

Pierre de Fermat (1601? - 1665)

His life beside mathematics

Klaus Barner

Fermat's outwardly uneventful life is soon told.
André Weil [13]

The 400th birthday of Pierre de Fermat, the great seventeenth-century French mathematician, was celebrated in 2001. However, this is probably based on a fallacy (see [2]): Fermat was probably born in 1607, or in the first days of January 1608, in Beaumont-de-Lomagne. He was the son of the rich wholesaler and manufacturer Dominique Fermat, and his mother, Claire De Long, his father's second wife, came from a noble family of jurists (see [11]). Thus, strictly speaking, the celebrations and conferences with respect to Fermat's 400th birthday are premature. But we won't spoil the fun - we'll join the celebrations of Fermat's birthday, and report on his little-known private and professional life.

In the second half of the fifteenth century, the Fermat family apparently emigrated from Catalonia to Beaumont-de-Lomagne, a fortified village with a market, about 55 kilometers to the northwest of Toulouse. There, in the sixteenth century, Pierre Fermat's grandfather Anthoine run an ironmongery that earned him a modest fortune which he bequeathed to his two sons Dominique (from his first marriage, Fermat's father) and Pierre (from his third marriage, Fermat's godfather). Both sons increased their father's inheritance to the best of their abilities. Dominique was particularly successful. A merchant who ran a leather wholesale trade with Italy, Spain and England, he also had a flourishing lime factory and gained considerable prosperity. He invested his profits in numerous farms and other plots of land, which he leased on the basis of *metayage* contracts.

Through his marriage with a noblewoman, Claire de Long, reflecting his increased standing, he gained access for his sons Pierre and Clément to the *noblesse de robe*. His family's social promotion was planned well in advance: for, the only way to achieve it was to buy the office of a parliamentary councillor (*conseiller*) at one of the Supreme Courts of Justice (*cours de parlement*) in the French provinces, just as in Toulouse or Bordeaux. This custom, already disputed during the *Ancient Régime* but completely legal, had been introduced by the French Crown in the sixteenth century because of lack of money. The prerequisite for this was not only a respectable fortune. One had also to gain appropriate qualifications: three years of study of law, leading to a *baccalaureus (juris civilis)*, and four years of practical experience as a lawyer at one of the Supreme Courts. Further, a suitable



Fermat Memorial with the sculpture by Falguière in front of the covered market of Beaumont

office had to be up for sale, and the support of members of the particular parliament was needed, requiring substantial favouritism. At the end there would be an entrance examination in law which not everyone passed.

Pierre de Fermat spent his schooldays with the *Frères Mineurs Cordeliers* in his home town. These were Franciscans who had settled in Beaumont around 1515 and founded a demanding grammar school in which classical Greek was taught, in addition to Latin, Italian and Catalan. This was unusual for the time in a small place with only 3000 inhabitants. For Pierre, who left school in 1623 at the age of 16, his good command of classical languages was a crucial precondition for his study in Orléans.

His choice of this place for study was well founded. The town on the Loire had an old and famous faculty of civil law whose

reputation far beyond France attracted students from all parts of Europe - above all from Scotland, the Netherlands and Switzerland, as well as from German countries where students of Lutheran denomination formed a high proportion. In the sixteenth century Orléans had made a name for itself as a stronghold of humanistic jurisprudence. In this, a critical-philological return to the classical origins and sources of Roman law (particularly Justinian) played a central part. A reliable mastery of Latin and classical Greek was indispensable for these studies, and the classical languages were especially cultivated by the faculty of the *artes liberales* of Orléans. A baccalaureate from Orléans undoubtedly gained a young jurist a considerable reputation.

Around August 1626, Pierre de Fermat passed his examinations in Orléans, and duly received his certificate for successfully

passing the examination of *baccalaureus juris civilis*. In the following month Dominique Fermat wrote his last will and testament. Giving a compensation to his younger son Clément, and fixing the dowries of his daughters Louise and Marie, he chose his elder son Pierre as sole heir.

Pierre Fermat proceeded to Bordeaux and was sworn in as a lawyer by the *Grand' Chambre* of the *parlement de Bordeaux* in October 1626. Being called to the Bar of one of the French provincial parliaments, he had to set up in practice as a lawyer, because this was by royal law a precondition for recognition as a *conseiller* by the Minister of Justice. After his natural choice of Orléans as a place of study, his selection of Bordeaux for practising as a lawyer was surprising; for many different reasons Toulouse was a more obvious choice. It is likely that Fermat's choice of Bordeaux is connected with his mathematical leanings.

