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Students, Scholars and Their Books at the University of Louvain (1425–1797)

Edited by
Violet SOEN
Wouter DRUWÉ
Wim FRANÇOIS
Ralph DEKONINCK



BREPOLS

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Rossana SCEBBA–Margherita FANTOLI
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LOUVAIN SCHOLARS ON THE MOVE NETWORKS AND MOBILITY PATTERNS AT THE EARLY UNIVERSITY OF LOUVAIN. AN ANALYSIS OF ACADEMIC MOBILITY (1425–1797)

1. Introduction

Among the illustrious premodern scholars who were members of the University of Louvain, the most famous is undoubtedly Desiderius Erasmus of Rotterdam (1466/67/69–1536). Throughout his life, he visited numerous European university centers and came into contact with many intellectuals. His thinking traveled with him of course, but was also enriched through the exchange of views with these scholars. He himself said: *Ego mundi civis esse cupio, communis omnium, uel peregrinus magis* ('For me, I want to be a citizen of the world, open, or rather foreign to all'),¹ revealing his cosmopolitan perspective and open-minded vision. After studying at the Collège de Montaigu in Paris, Erasmus taught at Cambridge² and actively participated in the foundation and development of the Trilingual College in Louvain.³ Subsequently, his *peregrinatio* continued to the main university centers of Europe, including Basel, Trier, Mainz, Strasburg, and during his travels in Italy, he visited Padua, Venice, Ferrara, Siena, Rome, and Naples. Although he did not teach at these universities, he came into contact with the illustrious scholars of the time, further stimulating his intellectual vitality. Erasmus is just one example among many. In fact, from its foundation, the University of Louvain has been characterized by the great mobility of both

¹ Erasmus, *Epistola 1314, V, 129, 2* (trans. Mynors & Thomson 1974).

² Venn 1927, p. 105.

³ Papy 2018.

faculty and students, constantly seeking the best conditions for teaching and learning.

The phenomenon of *peregrinatio academica* (academic pilgrimage)⁴ is undoubtedly one of the defining characteristics of the academic world, perhaps its most vital aspect, since the inception of universities. By moving from one university to another, scholars of the past began to weave a network that has become denser and more expansive over time. Even though it has undergone slowdowns and regulations over the centuries, it has continued to be a cornerstone of university life. Examples of this include the more recent creation of the Erasmus interuniversity exchange program, promoted by the European Union, which takes its name from the illustrious Dutch scholar. This program confirms the importance of the circulation of people and knowledge. Similarly, numerous university consortia have been established to facilitate exchanges among students, professors, and administrative staff, creating privileged bonds between institutions.⁵

In this work, we examine the mobility of the professors of the University of Louvain from its foundation in 1425 to its dissolution in 1797, presenting a new study that combines both qualitative and quantitative analyses to shed new light on this phenomenon.⁶ We aim to investigate the extent of professorial mobility between universities, both in and out of Louvain. This study delves into the identities of these scholars, the academic disciplines that piqued their interest, any temporal trends that may have influenced such academic migrations, and the role these scholars played in forging connections with other educational institutions.

We will substantiate the prevailing narrative that the University of Louvain, from its inception, attracted distinguished scholars from across Europe, elevating it into a pivotal hub for the instruction and exchange of ideas, notably in fields like theology, sciences, and humanities.⁷ Nevertheless, over the course of the

⁴ De Ridder-Symoens 1992, p. 280.

⁵ Some examples are CircleU and the Coimbra Group, of which our institution is a member, and U21, which includes universities from all over the world.

⁶ For a comprehensive view of the data, see also Catoire et al. 2021.

⁷ Engberts, in this volume.

seventeenth century, the University of Louvain underwent a gradual shift towards a more local identity that resulted in waning connections with European universities.

Thanks to the compilation of a prosopographical database on a European scale that encompasses most of the scholars who taught at universities and scientific academies from their foundation until the Industrial Revolution,⁸ we are able to measure academic peregrination from a global perspective to understand its effects and scope. On the one hand, the database allows a qualitative analysis related to individual scholars, aiming to comprehend social and historical phenomena through their individual biographies. On the other hand, it enables the analysis of the complex relationships between individuals, but also of the relationships that universities forged with each other based on these individuals.

In this article, we demonstrate the value of utilizing data of diverse nature and how quantitative analysis can support qualitative analysis. In 1987, Jan Roegiers published an interesting study on the careers of professors at the University of Louvain, drawing on a meticulous collection of data.⁹ He examined the recruitment process, offering valuable insights into the origins of professors, the subjects they taught, and the evolution of education at Louvain, all supported by an in-depth historical analysis. Our contribution aligns with this type of research but does not focus solely on academic careers. Instead, we aim to provide a more dynamic perspective on university education and the circulation of ideas through the analysis of networks connecting European academic institutions, facilitated by professors. Furthermore, we seek to understand how scholars of the past shaped the present. By employing economic tools, such as the measurement of scholars' *human capital*, we have explored the dynamics of past universities and how each scholar contributed to the development of the Western world.

⁸ The date that we have established as the starting point of our research is the year 1000. Even though there were no universities in Europe at this time (the first ones began to form around the twelfth century), higher education had begun to take shape in cathedral schools and monasteries. It is from this period that the first masters emerged, who, like the professors at later universities, moved from one religious center to another (de la Croix & Vitale 2022, p. 3).

⁹ Roegiers 1987.

After outlining the methodology and objectives of the project from which this study emerges, we present the results of our analysis. To fully highlight the figures included in the article, we have chosen to examine separately the various relationships the University of Louvain established with other European universities.

2. Exploring New Approaches

Various methodological approaches are available to piece together the history of universities. Undoubtedly, archival research, entailing the scrutiny and interpretation of written sources, remains the preferred method for reconstructing historical events and the biographies of influential figures. However, recent years have witnessed a convergence of technology and multidisciplinary interest in specific historical themes, ushering in new perspectives and fresh angles through which historical facts can be examined. Particularly, in tandem with meticulous qualitative analysis, quantitative analysis has surged in prominence. This approach hinges on the structured and precise processing of quantifiable data. Furthermore, the growing interest in history from disciplines that rely on data analysis, such as economics, sociology, political science, and even medicine, has created new opportunities for studying and reshaping certain aspects of history. Consequently, there has been an increased focus on databases, and diverse research methodologies have developed to comprehend and interpret data.¹⁰

Creating a comprehensive prosopographical database offers multiple advantages. Beyond its utility in organizing and streamlining data retrieval, it provides the foundation for qualitative and quantitative analysis methodologies. In the realm of quantitative analysis, a spectrum of methods, from basic descriptive statistics to advanced tools like regression analysis and time series analysis, can be employed to scrutinize the evolution of specific phenomena over time. Within these analytical techniques, network analysis occupies a prominent place. This approach leverages mathematical, statistical, and computational principles to examine and unravel the intricate relationships between elements or entities in a complex network.

¹⁰ Verboven, Carlier & Dumolyn 2007, p. 39.

