

Scholars and Literati at the Collège de La Flèche (1603–1762)

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The following note aims at presenting the scholars and literati who taught at the Collège Henri IV de La Flèche during its Jesuit period (1603 – 1762).

1 SOURCES

The three sources used to identify the scholars and literati of the Collège Henri IV are the following : the first one is "Histoire de l'école de La Flèche : depuis sa fondation par Henri IV jusqu'à sa réorganisation en prytanée impérial militaire," written by Clère (1853), who was a student at the college. The second source is "Un collège de Jésuites aux XVIIe et XVIIIe siècles : le Collège Henri IV de La Flèche," written by Rochemonteix (1889). Both of these sources provide a history of the institution; the version of Clère goes beyond the Jesuit years of the college. For the most part, Rochemonteix gives more details on the teachers of the Collège than Clère. The third source is "La bibliothèque de la Compagnie de Jésus," edited by Sommervogel (1890). This document is a compilation of bibliographies regarding Jesuits who published written work.

The work edited by Delattre, entitled "Les établissements des Jésuites en France depuis quatre siècles : Répertoire topo-bibliographique publié à l'occasion du quatrième centenaire de la fondation de la Compagnie de Jésus," was not used to complete the scholars and literati database. However, it contains a wealth of names of scholars, some of whom may not have been included in the current database. Incorporating this document in the future would be a step towards enhancing the data collection specifically related to the Collège Henri IV de La Flèche.

2 THE COLLEGE

The Collège Henri IV de La Flèche was founded on September 3, 1603, following an edict that also rehabilitated the other Jesuit institutions in France. The institution at La Flèche was the fourteenth Jesuit college created in France. King Henry IV gifted the Jesuits a castle and its grounds, which belonged to his family, the Bourbons. At the beginning, the college was meant to be a university, with teaching in medicine and law, but in 1607 a new edict defined the recent institution only as a "Jesuit school of first order." Father Barny was the Jesuit who was put at its head in 1603. After the first academic year, there were about one thousand students. New buildings were consequently erected to accommodate them. The king made new donations and promised to raise a church for the school. The promise was kept by the queen during her regency: the chapel was finished in 1614. In this chapel lay the hearts of the royal couple, Henry IV and Marie de Médicis, until the urns containing them were destroyed during the French Revolution. Nowadays, their ashes are still there, collected in a golden heart (Delattre 1949).

The Collège Henri IV was one of the most prominent Jesuit schools in France, second only to Paris's Collège de Clermont. Throughout the 17th century, the number of students remained above one thousand, but it decreased during the 18th century. In 1760, only 400 students were left. A maximum of 300 of them could reside in the boarding school, for a fee. Most of the students came

from the nearby regions of Anjou and Maine, and lived in the town of La Flèche. The number of Jesuits quickly grew: from 19 in 1604 to 83 in 1611. In 1762, just before the school was closed, there were 110 of them at La Flèche, with 34 teachers among them. Many famous missionaries spent some time at the college. Father Bouvet was one of them: he was Chinese Emperor Kang-Hi's mathematics teacher (Delattre, 1953).

After the college closed in 1762, it was converted to a military school. First, it became a cadet corps in 1764. Then, after 1808, it became the home of the Prytanée militaire, also a military school (Delattre, 1953).

Period	nb. obs	birth date	known place	mean age at appoint.	mean age at death	med. dist. birth-univ.	with Wiki.	with Worldcat
1527–1617	21	81%	81%	33.9	71.4	399	33.30%	57.10%
1618–1685	64	84.40%	79.70%	34.5	67.4	222	25%	57.80%
1686–1733	35	85.70%	82.90%	37.1	73.2	202	28.60%	60%
1734–1800	32	93.8	90.60%	30.6	67.1	230	6.20%	15.60%
1527-1800	152	86.20%	82.90%	34.6	69.4	222	23%	49.30%

