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**Heidelberg University**, officially the **Ruprecht Karl University of Heidelberg**, (German: *Ruprecht-Karls-Universität Heidelberg*; Latin: *Universitas Ruperto Carola Heidelbergensis*) is a public research university in Heidelberg, Baden-Württemberg, Germany. Founded in 1386 on instruction of Pope Urban VI, Heidelberg is Germany's oldest university and one of the world's oldest surviving universities. It was the third university established in the Holy Roman Empire.

## Founding

Seal of the *Ruperto Carola Heidelbergensis*

Motto in English "Always open"



In 1386, Heidelberg University was founded by Rupert I on instruction of Pope Urban VI who demanded modeling it after the ancient University of Paris.

The Great Schism of 1378 made it possible for Heidelberg, a relatively small city and capital of the Electorate of the Palatinate, to gain its own university. The Great Schism was initiated by the election of two popes after the death of Pope Gregory XI in the same year. One successor resided in Avignon (elected by the French) and the other in Rome (elected by the Italian cardinals). The German secular and spiritual leaders voiced their support for the successor in Rome, which had far-reaching consequences for the German students and teachers in Paris: they lost their stipends and had to leave.

Rupert I recognized the opportunity and initiated talks with the Curia, which ultimately led to a Papal Bull for foundation of a university. After having received, on 23 October 1385, permission from pope Urban VI to create a school of general studies (Latin: *studium generale*), the final decision to found the university was taken on 26 June 1386 at the behest of Rupert I, Count Palatine of the Rhine. As specified in the papal charter, the university was modeled after University of Paris and included four faculties: philosophy, theology, jurisprudence, and medicine.

On 18 October 1386 a special Pontifical High Mass in the *Heiliggeistkirche* was the ceremony that established the university. On 19 October 1386 the first lecture was held, making Heidelberg the oldest university in Germany. In November 1386, Marsilius of Inghen was elected first rector of the university. The rector seal motto was *semper apertus*—i.e., "the book of learning is always open." The university grew quickly and in March 1390, 185 students were enrolled at the university.

## Late Middle Ages

Between 1414 and 1418, theology and jurisprudence professors of the university took part in the Council of Constance and acted as counselors for Louis III, who attended this council as

representative of the emperor and chief magistrate of the realm. This resulted in establishing a good reputation for the university and its professors.

Due to the influence of Marsilius, the university initially taught the nominalism or *via moderna*. In 1412, both realism and the teachings of John Wycliffe were forbidden at the university but later, around 1454, the university decided that realism or *via antiqua* would also be taught, thus introducing two parallel ways (*ambae viae*).

The transition from scholastic to humanistic culture was effected by the chancellor and bishop Johann von Dalberg in the late 15th century. Humanism was represented at Heidelberg University particularly by the founder of the older German Humanistic School Rudolph Agricola, Conrad Celtis, Jakob Wimpfeling, and Johann Reuchlin. Æneas Silvius Piccolomini was chancellor of the university in his capacity of provost of Worms, and later always favored it with his friendship and good-will as Pope Pius II. In 1482, Pope Sixtus IV permitted laymen and married men to be appointed professors in the ordinary of medicine through a papal dispensation. In 1553, Pope Julius III sanctioned the allotment of ecclesiastical benefice to secular professors

## Reformation and modern era

Martin Luther's disputation at Heidelberg in April 1518 made a lasting impact, and his adherents among the masters and scholars soon became leading Reformationists in Southwest Germany. With the Electorate of the Palatinate turn to the Reformed faith, Otto Henry, Elector Palatine, converted the university into a Calvinistic institution. In 1563, the Heidelberg Catechism was created under collaboration of members of the university's divinity school.

As the 16th century was passing, the late humanism stepped beside Calvinism as a predominant school of thought; and figures like Paul Schede, Jan Gruter, Martin Opitz, and Matthäus Merian taught at the university. It attracted scholars from all over the continent and developed into a cultural and academic center. However, with the beginning of the Thirty Years' War in 1618, the intellectual and fiscal wealth of the university declined. In 1622, the then-world-famous Bibliotheca Palatina (the library of the university) was stolen from the University Cathedral and taken to Rome. The reconstruction efforts thereafter were defeated by the troops of King Louis XIV, who destroyed Heidelberg in 1693 almost completely.

