

- 1210
114) Ein Backenzahn vom Elefanten.
115) Ein Tropfstein aus der Baumhöhle.
Dieser Gussel ist im spanischen in
Morday in der Gussel. Daraus davon gefunden.
116) Ein Stein, od Meer Gewächs.
117) Ein Stück Gold so in Sumatra gefunden worden
in den dafigen reichen Bergwerken.
118) Ein Kieselstein so mit Gold ganz durchwachsen
Dieser ist in der Gussel in einem
Walden dem Gold in Sumatra. Der Gussel.
König Friedrich hat 100 Ducaten davon
gegeben, und der Herr Neumann hat
ihn für 300 Ducaten gekauft.
119) Eine Weinbeere, da Gold dran gewachsen
Dieser ist in Ungern gefunden in
Morday in der Gussel. Der Gussel soll die
Walden sein, das der Tochter der Walden,
gefunden ist.
120) Ein Crucifix von Bernstein. Dieses
hat die Königin von Serland an dem Walden
in der Gussel.
121) Verschiedene Stück Eisen so in Kupfer, verwandelt.
122) Eine Perle so wird sie in der Mörchel wächst.
Es ist ein Farn aus der Mörchel an der
Walden, und ein Farn ist der Walden, der
mehr als ein Farn, wie die Farn Walden.
123) Etliche Perlen so wie sie in Sachsen, in der
Elster gefunden worden. Diese Farn hat
der Gussel. König Friedrich Wilhelm mit
seinem Farn gefunden.
124) Ein Filzchen von einem Indianischen Kees.

The entry in the notes made by a *Kunstammer* visitor sometime between 1742 and 1752 can easily be overlooked: “123. Numerous pearls as they were found in the Elster River in Saxony.” The list, written in Latin cursive script, is followed by comments in German cursive by the same author: “These pearls were fished by the late King Friedrich Wilhelm with his own hands” (fig. 1).¹ The indication of sociocultural provenance distinguishes the collection exhibit from the preceding entry, in which the visitor emphasized the natural-historical aspect of the object: “122. A pearl as it grows in the shell. There is a pearl still attached to the shell and another is unattached, so that one can see how the pearls grow” (fig. 2).²

These pearls presented in their shell were also the products of the freshwater pearl mussel *Margaritifera margaritifera* and likewise came from Saxony. On 13 December 1690, a similar set had already been transferred to the *Kunstammer* collection,³ but was passed on to the Academy of Sciences along with most of the naturalia in 1735–36 [■ Monkey Hand]. The pearls in their shell that the visitor wrote about, however, were not added to the collection until the early eighteenth century and were retained for the *Kunstammer* by Conrad Christoph Neuburg, who became the warden in 1735, along with the pearls “fished” by Friedrich Wilhelm I, which had not been listed as naturalia in the inventory.⁴

Interconnecting the Collection

Pearls (which were also used for pharmacological purposes [■ Bezoars]) could be admired at various locations in the Berlin *Kunstammer*, in particular as precious ornamentation of artificialia such as the episcopal mitres indexed in 1694 under “Rarities and Works of Art”. Their use in these objects formerly owned by the church refer to the biblically authorized sacral semantic significance of pearls, as was the case with a “silver gilded medallion with a picture of Christ the Lord and a small pearl hanging from it.”⁵ The ornamental function of the small shimmering spheres, befitting regal splendour, linked the collection rooms with other living and social spaces of the palace [■ Cupid]. Prior to viewing the *Kunstammer*, another visitor saw the bed in the royal apartment, “wherein his royal Majesty held his nuptials with the queen,” decorated with “oriental pearls, the curtains of red velvet . . .”⁶ There were shells in the *Kunstammer* among the conchyliia in the Cabinet of Naturalia, and shells processed as mother-of-pearl inlays could be found in numerous objects in several rooms. Even more precious than pearls was byssus, a fabric made of secretions from the Mediterranean noble pen shell (*Pinna nobilis*) that was already priceless in ancient times. According to its old label, an extant pair of gloves made of this byssus silk in the Museum für Naturkunde [◆ Cases, Boxes] had been a gift, along with two noble pen shells, from the bishop of Tarent to the Prussian king in 1822. However, the present did not find its way to the *Kunstammer*, but was instead entered in the main catalogue of the Malacology (Mollusc) Department of the university collection (fig. 3).⁷

◀ 1 | Page from an anonymous description of the Berlin *Kunstammer*, with entries on Saxon freshwater pearls (nos. 122 and 123), ca. 1742–52, Staatsbibliothek zu Berlin

