

Scholars and Literati at the University of Naples (1224–1800)

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This note is a summary description of the set of scholars and literati who taught at the University of Naples from its inception in 1224 to 1800.

1 SOURCES

To compile the prosopographical database of the University of Naples, two main sources were primarily used. The first is *Istoria dello Studio di Napoli* by Origlia. While this work occasionally lacks precision, it offers a broad list of professors' names. The second source is *Storia dell'Università di Napoli* by Torraca and Monti, prepared for the 700th anniversary of the university's foundation. This publication is particularly notable for its high-quality information, bolstered by the inclusion of transcriptions from official university documents. For many scholars, the information was completed by consulting the *Treccani Enciclopedia* 1961.

2 THE UNIVERSITY

On June 5 (or July) 1224, with the *generalis litterae* (circular letter), Frederick II (Holy Roman Emperor from 1220) decreed the establishment of the *Studium* of Naples. The foundation of the university served multiple objectives: training officials and jurists loyal to the empire, reducing dependence on other centers of study, promoting scientific and legal knowledge, strengthening Naples's strategic role within the Kingdom of Sicily, and legitimizing imperial power in opposition to the Papacy. The 15th century was marked by significant instability. In 1443, following the establishment of Aragonese rule, the university was closed for approximately twenty years. It reopened in 1465 but remained active only until 1490. Stability was only restored starting from 1507. This instability was also reflected in the precariousness of the university's location, which kept changing until the 18th century. In 1500, under Spanish rule, the university underwent reorganization and gained greater prominence, although it faced political and economic challenges tied to historical events. In the 17th century, the University of Naples became the vibrant cultural hub of the Kingdom of Naples. However, the reforms of Charles III of Bourbon in the late 18th century, aimed at centralizing control, partially curtailed its autonomy. It is important to note the creation, in 1754, of the world's first chair in mechanics and commerce (political economy), which was entrusted to Antonio Genovesi.

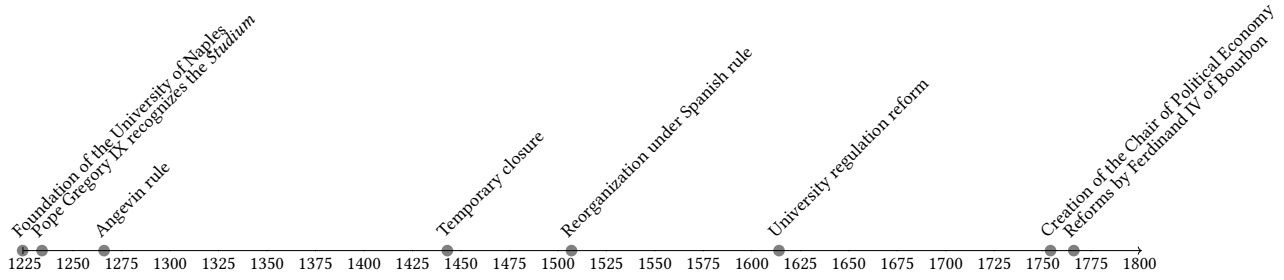


Figure 1: Timeline of the University of Naples

Period	no. obs	birth date	known place	mean age at appoint.	mean age at death	med. dist. birth-univ.	with Wiki.	with VIAF
1200–1347	192	10.9	78.1	44.4	66.9	79	13.5	14.6
1348–1449	59	13.6	84.7	47.5	69.9	46	13.6	13.6
1450–1526	214	17.8	56.1	38.3	68	38	10.3	19.2
1527–1617	216	17.1	61.6	35.8	68.6	46	8.8	20.8
1618–1685	158	15.2	44.9	41.8	67.6	193	7.6	13.3
1686–1733	83	33.7	47	34.9	68.9	34	15.7	21.7
1734–1800	81	54.3	61.7	36.2	68.4	46	29.6	40.7
1200–1800	1003	19.9	61.1	38.3	68.2	51	12.4	19.3

