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Author(s): Robert Darnton

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The *Encyclopédie* Wars of Prerevolutionary France

ROBERT DARNTON

THE PUBLICATION OF THE *Encyclopédie* has long been recognized as a turning point of the Enlightenment. In permitting Diderot's text to appear in print the state, however reluctantly and imperfectly, gave the philosophes an opportunity to try their wares in the market place of ideas. But what was the result of this break-through in the traditional restraints on the printed word in France? By concentrating on the duel between the *encyclo-pédistes* and the French authorities, scholars have told only half the story. The other half concerns some basic questions in the social history of ideas: how did publishers plan and execute editions in the eighteenth century? How well did works like the *Encyclopédie* sell? And who bought them? This essay is addressed to those questions. By recounting the life cycle of one book, it is intended to suggest some of the possibilities in the history of publishing, a field that has lain fallow too long despite its attractive location at the crossroads of intellectual, social, economic, and political history.¹

¹ This essay, which is intended as a preliminary sketch for a full-length study of the quarto editions of the *Encyclopédie*, is based almost entirely on the papers of the Société Typographique de Neuchâtel (hereafter STN) in the Bibliothèque de la Ville de Neuchâtel, Switzerland. All citations are to those manuscripts unless specified otherwise. Any researcher concerned with the later editions of the *Encyclopédie* is bound to feel indebted to the painstaking scholarship of two men: George B. Watts and John Lough. See especially Watts's articles, "Forgotten Folio Editions of the *Encyclopédie*," *French Review*, 27 (1953-54): 22-29, 243-44; "The Swiss Editions of the *Encyclopédie*," *Harvard Library Bulletin*, 9 (1955): 213-35; and "The Geneva Folio Reprinting of the *Encyclopédie*," *Proceedings of the American Philosophical Society*, 105 (1961): 361-67; and see Lough's book, *Essays on the Encyclopédie of Diderot and D'Alembert* (London, 1968). As far as the circulation of books within France is concerned the first edition of the *Encyclopédie* was relatively unimportant, but it has attracted most of the attention of scholars because its publication became the crucial episode in the liberalization of the Direction de la Librairie and in the battles between the philosophes and their opponents during the 1750s. A decree of the king's council suppressed the first two volumes of the *Encyclopédie* in 1752; and the council revoked the privilege for the book in 1759, when it had come under attack by the pope, the Jesuits, the Jansenists, the Parlement of Paris, and other enemies of the philosophes. But C. G. de Lamoignon de Malesherbes, the enlightened director of the Librairie, unofficially permitted the last ten volumes of text to appear in 1765. The last two volumes of plates were published in 1772. For an excellent synthesis of the scholarship on this aspect of the history of the *Encyclopédie*, see Arthur M. Wilson, *Diderot* (New York, 1957, 1972), and Jacques Proust, *Diderot et l'Encyclopédie* (Paris, 1967).

WHEN DIDEROT AND HIS PUBLISHERS brought out the last volume of the *Encyclopédie* in 1772, they had won more than a moral victory over the system for controlling French publishing. The first edition probably produced about 2,500,000 livres in gross profits. But the government refused to let the book sell openly, and most of the 4,225 sets went to customers outside France.² The second edition also seems to have been primarily a non-French affair. It was a folio reprint of the original text, produced in Geneva by a consortium of publishers allied with Charles Joseph Panckoucke of Paris. Its sales records have not survived, but its publishers originally hoped to market half of their 2,200 sets in France; and they had sold 1,330 sets throughout Europe when they settled their accounts in June 1775.³ So by that date only 3,000 copies of the first two editions, at the very most, existed in France. The country had not been inundated with *Encyclopédies*, despite the semi-legal status granted to the book.

But the publishing of the next editions—the three quarto and the two octavo printings of the original text—is a very different story; and unlike the publishing history of the first two editions, it can be told in detail, thanks to the papers of the Société Typographique de Neuchâtel in Neuchâtel, Switzerland. The story begins with Panckoucke, the extraordinary entrepreneur known as “the Atlas of the book trade,”⁴ and his system of alliances and alignments within the world of publishing and politics.

In December 1768 Panckoucke bought from the original publishers the plates of the *Encyclopédie* and the rights to future editions of it. Precisely what these rights were is difficult to say. Panckoucke used the terms “droits” and “privilège” throughout his correspondence, but the government had revoked the formal privilege of the *Encyclopédie* in 1759, and the registers of privileges in the Bibliothèque Nationale give no indication that it was ever restored. They do reveal that Panckoucke received a twelve-year *privilège général* on March 29, 1776, for a “Recueil des planches sur les sciences, arts et métiers,” which may have been enough to substantiate his claim to possess a kind of copyright.⁵ In any case, he asserted that claim in the most abso-

² On the economic aspects of the first edition, see, in addition to the works cited above, Norman L. Torrey, “L’*Encyclopédie* de Diderot, une grande aventure dans le domaine de l’édition,” *Revue d’histoire littéraire de la France*, 51 (1951): 306–17; John Lough, “Luneau de Boisjermain v. the Publishers of the *Encyclopédie*,” *Studies on Voltaire and the Eighteenth Century*, 23 (1963): 115–73; and Ralph H. Bowen, “The *Encyclopédie* As a Business Venture” in Charles K. Warner, ed., *From the Ancien Régime to the Popular Front: Essays in the History of Modern France in Honor of Shepard B. Clough* (New York, 1969), 1–22. What little is known about the sales of the first edition comes from the papers of Luneau de Boisjermain, which are too polemical to be trustworthy and which justify estimates of the foreign sales ranging from somewhat more than one-half to three-quarters of the edition.

³ Lough, *Essays on the Encyclopédie*, 103.

⁴ George B. Watts, “Charles Joseph Panckoucke, ‘l’Atlas de la librairie française,’” *Studies on Voltaire and the Eighteenth Century*, 68 (1969): 67–205.

⁵ *Privilège* no. 613, Mar. 29, 1776, Bibliothèque Nationale, fonds français, MS 21967. On February 10, 1776, Panckoucke had received a twelve-year *privilège général* (*privilège* no. 365, *ibid.*) for “un ouvrage qui a pour titre *Nouveau dictionnaire des arts et des sciences etc.*,” but nothing proves that this work was the *Encyclopédie* or had any connection with it. None of

lute manner, citing not only the contract by which he bought out the original publishers but also the sanction of the French government; and he sold portions of his “privilege” to a whole series of partners, periodically buying them back and reselling them again to new associates for new editions.

Panckoucke’s first *Encyclopédie* was the second edition, the folio reprint of 1771–76. Those were hard years in the book trade, owing to the repressive measures of the “triumvirate” ministry of Maupeou, Terray, and d’Aiguillon, so Panckoucke had the edition printed in Geneva by his partners, who included Voltaire’s publisher, “the angel Gabriel” Cramer. It was a stormy affair, involving quarrels among the associates, conflict with a rival, a “Protestant” *Encyclopédie* being produced by Barthélemy de Félice in Yverdon, and a losing battle with the French government, which had confiscated six thousand volumes that Panckoucke had originally printed in Paris. Whether Panckoucke ever had much success in cracking the French market with this edition cannot be known, but his difficulties did not discourage him. By the accession of Louis XVI he remained convinced that there was still a fortune to be made in *Encyclopédies*, and the liberal character of the new ministry swelled his hopes. He found doors opening for him everywhere within the government. His coach carried him into Versailles “like an official with a portfolio.”⁶ And his letters burgeoned with assurances of “protections” from lieutenants of police, directors of the book trade, and ministers.

