

Princely Presentation of Power: Samuel Quiccheberg, *Inscriptiones* (1565)

Abstract

Flemish physician Samuel Quiccheberg (1529–1567) composed *Inscriptiones* in 1565 for Duke Albrecht V of Bavaria. In this text, the first of its kind, Quiccheberg describes how a princely *Wunderkammer* should be assembled, listing the tremendous range of objects and the order in which they should appear. Power and identity are explicitly presented in the collections (e.g., maps and family trees) and implicitly performed through the act of collecting and presenting the objects. The text makes clear that the important organizing principle was the princely court and that the local ruler's status among his peers was paramount—all this took precedence over any kind of “national” or proto-national sentiment.

Source

INSCRIPTIONES

OR TITLES

OF THE MOST AMPLE

THEATER

That Houses Exemplary Objects and Exceptional Images of the Entire World, So That One Could Also Rightly Call It a:

Repository of artificial and marvelous things, and of every rare treasure, precious object, construction, and picture. It is recommended that these things be brought together here in the theater so that by their frequent viewing and handling one might quickly, easily, and confidently be able to acquire a unique knowledge and admirable understanding of things.

Authored by Samuel

QUICCHEBERG FROM THE LOW COUNTRIES

MUNICH

From the workshop of the printer Adam Berg

In the year 1565

By the grace and privilege of the Emperor

[...]

Digressions and Clarifications, According to the Order of Inscriptions

We use the term *inscription* in this way in our theater in case any king or prince or other patron should either have inscribed, in like fashion, collections of individual objects for specific places or indeed have resolved to so inscribe them. Whatever plan I have been able to furnish here—chiefly through the inscriptions, which I wished to be of almost a single design—for founding and appointing these things, I have already provided; the digressions will supply the rest.

Also, the term *theater* is not unsuitably, but instead quite properly, employed here for a grand building that is in

the form of an arc, or oval, or in the shape of an ambulatory (which in basilicas or cloisters are called “circuits” by those who reside in them) and that is constructed with high stories on four sides, in the middle of which a garden or interior courtyard might be left (such as the Bavarian theater of artifacts, for example), so that four enormous halls open out in very broad fashion toward the four directions of the sky (pl. 22). For this reason it would also be possible in some way to apply the term *amphitheater* to it.

Here it is necessary to mention that the museum of Giulio Camillo, on account of its semicircular construction, could also properly be called a theater. However, others have used this term figuratively, as did Christoph Mylaeus, Conrad Lycosthenes, Theodorus Zwinger, Guilelme de La Perriere, and perhaps others as well, when they, nonetheless beautifully, so titled certain books on, for example, the conditions of human life, the science of writing history, and remaining matters of exposition and narrative—though not on the importance of situating a building and the objects displayed or presented within it.

On the First Class

PANELS OF SACRED HISTORIES, ETC.: FOR INSCRIPTION 1

Here I give prominence to those panels that are sacred and most select—whether or not for any given topic there might be one panel or two or more—so that the gods favor the entrance to the theater or collection. Immediately next, I add the founder's genealogy (pl. 2), portrait (pl. 3), and other objects to which some preference is owed here. The remaining genealogies and portraits of certain distinguished and famous men, assembled without distinction, follow later in the fifth class. Moreover, there will be among the genealogies, portraits, and other chance objects (wherever they may finally be placed) something beautiful, so that princes and patricians might send excellent paintings to each other to preserve in a collection of images of this kind.

Furthermore, as regards the entire ordering, I hope that it will be judged sufficiently plausible, because here we are not dividing up for philosophers, precisely in line with nature itself, all natural objects; rather, we are sorting out for princes, into certain uncomplicated orderings, objects that are mostly pleasant to observe. Nor was it even possible to divide individual objects according to the seven planets, as these philosophers might have been able to do in imitation of Vitruvius and Camillo, since here it was necessary to exhibit a more obvious ordering according to the forms of things. Nevertheless, I will publish something more philosophically organized in a book on coats of arms in relation to their colors, or perhaps sooner, if there seems to be an opportunity, in a book on the simple methods that are in established use solely for the printers of Europe. For from these methods, printers know how to compose systematic indexes of books on whatever subject offered, and the most comprehensible and useful ones too.

