

# Credibility and Divination in the Age of Reason

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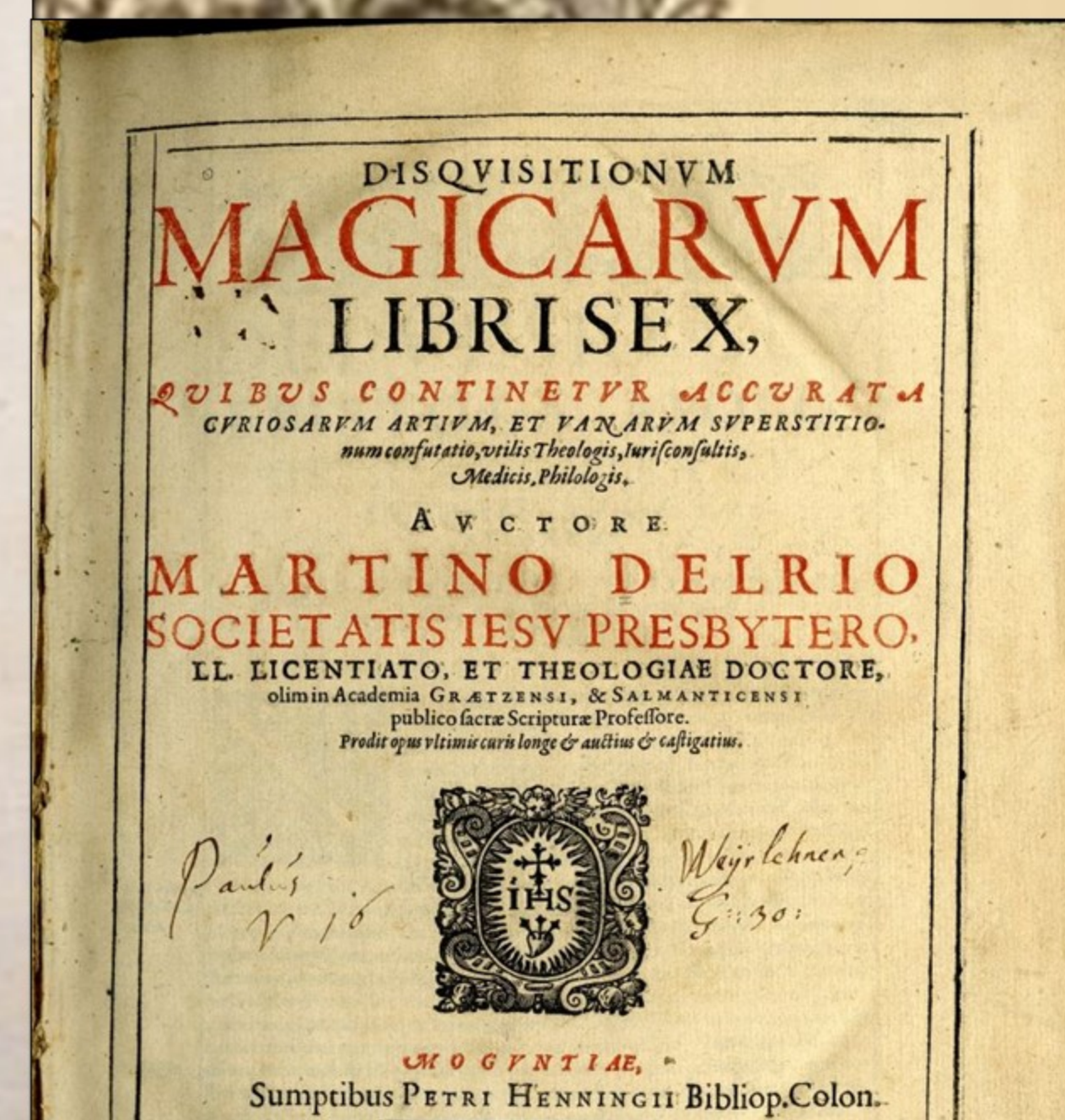
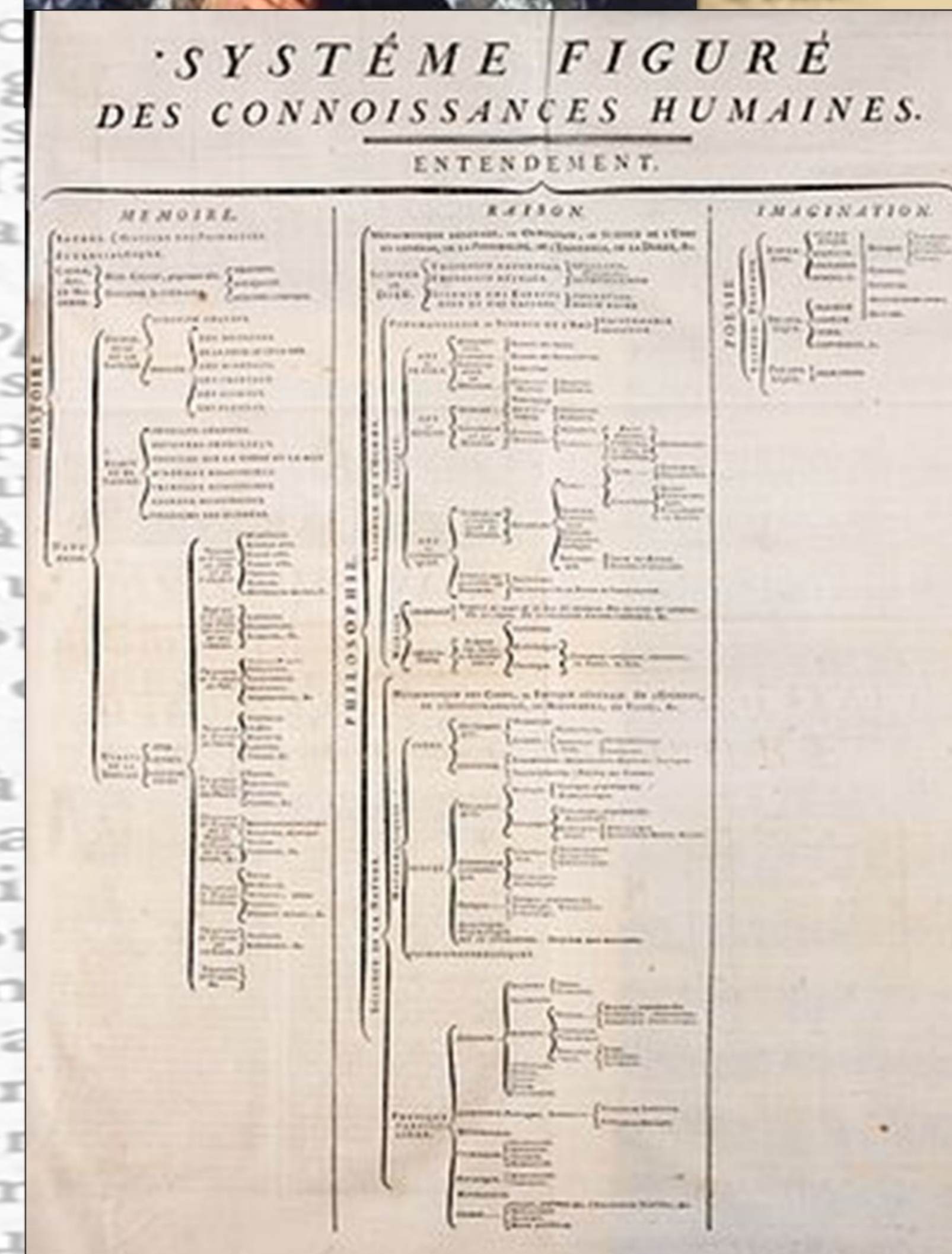
