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The Unknown Rival of the *Encyclopédie*

The Maurists' Abandoned Dictionary of Arts, Crafts and Sciences

BY LINN HOLMBERG (UMEÅ)

The early-modern history of science and ideas is full of grand books and famous authors. They constitute landmarks in the conception of our Western intellectual heritage – a chain of contributions that are endlessly revisited, studied and commented upon. However, parallel to all these publications, countless manuscripts never left their authors' desks or drawers. Due to various reasons, intellectual projects were abruptly abandoned or simply never finished. Since these texts never became official contributions to the Republic of Letters, they never became of importance to anyone besides the persons involved in their production. In hindsight, they might appear as dead-ends, losers or non-events. Nevertheless, these works were every bit as much a response and an intended contribution to the contemporary conversations as the published ones – simply, no one ever read them. This article is devoted to such a case. It treats a learned project that failed, but which once competed with and was abandoned in the shadow of one of the most famous literary enterprises in Western intellectual history: the *Encyclopédie, ou dictionnaire raisonné des sciences, des arts et des métiers* of Diderot and d'Alembert (1751–1772).

In 2008 I came across a reference to a hitherto unknown and unrealized encyclopedic project in mid-eighteenth-century Paris, executed by the Benedictines of the Congregation of Saint-Maur (1618–1790), also known as the Maurists. For about 260 years, these manuscripts have been overlooked by historians, and their history of production has remained unknown.¹ The article summarizes my ongoing dissertation that contextualizes the Maurists' project within the development of the contemporary encyclopedic genre and the secularization of the Benedictines' intellectual activities in the age of Enlightenment.² After a brief introduction to the scientific dictionary in eighteenth-century France, followed by a presentation of the Maurists and the manuscripts in question, I will summarize my findings on the history of the project and distinguish its characteristics compared to the *Encyclopédie* and the Jesuits' *Dictionnaire de Trévoux*.

The Scientific Dictionary in Eighteenth-Century France

The so-called dictionaries of arts and sciences constituted a particular lexicographic and encyclopedic genre of the

eighteenth-century book trade. In contrast to linguistic dictionaries, devoted to the common words of the languages, the dictionaries of arts and sciences focused on the terminology of various fields of specialized knowledge. Often their explicit ambition was not only to define the words, but to describe and explain the sciences and arts themselves.³ However, in the eighteenth century, "science" did not yet denote the natural sciences but rather "knowledge" in general. The study of nature was not separated from other kinds of inquiry and still had firm ties to theology.⁴ Consequently, the dictionaries of arts and sciences contained a wide variety of theoretical and practical knowledge. In their ambition to organize and classify their elements and internal relationship, they partook in the international and collective process eventually leading to the stabilization and institutionalization of the disciplines in the nineteenth century. In summarizing and popularizing different theories and practices they also became important media for diffusing information on the sciences and arts to a wider audience. Still, during a large part of the eighteenth century, there was only limited agreement about how these areas should be classified and discerned from each other and what a dictionary on arts and science should contain.⁵ The constant presence of theology further made this project highly sensitive. In France, this was particularly visible.

The history of the French universal dictionaries of arts and sciences has sometimes been described in terms of war.⁶ In the course of the eighteenth century, these works grew to large-scale commercial projects, published by rivaling booksellers and conveying different religious or philosophical apologetics. In addition they all built on and revised each other, which caused endless accusations of plagiarism. By the mid-eighteenth century, the Jesuits' *Dictionnaire de Trévoux* (1704–1771) had driven its predecessors out of competition and emerged as the dominating universal dictionary on arts and sciences in the French language. With its explicit Catholic apologetic it would become the perpetual adversary of the *Encyclopédie*, but it was also a source which the *encyclopédistes* used far more than they admitted. From 1751 and for two decades onwards, the "battle of the dictionaries" would first and foremost feature these two enterprises.⁷ Against this background, the discovery that members of another learned community in Paris – the Benedictines of the Congregation of Saint-Maur – initiated an encyclopedic project parallel to the *Encyclopédie*, calls for further examination.



1 One of the volumes of the Maurists' dictionary manuscripts (BnF. Ms. Fr. 16980).

By the mid-eighteenth-century, the scholars of the Congregation of Saint-Maur had produced several hundred publications, including critical editions of the Church Fathers, historical works and methodological treatises related to archive studies (such as diplomatics, paleography and the dating of sources). Within these areas the Maurists had not hesitated to undertake large-scale projects, running over several years or even decades and involving several writers and printers.⁸ The Maurists also were the first in France to use pre-subscription for financing their projects, starting with Dom Bernard de Montfaucon's illustrated *Antiquité expliquée* (15 vols., 1719–1724).⁹ The Congregation's intellectual, religious and political center was located in the Parisian abbey of Saint-Germain-des-Prés, situated on the left bank of Seine and only a block away from the *encyclopédistes'* favorite coffee house, *Le Procopé*. The abbey was the home of some of the most prominent savants and writers of the Congregation, transferred to the capital from the monasteries across the country. The abbey also possessed one of the largest libraries and manuscript collections in France and constituted an international meeting place for scholars interested in history.¹⁰ This was the environment in which the dictionary project was executed.

In early 1747, Dom Jacques Fortet briefly noted in his annual report regarding the Congregation's intellectual activities that two scholars in the abbey of Saint-Germain-des-Prés – Dom Antoine-Joseph Pernety (1716–1796) and Dom François de Brézillac (1709–1780) – “currently are working on a universal dictionary on the liberal and mechanical arts, the crafts and all the sciences with any relation to them”.¹¹ The same year, Diderot and d'Alembert were appointed editors of the embryonic *Encyclopédie*. However, while the dictionary of the *philosophes* later would become a controversial but successful best-seller and the most famous medium of Enlightenment thought, the Benedictines never finished or published their dictionary. Eventually, the manuscripts were put aside in the monastery library and were forgotten.

The Maurists' Dictionary Manuscripts

In 1795 all the manuscripts stored in the abbey of Saint-Germain-des-Prés came into the possession of the newly founded national library, today *Bibliothèque nationale de France* (BnF). According to the library's historical documentation, the dictionary material arrived in two large portfolios, numbered 455 and 457. This suggests that a third piece – portfolio 456 – was missing. In the 1850s the material was divided in smaller parts and bound in hard-back volumes. During this process several texts were radically edited into collages.¹² As a result, a contemporary reader encounters a well-organized material, which at first glance might appear as an integrated whole. It is therefore important to remember that its current form neither corresponds to the totality of what the monks actually wrote, nor to the state in which it was abandoned.

