

Porcelain: another window on the neoclassical visual world

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This article surveys the European, and especially German, porcelain industry's output of classicizing figurines between about 1740 and 1900 in order to comprehend what vision of the classics Europeans wished to bring into their homes. First made by Italians, classicizing figurines and cameos became a German (and English) specialty, and helped to knit together European luxury markets as well as to spread familiarity with classical iconography to northern and eastern climes. Made for aristocratic courtiers, the first pieces reflect a 'libertine' classicism; by about 1790, this style had largely been displaced by a more serious and exacting (but also cheaper!) 'chaste' classicism exemplified by Jasperware and white biscuit porcelains. After 1815, industry conditions and the disinterest of new consumers led to the freezing of classicizing porcelains in this latter, 'chaste' idiom. As a widely-owned household good by the mid-nineteenth century, porcelain provided an important, if narrow, form of classical education that has left its mark on the tourist industry, and on our perceptions of the classical world.

Understandably, many rich recent studies of the modern afterlives of classical antiquity have focused on texts, or on the 'high' arts of painting and sculpture, and on universities, academies, and museums. But any visitor to London's magnificent Victoria and Albert Museum or to any number of continental European regional museums will also be struck by the ubiquity of more heterogeneous 'decorative' items featuring imagery or designs inspired by Greek and Roman art, history, literature, and mythology. Most of these artifacts — ranging from teacups adorned with the Medici Venus to sleighs designed to resemble ancient chariots — belonged to private individuals rather than to heads of state or official institutions, and they have, in general, left shorter paper trails. But there is good reason to believe that these items, some commissioned but many bought and sold in an increasingly extensive and inclusive market, carried forward and helped to spread both the general prestige and certain specific forms of the Greek and Roman world; it might even be argued

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that they played an instrumental role in forming at least an elite, pan-Europe visual culture whose changes over time are telling. For the Renaissance era, Malcolm Bull has brilliantly demonstrated the crucial role played by purely ‘decorative’ pieces in classicism’s fifteenth-century spread northward: ‘the diffusion of classical mythology,’ he claims, ‘came about through an accumulation of expensive yet seemingly trivial exchanges; the distribution of pornography and wedding presents, and the acquisition of things such as picnic dishes and jewelry, and garden ornaments for people’s holiday homes. It may not sound like a cultural revolution,’ he concludes, ‘but that’s what it turned out to be’ (Bull 2005: 84, 85). Inspired by Bull’s example, this essay asks if decorative objects and trivial exchanges might help us understand the transformations — if not revolutions — of the visual universe underway in the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries as well.

There are, however, very great differences between Bull’s world and the one detailed in this essay; these include changes in literacy and schooling, in the scale of collecting and public exhibiting of antiquities, and in the relative importance of artistic genres, as the regard for canvas painters, for example, increasingly outdistanced the esteem in which sculptors and jewellers or silversmiths was held. But the biggest change, I will argue, lies in the functioning of the market for luxury goods, which by the eighteenth century had left behind the world of princely gift exchange for a mercantilist system, in which princes hoped to produce luxury goods for export as well as to display the refinement of their own domains. Already before the French Revolution, however, this mercantile system was suffering as a result of the inroads of private competitors, who increasingly competed on price, and all producers began to seek out wider and wider markets for their goods. As we shall see, this dynamic inclined manufactories to try to please many customers, and to introduce novelty into their designs. By studying the production of decorative goods — a large portion of which were now priced so as to entice buyers from the upper middling and middling classes — we have the opportunity to see how the market and popular (or increasingly so) taste interacted over time, and to extend Michael Baxandall’s claim that artistic objects are, among other things, ‘fossils of economic life’ (Baxandall 1972: 2). We can see how producers’ offerings shape consumers’ choices about how to decorate their homes — and how consumers’ choices in turn drive the next round of production, a process much easier to trace in the modern period than in Bull’s Renaissance context. Even in the post-1700 period, this response loop is more imperfect and fraught in luxury markets than in markets for ordinary goods, as state patrons, special commissions, and artisanal pride make business owners less likely to compromise on their artistic goals than in more utilitarian industries. Still, the changes in design, style, price, size, and materials in these industries may offer us many instructive ‘fossils’ to guide our inquiries into visual and cultural transformations.

As a paper of this length cannot hope to embrace all of the decorative arts — from fan-painting to ironwork — I have chosen here to focus on one particularly relevant industry — that of porcelain manufacturing — to attempt to understand which

aspects of the ancient world Europeans between about 1740 and 1900 most wanted to see and to own. I will narrow my focus even further to porcelain figurines, a small but highly visible segment of the manufactories' production. These were at first very costly and in the reach only of wealthy nobles, but gradually became more affordable, as did many other luxury goods such as books, wallpaper, and pocket watches. Like all forms of decorative art, porcelain has its peculiarities, both in its material qualities and in its social functions; it also has a distinct historical trajectory, as Europeans only discovered the means to make 'true' (hardpaste) porcelain in 1708, when a would-be alchemist working at the court of Saxon (and Polish) king Augustus the Strong replicated the Chinese recipe.¹ But porcelain as a subject for a study in classical reception has a number of attractive features, the first being its relative cheapness, especially as time went on, and its rapid responsiveness to changes in tastes and styles. The second is porcelain's whiteness, which appealed greatly to Chinese emperors long before European aristocrats learned to admire it. But in Europe, by the 1740s, porcelain's whiteness was applied in a special way to the depiction of the ancient Greeks and Romans, mimicking the marble of classical and Renaissance sculptures but also signifying ur-humanness and pure beauty. Particularly the unglazed 'biscuit' porcelains developed after this date were heavily used in the replication of ancient bas-reliefs, cameos, and sculptures which dispersed across the continent a powerful form of what Howard Coutts has called 'chaste' neoclassicism (Coutts 2001: 222). And finally, as an industry especially dear to the hearts and pocketbooks of Central European princes, porcelain gives us new insight into the little-studied visual and material worlds that surrounded the preponderantly cerebral universes of German classical scholars. Porcelain opens a window especially on German taste that has not previously been available for cultural historians in search of an understanding of stylistic and perhaps 'educational' evolutions over the course of the last two centuries.

Finally, I should be clear that what I am seeking here is a coarse-grained and synthetic overview of changes in the forms and content of neoclassical design in this period, especially in the German states. Included in my concept of 'neoclassical' or 'classicizing' are both named or iconographically-recognizable subjects from ancient mythology, history, or literature and, to a lesser extent, designs and forms, such as meanders or handled craters, which were meant to invoke antiquity as an artistic point of reference. Art historians and museum curators have sometimes been able to identify the actual sources — literary or artistic — used in the manufactories, and that can be most interesting. But they fully acknowledge that it is often hard to know what the makers of classicizing porcelains were reading or copying. Sometimes more or less skilled artisans copied directly from classical monuments; more often they imitated, strictly or freely, previous portrayals of a classical deity or scene. In this

¹ Hardpaste porcelain is differentiated from softpaste porcelain partly by the ingredients and partly by the higher temperatures at which the former is fired, which allow the paste and the glaze fully to fuse. Softpaste porcelains — which are easier to make and have a tendency to slump in the kiln — had been made in Italy and France much earlier.

article, I will rarely try to identify those sources for individual objects, but more generally survey the typical sources and forms of depiction used. Indeed, part of my argument will be that these pictorial or textual referents grew less and less specific over time and that the ‘classical’ by the twentieth century had become a very vague and abstract category, with little save whiteness and scraps of classical drapery to signal an object’s embeddedness in this tradition. Whereas in some other modern artistic genres, perhaps above all in theatre and architecture, a stripped-down and abstracted form of neoclassicism could be adopted for modernist ends (Cf. Marchand 2015), in porcelain modernism lost touch with classicism, save in the fascist artefacts that may have ruined our taste for classicizing porcelains forever. Porcelain, in any case, is no longer the high-profile artform it once was, but its history may tell us something about the road we have travelled to reach this end.

