Thomas Murner (1475-1537) as an Innovator in university teaching. Didactic games and the translation of legal texts

Thomas Murner (1475-1537) como innovador en la enseñanza universitaria. Juegos didácticos y la traducción de textos jurídicos

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Abstract: Thomas Murner is still regarded in scholarship primarily as a controversial theologian and a prominent opponent of Martin Luther. This perspective, however, obscures the fact that a substantial part of his work is rooted in late medieval and early modern cultures of education and knowledge. This article foregrounds Murner as an innovative didactician and examines the conditions and functions of his game-based forms of teaching within the university context around 1500.

The point of departure is Murner's didactic learning games, card games as well as chess and dice variants, with which he made logic, Roman law and prosody learnable through visualisation, ordering, and memorative repetitio. Within the framework of the ars memorativa, Murner was the first of his time to employ the medium of the playing card systematically as a teaching and mnemo-

Resumen: Thomas Murner sigue siendo considerado por la investigación, ante todo, como un teólogo polémico y un destacado adversario de Martín Lutero. Sin embargo, esta perspectiva oscurece el hecho de que una parte sustancial de su obra está arraigada en las culturas del saber y de la educación del final de la Edad Media y de la primera modernidad. Este artículo sitúa en primer plano a Murner como un didacta innovador y examina las condiciones y funciones de sus formas de enseñanza basadas en el juego dentro del contexto universitario en torno a 1500.

El punto de partida son los juegos didácticos de aprendizaje de Murner, tanto juegos de cartas como variantes de ajedrez y de dados, con los que hizo enseñables la lógica, el derecho romano y la prosodia mediante la visualización, la ordenación y la repetitio memorativa. En el marco del ars memorativa, Murner

nic apparatus for academic subjects. At the same time, contemporary reactions, ranging from admiration to mockery and suspicions of magic, reveal how strongly these experiments oscillated between academic norms and didactic transgression. Added to this are his achievements as a translator, through which he rendered learned knowledge, especially legal texts, into the vernacular, while also teaching in that language and thereby opening up new forms of mediation between university scholarship and a broader public.

What is new is the positioning of Murner within the history of universities and knowledge from a digital-historical perspective: prosopographical analyses based on the data of the Repertorium Academicum Germanicum (RAG) sharpen his profile as an exceptionally mobile and innovative scholar.

Keywords: digital history, university teaching, didactic games, playing cards, Thomas Murner.

fue el primero de su tiempo en emplear sistemáticamente el medio de la carta de juego como instrumento didáctico y mnemotécnico para materias académicas. Al mismo tiempo, las reacciones contemporáneas, que iban desde la admiración hasta la burla y las sospechas de magia, muestran hasta qué punto estos experimentos oscilaron entre las normas académicas y la transgresión didáctica. A ello se suman sus logros como traductor, gracias a los cuales vertió el saber erudito, en especial los textos jurídicos, a la lengua vernácula, al tiempo que enseñaba en esa misma lengua y abría así nuevas formas de mediación entre la erudición universitaria y un público más amplio.

La novedad reside en la ubicación de Murner dentro de la historia de las universidades y del saber desde una perspectiva de historia digital: los análisis prosopográficos basados en los datos del Repertorium Academicum Germanicum (RAG) perfilan con mayor nitidez su figura como la de un erudito excepcionalmente móvil e innovador.

Palabras clave: Historia digital, enseñanza universitaria, juegos didácticos, naipes, Thomas Murner.

1. Thomas Murner in (Digital) University History

Thomas Murner (1474-1537), a Franciscan friar from Alsace, is still presented in scholarship primarily as a sharp-tongued controversial theologian and an implacable opponent of Martin Luther (1483-1546).[1] In many accounts he appears above all in the context of the confessional conflicts of the early Reformation, in which he acted with drastic imagery and polemical sharpness. This perception is historically understandable, but it isolates only one prominent part of his work and obscures the diversity of his intellectual profile. A substantial portion of his oeuvre is not shaped by theological controversy, but is instead deeply embedded in late medieval and early modern cultures of education and knowledge. Here Murner emerges as a scholar who took the didactic challenges of his time seriously and sought to address them with remarkable creativity. He was thus far more than the sharp polemicist he so often appears to be in Reformation propaganda and in later historiographical

[1] For a general overview on Murner see: Ukena, „Murner, Thomas", 616-618.

tradition.[2] Two facets of his activity can therefore be distinguished in principle: on the one hand the aggressive controversial theologian, and on the other the innovative didactician. The latter is the focus of the following discussion.

In both aspects of his activity, a central trait of Murner's character becomes clearly visible: provocation. In many of his undertakings - whether as a combative theologian, in his sharp criticism of learned jurists, in his early German translations of Roman as well as imperial law for urban use, or finally in the development of didactic games - Murner deliberately positioned himself in fields marked by conflict. Through his games, he moreover entered a domain that universities increasingly sought to regulate, as they attempted in particular to curb gambling as well as card and dice games, in order to enforce temporal and moral regimes of discipline upon students.[3] Murner thus appears to have consciously sought out institutional border zones in which resistance was to be expected - precisely by means of card games which, in the late Middle Ages, were not only extraordinarily popular but were simultaneously subjected to ever tighter normative control.[4]

Engaging with Thomas Murner entails the difficulty of maintaining an overview in view of his extensive work, often published in parallel, comprising both texts and didactic games, as well as his numerous academic and monastic stations. In this respect, the account by Worstbrock is particularly helpful, as it systematically brings together Murner's biographical data and works and situates them within their respective scholarly contexts.[5]

Earlier scholarship long regarded these games as marginal curiosities within his work, a view shaped above all by the legal - historical and literary-historical research of the nineteenth century.[6] More recent studies have successfully rehabilitated Thomas Murner as a visionary of visual knowledge transmission and an outstanding didactician.[7]

Pauser's research explicitly recognises Murner as the creator of the first genuine educational card games of the Renaissance in the European context.[8] Pauser rightly emphasises Murner as a pioneer of play-based didactics whose methods of knowledge transmission were far ahead of his time. Mo-

[2] Henseleit, *Murner als Autor*, 25.

[3] Pauser, *Frevel*, 197-198.

[4] For Nuremberg see for example Smoller, „Playing Cards and Popular Culture", 190-191.

[5] Worstbrock, „Murner, Thomas".

[6] Erler, *Thomas Murner als Jurist*, 45, for the negative assessments of Murner, see *ibid.* 7 n. 1.

[7] For example Erler, *Thomas Murner als Jurist* or Heger, „Der Meister der Murner-Zeichnungen", S. 530, who quite rightly describes Murner as a "multitalent".

[8] Pauser, „Welch Frevel!", Pauser, „The Invention".

reover, as Pauser further argues, Murner was among the first to recognise the potential of the printing press to translate complex subject matter, such as the *Institutiones* of Roman law, logic, and prosody, into a systematic visual learning game. Scholarship has already illuminated various aspects of these games. Earlier research focused above all on the juridical card game (*Chartiludium institute*) and on the logic game (*Chartiludium logicae*).[9] By contrast, far less attention has been paid to the learning game on prosody (*Ludus studentum Friburgensium*) and to the unfinished manuscript *Instituta Helvetiorum*, probably produced in Lucerne, which stands in close succession to the juridical card games.[10] Stoffers and Thijs (1999) examined the card games from the perspective of the history of mentalities.[11] They demonstrate how perceptions of his teaching methods shifted from contemporary admiration, or suspicions of magic, to later rejection. Hoffmann (2000) situates Murner's playing cards against the background of the late medieval popularity of playing cards and emphasises the formal and functional similarities between the two.[12] It follows that with his playing cards Murner did not merely adapt a fashionable phenomenon, but also recognised the new possibilities of print technology and innovatively integrated the media - technological transition from manuscript to print into his play - based didactics, since his earliest card games were in all likelihood drawn by hand. In 2017, Delgadillo published a bilingual edition and translation of Murner's logic card game. In an accompanying article from 2019, he analyses Murner's system as a "world of symbols" and emphasises that Murner was the first logician to translate logic into a playful didactic form.[13] Wójcik (2011) interprets Thomas Murner's *Chartiludium* as the product of a Europe-wide space of knowledge in which *ars memorativa*, visualisation, and playful forms of teaching were transferred between Strasbourg, Freiburg, Paris, and Kraków.[14] In this context, Kraków appears less as a place of origin than as a central node and experimental space in which Franciscan Observant actors in particular shaped mnemotechnical practices. Alongside Murner's play-based didactics, more recent research has especially

[9] Sieber, *Kartenspiel*; Erler, *Murner als Jurist*; Sondheim, *Illustrationen*.

[10] On the On *Ludus studentum Friburgensium* see the research by Sondheim, *Frankfurter Drucke*, 42-49, 79-80 *and especially the overview of the different version by* Worstbrock, „Murner, Thomas", Sp. 321-322,, on the *Instituta Helvetiorum* see the research by Kaib, „Zu den juristischen Schriften Thomas Murners", 104-110.

[11] Stoffers and Thijs, „A Question of Mentality".

[12] Hoffmann, „Die mnemonischen Kartenspiele", 589-590.

[13] Medina Delgadillo, „A World of Symbols", Murner, *El Juego de Cartas de Lógica.*

[14] Wójcik, „Straßburg - Freiburg - Paris - Krakau".

highlighted his achievements in the field of visual mediation. In her study of Murner's German translation of the *Aeneid* (1515), Frick (2019) shows how he employed visual formulas as interpretative and mnemonic media in order to enable his pupils to understand complex Latin texts.[15]

The most recent comprehensive scholarly work to address Thomas Murner's activity as a publicist, and thus also his visual didactics, is Henseleit's dissertation, which examines Murner as an author and controversial theologian in Strasbourg and Lucerne. It pays particular attention to Murner's handling of mockery as well as to his visual self-representation, which is closely linked to his mnemotechnical methods.[16] This more recent perspective from media history, the history of education, and the history of knowledge makes it clear that Murner's playful didactics by no means stood at the margins of his work, but formed part of a broader transformation of European knowledge cultures in which visualisation and materiality increasingly gained importance. A substantial part of Murner's work is therefore not directly connected to confessional conflicts, but is instead best understood within the context of late medieval and early modern cultures of education and knowledge. Particularly striking is his readiness to deploy game mechanics deliberately as instruments of knowledge transmission. This becomes evident in the learning games that Murner developed between approximately 1500 and 1526, card games, chess variants, and dice games that conveyed juridical, logical, or poetic knowledge in playful, visual, and structured ways. Images had already been known in ancient rhetoric as mnemotechnical aids in their memory-supporting function, but later receded into the background before being taken up again in the late Middle Ages through the doctrine of the *loci et imagines*. Within the teaching of the art of memory, however, Murner was the first and only figure of his time to employ the specific medium of playing cards systematically in university teaching for logical and juridical mnemonic structures. In general, it should be noted that Murner's didactic card games likely circulated initially in hand-drawn form before being printed. They were subsequently embedded in book publications that provided systematic explanatory texts.[17]

Thomas Murner's academic biography is exceptional in several respects and provides a key to understanding his didactic innovative capacity. As a theologian, jurist, and European itinerant scholar, he moved through

[15] Frick, *Visual Narrative*.
[16] Henseleit, *Murner als Autor*.
[17] Pauser, *Frevel*, 209-210.

different educational spaces and thereby became acquainted with a wide variety of modes of engaging with knowledge. It was precisely this mobility and intellectual multifacetedness that shaped his later play - based didactics, in which he developed novel ways of transmitting knowledge. Yet to date, scholarship has lacked a positioning of Murner's work within the framework of more recent university and knowledge history. A more differentiated appreciation began as early as von Liebenau (1913), who was the first to provide an extensive biographical account.[18] Erler (1956) further rehabilitated Murner as a jurist and gave particular recognition to his creative linguistic achievement in the Germanisation of juridical texts.[19] Von Liebenau and Worstbrock examine his academic stations in detail.[20] Murner's significance for university teaching practice, as well as the concrete use of his games in academic instruction, has not yet been systematically examined in the history of universities, let alone from a digital-historical perspective.

The present article takes this gap as its point of departure and at the same time interprets Murner's learning games within the context of his academic, cultural, and media environment. Its starting point is provided by prosopographical analyses based on the research data of the *Repertorium Academicum Germanicum* (RAG) and its digital methods for reconstructing premodern spaces of knowledge.[21] Large-scale datasets make it possible to visualise his academic mobility and network position, showing that his didactic experiments did not emerge solely from local traditions, but from the interaction of different European spaces of knowledge.

The article first reconstructs Thomas Murner's academic mobility and situates it within European knowledge spaces. Building on this, it outlines the historical preconditions of late medieval cultures of play and memory and places Murner's learning games within their media-historical context. An analysis of the individual games in the context of university teaching cannot be undertaken within the scope of this article and is therefore reserved for separate studies. The added value of the contribution lies in the prosopographical contextualisation of Murner within the RAG, through which his distinctive position within late medieval learned culture becomes clearly visible. The focus is not on Murner's well-known profile as an controversial theologian with a sharp pen, but on his contributions to new forms of

[18] Liebenau, *Der Franziskaner Dr. Thomas Murner.*

[19] Erler, *Thomas Murner als Jurist*.

