

# Scholars and Literati at the University of Turin (1404 – 1800)

Chiara Zanardello

IRES/LIDAM, UCLouvain

This note is a summary description of the set of scholars and literati who were members or associates of the University of Turin from its inception in 1404 to the eve of the Industrial Revolution (1800).

## 1 THE UNIVERSITY

In the region that is now known as Piedmont, in Italy, the educational situation was mediocre until 1404, when the prince Ludovico d'Acaia promoted the creation of the "Studium Generale" in Turin. He did so under pressure from some professors who fled from the universities of Pavia and Piacenza. The Studium received official papal recognition in 1405 (Vallauri 1875). The first years of the University of Turin appear sluggish, and only Amedeo VIII (who replaced Ludovico in 1424) brought hope for effective improvements. However, the Black Death forced the transfer of the Studium to Chieri (until 1434) and then to Savigliano (until 1436). The son of Amedeo VIII, Ludovico brought the University back to Turin in 1436, with three chairs: theology, law, and medicine. New waves of the Black Death plague the region and wars between France and the House of Savoy weakened the educational apparatus for almost a century. It was only under the Duke Emanuele Filiberto that the situation improved. Emanuele Filiberto's reforms saw all the young scholars return to study in Turin, and 1572 was the University's most prosperous year since foundation. Carlo Emanuele I could not maintain the level of quality achieved by his father. The 17th century was a period of obscurity for the Italian culture and literature, especially in the Piedmont area, as Figure 3 shows. During this period, academic endeavours were superficial, and many talented younger scholars were sent abroad to seek a better education. In the 1630s, a civil war broke out over the succession in the Royal family, and the university bore the cost with a severe cut to the number of chairs. Only under Vittorio Amedeo II did the educational apparatus receive more attention, but another war between the House of Savoy and France hampered any possible improvements until 1706. The Duke introduced public contests to assign the university chairs of humanities and related fields to the most deserving professors (including foreign scholars). In 1719 he prohibited all the other schools, collegiums and universities (e.g., Mondovì) in the territory from awarding degrees, and he introduced stricter rules for obtaining these degrees (none graduated from 1720 and 1722). The scientific fields did not receive such attention, which led to the creation of the Academy of Sciences of Turin in 1757 (see De la Croix and Zanardello 2021). Many members of this Academy were also professors at the University (see Section 8). Throughout the end of the 18th century, the territory experienced frequent uprisings among the students. Peace was lost when France declared war against the House of Savoy. In the following years, the whole Italian peninsula saw political swings which affected the academic pursuits and the University of Turin.

## 2 SOURCES

The first point of data collection was Vallauri 1875, who described in detail the history of the universities of the Piedmont region, including the University of Turin from its foundation until 1800. The

author sought to reassemble all the available information related to the Studies of Piedmont with a particular attention not only to the most notable professors, for whom Vallauri 1875 gives specific bibliographic notes, but also to the obscure ones who are listed in his catalogues. This information is completed with research by Rosso 2005, who focused on the first centuries of the University of Turin. Additional information about the field of study and the year of affiliation are found in Bellardi 1820, who lists the members of the Medicine Faculty at the University of Turin from 1720 until 1820.

### 3 SOME STATISTICS

Table 1 shows some descriptive statistics. There are 425 scholars, and the year of birth is known only for 31.3% of them. The average age at nomination is 40.3 years, while the mean age at death is a few months short of 68 years. For 69.2% of these scholars the birthplace is known. The median distance between the city of Turin and the location of birth is 75 km. Most of the scholars came from the Reign of the House of Savoy - the North-West of Italy, South of France and for a period of time also from Campania, Sicily and Sardinia. The University of Turin experienced cyclical growth – after an initial deadlock, decline in the seventeenth century, and a return to growth towards 1800 (see Figure 3). These fluctuations are reflected in the number of professors per period. Note also the low percentage for the average number of scholars for whom we found a Wikipedia page written in some language (17.2%) and in the percentage of professors who have left a footprint in Worldcat (33.9%), the catalogues of the libraries of the world, either by having published some work, or by having been the subject of published books and articles.

