

# The French touch at Meissen: Christophe Huet's watercolour drawings for the *Cris de Paris*, 1753

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Research into European porcelain is gathering pace. Forty years ago in the early post-War years the only books worthy of the subject came mostly from English authors. Perhaps the pick of the bunch was Arthur Lane's short but revolutionary monograph on the Italian factories published in 1954, Honey's *European Ceramic Art* of 1952, and a host of other monographs published in London by Faber. Such books would have found neither the writers, publishers nor readers in Europe until the incomparable Dr Ducret of Zurich began his array of monumental, fully illustrated works on the lesser factories of Fürstenberg, Kassel, Würzburg and the gilt Hausmaler of Augsburg, besides much else. But in the past few years remarkable progress has come from mostly Continental specialists, amongst whom must be mentioned Angela Carola on the Neapolitan factories, the Baer team in Berlin using that factory's recently acquired archives, strong on prints and printed books, and the welcome French revival by Fay Hallé and Tamara Prèaud, based on the latter's generous use of the incomparable archive material in her care, willingly made available to anyone who asks. Now we await with bated breath for Rainer Rückert's multi-volume catalogue of the Ernst Schneider Bequest at Schleissheim, containing, it is rumoured, many revelations based on a close study of the seemingly endless material in the archives of the Meissen factory. The first volume has already been published, devoted to the biographies of Meissen workers in the 18th century.

One of the features of recent publications of both books and learned articles has been the stress

laid on tracing the prototypes of European pottery and porcelain; in particular the search amongst the thousands of prints in a variety of techniques – woodcuts, copper engravings, etchings – for those used both as models for figures in the round but also for painted decoration on wares. Even that ceramic genius of small sculpture, Johann Joachim Kaendler, used at Meissen from the mid-1730's sophisticated French prints for his so-called 'crinoline' figures and for many of his baroque masterpieces drawn from the characters of the *Commedia dell'arte*. Other German factories – Höchst, Fürstenberg and even Würzburg depended for their *Commedia* figures on a rare set of engravings published by Wolrab in Nuremberg. But rarer as prototypes are the original drawings commissioned from artists. This article is devoted to a set of 34 watercolour drawings of the *Cris de Paris* by the Parisian artist, Christophe Huet (1700–1759), a leading member of a group of artists whose work was in most cases devoted to what today might be called 'interior decoration', but of a quality to which we are no longer used.

The employment of Christophe Huet as a designer of porcelain figures for the Meissen factory is an odd one. The intermediary was Jean-Charles Huet, possibly his brother, and one of the leading Parisian dealers in porcelain. He had a long association with the Meissen factory, having been involved with the rascal Lemaire in 1729. Two attempts were made to persuade the Director, Graf von Hoym, to let Lemaire have Meissen copies of Kakiemon porcelain made without any mark of the crossed swords; Kakiemon wares, as we now call them,

fetching a higher price than the Meissen copies. Lemaire was eventually exiled in 1731, and with him went Jean-Charles Huet. But Huet was back in Saxony within a few years, where he evidently made friends with Kaendler, who made for him many special orders, such as a pierced spoon in 1747, a basketwork sugar box, a carnation in 1747. In 1740 Huet was reported to have spent even more than the King, Augustus III or Count Brühl on Meissen porcelain.

The employment, then, of Christophe Huet in 1753 was a logical development at a time when French fashions were beginning to impinge on the German baroque. Little is known of the detailed career of Huet: indeed, there is as yet no published monograph. Above all he was celebrated for his many *singerie* panels in the hotels and châteaux of the aristocracy: the Grande and Petite *Singerie* rooms at the Chantilly home of the Prince de Condé were universally acclaimed. He worked too for Madame de Pompadour at one of her many châteaux, he painted her two favourite dogs, Inez and Mimi, and he painted many landscapes. His delight in painting monkeys led to the issue of two sets of *singerie* prints early in the 1740's, all of them in the guise of humans, and some of them foreshadowing the Street Cries of 1753.

