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Europe's Forgotten Students? The Historiography of 19th and early 20th Century Students in France

¿Los estudiantes olvidados de Europa? La historiografía sobre los estudiantes franceses del siglo XIX y principios del siglo XX

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Abstract: Historians' interest in university history of the nineteenth and early twentieth centuries has been more limited in the case of France than for other countries. This interest has been even weaker with regard to students, a situation that only began to change at the beginning of the twenty-first century. However, pioneering work could have launched a research dynamic from the 1980s onwards, as the first part of this article shows and explains. In its second part, this paper analyzes the main themes addressed by the historiography of students in France. After underlining some of its persistent limitations, proposals for future research will be made.

Key words: France, student, university, grande école, historiography, Third Republic.

Resumen: El interés de los historiadores por la historia universitaria del siglo XIX y principios del siglo XX ha sido más limitado en el caso de Francia que en el de otros países. Este interés ha sido aún más débil con respecto a los estudiantes, situación que solo comenzó a cambiar a principios del siglo XXI. Sin embargo, un trabajo pionero podría haber iniciado una dinámica de investigación a partir de la década de 1980, como muestra y explica la primera parte de este artículo. En su segunda parte, este trabajo analiza los principales temas abordados por la historiografía de los estudiantes en Francia. Tras subrayar algunas de sus persistentes limitaciones, se realizarán propuestas para futuras investigaciones.

Palabras clave: Francia, estudiante, universidad, grande école, historiografía, Tercera República.

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In 1986, Christophe Charle described French students as «*des oubliés de l'histoire*», «forgotten by history».¹ In fact, at the time, almost no research on French students between 1800 and 1945 had been conducted. During the fifteen years following Charle's remark, a few considerable works were issued, but the history of students of the nineteenth and early twentieth century remained an unexplored field. On the contrary, studies on the second half of the twentieth century, especially on the student movement of 1968, were flourishing. This slowly began to change with the publication in 2002 of Pierre Moulinier's book on students during the nineteenth century.² In his paper on French university history published in *CIAN* in 2017, Moulinier, although one of the very few specialists of French students of the period considered here, offered a very general state of the art on a much longer period. Therefore, he could not go into detail and present the specificities of French student history.³ This essay aims to do so, focusing on students in France⁴ between the end of the Napoleonic era (1815) and World War II.

I argue that France's students of this period are not forgotten anymore, but are still largely disregarded by historians, who mainly consider specific groups and periods. This scarcity of the French historiography is even more striking in comparison with the research led on students of other time periods (especially from the 1960s onwards) and in other European countries.⁵ I will present some explanations for this neglect, linked with the history of French higher education and how historians studied it – first of all, the absence of both strong university *and* university history writing traditions. This article accordingly includes students from universities (called *étudiants*) as well as other higher education institutions, especially the *grandes écoles*

¹ Christophe Charle, "Les étudiants et l'affaire Dreyfus," *Cahiers Georges Sorel* 4 (1986): 61. All translations from French into English are from the author. I thank Emily Sharp for her linguistic corrections of my paper.

² Pierre Moulinier, *Naissance de l'étudiant moderne (XIX^e siècle)* (Paris: Belin, 2002).

³ Pierre Moulinier, "A Review of Recent Research on the History of Universities and Students in France," *CIAN-Revista de Historia de las Universidades* 17, no. 1 (June 2017): 141-161; available at <https://doi.org/10.20318/cian.2017.3731> (all links verified on 28.12.21).

⁴ In this paper, "France's students" or "students in France" refer to all students enrolled at French higher learning institutions regardless of their nationality while "French students" only designates students of French nationality.

⁵ As shown by the introduction and the other articles of this special issue, and, for the research on the second half of the twentieth century, see among many others Didier Fischer, *L'histoire des étudiants en France de 1945 à nos jours* (Paris: Flammarion, 2000), Jean-Philippe Legois, Alain Monchablon and Robi Morder, ed., *Cent ans de mouvements étudiants* (Paris: Syllepse, 2007), Jean-Philippe Legois, Marina Marchal and Robi Morder, ed., *Démocratie et citoyennetés étudiantes depuis 1968* (Paris: Syllepse, 2020).

(called *élèves*, like in the secondary degree). The duality between faculties and *grandes écoles* is at the core of the French higher education system since the late eighteenth, and even more so since the early nineteenth century.

After the suppression of the Ancien Régime's universities in 1793, faculties were recreated between 1802 and 1808 as part of Napoleon's "Imperial University". Five types of faculties existed: theology, law, medicine, sciences, and letters/arts.⁶ The Napoleonic system established a complete state monopoly over the education system. After the liberalization of primary (1833) and secondary (1850) education, an 1875 law allowed the creation of private institutions of higher learning, which led to the creation of private catholic "universities" in Paris, Lille, Lyon, Angers, and Toulouse. Already in 1880, the republicans reestablished the state monopoly over the right to award degrees and to use the name "university". After long debates, faculties were finally gathered together into universities in 1896. Fifteen universities existed on the metropolitan soil, in 1909 the University of Alger was officially founded. The *grandes écoles* are special higher schools aiming to form higher civil servants, civil and military engineers, teachers. Many of these schools were established in the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries and still exist today, to name only four of the most famous Parisian ones: École des Ponts et chaussées (1747), École des mines (1783), École polytechnique (1794, a military school since 1804), École normale supérieure (1794/1826, current name since 1845). Private schools were also founded during the second half of the nineteenth century, especially in the industrial and business domains. Furthermore, the École libre des sciences politiques (Institut d'études politiques de Paris since its nationalization in 1945), inaugurated in 1872, played a significant role in the formation of the political elite. More generally, French elites were mostly, and still are, educated in these schools.⁷ Some lycées as well as private institutions began to develop during the nineteenth century a two-year program after the last year of secondary school to prepare the competition (*concours*) to enter these schools, which became the *classes préparatoires aux grandes écoles* (preparatory classes).⁸

⁶ Professors of the *Facultés des lettres* taught literature, philosophy, history, geography, classical and modern languages, and social sciences courses. Christophe Charle, *La République des universitaires* (Paris: Seuil, 1994), chapter 5; Évelyne Héry, "Les facultés des lettres de province dans la tourmente des réformes de l'enseignement supérieur (1896-1914)," *Annales de Bretagne et des Pays de l'Ouest* 119, no. 4 (2012): 83-98.

⁷ Paul Pasquali, *Héritocratie. Les élites, les grandes écoles et les mésaventures du mérite (1870-2020)* (Paris: La Découverte, 2021).

⁸ George Weisz, *The Emergence of Modern Universities in France, 1863-1914* (Princeton:

I will first present the evolution of the historiography of France's students prior to World War II in order to show that historians' interest into this subject only grew very recently. On this basis, I will then underline the main characteristics of the existing research, explain its continuing limitations, and draw some perspectives on how some of these limitations could be resolved.

1. A brief history of the historiography of France's students

Antonio Watrison (1822-1864) was a well-known Parisian student activist of the 1840s. Before and during the revolution of February 1848, the police kept him and his newspaper *La Lanterne du Quartier latin* under surveillance, as Watrison spread democratic, republican, and, in the eyes of the authorities, even socialist ideas among students. Watrison was also one of the first, if not the first, to write a history of French students, in the form a short brochure on the students of Paris in 1845. Five years later he published the first volume of his *Political history of schools and students from the Middle Ages until 1850*. Watrison began with an overview of the eight centuries before 1800, and then focused on the years 1809/1815 to 1830. The journalist and revolutionary Louis Blanc wrote a foreword that should have served as an introduction for the second volume, but Watrison never finished it.⁹

Despite these pioneer publications and an abundant journalistic and para-academic production on students, only a few authors wrote on the history of French students during the second half of the nineteenth and the first half of the twentieth century. For instance, in his historical works on higher learning in France, Louis Liard, one of the most important university reformers and administrator from 1880 to his death in 1917, doesn't devote any particular chapter to students.¹⁰ Until the 1950s, only very few erudite and scholarly works were dedicated to students.¹¹ Some biographical studies

Princeton University Press, 1983); Robert D. Anderson, *European Universities from the Enlightenment to 1914* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2004), chapters 3, 9, 12; Bruno Belhoste, "La préparation aux grandes écoles scientifiques au XIX^e siècle : établissements publics et institutions privées," *Histoire de l'éducation* 90 (2001): 101-130.

⁹ Antonio Watrison, *Les étudiants de Paris* (Paris: J. Bry éditeur, 1845), *Histoire politique des écoles et des étudiants depuis le Moyen Âge jusqu'à 1850. Première partie : 1815-1830* (Paris: Michel et Joubert, 1850).

