

**A student of Athanasius Kircher, Gaspar Schott publishes treatises on the wonders of scientific innovation.**

Schott, Gaspar. *Ioco-seriorum naturae et artis, siue, Magiae naturalis centuriae tres: accessit Diattibe de prodigiosis crucibus*. [Würzburg?: s.n., 1666]. 8 ¼ inches (210 mm), [4], 365 [i.e. 363], [11] pp.; 22 leaves of plates.

Gaspar (or Kaspar) Schott was a pivotal figure, at the heart of Jesuit science of the 17th century even when most on the periphery. He was instructed in mathematics at the Jesuit college in Würzburg by Athanasius Kircher. The experience marked him for life. His path in the order led him to Sicily, while to Kircher, all roads led to Rome. The two nonetheless kept up an exchange by correspondence until, at last, in 1652, Scott was sent to Rome. He immediately entered into Kircher's inner circle, proofreading his master's *Oedipus Aegyptiacus* and editing the revised edition of his *Magnes*. Schott's superiors sent him back to Würzburg three years later, where he began a prolific publishing career of his own, as a sort of publicist for scientific innovation, especially for the mechanical contrivances that fascinated so many merchants and aristocrats of the period. Schott had not only carefully studied the machines in Kircher's Roman museum, but he had been introduced by the Bishop of Würzburg to the air-pump invented by Otto von Guericke—for Robert Boyle's copy of the instrument, see **boyexp** on **rarebookroom.org**. *Mechanica Hydraulicopneumatica*—the title is typical of the period—was based on the technical innovations of Kircher and Guericke. Further books spread Kircher's ideas and notions throughout the many minor principalities and prince-bishoprics of Germany. *Pantometrum Kircherianum* (1660) described Schott's teacher's latest mathematical instrument. In the same year Schott produced a second edition of Kircher's *Iter Extaticum*, the first to be illustrated—see **kirite** on this website.

Several other works dealt with the Weird and the Wonderful, monstrosities and anomalies of nature. Ever alert to a good scientific story, Schott exploited his metropolitan connections while publishing in the provinces. The *Serious Amusements of Nature and Art*, here reproduced, was published in the year of Schott's death. One further book appeared posthumously, on Kircher's *Organum Mathematicum* (1668). The *Joco-*

*Seriorum* is a typical Schott production of brief news-flashes on “profitable wonders.” The last and longest piece is a reprint of Kircher’s *Diatribes de Prodigiosis Crucibus* (1661), dealing with a subject well suited to the scientifico-religioso-inclinations (to adopt the Baroque system of hyphenation) of the many German princes and prelates—see **Spreads 179–208**.

This humbler printing of Kircher’s text, including the plate at **Spread 192**, may be compared with the original at **kirdia**. The *Diatribes* was not, however, one of Kircher’s large and expensive Amsterdam folios, which were designed either for serious study by fellow-scholars, or as items of conspicuous consumption in the libraries of influential patrons. Schott’s plump, squat duodecimos, with their crude engravings and inferior paper, were intended for casual recreation in an armchair by the fireside. Schott was the scientific Alastair Cooke of his day. Just as, a century later, Baron von Grimm’s manuscript newsletters, his *Correspondance littéraire*, brought (for forty years) the latest intellectual flashes of the French Enlightenment to kings, queens, and princes in distant Prussia, Poland and Russia, Schott’s incomparable scientific journalism took the Greatest Show on Earth—the wonders of Kircher’s Rome—on a whirlwind provincial tour.

The Joco-serial pleasures of the text extend to the imprint. There is no date on the engraved title page (**Spread 3**). The intelligent reader must instead deduce the year by decoding the chronogram at the end of the preface (**Spread 5**) in which Roman numerals are to be extracted from the phrase “**Me ergo frVere aC DIV VaLe**”, i.e. **MVCDIVVL**, i.e.,  $1000 + 5 + 100 + 500 + 1 + 5 + 5 + 50 = 1666$ . Misreading the chronogram (taking IV for the traditional 4, rather than the 6 that it must be under these cumulative circumstances) a previous reader has pencilled below it “1664”.