

Scholars and Literati at the Accademia della Crusca (1583–1800)

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This note summarizes our research into the group of scholars and literati who were at the Accademia della Crusca from 1583 to 1800.

1 SOURCES

This record of the members of the Accademia della Crusca in Florence is primarily constructed from Severina Parodi's foundational "Catalogo degli accademici dalla fondazione" (1983). This catalog was prepared for the 400th anniversary of the founding of the Florentine institution.

The new "Catalogo degli accademici della Crusca" (2018), available online, offers a complete list of, and information about, the members of the academy.

2 THE ACADEMY

The Accademia della Crusca was founded in Florence in 1582 during the reign of Ferdinando I de' Medici, Grand Duke of Tuscany. It was established by a group of friends who, in open contrast to the more serious Accademia Fiorentina (1540-1783), engaged in witty and playful discourse.

The main objective of the Accademia della Crusca was to establish and defend the linguistic norms of the Italian language, which was undergoing significant changes and lacked standardization at that time. Infact, Italy, like other countries (for example, 18th-century Russia according to Zaborov (2006)), appeared as a culturally and politically fragmented nation. Many scholars saw the usefulness of a codified language based on shared grammatical rules and authoritative lexical repertoire. The Florentine vernacular, shaped by the works of authors from the 14th century, particularly Dante, Boccaccio, and Petrarca, became the basis for a future Italian language.

The name "Crusca" (bran) derives from an agricultural metaphor: the members of the academy envisioned themselves as "sifters" who separated the "flour" (i.e., the correct Italian language) from the "bran" (i.e., incorrect or impure linguistic elements). The founding members of the Accademia were primarily Florentine intellectuals, including writers, poets, philologists, and scholars of classical languages. In its founding year, the Accademia received official recognition from Grand Duke Cosimo II de' Medici, and became one of the first linguistic academies in Italy. Starting from the 16th century, numerous academies were founded to study and attempt to regulate the Italian language because many scholars saw the usefulness for a codified language based on shared grammatical rules and an authoritative lexical repertoire.

In 1612, the Accademia della Crusca published its first significant work, the "Vocabolario degli Accademici della Crusca," a collection of correct Italian words approved by the academy. This vocabulary became a reference point for the Italian language and greatly contributed to its standardization.

Academies and Vocabularies

Directly inspired by the Crusca, academies such as the Accademia degli Apotisti (Italy, 1632), the Académie Française (France, 1634), the Die Fruchtbringende Gesellschaft (Germany, 1617), the Real Academia Española (1713), the Imperial Russian Academy (Russia, 1783) and Academia Real das Ciências de Lisboa (1779) were established.

These institutions deserve credit for laying the foundations of modern lexicography. Among their significant achievements, we must mention the compilation of dictionaries. Following the ancient lexicographic tradition, each of these academies produced a dictionary of the language that still serves as a linguistic reference today. These include the Vocabolario della lingua italiana (1612), the Dictionnaire de l'Académie française (1694), the Diccionario de la lengua castellana de la Real Academia Española (1726-1739), Dictionnaire de l'Académie russe (1783) and the Diccionario de Academia Real das Ciências (1793).

The compilation of a dictionary held significant scientific and identity value, but it went beyond that. For the scholars who were cited in these dictionaries, it provided an opportunity to enhance their reputation through citations or the inclusion of new terms (Altieri Biagi 1965). Ultimately, it also had political significance, as it was utilized as a tool to garner support and consensus on the part of governments.

3 DESCRIPTIVE STATISTICS

Table 1 displays some descriptive statistics. For the Accademia della Crusca, we have a comprehensive list of its 855 members from its foundation until 1800. The median distance between birth place and the academy is 133Km, a low number. In fact, the majority of the members were from Florence and the surrounding regions.

However, the median distance increased towards the end of our sample period, coinciding with the admission of some distinguished foreign scholars (e.g. François-Marie Arouet de Voltaire, Josef Andrej Zaluski, François-Joachim de Pierre de Bernis). In the sources we consulted, we did not find a clear distinction for foreign corresponding members, as was the case with other academies. In the absence of this information, we have treated all members as having the same status as ordinary members.

