

Maior (or Maioris), John | Encyclopedia.com

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(frequently cited as **JEAN MAIR**) (*b.* Gleghornie, near Haddington, Scotland, 1469; *d.* St. Andrews, Scotland, 1550)

logic, mathematics, natural philosophy, history.

Maior received his early education in Haddington, whence he passed to God's House (later Christ's College), Cambridge, and then to the University of Paris, where he enrolled at the Collège Ste. Barbe about 1492; he completed his education at the Collège de Montaigu. He received the licentiate in arts in 1495 and the licentiate and doctorate in theology in 1506. In 1518 Maior returned to Scotland, where he occupied the first chair of philosophy and theology at Glasgow; in 1522 he was invited to the University of St. Andrews to teach logic and theology. Attracted back to Paris in 1525, he taught there until 1531, when he returned again to St. Andrews. He became provost of St. Salvator's College in 1533 and, as dean of the theological faculty, was invited to the provincial council of 1549, although he could not attend because of advanced age.

Maior spent most of his productive life in Paris, where he formed a school of philosophers and theologians whose influence was unparalleled in its time. Himself taught by nominalists such as Thomas Bricot and Geronymo Pardo and by the Scotist Peter Tartaret, Maior showed a special predilection for nominalism while remaining open to realism, especially that of his *conterraneus* (countryman) [John Duns Scotus](#). To this eclecticism Maior brought a great concern for positive sources, researching and editing with his students many terminist and Scholastic treatises and even contributing to history with his impressive *Historiae Majoris Britanniae, tam Angliae quam Scotiae* (Paris, 1521). His students included the Spaniards Luis Coronel and his brother Antonio and Gaspar Lax; the Scots Robert Caubraith, David Cranston, and George Lokert; and Peter Crokart of Brussels and John Dullaert of Ghent. They and their students quickly diffused Maior's ideals of scholarship through the universities of Spain, Britain, and France, and ultimately throughout Europe. In theology Maior was unsympathetic to the Reformers (he taught the young [John Knox](#) while at Glasgow) and remained faithful to the Church of Rome until his death.

Maior's importance for physical science derives from his interest in logic and mathematics and their application to the problems of natural philosophy. He became an important avenue through which the writings of the fourteenth-century Mertonians, especially Bradwardine, Heytesbury, and Swineshead, exerted an influence in the schools of the sixteenth century, including those at Padua and Pisa, where the young Galileo received his education. Among Maior's logical writings the treatise *Propositum de infinito* (1506) is important for its anticipation of modern mathematical treatments of infinity; in it he argues in favor of the existence of actual infinities (*infinitaactu*) and discusses the possibilities of motion of an infinite body.

Maior also composed series of questions on all of Aristotle's physical works (Paris, 1526), based on "an exemplar sent to me from Britain" and thus probably written between 1518 and 1525; it is a balanced, if somewhat eclectic, exposition of the main positions that were then being argued by the nominalists and realists. Maior's commentaries on the theories; but he remained basically Cartesian. *Sentences* are significant for their treatment of scientific questions in a theological context; they were used and cited, generally favorably, until the end of the sixteenth century.

BIBLIOGRAPHY

I. Original Works. Hubert Élie, ed., *Le traité "De l'infini" de Jean Mair* (Paris, 1938), is a Latin ed., of the *Propositum de infinito* with French trans., intro., and notes. Some of Maior's works are listed in the *Dictionary of National Biography*, XII (1921–1922), 830–832. That list has been emended by R. G. Villoslada, S.J., "La universidad de Paris durante los estudios de [Francisco de Vitoria](#), O.P. (1507–1522)," in *Analecta Gregoriana*, 14 (1938), 127–164; and by Élie, *op. cit.*, pp. v–xix. Villoslada also analyzes Maior's philosophical and theological writings and provides a guide to bibliography.

II. Secondary Literature. See Hubert Élie, "Queques maîtres de l'université de Paris vers l'an 1500," in *Archives d'histoire doctrinale et littéraire du moyen âge*, 18 (1950–1951), 193–243, esp. 205–212; and William A. Wallace, O.P. "the Concept of Motion in the Sixteenth Century," in *Proceedings of the American Catholic Philosophical Association*, 41 (1967), 184–195; also A. B. Emden, *A Biographical Register of The University of Cambridge to 1500* (Cambridge, 1963), 384–385.

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