



## CANON AND TRANSFORMATION: COMPLETING, COMPARING, COMPETING

Ideas about which objects should be part of a collection were always oriented to the interests of those who assembled and maintained them. Which exhibits were noticed in a collection was influenced by the people who staged them and made them accessible in descriptions [◆ Changing Focuses]. These emphases, however, were by no means arbitrary, but were shaped by what existed at other locations and what was available [◆ Availability].<sup>1</sup> In this sense, the holdings of the Berlin *Kunstammer*, as reflected in inventories from the late seventeenth century [● 1685/1688], also represented the canon of objects for European collections of the time. This included not only scientific instruments and lathed ivory objects and goldwork fabricated in southern Germany, but artefacts from East Asia as well. Swordfish bills, rattlesnake rattles, and babirusa skulls were also part of the collection in Berlin, as they were in courtly, university, and “private” collections elsewhere. Likewise, hornbill beaks, popular due to their unusual appearance [■ Golden Plover, fig. 6], were collected not only at the Brandenburg-Prussian court, but also at the courts of Gotha, Gottorf, and Copenhagen and were regarded as one of the indispensable exhibits of early modern cabinets of curiosities.<sup>2</sup>

Even early on, there were theoretical reflections about the ideal holdings of such collections, but these notions were also repeatedly revised and updated in the course of newly developing museum concepts. In this process, individual ideas – such as Gottfried Wilhelm Leibniz’s proposal of bringing objects of art and nature together into a unity of collection and research in order to create a universal museum – were discussed repeatedly and attempts were made to implement them over the centuries, not only in Berlin.<sup>3</sup> In the collection culture of the eighteenth century, the scientific usability of collections gained in importance.<sup>4</sup> In this context, the completion of the royal *naturalia* holdings [■ Golden Plover] became a focus in Berlin, not least of all to prevent the Prussian collection from “falling behind the major similar collections in Paris, Vienna, and Petersburg”.<sup>5</sup>

In practice, the economic and political networks of collectors influenced their opportunities to expand the canon through gifts [■ Pearls] or purchases.<sup>6</sup> At trading venues such as Amsterdam, Brandenburg electors and Prussian kings competed with other German princes for objects from distant lands. In order to secure exotic items, the Great Elector and Friedrich III/I were willing to pay people who had contacts to locations where “the best rarities could be found”.<sup>7</sup> In this way, weapons, books, porcelain, and much more arrived in Berlin from present-day Vietnam, Indonesia, and Japan. With these objects, the Brandenburg-Prussian rulers sought to bring their *Kunstammer* to the level of corresponding institutions throughout Europe [● 1685/1688].<sup>8</sup>

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1. *Memorabilibus*, illustration of collectable artefacts from [Leonhard Christoph Sturm], *Die geöffnete Raritäten- und Naturalien-Kammer*, 1704

In his book *Die geöffnete Raritäten- und Naturalien-Kammer* (1704), Leonhard Christoph Sturm conceived an ideal museum, and in so doing also offered an ideal catalogue of holdings. His *Raritätenhaus* or “house of rarities” encompassed a universal collection; unlike Samuel Quiccheberg’s *Inscriptiones Vel Tituli Amplissimi* (1565), however, it was distinguished by a specialization of individual domains. The pictorial and textual representation of objects was modelled on printed collection catalogues such as that of the *Museum Wormianum* of 1655. In his museum utopia, Sturm reflected on the classificatory and media-specific developments in the collection culture of his time. His house of rarities was pioneering for the organization of universal museums in the eighteenth century.<sup>9</sup> ED

2. *Battle Scene with Elephants*, ivory, late seventeenth century, Staatliche Museen zu Berlin, Sculpture Collection and Museum for Byzantine Art

Lathed and carved ivory was not only a focal point of the Berlin Kunstkammer [●1685/1688], but also an integral component of the canon of objects established in the seventeenth century. This development, however, also meant that ivory exhibits became familiar and were often no longer met with heightened interest. While in the first half of the eighteenth century several visitors to the Kunstkammer praised especially prominent pieces in their travel notes – remarking about a “battle of elephants”, for example, that “this is a beautiful piece of art”<sup>10</sup> – others mentioned the ivory holdings only in general terms and in passing.<sup>11</sup> SW



