

# Scholars and Literati at the University of Freiburg (1457–1800)

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This note is a summary description of the set of scholars and literati who taught at the University of Freiburg from its inception in 1457 to the eve of the Industrial Revolution (1800).

## 1 THE UNIVERSITY

The University of Freiburg or Albertina belongs to a wave of universities established in the fifteenth century around the area of the Upper Rhine: the University of Dole (1422) (De la Croix and Mytilinaios 2022), the University of Freiburg (1457), the University of Basel (1460), and the University of Tübingen (1477) (De la Croix and Stelter 2022c). In April 1455, Pope Calixtus III complied with the wish of Albert VI, the Archduke of Austria, to establish a university in Freiburg. Albert's edict followed on September 21, 1457, constituting the official starting date of the University of Freiburg. Still, preparatory work – expedited by Matthäus Hummel, the first rector of the university – took some time. Teaching at the full university with its four typical faculties (theology, philosophy (or arts), medicine, and law) did not start before April 1460. In the sixteenth century, the university experienced a period of prosperity, with a number of important scholars being members or students there, such as Martin Waldseemüller – the first person ever to use the name “America” to refer to the newly discovered continent in his world atlas. However, with the entry of the Society of Jesus at the beginning of the seventeenth century, a long period of stagnation began (Speck 2007).

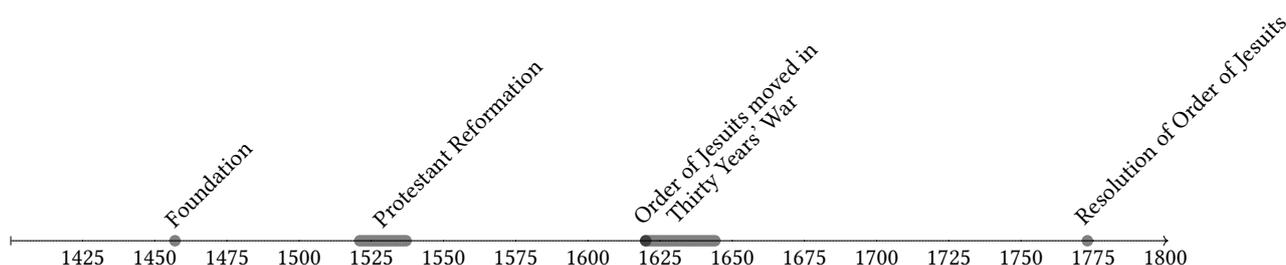


Figure 1: Timeline of the University of Freiburg

## 2 SOURCES

Our data collection on scholars and literati active at the University of Freiburg is based on different sources. Scholars from the theological faculty since the early years of the University of Freiburg can be found in Bauer (1957), while Ruth (2001) focuses on the overall university between 1520 and 1620. Jesuits in the period after 1620 can be identified thanks to Kurrus (1977) until 1773. We added further information on Jesuits from Fischer (1978). Finally, up to 1550, we add scholars from the Repertorium Academicum Germanicum (Schwinges and Hesse 2019) to achieve as comprehensive a data set as possible.

### 3 SOME STATISTICS

Table 1 displays some descriptive statistics for the 767 scholars we link to the University of Freiburg. Almost three-quarters of them were active in the first two periods for which information in *Repertorium Academicum Germanicum* (RAG) is available. Among these early scholars, we document a high fraction with known birth places. With the onset of the Thirty Years’ War (or the end of the time window covered by RAG), this share dropped significantly. Still, the overall fraction of scholars with known birth places is 84.1%, which is relatively high. The pattern is exactly the opposite for birth years: starting from around every fifth scholar whose year of birth is known, the data quality permanently improves and exceeds 60% before the start of the Industrial Revolution. Due to the dominance of the pre-Thirty Years’ War time, the overall share of 32.1% is low compared to other universities in the German-speaking area; see De la Croix and Stelter (2022a, 2022b, 2022c).

