

University and History. The Lesson of the Middle Ages. (An Introduction)¹

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Abstract: The following text has two main objectives: on the one hand, it intends to introduce the reader in a very cursory manner to some of the most important contributions made by the medieval university not only to the general development of higher education, distinguishable up until today, but also to the history of pre-modern European society. On the other hand, acknowledging the importance of university for the transformation (and “Europeanization”) of Transylvania from the second half of the 14th century until the 1550s, the author reflects briefly upon significant investigations concerning university, academic life and intellectuals in the Middle Ages conducted by scholars and research groups (especially during the last two decades) of the Babeş-Bolyai University in Cluj-Napoca.

Keywords: Middle Ages, University, Transylvania, Cluj-Napoca, Babeş-Bolyai University

Rezumat: *Universitate și istorie. Lecția Evului Mediu (O introducere)*
Textul care urmează are două obiective majore: pe de o parte își propune să-i reamintească cititorului, într-o manieră succintă, cele mai de seamă contribuții ale universității medievale, vizibile până astăzi, nu doar la evoluția generală a învățământului superior, ci și la istoria societății europene de dinainte modernității. Pe de altă parte, atrăgând atenția asupra importanței universității pentru transformările în sens european din Transilvania de la mijlocul veacului al XIV-lea până în jurul anului 1550, autorul trece în revistă cele mai semnificative investigații referitoare la universitate, viața academică și intelectuali în evul mediu întreprinse de cadre didactice și grupuri de cercetare (îndeosebi în ultimele două decenii) ale Universității Babeş-Bolyai din Cluj-Napoca.

¹ The purpose of this text – part of a research project of UEFISCDI PN-III-P4-ID-PCCF-2016-0064, see below note 22 – is to offer an introduction in form of an editorial for the research articles and book reviews grouped in this thematic issue and dedicated to the medieval and early modern university. For this reason, the literature cited now will be kept to a basic level.

Cuvinte-cheie: Evul Mediu, Universitate, Transilvania, Cluj-Napoca, Universitatea Babeş-Bolyai

*The university is a European institution;
indeed, it is the European institution par excellence [...]*
it is a creation of medieval Europe, which was the Europe of papal Christianity
(Walter Rüegg)²

The year 2019 has an anniversary significance for the Babeş-Bolyai University in Cluj-Napoca. A hundred years ago, the higher education institution experienced a moment of “re-establishment” in the conditions of the newly-enlarged dimensions of the Romanian state and, implicitly, the settlement of Transylvania in a distinct cultural matrix. As happens on such occasions, this moment of jubilee celebration provides the appropriate opportunity for remembrance, for scrutinizing the past and analysing the construction stages of Cluj-Napoca’s higher education over time. Naturally, one’s attention is drawn to the difficult episodes from recent times, to the Hungarian university education of the 19th century or to the Jesuit college constituted in the last decades of the *cinquecento*, this last historical frame being properly seen as the earliest precursor to present-day Cluj-Napoca’s academic life.³ Such a historical reconstitution would remain deeply incomplete without a fair assessment of those facts and data that link Transylvanian society as a whole to the European university tradition.

The European university has its origins in a time of profound transformations, designated by historians as the “Renaissance of the 12th Century”. This phenomenon of reorganization and consolidation of literacy, which actually begins in the middle of the 11th century but is anchored in time to the last phases of antiquity, differs from the Carolingian cultural reforms imposed by the imperial court through the social context and economic power that generates and feeds it.⁴ In an atmosphere of optimism influenced by the abandonment of millennial fears,⁵ material conditions in Western Europe open up an era of prosperity, with demographic and political effects, best expressed by urban development. The city becomes

² Foreword, p. xix, in: *A History of the University in Europe. Volume 1: Universities in the Middle Ages*, edited by Hilde De Ridder-Symoens, Cambridge, 1992.

³ Ovidiu Ghitta (ed.), *Istoria Universităţii “Babeş-Bolyai”*, Cluj-Napoca, 2012, passim, with further bibliography.

⁴ Robert E. Learner, *Literacy and Learning*, in: *One Thousand Years. Western Europe in the Middle Ages*, edited by Richard L. DeMolen, Boston, 1975, pp. 194-195.