- 1 See Collet 2010.
- 2 See Collet 2007, pp. 75–7.
- 3 See Bredekamp/Dolezel 2009; Bredekamp 2011.
- 4 See Savoy 2006, pp. 16–17.
- 5 GStA PK, I. HA Rep. 96 A Geheimes Kabinett, Nr. 1 E, Kunst-, Naturalien-, Medaillen- und Münzkabinett, fol. 88v. See also the chapter “Naturalien-Kammer” in Dolezel 2019, pp. 74–87.
- 6 See Collet 2010, p. 316.
- 7 GStA PK, I. HA Rep. 9 Allgemeine Verwaltung, Nr. D2, Fasz. 1, fol. 79r, fols. 238–46.
- 8 See Ledebur 1831, pp. 3–57.
- 9 See Dolezel 2018.
- 10 See Anonymus A; Anonymus B; Silbermann 1741; for the quotation, Anonymus B, fol. 3r.
- 11 See Hagelstange 1905, p. 208; or also Anonimo Veneziano 1999, p. 123.







### 3. Silver Denarii of the Roman Emperor Otho, illustration from Lorenz Beger, *Thesaurus Brandenburgicus*, 1696

One important criterion for evaluating coin collections was the possession of a complete se-

ries of coins, especially those of Roman emperors.<sup>12</sup> In his *Grösste Denkwürdigkeiten der Welt*, Eberhard Werner Happel challenged a Hamburg collection as to “whether it included [copper] pennies or coins of the old heathen Roman Emperor Otho” and drew comparisons to the collections of the Florentine archduke and the Imperial Library in Vienna.<sup>13</sup> In Berlin, at least four *silver* coinages of Otho – who had governed for only three months during the crisis year of 69 CE – could be shown. These coins came from the Palatine legacy of 1685 and have survived to the present day. Beger emphasized the completeness of the series by spanning his discussion of it in the *Thesaurus* between the formulae *sequitur Otho* and *successit Vitellius*.<sup>14</sup> MB

### 4. Preserved specimen of a baby crocodile (*Osteolaemus tetraspis*) hatching from an egg, nineteenth century, Freie Universität Berlin, Institute of Biology / Zoology

Preserved crocodile specimens were among the basic elements of early modern cabinets of curiosities. Andreas Bunemann, a traveller to the East Indies, thus kindled the interest of the Prussian king with his offer to sell several “crocodiles”, some as eggs and some removed from the eggs and embalmed.<sup>15</sup> Knowledge of Friedrich I’s interest in exotic rarities and “the Wonders of God in the products of nature” created opportunities for collectors who wanted to sell their objects for profit. An English physician in the service of the East India Company in Surat, for example, offered to sell him exotic naturalia [■ Bezoars], which resulted in the acquisition of valuable gems as well as bezoars from elephants, rhinoceroses, and snakes for the Berlin Kunstkammer.<sup>16</sup> MK/DS





## 5. The so-called *Karlsruher Türkenbeute* as staged at the Badisches Landesmuseum

The expansion of the Ottoman Empire into south-western and Central Europe resulted in contact zones from which objects, some of them spoils, entered the collections of the princely protagonists of the so-called Turkish Wars, such as the Habsburgs and Baden Margrave Ludwig Wilhelm.<sup>17</sup> For individual Ottoman exhibits – such as “a Turkish knife with a handle made from lapis lazuli” or the portrait of Sultan Mehmed IV, who led a siege of Vienna in 1683 – textual sources from the *Kunstammer* of the relatively uninvolved Brandenburg electors convey, in contrast, no gestures of triumph<sup>18</sup> – while in the armoury, objects such as “small Turkish drums, including several stretched with the skins of Christians” certainly heralded the changing fortunes of war.<sup>19</sup> MB



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## 6. Feather helmet collected by James Cook in 1778–79, Staatliche Museen zu Berlin, Ethnological Museum

