

Report of the Annual Meeting Rapports annuels de la Société historique du Canada

Report of the Annual Meeting

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Volume 43, numéro 1, 1964

URI : <https://id.erudit.org/iderudit/300442ar>

DOI : <https://doi.org/10.7202/300442ar>

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Éditeur(s)

The Canadian Historical Association/La Société historique du Canada

ISSN

0317-0594 (imprimé)

1712-9095 (numérique)

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Citer cet article

Hanrahan, J. (1964). Cathedral Schools: The Institutional Development of Twelfth-Century Education. *Report of the Annual Meeting / Rapports annuels de la Société historique du Canada*, 43(1), 61–70. <https://doi.org/10.7202/300442ar>

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CATHEDRAL SCHOOLS: THE INSTITUTIONAL DEVELOPMENT OF TWELFTH-CENTURY EDUCATION

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The great age of the cathedral schools came in the late eleventh and early twelfth centuries.¹ Before that, in the ninth and tenth centuries, the monastic schools had been more important; but there had always been a certain unease about the monastic schools, a certain suspicion that intensive study and especially teaching of the arts was somehow alien to the life of the monk, and the monastic reformers of the eleventh and twelfth centuries were generally opposed to such schools.² Thus it was in the cathedral schools that the great increase of interest in learning, that was so much a part of the late eleventh century, was reflected.

All of the major cathedrals had their schools. A student of the generation around 1100, who sought learning beyond the ordinary and was desirous of hearing the best masters, would have to travel from school to school. To Rheims he might go if he sought instruction in letters, although the best days of the school there were in the past;³ to Tournai, where a popular and well-disciplined school was run by Master Odo "skilled in all the seven liberal arts, but especially in dialectics";⁴ to Lille, where Master Raimbertus, in opposition to Odo, upheld nominalist ideas;⁵ to Noyon, a bit later, to hear the grammatical teaching of Master Guarmondus;⁶ to Laon, to which city the spreading fame of Master Anselm was drawing students of the arts and of theology from all over Latin Christendom;⁷ to Paris, where a disciple of Anselm of Laon,

¹ The best brief treatment of these schools is found in P. Delhaye, "L'organisation scolaire au XII^e siècle," *Traditio*, 5 (1947) 211-268. More lengthy discussion may be found in G. Paré, A. Brunet and P. Tremblay, *La renaissance du XII^e siècle: Les écoles et l'enseignement*, (Ottawa, 1933); E. Lesne, *Histoire de la propriété ecclésiastique*, 5, *Les écoles de la fin du VIII^e siècle à la fin du XII^e*, (Lille, 1940).

² Delhaye, "L'organisation scolaire", 225-228.

³ J. R. Williams, "The Cathedral School of Rheims in the Eleventh Century," *Speculum*, 29 (1954) 661-677.

⁴ Hermannus, *Narratio Restaurationis Abbatiae S. Martini Tornacensis*, P.L., 180, 41.

⁵ Hermannus, *Narratio*, P. L., 180, 42-43.

⁶ Guarmondus may have taught at Tournai in succession to Odo, rather than in Noyon. A letter of Baldricus, Bishop of Noyon, in 1102, was witnessed by magister Wermundus; original in Paris, Bibl. Nat., Collection de Picardie, 291, #4. For evidence linking him with Tournai, and for his grammatical and dialectical opinions, see R. H. Hunt, "Studies on Priscian in the Eleventh and Twelfth Centuries," *Mediaeval and Renaissance Studies*, 1 (1941-1943) 208.

⁷ G. Lefèvre, *De Anselmo Laudunensi Scholastico*, (Mdiolani Aulercorum, 1895), 71-93.

Master William of Champeaux, was attracting hearers in dialectics and rhetoric;⁸ to Chartres, where the glories of the school that had been so famous a century before under Bishop Fulbert were being revived under Bishop Ivo; to anyone of a number of other famous schools he might go to receive instruction in the arts or in the theological wisdom of Scripture and the Fathers, for which the arts were a preparation.

