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Representation of Social Positions in the Late Middle Ages

Edited by

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Rich Men, Poor Men: Social Stratification and Social Representation at the University (13th-16th Centuries)

HILDE DE RIDDER-SYMOENS

In older publications the medieval university is often idealized as a 'democratic' institution, lifted out of its environment and transformed into an egalitarian community based on shared 'academic activity'.[1] Some recent publications have turned the scales and state that there was no trace of social integration; social distinctions existing outside the university could also be found inside the academic community, and university members were ranked according to their status in society.[2] In my opinion this concept is not nuanced enough. The social classification and social representation at the university have specific characteristics which I want to discuss in this article.

We surely cannot speak of a democratic institution in the modern sense of the word. The university was not accessible to everybody and it certainly did not have the function of integrating all intellectually gifted people — independent of their social background — in a *respublica intellectualis*. That does not alter the fact that an extensive system of grants and taking jobs made it possible for *pauperes* to attend a university, get a degree and

[1] H. Grundmann, *Vom Ursprung der Universität im Mittelalter* (Darmstadt 1957; 1964[2]) 17, 23-4; J.H. Overfield, 'Nobles and Paupers at German Universities to 1600', *Societas* 4 (1974) 176-7.

[2] Synthesis in R.C. Schwinges, 'Student Education, Student Life', in: W. Rüegg (gen. ed.) *A History of the University in Europe*, vol. 1: *Universities in the Middle Ages*, ed. H. de Ridder-Symoens (Cambridge 1992) 203.

make a career afterwards. I will explain immediately what is meant by *pauper*.

In one corporation, the *universitas scolarum et magistrorum*, men from very different social backgrounds received the same statutory treatment and enjoyed the same legal rights and privileges and sat together in the classroom for months if not years. This meant that barriers were pulled down, something which did not happen in the outside world. For the *pauperes* or the *inferiores* it was a way to become familiar with the life-style, the norms and values and the language of the *honesti* or *superiores*: this was necessary if they were to integrate afterwards in a higher social class. The university was also the first step in building up a network of friends and colleagues which could be of use in their future career.

In this article I will not discuss the background and mechanisms of social mobility through higher education in the later Middle Ages. I will confine myself to two aspects: how the population was classified socially at the university and in what way the social differences were apparent. The next step will be to transfer the analysis of stratification from the university to the place of origin, where the students' families and their position in the local social matrix should be traced.[3]

Social Stratification

The most useful university sources to obtain information about the way social strata were defined are the matriculation and graduation lists. A detailed and nuanced description of these sources is given by J. Paquet in the *Typologie des sources du Moyen Age occidental*, published in 1992.[4]

We have at hand different types of matriculation and graduation lists. They concern the university as a whole, a faculty, nation or college. Not all medieval universities have such lists available. Generally speaking, the

[3] R.C. Schwinges, 'Admission', in: *A History of the University in Europe*, I 208; cf. J.K. McConica, 'The Prosopography of the Tudor University', *Journal of Interdisciplinary History*, 3.3 (1973) 548: 'If we can measure for a significant number of people what they did with their lives after being at the university, and contrast this information with data about a group of people from similar origins who did not graduate, we may be within reach of a reliable index to something called "social role" [of the university].'

[4] J. Paquet, *Les matricules universitaires*, Typologie des sources du Moyen Age occidental, Fasc. 65, A-IV.1 (Turnhout 1992).

universities in the German Empire and the German nations in Italy and France have the best kept and most complete matriculation and graduation lists. These can be complemented or even checked by other university sources. The most important are the accounts. They often mention the name of the student and the amount of the fees.

It is not advisable to use non-university sources to determine the social position of a student at the university because university social classification does not correspond to the hierarchy in society at large, which was far more complicated. On the other hand, it has been shown that the indications of social status found in university sources cannot be used effectively for a statistical investigation; only elaborate prosopographical research can bring some clarity and determine the correlation between university attendance, education and social position in towns and villages.

The stratification of students in university sources comes close to the traditional division into three orders, clergy, nobility and the third order, although in a more differentiated form. References to the clergy mention their clerical status (*clericus*, i.e. a student who wore the tonsure) and their status within the Church: prelate, canon, monk, chaplain, priest, beneficiary, and so on. The order of the nobility contains *illustres, nobiles, milites, honesti, superiores, tenentes statum nobilium, magnos status habentes, pro nobilibus reputati, pro nobilibus se gerentes*. The situation of the third estate is more complex. A distinction is made between *divites, semidivites, mediocres, pauperes, semipauperes, maiores et minores pauperes, veri pauperes, pauperimi, inferiores, indigentes*, and so on.

It is not always easy to know exactly what is meant by these terms. They must be considered in the context of each university, and within a university from rector to rector. Changes in time are also obvious. Moreover, we should remember that this is a random indication only, representing the situation at the moment of the matriculation of the student.

