

Engraved Spaces

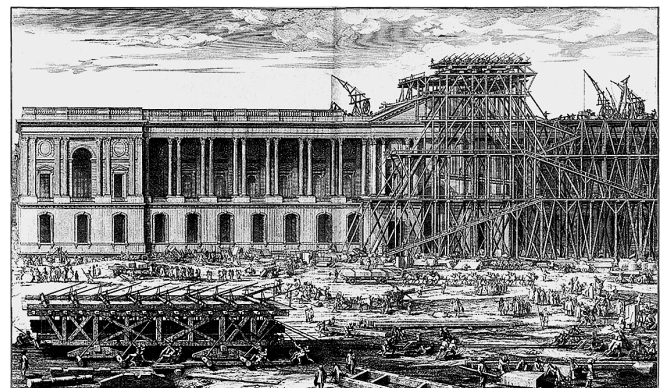
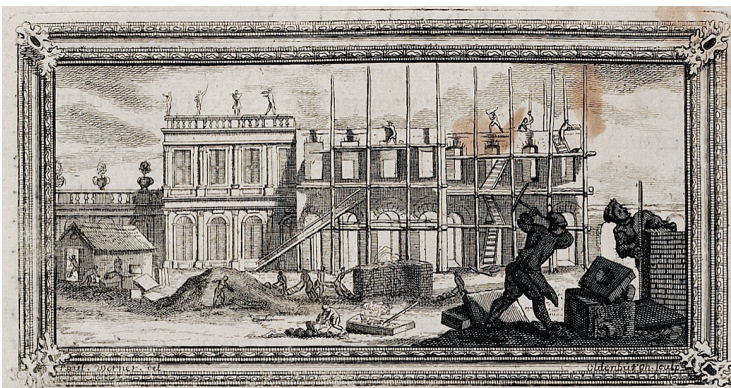
Lorenz Beger had a problem: the timing was bad. In 1686, the scholar was appointed Electoral Antiquarian and Second Librarian at the Berlin court. He had previously served the Electorate of the Palatinate and in 1685 had distinguished himself by publishing the *Thesaurus ex Thesauro Palatino selectus* on the antiquities collection in Heidelberg.¹ In 1688, with the accession of Friedrich III, he took over supervision of the antiquities collection in Berlin, and in 1693, after the death of Christoph Ungelter, he was put in charge of the entire *Kunstkammer*. However, because he was mainly interested in antiquities, he handed over responsibility for the Art and Rarities Cabinet to his subordinate, Johann Casimir Philippi, who also came from Heidelberg. The reorganization and expansion of the collection is documented by the inventory of 1694, and in the following years the Numismatic and Antiquities Cabinet was separated institutionally from the *Kunstkammer*.² Beger published the first volume of his richly illustrated *Thesaurus Brandenburgicus* in 1696, and the second followed shortly thereafter. In addition to presenting the antiquities in Berlin, this work celebrated Beger's employer Friedrich III in words and images, focusing on many areas of princely splendour.³ With the help of the thesaurus, the antiquities received a degree of media support that the *Lustgarten*, for its part, never attained, as its similarly lavish publication had become stalled in the manuscript stage in 1657 [■ Cupid]. This support was also lacking for the *Kunstkammer* well into the nineteenth century.

Although by the 1690s the collection of antiquarian objects was quite respectable, the rooms in which they were stored and displayed – much like the collection of the *Kunstkammer* as a whole – failed to meet the growing demands of electoral and soon-to-be royal representation [● 1685/1688]. Beger solved this problem through various visual strategies – for example, by hiring artists to depict the *Zeughaus* and other buildings as complete, although the construction of the *Zeughaus*, in particular, did not begin until 1695. He also presented the construction process itself as a testament to dynamic rule.⁴ The *praefatio* to the second volume of his thesaurus,

- 1 See Beger 1685.
- 2 See Gröschel 1982; Segelken 2010b, p. 124 and *passim*.
- 3 On the *Thesaurus Brandenburgicus*, see in particular the essays in Wrede/Kunze 2006, pp. 83–152.
- 4 See the engraving in Beger 1696/1701, vol. 2, unpag., after the *praefatio*.
- 5 *Ibid.*, unpag., at the start of the *praefatio*.
- 6 It is worth noting that the Sun King received copies of the first two volumes of the *Thesaurus Brandenburgicus* (see e.g. Segelken 2010b, p. 135).
- 7 Beger 1696/1701, vol. 3, after p. 216. Many scholars claim that the image is located before the main text in the first volume. This is possible, since the separately printed engraving was bound in different places in the book. This distinguished it from other illustrations on text pages with a set place in the volume. On historical depictions of curiosity cabinets, see e.g. Felfe 2003 and Valter 2004.

