https://doi.org/10.14428/rete.v13i0/ANancy

Scholars and Literati at the Stanislas Academy in Nancy (1750–1793)

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This note is a summary description of the set of scholars and literati at the Stanislas Academy in Nancy between its creation in 1750 and its dissolution 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 The Academy

The Stanislas Academy was established in Nancy on December 28, 1750, by Stanislas Leszczynski, former King of Poland and Duke of Lorraine, under the name *Société Royale des Sciences et Belles-Lettres de Nancy*. It was founded alongside a public library, with its statutes officially set on December 27, 1751. Its foundation was part of Stanislas' ambition to turn Lorraine into a beacon of Enlightenment thought (Roche 1978), but the region was still somewhat peripheral to the French cultural epicenter of Paris.

The Academy initially included censors responsible for selecting library acquisitions, resident members from Nancy, and foreign members. Its mission was to advance science and culture in Lorraine, which had been devastated by 17th-century wars, and it attracted prominent figures such as Montesquieu and Buffon.

After Lorraine became French in 1766, the Stanislas Academy was fully integrated into French cultural and intellectual life. While its original foundation under a Polish duke provided it with a unique character, it later became more closely linked with France's national academic tradition.

During the French Revolution, the Stanislas Academy suffered significant setbacks and was dissolved on August 14, 1793. Nevertheless, in 1802, following the Revolution, it was reestablished under the name *Société libre des Sciences, Lettres et Arts de Nancy*, with revised statutes reflecting the new political landscape.

2 Sources

The work by Hatton (1952) serves as a comprehensive index of the names of the academy's members, categorized into three distinct groups: "Membres honoraires", which we consider as such; "Membres titulaire", whom we consider to be ordinary members, and "Membres associés etranger", whom we classify as correspondents, thus reflecting a weaker connection to the academy. To supplement this information, we also consulted the academy's website, https://www.academie-stanislas.org/, which provides detailed biographical entries for some of its members. Finally, the "Comité des travaux historiques et scientifiques" offers a third source (Marion 2019), with an index of members dating back to before 1800. This approach allows for a more refined classification of members based on their status and connection to the academy.

Period	nb. obs	birth known date	birth known place	mean age at appoint.	mean age at death	with Wiki.	with VIAF
1734–1800	177	93.8	85.9	44.1	71.2	61	78.5

Table 1: Summary statistics by period

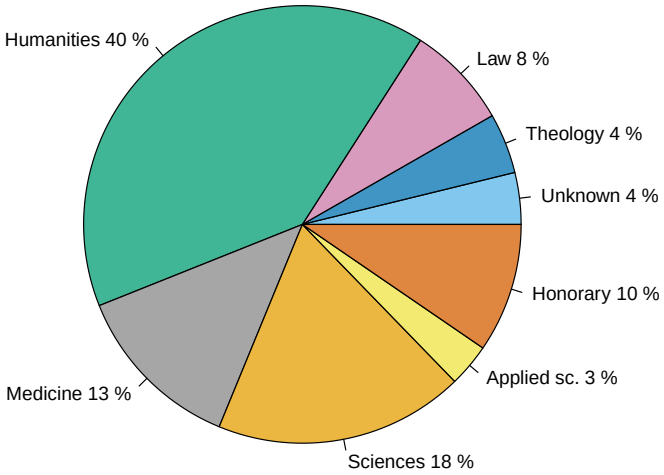

Figure 1: Broad fields at the Stanislas Academy (published scholars only)

