

# Scholars and Literati at the *Studium Florentinum* (1321–1800)

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This note is a summary description of the set of scholars and literati who taught at the *Studium Florentinum* from its inception in 1321 to 1800.

## 1 SOURCES

We compiled the list of professors and scholars from the *Studium Florentinum* using several sources. Giovanni Prezziner, a professor of ecclesiastical history, published in 1810 an important historiographical work in which he rewrote the institution's history. This history included professors' names. We drew on the transcription of the "Statutes of the University and Studio of Florence" edited by Gherardi (1881), and Armando Felice Verde's work, "Lo Studio fiorentino 1473-1503: Ricerche e documenti" (1973). To complete the scholars' biographical information, we consulted the Treccani Biographical Encyclopedia.

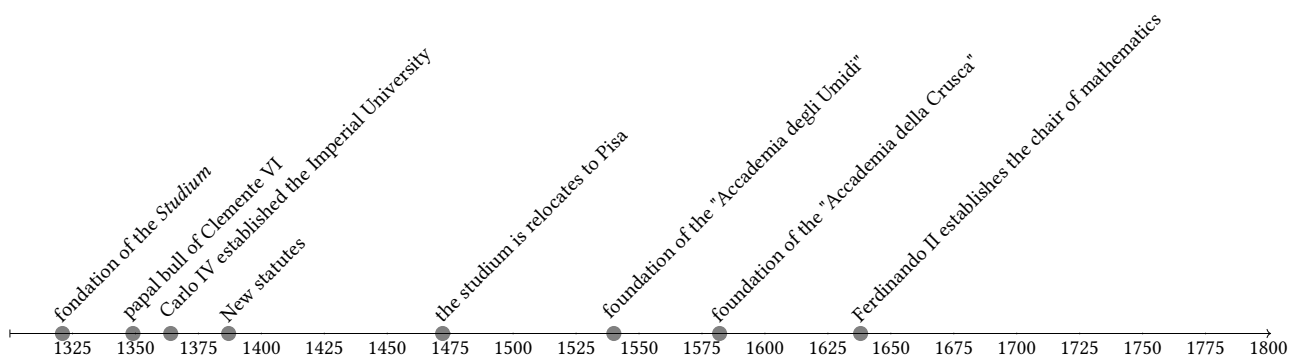


Figure 1: Timeline of the *Studium Florentinum*

## 2 THE UNIVERSITY

The *Studium Florentinum* was born when unrest in the city of Bologna in 1320 (the rebellion of Taddeo Pepoli), led to a dispersion of teachers and scholars to more peaceful locations. For Florence, it was an opportunity to establish its own *Studium generale* (university) for the teaching of civil and canon law, medicine, and the arts. After a difficult start, it was decided to seek approval from the Roman Curia to sanction the establishment of the *Studium*. In 1349, the foundation was certified with the papal bull of Pope Clement VI, granting the *Studium Generale* the same privileges as other universities. Then, in 1364, Emperor Charles IV declared it an Imperial University. In 1472, conflicts between political power and freedom of thought, along with issues caused by student corporations, led to the decision to move the *Studium* from Florence to Pisa, initiated by Lorenzo il Magnifico (Lorenzo the Magnificent). However, humanities disciplines continued to be taught in Florence. In 1497, the Florentine Republic definitively brought the *Studium* back to Florence, but six years later,

in 1503, it was closed due to lack of funds. Only the Theological College and some chairs remained in Florence (Prezziner 1810). Cosimo I's commitment was therefore to maintain the 'human letters' and the study of some scientific disciplines in Florence and to equip the reopened University of Pisa in 1543 with a wide range of disciplines (Gualandris and Vitale 2023). The academies gained increasing prominence in the cultural life of the city (Vitale 2023), and the grand dukes followed in succession who succeeded one another did not hesitate to establish chairs to attract illustrious scholars to Florence, as happened in 1638 with the physicist and mathematician Torricelli, known for inventing the barometer. In our study, we also considered the names passed down by him (Lotti, Leonardi, and Ceccuti 1986).