On July 3, 1776, Panckoucke sold an interest of fifty per cent in his newly consolidated “rights and privileges” in the *Encyclopédie* for 143,000 livres to the Société Typographique de Neuchâtel, one of the most important publishers of French books during the twenty years before the Revolution. After toying with a plan to publish another folio reprint, this new association decided to produce a completely revised edition. The text was to be rewritten by a whole stable of philosophes—including Marmontel, Morellet, La Harpe, D’Arnaud, St. Lambert, and Thomas—under the direction of Suard, with D’Alembert and Condorcet as associates. Panckoucke did not enlist Diderot, “*une mauvaise tête*, who demanded 100,000 écus and would have driven us to despair.”⁷ But he counted heavily on D’Alembert, who was to solicit the protection of Frederick II and perhaps even to persuade him to accept the dedication of the new work. D’Alembert also considered writing a history of the *Encyclopédie* for the new edition, but that essay died

the other registers of *privilèges* or *permissions tacites* contain any references to the *Encyclopédie* for the period 1768–88: see MSS 21964–67, 21983, 21984, 21989, 22000–02, 22013, and 22073. On September 8, 1759, after the revocation of the original privilege of the *Encyclopédie*, its first publishers received a privilege to produce a collection of its plates, which they probably construed as a “copyright” for the entire work and sold to Panckoucke.

⁶ D.-J. Garat, *Mémoires historiques sur la vie de M. Suard, sur ses écrits et sur le XVIII^e siècle* (Paris, 1820), 1: 274. For more details about the second edition, see Lough, *Essays on the Encyclopédie*, 52–111.

⁷ Panckoucke to STN, Aug. 4, 1776. In this letter Panckoucke explained that he was referring to an interview with Diderot that had occurred eight years earlier. For Diderot’s version of this famous encounter, see Wilson, *Diderot*, 578–79.

stillborn, like other potential classics of the Enlightenment—a history of French Protestantism by Raynal, a history of Turgot's ministry by Voltaire—that never got beyond the stage of projects knocked about in negotiations between authors and publishers. In the end this new *Encyclopédie* itself miscarried, despite the grandiose plans of its backers, because it was undercut by a quarto edition of the original text, which was launched in 1776 by Joseph Duplain of Lyons, the antihero of this story and one of the most intrepid buccaneers in the era of “booty capitalism.”

Like many provincial bookdealers Duplain built his business on the demand for cheap, pirated works, often of a racy or philosophical character, which were produced in the printing houses flourishing beyond the fringes of France's borders, thanks to the system of privileges and thought control that stifled innovative publishing within the kingdom. Duplain smelled a fortune in cut-rate *Encyclopédies*. He announced the opening of a subscription for a cheap quarto edition, which would incorporate the five-volume supplement in the original text. He protected himself by attributing the edition to Jean Léonard Pellet, a Genevan printer who received three thousand livres for acting as straw man. And when the flow of subscriptions proved strong enough, Duplain contracted the printing to several Genevan shops, keeping the financial and administrative work to himself. He counted on getting the books into France either by smuggling—he had great influence in the booksellers' guild of Lyons, although he had powerful enemies in the Parisian guild—or by winning the benevolent neutrality of the French authorities. But he had not reckoned with Panckoucke.

Panckoucke could choose either to beat Duplain or to join him. The first alternative appealed to Panckoucke because he was convinced that he could use his protections effectively enough to block the channels of the underground book trade. But the success of the subscription created a greater temptation. Panckoucke knew “every step that Duplain takes,”⁸ thanks to secret reports from an allied Lyonnais bookseller called Gabriel Regnault. Regnault learned that the subscription was selling spectacularly, and corroborative information “from everywhere”⁹ made it look as though the quarto *Encyclopédie* could turn into the most profitable publication of the century. So Panckoucke shelved the project for the revised edition and entered into negotiations, bartering his monopoly on legality against a cut of the subscriptions. On January 14, 1777, he and Duplain signed what later became known as the “Treaty of Dijon.” Each took a half interest in the quarto enterprise, which they subsequently divided among their own associates (the Société Typographique de Neuchâtel eventually came to own five twenty-fourths of the entire enterprise). Duplain committed himself to administer the production, distribution, and financing of the edition accord-

⁸ Panckoucke to STN, Dec. 26, 1776.

⁹ Panckoucke to STN, May 13, 1777.

ing to conditions specified in great detail by the contract. And Panckoucke promised to supply half the capital, the three volumes of plates, and the covering protection of his privilege. The last item was no small advantage. In August 1777 Panckoucke wrote that Le Camus de Neville, the director of the Librairie, “will protect our great affair” and had even given permission for Panckoucke to import the books directly to his warehouses in Paris, bypassing the customs, the booksellers’ guild, and the censorship.¹⁰ At the same time, writing as if he were himself a minister, Panckoucke directed the inspector of books in Lyons to give clear passage to the crates being shipped from Switzerland.¹¹ In fact Panckoucke pulled strings so effectively that the Swiss printers began to stuff their shipments of *Encyclopédies* with prohibited books. Far from drawing the fire of the established authorities, as it had done in the 1750s, the *Encyclopédie* circulated under the protective covering of their patronage; and that protection served as camouflage for the diffusion of works that the state wanted to suppress.

Panckoucke and Duplain had no idea that a small smuggling operation had grafted itself onto their enterprise. They gave all their attention to the maximization of profits, and the quarto proved to be extraordinarily profitable: orders poured in from everywhere, traveling salesmen reaped unheard-of harvests, and booksellers marveled at a hunger for the *Encyclopédie* that had remained dormant among clients who had not been able to buy the folio editions. “There is no other work so universally widespread,” wrote Dufour of Maestricht. “Our streets are paved with it,” said Resplandy of Toulouse, echoing exactly the observation of a Lyonnais salesman: “Our town is paved with it.” And Panckoucke exulted, “The success of this quarto edition passes all belief.”¹² In opening the subscription Duplain had set his sights high: he hoped to sell 4,000 copies. The subscription filled to overflowing with astonishing speed; so Duplain opened another, for 2,000 more copies. It, too, filled rapidly, and Duplain opened a third, making a total of 8,000 sets of thirty-nine quarto volumes each—an extraordinary amount for an era when printings of single-volume works normally ran to 1,000 copies or so.

This succession of subscriptions explains the mystery of the missing second quarto edition, which has plagued bibliographers who have been able to locate only the first, or “Pellet,” edition and the third, or “Neuchâtel,” edition of the quarto *Encyclopédie*.¹³ Duplain committed himself to print

¹⁰ Panckoucke to STN, Aug. 5, 1777.

¹¹ “Je vous serai obligé de donner vos ordres pour que ces volumes passent sans difficulté et d’accorder toute votre protection à cet ouvrage. M. de Neville est prévenu de tout ce que j’ai fait à ce sujet.” Panckoucke to La Tourette, July 18, 1777, Bibliothèque publique et universitaire de Genève, MS supp. 148.

¹² Dufour to STN, Aug. 2, 1780; Resplandy to STN, Jan. 2, 1778; D’Arnal to STN, Nov. 12, 1779; Panckoucke to STN, Sept. 9, 1777.

¹³ George B. Watts made a good guess as to the explanation of the “second” edition, but he mistakenly believed that Pellet directed the whole affair: see “Swiss Editions of the *Encyclo-*

the second subscription when the printers had reached sheet "T" of volume 6, working at a press run of 4,000 copies. He directed them to reprint 2,000 copies of everything they had completed and then to continue at a run of 6,000. So there was no distinct second edition. The third subscription coincided with a separate "third edition," because each sheet was reset and run off at 2,000 copies, and the title page of each volume proclaimed it to be "troisième édition, à Neuchâtel, chez la Société typographique." In fact this imprint was a ruse devised by Duplain to inveigle subscriptions from persons who had been put off by the slipshod quality of the Pellet editions. The Société Typographique actually printed only one volume of "its" edition and four of the volumes that appeared under Pellet's name. In every case Duplain subcontracted the printing and remained hidden behind his typographical false fronts.