By the end of the twelfth century, however, the situation was very different. Now the eager student was presented with no such variety of schools to choose from, no such need to travel about in order to hear the best masters. Now he need only go to Paris to find gathered there in the one university all the greatest masters in France. In the cathedrals, indeed, schools continued, but run now, save for a few exceptions, by lesser masters as mere preparatory schools for the university. In England Oxford was taking much the same role as was Paris in France, while in Italy the university of Bologna had actually preceded Paris in its development.

This remarkable change in the educational structure during the twelfth century involved, of course, much more than the replacement of many small centers of study by a few larger ones. There was change in the contents of the studies with the introduction, from the ancient Greeks through the Arabs, of a vast amount of science and philosophy unknown to Latin Christendom before this. The accommodation of all this new knowledge into the course of studies meant not only the prolongation of the time spent in school but also the pushing back of the older studies of the arts of grammar and rhetoric into a secondary role, while the old dialectics, based as it was on the small segment of Aristotle's logic that had been the only part known, became the nucleus of an arts program dominated by the study of the whole corpus of the writings of Aristotle.

Such a change in content was, almost inevitably, connected with changes in teaching methods and in the organization of studies. There was a tightening of the old commentary technique and the development of the Disputed Question. Faculties made their appearance and with them a much greater degree of specialization.

Perhaps more important than these changes, however, although certainly not unconnected with them, was the fact that the university was a teaching institution, and simply that. This had not been true of the cathedral schools, or indeed of other earlier schools. For centuries educational institutions had been, as it were, imbedded in larger institutions whose main function was not educational but religious. In the university, on the other hand, the whole purpose was edu-

⁸ J. T. Muckle, "Abelard's Letter of Consolation to a Friend (*Historia Calamitatum*)," *Mediaeval Studies*, 12 (1950) 176-179.

cational. The university might, indeed be an ecclesiastical body, but it fulfilled its religious function in and through its educational one. Thus in the institutional order the change from cathedral school to university marked an innovation of the first importance. It was an innovation that has since been much studied from the point of view of the end result, the university, but not so much from that of its beginning, the cathedral school.

Thus, Philippe Delhaye, in an excellent article on the educational organization of the twelfth century, saw the main reason for the downfall of the cathedral schools and the rise of the universities in the spread of the *licentia docendi*. He linked this with other factors we have already mentioned :

En effet, la license a tout d'abord permis de multiplier les maîtres, de varier les programmes et de les élargir. Les maîtres-agrégés vont se multiplier dans un même centre d'étude et ils finiront même par étouffer l'enseignement de l'école capitulaire. D'autre part, ils se grouperont avec leurs étudiants pour conquérir et défendre leurs droits corporatifs contre le pouvoir civil d'une part, contre le pouvoir du chapitre d'autre part.⁹

Now, this argument is admirable as far as it goes. But it does not explain why the cathedral schools succumbed so easily. It does not explain the changes that had already taken place in these schools themselves.

When in 1113 Anselm of Laon forbade Abelard to teach in that city, or when in 1121 Alberic prevented Walter of Mortagne from conducting a school in Rheims, this was done for good academic reasons. Neither master was willing to permit one of his students to begin to teach theology before he had finished his training.¹⁰ But when in the later part of the century Pope Alexander III was promoting the development of the *licentia docendi*, the main concern of many of the scholastics whom the Pope rebuked for refusing to grant the license to others seems to have been to collect payment in return for the permission to teach. Time after time the Pope had to insist that the license should be given freely to qualified persons.¹¹ The very fact that the problem presented itself in these terms indicates clearly enough the change that had already come over the cathedral school.

If, therefore, we are to understand the decline of the institution that had been, at the beginning of the century, the main instrument of higher education, it is not enough to look at the factors that promoted

⁹ Delhaye, "L'organisation scolaire", 260-261.

¹⁰ Muckle, "Abelard's Letter", 180-181; *Vita Hugonis Abbatis Marchianensis*, in E. Martène, *Thesaurus Novus Anecdotorum*, (Paris, 1717), 3, 1712-1713.

¹¹ G. Post, "Alexander III, the *Licentia docendi* and the Rise of Universities," in *Anniversary Essays in Mediaeval History by Students of C. H. Haskins*, (Boston, 1929), 255-278; Delhaye, "L'organisation scolaire", 258-260.

the rise of the university. We must examine more carefully the history of the cathedral school itself. To be satisfactorily done this will require more intensive studies of particular schools. The lack of such studies has been a serious deficiency in all efforts to write the history of education in the twelfth century. Here we can only attempt to see, in a general way, the direction such studies may take.