¹⁰ Louis Liard, *L'enseignement supérieur en France, 1789-1889/1893*, 2 vols. (Paris: Armand Colin, 1888, 1894), *L'Université de Paris* (Paris: Librairie Renouard, H. Laurens, 1909).

¹¹ Léon de la Sicotière, *L'Association des étudiants en droit de Rennes avant 1790* (Nantes: Vincent Forest et Émile Grimaud, 1883); Gabriel Vauthier, "Troubles à la Sorbonne en 1856,"

have been written and memoirs edited.¹² French students themselves wrote almost nothing on their predecessors – although the authors of the first history of the *Association générale des étudiants de Paris* (the General association of Paris students founded in 1884) in 1888 did mention Watrison.¹³

From the 1950s to the 1970s, countless writings dealt with students' current issues (even though less than in the USA and Germany) such as their political mobilizations, overcrowding in faculties, and housing shortages, but barely with their history. At the most, an historical introduction was included.¹⁴ The disinterest of French historians in students of the nineteenth and early twentieth century can be significantly illustrated by the fact that out of the few publications that existed on the subject until the early 1980s, several were written by foreign historians, in English and in French.¹⁵ French historians published only isolated articles. Some of them can be seen retrospectively as seminal: Adeline Daumard on the students of the *École polytechnique*, Jean Watrison on the first socialist student group created in Paris in 1891, and especially Michèle Tournier's unpublished PhD thesis. Excepting Edmée Charrier's law dissertation from 1931, Tournier was the first to study the access of women to

La Révolution de 1848 et les révolutions du XIX^e siècle 22, no. 109 (1925): 385-400. In 1926, one of Paris university libraries organized an exposition on student life in Paris "through the ages" and issued a catalog with historical summaries: Bibliothèque Sainte-Geneviève, ed., *Le quartier universitaire et la vie des étudiants à travers les âges* (Paris: Albert Morancé, 1926).

¹² For instance: Émile Longin, *Souvenirs d'un étudiant de l'Université de Strasbourg (1783-1793)* (Strasbourg: F.-X. Leroux, 1922, new ed. 1935); Jean-Victor Audouin, *Journal d'un étudiant en médecine et en sciences sous la Restauration, 1817-1818*, ed. Jean Théodoridès (Paris: Ed. Histoire de la médecine, 1959).

¹³ [Anonymous], "Historique," in *Annuaire 1888/89*, ed. Association générale des étudiants de Paris (Paris, 1888), 5.

¹⁴ As is the case in the often cited book by François Borella and Michel de la Fourrière, *Le syndicalisme étudiant* (Paris: Seuil, 1954, new ed. 1957).

¹⁵ A. Belden Fields, *Student Politics in France. A Study of the Union Nationale des Étudiants de France* (New York, London: Basic Books, 1970); Phyllis H. Stock, "Students versus the University in Pre-World War Paris," *French Historical Studies* 7, no. 1 (1971), 93-110; Robert J. Smith, "L'atmosphère politique à l'École normale supérieure à la fin du XIX^e siècle," *Revue d'histoire moderne et contemporaine* 20, no. 2 (1973), *The École Normale Supérieure and the Third Republic* (Albany: State University of New York Press, 1982); George F. Jewsbury, "Russian Students in Nancy, France: 1905-1914. A Case Study," *Jahrbücher für Geschichte Osteuropas* 23, no. 2 (1975): 225-228; Paul Cohen, "Les élèves catholiques de l'École Normale Supérieure (1906-1914)," *Cahiers d'histoire* XXIX, no. 1 (1984): 33-46; Terry Shinn, *Savoir scientifique et pouvoir social. L'École polytechnique (1794-1914)* (Paris: Presses de la Fondation nationale des sciences politiques, 1980) (from an unpublished dissertation in English, 1975); John G. Gallaher, *The Students of Paris and the Revolution of 1848* (Carbondale: Southern Illinois University Press, 1980).

higher education, comparing France and Germany.¹⁶ Other publications mainly examined specific events, such as students during the Paris Commune of 1871 (in a special issue of a journal edited by the French Communist Party) or students' reaction to Émile Zola's *J'accuse !* in January 1898.¹⁷ Only Paul Gerbod, a specialist of secondary education, wrote more general papers on students' studies and sociability from 1870 onwards.¹⁸ Inspired by the events of May 1968, the journalist André Coutin wrote an historical panorama of students' agitation and revolts in Paris since the Middle Ages.¹⁹ Beyond this, and despite the burning issue of student revolt and the success of Pierre Bourdieu's and Jean-Claude Passeron's sociological work on students and their class-based relation to culture,²⁰ historians have largely ignored student history.

However, their interest in this subject began to rise during the 1980s. First of all, in 1982, the renowned social history journal *Le Mouvement social* published a special issue on European students of the late nineteenth and first half of the twentieth century, entitled "Between socialism and nationalism: the European student movements". It contains articles on Russian students in

¹⁶ Adeline Daumard, "Les élèves de l'École polytechnique de 1815 à 1848," *Revue d'histoire moderne et contemporaine* 5, no. 3 (1957): 226-234; Jean Maitron, "Le groupe des Étudiants Socialistes Révolutionnaires Internationalistes de Paris (1892-1902). Contribution à la connaissance du syndicalisme révolutionnaire," *Le Mouvement social* 46 (1961): 3-26; Edmée Charrier, *L'évolution intellectuelle féminine* (Paris: A. Mechelinck, 1931); Michèle Tournier, *L'accès des femmes aux études universitaires en France et en Allemagne (1861-1967). Contribution à l'étude de l'enseignement féminin en France et en Allemagne durant ces 100 dernières années*, PhD thesis under the supervision of M. Debesse (Paris: Université René Descartes, 1972). Only a summary was published, significantly in English: "Women and Access to University in France and Germany (1861-1967)," *Comparative Education* 9, no. 3 (1973): 107-117.

¹⁷ Madeleine Rebérioux, "Jaurès et les étudiants parisiens au printemps de 1893," *Bulletin de la Société d'études jaurésiennes* 30 (1968): 1-9; Philippe Bénétou, "La génération de 1912-1914. Image, mythe et réalité?," *Revue française de science politique* 21, no. 5 (1971): 981-1009; Jacques Girault, "Les étudiants et la Commune," *La Nouvelle critique*, special no. (1971): 95-106; Éric Cahm, "Pour et contre Zola : les étudiants de Paris en janvier 1898," *Bulletin de la Société d'études jaurésiennes* 71 (1978): 12-15; Jean Flahaut, "La révolte des étudiants en Pharmacie de Paris en avril-mai 1886," *Revue d'histoire de la pharmacie* 69, no. 251 (1981): 229-241.

¹⁸ Paul Gerbod, "Les étudiants et leurs études," *Revue française de pédagogie* 52 (1980): 47-56, "La sociabilité étudiante depuis 1870," *Historical Reflections / Réflexions Historiques* 7, no. 2-3 (1980): 507-517; *La Condition universitaire en France au XIX^e siècle. Étude d'un groupe socio-professionnel, professeurs et administrateurs de l'enseignement secondaire public de 1842 à 1880* (Paris: Université de Paris, Faculté des lettres et des sciences humaines, 1965).

¹⁹ André Coutin, *Huit siècles de violence au Quartier latin* (Paris: Stock, 1969).

²⁰ Pierre Bourdieu and Jean-Claude Passeron, *Les Héritiers. Les étudiants et la culture* (Paris: Éditions de Minuit, 1964), *The Inheritors. French Students and their Relations to Culture*, translated by Richard Nice (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1979).

Germany (Claudie Weill), German and Austrian student corporations (Gilbert Gillot), national-socialist students (Gottfried Mergner), fascist Italian students (Michel Ostenc), and two on France between 1880 and 1914: by Yolande Cohen on socialist students, and by George Weisz on student associations and manifestations.²¹ Both authors published important works during the following years, Cohen on French youth movements, Weisz a still essential book on French university reforms of the second half of the nineteenth century.²²

During the following decade a change seemed to be underway with five major books and various articles being published by Guy Pervillé on Algerian-Muslim students and Scott McConnel on Vietnamese students in the French university during the colonial period; John Burney on the university and students of Toulouse in the nineteenth century; Jean-Claude Caron on Parisian students in the years 1814-1851; and Jean-François Sirinelli on the students of the preparatory classes for the *grandes écoles* and of the *École normale supérieure* during the interwar period.²³ Other sporadic articles were published.²⁴ Two publications on the periods before 1800 and after

²¹ Yolande Cohen and Claudie Weill, ed., "Entre socialisme et nationalisme : les mouvements étudiants européens," *Le Mouvement social* 120 (1982); Yolande Cohen, "Avoir vingt ans en 1900 : à la recherche d'un nouveau socialisme," : 11-29; George Weisz, "Associations et manifestations. Les étudiants français de la Belle Époque," : 31-44.

