

**HERODOTUS, AULUS GELLIUS  
AND THOMAS MORE'S *UTOPIA*. \***

The Yale Edition of *Utopia*<sup>1</sup> gives a very comprehensive picture of possible sources and parallels both in its detailed introduction (esp. p. cliii sqq.) and in the commentary (p. 267 sqq.). Since 1965 our knowledge of influences from classical antiquity in More's *Utopia* has been broadened through the publication of several short articles<sup>2</sup>. The main purpose of this -- likewise brief -- contribution is to inform a larger section of the public about an article by Moses Hadas, published in 1935<sup>3</sup>, which has so far attracted little attention in the field of More research. I would also like to illustrate certain parallels between the work of Thomas More and that of both Herodotus and Aulus Gellius. The likelihood that these writers provide sources is reinforced by the knowledge that their writings were readily available in a number of editions<sup>4</sup>. Some of More's other works leave no doubt as to his knowledge of the two authors.

The envoys of the Anemolians, who visited Amaurotum at the time of Hythlodæus' residence there, were unaware of the Utopians' contempt for gold and silver ornaments. They adorned themselves with gold-embroidered garments, gold necklaces and earrings, as well as rings, pearls and precious stones (152/29 sqq.). Consequently their attire provoked the ridicule of the Utopians, who regarded such jewellery as nothing more than a blemish, or cheap baubles at best. Even little children mocked them (154/8 sqq.). In addition to numerous ancient sources -- assembled by Bernhard Kytzler<sup>5</sup> -- referring to the dangers of gold and jewellery in general, one particular passage in Herodotus' historical work appears to be of some importance as a source. Although Moses Hadas mentioned this very passage, he neglected to discuss it in any great detail<sup>6</sup>.

Whilst the Persian King Cambyses II (529-522 B.C.) was planning his campaign against the Ethiopians and Ammonians, he sent some so-called Fish-eaters (ἰχθυοφάγοι) to Ethiopia as scouts, as they were proficient in Ethiopian (Hdt. III, 19 sqq.). On arrival the Fish-eaters made the Ethiopians a present of a purple robe, a twisted gold necklace, gold bracelets, and an alabaster receptacle containing

myrrh and a barrel of palm wine on behalf of the Persian King (Hdt. III, 20 sqq.). But the King of the Ethiopians saw through the envoys and branded them as spies. However, he did examine each of the gifts in turn with the purpose of emphasizing the superiority of his people (Hdt. III, 22 sqq.). Let us take a closer look at his reaction on seeing the gold jewellery<sup>7</sup>:

Next he inquired about the twisted gold necklace and the bracelets; and when the Fish-eaters told him how they were made, the king smiled, and, thinking them to be fetters, said: 'We have stronger chains than these'.

As was the case with the Utopians (150/16 sqq.), the King shows an utter lack of appreciation for the intrinsic value of the hand-made gold jewellery, which was doubtless quite exquisite. Furthermore, at this point it is merely implied that gold fetters were used whereas a short while later this is quite clearly stated<sup>8</sup>:

When they left the spring, the king led them to a prison where all the men were bound with fetters of gold.

Hence we can speak of distinct parallels between More's account of the Anemolian envoys and Herodotus' description of the Fish-eaters' delegation to the Ethiopians. But the remarkable thing about this passage is its location in, as it were, Utopian surroundings, as is evident from Hadas' convincing arguments<sup>9</sup>. This means that the news of the Fish-eaters and the Ethiopians etc. must be classified as part of the Utopian -- in the broadest sense of the word -- literature of the 5th and 4th centuries B.C.<sup>10</sup>. To sum up then, we can consider Herodotus III, 20 sqq. to be a probable source for More's account of the Anemolian envoys and consequently for the information gained about the Utopians' attitude to gold.