Period		nb.	% birth year	mean age	mean age	exp. age
Start	End	obs	known	at appoint.	at death	at death
1200	1347	2	50	–	–	–
1348	1449	77	9.1	50	73	73
1450	1526	90	8.9	31.5	68	69.2
1527	1617	94	30.9	44	61.4	55.3
1618	1685	10	80	43.8	66.8	66.6
1686	1733	71	38	40.3	68	66.3
1734	1800	81	65.4	37.8	70.3	69.5
1200	1800	425	31.3	40.3	67.6	65.7
			% birth place known	median distance birth-institution	% with Wikipedia	% with Worldcat
1200	1347		100	583	100	100
1348	1449		61	156	6.5	9.1
1450	1526		65.6	64	8.9	14.4
1527	1617		55.3	81	21.3	42.6
1618	1685		100	126	20	30
1686	1733		74.6	155	16.9	36.6
1734	1800		87.7	52	29.6	65.4
1000	1800		69.2	75	17.2	33.9

Table 1: Summary statistics by period

### 4 FIELDS

Figure 1 shows the relative importance of fields, broadly defined. More than half of the scholars are linked to law, humanities and theology, reflecting the direction determined by the Royal family for the University. The medicine faculty is not negligible either, although not as important as letters. In

fact, medicine was among the first chairs to be created. Science was not a priority for the various reforms, which is why the Academy of Science of Turin was founded (De la Croix and Zanardello 2021).

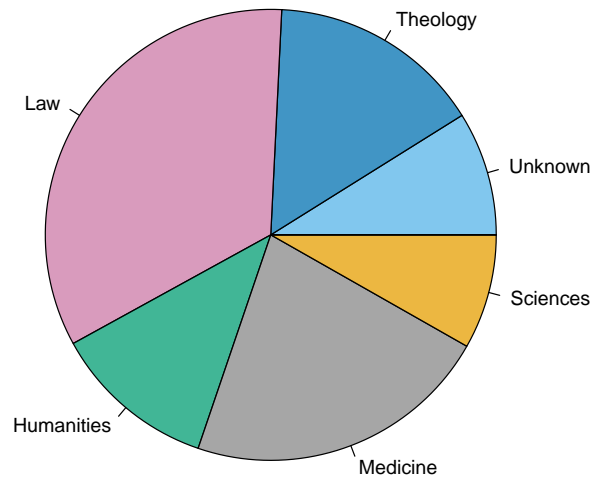


Figure 1: Broad fields at the University of Turin

## 5 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 a principal component analysis. Details are given in RETE in volumes 1–5. Figure 3 shows the names of all the ordinary scholars with a positive human capital index. The vertical green lines (rug plot) show the distribution of all these scholars, including the obscure ones, over time (counting from the beginning of their active life). Figure 3 shows half-a-dozen super stars, and a large portion of ordinary scholars belonging to the mid-high part of the human capital distribution.

## 6 TOP 5 SCHOLARS

We now provide a brief overview of the five resident professors with the highest human capital index.

**Francesco della Rovere** (Celle Ligure 1414 – Rome 1484) became Pope Sixte VI in 1471. He joined the Franciscan Order at just 9 years old. He studied grammar and philosophy in Savona. In 1430 began his studies, first at the Franciscan monastery in Chieri, and then at the Studium in Pavia. His academic career started at the University of Turin, when it was temporarily located in Chieri. Francesco della Rovere taught theology for three years from 1432 to 1435, before going on to teach in Bologna, Venice and Padua.