1 | Augustin Oldenburgh, after Joseph Werner, *Royal Construction Work*, illustration from Lorenz Beger, *Thesaurus Brandenburgicus*, 1698.

2 | Sébastien Le Clerc, *Eastern Facade of the Louvre under Construction*, 1677.



directed at the “kind reader”, begins with a vignette of an ambitious new building with scaffolding and bustling workers (fig. 1).⁵ The image looks like the counterpart to the engraved *Bilderfahrzeug* (image vehicle) that presented the spectacular eastern facade of the Louvre to the world as one of Louis XIV’s glorious projects (fig. 2).⁶ It shows workers erecting this structure (1667–74), which revolutionized the architectural debate of the period.

Around 1696, Beger chose a visual solution for the Antiquities Cabinet commonly known as the “ideal view” (fig. 3).⁷ The engraver Samuel Blesendorf depicted the spacious room as a “symmetrical immersion space”⁸ which draws the viewer through the invisible fourth wall into the stage-like arena of the picture. The slightly elevated point of view above the figures in the room directs attention to the back wall and the draped portrait of Friedrich III at the very centre of the composition. The central perspective, emphasized by the vanishing linearity of the tiled floor, places the collection space under the dictates of the royal patron. A



3 | Samuel Blesendorf, *Ideal Sketch of the Berlin Cabinet of Antiquities*, illustration from Lorenz Beger, *Thesaurus Brandenburgicus*, 1701. The engraving was made before 1696.

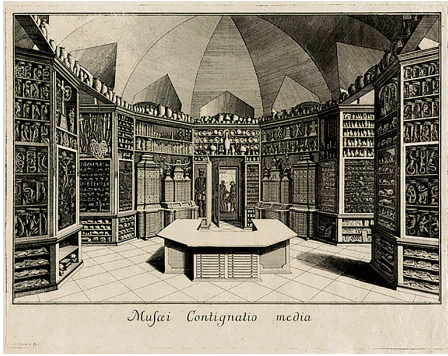
contrasting image is the well-known illustration of the *Musaeum Kircherianum* in Rome, which makes use of the more modern perspective technique of *scena per angolo*. With two vanishing points, it leaves open the possibility of movement and thus of spatially conditioned thought in this Jesuit cabinet of wonders (fig. 4).

4 | *The Musaeum Kircherianum in Rome*, illustration from Georgius de Sepibus and Athanasius Kircher, *Romani Collegii Societatis Jesu Musaeum Celeberrimum*, 1678.



The spatial envelope of the one-and-a-half-story room in Beger’s book is characterized by the use of coupled Corinthian pilasters. The surbased barrel vault rising from a massive entablature is decorated with a central ceiling painting of iconographically indeterminate gods reclining on clouds. In the lunette below the arch, genii hold a cartouche with Friedrich’s electoral monogram “FIII”, which was still used in the third volume of the thesaurus, published in 1701.⁹ Cabinets with sculptured tops stand along each of the longitudinal walls, and the room is divided by two rows of three tables with drawers. The antiquities are arranged symmetrically on top of the tables and between their legs. The col-

8 According to Robert Bauernfeind, Augsburg, with respect to a comparable depiction of an ideal curiosity cabinet in Happel 1683/1691, vol. 3, after p. 116. His comments were made at the conference *Das Meer in der Kammer* (Irsee Abbey, 5–7 November 2021).
 9 The view of the room on the title page offers a simplified version of the design, which was updated to include the royal monogram “FR” for *Fridericus Rex*, who was crowned in 1701 (see Beger 1696/1701, vol. 3, title page).



5 | Salomon Kleiner, *Curiosity Cabinet in Göttingen Abbey*, 1744.

lection includes antique busts displayed on corbels above the windows, where they forge a link between the spatial frame of the room and the contents of the collection. An aisle runs between the rows of tables, and at its centre we see a round table with a tablecloth for viewing the exhibited objects or consulting thick tomes of specialized literature. The room's different uses are illustrated by three staffage figures. The two male figures wear the Allonge wigs of persons of high rank and are engaged in conversation. The theatrically draped garment worn by the front figure indicates he is probably a courtier, while the shading transforms his counterpart into a lower-ranking scholar. The third figure on the left is an artist making sketches based on the antiquities in the room.