Abraxas, the original name of the island of Utopia, is the term used by certain Gnostics for the divine Dynamis and refers to the name Mithras which, according to Oliver, was formed in analogy to Abraxas (p. 585). The total value of the individual stoicheia of both names in Greek results in a numerical value of 365<sup>11</sup>, thus ascribing symbolic power over the days in an astronomical year, infinity and eternity to both names<sup>12</sup>. Mithras is also the name the Utopians give their supreme being (216/21). Why did More choose this name? The question becomes more compelling when we consider that More's description of the specific characteristics of Utopian religion has nothing whatsoever in common with those Mithraic mysteries known to us<sup>13</sup> -- apart from the fact that the word 'Father', an additional name for the supreme divine

being of the Utopians, is also used to denote the seventh and highest level of initiation into the Mithras mysteries<sup>14</sup>. It was probably because of the carefully formulated parallelism between Christianity and the rites of Mithras (218/3 sqq.) that Halkin came up with a brief answer to our question<sup>15</sup>:

Dans la religion mithriaque, il y a tant de traits qui rappellent le christianisme que l'on s'est posé la question d'éventuelles influences réciproques. Mithra naît dans une grotte et des bergers assistent à sa naissance; ses fidèles connaissent un baptême, des onctions et une communion; ils appellent leur dieu 'Père' et ils vivent dans l'espérance de la résurrection. A la différence des autres grands cultes païens, le mithraïsme n'a pas été taxé d'immoralité, de luxure ou de cruauté. Mithra était donc, pour l'Utopie, un patron commode et sûr.

Apart from these concrete considerations supporting the choice of the name of Mithras, there was one other major reason for More's choosing this name. Our first encounter with a fairly detailed characterization of Utopian religion is through Raphael Hythlodæus: « There are different kinds of religion not only on the island as a whole but also in each city. Some worship as god the sun, others the moon, others one of the planets » (216/7 sqq.). There is a similar description to be found in Herodotus' account of Persian customs<sup>16</sup>:

They sacrifice also to the sun and moon and earth and fire and water and winds. These are the only gods to whom they have sacrificed from the beginning. ... She (the heavenly Aphrodite) is called by the Assyrians Mylitta, by the Arabians Alilat, by the Persians Mitra.

These parallels between Persian and Utopian customs are not at all surprising in view of the amount of apparent evidence of close links between the inhabitants of Persia and of Utopia. The country of the Polylerites, mentioned by Raphael in the first book of *Utopia*, is situated in Persia (74/20 sqq.); the Polylerites are tributary to the Persian King (74/23). The narrator comes to the conclusion that the language of the Utopians is very similar to that of the Persians (180/23 sqq.). He also frequently refers to the tolerance of the Utopians in religious matters (218/18 sqq.), a characteristic which also applies to the Persians in the face of customs alien to their own (Hdt. I, 135). All in all, we can regard Herodotus' account of the customs of the Persians as a possible source for More's *Utopia*, yet another argument for the choice of the name of Mithras. More chose the name of Mithras for the supreme being of the Utopians not simply owing to the concrete considerations shown by Halkin but because Herodotus spoke of Mithras as being the name of

the supreme god of the Persians in a passage where at least one definite parallel to More's *Utopia* is apparent. This interpretation is backed up to a certain extent by the fact that in *Utopia* there is no extended comparison between the religious beliefs of the Utopians and the Christian faith. However, it is advisable to avoid placing too much emphasis on this *argumentum e silentio* as readers will scarcely have regarded the religious ideas of the Utopians -- with no more than two common factors (deism and eternal redemption<sup>17</sup>) -- as an alternative religion to Christianity.

Although the editors of *Utopia* have collected a fair number of possible parallels between the works of More and Aulus Gellius<sup>18</sup>, the following comments are intended to bring yet another parallel to light. The first book of *Utopia* reports on a discussion at the house of Cardinal Morton. One particular topic of conversation was the problem of theft and robbery in England (60/5 sqq.). Raphael advocated the Roman legal procedure in dealing with thieves, as opposed to the English system, which generally imposed the death penalty. It is interesting to note that one specific passage from the work of Aulus Gellius allows us valuable insight into Roman criminal law. This passage, as has already been observed by Surtz and Hexter (p. 343), corresponds to a fair extent with Raphael's line of reasoning in *Utopia* -- although the possibility cannot be denied that More, as a man of law, could probably have gained his knowledge of Roman law from other sources, too. What is more, the close link between the life of a soldier and that of a robber, as stated by Hythlodæus (62/24 sqq.), is also referred to by Aulus Gellius. The latter comments that a number of esteemed authors concerned with the customs and habits of the Spartans asserted that Spartan youths were ardently engaged in the art of robbery and thievery<sup>19</sup>:

... as an exercise and training in the art of war ; for dexterity and practice in thieving made the minds of the youth keen and strong for clever ambuscades, and for endurance in watching, and for the swiftness of surprise.