There was no shortage of skilled modellers at Meissen: one of them, Johann Joachim Kaendler, was a considerable artist, who more or less 'invented' the porcelain figure of small size. Working in a distinctive Saxon baroque style, he began to create small goups and figures from 1735 onwards – scenes of court life, of Italian Comedians and of animals, painted

in strong tones of red, blue, yellow and black. By the mid-1740's the style begins slowly to change into a rather less vigorous manner, with the occasional French touch. There was talk of the new factory of soft-paste porcelain at Vincennes, with its striking ground colours. Kaendler was able to see for himself the *Loius XV* style at its height, when he took to Paris in 1750 belated gifts of Meissen porcelain, wedding presents from Augustus III of Saxony to the Dauphine, Maria Josepha. Kaendler must surely have met in Paris the two Huets, Jean-Charles the porcelain dealer and Christophe the fashionable painter, and possibly discussed the idea of Christophe making drawings for the Meissen factory.

It is an old tradition of the Meissen factory to connect the 34 figures of the *Cris de Paris* as having been based on drawings by a Frenchman called Huet. But the Huet family of artists was a large one. Berling in 1900 not only chose the wrong Huet but also erred in the dating of the Cries. Later writers all referred to Huet, again imprecisely. It is not even certain when the watercolours disappeared from circulation. They seem to have been visible in the 1920's. But for the next half century they had been, it appears, regarded as lost, until about twelve or more years ago sixty tattered, torn, faded and quite enchanting watercolour drawings were accidentally discovered at the bottom of a case. At least this is the story that one is told. Some of the 34 drawings, those of particular charm or in better condition, are here illustrated in colour for the first time, it is believed. They form a remarkable discovery important both as designs for the factory and as examples of Christophe Huet's work; the largest collection in the medium of watercolour, and all of them once signed with a hitherto unrecorded monogram in the top left hand corner.

Since their re-discovery, each sheet



1 Christophe Huet (1700–1759), Poultry seller, watercolour, 1753. 160 x 98 mm. From a set of 34 drawings of Les Cries de Paris ordered for the Meissen factory. This is No 8 and is signed with the monogram of Huet

has been carefully cleaned, the paper repaired where possible, all mounted afresh; but even with this treatment they are but a reflection of their original brilliance. That the drawings were specifically made for the Meissen factory can be proved by the many inscriptions in French and German, some of them missing. In (Plate 1), for example, there is the number 8, followed by Christophe Huet's rare monogram, at the top left corner. Then comes a German translation of the poultry-seller in three lines, with a date, 1753, below, and then an estimate of the cost of preparing the moulds: 'zu Verputzen' and 'zu Formen'. Next comes the number, 'No 4', added probably in the 1770's. Finally, at the foot of the page the damaged and only partial description in Huet's hand: 'Paisan qui Crie des poussins . . .' There are, then three if not four hands to be read. Of particular interest to the collector are the two numerals, the no 8 in Huet's hand at the top left and the bold no. 4 half way down on the right. By noting these

numbers it is possible to tell whether a particular Cry came from the 1753 set or from a later set 'repaired' mostly by Carl Schönheit from 1775 to 1778, by which time such was the success of the set of *Cris* that the moulds had begun to be blunted by frequent use. This second set of numbers seems still to be used. The figures were usually impressed on the base in a small size (see Fig. 9).

The drawings by Huet of the *Cris de Paris* must have been received in Meissen in 1753, at the same time as Huet's drawings of the *Monkey Band* or *Affenkapelle*, which have, like the *Cris*, been attributed and dated in a variety of ways. We know that a complete set of 19 monkey musicians was sold by the *Marchand-Mercier* Lazare Duvaux in December 1753 to Madame de Pompadour; and it can be assumed that the *Cries* were modelled at the same time. Both sets have always been presumed to be the work of Kaendler with the help of Reinicke. Unfortunately all relevant documentation was destroyed for the period 1749 to 1764, but the highly professional style makes any other attribution unlikely. There is one figure of a man with a magic lantern which is dated 1756, and so gives us a good idea of an early Cry both as to modelling and as to the palette of the period.

