

THE GOVERNMENTAL STRUCTURE OF UTOPIA

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A close examination of the mechanics of the government of Amaurot shows that it was most closely modelled on the government of the City of London. Departures from its practice incorporate features of Venice and the Roman Republic. The Utopian federation was probably patterned on the constitutionalist tradition of the Netherlands while the national senate incorporated features of the English Parliament. The implications of More's use of contemporary government archetypes for the interpretation of *Utopia* are discussed.

Key words: Amaurot, government, London, Netherlands, Parliament.

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Le mécanisme du gouvernement d'Amaurote, capitale de l'Utopie, se montre, si on l'examine de près, modelé sur celui de la Cité de Londres. Lorsqu'il s'en écarte, c'est pour emprunter des traits à Venise et à la République romaine. Quant à la fédération que constituent les villes d'Utopie, elle est probablement modelée sur la tradition constitutionnaliste des Pays-Bas, et le sénat national incorpore des traits du Parlement anglais. L'article examine ce que l'usage, fait par More, des archétypes de gouvernement de son temps implique pour l'interprétation de l'Utopie.

Mots-clés: Amaurote, gouvernement, Londres, Pays-Bas, parlement.

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El mecanismo del gobierno de Amaurote, capital de la Utopía, se muestra, si se le examina de cerca, modelado sobre el de la Ciudad de Londres. Cuando se aleja de ella, es para tomar rasgos de Venecia y de la República romana. En cuanto a la federación que constituyen las ciudades de Utopía, está probablemente modelada sobre la tradición constitucionalista de los Países Bajos, y el senado nacional incorpora rasgos del Parlamento inglés. El artículo examina lo que el uso, hecho por Moro, de los arquetipos de gobierno de su tiempo implica para la interpretación de la *Utopía*.

Palabras claves : Amaurote, gobierno, Londres, Países Bajos, parlamento.

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In the outpouring of work on More's *Utopia* during the past generation, discussion of its government has generally been concerned with political theory, while among literary historians, sources for Utopian political practice have predominantly been found in ancient Greece.¹ Scant regard has been given contemporary archetypes for its polity. The editors of the recent Cambridge University Press *Utopia* do cite Venice as the "particular republic that the Utopian arrangements would be most likely to call to mind" among a humanist readership,² and Dominic Baker-Smith cites Venice with Sparta as constitutional references.³ Russel Ames relate Utopian government to details of a few European cities. He nominated Ghent as a model for Amaurot and judged that the island federation resembled the loose but stable Hanseatic league.⁴ The political historian J. H. Hexter avoided discussion of Utopian government.⁵ Of the island's civic institutions in themselves little has been written on their practical operation; and when John Guy asks if Utopia's senate provided "good counsel", he does not distinguish between city and island senates, a confusion not uncommon in writings on Utopian government.⁶

1 Judith P. Jones, "Recent Studies in More," *English Literary Renaissance*, 9 (1979), 442-58; Albert J. Geritz, "Recent Studies in More (1977-1990)," *Ibid.* 22 (1992), 112-40; George M. Logan, "Interpreting Utopia," and Germain Marc'hadour, "Ubiquitas Utopiae," *Moreana* 118-19/203-58, 259-85; Michael D. Wentworth, *The Essential Sir Thomas More* (New York: G. K. Hall 1995).

2 *Thomas More, Utopia*, ed. George M. Logan, Robert M. Adams and Clarence H. Miller (Cambridge UP 1995), 123 n 21, hereafter cited as *Cambridge Utopia*.

3 *More's Utopia* (London: Harper Collins Academic 1991), 154, 156; Plutarch's life of Lysurgus probably inspired many Utopian social institutions, but there are marked disparities between Spartan and Amaurot offices of government, as Baker-Smith himself notes; see Arthur F. Kinney, *Humanist Poetics* (U of Massachusetts P, 1986), 76-77. Besides Sparta's dual monarchy, its polity was not founded on a household base as was Amaurot's, Malcolm Schofield, *The Stoic Idea of the City* (Cambridge UP, 1991), 36-41.

4 *Citizen Thomas More and His Utopia* (Princeton UP, 1949), 86-92, 95-99; Adams missed the political similarity between London and Amaurot by examining only London guilds.

5 *More's Utopia: The Biography of an Idea*, Torchbook ed. (New York: Harper 1965); *Utopia*, ed. E. Surtz and J. H. Hexter, Vol 4 of *The Complete Works of St. Thomas More*, Yale UP, 1965, xv-cxxiv. Hereafter referred to as CW4.

6 "The Henrician age" in *The Varieties of British Political Thought, 1500-1800*, ed. J. G. A. Pocock (Cambridge UP, 1993), 21.

