Introduction

This book is an introduction to the intellectual culture that developed
in Paris from the early twelfth century, and it focuses in particular on
the theologians. The international standing of Paris and its theologians,
who came to Paris from all over Europe and left to hold important jobs
on an equally wide scale, makes this study relevant to medieval intel-
lectual culture more generally. The book has also been conceived so
as to cut across categories and conceptual boundaries that have sepa-
rated various fields of study and thus framed most existing works. First,
intellectual history and institutional history have generally been treated
separately. There are many outstanding studies of medieval thought,
but they have not been primarily concerned with the contexts in which
thinking took place; such information has been presented merely as
background. There are also excellent institutional histories of schools,
monasteries and universities, but they have tended not to dwell on the
scholarly work that took place in them. This book, however, examines
the relationship between ways of thinking and contexts. In part this
reflects a methodological principle that ideas can only be understood
historically if placed in context, but it was also an issue that medieval
scholars themselves considered, and their views on the matter were fun-
damentally important to their sense of identity and authority. Second,
the history of abstract philosophy and theology and the history of ethics
and moral theology have also been studied separately, and often by dif-
ferent historians. The work of theologians who operated in both fields
is only rarely analysed as a whole, and those who were preoccupied with
ethics and pastoral theology are sometimes dismissed as second-rate
thinkers by intellectual historians. This is to miss the place that medi-
eval theologians themselves accorded to ethics and moral theology, the
sense of pastoral mission that underpinned much of their apparently
abstract work, and the institutional significance of attitudes to virtue
and pastoral mission. Third, existing histories of medieval thought have
generally ignored the intellectual work of women, while learned women
have received separate treatment as individuals, in studies of women,

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or in histories of 'mysticism'. This book only begins the work of synthe-
sis and re-conceptualization that will be required to produce a general
history of ideas and gender, but at least the inclusion of Hildegard of
Bingen and Marguerite Porete points up the masculinity of Parisian
intellectual culture.

   This book also includes much more extended textual analysis than is
usual in outline intellectual histories of the period. The disadvantage
of this approach is that many significant figures and many themes have
to be omitted lest the book assume unmanageable proportions. Many
existing histories of medieval thought therefore offer much fuller cover-
age, but their brief references and compressed accounts of key argu-
ments surely mean more to specialists than to general readers. Students
can repeat the account of an argument, but they are in no position
to engage with it critically, or to place it with any confidence in any
broader analysis of their own. Moreover, they are not prepared effect-
ively to read the primary texts for themselves. Given the current trend
in universities towards independent learning and the writing of long
essays and dissertations, it is essential to train students to make sense of
texts that raise complex intellectual problems in unfamiliar and tech-
nical terms, and this requires close textual reading of substantial pas-
sages. This emphasis also facilitates the kind of interdisciplinary work
that is flourishing in centres of medieval studies. Wherever possible,
use is made of texts that are available in translation. Unfortunately
this skews the selection of material since the work of translation has
sometimes been driven by confessional as well as scholarly concerns.
Different styles of translation can also create misleading impressions
of, for example, similarity or difference between two figures, and it has
been necessary to make adjustments where translators have sought to
use modern terms in order to force an engagement between medieval
texts and modern philosophical debates. The great advantage of using
the most readily available translations, however, is that it permits non-
specialist readers to test the analysis on the basis of their own reading
beyond the quoted passages.

   It will perhaps be helpful briefly to set out the structure of the book.
The first three chapters look at three different contexts of learning and
the ways of knowing that were cultivated within them. The schools
of northern France, discussed in Chapter 1, were institutionally fluid,
highly competitive, and offered a new type of career to masters who
were able to cultivate their reputations and attract students. The intel-
lectual methods developed in the schools were highly diverse. Scholars
developed new methods of textual interpretation, and sought to under-
stand the physical world partly through sense perception but chiefly

through poetry and myth. Increasingly, however, the schools came to be dominated by the study of logic which offered its exponents a powerful form of argument that could be deployed in all subjects, a way into major philosophical issues, the promise that divine mysteries could be opened up to human understanding, and a process of initiation creating an intellectual elite. The plethora of intellectual approaches caused heated debate about what was true and appropriate. Nevertheless, the second half of the century witnessed developments that were to underpin the emergence of a university in Paris: a growing consensus about what should be studied and how, support for schools from major political authorities, and the emergence of a limited number of places as key centres of learning.

