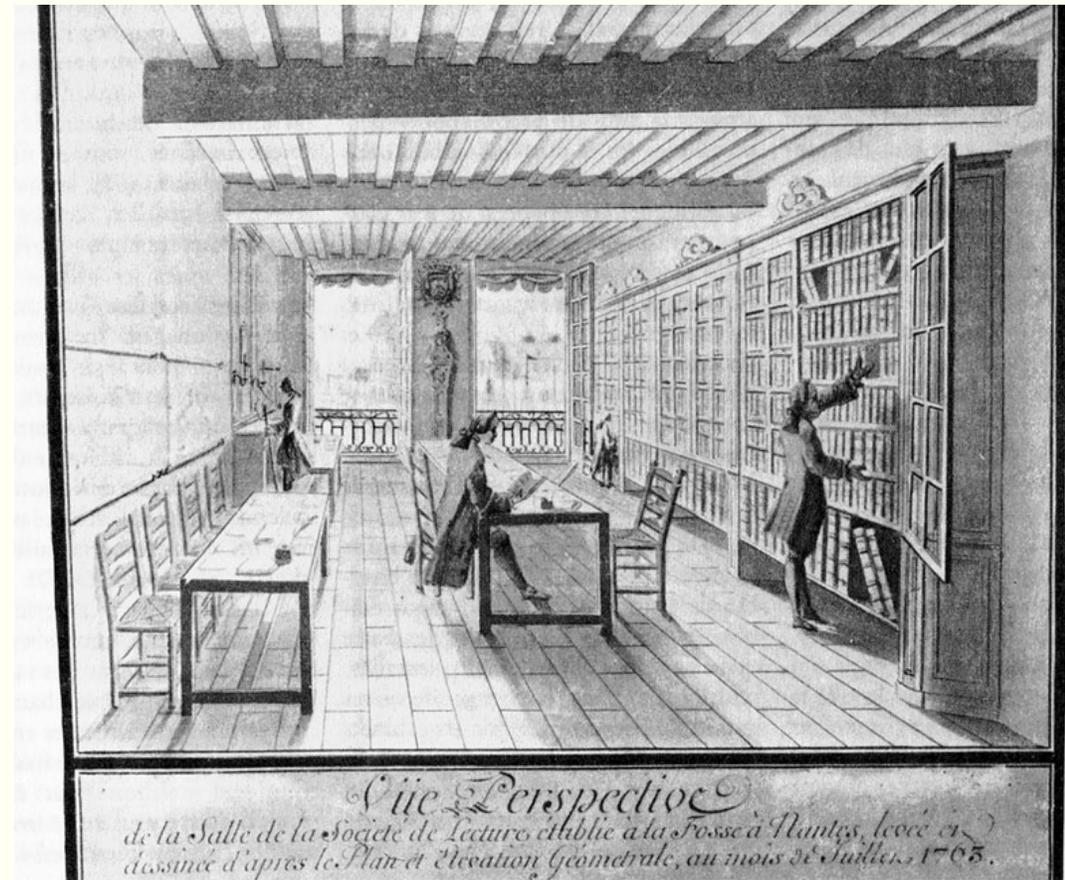


# WHO WAS AN ECONOMIST?

The historical sociology of early french economists and economics (1750-1788)

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# Introduction

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- What kind of people were doing economic/political economy before it was a profession?
- Historical case study on French political economy 1750-1788
- Context (1): period that saw the publication of the canonical *Wealth of Nation* and the creation of the first school of political economy, the physiocratic school.
- Context (2): Absence of institutions (universities, professional journals, professional associations) and professional positions that characterize (modern) academic disciplines
- Purpose of the paper: Reflect on the interaction between society, the nature of economic knowledge and the practices (social and scientific) practices of economic authors
- Argument: the leading role of institutions to trigger the creation of a discipline