As a consequence of the late Counter-Reformation, the university lost its Protestant character, and was channeled by Jesuits. In 1735, the Old University was constructed at University Square, then known as Domus Wilhelmina. Through the efforts of the Jesuits a preparatory seminary was established, the Seminarium ad Carolum Borromæum, whose pupils were also registered in the university. After the suppression of the Jesuit Order, most of the schools they had conducted passed into the hands of the French Congregation of Lazarists in 1773. They deteriorated from that time forward, and the university itself continued to lose in prestige until the reign of the last elector Charles Theodore, Elector Palatine, who established new chairs for all the faculties, founded scientific institutes such as the Electoral Academy of Science, and transferred the school of political economy from Kaiserslautern to Heidelberg, where it was combined with the university as the faculty of political economy. He also founded an observatory in the neighboring city of Mannheim, where Jesuit Christian Mayer labored as director. In connection with the four hundredth anniversary of the university, the elector approved a revised statute book that several professors had been commissioned to prepare. The financial affairs of the university, its receipts and expenditures, were put in order. At that time, the number of students varied from 300 to 400; in the jubilee year, 133 matriculated. As a consequence of the disturbances caused by the French Revolution, and particularly because of the Treaty of Lunéville, the university lost all its property on the left bank of the Rhine, so that its complete dissolution was expected

## 19th and early 20th century

This decline did not stop until 1803, when the university was reestablished as a state-owned institution by Karl Friedrich, Grand Duke of Baden, to whom the part of the Palatinate situated on the right bank of the Rhine was allotted. Since then, the university bears his name together with the name of Ruprecht I. Karl Friedrich divided the university into five faculties and placed himself at its head as rector, as did also his successors. During this decade, Romanticism found expression in Heidelberg through Clemens Brentano, Achim von Arnim, Ludwig Tieck, Joseph Görres, and Joseph von Eichendorff, and there went forth a revival of the German Middle Ages in speech, poetry, and art.

The German Students Association exerted great influence, which was at first patriotic and later political. After Romanticism had eventually died out, Heidelberg became a center of Liberalism and the movement in favor of German national unity. The historians Friedrich Christoph Schlosser and Georg Gottfried Gervinus were the guides of the nation in political history. The modern scientific schools of medicine and natural science, particularly astronomy, were models in point of construction and equipment, and Heidelberg University was especially noted for its influential law school. The university as a whole became the role model for the transformation of American liberal arts colleges into research universities, in particular for the then-newly established Johns Hopkins University. Heidelberg's professors were important supporters of the Vormärz revolution and many of them were members of the first freely elected German parliament, the Frankfurt Parliament of 1848. During the late 19th century, the university housed a very liberal and open-minded spirit, which was deliberately fostered by Max Weber, Ernst Troeltsch and a circle of colleagues around them.

In February 1900, the Grand Duchy of Baden issued a decree that gave women the right to access universities in Baden. Thus, the universities of Freiburg and Heidelberg were the first ones to allow women to study.

In the Weimar Republic, the university was widely recognized as a center of democratic thinking, coined by professors like Karl Jaspers, Gustav Radbruch, Martin Dibelius and Alfred Weber. Unfortunately, there were also dark forces working within the university: Nazi physicist Philipp Lenard was head of the physical institute during that time. Following the assassination of the liberal German-Jewish Foreign Minister Walther Rathenau, he refused to half mast the national flag on the institute, thereby provoking its storming by communist students

## **Nazi Germany**

With the advent of the Third Reich in 1933, the university supported Adolf Hitler and the Nazis like all other German universities at the time. It dismissed a large number of staff and students for political and racial reasons. Many dissident fellows had to emigrate and most Jewish and Communist professors that did not leave Germany were deported. At least two professors directly fell victim to Nazi terror. On 17 May 1933, members of the university faculty and students took part in book burnings at *Universitätsplatz* ("University Square") and Heidelberg eventually became infamous as a NSDAP university. The inscription above the main entrance of the New University was changed from "The Living Spirit" to "The German Spirit", and many professors paid homage to the new motto. The university was involved in Nazi eugenics: forced sterilizations were carried out at the women's clinic and the psychiatric clinic, then directed by Carl Schneider, was involved in Action T4 Euthanasia program.

The heads of the university helped in the deportation of Jewish men, women and children directly to the gas chambers.

After the end of World War II, the university underwent an extensive denazification.