

The Academy of Sciences, Inscriptions and Belles-Lettres of Toulouse is a creation of the Age of Enlightenment. On June 24, 1746, Louis XV signed the letters patent, prepared by the Count of Saint-Florentin, which authorized the activity in Toulouse of a Royal Academy of Sciences, Inscriptions and Belles-Lettres. Its program was to bring together brilliant minds, scholars in different fields, in order to promote the production and dissemination of knowledge validated by critical thinking. It is not surprising, from this point of view, that an old copy of the *Encyclopédie* of Diderot and d'Alembert, still figures prominently in his library, or that one sees, in his "White Room" the busts of Voltaire and Picot de Lapeyrouse, or that one finds in his archives the names of Condillac, Parmentier, de Cuvier, manuscripts concerning astronomy, medicine, archaeology, Greek and Roman studies... Pierre (de) Fermat appears in all his premises and on many of his medals. He represents his spirit, since he was from Toulouse, mathematician, lawyer, and even poet. Rather bourgeois in his family and his morals, member for some years of the Chamber of the Edict in Castres, he embodied a Catholicism capable of dialogue with the reformed. He was not, however, a member of the Academy, since he died almost a century before it was formed. Nor was he a member of the various groups that preceded it, the most famous of which - although its reality remains difficult to define - is that of the Lanternists, whose motto would have been "Lucerna in nocte", motto that remains that of the current Academy of Sciences, Inscriptions and Belles-Lettres of Toulouse. Many legends surround this origin. It is unlikely, for example, that the Lanternists, around 1640, systematically went to their meetings, lighting themselves with a lantern... The legends have their charm: the current Academy uses a fake metal lantern to deposit its ballots, when it seems necessary. The thesis and the works of Michel Taillefer allow a historically founded knowledge of the attempts that preceded for a century the constitution of the Royal Academy of Sciences, Inscriptions and Belles-Lettres of Toulouse. Before the problematic Lanternists, whose name seems to appear for the first time only in a writing of 1693, there existed Academic Conferences that brought together "beautiful minds" in different places, intermittently, between 1640 and 1685. These Conferences did not publish anything. Among their most prominent members were Father Maignan, who was a mathematician and physicist, the physician Bayle, and the two Pellisson brothers. Then, between 1688 and 1699, there existed a Society of Belles-Lettres, composed of about forty members, which was sometimes interested in the sciences, and which planned the creation of an Academy. This project, led by M.de Malapeire, clashed with the Collège du Gai Savoir, which managed to become in 1694 Academy of Floral Games. There was thus, according to Michel Taillefer, a "little war of pamphlets" of which we remain, dating from 1692, the Response to Memoirs that appeared against the establishment of an Academy of Belles-Lettres in the city of Toulouse. After thirty years of relative dormancy of the academic activity of Toulouse with a partly scientific vocation, a Society of Sciences was formed in 1729 which took over the project of an Academy of botany, and which found a room, then another, for meetings, experiments, conferences. The physician Antoine Sage was one of the most effective founders of this Society, where it was particularly important to cultivate geometry, botany, chemistry and anatomy. Memoirs were written, and around 1744, after a few moments of crisis, the Society of Sciences was very active. His main project was to become a Royal Academy, thus obtaining letters patent. In addition to the traditional hostility of the Floral Games, which had the support of Parliament, and which brought together a significant part of the nobility and clergy, this project came up against the reservations of the Academy of Montpellier, which could claim to be the only legitimate Academy in the province of Languedoc. Many steps were taken during the 1730s- 1740 to try to advance, thanks to the support of the Capitouls, even the Marquise de Pompadour. It was not until January 1746 that the president of Orbessan was able to announce that he finally believed he had succeeded. Statutes were drawn

up, and on 10 July 1746 the Société des Sciences read in session the letters patent which Louis XV had signed on 24 June: "The joy which this reading has caused has been most vivid." The Royal Academy of Sciences, Inscriptions and Belles-Lettres of Toulouse was born. It could play its part in the European and French academic movement, which had been growing steadily since the Renaissance, and which was then experiencing a new vigour.