The amount of the fees paid can also give some indication of the social position, or at least of the financial strength, of the student. Nobles, for instance, paid more than the statutorily required fee, if they were not excused *ob reverentiam personae* as were relatives and friends of the rector, sons of the professors and favourites of princes or local patrons. *Clerici*, on the other hand, were allowed to pay a reduced fee, as were the *semipauperes*. The *pauperes* were completely exempt. *Divites* were the students who paid the statutory sum required.

The most exhaustive research has been done on the poor student.[5] A *pauper* at the university cannot be seen on the same footing as a *pauper* in an urban or rural society. A poor student is a *non dives*, a *non mendicans*.[6] According to statutes he is a young man who does not have his own income from (personal) property, or who cannot pay the costs of his study himself, nor can his family. It means that a student with a mediocre or no income can ask to be exempted from fees or to be accepted in a college for poor students.[7] A mediocre income could include a small ecclesiastical benefice, a pension or a scholarship. To be more concrete, a mediocre income in the fifteenth century corresponded roughly to the income of an unskilled worker, which was insufficient to study at an average university.[8]

[5] It is impossible to mention all the specialized studies on poor students that were published in the 1970s and 1980s. Some will be mentioned further on. A good introduction is J. Paquet, 'L'universitaire "pauvre" au moyen âge: problèmes, documentation, questions de méthode', in: J. Pacquet and J. IJsewijn (eds.), *The Universities in the Late Middle Ages* (Louvain 1978) 399-425, and the more recent R.C. Schwinges, *Deutsche Universitätsbesucher im 14. und 15. Jahrhundert. Studien zur Sozialgeschichte des alten Reiches* (Stuttgart 1986) 443-4.

[6] J. Paquet, 'Recherches sur l'universitaire "pauvre" au Moyen Age', *Revue Belge de Philologie et d'Histoire* 56 (1978) 301-53; see p. 309.

[7] At Louvain the average grant (*bursa*) was 10 Rhenish florins (hereafter Rfl.) in 1457 en 20 Rfl. in 1500; it was the equivalent of the boarding price of the third table in a pedagogy (see n. 13). In Heidelberg only students with an income under 12 Rfl. were allowed to live in the college for poor students. At Tübingen the maximum tolerated income was increased to 16 Rfl. in 1488, E. De Maesschalck, 'De criteria van de armoede aan de middeleeuwse universiteit te Leuven', *Revue Belge de Philologie et d'Histoire* 58 (1980) 346; C. Fuchs, *Dives, pauper, nobilis, magister, frater, clericus. Sozialgeschichtliche Untersuchungen über Heidelberger Universitätsbesucher des Spätmittelaters (1386-1450)*, Education and Society in the Middle Ages and Renaissance 5 (Leiden 1995) 59; R.C. Schwinges, 'Pauperes an deutschen Universitäten des 15. Jahrhunderts', *Zeitschrift für Historische Forschung* 8 (1981) 292. The average annual income of a worker in a late medieval German city was about 20 Rfl.

[8] Louvain was such an average university. The expenses of an arts student for two years (summer 1448-50) were 50 Rfl. (for boarding 28 Rfl., private money 17 Rfl., clothing 3 Rfl., fees 2 Rfl.). The graduation costs (fees and festivities) from the first examination, the *determinatio*, up to the *licentia* were altogether 32 Rfl. For financial reasons the student, Jacobus Roberti from Cambrai, did not take the *magisterium in artibus* for 'pour estre maistres en ars, il ne falloit plus ne estudier, ne respondre, n'estre examiné, mais il falloit bien XII escus [14 Rfl., 8 st]' ('to be a master of arts, he needed not to study, nor to give responses, nor to be examined, but XII *escus*'), De Maesschalck, 'Criteria', 347-8; see also Paquet, 'Recherches', 306-7, 312.

The rector also took into account temporary poverty due to war, famine, robbery, loss of goods as a result of financial or political crises, etc.[9] That can be a reason why the same student is mentioned as *pauper* in one matriculation list and not in another, or that a man known to belong to a notable family is enrolled as a poor student and is sometimes mentioned as *pauper malitia temporum*.[10] It is not always easy to draw the line between *divites* and *pauperes* and the criteria are not the same everywhere. At Heidelberg and Louvain the grey area is rather large, at Leipzig and Erfurt, on the other hand, statutes provided a sophisticated graduated scale for the payment of fees.[11] In the same way, the occurrence of the term *nobilis* in the matriculation or graduation lists does not reflect the reality. As with the *pauperes* one can find students matriculating as *nobilis* in one university but not in another. These scholars often belong to the urban patriciate, in a position of transition between the second and the third order;[12] these students are called *pro nobilibus reputati* or *pro nobilibus se gerentes*.[13]

Besides the matriculation and graduation lists other university sources can be very relevant for the study of social positions within the university. College sources, for instance, can give valuable information.

