

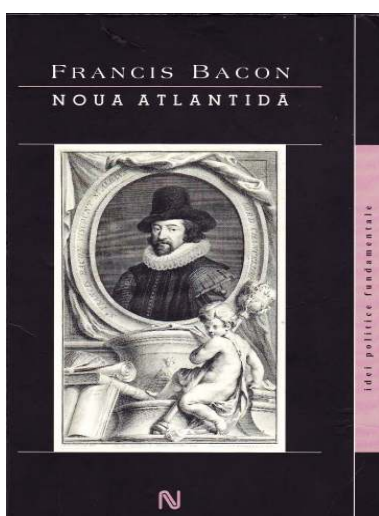
## ***NEW ATLANTIS* AND THE BEGINNING OF THE ‘SCIENTIFIC REVOLUTION’**

### ***NOUA ATLANTIDĂ* ȘI ÎNCEPUTUL ‘REVOLUȚIEI ȘTIINȚIFICE’**

Francis Bacon, *Noua Atlantidă*, traducere și studiu introductiv Dana Jalobeanu, Nemira, București, 2007, ISBN (13) 978-973-143-005-8, pp. 169

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The interpretation of the fundamental texts of the European modernity represents a difficult but necessary task for the Eastern European scholars. It is difficult because after half a century during which those texts were either banished or misinterpreted to serve the interests of the socialist regimes, the scholars from this part of Europe need to make up for a certain gap that separates them from their Western colleagues. At the same time it is a necessary task because now, maybe more than ever, Europe has to find its common roots, and one important step in order to achieve that is to return to the fertile thought of the 16<sup>th</sup> and 17<sup>th</sup> centuries.

Dana Jalobeanu's translation and interpretation of Francis Bacon's *New Atlantis* represents an important step in this direction. The first translation in Romanian of Francis Bacon's *New Atlantis* was published in 1957 by Virgil Căndea. Unfortunately, this was a biased edition which reflected the political ideas of the time, and Francis Bacon was presented as a forerunner of Marxism. Dana Jalobeanu offers us a new Romanian translation, based on the text published in 1627 in conjunction with *Sylva Sylvarum* and on other subsequent editions, and an objective interpretation of Francis Bacon's work.

An essential part of the volume is represented by the introductory study meant to familiarize the contemporary reader with the historical and intellectual context in which the *New Atlantis* was published and to offer a few keys of interpretation for this work.

The first part of the introductory study offers a general presentation of the work. From the very beginning the emphasis is on the complex and deceiving character of Bacon's *New Atlantis*. This was one of the last of Bacon's writings and was published after his death by William Rawley, in 1627. Since it was published, almost 400 years ago, the *New Atlantis* and Salomon's House as its central core have been interpreted in various ways: as a utopia of modernity, as a utopian project of a scientific society, as an attempt to rewrite the great Baconian project to reform knowledge, as a critique of the political power in 17<sup>th</sup>-century England, as one of the first manifestoes of colonialism etc. However, the disputes over Bacon's *New Atlantis* were born right in the 17<sup>th</sup> century. Thus, while some 17<sup>th</sup>-century authors, such as Robert Burton in *The Anatomy of Melancholy*, considered the *New Atlantis* as a utopia, several members of the new established British Royal Society interpreted it as a writing meant to promote the new experimental philosophy and Salomon's House as the prototype institution for the "scientific revolution". The author emphasizes that in the *New Atlantis* one could find numerous ambiguities and paradoxes: even Salomon's House, which is presented as a society whose main purpose is to produce knowledge, seems to be rather focused on

preserving, registering and transmitting knowledge. The image of Salomon's House is not that of a scientific institution but more that of a secret society. In order to understand correctly the meaning of the *New Atlantis*, the author urges us to read it through the eyes of Bacon's contemporaries.

The next section of the introductory study is dedicated to the presentation of the text of the *New Atlantis*. The author points out that in the first edition, published in 1627, the *New Atlantis* was not an independent text but it constituted the second part of a larger book entitled *Sylva Sylvarum, or a Natural History in Ten Centuries*. The first part was a natural history and its role in Bacon's vision was to provide raw material for science. Between the two texts there is no solid relation: in fact we have two unfinished texts that were published together after Bacon's death by his secretary, William Rawley. Is it possible that we have just two unsuccessful attempts, the first a notebook containing ideas, suggestions and observations to be tried in the future and the other an unfinished project of a 'scientific' utopia? The author pleads against such an interpretation with several arguments: *Sylva Sylvarum* was by far the most popular of Bacon's writings in the 17<sup>th</sup> century; the book was not based on a mere notebook but on an elaborated manuscript that was ready to be printed. However, what is the link between the *New Atlantis* and the *Sylva Sylvarum*? Jalobeanu suggests that the element of unity is represented by the public to whom this book was addressed: the growing number of people that were able to read and were interested in exploring the surrounding world. It was among these non-specialized readers that the 'scientific revolution' took place.

The *New Atlantis* can only be understood in the larger context of Francis Bacon's work. During his entire life Bacon attempted to achieve a great project of reforming the inherited knowledge. This project had different names: the advancement of learning, the reform of inherited knowledge, the great instauration. The last term, the great instauration or *Instauration Magna*, becomes the title of his great project to reform knowledge. But this great instauration depended on the formation of a 'brotherhood of light', of an international organization similar to the religious orders...or Salomon's House.

Dana Jalobeanu emphasizes the fact that *Instauration Magna* cannot be considered a finished program but it was rather an attempt to explain how to establish a community whose main task should have been the reformation of knowledge. Therefore, we have to place *New Atlantis* in the larger context represented by Bacon's attempt to rewrite and restructure the great project of the reformation of knowledge. In Jalobeanu's opinion, we can see in *Sylva Sylvarum* and *New Atlantis* the 'ideal' model of science that Bacon wanted to give to posterity.

Next, the author shows how *New Atlantis* was read and interpreted in the 17<sup>th</sup> century, insisting on the influence exercised by Bacon's work upon the protestant reformers of the time: Samuel Hartlib, John Dury, Theodore Haak, Jan Amos Comenius etc.

In the final part of the introductory study, Dana Jalobeanu gives a very interesting (re)interpretation of the text itself in context. We can see in the *New Atlantis* the successive stages of an initiative search: the secrets are unveiled gradually to the crew of European sailors. Each step of the initiation is analyzed and reinterpreted in order to give the contemporary reader the necessary tools to understand correctly the deep meanings of Francis Bacon's work.

The first impression after reading the introductory study is that it almost represents a book in its own right. The abundance of information, based on an impressive bibliography, the logical structure, the accessible language, all these aspects transform the introductory study into a compulsory tool for any contemporary reader of Francis Bacon's work, whether specialist or not.

The translation in Romanian of Bacon's *New Atlantis* represents an equally challenging attempt. Dana Jalobeanu solved this difficult problem in an elegant manner. She succeeded both in reproducing the characteristics of 17<sup>th</sup>-century English in Romanian and in making it understandable for the contemporary reader. The translation is permanently explained and exemplified with the help of numerous references.

Dana Jalobeanu's translation of Francis Bacon's *New Atlantis* certainly represents a successful attempt to familiarize the Romanian public with one of the major texts of the Early Modernity.