

# Scholars and Literati at the University of Bourges (1464–1793)

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This note is a summary description of the set of scholars and literati who taught at the University of Bourges from its inception in 1464 to its abolishment during the French Revolution in 1793. For more detailed information about these individuals, please visit the comprehensive database available at <https://shiny-lidam.sipr.ucl.ac.be/scholars/>.

## 1 SOURCES

We found no books on the history of the University of Bourges that provide comprehensive information on its teachers. The university was abolished during the French Revolution and was never re-established. Its archives were largely lost, and there seemed to be little interest during the Late Modern Period in this *ancien régime* institution. The most detailed account of the university is found in the third volume of the history of the Duchy of Berry, which was a province of France until it was replaced by two departments in 1790 (Raynal 1845). For information on the Jesuits, we relied on Sommervogel (1890), who offers an extensive and valuable compilation of Jesuit writings, including those by members of the Jesuit order affiliated with the University of Bourges before 1800. For law professors, the dictionary of famous jurists by Arabeyre, Halpérin, and Krynen (2007) proved useful. Lastly, we consulted the dissertation by Tucker (1997) on the Scottish professors and students at the University of Bourges.

## 2 THE UNIVERSITY

Louis XI (1423–1483), known as "Louis the Prudent," was King of France from 1461 to 1483. Born in Bourges, he decided in 1463, together with his brother, the Duke of Berry, to establish a new university in his hometown. The Pope granted approval in 1464, leading to the university's founding. Initially, the Universities of Paris and Orléans strongly opposed the new institution, as did the Parliament of Paris, the highest court of justice. However, the Parliament eventually conceded in 1670. The university's early years were slow; by the late 15th century, there were only two professors of canon law, two of civil law, and one of medicine. The 16th century was the university's golden age, thanks to the recruitment of leading lawyers of the time (see top scholars below). Following the death of Cujas in 1590, the civil law faculty entered a period of decline, which lasted until the university's abolition in 1793.

Raynal (1845) notes that only the civil law faculty had moments of distinction at the University of Bourges. The other faculties—canon law, medicine, theology, and arts—remained obscure, with no notable professors. An exception was the Jesuit college, which became part of the university in 1575, despite resistance. In 1627, the Jesuits also took control of the theology faculty. They succeeded in attracting many students, but their order was suppressed in 1762, triggering the college's rapid decline. With the Revolution, Raynal concludes: "The University of Bourges itself had perished in the turmoil; and public education, at all its levels, found itself thrown into a series of disastrous experiments and vicissitudes."