### 3 DESCRIPTIVE STATISTICS

Table 1 displays descriptive statistics. We have information on 520 scholars. We know the year of birth for 36.2% of them; the mean age at nomination is 39.6 years. Overall, the birthplace is known for 87.9% of the scholars. The median distance between the *Studium* and the birthplace is 40 km, confirming the local nature of this university. Most scholars do not have a Wikipedia page (in any language), and only 33.8% appear in the VIAF catalogue.

Period	nb. obs	birth date	birth known place	mean age at appoint.	mean age at death	med. dist. birth-univ.	with Wiki.	with VIAF
1200–1347	11	36.4	90.9	64	54.2	0	27.3	27.3
1348–1449	280	26.8	90.4	37.4	70.2	50	20.4	22.9
1450–1526	91	44	90.1	40.2	65.7	61	34.1	37.4
1527–1617	35	48.6	85.7	41.4	65.9	31	31.4	51.4
1618–1685	21	66.7	100	38.1	69	0	61.9	66.7
1686–1733	39	33.3	69.2	36.5	69.4	0	25.6	41
1734–1800	43	58.1	79.1	44.1	71.7	6	32.6	62.8
1200–1800	520	36.2	87.9	39.6	68.6	40	26.7	33.8

Table 1: Summary statistics by period

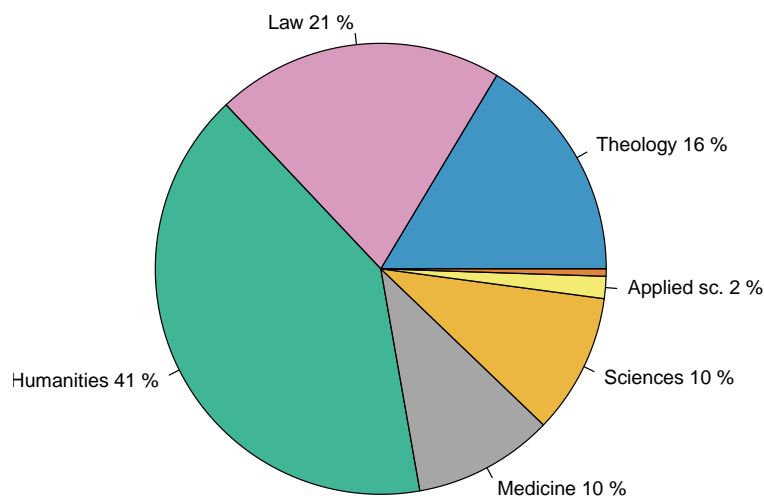


Figure 2: Broad fields at the *Studium Florentinum* (published scholars only)

