

# The Collector, Dealer and Researcher Wilhelm Bauer

## Approaching Scholarly Collecting in Mexico in the Early 20<sup>th</sup> Century

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**Abstract.** Wilhelm Bauer was a German researcher, collector and dealer particularly of Indigenous material culture who made a living in Mexico between 1901 and 1912. His life and work were largely influenced by his connection to the Königliches Museum für Völkerkunde in Berlin and Eduard Seler, with whom he had a special relationship. While maintaining close ties with Berlin, he also contributed to archaeological, ethnographic and photographic collections of scholars and museums in Europe, the USA and Mexico. Based on archival research in the Ethnologisches Museum Berlin and beyond, this article presents new insights into Bauer's biography and discusses his contacts with key figures in Americanist studies of his time. The article approaches Bauer as embedded in scholarly networks by working closely with the historical correspondence. It elaborates how Bauer earned a living in Mexico largely by establishing himself in a transnational network of scholarly collecting, to which he offered his services and even set up a business for antiquities, among other things. One central interest is the relationship with Eduard Seler, who defined his interconnected academic and economic ambitions. The article contributes to the understanding of the role of intermediaries in a global network of collectors and institutions at the beginning of the 20<sup>th</sup> century.

[Ethnographic and archaeological collecting, Americanist studies, Wilhelm Bauer, Königliches Museum für Völkerkunde, Eduard Seler]

### Introduction

Prussian archives are renowned for their meticulous order, and in Berlin's former Königliches Museum für Völkerkunde (KMV; Royal Museum of Ethnology), the predecessor of today's Ethnologisches Museum (EM), only a few collectors who provided items for the American Department could claim to have a file named after them. One of them was Wilhelm Bauer, whose particular relationship with the KMV as an agent and representative resulted in extensive correspondence and about 3,400 objects, most of which entered the museum between 1901 and 1908. While Bauer lived in many different places and had various occupations throughout his life, this article focuses on understanding his role as a collector, dealer and researcher. The case of Bauer shows how collecting was connected to an ambivalent scholarly identity, which was sometimes strategically used to earn a living.

Bauer is well-known among European and North American ethnographic museums due to having sold archaeological and ethnographic objects, as well as photographs to their collections (Sellen and König 2015: 398). There are several studies on materials related to Bauer. In Europe this includes collections in German museums such as in Berlin (Gaida 2011; Gyarmati 2006; König 2007; Schuler-Schömig 1970), Leipzig (Boot 1964), Bremen (König and Kröfges 2000) and Stuttgart (Gyarmati 2006), but also collections in museums in Budapest, Hungary (Gyarmati 2006, 2008, 2009; Péntek 2024), and Stockholm, Sweden (García *et al.* in press). In the USA, objects of Bauer can be found in the American Museum of Natural History in New York, and the National Museum of Natural History, Smithsonian Institution, Washington D.C. (Smith 2001). Many more names of museums and private collectors from Europe, the USA and Mexico can be found in Bauer's correspondence with the KMV and others, although their respective relationship requires further research. While his impact on the museum world is undisputable and first comprehensive studies on him have been conducted (Gyarmati 2006, 2008, 2009), relatively little is known about his life.<sup>1</sup>

<sup>1</sup> Throughout his life, Wilhelm Bauer used different versions of his name, like the Spanish form Guillermo in Mexico for his first name, and in later years he adopted the double surname Bauer-Thoma. At the beginning of research, it was a challenge to identify the person Bauer due to the limited information available about his life, his relatively common name and the many variations. A secure identification was possible by tracing his date and place of birth using a reference to Bauer's doctoral thesis in internal museum communications and relating this to documents in the university archives in Berne and Berlin. Based on this, a more complete picture can be presented. Examining the early years of Wilhelm Bauer's career as a scholarly collector and dealer sheds light on the interests at play in the museum and the qualities sought in a researcher and collector at that time. The surname of his mother is Thoma. While early use might have been motivated by using the two surnames of the parents in Mexico, he later uses the double name even in German contexts.

So far Bauer has been characterized as a former teacher who became a dedicated collector in Mexico (König 2007: 41), and as a dealer with scientific ambitions (Gyarmati 2006: 47). Indeed, he was a trained philosopher who went on to become a noteworthy side-figure in early Americanist studies in Germany, writing early ethnographic works on the Mazatecs (Bauer 1908), Mixes and Zapotecs (Bauer 1916). His relationship with the KMV, and particularly with Eduard Seler (1849–1922), who acted as a mentor and gate-keeper, was instrumental in this. Although there is abundant research on Seler and other key figures within the institution, much less is known about the global network of scholars, collectors and travellers they relied on.

This article aims to better understand Wilhelm Bauer and his relationship with the KMV, especially with Eduard Seler. Drawing on sources in the historical archive of the EM and beyond, new biographical insights are contextualized within the framework of scholarly collecting of Indigenous material culture and the transnational networks of the time. Approaching the historical correspondences from a qualitative view allows for a greater understanding of the motives and practices involved. This is intended to serve as a basis for future work on Bauer's activities as a collector and dealer of archaeological and ethnographic objects, as well as his research.

First, Bauer's activities and formation are contextualized in the transnational network of scholarly collecting. Then, the article depicts how Bauer became an Americanist scholar and dealer of material culture, becoming entangled with the Berlin museum and academia in the process. It presents how Bauer established himself in Mexico by making use of various economic strategies, including an antiquities business. The article then turns its attention to the relationship between Bauer and Seler, shedding light on their interpersonal dependencies and conflicts. Finally, it reflects on Bauer's case as a point of departure for further research.

This publication has its origins in a collaborative project on the Mazatec ethnographic collection of Wilhelm Bauer in Berlin between the Ethnologisches Museum, Staatliche Museen zu Berlin, Stiftung Preußischer Kulturbesitz, and the Biblioteca de Investigación Juan de Córdova, Fundación Alfredo Harp Helú Oaxaca, Mexico. The collaboration has various outcomes, including the travelling exhibition “Mazatec Presence in Berlin: On the traces of Wilhelm Bauer, 1903–1908” which was inaugurated in the Centro Cultural San Pablo, Oaxaca in May 2025.<sup>2</sup>

## Tracing Bauer as a Scholarly Collector

One central insight of the study of Bauer's life and work is that his activities as a collector, dealer and researcher cannot be understood separately, but need to be seen as joint practices in the context of a transnational scholarly network. It was his general interest especially in Indigenous cultures which enabled Bauer to partly make a living as a scholarly collector in Mexico between 1901 and 1912. Bauer gathered materiality of different kinds and in different ways: material of archaeological interest, including rare instances of human remains, collections of everyday and ritual objects to which he added notes on his linguistic and ethnographic observations, as well as books and manuscripts.<sup>3</sup>

The institutionalization of ethnology (“Völkerkunde”) in Berlin was closely connected with Adolf Bastian (1826–1905). Bastian contributed significantly to the foundation of the independent KMV in 1873, as well as of the scientific society “Berliner Gesellschaft für Anthropologie, Ethnologie und Urgeschichte” (BGAEU) and its journal “Zeitschrift für Ethnologie”. Part of this academic environment and someone who shared the passion for collecting with Bastian was Eduard Seler (1849–1922), who in 1899 became the first professor of American languages, ethnology and archaeology (“Amerikanische Sprachen, Völkerkunde und Altertumskunde”) in Berlin and was director of the American Depart-

<sup>2</sup> Original title: *Presencia Mazateca en Berlín: Tras las huellas de Wilhelm Bauer, 1903–1908*. The project is under the lead of Ute Schüren, curator of the Mesoamerican Collection of the Ethnologisches Museum and Sebastián (Bas) van Doesburg, one of the directors of the Biblioteca Juan de Córdova. In 2024, a fellowship from CoMuse: *The Collaborative Museum* by the Ethnologisches Museum enabled project member Gabriela García to study the collection in Berlin. Important historic research on Bauer and his travels in Mexico was done by Demián Ortiz Maciel, coordinator of exhibitions at the Biblioteca Juan de Córdova. On the exhibition see, for example, García *et al.* 2024 and García *et al.* in press.

<sup>3</sup> For example, Historical Archive of the Ethnologisches Museum, I/MV 0599 I B 043 Amerika, E 664/1902, letter Wilhelm Bauer to Eduard Seler, Mexico City, 3 May 1902, pp. 1–4.



