

Utopian Visions of the 15th century



Introduction

When we watch a grandparent or an older friend or relative struggle with new technology or fail to grasp some new trend in popular culture, we sometimes have to remind ourselves that they were merely born in a different era before anyone could have foreseen what was to come. If you never ask yourself what the world they grew up in looked like from their perspective, it's impossible to understand the changes that have taken place since. So it is with history in general. As we start our journey into utopian thinking in the early globalized world, to see what was new in the 16th century and what was not, it's similarly helpful to go back in time just a little bit. In a general sense, utopian thinking constitutes the imagining of places that are better than the current one. Before the emergence of the globalized world, such thinking was common, just as it remains today. In what follows, we find such utopian thinking among three groups of people living during the 15th century in sub-Saharan Africa, Mesoamerica, and Europe. All three had

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hierarchical and centralizing states with largely agrarian societies that also relied on long-distance trade, metallurgy, and regional production of a diverse array of goods and services. And as part of their understanding of the cosmos, they all described idealized places—and thus all engaged in a kind of utopian thinking. But what kind of utopian thinking was it? And how did it compare to that which emerged later? Let's see!

Nearly all this premodern utopian thinking shared a common feature: the better places people imagined already existed and/or were embedded within the nature of the cosmos itself; ordinary people did not imagine that they should have a role in designing such ideal places. Yet in the 15th century, there was emerging a distinct tradition of utopianism that expressed much greater optimism about the ability of humans to imagine and design more perfect worlds for themselves.

Utopian visions of the future before the Renaissance

Utopian visions of the Mexica people of Mesoamerica (in present-day Mexico) in the 15th century were largely rooted in idealized visions of the past. Reading and interpreting the surviving evidence from pre-colonial Mexico that tell us about their style of utopian thinking, though, is challenging, since in the 16th century Spanish governmental and church officials destroyed many Mexica records. Catholic missionaries often assisted Mexica and other Nahuatl-speaking people to record their pre-colonial beliefs and traditions, but often intervened in the production of those new records without leaving a clear record of how they did so. As a result, sources survive that record pre-colonial cultures of Mexico, but they are enormously complex and require considerable expertise to read. But historians, archaeologists, and anthropologists have worked hard to help

Key Terms:

Utopian thinking

Mexica / Aztec Empire

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Huitzilopochtli

Tenochtitlán

Kongo Kingdom

Land of the Dead (Ku Mpemba)

Christian apocalypticism

Prester John

Italian humanism



One of the pre-Columbian sculptures of Quetzalcoatl that survived the Spanish campaign to eradicate all non-Christian religious images.

us make sense of the records. There is not enough space here to survey the broad array of beliefs among the peoples who made up much of the Aztec Empire or to deal with all the interpretative challenges that the surviving sources pose for scholars. But there are a few accounts that are pertinent to our topic in this set of lessons.

First, the Mexica had moved into the area that became the Aztec Empire sometime after the collapse of the Toltecs around 1200 CE. Into the 1300s and early 1400s, the Mexica consolidated power in the area around present-day Mexico City. As they did, they presented themselves as part of a tradition of cosmologically ordained rulers going back to the Toltecs, whose capital at Tula (also called Tollan) was (and is) a real place, but also a symbolic utopian place of peace and order. Somewhere around 1,000 CE, the Toltecs had begun to emphasize sets of stories about Quetzalcoatl. One version portrayed Quetzalcoatl as one of the creator gods of the cosmos, and the god of the winds (Quetzalcoatl Ehecatl). The god is represented as a Feather Serpent to signify the eternal struggle between the serpent (which symbolized earth, destruction, and the night) and the quetzal bird (which symbolized heaven, order, and the day). Another version

of Quetzalcoatl included stories of an ideal ruler of Tula with the same name, often called Topiltzín Quetzalcoatl (along with other names). While there are various versions of the story, there are remarkable consistencies that suggest a possibility that such stories might have been widespread before the Spanish arrival. In most versions, Topiltzín Quetzalcoatl ruled Tula during a period of political unity, human ingenuity, and cosmic harmony. At some point, a conflict emerged between him and his rival, Tezcatlipoca (who also had multiple names and who was also understood as both god and human). In this conflict, Quetzalcoatl was forced into exile, ending a key cycle in cosmic history that the Mexica used to understand the universe. Over time, the various stories of Quetzalcoatl the human ruler and Quetzalcoatl the god intermingled and mutually influenced one another. By the late 15th century, it was hard to disentangle the two. In some versions, after the ruler fled the mythical city of Tula, he became the morning star (known today as the planet Venus) until his promised return.