All the universities and colleges had sliding payment systems. At the Louvain colleges, as elsewhere, there were three tables: one for noblemen and very rich burghers' sons, one for the ordinary commoners and one for the poor students who lived on a scholarship or money earned from a job. The rich students were guaranteed better food, wine instead of beer and more material comforts.[14]

In the fifteenth and early sixteenth centuries the Louvain alma mater included between 10 and 15 percent poor students and a low percentage of noblemen. Fifteen percent paupers is the normal average for universities with large arts faculties (housing about three-quarters of the student

[9] Fuchs, *Dives, pauper*, 57.

[10] Paquet, 'Recherches', 322-3; Schwinges, 'Pauperes', 293.

[11] Fuchs, *Dives, pauper*, 58.

[12] Examples in: H. de Ridder-Symoens, 'Adel en universiteiten. Humanistisch ideaal of bittere noodzaak?', *Tijdschrift voor Geschiedenis* 93 (1980) 422-4; and Paquet, *Matricules*, 72-4.

[13] M. Fournier (ed.), *Les statuts et privilèges des universités françaises depuis leur fondation jusqu'en 1789*, vol. 1 (Paris 1890) nos 286, 315.

[14] The price per year for the first table in 1512 was 30 Rfl., for the second 24 Rfl. and for the third 18 Rfl.: De Maesschalck, 'Criteria', 346.

population) such as Louvain, Cologne, Heidelberg, Leipzig and Paris, but that figure may rise to 25 percent.[15] Other universities with unimportant or even no arts faculties, but strong law faculties, and with little or no student facilities (such as Orleans, Bologna, Padua and Pavia), were favoured by rich members of the bourgeoisie and noblemen. Their number could exceed 15 percent in the fifteenth century and reached 50 percent by about 1600. The less aristocratic universities had percentages varying from 0.5 to 2 in the fourteenth century, up to 15 or 20 in the late sixteenth century.[16]

The majority of university students belonged to the urban bourgeoisie and consisted of *divites*, students who could live on their private income or whose studies were paid for by their parents. In contrast to the nobility, poor students and masters and clerics, little research has been done into the middle classes.[17] The university-educated middle classes (the urban bourgeoisie) are well researched in publications concerning the professionalization of late medieval and early modern society.[18]

Many of these noble, rich and poor students were clerics, people who received the tonsure and studied using the income from their benefices, or at least in expectation of a benefice soon to come. In the Middle Ages two main social groups can be discerned. First, sons of the higher nobility, almost exclusively bastards, and younger sons of the lower nobility studied with prebends, and were sure of a successful career in the Church. Second, the mass of the *clerici* belonged to the middle and lower layers of society. They expected that their diplomas and the network built up at the university would compensate their lowly birth and enable them to rise to the higher steps of the pyramid of benefices.

There is no way of knowing the proportion of laymen and clerics at the universities in the first centuries of their existence. Since the universities started as clerical institutions, or at least as institutions with a canonistic character, it is certain that in the beginning almost all the students and teachers had the status of *clericus* in the universities north of the Alps. In

[15] Figures in: Paquet, *Matricules*, 133-4; Overfield, 'Nobles and Paupers', 199-202; cf. also Schwinges, *Universitätsbesucher*, 447.

[16] Figures in: De Ridder-Symoens, 'Adel en Universiteiten', 424-5; Paquet, *Matricules*, 131-2; Overfield, 'Nobles and paupers', 183-8, 197-8.

[17] For more information on the different social groups see Schwinges, *Universitätsbesucher*, 341-496.

[18] For a state of affairs see the articles and bibliography in: W. Reinhard (ed.), *Power Elites and State Building*, vol. 4 of *The Origins of the Modern State in Europe (13th-18th Century)* (Oxford 1996).

the Italian universities scholars were not treated as *clerici*, apart from those who were enrolled by the bishop.[19] The number of clerics was still high in the fourteenth century (50 to 75 percent); it declined dramatically in most universities during the fifteenth century, and certainly after 1500.[20] From my own research for the Low Countries I would guess that by about 1500 only one-fourth to one-third of the students could be considered as *clerici*. How far this is related to the decrease in the number of poor students has not yet been researched. It is certainly also connected with the changing policy of benefices[21] and with the competition from university-educated laymen in administrative functions.[22]

The originally clerical character of the university manifests itself in many forms. That brings us to the second part of this study.