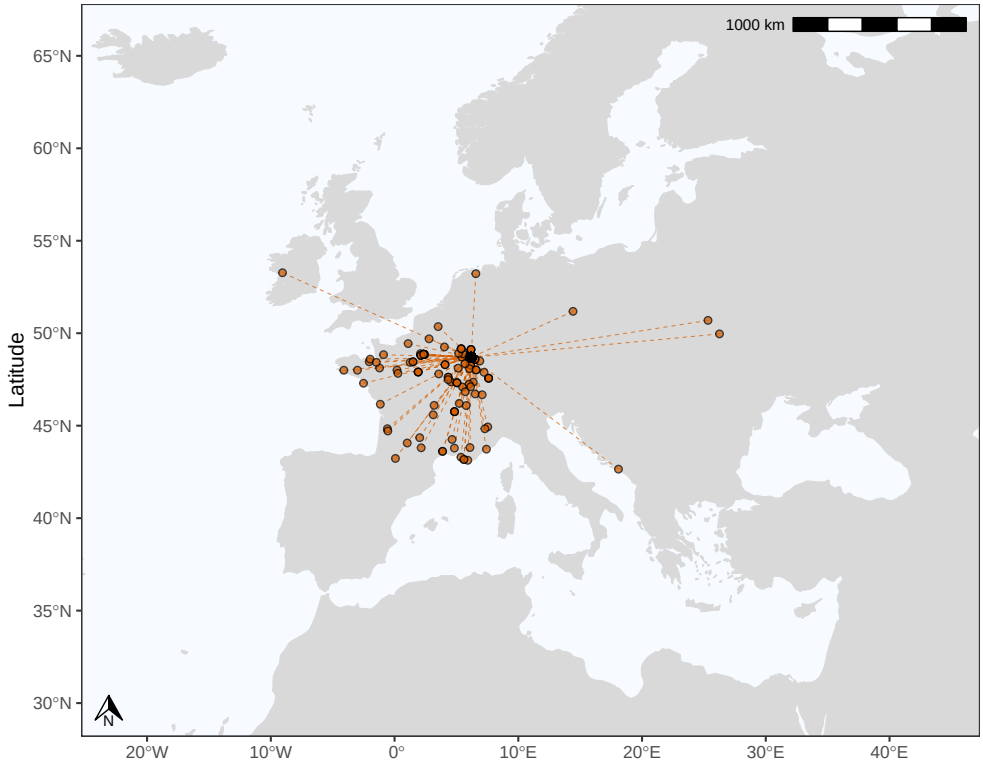

Figure 2: Places of birth of the members of the Stanislas Academy

3 Descriptive statistics

Table 1 displays some descriptive statistics. We found 177 people who were members from the foundation of Stanislas Academy until 1800. Overall, we find information for a large majority of the members. 93.8% of them have a known birth date, and 85.9 a known birth place. 61% have a Wikipedia page, which is a high percentage compared to other academies, and 78.5% have left a footprint in the library catalogues surveyed by VIAF. Stanislas' scholars lived long on average (71.2 years), although some had their life shortened by the French Revolution (see below).

4 Fields

Figure 1 illustrates the distribution of academic disciplines within the Stanislas Academy. The Academy is dominated by humanities, but one third of the output of its members are in sciences and medicine.

5 Place of birth

Figure 2 illustrates the documented birthplaces of the ordinary members active at the Stanislas Academy. While the Academy has some Polish roots, it remains distinctly French, with the majority of its members hailing from France. Notably, these members represent a broad range of regions across the country, extending beyond the eastern areas of Lorraine and Alsace.

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. The details are given in De la Croix et al. (2024) and Curtis and De la Croix (2023). Figure 3 shows the names of all the scholars with a positive human capital index at the Stanislas Academy.

7 Top 5 scholars

We provide a brief overview of five members with a high human capital index, skipping Montesquieu, Lefrançois de Lalande, and Daniel Bernoulli, who have already been described in other issues of RETE.

Bernard Le Bouyer de Fontenelle (Rouen 1657 – Paris 1757) was a distinguished French writer and philosopher known for his contributions to scientific popularization. Educated in letters, philosophy, and law, Fontenelle gained prominence with his seminal work Entretiens sur la pluralité des mondes (1686), which made complex scientific ideas accessible to the public. As the permanent secretary of the Royal Academy of Sciences from 1697 to 1740, he played a pivotal role in promoting scientific discoveries. Additionally, he was a member of the Stanislas Academy, where he supported the advancement of sciences and letters in Lorraine. His significant contributions are further recognized by posthumous honors, including a lunar crater and an asteroid named after him, highlighting his lasting influence on literature and science.

Roger-Joseph Bošković (Raguse 1711- Milan 1787), was a prominent mathematician and scientist, recognized for his contributions across various scientific fields. He entered the Jesuit Order in 1725 and later became a professor of mathematics in Rome, Milan, and Pavia. Bošković was a member of many prestigious academies, including those in Paris, London, and Saint Petersburg. His major work, The Theory of Natural Philosophy, published in 1758, influenced numerous scholars. In 1761, he was admitted as a foreign associate by the Stanislas Academy. After the suppression of the Society of Jesus, he was appointed director of optics for the French navy. His contributions to science and his extensive travels across Europe made him a highly respected figure in the scientific community of his time.