Chapter 2 focuses on the equally dynamic world of the twelfth-century monasteries, exploring their ways of knowing through the work of Anselm, Bernard of Clairvaux and William of Saint Thierry. They stressed the importance of personal experience, self-knowledge, prayer and love. Invariably they granted a critical role to God, as Hildegard's visionary experiences made especially clear. Crucially, they insisted that it was necessary to live a life of virtue, and that only an elite audience in a religious house could properly receive the more advanced ideas. In the late eleventh and early twelfth centuries, Anselm was keen to include reason and logic amongst many ways to know God, but a generation later Bernard and William reacted against the schools and their emphasis on logic, criticizing their intellectual methods, their way of life and their attitude to their audience. Despite instances of dramatic conflict, however, some saw a way forward through synthesis of the different approaches. Hugh of Saint Victor shared the fundamental monastic values and was highly critical of the schoolmen, but while emphasizing that a life of learning had to be a life of virtue, he offered a theory of knowledge and valued the liberal arts. Crucially, he found a place for study in the ascent to God, requiring those who moved beyond study to continue to practise scholarship on its own terms, an approach that was to underpin the ideology of the new university.

Chapter 3 explores the University of Paris in the thirteenth century. The statutes of 1215 and the papal bull *Parens scientiarum* of 1231 articulated a public vision that was shaped by key monastic ideals: the university was to be a properly regulated environment in which the virtuous behaviour necessary for achieving knowledge was required, and in which masters would take responsibility for the impact of their teaching on their audience. The university would therefore be immune to the criticisms that had been directed at the twelfth-century schools. *Parens scientiarum* also declared that the fundamental purpose of the university

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was to transform men into preachers, tying the university into the pas-
toral mission of the church. A process of institutionalization turned
the university into a permanent locus of authority, with masters now
dominating the students. The university was, however, extremely com-
plex; it was a community made up of many other communities, offering
masters and students a range of identities, and sometimes causing dis-
sension within the university. There were also striking intellectual dif-
ferences in approaches to knowing. Bonaventure and Thomas Aquinas,
for example, were very different in their assessments of sense perception
and innate ideas, and therefore in their reception of Aristotle. The most
dramatic controversies arose, however, when members of the faculty of
arts considered the unity of the intellect and the eternity of the world.
Despite the condemnations that ensued, and the involvement of exter-
nal authority on these occasions, these conflicts were largely played out
within the university. Moreover, there was a general consensus that it
was possible to know truths with certainty, and that the learned expos-
ition of truth underpinned the authority of the university and especially
the masters of theology.

The fourth chapter occupies a pivotal position in the book because it
explains the sense of responsibility that Parisian masters of theology felt
towards the rest of society and the ways in which they endeavoured to
communicate their views to others and assert their authority over them.
The masters had been taught ethics and moral theology when they stud-
ied grammar and rhetoric as young students, and they regarded ethics
and moral theology as the culmination of study. Moreover, they consid-
ered themselves to be at the summit of a hierarchy of learning, and jus-
tified their continued study and their high status in terms of their social
functions. This led them to claim an immediate authority as academic
theologians at the University of Paris, an authority that might even set
them over prelates of the church. Moreover, they developed a number
of ideas that served to generate a universal need for the masters' judge-
ments on every aspect of human life. Ideas about purgatory, the ethic
of intention and the devil threw responsibility onto each individual for
his or her own fate after death, raising the stakes by inspiring both hope
of salvation and fear of pain. At the same time, the issues involved in
achieving salvation were presented as so challenging and complex that
no individual could reasonably hope to cope alone, hence the need for
the masters' authoritative guidance. This guidance was communicated
through disputations, sermons and confession, practices about which
the masters theorized and to which they were heavily committed.