Porcelain in the era of libertine classicism

The recipe for hardpaste porcelain, as noted above, was first replicated in Europe in Saxony in 1708, to the delight of Augustus the Strong, already afflicted, by his own admission, with a ‘porcelain sickness’. The recipe was a state secret and the employees of the Saxon royal manufactory, founded in the town of Meissen in 1710, were virtual prisoners of the crown. Even so, Meissen was not able to keep its recipe secret for long, and soon many other German (and non-German) princes established their own porcelain manufactories, hoping to demonstrate the refinement of their courts as well as to profit from exports abroad. By mid-century there were more than a dozen German manufactories as well as French, Italian, and English makers producing porcelains of some kind. By 1810, Napoleonic occupations and reforms had fully abolished the official secrecy of the hardpaste recipe and the monopolistic privileges states had given their official manufactories. Thereafter, many more entrepreneurs made a bid to get into porcelain making — though most were short-lived, as the bottom had fallen out of the aristocratic luxury market. The eighteenth century had already had its booms and busts; but after 1810, many manufacturers as well as art historians would look back at this first one hundred years as the ‘golden age’ of European porcelain production. The second half of this period was also, as we shall see, the ‘golden age’ of classicizing porcelain.

In its first decades, the hardpaste industry does not give us insight into what Europeans saw of the classics, but rather what they saw of China. The first European hardpaste porcelains, made in Saxony in 1708, were copies of red Yixing ceramics, and when the first modeller was hired at Meissen in 1711, he was a silversmith, and drew exclusively on the Baroque and Chinese objects close to hand, in Augustus the Strong’s collection. By the 1720s the range had widened, but only one or two Baroque style pieces with classical subjects (in the manner of Bernini) had been made. Meissen’s craftsmen were, after all, too busy producing enormous goats, monkeys, and other animals commissioned for Augustus’s porcelain menagerie (Wittwer 2004).

Things began to change in the period between about 1745 and 1755, which could be described as the decade in which the Germans became, more fully than ever before, Europeans. This is the decade in which Frederick the Great astonished the world with his victories over the Austrians, and the Prussian king invited Voltaire to reside at his summer palace at Sans Souci. It is the decade in which Winckelmann became the great advocate of the Greeks, and Maria Theresa took up residence in her version of Versailles, Schönbrunn Palace, which, incidentally, had *two* porcelain rooms. Becoming European meant, in part, travel and interaction among elites in places renowned for culture and taste, especially Rome and Paris. But it also meant belonging in a much greater way to the European market for luxury goods and disseminating, beyond the small circle of the humanists, a common set of secular, classicizing referents and idioms. Porcelain, as one of the few luxury industries in which the Germans played a leading role, helped to integrate Central Europeans into this continental market, and the ubiquitous practices of imitation here helped to generalize styles and iconography in a new way. As this market grew, specific forms of classical imagery, their popularity originating with the Grand Tourists and libertine princes, radiated outward, spreading to many who would never visit Rome or Greece a vision of classical antiquity suitable for tasteful people to own.²

Hardpaste porcelain, it might be argued, was a key means by which Germans joined this market, as it was one of the first German-made luxury goods avidly bought and imitated by western Europeans. But as noted above, neither the Saxons, nor the Viennese, who enticed one of Meissen's 'Arcanists' (possessors of the Arcanum, or secret recipe) to set up shop in Austria in 1719, thought to adapt classical themes or models for use in porcelains. This was an innovation made by the Italians, long artistic tastemakers, and enabled by the passage of Tuscany into the hands of the Habsburgs when the last Medici heir died in 1737. The new political relationship brought the Marchese Carlo Ginori to the Habsburg capital where he visited the Viennese manufactory and secured an 'Arcanist' for the Doccia porcelain manufactory he would found just outside of Florence. Of course, there was nothing new in the international transfer of a master craftsman from one court to another. But Ginori's adoption of German methods to establish a whole new industry does herald the coming of an age of increasingly interconnected luxury production and trade.

From early on, Ginori's ambition was to produce copies of actual sculptural masterworks on display in the tribunal of the Uffizi, the Capitoline gallery, and other notable Italian villas. He purchased his own copies, plaster or wax moulds, and sketches from the studios of local sculptors and restorers and hired sculptors whose job was to make porcelain copies of these often heavily restored works of art (Winter 2005: 188). Quite possibly inspired by the nearly life-sized animals produced at Meissen, Ginori wanted to create technically-impressive large-format reproductions

² The same could surely be said of Rococo or East Asian imagery, but we will have to leave those subjects to other inquirers. For more on the appeal of German porcelain to other European buyers, see Marchand, forthcoming.



Fig. 1: 'Dancing Faun', Doccia manufactory, c. 1750. This 50.5 cm high figure was by no means the largest of Doccia's early imitations of classical sculptures. The Metropolitan Museum of Art, New York, Anne Eden Woodward Foundation gift, 1987, www.metmuseum.org.

in porcelain, and in 1745 did succeed in firing one of the eighteenth century's largest porcelains, a 132-cm high copy of the Medici Venus. Like most copyists and restorers of the period, Ginori did not worry greatly about altering the original to suit contemporary technical and aesthetic demands. In this case, the original dolphin was omitted and armbands and a modest skirt were added to cover the seams which joined together the artwork's several sections. (Ressos 2015: 158–65) Similarly, a 50-cm-high Dancing Faun (Fig. 1) — again copied after a heavily restored sculpture in the Uffizi — was an inexact copy even of that sculpture. Doccia's sculptures were admired throughout Europe, and can be found in many northern European collections today. But such technical bravura certainly did not make economic sense, and after Carlo died in 1757, his more practical son Lorenzo began emphasizing the production of cheaper, utilitarian majolicas and by the 1760s, at the latest, copying the German makers' smaller and more marketable lines of what I will call 'libertine' classical figurines (Biancalana 2016: 62–3) (Fig. 2).

While Ginori was copying — after a fashion — actual ancient monuments, in the German states a quite different form of classicizing production was underway. 'Libertine' figurines were probably first made at Meissen, and perhaps by that manufactory's talented and prolific modeller J. J. Kändler, who had been trained as a



Fig. 2: 'Venus Rising from the Sea', Doccia Manufactory, c. 1760, with later decorations. At about 18 cm high, this figurine would have been much easier to fire and more affordable than the earlier 'Dancing Faun'. The Metropolitan Museum of Art, New York, gift of Irwin Untermyer, 1964, www.metmuseum.org.

