



Varieties of economic history (VEH)

FS 2025 | MA Seminar Methoden und Theorie | Wednesdays 10-12 | KOL-G-203

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Abstract

This seminar aims to discuss the methodological, theoretical, and empirical variety of economic history. In contrast to other source and archival based research seminars, the final goal of the seminar is to help students write an in-depth analytical paper based on secondary literature.

This seminar will not provide a survey of classical authors, themes, and approaches but rather, through a selected list of important monographs and papers, will explore the multiple ways of doing economic history. We will focus on the differences, boundaries, and overlaps between qualitative and quantitative approaches as well as between economic history and other fields of historical inquiry like history of science, gender, law and global history.

Discussions will be held in English and German. You may write your short contributions and final research paper in either German or English. Choose the language in which you are the most proficient !

Requirements

- **Regular attendance, preparation and active participation** are expected.
Please send us a short email in advance to announce your absence.

Your final grade will be made of two components (**Portfolio format**)

- **25% of the final grade (Spring 2025): critical appraisal** of a monograph and its author as well as a short **research outline** (see Guidelines below for more details about these two contributions). Not handing in these two contributions and/or not presenting it in class will result in a failed grade (1.0) for the first 25% of the final grade.
- **75% of the final grade: (Fall 2025):** Preparation and writing of a **research paper** (20-25 pages, 50'000-62'000 signs, bibliography not included).

Submission deadlines during the Spring semester	21.3.2025	Critical appraisal
	19.5.2025	Research outline
Submission deadline for the final paper	1.12.2025	

We will also schedule a **follow up session** in the Fall semester of 2025 to discuss ongoing research papers.

Semester Program

	No session will take place on this Wednesday !
01 19.2	Use the first week of the semester to think about the monograph/theme you would like to focus on for your research paper. Post on OLAT-Forum by Friday 21st February a few sentences presenting the motivations for your (provisory) choice and the title of monograph you have chosen as your starting point. See the list for suggested readings.
	Introduction, aims and logistics
02 26.2	William H. Sewell. A strange career. The historical study of economic life, in: <i>History and Theory</i> , 49/2010. 146-66 We will also devote this session to a first discussion on the monographs you have selected.
	The variety of economic history journals
03 5.3	We will discuss together articles from recent issues of the <i>Economic History Review</i> (founded 1926) and <i>Capitalism. A Journal of Economics and History</i> (founded 2020). Each seminar participant will be assigned two articles to read/grade.
	Who we are as economic historians and what we read
04 12.3	Monika Dommann and Matthieu Leimgruber will situate their profiles in the field(s) of economic history as well as present one economic history monograph.
	Open session: Discussion topics for this session will be defined in accordance with the monographs/topics selected for your upcoming research papers.
05 19.3	
	FRIDAY 21.3 – DEADLINE – critical appraisals (2-3 A4 pages)
	WORKSHOP SESSIONS (3x) – Critical appraisals
06–07–08 26.3 2.4, 9.4	Presentation and collective discussion about your «critical appraisal» contributions. More details to follow.
	Open session
09 16.4	Discussion topics for this session will be defined in accordance with the monographs/topics selected for your upcoming research papers.
	Easter holidays
10 30.4	Helpdesk
	Open session: Discussion topics for this session will be defined in accordance with the monographs/topics selected for your upcoming research papers.
11 7.5	
	FRIDAY 9.5 – DEADLINE – research outlines (3-5 A4)
	WORKSHOP SESSIONS (3x) – research outlines
12–13–14 14.5, 21.5, 28.5	Presentation and collective discussion about your «critical appraisal» contributions. More details to follow.
	Follow up workshop in October 2025, TBA
	FRIDAY 1.12.2025 – DEADLINE for the final research paper

Guidelines for the short contributions

The two short contributions you are expected to write over the Spring semester 2025 should be thought as part of the cumulative process towards writing your final research paper. Providing us with these writing pieces will also help us give you adequate feedback. These contributions will be made available to all participants via OLAT.

By the end of the semester, you will thus have at your disposal a series of dossiers about key monographs. Please read other participants' contributions, so you can either discuss them or get inspiration from them.

Critical appraisal (2-3 A4 pages)

due on Friday 21 March 2025

This short paper should address the following two dimensions.

Provide us with a **short biographical notice** (not a bullet-point CV) mentioning key facts about the author of your selected monograph and try to answer/address some (or all) of the following questions. Is he/she a junior (young PhD) or senior researcher? In which career stage was this monograph written? Which was the institutional basis/setting for this study? In which context was it published? What are the intellectual and methodological influences for this author? Who were his/her mentor(s)/teacher(s)? Is the author active in the media, in the public sphere (is s/he a "public intellectual"?). etc. The aim of this piece is to situate your author in the academic sphere and the economic history field. Do not forget to list the main sources, references, websites, etc. that you have used to write the profile (but do not pepper the text with countless useless footnotes).