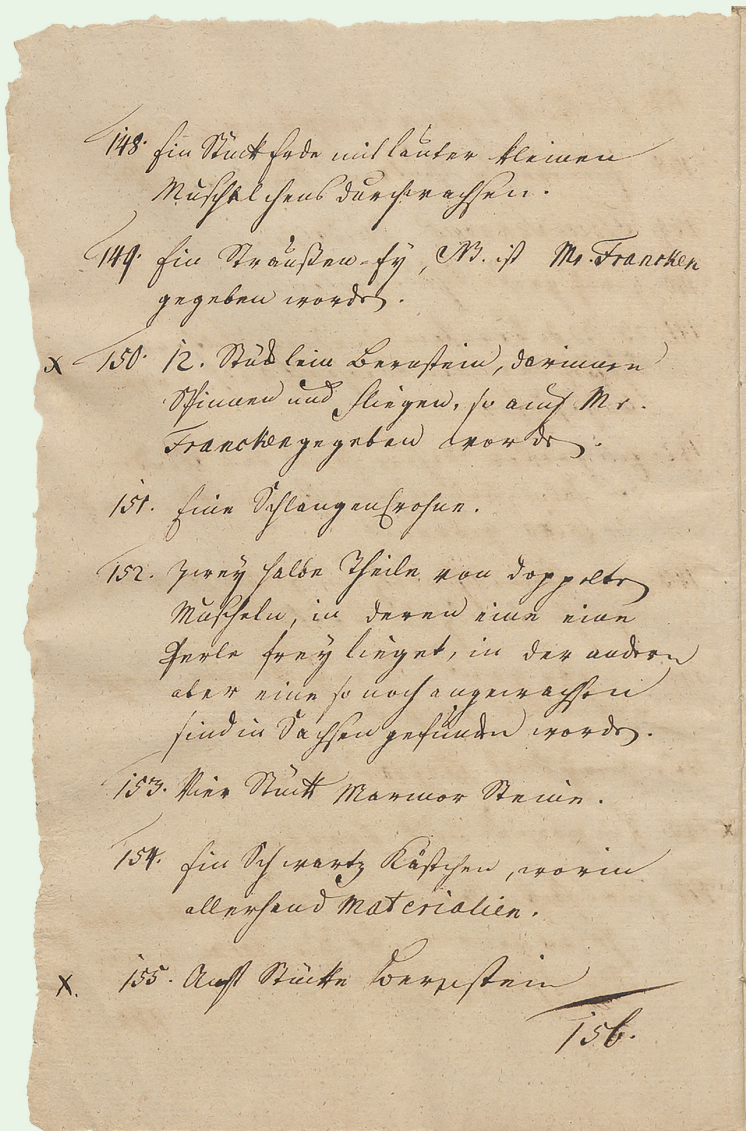
The repertoire of collectable objects was repeatedly expanded by significant geopolitical events. Artefacts from James Cook’s South Sea travels, which promised to reveal to Europeans things hitherto unknown, were also regarded as required items in Berlin.<sup>20</sup> In his collection guidebook of 1805, *Kunstammer* administrator Jean Henry mentioned as especially noteworthy the “beautifully woven rug from Queen Oberea’s audience chamber”. It was said of this exhibit that both Cook and the German naturalist Johann Reinhold Forster, who accompanied him, had sat upon it.<sup>21</sup> MK



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- 12 See e.g. Helmroth 2007.
- 13 Happel 1683/1691, vol. 1, pp. 756–7, and vol. 2, p. 327.
- 14 Beger 1696/1701, vol. 2, p. 627; Münzkabinett der Staatlichen Museen zu Berlin, 18227887, 18227908, 18227919 (and 18227939?).
- 15 GStA PK, I. HA Rep. 9 Allgemeine Verwaltung, Nr. D2, Fasz. 4, fol. 29v.
- 16 GStA PK, I. HA Rep. 9 Allgemeine Verwaltung, Nr. D2, Fasz. 1, fols. 238–46.
- 17 On the exemplary *Karlsruhe Turkish Spoils of War*, see Petrasch 1991.
- 18 See Anonymus B, fol. 6v; Eingangsbuch 1688/1692b, fol. 6v; Inventar 1694, p. 252; see also Nicolai 1786a, p. 797.
- 19 See a description from 1694 (Kohfeldt 1905, p. 46).
- 20 Feather helmet from Hawaii, acquired for the *Kunstammer* in 1831 (Ident.-Nr. VI 364). On the purchases, see Dolezel 2019, pp. 93, 132–6; on the continuing interest in Berlin, see Deterts 2021.
- 21 Henry 1805, p. 6.





