



Universalitas & Pervasivitas

IL COSTITUIRSI E DIFFONDERSI DELLA S.J. E SUOI ECHI (1540 - 1773)
di A. Pisani

Schede autori Contesto teologico e filosofico

Athanasius Kircher

Athanasius Kircher (1601 or 1602 – 1680) (sometimes erroneously spelled Kirchner) was a 17th century German Jesuit scholar who published around 40 works, most notably in the fields of oriental studies, geology, and medicine. Kircher has been compared to fellow Jesuit Roger Boscovich and to Leonardo da Vinci for his enormous range of interests, and has been honoured with the title "master of a hundred arts".[2]

Kircher was the most famous "decipherer" of hieroglyphs of his day, although most of his assumptions and "translations" in this field have since been disproved as nonsensical. However, he did make an early study of Egyptian hieroglyphs, correctly establishing the link between the ancient Egyptian language and the Coptic language, for which he has been considered the founder of Egyptology. He was also fascinated with Sinology, and wrote an encyclopedia of China, in which he noted the early presence of Nestorian Christians but also attempted to establish more tenuous links with Egypt and Christianity.

Kircher's work with geology included studies of volcanos and fossils. One of the first people to observe microbes through a microscope, he was thus ahead of his time

in proposing that the plague was caused by an infectious microorganism and in suggesting effective measures to prevent the spread of the disease. Kircher also displayed a keen interest in technology and mechanical inventions, and inventions attributed to him include a magnetic clock, various automatons and the first megaphone. The invention of the magic lantern is often misattributed to Kircher, although he did conduct a study of the principles involved in his *Ars Magna Lucis et Umbrae*.

A scientific star in his day, towards the end of his life he was eclipsed by the rationalism of René Descartes and others. In the late 20th century, however, the aesthetic qualities of his work again began to be appreciated. One modern scholar, Alan Cutler, described Kircher as "a giant among seventeenth-century scholars", and "one of the last thinkers who could rightfully claim all





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knowledge as his domain".[3] Another scholar, Edward W. Schmidt, referred to Kircher as "the last Renaissance man".

Life

Kircher was born on 2 May in either 1601 or 1602 (he himself did not know) in Geisa, Buchonia, near Fulda, currently Hesse, Germany. From his birthplace he took the epithets Bucho, Buchonius and Fuldensis which he sometimes added to his name. He attended the Jesuit College in Fulda from 1614 to 1618, when he joined the order himself as a seminarian.

The youngest of nine children, Kircher was a precocious youngster who was taught Hebrew by a rabbin addition to his studies at school. He studied philosophy and theology at Paderborn, but fled to Cologne in 1622 to escape advancing Protestant forces. On the journey, he narrowly escaped death after falling through the ice crossing the frozen Rhine — one of several occasions on which his life was endangered. Later, travelling to Heiligenstadt, he was caught and nearly hanged by a party of Protestant soldiers.

From 1622 to 1624 Kircher stayed in Koblenz as a teacher. At Heiligenstadt, he taught mathematics, Hebrew and Syriac, and produced a show of fireworks and moving scenery for the visiting Elector Archbishop of Mainz, showing early evidence of his interest in mechanical devices. He joined the priesthood in 1628 and became professor of ethics and mathematics at the University of Würzburg, where he also taught Hebrew and Syriac. From 1628, he also began to show an interest in Egyptian hieroglyphs.

Kircher published his first book (the *Ars Magnesia*, reporting his research on magnetism) in 1631, but the same year he was driven by the continuing Thirty Years' War to the papal University of Avignon in France. In 1633, he was called to Vienna by the emperor to succeed Kepler as Mathematician to the Habsburg court. On the intervention of Nicolas-Claude Fabri de Peiresc, the order was rescinded and he was sent instead to Rome to continue with his scholarly work, but he had already set off for Vienna.

On the way, his ship was blown off-course and he arrived in Rome before he knew of the changed decision. He based himself in the city for the rest of his life, and from 1638, he taught mathematics, physics and oriental languages at the Collegio Romano for several years before being released to devote himself to research. He studied malaria and the plague, amassing a collection of antiquities, which he exhibited along with devices of his own creation in the *Museum Kircherianum*.

