

The Virgin and the Dynamo: the growth of medieval studies in North America 1870–1930

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IN THE EARLY fall of 1870 Henry Adams, having recently returned from a disappointing summer in Europe and looking forward to building a literary-political career for himself in Washington, went out from Boston to Cambridge at the urging of family and friends to discuss with Charles W. Eliot the latter's invitation to join the small Department of History at Harvard as assistant professor of medieval history.

'But, Mr. President,' urged Adams, 'I know nothing about Medieval History.' With the courteous manner and bland smile so familiar for the next generation of Americans, Mr. Eliot mildly but firmly replied, 'If you will point out to me any one who knows more, Mr. Adams, I will appoint him.' The answer was neither logical nor convincing, but Adams could not meet it without overstepping his privileges. He could not say that, under the circumstances, the appointment of any professor at all seemed to him unnecessary.¹

Thus began a seven-year period in the life of Henry Adams as lecturer in History 2, which bridged the gap between Ephraim Whitman Gurney's lectures in classics and Henry Warren Torrey's lectures in modern history. His description of his first-year's experience strikes a familiar chord in the memory of almost every teacher.

For the next nine months the Assistant Professor had no time to waste on comforts or amusements. He exhausted all his strength in trying to keep one day ahead of his duties. Often the stint ran on, till night and sleep ran short. He could not stop to think whether he were doing the work rightly. He could not get it done to please him, rightly or wrongly, for he never could satisfy himself what to do.²

Although Adams was appointed more for his breeding and European experience, his energy and raw talent, than for any particular expertise, earlier sections in his *Education* betray a taste for things medieval. He thus spoke out of modesty when he reflected that at "the moment he took his chair and looked his scholars in the face, he had given, as far as he could remember, an hour, more or less, to the Middle Ages."³ Still, Adams knew of no textbook in his field and was unacquainted with any other medievalist. He could discern no natural social evolution in the period. He could isolate no great truths, no lessons that would advance career or help perfect a philosophy of life. Within the limits of 500 to 1500 and with a belief that the stuff of history concerned political and legal developments, his pedagogy had all the discipline and direction of unguided antiquarian research. What structure it had was largely a residue of his academic experience in Berlin.

Henry Adams's inability to think of anyone in America competent to teach medieval history reveals the limits either of his environment or his definition of history. By 1870 the Philadelphia publisher and private scholar, Henry Charles Lea, had already produced three works in the field of medieval religion and was on the way towards his major work on the Inquisition. But competence aside, there was no one with more expertise than Adams who could have been appointed. Lea, already forty-five and partner in his firm for a quarter century, would not have been attracted

to a teaching career. John W. Draper, who was just beginning to produce his works in intellectual history, was nearing retirement at City College of New York and was, in any case, professor of Chemistry and Physics. America had no scholars of standing in medieval political, constitutional, or institutional history, such as existed in England, France, or Germany. Many lecturers dealt with the Middle Ages as part of a larger sequence, and many professed knowledge on some aspect of medieval society, for example law, architecture, language, literature, or church history. The fact remains that Henry Adams was the first American academic who made the Middle Ages his territory and whose sole responsibility was to teach medieval history.

When Adams left his chair at Harvard in 1877, the situation was rapidly changing. Under the guidance of President Eliot, Harvard was acquiring a number of medieval specialists. One of Henry Adams's students, Ephraim Emerton, who took his doctorate at Leipzig, continued the teaching of medieval history at Harvard from 1876 until his retirement in 1918. His lectures gradually resulted in a three-volume history of the Middle Ages. In 1874 Charles Eliot Norton was appointed Professor of the History of Art and combined an interest in medieval church architecture with Dante studies. In 1876 Francis James Child, long the Boylston Professor of Rhetoric at Harvard, was made Professor of English and allowed to concentrate his energies on Chaucer and English philology. And in the following year Edward Stevens Sheldon was appointed instructor in modern languages and began his career in Romance philology.

Outside Harvard the scene was also changing. Herbert Baxter Adams (1850–1901), a distant cousin of Henry Adams, took his doctorate at Heidelberg in 1876 and began a teaching career at Johns Hopkins that lasted until his death. His research interests were in political, legal, and institutional history, particularly the Anglo-Norman development and what he felt to be a similarity between German villages of the early Middle Ages and New England villages. Thus, although grounded in the Middle Ages, the thrust of Herbert Adams's work was modern and American and had little direct influence on the field of medieval history. His medieval interests found fuller recognition through his students, particularly Charles Homer Haskins and Andrew Stephenson whose son, Carl Stephenson, later studied under Haskins at Harvard and went on to a brilliant career at Wisconsin and Cornell.

