

Scholars and Literati at the University of Leipzig (1409–1800)

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This note is a summary description of the set of scholars and literati who taught at the University of Leipzig from its inception in 1409 to the eve of the Industrial Revolution (1800).

1 THE UNIVERSITY

The Alma Mater Lipsiensis is the today Germany's second oldest continuously active university. In this paper we use the Anglicised version of the institution's name, the University of Leipzig. It was established after a crisis at the University of Prague. The University of Prague, also known as Charles University, had been governed under a sharing agreement between Poles, Bavarians, Saxons, and Bohemians. The famous Decree of Kutná Hora reduced the voting power of foreign nations, granting a 3:1 majority vote to the Bohemians. Second, the student registries, seal and key to the University of Prague were taken from the Saxon rector, Henning Boltenhagen, and the dean of the philosophical faculty, Albert Bärentrapp, in 1409. This was the final straw in pushing foreign students and professors to migrate to Leipzig. In September 1409 Pope Alexander V endorsed the establishment of the Alma Mater Lipsiensis and the university was founded on the 2nd of December 1409 in the St. Thomas Monastery. Financial resources were scarce and the rules were rigorous. Students and masters lived together in dormitories; Latin was the only language and all students had to pass courses in the faculty of arts before studying at the higher faculties of law, theology or medicine (from 1415) (Aberger 2009). During the Thirty Years War, Leipzig was besieged 5 times and occupied by the Swedish. Epidemics, destruction and a fast shrinking population led to difficult years for the university, see Figure 1. Matriculations were plummeting and scholars escaped (Richter 2009).

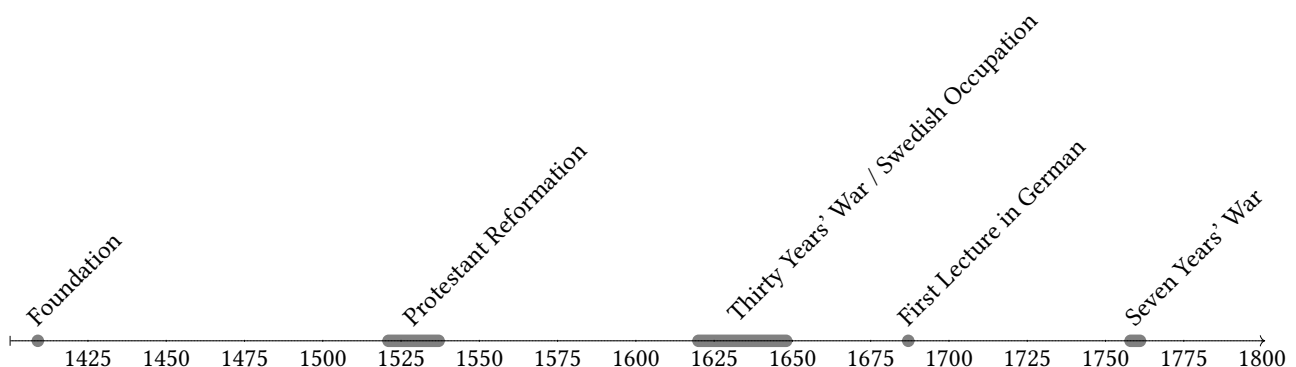


Figure 1: Timeline of the University of Leipzig

2 SOURCES

Two sources provide most of our data on the University of Leipzig. The *catalogus professorum lipsiensium* (Hehl and Riechert 2017) covers the whole time span from 1409 to 1800. Up to 1550, we add scholars - often the lesser-known ones - from the *Repertorium Academicum Germanicum* (Schwinges and Hesse 2019) to achieve as comprehensive a data set as possible. Some of the post-1550 names are drawn from a range of additional sources.