In his 1831 history of the *Kunstammer* [●Around 1855], Director Leopold von Ledebur speculated that the Cabinet of Antiquities, which was presented in the engraving in the *The-saurus*, “must have been completely transformed during the subsequent expansion of the palace, as no similar room can be found in the new sections or the adjacent older building containing the apothecary”.¹⁰ What Ledebur viewed with regret (much like scholars today) was the lack of historical visual documentation for the Berlin *Kunstammer* comparable, for example, to Salomon Kleiner’s detailed engravings of the curiosity cabinet in Göttingen Abbey in the Wachau Valley (fig. 5). But what Blesendorf’s design does authentically capture is the expectation that the presentation of the collections should suit the decorum of the elector and soon-to-be king Friedrich. What was at stake here was not so much the world as it was, but the world as it was supposed to be.

The few existing seventeenth and eighteenth-century images of exhibits at the Berlin *Kunstammer* are deceptive: the drawing of an anteater, for example, is based on a fur displayed there [■Anteater]; the hurriedly made sketch of an ominous die in a travel journal shows merely a functional diagram [■Shattered Die], and the meticulous drawing of a swallowed knife in the same journal depicts not an object in the collection but a comparable knife [◆Changing Focuses / ◆Availability]. By the same token, in the absence of alternatives and despite a growing sensitivity to the need for critical historical image analysis, the idealized Baroque engraving of the Cabinet of Antiquities has repeatedly been mined for analogies to the contemporaneous Berlin *Kunstammer*.¹¹

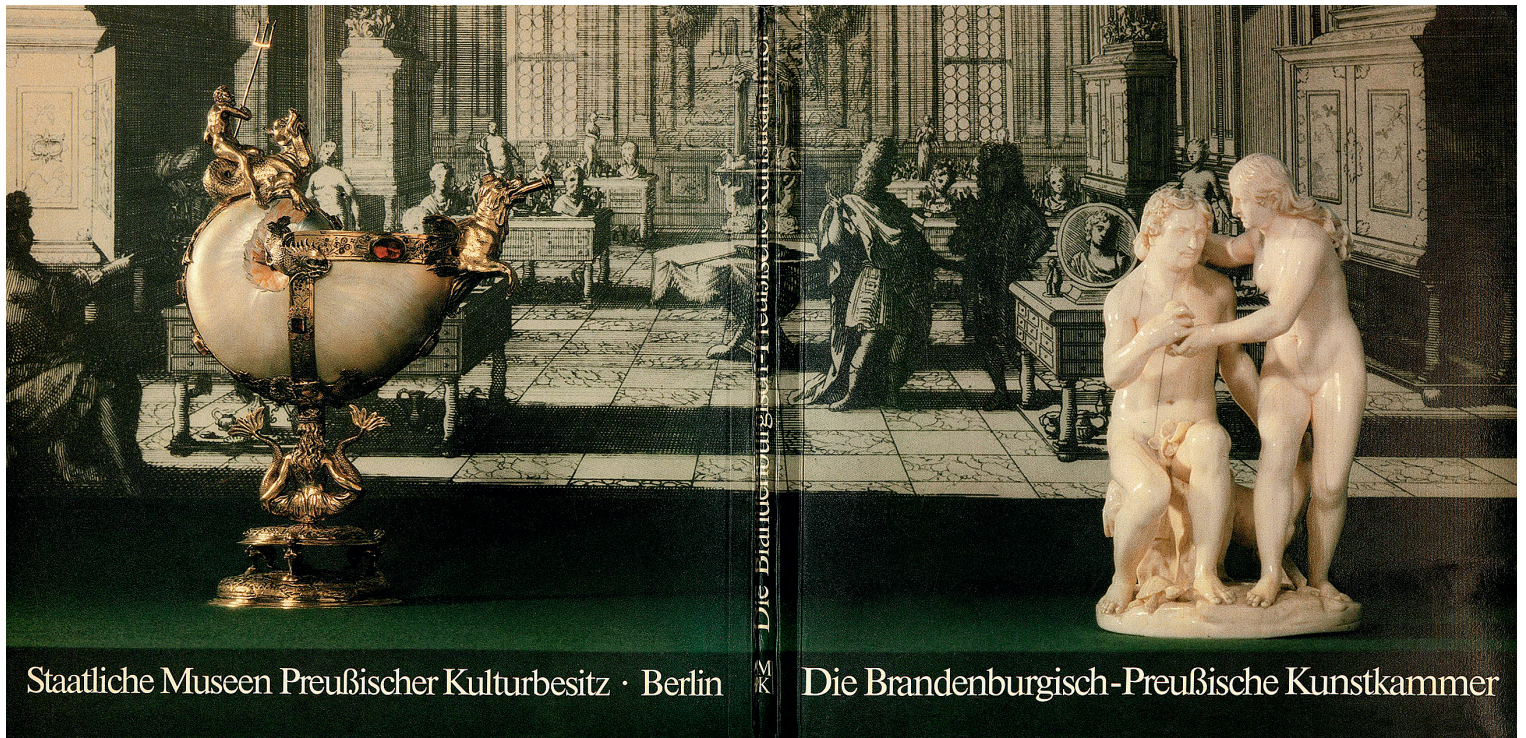
A visually appealing attempt to compensate for missing *Kunstammer* illustrations by using the existing idealized engravings of the Antiquities Cabinet can be found on the cover of a seminal work on the Brandenburg-Prussian *Kunstammer* published by the Staatliche Museen in 1981 (fig. 6). As a historical pictorial document, Blesendorf’s engraving (including its frame) forms the frontispiece. A detail from the lower part of the engraving, cropped slightly on both sides, runs across the front and back covers and spine.¹² The immersive immediacy of the interior view has been brought up to date by the close-up and the arbitrarily cropped section without the fixed framing of the baroque view of the world. The matt black-and-white detail fills the upper two-thirds of the layout. Colour photographs of emblematic *Kunstammer* objects extend into the engraving from the lower third of the front and back covers. The photo on the front shows Leonhard Kern’s outstanding ivory statuette of Adam and Eve, which, after completing the book, we understand as an allusion to the marriage of the Great Elector and Louise Henriette of Orange in 1646 and thus as an additional nod to the prince who re-established the *Kunstammer*. A masterful sixteenth-century nautilus goblet adorns the back [■Nautilus, fig. 1] – an inevitable choice from the perspective of image politics.¹³ As recommended by texts on museum theory from the