George Burton Adams (1851–1925), after graduating from Yale Divinity School in 1877, began teaching at the newly founded Drury College in Springfield, Missouri, and in 1883 published *Medieval Civilization*, his first of several textbooks. Soon after completing his doctorate at Leipzig (1886) he began an influential teaching career at Yale. G. B. Adams was primarily interested in English constitutional history, which long remained the core of Yale's program. One thinks in particular of George E. Woodbine, Sydney K. Mitchell (who apart from his syllabus in English constitutional history concentrated his attention on taxation in medieval England), and William Huse Dunham.

George Lincoln Burr (1857–1938), who graduated from Cornell in 1881, joined its faculty that year as lecturer in medieval history, and shared with Draper and Lea an interest in religious history, science, and magic. He produced *The Literature of Witchcraft* (1891) and edited with introduction *Materials toward a History of Witchcraft Collected by Henry Charles Lea*. His major interests, however, were in political history of the Carolingian and early Capetian periods. His interest in heresy and witchcraft were passed on to his student, Austin P. Evans, who made that topic a major focus of his seminar at Columbia (1915–51).

Few of these scholars who began their careers in the 1870's and 1880's could confine their teaching to the medieval period, for the needs of small departments would not permit that degree of specialization. They did, however, make the Middle Ages their area of research and graduate

teaching and in that way firmly established the field of medieval history in America.

In many respects medieval literary studies in American universities were more advanced than medieval history. The revision of the classical curriculum in mid-nineteenth-century America and the corresponding expansion of courses in modern languages led naturally to a study of the “classics” of vernacular literature—*Beowulf*, Chaucer, Dante, *Song of Roland*, *Nibelungenlied*. The emphasis was on their quality as great literature, not on their medieval character or the society that produced them. Still, they were being studied in the third quarter of the nineteenth century. For example, Francis Andrew March, who became Professor of English Language and Comparative Philology at Lafayette College in 1856, pioneered the study of Anglo-Saxon. Thomas Craine, who like March abandoned a law career for college teaching, established the teaching of medieval Spanish and German literature at Cornell in 1868. Child’s shift at Harvard to Chaucer and English philology was paralleled at Johns Hopkins by the appointment of A. Marshall Elliott (1844–1910) in the same year (1876). In addition to his own work in Romance languages, Elliott helped create the Modern Language Association (1883) and began his *Modern Language Notes* (1886). Johns Hopkins rapidly became the center for Romance languages and literature. Among the early products of Elliott’s seminar was Henry Alfred Todd who, after teaching at Johns Hopkins and Stanford, established the chair of Romance philology at Columbia. In medieval Italian literature, the teaching succession of Longfellow, Lowell, and Norton made Harvard the American center for Dante studies in the nineteenth century. By 1900 courses were available on various aspects of medieval culture and civilization in almost every major university in America.

Medieval scholars in America at the turn of the century shared certain characteristics that were already in evidence in the career of Henry Adams. First, the interest and even the expertise of those engaged in medieval studies was often self-acquired. They were individuals who were developing what was for them a new and uncharted area and in so doing moved away from the interests and perspectives of their teachers. What formal graduate training they had—and this was a second characteristic of crucial importance to medieval studies in America—was largely derived from European study, principally in Germany. Berlin and Leipzig were by far the most attractive centers of study for future American medievalists, but Göttingen, Munich, Heidelberg, Freiburg, and Jena were also popular. The pattern was to attend several universities. Francis Child was among the first to seek German learning, going in 1849 for two years of study at Göttingen and Berlin. The large majority of American scholars in the second half of the nineteenth century who became medievalists followed the same path to the German universities, occasionally studying at Paris or Rome as well.⁴ Even some who later specialized in English literature preferred to study in Germany rather than England. For most, the period of study in Germany lasted only two or three years, but the thorough grounding in the classics obtained by most Americans of that generation permitted some to complete their doctorate within that time.

The lure of German education for Americans in the two generations before the First World War had considerable effect on the shape of medieval studies in America. As with most areas of graduate study, the method of instruction modeled itself after the German seminar and what was thought to be the German ideal of scientific knowledge for its own sake. Narrative accounts of events and personalities were considered superficial. Respectable research centered on problems in interpretation of the sources and earlier scholarship. Moreover, German influence shaped the content of medieval studies in America. Concern for sources and original documents led to the importation of the ancillary skills, such as numismatics, diplomatics, and paleography. In this regard the seminars of Wölfflin and Traube at Munich were especially significant for the development of manuscript studies in America. Medieval history in America adopted the European concentra-

tion on political and constitutional development. Perhaps the model of the German university also encouraged a tendency towards centralization and school traditions through which a small number of prominent professors were expected to influence their individual disciplines, establish the guidelines for research, and provide the students from which the teachers of the next generation would come.

