The History of the University of Copenhagen
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Status, organisation and governance

The University of Copenhagen was inaugurated on 1 June 1479, after King Christian I was granted approval for its establishment by Pope Sixtus IV. The instrument of the formal establishment of the University was the Royal Charter of 4 October 1478, in which the King directed Master Peder Albertsen, who became the University's first Rector Magnificus, to gather a number of learned men and with them, to commence the work of the University. The new institution was granted Royal patronage and enjoyed a high degree of autonomy, as the Charter expressly emphasised the fact that the University was subordinate to neither the officers of the Crown nor the ordinary judicial system. The University's status as an autonomous institution has never been formally rescinded; on the contrary, it has permeated all of the later charters, etc., that have regulated the University's circumstances.

With its four traditional faculties (Theology, Law, Medicine and Philosophy), the University resembled most of the other late-medieval universities. It was organised along the lines of the Paris university, but with the Cologne university as its immediate model. This model, with its strong German influence on the way in which academic matters were organised in Denmark, was to remain characteristic until after World War II.

As was the case with all of the other medieval universities, the University of Copenhagen was a part of the universal Roman Catholic Church in 1479. Make no mistake: there was no question of a single, unified church organisation, which corresponded to the Danish National Evangelical Lutheran Church of the present day; the medieval Danish church consisted of a large number of institutions - churches, schools, monasteries, hospitals, etc. - and, from 1479, a university. All of these institutions were legal persons, with their own economies and their own laws, and in general they enjoyed considerable autonomy. The unifying factor was the fact that they were all under the supervision of the bishop in whose diocese they were located. Thus, there was nothing remarkable in the fact that it was Archbishop Jens Brostrup who ratified the statutes of the University on 28 November 1479, and it was a matter of course that the Bishop of Roskilde was to be the Chancellor of the new University until the Reformation. Thereafter, the supervision of the University became the responsibility of the State, which over the years exercised its authority through various specially-appointed officials - university chancellors or patrons - until after the adoption of the Danish Constitution, when it was passed on to the department deemed appropriate to the exigencies of the day.

As the University's economy was derived from its own income until the end of the 19th Century it was a true autocracy, and external powers - be they the Church or the State - only intervened in its internal affairs to a modest extent. Since the State has increasingly assumed the economic responsibilities of our universities over the past hundred years, the State's direct and ever-more detailed economic control of the universities has been growing. This has, however, not led to any revision of the underlying concept of our universities as autonomous institutions. It can thus be claimed that the new Universities Act, which enters into force in 2005, and which with its concepts of independent universities under vigorous, effective leadership, is an expression of the desire to reinforce the historical role of the universities as autonomous institutions under external supervision.

This form of governance - which has characterised the University until the present day, when it is the Rector Magnificus and Consistory who share responsibility for the operation of the entire University, whereas the Deans and Faculties are responsible for the teaching and research - remained fundamentally intact from 1479 to 1970. But the composition of the different bodies, the methods of election and their procedures as they were expressed in the University's statutes in
1479, in the charters of 1537, 1732 and 1778, and the royal ordinance on rectorial elections, etc., of 1936 have, of course, been adjusted over the years.

From the organisational point of view, the University we find in the statutes of 1479 was very different from that of today. The University was an academic republic - a state within the State - whose members elected their leadership for themselves, i.e., the rector and the dean of each faculty. They comprised a special council, from which today's Consistory has developed. The University had its own laws, courts and prison systems. The University's population was to bear distinctive ecclesiastical attire without unnecessary splendour, and was forbidden to bear arms.

The main business of the University was the pursuit of academic studies, first and foremost theological and, to a lesser extent, judicial. It was empowered to award the traditional, internationally-recognised academic degrees (Doctor's, Master's, Licentiate's and Baccalaureate). The whole of the University's business was conducted in Latin, which made possible the continuous wandering from university to university that was so widespread and that helped to emphasise the European universities' status as de facto international organisations.

Thus, the Roman Catholic university was primarily oriented away from Denmark and its influence on Danish society was only modest.