- 1 Anonymus B, fol. 8v.
- 2 Ibid., fol. 8v (see fig. 1). On the heated debate at the time about the origins of the pearls, see Suchy 2022, pp. 77–90. I would also like to thank Verena Suchy, Gießen, for her suggestions and helpful comments for this object biography.
- 3 See Eingangsbuch 1688/1692b, fol. 23r, and Inventar 1694, p. 11, no. 152.
- 4 See Verzeichnis 1735, fol. 8v, no. 152 (the earlier set), or 19v, no. 377 (the more recent set). The list is a copy of the inventory of 1694 (nos. 1–155), which was amended up to no. 406, reflecting the status in 1734. The high acquisition number 377 confirms the late acquisition of the second (remaining) set, whereas the first (with the same number as in the 1694 inventory) was transferred to the Academy in July 1736 (see ABBAW, PAW (1700–1811), I–XV–19, fol. 75r, no. 152).
- 5 Inventar 1694, pp. 144–45, nos. 52–4, and p. 149, no. 88.
- 6 Anonymus A, fols. 23v–24r.
- 7 Museum für Naturkunde, Malacology Collection, ZMB/Moll. 3823 (MS–Inventar 1). There is also another pair of gloves (ZMB/Moll. 103.239 a, b [MS–Inventar 2]) of unknown provenance. I am grateful to Christine Zorn as well as to Katharina and Parm von Oheimb, Museum für Naturkunde Berlin, for making me aware of these objects.

- 8 Küster 1756, col. 547.
- 9 On “cabinets, drawers, and panels as visualizations of state organization” (the book’s subtitle), see, generally, Segelken 2010b, which, however, places a stronger focus on spatially, visually, and textually fixed classification systems.
- 10 Küster 1756, p. 18 or col. 548. On “sovereigns as turners” in general, see Maurice 1985.
- 11 See Friedrich Wilhelm I 1990; on the lost portrait, see p. 63, cat. no. 1.78. The paintings were collected primarily in the remote Kossenblatt hunting lodge.
- 12 Anonymus B, fol. 10r.
- 13 As an example of the wealth of literature on maritime objects exchanged globally, especially shells and pearls, see in this context Grasskamp 2021.
- 14 On the studiolo, see Conticelli 2007.
- 15 Heydt 1744, p. 242. The “Moorish divers” mentioned here refer specifically to the “Moors” (so named by the Portuguese), a Muslim minority that developed from interaction between the local populations and the Arab traders who dominated pearl fishing and trading prior to the arrival of Europeans (see e.g. McGilvray 2008, pp. 44–5). A popular conflation of the historical Ceylon context and Orientalism was also offered in Georges Bizet’s 1863 opera *Les pêcheurs de perles* (*The Pearl Fishers*).
- 16 On Vogtland pearl fishing, see Meyer 1770 (an excerpt from an unpublished monograph of 1732; quotations p. 200); Jahn 1854; Rudau 1961; on Electoral Palatinate pearl fishing in the Odenwald hills, see Carl 1908/1909; on Bavarian pearl fishing from an early modern perspective with a comparison of domestic and oriental pearls, see Geiger 1637.

Like the natural history exhibit of the pearls in their shells, the “numerous pearls found in the Elster River in Saxony, which King Friedrich Wilhelm of Prussia of glorious memory had fished with his own hands”,⁸ were also first and foremost naturalia of precious ahistoricity. A divergent meaning for the collection came with the cataloguing and presentation practice when the pearls were finally linked to a reported royal act that turned the natural history objects in the Cabinet of Naturalia into royal memorabilia in the form of secular contact relics [■ Shattered Die]. The early modern royal representation thereby developed a power of hybridization – fuelled by Kunstkammer owners and administrators as well as the public – in which exhibits were no longer viewed solely within the context of object categories or room assignments and the collection was organized in an alternative manner.⁹ A counterpart to these social dynamics of organizing were the *ludi naturae* (whims of nature), the showpieces in which nature itself seemed to playfully hybridize naturalia and artificialia [■ Monkey Hand].

Among the memorabilia, objects were presented that, like hunting trophies [■ Antlers] or bent utensils [◆ Intact and Damaged], indicated the ups and downs of royal hunting and did not seem from the outset to be intended for a Kunstkammer. Virtually prototypical of such collections, on the other hand, were the turneries [● 1685/1688], whereby both product and tool were displayed in Berlin, such as the “ivory knob turned by Emperor Peter I of Russia,” and the “large turning lathe made in Petersburg, which the Emperor of Russia gave King Friedrich I”.¹⁰ Although Friedrich Wilhelm I attempted to distract himself from his gout symptoms by painting – including a portrait of the Russian Empress Catherine I, who had visited the Berlin Kunstkammer [■ Priapus] – it is striking that he did not consider his pictures worthy of being exhibited in a Kunstkammer.¹¹

Regarding remembrances of the Soldier King, the momentum of the memorabilia pervaded all categories of the collection, such as that of the naturalia, with the pearls and wild boar trophies;



2 | Shell and pearls of the European freshwater pearl mussel (*Margaritifera margaritifera*), Wolfstein Castle hunting museum. The presentation in the Berlin Kunstkammer likely resembled this one.