sculptor and even after his hiring by the Saxon manufactory continued his studies of mythology. By the early 1740s Kändler had begun to model Apollos and Venuses; he could count on wealthy and worldly local courtiers, including the very rich overseer of the manufactory, Count Heinrich von Brühl, to patronize creations such as the elaborate table fountain known as 'The Triumph of Amphitrite', produced by the manufactory in 1747 and now owned (and recently restored) by the Victoria and Albert Museum. But by this time Meissen's works were selling widely across Europe; even Russians and Ottomans ordered goods from the Saxons (though the Ottomans seem exclusively to have ordered a special sort of handleless cups known as *Türkenkoppchen*). By the 1750s there were many other manufactories also issuing figurines and beginning to move from Chinoiserie and Rococo to 'libertine' classicism, including Frankenthal (near Mannheim), Ludwigsburg (Kassel), Wegeley (Berlin; the predecessor to the KPM (Königliches Porzellan Manufaktur), or the Prussian Royal Manufactory), and Höchst (Frankfurt). By the early 1760s French styles were in such demand that the German manufactories sent artists to France to perfect their skills, and in 1764 Meissen hired a French artist, Michel Victor Acier, to rank alongside Kändler as master modeller. Acier's works were by no means all



Fig. 3. 'Europa', Meissen Manufactory, c. 1760. This highly popular 'libertine' version of Europa and her bull follows Ovid in not dramatizing the sexual violence of the myth. Rijksmuseum, Amsterdam.

classicizing; indeed most seem to have been courtly, slightly risqué, Rococo scenes. Manufactories, too, catered to the marketplace by drawing on a corpus of already popular prints and illustrated books such as Bernard Picart's version of Ovid's *Metamorphoses* (Cassidy-Geiger 1996: 113). Paintings by François Boucher, Antoine Watteau, and later Angelika Kauffmann were widely imitated and adapted. By the means of these market-driven exchanges of artists, techniques, and sources, a remarkably similar 'libertine' look evolved, as evidenced by this Meissen 'Europa' and Doccia 'Venus', both of which have been dated to about 1760 (Figs. 2, 3).

I have dubbed this style 'libertine' classicism to capture its tendency to emphasize sexual playfulness and drunkenness; there is a great deal of colour and much opportunity for nudity. In objects such as the 'Europa' mentioned above (Fig. 3), we see a



Fig. 4. Ovidian Coffeepot, Doccia Manufactory, c. 1760. This colourful service featured beloved and familiar scenes from Ovid's *Metamorphoses*. The Metropolitan Museum of Art, New York, gift of George F. Baker, 1931, www.metmuseum.org.

sensual, cheerful rendering of the ancient world that is allegorical rather than historicizing and playful rather than didactic. The scenes depicted tell stories; 'readers' are invited to guess the scene, but not to pinpoint a particular source or monument. In keeping with the eighteenth-century habit of reading Greek mythology through Roman sources — with Ovid predominating — the names of the deities are generally Roman ones, and love, music, and the pursuit of sex are depicted much more often than tragic death or warfare. It is telling that at Meissen, at least, Venus was statistically the goddess most often featured in eighteenth-century figurines. She was followed by Hercules, Amor, Apollo, and Bacchus. Diana, mistress of the beloved hunt, greatly outdistanced Mars, who rarely appears.³ Fantasies such as Kändler's virtuoso table-group 'Apollo and the Muses' celebrate the secular arts; a Ginori coffee set featured the drunken Silenus on the coffee pot, the flaying of Marsyas on the sugar bowl, and Phaeton's crash and the abduction of Persephone on two of the cups (Fig. 4). In these depictions modellers freely adapted sketches without worrying too

³ Examining numerically, the most beloved smaller classical figures — those intended, then, for sale — produced at Meissen between 1710 and 1775 yields the following best-loved ancients: 13 Cupid; 18 Apollo; 13 Bacchus; 9 each of Ceres and Diana, lagging behind Minerva at 15, and 10 Floras and Mercuries. Hercules came in with 14 models, the same number of Saturn; Juno outdistanced Jupiter 12 to 10. The grand winner, perhaps predictably, was Venus, at 21 different models. See Herzog (2008: 13–65, especially 74, 4–6).



Fig. 5: 'Allegory of Spring', c. 1760–8, Weesp Porcelain Manufactory. Note the adoption of the Venus and Cupid idiom for the purpose of capturing the warmth and fertility of spring. Rijksmuseum, Amsterdam.

much about getting exact proportions, costumes, or even storylines right. These were purely decorative items made for persons — perhaps the majority of them male, for they were the Grand Tourists, the Dilettanti, and the key patrons of the period — who wanted to display their intimacy with racy stories and mythological (rather than religious) iconography. But very elite women, beginning with that great tastemaker, the Madame de Pompadour, the great patroness of the French Royal Manufactory at Sèvres, also purchased classicizing porcelains. Several decades later, other queens commissioned classicizing table services based more closely on actual antiquities (and notably less risqué). Marie Antoinette, for example, ordered an 'Etruscan' (red-figure) service for her palace at Rambouillet, and Catherine the Great purchased a cameo service from Sèvres in the 1780s (Adams 2007: 184). By the century's end, a few of these (male) 'libertine' patrons were willing to commission what we might even call pornographic porcelains, like the teacups painted with phalluses Duke Ernest I of Saxe-Coburg Saalfeld had the Gotha

manufactory make for his private parties. But of course these were not sold on the open market!⁴

It is also important to emphasize the omnipresence of the language of classicism in the many allegories represented in porcelain in this era, a legacy, of course, of many other artistic genres, but one repeated, relentlessly, in porcelain. Many manufactories made groups, sometimes in the form of candelabras, of the Muses, the Seasons, Night and Day, the Senses, the Arts, and so forth, and almost always the iconography used was classical (Fig. 5). This was, of course, a much older tradition deployed in other artistic and poetic genres; but porcelain makers replicated it and made it more portable and accessible than ever before. If we want to understand how the classical continued and amplified its association with the general, the universal, the human, we should pay close attention to the virtually exclusive use of classical figures in the allegorical decorations of the ‘golden age’, and after.

Of course, allegories or even ‘libertine’ scenes did not comprise the whole of the classicizing production of this period. Those who take the time to visit the many collections scattered across Europe and to scan the beautiful exhibition catalogues available in libraries and bookshops today cannot help but be struck by the enormous range of iconography deployed in this period, appropriate to a consumer base with a wide, if shallow, familiarity with stories and mythological figures of the ancient world. A list of figurines produced at the Berlin Royal Manufactory between 1763 and 1786, for example, includes 173 mythological figurines, offered in different sizes and price ranges; the usual gods were represented (Apollo, Juno, Jupiter, Venus, Hercules, Bacchus, Diana, Mars) but also some less common ones: Hygea, Rhadamantus, and even Priapus. The list of real ancient intellectuals was very short, encompassing only Solon, Cicero, Diogenes, and Pythagoras (Köllmann and Jarchow 1987: 24–8). And this is only one German manufactory, of at least twenty by 1775. In fact, one finds all sorts of unusual classical scenes pictured in eighteenth-century porcelains, including Meleager with the Caledonia Boar, Tomyris with the head of Cyrus (from Herodotus) (Fig. 6), some very odd versions of Bacchus and Cleopatra, and even a Sphinx with a putto. Again, the general impression one receives is of a cheerful, libertine world, free from clerical oversight or political oppression, and un beholden to conventional mores such as marital fidelity or sartorial modesty. There was, however, also room for some theatrically-staged tragedy and violence, especially as we strike a Romantic vein, represented in scenes such as the Rape of the Sabines, or Artemesia with the head of her husband. ‘Antiquity’ has never been a single entity, and perhaps in the eighteenth more than any other century, thanks in large part to the expansion of the luxury market, it had become a vast archive in which scholars, artists, clergymen, and courtiers could find the proper form for self-expression or social critiques.

⁴ One of these teacups remains on display at Schloss Friedenstein, in Gotha; replicas can be purchased in the gift shop, suggesting that this porcelain artefact, almost alone of any of the Gotha manufactory’s output, still appeals to some consumers.



