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Kapitel: Notes on the Marcolini Period and brief biographies

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Meissen fortbezogen, erteilt worden war, liess sich nicht mehr feststellen».

⁹ WA I Ab 84: «1804 4. April, der Hof-Commissär und vormalige Arcanist Johann David Elsasser, er brachte sein alter auf 77 Jahr, 8 Monat, und genoss monatl. 34 Rt. 17 Gr. 4 Pf. Tractament bis an seinen Todt».

¹⁰ To show the riches of the Meissen *Werksarchiv*, how every piece of paper has been preserved, I cannot resist including the following: «WA Ab 72/112 Mai 1794. Der bisherige Vorsteher Adjunktus des Weissen Corps Johann Joachim Friedrich Elsasser jun. zeigt in Beylage No. 112 unterthänig an, dass er auf höchsten Befehl Sr. Churfl. Durchl. zum G(e)leits- und Zoll Einnehmer in Herrnhut ernannt worden. Er ist am 19. May d.J. dahin abgegangen, dessen Gehalt von jährl. 200 rT. fällt mit dem 1. Juni d.J. der Manufactur Casse anheim».

¹¹ WA I Ab 63/117, Juni 1785. Endlich ist anzumerken, dass der Vorsteher des weissen Korps Herr Elsasser jun. mit hoher Direktorial

Genehmigung einige Gruppen und Figuren, wovon bisher Zeichnungen für die auswärtigen Liebhaber gemacht worden sind, in Kupfer zu stechen angefangen hat. Es werden von jeder Gruppe 50 Abdrucke in 4^{to} mit Angabe der Höhe derselben und der Nummer der Forme schwarz abgeliefert, wofür derselbe 4 rth. 16 Gr. erhält. Bis ende Juni sind deren 4 abgeliefert und bezahlt worden.

¹² WA I Ab 70 Rapport Mai 1792 100. Am 3ten überreichte Herr Elsasser jun. die letzte Lieferung seiner von ihm mit hoher Direktorial Bewilligung seit dem Jahr 1785 in Kupfer gestochenen Figuren, Vasen und Gruppen. Es sind überhaupt 176 Blatt gestochen, welche zu 7 Thaler 16 Gr. 1349 Thaler 8 Groschen betragen. Sämtliche Kupfer-Platten sind im Archiv der Manufaktur beygelegt.

¹³ *Barock und Klassik: Kunstzentren des 18. Jahrhunderts in der deutschen Demokratischen Republik*, Schallaburg 1984, Part III.

II. Notes on the Marcolini Period and brief biographies

This is not the place for a detailed study of the period from 1774 to 1811, when Graf Marcolini was in charge of the Meissen factory. For an account of this period — at present so out-of-fashion with collectors but rapidly becoming a favourite with the art historian — the interested reader is referred to the standard works on the Meissen factory: the two Berlings of 1900 and 1911, the Zimmermann of 1926 and in particular to the more recent work of the late Otto Walcha, archivist of the factory, whose article in *Keramos* of April 1968 and, even more cogent, his posthumously published book, *Meissener Porzellan*, of 1963, together form a detailed account from original documents of this neglected period of the factory's history.

Many collectors of early Meissen think of the Marcolini Period as a homogeneous style. The fact that it was usual for the crossed swords of Meissen to have a star, also in blue, added between the hilts of the swords, during the years from 1774 to 1811 tends to confirm this imaginary unity of style.¹ In fact, there was a mixture of styles — Louis XV, Louis XVI, «goût grec» and the universal Empire style at the end. It is this aspect that is brought out by Elsasser's outline engravings. No one pretends that this period marked the height of Meissen's achievements: the Seven Years' War put paid to Meissen's supremacy. Both the contemporary market as well as today's collector, be he private or a museum director, prefers novelties of other factories and styles: Fürstenberg, Höchst, Nymphenburg and the lesser S. German factories. It is a truism that the earliest years of any porcelain factory, before production

had become stereotyped, are those that the collector most prizes. Meissen was already some seventy years old. Nonetheless there are aspects of late eighteenth century Meissen production which are worthy of study, both aesthetically and above all as a more or less unexplored chapter in the history of taste — or of lack of taste.