The state established by the Mexica people in the 14th later grew into the Aztec Empire (above); Quetzalcoatl, from 16th century Codex Telleriano-Remensis (below).





Huitzilopochtli, as depicted in the Codex Borbonicus (above); Codex Mendoza, with the coat of arms of Mexico, based on the Nahuatl story of the founding of the Aztec capital city of Tenochtitlán (below).



A second feature of beliefs about the future among Mexica people was the distinct role of the sun god Huitzilopochtli (“The Hummingbird of the South”). They associated the birth of Huitzilopochtli with the founding of the capital city of Tenochtitlán. In one version of this origin story, the sun god appeared to a priest, telling him to lead the Mexica to the south, to a place where Huitzilopochtli would appear as an eagle atop the flower of a nopal cactus (also called a prickly pear cactus). The Mexica apparently followed these instructions, and an eagle appeared where they built Tenochtitlán. Depictions of this story date to the early 1500s, and a version of it is on the national flag of Mexico today. By around 1375, the Mexica worked to spread new stories about Huitzilopochtli as well as their reappropriations of old stories about Quetzalcoatl, as they consolidated and expanded their authority in the region. Surviving Nahuatl-language stories depict Tenochtitlán as the center of the universe, an impermeable center that would collapse only at the end of cosmic time. Such rhetoric might have bolstered the Mexica’s image as unconquerable rulers among the diverse array of peoples they ruled. It also made keeping control of Tenochtitlán, as the reincarnation of earlier sacred capitals Teotihuacan and Tula before it, a precondition for preserving their entire

worldview. At the center of the capital stood a sacred district that linked the gods Huitzilopochtli and Quetzalcoatl at Coatepac (Serpent Mountain) the place where Huitzilopochtli supposedly defeated his sister, Coyolxauhqui (the goddess of the moon), who led a revolt against their mother, Coatlicue. According to many stories, later ritual sacrifices of women at the central temple at this site reenacted this victory and preserved harvests and the cosmic order as well as the rising of the sun for the future.

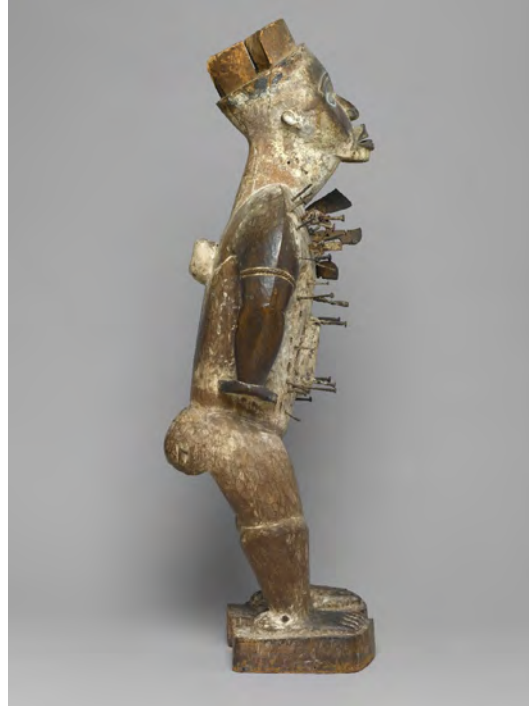
The Mexica had many more gods and many more stories, so we should not get the impression that the description here is sufficient to understand their beliefs, let alone the beliefs of the diverse peoples they ruled over. For our purposes, the



Quetzalcoatl Ehecatl, from the Codex Borgia, a document that features calendrical and ritual content, c. 16th century.