In Bordeaux, there was a small circle of lovers of mathematics, of whom the names D'Espagnet, Philon and Prades are known from Fermat's correspondence; Étienne D'Espagnet, whose father had been first president of the parliament of Bordeaux and a friend of Viète, owned Viète's works which were very difficult to obtain at that time. Here Fermat, who was just 20, started his mathematical career. But who advised him to settle as a lawyer in Bordeaux? It was probably Jean Beaugrand, who cultivated scientific relations with the gentlemen in Bordeaux. Fermat may have made his acquaintance in August 1626 in Orléans. At any rate, it is significant that Beaugrand followed Fermat's mathematical career with particular interest, and he always proudly reported on Fermat's achievements during his journeys to Italy and elsewhere. Beaugrand obviously felt that he had 'discovered' Fermat.

When Dominique Fermat died on 20 June 1628, Pierre became a wealthy man, and had only another two years to spend as an *avocat* in Bordeaux. If the opportunity then arose for him to buy a *conseiller's* office (in Toulouse, preferably), the first stage of the family plan would be achieved. This opportunity arose at the end of 1630, during a severe plague epidemic that carried off numerous *conseillers au parlement* in Toulouse. On 29 December 1630, Fermat concluded an advance contract with Ysabeau de la Roche, widow of Pierre de Carrière, *conseiller au parlement de Toulouse* and *commissaire aux requêtes*, regarding the purchase of the deceased's office.

The purchase price of 43500 *livres*, with an initial payment of 3000 *livres* on taking up the office, represented a usual, but enormous, sum. A farmer could earn about 100 *livres* per year, a parish priest some 300 *livres*, and a busy *conseiller* up to 1500 *livres* on which he then had to pay tax. From an economic point of view such a purchase was a miserable deal, particularly since by royal law the *conseillers* were not allowed to carry on a trade or practise a craft; nearly all of them earned

their living from their estates, which they leased. Fermat, who had inherited from his father six farms and numerous other pastures, gardens and vineyards, was no exception in this respect. Only very wealthy landowners could afford the luxury of purchasing an office of that kind. The 'profit' consisted of the advancement into the *noblesse de robe*, the social reputation and privileges that went with it, and the participation into political power.

After Fermat had asked for the king's consent and passed the prescribed entrance examination of the *parlement de Toulouse*, he was sworn into office by the *Grand' Chambre* on 14 May 1631. From this moment onward, he enjoyed all the rights and privileges of a *conseiller's* office - the income from his office, and the right to use



Two recent Fermat stamps

the title *écuyer* and put 'de' before his name.

The close chronological linking between Fermat's appointment as *conseiller au parlement* and his marriage with Louyse de Long, the daughter of Clément de Long, *conseiller au parlement de Toulouse*, is interesting. The marriage contract was concluded on 18 February 1631, and on 30 March, de Long paid his future son-in-law 2865 *livres* as a down payment on the promised dowry of 12000 *livres*. The church wedding took place on 1 June in the *Cathédrale St-Etienne* of Toulouse.

The de Longs, remote relatives of Fermat's mother, lived in Toulouse in the *rue Saint-Remes*, and also possessed a house in Beaumont-de-Lomagne adjoining the premises of the Fermat family. In that house Clément de Long used to spend his parliamentary vacations. Pierre and Louyse must have known each other from childhood, and their marriage seems to have been settled by the families long ago, provided that Pierre made it to *conseiller au parlement*. Contemporaries praise the beauty, beguiling charm and charity of the young woman who bore Pierre five children, Clément-Samuel, Jean, Claire, Catherine and Louise.

The French provincial parliaments of the *Ancient Régime* were not parliaments by

today's standards. The idea of separating the powers of legislature, executive and judiciary, which had been elaborated by John Locke and Charles de Montesquieu and politically realised much later, was still completely unknown in the seventeenth century. The *parlements* performed the tasks of law-making, administration and jurisdiction, so far as they had been transmitted to them by the Crown for the provinces administered by them.