**Fig. 1** Bauer posing on a horse with an unknown Mazatec man, 1903, photograph: Ibero-Amerikanisches Institut, Stiftung Preußischer Kulturbesitz, Berlin.

ment of the KMV from 1904 (Dürr and Mühlischlegel 2022: 13–15). Seler was probably the most prominent Americanist in Germany of his time, being a professor, an employee of the museum, and member of the important societies.

At that time, ethnographic and archaeological collecting as well as documenting information was generally considered not only a race against time, as Indigenous ways of living were thought to become extinct,<sup>4</sup> but also a competitive race between collecting scholars and institutions (Penny 2002; López Jaúregui 2020). For instance, in Germany demands for financing research travels and collections had been argued for by Adolf Bastian with nationalist arguments, putting Germany in relation to existing collections like in the USA (Fischer 2001: 156–157). In this context, Bauer became an intermediary with a particularly close relationship to the KMV, to which he would have a distinct relationship as an agent and representative between 1901 and 1910, with short interruptions.<sup>5</sup>

**4** Bauer himself makes explicit reference to this idea, emphasizing that the change through mundane and religious reformations and unifications would eradicate the customs of the Indigenous population—and that ethnological work would have to be conducted soon. “Only a limited amount of time remains for promising ethnological research in Mexico. The efforts at reform and standardisation by the secular and ecclesiastical authorities in the

country, which have become particularly apparent in recent years, as well as the clearly perceptible invasion of the North American Union, are likely to bring about decisive changes in the customs and habits of the Indians in the foreseeable future, with which the last remnants of one of the most interesting cultures will disappear.” Original: “Nur eine beschränkte Zeit bleibt noch der ethnologischen Forschung in Mexiko zu aussichts-

voller Thätigkeit. Die besonders in den letzten Jahren hervorgetretenen Reformierungs- und Uniformierungsbestrebungen der weltlichen und geistlichen Behörden im Lande selbst auch die deutlich fühlbare Invasion der nordamerikanischen Union dürften in absehbarer Zeit entschiedene Wandlungen gerade der Sitten und Gewohnheiten der Indianer herbeiführen, mit denen zugleich die letzten Überreste einer der interessantesten Kulturen da-

hinschweigen werden.” Historical Archive of the Ethnologisches Museum, I/MV 0599 I B 043 Amerika, E 664/1902, letter Wilhelm Bauer to General-Verwaltung of the KMV, Mexico City, 27 November 1901, p. 4.

**5** Historical Archive of the Ethnologisches Museum, I/MV 0554 I B 042 Amerika, E 326/1927, letter Ernst Vatter to Karl Theodor Preuss, Frankfurt a. M., 18 March 1927, p. 1.

## Becoming a Collector for the Königliches Museum für Völkerkunde

Wilhelm Bauer was born on the 25 January 1871 in Hoechst am Main.<sup>6</sup> He attended high school (Gymnasium) in Frankfurt am Main.<sup>7</sup> In October 1892, he began to study philosophy at the University in Berlin, concluding in November 1894.<sup>8</sup> Bauer completed his dissertation under Ludwig Stein in Berne, Switzerland, and was awarded a doctorate in philosophy with *magna cum laude* in 1896.<sup>9</sup> His thesis was published under the title “Der ältere Pythagoreismus” (Bauer 1897) and was referenced in the museum’s internal communications in 1901 as evidence of his good academic training.<sup>10</sup> In 1898, Bauer moved to Mexico to teach at the German school in Mexico City for two and a half years, returning to Berlin in 1901.<sup>11</sup>

That was the time the connection between him and the KMV began. In 1901, he studied with Eduard Seler four to five months and worked as a volunteer at the Berlin Museum on the Uhde collection.<sup>12</sup> Bauer also sold to the museum a small collection of archaeological pieces which he had brought from Mexico.<sup>13</sup> A museum employee, probably Karl von den Steinen (1855–1929), identified him as an ideal candidate to collect items for the museum:

On closer examination of the situation, Prof. Seler and I have come to the conclusion that Dr Bauer – who has an excellent education [...], who knows the country and speaks Spanish fluently – would be eminently suitable to undertake the following journey [to Mexico; Y. D.] in the interests of the museum[.] I would like to add that Dr Bauer volunteered for several months to help with the classification of the Uhde collection and proved to be very capable of observing ethnographic objects, that he has already put together a small archaeological collection over there on his own initiative and that he has read Aztec texts here with Prof. Seler at the university.<sup>14</sup>

The staff thus recognised Bauer’s presence in Berlin as an opportunity to recruit a knowledgeable and linguistically proficient collector for “archaeological and ethnological tasks”.<sup>15</sup> Bauer received a certificate presenting him as an “agent and representative” of the KMV with the objective of conducting ethnological and linguistic studies and asking the Mexican authorities “to help Bauer accomplish this task” (see Fig. 2).<sup>16</sup>

**6** Staatsarchiv des Kantons Bern, STABE BB 05.10.1703, p. 255.

**7** Humboldt-Universität zu Berlin, Universitätsarchiv, Abgangszeugnisse (1811–1926), Abgangszeugnis, p. 1.

**8** Humboldt-Universität zu Berlin, Universitätsarchiv, Studentenliste Philosophische Fakultät 1810–1907, p. 83. Rektorat, p. 18; Matrikelbuch 1891–1893, 82.–83. Rektorat, p. 102.

**9** Staatsarchiv des Kantons Bern, STABE BB 05.10.1703, pp. 251, 255.

**10** Historical Archive of the Ethnologisches Museum Berlin, I/MV 0599 I B 043 Amerika, E 771/1901, letter Karl von den Steinen to unknown, Berlin, 29 July 1901, p. 2.

**11** Historical Archive of the Field Museum, Chicago, letter Wilhelm Bauer to George A. Dorsey, un-

known place, 5 July 1904, p. 4. Historical Archive of the Ethnologisches Museum, I/MV 0559 I B 037 Amerika, E 625/1913, Berlin, letter Wilhelm Bauer to Wilhelm von Bode, Berlin, 7 April 1913, p. 1.

**12** Historical Archive of the Ethnologisches Museum Berlin, I/MV 0559 I B 037 Amerika, E 625/1913, Berlin, letter Wilhelm Bauer to Wilhelm von Bode, p. 1. Carl Adolf Uhde (1792–1856) was a collector of archaeological material from Mexico whose collection was acquired by the Brandenburg–Prussian Kunstkammer (chamber of art) and had become part of the KMV.

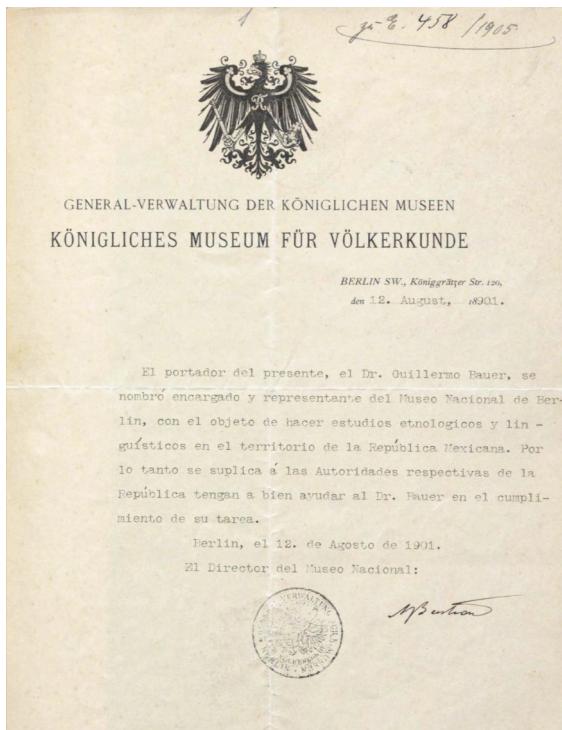
**13** Historical Archive of the Ethnologisches Museum, I/MV 0559 I B 037 Amerika, E 625/1913, letter Wilhelm Bauer to Wilhelm von Bode, Berlin, 7 April 1913, p. 1.

