

# Scholars and Literati at the Academy of Sciences, Letters and Arts of Arras (1737–1793)

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This note summarizes our research into the group of scholars and literati at the Academy of Sciences, Letters and Arts of Arras from 1737 to 1793.

## 1 THE ACADEMY

The Academy of Sciences, Letters, and Arts of Arras, established on May 22, 1737, holds a rich history rooted in the collaborative pursuit and diffusion of knowledge. Its structure is similar to other provincial French academies of the time (Roche 1978, 1988). Initially formed by 10 notable individuals in 1737, the academy's primary aim was to collectively comprehend the most significant writings of the time, as its members believed in the power of collaboration compared to solitary endeavors. Forty scholars solidified the academy's foundation by signing the first set of regulations on June 14, 1738 (Académie des Sciences Lettres et Arts d'Arras 2024). Membership, which was initially capped at 40, underwent fluctuations, settling at 30 with the issuance of patent letters in 1773. Members annually contributed 20 books as a membership fee, granting them access to the academy's "Salle du Cercle." This fee varied slightly over time, and usually went together with an initial fee of 40 books. Discussions bore on topics randomly chosen from a list with a focus on French history and letters. Obtaining patent letters was a challenge for the academy until 1773 when King Louis XV granted it the coveted recognition. The academy's crucial ties with the government of the Artois Region, especially with the Bishop of Arras, played a pivotal role in securing these letters. The bishop's support also extended to providing the academy with a meeting space and substantial book donations, facilitating the organization of prize competitions aimed at addressing practical issues within the local community. The inaugural competitions, held in 1784 and 1785, focused on optimizing crop productivity, as well as understanding the causes behind commerce activity closures and providing a plan to reopen them (Van Drival 1872).

## 2 SOURCES

The primary information source was the academy's official website, which presents a comprehensive list of all its members in alphabetical order from its inception to the present day. This repository serves as a complete reference, providing essential details such as members' names, birth and death years, and locations (when available), along with relatively detailed biographies for each member (Académie des Sciences Lettres et Arts d'Arras 2024).

To ensure the reliability and robustness of the data, we cross-referenced this exhaustive list with the work of Van Drival (1872). Notably, Van Drival (1872) exclusively provides the surnames of the members, arranged in chronological order. This comparative analysis improved the accuracy and level of detail of the information gathered.

### 3 DESCRIPTIVE STATISTICS

Table 1 displays some descriptive statistics. Before 1800, there were 117 members at the Academy of Sciences, Letters and Arts of Arras. On average, these scholars were relatively young when appointed and usually stayed until their death, with a mean age at death of 65. They were all French, and there is no trace of any corresponding member in the sources. The median distance between their birthplaces and the academy is null. The academy’s website provides the dates of birth of almost all 117 scholars, and for 77% of them, the places of birth as well. As for Wikipedia and VIAF links, the percentage is rather small, implying that many are obscure scholars.

Period	nb. obs	birth date known	birth place known	mean age at appoint.	mean age at death	med. dist. birth-univ.	with Wiki.	with VIAF
1737-1800	117	94%	76.9%	36.2	65	0	13.7%	18.8%

Table 1: Summary statistics by period

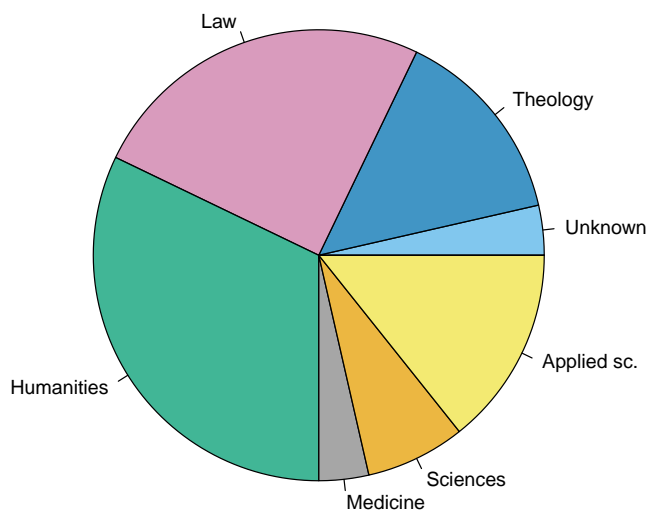


Figure 1: Broad fields at the Academy of Sciences, Letters and Arts of Arras (publishing scholars only)