The subjects of the 34 *Cris de Paris* or *französische Ausrufer*, as they were called in the Price List of 1765, are a mixed lot. Half are male, half female. Many are called *Savoyards*, since street criers were believed to have come to Paris from Savoy. The most popular subjects are the purveyors of food and drink, more than half the total. Some were treated as pairs; for example, the last two, the dandy and the coquette. Huet's drawings are always full of delight, many with their mouths open to shout their wares in their peculiar high-pitched tones. It must not be thought that every watercolour is an original composition, for prints of Street Criers were produced in most of



2 Christophe Huet (1700–1759), *Le Tambourin or Pipe and Tabor*, watercolour, 1753, 159 × 104 mm. The top left corner with Huet's monogram and No 7. The French description is missing, but there is the German translation as well as a note on estimated costs of production



3 Christophe Huet (1700–1759), *The Carp seller*, watercolour, 1753, 163 × 106 mm. The Meissen porcelain figure after this drawing was adapted at Chelsea by their leading modeller, Joseph Willems

the larger European towns, nowhere more often than in Paris. Meissen had already experimented with Paris Criers in the early 1740's, derived from prints of Edme Bouchardon of 1737–1742; and London Cries, smaller in size, were made in the late 1740's or early 1750's from prints published in London earlier in the century by Marcellus Laroon. Huet not only borrowed from these sources but also from some rather indifferent prints by François Boucher, etchings of 1737. Many other prototypes could be singled out were space sufficient. But whatever source Huet may have used, the results were always fresh and lively; he was able to give grace as well as pathos to the most ordinary scene. Look, for example, at the drawing of a boy playing the pipes and tabor, (Plate 2), a subject often referred to as *Le Tambourin*, the name of the long slender drum. The youth has a feathered cap, pink doublet with deep cuffs and yellow breeches. Huet's number 7 and his monogram appear at the top left, but the French inscription is missing. This drawing must surely be based on one of Huet's engravings in Huet's set of *singeries*, where a monkey is shown using pipe and drum in identical manner.

It is not easy to select the most enjoyable – and best preserved – of Huet's watercolours. A typical example (Plate 3), is the carp-seller: 'Femme criant les Carpes', is the usual title. Her rust-red skirt, her arms akimbo, give her a particular liveliness. This is an instance of a borrowed pose, from Edmé Bouchardon's engraving called 'Carpe vive!' some twelve years earlier. It inspired a Chelsea red anchor fish-seller by Willems. Soft drinks were also available in the streets of Paris, for example this seller of tisane, a warm concoction of herbs. The Meissen porcelain figure (Plate 4), derived from the drawing (Plate 5), shows how Kaendler was able to adapt his earlier style to a gentle Louis XV, adding a rococo base to stress the French character of these Cries.



4 Christophe Huet (1700–1759), *seller of tisane (or Iptisane)*, watercolour, 163 × 98 mm. Huet's No 24 torn off, monogram remains



5 Meissen porcelain figure of a tisane seller, H. 160 mm. Modelled by Kaendler after the drawing of fig 4 circa 1755, numeral 24 impressed on base, crossed swords mark in blue



6 Christophe Huet (1700–1759), *Limonadier*, watercolour, 1753 160 × 98 mm, No 18 and monogram in Huet's hand at top left. The large number 15 in brown at the right was evidently added at the time of Schönheit's 'repairs' in or about 1777

One of the more charming of Huet's creations is the *Limonadier* of Plate 6. This agile and alert waiter, who sells not only lemonade but sorbets, ices and other soft drinks is distinguished, at least in the watercolour, by the brilliant blue of his coat. This is particularly apt, for this colour invented by the porcelain makers at Vincennes and known as *bleu céleste* was the fashionable new colour, the rage of 1753, when in December a dinner service was acquired by Louis XV with this ground colour.

