

Scholars and Literati at the Academy of Catenati (1574 – 1800)

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This note is a summary description of the set of scholars and literati who were active at the Academy of Catenati from its foundation until 1800.

1 SOURCES

To reconstruct the list of academicians, we relied primarily on the membership list published on the official website of the Accademia dei Catenati, which records the scholars who were admitted from the foundation in 1574 through the nineteenth century. This list, provides the names, places of origin, and institutional roles of members across the full period covered by the dataset. Where available, this information was cross-referenced with work by Serangeli (2010), which documents the teaching staff of the University of Macerata between 1540 and 1824, thus allowing the identification of academicians who also held university positions. Additional biographical and institutional context was drawn from Maylender (1930).

2 THE ACADEMY

The Academy of Catenati was founded in Macerata on July 2, 1574, at the initiative of Girolamo Zoppio, who was at the time a professor at the University of Macerata (de la Croix and Spolverini 2021). Established during the period of intense intellectual and literary renewal that characterized late Renaissance Italy, the academy brought together members of the urban elite – literati, jurists, and ecclesiastics – with the aim of cultivating literature, eloquence, poetry, and the arts, while also encouraging the discussion of scientific and philosophical subjects.

The name of the academy derived from the emblem of a golden chain descending from heaven and connecting heaven and earth, an image inspired by Homer’s *Iliad* and symbolizing both the connection between divine and human knowledge and the cohesion among its members. This meaning was further expressed in the motto *Caelo demittitur alto* (“it is sent down from the high heaven”).

The academy was most active during the seventeenth and eighteenth centuries, achieving distinction via literary and philosophical debates, the publication of poetry, and public celebrations. Its members actively participated in contemporary linguistic and literary discussions and promoted and published scholarly works. The academy attracted prominent intellectuals such as Torquato Tasso and Giovanni Mario Crescimbeni, and maintained close relations with members of other academies, particularly those of Siena and Bologna. Alongside its literary activities, the academy also hosted discussions on natural philosophy, medicine, and law, although it never became a scientific academy in the strict sense (Maylender 1930).

3 DESCRIPTIVE STATISTICS

Table 1 presents descriptive statistics for the dataset of 566 scholars. A known date of birth is available for 18% of individuals, while the place of birth is identified for 87.5%. The mean age at ap-

pointment is 39.4 years, and the mean age at death is 70.3 years. Overall, 8.5% of the scholars are represented on Wikipedia and 17.5% are identifiable in VIAF.

Period	no. obs	birth date	known place	mean age at appoint.	mean age at death	with Wiki.	with VIAF
1574–1617	64	23.4%	96.9%	41.4	63.4	14.1%	26.6%
1618–1685	107	10.3%	69.2%	36.7	66.5	3.7%	5.6%
1686–1733	114	13.2%	83.3%	37.3	72.5	5.3%	10.5%
1734–1800	281	21.7%	94%	39.4	72.1	10.3%	22.8%
1574–1800	566	18%	87.5%	39.4	70.3	8.5%	17.5%