Mexica understood the universe as unfolding in an inevitable cycle of cataclysmic destruction and the return of order. To these older traditions that they inherited from the Toltecs, the Mexica added the origin story of Huitzilopochtli, which marked the start of the final age in a cosmic cycle—the so-called Fifth Age (*nahui ollin*)—the conclusion of which would mark the end of time. The utopian thinking of the Mexica looked to the past, though such idealized models were embedded in the fabric of the universe.

While utopian thinking among the Mexica focused on the idealized images of the past, the Kongo people of sub-Saharan Africa understood that an idealized land existed in the present, just across the seas, along with prophetic visions for what was to come. The kingdom of the Kongo was one of the largest political entities in 15th-century Africa; it stretched across more than 100,000 square kilometers and included more than half a million people. 15th-century Kongolese had plenty of hopes for the future, but their religious systems accommodated a diversity of beliefs and expectations. Many recognized a supreme deity, which existed alongside a range of other divine beings. Most also probably believed that the dead lived somewhere beyond the immediate world sometimes known in the KiKongo language as a utopian place of peace and purity known as *nsi a bafwa* or *Ku Mpemba* (“land of the dead”). Gods, the dead, as well as supernatural spirits (called *nkita* or *simbi*) or lesser spiritual beings in the land of the dead could intervene to help the living in this world (called *nza yayi*). The living could also access the land of the dead, often by means of objects that spirits were understood to inhabit. Truths might be revealed through when humans appealed to supernatural powers through supplication. The relative success of such supplications, rather than a fixed set of beliefs or teachings, determined belief and understanding of the cosmos. People seeking help from ancestors or spiritual beings for selfish ends or to harm others, known in KiKongo as *kindoki*, were viewed with distrust or suspicion. The land of the dead existed simultaneously to the life that ordinary living people experienced.



A nkisi comes from the late 19th century. While this example does not come from the period we are studying, it demonstrates the durability of beliefs centuries after contact with Europeans.

When the Portuguese first arrived in the kingdom of Kongo, in the 1480s, locals likely largely integrated these newcomers’ Christian beliefs within their own existing understandings. After all, devotion to any specific supreme deity posed no challenge to them. Many seemed to have interpreted the Catholic adoration of saints as equivalent to their own veneration of local supernatural spirits. When the Kongolese king, Nzinga-a-Nkuwu, accepted baptism in 1491, there is no reason to think that he understood that as a categorical conversion to a new faith, at least not in the sense that the priests who performed the ceremony intended. We need to be careful about not introducing modern distinctions between Western and non-Western ways of thinking to the Kongolese

in these decades of exchanges. Often Kongolese selectively incorporated some of the newcomers' practices and teachings without challenging their existing understanding of cosmos, while simply rejecting others.



Map of west-central Africa, c. 1668.

would overcome his enemies if he was true to Christianity and had his people baptized. Soon after, according to later report, another baptized nobleman claimed he had the same dream, but also had found a miraculous image of a cross. It is hard to know what to conclude from such visions of the future. Some people might have interpreted such dreams as idealistic visions from the land of the dead. It's possible that baptized nobles allied with Afonso hoped to convey some sense of inevitability to their claimants' authority. But Christian missionaries understood these visions as intercessions from the Virgin Mary and Jesus Christ (the latter appearing in the form of a cross). Whatever the case, the recording of such a utopian prophecy likely received increased attention because it explained and legitimated the state of affairs as it later emerged. The same is true with another report of a prophet who predicted that people with white faces (which were associated with the land of the dead) and no toes would arrive from across the waters. There's no reason to doubt that someone offered such prophecies, but we also need to recognize that all sorts of prophecies circulated in 15th-century Kongolese culture, and the fact that some of them could be mapped reasonably onto later developments might reflect the diverse range of such accounts, rather than the pervasiveness of this one interpretation in particular. Such prophecy could offer a kind of utopian thinking about the future that connected the living to the land of the dead—which continued to coexist in the present and whose existence is embedded in the cosmic order itself.

