

# Statuette of a Woman Feeding Poultry



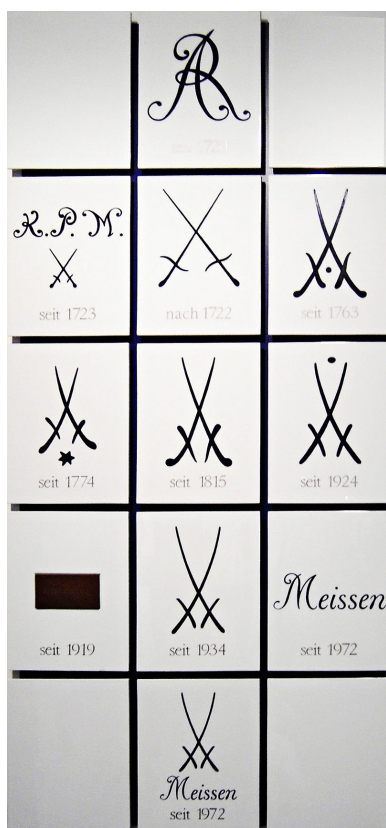
- Date of production ca. 1760
- Place of creation Meissen, Saxony
- Dimensions height: 12.7 cm, width: 6.5 cm
- Author's designation at the back of the base, crossed swords painted underglaze with cobalt
- ID no. ZKWawel 5112
- Museum [Wawel Royal Castle – State Art Collection](#)
- Availability Saxon Hall
- Subjects [daily life](#), [at the table](#), [sculpted](#)
- Technique [extrusion in mould](#), [baking](#), [glazing](#), [overglaze painting](#)
- Material [porcelain](#)
- Acquired date donated in 1966
- Object copyright Wawel Royal Castle – State Art Collection
- Digital images copyright public domain
- Digitalisation RDW MIC, Małopolska's Virtual Museums Plus project
- Tags [ceramika](#), [Miśnia](#), [3D](#), [WMM Plus](#), [kobieta](#), [domena publiczna](#)

The statuette shows a woman bending as she holds her pink dress filled with grain with both her hands. She is standing on a small pedestal with rocaille ornamentation. There are three chicks at her feet. She is wearing a shirt and a short, low-cut laced yellow bodice. Her costume is finished off with a broad flat hat and shoes, both decorated with bows.

During the mid-18<sup>th</sup> century it was popular to set the table on the occasion of the most important ceremonies with porcelain statuettes forming rich iconographic stories. Along the entire length of the table, next to the silverware and the china, sat an arrangement of many statuettes in the form of garden paths, streets or castle arcades, placed on a mirror sheet or coloured sand. The 2<sup>nd</sup> half of the 18<sup>th</sup> century saw a departure from Rococo style. Under the influence of Jean-Jacques Rousseau's philosophy, women started dressing up in shepherdess costumes, including Marie Antoinette, the Queen of France, who ordered that an entire picturesque village be built exclusively for her. Idyllic pastoral scenes and scenes called *fête champêtre* appeared in graphic art, as well as in minor plastic art. There are a few statuettes of this theme in the collection of the Wawel Royal Castle: A Shepherd Playing the Flute and A Shepherdess Leading a Sheep by a Ribbon, as well as the group of figures A Shepherd and a Shepherdess with a Sheep. The presented statuette also has a rural theme.

Elaborated by Dorota Gabryś (Wawel Royal Castle), editorial team of Małopolska's Virtual Museums, © all rights reserved

## “(...) and it was the famous Saxon porcelain from Myszna (Meissen)”



The trademark of Porcelain Manufactory in Meissen, source: [Wikipedia](#), public domain