Social Network Analysis (SNA) offers a lucid and intuitive means of visualizing relationships between entities, aiding in the identification of groups and the comprehension of the scale and nature of interactions within a network.¹¹ Additionally, within a network, it facilitates distinguishing which nodes (entities) are central or pivotal, shedding light on leaders or individuals with specific roles throughout the network. Network analysis also automates the identification of highly interconnected clusters of nodes, forming ‘communities’, enhancing our grasp of the network’s underlying structure. Furthermore, with SNA, distances or similarities between nodes in the network can be calculated, enabling the assessment of dissimilarities or likenesses among distinct entities.

Finally, among the numerous possibilities offered by this type of analysis, it should be noted that it allows the study of the diffusion of information or ideas (as well as diseases or other entities in other disciplinary fields). Network analysis is, therefore, a methodology that enables the study of the structure, dynamics, and behavior of a wide range of complex systems that can be represented as networks.¹²

3. *The RETE Project*

Several studies have focused on the lives of students, attempting to reconstruct their educational journeys.¹³ The interest in this aspect of academia is undeniable and provides a significant understanding of Western society and the organization of universities. Students have not only played a central role in the dissemination of ideas but have also contributed to the emergence of a new economy, enabling many cities to become important cultural and economic centers.

The *RETE* project, in the field of economic history, primarily focuses on university professors and how their contributions have influenced the development of Europe over eight centuries.

¹¹ Wasserman & Faust 1994, p. 20.

¹² Some key references for approaching SNA: Wasserman & Faust 1994; Degenne & Forsé 1999; Hanneman & Riddle 2005; Scott 2017; Borgatti, Everett & Johnson 2018.

¹³ See, e.g., Verger 1991; De Ridder-Symoens 1992; Brizzi 2002; Spychala 2022.

Mobility has certainly played a fundamental role in this context, facilitating the movement of individuals and their ideas. The full database contains information on 65,000 scholars who were appointed to universities or were nominated to academies over the period 1000–1800.¹⁴ The data were harvested manually from 572 different secondary sources on the history of universities and academies.¹⁵ The list of universities from Frijhoff and the list of academies from McClellan were used, with the addition of several other higher education institutions which conferred academic degrees.¹⁶ More information on the criteria to include scholars in the database is available from de la Croix et al., while some global statistics are provided in the various issues of the *Repertorium Eruditorum Totius Europae*.¹⁷

Using the *RETE* database, we have chosen to examine the case of the mobility of university professors associated with the Old University of Louvain.

Analyzing geographical mobility entails precisely identifying the geographic origins of each scholar involved. Figure 1 provides a visual representation of the mobility of professors in the *RETE* database between the years 1425 and 1540. It highlights both their birthplace and university affiliation to illustrate the extent of mobility across Europe during the period considered.¹⁸ The dotted lines represent the hypothetical path from a birthplace to a workplace, minimizing the cost of travel. At the European level, many local moves can be observed – those born in Portugal for example were more likely to end up in Coimbra or Evora. However, there are also many moves between the different regions of Europe, as witnessed by all the paths crossing the seas. The backbone of Europe is already very visible on the map, running from Tuscany to the Low Countries, through Savoy and West Germany (the old Lotharingia).

¹⁴ At the time of publication of this contribution, the database includes 83,000 scholars, based on 669 sources consulted.

¹⁵ The database can be accessed at: <https://shiny-lidam.sipr.ucl.ac.be/scholars/>.

¹⁶ McClellan 1985; Frijhoff 1996.

¹⁷ De la Croix et al. 2024a; *RETE* database available from <https://ojs.uclouvain.be/index.php/RETE/index>.

¹⁸ Professors for whom the birthplace is unknown are missing from the map. Hopefully, this is the case for less than one third of the sample, and concerns mainly quite obscure professors.

As far as Louvain is concerned, we can highlight three scholars: Adrianus Florentii (Adriaan Florenszoon, born in Utrecht in 1459, professor at Louvain from 1478 to 1507, and elected Pope in 1522), Juan Luis Vives (born in Valencia in 1492/93, professor at Louvain from 1519 to 1522, and then in Oxford), and Franciscus Cremensis (born in Cividale-del-Friuli in 1470 and professor of rhetoric at Louvain from 1492 to 1499). These three cases tell us something more. Indeed, Adrianus represents the movement that professors originally from the neighboring Low Countries began to undertake in order to reach the university now closest to them. On the other hand, Vives left the Iberian peninsula to escape religious persecutions against the Jews and conversos. His family was, in fact, accused of crypto-Judaism, and his father preferred to have him continue his studies in France. From there, his network of acquaintances took him first to Louvain and later to Oxford. Finally, the less-known Cremensis, an Italian, facilitated the circulation of humanist ideas, a new cultural movement that emerged at the end of the fourteenth century.

It is interesting to note how the establishment of numerous ‘princely’ or ‘national/regional’ universities, especially in the context of the Holy Roman Empire at the end of the medieval pe-

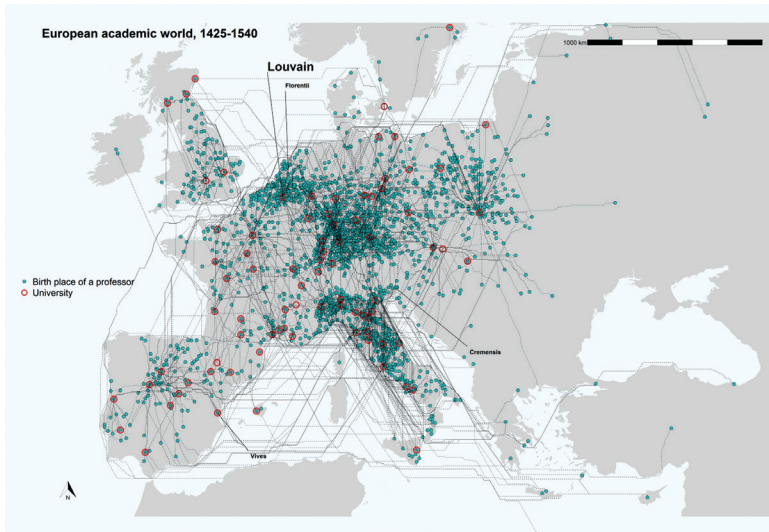


FIG. 1
The European academic world, 1425–1540.

riod, significantly reduced the need for long-distance travel. An emblematic example is the University of Heidelberg, founded in 1386 following the initiative of Elector Palatine Rupert I (1309–1390), who had this precise objective in mind. Their establishment was facilitated by two important factors. First, the Western Schism of 1378 forced German professors and students at the University of Paris to leave France when it chose to support the Avignon Pope. Second, the events at universities in Eastern Europe played a significant role. After years of conflicts between Bohemians and Germans at the University of Prague regarding the sharing of benefits and privileges, tensions only eased in 1385 with the emigration of German professors.¹⁹ Not only did historical events contribute to the creation of new universities, but as seen in the figure, it is clear that within the Holy Roman Empire, different electorates founded their own universities with the aim of reducing both long journeys and expenses, leading to a significant concentration of university professors in this region.

