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# Meissen Porcelain Sculpture from Kirchner to Kaendler

By Yvonne Hackenbroch, New York

(Figs. 151—168 and colour plates)

*Sculpture in porcelain* presented a new departure for the artists of Saxony, appointed by the Elector Frederick Augustus, King of Poland, to launch the first productions of his factory at Meissen. Although the temptation to copy time-honoured Oriental models, or to adapt them to Western taste, was frequently compelling, the challenge to explore the possibilities of the new material appealed even more strongly to the creative artist.

Upon Boettger's suggestion the court jeweller Johann Jacob Irminger was employed as consultant, to extend his guiding influence. Following the tradition of his craft, beakers and other useful vessels were now decorated with mascarons, lion heads and acanthus leaves in relief, and with term figures as handles. Boettger himself occasionally reproduced well-known small sculpture in red or white porcelain, including heads of Apollo and Vitellus in the classical manner, and the figure of the Elector as Roman emperor (fig. 8). He also worked from engravings, particularly from the *Zwerchen Cabinet* or *Il Callotto resuscitato* after Jacques Callot, published at Amsterdam in 1716, and from the first engravings for Luigi Riccoboni, *Histoire du Théâtre Italien*, Paris 1728. Georg Fritzsche, repairer and modeller at Meissen from 1712 to 1730, frequently followed Chinese convention, featuring Chinese divinities seated in arbours, chinamen and exotic birds. Yet, the butterbox in the form of a turtle, ascribed to him (fig. 151), reveals Western ancestry, related to German pottery. A constant interchange of form between the various disciplines of art took place; borrowing from ivory, boxwood, gold, silver and enamel was taken for granted, particularly where those grotesque cabinet pieces were concerned, for which the Dresden goldsmith and jeweller Melchior Dinglinger had created a fashion and a market.

With the appointment of Johann Gottlob Kirchner as modeller under Herold in April 1727, the emphasis shifted for the first time since Boettger's death from the pictorial to the sculptural. Kirchner was trained as a sculptor in stone and remained true to this basic discipline. He therefore tended to disregard the limitations of the new material, misled by the ambitious commissions of his royal patron for large figures. When, after only one year's em-

ployment he was dismissed due to disorderly conduct, he immediately obtained the position of court sculptor at Weimar. However, he was recalled to Meissen in 1730 for a period of three years, after which his traces seem lost.

Beside a variety of large-scale vases inspired by engravings, clock-cases and table-fountains, Kirchner executed large figures of saints, birds and animals for the Elector. He modelled in a summary fashion, without excessive devotion to detail, for fear of impairing the general flow of lines. The firing of these large figures was attended with great difficulty. To avoid taking the risk of repeated firing, even at the lower temperature required to fuse enamel colour, most of Kirchner's figures remain white. Thus is exposed to full advantage the mellow glaze of this early ware. Occasionally cold lacquer paint is applied, but this opaque colour obscured the porcelain and therefore that practice was abandoned. Kirchner modelled the Great Tiger between November 1732 and January 1733 (fig. 152). The powerful animal displays the intense alertness of a beast of prey, combined with a remotely human expression. The brittle character of the porcelain is in complete contradiction to the concentrated power of the Great Tiger, recalling heraldic standard bearers guarding fortified castles.

Kirchner was too deeply steeped in the tradition of the sculptor to become fully aware of the potentialities of porcelain as an artist's material. This recognition was the great contribution of Johann Joachim Kaendler, who came to Meissen in June 1731 and, for 21 months, worked beside Kirchner. After Kirchner's final departure Kaendler was appointed master modeller, a position he held throughout the vicissitudes of the Seven Year's War until his death in 1775. Up to 1735 Kaendler continued completing the Elector's earlier commissions for large animals, and for birds in particular. But already then he had successfully explored the possibilities of porcelain, in order to exhibit to full advantage its inherent charm, lucidity and brilliance in small figurines, with details heightened in colour. A pair of Chinese Roosters, modelled in May-June 1732 (fig. 153), on which the early caduceus mark is found occasionally, shows his new handling of porcelain figures, in spite of the obvious dependence upon Oriental prototypes. There-