[20] Liebenau, *Der Franziskaner Dr. Thomas Murner; Worstbrock, „Murner, Thomas".*

[21] On the RAG project see Schwinges, „Ursprung und Entwicklungen"; Gubler, „Digital History Project".

knowledge transmission, whether through the didactic format of learning games, through the first translations of learned content into the German vernacular, or through media and technological activities such as the founding of printing presses. Moreover, Murner's example shows that innovation in the age of the Reformation did not arise solely from university teaching, but to a significant extent from his education and activities within Franciscan monasteries. This brings the monastery into view as a productive site of didactic innovation.

2. Making Knowledge Accessible through Didactic and Technological Innovations

Thomas Murner explicitly understood himself as a teacher. He encapsulated his pedagogical self-conception in the programmatic phrase "Docere volui", which characterises his entire pedagogical and scholarly activity.[22] Accordingly, the forms and locations of his activity were highly diverse: the development of didactic learning games, university teaching, the translation of central juridical texts of Roman law such as the *Institutiones*, and the deliberate promotion of printing through the establishment of printing presses in Franciscan monasteries in Strasbourg and Lucerne. These activities mark a consciously broad model of early modern knowledge transmission operating between monastery, university, and the public.

The following discussion focuses on those places and spaces in which Murner's innovative activity within the university context becomes particularly evident. Starting from his education between monastery and universities, it shows that Murner's engagement with playful forms of learning and mediation arose largely from his confrontation with complex academic bodies of knowledge and what he perceived as their frequently overcomplicated modes of transmission. This experience repeatedly prompted him to organise content, simplify it didactically, and make it accessible to a wider audience through new formats, in particular learning games and translations into German. This audience consisted primarily of students. At the same time, through his translation of imperial law for urban use into the German vernacular, Murner pursued the aim of opening access to legal knowledge for broader segments of the population and protecting them from being misled by learned jurists. In this sense, Murner understood himself both as

[22] Erler, *Thomas Murner als Jurist*, 12.

an advocate of students and of legal laypeople, without restricting himself solely to these groups. With his German translation of the *Aeneid*, Murner built on strategies of media mediation that Sebastian Brant had already developed in his Strasbourg edition of Virgil from 1502. Its woodcuts were explicitly conceived as *pictura laicorum litteratura* and thus opened access to ancient epic for *indocti* and *rusticoli viri*. Murner expanded this approach by translating the text itself into the vernacular, thereby making the *Aeneid* readable even without Latin mediation.[23] In this consistent turn towards the vernacular and the didactic preparation of complex subject matter, Murner fulfilled a core concern of the Franciscan Order, whose self-understanding was traditionally shaped by proximity to everyday life and to the people. His proactive and innovative approach is ultimately also evident in his deliberate use of printing technology. By establishing printing presses in the Franciscan monasteries of Strasbourg and Lucerne, he created the conditions for disseminating his teaching methods and bodies of knowledge by means of the most advanced technical media of the time.

3. Creativity, Initiative, and Innovation: Familial Preconditions

For a better understanding of Murner's academic career and his efforts to make complex bodies of knowledge accessible, a brief look at his family background is helpful. Murner's father Matthäus worked as an advocate in Strasbourg and also served as a legal expert for the city's Grand Council. He passed on his interest in jurisprudence not only to Thomas, but also to another son, Johannes. In the case of the latter, however, university education has not yet been the focus of attention. In the scholarly literature, Johannes is generally described as a "jurist", although evidence for a corresponding education or even a university degree is lacking. Yet Johannes did in fact study at the University of Paris, at least for a time, together with Thomas.[24] His studies in Paris are indirectly attested through the first theological attempt of his brother Thomas, an unfinished treatise on the Immaculate Conception. The text is conceived as a scholastic disputation between the brothers and explicitly presupposes Johannes as a Thomist studying in Paris. A covering letter dated 1499 further documents an intra-familial conflict over

[23] Frick, „Visual Narrative", 250-251, 266-267 on the reception of this model in Thomas Murner's German translation of the *Aeneid* (1515).

[24] With regard to the following: Worstbrock, „Murner, Thomas", Sp. 313.

theological orientation, in which Thomas urges his brother to return to the Marian doctrine of Duns Scotus. The treatise thus attests both Johannes's period of study in Paris and the period-typical confrontation between Thomism and Scotism around 1500, particularly at the University of Paris. The accompanying letter moreover makes clear that Johannes, unlike Thomas, was still studying in Paris at that time.[25] It may furthermore be assumed that Johannes studied at the Faculty of Arts in Paris without aiming at a formal degree; evidence for such a qualification is lacking, just as it is for his brother Thomas. Unlike Johannes, however, Thomas later explicitly describes himself as a *magister artium* and as a student of theology in Paris, although this need not imply formal enrolment in the theological faculty; for Murner, study within the Franciscan educational milieu in Paris appears more likely just as it would also have been possible in the other university towns he visited.[26] For his later activity in the juridical field, Johannes evidently acquired the requisite specialised knowledge by extra-university means. He also undoubtedly benefited from the juridical experiential knowledge available within the family. It is therefore no coincidence that Johannes, like his father before him, later worked as an advocate for the city of Strasbourg. The juridical terminology employed by Johannes likewise recalls that of his father and brother, both of whom adopted a critical stance towards a socially aloof juristic elite. According to Weinacht, Johannes used precise juridical terminology, but expressed it in a strongly dialect-inflected style.[27] This emerges from a public justification addressed to the cathedral canons Cosmas and Johannes Andreas, members of the Strasbourg Wolff family. Johannes accused the two of having seduced several daughters of burghers, including his sister Maria, and at the same time denounced ecclesiastical and legal abuses

[25] The wording of the incipit and the accompanying letter dated to 1499 suggest that Thomas Murner sent the treatise to his brother Johannes in Paris. The phrase *parisius proficienti* presupposes that Johannes was studying in Paris at that time, while the designation of the text as *missus* implies a spatial separation between sender and recipient. The accompanying letter, in which Thomas urgently exhorts his brother to return to Scotist Mariology, is therefore to be understood as part of a written intervention in a theological dispute conducted at a distance, see Worstbrock, „Murner, Thomas", Sp. 313.

[26] See Roest, *Franciscan Learning,* 142-145 on education and the pursuit of degrees among Conventuals and Observants, and 165 on Paris; see also Liebenau, *Der Franziskaner Dr. Thomas Murner*, 10: Conrad Pellikan's remark that around 1500 some 350 Franciscans were studying in Paris strongly suggests the scale and importance of the Franciscan studium there, making it more likely that Murner's theological studies in Paris took place within the order's educational framework.

[27] Weinacht, „Murner, Johannes", Sp. 815.

in contemporary Strasbourg. Both in his dialectal and thus popular style and in his criticism of abuses, a clear affinity with his brother Thomas becomes apparent. Like Thomas, as will be shown below, Johannes also entered the service of a nobleman. Johannes Murner entered the service of Duke Anton II of Lorraine (1489-1544) after he had fled his home city as a result of a private feud with the Strasbourg patrician Wolff family.[28]

3.1. Early Insights into Legal Practice, Support from His Father

As Murner himself later recorded, among other places in a text written for Basel law students, his father and uncle in Strasbourg repeatedly drew his attention to how often laypeople were disadvantaged or misled by learned jurists. These experiences certainly contributed to his decision to convey complex juridical content not only to students, but also to a broader public in a clear and accessible form. Murner was not the only member of his family to turn towards new forms of knowledge transmission. Two of his brothers, Beatus (Batt) and Sixtus, worked as printers and at times collaborated with him.[29] This family environment, characterised by a pronounced openness to new forms of juridical, publishing, and technical practice, contributes to an understanding of Thomas Murner's proactive and innovative role.

In comparison with his siblings, Thomas Murner was clearly favoured by his father in the financing of his education. This is attested, on the one hand, by Murner's own statements. In the preface to his work *Germania nova*, published in August 1502 and addressed to the councillors, patricians, and magistracy of the city of Strasbourg, Murner emphasises that he had expended a considerable paternal fortune in order to attend the faculties of various universities, so that he might be able to defend his fatherland against bad advisers, here primarily referring to his adversary Jakob Wimpfeling.[30] He lists the stations of this years-long academic peregrination explicitly in the concluding prayer of the same work: Paris, Freiburg, Cologne, Rostock,

[28] Müller, „Murner, Johannes"; Rott, „Johannes Murners Streitigkeiten".

[29] After the death of their father in 1506, Johannes Murner was appointed curator (guardian) for his siblings who were still underage at the time, including Sixtus and Beatus (Batt), cf. Sondheim, *Frankfurter Drucke*, 37-40; As further siblings, Rudolph is named, as well as the sisters Gertrud, Ennelia, Richardis, Barbara, and Maria. On Beatus, see also Kelchner, „Murner, Beatus".

[30] Borries, *Wimpfeling und Murner*, 201.

Prague, Vienna, and Kraków.[31] The costs of his studies were dismissed by Murner's opponents in Wimpfeling's circle as mere "boasting". Thus Johannes Auriga, a pupil of Wimpfeling, mocked Murner in the polemical tract *Defensio Germaniae*, claiming that because of his extensive travels Murner had spent the money not on his studies but rather on carters, innkeepers, stable hands, and boatmen. Petrus Coquus, for his part, reproached Murner with having boasted that he had now attained the goal of his studies and would henceforth, like one of the "fathers", possess his own living quarters, a heated room, and a bath. In this way, he insinuated that the Franciscan Murner's studies had led to social aloofness.[32]

According to scholarly conjecture, the special support afforded to Murner was not based solely on his exceptional talent, but also on his physical impairment, as Murner suffered from a slight limp, that has been attributed to childhood paralysis.[33] The physical impairment thus also constituted a decisive factor in shaping his intellectual career. At a later point, Murner specified a concrete sum for his university studies, which he put at 600 guilders, excluding the periods of study in Freiburg and Paris. He mentioned this amount in a later source from 1524 in the context of his dispute with the city of Strasbourg over the dissolution of the Franciscan convent there. In this context, he claimed the expenses incurred for his studies as a demand for compensation. In the course of a settlement, Murner ultimately renounced all further claims against the city and in return received an annual life annuity of 52 guilders. It is noteworthy that Murner emphasised his decision to forgo further legal action, even though as a doctor of both laws he was sufficiently trained and experienced in legal matters.[34]

4. Thomas Murner: A Singular Position in the RAG

Murner's distinctive position within late medieval learned culture can also be made visible through his inclusion in the RAG database. The RAG records around 62,000 scholars with their biographical key data for the period from 1250 to 1550, thereby enabling a precise contextualisation of individual educational trajectories. This coverage is based on clearly defined prosopo-

[31] Borries, *Wimpfeling und Murner*, 32.
[32] Both passages in Borries, *Wimpfeling und Murner*, 39.
[33] Heger, „Der Meister der Murner-Zeichnungen", 538.
[34] Erler, *Thomas Murner als Jurist*, 78.

graphical criteria of inclusion. Included are all individuals who can be shown to have attended a university within the Holy Roman Empire and to have obtained the degree of *magister artium* there, or to have studied at a higher faculty (law, theology, or medicine). This applies regardless of whether they obtained a formal degree at the higher faculties. An exception is made for members of the nobility, who are always recorded at German universities, even without graduation or attendance at a higher faculty. A further exception comprises the comparatively small group of individuals from the Holy Roman Empire who did not study at a German university, but exclusively at a foreign one, where they acquired their academic qualifications. These selection criteria produce a comprehensive and multifaceted group of the learned elite of the Holy Roman Empire in the transition from the late Middle Ages to the early modern period. This group, and herein lies a central conceptual decision of the RAG, was in principle capable of exerting social influence by virtue of its academic training; it is this potential that the project investigates through the activities its members pursued after leaving the university.[35]

It is precisely within this academic field, characterised by mobility, multiple qualifications, and institutional diversity, that Murner occupies a striking position. His wide-ranging places of study and activity can be reconstructed on a data-driven basis using the RAG and show him as part of a European learned world, from which the uniqueness of his didactic experiments emerges even more clearly.

In addition to Murner, the RAG records 254 members of the Franciscan Order, who would merit a separate investigation, as would members of other orders such as the Benedictines or Dominicans. How exceptional Murner's academic mobility was becomes apparent across the scholars recorded in the RAG: only fourteen individuals, like Murner, studied or taught at nine or more universities. This number also includes universities outside the Holy Roman Empire, which scholars with particularly high levels of mobility frequently visited in addition to German universities.[36] Murner is moreover the only scholar recorded in the RAG who studied at (or at least visited) the universities of Basel, Freiburg, Kraków, Cologne, Paris, Prague, Rostock, and Vienna. He thus moved between studies in the arts, law, and theology at leading universities of his time. He does not form part of a "standard path", but

[35] Schwinges, „Ursprung und Entwicklungen"; Gubler, "Von Daten zu Informationen und Wissen".

