Enlightening the plates of the Encyclopédie (Paris, 27–29 May 21)

Paris, Sorbonne Université, May 27–29, 2021
Deadline: Sep 30, 2020
enccre.academie-sciences.fr/presse/Conference_the_Plates_of_the_Encyclopedie.pdf

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Enlightening the plates of the Encyclopédie. Perspectives and research on the Recueil de planches (1762-1772)

For several decades and due to the impulsion provided by the pioneering work of Jacques Proust, John Lough, Richard N. Schwab and then Frank A. Kafker, the studies on the "Encyclopédie, ou Dictionnaire raisonné des sciences, des arts et des métiers" (1751-1772) by Diderot and D'Alembert proliferated. Many conferences, books and articles, including those published since 1986 in the review Recherches sur Diderot et sur l'Encyclopédie, testify to this. Easier access to the work thanks to digital editions (the one designed by the Redon company, commercially distributed since 2000, and then the ARTFL edition, freely accessible on the web) have also contributed to this dynamic. The online publication in 2017 of a first critical digital edition of the work (ENCCRE) is a new stage in the interest shown by historians from all disciplines in this essential monument of the Age of Enlightenment.

Despite the founding studies already cited, Madeleine Pinault-Sørensen's seminal contributions and many other works dedicated to the 11 volumes of plates of the Encyclopedie, the latter remain far less known and studied than the 17 volumes of articles (1751-1765) that came before and refer to them, as if the illustrations and their relationship to the text, although considered as one of the most important innovations of the Encyclopedie, had in the end met less interest than the articles themselves.

Today, ENCCRE –– thanks to its high-quality digitization of the engraved plates and its ability to directly relate illustrations and explanations –– allows us to rediscover this iconographic treasure with a fresh eye and offers new resources for exploring it. More generally, new technologies encourage us to imagine specific ways of analyzing these illustrations, the explanations that accompany them, their reciprocal links and their relationship with the volumes of articles. It is therefore essential to hold an international conference to review the research specifically dedicated to the plates of the Encyclopédie.

In this perspective, we launch a call for papers for the conference “Les Planches de l'Encyclopédie en lumière” which will be held over three days at Sorbonne University from 27 to 29 May 2021 and within the framework of which the common reflection will be organized around four main axes

(hereafter, we will refer to the Recueil to designate the 11 volumes of the Recueil de planches sur les sciences et les arts, and to “series” to designate each of the thematic chapters which constitute it, such as “Anatomie”, “Bouchonnier” or “Draperie”).

The questions addressed by each of the axes are not limitative:

1. The manufacture of the engraved plates and series of the Recueil, i.e. all the questions relating to the modalities of their intellectual manufacture and the history of their editorial production: what are the sources of the plates? How were they used (additions, modifications, arrangement)? Have preparatory drawings been preserved? To what extent do these elements shed light on the content of the plates and the intentions of their author(s)? Furthermore, what are the elements that make it possible to reconstruct and, possibly, date the stages of the making of a series?

2. The contributors of the plates, i.e. the Encyclopédie’s draftsmen and engravers: who are they? What place did their work for the Encyclopédie hold in their career? What role(s) have they played in the Encyclopédie? What is their contribution (explicit attributions and attribution hypotheses)? Do they differ from each other according to technical and/or stylistic criteria?

3. The explanations of the plates, i.e. all the questions relating to the “Explications” which form the first part of each series of the Recueil before the corresponding engraved plates. This essential subject can be approached from several angles:
- authors: what do we know about the authors whose explanations bear the explicit signature? To what extent can we attribute to them the many unsigned plates in the book? Are they also contributors for articles on the same subjects?
- editor: question of Diderot's role, not only as author of explanations, but also as editor of the entire collection (organization of the series, writing of the introductory pieces presenting the volumes, etc.): at the end of the detailed statement of volume II (1763), he states that he “reviewed all the arts and crafts [explanations] on the manuscript and on the plates”;
- relations with the engraved plates: different types of links between explanations and illustrations according to the series? Additional cross-references to the articles (with the effects of repetition, correction or replacement)? There is also the more general question of the relationship between text and image as the Encyclopédie establishes it and, sometimes, takes them up as a central theme.
It is also possible to study in this perspective the relations between articles and plates in a given field: concordance or not between the articles and the figures they describe? Possible replacement of the plates on which the articles were written and for what reasons? Questions which also refer to the problem of the manufacture of a series (axis n° 1), whether or not associated with the writing of the articles.

4. The place of the plates of the Encyclopédie in the history of illustration in the 18th century: can we situate the traditional and innovative parts of the Recueil in relation to the standards of the time, according to the weight, place and roles of the illustrations in the book? According to the link that the plates maintain within the book with their explanations and the articles associated with them? To what extent can the book be considered as an illustrated corpus? More generally, to what extent the Recueil can be considered as a part of the history of the circulation of knowledge in the 18th century?

The proposed papers must necessarily fall within one or more of the previous axes. They may consist of a case study or address a more general issue.

They should be sent before 30 September 2020 to enccre@gmail.com. Proposals will include a title and an abstract of about fifteen lines, supplemented by some general information: your status within your institution (and department if necessary), main research topics, list of publications related to the themes of the colloquium and/or the French 18th century.

The languages of the conference are French and English.

More information: http://enccre.academie-sciences.fr/presse/Conference_the_Plates_of_the_Encyclopedie.pdf (English) and http://enccre.academie-sciences.fr/presse/Colloque_Les_Planches_de_l_Encyclopedie.pdf (French)

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Reference:

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