10 Ledebur 1831, p. 21.

11 Even in Segelken 2010b, p. 143. When comparing engravings of the Cabinet of Antiquities in Berlin with depictions of the curiosity cabinets of Ferrante Imperato, Ferdinando Cospi, Ole Worms, and others, Segelken comes to the hardly surprising conclusion that these engravings do not show “the wealth and variety of objects.”

12 See Hildebrand and Theuerkauff 1981, p. 2, and the cover.

13 See *ibid.*, pp. 172–5 (no. 89) and 109–11 (no. 37).



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Die Brandenburgisch-Preussische Kunstammer

early modern period, both objects are presented on a green background [●1685/1688]. Intruding into the engraving in a way that seems natural for former objects from the collection, they transform the idealized Cabinet of Antiquities into the contemporaneous *Kunstammer*. At the same time, the ivory sculpture and goldsmith's work mediate between two groups of elements: the depicted interior and the footer inscribed with the title on the front cover (“Die Brandenburgisch-Preussische Kunstammer”), and the publishing institutions on the back (“Staatliche Museen Preussischer Kulturbesitz – Berlin”). In this way, the layout emphasizes historical and present locations, which are suggested as being inevitable from the perspective of collection history.

6 | Josephine Hildebrand and Christian Theuerkauff, *Die Brandenburgisch-Preussische Kunstammer*, 1981, front and back cover.