The same trend is also evident at Louvain because it was the only university in the region.²⁰ In 1425, there were no universities in the territories at the North Sea, that now constitute the Netherlands and Belgium and Luxembourg, and several reasons led to the creation of a new institution. It is important to note that Louvain was facing a severe economic and demographic crisis that had begun in the fourteenth century. To overcome this difficult period, local authorities sought ideas to regain a central role within the Duchy of Brabant.²¹

Additionally, the declining power of the Duchy of Brabant at the beginning of the fifteenth century played a role. By the time it fell, it had already become a satellite state within the personal union of the Duke of Burgundy. These factors together led to the foundation of the university, with the aim of attracting students and professors, thereby helping to improve the city's challenging economic situation. Furthermore, after the foundation of the University of Dole in 1423, in the County of Burgundy, there was a need for a university center in the northern regions.

¹⁹ Classen & Wolgast 2013, p. 63.

²⁰ Van Mingroot 2000, p. 13.

²¹ Roegiers & Vandevivere 2001.

This would facilitate the mobility of students from these areas who were attending classes in Paris and Cologne and strengthen control over these regions.²² The creation of the university indeed allowed many students and professors to significantly reduce the distance between their birthplace and their workplace.

4. *Measuring* Human Capital

One specificity of our approach, in addition to its long period and broad geographical coverage, is that it attempts to assess the intrinsic quality of these professors and academics. This is what economists call *human capital*. The concept was developed in the 1960s by Gary Becker. He defines *human capital* as the set of knowledge, experiences, skills, know-how, good health, and interpersonal skills that individuals acquire throughout their lives and use in production processes.²³

In the case of professors and academics, systematic and comprehensive data on salary, income, or expenditure are not available. However, an index can be built based on several determinants of a scholar's quality. The quality of their teaching or the services they provided to the university or society cannot be measured, but their research activity can be documented through the books they authored and then had published. Specifically, today's library holdings can be used to catalogue the works of each individual and derive a measure of human capital. Of course, this is a noisy measure, but it allows for the comparison of individuals over time and across regions of Europe. This approach also examines these individuals through a contemporary lens (today's libraries), which could introduce bias compared to how professors were viewed in their own time. Nevertheless, it is not surprising to find figures such as Martin Luther (1483–1526), a professor at the University of Wittenberg, François Arouet de Voltaire (1694–1778), a member of numerous academies, and Thomas Aquinas (c. 1225–1274), a professor at the University of Paris, among the top 10 of all time. The most renowned authors of the Scientific Revolution also rank highly, such as Galileo Galilei (1564–1642) and Isaac Newton (1643–1727).

²² Reusens 1881–1903, V.

²³ Becker 1964.

The detailed methodology to build this index from publication data is described in Curtis and de la Croix.²⁴ In this volume, Scebba and Fantoli compare our human capital index to measures of the importance of scholars in the publication network of a university.²⁵ They find that betweenness centrality (a measure of the amount of influence a scholar has over the flow of information in a network) is positively correlated with the human capital index.

Measuring human capital enables us to address questions that would otherwise be difficult to explore. For example, are the most prolific professors more mobile than those who will never publish anything in their lifetime? Table 1 shows the top 10 scholars ‘affiliated’ to the University of Louvain.²⁶ The details for each person, including our sources, can be obtained from the online database at <https://shiny-lidam.sipr.ucl.ac.be/scholars/>.

TABLE 1
Top scholars at Louvain and their other academic affiliations

Name	Human capital index	Other institutions (strong affiliations only)
Desiderius Erasmus	12.2	Cambridge
Ioannes Lodovicus Vives	10.4	Oxford
Justus Lipsius	10.1	Leiden, Jena
Adrianus Florentii	9.9	
Johannes Baptista van Helmont	9.1	
Cornelius Iansenius	8.9	
Iacobus Amyot	8.5	Bourges
Nicolaus Clenardus	8.3	

²⁴ Curtis & de la Croix 2023.

²⁵ Scebba & Fantoli, in this volume.

²⁶ Our decision to affiliate someone to Louvain is subject to debate. For example, we kept Erasmus because his involvement as an institution builder and in the hiring of professors was very significant. However, he was not formally a professor. Vesalius and Mercator were kept out as they were only students at Louvain. Jesuits such as Bellarminus were also kept out as their college was never accepted by the university. The case of Amyot is also subject to uncertainty (see Lamberts & Roegiers 1990).

Name	Human capital index	Other institutions (strong affiliations only)
Reinerus Gemma Frisius	8.3	
Erycius Puteanus	8.1	
Arnoldus Geulincx	8.1	Leiden

In general, scholars with high human capital tended to move more, often transitioning between universities more frequently. This is because more prestigious or financially endowed universities sought to attract them by offering higher compensation and greater benefits.²⁷ In the full sample of university professors, we find that those with multiple affiliations exhibit an average human-capital index that is 2.35 times higher than that of scholars with a single affiliation. They account for 12.1% of all scholars and are linked to 2.16 universities, on average). In the case of Louvain, this trend is certainly confirmed, although we observe that many scholars with high human capital tended to remain at a single institution; the *stabilitas loci* was in early modern times also highly valued as a prerequisite for study.

5. Louvain in the Network

Another approach to analyze the *peregrinatio* of professors is to consider the connections generated by moving from/to other educational institutions. In order to gain a clearer understanding of the potential network established by professors' moves, we have designed a graphical representation that provides a visual overview of the various connections involving the professors of Louvain. To build Figure 2, we followed several steps. We started from the full database of professors and academicians before 1800 in Europe, i.e. 65,000 names. We removed those who were only weakly attached to their institutions. We kept all those who were linked to the University of Louvain or to the Jesuit College of Louvain. This gave us 1276 names.²⁸ Several of these individuals

²⁷ De la Croix et al. 2024a.

²⁸ To ensure that this list of scholars is as comprehensive as possible, we consulted several sources. We began with the work of Lamberts & Roegiers (1990),

had appointments to other higher education institutions over their lifetime. The 1276 Louvain people totaled 1442 activities or appointments (exclusively to universities or academies), involving 55 other institutions. For each of these institutions, we computed the earliest and latest date of contact with Louvain, a contact involving necessarily someone who held a position at Louvain. This gave a range of dates during which people were moving from/to Louvain. The institutions with which Louvain is related through these moves are listed in Table 2. The column ‘# nodes’ indicates how many Louvain professors held position there. The column ‘# nodes top’ only includes published scholars. The columns ‘start’ and ‘end’ show the period during which these moves took place.

TABLE 2
Louvain’s professors with other affiliated institutions

Institution	# nodes	# nodes top	start	end
Ucologne–1388	34	10	1417	1635
Udouai–1559	18	17	1561	1633
Uparis–1200	17	10	1408	1599
AcadBruxelles–1772	7	7	1769	1782

which provided us with an initial list. Later we used the history of the city of Louvain (Molanus, ed. De Ram 1861) which provides a list of rectors of the University. We then expanded the sample using information from Brants (1906) for the Faculty of Law and Tricot-Royer (1927) for the Faculty of Medicine. Additionally, we referred to Vanyacker et al. (2010), which offered valuable insights into scholars from the region.