after most of Kaendler's life-like birds were modelled from stuffed specimens in the Elector's collection at the Moritzburg. Factory records reveal exact names or descriptions, dates and prices, including stock numbers. There are domestic and exotic birds, among which multicoloured parrots excell as favourites (figs. 154/155), usually modelled in pairs as was the custom, perched upon flower-encrusted tree-trunks, eating cherries or sugar. The gay plumage of these birds is rivalled only by the colourful patchwork costumes of frolics harlequins and columbines performing on an imaginary stage, or by crinoline groups in all their exuberant splendour. Some of these figures or groups enjoyed such lasting popularity that they were repeated throughout Kaendler's life-time and thereafter. An indication of the actual date of a model can frequently be derived from the formation of tree-trunk or slab-base. Earlier trees and bases tend to be plain, or with striated underglaze design. Thereafter, painted and encrusted floral decoration appears and, about the middle of the century, coinciding with Kaendler's journey to Paris, rocaille decoration, heightened in gold, became characteristic.

Among Kaendler's domestic birds are large magpies (fig. 158, colour plate), common jays and pheasants. There are woodpeckers, modelled in February 1733 (fig. 157), golden orioles, first modelled in 1734 and repeated by Ehder 1740—41 (colour plate), and a variety of larger and smaller hens and other birds (figs. 153 and 156), some modelled to serve as boxes (fig. 209). The popularity of the parrot among birds is matched by that of the pug dog among animals (colour plate). Kaendler repeatedly modelled this favourite pet of fashionable society, with bells hung around his neck, placed upon tasselled pillows or bedded comfortably in a lady's lap. Among Kaendler's most exquisite inventions are his crinoline groups, in which the exuberance of a sparkling society is admirably caught and complemented by the brilliant porcelain, intensified by vivid colour decoration. Of studied simplicity are languid shepherd lovers meeting beneath trees, leading lambs on blue and pink ribbons or playing at music and song (figs. 163/164). Some of these groups are mounted in ormolu to form clock cases, placed within arbours of porcelain flowers, in imitation of, and in free competition with the soft-paste flowers of Chantilly and Mennecy. Hunting groups are another variety, characteristic of Kaendler. The chase formed one of the principal pastimes of Saxon court society, culminating in convivial festivities at the Elector's hunting lodge, the Hubertusburg, for which hunting services, hunting vases and other appropriate decorations were commissioned. This created a fashion for Meissen dinner services among Saxon ministers and other members of the court. The swan Service, ordered by Count Brühl,

executed by Kaendler and Eberlein between 1737 and 1741, is the most splendid and original example.

In a different mood Kaendler created figures of tradesmen and street vendors (fig. 166), some of free invention, others adapted from engraved series of *street cries*. Thus Kaendler introduced new characters in porcelain, soon to be imitated at other Continental and English factories. Kaendler also had a ready eye for comedy, satire and the grotesque, continuing in the tradition of Callot's engravings, Troger's ivories and Dinglinger's goldwork (fig. 179). Among the best-known satirical figures by Kaendler is the court jester Joseph Froehlich, modelled in April 1737 from an engraving by G. F. Boetius, dated 1729 (fig. 165). The stocky figure firmly stands his ground, with legs apart and thumbs thrust into black suspenders, which display his initials, and frequently also a date. There exist other portrayals of Froehlich by Kaendler — a bust, a group together with Postmaster Schmiedel, and a very rare group where he is seen riding in a sledge. Another satirical group, known as Tailor riding a Goat, was first modelled by Kaendler in 1737, repeated on a smaller scale in November 1740 (fig. 168). That group is described in the factory records as «Tailor, who is riding on a goat, as he carries with him all his tools» (Schneider, welcher auf einem Ziegenbock reitet, wie er sein ganzes Werkzeug bei sich führt). According to legend this group was made in mockery of Count Bruehl's tailor, who had asked to be present at a court banquet. Instead, his figure, modelled in porcelain, was substituted as a table decoration. The companion group, the Tailor's Wife (fig. 167), was modelled by J. F. Eberlein during the same year.

