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The Oxford Dictionary of the Middle Ages

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Buridan, John (Jean) (c.1295–1361) Career [*arts*master](#) and leading member of the [*Picardy](#) nation at the University of [*Paris](#).

Buridan was a brilliant logician and, thanks to his many students who spread his teachings and writings throughout [*universities](#) in Italy and central Europe, one of the most influential interpreters of Aristotle in the later MA. His logical masterwork, the *Summulae de Dialectica*, is a comprehensive textbook combining the traditional [*logic](#) of Aristotle with the newer, [*nominalist](#) methods focused on the semantics of terms and propositions. He brought the same innovative approach to the teaching of Aristotle, addressing various problems in Aristotle's [*metaphysics](#) and natural [*philosophy](#) through logical analysis. He popularized the theory of *impetus*, derived from [*John Philoponus](#) through the Arabic commentators—an account of projectile motion to replace the flawed Aristotelian theory of *antiperistasis*. His name is associated with 'Buridan's Ass', the parable of a donkey allegedly starving to death because it has no reason to choose between two equidistant and equally tempting piles of hay, though this illustration is not found in his writings. It is probably the work of later opponents, wishing to satirize Buridan's idea that freedom consists in the ability to defer choice. *See also* [ARISTOTELIANISM](#); [FREE WILL](#); [MOTION](#).

JACK ZUPKO

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