In 1661, Kircher discovered the ruins of a church said to have been constructed by Constantine on the site of Saint Eustace's vision of Jesus Christ in a stag's horns. He raised money to pay for the church's reconstruction as the Santuario della Mentorella, and his heart was buried in the church on his death.

Work

Kircher published a large number of substantial books on a very wide variety of subjects, such as Egyptology, geology, and music theory. His syncretic approach paid no attention to the boundaries between disciplines which are now conventional: his *Magnes*, for example, was ostensibly a discussion of magnetism, but also explored other forms of attraction such as gravity and love. Perhaps Kircher's best-known work today is his *Oedipus Aegyptiacus* (1652–54) a vast study of Egyptology and comparative religion. His books, written in Latin, had a wide circulation in the 17th century, and they contributed to the dissemination of scientific information to a broader circle of readers. But Kircher is not now considered to have made any significant original contributions,



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although a number of discoveries and inventions (e.g., the magic lantern) have sometimes been mistakenly attributed to him.[4]

Linguistic and cultural studies

Egyptology

Young and Jean-François Champollion found the key to hieroglyphics in the 19th century, the main authority was the 4th century Greek grammarian Horapollon, whose chief contribution was the misconception that hieroglyphics were "picture writing" and that future translators should look for symbolic meaning in the pictures.[6] The first modern study of hieroglyphics came with Piero Valeriano Bolzani's nonsensical *Hieroglyphica* (1566),[5] but Kircher was the most famous of the "decipherers" between ancient and modern times and the most famous Egyptologist of his day.[7] In his *Lingua Aegyptiaca Restituta* (1643), Kircher called hieroglyphics "this language hitherto unknown in Europe, in which there are as many pictures as letters, as many riddles as sounds, in short as many mazes to be escaped from as mountains to be climbed".[7] While some of his notions are long discredited, portions of his work have been valuable to later scholars, and Kircher helped pioneer Egyptology as a field of serious study.

Kircher's interest in Egyptology began in 1628 when he became intrigued by a collection of hieroglyphs in the library at Speyer. He learned Coptic in 1633 and published the first grammar of that language in 1636, the *Prodromus coptus sive aegyptiacus*. Kircher then broke with Horapollon's interpretation of the language of the hieroglyphs with his *Lingua aegyptiaca restituta*. Kircher argued that Coptic preserved the last development of ancient Egyptian.[7][8] For this Kircher has been considered the true "founder of Egyptology", because his work was conducted "before the discovery of the Rosetta Stone rendered Egyptian hieroglyphics comprehensible to scholars".[8] He also recognised the relationship between the hieratic and hieroglyphic scripts.

Between 1650 and 1654, Kircher published four volumes of "translations" of hieroglyphs in the context of his Coptic studies.[7] However, according to Steven Frimmer, "none of them even remotely fitted the original texts".[7] In *Oedipus Aegyptiacus*, Kircher argued under the impression of the *Hieroglyphica* that ancient Egyptian was the language spoken by Adam and Eve, that Hermes Trismegistus was Moses, and that hieroglyphs were occult symbols which "cannot be translated by words, but expressed only by marks, characters and figures." This led him to translate simple hieroglyphic texts now known to read as dd Wsr ("Osiris says") as "The treachery of Typhon ends at the throne of Isis; the moisture of nature is guarded by the vigilance of Anubis".

Although his approach to deciphering the texts was based on a fundamental misconception, Kircher did pioneer serious study of hieroglyphs, and the data which he collected were later used by Champollion in his successful efforts to decode the script. Kircher himself was alive to the possibility of the hieroglyphs constituting an alphabet; he included in his proposed system (incorrect) derivations of the Greek alphabet from 21 hieroglyphs. However, according to Joseph MacDonnell, it was "because of Kircher's work that scientists knew what to look for when interpreting the Rosetta stone".[9] Another scholar of ancient Egypt, Erik Iverson, concluded:

It is therefore Kircher's incontestable merit that he was the first to have discovered the phonetic value of an Egyptian hieroglyph. From a humanistic as well as an intellectual point of view Egyptology may very well be proud of having Kircher as its founder.[10]

Kircher was also actively involved in the erection of obelisks in Roman squares, often adding fantastic "hieroglyphs" of his own design in the blank areas that are now puzzling to modern scholars.