The preserved manuscripts consist of six volumes in-folio.¹³ The first five volumes are composed of article texts, both thematically and alphabetically organized. The first volume has been labeled “Agriculture”, the second “Natural history, mechanical arts and diverse crafts”, the third “Natural history”, the fourth “Beginning of a dictionary on mathematics, physics, arts and crafts”, and the fifth “Medicine”.¹⁴ Each volume start from A but the length of the alphabetical range varies, that is, some go all the way to Z while others end earlier. Together they contain about 7 000 articles and nearly 200 illustrations, but there are several indications of missing pieces (probably originally placed in the missing third portfolio). The sixth volume labeled “Index” consists of different working lists compiled alongside the work with the articles. Here one finds inventories of preceding universal dictionaries, catalogues of illustrations to copy from other works, thematic organizations of terms, and lists of used literature.¹⁵ The manuscripts contain no explicit information about the identity or the number of the writers. The documentation of the BnF suggests that the portfolios were labeled “material for a dictionary of arts and sciences by Dom Antoine-Joseph Pernety” when they arrived, which means that they had been attributed to Pernety (who later became in charge of the work) by the Maurist archivists in the abbey of Saint-Germain-des-Prés.¹⁶ Furthermore, the manuscripts contain no preface or final title. Some texts are working drafts with marginal notes, scribbles and crossed-out sections, while others are cleanly rewritten copies. On the basis of references to the current year and the use of literature published after these dates, the parts can be arranged in an internal order of production. Some texts then appear to have been deliberately abandoned in an early stage, while others simply were left frozen in progress as the project fizzled out. Consequently, the totality of this material cannot be studied in the same way as a published, finished dictionary. It must be approached as a dictionary “in the making”. Therefore, the study of the content is intimately connected to its history of manufacture.

Searching the Origins of the Project

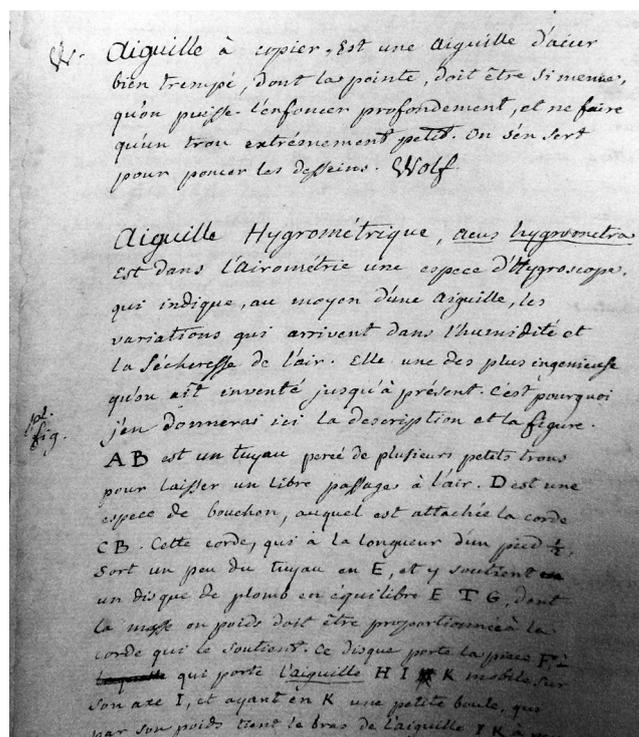
The first time I opened the volumes to the Maurists' dictionary manuscripts, I knew nothing more about their context of production than what had been provided in the short statement of Dom Fortet in 1747. When months of searching through the sources of the Congregation proved fruitless, I decided to try another entrance: the book trade. If Pernety and Brézillac ever intended to publish their dictionary, collaboration with a bookseller would have been necessary. The contemporary regulations of the Parisian book trade forbade unauthorized sales of literature and the license was granted to the publisher, not to the author.¹⁷ So with whom could the two monks have been working? Here the observations of Fortet provide some clues.

Fortet starts his report by announcing that Pernety and Brézillac just have published a translation of the German philosopher Christian Wolff's abridged "universal course in mathematics" (*Elementa matheseos universae*, 1713–1715). However, Fortet emphasizes that it is not question of "a simple translation".¹⁸ The two monks have added several treatises and such a number of observations and clarifications that it rather constitutes a new course in mathematics. He then declares that the same authors are currently occupied with a universal dictionary.

Wolff's *Cours de mathématique* (3 vols.) was published in the early spring of 1747 by the bookseller Charles-Antoine Jombert (1712–1784).¹⁹ Jombert was the owner of a bookstore specialized in illustrated works on sciences and arts for engineers and the military. His collection primarily focused on the physico-mathematical sciences and the mechanical arts, but included titles on the humanities.²⁰ His home also functioned as a salon for those interested in literature on sciences and arts, and was frequently visited by Parisian novelists, aristocrats, statesmen, painters and philosophers.²¹

Jombert had obtained the license for Wolff's Course in mathematics together with nine other works in 1743. Among these one finds another translation of a physico-mathematical work of Wolff: his *Vollständiges Mathematisches Lexicon* (1734).²² From 1743 and onwards, the translations of both the *Lexicon* and the Course are indicated as "in progress" in advertisements printed in books sold from Jombert's store, and in both cases the translators are anonymous.²³ In fact, Pernety and Brézillac were anonymous as translators of the *Cours de mathématique*. The title page simply announced that it was "translated and considerably augmented by Dom *** of the Congregation of Saint-Maur", and the monks' achievement was not officially acknowledged until in the mid-1750s.²⁴

In 1746 Jombert announced in an advertisement that the translation of Wolff's *Lexicon* would also be "considerably augmented" and supplied with a multitude of figures. The project was presented as "New dictionary of mathematics and physics and all the areas based on them, where one treats the origin, development and principles of the sciences, and



- 2 Two articles translated from Wolff's *Lexicon*. Next to "Aiguille hygrométrique" (Hygrometric needle), "pl. fig" (for "planche, figure") has been noted in the margin. The Maurist writer then describes the illustration occurring in Wolff's *Lexicon* ("Acus hygrometra", p. 21) in an identical manner. (BnF. Ms. Fr. 16982, fol. 76^v).

the method of acquiring sufficient knowledge to discuss and apply them correctly in short time [...].²⁵ Thus, by this time, it was no longer a question of merely a translation. Jombert rather described a project with an illustrated dictionary of mathematics, physics and the related arts, crafts and sciences, based on Wolff's *Lexicon*.

