

Albert the Great (d. 1280) was one of the most prolific authors of the Middle Ages. In his own lifetime, Albert's prestige equaled that of the ancients. His contemporary and rather jealous rival, Roger Bacon, praised him as one of the learned or *sapientes*.<sup>1</sup> Siger of Brabant, a younger contemporary sometimes identified as one of Albert's disciples, regarded him as one of the most eminent men in philosophy. Ulrich of Strassburg, Albert's student, described him as "so godlike in every branch of knowledge that he can properly be called the wonder and marvel of our age."<sup>2</sup> The fifteenth-century biographer Rudolph of Nijmegen insists (in Leonine verse) that Albert illuminated the entire world by his understanding of all things capable of being known.<sup>3</sup> While in the West Albert was known as *Doctor universalis* and the "sage and philosopher among the Latins," in the East he was specially recognized as the "teacher of the Franks."<sup>4</sup> His renown only increased following his death, as evidenced by an epitaph at his tomb eulogizing Albert as prince

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1 Roger Bacon, *Opus Tertium*, in *Opera Quaedam Hactenus Inedita*, ed. J.S. Brewer (London: Longman, Green, Longman, and Roberts, 1859), 1: 30.

2 "Vir in omni scientia adeo divinus, ut nostri temporis stupor et miraculum congrue vocari possit": quoted in Hieronymus Wilms, *Albert the Great: Saint and Doctor of the Church*, trans. Adrian English and Philip Hereford (London: Burns, Oates, 1933), 136.

3 "Mundo luxisti quia totum scibile scisti": *Legenda Beati Alberti Magni*, ed. Heribert C. Scheeben (Cologne: Kölner Görres-Haus, 1928), 16.

4 "Latinorum sapiens et philosophus" and "Doctor Francorum": quoted in Angelus Walz and Heribert Scheeben, *Iconographia Albertina* (Freiburg: Herder, 1932), 28.

among philosophers, greater than Plato, and hardly inferior to King Solomon in wisdom.<sup>5</sup> Albert the only man of the High Middle Ages to be called ‘the Great,’ and this title was used even before his death. Before the canonization of Thomas Aquinas in 1323, Albert’s prestige surpassed that all other Scholastics.

Even were we to discount the praise of medieval panegyrists, modern historians, particularly historians of science, have reaffirmed Albert’s importance for natural philosophy or natural science. Lynn Thorndike called Albert "the dominant figure in Latin learning and natural science of the thirteenth century..."<sup>6</sup> while Bernhard Geyer, late director of the Albertus-Magnus-Institut, remarked that Albert was "unique in his time for having made accessible and available the Aristotelian knowledge of nature (already enlarged by the Arabs) and for having enriched it by his own observations in all branches of nature. *Preeminent place in the history of science must be accorded to him forever.*"<sup>7</sup> For William Wallace, "Albert the Great is justly regarded as one of the outstanding forerunners of modern science in the High Middle

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<sup>5</sup> "Philosophorum Princeps ... Maior Platone vix inferius Salomone ...": *Legenda Beati Alberta Magni*, 94.

<sup>6</sup> Lynn Thorndike, *A History of Magic and Experimental Science*. 2<sup>nd</sup> ed. (New York: The Macmillan Co., 1929), 2:521.

<sup>7</sup> Bernhard Geyer, "Albertus Magnus," *Encyclopedia Britannica* (Chicago: Encyclopedia Britannica, 1973), 1: 529 (italics added).

Ages."<sup>8</sup> Accordingly, in 1931 Pope Pius XI elevated Albert to the status of saint and doctor of the Church, while in 1941 Pius XII proclaimed Albert to be the patron saint of students of the natural sciences.

Despite Albert's historical significance and renown, there remains considerable uncertainty regarding his early life. Both the date of his birth and the date of his entry to the Dominican Order (Order of Preachers) remain uncertain. The following brief chronology identifies some significant moments in his life and provides dates for the composition of his works (indicated in italics).<sup>9</sup> In some instances the dates are approximations at best.