A third characteristic was the close association of medieval studies and law. Both Francis March and Thomas Craine had abandoned law careers for medieval literature. Henry Adams had assumed that the most meaningful use to which the Middle Ages could be put was the study of customary and common law as preparation for law school, and some of those who made the practice of law their vocation, most notably Oliver Wendell Holmes, M. M. Bigelow, and—for a time—Henry Osborn Taylor, contributed important volumes to American medieval scholarship. The twin subjects of law and governmental institutions continued well into the twentieth century as the heart of medieval history for most American scholars.

A final characteristic of medievalists at the turn of the century—and a characteristic that continued into the 1930's—was a high proportion of private scholars. The Middle Ages provided abundant material for antiquarian interests, from numismatics to ecclesiastical monuments. Beyond such prominent private scholars as Henry Charles Lea, Henry Osborn Taylor, and—in his early career—Arthur Kingsley Porter were scores of others whose articles filled the scholarly journals and for whom the Middle Ages were an absorbing pastime. Even those who held university teaching positions often came from families of wealth. Medieval studies was without any obvious practical application and was, therefore, eminently suitable, a harmless hobby of the leisure class.

This is not to say that it did not also, at times, embody a philosophy of life. One of the influences that attracted scholars and students alike was the romantic appeal of medieval times. Those centuries were distant, filled with colorful pageantry, violent drama, imposing castles, knights on horseback, and fair damsels in distress. The complete “otherness” of medieval society was fascinating. In an era dedicated to the ideas of rationality, science, and technology, it was thought, the study of the medieval period was strikingly impractical. The New World, it was believed, had not inherited its governmental institutions, its social organization, or its religion, and thus the medieval period held no answers for the origin or future of America. It was not our history. It was, as Henry Adams observed, the most foreign of worlds to the American soul. Yet already in the nineteenth century “medievalism” attracted Americans, particularly Easterners of private means. The Gothic Revival in England entered America and gave birth to gothic train stations, municipal buildings, churches, and especially gothic mansions, those expressions of new wealth in search of aristocratic lineage.⁵

The European travel that American wealth provided, whether for study or personal enrichment, nourished a romantic and emotional attachment to medieval monuments and ideas. Notre Dame in Paris, St. Denis, Chartres, Carcassonne, and other sites exercised a powerful influence on the imagination of medievalists in America as elsewhere. Henry Adams's *Mont-Saint-Michel and Chartres* shared a dream with Victor Hugo, Viollet-le-Duc, and the Gothic renaissance in France. In time the mystique of French medieval monuments contributed to a shift, in the twentieth century, through which graduate study in France became more common for medievalists than study in Germany, and the field of Anglo-French medieval studies grew at the expense of medieval Germany.

For some, the romantic appeal became a conscious rejection of the modern in favor of the medieval. The Gothic Revival in church architecture had its internal counterpart—a growing religious conservatism that expressed itself in high-church Anglicanism and conversions to Catholicism. For every medievalist like Lea, who decried the injustice and corruption of the medieval

Church, there were many others who found in its liturgy and architecture a meaning and beauty lacking in Protestant austerity. The rejection of the Puritan heritage had a political and economic parallel. As with Henry Adams, so with many of that generation and the next, there was a growing distrust over the effects of industrialization on the quality of human life and misgivings about the values and direction of modern society. Nineteenth-century critics of industrialization called for a return to the personal dignity and pride in one's work that some associated with the medieval craft guilds.⁶ Others with more conservative social views, when faced with the growing problems of modern society, preferred the magic of King Arthur's court to the brash ingenuity of Twain's Connecticut Yankee. Henry Adams's contrast of the structure and social values of the societies that respectively centered on the Virgin and the dynamo became for many medievalists in the early twentieth century a political program. The most prominent architect of American Gothic, Ralph Adams Cram, expressed this view in 1934:⁷

The declension of the Renaissance-Reformation-Revolution era, with its issuance in materialism, industrialism, capitalism, rationalism, democracy and the delusion of progressive evolution, has now been in process for some twenty years, and its final extinction can hardly be postponed for another generation. Meanwhile the new era is coming to birth, the dim prophecies may be traced back, though hidden and often in misleading guise, for a full century, but since the close of the Great War which definitely marked the end of one era and the beginning of the swift glissade of its termination, the manifestation of the new energies that are to condition the coming age and the overt actions that embody them have been increasingly clear, while the last six years have accomplished more of revelation and accomplishment than the whole preceding century.

This revelation taking shape in prophecy finds its clearest formulation in certain books, all published within the last year. They are, first "The Revolt of the Masses" by Ortega y Gasset; "American in Search of Culture" by William Aylott Orton, and "The End of Our Time" and "Christianity and the Class War" by Nicholas Berdyaeff. Here scholarly works, published independently, one by a Spaniard, one by an Englishman, the other two by a Russian. They are all trenchant criticism and indictment of contemporary civilization, and all of them, directly or by implication, hark back to the Middle Ages as the high point in human development during the past two thousand years, while the Spaniard and the Russian state definitely that the next era, now coming to birth amid the ruins of an ending age, will be, in so many words, a New Mediaevalism.