Two curved and crossed cobalt swords are the hallmark of the porcelain factory in Meissen and have marked its products for over three hundred years. The Meissen Royal Factory first started the production of European porcelain. Ehrenfried Walther von Tschirnhaus, in collaboration with Johann Friedrich Böttger, discovered the closely guarded secret of its production in 1708. Under Böttger's supervision, pursuant to the Royal Decree, in 1710, *Kursächsische Manufaktur* started to function in the castle of Albrechtsburg in Meissen. The activity of the Meissen factory was divided into several periods, named after the artists employed at the time. Each one of them was a genuine, creative personality, who imparted a unique style to the factory products. The initial period (1710–1719), under the management of Böttger, was a time of experiments in the field of production. The first European proto-porcelain was the so-called Böttger's red stoneware, which did not require glazing. Johann Jakob Irminger — a goldsmith — was employed in 1711. He adapted the forms of

traditional metal utensils for the new material. Further experiments conducted by Böttger, aimed at obtaining a snow-white shade of porcelain, did not bring satisfactory results, and eventually enabled him to achieve a yellowish colour. Despite various attempts at developing pigments and methods of under- and over-glaze painting, the glaze itself was also imperfect. Böttger's death, in 1719, put an end to this pioneering phase of the factory's operation.

The work of the painter, Johann Gregorius Höroldt, started the next stage of technological and artistic

development. He turned out to be a brilliant paint specialist or rather the creator of the European onglaze painting decoration on porcelain. Creating motifs for his own products, Höroldt copied the patterns of Chinese and Japanese porcelain. During that period, produced porcelain was extremely exquisitely decorated with *chinoiserie*, motifs of “Indian blossoms”, various paintings, and [landscapes](#). In the Meissen factory, Höroldt organized a painting workshop, where many prominent painters and technologists worked. That time in the factory’s activity was labelled the pictorial period (1719–1731), because, in the field of decoration, painters gained supremacy over sculptors and modelers who worked in the factory at the time.

This situation reversed, when the next phase — called the sculptural period (1731–1763) — commenced. In that period of time, Joachim Kändler was the master modeler. He was considered to be the father of European porcelain sculpture, because he revolutionized the character of Meissen products by emphasizing their plasticity. After 1736, Kändler — as well as making the previously produced porcelain sculptures — began to create small ceramic figurines inspired by court life. For example, he created a great number of “crinoline” statuettes (from crinolines of female figures), actors of *commedia dell’arte*, and famous figures of [Polish men](#) and <sup>[2]</sup> His resources expanded in the second half of the 18<sup>th</sup> century. Further figures were created, including [characters from genre art scenes](#), such as figurines of craftsmen, villagers, and beggars, as well as the famous [Monkey Orchestra](#) (*Affenkapelle ware*).<sup>[3]</sup> Kändler’s best works include: the [tableware set made for Aleksander Józef Sułkowski](#) (1735–1737) — the first such set produced at the factory — and the most magnificent Meissen’s [Swan Tableware](#), created for the then factory’s manager and the later Saxon minister: Heinrich Brühl (1737–1742).

During this period, the paint room, still managed by Höroldt (until 1765), was — in line with the spirit of that era — dominated by the rococo theme of light and delicate court and pastoral scenes in the style of Watteau and Boucher. The previously popular “Indian blossoms” were replaced by the theme of naturalistic representations of plants and insects inspired by botanical patterns, called<sup>[4]</sup> However, since 1739, thanks to the improved technique of cobalt underglaze painting, the production of ceramics, decorated with one of the most famous Meissen decorative motifs — “blue onion” — began.<sup>[5]</sup>

In the 2<sup>nd</sup> half of the 18<sup>th</sup> century, the secrets of porcelain production were no longer a mystery. As a result, Meissen lost the monopoly on its production. At that time, there were already many rival manufacturers in Europe, whose products were maintained at a high artistic level. However, Meissen was still the forerunner in the field of porcelain production technique. During the time when the manager of the Meissen factory was Camill Marcolini (1773–1813), its products imitated French porcelain from Sèvres. Items were glazed in white, which made them look like antique marble. After 1814, in Meissen, imitations of products from the popular Wedgwood factory in England were produced: specifically, ceramics with a white relief on a pastel, matte background. The following periods of the Meissen factory’s work introduced changes in the forms and types of product decoration, according to the current fashion of the prevailing era.

Undoubtedly, the highest artistic level of the workshop in Meissen was reached in the mid-18<sup>th</sup> century, during the stewardship of Höroldt and Kändler. The patterns of glaze painting developed at that time and the types of porcelain sculptures established a characteristic repertoire, according to which traditional Meissen porcelain has been manufactured to this day.

Elaborated by Paulina Kluz (Editorial team of Małopolska’s Virtual Museums),



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*Słownik terminologiczny sztuk pięknych*, red. Krystyna Kubalska-Sulkiewicz, Warszawa 1996.

