

**RAMON LLULL AND  
THE TEACHING OF FOREIGN LANGUAGES  
IN THE LATE MIDDLE AGES**

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In standard histories of education, there is rarely more than a page or so devoted to the Late Middle Ages. Their authors of these histories seem to have felt that when the Middle Ages had done the job of retrieving Latin literacy, developed usable methodology for the study of philosophy, theology and law and founded the universities, nothing else of consequence happened until the glories of the Great Renaissance. As for general histories of the Late Middle Ages, their authors seem to have had virtually no interest in education, often oblivious to other narrative possibilities than the development of a cautionary tale of social and intellectual disintegration. Europe made exciting progress from the eleventh to the thirteenth centuries: an increase in the temperature gradient and gentler winters meant that people had more to eat, that their daily lives were getting easier, that the population grew, and along with it the number of people with the leisure for learning and the commitment to making their learning change the way people thought and acted, an exciting leavening of intellectuals.<sup>1</sup> The early fourteenth century, however, saw drought and famine, coupled with an upsurge of random violence committed by inadequately socialized knights. Toward the middle of the century, the Black Death killed an enormous fraction of the population of Europe in the first of what would become regular visitations. The Hundred Years War inaugurated 115 years of sporadic violence for the French and English, while the Papacy, having diminished its credibility by moving to Avignon, found itself with three rival popes excommunicating one another for the edification of the Christian people. The time lends itself to the narration of calamitous and cautionary tales. Barbara Tuchman even put the Late Middle Ages on the New York Times Bestseller List in 1978 with

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<sup>1</sup> See Jacques Le Goff, *Intellectuals in the Middle Ages*. London, 1993.

her book, *A Distant Mirror: The Calamitous Fourteenth Century*, a distant mirror of our own calamities in which only five pages of six hundred contain any mention of education!

As part of my investigation in the educational practices and innovations of the High and Later Middle Ages, I've been looking at the way that the study and teaching of languages changed in this period. My purpose is synthetic: to organize research that has already been done in such a way as to highlight those themes and persons in the period that argue to some distinctiveness in the production of educational ideas and institutions. My title is an awkward one and may well produce puzzlement as to what is meant by "foreign" languages in the Middle Ages. In the first place, it certainly does not mean Latin. Although the last native speaker of Latin did not die until 1867 in Croatia, by 1300 there were few Europeans who could claim Latin as their native tongue. Nor does it mean the vernacular languages of Europe. In 1961, Bernhard Bischoff surveyed the study of these languages, complete with many interesting examples to indicate that their study was continuous from the ninth century: the popularity of the study of French in England because of the Norman heritage, the Hundred Years War (which made Edward III require that his nobles learn French), and the persistence of Law French in English courts; the grammar of Old High German compiled under orders from Charlemagne and an Old High German phrasebook also from the ninth century; an Italian-Vulgar Greek vocabulary of the tenth century; Latin guidebooks from the twelfth century containing useful Vulgar Greek phrases and sentences; the Holy Roman Emperor Charles IV's mandate that heirs of electors be trained in Latin, Italian and a Slavonic language (probably Czech); the fifteenth century Elbing glossary of German and Old Prussian.<sup>2</sup>

These are very specific, ad hoc, practical and limited instances, but they're enough to

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<sup>2</sup> Bernhard Bischoff, "The Study of Foreign Languages in the Middle Ages," *Speculum*, 36, 2 (1961), 209-24.

indicate that by the High Middle Ages the study of European vernaculars was common enough. What happens in the Later Middle Ages that is different? More than anything else, it is the impact of religious motivation, the need to study languages so as to convert non-Christians, that extends the range of language study and mandates experiments in university language education and free-standing schools of language instruction. More than any other force in society, it was the new mendicant orders, the Dominicans and the Franciscans, who undertook the study of languages for missionary preaching purposes. In his 1924 inaugural dissertation at Breslau, Berthold Altaner described Dominican missions aimed at the Greeks, the Jacobites, the Nestorians, the Maronites, the Ethiopians, the Armenians, the Georgians, the Tartars, the Hungarians, the Bulgarians, the Albanians, the Serbians, the Prussians, the Lithuanians, the Latvians, the Estonians, the Finns, the Russians and the Poles.<sup>3</sup> The number of languages involved is breathtaking and certainly transcends the range of language study established earlier in the Middle Ages.