Social Representation

How did the academic community perceive its social position and social differentiation? What was the position of the different social strata in the alma mater? It is impossible to make a general statement here. One university is more 'democratic', another more 'aristocratic'. The opinions of individuals, however influential they may be, cannot be generalized. For

[19] H. Rashdall, *The Universities of Europe in the Middle Ages*, 2 vols (Oxford 1895). Revised by F.M. Powicke and A.B. Emden, 3 vols (Oxford 1936; reprint London 1942-58; reprint Oxford 1988) vol. 3, 386, n.1; see also H. Mayer, 'Die Frage nach den klerikalen Character der mittelalterlichen Universitäten under besonderer Berücksichtigung von Freiburg im Br.', *Freiburger Diözesan-Archiv* 63 (1935) 152-83. In 1497 the University of Freiburg-in-Breisgau was still considered an ecclesiastical institution (F. Schaub, 'Die Freiburger Universität und der Gemeine Pfennig von 1497', *Beiträge zur Freiburger Wissenschafts- und Universitätsgeschichte*, 33 (1966) 22).

[20] H. de Ridder-Symoens, 'Universiteitsgeschiedenis als bron voor sociale geschiedenis', *Tijdschrift voor sociale geschiedenis* 10 (1978) 106-7; J. Verger, *Les gens de savoir en Europe à la fin du Moyen Age* (Parijs 1997) 207-10; Overfield, 'Nobles and paupers', 205-6.

[21] P. Kibre, *Scholarly Privileges in the Middle Ages. The Rights, Privileges, and Immunities of Scholars and Universities at Bologna, Padua, Paris and Oxford*, Mediaeval Academy of America, Publication no. 72 (London 1961) 227-50; B. Schwarz, 'Römische Kurie und Pfründenmarkt im Spätmittelalter', *Zeitschrift für Historische Forschung* 20 (1993) 129-52.

[22] H. Millet & P. Moraw, 'Clerics in the State', in: Reinhard (ed.), *Power Elites and State Building*, 173-88.

instance, Marsilius von Inghen, the first rector of the University of Heidelberg (founded in 1386), believed in a rather utopian community of intellectuals where status and prestige should be determined by academic merits and not by birth or money.[23] The same view was held by the humanists. They agreed that nobility lay not simply in high birth, but rather in virtue and wisdom acquired through learning.[24] Italian *doctores* from the fourteenth century onwards claimed the supremacy of knowledge and pleaded for a doctor (*status doctorum*) to be placed on the same footing as a nobleman 'quod scientia facit hominem nobilissimum'.[25] The awareness and high esteem in which the doctor-professors of Bologna held themselves are reflected in the monumental tombs in the Bolognese street scene.[26]

The principle of equivalence between people with university diplomas and members of the nobility was first applied at the end of the fourteenth century by and for clerics becoming canons of a cathedral or collegiate church. Until then the important chapters had required that their canons should be of noble origin (both parents and grandparents).[27]

The university was a corporation with the same rights for all the *scolares* and *magistri* who swore the oath and paid the fees, if they were not (partially) exempted (clerics, paupers, family members of officers and staff). The status of the student (*status scolaris*) was indeed independent of his social origin, material condition or function.

In practice, the university itself imposed upon its members a strict hierarchy in titles (*ordo suppositorum*) in accordance with their status in society. The hierarchical differentiation, nevertheless, did not stop students of varying ranks from living in close proximity to each other day-in day-out and sharing almost the same study activities, privileges and the same values and norms, something that was unthinkable in society outside the university. It is difficult to say how far-reaching the effects of this shared

[23] Fuchs, *Dives, pauper*, 28.

[24] Overfield, 'Nobles and paupers', 192; De Ridder-Symoens, 'Adel', 415-20.

[25] I. Baumgärtner, '"De privilegiis doctorum". Über Gelehrtenstand und Doktorwürde im späten Mittelalter', *Historisches Jahrbuch* 106 (1986) 298-332, quotation 307; H. Lange, 'Vom Adel des Doctor', in: K. Luig & P. Liebs (eds.), *Das Profil des Juristen in europäischer Tradition* (Ebelsbach 1980) 279-94.

[26] See the beautiful pictures in R. Grandi, *I monumenti dei dottori e la scultura a Bologna (1267-1348)* (Bologna 1982).

[27] H. Millet, 'Les chanoines au service de l'Etat; bilan d'une étude comparative', in: J.-Ph. Genet (ed.), *L'état moderne: Genèse. Bilans et perspectives,* Actes du Colloque tenu au CNRS à Paris les 19 et 20 septembre 1989 (Paris 1990) 137-46.

education were, but there is certainly no doubt that it played an important role in the mechanisms of social mobility.[28]

We can see yet another difference in the ranking systems of the universities and the world outside. In the university the social orders were competing with the graduates according to a fixed scale system.

At Louvain, two sources enable us to distinguish the different social categories more precisely: a capitation list of the Louvain academic population dating from 1471 and a 1472 list fixing the funeral expenses of deceased *suppositi* (or university members) in seven categories.[29]

The highest category is reserved for noble students owning a house in Louvain and for the prelates, both groups disposing of an income of more than 100 Rhenish florins.