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Sinology

Kircher had an early interest in China, telling his superior in 1629 that he wished to become a missionary to the country. His *China Illustrata* (1667) was an encyclopedia of China, which combined accurate cartography with mythical elements, such as dragons. The work emphasized the Christian elements of Chinese history, both real and imagined: he noted the early presence of Nestorians, but also claimed that the Chinese were descended from the sons of Ham, that Confucius was Hermes Trismegistus/Moses and that the Chinese characters were abstracted hieroglyphs. In his system, ideograms were inferior to hieroglyphs because they referred to specific ideas rather than to mysterious complexes of ideas, while the signs of the Maya and Aztecs were yet lower pictograms which referred only to objects. Umberto Eco comments that this idea reflected and supported the European attitude to the Chinese and native American civilisations:

"China was presented not as an unknown barbarian to be defeated but as a prodigal son who should return to the home of the common father". (p. 69)

Biblical studies and exegesis

In 1675, he published *Arca Noë*, the results of his research on the biblical Ark of Noah— following the Counter-Reformation, allegorical interpretation was giving way to the study of the Old Testament as literal truth among Scriptural scholars. Kircher analyzed the dimensions of the Ark; based on the number of species known to him (excluding insects and other forms thought to arise spontaneously), he calculated that overcrowding would not have been a problem. He also discussed the logistics of the Ark voyage, speculating on whether extra livestock was brought to feed carnivores and what the daily schedule of feeding and caring for animals must have been.

Other cultural work

Kircher reportedly received a copy of the “Voynich Manuscript”¹ in 1666; it was supposedly sent to him by Johannes Marcus Marci in the hope of his being able to decipher it, and remained in the Collegio Romano until Victor Emmanuel II of Italy annexed the Papal States in 1870, though scepticism as to the authenticity of the story and of the origin of the manuscript itself exists. In his *Polygraphia nova* (1663), Kircher proposed an artificial universal language.

Physical sciences

Geology

On a visit to southern Italy in 1638, the ever-curious Kircher was lowered into the crater of Vesuvius, then on the brink of eruption, in order to examine its interior. He was also intrigued by the subterranean rumbling which he heard at the Strait of Messina. His geological and geographical investigations culminated in his *Mundus Subterraneus* of 1664, in which he suggested that the tides were caused by water moving to and from a subterranean ocean.

Kircher was also puzzled by fossils. He understood that some were the remains of animals which had turned to stone, but ascribed others to human invention or to the spontaneous generative force of the earth. He ascribed large bones to giant races of humans.[11] Not all the objects which he was attempting to explain were in fact fossils, hence the diversity of explanations. He interpreted mountain ranges as the Earth's skeletal structures exposed by weathering.[12]

¹ <http://www.voynich.nu/>
http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Voynich_manuscript
<http://www.voynich.net/>
<http://www.wired.com/wired/archive/12.09/rugg.html>



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Medicine

Kircher took a notably modern approach to the study of diseases, as early as 1646 using a microscope to investigate the blood of plague victims. In his *Scrutinium Pestis* of 1658, he noted the presence of "little worms" or "animalcules" in the blood, and concluded that the disease was caused by microorganisms. The conclusion was correct, although it is likely that what he saw were in fact red or white blood cells and not the plague agent, *Yersinia pestis*. He also proposed hygienic measures to prevent the spread of disease, such as isolation, quarantine, burning clothes worn by the infected and wearing facemasks to prevent the inhalation of germs.

