

# CONCLUSION

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The time has come to conclude this presentation. I hope everyone will have understood why we entitled it "The *Encyclopaedia's* Adventure."

From the simple translation of a two-volume English dictionary, to 28 volumes at its completion, the *Encyclopaedia*, by its scale, its variety, by the success it knew and also by the many obstacles it had to overcome was a real adventure, conducted for 25 years by Diderot, its genius leader, with the help of D'Alembert and the knight of Jaucourt.

We have been able to define the five great innovations of this immense work. First it was a collective endeavour. It was a dictionary, obviously, but enlivened by a set of cross-references. It was an encyclopaedia that gave floor to the trades as well as, in a unique fashion, to everyday language. Finally, it illustrated, thanks to the drawn and engraved plates, nature and the whole range of human activity. The *Encyclopaedia* focused the attention of all that Europe had of scholars and men of letters, and in France itself it found an immense resonance and counted among its supporters Malesherbes and the Marquise of Pompadour.

But it also had many enemies, especially in religious circles and with Court's devotees. Its publication was forbidden twice, and the second time, in 1759, was a permanent prohibition. It was completed in secret, and its volumes of plates do not even bear the title "Encyclopaedia". It still did not prevent it from being plagiarised, copied, with numerous pirate editions in France and Europe. Finally, it had an abundant legacy up to the 19<sup>th</sup> century.

To change the common way of thinking, as Diderot wished, was to make room for discoveries, for living heritages, for scientific advances. We saw a few examples of this in medicine, chemistry, physics or veterinary medicine. Changing the common way of thinking was also a challenge. We saw that the intellectual courage of publishers and of the many authors met this challenge both on a political and religious level.

The Enlightenment's thought is reflected in its articles, despite attacks and censures, like denunciation of classism, intolerance, fanaticism, institutional barbarities, prohibitions of thought; they also managed to emphasise a new moral oriented towards kindness and happiness, critical thinking and the transmission of knowledge. To transmit knowledge but also to illustrate it; we have seen how much plates reflect not only nature but also sciences and the arts of manual trades, to which the *Encyclopaedia* pays tribute. It was a question of collecting technical knowledge and diffusing it as widely as possible so that it would be useful to everyone.

And to this work, open to all knowledge, sciences, philosophy and literature, participated the most famous authors of the time. Montesquieu, for example, before he died, left to the Encyclopaedists fragments of an article on taste, which Diderot presents as follows: "It will be an eternal testimony of the interest great men of the nation took in this work; it will be said in the centuries to come: Voltaire and Montesquieu also took part in the *Encyclopaedia*."

Today, in the Internet age, the *Encyclopaedia* seems to us strangely contemporary. It has offered what we call "an interactive journey" for more than 250 years, thanks to the constant play of cross-references, counterpart of today's hypertext links. It was contemporary also in its desire to question and decompartmentalise knowledge. It is even ahead of our time in other respects, with its ability to render knowledge accessible to those who seek it, in common language, and especially with a concern of the human race and its future giving meaning and content to its didactic project.

That is why it's so important to recognise and enliven it, as we tried to do with ENCCRE, now yours to make the most of.



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