The Accademia della Crusca had a primarily local character, centered around its mission to establish a purely of the Italian language. This involved eliminating dialectal, foreign, or improper expressions, and promoting the correct and harmonious use of the Tuscan language, which was regarded as the foundation of the Italian language during that era.

Finally, 32.2% of members have a Wikipedia page and 58.7% are listed in the VIAF catalog. Informations from both sites were used to compute the human capital index for each scholar.

Period	nb. obs	birth date	known place	mean age at appoint.	mean age at death	med. dist. birth-univ.	with Wiki.	with VIAF
1527-1617	160	43.8%	66.2	37.8	65.2	65	25%	43.1%
1618-1685	264	59.1%	68.6	34.9	66.4	118	28.8%	43.6 %
1686-1733	206	61.2%	75.7	35.9	68.3	113	32.5%	47.1%
1734-1800	225	68.9%	71.1	45	69.7	213	40.9%	60%
1527-1800	855	59.3%	70.5	38.7	67.7	133	32.2%	48.7%

Table 1: Summary statistics by period

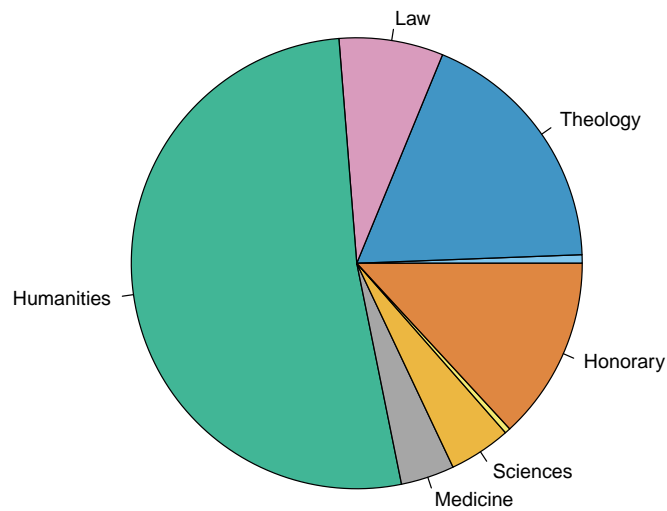


Figure 1: Broad fields at the Accademia della Crusca (published scholars only)