This alternative solution to the Marxian analysis of modern civilization, for all its escapism and fantasy, gave an ideological focus to the common interests of some medievalists of the early twentieth century. Doubts over the ability of industrialization and technology to produce a utopia increased during and after the First World War, a period that also produced the first national organization of medievalists of all disciplines. But in that development disillusionment and ideological escapism played only a minor role, if any. The principal force was the growing interest in professional research, fostered by the same scientific ideals that some medievalists abhorred in other areas of modern life. By the time of Henry Adams's death in 1918 the various branches of medieval studies were firmly established in the major American universities. Part of this was a natural result of diversification and specialization within all areas of higher education. Much of it was a direct result of the maturing quality of research, writing, and teaching. American medieval scholarship had finally come of age and could begin to command the respect of European scholars.

In the generation 1885–1915 only a handful of schools could yet offer extensive work in

medieval studies at the graduate level, but the quality of scholarship was impressive. Throughout much of that period Johns Hopkins remained a leading center under H. B. Adams in History and A. Marshall Elliott in Romance languages. Among those who took doctorates at Johns Hopkins in this period and were influenced by their teaching were Charles Homer Haskins and Henry Alfred Todd. Similarly, Yale had the combined talents of G. B. Adams in History and A. S. Cook in English Literature, and for a time Charles Upson Clark in Latin. By 1893 Columbia had acquired James Harvey Robinson in intellectual history and H. A. Todd in Romance languages, from whose seminars came Lynn Thorndike (Columbia) and G. L. Hamilton (Cornell), respectively. From 1890 Wisconsin maintained offerings in medieval history, first with Haskins, then with George C. Sellery and Dana C. Munro. In 1898 Chicago began to build its program, first with John Matthews Manly in English literature and Phillip S. Allen in German and Latin literature, then with James Westfall Thompson in History, Charles E. Beeson in Latin literature, and William A. Nitze in Romance languages.

No university in that generation, however, could offer the depth in medieval studies possessed by Harvard: Ephraim Emerton, Charles Gross, and eventually C. H. Haskins in History; Francis Child and George Lyman Kittredge in English; C. E. Norton, Edward Sheldon, Charles Grandgent, and J. D. M. Ford in Romance languages; and Edward K. Rand and Clifford Herschel Moore in Latin literature. Little of this was a direct outgrowth of Henry Adams's lectures, although he had influenced both Emerton and Gross as well as the private scholar, H. O. Taylor. Emerton and Gross had no students comparable to those of Francis Child, whose seminar at Harvard shaped both Manly and Kittredge. Most of this depth in medieval studies was a result of the educational vision of Charles Eliot, Harvard's president from 1869 to 1909. By 1910 Harvard's medieval offerings could not be equalled, and for much of the twentieth century that pre-eminence tended to make Cambridge the capital of medieval studies, exercising a magnetic force on teachers and students.

Harvard's predominance in medieval scholarship as well as the expansion of medieval studies in the early decades of the twentieth century is reflected in the careers of Kittredge and Haskins. Other universities produced scholars of reputation—Columbia was especially crucial for the development of intellectual history and the history of science—but no other graduate program quite staffed the medieval scene as did Harvard's.

George Lyman Kittredge was a product of Harvard College, from which he graduated in 1882. He began teaching there in 1888 and, with the death of Child in 1896, took on the senior responsibilities. In 1917 he became Gurney Professor of English literature. In addition to his own publications on Chaucer, Kittredge's influence can be seen in those who studied at Harvard during his years there: Fred Norris Robinson at Harvard; A. C. L. Brown at Northwestern, John Strong Perry Tatlock, who taught at Michigan, Stanford, Harvard, and Berkeley; Carleton Brown at Bryn Mawr, Minnesota, and New York University; John L. Lowes at Harvard; Karl Young at Wisconsin and Yale; Howard R. Patch at Smith; Harry Morgan Ayres at Columbia; George R. Coffman at Grinnell, Boston University, and North Carolina, Roger S. Loomis at Columbia; Francis Peabody Magoun, Jr. at Harvard, and many others.

