

# Scholars and Literati at the Academy of Sciences, Letters and Arts of Besançon (1752-1793)

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This note is a summary description of the set of literati who were members of the Royal Academy of Sciences and Arts of Besançon from its inception in 1752 to its (temporary) dissolution by the French Revolutionary Convention in 1793.

## 1 THE ACADEMY

In the beginning of the 18th century some associations appeared in Besançon. These associations were about literature, arts, and economic progress (mainly concerning agriculture). However, their meetings were not regular and one of the members, Pourroy de Quinsonas, wanted to create an organized, stable academy. He talked about this idea with several people including Voyer de Paulmy d'Argenson who helped him get the approval of King Louis XV. At first, the king was reluctant to have provincial academies because he was afraid this would lead to contestation. Besançon was also known for having a parliament which was not collaborative for the registration of royal edicts. In June 1752, Louis XV finally allowed the establishment of the academy and the statutes were soon approved. By 1793, the academy was dissolved as a result of the French Revolution.

## 2 SOURCES

In 2002, a book was published on the occasion of the 250th anniversary of the academy which lists its members until 2000. This book was written by scholars Jean Defrasne, Jean-Pierre Maurat, Marie Lordereau, and François Lassus.

## 3 SOME STATISTICS

Table 1 displays some descriptive statistics. There are 128 scholars and literati. The quality of information about them is quite high, except concerning the places of birth. The age at appointment (48.5 years old) is high, compared to other academies. The median distance between birth place and Besançon is 55 kilometers, testifying to the local nature of this academy. 40.6 percent of the academicians have a Wikipedia page, and about half of them (53.1%) have left a footprint in the catalogues of the libraries of the world, Worldcat.

| Period |      | nb. obs | % birth year known  | mean age at appoint.              | mean age at death | exp. age at death |
|--------|------|---------|---------------------|-----------------------------------|-------------------|-------------------|
| 1734   | 1800 |         | 128                 | 89.1                              | 48.5              | 72.8              |
|        |      | 1734    | % birth place known | median distance birth-institution | % with Wikipedia  | % with Worldcat   |
| 1734   | 1800 |         | 67.2                | 55                                | 40.6              | 53.1              |

Table 1: Summary statistics by period

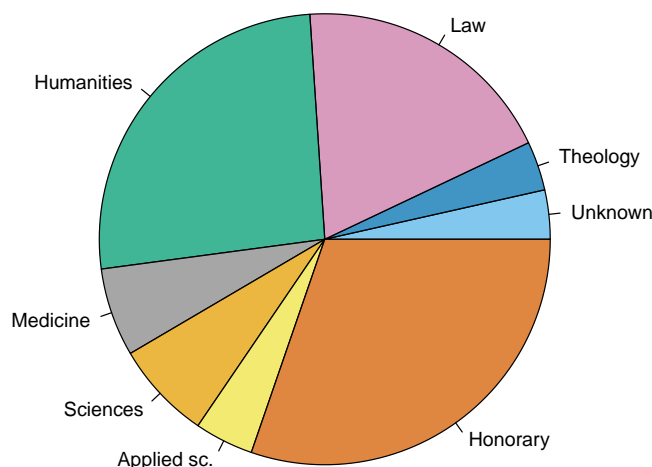


Figure 1: Broad fields at the Academy of Besançon

## 4 FIELDS

Figure 1 shows the relative importance of fields, broadly defined. The academy was dominated by literati active in the fields of the humanities and law. Besançon had a parliament and several of its members also belonged to the academy. Parliaments in pre-industrial France were courts of justice and administrative bodies, not legislative bodies. At the Academy of Besançon, scientists (including medicine) were a small minority. Besides the active scholars and literati, the “honorary” members were those who were elected to the institution with no clear scholarly identity.

## 5 PLACE OF BIRTH

Figure 2 is a plot of the places of birth of all the ordinary members of the Academy of Besançon. It shows that the academy recruited ordinary members from the region (Franche-Comté) and somewhat beyond. Figure 3 provides the same information for corresponding and foreign members. It shows a very moderate international character, with some scholars from the neighboring regions in Germany, Switzerland, and the Low Countries. The Academy of Besançon did not appoint corresponding members from far away.

## 6 HUMAN CAPITAL OF SCHOLARS AND LITERATI

For each person in the database, we compute a heuristic human capital index, identified by combining information from Worldcat and Wikipedia using principal component analysis. The details are given in RETE in volumes 1–5. Figure 4 shows the names of all the scholars and literati with a positive human capital index. The vertical green lines (rug plot) show the distribution of all members, including the obscure ones, over time (counting from the beginning of their active life).