Technology

In 1646, Kircher published *Ars Magna Lucis et Umbrae*, on the subject of the display of images on a screen using an apparatus similar to the magic lantern as developed by Christian Huygens and others. Kircher described the construction of a "catotrophic lamp" that used reflection to project images on the wall of a darkened room. Although Kircher did not invent the device, he made improvements over previous models, and suggested methods by which exhibitors could use his device. Much of the significance of his work arises from Kircher's rational approach towards the demystification of projected images.[13] Previously such images had been used in Europe to mimic supernatural appearances (Kircher himself cites the use of displayed images by the rabbis in the court of King Solomon). Kircher stressed that exhibitors should take great care to inform spectators that such images were purely naturalistic, and not magical in origin.

Kircher also constructed a magnetic clock, the mechanism of which he explained in his *Magnes* (1641). The device had originally been invented by another Jesuit, Fr. Linus of Liege, and was described by an acquaintance of Line's in 1634. Kircher's patron Peiresc had claimed that the clock's motion supported the Copernican cosmological model, the argument being that the magnetic sphere in the clock was caused to rotate by the magnetic force of the sun. Kircher's model disproved the hypothesis, showing that the motion could be produced by a water clock in the base of the device. Although Kircher wrote against the Copernican model in his *Magnes*, supporting instead that of Tycho Brahe, his later *Itinerarium extaticum* (1656, revised 1671), presented several systems — including the Copernican — as distinct possibilities. The clock has been reconstructed by Caroline Bouguereau in collaboration with Michael John Gorman and is on display at the Green Library at Stanford University: [website about Kircher's magnetic clock and reconstruction](#) view more images of reconstruction

The *Musurgia Universalis* (1650) sets out Kircher's views on music: he believed that the harmony of music reflected the proportions of the universe. The book includes plans for constructing water-powered automatic organs, notations of birdsong and diagrams of musical instruments. One illustration shows the differences between the ears of humans and other animals. In *Phonurgia Nova* (1673) Kircher considered the possibilities of transmitting music to remote places.

Other machines designed by Kircher include an aeolian harp, automatons such as a statue which spoke and listened via a speaking tube, a perpetual motion machine, and a Katzenklavier ("cat piano"). This last of these would have driven spikes into the tails of cats, which would yowl to specified pitches, although Kircher is not known to have actually constructed the instrument.



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Combinatorics

Although Kircher's work was not mathematically based, he did develop various systems for generating and counting all combinations of a finite collection of objects (i.e. a finite set). His methods and diagrams are discussed in *Ars Magna Sciendi, sive Combinatoria* (sic).

Legacy

Scholarly influence

For most of his professional life, Kircher was one of the scientific stars of the world: according to historian Paula Findlen, he was "the first scholar with a global reputation". His importance was twofold: to the results of his own experiments and research he added information gleaned from his correspondence with over 760 scientists, physicians and above all his fellow Jesuits in all parts of the globe. The *Encyclopædia Britannica* calls him a "one-man intellectual clearing house". His works, illustrated to his orders, were extremely popular, and he was the first scientist to be able to support himself through the sale of his books. Towards the end of his life his stock fell, as the rationalist Cartesian approach began to dominate (Descartes himself described Kircher as "more quacksalver than savant").

Cultural legacy

Kircher was largely neglected until the late 20th century. One writer attributes his rediscovery to the similarities between his eclectic approach and postmodernism:

[Four hundred] years after his birth there is a revival of interest in Kircher, perhaps because Kircher can be considered as the premodern root of postmodern thinking. With his labyrinthine mind, he was Jorge Luis Borges... before Borges. ...at the start of the 21st century Kircher's taste for trivia, deception and wonder is back.[14]

He added that "Kircher's postmodern qualities include his subversiveness, his celebrity, his technomania and his bizarre eclecticism". In Robert Graham Irwin's *For Lust of Knowing*, Kircher is called "one of the last scholars aspiring to know everything", with Kircher's contemporary countryman Gottfried Leibniz cited as the probable "last" such scholar.

