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This English text is largely identical with the chapter *Kunstkammer: Zur Neuverortung mittelalterlicher Schatzkunst* in my Book *Koloniales Erbe in Museen. Kritische Weißseinsforschung in der praktischen Museumsarbeit*, Bielefeld: transcript 2019, S. 43-70.

Re-Positioning Medieval Treasury Art: Syrian Glass Vessels and Italian Oliphants

A focal point of scholarship, objects like 11th to 13th c. Syrian glass vessels and oliphants primarily originate from European *Kunstkammern* (i.e. cabinets of arts and curiosa).¹ There are scattered articles by art historians who specialize in medieval or oriental studies. Such objects are referred to as “exotica”, disturbing the established classification for *Kunstkammern*. Horst Bredekamp even called their simultaneous inclusion in the segments *naturalia*, *artificialia*, and *scientifica* “methodically senseless”.² Controversies surrounding the interpretation of the *Kunstkammer* as a forward-looking “laboratory of scholarship”³ (Horst Bredekamp) or rather retrospective mnemonic institution – as Klaus Minges⁴ would express it – are not my topic. The presently booming *Kunstkammer* research simply offers a welcome opportunity⁵ to discuss the category *exotica*.

¹ This English text is largely identical with the post-doctoral qualification (*Habilitation*) lecture I presented in German on November 14, 2012 at the Fakultät für Architektur des Karlsruher Instituts für Technologie (KIT). My special thanks go to Prof. Dr. Monica Juneja (Universität Heidelberg) and Prof. Dr. Norbert Schneider (KIT) for their continued support. My thanks go also to Dr. Daniel Kletke (Berlin) for his translation for an English-speaking audience.

² Horst Bredekamp, *Antikensehnsucht und Maschinenglaube. Die Geschichte der Kunstkammer und die Zukunft der Kunstgeschichte*, Berlin 2007, p. 39 (1st ed. 1993).

³ *Ibid.*, p. 512.

⁴ Cf. Klaus Minges, *Das Sammlungswesen in der frühen Neuzeit. Kriterien der Ordnung und Spezialisierung*, Münster 1998, p. 117-124.

⁵ In my opinion, Horst Bredekamp’s explanation of the booming of the *Kunstkammer* topic as a parallel to the present media revolution is convincing: Thanks to the latter, new intellectual networks and opportunities to compare emerge via the internet. See Bredekamp 2007, p. 99-101. – Exhibition catalogues produced over the last decades, which published and contextualized individual *Kunstkammer* objects include *Von der Kunstkammer zum Schloßmuseum Gotha: 350 Jahre Sammlungen für Kunst und Wissen auf Schloß Friedenstein*, ed. Museum der Stadt Gotha, exh. cat. Gotha, Gotha 1990; *Wunderkammer des Abendlandes. Museum und Sammlung im Spiegel der Zeit*, ed. Kunsthalle Bonn, exh. cat. Bonn, Bonn 1995; *Theater der Natur und Kunst: Wunderkammern des Wissens. Eine Ausstellung der Humboldt-Universität zu Berlin*, ed. Horst Bredekamp, exh. cat. Berlin, Berlin 2000, 2 vols.; *Weltenharmonie. Die Kunstkammer und die Ordnung des Wissens*, ed. Susanne König-Lein, exh. cat. Brunswick, Brunswick 2000; *Exotica: Portugals Entdeckungen im Spiegel fürstlicher Kunst- und Wunderkammern der Renaissance*, ed. Wilfried Seipel, exh. cat. Vienna, Milan 2000; *Aus der Kunstkammer Würth, Meisterwerke von 1500 bis 1800*, ed. Ursula Angelmaier, exh. cat. Würth, Künzelsau 2003; *Princely Splendor: The Dresden Court 1580-1620*, ed. Dirk Syndram and Antje Scherner, exh. cat. New York 2004, Milan 2004; *Kunst- und Wunderkammer Burg Trausnitz*, ed. Renate Eikermann, exh. cat. Trausnitz, Munich 2004; *Die Kunstkammer auf Schloss Friedenstein*, ed. Martin Eberle, exh. cat. Gotha, Gotha 2010.

Surely, a 21st c. Central European viewer finds a Syrian glass vessel (ill. 1) and an oliphant (ill. 2) “exotic”,⁶ i.e. unusual, alien and thus originating in a far-off land. This seems to be due more to the figural decoration, which follows unfamiliar aesthetic categories, rather than the materials of glass and ivory. But is this not merely a present-day impression or an interpretive trap, determined by the assumption of centuries-old cultural constants? Using a selected group of objects, my essay attempts to trace how an absolute urge to form categories led to a situation wherein the European art history did either not perceive or ignored the histories of transcultural objects because questions pertaining to them would have contradicted categorization. It becomes clear that transgressing cultural borders and time limits offers new mental concepts. Questions relating to the scholarly merits of the *exotica* category will thus no longer be an approach conceived from the present vantage point – being inappropriately imposed onto the past – but will instead contribute to uncover forgotten historic connections and may even bring concrete knowledge to light that pertains to the individual objects.

Syrian glass vessels

Thanks to their technical and aesthetic qualities and due to their oftentimes Christian motifs, Syrian glass vessels are frequently discussed as European products. However, it has been proven that they are – for the most part – Syrian articles of export that were occasionally fitted with new European mounts. The opposite development may be observed vis-à-vis the geographic attribution of oliphants. Whereas they were formerly believed to be Arabic or African products imported to Europe, there is certainty today that the medieval examples were produced exclusively in Europe for the European market. This assessment was the reason to look at both groups together. Among the points of comparison are their dates of origin, the primary function of a profane status symbol, and in individual cases their function as drinking vessels within a hunting context. In the framework of European *Kunstkammern*, the former luxury products lost their implicit utilitarian value, gaining new status as *exotica*.

When I first saw two Syrian drinking vessels in Dresden’s Green Vault I wondered why these 13th c. Syrian glasses were given new mounts by 16th c. German goldsmiths. Did the European users find them unfinished? Was their unfamiliar aesthetic supposed to be integrated into a European appearance? Were they supposed to receive a dignifying setting? Are we hence looking at a refinement of medieval treasury art with the intent of novel *Kunstammer* presentations?

19th c. European scholars examined Syrian glass according to style, find site, and decoration.⁷ How far the attribution of individual fragments to the Aleppo, Damascus, or Fustāt groups are tenable has long been the center of scholarly attention.⁸ From the present socio-historic vantage point, queries regarding export production and

⁶ About the term *exotica* as a synonym for “coming from afar” cf. Dominik Collet, *Die Welt in der Stube. Begegnungen mit Außereuropa in Kunstkammern der Frühen Neuzeit*, Göttingen 2007, p. 29-30.

⁷ Cf. Carl Johan Lamm, *Mittelalterliche Gläser und Steinschnittarbeiten aus dem Nahen Osten*, Berlin 1929-1930, 2 vols.

