

REBUILDING SOLOMON'S HOUSE: A COLLECTION OF UTOPIAS AND OTHER TEXTS BELONGING TO THE 17TH CENTURY

Dana Jalobeanu (ed.), *Casa lui Solomon sau fascinația utopiei. Știință, religie și politică în Anglia secolului al XII-lea* (București: All, 2011), ISBN 978-973-571-992-0, pp. 431

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New Atlantis is today probably the most renowned of Bacon's writings, although it has been often considered to belong to totally different genres: utopia, unaccomplished project for the reformation of knowledge, a manifesto for the new science or a work of fiction. Among these, the image of Solomon's House represents the first pattern of "scientific" organization featuring the knowledge as a cumulative, community and experimentally testable establishment. Bacon had never finished *New Atlantis* thus provoking his followers to continue his work and his uncompleted projects. Some of the writings belonging to the 17th century literature recurrently claim not only to use the literary pattern of Solomon's House, but to continue and to popularize – at different levels, and from different perspectives, the projects announced in *New Atlantis*.

The volume entitled *Solomon's House or the fascination of utopia: science, religion and politics in the seventeenth Century England* contains a group of such texts that proposed to the seventeenth century reader different ways of continuing and interpreting Bacon's scientific utopia. They are translated for the first time in Romanian, and they are also gathered together for the first time under the covers of the same volume. Some of these texts are less known and have never been transposed in English modern editions, not being truly analyzed and commented on by the specialists.

Authors of these texts come into the fictional Baconian convention of the unfinished text and they propose possible continuations, re-writings, interpretations of the story, on the consideration of "what would have happened if...". The reader is invited to imagine means in which the text that Bacon never got to finish could have continued, and which, actually, is nothing but a series of relatively discontinuous episodes that describe some of the remarkable aspects of a "perfect" society situated on a mysterious island. What could complete this description? Or, even more, if we regard Solomon's House as a literary description of the Baconian project of reorganizing knowledge – an uncompleted project – how should it be continued and perfected? These are the questions resulting into a quite long series of descriptions interspersed along the 17th century.

Beyond the common feature of using the Baconian pattern of production, administration and transmission of the scientific knowledge, the diversity of the texts grouped in this volume is very wide. Solomon's House, re-built in each of them is, on a first glance at least, very different from the initial pattern and difficult to subscribe to the Baconian ideal of knowledge or modern science. In spite of the fact that we are dealing with texts written in about the same period of time (England during the second half of the 17th century) and for about the same declarative purpose (proposition, projection or built of societies for the production, organization, administration and dissemination of knowledge), their purposes are often very diverse and the differences are not only in the detail. In the pages of the volume we will see how Solomon's House is built to organize the human knowledge in the perspective of the millennium approach and of the

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expectation of Christ's second coming, how the Baconian pattern is reorganized to describe (or at least to criticize) an already built scientific society, the Royal Society, or how Solomon's House and the *New Atlantis* can be used to justify a proposal of legislative reorganization and sovereign's redefinition in England during Restoration.

The volume begins with an anonymous continuation of the Baconian utopia which appeared in 1660 and only identified by the initials R.H. Its title is *New Atlantis, begun by the lord Verulam, viscount of st. Albans and continued by R H Esquire, wherein is set forth a platform of the monarchical government with a pleasant intermixture of divers rare inventions and wholesome customs, fit to be introduced into all kingdoms, states, and common-wealths*, London, 1660, in the translation of Doina Cristina Rusu and Dana Jalobeanu (pp. 55-170). It is about a very little known text, which the mysterious author R.H. published in 1660 as a continuation of the *New Atlantis*, where the accent is moved from the natural philosophy and put on the perfect laws of the island and on the image of the king, Solomon, with whom Charles II, who had just become a king, is compared.

The second chapter presents the work of Joseph Glanvill, *Anti-fanatical religion or free philosophy. A continuation of New Atlantis*, in the translation and with an introduction by Dana Jalobeanu (pp. 173-249). The writing was published in a volume in 1676, but it represents an older manuscript of one of the famous apologists of the Royal Society for the Advancement of Learning and one of the partisans of the new science. Glanvill offers an interpretation and a continuation of the *New Atlantis* which, at a first glance, is extremely uncommon, offering a kind of "natural history of religion". Glanvill's text proposes a history of religion in Bensalem utopic island, a rewriting of the English (troubled) recent history of the Civil War and the Interregnum. The introductory study reveals the extent to which this text, that until now was relatively unknown, represents an important step in the interpretation of the Baconian scientific utopia in the second part of the 17th century. There are very few debates over this text in the secondary literature and none of them are discussed comparatively, wondering in what respect we are dealing with a "continuation" of the *New Atlantis*.