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[1] “Indian flowers” is a decorative motif taken from the decoration of Chinese porcelain, formed out of lush bushes, flowering chrysanthemums and peonies, maintained in red and purple colours.

[2] Polish figurines belonged to the category of “costume” art. Sarmatian culture with its eastern costumes was oriental for a Saxon court dominated by French fashion.

[3] Porcelain figurines were usually selected from several thematic groups and composed into scenes which, depending on the configuration of the characters, expressed various contents. Placed in such positions on a mirror pane in the middle of the table, they served as its decoration during the meal, called *surtout de table*.

[4] The term *Deutsche Blumen* refers to several types of floral decorations, namely “graphic” and “shaded” flowers, modelled on printmaking, very drawing-like (1735-1745); “naturalistic” flowers, painted on the basis of botanical compendia (1745-1765); and “mannerist” flowers which are compositions of bizarre bouquets (after 1765).

[5] *Zwiebelmuster* is a decoration of an oriental type. Its pattern is created from a bamboo shoot (*schakiako*) entwined with a branch (*clermatis*), and from a branch of chrysanthemum and a Japanese flower (*ominashi*), which are framed with pomegranate and peach fruits, which makes it look like the titular onion.

Tags: [history](#), [craft](#), [manufacture](#), [vessel](#), [Meissen](#), [ceramics](#), [Creative Commons licenses](#)

## “White gold” – concerning the beginnings of European porcelain

Chinese and Japanese porcelain was once an extremely valuable and desirable product in Europe, which was already being imported in the Middle Ages. It was called “white gold”, because it commanded value comparable to this precious metal and was often used as its substitute (e.g. as a gift). At that time, porcelain was viewed as a synonym of luxury and its possession testified to the splendour of the house; only the wealthiest people — mainly royalty — could afford it.

Porcelain is the finest type of ceramics. The formula of its manufacture was developed in China as early as the 7<sup>th</sup> century. In the modern era — in connection with the fashion for Orientalism — porcelain gained such great popularity, that a great effort was made to discover how it was manufactured: one of the most guarded secrets of the East. Initially, half-measures were used to obtain faience: a type of ceramics differing from the mineral composition of porcelain clay, but bearing the closest resemblance to it after firing. Through the use of a similar form, and characteristic cobalt under-glaze decorations on a white background, producers attempted to give it the appearance of original Chinese porcelain. The 2<sup>nd</sup> half of the 17<sup>th</sup> and the 1<sup>st</sup> half of the 18<sup>th</sup> centuries was the period in which the greatest number of porcelain imitations were manufactured in Europe.

The first product of this kind was the so-called Medici porcelain, which was made in Florence in the 16<sup>th</sup> century. However, these vessels had an original form and resembled Chinese porcelain only in its colour scheme. Around 1600, in the French city of Nevers, the production of faience in the Italian tradition began, which — due to the then contemporary fashion trends — adopted the Chinese cobalt-white colour palette and stylistics in the middle of the 17<sup>th</sup> century. The history of the famous Delft faience — also produced since the beginning of the 17<sup>th</sup> century — was similar. At the beginning of the factory’s operation, a characteristic collection of decorative motifs was developed, depicting landscapes or genre scenes, most often cobalt patterns on a white background (patterns of Dutch ceramics recognizable to the present day). In line with the increasing fashion for Chinese products in the 2<sup>nd</sup> half of the century, Delft faience started to resemble such products through the shape of its vessels and decorations, modelled on those from the Far East, although still retaining local features. In the following decades, the trend for this type of product resulted in the establishment of other production facilities of porcelain imitations, which

vied with one another in the field of ideas for production techniques and designs of crockery. The real breakthrough was the invention of a technique for making European porcelain by Ehrenfried Walther von Tschirnhaus in 1708. Von Tschirnhaus's research was continued by his collaborator, Johann Friedrich Böttger (an alchemist who, before embarking on the research into the production of the “white gold”, had conducted experiments on transmutating other metals into gold). In 1710, under Böttger's supervision, porcelain production commenced in the first European factory founded by Augustus II the Strong — *Kursächsische Manufaktur* — at the Albrechtsburg castle in Meissen. Saxon (or Meissen) porcelain was met with great appreciation from the very beginning and has been since produced almost continuously to the present day.