⁸ The few intact objects reveal different manufacturing techniques – particularly the goblet bottoms. Cf. Charles Hercules Read, *On a Saracenic goblet of enamelled glass of medieval date*, in: *Archaeologia or miscellaneous tracts relating to antiquity* 58 (1902), issue 1, p. 217-226.

connections with Venetian glass production are more interesting.⁹ Contemporary sources testify to the great appreciation for Syrian glass. The Italian Simone Sigoli, who stayed in Damascus around 1384, stated: “Here, the world’s most beautiful and most noble things of all types can be found. If the bones of your legs were made up of money, you would most certainly break them off in order to purchase objects from them.”¹⁰

Accordingly, European inventories mostly list the glasses as “Damascus-vessels”.¹¹ In Dresden’s 1741 *Kunstammer* inventory, on the other hand, one of the glasses is called “Turkish”, the other “Persian”.¹² The specific provenance was substituted with an unspecific one, following contemporary Orientalism.¹³ While the walls of the larger goblet are embellished with a depiction of a crane hunt around the circumference, the smaller one reveals three polo players, astride a white, a yellow, and a red horse on a ground of golden tendrils. Arabic inscriptions along the upper and lower rims praise an unidentified sultan. This typical iconography can be encountered on comparable vessels in other collections: For example on the slender, bell-like curved goblet made of colored glass with gold enamel kept in the Landesmuseum Kassel. Here, the main image shows a tambourine player beneath six cranes that fly to the right – like the small piece from Dresden. The three riders on differently-colored horses may also be encountered on an example in the Louvre. The Kassel goblet has been part of the landgrave of Hesse-Kassel’s treasure since the Middle Ages. The Parisian glass was found under an altar in the church Santa Margherita in Orvieto at the end of the 19th c.¹⁴

Glasses as drinking vessels have been known since antiquity. Appearing since the 11th c., these thinly-walled, enameled goblets were innovations of the “Fatimid-Kufic-Culture”, as older references point out.¹⁵ After the fall

⁹ Cf. Avinoam Shalem, *The Otherness in the Focus of Interest: or, If only the other could speak*, in: *Islamic Artefacts in the Mediterranean World. Trade, Gift Exchange and Artistic Transfer*, ed. Gerhard Wolf and Catarina Schmidt Arcangeli, Venice 2010, p. 29-44; Emilie Savage-Smith, *Das Meer in der islamischen Kartografie des Mittelalters*, in: *Das Meer, der Tausch und die Grenzen der Repräsentation*, ed. Hannah Baader and Gerhard Wolf, Berlin 2010, p. 239-262.

¹⁰ Quoted after Rachel Ward, *Metallarbeiten der Mamluken-Zeit, hergestellt für den Export nach Europa*, in: *Europa und der Orient 800-1900*, ed. Gereon Sievernich and Hendrik Budde, exh. cat. Berlin, Berlin 1989, p. 202-209, here p. 209.

¹¹ Cf. Renate Eikelmann, *Orientalisches Emailglas als Vorbild für den westlichen Goldschmied*, in: *Jahrbuch des Zentralinstituts für Kunstgeschichte* 3 (1987), p. 243-253, here p. 246-247.

¹² *Kunstammer* inventory of 1741, fol. 31v: Cap. IV. Crystalline u. venedische gläser, auch andere sachen u. dergleichen material. No. 13: “Ein alt persisch glaß, mit figuren und einer arabischen schrift gemahlt. Auf dem deckel ein männigen mit dem schilde und hellebarde, so nebst dem fuß in vergold + silber gefaßt.” No. 14: “Ein dergleichen etwas höheres türckisches glaß, mit figuren gemahlet und mit silbernen, etwas vergoldeten schinnen [?]. Der fuß ganz von silber und sechßeckigt [...]. Beides am 6.7.1832 zum grünen gewölbe abgegeben.” Cf. Dirk Syndram and Martina Minning (ed.), *Die kurfürstlich-sächsische Kunstammer in Dresden. Das Inventar von 1741*, p. 48.

¹³ About 18th c. Orientalism cf. Edward W. Said, *Orientalism*, London 1978.

¹⁴ Cf. *Europa und der Orient 800-1900*, ed. Gereon Sievernich and Hendrik Budde, exh. cat. Berlin, Berlin 1989, p. 576-577.

¹⁵ Enamel consists of melted glass paste applied in the fire onto metal as artificial, colored decorations. The term was adopted in the 17th c. from the French language. Glass pieces are pulverized, washed, and transferred onto the metal as a moist paste. After drying, the paste is melted in a muffle kiln at a temperature of 700 to 800 degrees centigrade. Once cooled, the substance is firm. The different colors are obtained thanks to adding metal oxides: Silver oxide – yellow, iron oxide – red to brown, cobalt oxide – blue, copper oxide – green, manganese oxide – violet to black, zinc oxide – white. One differentiates between opaque and translucent enamels, depending on the degree of transparency. The colors are mixed by creating different layers. The earliest historic source is Presbyter Theophilus “*Schedula diversarum artium*” (1100) book 3, chap. 53. The second major source is Benvenuto Cellini “*Trattari dell’oreficeria e della scultura*” (Florence 1568). Cf. Hans Wentzel, “Becher”, in: *Reallexikon zur deutschen Kunstgeschichte (RDK)*, vol. 2, Stuttgart 1948, col. 135-147; Erich Steingräber, “Email”, in: *RDK*, vol. 5, Stuttgart 1967, col. 1-65; Alice Bethe-Kränzner, “Emailglas”, in: *ibid.*, col. 65-84.

of the Fatimid dynasty in 1171, glass workers from Armenā resettled near Aleppo and developed a new décor combining Syrian, Iraqi, and Persian influences.¹⁶ Simple dating formulas – such as successively more decoration as time went by – as suggested by European art historians have been disproved by socio-historic facts. Gold-enamel vessels – like luster fayences and inlaid bronze works – were substitutes for golden vessels, which were prohibited for religious reasons. The glasses’ transparency was of imminent importance in order to identify the contents. At approximately the same time, lamps were completely painted.¹⁷ Contemporary sources address materials, production, and distribution of these objects as trade goods, presents, and tribute payments to Europe as well as to China. Knowledge derived from the more durable metal objects from the same region can be equally transferred to the glass vessels.¹⁸ The arrest of the last Ayyubid sultan – an-Nāṣir Yūsuf (1237-1260) – in 1260 by troops of the Mongolian grand khan serves as *terminus ante quem*. His reign is associated with an artistic and cultural blossoming that now came to a temporary end. As a consequence of the collapse of trade routes in the country’s interior, the European market gained importance. Time and again, Venetian merchants managed to successfully circumvent the papal embargo on imported goods from Islamic regions. The inscriptions on many containers found in Europe verify that sultans and high-ranking officials were once commissioners. Rachel Ward aptly states: “The non-Arabic speaking Europeans were without doubt welcome trade partners for merchants who liked to get rid of objects with the inscribed names of deceased and dismissed sultans or Mamluk officials and others who had fallen into disfavor.”¹⁹

A find of some 52,000 8th to 11th c. Arabic coins in Northern Europe testifies to the size of the Arabian trading network.²⁰ The Kufic inscriptions were increasingly reproduced to indicate the objects’ origin, without knowledge of context or meaning.²¹ This was unproblematic in so far as no specific Islamic iconography was picked up.²² Since Frederick II (1194-1250), even the coronation garments of the Holy Roman Empire show Arabic lettering.²³ From our present perspective, it is hard to understand a debate that has been going on for more than 100 years: whether Italian emigrants worked in Syrian studios or Syrian emigrants in Italian workshops, or whether domestic workers copied the “foreign” style.²⁴ What remains to be determined, however, is a transcultural production

¹⁶ Cf. Lamm 1930, p. 251.

¹⁷ Cf. *ibid.*, p. 252.

