

Dipartimento di
Studi UMANITICI

**ROMA
TRE**
UNIVERSITÀ DEGLI STUDI



Seminario di Storia della Scienza - DSU Roma Tre
convened by **Antonio Clericuzio**

in cooperation with

Zentralinstitut für Katholische Theologie
Lehrstuhl für Historische Theologie

and

Museo delle Civiltà di Roma

Missionary objects and collecting (16th - 20th centuries)

“Dispersed” Workshop, 4 March – 29 April 2021

organized by **Sabina Brevaglieri**

22 April 2021, 17:00 (CET)

Mariana de Campos França



© MA, Museo delle civiltà



***Searching for Athanasius Kircher's
Brazilian collection***

Discussant (English): **Filippo Comisi** – (MuCiv)

Online participation registration is required.

Please register per e-mail at sabina.brevaglieri@hu-berlin.de until 24 April 13.00 CET. The Zoom link to remote participation will be sent to registered participants on the morning of the seminar day. The presentation will be recorded.

Abstract

The Jesuit polymath Athanasius Kircher (1602-1680) is one of the most well-known scholars of the early modern period. His copious correspondence with missionaries and scholars from around the world, together with his numerous publications, have made him a subject of renewed scholarly interest in the last few decades. Having taught at the *Collegio Romano* for more than forty years, he created a museum with his collection of curiosities there, that despite not having survived as a complete set, still draws attention. The recent re-creation of part of Kircher's collection for public display, called Wundermusaeum at the Museo di Arte e Scienza of the Liceo Visconti in Rome, is just one of many such examples.

This paper focuses on a little studied part of Kircher's collections, namely his objects of Brazilian origin. Kircher corresponded with colleagues like Valentin Stansel at the Jesuit College in Bahia who could have sent him gifts from Brazil. The 'catalogue' of Kircher's museum, written by Giorgio de Sepi (1678), mentions a few objects as having come from Brazilian indigenous peoples. Likewise, currently at the Museo Pigorini, a small number of Brazilian indigenous artefacts, including a belt decorated with human teeth, are catalogued as of possible Kircherian origin.

Drawing on textual, visual, and material-based evidences, the aim of this paper is twofold. First, it looks at the possible composition of Kircher's Brazilian collection: which objects of ethnography and natural history did it include, and how did Kircher acquire them? Second, the paper investigates how museum catalogues and reports have constructed a narrative around Kircher's Brazilian objects that is part and parcel of the creation of the field of Americanism in the 19th and 20th centuries. In an attempt to pinpoint their provenance both chronologically and stylistically, this study relies on documentary sources and literature as well as the visual and scientific analysis of the ethnographic objects currently held at the Pigorini museum,

Mariana Françoza is Associate Professor in Museum Studies at the Faculty of Archaeology, Leiden University and currently director the ERC Research Project *BRASILIAE. Indigenous Knowledge in the Making of Science: Historia Naturalis Brasiliae (1648)*. She specializes in the history of ethnographic collections and the circulation of Brazilian indigenous knowledge and objects in Europe.