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The Engraved Sources of Feilner's Höchst and Fürstenberg Comedians

By Arthur Lane

(Figs. 1—23)

Among representations of the *Commedia dell'Arte* in 18th-century porcelain, one of the most conspicuously successful is the series of «Statuen, Komödie vorstellend» briefly mentioned in the records of the Fürstenberg factory for 1754. These must have been modelled by Simon Feilner in the year following his arrival from Höchst in May 1753. They are not included in the lists of models drawn up by the factory after 1770, but in 1775 Rombrich and Luplau modelled a series of 15 small «copies» whose individual descriptions helped in the identification of the larger, unmarked original figures made some twenty years before. The identification was successively carried out in important articles by E. W. Braun and C. Scherer¹. More recently the figures have been discussed by Robert Schmidt in his *Catalogue of the Otto Blohm Collection*², which included all the 15 models copied in 1775 with the exception of the Scapin. The collection also had an example of the Pierrot (No. 210), which was not copied in 1775, but which Scherer had correctly identified as one of the original series.

Three points about this series have given rise to special discussion. First is the general similarity in attitude between the Fürstenberg figures and the corresponding figures in the *Commedia dell'Arte* series produced at Höchst. This might be explained if Feilner were the modeller of both series; he had been employed at Höchst between 1750 and 1753, before moving on to Fürstenberg. But both Scherer and Schmidt came to the conclusion that the stylistic differences between the two series were too great for them to have been modelled by the same hand. If, as seemed certain, the Fürstenberg series (or most of it) was the work of Feilner, then the Höchst series must be attributed to some other unidentified modeller. But in that case Feilner and the Höchst modeller must each in their own way have interpreted the same set of original designs.

This brings us to the second point; what were these designs? H. C. Kruger, in his *Catalogue of the Jourdan*

Collection (1910), suggested that the Höchst series was copied from a set of ivory and wood figures attributed to the Bavarian sculptor Simon Troger. But as Schmidt pointed out, the process might have been reversed; the ivory-and-wood carvings could equally well have been copied from the Höchst porcelain figures. The subjects bore a general resemblance to figures in the twelve engravings by Balthasar Probst after designs by Johann Jacob Schübler, published at Augsburg in 1729 under the title «*Amor vehementer quidem flagrans etc.*». But the Probst-Schübler designs did not exactly correspond; it remained necessary to postulate some other source, probably a set of engravings, which served as the common original for the Höchst and Fürstenberg figures and for the carvings attributed to Simon Troger.

It is now possible at least to confirm the existence of this hitherto unrecorded set of engravings. In the Department of Engraving, Illustration and Design at the Victoria and Albert Museum is a series of twelve figures from the *Commedia dell'Arte* which came to the Museum in 1910 as part of a miscellaneous collection (figs. 1, 5, 10, 14, 18, 21)³. Unfortunately the figures have been cut out with scissors and pasted onto sheets of paper, so that the margins have been irretrievably lost, together with the titles, signatures, and dates with which they might have been inscribed.

If we compare the engravings with Schmidt's illustrations in the *Otto Blohm Catalogue*, we find that all twelve have been closely copied in the Fürstenberg series attributed to Feilner (Nos. 173—210), which further includes three additional subjects not shown in the engravings — the *Pantaloon disguised as a man*, No. 178; the *Cynthio*, No. 195; and the *Isabella*, No. 197. Ten of the fourteen Höchst figures in the *Collection* correspond so closely with the engravings as to leave no doubt that in spite of fairly free handling they derive from this source. The engraved Columbine and Dr. Balvarel are omitted from the Höchst

porcelain series, which however includes four figures not shown in the engravings — *Isabella's maid disguised as a man*, No. 153; *Brigatellin*, No. 163; *Isabella*, No. 167, and *Cynthio*, No. 171. It is possible that the set of twelve engravings is itself incomplete; the Fürstenberg *Pantaloone*, No. 178, and the Höchst *Isabella's maid*, No. 153 are evidently derived from the same source. But the renderings of *Isabella*, Nos. 197 and 167, and *Cynthio*, Nos. 195 and 171, are so different as to suggest that here each factory invented its own models or adapted them from different sources.

