THE EVOLUTION OF THE CABINET OF CURIOSITIES OF CLAUDE DU MOLINET

by

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LIST OF FIGURES

TABLE OF CONTENTS

Introduction

Whether it is Ernst Gombrich or Donald Perozi, most art historians agree that cabinets of curiosities not only determined the history of museums established at the end of the eighteenth century, but they also have their own complicated past. A cabinet of curiosities is a proto-museum, a mixture of a natural history and fine arts miniature museum in one. The learned aristocrats throughout Europe would curate them during the sixteenth, seventeenth, and eighteenth centuries before public museums were founded during the French Revolution of 1789. Some cabinets housed principally European objects, such as Roman coins, Greek vases, and paintings from Renaissance artists, while others expanded their collection to include objects from the Western Hemisphere.[1] They contained items from Indigenous cultures (masks, beaded necklaces, and garments) as well as from the natural world (shells, feathers, and bones). This brief summary underscores that cabinets of curiosities resemble a collection that is, according to Pomian Krzysztof, "a unique domain, whose history cannot be consigned to the narrow confines of the histories of art, the sciences or history itself. It is, or rather should be, a history in its own right."[2]

Viewing Kryzysztof's remark as an invitation to study cabinets of curiosities, this thesis synthesizes and critically analyzes the eclectic and vast cabinet of curiosities of the aristocrat, priest, and scholar Claude Du Molinet's (1620-1687). His cabinet was housed in the Bibliothèque Sainte Geneviève in Paris and is still housed there, albeit in a highly modified form. It provides a salient example of a cabinet of curiosities for two reasons. First, it contains, like so

[1] To provide an example of a cabinet of curiosity that housed objects from the Western Hemisphere would be the eighteenth-century collection of Denis-Jacques Fayolle.

[2] Pomian Krzysztof, *Collectors and Curiosities: Paris and Venice 1500-1800*. (Cambridge U.K. Cambridge Mass. USA: Polity Press; Basil Blackwell, 1990), 5. 18

many other cabinets, a wide range of natural and artistic objects from shells and animal teeth to swords and paintings. The diversity alone of Du Molinet's cabinet makes it a remarkable and an explicit case study of cabinets of curiosities. Unlike Joseph Bonnier de La Mosson's (1702-1744) cabinet of curiosities that contained only objects from the natural world, the priest's cabinet contained a wide range of articles from both *artificialia* and *naturalia*. Second, the collection was split up and shipped off to different types of museums following the 1789 Revolution. The priest's cabinet is an important and fruitful case study, because of its complicated past of being assembled, disassembled, and reassembled. Each period in the collection's history followed the ideals and standards of the time in the treatment and display of the objects in Du Molinet's collection. Indeed, each successive individual in charge of the collection used history and contemporary and societal norms to create the right way to display these objects. Or to borrow the words of Jean Baudrillard (translated by James Benedict), objects "constitute themselves as a system, on the basis of which the subject seeks to piece together his world, his personal microcosm."[3] By examining the different shapes and forms the collection has assumed, we can better understand how history coincides with the collection as a whole.[4]

I maintain that Du Molinet's cabinet of curiosities is defined by a precarious existence of assembling, disassembling, and reassembling, because collectors and curators did not fully understand so many of the cabinet's ethnographic objects. The mere fact that objects were labeled as curiosities reveals a lack of understanding. Indeed, as Stephan Greenblatt, Barbara

[3] Jean Baudrillard, *The System of Objects*, trans. James Benedict (London: Verso, 2020), 7.

[4] An illustration of how the treatment of the objects teaches us something about the historical moment can be seen in what happened to the *sauvageries* items. For instance, the *sauvageries* were often shipped around to various museums or left in storage. I believe that this was the fate of these items because individuals in charge of the cabinet did not receive the proper schooling about these so-called *sauvageries* that came from foreign lands and were relatively unknown.

Benedict, Mary Campbell, and others claim, "a defining characteristic of early modern curiosity and or wonder is ambiguity."[5] In addition, I put forward that these objects remained in a no-man's land of the cabinet. They were neither there (in the exotic lands) nor here (in Europe). They had no identity except for *sauvageries*. This strange makeup of the cabinet made for a most curious cabinet.

My analysis of Du Molinet's cabinet focuses on three moments in the cabinet's history. First, I examine how Du Molinet, who was a priest at the Church and Abbey of Sainte Geneviève in Paris, assembled the cabinet. Even before becoming the head of the Abbey's library in 1660, he collected precious objects and placed them in the library. He published a catalog, *Le cabinet de la bibliothèque de Sainte Geneviève* in 1692, clearly listing the objects in his collection. Du Molinet had a particular interest in antiquities and natural history, collecting rare and curious objects, such as coins and medals from popes, the Greeks, and the Romans, as well as stones and gems from the natural world, discussed extensively in his catalog. However, he gives comparatively less detail about the ethnographic objects from the Americas and Asia. Although it might have been difficult for the priest to have learned about these ethnographic objects through books or through explorers themselves, it is not out of the question that he could have learned something about them. There are not only publications of peoples in the Americas that date from this period, but there are also recorded examples of Native Americans who traveled to Europe as invited guests of aristocrats in the sixteenth, seventeenth, and eighteenth centuries.[6]

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[5] Evans Robert John Weston and Alexander Marr, *Curiosity and Wonder from the Renaissance to the Enlightenment*, (Aldershot England: Ashgate, 2006), 2.

[6] See *Tears of the Indians* (1542) by Bartolomé de las Casas. Also, see Coll Thrush, *Monument, Mobility, and Modernity; Or the Sachem of Southwark and Other Surprising Commemorations*. Ethnohistory 1 October 2014; 61 (4): 607–618.

This silencing of history and objects by Du Molinet provokes further questions that I discuss in this thesis.

Second, I analyze the disassembling of the cabinet during the French Revolution and the nineteenth century. During the French Revolution, revolutionaries looted objects and broke up collections of cabinets in aristocrats' homes and at church properties, including at the Abbey of Sainte Geneviève. Some of the items were sent to the dépot du Louvre and The National Library's Cabinet of Medals. The disassembling of Du Molinet's cabinet continued into the nineteenth century. In 1833, the Museum of the Navy at the Louvre sought to construct a museum of ethnographic objects, which included some pieces from the priest's original collection. As for objects from nature, some of the collection was sent first to the Lycée Henri IV and eventually to the Natural History Museum. I trace their provenance and how the collection changed during this period. I consider a series of objects and stress the importance of where these objects ended up according to how well they were understood or not understood.

Finally, I examine the reassembling of the cabinet during the end of the twentieth century when researchers located original objects from Du Molinet's cabinet in various museums and brought them back to a newly refurbished cabinet at the Library of Sainte Geneviève. Using the theories of post-colonist writer J.M.G. Le Clézio, I highlight the limitations of museums and argue that cabinets of curiosities can serve as an important function to foster forms of understanding.

The Origin of the Cabinet of Curiosities

During the Renaissance, humanists collected treasured objects from the past and from distant lands. Just as humanists from the period were inspired by Ancient Greece and Rome, they sought to collect items and writings from these past empires. Paolo Giovio (1483-1552) had a large, organized coin collection and wrote forty-five books about the history of the coins and times to accompany it.[7] Giovio used the collection of medals of the emperors as a way to study history. In fact, collections became associated with libraries. [8] In 1602 Thomas Bodley founded the library at the University of Oxford. It contained one of the most important collections of books and hosted a rich collection of medals.[9] In addition, humanist collectors were interested in the present and the discoveries of cultures from the Americas to Asia and amassed objects from distant lands. Cabinets of curiosities also became tools to instruct the aristocracy and members of religious orders about the world through items from nature (*naturalia*) and cultures (*artificialia*). They also provided a way for explorers and collectors to show off and highlight their social status. Eventually, these collections of *artificialia* and *naturalia* became known as *wunderkammern*, *studiolo*, and cabinets of curiosities. Collectors created guides and itineraries for visitors to see their collections. Depending on the rarity of the objects found in these cabinets, prestige would follow. As Roland Schaer claims, better collections would attract better and more notable visitors.[10]

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[7] Roland Schaer, *L'invention des Musées*, (Paris: Gallimard: Réunion des musées nationaux, 1993), 17. Paolo Giovio wrote *Histoires de son temps* in 1550.

[8] During the seventeenth century, a necessary feature of library collections was to have their own cabinet of medals (*cabinet des médailles*). For example, in 1665 Charles Patin, a medal collection specialist (numismatics), wrote about history through the study of medals.

[9] Schaer, *L'invention*, 35.

[10] Schaer, *L'invention*, 27.