3 DESCRIPTIVE STATISTICS

Table 1 displays the descriptive statistics. For most of the scholars they cover, Hehl and Riechert (2017) provide in depth biographic information, while Schwinges and Hesse (2019) provide a broader comprehensive overview of active scholars and literati (more than 50% of all scholars are observed in 1450–1526). As a result, Schwinges and Hesse (2019) cover a higher fraction of individuals with missing information. Thus, we document a clear break between the periods 1527–1617 and 1618–1685. The number of observations declines sharply from 186 to 55, but the date of birth is known for all of them and they all left a footprint in Worldcat. We are missing the place of birth for less than 4% and almost all of them have a page in Wikipedia (at least 87.5%). The numbers for earlier periods are much lower. We have birth dates for less than one fifth of scholars in the founding period of the University, and place of birth for about a quarter of them. Furthermore, very few of the scholars left a footprint in Worldcat (9.2%) or have a Wikipedia page (12.1%). This gives us comprehensive coverage up to 1550, and coverage of the important professors thereafter.

The mean age at death in 1409–1800 is around 60 years without any significant improvements in longevity over that period. While the level corresponds to the mean in the German area, the declining mortality around the Thirty Years War goes against the overall trend and reflects the selection effect/selection into our sample (Stelter, De la Croix, and Myrskylä 2021). The same factors apply with respect to the mean age at appointment, which fluctuates around 32 years. In 1618–85, it is more than 5 years higher than in the previous period. The overall median distance between the University and the place of birth is 131 km and is in the typical range of German universities; see e.g. De la Croix and Stelter (2022a, 2020, 2022b). The value was highest in the very early years when there were only a few universities nearby, such as the University of Prague, and lowest in the seventeenth century.

Period	nb. obs	birth known date	birth known place	mean age at appoint.	mean age at death	med. dist. birth-univ.	with Wiki.	with Worldcat
1348–1449	174	17.2%	25.3%	35.9	62.4	247	12.1%	9.2%
1450–1526	525	20.2%	24.6%	30.3	59.9	184	9.0%	12.8%
1527–1617	186	64.5%	61.3%	31.2	57.8	144	28.0%	52.2%
1618–1685	55	100 %	98.2%	36.9	62	41	94.5%	100%
1686–1733	56	100 %	96.4%	32.5	60.1	101	87.5%	100%
1734–1800	120	100 %	100%	31.3	62.4	79	89.2%	100%
1409–1800	1116	43.6%	46.1%	32.1	60.4	131	29.4%	36.8%

Table 1: Summary statistics by period

4 FIELDS

Figure 2 illustrates the broad fields of academic activities in the University of Leipzig. As in the case of other old German universities, such as Heidelberg or Jena, we see the dominance of humanities followed by the three higher faculties of law, medicine and theology (De la Croix and Stelter 2022a, 2020). As soon as we exclude scholars without any publications (right panel), who were mostly

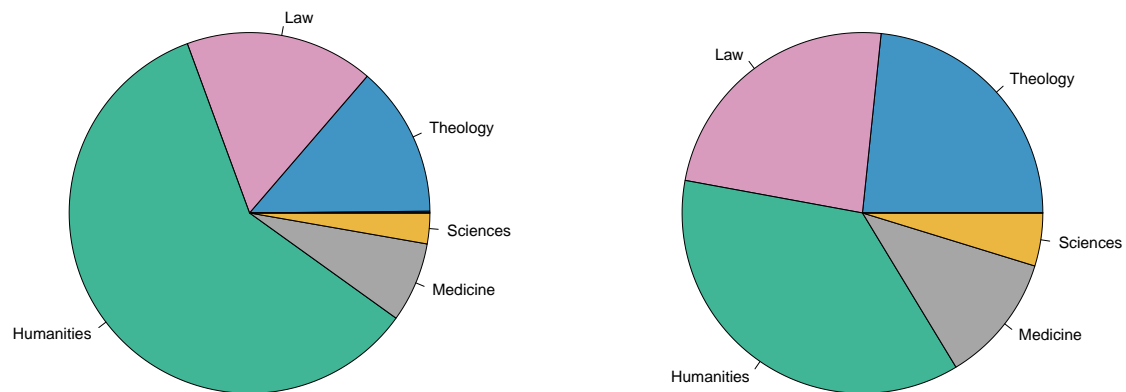


Figure 2: Broad fields at the University of Leipzig (left: all scholars, right: published scholars only)

scholars active in the early years of the University, the dominance of humanities declines significantly. This highlights the important role of the faculty of arts in the early period of the University of Leipzig, due to the compulsory classes in this faculty.