Charles Homer Haskins, who exercised a similar influence on the field of medieval history, was a testimony to Eliot's ability to strengthen Harvard's program from without. Haskins was a child prodigy; he learned Latin and Greek from his father and entered college at the age of twelve. When his application to transfer to Harvard was rejected, he went to Johns Hopkins, where he received his B.A. (1887) and Ph.D. (1890). In graduate school he developed an interest in American history and wrote his dissertation in that field. But after graduation his medieval interest, nourished

by Adams and his reading of Lea, became primary. He began teaching at Wisconsin in 1890 and by 1892, at the age of twenty-three, was full professor. After a period of study in Paris at the Ecole des Chartes, Haskins accepted a professorship at Harvard (1902) and subsequently became Dean of the Graduate School of Arts and Sciences (1908), Gurney Professor of History (1921), President of the American Historical Association (1922), Chairman of the American Council of Learned Societies (1923), President of the newly founded Mediaeval Academy (1926), and Henry Charles Lea Professor of Mediaeval History (1928). His major publications were all written in the last half of his academic career, in the decade from 1918 to 1929, but his teaching influence spanned a much longer period. From his seminar came Carl Stephenson (Wisconsin and Cornell) Sidney Packard (Smith), Charles H. Taylor (Harvard), Frederick Artz (Oberlin), Joseph Strayer (Princeton), Gaines Post (Wisconsin and Princeton), and Lynn White (U.C.L.A.).⁸

The First World War brought some profound changes to medieval studies in America. Thousands of young Americans from all social levels suddenly came into direct physical contact with Europe and its medieval past. The landscape and its monuments were foreign and exciting, yet they also represented the heritage from which American culture had come. Curiosity was stimulated, and upon their return there was a dramatic increase within American universities in the demand for courses on the language, literature, history, and art of European society west and south of the Rhine. Library holdings and teaching staff were greatly augmented, and medieval studies benefited from that growth.

The most striking effect of the war upon American medieval studies was the radical reorientation away from Germany to France, Belgium, and England. What Leipzig, Berlin, Göttingen, Halle, and Heidelberg had been to the previous generation, Paris, Oxford, and Ghent now became to the post-1918 generation. To the German contribution of textual analysis and scientific rigor were added the legal, social, economic, and literary perspectives of French, Belgian, and English scholarship. Traube was not forgotten, but German methods and technical disciplines were made more meaningful by the visions of Henri Pirenne and, eventually, Marc Bloch.

By 1920 medieval studies in America had come of age. Harvard, for all its prominence in the medieval area of various disciplines was perhaps less sensitive than others to the missed opportunities produced by geographical and disciplinary isolation. Some medievalists were aware that they could profit as much through lateral association with their counterparts in other disciplines and regions as through vertical contact with non-medievalists in the same discipline. Thus the movement to establish a national, interdisciplinary organization to promote research in the medieval period did not originate at Harvard, although it did draw upon the reputation of Harvard medievalists, especially Rand and Haskins. The idea was conceived in 1921 by George R. Coffman, then of the English Department at Grinnell College, Iowa, and initially fostered through a research committee of the Modern Language Association on "The Influence of Latin Culture on Mediaeval Literature."⁹

There were originally two aims. The first was to encourage the study of medieval Latin as an important but neglected research tool for understanding medieval vernacular languages and literature. Insufficient attention, it was felt, had been given by classicists to the morphology and literature of late and medieval Latin. No grammars or readers existed to aid in its study and teaching. To make matters worse, the shift away from the classical curriculum in American universities and colleges had eroded knowledge of Greek and Latin that were the linguistic foundation of the Middle Ages and a *sine qua non* of medieval studies.

The second aim was to coordinate research in the medieval area so that duplication could be avoided, closer cooperation be achieved among scholars, and defined research goals be set that

might ultimately lead to a synthesis of medieval civilization. It gradually became apparent to Coffman and others that both aims could best be achieved through the creation of a national, interdisciplinary organization of medievalists from all fields and through the publication of a journal.

The MLA research committee, appointed by John M. Manly of Chicago in 1921 under the chairmanship of Coffman, immediately addressed itself to two tasks. The first was to aid in the preparation and publication of Charles Beeson's *Primer of Mediaeval Latin*. The second was to diversify the committee. In the summer of 1922 E. K. Rand was asked to become official chairman of the committee alongside three regional chairmen: G. H. Gerould of Princeton, G. R. Coffman of Grinnell, and J. S. P. Tatlock of Stanford—all in medieval English literature. Coffman, as general secretary of the committee, remained the moving force. In the following summer, in order to appeal to a wider group of medievalists, the committee was reconstituted by Coffman, Rand, and Haskins (then chairman of the American Council of Learned Societies) as a standing committee of ACLS on Mediaeval Latin Studies. In addition to Rand, Coffman, Beeson, Gerould, and Tatlock, the committee included the historians Louis J. Paetow of Berkeley, James Westfall Thompson of Chicago, James F. Willard of Colorado, Maurice de Wulf of Louvain (then at Harvard as Professor of History of Philosophy in the Middle Ages), and eventually H. M. Ayres of Columbia, and John Nicholas Brown of Providence, R. I. The committee was thus transformed into the nucleus of a medieval organization representing the fields of English literature, Latin literature, history, and philosophy, with approximately equal representation among the three regional divisions.