[36] Database query in the RAG project by the author, November 2025; see also Henseleit, *Murner als Autor*, 27 n. 139 and Dollinger, „Das Leben Thomas Murners" on his exceptional mobility.

represents a special case of academic mobility. This shows that even during his university education, as well as in his later activities, he exhibited distinctive characteristics. Further unique features within the RAG include the fact that Murner is the only Franciscan recorded there who, as will be shown below, was promoted to the degree of doctor of both laws. Decisive here is the doctorate in civil law, which was exceptional for a member of a religious order. Equally unique are his professorships in civil law, which he held at the universities of Trier and Basel.

4.1. Education and Mediation between Monastery and University

His academic stages of learning and teaching, as well as his activities as a lector in various Franciscan monasteries, may be briefly outlined here to provide an initial orientation.[37] His first training took place in the Franciscan monastery in Strasbourg, followed by university studies in Freiburg im Breisgau where he almost certainly did not obtain a promotion to *magister artium*, then he studied in Paris.[38] The subsequent sequence, around 1500, of his university visits remains uncertain, but it included further studies, primarily in theology, or at least visits to universities, at Cologne, as well as stays in Rostock, Vienna, Prague, and Kraków, where he was promoted to bachelor of theology. From 1501 he served as a lector in the Franciscan monastery in Strasbourg. Around 1506 he may have been a professor of logic in Kraków, although this remains uncertain. In the same year he was promoted to doctor of theology in Freiburg. He participated in the General Chapter in Rome around 1506-1507. On his return journey, older scholarship (Liebenau) reports a stay at Bologna and a longer period in Venice, where he is said to have taught.[39] Further teaching activities followed as a lector in Franciscan monasteries in Freiburg (in parallel lecturer at the university there) Bern, and Frankfurt am Main, and probably also in his capacity as head of the Franciscan monasteries in Speyer and Strasbourg. From 1515 he was a professor

[37] Cf. on Murner's career stages the corresponding entry in the *Repertorium Academicum Germanicum* (RAG): Thomas Murner (RAG-ID: ngPF5e476PX2belBjOIe7NbG). The permanent link to the biographical profile is: https://resource.database.rag-online.org/[URI] and must in each case be supplemented by the specific URI (in the case of Murner: ngPF5e476PX2belBjOIe7NbG). For reasons of readability, the reference is given below in abbreviated form.

[38] On Murner's education and intellectual formation see generally Roest, *Franciscan Learning*; Fuchs, "Thomas Murners Belesenheit"; Smolinsky, "Thomas Murner."

[39] Liebenau, *Der Franziskaner Dr. Thomas Murner*, 44-45.

of civil law in Trier. In 1519 he was promoted to doctor of both laws at the University of Basel and served there as professor of civil law. In 1525 he became lector in the Franciscan monastery in Lucerne.[40]

The educational path and teaching activity of Thomas Murner between monastery and university correspond to a widespread pattern of clerical scholarly careers. Medieval universities were by no means closed institutions, but were in exchange with the religious orders, in particular the mendicant orders. Dominicans and Franciscans maintained their own internal systems of study, which remained legally autonomous but were functionally closely connected with the theological faculties of the universities. Their members served as lectors and masters, participated in university disputations, and obtained regular academic degrees.[41] The strong presence of members of religious orders among students of theology also explains the high level of mobility within this group, which was facilitated by a dense network of monasteries that provided accommodation and board and thus a stable travel infrastructure. The mendicant orders therefore pursued a deliberate policy of placing brothers as students and teachers in as many university towns as possible in which they maintained convents or centres of study.[42] By contrast, monastic orders such as the Benedictines remained outside this model of university integration. Their educational activity was organised primarily within the monastery; university studies took place only sporadically and on an individual basis, rather than as part of an order-wide strategy of education.

Returning to his p*eregrinatio academica*: Murner himself once names the universities he attended in connection with his Solothurn sermon, which was published as an appendix to *Germania nova*. In this prayer, Murner presents himself as a Christian wanderer moving between universities.[43] Murner

[40] Liebenau, *Der Franziskaner Dr. Thomas Murner*, 212.

[41] See on this Asztalos, „The Faculty of Theology", 409-441 (see esp.. 414ff. on the relationship between mendicants and the faculty and Verger, „Patterns", esp. 60f. on colleges and convents.

[42] Cf. on this in particular Schwinges, „Admission", 201f. on the mobility of the orders, as well as Asztalos, „The Faculty of Theology," 414ff. on the strategic training and placement of the friars.

[43] Borries, *Wimpfeling und Murner*, 232-233 (Excerpt): "Erinnere dich, selige Jungfrau, wenn du vor dem Angesicht meiner Gegner stehst, dass du Fürsprache für mich einlegest, damit sie ihren Unwillen abwenden, da mich das bestimmte, tapfere und unwandelbare Vertrauen in dich gestärkt hat, als ich von der Zeit an, wo mir der zarteste Flaum spross, unter deiner Führung die Universitäten zu Paris, Freiburg, Köln, Rostock, ja sogar die ketzerische zu Prag und die Hochschulen zu Wien und Krakau mit Eifer und Fleiss besuchte, nicht um

Fig. 1. Stages of Thomas Murner's life in the RAG, visualised by the author, December 2025, Places of study (blue), places of activity (red), place of origin (brown).

asks in the prayer the Virgin Mary for assistance against his opponents and refers to his faithful devotion to her throughout his entire period of study. Murner's enumeration in this prayer functions like an "academic curriculum vitae" in the guise of a devotional text. Instead of listing his credentials in a formal document, he embeds the stages of his educational trajectory within a religious supplication, thereby seeking to legitimise both his learning and his moral integrity in the face of his critics.[44]

In the appendix to this work, one finds the list of universities compiled by Murner himself that he attended the universities mentioned.[45] Prague was, in this context, explicitly described by him as a "heretical" university, a characterisation that must be understood against the background of

Gehässigkeit auszuüben, sondern in der Absicht, meine Fähigkeiten auszubilden und der Wahrheit nachzuspüren – und als ich in der Treue, mit der ich dir ergeben bin, versprach, mein ganzes Studium und alle Mühen zu deiner Ehre anzuwenden, wie ich es gelobt habe, da ich als Wanderer die im christlichen Glauben verschiedenen Universitäten kennenzulernen mich bemühte. Da du mich nun, nachdem ich viele Wechselfälle der Seele und des Körpers durchgemacht habe, nach Verlauf von sechzehn Jahren wiedergefunden und zum väterlichen Herde zurückgeführt hast, so widme ich dies Werkchen, das freilich deines Namens unwert ist, ganz und gar deiner Ehre, nachdem ich es in zwei Tagen, wie du selbst bezeugen wirst, mit feurigster Seele vollendet habe…"

[44] Printing of the prayer in Borries, *Wimpfeling und Murner*, 232-233.

[45] See especially the overview provided by Worstbrock, "Murner, Thomas", Sp. 301, on his academic stations; it is not clear from where Heger derives the information on the universities Murner attended, including the specific semesters, see Heger, „Thomas Murner", 296.

Bohemia's Utraquism tradition.[46] It reflects less a concrete situation around 1500 than a confessionally shaped, polemical perception that was widespread in Catholic circles. According to the list, Murner then visited the universities of Vienna and Kraków. Whether Murner actually attended the universities in the order given cannot be established with certainty. Only Freiburg can be securely placed before Paris. Moreover, in 1501 he travelled back to Strasbourg via Vienna.[47] For the remaining stations, the sequence may in principle be correct, especially since Murner is likely to have stayed only briefly at some locations and reliable evidence for more intensive study at universities exists only for Freiburg, Paris, and Kraków. The enumeration of universities does not follow an exact itinerary, but rather a roughly west-to-east progression that is rhetorically structured. Paris functions as a western point of reference for academic authority, while Prague is marked as a confessional counterpoint; Vienna and Kraków form the eastern conclusion of this educational space. In the same list, Murner speaks of sixteen years of wandering between universities, although this figure was probably misread and a period of around seven years seems more plausible.[48] With regard to the documentation of Thomas Murner's periods of study at universities, it must be borne in mind that in the course of the incorporation of religious orders into individual universities, such as that of the Franciscan Order at the University of Cologne, members of orders were not necessarily required to matriculate individually. For Murner, matriculations at the University of Freiburg and the University of Kraków are attested in university records; other periods of study at universities, by contrast, can be inferred only indirectly, mostly through self-statements in his own works. In addition, a structural gap in the sources must be taken into account: Schwinges has pointed to the absence or fragmentary survival of university matriculation registers at institutions outside the Holy Roman Empire.[49]

In an overall view, two focal phases can be identified in Murner's academic activity as a mediator of knowledge. A first phase is characterised by the development and use of various didactic learning games up to around 1518. In a second phase, the translation of central juridical works into German moved to the foreground, accompanied by the introduction of German-language teaching. This began in 1515 with an initial lecture on Roman law

[46] Borries, *Wimpfeling und Murner*, 232-233 (Excerpt): "... unter deiner Führung die Universitäten zu Paris, Freiburg, Köln, Rostock, ja sogar die ketzerische zu Prag... "

[47] Worstbrock, Murner, Thomas, Sp. 301.

[48] Here Borries, *Wimpfeling und Murner*, p. 58 n. 34, should be followed.

[49] Schwinges, „Why Were There Almost No Matriculation Registers".

Table 1. Chronological and thematic overview of the didactic games developed by Thomas Murner and his activities as professor and translator, compiled by the author, 12/2025.

Year	Activities	Title	Print / Drawings	Place of printing / sphere of activity	Content
ca. 1499	Card game	Chartiludium logicae	Drawings	Kraków / University	Logic (lost)
1500-1502	Card game	Chartiludium Institute	Drawings		Institutiones (lost)
1504-1508	Card game	Chartiludium Institute (Iuridicum)	Print	Strasbourg (?)	Institutiones
1507 (?)	Card game	Chartiludium logicae	Print	Kraków / University	Logic (lost)
1507 (?)	Professor			Kraków / University	Logic
1508/09	Lecturer / Professor			Freiburg i.Br. / University and Monastery	Didactics of Prosody (Verse Theory)
1508-10	Chess and dice game	Ludus studentum Friburgensium (3 versions)	Print	Basel / Frankfurt	Didactics of Prosody
1509	Card game	Chartiludium logicae	Print	Strasbourg	Logic
1511	Chess and dice game	Ludus studentum Friburgensium	Print	Frankfurt	Didactics of Prosody
1515	Professor			Trier / University	Institutiones (German)
1515	Translation	Virgil's *Aeneid*		Strasbourg	(German)
1518	Card game	Chartiludium Institute	Print	Strasbourg	Institutiones
1518	Translation	Utriusque juris tituli et regulae	Print	Basel	German - dedicated to law students in Basel
1519	Professor			Basel / University	Institutiones (Comparison Latin - German)
1519	Translation	Instituten (complete translation)	Print	Basel	German - dedicated to Basel students and audience
1521	Translation	Der keiserlichen statrechten	Print	Strasbourg	German - dedicated to law students in Basel
1526	Chess and dice game	Instituta Helvetiorum	Drawings	Luzern	Institutiones

delivered in German. In Basel, Murner further intensified his translation activity, perhaps not coincidentally in the Upper Rhine region, which at that time emerged as an innovative centre of juridical knowledge production and transmission. The following tabular overview brings together the stations discussed, with a focus on Murner's games and his activities within the university environment.

5. Influences from Freiburg and Paris on Murner's Early Conception of Games

Already at his first academic station, the University of Freiburg, Murner received impulses for his later game conceptions. In Freiburg, Jakob Locher was among his most influential teachers, as Murner himself emphasised.[50] Through Locher, Murner also came into more intensive contact with the *ars memorativa* within the university context, the field that he later developed further in his didactic games in a methodologically and visually distinctive manner. Locher himself had already received impulses from the art of memory before his professorship in Freiburg, notably through his teacher Conrad Celtis at the University of Ingolstadt around 1492. Wójcik has drawn attention to this connection and at the same time emphasised that another contemporary and influential representative of the Freiburg Faculty of Arts, Gregor Reisch, also moved within the same intellectual milieu. In his *Margarita philosophica*, Gregor Reisch treated the *ars memorativa* as an integral component of Artes teaching and contributed decisively to its systematic and visually supported transmission.[51] A playful or experimental implementation of the art of memory, however, is not found in his work. Further inspiration for play-based didactics was almost certainly gained by Murner at the University of Paris, his next academic station. In Paris, Murner was probably promoted to *magister artium*. The place of this promotion, however, cannot be established with certainty.[52] Whether the University of Freiburg can be considered as the place of promotion is rather doubtful, since no evidence exists for this, and within the RAG project all scholars attested in the sources who obtained a promotion to *magister artium* at a university in the Holy Roman Empire have been systematically recorded. For

[50] With regard to the following: Wójcik, „Masters, Pupils, Friends and Thieves", 412.

[51] Wójcik, „Straßburg - Freiburg - Paris - Krakau", 65.

