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What's in a doctorate? Doctoral dissertations and professional standards in the French faculties of letters and sciences (1810-1968)

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(Besançon)

Within the university system as it (re)crystallised during the 19th century in France, the doctorate acquired specific importance as faculties — institutions previously devoted primarily to the reproduction of knowledge — began to take an interest in producing that knowledge. While the highest university qualification, the doctorate, initially aimed to prove mastery of a set of traditional intellectual skills through a solemn ceremony similar to that for the bachelor's degree, it became the only degree to require the production of original knowledge (at least in the faculties of sciences and the faculties of letters). This process involves a profound transformation of the forms and content of the theses defended, which go from being simple programs of debate to comprehensive books, which are now at the heart of the exercise. The thesis became a scientific text and the first real work of young scholars. For historians, it is a gateway to the study of what is expected of them in terms of both integration into the professional organisation and disciplinary knowledge and the types of texts produced.

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