As few of Kircher's works have been translated, the contemporary emphasis has been on their aesthetic qualities rather than their actual content, and a succession of exhibitions have highlighted the beauty of their illustrations. Historian Anthony Grafton has said that "the staggeringly strange dark continent of Kircher's work [is] the setting for a Borges story that was never written", while Umberto Eco has written about Kircher in his novel *The Island of the Day Before*, as well as in his non-fiction works *The Search for the Perfect Language and Serendipities*. The contemporary artist Cybèle Varela has paid tribute to Kircher in her exhibition *Ad Sidera per Athanasius Kircher*, held in the Collegio Romano, in the same place where the *Museum Kircherianum* was.

The Museum of Jurassic Technology in Los Angeles has a hall dedicated to the life of Kircher. The Athanasius Kircher Society had a weblog devoted to unusual ephemera, which very occasionally relate to Kircher.[15] His ethnographic collection is in the Pigorini National Museum of Prehistory and Ethnography in Rome.

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Kircher's principal works, in chronological order, are:



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Year	Title	Link
1631	Ars Magnesia	
1635	Primitiae gnomonicae catropticae	
1636	Prodromus coptus sive aegyptiacus	
1637	Specula Melitensis encyclica, hoc est syntagma novum instrumentorum physico- mathematicorum	
1641	Magnes sive de arte magnetica	1643 ion (second ed.)
1643	Lingua aegyptiaca restituta	
1645 1646	Ars Magna Lucis et umbrae	1646 ion
1650	Obeliscus Pamphilius: hoc est, Interpretatio noua & Hucusque Intentata Obelisci Hieroglyphici	1650 ion
1650	Musurgia universalis, sive ars magna consoni et dissoni	Volumes I and II, 1650
1652 1655	Oedipus Aegyptiacus	
1654	Magnes sive (third, expanded ion)	
1656	Itinerarium extaticum s. opificium coeleste	
1657	Iter extaticum secundum, mundi subterranei prodromus	
1658	Scrutinium Physico-Medicum Contagiosae Luis, quae dicitur Pestis	
1660	Pantomtrum Kircherianum ... explicatum a G. Schotto	
1661	Diatrube de prodigiosis crucibus	
1663	Polygraphia, seu artificium linguarium quo cum omnibus mundi populis poterit quis respondere	
1664 1678	Mundus subterraneus, quo universae denique naturae divitiae	Tomus II , 1678
1665	Historia Eustachio-Mariana	1665 ion
1665	Arithmologia sive De abditis numerorum mysterijs	1665 ion
1666	Obelisci Aegyptiaci ... interpretatio hieroglyphica	

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1667	China Monumentis, qua sacris qua profanis	La Chine, 1670
1667	Magneticum naturae regnum sive disceptatio physiologica	
1668	Organum mathematicum	
1669	Principis Cristiani archetypon politicum	
1669	Latium	1671 ion
1669	Ars magna sciendi sive combinatorica	1669 ion
1673	Phonurgia nova, sive conjugium mechanico-physicum artis & natvrae paranympa phonosophia concinnatum	
1675	Arca Noe	
1676	Sphinx mystagoga: sive Diatribe hieroglyphica, qua Mumiae, ex Memphiticis Pyramidum Adytis Erutae...	1676 ion
1676	Obelisci Aegyptiaci	
1679	Musaeum Collegii Romani Societatis Jesu	
1679	Turris Babel, Sive Archontologia Qua Primo Priscorum post diluvium hominum vita, mores rerumque gestarum magnitudo, Secundo Turris fabrica civitatumque exstructio, confusio linguarum, & inde gentium transmigrationis, cum principalium inde enatorum idiomatum historia, multiplici eruditione describuntur & explicantur. Amsterdam, Jansson- Waesberge 1679.	
1679	Tariffa Kircheriana sive mensa Pathagorica expansa	
1680	Physiologia Kicheriana experimentalis	1680 ion

Notes

1. Woods, p 4, 109
2. Woods, p 108
3. Cutler, p 68
4. "Kircher, Athanasius." Encyclopædia Britannica from Encyclopædia Britannica
2007 Ultimate Reference Suite. (2008).
5. a b Frimmer, p 37
6. Frimmer, p 37-39
7. a b c d e Frimmer, p 38
8. a b Woods, p 109
9. MacDonnell, p 12
10. Iverson, p 97-98



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13. Musser, p 613
14. <http://www.safran-arts.com/42day/history/h4may/02kirxer.html>
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Cfr.: Wikipedia.en - http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Athanasius_Kircher - This page was last modified on 12 March 2011 at 10:31- Text is available under the Creative Commons Attribution-ShareAlike License.