The next two chapters explore what Parisian theologians actually had
to say about two fundamental aspects of human life. The theologians

discussed and wrote about a vast range of issues. In addition to matters
of doctrine and the basis for religious belief, they analysed Christian
society from every angle because the potential for sin was ever pre-
sent and correct behaviour had always to be defined. It would there-
fore be possible to examine their views on any number of themes: the
nature of the church as an institution, including the positions of the
pope and bishops; or the powers and responsibilities of secular rulers;
or the relationship between ecclesiastical and secular authorities; and
so on. The themes of these two chapters have been chosen because
they demonstrate the engagement of Parisian theologians with matters
that directly or indirectly concerned the overwhelming majority of the
population, and also show a response to profound changes taking place
in western European society. Thus Chapter 5 concerns their views on
sex and marriage, especially the consistency of their message, the lan-
guage that they used when discussing marital problems, and the issue
of misogyny. They were generally consistent on a whole range of mat-
ters including the binary opposition between the active male and the
passive female, male dominance, the purpose of marriage, the import-
ance of free consent, the theory of conjugal debt, how and when sex-
ual activity should occur, and the power of women to persuade with
words because there were specifically feminine forms of knowledge.
Individual masters could be inconsistent, however, when discussing
women: they expressed very different views depending on whether they
were considering the nature of women directly or extolling the value of
marital affection. There were also disagreements between theologians.
What established a valid marriage caused problems for some time, but
they were largely resolved. Disagreements were never settled, however,
with regard to sexual pleasure and the extent to which marital sex was
sinful, and with regard to the property rights of wives. While much of
their thinking about women is bound to strike the twenty-first-century
reader as misogynistic, it is important to avoid oversimplification: they
insisted on equality in a number of respects, and their treatment of
practical marriage problems shows that they were willing to address
moral problems that their basic values created for women, while also
taking into account social realities such as custom and personality. The
complexity of their attitude to women is perhaps most tellingly revealed
by the instability of their discourse when treating what we would call
gender issues.

Chapter 6 considers the theologians' treatment of money and urban
culture. The university was deeply embedded in the city, its very exist-
ence unthinkable without the urban growth of the period. While the
masters did not model themselves on artisans and merchants, as has

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been suggested, they undertook to give townspeople moral direction. Although slower to accept responsibility for financial life than for sexual activity, they came to devote much attention to the effects of the flourishing economy. Their thinking was ambivalent in many respects. They expressed a traditional hostility to trade while also largely justifying trade and the work of the merchant. In performing the latter task, they stressed the importance of justice in exchange, with the just price taken to be the current market price. They unanimously condemned usury, but went beyond the traditional authorities to develop a range of new arguments to support the condemnation, some contradicting older arguments. They then deployed these new arguments when scrutinizing types of contract and discovering that they were licit, thus in effect legitimating specific ways of charging for credit. They also found reasons to tolerate usury as a lesser evil, thus acknowledging the benefits of charging for credit. Furthermore, they used conceptions of money developed in arguing against usury to discover that it was morally safest to do business in money because it was less likely to change hands with an obligation to make restitution attached. Embedded within their arguments were new assumptions: the money economy was autonomous, no longer dependent on agrarian society or traditional forms of political authority for legitimacy; time was infinite and measurable, and experts could make predictions about what would probably happen in the market. These profound shifts remained understated or implicit, however, permitting traditional prohibitions and the church's pastoral strategy to remain intact, while much of what was happening in the marketplace became acceptable.