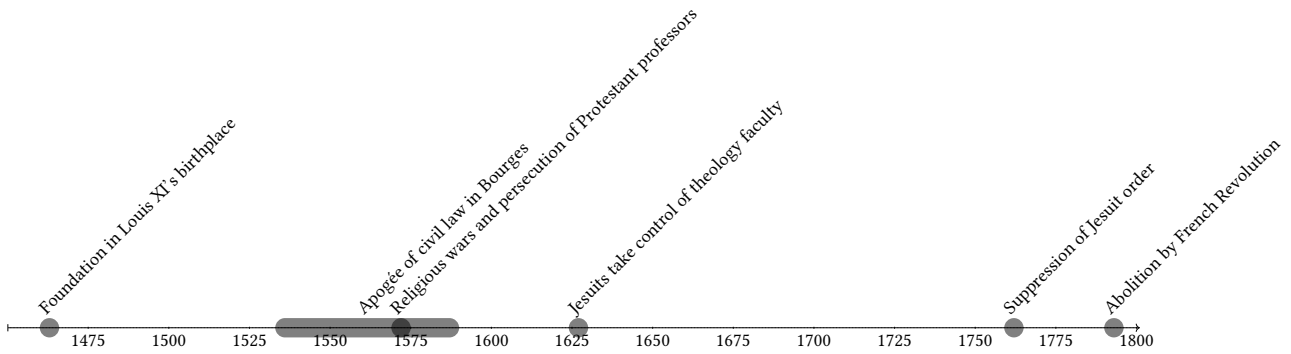


Figure 1: Timeline of the University of Bourges

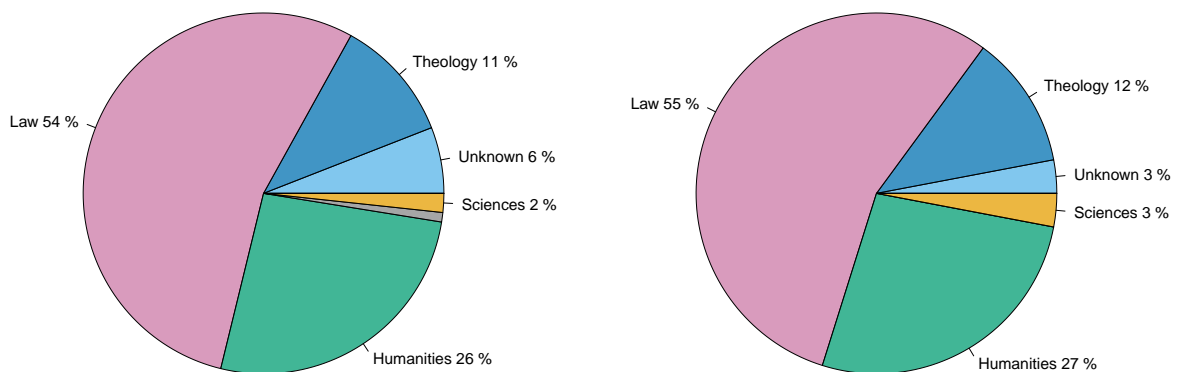


Figure 2: Broad fields at the University of Bourges (left: all scholars, right: published scholars only)

Period	nb. obs	birth date	known place	mean age at appoint.	mean age at death	med. dist. birth-univ.	with Wiki.	with Worldcat
1450–1526	26	11.5	15.4	44.5	80.0	478	11.5	15.4
1527–1617	45	80.0	95.6	30.0	62.7	291	57.8	77.8
1618–1685	18	83.3	88.9	42.0	64.5	197	33.3	66.7
1686–1733	13	69.2	61.5	57.0	67.5	121	30.8	61.5
1734–1800	12	91.7	91.7	32.2	66.8	327	25.0	41.7
1200–1800	114	64.9	71.9	34.6	64.8	260	36.8	56.1

Table 1: Summary statistics by period

### 3 SOME STATISTICS

Table 1 presents a summary of descriptive statistics for the scholars. The dataset includes information on 114 scholars, which suggests that either Bourges was a very small university, or our sources are incomplete. In the first period, the proportion of scholars for whom we know year and place of birth is quite low. Consequently, the other measures for this period are calculated from a very small sample size and may not be representative. The second period marks the peak of the law faculty’s prominence, as previously discussed. During this time, more scholars are documented, and they are better known, evidenced by a higher percentage of scholars with Wikipedia pages and/or VIAF records. The subsequent three periods see a decline in the number of scholars. Finally, it is noteworthy that the median distance from scholars’ birthplaces to the university is relatively high, suggesting that professor recruitment was not predominantly local.

### 4 FIELDS

Figure 2 illustrates the fields of specialization among scholars at the University of Bourges. As expected, law is the predominant field, aligning with our characterization of the university as being dominated by the civil law faculty. The humanities and theology follow, largely due to the influence of the Jesuits. Notably, there are no scholars teaching sciences or medicine.

### 5 PLACE OF BIRTH

Figure 3 depicts the birthplaces of scholars affiliated with the University of Bourges across different periods. This visualization highlights the geographical origins of the professors over time, providing insight into the documented high median distance from birthplaces to Bourges. The university’s peak period (second period) is particularly notable, with scholars being recruited from across France and even from abroad, including Scotland and Italy. In contrast, during the last three periods, the professors predominantly originate from the northwestern part of France, with the exception of one scholar from Ireland.

### 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. Based on the individual notability of scholars and literati, we compute the notability of the university at each date  $t$  by averaging the human capital of the scholars who were active at the University of Bourges within a 25-year time frame leading up to  $t$ , and who concluded their careers before  $t$ . The details are given in Curtis and De la Croix (2023) and in De la Croix et al. (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. The peak of notability is reached in 1550, and is followed by a slow decline.

