

Johann Christoph von Dreyhaupt, “The Natural History Collection of the Orphanage” (1749/50)

Abstract

This report about the Cabinet of Artefacts and Natural Curiosities of the Francke Foundations in Halle begins with the history of the collection (§1). It then describes the contents of the cabinets, which preserved natural specimens such as mollusks and snails, insects, mammals, reptiles (§2), and minerals (§3), in addition to artefacts from all over the world, such as manuscripts (§5), clothes, coins, dishes, weapons (§6), devotional and sacred objects (§7), and items sent from the Tranquebar Mission (§8). The collection, which was exhibited in the middle of the former dormitory of the orphanage, also included models of the Promised Land, the city of Jerusalem, Moses’s tabernacle, and Solomon’s temple. Finally, it featured different systems for understanding the universe, for example, the Copernican and the Tyconic systems (§4).

The Cabinet of Artefacts and Natural Curiosities in Halle is one of the few historic collections that remains at its original site. Moreover, it still uses the original cabinets, which were made by artist Gottfried August Gründler (1710–1775). The collection includes over 3,000 items. Like others of its kind, the Halle cabinet was supposed to show macrocosm in microcosm.

Source

§. 1. The natural history collection of the orphanage consists partly of natural objects that have mostly been presented by patrons and friends since the orphanage was built and partly of artefacts that were produced for the benefit of the schools and the academy on certain occasions; and the collection’s beginnings are occasionally remembered in the traces that were left behind. When the orphaned boys needed a larger dormitory and it was built, the previous dormitory was designated as the location for consolidating everything that was scattered in various rooms and was to be considered part of the natural history collection, and for bringing it into decent order, so that everything could be managed once and for all.

§. 2. For that reason, things relating to the *Regnum naturae* [kingdom of nature], including the shell-species cabinet [*Conchylien-Cabinet*], which contains about 500 specimens from 15 different classes of snails and mussels, are located in several cabinets on the wall straight ahead. In the next cabinet are insects preserved in alcohol, most of which were sent from Malabar, as well as salamanders, chameleons, a white bat, a large scorpion, tarantulas, and a neuroparasitic worm that is about 3½ feet long and the thickness of a thin string and was pulled from the foot of a patient by a doctor. At the top of this cabinet hang a crocodile that is 14½ feet long; a smaller 6-foot crocodile; an Indian lizard that is 3½ feet long; and a 5-foot swordfish, as well as two special swords, one 5 feet and the other 3 spans in length; and a long, 8-foot horn from a narwhal. There is also an 8-foot rib from a whale and a bone from a whale 4 feet wide and high.

§. 3. In the next cabinet is the *Regnum minerale* [mineral kingdom], consisting of all kinds of mining items collected from various countries, gold in ore from Hungary and Saxony, panned gold from the Danube; silver ores from India, Saxony, Hungary, and Sweden; likewise, copper, iron, lead, and tin ores. The rocks collected from various lands and regions are divided into their usual classes, into non-combustible, sulfurous, calcareous,

vitreous, salt-like, etc., including a halite specimen from Egypt; likewise, there is a collection of 120 different kinds of marble sent from Venice. The petrified specimens are also arranged according to their classes. From the *Regnum vegetabili* [plant kingdom], there is a 4-foot cocoa tree leaf from Coromandel coast and a special collection of exceptionally beautiful seaweeds that Provost [Bartholomäus] Ziegenbalg gathered on the island of Ceylon, in addition to many other specimens.

§. 4. In the middle of the room are models of the following:

1) The Promised Land, in which its borders, tribal subdivisions, cities, mountains, and rivers, as well as other notable features are presented in specific pictures. 2) The city of Jerusalem as it looked at the time of Christ. 3) The two great *Systemata mundi* [of Galileo] and the *Systema Copernicanum* [of Copernicus], in which the course of the planets and their satellites around the sun are shown using wheels and weights, but the sphere includes all of the images of the fixed stars that are observable at night with their different-sized stars in the star-filled heavens. The *Systema Tychoicum* [of Tycho Brahe] is constructed with an endless screw and demonstrates how the planets and the sun move around the earth, which is at the center. In these systems, the usual *Circuli mathematici* [mathematical circles] are applied; they usually appear and are explained in *Geographia mathematica* [mathematical geography]. 4) Moses's tabernacle, and 5) Solomon's temple.

