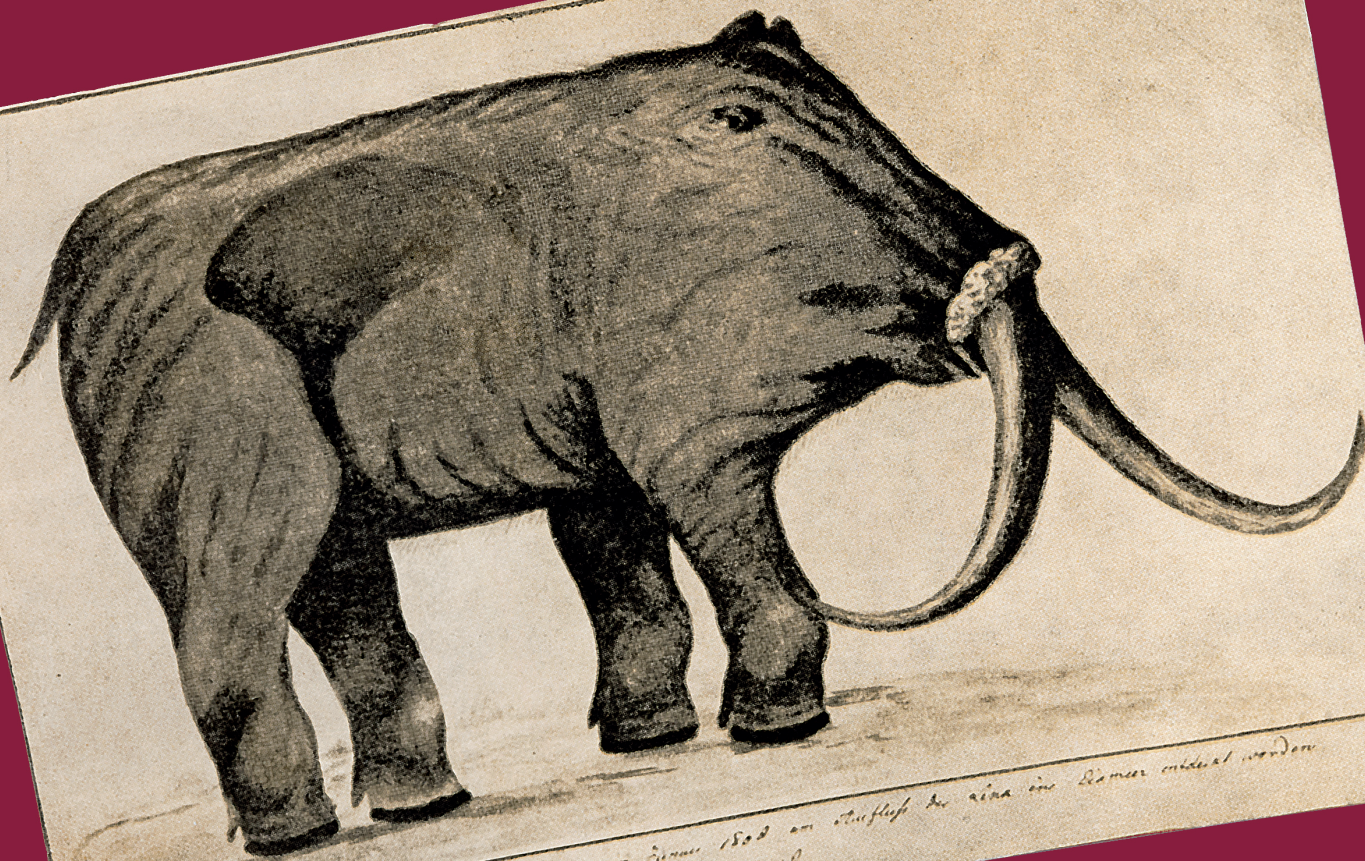


Das
europäische Mammuth



Elephas primigenius Blumenb. // gezeichnet, wie er im Jahre 1802 am Aufstapf der Aina im Rameer entdecket worden.
Mammuth.