The second category included noble students of the higher faculties living in a rented house with one or two servants, and the non-noble licentiates or bachelors of the higher faculties who owned their house or had full board and lodging. Their maximum income was 75 Rhenish florins.

The third group consisted of clerics with benefices and rich students living in private rooms, both enjoying a maximum annual income of 50 Rhenish florins, and of noble students in the arts faculty with one servant.

Students living in a private room with an income not exceeding 25 Rhenish florins made up the fourth group.

The fifth category contained students living on half board in a private house, and arts students living in a room, with an annual income of no more than 18 Rhenish florins.

The sixth category consisted of students in the higher faculties who earned money by doing 'acceptable' manual work such as copying, or being the servant of a well-to-do student, and students of the arts faculty supported by their parents or living on a very small private patrimony of up to 12 Rhenish florins.

[28] See for the role of education for social promotion in the fifteenth and sixteenth centuries: R. Braun, 'Staying on Top: Socio-Cultural Reproduction of European Power Elites', in: Reinhard (ed.), *Power Elites and State Building*, 235-59; and R. van Uytven, 'Vers un autre colloque: hiérarchies sociales et prestige au Moyen Age et aux Temps Modernes', in: W. Prevenier, R. van Uytven & E. van Cauwenberghe (eds.), *Sociale Structuren en topografie van armoede en rijkdom in de 14de en 15de eeuw. Methodologische aspecten en resultaten van recent onderzoek*, Studia Historica Gandensia 267 (Ghent 1986) 157-75.

[29] De Maesschalck, 'Criteria', 337-54.

The lowest category was for the *nihil habentes, nihil relinquentes* and *nihil solventes*, i.e. the *veri pauperes*.

Generally speaking, at medieval universities all bachelors and the licentiates in arts and medicine were considered as being on a par with the lesser nobility. A licentiate in law was on the same level as a high noble. Doctors of law and theology preceded all the nobles in parades and processions.[30] During graduation the doctor was, after all, assimilated into the nobility of the mind in a ceremony full of symbols taken from the world of the nobility and the Church (book, ring, hat, chain, coat, belt, etc.).[31]

For the interpretation of the social terminology university sources such as statutes, accounts, tax lists, court sentences, autobiographical works, etc. can be very helpful. Social differentiation in its material form can easily be recognized in a large number of iconographical sources relating to the different types of insignia.

In this article I will not deal with insignia such as seals, arms, chains, books, sceptres, scutcheons and so on, nor with rites, ceremonies and festivities. They were essential for the self-awareness and image-building of the academic community and its organs as a corporate body. The symbols were taken over from the leading orders, the Church and the nobility. In this way the university wanted to present itself not only as the third pillar of society (*sacerdotium, regnum, studium*), but also as the fourth social order, equal to the first and second.[32] I shall concentrate on the self-awareness and representation of the social groups belonging to these corporations.

[30] Verger, *Les gens de savoir*, 212-13; for a more elaborated comparative scale see R.A. Müller, *Universität und Adel. Eine soziostrukturelle Studie zur Geschichte der bayerischen Landesuniversität Ingolstadt 1472-1648* (Berlin 1974) 35-43.

[31] L. Boehm, 'Die Verleihung akademischer Grade an den Universitäten des 14.-16. Jahrhunderts', *Chronik der Ludwig-Maximilians-Universität München* (1958/59) 175; L. Boehm, 'Libertas Scholastica und Negotium Scholare. Entstehung und Sozialprestige des Akademischen Standes im Mittelalter', in: H. Rössler and G. Franz (eds.) *Universität und Gelehrtenstand 1400-1800* (Limburg an der Lahn 1970) 48-9.

[32] On insignia: A. Gieysztor, 'Management and Resources', in: Ridder-Symoens, *A History of the University in Europe* I, 139-42; H. de Ridder-Symoens, 'Management and Resources', in: id., *A History of the University in Europe* II, 205-8. See also: P. Michaud-Quantin, 'La conscience d'être membre d'une université', in: P. Wilpert (ed.), *Beiträge zum Berufsbewusstsein des mittelalterlichen Menschen* (Berlin 1964) 1-14; J. Le Goff, 'Quelle conscience l'université médiévale a-t-elle eu d'elle-même', in: ibid., 15-29; H. Grundmann, 'Sacerdotium, Regnum, Studium', *Archiv für Kulturgeschichte* 34 (1951) 5-21.