Duplain used printers in Neuchâtel, Geneva, Lyons, Trévoux, and Grenoble, putting more than forty presses at work to turn out about 300,000 volumes. To produce and distribute books on such a scale required assembling one of the largest operations in premodern printing and strained resources throughout the publishing industry. For two and a half years the *Encyclopédie* dominated printing in the region around Lyons. "Except for a few liturgical works, nothing else is being printed here, in all the shops, only the *Encyclopédie*," an agent reported in 1778.¹⁴ The Société Typographique took five months, using about half the capacity of its twelve presses and its work force of about thirty-five men, to print a press run of 6,000 copies of one of the huge, double-column tomes. Financing 8,000 copies of thirty-six such volumes required so much capital that Panckoucke and Duplain fell back on consortia of French and Swiss bankers, and the same agent in Lyons observed, "Whoever had a little money to put into books every month or every year has placed it on the *Encyclopédie* quarto."¹⁵ The *Encyclopédie* consumed so much paper that in December 1777 a buyer for the Société Typographique could not find a single sheet of the requisite kind in Lyons. The Société managed to continue printing only by sending paper scouts throughout France and western Switzerland in search of every last ream of *fin*, twenty-pound (Lyonnais measure) *carré* or *raisin*. Founders could not supply type rapidly enough to satisfy the demand (the quarto was printed, appropriately, in a type called "Philosophie"), and so some Genevan printers failed to begin work on schedule in 1777. The Neuchâtelois had to suspend printing at a crucial moment because they received a barrel of bad ink, and the inkmaker, a Parisian called Langlois who had a strangle hold on the quality-ink trade, kept inching up his prices, while lamenting

édie," 228. Lough agrees with Watts's version of this bibliographical imbroglio: *Essays on the Encyclopédie*, 36–38.

¹⁴ Jean-François Favarger to STN, July 21, 1778.

¹⁵ *Ibid.*

about his own increased costs, which he attributed to poor olive harvests in the Midi. Wagoners also took advantage of increased orders to force up their rates. And the *Encyclopédie* produced chaos in the labor market of printing. Not only did the printers have to send hundreds of miles for workers, but the supply was so scarce that they took to raiding each other's shops through the use of industrial spies like Louis Marcinhes, a down-and-out watchmaker in Geneva, who wrote to the Société Typographique in July 1777,

Pellet and Bassompierre have by inflated promises seduced many workers and drained off the printing shops of the surrounding area. But they only want to pay them 15 florins 9 sols of our money per sheet. So a good number want to leave, because they are asking for 17 florins per sheet. The man leaving this week [for Neuchâtel] is one of those. He is called Caisle. Two pressmen, who have promised to come talk with me, also should leave. . . . I won't lose sight of any occasion to send to you the discontented from the shops of Pellet, Bassompierre, and Nouffer.¹⁶

In short, the quarto *Encyclopédie* sent repercussions into the remotest sectors of the economy. For it to come into being a whole world had to be set in motion: ragpickers, olive growers, financiers, and philosophers collaborated to create a work whose corporeal existence corresponded to its intellectual message. As a physical object and as a vehicle of thought, the *Encyclopédie* synthesized a thousand sciences, arts, and crafts; it represented the Enlightenment, body and soul.

Its publishers probably spent too much time calculating costs and profits to entertain such lofty thoughts. The Société Typographique estimated the total revenue of the enterprise at 2,454,092 livres, the total cost at 1,117,354 livres, and the gross profit at 1,336,738 livres: a return of one hundred twenty per cent on expenditures. No wonder they considered this affair "the most beautiful ever to be done in publishing,"¹⁷ or that it touched off a series of fierce commercial wars.

Duplain, who had originally floated the quarto as a privateering venture, had no way, once he turned legitimate, of burying his treasure. Other pirates got wind of it and raced to the attack. First came announcements of rival counterfeit editions from Geneva and Avignon. Panckoucke read them as bluffs and counseled his associates to ride them out, since "I have arranged everything here in such a manner that none of those editions can enter France, and without France no success."¹⁸ He was right: the announcements were a way of holding the quarto publishers up for ransom by threatening to undersell them unless they paid a certain sum in protection money.

¹⁶ Louis Marcinhes to STN, July 11, 1777.

¹⁷ STN to Panckoucke, Aug. 20, 1778. Because the accounts became extremely embroiled, it is impossible to know the exact costs and profit of the enterprise.

¹⁸ Panckoucke to STN, Sept. 9, 1777.

The danger in this game was that one could not distinguish between a fake and a real attack until he saw the whites of his assailant's eyes. After the quartos of Geneva and Avignon had disappeared over the horizon, J. S. Grabit and J. M. Barret of Lyons announced plans to publish another quarto *Encyclopédie*, and they proved that they meant business by actually printing a few volumes. In this case Duplain and Panckoucke agreed that it would be wiser to capitulate. They bought out Grabit and Barret for 27,000 livres—the rough equivalent of a lifetime's wages for one of their printers—and received in return only a legalized promise to abstain from further counterfeiting. Then they learned that a consortium of publishers in Lausanne and Bern planned to produce an even smaller, even cheaper *Encyclopédie*, an octavo edition that would sell for approximately 200 livres. This time Duplain and Panckoucke decided to stand and fight.

At first the quarto publishers hoped that the octavo venture would simply collapse. They joked that the small type of "cette miniature" would blind its readers, and Panckoucke proclaimed "that octavo edition may cause some alarm, but it won't hurt us. . . . It is folly to print the *Encyclopédie* in such a small text. Moreover, we will be defended here. I am waiting for the magistrate [Le Camus de Neville] to return so that I can reveal everything to him. I promise you firmly that that *Encyclopédie* will never enter France." The Société Typographique replied, "You hold the keys to the kingdom."¹⁹ But reports from provincial booksellers indicated that the octavo subscriptions were selling as spectacularly as the quarto had done. So the quarto group began pourparlers—not with any serious intention of making peace but rather to delay the execution of the octavo until the quarto could be completed and the new, revised edition announced, thereby stealing the octavo market. The publishers of Lausanne and Bern, who were veterans of pirate publishing, detected this strategy after a few rounds of negotiation and resolved to proceed with their printing. Duplain then attempted to overwhelm them with a frontal assault: he published an announcement that the quarto group would produce its own octavo edition at an even cheaper price than the octavo of Lausanne and Bern. On November 1, 1777, Lausanne and Bern retaliated with an ultimatum: withdraw your announcement within fifteen days, or we will drop the price of our octavo to the level of yours, and we will undermine your quarto by producing a still cheaper quarto of our own.

You will have to give in to us or lower your own price. In this way we will cut each other's throats, but you have set the example and are forcing this necessity upon us. And don't think that this is an idle threat. The prospectuses are ready,

¹⁹ STN to Panckoucke, Dec. 18, 1777; Panckoucke to STN, Nov. 19, 1777; STN to Panckoucke, Dec. 7, 1777.

and we have the same type, the necessary presses etc. at our disposition in Yverdon.²⁰

This maneuver forced Duplain to retreat, but it also resulted in open war; for although negotiations continued intermittently—the usual style in eighteenth-century warfare—each side campaigned fiercely, attempting to destroy the other's market.

The octavo group relied on a strategy of smuggling. They filled their subscription and counted on reaching their clients through the underground circuits of the clandestine book trade. The quarto group calculated on blocking those circuits. Panckoucke promised his partners, "I guarantee that they will not penetrate France. The magistrate promised me so. . . . You understand, Messieurs, that being armed with a privilege, you should not concede your rights any more than I. Because of our contracts, our privilege, Duplain had to come make terms with us. The Lausannois will have to do the same."²¹ The system of privilege and protection that had nearly destroyed the first edition of the *Encyclopédie* was being used as the main line of defense in the effort to save its successor. So much had conditions changed from the reign of Louis XV to that of Louis XVI that the government treated *encyclopédisme* more as a commercial than an ideological matter. This new attitude suggests that enlightened ideas permeated the government itself, but it does not necessarily imply weakness; in fact the contest between the strategy of smuggling and the strategy of policing provides a test case of the government's ability to control the printed word.