5 PLACE OF BIRTH

Figure 3 displays the documented birthplaces of scholars and literati active at the University of Leipzig per period. Up to the beginning of the Thirty Years War (1618), the University of Leipzig attracted scholars from all over the German speaking area. Starting with the Thirty Years War, the distance between Leipzig and the place of birth declined dramatically for the observed scholars. The majority of scholars were locals. However, at the end of the eighteenth century the sphere of influence increased again and scholars were attracted from larger distances and from all over central Europe. At the end of our window of observation we see an increase in both local scholars and those that travelled longer distances from their place of birth to join the faculty at the University of Leipzig.

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. We also compute the notability of the University at each date t by averaging the human capital of the top 5 scholars active in Leipzig in a window of 25 years before t , but who are no longer active at t . Details are given in RETE in volumes 1–5. Figure 4 shows the names of all the scholars with a positive human capital index.

The orange line plots the notability of the University of Leipzig. Until the beginning of the sixteenth century notability was rather low and, then, increased rapidly to values between 4 and 6. These values correspond to the typical range of universities at that time; see De la Croix et al. (2020). The notability of the University of Leipzig peaked around 1700, when 4 out of the 5 top scholars described in the next section were active.

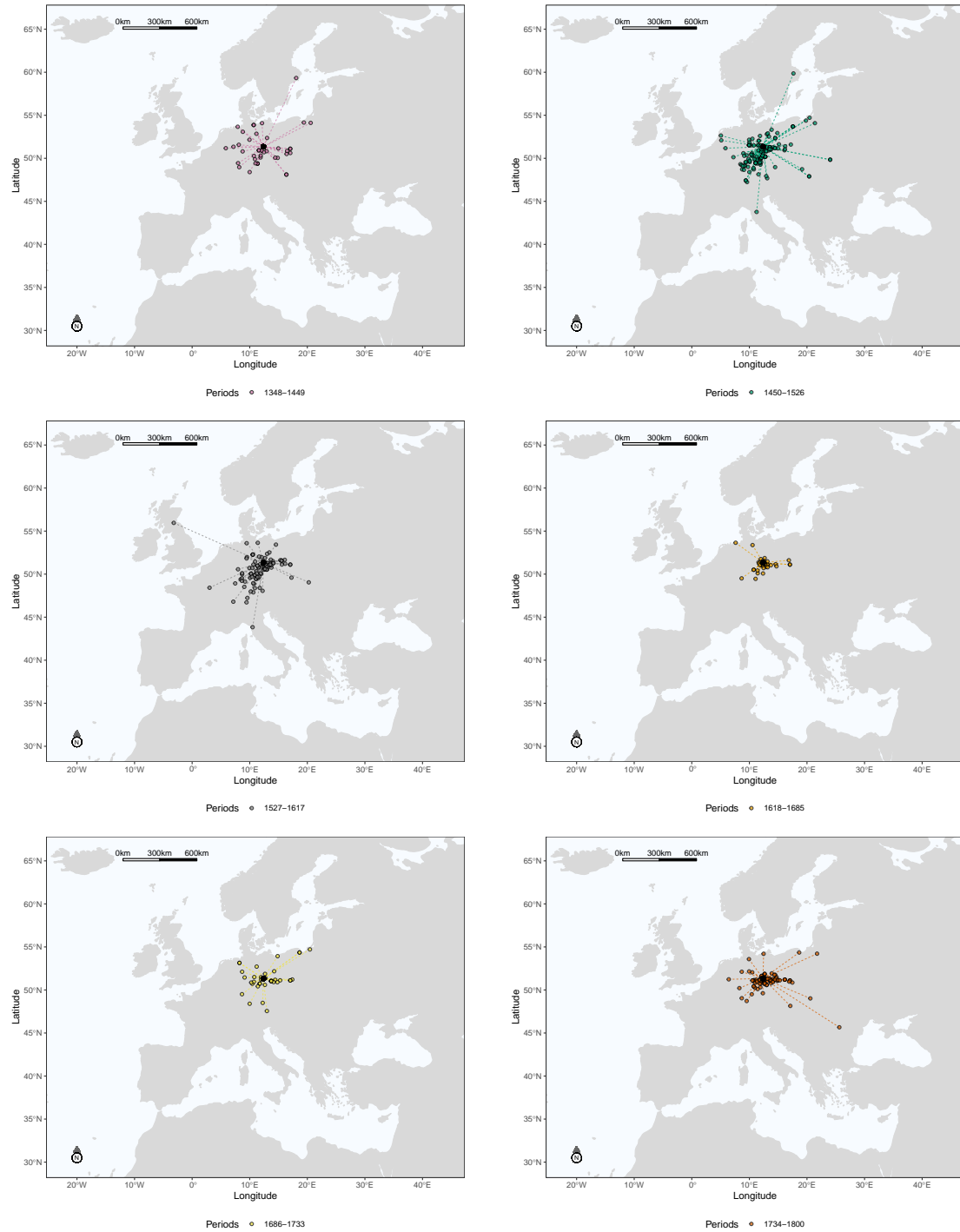


Figure 3: Places of birth of the scholars and literati at the University of Leipzig

