

### Between Leibniz and Jean Henry

From a broad historical perspective, the history of the Berlin *Kunstammer* in the eighteenth century spans two utopian projects. In 1700, Leibniz called for a “theatre of nature and art” with the founding of an academy of sciences, of which the *Kunstammer* was to be a central component.<sup>1</sup> Leibniz’s plan was only a partial success. Friedrich I’s concern for prestige, as well as insufficient funding, sent the *Kunstammer* along a different path [■Night Clock]. Beginning in the 1790s, *Kunstammer* warden Jean Henry fought for its expansion once again into a universal collection, against protagonists who advocated founding a university and a neo-humanist museum and who tended to view the *Kunstammer* merely as a source of fungible material [●Around 1800 / ■Adams Mammoth].<sup>2</sup>

Between these attempted re-definitions, the *Kunstammer* and its administrators appeared to suffer for decades from the indifference of their royal rulers Friedrich Wilhelm I and Friedrich II. Moments of a differentiated dissolution dynamic were evident when, in 1735, Friedrich Wilhelm I ordered that the naturalia of the *Kunstammer* be turned over to the academy [■Monkey Hand] and when, around 1770, his son had antiquities from the *Kunstammer* transferred to the Antique Temple of Sanssouci Park.<sup>3</sup> In the transformation processes of collection history during the century of Enlightenment, the Berlin *Kunstammer* fell behind its competitors in the residence and university cities of the empire.<sup>4</sup> Friedrich II’s opinion about *Kunstammern* in general was revealed in a letter to Voltaire from 1771, in which he whimsically described how at the Polish pilgrimage site of Częstochowa, pious largesse had indiscriminately piled up treasures in the “garderobe” (actually an intimate functional and storage space behind the closets of stately apartments) and in the “cabinet de curiosités” of the Holy Virgin.<sup>5</sup>

The *Kunstammer* in the Berlin Palace, however, continued to be open to the public. It was viewed and described.

### Tschirnhaus's Canon

In 1727, Wolff Bernhard von Tschirnhaus published the practical-educational and apodemic writings of his deceased relative Ehrenfried Walther von Tschirnhaus, universal scholar and trusted friend of Leibniz, under the title *Getreuer Hofmeister auf Akademien und Reisen* (Loyal steward on academies and journeys).<sup>6</sup> One of the additions made by the younger Tschirnhaus was an overview in the form of a list, *What remarkable things can be seen at the Kunstammer in Berlin*, which he recommended as a “Model of an academy and travel journal” (fig. 1).<sup>7</sup> Such contemporary guides on the art of traveling (apodemica)<sup>8</sup> also advised readers to visit collections and included the imperative to take notes.

Tschirnhaus’s “Model” was presumably based on his own visit to the Berlin *Kunstammer* on 27 February 1713, a Monday, when Johann Casimir Philippi led him on a tour through the collection

1 See Bredekamp 2000, pp. 12–19; Bredekamp 2020b, especially pp. 174–8.

2 For more detail, see Dolezel 2019.

3 On Friedrich and the antiquities, see e.g. Kreikenbom 1998.

4 On the history of the Berlin *Kunstammer* at this time, see e.g. Theuerkauff 1981b, pp. 28–33.

5 Friedrich II’s letter to Voltaire on 16 (or 5) March 1771 (Friedrich II. von Preußen 1853, pp. 212–14, here pp. 213–14).