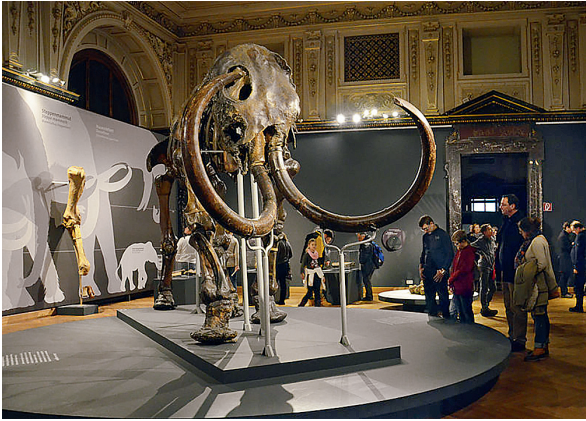
A Scientific Sensation around 1800

In August 1799, on a final foray through the Lena River Delta before the Siberian winter, Ossip Shumachov, a hunter of the indigenous Evenk¹ people of North Asia, discovered a large, bulky block in the perpetual ice of northeast Siberia. Two summers and a few journeys later into this inhospitable territory, his suspicions were confirmed: the ice gradually revealed the cadaver of an enormous animal. Shumachov had found a *mamantu*,² a woolly mammoth, remarkably with its soft tissue completely preserved. It took three more years for the sun to melt enough of the ice for the hunter to remove the tusks, which he sold to Yakut ivory dealer Roman Boltunov in March 1804. Boltunov made a sketch of the prehistoric animal on location, copies of which quickly spread among a public interested in natural history (fig. 1). It was in this way that the German-Russian botanist Michael Friedrich Adams, a naturalist at the Academy of Sciences in St. Petersburg, learned about the find. In 1806, Adams organized an expedition to the Lena River Delta and had Shumachov show him the fossil remains. In the meantime, about half the cadaver had been eaten by wild animals or fed by hunters to their dogs, but the skeleton and the half of the body lying on the ground, including the skin and hair, were still very well preserved. Adams had the animal excavated and brought to St. Petersburg.³ There the skeleton was prepared by German naturalist and draftsman Wilhelm Gottlieb Tilesius von Tilenau and displayed in 1808 in the Petersburg Kunstkammer, which was institutionally connected to the Imperial Academy of Sciences and constituted an imposing “theatre of nature and art”.⁴ A skeleton of an Indian elephant already in the Petersburg Kunstkammer served as a template for the mammoth specimen.⁵ The first assembled skeleton of this species was named after its scientific discoverer and was thus called the Adams Mammoth. It is currently held under this name in the Zoological Museum of the Russian Academy of Sciences in St. Petersburg and has also been displayed in special international exhibitions as one of the greatest and most beautiful specimens (fig. 2).⁶ It was and continues to be a scientific sensation.

In the spring of 1799, a few months before Shumachov first discovered the block of ice with the frozen mammoth, Göttingen scholar Johann Friedrich Blumenbach had given this species its first scientific name in the sixth edition of his *Handbuch der Naturgeschichte* (fig. 3). In the section of the book entitled “Petrifactions in the Animal World”, Blumenbach argued that the “ostensible” bones of giants that had been repeatedly found in excavations [■Monkey Hand] were in fact the fossil remains of “incredibly large elephants”, which he called *Elephas primigenius* (original elephant).⁷ British naturalist Joshua Brookes subsequently recognized that the differences between prehistoric mammoths and recent elephants were considerable and in 1828 used the genus designation *Mammuthus* for the woolly mammoth, from which the current designation *Mammuthus primigenius*, BLUMENBACH 1799, is derived.⁸ Blumenbach had seen only individual fossil bones from mammoth finds, so it is hardly surprising that Adams immediately embarked on his expedition to Siberia in the hope of landing the greatest coup of his scientific career by being the first