¹⁸ Cf. Ward 1989, p. 202-209; Richard Ettinghausen, *Der Einfluß der angewandten Künste und der Malerei des Islam auf die Künste Europas*, in: *Europa und der Orient 800-1900*, ed. Gereon Sievernich and Hendrik Budde, exh. cat. Berlin, Berlin 1989, p. 165-201.

¹⁹ Ward 1989, p. 202. – Cf. in general F.C. Lane, *The Venetian Galleys to Alexandria, 1344*, in: *Wirtschaftskräfte und Wirtschaftszweige: Festschrift für Hermann Kellebenz*, vol. 1: *Mittelmeer und Kontinent*, ed. J. Schneider, Stuttgart 1989, p. 431-440.

²⁰ Ettinghausen 1989, p. 166.

²¹ Cf. Kurt Erdmann, *Arabische Schriftzeichen als Ornament in der abendländischen Kunst des Mittelalters*, in: *Abhandlungen der Geistes- und Sozialwissenschaftlichen Klasse. Akademie der Wissenschaften und der Literatur in Mainz, Wiesbaden 1953*, p. 467-513. – The essay contains a comprehensive catalogue of scripture samples in European art. In the 14th c. Kufic ornaments disappeared entirely from European art (architecture, textiles, applied arts); they were apparently too closely related to Romanesque ornaments and hence not adopted in Gothic art. About the influence of Chinese art on Islamic applied arts see Herbert Fux, *Chinesische Medaillonformen in der islamischen Kunst*, in: *Forschungen zur Kunst Asiens. In Memoriam Kurt Erdmann (1901-64)*, ed. Oktay Aslanapa and Rudolf Naumann, Istanbul 1969, p. 278-300.

²² Ettinghausen 1989, p. 166.

²³ Cf. Tarif al Samman, *Inschriften auf den Krönungsgewändern des Heiligen Römischen Reichs*, in: *Jahrbuch der Kunsthistorischen Sammlungen in Wien, Vienna 1982*, vol. 78, p. 7-34; Franz Kirchweger and Werner Telesko (ed.), *Thesaurus Mediaevalis. Ausgewählte Schriften zur Schatzkunst des Mittelalters*, Ostfildern 2010, p. 117.

²⁴ In Paris, a guild for workers producing “tapiz sarrazinois” (i.e. according to Oriental fashion) existed as early as the 13th c. Cf. Ward 1989, p. 243.

process, bringing about a new style of decoration. Already in the 1980s Renate Eikelmann showed that the Syrian glass vessels still served as models for the French-Burgundian covered cups made circa 1400.²⁵

As part of the context under investigation here, another Syrian glass vessel will be introduced: Dated to circa 1250, its European mount was added in 1551. The glass sports four saints who wear richly pleated red and white garments. This type of saint is often encountered on metalwork from the region. Such objects were produced for the Christian minority within the Islamic society, for crusaders, and also for Muslims. The later mount follows the original organization, covering a freeze of simple lines as frames for the saints. A pointed glass protrusion was added to the base of the goblet, creating the shape of a horn. Since drinking-horns were uncommon in the realms of Islamic culture, the idea of turning this glass into a ‘griffin’s claw’ must be of European origin.²⁶ A blessing Christ with aureole and orb stands at the tip of the horn. He is placed on a double stepped base with a sophisticated figural program, including the twelve apostles. The inscription below reveals that Bruno von Drolshagen, a descendent of a Westphalian dynasty, gave the drinking-horn to his son Jürgen for the latter’s wedding in 1551. The couple is depicted under the inscription, the coat-of-arms of the von Drolshagens is placed between the griffin’s legs. The terminating frieze around the horn’s opening displays hunting scenes. The drinking-horn not only served to hail the marriage-bond but also attested to the sealing of the marriage contract – it is hence a type of document. The mount’s extensive image program underscores this function. The origin of the glass vessel from the “Holy Land” with Arabic inscription emphasizes the message once more.

In summary, and with reference to my initial questions, my conclusion is that the European mounts on Syrian glass vessels were executed neither with the intention of artistic rivalry nor arrogance, but as worthy frames for objects that were considered artistically superior. Although their creation and that of the mounts are 200 years apart, the European glass production had still not yet reached the Syrian standard. Today’s view of goldsmith’s works as the main component of medieval treasuries is thereby put into perspective.²⁷ At the time, craftsmanship and accomplishment vis-à-vis rare or challenging materials and their treatment were held in high esteem. Also the inconspicuous bezoars frequently received golden mounts. Named after the Persian word “bad-sahr” for “antidote”, gastroliths from goats were so popular that their price was ten times their own weight measured in gold. The stone alone was thus much more precious than its mount.²⁸

²⁵ Cf. Eikelmann 1987, p. 243-253; Renate Eikelmann, “mit Nidderlendischen schmelzwerch”: Das Regensburger Emailkästchen. Emailkunst an den französischen Fürstenhöfen im Spätmittelalter, in: Schatzkammerstücke aus der Herbstzeit des Mittelalters. Das Regensburger Emailkästchen und sein Umkreis, ed. Reinhold Baumstark, exh. cat. Munich 1992, Munich 1992, p. 37-58; Renate Eikelmann, Email um 1400, in: Das Goldene Rössl. Ein Meisterwerk der Pariser Hofkunst um 1400, ed. Reinhold Baumstark, exh. cat. Munich 1995, Munich 1995, p. 106-130.

²⁶ Cf. Berlin 1989, p. 575.

²⁷ Cf. e.g. Goldene Pracht. Mittelalterliche Schatzkunst in Westfalen, exh. cat. Münster 2012, Munich 2012. – Due to the hostility of the different faiths in later centuries and because of the curricula of Art History and Oriental Studies much knowledge has been lost. We presently go through an arduous process of regaining it through interdisciplinary studies. After clarifying the relationship between vessels and mounts I saw that without knowledge of the respective languages it made little sense to further study the iconography: In order to adequately grasp the topic, comprehensive understanding of the Arabic, Syrian, and Iraqi literature is crucial. Even relevant-sounding essays cited in London University’s database “SOAS School of Oriental and African Studies” are not available in Germany. Cf. www.soas.ac.uk (studied 10.27.2012).

²⁸ Cf. Géza von Habsburg-Lothringen (ed.), Fürstliche Kunstkammern in Europa, Stuttgart 1997, p. 123.

Italian Oliphants

The examination of three oliphants kept in the Dresden Armory raised so many questions that I gave up my initial resolution to study only medieval objects.²⁹ As will be seen in the end, in individual cases an analysis transgressing temporal and spatial parameters facilitates a frame of reference between medieval Italian oliphants, European Renaissance drinking vessels, and 16th c. Afro-Portuguese ivory tusks with European motifs. Since the latter are part of the ethnological collections, study was heretofore impossible.