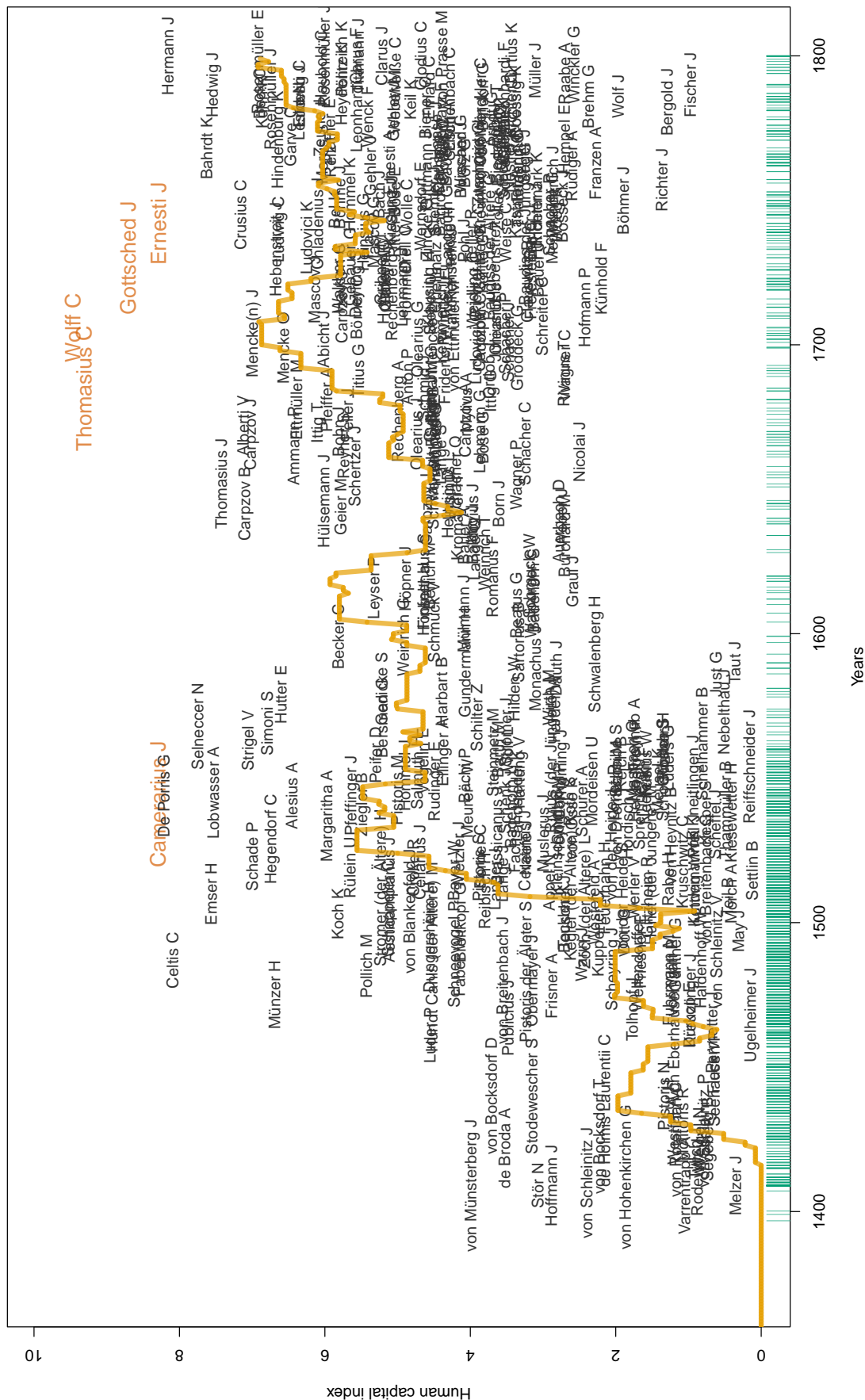


Figure 4: Famous scholars and university notability (orange)

7 TOP 5 PROFESSORS

Christian Wolff (1679 Breslau (Wrocław) – 1753 Halle) was a German philosopher of Polish origin and one of the most well-known figures in the German Enlightenment. His interest in Descartes' philosophy and mathematics began at the Maria-Magdalena Gymnasium in Breslau. After studying mathematics, physics and philosophy in Jena, he moved to the University of Leipzig. He graduated as Magister (a title equal to the doctorate) in 1702 and became private lecturer in 1703. At that time, he reached out to Leibnitz and started one of the most important exchanges of letters in the German history of science. As the maximum number of Polish committee members in the faculty of philosophy had already been reached, there was no chance of becoming an assessor at the faculty (an officer who pronounced judgement at the faculties of law). Instead, he accepted an appointment at the University of Halle in 1706 (Schrader 1898). He shaped the terminology that became the foundation of German philosophy, was a leading scholar in natural law, jurisprudence of concepts and influenced the Prussian laws.

Christian Thomasius (1655 Leipzig – 1728 Halle) is said to be the father of the German enlightenment and spiritual father of the University of Halle (Lieberwirth 1955). Thanks to his father Jakob Thomasius, he came into contact with the University of Leipzig quite early, and started studying law when he was 14. After receiving a masters degree, he completed his doctorate at the University of Frankfurt (Oder). He was not admitted to the Schöppenstuhl zu Leipzig (a court), so he started to give lectures in Leipzig in 1681, and became a professor of natural law in 1684. His attacks on traditional prejudices in theology and jurisprudence attracted both attention and trouble. After he criticised the