

Scholars and Literati at the Collegium Societatis Iesu Lovaniensis (1542–1773)

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This note is a summary description of the set of scholars and literati who taught at the *Collegium Societatis Iesu Lovaniensis*, the Jesuit College in the city of Leuven, from its inception in 1542 to its dissolution in 1773.

1 SOURCES

The names of the professors who taught at the *Collegium Societatis Iesu Lovaniensis* are not easy to find. The primary sources include the manuscripts from the Poncet collection, known as the "Catalogus Provinciae Societatis Jesu Flandro-Belgicae". These manuscripts consist of transcriptions of original texts, listing the names of Jesuits in various houses and colleges in the southern province of Belgium. Both the names and functions of each Jesuit are documented in these catalogues.

We used the work of Audenaert (2000), "Prosopographia iesuitica Belgica antiqua: (PIBA); a biographical dictionary of the Jesuits in the Low Countries; 1542-1773," to complete the biographical information of Jesuit professors. Other texts, such as those by Sommervogel (1890) and Poncet (1908), were equally useful sources of crucial details and relevant information.



Figure 1: Timeline of the *Collegium Societatis Iesu Lovaniensis*

2 THE COLLEGE

In 1542, when the truce between Charles V and Francis I was interrupted, the Jesuits, who had recently gathered around Ignatius of Loyola, were forced to leave Paris and received orders to go study at the University of Louvain. The first Jesuits arrived in Leuven on August 13, 1542. In 1551, Ignatius requested permission from Mary of Hungary to establish a college. In 1556, the queen granted the Jesuits the right to settle in the territories of the Low Countries (Van Even 1895). In a few years, the Jesuits managed to gain the trust of the population, as well as of the political and religious authorities, and they were allowed expand their presence in the city. The Council of Brabant (the highest law court in the historic Duchy of Brabant) granted permission to teach philosophy publicly in 1595. In the following years, the college benefited from the financial support of many prominent figures.

The library was enriched with significant collections, including that of Justus Lipsius. However, unlike what happened in Douai and in other important university centres, the college was never part of the university (Grendler 2019). The only professor who taught at both institutions was Harlemius Johannes Gulielmus (1538-1578), who was professor of Sacred Scriptures and Hebrew (Faesen 2012). As with all other Jesuit colleges, the Leuven college also closed its doors in 1773.

3 DESCRIPTIVE STATISTICS

Table 1 displays descriptive statistics. Overall, we found 160 scholars who taught at the *Collegium Societatis Iesu Lovaniensis*. Their years and places of birth are often known, which is common with Jesuits. For the whole period, 86.9% of birth years and 88.8% of birthplaces are known. This result can be attributed to the particularly accurate cataloging system adopted by the Jesuits for their members. The average age at first appointment was around 37.9 years. The median distance between the places of birth and activity is 77 km, highlighting the institution’s emphasis on proximity. The coverage of scholars on Wikipedia is relatively low, and the coverage on VIAF is in line with the average. Overall, 37.5% of the scholars appear in VIAF, compared to about 37% in the full database (all universities and academies).

Period	nb. obs	birth date known	birth place known	mean age at appoint.	mean age at death	med. dist. birth-univ.	with Wiki.	with VIAF
1527–1617	40	72.5	80	35.6	59.4	114	30	40
1618–1685	68	89.7	89.7	36.9	60.2	70	16.2	41.2
1686–1733	36	94.4	94.4	41.3	63.2	70	5.6	36.1
1734–1800	16	93.8	93.8	39.1	62.1	82	0	18.8
1527–1800	160	86.9	88.8	37.9	61	77	15.6	37.5

Table 1: Summary statistics by period

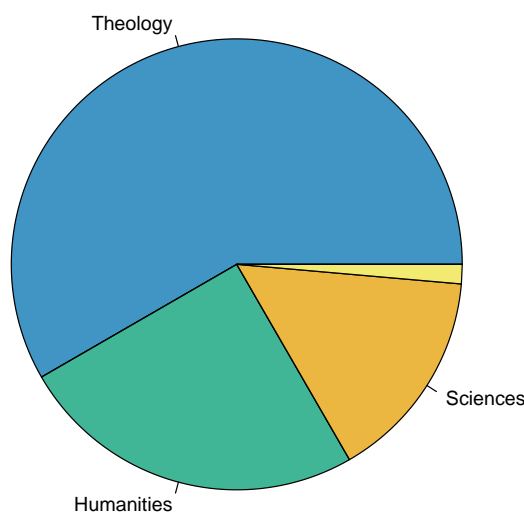


Figure 2: Broad fields at the *Collegium Societatis Iesu Lovaniensis* (published scholars only)

4 FIELDS

Figure 2 shows the balance between the different fields. Theology dominates, which is evidence of the proselytic aim of the college at its inception. Sciences are not negligible, however.

