Albert Göschl (University of Graz)

A Mediterranean Utopia. The Renaissance Fiction of Plusiapolis as an Ideal of Mediterranean Connectivity

Abstract: The discourse on the Mediterranean (as it has been promoted by authors such as Fernand Braudel) reveals a strong utopian impact. This special kind of Mediterranean utopian thinking refers to transregional, multiconfessional and multilingual chronotopoi, which create new forms of contact zones. These new spaces also manifest in the genre of literary utopia, a fact that has been proven by the existence of one of Italy's first early modern utopias, Filarete's *libro architettonico*, written shortly after the Ottoman conquest of Constantinople. Filarete's manuscript is usually understood by art historians to be a testimony of theoretical architecture, but from a literary point of view, it actually represents a complex metadiegetic novel depicting an imagined society which is characterized by a rich range of 'boundless' Mediterranean elements. On behalf of his Milanese ruler, the narrator founds therein an ideal utopian city during whose fictitious construction he discovers traces of an antique counter-town. This opposite world, Plusiapolis, is characterized by the description of urban buildings apparently influenced by the imagery of an oriental and eastern Mediterranean architecture.

This paper presents the *libro architettonico* as one of the first early modern Mediterranean utopias, and illustrates the influences of the Eastern Mediterranean on the literary utopia as well as the (im)possible influences of Filarete and his book on the reconstruction of Constantinople after the Ottoman conquest.

1 The Concept of Mediterranean Utopia

The Mediterranean region can be seen as a dense communicative network whose cultural and linguistic elements are genuinely closely interconnected.[1] However, the concept of Mediterranean has a hybrid character. On the one hand, it represents a concrete historical region, as described by Fernand Braudel, with more

---

[1] For the concept of Mediterranean connectivity as well as its necessary counterpart of fragmentation see Horden and Purcell (2000; 2019): "The unity and distinctiveness of the Mediterranean should be differently conceived. The unity is not that of ecological or cultural types so much as of connectivity between structurally similar (similarly mutable) microecologies" (Horden and Purcell 2019, 12).

or less fuzzy boundaries (cf. Portugali 2004, 18; Horden and Purcell 2000, 45). At certain times and places, it seems to crystalize into a strongly condensed form, such as in Medieval Andalusia or Sicily under the reign of Frederick II, both pluricultural and plurireligious melting pots, which symbolically stand as *pars pro toto* for the entire Mediterranean area. On the other hand, however, this concept of *méditerranée* also implies a strongly utopian moment. This concerns the sometimes overly idealized image of a constructed multi-ethnic society which generates transregional and multi-confessional spaces.

Hence, the *Dictionnaire de la méditerranée* contains an explicit entry on the concept of "Mediterranean Utopia". In using this term, Christian Bromberger, the author of the lexicon entry, is primarily referring to the harmonious coexistence of Orient and Occident in the geographical area of the Mediterranean (cf. Bromberger 2016, 1503–1506). Obviously, the concept of utopia in Bromberger's definition refers not to a place that does *not* exist, as the term was intentionally coined by Thomas More,[2] but rather emphasizes a particularly desirable social condition in its ideal design at its best. Utopianism is based first and foremost on a longing for a better situation, a utopian desire, as Ruth Levitas (1990) calls it. Thus, the Mediterranean region combines both the actual geographical region as well as the utopian longing for a multiethnic society; a longing which also implies its non-existence in the actual state.

But utopia is not only the longing for something. Utopia in its narrow sense is also a very well-specified literary genre. When we understand the implicitly utopian character of the Mediterranean, it is unsurprising to also find many Mediterranean utopias in the strict sense of a literary genre; texts that depict the ideal of a Mediterranean society in the genre of utopia. Besides the fact that the concept of Mediterranean is based on a broad understanding of utopianism, we also find Mediterranean utopias in a stricter sense, such as in the example of Filarete's manuscript on architecture. The Mediterranean also manifests itself in fictional utopian places, as will be shown in the following lines. In order to analyze this form of *méditerranée* as a utopian desire, one of the first utopias of the early modern period, (Antonio Averlino) Filarete's *libro architettonico*, should serve as a basis.[3]

---

2 The term *utopia* goes back to the Greek *ou*-topos, the non-existent place. In the argumentation of Thomas More utopia is – according to the English pronunciation of <u> – also interpreted as a *eu*-topos, a non-existent happy place (cf. More [1516/51], xi): "Wherfore not *Utopie*, but rather rightly my name is *Eutopie:* a place of *felicitie*".

3 While utopias had, of course, also emerged in the centuries before (such as, for example, the as yet little researched utopianism of the Middle Ages, cf. Oexle 1977), the term is a neologism of More alone.

