

*Utopia*  
*Una storia politica da Savonarola a Babeuf*

Girolamo Imbruglia  
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The book discusses the presence of utopian thought and discourse in early modern and eighteenth-century Europe, accompanying the reader on a fascinating journey across different centuries and beyond the political and denominational borders at the discovery of narratives, theories, projects, and experiences. More specifically, the volume maps the European cultural geographies of Utopia by following its trajectories as ‘a central moment in the history of the secularisation of politics’ (9).

The author adopts an entangled vision of European history, integrates different historiographies, and develops the itinerary of the book’s four chapters connecting prominent historical phenomena: the intercontinental expansion, the religious fracture in Europe and inside European societies, the ancien régime’s political and institutional conflicts, the reforms and the Enlightenment, and the French Revolution. Regarding the 1789 turning point, Imbruglia observes, ‘if Utopia had not achieved a revolutionary effect, the revolution brought about a utopian effect’ (14).

The author chooses to give an extensive diachronic overview. Therefore, he sometimes privileges the description while limiting the historiographic analysis and the intertwining of facts and ideas in historical development. This choice results in minor generalisations and oversights.

However, Imbruglia often adopts an archaeological technique to thoroughly approach the ideological constellations and strata that subtend his collection of sources detecting utopian traces, categories, and grammar in European writers, political theorists, philosophers, and political actors.

Moreover, the author often discusses utopian texts word by word displaying a clear example of critical analysis and a practical approach for educational purposes. This methodology allows the reader to enter into direct contact with a broad multi-linguistic corpus of authors and themes through diachronic scrutiny. As a result, the volume offers true intellectual pleasure to the reader interested in the making and the cultural transfers of utopian reflections, motifs, and projects.

The book demonstrates extensive research experience on specific intellectual and cultural historical dimensions and reflects Imbruglia's predilection for some prominent figures. We refer, for instance, to the in-depth analyses devoted to More, Campanella, Montesquieu, Rousseau, and Diderot. Furthermore, the author reaffirms the importance of the Jesuits as cultural mediators and creators of a broad exotic imagination in early modern and eighteenth-century European cultures.

The book intertwines growing European global interactions with utopian narratives, theories, and experiences. However, a more organic integration of the perspectives of Atlantic, global, and cross-cultural history would have probably allowed overcoming the residual tendency to exoticise the 'Others' and the 'Savages' described in the sources from the fifteenth- and sixteenth-century European 'discoveries' to the eighteenth-century European intercontinental competition through scientific voyages.

Far from being relegated to a remote past, both the 'Others' and the 'Savages' were very often coeval to the European writings carefully investigated by Imbruglia. Therefore, it could have been interesting to deepen the examination of ethnographic information within this utopian framework, considering the knowledge of archaeology, historical anthropology, material culture, and economic, political, institutional, and environmental history.

Imbruglia mainly focuses on the idealisation of the Jesuit missions in Iberian America and the utopian traces in the Puritan experiment in North America. He also mentions the heated debate on Amerindians' nature and rights in the *Monarquía hispánica* in the first half of the sixteenth century. Nevertheless, he does not linger on the circulation of Thomas More's *Utopia* in the dawning Spanish America. However, since the end of the 1930s, the Mexican historian Silvio Zavala has discussed the transatlantic trajectories of More's text in post-Conquest Mexico against the backdrop of the evangelisation and the strategies to deal with indigenous peoples' mistreatment by the Spaniards.

Recently, Víctor Lillo Castañ attributed to Vasco de Quiroga the Spanish translation of *Utopia* in the Real Biblioteca's manuscript II/1087.<sup>1</sup> He suggested that the translation depends on the 1519 Florence edition by Filippo Giunti's heirs, given that Giovanni Giunti ('Juan de Junta') was active in Spain in the first half of the sixteenth century.<sup>2</sup>

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<sup>1</sup> VÍCTOR LILLO CASTAÑ, 'De la Utopía al Manual de buen gobierno: Vasco de Quiroga y el manuscrito II/1087 de la Real Biblioteca,' *AVISOS. Noticias de la Real Biblioteca* 26, no. 91 (2020): 1–4. <https://avisos.realbiblioteca.es/index.php/Avisos/article/view/782/679>. In 2021 the author published *El buen estado de la república de Utopía. Tomás Moro. Traducción de Vasco de Quiroga. Estudio y edición de Víctor Lillo Castañ*, Clásicos Políticos (Madrid: CEPC).

<sup>2</sup> VÍCTOR LILLO CASTAÑ, 'El manuscrito II/1087 de la Real Biblioteca: La primera traducción castellana de la *Utopía* de Tomás Moro,' *AVISOS. Noticias De La Real Biblioteca* 24, no. 86 (2018): 3. <https://avisos.realbiblioteca.es/index.php/Avisos/article/view/482>.

