

The Maurists' unfinished encyclopedia

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In this groundbreaking study, Linn Holmberg provides new perspectives on the Enlightenment 'dictionary wars' and offers a fascinating insight into the intellectual reorientation of a monastic community in the Age of Reason.

In mid-eighteenth-century Paris, two Benedictine monks from the Congregation of Saint-Maur – also known as the Maurists – began working on a universal dictionary of arts, crafts, and sciences. At the same time, Diderot and D'Alembert started to compile the famous *Encyclopédie*. The Benedictines, however, never finished or published their work and the manuscripts were left, forgotten, in the monastery archive. In the first study devoted to the Maurists' unfinished encyclopedia, Holmberg explores the project's origins, development, and abandonment and sheds new light on the intellectual activities of its creators, the emergence of the encyclopedic dictionary in France, and the *Encyclopédie* of Diderot and D'Alembert.

Holmberg adopts a multidisciplinary approach to the challenges of studying a hitherto unexplored and incomplete manuscript. By using codicology and handwriting analysis, the author reconstructs the drafts' order of production, estimates the number of compilers and the nature of their work, and detects comprehensive editorial interferences made by nineteenth-century conservators at the Bibliothèque nationale de France. Holmberg's meticulous work proves, with textual evidence, the Maurist dictionary's origins as an augmented translation of a mathematical dictionary by Christian Wolff. Through comparing the Maurists' manuscripts to the *Encyclopédie* and the Jesuits' *Dictionnaire de Trévoux*, the author highlights striking similarities between the Benedictine project and that of Diderot and D'Alembert, showing that the *philosophes* were neither first with their encyclopedic innovations, nor alone in their secular Enlightenment endeavours.

Reasons for studying an unfinished encyclopedia

The discovery of the manuscripts, and earlier research

2. The Maurists' manuscripts under the loupe

The history of the physical documents

Determining the number of writers

3. The history of a dictionary in the making

The Congregation of Saint-Maur: organisation and erudition

Dom Pernetty revisited

The dictionary project: picking up the trail

The first phase: translating Wolff's lexicon (c.1743-1747)

Competition with the embryonic *Encyclopédie* (1746)

Turning point: interruption and transformation (c. 1747)

The second phase: continuation and abandonment (c.1747-1754/1755)

4. The Maurists' manuscripts compared

Establishing limits: comparison to the *Dictionnaire de Trévoux*

Creating clusters of knowledge: comparison to the *Encyclopédie*

Other aspects of order: classification and cross-references

Identifying the Maurists' sources

Mechanical arts and crafts

Natural history

Medical arts

Mathematical sciences

5. The Maurist enterprise and Enlightenment thought

A monastic community in transformation

Responding to the tastes of the time

The middle ground that could have been

Conclusion: 'To change the way people think'

Appendix 1: nomenclature

Appendix 2: working lists

Appendix 3: illustrations

Appendix 4: fields of knowledge

Appendix 5: transcriptions and translations

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