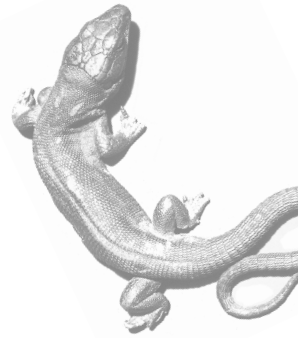


CHAPTER FIVE

Collecting Nature and Art

Artisans and Knowledge in the Kunstkammer

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In his 1565 treatise on how a collection should be formed, Samuel Quiccheberg (1529–67) extolled collecting as “a first philosophy”:

I must explain that the invention of the first philosophy [of collecting], as it calls itself, is a novelty in the whole of Europe; it has brought about the certainty of all scientific areas as well as the most complete methods; like the opening of the doors of wisdom, it has produced the greatest use and godly clarity in the sciences.¹

Quiccheberg titled his treatise “Inscriptions or Titles for an Ample and all-encompassing Theater which includes particulars of the whole creation and outstanding images, or . . . a storehouse of artful and wonderful things . . . which will bring about a new knowledge of things and admirable prudence [cognitio rerum et prudentia admiranda], or wisdom in statecraft.” I do not think that Quiccheberg’s claims that collections would bring “a new knowledge of things” and “wisdom in statecraft” were hyperbolic. Although Quiccheberg’s *Inscriptiones vel*

Tituli Theatri Amplissimi has often been seen as a set of instructions for displaying the wealth and power of a prince or of representing the plenitude of the cosmos, I argue in this essay that collecting was part of a new conception of philosophy that viewed knowledge as active, productive, and based on nature. This dimension of Quiccheberg's plan for a *Kunstkammer* emerges in particular relief when compared with the work of the Nuremberg goldsmith Wenzel Jamnitzer (1510–85), his contemporary and a collector himself.

The emergence of collections of antiquities, natural objects, and works of art in the sixteenth century, as well as their significance for the study of nature, has been a familiar subject since the 1980s and 1990s, when Oliver Impey and Arthur MacGregor's *The Origins of Museums* signaled the onset of the serious study of art and curiosity chambers—*Kunst- und Wunderkammern*—in early modern Europe. Since then, the work of Thomas DaCosta Kaufmann, Horst Bredekamp, Paula Findlen, Martin Kemp, and numerous others has illuminated many aspects of this important study for the understanding of nature in the Renaissance.² Scholars have noted the cluster of secular princely (as distinguished from Church) collections founded in the mid-sixteenth century. August I, Elector of Saxony, established a *Kunstkammer* in 1560, the same year that Archduke Ferdinand II began assembling one at Schloss Ambras near Innsbruck.³ It is clear, however, from Quiccheberg's comments about his ideas and models for collecting that some of the first secular collections in the north were probably those of the Fugger family, the long-distance merchants based in Augsburg, for whom Jacopo da Strada was already collecting in the 1540s.⁴ Indeed, Quiccheberg praised the Fugger collections, which he had helped to build when he entered their service as librarian in 1555. He commented that their collections helped people think up new inventions.⁵ Even before these merchant collections developed, it appears that the artisans of Augsburg and Nuremberg held extensive collections. Quiccheberg claimed that his own collection was already far surpassed by the collections of tools and precious items possessed by the artisans of these Free Imperial Cities: "It happened, as I truly confess, that I was energetically surpassed by goldsmiths, painters, sculptors, and other almost illiterates."⁶

Whatever the dates of the first secular collections—and we should not forget the collections of the dukes of Burgundy from the fifteenth

century⁷—Quiccheberg's treatise has been viewed as marking an important moment in the history of collecting, for it represents the first written treatise, in contrast to the actual collections themselves, that suggests a systematic organization of a collection.⁸ A close reading shows, however, that Quiccheberg's treatise is pragmatic rather than systematic, no doubt reflecting its composition in the service of the Wittelsbach duke, Albrecht V of Bavaria, and the fact that the wishes of this patron were uppermost in Quiccheberg's mind.⁹