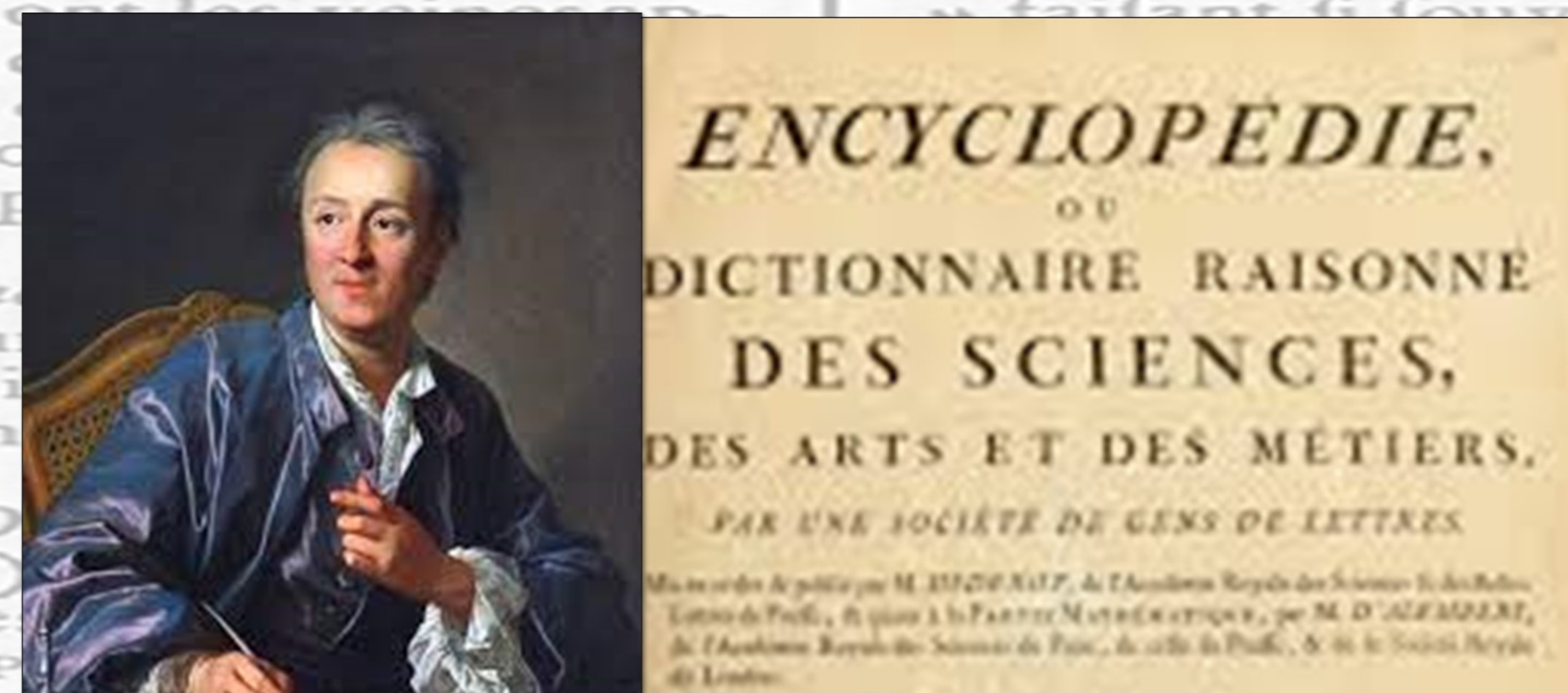
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## Abstract:

