

**Mordechai Feingold, ed.**

*History of Universities*, volume XXIX/1, 2016. Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2016. Pp. 233, Hb, \$90.

In 1981, a new serial entitled *History of Universities* appeared. The founder and editor was Charles B. Schmitt (1933–86), whose career path was unusual. He was born in Louisville, Kentucky, obtained a Bachelor of Science degree in chemical engineering, worked briefly in the field, then obtained a PhD in Renaissance philosophy at Columbia University under the direction of Paul Oskar Kristeller in 1963. After teaching at the universities of Fordham and Leeds, Schmitt was appointed senior lecturer at the Warburg Institute in the University of London in 1973. He published numerous books and well over one hundred articles on philosophy and science from the Renaissance, the early fifteenth century to the mid-seventeenth. Although his primary focus was Italy and Aristotelianism, he also published extensively on English philosophy and science. And he knew that most philosophers and scientists teach in universities then and now.

The preface to volume 1 (vii) stated the goals of *History of Universities*: to “publish material concerned mainly with the history of European and (North and South) American universities before the outbreak of the Second World War.” University meant “all institutions of higher education and learning: the academies of the ancient world and of the modern period, advanced colleges such as the Collège Royal (of Paris), the (Jesuit) Collegio Romano, the Strasbourg Gymnasium.” The preface discarded “the rather parochial nature of much previous publication in the field” in favor of viewing universities “in the general intellectual and cultural context of civilization.” It promised that each volume would have several articles based on research in primary sources, surveys of research, and reviews of the more important new publications in the field.

In early April 1986, Schmitt went to the University of Padua to deliver some lectures. There, he collapsed and died on April 15, 1986. His death was both a great loss to scholarship and keenly felt by his many friends and admirers. And it left *History of Universities* leaderless. Fortunately, Schmitt’s English collaborators rallied to the cause and *History of Universities* continued, even though a single volume sometimes had to cover two years in the 1990s. In 2000, Professor Mordechai Feingold, professor of history at the California Institute of Technology, a historian of Isaac Newton and science in English universities, became its capable editor. In that same year, Oxford University Press agreed to expand the journal to two annual hardcover volumes, its current format. And endnotes became footnotes.

The result is that *History of Universities* is the leading journal for university history. While it publishes articles concerning the Middle Ages up to World War

II, the long Renaissance remains a primary focus. And it continues to attract able contributors from many countries. The current volume is typical. Renée Raphael studies the philosophical teaching of Claude Bérigard (1578–1663) and Mauro Mancini (d. after 1703) at the University of Pisa in the seventeenth century. She demonstrates how they combined the new research of Copernicus, Galileo, Descartes, and Pierre Gassendi with Aristotle, not because of religious or institutional restrictions, but because Bérigard and Mancini sought truth wherever it could be found. Hence, the University of Pisa was “an intellectually stimulating environment precisely because its members were involved in this eclectic project of updating Aristotle” (28). It is the kind of article that Schmitt would have appreciated; indeed, Raphael cites his scholarship.

Pietro D. Omodeo describes a dispute concerning the introduction of Cartesianism into the University of Frankfurt on the Oder between 1653 and 1656. A young Polish scholar named Jan Kołaczek (Placentinus, 1629/1630–1683), was appointed to teach mathematics. Placentinus, who had studied at German, Baltic, and Dutch universities, began to teach the principles of Descartes through disputations by himself and his students. He treated the motion of the earth (Copernicanism), tides, and other traditional natural philosophy topics in mathematical terms, and rejected Aristotle. His colleagues charged that he was violating the philosophical statutes of the university and his oath as a mathematician. Both sides appealed to the ruler, Elector Friedrich Wilhelm of Brandenburg (1620–88), who supported Placentinus. Hence, change came to the university.

In the third article, Meelis Friedenthal looks at the definitions of words found in short printed summaries of disputations from German Protestant universities in the seventeenth century. In the Aristotelian tradition words were connected to things. But for Descartes words “signify something only through human convention” (80). The author notes a decisive turn from the Scholastic tradition to Cartesianism by the end of the century. An appendix lists the disputations examined.

The next article turns to nineteenth-century Italian universities. After unification, Jews had the right to hold university professorships. Marco Di Giulio examines how two prominent Jewish professors, Graziadio Isaia Ascoli (1829–1907) in Oriental languages and comparative linguistics, and Salvatore De Benedetti (1818–1891) in Hebrew language and literature, handled their roles of professor and Jew. In order to obtain positions they stressed their commitment to anti-clerical state universities whose goal was nation-building, while also emphasizing that their Jewishness made them uniquely qualified to teach their disciplines. For example, De Benedetti read the Old Testament as the story of Jewish nation-building from which Italians might learn. When Catholic

anti-semitism rose later in the century, both scholars reacted with scholarship that stressed the historical and cultural links between East and West, Jews and Italians. Unlike the previous articles, this one does not give the original Italian for the long translated quotes.

Christopher Stray offers a survey of histories of classical scholarship and classical journals in the nineteenth and twentieth centuries. The article is poorly organized, lacks adequate documentation, and offers the statement that there were web-based resources for classical studies in the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries (133). Nevertheless, the comments on the foibles and rivalries among classical scholars and journals are interesting, wry, and sometimes humorous.

The rest of the volume presents reviews and review essays about Oxford college histories, physical space in American universities, Mount Holyoke College, the universities of Ingolstadt and Helmstedt (founded 1576; closed 1810), and more, including a book about Jesuit libraries in China (Noël Golvers, *Libraries of Western Learning for China: Circulation of Western books between Europe and China in the Jesuit Mission* [ca. 1650 – ca. 1750] [Leuven: Leuven University Press, 2013]). The last connects to a point. Although *History of Universities* welcomes articles on Jesuit education, there have been few over the years. A happy exception was Paul Shore, “Baroque Drama in Jesuit Schools of Central Europe,” in vol. 20, no. 1 (2005): 146–79.

In 1981, there were very few if any journals devoted to university history. Since then several journals studying universities in one country have appeared, of which *Annali di storia delle università italiane* (founded 1997, and now a biannual), is an excellent example. *History of Universities* blazed a trail and remains unique after thirty-five productive years. May it have many more good years.

*Paul F. Grendler*

University of Toronto Emeritus

*paulgrendler@gmail.com*

DOI 10.1163/22141332-00401005-02