Table 1: Summary statistics by period

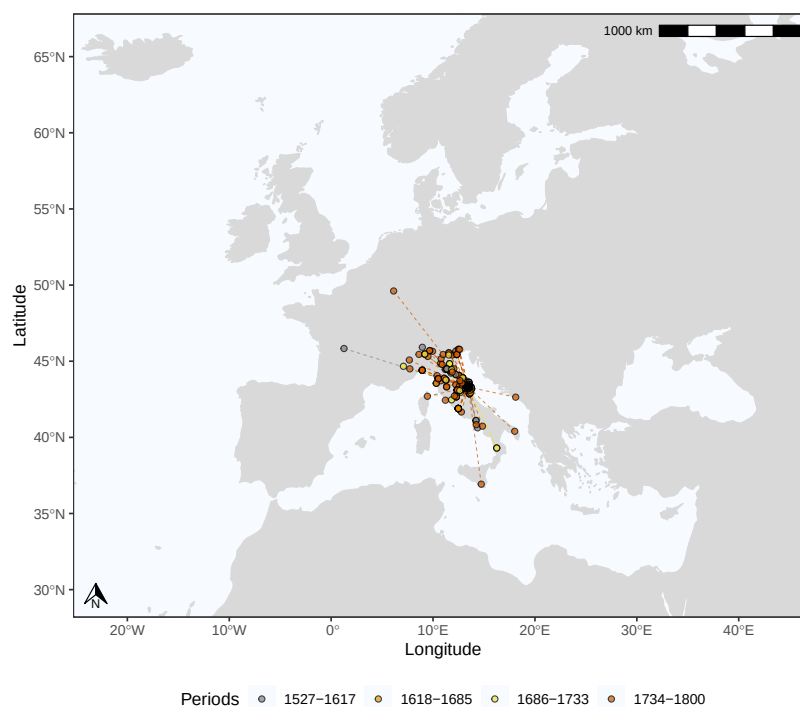


Figure 1: Places of birth of the scholars and literati at the Academy of Catenati

4 FIELDS

Figure 2 illustrates the distribution of teaching disciplines, on the left for all scholars, and on the right for published scholars. The disciplinary profile is dominated by the humanities, which account for 81% of all members and 84% of published scholars. Law constitutes a secondary but notable portion (16% and 14% respectively), while the sciences remain marginal (1% and 2%). This distribution is somewhat at odds with the Academy’s own aspirations: as noted in Maylender (1930), the Catenati cultivated ambitions as a scientific academy, hosting discussions in natural philosophy, medicine, and law alongside its literary activities. The data suggest, however, that in practice the humanities remained overwhelmingly dominant throughout the period, and the forays into science never translated into a substantial share of the membership.

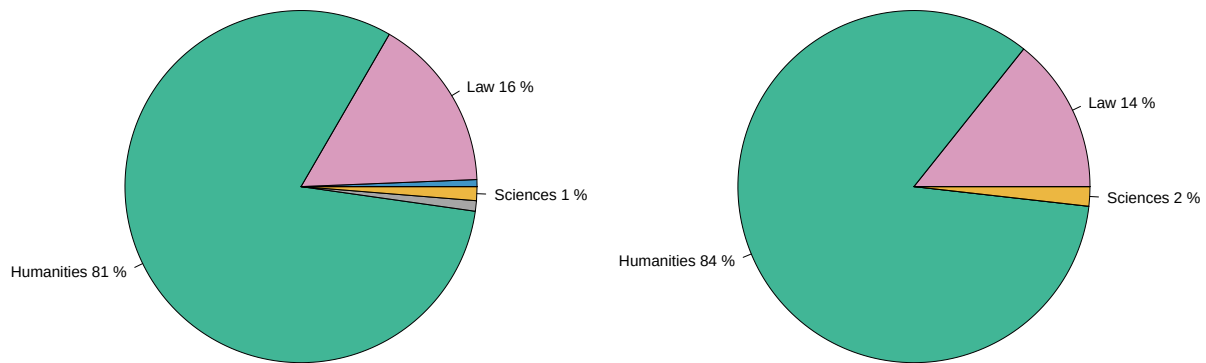


Figure 2: Broad fields at the Academy of Catenati (left:all scholars; right: published scholars)

5 PLACES OF BIRTH

Figure 1 displays the documented birthplaces for the scholars who were active at the Academy of Catenati for the period 1574–1800. The map reveals a strong concentration in the central regions, reflecting the Academy’s deep roots among the urban and ecclesiastical elites of Macerata and the surrounding Marche. A secondary cluster appears in northern Italy, corresponding to members drawn from Bologna, Venice, and other major cultural centres. A small number of scholars originated from beyond the Alps, attesting to the Academy’s occasional connections with the broader European cultural world, although it remained fundamentally a regional institution.