The fact that details about Roman criminal procedure in the case of theft as well as the use of robbery as training for a soldier appear in the same chapter in Aulus Gellius' work implies that More had this chapter in mind when he let Hythlodæus describe his visit to England.

Let us conclude by outlining the main points : Herodotus (III, 20 sqq.) may be a probable source for the report about the Anemolian envoys ; similarly, Herodotus (I, 131 sqq.) could well have influenced More's description of Utopian religion ; and finally, Aulus Gellius (*Noctes Atticae* XI, 18) contains definite parallels to descriptions in Book I.

## NOTES

\* I am deeply indebted to Germain Marc'hadour, Elizabeth McCutcheon, Clare M. Murphy and Richard J. Schoeck for their detailed criticism of an earlier draft of this paper.

1. E. Surtz and J.H. Hexter, Ed., *St. Thomas More, Utopia*, CW 4, (New Haven/London, 1965/3rd ed., 1974). Henceforth, references to this edition will be given in the text in parentheses.

2. E. Surtz, « Sources, Parallels and Influences : Supplement to the Yale Utopia », *Moreana* 9 (1966), pp. 5-11 ; H. Süßmuth, *Studien zur Utopia des Thomas Morus. Ein Beitrag zur Geistesgeschichte des 16. Jahrhunderts*, (Münster, 1967) ; T.S. Dorsch, « Sir Thomas More and Lucian : An Interpretation of Utopia », *Archiv für das Studium der Neueren Sprachen* 203 (1967), pp. 345-363 ; 5 art. in *Moreana* 31-32 (1971), by J.P. Jones (pp. 61-69), L.-E. Halkin (pp. 157-159), M.-M. Lacombe (pp. 169-182), C.C. Doyle (pp. 47-49), and R. Coogan (pp. 29-45) ; W.W. Wooden, « Thomas More and Lucian : A Study in Satiric Influence and Technique », *University of Mississippi Studies in English* 13 (1972), pp. 43-57 ; M.N. Raitiere, « More's Utopia and The City of God », *Studies in the Renaissance* 20 (1973), pp. 144-168 ; T. White, *A Study of the Influence of Plato and Aristotle on Thomas More's Utopia*, (Diss. Columbia University, 1974) ; T. White, « Aristotle and Utopia », *Renaissance Quarterly* 29 (1976), pp. 635-675 ; M.C. Ball, *Menippean Satire in More's Utopia and Erasmus' Praise of Folly*, (Diss. University of Georgia, 1979) ; B. Kytzler, « Marginalia Utopica. Acht Beobachtungen zur Utopia des Thomas Morus (1478-1978) », G.W. Bowersock/W. Burkert/M.C. Putnam, Ed., *Arktouros, Hellenic Studies Presented to B.M.W. Knox*, (Berlin/New York, 1979), pp. 447-460 ; J. IJsewijn, « Traces de Tacite et César dans l'Utopie », *Moreana* 65-66 (1980), p. 32 ; J.D.M. Derrett, « The Utopians' Stoic Chamber-Pots », *Moreana* 73 (1982), pp. 75-76.

3. M. Hadas, « Utopian Sources in Herodotus », *Classical Philology* 30 (1935), pp. 113-121.

4. Cf. M. Flodr, *Incunabula Classicorum. Wiegendrucke der griechischen und römischen Literatur*, (Amsterdam, 1973), pp. 178-179 (Aulus Gellius) and p. 181 (Herodotus).

5. Kytzler, art. cit.

6. Hadas, p. 113 : « In Herodotus the ambassadors of Cambyses are mocked for their golden chains and then shown that among the Ethiopians prisoners' fetters were made of gold ».

7. Herodotus III, 22, 1-2: δεύτερα δὲ τὸν χρύσειον ἐρώτα στρεπτόν τὸν περιαιχένιον καὶ τὰ φέλια. ἐξηγεομένων δὲ τῶν ἰχθυοφάγων τὸν νόμον αὐτῶν γελάσας ὁ βασιλεὺς καὶ νομίσας εἶναι σφεα πέδας εἶπε ὡς παρ' ἑνωτοῖσιν εἰσι ῥωμαλεώτεροι τούτων πέδαί.