Rather than attempt to detail modes and methods of studying all these tongues, the "foreign" languages considered here are the non-European contemporary tongues whose study was encouraged by the Crusades and related projects for recovering the Holy Land from the Muslims, i.e. Arabic, Hebrew and Syriac. These are the "new" languages that attracted most attention in the High and Later Middle Ages, and of them Arabic held pride of place because of the impact of translations from the Arabic upon science and philosophy and because it was the language of the infidel possessors of the Holy Places, the targets of Crusade. You might say that it had the popularity that Russian enjoyed in the West after the Second World War: without displacing languages previously studied, it generated its own departments, institutes, budgets,

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<sup>3</sup> Berthold Altaner, *Die Dominikanermissionen des 13. Jahrhunderts. Forschungen zur Geschichte der kirchlichen Unionen und der Mohammedaner- und Heidenmission des Mittelalters*. Habelschwert, 1924.

grants and gurus. And the unquestioned leaders in the process were the mendicant orders.<sup>4</sup>

Naturally, the hot-bed of the study and teaching of Arabic was Spain, still a place in which Arabic and Jewish cultures existed side by side with the Christian. In the first third of the twelfth century, the Toledo translators under the leadership of Dominic Gundisalvus began translating works of science and philosophy from Arabic, creating a respect for Arabic learning and an interest among intellectuals in Arabic culture. It was not long before interest developed in teaching Arabic for missionary purposes. Raymond of Peñafort, the Dominican monk who brought the Inquisition to Aragon and Castile, encouraged the teaching of Hebrew and Arabic in seminaries to further the conversion of the Muslims and Jews of Spain to Christianity.<sup>5</sup> No-one was more significant in advancing the study and teaching of Arabic than the eccentric Catalan thinker, Ramon Llull.

Born about 1232 in Palma de Mallorca, Llull received a courtly education and indulged his impetuous temperament before turning to religious devotion in 1263 and dedicating his life to the conversion of the Muslims and a personal quest for martyrdom. After intense study of

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<sup>4</sup> In addition to Altaner's *Dominikanermissionen*, see also his "Sprachstudien und Sprachkenntnisse im Dienste der Mission des 13. und 14. Jahrhunderts," *Zeitschrift für Missionswissenschaft*, 21 (1931), 113-36; "Die fremdsprachliche Ausbildung der Dominikanermissionare während des 13. und 14. Jahrhunderts," *Zeitschrift für Missionswissenschaft*, 23, (1933), 233-41; "Die Kenntnis des Griechischen in den Missionsordern während des 13. und 14. Jahrhunderts," *Zeitschrift für Kirchengeschichte*, 53 (1934), 436ff.; "Zur Kenntnis des Arabischen im 13. und 14. Jahrhundert," *Orientalia Christiana Periodica*, 2 (1936), 437ff.; "Zur Geschichte des Unterrichts und der Wissenschaft in der spätmittelalterlichen Mission," *Zeitschrift für Missionswissenschaft*, 26 (1936), 165-71; "Die Heranbildung eines einheimischen Klerus in der Mission des 13. und 14. Jahrhunderts," *Zeitschrift für Missionswissenschaft*, 28 (1938), 193-208. See also A. Berthier, "Les écoles de langues orientales fondées au XIII<sup>e</sup> siècle par les Dominicains en Espagne et en Afrique," *Revue Africaine*, 73 (1902), 84-108; Angel Cortabarría, "Originalidad y significación de los 'studia linguarum' de los dominicanos españoles de los siglos XIII y XIV," *Pensamiento*, 25 (1969), 71-92 and "El estudio de las lenguas en la Orden dominicana," *Estudios filosóficos*, 19 (1970), 79-128 and 359-392; and M. Roncaglia, "I Frati Minori e lo studio delle lingue orientali nel secolo XIII," *Studi Francescani*, ser. 3, 25 (1953), 169ff.