Among the Maurists' manuscripts one finds an unfinished draft preliminary called "Dictionary of mathematics, physics, arts and crafts".²⁶ Towards the end of the manuscript the current year is stated as 1747.²⁷ However, in the beginning the year is implied to be 1746, which suggests that it was contemporary to Jombert's advertisement.²⁸ The articles only reach ALL- before the draft is interrupted, but within this alphabetical span, the majority of the articles from Wolff's *Vollständiges Mathematisches Lexicon* have been translated.²⁹ The margins often contain notes on accompanying illustrations, of which several are drawn from Wolff's dictionary (see fig. 2). The monks have also constructed hundreds of additional articles by using journals, other dictionaries and specialized monographs.³⁰

The draft suggests that Pernety and Brézillac were the compilers of Jombert's new dictionary on physics and mathematics and the related arts, crafts and sciences, based on Wolff's *Lexicon*.³¹ The manuscript reveals large ambitions, approaching the ones of the contemporary universal dictionaries of arts and sciences. In the Index volume one even finds an

extensive inventory of the nomenclature of the Jesuits' *Dictionnaire de Trévoux*.³² So what kind of project did the Maurists and Jombert have in mind?

Competition with the Embryonic *Encyclopédie*

Very few manuscripts concerning Jombert's editorial activities have been preserved. However, there is one of particular interest to the history of the Maurists' project: a letter written by the bookseller himself and addressed to the Chancellor of France, the official in charge of the promulgation of the printing licenses. The document is non-dated and the name of the Chancellor is not specified, but it has been placed in a volume labeled "the book trade under Mr. de Malesherbes".³³ Chrétien de Lamoignon de Malesherbes did not become Chancellor until in December 1750, which implies the assumption that the letter was compiled after this date.³⁴ However, the content suggests that it was written in 1746 – and that it concerns the work of the Maurists.³⁵

Jombert presents the work as a large-scale enterprise in which he has invested a lot of time and money. He calls it "a Dictionary on mathematics and physics and all the sciences and arts that depend thereof, and which properly speaking is a Universal Dictionary".³⁶ He talks about the authors in plural, but without revealing their names. He asserts that they have been working on "assembling all the necessary material for nearly three years",³⁷ since the license was obtained in 1743.³⁸ When describing the preparatory work he mentions that he has ordered several translations of foreign works with the intention of including their content in the dictionary. Among these he names Wolff's Course in mathematics and the *Lexicon*, "whose plan and method has been followed and which serve as base and foundation for this project".³⁹ The enterprise is thus portrayed as something more than a translation – something independent and new – which corresponds with how Wolff's works are used in the Maurists' draft.

Jombert then proceeds to the main reason for the letter. He informs the Chancellor that "he has been dismayed to learn that [...] some of his colleagues just have obtained a new license for a Dictionary in just about the same style as his, even though it originally was supposed to be nothing but a simple translation of the Encyclopedia of Chambers".⁴⁰ Jombert thus describes the embryonic *Encyclopédie*.

The bookseller André Le Breton first applied for the license to translate Chambers' *Cyclopaedia or an Universal Dictionary of Arts and Sciences* in February 1745.⁴¹ After recurrent disagreements with the initial translators Mills and Sellius, the project was interrupted a couple of months later and the license was withdrawn in August. In October Le Breton associated himself with the booksellers Briasson, Durand and David in order to continue the work together and make a

revised and considerably augmented translation. On 21 January 1746 the Chancellor granted them a new license, this time for an *Encyclopédie ou dictionnaire universel des arts et des sciences*, "translated from the English dictionaries of Chambers and Harris, with additions".⁴² This was the first time that the work was portrayed as a combined translation of two English scientific dictionaries and with an unspecified amount of additions. From now on it could accurately be described as something more than a simple translation of Chambers.⁴³ Thus, this must have been the development which Jombert refers to.

Jombert asserts that the booksellers associated with the *Encyclopédie* have "heard about the advertisement of his own project and now want to oppose the publication of his Prospectus".⁴⁴ As earlier mentioned, an advertisement printed in one of the books sold from Jombert's store had briefly presented the project in 1746.⁴⁵ Considering that the merchants of the Parisian book trade all knew each other or even were related (Jombert and Le Breton were second cousins), it is not unlikely that the two teams were made aware of each other's plans about the same time.⁴⁶ However, no document found so far can support that the booksellers of the *Encyclopédie* actually wanted to stop the publication of Jombert's prospectus, or that he at this point in time was about to publish one.⁴⁷ Nevertheless, the two projects shared several common denominators that distinguished them from the preceding universal dictionaries in the French language.

Firstly, both started as French translations of foreign dictionaries – one English and the other German – which emphasized the role of mathematics, the technical arts and experimental physical sciences. In France, the previous dictionaries on arts and sciences mainly had been revised and enlarged editions of Antoine Furetière's more language-based *Dictionnaire universel* (1691).⁴⁸ Secondly, both intended to include additions from other works, which transformed them to new creations with similar ingredients. Thirdly, both projects aspired to include technical illustrations, which was unprecedented among the French universal dictionaries. Illustrations were also a specialty of Jombert. With all this in mind it would not be surprising if Le Breton and his colleagues really did consider the project of Jombert as a potential threat – at least at this early stage of planning. Abbé Gua de Malves was not officially appointed editor in charge until in June 1746, and Diderot and d'Alembert did not take his place until in October 1747.⁴⁹ Certainly, the embryonic *Encyclopédie* posed a threat to Jombert, and in contrast to his four colleagues, he managed the expenses alone.