In mid-1778 the Société Typographique de Neuchâtel sent an agent, Jean-François Favarger, on a tour of southern and central France. Favarger's first assignment was to check the society's supply lines along the French-Swiss border. In Saint Sulpice, the last town on the Swiss side of the border, he learned that the smuggling outfit of Meuron Frères had recently taken care of five 500-pound crates containing volume 1 of the octavo *Encyclopédie*. The Meuron brothers told him so themselves, with more than a hint of professional pride, because they handled the society's own smuggling but only as occasional substitutes for Pion of Pontarlier, the society's first-string smuggler, whom they wanted to replace. On the other side of the border, in Pontarlier, Pion told Favarger that he had seen five *acquits à caution*—a customs permit used by the French state to control imports of foreign books—that had been fraudulently discharged by Capel, syndic of the booksellers' guild in Dijon. Since Capel was officially required to confiscate the books that he forwarded, Dijon now promised to surpass Besançon as the main entrepôt of this underground route, as Favarger announced triumphantly in notifying his employers that the octavo had passed from Bern to Saint Sulpice to

²⁰ Société Typographique de Lausanne to Pellet of Geneva, Nov. 1, 1777, copy included in a letter from the Société Typographique de Lausanne to STN, Nov. 20, 1777.

²¹ Panckoucke to STN, Dec. 22, 1777.

Dijon and was now headed toward Paris. The Société Typographique hid Capel's name in the hope that "for money he will provide us with the same service"²² and relayed the rest of the information to Panckoucke, who alerted the French authorities, who eventually captured the crates. The authorities engineered other confiscations on their own—in Toulouse, for example, where a big bust inflicted huge casualties on the octavo group. By August Favarger's field reports showed that subscribers were deserting the octavo in droves throughout the Midi. And in early 1779 the octavo publishers sued for peace.

The negotiations dragged on for a year, while the quarto group finished a mopping-up operation in France and the octavo group tried to repair its losses through sales in Central and Eastern Europe. Finally in February 1780 Panckoucke sold the entry into France to the Lausanne-Bern consortium for 24,000 livres. That was a steep price—roughly eight per cent of the octavo's current manufacturing cost—and it shows how strong the demand for *Encyclopédies* remained, at least in the calculations of publishers who had discovered a new, undernourished public. Thinking they were safe at last, the octavo group increased their printing to 6,000 copies—hence the explanation of another "missing" edition²³—and promptly fell into another of Panckoucke's traps. Because they had not been able to pay off Panckoucke in cash, they had persuaded him to accept his ransom in kind—that is, in 24,000-livres' worth of octavo *Encyclopédies*. Panckoucke dumped his octavos on the French market at a reduced price and then compounded the damage to the octavo group's future sales by spreading the word that he would soon produce an *Encyclopédie* to end all *Encyclopédies*—not the revised edition that he had originally planned with the Société Typographique de Neuchâtel, but the *Encyclopédie méthodique*, which he was then organizing with the support of a consortium from Liège. That was not the last low blow in this battle, because four years later the old members of the octavo group joined by none other than Panckoucke's former ally, the Société Typographique, announced a plan to pirate the *Encyclopédie méthodique*.²⁴ It did not get far beyond the drawing board, however; so the

²² Favarger to STN, July 8, 1778; STN to Favarger, July 11, 1778.

²³ In the case of this second bibliographical mystery Watts ("Swiss Editions of the *Encyclopédie*," 230–32) and Lough (*Essays on the Encyclopédie*, 40–41) differ slightly, but each did a good job of guessing at the solution, considering that they did not know who was behind the quarto enterprise or how it came into conflict with the octavo edition.

²⁴ By this time the quarto association had been dissolved and the STN had split with Panckoucke and had formed the Confédération Helvétique with the sociétés typographiques of Bern and Lausanne. The plan of the Confédération Helvétique was to reprint all the articles of the *Encyclopédie méthodique* that had not appeared in the earlier editions, to arrange them in alphabetical order—rather than according to subject, as they appeared in the *Encyclopédie méthodique*—and then to sell them, in all three formats, as supplements to the early editions. In this way the owners of the first sets could acquire all the new material of the *Encyclopédie méthodique* by purchasing only a few volumes of supplements, and the Swiss printers could badly damage Panckoucke's potential market.

quarto-octavo war may be said to have ended in the defeat of Lausanne and Bern.

The publishing wars did not cut off the supply of relatively inexpensive *Encyclopédies* to France. On the contrary they show how fiercely publishers struggled to satisfy the French market and how important that market must have been. They also illustrate the aggressive, entrepreneurial character of Enlightenment publishing in contrast to the conservative publishing industry that was dominated by the guild structure within France.²⁵ And finally they expose the inadequacy of the common view that the Enlightenment and the regime were locked into a fight to the death; for the quarto group captured the market by enlisting the state on its side—a strategy of protection and privilege that typifies the ways of the Old Regime and that also suggests a shift in the tone of government in the mid-1770s. The book that had barely survived persecution under Louis XV became a best seller under Louis XVI—with the blessing of the government.

THE LAST EPISODE in the *Encyclopédie* wars was purely domestic, a civil war between Duplain and his associates. In February 1779 they met in Lyons to assess their affairs. Contrary to all expectations, Duplain gave a pessimistic account of the sales. The first two subscriptions had done splendidly, he explained, but that very success had tempted the associates to over-extend themselves, and the third edition now looked like a disaster. They might rescue it, however, if they divided up one thousand unsold sets so that each associate could market them in areas where his sales were normally strongest. Panckoucke accepted this proposal, because the Parisian territory was reserved for him and, anyway, he would allot almost half of his five hundred sets to the Société Typographique. Six months later, in a still gloomier report, Duplain warned that this maneuver had not sufficed to save the third edition. Hundreds of volumes would rot in their warehouses unless they took drastic measures. Fortunately Duplain had found a merchant, a certain Perrin, who had caught the *Encyclopédie* fever, and they could dump their unsold copies on him. To be sure, Perrin demanded extraordinary terms—a fifty-per-cent reduction—but they would be lucky to get rid of their excess stock at any price, and Perrin would take a huge number: 422 sets, as well as 160 from Panckoucke's share of the thousand that had been split between him and Duplain in February. Panckoucke accepted the proposal, but soon after signing the Perrin contract he began to harbor suspicions. He learned that Duplain had tried to involve a mutual friend in a secret conspiracy to raid his reserved quarto market in Paris, and he found that Duplain's letters sounded disturbingly vague about Perrin,

²⁵ For further information on these contrasting types of publishing, see Robert Darnton, "Reading, Writing and Publishing in Eighteenth-Century France: A Case Study in the Sociology of Literature," *Daedalus*, Winter 1971, pp. 214–56.

whom they described as “a commercial agent in Strasbourg, who has a business in Lyons, or rather, I believe, in Paris, anyhow an extremely rich man for whom I can reply.”²⁶ By September 1779 Panckoucke confided to the Société Typographique, “I am quite persuaded that this Perrin is only an imaginary being or, at most, a straw man. Duplain is avaricious and makes no pretense about being delicate.”²⁷ He had become convinced that Duplain was “a vile soul,” “a voracious man, who loves money with a fury”; “his rapacity has no limits.”²⁸ And he advised the Société Typographique to slip a spy into Duplain’s shop. They needed no prompting, for they had done so long ago. In fact all the associates spied on each other. Panckoucke had his own man watching Duplain; the Neuchâtelois received secret reports on Panckoucke; they kept an agent in Geneva; and their man in Lyons spun such a web of industrial espionage that they finally trapped Duplain in February 1780.

The Lyonnais network managed to track down the elusive Perrin, who indeed turned out to be a straw man in Duplain’s pay, and then it made an even bigger catch: it got hold of a copy of a secret subscription list, Duplain’s record of the actual number of *Encyclopédie* sales. The list made no reference to the Perrin sale; instead it contained 978 more subscriptions than Duplain was later to report at the final settling of accounts in February 1780. The Société Typographique suspected the fraud before this meeting and verified it, once Duplain made his report, by writing to the booksellers whose subscriptions had been falsified, according to a comparison of the reported subscriptions and the secret list. So it discovered that the flow of orders never had dried up, as Duplain had claimed. On the contrary, the entire third edition had been sold at the normal price, except for the five hundred sets that Duplain had dumped on Panckoucke. Duplain had hidden the sales in order to collect the full amount from them, while paying nothing for five hundred of the *Encyclopédies* that he sold and paying for the rest at half price through the phony intermediary of Perrin.

