

Scholars and Literati at the College of Polotsk (1580–1800)

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This note is a summary description of the set of scholars and literati who taught at the College of Polotsk from its inception in 1580 until 1800.

1 SOURCES

Two sources provide most of our data on the College of Polotsk. Sommervogel (1890), in his work “Bibliothèque de la Compagnie de Jésus” (Library of the Society of Jesus), offers a comprehensive and valuable compilation of Jesuit writings, encompassing works authored by members of the Jesuit order, including those affiliated with the College of Polotsk, before 1800. The Encyclopaedia of “Information on the Jesuits in the Territories of Poland and Lithuania, 1564-1995” edited by Grzebień (2004), provides meticulous data concerning the activities and the dates of the scholars and literati who taught at the College of Polotsk, as well as precise information about the locations of their births and deaths. The text of this encyclopedia can be searched online at <https://www.jezuici.krakow.pl/bibl/enc.htm>.

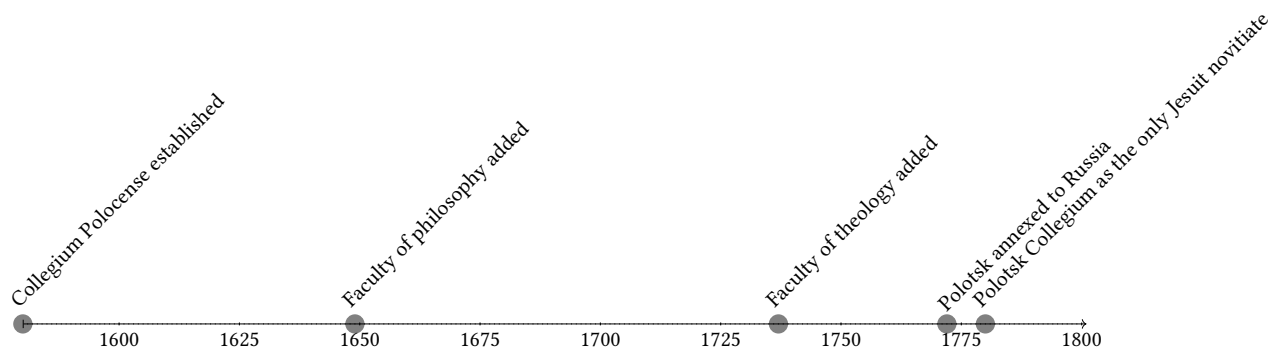


Figure 1: Timeline of the College of Polotsk

2 THE COLLEGE

Polish King Stephen Báthory captured Polotsk in 1579, and the Jesuit college was established in 1580 to counter the influence of the Eastern Orthodox Church (see the anonymous article by a A friend of free Poland (1918)). The Jesuit College began as a secondary educational institution. Initially located on the island of Zachodnya Dvina, a new site was chosen and the college was relocated after a fire in the first half of the 17th century. Piotr Skarga served as its inaugural rector, modeling it after the Jesuit University in Vilnius. The college expanded its offerings with a faculty of philosophy in 1649 and theology in 1737. Following the first partition of the Polish–Lithuanian Commonwealth in 1772, Polotsk fell under Russian rule, which safeguarded the college from Jesuit suppression. Indeed, Russian Empress Catherine the Great’s disregard for papal decrees ensured its survival.

In 1812, Tsar Alexander I, under the influence of Joseph de Maistre, elevated the college to an academy. However, the institution's fortunes reversed eight years later when Alexander I expelled the Jesuits from the Russian Empire and closed their schools, including the academy in Polotsk (Armenteros and Lebrun 2011).

3 DESCRIPTIVE STATISTICS

Table 1 displays descriptive statistics. Overall, 244 scholars are linked to the College of Polotsk. We know the year of birth for all of them, and the place of birth for most of them. For the whole period, 100% of birth years and 93% of birthplaces are known. The average age at first appointment was around 38.2 years, while longevity is low and shows no trend. The median distance between the places of birth and activity is 415 km, with a clear downward trend. The professors from the first periods came from farther away. The recruitment pool became more and more local over time. The coverage of scholars in Wikipedia is 32.8%, which is quite high. This is because someone wrote a (very short) page for each of the rectors. The coverage in VIAF is below average. Overall, 20.1% of the scholars appear in VIAF, compared to about 37% in the full database (all universities and academies).