Vedi anche: [profilo biografico di Athanasius Kircher nel sito dell'Enciclopedia Treccani](#)

E, per l'aspetto specifico dell'uso dell'antiporta nell'opera di Kircher: [A. Pisani, *Antiporta Kircheriana*](#)

“Athanasius Kircher [...] taught at the Roman College for many years and wrote on numerous scientific subjects. With contribution to almost every branch of science such as mathematics, astronomy, harmonics, acoustics, chemistry, microscopy and medicine, he played a significant part in the early scientific revolution. He was also a phenomenal linguist, an avid collector of scientific experiments and geographical exploration. He probed the secrets of the subterranean world, deciphered archaic languages, experimented with music-therapy, optics and magnetism. In his 39 books on the sciences, some quite massive, he shows his learning of the past, ever open to the developments and the possibilities of the future. His *Kircher Museum* was considered one of the best science museums in the world. Among his inventions are listed the megaphone, the pantometrum for solving geometrical problems, and a counting machine. His discoveries includes sea phosphorescence as well as microscopically small organisms (germs) which transmit epidemic diseases. It was by facilitating a wide diffusion of knowledge, by stimulating thought and discussion by his vast collection of scientific information, that Kircher earned a place among the fathers of modern science and the titles of *universal genius* and *master of a hundred arts*”.

Questo il ritratto alquanto celebrativo che i confratelli dedicano al loro illustre predecessore nel sito internet <http://www.faculty.fairfield.edu/jmac/jp/jpgrk.htm>.



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Decisamente più distaccato quello che gli dedica Ferguson I.466-468:

“Kircher was born 2 May, 1602, at Geysa, near Fulda. In 1618 he joined the Jesuits, devoted himself to study and was appointed to teach mathematics, philosophy, and Oriental languages at the University of Würzburg, a duty which he discharged in the most brilliant manner. On the outbreak of the thirty years’ war he went to Avignon, where he studied antiquities for two years, and was advised by Peiresc to attempt the interpretation of Egyptian hieroglyphics. He was on the point of going to Vienna as professor of mathematics, when he was suddenly called to Rome. In 1637 he accompanied the Cardinal Frederick of Saxony to Malta, and was received with great distinction by the Grand Master. He returned to Rome and acted for eight years as professor of mathematics, and afterwards resigned. He died 28 Nov., 1680. Kircher was a man of vast – almost cumbrous – erudition, of equal credulity, superstition, and confidence in his own opinion. His works in number, bulk, and uselessness are not surpassed in the whole field of learning. He was an opponent of alchemy and wrote against it the *Mundus subterraneus*.”

Questo personaggio, tuttavia, così come non può essere solo eulogizzato, nemmeno può essere liquidato con le parole non poco dure di Ferguson. Rilevante, infatti, fu il suo ruolo di sostegno alla Compagnia di Gesù nella sua attività missionaria, cosa che, per quanto paradossale possa oggi apparire, aveva al suo tempo una valenza, ora palesemente ora occultamente, anti-istituzionale. I gesuiti, infatti, pur di riuscire nel loro compito erano convinti che non fosse affatto disdicevole, contrariamente alle posizioni francescane, domenicane e in genere curiali, acquisire quante più conoscenze fosse possibile delle culture con le quali venivano a contatto e, una volta individuato il punto di attacco più agevole, scendere anche a compromessi formali pur di accaparrarsi il favore della categoria che, una volta convertita, avrebbe procurato il massimo vantaggio. Questa categoria quasi inevitabilmente coincideva con quella più colta e più vicina ai meccanismi del potere. Spesso, inoltre, i gesuiti stessi restavano affascinati dalla cultura con cui entravano in contatto, arrivando a darne una valutazione eccessiva, favorendo e avvicinandosi in questo modo al pensiero del “[libertinismo](#) erudito” che dell’Oriente aveva costruito all’epoca un vero e proprio mito, tanto sul piano religioso, quanto su quello politico e ideologico.

