

Meissen and the English porcelain factories

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Meissen and the English Porcelain Factories

By Arthur Lane, London

(Figs. 201—217)

Technically speaking, the major German factories owed their very existence to Meissen, whose «arcana» were first smuggled by Hunger and Stölzel to Vienna in 1718—19; and from Vienna, through the wanderings of J. J. Ringler and his associates, to a dozen new factories founded in the 1750's.

«Soft-paste» porcelain was made at Rouen and Saint Cloud in France long before Böttger discovered how to make true hard-paste of the Chinese type. The manufacture of soft-paste did not depend on knowledge of a highly recondite «arcanum» and available supplies of the rare mineral kaolin. The factories which sprang up later in France and England passed some technical secrets to each other, but were not nearly so interdependent as the factories making hard paste in Germany. In England especially a wide variety of formulae were used. Chelsea (founded 1745), Derby (about 1750), and Longton Hall (1749—50) made glassy «frit» porcelains; Bow (founded in or after 1748) incorporated calcined ox-bones in the paste; Bristol and Worcester (1749, 1752) used soapstone or steatite as an ingredient. For knowledge of their materials these factories owed nothing to Meissen. But there is no doubt whatever that the English attempts to make porcelain, which had

already been carried some way by John Dwight in the 17th century, were enormously encouraged by the Meissen achievement. Thus in 1744 Edward Heylyn and Thomas Frye, applying for a patent to make porcelain with kaolin imported from America, claimed that their invention (unsuccessful, as it proved) «would . . . save large sums of money that were yearly paid to the Saxons and the Chinese».

About 1753 Nicholas Sprimont, director of the Chelsea factory, drafted an appeal for protection against competition by the «Dresden China» then being imported by the London china-dealers without paying the prescribed customs-duty. In the same year Horace Walpole wrote of the decoration of tables for dessert, that «jellies, biscuits, sugar-plums and creams have long given way to harlequins, gondoliers, Turks, Chinese and Shepherdesses of Saxon China». And when, under William Duesbury's management, the Derby factory entered its most active phase, it publicly advertised «Great Variety of useful and ornamental porcelain, after the finest Dresden models» (1756). In the next year it even referred to porcelain of «the Derby or second Dresden».

It is nevertheless a surprising fact that the earliest English porcelain is quite free from Meissen influence in style. The Chelsea factory was founded in 1745 by Nicholas Sprimont, a Huguenot silversmith, and Charles Gouyn, a French jeweller, and for the first five years the vessel-shapes repeat those of English silver work, with elaborate relief ornament and little if any painted decoration. Very few figures were made at this time. But in 1749 came a change of management, improvements in technique, and a re-orientation of artistic policy — this last perhaps due to Sprimont's new and influential patron, Sir Everard Fawkener. Fawkener was secretary to the Duke of Cumberland, a son of King George II. In 1751 we find him writing to Sir Charles Hanbury Williams, British Ambassador in Dresden, asking him to obtain Meissen porcelain as examples of good design for the Chelsea factory. It was arranged that Hanbury Williams' own large collection, then stored in London, should be made available for the purpose. From this we may deduce that in 1751 good Meissen porcelain was still rather uncommon in England. Importation had vastly increased when Walpole wrote, in 1753, and it was about that time that Meissen began to exert a dominant influence on the style of English porcelain. The Chelsea factory seriously embarked on making figures between 1749—52, when it used the «raised anchor» factory mark. Porcelain figures were of course a Meissen invention; but very few of the fifty-odd Chelsea «raised anchor» figures were directly inspired by Meissen models. They derive rather from contemporary (and earlier) English and French engravings, from Chinese Fukien figures, and from sculptors' models in bronze, terracotta or plaster. The same is true of the earliest figures made at Bow, between about 1750—52. Many of these early English figures were left «in the white», or decorated with unfired oil pigments: the problem of applying enamel colours evenly to the soft, absorbent glaze had not yet been mastered. At Vincennes this technique was never learned, and the solution adopted was to omit colour and glaze altogether, in figures of «biscuit» porcelain. The English factories were far more persistent and successful. But at first the English figures, especially those made at Bow, Derby and Longton Hall, showed shortcomings additional to their lack of colour. The modelling was often exaggerated and clumsy, because the modellers did not yet fully understand how porcelain should be handled. They learnt this lesson by study of the Meissen figures that became more readily available from about 1752 onwards.