Jombert demands of the Chancellor that limits should be prescribed for the rivals' planned additions, based on the argument that he had obtained the initial license first (in 1743 compared to 1745), that "his" work is in a far more advanced state and that he is more well-equipped to execute this kind of enterprise, since his entire collection is specialized on sciences and arts.⁵⁰ Unfortunately there is no preserved answer from the Chancellor. However, judging by the subsequent

events it is quite obvious that Jombert did not get his desired response.

Sometime in late 1747, possibly early 1748, the draft of the Maurists was abandoned and the collaboration with Jombert seemingly interrupted.⁵¹ The bookseller then associated himself with the engineer Alexandre Saverien who in 1753 published a universal dictionary of mathematics and physics.⁵² Judging by the title as well as the description given by the prospectus published in 1749,⁵³ this was the continuation of the work first initiated by the Maurists. However, while the first draft of the monks contains over 400 articles within the alphabetical span A–ALL, the dictionary of Saverien only has fifty-one.⁵⁴ The reduction of the large-scale project described to the Chancellor in 1746 could be understood as commercial strategy. It is plausible that Jombert gradually realized that he did not have the means to compete with the rivaling project of his colleagues by going bigger – but he could go smaller in hoping to attract the readers who could not afford subscribing to the *Encyclopédie*.⁵⁵

However, the Benedictines did not stop working on a dictionary of arts, crafts and sciences. In contrast to Jombert, they chose to expand the scope of content. The handwritings of the manuscripts also indicate that Brézillac left the project in an early stage, but that Pernety was accompanied by two to seven additional unidentified writers.⁵⁶

The Continuation of a Dictionary of Arts, Crafts and Sciences

While the first draft stated the year to be 1747, the succeeding manuscripts contain dates from 1748 and onwards. In two articles on the military arts, Pernety speaks of “the present war of 1748”.⁵⁷ Later on there are references to literature published in 1749, 1750 and 1751, which indicate the project’s progression.⁵⁸ According to the biographical yearbook *France littéraire*, Pernety was still working on “a dictionary of arts and crafts” in 1754 and 1755.⁵⁹ The year after he was reported working on something else.⁶⁰ It seems therefore likely that the project was abandoned sometime between 1755 and 1756. Due to the lack of sources, one can only speculate why. It is possible that the monks had trouble finding a bookseller willing to financially engage in a large-scale encyclopedic project in the backwash of the *Encyclopédie*, or that it just turned out to be too large an enterprise to realize.

The new manuscripts contain many novel elements. One of the most striking differences is the complete lack of references to Wolff. There is no doubt that this work constituted a new project. However, there are still similarities in procedure and focus that indicate that the monks continued in the spirit of their collaboration with Jombert. Firstly, the manuscripts contain about 200 illustrations depicting technical arts and crafts, copied from different works.⁶¹ Catalogues in the index volume further indicate that an additional 300

illustrations were planned at the time for the project’s abandonment.⁶² Thus, the monks continued to have a practical approach, focusing on describing and explaining the things and the practices themselves and not only defining the meanings of the words. Secondly, the interest in the physico-mathematical sciences and the technical arts and utile crafts remained, but the scope of content was broadened to natural history, medicine and agriculture.

The manuscripts written by Pernety (gathered in volume two) treat flora and fauna, mathematics and physics, and a multitude of various practical arts, crafts and industries.⁶³ The three remaining dictionary volumes, written by the unidentified additional collaborators, reveal a more distinct thematic division. In these manuscripts Pernety functions as editor. He has inserted comments or instructions in the margins, corrected the language or added indications of accompanying illustrations.⁶⁴ The volume labeled “Medicine” contains articles treating pathology (different diseases, syndromes and treatments), anatomy and surgery (procedures and instruments), chemistry (substances, processes and equipment), alchemy and hermetic philosophy, botany and pharmacy.⁶⁵ The volume “Natural history” contains articles solely occupied with exotic animals, plants, trees, fruits and precious stones.⁶⁶ The volume “Agriculture” treats animal husbandry, breeding, agriculture, gardening and viniculture.⁶⁷

Distinguishing the Logic of the Maurists’ project

The Maurists’ dictionary material may not contain an explicatory preface, a philosophical program or an elaborate tree of knowledge, but the manuscripts are not without order or implicit ideas about the relationship between different fields of knowledge. One way to expose this logic is by means of comparisons.

Plagiarism was intrinsic to the encyclopedic and lexicographic genre in the eighteenth century. The dictionaries on arts and science did not aspire to present new knowledge but to summarize the best theories and books. Therefore, in constructing a new dictionary, already existing ones commonly served as models. For instance, Jacques Proust concludes that “all the articles of the *Encyclopédie*, even the most original ones, are partly based on borrowed material. Sometimes they are nothing more than long citations placed after each other, with or without reference to a source”.⁶⁸ The novelty of a dictionary was not necessarily confined to its content, but rather to its *use* and organization of other texts. As it turns out, the Jesuits’ *Dictionnaire de Trévoux* played a central role for both the Maurists and the *encyclopédistes* in the manufacture of their own works.

Marie Leca-Tsiomis characterizes the difference between the *Encyclopédie* and the *Dictionnaire de Trévoux* in terms

of “encyclopedism” and “lexicographic universalism”. The latter is described as a “voracious collecting” where every word and derivative variation suffice to expand the bulk of the dictionary.⁶⁹ This corresponds to the procedure of the Jesuits in elaborating the succeeding editions of the *Trévoux*. In contrast, the *encyclopédistes* “choose [...] cut, classify, sort, include or exclude” when using the nomenclature of the *Trévoux*.⁷⁰ Leca-Tsiomis concludes that “the encyclopedic nomenclature derives from a logic other than the one of accumulation”,⁷¹ which can be seen in a detailed comparison of a limited alphabetical section.

For instance, in the *Dictionnaire de Trévoux* (4th edn., 1743) the section AB–ABY contains 238 terms.⁷² The *Encyclopédie* has 208, of which 146 can also be found in the *Trévoux*. The *encyclopédistes* thus have excluded 92 terms, most of which are obsolete words and derivative variations. They have added 62 terms, which concern all areas of knowledge. However, the articles of the *Encyclopédie* are at all times considerably lengthier than in the *Trévoux*.⁷³

Since the Maurists’ dictionary material does not constitute a finished product (and parts of the original manuscripts are missing), it defies an absolute quantitative comparison with the *Trévoux* and the *Encyclopédie*. However, by studying the monks’ inventory of the articles of interest in the *Trévoux* (1743), this incompleteness can be compensated. In the section AB–ABY, the Maurists’ inventory enumerates 79 terms. The monks are thus far more selective than the *encyclopédistes*. Among the 159 exclusions one finds obsolete terms, derivative variations, words of the everyday language and proper names – but there also is a consistent exclusion of certain areas of knowledge. All terms on religion, metaphysics, moral philosophy, customs, jurisprudence and politics are systematically omitted.