Period	nb. obs	birth known date	birth known place	mean age at appoint.	mean age at death	med. dist. birth-univ.	with Wiki.	with VIAF
1527–1617	11	100	90.9	37.8	59.3	525	72.7	9.1
1618–1685	49	100	93.9	41.9	60.3	517	49	30.6
1686–1733	71	100	94.4	36.3	54	415	21.1	14.1
1734–1800	113	100	92	37.8	58.1	316	29.2	20.4
1527–1800	244	100	93	38.2	57.4	415	32.8	20.1

Table 1: Summary statistics by period

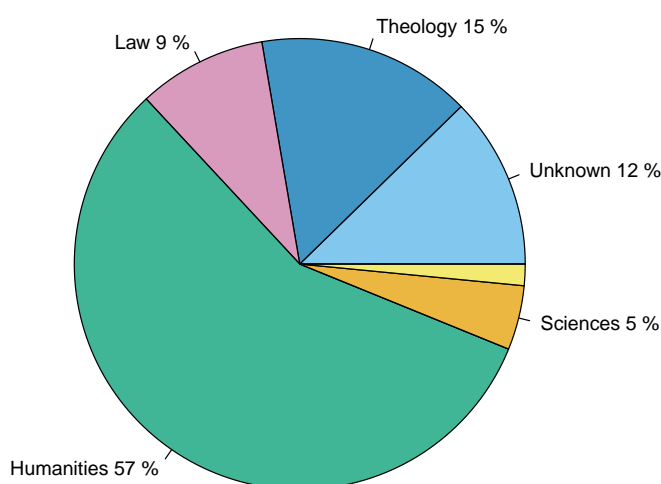


Figure 2: Broad fields at the College of Polotsk (published scholars only)

4 FIELDS

The establishment of the College in Polotsk represented the emergence of a secondary educational institution with a predominantly classical and philological orientation. This initiative was spearheaded by the renowned Jesuit preacher Pyotr Skarga, driven by the mission to cultivate students' allegiance to Catholicism and the Jesuit order. In alignment with the adaptable ideological approach characteristic of the Jesuits, there was a deliberate endeavor to integrate scholastic theological instruction with humanistic secular knowledge.

Figure 2 shows the balance between the different fields. Humanities dominates, then theology, law and sciences in progressively smaller proportions. This can be attributed to the efforts of the Jesuits to amalgamate scholastic theological education with humanistic secular culture. On the whole, this college is quite unbalanced in its fields of teaching.

5 PLACE OF BIRTH

Figure 3 displays the documented birthplaces of scholars and literati active at the College of Polotsk by period. During the first periods, there is little long distance hiring and the majority of scholars come from the surrounding area. Later, in the third and especially the fourth periods, we see that scholars come from much further afield, travelling longer distances from the west and south. In the fourth period, they might include Jesuits expelled from the other European countries.

