

**Thomas More's most famous book, *Utopia*, presented in the last edition corrected by its author.**

More, Sir Thomas. *De optimo reip. statv, deque noua insula Vtopia*. Apud inclytam Basileam, [1518]. 8 1/2 inches (220 mm), 355 (i.e. 359), [1] pp., illus.

Within the inner circle of fifteenth-century English humanists, only Sir Thomas More (1478–1535), the pupil of Thomas Linacre, disciple of John Colet and intimate friend of Desiderius Erasmus, preserves to this day the reputation of an author as well as a scholar. Just as Jonathan Swift, another prolific polemicist, is remembered chiefly for his not dissimilar *Gulliver's Travels*, so Thomas More's enduring fame rests on *Utopia*. The list of literary adjectives is short: Proustian, Dickensian ... and most resonant of all, Utopian. The word has benefited from an ambiguity in the transliteration of Greek diphthongs into English—More's "Utopia" was No-where (Ou-topia) but "Utopian" has become a good (an ideal) place (Eu-topia), its primacy further reinforced by reaction from its evil twin, the bad place (Dystopia). More was himself a contributor to this transformation of meaning inasmuch as the adjective "*optimo*" (best) is applied to the "*reipublicae statu*" (state of the commonwealth) of the island of Utopia (**Spread 7**). More's romance packs into a small space a multitude of comments and observations and speculations on the state of contemporary society. Like the *Apology for Herodotus* of the great printer Henri Estienne, *Utopia* is chiefly concerned with the life of its time and is not some classical hark back or futuristic projection.

*Utopia* was first published in Louvain in 1516, with the assistance of Erasmus. A Paris edition followed in the next year. The edition reproduced here is the fourth, the second of two published in Basel in 1518. The text was corrected by More: it is the last edition in which the author was directly concerned. (André Prévost's elaborate 1978 edition, published for the 500th anniversary of More's birth, bases itself on a facsimile of this edition). A German translation of *Utopia* appeared in 1524, followed by an Italian version in 1548, an English (often reprinted, including a Kelmscott Press edition) in 1551, a Dutch in 1553, and a French translation in 1559.

The 1518 editions are both supplemented by a reprinted selection of epigrams by

Erasmus, as well as a collection of More's own *Epigrammata*, here printed for the first time. (A second, separate, revised and enlarged edition of the *Epigrams* appeared in 1520). More's epigrams begin at **Spread 90**, followed by those of Erasmus (a revision of the Paris 1507 edition), which fill **Spreads 144–185**. This 1518 edition is improved in other ways. The 1516 edition contained a crude illustration of Utopia, the Paris edition omitted it altogether, but here the full-page plate (**Spread 13**) is an elegant artistic rendition of the narrator Raphael Hythlodæus addressing a citizen in the bottom left, a soldier standing guard at bottom right. He points past his ship to the island of Utopia, with its several features: the capital, the "Dream-town" *Amaurotum*, the "Waterless River" *Anydrus*, with its source (*Fons*) and mouth (*Ostium*). This plate is generally attributed to Ambrosius Holbien, son of Hans the Elder. **Spread 19** shows his fanciful scene of the bearded Hythlodæus (second from left) telling his tale to Thomas More and Peter Giles in the garden of More's Antwerp house. More's "pupil-servant" John Clement is seen waiting on the trio at the far left.

Ambrosius Holbein's younger brother was the more famous Hans Holbein the Younger, who also contributed various borders to this edition. The title-page, for instance (**Spread 7**), bears his name in two flanking cartouches at the top, as does the prefatory letter to Peter Giles (new to the 1517 edition) at **Spread 15**—Giles invented the Utopian alphabet (and composed the verses) at **Spread 13**. Armed with an introduction from Erasmus, Hans Holbein the Younger later traveled from Basel (where he had worked for the printers) to London, where he painted a portrait of More, and a lost masterpiece depicting More and his household.

The mark of the printer Johann Froben at **Spread 90** is bordered by texts in the three sacred languages of Christianity: Greek, Latin and Hebrew. The Greek motto at the top is from Matthew 10:16: "Be ye therefore wise as serpents, and harmless as doves." To the left is a Latin motto derived from Martial, advising "Prudent simplicity and the love of what is right." To the right is a Hebrew text from Psalm 125:4: "Do good, O Lord, unto those that be good, and to them that are upright in their hearts."

The earliest recorded owner of this copy was Thomas Hawkes, who has inscribed his name (followed by "his Booke") in English, with the equivalent (*idem*) in Utopian at **Spread 13**: there is no W in the 22-letter alphabet, so he has written the Utopian U

instead; he has also made a slight mistake in the transcription of two very similar Utopian letters, so the surname actually transliterates “Haukeu.” A Thomas Hawkes appears in John Foxe’s *Book of Martyrs*, having been burned under the Marian Persecutions at Coggeshall, Essex, in 1555, but the handwriting appears to be from somewhat later in the century. **Spread 7** bears the signature (dated 1772) of the bibliographer William Herbert (1718–95), who accumulated a large collection of 16th-century books as materials for his enlargement of Joseph Ames’s *Typographical Antiquities* (London, 1785–90). It was his habit to write his name and the date on the title-pages of his books (as here). Rebinding of the book in full brown morocco in the late 19th century has deprived this copy of any further signs of provenance, except for the bookplate (**Spread 2**) of the great collector of early English books and incunabula, George Dunn (1865–1912). His books were dispersed at auction in four Sotheby sales between 1913 and 1915. Dunn’s initialed acquisition note, dated March 1910, appears on **Spread 6**. The three Greek letters (\_\_\_) are presumably a cost-code.