

SOURCES OF UTOPIA

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Abstract

The myth of the Lost Paradise was present in more or less complex forms in almost all primitive culture and it can be considered the first manifestation of human thought on the harsh conditions of human existence, having as background the image of some primordial mythical happiness.

All the peoples of the world have started to have a theological and mythological vision on the world since ancient periods of their existence. The idea of beauty, equilibrium, equitableness and justice presented in different forms, represented with no exception a semiconscious need of life.

Key words: Utopia, myth of Paradise, Greek antiquity, Chinese

MATERIAL AND METHOD

The basic materials for the research included: myths, writings and works with utopian content from Antiquity and Renaissance. The working methods we used were selection of texts and authors, text contrastive analysis and explication as well as historical criticism of the works under study.

RESULTS AND DISCUSSIONS

The myth of the Paradise, of the *Lost Paradise* can be found even before Judaism and Christianity, at all ancient peoples starting with the Sumerians where we can find the idea of the separation of the An sky from the Earth, for the first time, continuing with the Egyptian one with their Pharaoh Menes who founded the ideal state at the beginning of the world and also the Greek one with Plato, the father of utopia. The same myth can be found in ancient Chinese culture, where once there was an Island of the Happy Ones, but to everyone's surprise, it can also be found at the pre-Columbus civilizations, where the perfect state had to be in harmony with nature.

In the Sumerian culture we find the idea of the separation of the Sky (An), identified with the Paradise, from the Earth for the first time. From the Sumerian clay tables we can notice the perfection and beatitude of the "beginnings": the old times when each thing was perfect. Nevertheless, the true Paradise seems to be *Dilmun*, the country where there is no disease or death. It is the place where "no lion kills, or the wolf does not take the lamb, nor a sick person

could say: my eyes hurt" (M. Eliade, 1992). The rupture, the separation of the paradise from the Earth took place as a result of an unlucky accident, in this case a fatal error of the Creator God which led to the scission of the two worlds.

The ancient Egyptians considered that the founding of the state by the Pharaoh- God (the first was considered to be Menes, the one who built the capital of the United Egypt at Memphis) represented the instauration of a new world, a perfect civilization which the Egyptians tried to keep immobile for three and a half millennium. The myth about a fabulous county, Ameti, situated in the South is also well known (C. Barborică, 1998).

The Egyptian tradition preserved the idea of "maintaining intact the first creation", as it is perfect from all points of view: cosmological, religious, social, ethical etc. This époque called *Top-zep* – **The First Time** lasted till the appearance of the Primordial Waters, till the enthronement of Horus. **The First Time** is the **Golden Age** of the absolute perfection before "the wrath, noise, fights or disorder appeared (M. Eliade, 1992).

There are significant differences between the sources of utopia in Europe and the ones in Orient, respectively India and China. They generally start from the different outlooks on human condition in the three different geographical areas, perpetuated since ancient times and preserved till today with small differences. The European thought has in view the domination of man over the surroundings, which constrains him to admit through science which are the results that trigger the phenomena in order to use them in technics. The Indian thought

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makes the universe an object of contemplation; the individual consciousness has to identify itself with the universe as a triumph over the isolated existence and oppressed desire. The Chinese thought looks for an identical order in nature and society where the wise should take part in.

The Chinese have a supreme principle, *Taoism*, that gathers a trinity of concepts: Order, Force and Totality. Taoism is an ideal which each of us should tend to reach. It is far from the individual God of the occidental religions, but it is the source of any efficient action. The term *taoism* is not clear to many persons and we have to pay attention not to confound it with certain notions which we are more familiar with.

In popular religiosity the taoist myth of the paradisiacal islands hidden in the Orient, the Islands of the Happy people, is indubitably one of the most representative myths in the Chinese tradition.

In antithesis with Taoism, Confucianism tries to set up the morale of common sense and of the good sovereign. The disciples of Lao-zi, the first great Dao master, offer the people what they need: explanations on life, death and the after life. In practice, they maintain the rituals and beliefs that are the sources of ancient popular religion.