In the second step, we consulted the electronic versions of the biographical dictionaries by Eloy (1755) for medicine and De Feller (1849). The coverage of the Trilingual College was further enhanced by Nève (1848; 1852). Subsequently, we explored the *Repertorium Academicum Germanicum* (Schwinges & Hesse 2019), which enabled us to achieve almost complete coverage of the period from 1425 to 1550. Finally, we compared our sample with that of the *Lovaniensia* project (<https://www.lovaniensia.be/lovaniensia/>), which draws on additional sources and aims to publish digitized versions of all printed works by members of the University of Louvain. We also consulted the online databases of the Royal Academy of Belgium (<https://academicroyale.be/fr/la-biographie-nationale-personnalites/>) and the Biografisch Portaal van Nederland (<http://www.biografischportaal.nl/>) to complete the biographical information. While we may still be missing some lesser-known scholars, we believe all the significant ones are included.

Institution	# nodes	# nodes top	start	end
Uoxford-1200	6	6	1523	1610
Uroma-1303	5	4	1565	1788
Uleiden-1575	4	3	1578	1662
UromaGregoriana-1556	5	5	1570	1617
Uvienna-1365	4	4	1548	1761
Udole-1422	3	3	1530	1570
Uheidelberg-1386	3	1	1423	1557
Upadua-1222	3	2	1456	1559

A second step consisted in selecting some of these institutions and a date range. We selected Cologne, Douai, the Academy of Brussels, Oxford, Roma, and Leiden over the time period mentioned in the table. Among the top institutions in Table 2, we abstracted from Paris because the data collection for this university is particularly complicated and is still ongoing, whereas we are confident that the other institutions are covered quite comprehensively in our database.

The number of scholars involved in Louvain and in these six institutions over the period considered is 3407. To reduce the sample size to the most significant individuals, we selected those with a strictly positive human capital index, giving us 1443 people. We then built their network assuming that professors are nodes and a link (edge) between two scholars is created if they were at the same time in the same institution.

Figure 2 plots the network using the Fruchterman-Reingold layout algorithm, using the *igraph* package of R. This algorithm creates a visual layout where connected nodes are near each other, and unconnected nodes are farther apart, making the graph easier to read and understand. In fact, the network represented in Figure 2 is only a part of a bigger network involving all the universities and all the professors in Europe over eight centuries. It is designed to offer a visual representation of the neighborhood of Louvain but cannot be used to compute centrality measures of individual nodes, as it is only a partial network. The big network, on the contrary, can lead to interesting statistics on professors, but cannot be

represented graphically in a readable way. The big network is the subject of another publication.²⁹

In Figure 2, we highlighted scholars with high human capital and represented them with larger circles and more intense colors. All the professors included in this figure are endowed with high human capital; however, the scholars belonging to the top 1%, such as Vives, Lipsius, and Erasmus, stand out particularly from the rest, with a larger circle.

Starting from the bottom of the figure, the initial links between Cologne and Louvain appear clearly. Next came the Golden Age, when Louvain had connections primarily with Oxford (U. Oxoniensis), Rome (Studium Urbis), and Douai (U. Du-



FIG. 2
The Louvain network over time.

²⁹ De la Croix et al. 2024a.

acensis). Later on, there was a connection with Leiden (U. Lugduno Batava). However, in the later period, as the connections established by the professors significantly waned, the University of Louvain retained links with the Academy of Brussels and the University of Rome. Let us now examine these relations in more detail.

6. Louvain/Cologne

The University of Cologne (1388) is the first institution with which Louvain not only shared professors but also a deep historical connection. This profound link between the two universities is reflected in various aspects, including the statutes of the University of Louvain, which were heavily influenced by those of the University of Cologne.³⁰ In the founding bull of the 'Sapientiae immarcescibilis' *studium generale*, in the second provision, Cologne is the first of the mentioned universities to be cited as an example for ensuring freedom, immunity, and privileges to doctors, masters, and students

[...] we declare that from this moment in that city a general school with all faculties, except for that of theology, must be established, and in the future must eternally remain and be upheld, and that all doctors, masters, and students and every one of them must be able to boast of and rely on all and sundry liberties, exemptions, and indulgences as were granted by the apostolic chair or in some other manner to any at all of the doctors, masters, and students who for reasons of study reside in Cologne, [and] in Vienna and Leipzig, cities in the bishoprics of Passau and Merseburg.³¹

Regarding the composition of the faculty, it is known that the municipal administration primarily recruited graduates from Co-

³⁰ Weiler 1978.

³¹ [...] *ordinamus quod a modo in dicto opido generale in facultate qualibet, preterquam in theologia, sit studium, illudque perpetuis futuris temporibus ibidem uigeat et obseruetur, quodque omnes et singuli doctores, magistri et scolares inibi omnibus et singulis libertatibus, immunitatibus et indulgentijs, quibusuis doctoribus, magistris et scholaribus Colonie, Wiennae ac Lipzensis, Patauiensis et Merseburgensis diocesium opidis, studij causa commorantibus, per sedem apostolicam uel alias qualitercunque concessis, gaudeant pariter et utantur; [...]* (Van Mingroot 1994, p. 24).

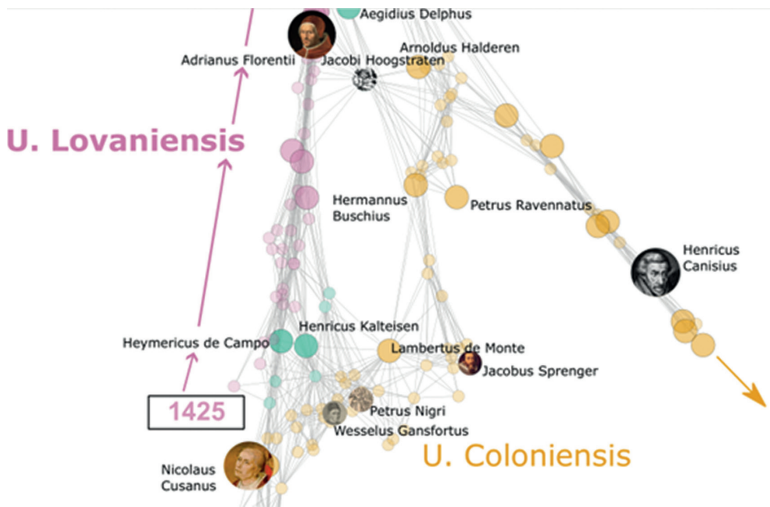


FIG. 3
Louvain/Cologne.

logne. To attract them to the newly established institution, highly attractive salaries and benefits were offered.³² Cologne had already gained a certain reputation in Europe, particularly for the teaching of legal disciplines and theology. Among the scholars who emerge from our study in the early years of the foundation of the University of Cologne, we find Nicolaus Cusanus (1401–1464), who likely had a reading of canon law in 1426. This distinguished scholar was contacted twice by the municipal administration of Louvain to teach; in 1428 and 1435, teaching positions in canon law were offered to Nicolaus, but he declined them to remain in the Church administration.³³

The municipal administration of Louvain was more successful with other scholars. Significant examples of this connection are Nicolas de Prumea, Johannes de Platea, and Johannes Kampbecker van Lyer, all graduates in civil or canon law from the University of Cologne and hired by Louvain to occupy the first law professorships. In his extensive work, Reusens reports that documents from the city's accounts for the years 1425/1426 reveal the hiring negotiations between the municipal administration and

³² Claey-Bouuaert 1956; Paquet 1958.