Write a **critical appraisal** of the main issues and topics addressed by your author. Here is a (non-exhaustive) list of issues that you may want to address in this piece. What kind of method(s) (qualitative? quantitative? others) has/have been used? What kind of economic/social science theories are the key references for this study? What kind of sources and/or materials has been used in this study? How was this material gathered and selected? How has the author structured his/her argument (and his/her table of contents)? What are the key results? In which historiography „current(s)“, and/or debates can you situate this book? Is this book written in dialogue and/or debate with other authors? What is the narrative style of the author? What is the audience for his book? The aim of this piece is to offer to the other participants to the seminar insights on the monograph you are using as a basis for your research essay. Do not write a summary of the selected book !

In addition to your critical appraisal, please copy and upload on OLAT (Forum) the **table of contents** and the **introduction** of your selected monograph (please do not forget to include endnotes to the introduction if necessary). Finally, select a **short passage** of the monograph (5-10 pages max) which you find either interesting/relevant and/or illustrative of the author's methodology/key findings and upload them on OLAT (Forum).

Name the **files** accordingly: "**Berend_1996_CriticalAppraisal.pdf**", "**Berend_1996_ToC.pdf**", "**Berend_1996_Intro.pdf**", and "**Berend_1996_EXCERPT.pdf**".

Research paper outline (3-5 A4 pages)

due on Friday 9 May 2025

Using your selected monograph as a starting point, present to the seminar audience a first draft of your research paper ideas. This outline can follow very different perspectives, be creative and do not forget that your paper could either be used as an opportunity to think analytically about a particular approach/field/theory/method or as a basis for a prospective MA thesis.

You may for example want to write a paper... (non-exhaustive and indicative list, topics can be combined, etc.)

... about the author's scholarly production (not only the selected monograph). In other words, situate the start monograph in a wider intellectual trajectory.

... comparing/situating the selected monograph with another author and/or another body of literature. How do different authors/approaches deal with a common topic and/or theory/methodology?

... analyzing the reception and influence of this monograph. Has it spurred debate, controversy, inspired other researchers, etc.?

At this point you should have ventured outside of the pages of the selected monograph and this outline should also contain a (short) **bibliography** of works, articles, etc. that you are going to use to write your paper. This is important: providing a start bibliography will improve the feedback you will receive.

Once again, writing a detailed summary of the selected monograph will not constitute a successful basis for your research paper!

Do not forget to clearly name your contribution: i.e. "**LASTNAME_ResearchOutline**".

Suggested monographs for your research paper

You will find below a first list of suggested titles, broadly sorted out in thematic categories. You are welcome to select an unlisted title. In any case, provide us with a short argument supporting your choice and do select a **substantial research monograph** (no textbooks, essays, edited books, etc.). Trade books (i.e. books for a wider public, without much scientific apparatus) should not be your priority, and you may need to convince us of the adequacy of your choice.

As you can use this seminar as a first step towards identifying a research idea and topic for a MA thesis, you may want, for example, to select a monograph that you could use in such a prospective MA thesis. But you can also use the opportunity to learn (and write) about a totally different period, theme, or approaches, etc.

You should also be prepared to read the book as soon as possible, actively engage with its content as well as gather additional materials that you could use for your short contributions as well as for the final research paper.

Once you will have selected a monograph, you are expected to stick with it.

Histories of economic ideas

- **Quinn Slobodian**, *Globalists. The End of Empire and the Birth of Neoliberalism* (Cambridge MA 2020)
- **Nicholas T. Philipson**, *Adam Smith: An Enlightened Life* (Yale UP, 2010) **Jeremy Adelman**, *Worldly Philosopher: The Odyssey of Albert O. Hirschman* (Princeton UP, 2013)
- **Edgar J., Dosman**, *The Life and Times of Raúl Prebisch, 1901-1986* (McGill UP, 2008) **Jan-Otmar Hesse**, *Wirtschaft als Wissenschaft. Die Volkswirtschaftslehre in der frühen Bundesrepublik* (Frankfurt a. M 2010) **Mary Poovey**, *A history of the modern fact. Problems of knowledge in the sciences of wealth and society* (Chicago 1998).
- **Jennifer Burns**, *Milton Friedman: The Last Conservative* (New York, 2023)
- **Verena Halmayer**, *Managing growth in miniature. Solow's model as an artifact* (Cambridge 2024)
- **Annette Kehnel**, *Wir konnten auch anders. Eine kurze Geschichte der Nachhaltigkeit* (München 2021)
- **Luc Boltanski und Ève Chiapello**, *Der neue Geist des Kapitalismus* (Konstanz 2006) [Le nouvel esprit du capitalisme, Paris 1999]
- etc.