This article reexamines Utopian political structure in the context of models contemporary to More -- not classical ones -- especially his own city, for the author allowed himself and it to be advertised as *inclutae civitatis Londinensis civis et Vicecomitis*.⁷ The physical equivalence of Amaurot and the City of London was obvious to the book's first glossators; not recognized by scholars but equally striking were similarities of government.⁸

Comparing Statistics

The basic political unit of Amaurot and other Utopian cities is a 30-household syphograncy of 10-16 adults (300-480 adults in all). Household heads annually choose one of themselves as a representative (phylarch/ syphogrant) to a council of 200 (*syphograntorum comitia*).⁹ This corresponds to the approximately 200 early sixteenth-century London common councilmen¹⁰ selected by vestries from parishes or precincts and approved by wardmote householders.¹¹

The average population of an early sixteenth-century London parish or precinct would have been from 300 to 480 adults. The first, very imperfect measurement of London's parish population was the

7 *Cambridge Utopia* 2; as London's official records referred to their Sheriff as "vicecomes", More would more correctly have been titled subvicecomes, CW4, 267, 295.

8 Superb maps of More's London are to be found in *The City of London from prehistoric times to c. 1520*, ed. Mary D. Lobel and W. H. Johns, *The British Atlas of Historic Towns*, vol. 3 (Oxford UP 1989).

Amaurot is not mentioned in *De Magistratibus*, but is implied, immediately following as it does its physical description. This may account for the appearance of the subject of government out of its proper order in the best commonwealth topos, George M. Logan, *The Meaning of More's "Utopia"* (Princeton UP, 1991), 191.

9 *Cambridge Utopia* 120-21, 135; uncited references to its government are to 120-25; for derivation of its terms, see CW4, 398-401.

10 There were approximately 190 common councilmen in 1460 and 212 under Elizabeth; the number per ward could vary annually, Frank F. Foster, *The Politics of Stability. A Portrait of the Rulers in Elizabethan London* (London: Royal Historical Soc. 1977), 180-81.

11 *Ibid.* 36-38, 59. Councilmen outnumbered parishes in part because the latter often fell between wards, *Two Tudor Subsidy Assessment Rolls for the City of London: 1541 and 1582*, ed. R. G. Lang, London Record Society, 29 (1993), xxxiii. Ralph Robinson, a citizen, probably with wardmote election in mind, equated syphograncy and ward, despite the fact that there were only 25 wards; *Utopia* (New York: Knopf 1992), 74. This modernized translation is hereafter cited as Robinson; he clearly equated Amaurot and London.

chantry certificate of 1548. It reveals a range in the number of communicants from 100 in the smallest to the extraordinary 3400 in St. Sepulchre Without Newgate; the most common totals per parish were 300 and 400. Dividing St. Dunstan West's communicant population of 900 by three, its later known number of precincts, we find also 300 adults for a parish divided into precincts.¹²

In Amaurot a tranibor, usually reelected yearly from the scholarly class, is above every 10 syphogrants and their 300 families; he sits in the city's 20-member senate.¹³ They correspond to the 25 life aldermen selected by the Court of Aldermen as vacancies occurred from four wealthy men nominated by the appropriate wardmote. The apparent differences between the two sets of magistrates beyond the critical one of learning versus wealth will be evaluated later.

At Amaurot's head is the prince elected for life from the learned. Syphogrants vote secretly for one among the four nominees presented by the people in each city quarter, then acclaim and recommend him to the senate: *selectus unus commendatur senatui* (Cambridge *Utopia* 122/5-6).¹⁴ London's Lord Mayor was chosen

12 *London and Middlesex Chantry Certificate*, 1548, ed. C. J. Kitching, London Record Society, 16 (1980), xx, 8, 12, 38 (St. John the Evangelist Watling Street), and passim. Rounding off communicant numbers raises the possibility that these were traditional estimates.

Amaurot's minimum *adult* population was 60,000, the same number Derek Keene estimates for London's *total* population in 1500, "Medieval London and Its Region," *London Journal*, 14 (1989), 107, a figure used by Baker-Smith, 196 n 12, without reference. While historical demographers give a mid-century total London population double that of 1500, the increase occurred in areas outside the walls: the central area in which More lived is believed to have had stable numbers, *London 1500-1700*, ed. A. L. Beier and Roger Finlay (London: Longman 1986), 8. At century's end, however, central parishes had from 60 to 80 households, Ian Archer, *The Pursuit of Stability* (Cambridge UP, 1991), 89. See also Lang, lxxii and Vanessa Harding, "The Population of London, 1550-1700: A Review of the Published Evidence," *London Journal*, 15 (1990), 111-17 and Table 1.