Other of the 34 drawings connected with the arts of eating, and drinking include sellers of green walnuts, oysters, grapes, macaroons, small and crisp, vinegar served from barrels wheeled on a barrow, ratafia, oranges, cream and poultry as well as cooks. Amongst the Savoyards are those asking for alms showing marmots in a box or a man with a barrel organ and a magic lantern. There are a few musicians, such as a fiddler, a hurdy-gurdy player and an oboist. Finally, Plates 7 and 8



7 Christophe Huet (1700–1759), *Dandy or Petit Maitre*, watercolour, 1753, 164 × 126 mm. Huet's normal marks at top left, No 36 and monogram. The exact rating of a finely dressed dandy or fop amongst *Paris Criers* is open to interpretation



8 Christophe Huet (1700–1759), *Coquette*, watercolour, 1753, 198 × 122 mm. Numbered by Huet 37, the last of the *Paris Cries*. Evidently intended as a pair to fig 7, the Dandy; the two must have worked as a team of confidence tricksters

show gaudily dressed creatures apeing a lady and gentleman but in fact a false dandy and a coquette. The latter is clad in pale blue and pink, holding an open fan with a gold watch dangling from her waist, while her companion wears a bright red coat and a yellow waistcoat.

All 34 watercolours were transformed into three-dimensional figures by Kaendler and his able assistant Reinicke, we believe. That they proved as it were 'good sellers' is shown by the fact that the moulds were badly worn by 1775 and had to be mended where they had worn out from constant use by the modeller Schönheit; and if further proof is needed it can be found in the hundreds of Meissen figures that have survived from this early period, and in the fact that they still occur on current factory lists.

When seen together the 34 watercolours painted by Christophe Huet for the use of the Meissen factory in 1753 present a gay and a pathetic side. Never intended as a social satire, yet some of the drawings do indeed make more than a merely sentimental gesture as to the happiness or misery of the participants. There is a touch of the Enlightenment that was slowly leading to social and political change. But most of the figures are smiling and at least look content. It must not be forgotten that Huet was drawing for an essentially German audience; and that he was not so familiar with the actual material properties of hard-paste porcelain as he was with the French soft-paste with its rather unctuous glaze. When drawing and Meissen figure are compared side by side, the difference becomes clear. The hard-paste figures have a precision that one does not find in French porcelain. Further, the Germans seem to have been a rather more fastidious race as regards clothing. The Huet drawings show clothes in tatters, torn and even unclean, whilst the Meissen figures have no torn skirts; every piece of clothing

looks as though it has just returned from the cleaners. Many of the drawings have instructions in Huet's hand as to alternative colouring for bodice or coat, and even sometimes suggest quite a different hat to that in the drawing; suggestions at times followed by the sculptor.

The question of colouring of porcelain figures has never satisfactorily been clarified. At Meissen all painting was under the control of Johann Gregor Höroldt (1696–1775), whilst the sculptural side was the territory of J J Kaendler. We do not know who gave the instructions for painting the figures. Regarding the Cris there can not have been much dissent, for the painter of figures always had the watercolours as a guide; and the palette then used in 1753 was carried on late into the century. It is worth noting that both the 1753 and 1775 issues of the Cries had the same palette of two yellows, dark and light, of a pink that tends to puce at times, of a rather hard dark green, of the *bleu céleste* or sky blue already mentioned, and of course black and gilding.

To distinguish between the early and late sets of Huet's Paris Cries is almost impossible with the naked eye. But, as already mentioned, there is a way round this difficulty. Certain sets of figures in the Meissen repertory are distinguished by having impressed numerals on the base: luckily both the Huet Cris and Monkey Band have such distinguishing marks. As an appendix there is added here a list of all 34 figures of both sets with their impressed numbers. Finally, the publication of the colour plates we owe to the permission and generosity of the Meissen factory and its directors and archivists.

