

Scholars and Literati at the Collège de Clermont in Paris (1563–1762)

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This note is a summary description of the set of scholars and literati who taught at the *Collège de Clermont* (renamed Collège Louis-le-Grand) until the expulsion of the Jesuits in 1762.

1 SOURCES

The database is primarily based on two sources. First, we relied on Gustave Dupont-Ferrier's *Du Collège de Clermont au Lycée Louis-le-Grand* (1921). Dupont-Ferrier, an honorary professor at the Lycée Louis-le-Grand, traces the history of the college, the organization of its teaching, and the composition of its faculty. Second, the *Bibliothèque de la Compagnie de Jésus* by Sommervogel (1890) provided valuable biographical information on the scholars. Additional encyclopedic works, such as the *Biographie universelle ancienne et moderne* by the Michaud brothers (1811) and Herbermann's *Catholic Encyclopedia* (1913) were also used to complete the database.

2 THE COLLEGE

The Collège de Clermont was founded in Paris in 1563 by the Jesuits, following the initiative of Guillaume Du Prat, Bishop of Clermont, who left the Society a bequest to purchase the Cour de Langres on rue Saint-Jacques, in the Latin Quarter. The institution, tolerated but not officially recognized by the University of Paris, opened its doors on October 1, 1563, during the French Wars of Religion, with the aim of providing a modern Catholic education grounded in the *studia humanitatis* and in Aristotelian-Thomistic philosophy. Its early success provoked opposition from the Sorbonne, which saw the Jesuits as a threat to its authority. After the attempted assassination of Henry IV by Jean Châtel (1594), a former student of the college, the Jesuits were accused of complicity, expelled from France, and the college was closed. With the Edict of 1603, Henry IV authorized their return; in 1618, the college finally reopened, thanks also to Louis XIII's support. Between 1620 and 1660, the institution experienced remarkable growth, enrolling up to 2,500 students, including members of the leading noble families of France. Following a visit from Louis XIV, in 1682 the college received royal patronage and the title of Collège Louis-le-Grand. After the suppression of the Society of Jesus in 1762, the institution was transformed by royal decree into the Collège Louis-le-Grand, *chef-lieu* of the University of Paris.

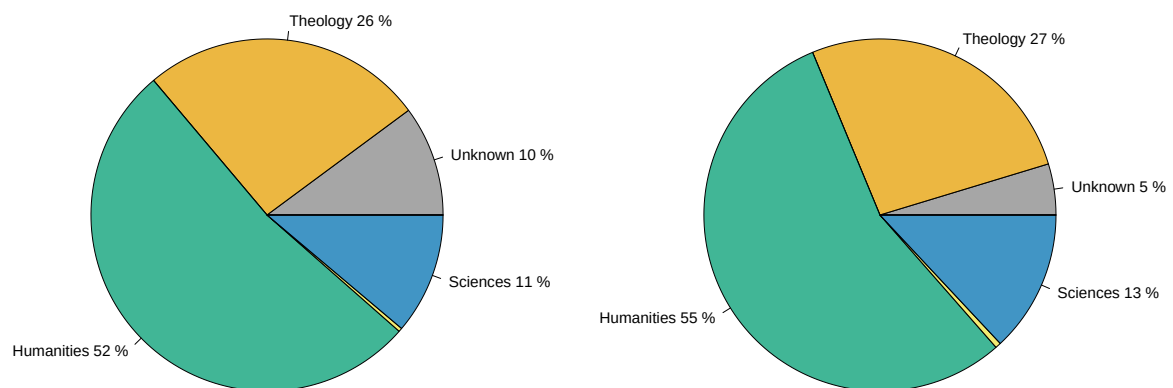


Figure 1: Broad fields at the Collège de Clermont (left:all scholars; right: published scholars)