13 Twenty tranibors numerically resembled Antwerp wethouders (law keepers): 16 aldermen, two burgomasters and two treasurers (20) plus a rentmaster, who together conducted day-to-day government. But only half were replaced each year (half of these nominated by Antwerp's 26 wardmasters) though repeated service was possible. The important differences were their appointment by the prince's regent, the fact that most were provincial nobles, and wardmaster electors were appointees of the wethouders. G. Marnef, *Antwerp in the Age of Reformation* (Johns Hopkins UP, 1996), 13-19, 27-28. In Venice the approximately 300 senators were subject to annual reelection.

14 This was the jurist Bartolus' model election procedure for sovereign cities, Joseph Canning, *The political thought of Baldus de Ubaldis* (Cambridge UP, 1987), 198.

annually by the aldermen from two nominated members of that body. He was then publicly approved by common councillors and guild liverymen assembled in common hall.¹⁵ Nomination procedures were, therefore, subtly inverted between the two cities, and the syphogrants' secret voting strongly contrasted with common hall's public choice. The most important difference was Amaurot's lifetime executive, probably based on the Doge of Venice.¹⁶ Not only did his term contrast with the Lord Mayor's but it was pointedly longer than that of republican Rome's two annual consuls who presided over lifetime senators.¹⁷

It is the household foundation and numerous electoral units which confirm that the polity of Amaurot derives from that of London and not another European city. The latter virtually all had fewer parishes and wards than London; Antwerp, a relevant example, had 13 wards and only four parishes.¹⁸ Most European cities were also based on guilds, corporate bodies unmentioned in *Utopia*.¹⁹ London government partly depended on these corporations; but since its

I prefer the English "prince" of Robinson, 62, to "governor" in the Cambridge *Utopia*, 123 and passim, because *princeps* had a specific juristic meaning well understood by More, an ambassador trained in civil law and a member of Doctors' Commons. He did not write *gubernator*, *praefectus* or another Latin term for provincial magistrate; also see below pp. 23-24. In "First Among Equals: The Utopian Princeps," *Moreana* 115-116/33-45 David Baker explores the implications of various translations of the word.

15 Alfred B. Beaven, *The Aldermen of the City of London*, vol. 2 (London: Corporation of the City of London, 1913), xx, xxiv-xxv; choice was limited by strict precedence. London did not have four electoral quarters; they probably refer to the four urban tribes of early Rome. Four markets undercounted London's 12 food markets, *Hugh Alley's Caveat, The Markets of London in 1598*, ed. Ian Archer, Caroline Barron and Vanessa Harding (London: London Topographical Society, 1988), 1.

16 More no doubt knew from his study of the Italian humanist that Giovanni Pico della Mirandola's republican circle admired the Venetian constitution with its life dogeship, H. C. Butters, *Governors and Government in Early Sixteenth Century Florence* (Oxford UP, 1985), 22-24, 45. Venice's senate and family-based grand council only superficially resemble Amaurot government; in numbers of officers and procedures, London is much closer.

17 See Baker-Smith, 34.

18 Archer, *Pursuit*, 83 and n 100; Marnef, 11, 26. Amaurot had only 13 churches (Cambridge *Utopia* 231), probably in this case the ubiquitous medieval reference to Christ and his apostles.

19 Antony Black, *Guilds and Civil Society in European Political Thought* (Cornell UP, 1984), ch. 5, esp. 71-72.

fourteenth-century constitutional crisis, aldermen and councillors had been elected by householders.²⁰

Once elected, Utopian phylarchs play a minor role; mainly they select a candidate for prince (Robinson even termed their meeting place the election house). Similarly, the usual function of London common councillors was to meet twice yearly with guild liverymen in common hall to nominate the Lord Mayor and one sheriff.²¹ Pairs of syplogrants attend the senate on a rotating basis, but practically speaking this would give them little voice in government. Their presence is probably as watchdogs to prevent the prince and senate from combining in tyranny, an evil repeatedly guarded against by More.²² Their limited appearance in the senate bears some resemblance to the fifteenth-century aldermanic practice of calling in select common councilmen as business required.²³

The assembly of syplogrants receives important public matters from the senate for consideration. In turn they confer with their families and make recommendations back to the tranibors for final decisions: the wise both propose and decide. So too in London, where City rulers identified wealth and experience with prudence: the aldermen brought important legislation before the common council,

20 *Liber Albus*, ed. H. T. Riley (London, 1861), 37. Archer, Foster, and Ames explain the role of livery companies (guilds) in sixteenth-century London, but the most complete account is David Rappaport, *Worlds Within Worlds* (Cambridge UP 1989), passim. Citizenship depended on company membership, and liverymen with councillors nominated the Lord Mayor. Company masters supervised crafts; in Utopia syplogrants do. Despite lack of guilds, Amaurot follows the custom of London by which citizens could follow any trade, not just that of their apprenticeship, Cambridge *Utopia* 125-27.