Table 1: Summary statistics by period

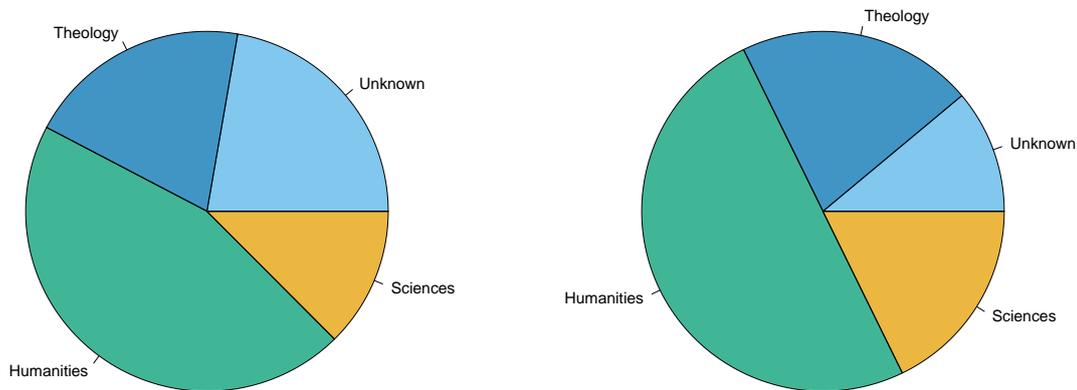


Figure 1: Broad fields at the Collège de La Flèche (left: all scholars, right: published scholars only)

3 SOME STATISTICS

Table 1 displays some descriptive statistics. Out of the 152 scholars, the birth years are known for 86.20%, and the birth places for 82.90%. The mean age at nomination is 34.6, while the mean age at death is 69.4 for the whole period (to be compared with 67.9 at the Jesuit university in Pont-à-Mousson (De la Croix and Karioun 2021) and with 62.6 for the college in Molsheim (Croix 2023)). The median distance between the birth places and La Flèche over the whole period is 222 kilometers. It indicates that these scholars mostly came from French regions around La Flèche. 23% of the scholars linked to La Flèche have a Wikipedia page, while 49.30% can be found on the VIAF site. This site was used to compute the human capital index for each scholar.

The college had a steady presence of published faculty members, and a set of very good scholars. It dominated the Jesuit universities of Pont-à-Mousson, Molsheim, and Aix-en-Provence (De la Croix and Karioun 2021; De la Croix and Fabre 2021; Croix 2023).