Fig. 6: 'Tomyris with the Head of Cyrus', Frankenthal Manufactory, c. 1773. Note the vivid detail and colour, complemented by a dash of humour, which the modeller and painter have deployed to sweeten this otherwise gruesome scene from Herodotus. The Metropolitan Museum of Art, New York, the Jack and Belle Linsky Collection, 1982, www.metmuseum.org.

What did it mean to purchase, and to display, 'libertine' porcelains? Of course, this is a difficult if not impossible question to answer directly, as consumers and even patrons rarely expressed their desires in print. But the objects we have been discussing so far were relatively expensive and many of them were individually commissioned by aristocratic men and women who paid a great deal of attention to the decoration of their rooms or tables. Some examined preliminary sketches or hired courtiers or artists to oversee a decorative programme that would properly reflect the household; the court confectioner (in German *Hof-Conditor*) took on the function of the impresario for elaborate banquets, ordering sugar sculptures or porcelain figurines for the adornment of the table (Cassidy-Geiger 2010). In many cases princes directly oversaw their porcelain manufactories; Frederick the Great of Prussia, for example, not only micro-managed his own porcelain manufactory with typical authoritarian brutality — forcing Prussian Jews who wanted to set up household to make porcelain purchases — but also designed his own tableware, featuring interlaced weaponry and musical instruments. Frederick was only one of many to covet the figurines designed by Kändler, and he would resist his manufactory's adoption of

a new, more austere form of neoclassicism down to the time of his death in 1786. Thus I think we can say that consumers of this period did not purchase ‘libertine’ depictions without thinking about how they ‘spoke’. But what then, did they say?

Combining many years of reading about Enlightened court society and intellectual life with an extensive survey of the manufactories’ production, the historian can speculate that those who purchased ‘libertine’ porcelains wanted to signal their participation in a world of secular, sensual pleasures. The buyer wanted to show that s/he was knowledgeable about music and mythology but not a pedant, a lover of the ancients but not to the exclusion of embracing the colourful modern world. To own a piece such as Kändler’s ‘Apollo and the Muses’, on Mount Parnassus’, a costly confection featuring the nearly naked god surrounded by scantily-clad muses, Pegasus, a palm tree, and a waterfall, was to show that one was a man (or woman) of the sensual world, a lover of the arts, a person not embarrassed to have a semi-nude pagan deity on one’s tabletop. Conversations in spaces with such decorations would not have to be constrained by orthodox religious strictures; indeed, it is a bit hard to imagine Bible readings going on in a space containing such an object, though of course elite Europeans since the Renaissance were accustomed to mixing classical and religious themes in their palaces. We might further infer that ‘Apollo and the Muses’ was neither made nor purchased to prompt scholarly discussions about the art and architecture of the ancient world as was, for example, the slightly later décor at the Duke of Dessau’s palace at Wörlitz. Here, the Duke’s antiquarian interests (and his hiring of the Italian restorer Bartholomeo Cavaceppi as artistic advisor) resulted in a different look; a combination of copies of real antique gemstones and images of the Portland vase interacted with imagined scenes from the classical past, creating a game, as another scholar has described it, ‘in which antiquarian knowledge was activated’ (Lang 2015: 144). Rather, Kändler’s ‘Apollo’ and the smaller ‘libertine’ figurines of the period fit very nicely into the style of Old Regime salon conversation cultivated by aristocratic women in particular, in which both pedantry and moral harangues were frowned upon. In these circles, learning and play were combined, and no one was likely to stint on the wine (Cf. La Vopa 2017: 19–43). As a cultural and economic ‘fossil’, ‘libertine’ classicism tells us that German court society, too, wished to belong to a European world whose language was secular, sensual, and playful. Antiquity was not purely beautiful, idealized, and distant, but was part of the modern world’s means of expressing its emotions and desires. Perhaps that is why it is this form of classicizing that scholars of the next generation such as J. J. Winckelmann most despised.

The advent of ‘chaste’ classicism

Winckelmann, it may be remembered, spent some of his formative years in Saxony, as librarian to Graf Büнау, and it was thanks to the Catholic connections of the Saxon royal house and his own conversion that he was able to travel to Rome in 1755 and to find employment with the great collector–prelate Cardinal Albani. During the period Winkelmann spent in and around Dresden, the Saxon holdings of actual

antiquities were extremely meagre; but the Meissen manufactory was issuing massive quantities of ‘libertine’ porcelain, and undoubtedly Winckelmann and the Meissen modellers shared some source materials, including Bernard de Montfaucon’s multi-volume *L’antiquité expliquée et représentée en figures* (1719–24). It is clear that Winckelmann was familiar with Meissen’s figurines, for in 1767 — after he had left Saxony and had ample opportunity to see a large number of ancient originals — he denounced the ‘silly dolls’ made by the porcelain manufactories and blamed them for spreading ‘childish taste’ (Winckelmann 2008: 34). By going to Rome, Winckelmann had learned to see antiquity differently, but he was well aware that his vision clashed with the courtly one we have been surveying above. It was his ill-fortune that he would die already in 1768, when ‘libertine’ classicism was still very much the way in which most Europeans perceived the ancient world.

By the 1770s and 80s, however, a metamorphosis of the classical imagination was in the works which Winckelmann abetted and would surely have applauded. By this time, the Grand Tour and the market for classical reproductions had begun to boom on a new scale, and northern and central Europeans had at their disposal a much larger, shared visual repertoire of classical images than had been available to most even 20 years before. This included the illustrated masterpieces composed by William Hamilton, Baron d’Hancarville, James Stuart and Nicholas Revett, and the Comte de Caylus, as well as the massive *Le Antichità Ercolano* (8 vols., 1757–92). But recent work has also revealed just how rapidly the plaster cast industry developed from the 1760s onward. This was an industry dominated, once again, by Italians, who, seeing an opportunity, took the Grand Tour crafts of restoration and copying on the road. Italian cast makers set up shops in London and took to the muddy roads of Central Europe, bringing with them moulds of the most famous sculptures from Italian collections. Germans, Swedes, and Englishmen purchased casts and copies by the hundreds, for private dwellings as well for the education of students and artists, and semi-public antiquities galleries opened in places such as Mannheim, Amsterdam, and Copenhagen. In 1783 the Saxon king purchased A. R. Mengs’ entire cast collection of 833 pieces, which the successful neoclassical painter and friend of Winckelmann had acquired during a career spent chiefly in Rome. The Saxons put many of these casts on display in Dresden’s ‘Japanese Palace’, pushing out the East Asian porcelain previously displayed there; this would become a sort of archive for Meissen’s modellers of the century’s end. Having now so many examples of real (if often heavily restored) classical sculpture, both modellers and their customers might well have come to regard the previous generation’s more freely imagined classicism as out of date, or even, like Winckelmann, as slightly silly.