Instead of contenting himself with this spectacular double swindle, a matter of more than 200,000 livres, Duplain piled fraud on fraud in combinations too complex to be fully explained here. His role as general administrator of the enterprise offered enormous opportunity for speculation, because the quarto association allotted him set amounts for all his expenses. He therefore contracted the printing to the lowest bidder, pocketing the difference between what he was allotted and what he paid. He also cheated on the costs of paper and transport and even collaborated in a technique of fraudulent spacing and paragraphing worked out by a Genevan printer—an item that might have seemed trivial to a lesser embezzler but that ex-

²⁶ Panckoucke to STN, Sept. 10, 1779, citing a letter he had received from Duplain.

²⁷ Panckoucke to STN, Sept. 27, 1779.

²⁸ Panckoucke to STN, Nov. 6, 1778, Mar. 7, 18, 1779.

panded volume 19 by 96 unnecessary pages, worth 744 livres. Panckoucke and the Société Typographique calculated that Duplain's kickbacks and rake-offs came to 127,000 livres, but that was only an estimate, one that probably did not do justice to his genius. His intentionally unintelligible accounts could have concealed far more peculation, because they scrambled more than three million livres of expenses and revenues, and Duplain seems to have cheated at every possible point. For example, he attributed 494 subscriptions to the Lyons firm of Audambron and Jossinet at the usual reduced price for booksellers of 294 livres plus one free set for every twelve subscribed, which brought their total up to 535 subscriptions. The anti-Duplain network discovered that Audambron and Jossinet operated as a false front to hide the fact that Duplain had sold all 535 sets at the full subscription price of 384 livres, thereby robbing the association of 60,204 livres.

Since the quarto enterprise had been conducted like a conspiracy from the beginning, it exploded in the end like the denouement of a *drame bourgeois*—or an “English cockfight,” as the Société Typographique put it.²⁹ The anti-Duplain forces had concealed their suspicions while they accumulated enough ammunition to destroy Duplain at the final meeting for the settling of accounts at Lyons in February 1780. This strategy of counterdisimulation had not been easy, as the Société Typographique confessed to Panckoucke: “You have wisely counseled us to dissimulate with him until the very end and not to reveal our just discontent, but by devil it gets more and more difficult every day.”³⁰ When the showdown came, therefore, Duplain's associates surprised him with a barrage of accusations that they had been preparing for almost a year. They produced a correct version of the accounts, exposing a spectacular string of embezzlements. They unveiled the Perrin affair; they stripped the camouflage from Audambron and Jossinet; and they produced the secret subscription list with letters from booksellers testifying to the enormity of the swindles in sales. Even then Duplain refused to break down and confess. So they raided his office with a police commissioner, an attorney, and a bailiff, demanding confiscation of his papers; and they turned his family and friends against him, threatening to ruin the family's name by revealing the entire affair to the public. Finally Duplain surrendered. He agreed to compensate his partners with 200,000 livres, if they would sweep everything under the rug, where it has remained until today.

What sort of a man was this Duplain? The question has a certain fascination, both for economic history and for the history of the human soul. Duplain was a robber baron of the book trade, a gambler who played off high risks against high profits and who made a business of Enlightenment. He decided to stake everything on the quarto *Encyclopédie*. He sold his shop,

²⁹ F.-S. Ostervald and Abram Bosset DeLuze, codirectors of the STN, writing to the STN from Lyons, Jan. 29, 1780.

³⁰ STN to Panckoucke, Mar. 14, 1779.

his stock of books, his house, and his furniture and moved into a furnished room in order to concentrate exclusively on the great affair. Then he hit the jack pot; for this supreme gamble made him a rich man, even after the settlement of 200,000 livres. And once he knew he was wealthy, Duplain began to buy. First he acquired a wife, a beautiful young Lyonnaise who dazzled Panckoucke; then an estate in the provinces; finally the office of *maître d'hôtel du Roi*—that is, nobility. He began signing his letters “de St. Albine.” He served the king for the requisite time in Versailles and lived with his bride in offensive luxury in Paris before carrying her off to his château.

What is the moral of this story? It is a Balzacian drama: the tale of a bourgeois entrepreneur who clawed his way to the top and then consumed his fortune conspicuously, in aristocratic abandon. It is a saga of fortunes made and *illusions perdues* in publishing. In a way it is the story of French capitalism. And its supreme irony is that the vehicle for Duplain’s rise into France’s archaic hierarchy, only a few years away from destruction, was Diderot’s *Encyclopédie*. Perhaps Duplain’s story may also serve as a warning against placing too much confidence in sociological analysis of the sort that follows; for even if you can put a man perfectly in some socioeconomic category, his heart may be elsewhere. Duplain, the perfect bourgeois capitalist, turns out to be a pseudonoble—or was pseudonobility the essence of the French bourgeoisie?

THE INSIDE STORY of the warfare among the men who produced the *Encyclopédie* may reveal something of the spirit of entrepreneurial capitalism in early modern France, but it does not answer the larger question of what the battles were all about. Of course “booty capitalism” was waged for booty. Panckoucke and the pirates, Duplain and the Swiss, and their supporting cast of financiers, smugglers, and traveling salesmen all realized that they could make a fortune by satisfying the vast market in France for a “popular” edition of the supreme work of the Enlightenment. The ferocity of the competition to supply that demand suggests that the interest in enlightened ideas had spread very widely throughout France—to a *grand public* if not a mass audience. But what was the character of that public? That question, like so many problems in the sociology of literature, is difficult to resolve, but one can measure the outside boundaries of the readership of the *Encyclopédie*. First it is necessary to review the basic facts about all the editions of Diderot’s text; then it should be possible to calculate the economic limits to their different consumption patterns; and finally one can attempt to chart the geographical and social distribution of the quarto editions, which were by far the most numerous in prerevolutionary France.

Aside from the Italian editions published (in French) in Lucca and Leghorn, the expurgated Protestant *Encyclopédie* published in Yverdon by Barthélemy de Félice, and the *Encyclopédie méthodique*—a completely

reorganized work that ran to 202 volumes and was not completed until 1832—Diderot's text went through four main metamorphoses.³¹

(1) The first edition (1751–52): this was a folio edition consisting of 17 volumes of text and 11 plates, followed by a five-volume *Supplément* and a two-volume *Table Analytique*. There were 4,225 sets printed, but only half, or perhaps merely a quarter, of them were sold in France. The subscription price was 980 livres, and the market price in the 1770s varied from 1,200 to 1,500 livres.

(2) The Genevan reprint (1771–76): it had the same number of folio volumes in a printing of 2,200 sets. The subscription price was 794 livres, but by June 1777 it was selling at 700 livres, owing to competition from the quarto editions.

(3) The three quarto “editions” (1771–81): these correspond to Duplain's three subscriptions and appeared under the names of Pellet and the Société Typographique de Neuchâtel, as explained above. The quartos contained 36 volumes of text and three volumes of plates. They included 8,011 sets in all and were almost entirely sold out at the subscription price of 384 livres—the price paid by individual subscribers; booksellers subscribed at a reduced price of 294 livres and received one free copy for every dozen they ordered.

(4) The two octavo “editions” (1778–82): these were really one expanded edition representing two subscriptions, published at Lausanne and Bern. The octavos consisted of 36 volumes of text and three of plates. They included 6,000 sets in all, and each sold at a subscription price of 231 livres.