§. 5. Straight ahead in the first cabinet are various foreign and rare documents, for example, a large printed Chinese patent that was sent in 1716 by a Russian caravan from China to Moscow. A Bagoan letter written on a palm leaf and stored in a long tube, sending a Madras [possibly a silk or cotton kerchief worn as a turban] from a Bagoan king to a merchant as a privilege, granting him the right to freely trade in the king's realm. A letter from a Hindustani prince to the [Benjamin] Schultz mission in Malabar in which he recommended an impoverished merchant. A Turkish order, written on beautiful Turkish paper and stored in a silk pouch, issued by the Turks regarding Fort Oczakew but intercepted en route by the Russians. Various rare and unknown documents that previously captured Swedish soldiers, as they were being sent to Siberia, found in chests in a large, old, idolatrous temple; [Maturin Veyssière] La Croze found and described similar objects in Uzbek Tatarstan behind the Caspian Sea. Other letters include a 1545 letter by [Martin] Luther in his own hand, and one from 1558 by Philip Melanchthon written to the King of Denmark. Among the books is Johann Arndt's *Garden of Paradise* [*Paradies-Gärtlein*]; in 1708 in Bautzen, when a large part of the city had burned down, the book was pulled unharmed from the rubble after six days. A Roman calendar consisting of seven wooden tablets, and likewise a Runic calendar staff. A copy of an old Roman wax writing tablet, on which the beginning of the Gospel of John is written.

§. 6. The next cabinet holds a variety of clothing from foreign countries, for example, from Greenland, Moscow, China, and a Turkish robe of honor that a member of the Imperial Delegation received at the audience with the Great Sultan. After this cabinet, another one contains various knives, spoons, and other vessels from many countries; this cabinet also holds various war items from foreign peoples, such as a Russian coat of mail with the associated helmet, vambrace, and gloves that were worn by a Russian general. A Tartar bow with a quiver and arrows, an Indian boomerang that completely smashes the person at whom it is thrown. An Indian command baton, a Japanese belly ripper, etc. Further, among the artefacts of Mr. [Jean] Labadie, there is a portrait of the erudite maiden [Anna Maria van] Schurmann; the portrait is embossed in wax and is so small that its casing is no bigger than a hazelnut. Included in this cabinet is also a collection of antique Greek, Egyptian, and Roman coins, together with other embossed castings and many medals from old and more recent times.

§. 7. In the next smaller cabinet are *Res sacrae* [sacred objects] of foreign religions, for example, a model of the holy tomb; this and other objects were made in Jerusalem. An original indulgence letter from 1505. A Turkish

circumcision knife. An image of Confucius in fired clay from China. The Peruvian god Bizlipuzlli [Huitzilopochtli] in red soapstone. The same god on a grain of rice, over it a wooden capsule with writing. A Mercury made of Corinthian ore, an original. An Egyptian Apis of metal. Two eternal lamps from a Roman grave, together with a tear vessel. Various funerary urns with the bones and ashes of cremated bodies.

§. 8. Finally, in a special cabinet are objects sent from Malabar by missionaries, for example, a small idolatrous chapel in which sits Vishnu, carved from wood. In front of the idol are six doors on which the history and transformations of the idol are painted; the extensive description can be found in the 40 installments of the Malabar reports on page 539. In addition, a lacquered box in which a Malabar woman kept the idol she worshipped; after her conversion, she gave it to Provost Ziegenbalg. The entire Bible translated into the Malabar language and written, or rather incised, with an iron stylus on palm or ola leaves, just like the Malabari are accustomed to writing their books; the same for the four books of Johann Arndt's *True Christianity* [*Wahres Christentum*]. And Thomas á Kempis's *Imitation of Christ* [*Die Nachfolge Christi*] translated into the Malabar language and written in the same manner on palm leaves. Among the Malabar clothing articles is a so-called penitence slipper, in which a penitent walked; it is especially unusual. Likewise, there are Malabar earrings, similar to those worn in the ears of girls from eight years old on to lengthen their ear lobes. When the lobes are quite long they are considered by the Malabari to be especially beautiful and decorative.

Source: Johann Christoph von Dreyhaupt, *Pagvs Neletici Et Nvdzici, Oder Ausführliche diplomatisch-historische Beschreibung des [...] Saal-Creyses [...]*. Halle: Schneider, 1749/50, vol. 2, pp. 224–26.

Translation: Kathleen Dell'Orto

Recommended Citation: Johann Christoph von Dreyhaupt, "The Natural History Collection of the Orphanage" (1749/50), published in: German History Intersections, <<https://germanhistory-intersections.org/en/knowledge-and-education/ghis:document-197>> [April 20, 2024].