GENEALOGY OF THE FOUNDER OF THE THEATER: FOR INSCRIPTION 2

In the preceding digression on this genealogy and on the contiguous inscription of the portraits, we have discussed at length why they are given a place of prominence; but we offer further advice elsewhere concerning the same things, as in the digression on class 5, inscription 5. This had to be indicated here so that you would not, perhaps under the preceding guidance of Mercury, inquire about such matters and nonetheless still stray from the path.

[...]

WEAPONS OF FOREIGN PEOPLES: FOR INSCRIPTION 9

Here I am referring as well to arms of the most diverse and practical employment so as to compare foreign

weapons with our own (pl. 14) and the old with the new. Here will also be those weapons preserved in commemoration of ancient duels and of the battles of our ancestors, since indeed nothing of this kind, though outdated now, should be ignored even by the nobility of our own period. In fact, in dealing with all such objects one ought to procure them as promptly and skillfully as possible. Thus nothing can be presented among courtiers, where many reside together, that is so old or so new that there are not some present who might have at least handled and used some instrument of this kind. Indeed, among these very objects there will be none so rare and so unfamiliar that knowledge of it would be useless.

Moreover, the art of javelin throwing ought never to be overlooked. You will find out something about this from our collection, but nothing altogether new; and you will learn that some have devised and introduced a way of hurling arrows from ballistas as well as balls from bombards, for particular purposes of their own.

FOREIGN CLOTHING: FOR INSCRIPTION 10

Here I also remind the reader of miniature figures like dolls, such as those that queens and princesses are in the habit of sending to one another so they can examine the foreign garments of distant peoples in fine detail. And sometimes the very customs of peoples present themselves for observation. These dolls indicate the habit of dress in the home and outdoors in winter and summer, in temples and at parties; what is worn at weddings and during times of mourning; and particularly what the noblest people wear.

It happens that the domestic clothing customary among the daughters of princes is also preserved in enduring memory by such miniature figures. Indeed, figures of this kind in the hundreds, with both minimal and elaborate silver ornamentation, are kept by Maria Anna and Maximiliana Maria, the daughters of Her Ladyship Anna, Duchess of Bavaria, and Albrecht her dearest husband; and in still greater numbers by Jacobaa and Salome, the granddaughters of the elder duchess Jacobaa from her daughter Mechilde, Marchioness of Baden, who are distinguished by so great an array of domestic duties and undertakings that anyone examining their individual rooms would seem to have at hand a complete picture of all the chambers, ceremonies, and courtly customs of a palace. But it will also be possible for some to take pleasure in these things by preserving even pieces of foreign cloths.

On the Fifth Class

OIL PAINTINGS AND WATERCOLORS: FOR INSCRIPTIONS 1 AND 2

Here we should not omit to inform our finest patrons to what degree Wilhelm, Duke of Bavaria, wisest father of Duke Albrecht and a leader most loving of peace, has expressed his fondness for honoring eminent paintings. For he saw to it that individual works by the most outstanding painters in Germany, in which their genius is marvelously evoked, were painted, with a certain honorable competitiveness, for his larger garden in Munich, and he also sent a number of specific pictures to particular individuals. In fact, to this day foreign visitors contemplate and admire these with the greatest reverence, as they do the city of Munich with the greatest longing, having traveled there owing to the loveliness of the city.

And thus the same fondness for the most outstanding works of art also developed in his sons and grandchildren. But let me not omit mention of these grandchildren at this juncture; that is to say, the dukes Wilhelm, Ferdinand, and Ernst, as in all other matters that it behooves princes most observant of royal virtue and most inspired by genius to follow.