**14** “Bei näherer Prüfung der Sachlage haben Herr Prof. Seler und ich die Ueberzeugung gewonnen, dass Herr Dr. Bauer – der eine vorzügliche Bildung besitzt [...], der das Land kennt und spanisch flüssig spricht, – in hervorragender Weise geeignet wäre, die folgende in Reise [nach Mexiko; Y. D.] im Interesse des Museums zu unternehmen[.] Ich füge hinzu, dass Herr Dr. Bauer mehrere Monate bei Einordnung der Uhdeschen Sammlung freiwillig geholfen und sich dabei sehr für die Beobachtung ethnographischer Objekte befähigt erwiesen, dass er selbst aus eignem Antriebe drüber schon eine kleine archaeologische Sammlung angelegt und dass er hier mit Hrn. Prof. Seler im Kolleg aztekische Texte gelesen hat.” Historical Archive of the Ethnolo-

gisches Museum, I/MV 0599 I B 043 Amerika, E 771/1901, Karl von den Steinen (?) to unknown, Berlin, 1901, pp. 1–2. Probably, he participated in the class “Explanation of selected Mexican texts” (“Erläuterung ausgewählter mexikanischer Texte”) (Thiemer–Sachse 2001: 209).

**15** Historical Archive of the Ethnologisches Museum, I/MV 0599 I B 043 Amerika, E 771/1901, Karl von den Steinen to unknown, Berlin, 29 July 1901, pp. 1–5.

**16** “The bearer of this letter, Dr. Guillermo Bauer, has been appointed agent and representative of the Königliches Museum für Völkerkunde in Berlin, with the aim of conducting ethnological and linguistic studies in the territory of the Mexican Republic. Therefore, we kindly request that the respec-



**Fig. 2** One of the writings by the KMV declaring Bauer agent and representative.<sup>17</sup>

The American Department of the museum, at that time led by von den Steinen, and Bauer in particular, seem to have been interested in a long-term collaboration from the outset. For now, however, Bauer received 1,200 German marks for his travel to Mexico and to conduct a trip to the area southeast of Mexico City, on the border between Puebla and Oaxaca, which had recently become accessible due to new coffee plantations and had been identified as a “new source of fruitful study and collecting activities”.<sup>18</sup> The money came from the *Ethnologisches Hilfssomitee* (Ethnological Support Committee), a society which provided financial support for research. In September 1901, Bauer returned to Mexico<sup>19</sup> at the museum’s expense and began systematically collecting items for the KMV, also to pay back the cost of his journey.

## Making a Living in Mexico

In Mexico City, Bauer established himself first in Calle de Espíritu Santo 7 (1902–1905), and then in Tacubaya (1905–1910/12?). While initially he probably relied on the network he had built during his time as a teacher between 1898 and 1900, Bauer made use of his new title as an agent and representative of the museum. He printed this title on business cards and used them to establish new contacts in the German colony of Mexico City.<sup>20</sup> At

tive authorities of the Republic assist Dr. Bauer in the fulfilment of his task.” Original: “El portador del presente, el Dr. Guillermo Bauer, se nombró encargado y representante del Museo Real Etnográfico de Berlin, con el objeto de hacer estudios etnológicos y lingüísticos en el territorio de la República Mexicana. Por lo tanto se suplica a las Autori-

dades respectivas de la República tengan a bien ayudar al Dr. Bauer en el cumplimiento de su tarea.”  
 Historical Archive of the Ethnologisches Museum, I/MV 0599 I B 043 Amerika, E 771/1901, writing by Adolf Bastian, Berlin, 14 August 1901, p. 1.  
**17** Historical Archive of the Ethnologisches Museum, I/MV 0599 I B

043 Amerika, E 458/1905, writing by Adolf Bastian, Berlin, 12 August 1901.

**18** Historical Archive of the Ethnologisches Museum, I/MV 0599 I B 043 Amerika, E 771/1901, Berlin, letter Arthur Baessler to Adolf Bastian, Berlin, 12 November 1901, p. 1.

**19** Historical Archive of the Ethnologisches Museum, I/MV 0599 I B

043 Amerika, E 771/1901, letter Wilhelm Bauer to Karl von den Steinen, Mexico City, 26 September 1901, p. 1.

**20** Historical Archive of the Ethnologisches Museum, I/MV 0599 I B 043 Amerika, E 1250/1903, Wilhelm Bauer to Eduard Seler, Mexico City, 24 August 1903, p. 11.

that time, the so-called “German colony” was a community of German immigrants, their organisations and institutions, such as schools, churches and societies. Most of its members venerated not only the German emperor, but also Mexican authoritarian president Porfirio Díaz (Nagel 2005: 163, 189).

Over the years, Bauer used his close ties to the German community to find work when needed and alternated between his activities for the scholarly network, and other jobs to maintain his living. For example, in 1902 he took on a teaching job, which he lost due to an extended research and collection trip.<sup>21</sup> Also, he occasionally worked for the German newspaper in 1902<sup>22</sup> and 1904 (Díaz de Arce, 2005: 60), and later became editor of the newspaper “Der Wanderer” between 1910 and 1912.<sup>23</sup> Moreover, Bauer attempted to establish an Ethnological Support Committee in the German colony based on the Berlin model to finance his research, but was unsuccessful.<sup>24</sup>

Since his arrival, Bauer set out to acquire objects by relying on other dealers as well as on his own collecting. As Gyarmati has summed up (2004: 48), Bauer generally bought the material he considered to have a scholarly and market value with his own money to then resell. For a short while between 1903 and 1904 he maintained a shop for antiquities, curiosities,<sup>25</sup> postal cards, photographs and other things, with the name Anahuac (pers. comm. Ortiz Maciel, July 2025). For his collecting activities he also employed an assistant with the name Eusebio.<sup>26</sup>

In order to collect and research, Bauer conducted trips to the countryside ranging from a few days to weeks, rarely months. He stayed in the settlements for some days to befriend the locals, as most of them were usually hesitant at first to sell their belongings (Gyarmati 2006: 48).<sup>27</sup> During these travels, he also took photographs which he sent to museums as an incentive to buy further collections (Gyarmati 2006: 48; König and Sellen 2015: 398–399). In some cases, he engaged in deeper conversations on traditions, language and rituals with informants (García *et al.* in press; Bauer 1908: 857, 861). He published his observations in newspaper articles in Mexico, which he later recycled in his academic publications (pers. comm. Ortiz Maciel, July 2025). With regard to archaeological material, Bauer adapted his collection techniques according to his clients’ instructions. For instance, Seler was not interested in multiple examples of the same type of object, which were considered duplicates and of little value in the collections (Gyarmati 2006: 48). He was also especially interested in pieces with provenance, as this guaranteed that the objects were originals and made their interpretation scientifically more relevant.

**21** Historical Archive of the Ethnologisches Museum, I/MV 0599 I B 043 Amerika, E 663/1902, letter Wilhelm Bauer to Eduard Seler, Mexico City, 23 April 1902, p. 1.

**22** Historical Archive of the Ethnologisches Museum, I/MV 0599 I B 043 Amerika, E 3/1902, letter Wilhelm Bauer to Eduard Seler, Mexico City, 5 December 1901, p. 6.

**23** Bauer 1913: preface. Historical Archive of the Ethnologisches Museum, I/MV 0559 I B 037 Amerika, E 625/1913, letter Wilhelm Bauer to Wilhelm von Bode, Berlin, 7 April 1913, p. 3.

**24** Historical Archive of the Ethnologisches Museum, I/MV 0599 I B 043 Amerika, E 3/1902, letter Wilhelm Bauer to Karl von den Steinen, Mexico City, 5 December 1901, p. 7;

E 44/1902, report of Wilhelm Bauer to the General-Verwaltung, Mexico City, 28 December 1901, pp. 2–3; E 82/1902, letter of Wilhelm Bauer to Karl von den Steinen, Mexico City, 30 December 1901, pp. 3–4. E 2074/1905, letter of Wilhelm Bauer to Eduard Seler, Tacubaya, 16 October 1905, p. 2, in a conclusive way on establishing a support committee: “The letter [explaining the aim and purpose of the committee; Y. D.] circulated among the heads of the most outstanding German houses + the success was an outright rejection. It was hardly to be expected otherwise, given my earlier experiences, but it was something of a last lifeline for me + that’s why I made the attempt again.” Original: “Der Brief [in dem

Ziel und Zweck des Komitees erläutert wurden; Y. D.] zirkulierte bei den Chefs der hervorragendsten deutschen Häuser + der Erfolg war eine glatte Absage. Es war ja auch noch meinen früheren Erfahrungen kaum anders zu erwarten, aber es war für mich so etwas wie ein letzter Rettungssanker + darum machte ich nochmals den Versuch.”

**25** Historical Archive of the Ethnologisches Museum, I/MV 0599 I B 043 Amerika, E 1251/1903, letter Wilhelm Bauer to Eduard Seler, Mexico City, 24 August 1903, p. 14; letter Wilhelm Bauer to Eduard Seler, Mexico City, 4 February 1904, p. 1. I/MV 0559 I B 037 Amerika, E 625/1913, letter Wilhelm Bauer to Wilhelm von Bode, Berlin, 7 April 1913, p. 2.