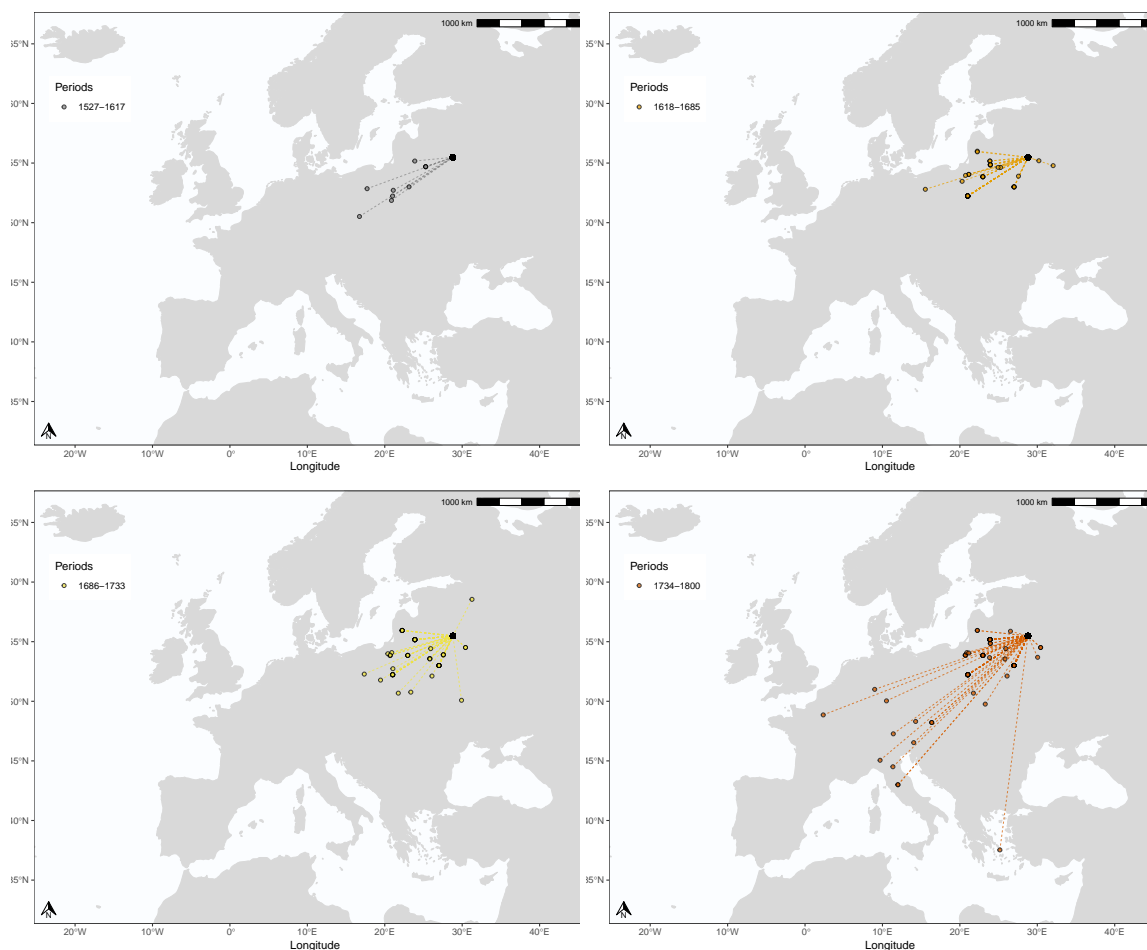


Figure 3: Places of birth of the scholars and literati at the College of Polotsk

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 Polotsk until the end of that date. The details are given in Curtis and De la Croix (2023). Figure 4 shows the names of all the scholars with a positive human capital index. The orange line indicates the notability of the college, based on how well published its top scholars were. The trajectory traced by the orange line depicts a relatively low and constant level until the arrival of the expelled Jesuits. The peak is attained around 1770, followed by relative stability.

7 TOP 5 PROFESSORS

Piotr Skarga (1536 Grojec – 1612 Krakow) was a fervent Jesuit preacher and author from Poland, who was among the earliest proponents of the Counter-Reformation movement. In Rome, he entered the Society of Jesus and later relocated to Vilnius, where he achieved notable success in persuading Protestants to embrace Roman Catholicism. He was appointed as the inaugural rector of the University of Vilnius in 1579, following its transformation from the former Jesuit academy in the city. Subsequently, he moved to Kraków, where he eventually served as court chaplain to King Sigismund III Vasa. In this role, he gained renown for his eloquent oratory and prolific writings on matters of faith (Encyclopedia Britannica 2024). Finally, he served as a professor at the College of Polotsk during 1582-1586 (Grzebień 2004).

Maciej Kazimierz Sarbiewski (1595 Sarbiewo – 1640 Warsaw), emerged as the foremost Latin poet of the 17th century in Europe and gained widespread acknowledgment as a significant figure in the realm of poetic theory. He commenced his journey with the Jesuits at Vilnius during his formative years, where he studied a rigorous curriculum encompassing philosophy, grammar, humanities, theology, and rhetoric. By 1622, he embarked on a pilgrimage to Rome to further improve his theological education, subsequently attaining priesthood in 1623. Speculation suggests that his poetic endeavors may have earned him accolades from Pope Urban VIII (Flood 2006). Concurrently, he also held the position of professor of humanities at the College of Polotsk from 1618 to 1627, alongside his other academic pursuits (Grzebień 2004).

Sigismund Lauxmin (1597 Zemaitija – 1670 Vilnius) was a distinguished Lithuanian Jesuit scholar, renowned for his expertise in theology and philosophy. He made significant contributions to rhetoric and music theory, and is acknowledged as a trailblazer in Lithuanian musicology. Sigismund Lauxmin was among the earliest Lithuanian educators, serving as a professor and later as a rector at the University of Vilnius (De la Croix and Gkopi 2023). At the College of Polotsk, Lauxmin had a lengthy career, serving as both a professor and a rector. He held the position of humanities professor from 1631 to 1650, and served as rector from 1650 to 1655 (Grzebień 2004). Within the Jesuit order, Lauxmin occupied various notable roles. He was the deputy provincial of the Lithuanian Jesuits and the appointed representative for electing leaders within the Lithuanian Jesuit community (Visuotinę lietuvių enciklopediją 2023).