One early result that aided in identifying American medievalists and their research interests was the *Bulletin of Progress of Medieval Studies in the United States of America*, produced by Willard at Colorado. The first issue, which appeared in 1924, mentioned some sixty scholars working in medieval studies across America. That first sampling proved that there was already a sizeable constituency for the developing organization.

The central focus of the group, and a means of publicizing its aims, was planned in 1924 and made feasible through the financial support of J. N. Brown. Throughout the summer and fall of that year, Brown and Ralph Adams Cram took the initiative in organizing an official medieval association. At the meeting of the committee in January, 1925, at Columbia University, the gift of \$3,000 by Brown convinced the group of the desirability of moving toward incorporating itself as a learned society that could support the publication of *Speculum: A Journal of Mediaeval Studies*. In contrast to the American Historical Association, the Modern Language Association, or the American Philological Association, the Committee on Mediaeval Latin Studies wanted to create an *endowed* society, capable of supporting its projects and ensuring their completion. The remainder of that year was spent in fund raising, most given by Brown himself. For reasons of legal simplicity and for the ability to have little or no limit on the amount of property held by the corporation, the State of Massachusetts was chosen as the place of incorporation. After some debate, the group decided to call itself an academy, an idea originally put forward by P. S. Allen and L. J. Paetow.

On December 23, 1925, at the offices of Messrs. Curtis & Curtis, Attorneys at Law, in Boston, the papers were signed for the incorporation of a Mediaeval Academy of America. Acting as official incorporators were Brown, Coffman, Cram, Haskins, Kittredge, Rand, Tatlock, De Wulf, and Francis Peabody Magoun, Jr. As officers for the corporation, the committee and the incorporators selected Rand as president, Brown as treasurer, Cram as clerk, Manly, Haskins, and Willard as first, second, and third vice-presidents, and as councillors: Philip S. Allen, Charles Beeson, George Coffman, Gordon Gerould, Louis Paetow, Arthur Kingsley Porter, William Walker Rockwell, John Ryan, J. S. P. Tatlock, J. W. Thompson, Karl Young, and George Arthur Plimpton. The official stated purpose of the Academy was

to conduct, encourage, promote and support research, publication, and instruction in Mediaeval records, literature, languages, arts, archaeology, history, philosophy, science, life, and all other aspects of Mediaeval civilization by publications, by research, and by such other means as may be desirable, and to hold property for such purposes.¹⁰

The founders of the Academy, particularly Coffman, Rand, and Brown, had worked hard to make the society a truly national, interdisciplinary, and service-oriented organization. It was not to be associated with any particular region or institution. If its nucleus was composed of leading medievalists and philanthropists, that was only a means of insuring its continued existence and attracting a wider membership. Circumstances, many of them unforeseeable, gave the Academy, however, an Eastern bias and a Harvard image. Rand, who was the logical choice for editor-in-chief of *Speculum*, was at Harvard, which therefore became the editorial home of the journal. Before the founding of the Academy, Magoun had been chosen managing editor. The first issue of *Speculum* appeared in January, 1926. By 1925 both Coffman and Tatlock, long the representatives of the central and west-coast regions, had moved to Boston; Coffman to Boston University and Tatlock to Harvard. The nine incorporators, whose status as founders gave them considerable influence in the early years, all lived in or near Cambridge, Massachusetts. The Massachusetts law of incorporation required that the annual meeting for the election of the governing body had to be held in Massachusetts (although other meetings of the corporation could be held elsewhere). And Harvard possessed the largest group of distinguished medievalists and had trained many of the others.

Despite the best intentions, therefore, the geographical and disciplinary circumstances of the founding produced an overwhelming concentration of scholars from Eastern universities (particularly Harvard), from English literature, and to a lesser extent from history. The editorial and advisory boards of *Speculum* were almost half composed of scholars from Harvard and Chicago. Of the twenty-eight members of these boards, almost two-thirds were from English literature and history. Similarly, among the initial thirty-three fellows chosen by the members from their number to honor those who had made distinguished contributions to medieval scholarship or who had played a prominent role in the formation of the Academy, all but seven were from the East Coast and two-thirds were from English and history. Harvard's presence was twice that of any other institution. By contrast, however, the first officers of the Academy continued to reflect a wide regional, professional, and religious diversity.

The decision to create a Society of Fellows did not have unanimous support among the founders. The model of the European academies, learned societies open only to elected fellows, had supporters and opponents, and it was only after considerable debate that the Committee on Mediaeval Latin Studies decided to call their association an academy. European academies were a natural model, for they were endowed institutions for the promotion of scholarly research and had produced exactly the type of monumental projects the Americans wished to undertake. Moreover, it was expected that election to fellowship would bring large donations from those so honored and thus more quickly build the resources of the society.