⁵ Georges Duby, *L’An Mil*, Paris, 1974 (first edition published in 1967).

now the initiator, and at the same time the main beneficiary of new training models. Medieval urban environment lays the foundation of university education, the city being the only institutional structure that, on the one hand, through its own legal position, could ensure the proper legal framework for the existence of a new institution in need of autonomy; on the other hand, towns gathered together a large number of people in a given location. At the same time, education became apparent as a vector of social mobility in the context of Western Europe's demographic and territorial expansion.⁶ This was due to the increasingly specialised bureaucratic organisation of governments, not only in secular terms but also ecclesiastically, in search of a better governed Church and in need of a straightforward transmission of the religious message. Such a complex phenomenon was synthesized by Peter Moraw in an inspired way, with direct reference to the impact of legal disciplines on the medieval administrative act, as the "Verwissenschaftlichung des Regierens", the scientific transformation of the government, as a result of the wider participation of individuals with academic background in steering the course of society.⁷ The medieval university can be thus defined as a European innovation, as Walter Rüegg noticed, both the product of accumulations of organised communities, but also generating numerous social, economic, and cultural changes.⁸

In the course of the 12th century, that of the university's genesis, some regions emerged where a greater concentration of resources and prestige in the sphere of education converged. On the one hand, the perfection of the formation of personalities such as Thomas Becket (c. 1119-1170), John of Salisbury (c. 1115-1180), or Otto von Freising (c. 1114-1158) illustrate the attraction of French schools for students from England and Germany. Among them, the Paris collegiate churches of St. Geneviève and St. Victor promoted an alternative to the old training centres, adjacent to cathedral and collegiate churches⁹ which could no longer offer the best and modern

⁶ Robert J. Bartlett, *The Making of Europe. Conquest, Colonization and Cultural Change (950-1350)*, (London, 1993), *passim*.

⁷ See for instance, Peter Moraw, *Gesammelte Beiträge zur deutschen und europäischen Universitätsgeschichte: Strukturen, Personen, Entwicklungen*, (Leiden, 2008), especially two articles: *Über gelehrte Juristen im deutschen Spätmittelalter*, pp. 435-464 and *Gelehrte Juristen im Dienst der deutschen Könige des späten Mittelalters (1273-1493)*, pp. 465-540.

⁸ Walter Rüegg, *Themen, Probleme, Erkenntnisse*, in: *Geschichte der Universität in Europa. Mittelalter*, vol. 1, edited by Walter Rüegg, (München, 1993), pp. 24-48.

⁹ Besides the fundamental work of Carla Frova, *Istruzione e educazione nel medioevo*, (Torino, 1973), see also *La scuola nell'occidente latino dell'alto medioevo*, I-II, (Spoleto, 1972), and especially the article by Ernesto Sestan, *La scuola nell'Occidente latino dell'alto medioevo*, pp. 17-37; Pierre Riché, *Écoles et enseignement dans le Haut Moyen Age*, (Paris, 1999) (first edition 1979). See also two very recent overviews on medieval education in the West, Paolo Rosso, *La scuola nel*

solutions. On the other hand, a series of direct testimonies, such as those of Guibert de Nogent (c. 1055-1124) or Pierre Abelard's autobiography (1079-1142), represent detailed pictures of the level achieved by higher education in 12th century France, certifying the birth of a new professional category: that of the intellectual, who - motivated by desire for knowledge, to the same degree as by material gain and fame - embraces a place in society, determined by acquisition and dissemination of knowledge.¹⁰

Synchronically, Italy achieves the status of leading centre of legal scholarship, especially through the work of Irnerius of Bologna (c. 1050 - after 1125), a layman surnamed *lucerna iuris*, who substantiated the study of Roman law based on the Code of Justinian (482-556). Another turning point in legal history was the endeavour of Gratian (c. 1100 - ante 1160), a monk who founded the systematic study of canon law through his own compilation of ecclesiastical court sentences, in an effort to synthesize and mediate various legal traditions (*Concordia discordantium canonum*) concluded around 1140 and associated forever with his name: *Decretum Gratiani*.¹¹ Bologna, the town linked with the two above-mentioned masters, became the undisputed European centre of legal education and scholarship throughout the Middle Ages.