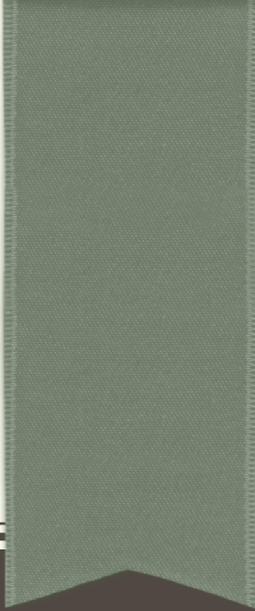
# Plan

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**Section 1.** French economic discipline before 1789: a statistical description

**Section 2.** The Gournay circle: A prosopography

**Sections 3.** In pursuit of a new science: Physiocracy and its institutions



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SECTION 1.  
FRENCH ECONOMIC AUTHORS BEFORE 1789: A  
STATISTICAL DESCRIPTION

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## Section 1.

# French economic discipline before 1789: a statistical description

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- What should count as an « economist »?
- Possible criteria: having a degree in economics, teaching economics, publishing in an economic journal, writing an economic text, etc.
- In France, before 1789, the only criteria available is the publication of a writing that may be considered an economic writing.
- What is an economic writing? What is economics before 1789?
- According to Walras (late 19th century), no definition of political economy « has yet met with the general final agreement that is a sign of the truths acquired by a science ».
- One source dating from the second half of the 18th century, the *Catalog of a library of political economy*, provides a nomenclature of texts belonging to the political economy discipline.

## Section 1.

# French economic discipline before 1789: a statistical description

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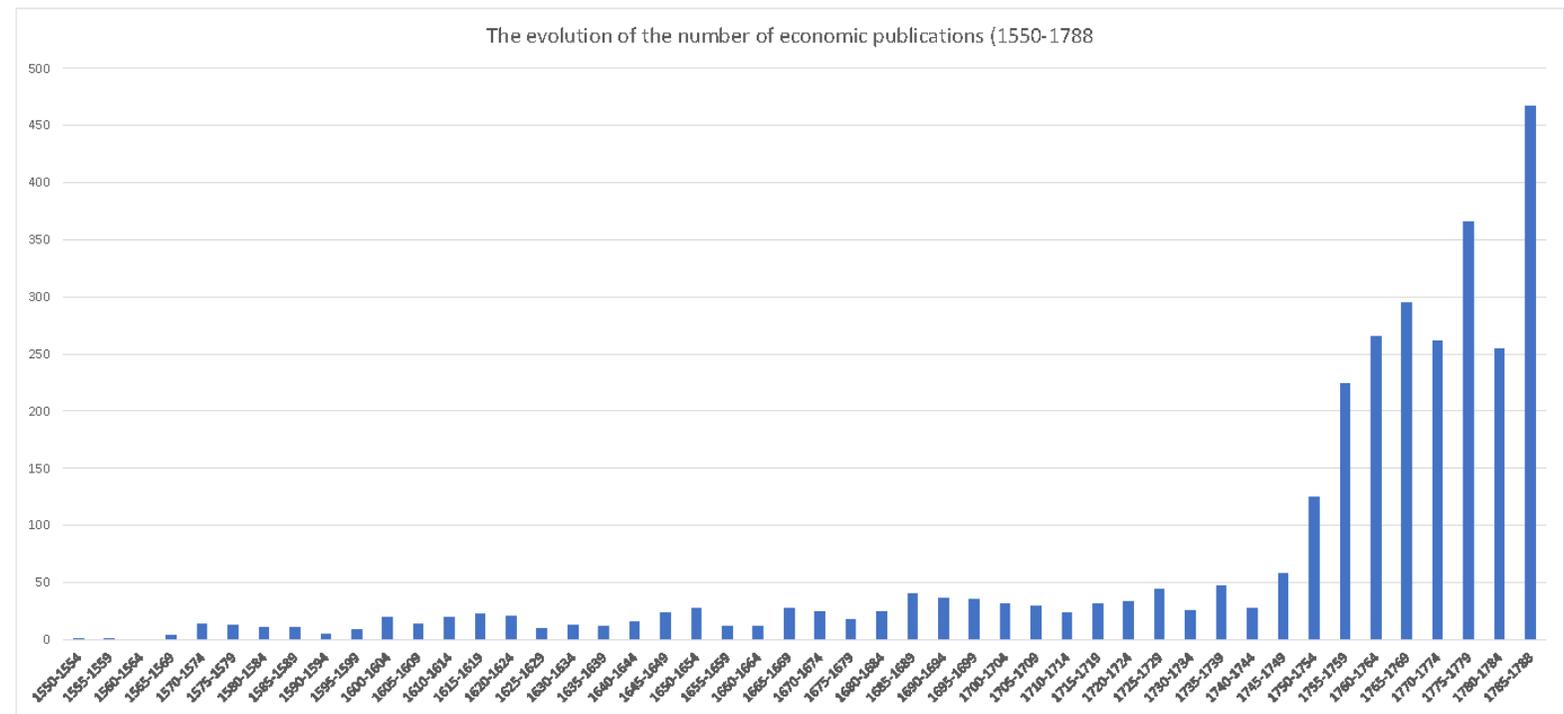
- Classification with 39 groups or categories of economic writings.
- Such as: General treatises on political economy; general treatises on politics in which are considered several issues of political economy; trade in general (treatises and miscellanies).
- But also: Weights and Measures; Population in General; History.
- Or various descriptive categories such as: Fisheries, fish, salts, etc.; internal navigation...
  