To these developments we should link — to return to porcelain — the massive new popularity of so-called biscuit porcelain, pioneered at the French royal manufactory at Vincennes in 1751 as a means to achieve the look of marble in smaller-sized (and cheaper) porcelains. When he became director of the manufactory, now located on the road between the two great markets of Paris and Versailles, at Sèvres, the sculptor Étienne-Marie Falconet expanded the use of biscuit, especially for the



Fig. 7: Fürstenberg Mini-Bust of Laocoon, c. 1760–70. The Fürstenberg manufactory took advantage of the notoriety of this Hellenistic sculpture in contemporary German aesthetic theory by issuing mini-busts of each of the sculpture's three heads. Landeshauptstadt Hannover, Museum August Kestner, Foto: Chr. Tepper.

reproduction of his own works. Originally made from a softpaste mixture, biscuit was twice-fired but unglazed, leaving a matte surface. It was relatively inexpensive to make and its colour and texture were considered perfect for the more exacting reproduction of classical marbles and bas-reliefs that Winckelmann and the Society of Antiquaries admired, doing away with the glaze that detracted from Ginori's porcelain copies. Biscuit also bore a closer resemblance to sugar than did glazed figurines and was desirable as a substitute for expensive and perishable sugar sculptures on noble tables. Falconet mastered the biscuit 'surtout' — a table decoration made in the round, to delight all guests — although most of his depicted European genre

scenes rather than classical ones; only after the appointment of Louis-Simon Boizot to head the modelling department in 1773 did Sèvres begin to adopt the *goût grecque* (Whitehead 2010: 33, 61–9). By this time, others were already busily exploiting biscuit's aesthetic possibilities.

One of the first manufactories to adopt biscuit was the Fürstenberg factory, owned by the Duke of Braunschweig-Wolfenbüttel, who already owned a sizeable, if heterogeneous, collection of antiquities. In 1771, apparently inspired by Gotthold Ephraim Lessing, author of the important aesthetic treatise *Laocoon* and librarian in Wolfenbüttel, Fürstenberg began producing small-sized biscuit busts of famous persons, ancient and modern, real and mythical, modelled by a French sculptor. Among the first were Voltaire and Sappho, but the list of busts eventually ran to 135, of which 56 were modelled after ancient sculptures, and included Winckelmann's favourites, the Dying Gaul, the Medici Niobe, and all three heads of the famous Hellenistic sculpture of Laocoon and his sons, in different sizes (MacLeod 2007: 58) (Fig. 7). Fürstenberg, like many other German makers, also offered porcelain medallions; 61 of 170 or about 36%, were of ancient figures (Walz 2008: 64, 67). Unlike Sèvres, Fürstenberg offered smaller items at more affordable prices, clearly aiming at a more 'serious' set of educated, rather than merely aristocratic, buyers. It apparently found them, for Fürstenberg, for a time at least, flourished.

But it was the English potter Josiah Wedgwood who fully recognized and exploited the promise of biscuit. Until the early 1770s, Wedgwood had made fine stoneware (not true porcelain) in direct imitation of the black basalt wares and red- and black-figure classical vases featured in William Hamilton's catalog of ancient vases.⁵ These works were immediately successful, earning profits as well as connoisseurs' esteem. But just as Fürstenberg began its production of mini-busts, Wedgwood turned his attention to the reproduction of Roman cameo gems, perhaps inspired by the blue and white medallions the Doccia factory had been selling to Grand Tourists, including members of the Society of Dilettanti, since the 1750s. It was essentially biscuit that Wedgwood adapted to make what he would call 'Jasperware', white biscuit juxtaposed to chalky but deep backgrounds of pink, lilac, green, and then, famously, blue. It took Wedgwood several years to perfect his mixtures, but by 1774 his 'Etruria' factory in Stoke-on-Trent was producing large numbers of mostly inexpensive items such as brooches, scent bottles, medallions, and plaques to be imbedded in boxes, fireplaces, or furniture (Fig. 8).

Once Jasperware took off, Wedgwood went into a frenzy of producing models, by commissioning cast makers to work from antiquarian books and existing objects, and eventually by sending his craftsmen to Rome to make copies of an increasingly eumenical set of artefacts. It is worth noting just how expansive a vision of the ancient, as well as modern, world Wedgwood incorporated into his catalogues. By 1787, the sixth edition of his catalogue of gems, busts, and bas-reliefs included only 10 Egyptian

⁵ He stocked his manufactory's library with volumes of Montfaucon, Caylus, Passeri, and d'Harcenville (plus of course Hamilton). See Bungarten (2008: 148).



Fig. 8: Wedgwood Secretary, c. 1780–90; note that the Jasperware plaques here still treat ‘libertine’ themes: above the marriage of Cupid and Psyche, and below images of Sappho and Flora. Rijksmuseum, Amsterdam.

figures, but 151 Roman gods and goddesses, and 74 depictions of Roman history, outdistancing the 18 depictions of scenes from *The Iliad*. There were 196 choices of tablets for chimney pieces, all of them classical in subject matter, hundreds of medallions of gods, statesmen, artists, poets, philosophers, and, rather jarringly, 253 Popes (Wedgwood 1787). This is indeed a hodgepodge, but it does create a kind of canon of things educated and tasteful people should know about: kings and poets, and especially the Greek and Roman gods. We should note that Wedgwood, the left-leaning non-conformist, at least claimed to be representing antiquity directly, and not through the mediation of Baroque sketches or Rococo paintings. There is a seriousness about this version of the classics which separates its rhetoric from that of the Rococo figurines; these are icons meant to demonstrate the buyer’s knowledge and taste, not his or her sense of humor, or desire to enjoy the sensual pleasures of life.

Although there is still some sensuality and nudity here, it is tempered by rendering the figures smaller, and by taking away the vividly painted details. As a whole, this form of neoclassicism rises to a level of greater idealization and historical accuracy than that aspired to by ‘libertine’ neoclassicism, and has been fittingly dubbed ‘chaste’ classicism by Howard Coutts. Or perhaps even better is the description Seymour Howard applies to the larger format sculptures in this genre by artists such as Berthel Thorwalsen and Antonio Canova: ‘refrigerated Eros’ (Howard 1990: 168; Coutts 2001: 222).

Despite trade barriers, German elites began buying Wedgwood as early as 1768, and by the 1780s, the great popularity of Jasperware’s ‘refrigerated Eros’ — despite tariffs or bans imposed on English goods — threw all of the Central European high-quality makers into panic, and many into debt. Manufactories did receive heavy state subsidies, but as Enlightened absolutists such as Joseph II began to adopt physiocratic ideas and tire of sinking fortunes into luxurious form of monarchical self-advertisement, they increasingly had to make ends meet (see here Marchand forthcoming, Chapter 2). Together with the increased circulation of casts and illustrated antiquarian books, the spread of Jasperware and other biscuits also had cultural, or more exactly visual, consequences. As more mobile, better read, and richer German courtiers and English gentlemen began to visit Italy and France in larger numbers, and to see plaster casts, Wedgwood, or Fürstenberg busts at home, their eyes were increasingly spoiled for ‘libertine’ classicism, and objects that more closely aped real antiques appealed more strongly. As the painter J. H. W. Tischbein — who spent much of his career in Rome — complained in a 1796 letter to C. A. Böttiger — himself a Gymnasium director and antiquarian author of a book on classical erotica: ‘I have also seen, to my sorrow, the vases and cups that are being made in Germany’s best porcelain factories. They have have tried to imitate the so-called Etruscan painting of our vases, but very awkwardly and without any understanding. They have thrown together without any sense figures from many sources and have cooked up the most absurd compositions, only in order to have some images to use ...’ (Bungarten 2008b: 156).