The most fascinating myth the Chinese have always been interested in is the one of the Islands of the Immortals or the Islands of the happy people, a pleasant place which is believed to be situated in the Oriental Sea. Taoism was closely interested in this myth, almost creating a science and writing exact descriptions of the places and their inhabitants. Lie-zi tells about the Lie-gu-ye mountain which is situated on a large island. On the mountain there live supernatural humans who inspire the wind, drink only dew and do not eat the five cereals (restraining from the five cereals was one of the practices to reach immortality). Yin and yang are always in harmony, the sun and the moon always shine, the four seasons are regular, the wind and rain are temperate and the months of the year are abundant. The people do not fear early death and the creatures do not suffer from diseases (Cfr. Lie-zi, 1993).

In Pu Song-ling's book (one of the greatest gatherer of legends and myths in the 17th century), the *Strange Stories of Liaozhai* (Pu Songling, 1983) the ambitious Mr. Wang happens to meet an immortal taoist who, at the beginning takes him in the high heavenly spheres, but later, realizing that his disciple is not ready for the life in the high spheres, takes him to the Island of the Immortals, which is very far from the Earthly world and is inhabited by the magi. After a period spent on this island and after getting married, Wang wants to

return home and due to the magic of his wife, a roll of white silk transformed into an infinite bridge, the two reach Earth. But, after having spent almost a year on earth, Wang realized the insignificance of the human things and the two decided to return to the amazing Island of the Immortals.

What essentially differentiates the Chinese thought from the ancient European one, respectively the Greek one, is that in the European belief, earth and society always seem two distinct domains, while the Chinese consider that there are two worlds that attune one another and are led according to the same principle.

The Chinese are not interested in the knowledge of things, but in the harmony among humans and this is best noticed in Confucius's philosophy. The principles of Confucius had a large diffusion due to their resemblance to the Chinese ideals. He promoted the loyalty towards the family, the respect for the predecessors. He considered the family to be the nucleus that could be shifted to the whole society. Like the Sumerians and the Egyptians, he nostalgically looked to the primordial époques and urged his people and especially the politicians to follow the model of the predecessors.

Living in a period of anarchy and unjustness, like Plato, Confucius wanted a "moral and political reform" through which he could accomplish total education, a method capable of transforming the ordinary man into a superior person (Mircea Eliade, 1992).

Unlike other authors, Confucius was able to put to practice some of his ideas. He governed a province with large success for 12 years, proving that wisdom is of great help when you are in politics.

Those who approached the utopian trend, tackling it from the literary, philosophical, historical, political or sociological points of view, consider it a kind of "awake dreaming".

All the prehistorical and antique societies, either oriental, Egyptian or pre-Columbian, were shaken by social disharmonies and as a consequence the writers dreamt of constructions with ideal forms that could ensure the harmony of the souls. All these constrictions strike through the mediocrity of the social horizon proposed: radiant cities with equilibrated plan, inhabited by citizens led by just laws, made by wise governors, Philosopher-Kings. The just laws and the Philosopher-Kings are emanations of radiant cities, the result being the happiness of the people (Jean Servier, 2000).

Even at the pre-Columbian peoples, especially the Aztecs, who had the most advanced social organization and culture, the idea of an ideal

state with obvious utopian peculiarities was present till the Spanish conquest of Cortes in 1520.

Unlike the Europeans, the Asians or Egyptians, the Aztecs imagined a strong society based on religion, where the divine held the main role, a harmonious society, ideal in its organization and utopian in the implications of the final objectives where the bloody ritual practices held an important role.

The social organization and this harmony were determined by the rhythm of the natural phenomena. Birth, maturity and death inexorably succeed in life; the night follows the day, the seasons of the year rotate endlessly, the planets move in space in an eternal succession. The first preoccupation of the religious leaders of the Aztecs was to discover those rhythms and especially to follow their complicated vibrations, although uniform, as they were convinced that they can ensure a happy cohabitation of the community.

The perfect harmonious society could be achieved in the context in which the elements of nature, personified in gods, preserved the rhythms whose disturbance could be determined by the negative actions of the persons. Thus, the ritual processions, with frequent human sacrifices were meant to unsteel the gods and bring social harmony on earth.

It is obvious that this fatalist thought including powerful utopian conceptions determined the rapid and dramatic fall of the Aztec empire and after a while, that of the Incas in South America.

