

The Encyclopedists as a group

a collective biography of the authors of the *Encyclopédie*

Series:

SVEC

Volume:

345

Author:

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Publication Date:

1996

ISBN:

978-0-7294-0521-8

This collective biography examines the similarities and differences among the 140 collaborators identified as having written articles for the seventeen folio volumes of text. It discusses the following topics: the family background, formal education, and occupational choice of the encyclopedists; how and where they were recruited for the *Encyclopédie* and their compensation; their contributions to the work and whether they were censored or persecuted or both because of them; their political and religious ideas; their productivity in old age; and, for those who lived past 1789, how they reacted to the French Revolution and the reign of Napoleon.

In this book Frank A. Kafker challenges a stereotype that has grown up about the Encyclopedists. Many scholars continue a tradition of writing about them as if they were united in a campaign to destroy the Old Regime. But they were, moreover, a varied collection of men of letters, physicians, scientists, craftsmen, scholars, and others, each frequently supporting his own point of view with little central direction. The *Encyclopédie* became not a party statement but rather a great compendium of knowledge, a mixture of ideas – some progressive and some conservative – filled with contradictions and innovations.

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Pages:

250

Price Sterling (£):

65