This enumeration of facts and figures suggests a surprising conclusion: there were far more *Encyclopédies* in prerevolutionary France than anyone—except eighteenth-century publishers—has ever suspected. Although the subscription figures in the publishers' papers make it difficult to calculate precisely how many copies remained in the kingdom, they permit a safe estimate: between 14,000 and 16,000 *Encyclopédies* existed in France before 1789, and half of them can be traced. So without pretending to know how many of those *Encyclopédies* were read, or in what way the readers responded to them, it seems legitimate to hypothesize that *encyclopédisme*

³¹ The following information comes from the sources cited above (nn. 1, 2), except for the figures on market prices and on the sizes of the quarto and octavo printings, which come from the papers of the STN. The extraordinary richness of those papers makes it possible for the first time to estimate accurately the total volume and cost of the *Encyclopédie* trade in prerevolutionary France. The octavo publishers originally announced that their edition, which followed the quarto page by page, would sell at a subscription price of 195 livres—6 livres down, 5 livres for each volume of text, and 15 livres for each volume of plates. When they learned that the quarto would run to 36 volumes of text instead of 29, as was originally planned, they had to follow suit and therefore charged 231 livres for their subscriptions—contrary to what has been affirmed by Watts (“Swiss Editions of the *Encyclopédie*,” 231) and by Lough (*Essays on the Encyclopédie*, 40). On the subscription prices of the octavo, see also the *Gazette de Berne*, Nov. 19, 1777, and Apr. 8, 1780.

could have spread far more widely through French society than is generally believed.

As the *Encyclopédie* progressed from edition to edition its format decreased in size, it contained fewer plates, its paper declined in quality, and its price went down. And as the publishing consortia succeeded one another, they cast their nets more and more widely, reaching out with each new edition toward remoter sections of the reading public. The price differential set some rough limits to this ever-broadening sales pattern: the quarto edition cost a little more than one-fourth and the octavo edition about one-fifth of the market price of the first folio in the 1770s. But what were the social boundaries of *Encyclopédie* "consumption"? The question may seem impertinent, since economics offers no explanation of what it is to "consume" a book and since book buying and book reading are quite different activities. Nonetheless, the purchase of a book is a significant act when considered culturally as well as economically. It provides some indication of the diffusion of ideas beyond the intellectual milieu within which cultural history is usually circumscribed. And as there has never been a study of the sales of any eighteenth-century book, a sales analysis of the most important work of the Enlightenment ought to be worthwhile.

One can estimate how closely the *Encyclopédie* came into contact with the lower classes by translating its price into bread, the key commodity of the Old Regime and the basic element in the diet of most Frenchmen.³² A first folio *Encyclopédie* was worth about 3,500 loaves of bread and a quarto 960 loaves, the standard of measurement being the "normal" price of 8 sous for a four-pound loaf of rye bread in prerevolutionary Paris. An unskilled laborer with a wife and three children would have to buy at least 18 loaves a week to keep his family alive. In good times he would spend half his income on bread. A "cheap" quarto *Encyclopédie* therefore represented more than a year of his family's precarious nutriment. It would have been as inconceivable for him to buy it—even if he could read it—as for him to purchase a palace. Skilled laborers—locksmiths, carpenters, and printers—made 15 livres in a good week. The first folio would have cost them 93 weeks' wages, the quarto 26 weeks' wages, and the octavo 15½ weeks' wages. So even the upper strata of the working classes, artisans like the men who printed the book, could never have afforded to buy it.

But the men who wrote it, the "Gens de Lettres" invoked on its title page, could have purchased the cheaper editions. Diderot himself made an average of 2,600 livres a year for his thirty years of labor on the *Encyclo-*

³² The following information on artisans' "budgets" and the price of bread comes from the work of Ernest Labrousse, George Rudé, and Albert Soboul. For a convenient summary of their findings, see Rudé, *The Crowd in the French Revolution* (Oxford, 1959). The "Banques des ouvriers" in the STN papers, contain full information on the wages of the printers of the Société Typographique. Oddly enough, they corresponded exactly to the wages of skilled workmen in Paris, where the cost of living was higher.

pédie.³³ A quarto would have cost him 7½ weeks of his wages and an octavo 4½—not an extravagant sum, considering that he had other sources of income. Many writers were wealthier than Diderot, thanks to patrons and pensions. B. J. Saurin, a typical figure from the upper ranks of the Republic of Letters, now deservedly forgotten, made 8,600 livres a year in pensions and “gratifications.”³⁴ He could have treated himself to a quarto, the equivalent of 2⅓ weeks’ income. The octavo was for hack writers like Durey de Morsan, a literary adventurer who lived off the crumbs from Voltaire’s table and who wrote as one of the octavo’s “zealous subscribers” to the Société Typographique de Neuchâtel:

The number of poor literary men far surpasses that of rich readers. I myself am delighted that this work, too expensive until now, does not exceed the means of the semi-indigent such as myself. I would like the door of the sciences, of the arts, and of useful truths to be open, day and night, to every human who can read.³⁵

It is impossible to produce typical figures for the wide variety of incomes among the middling classes of the provinces, but the following calculations should give some idea of the expensiveness of the *Encyclopédie* for persons located well below the great noblemen and financiers and well above the common people. Although curés received only 500 livres as their *portion congrue* after 1768, their annual income often amounted to 1,000–2,000 livres.³⁶ So a quarto *Encyclopédie* represented ten weeks’ income for a prosperous curé. Magistrates of the baillage courts stood at the top of the legal profession among provincial bourgeois and often earned 2,000–3,000 livres a year: a quarto *Encyclopédie* was worth six or seven weeks of their income. To live “noblement” a bourgeois had to count on at least 3,000–4,000 livres a year in *rentes*: the purchase of a quarto *Encyclopédie* would have taken five weeks of his revenue.³⁷

In strictly economic terms, therefore, the first two editions were so expensive that they cannot have penetrated far beyond the restricted circle of courtiers, salon lions, and progressive *parlementaires* who made up the cultural avant-garde. The cheaper editions were luxury items, but with some squeezing they could have been made to fit into many middle-class budgets, rather as encyclopedias do today. The cost, like the content, of the quarto and octavo *Encyclopédies* appealed to a wide variety of small-town notables

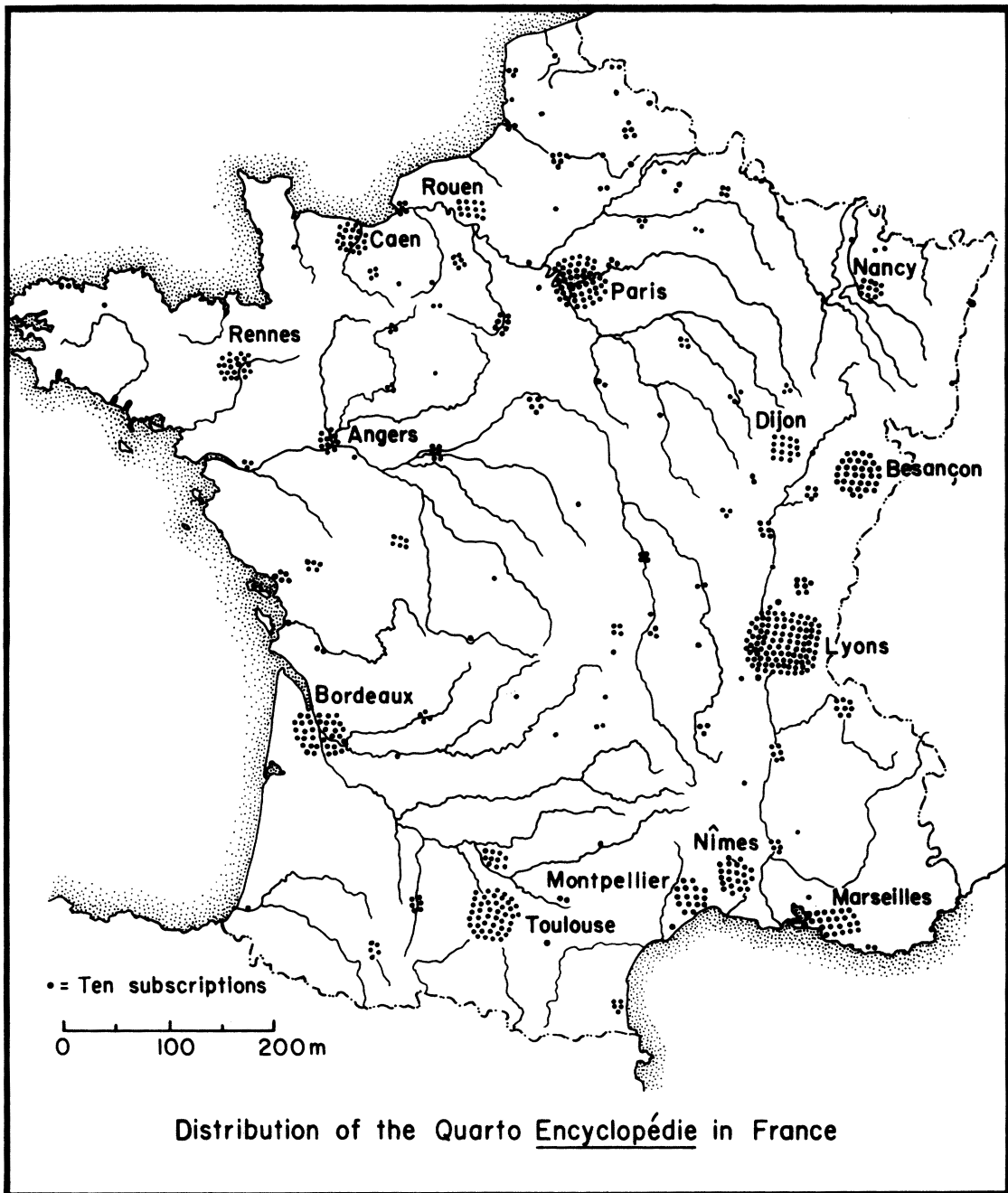
³³ Proust, *Diderot et l'Encyclopédie*, 59; for a detailed study of Diderot’s income, see pages 81–116.