Figure 4 shows the ordinary members of the academy who have left some footprint of their activity (note that corresponding members are not included in this figure).

## 7 TOP 5 SCHOLARS

We provide a brief overview of the five ordinary members of the Academy of Besançon with the highest human capital index. This allows to discover new individuals whom we have not met yet in the 47 issues of RETE published so far. The biographical information was drawn from Michaud

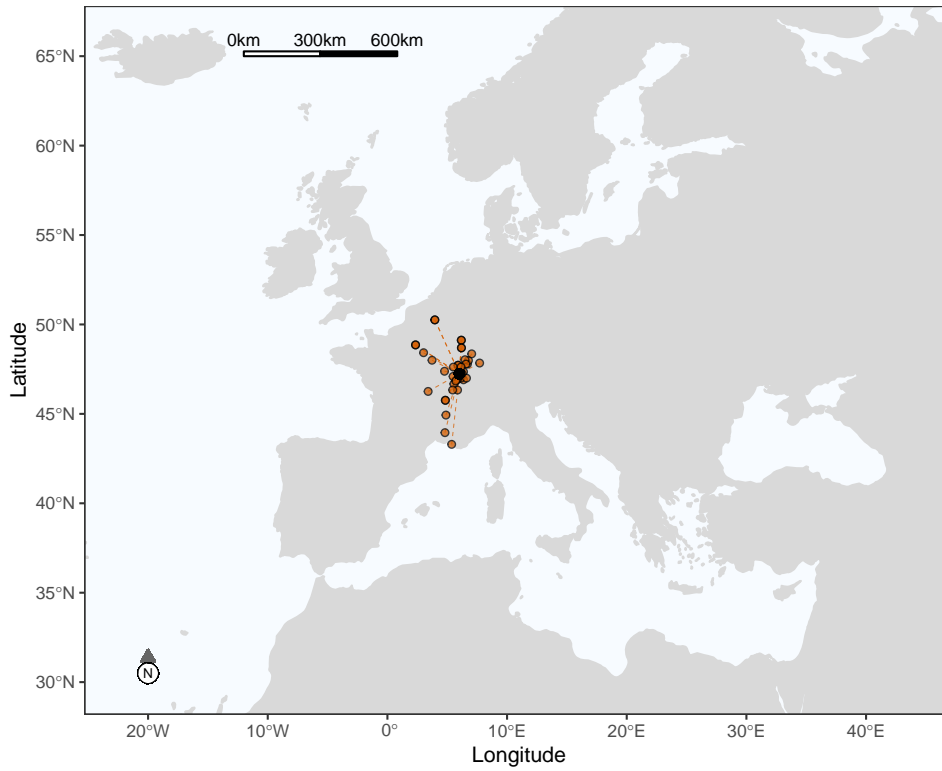


Figure 2: Places of birth of the ordinary members of the Academy of Besançon

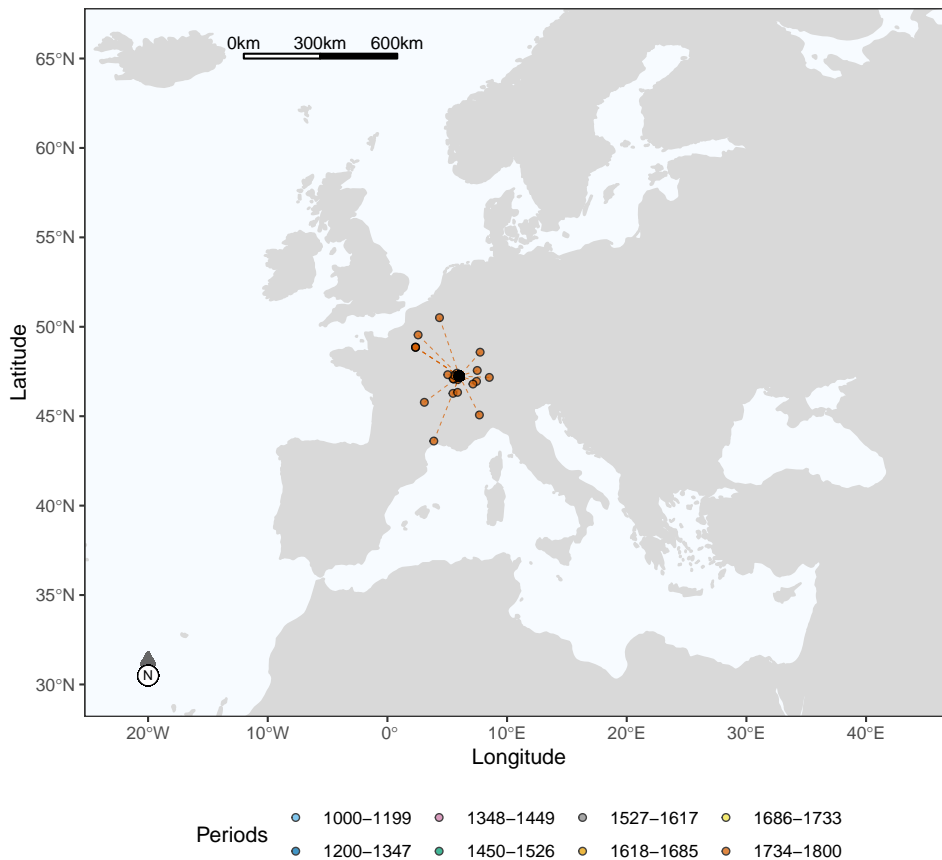


Figure 3: Places of birth of the corresponding members of the Academy of Besançon

(1811), Bouillet (1896), and Wikipedia.

**Nicolas-Sylvestre Bergier** (Darney 1718 -- Paris 1790) was a French theologian and antiquarian.

In 1743, he was ordained a priest and became a doctor in theology in October 1744. He then left for Paris to continue his studies. He was a high school principal and was also the confessor of Madame Adélaïde, a daughter of King Louis XV. He wrote numerous works against the philosophers of the Enlightenment because he was a fervent defender of Christianity. He became an associate member of the academy in 1766 before becoming a tenured member in 1769.

**Claude Nonnotte** (Besançon 1711 -- Besançon 1793) was a French priest, preacher, polemicist, and writer. He was ordained a priest in approximately 1742. He taught at several high schools and became the superior of the Jesuit residence of Paray-le-Monial in 1755 when the Jesuits were banned from France. Because Jesuit communities were dissolved, he came back to Besançon where he devoted the rest of his life to the defence of the Church against the philosophers. He was an associate member of the academy in 1780 and a tenured member from 1781.

**Antoine-René de Voyer de Paulmy d'Argenson** (Valenciennes 1722 – Paris 1787) was a French diplomat and statesman. He was one of the king's lawyers, a member of Parliament, a master of requests, and an ambassador in Switzerland. He was nominated State Secretary for War in 1751. After that, he was also an ambassador in Poland, Venice, and Rome. He had a passion for literature and had an enormous library counting thousands of volumes, most of which were written by French authors and were poetry. He was elected member of the *Académie Française* in 1748 and in 1756 of the Academy of Besançon.