### 7. Entries in the *Copey des Verzeich- nuß der Naturalien* of 1735 marked as delivered to August Hermann Francke

Naturalia from the Berlin Kunstkammer were repeatedly used to fill gaps in the holdings of teaching institutions in Prussian territories. In order to fulfil the typical canon of the era, August Wilhelm Francke requested from Friedrich III/I objects for which there were multiple specimens in Berlin. Francke's collection had been established in 1698 in the Paedagogium of his school town (the current Francke Foundations) and was intended primarily for instruction in natural history.<sup>22</sup> As documented in the Berlin Kunstkammer's Inventory of Naturalia of 1735, the objects that Francke received included ostrich eggs, several pieces of amber with inclusions, and a rhinoceros horn [■Monkey Hand].<sup>23</sup> DS

### 8. Entry for "two iron balls" in Jean Henry's *Allgemeines Verzeichniss*, 1805

One of the prominent curiosities in the Kunstkammer of the eighteenth century were two cannonball halves from the Sack of Magdeburg during the Thirty Years' War. The two cannonballs had ostensibly collided in mid-air, and the impact of this collision had flattened one side of each of them – a rare occurrence that was consistently emphasized as a special feature in visitors' reports.<sup>24</sup> In 1805, Jean Henry classified the flattened cannonballs within the *Oddities of the Fatherland* section,<sup>25</sup> where, along with the wax figures of Prussian rulers [■Wax] and the statue of an electoral valet [■Justus Bertram], they were part of a canon focused on the Prussian ruling dynasty. This canon was continued and intensified in the Hohenzollern Museum during the nineteenth and twentieth centuries.<sup>26</sup> DS

Translated by Tom Lampert

22 See Müller-Bahlke 2012, especially pp. 15–19; see also the collection catalogue, in which several of the objects from Berlin are specifically marked (Specification 1700, unpag.).

23 See the documented deliveries to Francke in *Verzeichniss 1735*, fols. 1r–8v, here fol. 8v.

24 Silbermann 1741, fol. 105v; Anonymus B, fol. 1v; Küster 1756, col. 549 f.

25 Henry 1805, p. 7; on this section, see Dolezel 2019, pp. 142–59, here p. 157.

26 See the entry in SPSG Historisches Inventar 833–836 [1876/1877], Hohenzollern-Museum, no. 2698; on the Hohenzollern Museum, see Kemper 2005.



spective in durchsichtigem Elfenbein. Viele Künsteleien aus dem siebzehnten Jahrhundert, meistens von Pet. Zick aus Nürnberg. — Statuen. Herkules, wie er den Nemäischen Löwen erwürgt. Adam und Eva, aus einem Stück. Herkules, der im Laufen einen Pfeil aus dem Köcher zieht. Darstellung der Geschichte Moses in sieben Gemälden en Hautrelief, zwischen welchen die zwölf Himmelszeichen, auf einem großen Opferbecken von Silber etc.

Sammlung von außer-europäischen Seltenheiten. Chinesische und Japanische Figuren, Schuhe, mechanische Spielsachen, Geschirre, ein äußerst künstlicher Handkorb aus Elfenbein, Indianische Götzen. — Otaheitische und Amerikanische Merkwürdigkeiten. Kleidungsstücke aus Baumbast, Fischhäuten und Vögelhäuten, ein Kopfputz von Federn, und andere Toilettenstücke; Waffen; eine schön geflochtene Fußtapete aus dem Audienzzimmer der Königin Oberea, worauf Cook und Forster gesessen haben.

Vermischte Seltenheiten. Ein Schrank von Eisen, an welchem die Thür

rechts und links aufgehet. Ein silberner Becher Kaiser Rudolphi II mit vielen besondern Vorstellungen. Ein Russischer Scepter. Künsteleien im Kleinen aus Holz, Kirsch- und Pfirsichkernen und Eisen etc.

ZWEITES ZIMMER. Vaterländische Merkwürdigkeiten. Wachfiguren in Lebensgröße, des großen Churfürsten Friedrich Wilhelms, des Churfürsten Friedrichs III (oder Königs Friedrich I), der jung verstorbenen Kinder Friedrichs I und Friedrich Wilhelms I. Larve Friedrichs des Großen nach seinem Tode. Statue des großen Churfürsten zu Pferde als Bellerophon, aus Eisen geschnitten von Leygebe. Modell in Erz der Statue des großen Churfürsten auf der langen Brücke, von Schlüter und Jacobi. Zwerge vom Hofe des Churfürsten Johann Sigismund. Zwei eiserne Kugeln, welche bei der Belagerung von Magdeburg durch Tilly im dreißigjährigen Kriege sich im Augenblick des gegenseitigen Gleichgewichts getroffen. National-Antiquitäten. Aschenkrüge der Wenden, in Norddeutschland ausgegraben. Degenhaken von massivem Golde, silberner gewundener Drath, Tartarische Götzenbilder, in