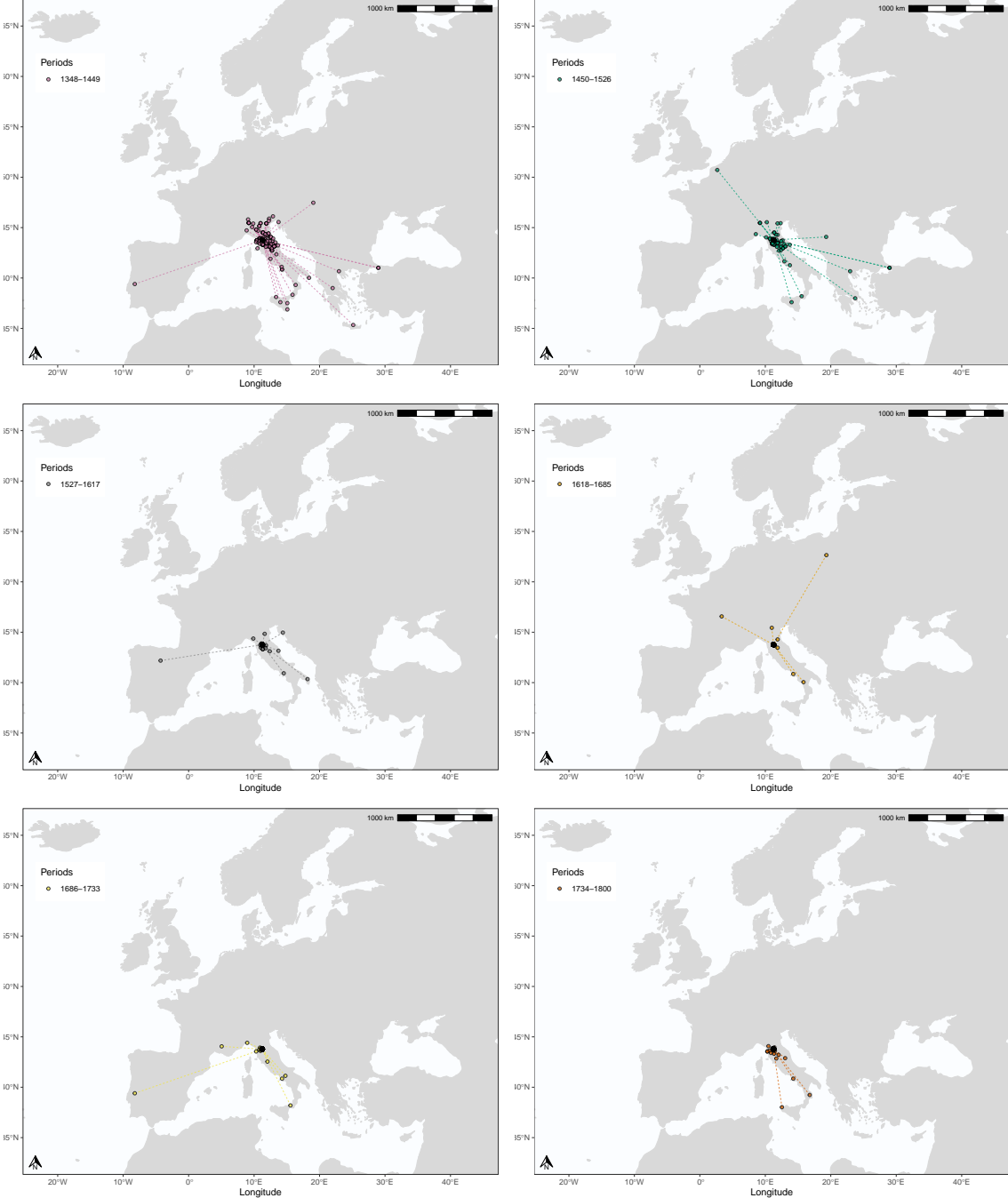


Figure 3: Places of birth of the scholars and literati at the *Studium Florentinum*

## 4 FIELDS

Figure 2 shows the balance between the different fields. The *Studium Florentinum* gained fame primarily for its humanistic studies, becoming the cradle of Humanism. Throughout its tumultuous history, it also promoted studies in jurisprudence, necessary to meet the demands of the Florentine government. Lastly, theological disciplines experienced significant development, especially in the later period, when it remained the sole faculty present in the city.

## 5 PLACES OF BIRTH

Figure 3 displays the documented birthplaces for the scholars and literati who were active at the *Studium Florentinum* by period. In the first centuries of its existence, the *studium* primarily welcomed professors from the Tuscan region. However, a significant number of scholars also came from Northern Italy, Sicily, and the territories of the Byzantine Empire.

## 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 university at each date by averaging the human capital of the best five scholars active in Florence 25 years before 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 displays the notability of the university, based on how well published its top scholars were. All the notable figures lived in the 15th century, when the *studium* was at its peak. After the *studium* relocated to Pisa in 1508 it retained a presence in Florence, with cycles of high and low activity.

## 7 TOP 5 PROFESSORS

**Marsilio Ficino** (Figline Valdarno 1433 – Careggi 1499) was an Italian philosopher, theologian, and humanist of the Renaissance. Ficino is primarily known for his role in the Neoplatonic movement and for being the foremost interpreter of Plato in his time. He was the founder of the Platonic Academy of Florence. He was a professor at the *Studium Florentinum* in 1466, for only one year. His most famous work is "Theologia platonica de immortalitate animarum" (1469-74)(Platonic Theology), in which he develops his syncretic vision of Platonism and Christianity. Ficino had a lasting influence on Renaissance thought and Western philosophy.