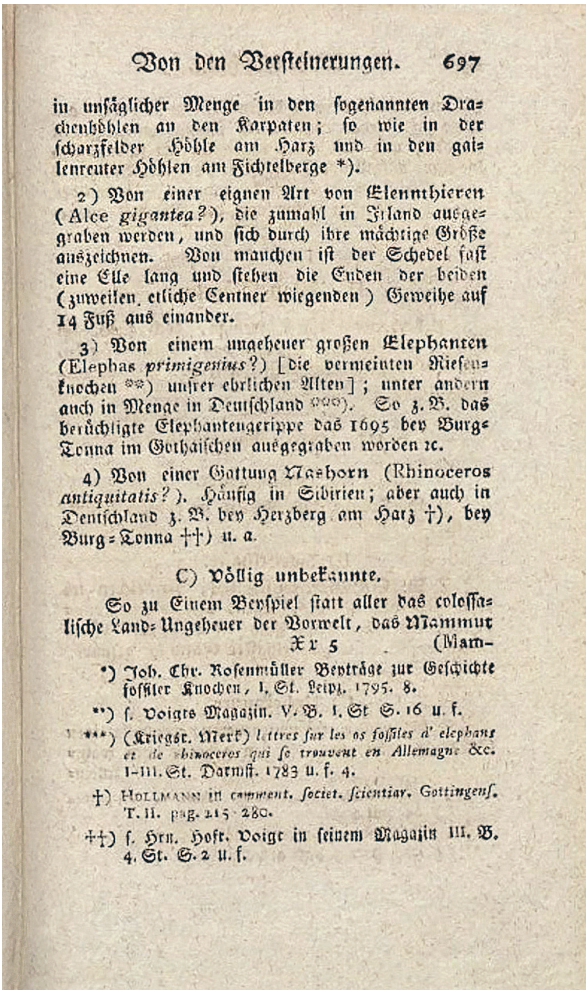
◀ 1 | Anonymous, copy of the first sketch of the Adams Mammoth by Roman Boltunov from 1804, Museum für Naturkunde Berlin. At the time the sketch was made, the cadaver was no longer complete, as it had been eaten by animals and the tusks had been removed.

- 1 At the time they were called Tungusic.
- 2 The Tungusic term for mammoth. On the mammoth finds in Siberia, see Jøger 1994; on the preservation of soft tissue in such fossil finds, see Thenius/Vávra 1996, pp. 10–11.
- 3 Adams recounted all of these events in his expedition report (Adams 1807).
- 4 On the Petersburg Kunstkammer and its ties to the Academy of Sciences, see Bredekamp 2020b, especially pp. 183–93; Palast des Wissens 2003; Kopaneva 2018.
- 5 See Tilesius 1815.
- 6 See Vosatka 2014 on the exhibition *Mammoths – Ice Mummies from Siberia* at the Naturhistorisches Museum in Vienna.
- 7 Blumenbach 1799, p. 697.
- 8 Brookes 1828, p. 73 g. See Reich/Gehler 2005, pp. 13–15, here p. 14.



scientist to recover a completely preserved mammoth. Copies of Boltunov's sketch, Adam's published expedition report, Tilesius's report on the preserved specimen, and tiny samples of the animal's skin and hair were sent from St. Petersburg to collections and scholars throughout Europe, including Blumenbach, who regarded all of these materials as confirmation of his own research.⁹

Samples were also sent to Berlin. In 1808, the Society of Friends of Natural Science (Gesellschaft Naturforschender Freunde) received hair and wool of the Adams Mammoth from Tilesius, who was an external society member (fig. 4).¹⁰ The Society of Friends of Natural Science, which had been established in 1773 and still exists today, was one of the parallel actors to the *Kunstkammer* in the collection landscape of Berlin around 1800. The society's objective was and is the promotion of all areas of natural history, including regular discussions on natural historical topics and the development of a collection whose historical holdings are kept in the *Museum für Naturkunde Berlin*.¹¹ The members of the society – renowned naturalists from Berlin and elsewhere – maintained extensive correspondence with scholars throughout the world, from whom they received specimens for their collection. Members were also obligated to contribute objects themselves, as Tilesius had done with the samples from the Adams Mammoth. His sample was sent to Berlin in an approximately five-centimetre long glass tube with a cork and is currently held in the Palaeontological Collection of the *Museum für Naturkunde* together with the accompanying handwritten evidence and copies of Boltunov's sketch (fig. 5). In addition, Adams's original publication in French about his trip and the find (which presumably arrived in Berlin shortly after the samples) has been preserved in the book collection of the Society of Friends of Natural Science (fig. 6). The log book of the society notes on 17 May 1808 that Carl Ludwig Willdenow, botanist and then director of the Botanical Gardens of the Royal Academy of Sciences in Berlin, read aloud a letter he had received from Tilesius in St. Petersburg, in which the latter stated that he promised to send as a present "hair and wool from the mammoth animal" as well as several other samples along with a treatise.¹²