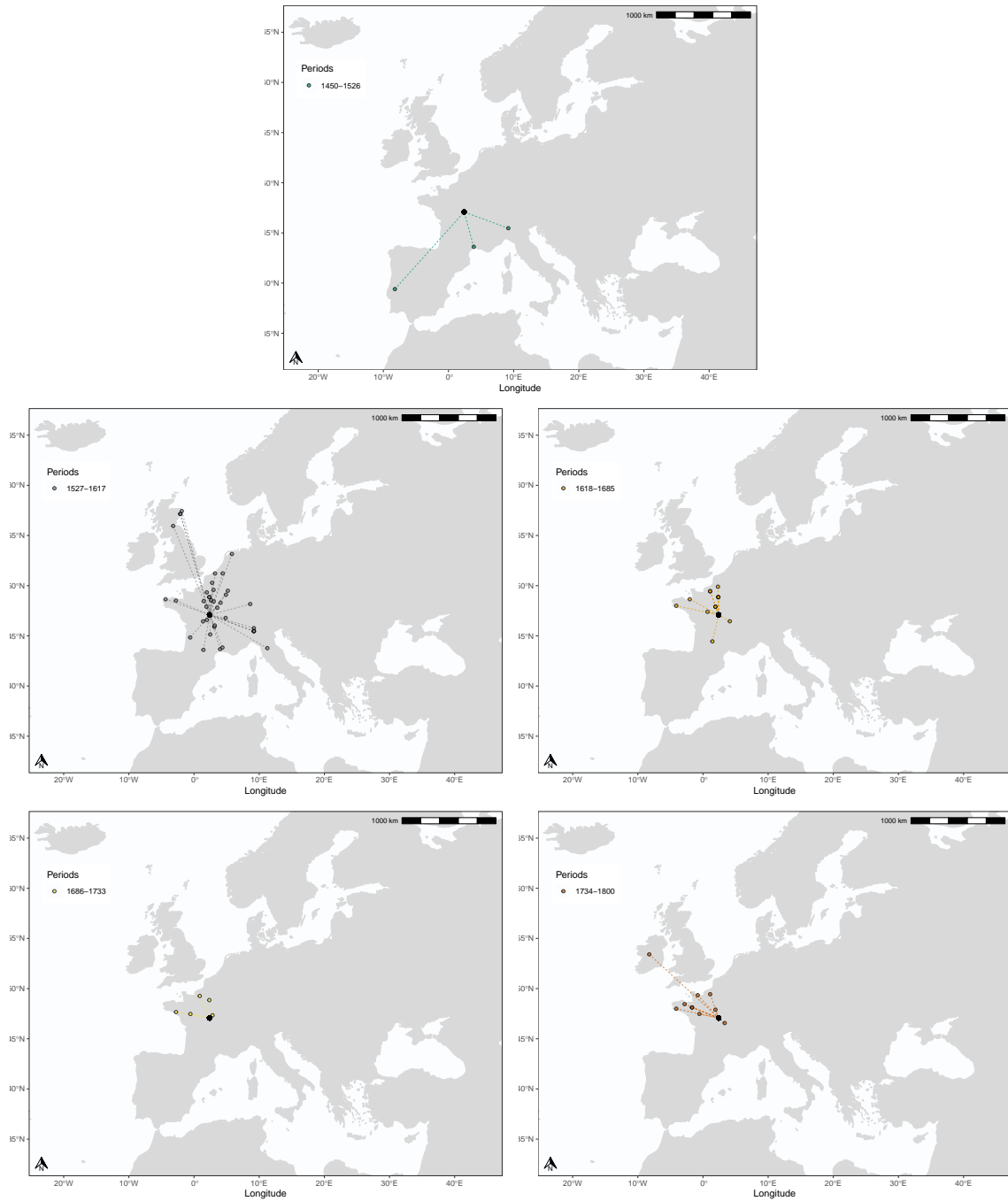


Figure 3: Places of birth of the scholars and literati at the University of Bourges

## 7 TOP 5 PROFESSORS

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

**François Hotman** (Paris 1524 – Balsen 1590). A professor of Roman law and graduate of Orléans, Hotman left Paris for Switzerland after converting to Calvinism. He became a fervent defender of the faith. In 1563, he began teaching law at the University of Valence, where he earned high esteem and was notably prolific. For financial reasons, he relocated to Bourges in 1567, replacing Jacques Cujas. At the University of Bourges, Hotman continued his influential work until shortly before the St. Bartholomew’s Day massacre in 1572, when he went into exile in Switzerland. He was known for his pamphlets against the Pope and for his significant contributions to the study of law, including *Franco-Gallia* (1573), a historical critique of royal absolutism that became one of the era’s greatest bookstore successes (De la Croix and Fabre 2021).

