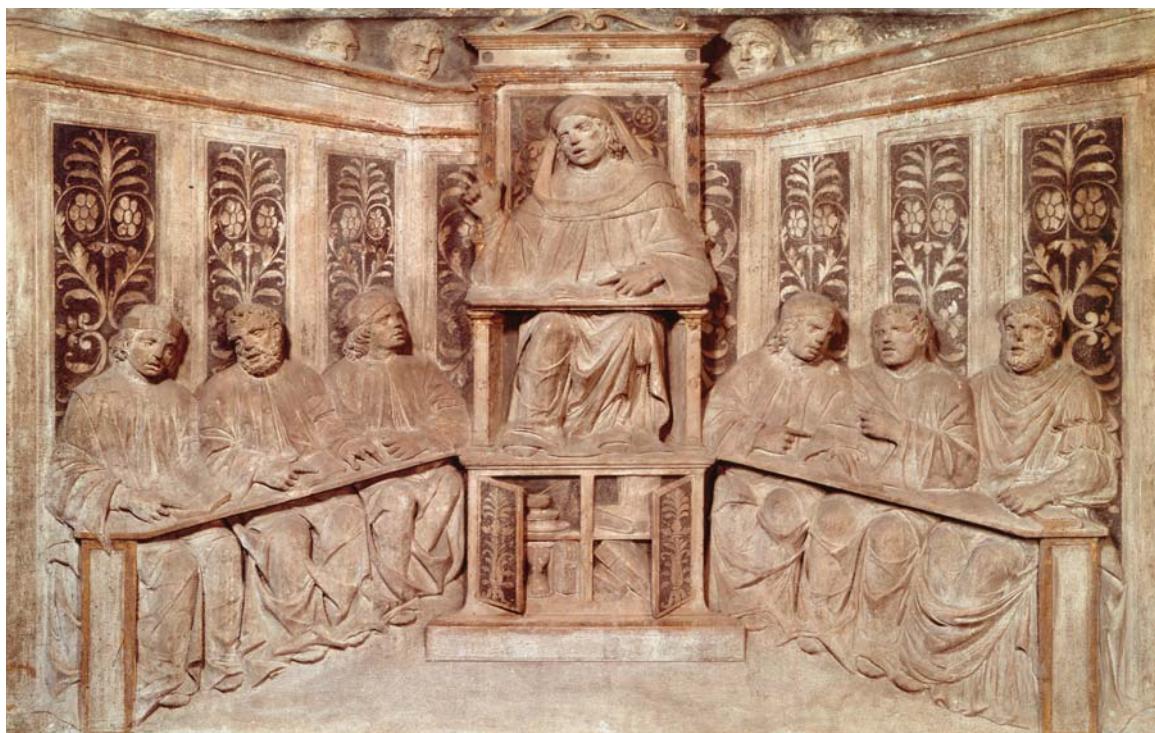




CONNECTING WITH THE POST-ANCIENT WORLD

UNIVERSITIES IN THE MIDDLE AGES

Both the favor displayed by Charlemagne for scholars and his promotion of Latin learning at his court set an important example for Western Europe as a whole. From his reign onward, despite the political chaos following his death, schools were founded in many of the settlements in which there was a cathedral church, or the seat of a bishop. These “cathedral schools” were the first significant educational establishments outside monasteries in Western Europe since the collapse of the ancient Roman Empire in the west. The importance and the number of cathedral schools increased greatly after 1050, owing to the growth of towns.



A relief in the Museo Civico in Bologna, Italy, glimpses into the everyday academic life of the medieval university. The professor seated in the *cathedra*, the official professorial chair, lectures to his class of students whose attention is rendered by the unknown sculptor. The size of medieval universities made for excellent student/professor ratios.