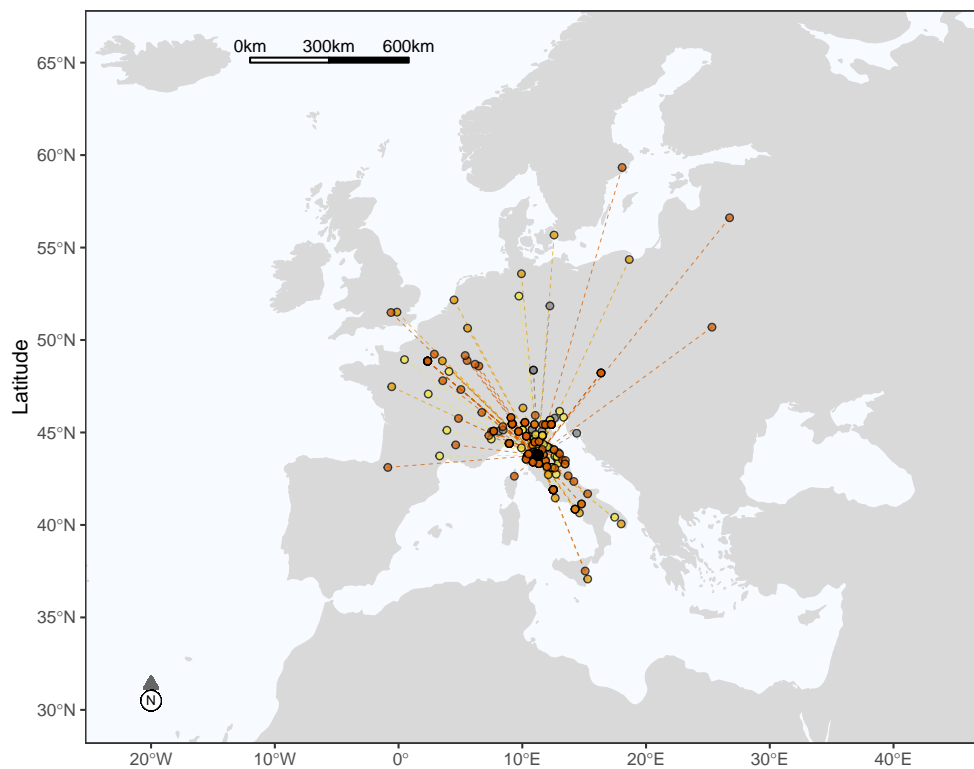


Figure 2: Places of birth of the members of the Accademia della Crusca

4 FIELDS

Figure 1 shows the balance between the different fields featured at the Accademia della Crusca. Certainly, the humanities have the largest slice of the pie chart. Another important part is theology: in fact, many of the members of the academy were prelates who intervened in linguistic matters related to scripture. As is often the case in academies, a large number of members are honorary: their presence in fact increased the prestige and credibility of the institution.

5 PLACE OF BIRTH

Figure 2 displays the documented birthplaces of the members active at the Accademia della Crusca. Most of the Academy's members came from Tuscany and neighboring Italian regions. Compared to the two other language academies we have surveyed, the Spanish (De la Croix and Duchêne 2021) and the French (De la Croix 2022), the Crusca has the highest international character.

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. Figure 3 shows the names of all the scholars with a positive human capital index at the Accademia della Crusca.

7 TOP 5 SCHOLARS

François-Marie Arouet de Voltaire (Paris 1694 – Paris 1778) for bibliographical information see De La Croix (2022).

Voltaire wrote: "*Les academies étouffent toujours le genie au lieux de l'exciter*" (Academies always stifle rather than excite genius) (Tribolati 1878), however, it was he who sent one of his works to the Academy of the Crusca in order to be admitted as a member, and in his letter of thanks after his admission he says, "You have shown pity on my passion, and inflamed it." (Beuchot 1840). From the correspondence Voltaire kept with some members of the academy, we understand how important it was for him to be a member, although his activity was limited to sending some of his dissertations.

Galileo Galilei (Pisa 1564 – Arcetri 1642) for bibliographical informations see De La Croix and Vitale (2021).

In 1605 Galileo Galilei was appointed academician of the Crusca. He actively participated in the compilation of the *Vocabolario*, particularly the second edition for which he oversaw the revision of many scientific terms. After his death, and when the constraints of censorship fell, many of his works were cited in the new editions of the vocabulary. Galilei's death in 1642 was not commemorated until 1644. In fact, the Counter-Reformation currents of that period imposed a certain amount of discretion on the academy, although they esteemed him were sympathetic to his scientific claims (Manni 1985; Blasutto and De la Croix 2023).

Pietro Metastasio (Roma 1698 – Vienna 1782) pseudonym for Pietro Antonio Domenico Trapassi, was a poet and librettist, considered the most important writer of text of *opera seria* (a term which refers to the noble and "serious" style of Italian opera that predominated in Europe from the 1710s to about 1770). Even as a child he distinguished himself by his ability to compose verse. In 1768 he was elected a member of the academy, and in the *Vocabolario* his writing is listed as an example to follow.

Nicolas Steno (Copenhagen 1638 – Schwerin 1686) In 1666 Steno went to Tuscany to further his studies in medicine and the Italian language. There he met a number of distinguished scholars (Francesco Redi, Carlo Dati, etc.) who made efforts with Ferdinand II dei Medici to have him stay in Florence and include him among the members of the Accademia del Cimento. The fame of the Accademia della Crusca prompted Steno to compose a dissertation in Italian in order to be admitted (Capellini 1881). In 1668 he became a member of the Accademia.