The final chapter argues that in the late thirteenth and early fourteenth centuries anti-intellectual intellectuals, as I have called them, presented a profound challenge to the authority and identity of the University of Paris and especially its masters of theology. Deeply learned and intellectually sophisticated men and women, operating both inside and outside the university but nevertheless connected with the university and its theologians, expressed their ideas in vernacular languages. Jean de Meun, Marguerite Porete and Eckhart were perhaps the key figures. In different ways they called into question the value of reason, and undermined the idea that language could be used to convey definite meaning, implying that truths could not be known and communicated with certainty. They also challenged the link between living virtuously and knowing correctly. They cast doubt on the worth of the pastoral strategies and the devotional practices of the church. They did not seem interested in how they themselves might be understood or misunderstood, and what effect they might have on many who received their

ideas. They deployed the language and imagery of nobility in associ-
ation with worthwhile knowledge, thus favouring a social category that
had its roots outside the university. The wider context in which the
theologians worked was now very different: they no longer had a mon-
opoly of higher theological learning. Moreover, the public discourse
that had generated the university's sense of purpose and permitted suc-
cessful negotiation of its privileged status in society was threatened.
The masters' ability to generate certain knowledge and to communicate
that knowledge with authority was called into question. The University
of Paris did not decline or fade in importance as a result, but a funda-
mental change was taking place, suggesting that a process of reinven-
tion and renegotiation would be required. Historians have pointed to
many changes in the intellectual culture of the fourteenth century, and
this is perhaps one more strand that needs to be considered as research
continues.

1   The twelfth-century schools of northern France

The masters of the twelfth-century schools in northern France lived, taught and wrote as if they were always on to something new. Many younger scholars were certain that they had access to truths that had been beyond their predecessors, whom they did not hesitate to insult and to try to supplant. Those who reacted with horror to the schools accepted that their endeavours had novel qualities, and indeed this was a large part of what they disliked. It is important, however, to step back from twelfth-century polemic and to note the debt that the masters owed to the past. The work of medieval scholars depended on analysis of ancient Greek and Roman texts, of the Bible, and of early Christian writers. Owing to common interests and the means by which the school-men came into possession of classical works, the more recent works of Muslim and Jewish thinkers were also highly influential. But this body of material did not exist in its entirety at the beginning of the twelfth century. On the contrary, by a complex process of transmission and translation, more and more of the work of the ancient world became available during the twelfth and thirteenth centuries. Paradoxically, therefore, to study the oldest texts was in a sense to study the newest material. The continual supply of new material had an important effect: it meant that existing scholarship was always going out of date. A student did not have to consider himself a genius to feel that his work was bound to make a worthwhile contribution and indeed surpass that of his teachers. Furthermore, much scholarly effort was directed towards the process of interpreting texts, so that even texts that had long been available could be subjected to new techniques and again a degree of originality was easily attained. It is hard to imagine a greater incentive to intellectual endeavour.

Schools were certainly not, however, a completely new invention of the twelfth century. Monastic schools had existed across western Europe for centuries, and they were chiefly responsible for the sur-vival of those authoritative texts which were available at the start of our period. Cathedral schools had also flourished in many parts of western

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Europe in the eleventh century and they did much to provide the framework within which twelfth-century masters operated. It is extremely difficult, however, to establish the relationship between eleventh- and twelfth-century cathedral schools because so little scholarly work by eleventh-century masters survives. It has been convincingly argued that the eleventh-century masters simply did not write a great deal, or attached little importance to what they wrote, because their aim was the ethical formation of men who would go on to serve in ecclesiastical and secular government, and their teaching technique was to offer themselves as living models.[1] These concerns were not entirely lost, but the twelfth-century schools of northern France clearly represented a significant departure from the prevailing pattern in western Europe, with much greater emphasis on texts.[2] Paris was by no means the only place in which schools took on a new character, and the schools of Chartres, Laon, Rheims and Orléans, for example, were just as eminent. The first part of this chapter will identify the characteristics that set a number of northern French schools apart from previous contexts of learning. It will then consider what drew young men to study there, and explore the diverse ways of thinking that were practised. This diversity caused great debate and controversy, and this too must be examined. Finally, we must consider developments that took place in the second half of the twelfth century and that, with hindsight, can be seen to take us towards the formation of a university in Paris.