3 | Glove made of byssus and fan mussel shell, 1822, and the old label, Museum für Naturkunde Berlin.

the artificialia, including the wax effigies of his children who had died young [■ Wax]; the scientifica, with the iconographic embedding of the Hohenzollern succession into the night clock [■ Night Clock]; and the curiosa, with the shoe buckle swallowed by the three-year-old crown prince [■ Shattered Die]. A net of princely functions and activities including hunting, dynastic transfer of rule, and private life spanned all the rooms of the *Kunstkammer*, whereby the biographical dimension at the same time drew a chronological axis between the contact relic of a child's swallowing experiments and the wheelchair of the aged, decrepit sovereign, "with which the late king could ride around on his own."¹²

- 17 On these pearls, first mentioned in 1734, see the SKD Online Collection, available at <https://skd-online-collection.skd.museum/Details/Index/118125> (accessed 1 February 2022); for the counterpart to a necklace made of oriental pearls, go to <https://skd-online-collection.skd.museum/Details/Index/118129> (accessed 1 February 2022). See also Syndram/Arnold/Kappel 1997, pp. 258–60. On the pearl figures in Dresden's *Grünes Gewölbe* (Green Vault), which have not been considered here, see also Weinhold/Syndram 2000.
- 18 Meyer 1770, p. 201.
- 19 See the genealogical table in Jahn 1854, pp. 206–8.
- 20 Meyer 1770, pp. 203, 208 and 196, respectively. On working conditions and ecological exploitation, especially in Caribbean pearl fishing, see Warsh 2018.
- 21 Meyer 1770, p. 195; and Jahn 1854, p. 46.
- 22 See Le Mang 1878, quotations p. 120; see also the *Gartenlaube* articles in Anonym 1888; Anonym 1892. The decreased yield, not least due to water pollution from mining, was already lamented in Meyer 1770, p. 194; on the great threat to freshwater pearl mussels in present-day Europe, see e.g. Bauer 2002.

Oceanus, Ceylon, and Oelsnitz



4 | Alessandro Allori, *The Pearl Fishers*, 1570–72, studiolo of Francesco I in the Palazzo Vecchio, Florence.

Pearl fishing, on the other hand, was not among the common activities of European princes. For Westerners, knowledge of the origins of oriental pearls ranged between two poles that were expressed not least in images.¹³ Alessandro Allori's painting from 1570–72 in Francesco I's studiolo in the Palazzo Vecchio in Florence places pearl fishing within the horizon of the elite imagination of European humanism (fig. 4).¹⁴ In an ideal landscape identified as antique through classical ruins, the human and mythological protagonists, both male and female, lift the treasures from a timeless sea as if in an effortless game, and the pearls string together virtually on their own. The figures in the manner of Michelangelo, with European features assumed to be universal, act in heroic nakedness, and through the light and dark flesh tones are separated only by gender. This design finds its context in the *Kunst-kammer* concept of the manneristic studiolo, which embeds pearl fishing into other metamorphic exchange processes and techniques between nature and art, such as alchemy.

The antithesis is marked – also with chronological distance – by an engraving from Johann Wolfgang Heydt's *Allerneuester Geographisch- und Topographischer Schau-Platz*

von Africa und Ost-Indien of 1744 (fig. 5). From the perspective of the European traveller, the harvesting of pearls, which would also find their way into European courts, is revealed to be a large, virtually industrial enterprise. The sea off the coast of Mannar, the settlement of the Dutch East India Company in northern Ceylon (today Sri Lanka), is filled with boats and ships, a considerable number of which predominantly served the colonial surveillance regime, “so that none of the Moorish divers, or even their boats and vehicles, could pass through; such as when their principals should regret the loss they imagine they could suffer if they were not successfully pearl fishing.”¹⁵ Heydt described the working conditions and diving procedures in detail and, as the subtitle of his book promised, “truthfully”, but the bodies of the thousands involved – Heydt gives the impression they were only men – disappear entirely among the many vessels depicted in the wide perspective of the copper engraving [■ Crystalline Gold].