The second part of the volume, *Solomon's House Rebuilt*, contains two texts that emerged inside Hartlib Circle: *A Description of the Famous Kingdome of Macaria and A Modell of A Christian Society*, continued by *The Right Hand of Christian Love Offered*. Oana Matei studied the anonymous writing that originated inside Hartlib Circle and for some years identified as belonging to Gabriel Plattes, *Macaria* (pp. 253-283). This text is very rare, very little known and very little read, not having other modern editions, but the Webster edition.¹ Although more like a public politics project than a per se utopia, *Macaria* represents a continuation of the Baconian project of knowledge production and organization, being well-connected both with other utopic writings of the century (e.g. Andreae, *Respublicae Christianopolitanae Descriptio*) but also with other manifestos produced at the outset of the Puritan Revolution (John Stoughton's *Felicitas Ultimi Saeculi*, Lord Brook's *Nature of Truth*, John Amos Comenius' *Via Lucis*). The translation is preceded by an introductory study which describes to the readers the historical moment when this writing appeared in England, the moment of the beginning of the 1640s, placing the text in the context of the Puritan Revolution, and emphasizing the millennial ideas animating Hartlib Circle and Plattes' contemporary England. It is interesting to mention that the members of Hartlib Circle continued the line imposed by Francis Bacon, of knowledge production and advancement, connecting the latter with an elaborated program of social reformations, Plattes seeming to be among the first authors arguing against the war from an economic perspective and proposing a program of reforms based on social distribution.

Cristian Bențe studied other two interesting texts emanated from Samuel Hartlib's Circle, *A Modell of a Christian Society and The Right Hand of Christian Love Offered* (pp. 287-330). The texts apparently represent an English translation of a famous utopic manifesto written by Johann

Valentin Andrae. Actually, the translator massively intervened in the text, to such an extent that we almost have a reproduction of the original text. Actually, until a few decades ago, what they knew about Andrae’s utopic writings was mainly limited to his famous writing *Christianopolis* (1619). Other two utopic writings of his: *Christianae societatis imago*, published anonymously at Strasbourg in 1619 (Tübingen, 1620), and *Christiani amoris dextera porrecta* (Tübingen, 1620; Strasbourg, 1621), were considered lost. G.H. Turnbull was the one who discovered copies of these manuscripts among Samuel Hartlib’s documents.² Urged by Hartlib, John Hall translated these two texts, which were subsequently published in 1647 at Cambridge as *A Modell of a Christian Society* and *The Right Hand of Christian Love Offered*.

A second translated text, cared for and commented on by Doina-Cristina Rusu and Dana Jalobeanu is Abraham Cowley’s famous manifesto, *A proposal for the advancement of experimental philosophy*, London, 1660 (pp. 33-362). It is also about a text appeared in the circle of writings and manifestos supporting the new science, emanated in the group from which the Royal Society would be constituted. Cowley takes Solomon’s House explicitly as the model of a savant utopic society, the purpose of which is the reformation of knowledge in England.

Grigore Vida worked on a selection of texts (pp. 365-404) belonging to the early years of the Royal Society. It is about a very diverse series of texts: letters, manuscript documents which were published only in the early 20th century; considered like some kind of “manifestos” of reformation of the Royal Society on the pattern of the New Atlantis. What the two texts have in common is the fact that each of them contains a proposal of reorganization of the royal Society and an implicit critic of the way this society was functioning.

One can definitely say that Solomon’s House volume, the result of an assiduous research, comprehension and context placing work on these quasi-known texts, represents a premiere for the Romanian culture. The volume succeeds to highlight both key-themes regarding the Baconianism of the Royal Society (and of the modern science) and a series of contextual elements essential for understanding the way the “scientific” and “pedagogic” utopianism acted in the 17th century and afterwards. The volume is also unique because it shows how the interesting interactions between such diverse fields like natural philosophy, “science”, politics and religion develop today.

References

¹ Webster, Ch., ed., *Samuel Hartlib and the Advancement of Learning* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1970).

² Turnbull, G.H., *Hartlib, Dury and Comenius: gleanings from Hartlib’s papers* (London: University Press of Liverpool, 1947).