Historic samples of the Adams Mammoth, the type specimen of the genus (i.e. the specimen used for the first scientific description), are very rare today. For this reason it was a sensation when Blumenbach's original research materials, which had been believed to be lost, were rediscovered in the Geoscientific Centre of the University of Göttingen in 2005, including the samples of the Adams Mammoth and the molar of a mammoth examined 100 years earlier by Gottfried Wilhelm Leibniz, who had interpreted it as that of a marine animal.¹³ On the occasion of this spectacular find, a major special exhibition was presented at the *Staatliches Naturhistorisches Museum in Braunschweig*, *Mammoths – Elephants of the Ice Age*, which presented the results of recent mammoth research to the public.¹⁴

2 | Mounted skeleton of the Adams Mammoth at the special exhibition *Mammoths – Ice Mummies from Siberia*, 2014, Naturhistorisches Museum, Vienna.

3 | Johann Friedrich Blumenbach, *Handbuch der Naturgeschichte* (6th ed.), 1799, section "Versteinerungen des Thierreichs, B. Zweifelhafte", entry no. 3 on *Elephas primigenius*.

The surprising discovery that the Adams Mammoth had also been mentioned in a document by Wilhelm von Humboldt in the Berlin State Library (fig. 7) gave rise for a brief time to the hope of uncovering another historical sample of the specimen among the existing *Kunstkammer* objects. In a letter written in Königsberg on 11 August 1809, Wilhelm von Humboldt – who had been director of the Section for Public Worship and Instruction of the Prussian Interior Ministry since February¹⁵ – commissioned Prussian General Postmaster Karl Ferdinand Friedrich von Nagler to send a “small box containing a piece of skin and hair from the mammoth skeleton discovered by Court Councillor and Professor Adams in the Arctic Sea” to the Academy of Sciences in Berlin.¹⁶

The documents indicate that the sample was to be sent on order of Prussian King Wilhelm III to the Berlin *Kunstkammer* and to be appropriately displayed there as an exhibition object.¹⁷ The king had been shown the skeleton by Adams personally during a previous visit to the Petersburg *Kunstkammer* and had evidently received the sample as a gift [■Pearls].¹⁸

Following a cabinet order in 1798, the *Kunstkammer* had been subordinated to the Academy of Sciences and was now exhibited together with the academy’s collections in the rooms of the Berlin Palace [●Around 1800].¹⁹ In this way, the former naturalia of the *Kunstkammer*, which had been turned over to the academy in 1735–36 [■Monkey Hand], were returned to their previous domicile. The reception of the intact sample of the Adams Mammoth was confirmed by the directorate of the academy.²⁰ However, only the specimen of the Society of Friends of Natural Science from 1808 has been found in the current holdings of the Museum für Naturkunde Berlin. There is another sample with bristles from an *Elephas primigenius* in the museum’s palaeontological collection from Siberia, but this one was found “west of the Yenisey River Delta” in 1866 (fig. 8).²¹ It remains unclear what happened to the samples of the type specimen sent by Humboldt and intended for the *Kunstkammer*. All traces of the material object disappear here, which would mark the end of a classic object biography investigating a real collection object in its changing contexts.²² In this particular case, however, it makes sense to continue to follow the historical context around the history of the Adams Mammoth and in this way to preserve further references to the object or at least to its collection context. In the interplay of relevant sources from various Berlin archives, the rediscovered note from Humboldt is an important document in a highly charged phase of science policy in the institutional and collection history of the *Kunstkammer*.²³



4 | Hair and wool from the Adams Mammoth, together with the certified notice of receipt from the collection of the Society of Friends of Natural Science: “From H[errn] Tilesius by H[errn] Willdenow, several pieces received on 17 May 1808. Hair and wool from the mammoth pelt which was recently excavated in Siberia, detached for the esteemed Society of Friends of Natural Science in Berlin”.

9 See *ibid.*; Joger 1994.

10 See Hackethal 2010.

11 See Böhme-Kaßler 2005; on the Society of Friends of Natural Science (Gesellschaft Naturforschender Freunde), its goals, and its history, see also GNF, accessed 11 February 2022: <http://www.gnf.berlin/index.php/schriften/historie>.