<sup>5</sup> Altaner, *Dominikanermissionen*, pp. 89-94; José Ma. Coll, "Escuelas de lenguas orientales en los siglos XIII y XIV," *Analecta Sacra Tarraconensis*, 17 (1944), 115-35; 18 (1945), 58-89; 19 (1946), 217-40.

Arabic (encouraged by Raymond Peñafort), he opened a school at Miramar in 1276 and divided his time between there and Montpellier between 1276 and 1287, when he set about seeking royal or papal sponsors for his missionary plans. He also taught or lectured publicly at Paris and Montpellier. At the same time, he was producing a prodigious quantity of written work: over 190 books and treatises in Latin and about 100 in Catalan survive, another fifty or so, some of them in Arabic, have been lost. The central effort of these treatises was to develop an "*ars combinatoria*," a thought system that would facilitate the discovery and exposition of all truth for apologetic purposes. Though he was never ordained, he was closely identified with the Franciscans and is thought to have joined the Third Order of St. Francis in 1295. He died in 1316, reputedly by martyrdom in North Africa.<sup>6</sup>

Among Latin theologians, Llull was unique in his thorough knowledge of the Arabic language and his understanding not only of Arabic philosophy but also of the Muslim religion.<sup>7</sup> At a time when numerous western intellectuals had only a smattering of ignorance about Islam, in a day in which hideous caricatures of Muslim beliefs and behavior were the stuff of polemic, this scholar was "absolutely alone in adopting the mode of religious (as distinct from intellectual) thought of his interlocutors, the dialectic of the *kalām*," i.e. the Arabic dialectical theology that preceded Arabic scholastic philosophy, and in attaching "the greatest importance to Muslim

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<sup>6</sup> For Llull's life and thought, see Anthony Bonner and Lola Badia, *Ramón Llull: Vida, pensament e obra literària* (Barcelona), 1988; Hugues Didier, *Raymond Lulle: un pont sur la Méditerranée* (Paris, 2001); Miguel Cruz Hernández, *El pensamiento de Ramon Llull* (Valencia, 1977); Armand Llinarès, *Raymonde Lulle, philosophe de l'action* (Paris, 1937); E. Allison Peers, *Ramon Lull: A Biography* (New York, 1929); and Erhard-W. Platzeck, *Raimund Lull, sein Leben, seine Werke, die Grundlagen seines Denkens* (2v.; Düsseldorf, 1964). For his Catalan works, see *Obres de Ramon Lull* (21 v.; Palma de Mallorca, 1906-50) and *Obres Essencials* (2v.; Barcelona, 1957-60). His Latin works are being published in a new critical edition, *Raimundi Lulli opera latina* (35v.; Palma de Mallorca and Turnhout, 1959- ).

<sup>7</sup> Charles H. Lohr, "Christianus arabicus, cuius nomen Raimundus Lullus," *Freiburger Zeitschrift für Philosophie und Theologie*, 31, 3 (1984), 57-88; Rudolf Brummer, "Ramon Llull und das Studium des Arabischen," *Zeitschrift für Romanische Philologie*, 85 (1969), 132-43. See also Dominique Urvoy, "Les Musulmans et l'usage de la langue arabe par les missionnaires chrétiens au moyen-âge," *Traditio*, 34, (1978), 416-27.

attitudes, types of prayer, bodily postures, customs."<sup>8</sup> This rare sensitivity made him an excellent conduit of intercultural contact. Yet Llull was possessed by the dream of the reunification of all mankind in Christ to be achieved by reuniting the Roman and Orthodox churches and converting the Jews, the Muslims and other pagans. For this reason his account of Islam is biased despite his interest and cultural sympathy. For this same reason, he conceived of the project of developing language schools and encouraging the teaching of Oriental language schools in universities.

After his renunciation of his worldly pursuits, Llull embarked on pilgrimages and began his study of Arabic, soon mastering the written and spoken language and cultivating a sophisticated appreciation for Islamic culture.<sup>9</sup> He set about persuading the King of Aragon, Jaime I, to permit him to establish a school of languages on Mallorca. Llull had grown up there, acquainted from birth with the Arab culture that coexisted with the Christian culture of the island. It was the matrix of his burning concern for the souls of Muslims, and the availability of living exemplars of Arab culture may also have played a role in his choice. Jaime I died in 1276, the year in which the school was actually founded, and we do not know whether it was he or his heir, Alfonso III, who actually approved the foundation. In November of that year, formal permission came from Pope John XXI to begin training thirteen Friars Minor at the new College of the Holy Trinity for missionary work among the Muslims.<sup>10</sup> Although Miramar seems to have stressed Arabic, it doubtless followed the practice of earlier Dominican and

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<sup>8</sup> Dominique Urvoý, *Penser l'Islam: Les présupposés islamiques de l'Art de Llull* (Paris, 1980), 84.