Competition, student power and the emergence of a new career

We are fortunate in that twelfth-century scholars were strongly inclined to reflect on themselves and their world, with the result that a number of accounts of the twelfth-century schools survive. Peter Abelard, for example, left a vivid and telling description in his autobiographical letter, the *Historia Calamitatum*, or 'History of my Misfortunes'. Peter Abelard was probably the most famous and controversial scholar of the first half of the twelfth century. He was born in 1079, the son of a Breton knight. He came to study in Paris in about 1100 and subsequently studied and

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[1] C. S. Jaeger, *The Envy of Angels: Cathedral Schools and Social Ideals in Medieval Europe, 950–1200* (Philadelphia, 1994).

[2] On the shift from the oral to the textual, see C. J. Mews, 'Orality, literacy, and authority in the twelfth-century schools', *Exemplaria* 2 (1990): 475–500; L. Smith, *The Glossa Ordinaria: The Making of a Medieval Bible Commentary* (Leiden, 2009), pp. 5–12, 37; B. Stock, *The Implications of Literacy: Written Language and Models of Interpretation in the Eleventh and Twelfth Centuries* (Princeton, 1983).

taught in various places in northern France, frequently benefiting from the political patronage of Stephen of Garlande, an archdeacon of Paris and a powerful figure at the French royal court. Several aspects of his intellectual achievements will be discussed later, but he was equally well known for his affair with Heloise. When established as the master of the cathedral school of Notre Dame in Paris, he was employed as private tutor to Heloise, the niece of Fulbert, one of the canons of Notre Dame. The affair between Heloise and Abelard has long been the stuff of legend, their story subject to reinvention in every age. Until recently, Heloise was thought to be about seventeen when the relationship began, with Abelard in his late thirties. Now she is more commonly placed in her twenties, at least in her early twenties and perhaps even her late twenties, and she is presented as Abelard's intellectual equal with distinctive views that influenced Abelard's work. However we imagine their affair, it resulted in the birth of a son and secret marriage. When Abelard lodged her in a nunnery, Fulbert supposed that he was repudiating her, and had his men attack Abelard as he slept at night and castrate him. Heloise obeyed Abelard's command to enter a convent, and he too entered religion at the abbey of Saint Denis. Abelard was condemned for heresy at the Council of Soissons in 1121 and became abbot of Saint Gildas in Brittany about 1126. He was once more condemned for heresy at the Council of Sens in 1140 and died, a monk of Cluny, in 1142.[3] The letters of Abelard and Heloise were written in the early to mid 1130s. The first letter in the collection was written by Abelard to an unnamed and probably imaginary friend to offer consolation. In this it conforms to a set rhetorical model, the *epistola consolatoria*, and the gist is that the friend's troubles are nothing compared to Abelard's. The letter tells of Abelard's early career as student and master, his affair with Heloise, their entry to religion, his trial at Soissons, and his subsequent career as monk and teacher.[4]

[3] For the life of Abelard, see R.-H. Bautier, 'Paris au temps Abélard', in J. Jolivet (ed.), *Abélard en sons temps. Actes du colloque international organisé à l'occasion du 9e centenaire de la naissance de Pierre Abélard (14–19 mai 1979)* (Paris, 1981), pp. 21–77; M. T. Clanchy, *Abelard: A Medieval Life* (Oxford, 1997); J. Marenbon, *The Philosophy of Peter Abelard* (Cambridge, 1997), pp. 7–35; C. J. Mews, *Peter Abelard* (Aldershot, 1995), pp. 1–20. For reassessment of Heloise's age and her influence on Abelard, see Clanchy, *Abelard*, pp. 173–4, 275, 330; C. J. Mews, *The Lost Love Letters of Heloise and Abelard: Perceptions of Dialogue in Twelfth-Century France* (New York, 1999), p. 32.

[4] On the nature of the letters of Abelard and Heloise, see Clanchy, *Abelard*, pp. 15–16, 122–5, 154–5, 327–9; D. E. Luscombe, 'From Paris to the Paraclete. The correspondence of Abelard and Heloise', *Proceedings of the British Academy* 74 (1988): 247–83; Marenbon, *Philosophy of Peter Abelard*, pp. 82–93; Mews, *Peter Abelard*, pp. 20–6; Mews, *The Lost Love Letters of Heloise and Abelard*; B. Newman, 'Authority, authenticity and