# Exciting Emulation in the Academies

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The Royal Society of Sciences and Belles-Lettres of Nancy gathered on 20 October 1763 to hold a public meeting. The society had but recently extended membership to M. Bollioud Mermet, perpetual secretary of the Academy of Lyon, and in accordance with custom, had asked him to prepare an address for the meeting. Mermet unfortunately could not attend, but he did send along a "Discourse on Emulation" to be read in his absence. In it he expressed his gratitude to the gentlemen of Nancy and praised the enlightened Duke of Lorraine, Stanislas Leszczynski, for his support of the society in its efforts to cultivate the arts and sciences. This gratitude soon gave way, however, to the real subject of the address, that sentiment "which so delightfully affects men, which so powerfully and supremely influences all their actions," namely, emulation.[1]

Mermet reflected at length on the case of savants because he believed them particularly vulnerable to two faults. The first, presumption, led men of genius to overestimate their own strength and consequently to undertake too much work. As a result, they often succumbed under the weight of their endeavor. The second, discouragement, characterized those men who were easily daunted by the success of others and despaired of ever keeping pace. The prospect of failure simply led them to quit. Though of a very different nature, then, presumption and

[1] M. Bollioud Mermet, "Discours sur l'émulation," (Lyon: Les Frères Perisse, 1763). Stanislas Leszczynski, enlightened (but alas dethroned) monarch of Poland, received the duchy of Lorraine from Louis XV. The research for this paper would not have been possible without generous funding from the American University College of Arts and Sciences and History Department. All translations from the French, unless otherwise noted, are my own.

discouragement had the same result: a lack of progress and learning. How to solve the problem? Mermet believed that emulation provided the answer—it encouraged humility in choosing "for a model all that is virtuous and laudable" and perseverance in the desire to equal or surpass that model. Emulation thus "avoid[ed] with equal precaution the danger of a reckless confidence which blinds us, and a lack of courage which demoralizes us." It guided the savant down the path of progress toward true glory. These lessons, moreover, applied to other spheres of life such as religion, morality, civic and military duty. Even princes felt the twinge of emulation. Witness Stanislas, "example of sublime virtues, truly worthy of the emulation of all the Sovereigns!"[2]

But Mermet was not the only one who spoke in such terms. The beneficial effects of emulation had by the mid-eighteenth century become a commonplace among savants. The Montauban Academy, for example, proposed for the theme of its 1758 essay contest, "Great souls are capable of emulation without being subject to jealousy," and the winning entry, authored by M. Desclaisons, developed many of the same themes as Mermet. The *Année Littéraire* in its summary of the contest stated that "the first thing that strikes us at the sight of great men or at the account of their actions is the glory that surrounds them; this is the first thing that excites us; the second is the desire to surpass others, this is emulation."[3] Even the bastions of the High Enlightenment fell to this discourse. In 1755 the Chevalier de Jaucourt wrote an article for the *Encyclopédie* dedicated entirely to the concept.[4] It seems that eighteenth-century savants had, on some level, a common intellectual toolkit. They shared a way of speaking about the world in which emulation played an important role.

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[2] Ibid., 7, 43.
[3] John Iverson, "Emulation in France, 1750-1800," *Eighteenth-Century Studies* 36.2 (2003): 217-223; "Discours Couronné," *l'Année Littéraire* (1759): 63.
[4] Chevalier de Jaucourt, "Emulation," in vol. 5 of *Encyclopédie ou dictionnaire raisonné des sciences, des arts et des métiers, par une société de gens de lettres* (Paris, 1755).

Intellectual activity in early Enlightenment France (1710-1750) took on many forms, but it was characterized, above all, by a faith in sociability. In salons, clubs, masonic lodges, and royal academies, people came together to talk and exchange ideas about everything from the nature of coral to *l'Esprit des Lois*. The discourses on emulation, like that of Mermet, often emerged from these venues and for that reason provide a unique opportunity to reexamine eighteenth-century cultural institutions. In particular, this holds true for the royal academies that spread throughout the French provinces in the first half of the century, for there, more than anywhere else, the discourse of emulation was put into practice.

The royal academies have in many respects come to embody the early Enlightenment in the historical imagination. "For contemporaries," and for scholars such as James McClellan, they "defined the invisible topography of this make-believe republic [of letters] as institutional outposts of its government and diplomacy."[5] Royal academies, moreover, provided an environment conducive to study of the "new sciences" based on observation and experimentation, so often contrasted with the study of ancient texts and the humanist curriculum. For that reason, they were perceived as forward-looking and representing intellectual progress. In the opinion of some scholars they even took on progressive (read subversive) ideological characteristics. According to Vincenzo Ferrone, "the new science, which by definition arose in opposition to the aristocratic and exclusive concept of hermetic knowledge typical of Renaissance magus, was above all founded on a spirit we might call democratic…"[6] The academies often practiced what scholars have termed a democratic sociability as well; that is, they observed no distinctions outside of those based on personal merit. Each academician

[5] James E. McClellan III, *Science Reorganized: Scientific Societies in the Eighteenth Century* (New York: Columbia Univ. Press, 1985), 5.
[6] Vincenzo Ferrone, "The Accademia Reale delle Scienze: Cultural Sociability and Men of Letters in Turin of the Enlightenment under Vittorio Amedio III," *Journal of Modern History* 70:3 (1998): 519-560.

supposedly had the same status. All these observations could apply equally well to the historiography surrounding other eighteenth-century cultural institutions.

A close study of emulation, however, casts doubt on this interpretation. In theory the concept of emulation served enlightened and progressive ends, but when put into practice in the academies, it could in fact reinforce the system of corporative privilege so often associated with the "Old Regime." The same observation applies equally well to the royal academies themselves. This comes through particularly strong in a case study of the early eighteenth-century struggles between the *Société Royale des Sciences* of Montpellier and rival savants in the cities of Beziers and Toulouse. Contrary to what some scholars have argued, though, this does not represent a "paradox," a "contradiction," or a "betrayal of principles."[7] It provides insight into the actual nature of the royal academies. For in a society based on privilege, like early Enlightenment France, organizing intellectual activity along hierarchical and corporative lines was an eminently sensible way to pursue "enlightened" ends.

## Emulation: Definition and Interpretation

To grasp the importance of the concept of emulation in early Enlightenment France requires first that we have a working definition. A good place to start is, of course, contemporary dictionaries. The fourth edition of the *Dictionnaire de l'Académie française* (1762) defines emulation as a "sort of jealousy that excites [a person] to equal or surpass someone in something laudable." It then gives examples of phrases in which the word commonly appears such as "to excite emulation," "to give emulation," and "to study better

[7] Ferrone, "The Accademia Reale delle Scienze," 526; Daniel Roche, *Le Siècle des lumières en province: Académies et académiciens provinciaux, 1680-1789* (Paris and the Hague: Mouton, 1978), 18.

through emulation."[8] While these common usages are certainly suggestive, neither they nor the definition itself provide much insight into the logic behind the concept—or, in other words, what it signified to eighteenth-century Frenchmen and why.

For such an understanding we must turn to the contemporary periodical press. The numerous treatises on emulation that began to appear in 1740s and 1750s not only analyze the concept in great detail but, by their sheer number, attest to its prevalence throughout French culture. A good example comes from the *Mercure de France*, which published a "Discourse on Emulation" in late 1746.[9] This discourse proves all the more useful in that its appearance coincides with the struggles of the *Société Royale des Sciences* of Montpellier.

The author, an *avocat* named Derhins, begins by philosophizing on the sources of human motivation. He states that men have an overwhelming desire for glory and that they act only to acquire it. This desire logically leads them to virtuous action because, to attain glory, one must distinguish oneself through praiseworthy acts. The argument is fairly simple up to this point, if a bit naïve. Derhins then proceeds to argue that the man who has achieved glory comes to serve as a model, for all men have a natural penchant to imitate one another. As soon as they see someone praised for his merit, they attempt to imitate him so as to achieve similar recognition—and herein lies the very essence of emulation. "With [emulation] one does with joy what one perceives as virtuous in others; one takes [others] as a model in order to give birth to the desire to equal them."[10]

Emulation, however, has still another aspect. According to Derhins, it involves not only the desire to imitate others, but to surpass them as well. Yet this competitive aspect poses certain problems: namely, how can one distinguish between a "noble emulation" and base jealousy?

[8] *Dictionnaire de l'Académie française*, 4th ed. (Paris: 1762), s.v. "Emulation."
[9] Derhins Doyen des Avocats de Bessiene en Foret, "Discours sur l'émulation," *Mercure de France* (November 1746): 58-63.
[10] Ibid., 59.