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
1457–1526	224	20.5%	96%	29.7	63.5	162	12.5%	21.9%
1527–1617	346	23.7%	91.6%	29.4	58.8	152	6.6%	23.7%
1618–1685	66	60.6%	60.6%	38.7	60.9	200	9.1%	53%
1686–1733	55	56.4%	52.7%	41.2	65.9	228	12.7%	40%
1734–1800	76	61.8%	57.9%	37.8	68.4	230	31.6%	53.9%
1457–1800	767	32.1%	84.1%	34	62.9	167	11.5%	29.9%

Table 1: Summary statistics by period

The mean age at appointment was low (younger than 30) before 1618, but in a plausible range at the University of Freiburg; see De la Croix and Stelter (2022a, 2022b) or Stelter, De la Croix, and Myrskylä (2021). Since the seventeenth century, the university appointed older scholars, with a peak at the turn of the eighteenth century when scholars on average were older than 41 years old. Up to the end of the seventeenth century, the mean age at death ranged around the typical value of 60. However, mortality improvements at the University of Freiburg were ahead of the general evolution and the mean age at death was already 68 before the turn of the nineteenth century (Stelter, De la Croix, and Myrskylä 2021). The overall median distance of 167 km between scholars’ places of birth and the University of Freiburg was higher than at other universities nearby, like those in Heidelberg or Tübingen. It was lower before 1617 and clearly higher after that date. The low coverage of scholars in Wikipedia (11.5%) and Worldcat (29.9%) indicates a low notability. The dichotomous pattern already observed for birth information persists with respect to scholars’ footprint in Worldcat. Before the Thirty Years’ War, less than a quarter left any footprint, while the share doubled afterwards. With almost one-third, we only observe a Wikipedia page for a significant fraction of scholars in the last period of our observation window.

### 4 FIELDS

Figure 2 illustrates the broad academic fields at the University of Freiburg for all scholars (LHS) and those who published (RHS). While the field is unknown for a relatively high share of scholars – in particular the obscure ones – we clearly document the dominance of humanities, which cover the lower faculty of arts (De la Croix and Stelter 2022a, 2020). As in the case of other old full universities in the German-speaking territory, such as Heidelberg or Tübingen, we find a significant fraction of scholars active at the three higher faculties of law, theology, and medicine as well. Most scholars at a higher faculty were active in the field of theology. Finally, we find a relatively high share of scholars linked to science.

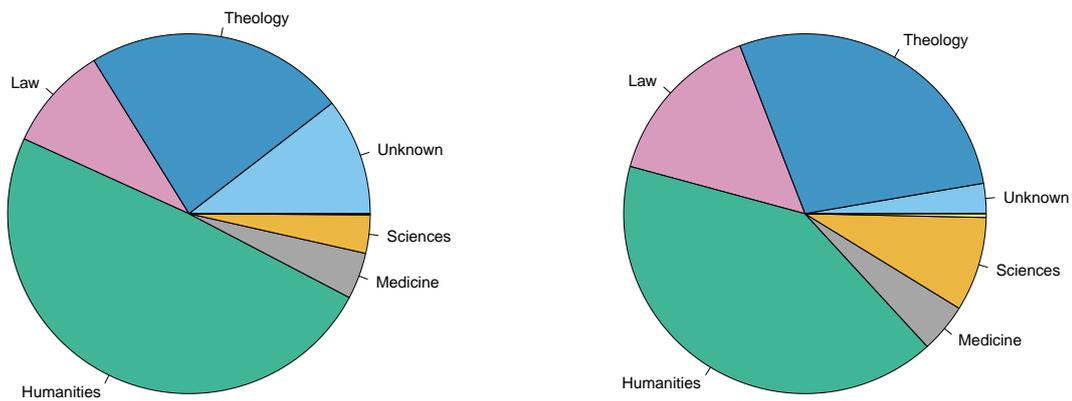


Figure 2: Broad fields at the University of Freiburg (left: all scholars, right: published scholars only)

## 5 PLACE OF BIRTH

Figure 3 displays the documented birth places of scholars and literati active at the University of Freiburg per period. In its early days, scholars born nearby, as well as from the Low Countries and other parts of the German-speaking area – in particular from the south of today’s Germany – were active at the University of Freiburg. While the role of the Low Countries declined in the following period 1526–1617, the university attracted more scholars from the North-East of Germany. With the onset of the Thirty Years’ War and until the end of the eighteenth century, not only was there a smaller number of scholars, but they were also all born relatively close to Freiburg. It is only in the eighteenth century that scholars were attracted from further afield again.