- Using this classification: we were able to register 3461 economic publications for the period 1550 to 1788. There are distributed chronologically as such:

# Section 1.

## French economic discipline before 1789: a statistical description

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- French language only, some by strangers though
- Accelerating trend after 1750
- More publications per author
- Higher proportion of treatises after 1750 as well



## Section 1.

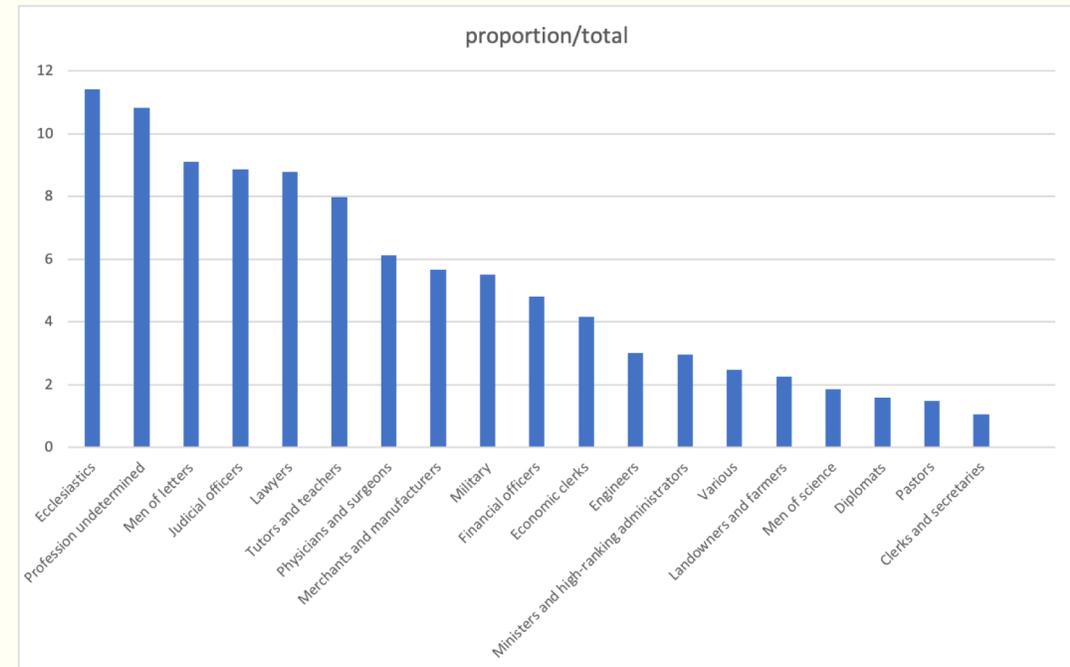
# French economic discipline before 1789: a statistical description

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- Who was writing economic texts?
- 2227 authors, 1946 for which we were able to gather some information on their social life and career. On average around 2 economic writings per author, a sign of low specialization.
- As a first approach to the type of socialization that characterize economic writers, we have classified them by social groups.