See also:

[Chinese porcelain salt shaker](#)

[“Hydria” apothecary vase](#)

[Teapot with lid](#)

[Porcelain vase with a wooden base](#)

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Ludwig Danckwert, *Leksykon porcelany europejskiej*, tłum. Agata Bobkiewicz, Barbara Bukowska, Roman Warszawski, Gdańsk 2008;

*Słownik terminologiczny sztuk pięknych*, red. Krystyna Kubalska-Sulkiewicz, Warszawa 1996.

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## Tableware in olden days

Dishes, in addition to their main function, began to play a decorative role over time, testifying to the status of their owner. Initially, they had a universal character, but as the ceremony associated with food and its setting was extended, they underwent a peculiar metamorphosis. First of all, the number of dishes increased significantly, as utensils of a specific form were already intended for particular dishes.

An appropriate selection of dishes for specific meals and beverages constituted a table service (for breakfast, dinner, tea, coffee, chocolate etc.), that is a set characterised by uniform decoration. Individual sets of tableware might belong to one whole set along with a dinner service, but most often, they were separate sets. Special development of richly decorated and elaborated table services was characteristic of the 18<sup>th</sup> century, when faience and porcelain products came into use, slowly replacing dishes made of clay and metal.

The dinner service was the most elaborate one in terms of quantity. It included soup vases, so-called [terrines](#), vases for dishes with a semi-liquid consistency, oval platters for roasted food and round ones for vegetables. The whole set was complemented by salad bowls, sauce boats, spice containers, baskets for fruits and bread, and of course, deep and flat saucers. Sometimes, in tableware sets, one might find tubs for sluicing and cooling glasses and buckets for cooling wine.

Tea, coffee or chocolate services were characterised by a different selection of dishes. Each of them consisted of cups of various forms together with saucers (e.g. chocolate service – high binaural cups), various pots, jugs, sugar bowls, creamers, cans (e.g. [tea cans](#)) etc. These services might be intended for many people or constitute a set only for two, the so-called *tête-à-tête*, as well as services for one person, so called “solitary” (from French: *solitaire*).

A model example of a full tableware set consisting of all kinds of table services with the same decoration

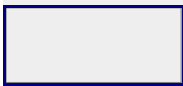


was [the Meissen service of Aleksander Józef Sułkowski](#), created from the following services: dinner, coffee, chocolate, dessert (cylindrical cups for vermouth, plates, stemmed platters, small platters, cans for candied fruit, rectangular cauldrons, flat bowls) and a spice set (*tafelauflatz*, *plat de manage*), table decorations (*surtout de table*) and candle holders.

This kind of tableware, apart from being very elaborate, also had a sculpturally shaped form and very rich pictorial decoration. In some cases, the form even outgrew its function, such as the spice set (*plat de menage*), which was often richly carved and a multi-storey structure. Out of it, a separate decoration of the centre of the table emerged— *surtout de table*, which served a decorative function. It consisted of porcelain figurines composed into groups against the background of various arrangements and constructions. However, it was a special table decoration, because the choice of figures was not accidental. The table decor was designed to convey some keynote during a lavish celebration. Only in exceptional cases was the *surtout de table* made to order as one large team with a specific iconographic programme. Porcelain figurines of this kind were manufactured in thematic series (see [The monkey orchestra](#) or national types, for example [the Polish women](#) and [Polish men](#)), which were bought and combined at choice, so as to illustrate the adopted content concept.

Tableware and figurines were kept in court cupboards. As it was written by Zygmunt Gloger in the *Old Polish Encyclopaedia*: “(...) the cupboard was usually arranged at the end of the dining room, behind the balusters like a cage, so that only the cup-bearer and those who helped them had access: the ones, who washed and wiped dishes. No one else was allowed to enter it. The servants received over the balusters whatever was needed and served it. In this chamber separated by balusters, there was one large table and sideboards or stairs up to the ceiling covered with silver, copper and faience. Only later did it become customary to place the cupboard in a separate room beside the dining room.” At the court, there was even a separate position of a cupbearer, who was responsible for the goods kept in the cupboard, that is, the silver and faience, and for setting them up on the table and preparing table decorations.

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Tags: [everyday life](#), [Meissen](#), [ceramics](#), [set](#)