[52] See Worstbrock, "Murner, Thomas", col. 301, and Sondheim, "Illustrationen", pp. 8-9, on the alleged promotion to *magister artium* at the University of Kraków, a title that is erroneously stated on Murner's early work *Practica* (1498).

Freiburg, the records of the Faculty of Arts concerning graduations for the relevant period at the end of the fifteenth century have survived and have also been included. This includes, for example, the promotion of Nikolaus Zengel to *magister artium* in the winter semester of 1499.[53] Like Murner and other scholars holding the same degree at the same university, Zengel came from Oberehnheim. The likelihood that Murner would have appeared in these registers, had he been promoted in Freiburg, would therefore be correspondingly high. That Murner studied in Paris is beyond doubt. Before that, however, Murner studied in Freiburg together with the nobleman Johannes (Hans) Werner von Mörsberg, whose preceptor he became, and with whom he may also have studied together in Paris.[54] The close connection of von Mörsberg to the academic world is shown by the fact that after this possible stay in 1499 he became honorary rector of the University of Freiburg.[55] He later became provost of the cathedral chapter in Basel. Murner's stay at the University of Paris is attested by dedications that he addressed to his pupil von Mörsberg, for example in two of his early works.[56] In the work *Invectiva contra astrologos*, dated 8 May 1499, Murner describes himself on the title page as master of the liberal arts and in the dedication as *sacrarum litterarum studens Parisiensis*.[57] The reference to the study of Holy Scripture in Paris may also point to an order-based course of study among the Franciscans. Murner further mentions his studies in Paris in a letter to Wimpfeling from 1502.[58] Murner himself also recalls his period of study in Paris in his work *Narrenbeschwörung*.[59]

It is plausible that during his stay in Paris he came into contact for the first time with game-based techniques of knowledge transmission within the university environment.[60] The renowned scholar Jacques Lefèvre d'Étaples (Jacobus Faber Stapulensis) taught there and already used cards to teach his

[53] Nikolaus Zengel (RAG-ID: ngSI3p173Rq96hoqmS3h5)

[54] Liebenau, *Der Franziskaner Dr. Thomas Murner*, 385-386; Sondheim, *Thomas Murner als Astrolog*, 9-12 on the relationship between Johannes Werner von Mörsberg and Murner and on the vague evidence for the two men's stays at the University of Paris. As Sondheim rightly notes, there is no unambiguous proof for von Mörsberg in this regard.

[55] Johannes von Mörsberg (RAG ID: ngWM3N577V63glsmqVFlhUiH)

[56] Johann Werner von Mörsberg was the son of the imperial *Landvogt* in Alsace, Kaspar von Mörsberg of Belfort. He was later elected honorary rector of the University of Freiburg (in October 1499).

[57] USTC 747318.

[58] Sondheim, *Thomas Murner als Astrolog*, 11.

[59] Liebenau, *Der Franziskaner Dr. Thomas Murner*, 10-11.

[60] Pauser, „Frevel", 221; RAG-ID (ngAQ9R173ZI91pwWuZ3p5YmN1ZN)

students the art of verse.[61] The strongest indication that Murner had become acquainted with this methodology in Paris is provided by another Alsatian humanist, Matthias Ringmann.[62] He himself, as he is quoted in a letter, stated that he had learned a school game from his teacher d'Étaples in Paris, the *Rithmomachia*, which he still remembered vividly on many occasions.[63] The *Rithmomachia* by Lefèvre d'Étaples was first published in Paris in 1496.[64] Around 1500, thus somewhat later than Murner, Ringmann stayed in Paris and thereby came into contact with these play-based techniques. It was not Ringmann himself, however, who conceived the idea of publishing his *Grammatica figurata* as a set of playing cards, but rather Walter Lud, secretary to René II of Lorraine (1451-1508). On the occasion of the composition and publication of the *Grammatica figurata* (printed in 1509 in Saint-Dié), Lud mentioned in his dedicatory letter to the Bishop of Toul Ringmann's impaired state of health. As a result of the intensive and continuous study of Greek manuscripts, Ringmann had become physically weakened. Lud therefore urged him to interrupt this strenuous activity temporarily and to turn instead to less demanding yet stimulating pursuits for the sake of recuperation. In this context, he encouraged Ringmann to develop a grammatical card game. Ringmann accepted this suggestion without resistance, since he recalled from his time as a student in Paris a school teaching game that he had learned from his renowned teacher Jacques Lefèvre d'Étaples, the so-called *Rithmomachia*. This game, which he still remembered vividly, was not based on cards but on an arithmetical board game using playing pieces. The *Rithmomachia* therefore cannot be regarded as a direct model for the *Grammatica figurata*. Rather, Walter Lud oriented himself towards those school compendia in the form of card games that Thomas Murner had developed a few years earlier and which had since circulated in Strasbourg and elsewhere. More generally, it can be observed that playful elements increasingly gained prominence in learned circles during the fifteenth century.[65] As an exponent of this development, mention may be made of Bernhard Hirschfelder from Nördlingen, an expert in the art of memory with a university background. Hirschfelder matriculated in the winter semester of 1454/1455 at the University of Leipzig. He is regarded as an important precursor of Thomas Murner in the field of

[61] Jacques Lefèvre d'Étaples, RAG-ID (ngAQ9R173ZI91pwWuZ3p5YmN1ZN)

[62] Kühlmann, „Ringmann, Matthias", 635-636.

[63] Wieser, *Ringmann*, 8. The citation of Ringmann in Walter Lud's letter to the Bishop of Toul.

[64] Wieser, *Ringmann*, 8 n. 2.

[65] See general on the subject: Carruthers, The Book of Memory, 222-226, 227-235.

playful knowledge transmission. Around 1470-1475, he devised a work entitled *Carteludium memorativum*, which can be considered one of the earliest examples of mnemotechnical educational card games.[66]

5.1. Kraków and the Beginnings of Murner's Card Games: Chartiludium logicae (1507)

The earliest evidence that Murner employed didactic playing cards in university teaching dates from his time in Kraków, after his return from Paris. He first visited in quick succession the universities of Cologne and Rostock, and possibly Prague as well. He then proceeded to Kraków, where he was promoted to bachelor of theology. As a franciscan friar, he was required for the academic ceremony to lay aside his habit and instead wear secular dress, a circumstance that one of his principal adversaries, Jakob Wimpfeling (1450-1528), later accused him of as constituting apostasy (*crimen apostasiae*).[67] Elsewhere in Murner's biography, however, it becomes clear that he maintained a decidedly pragmatic attitude towards the religious habit, which was by no means untypical of mendicant orders with a stronger orientation towards the world. In this context, Murner expressed critical views on outward appearance and on practices of ostentatious poverty among Franciscan friars, which he disparagingly described as *Affenspiel*, in contrast to his own piety, which he regarded as grounded in personal integrity.[68]

Of Murner's numerous university visits, which are known primarily from literary references, his first stay in Kraków is in fact attested in the university sources. Thomas Murner can be shown with certainty to have attended the University of Kraków in the winter semester of 1499/1500, as evidenced by his matriculation.[69] In addition to his matriculation, further evidence for Murner's stay in Kraków from the academic context has been preserved. Again deriving from literary sources, as in the case of the promotion to *magister artium*, information is available concerning Murner's promotion to bachelor of theology in Kraków, which is likely to have taken place around 1500. In his work *Germania nova*, published in 1502, he explicitly described himself as *baccalaureus cracoviensis*. On the title page of the first

[66] Pauser, *Invention*, S. 118; Volkmann, „Ars memorativa", 154.
[67] Cited in Liebenau, *Der Franziskaner Dr. Thomas Murner*, 12.
[68] Cited in Erler, *Thomas Murner als Jurist*, 90 n. 204.
[69] Thomas Murner (RAG-ID: ngPF5e476PX2belBjOIe7NbG)

edition of his logic textbook and game *Chartiludium logicae* (Kraków 1507, now lost), he is likewise listed - at least in the eighteenth-century bibliographical record - as *sacrae theologiae baccalaureus* of the University of Kraków, although the precise type of degree is unclear.[70]

More recent scholarship assumes that Murner conceived his first card game, the one devoted to logic, at the University of Kraków and employed it there in teaching. A possible second stay in Kraków is associated with the printing of this card game in 1507 in Kraków, which, however, is attested only by an eighteenth-century bibliographical reference. A copy of this 1507 edition is believed to be held in the Vatican Library.[71] It is possible, however, that this actually refers to the 1509 Strasbourg edition preserved in the same Library.[72] Murner's stay in Kraków can thus be dated to the period between 1499 and 1501, since he is securely attested as being back in Strasbourg by around 1501.

If one assumes that Thomas Murner was already using his first playing cards in Kraków around 1500, then the development of his second known card game, the *Chartiludium Institute* on Roman law, is likely to fall within the same period, perhaps shortly thereafter or even in parallel. By 1502 at the latest, these cards, apparently still in the form of drawings, were in circulation and already known, as a contemporary letter suggests. In contrast to the Kraków logic cards, this second card game is located by scholarship more in the Strasbourg milieu. Its composition is assumed to have taken place after Murner's return there, possibly stimulated by the success he had achieved with his logical card game among students. That the game on Roman law initially existed in an early, not yet fully elaborated form is suggested by the fact that a set of cards without accompanying instructions, in effect a "rough version", was rediscovered in Basel only at the end of the nineteenth century in a library. It was only years later, in 1518, that the work appeared in print with detailed rules of play and instructions for use. A comparable process could likely to have taken place in Kraków as well: an early card version around 1500, perhaps a first publication in 1507, and finally an expanded and commented version in the prints of 1509.

In his art-historical investigations, Sondheim provides the central evidence concerning the lost Kraków first edition of the logic card game from

[70] Worstbrock, „Murner, Thomas", Sp. 321; Liebenau, *Der Franziskaner Dr. Thomas Murner*, 12 n. 4, 47.

[71] Worstbrock, „Murner Thomas", Sp. 321; Alberici, *Mazzo*, 38.

[72] Biblioteca Apostolica Vaticana, catalogue entry for Thomas Murner, Logica memoratiua chartiludiu[m] logice (1509), accessed March 11, 2026, https://opac.vatlib.it/stp/detail/10332239

1507.[73] He notes that the Polish bibliographer Janocki was the first to describe this edition in detail in 1776. Nevertheless, Sondheim emphasises that despite extensive searches in German, Polish, and Russian libraries, no physical copy survives today. Sondheim advances the hypothesis that the Kraków edition may have been produced without Murner's knowledge. He considers it conceivable that a student took notes during Murner's lectures and copied his drawings, which the printer Johann Haller then had printed as a "practical handbook". A strong indication of this is that in his Strasbourg print of 1509 Murner speaks approvingly of his work in Kraków, yet ignores Haller's 1507 print. A possible second stay in Kraków around 1506/07 is therefore assumed in the scholarship only on the basis of biographical gaps and the date of the lost copy from 1507 with the place of printing given as Kraków.[74] Such a second stay therefore appears unlikely, as more recent scholarship also suggests.[75]

5.2. Kraków Traditions of the Art of Memory

Murner employed his first logic card game within an intellectually stimulating environment that, much like Freiburg and Paris, is likely to have contributed significantly to consolidating his interest in the art of memory and in didactic learning games. Various factors in Kraków played a role in this regard.

The *ars memorativa* was an integral component of university teaching in the late Middle Ages and the early modern period.[76] As *memoria artificiosa* one understood a learnable technique by means of which knowledge could be systematically impressed and made retrievable through order, visualisation, and repetition. This art of memory was taught in particular within the study of the Artes and served to manage extensive bodies of material in rhetoric, logic, and theology. Around 1500, Kraków constituted a multifaceted space of knowledge in which university teaching, studies within religious orders, and extra-academic practices of knowledge were closely intertwined. At the University of Kraków, studies in the Artes, theology, and law were combined with a pronounced training in rhetoric and mnemotechnics, with the Franciscans in particular, as teachers and preachers, shaping techniques

[73] Sondheim, *Illustrationen*, 20.

[74] Liebenau, *Der Franziskaner Dr. Thomas Murner*, 46.

[75] Wójcik, „Straßburg - Freiburg - Paris - Krakau", 65.

[76] Cf. the example of the University of Erfurt in Kemper, „Gedächtniskunst als akademische Übung", 272.

of ordering knowledge, visualisation, and memorisation. It is within this milieu that the didactic card games of the Franciscan Thomas Murner are to be situated. They do not represent a departure from the *ars memorativa*, but rather its didactic further development, insofar as they translate the mental ordering of *loci* and *imagines* into material, play-based forms that were especially well suited to university teaching.