The 79 selected terms concern mathematics, physics, mechanical arts, music, astronomy, natural history, navigation and life at sea, artillery and warfare, heraldry, ancient units of measurements and currency, gardening and agriculture, hunting, falconry and animal breeding, medicine, anatomy, surgery, pharmacy, chemistry, alchemy and hermetic philosophy, architecture, sculpture and painting, carpentry and masonry, mining and the steel industry, plumbing, sewing and pottery, the commerce of wood, meat, pastry, spices, etc. A closer look at the content of the *Trévoux* shows that the inventory only omits six terms belonging to the categories enumerated above (the omissions of derivative variations excluded).⁷⁴ However, four of these exist as written articles,⁷⁵ which means that only two terms actually remained unnoticed. The inventory thus exposes a systematic and consistent pattern of selection and exclusion, corresponding to the scope of content in the article volumes. Therefore, despite the indications of missing texts and the incompleteness of the project, a combined study of the working lists and the preserved manuscripts allows to form an idea about the dictionary the Maurists were making.

By excluding meanings of everyday language, the Maurists’

connected to the idea of a “hard-word” dictionary, in line with the English works of Harris and Chambers.⁷⁶ However, the exclusion of religious, moral, legal and political subjects constitutes a departure from the older and contemporary works. From the first *Dictionnaire universel* of Furetière to the *Encyclopédie* of Diderot and d’Alembert, religion, politics and moral philosophy had a given place – and it constituted a continuous source of controversy. When the Huguenot Henri Basnage de Beauval published a revised edition of Furetière’s dictionary in 1701, he had excluded all original remarks regarding the supremacy of the Catholic Church and the heretic nature of Protestantism.⁷⁷ This enraged the Parisian Jesuits who immediately announced the ongoing work with a new dictionary, “purged from everything that one has inserted contrary to the Catholic religion”.⁷⁸ The first edition of the *Dictionnaire de Trévoux* (1704) was a Catholic edition of Basnage de Beauval’s Protestant edition of Furetière, and its publication launched a two-decade long quarrel in the contemporary journals with accusations of plagiarism and heresy. The second and enlarged edition of the *Trévoux* eventually drove the Protestant edition out of competition (the last was published in 1727). Then, when the *Encyclopédie* entered the scene, the controversy flared once again and the Jesuits accused the *encyclopédistes* for “incompetence [...] stealing articles, heresy, irreligiosity and impiety”.⁷⁹ Against the background of the religious quarrels accompanying the dictionaries on arts and sciences, it is possible that the Maurists’ exclusions were a way of avoiding further controversy. Nevertheless, the result of these omissions is an actual separation of religion, morality and politics from the realm of other arts and sciences. In fact, in 7 000 articles, God is only mentioned three or four times. Compared to the *Dictionnaire de Trévoux*, where a quote from the Scripture appears in every other article, this absence is highly remarkable. If anything, the monks employ an abstract deistic language, simply referring to “the intelligent structure of nature” or the “author of nature”.⁸⁰ The philosopher Martine Groult partly defines the novelty of the *Encyclopédie* as “liberating encyclopedism from a religious point of departure”⁸¹ by making the human faculties the organizing principle for all kind of knowledge – even the knowledge about God. By separating religion from the other arts, crafts and sciences, the Maurists too, in their way, detached encyclopedism from a religious point of departure.

A Monastic Reflection of the French Enlightenment

It is impossible to say how the dictionary of the Maurists would have turned out if it had ever been published. A critical reader could easily discard the unfinished manuscripts as never standing a chance against the *Encyclopédie*; as never coming close to its magnitude, philosophical sharpness or

political edge. However, we already know that the Maurists' project failed. This work never became of importance to their contemporaries, and if it does become important retrospectively, it is because it displays the contours of a new kind of dictionary – albeit unfinished and fragmentary – choosing other limits and clusters of knowledge than the contemporary dictionaries on the French market. Even though there is no preface explaining the Maurists' choices, the choices are there – visible, systematic and consistent. The manuscripts also contain elements often described as novel to the parallel enterprise of Diderot and d'Alembert. The Benedictines express the same strong interest in mathematics, experimental physics, utile arts, crafts and manufactures and they share the same ambition of wanting to explain their elements and practices with technical illustrations.⁸²

The initial work based on Wolff, described in the letter of Jombert and illustrated in the first draft, further accentuates the important role of foreign dictionaries focused on the physico-mathematical sciences in the development of the encyclopedic genre in France. Considering the simultaneousness of the two projects, these similarities indicate a general trend within encyclopedic writing. When the *Encyclopédie* is considered alone, it is easy to interpret its novelties as a result of the geniuses of the *philosophes*. The Maurists' project thus provides a new context to the *Encyclopédie*. The manuscripts may not constitute the same torch of Enlightenment, but they reflect many of its ideas and values: the centrality of reason before religion and tradition, the encouragement of human curiosity, the belief in progress by diffusing knowledge about the most productive and utile arts, crafts and sciences – and all permeated by an increasing secularization. While the Jesuits conducted an explicit Catholic apologetic with the ambition of refuting heresy, immorality and irreligiosity, and the *Encyclopédie* turned into a *machine de guerre* towards superstition and the dogmas of the Church, the Maurists chose a non-confrontational third path by excluding religion, metaphysics, morality and politics all together. Thus, even though the dictionary of the Maurists never left the writing atelier of the abbey of Saint-Germain-des-Prés, this failing project provides new insights into the development of the encyclopedic genre and the approach to knowledge in the eighteenth century, at the same time as it gives a glimpse of the Enlightenment culture in a learned monastic community.