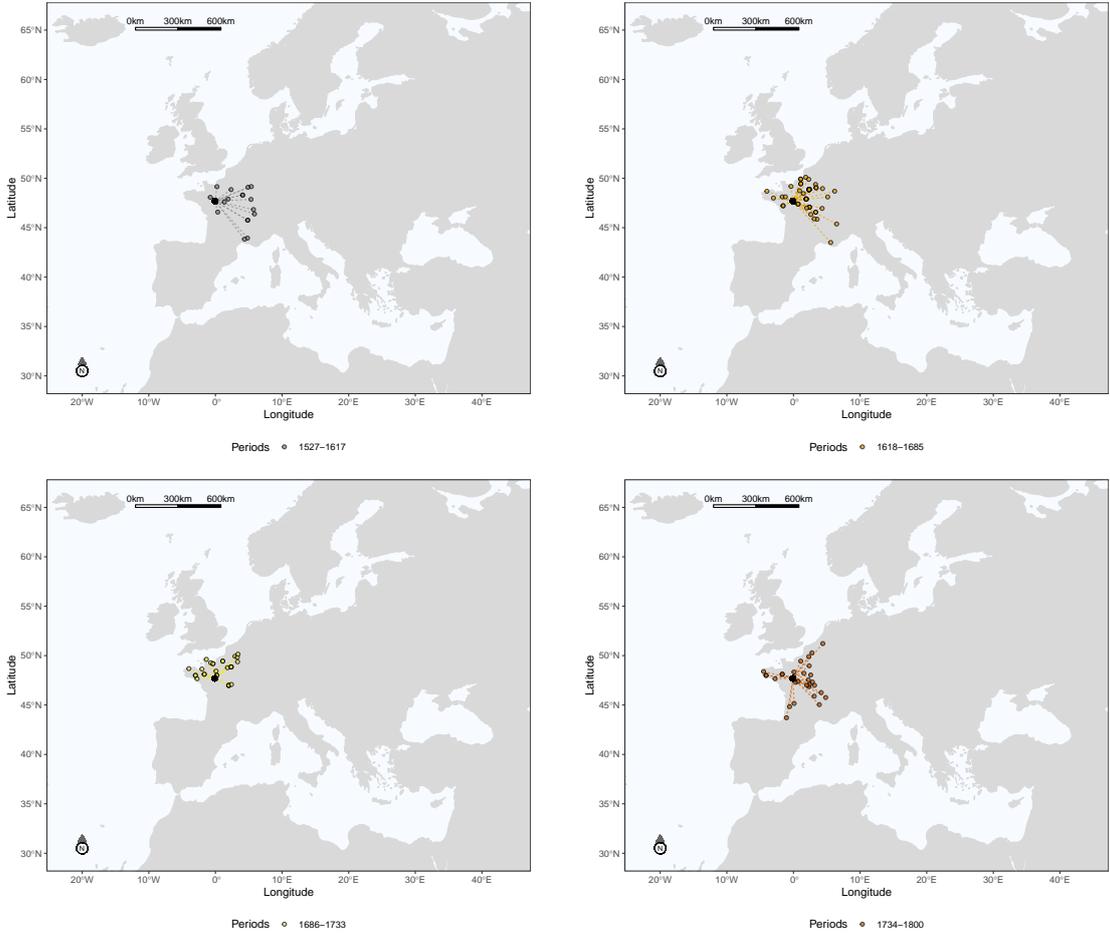


Figure 2: Places of birth of the scholars and literati at the Collège de La Flèche

4 FIELDS

Figure 1 shows the fields of specialization of La Flèche’s scholars. “Humanities” is clearly the first field, followed by theology and “unknown,” which represent almost the same share. The relative importance of the “unknown” category is due to the limited description of some professors’ stays at La Flèche by the sources: for some, there is only a reference to their teaching, without mentioning what they taught exactly. “Sciences” are an important share, while medicine and law are absent, as La Flèche was not a university.

5 PLACE OF BIRTH

Figure 2 shows the different birthplaces of the scholars affiliated with the College of La Flèche. The black dot on the map indicates the localisation of La Flèche. Almost all the jesuits who taught at La Flèche were born in the Kingdom of France.

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 VIAF and Wikipedia, using principal component analysis. We also compute the notability of the college at each date by averaging the human capital of the scholars active at La Flèche 25 years before that date. The details are given in Curtis and De la Croix (2023). Figure 3 shows the names of all the scholars with a positive human capital index. The orange line displays the notability of the college, based on how well published its top scholars were.

7 TOP 5 PROFESSORS

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

Jean-Baptiste-Louis de Gresset (Amiens 1709 -- Amiens 1777) was a French scholar, who was a member of the Jesuits for almost ten years (1726-1735). He taught grammar, humanities, and theology. Among many other works, he wrote “Vert-Vert,” a play, which caused him to be dismissed from the Society in 1735. He only stayed at La Flèche, where he was exiled, from October to November 1735. After his departure, he kept writing while being clergyman and eventually entered the Académie Française in 1748. In 1750, he founded the Académie d’Amiens, one year before he married the daughter of Amiens’ mayor, Miss Galland. In 1754, he was the Director of the Académie Française (d’Amat and Limouzin-Lamothe 1965; Sommervogel 1890).

Denis Pétau (Orléans 1583 – Paris 1652) was a French Jesuit scholar who taught rhetoric, notably at La Flèche, and dogmatic theology, a field in which he was famous for his knowledge (Sommervogel, 1890). Pétau was a prolific researcher: the complete list of his works fills twenty-five columns in Sommervogel. The reputation he enjoyed during his lifetime was especially due to his work on chronology (Herbermann 1913), and a crater on the Moon is named Petavius in his honor.

Dominique Bouhours (Paris 1628 – Paris 1702) was a French Jesuit scholar (he joined the Society in 1644) who taught humanities and rhetoric, notably at the Collège de Clermont. He was mostly known as a grammarian, but he has also published translations or new editions of spiritual works. He fought the Jansenists by writing letters against some of their works, which fueled the controversy between them and the Jesuits. He published a new translation of the Bible with two of his Jesuit colleagues, Father Besnier and Father Le Tellier, to compete against the Jansenist version of Port-Royal. Moreover, he was the tutor of Colbert’s son (Prevost and d’Amat 1954; Sommervogel 1890).