The geographical zone where the literary utopia flourished in different forms is Greece and especially the Athenian area. The Classical antiquity imagined a harmonious and happy equilibrium between interior and exterior, the human and the world. The humanists consider this equilibrium as one of the happy moments of the history of humanity, the moment in which the human finds the free burst of any of his inspirations and any spiritual exigency finds the most complex accomplishment.

Plato's and Aristotle's outstanding philosophical syntheses, the inimitable lives of Socrates, Epicure and Pythagoras remind us of the wonderful works of art in Ancient Greece and lead to the ideal through which all the Greek artists and philosophers thought they could stop the passing image of time in its eternal mobility.

The Greeks wanted to offer all the possibilities from the spiritual point of view in their artistic creations. But they did not find this harmonious proportion only in art or philosophy: in public life they wanted to fulfil their human destiny, socializing their possibility at most by

eliminating any distinction between the private and public laws.

As a consequence of the geographical discoveries of the 4th and 5th centuries due to trading and political events a new type of literature appears. It starts to question the civil society after having compared it to the barbarian societies. Thus ideal states appeared such as Hecateu of Abdera's Hyperboreans' county, Euhemerus's Panchaea, Iambulos's City of the Sun and Theopompus's Meropis.

These utopian constructions appeared out of the desire to escape from the corrupt societies, find the natural conditions and the solution to renew the human community. At the same time, the need to localize the ideal land corresponds to the inner desire to transfer the ideal from myth to reality, to make the existence of an accessible world credible. In a more sophisticated form they tried to transfer the mythical data to history by projecting some ideal utopian societies.

Utopia did not appear accidentally, but in a certain period of crisis or major changes in the development of the Athenian democracy. This also happened at the beginning of great geographical discoveries (Campanella) or during social and religious convulsions (Thomas More in England and the French utopians in the 19th century) and ended with the great utopia represented by the communist society.

It is obvious that these periods of crisis or historical fractures represent a ferment for the scientific philosophical thought, predisposed to dreaming, the desire to return to the myths, which essentially have a utopian character. The defeat of the Athenians by the Spartans in 413 B.C., followed by numerous coups d'etat, the abuses made by those who governed the new Athenian republic, the banishments, the arbitrary decisions of the courts of law, Socrate's conviction etc, are elements that determined the philosophers of that time, such as Aristophanes, but especially Plato, to conclude that the governing of the city should not be in the hands of the people, but it should be confided to the real philosophers who will protect the moral integrity of the city in order to have a perfect society (Jean Servier, 2000).

In all the periods of crisis, the followers of the utopia and the creators of literary or philosophical works with utopian character started from the conception that the harmony of the forms would determine the harmony of the souls and that a new social structure would bring a newly born humanity.

Most of the utopians, both the ancient ones (Greek or Roman) and the Renaissance ones had similar visions regarding the utopian social

constructions: cities or islands with equilibrated plan, populated by citizens led by just laws made by wise governors, the Philosopher Kings, the result being the happiness of the citizens.

In ancient Greece Socrate's collocation "know yourself" which is also presented in Plato's "philosophy of the soul" generated the aspiration for the beautiful, good and truth, the desire to return to the celestial land.

There were numerous studies that were interested in the paternity of the philosophical and literary genre of utopia. It is certain that the term appeared in Thomas More's work as the proper name of the island. Subsequently, the term became a common noun.

The utopia as political project had existed even before Thomas More but it flourished in the Greek and Roman antiquity. It also continued in the pre-modern and modern periods, culminating with the Marxist utopia that was meant to be put to practice almost century ago but which failed in almost all the countries.

CONCLUSIONS

All the undergone researches led to the conclusion that:

At all ancient peoples, the idea of equilibrium and justice represented a semi-conscious need of their life.

The myth of the Lost Paradise is to be found not only in Judaism but also in Christianity.

In the Sumerian tradition, initially the Land was united to the Sky (Paradise) and all the things were perfect. There was neither any disease nor death. An unhappy event led to the separation of the two worlds.

In the Egyptian tradition, the first state, which was set up by the Pharaoh Menes, was perfect and the Egyptians tried to preserve its harmony. There had been a Golden Age where anger or disorder did not appear.

Confucius had the nostalgia of the primordial beginnings and urges the people and the politicians to follow the model from their ancestors.

In the *Republic*, Plato imagined an ideal world which was in antithesis with the Athenian realities.

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