By about 1200 a few of these towns witnessed the development of special institutions, devoted to higher learning, known as universities. Educational institutions restricted to more advanced students were by no means new. They had existed in the ancient Greek and Roman world even since the founding of Plato's Academy in the fourth century BCE, and were also known in Islamic society. Nevertheless, the universities that arose in medieval Europe were unlike anything that



had preceded them in several ways. The word *ūniversitās* itself denoted a legal society or guild. In this instance the guild was academic, and followed one of two models. The University of Bologna, perhaps the oldest university, with origins dating from the late eleventh century, was a guild of advanced law students, who hired professors to provide them with advanced legal training. It became the prototype of the student-run university, which was imitated in several places, particularly in southern Europe. This form of academic organization, however, gradually faded away. The University of Paris, founded ca. 1160, and the University of Oxford, founded ca. 1200, represented another prototype, that of the masters' university. In this form of organization, the *Universitās* was a guild of masters, and students associated with them as apprentices.

A university was not only a corporation or a guild but also an institution of higher learning. To qualify as a legitimate university, it had to offer a degree in at least one of the three highest academic disciplines in the Middle

Window from the Spanish College founded in 1367 for Spanish students studying at the University of Bologna, Italy. It was the largest of the colleges at the university in the fourteenth century having thirty students: eight in theology, eighteen in canon law, and four in medicine.



All Souls College was founded by King Henry VI and Henry Chichele, Archbishop of Canterbury, in 1438. Its stated purpose was the "service of Church and State" to learning and society. Today, All Souls College is primarily a research institution devoted to the humanities. This bird's eye view shows the typical Oxford college with its grassy quadrangle.





Ages, and preferably all three: law (both Roman civil law and the canon law of the church), theology (which also included what we today would call philosophy), and medicine. All entering students, males typically in their middle teens, would have already acquired some elementary education, especially in Latin. They were required to study the seven subjects comprising the liberal arts: a group of three, known as the *trivium*, consisting of grammar, rhetoric, and dialectic (or logic); and a group of four, known as the *quadrivium*, consisting of arithmetic, geometry, astronomy, and music. One could earn two degrees for studying the arts: the *baccalaureatus*, *iūs*, m. or “Bachelor of Arts,” and the *magisterium*, *iī*, n. or “Master of Arts.” The degree of *doctorātus*, *iūs*, m. was only awarded in the three highest disciplines. Those who received this degree had—at least in theory if not in practice—the *iūs ubique docendī*, or “right to teach everywhere.” Much of our present-day academic terminology derives from words in medieval Latin, which served as the universal language of academia throughout Europe: not merely the names of the degrees conferred today, but also the words used for various academic positions such as “Dean” (*decānus*), “Rector” (*rector*) and “Regent,” and “Faculty” (*facultās*). The mortarboard hat and gown worn by modern students and professors at commencement ceremonies was the official daily garb of medieval university lecturers.

Medieval professors not only lectured, but also held public disputationes with other professors on the finer points of their academic disciplines. They published their ideas and arguments in three different types of treatises, *summae* (“overviews”), *quaestiōnēs disputātae* (“debated issues”), or sometimes a *quodlibet* (a “whatever one pleases”), as well as in commentaries of various

The academic gowns seen at formal college functions like convocation and commencement are based on the academic garb of the medieval university. Sunday chapel and dinner at the University of Oxford requires students to wear their academic gowns while faculty don their doctoral gowns and male guests their tuxedos.





types. Universities, particularly the University of Paris, could possess great cultural prestige, and the views of university professors would weigh heavily in major political and religious events. The theologians at the University of Paris, for example, had a serious impact on settling the Great Schism of the Papacy, which had bitterly divided Europe in the late fourteenth and early fifteenth centuries.

Latin was the exclusive language of all lectures, disputations, official university functions, and publications. The situation only began to change in the late seventeenth century CE, partly in response to the growth of increasingly powerful monarchies, which closely associated their national language with their identity as political states; rulers of these countries favored the use of their own national language in universities located within their borders.



© Bolchazy-Carducci Publishers, Inc.
www.BOLCHAZY.com