This we can most fully appreciate in the Chelsea figures with the «red anchor» mark, made between 1752 and 1757. A far higher proportion than before are imitations or adaptations from Meissen; and even original designs are modelled and painted in the Meissen idiom. But there

is a time-lag; the Meissen models most imitated are those of the 1740's, with simple pad bases — especially the first *Cris de Paris* series (1744 onwards), and the figures from the *Commedia dell'Arte*.

The beggars in fig. 201 are original Chelsea contributions to the series of street-criers conceived by Kaendler some years earlier. But the Kaendler types lose something of their crisp detail and boisterous movement through translation into soft-paste porcelain. The strong discordant colours and heavy dress-patterns of *indische Blumen* also disappear. Partly because of difficulty in reconciling enamel colours with the soft glaze, the Chelsea «red anchor» figures are sparingly painted with washes of pale clear colours and with slightly pencilled floral patterns on the dresses. The sensuous beauty of their material is thus revealed and enhanced. Compared with the sharp, sardonic humour of Kaendler's late German Baroque, the Chelsea figures show a gentler, more sentimental mood. This may not be a specifically English characteristic; rather, a concession to the *Zeitgeist*. But the actual forms, as opposed to the sentiment, of the Rococo, were rather slow to appear in English porcelain figures. A large shepherd and shepherdess with Rococo bases (fig. 202), made at the Bow factory about 1754, are quite exceptional as imitations of Meissen prototypes that must have been almost contemporary.¹ And figures of monkey musicians, after the Meissen *Affenkapelle* (figs. 161/162, 203), are already listed in the Chelsea sale-catalogue of 1756. Three Chelsea examples are in the Schreiber Collection at the Victoria and Albert-Museum (Cat. Nos. 136 etc.). But the new Meissen models were seldom imitated till some years later, and with the usual time-lag, pad bases were not generally superseded by Rococo scrolled pedestals until the late 1750's, when they became almost universal in English figures. After 1756 England and Saxony were at war; Frederick the Great, «The Prussian Hero», became a popular subject in English porcelain decoration; and importation of Meissen porcelain temporarily ceased. But its «posthumous» influence is still seen in Chelsea Rococo figures of the «gold anchor» period, after 1758, which include copies of the later and smaller *Cris de Paris* series produced at Meissen in 1753. And the continued inspiration from Meissen is even more evident in the Derby figures of the 1760's. Even after 1770, when the united Chelsea and Derby factories preferred to borrow suggestions from Sèvres and Tournay models in biscuit porcelain. Acier's groups of cupieds representing the *Sciences* were copied almost immediately after their production at Meissen.²

Compared with the figures, the *English useful and ornamental wares* were less conspicuously influenced by the Meissen styles. Native designs for silver, already mentioned in connection with the earliest Chelsea wares of 1745—49, con-

continued to provide examples for shapes. Before the development of enamel-painting, white wares with relief-ornament were made in imitation of *blanc de chine* porcelain, especially at Bow. And Chinese porcelain also set the example for the cheaper wares painted in blue-and-white which formed such a large part of the output of most English factories (except Chelsea). First in order of popularity among coloured designs were those borrowed, along with the shapes, from Japanese Kakiemon porcelain. Honey opined that the English factories drew on Meissen imitations rather than the Japanese originals. This, I believe, was not necessarily so; designs especially favoured in England are much less common at Meissen, and vice versa; and the sketchy drawing on some early Chelsea examples is closer in spirit to the Japanese than is the tight German drawing (fig. 204). At Meissen, Kakiemon imitations were a phenomenon of the 1720's; at Chantilly of the period 1730—1745; at Chelsea, Bow and Worcester of the 1750's. It is easy to understand how the porcelain industry of each country in turn, at an early stage of its existence, fell under the spell of the supremely felicitous Japanese designs — perhaps the best ever devised for porcelain. Visitors to the State Apartments at Windsor Castle and Hampton Court can still see a wonderful series of Kakiemon wares, the survivors of the collection formed by Queen Mary II before her death in 1694. In 18th-century England the Japanese originals must have been far commoner than the imitations exported from the still only semi-commercial Meissen factory. Nevertheless the Meissen and early Chelsea series of Kakiemon imitations are closely parallel, and most of the Meissen types shown in figs. 205—209 have English counterparts.

