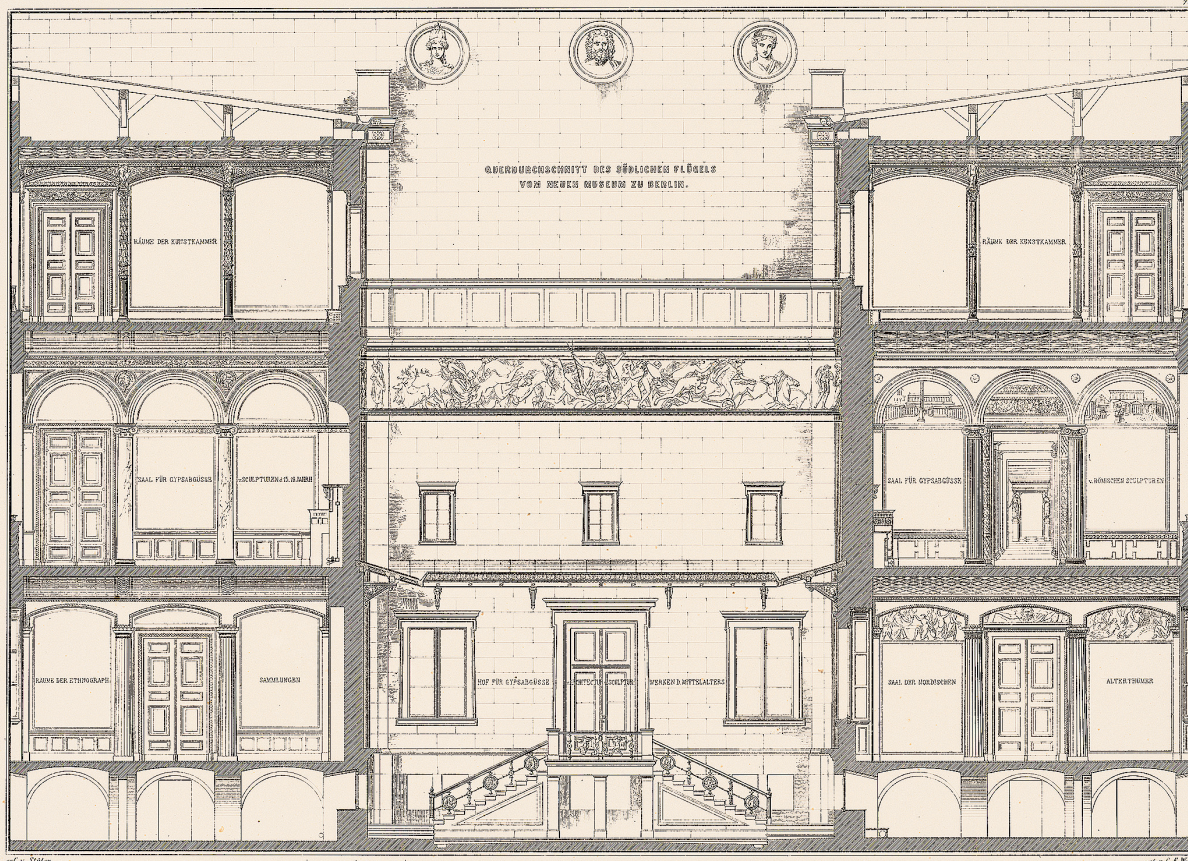


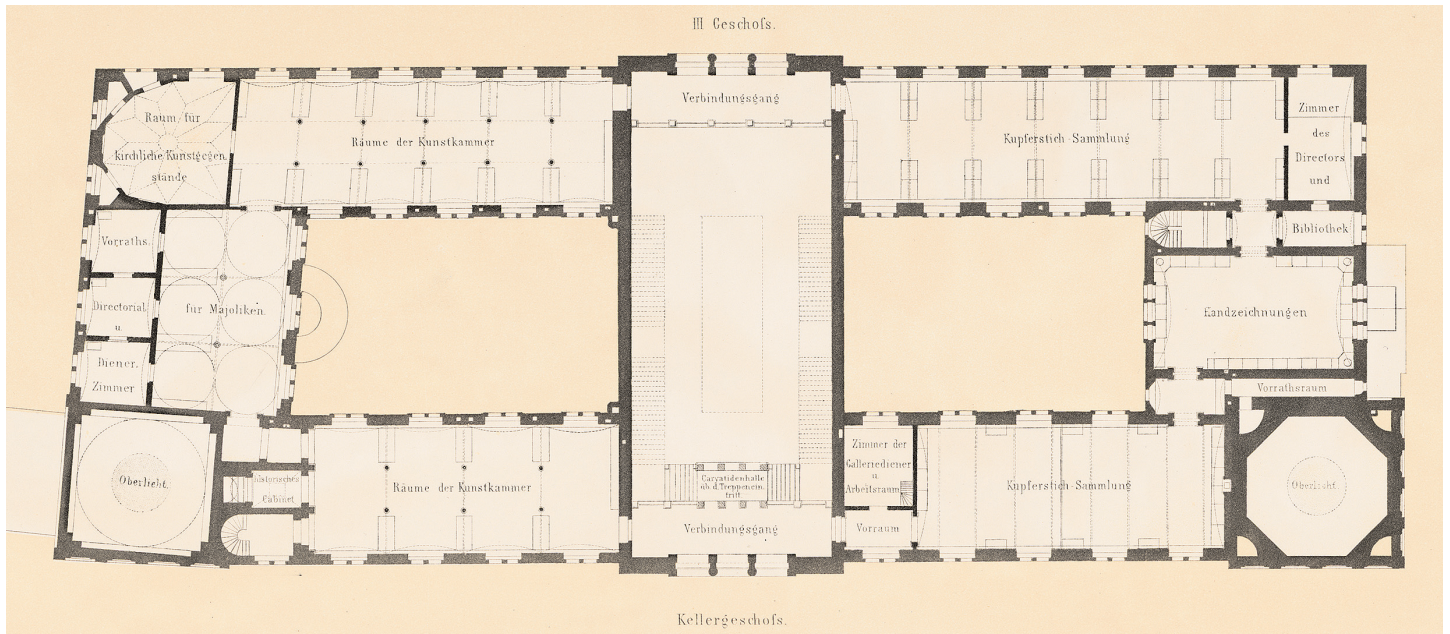
AROUND 1855: THE KUNSTKAMMER IN THE MUSEUM – THE PATH TO A NEW COLLECTION LANDSCAPE

From the Palace to the Neues Museum

In 1830, the *Kunstammer* became part of the newly founded (Altes) Museum.¹ It was instructed to transfer antiquities, post-classical sculptures [■ Priapus / ■ Cupid], ancient Egyptian artefacts, and “patriotic antiquities” to other departments.² What remained were the objects and collection areas that went beyond the epistemic conception of the museum that had grown out of the spirit of Wilhelm von Humboldt. *Kunstammer* director Jean Henry had failed to realize his idea of a universal collection [● Around 1800],³ and the new director, the historian Leopold von Ledebur,⁴ faced the task of creating an architecture of knowledge in three departments that would enable the *Kunstammer* to hold its own as a complement to the art museum on the other side of the *Lustgarten*. The *Kunstammer* once again reinvented itself, developing a dynamic that, with the

1 | Cross-section of the Neues Museum, illustration from August Stüler, *Das Neue Museum in Berlin*, 1853.





increase in objects in initially marginalized fields, had the potential to challenge the museum’s primarily neo-humanist focus and ultimately bring about its own demise.

2 | Floor plan of the third floor of the Neues Museum, illustration from August Stüler, *Das Neue Museum in Berlin*, 1853.

