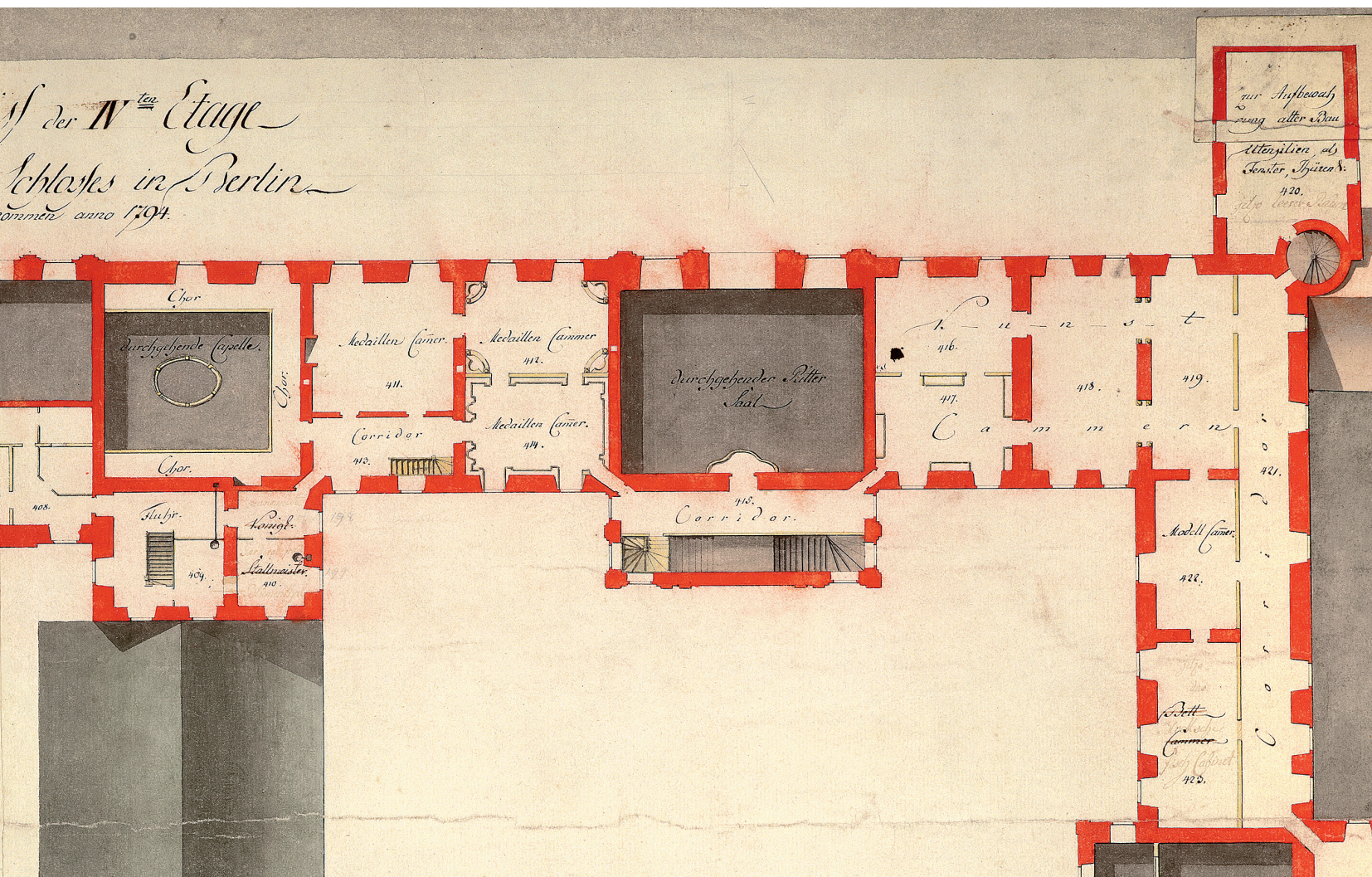


AROUND 1800: THE KUNSTKAMMER IN TRANSITION

The Kunstkammer is visible in the 1794 floor plans of the Berlin Palace, which have survived in the Architectural Drawing Collection of the Prussian Palaces and Gardens Foundation Berlin-Brandenburg. The sheet for the third floor shows the rooms grouped around the open space of the Knights' Hall (fig. 1), including the section for coins and antiquities to the west, labelled "Medaillen-Cammer" (Medals Chamber), and the section for artistic crafts, naturalia, and ethnographic and historical holdings to the east, designated "Kunst-Cammern" (Art Chambers) [● 1696 vs. 1708]. The plans are the earliest known documents of their kind in the history of the Berlin Kunstkammer and are among the few existing visual records for the collection. They provide a glimpse of a phase in the history of the institution marked by extensive discussions and transfers of holdings.¹

1 | The rooms of the Kunstkammer, detail of the 1794 floor plan of the Berlin Palace, third floor, Prussian Palaces and Gardens Foundation Berlin-Brandenburg, Architectural Drawing Collection.



