103. More himself, I will be arguing, problematizes that exclusion in *Utopia*.

Another reference to Rome reinforces the impression that the scarcity of history in Utopia is not necessarily a bane. Raphael tells Giles and More that, according to the Utopian annals, a shipwreck 1200 years earlier brought several Romans and Egyptians to Utopia. The Romans taught the Utopians every art worth knowing within the Roman "*imperium*" (CW4, 108/8). Yet, this is not the "*imperium*" of Augustus Caesar when Livy wrote his history. Arriving at the outset of the fourth century, these shipwrecked Romans would have brought news of an empire in decline and on the verge of being overrun by Barbarians. In effect, these Romans carry Roman history several centuries past the time of Livy, though not all the way to the sack of Rome in 410 A.D.<sup>34</sup> Still, the inclusion of the Egyptians among the shipwrecked might have suggested Rome's ultimate fate. For these Egyptians are representatives of a more ancient civilization than Rome's, one that survives only in its monuments, most conspicuously, the pyramids that More refers to in his numismatic epigram.

By contrast, as Busleyden's letter to More hints, an underlying paradox of More's "nowhere" is that of antiquity without ruins. In all respects Utopia seems to be in good repair. Thus, its buildings last [*perdurant*] to such an extent that new ones rarely have to be built (CW4, 132/26). This durability is the result of Utopian attentiveness to potential damage, but it must also be due to the fact that invaders have yet to sack any Utopian cities. Instead, the virtual imperviousness of Utopia to invasion is established at the outset of Book II as the precondition of Utopian felicity. By having a channel dug through the isthmus that connected Utopia (formerly Abraxia) to the mainland, Utopus, it would appear, curtailed further threat from conquerors like himself.

So too at the end of Book II, Raphael concludes his peroration with the claim that the foundations [*fundamenta*] (CW4, 244/5) of the

<sup>34</sup> For a different interpretation of the importance of this date in Roman history, see Marina Leslie, *Renaissance Utopias and the Problem of History* (Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 1998), 51-52.

Utopian republic have been laid so well as to last forever [*aeternum duratura*] (CW4, 244/7), at least as far as human conjecture can forecast. Here, like its own buildings, Utopia appears invulnerable to the forces of ruin, by means of which, in Busleyden's words, the "*florentissimus status beatissimarum rerumpublicarum*" is destroyed [*funditus pessundatur*] (CW4, 36/5-6). Even the ill will of neighboring princes, Raphael claims, has been of no avail against Utopia.

Possessing no money, Utopia lacks the chief type of antiquity that More and Busleyden collected, i.e., coins. This lack is of course primarily a result of the absence of private property, but it may also betoken the attempt to exclude the kind of history so often inscribed on both ancient and modern coins. As we have seen, this history tended to glorify the power and territorial ambitions of individual rulers. By contrast, Utopia possesses neither a sovereign coin nor a monarch. Not that Utopia is without physical monuments to its own past, but these do not conform to classical models. The Utopians, for instance, do erect victory trophies on the battlefield, but only when they win a relatively bloodless victory (CW4, 203/20-21). So too they erect statues to commemorate individuals who have benefitted the republic, but there is no indication that these individuals are military leaders. In fact, these statues are not mentioned in the section on Utopian warfare.

The Utopian humiliation of gold and silver, moreover, degrades the very mediums through which European princes exalted themselves. Utopia's golden chamber pots are an even humbler vessel for regal magnificence than Busleyden's coin box. Indeed, in Utopia the crown, which we have seen, had become an important symbol of empire during this period, stigmatizes its wearer. Only criminals have their heads bound with gold (CW4, 152/13). This punishment is More's droll comment on the means whereby European monarchs prosecuted their imperial ambitions.

In a 1516 letter to Erasmus, More deplored the condition of "subjects, as kings now call their peoples, that is, worse than slaves"

[*subditos ac subjectos, quomodo nunc reges populum vocant, hoc est plus quam servos*]<sup>35</sup> More here is noting the encroachments of a language of imperial absolutism on the discourses of those with power and authority. As T.F. Mayer has argued, Henry's efforts in 1516 and 1517 to dislodge a French bishop from the recently captured Tournai show an increasing reliance on such language, which dissolves a "feudal hierarchy with its fixed relationships into a pool of equal subjects."<sup>36</sup> In his comment to Erasmus, More, who visited Tournai in 1515, indicates his own awareness of the magnitude of this change, and, as Mayer points out, Utopia's unmonarchical government provides an institutional solution to the problem of royal tyranny.<sup>37</sup>