“Oliphant” in Old French simply means elephant; the Old English term is “olfend”.³⁰ The name refers to signal- or drinking-horns made of elephant tusks. As in the case of Syrian glass vessels, German-speaking scholars have grouped them according to style from the beginning. This did not result in a detailed scholarly bibliography. Until today, scholars only attribute the individual museum objects to the categories developed by Otto von Falke and Ernst Kühnel between 1929 and 1959.³¹ Today, we know of roughly 100 specimens; European medieval inventories reveal that the respective collections usually contained more than one example. The 1060 inventory of Speyer Cathedral includes six “Hörner von Helffantzehnen”.³² Von Falke divided the medieval oliphants into four groups: Fatimid prototypes, a group of Italian copies, a later European, not necessarily Italian group, and a Byzantine group.³³ According to von Falke, the first – Fatimid – group, due to the flat surface treatment of the, relief, “display no Western formal notions”.³⁴ Their place of origin could only be searched for East of the Mediterranean. For the Italian copies he observed less precision in the execution of the arabesques. Originating from their “occidental feel”,³⁵ the modeling of the animal ornaments had greater plasticity. It appears that this is only comprehensible when looking at the originals, and Kühnel contradicted him accordingly by assigning the

²⁹ I owe thanks to Dr. Jutta Charlotte von Bloh (Oberkonservatorin der Rüstammer), who opened the case upon short notice, offered to study the inventory books, and got involved in a content-related discussion.

³⁰ Cf. Wolfgang Pfeifer (ed.), *Etymologisches Wörterbuch des Deutschen*, Munich 1999, 4th ed., p. 275; Adolf Tobler and Erhard Lommatzsch (ed.), *Altfranzösisches Wörterbuch*, Wiesbaden 1964, vol. 6, part 2, col. 1063-1066. – About the numerous different spelling variants of “olifant” in *The Song of Roland* see Joseph J. Duggan, *A Concordance of the Chanson de Roland*, Ohio State Univ. Press 1969, p. 277. – This term appears to be the consequence of an unfortunate translation of *cornea eburnea* (a war horn made of ivory). Cf. Hanns Swarzenski, *Les Olifants*, in: *Les monuments historiques de la France* 12 (1966), p. 7-8; David MacKinnon Ebitz, *The Oliphant: its function and meaning in a Courtly Society*, in: *Houston German studies* 6 (1986), p. 131-132.

³¹ About research on oliphants cf. Fr. Bock, *Über den Gebrauch der Hörner im Alterthum und das Vorkommen geschnitzter Elfenbeinhörner im Mittelalter*, in: *Mittelalterliche Kunstdenkmale des österreichischen Kaiserstaates*, ed. G. Heider and R.V. Eitelberger, Stuttgart 1860, p. 127-143; Otto von Falke, *Elfenbeinhörner. I. Ägypten und Italien*, in: *Pantheon* 4 (1929), p. 511-517; Otto von Falke, *Elfenbeinhörner. II. Byzanz*, in: *Pantheon* 5 (1930), p. 39-44; Ernst Kühnel, *Die Sarazenischen Olifanthörner*, in: *Jahrbuch Berliner Museen* (1959), p. 33-50; Ernst Kühnel, *Die islamischen Elfenbeinskulpturen*, Berlin 1971, 2 vols.; Jean-Claude Roc, *L’Olifant, à l’époque romane*, in: *Bulletin de l’association Cantal-Patrimoni*, ed. Patrimoine en Haute-Auvergne, Saint-Flour 2006; A Shalem, *Islami Christianized*, Frankfurt 1996, p. 99-110.

³² Kühnel 1971, vol. 1, p. 55.

³³ Cf. von Falke 1929, p. 511-517; von Falke 1930, p. 39-44.

³⁴ Von Falke 1929, p. 513. – “Gothic or Fatimid” is an intense discussion among researchers dealing with ivory caskets and metal works that is only peripherally applied to oliphants. Cf. Ernst Kühnel, *Das Schriftornament in der islamischen Kunst*, in: *Buch und Schrift* 4 (1930), p. 47ff.; Otto von Falke, *Gotisch oder Fatimidisch?*, in: *Pantheon* 12 (1938), p. 120-129; Kurt Erdmann, *Islamische Giessgefäße des 11. Jahrhunderts*, in: *Pantheon* 12 (1938), p. 251-254; David MacKinnon Ebitz, *Fatimid Style and Byzantine Model in a Venetian Ivory Carving Workshop. The Meeting of two worlds, Cultural Exchanges between East and West during the period of the Crusades*, ed. V.P. Goss et al., Michigan 1986, p. 309-329.

³⁵ Von Falke 1929, p. 514.

production of all medieval oliphants to Sicily and Southern Italy.³⁶ Comparable to the issue of the Syrian glass vessels, he strove to answer the question of whether we are dealing with immigrant “Saracen” carvers integrating Byzantine or Christian influences into their Islamic traditions or Italian artists working with Fatimid prototypes: “We must deal with the fact that one of the main groups of oliphants is embellished with distinctly Islamic carving and that they were fabricated by Saracen carvers with the explicit intention of being used in the Occident where, for special reasons, they were especially popular.”³⁷

We know for certain that circular animal ornaments originated during Egypt’s Coptic period.³⁸ In the 11th c., when oliphants came about, this was no longer the current system: therefore Egypt can be ruled-out as their place of origin.

The Byzantine oliphants von Falke defined as the fourth group go back to Late Antique motifs.³⁹ A particularly well-known oliphant, a so-called Roland’s horn, is presently kept in Toulouse.⁴⁰ This is the first instance in which an old inventory refers to an object as “oliphant” – a term used in *The Song of Roland*, composed around the year 1100. Like most other medieval examples, this oliphant dates to the 12th c. Corresponding to the narrowing object, the registers are decorated with lions, eagles, and fabulous creatures who attack each other, as well as peaceful animals. The figure of a sheep-carrier stems from Late Antique art. The original depiction of philanthropy on sarcophagi became the parable of the Good Shepherd in Christian art. In tandem with the animals, we see a concrete allusion to the horn’s signal and hunt function.

In Europe, horns were customary booty and obeisance gifts in parades or contests since Antiquity.⁴¹ In addition to the few surviving ones, oliphants are documented in diverse media. In manuscripts and on column capitals, for example, we encounter angels blowing into horns, announcing the Last Judgment.⁴² The immense appreciation of them originated in Pre-Christian customs. We know that in England during the times of William the Conqueror (1027-1087) many estates changed hands without written documents but only through oral agreement, the Lord’s sword or helmet, or through a horn or a beaker.⁴³ Ivory horns were substituted for earlier ones made of aurochs horn, entailing incomparably more difficult work. Unlike the naturally hollow horns, elephant tusks had to first be laboriously hollowed-out. The oliphants’ added value results from the rarity of the material, human labor in the

³⁶ Cf. Kühnel 1959, p. 46. – Part of the Fatimid empire until 1071, Sicily was largely detached from Western cultural influences. It remained Arabic under Norman rule. Beside the Greek language and script, Roger II (1111-54) also retained Arabic in his chancellery.

³⁷ Cf. Kühnel 1971, vol. 1, p. 11.

³⁸ Cf. Kühnel 1959, p. 37. – Kühnel suggests that lion, hare, griffin, elephant, bear, hyena, as well as boar can be encountered (*ibid.*, p. 40). Although known in Arabic bestiaries, the pelican does not appear there piercing his own chest, as hinted at in the “*Physiologos*”, where this is interpreted in a Christian manner. The rendering of the self-sacrificing pelican goes back to the “*Physiologos*” from the 2nd half of the 4th c., when Christian animal symbolism was fundamentally developed, becoming the model for most medieval bestiaries.

³⁹ The corresponding decoration is reminiscent of 6th-c. consular diptychs. Cf. von Falke 1930, p. 39.