**Andrea Alciat** (Alzate Brianza 1492 – Pavia 1550) was an influential Italian jurist and scholar, widely regarded as the founder of the French school of legal humanism. His career took him to various prestigious universities. In 1529, Alciat was invited to Bourges by Margaret of Angoulême, sister of King Francis I of France, to revitalize the university’s law faculty. At Bourges, he introduced the methods of humanist scholarship to the study of law, emphasizing the importance of historical context, philology, and the critical examination of classical texts. His teachings attracted students from across Europe and significantly enhanced the university’s reputation as a center for legal education. After leaving Bourges, Alciat continued his academic career in Italy, but his legacy at Bourges endured, marking a golden era in the university’s history.

**Iacobus Amyot** (Melun 1513 – Auxerre 1593) A distinguished humanist and churchman, Jacques Amyot is renowned for his exceptional skills as a translator. His academic career began in Paris and flourished in Bourges, where he honed his mastery of Greek and Latin letters. It was at the University of Bourges that Amyot developed his reputation as a scholar of classical languages, which laid the foundation for his later achievements. Amyot’s scholarly prowess attracted the attention of influential figures, including King Francis I, who commissioned him in 1542 to translate Plutarch’s *Parallel Lives*. This translation was a remarkable success, cementing Amyot’s reputation in the literary world. His success in letters paralleled his rise in ecclesiastical ranks, culminating in his appointment as Bishop of Auxerre in 1570 (see also Catoire et al. (2021)).

**Jacques Cujas** (Toulouse 1522 – Bourges 1590). A distinguished professor of civil law, Jacques Cujas graduated from Toulouse and taught at several universities, including Toulouse, Cahors, Bourges, Valence, Turin, and for one year in Paris, where he sought refuge from the Reformation in 1576 before returning to Bourges. His tenure at the University of Bourges was particularly notable, as he is considered one of the greatest humanists among French jurists. Cujas made a significant contribution to the university’s reputation as a center for legal studies. His scholarly works, especially his collection of Justinian manuscripts, continue to be invaluable resources for the study of Roman law (see also De la Croix and Fabre (2021)).