12 Cited in Hackethal 2010, p. 82.

13 Reich/Gehler 2005, p. 15.

14 See the press release of the museum in 2005, e.g. on the Karstwanderweg website: https://www.karstwanderweg.de/publika/snm_b/pm231105.htm (accessed 22 February 2022).

15 Beginning in 1817, this section became the independent Ministry of Ecclesiastical, Instructional, and Medical Affairs.

5 | The samples of the Society for Friends of Natural Science as they are currently kept in the Fossil Vertebrates Collection at the Museum für Naturkunde Berlin.

16 SBB PK, Slg. Darmstaedter 2b 1816: Humboldt, Wilhelm von, fols. 8–9, here fol. 8. Regarding the history of this documentation: in the early twentieth century, Ludwig Darmstaedter established an extensive collection of handwritten manuscripts and letters, primarily from natural scientists, which formed an important basis of the manuscript department at the Berlin State Library. The two sheets also exist as copies in the original context in the Geheimes Staatsarchiv (GStA PK, I. HA Rep. 76 Ve, Sekt.15, Abt. XI, Nr. 16, Bd. 1, fol. 16), along with a note that the originals were taken by Ludwig Darmstaedter in 1913. For further documents on these proceedings, see *ibid.*, fols. 14–17. The related documents in the Academy of Sciences are located at ABBAW, PAW (1700–1811), I–XV–10, fols. 11–30v; the receipt of the box is documented in *ibid.*, fol. 30r–v.

17 “Through the Section for Public Instruction, his Royal Majesty sends the directorate of the Academy of Sciences a box containing a piece of skin and many hairs from the mammoth skeleton that Court Councillor and Professor Adams discovered on the Arctic Sea, with the order to exhibit and adorn these items in the *Kunstkammer*” (SBB PK, Slg. Darmstaedter 2b 1816: Humboldt, Wilhelm von, fol. 8).

18 See Postmaster Nagler’s note of 27 February 1809 on the transfer of the sample to the Minister of the Interior, Friedrich Ferdinand Alexander Graf von Dohna-Schlöbitten: “Your Excellence finds in the enclosed box 1 piece of skin and 4 hairs from the mammoth skeleton that Court Councillor and Professor Adams discovered on the Arctic Sea and has shown His Majesty the King in St. Petersburg” (GStA PK, I. HA Rep. 76 Ve, Sekt.15, Abt. XI, Nr. 16, Bd.1, fol. 14). Dohna gave the sample to Humboldt on 30 July 1809 (see SBB PK, Slg. Darmstaedter 2b 1816: Humboldt, Wilhelm von, fol. 9).



The Controversy around the Mineralogical Collection of the *Kunstkammer*

The aforementioned cabinet order of 1798 gave the *Kunstkammer* a new administrative structure. Librarian Jean Henry was its chief administrator, and various renowned scientists were responsible as wardens for the different discipline-specific collections.²⁴ For example, Carl Ludwig Willdenow, who would receive the sample of the Adams Mammoth in the Society of Friends of Natural Science in 1808, was in charge of taxidermy for the academy, and Martin Heinrich Klaproth, one of the most important chemists and mineralogists of the time, was assigned the mineralogical collection. The appointed wardens, however, had little influence on the development of the collections. It was Henry himself who ensured an enormous increase in objects in all areas of the collection over the next ten years. In 1805 he developed his plan for a universal museum, in which the holdings of the *Kunstkammer* would be united with other significant royal collections in Berlin. This proposed museum would rival similar European institutions in Dresden, Kassel, London, Paris, Vienna, and St. Petersburg [♦ Canon and Transformation]. For Henry, this museum would be oriented primarily to a lay public, who would also have access to the collections. The scientific usage that the Academy of the Sciences had sought for more than a century was clearly secondary

in these plans.²⁵ It initially looked as if Henry's ideas would be implemented. He received, for instance, money to purchase several private collections [■Golden Plover]. However, there were also parallel efforts in Berlin during these years to establish a major research institute and teaching campus with affiliated collections.²⁶ The brothers Alexander and Wilhelm von Humboldt pursued the ambitious plan of founding a university in Berlin.