I have said that in the cathedral school we may see an educational institution imbedded in a religious institution. Properly understood this may explain some of the features of these schools that pose problems for historians.

It is difficult, indeed, to find evidence of the institutional life of the cathedral schools. What John R. Williams has said of the school of Rheims might almost be repeated of any of these schools even in the days of their greatest fame :

As an "institution" the eleventh century school of Rheims is a very elusive entity. In vain does one search charters and official documents for indication of its mere existence. It seems to have received neither bequests of property nor grants of privilege. The prerogatives of its masters and students, its curriculum, and its relations with the townsmen of Rheims are nowhere mentioned. It is only indirectly, through incidental reference to the men who taught or studied there, that we are able to generalize as to the school itself.¹²

Further, as Paré, Brunet and Tremblay have pointed out,

... c'est l'un des traits de ces écoles capitulaires ou épiscopales, de dépendre exclusivement du maître du moment. Que vienne à mourir l'écolâtre éminent et célèbre, ou qu'il s'installe ailleurs, et très vite l'école tombe dans l'oubli.¹³

Can we, then, really speak of the cathedral school as anything more than the result of the effort of individuals? Did it have an institutional permanence?

Such questions find an affirmative answer when we see the school not as a separate institution but as a function of the cathedral chapter. The very absence of documentation may be taken as a measure of the normality of the function. And if the success of the school depended greatly on the abilities of the master, nonetheless its existence and even to some considerable degree its success was institutionalized in the chapter.

Despite the objections of reformers, most of the cathedral chapters of the twelfth century still purported to follow the Rule promulgated by the Emperor Louis the Pious at Aix in 816. According to this rule,

¹² Williams, "The Cathedral School of Rheims", 672.

¹³ Paré, Brunet, Tremblay, *La renaissance du XII^e siècle*, 24.

each chapter of canons was to maintain a school for the young boys, future canons and others, who received their moral and intellectual training there. Moreover, the chapter as a whole was to be a place of study and learning.¹⁴ It would presumably be normal for the one in charge of the school to be also the leading intellectual figure in the chapter itself. Thus there was some guarantee of the existence of the school in the very rule of life of the canons.

Now, certainly we cannot assume that the prescriptions of the Rule of 816 were effectively applied in the eleventh and twelfth centuries. It is perfectly evident that most of the cathedral chapters of the eleventh century were anything but learned bodies. But this very fact made it all the more important to them to have some learned man among them. There could be great practical advantage in this. In dealing with potential benefactors, in political and legal matters, learning could be a very valuable commodity. Thus there could be a strong pressure upon a chapter to attract and hold a learned man. He would run the school, and in order to make this position more attractive to him, and also in order to make his learning more applicable to the problems of the chapter, he would usually be given one of the places of honor in the hierarchy of the chapter organization.

The most common office to be joined with that of master in the school was that of chancellor of the cathedral. In England, where there was a comparative uniformity in the administrative structure of the chapter, the linking of the two offices was a standard part of the constitution of the chapter.¹⁵ In France while it was still the chancellor's office that was most commonly tied to the master's, there were places where the master was archdeacon or chanter rather than chancellor.¹⁶ The connection seems usually to have been merely a *de facto* one. A particular scholastic was given the higher office as well, and this link continued as both offices became vacant at the same time thereafter. But the widespread adoption of this practise and its continuation over generations shows it to have been deeply rooted in institutional necessities. Capitular offices regularly went to members of the local nobility, to relatives of the bishop, in general to men whose connections could be advantageous to the chapter. That there was also

¹⁴ *Concilium Aquisgranense, 816, Institutio Canonorum Aquisgranensis*, ed. A. Werminghoff, *M. G. H., Concilia*, II, i, 308-421, cc. 123, 135, 145.

