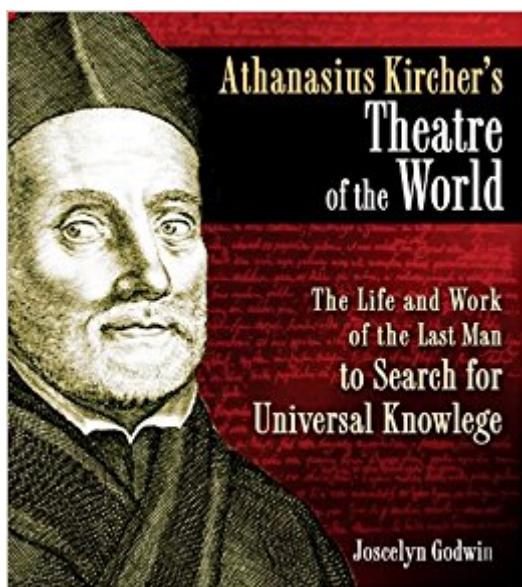


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Athanasius Kircher's Theatre Of The World: The Life And Work Of The Last Man To Search For Universal Knowledge



Synopsis

A major study of both the written and pictorial work of a neglected genius whose breadth of interest made him the last Renaissance man. Fully examines every area of Kircher's wide field of study and accomplishment. Magnificently illustrated with the stunning engravings from Kircher's work. Jesuit, linguist, archaeologist, and exceptional scholar, Athanasius Kircher (1602-1680) was the last true Renaissance man. To Kircher the entire world was a glorious manifestation of God whose exploration was both a scientific quest and a religious experience. His works on Egyptology (he is credited with being the first Egyptologist), music, optics, magnetism, geology, and comparative religion were the definitive texts of their time--and yet they represent only a part of his vast range of knowledge. A Christian Hermeticist in the mold of Marsilio Ficino and Pico della Mirandola, his work also examined alchemy, the Kabbalah, and the Egyptian mystery tradition exemplified by Hermes Trismegistus. The Hermetic cast of Kircher's thought, which was foreign to the concerns of those propelling the Age of Reason, coupled with the breadth of his interests, caused many of his contributions to be widely overlooked--an oversight now masterfully rectified by Joscelyn Godwin. It has been said that Kircher could think only in images. While this is an exaggeration, the stunning engravings that are a distinguishing feature of his work are included here so we may fully appreciate and see for ourselves the life work, philosophy, and achievements of "the last man who knew everything."

Book Information

Hardcover: 304 pages

Publisher: Inner Traditions; First Edition edition (September 3, 2009)

Language: English

ISBN-10: 1594773297

ISBN-13: 978-1594773297

Product Dimensions: 9.9 x 1.3 x 11 inches

Shipping Weight: 4.6 pounds (View shipping rates and policies)

Average Customer Review: 5.0 out of 5 stars 6 customer reviews

Best Sellers Rank: #410,665 in Books (See Top 100 in Books) #153 in Books > Biographies & Memoirs > Arts & Literature > Theatre #154 in Books > Religion & Spirituality > Other Religions, Practices & Sacred Texts > Freemasonry #260 in Books > Biographies & Memoirs > Professionals & Academics > Philosophers

