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PART I
THEMES AND PATTERNS



CHAPTER 1

THEMES



WALTER RÜEGG

INTRODUCTION

The first part of each of the volumes of *The History of the University in Europe* is intended to offer the reader a conspectus – a sort of bird's eye view – of the university landscape for each respective period. Once that is done, the topical chapters, each with its own particular focus, should serve to give the reader a better understanding of the details. The opening chapter is not intended to anticipate the topical chapters. In this volume, for example, it does not attempt to summarize the historical framework of the Reformation and Counter-Reformation and the movement of the absolute monarchies towards the French Revolution. As in the first volume, it calls attention to certain themes as they emerge in the course of the development of the universities; it aims to lay bare their preconditions, just as in archaeology the aerial photography of a landscape is used to lay bare its deeper configuration before one begins the work of excavation. The second chapter then shows in concrete detail the features of the university landscape in all its institutional manifestations; it places in a broad perspective the geographical expansion and distribution of universities between 1500 and 1800.

One theme which runs throughout the entire volume is the significance of humanism in the process of differentiation undergone by the universities; it is visible in the curricula as well as in the various schools of thought which affected the universities; it is related to the emergence of new centres of intellectual gravity, to the relative attractive power of certain universities, and to the migrations of university teachers and students. This is followed up in detail in the individual chapters.

But what underlay the diverse effects of humanism? Was it only an outcome of the profusion of the newly discovered ancient theological, jurisprudential, medical, philosophical and historical texts which so

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greatly broadened the range of knowledge and which made corresponding demands on higher education? The encyclopaedic view of education, science and scholarship which also pervaded the mathematical and natural sciences does not, however, explain how the impact of humanistic education led to new discoveries, and indeed to revolution, in the sciences, as in the cases of Copernicus in astronomy and Vesalius in anatomy. Did these occur because of or in spite of humanism?

There is a second theme which marks the history of universities between 1500 and 1800. This is the fragmentation of the political world along the lines separating ecclesiastical confessions and territorial principalities. This fragmentation brought in its train an unending sequence of persecutions and wars. How was it possible under these circumstances for a European republic of learning to maintain itself and even to extend and deepen itself?

It is true that the medieval Occident was far from attaining a perfect intellectual unity. Nevertheless, a certain measure of unity in the academic world was fostered by papal authority which guaranteed the universal right to teach – the *licentia ubique docendi*; it was also fostered by the uniformity of the scholastic methods of teaching and by the effective functioning of the Universities of Paris and Bologna as models for newer and lesser universities. But when these factors ceased to exist, as they did in early modern Europe, what was it that held the European republic of learning together?

As indicated in the Foreword, the social role of the university is the fundamental theme of all four volumes of our work. Did the European universities neglect their obligations to their respective societies, and were they crippled by internal crises at the very moment when their contributions to society were most urgently demanded? This argument, to which earlier reference has been made, of the ‘best historians of universities’, has been out of date for a decade. H. A. Oberman, who cites those views, has pointed out that it is impossible to speak of crises in the universities of the German Empire before the Thirty Years War; he says that, on the contrary, ever since the Councils, ‘the new class of civil servants, the *doctores*, had been riding high’. Following the pattern set by a later opponent, Dr Eck, professor and vice-chancellor of the University of Ingolstadt, Martin Luther claimed the right, as a doctor of theology, to a free discussion of the critical theses about the church; in this claim, he was supported by his University of Wittenberg and its authority, the Elector Frederick the Wise, not as an individual but as a distinguished member of the university.¹

¹ H. A. Oberman, ‘University and Society on the Threshold of Modern Times: the German Connection’, in J. M. Kittelson and P. J. Transue (eds.), *Rebirth, Reform and Resilience: Universities in Transition 1300–1700* (Columbus, Ohio, 1984), 30–5.

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The Reformation, because of the suspension of ecclesiastical privileges and benefits, led at first to a drastic diminution in the numbers of students; there then occurred a striking expansion in attendance at the universities. Why were universities so important for princes and municipalities that they created new universities of their own, to the extent that they had sufficient financial resources? What did they expect of the universities, and to what extent did the universities satisfy these expectations?