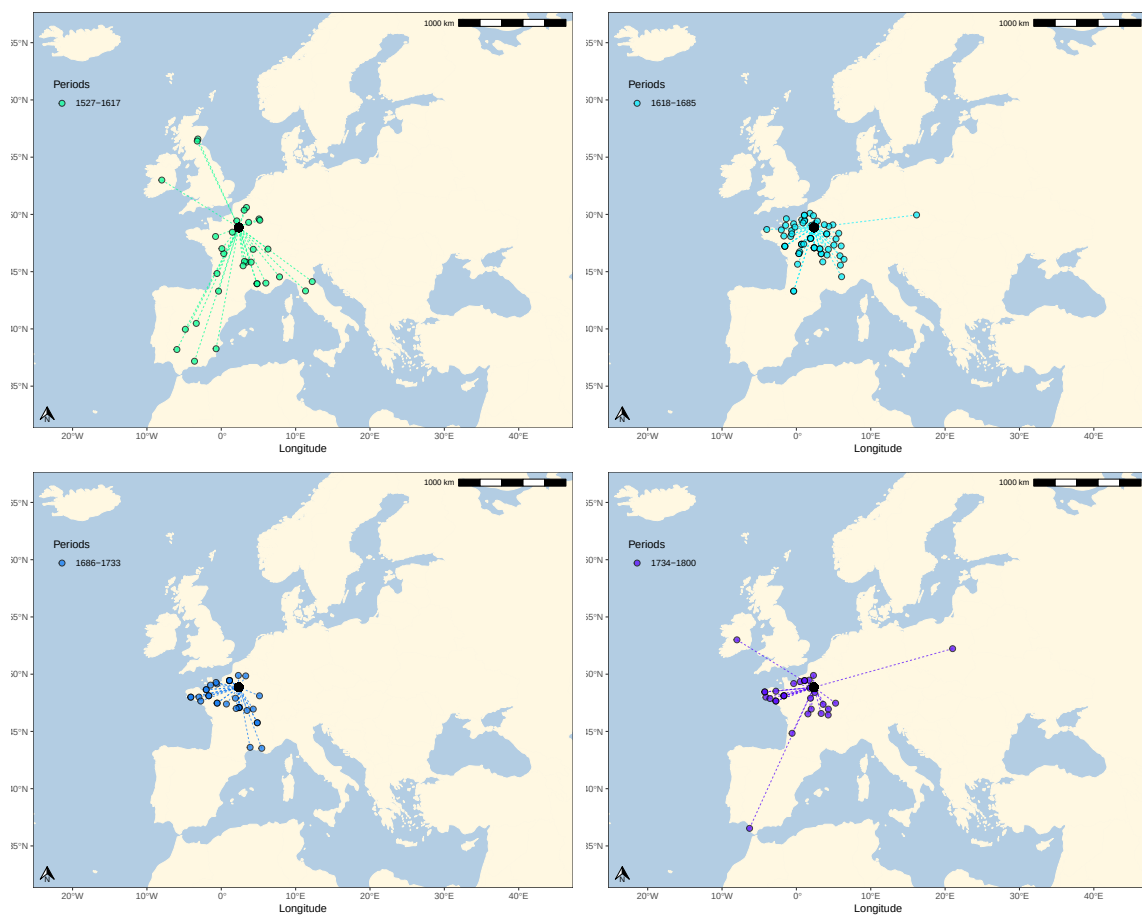


Figure 2: Places of birth of the scholars and literati at the Collège de Clermont

3 DESCRIPTIVE STATISTICS

Table 1 displays descriptive statistics. The dataset includes information on 254 scholars. The quality of the biographical information is high: 80.7% of the individuals have a known date of birth, and 71.3% a known birthplace.

The presence of scholars in Wikipedia declines from 35.8% in the first period to 17.9% in the last, while it remains more stable in VIAF, rising from 49.1% to 56.4%. This pattern indicates that professors from earlier centuries, particularly those of the seventeenth century, are more visible today in digital resources than those of the late eighteenth century, whose work was mostly internal or administrative in nature.

Period	no. 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	53	58.5	62.3	30.5	67.7	374	35.8	49.1
1618–1685	107	83.2	72.9	40.2	69.5	197	40.2	70.1
1686–1733	55	87.3	70.9	43.8	69.5	218	21.8	63.6
1734–1800	39	94.9	79.5	40.6	67.9	266	17.9	56.4
1200–1800	254	80.7	71.3	39.5	69	228	31.9	62.2

Table 1: Summary statistics by period

4 FIELDS

Figure 1 illustrates the distribution of teaching disciplines, for all scholars on the left, and for published scholars on the right. In both cases, the humanities form by far the largest group, comprising 52% of all scholars and 55% of published authors, followed by theology, with 26% and 27% respectively, and by the sciences, which account for 11% and 13%. The proportions remain almost identical between the total population and the subgroup of published scholars, suggesting that the publication activity was not confined to a single field but rather spread relatively evenly across disciplines.

