

# Scholars and Literati at the Academy of Georgofili (1753 – 1800)

Blandine Clément

Chiara Zanardello

IRES/LIDAM, UCLouvain

This note summarizes our research into the group of scholars and literati who were at the Academy of Georgofili in Florence from 1753 to 1800.

## 1 SOURCES

Maylender (1930) elaborates on the history of the Academy and provides insights into a few of its members (p. 460, Vol.1). However, our primary and more comprehensive source is the book *“Degli Studi e delle vicende della Reale Accademia dei Georgofili - nel primo secolo della sua esistenza”*, written by Tabarrini and published in 1856 (Tabarrini 1856). This historical account includes thorough lists of members, categorized as either ordinary or honorary members, along with their likely dates of affiliation. Tabarrini acknowledges the scarcity of sources about memberships during the academy’s initial years of operation, with names often inferred from the recollections preserved by the Secretaries of the Academy of that time.

The Academy is still active today, and we have imported the most relevant online lists into our database. This is particularly pertinent for corresponding members, a category introduced only after 1771 (Tabarrini 1856). We have also made use of the online digital archive, utilizing relevant “Memories,” to recover significant detail about members’ fields of study, even though a substantial number lack additional information (Accademia dei Georgofili 2023a).

## 2 THE ACADEMY

The Georgofili Academy was founded in Florence in 1753, prompted by an essay by Abbot Ubaldo Montelatici in which he suggested new horizons for agronomic research. At the time, Italy was in a critical socio-economic situation, not least because of severe famines. The academy had an innovative, democratic structure under which people ranging from land owners to learned men were encouraged to collaborate. The academy first gained renown thanks to the support of Prince Pietro Leopoldo di Lorena (Accademia dei Georgofili 2023b). By the 19th century, it became a centre of national agrarian progress. The academy also distinguished itself in the field of oenology. Many of its innovations helped to improve living standards and find economic solutions to problems caused by famine. The Academy of Georgofili still exists today, and is among the oldest institutions of its kind dealing with agronomy, environment and nutrition.

## 3 DESCRIPTIVE STATISTICS

Table 1 presents various descriptive statistics. For the Academy of Georgofili, we possess a comprehensive list encompassing 304 members, spanning the period from its inception in 1753 until 1800.

However, our sources offer limited personal details, and mostly pertain to the year of appointment. Consequently, our knowledge extends to birthplace and birth year for fewer than 40% of the individuals on our list. The same limitation applies to Wikipedia and VIAF links, which stand at

24.7% and 36.8% respectively. These percentages are in line with the average for the total set of institutions.

The average age at which a scholar attained ordinary membership was 43 years — this is relatively old for that era.

The median distance between birthplaces and the academy shows a predominant concentration of members from Florence and its adjoining regions, with an average distance of 37 kilometres. This geographical concentration is also shown in Figure 2, and further highlighted in Figure 3, where the barycentre almost overlaps with Florence itself.

Period	nb. obs	birth date	known place	mean age at appoint.	mean age at death	med. dist. birth-acad.	with Wiki.	with VIAF
1734-1800	304	33.9%	34.5%	43.1	71	37	24.7%	36.8%

Table 1: Summary statistics by period

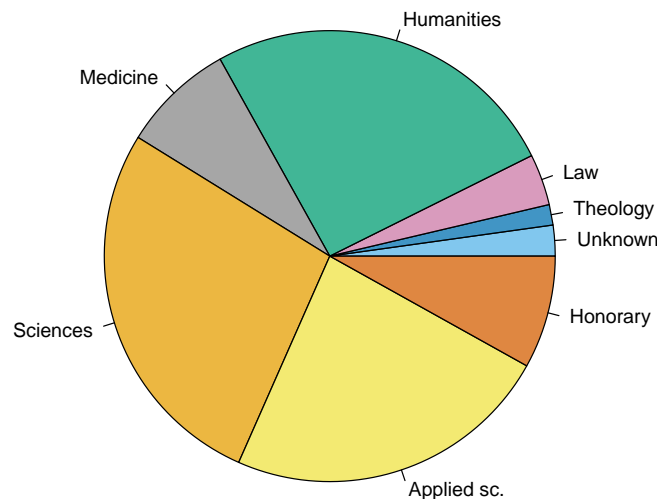


Figure 1: Broad fields at the Academy of Georgofili (published scholars only)

## 4 FIELDS

Figure 1 illustrates the distribution of fields of study at the Academy of Georgofili. Scientific and related disciplines dominated, encompassing 43.1% of the members' pursuits. If we include medicine within the realm of scientific subjects, the percentage increases to 47%. Around 19% of members are associated with humanities: this category includes scholars who produced specialized texts and historical works pertaining to the region, without being directly tied to scientific breakthroughs by other members of the institution.