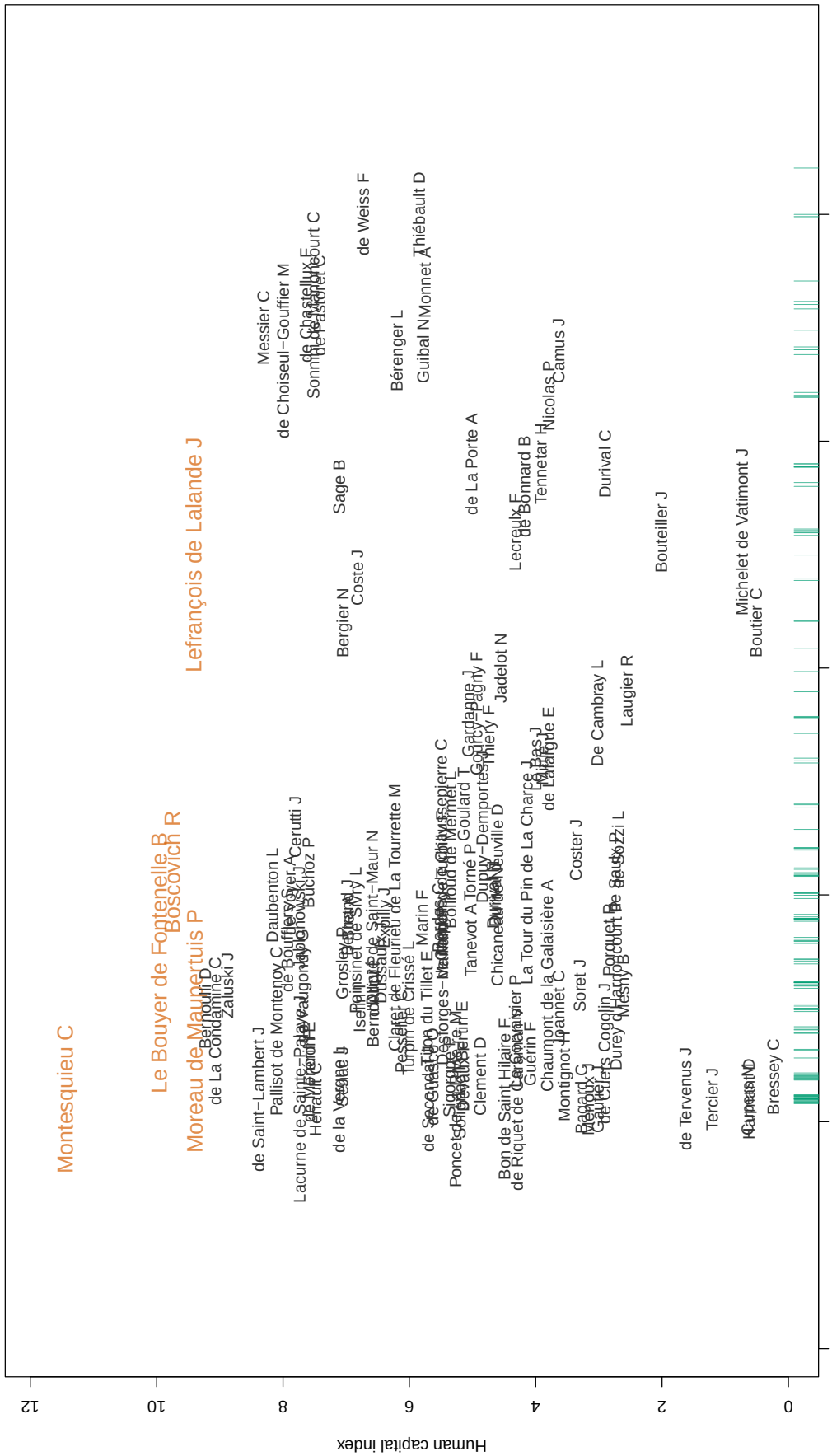

Figure 3: Famous scholars at the Stanislas Academy

Pierre-Louis Moreau de Maupertuis (Bretagne 1698- Bâle 1759) was an influential French scientist who popularized Newton's theories in France. In 1736, he led an expedition to Lapland that confirmed the Earth is flattened at the poles. As President of the Berlin Academy of Sciences from 1746, he proposed the principle of least action and introduced pioneering ideas about evolution. His career, marked by scientific successes and conflicts with Voltaire, also included his role as a member of the Paris Academy of Sciences from 1728, the Royal Academy of Sciences of Prussia, and the Stanislas Academy in Nancy in 1754.

Charles-Marie de La Condamine (Paris 1701 – Paris 1774) was a French explorer and scientist, a member of the Academy of Sciences and the Stanislas Academy in 1754. He is renowned for his expeditions to Ecuador, where he too confirmed that the Earth is flattened at the poles. He also explored the Amazon, discovering important species and natural phenomena. In addition to his contributions to geodesy and botany, he played a significant role in promoting smallpox inoculation and was elected to the French Academy in 1760. His work profoundly influenced the sciences and geographical knowledge of his time.

Józef Andrzej Załuski (Loutsk 1702 – Kalouga 1774) was a Polish Catholic bishop of Kiev, a patron, and a renowned bibliophile. A member of the Polish nobility with the Junosza coat of arms, he is best known for co-founding the Załuski Library with his brother Andrzej Stanisław Załuski, one of the largest book collections of the 18th century. He also facilitated the sale of the Petit Fontenet to Buffon, who established his library there. Serving as chaplain at the court of Stanislas Leszczynski, King of Poland and Duke of Lorraine, Załuski left some of his books to the library in Nancy upon his departure, and donated others to the Academy of Stanislas in 1756. In 1741, he assumed the position of Grand Prelate of Saint-Dié in Lorraine but resigned in June 1741 to return to Poland. As Bishop of Kiev, he was imprisoned by the Russians in 1767 for defending Polish liberties and remained captive until his death in 1774.