**26** Historical Archive of the Ethnologisches Museum, I/MV 0599 I B 043 Amerika, E 1251/1903, letter Wilhelm Bauer to Eduard Seler, Mexico City, 26 January 1904, p. 3.

**27** “In some places, I stayed for two or three days to befriend the people a little, because most of the time they refused to give me the things from the beginning.” Original: “An einzelnen Orten nahm ich 2–3 tägige Aufenthalte, um mich mit den Leuten etwas anzufreunden, denn meistens weigerten sie sich von vornherein, die Sachen herauszugeben”. Historical Archive of the Ethnologisches Museum, I/MV 0599 I B 043 Amerika, E 420/1904, letter Wilhelm Bauer to Eduard Seler, Mexico City, 29 February 1904, p. 1.

This becomes clear when specific questions are asked about the context in which the find was made,<sup>28</sup> and resulted in a more concrete documentation of Bauer for the Berlin museum.

Apart from the close relationship with the KMV, Bauer offered his collections and services to museums and individuals in Mexico, Europe and the United States. For this he could rely again on the network of scholarly collectors, reaching across universities and private collections. In 1904, Bauer offered his expertise as an archaeologist and ethnologist to the Field Museum in Chicago, emphasizing previous research and collecting experiences in Mexico.<sup>29</sup> He also maintained contact with George Pepper from the American Museum of Natural History in New York, in an attempt to acquire a book for him.<sup>30</sup> Between 1906 and 1908, Bauer worked for the Mexican collector Guillermo de Heredia in order to establish a catalogue and photographs of his renowned archaeological collection.<sup>31</sup> Furthermore, after the special relation with the KMV had ended in 1910,<sup>32</sup> Bauer began working as an agent and representative for the Ethnographic Museum in Stockholm, and established collections in Tabasco, Chiapas and Oaxaca (pers. comm. Ortiz Maciel, July 2025).<sup>33</sup> For his activities along the lines of the scholarly network, skill, experience and reputation, but also availability in regards to travelling, were of major importance.

Establishing himself in Mexico and the German community was not without conflicts. For example, the KMV was asked by the author and German commissioner of the Mexican government Lemcke in 1903 to verify Bauer's identity as its agent and representative, as Bauer had attracted further attention through the publication of travel reports in newspapers.<sup>34</sup> While Bauer believed that he was questioned in his role as a competitor, his justification towards Seler is insightful on the role of trust and reputation in a world of comparatively slow communication:

So I'm interested to know the brave adversary. Is it perhaps H-ch L....e? He was at least my best - + only - enemy here, because I often watched him in his shenanigans + honestly warned unsuspecting victims about him. He has now 'travelled', leaving behind significant debts. From the form of the enquiry as to whether I was really an employee of the museum, one could conclude that I had pretended to be one. But that is by no means the case. I always + indeed (only?) posed as an 'authorised representative' of the museum where it had a purpose for the museum + the enclosed card does not say otherwise. You know that with the locals it is necessary to introduce oneself as some kind of 'official personality' in order to be successful in certain matters. My documents + business cards have already opened many doors for me in the first place.<sup>35</sup>

**28** Historical Archive of the Ethnologisches Museum, I/MV 0599 I B 043 Amerika, E 1251/1903, letter Seler to Bauer, Berlin, 5 December 1903, p. 2–3.

**29** Historical Archive of the Field Museum Chicago, letters Wilhelm Bauer to George A. Dorsey, Chicago, 5 July 1904, pp. 1–7; Hoboken, 7 July 1904, p. 2.

**30** Smithsonian Institution, Museum of the American Indian/Heye Foundation records, letter Wilhelm Bauer to George H. Pepper, Mexico City, 1 of May 1907, p. 1.

**31** Historical Archive of the Ethnologisches Museum, I/MV 0599 I B

043 Amerika, E 2312/1905, letter Wilhelm Bauer to Eduard Seler, Tacubaya, 17 November 1905, p. 1; I/MV 0568 I B 030 Amerika, E 233/1908, letter Wilhelm Bauer to Eduard Seler, Tacubaya, 9 January 1908, p. 1. He was characterized as a salaried "middleman" (see Seller 2015: 159–163). This confirms the suggestion that it is the same Mr. Bauer who worked for Heredia at that time (Gyarmati 2019: 69).

**32** Archive of the Ibero-Amerikanisches Institut, Nachlass Maler, letter Wilhelm Bauer to Teobert Maler, Tacubaya, 14 March 1910, p. 1.

**33** Historic Archive of the Museum of Worldcultures. File 10587, online <https://collections.smvk.se/carlotta-em/web/object/1634394>, accessed 25.07.2025.

**34** Historical Archive of the Ethnologisches Museum, I/MV 0599 I B 043 Amerika, E 963/1903, letter Heinrich Lemcke to Adolf Bastian, Mexico City, 5 July 1903, p. 1. Heinrich Lemcke was commissioned by the Porfirian government to write a book on Mexico for a German audience (Lemcke 1900).

**35** "So interessiert mich, den tapferen Widersacher zu wissen. Ist es vielleicht H-ch L....e? Der war

wenigstens hier mein bester – + einziger – Feind, will ich ihm öfter in seinen Schwindeleien hineinschaute + arglose Opfer ehrlich vor ihm warnte. Er ist jetzt mit Hinterlassung bedeutender Schulden 'verreist'.

Aus der Form der Anfrage, ob ich denn wirklich Angestellter des Museums wäre, könnte man schliessen, ich hätte mich hier dafür ausgegeben. Das ist aber keineswegs der Fall. Ich gab mich immer + zwar (nur?) da, wo er einen Zweck eben für das Museum hatte, als 'Beauftragter des Museums' aus + beiliegenden Karte sagt

## Competing and Negotiating

In the early 20<sup>th</sup> century in Mexico, national and foreign museums and private collectors were competing with each other to acquire artefacts and collections, resulting in the commercialization of antiquities and an increase in prices (López Jáuregui 2020: 228). Anecdotes tell about the rising tourism (Bueno 2016: 35–37) and the desire for souvenirs. Bauer frequently emphasized how difficult and expensive it would be to acquire good quality collections and to conduct research. In 1901, he complained in a letter in which he asked for further money:

The competition with the Yankees on that level is a true calamity. They travel by hundreds through the country for their recovery and with force they want to take a piece of memory. Ruthlessly they pay away, often 10 and 20 times the value of a piece. And moreover, we have constantly several archaeological expeditions in the country, sent by rich American universities and museums and which conduct real raids.<sup>36</sup>

The early correspondence between Bauer and the museum is full of offers of supposedly valuable collections and in 1901 he received additional 1000 marks from the Ethnological Support Committee for further acquisitions.<sup>37</sup> Already at that time the advance on the payment was debated internally in the museum as a risky investment in a collection whose quality could only be assessed later in Berlin.<sup>38</sup> Indeed, the first archaeological pieces sent by Bauer were of poor quality, including several fakes.<sup>39</sup>

To send the collections to Berlin, Bauer shipped them from Veracruz to Hamburg. He wrote extensive lists, dividing collections regarding their theme and between “archaeological” and “ethnographic” and including the number of pieces and sometimes the respective prices (s. also Gyarmati 2006: 50). The prices were often subject of previous correspondences between Bauer and Seler. After 1901, the museum would wait for the collection to arrive, be assessed by the scientific committee, and would then enter renegotiations of the price if necessary before making payment. When they agreed on a price in German marks, the money would be transferred via a bank to Bauer, who would then collect it from the bank in Mexico.

Gyarmati has demonstrated that Bauer was often in contact with several museums at a time, and while the KMV was his priority, he seems to have strategically communicated his efforts to create a collection in order to increase the prices (Gyarmati 2006: 48–49, 52). Also, Bauer’s letters seem to frequently omit or accentuate details in his favour.<sup>40</sup>

nichts Anderes. Sie wissen ja, dass es bei den Hiesigen nötig ist, sich als irgendwie 'offizielle Persönlichkeit' einzuführen, um in gewissen Dingen Erfolg zu haben. Meine Dokumente + - Visitenkarten haben mir schon manche Tür überhaupt erst möglich gemacht." Historical Archive of the Ethnologisches Museum, I/MV 0599 I B 043 Amerika, E 1250/1903, letter Wilhelm Bauer to Eduard Seler, Mexico City, 24 August 1903, p. 11.