Annotations

- 1 To my knowledge, the existence of the manuscripts only has been briefly mentioned by two researchers. See Jacques Proust: *L'Encyclopédie*, Paris: Armand Colin 1965, pp. 45–46; Micheline Meillassoux-Le Cerf: *Dom Pernety et son milieu (1716–1796) – Contribution à l'histoire de la sensibilité et des idées à la seconde moitié du XVIII^{ème} siècle*, Thèse de doctorat de Université Paris-IV Sorbonne, 1988, p. 45.
- 2 Linn Holmberg: *The Maurists' Universal Dictionary of Arts,*

- Crafts and Sciences – A Monastic Reflection of the French Enlightenment, Umeå University, PhD thesis in history of science and ideas, disputation in spring 2014.
- 3 Bernard Quemada: *Les dictionnaires du français moderne 1539–1863*, Paris: Didier 1967, pp. 37f, 76–101, 157–191; Richard Yeo: *Encyclopedic Visions – Scientific Dictionaries and Enlightenment Culture*, Cambridge: Cambridge University Press 2001, pp. 16–25.
- 4 Dorinda Outram: *The Enlightenment [1995]*, Cambridge: Cambridge University Press 2004, pp. 48–49.
- 5 Richard Yeo: *Classifying the Sciences; in Roy Porter (Ed.): The Cambridge History of Science – Eighteenth-Century Sciences*, Cambridge: Cambridge University Press 2003, pp. 241–243.
- 6 Robert Morin: *Diderot, l'Encyclopédie et le Dictionnaire de Trévoux*; in *Recherches sur Diderot et sur l'Encyclopédie 7(1989)*, pp. 71–122; Marie Leca-Tsiomis: *Écrire l'Encyclopédie – Diderot, de l'usage de dictionnaires à la grammaire philosophique*, Oxford: Voltaire Foundation 1999, pp. 3, 10–11, 230.
- 7 Leca-Tsiomis: *Écrire l'Encyclopédie* (fn. 6), pp. 1–11, 17–109.
- 8 Daniel-Odon Hurel: *The Benedictines of the Congregation of Saint-Maur and the Church Fathers*; in Irena Backus (Ed.): *The Reception of the Church Fathers in the West – From the Carolingians to the Maurists*, Boston/Leiden: Brill 1997, vol. 2, pp. 1007–1031; Madeleine Laurain: *Les travaux d'érudition des mauristes – Origine et evolution*; in *Mémorial du XIV^{ème} centenaire de l'Abbaye de Saint-Germain-des-Prés*, Paris: Vrin 1959, pp. 231–271; Blandine Barret-Kriegel: *Les académies de l'histoire*, Paris: Presses Universitaires de France 1988, pp. 41–140; David Knowles: *Great Historical Enterprises*, New York: Thomas Nelson and Sons 1963, pp. 35–62.
- 9 Henri-Jean Martin: *Les bénédictins, leur libraires et le pouvoir – Notes sur le financement de la recherche au temps de Mabillon et de Montfaucon*; in *Mémorial du XIV^{ème} centenaire de l'Abbaye de Saint-Germain-des-Prés*, pp. 284–286.
- 10 Pierre Gasnault: *L'érudition mauriste à Saint-Germain-des-Prés*, Paris: Institut d'Études Augustiniennes 1999; Emmanuel de Broglie: *Mabillon et la société de l'abbaye de Saint-Germain-des-Prés à la fin du XVII^{ème} siècle*, 2 vols, Paris: Plon, Nourrit et C^o 1888; Idem: *Bernard de Montfaucon et les bernardins 1715–1750*, 2 vols, Paris: Plon, Nourrit et C^o 1891.
- 11 Edmond Martène: *Histoire de la Congrégation de Saint-Maur*, Gaston Charvin (Ed.), Paris: Braud 1934, vol. 9, p. 342. “Les mêmes auteurs travaillent actuellement à un dictionnaire universel des arts mécaniques et libéraux, des métiers et de toutes les sciences qui y ont quelque rapport.”
- 12 Articles were cut out from their original folios and pasted on new ones in alphabetical order, probably to economize the space and facilitate the reading. The history of the manuscripts' storage and editing is investigated in detail in my dissertation.
- 13 Bibliothèque nationale de France (BnF), Manuscrits (Mss), Fonds français (Fr), 16979–16984: *Matériaux pour un dictionnaire des arts et sciences*, par Dom Antoine-Joseph Pernety.
- 14 BnF. Ms. Fr. 16979: *Agriculture*; 16980: *Histoire naturelle, arts mécaniques, métiers divers*; 16981: *Histoire naturelle*; 16982: *Début d'un dictionnaire de mathématique et physique, d'arts et métiers, etc.*; 16983: *Medicine*.
- 15 BnF. Ms. Fr. 16984: *Tables*.
- 16 BnF. Ms. *Nouvelles acquisitions Françaises (NaF)*. 5788: *Catalogue du Résidu des manuscrits de l'abbaye de Saint-Germain-des-Prés*, fol. 48^r.
- 17 Walter Kirsop: *Les mécanismes éditoriaux*; in Roger Chartier & Henri-Jean Martin (Ed.): *Histoire de l'édition française – Le livre triomphant 1660–1830*, Paris: Fayard/Promodis 1990, pp. 21–22. According to Kirsop, the regulations were not changed until 1777, where after authors were allowed to print and