<sup>9</sup> See S. Garcías Palou, *Ramon Llull y el Islam*. (Palma de Mallorca, 1981); Johann Fück, *Die arabischen Studien in Europa bis in den Anfang des 20. Jahrhunderts*. (Leipzig, 1955); A. Gottron, *Ramon Lulls Kreuzzugsideen* (Freiburg, 1912); Rüdi Imbach and Ramon Sugranyes de Franch, *Raymond Lulle: Christianisme, Judaïsme, Islam*. (Fribourg Suisse, 1986); and U. Monneret de Villard, *Lo studio dell'Islam in Europa ne XII e nel XIII secolo*. (Città del Vaticano, 1944).

<sup>10</sup> Brummer, pp. 133-34; Louis Bréhier, *L'église et l'Orient au Moyen Age: Les croisades* (2d. ed.; Paris, 1907), p. 250.

Franciscan missionary schools of providing studies in philosophy and apologetic theology as well as some instruction in other languages that would be useful for missionary purposes.<sup>11</sup> Unfortunately, little else is known of the operation of the school and its success or lack of same, and we hear no more of it after 1293.

During the remainder of his life, Llull devoted himself to the promotion of the recovery of the Holy Land by the Latin Christians, his ideas embracing crusades as well as missionary work.<sup>12</sup> He traveled to Paris to petition the King of France, to Rome to lobby the Pope. The basis of his notions is found in two brief tracts he wrote early in the 1290s, *Quomodo Terra Sancta recuperari potest* and *Tractatus de modo convertendi infideles*, the former proposing a crusade, the latter proposing the establishment of "studia linguarum" in Rome, Paris, Spain, Genoa, Venice, Germany, Hungary, Haifa and Armenia. These would have been more akin to specialized universities than to the Miramar-type language schools and obviously would aim at more tongues than just Arabic.<sup>13</sup> By 1305, he was ready to content himself with the establishment of three such studia, in Rome, Paris and Toledo.<sup>14</sup>

Llull seems to have been taken most seriously at the court of the King of France. One of the king's advisers, Pierre Dubois, "a typical member of the brilliant crowd of mediocre

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<sup>11</sup> Rudolf Brummer, "L'enseignement de la langue arabe à Miramar: faits et conjectures," *Estudios Lullianos*, 22 (1978), 37-48; S. Garcías Palou, *El Miramar de Ramon Llull* (Palma de Mallorca, 1977), pp. 122-34 and C. Genovard Rosselló, "Historia de las instituciones pedagógicas lullianas en Mallorca," *Estudios Lullianos*, 18 (1974), 180-188.

<sup>12</sup> See Berthold Altaner, "Glaubenszwang und Glaubensfreiheit in der Missionstheorie des Raimundus Lullus," *Historisches Jahrbuch der Görresgesellschaft*, 48 (1928), 586-610; Ramon Sugranyes de Franch, "El projecte de creusada en la doctrina missional de Ramon Llull," *Estudios Lullianos*, 4 (1960), 275-290 and *Raymond Lulle, docteur des missions* (Schöneck-Beckenreid, 1954); and Helene Wieruszowski, "Ramon Lulle et l'idée de la Cité de Dieu. Quelques nouveaux écrits sur la croisade," *Estudis Franciscans*, 47 (1935), 100-110.

<sup>13</sup> The tracts are to be found in his *Opera latina*, fasc. 3 (1954), 96-112.