Table 1: Summary statistics by period

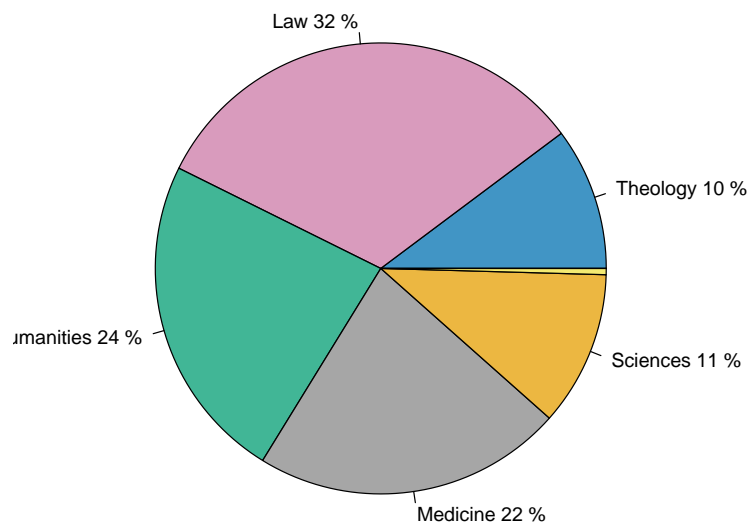


Figure 2: Broad fields at the University of Naples (published scholars only)