### 4 FIELDS

Figure 1 illustrates the distribution of academic fields studied at the Academy of Sciences, Letters and Arts of Arras. This academy was notably a literary institution, populated by lawyers or judges from different public institutions. This is scarcely surprising, since Arras was the capital of Artois and the seat of nine jurisdictions (*Académie des Sciences Lettres et Arts d'Arras* 2024). Humanities, including letters, history, and rhetoric, also takes up a significant portion of the pie. On the contrary, sciences, together with medicine and applied sciences, represent a smaller share than they did at other contemporary academies.

### 5 PLACE OF BIRTH

Figure 2 displays the documented birthplaces of the ordinary members active at the Academy of Sciences, Letters and Arts of Arras. They were all French, mostly from towns or cities around Arras,

while some came from Paris, and a smaller portion from the South of France. In the sources, there is no mention of foreign or corresponding members, i.e. members contributing to the academy mainly through letters and private correspondence but residing elsewhere. However, some of the registers containing more precise information burned during a fire in 1915 at the Saint-Vaast Palace (Arras) where they were stored.

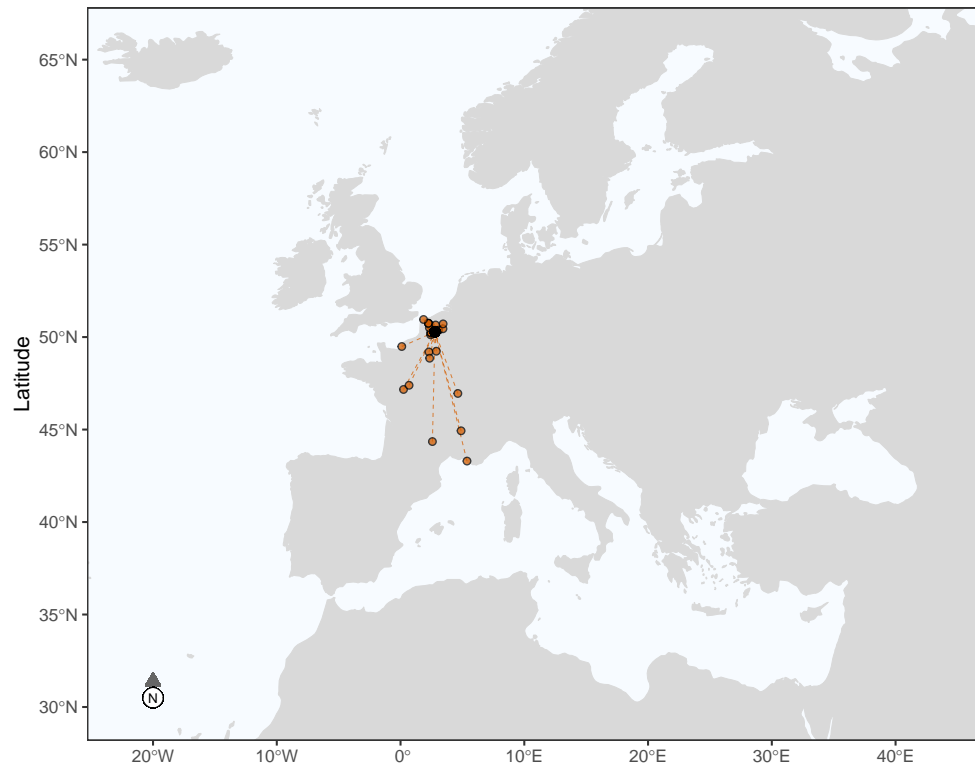


Figure 2: Places of birth of the members of the Academy of Sciences, Letters and Arts of Arras

## 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. Figure 3 shows the names of all the scholars with a positive human capital index at the Academy of Sciences, Letters and Arts of Arras.

## 7 TOP 5 SCHOLARS

We provide a brief overview of the five ordinary members of the Academy of Sciences, Letters and Arts of Arras with the highest human capital index. This allows discovering new individuals who have not appeared yet in the 11 volumes of RETE published so far. There are some interesting and powerful new entries, like Robespierre (in the top 100 of the whole database), and in fourth position a woman, de Kéralio.