³³ Miller 2021.

the first professors.³⁴ Some of them already had teaching experience at the latter institution, further arousing the interest that Cologne's professors had in the new institution.

From our study, it emerges that over the centuries the University of Cologne shared the highest number of professors with Louvain. Between 1417 and 1642, we have documented 34 professors who taught at both institutions. Among them, there were mainly jurists such as Henricus de Piro (1403–1473). Beginning in 1432, the year the Faculty of Theology was founded, there were also numerous theologians. Early *magistri* of theology include Heymericus da Campo (1395–1460),³⁵ a teacher of Cusanus, and the Dominican Henrich Kalteisen (1390–1465). The last link between the two universities is Jacob van Hoogstraten (1460–1527).³⁶ The majority of connections were concentrated in the sixteenth century, the most flourishing period for the university. However, after this period, no further cases of professors teaching at both universities have been recorded.

In general, Louvain went through a period of decline at the end of the seventeenth century. The number of enrollments decreased significantly,³⁷ and the political events, the plague epidemic,³⁸ and the succession of wars did not help the university to increase its reputation and attract new students.

³⁴ As reported by De Reiffenberg, the documents of municipality state that in addition to the agreed-upon cash salary, Nicolaus de Prumea would also receive two measures of Beaune wine and two measures of Rhine wine. See De Reiffenberg 1829, p. 19; Reusens 1881–1903. See also Engberts, in this volume.

³⁵ Hoenen 1994.

³⁶ RAG: <https://rag-online.org/datenbank/abfrage.p/0.m/embed.v/viewer.p%7C17%7C4%7Cobject%7C46-2198453>.

³⁷ During this period, there were approximately 350 students per year, a significantly lower number compared to the previous decades. For more information, see Reusens, Schillings & Wils 1903.

³⁸ In 1578, the plague epidemic that struck the city was devastating. In fact, in 1579, the population of Louvain shrank from 36,000 to approximately 7000. The Faculty of Medicine lost five of its six professors and took refuge in Diest and Tirlemont (source: https://www.louvainmedical.be/sites/default/files/content/article/pdf/lmed-10-2020-ama_histoire.pdf). In addition to the significant loss in the population, the university also lost numerous professors and students (*Chartularium Lovani*).

7. *Louvain/Douai*

The University of Douai was founded in 1559. When the decision was made to establish it, the intention was not only to take the University of Louvain as an example but also to work towards hiring some scholars from Louvain for the new university.³⁹ The authorities delegated by the government of Douai to conduct negotiations with Louvain Jean de Vendeville (Joannes Vendevilius, 1527–1592) to become the first professor of law, by paying him 500 florins.⁴⁰ As we will see below, Vendeville not only played a fundamental role in the birth of the university, but also had a significant impact on the creation of Jesuit colleges in Douai and Louvain. Additionally, with a compensation of 500 florins, they hired the jurist Ramus Johannes (1535–1578), while Epo Boetius (1529–1599) joined the faculty with a remuneration of 300 florins.

The first professors did not limit themselves to teaching but also dedicated themselves to the growth of the university: they were involved in the organization and in the search for new faculty members. They scoured their network of connections for new professors, such as a lawyer from Malines, Adrien Puessius, who was called to teach at Douai in 1565 and remained there for approximately twenty years, or a recent theology gradu-

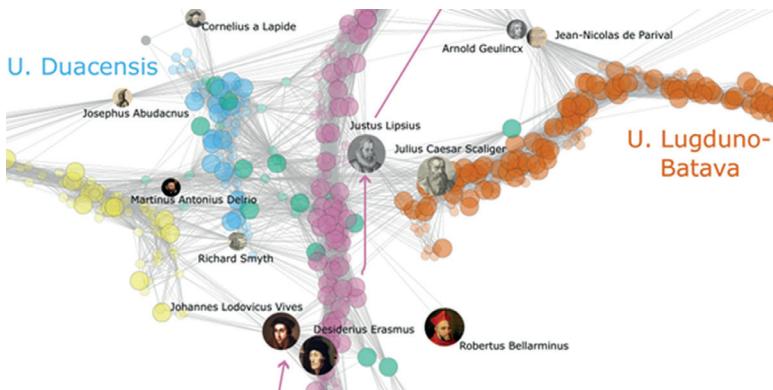


FIG. 4
Louvain/Douai/Leiden.

³⁹ Dehon 1968; Soen 2019.

⁴⁰ Soen 2010.

ate, Jean du Buisson, who was offered a generous salary of 200 florins.⁴¹

The network that emerged from the University of Douai is characterized by the fact that it united the (Protestant) Anglo-Saxon world with the Catholic world. In fact, a number of professors were Catholic exiles from Oxford and had the opportunity to teach at the French and Southern Low Countries universities. An example of this is the theologian Richard Smyth (1499/1500–1563), who taught at Oxford and later at Louvain and Douai.⁴² Thomas Stapleton (1535–1598) moved to Louvain precisely because he had refused to renounce the authority of the Pope, as requested by the Anglican bishop William Barlow (c. 1498–1568).⁴³

Another interesting figure is Abudacnus Josephus Barbatus (1570–1643). The reasons that brought this Coptic scholar originally from Cairo to Europe⁴⁴ are not entirely clear; however, his arrival occurred during a period characterized by a strong interest in the East, the Church of the East, and the languages spoken in those regions (Greek, Arabic, Hebrew, Turkish, Armenian, etc.).⁴⁵ For this reason, he was received in Rome with great interest, and it was precisely there that he converted to Roman Catholicism, while continuing his study of languages. His career began as an interpreter, taking him across Europe. In Oxford, he obtained teaching qualifications and taught Arabic courses at the university. Barbatus managed to expand his network, leading him to Antwerp, Paris, and Louvain. He arrived at Louvain in 1615 thanks to the intervention of the *louvainistes*, who wanted him as a lecturer in Middle Eastern languages. With the support of his supervisor Johannes Drusius (1550–1616), Abbot of the Abbey of Parc, an attempt was made to assign him a Hebrew course. This stirred the anger of the incumbent Hebrew chair, Valerius Andreas (1588–1655), and some of his colleagues. Accused of concubinage, he was asked to leave Louvain. Abudacnus's jour-

⁴¹ Cardon 1892.

⁴² Löwe 1999.

⁴³ Cooper & Cooper 1858.

⁴⁴ Nève 1852, p. 7.

⁴⁵ Hamilton 1994, p. 129.

ney continued, and after a stop in Prague, with the support of Johannes Kepler who recommended him for a librarian position, he arrived in Vienna.