In the summer of 1809, Wilhelm von Humboldt was working out the design of such an educational institution for the Prussian king Friedrich Wilhelm III. According to Humboldt's plan, the collections of the academy and other royal research institutions such as the Library, the Botanical Garden, and the Anatomical Museum would be turned over to the new university, divided up into the discipline-specific museums of the academic departments, and used to instruct students.²⁷ In his "Proposal to Establish the University of Berlin" from 24 July 1809, Humboldt wrote "that collections and institutes . . . become truly useful only when comprehensive scientific instruction is tied to them".²⁸ For this reason, he planned "to link them into an organic whole so that each part, by attaining an appropriate independence, works together with the other parts toward a general ultimate objective".²⁹

In the midst of these plans, Henry, who for years had vehemently opposed the division and curtailment of the venerable institution entrusted to him, wrote several letters of complaint.³⁰ A particular point of contention was the Mineralogical Collections of the *Kunstammer*. Already in 1805, Friedrich Wilhelm III had issued a cabinet order stipulating that all minerals and stones in the *Kunstammer* be turned over to the Mineral Cabinet of the Department of Mines and Metallurgy, which was more significant for economic and scientific reasons. This order, however, had not been initially implemented due to lack of space [■Crystalline Gold]. The debate among the different parties extended over years and focused in particular on the question of whether a collection should aim at communicating knowledge as a display collection (Henry's standpoint) or producing knowledge as a teaching collection (the position of the Department of Mines and Metallurgy).³¹

In the summer of 1809, Henry was almost certain that Wilhelm von Humboldt, as director of the section for public instruction, would look favourably on his arguments. After a weeks-long



6 | Original travel report by Michael Friedrich Adams, *Relation abrégée d'un Voyage à la mer glaciale, et découverte des restes d'un Mamouth*, 1807, Museum für Naturkunde Berlin.

7 | Wilhelm von Humboldt's commission and letter regarding the sending of a sample of the Adams Mammoth to the Kunst-kammer Berlin, with various notes in different hands, 11 August 1809, Staatsbibliothek zu Berlin.

acc. Darmst. 1914. 27

8

1370.

An
 L. Königl. Vicekanzler des Reichs
 des Reichspostamts
 zu
 Königsberg.
 Gegenwärtig A. d. W. Berlin
 und. 16.
 W. B. unter Adresse N. 79 N. Mark
 Ein unterzeichnetes Dekret ist
 mein Angelegenheit aus dem folgenden Anlaß
 entstanden.

Das Königl. Majorität bey dem Reichs
 die von dem Reichspostamt dem
 den Dekret des öffentl. Unterrichts
 Königsberg, worin sich ein Stückchen Haut und
 einmahl von dem Reichspostamt,
 und daß der Herrschaft und Herr von Adams
 ein Schreiben unterzeichnet hat, beizubringen, mit
 dem Anlaß zuzustimmen, dieses Dekret in der
 Königsberg am 11. Aug. 1809.
 Königsberg den 11. Aug. 1809.

#

An
 dem Königl. Professor Engelhardts nach und
 Hier General Postamt der Herrn Nagler
 Hofpostamt
 Gegenwärtig A. d. W. Berlin. Siegelst.
 und. 16.
 18. mit 1. Oktober 1. Brief
 Brief

L. Hofpostamt. Ein Dekret
 des öffentl. Unterrichts beizubringen ein
 Schreiben an das Reichspostamt des Reichs
 den Reichspostamt zu Berlin unterzeichnet
 Königsberg, worin sich ein Stückchen Haut und
 einmahl von dem Reichspostamt,
 und daß der Herrschaft und Herr von Adams
 ein Schreiben unterzeichnet hat, beizubringen, mit
 dem Anlaß zuzustimmen, dieses Dekret in der
 Königsberg am 11. Aug. 1809.

Das Dekret wird hier durch den Postamt
 durch den Reichspostamt.

Humboldt

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16.

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26* 1836 H. v. H.

controversy with numerous written statements from the academy, interior ministry, Humboldt, and Henry,³² the latter wrote a letter to the directorate of the academy on 10 August once again detailing his thoughts about a museum for a lay public and identifying the reasons why it was indispensable that the collections remain together (fig. 9). Henry refused to turn the petrifications over to Dietrich Ludwig Gustav Karsten, director of the Mineral Cabinet of the Department of Mines and Metallurgy, and sought in his arguments to employ a current scientific debate in mineralogy for the aims of the *Kunstkammer*.