**Jacques Cujas** (Toulouse 1522 – Bourges 1590) was a French jurist. He started his career as a professor in Toulouse and ended it in Bourges. He taught in Turin for only one year (from October 1566 to August 1567), which raised some doubts about his effective activity at this University. However, his lectures are confirmed by Lodovico Vitale (Bologna ? – Bologna 1554), professor of law in Bologna at the same time as Jacques Cujas, who explicitly cited Cujas' lectures in one of his writings (Vallauri 1875).

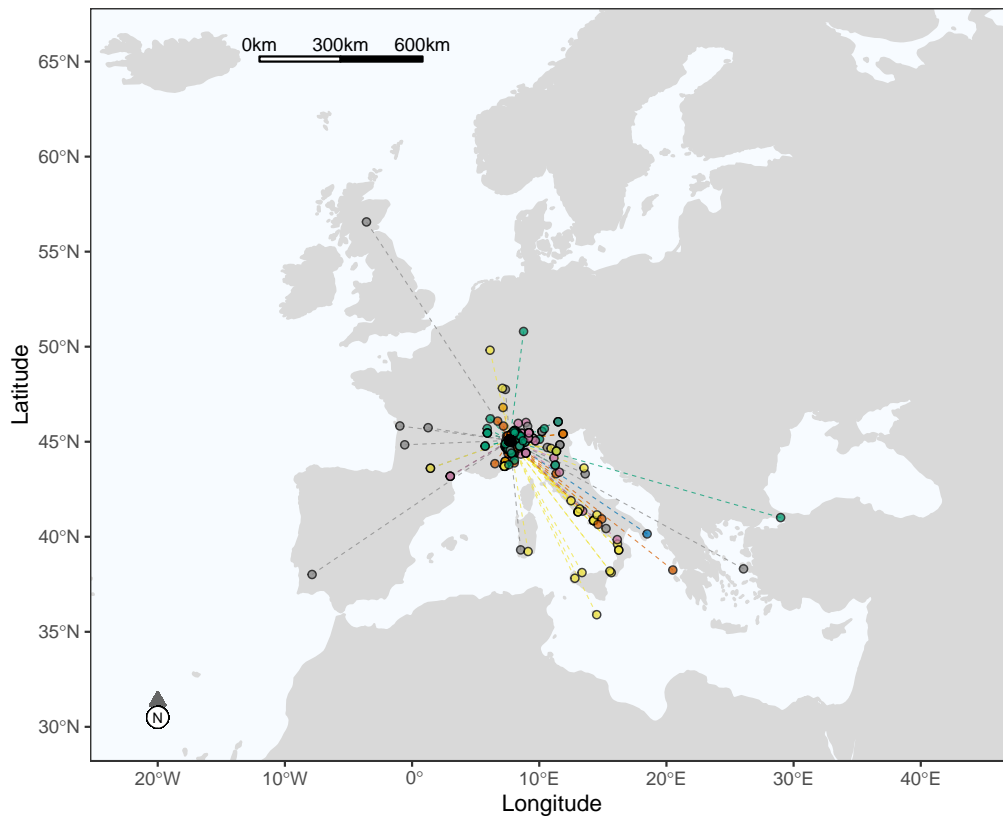


Figure 2: Place of birth of the scholars at the University of Turin - Ordinary members

**Giovanni Battista Giraldi** (Ferrara 1504 – Ferrara 1573) was an Italian literatus and poet, known as "Il Cinthio". At the beginning of his academic career, he taught rethoric in Ferrara, then he was a private secretary until the 1560s. He then moved in Piedmont where he taught at both the University of Mondovi (from 1562 to 1566) and the University of Turin (from 1566 to 1568), when the two institutions were competing to obtain exclusive Royal rights to teach and award degrees (Vallauri 1875). "Il Cinthio" is one of the most important scholars of the Renaissance in Ferrara.