## 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 by averaging the human capital of the scholars active in Freiburg 25 years before that date. The 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 displays the notability of the University of Freiburg. We document significant fluctuations in the university’s fortunes, reflecting the political decisions of the ruling princes, who often used universities as political tools. Coinciding with Ferdinand I’s desire to oppose the ideas of the Reformation, aggregated notability quickly climbed above 5 and reached its peak in the middle of the sixteenth century. Unsurprisingly, four out of five scholars in our top five were active during that period of prosperity. With the contrast between the position of Archduke Leopold V, who welcomed the Jesuits with a solemn ceremony, and that of the city and university authorities, who were opposed to their inclusion, notability declined and was almost halved by the beginning of the seventeenth century (Buscot 2010). Up to the early eighteenth century, aggregated notability further declined below 2. It may be a coincidence that notability recovered at the very end of the observation window, when the university freed itself from the Jesuits.

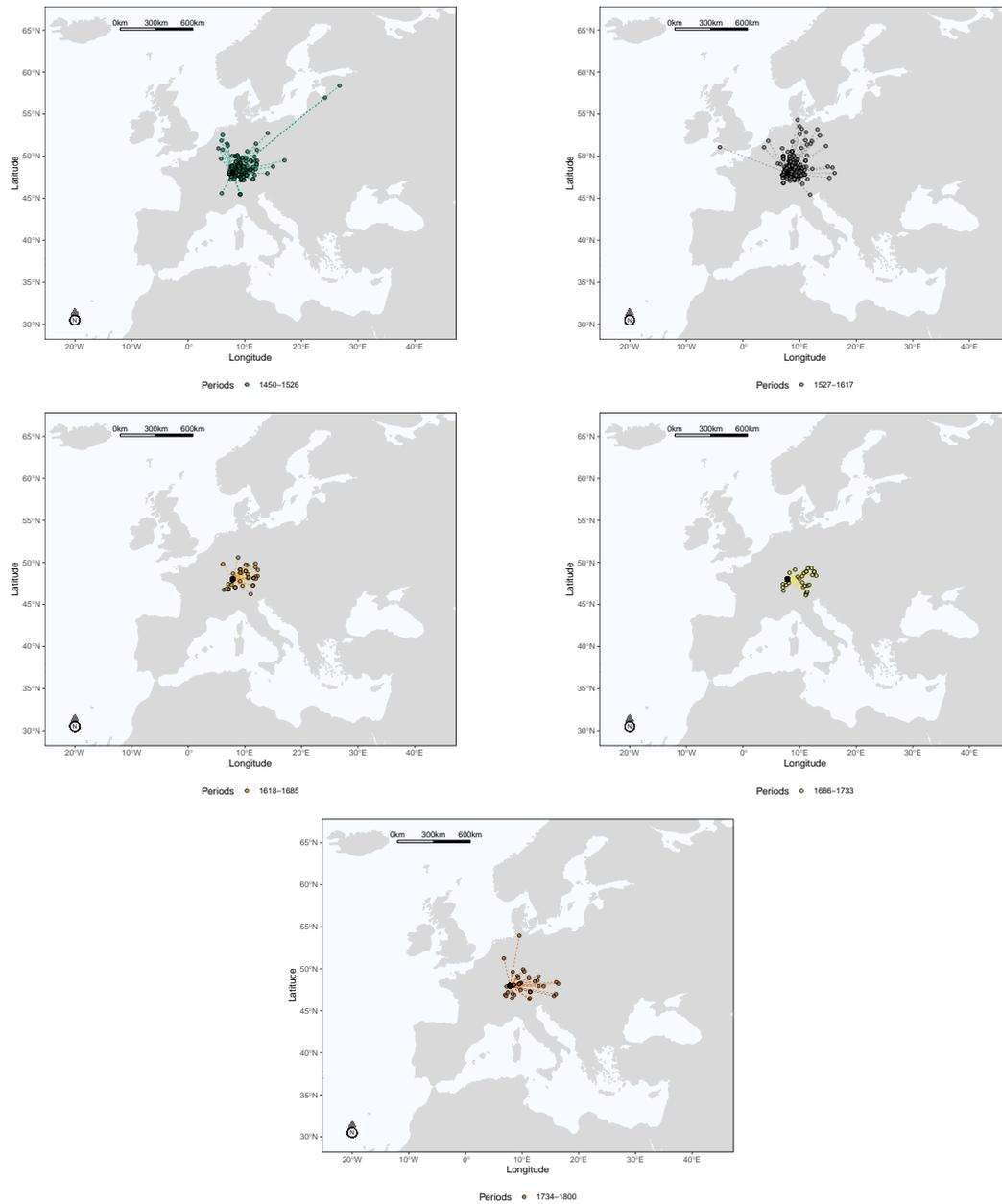


Figure 3: Places of birth of the scholars and literati at the University of Freiburg