5 PLACE OF BIRTH

Figure 3 displays the documented birthplaces of scholars and literati active at the *Collegium Societatis Iesu Lovaniensis* by period. In the early two periods, a noteworthy number of scholars originating from the British Isles. Following the anti-Catholic persecutions perpetrated by Protestants, many Jesuits were compelled to emigrate to French territories and the Spanish Netherlands. As a result of these relocations, a English novitiate was established in Louvain around 1605, and subsequently elevated to the status of a college, with theology professors, in 1614. The college remained in Louvain until 1624, after which it relocated to Liège. The clustering of birthplaces and networking in the Southern Low Countries can be interpreted as both a consolidation and a strengthening of a Catholic stronghold at the northern border of the Catholic World. This phenomenon may account for the higher human capital index observed in the first half of the 17th century (see next section).

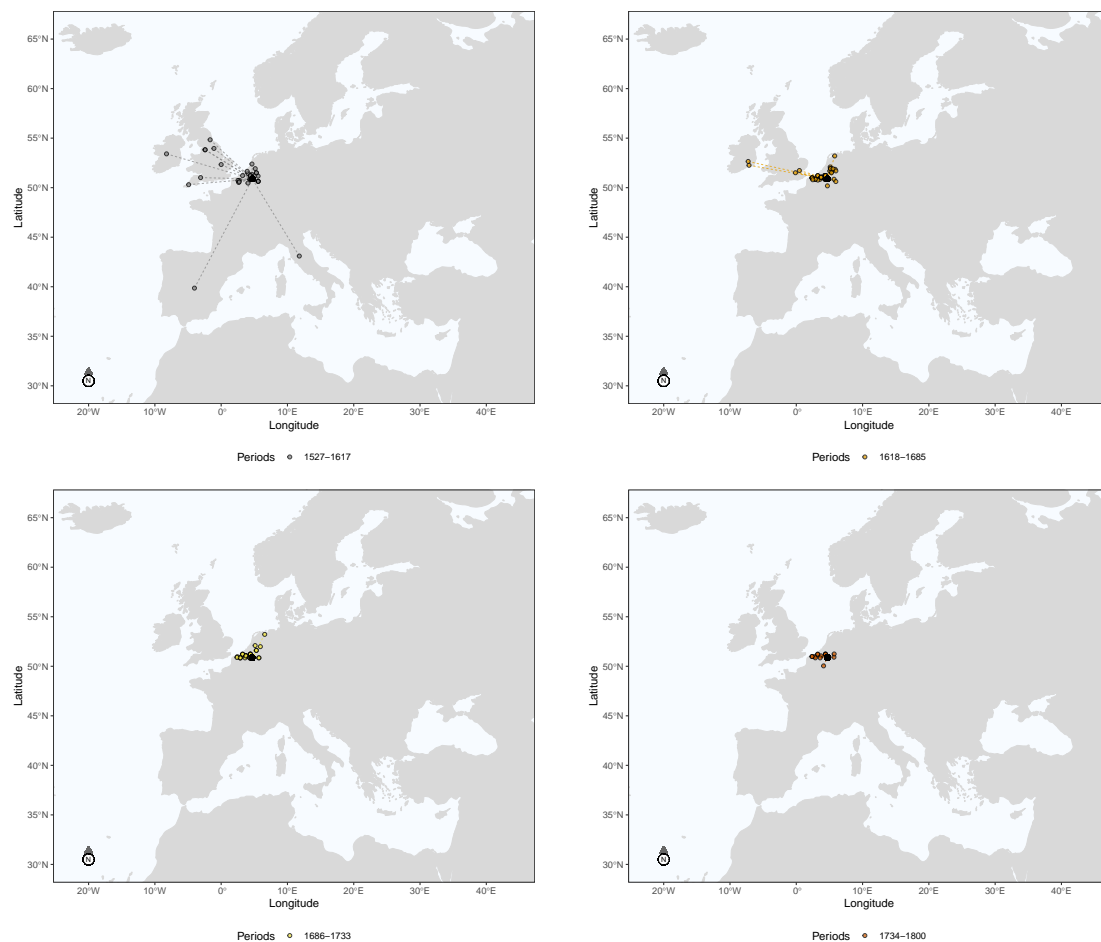


Figure 3: Places of birth of the scholars and literati at the *Collegium Societatis Iesu Lovaniensis*