The original Meissen types whose influence in England can be recognised were more recent in date. The Meissen *deutsche Blumen* of the period 1735—45 were imitated at Chelsea after 1750, but less closely than on the porcelain made at Vincennes after 1745. True enough, they suggested the «botanical» treatment of plant-motives to the English porcelain-painters; but the latter developed the idea on their own lines, with extraordinary breadth and power, using for this purpose book-illustrations designed by the contemporary London artist G. D. Ehret (fig. 210). It is interesting to note, on the plate here shown, how the insects cast shadows according to the Meissen convention, while the plants themselves (the English contribution) are shadow-free. From about 1756 the «botanical» flower-painting at Chelsea was superseded by more conventional bunches and scattered blooms in the current Meissen fashion, these being often associated, as at Meissen, with patterns moulded in low relief on the borders (fig. 212).

Kakiemon and Meissen influences are respectively combined in the shape and decoration of the Chelsea

bowl in fig. 211. Here the landscape with palm-trees, a camel, and small Near Eastern figures is painted in crimson monochrome, in a manner recalling the earlier work at Meissen of the painters C. F. Herold, Heintze, and Häuer. There are a few Chelsea imitations of the Meissen harbour scenes. But here, as with the «botanical» flowers, the Chelsea painters used the Meissen idea mostly as a starting point for creations of their own. A painter named J. H. O'Neale did some most picturesque crimson landscapes with figures in classical dress and ruins (fig. 213); also some lively fable-subjects, with animals in polychrome (fig. 212, border). His touch is more fluent, perhaps more graceful, though less vital, than that of the Meissen painters. And at Chelsea these landscape and figure subjects are not inset in coloured grounds, as so often at Meissen. The soft glaze made it difficult to obtain an even tone. Meissen influence had given place to that of Sèvres after 1758, when Chelsea produced its characteristic *Fond-Porzellan* with deep underglaze blue and «claret coloured» enamel grounds covered with Rococo gilt ornament. A pair of Meissen plates of the «Punkt» period in the Victoria and Albert Museum (No. 2016A—1835, figs. 214/215) are exact copies of claret-ground Chelsea pieces with typically English «fantastic birds» in the middle. But «Chelsea influence on Meissen» is hardly a fruitful subject for discussion; the plates may have been made as an experiment, or more probably as replacements for a Chelsea service.

In one large class, the vessels modelled in the form of plants, vegetables, birds and animals, the English factories followed Meissen very closely. This particular manifestation of the Rococo was especially cultivated at Chelsea, Bow and London Hall. The partridge-tureen in fig. 209 was exactly imitated both at Chelsea and Bow. It is a curiosity of that upside-down world, the Antique-Market, that Chelsea sunflower-dishes (fig. 216) are now worth far more money than the Meissen dishes which they so exactly imitated (fig. 217).

It would be difficult to find evidence that the influence of any German porcelain-factory except Meissen was felt in England. Other formative influences were indeed at work; native silver-design for the forms; Chinese and Japanese porcelain for the more ornamental shapes and painted decoration; and (after 1760) the sumptuously decorated vases and table services of Sèvres. But discriminating connoisseurs would agree that the English porcelains reached their artistic peak in the decade 1750—60. The factories were then all new foundations, experimenting with a difficult and unfamiliar technique. The Meissen porcelain imported in such quantities soon after 1750 came as a revelation to the English makers. It showed how porcelain could be handled as an artistic medium, and offered an immense variety of decorative themes. The

Meissen figures and vessels were literally copied in England, as everywhere else. To the informed student these imitations are not particularly rewarding. Of far greater interest is the more original work, in which English artists borrowed an idea from the Meissen wares, and developed it to suit their own different material and their own artistic taste. It is here that the influence of the great Saxon factory can truly be described as seminal; and at Chelsea in particular it called into existence a series of vessels and figures which can stand among the best porcelain produced in Europe.

Remarks

¹ Compare C. H. Fischer Sale Cat., Köln 1906, No. 441. A later *Ausformung* of the Bow pair, exhibited at the British Museum in 1959—60, is dated 1757.

² Victoria and Albert-Museum, *Schreiber Collection Catalogue I*, Nos. 345, a and b, dated 1773.