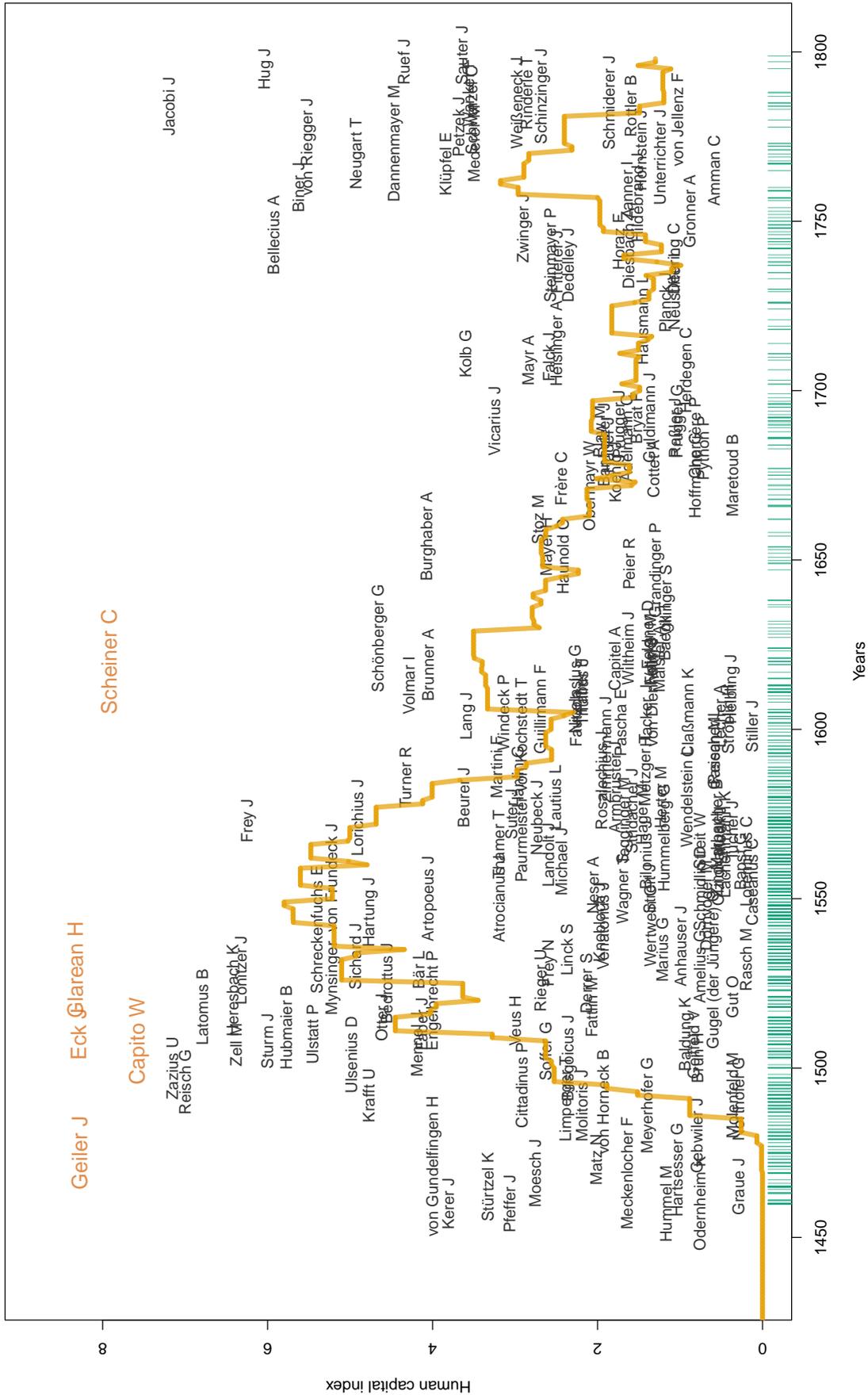


Figure 4: Famous scholars and university notability (orange)

## 7 TOP 5 PROFESSORS

We now provide a brief overview of the five professors with the highest human capital index. Four of them were at Freiburg during the sixteenth century – in the midst of the Reformation period.

