



## INTACT AND DAMAGED OBJECTS: REPAIRING, REPLACING, DISCARDING

Collection focuses may change as a result of the semantic re-evaluation of objects or object groups [◆ Changing Focuses]. How collectors deal with damage – whether evident on a newly acquired object or sustained while the object is in the collection – is an important phenomenon in which material states and the evaluation of meaning interact. In the virtual research environment developed for the Berlin *Kunstkammer*, researchers can investigate the objects for which historical sources document conditions such as “damaged” [VRE].

Damaged objects offer a specific affordance: damage calls for something to be done with the object. The damage can be documented and, if necessary, used for argumentation. Despite their defectiveness, the objects may enter or remain in a collection. Because of the damage, they may be presented as curiosities in a collection of rarities [■ Shattered Die]. If they have remained intact when normally they should have been destroyed, they may even be marveled at as *mirabilia*. The collection activities prompted by damage include above all repairing, replacing, and discarding – in addition to simply ignoring. All of these *Kulturtechniken* (cultural techniques) are associated with an evaluation of the damaged item. Repair is preceded by a determination of the object’s possible indispensability, and replacement by an assessment of the object’s significance for the collection focus. Disposal is based on a diminished view of the object’s value and the conclusion that it is dispensable.

An administratively relevant group of words emerged to describe the condition of objects. The 1685/1688 inventory of the Berlin *Kunstkammer* [● 1685/1688] contains different status notes recorded during on-site inspections: “(highly/slightly) defective”, “split in two”, “shattered/cracked/broken off”, and “torn open”. In addition, we find assessments that imply a comparison with earlier states and suggest that parts have been lost: “[pieces] lacking”, “but without . . .”, “something missing”, “only [certain parts] exist”, “no longer on”, “but [certain parts] have fallen off”. Terms like “torn to bits”, “decomposed (into)”, and “(mostly/slightly) decayed” were reserved for *naturalia* [■ Anteater].<sup>1</sup> Within the context of established perceptual practices, travellers could habitually ignore or meaningfully emphasize damage [■ Priapus / ■ Cupid]. Occasionally they were surprised when precious objects such as a bouquet of gemstone flowers were in flawless condition: “It still has all its jewels”.<sup>2</sup>

All of these notes refer to past processes, physical decay as an energy balancing process, and the contingencies of improper handling, as well as inappropriate storage, vandalism, and theft.

The operations of repair, replacement, and disposal gave rise to the early history of modern museological practice, caught between institutionalized restoration workshops and rules governing discarding or deaccessioning [■ Monkey Hand].

Marcus Becker

## 1. The Diana automaton in the 1694 inventory of the Kunstkammer, Geheimes Staatsarchiv

Damage having to do with the absence of valuable parts had a special legal significance in the inventory process, as it required administrators to justify a monetarily quantifiable loss. Among the holdings of the Kunstkammer was a drinking game automaton depicting the Roman goddess of the hunt on a stag [◆ Changing Focuses / ■ Crab Automaton]. The entry for this automaton illustrates just how precisely such losses were recorded: “A silver gilt rosette is missing from the front part of the base, while a similar one still exists on the other side.”<sup>3</sup> MB

12. Eine Silber verguldeter Ring, darauß sitzt die Diana, mit einem Körper oben und pfil, unter dem Ring steht ein Schindstiel und Kupferdant anderer Größe, item ein Zerser oben auf dem Ende, der Ringel ist ein pferde, das jünger aber, so dazu gesät ist nicht vorhanden, ingleichen unangelt auf dem auf dem Postament ein Silber verguldetes Köpfe, dergleichen auf dem anderen seiten nicht vorhanden ist; Zu die gesät auf dem Postament ein Silber, das über dem auf dem Postament der Ringel damit aufgeführt.

## 2. Letter from the Board of Directors of the Academy of Sciences to Jean Henry, dated 2 June 1804 (draft), Berlin-Brandenburgische Akademie der Wissenschaften

In 1804 a conflict arose over the newly acquired fish collection assembled by the naturalist Marcus Élieser Bloch [● Around 1800]. In a letter to Jean Henry, curator of the Berlin Kunstkammer, the Board of Directors of the Academy of Sciences explained that the Bloch collection should be handed over to the Anatomical Museum, since it was “subject to ruin” in the Kunstkammer.<sup>4</sup> Ultimately, the Bloch collection remained in the Kunstkammer until 1810, when it was transferred to the new university with all the other naturalia. There it was exhibited in the Zoological Museum. The question of conservational treatment was one aspect of the professionalization of collection practice in natural history during the eighteenth century. It laid the foundation for the removal of the naturalia from the Kunstkammer. ED