⁴⁰ Cf. Hanns Swarzenski, *L’Olifant de Toulouse*. *Les Olifants*, in: *Les Monuments Historiques de la France* 12 (1966), p. 7-11; L. Golvin: *L’Olifant de Toulouse*, in: *Archeologia: l’archéologie dans le monde et tout ce qui concerne les recherches historiques, artistiques et scientifiques sur terre et dans les mers* (1978), p. 54-63.

⁴¹ Art historic research of profane medieval art neglected these objects. Cf. David MacKinnon Ebitz, *The Olifant: Its Function and Meaning in a Courtly Society*, in: *Houston German studies* 6 (1986), p. 123-141.

⁴² A world chronicle authored by Rudolf von Ems / the *Knitter* depicts an angel handing the sword Durandal and the horn Oliphant to Charlemagne who ceremoniously passes them on to Roland. This book illumination is dated circa 1300: Sankt Gallen, Kantonsbibliothek Vadiana (Inv. No. Ms. 203). Cf. Rita Lejeune and Jaques Stiennon, *Die Rolandssage in der Mittelalterlichen Kunst*, vol. 1 (2), Brussels 1966, p. 251, pl. XXIV. – An angel blowing into an oliphant is rendered on a choir capital Notre-Dame du Port in Clermont-Ferrand, made circa 1100-1150. Cf. Zigmunt Swiechowski, *Sculpture romane d’Auvergne, Clermont-Ferrand* 1973, p. 422.

⁴³ Cf. Kühnel 1971, vol. 1, p. 12. – We know about the ceremonial gift of a forest to the Danish King Knut (1016-35) that is sealed with the handover of a horn (*ibid.*, p. 13).

production process, and the aesthetic innovation in designing the surface. Despite their moderate ability to act as signals, due to their symbolic value in the tradition of the Roland's horn, oliphants were knightly insignia. Roland used an oliphant when uttering his warning to Charlemagne's main army in 778 on the Pyrenees pass:

"...Roland lifted with both hands
the good oliphant to his mouth
and began to blow –
the sound was so strong
that the heathens were startled
and they could no longer hear each other ..."⁴⁴

This tradition fits well into the times of the crusades and the hatred between Muslims and Christians, which has been maintained and constructed time and again ever since then. The Song of Roland served as model for multiple literary works in Western Europe well into the 16th c. In France it assumed the status of an early type of national epic. Starting in the 14th c., Roland became the symbol for the cities' independence against the territorial lords. Accordingly – like in Bremen – a monumental sculpture of him was placed in the market square across from the cathedral – symbol of ecclesiastical dominance – thereby symbolizing civil liberties.

Gift documents and inventory entries verify that the nobility often donated their horns to church treasuries, where they were converted into drinking vessels or reliquaries.⁴⁵ Some of the oliphants may have only been decorated with Christian motifs during this phase.⁴⁶

As already pointed out with regards to the Syrian drinking vessels, drinking horns were only customary in Europe. Medieval oliphants were found throughout Europe, but never beyond this territory, neither as fragments nor depicted in works of art.⁴⁷

The state of research of the objects kept in Dresden's Armory is indicative of the rudimentary oliphant study. According to Otto von Falke's criteria, object "Y 531" is dated to the 12th c. and European, executed in Fatimid style (ill. 2).⁴⁸ The division in three zones – blow (= tip), main, and echo (= base) – is typical. Ornamental bands divide the zones, whose planes are filled with overlapping circles inhabited by hares, antelopes, lions, and fabulous creatures. Since 2006, this oliphant is part of the permanently installed Turkish Chamber in Dresden's Residential Palace. Aesthetically speaking, this seemingly exotic object fits in perfectly with the Turkish knives shown nearby. Hopefully it is clear that a juxtaposition with European hunting tools or ecclesiastical objects would be just as

⁴⁴ Quoted after Hans Werner Hegemann, *Olifant. Geschichte und Geschichten um Elfenbein*, Munich 1981, p. 6. – Roland (circa 736-778) was count of Brittany in Charlemagne's Frankish realm. He was the commander of the rear guard of the Frankish army, which Charlemagne led in his battle against the Moors. When retreating from the Pyrenees pass in 778, he was attacked once more, whereupon he warned Charlemagne's main army with his horn.

⁴⁵ An endowment of Emperor Heinrich II (1002-34) for St. Vincent in Verdun is considered the earliest mention. Cf. Kühnel 1971, vol. 1, p. 14.

⁴⁶ Cf. David MacKinnon Ebitz, *Secular to Sacred: The Transformation of an Oliphant in the Musée de Cluny*, in: *Gesta* 25 (1986), p. 31-38, here p. 37.

⁴⁷ Cf. Avinoam Shalem: *Des objets en migration: les itineraries des objets islamiques vers l'occident latin au moyen age* 35 (2004), p. 81-93.

⁴⁸ According to von Falke, the relief was created by carving out the ground. Cf. von Falke 1929, p. 517.

plausible, especially since the oliphant was only purchased for Dresden's Historisches Museum from the Dreger Collection in Berlin in 1925.⁴⁹

The Dresden oliphant "X 497" (ill. 3) is even less extensively researched. The 1741 inventory – compiled on the occasion of Gottfried Heinrich Duckewitz (um 1700-1775) assuming his position as *Kunstkammerer* – states: "A large horn, cut all around with foreign people, animals, birds. It measures almost one forearm and entered the collection in 1658. This is a copy of the very famous Oldenburg horn."⁵⁰ A later postscript in Duckewitz's own hand adds: "They are hieroglyphic figures and between them: da pacem Domine in Diebus nostris, with old letters, like I saw them on the original in Copenhagen in the month of September, 1720. Duckewitz."⁵¹

A medical doctor with a PhD, Duckewitz's self confidence and contributions as inspector can be deduced from numerous of his entries. Beside documenting acquisitions and deaccessions, cleanings, repairs and his personal involvement to protect the objects during the Prussian invasion of 1765, he made donations to the collection and furthered his knowledge by visiting other European *Kunstkammers*. He mentions travels to Sweden and Norway.⁵²

Anyone who knows the Oldenburg horn must be surprised by Duckewitz's postscript (ill. 4). But how can we doubt an inscription, evidenced by an eyewitness's statement? This can only be done by comparative examination, thereby deducing that they are totally different objects. Clearly, detailed knowledge was invented, because, although using comparable lettering, the inscription on the goldsmithswork of the horn from Oldenburg is completely different. It reads: "o mater dei memento mei."⁵³

The Oldenburg horn's fame grew around 1650, during the reign of Count Anton Günther von Oldenburg (1583-1667). He presented the prized object to his visitors, ensuring the related saga was disseminated.⁵⁴ It is beyond doubt that the legend was not invented until later or rather that it was connected to the object produced before 1474. Hamelmann's Oldenburger Chronik of 1599 seriously considers that a monk made it, presenting it to Charlemagne, who in turn gave it to Wittekind, supposedly an antecedent of the Oldenburgs.⁵⁵ Slightly later, more

⁴⁹ Cf. Holger Schuckelt (ed.), *Die Türkische Cammer. Sammlung orientalischer Kunst in der kurfürstlich-sächsischen Rüstammer*, Dresden 2010, p. 42.

⁵⁰ Cf. Dirk Syndram and Martina Minning (Hg.): *Die kurfürstlich-sächsische Kunstammer in Dresden. Das Inventar von 1741*, Dresden 2010, fol. 102v/pag. 190.