Collectors chose their own organizational patterns of display. For example, shells would be housed together with gems, whereas sacrificial tools would be housed with religious icons. However, objects were not always displayed by particular themes or geography. As scholars suggest, the collections from this time were organized "haphazardly".[11] Françoise Zehnacker and Nicolas Petit, editors of *Le Cabinet de curiosités de la Bibliothèque Sainte Geneviève*, suggests nonetheless there was more of an intentional organization with collections of antiquities, as opposed to those from distant lands, which were considered *sauvageries.*[12] The term *sauvageries* was used to define ethnographic objects from non-Western cultures.

Du Molinet and the Abbey of Sainte Geneviève

Claude du Molinet was a Reverend Canon (*chanoine régulier*) of the Abbey of Sainte Geneviève, of an Augustinian order in Paris. He was born in 1620 in Châlons-en-Champagne, a city in northeastern France, to an old and illustrious (*ancienne & illuftre*) family.[13] His mother was from the de L'hôpital family, and his father was Pierre du Molinet, an esquire and provost of Châlons-en-Champagne. After studying philosophy in Paris, Du Molinet decided to become a c*hanoine régulier*. He distinguished himself in the order through his "erudition, knowledge, and piety."[14] He was given the position of General Procureur of the Congregation, a role responsible

[11] Françoise Zehnacker and Nicolas Petit, eds., *Le Cabinet De Curiosités De La Bibliothèque Sainte Geneviève: Des Origines À Nos Jours: Exposition*, (Paris: Bibliothèque Sainte Geneviève 1989), 7.

[12] Zehnacker and Petit, *Cabinet*, 7.

[13] Claude Du Molinet, 1620-1687 and Franz Ertinger 1640-ca 1710, *Le Cabinet De La Bibliotheque De Sainte Geneviève: Divisé En Deux Parties: Contenant Les Antiquitez De La Réligion Des Chrétiens, Des Egyptiens, & Des Romains; Des Tombeaux, Des Poids & Des Médailles; De Monnoyes, Des Pierres Antiques Gravées, & Des Mineraux* (Chez Antoine Dezallier), *eloge* to *Cabinet*, 1.

[14] Du Molinet and Ertinger, *eloge* to *Cabinet*, 1. ("*Son érudition & sa suffisance, que par sa piété* […]")

for managing the financial and legal affairs of the community. Nevertheless, Du Molinet's "humility was the only obstacle to his achieving a more prestigious title, which he was often offered."[15] In addition to his religious duties, Du Molinet had a particular interest in antiquities and natural history and dedicated a significant amount of time and resources to collecting rare and curious objects related to these subjects. He also wrote several works on these subjects, which were highly esteemed by scholars, according to the publication *Journal des sçavans*.[16] Du Molinet died at the age of sixty-eight, esteemed by many as "humble, learned, generous and wise."[17] He left a collection of rare and curious objects in the library of Sainte Geneviève at the Abbey, which was intended to educate. He played the role of not only librarian, but also teacher, collector, scholar, curator, and historian.

Before analyzing Du Molinet's cabinet of curiosities housed at the Sainte Geneviève Library, it is instructive to understand the Abbey itself. The Abbey of Sainte Geneviève, led by the Augustinian order, was highly noted for its devotion to teaching and learning. The Abbey and Church of Sainte Geneviève was founded by King Clovis at the beginning of the sixth century. The Abbey and the Church of Sainte Geneviève, named after one of the city's patron saints, played a prominent role in Paris's history. It was at the heart of the city's learning community in the Latin Quarter, keeping company with the Sorbonne University (founded in 1256) and the College of France (founded in 1530). The Abbey contained a library and cabinet of curiosities

[15] Du Molinet and Ertinger, *eloge* to *Cabinet*, 1. ("[…] *son humilité seule servit d'obstacle à son élévation aux autres Charges qui luy furent souvent offertes.*")

[16] Du Molinet and Ertinger, *eloge* to *Cabinet*, 1.

[17] Du Molinet and Ertinger, *eloge* to *Cabinet*, 1. ("*Il fut humble, sçavant, officieux, et sage* […]")

and was supported by the learned clergy, including Claude du Molinet. It endorsed education just as much as the priests and faculty at the Sorbonne University and the College of France.

The Library of Sainte Geneviève was owned and operated by the Abbey, and the collections it contained were its property. The library was an important part of the Abbey's mission to preserve and promote knowledge and learning, and the collections were used for research and study by the clergy and other scholars who were affiliated with the Abbey. For example, in Du Molinet's preface to the catalog, he states that during the seventeenth century there were not many books within the library's collection. The monks of the Abbey promptly began working on building a new collection of books and with that, the new library was built in 1672-1673. The cabinet of curiosities was built shortly after in 1675.[18]

According to the preface of the *Catalog*, at the end of the seventeenth century the Abbey monks decided that in order to maintain the Abbey, it was necessary to link it with the study of the Liberal Arts, which had been flourishing in this famous setting.[19] Du Molinet took this devotion to the Liberal Arts seriously, as made evident in the content of his cabinet of curiosities and the accompanying catalog he wrote. He believed that it would be a good idea to embellish the library collection by adding rare and curious pieces ("*pièces rares et curieuses*") that would serve as a source of study. He explained: "I tried to find only those objects that would be useful for Science, Mathematics, Astronomy, Optics, Geometry and especially, History, either Natural History or Ancient History or Modern History and so this is what I devoted myself to do."[20] This

[18] Zehnacker and Petit, *Cabinet*, 18.

[19] Du Molinet and Ertinger, *préface* to *Cabinet*, 1. ("[...] *jugérent qu'il étoit néccesire, pour l'entretenir, d'y joindre l'étude des bonnes lettres, autrefois si florissantes en cette célèbre Maison.*")

[20] Du Molinet and Ertinger, *préface* to *Cabinet*, 1. ("[...] *j'ay tâché de n'en point chercher, & de n'en point avoir, qui ne pussent être utiles aux Sciences, aux Mathématiques, à l'Astronomie, à l'Optique, à la Géométrie, & sur tout, à l'Histoir, soit naturelle, soit antique, soit moderne; & c'est à quoy je me suis principalement appliqué.")*

statement makes it clear that the priest's collection was to be a center of learning about the Liberal Arts.

Assembling Du Molinet's Cabinet of Curiosities

Claude Du Molinet's 1692 catalog *Le cabinet de la Bibliothèque de Sainte Geneviève* provides insight into both the content of the cabinet and, more importantly, the priest's mindset. Before the curator elaborated on the collection, there is a eulogy on Du Molinet written by the publication *Journal des sçavans* and a preface penned by the priest himself.[21] The catalog intimates that the collection was organized into two different parts: human history and culture, and natural history. Indeed, we can imagine that the original collection was organized this way because there were three engravings of the Library and four of the collection by François Ertinger that still exist today (Figures 1-4). Later in this thesis, we shall discuss the content of the cabinets displayed in these etchings. As for a more general reading of the etchings, they give us the distinct impression that Du Molinet organized the objects with an aesthetic taste. The engravings show that objects were placed methodically to show formal balance. For example, in Figure 1, a shield separates two bows, while two swords mirror the two bows.

In the preface, Du Molinet provides an overview of the collection. He states that the cabinet was placed next to the library and in between two windows to provide adequate lighting for viewing the objects. Visitors would first come upon an alcove where several articles of clothing and other forms of weaponry originating from foreign lands appeared. While the objects spanned from across the globe, the priest briefly mentions a few examples in the preface from

[21] Du Molinet and Ertinger, *Eloge* to *Cabinet*, 2.

Persia, India, and America. Opposite to the alcove at the entry door, there was a large wooden statue of Sainte Geneviève. It faced the alcove that presents the clothing and arms of foreign countries in a theatrical way, as if they were trophies.[22] Above the garments and weapons there were three shelves (*grandins*) that held different antique vases, urns, and figures as well as instruments used in sacrifices, lamps, and several other important objects from antiquity.[23]

In part I of the catalog, Du Molinet provides more details about these objects. For instance, he explains that item one a sistrum (a musical instrument of the Egyptian Goddess Isis) was employed by both Egyptian and Jewish priests to chase away evil spirits.[24] There were also two large armoires (*buffets*) filled with different items of *naturalia*, including trays that contained petrified objects, birds from India, and animals.[25] While most of the items were from the natural world, the priest mentions ornaments and shoes from several different countries.[26] Also within the *buffets* were two shelves that held a few different vases and figures from China. These Chinese objects were complemented by red, white, and black coral branches, plus other diverse items from the sea.[27] The combination of both *naturalia* and *artificialia* demonstrate that Du Molinet was interested in both culture and history as well as the natural sciences.