The Monkey Band, modelled by Kaendler and Reinicke from August 1765 to February 1766, is among Meissen's most popular satirical creations (figs. 161/162), copied repeatedly at Meissen, Chelsea and elsewhere. The band consists of more than twenty figures of monkeys dressed as musicians, presumably intended to ridicule the Saxon court orchestra. Similar satires occur in Kaendler's earlier work, such as the group of Faustina Bordoni singing to the accompaniment of a fox playing the harpsichord, a portrayal of the composer husband Adolph Hasse.

If the name of Herold has hardly been mentioned, it is because he was not concerned with sculpture. As director of the Meissen factory from 1720—65, his great contribution was the invention of brilliant ground colours, culminating in the highly valued, difficult to attain imperial yellow, and the introduction of an entirely original style of decoration from his own designs. These include chinoiserie, harbour scenes and landscapes, Oriental and «German» flowers. He freed European porcelain from tedious imitations of Chinese and Japanese patterns which had formed the traditional decoration of vases and table ware, but lost

their initial freshness. Kaendler's contribution, by contrast, is entirely concentrated on sculpture in porcelain. His versatility is astounding, and his output prodigious. The progression of his style is reflected in a change from baroque exuberance to the ultimate refinement of rococo. Thus the coarser songs of his harlequins performing on rough boards, yielded to softer tunes played on shepherd's flutes, and to operatic arias sung by sophisticated courtiers in all their finery before an audience of kings and queens. With the utmost versatility Kaendler adapted his art to the fashion of the day which he frequently helped to create and establish. His work represents the highest achievement at Meissen, unrivalled and never excelled.

**Zusammenfassung:** Die Meissner Porzellanplastik war für die damaligen schaffenden Künstler etwas völlig Neues. Die Versuchung, die bekannten chinesischen Modelle nachzuahmen, war gross; die Künstler haben aber aus dem neuen Material vollkommen neue europäische Formen geschaffen. Dabei war der Hofgoldschmied J. J. Irminger beratender Fachmann. Nach ihm hat man die Geschirre mit Maskarons, Löwenköpfen, Akantusblättern usw. plastisch verziert.

Böttger selbst hat bekannte kleine Plastiken in seinem neuen Material abgeformt, wie z. B. den Kopf des Apollo, des Vitellus, Augusts II. in römischer Imperatorenracht. Auch nach Callots «Zwergenkabinett» und Riccobonis «Histoire du Théâtre Italien» wurden Figuren hergestellt. Georg Fritzsche werden chinesische Nachahmungen, wie Gottheiten, exotische Vögel und kleine Chinesen zugeschrieben. Aber auch Plastiken aus Holz, Elfenbein, Silber und Bronze dienten zur Anregung der Künstler. Auch der Dresdener Hofgoldschmied Melchior Dinglinger hat Modelle gezeichnet.

Mit Kirchner trat 1727 der erste ausgebildete Bildhauer in die Manufaktur ein, der aber bereits nach einem Jahr wieder entlassen wurde. Er hatte eine gewisse Anzahl Modelle geliefert: Uhren, Tischfontänen, Grotteskvasen, Tiere, die keine besondere Anerkennung fanden. Als Beispiel wird hier sein grosser Tiger abgebildet.

Erst mit J. J. Kaendler wurde die Meissner Plastik berühmt. Er arbeitete von 1731 bis 1775 als Modelleur und hat herrliche gross- und kleinplastische Werke geliefert, von denen hier verschiedene abgebildet sind. Seine Vögel hat er wohl alle nach Natur geformt. August II. besass auf der Moritzburg einen Zwinger, aber auch viele ausgestopfte Tiere, so dass Kaendler genügend Anregung fand. Man hat seine Vögel auch später immer wieder ausgeformt, so dass es nicht leicht ist, frühe von späteren Modellen zu unterscheiden. Vor allem die Papageien sind heute berühmt und begehrte Modelle. Aber auch seine Krinolinengruppen, seine Komödianten, Liebesgruppen, Jäger und Ausrufer sind

künstlerisch hochwertige Modelle. Zu den schönsten plastisch dekorierten Arbeiten Kaendlers gehört das Schwanservice für den Grafen Brühl. Eine besonders berühmte Figur stellt den sächsischen Hofnarren Fröhlich dar, eine besonders beliebte Gruppe ist die Affenkapelle. Neben Kaendler hat auch Johann Gregor Höroldt der Meissner Manufaktur Weltruhm eingebracht.