The Academy of Georgofili also boasts a substantial number of honorary members. These individuals significantly enhanced the institution's prestige and credibility, albeit without directly contributing to Academy's skills and innovations.

## 5 PLACE OF BIRTH

Figure 2 displays the documented birthplaces of the members active at the Academy of Georgofili. Most of the Academy's members came, if not from Florence, from Tuscany and neighboring Italian

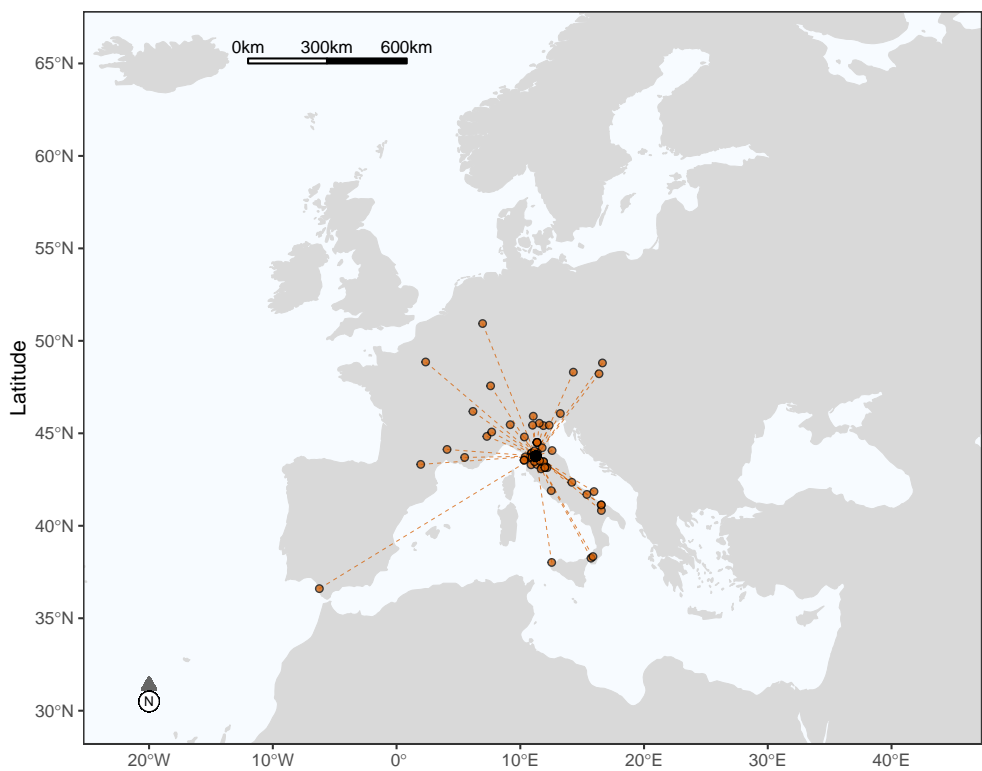


Figure 2: Places of birth of the members of the Academy of Georgofili

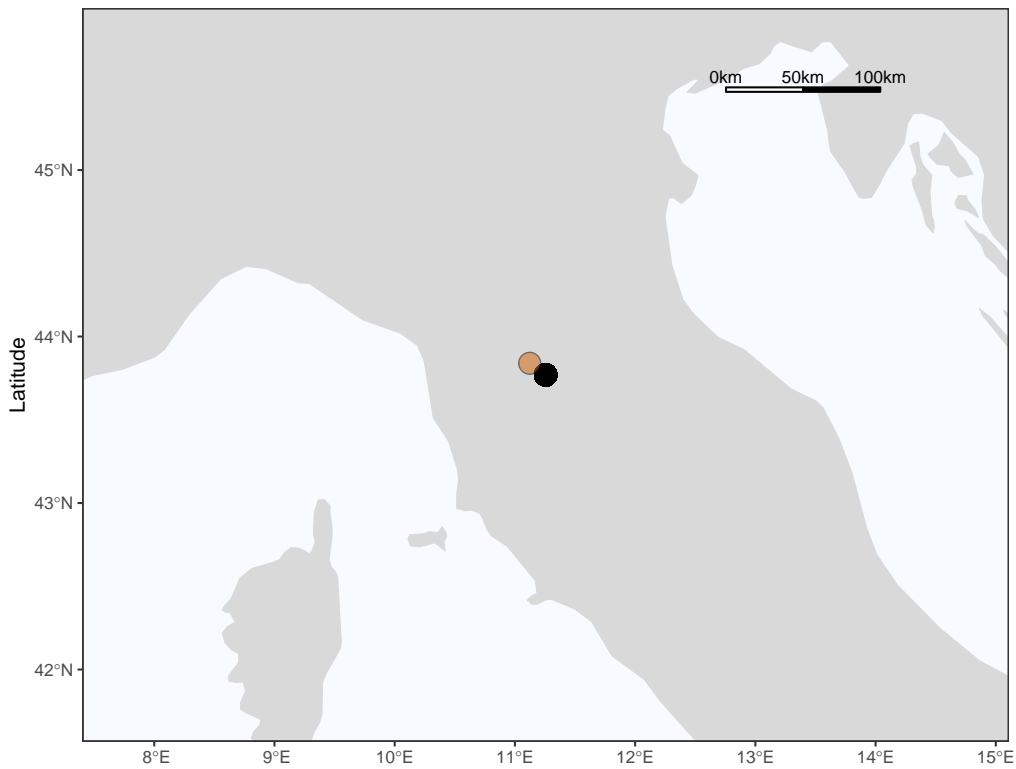


Figure 3: Barycentre of Academy of Georgofili members’ places of birth.

regions. This is also visible in Figure 3.

## 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 (for technical details see Curtis and De la Croix 2023). Figure 4 shows the names of all the ordinary members with a positive human capital index at the Academy of Georgofili. Honorary members do not appear.

## 7 TOP 5 SCHOLARS

**Francesco Bartolozzi** (Florence 1727 – Lisbon 1815) was an Italian draughtsman, painter and engraver. Even as a child, he already displayed excellent engraving skills. He attended the Florence Academy of Fine Arts and continued his training in Venice at Joseph Wagner's studio. He began to build a reputation for his prints and caricatures. In 1764, Bartolozzi moved to London and joined the Incorporated Society of Artists, receiving the title of Academician for his role in founding the Academy of Arts. During this extended stay, Bartolozzi popularised the stippling process. His growing reputation earned him membership in the Academy of Georgofili around 1784. He spent his last years in Lisbon, where he passed away.