The *ars memorativa*, an art of memory developed since antiquity, was firmly established as an academically legitimised practice that was at the same time imaginatively effective, and in Kraków it certainly found particular resonance also because of the openness towards astronomy, astrology, and border areas of knowledge. Lectures on the art of memory were therefore also delivered in Kraków by local, Polish professors. Remarkably, all known teachers of mnemotechnics at the turn of the fifteenth to the sixteenth century were of Polish origin and closely connected with the Observant branch of the Franciscan Order.[77] At the University of Kraków, almost all teachers of the *ars memorativa* who were active there, with the exception of a few humanists, were Franciscan Observants. The order functioned as a decisive carrier and multiplier of mnemotechnical practices. The University of Kraków thus emerges as one of the most important centres of the art of memory in the late fifteenth and early sixteenth centuries. There, the *ars memorativa* was taught, practised, compiled, and printed, by both humanists and members of religious orders.[78]

In addition, there were other significant scholars from outside Kraków who taught the art of memory at the University of Kraków. In principle, this group, both with regard to its specialisation in the *ars memorativa* and in relation to games such as those developed by Murner, would merit closer investigation within the RAG as a whole, particularly with respect to the dissemination of their specialised knowledge.[79] Only a few scholars will be mentioned here by way of example, all of whom also have a connection to the University of Kraków and may therefore have been of interest as sources of inspiration for Murner.

For Thomas Murner, Jacobus Publicius was certainly a pioneer in Kraków, as he was at other universities. After his teaching activity on the art of memory in Erfurt, Publicius taught at various other universities. He matri-

[77] Wójcik, „Masters, Pupils, Friends, and Thieves“, 403.

[78] Wójcik, „Straßburg - Freiburg - Paris - Krakau“, 77-83.

[79] I am following the approach of Wójcik, "Masters, Pupils, Friends, and Thieves", on the dissemination of the *ars memorativa* among early German humanists.

culated in Leipzig in 1467, then in Cologne in 1468, in 1469 at the University of Kraków, and finally in 1469/70 in Basel. His itinerant teaching of the art of memory reached back to the mid-1460s, attesting to a long and mobile career across several universities. An illustrative example of his teaching is provided by a rare set of lecture notes from 1466/1467 recording Jacobus Publicius's lecture in Erfurt, written down by the student Johannes Knaes, who later became a jurist, professor, and rector at the same university.[80] Publicius was trained as a physician, but appeared primarily as a teacher of rhetoric and poetics. The lecture notes contain, among other things, material relating to the teaching of the Spanish itinerant humanist, which comprised instruction in punctuation, rhetoric, epistolography, and illustrated mnemotechnics.[81] Jacobus Publicius, for example, introduced movable elements into his books, such as parchment volvelles with which letter combinations could be practised, as well as an illustrated alphabet.[82] Murner was familiar with the works of Jacobus Publicius and was therefore able to build on his visual methods. Whereas Publicius still presented mnemotechnical images primarily in book form, Murner radicalised this approach by translating them physically into playing cards in order to convey learning material.

Jacobus Publicius was followed, particularly in Kraków, by other important itinerant scholars who earned their livelihood in university towns, especially within the Holy Roman Empire, among other things by passing on techniques of artificial memory to students. It is noteworthy that the culture of memory initiated by Publicius found particular resonance in Kraków among the Observants, the Bernardines. Professors such as John of Glogau, under whom both Conrad Celtis during his Kraków stay (1489-1491) and later Thomas Murner studied, integrated these influences into a system that combined astronomy, logic, and the art of memory. In doing so, Glogau created an intellectual infrastructure that made it possible to establish mnemotechnical procedures as legitimate tools of the exact sciences.

Sustained impulses for the transmission of the art of memory also emanated from Conrad Celtis.[83] In Kraków, Celtis also devoted himself in particular to mathematics and astronomy. In addition to Celtis, Wójcik names Hermann von dem Busche as another significant pioneer of the art of memory, which gained prominence especially among German humanists at

[80] Jacobus Publicius (RAG-ID: ngMC5b173L29vbiUgLVb6KyX); Johannes Knaes (RAG-ID: (ngKA7R577KC3tzgYeKDz9IwV).

[81] Kemper, „Gedächtniskunst als akademische Übung", 272-273.

[82] Green, „Mnemonic Alphabet of Jacobus Publicius (1482)".

[83] Conrad Celtis (RAG-ID:ngFV7I072GX80ubBzFeuoDrW)

the end of the fifteenth and the beginning of the sixteenth century. For many of them, Celtis served as a model in the field of the *ars memorativa*.[84]

A formative example of the long-term establishment of the art of memory is the career of Johannes Enclen de Cusa (Cusanus). His *Tractatulus artificiose memorie*, which circulated widely from 1510 in Frankfurt an der Oder and from 1514 in Vienna, documents the methodological maturity of this discipline.[85] That Cusanus was still explicitly listed in Kraków in 1529 as *lector artificiose memorie* in the register of university teachers underscores the fact that the art of memory there had attained the status of an independent and highly specialised field of instruction. By noting that he had taught in seven countries and at nineteen universities, including Cologne, Erfurt, and Vienna, Cusanus stands as an exemplary representative of those mobile scholars who disseminated mnemotechnical knowledge across Europe. For Murner, this environment meant that in Kraków he encountered not merely isolated stimuli, but a deeply rooted and professionally cultivated culture of memory that had already accepted the play with places and images as an established component of academic education.

5.3. Learning Successes at the University of Kraków: Accusations of Magic and Rehabilitation

Within the context outlined above, it can hardly be coincidental that Murner encountered at the University of Kraków an intellectual openness that enabled him to employ his novel play-based didactics successfully in teaching. In Kraków, his previously acquired experiences with the art of memory and with didactic games, as known at least from Freiburg and Paris, took concrete shape, even though his methodology here too initially met with suspicion. Thomas Murner was a student of John of Glogau (c. 1445-1507), whom he cites as his teacher. Glogau played a decisive role in the establishment and legitimation of the art of memory and of didactic games at the University of Kraków. He was a highly esteemed professor of philosophy, logic, mathematics, and astronomy, who prepared the intellectual ground for mnemotechnical innovations, including those of Thomas Murner. Among other students, he also taught Nicolaus Copernicus.

[84] Wójcik, „Masters, Pupils, Friends, and Thieves", 412.

[85] Kiss, „The Art of Memory in Hungary", 143-145; Johannes Cusanus (RAG-ID: ngVL6o072Ut-8gkrHpU2keThG)

Johannes von Glogau thus became an important patron for Thomas Murner in Kraków. The background is provided by a well-known episode. The introduction of this didactic method at the University of Kraków led to considerable difficulties for Murner. The success of his teaching method was so striking that in Kraków he fell under suspicion of practising magic.[86]

It was assumed that he was using supernatural means, since his students learned logic in only about one month. In order to justify himself, Murner was required to demonstrate his game publicly before the professors of the University of Kraków. The renowned professor John of Glogau, a leading member of the university assembly, thereupon issued Murner a highly laudatory testimonial (*testimonium magistrale*), in which the method was admired as a "divine invention" (*divinum potius ingenium*). More recent scholarship, however, has also expressed doubts about the authenticity of this report attributed to Glogau and considers that it may, at least in part, represent a form of self-promotion on Murner's part.[87]

In Kraków, Murner taught dialectic and logic using his mnemotechnical card game (*Chartiludium logicae*), for which he himself drew the cards.[88] This emerges from the preface to the Strasbourg (1509) edition of the *Logica memorativa*, where he also notes that in Kraków he taught the logic of Petrus Hispanus by means of the cards. In the prefaces to the *Chartiludium logicae*, Murner repeatedly attributes clear learning successes to his cards. He emphasises in particular the easier introduction to logic even for those with little prior training, a rapid overview of the entire field of dialectic, and a lasting memorative mastery of the material through playful repetition. Concrete indications of time are generally lacking; programmatically, however, the learning outcome is presented as faster, more stable, and more accessible than in conventional lecture-based teaching.

A specific indication of time is contained in the testimonial of his teacher Johannes von Glogau printed in the Strasbourg edition. There it is stated that within four weeks the students had made such considerable progress that suspicion arose that Murner was practising magic or employing "magical things". In order to clear himself of this accusation, Murner was summoned before the college of professors. He had his students swear an oath not to disclose the secret of the cards for two years and not to reveal to anyone their content, a measure that is likely to have reinforced suspicions of illicit

[86] Pauser, *Invention*, 25.

[87] Wójcik, „Straßburg - Freiburg - Paris - Krakau", 64.

[88] Regarding what follows Sondheim, *Illustrationen*, 18-19.

practices. Murner was then required to disclose his method and to present the cards to the learned audience. The professors recognised that his success was not due to magic, but to an extraordinary pedagogical talent. As a result of this achievement, Murner was officially admitted to the circle of Kraków teachers and received a reward of twenty-four Hungarian guilders. Murner was so proud of this attestation that he later published it as evidence of the effectiveness and legitimacy of his teaching method in his printed works, such as the Strasbourg edition of the *Logica memorativa* (1509).[89] The *testimonium magistrale* functioned for Murner like an acquittal that at the same time served as a seal of quality for his innovative teaching method. It transformed the accusation of dark magic into recognition of his didactic invention.

Murner repeatedly attributes considerable learning successes to his logical card games, in particular a rapid overview of dialectic and a lasting memorative mastery of the material. From a source-critical perspective, these claimed successes must be read as programmatic self-ascriptions, yet they are indirectly supported by contemporary reactions, the dissemination of the printed editions, and the further development of the didactic model. Unlike in the case of the juridical card game, Murner did not provide concrete time indications for these learning outcomes. He also explicitly understands the game as a guarantor of *repetitio*: through repeated play, logical contents are recapitulated more frequently than would be possible through mere reading or listening, which he regarded as a central prerequisite for sustainable memorative acquisition.[90]

5.4. The First Juridical Card Game: Chartiludium institute (iuridicum) (ca. 1500-1502)

After his stay in Kraków, Murner returned to his homeland and from around 1501 worked as a lector for his order in Strasbourg. With this, his great *peregrinatio academica* came to an end. From this point onwards, Murner remained largely within the Upper German and Swiss regions. It is plausible that, at the latest after his successes in Kraków, Murner entertained the idea of transferring not only logic but also the juridical material of the *Institutiones* into a didactic game. The juridical card game represents the first didactic card game designed for the teaching of Justinian's *Institutiones*. This

[89] Liebenau, *Der Franziskaner Dr. Thomas Murner*, 12.
[90] Pauser, *Frevel*, 219.

text constituted the introductory work for the study of Roman law and was regarded as particularly difficult, as it is complex, highly systematic, and rich in technical terminology. Murner's motivation was therefore clear. He sought to create a didactic access that did not alter the substance of the material, but made its structure visible and memorisable, enabling learners to grasp the order and inner architecture of the *Corpus iuris civilis*.

It is very likely that Murner developed the juridical card game in parallel with the logic game. Perhaps, as a later source claims, he had already drawn the juridical playing cards during his time in Kraków. According to this source, he is said to have divided the four books of the *Institutiones* into playing cards already during his Kraków period.[91] In any case, by this point Murner had already acquired a solid command of Justinian's *Institutiones*. In the *Defensio Germaniae* (1502), Murner was criticised for boasting that he was without equal in civil law, particularly in the *Institutiones* of Justinian, and that he had moreover attained the highest rank in the mathematical sciences, an allusion to the mathematics-oriented profile of the University of Kraków. According to the *Defensio Germaniae* (1502), Murner in his lecture on Boethius accused Wimpfeling of ignorance in mathematics.[92] The accusation concerning civil law referred in particular to Murner's claim, made in a letter of 1502 to the renowned indulgence preacher Geiler von Kaisersberg, that apart from himself no one had organised the study of Justinian's *Institutiones* so practically through a variety of exercises for teaching purposes. This statement at the same time constitutes the earliest reference to the juridical card game.[93] In the same year, Murner stated in one of his writings that he had tried to explain the *Institutiones* by means of cards, partly to stimulate the desire to read and partly to displace bad games.[94] Murner's opponents immediately seized upon this statement as an occasion for further mockery. They remarked that it was astonishing why Emperor Maximilian I had not long since appointed such a great jurist to his council, or why the prince-electors had not delegated him as an assessor to the *Reichskammergericht*.[95] More generally, Murner's self-fashioning as a universally learned Franciscan, who at the same time claimed the highest authority in Roman law and in theology, was subjected to caricature and ridicule.

[91] Regarding what follows: Liebenau, *Der Franziskaner Dr. Thomas Murner*, 119.

[92] At the faculties of arts, a *lectio Boethii* generally referred to instruction based on the works of Boethius as the canonical authority for the subjects of the *quadrivium*; cf. Borries, *Wimpfeling und Murner*, 64.

[93] Borries, *Wimpfeling und Murner*, 65.

[94] Liebenau, *Der Franziskaner Dr. Thomas Murner*, 118.

[95] Sieber, „Thomas Murner", 287, n. 1.

That Murner possessed and employed a juridical card game for didactic purposes by 1502 at the latest is, however, unequivocally attested by a source. A key piece of evidence is a letter from the Strasbourg jurist Thomas Wolff, who had been promoted *doctor decretorum* at the University of Bologna, dating from 1502. In this letter, Wolff reproaches Murner for having disfigured the venerable *Institutiones* of Justinian with foolish glosses and little "pictures" in the margins.[96] In this letter, Wolff mocked the fact that it was a sacrilege for imperial edicts to appear as playing cards. In a reply (1503/4), written as a defence, Murner confirmed the existence of this game and stated that he had created a *cartiludium institutionum* in order to make it easier for students to memorise the text.[97] He justified this by arguing that through this "wholesome game" he wished to displace inferior games and to stimulate a desire for reading. Murner initially appears to have employed this early juridical card game (or images of playing cards) within the framework of his activity as a lector in the monastery. A renewed institutional connection with the university is only securely attested again for the year 1506, when he was promoted to doctor of theology.

