

Kircher's exhaustive study of hieroglyphics with the first Coptic grammar and lexicon based on Della Valla's 13th- and 14th-century Egyptian manuscripts.

Kircher, Athanasius. *Lingua aegyptiaca restituta, opus tripartitum*. Romæ, Sumptibus Hermanni Scheus, apud Ludovicum Grignanum, 1643. 9 7/8 inches (250 mm), 8 pp. l., 32 numb. l., 33–622 pp.; 1l., [64] pp.

Like Guillaume Postel, Athanasius Kircher is one of those multifarious scholars with a finger in every improbable pie who are best measured by what they attempted rather than what they achieved. He was often, as the authors of *1066 and all that* (1930) put it, contrasting King Charles' dashing cavaliers with Cromwell's puritan roundheads, "Wrong but Wromantic." When it came to Egyptology, Kircher was in good company. He devoted over two decades of his scholarly career to its study, in all its various romantic forms: hieroglyphs, pyramids, mummies, and obelisks. When least romantic, his scholarship was soundest, as in this influential though flawed contribution to Coptic studies.

Although by birth and education a German Jesuit (1602–80), Kircher spent most of his life in Rome. He had first encountered hieroglyphics in 1628, seven years before his arrival in Rome, apparently through finding in the library a copy of J.G. Herwart van Hohenburg's *Thesaurus Hieroglyphicorum* (1610), a large collection of illustrations of hieroglyphic inscriptions that provided a documentary underpinning to much untethered speculation about such iconic ancient Egyptian figures as Horapollo and Hermes Trismegistus, both of them known only through fantastic Greek texts of the Christian era, of no possible authenticity.

Kircher's encounter with Pietro Della Valle's Coptic Christian manuscripts gave new direction to his Egyptian speculations. His first publication on the subject was *Prodromus Coptus* (1636), which might be flippantly translated as *Coptic Hors d'eouvres*. It provided, certainly, a foretaste of the main course offered in the pioneering *Lingua Aegyptiaca Restituta*, or *Egyptian Language Restored* of 1643, here reproduced, presenting to European scholars for the first time a Coptic grammar and lexicon, both based on Della Valla's 13th- and 14th-century Egyptian manuscripts. The originals were

in Coptic and Arabic: Kircher added a Latin translation, not always accurate in detail. The grammar begins at **Spread 11** with the texts of al-Sammanudi and Ibn Katib Qaysar. The two lexicons of Coptic, with Latin and Arabic equivalents, fill **Spreads 47–163** (the *Scala Magna* of Abu al Barakat ibn Kabar) and **163–273** (the *Scala Electa* of Abu Ishaq ibn al-’ssal). An *Index Latinus* at **Spreads 339–366** enables the reader to reverse both dictionaries to form a Latin-to-Coptic lexicon.

Kircher’s appendix qualified his claim in the *Prodromus* that Cadmus had transmitted the Egyptian language to Greece: he now suggested that the Greeks owed their letters to Egypt, but not their words (**Spread 280**)—a contemporary reader has added a marginal note of dissent at the bottom right of this spread. In typical Kircher style, the appendix also included digressions on the hieroglyphic substratum in Coptic, with cross-cultural sidelights on Mystic Egypt and the Mystic East. Kircher went so far as to tamper with his manuscript for theological purposes, inserting the imaginary Coptic word *Pihtonpanikha* (translated as “augur”) into the lexicon at **Spread 168, right, line 20**. He thereby resolved (from “ancient evidence”) the conundrum of the origin of Pharoah’s name for Joseph at *Genesis* 41:45: the “Coptic” word showed that St. Jerome was correct in thinking that it was a distortion of Egyptian rather than of Hebrew. Other mistakes, owing to Kircher’s ignorance and carelessness rather than duplicity, are recorded in detail in Alastair Hamilton’s indispensable *The Copts and the West, 1439–1822* (Oxford, 2006).