

The Forgotten Encyclopedia

The Maurists' Dictionary of Arts, Crafts, and Sciences,
the Unrealized Rival of the *Encyclopédie* of Diderot
and d'Alembert

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Abstract

In mid-eighteenth century Paris, two Benedictine monks from the Congregation of Saint-Maur – also known as the Maurists – started compiling a universal dictionary of arts, crafts, and sciences. The project was initiated simultaneously with what would become one of the most famous literary enterprises in Western intellectual history: the *Encyclopédie* of Diderot and d'Alembert. The latter started as an augmented translation of Ephraim Chambers's *Cyclopaedia*, but it was constructed with another French dictionary as its ideological counterpart: the Jesuits' *Dictionnaire de Trévoux*. While the *Encyclopédie* eventually turned into a controversial but successful best-seller, considered as the most important medium of Enlightenment thought, the Benedictines never finished or published their work. After a decade, the manuscripts were put aside in the monastery library, and were soon forgotten. For about two hundred and sixty years, the Maurists' dictionary material has largely escaped the attention of researchers, and its history of production has been unknown.

This dissertation examines the history and characteristics of the Maurists' enterprise. The manuscripts are compared to the *Encyclopédie* and the *Dictionnaire de Trévoux*, and the project situated within its monastic environment of production, the history of the encyclopedic dictionary, and the Enlightenment culture. The study has an interdisciplinary character and combines perspectives of History of Science and Ideas, History of Monasticism, History of Encyclopedism, and History of the Book. The research procedure is distinguished by a microhistorical approach, where the studied materials are analyzed in a detailed manner, and the research process included in the narrative.

The dissertation shows that the Maurists early found themselves in a rival situation with the embryonic *Encyclopédie*, and that the two projects had several common denominators that distinguished them from the predecessors within the genre. At the same time, the Maurists were making a dictionary unique in the eighteenth century, which assumed a third position in relation to the works of the *encyclopédistes* and the Jesuits. The study provides new perspectives on the *Encyclopédie* of Diderot and d'Alembert, the intellectual activities of the Congregation of Saint-Maur, as well as the editor in charge of the Maurist dictionary: Dom Antoine-Joseph Pernety, otherwise known for his alchemical writings.

Keywords: The Congregation of Saint-Maur, the Maurists, Dom Antoine-Joseph Pernety, the *Encyclopédie* of Diderot and d'Alembert, the *Dictionnaire de Trévoux*, History of Science and Ideas, History of Encyclopedism, History of Monasticism, History of the Book, the French Enlightenment, Classification and Organization of Knowledge, Eighteenth-Century Sciences and Arts, Microhistory.

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