There were also likely whole ranges of prophetic visions circulating among the people of Kongo during their earliest contacts with the Portuguese, some of which demonstrated utopian expectations. In one that was later written down, a Kongolese nobleman who had been baptized reported seeing a beautiful woman who had some form of aura around her. Apparently, she asked the man to tell King Afonso I her message that “there would be peace in your kingdom” and he



Depiction of king Nzinga-a-Nkuwu, also known as Manikongo João I of Kongo.

In medieval Europe, utopian thinking was often embedded in Christian apocalypticism. Rooted in its sacred texts, Christianity has included a diverse array of prophetic visions for the future from its earliest days. Often such teachings stemmed from biblical texts that foretold the return of Jesus Christ, though most commentators posited few specific timetables or predictions for what the future millennial age would look like. One exception was the Italian apocalypticist Joachim of Fiore (c.1135–1202), who envisioned a detailed chronology that would culminate in the triumph of a utopian ideal—the Age of the Holy Spirit—in which the church would be ruled by the so-called Order of the Just. In later years, the Order of the Just was often interpreted to be the Franciscan order; Franciscan friars soon became the most prominent advocates of Joachim’s brand of apocalyptic utopianism. As Europeans began expanding their connections with peoples and places across Afro-Eurasia in the 13th and 14th centuries, many began using such utopian apocalyptic traditions to understand the possibilities for such travels. Franciscan missionaries understood their trips to the Mongol Empire, for instance, as ushering in Christ’s promised millennial kingdom before the Last Judgment.

Some medieval Christians also circulated stories that mapped onto travels to the east specific locations identified in the Bible, or hypothesized to exist by its readers, including the site of the kingdom of Prester John, supposedly a descendent of one of the Three Wise Men. Many believed that Prester John’s kingdom was near the Garden of Eden, somewhere in Asia. A letter supposedly written by Prester John himself began circulating in the 12th century, describing his lands somewhere in India. Often such stories mingled with tales about the shrine of Thomas the Apostle, the location of the Lost Tribes of Israel, and a mythical land of women warriors known as Amazonia. In many versions, one of the four Rivers of Paradise, mentioned in Genesis as originating in Eden, flowed through the kingdom of Prester John.

Versions of Prester John’s kingdom circulated among Christians into the 14th and 15th centuries. The travelogue supposedly written by John Mandeville, which dates to roughly 1357–1371, described Prester John’s kingdom as somewhere in Asia beyond India. In 1410 the cosmography written by Cardinal Pierre d’Ailly, *The*



Late sixteenth-century image of Prester John of the Indies.

Image of the World (Imago Mundi) located Prester John’s kingdom somewhere in East Asia. Over time, as European authors’ understanding of the geography of Asia increased, many began suggesting that Prester John’s kingdom was located instead in Africa, usually Ethiopia. When the Portuguese monarch sponsored expeditions down the west coast of Africa, ship captains were instructed to be on the lookout for Prester John’s kingdom. The Portuguese explorer Diogo Cão, who first arrived at the mouth of the Congo River in 1482, was searching for Prester John’s kingdom. Three years later, Cão sailed up the river as far as Yelala Falls, hoping to find a shortcut to the holy kingdom in Ethiopia.



Prester John depicted on a map of East Africa created before 1559

Portuguese explorers continued carrying copies of the purported letter from Prester John into the coming years. There's no evidence that Christopher Columbus sailed with a copy of Prester John's letter, but he had studied stories about the mythical kingdom before his famous journey of 1492. When European explorers first encountered the lands of the Americas, many speculated that they might uncover the kingdom of Prester John, the Garden of Eden, or the lost tribes of Israel, and in the tradition of Franciscan apocalypticism upon which they drew, thereby usher in the final millennial kingdom of Christ. With all these speculations, none of these people could have conceived of the diverse worlds that travelers were about to encounter in real life.