Reality Check I: Built Spaces

The room depicted in the *Thesaurus Brandenburgicus* probably never existed – so where did such an “ideal” come from? In 1687, under the Great Elector, work began on a new building as an extension of the Apothecary Wing overlooking the Lustgarten, but the project was discontinued after Friedrich III came to power. The historical sources mention only its intended use as a library and gallery (and the site of princely living quarters), but the close connection between the library and the collections in the seventeenth century suggests that more suitable rooms must also have been planned for the *Kunstammer* and the Collection of Antiquities. Blesendorf’s engraving shows a room located in a building wing¹⁴ and, most importantly, the architectural style strongly recalls the work of Johann Arnold Nering, who was responsible for the extension. The library would have been located on the second floor of the building, and according to the construction contract, the domed rooms of the pavilions were to have vaulted ceilings and stucco decoration. Thus, one might tentatively propose that Blesendorf based the architectural shell of his engraved interior on older designs by Nering, which were in fact meant for the construction of collection rooms in the discontinued project for the new library.¹⁵ The somewhat old-fashioned character of

14 However, the conceptualization of the right wall seems unclear. The door suggests an exit to a corridor (*appartement semi-double*), but the reveal of the window and the curtain in the front right corner point to the possibility of an outer wall (*appartement simple*).

15 On the library wing project, see Peschken 1992, pp. 96–102; Jäger 2005, pp. 72–4; and, recently, Usenbinz 2021, pp. 299–309, esp. pp. 305–9 (with references to older studies by Gerald Heres and others). I would like to thank Kay Usenbinz, Humboldt-Universität zu Berlin, for discussion of the connection between the engraving and the library wing.



7 | Second room in the Cabinet of Antiquities, photo by Gustav Schwarz, c. 1930.

the Apothecary Wing can perhaps be seen behind a decorative capital “T” in the third volume of the *Thesaurus Brandenburgicus*, performatively revealed by pulled-back curtains [● 1685/1688, fig. 5]. The exhibits are crowded together on top of a low cabinet with ball feet and three rows of drawers, and they also appear on the two shelves above. The showpieces of the collection stand in the front left corner, including the archaizing, many-breasted Diana Ephesia from the Bellori Collection, which arrived in Berlin in 1698.

Despite its stylization, the depiction of the “intimum [or ultimum] Electoris Conclave” in the first volume of the *Thesaurus Brandenburgicus* is probably every bit as realistic. It is presented in a floral cartouche flanked by Juno and Minerva and was used by Beger as the final vignette in his discussion of the gem collection [● 1930, fig. 7].¹⁷ Because of Beger’s tendency to employ elevated Latin terms for the rooms of the early modern palace, it is difficult to identify the space. In all likelihood it was not one of the collection rooms proper, but a “closet” (*conclave*) with more restricted public access (*intimum*) at the very end (*ultimum*) of the living quarters belonging to the elector (*Electoris*). Here, too, we see a table at the centre for the study of objects, and the room is dominated by four tall pyramid-shaped showcases. Beger uses an orthodox image of a curiosity cabinet to represent this closet, which, as a specific room type, usually contained particularly valuable artworks (so-called *Kabinetstück*). According to Beger, the display cases showed “wonders of nature” that were decorated not by crude work (*rudi opere*), but by history paintings by famous artists, or that were represented by various animal species. The first pyramid holds crystal vessels, including a *draco* (dragon) that calls to mind a pale, fluid-preserved crocodile specimen, lacking only “colour and movement”. The three other cases contain vessels and objects, both new and ancient, made of precious materials. As Beger concludes, “Whatever precious things nature produces, and whatever beautiful things art, as nature’s pupil, creates – this is what I saw in the most sublime compartments of the electoral pyramids”. It was a classic curiosity cabinet programme – outside a curiosity cabinet.¹⁸

the room is also conveyed by the bull’s eye windows, which point back in time to the seventeenth century rather than forward to a future in which rectangular panes of plate glass would find favour.

At the same time, at Beger’s request, Blesendorf inserted existing objects into the depicted space. Many of the antiquities, including the round *imagines clipeatae* on the table in the front right corner [■ Priapus, fig. 3], are readily identifiable, and several pieces of the collection furniture, such as the tables¹⁶ and coin cabinets [◆ Cases, Boxes, fig. 2], actually existed. A realistic depiction of the old home of the antiquities in

16 On the collection furniture and the accommodation of the collections in the Apothecary Wing, see Stört 2022.

17 Beger 1696/1701, vol. 1, p. 226; for the version with *in ultimo Conclavi*, see *ibid.*, p. 227.

18 *Ibid.*, p. 227. The *conclusio* is strongly reminiscent of Francis Bacon’s programme; see e.g. Bredekamp 1995, pp. 64–65. I am grateful to Stefan Heinrich Bauhaus for assistance with translation and discussion of the extremely ambiguous formulations.