Credibility is vital for comprehending the world around us. This is as true today as it was in the 18th century when Diderot and d'Alembert were producing France's first *Encyclopédie*. Translating articles from this body of knowledge provides insight into public perceptions of credibility. Designed to collect and share knowledge, the *Encyclopédie* required extensive collaboration among experts and editors. Article topics ranged from philosophy to the arts to physical science. What made these articles credible? Was it the oversight of well-known editors, the use of already verified sources, or the seal of approval from the State? Or was it a mix of these? What if the topics strayed into mystical territory? Numerous articles delve into the realm of divination, exploring types, procedures, and history. How were entries on ophiomancy, pyromancy, alectryomancy, and other types of divination legitimized? What does this reveal about credibility in the Age of Enlightenment?



## Authors/Delrio:

While translating articles about divination, there was one work that was cited multiple times. Martin Delrio (1551-1608) wrote *Disquisitiones magicae*, which was first published in 1599, and subsequently used in the *Encyclopédie* to solidify the authority of articles about divination. Other works cited in these articles include *History* (a work by Greek historian Niketas), *De Inventoribus Rerum* (a work by Polydore Virgil), and *Histoire du ciel* (a work by Noël-Antoine Pluche).

## Helpful Resources:

During the translating process, there were many words or phrases that were difficult to translate for various reasons. Different resources were consulted based on the issue.

- Dictionnaires d'autrefois: French dictionaries of the 17th, 18th, 19th and 20th centuries were helpful for understanding archaic words.
- Many of the articles also contained Latin words or phrases, which presented challenges and required additional research.
- Chambers' *Cyclopaedia* provided clarification of ideas, since many of the articles were published there before being translated to French.
- Plates, which were images corresponding to certain articles, were visually helpful for understanding technical articles.

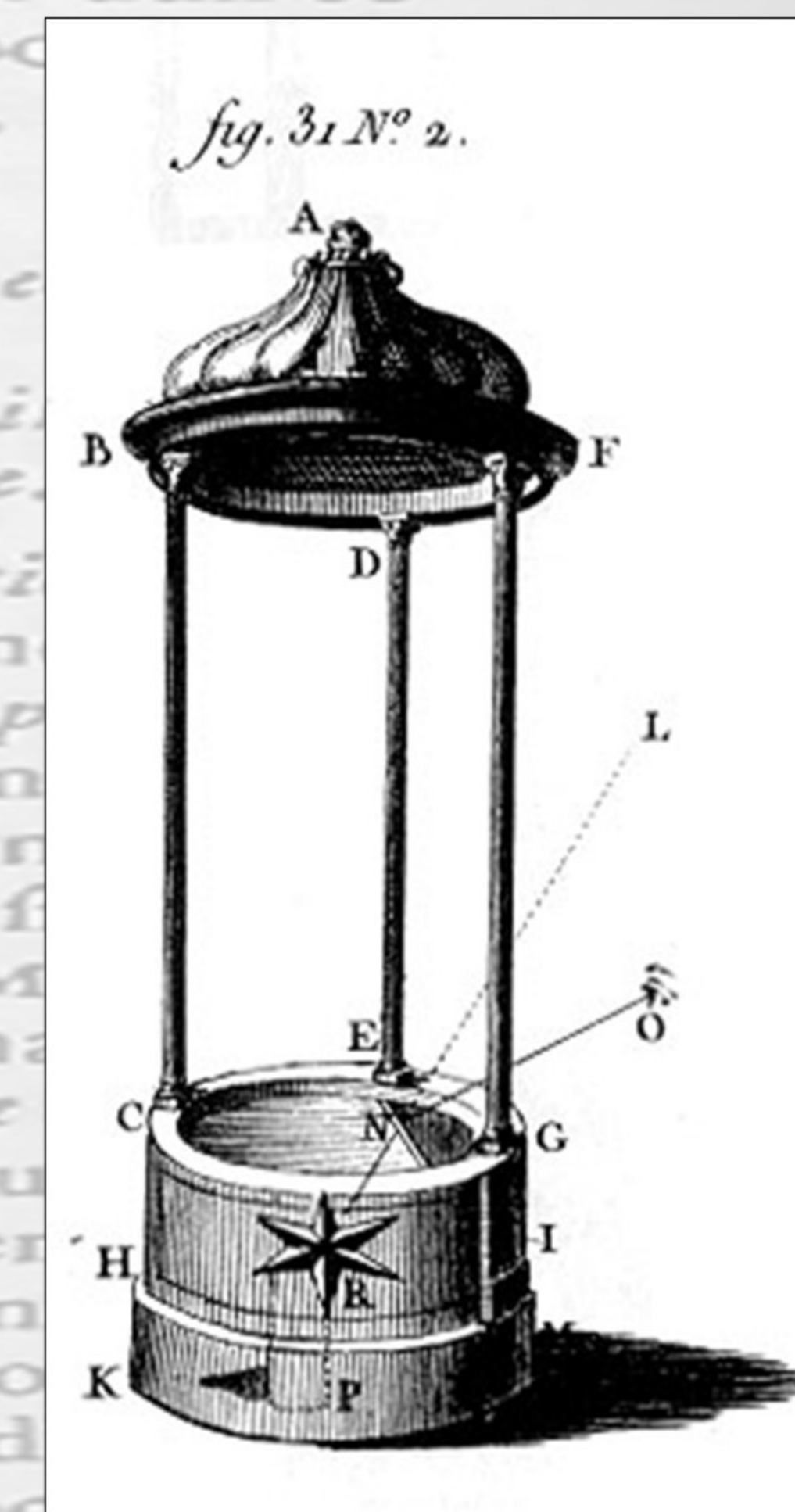
## L'Encyclopédie:

What started as a simple translation project of Chambers' *Cyclopaedia* from English to French became a collaborative encyclopedia of its own. It was a prime example of the influence of the Age of Enlightenment and the Scientific Revolution in Europe. The vast number of articles written and topics covered are what made the *Encyclopédie* so different from others of its time. Against the wishes of the State, articles challenged societal norms and touted freedom of thought.

- Written, edited, and printed in the 1700s.
- Total of 27 volumes published from 1751-1772.
- A tree of knowledge was used to organize the articles, mainly inspired by Francis Bacon. Diderot and d'Alembert "followed it so closely that they were accused of plagiarism." (Darnton 198)

## Articles Translated for OURE Project

Article Title	Word Count	# of References	Antiquity	Between	Contemporary
Aeromancy	135	2	X	X	
Alectryomancy	291	3	X	X	
Aleuromancy	80	2		X	
Geomancy	262	7		X	
Hydromancy	1,069	9	X	X	
Ophiomancy	434	4	X	X	
Pyromancy	559	6	X	X	
Teratoscopy	140	0			



## Credibility:

The articles that I translated about divination did not cite contemporary sources. I believe that the use of scholarly sources from the past was purposeful, as divination was already declining in popularity. This would have made it difficult to find contemporary sources to use, making it necessary to cite outdated tomes. And while the *Encyclopédie* may have been considered credible when it was published, the inclusion of topics like divination and magic detract from its overall believability.

## An example of reliance on other references:

"Delrio says that Lithuanians still practiced a type of pyromancy during his time. He says, "To know what the outcome of a sickness will be, they put the sick person before a large fire. If the shadow formed by the body is straight and directly opposite the fire, that is, according to them, a sign of healing. If on the contrary, the shadow appears on the side, they despair and consider the sick person dead." Delrio, *Disquisitionum Magicarum*, book IV, chapter ii, section iv, question vii, p. 550 & 251. ("Pyromancy")

## Collaborative Translation Project:

The Collaborative Translation Project, following in the footsteps of the *Encyclopédie* of Diderot and d'Alembert, "is a collaborative effort of volunteers translators who share an interest in the Enlightenment and a belief in the value of making freely available in English readers articles from the *Encyclopédie*."

## Conclusions:

Authors covered topics "ranging from asparagus to zodiac," and used plates to add helpful imagery, making the *Encyclopédie* a comprehensive work. In order to bolster credibility, authors relied on referencing external sources, especially from antiquity and previous centuries.

What Diderot and d'Alembert were able to achieve with the *Encyclopédie* is incredible and something that we strive to achieve today via Wikipedia and other online encyclopedias, including the Collaborative Translation Project. A collection of knowledge that is accessible to and worked on by many is something that will always be useful.

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