The post-war period from 1764 to the second post-war period of 1814 form a continuous episode in the factory's history, embracing both the so-called Academic or «dot» period with the long Marcolini Period. In figure production these fifty years saw two styles or moods curiously entwined, a sort of eighteenth century *Historismus*; as can be seen by glancing through Elsasser's «Contouren». The first style was not so much an innovation as a continuation of French rococo influence, which had been growing even before the introduction of Christophe Huet's drawings for models of the *Cris de Paris* in 1753. This French influence was epitomised by the appointment of a minor French sculptor, Michel Victor Acier, in 1764. This mediocre sculptor remained, alongside the ageing Kaendler, who found it difficult to adapt himself to the newer styles, the leading modeller of the factory for his contract period of fifteen years: not a day over.² Supposedly a practitioner of «the new style», to my mind he shows very little of the classifying influence characteristic of the Louis XVI style, but continued to produce figure sculpture in a rather feeble fading out of the Louis XV style, itself a civilised and restrained rococo which lacked the exuberance of, for example, South German rococo. Acier's subject matter



*Les Delices du Mariage,
Groupe de quatre figures.
Prix 11^l. 12^s. Valeur de Dologne.
" 35^l. — " De Saxe.*

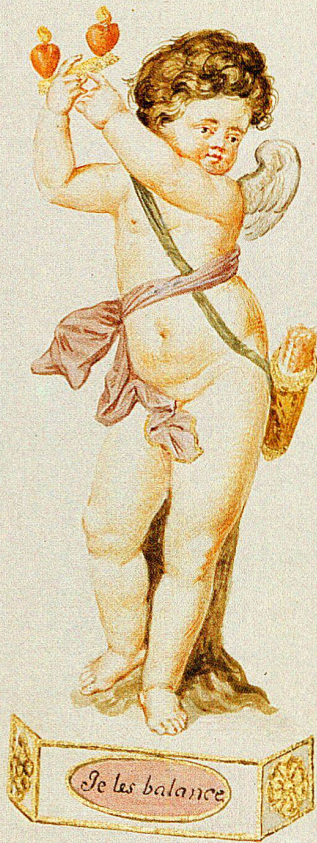


C. 81.





10 1/2 Zoll hoch. E. 71.



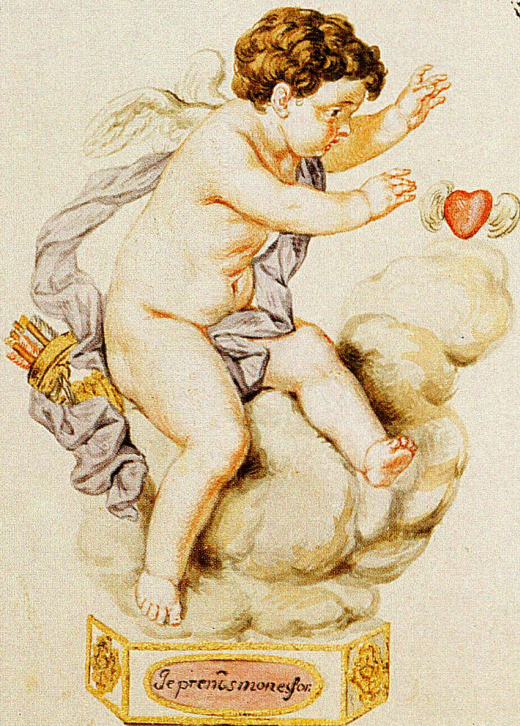
Je les balance

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Je prends mon esor



Je te dompte

included the seemingly endless taste for naked putti such as the *Devisenkinder*,³ but also it did produce a new type of domestic group, a porcelain version of the paintings of Greuze through the usual intermediary of prints. These bourgeois and often over-sentimental groups found an appreciative market all over Europe. This belated rococo lasted until the 1780's (Acier retired in 1781). Gradually it paid lip service to the classicising Louis XVI taste by the introduction of certain classic mouldings on the round bases of the groups, such modest ventures as bands of Vitruvian scrolls, key-frets, ovolos and other architectural devices; but the figures themselves remained unaltered in their expressions, their colouring and in their modelling.

The *goût grec* was at first a modest affair in a half-hearted conversion to fully developed neo-classicism. This second Marcolini style existed alongside the Louis XV rococo; and indeed until the latest of Elsasser's *Contouren*, towards 1790, we still find sentimental family groups. But these are by then the exception, and most of the *Contouren* show either copies of classical gods and goddesses, or else groups in classical style. The Meissen neo-classic biscuit and glazed figures and groups are more fully mentioned in Chap. III.

These two quite separate styles, the limpid Louis XV rococo and the Winkelmann-inspired neo-classical are both covered by the term Marcolini Period (Marcolini-

Zeit); as is too a derivation from the latter, the international Empire style. This latest development is stronger in wares than in figure sculpture. Typical is the elaborately decorated cabinet cup and saucer; so overplayed is the decoration that the porcelain as a material in the white can only be observed by turning the cup or saucer upside down. This was, and is, considered bad manners, but, since the very term «cabinet cup» suggests that such masterpieces of virtuosity were kept behind glass, opportunities for such bad ceramic behaviour must have been few.