Already in fourteenth-century statutes noblemen or students whose behaviour was noble (*nobiles seu pro nobilibus se gerentes*) were given rank-specific privileges (*privilegia nobilium*).[33] These increased continually through the centuries. First there were the traditional rules of precedence. The order in processions and ceremonies, and even the position of the names on the rolls of benefices sent to the Pope take into account the ranking system in society outside the university. In some institutions the benches on the first row were reserved for the noble students, as were the seats near the rector or the dean in assemblies and councils. By the fifteenth century, and more generally in the *ancien régime*, universities were anxious to gain prestige by electing a rector of noble birth.[34] From the late fifteenth century onwards, rectors started to group names of the newly matriculated students according to their social rank — *nobiles*, *divites*, *pauperes* — and using the appropriate titles. This practice became more general in the matriculation and graduation lists of the sixteenth century.[35]

Academic dress can also be helpful in measuring the social status of students and professors.[36] In the beginning they all had to wear the traditional, long, black robe of the cleric (*cappa*). Gradually the clothing of undergraduates, bachelors, licentiates and doctors became more distinctive. In about 1400 caps and birettas in red or purple were adopted by doctors in the superior faculties. Noble students and well-beneficed ecclesiastics were allowed to use minever hoods, as did the masters, instead of the normal lamb's wool or rabbit fur.

From the sixteenth century onwards academics increasingly bent the rules, exchanging the sober 'clerical' gown for fashionable civilian clothes befitting their social rank. Nobles and burghers aspiring to a noble status introduced distinctive insignia to accentuate their noble status, e.g. bearing

[33] Verger, *Les gens de savoir*, 212-3; H. de Ridder-Symoens, 'L'aristocratisation des universités au XVIe siècle', in: *Les grandes réformes des universités européennes. IIIe session scientifique internationale de Cracovie*. Zeszyty Naukowe Uniwersytetu Jagiellonskiego, DCCLXI; Prace Historyczne Zeszyt 79 (Warsaw/Cracow 1985) 37-47; Müller, *Universität und Adel*, 40-1.

[34] Schwinges, 'Pauperes', 289.

[35] Schwinges, 'Pauperes', 290.

[36] General overview (with literature) in A. Gieysztor, 'Management and Resources', in: Ridder-Symoens, *A History of the University in Europe* I, 139-41; H. de Ridder-Symoens, 'Management and Resources', in: id., *A History of the University in Europe* II, 205-7; W.N. Hargreaves-Mawdsley, *A History of Academic Dress in Europe until the End of the Eighteenth Century* (Oxford 1963); Rashdall, *Medieval Universities* III, 385-93.

arms, coats of arms and blazonries. For reasons of safety, from about 1300 onward ecclesiastical and secular authorities forbade students and their servants to bear arms. Scholars did not follow the rules. Noble students protested regularly, arguing that it was an offence against their noble status.[37] In certain universities with strong German nations like Padua and Orleans, for instance, noblemen were exempted from the rule and allowed to bear a weapon in order to be recognized as noble.[38] After student riots at Orleans in 1512 bearing arms was forbidden, *les nobles allemands excepté*, in spite of older privileges,

> et que d'ailleurs s'il falloit faire cette discrétion de noble et de non noble d'entre eux ce seroit oster la concorde et amitié qui a toujours été en ladicte nation, veu mesme qu'à toute ladicte nation et sans distinction de personnes nous et nos prédécesseurs leurs avons octroyé le privilège de porter leurs dagues et épées...
>
> ('if it were otherwise required to draw a distinction between noble and non-noble among them, it would dissipate the concord and friendship that had always existed in the said nation, especially since we and our predecessors have granted the privilege to bear their daggers and swords to the said nation without distinction as to persons.')[39]

At the universities of Bologna and Padua the coats of arms of students and professors were painted on the walls of the academic buildings.[40] Deceased students at Padua were given funeral monuments according to their status.[41] Books and registers of faculties and nations are illuminated with portraits and arms of the officials.[42]

[37] M. Waxin, *Statut de l'étudiant étranger dans son développement historique* (Amiens 1939) 98-100. For Orleans: Fournier, (ed.), *Statuts et privilèges*, vol. 1, nos 19, 30, 37, 80, 121, 129, 216.

[38] For Padua: P. Kibre, *Privileges*, 63; for Orleans: S. Denis, 'La Nation Germanique à l'Université d'Orléans, XVIe et XVIIe siècles', *Revue de littérature comparée* 10 (1930) 392-94.

[39] Quotation: Denis, 'La Nation Germanique', 392-3.

[40] G. Zuccini, *L'arte nel palazzo universitario di Bologna* (Bologna 1938); A. Brillo, *Gli stemmi degli studenti polacchi nell' Università di Padova* (Padua 1933).

[41] F. Weigle, 'Die Nationsgräber der deutschen Artisten und Juristen in Padua', *Quellen und Forschungen aus italienischen Archiven und Bibliotheken* 42-43 (1963) 495-504.