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 Curtis and De la Croix (2023). Figure 4 shows the names of all the scholars with a positive

human capital index. We also compute the notability of the university at each date t by averaging the human capital of the best five scholars active at the *Collegium Societatis Iesu Lovaniensis* at some point in the 25 years before that t , and who had concluded their careers before t . The orange line indicates the notability of the college. It shows an apogee in the middle of the 17th century, followed by a slow decline. When the college closed in 1773, it was shadow of its former self.

7 TOP 5 PROFESSORS

Robertus Bellarminus (Montepulciano 1542 – Roma 1621) was an Italian theologian who taught at the *Collegium Societatis Iesu Lovaniensis* from 1570 to 1576 before moving to the Gregorian University in Rome (De la Croix and Karioun 2021a) also called Collegio Romano. His body can still be seen in the Church of the Gregorian University. More information is given in Catoire et al. (2021). Handwritten lecture notes of his classes in Leuven can be seen in the *Magister Dixit* project (<https://www.kuleuven.be/lectio/research/MagisterDixit>).

Leonardus Lessius (Acquoy 1585 – Ypres 1638) was a philosopher and theologian who started his academic career at the University of Douai, from 1575 to 1582, before moving the *Collegium Societatis Iesu Lovaniensis*. He taught in Leuven from 1585 to 1621. See Catoire et al. (2021).

Cornelius a Lapide (Bocholt 1567 – Rome 1637) was an exegete of Sacred Scripture. He studied at the Jesuit colleges of Maastricht and Cologne, and focused on literature, philosophy, and theology at the universities of Douai and Leuven. Joining the Society of Jesus in 1592, he spent a year and a half teaching philosophy before gaining prominence as a professor of Sacred Scripture in Leuven in 1596. The following year, he assumed the chair of Hebrew there. Called to Rome on November 3, 1616, he dedicated the remainder of his life to the Gregorian University, teaching Sacred Scripture and Hebrew until his death in 1637.

Andreas Tacquet (Antwerp 1612 – Antwerp 1660) was a mathematician who taught at the *Collegium Societatis Iesu Lovaniensis* from 1646 to 1660 (see Catoire et al. (2021)) before being called to the Imperial College of Madrid (De la Croix and Karioun 2021b).

Gregorius a Sancto Vincentio (Bruges 1584 – Ghent 1667) was a mathematician. He is renowned for his studies on squaring the circle. After studying literature in Bruges and philosophy in Douai, he joined the Jesuit order in Rome in 1605. There, he continued his philosophical studies and delved into mathematics under the guidance of another Jesuit, Cristoforo Clavio. He transitioned from being a teacher of literature to a professor of mathematics in Antwerp from 1618 to 1620, and later in Leuven from 1621 to 1624. In 1647, he published his major work, "Opus geometricum," asserting knowledge of at least four methods to solve the squaring of the circle, despite flawed demonstrations. Although criticized, his methods were praised by Huygens and later acknowledged by Leibniz for their contribution to the development of infinitesimal analysis. In addition to squaring the circle, Saint-Vincent also explored other area calculations using the "method of exhaustion," a technique derived from ancient methods, particularly those of Archimedes.

8 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 lunar crater names. The mathematician André Taquet (1612 – 1660) is the only Jesuit scholar from this college to whom a crater has been dedicated.