**Gian Vincenzo Gravina** (Roggiano-Gravina 1664 – Rome 1718) was an Italian jurist and literatus, one of the founders of the Academy of Arcadia in Rome. The King Vittorio Amedeo II summoned Gravina in the end of 1717, because he wanted to attract the most important personalities of that time to increase the fame of the University of Turin. Gravina was the only scholar, among those sought by the King, to accept the chair he was offered. The professor hoped to manage all of the faculties, not only his own - an ambition bolstered by the frequent advice he gave to the King about the organization of the whole University. However, when every detail of the transfer had been agreed to, Gravina started to suffer from a strange disease and he postponed the travel. The situation worsened in the first days of 1718 and on the night of the sixth of January Gravina died (Vallauri 1875). He is included among the professors at the University of Turin for his great influence in managing the institution.

**Carlo Danina** (Ravello 1731 – Paris 1813) was an Italian historian, known also as "Denina". He was professor of humanities in Pinerolo, then of rhetoric in Turin. Later he was employed by the King of Prussia, Federico II and, at the end of his career, he was the librarian of Napoleon in Paris. He was a man with an extraordinary intellect. As a professor he refreshed the literature in the Piedmont area, spreading not only great knowledge but also a pro-active mindset to the wave of writers active at the end of the 18th century (Vallauri 1875).