¹⁵ On the link between the offices of scholastic and chancellor, E. Rathbone, *The Influence of Bishops and of Members of Cathedral Bodies in the Intellectual Life of England*, (unpublished Ph.D. thesis, London University, 1936), 40. On English Cathedral chapters in general and on the chancellor's office, K. Edwards, *The English Secular Cathedrals in the Middle Ages*, (Manchester, 1949); C. R. Cheyney, *English Bishops' Chanceries, 1100-1250*, (Manchester, 1950)

¹⁶ The master was also chancellor in many places, including Chartres, Laon, Tournai, Rheims (in the eleventh century); Archdeacon in Angers, Rheims (in the twelfth century); Chanter in Sens, Le Mans.

room for advancement based on learning is sufficient indication that this was seen as bringing real advantages.

The importance of the practise for the cathedral school must be obvious. The offices given to the master were posts of considerable honor and authority that brought to the one holding them prestige and some wealth along with a good possibility of further advancement. The attractions of such offices were obviously of importance in drawing good men to teach in the cathedral schools. For the students too the fact that their studies could bring them to such offices must have provided a considerable incentive. Thus the system gave a certain guarantee not only of the continued existence of the school but also of its quality. There was hardly a noted school that was not buttressed by some form of this arrangement.

The question immediately arises, then, of the changes brought upon this happy situation by institutional developments in the cathedral chapter during the twelfth century. There were, indeed, several aspects of such developments that might be likely to affect the position of the cathedral school. Here we may look briefly at three of them.

A most obvious change was that the chapters grew in size and wealth. Their archives are filled with records of the donations of properties and revenues made to them, and of their efforts to increase the value of property already held. There was nothing very remarkable in this; it was a normal part of the advance that was going on almost everywhere in the twelfth century. But inevitably it greatly increased the volume of the chapter's business and the responsibilities of its officials.

This effect was intensified by a marked tendency toward a greater formality in business affairs. The parchment work involved in transfers of property and other transactions grew apace. Again there was nothing peculiar to the chapter in this. It was a commonplace feature of the time, and was if anything more true in the affairs of the bishop and diocese as a whole than in those of the chapter.

Connected with these two developments, and perhaps more important from our point of view than either of them, was the constant movement towards what might be called the clarification of function. Here too, no doubt, there was nothing unique in the way the chapter moved, but the movement very definitely brought important changes with it. It can be seen as true of the chapter as a whole. Its function of electing the bishop was clarified during the twelfth century, to the exclusion of others who formerly had had a say in this matter. The chapter became a much more clearly defined body, as it withdrew more and more from its former involvement in diocesan affairs and jealously asserted its own rights even against those of the bishop. In its internal

organization this was the time when the system of individual prebends was elaborated. And the capitular offices, which in older, simpler days had usually been identified with diocesan offices, and several of which had often been exercised by the same man, were now distinguished more clearly from one another and from their diocesan counterparts.¹⁷

Obviously, the position of the master in the cathedral school, whose office had been tied to one or other of the major dignities, was bound to be affected by such developments. This was perhaps especially true where the master was also chancellor. The chancellor's office involved the preparation of documentation needed for the business of the bishop or chapter, and as both the volume and the formalities of the business increased, his functions became more and more onerous. Serving both the bishop and the chapter, and often more the former than the latter, he was placed in a very difficult situation when the chapter's former close ties with the bishop were weakened and the two split apart. The affairs of the chapter had once been almost identical with those of the bishop, but by the third quarter of the twelfth century they were becoming ever more clearly separated. Quite generally there began to appear, either beside or in place of the old *cancellarius ecclesiae*, a new *cancellarius episcopi*, serving the bishop rather than the chapter.¹⁸

Such changes in the office most commonly linked with that of the master were bound to have effects on the position of the school itself. The most drastic effects came, naturally, where the chapter made the decision to abolish the office of chancellor when the bishop's chancellor was appointed. This step had certain advantages for the chapter for it meant that the revenues that had formerly gone to the chancellor could now be used for the common purposes of the chapter as a whole. But where the chancellor had also been master, this meant the abolition of the master's office as well, and the ending of the school.

That a cathedral chapter should make such a decision may seem almost impossible. Nevertheless it happened in Laon and in Tournai, two cathedrals which had had famous schools. I shall be examining the case of Laon at greater length elsewhere; here we shall look briefly at Tournai.