So also I ought to greatly admire and praise the benevolent patrons of both scholarship and the most

accomplished paintings of this age. The surest example of this pattern of patronage is the fact that Duke Wilhelm himself, already an extraordinary hero with regard to the preeminence of his virtues and the stature of his body, drew elaborate battles and historical illustrations with his own hand and in a most deft style, even before he had sought instruction from teachers, and engraved them on copperplates.

Because Wilhelm's brothers actively imitate him in all the most genteel pursuits and in the most lofty endeavors of the mind—particularly Ferdinand in geographic pursuits and Ernst in his greater commitment to religious observance—it is proper that all the princes of the empire show the greatest gratitude to Albrecht himself, so eminent a father, and to his eminent sons.

IMAGES STAMPED FROM COPPER: FOR INSCRIPTION 3

Perhaps some scholars will be unaware that it is customary for a library specifically about these things to be constructed, which it is accepted practice to call a collection of images. They will grasp this fact presently from subsequent titles.

Although, as all the most perceptive and wise are accustomed to do, collectors leave unbound those pieces that are printed individually on large pages, in their own groups, but, continually being augmented, are kept spread out in very broad chests under their own distinct titles so that they are stored, separated by their own inscriptions, between unbound sheets in just the same manner as individual books. And so, only those who have no intention of further increasing their collection are content to classify them once and for all according to distinct classes, bind them into books, and store them among the rest.

Therefore, the small bundles and materials of this foundation are constantly increased through the more industrious of its patrons in such a way that it seems possible to acquire knowledge of the greatest number of disciplines from these images alone, for sometimes the simple examination of any picture stands out more in the memory than an extended reading of many pages. And thus scholarship will gradually gain much through these resources, provided that Netherlandish and other artists and engravers continue to enrich our world with their work.

Further, to digress here more freely for the benefit of those who support such things, we have arranged all images thus far into their own regions and headings in the following way.

In the first region there are: (1) biblical histories; (2) New Testament histories; (3) the apostles and evangelists; (4) the saints, male and female; (5) theological discoveries; (6) histories of Christians; (7) miracles; (8) crusades; (9) portraits; (10) genealogies.

In the second region there are: (1) works of nature, such as animals, roots, anatomical parts, etc.; (2) philosophical discoveries; (3) disciplinary charts of mathematics and the arts (pl. 16); (4) musical scores; (5) histories of pagan antiquity; (6) poetry and love affairs of the gods; (7) lighthearted and lewd scenes; (8) spectacles and a good many ancient triumphal ceremonies; (9) contemporary customs: hunting, the art of gesture, festivals, the exercises of gladiators and diverse practitioners; (10) images of apparel and deportment; (11) family coats of arms.

In the third region there are: (1) geographic maps; (2) plans of regions (pl. 5); (3) depictions of cities; (4) buildings and architecture; (5) ancient monuments; (6) ancient and modern coins; (7) war machines and ships; (8) workshops; (9) various equipment; (10) small vases, all of them illustrated; (11) small figures for ornamentation, also illustrated in various ways.

Thus far I have mentioned the main headings, but many are subdivided into subclasses, which we place in separate cases. For example, I make three or four sufficiently large divisions among biblical pieces by sorting them into earlier, later, and final biblical scenes and into those scenes that are separately presented in individual books. Accordingly, I divide images relating to the New Testament into scenes of the Nativity and those closest to it in time; ones relating to the Gospels; those relating to the Passion and events following the Passion; and finally, images related to the Acts of the Apostles, and to the Apocalypse. Afterward, there are images of the apostles and evangelists and of the Savior, the Trinity, and the Assumption of Mary.

I likewise divide geographic maps in this manner, and indeed it should not trouble anyone to see some large maps that have been displayed on wooden strips and perhaps hung on walls, or otherwise presented rolled up into very large scrolls, are separated and stored in one place, while others remain under specific inscriptions of the theater. That is to say, I divide these into world maps, sea maps, European maps, or ones devoted to regions of Germany, charts of kingdoms such as Italy, France, Spain, England, and others. Here all islands are classified according to the kingdoms to which they are adjoined.