**36** "Es ist eine wahre Calamität mit der Concurrenz der Yankees auf diesem Gebiete. Sie durchreisen zu Hunderten das Land zu ihrer

Erholung + wollen alle mit Gewalt eine Erinnerung mitnehmen. Skrupellos zahlen sie da drauf los, oft den 10 + 20 fachen Wert der Stücke. Und nicht nur das, wir haben auch beständig mehrere archäologische Expeditionen im Lande, die von den reichen amerikanischen Universitäten + Museen ausgeschickt werden + wahre Beutezüge veranstalten." Historical Archive of the Ethnologisches Museum, I/MV 0599 I B 043 Amerika, E 3/1902, letter Wilhelm Bauer to Karl von den Steinen (?), Mexico City, 5 December 1901, pp. 2–3.

**37** Historical Archive of the Ethnologisches Museum, I/MV 0599 I B 043 Amerika, E 1183/1901, letter Karl von den Steinen to Wilhelm Bauer, Berlin(?), 18 November 1901, p. 1.

**38** Historical Archive of the Ethnologisches Museum, I/MV 0599 I B 043 Amerika, E 771/1901, letter Arthur Baessler to Adolf Bastian, Berlin, 12 November 1901, p. 1.

**39** Historical Archive of the Ethnologisches Museum, I/MV 0599 I B 036 Amerika, E 625/1913, letter Eduard Seler to unknown, Berlin, 2 May 1913, p. 2.

**40** For example, in the letter which promotes his research experience, he mentions that he spent months, instead of weeks, for ethnographic field work. Historical Archive of the Field Museum, letter Wilhelm Bauer to George A. Dorsey, Chicago, 5 July 1904, p. 6. And in 1913, he tells von Bode that he only received 1200 marks by the museum to work in Mexico, although he had received an additional 1000 marks, as mentioned above. Historical Archive of the Ethnologisches Museum, I/MV 0559 I B 037 Amerika, E 625/1913, letter Wilhelm Bauer to Wilhelm von Bode, Berlin, 7 April 1913, p. 2.

## Selling Antiquities

Bauer was involved in the trade of antiquities on the local and international level. As mentioned earlier, after the first years of collecting and selling he had opened a shop for his business. In January 1904, he reported that Mexican collector Guillermo de Heredia was one of his most frequent clients, buying the finest pieces at reasonable prices.<sup>41</sup> By February, he had moved his business from a shop to a warehouse on 5 de Mayo Street to save costs, reasoning that “a few good customers will come anyway, probably preferring a warehouse to an open shop”.<sup>42</sup>

Lorena López Jaúregui has, among other things, discussed the legal framework for negotiations on antiquities in Mexico and the occasionally contradictory legal practices (2020: 232–235). In 1897, the Ley General de Monumentos Arqueológicos was enacted. Among other things, it declared archaeological sites to be the nation’s property and judged the export of antiquities without authorization illegal. The person who was supposed to enforce the law was Leopoldo Batres (1852–1926), first Inspector General of Monuments and in charge of protecting Mexican national heritage. Generally, international scientific exchange and study was promoted, including concessions for excavations in Mexico and permits for the export of pieces in exceptional cases. Leopoldo Batres mentions the authorization of Eduard Seler to export pieces in 1908, permitted due to his services to Mexican scholarship and the Museo Nacional (López Jaúregui 2020: 234–235). Batres permits seem to have depended partially on his personal evaluation and the social relations with the individual researchers and the institutions they represented (López Jaúregui 2020: 233–239). Also, Bauer’s shop received the attention of Batres, who considered his export of antiquities problematic (Gaida 2011).<sup>43</sup> Further research is required to assess the practices regarding antiquities and the relationship between Seler, Bauer and Batres.

Bauer’s business model of selling antiquities to the US and Europe faced severe challenges, as the shipping of antiquities was getting more difficult around 1904. In this year, Bauer wrote to Seler that greater care was being taken by the Mexican officials to ensure that no further antiquities were exported.<sup>44</sup> In 1905, an export of a major collection failed,<sup>45</sup> and in the following correspondence Seler mentioned to Bauer that German shipping lines had refused him to attempt the export of a heavy stone object to Berlin.<sup>46</sup> A few months later Bauer referred in a letter to an export ban associated with Leopoldo Batres, and that his exporting of antiquities was almost paralyzed.<sup>47</sup>

Locally, Bauer seems to have continued selling antiquities. He mentions that he maintained a storage in Mexico City and was hoping to sell pieces in the tourist season. In the same letter, he mentions working for Guillermo de Heredia by ordering, photographing and cataloguing his archaeological collection.<sup>48</sup> From then on, at least as it can be traced in the material in the EM, Bauer seemed to focus on the selling of alternatives to antiquities, such as the ethnographic collections among other things. These might not have been affected by the export ban.

**41** Historical Archive of the Ethnologisches Museum, I/MV 0599 I B 043 Amerika, E 1251/1903, letter Wilhelm Bauer to Eduard Seler, 26 January 1904, Mexico City, pp. 1–3.

**42** “Das Geschäft besteht weiter + die wenigen guten Kunden kommen auch so, ja vielleicht noch lieber als in einen offenen Laden.” Historical Archive of the Ethnologisches Museum, I/MV 0599 I B 043 Amerika, E 1251/1903, letter

Amerika, E 1251/1903, letter Wilhelm Bauer to Eduard Seler, Mexico City, 4 February 1904, p. 3.

**43** Historical Archive of the Ethnologisches Museum, I/MV 0599 I B 043 Amerika, E 634/1904, letter Wilhelm Bauer to Eduard Seler, Mexico City, 17 April 1904, pp. 1–4.

**44** Historical Archive of the Ethnologisches Museum, I/MV 0599 I B 043 Amerika, E 634/1904, letter

Wilhelm Bauer to Eduard Seler, Mexico City, 13 April 1904, pp. 1–3.

**45** Historical Archive of the Ethnologisches Museum, I/MV 0599 I B 043 Amerika, E 1251/1903, letter Wilhelm Bauer to Eduard Seler, Tacubaya, 21 June 1905, pp. 1–3.

**46** Historical Archive of the Ethnologisches Museum, I/MV 0599 I B 043 Bauer, E 1426/1905, letter Eduard Seler to Wilhelm Bauer, Berlin, 24 August 1905, p. 1.

**47** Historical Archive of the Ethnologisches Museum, I/MV 0599 I B 043 Amerika, E 2074/1905, letter Wilhelm Bauer to Eduard Seler, Tacubaya, 16 October 1905, p. 6.

**48** Historical Archive of the Ethnologisches Museum, I/MV 0599 I B 043 Amerika, E 2312/1905, letter Wilhelm Bauer to Eduard Seler, Tacubaya, 17 November 1905, pp. 1, 3.

## Wilhelm Bauer and Eduard Seler: Between Care and Conflict

The relationship between Wilhelm Bauer and Eduard Seler is complex in regard to personal, economic and social aspects. It was characterized by a marked unequal interdependency: while Seler needed Bauer as a contact and collector in Mexico, Bauer depended academically and economically on Seler's judgement. Bauer and Seler frequently clashed on opposing expectations and the nature of their affiliation, resulting in both oscillating in their proximity and affiliation to each other. Seler was an early guide of Bauer's scientific ambitions, and over the years he maintained an ambivalent role between a demanding academic gatekeeper and a friendly mentor, generally supporting Bauer to establish himself in Mexico. Seler coined Bauer's development as a scholarly collector. Their connection marked a significant change in Bauer's life, who over the years also adopted the identity of an ethnologist and archaeologist.<sup>49</sup>

The nature of the relationship between Bauer and Seler was generally a debated issue: Seler occasionally highlighted that Bauer was collecting for the KMV, but that this did not constitute an official affiliation nor a mandate by the museum—while Bauer on the other hand frequently interpreted it as such.<sup>50</sup> Generally, the premise of their collaboration and under which Bauer went to Mexico remained an issue. Bauer seems to have understood that he was sent on a mission to collect and research for the museum, or at least that he had the expectation that this was a serious perspective.<sup>51</sup> Seler, on the other hand, denied from early on that there was ever any long-term commitment by the museum to maintain Bauer as a research traveller.<sup>52</sup> Although they seemed to settle after a first extensive conflict, their affiliation would remain subject of interpretation which occasionally was communicated strategically to others.<sup>53</sup> Despite their conflicts, the correspondence shows that their relationship was also characterized by care in the sense of being emotionally aware of the other person's situation, and offering support when needed. Apart from their correspondence, they occasionally met in Mexico during the travels of Seler and Caecilie Seler-Sachs (1855–1935), herself researcher, photographer and political activist, who was married to Seler.<sup>54</sup>