**Josef von Sonnenfels** (Mikulov 1732 – Vienna 1817) was an Austrian Enlightenment writer, reformer and professor of political science. After completing his military service, he studied law in Vienna and worked as an assistant. In 1763, he began teaching at the University of Vienna, in parallel with a rich journalistic practice. His treatise against torture was followed by the abolition of the practice throughout Austria, a pioneering decision for Europe. As a scholar, he became member at the Academy of Georgofili in 1766 and at the Bohemian Society of Prague in 1770.

**Giovanni Bianchi** (Rimini 1693 – Rimini 1775) sometimes known as Jano Planco or Simone Cosmopolita, was an Italian physician, anatomist, archaeologist, and zoologist. He studied medicine, physics and botany at the University of Bologna. He then worked as a physician for 20 years. In 1741, he began teaching anatomy at the University of Siena, but resigned due to conflicts with other professors. His academic career also took him to the University of Padua and to the Royal Bohemian Society of Prague. He was member at Academy of Georgofili from its beginning and he joined the Crusca Academy in Florence. Throughout his life, his talent as a physician and his relationships with other important scholars brought him considerable renown.

**Giovanni Luigi Targioni Tozzetti** (Florence 1712 – Florence 1783) was an Italian physician and naturalist. He studied medicine and philosophy at the University of Pisa, before devoting himself to the study of botany. As an eminent scientist, he played an active role in the reform and organisation of the Tuscan State. Elected to the Crusca and Etrusca Academies, he was also one of the founders of the Academy of Georgofili in 1753. For the latter, he published several memoirs and helped to draw up the first set of rules. Targioni was one of the leading figures of Tuscan culture in the 18th century.

