ZESZYTY NAUKOWE UNIWERSYTETU JAGIELLOŃSKIEGO
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MEUS: The European Museum of Students at the University of Bologna

The European Museum of Students is the result of over ten years of work and is an original and valuable addition to the museums of the University of Bologna, the oldest university in Europe and one of the earliest student universities in the world. It is thus fitting that the University of Bologna should take steps to promote the knowledge and study of the student world with a centre for the documentation of student history, hence a location going beyond the function of an ordinary museum.

MEUS initially grew out of an encounter between a number of historians studying student presence at universities and members of former student associations who wished to donate memoirs, journals, press articles and other items related to their experience as students and intended these to be part of an exhibition on the goliard associations which had characterized university life in Italy before 1968. That event led to the more ambitious aim of creating a permanent exhibition on the history of university students in Europe from its origins until the present.

Seminars, conventions and workshops were held – and the proceedings thereof were published in various formats – on what student history means to the social historian, the historian of social attitudes, the political scientist or to those who study the creation of the ruling classes. We also examined how best to represent the figure of the student within the confines in which we were working. Plenty of university museums already existed with some space devoted to student presence, such as Leipzig, Würzburg or Utrecht, but we felt none were sufficiently representative of the complex evolution of the student as a member of society and an essential component of the university as institution.

We also realized we would have to confront the opinion of the academic world and see whether it was prepared to share our aim. We recalled Charles H. Haskins' polemical opening remarks at a conference on the figure of the medieval student that a university would be an extremely pleasant place if it were not for the students, which reflected the opinion prevalent among his colleagues at the time. Haskins' remarks were thus more than mere rhetoric and although some seventy years had passed since he had made them, we knew that many academics still concurred wholeheartedly. This is confirmed by the

large gaps extent in university historiography: student history is quickly dispatched with accounts of conflict between students and locals – traditionally known as "town and gown" in English historiography – or with a few statistics illustrating the success of a particular school or don. It must be said that students themselves throughout the ages have encouraged this tendency by preferring to focus on the seamier side of the student experience, due to the complicit nature of friendship among the young. This attitude has kept alive the image of students as a "potentially dangerous class" an opinion which was in turn strengthened during the era of demands for university education for all and of student protest.

We then looked at the suitability of the museum format. The very term "museum" calls to mind something which is stable and definitive in relation to knowledge and which thus has an equally stable and definitive function. Being a student is a stage in an individual's life which leaves behind very few traces which might be usefully displayed in a museum. We also know that many of the ways in which young people behave remain confined within a particular group to strengthen its identity and the bonds between members. Seen from the outside, these are often distorted by those who record them. Such terms as "research workshop" or "centre for documentation" might have been more appropriate but we considered that the museum format would allow recognition of the central role of the student within the world of the university.

Everyone agreed that this museum should be located in Bologna since that was where, for the first time in history, students created their own independent association and governed themselves through the regular election of chancellors who were also students and who remained the pre-eminent authority of the Studium for centuries. Thus the myth of student power, which was the rallying cry during the protests of 1968, has real, historical roots and it was Bologna which saw the origin of a number of fundamental elements of student identity. Despite continual transformations and adaptations, those elements are still with us and we intended our museum to emphasize both this continuity in student history and the peculiarities of individual universities in various countries throughout almost nine centuries of university life.

The many difficulties we encountered only increased our conviction that our project might be of immediate use, institutionally speaking: filling in the many gaps in the records might help those in daily contact with the student world to make the right choices. Our determination to go forward had the support of a number of academic bodies who understood the significance of the project and its consistency with action taken in favour of students in recent years.

Developing designing a Museum of Students

As the material we selected and collected for display was beginning to pile up in the deposits of our future museum, we were also working on organization and selection of the right ways and means of representing our concept of, or atttitude towards, historiography, which would be apparent in the items that we chose and how we displayed them. The problem was first and foremost one of method, concerning the type of items and

records we should use. We began by establishing the historical identity of the student and providing a timely definitive profile of this figure.