This chapter argues that the three phenomena of humanism, the republic of learning and the social role of the universities can be traced back to a common source. This common source is the changed conception of time and the world and the parallel change in the image which humanistically educated intellectuals had of their own professional role and of their powers and obligations in society. This change originated in Italian humanism and it influenced the universities throughout Europe in early modern times.

The emergence of humanism was treated in the epilogue to the first volume. It is against that background that the humanistic sources of the development of universities in early modern times can be briefly sketched in the present volume.

The changed sense of time was manifested first in the belief that a new epoch had begun and that the present was disjunctively different from Antiquity and the Middle Ages. The present ceased to be regarded as the final stage of the history of the world here below, but as a moment of transition between two epochs.

This period of transition from one epoch to the next was defined by means of – very variegated – historical facts and dates, such as the poetry of Dante and Petrarch, the invention of printing, the fall of Constantinople in 1453 and the discovery of America in 1492. The past as the *locus* of human action was subjected to historical criticism. An attempt was made to describe as accurately as possible and to locate by precise dates the biographies of ancient individuals and complex past events. University teachers uncovered forgeries like that of the ‘donation of Constantine’ of ecclesiastical properties.

Last but not least, the sense of transition from one epoch to another made meaningful the idea of a secular future, which individual curiosity and concern could explore horizontally, without regard to the world beyond, and thereby create a wide perspective. History was not yet seen as an embodiment of the idea of progress. Nevertheless, following the discovery of America, ‘new’ became a crucial term for scientists and scholars, who proudly pointed to the ‘newness’ of their discoveries and their writings in which the discoveries were described. In referring to these, they distinguished them from ‘older’ discoveries and works. This

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represented a change from traditional normative criteria, which were based on the authority of the past as such, to a criterion which was compatible with the possibility of new and valuable discoveries in the future. A desire for novelty, restlessness, a yearning for fame, all of which had not been regarded as virtues by scholastic ethics, were coming to be more highly regarded in the universities than the old virtues of repose, contemplation and self-restraint.

It was not only time as a dimension of human action that acquired a new significance. The world as the scene of human action became an object of scientific and scholarly curiosity and exertion. This was not something which happened only after the discovery of America. The discovery of America was preceded by other sea-voyages and by the occasional travels of merchants to East Asia. Oral reports on travels were recorded in Latin and were thereby made available to an international public including the international world of learning. Around the middle of the fifteenth century, humanistic scholars began to bring together geographical and historical facts about the land and inhabitants of neighbouring countries, as well as about those remote countries of which previously only the names had been known. This was done partly from books and partly from the reports of first-hand observations contained in travel accounts. Cosmographies and descriptions of the world were among the products of the humanistic efforts. Together with cartography, these works played a significant role in the preparation and carrying out of voyages of discovery.

The voyages of discovery were soon brought to the attention of the universities, and they led no less rapidly to the conclusion that the traditional views of the shape and inhabitability of the earth had to be discarded. The conquests of the peoples of America and the attempts to convert them to Christianity gave rise to discussions by academics about the rights of whole peoples and of human beings as individuals. The discoveries entered more slowly into the syllabuses of university teaching. But these syllabuses too expressed some awareness that there was something new to be learned about the world which had hitherto been thought to be exhaustively known. The frontispiece of Francis Bacon's *Instauratio magna* and its *Novum organum* shows ships passing through the Pillars of Hercules into the open sea. Beneath the engraving is the epigraph: *multi pertransibunt et augebitur scientia* ('many will traverse and knowledge will be increased').²

The image of the voyage beyond the boundaries of the known expressed the new dynamic understanding of scientific knowledge. In

² Illustration in: A. Grafton, with A. Shelford and N. Siraisi, *New Worlds, Ancient Texts. The Power of Tradition and the Shock of Discovery* (Cambridge, Mass., 1992), 199. This work gives the newest survey and bibliography on discoveries.

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the famous metaphor of Bernard of Chartres (died c. 1130), the medieval scientists and scholars were said to be standing on the shoulders of the ancients, and were thus able to see further than the latter. In their dialogue with the ancients and in their discussions among themselves, the humanists introduced a new – personal – element into the process of growth of scientific and scholarly knowledge and, in so doing, they relativized it somewhat. In the sixteenth century, science and scholarship began to be conducted like a voyage of discovery. For the preparation, the auxiliary procedures and devices, and the general direction of the investigation they were dependent on the current state of technological and scientific knowledge. Nevertheless, it was clearly understood that the increase in scholarly and scientific knowledge lay in the discovery and exploration of new horizons.