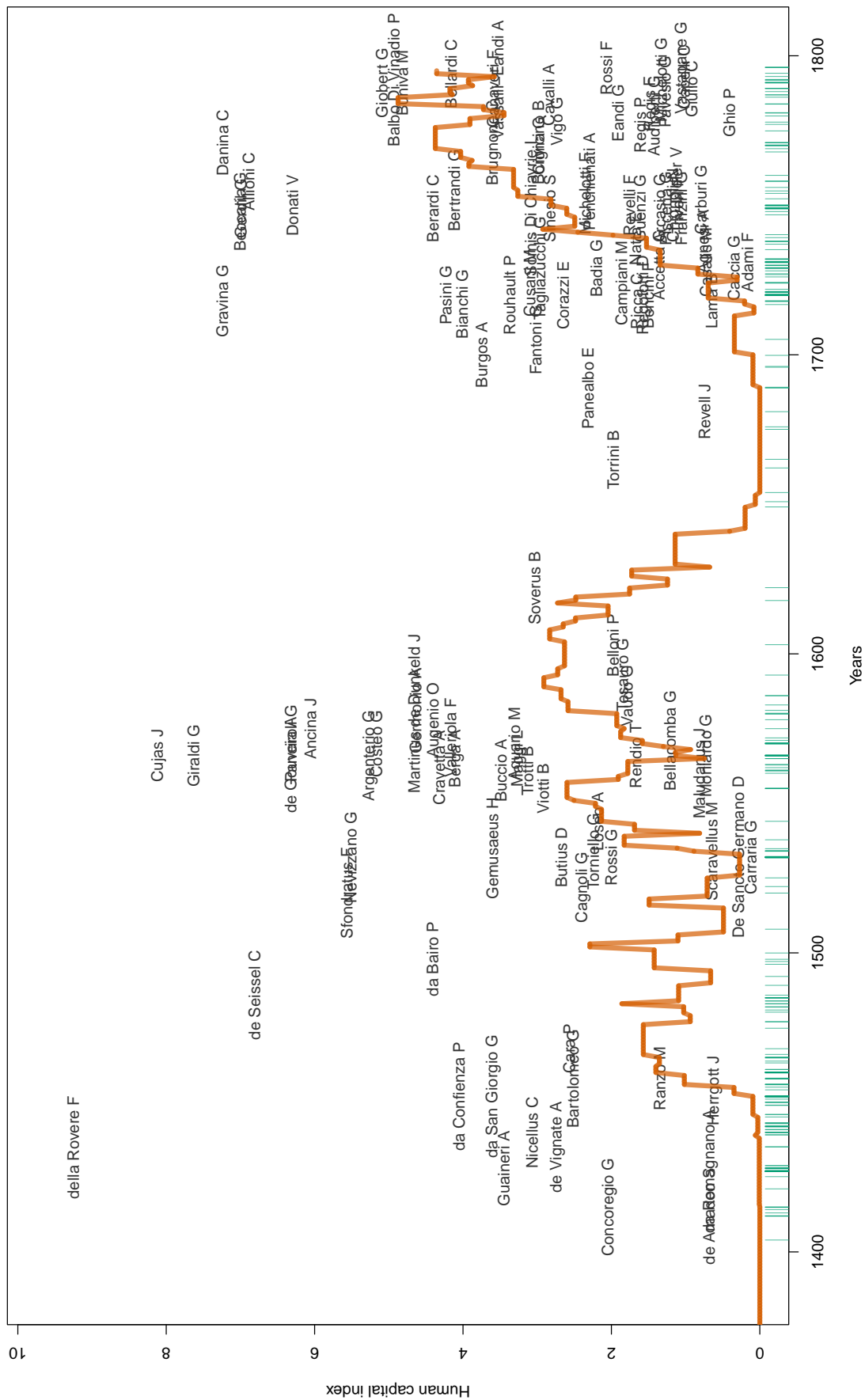


Figure 3: Famous scholars by period

## 7 RELATED SCHOLARS

In addition to the ordinary members teaching at the University of Turin, several individuals were linked to the University via other roles, such as advisors or reformers. They had an influence on the general organization of the institution, but did not teach. These scholars are included in the calculations for all figures but Figure 3. The most notable scholars belonging to this category are presented in this section.

**Battista Guarini** (Ferrara 1538 – Venice 1612), was an Italian writer and poet, known also as "Guarino". He completed his education by travelling to several Italian universities and he became professor at the University of Ferrara, taking his uncle's chair of rethoric and poetic. Due to some differences with the Duke of Ferrara, Guarini left the city. In 1585, he presented for the first time his work *"Il Pastor fido"* at the nuptials of the Duke of Savoy and Catharine of Austrie. This representation, together with the reputation he had already established, led the Duke of Savoy to offer him the role of reformer at the University of Turin. However, the Duke of Ferrara impeded his hiring, given he felt offended when the professor left him for other foreign Kings (Vallauri 1875).

## 8 FAMILIES OF SCHOLARS

Within the University of Turin, we counted 9 father - son links. Figure 5 shows the Michelotti family. This family is of particular interest because it confirms the strong connection between the University of Turin and the Academy of Science created in 1757 in the same city. Mathematicians and scientists were usually both professors at the University and members at the Academy. This close relationship demonstrates how scientific research can benefit from having a place to develop and progress outside the traditional constraints of the University (for details about the Academy of Sciences of Turin, please see De la Croix and Zanardello 2021). The interaction between the two institution can be visualized in Figure 4, where almost one third of university professors were also members of the Academy of Turin.

The Michelotti father, Francesco Domenico, was both professor of Mathematics at the University of Turin from 1754 and a resident member of the Academy, probably since its foundation. In the "Almanacco reale o sia guida per la città di Torino" (Derossi 1780), there are two Michelottis residing at the same address: Francesco Domenico, and another without a forename – possibly his brother. The first son of Francesco Domenico, Giuseppe Teresio, was also professor of Mathematics at the University of Turin and at the same time he took his father's position as a resident member of the Academy of Science in 1784. The second son, Ignazio Maria Lorenzo, joined only the Academy of Sciences of Turin in 1791. The third son followed almost the same path as the firstborn: he was a professor of Mathematics at the University of Turin and a member of the Academy, but only in 1800. All of them were mathematicians and architects who specialised in the construction of the hydraulic systems under the House of Savoy.

## 9 ANECDOTES

The old Statutes of the University of Turin proscribed every possible detail. For example, the statute of 1450 establishes the gifts each student had to bring on graduation day for the commission members and the promotors: twelve arm's lengths of cloth in satin worth at least forty Viennese coins, a cap, a ring and a pair of gloves. Furthermore, students were required to provide the refreshments, such as sugared almonds and excellent wines. To these gifts, others were added to the Statutes over time.