Customer Reviews

... an encyclopedic feast of extraordinary images, all fascinating, and many exotic . . .
John Carey, Temenos Academy, March 2011)"Almost any modern work on archaeology, geology, science, medicine, or even Egyptian or Chinese history will present some intriguing fact . . . with a footnote referencing a work by Athanasius Kircher (1601-1680). The work of the polymath Jesuit richly rewards pursuit, and Joscelyn Godwin, a distinguished translator and professor of music at Colgate University, is the ideal guide. Not least of Godwin's services is placing Kircher in his intellectual context. . . . What makes Kircher endlessly fascinating, as Godwin amply demonstrates, is the sheer breadth, depth, and expansiveness of his ever-curious mind. . . . Godwin and Inner Traditions deserve congratulations for a superb book, complete with bibliographies of Kircher's works and works about him." (Peter Skinner, ForeWord Reviews, Nov/Dec 2009)"There was a slightly surreal side to 17th century science, too . . . His [Athanasius's] mind resembled a chamber of curiosities: full of strange and astonishing objects." (Bloomberg.com, Dec 2009)"Here we have a virtual window into the mind of a 17th century genius. Athanasius Kircher's *Theatre of the World* fully and masterfully examines every area of Kircher's wide field of study and accomplishment. The large volume is magnificently illustrated with the stunning engravings from Kircher's work." (SirReadALot.org, Nov 2009)"Despite the constraints of his religious order, Kircher and his publishers engaged engravers, printers, and patrons to finance and produce a series of learned volumes on his subjects. He was at the heart of a global system of knowledge transfer, and was usually first to hear of geographical or scientific discoveries, as missionaries sent reports to him from all over the world. . . . The illustrations remain breathtaking . . ." (James Hamilton, The Spectator, Nov 2009)"The great show in this beautifully produced book is the illustrations themselves, and the huge range of ideas they occupy. . . . Kircher might not have been hugely influential, might not have been the 'Renaissance Man' that, say, Leonardo was, but just looking at these pictures shows he ought to be more widely known. The beauty of many of the pictures is obvious, but with so many of them, covering such a broad array of inquiry, the effect of Godwin's book is to excite admiration for an extraordinary mind." (Rob Hardy, Top 50 Reviewer on .com, Mar 2010)"The reproductions are good, and Godwin deserves considerable praise for his close observation and background research" (Peter Carl, Times Higher Education Supplement, UK, Jan 2010)"Godwin's magisterial tome explains Kircher's many achievements (among them a prototype of the magic lantern, the ancestor of the slide-projector), and contains many of his astonishing illustrations, accompanied with detailed captions. He has been well served by his publisher, which has presented exemplary texts with masses of Kircher's fabulous images as a beautiful, absorbing and utterly wonderful book." (James Stevens Cull, Times Higher Education, Jan 2010)" . . . the main

thing to say about this book is that it is a stupendously good piece of design. Every illustration is reproduced in exactly the right place; the captions are superbly apt and very clearly signaled; the sidebars are tactfully positioned and filled with exactly the right amount of information. The paper is heavy and rich, and properly bound. The author and the publisher have taken real, prolonged, and exhaustive pains to make a beautiful book, and succeeded." (The Guardian, Feb 2010)"Kircher obviously had his books of ideas copiously illustrated with expensive copper engravings . . . the engravings were largely ignored. But now they are shown to advantage in Joscelyn Godwin's new book, a wonderful theatrical feast of architecture, mythological figures, curiosities such as moon dials and sunflower clocks along with machines which embrace both the past and the future. This is not to mention images of fabulous cities and the deities which were believed to have inhabited them, plus a sensational engraving of the Tower of Babel." (Richard Edmonds, Birmingham Post, Oct 09)"Kircher's lasting legacy has been his prodigious outpouring of scientific tomes, copiously--at times fantastically so--illustrated by a variety of highly skilled artists to help articulate his often startling and marvelous postulations. . . . a charming, hugely knowledgeable and delightfully droll guide to this fascinating seventeenth-century personage who embodied the intersection of science, art, and the imagination. In the end, it is his unrelenting spirit of inquiry that stands out as the thing that we, as present-day readers, can learn from. Making the most of his situation, station, and formidable intellect, Athanasius Kircher embarked on a life-long, all encompassing scientific enterprise on a scale that is nothing short of staggering." (David Mathews, The Vienna Review, Mar 2010)" . . . a valuable addition to the history and philosophy of science shelves, offering valuable insight into the life of one of the world's last true polymaths." (C.G. Wood, Choice: Current Reviews for Academic Libraries, September 2010)