The *parlement de Toulouse* was opened for the first time in 1303. From the start, its area of responsibility included the complete south-east of the kingdom. Following the Parisian model, it had a *Grand' Chambre*, the original chamber from which all other chambers developed for procedural reasons: the *chambre criminelle* (also known as *la Tournelle*) and two *chambres des enquêtes*. The *Tournelle* dealt in the final instance with all offenders threatened with corporal punishment, and no clergyman was allowed to be a member of it; this chamber regularly delighted the citizens of Toulouse with its public executions. Each year two *conseillers* were exchanged between the *Grand' Chambre* and *Tournelle*, so that they were considered as one chamber divided in two. In the two *chambres des enquêtes* civil actions were decided in writing in the final instance.

The chairman of the *Grand' Chambre* and head of the whole parliament was the *premier président*. He was the only magistrate who had not purchased his office, being appointed by the king. His deputies in the *Grand' Chambre* were the chairmen of the other chambers and the *présidents à mortier* (two or three per chamber) who had also bought their prestigious offices, at three times the price of the ordinary *conseillers*. They regularly led the sittings of their chambers in rotation.

An ordinary *conseiller*, as Fermat remained all his life, could also play a central role if he was appointed the *rapporteur* of a case by the chamber. Additional income came with a *rapporteur's* role in a court case, and a hardworking *rapporteur* could raise his income significantly. Fermat was one of the most hard-working *rapporteurs* of the parliament; for example, in a ten-week period in the *Tournelle* from November 1657 to January 1658, he wrote no fewer than 34 *rapports/arrêts*. Fermat drew up his first *arrêt* on 6 December 1632 in the *chambre des requêtes*, his first *rapport* in the *Grand' Chambre* on 9 December 1654, and his last *arrêt* in the *chambre de l'Edit* on 9 January 1665, three days before his death.

The four chambers mentioned above formed the proper *cour* of the *parlement de Toulouse*. The *chambre des requêtes* in which Fermat took up his office of *conseiller* and *commissaire* in 1631, did not belong to the proper *cour* of the *parlement* and was at the lower end of the parliament's hierarchy. Its members heard preliminary civil cases, leaving the final judgements to one of the *chambres des enquêtes*.

A *commissariat aux requêtes* was generally a position for a beginner, allowing him to

become acquainted with the practice of the parliament, but it gave no advancement. For this purpose, the *conseiller* had to sell his office in the *chambre des requêtes* and purchase an office in the proper *cour* of the parliament. Fermat duly gave up his *commissariat des requêtes* on 4 December 1637, and acquired an office in the *cour* of

first time for the *chambre de l'Edit*, and Fermat was selected by the king on 16 July. He spent the session of 1638-9 with his family in Castres.

From 1646, Fermat's letters to his erudite colleagues became sparse, and for several years his mathematical correspondence almost stopped

citizens' meetings - his name turns up in the minutes for many years - helping them with particularly difficult items on the agenda. The Fermat family also showed its close attachment to Beaumont with charity and donations and by becoming godparents on numerous occasions. Very often Fermat had less time there for his beloved 'geometry' than he had hoped.

The Huguenot stronghold Castres, seat of the *chambre de l'Edit de Nantes*, was a particularly strong attraction for Fermat. Again and again he tried, not always successfully, to be proposed by the *Grand' Chambre* for the delegation to Castres and to be confirmed by the king. Between 1632 and 1665, of the 45 *conseillers au parlement de Toulouse* delegated to Castres whose term was renewed by the king for a further year, seven were renewed twice, four three times, and only Fermat four times: in 1644-6, 1648-50, 1655-7 and 1663-5. But what attracted Fermat so strongly to this town on the banks of the river Agout?

Three reasons can be given. First, a certain sympathy for the Reformed Church, which can already be observed in his parents and grandparents. Secondly, Fermat's exceptional capability as a mediator between conflicting interests, inherited from his father Dominique, which could not show to better advantage than at a chamber where reconciliation between the representatives of the two religions had regularly to be sought. The third, and perhaps strongest, reason was the intellectual atmosphere of Castres which, while the seat of the *chambre de l'Edit*, saw a golden age of culture that it never achieved again, before or since. Historians of Toulouse lament the intellectual fall of that town in almost all areas of art and science at that time, particularly with regard to the university, but note as an exception and *gloire de Toulouse* the great scholar Pierre de Fermat.

In Castres, in 1648, the Protestant Academy was founded with 20 initial members who came exclusively from the Reformed Church. Most of these gentlemen were *conseillers* or *avocats* of the *chambre de l'Edit*. Among them were the poets Samuel Izarn, Hercule de Lacger and Jacques de Ranchin, the theologians Raymond Gaches and André Martel, the philosopher Pierre Bayle, the medic, chemist and philosopher Pierre Borel, the physicist and translator Pierre Saporta, and the historiographer Paul Pellisson, but no mathematician.