<sup>14</sup> Garcías Palou, pp. 118-19.



men who were the mainstay of France in the reign of Philip the Fair,"<sup>15</sup> authored a treatise, *De recuperatione terrae sanctae*, that leaned heavily on Llull's ideas, leading him to propose equal education for both sexes, first in Latin, then in Greek, Arabic and other languages and in such practical arts as medicine and surgery before sending them to the Holy Land for the care of souls.<sup>16</sup> The fit between Llull's advocacy of crusade and the French court's interest in such a project provided Llull with the opportunity to enshrine his project for *studia linguarum* in ecclesiastical legislation.

Chronically strapped for money, Philip the Fair had been greedily eyeing the wealth of the Knights Templar and pressing upon the Pope the project of their dissolution. To advance this project, Philip urged upon Clement V, the French pope residing at Avignon, the convening of an Ecumenical Council that would deal with the Templars and take up discussion of a renewed crusade under the leadership of the French King. As plans for a council matured, Llull sent to Pope Clement V a treatise, *Liber de acquisitione Terrae Sanctae*.<sup>17</sup> In it, Llull envisioned an ambitious military effort beginning with mastery of the Mediterranean and destruction of coastal villages, followed by an expedition from Syria to lay waste to Syria and invade Egypt, with attacks on Arabic Spain and Morocco to support the main effort. In the aftermath of victory, he foresaw the quick conversion of the conquered infidels by use of powerful rational apologetics, a process in which language was vital. Accordingly, he advanced his proposal for *studia linguistica*, as he had previously done to other popes.<sup>18</sup>

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<sup>15</sup> F.M. Powicke, "Pierre Dubois: Medieval Radical," in T.F. Tout and James Tait, *Historical Essays by Members of the Owens College, Manchester* (London, 1902), p. 173.

<sup>16</sup> Pierre Dubois, *The Recovery of the Holy Land* (New York, 1956); Berthold Altaner, "Raymundus Lullus und der Sprachenkanon (can. 11) des Konzils von Vienne," *Historisches Jahrbuch*, 53 (1933), 212-17. See also J.N. Hillgarth, *Ramon Lull and Lullism in Fourteenth-Century France* (Oxford, 1971).

<sup>17</sup> *Criterion* [Barcelona], 3 (1927), 266-278.

<sup>18</sup> Joseph Lecler, *Vienne* (Paris, 1964), pp. 71-2. Llull "Petitio." See also Berthold Altaner, "Die Durchführung des Wiener Konzilsbeschlusses über die Errichtung von Lehrstühlen für orientalische Sprachen,"

The Council of Vienne met in October of 1311 to consider the matter of the Templars, the project of a crusade and proposals for church reform. Lull insisted on attending, and prepared new versions of his proposals, a poem urging the conversion of the infidels and a dialogue in which a savant demands that the council found language schools, unite all of the orders of militant knights in a single order and root out Averroism. During the council, he refined his ideas in one more petition directed at the Council Fathers.<sup>19</sup> The greater part of the council was taken up with the matter of the Templars, but eventually it turned to the project of a crusade. Though the crusade never materialized, Lull's incessant petitions and pleas found their fruition in Canon Eleven of the council's decrees:

Among the cares lying heavily upon us there is one on which we reflect constantly: how we may lead the erring into the way of truth and win them for God with the help of his grace. . . . We are in no doubt that to attain our desire, the word of God should be fittingly explained and preached to great advantage. Nor are we unaware that the word of God is learned in vain and returns empty to the speaker if it is directed to the ears of those ignorant of the speaker's language. We are therefore following the example of him whom we, though unworthy, represent on earth. He wished that his apostles, going through the whole world to evangelize, should have a knowledge of every tongue. We desire earnestly that holy church should be well supplied with catholic scholars acquainted with the languages most in use by unbelievers. These scholars should know how to

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*Zeitschrift für Kirchengeschichte*, 52 (1933), 226-31.

<sup>19</sup> Lecler, pp. 72-3. The poem may be found in *Histoire Littéraire de la France*, 29, n. 102, p. 270, the dialogue in *Wissenschaft und Weisheit*, 2 (1935), 311-24, the petition in Ewald Müller, *Das Konzil von Vienne 1311-1312. Seine Quellen und seine Geschichte* (Münster in Westphalia, 1934), 693-97.

train unbelievers in the Christian way of life, and to make them members of the Christian body through instruction in the faith and reception of sacred baptism.