The manufactories responded by sending artists directly to Italy—as did Wedgwood—or into the cast collections. At Meissen, the next generation of modelers after Kändler and Acier, C. G. Jüchtzer, J. G. Matthäi, and J. C. Schönheit, increasingly based their designs on existing, often heavily restored ancient sculptures or casts rather than on imaginative adaptations of prints (Möller 2010: 90).⁶ They were joined by the young neoclassical sculptor Johann Gottfried Schadow, whose first job after his return from Rome was that of modeller at Prussia’s Royal Porcelain Manufactory (KPM) in Berlin. By the later 1780s, under Schadow’s leadership, the manufactory was producing models in biscuit, and priding itself on coming much

⁶ Interestingly this means that some of these models can now be used to see what Renaissance and Baroque restorers added to those ancient monuments which subsequently were stripped of their later enhancements (Loesch 2010: 45).



Fig. 9: Minerva in Biscuit, c. 1796. Note the severity of the pose and the Meissen modeller's attempt to more closely replicate ancient draperies and armaments. Rijksmuseum, Amsterdam.

closer to 'real' and especially Greek, antiquity than ever before, though still usually working with Roman copies or Baroque restorations. Schadow would continue to model occasional pieces for the manufactory even while executing major commissions for the Prussian court such as the Quadriga for the Brandenburg gate. His work would forge powerful connections between Berlin's modernizing aspirations and the style of 'chaste' neoclassicism, a linkage extended and amplified in the architectural and sculptural compositions of Christian Daniel Rauch and Karl Friedrich Schinkel, both of whom would also provide models to the KPM.

We can see very clearly the stylistic contrast between 'chaste' and 'libertine' classicizing figurines by contrasting two Meissen pieces, our 'Europa' of about 1760s (Fig. 3) with a 'Minerva' modelled by Carl August Starke in 1796 (Fig. 9). The 'Europa' could have sprung from one of François Boucher's paintings; indeed, it is very much like his 1747 'Rape of Europa', now in the Louvre. The Minerva does not seem to be an exact copy of an ancient sculpture, though it may be a slightly free



Fig. 10: Teacup with the Portrait of Frederick Wilhelm III. During and after the Napoleonic Wars, the ‘chaste’ neoclassical style was used to celebrate monarchs and military leaders. © Porzellanikon-Staatliches Museum für Porzellan Selb / Hohenberg an der Eger Dauerleihgabe Oberfrankenstiftung, Bayreuth, Foto: Helmut Groh.

copy of a restored bronze. Other biscuits, like Schadow’s 1791 ‘Cupid and Psyche’ or Jüchter’s ‘Orestes and Pylades’ of about the same time, stick rather closely to ancient idioms in dress and hairstyles if not poses. Biscuits favour the representation of serious or melancholy figures and subjects — Athena or Diana — rather than more comic or playful figures (Silenus, Leda). But there are plenty of love scenes (Selene and Endymion, Cupid and Psyche) and seduction or abduction attempts (Proserpina, Daphne), and many Venuses and Apollos as well. Groups tend to give way to individual figures; but the Capodimonte modeller Filippo Tagliolini made a name for himself with huge groups such as ‘The Procession of Aurora’ and ‘The Fall of the Giants’. (He also modelled a Laocoon, a Niobe, and a Flora, all based on ancient models.) There is a drift towards real historical figures, ancient or modern (Socrates, Joseph II, Marie Antoinette), but allegorical figures did not entirely disappear. ‘Chaste’ classicism could still appeal to courtly taste and adorn noble tables, but many pieces seem to have been tailored to suit the needs of a more serious and less profligate class of officials and scholars who might have found it hard to justify owning a ‘Leda’ or a ‘Europa’.

'Chaste' classicism, as we have seen, was at first an international style, pioneered at Sèvres, and pursued by Fürstenberg, Meissen, Capodimonte, and Wedgwood, among others. But in the era of the French Revolution and Napoleonic Wars, it was increasingly mobilized for nationalistic purposes and began to lose its connections with literary narratives. It has been plausibly claimed that Wedgwood became so popular in France, especially after the Anglo-French trade treaty of 1786, that this new style, not yet associated with the monarchy, formed the basis for revolutionary and then Napoleonic neoclassicism (Evans 1931: 114). The pure white 'language' of biscuit was well suited to the glorification of a new breed of Emperors and military leaders, who were at once timeless and nationally specific. By the early 1800s, the 'refrigerated' style was being deployed in patriotic depictions not only of Napoleon but of his opponents—including Frederick Wilhelm III and the Duke of Wellington—as well (Fig. 10).

Thus, all across Europe a 'chaste' form of classical imagery did not entirely replace the Rococo sensuality of eighteenth-century porcelain, but became the serious, and largely anti-libertine means to link Greek antiquity and European modernity. Biscuit's resemblance to marble enhanced this association, giving porcelains in this way an exalted feel, suitable for use for modern heroes as well as for ancient art. 'Chaste' neoclassicism after 1800 also distanced itself more and more from Rococo playfulness and light eroticism; there is still some nudity, but it is often abstracted or miniaturized; some porcelain replicas even added clothing to suit more prurient tastes (Klemm 1834: 109). (Libertinage moves, instead, to the decoration of pipe-heads, quite a number of which were explicitly erotic, occasionally with the familiar classical referents: Leda, Danae, Venus, and Cupid and Psyche.) In the Napoleonic years, biscuit depictions seem more and more to favour solemnity and historical accuracy rather than fantasy or allegory, to conform to Winckelmann's lauding of ancient sculpture as characterized by 'noble simplicity and silent grandeur'. Thus did biscuit porcelain reinforce a new way of 'seeing' the ancients: as serious, colorless, and timeless; as elevating to the mind rather than pleasing to the eye. This was an image that certainly fit with the ideals of the new Gymnasium and with new directions in classical philology, in which historicizing interpretation drove out more speculative comparative mythologies (Marchand 1996: 75–115). If it read as anti-aristocratic in post-Revolutionary France, in northern Europe it distanced itself from 'French' forms of classicism which it now cast as inauthentic, decadent, and out of date.⁷

⁷ As late as 1862, a British critic was still contrasting the 'undying loveliness' of the forms of Flaxman (Wedgwood's favourite modeler) and Thorwaldsen as compared to the lavish creations of Sèvres and other 'pampered productions of royal dynasties redolent in wealth'. 'Dresden', he wrote, in tones resonant of Winckelmann, 'has long indulged in a confectionary Art—a style which, congenial to a nursery, was promoted to the palace. Cupids flying like pretty moths to the flame of a candle, and then caught against the melted wax and roasted in the hot flame, would fairly designate the favorite subjects in this fancy Art-manufacture' (Atkinson 1862: 303–4).

Across the porcelain market, then, the ‘chaste’ style displaced ‘libertine’ classicism, appealing to an elite consumer base composed of a mixture of nobles and wealthy *Bildungsbürger*. Sales remained reasonably steady until the Napoleonic occupations of Central Europe began, but after 1806, everyone curtailed their non-necessary purchases, and porcelain makers fell on very hard times. The collapse of the Holy Roman Empire and the subsequent wars bankrupted many German princelings, and these patrons and buyers were not replaced by a rising middle class of customers very quickly; indeed, not until the 1850s did consumption of housewares really begin to take off in the towns and cities of this region. ‘Strict and tight was the budget of the urban citizen’, the mid-century novelist Gustav Freytag wrote, looking back on his grandparents’ world; ‘only a few were sufficiently well-off to be able to give the decoration of their homes and lives a little refinement (*Glanz*). . .’ (Freytag 2019: 445). The visual evidence offered by hundreds of paintings and sketches of Biedermeier interiors confirms that in the early nineteenth century, even middle-class Central Europeans owned little more than the occasional, large-sized bust or biscuit copy for the salon or man’s study.⁸ When such households did begin buying porcelains, they seem chiefly to have desired not figurines but sentimental, mismatched teacups for intimate parties. The market, once again, was moving on, and those stuck in older modes of representation would suffer, no matter what the quality of their work or the integrity of their vision.