I also divide ornamental prints into several cases—namely, those ornaments called leafy, those called composite, those designated grotesque, and those designated monstrous; also, others adorned with trophies, with fruit, or with a combination—in the same way as I made divisions among the images owned by the most illustrious Prince Albrecht, Duke of Bavaria, who some time ago, after consulting with Mathias Schalling, collected the largest quantity of all these sorts of objects.

Thus, as regards the depictions of cities, it is easy for a man who collects everything produced everywhere to understand that he will need several cases into which he will know how to sort them perfectly in the same manner as the geographic maps.

[...]

Exemplars for the Reader and for Furnishers of Storehouses of Wisdom, and Founders of Libraries Equipped with Diverse Furnishings; Then as Well for All Collectors of Objects from the Entire World, and for Patrons of Antiquities, Whom Hubertus Goltzius Has Named in His Own Iulius Caesar. Samuel Quiccheberg.

Apart from this—that through our inscriptions of man-made objects in the theater I wish especially to persuade all patricians and those of the upper nobility to found similar institutions—it is also clearly my design that in the future it might be possible to provide lists of the names of Maecenases of this same class and of eminent sponsors of the arts throughout the kingdoms of Europe, such as Hubert Goltzius of Bruges, Belgium, provided in relation to the cultivators of antiquity; or Heinrich Pantaleon of Basel, Switzerland, compiled during these same years in relation to illustrious Germans.

Moreover, I thought that I should briefly present here some examples of how this task ought best to be approached, on the basis of which it would be fitting to make a start. For now, I will principally concern myself, where I am able, with cultivators of antiquities themselves, as Goltzius has done: I will give the names of those who come to mind as founders of libraries; and then just those who furnish storehouses of images produced from copperplates or in some other way; then all together the collectors of objects from the whole world, for the remaining tasks connect to these immediately.

And so I shall take as our starting point a most illustrious exemplar, far ahead of all others, our own emperor Maximilian II. He is indeed by the testimony even of many princes someone of every excellence, the greatest

guardian of the arts of this world whom Nature provides, a distinguished furnisher of a storehouse filled to the brim with the most beautiful objects—so that Nature herself, who flourishes most in the presence of novel things, seems to have begotten him especially for the purpose of honoring these times. Indeed, this man has thus far always been devoted to the greatest, most useful enterprises and those most to be admired, to the degree that whatever reposeful time he has left over from governing the Christian world, the Holy Empire, and his own realms, he freely, generously, and without qualification devotes to listening to and promoting those whom he recognizes as discoverers and cultivators of the most numerous and useful arts, or those whom he is able to track down anywhere in the world. And thus, as a result of this, so many ancestral treasures have been restored and increased; so many chests of ancient coins have been enriched; so many books depicting statues, monuments, inscriptions, diverse instruments, and small vessels rescued from ruin have been published; so many of the most refined paintings, produced by the most outstanding painters; and so many marvelous things have been conserved with such care—of which the most illustrious prince, my Lord Albrecht the Duke of Bavaria, has not ceased to be the most diligent patron—that clearly all who look at them ought to be led to highest admiration. Therefore, just as our Goltzius most gloriously counted Albrecht's brother-in-law, Emperor Maximilian, and the Archdukes of Austria, Ferdinand and Charles, the sons of Emperor Ferdinand, among the ranks of those who have ardently emulated the ancients, so I as well am able, in a far more lustrous encomium, to attribute to these men an instinctive capacity for seeking out all the most beautiful things and to attribute to them the founding of repositories for the arts; their repositories, moreover, would be worthy of being inscribed in individual books and commended to posterity.

Beyond those Goltzius named, however, I will also recount others among the most eminent people who cultivate diverse things, at least in Germany, although there are kings, princes, and other outstanding men in various parts of Europe who have merited their own glory and who therefore ought to be celebrated. This would certainly not be difficult within so great an abundance of inscriptions and titles, but it is scarcely possible in so short an epistle as this. It therefore has been necessary to limit the variety of exemplars within the inscriptions in order to avoid presenting exemplars for each individual object altogether.