In order, then, that skill in these languages be attained by suitable instruction, we have stipulated, with the approval of the sacred council, that schools be established for the following languages wherever the Roman curia happens to reside and also at Paris, Oxford, Bologna and Salamanca: that is, we decree that in each of these places there should be catholic scholars with adequate knowledge of Hebrew, Arabic and Chaldaic [Syriac]. There are to be two experts for each language in each place. They shall direct the schools, make faithful translations of books from these languages into Latin, and teach others those languages with all earnestness, passing on a skilful use of the language, so that after such instruction these others may, God inspiring, produce the harvest hoped for, propagating the saving faith among the heathen peoples. The salaries and expenses of these lecturers in the Roman curia will be provided by the apostolic see, those at Paris by the king of France, and those at Oxford, Bologna and Salamanca by the prelates, monasteries, chapters, convents, exempt and non-exempt colleges, and rectors of churches of England, Scotland, Ireland and Wales, of Italy, and of Spain respectively. The burden of contributing shall be imposed on each in accordance with the needs of the faculties, notwithstanding any contrary privileges and exemptions, which however we do not wish to be impaired in other respects.<sup>20</sup>

This is little more than the repeated petitions of Llull rendered into the formal language of conciliar legislation. There can be no doubt that it was a great triumph for him. He died four

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<sup>20</sup> Norman P. Tanner, ed., *Decrees of the Ecumenical Councils. I: Nicaea I to Lateran V* (Washington, DC, 1990), pp. 379-80.

years later, martyred, so legend has it, in Tunisia.

Legislation is one thing, implementation quite another. Canon Eleven does not seem to have made much of a practical impact as intended. Though the Canon made provision for financial support, even the pope was not able to arrange implementation at his own curia in Avignon.<sup>21</sup> There is evidence that a teacher of Arabic was active at Oxford in 1320 and that efforts were made to implement the taxes mandated by the decree in 1321, but there is no mention of the taxes later than 1325, indicating that the decree failed of its purpose there as well.<sup>22</sup> The idea had some persistence, as the Council of Basle renewed the decree in 1434, but that renewal does not seem to have been any more effective than the original decree.

The career of Ramon Llull and the efforts of the mendicant orders to train missionaries in languages constitute instances of an educationally innovative trend absent before the middle of the thirteenth century, powerful thereafter. Regrettably, the main business of the Council of Vienne was dealing with Philip the Fair's vendetta against the Templars and Llull's educational program, though enacted by the Council, was all but obliterated by the French king's political agenda and the need to legislate disciplinary decrees regarding abuses in Church governance. What Philip Hughes wrote about those disciplinary decrees may be said also about Llull's language teaching project: "The remedies provided in the decrees are all admirable. If only they had been generally obeyed, and if, in those centuries of such miserable communications, there had been some way of enforcing obedience."<sup>23</sup> Though Llull's proposals for extending language instruction and embedding it in the most prestigious universities of his time outran the ability of both the Church and secular society to incarnate in educational institutions and programs, it is clear that here is a case in which conceptions of the nature of Christian commitment took the pragmatic efforts of earlier days to a new level. When the humanists of the Renaissance embraced the study of Ciceronian Latin as the ideal formation of the gentleman, they would find that the study and teaching of more modern tongues in the context of the cultures that used them had created its own momentum, promoted the use of these tongues as vehicles for literature as well as commerce and gave them a claim to respectability that no amount of admiration for the classical past could overcome. Moreover, a charter now existed

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<sup>21</sup> H.J. Schroeder, *Disciplinary Decrees of the General Councils: Text, Translation, and Commentary* (St. Louis, 1937), p. 397.

<sup>22</sup> Roberto Weiss, "England and the Decree of the Council of Vienne on the Teaching of Greek, Arabic, Hebrew, and Syriac," *Bibliothèque d'Humanisme et Renaissance*, 14 (1952), 1-9.

<sup>23</sup> Philip Hughes, *The Church in Crisis: A History of the General Councils, 325-1870* (Garden City, NY, 1961), p. 259.

for the university teaching of "modern" foreign languages, a respectability rooted in religious purposes and engaging the prestige of the church. The theoretical framework for future practice had been built.