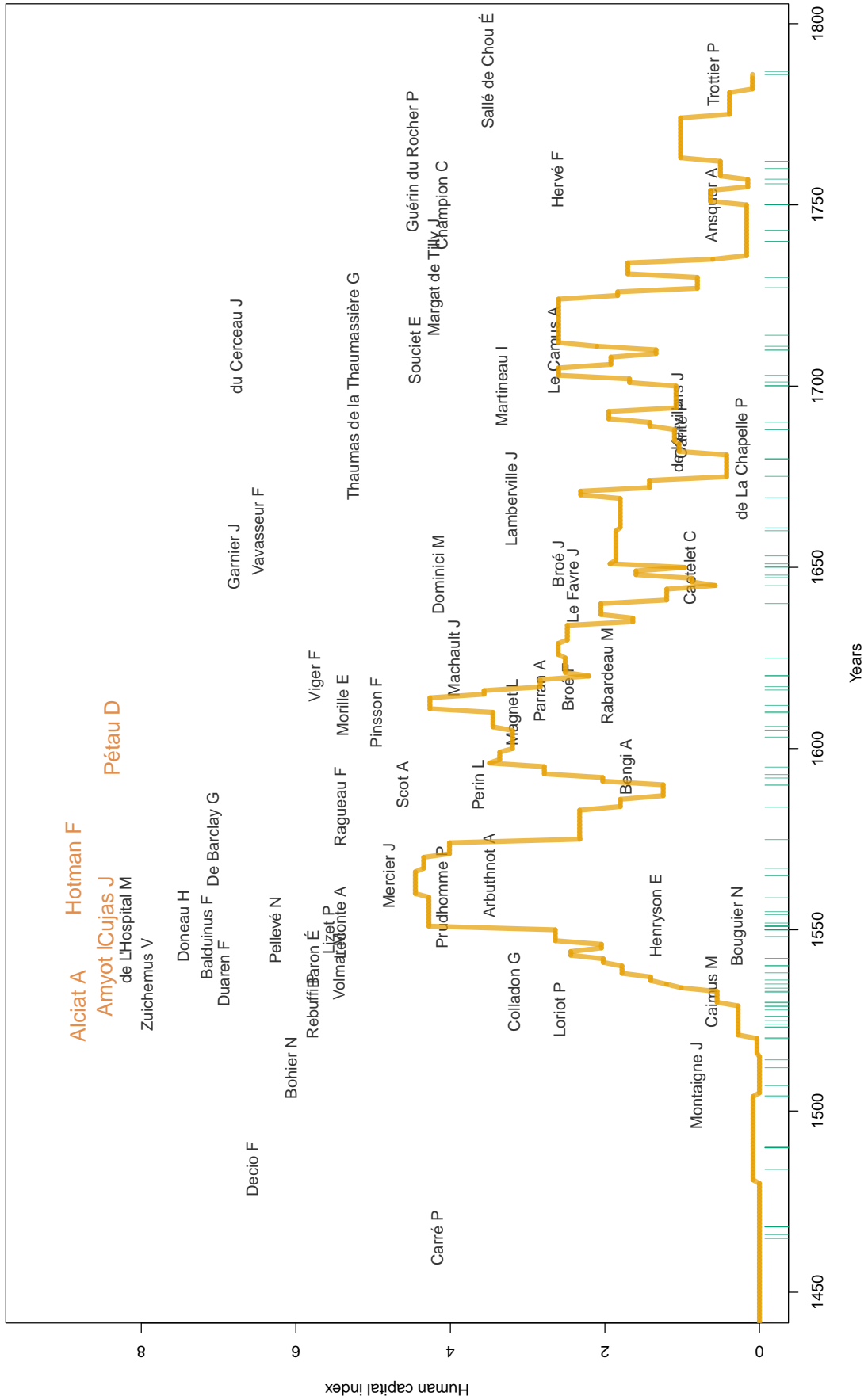


Figure 4: Famous scholars and university notability (orange)

**Denis Pétau** (Orléans 1583 – Paris 1652) was a renowned French Jesuit theologian, historian, and scholar. Born in Orléans, he exhibited exceptional intellectual talents early on, and he was appointed to teach philosophy at the University of Bourges for two years. Pétau’s tenure in Bourges allowed him to develop a deep expertise in patristics and chronology, subjects that would define his scholarly legacy. After leaving Bourges, he continued his education and teaching in Paris, where he joined the Jesuit Order in 1605. Later, we find him teaching in various Jesuit institutions: the University of Reims, the college of La Flèche (De la Croix and Theis 2023), and the college of Clermont in Paris. He was also a member of the “Mersenne” academy (De la Croix and Duchêne 2021). His most notable works include *Opus de doctrina temporum*, a comprehensive chronology of the ancient world, and *Dogmata Theologica*, an influential theological treatise.

## 8 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 University of Bourges, only one has had a lunar crater named after them, indicating a high level of recognition in this regard.

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

## 9 FAMILIES OF SCHOLARS

As in most civil law faculties, the majority of professors were married laymen. Some had children who also appear as professors in the same university as their father. We counted two thousand such father-son pairs in the full database (De la Croix and Goñi 2024). In many cases, the father is better known and has more publications than the son, which might indicate some degree of favoritism in the appointments. In Bourges, we counted only one father-son pair, shown in Figure 5. We had no other information on this family. Both father and son are recorded in VIAF, with the son having more titles published than the father (8 titles *versus* 5 titles).

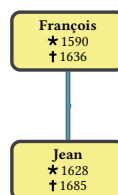


Figure 5: The Broé family. Professors at Bourges in yellow squares

## 10 UNIVERSITY NETWORK

We assume that when a professor held positions at multiple universities during their career, it established a connection between those institutions. Figure 6 displays the universities that were linked to Bourges during the various periods. Again, the apogee during the period from 1527 to 1617 appears very clearly in the graph. The other periods are quite poor in terms of mobility pattern.