³⁴ Robert Darnton, “The High Enlightenment and the Low Life of Literature in Prerevolutionary France,” *Past and Present*, no. 51 (1971): 87.

³⁵ Durey de Morsan to F.-S. Ostervald of the STN, Apr. 17, 1778.

³⁶ Marcel Marion, *Dictionnaire des institutions de la France aux XVII^e et XVIII^e siècles* (Paris, 1923), 446; Henri Sée, *La France économique et sociale au XVIII^e siècle* (Paris, 1933), 64–66. The *portion congrue* allotted to every curé from the revenue of the *dime* (tithe) was increased in 1786 to 700 livres.

³⁷ Phillip Dawson, *Provincial Magistrates and Revolutionary Politics in France, 1789–1795* (Cambridge, Mass., 1972), ch. 3; Sée, *La France économique et sociale*, 162.



This map is drawn up from Duplain's secret subscription list, MS 1220 in the Bibliothèque de la Ville de Neuchâtel. The list covers all but one of the 8,011 sets printed. Of these 828 were foreign and so do not figure on the map. The map also excludes 76 sets that were sold to unidentified individuals and 25 sets that were given away—either as compensation for employees and associates or to procure protections; at least 10 of these went to Lyons, and Panckoucke dispensed 4 in Paris. The unidentified sales all involved single sets, except in four cases, which appear on the list simply as "Ollier 6," "Vasselier 4," "La Flèche 39," and "Berage 8." "La Flèche" could have been a person but probably represents La Flèche, Maine, where there was a famous school, originally founded for the Jesuits by Henry IV. The large number of copies sold in Lyons as compared with Paris resulted in part from the way the business was handled: Duplain directed the marketing operations from Lyons, while Panckoucke's many affairs kept him too busy to be much of a salesman in Paris. Also, the Parisian market was probably pretty well supplied by earlier editions. This map therefore should not be taken to prove that the capital of the Enlightenment absorbed relatively few *Encyclopédies*. What it provides is a fairly accurate picture of *Encyclopédie* diffusion in the provinces.

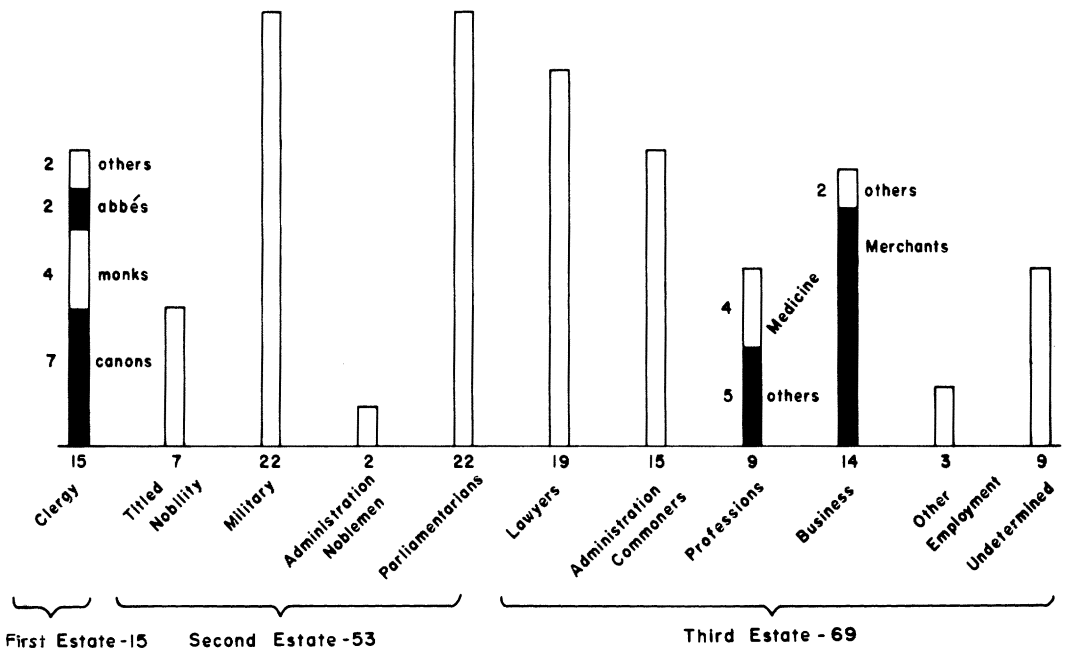
SUBSCRIPTIONS TO THE QUARTO *ENCYCLOPÉDIE* IN FRANCE

Abbéville	26	Castelnaudary	27	Macon	17	Rethel	40
Aire	8	Castres	28	Mantes	8	Roquemaure	7
Aix	6	Chalon-sur-Saône	67	Marseilles	228	Rouen	125
Alençon	34	Châlons-sur-		Meaux	30	St. Chamond	2
Amiens	59	Marne	1	Metz	22	St. Didier	1
Angers	109	Champagne	2	Montargis	26	St. Etienne	13
Argentin	3	Chartres	75	Montauban	105	St. Flour	24
Arras	26	Chatillon	39	Millau	8	St. Lô	7
Auch	65	Clermont	13	Montbrisson	6	St. Omer	5
Aurillac	13	Colmar	1	Montpellier	169	St. Quentin	16
Autun	39	Dijon	152	Morlaix	1	Saintes	26
Auxerre	10	Dôle	52	Mortagne	22	Saumur	1
Auxonne	1	Embrun	3	Moulins	52	Sedan	2
Avignon	55	Evreux	65	Nancy	120	Sète	13
Bayonne	16	Falaise	45	Nantes	38	Soissons	52
Beaune	26	Douai	14	Nîmes	212	Strasbourg	2
Beauvais	8	Grenoble	80	Niort	58	Tarbes	52
Bergerac	13	Gueret	19	Noyon	26	Thiers	39
Bergues	1	La Fère	15	Orléans	52	Toulon	21
Besançon	338	Langres	26	Paris	487	Toulouse	451
Billom	2	Laon	17	Perigueux	36	Tours	65
Bordeaux	356	La Rochelle	56	Peronne	15	Troyes	53
Boulogne-sur-Mer	34	Le Havre	52	Perpignan	52	Tulle	4
Bourg	91	Le Mans	40	Poitiers	65	Valence	65
Bourg-Saint-		Le Puy	39	Reims	24	Valenciennes	13
Andéol	4	Lille	28	Rennes	218	Verdun	12
Bourges	20	Limoges	3	Riom	46	Versailles	4
Brest	20	Lisieux	27	Roanne	26	Vichy	2
Caen	221	Lunéville	1	Rochefort	27	Villefranche	37
Cambray	57	Laigle	3				
Carpentras	2	Lyons	1078				

and country gentlemen but not to anyone below the bourgeoisie. As the publishers remarked—and they knew their clientele—“The in-folio format will be for grands seigneurs and libraries, while the in-quarto will be within the reach of men of letters and interested readers [*amateurs*] whose fortune is less considerable.”³⁸ The *Encyclopédie* entrepreneurs realized that they could widen their profit margin as they broadened their market. They had discovered a gold mine of untapped literary demand, and their scramble to exploit it shows how advanced culture reached the general reading public. But where were those readers located, and who were they?

