

HISTORY

The year **1222** is officially recognised as that of the foundation of Padua University; however, even before then the city was home to 'schools' for the study of law. The establishment of the university itself was due to the move here of a number of teachers and students from nearby Bologna University, their decision being caused by "grave offences to academic freedoms and the failure to observe the privileges solemnly granted to teachers and students." So, Padua was not a university founded by papal or imperial decree, but rather the "fruit of particular events and most favourable cultural circumstances." The spirit of academic freedom that inspired its foundation would continue to be a characteristic of the university over the centuries. Guaranteed by the free City Commune (13th cent.), it was then protected by the fourteenth-century Da Carrara rulers of the city and later by the Republic of Venice, which governed Padua from 1405 to the end of the eighteenth century. Quite rightly, the University's motto remains *Universa Universis Patavina Libertas*.

At first a centre for the study of law, the university would gradually expand to cover other disciplines. In 1399 it was divided into two **universitates**: *luristarum*, for the study of civil and canon law, and *Artistarum*, for the study of medicine, philosophy, theology, grammar, dialectics, rhetoric and astronomy.

Initially, the university was organised as a free corporation of students, who were divided into *nationes* according to their region or ethnic group of origin. These nationes themselves then formed two larger groups: the **citramontani** (the Italians) and the **oltramontani** (the non-Italians). It was the students who approved the university statutes, elected the rectors, chose the teachers and paid them with money collected from those attending their lessons. Then the teachers were directly called and paid by the public authority.

The fifteenth century marked the beginning of a period of great splendour and development, which would continue for at least three centuries to come. Having decided that Padua should be the sole *Gymanisum Omnium Disciplinarium* for the entire Venetian Republic, the government in Venice guaranteed an extraordinary level of religious tolerance and freedom of thought – something which undoubtedly contributed to the growing international reputation of the University. Not only did Padua con-

tribute to the rapid development of philosophical thought then taking place, it also had important schools of medicine and anatomy. And, of course, there was Galileo Galilei, who taught at Padua for eighteen years, making fundamental contributions in the fields of astronomy, physics and mathematics. All in all, Padua played a great role in the nascent scientific revolution, and as a result attracted students from all over Europe. In the scientific field, this period in the university's history is significant for numerous reasons, amongst which one might mention: Gian Battista Da Monte's contribution to the birth of modern medicine (he was the first in Europe to teach clinical medicine at the bedside of his patients); the 1545 foundation of the **world's first public university Botanical Garden**; the study of anatomy as a means to further medical knowledge; the construction of the **world's first Anatomy Theatre** (1594-95). Meanwhile, the university was also distinguishing itself in other fields. Philosophy was gradually breaking away from the schema imposed by scholasticism; and the Jurisprudence department was so prestigious that the governments of Europe applied to it for rulings and opinions.

The fall of the Venetian Republic (1797) and the political vicissitudes that preceded Italian Unification (1866) led to reduced economic resources and increased restraints on freedom of thought; however the university continued to fulfil its role successfully at a regional level. Padua's professors and students would participate actively in the struggle for Italian independence, most noticeably in the local uprising of **February 1848**. The university also found itself in the frontline during the First World War, when Padua became the centre of a military zone of operations. True to its above-mentioned motto, it would be the university itself that was a centre of operations within the Veneto during the struggle against Fascism and the occupying Nazi forces, with Chancellor Concetto Marchesi and Vice-Chancellor Egidio Meneghetti playing leading roles. In fact, due to the number of young people here who gave their lives in that struggle, Padua is the only university in Italy to have been awarded the **Gold Medal of Military Valour**.

Today, Padua is one of Italy's most prestigious universities. Fully autonomous since 1995, it is now a regional presence, with teaching branches and departments located throughout the Veneto.

"Allowing that the honour of being home to the scientific revolution might be said to belong to one single place, that place is Padua."
(H.Butterfield, Harvard University, 1958)



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A visit to
PALAZZO DEL BO



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In the first decades of the sixteenth century the various 'schools' scattered throughout the districts of the city were housed in one single structure, the Palazzo del Bo. Located near the street traditionally occupied by butcher's shops, the building derived its name from the sign of the famous **Hospitium Bovis** [Ox Inn] that occupied one of the patrician homes built in this area from the end of the thirteenth century onwards. The conversion of the existing structures for university use began in 1494 and would be concluded at the beginning of the seventeenth century. A new programme of work on the structure would begin in 1889, with the building being completed in its present form in 1938-1942. That latter phase included the creation of the New Court, commissioned from the architect Ettore Fagioli by the then Chancellor, Carlo Anti. The décor and furnishings of the completed structure were the work of the famous architect Giò Ponti.

THE OLD COURT AND THE HERALDIC CRESTS

Begun in 1546, this is the work of Andrea Moroni, the most important architect working in Padua around the middle of the sixteenth century. One of the finest buildings of the Renaissance, it comprises a double loggia of two orders, with Doric columns in the lower order and Ionic in the upper.