**Giovanni Boccaccio** (Certaldo 1313 – Certaldo 1375) was an Italian writer and poet, best known for his masterpiece "the Decameron", a collection of 100 tales told by ten young people seeking refuge from the Black Death in a secluded villa outside Florence. This work is celebrated for its vivid portrayal of medieval life and its influence on Italian prose. He was a prominent figure of the Italian Renaissance and a contemporary of Dante Alighieri and Francesco Petrarca. Boccaccio studied at the *Studium Florentinum*, where he gained a deep appreciation for classical literature and humanist ideals. In 1373, older and in poor health, he returned to the *studium* to deliver a series of lectures on Dante's work in the Badia Fiorentina.

**Angelo Ambrogini** (1454 – 1494) also known as Angelo Poliziano, was an Italian Renaissance humanist, poet, and scholar. He showed an early talent for languages and literature. He studied at the University of Florence, where he became a student of Marsilio Ficino. His academic career flourished under the patronage of the Medici family, for whom he held various positions as a teacher and secretary. Poliziano was known for his extensive erudition and skill in translating and commenting on ancient classical texts. Among his most famous works are the "Stanze per la giostra," a series of poems celebrating the deeds of Prince Lorenzo, and his critical edition of Homer's work, known as the "Editio Princeps."

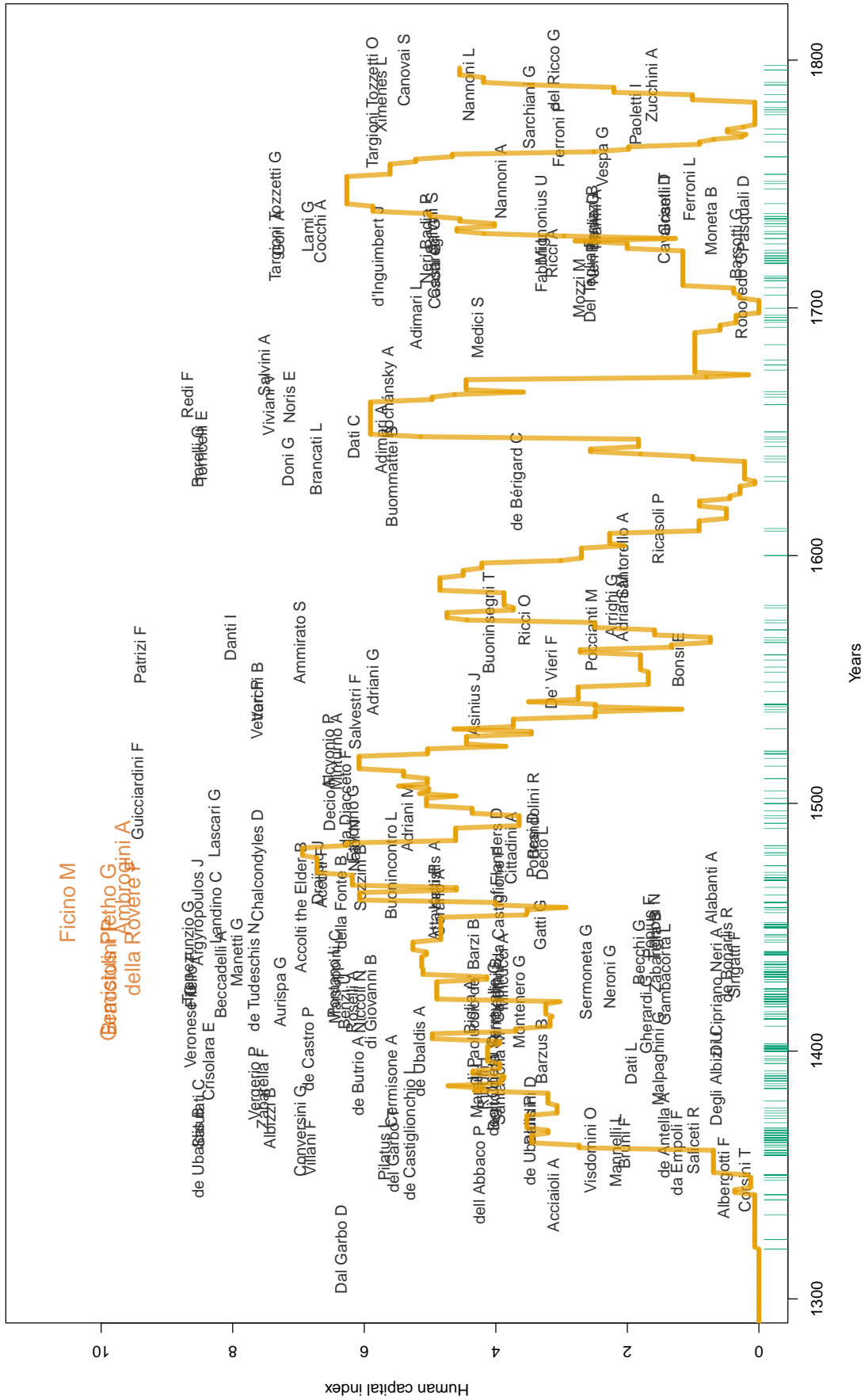


Figure 4: Famous scholars and university notability (orange)

In addition to his literary activity, Poliziano played an important role in spreading Platonism in Italy, promoting dialogue between ancient philosophy and Christian theology. He died of the plague in 1494.

**Francesco della Rovere** (Celle Ligure 1414 – Roma 1848) was an Italian ecclesiastic, ascended to the papacy in 1471, taking the name Sixtus IV. Endowed with remarkable intellectual prowess, he gave lectures at various Italian universities both during and after his academic career, including those in Padua, Pavia, Siena, Bologna, and Florence. During his papacy as Sixtus IV, he distinguished himself with a series of significant initiatives and controversies. Under his reign, he commissioned the construction of the Sistine Chapel and engaged renowned artists such as Botticelli, Perugino, and Ghirlandaio to decorate it. Nevertheless, his pontificate was marred by allegations of corruption and nepotism, particularly regarding favoritism shown to his family.