**Nicolas-Gabriel Clerc** (Baume-les-Dames 1726 – Versailles 1798) was a French doctor, historian, essayist, and cartographer. He was the primary doctor of the King's Armies in 1757. He tried to reform the abuses that were happening in the administration of military hospitals. He was also chosen as a doctor by General Kirill Razoumovski for a trip along the main rivers of Europe. During another trip to Russia, he brought back many documents and handmade maps about the country at the request of the king, who had a limited knowledge of that country. He was elected to the Academy of Besançon in 1776.

**Jean-Baptiste Bullet** (Besançon 1699 – 1775) was a French theologian and historian. He taught theology for 50 years at the University of Besançon and died as its dean. He was elected to the Academy of Besançon in 1752 and was also a member of the Academies of Lyon and Dijon. He is known for his works about Celtic languages and about playing cards.

## 8 RELATED SCHOLARS

Several other important individuals were related to the academy, as corresponding or foreign members. These scholars are counted in all figures, except Figure 4.

**Louis-Bernard Guyton de Morveau** (Dijon 1737 – Paris 1816) was a French chemist, juriscounsel, and politician. He was an advocate general at the Burgundy Parliament from 1762 to 1782. In 1764 he entered the Academy of Dijon. He carried out two aerostatic experiments in 1784 and he created a classification of chemical elements. He was politically active and was elected deputy to the Legislative Assembly during the Revolution. He became an associate member at the Academy of Besançon in 1786.



**Jacques Delille** (Clermont-Ferrand 1738 – Paris 1813) was a French poet and translator. He started his education by receiving private lessons from the village priest before going to Paris for high school. He then became a teacher at various high schools. He translated poetry and was elected to the *Académie française* in 1774. He also wrote poetry including *Jardins* (gardens), his most famous one. He became an associate member of the Academy of Besançon in 1780.