#### Chronology

ca. 1200	born in Lauingen on the Danube.
ca. 1221	sent to study in Padua.
1223 or 1229	enters the Dominican Order either at Padua in 1223, or at Cologne ca. 1229.
1229	provides theological instruction in Cologne at the Dominican priory.
1233-34	begins teaching as a lector at Dominican houses in the German Province (in Hildesheim, in either Freiburg-im-Breisgau or Freiberg in Saxony, in Regensburg, and then in Strasbourg).

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<sup>8</sup> William A. Wallace, "Galileo's Citations of Albert the Great," in *Albert the Great: Commemorative Essays*, ed. Francis J. Kovach and Robert W. Shahan (Norman: University of Oklahoma Press, 1980), 261.

<sup>9</sup> Dates for Albert's works are based on "Zeittafel (Chronologie nach derzeitigem Forschungsstand)," in *Albertus Magnus und sein System der Wissenschaften*, ed. Hannes Möhle, Henryk Anzulewicz, Maria Burger, Silvia Donati, Ruth Meyer, Martin Bredenbeck, and Susana Bullido del Barrio (Münster: Aschendorff Verlag, 2011), 28-31.

	<i>De natura boni</i> <i>Sermones</i>
ca. 1240	arrives in Paris to continue his studies at the University of Paris.
1242-1245	<i>De sacramentis</i> <i>De incarnatione</i> <i>De resurrectione</i> <i>De IV coaequaevis</i>
ca. 1242	<i>De homine</i> <i>De bono</i>
1242	<i>Principium super totam Bibliam</i>
ca. 1242-1250	<i>Quaestiones (theologicae)</i>
1243	<i>I Sententiarum</i> <i>III Sententiarum</i>
1245	master of theology and then installed as regent master at the University of Paris.
ca. 1246	<i>II Sententiarum</i> completed
15 May 1248	Albert's name appears as a signatory to the Parisian condemnation of the Talmud.
From 1248	Albert begins his commentary on the <i>Corpus Dionysiacum</i> <i>Super Dion. De caelesti hierarchia</i> <i>Super Dion. De ecclesiastica hierarchia</i>
Summer, 1248	Returns to Cologne (accompanied by Thomas Aquinas) to establish and direct a <i>studium generale</i> at the Dominican priory of the Holy Cross.
1249	<i>IV Sententiarum</i> completed
	<i>Super Dion. De divinis nominibus</i>
1250	<i>Super Dion. De mystica theologica et Epistulas</i>
1250-1252	<i>Super Ethica</i> (redaction)
1251	Begins his commentaries on the <i>Corpus Aristotelicum</i>
1251-1252	<i>Physica</i>
ca. 1251-1254	<i>De natura loci</i> <i>De causis proprietatum elementorum</i> <i>De generatione et corruptione</i> <i>De caelo et mundo</i>  <i>Super Porphyrium De V universalibus</i>

- 1254 elected Dominican Prior Provincial for the German province.
- ca. 1254-1257 *Meteora*  
*De mineralibus*  
*De praedicamentis*  
*De anima*
- De sex principiis*  
*Liber divisionum*
- Peri hermeneias*  
*Analytica priora*  
*Analytica posteriora*
- 1256-1257 present at the papal court at Anagni for the condemnation of William of Saint-Amour's *On the Dangers of the Last Times*; provides a refutation of the Averroist doctrine of the unity of the intellect.
- 1256 *De fato* (treated again in *Summa I*)
- Parva naturalia:*  
*De nutrimento et nutrito*  
*De sensu et sensato*  
*De memoria et reminiscencia*  
*De intellectu et intelligibili* (1.1)  
*De somno et vigilia*  
*De spiritu et respiratione*  
*De motibus animalium*  
*De iuventute et senectute*  
*De morte et vita*  
*De intellectu et intelligibili* (1.2 before *De natura et origine animae*)
- De vegetabilibus*
- De unitate intellectus* (final version, 1263; incorporated in *Summa II*)
- 1257 resigns as Prior Provincial and returns to Cologne (by spring 1258) to lecture.
- Late 1257-1264 *Super Matthaicum*
- 1258 participates in the Great Arbitration to negotiate a settlement between Cologne's burghers and Cologne's Archbishop Conrad von Hochstaden.