These first juridical playing cards created by Murner were probably hand-drawn and have not survived.[98] The phase of material consolidation (after 1504) marks the transition to the printed medium. As Sondheim demonstrates, it was during this period that the physically tangible sets of cards were produced - the ones now preserved in Basel, Vienna, and Milan.[99] Sondheim demonstrated that the surviving printed cards of the Basel set contain a figure, the herald, which is a copy of a woodcut by Hans Burgkmair from 1504.[100] Since a print of 1502 cannot have used a model from 1504, these physical cards must have been produced after 1504. Around 1873, the Basel University librarian Ludwig Sieber discovered the incomplete set of 119 cards in a dusty corner of the juridical section of the library.[101] The Basel cards contain only brief keywords or questions. The actual instructions and the detailed definitions of terms are included in the

[96] Regarding what follows: Pauser, *Frevel*, 209; Thomas Wolff (der jüngere) (RAG-ID: ngPF8W072QX81elXjQIe0Nbi)

[97] Sieber, *Kartenspiel*, S. 289.

[98] On the various versions of Murner's juridical card games, see in detail Sondheim, *Illustrationen*, 10-18.

[99] Pauser, *Invention*, 125.

[100] The copy dating from after 1503 can be found on *e-rara*: https://www.e-rara.ch/bau_1/doi/10.3931/e-rara-56100

[101] Sieber, *Kartenspiel*, S. 275.

book edition published in 1518 (*Chartiludium institute summarie*). The game is structured into twelve suits, represented by coats of arms and images of the Emperor and the princes of the Empire (as aces). The reverse sides of the cards were, for the first time, printed with coats of arms in order to indicate the systematic organisation of the legal material (persons, things, actions).[102] Also preserved is a handwritten fragment, or, according to Sondheim, simply a copy of the juridical card game, produced after 1515.[103] It is the only known manuscript of the juridical card game; it also contains the Trier lecture announcement of 1515. In terms of content, it corresponds in part to the later printed version, while other passages are entirely absent or appear in a different arrangement. This manuscript is to be understood as a preliminary stage of the Strasbourg print of 1518. It demonstrates that Murner did not develop his didactic system only in theory, but had already tested it in university practice in Trier in 1515. At the same time, the absence of certain elements that appear in the later print shows how Murner gradually refined and expanded his concept didactically between 1515 and 1518.

For instance, Murner provides in the Trier Intimatio (1515) chronological indications of learning success for the *Institutiones*. He promised that they could be mastered within a period of only four weeks.[104] He asserts that even someone entirely ignorant could acquire complete knowledge and an exact memory of the legal material within this period. But in the *Chartiludium Institute summarie* (1518), Murner emphasized that the use of his legal playing cards as an exercise was only permissible and beneficial once the student had already understood the text through prior instruction. Without such foundational comprehension, the game was "forbidden". In the same work, Murner sets out his didactical method. The prospective jurist was first to study the *Theorica* carefully and master it by heart, then to work through the explanatory *Declaratio*. Only on this basis could he attain a proper understanding of the law of the *Institutiones*, for which a teacher was required who would expound the entire material within no more than six weeks. Murner emphasises that he himself was accustomed to completing this task within four weeks. If the Latin text presented particular difficulties, he recommended recourse to his German translation, which, although criticised by some law teachers as a profanation of jurisprudence, had proved practica-

[102] Pauser, *Frevel*, 213 with a tabular presentation explaining the significance of the playing-card illustrations in relation to the chapters of the *Institutiones* to be learned.

[103] Sondheim, *Illustrationen*, 10-18; *Pauser, Frevel,* 210.

[104] Sieber, *Thomas Murner*, 302-303.

ble and had already achieved wide circulation; some had even appropriated it unlawfully. Those who rejected the German language could instead consult a more extensive Latin edition of the *Institutiones*, whose imminent appearance in print was announced.

6. Criticism of Murner's Methodology

Criticism of Thomas Murner's play-based didactic approaches and his mnemotechnical card games began with their first appearance and accompanied his work throughout the contemporary learned world. While in Kraków - despite initial resistance - Murner was able to achieve tangible successes with his new methodology, it encountered early opposition in his Alsatian homeland. Established jurists in particular reacted negatively, directing their criticism not only against the playful mediation of law, but also against Murner's German translations of juridical texts, which were alleged to promote a profanation of the law. Murner's play-didactic programme might perhaps have been more widely received had it not from the outset been exposed to this ill-fated concentration of critical voices. For the objections were directed, on the one hand, against the unusual didactic procedure itself, but on the other hand repeatedly also targeted Murner as a person and his outsider position within the learned field. It must also be borne in mind that critical voices, then as now, are often more readily heard and documented than the many possible voices of students who achieved learning successes through the didactic games, and of scholars who viewed the methodology with goodwill.

Well known is the criticism voiced in the Strasbourg milieu of the jurist Thomas Wolff in 1502, who disparaged the playing cards. Yet this criticism also had its specific background, since, as noted, the influential Strasbourg patrician Wolff family had for decades been embroiled in fierce disputes, above all with Thomas and Johannes Murner. Satirical mockery by contemporaries reached Murner in 1515 in the so-called satirical *Epistolae obscurorum virorum*. People laughed at Murner's claim that logic could be learned through cards or the art of verse through a game of chess.[105]

A fundamental rejection was articulated by the renowned Freiburg jurist Ulrich Zasius, particularly after the appearance of the expanded version of the juridical card game in 1518. Zasius took a firm stand both against

[105] Pauser, *Frevel*, 224.

the translation of civil law into the German vernacular and against playful approaches to the acquisition of legal knowledge, intensifying his criticism to the polemical demand that those who refused to abandon such practices should be punished.[106] The vehemence of this reaction suggests that Murner's didactic approaches did indeed find resonance. Zasius evidently perceived them not merely as a curiosity, but rather as a trend that was being imitated, a circumstance that helps to explain the intensity of his opposition.

It was subsequently Ulrich Zasius who sought to prevent Murner's solemn promotion to doctor of both laws in Basel. In a letter of 1 March 1519 to his friend Claudius Canticula in Basel, Zasius attempted to persuade him not to promote Murner to the doctorate, arguing that Basel was already notorious for conferring doctoral degrees in law on insignificant individuals.[107] Zasius feared for the reputation of the faculty of law. In the same letter, he described Murner as an unwashed man who, with his fool's cap, would profane the sacred law. Murner, he claimed, knew as much about both laws, the canon and the civil, as a blind man knows about colour.[108] As early as 1518, Zasius fundamentally criticised what he perceived as a profanation of the law.[109] Zasius's primary aim was to prevent a lavish promotion ceremony. Probably at Canticula's instigation, two preliminary questions were raised: whether, under the statutes of the Franciscan Order, it was permissible for a poor Franciscan to celebrate a splendid doctoral promotion, and whether a Franciscan could be promoted doctor of imperial law. The academic senate decided to seek a ruling from the Holy See on these matters. Even before this, the senate forbade the town musicians of Strasbourg, whom Murner had engaged and who had already arrived, from accompanying the promotion festivities, on the grounds that Murner was a Franciscan.

In the summer of 1519, Murner travelled to Italy in order to clarify the matter and to obtain papal approval for his undertaking, which he did successfully.[110] After his return, Murner was promoted to doctor of both laws in Basel in June or July 1519, albeit without the originally planned festivities owing to the controversies. In fact, with his promotion to *doctor utriusque iuris*, Thomas Murner represents a singular exception among the Franciscans

[106] Pauser, *Frevel*, 224; Liebenau, „Murner in Basel", 81-82.

[107] Liebenau, *Der Franziskaner Dr. Thomas Murner*, 120-126; Liebenau, „Murner in Basel", 82.

[108] Letter printed in Liebenau, *Der Franziskaner Dr. Thomas Murner*, 121, n. 1..

[109] Erler, *Murner als Jurist*, 22-23.

[110] Erler, *Murner als Jurist*, 13, n. 18. Erler notes that with this journey Murner may at the same time have sought to avoid the plague, which was raging in Upper Germany at the time.

recorded in the RAG, since no comparable promotion can be demonstrated for any other member of the order.[111]

Erasmus of Rotterdam, by contrast, voiced primarily pedagogical reservations about Murner's approach. He argued that card and board games absorbed the minds of learners too intensely for serious learning oriented towards understanding to be possible. As Pauser rightly points out, Erasmus thus falls into a certain contradiction. For it is precisely the *repetitio* of the material, which Erasmus fundamentally endorsed, that constitutes a central element of Murner's play-based didactic concepts. Murner's games are not aimed at distraction, but at repeated practice and consolidation of what has already been learned.[112] Overall, it can be stated with regard to the criticism of Murner's play-based didactics that, while influential voices among leading scholars expressed rejection, the great majority of scholars exercised restraint.

7. From Logic and Law to Prosody and Metre: Ludus studentum Friburgensium (1511)

Before Murner moved to Basel, he taught at the universities of Freiburg and Trier. At both institutions he once again emerged as an innovative teacher and broke new ground in academic instruction. In Freiburg, by virtue of his promotion to doctor of theology on 27 March 1506, Murner had undertaken an obligation to teach at the university for at least one year.[113] After his promotion, Murner stayed in Rome, where he took part in the General Chapter of his order. As already mentioned, beyond the stay in Bologna and Venice reported by older scholarship, no firm evidence is known that he used this brief journey to Italy for formal university studies. In the winter semester of 1508/9, Murner then taught not only at the University of Freiburg, but also in the Franciscan monastery in Freiburg. In this milieu, and in particular for the students of the university, he developed his learning games devoted to prosody and metre. This game has two precursor versions.[114] It began with the *Scacus quantitatis syllabarum* (1508/09), a combined chess and rotating-game apparatus designed to practise prosodic rules. This was followed by *De*

[111] Data query in the RAG database conducted by the author, December 2025.
[112] Pauser, *Frevel*, 224.
[113] Liebenau, *Der Franziskaner Dr. Thomas Murner*, 45-46.
[114] Worstbrock, „Murner, Thomas", Sp. 321-322.

sillabarum quantitatibus (1510), an expanded version in which the wheel game was replaced by the Guidonian Hand and supplemented with general rules on syllable quantity. The final stage is represented by the *Ludus studentum Friburgensium* (1511/12), which brings together the earlier game instruments, develops them didactically, and adds a tric-trac game. In this way, Murner created the first known instructional game for the teaching of Latin metre in a university context. The fact that Murner lectured the Version of 1510 at the university of Freiburg appears in the print.[115] In addition to the chessboard, a new game was incorporated: a tric-trac board with dice, integrated in order to practise what had been learned in a playful manner.[116]

Once again, Murner was the first through his inventive ingenuity, and this in a twofold sense. The *Ludus studentum Friburgensium* is the first known instructional chess game for the teaching of Latin metre. At the same time, in 1511 it represents the earliest known print produced in Frankfurt am Main, where Thomas Murner's brothers, Sixtus and Beatus, were active as printers and operated the first printing press in the city. The *Ludus studentum* was printed by Beatus in several editions (1511 and 1512), which may indeed point to a growing interest in Murner's play-based didactic methods.[117] In Freiburg, Murner acted not only as an academic teacher, but also as a preacher in the Franciscan convent. In doing so, he came into conflict with the university by touching upon the contentious field of parochial rights and mendicant preaching privileges.[118] On 25 November 1508, the University of Freiburg, under its rector Angelo de Besutio, a nobleman from Milan, forbade him to present from the pulpit any content that might infringe the rights of the parish church or provoke tensions between the parochial clergy and members of religious orders. Subsequently, the university denounced Murner to his superiors in the order on various grounds. As late as 8 June 1509, under the rectorship of Blasius Eichhorn, it justified its actions in response to a complaint by Murner as having been carried out in accordance with its duty.[119] These disputes are likely to have contributed to Murner's subsequent transfer to Bern as Lector of the Franciscans. Prior to Bern, Murner served for a time as guardian of the Franciscan monasteries in Speyer and Strasbourg, positions that could also involve teaching activities.

[115] *In Alma Universitate Friburgensi lecta*, cited in Worstbrock, „Murner, Thomas", Sp. 322.

[116] Sondheim, *Frankfurter Drucke*,12, 49.

[117] Sondheim, *Frankfurter Drucke*, 5-6.

[118] Regarding what follows see: Liebenau, *Der Franziskaner Dr. Thomas Murner*, 57.

