

BOOK REVIEWS

“A Pearl of Powerful Learning:” The University of Cracow in the Fifteenth Century. By Paul W. Knoll. (Education and Society in the Middle Ages and Renaissance, 52.) Leiden–Boston: Brill, 2016. 789 pp.

Publications on the history of the University of Kraków, including the medieval period, would fill a library. The topic has been attracting historians’ interest for a long time now. The very first summaries were published in the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries, both in Polish and in French. Since then, several works have examined and presented the history of the university, but most of them were written in Polish. Paul W. Knoll, Professor Emeritus of History at the University of Southern California, is an expert in Eastern European and, in particular, Polish history, and he has been dealing with the history of the University of Kraków in the Middle Ages for half a century. The present monograph can be regarded as the essence of his oeuvre.

Knoll examines the history of the Jagiellonian University until the fifteenth century. His work is divided into eleven chapters, framed by an *Introduction* and a *Conclusion*, two maps at the beginning, and eighteen illustrations (mainly of the university buildings) scattered throughout the text. The *Appendix A–D* contains the list of the rectors of the university and deans of the faculty of arts between 1400 and 1508 and the number of the matriculated students year by year at the University of Kraków between 1400 and 1509, classifying them into ten geographical groups. The latter are presented in charts, too. The *Appendix* includes a short summary of the life and work of Copernicus. The *Index* of people and place names will be very useful for researchers who are in search of precise data.

The *Bibliography* is impressive and grandiose, and it merits some emphasis. The 129 published sources in Latin with Polish, English, French, and German comments and the 1,151 (!) bibliographical entries in Polish, English, German, French, Italian, Czech, and Slovak were issued between 1665 and 2015 all over Europe, in the United States of America, and in Canada. Naturally, the bibliography primarily contains works on university history and the history of the University of Kraków, but it also includes publications on the history of Poland and Kraków and its buildings, the history of other universities and the academic curricula, and writings on several sciences (the liberal arts, philosophy, literature, theology, astronomy, astrology, humanism, etc.).

The first, second, and third chapters (*Instauracio Studii: The Foundation of a Pearl of Powerful Learning, Cracow and Its University, Institutional History and Development*) give a portrait of the origins of the University of Kraków and the history of the university in the fifteenth century. The book provides a summary of the history of the university, which includes descriptions of the academic dignitaries, academic everyday life, and the city of Kraków itself. The fourth chapter (*The Personnel of the University: A Statistical, Social, and Academic Profile*) discusses the students of the university, focusing in particular on their geographical and social origins and the main tendencies in matriculation and graduation. The fifth chapter (*The University in the National Life of Poland*) examines the uses of the courses of study for the Krakowian clergy and the role of the university in the spread of the vernacular Polish language and the formation of Polish national consciousness.

The subsequent chapters are dedicated to the curriculum at the Jagiellonian University, including the ideas which shaped it, the works which were used during the lessons, and the professors who interpreted these works. Furthermore, it examines the works by Polish thinkers which became part of the curriculum by the end of the fifteenth century. The sixth and seventh chapters (*The Arts Faculty I–II*) discuss the curriculum of the most important faculty, the seven liberal arts, and the eighth chapter is dedicated to the other two faculties (*Medicine and Law*). However, the faculty of medicine was relatively weak in Kraków in the fifteenth century, but the faculty of law had existed since the foundation of the university, and it was very important as a tool with which Casimir the Great consolidated his power and regulated the system of public administration. Although both canon and Roman law were supposed to be taught in Kraków, the teaching of the latter started only in the sixteenth century. The ninth chapter (*Theology*) emphasizes the significance of theology. As the “queen of sciences,” it was especially important in medieval education. In Kraków, the second founder, King Władysław Jagiello, managed to get papal permission for this faculty.

The tenth chapter (*Humanism*) describes the spread of Humanism from the middle of the 15th century. However, Humanism did not dominate the era, and in the early period the neighbouring countries inspired its spread. It became a significant phenomenon only at the end of the fifteenth century. The eleventh chapter (*Libraries and the Library*) emphasizes the importance of books and libraries in academic education. It describes the establishment of the first libraries of the University of Kraków, namely the present-day *Biblioteka Jagiellońska* and the libraries of the students and professors. This chapter is especially worthy of

attention since it interprets in detail the works which were used by the masters of Kraków, and it follows shifts in both public and scientific interests and seeks to restore the personal libraries of more than forty scholars of Kraków, completing them with their biographical data.

Knoll's publication is an essential work, since no other modern English monographs have been published on the medieval Jagiellonian University (except some publications on the whole history of the university). The English translations of the cited Latin sources add to the value of the monograph, as do the shorter and longer biographies of the relevant representatives of the university in the various chapters.

If one takes the above mentioned aspects into consideration, the monograph is highly recommended to anyone who is interested in university history, the history of the University of Kraków, the city of medieval Kraków, the ideas and works which flourished here, or the Polish scholars who exerted important influences on education in the fifteenth century.

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