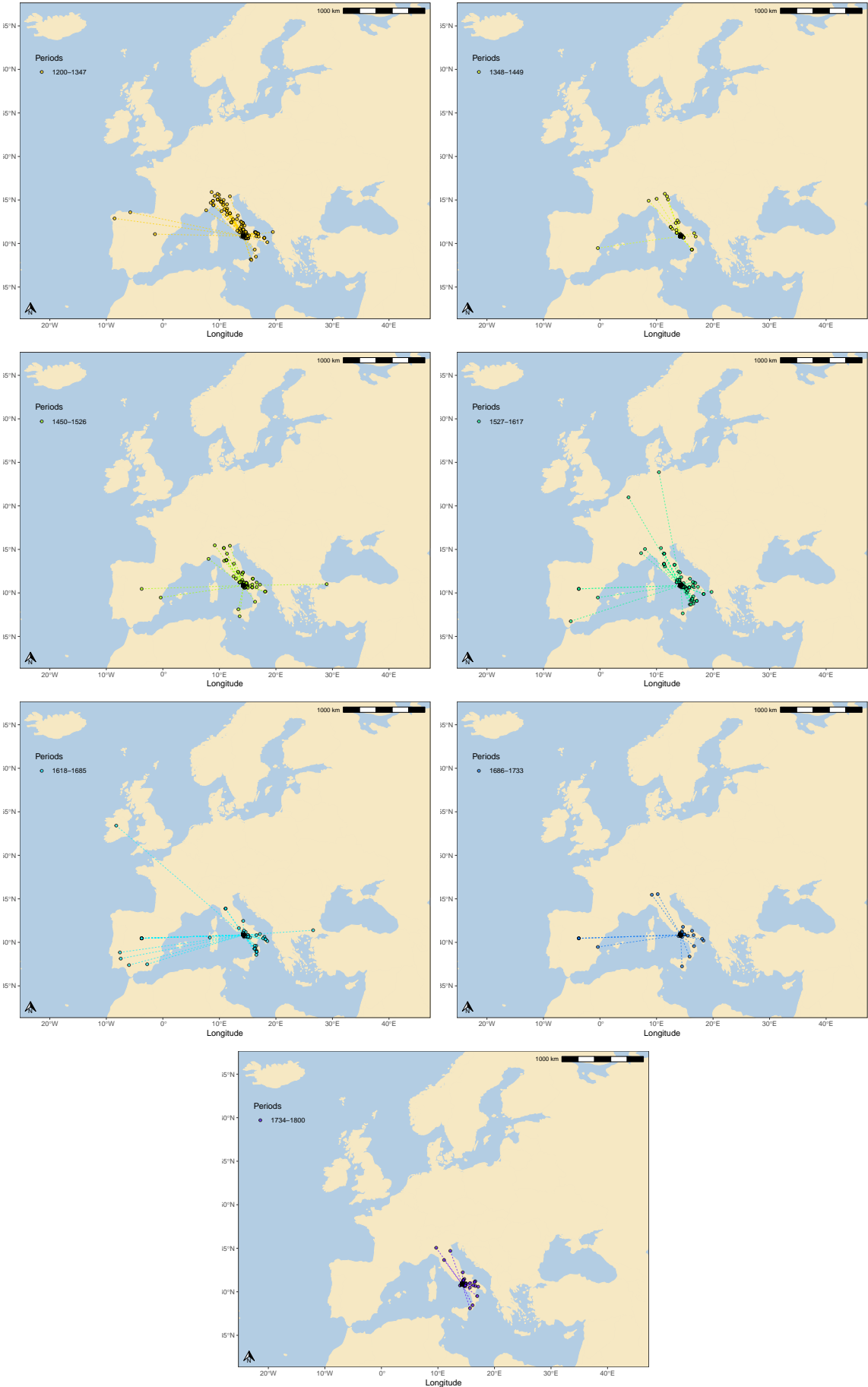


Figure 3: Places of birth of the scholars and literati at the University of Naples

3 DESCRIPTIVE STATISTICS

Table 1 displays descriptive statistics. The dataset includes information on 1,003 scholars. The quality of information is good regarding their places of birth. The average age at which they began teaching is quite high, 38.3 years, and it tends to decrease only in the most recent periods. This can be explained by the fact that, in earlier centuries, professors were likely appointed after already having been active and having gained experience at other universities.

The median distance between professors' places of birth and the university is 51 km, a very low value that confirms the local nature of the university. Finally, 12.4 of the scholars have a Wikipedia page (in some language), while 19.3 of them have left a footprint in the world's library catalogs, as recorded in VIAF. Those are below average numbers.

4 FIELDS

Figure 2 illustrates the distribution of teaching disciplines, which is relatively balanced across law, medicine, and the humanities. The *Studium* was primarily established to train the new administration of the kingdom, which required more competent officials. Regarding medicine, it was influenced by the tradition of the nearby Salerno school.

A rather interesting element observed when adding professors to the database is their flexibility when it came to teaching subjects that were often very different from each other. This characteristic is confirmed by Celestino Galiani (the prefect of Royal Studies, with full authority over the faculty and students of the University of Naples in 1731), who explains that professors in Naples were poorly paid, and therefore had to switch from one chair to another in order to secure a better salary (Boutier 2005).

5 PLACES OF BIRTH

Figure 3 displays the documented birthplaces for the scholars who were active at the University of Naples by period. At the time of its foundation, a significant number of faculty members came from northern and central Italy. This phenomenon can easily be explained: in the 13th century, most Italian universities were located in the northern regions of the peninsula, which served as the main pool for graduates and educators. However, in the following centuries, a stronger local presence characterized the composition of the faculty. It is also worth noting the university's connection with Spain, which persisted until the first half of the 18th century and brought numerous scholars from there.

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 five best scholars active in Naples 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. In its early years, the University of Naples managed to attract numerous professors with a high human capital. After its reopening in 1507, it continued to draw distinguished scholars, albeit to a lesser extent than in its initial period. It was only in the 18th century that a significant revival in academic standards was observed, marked by an increase in the quality of professors and intellectual output.