How can one distinguish between virtue and vice? The answer is to be found in the means by which one proceeds. In his pursuit of glory, an emulator seeks to elevate himself to level of another, whom he admires. An envious person, on the other hand, seeks to lower his rival to his own level and thus both lose. As the Chevalier de Jaucourt explained in his article on emulation for the *Encyclopédie* (1755):

> [Emulation] seeks to surpass a rival by laudable and generous means. Envy thinks only of abasing its rival through opposition. Emulation, always active and open, takes the merit of others as its motive, so as to strive for perfection with more ardor: envy, cold and dry, saddens and remains passive; it is a sterile passion which leaves the envious man in the position where it found him, and in which this vice is the sole motive![11]

Here the notion of progress is also tied up with emulation. The many references to surpassing others in virtue or merit certainly evoke a triumphal march of history, with each generation becoming progressively more enlightened. And Derhins, in a fit of characteristically French chauvinism, makes this argument explicit. He portrays France as the heir to the classical tradition, perfecting the work of all those who came before it. "[Emulation] is the advantage that the Romans had over the Greeks, why should we not have it over the Greeks and the Romans? That beautiful emulation is worthy of us in order that we may serve as an example to all other Nations."[12] To sum up, then, the desire for glory or honor leads men to imitate others who have distinguished themselves through praiseworthy acts (hard work, intense study, etc.). But emulation does not stop at imitation. It seeks to surpass its rival by virtuous means and consequently leads to progress in all fields in which it occurs, for "one can say that the human mind is capable of anything, when it is pricked by emulation."[13] Thus it should come as no surprise that an enlightened French nation, concerned with encouraging the arts and sciences, would place great emphasis on this concept.

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[11] Jaucourt, "Emulation," in vol. 5 of *Encyclopédie ou dictionnaire raisonné*.
[12] Derhins, "*Discours*," 62.
[13] Ibid., 59.

*The Historiographical Debate*

Historians have largely adopted this definition in exploring the significance of emulation in eighteenth-century France. The arguments of two in particular, John Shovlin and Nira Kaplan, deserve attention because of the important questions they raise. In his article, "Emulation in Eighteenth-Century French Economic Thought" (2003), Shovlin attempts to explain the successful emergence of a commercial society in France during the last decades of the "Old Regime." He begins by arguing that the 1750s and 1760s saw the rise of a patriotic movement that acknowledged the importance of commerce and civic virtue in regenerating the French nation following the disastrous Seven Years' War. At the same time, however, these patriots evinced a distrust of commerce insofar as it encouraged selfish, acquisitive behavior. Such a mercantile personality was incapable of the public-spiritedness so desperately needed. In an attempt to reconcile commerce and civic virtue, Shovlin argues, merchants and entrepreneurs of all types were recast as "emulators" who pursued honor and glory, not riches. To attain such honor, merchants would have to perform public-spirited acts, for only these could win the esteem of fellow citizens. Thus the economic actor, formerly motivated by crass self-interest, became a "potential patriot" through the concept of emulation.[14]

Shovlin believes that this notion of merchants being sensitive to honorific rewards emerged from the writings of a small coterie attached to the Intendant of Commerce, Jacques-Claude-Marie Vincent de Gournay. These writers argued that, to regenerate French commerce, useful professions such as farming and manufacturing, formerly objects of scorn, needed to be

[14] John Shovlin, "Emulation in Eighteenth-Century French Economic Thought," *Eighteenth-Century Studies* 36.2 (2003): 224-230.

honored. This argument found expression in the numerous agricultural societies that cropped up all over France in the second half of the eighteenth century. The prize contests they offered, along with other honorific rewards, served to recognize and encourage agricultural innovations such as the invention of new machines, techniques, and so on. All this would excite the emulation of farmers and bring about commercial progress. Meanwhile the farmer would appear a patriotic citizen, motivated not by a desire for wealth, but by love for the *patrie*. Shovlin suggests that such representations of commerce took on particular importance during the French Revolution because they resolved "the contradiction between political liberty and civil liberty, virtue and interest."[15] By the early nineteenth century, then, economic and exchange relations (now linked to the desire for honor and emulation) became the basis for a new social order.

Nira Kaplan, taking a wider view, traces the evolution of the concept of emulation from the seventeenth-century Jesuit *collège* up to the early nineteenth century in her article "Virtuous Competition among Citizens: Emulation in Politics and Pedagogy during the French Revolution" (2003). She begins by noting that emulation was an important pedagogical tool in the *collège*. There students received a rigorous humanist education centered on the imitation of Greek and Roman works. Students did not simply imitate the style of the ancients, though. They drew moral lessons from the heroic figures of antiquity, so that when they entered society, they would not only be educated but "expected to behave with the virtuous self-sacrifice of a Brutus and Cato and the justice and disinterestedness of Solon."[16]

[15] Ibid., 228.

[16] Nira Kaplan, "Virtuous Competition among Citizens: Emulation in Politics and Pedagogy during the French Revolution," *Eighteenth-Century Studies* 36.2 (2003): 241-242. The work on emulation in the Renaissance is extensive and prefigures many of the debates that emerged in the eighteenth century. See G.W. Pigman III, "Versions of Imitation in the Renaissance," *Renaissance Quarterly* 33 (1980): 1-32; ibid., "Imitation and the Renaissance Sense of the Past: The Reception of Erasmus' *Ciceronianus*," *Journal of Medieval and Renaissance Studies* 9 (1979): 155-177; Thomas M. Greene, "Petrarch and the Humanist Hermeneutic," in *Italian Literature: Roots and Branches*, ed. Giose Rimanelli and Kenneth John Atchity (New Haven: Yale Univ. Press, 1976), 201-224; Howard Meyer Brown, "Emulation, Competition, and Homage: Imitation and Theories of Imitation in the Renaissance," *Journal of the American Musicological Society* 35 (1982): 1-48; Howard D. Weinbrot, "'An Ambition to Excell': The Aesthetics of Emulation in the Seventeenth and Eighteenth Centuries," *Huntington Library*

But as the eighteenth century progressed, emulation came to take on a more competitive aspect. This found expression in the frequent *concours* of the Jesuit *collèges*, in which students publicly competed against one another for things like best French translation of a Latin text. This competitive emulation was, of course, intended to spur the students on to further work, with a view toward "encouraging competence and social productivity rather than the inculcation of virtue [as had formerly been the case]."[17] This emulation spread beyond the walls of the *collège*, too, taking the form of prize competitions sponsored by royal academies (a phenomenon also noted by Shovlin).

As competitive emulation spread throughout society, however, it came under attack as a means of education. Jean-Jacques Rousseau's wildly popular *Emile* (1762) played its part in condemning a culture that valued merit and talent, but neglected virtue. This prompted a return to earlier practices in the *collège*, where emulation meant, first and foremost, imitation with the aim of inculcating public-spiritedness.[18]

Kaplan argues that these two trends merged when the "Old Regime" collapsed in 1792. The destruction of the privileges and corporate structure that had characterized French society left citizens fearing that "their social identity was threatened by dissolution in a sea of anonymity or by the prospect that distinction would be gained solely through ambition and avarice."[19] The second option posed certain problems insofar as ambition and avarice—in other words, self-interest—seemed the very opposite of the public-spiritedness required in a republic. Contemporaries used the concept of emulation to reconcile these "personal" and "social" needs. In the *collège*, emulation entailed imitation of virtuous models. But students no longer imitated classical texts. They focused their attention on the teacher, a model republican, and learned how

*Quarterly* 48 (1985): 121-139.
[17] Kaplan, "Virtuous Competition," 242.
[18] Ibid., 243.
[19] Ibid., 241.

to be a good citizen through practical experience. This enabled them to act in a public-spirited manner in the outside world characterized by a more competitive emulation (i.e., the free competition for jobs and offices supposedly introduced by the new republic).

Although the arguments of Kaplan and Shovlin do not seem to have much in common, upon closer inspection it becomes clear that they share certain assumptions. These assumptions, moreover, follow logically from their approach to emulation in eighteenth-century France. Both of the interpretations outlined above, as should be clear from their use of the term "Old Regime," explore the eighteenth century with an eye toward the Revolution of 1789. In an extremely clever move, Shovlin uses the concept of emulation to revive the idea of a bourgeois revolution —not in the sense that it was conducted by members of a "middle class," but rather that it saw the rise of a social order conceptualized in terms of exchange relations. Kaplan, on the other hand, concerns herself with the revolutionary preoccupation of regenerating the French nation. She ultimately argues that emulation became a key characteristic of the revolutionary because it helped resolve the tension between personal ambition and civic virtue—it became a kind of mechanism by which future generations would be inculcated with republican values.

Both of these arguments have a lot to recommend themselves. Most important for our purposes, they highlight the role of emulation as a form of encouragement to virtuous and meritorious action. By the same token, though, they do not consider the eighteenth century on its own terms. Shovlin examines the closing decades of the "Old Regime" in light of notions of patriotism, nationalism, citizenship, and their relationship to shifting representations of political economy (references to the work of David A. Bell in the notes make this clear). Meanwhile Kaplan seeks to explain emulation and its eventual role in republican ideology. But these approaches, however useful in the context of the late monarchy and early republican period,

seem inappropriate for the first half of the eighteenth century. Kaplan and Shovlin present emulation as the mechanism behind shifting relations between the individual and the state hurdling headlong toward 1789.