13. Ich habe die Ehre zu vernehmen zu lassen, Berlin den 2ten Juny 1804.

Die von dem Bloch'schen Cabinet, welches in seinem jetzigen locale dem Verderben ausgesetzt ist, gegen diesen Verfall zu setzen, ist für praktisch die geeignete Anstalt, welches in dem Ansehung der Mühen zu pleiren, d. h. Graf. Ruff Walder der Ordnung zu setzen, welches in ein neues stellen zu stellen. Ich habe diese Anstaltung von Henry beauftragt mit der Anweisung bei dem, gedachten Cabinet den Graf. Ruff Walder vorzuführen zu lassen Berlin den 2ten Juny 1804.

Maria Augustin. f. d. K. d. A.

- 1 See Inventar 1685/1688, passim; the group of words used to describe damage in this inventory has been quoted in its entirety.
- 2 Anonymus B, fol. 4 v.
- 3 Inventar 1694, p. 223.
- 4 Letter from the Board of Directors of the Academy of Sciences to Jean Henry, dated 2 June 1804 (draft), ABBAW, PAW (1700–1811), I-XV-30, fol. 1r.



2

3

3. Eighteen-armed Kuan Yin, China, second half of the seventeenth century, Staatliche Museen zu Berlin, Collection of East Asian Art (lost)

Under “Small Chinese Idols”, the 1694 inventory of the Berlin Kunstkammer lists a porcelain figurine “with eighteen arms, one of which has broken off”.<sup>5</sup> The piece was prized despite the damage, and the flaw did not keep the curator

of the East Asian Art Collection, the art historian Leopold Reidemeister, from selecting the figurine for his 1932 exhibition *China and Japan in the Kunstkammer of the Brandenburg Electors* [■Crab Automaton]. By then it must have lost a few more arms – assuming the author of the 1694 inventory had not miscounted.

ED

- 5 Inventar 1694, p. 187.
- 6 Ledebur 1833b, pp. 294–5.
- 7 Tschirnhaus 1727, p. 285; see also Küster 1756, p. 20, and Anonymus A, fol. 39v (here the vivat cheers “at the king’s nuptials”).
- 8 See Ledebur 1844, pp. 102–3

4. Bent eating utensils belonging to a cowherd, before 1696, now lost, in Leopold von Ledebur, *Wanderung durch die Königliche Kunstkammer in Berlin*, 1833

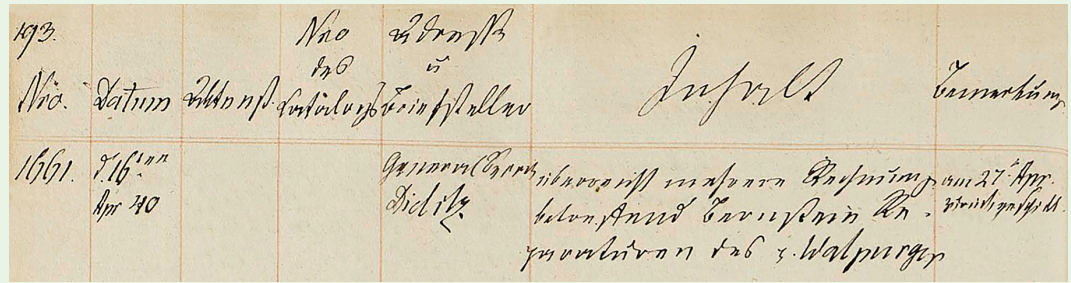
Precisely because they were damaged, the eating utensils used by a cowherd were transferred to the Kunstkammer, where they recalled the attack by a 400-kilo boar on Friedrich III, who fortunately survived. As the story was told 130 years later, the “mighty” animal charged the elector, let up, and then knocked over a cowherd standing nearby. The utensils in his pocket were “badly damaged ... the sheath completely torn open ... and the knife and fork bent crooked”.<sup>6</sup> MK

5. St. Mary's Church, margin illustration from Johann David Schleuen, *Die Königl. Preussl. Residentz Berlin nach ihrem accuraten Grundriss . . .*, 1739–40

St. Mary's Church in Berlin was visible to any Kunstkammer visitor looking out the window to the right [■ Cupid]. As Wolf(f) Bernhard von Tschirnhaus wrote in his text “Model eines Academie- und Reise-Journals” in 1727, the concise selection of objects in the collection that was definitely worth viewing included “a drinking glass that had been thrown from the top of the church tower during the royal entry into Berlin [after the coronation of Friedrich I in Königsberg in 1701] and was undamaged except for a small piece that had broken off its base”.<sup>7</sup> As a mirabilium, the glass was probably more impressive than the lead jug that had been dropped by another slate roofer from the Red Tower in Halle during the founding ceremony for Halle University in 1694.<sup>8</sup> This jug is thought to have been acquired in the nineteenth century. MB