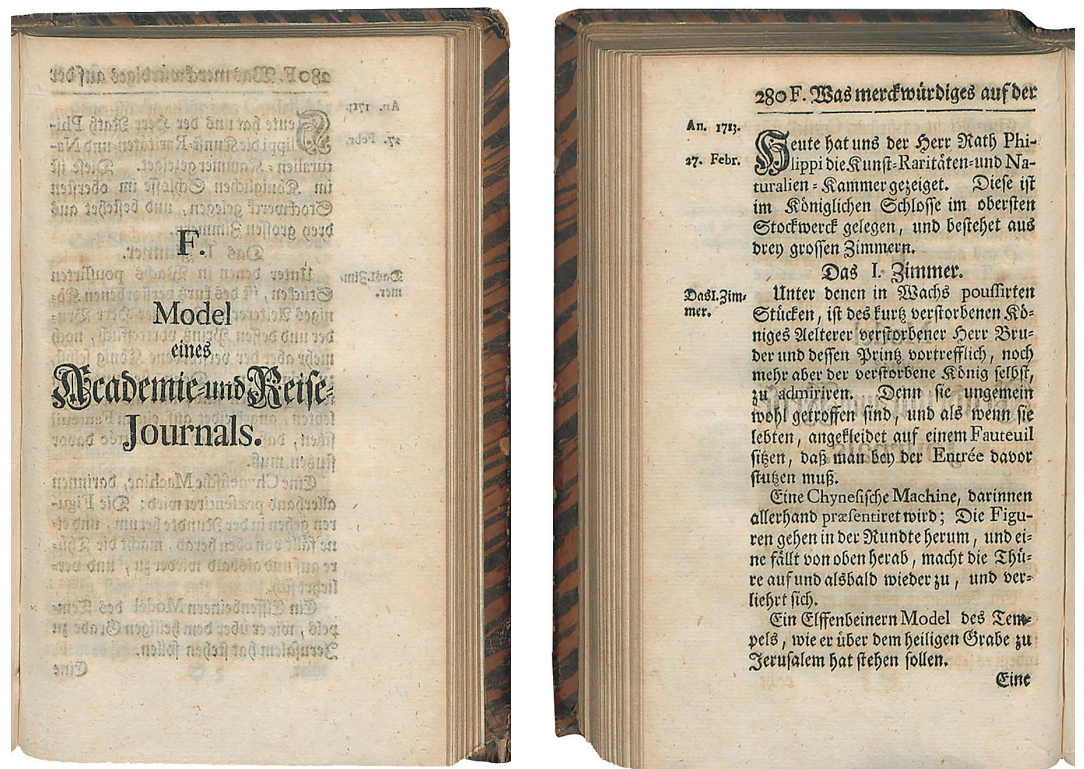
6 See Schmitt-Maaß 2018, pp. 265–8.

7 Tschirnhaus 1727, pp. 279–87.

– two days after the death of Friedrich I (fig. 2). Tschirnhaus's description follows a path through the three cabinets [● 1696 vs. 1708] and consists of a list of especially notable exhibits. Fifteen objects or object groups are identified in the “First Room” (Room 991/992), with Tschirnhaus briefly summarizing first the wax effigies [■ Wax], followed by “an Indian deer and two African donkeys; a deer with white spots”, and then ivory furniture [■ Anteatel] and Japanese lacquer works as exotica. The iron statuette of “Friedrich Wilhelm on horseback felling the chimera in bronze” (!) was already one of the most prominent exhibits from the time of the Great Elector depicted here [● 1685/1688 / ◆ Changing Focuses].<sup>9</sup> The list for the “Second Room” (Room 989) begins – appropriately for the Ivory Cabinet – with “all kinds of very small ivory work”, once again encompasses fifteen objects and object groups and then concludes, as with the first room, with “etc., etc.”, thereby implicitly embedding the selection in an object-cosmos usual for such cabinets of curiosities [◆ Canon and Transformation].<sup>10</sup> Tschirnhaus extolls a few typical *Kunstammer* pieces with brief characterizations such as “incomparably artful, rare and curious”,<sup>11</sup> pays tribute to the *Weltallschale* of Emperor Rudolf II (a bowl with representations of universal order) in a longer description,<sup>12</sup> and sketches related anecdotes about curiosities such as the shattered die in order to make these pieces comprehensible [■ Shattered Die]. His list for the Naturalia Cabinet or “Third Room” (Room 990) includes seventeen objects or object groups that subsume, for instance, “all kinds of animals and insects in alcohol”, and he also mentions the sophisticated collection furniture – a pyramid vitrine – before once again ending with “etc., etc.”<sup>13</sup> Tschirnhaus wrote nothing about the Cabinet of Medals and Antiquities and visited the library only on the following day.<sup>14</sup> On the basis of this guided tour of the collection immediately after the death of Friedrich I, Tschirnhaus contrived a specific canon of objects for the Berlin *Kunstammer*. This canon claimed context and legitimation within the larger canon of cabinets of curiosities around 1700, and fifteen years later Tschirnhaus still believed it to be valid and worthy of publication.