But French society in the early 1700s was characterized not by individual relations to the state, but by a complex corporate structure and the system of privileges that went along with it. Emulation as practiced before 1750 had something of this "Old Regime" character, for as Derhins and his contemporaries make abundantly clear, it was rooted in traditional notions of honor and glory.[20] Jeremy A. Caradonna notes in his article, "The Monarchy of Virtue: The *Prix de Vertu* and the Economy of Emulation in France, 1777-1791," that scholars have all too often observed "virtue in the Old Regime anachronistically through the lens of the French Revolution."[21] This statement applies equally well to the concept of emulation. A look at the ways in which emulation functioned within the system of corporatism and privilege of the early Enlightenment could serve as a healthy corrective to this trend. To do this we must treat it not as an abstract idea, but as a cultural practice rooted in the institutions of eighteenth-century France. And since Shovlin, Kaplan, and Caradonna all touch upon the role of emulation in the royal academies, it is to the academies that we shall go.

## The *Société Royale des Sciences* of Montpellier

[20] John Shovlin has discussed this issue elsewhere. See his article, "Toward a Reinterpretation of Revolutionary Antinobilism: the Political Economy of Honor in the Old Regime," *The Journal of Modern History* 72 (2000): 35-66; and his book, *The Political Economy of Virtue: Luxury, Patriotism, and the Origins of the French Revolution* (Ithaca: Cornell Univ. Press, 2006), passim.

[21] Jeremy A. Caradonna, "The Monarchy of Virtue: The *Prix de Vertu* and the Economy of Emulation in France, 1777-1791," *Eighteenth-Century Studies* (forthcoming). I would like to thank Prof. Caradonna for sharing his unpublished work with me.

When moving from the realm of theory to practice, the concept of emulation becomes more complex. The men of the *Société Royale des Sciences*, for example, employed it in three different ways during their conflicts with Beziers and Toulouse. First, emulation governed relations between a particular academy and the outside world. Through prize contests, or any other type of honorific award, the Société could "excite" the emulation of savants throughout the province of Languedoc, leading them to redouble their efforts in the pursuit of the arts and sciences. The noble example of the Société, moreover, would encourage savants in other cities to set up their own scientific academies. It is mostly in this sense—i.e., emulation as a form of outside encouragement—that other scholars have used the term.[22] Second, emulation played an important role within the scientific academy itself. It was argued that the example of illustrious colleagues would lead academicians, who hoped to achieve a similar vastness of knowledge, to study and work harder. This type of emulation lay at the heart of all scientific academies (and enlightened sociability more generally) and often served as a justification for their existence. Both of these usages should make clear the goal of spreading the "taste" for learning to as wide an audience as possible.

But emulation could also serve to limit the number of people who practiced eighteenth-century science. The Société Royale, in its struggles to preserve its privileges against Beziers and Toulouse, used it as an argument against the "multiplication" of scientific academies in too close a proximity. One could argue that, in this respect, the concept of emulation came to betray its original purpose: to encourage the progress of the arts and sciences. Other scholars have certainly noted this phenomenon in relation to the academic movement as a whole. As Daniel Roche put it in his book, *Siècle des lumières en province* (1978), "the desire to defend privileges

[22] Shovlin, *The Political Economy of Virtue*, passim; Jeremy A. Caradonna, "The Enlightenment in Question: Prize Contests (*Concours Académiques*) and the Francophone Republic of Letters, 1670-1794," Ph.D. diss., Johns Hopkins University, 2007, ch.7

won with difficulty appeared very quickly, and from its birth, the academy contradicted the implicit premises of its origins."[23] The following discussion will show that such a characterization really misses the point.

*The Founding Act*

Before proceeding to our case study, however, we must first place the Société Royale in context, for the scientific societies of provincial France were profoundly influenced by the urban environment in which they took shape. The city of Montpellier, located in the heart of Bas-Languedoc, boasted a population of about twenty thousand at the turn of the eighteenth century. Its proximity to the Mediterranean and the *Canal des Deux Mers*, which connected France's southern coastline to the Atlantic Ocean, established the city as a thriving trading post with its own board of commerce. Manufacture and trade in wines, eaux-de-vie, perfumes, and textiles dominated the local economy and ensured its growth through the first half of the eighteenth century.[24]

This *ville marchande* also served as the seat of many provincial and royal institutions. At the top of the hierarchy was the Court of Accounts, Aids, and Finances, which traditionally oversaw the levying of indirect taxes and royal finances in Languedoc. It comprised 138 offices, with varying costs and incomes, all of which conferred nobility on their holder.[25] Montpellier played host to the Intendancy of Languedoc as well. This institution, first established in the early seventeenth century, represented the king's power in the province. It was headed by a royally appointed Intendant who functioned as an intermediary between Versailles and Montpellier. As

[23] Daniel Roche, *Le siècle des lumières en province*, 18.
[24] McClellan, *Science Reorganized,* 8; Elizabeth Randall Kindleberger, "The *Société Royale des Sciences de Montpellier*: 1706-1793" (Ph.D. diss., The Johns Hopkins University, 1979), ch. 1.
[25] Ibid., 8-9.

a *pays d'états*, moreover, Languedoc had the privilege of a semi-autonomous administrative body known as the Estates. Each year the Estates would hold session over a five week period in December and January, during which Montpellier erupted with festivities of all kinds. These three institutions combined to make Montpellier the political center of the province, despite its relatively small size, and enabled it to mobilize a network of powerful officials to protect its interests. Later this would prove decisive for the Société Royale.[26]

But the reputation of Montpellier rested first and foremost on its role as *ville savante*. The city was renowned for its medical school, founded in the thirteenth century, whose "more advanced" curriculum led it to surpass even that of Paris in prestige. By the end of the eighteenth century, the medical faculty consisted of eight chairs and enrolled around 100 students annually. It taught more than strictly "medical" subjects as well, with three of its chairs dedicated to anatomy, botany, and chemistry. Montpellier also had faculties of arts and theology, which, in contrast to the medical school, languished over the course of the eighteenth century until the Jesuits made them into a *collège* for younger students. This learned culture was not confined to the university either. Montpellier could boast the first *Jardin botanique* in France, and last but not least, a royal chair of mathematics and hydrography dedicated to educating sailors, merchants, or whoever might be interested in the fundamentals of navigation.[27]

All this created the atmosphere necessary to give rise to the *Société Royale des Sciences* of Montpellier in 1706. Yet this outcome was by no means a foregone conclusion. Science, in the more narrow sense of the term, first had to separate itself from the practice of medicine to which it had long been subordinate at the university. Two factors helped bring this about. The

[26] Ibid., ch. 3. For a terrific discussion of Montpellier's social and institutional structure see Robert Darnton, *The Great Cat Massacre and Other Episodes in French Cultural History* (New York: Basic Books, 1999), ch. 3.
[27] Ibid., 10-13; Elizabeth A. Williams, "Medicine in the Civic Life of Eighteenth-Century Montpellier," *Bulletin of the History of Medicine* 70.2 (1996): 205-232.

first involves a certain Marquis de Vardes who had been expelled from the royal court for his "indiscretions" and took up (forced) residence in the city's citadel. The Marquis found that he had a lot of time on his hands and decided the take up philosophy. Accordingly, he sent for Pierre-Sylvain Régis, a renowned disciple of Descartes, who had spent the past few years teaching at nearby Toulouse. Régis accepted the offer and arrived in Montpellier in 1671, where he passed the next eight years giving public lectures. By destroying the outmoded theories of Aristotle and Ptolemy, according to Junius Castelnau, his series of Cartesian lectures exerted "a decisive influence on the development of the taste for sciences which manifested itself soon thereafter."[28]

The second factor does not have as amusing a history, but did much more to encourage the pursuit of science in Montpellier. In 1674 the Paris Academy of Sciences sent one of its astronomers, Jean Picard, to the city to make some astronomical observations. This brief visit, "and perhaps the lessons of Picard," encouraged two professors at the local medical school (MM. Rheyle and Saporta) to take up astronomy. This new interest quickly bore fruit, and the two men were soon making observations of eclipses, one of which appeared in the prestigious Parisian *Journal des Savants* in 1676.[29]

These encounters with prominent savants combined with the intellectual atmosphere of the university to produce the first signs of a scientific community in Montpellier. The closing years of the seventeenth century saw the formation of a private gathering, which met regularly to discuss questions of astronomy, physics, anatomy, and natural history. Not much information is available about these early meetings. But we do know that, around the turn of the eighteenth century, the Bishop of Montpellier, Joachim Colbert, allowed these men to use his library for