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[22] Zehnacker and Petit, *Cabinet*, 19. ("[...] *sous forme de trophée* […]")

[23] Du Molinet and Ertinger, *préface* to *Cabinet*, 5. ("*Au-dessus sont trois 'Grandins' garnis de Vases, d'Urnes, de Figures antiques, d'Instruments de Sacrifices, de Lampes, et de plusieurs autres sortes d'Antiquiez.*")

[24] Du Molinet and Ertinger, *Cabinet*, 7. ("[...] *chasser les malins esprits* […]")

[25] Du Molinet and Ertinger, *préface* to *Cabinet*, 6. ("[...] *lesquelles sont des Pétrifications, des Oyseaux des Indes, & des Animaux, des Ornemens & chaussures de plusieurs Païs*.")

[26] Du Molinet and Ertinger, *préface* to *Cabinet*, 6. ("*Cette Alcôve est accompagnée de deux Buffets garnis de tablettes sur lesquelles sont des Pétrifications, des Oyseaux des Indes, & des Animaux, des Ornemens & chaussures de plusieurs Païs*.")

[27] Du Molinet and Ertinger, *préface* to *Cabinet*, 6. ("*Ces buffets portent aussi deux Grandins, sur lesquels sont des figures & des vases de la Chine avec des branches de corail rouge, blanc, & noir; & diverses sortes de croissance de Mer*.")

The three other sides of the room were adorned with four large cabinets each accompanied by two smaller cabinets.[28] Du Molinet provides a detailed description of the make-up of these twelve cabinets in his catalog. Notably, he provides explanations for many items as well as engravings of them.

In the first large cabinet, there were bronze medals, which were in good condition and contained intact engravings of the heads of emperors and princesses. The bronze medals were accompanied by books that elaborated on the 400 different rare medals, many of which were from Ancient Greece, dating back to the early Empire.[29] It is easy to conjecture that Du Molinet did not start the collection from the ground up. He took bits and pieces from the previous medal collections of the cabinet and recycled them for his medal collection. In addition to recycling objects from previous collections, he probably relied on other examples of medal collections illustrated in accompanying books.

The second large cabinet had two collections of medals from antiquity, one that was made up of small bronze medals and the other silver medals. The silver collection, which contained medals with heads of gods, consisted of more than seven hundred pieces.[30] According to Du Molinet, the small bronze collection was quite extraordinary and there was "nothing like it in Europe."[31]

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[28] Du Molinet and Ertinger, *préface* to *Cabinet*, 7. ("[...] *il y en a quatre grands accompagnez chacun de deux petits*.")

[29] Du Molinet and Ertinger, *préface* to *Cabinet*, 7. ("*Dans le prémier des grands, sont les Médailles de grand bronze, dont la suite est entiére, & qui ont mîeme les Têtes les plus rares des Empereurs & des Princesses leurs femmes, avec un Livre, où sont toutes dessinees & expliquées au nombre de plus de quatre cens*.")

[30] Du Molinet and Ertinger, *préface* to *Cabinet*, 8. ("*La suite d'argent qui a en tête les Deïtez, comprend plus de sept cens Medailles*.")

[31] Du Molinet and Ertinger, *préface* to *Cabinet*, 8. ("[...] *qu'il n'y en a peut-être pas une semblable dans l'Europe* [...]")

The third cabinet contained scientific objects, such as tools of measurements and weights, coins from Ancient Rome, Ancient Greece, and the Jewish Kingdom. The cabinet also held different stone and metal talismans from both ancient and modern times that were engraved in many different languages.[32] Du Molinet introduces a Roman abacus and goes into great detail to explain how it was used. He even informs the reader how it was carried around in people's pockets.[33] This detail provokes us to conclude that the priest played the role of an anthropologist too. He did not just simply enumerate the contents of the collection he explained how the objects were used in societies.

Finally, the fourth large cabinet contained objects and instruments for sacrifices and other items. They came from Ancient Rome, Ancient Greece, and Ancient Egypt. Of particular interest in the Ancient Roman section are items seven and eight that were used as sacrificial tools. Du Molinet states that the knives were used to slit the necks of victims and then the ladle (*simpulum*) would be employed to extract the blood to give as a sacrifice to the gods.[34] Du Molinet's collection from Ancient Rome did not just focus on barbarism. For example, though the collection contained Ancient Roman axes that were used to immolate victims, the priest goes on a diversion to tell how great Roman authors (like Virgil) would talk about these very axes in their writings. By speaking about Virgil, Du Molinet diverts attention away from the barbaric nature of the items in the collection. This detailed knowledge reveals that the priest had to have studied extensively both these objects and their related history.

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[32] Du Molinet and Ertinger, *préface* to *Cabinet*, 9. ("[...] *il s'y voit des tablettes de Talismans, tant en pierre qu'en métaux, anciens & modernes, de toutes sortes de Langues.*")

[33] Du Molinet and Ertinger, *Cabinet,* 23. ("[...] *cet instrument d'Arithmetique que l'on portrait dans la poch*e.")

[34] Du Molinet and Ertinger, *Cabinet*, 22. ("*Cet instrument s'appelloit simpulum, ou Capedo, à capiendo, à cause que le Prêtre s'e servoit pour prendre du sang de la victime, afin de l'offrir aux dieux*.")

Next, Du Molinet describes the eight smaller cabinets. The first smaller one housed copper medals from different popes. In the catalog, the priest describes a few different rings worn by the popes. He speculates that these rings could have even come from an antipope.[35] It is remarkable that he felt confident enough to conjecture that a ring would have come from an antipope. This speaks volumes about his knowledge of the history of the Church.

The second smaller cabinet held 100 square (*quarrez*) steel engraved medals.[36] Du Molinet provides a description of the Julius Cesar medal in the catalog. He describes the meaning of the symbolism of the globe and the ax engraved on the medal.[37] Again, this description indicates that Du Molinet knew his history well and furthermore, that he wanted to share his knowledge.

The third smaller cabinet held other medals depicting French kings (such as Charles VII to Louis XIV) and Christ.[38] Du Molinet describes how Jesus is depicted on the medal: He is raising his right hand, giving his blessing.[39] On the other side, God is sitting on the clouds, clutching a triangle while his feet are leaning on a globe. If God is depicted carrying a triangle,

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[35] Du Molinet and Ertinger, *Cabinet,* 4. ("*Je n'ay pû encore trouver de quel Pape il est; il pourroit bien être de quelque anti-Pape.*")

[36] Du Molinet and Ertinger, *préface* to *Cabinet*, 11. ("[...] *entre lesquelles sont celles des Empereurs depuis Jules Cesar jusques à Eliogabale* […]")

[37] Du Molinet and Ertinger, *Cabinet,* 94. ("*Le revers nous réprésente un globe pour marque du dessein qu'il avait de réduire tout le monde sous l'Empire Romain… la hache, qui se mettoit au milieu au milieu des faisseaux que l'on portoit devant les Consuls, la Justice.*")

[38] Du Molinet and Ertinger, *préface* to *Cabinet*, 12. ("*Le troisème petit cabinet renferme les Médailles des Rois de France, depuis Charles VII, jusqus à Louïs XIV, celles des Reines, des Princes, des Chanéliers, & des Illustres de tous les Etats de ce Royaume.*")

[39] Du Molinet and Ertinger, *Cabinet*, 93. ("*La prémiére Médaille réprésente l'image de Nôtre-Seigneur JESUS CHRIST, tenant sa main droite élevée, comme pour donner la bénédiction. Au bas de son buste se lit le nom de l'Auteur, JOAN CAVINUS F. qui nous donne ce prémier creux, comme le chef-d'oeuvre de tout son travail* [...] *Pour revers, Dieu est réprésentEe assis sur les nües, sa tête comportant trois faces; il porte un triangle, & il a les pieds appuyez sur un globe; deux Cherubins à ses coôtez, deux autres à ses pieds.*")

this makes it seem as if he were an engineer or a freemason. And if his feet are on the Earth, then this makes it appear as if he is in control of the planet. He can easily set it in motion with just a kick. This discussion spurs us to conclude that Du Molinet's collection of medals spanned a wide range of figures, themes, and time periods. It also suggests that his narratives about the pieces did propagate the faith, to a certain extent.

The fourth smaller cabinet also housed medals from nobility. Du Molinet informs us that these objects come from European countries. He stresses that this cabinet contains medals associated with popes throughout history and describes them meticulously. He provides detailed information about the 38 medals from Pope Clement VIII (1536-1605). Before even providing a narrative of the origin or meaning of the coins, he gives a history lesson on Clement VIII and on the Catholic Church when speaking about one particular coin.[40] Again this proves that Du Molinet knew his Church history.[41] The medals, like other objects, seem to be talking points. They allowed Du Molinet to inform his readers about the life and career of the popes, as well as the history of the Church. This suggests that the priest viewed himself as a Church historian.[42]

The fifth smaller cabinet housed a variety of different coins. The priest explains how some of the coins came from different chapters (*chapitres*) and abbeys that would mint them. This cabinet also contained pieces from China, Japan, Calcutta, Thailand, Mongolia, Turkey, and

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[40] Du Molinet and Ertinger, *Cabinet*, 172. ("[...] *on les voit se prosterner à les genoux pour luy rendre leurs obéissance, & pour luy témoigner qu'ils vouloient demeurer unis avec l'Eglise Romaine.*") Also, he informs us that the pope appears on his throne, giving his blessing to the Russian cardinals, who were not part of the Roman Catholic Church, but rather in the Greek Orthodox Church. The coin's engraving depicts Eastern Orthodox cardinals "prostrate on their knees to show their obedience and to prove their desire to unite with the Roman Catholic Church."