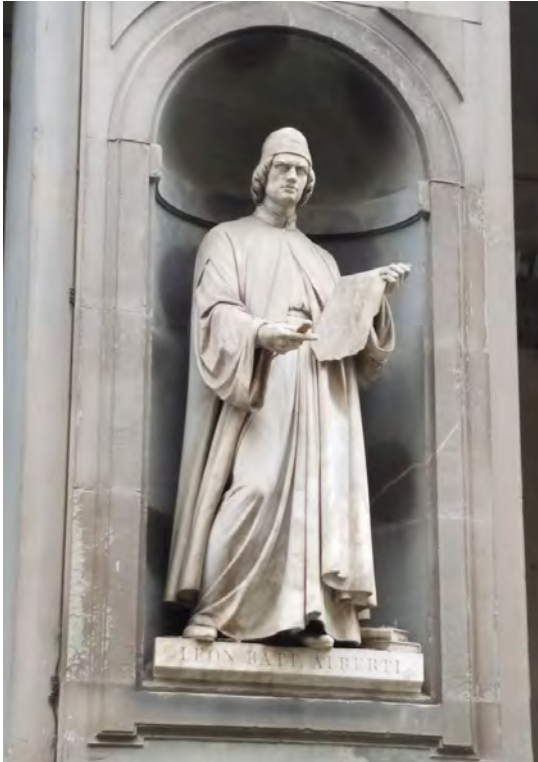
Architects of utopian cities in 15th-century Italy

On the Italian peninsula of Europe, a new tradition of utopian thinking began to emerge in the 15th century that distinguished itself from the other forms we have examined so far: it stressed the active role that human beings could take in envisioning and then building more perfect societies. This new utopian tradition built on ancient traditions of urban planning. However, urban planning itself need not be utopian in orientation. Empires and other states around the world have planned and then built expansionist settlements without envisioning them as means to create a better society—unless by “better” we simply mean that their leaders became more powerful. But in the 15th century, two changes in the Italian peninsula led to the spread of a new style of utopian thinking about urban design and settlement growth. First, a demographic recovery resulted from decreasing death rates and flourishing harvests. Migration to cities increased, trans-local trade expanded, and urban elites accumulated greater wealth.



Depiction of an “ideal city” by Fra Carnevale, c. 1480-1484.

Second, and more critically, an intellectual movement called *humanism* sought to build from and expand intellectual movements from the ancient Greek and Roman worlds. As it pertains to urban planning, humanism included a turn away from recent trends (like Gothic architecture) and toward reviving techniques but using advanced mathematics and engineering to improve upon them, and thereby build better societies.



Statue of Leon Battista Alberti.

As an intellectual movement, humanism used ancient Roman and Greek cultural forms to imagine ways that humans could live as the best versions of themselves. A key writing that harnessed this new humanist energy for urban planning was *On the Art of Building* (*De re aedificatoria*), written by Leon Battista Alberti between 1443 and 1452. The massive work's ten books offered design plans for an ideal city. Alberti drew on Vitruvius, the 1st century BCE Roman architect, but also on the Greek philosopher Plato, whose *The Republic* (c.375 BCE) offered a dialogue set in ancient Athens that imagined an ideal city-state that could offer justice in its most complete form. Alberti's architectural guide imagined idealized communities that could allow humans to live out the best versions of themselves. Yet, while his mathematical calculations

were meticulous, ironically, his buildings were also far too expensive for any government he was familiar with to build. This tension—between meticulous realism and impossible fantasy—became a common feature of humanism. At its core is the idea of verisimilitude—a *fictional representation of something as if it could be real*. This verisimilitude was often playful and witty in tone, sometimes making it hard to ascertain the author's true convictions. Painters, philosophers, poets—creatives of all types—portrayed images of worlds that looked as if they were real, even though there were clear hints for the educated consumer that the works were fabrications aimed at provoking discussion, inspiring innovation, or even just spreading laughter and delight. One common way for humanists to do this was to write works in which the author portrayed real-life people—whom readers were supposed to recognize—having a fictional dialogue about a topic of interest.



Depiction of Leon Battista Alberti, c. 1440s.