But this Utopian solution includes a different kind of governor as well as government. In the same letter to Erasmus in which he deplored the transformation of peoples into subjects, More indicates who the models for this new kind of governor are. For there, anxiously awaiting the verdict of Busleyden, Tunstal, and Le Sauvage on *Utopia*, More nevertheless describes them as partial rather than neutral readers since they might be flattered by the idea of rulers being "men great in culture and virtue" [*tales viri, litteris ac virtute tanti*], that is, humanists, like themselves.<sup>38</sup> For no matter how important their positions in their native lands, figures such as Busleyden and Tunstal would always have to suffer complete buffoons as equals or superiors – hence the attractiveness of Utopia where government positions, including that of *princeps*, are held by "litterati" (CW4, 132/5-8).

<sup>35</sup> See Allen II, no. 481.

<sup>36</sup> See T.F. Mayer, "Tournai and Tyranny: Imperial Kingship and Critical Humanism" in *The Historical Journal*, 34 (1991), no. 2, 263-267. Mayer cites examples of the usage of "subject" to denote the imperial character of Henry's authority over Tournai. See also Damian Grace, "Subjects or Citizens?" in *Moreana* 97/133-136.

<sup>37</sup> See Mayer, 270. On More's visit to Tournai in 1515, see Germain Marchadour, "Tournai-Doornijk -Comme la vit Thomas More-" in *Moreana* 46/97-102.

<sup>38</sup> See Allen II, no. 481/67.

This is the familiar humanist complaint as explored in Book I of *Utopia* and best exemplified to Busleyden by the career of his brother Francis. What power humanists were able to acquire was dependent upon the favor of others. Utopia, however, not only offers the fantasy of escape from this dependence, but, seen in the context of Busleyden's and More's shared antiquarian interests, it offers the further fantasy of avoiding the mistakes that doomed so many real polities to ruin and oblivion. Thus, in his Utopian letter, Busleyden ascribes Utopia's success in avoiding such costly mistakes to its magistrates [*probatissimi magistratus*] (CW4, 34/16). A country run by humanists, we are to infer, might elude the destructive forces of history.

But the humanist fantasy of rule also parodies the kind of history that it seeks to exclude. Raphael's own insistence that Utopia will last forever partakes of the blindness that afflicts most empires. He cannot imagine that the sun will ever set on a country so well governed as he believes Utopia to be. In his peroration he even calls Utopia an "*imperium*" (CW4, 244/13), a term that suggests the Utopians may have learned some of the wrong lessons from the shipwrecked Romans.<sup>39</sup> Indeed, the Utopians, for all their pacifism, do at times pursue familiar imperialistic goals such as colonization (CW4, 136-137). Moreover, despite the seeming imperviousness of their island to foreign invasion, wars are, it turns out near the end of Book II, sometimes fought on Utopian soil.<sup>40</sup> In other words, Utopia's isolation from the possibility of ruin is not as complete as it initially appears to be.

In another letter to Erasmus, written while *Utopia* was in the press, More shows a different sensibility from Raphael Hythlodæus.<sup>41</sup> There he describes himself as having dreamed that the Utopians had

<sup>39</sup> For other uses of "*imperium*" in *Utopia*, see 94/27, 96/14, 64/11, and 108/7. In these instances the term denotes either the rule of kings over their peoples or specific empires, including Rome.

<sup>40</sup> See CW4, 209/30: "Should any war, however, assail their own country..."

<sup>41</sup> See Allen II, no. 499.

awarded him the "perpetual principate" of Utopia. He playfully assures Erasmus that he will not be carried away by this new honor and forget his old friends. Indeed, if Erasmus or Tunstal ever comes to Utopia, More will ensure that all who enjoy the rule [*imperium*] of his clemency treat them with the proper respect. So far so good, but all of a sudden the arrival of the dawn shatters this most sweet [*dulcissimum*] dream and leaves More with the less glamorous prospect of a day's work in the courts. The disappointed More, however, has one consolation for the loss of his perpetual principate: real kingdoms do not last much longer. It is a rude awakening but one that, if history is any indication, all empires must undergo sooner or later.

The antiquities that More and Busleyden collected are the tangible record of that history. In More's epigram coins once struck to monumentalize Rome's rulers teach the vanity of empire. Yet, as More's own dream of a perpetual principate suggests, they do not teach this lesson with complete success. The choicest irony of More's dream may be the implication that real princes suffer from the same delusions of grandeur as the creator of a made-up "nowhere". Raphael's claim that Utopia will last forever may be predicated upon a denial of history, but the most strenuous denials come from history's chief actors.<sup>42</sup>

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