⁵¹ *Ibid.*, fol. 103r/pag. 191.

⁵² Cf. Christine Nagel: *Professionalität und Liebhaberei: Die Kunstkammerer von 1572 bis 1832*, in: *Die kurfürstlich-sächsische Kunstammer in Dresden. Geschichte einer Sammlung*, ed. Dirk Syndram and Martina Minning, Dresden 2012, p. 360-379, here p. 374-375. – With reference to a silver-ore-step, the 1741 inventory, fol. 13v-14r, No. 34, states: "Ein sträußlein von gewachßenen gediegen silber auf bleyernes höltzernen füßgen. Nota bene. Diese habe ich, Dr. Duckewitz, mit aus Norwegen gebracht und hierher verschencket. Nota Bene: Dießes stück ist von glas ertz superbe geschnitten." (*Ibid.*) Note: Duckewitz states that he brought the silver from Norway, and that he rendered the superb cut.

⁵³ The vertical inscription "in hopen ic leve, im genohghen, ich bhegere" corresponds to the duke of Oldenburg's motto. A fourth text reads "ave maria". Inscribed on the horn itself is "o mater dei memento mei", and on the lid the names of the Three Magi Caspar, Melchior, and Balthazar. A person holding a shield that says "trink alles aus" is seated on the horn's tip. Cf. Gitte Kjær: *Das Rätsel vom Oldenburger Horn im Schloß Rosenborg*, in: *Oldenburger Jahrbuch* 90 (1990), p. 7-20, here p. 8-9.

⁵⁴ In around 990, a fairy is supposed to have appeared to the thirsty count Otto von Oldenburg during a hunt, offering libation from a silver-embellished, artfully decorated drinking horn. When the duke did not begin to drink instantly, the fairy lured him by saying that drinking would have the most beneficial results for his house, whereas objection to drinking would lead to despair. Grown even more skeptical because of these words, the count tossed the liquid behind him, where some drops hit his horse's back, instantly burning its fur. The fairy demanded the horn back, but the duke took it with him, holding the precious object in high esteem. Cf. Heinrich Dageförde, *Die Sage vom Oldenburger Horn*, Dissertation Oldenburg 1971, p. 9-10.

⁵⁵ Cf. Johann Heinrich Zedler (ed.), *Großes vollständiges Universal-Lexikon aller Wissenschaften und Künste*, Leipzig 1740, vol. 25: "Horn (Oldenburgisch-goldene)", col. 1133-1134.

realistic ideas about the provenance were proposed.⁵⁶ The goldsmithwork was supposedly created in conjunction with King Christian I of Denmark's (1426-1481) diplomatic travel to Cologne, where he met his brother, Count Gerhard von Oldenburg.⁵⁷ The journey was disguised as a pilgrimage to the holy grave of the Three Magi, whose names may also be found on the Oldenburg horn.⁵⁸ An engraving dated 1684 served for the object's visual propagation and was utilized in the early 19th c. as model for the copperplate on the title page of Achim von Arnim's second volume of "Des Knaben Wunderhorn" from 1808. Although clearly showing a goldsmithwork, the tome's first text reads:

"Das Wunderhorn vom Elephant,
So groß man keinen fand,
So schön man keinen fing,
Und oben dran ein Ring."⁵⁹

Correspondingly, the engraving of the first volume's title page sports an oliphant. Intellectually tying an oliphant to the Oldenburg horn – inaccurate from a visual perspective – was thus not just a crazy association of *Kunstkammerer* Duckewitz. Instead, this link even occurred centuries later. The thought is not totally far-fetched, once one abandons the literal view. Could it possibly be feasible to establish connections between the local saga of the Oldenburg horn from Carolingian times and the Song of Roland, popular throughout Europe, and its significance for Charlemagne?⁶⁰

Let us leave the historic aspects now and once more turn to the object. The elephant's tusk shows numerous figural bas-reliefs. On the exterior of the curvature, three male creatures are rendered in bas-relief. A spiral-shaped scroll bearing the above-cited inscription is located between the third loop and the base. Referred to in the inventory as "foreign people, animals", these figures are very familiar indeed: They include a centaur with a bow, a siren, a unicorn, and a hare. We already know the sheep-carrier from the so-called Roland's horn. What makes these figures appear "exotic" is not their iconography but their technical rendering. They were obviously made more according to descriptions than from visual models. This is particularly clear in the case of the unicorn and the hare. Based on comparable material, the Dresden oliphant can clearly be identified as a Sapi-Portuguese work from present-day Sierra Leone, dated between 1490 and 1530.⁶¹ Sapi-Portuguese horns are distinguished by the design of their mouth pieces in the shape of an animal snout and the position of the blowing hole at the tip. African horns that are not influenced by Europe usually have lateral blowing holes.

⁵⁶ Cf. Johann Just Winckelmann, *Des Oldenburgischen Wunder-Horns Ursprung, Herkunft, Materie, Form, Gestalt, Figuren und Hieroglyphische Auslegung*, Bremen 1684.

⁵⁷ Christian I had been called in as mediator in a dispute between Emperor Frederick III and Duke Charles the Bold to avoid a war between Burgundy and the Empire. Cf. for this Kjær 1990, p. 11-13.

⁵⁸ Cf. *ibid.*, p. 15-19. – From a political standpoint, the stay was unsuccessful, financially it was precarious since they had to pawn some precious objects with the innkeeper of "Zur Krone". One year later, Gerhard sent his secretary Richard to Cologne to retrieve them. The Oldenburg horn was likely among them.

⁵⁹ Cf. Achim von Arnim (ed.), *Des Knaben Wunderhorn*, vol. 2, Hildesheim 1982, p. 11 (1st ed. 1808). Note: "The wondrous horn of the elephant // none other was a big // nor quite a beautiful // on its tip, the horn bore a ring".

⁶⁰ Not even Heinrich Dageförde suggested this idea in his 1971 ethnographic dissertation about the saga of the Oldenburg Horn. Cf. Dageförde 1971.

⁶¹ Cf. Ezio Bassani and William B. Fagg, *Africa and the Renaissance. Art in Ivory*, Munich 1988, p. 101, 143.

An exemplar in the Museo Nacional de Artes Decorativas in Madrid can be compared to the Dresden oliphant. On the exterior, at the height of the fastening devices, it shows three male figures in high-relief.⁶² Their European clothing is very similar to the style of the Dresden piece. Divided in numerous registers, the bas-reliefs reveal hunting scenes, a Descent from the Cross with “Ave Maria”, the coat-of-arms of the house of Avis, and a flag held by angels and soldiers inscribed “Aleo”. This exclamation accompanied the conquest of Ceuta in 1415 and later served as the motto for the city’s new governor, Dom Pedro de Menezes. This was presumably a gift of the monarch Dom Sebastiao to Philipp II. Another example, kept in Stuttgart’s Württembergisches Landesmuseum, has a very similar mouth piece and corresponding fastening devices.⁶³ Richly profiled ornamental bands divide the base into numerous registers, revealing hunting scenes, some of which are derived from European book illumination. This object has been documented in the ducal *Kunstammer* of Stuttgart’s Residential Castle since 1669; it is described in an 18th-c. inventory together with three other elephant horns.