2 Filarete's Construction of Utopia

In literary studies utopia is understood to be a literary mediated social concept that is situated in a non-existent, fictional place and presents a radically different counter-model to the author's contemporary reality.[4] Unlike the ideal city of Sforzinda, the equally fictitious town of Plusiapolis is far less well-known. Plusiapolis is an ancient port whose existence was narrated by Filarete's literary meta-utopia between 1460 and 1464.[5] It is an urban and at the same time global Mediterranean metropolis whose transregional nature is expressed through the literalization of building structures.[6] Filarete's untitled manuscript, which in research is called either *trattato di architettura* or *libro architettonico,* is of central importance for the history of art, as it contains the first classical design of an ideal city in the Renaissance.[7]

However, in reducing its importance to art history, it has been long overlooked that this text is also of great interest for literary studies, including *Mediterranean* literary studies. The art historical and architectural discourse on the text usually devalues its narrative elements in favor of the description of architectural components. In the late nineteenth century translation into German by Wolfgang von Oettingen (1896) for example, narrative passages were even partially shortened and deleted as uninteresting with the purpose of emphasizing the treatise-like structure of the text. But beyond the architectural treatise, the text also represents a literary social draft which contains the most essential components of literary utopias and thus already anticipates a large part of Thomas More's utopian writing. Filarete refers in his manuscript to a non-existent, desirable world which is not only architecturally outlined, as the title suggests; he also depicts the utopian society itself. The description of the new society outlines, as in all classical utopias, the education system, clothing, penal system, daily routine, and similar sociological elements. In addition to the pure description of architectural sketches and ideal

---

4 Utopia and utopian thought in general always arise from concrete historical conditions. Their analysis contributes to the understanding of utopia. Important introductions to Utopia as a genre are, among many others, Sargent (1994), Levitas (1990), Hölscher (1996), and Kuon (1986).
5 Pivotal research on Filarete is presented, above all, in the works of Berthold Hub (2011; 2012; 2014) and Hubertus Günther (1988; 2009; 2014), Pfisterer (2002; 2009); Finoli (1985), Grassi (1985).
6 The most important new editions of the text from the twentieth century were presented by Spencer (1965) and Finoli and Grassi (1972).
7 For an introduction to the ideal city discourse during the Renaissance cf. Buck (1991), and a concise study on Filarete as architect by Tigler (1963).

social structures, the text consists of a convoluted narrative framework which transcends the *écriture* of a treatise, integrating novelistic traits.[8]

The starting point of the text is a conversation about the unnecessary nature of architecture, which Filarete coincidentally witnesses. For this reason, he writes his book in the Italian vernacular to emphasize how necessary this art form is to society. In using the *volgare*, he distinguishes himself from his recent predecessor Leon Battista Alberti, who had written a Latin treatise *De re aedificatoria* on architecture shortly before (1443–1452). Subsequently, Filarete's text consists primarily of a dialogue between the narrator-architect and his Milanese ruler, Francesco Sforza (including his son). Even though the latest edition of the manuscript from 1972 is entitled *trattato di architettura*, it is not, strictly speaking, a treatise from a literary studies point of view given that the voice is far too personal, the narrative framework inappropriate, and the utopian social drafts equally unfitting.

In any case, the narrator reflects on the ideal city and convinces his ruler to construct it. At the outset he searches for the best possible landscape he can find in the fictitious *Valle d'Inda.* There he begins, after an accurate astrological analysis of the best moment (cf. Bertolini 2010, 142), with the construction of his ideal city Sforzinda, unmistakably named after the Milanese ruling dynasty, the Sforza. He depicts in detail the buildings, their dimensions and functionalities as they are arranged in the literary created space. In front of the reader's eyes, an ideal city is brought into being, arranged according to classical principles, congeneric to the one we perceive in Urbino's cityscapes, which have also become iconic.

The crucial moment for interpreting the *libro architettonico* as an outline of Mediterranean utopianism occurs at the end of the first book in chapter XIV.[9] After the architect has convinced the prince to construct a new harbor for Sforzinda, the workers discover a mysterious box, during the excavations. They immediately recognize an inscription on it, written not in Latin or Italian, but in Greek, Hebrew, and Arabic.

> E nel cavare fu trovato uno sasso quadro, il quale era come dire una cassa grande […], tutto pulito e quadro, che non pareva se none un pezzo intero; il quale vedutolo mi piacque, e fattolo scavare intorno e voltatolo sotto sopra, *gli era scritto lettere antichissime ebree e arabiche*

---

8 The narrative elements here correspond to the fictionalization strategies of later utopias. In addition to the narrative perspective, these concern the attitude of reception, the metaphorical function of the voyage, the toponomy of geographical places, and the symbolic imagery (cf. Rivoletti 2008).

9 Besides De Alberti and the art historian influences, other literary influences can be traced back to travel narratives such as Marco Polo's *Milione* (cf. Grassi 1985, 36–38) or, as with all literary utopias, to Plato's myths of Atlantis (cf. Onians 1971, 107).

e greche; e veduto queste mi piacquono e molto ci maravigliamo, e subito lo facemo condurre fuori del fondamento. [...];[10] [emphasis mine] (TdA, 385).[11]

Since none of the workers involved in the excavations is capable of speaking any of the three languages, the narrator commissions a translation.

[F]eci trascrivere quelle lettere nella propia forma, le quali innanzi che altrimenti fusse tocco le mandamo al Signore. E quale, maravigliatosi, subito le fece interpretare, e inteso la significazione d'esse, subito ne scrisse indietro che per infino che lui non venisse non si dovesse aprire, e che s'attendesse a murare, che infra otto o dieci dì vi sarebbe sanza manco. (TdA, 385).[12]

As the lord arrives, the box is finally opened, which inaugurates the pivotal moment of the book, dividing it ultimately into two parts on a narrative level. As the casket is opened, two butterflies escape, and a golden book appears next to two vases filled with ashes.