Bayle and Pellisson enjoyed national reputation, and Saporta and de Ranchin were Fermat's friends. The latter read poems of Pierre and Samuel Fermat at meetings of the Academy; to him Fermat dedicated his critical commentary on the work of the Greek historian Polyainos, thereby demonstrating a knowledge of Greek philology. In 1664 Fermat saw one of Polyainos's rare works printed, prepared by Saporta; it concerns a short text in which Fermat interprets a passage from a letter of Synesios of Kyrene. Time



Coats of arms on one of Picharrot's towers. In the lower row are those of four consuls of Beaumont, elected for the year 1617. Third from left is the coat of arms of the Fermat family

the deceased Pierre de Raynaldy. He was registered at the court of the parliament on 16 January 1638, and held this office until his death.

During Fermat's time as a *commissaire aux requêtes* he made the acquaintance of his long-time friend Pierre de Carcavi, who in 1632 became his colleague at the *parlement de Toulouse*. Carcavi moved to Paris in 1636 and mediated for Fermat with Marin Mersenne and his Parisian circle. Fermat's long-standing correspondence with these gentlemen started a few days after Carcavi's arrival at Paris and lasted (with an interruption) until shortly before his death. Fermat's famous dispute with Descartes occurred at the time of his move from the *chambre des requêtes* to the first *chambre des enquêtes*.

The *chambre de l'Edit de Nantes* belonged to the *parlement de Toulouse*. This chamber was created in 1598 by Henri IV, with equal representation by members of the Reformed Church and the Roman Catholic Church, and had its seat from 1632 to 1670 in Castres, 75 kilometres to the east of Toulouse. In this chamber, all cases of conflict, and all criminal cases in which adherents of both religions were involved, were settled. It consisted of two presidents, one from each Church, as well as ten magistrates of each denomination. The judges, members of the Reformed Church, were local and had purchased their offices. Each year, eight of the Catholic judges were elected by the king from a list of twelve *conseillers au parlement de Toulouse* that had been compiled by the *Grand' Chambre*. On 29 May 1638, the *Grand' Chambre* nominated Fermat for the

completely. Why was this? Deteriorating mental ability? (Fermat was just forty years old.) Mersenne's death on 1 September 1648? (His place was soon taken over by Carcavi.) We have rather to look for reasons among the strains of Fermat's professional life; these were connected with social and political disturbances: peasants' revolts in the south of France arising from brutal methods of tax collections, the rebellion of the *Fronde* against Mazarin, and the war against Spain. At the beginning of the 1650s, the last great French plague epidemic broke out, followed by famine.

We are rightly used to seeing Fermat as the great mathematician and humanist scholar. But according to his conception of himself, he was first and foremost a judge. At the parliament of Toulouse he had a seat for life. Even though he could live off his possessions in Beaumont-de-Lomagne, he regarded his job as *conseiller au parlement de Toulouse* as his proper life's work, and his career in this institution was more important to him than his reputation as a mathematician. Only when his professional activities allowed him enough leisure, such as when parliament was not in session during the numerous religious festivals, could he devote himself to his hobby of mathematics.

Fermat spent the great parliamentary recesses in September and October à la campagne in Beaumont-de-Lomagne, where at harvest time he received his share of the yields from the leased farms, as agreed by contract. He gave advice on legal questions to the inhabitants of his home town, and regularly took part in the

and time again, Fermat felt drawn to Castres; his youngest daughter Louise was born there in 1645, and when Fermat died there in 1665 his younger son Jean was canon.

His strong interest in a delegation to Castres did not prevent Fermat from pressing ahead with his professional rise to the *Grand' Chambre*. By 1647 he was already the longest serving *conseiller* in the first *chambre des enquêtes* and he frequently took over the presidency when the *présidents à mortier* were both absent.

His move from the first *chambre des enquêtes* to the *Tournelle* coincided with the outbreak of the Toulouse plague epidemic of August 1652 to July 1653. About 4000 citizens died - about ten per cent of the town's population - and Fermat himself almost fell victim to the plague. In May 1653 the philosopher Bernard Medon, *conseiller au présidial de Toulouse* and a friend of Fermat, wrote to the Dutch writer Nicolas Heinsius the Elder of Fermat's death (*Fato functus est maximus Fermatius*), only to withdraw this news in his next letter: *Priori monueram te de morte Fermatii, vivit adhuc, nec desperatur de ejus salute, quamvis paulo ante conclamata*. Fermat was one of those who became ill with the bubonic plague and survived, but his health was weakened from this time onwards.