The walls and the vault of the portico are entirely covered with the crests of the rectors and councillors of the *Universitatis Iuristarum* and the *Universitatis Artistarum* over the period 1592-1688, the year in which the Venetian Republic found itself forced to ban "the placing of further memorials in the Bo;" the decision was taken partly to quell exhibitionism and partly because of the risk that the addition of new memorials would lead to the destruction of the old. The university's Great Hall is also decorated with original crests.

THE GREAT HALL

From the sixteenth to the eighteenth century this housed "The Great School of Jurists" and was where lessons were held. One of those who taught here was Galileo, and the hall is now dedicated to his memory. Used in the first years of the nineteenth century as a drawing studio, the space would only become the university's Great Hall after restoration in 1854-56. Painted then, the ceiling frescoes are by Giulio Carlini; the central allegory depicts *Wisdom and the Other Disciplines*. The architect Gio Ponti would in 1942 do the work that gave the end wall its present appearance. This is where the members of the University Senate sit during important occasions (the opening of the academic year, the presentation of honorary degrees, etc.); the inscription is the university's ancient motto: **Universa Universis Patavina Libertas**.

THE SALA DEI QUARANTA

This takes its name from the forty (quaranta) portraits on the walls, each one depicting an illustrious foreigner who studied at Padua. With no claim to be actual likenesses, these works were painted in 1942 by Giangiacomo dal Forno and show such figures as: *Antonio Augustin*, the Spanish ambassador of Philip II and of various popes; *Michel de L'Hospital*, Chancellor of France and adviser to Catherine de Medici; *Thomas Linacre*, physician to Henry VIII of England and a teacher at Oxford University; *William Harvey*, the Englishman famous for his study of the circulation of the blood and a founder of the English school of medicine; *Olof Rudbek the Elder*, a professor of botany, anatomy and medicine at the University of Uppsala in Sweden, where he promoted the establishment of a botanical garden modelled on that in Padua; *Thomas Bartholin*, a Dane who played a leading role in establishing medical studies

in his native country; *Nicholas de Cusa*, a famous fifteenth-century German philosopher and cardinal; *Werner Rolfinck*, a German who promoted the study of anatomy and chemistry in his native country; *Peter Vasiljevic Postnikov*, a Russian sent to Padua by Peter the Great to study medicine; *Stefan Báthory*, a Hungarian who would become King of Poland in 1576; *Giovanni Capodistria*, a Greek appointed dictator/president of the Greek government in 1828; *Emanuele Sciascian*, an Armenian physician at the imperial court of Constantinople and the promoter of the first institution of medical studies in Turkey.

GALILEO'S ROSTRUM

The Sala dei Quaranta also contains the podium which, tradition has it, was set up by his students so that Galileo could teach in the "great hall of jurists" (now the Great Hall); none of the other rooms was large enough to house the large crowds that thronged to his lessons. The podium was kept in the Great Hall until the middle of the nineteenth century. Galileo would teach at Padua University for eighteen years (1592-1610), later recalling this as amongst the happiest periods of his life. Much admired by his students and protected by the Venetian government, he would here take the first steps towards the development of modern scientific method.

ANATOMY THEATRE

This was built in **1594** for the famous professor of anatomy **Gerolamo Fabrici d'Acquapendente**; it is said that the design was based on suggestions from Fra Paolo Sarpi. The earliest permanent anatomy theatre in the world – up to then, temporary structures were erected for those attending autopsies – this is also the oldest still extant. The wooden structure

has the form of an inverted cone with an elliptical ground plan; it comprises six concentric ranks of seats that rise around the anatomy table. The banisters and balustrades are in carved walnut. Originally, the windows were blank panels, with the lighting for anatomy lessons being provided by torches; they were only opened up as windows proper in 1844, the final year of modifications which had begun in 1842. The theatre was last used for teaching purposes in 1872 and was restored in 1991-92. In the small room alongside – once used in preparing the bodies for dissection – there is a small exhibition illustrating its history.

THE MEDICINE HALL

One of the oldest and most attractive teaching rooms in the building, this is now used for the public discussion of degree theses presented by students of medicine and other subjects. This room formerly housed lessons in anatomical theory, but it actually dates back to before the establishment of the university here: the perfectly-preserved coffered ceiling and the typical medieval frieze on the walls reveal that it was part of one of the three fourteenth-century patrician houses which once stood here. Belonging to the Da Carrara family, those buildings formed the core structure on the site which would be occupied by the afore-mentioned Ox Inn.

THE FIRST WOMAN GRADUATE IN THE WORLD

At the foot of one of the two wide staircases leading to the upper loggia in the Old Court is a statue of **Elena Lucrezia Cornaro Piscopia**. In 1678 she would become the world's first woman graduate when she took her degree in philosophy at Padua.

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