

Tina Asmussen, *Scientia Kircheriana. Die Fabrikation von Wissen bei Athanasius Kircher, Affalterbach (Didymos-Verlag) 2016, 220 S., 24 Abb. (Kulturgeschichten. Studien zur Frühen Neuzeit, 2), ISBN 978-3-939020-43-1, EUR 39,00.*

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The German Jesuit polymath Athanasius Kircher (1602–1680) has increasingly moved from the periphery to the center of conversations about seventeenth-century intellectual pursuits. Around 2002, he enjoyed a brief quasi-celebrity that produced a flurry of new scholarship in honor of his 400th birthday and the creation of a digital archive of the bulk of his surviving correspondence in the Archive of the Pontifical Gregorian University. Some fifteen years later, we are now at a more mature and well-considered phase in Kircher scholarship. Tina Asmussen's »Scientia Kircheriana«, a study of how Kircher fabricated his science that began as her doctoral dissertation at Lucerne, reflects the evolution of this complex and fascinating subject.

Asmussen's study is a methodologically stimulating reflection on how to consider the invention of Kircher as an author of European fame who self-consciously claimed a global celebrity. She explores the making of the Kircherian corpus as a sociological, cultural, religious, and linguistic project that involved multiple people in different locations, especially his patrons, key collaborators and assistants, and his publishers. This multi-tiered approach to Kircher's publications captures the way his authorial fame and reputation became a collaborative project of his age. At the apex of Kircher's long career, engraved portraits proclaimed him to be known all the way to the Antipodes; published lists of books, both actual and aspirational, became a paper museum of the intellectual marvels attributed to him. Asmussen rightfully insists that we need to understand the variety of different contexts in which Kircher made his reputation – and in which his reputation was made by others – in order to understand how a German Jesuit refugee from the Thirty Years War became an icon and an institution in baroque Rome.

Asmussen begins with a chapter on Rome itself, exploring how the 17th-century city and papacy inspired the direction and style of Kircher's work. Building on the recent scholarship on Rome as a city of faith and science that was also a capital city with an expanding court culture, she focuses on key moments in which Kircher contributed to Roman spectacle. They include the role of Barberini patronage at the moment of Kircher's arrival, the Roman Jubilee of 1650, the arrival of the recently converted Queen Christina of Sweden in 1655, and the creation of Bernini's obelisks under different popes culminating in the age of Alexander VII. Her goal is to dissect Kircher's role in high visibility projects that were collaborative and accrued a great deal of cultural capital in the public life of the papal city.

Having situated Kircher in baroque Rome, Asmussen then describes the web of relations that formed around Kircher and his books. Building on recent work on the early modern Republic of Letters and the role of long-distance networks in early modern Europe, Asmussen explores how Kircher published and distributed his books, focusing primarily on key



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elements of his European rather than missionary correspondence. She looks closely at the role of key correspondents in facilitating Kircher's publications, further explaining how Kircher became an important author who attracted the attention of the Dutch publishers. In addition to analyzing Kircher's relationship with the Amsterdam publisher Jan Jansson van Waesberge, who signed Kircher to a multi-book contract in 1661 when he was already a well-established author, Asmussen briefly explores the place of the Dutch cartographer and publisher Joan Blaeu in the trans-confessional network of people facilitating the production and distribution of Kircher's books. In an appendix, she transcribes two important letters exchanged by Kircher and Jansson to allow readers to look at the relationship between this celebrity author in light of the proposal made by an important publisher, assessing the value of his books. Kircher's relationship with this Dutch publishing house represents the apogee of his authorial fame. It is indeed a moment to dissect with some care, since it was the culmination of all that he and his patrons, agents, and assistants had worked for in the previous two decades.

Asmussen rightfully emphasizes the role of key agents who brokered these arrangements, including the theologian and Catholic convert Barthold Nihus and the Jesuit controversialist Jodocus Kedd. Using their correspondence, she shows how their activities fueled the spectacular growth of Kircher's reputation and determined the shape and message of important publications such as the »Oedipus Aegyptiacus« (1652–1655). She takes seriously the role of these less well-known figures in making Kircher's success possible, indeed, insists on the importance of seeing Kircher's success as a product of an elaborate scholarly, religious, and political infrastructure. Fundamentally, she raises the question – could Kircher have become »Kircher« without this network of supporters who perceived his books as crucial to the realization of their own ambitions?

Asmussen pays close attention to Kircher's assistants at different stages in his life, beginning with his fellow Jesuit and disciple Caspar Schott who came to Rome to assist Kircher with the completion of the »Oedipus Aegyptiacus« and continued to publicize Kircher's work even after returning to Germany. Asmussen encourages us to pay closer attention to Schott's twenty-nine extant letters to understand more precisely the nature of their relationship. She describes the joyful effect of Kircher's portrait on Schott when he received it in Mainz in the summer of 1655 as he travelled from Rome to Würzburg. He kissed it several times, making it a virtual contact relic. Fundamentally, Asmussen asks what it meant to become an intimate part of the efforts to forge Kircher's reputation in the mid-17th century. Once he was back in Germany, Schott helped Kircher establish even closer relations with German publishers and book distributors, supplying them with copies of Kircher's books. He celebrated Kircher's accomplishments in his own publications, further assuring that Kircher would be well known in Central Europe. Asmussen discusses Kircher's other assistants towards the end of his career in Rome (Giorgio de Sepi, Gioseffo Petrucci, and Johan Kestler, especially), exploring each of their strategies to publicize and defend his reputation. Yet Schott remains the most important point of departure for understanding the entire process, namely, the collective invention of Kircher as a baroque author of some renown.

Reading Asmussen's account of Kircher, I am reminded of Antoine Lilti's interesting study of *The Invention of Celebrity* (English trans., Polity Press, 2017) which explores the public reputations of key 18th-century



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figures such as Voltaire. Her thematic study dissects all the ingredients of Kircher's reputation – his patrons and letters, his agents and principal publisher, his editors and assistants, and his museum. Last but hardly least are his long printed lists of books, some published and others promised, designed to inspiring further readings of a seemingly infinite corpus on an enticing variety of subjects. This is a historical sociology of a 17th-century author whose well-cultivated persona reflected many of the preoccupations of learned and Catholic Europe. Asmussen's fine-grained cultural analysis that combines recent insights from *histoire du livre*, history of collecting, and new approaches to studying early modern correspondence. She makes the vast textual museum of his books her centerpiece yet supplements her reading of this corpus with an equally close reading of Kircher's unpublished archive. Her other appendix, on the patronage strategies of the »Oedipus Aegyptiacus«, complements well her analysis of the discussion of the making of this book by many different hands in multiple locations. Methodologically rich and full of interesting reflections, Asmussen's »Scientia Kircheriana« is a book that anyone interested in Kircher, and more generally in the cultural production of knowledge in 17th-century Europe should read.



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