## 11 IF YOU VISIT BOURGES

Bourges is a charming city located in central France, renowned for its stunning Gothic cathedral and well-preserved examples of civilian architecture dating back to the 15th century. While exploring the city for remnants of its old university buildings, I regrettably found none. Perhaps better preparation, including reading topographical references such as those in Guénée (1978), would have

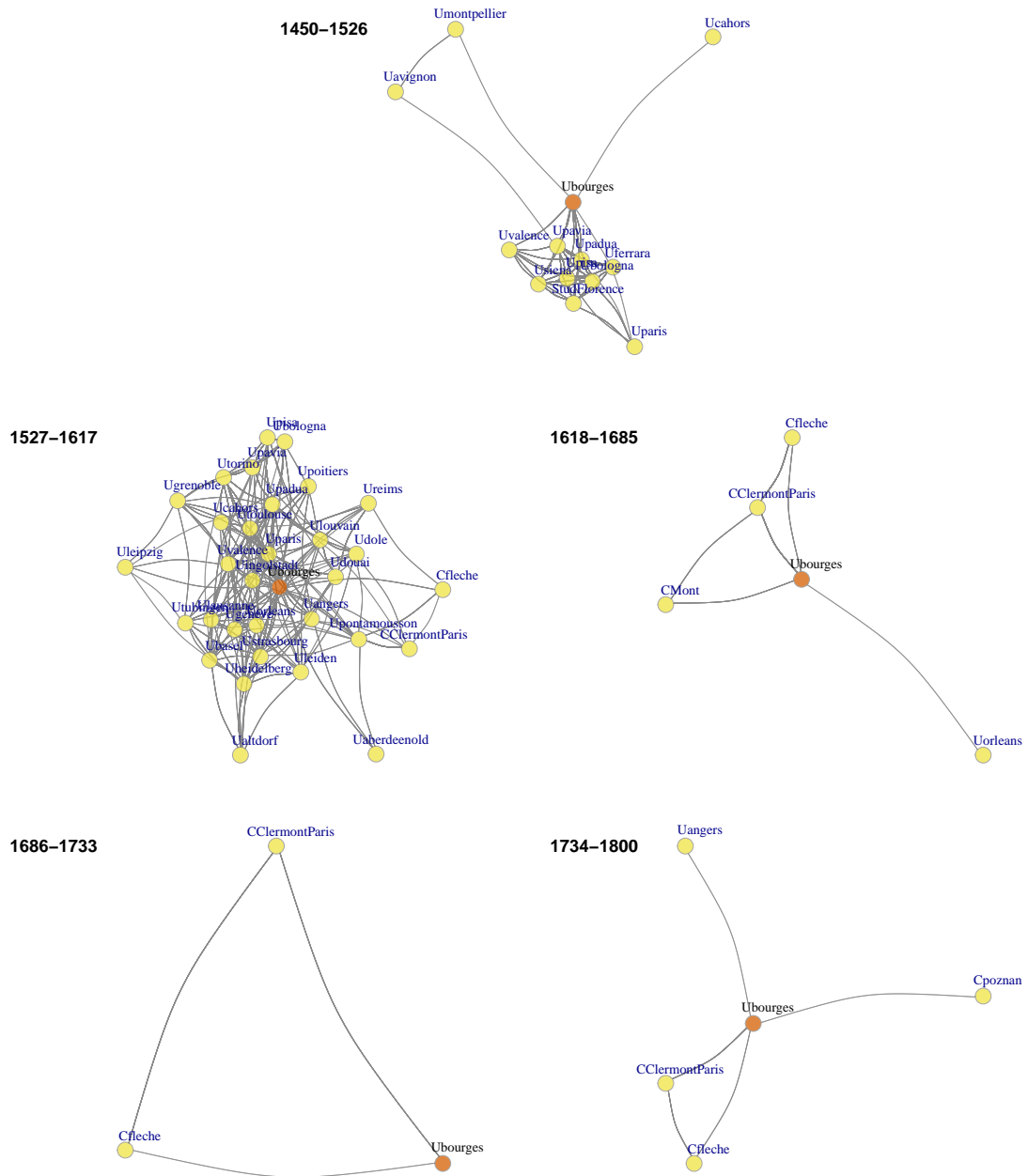


Figure 6: Links between Bourges and other universities through scholars' mobility



been beneficial. The Jesuit college, which may have had a better chance of survival, also eluded my search.

## 12 FINAL THOUGHTS

Although it was a comprehensive university, the University of Bourges is primarily renowned as the epicenter of legal humanism (revival of classical Roman legal texts emphasizing linguistic and historical analysis in interpreting law), during the sixteenth century.

## 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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