In order to understand why a foreign student like Thomas Browne chose Leiden University to take his doctoral degree, clarification of some of the special aspects of medical education in Leiden is necessary, as well as of the development of the medical faculty in the short period of its existence. That period encompassed barely sixty years before Browne’s matriculation in 1633. Browne’s stay in Leiden occurred between two major phases of the faculty’s history. In the first place, the University had just obtained a more definitive organization with the new statutes of October 1631, which replaced the original statutes of 1575. In the second, the medical faculty was about to flourish, starting in the 1650s with the appointments of Franciscus de le Boë (Sylvius, 1614–1672) famous for his iatrochemistry and bedside teaching, and Johannes van Horne (1621–1670), who pioneered anatomical research. Records show that Leiden attracted many students from abroad in the seventeenth century. What was the nature of the “Leiden career” of Thomas Browne and his English-speaking peer group?

1. The Beginning

At the time of Thomas Browne’s matriculation Leiden University had become a mature institution. The State of Holland, the Curators of the University and the Burgomasters of Leiden could look back upon a successful venture after a doubtful beginning, since the foundation of university had occurred with considerable rapidity. William of Orange

---

1 Editors’ note. This contribution arose out of a panel discussion on the study, teaching and practice of seventeenth-century medical science at Leiden University held during the Thomas Browne conference in October 2006. The editors are most grateful to Professor Beukers for writing it up in this form, to Professor Manfred Horstmannhoff for taking part in the discussion, and to all those who contributed from the “floor”. It has been decided to render the conversational tone in the form of a more archivally-based research paper that is most usefully read with that of Professor Reid Barbour, whose contribution to the discussion is also much appreciated here.
presented a proposal for a university on 28 December 1574. As early as 3 January 1575 the State of Holland approved the proposal, and one month later, on 8 February, the inauguration (Dies Natalis) took place. Three medical doctors participated: Pieter van Foreest (Petrus Forestus, 1521–1597), assigned to teach medicine; Laurens van Oorschot (fl. 1575) for Greek; and Gerardus Bontius (1536–1599) for the artes liberales. The speedy establishment of the university resulted in the unusual situation of professorial appointments for the medical faculty having been made before there were any students. In fact, the first medical student, an Englishman named Jacobus James, matriculated in 1578. Both van Foreest and van Oorschot returned to Delft after their inaugural addresses, where they had previously acted as town physicians. Bontius, the town physician of Leiden, was now entrusted with medicine as well as the liberal arts. By the end of the sixteenth century the medical faculty had filled its customary number of professorships: three ordinary, and one extra-ordinary. The Statues of 1631 made this situation permanent.

Leiden University was set up as a Protestant institution right from the beginning, but it was not the intention of the founders to bind the professors and students to one true faith. The Dutch Reformed Church was only a public church, not a state church. It had no legal power in the appointments regarding the chairs of theology and philosophy. Only after the Synod of Dort (1618–1619), when the Contra-Remonstrants prevailed over the Remonstrants, did a particular denominational influence develop. The States-General sanctioned the resolutions of the Synod, and in consequence the State of Holland decided to purge the University personnel. Two of the three Curators, suspected of Remonstrant sympathies, were replaced, and the new College of Curators freed the University from Remonstrant influences, especially in the faculty of theology. The Remonstrant theologian Simon Bishop (Episcopius, 1583–1643) was dismissed in 1619, while the more moderate Johannes Polyander (1568–1646) continued in office, and three new professors were appointed. The new faculty members Antonius

---

2 The Synod of Dort established the orthodoxy within the Dutch Reformed Church. The Remonstrants held Arminian beliefs, including insistence on the importance of human free will in salvation, and that Christ had died for all, not just the elect. They were defeated at Dort and Calvinist interpretation of Scripture and salvation prevailed.

3 Curators had general superintendence over the faculties of the university, and the power to appoint professors.