The map (see p. 1348), drawn up from Duplain’s secret subscription list, shows the geographical distribution of almost all the quarto copies, that is approximately half the *Encyclopédies* that existed in prerevolutionary France. It demonstrates that the *Encyclopédie* reached every corner of the country and that its distribution coincided fairly well, as far as one can tell, with the distribution of population. Subscriptions in the Parisian area and the northwest were few, perhaps because those markets were sated by other editions. Beyond Rennes, Brittany looks like an intellectual desert, which might have been the case, but a surprising fertile crescent of *Encyclopédies*

³⁸ STN to Rudiger of Moscow, May 31, 1777.

Subscribers to the Quarto Encyclopédie in Besançon

First Estate - 15 Second Estate - 53

Third Estate - 69

This bar graph is drawn from the list of individual purchasers of the quarto edition in Lough, *Essays on the Encyclopédie*, 466-73. It contains the names and *qualités* of 253 subscribers from the Franche Comté, of whom 137 were from Besançon. Duplain's secret list shows there were 390 subscriptions sold in the province, a figure that is confirmed by letters from the two booksellers who collected them. Therefore the representativeness of the Comtois list, which was drawn up according to the order in which the subscriptions arrived, is far from being complete—it amounts to two-thirds of the subscriptions sold. But the last third of the subscribers probably tended to come from outlying areas of the large, mountainous province, and so the bar graph probably gives a fairly accurate picture of the subscription pattern within Besançon. The military category seems to have been made up entirely of noblemen—most had titles but are not entered under "titled nobility"—but the "parlementaires" probably included an undetermined number of commoners, so the second estate appears somewhat larger on the graph than it was in reality. The same may be true of the third estate, because some of the "undetermined" category could have been noblemen. The three men represented by "other employment" were identified on the list as "intendant du Prince de Bauffremont," "Conseil de Mgr. le Duc du Châtelet," and "garde-magasin," presumably an army position.

curves through the Midi, from Lyons to Nîmes, Montpellier, Toulouse, and Bordeaux. Even the Massif Central shows a fairly high density of subscriptions. So there is little evidence here for the hypothesis that France was divided into a backward south and a progressive north by the "Maggiolo line" of literacy, running from Mont St. Michel to Geneva.³⁹ The *Encyclopédies* seem to have sold best in towns where there were parlements and academies, but it sold very well everywhere: that is probably the main conclusion to be drawn from the map. Once reincarnated in a comparatively cheap edition, Diderot's text traveled farther and wider than has been appreciated.

³⁹ Michel Fleury and Pierre Valmary, "Les Progrès de l'instruction élémentaire de Louis XIV à Napoléon III," *Population*, no. 1 (1957): 71-92. Of course there is no reason to expect that the diffusion of the *Encyclopédie* should coincide with the primitive level of literacy indicated by Fleury and Valmary.

Duplain's secret subscription list does not identify all of the subscribers; it contains only the names of booksellers, who generally bought lots of a dozen or more sets, which they retailed among their local clients. But there is one list of individual purchasers of the quarto edition in the Franche Comté. It has been translated into the bar graph (see p. 1350), which covers Besançon, a judicial, administrative, ecclesiastical, and military center, where sales were unusually strong. The graph shows a high percentage of purchasers in the legal profession, both lawyers and members of the parlement of Besançon. The *Encyclopédie* sold well in the first two estates, and especially among noblemen in the army, as might be expected in a garrison town. Royal administrators, almost all of them nonnoble, also bought the book in large number, and so did bourgeois professional men, particularly doctors, though to a lesser extent. Fourteen of the 137 sets went to merchants and manufacturers—a large proportion in comparison with Daniel Roche's statistics on provincial academicians and Jacques Proust's analysis of the contributors to the *Encyclopédie*.⁴⁰ Approximately one-half of one per cent of the people in Besançon bought the quarto *Encyclopédie*—a high percentage, but one that seems credible, given the above economic analysis of cost and clientele. The town's two main booksellers, Lépagnez and Charmet, had not expected to sell more than a dozen or so sets and were astounded at the book's success, especially as their trade had fallen into a slump since 1777. "Please don't believe that I enjoy any great consumption of books here," Lépagnez wrote to the Société Typographique. "I swear to you that after *L'Histoire universelle*, *L'Histoire ecclésiastique*, that of the Gallican Church, the Bible of Vance, the *Encyclopédie*, and the Rousseau, everything else has given me no business at all for the last two years."⁴¹

The sales pattern of Besançon may not have been typical of France as a whole, but nonstatistical information shows a similar enthusiasm for the *Encyclopédie* in other provincial centers. In Toulouse, at the other extremity of the kingdom, a bookbinder called Gaston sold 182 quartos in three weeks and expected to place 400 octavos. And in general, when French booksellers mentioned their quarto clients in their correspondence they named lawyers, royal officials, and local noblemen—unlike their counterparts in Northern, Central, and Eastern Europe, who referred only to courtiers. So all the evidence points in the same direction: in prerevolutionary France the *Encyclopédie* worked its way into the world of the provincial notables who assumed the leadership of the Revolution and who continued to dominate the countryside throughout the nineteenth century.

No one can pretend to know what message "took" in the minds of those readers. Many of them must have bought the *Encyclopédie* for what it

⁴⁰ Daniel Roche, "Milieux académiques provinciaux et société des lumières," in François Furet et al., *Livre et société dans la France du XVIII^e siècle* (Paris, 1965), 93–185; Proust, *Diderot et l'Encyclopédie*, ch. 1.

⁴¹ Lépagnez to STN, Aug. 30, 1780.

claimed to be: a compendium of all knowledge, rather than philosophic propaganda. As Panckoucke put it, "The *Encyclopédie* will always be the first book of any library or cabinet"⁴²—but it could have been a book to display on shelves, not to read. In fact Panckoucke reported that some subscribers in Lyons could not read at all. But it is difficult to believe that a high proportion of its owners never got through even its Preliminary Discourse, which is a manifesto of the Enlightenment. And far more people must have read the *Encyclopédie* than owned it, as would be common in an era when books were liberally loaned and when *cabinets littéraires* were booming. It therefore seems legitimate to conclude that the biography of this book—the protection accorded it by French authorities, the struggle to exploit it among bookdealers, and its diffusion among a clientele of middle-range notables everywhere in the country—that this extraordinary success story reveals an Enlightenment that had spread far beyond the elite of court and capital and had penetrated throughout the upper echelons of the Old Regime. As the Société Typographique wrote to a customer in August 1779:

Never has an enterprise of this kind and this scope had a greater success, nor has one been conducted with such speed. In less than two and a half years, and after having renewed the subscription twice, we have printed 8,000 copies of this *Encyclopédie*, of which we have only a small number yet to sell. The public seems to have waited impatiently to be served by publishers less rapacious than the producers of the first edition [a dubious statement]. We and our associates pride ourselves in having satisfied it in this respect; and you will observe, Sir, that if Enlightenment [*lumières philosophiques*] lacks in this best of all possible worlds, it will not be our fault.⁴³

⁴² Panckoucke to STN, Aug. 4, 1776.

⁴³ STN to J. G. Bruere of Homburg, Aug. 19, 1779.