Indeed, if it were appropriate to move on to the principal electors of the empire (as if to distinguished kings and popes), of which there are seven living at this time whose frequent company it happens to be most agreeable to enjoy, just as it has been by far the most pleasant thing to contemplate their studies, then I would have in their individual research as many exemplars as possible pertaining to our classes, which would by no means have to be passed over for brief citations. I say, that in Daniel Brendel of Hamburg, archbishop of Mainz (whom I am accustomed to call the most sought-after father of the empire) and in Johann von der Leyen from Trier (whom I acknowledge as guardian of the empire, a person of the greatest authority and prudence), I would have what I would celebrate most fittingly by virtue of the restoration of academies by each of them and the revival of the culture of letters in each place on their account. Indeed, concerning the men themselves it ought to be said that they have in this manner founded by far the most renowned theaters of wisdom—but because I have already written and dedicated a certain account to these matters, I think that a lengthy narrative should be avoided at this juncture. However, since in passing I am touching on matters concerning these two, one also ought never to omit, in the case of Friedrich, Count of Wida, elector and archbishop of Cologne (just as Goltzius wrote in the case of his predecessor Count Gebhard von Mansfeld, that a zeal for antiquity has also been attributed to him, and that the same has even been extended to the attentiveness of his venerable family. This is confirmed in Friedrich of Wida's substantial collection of books, where, when the best form of governing his own electorate arises, his other clearly heroic virtues can easily be expanded upon in the most dignified phrases.

Finally (leaving aside for now the elector and king of the Bohemian Empire, also known as Emperor Maximilian

II), I have what I witness with my own eyes in the case of Friedrich, elector of the Palatine: museums of antiquities, which were founded with the utmost industry by Ottheinrich von der Pfalz in Heidelberg, are being beautifully refined and improved by this prince; and likewise their artistic buildings visibly shine with regal splendor. I would wish that no one of them at this point not recommend to themselves for contemplation a marvelous abundance of natural objects.

At last, having arrived at the most illustrious princes—Augustus, elector of Saxony, and Joachim, elector of Brandenburg—I will say briefly, which will nonetheless be gratifying to the entire nobility, that in the latter (as regards our titles for the theater) there is present an enthusiasm for the offices and genealogies of the empire that ought to be commended to the highest degree; and in the former a lively industry for collecting the names of the equestrian nobility and the ensigns of these same men, something that must always be properly applauded in our theater. If that which I gather together in the future concerning these matters should not displease these men, the door to adorning our world will have been opened wider.

However, since it is not possible to do justice to all these matters here, it will be necessary to digress a little on them elsewhere. Indeed, here we have not woven together any complete list but merely seek out certain examples—especially from those places in Upper Germany where we have spent a somewhat longer time, namely Bavaria, Swabia, and Franconia—provided it be permitted to impart to everlasting memory the names of learned men everywhere, and artists of the world, and those famous in our own age, connected to their leaders or regions, in a mere, albeit very full, list to serve posterity.

[...]

Source of English translation: *The First Treatise on Museums. Samuel Quiccheberg's Inscriptiones 1565*, edited and translated by Mark A. Meadow and Bruce Robertson. Los Angeles, CA: Getty Publications, 2013, pp. 61, 77–79, 84–87, 92–94. Reproduced with permission.

Source of original Latin text: *Der Anfang der Museumslehre in Deutschland. Das Traktat „Inscriptiones vel Tituli Theatri Amplissimi“ von Samuel Quiccheberg. Lateinisch-Deutsch*. Edited by Harriet Roth. Berlin: Akademie-Verlag, 2000, pp. 37, 107–13, 131–45, 165–75.

Recommended Citation: Princely Presentation of Power: Samuel Quiccheberg, *Inscriptiones* (1565), published in: German History Intersections, <<https://germanhistory-intersections.org/en/germanness/ghis:document-273>> [July 08, 2025].