The “numerous pearls” in the Berlin *Kunst-kammer*, however, were not oriental saltwater pearls, but central European freshwater ones, as they have been harvested for centuries from clear mountain streams – in German states, especially at the headwaters of the White Elster in the Vogtland or in the Danube catchment area between Regensburg and Passau. In Dresden, the capital of the sovereign territory of Saxony, the government took note of the pearl fishing around Oelsnitz in the mid-sixteenth century. In 1621, Elector Johann Georg I summoned the “elder” Moritz Schmirler to him, a master cloth-maker from Oelsnitz. He forbade him from wild fishing and appointed him to the well-paid “position of Electoral Pearl Fisher”.¹⁶ The Vogtland pearl fishery, like mining, thus ultimately came under the regalian rights of the sovereign territory. Its yields came from a

23 “Perlenförster” was the term for this position in Bavaria; see Jahn 1854, p. 48n.

24 See Weigel 1698, pp. 271–2, 265–7 (incorrect pagination), quotations p. 265 and in the caption of the engraving following p. 270. *The Pearl Driller* (engraving following p. 266), on the other hand, is described and depicted as a European occupation.

25 See the SKD Online Collection, available at <https://skd-online-collection.skd.museum/Details/Index/117442> (accessed 1 February 2022).

26 Also to be included in the interpretation would be the two similar, albeit smaller figures of “Moors” carrying pearl bowls with grotesquely knobby pieces of mother-of-pearl; see *ibid.*, <https://skd-online-collection.skd.museum/>



Auf diesem Blat wird die Perl-Fischerey bey Manaer oder Arippa, vorgestellt.
 a. ein Holländisches Jagd Schiff, so Kreuzet. b. Mohrische Fahrzeug, so vorkellen, wie sie tauchen und die Perlen aus dem Grund herauf holen.
 c. zwei kleine Jagd-Schuyßen. d. Mohrische Fahrzeuge, wie solche aus der See gehen wann sie geträchet haben.
 f. der Rigger, bey dem die Holländische Milite liegt. g. zeltet über Handelsleuthe und Fremde, welche dahin kommen. h. das Gebürge wie sich selches von der See präsentirt.

J. W. Heydt, del. et sculp.

pleasant landscape which, in contrast to Allori, could be charted precisely (fig. 6) and were to be submitted in Dresden under strictly monitored administrative regulations (fig. 7), where the generally somewhat smaller, darker pearls with less lustre became a lucrative and proudly presented counterpart to the treasure of oriental pearls (fig. 8).¹⁷

Care of the banks that were harvested in the summer months, filled with mussels growing over decades in the shallow water of the streams, demanded considerable arcane expertise on the “science of fishing pearls”.¹⁸ The office of the Electoral Pearl Fisher – which also had the authority to require local millers to regulate the water levels and the obligation to oppose poaching – remained with the Schmirler/Schmerler family until well into the nineteenth century; the family members who held this office are all known by name.¹⁹ As early as 1732, Georg Christoph Meyer contrasted the “loyalty and painstaking diligence” of these “very skilled people” with the production conditions overseas,

5 | Johann Wolfgang Heydt, *Perl-Fischerey bey Manaer oder Arippa*, illustration from Johann Wolfgang Heydt, *Allerneuester Geographisch- und Topographischer Schau-Platz von Africa und Ost-Indien*, 1744.

Details/Index/117608 and <https://skd-online-collection.skd.museum/Details/Index/117607> (accessed 1 February 2022). As a comparison, see also the figure with emeralds, SKD object number 117440.



6 | The White Elster near Oelsnitz, p. 168 from the Saxon Mile Sheets, 1794.

because if you would let the Vogtland pearl mussels be dealt with just as carelessly as the Indians are used to treating their own, the benefit and value would not last very long, but the waters would be exhausted of them in a very few years.²⁰

27 Letter from Friedrich Wilhelm I to Leopold von Anhalt-Dessau, 13 February 1728 (Klepper 1938, pp. 87–8, quotations p. 88).

The Elster pearls could be “reached with moderate wading”, and thus in contrast to deep-sea pearl diving “it was not necessary that the pearl fisher risk blood and life in obtaining a pearl”, as was still conceded in 1854.²¹ In the *Gartenlaube* magazine, an 1878 article on the “mussel workers in

the Vogtland” once again conjured associations of conquest and adventurous hunting with the “pearl fisher on the prowl”. However, nostalgic family tradition and knowledge transfer between the generations were positioned as a patriarchal stereotype against a capitalistic modernity that was preparing an end to the old world through the industrial processing of globally imported raw materials, with pollution of the environment and overexploitation of resources: “A thousand steps farther!” consoled the young companion of the hoary huntsman [i.e., official pearl fisher]. The old man shook his head, smiling sadly.”²²

With Moritz Schmirler and his successors, the Saxon guild master craftsman, who functioned in a side job as a “pearl ranger”²³ or official conservator of the electoral pearl fishing rights, joined the role models of playful Triton, playful Naiad, and the “Moorish divers”. What habitus might have served as orientation for the Prussian king Friedrich Wilhelm I? Or more importantly, what image of a pearl fisher might the visitors to the Berlin Kunstkammer have had in mind when they were told that the Soldier King had fished “with his own hands” the Elster pearls that enthralled them?

