

**To raise funds for the restoration of a church in the Roman countryside commemorating the site of St. Eustace's conversion to Christianity, Kircher published *Historia Eustachio-Mariana*.**

Kircher, Athanasius. *Historia Eustachio Mariana*. Romae: Ex typographia Varesij, 1665. 9 ½ inches (240 mm), [12], 184, [12] pp.; [8] leaves of plates.

Athanasius Kircher's (1602–80) penchant for the wilder shores of scholarship, his love of the marvelous, the mysterious, and the exotic, did not preclude an occasional involvement in the more mundane activities of the conventional Italian provincial antiquary. For the historian of Noah's Ark (1675) and the Tower of Babel (1679), a forgotten shrine on the Roman countryside might appear to be rather small game, but the precipitous site and the picturesque vision had mythological overtones that Kircher could invest with all his usual panoply of reference.

Although German by birth, Kircher had spent most of his career, from 1635 until his death in 1680, in Rome. In the course of nearly a half-century's residence, he had acquired an understandable but perhaps exaggerated sense of the city's place in the cosmos. Italy, according to Kircher, was first colonized under Noah himself, and Latium, the area around Rome, extending southward as far as Capua, was “the primeval seat and colony of the earliest mortals, the realm of Saturn, the native home of great heroes, kings and caesars, the fount and origin of human wisdom, knowledge and erudition.” That debatable encomium comes from Kircher's folio on *Latium* (Amsterdam, 1671). During the years of research into the Roman countryside that culminated in that monument of local topography, Kircher had come across, a decade earlier, the village of Mentorella, home of a small medieval shrine, commemorating the site of St. Eustace's conversion to Christianity. There is a map of the area at **Spread 108**. (Mentorella is merely a corruption of Monte Vulturello, via the local church of Sancta Maria de Vulturella, or Vultouilla, see **Spread 66**—the peak is now known as Monte Guadagnolo.)

St. Eustace was said to have been a Roman general of the first century A.D. who, while hunting, had a vision from the foot of the mountain of a stag on its crest with a crucifix between his antlers, or (to quote Kircher's title page) *inter cornua cervi apparuit*.

The splendid engraved title page at **Spread 4** depicts the scene, with the future saint asking God for direction in the words of *Acts 9:6*, *Domine, quid me vis facere?* Here, surely, was a vision after Kircher's own heart! The tale is now considered to be entirely legendary: Eustace is one of half-dozen saints, of which the most notable is St. Hubert, who had such visions while hunting. Refusing to sacrifice to pagan gods, Eustace was martyred in 118 A.D. under the persecutions of the Emperor Hadrian: the method was incineration inside a bronze bull. Kircher undertook the restoration of the shrine on the site of the vision and eventually, as his health declined in his last decade of life, essentially retired from the Collegio Romano in Rome to this retreat in Mentorella. When Kircher died, the main Jesuit church in Rome, Il Gesù, claimed most of his body; his heart, however, was buried before the high altar of the church at Mentorella.

To raise funds for the restoration, Kircher published this *Historia Eustachio-Mariana*. "Mariana" refers to the fact that the church was not dedicated to St. Eustace but had been founded (it was said) by the Emperor Constantine in honor of the Virgin Mary—a silver cross from the period of Constantine is illustrated at **Spread 88**. The volume opens with an account of the life and ancestry of the saint. The *Vita S. Eustacij* fills **Spreads 12–33**, the *Genealogia S. Eustacij* appears on **Spreads 33–55**, with folding genealogical charts at **Spreads 45** and **47** and the knightly saint's supposed "coat of arms" at **Spread 50**. The site of his conversion to Christ is the subject of Part 3 (**Spreads 56–66**). **Spreads 66–114** describe the various church buildings, which are illustrated at **Spreads 57, 71, and 77**. Conveniently situated a mere 35 miles from the Vatican, Mentorella has come to be a favorite place of pilgrimage for recent popes.