Finance, debt, money matters

- **Julia Ott**, *When Wall Street Met Main Street. The Quest for an Investors' Democracy* (Princeton 2011)
- **Alexander Engel**, *Risikoökonomie. Eine Geschichte des Börsenterminhandels* (Frankfurt 2021).
- **David Graeber**, *Debt. The first 5000 years* (New York 2011)
- **Francesca Trivellato**, *The Promise and Peril of Credit: What a Forgotten Legend about Jews and Finance Tells Us about the Making of European Commercial Society* (Princeton University Press, 2019)
- **Harold James**, *Schockmomente. Eine Weltgeschichte von Inflation und Globalisierung 1850 bis heute* (Freiburg 2022)
- **Jonathan Levy**, *Freaks of Fortune: The Emerging World of Capitalism and Risk in America* (Cambridge 2012)
- **Thibaud Giddey**, *Histoire de la régulation des banques en Suisse (1914-1972)* (Genève 2019)
- **Arnaud Orain**, *The Politics of Utopia. A New History of John Law's System, 1695–1795* (Chicago 2023) [Original : *La Politique du merveilleux, une autre histoire du Système de Law (1695-1795)* (Paris 2018)]
- **Ann Goldgar**, *Tulipmania. Money, Honor, and Knowledge in the Dutch Golden Age* (Chicago 2007)
- **Destin Jenkins**, *Bonds of Inequality: Debt and the Making of the American City* (Chicago, 2021)
- **Mischa Suter**, *Rechtstrib: Schulden und Vollstreckung im liberalen Kapitalismus 1800-1900* (Konstanz 2016)
- **Hannah Catherine Davies**, *Transatlantic Speculations: Globalization and the Panics of 1873.* (New York 2018).
- etc.

Markets, trade, resources

- **Béatrice Veyrassat**, Histoire de la Suisse et des Suisses dans la marche du monde. XVIIe siècle – Première Guerre mondiale. Espaces – Circulations – Echanges (Alphil, 2018)
 - **Taco Terpstra**, Trade in the Ancient Mediterranean. Private Order and Public Institutions (Princeton UP 2019)
 - **Jan de Vries**, The Price of Bread: Regulating the Market in the Dutch Republic (Cambridge UP, 2019)
 - **Jan-Otmar Hesse**, Exportweltmeister Geschichte einer deutschen Obsession (Berlin 2023)
 - **Laleh Khalili**, Sinews of War and Trade. Shipping and Capitalism in the Arabian Peninsula (London 2020)
 - **Maxine Berg**, Luxury and Pleasure in the Eighteenth-Century Britain (Oxford 2005)
 - **Jane Humphries**, Childhood and Child Labour in the British Industrial Revolution (Cambridge 2015)
 - **Yigit Topkaya**, Seidener Handel. Basel und das Osmanische Reich im 19. Jahrhundert
 - **Jeronim Perovic**, Fuel and Power. Energy, Trade, and Russian Foreign Relations from Lenin to Putin (Cambridge 2024)
 - **Markus Lampe and Paul Sharp**, A Land of Milk and Butter. How Elites Created the Modern Danish Dairy Industry (Chicago 2018)
 - **Giovanni Federico**, Feeding the World: An Economic History of Agriculture, 1800-2000 (Princeton 2008)
 - **Tirthankar Roy & Anand V. Swamy**, Law and the Economy in Colonial India (Chicago 2021)
 - **Ritu Birla**, Stages of Capital: Law, Culture and Market Governance in late Colonial India (Duke UP, 2009)
 - **Geoffroy Legentilhomme**, Entre mutualisme et marché. Le développement du système suisse d'assurance-maladie (XIXe-XXe siècles) (Neuchâtel 2024)
 - **Pierre Yves Donzé**, The business of time: A global history of the watch industry (Manchester 2023) [Original : Des nations, des firmes et des montres : histoire globale de l'industrie horlogère de 1850 à nos jours, Neuchâtel : Alphil, 2020 (Neuchâtel 2020)]
 - **Inikori, Joseph E.** Africans and the Industrial Revolution in England: A Study in International Trade and Economic Development. (Cambridge 2002)
 - **William Cronon**, Nature's Metropolis: Chicago and the Great West (New York 1992)
- etc.

Labor, Business history

- **Caitlin Rosenthal**, Accounting for Slavery. Masters and Management (Harvard UP 2018)
 - **Bethany Moreton**, To Serve God and Wal-Mart: The Making of Christian Free Enterprise. (Cambridge MA 2009)
 - **Sheilagh Ogilvie**, The European Guilds: An Economic Analysis (Princeton 2019)
 - **Alessandro Stanziani**, Labor on the Fringes of Empire: Voice, Exit and the Law (Palgrave Macmillan, 2018) [or choose as an alternative: Les métamorphoses du travail contraint. Une histoire globale (XVIIIe-XIXe siècles) (Paris 2020)]
 - **Sheth, Sudev**. Bankrolling Empire: Family Fortunes and Political Transformation in Mughal India (Cambridge: 2023)
 - **Alexia Yates**, Selling Paris. Property and Commercial Culture in the Fin-de-siècle Capital (Cambridge 2015)
 - **David Edgerton**, Britain's War Machine: Weapons, Resources and Experts in the Second World War (2020)
 - **Leo Grob**, Bevor die Fabriken schließen. Arbeit und Management bei Alusuisse (1960–1991) (Böhlau 2024)
 - **Adam Tooze**, Ökonomie der Zerstörung: Die Geschichte der Wirtschaft im Nationalsozialismus (2018) [Original : Wages of destruction. The Making and Breaking of the Nazi Economy (2006)]
- etc.