### Tschirnhaus's Potential Readers

A small group of handwritten reports from around 1740 regarding the *Kunstammer* in the Berlin Palace have survived to the present day. These reports adhere to a schema of listing notable exhibits. They paint a picture of the collection from the perspective of middle-class visitors at a time for



1–2 | “Model eines Academie- und Reise-Journals: Was merckwürdiges auf der Kunst-Kammer in Berlin zu sehen”, in Wolff Bernhard von Tschirnhaus, *Getreuer Hofmeister auf Academien und Reisen*, 1727.

- 8 See e.g. Stagl 1983; Stagl 2002.
- 9 See Tschirnhaus 1727, pp. 280–2, with quotations on pp. 281 and 282.
- 10 See *ibid.*, pp. 282–6, with quotations on pp. 282 and 286.
- 11 *Ibid.*, p. 283.
- 12 See Hildebrand/Theuerkauff 1981, pp. 114–17, no. 41.
- 13 See Tschirnhaus 1727, p. 286–7, with quotation on p. 287. There was already an “etc.” for the selection of objects within the pyramid vitrine (*ibid.*, p. 286).
- 14 See *ibid.*, p. 288.

which almost no inventories have been preserved. All of these reports were written by male authors; female voices can be perceived only indirectly [■Priapus].

3 | Christophe Guérin, after Jean-Georges Daniche, *Johann Andreas Silbermann*, ca. 1780. This copper etching portrays the successful organ builder decades after his visit to Berlin.



In 2014, the Saxon State and University Library Dresden acquired the travel journal of Alsatian organ builder Johann Andreas Silbermann (fig. 3). A native of Strasbourg, the almost thirty-year-old Silbermann travelled to Central Germany to become acquainted with his own instrument-making family, meeting its most famous member, his uncle Gottfried, at work in Zittau.<sup>15</sup> In his *Anmerckungen derer Auf meiner Sächsischen Reyße gesehenen Merckwürdigkeiten*, Silbermann dedicated sixteen pages of the description of his Berlin visit to a tour of the Library, the *Kunst-kammer*, and the Antiquities Cabinet on Tuesday, 6 June 1741.

Like other travellers of the time, Silbermann paid little heed to the institutional divisions of these collections. On the day of his visit, he announced himself to “Herr Councillor [Conrad Christoph Neuburg], who is in charge of the *Kunst-kammer*”, and as he “is also librarian, I found him at the library”.<sup>16</sup> Neuburg led Silbermann through the library and then accompanied him “up to the *Kunst-kammer*”. After this, the visitor probably left the Ivory Cabinet at the corridor to the Knights Hall staircase [●Around 1800] and was then shown the Medals Cabinet “by another court councillor”,<sup>17</sup> presumably Jacques Gaultier de La Croze.<sup>18</sup>

Silbermann’s recital of notable exhibits roughly followed his tour through the *Kunst-kammer*, although he wrote from memory since he was not allowed to take notes on his “writing board”, ostensibly per royal order [■Shattered Die, fig. 1].<sup>19</sup> This was completely unusual and was mentioned by no one else in regard to Berlin – had Silbermann perhaps irritated his cicerone? In his retrospective, he described the spatial arrangement as “4 or 5 rooms”, which he then barely distinguished when identifying the location of objects. However, his introductory note – “as best as I can recall, I saw first a bezoar buck, which came from Africa” [■Bezoars] – indicates at least that the presentation of especially spectacular exhibits in the first room of the collection did have the desired effect [■Cupid].<sup>20</sup> Silbermann mentioned neither the ornate architectural design of the spatial interiors nor the iconography of ceiling paintings [●1696 vs. 1708], and with few exceptions showed little interest in the naturalia. In 1708, a Venetian visitor had abruptly broken off his retrospective list of astounding objects because, as he explained, not everything “can be described by one who is traveling and has to go to dinner.”<sup>21</sup>