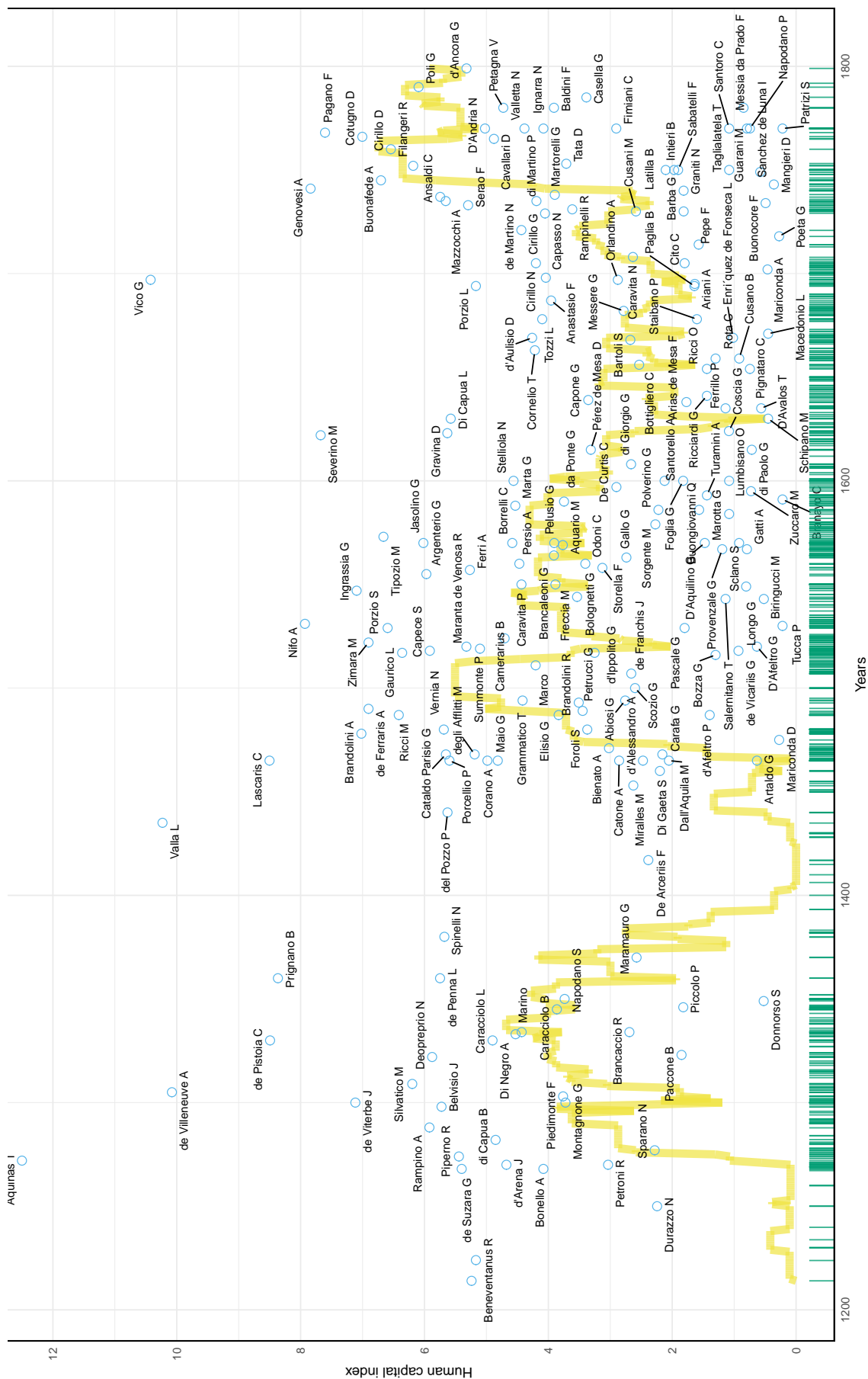


Figure 4: Famous scholars and university notability (orange)

