When Europe went to college
The university is a European invention born from the hands of the Church

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The University is a European "invention" born from the hands of the Church. The 13th century is the century of the universities. Academic development needed to protect the interests of teachers and students and maintain their "body" character. Although there are universities that are born "from scratch", the first to appear, and also those that reached more prestige, were those that emerged from the episcopal schools of the 12th century: Paris, Oxford, and Bologna. The academic development needed certain autonomy in front of the municipal and episcopal powers. The conflict was settled by attending the pope, who settled the independence of the institution and its privileges. Out of a total of 44 European universities before 1400, at least 31 had a pontifical founding document, which underlines its international character and ecclesiastical status. The Bull "Parens Scientiarum" (1231) by Gregory IX recalled the dependence of the universities of the Holy See.

The word "university" ("universitas") in the 13th century meant "association, consortium". Thus, in 1221 the University of Paris speaks of itself as "Nos Universitas magistrorum et scholarium Parisiensium" ("We, the consortium of professors and students of Paris"). In addition, of the term "university", one uses also that of "General Study", defined in the games of Alfonso X as "Council of teachers et of schoolchildren, which is dated somewhere with a will and with the understanding to learn the knowledges". With the term "general" the international origin of its members was indicated, and the universal validity of their titles to be able to teach anywhere in the world ("licentia ubique terrarum" o "licentia ubique docendi"), that only the Pope and, over time, also emperors and kings, could grant.