Paradoxical overlappings were indeed possible in the European imagination around 1700. In Christoph Weigel’s 1698 book of trades, the “pearl fisher” suddenly and surprisingly appears between the guild trades of stonemason and miner within the statist early modern society (fig. 9). Weigel mentions the pearl fishery of the East and West “Indies”, “with wife and children”, as well as that of Europe. However, the engraving shows two men with exoticized muscular, dark-skinned bodies wearing only loin-cloths who are presenting their pearl mussel catch in a pathos formula, an emotionally charged visual trope in which they bow submissively to three men standing erectly. The posture and dress depict these

In den Jahren	Helle Perlen		Halbhelle Perlen		Sandperlen		Verdorbene Perlen		Gesamtsumme	
	Summa	Durchschnitt pro Jahr	Summa	Durchschnitt pro Jahr	Summa	Durchschnitt pro Jahr	Summa	Durchschnitt pro Jahr	aller Perlen	Durchschnitt pro Jahr
1719–1739	1809	90,45	727	36,35	1200	60,0	552	27,6	4288	214,40
1740–1759	1412	70,60	578	28,65	485	24,25	281	14,05	2751	137,55
1760–1779	1042	52,1	272	13,6	427	21,35	219	10,95	1960	98,0
1780–1799	1261	63,05	243	12,15	357	17,85	179	8,95	2040	102,0
1800–1819	1603	80,15	261	13,05	325	16,25	203	10,15	2392	119,6
1820–1839	1659	82,95	340	17,0	325	16,25	326	16,30	2650	132,5
1840–1859	1884	94,20	610	30,5	388	19,4	505	25,25	3387	169,35
1860–1879	1618	80,90	682	34,1	450	22,5	514	25,7	3264	163,2
in 161 Jahren	12288	76,32	3708	23,03	3957	24,57	2779	17,25	22732	141,19

7 | Vogtland pearl fishing yields, 1719–1879, illustration from *Amtliche Berichte über die Internationale Fischerei-Ausstellung zu Berlin 1880, 1881*.



8 | Necklace of 177 Elster pearls, harvested before 1734, strung between 1927 and 1937, Dresden State Art Collections, Green Vault.



9 | Christoph Weigel, *The Pearl Fisher*, illustration from Christoph Weigel, *Abbildung Der Gemein-Nützlichen Haupt-Stände*, 1698.

two colonial Europeans and a bearded Jewish trader wearing an orientaling fur-trimmed coat and turban as lords. In contrast to the depictions of other occupations in this book of trades, these men are the main actors, with the composition emphasizing at the same time the global diversity in the contact zones of pearl fishing and trade. The caption of the emblematic text-image combination presents the activity of the “deep-sea divers” as an expression of a morality that the author considers universally comprehensible, whereas at the centre of the picture, men are simply wading chest-deep in the water, more likely bringing to mind the European harvest of freshwater mussels.²⁴ Hardly less complex than this classically formalized embedding of a colonial context within the framework of European guild trades is the statuette of a “Moor” in Dresden’s Green Vault, created by Johann Heinrich Köhler in 1724, showing an artificially composed ore sample comprising Saxon silver and Saxon gems.²⁵ It was designed as a counterpart to the more famous *Moor with* [presumably Colombian] *Emerald Samples*. The two works comment on one another. In one possible interpretation, the similarity between the figure carrying the emeralds, as a representative of the area of origin, and the holder of the domestic Saxon ore seems to transform Saxony into a comparably exoticized realm.²⁶