As will be clarified below, the advent of the Reformation in 1536 meant a radical change in the position and role of the University in Danish society. But from the organisational point of view, the University was to remain an academic republic along the lines of the medieval model far into the future. Thus, it was not until 1771 that it lost its own jurisdiction. And only in the second half of the 20th Century did the last traces of what was called "professorial power" in the 1960s finally disappear.

First and foremost, the effects of the Universities Governance Act of 1970/73, which is discussed in more detail below, were the radical democratisation and decentralisation of the universities' governing bodies. The most important elements of the Universities Act of 1993, and of the new Universities Act which enters into force in 2005, are a variety of measures intended to strengthen the University's leadership at all levels.
Function and activities
I 1479-1788

Academic degrees and examinations
Where we consider research and teaching to be two equally vital parts of the University's activities today, teaching was clearly the more important of the two in the Middle Ages, and this also applied to the University of Copenhagen. Even though significant scientific results were attained in older times, it was not until the end of the 1700s that research began to have any real impact as one of the two main elements in the life of the University.

The oldest University was housed in the old Copenhagen Town Hall at the corner of Nørregade, where Bispegården ("The Bishop's Palace") is now located.

In Denmark, the Reformation of 1536 was of decisive significance to the University of Copenhagen. It was reorganised, granted a considerable fixed income and a number of permanent chairs. The role of the University was clearly defined in the charter of 1537: from being a minor part of the all-embracing European church, the University's main assignment was to become the ideological prime mover of the new-born Danish-Norwegian State Lutheran Church and the Alma Mater of the church's pastors.

This was tangibly expressed by the University moving into the Bishop of Zealand's commodious residence at Frue Plads ("Our Lady's Square"), i.e., the present University quadrangle, which was to frame the University's activities over the coming 350 years.

The abundant funding provided a solid foundation for extensive self-government, which was exercised by the Consistory as the supreme governing body, where in older times all of the permanent professors had chairs under the leadership of the Rector Magnificus. The individual faculties were correspondingly led by deans. New charters in 1732 and 1788 adjusted - without radically changing - the scope of the University's activities.

Due to the prevailing trend of the national economy, and to trends in the humanities and sciences, the University's economy (which had hitherto been excellent) entered a decline after 1800. Thus, the dramatically increasing costs of building, first as a consequence of the 1807 bombardment and subsequently to meet the demands of the natural sciences, had to be covered by the use of the University's capital, which had been largely consumed by the beginning of the 20th Century. One contributory factor in this context was the rapid increase in the teaching staff, in step with academic growth. From this time on, by far the greater part of the financial foundation for the University's operation was to come from the State, although the significance of contributions from private foundations and contracts with private companies also started to increase.

From 1817, the growing number of teachers made it necessary to introduce the election of representatives to the Consistory, etc., although the form of governance that had been introduced after 1536 prevailed until 1970.
Vocational examinations
The Reformation started a trend in which the University became the State University, with the education of government officials as its primary duty. As a consequence of this - and in parallel with the traditional academic degrees (Baccalaureate, Licentiate's, Master's and Doctor's) - a system of vocational examinations was developed towards the end of the 1700s. This had started in 1629, with a directive stating that no-one could be ordained as a pastor unless he could produce certification of his knowledge, signed by three professors, two of whom had to be theologists. This led to the introduction in 1675 of a formal examination, the theological degree. A slightly different system can be found in medicine, where it was decided in 1672 that the medical doctorate was to be a condition for practising medicine - a system whose effects can be traced down to the present day, as the number of medical doctors still exceeds the total number of all other doctors. The new charter of 1732 also laid down rules stipulating an examination in the various medical disciplines, before permission to defend a doctoral thesis could be granted.

Up to the 18th Century, The Faculty of Law, which normally only had a single professor, had been of little significance. This was changed in 1736, when a true judicial vocational examination in Latin was introduced, together with a "judicial examination for laymen," i.e., a practical judicial examination in Danish, which was retained until 1936. Finally, the Master's degree, which had normally been the qualification necessary to become a headmaster in the Latin schools, was defined in the new Danish code of law (Danske Lov 1683).