8. Herodotus III, 23, 4: ἀπὸ τῆς κρήνης δὲ ἀπαλασσομένου ἀγαγεῖν σφέας ἐς δεσμοτήριον ἀνδρῶν, ἔνθα τοὺς πάντας ἐν πέδησι χρυσῆσι δεδέσθαι.

9. Hadas, pp. 114-121 (cf. Hdt. IV, 1 sqq. (Scythians), IV, 32 sq. (Hyperboreans), IV, 76 sqq. (Anacharsis) and IV, 103 sqq. (the neighbourhood of Scythia)).

10. Cf. the following representative articles for comprehensive overview of original sources : H. Braunert, *Utopia, Antworten griechischen Denkens auf die Herausforderung durch soziale Verhältnisse*, (Kiel, 1969) ; J. Ferguson, *Utopias of the Classical World*, (London, 1975) ; H. Flashar, *Formen utopischen Denkens bei den Griechen*, (Innsbruck, 1974) ; B. Kytzler, « Utopisches Denken und Handeln in der klassischen Antike », R. Villgrader/F. Krey, Ed., *Der Utopische Roman*, (Darmstadt, 1973), pp. 45-68 ; F. Seibt, « Utopia im Mittelalter », *Historische Zeitschrift* 208 (1969), pp. 555-594.

11. Μ-ε-ι-θ-ρ-α-ς=40-5-10-9-100-1-200 = 365 and Α-β-ρ-α-ξ-α-ς = 1-2-100-1-60-1-200 = 365. Cf. Riess, *Realencyclopädie der classischen Altertumswissenschaft* I (1893), 109-110, s.v. 'Abraxas' ; M. Hain, *Lexikon für Theologie und Kirche* I (1957), 66, s.v. 'Abraxas' ; F. Dornseiff, *Das Alphabet in Mystik und Magie*, (Leipzig/Berlin, 2nd ed. 1925/repr. Leipzig, 1977), esp. pp. 42sq. and 105 ; cf. also *Utopia*, p. 517.

12. K. Preisendanz, *Der Kleine Pauly* 1 (1964), 17-18, s.v. 'Abraxas'.

13. F. Cumont, *Die Mysterien des Mithra*, (Leipzig, 1911) ; F. Cumont, *Die orientalischen Religionen im römischen Heidentum*, (Leipzig, 1931/repr. Darmstadt, 1975), esp. pp. 135-147 ; L.A. Campbell, *Mithraic Iconography and Ideology*, (Leiden, 1968) ; H. Hunger, *Lexikon der griechischen und römischen Mythologie*, (Reinbek, 1974), esp. pp. 259-260.

14. *Utopia* 216/15 and cf. W. Fauth, *Der Kleine Pauly* 3 (1969), 1533-1541, s.v. 'Mysterien'.

15. L.-E. Halkin, « Mithra dans l'Utopie », *Moreana* 31-32 (1971), pp. 157-159.

16. Herodotus I, 131, 2-3 : θύουσι δὲ ἠλίῳ τε καὶ σελήνῃ καὶ γῆ καὶ πυρὶ καὶ ὕδατι καὶ ἀνέμοισι. τοῦτοισι μὲν δὴ θύουσι μόνουσι ἀρχῆθεν, ... καλέουσι δὲ Ἀσσύριοι τὴν Ἀφροδίτην Μύλιττα, Ἀράβιοι δὲ Ἀλιλάτ, Πέρσαι δὲ Μίτραν.

17. Cf. H. Schulte Herbrüggen, *Utopie und Anti-Utopie, Von der Strukturanalyse zur Strukturtypologie*, Beiträge zur englischen Philologie, Heft 43, (Bochum-Langendreer, 1960), p. 24.

18. Cf. *Utopia*, p. 591 (Index !) ; also cf. R.J. Schoeck, « More's Attic Nights : Sir Thomas More's Use of Aulus Gellius' 'Noctes Atticae' », *Renaissance News* 13 (1960), pp. 127-129 ; R.J. Schoeck, « Aulus Gellius : A Post-Praefatio », *Renaissance News* 13 (1960), pp. 232-233.

19. Aulus Gellius, NA XI, 18, 17 : « sed pro exercitio disciplinae rei bellicae facitatum, quod et furandi sollertia et adsuetudo acueret firmaretque animos adulescentium et ad insidiarum astus et ad vigilandi tolerantiam et ad obrepenti celeritatem ».