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# The First Decades of Charles University

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On November the 6<sup>th</sup> through to November the 7<sup>th</sup>, a series of lectures was held at the Academy of Sciences of the Czech Republic, titled "*The First Decades of the Prague University: Transforming Intellectual Space in 14<sup>th</sup>-century Central Europe.*" This series of lectures concerning Charles University (back then known as Prague University) aimed to analyse and uncover the influence that Prague University had on Europe during its first decades of establishment. The series included lectures centred on specific literary sources prepared by specialist scientists from universities from the Netherlands, Germany, Austria, Cyprus and Italy, as well as lecturers from Charles University; the texts often concerning the views which were held of Charles University by its neighbouring countries in its first decades of founding.



Charles University is renowned for being the oldest University to the North of the Alps and to the East of the Rhine, with it being founded by King Charles IV of Bohemia and the Romans in 1348. It originally only consisted of four faculties – theology, the liberal arts, law and medicine; not the 17 faculties which are in existence today. In 1882 the University was split into two, a German part and a Czech, due to the lectures being taught in German rather than Czech. The University has had its periods of wealth as well as decline; with the first decades of the University being one of renown and esteem, supported by both monarchy and church. But by 1491 the strength of Charles University can be seen to decline, with students and professors refusing to attend a direct consequence to the western schism. Despite these periods of uncertainty the University has survived to remain an established centre for education in Europe in the 21<sup>st</sup> century. Famous graduates have included Franz Kafka or the first President of the Czechoslovak Republic Professor Tomáš Garrigue Masaryk. In addition to this Albert Einstein was appointed Professor of Theoretical Physics in the German part of the University in 1911.



The first day of this informative event consisted of lectures focused around the individual Henry Totting of Oyta and other Masters of Prague University. The second day focused on Prague University viewed by foreigners, the transmission of knowledge and other historical aspects. The block of lectures held in the morning on the second day titled *“Prague University Viewed by Foreigners”* was especially interesting. With Charles University in the 21<sup>st</sup> century being attended by approximately 1400 Erasmus students in the academic year 2013-2014, the studying of past views affectively shows the continuation of international interest in this particular University. The key texts included *The Charters of Foundation of Prague and Naples: The Models and Their Reuse* by Fulvio Delle Donne from the University della Basilicata, *Umberto Decembrio: A Humanist in Prague at the End of the Fourteenth Century* by Daniela Pagliara (University of Chieti-Pescara), and *John of Marignolli and the Historiographical Project of Charles IV* by Irene Malfatto from the SISMEI, Florence. Notably this lecture focused mainly on the Italian view of the University from the fourteenth century. Possibly as Italy was the centre of education and arts in Europe at this time, with the University of Bologna being a model for Charles University. Through the study of the texts as well as the information discussed at the presentation it can be viewed that Charles University at this time was a slowly emerging educational power, with the Faculty of Arts, Theology and Medicine gaining international acclaim. In addition to this, the texts studied in this lecture showed Prague to still possessed its majestic appearance in the medieval era as it does today.

This series of lectures successfully explored and analysed the growth of Charles University within its first decades, and its influence on other educational centres within both Central and Western Europe. Its organisers included The Institute for Medieval Research of the Austrian Academy of Sciences and The Centre for Medieval Studies of the Czech Academy of Sciences and Charles University; individuals responsible for the organisation being Jan Odstrčilík (Austrian Academy of Sciences and Charles University in Prague), Francesca Battista and Riccardo Burgazzi (both Charles University in Prague). With this diverse range of input both individual and literary, this lecture series can be deemed as an overall success.



**Suzanna Knuckey** is a joint honours student studying music and history with archaeology at Bangor University, North Wales. Currently she studies in the department of music, faculty of education at Charles University as an Erasmus student. Her interests include history, art, culture and music, her main instrument being the violin. Suzanna joined the I Forum to become more involved in student life in Prague as well as meet others from different countries and backgrounds.