[28] Junius Castelnau, *Mémoire historique et biographique sur l'ancienne Société royale des sciences de Montpellier* (Montpellier: 1858), 17-18.
[29] Ibid., 16-17.

their "reunions." This support led three of the founding members of what would become the Société Royale—MM. Bon, de Clapies, and Plantade—to consider making their private gatherings into a royal academy of sciences. To accomplish such a feat, however, they needed official sanction in the form of letters patent, and for this they needed an intermediary to represent their interests in Paris.[30]

Once again a fateful visit seemed to change the course of events. In 1702 the famous astronomer Jean-Dominique Cassini, accompanied by his son and son-in-law, came to Montpellier to make some observations for a new map of France. Plantade was related to these three men by marriage (indeed they stayed at his father's house), and during their stay, he proposed the idea of a new academy to Cassini. Yet whether because of the War of the Spanish Succession or Cassini's neglect, the initial proposal failed. Then the Bishop of Montpellier threw his weight behind the project, and heartened by this support, the savants renewed their request. This time Cassini forwarded the project to the Abbé Bignon (known to contemporaries as the "moderator of the academies") and testified to the merit of the savants.[31] But to be sure, Bignon also wrote to the Intendant of Languedoc, Lamoignon de Basville, inquiring about the men and the nature of the project. In his response, Basville noted that "our city of Montpellier, long famous and celebrated, for the great number of skilled personages it has produced in all the sciences, would receive a new *éclat* and a notable advantage from this establishment," whose founding members were capable, laborious, and upright.[32] Satisfied with this testimony, Bignon went ahead with the plans, and the Société Royale received its letters patent in February 1706, giving *de jure* status to a scientific community that had existed *de facto* for some years.[33]

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[30] Ibid., 18-20.
[31] Jack A. Clarke, "Abbé Jean-Paul Bignon 'Moderator of the Academies' and Royal Librarian," *French Historical Studies* 18 (1973): 213-235.
[32] Bibliothèque Nationale de France (BN), Richelieu, Paris, Fr. 22225-22233, *Correspondance et Papiers de l'Abbé Bignon*, Fr. 22225, Règlements de la Société Royale des Sciences de Montpellier (Montpellier: Jean Martel, 1706).
[33] Castelnau, *Mémoire historique*, 20-24.

The Société Royale prided itself on being the second scientific academy in the kingdom after that of Paris. In many respects it typified those academies of the middle rank, "located in comparatively large urban centers and major provincial capitals," which James McClellan has described in some detail. It originated as a private gathering before receiving official status, relied heavily on local institutions for support, and suffered constant financial instability.[34] Unlike most academies, however, the Société enjoyed a number of privileges as laid out in its letters patent. It formed "but one and the same body" with the Paris Academy of Sciences, the most prestigious institution in France, and its members could sit in on meetings in Paris if they happened to be in town. It was also allowed to send one memoire each year to be published in the Paris Academy's *Histoire et Mémoires* (a right typically reserved for members). All this served to distinguish the Société from other provincial academies and became a special source of pride. To protect its preeminence, moreover, Montpellier was granted a monopoly on all scientific societies in the province of Languedoc. The Société proved especially "jealous" of these privileges in its early years because of its financial uncertainty and general lack of support. But the emulation it excited in others eventually forced it on the defensive in a struggle to preserve its status.[35]

*Attack from All Sides*

The preeminent position of the Société Royale was first called into question by a group of savants meeting in the nearby city of Beziers. This group first formed in 1723 and, encouraged by the example of its neighbor, decided to apply for letters patent in January 1729. This project

[34] McClellan, *Science Reorganized*, 35.
[35] BN Fr. 22225, Règlements de la Société Royale des Sciences de Montpellier (Montpellier: Jean Martel, 1706).

went forward with the support of the Bishop of Beziers and the perpetual secretary of the Paris Academy of Sciences, Dortous de Mairan, who came from the small southern city. Mairan wasted no time in trying the gain the support of the Paris Academy for the project and, toward this end, paid a visit to the Abbé Bignon.[36]

All this seemed to bode well for the men of Beziers, for not only did they have the support of a local notable, but an advocate at the heart of the most powerful scientific institution in France. It did not take long, though, for the Société Royale to mount an opposition. The perpetual secretary, Antoine Gauteron, immediately sent a letter to the Abbé Bignon, who had maintained his contacts with the Société after its foundation in 1706. Gauteron used this opportunity to outline the reasons that forced Montpellier to oppose the new academy. These included, first and foremost, the desire of Beziers "to work on the projects which are the object… of our academy, which would serve only to interfere with or retard the work of our Company." By this he meant the plans for a map and natural history of Languedoc that the Société had been pursuing for some time. The unwanted help from Beziers seemed all the more threatening because the Estates were just beginning "to take interest in our works…and make us hope for some liberality once the map of Languedoc was begun."[37]

Gauteron also communicated the "pretentions" of Beziers to M. Bon. Outside of his official duties as *premier président* of the local Court of Accounts, Aids, and Finances, M. Bon was an amateur physicist and natural historian who took an intense interest in the affairs of the Société Royale, of which he was an honorary member.[38] On this occasion, he used his personal prestige to gain access to the centers of power in Paris and Versailles. He wrote two letters, dated 1 February 1729, to the Archbishop of Albi, president of the Société that year, and to the

[36] Kindleberger, "*Société Royale*," 149-156; Archives Départementales de l'Hérault (ADH), Series C, 549, Letter from the Abbé Bignon to M. Bon (10 February 1729).
[37] BN Fr. 22229, Letter from Antoine Gauteron to the Abbé Bignon (30 January 1729; 3 February 1729).
[38] Castelnau, *Mémoire historique*, 19-21.

personal secretary of the Cardinal de Fleury. Both letters rehearse the same objections raised by Gauteron. But Bon went one step further, arguing that "the city of Beziers, having no university, would not know how to furnish the men [necessary] for an academy of sciences." This lack of qualified men would be further exacerbated by its close proximity to Montpellier, which would place the cities in competition for members. Such a "multiplicity of academies," Bon asserted, "would serve only to bring about their collapse."[39] He also stated quite explicitly that the Société would be willing to use its monopoly on scientific societies to oppose the new project, for the intention of Louis XIV was that the Société would form an intimate union with the Paris Academy of Sciences, with protection against all others who might try to infringe upon this privilege.

Both the secretary of the Cardinal de Fleury and the Archbishop of Albi responded positively to the letters. The former informed Bon that his objections to the new academy had been sent to the Comte de Saint-Florentin, the chief administrator for all *pays d'états*, while the latter promised to support the men of Montpellier by writing another letter to Fleury.[40] The most interesting response, however, came from the Abbé Bignon, to whom Bon had also written on 1 February. Bignon began his letter by noting that Dortous de Mairan had indeed solicited his support for the academy in Beziers, but that it was refused. He then proceeded to explain in detail the reasons for his opposition, which he framed in terms of a larger problem confronting the Republic of Letters.

> In general as much as some learned companies appear to me useful to the progress of the Sciences, I am persuaded that their multiplication dishonors them. I will also admit to you that despite my inclination for letters, I am convinced that the too large multitude of simple Collèges is a problem in the state. We see this in the quantity of men who after having their first taste of Latin…become useless to the Kingdom in no longer applying themselves to Agriculture, to

[39] BN Fr. 22226, Letter from M. Bon to the Abbé Bignon (1 February 1729).
[40] ADH, Letter from Monglad (?) to M. Bon (10 February 1729) and Letter from the Archbishop of Albi to M. Bon (16 February 1729).

crafts, or to Commerce: and as regards Academies the languor into which those of Caen, d'Angers, etc., fell is good proof of the little utility they had for Language, Eloquence and Poetry.[41]

The Abbé Bignon here strikes an elitist note in describing those men who, as soon as they have a bit of education, reject more "useful" professions for a life of letters. Yet more important for our purposes, he sees the notion of honor as central to the success of scientific academies. It follows, according to his argument, that too many academies in too close a proximity erode this honor by making them (and membership in them) a common commodity. As we have seen, Derhins and other theorists of emulation considered notions of "honor" and "glory" the sole motivation for virtuous action—a point to which we shall return.