Casimir Wijuk Kojalowicz (1617 Kaunas – 1674 Polotsk), brother of Albert Wijuk Kojalowicz, was a poet, educator, and devoted member of the Catholic Church and the Jesuit order, entering the latter at the age of 17. His academic journey led him to study philosophy from 1638 to 1641, followed by a concentration in theology from 1643 to 1647 at the University of Vilnius (De la Croix and Gkopi 2023). In 1646 he was ordained a priest. He taught rhetoric, philosophy and theology at several Jesuit institutions, including the College of Polotsk from 1649 to 1674. During his time at the College of Polotsk, he held the positions of professor of humanities and rector (Grzebień 2004). Lastly, he was an author of sermons, lectures on rhetoric, and biographies of Jesuits and their guardians.

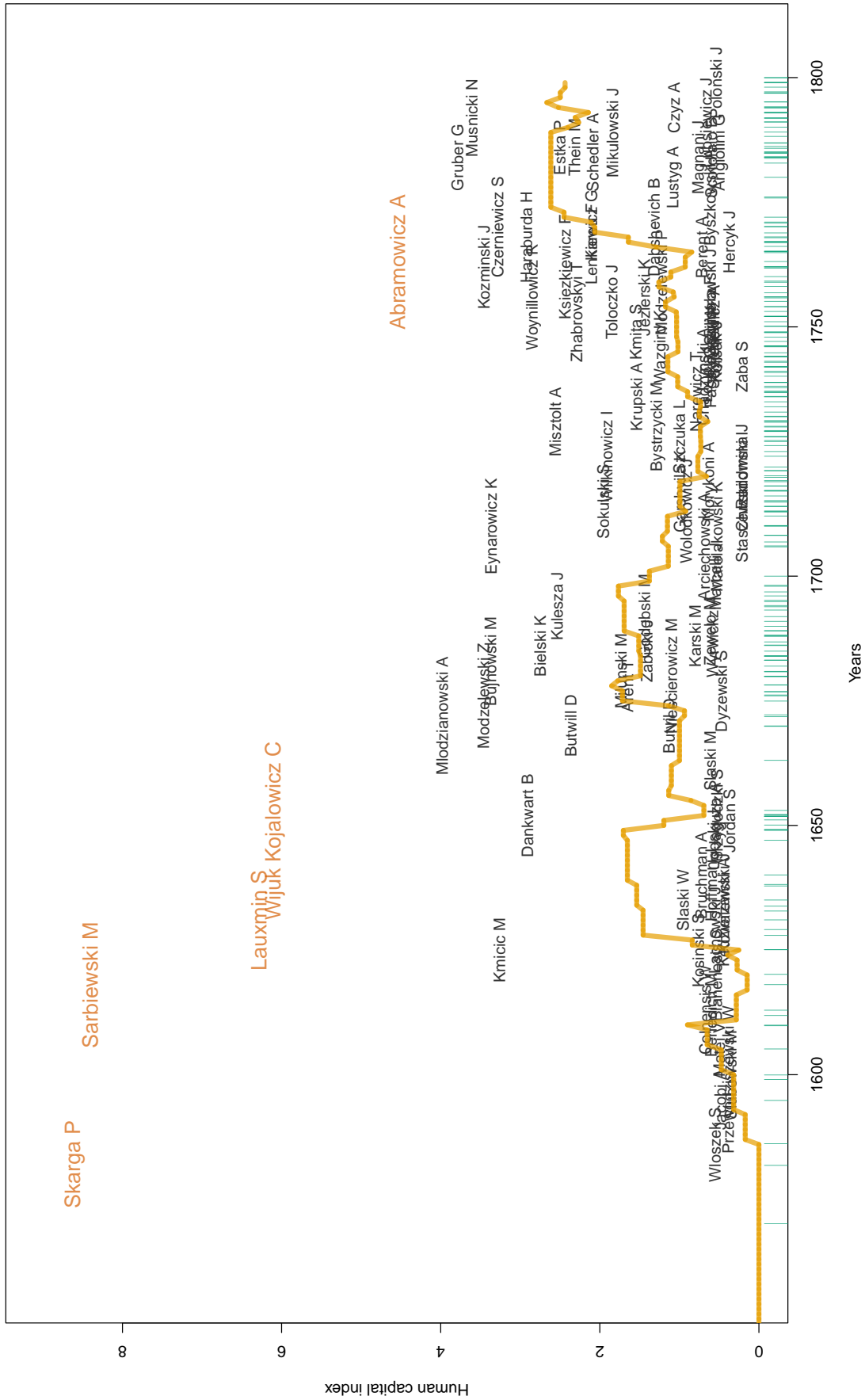


Figure 4: Famous scholars and college notability (orange)

Adam Abramowicz (1710 Lithuania – 1766 Varniai), was a Jesuit from Poland, instructing in eloquence, philosophy, and moral theology, while also participating in the establishment of numerous churches and colleges. His affiliation with the Society of Jesus began in Vilnius (1726). Between 1743 and 1744, he held the position of prefect at the Jesuit schools, followed by a period of tenure as a philosophy professor at University of Vilnius from 1744 to 1748 (Bednarski 1935). Lastly, he was rector at the College of Polotsk from 1763 to 1766 (Grzebień 2004).