Soon after the outbreak of the plague Fermat progressed to the *Tournelle*, according to the principle of seniority, and from there a move to the *Grand' Chambre* was routine. In November 1654 he became a member of the highest chamber of the parliament, and on 9 December he read his first *rapport* there. In November 1655 he was back in Castres, but returned to Toulouse in November 1657, again to the *Tournelle*.

Throughout his life Fermat was a loyal servant of the Crown. Born during the regency of Henry IV, he was a fourteen-year-old boy when the young king Louis XIII spent the night of 24 November 1621 in his father Dominique's house in Beaumont-de-Lomagne, while on a journey from Toulouse to Lectoure. But Fermat's impression of his king did not remain unsullied. In 1632 he witnessed the arrival in Toulouse of Louis XIII, with Cardinal Richelieu and 5000 soldiers. The king forced the Toulouse *Grand' Chambre* and the *Tournelle* to condemn to death the popular and highly regarded Duke Henri II de Montmorency because of rebellion against the king. The awkward task of *rapporteur* in this case fell to the oldest *conseiller* of the *Tournelle*, Fermat's father-in-law Clément de Long, in whose house Fermat lived at that time with his wife Louyse.

A stereotype that goes back to Mahoney (see [7, 8]), and has been adopted by more recent authors, is that Fermat was a mediocre *conseiller* and judge who tried to avoid all social, political and religious conflicts. Nothing is further from the truth. Fermat was no jurist who composed legal treatises, but was an outstanding practitioner who, tolerant of religious

differences, stood up for justice and humanity without shrinking from confrontations with the mighty, such as the first president Gaspard de Fieubet.

In 1648 and 1651 Fermat committed himself to a rather hopeless fight against

confiscate the forbidden dye-stuff. This wasn't a pleasant task for a 'gentle, retiring, even shy man' ([7, Vol. 1, p.22]). Frequently Fermat was assigned to a small group of *conseillers* who travelled far to meet bishops, ministers and other



Epitaph from the former Fermat-mausoleum in the monastery of the Augustins, Toulouse. Year of creation: 1665

the illegal and brutal methods with which the tax collectors (*partisans*) recovered the *taille* from the farmers. On this occasion Fermat uncovered the *partisans*' deceitful practice of backdating the tax receipts, thereby withholding for themselves revenues that were due to the king. In 1651, at the time of the *Fronde*, he was a member of the delegation for the parliament of Toulouse which successfully demanded (after negotiation for several months) that the delegates of the Estates of Languedoc (who took the side of the *Fronde*) should return to a legal state of affairs loyal to the king. And on 30 July 1652, through a courageous visit to the camp of the royal army, he prevented his home town of Beaumont-de-Lomagne (which had been plundered by the soldiers of the *Fronde*) from being taken by storm and completely destroyed by the king's soldiers. After the defeat of the *Fronde*, Fermat achieved through tough negotiation the outcome that Beaumont should receive reparation payments of 16266 *livres*. In 1654 Fermat put through the *Grand' Chambre* a fairer distribution of the income from the charges between the *Tournelle* and the *Grand' Chambre*; in this way, Fermat made himself unpopular with the clerics in the *Grand' Chambre*.

Another stereotype is the claim that Fermat never ventured farther than Bordeaux (see [13, p.39]). As we have already seen, he studied law in Orléans from 1623 to 1626. He may also have visited Paris as a student. Certainly, his duties as a *conseiller* forced him to undertake longer journeys; for example, in November 1646 the *Grand' Chambre* banned the dyers of Nîmes from buying high-quality indigo from the Middle East instead of the woad produced around Toulouse. When the dyers disobeyed the ban, Fermat was sent to Nîmes, about 300 kilometers to the east of Toulouse, to present the parliament's decision and

dignitaries, or escorted them a long distance when they had taken their leave of Toulouse. In such cases Fermat's reputation as a scholar and good conversationalist was the reason for his selection.

