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## The Maurists' Unfinished Encyclopedia

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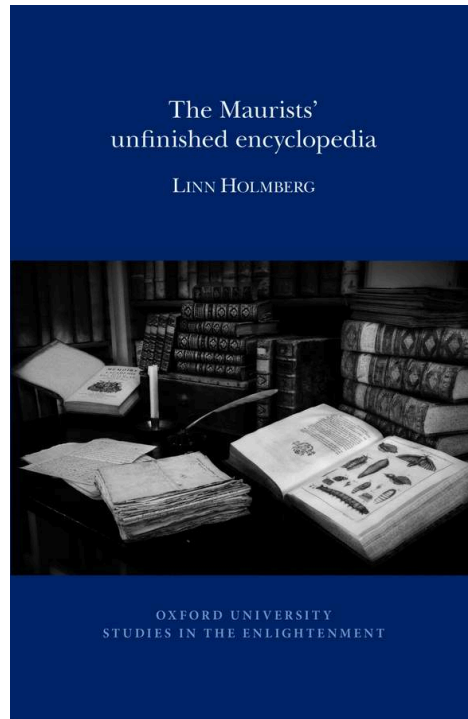
Enrico Pasini

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## REFERENCES

Lynn Holmberg, *The Maurists' Unfinished Encyclopedia*, Voltaire Foundation, Oxford, 2017, p. xv-313. ISBN 9780729411912, £ 70.

## 1 The Congregation of Saint-Maur, founded



in 1618 inside the Benedictine order, by 1770 had already been the subject of a reference work, a *histoire* (in the academic meaning of annual records) and a literary history (F. Le Cerf, *Bibliothèque historique et critique des auteurs de la Congrégation de Saint-Maur*, La Haye: Pierre Gosse, 1726; E. Martène, *Histoire de la Congrégation de Saint-Maur*, éd. par G. Charvin, 10 vols., Paris: Picard, 1928-1954; R.P. Tassin, *Histoire littéraire de la congrégation de Saint-Maur, ordre de S. Benoit*, Paris: Humblot, 1770). Distinguished for their learning, they were based at St-Germain-des-Prés, where their most famous representative, Mabillon, spent 43 immensely productive years. The Maurists edited the Fathers, collaborated to Du Cange's *Glossarium*, and variously deployed their erudition. They were suppressed during the Revolution, their superior general being guillotined in 1790.

- 2 A particular enterprise of theirs remained unachieved and largely unsung: two monks, Dom Antoine-Joseph Pernety and Dom François de Brézillac, devoted years of toil to the project of a universal dictionary of arts, crafts, and sciences, that was initiated in the same year 1747 in which the *Encyclopédie, ou Dictionnaire raisonné des sciences, des arts et des métiers* made its start. Pernety would eventually develop a taste for esotericism and leave the Congregation to become a disciple of Swedenborg's. The author describes her approach to an unfinished manuscript devoid of any prefatory material as that of "a detective", looking for "clues" in the six in-folio volumes that have survived, and thus scrutinizing nearly 7000 articles, illustrations, "and a multitude of working lists" (11). She analyses the plans, the lemmatisation, the distribution of authors and articles, the sources (e.g. Wolff's *Mathematisches Lexicon*, the *Dictionnaire de Trévoux*), the project phases and its transformations. Much information is presented, and the comparison with the *Encyclopédie* is constant.
- 3 The project was abandoned around 1754-55, and the decision, the author says, "could have many reasons" (138): it had become too large and expensive to manage; its success relied, as it had often happened in the Congregation, on individual efforts that were not

entirely dependable; the autonomy and amplitude of its cultural program were insufficient and, had it been published, it would probably have been “eclipsed by the controversial but successful *Encyclopédie*” (242). But the very fact that, among a congregation of pious supererudites, this much more mundane enterprise was begun, testifies to the spirit of a time when compilers of encyclopedic dictionaries “aspired to describe and illustrate work processes rather than merely defining the vocabulary of artisans” (182). All these aspects are thoroughly studied and attentively assessed in this book, that—although its object may be deemed by some exceedingly particular—is indeed informative and useful.