21 Robinson, 62; Sylvia Thrupp concludes that the common council was identical with common hall, *The Merchant Class of Medieval London*, Ann Arbor Paperbacks, U of Michigan P, 1962), 83-84. Council members' only city-wide administrative office was as four members of the committee to audit Bridgemaster and Chamberlain accounts.

22 Baker-Smith 155-56. The institutional means to restrain tyranny suggested by Scholastics and legists, especially Bartolus and Marsilio, read like a commentary on *Utopia*, Quentin Skinner, *The Foundations of Modern Political Thought*, vol. 1 (Cambridge UP, 1978), 51-65, though his discussion of Utopia takes up different issues; see also Logan, *Meaning*, 75-83.

23 Thrupp, 81-82; Archer, *Pursuit*, 31.

which had power to reject it; otherwise implementation was left to the higher court.²⁴

The differences of number and tenure between tranibors and aldermen would have little practical force especially as tranibors are usually reelected. The procedures of the two groups of senior magistrates are markedly similar. Joint conduct of business by prince and senate conformed to the Lord Mayor's chairmanship of the Court of Aldermen, while the latter's two meetings per week, frequently augmented, matched the thrice weekly schedule of Amaurot's senate.²⁵ Both dispense criminal and civil justice. Most importantly these small executive councils governed both cities; Amaurot's does so with sovereign authority.

Examining Some Difficulties

Establishing the main points of similarity between the operations of the real and fictional city governments and identifying the significant alterations in the selection and term of Amaurot's chief officers necessitates consideration of some puzzling aspects of More's description of the Amaurot polity, both in its own terms and in relation to London. A procedure that seems to apply to both Amaurotian councils reveals a seeming contradiction. First we are told *Extra senatum aut comitia publica de rebus communibus inire consilia capitale habetur*. (Cambridge *Utopia* 122/16-17) [It is a capital offense to make plans about public business outside the senate or the popular assembly (123/18-20)]. But on important matters referred to them the syplogrants *qui cum suis familiis communicata re* (122/21) [talk the matter over with the households they represent (123/24-25)]. If the rule applied to the senate alone, there would be no discrepancy,²⁶ but Raphael includes Amaurot's *comitia publica* in the ban. If this is the electoral meeting of each city quarter rather than the *comitia syplograntonum*, there is no contradiction. London practice suggests this alternative: in common hall, the functional equivalent to

24 Foster, 16

25 *Ibid.* 80

26 Ames, 172-73 adopted this solution. The Court of Aldermen's rule was cited in 1646, Corporation of London Records Office, "Journal of the Common Council," 40, ff. 170, 172. Secrecy was common in European legislative bodies; Butters, 20 for the Florentine rule.

the electoral meetings of Amaurot's quarters, councilmen swore not to disclose what was spoken there.²⁷

The second interpretive problem relates to the electoral status of the countryside surrounding Amaurot. Socially democratic and contrary to the values of classical and medieval republics, the insistence that all citizens perform rural labor leads to misunderstanding of the political implications. The larger rural households are overseen by rural phylarchs (*agricolarum phylarchi*) distinguished from town magistrates (*magistratibus urbanis*). Robinson termed them head *bailiffs*, but assumed that *farms* choose them.²⁸ If one assumes a close parallel with London, such choice would be unlikely, because Middlesex was subject to London's sheriffs, and the City controlled Southwark and appointed one Surrey justice;²⁹ there was no question of reciprocal elective choice by these areas.

The subjection of Amaurot's countryside results less, however, from lack of suffrage (household heads, at least, vote when they go from country to city whether or not rural phylarchs are elected) than from lack of the other part of citizenship, the right to hold magisterial office.³⁰ Whatever More's social disagreement with Aristotle, Utopian rulers are not husbandmen. This is because prince and tranibors, unlike syphogrants whose chief administrative function is to supervise material production (part of Aristotle's *oekonomia* as distinct from the *politeia*), come solely from the scholarly class whose members had been nominated by priests and elected by syphogrants to be free of

27 *Liber Albus*, 37. Baker-Smith (156) interprets *comitia publica* to be the consultations of syphogrants with their 30 families (equivalent to London wardmotes or vestries), but that does not answer to the rule's purpose: prevention of conspiracy between the prince and tranibors. Interpretation of these passages is perplexing; has More left a few loose ends?

28 Cambridge *Utopia* 112/20-21, 114/26-27; Robinson, 57, 62

29 Beaven, vol. 2, xxxii; Foster, 186.

30 Canning, 178-80. Some country dwellers remained longer than the normal two years, Cambridge *Utopia* 113-15.

labor.³¹ Pursuing this distinction further reveals that most urban Utopians also lack full citizenship.