By the mid-1820s it was clear that emphasizing neoclassical forms and decoration was not economically viable for firms under increasing financial pressure from ministries; private makers largely gave up producing classicizing pieces and radically downsized their figurine lists in favour of producing the now highly demanded tea sets. To the disappointment of the artisans, manufactories discovered that buyers wanted flowers and neo-Rococo genre scenes, with lots of gilding. They argued, it turned out rightly, that exhibiting such wares would give the impression ‘that our firm has absolutely no sense of beauty or progress’ (Quoted in Schulze 1992: 22). The critics — including Gottfried Semper — did say this, and urged the manufactories to refrain from eclecticism and over-decoration, and to return to simple, noble styles, especially those of the Greeks (see Marchand 2017). This advice was all very well, wrote Georg Kolbe, director of the KPM, but the practical reality was that decorative arts producers, and especially ceramics makers, could not possibly follow Semper’s rules and still please the public; and without pleasing the public, the KPM and others could not continue to produce, among their wares, the works of art that Semper desired. Were his factory to seek a unified style, and to produce only Greek or Chinese forms, Kolbe wrote, ‘almost the entirety of the whole modern porcelain

⁸ Cast prices were falling as well. Examining a list of prices for casts of the Elgin Marbles in 1817, Goethe would predict that ‘the continent will soon be flooded with these wonderfully formed items, as with bad cotton and other such wares’. Quoted in Ladendorf (1958: 69). It is certainly true that institutions bought copies of the Elgin Marbles, but my sources do not suggest that they were particularly appealing to private buyers.



Fig. 11: Salon of the Dancer Fanny Elssler, 1830–40. This depiction of the salon of the successful dancer Fanny Elssler suggests that when Biedermeier-era women purchased porcelains, they favoured colourful vases and cups rather than biscuit figurines. Wiki commons, [https://commons.wikimedia.org/wiki/File: Living_room_Fanny_Elssler.jpg](https://commons.wikimedia.org/wiki/File:Living_room_Fanny_Elssler.jpg).

art-world would fall into ruins’ (Kolbe 1863: 250). The artists might turn up their noses at historicism; but if the public wanted it, the manufactories, including the state *Kunstanstalten*, were going to have to give it to them.

One might also attempt an explanation of the decline of ‘chaste’ classicism, or at least its limitation to buyers of a certain kind, by invoking gender analysis. It was suggested above that ‘libertine’ artefacts were most probably chiefly purchased by men, partly because princes supervised and patronized many manufactories and partly because the whole culture of the Grand Tour was so very male. But some women, too, seem to have found this style congenial and female figures were central to the repertoire. As we have seen, ‘libertine’ classicism comported with the style of discourse encouraged in the salon, where women played a key role in keeping the conversation lively and free from pedantry. ‘Chaste’ classicism, on the other hand — perhaps aside from Wedgwood’s cameos — seems to have lent itself especially to busts and figurines of men, ancient and contemporary, something increased by the historicizing of representations, which then omitted the women so frequently used in allegorical and mythological scenes.⁹ As Central Europe passed through a religious revival in the

⁹ If we look at the offerings of plaster casts made by Klauer offered for sale in the *Journal des Luxus und der Moden* in 1787, we see that 9 of the full sized figures are women, with Venus topping the charts (none of the more viril goddesses such as Athena or Diana appear) and only 5 men (plus fauns and cupids), while ancient busts tend to the male (19 men, 6 female) and 15 of 18 modern busts are male (the exceptions are two madonnas and one bust of the popular writer (Elise von der Recke). The full-sized figures are very

1820s, classicizing biscuits seem to have disappeared from the salon and found their homes chiefly in libraries, studies, and artists' studios, all spaces more or less off-limits to women.

Female spaces in the home, by contrast, are characterized by colour, and populated by objects useful in their forms of socializing, most importantly the mid-afternoon *Kaffeekränze*. This sketch of the Berlin apartment of the dancer Fanny Elssler in the 1830s, for example, teams with porcelains — none of it, however, biscuit (Fig. 11). When we see female shoppers depicted, too, they are not purchasing biscuit figurines; if these images tell us anything, they suggest that Biedermeier wives were expected to limit their porcelain purchases to tableware, and perhaps to leave the artistic decoration to the *pater familias*. If, then, the 'refrigerated', biscuit style read as 'male', as women increasingly took over household buying and adornment, this did not bode for those whose production focused too exclusively on 'serious' porcelains.

Porcelain in the Age of Eclecticism

For a number of reasons, it is more challenging to tell the story of porcelain and the classics after about 1830 in the way we have done above for the 'golden age'. First, in this period, figurines, like larger-form sculptures, lost much of their cultural salience, and artistic patrons, as well as critics, put more emphasis on painting. Porcelain modellers in the nineteenth century were now chiefly trained in the manufactory, and usually lacked the social notoriety of eighteenth-century modellers such as Falconet, Kändler, and Schadow. Often manufactories put older models back into production, obviating the need for new ones, and caste and copy services attached to museums — beginning with the Louvre's *Atelier de Moulage* — took over the business of creating exact replicas of ancient works. At the high-end manufactories, porcelain painting remained a revered art, and there are thousands of magnificent objects on exhibit in museums today which demonstrate the virtuosity of nineteenth-century porcelain painters. But as firms struggled to reduce costs, they hired more chemists and reduced artisans' salaries as much as 80% between 1820 and 1839 (Siebeneicker 1993: 33), driving aspiring artists who could make a living painting on canvases out of the manufactories. Although magnificent porcelains were still made, especially for state commissions or for display at exhibitions, the industry shifted powerfully towards the production of ordinary tableware, pipeheads, and later tiles, and classical imagery took a distinct backseat as compared to flowers, sweet children, and cute animals.

expensive; 16 Taler (T) for a Venus di Medici and a very expensive 50 T (approximately the annual salary of a Meissen day laborer) for an Apollo Belvedere; but one could buy a much smaller Venus or drunken faun for about a Taler and a half. 'Gipse bei Hr. M. G. Klauer in Weimar', *Journal des Luxus und der Moden* 2 (June 1787): pp. Xliv-Xlv, https://zs.thulb.uni-jena.de/receive/jportal_jparticle_00085899 [accessed 23 October 2019].



Fig. 12: Minton Amphora, c. 1880. This amphora, decorated with the fashionable *pâte-sur-pâte* method in orientalizing style, made no attempt at historical accuracy or even the matching of form and ornamentation. The Metropolitan Museum of Art, New York, gift of Helene Fortunoff and Robert Grossman, 2017, www.metmuseum.org.