**Résumé:** Les plastiques de porcelaine de Meissen étaient quelque chose de tout à fait nouveau pour les artistes de l'époque. La tentation d'imiter les modèles chinois connus était grande; cependant les artistes créèrent avec le nouveau matériel des formes européennes tout à fait nouvelles et pour cela, l'orfèvre de la Cour J. J. Irminger donnait ses conseils en tant qu'homme de métier. C'est d'après lui qu'on orna la vaisselle de mascarons, têtes de lions, feuilles d'acanthé et d'autres motifs plastiques. Böttger lui-même a modelé dans son nouveau matériel de petites pièces connues, telles que la tête d'Apollon, de Vitellus, Auguste II en costume d'empereur romain. On produisit aussi des figures d'après le «Cabinet des Nains» de Callot et l'«Histoire du Théâtre Italien» de Riccoboni. On attribue à Georg Fritzsche des imitations chinoises telles que divinités, oiseaux exotiques, petits chinois. Les artistes s'inspirèrent aussi de plastiques de bois, d'ivoire, d'argent et de bronze. L'orfèvre de la Cour à Dresde Melchior Dinglinger dessina aussi des modèles.

Kirchner fut le premier sculpteur de métier qui entra à la manufacture en 1727, mais il fut congédié déjà au bout d'un an. Il avait livré un certain nombre de modèles: horloges, fontaines de table, vases grotesques, animaux, qui ne furent guère appréciés. Son grand tigre est reproduit ici.

Ce n'est que par J. J. Kaendler que la plastique de Meissen devint célèbre. Il travailla de 1731 à 1775 en tant que modelleur et il a produit de magnifiques pièces de petite et de grande plastique dont plusieurs sont reproduites ici. Il a certainement modelé tous ses oiseaux d'après nature. August II possédait à la Moritzburg un chenil, mais aussi beaucoup d'animaux empaillés, Kaendler pouvait suffisamment y exercer sa fantaisie. On a reproduit si souvent ses oiseaux plus tard qu'il n'est pas facile de distinguer les modèles anciens des plus tardifs. Ses perroquets surtout sont aujourd'hui des modèles célèbres et recherchés. Mais ses groupes à crinolines, ses comédiens, amoureux, chasseurs et crieurs publics sont aussi des modèles de haute valeur artistique. L'une des plus belles œuvres de Kaendler décorée en plastique est le service au cygne destiné au Comte Brühl. Une figure particulièrement célèbre représente le fou de la cour de Saxe Fröhlich, un groupe qui eut un succès particulier est l'orchestre des Singes. Outre Kaendler, Johann Gregor Höroldt contribua aussi à la célébrité de la manufacture de Meissen.