annulation of the marriage between Wilhelm von Sachsen Zeitz and the widow of Karl Wilhelms von Mecklenburg-Güstrow, in 1690 he was banned from lecturing and writing. He moved to Halle, where he started lecturing at the academy for nobles and became a founding member of the University of Halle in 1694 (Schröder 1999).

Johann Christoph Gottsched (1700 Königsberg (Kaliningrad) – 1766 Leipzig) started to study theology at the University of Königsberg in 1714. With his growing interest in philosophy, in around 1720 he became a follower of Christian Wolff. In 1723, he left Prussia for Leipzig, to avoid being conscripted into the Prussian army. In Leipzig, he received his *venia legendi* (authorisation to independently hold lectures) in 1724 and became an extraordinary professor of poetry. In 1734, he received a second appointment as an ordinary professor of logic and metaphysics. He was several times rector in Leipzig. His contribution to the reformation of German drama and his literary works form part of the German literary canon. Still, his criticism of Klopstock went too far, and for this he was ridiculed (Bernays 1879).

Joachim Camerarius (1500 Bamberg – 1574 Leipzig) was a leading German classical scholar. He established an early reputation as a scholar in Latin and Greek while studying in Leipzig and Erfurt. In 1521, he moved to Wittenberg, where he met his long lasting friend Philipp Melanchthon and became a supporter of the ideas of Luther. He was a very active researcher and lecturer: from 1526–35 he was the director of the newly established Gymnasium in Nuremberg. Until 1541, he was professor of Greek in Tübingen, and he finally moved to Leipzig where he was professor of Latin and Greek until his death in 1574. He enjoyed an outstanding reputation and is often considered to have been the leading humanist in the German speaking territories after the death of Erasmus (Baron 1978).