The University received a new charter in 1788, which in many ways came to determine the scope of the University's activities up to the second half of the 20th Century. It revised the existing examinations and introduced specific vocational examinations in all faculties. This same occasion also saw the introduction of external examiners – as society's guarantee for the quality of a university education, which had attained considerable authority in society. The 1788 charter can be said to have completed the reforms through which the university's most important assignment became the education of the State's officials.

Disciplines
From its inception in 1479, the University consisted of faculties of the theological, judicial, medical and philosophical disciplines, although as there were no permanent chairs and as sources are sparse, it is not possible to say anything more specific on the teaching, except that it probably proceeded along the same lines as in Cologne and at other German universities.

One crucial facet of the reorganisation that followed in the wake of the Reformation was that the University now gained a number of permanent professorships, and a number of directives on teaching were introduced at the same time.

The three professors of theology covered the traditional theological disciplines, primarily Bible studies, dogmatics, etc. One of them, Niels Hemmingsen (1513-1600) attained international renown, and his works were translated into a number of languages.

The sole professor of jurisprudence mainly occupied himself with natural, Roman and canon law, whereas education in and studies of Danish law were conducted outside the University, in the form of an apprenticeship in administration and the judicial system.
Until 1600, the two professors of medicine had been largely occupied with studies of the medicine of antiquity, as expounded by such authorities as Hippocrates and Galen. Proper empirically-based research was introduced at the University of Copenhagen after 1600, when such names as Thomas Bartholin (1616-1680), who discovered the lymphatic system, and Niels Stensen (1638-1686), who discovered the parotid gland's duct to the oral cavity and the secretion and purpose of the lachrymal fluid, attained international fame. Stensen also gained prominence for the studies that led to the foundation of geology as a science.

The Faculty of Philosophy, which ranked lowest according to the understanding of the period - thus, its professors only received about two-thirds of what the theologians were paid - functioned as a kind of preparatory school for the other faculties, especially for The Faculty of Theology. The faculty's seven to nine professors taught Latin, Greek, Hebrew, philosophy, rhetoric and ethics, all of which were subjects additional to theology. Teaching in mathematics and astronomy - i.e., astrology - also played an important part. It is appropriate in this connection to mention the greatest Danish scientist of the 16th Century, the astronomer Tycho Brahe. His reputation is largely due to his publication in 1573 of De nova stella: it was a sensation in a time when it was believed that heaven and earth had been created once and for all, eternal and immutable, and it heralded the dawn of an entirely new scientific cognition.

Although new disciplines (poetry, French, linguistics and literature, metaphysics, etc.,) were introduced from time to time, the only enduring chair was the professorship in history and geography, inaugurated in 1635.

Many of the professors at The Faculty of Philosophy were superb scholars, and a few of them attained international recognition, such as Olaus Roemer (1644-1710), who was the first to measure the speed of light.
II The 19th Century

The charter of 1788 set the terms of reference for the University's transformation, from a classical European university, into a modern institution for research and education. Moreover, the 19th Century marked the beginning of a hitherto unfinished phase of growth. The University of 1788 had a teaching staff of about 20 permanent teachers and around 1,000 students. By 1900, the numbers had grown to about 60 and roughly 4,000, respectively.

The formal framework of the University's academic degrees and vocational examinations remained largely unchanged throughout the century, although it was, of course, expanded to accommodate developments in research and education.

Danish medical training was reorganised over the years 1838-1842. The independent Academy of Surgery was established in 1785, first and foremost to satisfy the army's and navy's needs for practical and proficient doctors. The teaching at the Academy was good, even better than that offered by The Faculty of Medicine. One indication of this was that the greater part of the Faculty's graduates also took the Academy's examination, whereas the converse did not occur to the same extent. That is why, in 1838, it was decided to introduce a common vocational examination for the two institutions, which decision was carried to its logical conclusion four years later, when the Academy of Surgery and The Faculty of Medicine were integrated into a new faculty of medical science at the University.