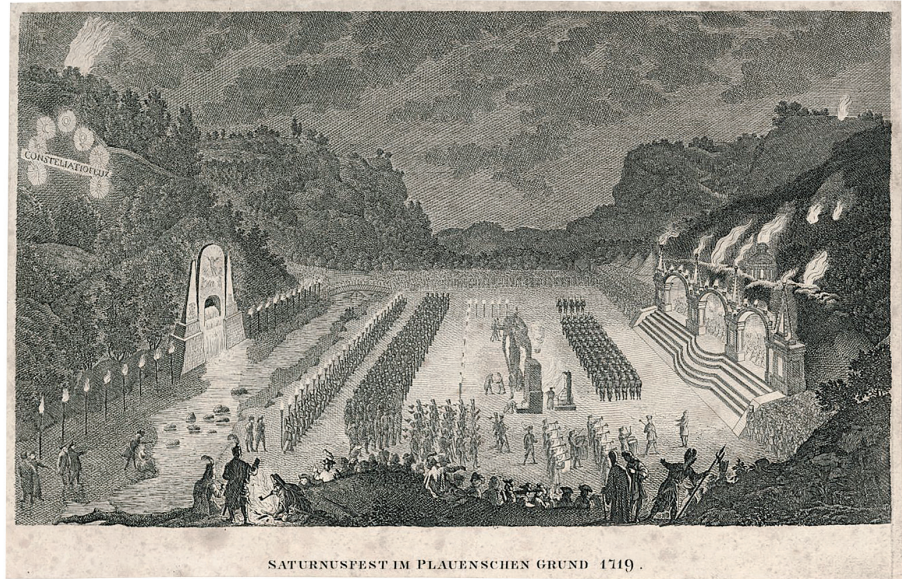
Only within the framework of official state visits would it have been conceivable for the Prussian king to fish for Saxon pearls with his own hands. In 1728, Friedrich Wilhelm I travelled to Dresden during Carnival, where he could not “express everything that I saw of curious things and magnificence”; of the Green Vault, he stated: “*cella éblouit* [it is dazzling]! My father’s jewels are nothing in comparison”.²⁷ In 1730 he participated in the legendary military review at the pleasure encampment at Zeithain. However, none of these visits brought the distinguished guest to the Vogtland, although translocations of regional attractions to sites more convenient for the court were by no means unusual. The Saturn Festival, for example, which celebrated mining as the source of Saxony’s wealth, did not take place in the Ore Mountains, but instead in the only moderately hilly Plauen Ground because it was closer to Dresden (fig. 10).²⁸ This festival, which the Prussian king did not attend, was held in 1719 as the highlight of the planet festivals on the occasion of the marriage of the prince elector. Against the backdrop of an artificial mine, Augustus the Strong subjected the participating miners to princely decorum, not only in terms of their clothing but their bodies as well. Only handsome men of strong stature were assembled, while the countless children working in the mines were excluded, and the costuming in a miner’s habit that was actually exorbitantly expensive for the protagonists obscured the true everyday working conditions of the miners. At Augustus the Strong’s return visit in Berlin following the Prussian visit to Saxony during Carnival, Friedrich Wilhelm hosted a “water jousting

28 See Schlechte 1990, pp. 219–29; Schnitzer 2014, esp. pp. 212–28.

29 See Fassmann/Horn 1734, p. 914, quotations *ibid.*; and Fassmann 1735/1741, p. 382.

30 On Friedrich Wilhelm I’s visit to Dresden in 1728, see Fassmann/Horn 1734, pp. 889–902; Fassmann 1735/1741, pp. 375–78; on the Zeithain pleasure encampment (*Lustlager*), see Fassmann/Horn 1734, pp. 927–66.

competition” on 6 June 1728, after Augustus the Strong’s son, the Polish crown prince and Saxon prince elector, had viewed the “rarities chamber” (armoury) in the royal stables. For this, it was not the resident fishers from Stralau who were sent for the event on the Spree River before the Berlin palace, but instead the salt panners (*Halloren*) from Halle.²⁹ Unfortunately, none of the contemporary descriptions of Friedrich Wilhelm I’s visits to Saxony mention any sort of pearl fishing for state guests staged in any comparable way.³⁰ Could the Elster pearls in Berlin’s *Kunstkammer* perhaps have made it to Prussia along a politically more dubious path?



10 | Andrea Zucchi, after Carl Fehling, *Saturn Festival in the Plauen Ground* 1719, ca. 1729.