²² Yolande Cohen, *Les jeunes, le socialisme et la guerre. Histoire des mouvements de jeunesse en France* (Paris: L'Harmattan, 1989); Weisz, *The Emergence*.

²³ Guy Pervillé, *Les Étudiants algériens de l'université française (1880-1962)* (Paris: Éditions du CNRS, 1984); Scott McConnel, *Leftward Journey. The Education of Vietnamese Students in France 1919-1939* (New Brunswick, Oxford: Transaction Publishers, 1989); John M. Burney, "Student Organization in Nineteenth-Century France: The Example of Toulouse," *History of Education Quarterly* 25, no. 3 (1985): 303-323, *Training the Bourgeoisie. The University of Toulouse in the Nineteenth Century: Faculties and Students in Provincial France* (New York: Garland, 1987), translated in French in 1988; Jean-Claude Caron, "Maintenir l'ordre au Pays latin : la Jeunesse des Écoles sous surveillance (1815-1848)," in *Maintien de l'ordre et polices en France et en Europe au XIX^e siècle*, ed. Société d'Histoire de la Révolution de 1848 et des Révolutions du XIX^e siècle (Paris: Créaphis, 1987), 329-346, "Révoltes étudiantes, révoltes agissantes ? Le poids des révoltes étudiantes dans la vie politique française (1815-1848)," in *Révolte et société. Actes du IV^e colloque d'histoire au présent*, vol. 2, ed. Fabienne Gambrelle and Michel Trebitsch (Paris: Histoire au présent, Publications de la Sorbonne, 1989), 194-204, *Généralisations romantiques. Les étudiants de Paris et le Quartier latin (1814-1851)* (Paris: Armand Colin, 1991), "Une approche de la sociabilité de la jeunesse : la presse étudiante à Paris (1829-1850)," *Bulletin de la Société d'Histoire de la Révolution de 1848 et des révolutions du XIX^e siècle* 8 (1992): 75-86; Jean-François Sirinelli, *Génération intellectuelle. Khâgneux et normaliens dans l'entre-deux-guerres* (Paris: Fayard, 1988, 2nd ed. Paris: Presses universitaires de France, 1994).

²⁴ Jean-François Sirinelli, "Action française : main basse sur le quartier latin !," *L'Histoire* 51 (1982), republished in *Les Collections de l'Histoire* 14 (2002): 54-59; Charles-Robert Ageron, "L'Association des étudiants musulmans nord-africains en France durant l'entre-deux-

1945 should be mentioned as well, as they also participated to this research dynamic: the social history of European and French students of the sixteenth to eighteenth centuries under the supervision of Dominique Julia, Jacques Revel, and Roger Chartier as well as Alain Monchablon's monograph on the *Union nationale des étudiants de France* (France's students' national union) during the decade before 1968.²⁵

In this context, a research trend could have emerged during the early 1990s, reinforced by the foundation in 1995 of the *Groupe d'études et de recherches sur les mouvements étudiants* (GERME), a research group on student

guerres. Contribution à l'étude des nationalismes maghrébins," *Revue française d'histoire d'outre-mer* 70, no. 258-259 (1983): 25-56; Rémi Fabre, "Un groupe d'étudiants protestants en 1914-1918," *Le Mouvement social* 122 (1983): 75-101; Charle, "Les étudiants"; Madeleine Ventre-Denis, "La Faculté de droit de Paris et la vie politique sous la Restauration. L'affaire Bavoix," *Revue d'histoire des Facultés de droit et de la science juridique* 5 (1987): 33-64; Paul Cohen, "Heroes and Dilettantes: The Action française, Le Sillon, and the Generation of 1905-14," *French Historical Studies* 15, no. 4 (1988): 673-687; Olivier Devaux, "Les étudiants en droit de Toulouse sous la Restauration : l'effervescence bonapartiste et libérale," *Revue d'histoire des Facultés de droit et de la science juridique* 7 (1988), 93-105; Robert J. Smith, "The Social Origins of Students of the École Libre and the Institut d'Études Politiques, 1885-1970," *History of Education* 17, no. 3 (1988): 229-238; Marguerite Fechner, "À Montpellier une étudiante de jadis. Anna Hamilton (1864-1935)," *Bulletin historique de la Ville de Montpellier* 11 (1989): 5-9; Anne Martin-Frugier, "La formation des élites : les 'conférences' sous la Restauration et la Monarchie de Juillet," *Revue d'Histoire Moderne & Contemporaine* 36, no. 2 (1989): 211-244; Françoise Mayeur, "Naissance de l'étudiant en Sciences et en Lettres à la fin du XIX^e siècle en France," in *Les étudiants. Liens sociaux, culture, mœurs du Moyen-Âge jusqu'au XIX^e siècle. V^e session scientifique internationale. Cracovie 28-30 mai 1987* (Varsovie, Cracovie: Panstowowe Wydawnictwo Naukowe, 1991), 157-163; Christine Bouneau, "Élites étudiantes et socialisme : le Groupe des Étudiants Collectivistes de Paris à la fin du XIX^e siècle," in *Les élites fins de siècles (XIX^e et XX^e siècles)*, ed. Sylvie Guillaume (Bordeaux: Éditions de la Maison des Sciences de l'Homme d'Aquitaine, 1992), 127-139. Rémi Fabre also submitted his PhD thesis under the supervision of Madeleine Rebérioux on the French Christian Students' Federation: *La Fédération française des étudiants chrétiens, 1898-1914. Un mouvement de jeunesse protestant face à son temps, de l'affaire Dreyfus à l'été 1914* (Université Paris 1 Panthéon-Sorbonne, 1985), which remained unpublished. A today completely unknown master's thesis on foreign students at Montpellier's Faculty of medicine in the twentieth century can also be mentioned here as a pioneer study on the subject: André Coudurier, *Les Étudiants étrangers, docteurs d'université (mention médecine), à Montpellier, au XX^e siècle*, mémoire de maîtrise under the supervision of Gérard Cholvy (Université Paul Valéry-Montpellier III, 1988).

²⁵ Alain Monchablon, *Histoire de l'UNEF de 1956 à 1968* (Paris: Presses universitaires de France, 1983); Dominique Julia, Jacques Revel and Roger Chartier, ed., *Les Universités européennes du XVI^e au XVIII^e siècle : histoire sociale des populations étudiantes*, vol. 1 (Paris: Éditions de l'École des hautes études en sciences sociales, 1986); Dominique Julia and Jacques Revel, ed., *Les Universités européennes du XVI^e au XVIII^e siècle : histoire sociale des populations étudiantes*, vol. 2: *France* (Paris: Éditions de l'École des hautes études en sciences sociales, 1989).

movements, although its members were (and still are) predominantly non-academic historians, as is the case of Robi Morder (its president until today) and Alain Monchablon, and are mostly interested in the second half of the twentieth century, as shown by the dissertation of Didier Fischer, submitted in 1998 and published in 2000.²⁶ Yet, the disinterest in student history remained strong among academic historians. A reviewer of Burney's book mentioned that "Professor Jacques Godechot suggested the topic to John Burney after having proposed it, in vain, to his French students."²⁷ Neither Pervillé, Sirinelli or Caron supervised during their careers any dissertation specifically dedicated to students.²⁸ Unlike historians from the English, German, Italian and Spanish-speaking areas, French-speaking historians do not have a specific journal for university history, but only a journal considering history of education in general. Although *Histoire de l'éducation* was founded as early as 1978 and a majority of its issues being thematic ones,²⁹ until today only two were devoted to higher education, which did not include any article specifically concerning students.³⁰ As such, this institutional context did not help the promotion and the development of student history.

In the 1990s and first years of the 2000s, publications on students of the nineteenth and early twentieth century remained scarce and isolated, analyzing collective movements and political activities,³¹ the first female stu-

²⁶ Fischer, *L'histoire*.

²⁷ Charles Rearick, "John M. Burney – Toulouse et son université. Facultés et étudiants dans la France provinciale du 19^e siècle. Toulouse: Presses Universitaires du Mirail, 1988. Pp. 330," *Histoire sociale / Social History* 24, no. 48 (1991): 376.

²⁸ According to the database: <http://www.theses.fr/>.

²⁹ Out of 52 issues between 2000 and 2019, 31 were thematic, excluding seven double issues of bibliography. Renaud d'Enfert and Rebecca Rogers, "Orientations et lieux de la recherche en histoire contemporaine de l'éducation en France depuis 2000," *Histoire de l'éducation* 154 (2020): 143-176.