“Il gesuita Kircher, campione dell’erudizione orientalistica, e, più in particolare ‘cinese’, in Europa, prima di cimentarsi nell’opera apologetica *China monumentis qua sacris, qua profanis illustrata* (Amstelodami, 1667), aveva a lungo argomentato e fantasticato, particolarmente nell’opera *Oedipus Aegyptiacus, hoc est Universalis Hieroglyphicae Veterum doctrinae temporum iniuriam abolitae instauratio. Opus ex omni Orientalium doctrina et sapientia conditum, nec non viginti diversarum linguarum auctoritate stabilitum* (Romae, 1652-54), su una interpretazione magico-ermetica del mondo a sfondo cristiano, in contrapposizione ai nuovi risultati della scienza... e alla nuova visione del cosmo... Si trattava di un sistematico quadro cosmologico e filosofico-teologico che, nelle oniriche aspettative del Kircher, secondo una oculata chiave neo-platonica, avrebbe dovuto essere in grado di sostituire, nell’ambito della cultura filosofica e religiosa contemporanea, la tradizione scolastica medioevale che ormai dava evidenti segni di anacronisticità e, in pratica, l’aristotelismo ormai vacillante, cui, ancora, continuava ad appoggiarsi la chiesa in sede filosofica. Il Kircher si era accinto, appunto, ad una capillare opera di assorbimento da parte della visione cristiana del mondo,



BIBLIOTECA UNIVERSITARIA DI GENOVA - PERCORSI TEMATICI

Universalitas & Pervasivitas

IL COSTITUIRSI E DIFFONDERSI DELLA S.J. E SUOI ECHI (1540 - 1773)
di A. Pisani

Schede autori Contesto teologico e filosofico

di tutti quei filoni culturali (magia, ermetismo, alchimia, astrologia simbolismo, naturalismo rinascimentale) che erano emersi nella panoramica del sapere moderno. La cosmologia kircheriana era attraversata da una *energheia* che promanava da Dio e che, estrinsecandosi nella fenomenologia universale, si manifestava in forme simboliche. Per conoscere l'universo e la sua riposta e originaria sapienza divina, bisognava penetrare quella cultura esoterica che rimontava all'antico, dischiudendo sempre più ascose o arcane e graduali certezze e organicità.”

(Cfr.: S. Zoli, *Europa libertina tra Controriforma e Illuminismo*, Bologna, Cappelli, 1989, 148-149; (a questo riguardo si veda anche D. Pastine, *La nascita dell'idolatria. L'Oriente religioso di Athanasius Kircher*, Firenze, La Nuova Italia, 1978, nda).

Né la poliedricità di A. Kircher trova qui un punto di arresto. Sono noti infatti i suoi interessi per la cabala, sebbene, come gli era congeniale, con quella quella leggerezza e con quella indomabile autostima che gli procurarono tanti avversari e tante critiche. Nell'*Oedipus Aegyptiacus* egli riprende, senza citarne la fonte, gli attacchi di Paolo Ricci contro Hoogstraten, eliminando tutti i riferimenti al Nuovo Testamento nel tentativo, forse un po' patetico, di palesare un atteggiamento di condanna nei confronti di una disciplina come la cabala per la quale tuttavia provava una certa attrazione. Inoltre, sempre nell'*Oedipus...*, Kircher, probabilmente sopraffatto dalla sua smania di spaziare in ogni campo dello scibile, non si preoccupa di citare un esegeta (il convertito William Alabaster, 1567-1640) fondamentalmente non allineato all'ortodossia cattolica e, per questo, condannato.