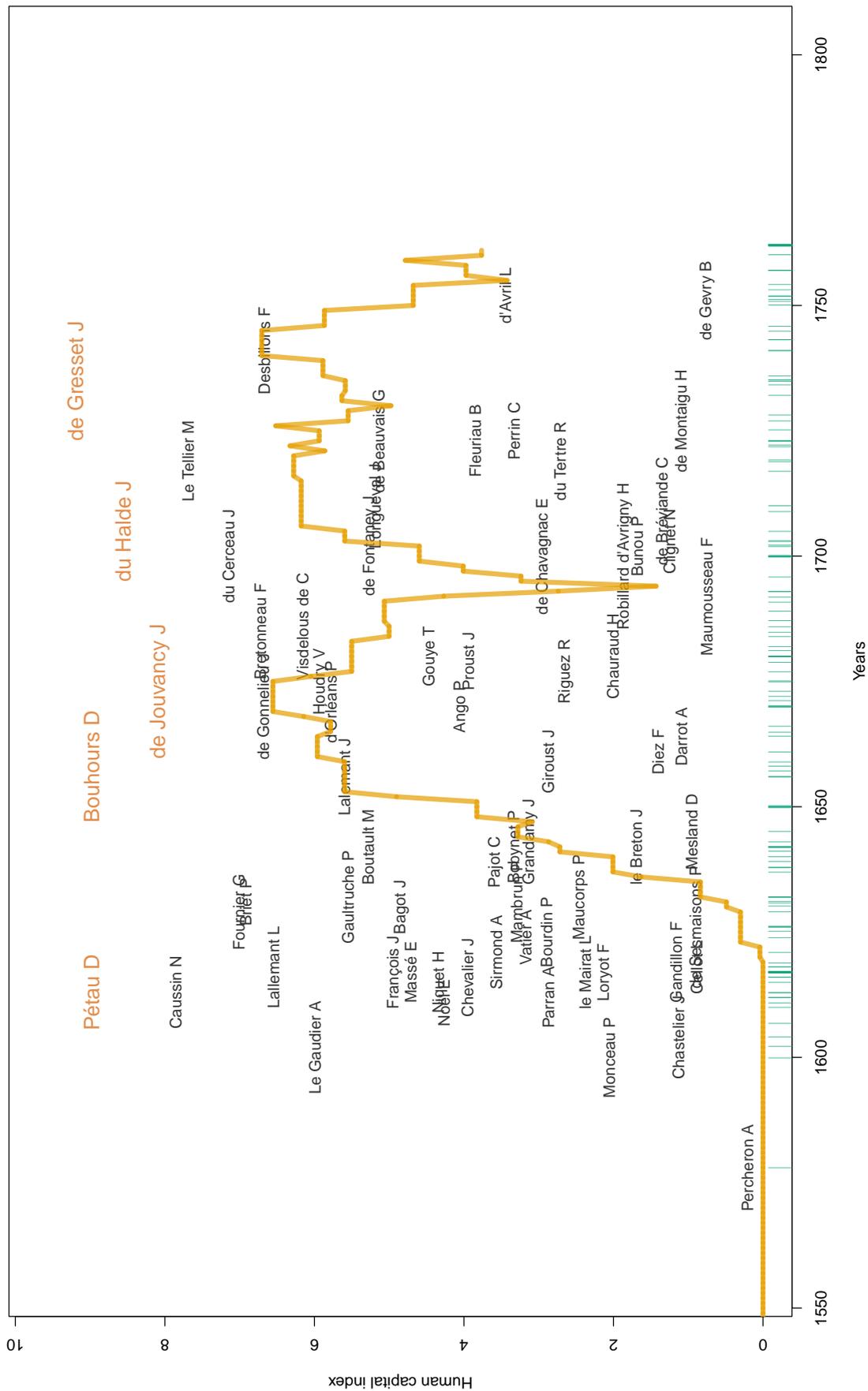


Figure 3: Famous scholars and college notability (orange)

Jean-Baptiste du Halde (Paris 1674 – Paris 1743) was a French Jesuit scholar who taught rhetoric at La Flèche. He wrote “Description géographique et historique du grand empire de la Chine,” which is a document about China’s geography. He was the Jesuit designated to publish the letters written by the Society’s missionaries, and was also the Duke of Orléans’s confessor (d’Amat and Limouzin-Lamothe 1965; Sommervogel 1890).