The first section of the *Kunstammer*, the Department of Art, continued to hold “artworks and artistic works . . . furniture . . . utensils, weapons, bric-a-brac”⁵ – in other words, objects of European material culture that contributed to the eminent rise of the decorative arts in the age of historicism [■ Nautilus]. The second, the Department of History, preserved “materialized memories of noteworthy times and famous personages, with special consideration of the royal house and the fatherland”.⁶ With its patriotic perspective and fidelity to the Hohenzollerns, this department already contained the seeds of the more differentiated historical collections to come [■ Pearls / ■ Wax / ■ Justus Bertram]. The third, the Department of Ethnology, supervised by the directorial assistant Friedrich Christoph Förster, went beyond the Eurocentric perspective. Although it had originally focused on East Asia [■ Crab Automaton], in the early nineteenth century, with the acquisition of private collections and objects brought to Berlin by research expeditions and trade relations, it began offering a more comprehensive (European) view of the world that included Asia, the South Seas, Africa, and the Americas [◆ Canon and Transformation]. It had a cultural-geographical orientation, adopted the arguments of cultural relativism and art archaeology, and to some extent already sought to grasp cultural totalities. It not only attempted to redefine older “exotic” collection pieces, but also presented trophies from the colonial conquests of other European powers. In 1844, an overview of the restructured collection was presented in the guide *Leitfaden für die Königliche Kunstammer und das Ethnographische Cabinet zu Berlin*.⁷

The validity of the new structure was confirmed by the relocation of the collections to the Neues Museum, which began in 1855. The Museum of Nordic Antiquities and the now separate Ethnographic Museum were located on the first floor and thus on the same level as the Egyptian Museum. As a “museum of craftwork, the art industry, and historical curiosities”,⁸ the *Kunstammer* was assigned to the third floor, above the plaster casts of ancient and post-classical statues and

- 1 On the founding of the museum, see Vogtherr 1997.
- 2 See Ledebur 1831, pp. 43–4.
- 3 See above all Dolezel 2019.
- 4 On Ledebur, see Fischer 2013.
- 5 Ledebur 1831, p. 44.
- 6 Ibid.
- 7 Ledebur 1844 (on the Ethnographic Cabinet, pp. 117–42; see also Bolz 2007; Bolz 2011).
- 8 Described as such in Schasler 1861. On the Neues Museum and its departments, see the essays in Bergvelt et al. 2011; on the *Kunstammer*, see esp. Segelken 2011 as well as Dietze 1998 and Röber 2001.

architecture on the second. It shared this level with the Print Room (figs. 1–2) and had four rooms available for its collections. The Altes and the Neues Museum were joined by a bridge, a transitional zone “at whose beginning the museum sphere of Wilhelm von Humboldt was left behind and at whose end the Neues Museum, the world of Alexander von Humboldt, was entered”.⁹

In Ledebur’s Footsteps

Ledebur navigated the institution through this period of change for forty-three years. He was appointed by Friedrich Wilhelm III after publishing a highly acclaimed work on historic buildings in the principality of Minden.¹⁰ As a historian, he immediately set out to provide cultural-historical legitimacy for the collections.¹¹ In his role as editor of the journal *Allgemeines Archiv für die Geschichtskunde des preußischen Staates* (General Archive of the History of the Prussian State), which appeared between 1830 and 1836, he published essays on the institutional history of the *Kunstammer* and *Rüstammer* (Armoury) that introduced readers to objects from the collections he supervised and that remain of fundamental importance today.¹²

In contrast to Jean Henry, who attempted to emphasize the universal character and contemporary educational relevance of the *Kunstammer* for a lay audience,¹³ Ledebur provided a historical perspective, believing that the aim of the *Kunstammer*

was nothing less than to offer a well-ordered, clear view of the spirit and history of all peoples and times, especially of the fatherland, through a series of documents that differ from archival ones, namely, through artworks and historical curiosities.¹⁴

According to Ledebur, cultural history could be conveyed by studying material culture – an apologetically formulated concept for the reorientation of the collection. His essays portray the contributions of the Brandenburg electors and Prussian kings as collectors. For his research he ordered and copied numerous files from the Royal Library, the Academy of Sciences, and the Secret State Archives.¹⁵ One hundred years later, the same approach was taken by the art historian Otto Reichl in his attempts to reconstruct the *Kunstammer* [●1930],¹⁶ and all subsequent researchers have followed in Ledebur’s footsteps as well. Although he rarely recorded unprinted sources in his annotations, the surviving files make clear that his work as a historian was rigorously based on these documents. The selection of information was determined by his focus on the ruling dynasts; at the same time, he had other sources at his disposal that have been lost today.