**Angelo Maria Bandini** (Florence 1726 – Fiesole 1803) was an Italian cleric, librarian and art collector. His work for the journal *Le Novelle Letterarie* brought him a certain notoriety in scholarly circles. He went to Rome, where he wrote his first famous work about the Obelisk on the Campus Martius. Back in Florence, he became director of the Biblioteca Marucelliana and the Biblioteca Medicea Laurenziana. He became an ordinary member of the Academy of Georgofili in 1754. His notable work made him one of the leading figures in Florentine cultural life during the Lorraine period.

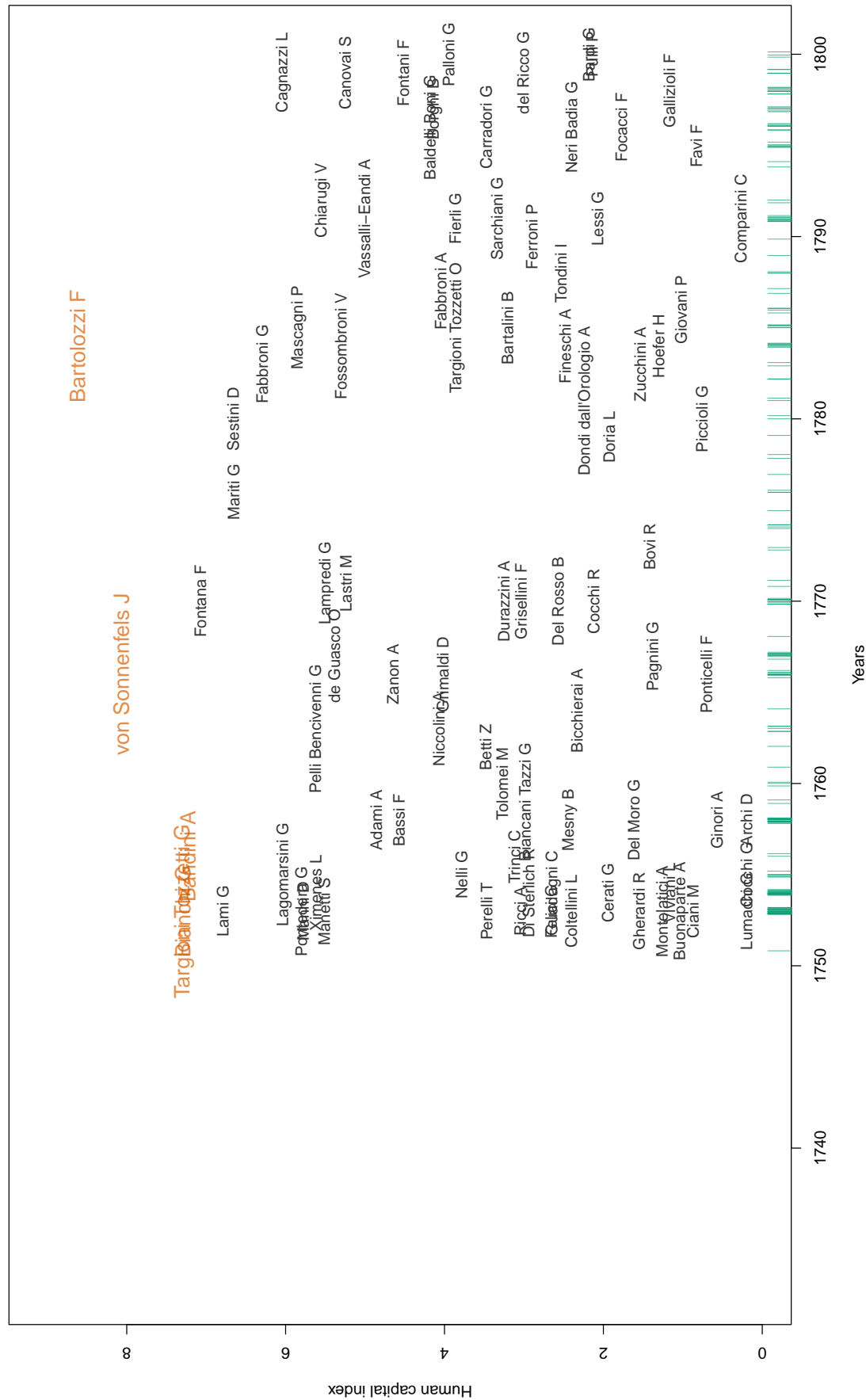


Figure 4: Famous scholars at the Academy of Georgofili

## 8 CENSORSHIP

Several members of the academy were censored by the Catholic Church in its *Index Librorum Prohibitorum* (De Bujanda and Richter 2002). These persons were not particularly renowned, illustrating the concept developed by Blasutto and De la Croix (2023) that the authors daring to be non-compliant with the Church doctrine were of declining quality during the eighteenth century. Three examples are:

**Giovanni Bianchi** (1693 Rimini – 1775 Rimini) was an Italian physician, anatomist, and university professor. His teaching and practice of anatomy disturbed the city’s clergy, who considered them contrary to Church doctrine. In 1752, his speech on the art of comedy was finally condemned by the Sacred Congregation of the Index in Rome. Bianchi was accused of promoting the Protestant religion, whose ideas on theatre differed from those of the Catholic tradition.

**Francesco Grisellini** (1717 Venice – 1787 Milano) was an Italian naturalist and botanist. In 1760, he took a stand in a political-religious debate concerning the alleged religious heterodoxy of Paolo Sarpi. In defence of the accused and in response to the Jesuits, Grisellini wrote a laudatory biography of Sarpi that provoked controversy entitled *Memorie anedote spettanti alla vita ed agli studi del sommo filosofo e giureconsulto F. Paolo servita, raccolte ed organizzate da F. Grisellini*.

**Giovanni Lami** (1697 Santa Croce sull’Arno – 1770 Florence) was an Italian historian, librarian and abbot. He was involved in founding the Academy of Georgofili. His criticism of clericalism and Jesuits’ subservience to the papacy, as well as his affinities with Jansenism, led to several disagreements with the Jesuits.