Around these epitomes of higher-level study and education, coagulate around 1200 the earliest corporations of students and magistrates: the universities, supported by the communal structures in Bologna, and the episcopal ones in Paris. The difference between the two paradigms continues throughout the Middle Ages, due to the fact that Bologna develops as a *universitas scholarium*, a student community that would inspire the entire university phenomenon in Italy, while the Parisian model was structured around the academic body, *universitas magistrorum et scholarium*. In spite of initial hesitations, both papacy and royal power decide to support university initiatives, and thus the impetus given by monarchic authority sets up the migration of students and magistrates from Bologna and Paris towards the university nuclei at Oxford (1214), Montpellier (1220), Padua (1222), Naples (1224), Toulouse (1229), to recall only some of the earliest forms of higher

Medioevo. Secoli VI-XV, (Roma, 2018), pp. 23-102 and Robert Gramsch-Stehfest, *Bildung, Schule und Universität im Mittelalter*, (Berlin-Boston, 2019), pp. 23-72.

¹⁰ On intellectuals and their wide range of activity in the Middle Ages, see Jacques Le Goff, *Les intellectuels au Moyen Âge*, (Paris, 1957) and Jacques Verger, *Les gens de savoir dans l'Europe de la fin du Moyen Âge*, (Paris, 1997); see also, Olga Weijers, *Le maniment du savoir. Pratiques intellectuelles à l'époque des premières universités (XIII^e-XIV^e s)*, (Turnhout, 1996), pp. 9-23.

¹¹ On the legal revival of the 12th century, see James A. Brundage, *The Medieval Origins of the Legal Profession. Canonists, Civilians, and Courts*, (Chicago, 2008), pp. 75-125.

education in Latin Europe.¹² This wave reached Central Europe in the mid-14th century, after the founding of the University of Prague in 1347, followed by a generation of other higher schools, the majority established after the beginning of the Great Western Schism (1378-1417). The year 1378 traditionally marks the start of the second major stage of propagation of the university phenomenon, towards Krakow (1364/1397), Vienna (1365), Pécs (1367, closed after 1376), Erfurt (1379), Heidelberg (1385), Cologne (1388), Buda (1389, shut down shortly after this date, only to be reopened briefly in 1410), Leipzig (1409), etc. All these “national” universities¹³ come to the reception of a great desire for knowledge, motivated by the hope of social ascension and prosperity. The only truly “international” academic institutions of the Middle Ages remain the prestigious schools of Bologna, Paris and Padua.

Medieval universities are, essentially, organized communities of individuals, focused on the specialized study of certain disciplines. As institutions of learning at the highest level, they possess a legal personality which assures a particular degree of autonomy, exemplified, among others, by the apparent management of their finances, as well as an individual seal and an established statute. Depending on the organization, one may distinguish between an Italian model, a French type and a hybrid design, the latter being specific to both Central and Mediterranean Europe, where the university offices were controlled by both students and teachers. Two other main elements must be mentioned in connection with the structuring of universities throughout the Middle Ages: the division of students into *nationes*, according to their native country (twenty *nationes* in Bologna, ten in Orléans, but usually four in most universities, according to the Parisian model), but also the division of universities into faculties (liberal arts, theology, law and medicine). The complexity and particular emphasis placed by one university or another on one of the organizational elements mentioned above can vary greatly, usually a product of local traditions and the prestige accumulated by a particular school in a specific sphere of knowledge. Thus, some higher education institutions will build their reputation on the tradition and excellence of legal studies, others on theology or medicine.

¹² For the chronological progression of the university foundations until 1250 (approximately twenty new higher schools), consult Jacques Verger, *Patterns*, in *A History of the University in Europe. Volume 1: Universities in the Middle Ages*, edited by Hilde De Ridder-Symoens, (Cambridge, 1992), p. 62 sq.