A final problem is that lay authority in Amaurot over traditional areas of English clerical control - marital law, appointment of priests, and hospitals - seems in marked contrast with London. But the latter two practices existed there, as in many European cities, with the expansion of lay authority during the late medieval period.³² Citizen selection of priests occurred in a few parishes where London corporations held the advowson,³³ while in chantries, parish fraternities,³⁴ and company chaplaincies lay choice of clergy was widespread. This development was dramatized when More's friend and mentor, Dean John Colet, made the court of the Mercers' Company governors of St. Paul's School.

Civic supervision was widespread among London's nearly 30 hospitals and almshouses, especially over its 10 leper refuges. Bethlehem or Bedlam had secured the Lord Mayor and Aldermen's protection in 1346. Richard Whittington's many almshouses were supervised by lay corporations. The Mercers expanded their ownership of St. Thomas Acon property to enlarge their chapel during 1510-17, the years of More's active membership in the company.³⁵

31 Aristotle, *Politics*, ed. and trans. Ernest Barker (Oxford UP, 1962) ¶1329a; Cambridge *Utopia* 113, 123, 130-31, 231 and n 125. Therefore syphogrants usually work at their trades but not tranibors or prince, Cambridge *Utopia* 131.

32 Bernd Moeller, *Imperial Cities and the Reformation*, ed. and trans. H. C. Erik Midelfort and Mark U. Edwards, Jr. (Philadelphia: Fortress Press 1972), 45-49; Patrick Collinson, *The Religion of Protestants* (Oxford: Clarendon, 1982), 171-75.

33 The Corporation of London presented to two livings, five of the great companies to one each, Henry W. Clarke, *The City Churches*, 2d ed. (Balham, S. W.: the author 1902), 238, 313, 356, 387, 397, 464, 499. In his unpublished dissertation *Sir Thomas More and the English Clergy* (St. Andrews 1984), Seymour B. House studies several priests who received their ecclesiastical benefices by More's advowson, including St. John Larke, parish priest of Chelsea.

34 John A. F. Thomson, *The Early Tudor Church and Society, 1485-1529* (London: Longman 1993), 182-85. Caroline Barron, "The Parish Fraternities of Medieval London" in *The Church in Pre-Reformation Society*, ed. Caroline Barron and Christopher Harper-Bell (Woodbridge, Suff: Boydell Press 1985), 32-35; they provided a model for Utopian religious feasts (CUP, 237). Susan Brigden, "Religion and Social Obligation in Early Sixteenth Century London," *Past & Present*, 103 (1984), 112.

35 Carole Rawcliffe, "The Hospitals of Later Medieval London," *Medical History*, 28 (1984), 1-21; Derek Keene, "Introduction" in Jean Imray, *The Mercers' Hall*, ed. Ann Saunders (London: The Mercers' Company 1991), 13-15.

That central hospital, erected in memory of London's famous martyr (and certainly More's namesake and patron, Thomas Becket), was a locus of civic observances. Just as significant were the detailed statutes lay founders drew up to guide clerical routine. A firm base existed for the Corporation's later administration of all city hospitals.

Legislative Procedures

A prominent rule of Amaurot's senate, that matters affecting the commonwealth cannot be discussed the day they are proposed nor enacted until discussed over three days, differs from normal aldermanic practice of decision on first hearing.³⁶ The rule related to Parliament, however, and that leads to discussion of Utopia's island senate, composed as it is of three elders, from each of Utopia's 54 cities, who yearly assemble in Amaurot. The number of cities has generally been interpreted as equaling all English and Welsh counties, plus London. This is perhaps unsatisfactory: Wales was not enshired until 1536, usually with only one parliamentary representative per shire, and the tally includes Richmondshire as an English county.³⁷ An alternate derivation of 54 electoral units more consonant with Utopia's civic structure would be based on England's 39 territorial counties plus the 13 boroughs with county status in 1516.³⁸ To make up the additional two jurisdictions More may have regarded each Yorkshire riding as a shire or, like Harrison, included Richmondshire and perhaps Dover (head of the Cinque Ports) or some other local unit.³⁹ In any case Utopia's unicameral senate radically differs from the early

36 Foster, 78-79.

37 Cambridge *Utopia* 113 n 6; for another model see below p.21. Ames' nominee, the Hanse, does not provide a basis for this figure. More and the English did not learn the number of its member cities until his 1520 embassy (38 or 45, though only a dozen led negotiations), T. H. Lloyd, *England and the German Hanse, 1157-1611* (Cambridge UP, 1992), 242-43, 257 and n51.