From 1656 to 1718, the Vogtland belonged to the territory of the duchy of Saxe-Weitz, a secundogeniture of the Saxon house of Wettin. As of the 1680s, the Dresden elector and the duke of Weitz agreed to divide up the revenue from the pearl-fishing rights. Nevertheless, the sovereignty efforts of the Weitzers led to endless animosity, which in turn prompted especially Maria Amalia, daughter of the Great Elector from his second marriage and wife of Duke Moritz Wilhelm, to pull strings with her relations in Brandenburg, her half-brother Friedrich III/I,³¹ causing severe conflicts of loyalty for the official pearl fisher. On 21 June 1708, Augustus the Strong and his wife appeared “quite unexpectedly” in Oelsnitz, summoned Wolf(f) Adam Schmirler, nephew of the first conservator, and had him present the mussel banks at the Würschnitz stream the next morning.³² When the elector and Polish king requested some pearls, ultimately even in return for payment, the pearl fisher hemmed and hawed, saying that he could not do so without ducal authorization, to which Augustus responded that Schmirler

had given some to the King of Prussia [at that time still Friedrich I], to which [Schmirler] replied that Mr. Privy Councillor von Maltiz [i.e. representative of the Weitz dukedom] was there and had offered some and had orders to. He said the king [i.e. Augustus] smiled and a distinguished servant said to him, you can see, Your Majesty, that there are indeed still loyal people in Vogtland.³³

The incident in which the desires of Weitz, Dresden, and Berlin collided was in the context of the Prussian presence in Weitz during the Great Northern War. It caused Schmirler some anxiety, led to all kinds of complications and correspondence, and might be the source of at least some of the Elster pearls in the Berlin *Kunstkammer*. This was a case of fishing without getting wet. We can only speculate as to whether Friedrich I was later mistaken for his son Friedrich Wilhelm I in the *Kunstkammer* provenance data, if these were pearls with or without a shell, or if the pearls involved in this affair were even the same ones as those described in the collection.

31 On the historical background, see for example Czech 2009, pp. 50–54 and *passim*.
 32 See the detailed discussion of this episode in Jahn 1854, pp. 158–61, quotation p. 159.
 33 *Ibid.*, pp. 159–60; Jahn cites a letter of justification by Schmirler.
 34 See *ibid.*, p. 183.
 35 See Ledebur 1844, pp. V–VI, quotation p. VI; on the context in depth, see Giloi 2011.
 36 Ledebur 1844, p. 86 (at least under “Künsteleien und Curiositäten” [“Trinkets and Curiosities”]).
 37 See *Der Großer Kurfürst* 1988, p. 148, cat. no. V.66 (Gerd Bartoschek).
 38 Ledebur 1844, p. 94.
 39 Fontane 1995, p. 187. Fontane observed the changing locations of such items very closely. In *Wanderungen durch die Mark Brandenburg*, he wrote that the devotional objects associated with Hans Joachim von Zieten “used to be in the Berlin *Kunstkammer* and are now, if I am not mistaken, in the Hohenzollern Museum in Monbijou Palace” (Fontane n.d., p. 13n).
 40 See Schasler 1861, pp. 207–9.

41 Friedländer 1881, p. 78. Articles from *Der Bazar. Illustrierte Damen-Zeitung* confirm such an assessment; see T. 1888 and Bratzky 1894. I would like to thank Simon Hofer, Berlin, for his remarks on this point.

42 See Friedländer 1881, p. 78.

43 See Nitsche 1881. Responsible for this section was Hinrich Nitsche, zoologist and professor at the Royal Saxon Academy of Forestry in Tharandt, who also composed the official report (see Wiese 2014).

Conditions during the Seven Years' War were less complicated. The regular pearl revenue in Vogtland flowed from occupied Saxony directly into Berlin's war chest and the rowdy band of Prussian soldiers plundered their way through the mussel banks with devastating ecological consequences at their own expense.³⁴

Contact Relics and the *Kunstkammer* as the Ghost of Exhibition Aesthetics

In the *Kunstkammer* guides of Friedrich Nicolai, Jean Henry, and Leopold von Ledebur, the Saxon pearls and the question about how they had been "fished" no longer mattered. This applied by no means to the royal memorabilia in general. In the epistemic order representing the new position of the *Kunstkammer* as an institution of the museum founded in 1830, they were put in the substantially expanded Department for History. Director Ledebur also placed the geographic reliefs there, since geography could be considered one of the "historical auxiliary sciences".³⁵

Especially Prussian memorabilia, which also included souvenirs from the Napoleonic Wars, did not forfeit the aura of mirabilia in the age of historicism and Hegelian state philosophy. Appearing as new *ludi naturae* were two stones with the Prussian black eagle in a white field and a piece of