- diffuse their works independently.
- 18 Martène: Histoire de la Congrégation de Saint-Maur, vol. 9 (fn. 11), p. 342. “Cet ouvrage n'est pas une simple traduction.”
- 19 Christian Wolff: Cours de mathématique, qui contient toutes les parties de cette science, mises à la portée des commençans [...] traduit en françois & augmenté considérablement par D. *** de la Congrégation de Saint-Maur, 3 vols. in-8, Paris: Jombert 1747.
- 20 Catherine Bousquet-Bressolier: Charles-Antoine Jombert (1712–1784) – Un libraire entre sciences et arts ; in Bulletin du bibliophile 2 (1997), p. 299.
- 21 Ibid., pp. 310–311.
- 22 See the license printed in Wolff: Cours de mathématique, vol. 2, pp. 358–360; Idem: Vollständiges Mathematisches Lexicon Darinnen alle Kunst-Wörter und Sachen, Welche In der erwegenden und ausübenden Mathesi vorzukommen pflegen, deutlich erkläret; Uberall aber Zur Historie der Mathematischen Wissenschaften dienliche Nachrichten eingestreuert Und die besten und auserlesensten Schrifften, welche jede Materie gründlich abgehandelt angeführet ; Ferner auch Die Mund- und Redens-Arten derer Marckscheider auch hieher gehöriger Künstler und Handwercker beschrieben ; Und endlich alles zum Nutzen so wohl gelehrter als ungelehrter Liebhaber der vortreflichen Mathematick eingerichtet worden, Leipzig: Gleditsch 1734.
- 23 See for instance the advertisement in Guillaume Le Blond: Éléments de la guerre des sièges, Paris: Jombert 1743, pp. xii–xii. “Le même libraire imprime les livres suivantes [...] Nouveau dictionnaire mathématique, par M. Chrétien Wolfius [...] traduit de l'Allemand sur la dernière édition, gros in-4, enrichie de figures”
- 24 France Littéraire, ou almanach des beaux arts contenant les noms et les ouvrages des gens des lettres, des savants et des artistes célèbres qui vivent actuellement en France, Paris: Duchesne 1756, p. 35; René-Prosper Tassin: Histoire littéraire de la Congrégation de Saint-Maur [1770], New Jersey: Gregg Press 1965, pp. 689–690.
- 25 See advertisement in Jacques Ozanam: Les éléments d'Euclide, Paris: Jombert 1746, p. 528. “Nouveau Dictionnaire de Mathématique et de Physique et de toutes les parties qui en dépendent; où l'on donne l'origine, les progrès et les principes des sciences et la méthode d'en acquérir en peu de temps une connoissance assez étendue pour en raisonner exactement, et en faire une juste application. [...] traduit de l'Allemand de M. Wolffius et augmenté considérablement, in-folio, avec beaucoup de figures, sous presse.” The formulation “sous presse” was commonly used by Jombert to indicate that a work was in progress, not that the manuscripts actually had been placed in the printing press. Wolff's *Cours de mathématique* is also indicated as “sous presse” in the same paragraph, and the censor did not approve of the finished manuscript until in January 1747 (See Wolff: Cours de mathématique, vol. 2, pp. 358–360).
- 26 BnF. Fr. Ms. 16982, front page. “Dictionnaire de mathématique, de physique, des arts et des métiers”.
- 27 BnF. Fr. Ms. 16982, fol. 61.
- 28 BnF. Fr. Ms. 16982, fol. 3. The dating of this draft is further treated in my dissertation.
- 29 Between A–ALLER, Wolff's Lexicon contains 130 individual terms of Latin, Arabic, German and French origin, accompanied by short definitions or longer explicatory articles. Considering only the nomenclature, close to all Latin, Arabic and French terms can be found in the Maurist draft, with none or only minor orthographic changes. Also some German terms have been directly imported. However, the majority of the German terms are absent since the French equivalents would have ended up after ALLER. Also several Latin terms starting on AE- are absent, but here the Maurists explicitly refer to alternative spellings on E-. On the other hand, the draft contains translations of articles located after ALLER in the German work, such as 'Air' (Wolff: 'Lufft') and 'Abeille' (Wolff: 'Fliege'). A more thorough comparison of the Maurist draft and Wolff's work can be read in my dissertation.
- 30 The additional sources are presented in my dissertation.
- 31 Considering that the Lexicon and the Course treated the same areas of knowledge, this is not surprising. Wolff's *Cours de mathématique* contains elaborate treatises devoted to the branches of both “pure” mathematics (e.g. arithmetic, algebra, geometry and trigonometry) and “mixed” mathematics (e.g. mechanics, hydrostatics, hydraulics and aerometry, optics, dioptric and catoptric, architecture, astronomy, navigation, gnomonic, perspective, geography, chronology, fortification and attack and defense of places). In the *Vollständiges Mathematisches Lexicon*, elements from the same areas are treated in alphabetically organized articles.
- 32 BnF. Ms. Fr. 16984, fols. 44^r–85^v.
- 33 BnF. Ms. NaF. 3347: La librairie sous Mr. de Malesherbes.
- 34 Pierre Grosclaude: Malesherbes – Témoin et interprète de son temps, Paris: Fischbacher 1961, pp. 102–103.
- 35 The arguments for this dating of the letter are explained in detail in my dissertation.
- 36 BnF. Ms. NaF. 3347, fol. 199: Requête au Chancelier de Charles-Antoine Jombert, libraire de l'artillerie et du génie, relative à la concurrence que lui créent les traducteurs de Chambers. “Dictionnaire sur les mathématiques, la physique et toutes les sciences et arts qui en dépendent et qui à proprement parler est un Dictionnaire Universel.”
- 37 Ibid., fol. 199. “[Les] auteurs qui travaillent depuis près de trois ans à rassembler tous les matériaux nécessaires pour remplir ce vaste projet [...]”
- 38 Ibid., fol. 199. Jombert writes that the Chancellor granted him a general license for a number of works “three years ago”. All the enumerated works are listed in the license obtained in 1743. See Wolff: Cours de mathématique, vol. 2, pp. 358–360.
- 39 Ibid., fol. 199. “[...] Le Dictionnaire de mathématique et des arts qui y ont rapport, par le célèbre M. Wolffius [...] dont on a suivi le plan et la méthode, et qui sert de base et de fondement à celui-ci [...]”
- 40 Ibid. “Le suppliant a le chagrin de voir que [...] quelqu'un de ses confrères viennent d'obtenir un privilège pour un Dictionnaire au peu près dans le même goût que le sien, quoiqu'il ne dût être d'abord qu'une simple traduction de l'Encyclopédie de Chambers [...]”
- 41 John Lough: The Encyclopédie, Geneva: Slatkine 1989, pp. 9–10.
- 42 Ibid., pp. 13–14.
- 43 Ibid.
- 44 BnF. Ms. NaF. 3347, fol. 199. “[...] ces mêmes libraires ayans eu avis de son projet veulent s'opposer à la publication de son prospectus [...]”
- 45 Ozanam: Les Éléments d'Euclide (fn. 25), p. 528.
- 46 Bousquet-Bressolier: Charles-Antoine Jombert (fn. 20), pp. 299–311.
- 47 The documentation preserved from the earliest stage of the project is very fragmentary. See Louis-Philippe May: Documents nouveaux sur l'Encyclopédie – Histoire et sources de l'Encyclopédie d'après le registre de délibérations et de comptes des éditeurs et un mémoire inédit ; in Revue de synthèse 5 (1938), p. 7–30.
- 48 See Leca-Tsiomis: Écrire l'Encyclopédie (fn. 6), pp. 31–104.
- 49 May: Documents nouveaux sur l'Encyclopédie (fn. 47), p. 9, 18–21.
- 50 BnF. Ms. NaF. 3347, fol. 199.
- 51 The evidence pointing in this direction is further treated in my dissertation.
- 52 Alexandre Saverien: Dictionnaire universel de mathématique et de physique, où l'on traite de l'origine, du progrès de ces