5 PLACES OF BIRTH

Figure 2 displays the documented birthplaces for the scholars who were active at the Collège de Clermont by period. The median distance between birthplace and college decreases significantly from the first to the second period, falling from 374 km to 197 km, and then remains stable. This suggests that, over time, the college hired professors born closer to the institution, probably because Jesuit careers increasingly developed within the same religious province, with fewer transfers between regions or countries. In the early decades, the geographical origins of the scholars were rather diverse, with a significant presence of individuals from various European regions, particularly from Italy, Spain, and the Low Countries. As the institution became more established, the composition gradually grew more homogeneous and increasingly centered on France, reflecting the college's integration into the national context and the growing importance of Paris as a major center for Jesuit education.

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 Paris 25 years before that date. The details are given in De la Croix et al. (2024) (for notability of institution) and Curtis et al. (2025) (for our individual measures of human capital). Figure 3

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.

7 TOP 5 PROFESSORS

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

Pierre-François-Xavier de Charlevoix (Saint-Quentin 1682 – La Flèche 1761) was a French Jesuit teacher, historian, and writer. Born into the minor nobility, he was educated by the Jesuits at the Collège Louis-le-Grand. He subsequently taught grammar in Quebec City before returning to France, where he was ordained a priest and became a professor of humanities and philosophy at the Collège Louis-le-Grand. Charlevoix later undertook several exploratory voyages to the Americas. He is best known for his accounts of the New World, particularly *Histoire et description générale de la Nouvelle France*.

Louis Bourdaloue (Bourges 1632 – Paris 1704) was a preacher and professor. Educated at the Jesuit college in Bourges, he entered the Society of Jesus in 1648. At the age of twenty-four, he became a professor of theology, rhetoric, and philosophy at the Collège de Clermont, where he taught for four years. His outstanding reputation soon brought him to preach at the royal court, earning him the nickname “king of preachers and preacher of kings.” His sermons were renowned for their moral rigor, the strength of their reasoning, and their accessibility to all audiences.

Juan de Mariana (Talavera 1536 – Toledo 1624) was a Spanish Jesuit priest and professor. He studied at the University of Madrid before teaching theology in Rome. In 1569, he was sent to Paris to hold the chair of theology at the Collège de Clermont, where his commentaries on the writings of Thomas Aquinas met with great success. He returned to Spain four years later and devoted himself to writing numerous works, some of which proved controversial. His treatise *De rege et regis institutione*, for example, in which he justified tyrannicide, was very poorly received in France and created considerable difficulties for the Jesuit order.

Giovanni Botero (Bene Vagienna c. 1544 – Turin 1617) was an Italian priest, political thinker, and man of letters. He taught rhetoric and philosophy at various Italian and French colleges, including the Collège de Clermont between 1567 and 1569. His difficult temperament led to his expulsion from the Society of Jesus in 1580. He later entered the service of the Cardinal Archbishop of Milan, followed by the Prince of Piedmont, and finally Cardinal Federico Borromeo. Botero published numerous works on political philosophy and economics, several of which brought him considerable fame.

Denis Pétau (Orléans 1583 – Paris 1652) was a theologian and philologist. He studied in Orléans and Paris before teaching philosophy in Bourges. In 1605, he joined the Society of Jesus and continued his theological studies in Pont-à-Mousson. From 1618 onwards, he taught rhetoric and, later, positive theology at the Collège de Clermont. He was renowned at the college for his exceptional command of Greek and was praised for his ability to engage young minds, mentor them, and identify the most talented students. At the age of sixty, he ceased teaching but remained as the librarian at Clermont. He devoted the rest of his life to composing his major work, *Dogmata theologica*, a monumental treatise on dogmatic theology that was highly influential in the seventeenth century, in which Pétau systematized the historical development of Christian doctrines.