Actually, the cathedral school of Tournai, in its period of greatest fame, the late years of the eleventh century when Master Odo ruled over two hundred students, was remarkable in that the cathedral there

¹⁷ R. Foreville and J. Rousset de Pina, *Du premier concile du Latran à l'avènement d'Innocent III (1123-1198)*, 2, (A. Fliche and V. Martin, eds., *Histoire de l'Eglise depuis les origines jusqu'à nos jours*, IX, ii, Paris, 1953), 289.

¹⁸ This was, of course, only one aspect of the changes in administrative structure taking place at this time, cf. E. Fournier, *L'origine du vicaire général et des autres membres de la curie diocésaine*, (Paris, 1940); same author, *Nouvelles recherches sur les curies, chapitres, et universités de l'ancienne Eglise de France*, (Arras, 1942).

did not have a bishop of its own, the diocese of Tournai being linked to that of Noyon. Odo was succeeded by a line of masters whose names can, at least in sketchy fashion, be traced in the documents.¹⁹ In 1141 the name of Lethbertus, *magister*, is found among the witnesses to a grant made by Symon, Bishop of Tournai and Noyon.²⁰ Then in 1146 Tournai finally was again given a bishop of its own. This was Anselm, formerly Abbot of St. Vincent of Laon (1129-1146), and it was perhaps with a view to the pattern followed at Laon that he named Lethbertus chancellor. Lethbertus was to hold this office at least to 1173,²¹ and for the last decade or so of this period that of chanter as well.²² He was to have a successor as chanter, but none, as far as can be judged from the documents, as chancellor, for the title is not found after 1173. Just about this same time, similar developments were taking place in Laon.

In 1179 Pope Alexander III wrote to the Archbishop of Rheims, commanding him to do something about the situation in Laon and Tournai :

Report has come to us that while formerly, in the church of Laon and that of Tournai, a benefice had been due for the maintenance of the one who ruled the schools, as indeed used to be done in almost all the major churches of France and is still the case in some, some little time ago the clergy of these churches, depraved by avarice, presumed to reduce this benefice to their common use. Because of this, the teacher's stipend being removed, all teaching has ceased.²³

In view of the recent regulation of the Third Lateran Council that a prebend be set aside in all cathedrals for the master who ruled the school,²⁴ the pope commanded the Archbishop to see to the restoration of the former arrangement in Laon and Tournai.

What was done in Tournai as a direct result of this letter, we do not know. Probably there was something done to re-establish the position of *magister scholarum* before the statute agreed on by the chapter and Bishop Stephan of Tournai in 1197. According to this statute the one chosen for the office should be suitable both as to his uprightness of character and his perfect knowledge of letters. He was to be bound to residence, and unless he were sick or grew too old

¹⁹ Lesne, *Les écoles*, 336.

²⁰ *Chartes de l'Abbaye de Saint-Martin de Tournai*, ed. A. d'Herbomez, (2 vols., Brussels, 1898-1901) I, 59-60, #56.

²¹ *Chartes de l'Abbaye de Saint-Martin de Tournai*, I, 119-120, #116, letter of Bishop Evrardus.

²² His name is first found as chanter in a letter of Bishop Giraldus of 1163 : *ibid.*, I, 100, #97. He last appears in this office in the letter of 1173 cited above, n. 21. By 1182 the chanter's name was John : *ibid.*, I, 134-135, #133.

²³ *Quinque Compilationes Antiquae*, ed. A. Friedberg, (Lipsiae, 1882), Comp. II, Lib. V, Tit. III, c. 1.

²⁴ *Concilium Lateranense III*, c. 18, *Conciliorum Oecumenicorum Decreta*, (Freiburg, 1962), 196.

he was to teach Scripture and at least the major disciplines. He was to choose an assistant, literate and of good character, to run the school under his direction, and he must provide for this man's support. It would therefore be licit for him to turn to his own use all the revenue of the school.²⁵

Such a statute shows evidence of a sincere effort to follow the papal directives regarding the role of the master. But the very fact that it had to be so formally drawn up shows that the old institutional advantages that had supported the school were gone. It could now be maintained only by the exercise of authority, papal and episcopal.