³⁰ Christophe Charle, ed., "Les universités germaniques (XIX^e-XX^e siècles)," *Histoire de l'éducation* 62 (1994); Emmanuelle Picard, ed., "L'enseignement supérieur. Bilan et perspectives historiographique," *Histoire de l'éducation* 122 (2009).

³¹ Romuald Szramkiewicz, "Autour d'une pétition d'étudiants de la Faculté de droit de Paris contre le projet Villèle de retour au droit d'ainesse en 1826," *Revue d'histoire des Facultés de droit et de la science juridique* 14 (1993): 93-136; Marc Milet, *La Faculté de droit de Paris face à la vie politique. De l'affaire Scelle à l'affaire Jèze, 1925-1936* (Paris: LGDJ, 1996); Jean-Claude Caron, "Aux origines du mythe : l'étudiant sur la barricade dans la France romantique (1827-1851)," in *La barricade*, ed. Alain Corbin and Jean-Marie Mayeur (Paris: Éditions de la Sorbonne, 1997), 185-196; Christophe Charle, "Le souvenir du Deux-Décembre, les étudiants et le boulangisme," in *La France démocratique : combats, mentalités, symboles. Mélanges offerts à Maurice Agulhon*, ed. Christophe Charle, Jacqueline Lalouette, Michel Pigenet and Anne-Marie Sohn (Paris: Publications de la Sorbonne, 1998), 277-285; Christine Bouneau, "Le groupe

dents,³² foreign students,³³ students during both world wars.³⁴ Some master's and PhD theses also dealt with student history: all remained unpublished.³⁵ Finally, Jean-François Condette's dissertation from 1997, published in 1999, on the Faculty of letters of Lille, far from being only an institutional history, analyses at length its professors and students. Condette has since worked

des étudiants socialistes de Toulouse et leur revue *La Jeunesse socialiste* (1894-1895)," in *L'implantation du socialisme en France au XX^e siècle. Partis, réseaux, mobilisation*, ed. Jacques Girault (Paris: Publications de la Sorbonne, 2001), 297-308.

³² Carole Lécuyer, "Une nouvelle figure de la jeune fille sous la III^e République : l'étudiante," *Clio. Femmes, Genre, Histoire* 4 (1996), available at: <https://journals.openedition.org/clio/437>; Raymonde Albertine Saliou Bulger, "Les Démarches et l'exploit de Julie Victoire Daubié, première 'bachelière' de France, à Lyon, sous le Second Empire," *The French Review* 71, no. 2 (1997): 204-212.

³³ Nicolas Manidakis, "Étudiants étrangers, universités françaises et marché du travail intellectuel (fin du XIX^e-années 1930). Certifier sans gratifier, des titres universitaires pour l'exportation," in *Construction des nationalités et immigration dans la France contemporaine*, ed. Gérard Noiriel and Éric Guichard (Paris: Presses de l'École normale supérieure, 1997), 123-154, "Les migrations estudiantines en Europe (1890-1930)," in *Migrations et migrants dans une perspective historique. Permanences et innovations / Migrations and Migrants in Historical Perspective. Permanencies and Innovations*, ed. René Leboutte, Bruxelles, Bern et al: P.I.E., Peter Lang, 2000), 243-270; Françoise Dubourg, "Les étudiants russes à Toulouse du XIX^e au XX^e siècle," *Slavica occitania* 7 (1998), 129-136; Dimitri Gouzevitch and Irina Gouzevitch, "Étudiants, savants et ingénieurs juifs originaires de l'Empire russe en France (1860-1940)," *Archives Juives* 35, no. 1 (2002): 120-128; Victor Karady, "La migration internationale d'étudiants en Europe, 1890-1940," *Actes de la recherche en sciences sociales* 145 (2002): 47-60.

³⁴ André Gueslin, ed., *Les facs sous Vichy. Étudiants, universitaires et universités en France pendant la Seconde Guerre mondiale* (Clermont-Ferrand: Institut d'études du Massif central, 1994); Olivier Chaline, "Les Normaliens dans la Grande guerre," and Jacques Amaz, "Les Étudiants de l'École des Beaux-Arts de Lyon engagés sur le front pendant la Première Guerre mondiale. Le salut par l'art?," *Guerres mondiales et conflits contemporains* 183 (1996): 99-110 and 125-139.

³⁵ David Colon, *Un Cercle d'étudiants catholiques sous la Troisième République. La Conférence Olivaint (1875-1940)*, mémoire de DEA under the supervision of Jean-Pierre Azéma (Institut d'Études Politiques de Paris, 1996); Benoît Graisset, *Les Étudiants d'Action française de Paris avant 1914. Présence d'une influence, influence d'une légende*, mémoire de maîtrise under the supervision of Christophe Charle and Rosemonde Sanson (Université Paris 1 Panthéon-Sorbonne, 1997); Hervé Le Goc, *L'Association Générale des Étudiantes et Étudiants Rennais de 1919 à 1940. Un exemple du corporatisme estudiantin de l'entre-deux-guerres*, mémoire de maîtrise under the supervision of Gilbert Nicolas (Université de Haute-Bretagne Rennes 2, 1999); Nicolas Manidakis, *L'essor de la mobilité étudiante internationale à l'âge des États-nations. Une étude de cas : les étudiants grecs en France (1880-1940)*, PhD dissertation under the supervision of Gérard Noiriel (École des Hautes Études en Sciences Sociales, 2004). Other master's theses from the 1960s to the 2000s can be found in the non-exhaustive database *XIX^e siècle en mémoires* with the keywords "étudiant" and "élève": <https://19m.nakalona.fr>.

on foreign and female students, student associations, scholarship recipients, mainly in Lille but also more generally in France.³⁶

The publication in 2002 of Pierre Moulinier's book changed the state of the existing knowledge on students in France during the nineteenth century. *Naissance de l'étudiant moderne* includes chapters on the student body, students' cultural and political activities, living conditions, sociability, curricula and diplomas. It focuses mainly but not only on the years 1880-1914 and on Paris. Moulinier has since published several papers as well as a second book on foreign students in Paris during the nineteenth century.³⁷ He is currently finishing a new book on students in France during the interwar period. The fact that Moulinier is the most prolific author on France's students of the nineteenth century, while being a non-academic historian, is another

³⁶ Jean-François Condette, *La Faculté des lettres de Lille de 1887 à 1945. Une faculté dans l'histoire* (Villeneuve d'Ascq: Presses universitaires du Septentrion, 1999), "Les Cervelines' ou les femmes indésirables. L'étudiante dans la France des années 1880-1914," *Carrefours de l'éducation* 15 (2003): 38-61, "Folklore, solidarité et revendications étudiantes : l'Union lilloise des étudiants de l'État de 1881 à 1940," *Matériaux pour l'histoire de notre temps* 86 (2007): 34-47, "Les associations générales d'étudiants en France et le politique (1881-1914). Première partie : espoirs et développement," *Carrefours de l'éducation* 23 (2007): 85-101, "Les associations générales d'étudiants en France et le politique (1881-1914). Deuxième partie : les espoirs déçus du régime républicain : limites et contestation des AGE," *Carrefours de l'éducation* 24 (2007): 149-158, "Le bon levain. Les étudiants boursiers en France de 1877 à 1914," in *Le coût des études. Modalités, acteurs et implications sociales, XVI^e-XX^e siècle*, ed. Jean-François Condette (Rennes: Presses universitaires de Rennes, 2012), 333-388, "Servir la paix du monde par les échanges étudiants : l'Institut lillois d'expansion universitaire et de patronage des étudiants étrangers (1892-1939)," in *Étudiant(e)s du monde en mouvement. Migrations, cosmopolitisme et internationales étudiantes*, ed. Robi Morder and Caroline Rolland-Diamond (Paris: Syllapse, 2012), 313-338, "Les étudiants des facultés publiques septentrionales (1808-1970) : l'affirmation d'une jeunesse spécifique ?," in *Histoire de l'enseignement supérieur en Picardie (1804-1970)*, ed. Brunot Poucet (Amiens: Encrage, 2015), 139-163.

³⁷ Moulinier, *Naissance*, "La 'Belle Époque' des carabins et des potards : préhistoire du syndicalisme étudiant ? (1902-1912)," *Matériaux pour l'histoire de notre temps* 86 (2007): 10-28, "Naître hors de la métropole et se former à Paris : les cas des docteurs reçus à la Faculté de médecine de Paris au XIX^e siècle," *Outre-mers* 96, no. 362-363 (2009): 193-211, *Les étudiants étrangers à Paris au XIX^e siècle. Migrations et formation des élites* (Rennes: Presses universitaires de Rennes, 2012), "Un campus universitaire au Quartier latin ? Le logement des étudiants français et étrangers à la Belle Époque," in *La Babel étudiante. La cité internationale universitaire de Paris (1920-1950)*, ed. Dzovinar Kévonian and Guillaume Tronchet (Rennes: Presses universitaires de Rennes, 2012), 45-57, "Les étudiants et les étudiantes en France dans la Grande Guerre," *Annali di storia delle università italiane* 19, no. 2 (2015): 55-77, "Supporting the Professors and the Professions? The Medical Student Demonstrations of 1907-1908 in Paris," in *Student Revolt, City, and Society in Europe: From the Middle Ages to the Present*, ed. Pieter Dhondt and Elizabethanne Boran (New York, London: Routledge, 2018), 54-66.

symbol for the persisting low involvement of professional historians in the field. Nevertheless, the number of publications on the subject has increased significantly in the last twenty years.