Veduto, com'io ho detto, lui ancora questo sasso quadrato, molto si maravigliò e volle vedere dove e in che luogo fu trovato; e fattolo scoprire e guardato dentro gli era una cassetta di piombo [...]. *Eragli ancora uno libro grande tutto d'oro*, [...]. E nel resto del vacuo erano due vasi del medessimo metallo ch'era el libro [...]. E vedute queste cose, ognuno rimase stupefatto e anche molto allegri, veduto quell'oro [emphasis mine] (TdA, 386).[13]

This golden book is richly decorated and written in Greek "tutto era scritto a lettere greche" (curiously, despite its verbal description, the corresponding figure only illustrates a Latin title without Greek inscription)[14]. It is sent to the main

---

10 Trans. "During the excavation, a square stone was found that was almost like a large chest. It had a volume of three braccia and was all polished and square so that it seemed to be a solid piece. When I saw it, I liked it and had it dug out all around and brought out. On top of it there were writings in very old letters in Hebrew, Arabic, and Greek. I was pleased when I saw these. We were astonished by it but soon had it brought up out of the foundations." (ToA, 177; ToA refers further on to Spencer's translation of 1965 entitled *Treatise on architecture.*
11 TdA refers hereafter to the edition of Finoli and Grassi *Trattato d'architettura*, 1972.
12 Trans. "I had these letters transcribed exactly, and before anything else was touched we had them sent to my lord. He was amazed at them and soon had them translated. When he understood their meaning, he quickly wrote back that it should not be opened until he arrived" (ToA, 177).
13 Trans. "He had it opened and looked inside. [In it] there was a small lead box [...]. There was also a large book all of gold. [...] In the remainder of the hollow, there were two vases [made] of the same metal as the book [...]. Everyone was amazed by these things and also very happy"(ToA, 178).
14 Pfisterer (2002) undertook a detailed analysis of the description of the Golden Book and the differences from the illustrated version of it. For a general analysis of Filarete's illustrations cf. Beltrami (2001), Samsa (2012), and Hubert (2003).

translator of Francesco Sforza, who – as a highly educated humanist scholar – will soon translate the contents of the book.

> Scoperti i vasi, non altro che polvere v'era dentro, la quale stimamo per quell'ora essere polvere de' corpi morti e quasi furono tentati di gittarla via, senonché io dissi: *"Nolla gittate, Signore, vogliate prima fare interpretare queste lettere che sono scritte su questi vasi*, poi si può fare come vi piace" [emphasis mine] (TdA, 387–388)

The prince opens the vases and discerns them to be filled with ashes. Finding them worthless, he is about to discard them. Only the intervention of the architect protects the important discovery, as it will later transpire. The inscription on the vases should be translated first.

> E così si partì, e con noi rimase il suo poeta valentissimo in greco e in latino; trascritto tutto il libro dell'oro al figliuolo del Signore e a me, tutto iscolpito nelle pagine, la quale significazione disse che era in questa forma (TdA, 392).[15]

Once translated, it becomes evident that the author of this book is a certain King Zogalia,[16] the ancient king of Plusiapolis himself and his architect Onitoan Nolivera Notirenflo, who constructed the old town. Consequently, a considerable metadiegetic narration is about to begin.

> Io, Rex Zogalia – il quale in nostro volgare dioma vuol dire sapiente e ricco – come amaestrato in più scienze, lascio questo tesoro in guardia a te Folonon e a te Orbiati, che mai nessuno debba potere toccare questo tesoro per infino che non verrà uno, il quale dee venire di piccolo principio e per sua virtù acquisterà una signoria non piccola, [...] (TdA, 393).[17]

Zogalia reports therein that there was once an ancient port city at this place whose existence he wishes to preserve for posterity by describing it in such detail. He depicts the structure of the city, its buildings, gardens, labyrinths, and social struc-

---

15 Trans. "He left, and his poet, [who was] well educated in Greek and in Latin, remained with us. He translated both to my lord's son and to me all the book of gold – everything that was engraved on its pages. The poet said its meaning was this" (ToA, 181).

16 Regarding the names of his protagonists, Filarete works with a system, similar to the French verlan, exchanging syllables so that Zo-ga-lia might refer to Ga-lia-zo; with the same logic, Zogalia's architect Onitoan Nolivera Notirenflo is an anagram of Antonio Averlino (Filarete) (cf. Finoli 1985, 63).

17 Trans. "I, King Zogalia, which means in our vulgar tongue wise, rich, trained in many sciences, leave this treasure in your guardianship, Folonon and Orbiati. No one will ever be able to touch this treasure until there comes a man who will rise from a small principate and through his own virtù" (ToA, 181).

ture. Filarete and his colleagues read these metadiegetic descriptions with great interest and decide, with the prince's consent, to reconstruct the old town right in this place. Thus, instead of building a *new* port town, it was decided that the *ancient* port be rebuilt according to the fictional architect's descriptions. Here, the program of the Renaissance is about to be realized on a fictional level in an astonishingly condensed form.