A more comprehensive utopian architectural vision that drew on this dialogue tradition was offered by another Italian humanist, Antonio di Pietro Averlino (c.1400–c.1469), who preferred to be known as Filarete, which in Greek means “lover of virtue.” Shortly after the new duke of Milan, Francesco Sforza (r.1450–1466), hired him as an architect, Filarete began work on his *Treatise on Architecture* (*Trattato di architettura*), a 25-book work that took him 15 years to complete (c.1451–1465). The work was influenced by Alberti’s *On the Art of Building* and, like its predecessor, also drew on the ancient models of Vitruvius and Plato. For our purpose, the significance of Filarete’s work is not in its later influence, but its offering of a complete utopian vision of an imaginary ideal city. Like Alberti’s treatise, Filarete’s treatise was marked by verisimilitude. Its detailed instructions could be used by architects and builders to design a new city from scratch—even though such efforts still lay beyond the capacity of Sforza or other princes of the time. For example, Filarete described needing 102,000 workers to lay the foundations for the imagined city, known as Sforzinda (name for the duke). Such a workforce would have been equal to roughly the entire population of Milan! The book depicts a fictional dialogue between a prince and his architect (based on Sforza and Filarete). The architect helps the prince build a perfect city in the countryside, starting with picking the perfect site, and then walking step-by-step through the construction of nearly every part of what would be needed.



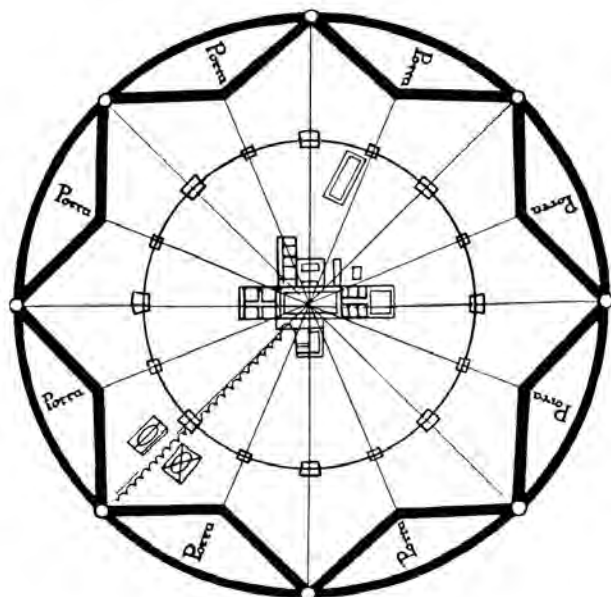
Depiction of Antonio di Pietro Averlino, or Filarete, 1648.



A seaport and bridge for the ideal city of Sforzinda.

Sforzinda shared some features with Alberti’s imagined city. Both Filarete and Alberti gave careful attention, for instance, to infrastructure that could ensure that clean water got into the city and that sewage got out. But Sforzinda was more comprehensive than anything that Alberti envisioned. Filarete

designed streets, neighborhoods, and buildings, and then placed them in specific places on a city map that he drew for the reader. The *Treatise on Architecture* is also not a complicated or hard-to-interpret source. There’s some humor, but no irony, sarcasm, inversion, or double meanings common in other humanist writings. In Sforzinda, everything is in its place, and every place has a larger logic in terms of the organization of the whole. Its prison represents the ideal goals of a criminal justice system (according to Filarete). Its schools represent

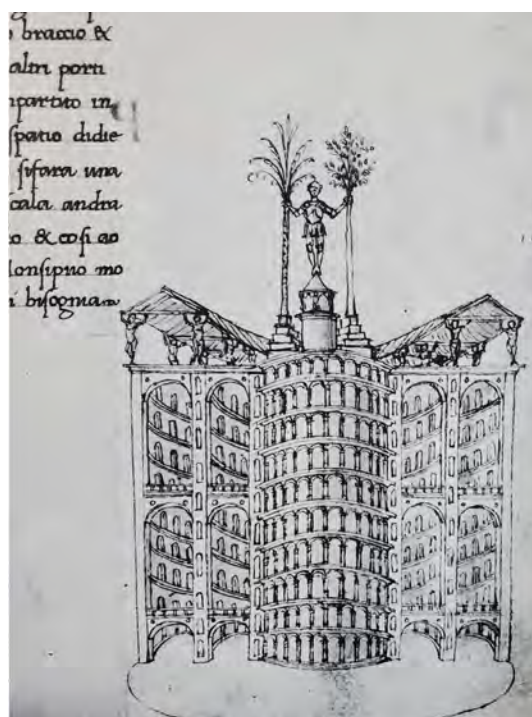


Plan for Filarete's ideal city of Sforzinda, 1457.