8 Related scholars

Two other important individuals were related to the Academy. Whether they occupied an official position is not clear, because they are mentioned in Marion (2019) but not in Hatton (1952). Those scholars are counted in all figures, except Figure 3.

Georges-Louis Leclerc, Comte de Buffon (Montbard 1707 – Paris 1788), was a major French naturalist, mathematician, and philosopher of the Enlightenment. His principal work, Histoire naturelle, published in 36 volumes between 1749 and 1789, profoundly influenced science, impacting figures such as Lamarck and Darwin. After studying law, Buffon dedicated himself to science and settled in Paris in 1731. Appointed as the intendant of the Jardin du Roi in 1739, he transformed this institution into a leading research center. He was also a member of the Académie des sciences and the Académie française and contributed to the establishment of the Stanislas Academy. Buffon is also known for his practical projects, such as building forges near the Canal de Bourgogne, although these were sold after encountering financial difficulties. Despite criticism for some erroneous theories and his ornate literary style, his work remains fundamental in the history of natural sciences, with a significant influence on the development of scientific ideas.

Gabrielle Émilie Le Tonnelier de Breteuil, Marquise du Châtelet (Paris 1706 – Lunéville 1749), was a prominent figure of the Enlightenment. She is best known for her French translation of Newton's Principia Mathematica, which remains respected today, and for introducing Leibniz's theories to France, notably by experimentally proving the relationship between kinetic energy, mass, and velocity. Born into nobility, she received an education that was rare for a woman of her time, excelling in mathematics and physics. As Voltaire's companion, she defied social conventions to actively participate in scientific debates. At times, she had to disguise herself as a man to enter Parisian cafés where women were prohibited. She was elected

a member of the Academy of Sciences at the Institute of Bologna, a rare recognition for a woman. She also frequented the court of Stanislas Leszczynski in Lunéville, where she joined the circle of the Stanislas Academy.

9 Diversity

One of the distinctive features of the Stanislas Academy is that it had close relationships with women. We have seen above the case of Emilie du Châtelet, about whom we are not sure whether she was really an official member or not. Emilie du Châtelet was not alone. There is also the case of Marie-Françoise-Catherine de Beauvau, marquise de Boufflers (1711-1786), who is sometimes recorded as a member of the Stanislas Academy (on her Wikipedia page for example). She was a friend of Voltaire, and the mistress of King Stanislas Leczszinski. For a more detailed discussion on the role of women in pre-modern academies, see De la Croix and Vitale (2023).

10 Victims of the Revolution

The French Revolution was probably the most deadly event for academics over the period 1000-1800. Not only was every French academy and university shut down in 1793, but many scholars were arrested, jailed, and sentenced to death. We list the three victims from the Stanislas Academy with a brief story and their human capital index q.

Arnaud de La Porte , who was arrested after August 10, 1792, for financing the King's escape, was guillotined on August 23, further accused of destroying compromising documents (aged 54, Minister of the Marine, $q = 5.01$).

Jean-Baptiste de Thomas de La Valette , having received support from Robespierre despite several arrests for indiscipline, was guillotined on 10 Thermidor Year II (July 28, 1794) after Robespierre's fall (aged 40, Count de La Valette, military officer and political leader).

Philippe-Ferdinand de Mory d'Elvange was arrested in 1794 after the discovery of white cockades in his château at Elvange. He was tried by the Revolutionary Tribunal and guillotined in Paris on May 14, 1794 (aged 55, lawyer, $q = 0$).

11 Families of scholars

Many scholars at universities and academies had children who also appear as scholars in the same institution 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 Nancy, we find two parent-son cases, which both contradict this view: the families Boufflers and Caraman. For Boufflers, the son has 51 titles published while his mother has none. For Caraman, the pattern is the same, the son has 39 titles published, his father none.

12 Final thoughts

The Stanislas Academy was a regional institution established to foster intellectual debate, scientific inquiry, and the promotion of arts and literature in Lorraine, in keeping with the ideals of the Enlightenment.

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."

This work was also supported by the Fonds de la Recherche Scientifique-FNRS under Grant n° A2.11903.007-F "Human capital and the rise of the West: the key role of scientific academies."

Homepage: https://perso.uclouvain.be/david.delacroix/uthc.html
Twitter: https://twitter.com/UTHCerc
Database: https://shiny-lidam.sipr.ucl.ac.be/scholars/

This version August 26, 2024

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