Bignon also advised the Société Royale to write a memoir to the Comte de Maurepas, president of the Paris Academy of Sciences in 1729. He further suggested that they place special emphasis on the relationship between Montpellier and Paris, "being one and the same body," in an attempt to make Maurepas realize their common interest in opposing Beziers. All this the Société did in a letter dated 22 February.[42]

By mid-March it seemed clear that the request for letters patent would come to naught. The Société Royale had managed to gain the support of powerful men in Paris and Versailles, and all that remained was official confirmation from the Comte de Saint-Florentin. This came on 27 April 1729. Saint-Florentin reported that

Having communicated to the King the request [of Beziers] and the oppositions that you addressed to M. the Cardinal de Fleury, His Majesty charged me to inform those persons [of Beziers] that he did not judge it appropriate the accord them letters patent, and that he permits them only to assemble as they have done up to this point, all the more so because that can have only a good effect, since these private assemblies excite emulation and encourage work and new discoveries.[43]

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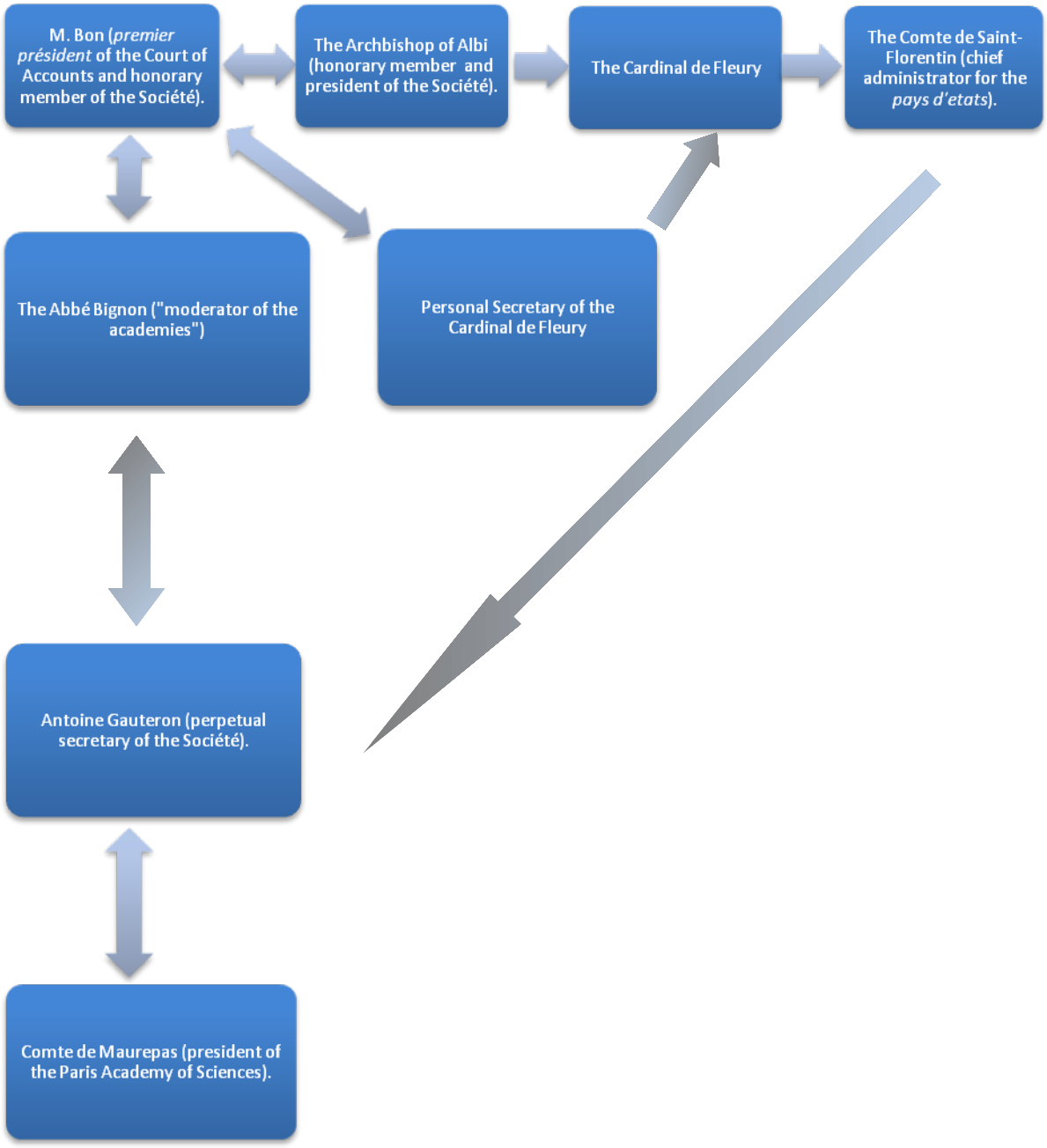
[41] ADH, Letter from the Abbé Bignon to M. Bon (10 February 1729).
[42] Ibid; Bibliothèque Municipale de Montpellier (BMM), MS. 52, *Recueil des lettres adressées à l'ancienne Société Royale de Montpellier*, Draft of a Letter to Maurepas (20 February 1729).
[43] BMM, Letter from the Comte de Saint-Florentin to Antoine Gauteron (27 April 1729).

This much the Société Royale could concede, as long as Beziers did not try to infringe upon its privileges.

This episode illustrates very well the ways in which Montpellier savants mobilized support. The Société Royale, as many historians have noted, had a "town-and-gown" air to it and drew much of its membership from a group of overlapping elites.[44] The University of Medicine provided many of the regular members who were expected to carry out scientific research and present their findings during weekly meetings. As set out in its statutes, though, the Société also had a class of honorary members not required to do work. These men often held important positions in the local institutions of church and state. Their worth lay in their connections, and when trouble arose, they were expected (like M. Bon and the Archbishop of Albi) to write to officials in Paris and Versailles otherwise inaccessible to the Société. Thus Montpellier, as the administrative center of Languedoc, had a powerful support base and little trouble making itself heard (see Fig. 1).[45]

**Fig. 1 The Correspondence of the Société Royale**
This figure depicts the ways in which Antoine Gauteron, M. Bon, and the Archbishop of Albi mobilized support for the Société Royale in opposition to Beziers.

[44] McClellan, *Science Reorganized*, 97.
[45] Kindleberger, "*Société Royale*," ch. 4




The Société Royale soon faced another challenge, however, this time coming from Toulouse. A group of savants that had been meeting in that city since 1729 decided to request letters patent in order to transform their private gatherings into a royal academy of science. Their first step involved writing to Antoine Gauteron on 12 March 1735 to find out whether the Société, as set out in its letters patent of 1706, had an exclusive privilege on scientific societies in

the province of Languedoc. They also wanted to know if Montpellier would attempt to oppose their efforts based on such a privilege.[46]

Gauteron replied to these inquiries in early April after communicating them to the Société Royale and its honorary members, "without the opinion of whom we could not give…a precise response." Gauteron stated that the men of Montpellier would gladly enter into "commerce" with savants in Toulouse, but that any attempt to obtain letters patent would be blocked, for "our company is very jealous of the distinctions it has pleased the King to bestow upon it." He then proceeded to outline the distinctions he had in mind (one of which was, indeed, a monopoly on scientific societies in Languedoc) and placed special emphasis on the new class of *associés libres* granted to the Société so that it would conform more closely to the structure of the Paris Academy of Sciences. This emphasis revealed the real thrust of Gauteron's argument—that the Société, forming but "one and the same body" with the Paris Academy, would suffer no rival that might infringe upon this privilege. A request for letters patent by Toulouse would thus come to naught.[47]

Gauteron implied that his delay in responding to the inquiries stemmed from his having to consult the regular and honorary members of the Société Royale. This without a doubt had an element of truth to it. But it is also true that Gauteron used the three weeks between his reception of and response to the letter to communicate the designs of Toulouse to M. Bon, president of the Société in 1735. Once more, Bon did not hesitate to use his influence to support the cause of Montpellier. He immediately wrote to the Abbé Bignon, the Comte de Saint-Florentin, and the Cardinal de Fleury.

[46] BMM, Letter from M. Soubeiran to M. Gauteron, Toulouse (12 March 1735).
[47] BMM, Letter from M. Gauteron to M. Soubeiran, Montpellier (1 April 1735).