[41] As it turns out, the history depicted on the medal is a little misleading. We know today from Church historians that the Orthodox Church reneged on the agreement to join the Roman Catholic Church.

[42] It is no stretch to refer to Du Molinet as a Church historian. He also wrote a detailed book on the different garb of priests and nuns and included etchings of their costumes. See: *Figures des Différents Habits des Chanoines Réguliers en ce Siècle*, 1666.

other parts of the Middle East. The priest even claims that coins from all the kings and princes of Europe were found in the cabinet.[43] Even if this is an exaggeration, the extensive coin collection illustrates the purposeful and exhaustive nature of the collection: it contained many artifacts from different cultures and time periods.

Next, the sixth smaller cabinet held tokens from the kings of France from François I to Louis XIV and other nobility. There were up to 1,000 tokens in total in this smaller cabinet. Du Molinet explains in detail the token depicting King Charles Le Chauve, such that the King's crown was enriched with pearls.[44] It may be that the priest wanted to use these tokens to evoke and teach history. But perhaps he could have used these tokens to promote the idea of the mighty and majestic quality of the Monarchy.

The seventh smaller cabinet housed, like the third large cabinet, a multitude of different mathematical and scientific objects. It held clocks, magnifying glasses, magnets (*les pierres d'aimant*) and other similar objects.[45] Du Molinet describes in detail different talismans found in the Egyptian section. He talks about how these can be associated with scientific properties. For instance, item seven is a stone with a magnetic pull and contains a set of inscriptions on it, which the curator interprets.[46] The priest takes this opportunity to show off his scientific knowledge and acts as a pseudo-scientist or perhaps even scientist.

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[43] Du Molinet and Ertinger, *préface* to *Cabinet*, 14. ("[...] *enfin celles de tous les Rois & Princes de l'Europe.*")

[44] In Du Molinet and Ertinger, *Cabinet*, 94. ("*Un dernier d'argent du Roy de France, Charles le Chauve, qui fut depuis Empereur, sur lequel on voit sa tête ornée d'un cercle ou d'une couronne qui semble étre enrichie de perles, avec cette inscription: CAROLUS REX.*")

[45] Du Molinet and Ertinger, *préface* to *Cabinet*, 16. ("*Le septiéme renferme les Instrumens de Mathématique, les Horloges, Les Lunettes d'approche, les pierres d'aimant, & autres choses semblables.*")

[46] Du Molinet and Ertinger, *Cabinet*, 127. ("*Une pierre d'aimant sur laquelle il n'y a aucune figure, mais une inscription qui fait un sens continu des deux côtez* [...]")

The final eighth smaller cabinet contained engraved stones and other precious gems. Du Molinet goes out of his way to describe a precious stone made of agate and onyx housed in this final cabinet. Engraved with the word *EYTUXIAC* it would have been fitted into a ring. Supposedly the person who would wear it would be showered with good fortune.[47] Not only did this cabinet contain precious stones, but it also housed other types of minerals and shells and examples of the remains of rare animals and fish. For instance, Du Molinet gives the reader a lesson on natural history by describing the exotic fishes, snakes, sharks, and even bones from the related sea life.[48] In addition, this cabinet was particularly interesting because it was decorated with curious portraits and paintings.[49] The ledge along the top contained twenty-two portraits of the kings, which are on view today in the study room of the library. The curator's enumerations and descriptions of the different stones and exotic animals make him seem like a naturalist even before the term was embodied in and made popular by Georges-Louis Leclerc de Buffon (1707-1788), the most influential Academy of Science member of the eighteenth century.

Du Molinet did not haphazardly place objects in the cabinets. He analyzed them carefully and decided where they would complement other pieces. Moreover, he went into detail in his catalog about many items, indicating their geographical and cultural origin and sometimes their use. We can deduce therefore that whether it be from a cultural or historical perspective or a pedagogical one, he was very purposeful about the placement of the pieces.

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[47] Du Molinet and Ertinger, *Cabinet*, 123. ("[...] *& procurer quelque bonne fortune à celuy qui portoit cette pierre.*")

[48] Du Molinet and Ertinger, *Cabinet*, 201.

[49] Du Molinet and Ertinger, *préface* to *Cabinet*, 17. ("*Les murailles du Cabinet, outre cela, sont ornées de Portraits & de Tableaux curieux* [...]")

With a collection so vast and extensive, it begs the question how did Du Molinet begin to amass these items? While I briefly discussed the point that he "recycled" previous collections and included them in his own, we know that he extensively invested in the collection. To prove this point and, if we believe Du Molinet to be honest, he indicates in his preface that he dedicated his own efforts and investments to the collection.[50] This is not hard to believe given that the catalog provides so much detail and hence serves as an artifact of his efforts.

Even before Du Molinet's cabinet of curiosities took form he was regarded as a medal collector.[51] In 1670, the collector met Thomas Lecointe, who was the antiques dealer of the King. The dealer offered Du Molinet a set of famous medals from Padua.[52] Subsequently in 1671, Du Molinet was given a large sum of small unique items from the collection of Achille de Harlay.[53] De Harlay was considered to have one of the finest collections of antiques in Europe at the time. The priest's collection continued to expand through 1675-1685. The items that entered the priest's collection were either purchased or given to him. During this ten-year period, the famous engraved stones from the Collection Chaduc were added to his collection.[54] Finally, we know that in 1680-1682 Du Molinet had the twenty-two portraits of the Kings of France commissioned and that he placed them on the walls of the cabinet.[55]

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[50] Du Molinet and Ertinger, *préface* to *Cabinet*, 18. ("[...] *au bonheur & aux bienfaits de mesa mis, qu'à mon industrie, & à la dépense que jy aye faite.*")

[51] Zehnacker and Petit, *Cabinet*, 7. ("*Collectionneur de médailles*")

[52] Zehnacker and Petit, *Cabinet*, 13.

[53] Zehnacker and Petit, *Cabinet*, 13.

[54] Zehnacker and Petit, *Cabinet*, 13.

[55] Zehnacker and Petit, *Cabinet*, 13.

The priest's writings help us to understand just how much he drew from other collections. The ending of the catalog's preface acknowledges in particular a few other famous cabinets. Monsieur de Pereise, Councilman of the Parliament of Aix and owner of a famous Cabinet bequeathed Du Molinet rare objects.[56] As mentioned before, Monsieur de Harlay, the General Procurer of the Parliament of Paris, gave the priest many precious (*curieux*) books, metals, antiques, and other rare objects.[57] Most significantly, the King of France donated his medals (from various members of the nobility) from the third little cabinet to Du Molinet. This leads us to think that the notoriety behind the collection made individuals more willing to donate to the cause. Regarding the reputation of the cabinet, Du Molinet explains that Monsieur Gassendi and several other authors had spoken about the collection, intimating that it was quite noteworthy.[58]

Related to this idea of Du Molinet's political clout to amass more objects for the collection is his association with the Catholic Church. It is likely that a member of the clergy who was also a collector might have used a cabinet of curiosities to educate the public in a way that corresponded with the teachings and beliefs of the Church. In this case, the education provided through the cabinet of curiosities would not necessarily be based solely on the objects in the collection, but rather on the interpretation of those objects within the context of the teachings and beliefs of the Church. For example, he refers to natural objects as works by the Author of nature.[59] He obviously is speaking about God here and transmits a religious message.

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[56] Du Molinet and Ertinger, *préface* to *Cabinet*, 18. ("*J'attribuë, en effet, à un bonheur singulier, que les raretez du fameux Cabinet de M. de Pereise, Conseiller au Parlement d'Aix.*")

[57] Du Molinet and Ertinger, *préface* to *Cabinet*, 18. ("*M. de Harlay Procureur Général du Parlement de Paris, m'a gratifié de tant de Livres curieux, de Médailles, d'Antiquitez, & d'autres piéces rares* [...]")

[58] Du Molinet and Ertinger, *préface* to *Cabinet*, 18. ("*M. Gassendi & plusieurs autres Auteurs en parlent avec estime.*")

[59] Du Molinet and Ertinger, *Cabinet*, 213. ("[...] *de l'Auteur de la nature* [...]")

