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The Encyclopedic Nature of the Collection of Kunstkammer of Emperor Rudolf II in Prague

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During the late 16th century, collecting became an increasingly significant element in the pursuit of understanding nature (e.g.: Findlen 1994; Bredekamp 1995; Daston, Park 1998; Findlen 2006). The Kunstkammer of Emperor Rudolf II constituted one of the most valuable collections of its kind in Renaissance Europe, and as evidenced by its preserved inventories, was characterized by a considerable variety of collected items. These may also serve as evidence of the interconnectedness of the court of Rudolf II with distant and exotic regions, cultures and other similar collections.

Given the study collection purpose of the Kunstkammer, the presented paper aims to enrich the existing research of the Rudolfian collection by broadening the perspective to include the history of science and to take into an account the collection's encyclopedic nature. To this end, the paper will present and examine the results of a data analysis of the Rudolfian inventory written between 1607–1611 with regard to the composition, organization and classification of its objects. Finally, the paper will discuss the extent to which the categorization of collected items corresponds with the assumed pivotal role of these collections in establishing modern scientific inquiry.

Keywords

Kunstkammer, Rudolf II, encyclopaedism, history of science, digital humanities

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Short Biography

Jindra Kubickova completed her Master's degree in Art History at the Academy of Arts, Architecture and Design in Prague. She is currently a PhD candidate at the Department of Philosophy and History of Science at Charles University in Prague. In her PhD thesis, she focuses on the encyclopedic nature of the collection of Kunstkammer of Emperor Rudolf II from the perspective of its organization, early modern knowledge and perception of nature.

She is the principal investigator of a grant project, founded by the Grant Agency of Charles University (GA

UK) which aims to analyze the Rudolfian inventory of Kunstkammer (1607-1611) while using the tools of digital humanities.

Since 2023 she participates in the ERC grant titled The Origins of Modern Encyclopaedism: Launching Evolutionary Metaphorology (TOME) at the Institute of Philosophy, Czech Academy of Sciences. Within TOME, she is assembling and pre-processing the digital corpus of sixteenth- and seventeenth-century alchemical and Paracelsian prints. She served as the data curator of a recently published dataset: Hedesan, G., Huber, A., Kodetová, J., Kříž, O., Kubičková, J., Kaše, V., & Pavlas, P. (2025). EMLAP (v0.4) [Data set]. Zenodo. <https://doi.org/10.5281/zenodo.14765294>.

Her main research interests range from early modern natural collections, renaissance visual and intellectual culture, to media archaeology and contemporary art. Through her research projects, she attempts to examine the academic potentials and challenges of intersections between art history, history and philosophy of science and digital humanities. Since 2022 she also works as a curator and educator at Kunsthalle Praha.

Zuzana Vařáková received both her Bachelor's and Master's degree in History, specializing in Czech History from the Faculty of Arts, Charles University in Prague. She also studied Anglo-American Studies and received a Bachelor's degree for her thesis on corpus analysis of medieval and early modern corpora. She is currently pursuing her PhD degree at the Department of Philosophy and History of Science, Faculty of Science, Charles University. Her main research interest is medieval zoology with a focus on ancient and medieval zoological works, medieval encyclopedism and symbolism. Her PhD thesis focuses on the reception of a selected corpus of zoological treatises in medieval and early modern Bohemia.

She is currently working at the Institute of History of the Czech Academy of Sciences as a PhD student and assistant of the Institute of History Press. On the basis of this opportunity, she is the principal investigator of a Strategy AV 21 project Zoonoses in the Past and Present: Diseases –Animals –People, in close collaboration with the Institute of Vertebrate Biology of the CAS. She is also a team member of the Grant Agency of Charles University The Collection of Kunstkammer of Rudolf II as an Image of Early Modern Knowledge of Nature, which aims to analyze the inventory of the Rudolfian Kunstkammer (1607–1611) using the methodology of digital humanities and to contextualize it within contemporary science and encyclopedic knowledge.

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