8. *Louvain/Oxford*

Several scholars and students abandoned Oxford to join the nearest Catholic universities.⁴⁶ Indeed, Queen Elizabeth I's (1533–1603) support for the Anglican Church drove many recusant students and faculty to leave Oxford and go to Catholic universities on the European continent.⁴⁷ In addition to the previously mentioned names associated with Douai, some of whom also taught at Louvain, Nicholas Sanders (1530–1583) is noteworthy. After teaching theology at Oxford from 1551 to 1558, Sanders moved to Louvain, where he obtained a theology professorship in 1565. During his time there, he was able to publish his major work, *De visibili monarchia ecclesiae* (1571), an anti-Anglican treatise in which he defended the doctrine of Papal Primacy. The years that he spent at Louvain were crucial for organizing Catholic propaganda in England, of which he would become a leading figure in the following years.

9. *Louvain/Leiden*

Founded in 1575, the University of Leiden immediately established itself as an institution under Protestant banner (you did not have to swear an oath to Protestantism, only in the Faculty of Theology). It was the first university in what is now the Netherlands, and was created in response to the Spanish conflict to retain students from other institutions.⁴⁸ The connections between Louvain and Leiden may not have been numerous, but they were certainly significant. The first professor appearing in Figure 2 is the humanist Justus Lipsius (1547–1606), an eloquent example of academic *peregrinatio* and much more. Throughout his life, he journeyed extensively for study and pleasure, engaging with numerous

⁴⁶ Aston, Duncan & Evans 1980, p. 14.

⁴⁷ Rashdall 1895, p. 545; Logan 2012, p. 231.

⁴⁸ De la Croix & Stelter 2021a, p. 10.

scholars of his time. His ideas traveled with him and through the extensive correspondence that he maintained with many intellectuals, which he himself sought to publish.⁴⁹ Educated by the Jesuits, Lipsius immediately gravitated towards philology and philosophy. From 1570, as secretary to Cardinal Antoine Perrenot de Granvelle (1517–1586), he spent two years in Rome, coming into contact with the leading figures of the Italian cultural movement. In 1572, he embarked on a journey to Germany and accepted a chair of history at the new Lutheran University of Jena (1572–1574). After a brief and bitter stay because of the hostility of his colleagues, he traveled to Cologne, Antwerp, and Louvain, where he taught for a short time (1576). He then moved to the Calvinist University of Leiden (1578). This led to speculation about his adherence to Protestantism, but in reality, it was an external adaptation to circumstances. He eventually reconciled with Catholicism and taught history at Louvain from 1592.

Leiden became an important humanistic center, especially after Lipsius joined the faculty there.⁵⁰ It is primarily the humanists who united Leiden and Louvain. Besides Lipsius, the philosopher Arnoud Geulincx (1624–1669) should be mentioned, even though his *peregrinatio* was less extensive than that of his colleague. Having left Louvain due to suspicions arising from his opposition to traditional philosophy, through his friendship with the Cartesian professor Abrahamus Heidanus (1597–1678) and following his conversion to Calvinism, he secured a teaching position at the University of Leiden.

10. *Louvain/Rome*

The ties with the University of Rome were primarily established around theological disciplines. Among the distinguished scholars, Pierre-Lambert Ledrou (1641–1721) and Bernardus Desirant (1656–1725) stand out. Ledrou, a member of the Augustinian Order, had a chair at Louvain starting from 1673 after obtaining his doctorate. While maintaining his teaching position in southern Low Countries (a rare case where a professor simultaneously

⁴⁹ Fragonard 2012.

⁵⁰ Schneppen 1960.

held two chairs), he relocated to Rome in 1687, where he was appointed to the chair of theology at La Sapienza University. In 1714, he was dismissed from Louvain due to his absenteeism, which led to various conflicts with colleagues.⁵¹ Also a member of the Augustinian Order, Desirant spent a long period at Louvain, where he defended anti-Jansenist theses precisely during the most heated period of the debate.⁵²

Another significant figure is that of Etienne Heuschling (1762–1847), a professor of Hebrew at the Trilingual College and at La Sapienza University in Rome. A man of great erudition, he graduated in all disciplines except medicine, and was said to speak fourteen languages.⁵³ His teaching coincided with the difficult period leading up to the dissolution of the University of Louvain in 1797.

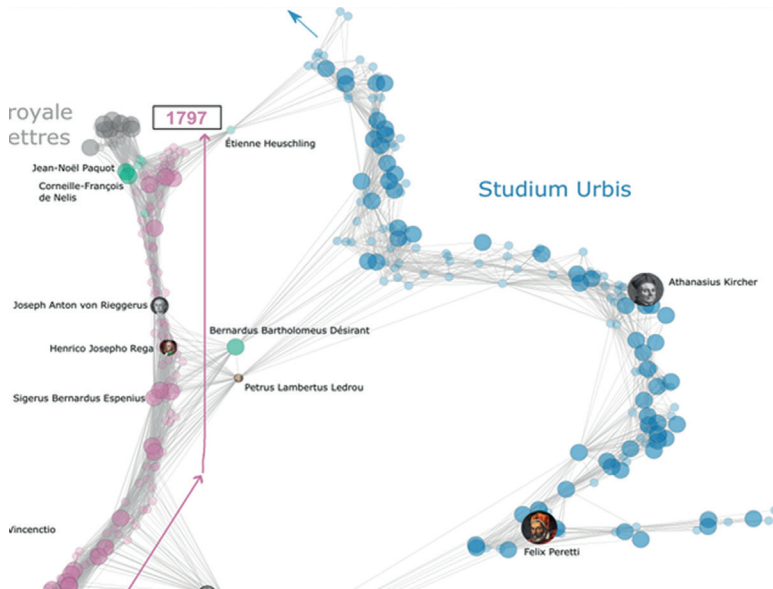


FIG. 5
Louvain/Rome.

⁵¹ UCLouvain 1859, p. 282.

⁵² Varenberg 1878.

⁵³ Nève 1848.

11. *Louvain/Academie Royale (Imperial Academy)*

The University of Louvain gradually lost its appeal over time, as highlighted in the figure. With the exception of significant ties to the University of Rome, its connections with foreign institutions decreased dramatically. In the second half of the eighteenth century, the University of Louvain went through a period of decline, with frequent criticism of the pedagogical choices it made.⁵⁴ Nearby universities, belonging to the Protestant world, heavily invested in scientific disciplines, making them more attractive to both students and professors, thus highlighting a lag compared to Catholic universities worldwide.⁵⁵ Furthermore, the proliferation of scientific academies in the territories of the Holy Roman Empire did not benefit universities that had not adequately renewed the courses they offered.⁵⁶

The foundation of the Imperial Academy in 1769 allowed this educational institution to fill the gaps in the university's curriculum and to catch up with the lag that had arisen compared to England and France.⁵⁷

Between Louvain and the academy, three significant connections can be identified: two with professors, and one with the librarian. These connections are Adrien Van Rossum, a professor of medicine from 1754 to 1788, Jean-Noël Paquot (1722–1803), a professor of Hebrew at the Trilingual College from 1755 to 1771, and Corneille-François de Nelis (1736–1798), who held the position of librarian at the University of Louvain.