If the original Society of Fellows reflected a perhaps unavoidable regional and institutional bias (almost half held Harvard degrees), Academy members did make a conscientious attempt to include most areas of medieval studies and to establish a proportion in representation that would reflect the numerical strengths of each separate discipline. English literature was represented by Manly at Chicago, Kittredge, Lowes, Tatlock, and Robinson at Harvard, A. S. Cook and Karl Young at Yale, Gordon Gerould and Robert K. Root at Princeton, Carleton Brown at Bryn Mawr, and Coffman at Boston University. History was represented by Haskins at Harvard, Burr at Cor-

nell, Munro at Princeton, Thompson at Chicago, Thorndike at Columbia, Paetow at Berkeley, Willard at Colorado, Nellie Neilson at Mt. Holyoke, Norman Gras at Minnesota, Thomas Shahan, who had been at Catholic University of America, and H. O. Taylor. Although many of the fellows had a strong interest in medieval Latin and palaeography, that field was specifically represented by Rand at Harvard, Allen and Beeson at Chicago, E. A. Lowe of Oxford and Washington's Carnegie Institute, and C. U. Clark, formerly of Yale and the American Academy in Rome. Medieval art and architecture were represented by Ralph Adams Cram, Arthur Kingsley Porter at Harvard, and Charles R. Morey at Princeton. Finally, Charles H. Grandgent at Harvard was the sole person from the Romance languages. The surprising thing is not that there was so little regional representation from the South, Midwest, and West Coast but that universities like Johns Hopkins and Pennsylvania, which had given and were to give so much to medieval studies, were not represented at all. It is worth noting, however, that in recognition of their importance and contribution to medieval studies, women were present both among the fellows (Neilson of Mt. Holyoke) and on the advisory board of *Speculum* (Cornelia Catlin Coulter of Vassar) from the inception of the Academy."

In addition to the professional academicians, there were a number of non-academic supporters whose financial aid and moral encouragement permitted the Academy to begin and to prosper. Prominent among these were John Nicholas Brown of Providence and Newport, Ralph Adams Cram of Boston, and George A. Plimpton of New York. The Academy owed its very existence to the largess of Brown, who remained its most ardent supporter throughout his life.

The founding of the Mediaeval Academy marked a turning point for medieval studies in America. It was not responsible for the growth in medieval positions nor the corresponding expansion of graduate programs, but it did coordinate research efforts and act as a supra-regional and interdisciplinary society that gave medievalists a sense of identity as members of a defined group with common interests—a phenomenon that existed in no other country at that time. Much of its influence was felt immediately through the development of publication opportunities and direct financial support. It produced *Speculum*, which became the leading American journal of medieval studies. Its monograph series published more than two scholarly works a year. It supported the archaeological research of Kenneth Conant at Cluny and encouraged the *Bulletin of Progress of Medieval Studies*, edited by Willard and later by S. Harrison Thomson. It also helped to create the climate in which large enterprises were brought to completion: C. R. Morey's *Index of Christian Art*, H. A. Wolison's editions and translations of Averroes' commentaries on Aristotle, E. A. Lowe's *Codices Latini antiquiores*, the multi-volume history of the crusades, and many other projects. When, as a result of social, political, and academic conditions in Europe, a number of medieval and Renaissance scholars sought a new home and a compatible academic environment (one thinks of Erwin Panofsky, Ernst Kitzinger, Richard Krautheimer, Willi Apel, Felix Gilbert, Leo Spitzer, Gerhard Ladner, Robert Lopez, Hans Baron, Ernst Kantorowicz, Adolf Katzenellenbogen, Paul Oskar Kristeller, and Ernst Cassirer), they found in the universities, colleges, and institutes of America a world in which the Middle Ages were studied and appreciated not only as a period in its own right but as part of the cultural past of America.

NOTES

*Several scholars made helpful suggestions or provided sources for this paper. I am particularly indebted to Paul Meyvaert, Daniel Rodgers, and Joseph Strayer.

¹ *The Education of Henry Adams* (Boston, 1907; New York, 1931), pp. 293–94.

² *Ibid.*, pp. 299–300

³ *Ibid.*, p. 300.

⁴ Among them Henry Adams, Marshall Elliott, H. B. Adams, Ephraim Emerton, Edward Sheldon, A S. Cook, H. A. Todd, Charles Gross, Henry Osborn Taylor, G. B. Adams, George Lyman Kittredge, James Harvey Robinson, Dana Munro, Charles Upson Clark, John L. Lowes, Philip S. Allen, E. K. Rand, Charles Beeson, and Charles Homer Haskins. Those of this generation who, like George L. Hamilton, limited their European study to Paris, formed a small but important minority. On German influences in American education see Laurence Veysey, *The Emergence of the American University* (Chicago, 1965) and Jurgen Herbst, *The German Historical School in American Scholarship* (Ithaca, 1965).

⁵ On the Gothic Revival and medievalism in nineteenth century America see James Early, *Romanticism and American Architecture* (New York, 1965) and Roger B. Stein, *John Ruskin and Aesthetic Thought in America* (Cambridge, MA., 1967).