Giovanni Nevizzano (Buttigliera d'Asti ? – Turin 1540) was a professor of law at the University of Turin until 1532. All his works demonstrate his talent, but *"Sylva nuptialis"* (printed in 1518) is particularly interesting for its resonance, specifically among the women of Turin. In this work,

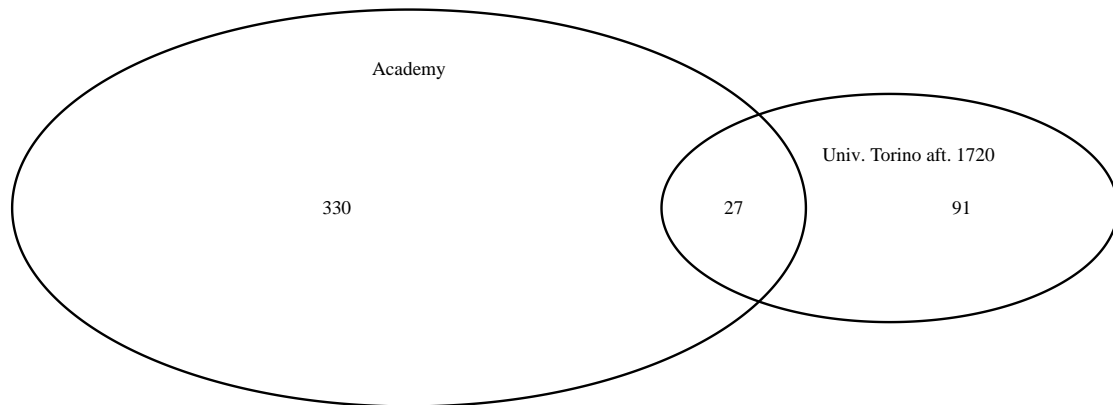


Figure 4: Venn diagram showing the interaction between the University and the Academy of Science of Turin

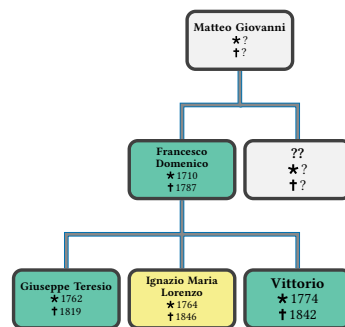


Figure 5: The Michelotti family. Members of both the University of Turin and the Academy of Sciences of Turin in green squares. Members of the Academy of Sciences of Turin (only) in yellow squares.

Nevizzano discuss marriage issues, showing tendencies probably too free and festive. He was disdained by the women, and driven from Turin with stones. He would be allowed back only when he asked them for forgiveness, kneeling on the ground, and carrying the following two lines on his forehead as a sign of repentance: "*Rusticus est vere qui turpia dicit de muliere, nam scimus vere quod omnes sumus de muliere.*", which literally means "*A peasant is really one who says ugly things about a woman, for we know truly that we are all about a woman*", probably meaning that only "*a peasant*" can say "*ugly things*" against women, from whom we are all begotten.

In 1755 the circus of the "*Cremonese*" arrived in Turin. The "*Cremonese*" trained a bear, a bull and a dog to dance. At first, he was not able to find a place to present the shows, ultimately secured the use of the courtyard at the University of Turin. From the moment the shows were advertised with posters around the city, many started to make fun of the institution – now the host of dancing beasts instead of scientific discussions. The students responded by trying to block the shows with every possible means: they cut ropes, moved planks and demolished beams belonging to the circus. The police alone were not able to stop this strange riot without the use of force, so the King sent an authoritative ambassador to tell the students, and the people gathered for the unusual noise, that the circus would take place in another location. This placated the students and they went away screaming "*long live the King*".

## ACKNOWLEDGMENTS

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