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, Wikipedia, and Wikidata, using principal component analysis. The details are given in Curtis et al. (2026) for these individual measures of human capital. Figure 3 shows the names of all the scholars with a positive human capital index. The figure reveals a notable gap in the presence of high-human-capital scholars during the period 1620 to 1665. A very similar pattern is observed in the contemporaneous human capital index of the University of Macerata (de la Croix and Spolverini 2021), suggesting that the gap reflects a broader crisis in the local intellectual environment rather than a dynamic specific to the Academy.

7 TOP 5 SCHOLARS

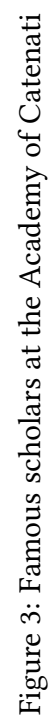
Here we provide a brief overview of the five members with the highest human capital index.

Torquato Tasso (Sorrento 1544 – Roma 1595), was a poet and one of the leading figures of the late Renaissance. His education began with the Jesuits in Naples and continued at the universities of Padua and Bologna. In 1564, he was investigated in Bologna for writing satirical verses, a sign of his bold literary activity. His studies reflected a wide-ranging intellect, encompassing philology, philosophy, and the sciences (de la Croix and Vitale 2021; Vitale 2026). He was admitted to the Academy of Catenati on 17 November 1574, only a few months after the academy’s foundation. The admission is recorded in the Acts of the Academy, where his candidacy was proposed by Marcantonio Cittadini following a recommendation by Girolamo Bisaccioni, a scholar and rhetorician associated with the court of Alfonso II d’Este in Ferrara, where Tasso himself was active. The poet’s connection with the academy reflected the prestige of the Catenati within the intellectual networks of late Renaissance Italy, as well as Tasso’s

close relationships with several of its members, including Jacopo Mazzoni, Fabio Ranucci, and Marcello Ferri (Accademia dei Catenati 2026). The relationship became particularly important during the controversies surrounding the *Gerusalemme Liberata* in the 1580s, with Mazzoni serving as one of the principal defenders of the poem against the criticisms of the Accademia della Crusca (Accademia dei Catenati 2026; Vitale 2026). During a documented stay in Macerata in November 1587, Tasso is traditionally believed to have presented the *Gerusalemme Liberata* before the academicians for discussion and judgment, reinforcing the academy's role as an important center of literary debate and intellectual exchange in late sixteenth-century Italy (Accademia dei Catenati 2026). He died in Rome at the convent of Sant'Onofrio al Gianicolo in 1595, shortly before he was to receive the poetic coronation on the Capitoline Hill, an honor bestowed by the Pope that he did not live to experience (Vitale 2026).

Vicenzo Monti (Alfonsinel 1754 – Milano 1828) was an Italian poet, playwright, translator, and scholar, widely regarded as one of the leading representatives of Italian Neoclassicism throughout its different phases of development (Pizzamiglio 2006). Educated at the University of Ferrara, where he studied medicine and law, he soon distinguished himself through his mastery of classical forms and his admiration for Virgilian poetry. After joining the Accademia dell'Arcadia in 1775, he moved to Rome in 1778 under the patronage of Cardinal Scipione Borghese and rapidly achieved prominence inside the literary circles surrounding Pope Pius VI. During this Roman period he composed several of his most celebrated works, including the *Prosopopea di Pericle*, the *Ode al Signor di Montgolfier*, and the unfinished *Feroniade*, poems characterized by formal elegance, mythological imagery, and the exaltation of scientific and political achievements within a classical framework (Flamini 1906). His arrival and activity in the Academy of Catenati in 1795 were marked by the political upheavals following the French Revolution, which profoundly influenced Monti's literary and ideological trajectory. Initially a defender of the Papal order and author of the anti-revolutionary *Bassvilliana* (1793), he later became an enthusiastic supporter of Napoleon and the Cisalpine Republic, serving in various official cultural positions in Milan and the Kingdom of Italy (Collison-Morley 1912). His verse translation of Homer's *Iliad* (1810) is still considered among the greatest Italian renderings of the epic (White 1979). His final years, marked by illness and financial difficulties, saw him defending classical literary ideals against Romantic aesthetics, particularly in the *Sermone sulla mitologia* (1825). He died in Milan in 1828.