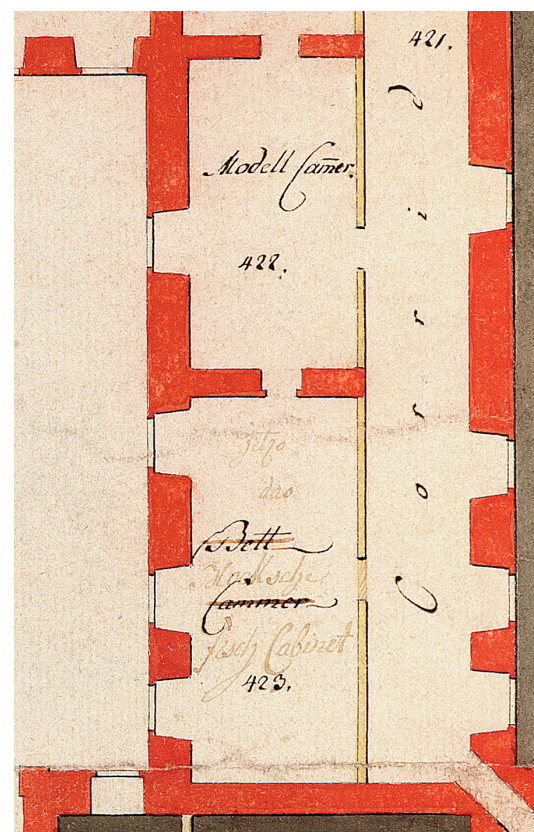
Developments during these years are closely linked to the curator at the time, the librarian and Huguenot pastor Jean Henry, who worked tirelessly for the collection. They are also associated with an administrative change that was to have a profound impact on the institution: in 1798, as a result of reform efforts, the *Kunstammer* was placed under the control of the Academy of Sciences. Although management remained in Henry's hands, the institution was divided into sections overseen by individual members of the academy.² At a time when collections of this type were already being dissolved in other cities, the Berlin *Kunstammer* maintained its universal concept but was already organized into specialized departments. From its inception, it had undergone numerous transformations, but around 1800, the reforms were so far-reaching as to bring about fundamental, permanent change.

The *Kunstammer*: A Black Box

Several photographs from 1930 have survived along with the plans. They provide partial information on the design of the rooms [●1696 vs. 1708 / ●1930], which were remodelled several times after the *Kunstammer* moved in 1854 [●Around 1855].³ All that has remained of the holdings presented in the rooms around 1800 are a few partial inventories and Jean Henry's 1805 register *Allgemeines Verzeichniss des Königlichen Kunst-, Naturhistorischen und Antiken-Museums*, which provides a summary of the objects.⁴ Compared to previous years, the collection's focus had expanded considerably, necessitating various spatial adaptations. Under Henry's direction, comprehensive collections from nearly all fields of knowledge had found their way to the *Kunstammer*, including the antiquities that had arrived from Sanssouci in 1798 and 1801. These were displayed in the rooms to the west of the Knights' Hall that had stood empty for decades. Extensive acquisitions of naturalia were made, and one of the most important additions of the period – the collection assembled by the physician and naturalist Marcus Élieser Bloch [■Golden Plover] – also left its mark on the floor plan. At the request of the Academy of Sciences, Bloch's fish collection was presented separately from the existing naturalia in order to make it available for research and teaching as a self-contained scientific corpus. The academy received its own key for this room, which was located at the end of the collection space, where separate access was possible.⁵ A correction in the floor plan (fig. 2) documents these changes: in the area for Room 423 (later Room 1005), the word "Bett Cammer" (bed chamber), entered in black ink, was crossed out and replaced by the note "jetzo das Blochsche Fisch Cabinet" ("Now the Blochian Fisch Cabinet"). The room received new furnishings that were later taken over by the Zoological Museum at Berlin University [◆Cases, Boxes].⁶ What the floor plan does not show is that the wall cabinets in the antiquity collection, which are also visible in the drawing, were remodelled and substantially modified in terms of colour to suit the neo-classical tastes of the period.⁷