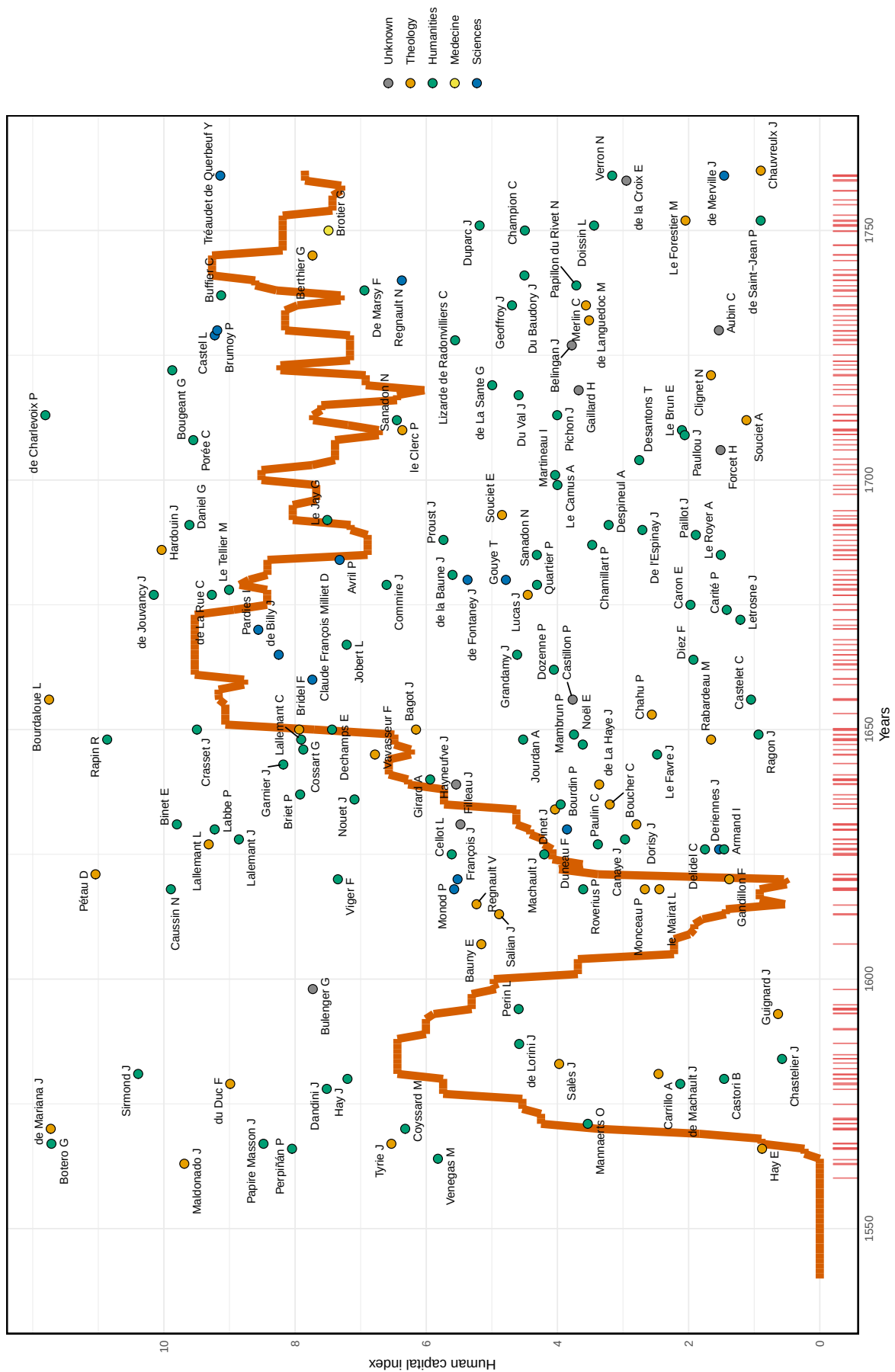


Figure 3: Famous scholars and college notability (orange)

8 RELATED SCHOLARS

Beyond those who taught at the Collège de Clermont, several significant individuals were related to the college. From their writings, we can deduce that they also probably taught there. They are counted in the data for all figures but Figure 3.