Lillo Castañ argues that the translation was ‘very likely written in Mexico City Tenochtitlan between 1532 and 1535,<sup>3</sup> and is ‘the first vernacular complete version’ of More’s text.<sup>4</sup> In a new article for *Historia Mexicana* (2022), he examines the translation’s transatlantic background as an example of the ever-changing texts’ significance according to their creation, reception, and circulation contexts.

In Europe, *Utopia* was mainly read as a political fiction text and a critique of the society of the epoch, in no way meant to be used to organise society politically. In America, on the other hand, Vasco believed that a model of society could be built following Thomas More’s work to educate the indigenous peoples, introduce them to the Christian faith, and protect them from the rapacity of conquerors and colonists.

Thomas More wrote *Utopia* based on the first chronicles of the New World that reached Europe during the first half of the sixteenth century. The text made the reverse journey from Europe to America with Vasco de Quiroga. Because of More and Quiroga’s different horizons of experience, the Spanish jurist was able to give a new significance to this text. Vasco, unlike More, had first-hand knowledge of the American reality and not only through literary sources. However, one last stage remains in More’s *Utopia* metaphorical and physical journey. When Vasco’s translation reached the Council of the Indies members in Spain, the text had already acquired a different meaning: on this fruitful round trip, *Utopia* ceased to be a book of political fiction and became a manual of good government.<sup>5</sup>

Imbruglia would have probably reduced the contraposition between Europe and the Hispanic world pointed out by Lillo Castañ.

The Italian author mainly focuses on European trajectories of utopian motifs but considers Utopia as a historical actor capable of critically crossing the oceans and the centuries, inviting the reader to reconnect the early modern and eighteenth-century Europe and the present-day globalised world.

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<sup>3</sup> VÍCTOR LILLO CASTAÑ, ‘Una utopía para el Nuevo Mundo: Vasco de Quiroga y su traducción de la *Utopía* de Tomás Moro,’ *Historia Mexicana* 72, no. 2 (2022): 639. <https://doi.org/10.24201/hm.v72i2.4505>.

<sup>4</sup> LILLO CASTAÑ, ‘El manuscrito II/1087 de la Real Biblioteca,’ 5. VÍCTOR LILLO CASTAÑ, ‘Una traducción castellana inédita del Siglo XVI de la *Utopía* de Tomás Moro: Estudio del Manuscrito II/1087 de La Real Biblioteca de Palacio,’ *Moreana* 55, no. 2 (2018): 184–210.

<sup>5</sup> ‘En Europa, *Utopía* se leyó principalmente como un texto de ficción política, muy crítico con la sociedad del momento, pero que en ningún caso podía usarse para organizar políticamente a la sociedad. En América, en cambio, Vasco creyó que sobre la falsilla de la obra de Tomás Moro podía erigirse un modelo de sociedad que permitiera escolarizar a los indígenas, introducirlos en la fe de Cristo y protegerlos de la codicia de conquistadores y colonos. Tomás Moro escribió *Utopía* a partir de las primeras crónicas del Nuevo Mundo que llegaron a Europa durante la primera mitad del siglo xvi. Con Vasco de Quiroga, el texto hizo el viaje inverso, de Europa a América. Debido al distinto horizonte de experiencias que mediaba entre Moro y Quiroga, el jurista español pudo darle un nuevo significado a este texto pues Vasco, a diferencia de Moro, conoció de primera mano la realidad americana y no sólo a través de fuentes librescas. Queda, con todo, una última etapa en el viaje, metafórico y físico, que hizo la *Utopía* de Moro. Cuando la traducción de Vasco llegó a los miembros del Consejo de Indias, en España, tenía ya un sentido distinto: en este fecundo viaje de ida y vuelta, *Utopía* había dejado de ser un libro de ficción política para convertirse en un manual de buen gobierno’ (LILLO CASTAÑ, ‘Una utopía para el Nuevo Mundo,’ 640).

More specifically, Imbruglia observes:

Today, social and individual life structures are so diverse and complex that they push us to renounce the materialist monism of the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries. Hence, the question of Utopia returns, and the need to consider Utopia as a hybrid, as [writers and philosophers] thought it in the modern age, resurfaces (168).

The author invites us to approach his book ‘not [as] a history of Utopia as [a] genre [...] inaugurated by Thomas More and dried up with the French Revolution’ (9), but as a diachronic study that ‘points out a problem to reconsider’ (168). With this interpretation, he reaffirms Utopia as an ever-valuable intellectual and political tool because of its hybrid nature, nourished by multifaceted human reflections, aspirations, and experiences. That explains why he underlies that universalism and relativism, the pursuit of happiness and the acknowledgment of conflict, theory and practice, communitarianism and liberalism, may coexist within a utopian framework.

Imbruglia’s ethical vision of the past encourages the reader in these challenging times marked by cultural and political polarisation, exploding inequality, environmental and climate crisis, and war.