3 Mediterranean Influences of Plusiapolis

The fictional discovery of the Golden Book is a key moment in the history of the Renaissance. It combines the rediscovery of Vitruvius's books on architecture with Middle Eastern narratives (the discovery of a treasure) as well as alchemical-allegorical elements, which also emanate from the Eastern Mediterranean region (cf. Hub 2011, 29). Filarete presents through his *libro d'oro* a literary utopian ideal of a non-existent antiquity. The Renaissance ideal should not, however, be expected in the classical sense such as that represented by Alberti (cf. Onians 1971, 107). The fact that the Golden Book is written in Greek, and that all the inscriptions in the ancient port town are also written in Greek, Hebrew, Arabic, or even with Egyptian hieroglyphs suggests that Plusiapolis lies somewhere in the Eastern Mediterranean.[18] It is not Western Rome that is going to be rebuilt; it is the Eastern Byzantine part of the Empire that is integrated into this fictional utopia. Filarete's fantasies refer to a geographical context which extends from Constantinople to Egypt and beyond to a boundless Mediterranean space oriented towards the East.

But even before the appearance of the Golden Book, there are already indications of the Mediterranean character of the text, as can be observed in the allegorical symbol of the snake: when the construction work on Sforzinda commences, the workers witness the sudden appearance of a snake.

> In questo cavando, uno de' cavatori vidde un certo buco ch'era lì propinquo a lui, alzando la zappa in su quel diritto diè in modo che, levando uno gran pezzo di terra, scoperse una certa tana dove una grossa e bella serpe era inviluppata; [di che costui sbigottito, e la serpe, vedendosi scoperta e anche la sua abitazione guasta, presto alzò la testa e di quel luogo si partì molto severa e colla testa alta, che pareva ch'ella fusse levata due braccia da terra, e così inverso del centro del nostro circuito s'adirizzò] (TdA, 108).[19]

---

18 As Hub (2011, 21) notes, there are only a few proposals relating to classical Roman antiquity.
19 Trans. "During the excavation, one of the diggers saw a hole near him. With his shovel, he lifted a large piece of earth and discovered a den where a large and beautiful serpent was coiled up. He was terrified by it, but the serpent, seeing himself discovered and his house ruined, suddenly

The workers are terrified and attempt to kill it, but the snake dispatches one of its aggressors by coiling around his neck and constricting him to death.

> Vedendo questa così andare, ognuno guardava, e uno fra gli altri corse per volerla amazzare, e con uno bastone le trasse per modo che, se l'avessi colta, senza dubbio l'arebbe morta, pure un poco di punta per ischiancio la toccò. Lei, sentitasi tocca, con grande velocità e impeto incontra di costui s'adirizzò, e sanza essere potuto aiutare, se gli avolse al collo e tanto lo strinse che la detta serpe gli tolse il fiato. E fatto questo, in un momento se gli svolse dal collo e andò alla sua via. Molti volevano andare per amazzarla (TdA, 109).[20]

One could expect that the aggression against the snake would escalate but astonishingly, the opposite is the case. As the lord observed this event, he ordered that no one should attack the animal. In the meantime, the snake moved to the laurel in the center of the *piazza* and entered it through a hole in the trunk. The lord finally claimed: "Certainly these are omens of great significance" (ToA, 47):

> Veduto il Signore questo così fatto augurio, fece comandare che niuno la dovesse offendere, non faccendo ella molesta, e non dessi impaccio a niuno per mezzo della nostra lineata città. E quando ella fu in el centro dove era disegnata la piazza, e sendo a caso e a fortuna quasi a mezzo, o vero presso a mezzo, della detta piazza una grossa pianta d'alloro, e la dirittura più al principio della piazza una grossa e antica quercia concava, non volle entrare in quella, ma adirizzatasi all'alloro, su per esso andò; e trovatavi una concavità dentro vi si misse. E stando così atenti tutti a riguardare questo animale, il quale si misse in questa pianta dell'alloro, e uno sciamo d'ape sopra al detto alloro si posò. E stando così atenti e mezzi stupefatti ogni persona di questo caso, il Signore dice: 'Per certo questi sono auguri che importano grandissima significazione' (TdA, 109).[21]

The interpretation of the scene becomes explicit when Filarete subsequently discusses this event with a clairvoyant. The wise man informs Filarete that the

---

raised his head and very angrily left the place with his head so high that it seemed to be raised two braccia off the ground. He started toward the middle of our circuit" (ToA, 47).

20 Trans. "Everyone watched him go. One person ran after it to kill it. He struck it with a club in such a way that if he had hit it, he would certainly have killed it, but the point only struck a glancing blow. Feeling itself touched, the snake attacked him with such speed that we were not able to aid him. The serpent wrapped itself around his neck and squeezed so hard that it took his life" (ToA, 47).

21 Trans. "When my lord saw this omen, he ordered that no one should attack it. [...] It arrived in the center where the piazza was laid out. [Here there was] almost in the middle, or near the middle, of the piazza a large laurel, and in line with it, but nearer the beginning of the piazza, a large and hollow old oak. It did not wish to enter this but went straight to the laurel. It went up it and found a hole where it entered. [...] My lord said: Certainly these are omens of great significance" (ToA, 47).

snake is not a symbol of sin, but of the new town. In this crucial scene, two symbolic systems are competing with each other. While the simple workers interpret the snake as a threat in the sense of the Christian symbol of sin and the expulsion from paradise, the snake is now positively revalued.