38 S. J. Gunn, *Early Tudor Government, 1485-1558* (Houndsmills, Basingstoke: Macmillan 1995), 58; he omits Gloucester and Scarborough which also had county status, *The House of Commons, 1509-1558*, ed. S. T. Bindoff, vol. 1 (London: History of Parliament Trust 1982), 96, 249.

39 The readiest way to make up the number 54 would be with Calais and Tournai, each of which had Parliamentary representation in 1516; their resemblance to Utopia's subordinate overseas dependencies, however, makes one hesitate to categorize them as island cities, Cambridge *Utopia* 197.

Tudor Commons, not least in annual assemblage.⁴⁰ Proportional representation awaited Cromwell's Protectorate and the Reform Act of 1832.

The three-reading procedure is introduced as a tranibor rule but then amplified with arguments for delayed procedure in connection with the island senate. Robinson's version suggests the rule applies only to the larger body; he probably thought so, because it applies to Parliament, not the City. Raphael may mean that both Utopian assemblies use the rule and, as undersheriff, More may have believed that the Court of Aldermen would benefit from it.⁴¹ But the lopsided emphasis paid to the procedure in connection with the Utopian general assembly in his meager account of that body suggests the author was musing on the English Lower House.

As a London member of the 1510 Commons and a 1504 member from another constituency,⁴² he evidently thought it should adopt a three-reading rule. A 1485 account reveals that the Commons passed statutes either on introduction or after two readings,⁴³ though by 1510 the Lords practiced three readings.⁴⁴ The relatively lengthy case for delayed consideration of public business in *Utopia* because of unskillful or vain presentation of initial proposals anticipates the argument of Speaker More's famous 1523 address wherein he begged the king to pardon in advance ill-considered utterances by Members.⁴⁵

40 Recalling late fourteenth-century annual parliaments, a time of yearly elected aldermen, Archer, *Pursuit*, 21-25. The primary contrast with parliament as a whole is lack of a predominantly hereditary House of Lords which includes members of the higher clergy.

41 Recorder William Fleetwood later cited Commons practice as a model for the common council, *Ibid.* 40.

42 G. D. Ramsay, "A Saint in the City: Thomas More at Mercers' Hall, London," *English Historical Review*, 97 (1982), 270.

43 *Parliamentary Texts of the Later Middle Ages*, ed. Nicholas Pronay and John Taylor (Oxford: Clarendon: 1980), 185-89; London's Recorder was the procedural expert in the Parliament of 1485; More, a London lawyer, would therefore have closely observed how the House conducted business in 1504 and 1510.

44 *English Historical Documents, 1485-1558*, ed. C. H. Williams (Oxford UP 1967), 592-94; as the Commons Journal only begins with the reign of Edward VI, it is not known when three readings of bills became a regular practice (583).

45 *Ibid.* 605-607.

The connection further suggests that the 1523 Commons under More's Speakership made his three-reading remedy a regular practice.⁴⁶

Despite the stress on the Utopian assembly's structure, its procedures are less articulated than those of urban magistrates and it does rather little; it hears public matters referred by cities, considers common affairs of the island and redistributes local surpluses. The latter is the only concrete function Raphael describes except for reception of foreign ambassadors.⁴⁷ It is surprising that the practice of redistributing population, like surplus goods, between the 54 cities and with Utopian colonies is not ascribed to it.⁴⁸ Raphael does not explain the island's unified diplomacy and warfare. Despite its reception of ambassadors, the island senate's brief annual meetings leave it incapable of day to day conduct of foreign relations. Before suggesting a solution to this important problem, we need to consider an alternate contemporary model for Utopia's civic federation.

The Low Countries where *Utopia* was apparently conceived and whose cities were the model for Amaurot's fine buildings and streets,⁴⁹ offer an alternate source for the Utopian federation. During the previous century, their major cities had sought the status of federated republics in control of their respective hinterlands under distant princely authority.⁵⁰ Erasmus or Peter Giles, town clerk of Antwerp, More's interlocutor in *Utopia* and collaborator in the

46 John S. Roskell, *The Commons and their Speakers in English Parliaments, 1376-1523* (Manchester UP 1965), 344-46 for the Speaker's procedural authority, ch. 2 for his protestation. Persistent three readings in 1523 could help account for Thomas Cromwell's complaint about the session's tedious length

47 Cambridge *Utopia* 113, 123, 145-47, 151; see below on legislation.

48 Cambridge *Utopia* 135-37

49 David Starkey, "England", in *The Renaissance in National Context*, ed. Roy Porter and Mikuláš Teich (Cambridge UP, 1992), 146; *English Historical Documents, 1485-1558*, 189. Hugh Trevor-Roper, "The Intellectual World of Sir Thomas More", *American Scholar*, 48 (1978-79), 29.