**Maximilien Marie Isidore de Robespierre** (Arras 1758 -- Paris 1794) was a lawyer and politician with controversial influence during the French Revolution. Initially educated in his hometown, he earned a scholarship to study in Paris. In the capital, he was awarded a master's degree in arts, specialized in law, becoming a lawyer at the Parliament of the Capital and the Regional Council of Artois. He returned to Arras in 1783 where he was immediately nominated as a member of the Academy of Sciences, Letters, and Arts. His first speech there drew widespread

attention, contributing to his growing reputation. As the first advocate of democratic principles, among others, he championed equality before the law, the abolition of noble privileges, and the inclusion of women in academic life (Académie des Sciences Lettres et Arts d'Arras 2024). In 1784, Robespierre received a medal from the Academy of Metz for his essays addressing the social burden on convicts' parents. His political career started in 1789 during the Estates General in Versailles. Following the failure of the gathering to democratize the country, he played a pivotal role in forming the National Assembly to draft a democratic constitution, which was adopted in the early summer of 1793. Tasked with structuring the revolutionary government, Robespierre drew inspiration from Montesquieu's principles of virtue and terror, leading to the execution of many political opponents. By the summer of 1794, suspicions arose about his influence and power. Along with his supporters, he was arrested, and after a chaotic night, he faced the guillotine for allegedly instigating a counter-revolution.

**Lazare Nicolas Marguerite Carnot** (Nolay 1753 – Magdeburg 1823) was a military engineer, politician, and scientist, renowned as one of the pioneers of modern geometry. He began his studies in Autun and then specialized in engineering in Mézières. Upon arriving in Arras in 1783, when literature and poetry were a hobby for him, Carnot received recognition from the Academy of Dijon for his poem *Éloge de Vauban* in 1784. Three years later, he became a member of the Academy of Sciences, Letters, and Arts of Arras. As the French Revolution unfolded, Carnot and his brother were elected deputies to the National Assembly in 1791. He participated in the Convention of 1792, which voted the execution of the king, and in 1793, he joined the Committee of Public Safety during the Terror. A remarkable victory in Wattignies spared him from the fate of Robespierre, with whom he disagreed on radical political beliefs and actions, despite their friendship since the age of 20. Nevertheless, he had to escape to Germany in 1797 due to his opposition to the Coup of 18 Fructidor. This coup was initiated because royalist candidates aiming to restore the monarchy had won the majority in the elections. A handful of Directory members led the coup, removing the monarchists from their seats. Carnot returned to France only under Napoleon's rule, assisting him in Antwerp but facing exile again during the second Bourbon Restoration in 1816. He then moved to Warsaw under the Tsar's governance and eventually died in Prussia, where he had been invited by the king. Today, his name is inscribed on the Eiffel Tower alongside that of 71 other scientists, and his ashes rest in the Pantheon, where they were transferred by his grandson, Sadi Carnot, who eventually became President of the Republic.

**Pierre Antoine de La Place** (Calais 1707 – Paris 1793) was a writer and playwright, notable for being the first to translate Shakespeare's works into French. Educated at the English College of the Jesuits in Saint-Omer, he later specialized in law in Paris before relocating to Arras upon his appointment as an alderman. La Place, along with Victor-Hyacinthe d'Artus (1690 – 1751) and Galhaut de Lassus (1704 – 1776), became one of the first members of the Academy of Sciences, Letters, and Arts of Arras. However, his direct contribution to the academy's success was limited, as he assumed the role of deputy for the Estates of Artois, prompting his return to Paris in 1740. La Place officially resigned from the academy in 1745, but continued translating English plays, sending his work to Arras around 1747. From 1760 to 1768, he held a prominent position at the *Mercure*, a periodical financed by the Marquise de Pompadour. This association significantly elevated the academy's fame and reputation during that period.

**Louise-Félicité Guynement de Kéralio** (Valence 1757 - Brussels 1821) was a writer and translator hailing from a minor noble family in Brittany. Following in her mother's footsteps, who was also a writer and translator, she embarked on her literary journey from a young age. In 1787, she gained admission to the Academy of Sciences, Letters, and Arts of Arras and was warmly received by Robespierre, who served as its President at the time.