7 TOP 5 PROFESSORS

Thomas Aquinas (Roccasecca 1225 – Fossanova 1274) was a Dominican friar, theologian, and philosopher, among the most influential figures of the Middle Ages. At the age of five, he was sent to the Abbey of Montecassino as an oblate, and around the age of fourteen, he enrolled at the newly established Studium Generale in Naples. There, in 1241, he encountered the Dominican order, which he joined, taking the habit in 1244. He continued his studies in Paris and Cologne, where he became a student of Albert the Great, one of the most renowned scholars of the time. Aquinas later served as the director of the Dominican College of Saint-Jacques in Paris, but due to intellectual tensions, he moved back to Cologne. Returning to Naples in the final years of his life, he completed part of his *Summa Theologiae*, attracting students from across Europe. He died in 1274 and was canonized in 1323. Since 1567, he has been recognized as a Doctor of the Church and, since 1880, as the patron saint of universities and Catholic educational institutions.

Giambattista Vico (Naples 1668 – Naples 1774) was a philosopher, historian, and jurist, renowned for his innovative view of human history based on the eternal cycle of recurrence, as outlined in his main work *Scienza nuova* (1725). Born into a modest family, he began his philosophical studies at the Jesuit college and continued them as a self-taught scholar. Later, encouraged by his father, he pursued legal studies, earning a degree in canon and civil law, probably in Salerno, between 1693 and 1694. In 1699, he was appointed to the chair of rhetoric at the University of Naples, a position he held until 1741. He led a reclusive and modest life, experiencing periods of significant physical and financial hardship. He worked intensively, gaining some fame, which in 1735 earned him the position of royal historiographer from King Charles III of Bourbon, thus improving his financial situation. He died in Naples in 1744.

Arnaldus de Villa Nova (Villeneuve lès Maguelone 1240 – Genoa 1311) was a Catalan physician, alchemist, and theologian, considered one of the most important representatives of medieval medicine and the alchemical tradition. He studied in Montpellier, Paris, and several Italian universities, acquiring extensive knowledge of the medical and philosophical sciences. In 1305, he served as a lecturer at the studium in Naples. The Inquisition later banned his books because he predicted the end of the present era and the coming of the Antichrist by the mid-14th century.

Costantino Lascaris (– Messina 1501) was a Greek humanist, philologist, and teacher. After the fall of Constantinople, he moved to Italy, becoming the tutor of Ippolita Sforza, who would later marry King Alfonso II of Naples. In 1465, he was called to teach rhetoric, and Greek language and literature courses at the University of Naples. Lascaris is remembered for the Greek grammar he wrote, titled *Erotémata*, which was printed in 1476. It was the first book entirely written in the Greek language to be printed in Europe.

Bartolomeo Prignano (Naples 1318 – Rome 1389) was an Italian theologian and cardinal, elected pope under the name Urban VI. After studying canon law, he was appointed rector of the Studium of Naples. His rapid ecclesiastical career culminated in 1378, when, following the death of Pope Gregory XI, he was elected pope during a period of severe instability within the Church, marked by the beginning of the Western Schism. His election was contested by some cardinals, who deemed him unsuitable, but despite the opposition, Urban VI was committed to implementing significant reforms.

8 RELATED SCHOLARS

Beyond those who taught at the University of Naples, at least two important individuals are related to the university. They are counted in the data for all figures but Figure 3.

Dino Rosoni (Florence 1253 – Bologna 1303), also known as Dino del Mugello, was a prominent Italian jurist of the 13th century. After earning his degree in law in Bologna in 1279, he accepted a five-year teaching position in Pistoia, where he taught civil law and counted a young Cino da Pistoia among his students. In 1284, he returned to Bologna, and in 1289, the city council entrusted him with the extraordinary lecturing of the *Inforziato*. In 1296, Charles II offered him a chair at the University of Naples with a generous salary, but Rosoni declined the offer. His reputation as an outstanding civil lawyer caught the attention of Pope Boniface VIII, who, in 1297, summoned him to Rome to assist in compiling the *Liber Sextus*, a collection of decrees from general councils and pontiffs from Gregory IX to Boniface VIII.