Students – as we understand them – arose as new figures in society in the 12th century in Bologna, Paris and Oxford. In 1155, Emperor Frederick I granted them the legal recognition fundamental to their identity (*amore scientiae facti exules*), which was the basis for subsequent privileges granted by popes, emperors or princes and for defining their social and legal status. For several centuries, students were typically young, single and male, ranging in age from adolescents (in the faculty of arts) to adults (particularly in theology). Aside from their real age, students were "institutionally young," which at times led them to indulge in what might be termed "Rabelaisian" behaviour, involving practical jokes, facetiousness and dressing in a style more appropriate to carnival than anything else. This stereotype has changed considerably over the last two centuries, partly because of the growing number of female students, who now account for the majority, and also because the age factor has stabilized and there are fewer foreigners in a given student community. Since their origins, students have been present in urban societies only because of material and intellectual considerations. Towns were the ideal place for increasingly secularized knowledge to grow and, then as now, towns facilitated encounters with other intellectuals, dons or students from other institutions with whom opinions and ideas could be exchanged continually. However, although students lived in towns, for several centuries they did not fit in with other social groups, particularly their non-student peers, and were constituted something of a foreign body, protected as they were by privileges and laws which did not apply to the local population. The dichotomy between student body and town thus inevitably meant conflict could always arise and this dichotomy has remained in the attitude of society with the result that even today, although circumstances differ greatly from the past, local people are liable to remain detached from and suspicious of students. This led to the creation of forms of mutual assistance, of independent regulations and of independent legal authorities to deal with those dangers and tensions which have been a constant in student history and not merely the stuff of legend. Accordingly, the Museum has a great deal of material on student associations, whether the medieval *nationes* and *universitates,* the later *Burschenschaften*, the goliard associations of the 19th and 20th centuries or the offshoots of the student movement of 1967–1968. And, although forms may have changed through the ages, elements of continuity are apparent in how students socialize. Students have generally been immigrants yet, unlike most immigrants, have never been rootless because the group they belong to has its own code of manners and its own original cultural forms with which members identify – and are identified – beyond the specific place where they are living temporarily. This is a sort of universal metalanguage and is shared by students as a whole across territorial barriers, enabling exchanges between them, which is as true in today's age of student mobility programs as it was in that of the *peregrinatio academica* in the past. Typical of a student code of manners might be one of the many rites of initiation which have had a lasting impact, despite cultural changes through the centuries: a good instance is the rite of *depositio* in vogue in the modern age with a "liturgy" so precise as to be set down in printed manuals. A freshman – known as a *beanus* – was considered a beast of such filth as to require subjection to a rite of purification: imaginary claws, crests and fangs were filed down, blunted or removed and the subject's innards were

purified by having to swallow a large dose of salt washed down with plenty of wine. The freshman thus acquired the necessary wisdom and was admitted into the group. The metaphor of the beast in need of cleansing shows the self-confidence students had in their status and their haughty attitude towards the rest of society. This ancient ceremony was still being performed in the 18th century and does not differ greatly from that of *le bizutage* prohibited in France only some ten years ago.

These reflections accompanying our preparations are intended to show how those preparations were carefully grounded in historiography. However, the main concerns when starting a museum are selecting items for display, finding the right formula for selection and structuring the museum so that it reflects the concepts intended by its founders. Every generation of students and, every student group has produced its symbols and distinguishing signs but the transitory nature of student existence has been of no help in conserving them and passing them on. Retrieving them and knowing how to interpret them is a further task which will continue to claim our attention when tracking both the continuity and the changes in the many expressions of student life.

MEUS Structure and Content

This is neither the time nor place for an analytical description of the many items left by students from all eras which we have collected, catalogued and, albeit only in part, have put on display at the Meus. All of them are items and symbols with metaphorical qualities, created for use in given circumstances or at certain times: a student's devotion to a patron, membership in a *natio* or consent to subjection to a ritual all show that students lived in a system of relations and contexts and it is on these the museum intends to focus. Thus the criterion for selecting each item is its ability to represent behaviour and culture typical of the student world.

The first section is devoted to The Construction of Student Identity and is intended to show several salient aspects of how the figure of the student came into being. We begin with the *Habita* of Frederick I, the foundation for all subsequent measures in favour of students, and a series of display cases showing forms of student independence, the ways groups, nations or student universities were organized, rituals of admission, devotional practices and the *peregrinatio academica*.

The second section (Disciplining Behaviour, Intellect and the Body) concerns changes since the end of the medieval era in the role of the student in relation both to institutions – with the increasing dominance of the dons and gradual loss of the *libertas scholarium* – and to the expectations of society and politicians intending to control the acquisition of the skills necessary for those who would be required to run the new apparatus of government and state. This process went on through the modern age, from the 16th to the 19th centuries, with the rise of the college as the most suitable solution for the all-round education and discipline of the young and this was readily apparent even in dress codes intended to show where students belonged and their status in the hierarchy. With the loss of student independence, new associations created their own areas for socialization outside the university and employed a range of emblems and distinguishing signs on everything (such as cups, mugs, walking sticks, pipes, etc.) and new rituals like

the *mensur* to show others who they were and strengthen their own sense of belonging. It was also at this time that the meritocracy became an ideology and social value: portraits of the best pupils or those from élite schools were hung in major offices of government as models for the young to emulastet. This was also the era when sport became the means to shape the ideal young intellectual with the notion of *mens sana in corpore sano*.