## 9 INTERACTION WITH FLORENTINE INSTITUTIONS

Being situated in Florence, the Academy of Georgofili may have fostered significant connections with other Florentine academies or universities within the city. Figure 5 visually depicts the interactions of the Academy of Georgofili with contemporaneous institutions, spanning roughly from 1735 to 1800. The Academy of Georgofili is represented in yellow and is the successor to the Botanic Academy (labeled as “A. Botanica” in Figure 5). According to Maylender (Maylender 1930), members of the Botanic Academy were granted the privilege of joining the Academy of Georgofili; however, only 7 out of 35 members made the transition.

The Accademia della Crusca, established in 1583, was active during the same period. For our analysis, we have included only the members active from 1734 onward, which is our designated cut-off year for the partitioned periods<sup>1</sup>. The most robust connection between the Academy of Georgofili and the Accademia della Crusca is the 37 scholars shared between them. The Accademia della Crusca was primarily a literary academy dedicated to promoting and safeguarding the Italian language (Vitale 2023). As such, it is probable that these 37 academics represent the substantial portion (62.7%) of the writers, poets, and philologists at the Academy of Georgofili.

Highlighted in green, we showcase the University of Florence, founded in 1321. To ensure optimal alignment with the Academy of Georgofili, we exclusively considered university professors active post-1734. It is important to note that the database of scholars affiliated with the University is an ongoing endeavour. However, the intersection with the Academy of Georgofili will not change and it appears limited. This observation extends to the University’s connection with the Accademia della Crusca, indicating a certain degree of divergence between university professors and academicians within the city of Florence.

1. In our primary analyses, we divide the period 1000 – 1800 into six distinct intervals. For additional details, see De la Croix et al. 2023.

