

CHAPTER 18

Medieval Universities

Universities—Most important contribution of Catholic Church

1/ Origin and growth : OF ALL MEDIEVAL INSTITUTIONS, except the Catholic Church, handed down to the posterity, the universities were perhaps the most important and have remained insofar as their organisation was concerned, unchanged. The university, Latin *universitas* was originally one of the several vague words which meant association of people or the whole body of teachers and students. The university headed by a chancellor and divided into colleges, administered by deans or rectors, in which a faculty presents a definite curriculum at fixed hours to a group of students who take academic degrees, goes back to twelfth and early thirteenth centuries.

Defence of the church helped the growth of universities

Influences other than love of new learning, favoured the growth of the earliest universities. The heresy of the twelfth century needed some kind of institution where a large number of students could be trained to defend the dogma and the organisation of the church. The church by the twelfth century had developed into a massive organisation which required the services of lawyers for its courts, men trained in the formalities and intricacies of correspondence for its chancelleries. The feudal kings and the lords also needed the services of civil servants trained in law and in the use of the Latin language. The fast growing towns with autonomous existence likewise needed the services of lawyers and administrators. The scholarship of the twelfth century was well adapted to meet these needs.

No mention of specific date possible

It is impossible to mention any specific date about the emergence of the oldest universities. They took form in the twelfth century. It was not in one way

only that the universities grew up. (i) Secular schools which were numerous in Italy developed into universities. (ii) Universities also grew up when scholars flocked round eminent teachers. Scholars from different nations used to flock round great teachers. The fact that such scholars came from different nations without restriction also explained the name 'university'. (iii) Migration of scholars also gave rise to new universities, as in the cases of Oxford and Cambridge. (iv) When the models had been perfected, it became the usual practice to found universities by royal charter. (v) Some of the universities, for example, those of Bologna and Paris were originally organised as guilds. Like other guilds, these educational guilds or universities sought and obtained same kind of autonomy as any other.

about emergence of universities; Causes helping rise of universities: Secular schools and eminent teachers; much use of university; Migration of scholars; Royal charter; Educational guilds

The very name *University* has its own history. The original name was *universitas magistrorum et scholarium* which practically meant a guild of masters or scholars. But in the twelfth century the term *Studium Generale* was being used for institutions which may be compared to what we understand by university. Bologna was the first of the West European cities to enlarge its school into a *studium generale*, which was the name for medieval university. The University of Pavia received its charter of *studium generale* in 1361 and transformed from a school into a university. Roman law was being studied in many of the schools since ninth century. Rome, Ravenna and Orleans were schools which revived the study of the Roman law since the ninth century, Milan, Narbonne and Lyons in the tenth and Verona, Mantua and Angers in the eleventh. Many of these were later transformed into universities. The Bologna University was, however, the most important centre of the study of law and with Irnerius as teacher of law in that university the golden age of medieval jurisprudence began—it is said. *Summa Codicis Irnerii*—a compilation of the lectures by

Initial names of universities: Universitas magistrorum et scholarium, Studium Generale

Transformation of schools into universities: Bologna, Pavia

University of Bologna seat of law studies

Salerno:
Medicine;
Rise of
universities
like those of
Vicenza,
Arezzo,
Padua, Venice,
Naples, etc.

Irnerius himself, is regarded a masterpiece of exposition and argument. At Salerno there began a specialised study in medicine. The school of Salerno maintained the tradition of Graeco-Roman study of science, kept touch with the Byzantine physicians and gained knowledge of Arabic medicine from Sicily. It was in the twelfth and the thirteenth centuries that Italy broke out into universities, some of them were spawned by Bologna through the emigration of professors and students. Thus there arose in Italy many universities of which those of Vicenza, Arezzo, Padua, Venice, Naples, etc., may be specially mentioned.

Distinguished
scholars in
universities

Yet, the unquestioned leader of the European mind in the twelfth and the thirteenth centuries, was France. Many of the French Cathedral schools, as distinguished from the secular schools of Italy, achieved international renown. These schools flowered into a great University at Paris which became a centre of intellect, finance, science, arts and philosophy. William Champeaux played the same part in the University of Paris as did Irnerius in the University of Bologna. But Peter Abelard was the most unrivalled lecturer of the University of Paris whose fame drew crowds of students from different parts of Europe and thus gave the University of Paris an unprecedented distinction. Theology, canon law, medicine and arts were the four special branches or faculties into which the University of Paris was divided since the middle of the thirteenth century.