# Professional distribution of economists 1550-1780

Social/Professional Groups	proportion/total
Ministers and high-ranking administrators	2,96
Economic clerks	4,18
Clerks and secretaries	1,06
Diplomats	1,59
Engineers	3,01
Military	5,50
Financial officers	4,81
Judicial officers	8,88
Lawyers	8,78
Physicians and surgeons	6,13
Men of science	1,85
Tutors and teachers	7,99
Men of letters	9,10
Ecclesiastics	11,42
Pastors	1,48
Landowners and farmers	2,27
Merchants and manufacturers	5,66
Various	2,49
Profession undetermined	10,84
Total	100



## Section 1.

# French economic discipline before 1789: a statistical description

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- Although, there was no such thing as a modern economist, there were however trades in which one has to develop some kind of economic expertise.
- 8 categories: economic clerks, engineers, ministers and intendants, financial magistrates, landowners and farmers, traders and, finally, manufacturers.
- Economic writers who work in these trades represent about 30% of our dataset of authors.
- A second group of economic writers had trades that to some extent relates to the ethos of the modern economist because they engaged into writing and intellectual undertakings.
- 3 categories: men of letters, ecclesiastics, doctors and physicians. They represent about 30% of authors.

## Section 1.

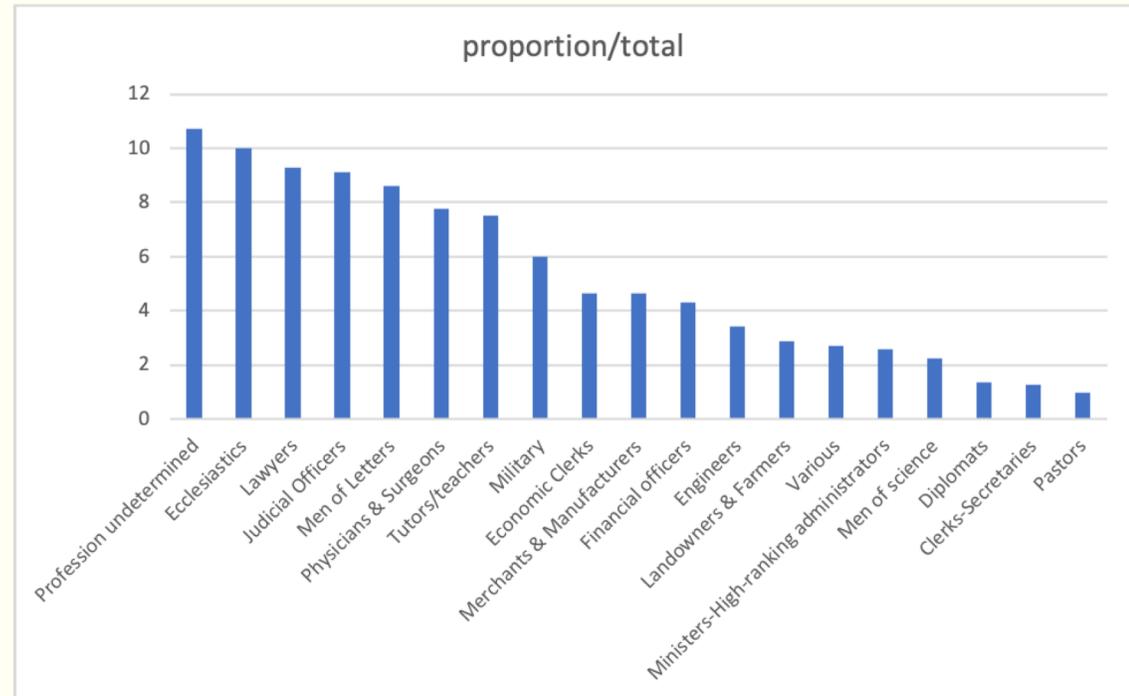
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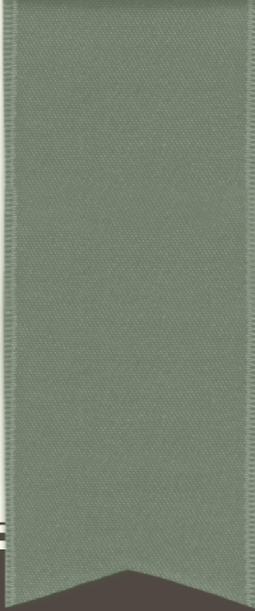
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- A third group consisted of people of legal background, without specific relations to the economic and business world – lawyers and parliamentaries – and military men.
- They represent 25% of our dataset.
- The last group is a miscellanea category in which the category « profession undetermined » dominates largely, it represents the remaining 15% of our sample.