Because of an identical inscription on an oliphant mentioned in the 1598 inventory of the ducal *Kunstammer* in Munich, it was proposed that the one from Dresden was formerly kept in Munich.⁶⁴ The same text can also be found on an exemplar in a private collection in Paris.⁶⁵ Motifs and inscriptions suggest that the studios did not produce these oliphants as individual works but as “serial products”. Our oliphant was made around 1490 in Sierra Leone, it was maybe in Munich in 1598, in Dresden in 1658. The association with the Oldenburg horn starts after 1741, exactly at the moment our oliphant came to Dresden. The former has in fact been kept in Copenhagen since 1690, where Duckewitz might have seen it.⁶⁶

Early-19th-c. *Kunstammer* research did not identify the Afro-Portuguese 16th-c. oliphants as a group, but as individual European pieces dated to the first millennium.⁶⁷ Meanwhile, we know that these types of ivory oliphants – as well as spoons and salt cellars – were made for the European market according to European taste. In his catalogue on African objects in European collections Ezio Bassani explains the narrow time margin during which the Afro-Portuguese ivory objects were created as well as their stylistic proximity.⁶⁸ The oliphant is indeed an “exotic” object from far away that was, however, named and created for European patrons according to earlier European prototypes.

⁶² Oliphant, Museo Nacional de Artes Decorativas, Madrid, Inv. No. 21.348. Cf. *Novos Mundos – Neue Welten. Portugal und das Zeitalter der Entdeckungen*, ed. Michael Kraus and Hans Ottomeyer, exh. cat. Berlin, Dresden 2007, p. 483.

⁶³ Oliphant, Württembergisches Landesmuseum Stuttgart, Inv. No. KK braun/blau 124. Cf. *ibid.*

⁶⁴ “...auf dem andern allerhand figur von Menschen und Thieren außgeschnitten, umb und umb mit disen worten beschriben: Da pacem Domine in diebus nostris.” Quoted after Elke Bujok, *Africana und Americana im Ficklerschen Inventar der Münchner Kunstammer von 1598*, in: *Münchner Beiträge zur Völkerkunde* 8 (2003), p. 57-142, here p. 74. – Because of the identical inscription, Ezio Bassani’s suggestion is plausible. Cf. Ezio Bassani, *African Art and Artefacts in European Collections*, London 2000, p. 101.

⁶⁵ Cf. Bassani 2000, p. 252.

⁶⁶ After the county of Oldenburg came under Danish rule, King Christian V (1646-99) demanded that the wonder horn be brought to Copenhagen, where it has been kept since 1690. Since 1863, Oldenburg Castle has displayed a copy. Cf. Kjær 1990, p. 10-11.

⁶⁷ Cf. Fr. Bock: *Ueber den Gebrauch der Hörner im Alterthum und das Vorkommen geschnitzter Elfenbeinhörner im Mittelalter*, in: *Mittelalterliche Kunstdenkmale des österreichischen Kaiserstaates*, ed. G. Heider and R.V. Eitelberg, Vienna 1860, vol. 2, p. 138.

⁶⁸ Cf. Ezio Bassani: *Collections and Collectors. Works of art and artefacts from Black Africa in European collections from the age of discovery to the end of the eighteenth century*, London 2000. – Displaying script, centaur, stag, and sheep-carrier, the exemplars in the Paul and Ruth Tishman Collection of African Art, Walter Disney Co. in Los Angeles and in a private collection in France are embellished with the same figure style. Bassani/Fagg 1988, p. 99, 106, 139.

In summing up, it can be stated that the connection Duckewitz constructed between the oliphant and the Oldenburg horn served to authenticate a *Kunstammer* object in a European context, accentuating his scholarly authority. It is almost inconceivable that he neither noticed that one is made of ivory and the other a piece of goldsmithswork nor that their inscriptions were totally different. Whereas on the one hand, this is an active “construction of historicity”, on the other hand – due to a loss of knowledge – the more likely identification of the object – based on its appearance and provenance – as colonial ware did not take place. What remained unrecognized was the fact that someone who knew decoration and motifs of medieval oliphants commissioned the piece from overseas, desired during an era when the European originals had long since become *exotica* in European *Kunstammern*. This item bears wonderful witness to the tight intricacies between European and extra-European history.

The third oliphant from Dresden, kept there since the times of the *Kunstammer*, would require further research. It is neither medieval nor Afro-Portuguese. The poor carving and the fact that it is not completely hollowed-out suggest that this is a 17th-c. European product executed in pseudo-Asian style.

The “Third Space” within the Museum

I would like to take a final look at the challenges present *Kunstammer* scholarship faces by glancing back. Julius Schlosser⁶⁹ offered the first systematic account of the *Kunstammer* as an institution and the predecessor to present-day museums. He began his report from 1908 by calling collecting an anthropological constant, referring to children’s and “primitive people’s”⁷⁰ urge to collect. From here, Schlosser ventured into European, “pre-modern” history. The first illustration of his publication shows an oliphant that he views as an Oriental witness of the enchanted world of the Middle Ages.⁷¹ Lorraine Daston pursued the evolution of *curiositas* from a deadly medieval sin to a true Renaissance virtue and one of the driving forces for exploring the world by focusing on the transition from medieval treasuries to Early-Modern *Kunstammern*.⁷² Elisabeth Scheicher pointed out that during this

⁶⁹ Cf. Julius von Schlosser, *Kunst- und Wunderkammern der Spätrenaissance. Ein Beitrag zur Geschichte des Sammelwesens*, Leipzig 1908.

⁷⁰ Schlosser 1908, p. 2.

⁷¹ Cf. *ibid.*, p. 13. – The page one caption for the illustrated example states: “Reliquien-Olifant, angeblich von Landgraf Albert III. von Habsburg 1199 dem Kloster Muri gespendet (Wien, Hofmuseum).” After referring to the image, page 13 proceeds to report about the “most famous” oliphant, kept today at Aachen Cathedral: “Supposedly Charlemagne’s hunting horn and a gift of Harun-al-Raschids.” Based on the criteria von Falke / Kühnel developed in 1930 / 1959 (*resp.*), I would place the illustrated oliphant with the horns made in Norman Sicily according to Byzantine tradition. Schlosser also presents enamelled vessels as typical *Kunstammer* material. Cf. *ibid.* 1908, p. 48.

⁷² Cf. Lorraine Daston, *Neugierde als Empfindung und Epistemologie in der frühmodernen Wissenschaft*, in: *Macrococosmos in microcosmo: die Welt in der Stube. Zur Geschichte des Sammelns 1450-1800*, ed. Andreas Grote, Opladen 1994, p. 35-59; Lorraine Daston and Katharine Park, *Wunder und die Ordnung der Natur 1150-1750*, Berlin 1998. – For Augustine (354-430) *curiositas* as the hunger for knowledge was a type of lust, a “desire of the eyes” (Daston 1994, p. 38). Bernhard of Clairvaux (ca. 1090-1153) defined the hunger for knowledge as the opposite of modesty (*ibid.*, p. 39). Thomas Hobbes (1588-1679) came up with a new definition of curiosity, stressing it as a human (in contrast to animals) characteristic, even more important than intellect (*ibid.*, p. 41). René Descartes (1596-1650) defined curiosity as an effect of astonishment (*ibid.*, p. 42). Daston concludes: “Because nature’s secrets challenged astonishment and astonishment for its part challenged the hunger for knowledge for reasons, the latter became one of the major subjects for Early-Modern scholarly queries.” *Ibid.* p. 49.

process the *naturalia*, formerly praised as divine miracles, were degraded to material matter: Henceforth their reception stressed the man-made, symbolic value.⁷³