Two unnamed visitors, who are referred to by the Latin designations “Anonymus A” and “Anonymus B” in the research project on the Berlin *Kunst-kammer* and whose notes have been preserved in the Manuscript Collection of the Berlin State Library, proceeded more systematically. Anonymus A wrote his report when Friedrich Wilhelm I was still the “current” king.<sup>22</sup> Anonymus B referred to the Soldier King as deceased; his mention of a 1742 publication provides a *terminus post quem*, while his reference to the clocks in the *Kunst-kammer* that were deaccessioned from the collection in 1752 [■Night Clock] offers a *terminus ante quem*.<sup>23</sup> In their respective lists of exhibits organized by rooms, both of these anonymous visitors followed a schema comparable to Tschirnhaus’s “Model”, although more comprehensive.<sup>24</sup> The internal medial dynamics of such selective lists often created an image that a visual inspection of the collection itself would not have con-

15 On Silbermann, see Schaefer 1994; SLUB, <https://www.slub-dresden.de/entdecken/musik/musikhandschriften/johann-andreas-silbermann> (accessed 17 February 2022).  
 16 Conrad Christoph Neuburg had been director of the *Kunst-kammer* since 1735 and librarian since 1723.  
 17 Silbermann 1741, pp. 30–1 and 41. The private lodgings of the wardens could also be looked up in Berlin address books, (see for instance Adreß-Calender 1704, not pag., s.v. “Bibliothec, Antiquitaeten und Raritaet[en] Cammer”). In 1826, a guidebook would recommend that visiting groups announce themselves at Jean Henry’s personal address, or even better – an indication of the increasing tourist traffic – at that of his “famulus”, whose personal address was also listed (see Rumpf 1826, p. XI).  
 18 Jacques Gaultier de La Croze was director of the Cabinet of Medals and Antiquities beginning in 1739.  
 19 Silbermann 1741, p. 31.  
 20 Ibid.  
 21 Anonimo Veneziano 1999, p. 125.  
 22 Anonymus A, fols. 35r and 36v.  
 23 See Anonymus B, fols. 7v and 8r.

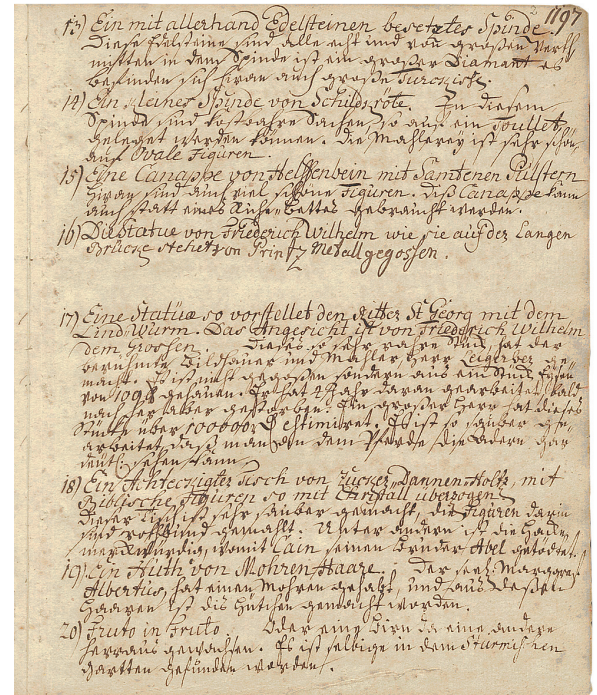
firmed. While Anonymus B's isolated reference to "The Oldenburg horn: a copper etching" certainly ennobled the object depicted as well as its portrayal, it also concealed the fact that this was merely a single sheet in an extensive "paper museum" [◆ Availability].<sup>25</sup>