Bauer and Seler were connected through the conditions of the scholarly network. In this the academic pursuit of creating knowledge, largely based on material culture, was important. This implied certain expectations and standards, as demonstrated by Seler's interest in originals and pieces from unknown periods and regions, as well as documentations on their origin. This also entailed the willingness and ability to travel and follow instructions regarding what and where to collect. This was mirrored by Bauer, expecting Seler to publish the articles he had written and help him establish a reputation in the field. And in regard to collecting, it meant to cover the costs and efforts of travel.<sup>55</sup>

**49** This is evident, as there are two marriage certificates that mention Bauer's profession. The first, from his marriage to Dolores Gómez de Pasada in 1904, refers to him as an ethnologist ("etnologista"), while the second, from his marriage to Emma Hansen in 1906, refers to him as an archaeologist ("arqueólogo"). Marriage Certificate, Toluca (Mexico), 12 October 1904, Registro Civil, 1861–1941, pp. 85–86: <https://www.familysearch.org/ark:/61903/1:1:QG08-KW68>, accessed 23.07.2025. Marriage

Certificate, Tacubaya (Mexico), 17 October 1906, Distrito Federal, Registro Civil, 1832–2006, pp. 25–26: <https://www.familysearch.org/ark:/61903/1:1:QG4F-ZW48>, accessed 23.07.2025.

**50** See for example: Historical Archive of the Ethnologisches Museum, I/MV 0559 I B 036 Amerika, E 625/1913, letter Eduard Seler to unknown, Berlin, 2 May 1913, pp. 1–2.

**51** Historical Archive of the Ethnologisches Museum, I/MV 0599 I B

043 Amerika, E 1035/1902, letter Wilhelm Bauer to Eduard Seler, Mexico City, 27 July 1902, pp. 1–4.

**52** Historical Archive of the Ethnologisches Museum, I/MV 0599 I B 043 Amerika, E 866/1902, letter Eduard Seler to Wilhelm Bauer, 5 July 1902, p. 2.

**53** Historical Archive of the Ethnologisches Museum, I/MV 0559 I B 037 Amerika, E 625/1913, letter Wilhelm Bauer to Wilhelm von Bode, Berlin, 7 April 1913, pp. 1–2; E 212/1913, letter Eduard Seler to

unknow, Berlin, 5 February 1913, pp. 1–2.

**54** The travels of Seler and Seler-Sachs to Mexico which coincide with Bauer are: October 1902 to March 1903, September 1904 to January 1905, August 1906 to October 1907, and April 1910 to autumn 1911 (Seler-Sachs 1922: 1).

**55** The price of the Mazatec collection for the Budapest museum was higher than the archaeological objects, because it required more effort to collect them (Gyarmati 2006: 51).

In 1902, the first of many conflicts with long-lasting consequences emerged. Seler criticised the quality of the collection sent by Bauer, questioned his ability to recognise ancient artefacts, and criticised his decision-making when he lost his teaching job because of his collecting activities. Bauer was supposed to repay the museum with this collection, but Eduard Seler did not deem the value to be sufficient due to the poor quality and high number of fakes.<sup>56</sup> As a consequence of the conflict, Bauer stepped down from his affiliation with the museum for a time,<sup>57</sup> and Seler wrote to the Mexican authorities to inform them that Bauer no longer had the title of an agent and representative of the KMV.<sup>58</sup> However, the dispute was soon settled. They corresponded while Seler attended the International Congress of Americanists in New York in 1902, and shortly after met in person in Mexico which resulted in them continuing to collaborate on original terms.<sup>59</sup>

Most of Bauer's academic ambitions were channelled through Seler who seems to have had an earnest interest in his research. During his travels to the Mixe and Zapotec regions in 1902, Bauer carried out linguistic documentation and began writing travel reports. Similarly, in the Mazatec region, Bauer collected linguistic data in 1903, and the ethnographic objects he sent to Berlin and Budapest were accompanied by notes on the use of the objects, their Indigenous names and photographs (Gyarmati 2006: 51; García *et al.* in press). Bauer seems to have enjoyed linguistic and ethnographic work, and told the museum that he would like to focus solely on ethnographic work but this was rejected by Seler due to a lack of funds (Gyarmati 2006: 47).<sup>60</sup>

While Bauer published short notices on his travels in newspapers on his own (pers. comm. Ortiz Maciel, July 2025), he sent his academic work to Seler with the intention to have it published. However, in 1913 he requested the return of several articles and unpublished linguistic material he had sent to Seler over the years, some of them a decade earlier.<sup>61</sup> Also, for the pieces published, it took a long time. For example, in 1902 Seler accepted the early linguistic manuscripts without corrections but criticised the travel reports for making superficial anthropological statements and irrelevant contents.<sup>62</sup> An early version of the article on the Mixes and Zapotecs seems to have been sent to Seler already in 1902,<sup>63</sup> but was only published in 1916. On the other hand, an article about the Mazatecs which had its origins partly in 1903, was sent to Seler in 1908<sup>64</sup> and submitted for publication by him to the "Zeitschrift für Ethnologie" in the same year.<sup>65</sup> Although part of Bauer's linguistic research was never published, it was referred to at different times by Seler and Walter Lehmann (1878–1939) (Lehmann 1915; Seler 1917; Lehmann

**56** Historical Archive of the Ethnologisches Museum, I/MV 0599 I B 043 Amerika, E 663/1902, letter Wilhelm Bauer to Eduard Seler, Oaxaca, 24 March 1902, p. 1.

**57** Historical Archive of the Ethnologisches Museum, I/MV 0599 I B 043 Amerika, E 1035/1902, letter Wilhelm Bauer to Eduard Seler, Mexico City, 27 July 1902, p. 12; E 866/1902, letter Wilhelm Bauer to Eduard Seler, Mexico City, 13 June 1902, p. 6.

**58** Historical Archive of the Ethnologisches Museum, I/MV 0599 I B 043 Amerika, E 1035/1902, letter Eduard Seler to Nicolás León, Antonio Peñaflor y Jesús Galindo y Villa, Berlin, 1 September 1902, p. 1. At the same time, the director of the

museum Felix von Luschan (1854–1924) wrote to the Imperial Delegation in Mexico. E 1035/1902, letter von Luschan to von Heyking, 7 September (?) 1902, p. 1.

**59** Historical Archive of the Ethnologisches Museum, I/MV 0599 I B 043 Amerika, E 971/1902, letter Wilhelm Bauer to Felix von Luschan, Mexico City, 1 December 1902, p. 1. I/MV 599 I B 043 Amerika, E 1251/1903, letter Eduard Seler to Wilhelm Bauer, Berlin, 5 December 1903, p. 1. Eduard Seler and Cäcilie Seler-Sachs were travelling from October 1902 to March 1903, first to New York and then through Mexico (Seler-Sachs 1922: 1).

**60** Historical Archive of the Ethnologisches Museum, I/MV 0599 I B

043 Amerika, E 1250/1903, letter Wilhelm Bauer to Eduard Seler, Mexico City, 24 August 1903, p. 15; E 1251/1903, letter Eduard Seler to Wilhelm Bauer, Berlin, 26 November 1903, p. 2; E 1183/1901, letter Wilhelm Bauer to Karl von den Steinen, Mexico City, 11 October 1901, p. 4.

**61** Historical Archive of the Ethnologisches Museum, I/MV 0559 I B 037 Amerika, E 625/1913, Wilhelm Bauer to Wilhelm von Bode, Berlin, 7 April 1913, p. 3; E 212/1913, letter Eduard Seler to unknown, 5 February 1913, p. 1. The works are mentioned as: "Unter den Zapoteken und Mixes des Staates Oaxaca der Republik Mexiko" (later published in 1916), "Die Gebirgszapoteken des Staates Oaxaca", "die Mixe der Sierra de Oaxaca", "Mazateca", aufgenommen

in der Gegend von Chilchotla", "Documentos relativos á los Indios Lacandones".

**62** Historical Archive of the Ethnologisches Museum, I/MV 0599 I B 043 Amerika, E 499/1903, letter Eduard Seler to Wilhelm Bauer, 6 August 1903, p. 2.

**63** Historical Archive of the Ethnologisches Museum, I/MV 0599 I B 043 Amerika, E 663/1902, letter Wilhelm Bauer to Eduard Seler, Mexico City, 23 April 1902, p. 7.