This is where Elke Bujok (2004) and Dominik Collet (2007) started in their dissertations, examining images – in a material as well as in an imaginary sense – from extra-European sources preserved in 17th-c.-European collections.⁷⁴ In his investigation of holdings, Collet correlated contemporary knowledge derived from books and found out that, especially due to decontextualization of non-European objects, an essentialization took place, preventing the emergence of a “third space” in Homi K. Bhabha’s sense.⁷⁵ Consequently, the question remains how such objects might be made “to speak” in present-day museums. Those contributing to *Kunstkammern* – hunters, sellers, and collectors – did not strengthen the concrete stories concerning their objects: Caused by essentialization, they utilized prevailing stereotypes surrounding their products instead of enhancing their value, thereby preventing perception of the “third space”. According to Bhabha the power of ambivalence causes the dissemination and the acceptance of colonial stereotypes: “assuring the ability that it can be repeated in a changing historic and discursive context.”⁷⁶ Within the European context, the object groups under discussion are not seen for what they originally were. They are therefore bereft of their original identity, simultaneously serving, as the contrastive “other”, to define that which is European. Bhabha introduced the term “third space”, implying no spatial category, but rather an epistemological dimension. It is an “in-between”, a sphere of experience within the constraints of identity (as the subject’s transitory location) and difference (to the object’s historic location). Taking the oeuvre of Afro-American artist Renée Green as point of departure, Bhabha described:

“The stairwell as threshold to determine identities becomes a process of symbolic interaction, a connector constructing the difference between upstairs and downstairs, black and white. The stairwell’s back and forth, the movement, the transition into time permitting this all prevent identities from settling at the upper or the lower end of the original polarities. This inter-spatial transition between firm identities enables a cultural hybrid that offers a place for difference devoid of an adopted or stipulated hierarchy.”⁷⁷

If the art historic perceptive interest were based on investigating such a “third space”, then the respective objects would have to be re-contextualized with regards to their cultural-historic background and their inconsistent research and exhibition histories. In addition, an active dialogue with present-day recipients, initiated by the latter, would be mandatory.

It is not until we acknowledge a shared world history that we will be able to re-stage the past. Questions to visitors could set off corresponding intellectual processes: Which cultural dominion is this object derived from? Why? Or: Do my ideas vis-à-vis familiar / alien get altered if I am taught differently? How can I apply insights about my own stereotypes to my everyday life – in this case from the museum? Post-colonial historic awareness in Germany – and the respective actions deduced thereof – is to understand people and cultural goods “with migration backgrounds” as part of our domestic, national narrative, thus offering the opportunity for an innovative self definition.

⁷³ Cf. *ibid.*, p. 124. – See also Martin Kemp, “Wrought by No Artist’s Hand”: The Natural, the Artificial, the Exotic, and the Scientific in Some Artifacts from Renaissance, in: *Reframing the Renaissance: visual culture in Europe and Latin America 1450-1650*, ed. Claire Farago, New Haven 1995, p. 177-196.

⁷⁴ Cf. Elke Bujok, *Neue Welten in europäischen Sammlungen. Africana und Americana in Kunstkammern bis 1670*, Berlin 2004; Dominik Collet, *Die Welt in der Stube. Begegnungen mit Außereuropa in Kunstkammern der Frühen Neuzeit*, Göttingen 2007.

⁷⁵ Cf. Collet 2007, p. 346.

⁷⁶ Cf. Homi K. Bhabha, *die Verortung der Kultur*, Tübingen 2000, p. 98 (1st Engl. ed. 1994).

⁷⁷ *Ibid.*, p. 5.

Nowadays, oliphants are kept throughout the world in museums for Islamic art, sculpture galleries, museums for applied arts, and armories. The realization that these are without doubt profane European insignia – some of which were reused as religious receptacles – was lost over time and as collections evolved. To come back to Bredekamp: The “senselessness” of exhibiting *exotica* in various different locations within *Kunstkammern* is rarely due to the objects themselves, but a lack of familiarity on the part of those in charge.

Finally, I would like to ask what the possible consequences of such insights for current curatorial work might be. Especially the present Humboldt-Forum project is faced with this question. A new art center that uses the slogan “Preserving the legacy to ensure the future” is in the process of being created in the heart of Berlin right now. Intended to be comparable to the British Museum in London, Madrid’s Prado, and the Louvre in Paris,⁷⁸ this place for non-European cultures is a counterpart to the Museum Island (primarily focused on European art).⁷⁹ A network entitled “NoHumboldt21! Moratorium für das Humboldt-Forum im Berliner Schloss” criticizes the planned reconstruction of the Prussian palace’s facade as an architectural memorial to a regime furthering and institutionalizing colonial exploitation and global art theft.⁸⁰ Whereas some intend to exhibit the art from the formerly colonized areas on a par with the European materials, others feel that the hierarchic difference persists. Therefore, an innovative and creative approach in dealing with the histories of transcultural objects is urgently required in our contemporary, diversified society. Our goal ought to be to make people curious regarding connections and to help them endure and ultimately to appreciate multiple perspectives. It is not until we acknowledge our shared world history that we will be able to re-stage the past. Exhibitions approaching visitors with specific questions might initiate the relevant thought processes. Possible queries: To which cultural realm would you attribute this object? Why? Or: Do my stereotypical ideas regarding the own and the alien change after I have been taught? How can an understanding of my stereotypes – in this case initiated by a museum – be carried into my everyday life? Disposing of authoritarian texts like “object” and “wall labels” might be a step of European museums to abandon their global claims about an object. A text with the author’s name displayed on a gallery wall is a deliberate break with the institution’s presumed objectivity. A text marked as a subjective view leaves no doubt that it is but one interpretation, suggesting alternatives.⁸¹ Extra information for individual objects and context far superior to conventional label texts is readily available thanks to electronic media like audio guides or apps. Cross references to objects in neighboring museums encouraging further discoveries are just as feasible as thematic tours focusing on a post-colonial perspective. Each gallery ought to offer room for statements and controversies because present-day visitors increasingly define themselves as users of the institutions rather than passive consumers of culture. Moreover, the exhibits could travel between different venues, especially if their initial collection context, provenance, or ownership issues (booty) are undetermined. For Germany, a post-colonial historical awareness – as well as current actions, derived from the former – means to comprehend people and cultural goods “with migration background” as part of the domestic, national narrative, offering a chance for innovative definitions of the self.

⁷⁸ Cf. www.sbs.humboldtforum.de (05.15.2012).

⁷⁹ Cf. Komplexe Geschichten erzählen. Konzeptdiskussion zum Humboldt-Forum, in: *Jahrbuch Preußischer Kulturbesitz XLVII* (2011), p. 279-317.

⁸⁰ Cf. www.no-humboldt21.de (02.10.2014).

⁸¹ Cf. for this Oliver Marchart: *Die Institution spricht. Kunstvermittlung als Herrschafts- und als Emanzipationstechnologie*, in: *Wer spricht? Autorität und Autorschaft in Ausstellungen*, ed. Beatrice Jaschke, Charlotte Martinz-Turek, and Nora Sternfeld, Vienna 2005, p. 34-58; Belinda Kazeem, Charlotte Martinz-Turek, and Nora Sternfeld (ed.), *Das Unbehagen im Museum. Postkoloniale Museologien*, Vienna 2009.