Even if it is just an assumption, it appears to be plausible that Filarete had the ancient symbol of the ouroboros in mind, the depiction of a snake eating it's own tail and a symbol which hints at an old but well known (in humanist circles) Egyptian alchemic discourse (cf. Assmann 2017), in which Filarete seems to be interested. The ouroboros would fit perfectly into the construction of a self-sufficient utopia where the past and the present, the *we* and the *other*, symbolized by the two towns of Sforzinda and Plusiapolis, create a self-sufficient circle. The interpretation of this scene as being based on ancient alchemical symbols is strengthened by Filarete's special interest in a mystical Egyptian past (cf. Hub 2011, 19). The text is replete with references to Egyptian obelisks, pyramids, labyrinths, and an enthusiastic fascination with hieroglyphics. Obviously, it is only a vague stereotypical image of Egypt, which has little in common with the true geographical region.[22]

> ed eravi ancora nel centro uno obilisco, cioè una guglia, la quale era scolpita tutta di lettere egiziache come già anticamente s'usavano. [...] E così in ciascheduno di questi due teatri volle si mettesse nel mezzo uno obilisco con lettere di quelle che avevo detto che erano in figura d'animali e d'altre cose, quasi come quelle egiziache , e volle ch'io scrivessi il nome suo e ancora il tempo che correva, cioè el millesimo (TdA, 119).[23]

Another example of Filarete's special kind of Mediterranean utopianism is the central tower of Sforzinda, whose depiction strongly reminds us of the lighthouse of Alexandria.[24] In both cases, the towers can be imagined as a parallelepiped on which stands an octagonal tower, leading into a round tower on which a small statue has been placed. The similarities between the two buildings are evident. Nevertheless, Filarete's predominant interest lies not in Egypt, but in a more general Byzantine world. Constantinople, for example, serves as an explicit model.[25]

---

22 Additionally, it seems plausible that Filarete's interest in Egyptian hieroglyphs is based on the rediscovery of the *Corpus Hermeticum* in 1460, the year Filarete began to write his *libro architettonico.* The book was brought to Florence where Marsilio Ficino worked contemporaneously on its translation into Latin and caused a first peak of interest in Egyptian hieroglyphs amongst Italian humanists (cf. Keiner 2003, 67–68).

23 Trans. "He also wanted an obelisk erected in the middle of these two theaters with the letters that I have mentioned in the form of animals and other things, almost like the Egyptian ones. He wanted me to write his name and the date, that is the year" (ToA, 155).

24 I want to thank Nicolai Kölmel who made me aware of this important fact.

25 See, for example, the cathedral of Plusiapolis which is akin to Ottoman mosques.

Moreover, all the main buildings of Plusiapolis are akin to elements of Eastern Mediterranean, Byzantine and oriental architecture.

4 Filarete's Mediterranean Network

One of the reasons for this interest in the Byzantine world may be Filarete's stay in Milan. Since the 1430s, a strong philobyzantine interest has prevailed among humanists, with whom Filarete also came into contact (cf. Rovetta 1983).[26] Among them, Francesco Filelfo is to be mentioned above all, who besides Latin also mastered Greek perfectly (cf. Meserve 2010, 47).

As a matter of fact, Filelfo himself enters the fictitious world of Filarete's utopia. It is none other than him (or to be more precise, his fictional counterpart) who translates the Golden Book on behalf of the prince. As in the aforementioned examples of Zogalia (Galiazo Maria Sforza) or Onitoan Nolivera Notirenflo (Antonio Averlino Florentino), it is easy to decipher the character of Scofrance Notilento, the translator of the Golden Book, as Filelfo da Tolentino. The humanist Filelfo lived in Constantinople in the 1420s as a *bailò*, a Venetian ambassador (cf. Meserve 2010, 51). There he married a Greek woman, whose father taught him ancient Greek (cf. Meserve 2010, 48). During his stay, Filelfo also came into contact with the Ottoman Empire, negotiating Venetian trade interests with the Sultan. Filelfo then became an essential connoisseur of the Eastern Mediterranean. This self-stylization came to pass by means of numerous public *epistolae* which were addressed to rulers all around the world (cf. Meserve 2010, 47).

A key moment is the final takeover of Constantinople by the Ottomans and Filelfo's conviction that a crusade against the Empire should be organized (cf. Meserve 2010, 47). Filelfo's family is consequently arrested by the Ottomans and only a praise poem of Filelfo's to Mehmed II leads to their liberation. It appears obvious that Filarete may have been significantly influenced in the literary construction of his two ideal cities by the first-hand descriptions of his best friend, Francesco Filelfo.

The friendship between Filelfo and Filarete began in 1456. In 1465, however, one year after finishing his manuscript, all traces of Filarete are suddenly lost. The last vestige which is preserved is a letter of recommendation from Filelfo to

---

26 Besides Milan, Mantova also maintained very close relations with the Ottoman Empire (cf. Gatward Cevizli 2014). For the special role Filelfo had for Filarete's book, cf. McEwen (2016).

the Greek Georgios Amiroutzes, teacher of Mehmed II, in which Filarete is depicted as Filelfo's best friend and outstanding architect,[27] here in the Greek original:

Φραγκίσκος ὁ Φιλέλφος Γεωργίῳ Ἀμοιρουκίῳ, φιλοσόφῳ, χαίρειν.