**64** Historical Archive of the Ethnologisches Museum, I/MV 0566 I B 030 Amerika, E 233/1908, letter Wilhelm Bauer to Eduard Seler, Tacubaya, 14 April 1908, p. 2.

**65** Zeitschrift für Ethnologie (1908: 925): Sitzung vom 24. Oktober 1908.

1928). In 1927, Bauer mentioned that he had sold his linguistic material to the journal "Anthropos", but that he was dissatisfied that it intended to publish only a selection of it and without further remuneration.<sup>66</sup>

Bauer also corresponded with other scholars of German Americanist studies, such as Count von Linden and Karl von den Steinen (Gyarmati 2006: 47–52). With the support of the latter, Bauer joined the key German scientific society BGAEU as a paying member in 1903.<sup>67</sup> Another detail telling of his ambition and role was Bauer's unsuccessful attempts to secure funding from Count von Linden to attend the International Congress of Americanists in Stuttgart in 1904. Seler's response to Bauer suggests that the latter was at least a partially recognised member of the German Americanists:

We, Linden, Steinen and I, have been talking about your coming over [from Mexico to Germany; Y. D.] [...]. We would of course be very pleased [about it], as we would very much like to have gathered the German community of American sciences in Stuttgart. However, we are unable to grant you the trip.<sup>68</sup>

Seler was interested in making Bauer a reliable academic partner in Mexico. To do so, he wanted him to become financially and socially stable. Indeed, Seler advises Bauer in the same letter to accept the offer of a permanent position at a newspaper, even if this would mean collecting less for the museum.

And this position makes you financially independent in a completely different way than you were as a teacher, and perhaps you can make your fortune. In God's name, say yes. I trust that you will remain our friend even in this situation, just as I will remain your friend. And I trust that now more than ever we can expect something from you. Because the first years of your apprenticeship are behind you.<sup>69</sup>

The same motive of Seler, to make Bauer an established contact, comes up later in that year when cultural anthropologist Franz Boas (1858–1942) proposed to Eduard Seler to send Bauer for a joint expedition of the Berlin museum and the New York Museum of Natural History to Nayarit and the Huicholes.<sup>70</sup> Seler advised against Bauer, whom in this letter he characterized to be just establishing himself in Mexico, not particularly talented for the work with Indigenous people, and also busy. He expressed his hopes that Bauer might become more stable financially and on the long run turn out to be a reliable con-

**66** "I did not reply to *Anthropos* at all out of a kind of displeasure that, after accepting all the material for a fee, the people now only wanted to publish a fraction of it without remuneration." Original: "Dem *Anthropos* habe ich garnicht [sic!] mehr geantwortet aus einer Art Missstimmung heraus, dass die Leute, nachdem das ganze Material gegen Honorar angenommen war, nun nur einen Bruchteil honorarlos bringen wollen." Historical Archive of the Ethnologisches Museum, I/MV 0554 I B 042 Amerika, E 326/1927, letter Wilhelm Bauer to Karl Theodor Preuss, Frankfurt a. M., 26 March 1927, p. 1. Notes on the papers suggest that Walter

Lehmann transcribed the material in St. Gabriel-Mödling, Austria, in 1928. In 2024, Michael Dür and Ulrike Mühlischlegel located copies of Bauer's linguistic material in the library of Walter Lehmann in the Ibero-Americanisches Institut.

**67** Historical Archive of the Ethnologisches Museum, I/MV 0599 I B 043 Amerika, E 499/1903, letter Wilhelm Bauer to Karl von den Steinen, Mexico City, 5 April 1903, p. 1. However, as a letter to the BGAEU documents, he left the association in February 1905 for unknown reasons. Probably because his early expectations to publish his travel reports and articles were not fulfilled and he want-

ed to save money. BGAEU, Archive, Sign. BGAEU-MIT 42, 19.

**68** "Über Ihr Herüberkommen [von Mexiko nach Deutschland; Y. D.] haben wir, Linden, Steinen und ich, in Stuttgart beraten. Es wäre uns natürlich sehr lieb, da wir das amerikanische wissenschaftliche Deutschtum gern in Stuttgart beisammen hätten. Aber die Reise können wir Ihnen nicht gewähren." Historical Archive of the Ethnologisches Museum, I/MV 0599 I B 043 Amerika, letter Eduard Seler to Wilhelm Bauer, Berlin, E 1251/1903, 26 November 1903, p. 2.

**69** "Und Sie sind durch diese Stellung doch ganz anders finanziell unabhängig, als Sie es als Lehrer

waren, und können vielleicht Ihr Glück machen. Sagen Sie, in Gottes Namen, ja. Ich vertraue, dass Sie auch in dieser Gebundenheit unser Freund bleiben werden, wie ich Ihr Freund bleibe. Und ich vertraue, dass wir jetzt erst recht etwas von Ihnen erwarten dürfen. Denn die ersten Lehrjahre liegen hinter Ihnen." Historical Archive of the Ethnologisches Museum, I/MV 0599 I B 043 Amerika, letter Eduard Seler to Wilhelm Bauer, Berlin, E 1251/1903, 26 November 1903, p. 2.

**70** Historical Archive of the Ethnologisches Museum, I/MV 0571 I B 025 Amerika, E 1594/1903, letter by Franz Boas to Eduard Seler, New York, 28 October 1903, pp. 1–2.

tact, and suggested to find a better-suited individual among Boas' students.<sup>71</sup> In 1904, however, Seler seemed to have changed his mind and proposed sending Bauer on an expedition to Nayarit. Yet, the previous conflict between Bauer and the museum, which resulted in a brief period of dissolving their official connection, was not forgotten despite having been resolved. For the expedition to Nayarit, the Imperial Delegate in Mexico first gave a negative assessment of Bauer, emphasizing the loss of his special role for the museum, and Seler had to inform the officials of their renewed official relationship (Díaz de Arce 2005: 60–62). Due to unknown reasons, eventually it was Karl Theodor Preuss who went on the trip. Later, he mentions Bauer in his acknowledgements for supporting him (Preuss 1912: VII).

A concrete case of Seler's care appeared in 1908 when Bauer asked Seler for money, who indeed supported him to a certain point. The financial crisis, probably the Panic of 1907 in New York, had an impact on Mexico. Even Heredia, the wealthy collector, cut his expenses. Bauer informed Seler in a letter that he had consequently lost his job in January 1908. In desperation, he tried to sell his collections and asked the KMV for new commissions.<sup>72</sup> Indeed, Seler bought an ethnographic Mazatec collection from Bauer, and added two pieces for Caecilie Seler-Sachs for the couple's personal collection.<sup>73</sup> In an internal letter to the German bank in Mexico, Seler expressed his pity for Bauer and how he intended to help him in this complicated financial situation, sending him money which Bauer was intended to partially pay back by sending him photographs of the Heredia collection.<sup>74</sup> This Mazateca collection from 1908, which added to an earlier collection from 1903, seems to have been the last large collection acquired by the KMV from Bauer. In 1911, they met personally in Mexico, as a letter to the museum in Stockholm mentions,<sup>75</sup> shortly before Bauer's return to Germany.

In 1912, Bauer left Mexico as a result of the revolution and the accompanying economic, social and political unrest. He had strongly opposed the seizure of power by Francisco I. Madero, the exile of Porfirio Díaz in 1911, and the restrained stance of the German Colony on these political developments. He vacated Mexico together with his wife, Emma Bauer, via Veracruz on 27 March 1912.<sup>76</sup> Later Bauer published his perspective on the Mexican Revolution and the role of the German Colony as political polemic in a self-edited book in Berlin (Bauer 1913). Back in Germany, he tried to re-establish himself also by unsuccessfully attempting to sell his remaining collections to the KMV in 1913 (Gyarmati 2006: 48). Bauer had first approached Wilhelm von Bode (1845–1929), the General Director of the Royal Museums, in 1912 with the offer of a jade mask. Then, he tried to sell his collections to the KMV. However, Seler did not react and Bauer tried to get around him, but was unable to do so. He wrote a lengthy letter to von Bode in which he recounted his long relationship with the museum describing the challenge to re-establishing himself in his forties in Berlin. He attempted to convince Bode to make the KMV accept his collections, although Seler had already rejected the offer.<sup>77</sup> After Seler had been informed of this, he wrote an internal statement describing their relationship from his point of view.<sup>78</sup> Bauer had, as he described it, been an unstable and unfit character whom Seler had sup-

**71** Historical Archive of the Ethnologisches Museum, I/MV 0571 I B 025 Amerika, E 1594/1903, letter Eduard Seler to Franz Boas, Berlin, 7 December 1903, pp. 1–2.