¹³ Peter Moraw, *Die Universitäten in Europa und in Deutschland: Anfänge und erste Schritte auf einem langen Weg (12.-16. Jahrhundert)*, in: Idem, *Gesammelte Beiträge zur deutschen und europäischen Universitätsgeschichte: Strukturen, Personen, Entwicklungen*, (Leiden, 2008), pp. 229-249.

The contribution of the medieval university (*universitas*, sometimes *studium generale*) to the birth of modernity can by no means be synthesized in a few lines, as it is deeply expressed at the overall level of society. Cities that hosted universities – despite the occasional conflicts – have taken full advantage of the influx of people, goods and ideas associated with complex education. The concentration of economic means and the constantly increasing need for their administration, linked either to urban centres or to other “nodes” of authority, brought about other contexts of direct, practical expression of the theoretical knowledge accumulated in the years dedicated to university study. However, more subtle transformations have taken place, and universities became laboratories for experiments that would open the way for cultural transformations (such as introducing the written vernacular) and religious-social reforms (as is the case with Hussitism), the two being often associated. Without these structures, the transition from oral forms of communication to more and more inclusive forms of literacy would be impossible to imagine. High education has also put its mark on some aspects that may seem minor compared to the phenomena already mentioned. Writing and book physiognomies have undergone mutations to adapt to the increased demand for diverse texts that had to follow certain standards of clarity and integrity.¹⁴ In the same manner as the book production, all scholastic education has undergone a rationalization process whose effects can still be recognized even today in almost all teaching structures or student bodies.

In the history of medieval Transylvania, the university plays a remarkable role, not yet highlighted by specialists. University education is the one factor that produced an accelerated incorporation of a peripheral province, Transylvania – later under the rule of the Hungarian crown – within the area of Latin Christianity with its complex political, religious, artistic phenomena emerging from the advanced centres of the continent.

Specific to any cultural picture from the perspective of comparing a centre and its periphery, the medieval university phenomenon expressed itself in Transylvania through reactivity, not by initiative: no universities were established locally, nor elsewhere throughout Hungary in the Middle Ages, thus Transylvanians completed their education initially in Paris or Bologna, then (from the 15th century onwards at a rapid pace) in Vienna, Krakow or Prague. Yet, the interest in higher education – according to the social vocation of the medieval university – was generated by the same factors that ensured the germ of the collegiate phenomenon from the beginning:

¹⁴ Olga Weijers, *A scholar's paradise: teaching and debating in medieval Paris*, (Turnhout, 2015), pp. 175-193.

university education is at the same time the consequence, but also the motor of rationalization and urbanization of a society increasingly open to communication and cultural transfer.

It is only natural, under these conditions, that the beginnings of modern research on the impact of university studies on Transylvania should come precisely from the environment of the Germans or Transylvanian Saxons, the creators of urban civilization within the Carpathian arch. Georg-Daniel Teutsch (1817-1893) and Friedrich Teutsch (1852-1933) have the greatest merits in conducting intensive work of identifying Transylvanian students before the Reformation or in the second half of the 16th century.¹⁵ Yet, the most important achievement of any Transylvanian scholars regarding the medieval university phenomenon belongs to a Cluj professor, Tonk Sándor (1947-2003). His remarkable repertoire of the Transylvanian medieval academic *peregrinations*¹⁶ is now, five decades after its publication, in spite of important additions, an indispensable tool, doubled by a great depth of interpretations of facts and events.

The impact of Tonk's studies on medieval university and Transylvania was so great that the theme was regarded as fully exploited for a long time. Nevertheless, the late 1970s research of a pronounced prosopographic character has begun in the last decade to show its limitations.