**Francesco Guicciardini** (Firenze 1483 – Arcetri 1540) was an Italian writer, historian, and politician. After receiving a humanistic education at home, he studied law in Florence. From 1500, he resided in Ferrara for about two years, then moved to Padua to attend lectures by renowned professors. Upon returning to Florence in 1505, he began teaching civil law institutions, although he had not yet graduated. He obtained a doctorate in civil law in November of the same year and embarked on a legal career. His academic activity concluded in 1506. In his main works, "Storia d'Italia" (History of Italy) (1537-1540) and "Ricordi politici e civili" (Political and Civil Memories) (1530), Guicciardini takes a critical stance towards the prevailing humanist thought. He believed that it was not possible to identify absolute laws and models in history that could be used to predict the course of events. Guicciardini paved the way for a new style in historiography characterized by the use of governmental sources to support arguments, and a realistic analysis of the people and events of his time.

**Francesco Patrizi** (Cherso 1529 – Roma 1597) was an Italian philosopher and scientist of the Renaissance. He studied in Padua and later in Bologna, where he graduated in philosophy. Patrizi became known for his philosophical and scientific works, particularly for his critique of the prevailing Aristotelian conceptions. His most famous work is "Nova de Universis Philosophia" (1591), in which he proposes a worldview based on the theory of universal harmony. Patrizi was an important figure in Renaissance thought and influenced the philosophical and scientific debate of his time. Tiraboschi (1833) includes him among the professors of the Florentine studio. From 1577 to 1592, he taught philosophy at the University of Ferrara and was a member of several academies, including the prestigious Accademia della Crusca in 1587.

## 8 RELATED SCHOLARS

**Niccolo Machiavelli** (Firenze 1469 – Firenze 1527) was an Italian writer, philosopher, historian, playwright, politician, and diplomat, serving as the secretary of the Second Chancery of the Florentine Republic. He is renowned as the founder of modern political science, with foundational principles articulated in his most famous work, "The Prince." In this work, he introduced the concept of "ragion di stato" (reason of state), which posits that politics should be understood as a science with its own rules and internal logic. Additionally, he presented a cyclical view of history. In 1520, at the behest of the Medici family and funded by the *Studium Florentinum*, he began composing the "Istorie Fiorentine" (Varotti 2014).