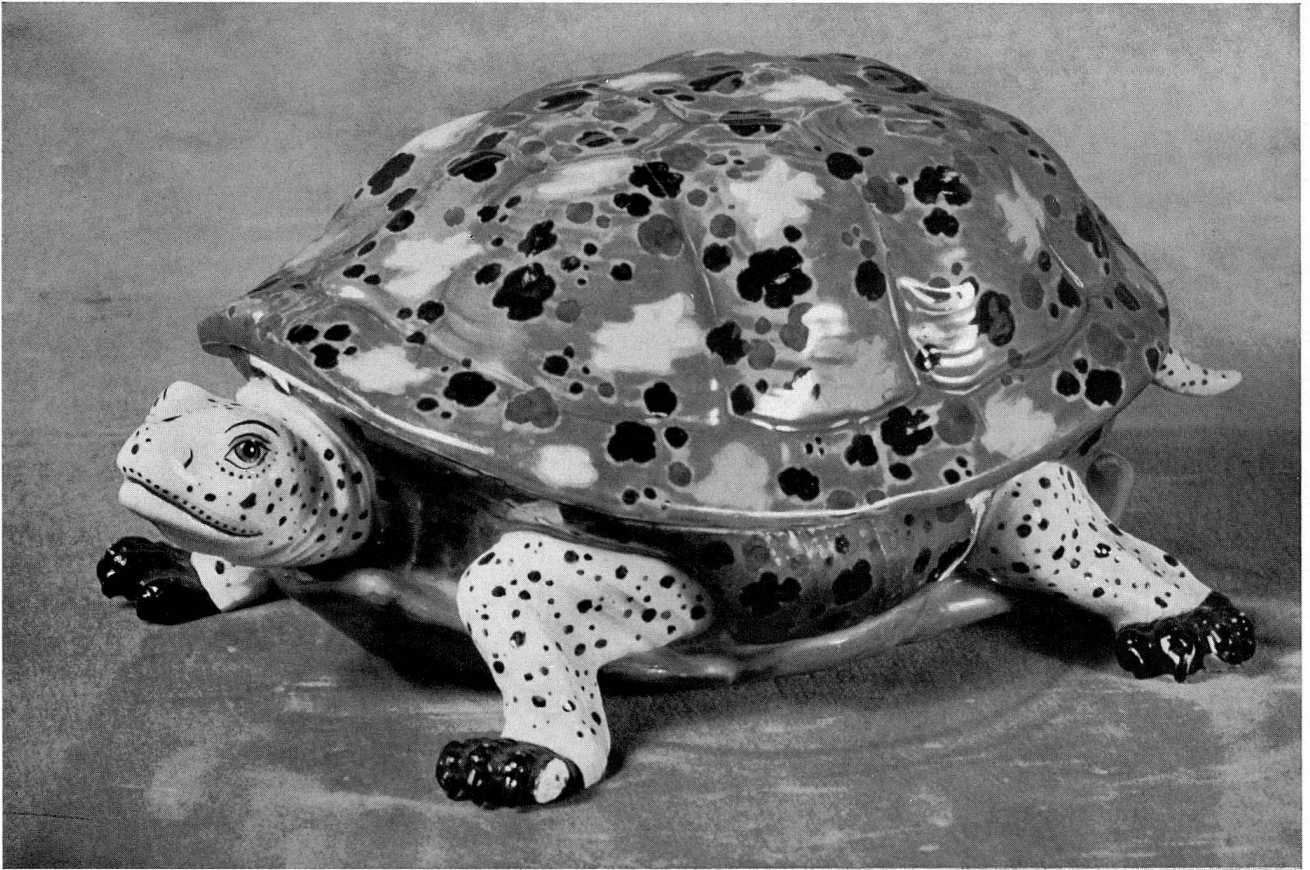
Von GOTTES Gnaden,  
Friedrich August,

Herzog zu Sachsen, Jülich, Cleve, Berg, Engern  
und Westphalen, ꝛ.

Chur-Fürst, ꝛ. ꝛ.

**S**iehe getreue. Nachdem zeithero wahr-  
zunehmen gewesen, welchergestalt von  
neuerlich angelegten ohnentfernten Por-  
celaine-Fabriquen, verschiedenes mit einem, denen auf  
dem in Unserer Porcelaine-Manufactur zu Meissen ge-  
fertigten Porcelaine befindlichen, übers Creuß gelegten  
Chur-Schwertern sehr ähnlichen und von jenen kaum  
zu unterscheidenden Zeichen bemercktes Porcelaine-Ge-  
schirr in hiesige Lande zum Verkauf eingebracht wor-  
den, wodurch dann, da die Käufer dergleichen dem  
Meiß-

*Memorale, das den Verkauf von ausländischem Porzellan verbietet,  
das mit den Meissner Schwertern betrügerisch gemarkt ist, dat. 3. Octobris 1775  
(Original in der Sammlung Dr. Schneider)*



*Fig. 151. Turtle. Box. Model attributed to G. Fritzsche, November—Dezember 1727.*



*Fig. 152. Great tiger. Model by J. G. Kirchner, November 1732 to January 1733. Side view.*