These three letters are dated 21 March 1735 and present exactly the same arguments in almost exactly the same form. Bon began with a brief history of the academy in Montpellier, reminding his readers of the similar request for letters patent made by Beziers in 1729. He then proceeded to appeal to the three men as the esteemed "protectors" of the Société who had so justly prevented Beziers from realizing its design. But the men of Toulouse now posed a new threat and forced the Société to renew its opposition for the same reasons as before: to wit, that a new academy would "retard the execution" of the map and natural history of Languedoc through misguided attempts to help, would derail the efforts of the Société to secure funding from the provincial Estates, and would make it difficult to fill the academy with worthy men due to the inability of the province to support more than one learned society.[48]

Whereas Beziers could be written off due to its small size, though, Toulouse had a population far larger than that of Montpellier and served as the seat of the prestigious Parlement of Languedoc. For many years, it had also supported the Academy de Jeux Floraux, dedicated to the cultivation of *belles-lettres*. But Bon, in a clever move, turned these advantages against Toulouse. The size and prominence of the city certainly deserved recognition, but the legalistic culture that grew up around the Parlement and the lack of a university meant that Toulouse was "more proper to form great magistrates and skilled advocates than to give birth to anatomists, botanists, and chemists." The city should content itself with its Academy de Jeux Floraux and the study of *belles-lettres*, both of which have more in common with the "sciences of the Palace."[49]

Gauteron also wasted no time in writing a letter to the Abbé Bignon. He began by noting that "Our Academy always excites the emulation of our neighbors and perhaps their jealousy"

[48] BMM, Draft of a Letter to Maurepas (20 February 1729).
[49] ADH, Letter from M. Bon to the Cardinal de Fleury (21 March 1735).

and then sounded many of the same themes as Bon. Here we have a hint of the first type of emulation: namely, that which governed relations between a particular academy and the outside world. In this instance, Gauteron modestly noted that the example of the Société Royale not only encouraged the men of Toulouse to study science, but also to form private assemblies specifically for that purpose. This argument would have resonated with Bignon who believed the value of scientific academies lay partly in their ability to excite the emulation of men throughout France, thereby leading to the spread of enlightenment. This much comes through in his correspondence. As M. D'Alberty noted in a letter to Bignon, dated 23 February 1726, "what will become of that emulation if one does not take into account [through honorary awards] those persons who could have some talent; you judge well that to leave in obscurity those who direct all their efforts toward rendering themselves useful to the public is not a way to engage them in making great discoveries…."[50]

By combining the notions of "emulation" and "jealousy," however, Gauteron sought in a more subtle way to deny the legitimacy of Toulouse's request. Recall that a key characteristic of emulation is the virtuous and noble means by which one proceeds. This and this alone distinguishes it from the more base human urges. To accuse the men of Toulouse of jealousy amounted to a condemnation of their actions. For as the Chevalier de Jaucourt noted, "jealousy [in contradistinction to emulation] is violent emotion, a confession constrained by a merit which it does not possess, and which in often denies in those who do. A shameful vice, which by its excess always tends toward vanity!"[51] Here Gauteron did not so much use the concept of emulation against the men of Toulouse as deny them the role of emulators. In an effort to prove that the Société Royale "was more than sufficient to support the taste for the Sciences in this

[50] BN Fr. 22226, Letter from M. D'Alberty to M. l'abbé Bignon, Aix en Province (23 February 1726).
[51] Jaucourt, "Emulation," in vol. 5 of *Encyclopédie*.

Province," moreover, he wrote of the new observatory that members de Guilleminet and Danyzy had just constructed at their own expense. He assured Bignon that, henceforth, astronomical observations would be much more frequent.[52]

The Abbé Bignon responded in a letter of 29 March 1735. He told Gauteron that he had already given his opinion on the matter to Bon, who would surely communicate it to the Société Royale, and spent the rest of the time congratulating the men of Montpellier on "their new vivacity…for the perfection of the sciences."[53] The Cardinal de Fleury does not seem to have responded directly to Bon. But the Comte de Saint-Florentin did and was much more to the point. He informed Bon in early April that he had not yet heard anything of the request by Toulouse for letters patent, but that if such an attempt were made, "I will not forget to use the reasons of the academy of Montpellier to oppose the new establishment."[54] By the time Gauteron responded to the initial inquiries of Toulouse, then, he already had a guarantee from Versailles that any request for letters patent would not succeed.

The Société Royale continued as usual over the next six years and actually saw its position in Languedoc strengthened. After a long struggle for funding from the royal government, for example, it turned its gaze to the provincial Estates, which through the agency of the Archbishop of Narbonne, honorary member of the Société, granted the savants a yearly pension of 600 *livres* starting in 1737.[55] This money was by no means sufficient, but it did allow the savants to put their new observatory in working order and to cover other basic expenses. Unfortunately this peace and tranquility did not last long. Undaunted by failure, the men of Toulouse renewed their request for letters patent in 1739.

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[52] BN Fr. 22229, Letter from M. Gauteron to M. l'abbé Bignon (18 March 1735).
[53] BMM, Letter from M. l'abbé Bignon to M. Gauteron (29 March 1735).
[54] ADH, Letter from the Comte de Saint-Florentin to M. Bon. The Comte de Saint-Florentin often served as the mouthpiece of the Cardinal de Fleury in matters dealing with the *Société Royale des Sciences de Montpellier*.
[55] Kindleberger, "*Société Royale*," 115.

One of the first things they did was to write to the Abbé Bignon in July of that year, asking his support for their project, as "We would not consider ourselves worthy of that grace [letters patent], without your approbation, and our efforts to obtain it would be in vain without your protection…." To the letter they attached a memoir explaining the reasons behind the request, which provides a glimpse into the way eighteenth-century savants understood scientific academies and their function in the Republic of Letters. For this reason alone it deserves close attention.

The memoir, not surprisingly, begins with praise for Toulouse, whose love of science has apparently earned it the name of "city of Pallas." This natural penchant for learning, according to the author, M. Planque, has often led the citizens of the city to form scientific gatherings, the most recent instance of which occurred in February 1729. Other savants soon realized the "public utility" of these gatherings and, hoping to prove useful to their fellow citizens, began to join in greater numbers. And after several public works, which were "met with the applause of Societies of the other cities of the province like Montpellier and Beziers," they became more confident in their work—to the point that they started holding public assemblies in 1733 with a view toward communicating their discoveries to their fellow citizens. For the "utility of these sciences for the general society of man is no less known by everyone than the progress of knowledge that one acquires in these Establishments."[56]

Historians have made much of this discourse of utility in relation to eighteenth-century science. They have noted the role scientific academies played in the absolutist French state, eventually becoming, at least in the case of the Paris Academy of Sciences, another arm of government bureaucracy, providing scientific and technical advice in exchange for material

[56] BN Fr. 22232, Letter from M. Planque to M. l'abbé Bignon, Toulouse (July 1739).

support.[57] Take astronomy as an example. This science had an obvious application to map-making and navigation, which in turn facilitated commerce and the ability of France to make naval war. Botany often contributed to the discovery or creation of new medicines, mathematics to civil and military engineering. And the royal government, or in the case of Montpellier, the provincial Estates, often referred new inventions to the academies for evaluation.

It is possible, however, to overestimate the sincerity of this discourse of utility. Elizabeth Randall Kindleberger makes the valid point that the cultural and intellectual climate of early eighteenth-century France did not place great value on scientific knowledge. Science (or natural philosophy) seemed to many a mere curiosity, or worse still, a frivolous waste of time. Thus the Société Royale was fighting an uphill battle for local and official recognition until the 1740s. During this earlier period the men of Montpellier often drew on the discourse of utility during their public assemblies, attended by the provincial Estates, in an attempt to solicit material and financial support. M. Plantade noted in the public assembly of 1726 that the Société "has not neglected a single occasion to render its work useful and profitable" for the province.[58] In short, this discourse of utility, for all its seriousness, often functioned as a sales pitch. It should come as no surprise that the men of Toulouse appealed to it in a request for letters patent. They were, after all, trying to sell the idea to Versailles.

More important for our purposes, Planque proceeded to describe the benefits to be derived from a scientific academy. An individual savant, no matter how gifted, could accomplish only so much. He could not read every book, carry out every experiment, consider

[57] See Roger Hahn, *The Anatomy of a Scientific Institution: The Paris Academy of Sciences, 1666-1803* (Berkeley: Univ. California Press, 1971); Robin Briggs, "The Académie Royale des Sciences and the Pursuit of Utility," *Past and Present* 131 (1991): 38-88; James E. McClellan III, *Colonialism and Science: Saint Domingue and the Old Regime* (Baltimore: Johns Hopkins Univ. Press, 1992). See, in particular, the section "Time, Spaces, and Power" in Daniel Roche, *France in the Enlightenment*, trans. Arthur Goldhammer (Cambridge: Harvard Univ. Press, 1998).
[58] "Mémoire de la Société Royale des Sciences de Montpellier au Sujet de l'Histoire Naturelle de la Province de Languedoc," in *Extraits des Assemblées Publiques*, Vol. 1, 1726, 1-16. Quoted in Kindleberger, "*Société Royale*," 175.

every theory. Life simply did not last long enough. "In an Enlightened society, in an assemblage of men who have the same object," though, "one can draw on the resources that elevate man above himself and…acquire that breadth of knowledge of which the human mind appears barely capable." This faith in the power of enlightened sociability characterized much contemporary thought and found expression in the explosion of "public spaces" in eighteenth-century France. The prominence of academies, salons, masonic lodges, and other more informal places of gathering bespoke a commitment to the "collective project of Enlightenment"—to the Baconian ideal.[59]