**Francesco Petrarca** (Arezzo 1304 – Arduà 1374) is considered one of the greatest poets of the Italian Renaissance. Renowned for his poetic work, particularly for the collection of sonnets "Canzoniere," he is also known for his contribution to the renewal of Italian literature. His passion for classical culture led him to undertake numerous journeys to rediscover ancient manuscripts, thus contributing to the revival of interest in the works of classical authors. His work and his spirit of inquiry make him a prominent figure in the cultural landscape of the

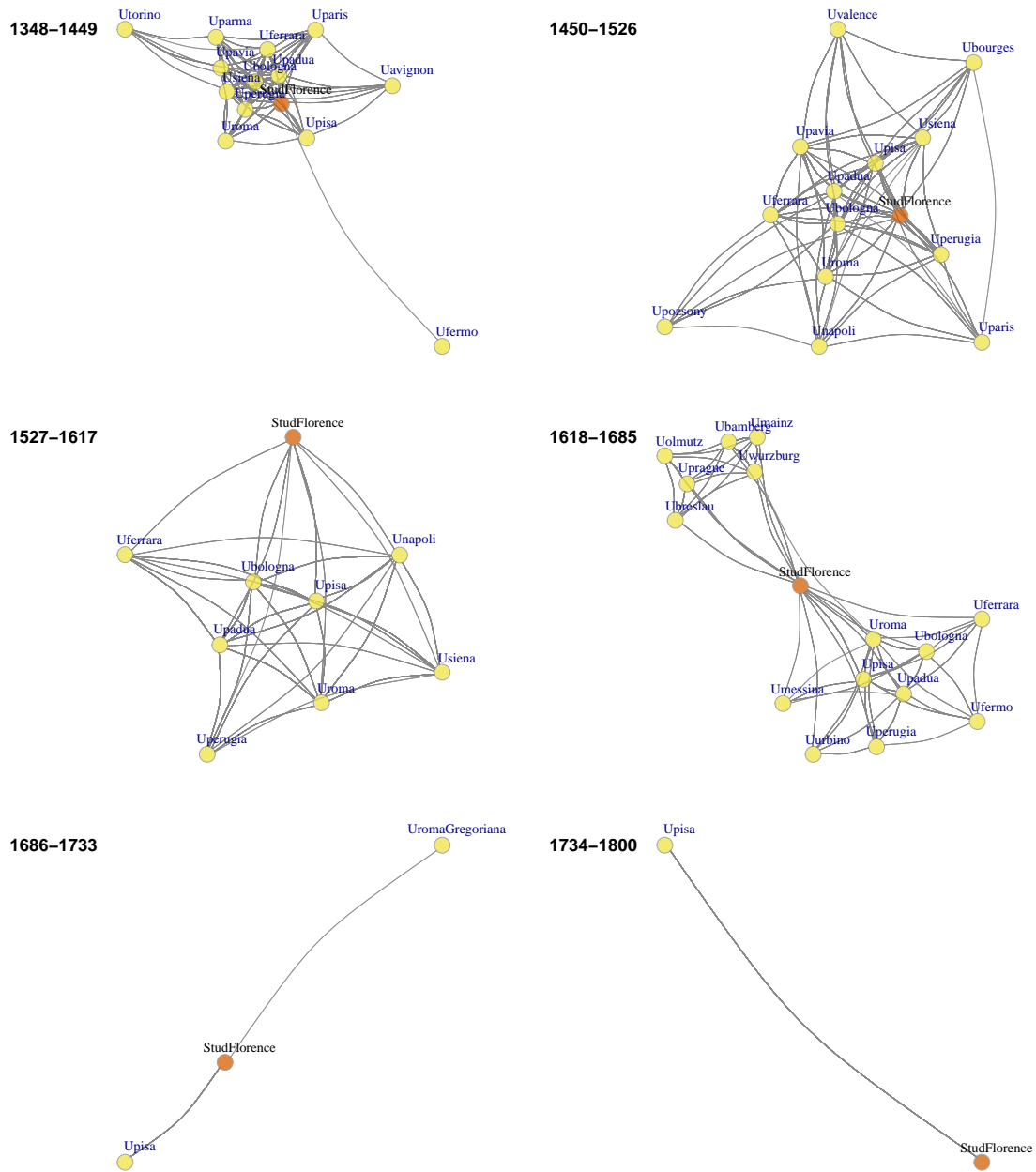


Figure 5: Links between Florence and other universities through scholars' mobility by period

Renaissance. The University of Florence to recruit him and sent Boccaccio to Padua to make an offer, which he declined (Gherardi 1881).