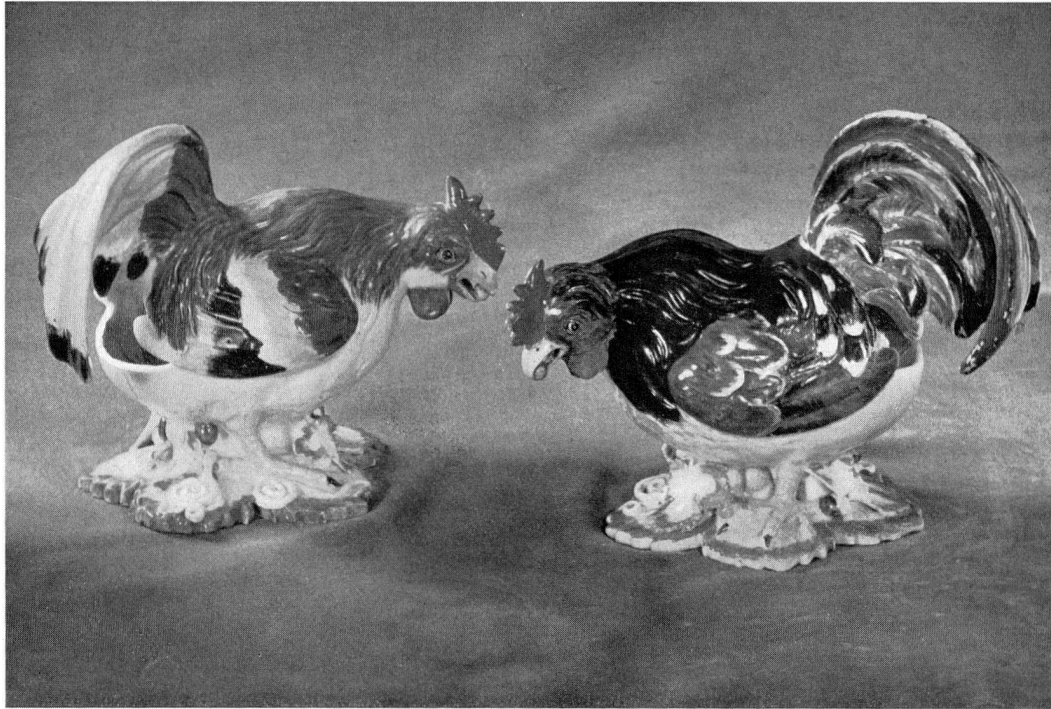


Fig. 153. Chinese roosters. Models by J. J. Kaendler, May 1732.



Fig. 154. Parrots. Models by J. J. Kaendler, October 1741.



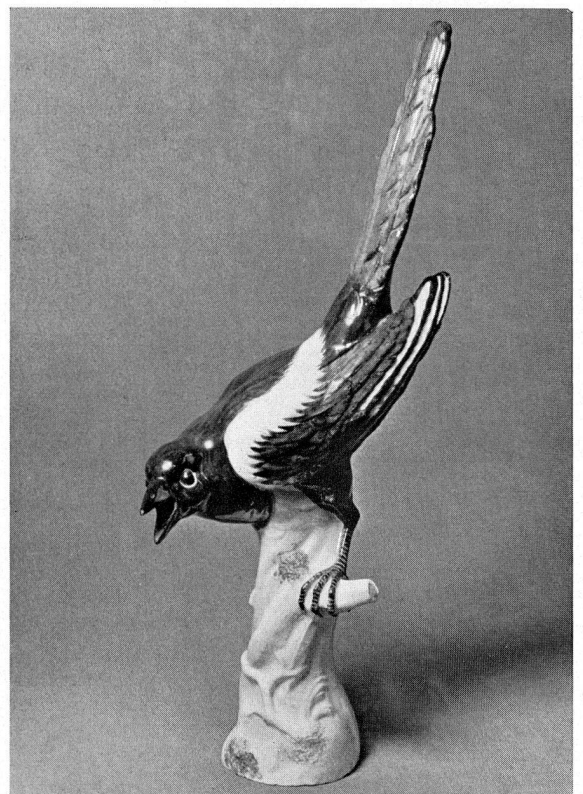
*Fig. 155. Parrot. Model by J. J. Kaendler, October 1741.*



*Fig. 156. Quail. Model by J. J. Kaendler, 1748.*



*Fig. 157. Woodpecker. Model by J. J. Kaendler, Febr. 1733.*



*Fig. 158. Magpie. Model by J. J. Kaendler, February 1733.*





Fig. 159. Tigers. Models by J. J. Kaendler.