While at first glance it seems logical to argue that Du Molinet would have propagated Catholic doctrine in his cabinet and catalog, it is not completely accurate when considering the actual catalog's content. Du Molinet does not proselytize in his catalog. As we shall see, he sounds more like a historian or scientist. He describes the objects in an objective way without mentioning the hand of God in the creation of the objects, except for a few times.

A synthesis of both the cabinet and the catalog from the priest, librarian, teacher, collector, scholar, curator, and historian illuminates several key points. First, Du Molinet fixates not only on the objects themselves in his collection but also on the different cultures and histories associated with the objects. This fixation on so many different subjects suggests that he was a scholar of the Enlightenment. Secondly, his breadth and depth of cultures make it seem as if he was an anthropologist conducting research, even before the term existed.[60] He explains how items were used in different societies and wants his reader and the visitor to his cabinet to understand so much more than just the content of the collection. Thirdly, he is like a teacher, but a Socratic one. He dialogs with the reader of the catalog by providing both insight into the collection and his own thoughts about his research on the objects. For instance, the curator-teacher-author speaks often in the first person in the catalog. He confesses: "I think that one would not object that I say something here about what people would do with this instrument."[61] It is remarkable that Du Molinet considers what we as readers might be thinking. It is as if he is asking permission from readers for him to hypothesize what people would do with the objects. Even more remarkable is that he informs us that he does not know the name of the object.[62] He

[60] The modern term of an "anthropologist" did not come into existence until the nineteenth century.

[61] Du Molinet and Ertinger, *Cabinet*, 18. ("*Je croy qu'on ne trouvera pas mauvais, que je dise icy quelque chose des personnes qui se servoient de cet instrument* [...]")

[62] Du Molinet and Ertinger, *Cabinet*, 18. ("[...] *dont je n'ay jamais pû trouver le nom.*")

seems to be an honest teacher and researcher. Fourth, just as he appears honest, he seems proud. His catalog and collection provide us with a psychological reading of the curator. Recall that the priest explains how his collection had no rivals in Europe and how he invested so much in it. Fifth, while he was an educator of the Catholic faith, he was not a zealous proselytizer. Finally, the collection and catalog are one of the first of their kind, because of the vastness of the collection and the in-depth descriptions of the catalog. Indeed, they act almost as precursors to the *Encyclopédie* (1751-1772) by Denis de Diderot and Jean Le Rond d'Alembert.

The Sainte Geneviève Cabinet of Curiosities

After the death of Claude Du Molinet in 1687, the cabinet at Sainte Geneviève continued to grow but did not change as much as when Du Molinet oversaw it. We know this fact thanks to numerous guides of Paris. The narratives about the priest's cabinet in the guides did not differ a whole lot during the time after his death, except for a few exceptions.[63] During the first half of the eighteenth century, the collection was moved to another part of the library. In 1752 Louis, Duc d'Orleans, donated his entire collection to the library.[64] His collection consisted of a wide variety of coins, engraved stones, and golden medals. The Duc's objects were placed in a piece of highly decorated furniture, and this collection was referred to as the *Médaillier de Cressent* or *Médaillier du Régent*.[65] This shows the unwavering interest in the cabinet among aristocrats, and how it was still an important part of French culture.

[63] Zehnacker and Petit, *Cabinet*, 19. The guides of Paris continued to give an identical description, more or less the same as the preface.

[64] Zehnacker and Petit, *Cabinet*, 14.

[65] Zehnacker and Petit, *Cabinet*, 14.

Between Molinet's death and before the 1789 Revolution, the cabinet of curiosities was open twice a week to invited guests. The objects were displayed in large wooden cases with accompanied labels written in Latin emphasizing the continued pedagogical nature of the collection.[66] During the second half of the eighteenth century, the collection was given a much bigger space. There were built-in cabinets with glass windows that lined the walls and allowed viewers to gaze in at the objects. The new layout was divided into two rooms. The larger of the two contained medals and antiques. The second, smaller room, held objects from natural history, minerals, and the *armes des sauvages*.[67] Zehnacker informs us that the viewer would have been able to tell which objects held the most importance. Certain would be behind glass such as the antiques, Etruscan vases, bronzes, marbles, Egyptian, Roman, Gallic, and French antiques.[68] Other objects, paintings, the optical instruments, clocks, shells, *sauvageries*, and stuffed animals were not placed behind glass.[69] In other words, by 1753, there was more of a segregation of objects according to their deemed importance. In 1777, Antoine Mongez took over as chief of the cabinet. He wrote a catalog about the antiques and some of the medals and commissioned a miniature model mockup of Rome.[70]

In sum, the cabinet of curiosities was not considered to be an amateur collection after the priest's death. The pieces were organized in a logical fashion. They were permanently viewable, sometimes protected behind glass, and accompanied by information about the objects. As

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[66] Zehnacker and Petit, *Cabinet*, 14.

[67] Zehnacker and Petit, *Cabinet*, 24.

[68] Zehnacker and Petit, *Cabinet*, 25.

[69] Zehnacker and Petit, *Cabinet*, 25.

[70] Zehnacker and Petit, *Cabinet*, 14. Antoine Mongez wrote in 1777 *Catalogue des médaillons et médailles antiques*. The mockup is on display at the Museum of Antiqués nationales de St-Germain-en Laye.

Zehnacker emphasizes, the collection begins to resemble a museum.[71] Finally, the separation of objects between *naturalia* and *artificialia*, in the two rooms, foretells what happened during the Revolution, when the two collections, *naturalia* and *artificialia*, were dispersed separately and subjected to different fates.

One of the most extensive pieces of literature on Du Molinet's collection comes from Françoise Zehnacker and Nicolas Petit, who wrote *Le Cabinet de curiosités de la Bibliothèque Sainte Geneviève*. Zehnacker states that Du Molinet's collection is very heterogeneous.[72] Furthermore, she suggests that from the etchings and the accompanying book one can see how the collection is organized in a haphazard or incoherent way (*un désordre remarkable*): crocodiles were shelved next to silver coins, horns from a unicorn, birds from the tropics, Egyptian sarcophagi, and bronzes from Antiquity.[73] Zehnacker made this statement in 1989 when museums had a very "homogenous" ordering system. Today, museums welcome this "heterogeneous" way of displaying objects to speak to a wider and more diverse audience.[74] Du Molinet was on to something with his organizational methods.

This conclusion needs to be nuanced, because there is one important fact about the cabinet we have not yet uncovered. First, recall that his collection located in the alcove contained objects from Persia, India, and the Americas. There is no record however of them in his catalog,

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[71] Zehnacker and Petit, *Cabinet*, 25. ("*une approache muséographique des collections.*")

[72] Zehnacker and Petit, *Cabinet*, 5.

[73] Zehnacker and Petit, *Cabinet*, 9. ("*les crocodiles côtoient les dernier d'argent augustéen, les cornes de licorne, ou les oiseaux de paradis, les sarcophages égyptiens et les bronzes antiques.*")

[74] To prove the point that in the past museums had a more homogeneous way of ordering objects, let us consider how museums typically organized their galleries to display objects based on cultures, location, or time, as seen in the Louvre's Denon, Sully, and Richelieu Wings. Next to these traditional wings, the Louvre has added (in the last twenty years) galleries and new displays containing more heterogenous objects from neon lights to photography.

except for the simple enumeration of them in the preface. More importantly, they are shown so clearly in the engraving by Ertinger. But these ethnographic objects and optical instruments are not mentioned at all in the actual catalog.[75] There are also other objects that are missing or hardly mentioned within the catalog, including the paintings, the model ships, and the clock.[76] The curator did not introduce them in the detailed way he described the coins and medals from Ancient Greece and Rome or the exotic animals and shells from across the globe. Those items were "treated" differently than those from Western cultures. Again, this curious treatment of objects from "exotic" cultures may be explained in several ways: he did not understand the objects; he had no way to learn about them; or he did not appreciate their value. Thus, an important critical and creative contribution we can add to this research on Du Molinet's cabinet is that his curious silence about the objects *les sauvageries* from Persia, India, and the Americas is noteworthy; but the reason for this silence is still unclear.

The French Revolution, Cabinets of Curiosities, and the Birth of the Museum

During the French Revolution, many private collections, including cabinets of curiosities, were dissolved or destroyed. The Revolution was a time of great political and social upheaval in France, and it was marked by a rejection of the traditional social and political order. One of the main goals of the Revolution was to eliminate the privileges of the aristocracy and the clergy, and this included the confiscation of their possessions.