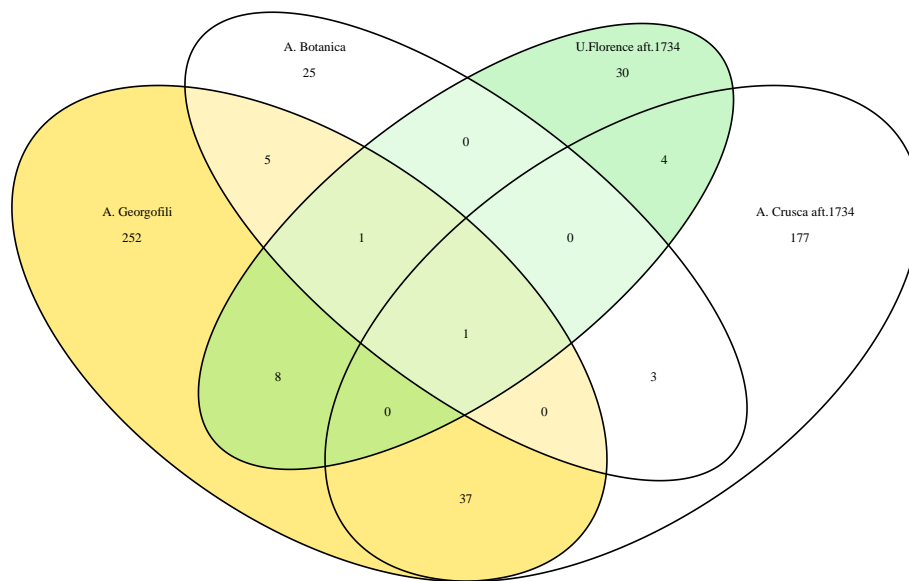


Figure 5: Interaction of the Academy of Georgofili with Botanic Academy of Florence, with Accademia della Crusca after 1735, and with the University of Florence after 1735.

## 10 ANECDOTES

The name of the Academy, "Georgofili," is derived from the Latin root "Geo," meaning "Earth." This etymology directly connects the name to the Academy's primary objective, as laid out by its founder in 1753: *"to conduct continuous and well-regulated experiments and observations, in order to perfect the highly beneficial Art of Tuscan cultivation"*. While the name might pose pronunciation challenges for non-Italian speakers, it aligns so well with the Academy's mission that it remains unaltered, as stated in the supplement to the 2014 Academy Act (Accademia dei Georgofili 2015).

## 11 FINAL THOUGHTS

Continuing its activities to the present day, the Academy of Georgofili has not achieved the same level of renown as the Accademia della Crusca, another Florentine institution established 170 years earlier. However, prior to 1800, the Academy of Georgofili attracted numerous eminent scientific intellects who were primarily dedicated to enhancing the local community through the resolution of practical challenges, such as the reclamation of swamplands in the Maremma Senese.

## 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."

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

Twitter: <https://twitter.com/UTHCerc>

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

First version August 23, 2023

## REFERENCES

- Accademia dei Georgofili. 2015. *The georgofili academy*. Supplement to “I Georgofili. Atti dell’Accademia dei Georgofili” 2014 - Series VII - Vol.11. <https://www.georgofili.it/download/1508.pdf>.
- . 2023a. *Archivio digitale*. <https://ad.georgofili.it/index2.asp>.
- . 2023b. *La storia dell’accademia*. <https://www.georgofili.it/contenuti/storia/103>.
- Blasutto, Fabio, and David De la Croix. 2023. Catholic censorship and the demise of knowledge production in early modern Italy. *The Economic Journal*, uead053. <https://doi.org/10.1093/ej/uead053>.
- Curtis, Matthew, and David De la Croix. 2023. Measuring human capital: from worldcat identities to viaf. *Repertorium Eruditorum Totius Europae* 10:17–22. <https://doi.org/10.14428/rete.v10i0/hc>.
- De Bujanda, Jésus Martínez, and Marcella Richter. 2002. *Index des livres interdits: index librorum prohibitorum*. Montréal: Médiaspaul.
- De la Croix, David, Frédéric Docquier, Alice Fabre, and Robert Stelter. 2023. The Academic Market and the Rise of Universities in Medieval and Early Modern Europe (1000-1800). Accepted in The Journal of the European Economic Association. <https://cepr.org/publications/dp14509>.
- Maylender, Michele. 1930. *Storia delle accademie d’Italia*. Vol. 5. L. Cappelli.
- Tabarrini, Marco. 1856. *Degli Studi e delle vicende della Reale Accademia dei Georgofili - nel primo secolo della sua esistenza*. M. Cellini & Co., Firenze.
- Vitale, Mara. 2023. Scholars and Literati at the Accademia della Crusca (1583–1800). *Repertorium Eruditorum Totius Europae* 10:39–45.