

Digitizing the Revolution

Eighteenth-Century France Through Digital Archives and Tools (5 credits; I&S/VLPA)

Course is conducted in English

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Tues, Thurs 1:30-3:20

A “reading revolution” struck the 18th century. After 1750, France was flooded in new printed materials: pamphlets, periodicals, novels, and encyclopedias. These topical and opinionated texts brought new kinds of information to new publics, who were enticed to engage their world in new ways. We’ve long thought that new reading habits lay at the roots of the French Revolution. But how individuals were led by their reading to question the monarchy, the church, and the traditional social order is a matter of considerable debate.

We are now living through our own “reading revolution,” driven by the massive migration of texts and data onto digital platforms. This has transformed how we read and study the materials from which we gain our knowledge of the past. Can our “digital revolution” help us better understand the political and cultural transformations of 18th-century France?

We’ll explore databases and archives which give us unprecedented access to primary sources, administrative and business records, 1st editions, and statistics. We’ll discover tools that leverage the processing power of computers to help us analyze these materials. And we’ll learn basic techniques for digitizing and publishing texts, through the preparation of a digital reader of a selection of French Revolutionary.