This new attitude changed the role of the scholar. As early as 1518, a French statesman placed friendship between humanistic scholars above their loyalty to their respective countries, and there was no lack in later years of famous university teachers who accorded a higher place to their obligations to science than to their ecclesiastical attachments. It is certain that their conformity in matters of dogma was closely scrutinized, and heretical scholars were burned in Calvin's Geneva, as they were in papal Rome. Even as late as the eighteenth century, such an illustrious university teacher as Immanuel Kant was reproved by the Prussian superintendent for his unorthodox ideas. Nevertheless, the trials of heretics and the actions of the censors could not stop the advance of knowledge. One of the important reasons for this was – as the legend on the frontispieces of Bacon's work said – 'many' were ready to press forward beyond the boundaries of the already known. The scientific investigation of the world became the task and the *raison d'être* for the republic of learning, which transcended the boundaries of nationalities, principalities and religious communities. The international republic of learning did not, as did the medieval university, rest on the universal authority of the church. It rested rather on a new form of communication, the dialogue through which shared questions could be discussed from diverse standpoints. It penetrated into the mode of teaching in advanced secondary schools and universities, just as it came to predominate in the oral and written communication of the learned with each other and in the interchange of town and gown.

In the course of this change, the social role of scientific and scholarly knowledge, and with it the university as still the most important *locus* for the discovery and transmission of this new knowledge, also changed. Much more so than during the Middle Ages, the universities of early modern times attended to the demands of their respective societies. It is of course true that the graduates of the medieval universities often

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entered into the services of the ecclesiastical and earthly powers, but the *vita contemplativa* remained the dominant ideal of the medieval university. Under the dominion of humanism, the university teacher placed himself at the service of the *vita activa*, the life of practical action in society, to such an extent that the teachings of Justus Lipsius, professor in Leiden and Louvain, on the ancient Roman art of government and on Roman military techniques, were applied in practice by rulers and military men alike.

One result of this was the heightened self-confidence of university professors. They came to regard themselves not only as the teachers of their pupils but as the teachers of the elites of their societies as well. Intellectual training was no longer intended to provide for the training of university teachers to the same extent as it had done in the Middle Ages;³ it was intended to a greater extent than ever before to form the minds of the wide circle of elites of the larger society. The universities therewith acquired the important task of preparing the *litterati*, the *letadros* or 'gentlemen' to live and act in society in accordance with the norms of 'civility', 'civilization' or 'culture'. This education consisted of dialogue with ancient forerunners, ancient models of thought and ancient forms of art. The more absolute these were taken to be, the more at odds they were with social reality. It was not the neglect of their social obligations but rather the excessively one-sided attention to the *vita activa* that led to the ossification of humanism, to the disintegration of the European reputation for learning, and to the challenges facing the universities of the eighteenth century – all of which will be treated in the next chapters.

HISTORICAL TURNING POINTS

'O saeculum! o litterae! iuvat vivere; etsi quiescere nondum iuvat, Bilibalde! vident studia, florent ingenia, Heus tu, accipe laqueum, barbaries, exilium prospice!' (Oh century! Oh knowledge! It is a joy to be alive; but one must not relax, Willibald! Fields of knowledge are flourishing, spirits are stirring, You, barbarism, get a rope and prepare yourself for exile!) With this famous invocation, the assertive humanist, Ulrich von Hutten (1488–1523), concluded in 1518 his autobiographical report to the Nuremberg councillor, Willibald Pirckheimer.⁴

As was shown in the Epilogue to the first volume, Italian humanists as early as the fourteenth century saw their own times as marking a sharp break from the Middle Ages. Between 1450 and 1550, this epochal self-consciousness became more pronounced. The Florentine philosopher Marsilius Ficino (1433–99), who had hitherto been regarded as

³ J. Le Goff, *Les Intellectuels du Moyen Age* (Paris, 1957), 4.