The Marcolini Period in all its diverse aspects has for long had «a bad press», with the exception of the Empire wares. One result is that the collecting world has neglected the Acier figures and the biscuit gods, with the result that their value is low when compared with products of the lesser factories of the late eighteenth century. Since the values are low, they seldom appear on the open market in their original editions — nineteenth century copies tend to be more readily available than the originals. But like all fashions, there is only one certainty, namely, that all fashions change, and one day Marcolini will be a word of esteem rather than of disrepute.

Early writers on the Dresden porcelain collection, such as its directors, Dr. Joh. Georg Theod. Grässe in 1853 and his predecessor, Gustav Klemm in 1834, were naturally loth to criticise the porcelain under their care, crowded in the lower rooms of the Japanese Palace; they were content to describe. Berling in 1900 and 1911 again avoided an aesthetic judgment. But soon after the first World War, with the baroque, after a century of neglect, again finding admirers in Germany and even in England, critics became bolder and severe in castigating the decline of Meissen porcelain of the post-Seven Years' War era. Kaendler may still have been fighting a rearguard action, breaking out from time to time in his earlier baroque and even rococo; but the younger Frenchman, Acier, was the forerunner of a different style, a pale Louis XVI, an abomination to such as Otto Pelka⁴ writing in 1923. Here is no mincing of words. After praising the worldly elegance of early Meissen porcelain, he attacks the Marcolini Period in strong words as being «cool, calculating, petty, commonplace and lacking in fantasy and taste», adding the untranslatable word «Geschmacksbürokratismus».

Zimmermann in 1926 is hardly encouraging, and steps warily for fear perhaps of hurting his readers; he was, after all, in charge of the Porzellansammlung. But W. B. Honey, usually restrained in his opinions, in his *Dresden China* of 1934 (still by far the most informative book on Meissen in the English language) writes of «the amorous allegories of a particularly offensive kind», of «tedious allegories of the state of Saxony», and, as far as the sense of colour goes he attacks «the mawkish pink flesh

Fig. p. 8:
Friedrich Elsasser's outline engraving or «Contour» of Acier's group called *Married Bliss* or *Les Délices de Mariage*, modelled in 1775. Slightly enlarged from the original, 19.5 x 15.8 cm. See p. 26, N. 31.

Plate 1:
Watercolour drawing of *Les Délices de Mariage*, modelled by Acier in 1785 after a print from a painting by Greuze. Werksarchiv of the Meissen Factory.

Plate 2:
«Contour» by Friedrich Elsasser of Acier's group of 1775, «Three figures under an apple-tree», slightly enlarged. See p. 25, N. 26.

Plate 3:
Elsasser's «Contour» of *The Secret of The Young Bride* (*Das Geheimnis* or *Die junge Braut*). See p. 25, N. 26.

Plate 4:
Watercolour drawing by J. E. Schenau (1737—1800) of four of the set of sixteen *Devisenkinder* (children with mottoes), modelled by Acier 1775—8. See p. 27f., N. 27, 41, 46, 51. Werksarchiv of the Meissen Factory.

tones». But this was over half a century ago. The late Otto Walcha is less prejudiced. With his vast knowledge he tries to explain the financial and other difficulties that beset the Meissen factory; and sees good where it exists. It is time, with the help of Elsasser's outline engravings, to take a fresh look at Meissen's neo-classical period: to acknowledge its shortcomings and to appreciate its successes.

The following very brief biographies of the principal characters involved in the production of the figures and groups of both the so-called Academic Period (176 — 177) and of the Marcolini Period may be found of use when reading the notes on the «Contouren» in part V.

FREDERICK AUGUSTUS III, 1750—1827. Elector of Saxony 1763—1806, King of Saxony as Frederick Augustus I 1806—27. Steady supporter of Marcolini.

GRAF CAMILLO MARCOLINI, 1739—1814. Rose rapidly in the favour of the Elector during his minority. Appointed Kämmerer (Chamberlain) 1767. In 1774 took over the running of the Meissen factory. 1778 Oberkammerherr. 1780 made director of all the Saxon collections. Responsible for relegating the oriental and Meissen porcelain from the first floor of the Japanese Palace to crowded rooms in the basement, replacing the porcelain with antiquities, books and coins. On the whole a good administrator in a very difficult period, both financially and artistically.