After noting that he had acquired his mineralogical knowledge from visits to several collections and through the instruction of Martin Heinrich Klaproth, who was also the curator of the academy's mineralogical collection, Henry stated that in none of the mineralogical handbooks he knew were petrifications classified within the current mineralogical systems. He referred here to Blumenbach as one of the greatest naturalists of the era:

In Blumenbach's classical natural history, from which I have drawn the little knowledge that I possess of this discipline, petrifications or . . . petrifacts are separated completely and definitely from minerals or fossils and constitute their own genus in the realm of nature. Both genera are indeed related in inorganic nature, but the one is by no means a species of the other.³³

With his assertion that “petrifacts are not counted among minerals”, Henry referred to the contemporary scientific debate about the classification of different branches of mineralogy and concluded: “[M]y refusal to deliver both collections without a specific order can thus by no means be attributed to my gross ignorance or to rigid obstinacy.”³⁴ His explanations, however, were in vain, as Wilhelm von Humboldt had already decided the matter on 5 August 1809 in Königsberg and informed him:

[T]hus esteemed sir, you are hereby commissioned to turn over immediately to Herr Karsten this mineral collection, to which the petrifacts of course belong. The separation of objects that belong to one and the same class cannot be viewed as anything but inappropriate. If this does not accord with your wishes, you will, however, be pleased to learn of another addition to the Naturalia Cabinet of the Academy of Sciences: in the near future, a box with a piece of skin and many hairs from the mammoth skeleton discovered on the Arctic Sea by Court Councillor and Professor Adams will be sent from here.³⁵

It was thus the sending of the sample of the Adams Mammoth that ultimately put an end to all discussions. Humboldt, who planned a teaching institution par excellence in sharp contrast to Henry's ideas, did not even bother addressing the latter's arguments. Henry had to turn over the collection to Karsten and received de facto a single object – albeit a rather famous one at the time – as compensation. Henry was soon compelled by royal order to relinquish all of the naturalia of



8 | Sample containing bristle hairs from the *Elephas primigenius* in the palaeontological collection of 1866, Museum für Naturkunde Berlin.

- 19 See Dolezel 2019, p. 22.
- 20 SBB PK, Slg. Darmstaedter 2b 1816: Humboldt, Wilhelm von, fol. 8. See also the confirmation of receipt ABBAW, PAW (1700–1811), I–XV–10, fol. 30r–v.
- 21 I would like to thank Thomas Schossleitner from the management of the Fossil Vertebrates Collection for providing information and evidence on the specimens at the Museum für Naturkunde.
- 22 On the concept of object biography and its methods, see Braun 2015, pp. 9–26.
- 23 On the context of the sources, see notes 16–18 above.
- 24 See the extensive discussion in Dolezel 2019, especially pp. 22–5.
- 25 *Ibid.*, p. 28.
- 26 See *ibid.*, pp. 29–36.
- 27 See Bredekamp/Labuda 2010, pp. 238–9; Bredekamp 2020a.
- 28 Gründungstexte 2010, pp. 244–5.
- 29 *Ibid.*, p. 245.
- 30 See Dolezel 2017b.
- 31 See Dolezel 2019, especially pp. 204–7.
- 32 See ABBAW, PAW (1700–1811), I–XV–10, fols. 1r–30v.
- 33 Jean Henry's letter to the directorate of the academy on 10 August 1809 (ABBAW, PAW (1700–1811), I–XV–10, fols. 25r–26v, here fol. 26r).
- 34 *Ibid.*, fol. 26r. On the specialization and related division of the Royal Mineral Collection over the course of the nineteenth century, see Hoppe 1998, especially p. 6.

9 | Letter from Jean Henry to the
 directorate of the Academy of
 Sciences, 10 August 1809, Berlin-
 Brandenburg Academy of
 Sciences.

27.
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Wah! die Fragen wegen der Versäuerungen betriff, so sagt das Rescript vom 3 August,
 daß es keinem Menschen, der uns irgend etwas aus dem Lande der Mineralogie hat,
 beizufallen kann, Versäuerungen anders als zu den Mineralien zu verstehen.