Quiccheberg, who had been born in Antwerp, raised in Nuremberg, and educated in Basel and Ingolstadt, entered the service of Duke Albrecht V of Bavaria in 1559. In 1565, the same year that he wrote the treatise, the duke ordered seventeen precious objects to be kept in perpetuity by the Wittelsbach family. A princely proclamation of this sort was necessary in order to protect them from being melted down or sold as the need for specie arose. The explosive growth of such collections in the course of the century is illustrated by the fact that Albrecht's original list of items was increased to twenty-seven a few years later, and then still further by Duke Wilhelm V, finally reaching 3,407 items by 1598, only thirty-three years later.¹⁰ Such collections were filled with (as the inventory of Rudolf II's *Kunstammer* classified them) *naturalia*—things of nature; *artificialia*—things made by the human hand; and *scientifica* or *instrumenta*—instruments of all kinds.¹¹ In accord with different interests and regional concerns, patrons often specialized in the collecting of different objects. For example, Archduke Ferdinand's Schloss Ambras collection focused on armor, *naturalia* (especially the wonders of nature), and works of art that incorporated natural objects. The Saxon Elector, August I, was particularly interested in tools and objects associated with mining and metalworking; he accumulated an impressive collection of goldsmithing tools, including a wire-pulling machine and many other items, now held by the Musée de la Renaissance at Château d'Ecouen outside Paris. He also collected measuring and drawing implements and a remarkable collection of practical and scientific books, which he bought at the rate of about a hundred per year throughout his entire thirty-three-year reign.¹²

All these collections functioned not only as reservoirs of specie and demonstrations of noble largesse and living, but also as vehicles for self-definition and high politics. Collecting was about princely mastery, including the mastery of nature, and Quiccheberg's 1565 treatise, the

“Ample and all-encompassing Theater,” begins in this manner, making clear that a collection should be deployed in the representation of the power, wealth, and noble characteristics of the ruler. Quiccheberg’s treatise divided the collection into five “classes” of inscriptions—it must be remembered that Quiccheberg is not so much describing a space as describing a set of objects and their labels (*Inscriptiones vel Tituli Theatri Amplissimi*) that will be set into a space probably containing multiple chambers. Although he lists five classes of labels, and thus his scheme has been compared to Giulio Camillo’s memory theater, he is not so much interested in the scheme of organization as in the material objects themselves. This emerges both in his comments on the classes and in the fact that he often refers to material aspects of the objects, for example, their size, in justifying their classification within the various classes.

In the first class Quiccheberg placed saints’ portraits, since the saints were intermediaries between the rulers, representing both the divine on earth and God. Following these came family portraits, then maps that delineated the ruler’s territory. Along with these could be included maps of the world, but Quiccheberg specified that the map of the patron’s territory must be more conspicuous, larger, and more richly ornamented than all the rest. The political and representational aspects of these collections, as demonstrated by Quiccheberg’s remark about the maps, is vitally important and much has been written about it, but more significant for this volume’s focus on nature is that Quiccheberg does not dwell on political representation. Instead he moves rapidly over paintings of the ruler’s residence, military campaigns, ritual, and spectacle to the things that appear closer to his heart: paintings of large, rare, or unusual animals, especially those found in the patron’s territory, and all kinds of models demonstrating human artifice. These models, which were meant to be scaled up for the use of architects and builders, included buildings of all types, constructed of wood, paper, and feathers and ornamented with colors, as well as models of ships, wagons, stairs, fountains, arches, and bridges. In addition, small-scale models of machines, including water pumps, sawmills, grain mills, stamping mills, and dams, were to occupy this first section of the collection, expressly made for the purpose of scaling them up to full size and thereby discovering whether they functioned usefully or could be improved.¹³

tually became central to the “new philosophy” or the new active science of the late sixteenth and seventeenth centuries.⁴⁶

Quiccheberg, however, remained a scholar. His musings about what actually happened in the *Kunstkammer* and its associated workshops reveal him to be a typical word- and text-based scholar of his time, who could enumerate what artisans would learn from collections: “artisans of every type can practice distinguishing the difference between individual materials that they work,”⁴⁷ but could only articulate philological goals for scholars like himself. “I have recognized how pleasurable it is to visit individual craftsmen, to observe their admirable works and to research when German names can be compared and made equivalent to Latin names.”⁴⁸ From such quintessentially scholarly remarks, I suggest that, despite their belief that they possessed a new philosophy—a new science that surpassed the learning of artisans—Quiccheberg and other sixteenth- and seventeenth-century scholars never harnessed this productive knowledge for themselves. Rather, scholars continued to rely on those “almost illiterates” until well into the nineteenth century.

Notes

1. Harriet Roth, ed., *Der Anfang der Museumslehre in Deutschland: Das Traktat “Inscriptiones vel Tituli Theatri Amplissimi” von Samuel Quiccheberg* (Berlin: Akademie Verlag, 2000), facing Latin and German text, p. 187.