Friedrich III/I put an end to the haphazard addition of new rooms to his residence, and in 1699 Andreas Schlüter began extensively reconstructing the old Renaissance palace. Around 1703 and 1705, respectively, the Cabinet of Antiquities and the *Kunstkammer* moved to the mezzanine on the third floor of the palace, where they were situated in the north wing directly above the royal *Paradekammern*, or official state apartments. The *Kunstkammer* was reached primarily from a spiral staircase at the palace's northwest corner. This led from the library, which had remained in the Apothecary Wing, to the new collection rooms, thus ensuring the traditional close connection between the two institutions. The *Kunstkammer* had three rooms at its disposal [●1930]. Two arched passageways divided the first space, creating Rooms 991 and 992, where spectacular exhibits opened the exhibition [■Cupid]. Rooms 989 and 900 followed, containing the Ivory and Naturalia Cabinets. A very narrow passageway led from the corner of the Ivory Cabinet to the corridor between the stairway in Portal V (an additional connection between the floors) and the open space of the one-and-a-half-story Knights' Hall in the piano nobile. A similar passageway at the opposite end of the corridor provided access to the three showrooms in the Cabinet of Antiquities (Rooms 985–7) [■Priapus], which could also be accessed by additional entrances in a side room.¹⁹

The new premises fulfilled many of the promises of the copper engraving in the *Thesaurus Brandenburgicus* – but not all. The rooms had relatively low ceilings because of their location in the mezzanine, but Schlüter's workshop had created elaborate spatial envelopes with dynamically articulated wall panelling and lavish ceiling paintings framed by stucco. These details distinguished the rooms from many other curiosity cabinets. Given the great sensitivity to the spatialized representation of social hierarchies in the premodern period, an especially striking feature was the use of classical column orders in several of the rooms as the best possible means of expressing royal dignity. The early modern period had also ranked the five orders of columns. In the second room of the Cabinet of Antiquities (Room 986), the Corinthian or second highest order was in fact adopted in the form depicted in the engraving. Thus, the site of the antiquities invited a comparison and provoked rivalry with the most important rooms of the *Paradekammern* in the piano nobile, which incorporated the same order (fig. 7). For his 1704 publication on contemporary coins in the royal collection, often regarded as the fourth volume of the *Thesaurus Brandenburgicus*, Beger drew on this design, which proudly opens the book (fig. 8).²⁰ The coin cabinets and tables are the same pieces of furniture found in Blesendorf's older engraving, but with its emphasis on a longitudinal perspective, the room now has three windows instead of the existing two. In fact, the coin collection was to be displayed in the neighbouring



8 | Page from Lorenz Beger, *Numismatum Modernorum Cimeliarchii Regio-Electoralis Brandenburgici Sectio Prima*, 1704, with idealized views of the Cabinet of Antiquities. The second room is visible in the illustration at the top, the first behind the capital H.

19 For a detailed discussion, see e.g. Theuerkauff 1981b, pp. 19–28, and Segelken 2010b, pp. 147–59.
 20 Beger 1704, p. 1.

room (985). The large capital H with which the text under the engraving begins (fig. 8) also reflects real-life conditions: it shows urns on shelves and in a pyramid-shaped display case, which visitors found in the first room of the Cabinet of Antiquities (Room 987), devoted to funerals.

The Ionic pilasters in both the first room and the Cabinet of Naturalia in the *Kunstammer* [●1930, figs. 2, 4, and 6] were a more appropriate choice than the Corinthian columns. In the early modern hierarchy of column orders, the Ionic was ranked below the Corinthian. It was gendered as “female” and semantically functionalized for areas devoted to the muses.²¹ In the Cabinet of Naturalia, this column order structured and humanistically tamed the natural space of the grotto, whose tectonic layers began with the rock-like pedestal and the coral red colour scheme of the pilasters, rose to the bark panelling on the overdoor and cornice, and culminated in the painted sky. The naturalia on display were multiplied in the mirrors between the pilasters.²² The Ionic framing of the collection rooms enjoyed surprising continuity. When Schinkel designed the Greek stoa for the (Altes) Museum, the same order was once again selected for the facade facing the Lustgarten. Well into the mid-nineteenth century, overlooking the broad square, this facade formed the counterpart to the rooms of the *Kunstammer* in the palace, now a department of the new institution [●Around 1855].