Johann August Ernesti (1707 Tennstedt – 1781 Leipzig) was a German theologian, philologist and educator, well known for his contribution to humanist education and his reform of classical scholarship. In 1726, he started studying in Wittenberg. He continued his studies in Leipzig, where he spent all of his remaining career. From 1742 he was an extraordinary professor of philology. In 1756 he also became a professor of eloquence and in 1759 a full professor in theology. He was also rector of the Thomas School in Leipzig (Blaschke and Lau 1959).

8 WHO'S WHO ON THE MOON

Another way to measure the notability of individuals is to look for signs of recognition such as street names, names of schools, research institutes, prizes and lunar crater names. Craters on the moon were named after the following five professors, in recognition of their contribution to the advancement of sciences.

Christian August Hausen (1683 Dresden – 1743 Leipzig) was a mathematician, physicist and astronomer who was the first to develop a method to measure the duration of a sun rotation based on observations of sun spots. He started to study theology and, as a sideline, mathematics and physics, at the University of Wittenberg in 1711. He moved to the University of Leipzig where he became an extraordinary professor in 1714. After an extensive research journey throughout Europe, he returned to the University of Leipzig and was appointed to an ordinarius (full professor) in 1726.

Gottfried Heinsius (1709 Naumburg – 1769 Leipzig) enrolled to study law at the University of Leipzig. Soon he switched to mathematics and astronomy and became a student of Christian Hausen. In 1745, he took over the position previously held by his teacher and mentor. He held this position until his death in 1769. The description of the large comet in the year 1744 was one of his main contributions.

Johannes Hommel (1518 Memmingen – 1562 Leipzig) studied in Strasbourg and Wittenberg and became a professor of mathematics at the University of Leipzig in 1551. He was the teacher of the famous astronomer Tycho Brahe (Bruhns 1881; Schwinges and Hesse 2019).

Abraham Gotthelf Kästner (1719 Leipzig – 1800 Göttingen) under the private tuition of his father and aunt, matriculated in 1731 and began to study law. Interested in several other fields, such as physics, chemistry and mathematics, he became an extraordinary professor of mathematics at the University of Leipzig in 1746. In 1756 he moved to Göttingen where he became the head of the observatory (Hofmann and Menges 1881).

9 FAMILIES OF SCHOLARS

We counted 31 father-son pairs among the professors at the University of Leipzig. This is more than what we have found in most other universities.

Among them is the Pistoris family. This lineage spans four generations. Figure 5 shows a simplified genealogical tree of this family.