**72** Historical Archive of the Ethnologisches Museum, I/MV 0566 I B 043 Amerika, E 233/1908, letters Wilhelm Bauer to Eduard Seler, Tacubaya, 9 January 1908, pp. 1–3; 4 March 1908, pp. 1–2; 13 March 1908, p. 1.

**73** Historical Archive of the Ethnologisches Museum, I/MV 0566 I B 043 Amerika, E 233/1908, letter Eduard Seler to Wilhelm Bauer, Berlin, 30 March 1908, p. 1.

**74** Historical Archive of the Ethnologisches Museum, I/MV 0566 I B 043 Amerika, E 233/1908, letter Eduard Seler to Guillermo Höpfner, Berlin, 7 May 1908, pp. 1–2.

**75** Historical Archive of the Världskultur Museerna (The National Museum of World Culture), Stockholm, Inv. 1910.10, letter Wilhelm Bauer to C. V. Hartmann, Tenosique, 9 February 1911, p. 1.

**76** List or Manifest of Alien Passengers, sailing from Veracruz, New York, 27 March 1912: <https://www.familysearch.org/ark:/61903/1:1:JJBK-JJD>, accessed 23.07.2025.

**77** Historical Archive of the Ethnologisches Museum, I/MV 0559 I B 037 Amerika, E 625/1913, letter Wilhelm Bauer to Wilhelm von Bode, Berlin, 7 April 1913, p. 4.

**78** Historical Archive of the Ethnologisches Museum, I/MV 0559 I B 037 Amerika, E 625/1913, Eduard Seler to unknown, Berlin, 2 May 1913, pp. 1–4.

ported several times, and who was himself responsible for his personal misery. Seler expressed his disappointment, emphasizing that Bauer got the job at the newspaper in 1910 with his support and that he had lost it due to unwise and provocative writing and by this bringing against himself the entire German Colony in Mexico City. Officially, Seler rejected Bauer's offer due to the lack of funds.<sup>79</sup> Actually, in both of their narrations there are misrepresentations of what can be reconstructed from the archive. The example shows that the once trusting relationship between the two had been severely damaged.<sup>80</sup>

In 1923, a year after Seler's death, Bauer managed to sell some objects to the KMV, whose new head of the American Department was Preuss. According to the documents relating to this transaction, Bauer left Berlin on 3 May 1923 for an indefinite period to travel to Spain. The name Bauer appears again in the museum's documents in 1927. On the recommendation of Ernst Vatter, curator at the Ethnological Museum in Frankfurt, Bauer was able to sell photographs of the Mexican archaeological collections of Heredia and Sologuren to the KMV. Also, he asked for a recommendation for other museums to sell them photographs.<sup>81</sup> In the correspondence with Preuss, he revealed that he was now working as a Spanish translator in Frankfurt, and that his financial situation was difficult. He added in a side note: "[M]y estate, small as it may be, will one day have to be collected in Berlin, Frankfurt, Barcelona and Mexico".<sup>82</sup> This might be interpreted not only as part of a self-evaluation of his life and work, but also that he considered his endeavours to be of academic interest to Preuss.

Summing up, both Bauer and Seler had plans for each other and used their relationship strategically. Bauer wanted to establish himself academically and financially, building a reputation as a scholarly collector. Seler was his path to accessing both worlds, where collecting and research mutually reinforced his reputation and the skills required for his existence as a collector and dealer. Conversely, Seler wanted Bauer to become a collector, informant and researcher from whom he could benefit. He expected Bauer to establish himself with a stable income and social standing, which would enable him to collect items for the museum, share information, and act as a liaison for Seler and the museum in Mexico. This resulted in open communication about job opportunities and scholarly aspirations that affirmed their mutual interdependencies and did not question the particular role of the KMV for Bauer.

<sup>79</sup> Historical Archive of the Ethnologisches Museum, I/MV 0559 I B 037 Amerika, E 625/1913, Eduard Seler to unknown, 5 May 1913, p. 4; General Directorate of the Royal Museums to Wilhelm Bauer, Berlin, 5 May 1913, p. 1.

<sup>80</sup> Nevertheless, Bauer later published his study on the Mixe and Zapotec in the journal "Baessler-Archiv", which was reviewed critically by Seler (1917). This probably indicates a separation between Seler's personal and professional academic interests.

<sup>81</sup> Historical Archive of the Ethnologisches Museum, I/MV 0554 I B 042 Amerika, E 326/1927, letters by Wilhelm Bauer to Karl Theodor Preuss, Frankfurt a. M., 18 March 1927, 26 March 1927, 7 May 1927, 26 June 1927.

<sup>82</sup> "[M]ein Nachlass wird einmal, so gering er an sich sein mag, in Berlin, Frankfurt, Barcelona und Mexiko zusammengesucht werden müssen[.]" Historical Archive of the Ethnologisches Museum, I/MV 0554 I B 042 Amerika, E 326/1927, letter by Wilhelm Bauer to Karl Theodor Preuss, Frankfurt a. M., 26 March 1927, p. 1.

## Concluding Remarks

Wilhelm Bauer was, among other things, a collector, dealer and researcher who made strategic use of scholarly affiliations, as well as his special relationship with the museum, to make a living. It seems safe to say that Bauer was initially motivated by scientific interest and that his scholarly ambitions have defined a large part of his life, even long after he left Mexico, and his career reveals how early Americanist research and the demand for material culture resulted in collections work on the ground. This was defined particularly by his correspondence and interaction with Eduard Seler. The relationship of Bauer and Seler was marked by an unequal interdependence, in which Bauer was the museum's man in Mexico and Seler the most valuable client as well as mentor and gatekeeper for Bauer's academic ambitions. Bauer needed Seler to establish himself in the global scholarly network. Despite numerous conflicts, primarily over unmet expectations on both sides, the relationship was characterised by care. Bauer's identity as a scholar accompanied his work with collections, and enabled him to access rare job opportunities and to offer a range of services related to material culture. He gathered and sold what was of interest to his network and at the same time was himself driven by scientific interest.

Over the last years, comprehensive and critical research into the history of archaeological and ethnographic collections has taken off. Especially in the case of Mesoamerica,

this work has largely applied a framework of art and markets to focus on the gathering and trafficking of antiquities during the 20<sup>th</sup> century (Tremain and Yates 2019; Berger 2023; Turner and O'Neill 2024). This analytical perspective is potent, covers many of the involved aspects, and can with some considerations also serve for the earlier relationships along the lines of collecting and selling material culture. If only antiquities and a framework of demand and supply are considered, then Bauer surely had performed mostly in the role of a middleman supplying material culture to the KMV and others. However, his case as a scholarly collector in the early 20th century shows that there are many more aspects to consider. His activities included, among others, archaeological and ethnographic collecting as well as ethnographic and linguistic research. Also, to exercise the role of a collector in a scholarly network, certain knowledge, experiences and skills were expected. In the case of Bauer, these were inseparably linked to a constant affirmation and negotiation of relationships across the lines of trust and reputation. In practice, this required individual availability and resulted in competitiveness between the viable and competent actors. If Bauer's case is similar to others, then this might be a difference in comparison to the trafficking networks from several decades later. Assessing the historic and regional continuities, similarities and differences would offer new insights into the collections of, especially Indigenous, material culture from Mexico.

There are undoubtedly many more aspects to explore in the case of Bauer, the KMV and beyond. For example, a detailed analysis of the costs of acquiring material culture and of research trips could improve the understanding of the financial dynamics and dependencies at play at individual and structural levels. Also, several people and connections are mentioned in Bauer's letters which deserve further attention. Among them are Natalie von Schenck and the renowned Zelia Nuttall (1857–1933), who appear as competing collectors and dealers towards the museum and Bauer. Another aspect to consider is how international scholarly relationships between Mexico, the USA and Europe were (re) configured through changes in government and global crises, such as the Mexican Revolution and the First World War. Individual cases can contribute to a more nuanced understanding of the particular political, social and cultural contexts of scholarly collecting.

It is expected that future technical advances will make archives around the world even more accessible and provide a much fuller picture of individuals, their activities and their networks. While large quantities of data enable us to examine the movement of people and materials on a broad scale, the biographies of collectors, the detailed analysis of their writings and activities can provide a deeper understanding of the individuals involved and their motives and attitudes. Together, they can best reveal the history of current museum collections and their local implications, and further research to collect and connect the pieces of information is therefore desirable.

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