Da ich kein Mineralog von profession bin, und meines dinstigen Lande
 mich dem säulichen Studium einiger guten Elementarbücher, dem sonderlich
 Nutzen des Herrn v. Klaproth, und der Aufsichtigung einiger Cabrette und auch,
 so muß ich mich zwar bescheiden, und die Aufspürung wissenschaftlicher
 Männer überlassen.

Indessen daß ich gute und salzbare Gründe zu meinem Zusichal fahre,
 daß mir wenigstens fünf angestehen.

1, Sünde ich in keinem der uns unter der Hand gekommenen mineralogischen
 Handbüchern und Systemen, Quamtelich in den Wiedemannschen, der Versäuerungen
 erwählet. Gestehen diese so unvollständig zu den Mineralien, so ist es doch sonderbar,
 daß sie gänzlich von dem System ausgeschlossen sind.

2, In Blumenbach's classifir Naturgeschichte, warant ich meine
 Lande in diesem Sache geschöpft habe, sind die Versäuerungen und Petrefacten,
 gänzlich und bestimmt, von den Mineralien oder Fossilien, abgetrennt, und
 weihen sich für sich besondern Gattung in Naturwissen auf. Vorhand sind
 beyden Gattungen förmlich in der inorganischen Natur, aber die eine ist Mineralien
 eine Species der andern.

Obgleich ich ein ganzes die Dinstigkeit meines Lande im Naturfaj eingest,
 so konnte ich mir doch, mit beyden obigen Gründen einfallen, die Petrefacten
 nicht zu den Mineralien zu verstehen, und meine Abgrenzung beyden Gattungen
 ohne bestimmte oder abzuleiten, kann also keineswegs stande meine
 groben Unwissenheit, noch einem Person Lignissen beizurechnen werden.

Henry

Berlin den 10. August 1809

Ad Acta Cassillor. Schod
 Im 12. 1809

the *Kunstkammer*. His institution could no longer offer any substantial opposition to the Humboldtian educational reforms. The mineralogical collections were transferred to the Mineralogical Cabinet (which with the founding of the university was renamed the Mineralogical Museum in 1810), and in the same year the zoological objects in the *Kunstkammer* were surrendered to the university's Zoological Museum [■ Golden Plover].³⁶ Henry's plans of an encyclopaedic museum for a lay public was thus rendered passé, although the idea of a comprehensive universal museum would be later be revived in the Neues Museum [● Around 1855]. The estate of the Humboldt brothers was also incorporated, in accord with their own wishes, into the vision of a scientific cosmos in Berlin that they had designed. During his own lifetime, Alexander von Humboldt donated numerous samples to the Royal Mineral Cabinet, and his encyclopaedic collection was later divided up among various Berlin museums.³⁷

It is possible that the historic sample of the Adams Mammoth was, as a fossil object, transferred from the *Kunstkammer* along with other objects from the mineralogical and palaeontological collections to the university's Mineralogical Museum, which in accord with the understanding of the time encompassed both mineralogy and palaeontology. If this was the case, it would not be surprising if the sample was lost in the turmoil. Perhaps it awaits its rediscovery in another collection as the result of deaccession, that is, being turned over to a different museum [■ Monkey Hand], where it will once again cause a scientific sensation. The history of the geoscientific collections in Berlin has remained unsettled: objects have continued to be transferred back and forth between various Berlin institutions to the present day.³⁸ The object history of a complete skeleton such as the Adams Mammoth in St. Petersburg, on the other hand, is easier to trace. These giants from the Ice Age have lost none of their fascination. Alongside dinosaurs, they are among the great attractions of today's natural science exhibitions.

Translated by Tom Lampert

35 Wilhelm von Humboldt's letter to Jean Henry on 5 August 1809 (ABBAW, PAW (1700–1811), I–XV–10, fol. 27r).

36 On the Mineralogical Cabinet, see Hoppe 1987.

37 On Alexander von Humboldt's mineralogical collections, see Damaschun/Schmitt 2019, especially the chapter "Sammlung", here p. 23; on further objects from the collection as well as the lifeworld of the Humboldt brothers in present-day Berlin museums, see Spies/Tintemann/Mende 2020.

38 See Hoppe 1998.