Zusammenfassung: Der grösste Teil der deutschen Porzellanfabriken verdankt ihre Gründung Meissen und Wien, von wo aus Arkanisten auswanderten. Lange vor Meissen hat man in Rouen und Saint Cloud Weichporzellan (pâte tendre) hergestellt. Diese Fabrikation war weder an eine «Arcanum noch an bestimmte Mineralien gebunden. Jede englische Fabrik machte Weichporzellan nach ihrem eigenen Rezept, sie wurden aber von Meissen ermuntert. Um 1753 hat man viel Meissner Porzellan importiert. Es ist eine überraschende Tatsache, dass das erste englische Porzellan völlig frei vom Meissner Einfluss entstand. Für die frühesten Formen galt Silbergeschirr als Modell. Erst 1751 kaufte man in Dresden Meissner Porzellan, um es in Chelsea als Vorbild zu gebrauchen. Seit 1753 zeigte sich ein gewisser Meissner Einfluss. Die ersten englischen Porzellanfiguren wurden durch englische und französische Stiche beeinflusst, vor allem aber durch die Fukien-Waren, Bronze-, Terrakotta- und Gipsmodelle. Das gilt für die ersten Figuren von Chelsea und Bow, die meistens unbemalt blieben. Die spätere Bemalung lernten sie von Meissen. Vor allem die Cris de Paris und die Commedia dell'Arte waren bevorzugt. Der Verfasser zeigt dann, welche Figuren und Dekors man nachgeahmt hat (Bettler Kaendlers, Abb. 201). Spätere Kaendlerfiguren aber zeigen einen typisch englischen Charakter (Schäferin, Abb. 202) entsprechend dem Rokokozeitgeist. Man hat auch die bekannte Affenkapelle um 1756 in Chelsea modelliert. Des Krieges wegen stoppte die Meissner Einfuhr nach 1756.

Verglichen mit den englischen Figuren waren die englischen Geschirre wenig von Meissen direkt beeinflusst. Sie gehen vor allem auf die japanischen Vorbilder des Kakiemon zurück, die man in beiden Fabriken verwendet hat.

Bow hat vor allem das blanc de Chine mit den Reliefauflagerungen bevorzugt. Die «deutschen Blumen» wurden vor allem nach 1750 in Chelsea kopiert, aber auch die Hafenszenen haben die englischen Porzellanmaler beeinflusst (O'Neale). Nach 1758 fanden die französischen Fondporzellane auch in England Eingang und wurden dann von dort wieder in Meissen kopiert, was die Abb. 00 belegen mag. Andere deutsche Fabriken fanden in England keine Nachahmer.

Resumé: Le plus grand nombre des fabriques de porcelaine allemandes doivent leur fondation à Meissen et à Vienne d'où venaient les artisans de la porcelaine. A Rouen et à Saint-Cloud, on avait fabriqué des pâtes tendres bien avant les porcelaines de Meissen. La fabrication n'en était pas liée à un certain mélange ni à certains minéraux. Chaque fabrique anglaise faisait des pâtes tendres d'après ses propres recettes, mais l'exemple de Meissen les encouragea. On importe beaucoup de Meissen autour de 1753. Il est assez surprenant que la première porcelaine anglaise ait pris naissance en dehors de toute influence de Meissen. Pour les premières formes, c'est la vaisselle d'argent qui servit de modèle. Ce n'est qu'en 1751 qu'on acheta à Dresde des porcelaines de Meissen pour s'en servir comme modèles à Chelsea et depuis 1753, on constate une certaine influence de Meissen. Les premières figures de porcelaine anglaises furent sous l'influence de gravures anglaises et françaises, mais surtout sous celle de produits de Fukien, des modèles de bronze, de terre cuite et de plâtre. C'est le cas pour les premières figures de Chelsea et de Bow qui restèrent pour la plupart sans peinture. On apprit par la suite la peinture de Meissen. Les préférences allaient surtout aux Cris de Paris et à la Commedia dell'Arte. L'auteur montre ensuite quelles figures et quels décors ont été imités (Mendiant de Kaendler, fig. 201). Des figures ultérieures de Kaendler ont cependant un caractère typiquement anglais (Bergère, fig. 202) du genre de l'époque rococo. L'orchestre des singes bien connu fut aussi modelé à Chelsea en 1756. Après 1756, la guerre mit fin aux importations de Meissen.