- 1258-1262/1263      *Quaestiones super de animalibus*  
*De animalibus*
- De natura et origine animae*
- De principiis motus processivi*
- 1259                      Participates in the General Chapter of the Dominican Order in Valenciennes; collaborates on the development of a new curriculum of study for Dominicans.
- 1260                      named Bishop of Regensburg by Pope Alexander IV; consecrated in March 1260.
- ca. 1260                      *Super Isaiam*
- 1262                      travels to the papal court to obtain permission to resign his Regensburg bishopric, which was granted by Alexander IV's successor, Pope Urban IV.
- ca. 1262                      *Ethica*  
ca. 1262/1263                      *Super Euclidem*
- 1263-1264                      Pope Urban IV commissions Albert to preach the Crusade in German lands.
- ca. 1264                      *Metaphysica*  
ca. 1264-1267                      *De causis et processu universitatis a prima causa*
- 1264-1270                      Death of Pope Urban IV on 10 October 1264. Albert resigns his commission to preach the Crusade. Albert resides in Würzburg and travels widely across Germany in service to the Dominican Order and the Church.
- ca. 1264                      *Topica*  
*De sophisticis elenchis*
- after 1264                      *Politica*
- 1264-1268                      Prepares biblical commentaries:  
*Super Marcum*  
*Super Lucam*  
*Super Iohannem*  
*Super Ieremiam*

	<i>Super Threnos</i> <i>Super Baruch</i> <i>Super Ezechielem</i> <i>Super Danielelem</i> <i>Super Prophetas minores</i> <i>Super Iob</i> (completed 1272 or 1274)
1267-1270	Lecturer in Strassburg and Pommern
after 1268	<i>Summa theologiae pars I</i>
1270	returns to the Dominican priory of the Holy Cross in Cologne to teach and to write.
1270 (before 10 Dec.)	<i>De XV problematibus</i>
1271	negotiates peace between the townspeople of Cologne and Archbishop Engelbert II.  <i>Problemata determinata</i>
May 1274	likely attended the Second Council of Lyons.
after 1274	<i>Summa theologiae pars II</i> <i>Super missam</i> <i>De corpore domini</i>
15 November 1280	Albert dies in Cologne.
1670	beatified by Pope Clement X.
1931	canonized as a saint by Pope Pius XI.
16 December 1941	Pope Pius XII declares Albert the patron saint of students of the natural sciences.

For additional discussion of Albert's life and of his intellectual legacy one may wish to consult two recent books:

Hannes Möhle, *Albertus Magnus, Zugänge zum Denken des Mittelalters*, 7 (Münster: Aschendorff Verlag, 2015)

Irven M. Resnick and Kenneth F. Kitchell, Jr., *Albertus Magnus and the World of Nature*  
(London: Reaktion Books, 2022)

For further research, we recommend *Albert the Great: A Selectively Annotated Bibliography (1900–2000)*, edited by Irven M. Resnick and Kenneth F. Kitchell Jr., and Bruno Tremblay, “Modern Scholarship (1900–2000) on Albertus Magnus: A Complement”, *Bochumer Philosophisches Jahrbuch für Antike und Mittelalter* 11 (2006): 159–94. Both are available on this site. For more specialized investigations, see *A Companion to Albert the Great: Theology, Philosophy, and the Sciences*, ed. Irven M. Resnick (Leiden: Brill, 2013).