Lorenzo Valla (Rome 1407 – Rome 1457) was a humanist, philologist, and theologian, who is famous for his rediscovery of Latin classics and his critical approach to the authorities of his time. Born in Rome, he studied at the University of Padua, where he refined his knowledge of Latin and philosophy. In 1431, with the help of Antonio Beccadelli, known as the Panormita, Valla was invited to teach rhetoric at the University of Pavia, where he remained until 1433. Later, he held temporary positions at various universities in Italy. During this time, he came into contact with King Alfonso V of Aragon, who appointed him his secretary in 1435, defended him from attacks from his enemies, and encouraged him to open a school in Naples. With his radical critiques of the Catholic Church, Valla was a precursor to Luther and promoted numerous revisions of ecclesiastical texts.

9 UNIVERSITY NETWORK

Our assumption is that a professor's involvement in multiple universities throughout their career establishes a link between those institutions. We present the universities that were connected to the University of Naples during each period in Figure 5. Until 1617, the Studium maintained connections with various universities through its professors. In the early centuries, these connections were primarily with Italian institutions, aiming to attract the best scholars. However, from the 17th century onward, these relationships expanded significantly, involving European universities as well, and not only Spanish institutions as one might expect. Notably, some universities in Eastern Europe and the Holy Roman Empire stand out.

10 CENSORSHIP AND HUMAN CAPITAL

At the University of Naples, as many as 15 scholars were censured by the Catholic Church. Their works are listed in the *Index librorum prohibitorum* De Bujanda and Richter (2002), a catalog of publications banned by the religious institution and established in 1559 by Pope Paul IV. Consistent with the findings of Blasutto and De la Croix (2023), the scholars included in this index were, on average, of high quality. This is particularly true of professors in the 15th century. Over time, however, the gap diminishes.

11 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 names of lunar craters. Among the professors of Naples who had this honor was the bishop and astrologer Luca Guarico (1475-1558), who, through the study of judicial astrology (a branch of astrology focused on predicting events related to individuals' lives), predicted the events in the lives of many prominent figures of the time.