The Dissolution of the *Kunstammer*

A turning point in the late history of the *Kunstammer* came in 1872 with the *Ausstellung älterer kunstgewerblicher Gegenstände im Königlichen Zeughause* (Exhibition of Older Craftwork in the Royal Zeughaus). This exhibition was co-organized by the art historian Julius Lessing, the subsequent director of the Museum of Decorative Arts (*Kunstgewerbemuseum*), and presented not only objects from the Prussian palaces but above all craft holdings from the *Kunstammer* (fig. 3). Already evident in its title was an approach to the future storage and presentation of such holdings in museums. In November 1875, barely two years after Ledebur’s retirement, the *Kunstammer* was ordered to transfer its objects, initially as loans, to the Museum of Decorative Arts, founded

9 See Bredekamp 2020a and, for the quotation, p. 33; see also Bredekamp 2011.

10 See Ledebur 2009.

11 Ledebur’s ideas and management can be reconstructed on the basis of the files preserved in the Central Archives of the Staatliche Museen; for an overview see *Kunstammer–Eingangsjournal 1830–1875* and the corresponding documentation in *GStA PK, I. HA Rep. 76, Sekt.15, Abt. XI, Nr. 16*, esp. Bd. 8.

12 See Ledebur 1831, Ledebur 1833a, Ledebur 1833b.

13 On this topic, see Dolezel 2019, esp. p. 206.

14 Ledebur 1831, pp. 3–4.

15 See *Kunstammer–Eingangsjournal 1830–1875* and the various entries on this topic in 1830.

16 Reichl 1930a; Reichl 1930b.

17 For a comprehensive discussion on the establishment and early history of the Museum of Decorative Arts, see Mundt 2018, pp. 25–94, esp. pp. 45–51, 69. See also Röber 2001, pp. 79–89; and Dreier 1981, pp. 42–4.

18 *Kunstammerinventar 1875*.

19 See Dreier 1981, p. 43.

20 See Mundt 2018, pp. 61–4.

21 On the dissolution of the remaining holdings of the *Kunstammer* Department after 1875, see Stibinger 1990, pp. 48–52.

22 On this topic, see the online exhibition *Objects on the Move: From the Kunstammer into the Museum*, created in 2021 as part of the Berlin *Kunstammer* research project (see *Objects on the Move* in the bibliography).

in 1867, which was still operating under the name Deutsches Gewerbe-Museum zu Berlin (German Museum of Industrial Arts in Berlin).¹⁷

The transfer of items was documented in the so-called K-Number Inventory [■Night Clock],¹⁸ whose ten volumes describe 6,507 objects arranged by material. Even today, their inventory numbers begin with “K”. The majority are not acquisitions from the seventeenth or eighteenth centuries; only around 150 can be assigned to older holdings.¹⁹ The bulk entered the *Kunstkammer* as part of the extensive acquisitions of the nineteenth century.²⁰ However, the inventory is not only of interest as a snapshot of time. It also provides information on the registration of objects in older inventories, some of which no longer exist. At the same time, it documents later transfers, removals, and losses due to war.

Beginning in the 1870s, other museums received holdings from the former *Kunstkammer*, including the Ethnological Museum, which opened in 1873, and the Hohenzollern Museum, founded in 1877.²¹ Today, objects from the *Kunstkammer* can be found in almost all the collections of the Staatliche Museen zu Berlin – not only in older ones such as the Museum of Prints and Drawings, the Numismatic Collection, the Collection of Antiquities, and the Sculpture Collection, but also in twentieth-century institutions such as the Art Library [◆Availability] and the Museum of Asian Art [■Crab Automaton]. The migration of *Kunstkammer* objects through the museums of Berlin testifies to the ever-changing collection focuses and classification systems that emerged as museums became more specialized.²² As a result, the biographies of the objects open up new vistas on epistemic processes in nineteenth- and twentieth-century museology.



3 | Workshop of Lorenz Zick (?), Three Ivory Cups from the Berlin *Kunstammer*, illustration from *Photographien der Zeughaus-Ausstellung Berlin September bis Oktober 1872*, vol. 1.

Translated by Adam Blauhut