2. From the work of Julius von Schlosser, *Die Kunst- und Wunderkammern der Spätrenaissance* (1908; repr., 2 vols., Braunschweig: Klinkhardt und Biermann, 1978), and Oliver Impey and Arthur MacGregor, eds., *The Origins of Museums: The Cabinet of Curiosities in Sixteenth- and Seventeenth-Century Europe* (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1985), the study of early modern collecting has expanded exponentially. Notable recent contributions are Thomas DaCosta Kaufmann, *The Mastery of Nature: Aspects of Art, Science, and Humanism in the Renaissance* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1993); Horst Bredekamp, *The Lure of Antiquity and the Cult of the Machine*, trans. Allison Brown (Princeton: Markus Wiener, 1995); Paula Findlen, *Possessing Nature* (Berkeley and Los Angeles: University of California Press, 1994); Martin Kemp, *The Science of Art: Optical Themes in Western Art from Brunelleschi to Seurat* (New Haven and London: Yale University Press, 1990); and Martin Kemp, “‘Wrought by No Artist’s Hand’: The Natural, the Artificial, the Exotic, and the Scientific in Some Artifacts from the Renaissance,” in *Reframing the Renaissance: Visual Culture in Europe and Latin America 1450–1650*, ed. Claire Farago (New Haven and London: Yale University Press,

1995), 117–96; Ellinoor Bergvelt and Renée Kistemaker, eds., *De wereld binnen handbereik: Nederlandse kunst- en rariteitenverzamelingen, 1585–1735* (Zwolle: Waanders Uitgevers, 1992); and Andreas Grote, ed., *Macrococosmos in Microcosmo: Die Welt in der Stube. Zur Geschichte des Sammelns 1450 bis 1800* (Opladen: Leske & Budrich, 1994). See also Krzysztof Pomian, *Collectors and Curiosities: Paris and Venice, 1500–1800*, trans. Elizabeth Wiles-Portier (Cambridge: Polity Press, 1990), and Antoine Schnapper, *Le Géant, La Licorne et la Tulipe: Collections et Collectionneurs dans le France du XVIIe Siècle* (Paris: Flammarion, 1988).

3. Helen Watanabe-O’Kelly, *Court Culture in Dresden: From Renaissance to Baroque* (Hampshire and New York: Palgrave, 2002); Elisabeth Scheicher, *Die Kunst- und Wunderkammern der Habsburger* (Vienna: Molden, 1979); Elisabeth Scheicher, *Die Kunstkammer (Schloss Ambras)* (Innsbruck: Kunsthistorisches Museum, 1977); Christian Gries, “Erzherzog Ferdinand II von Tirol und die Sammlungen auf Schloß Ambras,” *Frühneuzeit-Info* 5 (1994): 7–37.

4. See Mark A. Meadow, “Merchants and Marvels: Hans Jacob Fugger and the Origins of the Wunderkammer,” in *Merchants and Marvels: Commerce, Science, and Art in Early Modern Europe*, ed. Pamela H. Smith and Paula Findlen (New York: Routledge, 2002), 182–200.

5. Roth, ed., *Der Anfang*, 193–95.

6. Roth, ed., *Der Anfang*, 125.

7. Jeffrey Chipps Smith, “The Artistic Patronage of Philip the Good, Duke of Burgundy (1419–1467)” (Ph.D. diss., Columbia University, 1979); Wim Blockmans and Walter Prevenier, *The Promised Lands: The Low Countries under Burgundian Rule, 1369–1530*, trans. Elizabeth Fackelman (Philadelphia: University of Pennsylvania Press, 1999); Dagmar Eichberger, *Leben mit Kunst: Wirken durch Kunst. Sammelwesen und Hofkunst unter Margarete von Österreich, Regentin der Niederlande* (Turnhout: Brepols, 2002).

8. It has been called the first museological text by Eva Schultz, “Notes on the History of Collecting and of Museums in the Light of Selected Literature of the Sixteenth to the Eighteenth Century,” *Journal of History of Collections* 2 (1990): 205–18.

9. Quiccheberg includes a lengthy list of nobles, patricians, merchants, scholars, citizens, and artisans who collected (Roth, ed., *Der Anfang*, 164–211).

10. J.F. Hayward, *Virtuoso Goldsmiths and the Triumph of Mannerism, 1540–1620* (London: Sotheby Park Bernet Publications, 1976), 32.

11. Literature on the Habsburg and Rudolfine *Kunstkammern* is now abundant. For an overview and bibliography, see Eliska Fuciková et al., eds., *Rudolf II and Prague: The Court and the City* (London: Thames and Hudson, 1997); Eliska Fuciková, ed., *Prag um 1600: Beiträge zur Kunst und Kultur am Hofe Rudolfs II* (Freren and Emsland: Luca, 1988); and the exhibition catalog, *Prag um 1600: Kunst und Kultur am Hofe Rudolfs II* (Ausstellung, Kulturstiftung Ruhr, Villa Essen, 10.6–30.10 1988).