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[75] Zehnacker and Petit, *Cabinet*, 11. ("*Mais le catalogue ne décrit ni les objets ethnographiques, qui ont pourtant frappée les contemporains et que l'on voit nettement gravés sur les planches de Ertinger, ni les instruments d'optique…*")

[76] Zehnacker and Petit, *Cabinet*, 19. ("*Les tableaux, la maquette de navire, la pendule ou le miroir d'Anne de Bretagne que l'on y voit distinctement, ne sont pas ou à peine mentionnés dans le texte.*")

Private collections, including cabinets of curiosities, were seen as symbols of the extravagance and excesses of the *ancien régime*. Many of the objects found in cabinets of curiosities were considered by the Revolutionaries as excesses; they were incompatible with the new, rational order being established and the concept of greater social equality.

In August of 1789, the National Constituent Assembly abolished the feudal system completely. These August Decrees got rid of the rights of land ownership of the nobility and the tithes collected by the Catholic Church. This then gave the green light to revolutionaries to attack chateaux belonging to nobles and to seize the objects within them. On the second of November 1789, the assembly decreed that all properties belonging to the Church were now at the disposition of the Nation. The text was drafted by Honoré-Gabriel Riqueti, comte de Mirabeau, a Member of the National Assembly of France. Private and ecclesiastical collections were seized, and their contents were either sold at public auctions, destroyed, or dispersed to museums and other public institutions. Some nobles and clergy were able to protect their collections by hiding them or by selling them to other collectors, but many lost their collections completely.[77]

An important issue about what the Revolutionaries did with items from the Church and nobility revolved around what they thought their own goals and the goals of the items were. The famous Abbé Grégoire summed up this issue: "[...] the Republic must accept (*assumer*) the history of the Nation; to want to erase it is a form of barbarity."[78] On the one hand, items could be destroyed. For example, the statues of the kings at Notre Dame de Paris were "decapitated"

[77] Patrick Mauriès, *Cabinets of Curiosities*, Compact ed, (London; New York, New York: Thames and Hudson), 2019, 24.

[78] Schaer, *L'invention*, 56. "*La république doit assumer l'histoire de la Nation, vouloir l'effacer, c'est revenir à la barbarie.*"

and removed.[79] On the other hand, during the start of the French Revolution, the idea of *biens nationaux* took form. This term refers to the idea that all was done for the good of the nation. The confiscation of properties of the Church, the aristocracy, and the monarchy could edify the people, for example by instructing them about the past and helping them to imagine a new future. Furthermore, scholars suggest that the reason some objects were saved and conserved was due to their aesthetic value.[80] Revolutionaries did not necessarily want to see history completely erased; their purpose was to replace the *ancien régime*. The Republic created a place of (supposed) neutrality by confiscating objects and moving them to places void of the significance of religion, the feudal system, and the monarchy.[81]

Many objects from the royal collection were transferred, for instance, to the dépot du Louvre where they were to be kept and conserved.[82] The Revolutionaries realized that through the motive of instruction, they could maintain these objects and relinquish the underlying monarchical and religious associations of them. The Revolution's focus on the common good and the promotion of universal learning from the arts and sciences led to the nationalization of many private collections, including cabinets of curiosities. This meant that these collections were taken over by the state and often made available for the public to view.

It is important to point out that cabinets of curiosities, like other treasures housed in palaces and aristocratic homes, were also undermined during the Revolution because of indirect reasons, as opposed to direct assaults against them. The social instabilities that triggered

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[79] Schaer, *L'invention*, 56.

[80] Schaer, *L'invention*, 53. Charles Maurice de Talleyrand-Périgord gave a statement expressing his opinion about the conservation of these objects.

[81] Schaer, *L'invention*, 51.

[82] Schaer, *L'invention*, 55.

economic troubles for the aristocracy contributed to the decline of cabinets of curiosities. If their art was not seized, then other parts of their estates were. Aristocrats had more pressing concerns than collecting and displaying the exotic objects they had amassed over the years. Furthermore, they had to worry about their lives and very often had to flee their estates and their collections.[83]

The Revolution and the Cabinet of Sainte Geneviève

In 1789, cabinets of curiosities were a well-established entity throughout Europe. The Augustinian's cabinet of curiosities at the Library Sainte Geneviève was still a significant part of the Abbey. The Augustinian priests had traveled throughout the world embarking on scientific investigations and would return with items to add to the collection.[84] As learned priests devoted to teaching others, they sought to continue the cultivation of knowledge throughout Europe by adding new items of interest from the past or from distant lands. When the French Revolution began, the priests understood the tumultuous grounds they were on. They feared that their place of worship would be taken from them, not to mention their lives.

The priests reached out to the Mayor of Paris to make a deal. They offered the library's collection and the cabinet of curiosities in exchange for them to continue to gather in service at the Church of Sainte Geneviève. The request by the priests was done in vain, because the items of the cabinet already belonged to the Nation, according to the Revolutionaries. Subsequently, the collection was then written up by the Revolutionary commissioners (*commissions*

[83] François-René de Chateaubriand serves as a good example of an aristocrat who fled France during the Revolution. He left behind his estate in Bretagne and its treasures and traveled to North America. *Chateaubriand's Travels in America* translated by Richard Switzer.

[84] Zehnacker and Petit, *Cabinet*, 15.

révolutionnaires). From the list, we know that during this time nearly all of the collection from the library remained intact, and the library collection was even said to be enriched during this time.[85] However, the objects from the cabinet of curiosities began to be dispersed. Even though the Library was fortunate to be spared from the surrounding acts of violence, the cabinet which had been esteemed throughout Europe was now amputated (*amputee*). The disassembling of the collection had begun and the cabinet of curiosities of Sainte Geneviève took on a new shape and form.

The two parts of the cabinet, *naturalia* and *artificialia*, were dispersed separately. The noble objects from the *salon des antiques* were housed in the Cabinet of Medals of the National Library in 1793, and subsequently the antiques joined them in February of 1797.[86] The National Library received 7,000 Roman coins, 842 of which were in gold, and 10,000 antique or modern metals and other items.[87]

On the other hand, natural history objects and the *sauvageries* were neglected.[88] Apart from the *sauvageries*, the pastel portraits of the Kings, the natural history objects, and the stucco table, the Cabinet was no longer intact by 1797. As to be expected, the portraits of the Kings of France were shut away in an armoire.[89]

By 1797, the *sauvageries* were left alone and behind at the Sainte Geneviève location. Though some of them remained next to the library in the same building, the shells and the

[85] Zehnacker and Petit, *Cabinet*, 5.

[86] Zehnacker and Petit, *Cabinet*, 26.

[87] Zehnacker and Petit, *Cabinet*, 15. *La Bibliothèque Nationale* by Louis Vachard

[88] Zehnacker and Petit, *Cabinet*, 26.

[89] Zehnacker and Petit, *Cabinet*, 138.

minerals were transferred to the college, installed in the Abbey, and turned over to the state.[90] When the objects were at the college, they acted as illustrations for scientific lessons and demonstrations. The collection had been disassembled and as Zehnacker states "It is (was) the end of the cabinet of curiosities as a whole entity."[91]

After the Revolution the institution of the museum began to take shape, and cabinets of curiosities became an artifact of the past. Many suggest that the rise of museums was in fact thanks to the cabinets of curiosities and collections of the aristocracy and the Church. For example, Cláudia Martins argues that cabinets of curiosities, the French Revolution and its ideals gave rise to the first public museums. She claims that it provoked the definition of museums, which were designed to act as "an ally to combat myths, dogmata and superstitions."[92] If museums were to serve as a propaganda tool of the Republic, then they would have to be open to all. Martin states how many consider the Louvre to be the very icon of public museums; the converted king's palace opened for all on the tenth of August 1793.

As cabinets of curiosities took on many different forms, the Louvre did as well. In 1827, Charles X opened the Museum of the Navy at the Louvre. The museum displayed miniature mock-ups of navy ships as well as ethnographic pieces from around the globe, even as far as the Island of Vanikoro.[93] In 1833, Pierre Zédé, the curator of the Museum of the Navy at the Louvre, tried in vain to unite all the ethnographic objects "found" by navigators and housed at the Museum of Natural History in the former Jardin du Roi and those remaining behind at the

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[90] Zehnacker and Petit, *Cabinet*, 26. Also, today the spot of the college is the current Lycée Henri IV.

[91] Zehnacker and Petit, *Cabinet*, 15. ("*C'est la fin du Cabinet de curiosités en tant qu'entité.*")

[92] Cláudia Martins, "Was Culture a Commodity 'all' Victorians could Afford? – Notes on the First British Public Museums," *Anglo Saxonica* 19, no. 1 (2021), 3.

[93] Schaer, *L'invention*, 96.

