

**Professor Janet Clare, 'The circulation of cosmographical knowledge and Thomas More's *Utopia*'**

The translation in 1406-1409 of Ptolemy's *Geography* as *Cosmographia* indicates a European revival of interest in cosmography. The Renaissance elicited a transformation in cosmographical thinking, as the more God-centred medieval attitudes were confronted by a resurgence of interest in the geographical writings of Ptolemy and Strabo. The voyages of Vespucci and Columbus added to the mix, as lands were discovered that were —it was generally agreed — unknown to the ancients and without mention in the Bible. Although it was not until 1652 that England was to produce a vernacular cosmography, from the beginning of its European revival, cosmography fed into the English literary imagination.

In this paper I begin by examining the cosmographical turn in Europe and the early circulation of cosmographical knowledge in England. In the second part, I will consider as a foundational text, Thomas More's *Utopia* (Louvain, 1516), a work which assumes its readers are familiar with the discoveries and letters of the navigator, Amerigo Vespucci. *Utopia*'s fictionality is belied by its connections with the European cartographers and explorers of its age. Its anthropological account of an advanced society draws on accounts of primitive societies while its rationality is affirmed by its distance from the excesses of embellished travellers' tale. Through its links with contemporary voyages and voyagers More's work is embedded in the poetic geography of Renaissance cosmography and, I will suggest, no more fantastical than accounts of hitherto unknown worlds.