the ideal goals of an educational system (according to Filarete). In contrast to the Roman grid model, Sforzinda is designed as a circular city, primarily for aesthetics: Filarete saw circles as beautifully balanced and orderly. Sforzinda also has a House of Virtue and Vice, which serves as a metaphor, in which (male) individuals chose to embrace either drinking, gambling, and visiting prostitutes or the more difficult path toward learning and self-improvement. Filarete imagined a socially segregated world marked by an unchanging and stratified social structure. It offered no space for

social change or differences of opinion, and was ideologically uniform, socially rigid, and hierarchical. Morality, in such a view, was static and absolute. Harmony only emerged because everyone followed a predetermined role.

In the real world of 15th-century Italy, political leaders used utopian urban plans like those prepared by Alberti and Filarete to fund architectural redesigns in Italian cities of Roma, Urbino, Mantua and elsewhere. But such efforts were on very limited scale and often faced opposition or shortages of funding. In any case, by the 1490s, new military technology transformed warfare of the day and marked the beginning of the end of the role of Italian architects as key innovators in utopian thinking. Medieval-style fortifications—large vertical stone walls—had once been impermeable to the arrows, swords, and horses that dominated warfare. New siege cannons now quickly reduced medieval city walls to rubble. During the initial decades of this so-called “gunpowder revolution,” architects experimented with all sorts of new approaches to urban defense. Architects ceased thinking about how to promote a perfect society and began devoting more attention to shielding the existing ones from attack. But for a time, urban planners in 15th century Italy were the center of a new mode of utopian thinking that highlighted humans’ ability to design and plan more perfect places themselves.



Sforzinda's House of Virtue and House of Vice.

In imaginary worlds of 15th-century Italy like the one imagined by Filarete, male authors either treated women’s social roles as an afterthought or only recognized women as objects of male sexual gratification or as little more than birthing



Depiction of an “ideal city” by an anonymous artist, 1480s.

chambers. The most extreme examples of such visions described an ideal society in which women’s central purpose was to satisfy men’s sexual desires. Filarete hardly mentioned women at all. He acknowledged the advantage of educating girls but gave little thought to adult women, except when mentioning brothels.



Depiction of Christine de Pizan, 15th century

Another 15th-century Italian humanist, the noblewoman Christine de Pizan, offered a detailed vision of an ideal society that centered on women’s positive contributions to the world. Pizan, moved from Venice to the French court as a child; as a teenager she married a nobleman who died when she was just twenty-five. She never remarried, and instead made her living as an author. Her most famous work, *The Book of the City of Ladies* (1405) describes an imaginary society entirely populated

by virtuous women, as recounted to a fictionalized version of herself by three allegorical women: Reason, Rectitude, and Justice. In the introduction, Pizan described how she had internalized the negative stereotypes about women’s inferiority that she had heard so often from men. Reason, Rectitude, and Justice urge her to reject such limitations, and describe the construction of a city filled with women deserving of honor and respect. Pizan imagined her work as a rebuttal of works circulating at the time; she mentioned Mathéolus of Boulogne’s *Lamentations* (1290–1291) by name on the first page. *The Book of the City of Ladies* condemned the widespread denigration of women’s potential for intellect, virtue, wisdom, and physical capacity. Still, looking at the idealized gender roles of Pizan’s work, we can also see places where she reinforced some of the same stereotypes she challenged.