Classical forms persisted but were mixed ever more promiscuously with other styles and imagery, and the bottom line dictated that what sold least could and should be discontinued. Consider, for example, what became of the amphora and Krater vase forms, which were never copied exactly, but by the mid-nineteenth century had become conventional forms for state gifts and ‘Prunkstücke’, displayed with bravado at trade fairs and world exhibitions. Most of these featured landscapes or flowers rather than mythological scenes, and ancient shapes received decorations far distant from the scenes represented in Hamilton’s catalogues and on Wedgwood’s eighteenth-century wares (Fig. 12). Most of those who saw such vases almost certainly did not



Fig. 13: Charger with Bathing Nymphs, 1876–86, George Jones and Sons (Stoke on Trent) The nymphs depicted here do not tell a specific story but simply bathe, in a watery landscape whose beauty outshines their own. The Metropolitan Museum of Art, New York, gift of Helene Fortunoff and Robert Grossman, 2017, www.metmuseum.org.

think of them as classical; these forms had been fully tamed and modernized, and have lost their referents. As for nineteenth-century figurines, classical draperies signal antiquity, but the figures are more and more likely to be abstractions or unnamed nymphs and satyrs than recognizable gods or mythological scenes (Fig. 13). Biscuits of the older sort continued to be produced, but only by the state manufactories, whose output was more and more swamped by that of the private firms.¹⁰ When we see images of the salons and studies of the post-1850 period, classical figurines appear, often in combination with a host of other items; but they seem increasingly to be an empty gesture, to have become something pedantic rather than playful, a part of the mental furniture (which is still something!), but not an expression of the self.

In the declining number and variety of classical images we might see reflected the advocacy of the *Realschulmänner*, advocating for schools to teach more science and modern languages and history, and the increasing strength and self-confidence of the commercial middle class, which no longer felt it had to cultivate the ideals of the aristocrats and scholars. By comparison to the wide variety of eighteenth-century

¹⁰ Even at Meissen, the director concluded from his experience at the 1862 London Exhibition that it was advisable only to offer a small number of white groups and figures as the public likes colored ones better. See Berling (1910: 90).



Fig. 14: Meissen biscuit catalogue, 1905. This page (one of about 20!) demonstrates the range of biscuit figurines still offered by the Meissen Manufactory at the turn of the twentieth century. All of the figurines, however, now look very dated, and sales were not brisk. Author's photograph.

classical representations, those of the later nineteenth century are very thin; the diverse pantheon of gods and goddesses has diminished (definitely no Priapus!) and the storytelling has grown simpler. Venus appears, but has become quite thoroughly bourgeois, and her active love life forgotten. The classics were moving in the direction of abstraction, so that what is depicted is further than ever away from a textual source; in the meantime, the wide circulation of retro-reproductions of biscuit reperi-toires made porcelain feel ever more artistically obsolete (Fig. 14).

That the classics still served as an elite language of artists and connoisseurs is borne out in genres outside the porcelain world, where the avant-garde was discovering a new, Dionysian form of philhellenism, one that reached back to chthonic and irrational elements in the Greek tradition and infused representations with a more violent and erotic vision of antiquity. This vision inspired painters, composers, dramatists, and dancers: unquestionably, the fin de siècle avant-garde was finding new ways back to the Greeks and Romans. This new form of classicism, epitomized by Arnold Böcklin, Franz von Stuck, Isadora Duncan, and Richard Strauss,



Fig. 15: *The Modern Europa*, 1909. Modelled by Adolf Amberg for the Meissen Manufactory, this vaguely titled ‘Woman Riding a Bull’ was supposed to be the centerpiece of an elaborate table decoration made to celebrate the marriage of Crown Prince Frederick William and Cecilie of Mecklenburg-Schwerin, but was rejected by Wilhelm II. Rijksmuseum, Amsterdam.

however, was not easily transferable to porcelain. At the higher end, where the artists had more clout and the market less, one can find a Böcklinian element to some of the fin de siècle representations in ceramics as well as in painting. Artists now more often opted to depict mythological rather than historical scenes, and depicted more drunken Bacchuses and ecstatic bacchantes than before, all with an edge of abstraction and dark emotionality characteristic of Symbolism. In post-1905 work of Offermann Friedrich we can observe Venus evolving an art nouveau body type — though without the title appended we would hardly know she is Venus, as her accouterments and usual companions are missing. Efforts to create modernized classical scenes in porcelain met their most embarrassing end with the KPM artist Adolf Amberg’s *Wedding Procession* table decoration, commissioned by the Prussian royal family for the nuptials of Crown Prince Frederick William and Cecilie of Mecklenburg-Schwerin. The Kaiser rejected the elaborate twenty-piece set of figures which, apart from its modernism, featured too much nudity for his taste; admittedly, the father of the groom might have found the (topless) depiction of the bride as Europa riding a bull a bit racy for a wedding table (von Treskow 1971: 108) (Fig. 15).

Porcelain as a genre does not seem to lend itself to psychologizing or Symbolism, or to Modernism as a whole, and though a large number of artists have tried, successes have been limited. The architect Gio Ponti, employed as artistic director for the Ginori porcelain manufactory in the 1920s, created perhaps the most lasting designs by adapting a surrealist idiom akin to that of Giorgio di Chirico and by using brilliant colors to enliven his vessels; few of his figurines invoke classical themes.

The most classicizing German modeller of the mid-twentieth century, Paul Scheurich, attempted to incorporate more eroticism into works such as his ‘Europa’, ‘Apollo and Daphne’, and an elaborate all-white table tableaux entitled ‘The Birth of Beauty’, made for Nazi Foreign Minister Joachim von Ribbentrop in 1942. The elongated limbs, well-defined breasts, modern hairstyles, and glossy glazing give these a different look from Schadow and company’s ‘chaste’ classicism, but the effect, at least to this reader’s eyes, is more decadent and sickly than cheerful or edifying. The white classical body has its ultimate, awful, end in Nazi era biscuits, such as Rosenthal modeller Fritz Klimsch’s clunky update of the Crouching Venus, or the frigidly abstract Athena made by Heinrich Himmler’s SS Manufactory at Allach. It comes as little surprise that Himmler specifically instructed his manufactory that most of its figures be made in white, and that the firm’s first catalogue claimed: ‘White porcelain is the embodiment of the German soul’ (Quoted in de Waal 2018: 356). This is ‘refrigerated Eros’ at its worst. But from another direction, too, porcelain classicism has become a dead letter: the replicas of ancient statues which fill the tourists shops of Rome and Athens—the legacies of the traditions of Doccia and Fürstenberg — are now mementoes of a visit to those cities more than self-reflections or inducements to conversation. At this writing, it seems reasonable to conclude that the combination of fascist whiteness and banality has destroyed Europeans’ and Americans’ taste for porcelain figurines for good. They are part of our visual world no longer.

Conclusion

Tableware and salon decorations may not have meant much, not as much, probably, as school lessons or museum visits, to the interpretation of the ancient world, but they complemented the main point of access most Europeans had to the classical world, by way of mythology and allegory, and gave elite Europeans a language beyond Christianity in which to understand one another. The expansion of semi-luxury markets in industries such as porcelain making in the eighteenth century may not constitute a ‘cultural revolution’ on the order of the Renaissance, but the sharing of skills, sources, and models certainly integrated more Europeans than ever before into a common visual and referential world. This was at first a world populated by cupids and ruled by a lovable, and not too priapic, Bacchus; it evolved into a more serious and white world, of beautiful, young, fit gods and goddesses, who lent some gravitas to increasingly colourful and crowded bourgeois salons and brains. But once it had taken on this gravitas it was hard to re-inject imagination or to extend the genre’s appeal beyond the educated, and chiefly male, elite. Since the early nineteenth century, classicizing porcelain has been stuck essentially in ‘refrigerated Eros’, and as such, it has reinforced some of the problematic aspects of classical idealism that still have an intractable hold: whiteness, heroic musculature, ponderousness. Now that artists, scholars, and luxury buyers seem to have largely forgotten porcelain, it is hard to imagine the revival of a market which once dispersed and reinforced classical narratives and forms of design. Where will we look for our age’s neoclassical ‘fossils’

— the movies? Computer games? That will be for the next generation of classical reception historians to discover.

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