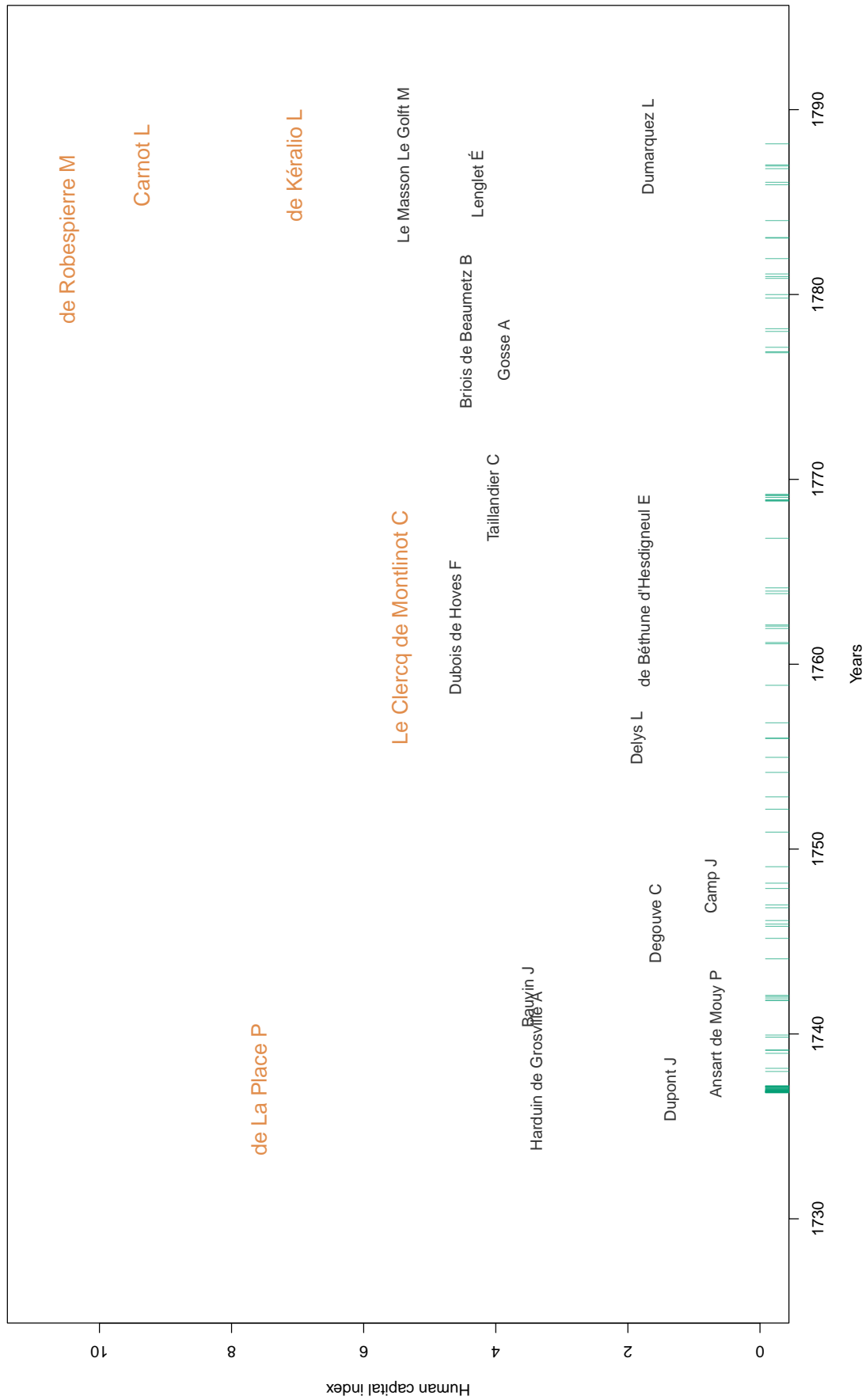


Figure 3: Famous scholars at the Academy of Sciences, Letters and Arts of Arras

Active during the French Revolution, de Kéralio passionately advocated for feminist beliefs and fearlessly participated in male-dominated environments such as the Cordeliers Club. This political club was active between 1790 and 1794, advocating for universal suffrage for men and immediate democracy. It is noteworthy that her husband, Pierre-François-Joseph Robert, was the president of the Club when de Kéralio was admitted to it. She was also a member of the Fraternal Society of Patriots of Both Sexes, a feminist organization. Pioneering in her endeavors, she became the first female editor-in-chief of the *Journal d'État et du Citoyen* and edited several other political periodicals before ending her career as a political writer just before giving birth. During the Revolution, her husband voted the death of the king, which led to their escape to Brussels, where they transitioned into becoming a merchant family.