50 Wim P. Blockmans, "Alternatives to Monarchical Centralization: The Great Tradition of Revolt in Flanders and Brabant" in *Republiken und Republikanismus im Europa der Frühen Neuzeit*, ed. Elisabeth Müller-Lückner, Schriften des Historischen Kollegs 2 (München: Oldenbourg 1988), 145, 152-54; Martin van Gelderen, "The Machiavellian Moment and the Dutch Revolt: the rise of Neostoicism and Dutch republicanism" in *Machiavelli and Republicanism*, ed. Gisela Bock, Quentin Skinner and Maurizio Viroli (Cambridge UP 1990), 220-23. More distanced Utopus, the conquering monarch, by nearly two millennia!

parerga would most likely have informed More of this tradition.⁵¹ Like the Utopian island senate, the States General was dominated by city delegations, usually composed of two or three members. By the Great Privilege of 1477 it had obtained the right to gather annually and met even more frequently at the behest of the Hapsburg prince during the decades before More's embassy.⁵² But State's representatives were tethered ambassadors; like English Members of Parliament, Utopian delegates freely dispose of civic resources.

The prince superintended the Netherlands' foreign relations, but when the States later rebelled against Philip II they found it acutely difficult to mount united military action. This brings us back to the question, how are foreign policy and warfare directed in the monarchless Utopian federation? Ambassadors were chosen -- as were prince, tranibors and priests-- by city electoral process.⁵³ Yet Raphael's relation indicates a focused foreign policy impossible if each city mounted separate embassies and military campaigns.

The primacy of Amaurot provides a possible answer. Raphael clearly states, despite the nominal equivalence of cities, that Amaurot *qua nec ulla dignior est quippe cui senatus gratia reliquae deferunt* (Cambridge *Utopia* 116/2-3) and "*prima princepsque*" *habetur*. (112/10, quotation marks added) [acts as a capital.] (113/10) A lifetime executive for Amaurot *à la Venice* provides stable authority for foreign policy and the title "prince" (*princeps*) bespeaks such a

51 James D. Tracy, *The Politics of Erasmus* (Toronto UP, 1978), 91-92; Erasmus did not favor a headless civic confederation but supported Netherlands constitutionalism, 35, 39, 106. On Giles and Jerome Busleyden, another possible informant, P. R. Allen, "Utopia and European Humanism: the Function of the Prefatory Letter and Verses," *Studies in the Renaissance*, 10 (1963), 92-95 and Karl G. Schroeder, "Jerome Busleyden and Thomas More," *Moreana* 121/3-10.

52 John Gilissen, "Les États Généraux des Pays de par deçà (1464-1632)," *Anciens Pays et Assemblées d'États*, 33 (1965), 275-91; and see *Actes des États généraux des anciens Pays-Bas, 1427-1477*, ed. Joseph Cuvelier, vol. 1 (Bruxelles: Palais des Académies, 1948), passim for attendance lists of its mid-fifteenth century assemblies; the largest number of villes, 18, attended the April-May 1476 session, 225-28. There would be major difficulties in deriving the elusive number 54 from the States General.

53 Cambridge *Utopia* 131, 231 (priests), 123 (prince); for Ames' statement of the problem (87).

role.⁵⁴ External responsibilities would help explain the Draconian punishment for betrayal of the civic senate's *arcana*. As a Londoner, More assumes its dominance among English cities; he also knew of Antwerp's growing ascendancy in the Netherlands, a development his embassy encouraged.⁵⁵ More's letter to Erasmus fantasizing his regal *imperium* of Utopia as *princeps* by welcoming foreign ambassadors and sovereigns (*principibus*) surrounded by *Amaurorum comitatu* seems to confirm his belief in its leadership of foreign relations.⁵⁶

Of matching interest to the problem of the conduct of Utopian foreign policy is the question of legislative activity. Despite all the attention to delayed consideration of public business and the tranibors' referral of important matters to the syphogrants, close examination of Utopian public assemblies makes it doubtful that they engage in making law. The first description of the Utopian federation indicates that all cities have the same laws.⁵⁷ If each has engaged in legislation, it would be an impossible result after 1760 years of history, especially as the national assembly is not explicitly said to have legislated either. Consonant with the classical value placed on stability in a republic, Utopia underwent no constitutional change after Utopus imposed transforming institutions on the Abraxans. There was technological and intellectual progress, often from foreign example (Cambridge *Utopia* 107, 183), a movement toward religious consensus and expansion of the continental sphere of influence, but Utopian institutions, and therefore its laws remained static (Cambridge *Utopia* 107, 111-13, 121). This would mean that all their actions were what we would term administrative decisions; the limited activities of the island senate listed above are consistent with this. Here is a major

departure in practice from the real world of London, England and the Netherlands, despite their institutional and legal traditionalism. Like Harrington's frozen *Oceana*, Utopia was also a far cry from modern ideals of republican government.