The existence of these engravings enables us, if we wish, to discard completely the hypothesis that Feilner was the modeller of the Höchst series. Here the thickset figures are free adaptations, with broadly simplified detail, and an admirable if uncouth vitality of movement. The modeller has introduced a burlesque humour of his own. The Fürstenberg series is far less consistent in style. The thickset Harlekin and Harlekine come fairly close in spirit to the Höchst series, but some movement has already been sacrificed; and other figures such as the dignified Pantalon and his companion are notably tall and slender in form. I cannot agree with Schmidt that the Columbine and Isabella should be attributed to some other modeller than Feilner, merely because they are relatively lacking in «temperament». The other early Fürstenberg models recently attributed to Feilner by Dr. Ducret show that his style underwent much variation⁴. It may have reached its final form in the series of miners made in 1758; these are remarkable for the painstaking thoroughness of the modelling, and for their slow, deliberate, but essentially lifelike

movement. They stand at the opposite extreme from the Höchst Comedians, but it seems to me quite conceivable that Feilner could have compassed these too⁵. Trained as a stuccateur, he first approached the porcelain medium at Höchst with carefree enthusiasm. At Fürstenberg, perhaps hampered by the treacherous nature of the paste used in this factory, his style became ever more painstaking and laboured. After 1760 he seems to have been reluctant to model at all; his group of a man and woman embracing, made in 1766, is merely an elaborate plagiarism of a Meissen model. In 1768 he was dismissed from Fürstenberg for laziness and insubordination. It is remarkable that in his subsequent career as an administrator and chemist at the Frankenthal factory (1770—95) he took little or no active part in the figure-modelling. Evidently his creative inspiration was intermittent, and finally ceased; his style never degenerated into a manner. Yet with his curious temperament he created some of the most various and interesting of the eighteenth-century porcelain models.

¹ E. W. Braun, Some early Fürstenberg figures of Italian Comedians, *Burlington Magazine* XIV, 1909, pp. 217—18. C. Scherer, Die Fürstenberger Komödianten Simon Feilners, *Cicerone* XV, 1923, pp. 67—81.

² R. Schmidt, *Frühwerke europäischer Porzellanmanufakturen: Sammlung Otto Blohm*, München and Caracas, Venezuela, 1953.

³ Nos. E 5246 to 5257 — 1910, Box 03e.

⁴ S. Ducret, *Unknown porcelain of the 18th century*, Frankfurt a. M., 1956, Plates 1—3, etc.; also *Porcelaines inconnues; nouvelles œuvres de S. Feilner, créées à Fürstenberg vers 1755*, in *Cahiers de la céramique et des arts du feu* No. 5, 1956—57, p. 17.

⁵ His authorship of the Höchst series was accepted by Kurt Röder and by Schnorr von Carolsfeld—E. Köllmann.

Eine neue Signatur

Von Richard Seyffarth, Dresden

(Abb. 24—26)

Noch will der Streit um Adam Friedrich von Löwenfinck nicht verstummen, doch immer mehr festigt sich das Bild dieses für Meissen so bedeutenden Malers.

Ralph H. Wark ist das grosse Verdienst zuzusprechen, diesem Thema eine positive Wendung gegeben zu haben, indem er Signaturen veröffentlichte, welche einwandfrei beweisen, wie und was Löwenfinck gemalt hat.

Doch wie recht hat er, wenn er schreibt: «Dass nicht alle diese Malereien eigenhändige Arbeiten Löwenfincks sind, wurde manchem klar, bestanden doch grosse Unterschiede in der Qualität der einzelnen Malereien!» (Ker.-Freunde der Schweiz, Mittbl. 34, 1956.) Das Museum des Kunsthandwerks, Leipzig, besitzt eine wundervolle achteckige Kanne, bemalt mit Fabeltieren, und jeder würde sofort auf

Tafel I
(Arthur Lane, London)



Fig. 1 Dr. Balvarel

Ragonde



Fig. 2. Fürstenberg, Dr. Balvarel, Victoria and Albert Museum, London.

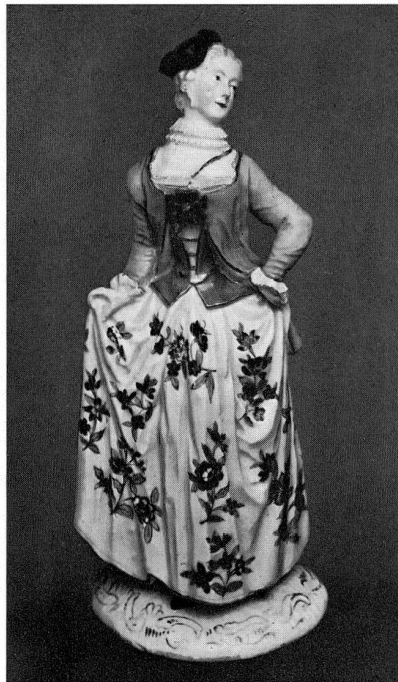


Fig. 3. Fürstenberg, Ragonde, USA. Private collection.