spruce from 1813 with the Iron Cross, "whose shape had been clearly formed in the trunk by nature".³⁶ Whereas the Calvinist Great Elector, in exchange for a floral still life by the Catholic artist Daniel Seghers of Antwerp, returned the favour in 1648 with relics from the old holdings of the Berlin cathedral that were of little value from his denominational perspective,³⁷ the nineteenth-century Hohenzollern hagiographers helped themselves to secular (?) relics. As Leopold von Ledebur acclaimed with reverence, the umbilical cord and "a handkerchief soaked with the death sweat of the great king" in the *Kunstkammer* marked the beginning and end of the biography of Friedrich II.³⁸ "We still have [the relics] in our own way and looks like we just can't do without something like that, I guess. Started with Old Fritz, of course. We've got his walking stick and that three-cornered hat of his and his handkerchief. Well, maybe they could have forgotten about that." That is how, in 1897–98, Theodor Fontane, in his novel *The Stechlin*, let the old Dubslav comment on such a construction of historical images.³⁹ The *Kunstkammer* in

the Neues Museum sealed this quasi sacralization with its presentation of the historical, mostly Prussian, memorabilia in an alcove as the final destination of the first hall of the collection [●Around 1855 / ■Wax].⁴⁰

Only a few years after the *Kunstkammer* was ultimately closed, the Saxon freshwater pearls triumphantly moved back to Berlin. From April to June 1880, the *International Fishery Exhibition* opened its doors on 14,000 square metres in the just completed Agricultural Museum right next to the construction site of the university's Museum für Naturkunde. Pearl fishing and processing, in contrast to earlier exhibitions, had its own department, since "pearl jewellery is, precisely in



11 | *International Fishery Exhibition*, Berlin, 1880, Room 8 with the Saxon pearls, photo by Carl Günther, 1880.

these times, appreciated and destined to replace diamonds and gemstones.”⁴¹ Four jewellery companies stocked the subsection on saltwater pearls, and it was hardly by chance that the highlight was – in addition to historical objects borrowed from the Green Vault – a nautilus cup of the Sy & Wagner Company:

a shell carried by a siren and etched with figures. The stand is richly set with corals and pearls. This attractive room decoration, which is now owned by His Majesty the Emperor and King, made a very pretty impression and has already been reproduced using less precious metals [■Nautilus].⁴²

However, it was primarily the subsection on freshwater pearls – which dominated the *Collective Exhibition of the Royal Saxon Pearl-Fishing Rights and the Ensuing Industrial Branches*, organized by the finance and interior ministries and the general directorate of the Dresden museums – that seemed like a return of the *Kunstkammer* (fig. 11).⁴³ Whereas the nearby Museum für Naturkunde would become a prototype for the differentiation and separation of knowledge in the specialized museums of the nineteenth century, this exhibition brought back together all aspects of *Margaritifera margaritifera*. In the opulent neo-baroque framework of the exhibition architecture by the duly qualified Kyllmann & Heyden architectural office,⁴⁴ the biology and ecology of the freshwater pearl mussel were presented and ancient “poetical explanations” contrasted with modern natural sciences [■Monkey Hand].⁴⁵ The exhibition brought together the breeding attempts of distant countries such as Japan, China, and the United States and illustrated the possible uses in the present-day art industry as well as the cultural history through the presentation of documents on the Schmirler family of Vogtland and the eighteenth-century necklace with 177 Elster pearls from the Green Vault, worth a total of 27,000 marks (fig. 8).⁴⁶

What was new, however, were the more spectacular exhibition media used. While Lorenz Beger still felt the need to justify the pyramid showcases in the *Thesaurus* by comparing them with the pyramids of Egypt [●1930, fig. 7],⁴⁷ the *International Fishery Exhibition* relied without reserve on the most novel technology. In an aquarium – an innovation at the time – visitors could marvel at the replica of a mussel bank with live mussels, and in addition to “animals conserved in alcohol”, there were very thinly sliced mussel shell specimens, which could be viewed through microscopes supplied by the Schiek company.⁴⁸ In front of an aquarium in another part of the exhibition, one can see middle-class urban visitors, an officer, rural visitors, and a child, women, and men (fig. 12).⁴⁹ They are evidence of the projected popularity of the “*Kunstkammer* concept” – whose continuities stretch into the present – among ever-wider strata of modern societies.⁵⁰



For dem Aquarium.

12 | In Front of the Aquarium (at the International Fishery Exhibition), illustration from *Die Gartenlaube*, 1880.

44 For a magnificent photo documentation of the entire exhibition, see Günther 1880.
 45 See Schubert 1880, p. 418, quotation *ibid.*
 46 In the laudatory review in the *Gartenlaube*, this declaration of value from the official report had already increased to 30,000 marks (see *ibid.*, p. 418).
 47 See Beger 1696/1701, vol. 1, p. 227.
 48 See Nitsche 1881, p. 87, quotation *ibid.*
 49 On the aquarium as a new medium, see the extensive discussion in Vennen 2018.
 50 Such continuities, for example, were also emphasized in Wagner 2021b, *passim*.

Translated by Allison Brown