**Heinrich Glarean** (1488 Mollis – 1563 Freiburg), also known as Henricus Glareanus, was a prominent humanist, music connoisseur, and geographer (Geiger 1879). After his primary training in Bern and Rottweil, he studied at the University of Cologne. In Basel, he came into contact with important scholars, such as Erasmus von Rotterdam. In 1529, Glarean accepted to lecture on poetry in Freiburg/Breisgau. These lectures also covered topics such as history and geography, and Glarean continued to hold them until 1560 (Grimm 1964). Glarean significantly contributed to the field of music theory with his publication “Dodecachordon” (1547). He presented a new version of the note system with twelve musical modes instead of eight, which corresponded to the types of ancient Greek music (Geiger 1879).

**Johannes Eck** (1486 Egg an der Günz, Swabia – 1543 Ingolstadt) was born Johannes Maier. He adopted the name Eck to point to his place of birth (Werner 1877). His uncle, M. Maier, played a pivotal role in Eck’s education. He studied at several universities before moving to Freiburg in 1502. From then until 1510, he lectured at the ‘Aristotle’ artistic department (Iserloh 1959). In 1505, he became part of the *Bursa pavonis di modernorum* in Freiburg and was elected rector there as well (Werner 1877). Furthermore, he was involved in legal, mathematical, and geographical lectures. In 1510, he received the title of Dr. theological in Freiburg and was appointed soon thereafter by the University of Ingolstadt (Iserloh 1959). He took up the position of Georges Zingel and remained professor of theology at Ingolstadt until his death (Werner 1877). Johannes Eck is well-known for the Leipzig Debate of 1519, in which he was opposed to the reformer Martin Luther concerning the topic of the papacy’s authority. More specifically, during the era of assertive equivocation, Eck was able to clearly show Luther’s attack on this pillar of the Catholic doctrine (Iserloh 1959).

**Johannes Geiler** (1445 Schaffhausen – 1510 Strasbourg) also known as Johannes Geiler von Kayserberg was an eminent theologian and preacher. In 1460, Geiler joined the newly established University of Freiburg, where he studied until 1463. In addition to that, he performed duties as dean of the Philosophical Faculty in 1469 and 1470 (Martin 1878). In 1471, he moved to the newly founded University of Basel, where he served as deputy titular professor for the faculties of philosophy and theology. In Basel, he obtained a bachelor’s degree in theology. In 1474, he was elected dean of the Faculty of Arts, and lastly he received a doctorate and full professorship in theology in 1475 (Martin 1878). In 1476, he was appointed by the University of Freiburg where he was also elected rector and stayed for one year (Wuttke 1964). In 1477, he left the University of Freiburg and stopped his teaching activity (Martin 1878). After quitting this career, he devoted the rest of his life to preaching in Strasbourg (Wuttke 1964). He is specifically known for his powerful sermons and their easily accessible content (Wuttke 1964).

**Christoph Scheiner** (1573 Wald, Swabia - 1650 Neisse) was a mathematician, Jesuit priest, physicist, and prominent astronomer. From 1591 to 1595, he attended grammar school in Augsburg and soon thereafter joined the Jesuit order in Landsberg/Lech (Daxecker 2005). From 1598 to 1601, he studied mathematics and metaphysics at the University of Ingolstadt and worked as a Latin teacher in Dillingen. In 1603, he created the Pantograph, known also as “Cranesbill,” a tool for expanding or decreasing drawings (Daxecker 2005). In 1610, he moved back to the University of Ingolstadt as a professor of mathematics and of the Hebrew language (Günther 1890b). From 1620 to 1621, he was a professor of mathematics at the University of Freiburg (Fischer 1978).