Where the office of chancellor did not disappear, the change in the school was less clearly marked. An example of this can be found in Chartres. There the office of chancellor had been held in the first half of the twelfth century by a line of famous masters. Bernard of Chartres had been followed by Gilbert of La Porrée, and then by Thierry of Chartres, younger brother of Bernard. Their successors in the later half of the century were lesser figures, but the offices of master and chancellor were still tied together.²⁶ By 1166, however, there is found along with the chancellor of the cathedral a chancellor of the bishop as well.²⁷ Indeed, for a time, from at least 1187 to 1193, the office of chancellor of the cathedral was left vacant.²⁸ What happened to the famous school during this time we do not know. It is noteworthy, however, that while the office was once again filled from about 1200,²⁹ none of the thirteenth-century chancellors can be definitely said to have taught in the school themselves.³⁰ They shared, with the chanter, the right to determine appointments of masters to the school,³¹ but the day was past when great masters could find an opportunity to exercise their talents and a forum in which to express their ideas in the combined offices of master and chancellor of Chartres.

²⁵ A. Miraëus, *Opera Diplomatica, Codex Donatorum Piarum*, (Bruxelles, 1624) II, 981, cited in Delhaye, "L'organisation scolaire", 248.

²⁶ A. Clerval, *Les écoles de Chartres au moyen-âge, du V^e au XVI^e siècle*, (Mémoires de la Société Archéologique d'Eure-et-Loire, XI, Chartres, 1895), 172-174; 280-283.

²⁷ Clerval, *Les écoles de Chartres*, 283.

²⁸ Clerval, *Les écoles de Chartres*, 283-284.

²⁹ Clerval, *Les écoles de Chartres*, 284.

³⁰ Clerval, *Les écoles de Chartres*, 323, argues that the chancellor did often teach during this time. The only evidence he adduces, however, is drawn from the obituary notices of two of them. Pierre de Roissy, chancellor from about 1204 to 1211, is said to have been a doctor in Holy Scripture and an excellent preacher, *ibid.*, 328, but this does not really give us much assurance that Pierre, who had taught at Paris but abandoned his teaching to become a preacher, returned to teaching at Chartres. Still more vague is the notice on Pierre desChamps which tells us that it is to be believed that Pierre, clothed with the white stole of confessors, as a true professor of religion, has been admitted into the heavenly choir, *ibid.*, 330; presumably in the thirteenth century as in the twentieth it was possible to profess religion without being a professor in the academic sense.

³¹ Clerval, *Les écoles de Chartres*, 323.

What was true of Laon and Tournai and Chartres must have been true of many other cathedral schools as well. The kind of development that they underwent during the twelfth century must have been very much affected by the institutional changes that took place in the chapters of which the schools were functions. The process of clarification of function was at work here too, and it effectively separated the offices of chancellor and master. The schools continued, but without their old importance.

But if the old institutional arrangements that had protected the schools decayed, why, it may be asked, were not new ones worked out? Why were the papal efforts to give legal support to the position of the schoolmaster given such minimal backing in most chapters? The answer seems to be that the very success of the cathedral schools, and still more that of the universities, undermined the position of the master in the chapter. His learning had formerly been of value to his fellow canons precisely because it was something rare. With the increase of learning this value of the schoolmaster almost disappeared. Now any well-run chapter would have several members who rejoiced in the title of master, a title which indicated the educational heights they had reached but did not imply that there were actually teachers.³² Often these men had training in law which the schoolmaster lacked, and their value to the chapter was made relatively greater than his by this fact as well as by the fact that most of their time was not consumed, as his was, in the classroom. No longer, therefore, was the need felt to attract outstanding masters to the school, whether by offering them high posts in the chapter or by any alternative means. No doubt the lower school was still needed, but no extraordinary talent was regarded as necessary in order to teach there. As to the higher studies, it was evident that the universities could serve this purpose satisfactorily, and the cathedral chapters were, on the whole, quite willing to let them do it.

³² Some did teach, of course, but they seem to have been a small minority. Clerval, *Les écoles de Chartres*, 284, considers most of them as teachers, but of the fifteen masters he lists in Chartres for the period 1155-1200, only for one is there any evidence of this, *ibid.*, 284-288. Similarly only for one of the twenty-two masters whose name are found in documents from Laon in the second half of the twelfth century is there any indication that he taught there. Generally speaking therefore it is not safe to assume, at least with regard to the period after 1150, that because there were masters in a certain place there must have been a school there.