⁶ For a perceptive account of the clash of industrial and anti-industrial values in the late nineteenth century see Daniel T. Rodgers, *The Work Ethic in Industrial America 1850–1920* (Chicago, 1974), esp. chapters 3, 5, and the “Epilogue.”

⁷ “The New Middle Ages” (Presidential Address, Mediaeval Academy of America, 1934), in R. A. Cram, *Convictions and Controversies* (Boston, 1935), pp. 258–59. A less apocalyptic but still value-oriented restatement of this theme was made by George Coffman, “The Mediaeval Academy: Evaluation and Revaluation,” *Speculum*, 22 (1947), 446: “The humane spirit which fosters such interests as the Academy represents still centers in these universities (Chicago and Harvard). But today, almost as a bit of cosmic irony, the University of Chicago, despite certain ideas and ideals which have for the past two decades shaped some of its basic educational policies, takes particular pride, as a sequence to this last world war, in its great Institute of Nuclear Physics, devoted to a study of the innermost structure of the atom. And a high point in President Conant’s recent Annual Report emphasizes the importance of attracting, through university and federal grants, the most promising young scholars into specialized fields of the natural sciences and medicine. With such a situation, typical of the non-academic as well as the academic world, one in which the greatest reliance of our nation is on its material power, it may be well . . . to attempt a reevaluation, as we hope through our fears for a return to a rational, peaceful, constructive era. A sense of continuity, a purposive cause which appears to lead in a constructive manner toward a goal better than the present, should characterize the activities of an organization as well as those of an individual.”

⁸ One detects at this early stage in the study of medieval history in America a dichotomy between the stuff of classroom teaching and the spirit that motivated medievalists. The dichotomy was already present in Henry Adams, who centered his classroom teaching on political and legal history in the German manner but whose presuppositions, emotional attachment, and broader view of medieval history are revealed in his *Mont-St.-Michel and Chartres*, i.e., a commitment to cultural history. It was in the artistic and intellectual achievements of the 12th and 13th centuries that Adams saw the value and essence of medieval society against which he judged the modern age and found it wanting. In contrast to the spirit of the Virgin to whom much of the artistic and intellectual products of the high Middle Ages seemed dedicated, the dynamo stood forth as a materialistic, dehumanizing symbol of greed and valueless technology. The contrast of the Virgin and dynamo, of the society of 1200 over against the society of 1900, was the ultimate vision of Henry Adams’s education and the one that influenced the attitudes of Ralph Adams Cram and several of the founders of the Mediaeval Academy of America, as well as Marshall McLuhan, in his *The Mechanical Bride* and *The Gutenberg Galaxy*. However, Adams’s vision of medieval society at its apex took root only in the emotions and historical perspective of subsequent medievalists and occasionally produced works on cultural and intellectual history. The stuff of the classroom experience remained what it had been for Henry Adams: political-institutional history with its concentration on constitutional, administrative, and social development. It is well within the spirit of Henry Adams that Charles Homer Haskins is best remembered for a work in intellectual history, *The Renaissance of the Twelfth Century*, while the best products of his classroom and seminar, such as Carl Stephenson, C. H. Taylor, Joseph Strayer, and Gaines Post, dedicated themselves to administrative and institutional history.

⁹ On the stages in the founding of the Mediaeval Academy of America, in addition to the documentation of the Academy’s files, see George R. Coffman, “The Mediaeval Academy of America: Historical Background and Pros-

pect,” *Speculum*, 1 (1926), 5–18; George R. Coffman, “The Mediaeval Academy: Evaluation and Revaluation,” *Speculum*, 22 (1947), 446–57; F. N. Robinson, “Anniversary Reflections,” *Speculum*, 25 (1950), 491–501.

¹⁰ Quoted from the Charter of Corporation and also reproduced in Coffman, “The Mediaeval Academy,” *Speculum* I (1926), 17.

¹¹ Others had been nominated, such as Bertha Putnam of Mt. Holyoke.

¹² For the subsequent development of medieval studies in America, see C. W. David, “American Historiography of the Middle Ages, 1884–1934,” *Speculum*, 10 (1935), 125–37; James L. Cate, “A Decade of American Publication on Medieval Economic History,” *Progress of Medieval and Renaissance Studies in the United States and Canada*, 16 (1941), 8–26; S. Harrison Thomson, “The Growth of a Discipline: Medieval Studies in America,” in *Perspectives in Medieval History*, ed. K. F. Drew and F. S. Lear (Chicago, 1963), pp. 1–18; and most recently, Karl Morrison, “Fragmentation and Unity in ‘American Medievalism,’” in *The Past Before Us. Contemporary Historical Writing in the United States*, ed. Michael Kammen (Ithaca, 1980), pp. 49–77.