But what was the reasoning behind such a faith in sociability? Why did the savants of Toulouse believe that it could "elevate man above himself"? The answer to these questions brings us to the second type of emulation. Planque explained that scientific academies had these beneficial effects due to the "commerce" of ideas that went on within them. Each member willingly communicated his work with the group and, as a result, each profited from the progress of the others. Thus private study came to be supplemented by "communication, advice, example." The presence of great men within scientific academies also inspired members to redouble their efforts in an attempt to attain a similar vastness of knowledge. In a word, they excited the emulation of others and spurred them on to further study, which in turn led to scientific progress. As Planque noted, in reference to the first gatherings in Toulouse, "the combination of knowledge that is communicated in these assemblies, and the emulation which is always the product, produced at first some Essays of a good augur." This emulation was the chief virtue of enlightened sociability and, more specifically, of the early eighteenth-century

[59] The historiography on sociability is extensive. See Jürgen Habermas, *The Structural Transformation of the Public Sphere: An Inquiry into a Category of Bourgeois Society*, trans. Thomas Burger (Cambridge: MIT Press, 1989); Margaret C. Jacob and Janet M. Burke, "French Freemasonry, Women, and Feminist Scholarship," *Journal of Modern History* 68 (1996): 513-549; Dena Goodman, *The Republic of Letters: A Cultural History of the French Enlightenment* (Ithaca: Cornell Univ. Press, 1994); Roche, *Le siècle des lumières*.

scientific academy. In fact, it served as the very mechanism by which the academy fulfilled its aim of furthering scientific knowledge. Before they could benefit from such effects, though, the men of Toulouse needed "that authentic form, that durable stability [i.e., letters patent] that only the authority of the sovereign can give."[60]

Planque also sent this memoir directly to the Cardinal de Fleury in July 1739. This copy, destined for Versailles, had the title "Collectif de trente personnes de distinction de la ville de Toulouse." Upon receiving the memoir, the Cardinal de Fleury immediately communicated it to the Comte de Saint-Florentin, who was instructed to investigate the request for letters patent before a decision was made. Saint-Florentin accordingly wrote to the Archbishop of Albi, a town located about halfway between Montpellier and Toulouse, asking him for information. The Archbishop gladly consented and prepared a sixteen-page memoir dated 30 December 1739. This memoir is worth going over in detail, for it provides not only the needed "clarifications," but a full account of the reasons behind the opposition of Montpellier. This comes as no surprise —the Archbishop of Albi served as the president of the Société Royale in 1739 and thus had its interests at heart.

The memoir begins with an acknowledgement of Saint-Florentin's letter and then proceeds to list four major points of interest: first, whether such a request for letters patent would result in any inconvenience; second, whether the 6,000 *livres* the men of Toulouse claimed to have raised for their scientific academy would be sufficient; third, whether the Archbishop of Albi knew the names of these "thirty people of distinction"; and, finally, whether he could procure a copy of the statutes for the proposed academy. The Archbishop attached to his memoir both a notarized document in which ten people had committed themselves to raising the 6,000 *livres* and a copy of the proposed statutes, thereby partially fulfilling his duty. He did not seem

[60] BN Fr. 22232, Letter from M. Planque to M. l'abbé Bignon, Toulouse (July 1739).

to know the names of the "thirty persons of distinction," however. And with this behind him, he dedicated the other fourteen pages to the various inconveniences such a project could cause.[61]

His arguments against the academy in Toulouse fall roughly into two categories, the first dealing with the perceived flaws in its structure. Albi notes that in several places the statutes do not follow the model set by the Paris Academy of Sciences and the Société Royale. He takes issue first with the proposed class of 25 academicians called *associés libres*. To his mind, he knows of no such precedent in Paris or Montpellier. This shows how closely the Archbishop was involved in the affairs of the Société, however, because it did indeed have a class of *associés libres* (established in 1733).[62] Albi then questioned the function of such a class, which, according to the statutes, would be exempt from all scientific work and whose members would be required only to pay a fixed yearly sum of 750 *livres*. This led to his fear that "those 25 places will be destined in the future for those most able to pay," contrary to the spirit of a scientific academy, whose fame "must consist in the discoveries that research and the work of the mind can produce…." In all fairness, though, the men of Toulouse probably included this class so that it could claim financial independence and forestall the objection of Montpellier that another academy in Languedoc would ask for support from the provincial Estates.[63]

Next came the class of 18 *associés ordinaries*, whom Albi considered subjected to humiliating requirements. They had to prepare a yearly assignment not of their choosing, and the failure to do so two times would result in their expulsion from the academy. This seemed to Albi more suited to discourage the members and distract them from their own work than to excite them to study through "love for the sciences." And, finally, what could Toulouse possibly want with an unlimited number of *associés correspondants*? Such a statute would allow the

[61] ADH, "Accademie des Sciences naturelles à Toulouse," (30 December 1739).
[62] Kindleberger, "*Société Royale*," 241.
[63] ADH, "Accademie des Sciences naturelles à Toulouse," (30 December 1739).

academy to augment its membership whenever it wished, and with anybody it wished—whether foreign or native. "If the King judges it appropriate to grant [letters patent]," then, "it would be necessary, at the very least, to remove these novelties, and these distinctions, which appear to be one of the main objects of the proposed establishment." [64]

At this point, the Archbishop of Albi shifted his criticism from the statutes of the academy to the request for letters patent itself. He informed Saint-Florentin that, as honorary member and president of the Société Royale, he was explicitly instructed to remind him that this request, "which is but a renewal of one made in 1735," was already rejected once, along with that of Beziers in 1729. Albi admitted that he had no written proof in the case of Toulouse; he knew only that "the demand was made, that it was opposed and that it came to no effect." Yet he did refer to a letter that Saint-Florentin himself had written to Antoine Gauteron in 1729, which stated that the King did not find it appropriate to grant Beziers letters patent.[65]

The reasons behind the opposition of Montpellier remained largely the same as in 1735. They centered on the prejudice another academy would cause the Société Royale and, more generally, the progress of the arts and sciences. The "particular interests" of the Société again had to do with its privilege of forming but "one and the same body" with the Paris Academy of Sciences. The men of Montpellier apparently thought that the academy in Toulouse would attempt to form a similar union with Paris, which could not be tolerated. Significantly, the objection that the men of Toulouse would be a drain on the finances of the Estates was dropped.[66]

The argument that the "multiplication" of academies in the same province would result in the retardation of the arts and sciences seems counterintuitive, however. One would expect that

[64] Ibid.
[65] For an excerpt, see page 21.
[66] Ibid.

an institution, whose sole aim was to encourage study, would have the very opposite effect. But the Archbishop of Albi believed that too many academies in too close a proximity would, in fact, "prove prejudicial, due to the difficulty of finding people whose application, joined to a superior talent and genius, can support such Academies, and fulfill with distinction all its objectives." He thus reworked the earlier argument that the province of Languedoc was capable of supporting only one learned body. Then, in an effort to prove his point, the Archbishop elaborated further and drew on well-known examples: "The languor into which the Academies of Caen, and d'Angers, fell is proof of the inutility, and bad effects, of that multiplication which cannot but weaken emulation and inspire distaste in those who would be in a position to work with the most success."[67] This time the Société Royale did not deny its adversary the role of "emulator," but used the enlightened discourse of emulation to refute their request.

This latter point has the most interest for our purposes. Unfortunately, the memoir does not contain a detailed account its logic and allows only inference. The letters of the Abbé Bignon, though, elaborate on it at length. Bignon believes that the success of any learned body depends on the honor and privilege it can bestow on its members. But too many academies in too close a proximity erode this honor by making membership not the privilege of a talented few, but a common commodity. This multiplication (as can be seen in the memoir) also makes it difficult to fill positions with the talented "subjects" necessary to carry on scientific work; thus the quality of this work declines and with it the prestige of the institution. Since eighteenth-century savants saw themselves as motivated by the desire for honor and glory, such a sequence of events would prove disastrous for the arts and sciences—it would destroy the zeal and emulation of those who otherwise would work toward their perfection. In short, the

[67] Ibid.

establishment of too many academies would hinder the collective project of Enlightenment.[68] This argument represents the third type of emulation and the logical culmination of the ideas first set forth by the Abbé Bignon in 1729.

Yet this time the city of Toulouse proved too powerful. Its project for a new academy garnered the support of both local notables and government officials in Versailles, including the Intendant of Languedoc, the Duc de Richelieu, the Archbishops of Toulouse and Narbonne, and the municipality of Toulouse.[69] The Société Royale received the sobering news in a letter addressed to M. Bon on 17 January 1740. In it they learned that the King, "having examined the statutes proposed as well as the reasons that have engaged…Montpellier to oppose them," did not believe it appropriate to refuse the letters patent. The prejudices that might result from a new academy simply did not justify the refusal of a request that will have "certain and favorable Effects on the progress of the Sciences."[70] Due to certain complications arising from the statutes of the proposed academy, the savants of Toulouse did not actually receive official recognition until 1746. In that year they became the *Académie Royale des Sciences, Inscriptions et Belles-Lettres*, thereby ending a decades-long struggle with the Société Royale.