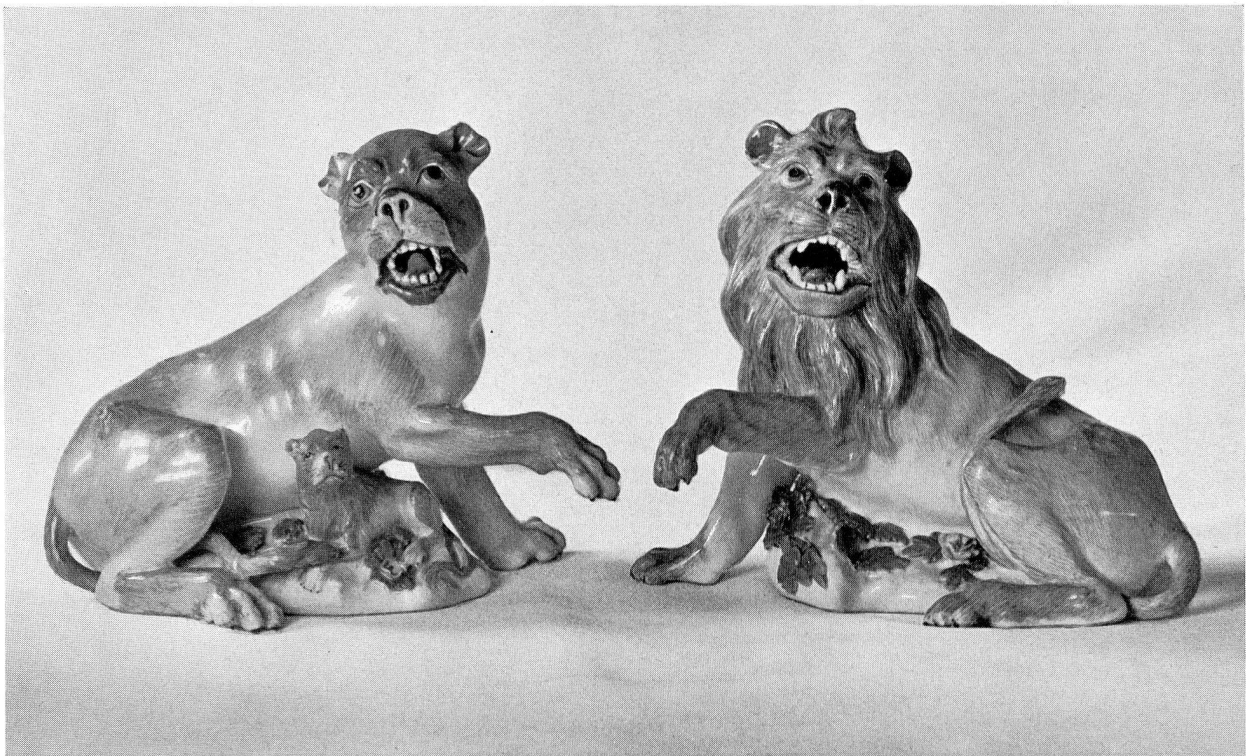


Fig. 160. Lion and Lioness. Models by J. J. Kaendler, cr. 1758.



Fig. 161. Monkeyband. Conductor and singers. Models by J. J. Kaendler and P. Reinicke, 1753 and August 1765 to January 1766.



Fig. 162. Monkeyband. Part of the Orchestra. Models by J. J. Kaendler and P. Reinicke, 1753 and August 1765 to January 1766.



*Fig. 163. Clock centering shepherd lovers. Model by J. J. Kaendler, 1740—1741.*



*Fig. 164. Lady with blackamoor. Model by J. J. Kaendler, April—June 1737.*



Fig. 165. Joseph Froeblich. Model by J. J. Kaendler, April 1737.



Fig. 166. Map seller. From a series of street vendors, Models by J. J. Kaendler and P. Reinicke, 1753.



Fig. 167. Tailor's wife riding goat. Model by J. F. Eberlein, 1740.



Fig. 168. Tailor riding goat. Model by J. J. Kaendler, November 1740.