Francisco Suárez (Granada 1548 – Lisbon 1617) was a Spanish Jesuit, philosopher, and theologian. He studied law, philosophy, and theology at Salamanca, where he entered the Society of Jesus. He later taught philosophy and theology in various cities across Spain, Portugal, and Italy, including Ávila, Alcalá, Segovia, Valladolid, Coimbra, and Rome. According to Sommervogel, he also taught in Paris; however, this information has been refuted by more recent studies. The origin of this claim seems to stem from a confusion between the great prestige associated with his work in France – which was read and commented upon in Paris soon after publication – and an actual presence or teaching appointment there, for which no documents or college records exist (O'Neill and Domínguez 2001).

9 WHO'S WHO ON THE MOON

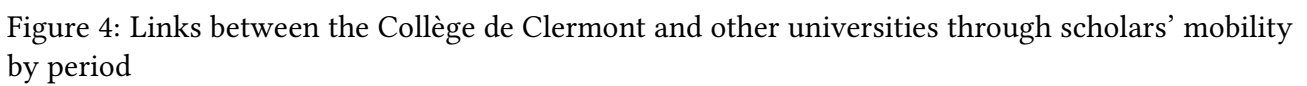
Another way to measure the notability of individuals is to look for signs of recognition such as street names, but also lunar crater names. The following three professors were thus honored, in recognition of their contribution to the advancement of mathematics. Among the scholars of the Collège de Clermont in Paris, Denis Pétau – who has been mentioned above – and Jacques de Billy (Compiègne, 1602 – Dijon, 1679) share the distinction of having lunar craters named after them. The latter taught at several colleges, including Pont-à-Mousson, Reims, Dijon, Grenoble, and Clermont. At the Collège de Clermont, he carried out astronomical observations from the school's observatory, known as "La Guérite." His mathematical research focused mainly on number theory, and he was among the first scholars to reject the influence of astrology on scientific inquiry.

10 COLLEGE NETWORK

Following De la Croix and Morault (2025), our assumption is that a professor's involvement in multiple universities throughout their career establishes a link between those institutions. Figure 4 illustrates the connections between the Collège de Clermont and other institutions through scholars' mobility across periods. In the first period, the college appears connected both to other universities and to several Jesuit colleges, reflecting its integration within a broader academic network. In the following centuries, the links with universities gradually disappear, while those with other Jesuit colleges become more prominent, indicating the progressive incorporation of the college into the internal structure of the Society of Jesus and the increasing specialization of its educational role.

11 IF YOU VISIT PARIS

The *Collège de Clermont* is located at number 123 of rue Saint-Jacques, an ancient Roman road. It is on this very street that the first printing press in Paris was established, and it still boasts some of the city's most important cultural and educational institutions, such as the Collège de France and the Sorbonne. Of the college's original buildings, two historic towers remain: the Belvédère Tower and, above all, the Sundial Tower, erected in 1679. This scientific masterpiece, restored in 1988, features eight dials designed for the teaching of astronomy. On its southern façade, the following motto can be read: *Plures labori, dulcibus quaedam otii* (many for work, others for sweet leisure). The motto symbolically comments on the course of the sun and the hours marked by the sundial, distinguishing between the moments of the day devoted to work and those to rest, in keeping with the Jesuit ideal of discipline and moderation in the use of time.



12 ANECDOTE

The Western presence in the Ottoman Empire always required the use of interpreters. From 1551 onward, Venice sent young citizens to Constantinople. These apprentices, whom the Senate destined for the profession of *dragomans*, were known as *jeunes de langue* (“language youths”). Subsequently, a similar model developed in France. The Collège de Clermont in Paris hosted the school for young interpreters (*école des jeunes de langue*), where Armenian and Greek were among the languages taught. This type of institution expanded from the seventeenth century onward, as relations between Europe and the Middle East intensified and the knowledge of these languages became increasingly necessary. It was King Louis XIV who ordered the creation of this school, granting twelve scholarships to young French students in order to train them in Eastern languages (Hitzel 2013). In addition to the college’s teachers, non-Jesuit scholars who were members of the Collège de France also joined the institution.

13 FINAL THOUGHTS

Since its foundation, the college has stood out for the quality of its teaching and for the lasting impact it has had on the education of intellectual elites.

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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