[42] For Bologna see the pictures in *inter alia* G.P. Brizzi & A.I. Pini (eds.), *Studenti e Università degli studenti dal XII al XIX secolo*, Studi et Memorie per la Storia dell'Università di Bologna, NS 7 (1988) after 191; J. Seghers, 'Un portrait armorié inédit d'Adrien vanden Spiegel, professeur de médecine à Padoue (1578-1625)', in: *Actes du XLIXe congrès de la Fédération des cercles d'archéologie et d'histoire de Belgique. Congrès de Namur*, vol. 1 (Brussels 1988), picture p. 149. The *libri procuratorum* of the German Nation of the University of Orleans contain several beautiful miniatures with coats of arms from the procurators (Archives Départementales du Loiret, D 213 and D 214).

These external signs of status began to appear during the fourteenth and fifteenth centuries, but were in general use a century later. Indeed, it is only in the course of the sixteenth century that we begin to see a real aristocratization of the university. It is only then that several types of distinction between nobles and non-nobles, which existed rather marginally in medieval universities, were more systematically introduced, extended and fixed by rules. It is a time when fresh impetus was given to the ideology of the ennobling effects of intellectual achievement, now expressed in terms of 'nobility of the mind' or 'nobility of letters'. In this way it could support the aristocratic pretensions of the increasingly educated urban patriciate, especially in the big industrial and commercial cities of northern Italy, the Low Countries and the German Empire.[43] It was mostly sons of the urban patriciate who were members of the German nations in Bologna, Padua, Siena and Orleans where rank-specific privileges were so generously accorded.

This is also the time when colleges for poor students were more systematically turned into homes for the well-to-do, and there was little room or money in the form of scholarships left for poor students. The evolution of the Oxbridge colleges in that sense is well known, but also on the Continent rich students took the place of their needy colleagues.[44]

Notwithstanding the exhaustive studies of J. Paquet and others on poor students it is still difficult to get information on the social representation of that group. The sources are rather discreet, which is interesting in itself. According to J. Paquet the reason for this silence is the fact that the situation of students earning their living and paying for their studies with intellectual or even manual work[45] does not correspond to their vocation. It

[43] W. Frijhoff, 'Careers of Graduates', in: *A History of the University in Europe* II, 368-9.

[44] R.A. Müller, 'Student Education, Student Life', in: Ridder-Symoens, *A History of the University in Europe* II, 333-9; H. de Ridder-Symoens, 'Management and Resources', in: *A History of the University in Europe* II, 158-60; Domenico Maffei and Hilde de Ridder-Symoens (eds.) *I collegi universitari in Europa tra il xiv e il xviii secolo*. Atti del Convegno di Studi della Commissione Internazionale per la Storia delle Università, Siena - Bologna, 16-19 maggio 1988 (Milan 1990).

[45] They may have worked as private teacher (*repetitor*, *paedagogus*), servant (*famulus*, *servitor*, etc.), private secretary, scribe or copier, landlord, manual worker or at least as beggar (J. Paquet, 'Coût des études, pauvreté et labeur: fonctions et métiers d'étudiants au Moyen Age', *History of Universities* II (1982) 21-34).

was a situation in their life that should not be stressed and was certainly best forgotten.

The *status paupertatis* at the university was ambiguous. On one hand, the *privilegium paupertatis* accorded financial and material facilities; on the other, the low social status gave rise to harassment and injustice on the part of fellows and masters. Academic and civic authorities, founders of colleges and moralists condemned all forms of discrimination. Statutes urged professors to treat poor students in a decent way, to be correct at the examinations and not to extract money from them.

Tangible forms of discrimination were institutionalized very early. In colleges and halls, paupers sat at different tables or had to wait on the others before sitting down themselves, and they ate different food. There were also halls, the Domus Pauperum in Vienna, for example, where inmates — in the spirit of the mendicant friars — were obliged to beg for their sustenance. In the classrooms the poor were seated at the back, and in processions and during festivities their presence had to be discreet.[46] But, as J. Paquet admits, forms of discrimination in the Middle Ages are not the rule; they are partial and localized in some universities.[47]

There is more evidence that the universities and society in general took a positive view of the great efforts that the less well-to-do made to get a higher education. All the universities provided financial assistance for their study and graduation, and in most universities there were special housing arrangements for the poor. Sometimes they found a protector or patron to guide and help them during their studies. This was certainly true in the case of paupers who were in the service of a rich student or master. Not infrequently the student-servant achieved better results than his fellow-patron and went home with a degree from a university which he normally could not afford.[48]

From the late fifteenth century onwards the condition of the poor at the university deteriorated, and not only in the housing facilities already mentioned. In Glasgow and Vienna the students on a grant had to live in separate buildings.[49] In some colleges, for instance in the Standonck Colleges of Paris and Louvain, there was not only the distinction between

[46] Many examples in Paquet, 'Recherches', 337-9; Rashdall, *Medieval universities* III, 405-6.

[47] Paquet, 'Recherches', 347.

[48] Examples in R.C. Schwinges, 'Pauperes', 305-6.