HERMETIC STUDIES / ALCHEMY Linguist, archaeologist, and exceptional scholar, Athanasius Kircher (1602-1680) was the last true Renaissance man. By profession a Jesuit priest, he made himself an authority on almost every subject under the sun. To Kircher the entire world was a glorious manifestation of God, and his exploration was both a scientific quest and a religious experience. His works on Egyptology (he is credited with being the first Egyptologist), music, optics, magnetism, geology, and comparative religion were the definitive tests of their time--and yet they represent only a part of his vast range of knowledge. A Christian Hermeticist in the mold of Marsilio Ficino and Pico della Mirandola, his work also examined alchemy, the Kabbalah, and the Egyptian Mystery tradition exemplified by Hermes Trismegistus. Kircher was the first to map ocean currents; the first to offer a comprehensive theory of vulcanism; the first to compile an

encyclopedia on China, a dictionary of Coptic, a book dedicated solely to acoustics; the first to construct a machine for coding messages and another for composing music. His museum in Rome was among the most famous "cabinets of curiosities," visited by everybody in the intellectual world. The Hermetic cast of Kircher's thought, which was foreign to the concerns of those propelling the Age of Reason, coupled with the breadth of his interests, caused many of his contributions to be widely overlooked--an oversight now masterfully rectified by Joscelyn Godwin. It has been said that Kircher could think only in images. While this is an exaggeration, 400 of the stunning engravings that are a distinguishing feature of his work are included here so we may fully appreciate, learn from, and see for ourselves the life work, philosophy, and achievements of "the last man who knew everything." JOSCELYN GODWIN, musicologist and translator, is a professor of music at Colgate University. He first explored the life and work of Athanasius Kircher in 1979 in his book *A Renaissance Man and the Quest for Lost Knowledge*. Godwin was educated at Cambridge and Cornell Universities and has authored and edited many books on Hermeticism and music, including *Cosmic Music*, *The Golden Thread*, *The Harmony of the Spheres*, and *Arktos: The Polar Myth*. He is also known for his translations of the works of such figures as Fabre d'Olivet and Julius Evola and the first complete English translation of Francesco Colonna's *Hypnerotomachia Poliphili*. He lives in New York state.

Historic iconography of cosmology, with unimpeachable text, a bargain at this price.

I have had the small paperback on Kircher by the same author from the 70s and finally a well done book has been released on this curious creative man from ages back....

excellent!

In 2002 was celebrated the 400th anniversary of the birth of Athanasius Kircher. Athanasius Who? That might have been the reaction of everyone except the participants of a symposium on Kircher's life and work that was part of the celebration. Joscelyn Godwin says that he was watching television when a ribbon of words passed under the talking head: "WAS ATHANASIUS KIRCHER THE COOLEST GUY EVER, OR WHAT?" "It seemed for a moment," Godwin writes, "that I had slipped into a parallel universe in which it was not politicians and catastrophes that had made the morning headlines, but subjects of real interest to me." Godwin is a musicologist and translator who has explored Kircher and his works for thirty years, and his publications about Kircher are now crowned

with a gorgeous book, *Athanasius Kircher's Theatre of the World: The Life and Work of the Last Man to Search for Universal Knowledge* (Inner Traditions). This is a coffee table book for those who are interested in the Renaissance or the history of science, or of linguistics, or of music, or of optics, or of the countless other subjects Kircher wrote about. It is a large sized and glossy book, containing over four hundred illustrations that are mostly woodcuts and engravings from Kircher's many publications. The intricate, spectacular pictures range from the bizarre to the practical, and plenty of them have complexities that can only be appreciated with Godwin's notes: "In order for modern people to enjoy this kind of activity," writes Godwin, "most of them need a helping hand across the gulf of history, culture, religion, and erudition that yawns between Kircher's age and ours." The help will be deeply appreciated by anyone spending time on these curious pictures. After all, even Godwin admits, "Kircher's writing abounds in superfluities, repetitions and sermonizing; that is why his books are so long, and why no one translates them," but his pictures are immediately appealing. It has been said that Kircher could only think in images, but with all the huge body of prose from which these illustrations are taken, this seems unlikely. He did recognize that diagrams had a capacity to attract and instruct, and he used them profusely. We take visual representations for granted now, but each of these images had to be drawn, and then engraved and printed by hand. The degree of detail even in the woodcuts is often astonishing. There are many surprising gadgets illustrated here, like the explosive sundial. The Sun's rays were focused onto a ring, along which the focused beam traveled and every hour it hit a channel of gunpowder. Kircher may be thought of as the founder of Egyptology. He was his age's foremost authority on hieroglyphs, and correctly established that the Coptic language is a descendant of the ancient Egyptian one. His *Oedipus Aegyptiacus* assembled just about everything known about Egypt at the time, and is a source for many pictures here. He searched diligently for connections that showed that ancient or oriental religions were really something like proto-Christianities. However, he also wrote a dialogue that shows how all Protestants were damned because they belonged to a pseudo-church. Kircher had good arguments against the existence of giants so big they would collapse under their own weight, but he allowed there were dragons, although he thought they were merely phosphorescent and did not truly breathe fire. He accepted that barnacles turned into geese, but he knew that the long, spiral "unicorn" horns were really from narwhals. Stones that seemed to reveal letters inscribed on them he thought were just random lines interpreted by an eager observer. He never drew up horoscopes or did occult magic, although he liked surprising people with gadgets that did things like projecting images; he didn't invent the magic lantern, but helped perfect it and used it in shows. He was skeptical that Archimedes had set enemy ships on fire by a gigantic mirror to focus