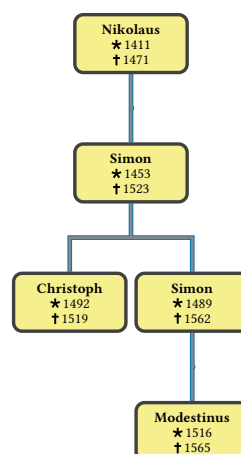


Figure 5: The Pistoris family

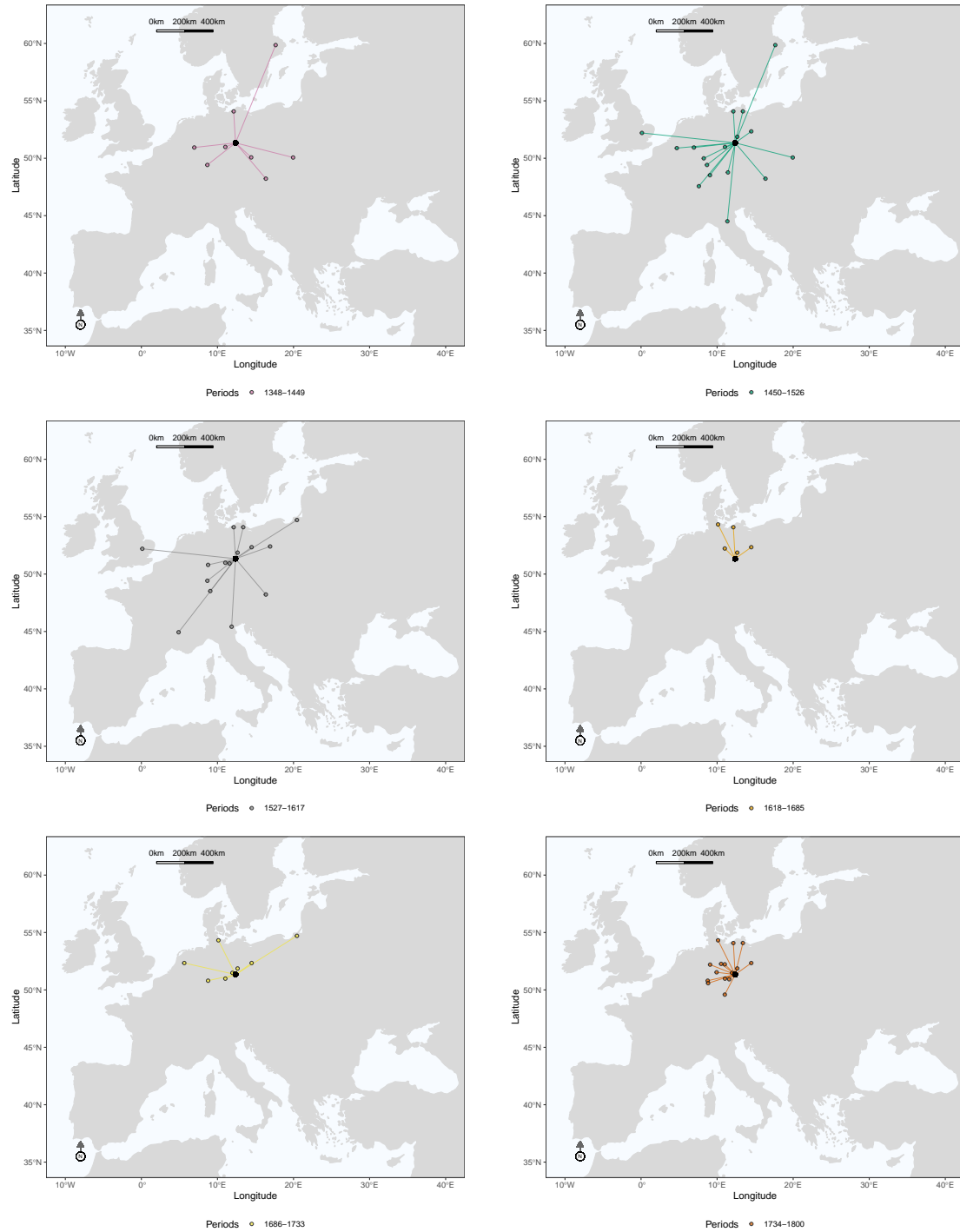


Figure 6: Links between Leipzig and other universities through scholars' mobility, by period

10 UNIVERSITY NETWORK

Here, we assume that when a professor occupied a position in more than one university over his/her life, this established a link between the universities in which they taught. The universities with which the University of Leipzig was linked in each period are displayed in Figure 6. The figures show some similarities to the birth places. The university was rather well connected to the existing Central European Universities until 1618. With the onset of the Thirty Years War the network collapsed. Only five universities in the North - Kiel, Rostock, Halle, Frankfurt and Helmstedt - remained. At the end of the seventeenth century, the network started to recover. Among the most important universities in the network is Halle University. With Ch. Wolff and Ch. Thomasius, the two top professors, moved from Leipzig to Halle.

11 ANECDOTES

Jakob Thomasius matriculated his son Christian Thomasius at age 0 at Leipzig University. Professors had the right to matriculate their sons directly after birth. However, the latter did not start studying before age 14 (Schröder 1999).

12 FINAL THOUGHTS

The Alma Mater Lipsiensis is an example of a university that was spun off from an existing university due to political troubles. It suffered during the Thirty Years War and the Swedish Occupation in Leipzig, before reaching its apogée during the German Enlightenment.

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Homepage: <https://perso.uclouvain.be/david.delacroix/uthc.html>

Twitter: <https://twitter.com/UTHCerc>

Database: <https://shiny-lidam.sipr.ucl.ac.be/scholars/>

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