[119] Angelo de Besutio (RAG-ID: ngYO1X173X29knuosXHn1Wkr); Blasius Eichhorn (RAG-ID: ngPF5e476PH2zelHjPoe7NbW)

He is then documented as a lector of his order in Frankfurt am Main from 1511 to 1513

8. Murner as Professor of Civil Law at the University of Trier

After a brief interlude as head of the principal Franciscan convent in Strasbourg in 1513, Murner returned once more to the university sphere. At the latest following his teaching activity at the University of Freiburg, he thus increasingly turned again towards juridical subject matter. Murner arrived in Trier in the first half of 1515. From St. Andrew's Day (30 November) onward, he is documented as having delivered lectures on Justinian's *Institutiones* at the local University.[120] The lecture covered the four books of the *Institutiones*, which were regarded as the foundation of imperial law. Murner promised the students that, even with only moderate prior education, he would teach them the material completely within just four weeks, enabling them to master the individual paragraphs with the greatest precision and permanently.[121] The lecture announcement in Trier from 1515 is reproduced in the *Chartiludium Institute summarie* printed in 1518.[122] Once again, Murner appears as a pioneer with what was the first lecture on the *Institutiones* delivered in the German language. As he later did at the University of Basel, he likely adopted a didactically valuable approach by juxtaposing the Latin original text with his German translation in his teaching. As Erler has emphasised, Murner was thus not only the first translator of the *Institutiones* into German, but at the same time the first university teacher to deliver a juridical lecture in the German vernacular.[123] His intensified engagement with juridical material in the following years is reflected in the extensive publication of the learning game on Justinian's *Institutiones*, which had originally been conceived as a set of playing cards. This period also saw the translation of central juridical texts into German. In this field as well, Murner acted as an innovator and contributed significantly to the formation of a German legal language.[124] Yet Murner was not innovative only in juridical

[120] Pauser, *Frevel*, 206.

[121] Liebenau, *Der Franziskaner Dr. Thomas Murner*, 82; Pauser, *Frevel*, 210; Erler, *Murner als Jurist*, 51-52.

[122] Erler, *Murner als Jurist*, 51.

[123] Erler, *Murner als Jurist*, 47.

[124] An overview of Murner's juridical writings is provided by Kaib, „Zu den juristischen Schriften Thomas Murners".

terms during this period. In 1515, his translation of Virgil's Aeneid also appeared for the first time in German.

9. Murner at the University of Basel: Teaching and Translations

His intensive engagement with jurisprudence continued after Trier at the University of Basel, where it was further accompanied by the translation of significant legal texts. Murner's stay in Basel between 1518 and 1519 was highly productive. He arrived in Basel in the first half of 1518 and enrolled at the local university, already holding a doctorate in theology.[125] On 11 June 1519 he was awarded the doctorate in both laws (utriusque iuris) in Basel, as earlier in Trier, Murner taught as a professor of civil law - this time with a municipal salary - and continued to lecture in German. During this period, he also published several key works aimed at making juridical knowledge more accessible, above all through translation and didactic adaptation. The *Utriusque iuris tituli et regulae* appeared 1518 from the press of Adam Petri in Basel. It contains, among others, a register of the title rubrics of the Justinianic law books as well as translations of the *regulae iris civilis et canonici*.[126] For the first time, Murner added a German translation to the Latin titles. In the preface, he addresses the Basel law students directly and justifies his approach against critics who accused him of profaning the law through the use of the vernacular and of "casting pearls before swine".[127] This was followed by the expanded version of the juridical card game, *Chartiludium Institute summarie* (1518), which, although printed in Strasbourg by Johannes Prüß, is closely connected with Murner's teaching activity and preparatory work in Basel. Here Murner makes use of images and playing cards (121 illustrations) in order to convey the material of the *Institutiones* and to explain it in far greater detail than was possible with the original card sets. The book contains a reprint of the Trier lecture announcement (*Intimatio*) of 1515 mentioned above, in which he promises to teach the students the entire subject matter within just four weeks. In this text, Murner also reports accusations that his rapid teaching successes were due to magic or the assistance of a demon, accusations he rejects by invoking divine grace.

[125] Regarding what follows see: Liebenau, „Murner in Basel"; Erler, *Murner als Jurist*; Pauser, *Frevel*.

[126] Erler, *Murner als Jurist*, 10, also it contains all sources of the so called *Kaiserrecht* around 1500.

[127] Liebenau, „Murner in Basel", 76.

Another work followed with the translation of the *Institutiones* (prepared in 1518, printed in 1519). In Basel, Murner worked on the first complete German translation of the *Institutiones*. In the preface to the work published in 1519, he emphasises that he had already submitted his translation project for discussion at a scholarly gathering in Basel prior to publication, where it had been described as an impossible undertaking.[128] Before undertaking the translation, he had first publicly compared the text with the Latin original as a Professor in his, as pointed out, regular teaching at the University of Basel, and only thereafter committed the translation to writing. Murner's German translations thus mark the beginning of a development that was fundamental to the emergence of a new German legal language.[129]

With the work *Der kaiserlichen statrechten ein ingang* (1521), Thomas Murner moreover transferred his didactic concept to urban legal practice. While his early production was still focused on academic training, this work aimed at a far broader popularisation of the law. Murner broke with Latin learned culture by translating complex imperial statutes into the vernacular and arranging them systematically in such a way that they became directly applicable for a non-academic, urban audience, in particular city councils.[130] This *Ingang* is therefore far more than a mere translation; it represents an attempt to transform the law, through structuring and simplification, into a reliable instrument of everyday civic life. In this way, the work can be situated within Murner's overarching didactic programme.

Through his translations of major legal texts, Murner thus presented himself not only as an advocate for students and for lay users of the law, but also as a polemicist against learned jurists, who held influential positions in the Upper Rhine region, particularly at the universities of Freiburg and Basel. His promotion to doctor of civil law further sharpened this challenge to the learned jurists. In Basel, Murner also assumed a pioneering role in a broader sense: in 1527, Paracelsus likewise delivered medical lectures in German. As in Murner's case with his vernacular legal translations, Paracelsus too was confronted with accusations of charlatanry.[131] According to Worstbrock, Murner was the first, and for a long time the only one, to recognise that debates over matters of faith could not be left to learned theologians alone. In order to achieve a broader impact, the central texts had to be translated into

[128] Erler, *Murner als Jurist*, 35-36.
[129] Worstbrock, „Murner, Thomas", Sp. 339.
[130] Worstbrock, „Murner, Thomas", Sp. 341.
[131] Erler, *Murner als Jurist*, 45.

the vernacular and made accessible to a non-academic audience.[132] In this respect, Murner acted in a manner comparable to Martin Luther, in that he likewise relied on German-language pamphlets - an aspect of his activity that cannot be pursued further here.

10. Murner's Critique of Learned Jurists

Between Murner and certain learned jurists in the Upper Rhine region there existed a conflictual relationship. Murner articulated a fundamental critique of their learned detachment from practice and at the same time attacked them polemically in his works. Thus, for example, it was said of jurists that they were good Christians only as corpses.[133] His attacks were also directed against the excessive commentary of the law through glosses, which in his view contributed to its distortion, as well as against the fundamental social injustice that resulted from the Latin monopoly over the transmission of legal knowledge. This criticism was aimed not only at juridical teaching at universities, but equally at urban legal practice, as Murner knew it from the milieu of his father and his uncle.

In the dedicatory preface to his work *Der kaiserlichen statrechten ein ingang* (1521), Murner mentions his father Matthäus and his uncle Jakob by name. There he writes that he had "so often heard them complain" about how poor people were deprived of their rights by legal scholars (the *Baretlissleut*) on account of the Latin language. He laments that in many German cities councillors and citizens, because of their lack of knowledge of Latin, had to "beg" the imperial law by which they were supposed to judge from the "Latin doctors".[134] Murner further argued that jurists deliberately prolonged legal proceedings in order to increase their own profit. He saw this as a conscious strategy by jurists to keep the populace in a state of dependence. His own translations of the legal texts mentioned were intended to break this monopoly. In this sense, Murner also expressed himself in his translation of the *Institutiones* (1519), which was not meant to serve learned judges alone, but above all the lay users of the law, so that everyone might thereby

[132] Worstbrock, „Murner, Thomas", Sp. 342.

[133] Liebenau, „Murner in Basel", 80: In his works *Narrenbeschwörung* (c. 1522) as well as *Schelmenzunft* (1512), Murner mocked learned jurists.

[134] Cited in Erler, *Murner als Jurist*, 47-48.

"behelfen mag in allen hendeln alle tag", that is, be able to make use of it in all matters of everyday life.[135]

In his satire *Narrenbeschwörung* (1512), Murner claimed that jurists were not good Christians, since they twisted the law according to their own will in order to enforce even godless causes by force. Such a corrupt legal practice, Murner further asserted in an antisemitic vein, was a Jewish invention.[136] At the same time, he directed his criticism against university learning itself. Murner mocked the academic jurists of his time as mere theoreticians. He compared their understanding of the law to that of a blind man shooting at a target or attempting to judge colours. Erler notes that Murner's opponent Ulrich Zasius later inverted this comparison, claiming that Murner understood the law about as well as a blind man understands colours.[137] Murner's pointed remark is particularly striking: "Great books, great fools." He accused scholars of an art that consisted merely in turning pages and making themselves important with "rusty decretals", without grasping the true core of the law. A principal target of his attack was the gloss, the juridical commentary. Murner rejected the domination of the gloss over the original text. He versified that the gloss was a "rogue" that kept "baptising" the text until its original meaning was completely distorted. Glossing, he argued, was the root of legal uncertainty and served jurists merely to ensure that no lawsuit was ever lost.

Murner's critique of learned jurists must, however, be situated within contemporary patterns of scholarly criticism. It is connected with the expansion of universities and the academisation of social roles since the late fifteenth century, and it became established as a durable discursive pattern in the sixteenth century.[138]

11. Away from the University with the Advent of the Reformation

With the emergence of the Reformation around 1520, a clear rupture occurred in Murner's life trajectory. His academic teaching activity receded, giving way to a sharpened and highly public antireformational polemic. In the following years, Murner increasingly appeared as a controversial theologian.

[135] Cited in Erler, *Murner als Jurist*, 37.
[136] Liebenau, *Der Franziskaner Dr. Thomas Murner*, 124-126; Erler, *Murner als Jurist*, 16.
[137] Erler, *Murner als Jurist*, 22.
[138] Resch, "Sprichwörtliche Intellektuellenschelte".

During his stays in Strasbourg, in Lucerne - where he once again served as a lector of his order - and later again in the Upper Rhine region, the Franciscan positioned himself decisively against Martin Luther and the Reformation movement. In a series of satirical and polemical writings, he combined humanist forms of satire with sharp theological argumentation. In doing so, Murner recognised not only the importance of the vernacular, but also that of its central medium of transmission, the printing press. As with his didactic games, he likewise embraced innovation in the realm of print. In 1524, when the Strasbourg city council forbade him to print further polemical writings, he established a printing press within the Franciscan monastery in Strasbourg. This was followed by his expulsion from the city under political pressure and his flight in 1526 to Lucerne, where, as noted, he became a lector and preacher and likewise promptly set up a printing press.

In the same year, he took part in the religious disputations in Baden, which were organised as a countermeasure to the Zurich Reformation by the five Inner Swiss cantons that had remained loyal to the old faith. Murner was among the principal theological representatives of the traditional faith and attracted particular attention through his personal attacks on the reformer Ulrich Zwingli. The theses of the Baden Disputation that he directed against Zwingli further show that Murner was indeed a skilled jurist. For he grounded Zwingli's alleged dishonour not in canon law - which his opponents in any case partly rejected - but in Roman law, thereby attacking Zwingli, as he himself stated, not only in his faith, but also in his honour.[139] Murner was ultimately commissioned to print the acts of the disputation in his own printing workshop. Although accusations were raised by opposing parties that he had falsified the records, this was never proven.

12. Final Game in Lucerne: Instituta Helvetiorum figurante et memorante (1526)

The work was probably produced during Murner's time in Lucerne, after his flight from Strasbourg. The title *Helvetiorum* ("of the Swiss") in the manuscript has not yet been fully explained in the scholarship, since at this point Murner does not appear to have been planning a new juridical didactic programme. It is nevertheless likely that Murner composed the game in Lucerne. It is a juridical chessboard game that represents a further development

[139] For a detailed discussion of the theses Murner directed against Zwingli in the context of the disputation, see Erler, *Murner als Jurist*, 78-94.

of his mnemotechnical teaching methods for Roman law.[140] In contrast to his earlier *Chartiludium institute* (1518), which was based on playing cards, Murner conceived the *Instituta Helvetiorum* as a board game. The playing board comprises 100 squares (10 × 10), which are assigned to the ninety-nine titles of Justinian's *Institutiones* as well as to the prologue. The manuscript further employs an optical structuring concept in which the core contents of the legal titles are written into squares and circles and graphically linked to one another. The aim was to make the complex juridical structures memorable for the student. Although Murner did not complete the work, the structure, together with the chessboard layout, suggests a dice game. The learner would throw the dice to determine a specific square and then have to repeat from memory the juridical content deposited there, that is, the definitions and subdivisions of the respective title.