First of all, the traditional source called upon to chronicle the history of any university, the matriculation book, cannot provide answers to the questions formulated insistently by present-day medieval studies, dominated by interdisciplinarity. The cultural transfer, the mobility of ideas, the doctrinal transformations within the academic space, the regional and local intellectual consequences of political mutations (the Hundred Years' War, for example) or religious (such as the Great Western Schism) can only be analysed by interrogating other types of historical sources. In this respect, it is the merit of research centres at Babeş-Bolyai University in Cluj-Napoca to have assumed such a paradigm shift. The *Centre for Ancient and Medieval Philosophy* successfully interrogates through a set of specially dedicated research methods the doctrinal metamorphoses reflected by theological and philosophical

¹⁵ The research literature concerning this topic can be easily reviewed with the help of the bibliographical work *Register der Periodika des Vereins für siebenbürgische Landeskunde (1840-1944)*, prepared by Mathilde Wagner and published in *Arbeitskreis für Siebenbürgische Landeskunde e.V. Heidelberg*, 2005, especially section dedicated to *Schule und Hochschule: Sächsische Studenten an deutschen Universitäten*, pp. 112-113. An even more comprehensive bibliography on this topic can be consulted in the present volume in the article authored by Konrad Gündisch and Adinel Dincă (see below).

¹⁶ *Erdélyiek egyetemjárása a középkorban*, (Bucureşti, 1979).

texts.¹⁷ In a consonant manner, *CODEX. Centre for the History of the Book and Texts* pays constant attention to the manuscript tomes that have circulated in the university ambient and which, through their Transylvanian owners, have become real agents of a more intense cultural transfer than might have been anticipated.¹⁸ The experience gained in universities from France, Italy, Austria or Poland is in other cases the premise for institutional, educational or artistic imports, detailed research being underway at another research centre of Babeş-Bolyai University in Cluj-Napoca, the recently-constituted *TRANS.SCRIPT – The Centre for Diplomatic and Medieval Documentary Palaeography*.¹⁹

From the perspective of these briefly summarised data, it is clearly evident that investigating Transylvania's medieval university roots is presently experiencing a moment of effervescence which will surely penetrate much deeper into the meanings of higher studies and their role in defining the historical path of Transylvania.

The deepening of the research regarding the links of medieval society (from Transylvania or abroad) to the university phenomenon must take full advantage of newly- published sources²⁰ and the recent instruments such as *Repertorium Academicum Germanicum*,²¹ an example being the current project that intends to take a broader look at the complicated phenomenon of the medieval intellectual elite's aggregation in central Europe.²²

¹⁷ Regarding various research projects and initiatives, with their results (publications, conferences etc.) of this group, starting with the year 2003, see <http://hiphi.ubbcluj.ro/fam/programe>.

¹⁸ http://lett.ubbcluj.ro/dell/?page_id=720.

¹⁹ <http://ts.centre.ubbcluj.ro/2019/01/13/university-manuscripts-of-french-origin/>.

²⁰ A recent overview concerning the latest Hungarian contributions on the history of the University, László Szögi, *Die Ergebnisse und Aufgaben des Schreibens über die ungarische Universitätsgeschichte*, in: *University of Pécs 650th Jubilee in Education "University and Universality the Place and Role of the University of Pécs in Europe from the Middle Ages to Present Day"*. *International University History Conference 12-13 October 2017*, edited by Ágnes Fischer Dárdai, István Lengvári, Éva Schmelczér Pohánka, (Pécs, 2017), pp. 33-46.

²¹ <https://rag-online.org/>.

²² <https://rise-ubb.com/>. *The Rise of an Intellectual Elite in Central Europe: University of Vienna, 1389-1450 (RISE)*, a research project supported by the Executive Unit for Financing Higher Education, Research, Development and Innovation (UEFISCDI) of the Romanian Government, project ID: PN-III-P4-ID-PCCF-2016-0064. The articles and the book reviews regarding the medieval and early medieval university published now by Dr Monica Brînzei, Dr Adinel Dincă and Paula Cotoi, Ph. D. student, are all results of investigation conducted within the aforementioned *RISE* project.

The materials published on this occasion in *Studia Universitatis Babeş-Bolyai. Series Historica* represent an optimistic sign in this respect and express in the clearest possible way the interest and support granted to medieval research at the Faculty of History and Philosophy by well-known personalities from France, Italy, Germany or the United States of America in the field of intellectual history in the Middle Ages, with firm interests in the history of the medieval university. The presented texts combine, I dare say in an inspired way, the classical approaches centred around historical sources, the importance of *digital humanities* in the context of new research paradigms, but also the methodological reflections offered by interviews.