**Charles Antoine Joseph Le Clercq de Montlinot** (Crepigny-en-Valois 1732 – Paris 1801) was a theologian and priest. He studied in Paris and settled in Lille in 1761. Just one year later, he was exceptionally admitted to the Academy, despite not being a resident of the Artois region. However, due to a significant scandal arising from his controversial opinions on religious institutions, he renounced his ecclesiastical vows and relocated to Paris to become a bookseller. The king then sent him to Soissons, where he dedicated himself to improving the lives of the poor. During the Revolution, he returned to Paris for administrative duties.

## 8 VICTIMS OF THE REVOLUTION

The French Revolution was probably the most deadly event for academics over the 1000-1800 period. Not only was every academy and university shut down in 1793, but a large number of scholars were arrested, jailed, and sentenced to death. We provide a list of the members of the Academy of Sciences, Letters and Arts of Arras who were victims of the Revolution, beyond the cases already described in De la Croix and Zanardello (2022) and De la Croix and Delvaux (2023).

We have already delved into the intricate life of **Maximilien de Robespierre**, and his death is equally complex. In late July 1794, some members of the Convention ordered Robespierre's arrest, fearing potential actions against his political opponents. Alongside four of his closest allies, including his brother, Robespierre was thus arrested. An armed crowd sought to halt the execution, but faced with blocked streets, their efforts were in vain. Within the prison, chaos ensued, and the precise events remain uncertain. Reports suggest Robespierre attempted suicide, only to be thwarted, while others tried to escape, resulting in injuries. It was not until the following afternoon that they were all executed. Subsequently, many of Robespierre's supporters met the same fate.

Numerous other members of the Academy of Arras faced arrest or execution during the course of the French Revolution.

**Bouquet de la Compté François-Guillaume** (1727 – 1794) met the guillotine, as he was suspected of orchestrating and participating in the sale of the Saint-Géry church (Arras) as a national property. This act branded him "Martyr de la Foi pendant la Révolution française" (Martyr of the Faith during the French Revolution) (Académie des Sciences Lettres et Arts d'Arras 2024).

**Foacier de Ruzé Auguste Joseph Marie** (1735 – 1793) perished under house arrest as a suspected opponent of the French Revolution, and two of his three daughters also died imprisoned in 1794 (Académie des Sciences Lettres et Arts d'Arras 2024).

**Fruleux Jean Guillaume Philippe** (1731 – 1794) initially supported the revolution, but in 1794, he was denounced by his friends, arrested, and guillotined (Académie des Sciences Lettres et Arts d'Arras 2024).

**Gaston Bernard-Xavier** (1724 – 1793) faced arrest after attempting to flee to a family refuge and died in prison (Académie des Sciences Lettres et Arts d'Arras 2024).

**Lannoy de Beaurepaire Ignace Godefroy** (1722 – 1794) participated in the protest for nobility and royal privileges in the spring of 1789, leading to his sentencing to death during the Terror (Académie des Sciences Lettres et Arts d'Arras 2024).

**Le Sergeant d’Hendecourt Louis Ignace Joseph** (1730 – 1794) met the same fate, as he was executed on April 5, 1794 for his involvement in the same protest as Lannoy de Beaurepaire.

## 9 FINAL THOUGHTS

The Academy of Sciences, Letters, and Arts of Arras was a provincial French academy, yet it played a pivotal role in the public administration of the Artois Region. Its influence extended to Paris, particularly during the tumultuous period of the French Revolution. This broader impact can be attributed to the exceptional skills, charisma, and determination of Maximilien de Robespierre, who propelled the academy to both its zenith and nadir, significantly shaping its reputation.

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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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