Library of Sainte Geneviève. It turns out that the administrator of the library falsely claimed that everything had been given to the Royal Library.[94] In 1848, the Cabinet of Medals at the National Library, which previously held the objects from the *salon des antiques* from the cabinet at Sainte Geneviève, transferred the arms of Henri II to the Museum of Artillery (Museum of the Army).[95] In 1876, the Museum of the Navy became the Museum of Ethnography at the Palace of Trocadero. According to Zehnacker's chronological timeline, the Museum of Ethnography at the Palace of Trocadero received medals from China and East India and some American objects from the Bibliothèque Nationale in 1879; whether that includes some of the original items from the collection of Sainte Geneviève remains ambiguous. Some of the *naturalia* from Sainte Geneviève were sent to the Museum of Natural History. Other former objects from Sainte Geneviève continued to be shifted around despite objections from administrators of the Library: the Medal of Crescent and the bust of Louis d'Orléans, which had been at the National Library since 1793, found a new home at the Petit Palais during the Universal Exposition.[96] In 1907, a part of the Ancient Egyptian collection at the Cabinet of Medals of the National Library was placed in the Ancient Egyptian collection at the Louvre, including one canopic jar.

In the early part of the twentieth century other items from the Cabinet of Medals at the National Library will continue to be distributed to other museums. And again, whether this included items from the Sainte Geneviève collection remains unclear. What is certain is that in 1926 the Library of Sainte Geneviève gave its large map of the moon to the Observatory of Paris, and in 1933 the reserve room of the Library of Sainte Geneviève was rearranged to

[94] Zehnacker and Petit, *Cabinet*, 13.

[95] Zehnacker and Petit, *Cabinet*, 15.

[96] Zehnacker and Petit, *Cabinet*, 139.

accommodate the book collection of Jacques Doucet. Simultaneously, the vestibule became a reading room and the *sauvageries* were put away in boxes.[97]

Some of these *sauvageries* were put back on display in 1951 and were studied by scholars on site. Not all the original items from the library's *sauvageries* collection were appreciated. In 1952, the Museum of the Man tried in vain to relinquish its ownership of the ethnographic objects from the Sainte Geneviève collection.[98] Be that as it may, there was still some interest in the *sauvageries* collection: in 1958 three ethnographic objects from the original library's collection were included in the show entitled, *Trésors d'archéologie américaine et océanienne at the Museum of Dobrée at Nantes*. Objects moved frequently from the Sainte Geneviève Library to other institutions, and the cabinet as conceived by Claude du Molinet had become unrecognizable.

Re-Assembling the Cabinet: The 1989 Bicentennial

In the twentieth century, the Cabinet of Curiosities of Sainte Geneviève took on a new form. During the bicentennial anniversary of the Revolution of 1789, librarians and curators at the Library of Sainte Geneviève decided not only to exhibit the library's book collection but also to try to reassemble the original collection of the cabinet. As discussed previously, the once notable Cabinet of Curiosities of Sainte Geneviève was torn apart during the Revolutionary period; its medals and objects, and later, its natural history specimens were dispersed. Only the *sauvageries* and a few other objects remained attached to the library collection. The exhibition of

[97] Zehnacker and Petit, *Cabinet*, 140.

[98] Zehnacker and Petit, *Cabinet*, 140. ("*Le Musée de l'homme tente, sans succès, de se faire déposer les objets ethnographiques de Sainte Geneviève*")

1989 and the accompanying catalog meant that curators and librarians could bring to life, once again, the splendor of the collection that had been disassembled. It is worth mentioning that the cabinet of curiosities was, ironically, brought back together, in part, during the bicentennial of the very event that caused its diss assembling.

According to Geneviève Boisard, author of the preface of the 1989 catalog, Du Molinet's cabinet of curiosities had never really been studied prior to the bicentennial celebration.[99] In order to reassemble the cabinet as closely as possible its pre-Revolutionary state(s), the curators borrowed a large number of objects in the original collection from the Cabinet of Medals at the Bibliothèque Nationale. They also borrowed from the Natural History Museum in Paris several specimens similar to those that would have been housed at the Cabinet of Sainte Geneviève. Finally, the Cluny Museum even lent a unicorn tusk (*une corne de licorne*).[100]

[99] Zehnacker and Petit, *Cabinet*, 85.

[100] Zehnacker and Petit, *Cabinet*, 5.

Conclusion

Throughout this thesis, I have focused on two lines of argument. I put forth first that Du Molinet's cabinet of curiosities is defined by a precarious existence of assembling, disassembling, and reassembling, because collectors and curators did not fully understand so many of the cabinet's ethnographic objects. (Again, the mere fact that objects were labeled as curiosities reveals a lack of understanding.) I also argued that these objects remained in a no-man's land of the cabinet. They were neither there (in the exotic lands) nor here (in Europe). They had no identity save for *sauvageries*. This strange makeup of the cabinet made for a most curious cabinet.

The attempt to reassemble the Library's cabinet of curiosities at the end of the twentieth century spurs us to ask what lessons do cabinets offer us today and how they might differ from museums. In his edited and untranslated catalog *Les musées sont des mondes* (*Museums are Worlds*), the Nobel-Prize winning post-colonial author J.M.G. Le Clézio explains his thought process behind the creation of the 2011 exhibition titled *Les musées sont des mondes* he curated at the Louvre. Le Clézio took objects from around the world and constructed an exhibition. He displayed the works of art by theme as opposed to by culture, chronology, or place. He thus disrupted the rigid rules of genre, time, and place of origin of objects in a museum.[101] The way he curated these objects allowed viewers to see how works of art could interact in novel ways with other objects that would not have otherwise been together.

Le Clézio's curated show proposed a more inspirational rendition of the world, one that is defined by different cultures dialoguing among themselves rather than being segregated away.

[101] Loyrette in Marie-Laure Bernadac, J. M. G. Le Clézio, Jean-Marc Terrasse, Susana Guimaraes, Martine Lusardy, André Delpuech, Hélène Joubert, et al, *Les Musées Sont Des Mondes* (Musée du Louvre, 2011), 16.

Le Clézio did not simply disrupt the rigid ideas of museums by his curated show. He also put pressure on the concept of museums by offering new theoretical positions. He maintains for instance that today museums are a materialization of memory.[102] In other words, they are a physical construction of a record of the past assembled in a single room or building. They can serve moreover as a no man's land or all lands where cultures meet.[103]

To illustrate this point, Le Clézio brings up the story of the staggering question posed to the Chief of the Nation Apma on the Island of Pentecôte. Westerners asked the Chief if they had a museum on their island. He responded, sir, our whole island is a museum.[104] This definition of a museum demolishes the silos of *naturalia* and *artificilia*. It demolishes buildings or rooms and offers cultural and natural objects the possibility to be housed in a more culturally (and naturally) appropriate place. It demolishes the boundaries between art and ethnography, minor art and major art. In short, for Le Clézio, as for André Malraux, in art there is no hierarchy.[105] If we take the Apma Chief's response stated above and reverse Le Clézio's "*Les musées sont des mondes*", it becomes the expression, "the world is a museum". The world becomes a place that houses and displays all different objects from all cultures. The museum does not have to be a neoclassical monument with Doric columns and white marble. If the world is a museum, the latter can take on any form and shape.

If we take these ideas as a starting point, we could replace the term "museum" with "cabinet of curiosities". The phrase would read: cabinets of curiosities are the world. We could

[102] Le Clézio et al., *Musées*, 23.

[103] Le Clézio et al., *Musées*, 22.

[104] Le Clézio et al., *Musées*, 24.

[105] Bernadac in Le Clézio et al., *Musées*, 51.

also put forward: the world is a cabinet of curiosities. The history of cabinets of curiosities, which we have explored in this thesis, gives us reason to experiment with Le Clézio's saying. First, cabinets encompassed both natural and artificial objects. They mimicked the world more than a fine-arts museum. Second, cabinets of curiosities held objects from around the world. They thus mirrored more the actual diversity of the world. Third, cabinets of curiosities amounted to an accumulation of different ideas expressed through different objects from different cultures and times, like the world itself. For these three reasons the motto of "cabinets of curiosities are the world" is a better fit than Le Clézio's saying "museums are the world".

If we take our edited adage a step further and reverse it, we get the expression, "the world is a cabinet of curiosities". Let us break down this statement by concentrating on the word "curiosities". On the one hand, the term has a derogatory connotation, as alluded to previously. It has been used to describe art from non-Western cultures and from nature and has been employed to describe the exotic and "weird". The expression "curiosities" also points to an unwillingness to study extensively non-Western objects and a readiness to assign a quick label. On the other hand, collectors such as Du Molinet might not have had easy access to information about objects from other cultures. The use of the term "curiosities" is more a sign of ignorance than arrogance. Moreover, I consider the word in a way that speaks to the wonder and intrigue of the world. There is nothing wrong with being curious. The term invites us to shed our myopia. It invites us to look further towards other cultures. It invites us to look deeper into ourselves, questioning and pondering ideas that are so ingrained within our mind.