Its members, scholars in various fields, belonged mainly to the local bourgeoisie. The young Academy strove to extend the scope of its relations to the whole France, even to Europe. It is significant that the Scottish scholar, Adam Smith, while beginning to write *On the Wealth of Nations*, and staying at Toulouse in 1764, attended some of its sessions. We can read in her *Memoirs*, four volumes of which were printed in 1782 and 1790, but also in manuscript registers, and in correspondence, that she studied archaeology, astronomy, mathematics, medicine, ancient languages, water circulations, town planning, that there was in fact nothing that interested humanity that was foreign to her. If several of its members have a certain notoriety, such as the collector Martin de Saint-Amand, the naturalist Picot de Lapeyrouse, or the astronomer Garipuy, none was an illustrious figure of European thought. The competitions she organized did not have the impact of those of the Academy of Dijon. Michel Taillefer considers that "its influence remained mediocre and almost exclusively local." This is not nothing: we owe him the constitution in Toulouse of an astronomical observatory, a garden of plants, an important cabinet of medals. It promoted the practice and dissemination of critical thinking. At the very beginning of the Revolution, it tried to adapt. She tried to celebrate the new authorities, and to put her activities at the service of the Constitutional Monarchy, then of the Republic. If it was less suspicious than the Floral Games of rooting in absolutism, it was not able to convince the Convention, which suppressed it on August 8, 1793, with all the other Academies and Literary Societies. His possessions and collections were dispersed or recovered by museums. Several of its members were imprisoned or prosecuted. Some played a role in the new schools that the Republic created in Toulouse, then in the Lycée and the Athénée, which strove to offer teaching, and Picot de Lapeyrouse was mayor of Toulouse between 1800 and 1806.

The nineteenth century was happy for the Academy, which successive regimes never prevented from being maintained. It went through the fall of the Empire, the various forms of monarchical restorations, the Second Republic, the Second Empire, and prospered particularly during the Third Republic. There remain from this time many manuscript archives, printed memoirs, a considerable part of his library, and some elements of his collections which were, for the most part, distributed among the museums of Toulouse. We can see from her archives that she was involved in urban, political and scientific projects in the city. She received many messages from correspondents who warned her of archaeological discoveries, new experiments, the fall of a meteorite in Prade. (Tarn-et-Garonne), the publication of a book... She was handing out prizes. She gave praise, gave opinions. Several of its members played notable roles in astronomy, chemistry, and the local and national natural sciences. She accompanied, with Émile Cartailhac, the invention of modern prehistoric archaeology. She communicated with eminent personalities such as Cuvier or Michelet. In a century when the CNRS and the many often university research institutes did not yet exist, it played a central role in Toulouse and its region for the validation, creation and encouragement of knowledge. One can only hope that a thesis comparable to the one that Michel Taillefer devoted to his inaugural half-century, will one day analyze its role and functioning during the long century preceding the First World War. The twentieth century especially allowed the Toulouse Academy to obtain premises worthy of it. She was indeed somewhat wandering from her origins, and even victim, in 1875, of the construction work of the future rue Alsace, which led to the destruction of the "little Versailles", where she lived. Fortunately Ozenne came, and, in 1895, bequeathed the Hôtel d'Assézat to the municipality, which he charged with maintaining it and housing six Academies and Learned Societies, including the Academy of Sciences, Inscriptions and Belles-Lettres of Toulouse. The

installation, in 1995, of the foundation Bemberg in the Hôtel d'Assézat led, after negotiations, to the construction of a new building, the redevelopment of certain rooms, which allowed the Academy to have two salons, premises for its library, and to share with the other companies the use of the Clémence Isaure room, which it helped to embellish.

The considerable development of scientific activity, thanks to universities, industries, the CNRS, and various institutions for research and dissemination of knowledge, left the Academy a little behind, which encountered some difficulties in finding another role than that of bringing together notables at the end of their careers. Its members now represented only a small part of the city's abundant scientific and literary elites. It was no longer the place of research, nor that of the validation of knowledge. However, it was able to maintain itself, preserve its publications and its regular sessions, continue to award prizes to young doctors, rearrange its premises, its library, and, in the twenty-first century, create a rich website, put its archives and its Memoirs at the disposal of the research community with Gallica. Above all, it rediscovered part of its original vocation - the dissemination of knowledge - by multiplying, over the past twenty years, public conferences, symposia, meetings with writers, journals, and collaborations with bookstores, the Quai des savoirs, museums, Toulouse universities, cultural events, as well as with other academies. Its new members, who are more and more often women, can be specialists in artificial intelligence, genetics, oncology, avionics, drones..., but also ancient literature, archaeology, Proust, or music... The Academy tries, in this world sometimes invaded by new obscurantisms and often seduced by "fake news", to help resist by practicing its old motto, "lucerna in nocte", or even by trying to multiply "lucernae in noctibus".

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