The Faculty of Law was changed by the introduction of the vocational examination in political science (cand.polit.) in The Faculty of Jurisprudence and Political Science. A Royal Decree of the same year introduced an innovation, which was to prove to be of enormous significance, i.e., the magisterkonferens. The background to this was the very inflexible vocational examinations, which made it extremely difficult for students studying the new disciplines, not least of which were the sciences, to achieve a formal conclusion to their education. This was made possible by the magisterkonferens, which authorised the University to compose individual examinations in the disciplines for which no vocational examination had been appointed. In this way, the magisterkonferens emerged as an instrument important to the continuous expansion of the University's disciplines within the humanities and, in particular, natural sciences. It was not until 1883 that the latter received a true vocational examination, when the grammar-school teacher's examination of the 1788 charter, with its strong emphasis of the classical languages, was replaced by the skoleembedseksamen (cand.mag.) (Danish M.A. for secondary-school teachers), where modern languages and, not least, natural sciences played an important part.

From the early years, a few of the sciences (mathematics, astronomy and, to some extent, physics) had been taught by The Faculty of Philosophy, whereas botany and chemistry had been taught as additional subjects at The Faculty of Medicine. The charter of 1788 improved the position of the natural sciences, and 1829 saw the establishment of the Polytechnical College. Its purpose was to take care of the education of graduate engineers, in close collaboration with the University. It is characteristic of the powerful German influence that this vocational education, in similarity to other practically-oriented courses, e.g., in veterinary and agricultural science and pharmacology, were taught by special colleges, whereas the more theoretical courses remained at the University, where an independent faculty of mathematical and natural sciences, with chairs in astronomy, mathematics, physics, chemistry, zoology, botany and mineralogy, was inaugurated in 1850.
The disciplines taught by The Faculty of Philosophy were considerably expanded by the addition, e.g., of the modern languages, Danish and the other Scandinavian languages and literature, comparative literature, archeology, music and the history of art, and psychology, to name some of the most important.

In the sciences, the University of Copenhagen attained prominence in the international scientific community during the course of the 19th Century thanks to a number of eminent professors in many disciplines. The greatest name of the century was, of course, H. C. Oerstedt (1777-1851), who attained world-wide renown for his discovery of electro-magnetism.

III The 20th Century

By the beginning of the 20th Century, the University of Copenhagen had become well-established in both the international scientific community and the Danish community, whose pastors, lawyers, economists and other civil-servants, doctors, grammar-school teachers, etc., it had taught. The growth that had hallmarkmed the previous century continued until about 1960. Thereafter, the University was subjected over the space of a few years to a radical process of renewal, which transformed it from a relatively closed society, whose students were recruited from the same narrow sector and to which its graduates subsequently returned, to a democratic institution of mass-education.

This shows clearly in the numbers of students: there were about 6,000 in 1960, and the proportion of school-leavers who obtained their General Certificates of Education at the Ordinary or Advanced Levels was about 6-7%. 40 years later, the corresponding figures are about 33,000 and over 50% of the youth population of a given year take an entrance examination to further or higher education. One consequence of this was that the centuries-old principle of free access to the University's courses could no longer be upheld: restricted admission to medical studies was introduced in 1976, and to all studies, the following year. One of the consequences of this was that it has become exceptionally difficult to gain access to certain studies; whereas there are not enough applicants to fill the places in others.

There has been a similar trend in the teaching staff: the roughly 50 professors in 1900 had increased to about 140 in 1966 - a number that was to be doubled over the next decades. After 1960, the number of non-professorial teachers, which had hitherto been modest, rose dramatically, so that the number at the beginning of the 1990s had risen to nearly 1,800. It is important to note that their status changed at the beginning of the 1970s, from that of being considered as assistant teachers, to that of in principle having the same rights and duties as the professors, as far as research, education, degrees, etc., were concerned. This growth was still more dramatic among the technical and administrative personnel (TAP), whose number came to exceed that of the scientific personnel (ScP).

