DOMINICAN EDUCATION

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The Order of Friars Preachers developed a system of scholastic studies for all friars who should become priests. The development of this organization was a complex process. Its foundation was laid by the earliest constitutions in 1221. Its unfolding was based on the order of studies (Ratio studiorum) elaborated in 1259 by a commission comprising Albert the Great, Bonushomo Brito (Mag. Paris c. 1253–55), Florentius de Hisdino (Mag. Paris 1255–57), Petrus de Tarentasia (Mag. Paris 1258–60, subsequently Pope Innocent V), and Thomas Aquinas. From then onwards the rules of the annual general chapters allow us to reconstruct both the time limits for the curriculum of studies and the subjects that needed to be studied. Usually, the competent chapter assigned tasks to lectors and to priories in a province. The curriculum as well as the places of studies—usually a specific place for each part of the curriculum by (one or more) nationes—changed from time to time. The situation in Germany in the last decades of the 13th century is known, however fragmentarily, both by the promulgations of the general chapters and by some insights from surviving documents. Yet many details remain uncertain.


2 First researched for the province of Toulouse, where we still have most of the acts of provincial chapters, by Célestin Douais, Essai sur l'organisation des études dans l'Ordre des frères prêcheurs au 13e et au 14e siècle (1216–1342) (Paris: 1884). The best general overview is provided by Mulchahey (note 1 above), especially 220–78. For Germany, where the nationes were the subdivision of the large province Teutonia and later from 1303 onwards Saxonia as well, see: Walter Senner, Johannes von Sterngassen OP und sein Sentenzenkommentar, vol. 1, (Quellen und Forschungen zur Geschichte des Dominikanerordens) 4 (Berlin: 1995), 124–44.

3 See Isnard Frank, ”Zur Studienorganisation der Dominikanerprovinz Teutonia in der ersten Hälfte des 14. Jahrhunderts und zum Studiengang des Seligen Heinrich Seuse OP,” in
Whoever wants to join a religious order first has to complete a period of probation, the noviciate, during which the novice is introduced to life in the order, the constitutions, community prayer, and singing. In 1254 Pope Alexander IV decreed one year as the duration of noviciate time for all orders.\(^4\) When in the course of the 13th century more and more young boys joined the Friars Preachers (unlike in the beginning when university students were the main entrants), the age of 18 years that was originally required was lowered to 15 in 1265.\(^5\) The threats of sanctions for receiving younger candidates showed that this was not always respected.\(^6\) And so, a prolonged introduction to prayer and religious life\(^7\) and lessons in Latin grammar and elementary logic were required. For this, the general chapter in 1305 prescribed two years to be served in the priory where such teenagers had been received.\(^8\)

After initial hesitations concerning philosophy in the Dominican curriculum, the subject was fully integrated into the course of studies during the second half of the 13th century, largely due to the work of Albert the Great.\(^9\) In 1271, due to the fact that philosophy had become the preference of many students, the general chapter demanded more attention to…

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\(^5\) “Nullus recipiat infra octodecim annos,” in Constitutiones antiquae Ordinis Praedicatorum, ed. Antonin H. Thomas, De oudste constituties van de Dominicanen, Bibliothèque de la Revue d'histoire Eclésiastique 42 (Leuven: 1965) (from here onwards: Const. ant.), d. 1, c. 14: 325.23; ACG (note 1), 1, 129.19ff. In exceptional cases the conventual prior could admit even younger candidates.

\(^6\) As noted by the general chapters in 1272: ACG (note 1), 1, 164.12–18; and in 1283: ACG (note 1), 1, 223.13–24. Walz: Compendium (note 1), 114, gives some examples of even younger boys received.

\(^7\) Already in the constitutions, Const. ant. (note 5), d. 1, c. 15: 236.15ff., it had been demanded that the friars should know much of the office by heart. See Humbertus de Romanis, De officiis ordinis, c. 5: Romanis, Opera de vita regulari, vol. 2, ed. Joachim J. Berthier (Rome: 1889; repr. Turin: 1956), 216ff.

\(^8\) “Nullus ad studium logicae mittatur, nisi saltem in ordine bene et religiose duobus annis fuerit conversatus vel alias in seculo fuerit etate proiectus et in logicalibus instructus.” ACG (note 1), 2, 12.29–32. This seems to have been less a special course of study than a time of maturation in religious life; from the wording it is not clear whether that would be at least two years after noviciate or with the noviciate included.