- deux sciences et des arts qui en dépendent et des diverses révolutions qui leur sont arrivées jusqu'à notre temps, avec l'explication de leur principes et l'analyse des sentiments des plus célèbres auteurs sur chaque matière, Paris: Jombert & Rollin 1753.
- 53 Prospectus – Dictionnaire universel de mathématique et de physique, contenant l'explication des termes de ces deux sciences, & des arts qu en dépendent, tirés des Dictionnaires de mathématique d'Ozanam, de Wolf, de Stône, & d'un grand nombre d'autres Ouvrages. Avec leur origine, leurs progrès, leurs Révolutions, leurs principes, & les sentiments des plus célèbres Auteurs sur chaque matière. Par M. Saverien, Ingénieur de la Marine, Paris: Jombert 1749.
- 54 Comparisons between the first draft of the Maurists, the dictionary of Saverien and the Lexicon of Wolff are treated in detail in my dissertation.
- 55 This became a common strategy among many publishers of lexicographic literature in the second half of the century. See Pierre Rézat: *L'âge des dictionnaires*; in Roger Chartier & Henri-Jean Martin (Ed.): *Histoire de l'édition française* (fn. 17), p. 232.
- 56 My dissertation contains a detailed handwriting analysis of the manuscripts.
- 57 BnF. Ms. Fr. 16980, fols. 40^r, 121^r.
- 58 BnF. Ms. Fr. 16980, fols. 27^r, 42^r, 52^r, 58^r, 59^r, 64^r, 167^r, 181^r, 189^r, 197^r, 233^r, 264^r, 265^r, 145^r; BnF. Ms. Fr. 16984, fol. 263^r.
- 59 France Littéraire, Paris: Duchesne 1755, p. 186.
- 60 France Littéraire, Paris: Duchesne 1756, p. 171.
- 61 BnF. Ms. Fr. 16980, fols. 283–304. The sources are enumerated in my dissertation.
- 62 BnF. Ms. Fr. 16984, fols. 1^r–43^r.
- 63 BnF. Ms. Fr. 16980.
- 64 See for example BnF. Ms. Fr. 16981, fols. 2^r–4^r, 6^r–9^r, 14^r, 18^r, 20^r, 24^r; BnF. Ms. Fr. 16979, fol. 5^r; BnF. Ms. Fr. 16983, fols. 8^r, 219^r.
- 65 BnF. Ms. Fr. 16983.
- 66 BnF. Ms. Fr. 16981.
- 67 BnF. Ms. Fr. 16979.
- 68 Jacques Proust: *Questions sur l'Encyclopédie*; in *Revue d'histoire littéraire de la France*, 72 (1972), p. 40. "Tous les articles de l'Encyclopédie, même les plus 'originaux', sont faits de matériaux en partie empruntés. Ce ne sont même parfois que de longues citations mises bout à bout, avec ou sans indication de source."
- 69 Leca-Tsiomis: *Écrire l'Encyclopédie* (fn. 6), p. 152. "L'universalisme lexicographique [...] tend avant tout à la collection vorace; tout lui est bon pour augmenter la liste des vocables."
- 70 Ibid., p. 152. "L'encyclopédisme [...] choisit dans la liste, découpe, classe, trie, retient ou expulse."
- 71 Ibid., p. 153. "Bref, la nomenclature encyclopédique procède d'une logique autre que celle de l'accumulation."
- 72 Dictionnaire de Trévoux, 4th edn., Paris 1743, vol. 1, columns 6–59.
- 73 Encyclopédie, ou dictionnaire raisonné des sciences, des arts et des métiers, Paris 1751, vol. 1, pp. 6–49.
- 74 Dictionnaire de Trévoux 1743, vol. 1, "Ab", "abat-jour", "abokelle", "abomasus", "abondant", "abstraire".
- 75 BnF. Ms. Fr. 16982, fol. 1 "Ab"; fol. 4 "abat-jour"; fol. 7 "abondant"; fol. 13 "abstraire".
- 76 Yeo: *Encyclopedic visions* (fn. 3), pp. 18–22.
- 77 Walter W. Ross: *Antoine Furetière's Dictionnaire universel*; in Frank A. Kafker (Ed.): *Notable Encyclopedias of the Seventeenth and Eighteenth Centuries: Nine Predecessors of the Encyclopédie*, Oxford: The Voltaire Foundation 1981, p. 64.
- 78 Leca-Tsiomis: *Écrire l'Encyclopédie* (fn. 6), p. 58. "[...] purgé de tout ce qu'on y a introduit de contraire à la Religion catholique."
- 79 Ibid., p. 230. "[...] l'imputation d'incompétence, [...] celle de vol des articles et celle d'hérésie, celle d'irréligion et d'impiété."
- 80 See for instance BnF. Ms. Fr. 16980, 23^r, 71^r, 96^r.
- 81 Martine Groult: *L'encyclopédisme dans les mots et les choses – Différence entre la Cyclopaedia et l'Encyclopédie*; in Françoise Tilkin (Ed.): *L'Encyclopédisme au XVIII^e siècle*, Geneva: Droz 2008, p. 169. "[...] en libérant l'encyclopédisme du point de départ contraignant du divin [...]."
- 82 See for instance Aude Doody: *Pliny's Encyclopedia – The Reception of the Natural History*, Cambridge/New York: Cambridge University Press 2010, p. 75. Doody writes that the *Encyclopédie* expanded "the horizon of what counted as common cultural knowledge" by making "the work of manufacturers the subject of legitimate interest and scrutiny on the part of the emergent bourgeoisie". The Maurists emphasis on the manufactures and industries are further treated in my dissertation.

□