Im Jahre 1696 war Friedrich III. bei Potsdam auf der Jagd, als unversehens ein mächtiger Eber wüthend auf ihn eindrang, mehreremal, ohne jedoch etwas auszurichten nach dem Pferde, warauf der Churfürst saß, hieb, dann sich gegen einen in der Nähe befindlichen Kuhhirten wandte, diesen niederwarf, ihm zwar das rechte Bein etwas verletzte, jedoch noch mehr in dessen Tasche befindliches Besteck auf wunderbare Weise so zurichtete, daß die Scheide ganz aufgerissen, Messer und Gabel aber ganz krumm gebogen war. Zur Erinnerung sowohl an die glücklich überstandene Lebensgefahr des Churfürsten, als an die sonderbare Wirkung der Wuth des Ebers, der 4 Centner wog, ist das Besteck in dem gedachten Zustande, gleich nach dem Ereignisse am 21sten Decbr. 1696 auf die Kunstkammer gegeben worden.





6

## 6. Entry from 16 April 1840 in the *Kunstammer's* accession book regarding invoices for amber repairs by Johann Gottlieb Walpurger, *Staatliche Museen zu Berlin*

The *Kunstammer* displayed many damaged amber artefacts for centuries.<sup>9</sup> They were already listed as being defective in the 1694 inventory, and around 1750 a *Kunstammer* visitor, upon viewing an amber cabinet containing a sheep farm, noted critically: “These beautiful things are . . . in great need of repair.”<sup>10</sup> But repairs were a long time in coming. By the end of the eighteenth century, the *Kunstammer* administration had drawn up a seventy-eight-item list of badly damaged amber objects (including the cabinet),<sup>11</sup> but it was not until the 1830s that it solicited expert assessments. In 1840 the “academic artist” Johann Gottlieb Walpurger, employed by the Royal Museum, was hired to restore some of the pieces.<sup>12</sup> DS

## 7. Comparative example of a damaged lynx skull, undated, provenance unknown, Mammal Collection, *Museum für Naturkunde Berlin*

Even damaged objects could be used to further develop the *Kunstammer*. In April 1805, a doctor interested in anatomy offered to give the institution what he considered to be the only surviving death mask of Friedrich II [■ Wax] in exchange for several animal skulls. The responsible parties at the *Kunstammer* readily agreed. “Half a bear head”, whose lower jaw and teeth

were missing, and a damaged lynx skull were “lying uselessly around” the Cabinet of Naturalia, and there were additional walrus and deer-pig skulls that were in better condition. The death mask, by contrast, would “give infinitely more pleasure to all visitors to the cabinet”.<sup>13</sup> MK

## 8. Remains of a dermoplastic model of a wild boar, early eighteenth century, *Museum für Naturkunde Berlin*

The fact that only a few naturalia have survived from the *Kunstammer* is attributable not only to missing information about their provenance [■ Monkey Hand], but also to the precarious state of pelts and mounted specimens. For example, only one of the wild boars shot by Friedrich Wilhelm I whose heads or entire bodies were exhibited in the eighteenth-century *Kunstammer* [■ Antlers] still exist today. This badly damaged specimen landed in the garbage pile, where passers-by pried out its teeth and pulled off its holey skin until a taxidermist recognized its significance for cultural history. Providing one of the earliest examples of the dermoplastic technique, the remains offer rare insight into historical taxidermy methods.<sup>14</sup> MK

Translated by Adam Blauhut

9 See *Inventar 1694*, pp. 53–6.

10 Anonymus B, fol. 4r.

11 *Kunstammer Generalia: Verzeichniss des gearbeiteten Bernsteins so mehrentheils sehr schadhafft ist*, SMB-ZA, I/KKM 40, pp. 323–6, here p. 323.

12 See the transcription of the accession book kept by the *Kunstammer* administration under Leopold von Ledebur (*Eingangsjournal Kunstammer 1830–1879*, unpag.), entries dated 22 July 1833 (report on repairs to the amber fountain) and 16 April 1840 (several bills for amber repairs by Walpurger).

13 See ABBAW, PAW (1700–1811), I-XV-32, fols. 5–6, including quotes.

14 See Matzke 2010.



7



8