the sun, and did demonstrations to show how unlikely such a feat would have been. He was fascinated by volcanoes, and was the first observer to study them close up, descending into the crater of Vesuvius. The great show in this beautifully-produced book are the illustrations themselves, and the huge range of ideas they occupy. Besides all the pictures of obelisks, hieroglyphics, and pyramids, there are illustrations of Noah's Ark, a blueprint of each of three levels showing just where the animals went (and the ropes and spices). There is a gorgeous Tower of Babel (along with a calculation that it would take far too many bricks to have reached the Moon). There is a picture of tarantulas combined with the tune that was for the tarantella, the dance that those bitten could do and thus neutralize the poison. There are designs for a wind harp and for echo chambers. There are maps, some of them quite modern-looking, and there are pictures of impossible beasts and loads of symbolic figures. There is a picture of sunspots. Kircher might not have been hugely influential, might not have been the "Renaissance Man" that, say, Leonardo was, but just looking at these pictures shows he ought to be more widely known. The beauty of many of the pictures is obvious, but with so many of them, covering such a broad array of inquiry, the effect of Godwin's book is to excite admiration for an extraordinary mind.

When I was a boy, nothing was as fascinating as my dad's bookcase. There were books on history, geography, religion, art and architecture, dictionaries, encyclopaedias and picture books with engravings by Gustav Dore. It was a weird and wonderful world, full of foreign fascination, far from the cosiness of home. For a short while I thought my dad knew everything. Athanasius Kircher wrote nearly 40 books and really attempted to know everything. This one volume expose concentrates on the illustrations used for those books and provides wonderful specimens of the man's work. After all, who would have the patience to plough their way through the originals written in Latin? Not me! Kircher writes about and the illustrations show, details of an incredible scope of disciplines. Best known for work on oriental studies, geology and medicine, he was considered the father of Egyptology. 200 Years before the Rosetta Stone made things "easy". Kircher had a crack at deciphering hieroglyphics. A composer himself, he knew all about music. He studied map making and his museum in Rome was full of the most wonderful contemporary machinery as well as gadgets from the past. He was a pioneer volcanologist. Athanasius Kircher's Theatre of the World is a treasure trove. If you want to know which animal was kept where in Noah's Ark, Kircher is your man. Want to know all about the Tower of Babel? AK can explain. And although uncle Athanasius suspected unicorns did not exist, he does tell us lots about giants and dragons. Indeed, descriptions of AK's failings and sometimes ludicrous assumptions are a most diverting aspect of this book. The

man believed that water vanished down a whirlpool at the North Pole only to re-emerge at the South Pole. Diagrams show you how that "worked". He was so obsessed by Egyptology that he saw ancient Egypt's influence simply everywhere. Most interesting is Kircher's position in and towards the Catholic Church. As a Jesuit and a scholar he did of course stumble on areas where the rigid teachings of the church did not provide answers. His books were occasionally financed by non catholic potentates and published in the protestant Northern Netherlands. The censors were quite busy examining his writing. Eventually of course he did toe the line, but he must have done so reluctantly. Nobody of course knows everything, not my dad, not Athanasius Kircher. But leafing through this beautiful book made me once again feel like that boy standing on a chair looking at a top shelf full of exciting books for grown ups. This is full of wonder : wonderful.

For people loving creativity and great all time Geniuses this book is for you!

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