[49] Paquet, 'Recherches', 339-40.

the 'tables' mentioned above; during the sixteenth century the paupers became a kind of 'second-class' students, kept apart from the rich students and obliged to do all the humiliating domestic work.[50] Some universities abolished the *privilegium pauperum* or made fewer financial exemptions. Others (Paris, Bologna, Perugia) took certain rights and privileges away from the poor students: they were not allowed to vote, become members of councils, or take on academic functions. Sometimes they were obliged to wear distinctive dress or attributes. At Louvain, for instance, a statute of the arts faculty of 1509 obliged the paupers to wear a white shoulder piece, instead of the traditional black, for the graduation as licentiate in arts. It also became more difficult for a student to find a job.[51]

All these regulations ensured that the number of poor scholars declined drastically and the gap between the rich and the poor widened. It seems clear that this changing attitude towards poor students in the university is a result of the new views on poverty and poor relief, and of the subsequent transformation of social policy after 1450-1500 which aimed at preserving the traditional hierarchic structure of society.[52]

Conclusions

The social position and the social perception of the academic in the Middle Ages seemed to exist in two different worlds.

As far as the outside world was concerned all members of the university community, the *universitas scolarum et magistrorum*, were at the top of the social ladder among the privileged elite of society. The academic status guaranteed that its holders — rich and poor, noble and commoner — enjoyed the same privileges. The dividing lines between social categories are less marked in the university corporation than in society. The disadvantages of humble origins disappeared. So for people of lower social standing the achievement of academic status proved to be a major step upwards in society, which had nothing to do with one's office or occupation.

[50] Paquet, 'Coût des études', 24, 31, 35-37.

[51] Paquet, 'Recherches', 339-41; Overfield, 'Nobles and Paupers', 205-6.

[52] C. Lis & H. Soly, *Poverty and Capitalism in Pre-Industrial Europe* (Hassocks [W. Sussex] 1979, paperback 1980); C. Lis & H. Soly, 'Policing the Early Modern Proletariat, 1450-1850', in: D. Levine (ed.), *Proletarianization and Family History* (Orlando etc. 1984) 163-228.

The social prestige of this position gave academics of high and low origin a feeling of social superiority. In this sense a university education can be seen as a route to social advancement.

Within the university itself this perception of equality was less evident. It is true that all students enjoyed the same privileges, except for those pertaining to specific ranks; attendance at lectures, taking examinations and receiving a degree were the same for rich and poor alike. Beyond that — as far as we can see from the documents — the time-honoured division into three estates, the nobles, the clergy and the rest, remained. This difference in rank was externalized in all sorts of ways that are not uniquely academic, in housing, food, clothing and lifestyle.

From the end of the fifteenth century a process of aristocratization started to take place within the universities, in line with the process of social polarization that was happening in the outside world. The well-to-do began to attach more and more importance to the recognition of differences in status. They could no longer remain reconciled to the egalitarian, clerical atmosphere, the sober, monastic lifestyle and the discipline which was not suited to their class and rank. The urban elites, whence came the largest number of university students, tried to differentiate themselves from their fellow citizens by all manner of show and symbolism and to draw closer to the nobility. Certainly those who achieved the very highest academic qualifications began to consider themselves the equal of the nobility. Members of the nobility themselves began to make manifest their high social standing and to compensate for the loss of political and social power with ever more elements and show of status.

But there is more. The attitude of the rich towards the poor was changing, as it was in the outside world too. Feelings of sympathy and understanding gave way to a lack of regard and appreciation. The rich wanted to monopolize the universities for the education and upbringing of their descendants.

For their part, there was little the poor could do. Even though, until the sixteenth century, the poor student enjoyed a number of facilities enabling him to complete his studies, he was still the underdog. In a class society where social position was everything, the close social contact with fellow students and teachers from a higher class must have been frustrating. In spite of financial assistance the poor student was faced with a chronic shortage of money whenever he wanted to buy books, take part in cultural or sporting activities or enjoy the nightlife. Sometimes, too, he had to suffer the humiliating attitude of his teachers and fellow students and the discriminating rules of the academic governing bodies.

On the other hand, this community provided the opportunity for the student to acquire the language, attitudes, norms and values of the elite, and to build up a network of patrons, colleagues and friends which would be invaluable trump cards for a future career. Moreover, thanks to the studies that he had completed and the degree that he had acquired, the poor student could consider any number of career opportunites which would never have been open to him without the long years spent at the university. In that sense a university education was the first and most important step on the ladder of social success.

And now to return to our first question: even if the medieval university was not an egalitarian community based on intellectual merit, it was still a socially more open microcosm than the world outside. Only at the end of the fifteenth century did the two worlds draw closer together, or rather, only then did the academic world largely adapt to the mores of society. The university became an extension, perhaps even a part — though certainly with its own specific function — of high society.

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