The latter played a crucial role in the history of the academy as he was the first to propose to the Count of Cobenzl, Minister Plenipotentiary of the Empress Maria-Theresa to Prince Charles

⁵⁴ The reputation of the University of Louvain at the time was not positive. Abbé Corneille-François Nelis (1736–1785), the librarian of Louvain, Canon of Tournai, and bishop of Antwerp, when proposing the idea of an academy to raise the institution's standards, referred to Louvain as *vestigia ruris* (indicating a rustic or coarse nature) and the professors of this university as 'barbarians' (Mailly 1883, p. 117; Discailles 1872, p. 214).

⁵⁵ Frijhoff 2005.

⁵⁶ Among the numerous scientific academies that emerged in this geographical area, the Leopoldina (1652), the Royal Prussian Academy of Sciences (1700), the Göttingen Academy (1751), the Munich Academy (1759), and the Mannheim Academy (1763) should be mentioned.

⁵⁷ Hasquin 2009, p. 45.



FIG. 6
Louvain and the Imperial Academy of Brussels.

of Lorraine, Lieutenant Governor and Captain General of the Low Countries, the creation of an academy in Brussels, which would revive an interest in eloquence and the humanities, disciplines that received little consideration from the university.⁵⁸

12. *Louvain/Other Universities*

Although it was not possible to depict the connections between Louvain and the University of Paris in the figure, as data collection for the latter has not been completed, a partial analysis shows that they were very close. In fact, similarly to Cologne, the proximity to Paris prompted municipal administrators to seek faculty from the renowned French university.⁵⁹ Many students went to Paris to study theology, among them Guillaume de Coster (Wilhelmus Bont), for instance. After obtaining his degree, he had the opportunity to stay there as a *regens et legens* (1427). Already in 1428, he was a lecturer (*ad legentiam*) at Louvain, where he remained until 1451.⁶⁰

While initially the *peregrinatio* of professors mainly occurred with nearby universities, there were also exchanges with more distant universities, particularly Italian ones. These Italian universities enjoyed a great reputation throughout Europe, especially in the field of law. Professors who had studied or taught in the Italian peninsula were highly regarded, and this was reflected in their salaries. The universities that established ties through the *peregrinatio*

⁵⁸ Hasquin 2009, p. 14.

⁵⁹ Gabriel 1978, p. 20.

⁶⁰ Paquot 1768, II, p. 515.

natio of professors included Rome, Padua, Bologna, and Pavia. Not only did Lovanists travel to Italian universities, but Italian scholars also went to teach at southern Low Countries universities for shorter or longer periods. For example, Ludwing de Garsiis/Lodovico Garsi, a Doctor of Law from Bologna, taught at Louvain between 1435 and 1438⁶¹ before going on to lecture on decretals at Bologna from 1440 to 1444.⁶²

A lesser-known name deserving of mention is Geronimo Olzignano.⁶³ This legal expert can also be found at the universities of Dole and Freiburg. In Dole, he also served as a counselor in the parliament. There, and at other ‘princely’ universities that emerged during this period, scholars who were called upon by the Duke to become counselors were often also tasked with teaching at the university.

13. *Jesuits in Louvain*

A first group of eight Spanish Jesuits expelled from Paris arrived in Louvain in 1542. They managed to establish a college only in 1556. The idea was to create a college-seminary where novices could be accommodated with the support of teaching provided by the university. Initially, their presence was not well received in the city,⁶⁴ and for this reason, the college was never part of the university, unlike what happened in Douai⁶⁵ and other important European university centers. However, the college began to play an important role when it established a public pastoral course to address the inadequate preparation of young priests.⁶⁶ The college received strong support from Jean de Vendeville, a professor of law at both Louvain and Douai, and later the bishop of Tournai. He had also undertaken the responsibility of establishing the University of Douai.⁶⁷

⁶¹ Reusens 1881–1903, II, p. 157.

⁶² Mazzetti 1847, p. 142.

⁶³ Facciolati 1757, p. 111; Ruth 2001, p. 37; Beaune 1870, p. 159.

⁶⁴ Hermans 2008, p. 23.

⁶⁵ Grendler 2019, p. 15.

⁶⁶ Poncelet 1927.

⁶⁷ According to Jean Vendeville, the University of Douai lacked a ‘principal member’ (Cardon 1892, p. 64), that is to say, a Jesuit college capable of provid-

Figure 7 shows that the Jesuit College of Louvain was never merged with the university. Several figures with a rather high level of *human capital* who taught at this college can be identified, such as Andres Vitus (1579–1656), Gregorio a Sancto Vincentio (1584–1667), or Andrea Tacquet (1612–1660). The latter was an important mathematician who paved the way for studies in infinitesimal calculus. The only professor who taught at both institutions was Harleminus Johannes Gulielmus (1538–1578), who served as a professor of Sacred Scriptures and Hebrew.⁶⁸

Among the famous Jesuits at the college of Louvain, there is Robertus Bellarminus (1542–1621). In this period, he taught scholastic theology, commenting on Thomas Aquinas's *Summa*. The period he spent in the Brabant city was marked by both remarkable productivity and an intense religious journey. In fact, in 1570, he was ordained as a priest and took the four solemn vows that committed him to the Society of Jesus. Finally, the theologian Leonardus Lessius (1554–1623), who also taught scholastic theology for fifteen years at the Jesuit College in Louvain, must be

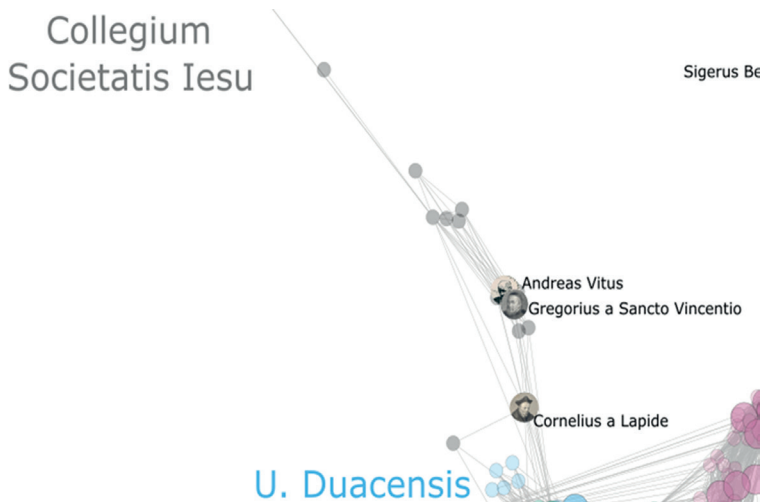


FIG. 7
The Jesuit College.

ing good quality theological education. As a result, in 1568, the Jesuit College of Douai was also established.