En comparaison avec les figures anglaises, la vaisselle anglaise subit peu l'influence directe de Meissen. Elle se rattache surtout aux modèles japonais de Kakiemon qu'on utilisa dans les deux fabriques. Bow a surtout accordé sa préférence au blanc de Chine avec applications en relief. Les «fleurs allemandes» furent copiées à Chelsea principalement après 1750; les scènes de ports ont aussi influencé les peintres de porcelaine anglais (O'Neale). Après 1758, les porcelaines de fond françaises s'introduisirent également en Angleterre et de là furent copiées à Meissen, ce que la figure pourrait démontrer. Aucune autre fabrique allemande ne trouva d'imitateurs en Angleterre.



Mops, Modell von J. J. Kaendler, Juni 1741. Höhe 17 cm.



Fig. 201. Two beggars. Red anchor mark. Chelsea; about 1754—55. Height 19,8 cm. Victoria and Albert Museum.



Fig. 202. Shepherdess. Bow; about 1754. Height 26,5 cm. Victoria and Albert Museum.

A. Lane



Figs. 203. Two Monkey musicians, Meissen, about 1753.

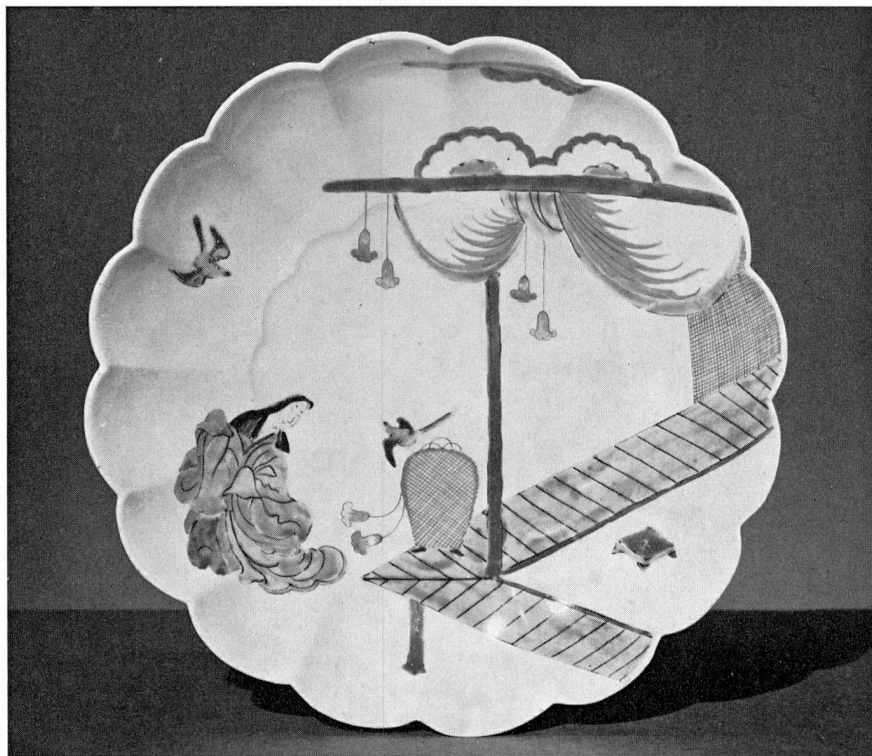


Fig. 204. Dish in Kakiemon style. Chelsea; about 1750—51. Diam. 22 cm. Victoria and Albert Museum.

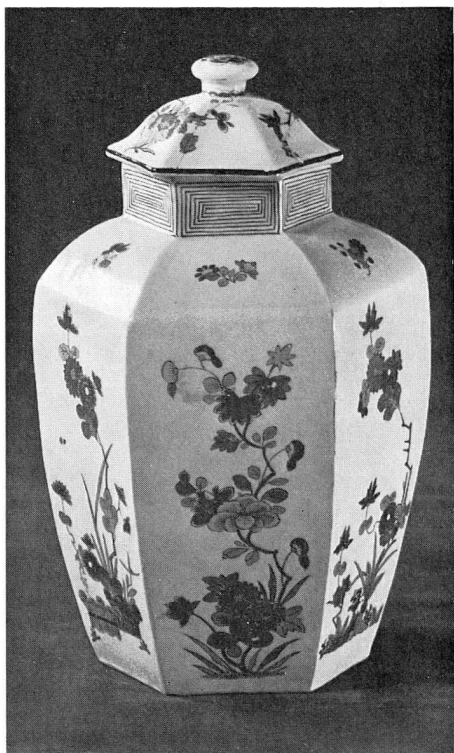


Fig. 205. Vase and Cover, Kakiemon pattern, Meissen, about 1730.