**Wolfgang Fabricius Capito** (1478 Haguenau, Alsace – 1541 Strasbourg) was an important re-

formed theologian, priest, and humanist. Under the influence of his father, he firstly studied medicine at the University of Freiburg, where he obtained a doctoral degree in medicine in 1498 (Herzog 1876). In the following years, he studied liberal arts at Ingolstadt and returned to Freiburg in order to study law and to obtain a degree in this field (Herzog 1876). After his father's death, he followed his own preferences and studied theology at the University of Freiburg, where he received his degree in 1511. In addition to that, Wolfgang gave lectures at the Faculty of Theology (Herzog 1876). From 1515 onward, he served as a preacher at the Basel Minster's council and became a professor of theology at the University of Basel, where he met and was influenced by Erasmus von Rotterdam (Grimm 1957). While at the University of Basel, he was very productive. The positive emphasis he gave to the Christian truth paved the way for the Reformation (Herzog 1876). Capito's path as a scholar was marked by his acquaintance with Martin Luther. His opposition to Luther – while he was in Mainz (1520-1523) in the service of Archbishop Albrecht and his church policy – played a decisive role in his decision to settle in Strasbourg in 1523. The epicenter of his activity remained Strasbourg, but it also expanded to Germany and Switzerland (Herzog 1876).

## 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. The following two professors received this honor, in recognition of their contribution to the advancement of the sciences.

**Christoph Scheiner** (Wald, Bavaria 1573 – Neisse 1650), the fourth in our top scholars, observed black spots on the sun in 1611 alongside his student, Johann Baptist Cysat (1587–1657), which he originally considered as moons of the sun. Under the pseudonym “Apelles,” he sent his observations to Galileo Galilei and Marcus Welser. This led to a dispute between him and Galileo over primacy, although both of them had noticed spots separately (Günther 1890a).

**Georg Schönberger** (Innsbruck 1597 – Uherkse-Hradiste 1645) was a student of Scheiner. In 1615, he joined the Society of Jesus. In Freiburg, he taught literature, philosophy, Hebrew, theology, and mathematics before he moved on to Prague and Olomouc (Fischer 1978).

## 9 RELATED SCHOLARS

**Desiderius Erasmus (von Rotterdam)** (Rotterdam 1467 – Basel 1536) was the most important humanist of his era, specifically during the transition from the Middle Ages to the Modern Era. He spent extensive time in Italy, France, and England in order to complete his studies and expand his horizons. From 1517 to 1521, he was a member of the University of Louvain in Belgium. However, he never accepted a formal position as a professor there (Catoire et al. 2021). Indeed, Erasmus showed a preference for Basel and its university, where he died in 1536. Before returning to Basel for the last time, he moved to Freiburg from 1529 to 1535. He was received at the University of Freiburg with great honor, and was treated as a figurehead of humanism by Ulrich Zasius and Konrad von Heresbach (Kämmel 1877).

## 10 UNIVERSITY NETWORK

When a professor occupied a position in more than one university over his/her life, we can assume that this established a link between the universities at which they taught. The universities with which the University of Freiburg was linked during each period are displayed in Figure 5. In its early days and up to the beginning of the Thirty Years' War, the University of Freiburg was well integrated