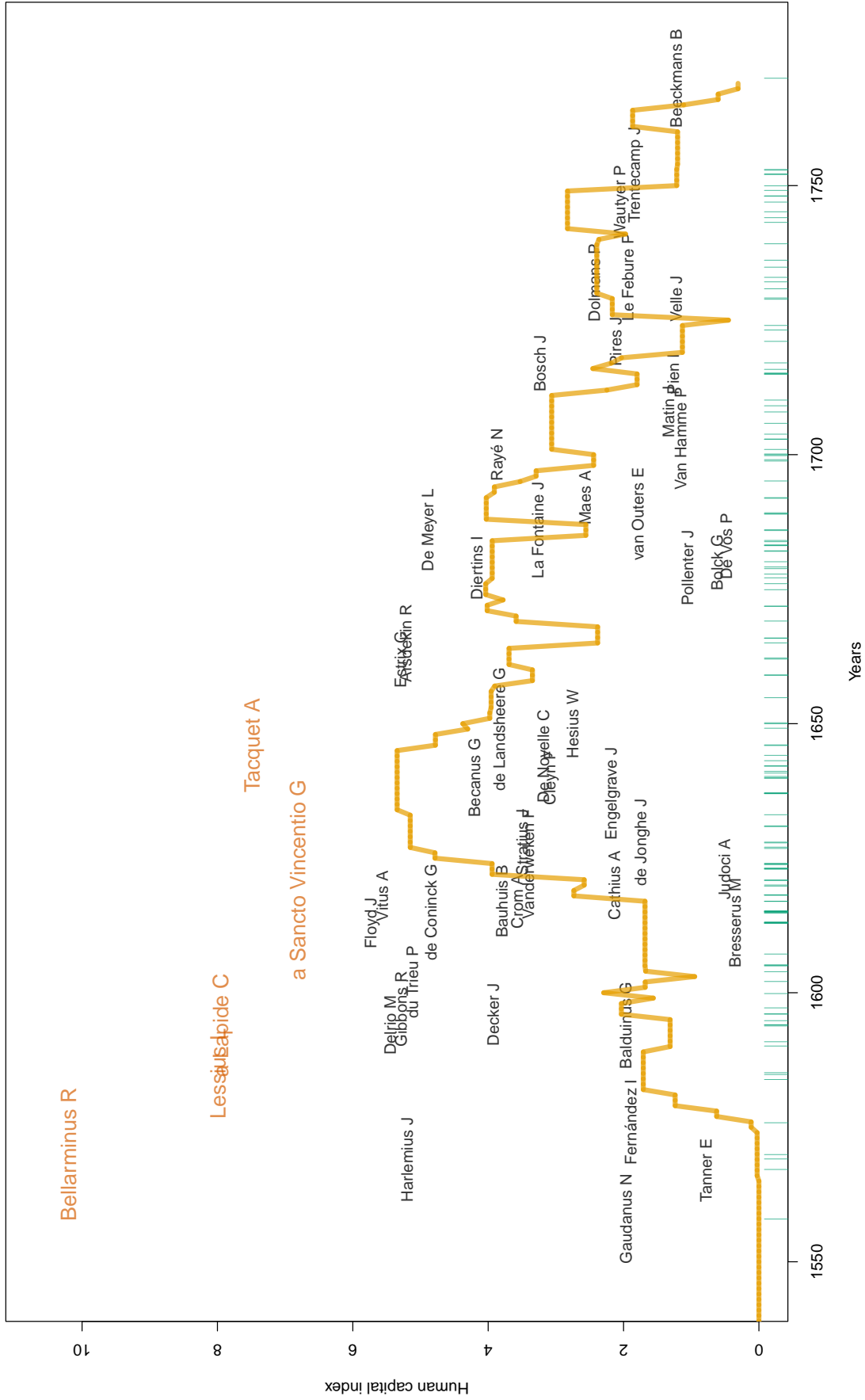


Figure 4: Famous scholars and college notability (orange)

Jansenism in Louvain

In the 17th century, Louvain was the stage for a lively theological clash between the Augustinians from the university and the Jesuits from the college. The origins of this debate can be traced back to the thoughts of Augustine of Hippo (354–430) and are embedded in the theological discussion that unfolded after the Council of Trent (1545–1563), during the Counter-Reformation. According to the Bishop of Hippo, after the original sin, man is unable to do good on his own. The possibility of salvation is only provided by Christ when God grants grace. However, this grace is not extended to all sinners but only to those whom God has predestined regardless of their merits. Not all baptized individuals are predestined, only those chosen by God. Without grace, man is confined to doing only evil, whereas with it, he is capable of doing only good. In 1567, the debate began in Louvain and then spread throughout Europe, involving numerous scholars. The theologian Michel De Bay (Baïus) was condemned by Pope Pius V for his denial of the reality of free will. In response to Baïus, the Spanish Jesuit Luis de Molina argued for the existence of "sufficient grace," which provides humans with the means for their salvation but acts only upon explicit human will (doctrine of semi-Pelagianism). This position was strongly opposed by the Augustinians, leading in 1611 to a ban by the Holy Office on any publication concerning the issue of grace. In 1628, Cornelius Jansen, a professor at the University of Louvain, began writing a theological summa titled "Augustinus" aimed at resolving the issue of grace by advocating Augustinian thought. This work was published posthumously in 1640 but was condemned by the Jesuits and banned by the Church in 1642 (Cognet 1991). From Louvain, the debate shifted to France, where the Jansenists found considerable support among various religious orders, including the members of the Port-Royal Abbey, and among several intellectuals of the time. The theological thought of the Jansenists influenced the cultural and political thinking throughout Europe (Doyle 2000).