Fig. 206. Vase and Cover, Kakiemon pattern, Chelsea, about 1753—55. Ht. 31,7 cm. Victoria and Albert Museum.



Fig. 207. Plate, Kakiemon partridge pattern, Meissen, about 1735.



Fig. 208. Plate, Kakiemon pattern, Bow; about 1755. Diam. 23 cm. Victoria and Albert Museum.



Fig. 209. Partridge-tureen, Meissen, Kaendler, 1748.



Fig. 210. Dish with English variant of «deutsche Blumen». Red anchor mark. Chelsea; about 1753—55. Diam. 24 cm. Sloane-Stanley Collection.

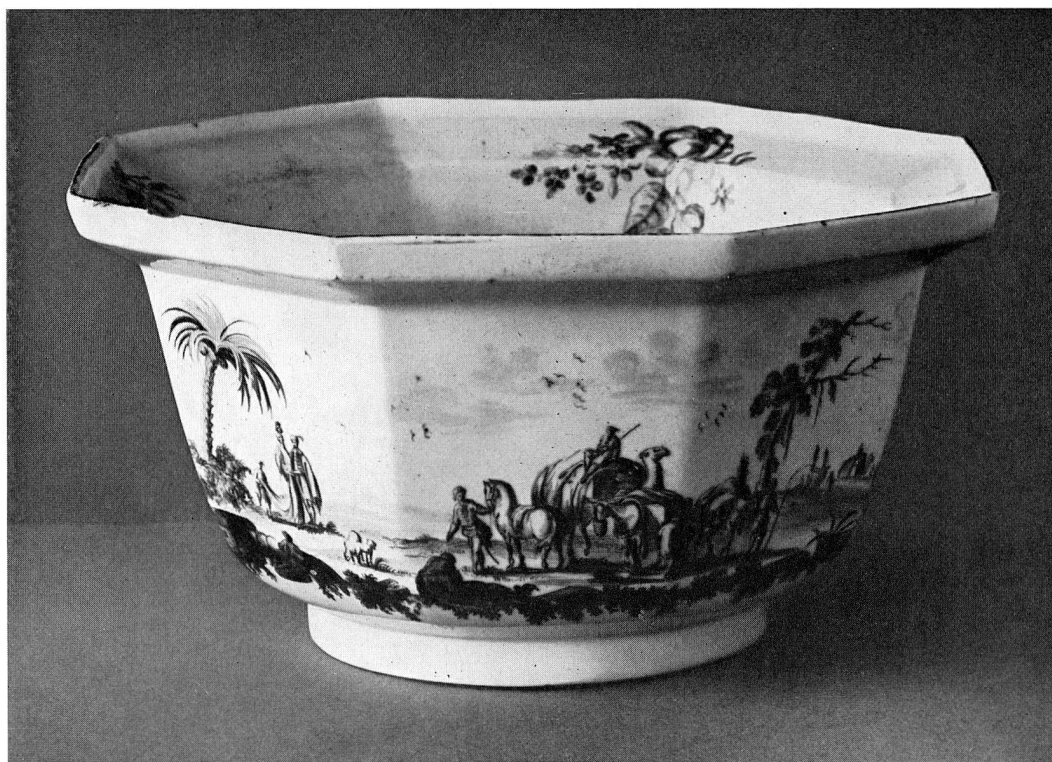


Fig. 211. Bowl, crimson monochrome painting. Red anchor mark. Chelsea; about 1753—55. Diam. 15,2 cm. Victoria and Albert Museum.



Fig. 212. Dish, Chelsea; about 1756. Diam. 47 cm. Victoria and Albert Museum.