## Emulation as Cultural Practice

The establishment of the *Académie Royale* in Toulouse was, in certain respects, typical of eighteenth-century scientific societies. Most, if not all, began as private gatherings of friends who shared similar interests in the arts and sciences. After meeting for some time, they typically applied for letters patent, which they believed would lend their gatherings a much needed

[68] ADH, Letter from the Abbé Bignon to M. Bon, Paris (10 February 1729).
[69] Kindleberger, "*Société Royale*," 154.
[70] ADH, Letter from the Comte de Saint-Florentin to M. Bon (17 January 1740).

permanence and regularity. But as James McClellan rightly notes: "Requests from the provinces for letters patent were not immediately honored at Versailles…and potential academies all suffered probationary periods of anywhere from two to twenty-five or even thirty years."[71] Measured against this yardstick, the struggles of Toulouse seem comparatively light. These probationary periods gave aspiring academicians an opportunity to prove their perseverance and the utility of their work to the French monarchy. Having the backing of prominent officials near the centers of power in Paris and Versailles, of course, did not hurt. Toulouse was able to push through its request for letters patent only once it had built up a critical mass of support. The Société Royale, it will be remembered, went through a similar process at the turn of the eighteenth century, using its connections with the Bishop of Montpellier and Jean-Dominique Cassini to further its cause.[72]

On the other hand, the local opposition that Toulouse faced had to do with its unique position in the province of Languedoc. As M. Bon grudgingly acknowledged in his letter to the Cardinal de Fleury, the city had by far the largest population and served as the seat of the Parlement. These two factors made Toulouse the chief rival of Montpellier "for the position of unofficial capital of the province" and were the source of a bitter feud between the two cities.[73] This rivalry with Toulouse became institutionalized as well. Elizabeth A. Williams notes the resentment the medical faculty felt toward the Parlement, which sometimes took it upon itself to meddle in university affairs. In the case of one faculty member, Paul-Joseph Barthez, the Parlement even acted as censor, demanding that Barthez come to Toulouse to defend himself against charges of subverting established religion.[74] Both Williams and Elizabeth Randall

[71] McClellan, *Science Reorganized*, 91.
[72] See pages 15-17.
[73] Williams, "Medicine in the Civic Life," 218; ADH, Letter from M. Bon to the Cardinal de Fleury (21 March 1735). Also quoted on page 23.
[74] Williams, "Medicine in the Civic Life," 219.

Kindleberger also mention the strong presence of the medical faculty in the Société Royale—providing roughly half the members over the course of the eighteenth century.[75] Thus it should come as no surprise if the Société took a hidden pleasure in opposing the aspiring savants in Toulouse.

Most historians believe that this provincial rivalry and a desire to defend its privileged connection with the Paris Academy of Sciences account for the conflict between Société Royale and the cities of Beziers and Toulouse. The Société was all the more protective of its prerogatives in the early eighteenth century, they argue, because of its financial instability.[76] This argument certainly has an element of truth to it and finds support in comments, such as that of Antoine Gauteron, which bemoan the establishment of new academies at a time when the provincial Estates were just beginning "to take interest in our works…and make us hope of some liberality once the map of Languedoc was begun."[77] Financial issues occupied the attention of many other scientific societies in the early eighteenth century—whether or not they faced local competition.

Does this mean that the Société Royale, in employing a discourse of emulation to oppose Beziers and Toulouse, had only its own interests at heart? That it sought only to justify attempts to preserve its privileges and status in the province? It seems clear that the Société was not materially hurt, despites its earlier predictions, by the new academy in Toulouse. In fact, the 1760s and 1770s saw it "reach the full peak of its power as an institution of sciences."[78] The royal chair of mathematics and hydrography, for example, passed into its control with the expulsion of the Jesuits (who had previously administered the chair) in 1764. This new responsibility brought with it a level of control over the teaching of science in Montpellier and a

[75] Kindleberger, "*Société Royale*," ch. 2.
[76] Ibid., 149-156; McClellan, *Science Reorganized*, 97.
[77] BN Fr. 22229, Letter from Antoine Gauteron to the Abbé Bignon (3 February 1729). Also quoted on page 19.
[78] McClellan, *Science Reorganized*, 97.

regular royal pension. Those same decades, moreover, saw the publication of two volumes of scientific memoires funded, in large measure, by the Estates.[79] The Société also bought its first academic *hôtel* in the 1770s with a generous grant from the royal government. And the list of good news could go on!

In this connection, it might prove fruitful to recall the arguments of John Shovlin and Nira Kaplan.[80] Both scholars show, in their own way, the role emulation played in reconciling the more "base" human urges with social ideals. According to Shovlin, emulation recast selfish and acquisitive merchants as potential patriots driven by a desire for honor and glory. This enabled patriotic writers to encourage both commerce and civic virtue in an attempt to regenerate the French nation following the Seven Years' War. Emulation served the same function as a pedagogical tool during the French Revolution. With the fall of the monarchy in 1792, Kaplan reminds us, there was a need to harmonize competition for public offices and positions with the ideal of republican virtue. As practiced in the *collège*, emulation did just that by exposing students to the example of their public-spirited teacher whose job it was to make them into model republicans. One could argue that, similarly, emulation reconciled the "private interests" of the Société Royale, as played out in the conflicts with Beziers and Toulouse, with notions of proper conduct in the imaginary "republic of letters."

But to ascribe this series of conflicts to local rivalry and the defense of privileges leaves something to be desired. It certainly provides valuable insight into the cultural and political climate of early eighteenth-century Languedoc, but for that very reason, it does not tell us much about scientific academies as a whole and the role emulation played in them. Recall that M. Planque, speaking in behalf of Toulouse, considered emulation the chief virtue of all forms of

[79] Ibid., 135-136.
[80] Shovlin, "Emulation in Economic Thought," 224-230; Kaplan, "Virtuous Competition," 241-247. See pages 7-11 for complete discussion.

enlightened sociability and, in the case of royal academies, the mechanism by which they brought about the progress of the arts and sciences. He and others also believed that this progressive aspect of emulation extended beyond the walls of the academy. Through honorific awards or the prospect of membership, for example, a particular academy could excite men throughout the province to work and study harder. But as we have seen, in the hands of the Société Royale emulation took on a decidedly different aspect as well. The men of Montpellier used the concept to argue against the multiplication of scientific societies in Languedoc in an attempt to preserve their preeminent position and all the privileges adhering thereto. Does this represent a "contradiction" or "betrayal of principles" as some historians would have it? If not, what does it tell us about the nature of royal academies more generally?[81]

A close examination of the ways in which the men of Montpellier used the concept of emulation will help answer these questions. Recall that not once did the Société Royale repudiate or abandon its goal of encouraging scientific progress. In fact, all of its arguments against the academies in Beziers and Toulouse take this goal as their premise. The Société did not try to prevent the establishment of rival academies in Beziers and Toulouse out of pure self-interest—to assume so would be too cynical. The Société genuinely believed that the "multiplication" of academies would erode their honor and thereby destroy emulation, which would prove disastrous for the cultivation of the arts and sciences in Languedoc.

This argument, moreover, is internally consistent with the other uses of emulation. The three types of emulation outlined above all conform to the definition provided by Derhins and other contemporaries, in which "honor" and "glory" figure as the sole motivation for virtuous human action. The honor and glory attached to academies or individual academicians served to excite individuals, who might not otherwise apply themselves to science, to study and work

[81] Ferrone, "The Accademia Reale delle Scienze," 526; Roche, *Siècle des lumières*, 18.

harder. By the same token, if too many academies in too close proximity eroded this honor, as the Société Royale contended, savants would become discouraged and give up. Thus we must understand that the discourse of emulation can be deployed in numerous ways, which may seem contradictory ("enlightened" vs. "unenlightened"), but which in fact adhere to the same internal logic.

These observations and the very attempt of the Société Royale to prevent the establishment of academies in Beziers and Toulouse invite further reflection on the academic movement as a whole, for scholars often present it as an inherently progressive, democratic, and subversive phenomenon. As a result, any series of events that does not fit this description is soon labeled a paradox or a contradiction. Such an interpretation, however, fails to appreciate the peculiar nature of royal academies. One the one hand, they did indeed pursue "enlightened" ends and encourage the spread of knowledge. On the other hand, they were royal institutions, incorporated by the king and given their own place in the hierarchical, corporative structure of eighteenth-century France. These two fundamental characteristics, moreover, did not exist in tension with each other.[82] To label certain of their academic activities "enlightened" and others "unenlightened," then, really misses the point and attempts to fit them into a mold that perhaps did not apply to the cultural institutions of early Enlightenment France (1710-1750). For this was a society that saw no contradiction in pursuing "enlightened" ends through principles of privilege and exclusivity.

[82] McClellan, *Science Reorganized*, 137.

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