 Ὁ ἀποδιδούς σοι τὴν παροῦσαν ἐπιστολήν, Ἀντώνιος Αὐερλῖνος, ἀνήρ ἐστι καλός τε καὶ ἀγαθός, κἀμοὶ ἐν τοῖς μάλιστα φίλος τυγχάνων. Διὸ κατὰ τὴν πάλαι παροιμίαν, συνίστημί σοι τὸν ἄνδρα, ὡς καὶ φίλον ὄντα ἐμὸν σόν τε ἐσόμενον, κοινὸν ἄρα φίλον ἡμῖν τοῖς φιλτάτοις. Ἔστι δὲ πραγμάτων ἔμπειρος ἄλλων τε πάνυ πολλῶν καὶ καλῶν, ἔτι δὲ καὶ ἀρχιτέκτων ἄριστος. Ἔρχεται μὲν οὖν αὐτόσε θέας ἕνεκα μόνον. Ποιήσεις μοι τοίνυν πρᾶγμα λίαν ποθεινὸν δεξάμενος τὸν ἄνδρα ἀσπασίως καὶ δείξας αὐτῷ ἅπασαν τὴν ἀγάπην σου πρὸς ἡμᾶς.

 Ἔρρωσο. Μεδιολάνοθεν, τῇ πρὸ Αὐγούστου Καλενδῶν τρίτῃ, ἔτει ἀπὸ τοῦ Χριστοῦ γεννήσεως ͵αυ°υ°ξ°έ° (30.07.1465; Filelfo 2015, 1134, PhE 25.49).[28]

Filarete "is a gentleman and one of my dearest friends. [...] He is experienced in many useful fields and most importantly he is a great architect", as translated in the critical edition of Filarete's letters by Jeroen De Keyser. Although impossible to prove, there seems to be evidence that Filarete went to Constantinople after 1465 to participate in the reconstruction of the city (cf. Hayes 2001, 170; Kafescioğlu 2009, 74).

 Mehmed II actively brought intellectuals from all over the world to work on the reconstruction of the new capital and the construction of the new empire. The Italian influences on the new empire are manifold, such as the portrait of Mehmed II. by Gentile Bellini in 1480 (cf. Kafescioğlu 2008, 253). According to Marcell Restler (1981, 361–367), there are Florentine influences on the dimensions of the Medresses and the Fatih Mosque in Istanbul, whose construction began after 1464 (cf. Hayes 2001, 168). Mehmed also constructed the first star-shaped fortress (Yedikule Hisarı), as depicted by Alberti and Filarete. Benedetto Dei, a Florentine spy noted in his *Cronica* that in 1466 Florentine builders assisted the Ottomans in constructing the "chastello de la Grecia" (cf. Hayes 2001, 180). The star-shaped construction of the Yedikule, built in 1458, already points to an Italian influence. Florentines were also involved in the construction of Kilitbahir (cf. Gat-

---

27 See also Tigler (1963, 5) and Monfasani (2019, 20–21).

28 Trans. "Francesco Filelfo greets the philosopher Georgius Amoerucius.
The man who brings you this letter, Antonio Averlino, is a gentlemen and one of my dearest friends. Thus, according to the old proverb, I entrust to you this man, as my friend, to become your friend, a mutual friend, then, for the two of us, who are dear friends. He is experienced in many useful fields and most importantly he is a great architect. He is coming there only to see the sights. You will do me a great pleasure if you welcome him with kindness and if you show him all the love that you have for me.
Goodbye. Milan. '30 July 1465" (Filelfo 2015, 1135, PhE 25.49).

ward Cevizli 2014, 183). From these facts it could be deduced that even Filarete was involved in the construction (cf. Hayes 2001, 168).

More evidence of a possible contact between Filarete and the Ottoman Empire lies in the fact that parts of the Corvinus library (Mathias Corvinus, King of Hungary, requested a translation of Filarete's manuscript into Latin) were discovered in 1862 in Constantinople (cf. Hayes 2001, 170). During Filarete's lifetime, Corvinus had the Italian text translated into Latin in order to include it in his library. In the Corvinus library of Istanbul, however, there was also a Vitruvian manuscript which had most probably been in the possession of Filarete (cf. Hayes 2001, 169).

Of course, these are only speculations; perhaps it is only a romantic idea that embeds the disappearance of Filarete in such an attractive narrative. Regardless of whether Filarete actually moved to the court of Mehmed II after he had quarreled with his Milanese rulers, it is evident that the Ottoman Empire and Italian Renaissance architecture influenced each other's urban structures.

5 Conclusion

Filarete's Plusiapolis symbolizes the ideal past of a pan-Mediterranean urban system inscribed in an Arcadian landscape at the seaside, somewhere in the Mediterranean. Filarete explicitly depicts architectonic buildings in the opening chapter of his book as human individuals: "Io ti mostrerò l'edificio essere proprio uno uomo vivo, e vedrai che così bisogna a lui mangiare per vivere, come fa proprio l'uomo" (Finoli and Grassi 1972, 29).[29] The buildings were created according to human characteristics and are as individually different as people are; just as no man is like another, no building is like another. Taking this point of view seriously, Filarete depicts Plusiapolis as a city populated by individuals of different origins. Most of them are of Greek, generally of Byzantine, Egyptian, or Roman origin, traces of which can be proven in individual cases as distant as Persia and India. The actual absence of people in the cities is substituted for the individual descriptions of people who open up a highly connected Mediterranean communication space. At the same time, it shows the potential of this past utopian town to become a future city since the narrator is presenting us with a plan to rebuild it.