Conclusion

We need to be careful to avoid thinking that 15th-century beliefs among the Mexica, Kongolese, or Europeans were static and unchanging or that ordinary people did not have plenty of latitude to challenge, resist, amend, or question views expressed by religious and political authorities. The example of Christine de Pizan shows us that we can sometimes find such dissent if we look for it and if its promoters had the ability to leave records that survive. Neither should we imagine that these premodern people were culturally isolated or naïve.

They all existed within regional and trans-regional trade and communication networks that connected them to all sorts of diverse peoples and cultures. And yet none of these people—whether nobles or peasants—could have imagined the vast world that they were about to enter. As the world became globalized, the new interactions fueled all sorts of new ideas about possible futures. If your grandparent or older friend sometimes struggles with the changing technology of today, just imagine how these people felt when they learned about one another.



Illustration from The Book of the City of Ladies.

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Image Citations

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Figure of Quetzalcoatl, 1200-1500 CE, MAG Memorial Art Gallery, University of Rochester, <https://magart.rochester.edu/objects-1/info/5296?sort%3D0>

Map of the Aztec Empire lead by Tenochtitlan circa 1519, CC BY-SA 3.0, Yavidaxiu, https://commons.wikimedia.org/wiki/File:Aztec_Empire_1519_map-fr.svg

The Aztec god Quetzalcoatl as depicted in the Codex Telleriano-Remensis, 16th century, Public Domain, https://commons.wikimedia.org/wiki/File:Quetzalcoatl_telleriano2.jpg

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Huitzilopochtli in the Codex Borbonicus, Fair Use, <https://www.mexicolore.co.uk/aztecs/ask-experts/which-was-the-most-powerful-aztec-god>

The founding of the Aztec capital Tenochtitlan; first page of the Codex Mendoza, c. 1541, Bodleian Libraries, University of Oxford, CC BY-NC 4.0, <https://iiif.bodleian.ox.ac.uk/iiif/viewer/?iiif-content=https://iiif.bodleian.ox.ac.uk/iiif/manifest/2fea788e-2aa2-4f08-b6d9-648c00486220.json#?c=0&m=0&s=0&cv=13&r=0&xy-wh=-3713%2C-458%2C13842%2C9133>

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Codex Borgia, page 19, c. 16th century, Public Domain, https://commons.wikimedia.org/wiki/File:Codex_Borgia_page_19.jpg

Power Figure (Nkisi Nkondi), 19th century, Brooklyn Museum, CC BY-SA 3.0, [https://commons.wikimedia.org/wiki/File:Brooklyn_Museum_22.1421_Power_Figure_Nkisi_Nkondi_\(4\).jpg](https://commons.wikimedia.org/wiki/File:Brooklyn_Museum_22.1421_Power_Figure_Nkisi_Nkondi_(4).jpg)

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Olfert Dapper, “Reguna Congo et Angola,” *Naukeurige beschrijvinge der Afrikaensche gewesten van Egypten, Barbaryen, Libyen, Biledulgerid, Negrosland, Guinea, Ethiopiën, Abyssinie*, Amsterdam, Jacob van Meurs, 1668, CC BY-SA 4.0, https://commons.wikimedia.org/wiki/File:Reguna_Congo_et_Angola._R_2%3D_22._Pi%C3%A8ce_20.jpg
 Pierre Duflos, Manikongo João I of Kongo, alias Nzinga a Nkuwu or Nkuwu Nzinga, *Histoire des Voyages*, before 1816, Public Domain, https://commons.wikimedia.org/wiki/File:Jean_Roy_de_Congo.jpg

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Prester John of the Indies, close-up of a portolan chart, late 16th century, Bodleian Libraries, University of Oxford, CC BY-SA 3.0, <https://digital.bodleian.ox.ac.uk/objects/84d15601-fe05-469f-8a57-ade3304a1fb5/surfaces/84d15601-fe05-469f-8a57-ade3304a1fb5/>

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Diogo Homem, East Africa with Prester John enthroned, before 1559, Public Domain, https://commons.wikimedia.org/wiki/File:Diego_Homem_-_Africa.jpg
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Statue of Leon Battista Alberti, photographed by Jesse Spohnholz.

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