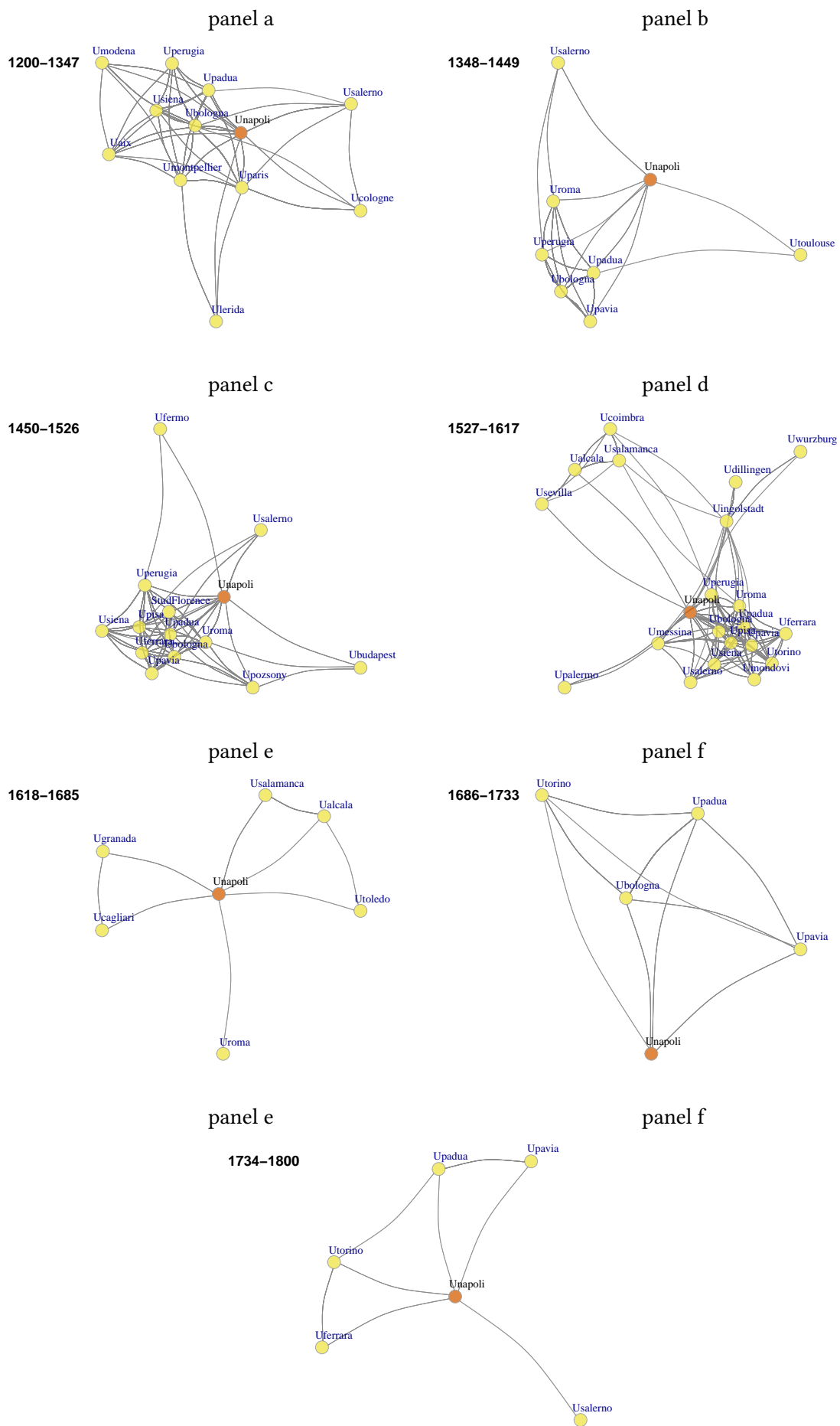


Figure 5: Links between Naples and other universities through scholars’ mobility by period



Figure 6: The Cortile delle Statue. Photo by D. De la Croix

12 ANECDOTES

Giuniano Maio, a distinguished professor of rhetoric at the University of Naples, was renowned not only for his academic achievement, but also for a peculiar talent that made him highly popular: dream interpretation. It is said that he could often be found walking the streets of the city, surrounded by common folk eager to hear him reveal the meaning of their dreams.

13 IF YOU VISIT NAPLES

In the early centuries following its foundation, the University of Naples did not have a fixed location. Lessons were held in private buildings, at professors' homes, or in Neapolitan monasteries, most notably the Monastery of San Domenico Maggiore.

Around 1560, during the Spanish period, the university found a permanent home in the *Palazzo dei Regi Studi*, located at the heart of the city's historic center. This palace, also known as the *Collegio dei Gesuiti* (Jesuit College), became the seat of the schools of the Society of Jesus starting in the mid-16th century. The Jesuits acquired the palace in 1554 from Gian Tommaso Carafa, its original owner, who had built it in the 15th century.

In 1777, the *Palazzo dei Regi Studi* underwent extensive renovations to enhance its educational and logistical efficiency. Architecturally, the building reflects a blend of Late Renaissance and Neapolitan Baroque styles. Construction began in the 16th century and was completed in the 18th century during the Bourbon period.

One of the most captivating features is the central courtyard, surrounded by porticoes with round arches supported by columns, which create a luminous, elegant atmosphere. This space, known as the *Cortile delle Statue* (Courtyard of the Statues), was enriched in 1865 with statues of some of the most illustrious scholars who taught at the *Studium* in Naples, adding symbolic significance to the site while embellishing it (Figure 6).

14 FINAL THOUGHTS

The University of Naples was established as an institution independent of the Catholic Church, with the aim, from its very inception, of aligning itself with the intellectual currents of its time.

ACKNOWLEDGMENTS

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Homepage: <https://perso.uclouvain.be/david.delacroix/uthc.html>

Database: <https://shiny-lidam.sipr.ucl.ac.be/scholars/>

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