The common language of Plusiapolis is Greek. The fictional treatise is written in Greek; all the inscriptions in the main buildings are Greek. The architectonic allusions are inspired by the Egyptian and Byzantine world; not by the real world

---

29 Trans. "I will [then] show you [that] the building is truly a living man. You will see that it must eat in order to live, exactly as it is with a man" (ToA, 12–13).

but by the imagined world Filarete had in mind, without studying it, but rather by being informed by acquaintances such as the humanist Francesco Filelfo, whose biography is crucial to understanding Filarete's text. It is much more likely that *Inda*, even as an allusion to India, simply symbolizes a form of otherness. It is a global, antique Mediterranean world vision which had to be reborn in Filarete's vision; a rebirth not of classical Roman antiquity, but of an apparently homogeneous but also diverse, ideal Mediterranean town.

References

Assmann, Jan. "Ouroboros: Der altägyptische Mythos vom Sonnenlauf." *Never Ending Stories: Der Loop in Kunst, Film, Architektur, Musik, Literatur und Kulturgeschichte.* Ed. Ralf Beil. Berlin, Wolfsburg: Hatje Cantz, Kunstmuseum Wolfsburg, 2017. 58–63.

Beltrami, Maria. "Le illustrazioni del 'Trattato d'architettura' di Filarete: Storia, analisi e fortuna." *Annali di architettura* 13 (2001): 25–52.

Bertolini, Lucia. "Le date di Sforzinda: il tempo del racconto nel 'Trattato d'architettura' del Filarete." *Letteratura e filologia fra Svizzera e Italia: studi in onore di Giuglielmo Gorni.* Vol. II: *La tradizione letteraria dal Duecento al Settecento.* Eds. Maria Antonietta Terzoli, Alberto Asor Rosa, and Giorgio Inglese. Roma: Edizioni di storia e letteratura, 2010. 137–156.

Bromberger, Christian. "Utopie méditarréenne." *Dictionnaire de la Méditarranée.* Eds. Dionigi Albera, Maryline Crivello, and Mohamed Tozy. Arles: Actes Sud, 2016. 1503–1506.

Buck, August. "Die Idealstadt Der Italienischen Renaissance." *Studien Zu Humanismus Und Renaissance: Gesammelte Aufsätze Aus Den Jahren 1981–1990.* Eds. Bodo Guthmüller, Karl Kohut, and Oscar Roth. Wiesbaden: Harrassowitz, 1991. 409–426.

Filarete. *Antonio Averlino Filarete's Tractat über die Baukunst: nebst seinen Büchern von der Zeichenkunst und den Bauten der Medici.* Mit 15 Abbildungen im Text. Ed. Wolfgang von Oettingen. Wien: Carl Graeser, 1896.

Filarete. *Filarete's Treatise on Architecture.* Ed. John R. Spencer. 2 vols. New Haven, CN: Yale University Press, 1965.

Filarete. *Trattato di architettura.* Eds. Anna Maria Finoli and Liliana Grassi. Milano: Il Polifilo, 1972.

Filelfo, Francesco. *Collected Letters. Epistolarum Libri XLVIII.* Ed. Jeroen De Keyser. Vol. 3. Alessandria: Edizioni dell'Orso, 2015.

Finoli, Anna Maria. "Il Filarete scrittore." *Studi di letteratura francese* 11 (1985): 51–65.

Gatward Cevizli, Antonia. "More Than a Messenger: Embodied Expertise in Mantoan Envoys to the Ottomans in the 1490s." *Mediterranean Studies* 22.2 (2014): 166–189. DOI: 10.5325/mediterraneanstu.22.2.0166.

Grassi, Liliana. "Sforzinda, Plusiapolis, Milano: città ideale, città del mito, città della storia nel trattato del Filarete." *Studi di letteratura francese* 11 (1985): 26–50.

Günther, Hubertus. "Sforzinda: Eine Idealstadt der Renaissance." *Alternative Welten in Mittelalter und Renaissance.* Ed. Ludwig Schrader. Düsseldorf, 1988. 231–258.

Günther, Hubertus. "Society in Filarete's 'Libro Architettonico' Between Realism, Ideal, Science Fiction and Utopia." *Arte Lombarda* 155.1 (2009): 56–80.

Günther, Hubertus. "Utopische Elemente in Filaretes Idealstadt Plusiapolis." *Utopie, Fiktion, Planung: Stadtentwürfe zwischen Antike und Früher Neuzeit.* Ed. Albert Dietl. Regensburg: Schnell & Steiner, 2014. 197–220.

Hayes, Kenneth. "Filarete's 'Journey to the East'." *Oriental-Occidental Geography, Identity, Space.* Ed. Michelle A. Rinehart. Wahington DC: ACSA Press, 2001. 168–171.

Hölscher, Lucian. "Utopie." *Utopian Studies* 7.2 (1996): 1–65.