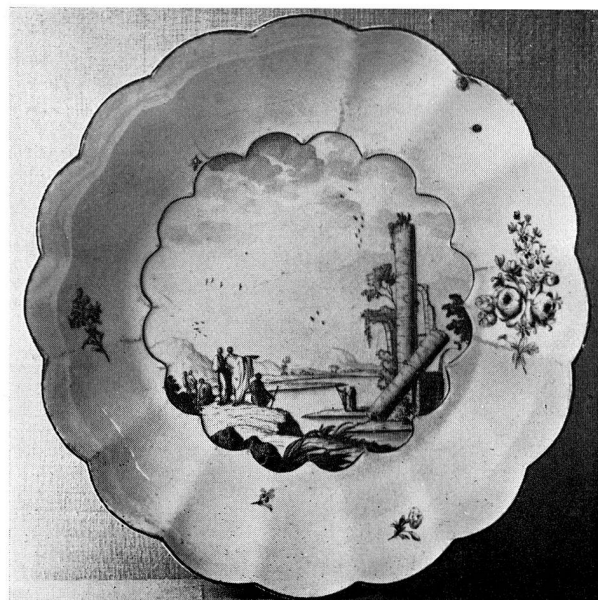


Fig. 213. Dish, crimson monochrome painting. Red anchor mark. Chelsea; about 1753—55. Diam. 23 cm. Victoria and Albert Museum.



Fig. 214. Meissen plate printed in Chelsea style. Mark, crossed swords with dot. About 1770. Diam. 22,7 cm. Victoria and Albert Museum.



Fig. 215. Chelsea plate, gold anchor mark, about 1760—65. Diam. 20 cm. Victoria and Albert Museum.

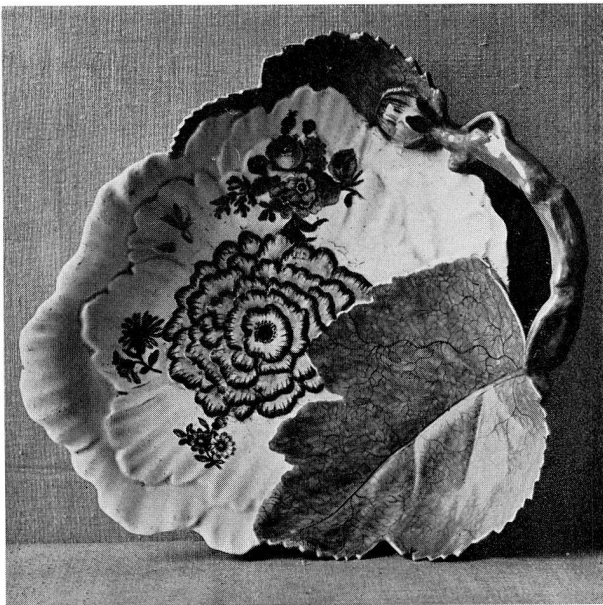


Fig. 216. Flower dish. Red anchor mark. Chelsea, about 1753 to 1755.

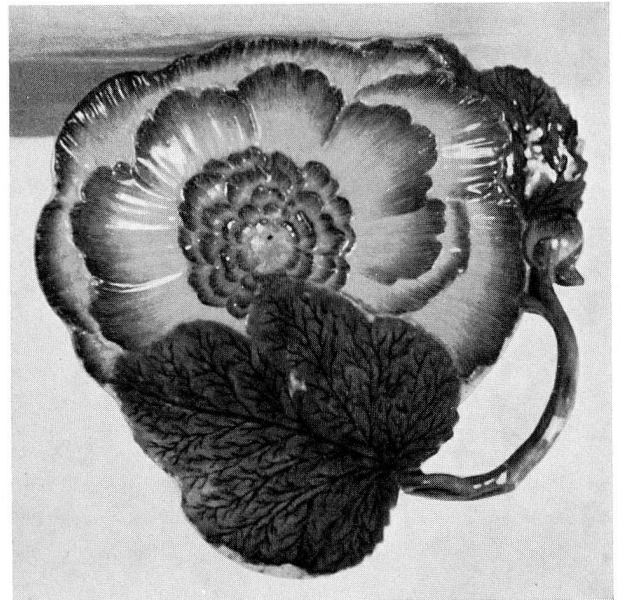


Fig. 217. Sunflower-dish, Meissen, about 1750.