⁴ U. von Hutten, 'Epistola vitae suae rationem exponens', H. Scheible and D. Wuttke (eds.), *Willibald Pirckheimers Briefwechsel*, vol. III (Munich, 1989), 400–25.

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the ‘head of the Platonic Academy’, but who, in the light of most recent research has become a figure of the history of universities,⁵ felt himself to be living in a new golden age. In this age, poetry and oratory, painting and sculpture, architecture and music emerged once more as Platonic philosophy was rediscovered, astronomy was brought to perfection, and in Germany, the cutting tools were found for type to print books.⁶ These were the innovations in intellectual life:⁷ humanism, which entered upon new paths not only in the human sciences but also in the natural sciences; the enrichment of philosophical thought by the discovery of Plato’s original writings; and the printing of books, which revolutionized the expansion of the written word and its influence within and outside the universities.

The humanistic university teacher, Aldus Manutius (1452–1515), changed professions in 1494 and became a book printer and publisher. In the same year, the French king Charles VIII, thanks to his artillery, penetrated into Italy, encountering scarcely any resistance, as far as Naples. The Italian state system collapsed, which for many contemporaries – as well as for many later historians – marked a new epoch in the European struggle for power. Humanism by the sixteenth century moved from being an Italian phenomenon into being a European movement.⁸ In this process Aldus’s Venetian publishing firm played an important role. He created a library which was not confined by walls, as the great libraries of the past had been, but instead could reach into the entire world, as Erasmus of Rotterdam wrote in 1508 in his annotated collection of proverbs, *Adagia*. Thomas More, who was a close friend of Erasmus, wrote in his *Utopia* (published in 1516), that of all the achievements of European culture, only the works of Greek poets, historians and physicians in the ‘jewelled letters of Aldus’, i.e., as printed books, were allowed entry into the ideal state of ‘Utopia’.⁹

In assimilating humanism, northern Europe also acquired its epochal self-consciousness. Philip Melanchthon, who was Luther’s main support in educational and philosophical matters and his successor as the head

⁵ J. Hankins, ‘The Myth of the Platonic Academy of Florence’, *Renaissance Quarterly*, 44–3 (1991), 429–75 proves convincingly that Ficino was not the head of a ‘Platonic Academy’, but temporarily head of a – private – gymnasium and university professor. For both education institutions the humanists used – as will be shown in chapter 2 – the word *academia*. The reference to Ficino’s ‘Platonic Academy’ in vol. 1, 451, is superseded.

⁶ E. Garin, ‘Die Kultur der Renaissance’, in G. Mann and A. Heuss (eds.), *Propyläen Weltgeschichte*, vol. VI (Frankfurt-on-Main/Berlin/Vienna, 1964), 468.

⁷ See chapters 11 to 14.

⁸ As indicated in the epilogue to the first volume.

⁹ M. Mann Phillips, *Erasmus on his Times, a Shortened Version of the ‘Adages’ of Erasmus* (Cambridge, 1967), 10; T. More, *Utopia*, ed. P. Turner (London, 1965), 100 quoted by M. Lowry, *The World of Aldus Manutius. Business and Scholarship in Renaissance Venice* (Oxford, 1979), 258.

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of German Protestantism, acknowledged, in 1518, in his inaugural lecture at the University of Wittenberg, the exertions of the Benedictine monasteries of the Carolingian period and of the twelfth century on behalf of ancient authors. He added that, after 1200, poor translations of Aristotle and the scholastic controversies which these instigated deformed the universities, the churches and morals. As the main objective of humanistic university reform, the 21-year-old professor insisted on a return to the sources of poetry, of sciences and theology. Thus, one would go back to the very substance of things themselves, in theology, directly to the wisdom of Jesus Christ.¹⁰ In his lecture on the opening of the newly founded higher humanistic school in Nuremberg in 1526, Melanchthon attributed to Florence the virtue not only of welcoming those scholars who fled from Constantinople but also of providing handsome salaries for them as professors of Greek. Florence was to be thanked for having saved the Greek language from dying out and for having aroused the *honestae artes*, the honourable sciences, to enter upon a new life. The new educational movement radiated in all directions from Florence and led to the development of vernacular languages, the improvement of municipal laws and the purification of religion.¹¹