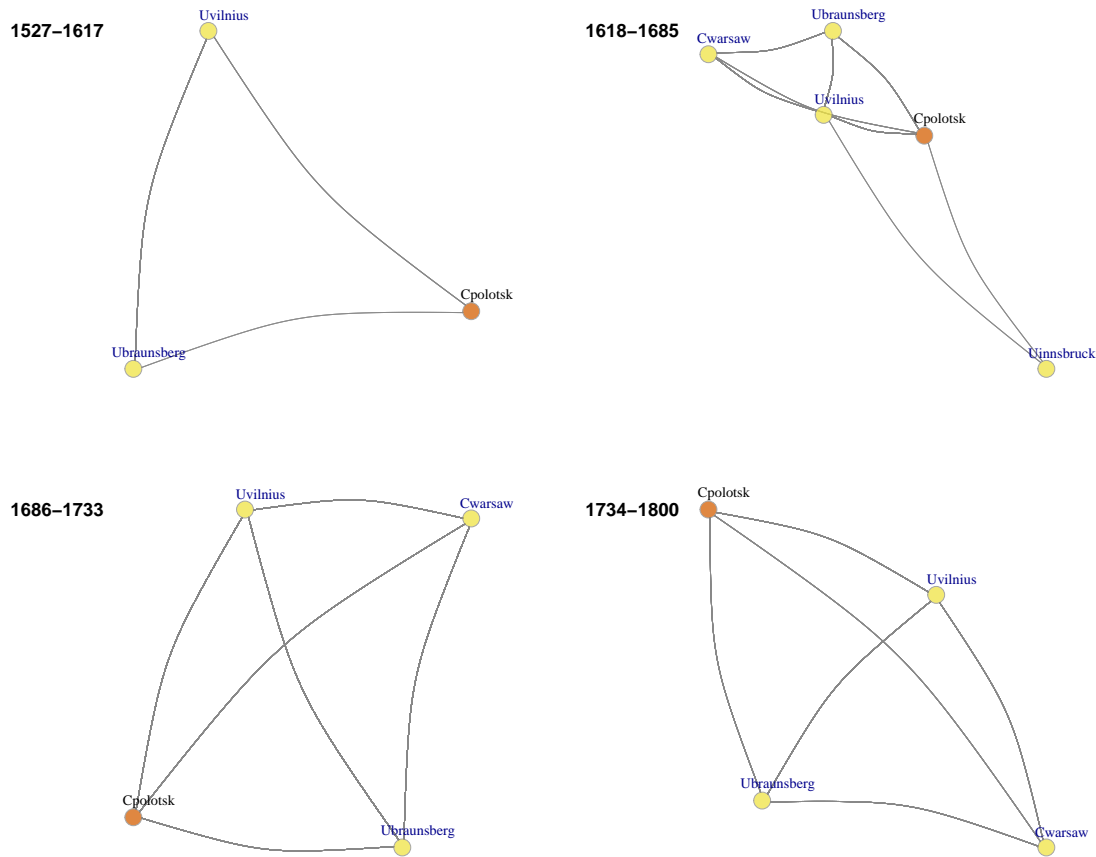


Figure 5: Links between Polotsk and other universities through scholars' mobility, by period

8 UNIVERSITY NETWORK

Our assumption is that a professor's involvement in multiple universities throughout their career establishes a connection between those institutions. We present the universities that were linked to the College of Polotsk during each period in Figure 5, highlighting the following observation. During all periods the mobility of professors between universities and Polotsk was restricted to the University of Vilnius, the University of Braniewo (Braunberg) and the Jesuit college of Warsaw, in the Polish-Lithuanian Commonwealth. An outlier appears in the second period: the Jesuit University of Innsbruck.

9 FINAL THOUGHTS

The Jesuit College of Polotsk was founded on the Eastern border of the Catholic world. It did not reach the status of a university, and was for a long time related to the other Polish Jesuit centers, teaching both scholastic theology and humanism. Because it was annexed to Russia in 1772, it survived temporarily the dissolution of the Jesuit order.

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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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