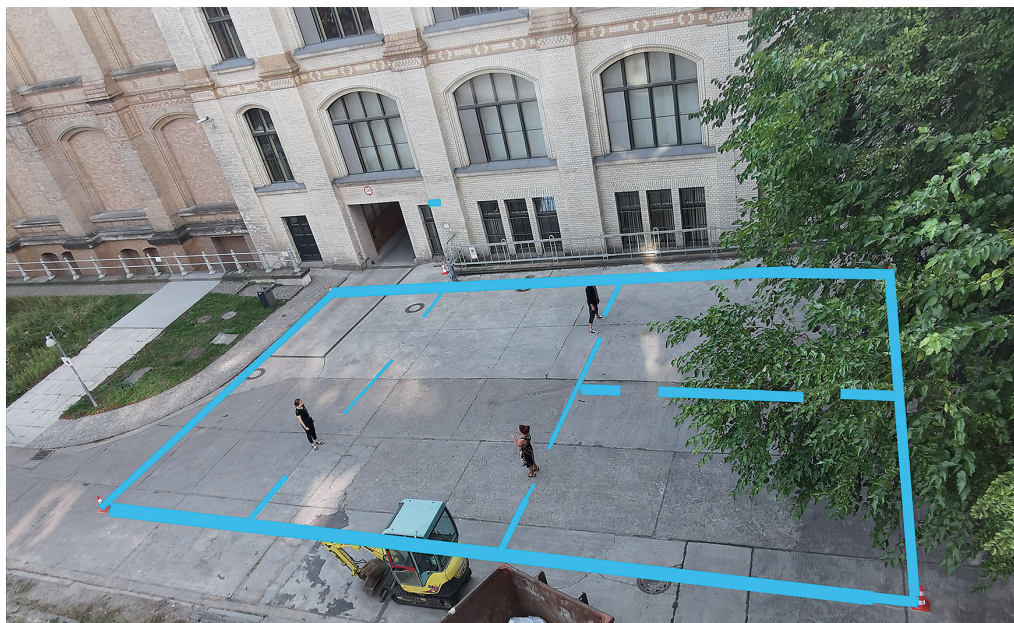
Museum Planning and Founding

Among the special attractions of the period were a roughly 2 x 2.5 metre terrain model of the Swiss Alps and other large-scale exhibits, such as a diorama of a Sámi man, reindeer, and sled [■Antlers] and the wax figures of the Prussian kings [■Wax], whose dimensions raise the question



2 | The rooms of the *Kunstammer*, detail of the 1794 floor plan of the Berlin Palace, third floor, Prussian Palaces and Gardens Foundation Berlin-Brandenburg, Architectural Drawing Collection.

- 1 For a comprehensive discussion, see Dolezel 2019.
- 2 See *ibid.*, pp. 10, 22–3.
- 3 See Reichl 1930a, p. 231.
- 4 See the eighteenth-century lists and directories in SMB-ZA I/KKM 40; Henry 1805; and Dolezel 2019, pp. 63–107.
- 5 See ABBAW, PAW (1700–1811), I–XV–29, fols. 22r–23r, here fol. 22v.
- 6 On this topic, see Dolezel 2019, pp. 81–7.
- 7 *Ibid.*, pp 64–74.
- 8 *Ibid.*, pp 79–80, 162–70.
- 9 The model was designed and produced by Julia Blumenthal in the excellence cluster "Matters of Activity" at the Humboldt-Universität zu Berlin.
- 10 See Reichl 1930a, pp. 232–3.



3 | Floor plan of the *Kunstammer* drawn by the research team in chalk in the courtyard of the Museum für Naturkunde Berlin (subsequently modified), 2020.

Kunstammer rooms, including those from the corridor behind the Knights' Hall, were less than two metres wide and thus relatively narrow. This corridor was built in the eighteenth century to provide a direct connection between the two groups of rooms in the Medals Cabinet and the *Kunstammer* and to save visitors the ten-minute detour between the suites.¹⁰

4 | Julia Blumenthal and Mattis Obermann (Design Lab of the excellence cluster "Matters of Activity" at the Humboldt Universität zu Berlin), 1:50 scale model of the Berlin *Kunstammer*, 2020.

It is not easy to reconstruct the way in which objects and spaces were presented in the cabinets of curiosities, since the furnishings and the exact position of the items are rarely documented. As a result, early modern collection spaces often seem to be black boxes. This applies to the Berlin *Kunstammer* and the turn of the eighteenth to the nineteenth century in particular. The absence



of the scenographic effect of the exhibits in the collection space.⁸ As part of the Berlin research project devoted to the *Kunstammer*, such questions were examined from two perspectives. A floor plan of the *Kunstammer*, drawn to 1:1 scale in chalk in the interior courtyard of the Museum für Naturkunde Berlin, illustrated the institution's dimensions and revealed that the rooms were in fact quite small (fig. 3). In addition, in 2020 a cardboard model was made at a scale of 1:50 to explore the details of the spatial effects (fig. 4).⁹ The passageways to the