JOHANN JOACHIM KAENDLER, 1706—75. Creator of the porcelain figure and group as a work of art. Modellmeister from 1733. Evidently not a favourite of Elsasser, who illustrates only a handful of his models.

CHRISTIAN WILHELM ERNST DIETRICH, 1712—1774. Painter, director of the Meissen Kunstschule 1764—70. Supporter of the «antique» taste through his friendship with Winckelmann, who lived in or near Dresden from 1748 until his departure for Rome in 1755.

MICHEL VICTOR ACIER, 1736—1799.⁵ French sculptor persuaded by Elsasser to migrate to Meissen as modeller, and eventual replacement for the ageing Kaendler, at a high salary. Arrived in Meissen on 30th March 1765, remaining according to his contract exactly fifteen years before retiring in 1781 to Dresden. A prolific

modeller, much under the influence of Greuze. In his early days a proficient sculptor but no genius; his classicism was only superficial, and he preferred to model sentimental groups. Recently summed up as follows: «Er erreichte nie die Grösse und Geschlossenheit in seinen Werken, wie sie Kaendler eigen war. Später dürfte er sicherlich nur noch produktiv gewesen sein. Er schuf oft moralisch belehrende, sentimentale kleinbürgerliche oder mythologische Darstellungen, die künstlerische Aussage in den meisten Fällen vermissen lassen» (Exhibition Catalogue, *Meissner Porzellan von 1710 bis zur Gegenwart*, Cologne, 1983, p. 248).

JOHANN CARL SCHÖNHEIT, 1730—1805. Pupil of Kaendler, then assistant to Acier and inheritor of his studio. Revised some of Kaendler's figures, in later years modeller in biscuits of figures after the Antique. Retired 1794.

SCHENAU, JOHANN ELEAZAR ZEISSIG, genannt Schenau, 1737—1806. Pupil of the Dresden Court Painter Silvestre with whom he spent the 7 Years' War in Paris, where he was close to Greuze. Returned to Meissen in 1769 as a senior painter (*Obermaler*), 1773 appointed Court Painter (*Hofmaler*). 1773 Director of Meissen drawing school. Lived nine months of the year in Dresden as Director of the Dresden Academy from 1777. Prepared drawings for important groups.

CHRISTIAN GOTTFRIED JÜCHTZER, 1752—1812. 1769 apprentice modeller at Meissen, (*Modellbossierer*), worked with Kaendler. 1794 Modellmeister. Made much use of the Mengs collection of casts (see p. 15). Exhibited in Dresden art salon, e.g. *The Three Graces* in biscuit in 1785. Regarded as modeller of the best works of the classic revival.

JOHANN GOTTLOB MATTHÄI, 1753—1834 (or 1832). 1773 apprentice painter (*Malerlehrling*), then switched to sculpture (*Bossierer*). Spent a few months in Copenhagen in 1776, but returned to Dresden in 1777 to draw in the Antikensammlung. From 1777 to 1795 Bossierer at the Meissen factory. In 1795 appointed inspector of the Dresden Collection of Casts (*Gipsgussammlung*). An important protagonist of the «Antique». Compiled a catalogue of the Mengs Collection of Plaster Casts, 1831. See Bibliography.

¹ Rückert, 1966, p. 23 notes that the star is nowhere officially registered as the mark of the Marcolini regime.

² Acier's salary was a high one. Besides the title of *Modellmeister*, he had a salary of 800 Thaler, a pension of 400 Thaler, 600 Thaler for removing himself and his effects from Paris to Meissen.

³ From designs sent from Paris by Schenau, modelled according to Walcha by other modellers besides Acier; Walcha 1968.

⁴ «Meissens Blüte war gebrochen. Böttgers Erbe war vertan, Fremde mussten das kostbare Vermächtnis, dessen Wertbedeutung den Erbfolgeberechtigten entging, vor gänzlichem Untergang retten. An die Stelle reichster gesellschaftlicher Kulturansprüche, hinreissender Formen- und

Farbenfülle, lebensprühender Grazie und weltmännischer Eleganz war kühle, berechnende, kleinliche, phantasie- und geschmacklose Spiessbürgerlichkeit, versüßlichte Empfindelheit, von einem gelehrten Literatentum gezüchteter papierener Geschmacksbürokratismus und dunkelhafte Überhebung über die Schönheit der lebendigen Erscheinung getreten. Erst in diesem Jahrhundert erblühte an dem alten Stamm ein neues Reis.» Otto Pelka, *Alt-Meissen*, Leipzig, 1923, p. 166.

⁵ For Acier see an invaluable article by Willi Goder, «Michel Victor Acier zum 250. Geburtstag». *Keramos* 112/86; published after this article went to press.