Nearly all of these publications are articles and book chapters, with only a few monographs and PhD theses. In the continuity of the previous decades, they consider various topics: the student body in general,³⁸ foreign and colonial students,³⁹ Catholic students,⁴⁰ associations and mobilizations,⁴¹

³⁸ Boris Noguès, "Élèves ou auditeurs ? Le public des facultés de lettres et de sciences au XIX^e siècle (1808-1878)," *Histoire de l'éducation* 120 (2008) : 77-97; Caroline Barrera and Christophe Jalaudin, "Les effectifs étudiants de l'université toulousaine, XIX^e-XXI^e siècle," and Isabelle Lacoue-Labarthe, "Femmes et bancs d'amphis, histoire d'une conquête, XIX^e-XXI^e siècle," in *Histoire de l'université de Toulouse*, vol. III: *L'époque contemporaine, XIX^e-XXI^e siècle*, ed. Caroline Barrera (Toulouse: Éditions Midi-Pyrénées, Université Fédérale Toulouse Midi-Pyrénées, 2019), 463-488 and 48-500.

³⁹ Manitakis, *L'essor*; Lynda Khayar, "Les étudiants juifs étrangers à Strasbourg au tournant des années trente," *Archives Juives* 38, no. 2 (2005): 124-135; Whitney Walton, "Internationalism and the Junior Year Abroad: American Students in France in the 1920s and 1930s," *Diplomatic History* 29, no. 2 (2005): 255-278; Caroline Barrera, *Étudiants d'ailleurs. Histoire des étudiants étrangers, coloniaux et français de l'étranger de la Faculté de droit de Toulouse (XIX^e siècle-1944)* (Albi: Presses du Centre universitaire Champollion, 2007), "Les étudiants-soldats américains en France au sortir de la Première Guerre mondiale," *Histoire de l'éducation* 125 (2010): 27-47; Caroline Barrera and Patrick Ferté, ed., *Étudiants de l'exil. Migrations internationales et universités refuges (XVI^e-XX^e s.)* (Toulouse: Presses universitaires du Midi, 2009); Boris Czerny, "L'Association des étudiants russes de Paris," *Cahiers du monde russe* 48, no. 1 (2007): 5-21; Victor Karady, "Les Juifs d'Europe de l'Est et l'accueil des étudiants étrangers en France sous la III^e République," *International Journal of Jewish Education Research* 2 (2010): 7-34; Amady Aly Dieng, *Histoire des organisations d'étudiants africains en France (1900-1950)* (Dakar: L'Harmattan-Sénégal, 2010); Kelly Duke Bryant, "Social Networks and Empire: Senegalese Students in France in the Late Nineteenth Century," *French Colonial History* 15, no. 1 (2014): 39-66; Sara Legrandjacques, "Hanoï au cœur des mobilités étudiantes (1880-1945)," *Bulletin de l'Institut Pierre Renouvin* 43 (2016): 89-102, "Global Students? The International Mobility and Identity of Students from Colonial India and Indochina, 1880s-1945," *Global Histories. A Student Journal* 4 (2018): 46-63, *Voies étudiantes. Pour une histoire globale des mobilités étudiantes en Asie (Inde britannique - Indochine française, années 1850-1940)*, PhD thesis under the supervision of Pierre Singaravélou (Université Paris 1 Panthéon-Sorbonne, 2021).

⁴⁰ Matthieu Brejon de Lavergnée, "Génération catholiques. Les étudiants de Paris aux origines de la Société de Saint-Vincent-de-Paul (1833-1844)," in *Mentalités et croyances contemporaines : mélanges offerts à Gérard Cholvy*, ed. Dominique Avon and Michel Fourcade (Montpellier: Publications de l'Université Montpellier 3, 2003), 469-502; David Colon, "La naissance des organisations d'étudiants catholiques en France," *Matériaux pour l'histoire de notre temps* 86 (2007): 29-33; Catherine Masson, *La Catho. Un siècle d'histoire de l'Université catholique de Lille (1877-1977)* (Villeneuve-d'Ascq: Presses universitaires du Septentrion, 2010).

⁴¹ Jean Garrigues "Le Quartier latin à la Belle Époque : un lieu privilégié de l'engagement," in *Les Universités en Europe du XIII^e siècle à nos jours. Espaces, modèles et fonctions*, ed. Frédéric Attal, Jean Garrigues, Thierry Kouamé and Jean-Pierre Vittu (Paris : Publications de la Sorbonne, 2005),

political groups, actions and ideas,⁴² the press,⁴³ culture, sociability, sexuality, and folklore,⁴⁴ students during the two world wars.⁴⁵

139-154; Legois, Monchablon and Morder, ed., *Cent ans*; Jean-Philippe Legois, Alain Monchablon and Robi Morder, ed., "1907 : une union étudiante est née," *Matériaux pour l'histoire de notre temps* 86 (2007); Pierre Moulinier, "L'AGE de Paris, les associations corporatives et la représentation des étudiants à la Belle Époque," *Les Cahiers du GERME* 29 (2010-2011): 49-53; Camille Creyghton, "La formation de l'identité étudiante sous la Troisième République et les obsèques de Jules Michelet," *Revue belge de Philologie et d'Histoire* 92, no. 4 (2014): 1151-1172; François Audigier, "L'univers associatif étudiant nancéien de la fin du XIX^e siècle aux années 1960," in *L'Université à Nancy et en Lorraine. Histoire, mémoire et perspectives*, ed. Jean El Gammal, Éric Germain and François Lormant (Nancy: PUN/Éditions universitaires de Lorraine, 2015), 283-300; Antonin Dubois, "Des étudiants en congrès. Deux tentatives de restructuration de l'espace des organisations étudiantes en France et en Allemagne à l'aube du XX^e siècle," in *Les associations d'élèves et d'étudiants. Entre socialisation et apprentissage (XVI^e-XX^e siècles)*, ed. Véronique Castagnet-Lars (Toulouse: Presses Universitaires du Midi, 2020), 97-110, "Servir la nation, défendre ses intérêts. Les étudiants français face aux réformes du service militaire (1889-1913)," *Le Mouvement Social* 275 (2021): 51-71, *Organiser les étudiants. Mobilisations collectives et formation d'un groupe social*, PhD thesis under the supervision of Gérard Noiriel and Katja Patzel-Mattern (École des hautes études en sciences sociales and Universität Heidelberg, 2019), published as *Organiser les étudiants. Socio-histoire d'un groupe social (Allemagne et France, 1880-1914)* (Vulaines-sur-Seine: Éditions du Croquant, 2021). In the following notes, I will only quote the book.

⁴² Jacques Varin, "Les étudiants communistes, des origines à la veille de Mai 1968," *Matériaux pour l'histoire de notre temps* 74 (2004): 37-49; Jean-Claude Caron, "Jeunes élites et processus de politisation. Le rôle des étudiants dans la France des notables," in *Les Universités en Europe*, 63-76; Christine Bouneau, "Les jeunesses socialistes et l'action internationale durant l'entre-deux-guerres," *Le Mouvement social* 223 (2008): 41-53, "Les jeunesses et les étudiants socialistes en France des années 1880 aux années 1960 : groupes politiques et/ou générationnels ?," *Histoire@Politique* 4, no. 1 (2008), available at: <https://doi.org/10.3917/hp.004.0004>; Alain Monchablon, "Les années Front populaire des étudiants de Paris," *Vingtième Siècle. Revue d'histoire* 133 (2017): 27-37.

⁴³ Laurence Corroy, *La presse des lycéens et des étudiants au XIX^e siècle. L'émergence d'une presse spécifique* (Lyon: Institut national de recherche pédagogique, 2004), "Une presse méconnue : la presse étudiante au XIX^e siècle," *Semen. Revue de sémio-linguistique des textes et discours* 25 (2008), available at: <https://journals.openedition.org/semen/8140>.