Horden, Peregrine, and Nicholas Purcell. *The Corrupting Sea: A Study of Mediterranean History.* Malden, Mass.: Blackwell, 2013.

Horden, Peregrine, and Nicholas Purcell. *The Boundless Sea: Writing Mediterranean History.* Abingdon, Oxon: Routledge, 2019. DOI: 10.4324/9780429273377.

Hub, Berthold. "Filarete and the East: The Renaissance of a Prisca Architectura." *Journal of the Society of Architectural Historians* 70.1 (2011): 18–37. DOI: 10.1525/jsah.2011.70.1.18.

Hub, Berthold. "Founding an Ideal City in Filarete's 'Libro Architettonico'." *Foundation, Dedication, and Consecration Ritual in Early Modern Culture.* Eds. Minou Schraven and Maarten Delbeke. Leiden: Brill, 2012. 17–57.

Hub, Berthold. "Persuasive Wort-Bild-Strategien in den Architekturtraktaten der italienischen Frührenaissance." *Bilder in historischen Diskursen.* Ed. Franz X. Eder. Wiesbaden: Springer VS, 2014. DOI: 10.1007/978-3-658-05398-7_5.

Hubert, Hans W. "In der Werkstatt Filaretes: Bemerkungen zur Praxis des Architekturzeichnens in der Renaissance." *Mitteilungen des Kunsthistorischen Institutes in Florenz* 47.2/3 (2003): 311–344.

Kafescioğlu, Çiğdem. "La capitale dell'impero ottomano: Istanbul tra XV e XVIII secolo." *Bisanzio, Costantinopoli, Istanbul.* Ed. Tania Velmans. Milano: Jaca Book, 2008. 251–320.

Kafescioğlu, Çiğdem. *Constantinopolis: Cultural Encounter, Imperial Vision, and the Construction of the Ottoman Capital.* University Park, PA: Pennsylvania State University Press, 2009.

Keiner, Astrid. *Hieroglyphenromantik: Zur Genese und Destruktion eines Bilderschriftmodells und zu seiner Überforderung in Friedrich Schlegels Spätphilosophie.* Würzburg: Königshausen & Neumann, 2003.

Levitas, Ruth. *The Concept of Utopia.* New York: Philip Allan, 1990.

McEwen, Indra Kagis. "The Architectonic Book". *Vitruvianism: Origins and Transformations.* Ed. Paolo Sanvito. Berlin/Boston: De Gruyter, 2016. 101–111. DOI: 10.1515/9783110422283–008.

Meserve, Margaret. "Nestor Denied: Francesco Filelfo's Advice to Princes on the Crusade Against the Turks." *Osiris* 25.1 (2010): 47–65. DOI: 10.1086/657262.

Monfasani, John. "Filelfo and the Byzantines." *Francesco Filelfo, Man of Letters.* Ed. Jeroen De Keyser. Leiden, Boston: Brill, 2019. 13–21. DOI: 10.1163/9789004382190_003.

More, Saint Thomas. *More: Utopia.* Trans. Robert M. Adams. Ed. George M. Logan. Cambridge University Press, 2016.

Oexle, Otto Gerhard. "Utopisches Denken im Mittelalter: Pierre Dubois." *Historische Zeitschrift* 224.2 (1977): 293–339. DOI: 10.1524/hzhz.1977.224.jg.293.

Onians, John. "Alberti and Filareth. A Study in Their Sources." *Journal of the Warburg and Courtauld Institutes* 34 (1971): 96–114. DOI: 10.2307/751017.

Pfisterer, Ulrich. "I libri di Filarete." *Arte Lombarda* 155.1 (2009): 97–110.

Pfisterer, Ulrich. "Ingenium und Invention bei Filarete." *Nobilis Arte Manus: Festschrift Zum 70. Geburtstag Von Antje Middeldorf Kosegarten.* Ed. Bruno Klein. 2., korrigierte Aufl. Dresden: [Hrsg.], 2002. 265–289.

Portugali, Juval. "The Mediterranean as a Cognitive Map." *Mediterranean Historical Review* 19.2 (2004): 16–24. DOI: 10.1080/0951896052000336418.

Restler, Marcell. "Bauplanung und Baugesinnung unter Mehmet II. Filarete in Konstantinopel." *Pantheon* 39 (1981): 361–367.

Rivoletti, Christian. "Konstruktion und Typologie des fiktiven Raums und die neue Position des italienischen Staats." *Orientierungen im Raum: Darstellung räumlichen Sinns in der italienischen Literatur von Dante bis zur Postmoderne.* Ed. Rudolf Behrens. Heidelberg: Winter, 2008. 149–170.

Rovetta, Alessandro. "Filarete e l'umanesimo greco a Milano: Viaggi, amicizie e maestri." *Arte Lombarda* 7 (1983): 89–102.

Samsa, Danilo. "Verba e picturae di lineamenta e di res gestae nel Filarete." *Humanistica* 7.1–2 (2012): 159–207.

Sargent, Lyman Tower. "The Three Faces of Utopianism Revisited." *Utopian Studies* 5.1 (1994): 1–37.

Tigler, Peter. *Die Architekturtheorie des Filarete.* Berlin/New York: De Gruyter, 1963. DOI: 10.1515/9783110838251.