Certainly Fermat was political, but he lacked two important qualities: unscrupulousness and ambition for power. But his abilities as a jurist have also been doubted by Mahoney (see [7, Vol. 2, p.20]) who wrote: 'The most candid appraisal of Fermat's abilities as a jurist, and one that runs counter to the usual adulation, comes from a secret report of Claude Bezins de Bésons, *intendant* of Languedoc, to Minister Colbert in 1663. Speaking of the *conseillers* and their relations to the suspect First President, Gaspar de Fieubet, Bezins said of Fermat: "Fermat, a man of great erudition, has contact with men of learning everywhere. But he is rather preoccupied; he does not report cases well and is confused. He is not among the friends of the First President." Mahoney then drew negative conclusions with regard to Fermat's judicial qualities that have since been adopted without question by other authors. If he had investigated more carefully, such incorrect judgements would not have occurred to him.

In 1965, the legal historian Henri Gilles of Toulouse showed, in a careful investigation which Mahoney obviously did not read, that Fermat always cultivated a very clear style and that the language of his *arrêts* and reports stands comparison with the style of those written by his colleagues (see [6]). I have convinced myself that Gilles is right. A disparaging judgement by the *intendant* Claude Bazins de Bessons is easily explained: in September 1663 the minister Jean-Baptiste Colbert demanded from the *intendants* individual judgements of all *conseillers* and other royal officials at the parliaments. The *intendants* complied with this request so reluctantly that Colbert

asked some *intendants* for greater thoroughness. Had Mahoney read the whole report of 24 December 1663, and not only an isolated citation in the

in form of a wicked slander: that it was Fermat who condemned the priest to be burned alive (see [12, p.808f] and [8, p.360]).



The house where Fermat was born. Its present shape was given to the property in the 18th century. In the background at the top is a 15th-century tower that belongs to the premises.

accompanying text for an exhibition catalogue (see [3, p.33]), he would have realised how superficial the judgements turned out to be (see [5, p.111ff]).

De Bessons resided in Montpellier and had to travel to Toulouse to make investigations and write his report. There he first informed himself about the *conseillers*. By that time Fermat was not in Toulouse, but rather in Beaumont or Castres. Therefore de Bessons, turned on behalf of Fermat to the king's man, the first president Fieubet, Fermat's enemy. That no fair judgement resulted is not surprising.

Much more interesting is the reason for the aversion between Fermat and Fieubet. The judicial murder of a priest, Jean Montralón, was stage-managed by Fieubet on 26 January 1658 (see [1]). This case had a Jansenist background, and Fermat was involved in it as *rapporteur* and examining judge. Montralón, of whose proved innocence Fermat was convinced, was hanged next day and his body was burned. Fermat was so incensed and shocked that he could not work as a judge for a month. On 6 February 1658, Sir Kenelm Digby, a notorious liar, reported on this case to John Wallis in Oxford, but

Perhaps because of this event, or because of his visibly deteriorating health, Fermat seems to have thought about relinquishing his office of *Conseiller* in the *Grand' Chambre*. In a letter of 25 July 1660 to the ailing Pascal, he proposed that the two men should meet half-way between Clermont-Ferrand and Toulouse because his health was hardly better than Pascal's [10, Vol. II, p.450]. If the latter expected Fermat to travel the whole distance of 300 kilometres, then Pascal would run the risk *de me voir chez vous et d'y avoir deux malades en même temps*.

On 4 March 1660, Fermat wrote his last will and testament, with his elder son Samuel as his sole heir. He amplified this testament on 13 September 1664, in a codicil in which he made settlements in favour of his wife Louyse: Samuel was to pay his mother 32000 *livres* from the inheritance, an imposing sum which she could make good use of. Louyse outlived her husband by more than 25 years. In the preamble of this codicil Fermat speaks rather openly of his coming end ([4, p.347]): *Je soubsigné éstam incommode d'une maladie qui pourroit avoir de mauvaises suites*. In October 1664 Fermat set off for Castres for the last time, and died there on 12

January 1665 aged 57 years, after receiving the holy sacraments and with an alertness of mind to the end. On the next day he was laid to rest in the chapel of the Jacobins in Castres.

The date of Fermat's birth is disputed, and there is also confusion about where his mortal remains found their last resting place. Is it the chapel of the Jacobins in Castres which was demolished soon after Fermat's decease? Or is it the family mausoleum in the church of the Augustins in Toulouse, to which Samuel and Jean Fermat had their father's body moved? After examining all arguments (see [10, 4]) I believe that Fermat's body was transferred to Toulouse in the year of his death. But there is no proof. The family mausoleum was destroyed during the French Revolution and only Fermat's epitaph, currently restored, has survived.

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