Joseph de Jouvancy (Paris 1643 – Rome 1719) was a renowned French Jesuit philologist and historian. He started his career teaching rhetoric at the Collège de La Flèche, and later received a prestigious invitation to teach at the college in Paris. In 1699, he was summoned by his superiors to Rome to continue the historical documentation of the Society of Jesus, which had been initiated by Niccolò Orlandini. He dedicated himself to this monumental task until his passing. (Herbermann 1913)

8 RELATED SCHOLARS

In addition to the ordinary members teaching at the college, another individual is linked to it, although he might not have taught there.

Pierre-François-Xavier de Charlevoix (Saint-Quentin 1682 – La Flèche 1761) was a French Jesuit scholar who taught humanities, philosophy, and rhetoric. He wrote the history of several countries including Japan, Paraguay, and New France. He also worked for the “Mémoires de Trévoux,” an influential academic journal, for twenty-two years. He traveled twice to the new world, and even taught in Québec (Sommervogel, 1890, Rochemonteix, 1889).

9 WHO’S WHO ON THE MOON

There are various indicators of an individual’s notable achievements, such as the recognition they receive through the naming of streets, schools, research institutes, prizes, and even lunar craters. When it comes to scholars from the Collège de La Flèche, there are only two lunar craters that bear the name of one them, indicating a high level of recognition in this regard.

Denis Pétau (Orléans 1583 – Paris 1652), see above.

Georges Fournier (Caen 1595 – La Flèche 1652) was a French Jesuit geographer and mathematician. He published several well recognized treaties on hydrography, military fortification, and geometry.

10 UNIVERSITY NETWORK

We operate under the assumption that when a professor held positions at multiple universities during their career, it established a connection between these institutions. Figure 4 displays the universities that were linked to La Flèche. These institutions were all Jesuit and situated in the Kingdom of France or in its area of influence.

11 ANECDOTE

René Descartes (La Haye-en-Touraine 1596 – Stockholm 1659), the famous French mathematician and philosopher, studied at La Flèche between 1606 and 1612. His Jesuit teachers saw him as a talented student, particularly in mathematics and philosophy, where his arguments were hard to contradict. It was probably during those years that he gained his taste for philosophy. It was also the knowledge imparted to him at La Flèche that he aimed to surpass with his subsequent contributions to science. He exchanged letters with some of his former teachers at La Flèche, and even sent them some of his works, longing for their approval of his theories. He is mainly known for his

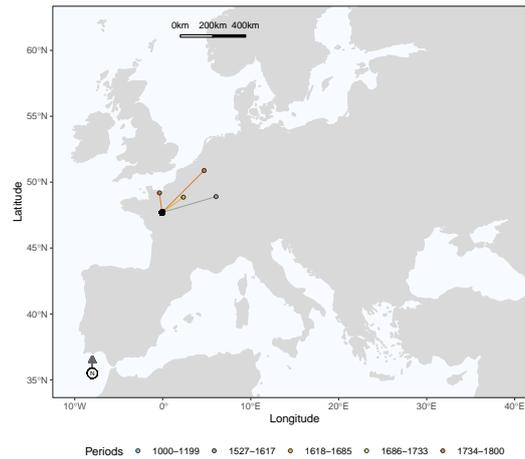


Figure 4: Links between La Flèche and other universities through scholars' mobility

development of new methods in philosophy and mathematics. He had a major influence on several other famous scholars, such as Leibniz or even Newton, and was a necessary precursor to their breakthroughs (d'Amat and Limouzin-Lamothe 1965; Rochemonteix 1889).

12 FINAL THOUGHT

The Jesuit college at La Flèche was a simple college of exceptional quality, surpassing many universities by the caliber of its faculty.

ACKNOWLEDGMENTS

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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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