University
of Paris

Universities
of Oxford
and Cambridge

The University of England was an offshoot of the political union of France and England under the Angevins. In the mid-twelfth century England was part of the Angevin empire and the first English university, namely the University of Oxford was modelled on the studium of Paris. The central position of Oxford as well as its importance as a market town conditioned the growth of the Oxford

University. By the middle of the thirteenth century the University of Oxford became second only to the University of Paris. Migration of scholars from Oxford to Cambridge in 1209 led to the foundation of a new school which was raised to the status of a university in 1233 by the bishop of Ely.

The Spanish universities had rather an unconventional beginning. Whereas the Studium Generale of almost all countries in the medieval times had their origin in schools or were founded by teachers who spread out of a university, as in the case of Cambridge, the Spanish universities were all originated by royal charter. The Universities of Palencia, Valladolid, Salamanca, etc., were all founded by royal charter. Naturally, these were under government control.

Spanish
universities—
greater
government
control

The curriculum which included the study of liberal arts was divided into two parts, the Trivium and Quadrivium. The universities admitted students from everywhere and their graduates had the right to teach anywhere. The universities would offer instruction in at least one of the professional subjects—law, medicine, theology, etc. The degree conferred by the university faculties would signify that the degree holder had the right to teach the subject and he was recognised to be a member of the teaching guild. Four or even five years of study would qualify a student for sitting for the Bachelor's degree on passing an examination, the Trivium. After that, four more years would be necessary to complete the course of Quadrivium, with special attention to Aristotle, when a student would become master of the subject. A doctoral degree would require continued study up to the age of thirty-five. No one below that age could be a doctor. A public defence of the thesis had to be made by the student from six in the morning till six in the evening and theoretically, any person was at liberty to put any question to him. The scholar was then

Curriculum:
Trivium and
Quadrivium

University
degrees
passports to
undertake
teaching in
any university

Period of
study

Testing of
the scholar

to inaugurate his teaching career with a specimen lecture. His degree was then conferred on him.

Nature of administration and conduct of students

Earliest universities had no buildings of their own and classes met in any available church building or rented halls. Students had to sit on the floor, later on benches were used. Disciplined conduct was demanded of the students. Yet there were many cases of student rowdism. The rowdies would enter into fight with the citizens, would stone their houses on occasions. But there were serious students who minded their studies with much care and attention, as we also have in our own times.

Text books

Courses of studies were based on text-books which the teachers would read and elaborate in lectures. Commentaries on the text-books had to be made extempore. There was no paper, and the price of parchments was so high that students could not afford to buy them. Often the students used to combine in purchasing text-books which were in manuscripts. Students would discuss and exchange notes after hearing the lectures of their teachers.

Robert of Sorbonne began the system of residential college

Robert de Sorbonne a Chaplain of St. Louis of France, founded a college to furnish free board and lodging to twenty students. This was the beginning of residential colleges.

Impossible to overrate importance of the universities

2/ Influence and importance of Universities : Twelfth century was remarkable for the development of education and the most remarkable in it was the development of the universities. It is impossible to overrate the influence that the medieval universities had exercised on the life of the middle ages. The importance that the university had acquired may be easily understood from the common saying that three powers to guide the world were the church, the king and the university (Sacerdotum, Regnum and the Studium).

Sacerdotum, Regnum and Studium.

The universities as corporate bodies were makers

of public opinion. It was from the time of the growth of the universities that the leadership of the social and cultural life and at a later stage of the political life was coming into the hands of the universities.

Universities —makers of public opinion

The theology of the western church' was largely shaped in the University of Paris and the canon law if not created at Bologna was taught there. Wherever the Roman law or canon law was taught, it became a training ground for lawyers of almost every country.

University of Paris—shaped theology of western church; Study of Roman law

At the time when the great schism had disrupted Europe, the University of Paris took the lead of the Conciliar Movement to combat the schism.

Leadership of Conciliar Movement

The universities with their specialised courses and assemblage of qualified teachers, became homes of advancement in creative thought as was displayed in scholasticism.

Universities houses of advancement in creativethought

The educative influence of the universities upon those who had opportunities to receive training there made the later great men of affairs who directed and guided the destinies of many a country and society.

Educative influence of the universities

Education imparted by the universities made opportunities open before the poor and the younger sons of nobles, who were of not much importance to the society otherwise, to rise to great heights. This was the beginning of the principle 'career must be open to talents'. Today a peasant's son in the university is not at all astonishing.

Universities offered opportunities for rising to great heights

Persons educated in the universities took up the lawyers' duty both in the state and the church, and were the basis of the bureaucracies of church and state.

Universities produced lawyers

The rapid expansion of universities and colleges and the huge number of the students reading therein showed the unprecedented and the growing intellectual enthusiasm that had gripped the European societies of the time.

Unprecedented intellectual enthusiasm