This affected the University's governance, which had by and large remained unchanged over the centuries. The Folketing (the Danish Parliament) adopted the Universities’ Governance Act in 1970, the scope of which was extended in 1973 to cover almost all institutions of higher education. This Act indicated a radical break with the past and was characteristic, insofar as influence and competence were decentralised to governing bodies at the institute, faculty and university levels. The composition of these bodies was generally 50% ScP, 25% TAP and 25% students. The influence of the rectors and deans was correspondingly reduced. An even more radical step was the placing of responsibility for the
development of courses and curricula with boards of studies, on which the teachers and students each have half of the places.

From 1993, the Universities’ Governance Act was replaced by the Universities’ Act, which reinforced the universities’ leadership at all levels (rector, deans and heads of institute and supervisors, e.g., by reducing the competency of the governing bodies and of the TAPs and students thereon. On the other hand, the boards of studies have remained largely unchanged, but with the not insignificant amendment that the desire for stronger leadership is also reflected here, as the chairman is now a specially-appointed supervisor.

These increases in the numbers of students and teaching staff have led to a correspondingly spectacular expansion of the University’s accommodation. This began in the latter half of the 19th Century when, after completion of the main University quadrangle (1836), the University library (1861) and the Zoological Museum (1870), the University started building on parts of the Copenhagen Embankment, e.g., the Observatory (1861), the Botanical Garden (1870) and the Geological Museum and Chemical Laboratory (1893), to name the most important buildings. They were joined in 1890 by the new Polytechnical College in Sølvgade (“Silver Street”).

The University moved its building activities north of the lakes at the beginning of the 20th Century. The new Copenhagen University Hospital (1906) can be considered to mark the start. Otherwise, it was mainly the natural sciences that moved north, e.g., the Department of Theoretical Physics (1916) and the new medical and natural-sciences university library (1938).

Next, the period 1960-1980 witnessed a hitherto unseen level of building activity, in which major building complexes (the Zoological Museum, H.C. Ørsted Institutet, August Krogh Institutet and Panum Institutet) grouped around Nørre Fælled (“The North Common”) came to house a number of medical and scientific disciplines. This included the new Copenhagen University Hospital, which is still the central university hospital. At the same time, when the Technical University of Denmark moved to Lundtofte, the University took over the old Polytechnical College in Sølvgade, for the botanical disciplines, and the Østervold (“East Embankment”) complex, in which geography and geology are housed.

The humanist disciplines, which had received a very large proportion of the new students after 1960, were largely housed in temporary, rented premises in central Copenhagen. During the 1970s, they were gathered into a major complex (KUA, University of Copenhagen Amager) in the northern part of Amager Fælled (“Amager Common”). As the question of the future physical location of the University in the 1960s was still undecided, its location to Amager was temporary from the very start. Similarly, the associated building activities were only considered temporary for which reason, the overall quality was less satisfactory, which in turn gave rise over the years to many complaints about the poor working environment and indoor climate. A decision was therefore taken in the mid-1990s to build an entirely new KUA on the same site - the country's hitherto largest single university building project. The first stage of the new KUA was taken into use in the autumn of 2002. The last years of the 1990s were generally marked by area extension: apart from the new KUA, a GEO-Center was established in Østervold 10, and a new Biotech centre, at Tagensvej. It was also decided to rent most of the old City Hospital between the Botanical Garden and the lakes, in which to establish a centre for public health and a number of disciplines within the social sciences.
At the beginning of the 21st Century, the University of Copenhagen, with its 35,000 students and more than 7,000 scientific, technical and administrative employees, its more than 100 educations distributed over as many institutes and other sections, stands forth as Denmark’s largest educational institution.

In 1997, the University linked up with the other institutions of further education in the metropolitan area and in Scania, Sweden, to form the University of Oresund, the purpose of which is to provide these institutions with a framework for increasingly integrated collaboration on research and education.

In 2007, The University of Copenhagen came to include two new faculties: the Faculty of Life Sciences and the Faculty of Pharmaceutical Sciences. The new faculties are the result of a merger with The Royal Veterinary and Agricultural University and The Danish University of Pharmaceutical Sciences. The Faculty of Life Sciences and the Faculty of Pharmaceutical Sciences will, together with the Faculty of Health Sciences and the Faculty of Science, make up one of the largest Health and Life Science Centres in Northern Europe.