⁴⁴ Michaël Attali and Jean Saint-Martin, "Le sport universitaire et l'affirmation de l'identité étudiante (XIX^e-XX^e siècles)," in *Cent ans*, 121-134; Lola Gonzalez-Quijano, "Entre désir sexuel et sentiments : l'apprentissage amoureux des étudiants du Quartier latin du second XIX^e siècle," in *Les Jeunes et la sexualité. Initiations, interdits, identités (XIX^e-XX^e siècle)*, ed. Véronique Blanchard, Régis Revenin and Jean-Jacques Yvoret (Paris: Éditions Autrement, 2010), 180-188; Arnaud Babérot, "De la vie sainte à la vie saine. Hygiène et sport dans les mouvements de jeunesse protestants (1890-1914)," *Études théologiques et religieuses* 87, no. 3 (2013): 279-291; Antonin Dubois, "Les maisons des organisations étudiantes en France et en Allemagne. Un lieu de sociabilité masculine et d'encadrement (1871-1914)," *Agora débats/jeunesses* 73, no. 2 (2016): 35-48.

⁴⁵ Didier Fischer, "Les étudiants et la Résistance," *Matériaux pour l'histoire de notre temps* 74 (2004): 20-28; Olivier Guillot, "Les étudiants et anciens étudiants de la Faculté de Droit de Nan-

Finally, it should be underlined that the lack of interest from French historians for the history of France's students before World War II is also true for students of other countries. Some of them have published on students in Germany, Spain, Portugal or Britain, but, with a few exceptions such as the works of Claudie Weill on Russian students in Germany and of Romain Robinet on students during the Mexican revolution,⁴⁶ these publications consist only of an article or a book chapter, in or without connection with the author's main research interests.⁴⁷

After this brief history of student history in France, I will now analyze more precisely how it was written and present some of its predominant characteristics and limitations.

2. Parisian Students of the early Third Republic and nothing else?

In their introduction of the aforementioned *Le Mouvement social's* issue on student movements, Yolande Cohen and Claudie Weill wrote: «First of all, the student movement must be dissociated from the milieu from which it comes. A preliminary study of this milieu, of its social composition and its numerical transformations [...], of the variations from one country to another, certainly appears necessary. However, it runs the risk of invading the whole field of investigation and of pushing back to the background the study of movements as such.» Cohen and Weill consider the student movement as an independent social form, separated from official education politics as well as from cultural movements and political groups. According to them, its history is the result of

cy 'Morts pour la France' en 1914-1918 : éléments statistiques et monographiques," in *L'Université à Nancy*, 209-226; Hugo Melchior, "Les étudiants rennais à l'épreuve de l'occupation allemande," *Annales de Bretagne et des pays de l'Ouest* 124, no. 2 (2017): 101-120; Sara Le-grandjacques, "Déroutes étudiantes. Les étudiants indochinois en France, 1940-1945," *Les cahiers Sirice* 22 (2019): 69-83.

⁴⁶ Claudie Weill, *Étudiants russes en Allemagne 1900-1914. Quand la Russie frappait aux portes de l'Europe* (Paris, Montréal: L'Harmattan, 1996); Romain Robinet, *La Révolution mexicaine. Une histoire étudiante* (Rennes: Presses universitaires de Rennes, 2018); Dubois, *Organiser*; Legrandjacques, *Voies*.

⁴⁷ Three examples: Jean-René Aymes, "L'image 'costumbrista' de l'étudiant espagnol à l'époque romantique (1830-1850)," in *L'Université en Espagne et en Amérique Latine du Moyen Âge à nos jours*, vol. II, ed. Ève-Marie Fell and Jean-Louis Guereña (Tours: Presses universitaires François-Rabelais, 1998), 475-488; Christian Ingrao, "Étudiants allemands, mémoire de guerre et militantisme nazi : étude de cas," *14-18 Aujourd'hui, Today, Heute* 5 (2002): 55-71; Sabine Chaouche, "'Traités comme des pigeons'. Pratiques commerciales et marché estudiantin à Oxford à l'époque victorienne," *Revue d'histoire du XIX^e siècle* 58 (2019): 209-227.

«a series of ruptures between student generations.» Cohen and Weill therefore pleaded for an «endogenous analysis of the student movement.»⁴⁸ Both Cohen (born in 1950) and Weill (1945-2018) took part in the French student movement of the late 1960s and early 1970s. Their vision and interpretation of the history of student movements was deeply rooted in this experience – but so was also US political scientist Philip Altbach, who nevertheless proposed a decidedly different theoretical and interpretative framework.⁴⁹ Cohen even wrote in the introduction of her book on youth movements, that, even finished only two decades later, her research was «born out of May '68» and «saw the light of day during the turmoil that followed the events.»⁵⁰

In reality, historians of students in France before World War II have tried to combine, on one hand, the analysis of students' social background, the structuration of the student body and its evolution (enrollment, feminization, foreign students), and, on the other hand, the study of students' organizations and mobilizations (political or not), culture, and sociability. That was already, to some extent, the case in Jean-François Sirinelli's book – a shortened and revised version of his 1986 PhD thesis, supervised by political historian René Rémond. Sirinelli focused mostly on political ideas, mobilizations, and groups, and also dedicated large parts of his research to the careers of former students of the *École normale supérieure* in teaching, university, and politics. This was much more the case in Jean-Claude Caron's book on Parisian students of the first half of the nineteenth century, also a shortened and revised version of his PhD thesis (1989), supervised by social and sociability historian Maurice Agulhon. Caron tackled student history combining social (as much as allowed by the limited contemporary sources), political (according an at least as important place to concrete practices like manifestations, associations, and writings as to ideas), and cultural (practices and lifestyle) perspectives. Some chapter titles give an idea of this varied approach: «The students of Paris: group portrait», «Schools in revolution», «The student in the city: folklore, marginal practices, associative life». Another chapter deals with male students' relations with women and sexuality.⁵¹ This multi-faceted

⁴⁸ Cohen and Weill, "Les mouvements étudiants": 5, 7, and 6.

⁴⁹ Philip G. Altbach, "Perspectives on Student Political Activism," *Comparative Education* 25, no. 1 (1989): 97-110; Thierry M. Luescher, "Theorising Student Activism in and Beyond the 20th century: the Contribution of Philip G. Altbach," in *Student Engagement in Europe: Society, Higher Education and Student Governance*, ed. Manja Klemenčič, Sjur Bergan and Rok Primožič (Strasbourg: Council of Europe, 2015), 33-49.

⁵⁰ Cohen, *Les jeunes*, 13.

⁵¹ Sirinelli, *Génération*; Caron, *Génération*.

approach has had a strong influence on subsequent works by Condette, Moulinier, and others. Without completely excluding the older literature, I will now focus on the publications of the last 35 years to analyze how the history of students in France during the nineteenth and early twentieth century was written through five themes: Paris/province, the studied periods, the student body, non-university students, associations and politics.

2.1. Paris and the “French desert”?

«Paris and the French desert» is the title of Caron’s first chapter to characterize the state of university life during the first half of the nineteenth century. Sirinelli spoke of «Paris, Lyon, and the French desert» to describe the existence, and more importantly, the significance of preparatory classes for the *grandes écoles* during the interwar period. The centralization of French political, intellectual, and cultural life is well-known. It is also the case of its university life, which made Paris a world’s major scientific and academic center. Between the 1880s and the 1930s, the University of Paris was Europe’s biggest university – counting in 1900 nearly as much students as the universities of Vienna and Berlin combined (ca. 12,000 against 6,300 and 6,100). From 1815 to 1940, between 60% and 40% of all France’s university students were enrolled at Paris. Many other public and private higher learning institutions were also established there. It explains, at least partly, why historians have almost only considered Parisian students. Whilst some bigger provincial universities have been studied (Lille, Montpellier, Toulouse), on the contrary, other important provincial universities like Lyon and Bordeaux, and the smaller ones such as Besançon, Caen, and Dijon have been ignored so far. Another reason for the focus on Paris is the often richer archival funds that can be found on the capital’s higher learning institutions in comparison to the provincial ones. This can be explained by the importance of the University of Paris, which led to the production of more documents. But the archiving of university records has been overall deficient for the period considered here,⁵² and even more so of students’ archives (personal ar-

⁵² Still today only 22 universities have their own archives. Jean-Noël Luc, Stéphanie Méchine and Emmanuelle Picard, *Les archives universitaires. De nouvelles sources pour l’histoire de l’enseignement supérieur et de la recherche* (Paris: Centre d’histoire du XIX^e siècle, 2014); Charles Mercier, “Les archives des universités (1968-2012),” in *Sur les traces du passé de l’éducation... Patrimoines et territoires de la recherche en éducation dans l’espace français*, ed. Jean-François Condette and Marguerite Figeac-Monthus (Pessac: Maison des sciences de l’Homme d’Aquitaine, 2014), 125-133.

chives, associations records, student press). Furthermore, the archives do not explain everything: for instance, the material from the interwar period has been largely neglected so far.