One striking difference to the design shown in the engraving from the 1690s is the representation of the royal patron. While it is true that wax effigies of Friedrich I dominated the first room of the *Kunstammer* [■Wax] and the need for royal representation influenced the presentation of several exhibits [■Pearls], the portrait medallion of Friedrich I above the fireplace in the third room of the Antiquities Collection (fig. 9) could by no means compare with the absolutist *éclat* of the ruler’s portrait and monogram at the centre of the idealized scenography of the engraving. The main difference was the actual grouping of rooms in the *Kunstammer* and the Cabinet of Antiquities, which did not conform to any standard arrangement and made only partial use of enfilades. The entrances to the world of the collection were inconspicuous, and the paths through the rooms were so variable that they cannot always be reconstructed from the reports. The dramatically cloudy sky in the centre of the ceilings, not peopled by gods, provided a view that was as uncluttered and open as that from the windows.

Reality Check II: Countercheck by Visitors

But when confronted with all these things, what did visitors to the *Kunstammer* and Cabinet of Antiquities consider relevant? In 1706, a group of Austrian travellers led by Count Rindsmaul viewed the collections in their newly completed rooms. In his travel report, Rindsmaul praised the design of these rooms but spoke critically of the objects, noting that the rooms of the *Kunstammer* “looked more splendid than the art and rarities found inside”.²³ The mirrored walls seemed especially noteworthy to him – which is hardly surprising given the high price of mirrored glass at the time. Describing the third room of the Cabinet of Antiquities, Rindsmaul writes that it too was “painted” and “a cast portrait of the king on a metal plate is visible upon entering” (fig. 9).²⁴ Two years later, in October 1708, the *Kunstammer* was visited by an Italian traveller whom scholars have dubbed “Anonimo Veneziano”. The artificial grotto in the Cabinet of Naturalia appears to have reminded this traveller of the universal concepts evoked by Lorenz Beger in his description of the *intimum Conclave*. He highlights the “rarities of the earth, air, and sea” and



9 | Third room in the Cabinet of Antiquities, photo by Gustav Schwarz, c. 1930.

subsumes the previously described heterogeneous naturalia under a more general perspective: “In short, one sees in this room all the rarities of the four elements and the entire world”.²⁵

This dearth of information continued into the eighteenth century [●Around 1740], at the end of which Friedrich Nicolai made the following generalization in his *Kunstkammer* guide: “The rooms are decorated with columns, stone carvings, stucco, paintings, and mirrored walls.”²⁶ The lack of interest in the iconographic dimension of the ceiling paintings is conspicuous. In their framed fields, they connected objects that were actually present, such as the narwhal tooth in the Cabinet of Naturalia [●1930, fig. 6], with those that possessed an allegorical meaning, including the bust of the so-called Vitellius Grimani.²⁷ In this way, they created meaningful arrangements. The travellers’ silence on this topic corresponds to its marginalization in contemporaneous engravings of palace complexes,²⁸ as can also be seen in the illustrations in the *Thesaurus Brandenburgicus* (figs. 3 and 8). This finding may help art historians, who take such great pleasure in iconographic analysis, to adjust their practices to actual historical structures of communication.

Much of what in retrospect appears to be a discrepancy between the engraved images, constructed space, and textualized experience is attributable to the intrinsic laws of various media and evanesces in the undocumented sphere of what was considered natural in the lives of contemporaries. We do not know what the visitors to the Berlin *Kunstkammer* actually saw, thought, or said before they reached for their pens.

Translated by Adam Blauhut

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- 21 Pilasters in the Ionic order were also planned for the facade of the aborted new library wing; see the building contract in Usenbinz 2021, pp. 400–3, here p. 401.
 - 22 The author is currently preparing an essay on the correspondences between the Cabinet of Naturalia and the grotto in the Lustgarten.
 - 23 Hagelstange 1905, pp. 207–8.
 - 24 *Ibid.*, p. 206.
 - 25 Anonimo Veneziano 1999, pp. 123 and 125.
 - 26 Nicolai 1786a, p. 792.
 - 27 See Becker 2014, pp. 254–8, for a discussion of how the Vitellius Grimani, displayed in the corner of the Ivory Cabinet, allegorized the art of sculpture.
 - 28 Völkel 2001, pp. 286–90, explicitly refers to this phenomenon.