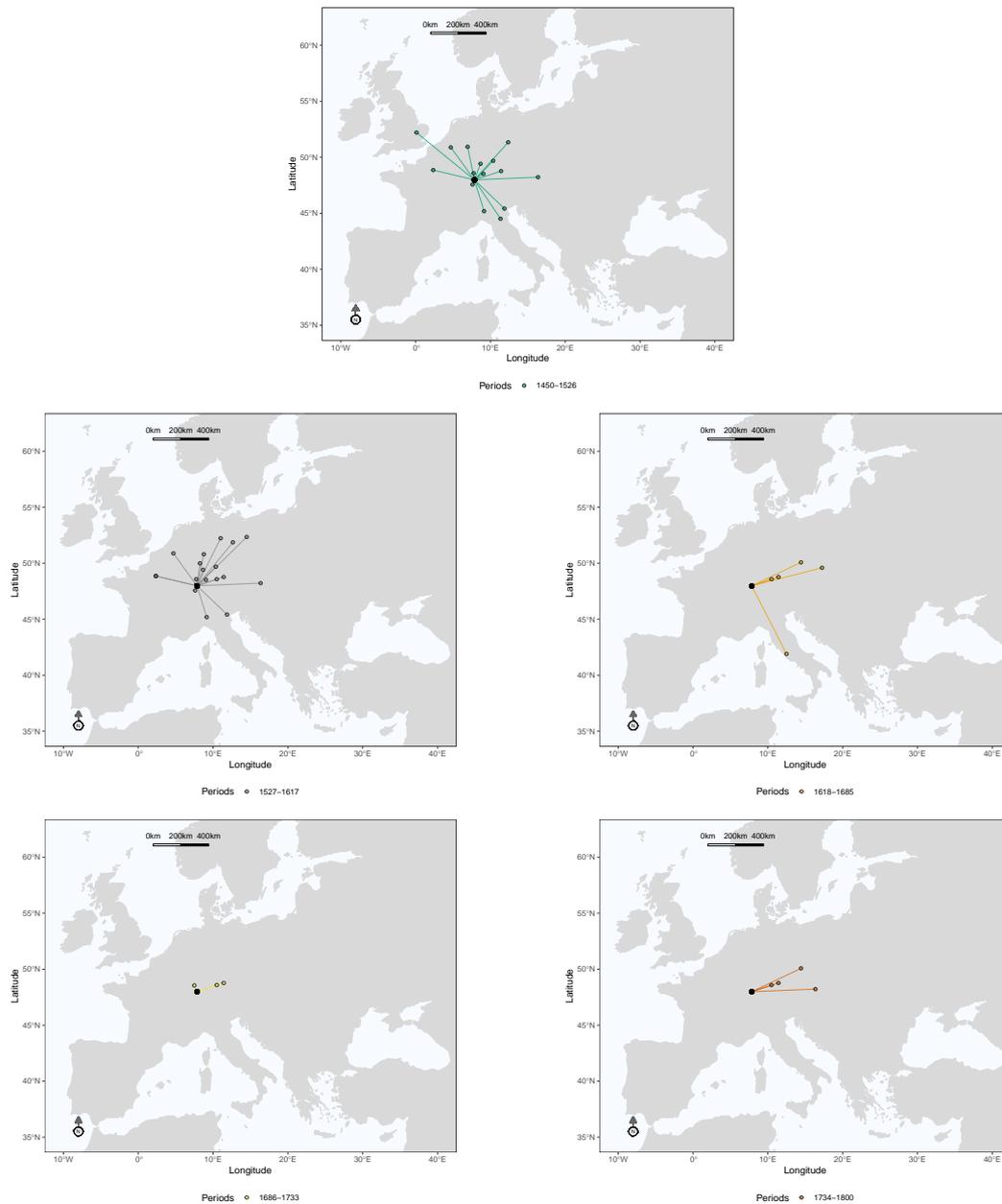


Figure 5: Links between Freiburg and other universities through scholars' mobility, by period

in the network of existing universities. This was also a period of prosperity for the University of Freiburg. Once again, 1618 marks a turning point. With the arrival of the Jesuits, the network did not only collapse, it was also linked to very few universities nearby, most importantly Ingolstadt and Dillingen, where the Jesuits were also active.

## 11 ANECDOTES

*Heinrich Glarean* had a special, intense personality. He was quick-tempered and easily provoked, and had a sharp sense of humor, which led to his jokes being remembered and shared. Moreover, he was fond of Latin but looked down upon the German language, thinking that it was suitable only for emotional outbursts (Geiger 1879).

Due to his intelligence and his uncle's support, *Joannes Eck* firstly joined the University of Heidelberg at the age of 12. Before adulthood, he had already joined four universities: the University of Heidelberg (1498), the University of Tübingen (1499), the University of Cologne (1501), and lastly the

University of Freiburg (1502) (Iserloh 1959). Additionally, at the early age of 14, he became magister artium (Werner 1877).

The oldest scepter of the University of Freiburg shows both the Austrian and Palatinate coats of arms, which is believed to reference Archduke Albrecht and Countess Palatine Mechthild. It is rumored that *Mechthild von der Pfalz* persuaded Archduke Albrecht VI to establish a university in Freiburg im Breisgau. However, a detailed, source-based description of the university's founding by Dieter Speck suggests that Mechthild's role as the actual founder may be more of a legend (Speck 2000).

## 12 FINAL THOUGHTS

The University of Freiburg experienced its golden age in the sixteenth century, with the presence of notable humanists as both students and professors. Then, overlapping with the arrival of the Jesuits in the seventeenth century, a long period of scientific decline began.

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