IMAGES

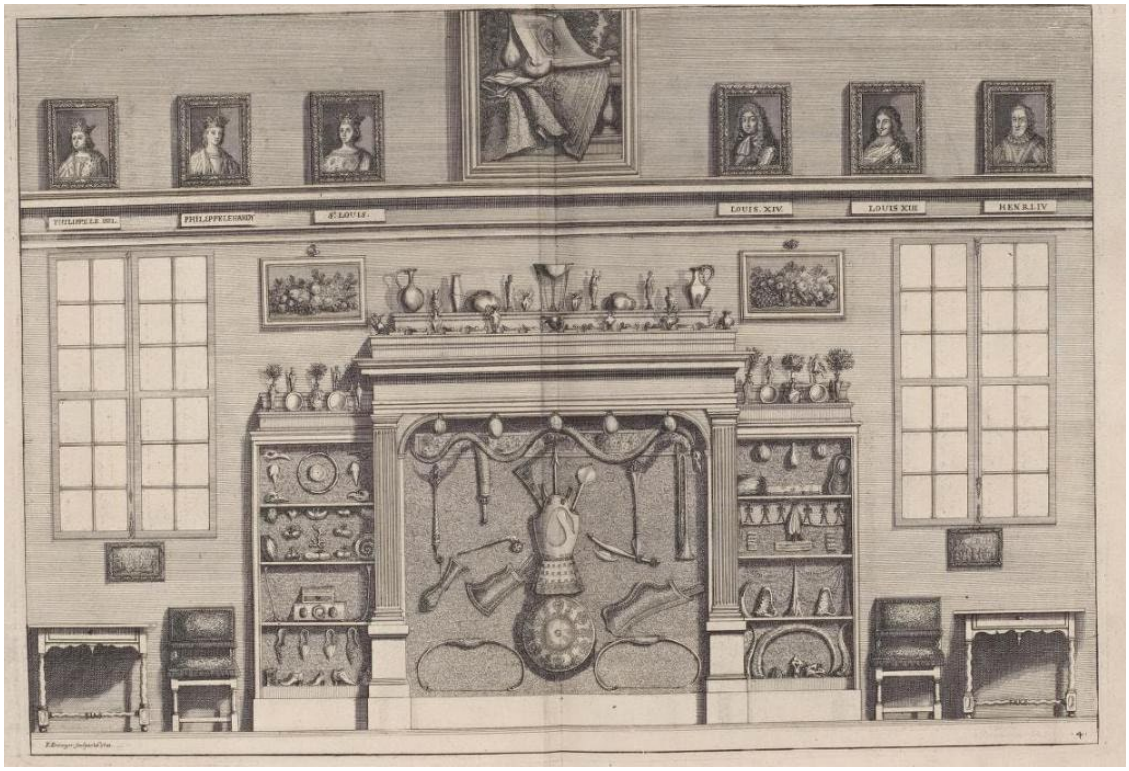

Figure 1: François Ertinger, *View of the alcove of the cabinet*, engraving, 1692, Bibliothèque Sainte Geneviève.

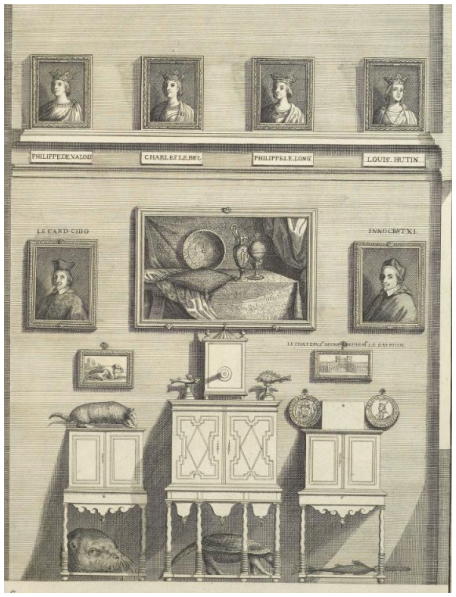

Figure 2: François Ertinger, *View of the cabinet*, engraving, 1692, Bibliothèque Sainte Geneviève.

Figure 3: François Ertinger, *View of the cabinet*, engraving, 1692, Bibliothèque Sainte Geneviève.

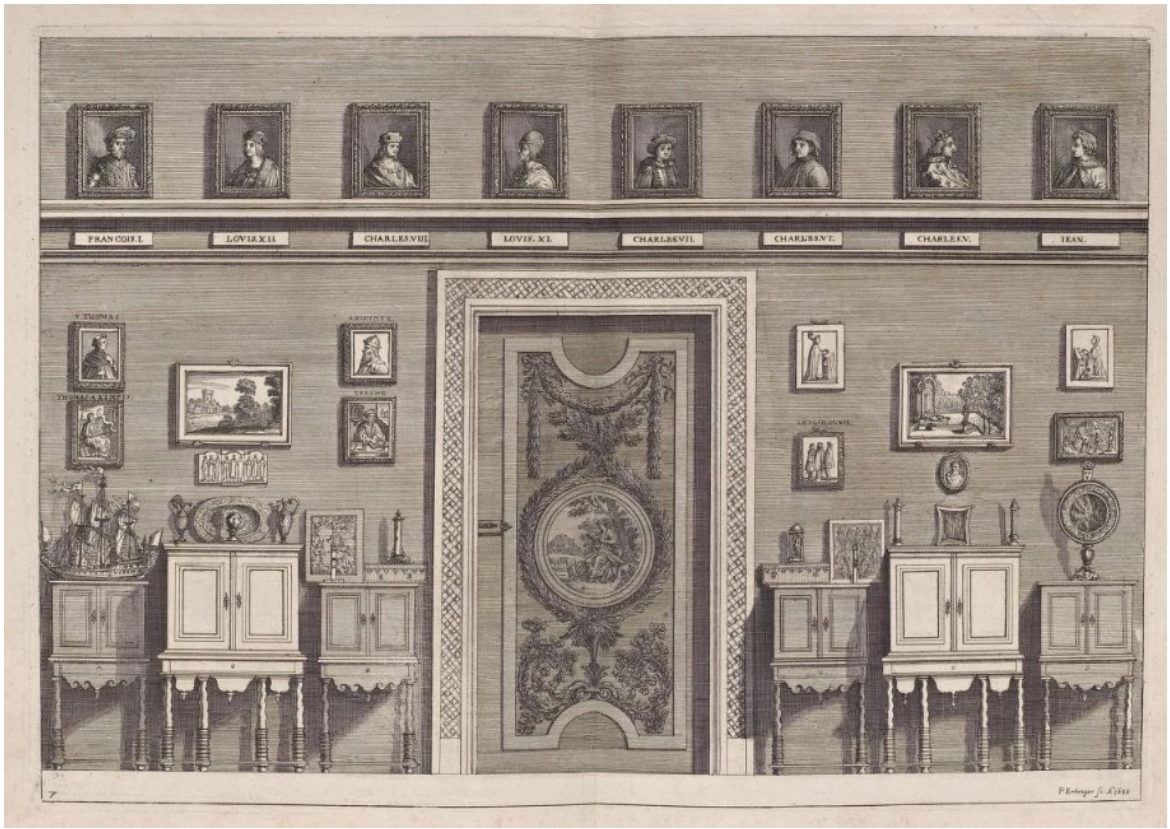

Figure 4: François Ertinger, *View of the wall of the portraits of the Kings*, engraving, 1692, Bibliothèque Sainte Geneviève.

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VITA

Marc Lalonde-Romano was born in Salt Lake City, Utah, on February 27, 1995. They studied economics and the University of Texas at Austin and graduated in May 2018. The following October they began working at the San Antonio Museum of Art. They spent three years working in the education department before applying to graduate school. In August 2021 they enrolled in Texas Christian Universities art history master's program. In May 2023, they received a Master of Arts degree in Art History.

ABSTRACT

THE EVOLUTION OF THE CABINET OF CURIOSITIES OF CLAUDE DU MOLINET

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The cabinet of curiosities of Claude Du Molinet (1620-1687), housed at the Bibliothèque Sainte Geneviève in Paris, provides a salient example of a cabinet of curiosities, because of its past of being assembled, dissembled, and reassembled. This thesis provides a historical synthesis of Du Molinet's cabinet by providing descriptions of it during these phases. A critical analysis of the cabinet is also provided, focusing on two arguments. It is maintained that Du Molinet's cabinet is defined by this precarious existence of assembling, disassembling, and reassembling, because collectors did not understand many of the cabinet's ethnographic objects. It is argued moreover that these objects remained in a no-man's land of the cabinet. They were neither there (the exotic lands) nor here (Europe). They had no identity, except for *sauvageries*. This makeup of the cabinet makes for a most curious cabinet that might help us to contemplate differently the definition of museums today.