



Seminar

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*Dictionary Craze:  
Transforming Knowledge across  
Early Modern Europe*

Tuesday, 2 March 2021, 2:15 p.m.

Due to the precautions imposed by the current Corona pandemic, the Thunberg Hall will be closed to the public until further notice.

You are therefore invited to join the seminar via Zoom instead:

<https://uu-se.zoom.us/j/66892111617>

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## ABOUT LINN HOLMBERG

Linn Holmberg earned her PhD in History of Science and Ideas from Umeå University in 2014. Her dissertation, *The Forgotten Encyclopedia*, received the Royal Swedish Academy of Letters, History and Antiquities' award for prize-worthy dissertations in 2015 as well as Johan Nordström's and Sten Lindroth's prize for scholarly excellence in 2016.

Holmberg's research is broadly concerned with information management in early modern Europe. She is especially interested in the emergence of the encyclopedic dictionary and its role in transforming and democratizing knowledge.

Her interest in encyclopedias took form during her PhD studies, when she explored the history of an encyclopedic enterprise in mid-eighteenth-century Paris, led by Benedictine scholars at the same time as Diderot and D'Alembert compiled the famous *Encyclopédie*. Unlike the philosophers, however, the monks never finished or published their work. By using handwriting analysis, comparative literature studies, and extensive archival detective work, Holmberg reconstructed the monks' working process and ended up unearthing a hitherto unknown rival of the *Encyclopédie*, which ultimately challenged the latter's position in narratives about the French Enlightenment. In her postdoctoral projects, she has continued exploring encyclopedic projects in eighteenth-century Scandinavia.

Holmberg is the author of *The Maurists' Unfinished Encyclopedia* (2017) and co-editor with Maria Simonsen of *Stranded Encyclopedias: Broken Dreams of Complete Knowledge, 1700–2000* (forthcoming from Palgrave MacMillan, 2021).

As a Pro Futura Scientia Fellow, she is working on a project entitled 'Dictionary Craze: Transforming Knowledge across Early Modern Europe', in which she traces the emergence of the encyclopedic dictionary seen from the European periodical press (c. 1665–1800) and explores how the genre transformed the ways in which knowledge was conceptualized, consumed, and debated across European societies.

## ABSTRACT

Today we can barely remember how we used to live before it was possible to look everything up on the Internet. As the new information technology rapidly reshapes the way knowledge is communicated, consumed, and conceptualized, its far-reaching societal consequences are met with fears as well as hope. Yet this is not the first time that a new format for managing information has fundamentally transformed our system of knowledge. Three hundred years ago, alphabetically-organized dictionaries and encyclopedias were considered a new and curious phenomenon – praised by some as revolutionary 'short-cuts to knowledge', feared by others as 'weapons in the hands of fools'.

In this talk, I will present my Pro Futura project, entitled 'Dictionary Craze: Transforming Knowledge across Early Modern Europe', in which I explore the transnational process when the alphabetically-organized reference work was established on European book markets, and the intellectual, practical, and emotional consequences that followed in its trail. Long before the rise of smartphones, how did dictionaries contribute to reshaping the ways knowledge was communicated, consumed, and conceptualized – and by whom?