The third section looks at the history of how women entered university, from the first female graduate in 1678 to today, when the majority of university students are female. The stages of this evolution, with all its setbacks and conflict are followed through changes in legislation, treatises on the subject and individual accounts and memoirs.

The collapse of the *ancien regime* meant students were no longer a privileged group apart and that, as citizens like all the other young, they now participated in the life of the Nation and had to serve it militarily. This is the starting point for the fourth section on Students and Politics, concerning the political involvement of the young over the last two centuries, with exhibits on student battalions in the Napoleonic era; on student participation in 19th century national unification movements, in liberal or nationalistic organizations; in support of or resistance against totalitarian regimes; and on the years of student protest.

The fifth section is on Student Folklore and focuses on the mainly leisure and play-oriented activities promoted by the traditional European student organizations (Goliardia, Faluche, Zofingue, Burschenschaft, Tunos, etc.). Student newspapers, stage plays, posters, clothing, traditional headgear and music are featured. Pressing the keys on a jukebox enables selection of a number of films of 20th century student parties.

The Meus has 23 display cases and 18 monitors offering detailed information on particular aspects and periods of student history. Some 200 newspapers, periodicals or one-off publications may be read; an archive of early student posters from various countries may be accessed. There is a database on over 400,000 students who graduated from Bologna University between 1380 and 2005, on the early centuries of the spread of the university movement through Europe, and much more.

STRESZCZENIE

MEUS Europejskie Muzeum Studentów na uniwersytecie w Bolonii

Europejskie Muzeum Studentów jest oryginalnym i ważnym uzupełnieniem muzeów uniwersytetu bolońskiego. To stała ekspozycja poświęcona historii studentów uniwersytetów europejskich – od ich początków po czasy współczesne.

Wszystkie eksponowane przedmioty posiadają wartości symboliczne i metaforyczne, powstały w określonych okolicznościach i w określonym czasie. Kryterium wyboru eksponatów stanowiła ich zdolność reprezentowania zachowania i kultury typowej dla świata studenckiego.

Wystawa podzielona jest na 5 sekcji podsumowujących rozwój życia studenckiego.

Celem części pierwszej – *Powstawanie tożsamości studenckiej* – jest ukazanie aspektów zaistnienia postaci studenta.

W części drugiej wystawy – *Zdyscyplinowanie zachowania, umysł i ciało* – ukazane są przemiany, które nastąpiły od końca średniowiecza. Dotyczą one roli studenta w życiu publicznym, jego relacji z instytucjami, a także oczekiwań społecznych i politycznych, mających na celu kontrolę kształcenia.

Część trzecia – *Kobiety na uniwersytecie* – jest spojrzeniem na historię kształcenia uniwersyteckiego kobiet, poczynając od pierwszej kobiety, która ukończyła uniwersytet w Bolonii w roku 1678 aż do czasów współczesnych, gdy większość studiujących stanowią kobiety.

Część czwarta – *Studenci i polityka* – przedstawia polityczne zaangażowanie młodzieży w ciągu ostatnich dwóch wieków: od batalionów studenckich w czasach napoleońskich do lat protestu studentów w XX wieku.

Część piąta – *Studencki folklor* – ukazuje czas wolny od nauki, ukierunkowany na zabawę i rozrywkę, organizowane przez tradycyjne studenckie stowarzyszenia.

Gian Paolo Brizzi

Fig. I. Meus Logo, graphics by Yari Teggi

Fig. II. Early female graduates: portrait of Laura Bassi (1732)

Fig. III. Chancellor of student university in ceremonial dress (15th century)

Fig. IV. Students and religion: Saint Catherine of Alexandria, patron saint of students in many countries. Haut-relief in copper, Flanders (15th century)

Fig. V. Section devoted to student associations (19th century)

Fig. VI. The Béjeune (orig. *bec jaune*, meaning “yellow beak”, hence “chick”), humorous name for freshmen. Bronze by J.I. Grandville, ca. 1825

Fig. VII. Emile Louis Picault, Escholier du Quartier Latin. Bronze statuette (Paris, 1875)

Fig. VIII. Studentenbude: recostruction of a typical student room (Germany, ca. 1890)

Fig. IX. Detail from section on Students and Politics. Mural by Marco Cechet

Fig. X. Section on Student Folklore (the juke box enables selection of documentaries on student parties)