# Professional distribution of economists 1550-1780

Social/Professional Groups	proportion/total
Ministers-High-ranking administrators	2,56
Economic Clerks	4,64
Clerks-Secretaries	1,28
Diplomats	1,36
Engineers	3,44
Military	6,00
Financial officers	4,32
Judicial Officers	9,11
Lawyers	9,27
Physicians & Surgeons	7,75
Men of science	2,24
Tutors/teachers	7,51
Men of Letters	8,63
Ecclesiastics	9,99
Pastors	0,96
Landowners & Farmers	2,88
Merchants & Manufacturers	4,64
Various	2,72
Profession undetermined	10,71
Total	100





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SECTION 2.

THE GOURNAY CIRCLE: A PROSOPOGRAPHY

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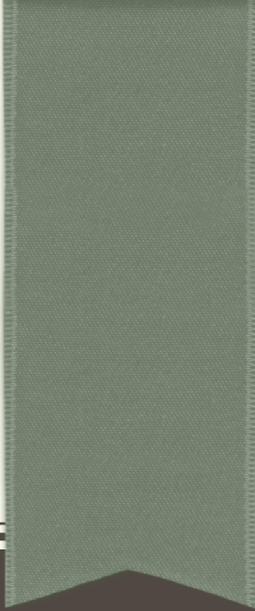
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# Professional distribution of Gournay circle

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Social/Professional Groups	Number of authors	proportion/total
Ministers-High-ranking administrators	3	13,64
Economic Clerks	3	13,64
Clerks-Secretaries	1	4,55
Diplomats	0	0,00
Engineers	0	0,00
Military	0	0,00
Financial officers	1	4,55
Judicial Officers	0	0,00
Lawyers	1	4,55
Physicians & Surgeons	0	0,00
Men of science	2	9,09
Tutors/teachers	0	0,00
Men of Letters	6	27,27
Ecclesiastics	1	4,55
Pastors	0	0,00
Landowners & Farmers	1	4,55
Merchants & Manufacturers	3	13,64
Various	0	0,00
Profession undetermined	0	0,00
Total	22	100



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SECTION 3.  
IN PURSUIT OF A *NEW SCIENCE*:  
PHYSIOCRACY AND ITS INSTITUTIONS

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# Professional distribution of the physiocratic movement

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Social/Professional Groups	Number of authors	proportion/total
Ministers-High-ranking administrators	5	5,10
Economic Clerks	6	6,12
Clerks-Secretaries	1	1,02
Diplomats	2	2,04
Engineers	2	2,04
Military	21	21,43
Financial officers	7	7,14
Judicial Officers	6	6,12
Lawyers	3	3,06
Physicians & Surgeons	6	6,12
Men of science	2	2,04
Tutors/teachers	2	2,04
Men of Letters	11	11,22
Ecclesiastics	5	5,10
Pastors	0	0,00
Landowners & Farmers	12	12,24
Merchants & Manufacturers	3	3,06
Various	4	4,08
Profession undetermined	0	0,00
Total	98	100