2.2. The great transformation, 1880-1914

The thirty-five years before World War I were a period of tremendous reforms for French education, with the university system established by the republicans lasting until 1968.⁵³ As such, this period has been studied considerably more than the seven previous and three following decades. In particular, two periods have been particularly neglected until today: the Second Empire of Napoleon III (1852-1870) and the interwar period. Several facts can explain this unfortunate disregard. The first decade of Napoleon III's empire is often qualified as "authoritarian", the second as "liberal". Victor Duruy introduced first reforms during his time as minister of public education from 1863 to 1867.⁵⁴ If they are frequently cited and taken into consideration, it is often only as a "pre-history" of later transformations. For students, the Empire's liberalization was barely perceptible. The Second Empire is in some sort "stuck" between pre-1850 students' agitation and revolts, the highlight of which was their participation to the revolutions of 1830 and 1848, and the transformations of the student body resulting from republican university reforms from the late 1870s on. The absence of research on French students during the interwar period however is harder to understand. Sirinelli's book could have raised interest in students of these years. For Paris as well as for provincial universities, more archives are generally available than for the previous decades. And there is a lot to consider: as highlighted by the few existing publications, students demonstrated, campaigned, struck during all of the 1920s-1930s.

2.3. The diversification of the student body

Until the end of the nineteenth century, France's only "true" – in European comparison – university students were law and medicine students. Pharmacy students had a peculiar curriculum, as the internship in a pharmacy was

⁵³ Weisz, *The Emergence*; Jean-Noël Luc, Jean-François Condette, Yves Verneuil, *Histoire de l'enseignement en France (XIX^e-XXI^e siècle)* (Malakoff: Armand Colin, 2020).

⁵⁴ Jean-Charles Gueslot, *Victor Duruy. Historien et ministre (1811-1894)* (Villeneuve d'Ascq: Presses universitaires du Septentrion, 2009).

at least as important as theoretical and practical studies to obtain the diploma. There were only very few students in the faculties of letters and sciences, which served mainly to examine students and to deliver the *baccalauréat*, created in 1808, at the time the first degree of higher education.⁵⁵ Things began to change at the end of the 1870s, with the introduction in these two faculties of scholarships for the preparation of a bachelor's degree (*licence*) in 1877 and of the secondary teachers' examination (*agrégation*) in 1881, before then almost exclusively prepared at the *École normale supérieure*.

For the first three quarters of the nineteenth century, there are almost no statistics on student enrollment. Before 1897, there existed no similar semestrial or yearly "matriculation" as was the case in Germany, but only "inscriptions", which functionated in a very complex manner (a student could "take" between one and four "inscriptions" per academic year). This system complexified and reduced the accuracy of the statistical surveys. According to Caron, 6,131 students were officially enrolled in 1814, 2,285 of whom in Paris. The faculties of the capital then counted 7,446 students in 1828 and 5,543 in 1844. In 1865, there were around 8,000 students in France: 2,545 of them were studying medicine and 4,913 law. In 1875-76, at the eve of the republican reforms, French faculties enrolled 9,299 students. Ten years later, they were 15,158 and already 20,714 in 1890-91. The numbers then continued to rise steadily, reaching 30,370 in 1900-01 and culminating during the last pre-war academic year 1913-14 with a total of 42,037. After a decline, like in every other country, during World War I (only 12,566 students in 1916-17 for instance), the enrollments rose extremely rapidly just after the armistice, already surpassing the pre-1914 high in 1919-20 with 45,117 students. But contrary to the Belle Époque, student enrollments rose with ups and downs during the interwar period: 50,906 in 1921-22, 56,367 the next year but 50,891 the year after that, then increasing continually despite the economic crisis, reaching a maximum of 87,166 in 1933-34. A rapid reduction followed the next years with a low in 1936-37 (72,099), but then enrollments increased again with 78,973 students in 1938-39. In 1880-81, 47.2% of the students studied law, 31.7% medicine, 6.7% pharmacy, 6.2% sciences, 7.3% in the faculties of letters, and 0.7% evangelical theology. In 1910-11, 42% studied law (but only 34% ten years earlier), 24% medicine,

⁵⁵ Noguès, "Élèves"; Philippe Marchand, ed., *Le baccalauréat, 1808-2008. Certification française ou pratique européenne ?* (Villeneuve-d'Ascq, Lyon: Revue du Nord, Institut national de recherche pédagogique, 2010), especially Pierre Moulinier, "La clé de la forteresse : le baccalauréat comme instrument de régulation des cursus étudiants dans les facultés parisiennes au XIX^e siècle," 95-108.

3.8% pharmacy, 17.4% sciences and 15.7% letters (the faculties of theology have been suppressed after the separation of the State and the churches in 1905). By 1930-31 the repartition had continued to change in favor of the faculties of sciences and letters, which recruited respectively 20.7% and 23% of all students, for 26.6% in law, 22.1% in medicine, 7.1% in pharmacy, and 0.4% in the again recognized faculties of theology.⁵⁶

As in many other European countries, two new groups of students took an increasing part in the evolution of the student body: women and foreigners. The first woman to obtain the *baccalauréat* was Julie-Victoire Daubié in 1861, who then studied at the Parisian Faculty of letters and obtained her *licence* (Bachelor) in 1871. Contrary to other European countries, there was no law or university official decision to grant access to university to women in France. It was a succession of fights for equality, debates, and authorizations. Another peculiarity was the high proportion of foreign women before 1914, especially in Paris. Approximately 3% of the students in 1900 were women, 10% in 1914, 13% in 1920, 26% in 1930. Except for even more exceptional personalities among these pioneers, such as Daubié or Madeleine Deries, the first Frenchwoman awarded a doctorate in history,⁵⁷ female students' lives before, during, and after their studies remain often obscure.⁵⁸

Unsurprisingly, Paris attracted the most foreign students: 834 were enrolled there in 1885-86, 1,258 ten years later, 3,242 in 1913-14, 6,584 in 1928-29, 4,672 in 1938-39. In 1928-29, 18.7% of all enrolled students at French universities were foreigners, but with great differences from one university to another: 0.6% in Alger, 1.6% in Rennes, but 25.2% in Paris, 37.7% in Nancy, and even 56.7% in Grenoble. Ten years later, foreigners represented only 10.5% of all students, with an equivalent unequal repartition between universities. This decrease is explained by the uncertain international situation, but also by the xenophobic campaigns against foreign students. Such attacks had already been carried out before 1914, but in the 1930s they were

⁵⁶ Caron, *Généralisations*, 37; Weisz, *The Emergence*, 46; Dubois, *Organiser*, 100-103; Moulinier, "Les étudiants": 60-61. For the interwar period, numbers come from a ministerial survey, cited in Moulinier's upcoming book, whom I thank for sending them to me.

⁵⁷ Saliou Bulger, "Daubié"; Yves Marion, *Madeleine Deries, 1895-1924, première docteure "ès histoire". Itinéraire d'une étudiante au début du XX^e siècle* (Caen: Presses universitaires de Caen, 2017).

⁵⁸ At least until the publication of Amélie Puche's research, who studied women's access to university as well as female students' daily life and careers: *Les femmes à la conquête de l'université (1870-1940) : les implications sociales et universitaires de la poursuite du cursus scolaire dans l'enseignement supérieur par les femmes sous la Troisième République*, PhD thesis under the supervision of Jean-François Condette (Université d'Artois, 2020).

echoed and took on a dimension, including violence, that was unknown before.⁵⁹ With the exception of Caroline Barrera's work on Toulouse, colonial and foreign students in provincial universities have barely been considered yet.⁶⁰ In contrast to Italy or Germany, where many works are local case studies, the examination of these provincial universities is becoming essential for a better knowledge of students in France. On the other hand, almost nothing is known on the experience of French students at foreign universities.⁶¹

The preservation of university students' individual files is disastrous for the nineteenth and a large part of the twentieth century. Even when they exist, they don't necessarily contain information on the father's profession.⁶² This has prevented historians from writing a detailed social history of students. They have had to limit themselves to general considerations, based on limited sources such as the costs of enrollments, examinations, rents, and other living costs. According to Condette's and Moulinier's estimations, between 200 and 500 francs per month were necessary around 1900 for a student, depending on their city and lifestyle, at least nine months (from November to July) per year. A primary school teacher then earned between 1.200 and 2.200 francs yearly, a secondary school teacher with the agrégation between 3.700 and 5.700 francs (more in Paris).⁶³ Only Moulinier could draw some statistics on Parisian medicine students for the years 1869, 1879, 1889 and 1899, showing that their fathers preponderantly had the status of "owners" or exercised a medical or pharmaceutical profession.⁶⁴

2.4. Non-university students

Historians have turned a particular attention to the *grandes écoles* and their students. Thanks to the good archival preservation of students' individual files, historians have been able to draw up statistics on their geographic and

⁵⁹ Moulinier, *Les étudiants* and his upcoming book; Dubois, *Organiser*, 242-248; Julie Fette, *Exclusions: Practicing Prejudice in French Law and Medicine, 1920-1945* (Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 2012).