of images and inventories from these years stands in contrast to the extensive correspondence between Henry and the board of directors of the Academy of Sciences. Their letters convey a lively impression of how contested the collection was at this time and the extent to which the discussion touched upon fundamental museological issues.¹¹ A partial inventory of the collection was compiled in 1806, when some of its holdings, including the large-scale terrain model of the Alps, were transported to Paris during the Napoleonic Wars and this vital phase in the history of the Berlin *Kunstammer* came to

an abrupt end (fig. 5).¹² Nevertheless, plans for a museum were formulated in subsequent years. As early as 1805, Henry outlined his vision of a universal public museum that would enable Berlin to compete with cities such as Dresden, Kassel, Braunschweig, and St. Petersburg.¹³ Inspired by a number of writings by Alexander von Humboldt, negotiations were conducted in 1808–09 to reform the academy. They focused on the idea of a comprehensive universal museum that would be associated with the academy and oriented mainly towards research.¹⁴ Unlike the planning of the (Altes) Museum, which assumed more concrete form soon afterwards, the negotiations did not produce any floor plans or building views of their own.

In cooperation with the Zoological Museum and the Anatomical-Zootomical Museum, specialized collections emerged in the rooms of the newly founded university that drew on the naturalia holdings of the *Kunstkammer*. Despite intense efforts, Henry was unable to put a halt to these developments [■ Adams Mammoth]. In the end, the *Kunstkammer*'s mineral collection – as part of the Royal Mineral Cabinet – was initially moved to the Old Mint at Werderscher Markt, where the Mineral Cabinet had been overseen by the Mining Academy since 1800–01. In 1813–14, all the mineralogical and paleontological holdings of the various royal collections were transferred to the middle floor of the university's main building on Unter den Linden (the former Prince Heinrich Palace), where they were united in the Mineralogical Museum.¹⁵

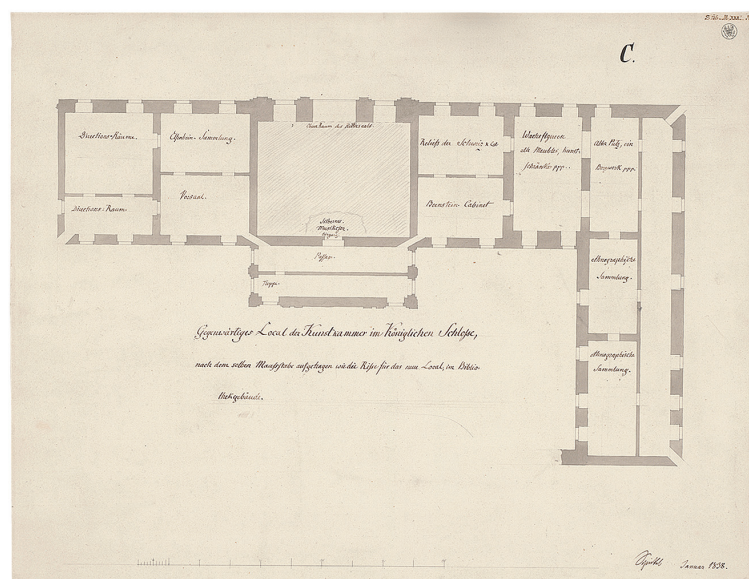
Additional transfers followed twenty years later. The objects went either to the (Altes) Museum, where all the antiquities and coins were now displayed, or to Monbijou Palace, which presented “patriotic antiquities” and ancient Egyptian holdings until the Neues Museum was constructed. After more than two hundred years, the Berlin *Kunstkammer* was no longer a universal collection.

In 1838, Karl Friedrich Schinkel documented the new state of affairs in a floor plan that suggests the emphases of the decades to come (fig. 6). Ethnographica and artistic craftwork, previously shown in the Ivory Cabinet, were now dispersed across several rooms. The former Medals Cabinet contained “Directions-Räume” (director's rooms) for the new collection curator, Leopold von Ledebur, who was to play an important role in the design of the collection until it was dissolved in the 1870s [● Around 1855].



5 | Benjamin Zix, *Dominique-Vivant Denon in the Kunstkammer of the Berlin Palace, 1807*, British Museum, London.

6 | Karl Friedrich Schinkel, *Current Location of the Kunstkammer in the Royal Palace, 1838*, Staatliche Museen zu Berlin, Museum of Prints and Drawings.



- 11 See Dolezel 2019, pp. 203–14.
- 12 See Savoy 2011.
- 13 See Dolezel 2019, p. 28.
- 14 See *ibid.*, pp. 30–4.
- 15 See Hoppe 1987; Hoppe 1998; Damaschun/Schmitt 2019, here pp. 20–33.

Translated by Adam Blauhut