Marc Antoine Muret (Limoges 1526 – Roma 1585) was a French humanist and classical scholar, renowned for the exceptional elegance of his Latin prose style. From the age of eighteen, he taught classical studies at various schools, where among his pupils was Michel de Montaigne. In the 1540s he composed the Latin tragedy *Julius Caesar*, considered the earliest known French play on a secular subject, and later lectured in philosophy and civil law in Paris. Closely associated with the poets of La Pléiade, he also published commentaries on Pierre de Ronsard's *Les Amours* and his own *Juvenilia*, a collection of poems often marked by erotic themes (Encyclopaedia Britannica 2026b). After being accused of heresy and immoral conduct in 1554, Muret fled France and eventually settled in Rome in 1563, where he gained wide recognition as a lecturer at the University of Rome. His scholarly reputation grew throughout Europe thanks to his refined Latin style and his critical works on classical authors, including Cicero, Catullus, Tacitus, Plato, and Aristotle. In the last decade of his life, he entered holy orders (1576) and, in 1580, was received into the Academy of Catenati (Accademia dei Catenati 2026). He died in Rome five years later.



Paolo Antonio Rolli (Roma 1687 – Todi 1767) was a librettist, poet, and translator who, as Italian language master to the English royal household, played a significant role in shaping and Italianizing eighteenth-century English cultural and artistic taste (Encyclopaedia Britannica 2026c). His early education took place within ecclesiastical settings and later at the Roman College, with occasional references suggesting that he may have taken minor religious orders. He completed his studies under the jurist and playwright Giovanni Vincenzo Gravina, a founding figure of the reformist Accademia dell’Arcadia, from whom he and his fellow student Pietro Metastasio absorbed neoclassical principles. After a conflict with the academy’s head, Giovanni Mario Crescimbeni, Gravina and his circle left the Arcadia and established the Quirinian Academy (Caruso 2017). Upon returning from England to Italy, he settled in Todi, where he also died, while in the mid-eighteenth century he became associated with the Academy of Catenati (Accademia dei Catenati 2026).

Antonio Genovesi (Castiglione 1712 – Napoli 1769) was an Italian philosopher and economist whose reformist thought played a key role in the intellectual renewal of eighteenth-century Naples. Ordained a priest in 1737, he moved to Naples the following year, where he became a professor of metaphysics at the University of Naples in 1741 (Encyclopaedia Britannica 2026a). A few years later, he was associated with the Academy of Catenati (1750), where he lectured on philosophy and literature (Accademia dei Catenati 2026). His career reached its turning point in the 1750s when he was appointed to the first European chair of "commerce and mechanics" at the University of Naples, effectively the first chair of political economy, where he developed influential mercantilist ideas combining economic analysis with moral and social reform. More importantly, he laid the foundations of the so-called "Neapolitan School", advocating a systematic reform of Neapolitan economic policy grounded in a balanced synthesis of traditional mercantilist theory with emerging physiocratic and liberal ideas (Perna 2017). He died in Naples in 1769 as a key figure in modern economic thought (Encyclopaedia Britannica 2026a).

8 ANECDOTE

The academy’s name conceals a curious wordplay: the letters of Catenati are all contained within the motto *Hinc a te nati* ("born from you"), making the motto itself a disguised form of the academy’s name (Maylender 1930).

9 FINAL THOUGHTS

The Academy of Catenati represents a remarkable case of institutional longevity in the landscape of early modern Italian academies. While it never achieved the visibility of the great Italian academies, its durability and its ability to attract, at times, figures of broader renown — such as Torquato Tasso — testify to the cultural vitality of this central Italian institution.

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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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