⁶⁰ Barrera, *Étudiants*; see also Khayar, "Les étudiants"; Laurence Prempain, "Escaping Violence in 1935: Polish Jewish Students' Strategy, from Montpellier to Lyon," in *Student Revolt*, 304-315; Legrandjacques, *Voies*.

⁶¹ Charle, *La République* analyses the reports of students having received a scholarship to study in Germany in the 1870s-1890s (chapter 1).

⁶² Condette, *La Faculté*; Guillot, "Les étudiants".

⁶³ Condette, "Le bon levain", 335.

⁶⁴ Moulinier, *Naissance*, 121.

social origins. The earliest studies were published in 1979-1980 by Victor Karady, Terry Shinn, and Robert J. Smith on the *École normale supérieure* (ENS), the *École polytechnique*, and the *École libre de sciences politiques*.⁶⁵ Since then, almost no new research has been done, except on the social origins of the ENS' students (called *normaliens*) in the nineteenth century⁶⁶ and on the *École polytechnique*. Bruno Belhoste devotes one chapter of his book on the *École polytechnique* between 1794 and 1871, through which he demonstrates the emergence of a "technocratic field", to the students' social origins. Hervé Joly recently studied the profiles and careers of the 180 *Polytechnique's* students (out of 1.051 candidates) of the class of 1901.⁶⁷ Other works consider students' experience inside these *grandes écoles*. That's the case of Smith's book on the ENS and politics between 1871 and 1914, and of Stéphane Israël's study of the ENS and the *normaliens* during World War II. In the ENS' bicentenary book, two chapters deal with *normaliens'* political and intellectual engagements and role, but rather focus on personalities after their graduation.⁶⁸ Belhoste attaches importance to the students' curricula and formation, and analyses the collective identity of the *polytechniciens*. Even though many historians have been educated there, no general history of the ENS and the *normaliens* during the nineteenth century has been published since Smith's book. Excluding the commemorative publications, studies also lack on the *École libre des sciences politiques*, and on the industrial and business schools.⁶⁹ Françoise Delfour has dedicated her

⁶⁵ Victor Karady, "Scientists and Class Structure: Social Recruitment of Students at the Parisian École Normale Supérieure in the Nineteenth Century," *History of Education* 8, no. 2 (1979): 99-108; Shinn, *Savoir*; Smith, "The social origins".

⁶⁶ Christian Baudelot and Frédérique Matonti, "Le recrutement social des normaliens, 1914-1992," in *L'École normale supérieure : le livre du bicentenaire*, ed. Jean-François Sirinelli (Paris: Presses universitaires de France, 1994), 155-189.

⁶⁷ Bruno Belhoste, *La Formation d'une technocratie. L'École polytechnique et ses élèves de la Révolution au Second Empire* (Paris: Belin, 2003); Hervé Joly, *À Polytechnique. X 1901* (Paris: Flammarion, 2021).

⁶⁸ Smith, "L'atmosphère", *The École Normale*; Stéphane Israël, *Les études et la guerre. Les normaliens dans la tourmente (1939-1945)* (Paris: Éditions Rue d'Ulm, 2005); Stéphane Israël and Jean-Philippe Mochon, "Les normaliens et la politique," and Rémy Rieffel, "Les normaliens dans la société intellectuelle française," in *L'École normale supérieure*, 191-214 and 215-241.

⁶⁹ Rachel Vanneuville, *La référence anglaise à l'École libre des sciences politiques. La formation de gentlemen républicains, 1871-1914*, PhD dissertation under the supervision of Jean-Pierre Arthur Bernard (Université Pierre Mendès France Grenoble, 1999); Marc Meulau, *H.E.C. 100. 1881-1981 : histoire d'une grande école* (Jouy-en-Josas: H.E.C., 1981); Marianne Thivend, "Les filles dans les écoles supérieures de commerce en France pendant l'entre-deux-guerres," *Travail, genre et sociétés* 26 (2011): 129-149; Marianne Blanchard, *Les écoles supérieures de*

thesis to the national agricultural school of Grignon (near Paris) in the nineteenth century, opening the field to other problematics.⁷⁰

2.5. Associations and collective mobilizations

Another reason for historians' attention to the decades prior to World War I is that the 1880s marked the birth of modern student associations in France. Before then, all forms of students' collective organization were forbidden and suppressed by the political power and university administrators. This official position against student associations changed with the republicans' access to power in the late 1870s. They viewed these associations as part of their reform for the renewal of higher education and students as a support group for the new regime. These new associations aimed to bring together all of the students of one university town and took the name *Association générale des étudiants* (AGE). The first General Association of Students was established in 1877 in Nancy, followed by Lille in 1881. From 1884 onwards with Paris and Caen, the number of associations increased and by the end of the decade, almost all university towns had their own association. The AGE members constituted a national umbrella organization in 1907, the *Union nationale des associations d'étudiants de France*. By then, other forms of associations had been created: on religious or political grounds, for female or foreign students, and sports clubs. The most important rivals of the AGE were the associations called *corporatives* or *amicales*, founded mainly by students of medicine and pharmacy, who wanted to defend their interests in a more active and scathing way. After 1918, the corporative and political questions became the central themes of student engagement and conflicts.

In his pioneer study of student associations and demonstrations in the last fifteen years before World War I, George Weisz drew a very negative image of these associations, especially the AGE, considering that «they didn't manage to threaten neither the university or the political system».⁷¹ Burney

commerce. Sociohistoire d'une entreprise éducative en France (Paris: Classiques Garnier, 2015), chapter 1.

⁷⁰ Françoise Delfour, *L'École d'agriculture de Grignon de 1867 à 1918*, thesis for the diploma of archivist, École nationale des chartes, Paris, 2000, "«Ramener vers l'agriculture des intelligences'. L'école d'agriculture de Grignon et ses élèves, 1826-1918," in *Actes du 127^e congrès national des sociétés historiques et scientifiques, Nancy, 2002*, ed. Thérèse Charmasson (Paris: Éditions du CTHS, 2005), 281-290.

⁷¹ Weisz, "Associations": 44.

also proposed a miserable picture of the AGE of Toulouse. Later, Condette and Moulinier were likewise critical against these associations.⁷² Although they had internal flaws, didn't manage to assemble a majority of students, and couldn't follow up the ambitious program that some republican politicians and professors had imagined for them during the 1880s, the AGE and other associations did succeed in presenting themselves as representatives and defenders of students, in emancipating themselves (at least in part) as independent and autonomous organizations, in obtaining advantages for students and some ameliorations for their living conditions. Contrary to what Weisz's conclusion suggests, with the exception of a few identified organizations such as the student group of the nationalist and antisemitic *Action Française*, it was never the goal of student associations to attack the university and the republican regime, but much more to be integrated in them in order to promote students' interests.⁷³

The limitations in the historiography on associations and collective mobilizations join those already mentioned: the years 1850-1880 and 1918-1940, provincial universities, associations of female or foreign students, and more generally religious and political associations. Even though the archives are incomplete, the student press, especially for the interwar period, can be a first gateway to the study of these organizations, as the majority of them published a journal.⁷⁴

The late interest in the history of France's students in the nineteenth and early twentieth centuries is linked to the limited development and institutionalization of university history in France more generally. To this day, research on France's students remains fragmented and consists mainly of episodic publications by various historians. Even if Paris and the years 1880-1914 have been better studied, most of the historiography took the form of small publications on a multiplicity of particular objects, events, and groups, and, correlatively, only a handful of more general works by specialists have been published. Several important limitations still exist and works on the social history of students, on students of provincial universities or

⁷² Burney, "Student"; Condette, "Folklore", "Les associations": 149-158; Moulinier, *Naissance*, 167-178, "Belle Époque", "L'AGE".

⁷³ For a critical discussion, see Dubois, *Organiser*, 342-356.

⁷⁴ For a list of (partially) digitized student journals, see: <https://student.hypotheses.org/50>.

on students during the interwar period for instance are greatly needed. All this has contributed to prevent the development of common questioning and research programs on this subject, despite the increasing number of publications since the 2000s. Hopefully, this historiographical survey will contribute to show that student history of these 150 years has still much to offer. New subjects, new research questions, and a rich archive material now await their historians.

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