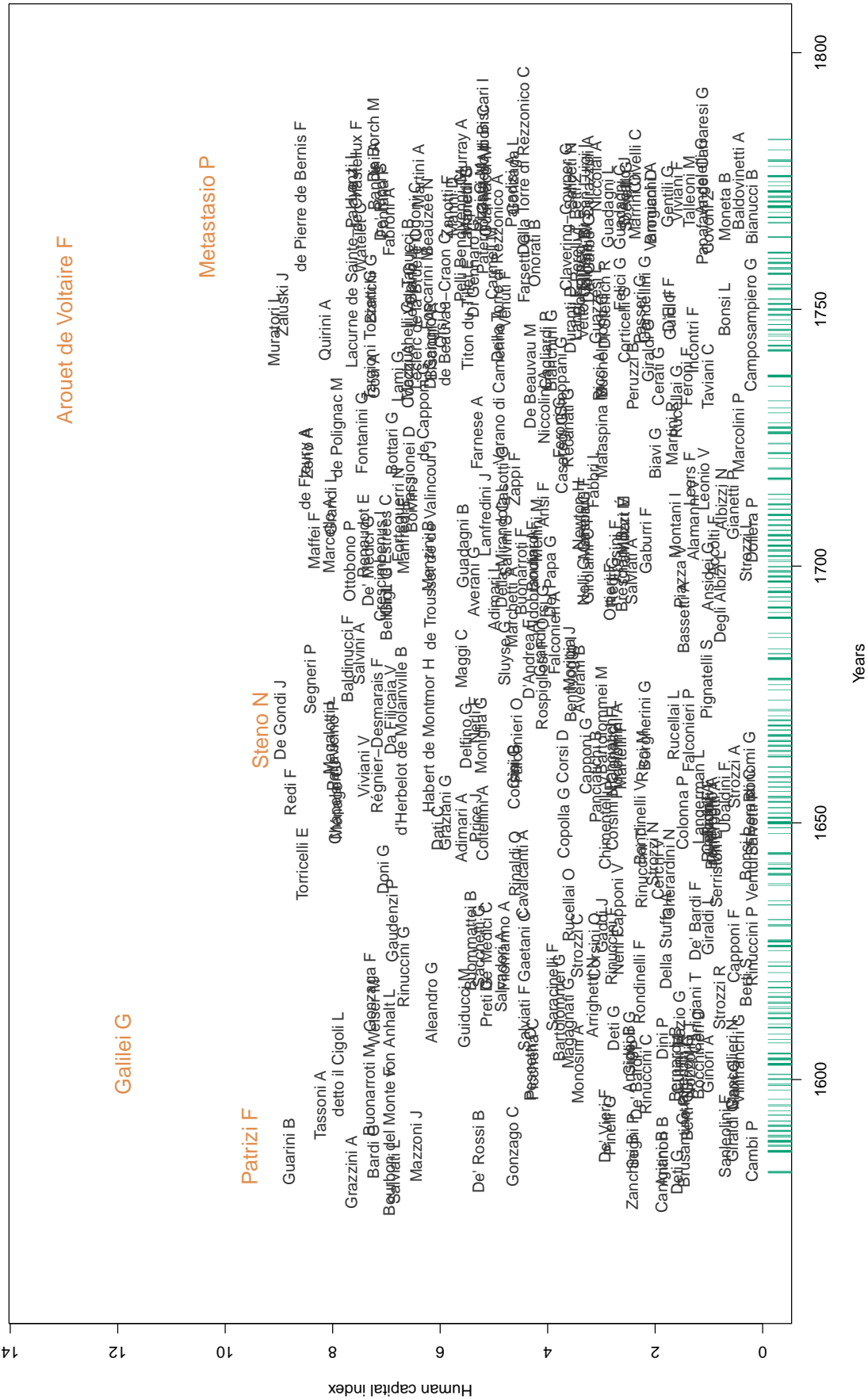


Figure 3: Famous scholars at the Accademia della Crusca

Ludovico Antonio Muratori (Vignola 1672 – Modena 1750) was a clergyman, historian, numismatist, and author. Even today, he is widely regarded as a prominent figure of the moderate Catholic Enlightenment and is often hailed as the father of Italian historiography, particularly in the context of medieval studies. Notably, Muratori penned a monumental work in historiography spanning 25 volumes from 1723 to 1751, titled the "Rerum italicorum scriptores," which meticulously compiles medieval sources ranging from the year 500 to 1500. In recognition of his contributions, he was granted admission to the Accademia della Crusca in 1746.

8 ANECDOTES

In the four first editions of the Crusca vocabulary, we did not find the term "aneddotto" (anecdote).

9 FINAL THOUGHTS

The Accademia della Crusca is the first language academy in the world.

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

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