Athanasius Kircher Encyclopedia Article

Athanasius Kircher

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Athanasius Kircher

1601-1680

German scholar who was renowned for his prolific writings on a variety of academic subjects. Kircher was the youngest of nine children, the son of a doctor of divinity. He narrowly escaped death several times during childhood, and felt that he was spared because he was predestined for a special purpose in life. Kircher studied Greek, Hebrew, the humanities, natural science, and mathematics at various institutions, and was ordained in 1628. Three years later, he fled to France to escape the Thirty Years' War; while in France he taught mathematics, philosophy, and oriental languages. After a few years, he began a journey through Italy and eventually settled in Rome. Once there, he began writing on a wide variety of subjects, documenting his vast knowledge of geography, astronomy, theology, language, and medicine. He eventually completed approximately 44 books in addition to several thousand manuscripts and letters. Kircher was also something of an inventor. He described several innovations, including a graduated aerometer and a method of measuring temperature by the buoyancy of small balls. Throughout his lifetime he collected a vast array of historical materials, which were eventually displayed in a museum bearing his name, the Museo Kircheriano in Rome.