It is certain that in Lucerne Murner founded the city's earliest printing press, located in the Franciscan monastery. It is plausible that Murner composed the *Instituta Helvetiorum* not least in order to teach as *Lesemeister* within the monastery and, more generally, to disseminate his methodological approach within the Swiss Confederation. When, during the negotiations leading to the First Peace of Kappel (1529) - which temporarily brought the open conflict between the Reformed and the Catholic cantons of the Confederation to an end - the Protestant side demanded his extradition in order to put him on trial in Basel, Murner left Lucerne. The background to this demand was his active involvement in confessional conflicts through sharp antireformational propaganda; his writings were regarded by the Reformed cantons as dangerous, inflammatory, and disruptive to peace. Murner then initially went to the court of Elector Ludwig V in Heidelberg and ultimately served as a pastoral cleric in Oberehnheim (Obernai), his birthplace, where he also died. In Lucerne, however, he remained in good remembrance. As late as 1535 he received a call to return to Lucerne as *Lesemeister* and head of a school, which he declined.[141]

13. Reception of Thomas Murner's Didactic Games

While image-based mnemonic aids such as the *ars memorativa* had been firmly established in school and learned contexts since the late Middle Ages,

[140] Worstbrock, „Murner, Thomas", Sp. 324; Liebenau, "Franziskaner Thomas Murner," 134-135. Three copies are still extant, two of them transcripts. The original version is held in the Badische Landesbibliothek: Thomas Murner, *Instituta Helvetiorum*, Cod. Karlsruhe 1184.

[141] Rainald Fischer: "Murner, Thomas".

didactic playing cards were met with fundamental scepticism, particularly within the university milieu. The reception of the learning games developed by Thomas Murner was not uniform, either within or outside the universities. Within academic teaching, the games were primarily perceived as didactic experiments that could complement or challenge established forms of instruction. Their use in university teaching - especially in the faculties of arts and law - met with both interest and scepticism.

On the one hand, the games offered structured, visual, and memorative approaches to complex subject matter such as logic, law, or prosody, and thus corresponded to widespread practices of the *ars memorativa*. On the other hand, they ran counter to the traditional ideal of learned instruction, which was based on oral disputation and text-bound exegesis. Contemporary reactions therefore range from pragmatic use to open rejection or mockery, which becomes particularly visible in satirical and polemical contexts. These reactions, however, often targeted Murner as a person as much as, or even more than, his play-based didactics.

Within the universities, Murner's visual play-based didactics failed to establish themselves in a lasting manner. Especially in the field of law, image-based pedagogy never truly gained a foothold.[142] According to Röhl, Murner's work represents one of the few, but ultimately isolated, attempts to introduce a systematic visual pedagogy into legal scholarship. Röhl describes Murner's juridical teaching card game as a "*unicum* in the history of law" and classifies it as a special case of mnemotechnical visualisation. At the same time, he emphasises that the cards were conceived less as pictorial mnemonic aids than as stimuli for systematic repetition of the text.[143] In line with the widespread academic rejection, a near silence of student voices regarding the actual use of these games can be observed. This is likely related both to the general invisibility of informal learning practices and to the explicit criticism voiced by influential scholars who rejected play-based forms of teaching.

Apart from the recognition at the University of Kraków and Murner's own accounts, there are no known indications of a contemporary positive reception of his play-based didactic approaches within the universities. The contemporary reception, and above all the criticism by influential scholars of Murner's playful methods, has already been noted. Yet even during his lifetime, Murner's methodology did exert an impulse, as seen in Matthias

[142] Röhl, "Bilder in gedruckten Rechtsbüchern," 294.
[143] Röhl, "Visuelle Rechtskommunikation," 243-245.

Ringmann's *Grammatica figurata*, which at the time nevertheless remained an isolated case.[144]

Later reception nevertheless shows that such impulses continued to exist and that Murner's didactic games enjoyed a remarkable longevity within specialist circles, even though rejection on the part of the universities persisted. The after-effects of Murner's translations of the *Institutiones* were even more significant; these, in particular, would merit further detailed investigation.[145] In general, it can be stated that Murner may have exerted less influence through the specific concept of playing cards than through his broader approach of employing images in pedagogy and didactics in combination with the art of memory. In this way, he was able to generate numerous impulses that would merit closer examination in their own right. Murner thus helped prepare the ground for influential pedagogues such as Johann Amos Comenius, whose work is closely associated with the development of visualized forms of knowledge transmission grounded in mnemonic principles.[146]

In the field of visual pedagogy, Johannes Buno is also rightly mentioned, especially with regard to the illustration of the *Institutes*. Buno did not attempt to convey legal knowledge through playing cards, but instead developed a different image-based didactic method. Johannes Buno (1617-1697), a pedagogue and theologian, worked primarily in Lüneburg as a scholar situated between school education, theology, and the Republic of Letters, and ultimately taught at the local Gymnasium.[147] Like Murner, Johannes Buno developed an innovative mode of didactic knowledge representation, including for texts of Roman law. His image-based teaching method systematically condensed learning content into memorable visual forms. This emblematic, memory-oriented technique was also applied by Buno to the *Institutes*: he worked with fold-out pictorial plates that visually structured legal material and made it accessible through memorative ordering.

The longevity of didactic playing cards is nevertheless striking, especially given that they were not institutionally promoted by universities. In the sixteenth century, Murner's cards had by no means fallen into oblivion. Johann Fischart, for example, explicitly mentioned Murner's *Chartiludium*

[144] Worstbrock, „Murner, Thomas", Sp. 362.

[145] Erler, *Murner als Jurist*, 43: Murner's German translation of Justinian's *Institutiones*, which was closely linked to his card game, appeared in new editions in Frankfurt in 1536 and 1537. His work also served as the basis for Dutch translations published in 1547 (University of Leuven), 1620, and even as late as 1648 in The Hague.

[146] Röhl, "Bilder in gedruckten Rechtsbüchern," 310; Volkmann, *Ars memorativa*, 179-180.

[147] Röhl, "Bilder in gedruckten Rechtsbüchern," 298-306.

institute and its mnemonic chess game in 1575.[148] A more condensed reception of these games can also be observed in the first half of the seventeenth century, in some cases almost simultaneously at different locations across Europe.[149]

Then, in 1629, there was once again a positive assessment from an academic milieu with the publication by the Parisian jurist Jean Ballesdens, who reissued Murner's logical card game and, much as Murner himself had originally done, once again emphasised its didactic value.[150] Ballesdens modernised the typography as well as the illustrations and was convinced that there was no better means of teaching logic to students quickly and enjoyably.[151] The title already indicates that the work had remained in obscurity for more than a hundred years. Only a few years later, however, critical voices from academic circles re-emerged, notably in Strasbourg and Kraków.

In 1636, a magister by the name of Dauphin attempted to hold a course on logic at the University of Strasbourg based on Murner's card game.[152] The Philosophical Faculty, however, firmly rejected the proposal, judging the method to be "imperfect" and arguing that no one could be made into a logician by means of such a game. In addition, Murner's religious stance was cited as an obstacle to its use at a Protestant university.

The rejection of the request in 1636 by the Philosophical Faculty of the University of Strasbourg is therefore less to be read as a judgement on Thomas Murner himself than as a fundamental position statement on didactic innovation as such. By referring to the "Rattichian nature" of Wolfgang Ratke and to the methods of Johann Heinrich Glaum, which had been rejected in Giessen, the faculty placed Murner's *Chartiludium logicae* within a broader category of teaching approaches considered methodologically seductive but scientifically insubstantial.

At the core of the criticism lay an epistemological boundary. While trained logicians might be able to follow such systems, it was deemed impossible to produce logicians in the first place through games or methodological

[148] Pauser, *Invention*, 130-131.

[149] According to Delgadillo, *A World of Symbols*, p. 273, Murner is listed in the earliest editions of the *Index librorum prohibitorum* of the Roman Inquisition from 1557, 1559, and 1564; however, as Liebenau (*Der Franziskaner Thomas Murner*, p. 228) notes, this inclusion was erroneous, and Murner was removed from the Index again in the eighteenth century.

[150] Jean Ballesdens (1595-1675), Eintrag „Ballesdens, Jean", *Référentiel d'autorités « personnes »* (IRHT), Zugriff am 19. Dezember 2025, https://personnes.irht.cnrs.fr/28125.

[151] Knod, „Ein Urteil der Philosophischen Fakultät …", 108.

[152] Knod, „Ein Urteil der Philosophischen Fakultät …".

apparatuses. In this way, the Strasbourg professors defended a traditional understanding of logic as the outcome of prolonged intellectual training and at the same time rejected those playful and materialised forms of knowledge that Murner had already experimented with a century earlier.

Shortly thereafter, in 1640, the Strasbourg professor Matthias Bernegger likewise criticised Murner's cards in his *Orationes Academicae* of 1640 as largely useless, clumsy and arrogant.[153] He took particular offence at the claim that complex logic could be learned within the space of only one month. Tellingly, this criticism issued from the very university that had rejected the card game four years earlier, and from Strasbourg, Murner's home city. At the same time, this criticism also demonstrates that Murner's playful didactic approach was still known and discussed at that time. Finally, mention should be made of the negative judgement of the legal historian Stintzing in 1867, who criticised the fact that the chosen symbols often bore no tangible relation to the content of the legal material at all.[154]

Although Murner's didactic games, like comparable game-based teaching tools by other authors, failed to establish themselves as part of official academic instruction, there is nonetheless increasing evidence that playing cards and card-based formats continued to circulate as learning aids after 1500 and were in fact used. In this respect, cautious parallels may be drawn with modern flashcards, which to this day enjoy considerable popularity, not least in the study of law.

Outside the universities, the learning games opened up different spaces of reception. The surviving copies of Murner's various learning games alone demonstrate that their contemporary reception, very likely especially among students, was by no means insignificant. A decisive role was played by the printing press, which enabled the games to be received in learned, school-based, and semi-learned milieus as visual tools of order and memory. Moreover, it may be assumed that the games always possessed a practical utility in the sense of reference works. It is further likely that Murner also employed the games in monastic educational contexts, particularly within Franciscan circles. The games were well suited to the propaedeutic training of members of religious orders who had not always undergone a full university education.

Following Murner, playing cards were indeed used as a didactic medium outside official university teaching, as various pieces of evidence as-

[153] Stoffers and Thijs, „A Question of Mentality", 286-287.

[154] Sieber, *Kartenspiel*, pp. 306-307, concurs with the negative judgement of Stintzing.

sembled by Pauser demonstrate.[155] Especially in the seventeenth century, the method experienced a renewed vogue through its use at the French court to instruct the six-year-old, later King Louis XIV, where playing cards were employed as educational tools in the prince's upbringing. In the Holy Roman Empire, too, as Pauser has shown, didactic playing cards were at that time regarded as prestigious media within learned culture. Gaab's examples include astronomical card games and related visual instruments.

Overall, it can be concluded that Murner's learning games did not bring about a lasting didactic transformation, but they did function as a visible model of alternative forms of knowledge transmission. Their reception oscillated between innovation and provocation, thereby revealing tensions within early modern educational cultures. It is precisely in this ambivalent reception that their historical significance lies: not as a permanently institutionalised form of teaching, but as an expression of an experimental approach to knowledge, instruction, and academic practice around 1500.

14. Innovation in the Age of Reformation

In retrospect, Thomas Murner appears both as a fierce opponent of the Reformation and as a remarkable innovator in early modern knowledge transmission. This dual position makes clear that confessional opposition to the Reformation is not to be equated with didactic or medial backwardness. On the contrary, Murner's work exemplifies how innovations in teaching and the organisation of knowledge also emerged from Catholic, monastic-university contexts. His learning games should therefore be understood neither as marginal curiosities nor merely as a prelude to his later controversy theology, but as serious didactic interventions in an academic teaching culture at the threshold of the early modern period. Murner's games - card, chess, and dice variants - translate logic, prosody, and Roman law into systems of order, visualisation, and repetitive practice. Their innovation lies not in play as entertainment, but in the consistent combination of *ars memorativa* and game mechanics. Murner is the first known scholar to employ playing cards as a teaching medium for logical and juridical memory structures. The fact that these procedures elicited both admiration and ridicule, as well as suspicions of magic, points to their liminal position between academic norm and experimental practice.

[155] Pauser, *Invention*, 128-129.

Murner's games did not transform university teaching at large. Their historical significance lies rather in making alternatives visible: knowledge can be reorganised through changes of medium (print), language (German), and format (game). This insight had long-lasting effects. The later revival of didactic playing cards, for example in courtly instruction of the seventeenth century, marks less a direct line of transmission than the recurring attractiveness of the medium itself. Such innovations demonstrate how permeable the boundaries of learned instruction were, how new media and vernacular languages could reshape knowledge organization. For these reasons, Murner's experiments remain particularly illuminating for the educational and university history of the early modern period.

The prosopographical perspective of the *Repertorium Academicum Germanicum* (RAG) sharpens this assessment. Murner emerges as an exceptionally mobile boundary-crosser between monastery and university, between theology and jurisprudence, and between Latin and the vernacular. This versatility, together with his special position in the field of civil law, helps explain both the conditions under which his didactic experiments emerged and the influences that informed them.

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