⁶⁸ Sommervogel & De Backer 1890, IV, p. 113; Roegiers 2012.

mentioned. Before his experience in Louvain, during his formative years, he taught philosophy at the Jesuit College in Douai (Figure 4). These two figures, although not strictly related to the university, have much significance for the cultural and re-elective environment of Louvain.

Finally, consulting the records of the Society of Jesus in the Spanish Netherlands reveals that a small community of English Jesuits settled in Louvain fleeing persecution against Catholics in English territories.⁶⁹ Initially, in 1605, they established a novitiate and later founded a college dedicated to the teaching of theology and philosophy. This educational institution came into existence in 1614 but was amalgamated into the prestigious, larger English College in Liège in 1624. Over these ten years, the names of Andres Vitus (Figure 7), Bresserus Martinus, Joannes Floydus, Michael Freemannus, Joannes Persaus, Henricus Silisdonius, Sylvester, Noritius, Laurentius Wortinektonus, and Christophorus Greenwood should be mentioned.

14. *The Reasons for the peregrinatio*

The mobility of professors can be attributed to a myriad of factors, and their journeys should be considered within the context of political, economic, health, religious, or other motivations. In contrast to student migrations, which often stemmed from shared geographical origins, professors were predominantly propelled by economic incentives and aspirations to academic prestige. In many instances, the decision to transition from one university to another was motivated by the allure of improved compensation. The prospect of a higher salary, a larger student body (resulting in increased income), or enhanced benefits proved enticing enough for professors to embark on a quest for better opportunities elsewhere.

A notable competition that existed among professors should not be underestimated. A professor's prestige was determined by various factors, such as the number of students attending their lectures and their regularity in attendance, their publications, the

⁶⁹ MS BE/942855/1723/3317 'Catalogus Provinciae Societatis Jesu Flandro-Belgicae, 1620–1640', transcription by P. Charles Waldack, nineteenth century.

discipline they taught, as well as their social prestige.⁷⁰ In other cases, changes occurred because the conditions for staying deteriorated. This was the case, for example, with Geulincx, who was dismissed from the university in 1658 for a combination of academic and religious reasons. Geulincx was a follower of Cartesian philosophy, which was considered controversial at the time, and he did not hide his sympathies for Jansenist thought.⁷¹

In various cases, professors sought greater freedom to conduct their research. A notable example of this approach is Andreas Vesalius (1514–1564), the renowned Flemish anatomist. After completing his medical studies in Paris, he chose to further his education in Padua. In 1537, he obtained a teaching position at the university there. The academic environment in Padua had already established a strong tradition in anatomy, with the practice of dissections dating back to as early as 1446.⁷² Vesalius believed that this research methodology was crucial for the study of human anatomy. However, he often found himself in direct conflict with the anatomists in Louvain, who held a more restrictive view regarding this practice. The opportunity to conduct dissections without excessive limitations drew Vesalius's interest to the University of Padua. As emphasized by the historian David Soulier, Padua became a draw for numerous physicians from France, Spain, and other Italian universities.⁷³

A move to another institution could also occur to escape the excesses of university cities, where students often led an undisciplined life that did not align with the rigor of teaching and study. Finally, epidemics were also among the reasons that led professors and students to seek new places of study.

⁷⁰ The different disciplines enjoyed varying levels of prestige, which were primarily reflected in professors' salaries. For instance, law was the most prestigious field. A law professor could receive over a thousand florins in annual compensation for their teaching, while the salary of a theology professor could be ten times lower. This strong hierarchy led to numerous heated controversies. See Denley 2013, p. 491.

⁷¹ Hutton 2008, p. 433. For a long time, the reasons for his dismissal were shrouded in mystery. The documents outlining the decision to remove him from Louvain provide no explanation. There were rumors of financial difficulties and an alleged affair with a local girl, Susanna Strickers, who later became his wife (Paquot 1768, III, p. 68; Van Der Haeghen 1886, p. 11).

⁷² De la Croix 2021a.

⁷³ Soulier 2021, p. 177.

15. *Conclusions*

The *Repertorium Eruditorum Totius Europae* that we are currently developing goes beyond localized efforts by creating a comprehensive catalogue of premodern professors across the entire European continent. This tool makes it possible to trace the mobility patterns of scholars, which are otherwise difficult to discern from individual university records, each with its own format. Additionally, the human capital index we have introduced to measure the quality of scholars is designed to enable meaningful comparisons across both geographic regions and historical periods.

This study explored the history of the University of Louvain through the mobility of its professors, highlighting how it served as an important crossroads for the circulation of ideas in Europe between the fifteenth and eighteenth centuries. In its early years, Louvain was closely linked to the University of Cologne, but soon developed academic relationships with other prestigious European institutions, such as Oxford and Rome. Over time, the university became a reference point for intellectual exchange, establishing ties with the new University of Douai and later with Leiden, although the latter became more of an antagonist.

However, after this peak period, academic mobility began to decline, indicating the gradual isolation of the university and its diminishing centrality in the European landscape of knowledge. In the eighteenth century, Louvain established new connections with the Académie Royale in Brussels, but the density of relationships with other universities had diminished, limiting its role in the dissemination of new scientific and cultural ideas.

In our study, we assessed and quantified the human capital of scholars, using their publications as a measure of their value. Our analysis showed that those with higher human capital, as reflected in their scholarly output, tended to move more frequently, attracted by prestigious institutions or better economic conditions. However, some of the most eminent scholars, such as Gemma Frisius (1508–1555), chose to spend much of their careers in Louvain, while their knowledge continued to spread through the work of their distinguished disciples, including Gerard Mercator (1512–1594), Andreas Vesalius, Rembert Doedens (1517–1585), and Johannes Stadius (c. 1527–1579). The

decline in academic mobility in the eighteenth century marked the beginning of a period of isolation for the university, which gradually lost its central role in European intellectual development.

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Abstract

This study explored the history of the University of Louvain through the mobility of its professors, highlighting how it served as an important crossroads for the circulation of ideas in Europe between the fifteenth and eighteenth centuries. In its early years, Louvain was closely linked to the University of Cologne, but soon developed academic relationships with other prestigious European institutions, such as Oxford and Rome. Over time, the university became a reference point for intellectual exchange, establishing ties with the new University of Douai and later with Leiden, although the latter became more of an antagonist. However, after this peak period, academic mobility began to decline, indicating the gradual isolation of the university and its diminishing centrality in the European landscape of knowledge. In the eighteenth century, Louvain established new connections with the Académie Royale in Brussels, but the density of relationships with other universities had diminished, limiting its role in the dissemination of new scientific and cultural ideas.

In our study, we assessed and quantified the human capital of scholars, using their publications as a measure of their value. Our analysis showed that those with higher human capital, as reflected in their scholarly output, tended to move more frequently, attracted by prestigious institutions or better economic conditions. However, some of the most eminent scholars, such as Gemma Frisius, chose to spend much of their careers in Louvain, while their knowledge continued to spread through the work of their distinguished disciples, including Mercator, Vesalius, Dodoens, and Stadius. The decline in academic mobility in the eighteenth century marked the beginning of a period of isolation for the university, which gradually lost its central role in European intellectual development.

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