**Henri-Louis Duhamel du Monceau** (Paris 1700 – Paris 1782) was a French physicist, botanist, and agronomist. It was his uncle who took care of his education and his brother's. He did not like many school subjects, but he enjoyed physics which allowed him to satisfy his taste for tangible and manual work. During his life he carried out various experiments. He turned his attention to salts, trees, fishing, agriculture, etc. He was also involved in the navy and wrote a book about naval architecture. He was a member of the *Académie des Sciences* in the botany class, and he was also elected its President three times. He became one of the most significant agronomists of the 18th century. He became an associate member of the Academy of Besançon in 1757.

**Chrétien Guillaume de Lamoignon de Malesherbes** (Paris 1721 – Paris 1794) was a French magistrate, botanist, and statesman. He was fascinated by botany and had his own plantations on his castle grounds. He travelled through France, the Netherlands, and Switzerland to study agriculture, industries, and the plants of those regions. He was a member of the *Académie des Sciences*, *Académie des inscriptions* (devoted to archeology and literature), and of the *Académie française*, and became an associate member of the Academy of Besançon in 1757. As a defender of the king, he was considered as an enemy of the nation and was thus guillotined in 1794.

**Antoine Parmentier** (Montdidier 1737 – Paris 1813) was a French military pharmacist, agronomist, nutritionist, and hygienist. He became a pharmacist in his town's pharmacy in 1750. In 1755, he went to work in Paris but since he lacked the means to open his own pharmacy, he decided to join the army which needed apothecaries. He wrote papers about the nutritional benefits of potatoes which until then had been left to animals. He also worked on chestnuts, corn, wheat, etc. He advised on the consumption of new foods during times of famine. He became an associate member of the Academy of Besançon in 1780.

**Johannes Daniel Schöpflin** (Sulzburg 1694 – Strasbourg 1771) was a historian and professor at the University of Strasbourg. He started his academic studies at the University of Basel. He also studied theology in Strasbourg but had a passion for history, and the Latin language and literature. In 1740, he obtained the title of King's Historiographer. He was a bibliophile, with a library of approximately 10,000 volumes, which he donated in 1765 to the city of Strasbourg. He became an associate member of the Academy of Besançon in 1757.

## 9 INTERSECTIONS WITH NEARBY UNIVERSITIES

Figure 5 shows that some members of the academy were also professors at the University of Besançon. The University of Besançon was created in 1691, when the University of Dole was closed down (or alternatively, the University of Dole moved to Besançon, 56 kilometers away, see De la Croix and Mytilinaios (2022)). Sources for the University of Besançon are Lavillat (1977) and Beaune and d'Arbaumont (1870). Six percent of academicians were also professors (8/128). This was probably a standard pattern for France, where academies were often unrelated to local universities (see for example De la Croix and Delvaux (2022)). An exception was Montpellier, where 34% of academicians also taught at the university (see De la Croix (2020)).

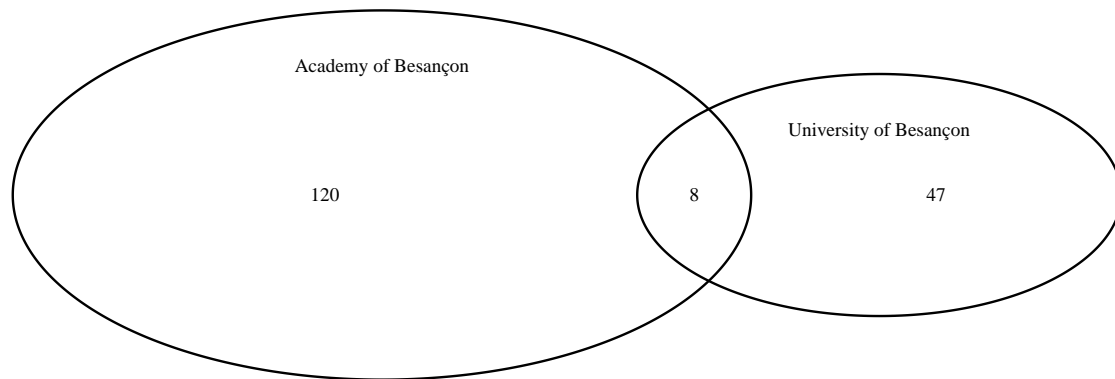


Figure 5: Intersections of the lists of scholars between the University and the Academy of Besançon

## ACKNOWLEDGMENTS

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