9 UNIVERSITY NETWORK

Figure 5 illustrates the gradual weakening of the college's connections with other university institutions over time. It is evident that these connections diminish until almost completely disappearing in the last period of our study. This phenomenon can be attributed, at least in part, to the history of the Jesuits and the diminishing appeal of Louvain as a university reference center.

10 FINAL THOUGHTS

The college initially boasted several world-class professors, yet it remained detached from integration into the local university. After reaching its zenith, it gradually declined until its eventual closure coinciding with the dissolution of the Jesuit order.

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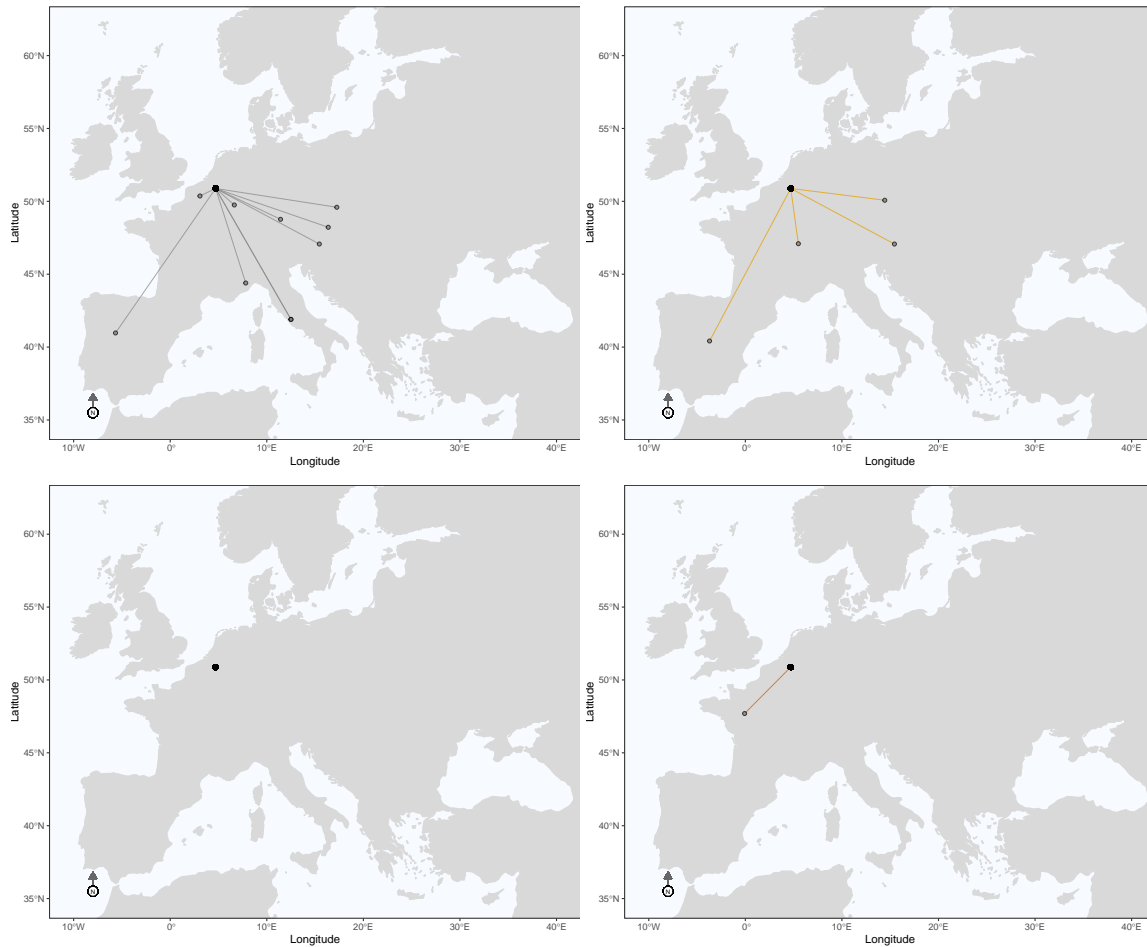


Figure 5: Links between *Collegium Societatis Iesu Lovaniensis* and other universities through scholars' mobility, by period

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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