* * *

In *The Meaning of More's Utopia*, George Logan convincingly demonstrates that More eclectically drew on a variety of sources - historical, literary, imagined, and contemporary - to create his discourse on the best state of a commonwealth and his description of Utopia. Logan concludes that their free alteration and recombination demonstrates that use of specific institutions from London or England had no import for More's meaning.⁵⁸ This deduction would make the detailed comparison of real with imaginary government in this article a matter of only mild curiosity.

Yet misprizing the importance of contemporary governmental practice has led to lack of attention to Amaurot and Utopia as functioning political organizations and consequent misconceptions about them. The Cambridge *Utopia* (123/6) gives syphogrants *final* selection of the prince, neglecting the senate's implied veto.⁵⁹ Without reference to such subtleties of oligarchic practice in London, Utopia's formal democratic base is given undue weight by most recent commentators. In particular the differential status of rural/urban Utopians and of syphogrants/tranibors in their political capacities is often lost in a democratic haze. Mistaken credit has been allowed the one contemporary model actually accepted, that for Utopia's 54 cities. Use of *governor* for *princeps* is based on dubious suppositions about More's ideas on the status of cities (not to mention general principles of government) which in turn bear on interpretation of how Utopian foreign policy is conducted. Serious attention to Utopian political practice yields the novel insight that, although Raphael at several points declares that decisions are made about important matters affecting the public, the laws evidently remain unchanged.

58 Logan, *Meaning*, 193-94.

59 CW4, 123 also misses the senate's final choice and translates *princeps* as *governor*.

54 Significantly, the depiction of the honor accorded the prince occurs just prior to the account of law, treaties and foreign relations, Cambridge *Utopia* 194; also see above note 14.

55 Edward Surtz, "St. Thomas More and his Utopian Embassy of 1515," *Catholic Historical Review*, 39 (1953-54), 291; Antwerp's ascendancy was strongly contested by the previously dominant Flemish cities. As for London's high self-conception, eleven years after *Utopia*'s publication a common council committee on the commonweal (!) asserted its acts "ar of noo lesse strength then actes of the high court of parliament having this high libertie and large prehemynence," Gunn, 61

56 Kinney, 87-88, More refers to himself four times as *princeps* in this passage; Baker, 44.

57 Cambridge *Utopia* 113, for fewness of Utopian laws, 101, 195.

Without an accurate view of Utopian government, correct assessment of More's intent is placed in jeopardy. Like many readers, I feel the vivid account of injustices in Book I calls for remedies like those in Book II.⁶⁰ Interpreters of *Utopia* who deny this connection tend toward classical references which may compound the illusoriness of More's commonwealth. But if much of Utopia consisted of barely disguised versions of contemporary institutions favored by the author, was the whole an unattainable dream?

Granted, More as character and probably as author concludes by doubting that Raphael's most radical proposals could be achieved; and a society of unchanging laws can exist only as an ideal. Yet many of his Utopian political devices gained early acceptance. The London Court of Conscience (small claims) began to provide lawyerless justice six months before he resigned as undersheriff in July 1518.⁶¹ That the 1523 Commons was critical in that body's adoption of the three-readings rule has been argued above. In 1525 the aldermen used the ballot box to vote secretly.⁶² Later they resolved to bring greater deliberateness to their proceedings by speaking in order of seniority.⁶³ Parish election of ministers increased during the century (although under a royal church government Sir Thomas tenaciously resisted), and London achieved control of its hospitals. Such realizations in bodies with which he was closely associated argue for reformist purpose in More's imagined commonwealth. As humanist rhetoric was intended to inspire moral action, we should expect no less.⁶⁴



60 As argued by Brendan Bradshaw, "Transalpine Humanism" in *The Cambridge History of Political Thought, 1450-1700*, ed. J. H. Burns (Cambridge UP, 1991), 104-105, 111, 116-125.

61 John Stow, *Survey of the Cities of London and Westminster*, ed. John Strype, 6th ed., vol. 2 (London, 1755), 477-78; Ramsay, 286. As Lord Chancellor, More initiated an abortive effort to reform Common Law by the introduction of equity principles, John Guy, *The Public Career of Sir Thomas More* (Brighton, Harvester Press, 1980), 85-91.

62 Beaven, vol. 2, xxxii.

63 Foster, 78.

64 Martin Fleisher, *Radical Reform and Political Persuasion in the Life and Writings of Thomas More* (Genève: Droz 1973), 123, 128-29, 139, 171; Logan, *Meaning*, 38.