**Georgius Gemistus Pletho** (Istanbul 1360 – Mistra 1453) was a Byzantine Neoplatonic philosopher who played a significant role in the rediscovery of Plato during the early Italian Renaissance. He also contributed to idea of unifying different religious traditions. For several years, he led a school of philosophical and religious thought in Mistra. In 1438, as an advisor to the Byzantine Emperor John VIII, he traveled to Italy to participate in the councils of Basel, Ferrara, and Florence. His ideas had a considerable impact on the thought of the time, and according to Ficino, Pletho persuaded Cosimo de' Medici of the importance of returning to the ancient values of Platonic philosophy, inspiring him to establish the Platonic Academy.

### The first chair of Greek and Humanism

The Florentine cultural center played a fundamental role in elevating the importance of studying ancient works. This gave rise to the literary and cultural movement known as Humanism, which exerted a significant impact on Western culture. It was Francesco Petrarca who gave a new meaning to the study of the classics. He was the first to embark on the translation of the great Greek and Latin classics, but he was aware of the need to initiate a translation of the Greek language. Boccaccio then took action to ensure that the *Studium Florentinum* established a chair of Greek. In 1360, a chair of Greek was created and entrusted to Leonzio Pilato (d. 1366). It was the first chair in Europe and marked a new course for Western culture. Despite some difficulties, the texts of Homer and the classical Greek authors began to be brought in. After the fall of Constantinople (1453), numerous Byzantine and Italian intellectuals, specialists in these texts, began to arrive in Florence. The rediscovery of ancient Greek was the shift that allowed the emergence of the humanistic movement. With humanism, man regains his centrality relative to God. This new vision had profound repercussions in the academic world, extending beyond the mere establishment of the Greek chair. Indeed, the hierarchy of disciplines was thrown into crisis, and theology, which previously held primacy, diminished in importance. Humanism emphasized the absolute significance of each field of study, and the subjects of the "trivium" (Grammar, Rhetoric, and Logic) underwent a reinterpretation that contributed to the modern conception of "humanistic disciplines". Similarly, the "quadrivium" (Arithmetic, Geometry, Astronomy, and Music) gained recognition for its intrinsic value, no longer solely seen as a tool for theological instruction but as an autonomous area of study with specific teaching methods.

## 9 UNIVERSITY NETWORK

Our assumption is that a professors' involvement in multiple universities throughout their career establishes a connection between those institutions. We present the universities that were linked to the *Studium Florentinum* during each period in Figure 5. Despite its discontinuous existence, this university remained a focal point in the *peregrinatio academica* of many professors, especially in the fields of humanities and theology.

## 10 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. In the panorama of the *Studium Florentinum*, two illustrious figures emerge: Evangelista Torricelli (Fanza 1608 – Florence 1647) and Vincenzo Viviani (Florence 1622 – 1703). Both disciples of Galileo Galilei, these two mathematicians alternated at the chair of mathematics established by Ferdinand I and maintained by Ferdinand II (Conti et al. 2024).



## 11 ANECDOTES

In 1429, the University of Florence agreed to pay 300 scudi to Francesco Filelfo to teach Humanities in Florence (Tiraboschi 1833). It is said that Filelfo was not particularly likable ("vanity and slander" (Prezziner 1810)), and he managed to provoke the antipathy of various colleagues. These colleagues, in an attempt to persuade him to leave Florence, convinced the academic authorities to reduce the salary of all professors and limit the privileges they could enjoy. However, Filelfo delivered a speech that persuaded the authorities to restore the old salary, and his tenure at the *Studium Florentinum* continued until 1435.

## 12 FINAL THOUGHTS

The *Studium Florentinum* significantly contributed to the advancement of the classical studies, thus giving rise to the humanist movement that deeply influenced Western culture.

## ACKNOWLEDGMENTS

This project has received funding from the European Research Council (ERC) under the European Union's Horizon 2020 research and innovation programme under grant agreement No 883033 "Did elite human capital trigger the rise of the West? Insights from a new database of European scholars."

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First version May 23, 2024

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