Anonymus B's approach is both instructive and enigmatic in regard to the information flow of collection history. He gave the individual positions consecutive numbers written in meticulous Latin cursive, and then left space beneath each number for notes composed in a fluid German cursive (fig. 4). At times these notes were simply omitted, as in the case of the statuette replica of Schlüter's Great Elector on horseback (no. 16); at other times they claimed so much space – as in the case of the ornate table top (no. 18) [◆ Changing Focuses] – that the writing was cramped. How was this document composed? Did the unnamed visitor have access to a select list of attractions prior to his visit? Did he arrive at the *Kunst-kammer* well prepared and then supplement his list with narratives from the tour? There is a striking resemblance between the formulations about objects in the inventories and visitors' descriptions of them. Were visitors permitted to look at the inventories? Did wardens have them at hand during tours?<sup>26</sup> The Virtual Research Environment of the Berlin *Kunst-kammer* [VRE] facilitates the analysis of such reports with filter functions that permit comparisons of objects mentioned as well as choice of words.

The faithful reproduction of information in visitors' formulations ensured the continuing prerogative of interpretations for the object-cosmos of the *Kunst-kammer*. At the same time, however, it is also evidence of an appropriation of global knowledge manifested here in material culture by a public beyond the interests of the royal owners. Such an appropriation was regulated by the objects themselves, which suggested certain reception scenarios (affordance), as well as through their presentation in the rooms and the practices of the tours. A visitor such as Silbermann, for instance, reacted to direct appeals when the fox pelt with two tails "was given to me to examine in order to see that neither was sewn on" [◆ Availability]. However, he could also decide on his own how things were presented to him: of the aforementioned *Weltallschale* of Rudolf II, he wrote: "I had it shown to me twice and could almost not get enough of it".<sup>27</sup> Such remarks offer vivid insight into the praxeological dimension of the *Kunst-kammer* and give shape to the biographies of numerous objects beyond a mere inventory.<sup>28</sup>

For visitors, the experience that they had with collection exhibits was incorporated into their experience of the entire visiting program<sup>29</sup> and was reconnected to prior knowledge, group-specific as well as individual. Numerous anecdotes related about the objects flowed into the stream of early modern narration; Silbermann's fascination with the two cannonballs that collided in mid-air [◆ Canon and Transformation] during his visit to the Berlin *Kunst-kammer*, for example, was echoed more generally among the readers of Baron Munchausen's adventures.<sup>30</sup>

In his *Beschreibung der Königlichen Residenzstädte Berlin und Potsdam* (1769/86), Friedrich Nicolai continued to recommend this *Kunst-kammer* as a matter of course to both the local and travelling middle-class public as the pinnacle of Berlin's "collections of naturalia, anatomical preparations, art objects, machines, antiquities, coins, and geographical maps".<sup>31</sup>



4 | A page from *Specification derer Sachen auf der Königl. Preuß. Kunst Cammer zu Berlin befindl. Sein. Und jetzo in nachfolgenden Cammern eingetheilet sind*, 1742–52, Berlin State Library.

24 On Tschirnhaus's apparent topicality, see his adoption in Schramm 1744, col. 148–52.  
 25 Anonymus B, fol. 4v.  
 26 See also Küster 1756, pp. 18–20, col. 539–49, which compiles older inventory lists (see also Fischbacher/Hahn 2020, p. 282).  
 27 Silbermann 1741, pp. 37 and 35.  
 28 See e.g. Welzel 2006; Classen (Constance) 2007; Zaunstöck 2020.  
 29 On the practice of palace tours, see Völkel 2007; for the Berlin Palace in particular, see Völkel 2017.  
 30 See Silbermann 1741, p. 32; and Anonym 1788, pp. 109–13.  
 31 See Nicolai 1769, pp. 337–53; Nicolai 1779, pp. 581–92; Nicolai 1786a, pp. 791–802.