Melanchthon's concept of an epoch is very interesting from many different angles. For him, the new age began with the conquest of Constantinople by the Turks in 1453, and this is the date which has been assigned until recently by many historians as the end of the Middle Ages. The novelty of humanism, for Melanchthon – as it was for the German neo-humanists of the nineteenth century – lay in the study of Greek, the return to the sources, *ad fontes*. The humanistic educational reform, according to Melanchthon, had practical effects on the national linguistic culture, on civil order and on the Reformation.¹²

Petrus Ramus (Pierre de la Ramée, 1515–72), whose philosophical and pedagogical works were a *succès fou*, above all in the universities influenced by Calvinism,¹³ in his lecture at the opening of his career as

¹⁰ P. Melanchthon, 'Sermo habitus apud iuventutem Academiae Witebergensis de corrigendis adolescentiae studiis', in R. Nürnberger (ed.), *Melanchthons Werke in Auswahl*, vol. III (Gütersloh, 1961), 32–40.

¹¹ P. Melanchthon, 'Oratio . . . in laudem novae scholae habita Noribergae in corona doctissimorum virorum et totius ferme Senatus', in Nürnberger (ed.), *Melanchthons Werke* (note 10), 67.

¹² These themes are dealt with in chapters 2 and 3.

¹³ A. Grafton and L. Jardine, *From Humanism to the Humanities. Education and the Liberal Arts in Fifteenth- and Sixteenth-Century Europe* (Cambridge, Mass., 1986), 162; W. J. Ong, SJ, *Ramus, Method, and the Decay of Dialogue. From the Art of Discourse to the Art of Reason* (Cambridge, Mass., 1958; 2nd edn, 1983), 295, mentions about 800 'editions and adaptations of Ramus' and Talon's [his pupil] 'own works (some 1100 if one numbers separately individual works appearing in collections) and those of nearly 400 Ramist educators and public figures'.

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a teacher at the Collège de Presles in Paris, declared that there had been a radical break between the old and new universities, in the following image:

Let us imagine a teacher of a university who died a hundred years ago, and had now returned among us. If he compared the efflorescence of the humanistic disciplines and the sciences of nature in France, Italy and England as they developed since his death, he would be shaken and astonished when he compared his own age with the present. He knew only human beings who spoke in a crude barbarian manner. Now he sees countless persons of all ages who speak and write Latin with elegance. As regards Greek, he would have repeatedly heard the usage: 'That is Greek, that is unintelligible.' Now, he would not only hear Greek being read with the greatest of ease but he would encounter scholars who would be able to teach this language with the greatest expertise. And how could one compare the darkness which once covered all the arts with the light and the brilliance of today? Of the grammarians, the poets and the orators only Alexander of Villedieu and works like Facetus and Graecismus,¹⁴ in philosophy only Scotus and the Spaniards, in medicine the Arabs, in theology there were few, one does not know where they came from. Now, he would hear Terence, Caesar, Virgil, Cicero, Aristotle, Plato, Galen, Hippocrates, Moses, the prophets, the apostles and the other true annunciators of the gospel and he would hear them speaking in their own languages. How could he not be astonished? It is almost as if he raised his eyes from the depth of the earth to the heavens and saw for the first time the sun, the moon and the stars.¹⁵

For the French humanist the correct cultivation of language was the heart of the new educational movement. He was also repeating the prejudice of his Italian predecessors. He said that, in the medieval universities, language was raw and barbarous; scholastic textbooks darkened the intellect. It was through reading the ancient and biblical writings in the original languages that light was brought into university education.

In contrast with Melanchthon, Ramus – like the Italian humanists – was not primarily concerned with the intellectual substance of what was transmitted from the Greek sources but rather with dialogue with the pagan and biblical authors of Latin and Greek Antiquity; because, in the humanistic university, these could be 'heard speaking – and, what is more, in their own languages'.

In the concluding sentence of his comparison, Ramus invoked Plato's image of the cave, without, however, accepting its meaning. It is not the strenuous avoidance of human opinions and the turning towards the

¹⁴ See volume I, 312, 344.

¹⁵ P. Ramus, 'Oratio de studiis philosophiae et eloquentiae conjugendis Lutetia habita anno 1564', in *P. Rami et Audomari Talei collectanae prefationes, epistolae, orationes* (Paris, 1577), 305.