



Rare Books, Manuscripts, Maps & Photographs (630)

Wed, 24th Feb 2021, Live Online

Viewing Times:

In-person viewing is unavailable. Please contact us for further information, photographs or detailed condition reports regarding any of the items in the sale.

Lot 58

Estimate: £15000 - £20000 + Fees

Diderot, Denis - Jean Le Rond D'Alembert *Encyclopédie, ou Dictionnaire, Raisonné des Sciences, des Arts et des Metiers, par une Société de Gens de Lettres*

Paris: Chez Briasson, David, Le Breton, Durand / Chez Pancoucke / M.M. Rey, 1751 -1780. First edition, 35 volumes, including Supplements and Index volumes (i.e. 17 text volumes; 11 plate volumes; 2 tables volumes & 5 supplement volumes including supplement plates), folio, engraved frontispiece, 2783 (of 2784?) engraved plates, contemporary mottled calf gilt, red morocco gilt labels and gilt tooling to spines, a little rubbing to some volumes, and a little wear and occasional slight cracking to joints, a few spine labels faded, a few pages slightly creased in places, ink library number to volume 1 half-title and to volume 3 of the supplement, occasional light foxing and light browning to some leaves (35)

Note: A "bible of enlightenment" according to Denis Diderot's biographer, P.N. Furbank, the *Encyclopédie, ou Dictionnaire Raisonné des Sciences, des Arts et des Metiers* was first published in 1751. It had been advertised the previous year in a prospectus, promising a 10 volume set (comprising 8 text volumes and 2 plate volumes), with a subscription cost of 280 livres (£14) - or 25 livres per volume for those not willing or able to subscribe to the complete series. The final number of subscriptions totalled an impressive 4000, with an additional 25 volumes, including supplements, being added to the anticipated 10 by 1780.

The *Encyclopédie* was originally conceived of by the publisher, André le Breton, as a simple translation of Chambers *Cyclopaedia* from English into French. Denis Diderot, as editor, alongside the mathematician, Jean Le Rond d'Alembert, pushed the work far beyond this and placed the *Encyclopédie* clearly in the enlightenment tradition of Bacon, Descartes, Newton and Locke. A vast number of 18th century writers contributed to the work and Diderot, as editor, would take their writings and subtly remodel and expand them, aligning them to his own world view. The subscribers - a wealthy collection of people bearing in mind a reasonable salary in the 1750s sat at around £7 - were thus exposed to the notions of religious tolerance and government for the benefit of the masses, woven throughout the text.

The *Encyclopédie* is credited with delivering a blow against the established church, with its focus on rationalism and science. The work's attitude towards history is more cursory, placing this in "Arts of Memory", and there is a complete absence of biographical articles, unless nestled amongst the description of a location. Furbank writes: "D'Alembert... would say that he and his co-editor had purposely included not the genealogies of great families, but the genealogies of sciences..." Indeed, even after formal suppression of the work

by the state in 1759, Diderot managed to continue the surreptitious production of this key work of enlightenment thinking.