Fig. 4. Höchst, Ragonde, Cecil Higgins Museum, Bedford.



Fig. 5 Harlequin

Pantaloon



Fig. 6. Fürstenberg, Harlequin, Fenton House, London.



Fig. 7. Höchst, Harlequin, Coll. Dr. H. Syz, Westport, USA.



Fig. 8. Fürstenberg, Pantaloon. (Cat. Coll. O. Blohm, fig. 173).

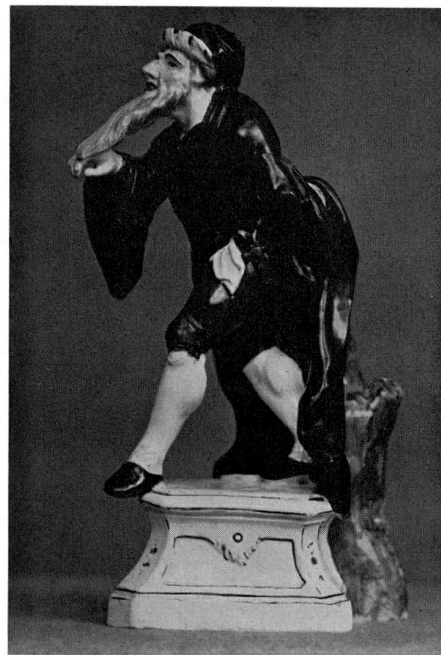


Fig. 9. Höchst, Pantaloon. Private collection.



Fig. 10 Harlequin

Bagolin

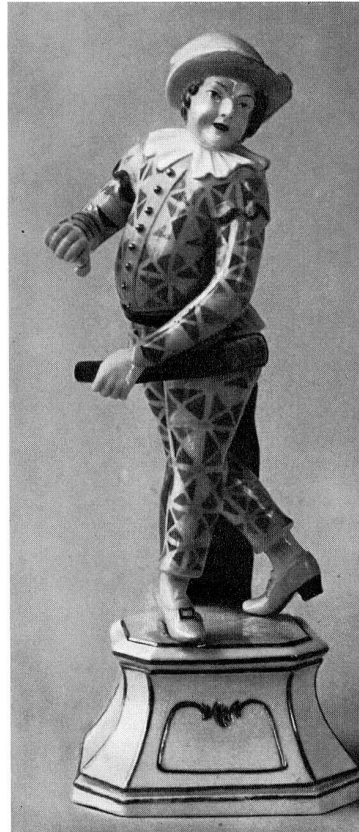


Fig. 11. Fürstenberg, Harlequin. Fenton House, London.

Fig. 12. Höchst, Harlequin. Private coll.

Fig. 13. Fürstenberg, Bagolin. (Cat. Coll. O. Blohm, fig. 208).



Fig. 14 Capitaine

Scaramouch



Fig. 15. Fürstenberg, Scaramouch. (Cat. Coll. O. Blohm, fig. 188).



Fig. 16. Höchst, Scaramouch, Cecil Higgins Museum, Bedford.



Fig. 17. Fürstenberg, Capitaine. (Cat. Coll. O. Blohm, fig. 203).

Tafel VIII
(A. Lane)



Fig. 19 Scaramouch

Mezetin



Fig. 19. Fürstenberg, Scaramouch. (Cat. Coll. O. Blohm, fig. 206).



Fig. 20. Fürstenberg, Mezetin. (Cat. Coll. O. Blohm, fig. 207).



Fig. 21 Columbine

Pierrot



Fig. 22. Fürstenberg, Columbine. (Cat. Coll. O. Blohm, fig. 201).

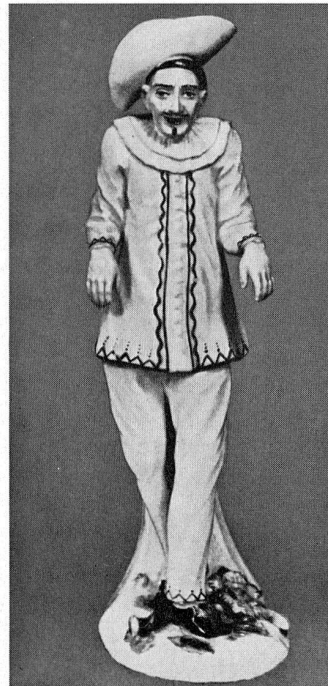


Fig. 23. Fürstenberg, Pierrot. (Cat. Coll. O. Blohm, fig. 210).