*All photographs from the Archives of the Meissen Factory except Plates 5 and 9, the latter kindly provided by Mr Armin Allen*

## Appendix

### Impressed numerals on Meissen Cris de Paris

It was the practice of the Meissen Factory usually to add small impressed numbers to the bases of long sets of figures. This was done in the case of both 18th century sets of Paris Cries, the original set of 1753 and the 'Repaired' set of *circa* 1775–8. This is fortunate for collectors, since it helps to distinguish between the two sets and so give an approximate date for the figure under discussion. In addition to these impressed (occasionally incised) numerals, there were also the factory marks of the crossed swords in its succeeding periods to act as an additional check, though it should be mentioned that the later marks of the so-called 'Academic' or 'Saxe au point' and Marcolini periods are rare.

The two issues of 1753 and 1775–8 are shown here side by side, each with reference to the other. 'S' in column 1 refers to the modeller Schönheit, while 'CH' in column 2 refers to Christophe Huet.

The Huet set of 1753 is listed on the left, beginning with no 4. Why nos 1–3 were omitted is not known. These numerals derive mostly from Huet's watercolours, but where these are missing the numbers are supplied by a study of the porcelain figures with their small impressed marks. Where a porcelain Cry has these numbers, then it can

be safely assumed that the date of production is between 1753 and *c.* 1775. But of course there are always exceptions.

Most of the numbers in the right-hand column derive either from Schönheit's own monthly statements (*Arbeitsberichte*) or from the large numerals added probably after 1775 to the watercolour drawings; these are set half way down the drawing on the right.

The size of the drawings in their present state varies in height from 97 to 126 mm.



9 Typical base of a Meissen Cri de Paris figure of the first issue of 1753. No 17 refers to the *ratafia* seller (Photo courtesy Armin B. Allen Inc.)

#### 1753

From the watercolours of Christophe Huet

- 1 —
- 2 —
- 3 —
- 4 Pâtissier (S1)
- 5 Green walnuts (S2)
- 6 Savoyarde music-making (S3).  
Le Tambourin
- 7 Pipe and tabor (S5)
- 8 Poultry seller (S4)
- 9 Lemon seller (S6)
- 10 Grape seller (S7)
- 11 Milk and egg seller (S8)  
La Laitière
- 12 Oyster seller (S9)
- 13 Carp seller (S11)

#### 1775–1778

From the Work Notes (*Arbeitsberichte*) of the modeller Schönheit and later additions to the Huet watercolours.

- 1 Pâtissier (CH4).  
Repaired S. March 1775.
- 2 Green Walnuts (CH5).  
Repaired S. March 1775.
- 3 Savoyarde playing iron instrument (CH6).  
Repaired S. March 1775.
- 4 Poultry seller (CH8).  
Repaired S. April 1775, mentioning '2 fasanen'.
- 5 Pipe and tabor (CH7).  
Repaired S. April 1775.
- 6 Lemon-seller (CH9).  
Repaired S. April 1775.
- 7 Grape-seller (CH10).  
Repaired S. April 1775.
- 8 La laitrière (CH11).
- 9 Oyster seller (CH12).
- 10 Cook (Cuisinier) (CH14).  
Repaired S. September 1777 as cook.
- 11 Carp seller (CH13).  
Repaired S. September 1777 as Köchin.
- 12 Cream seller (CH15).
- 13 Macaroon seller (CH16).  
Repaired S. September 1777.

- |   |   |
|---|---|
| 14 Cook (S10)                                 | 14 Ratafia seller (CH17).<br>Repaired S. September 1777 as<br>'Mann mit Laterne in einem Mantel'. |
| 15 Cream seller (?)(S12)                      | 15 Lemonade seller (CH18).<br>Repaired S. October 1777 as<br>'Credenz Teller in der Hand'.        |
| 16 Macaroon seller (S13)                      | 16 Flower seller (CH20).<br>Repaired S. October 1777.   |
| 17 Ratafia seller (S14)                       | 17 Orange seller (CH19).<br>Repaired S. October 1777 as<br>'Früchte vor sich hin tragend'.        |
| 18 Lemonade seller (S15)<br><i>Limonadier</i> | 18 Lottery (CH21).<br>Repaired S. October 1777 as<br>'Mit eine Holisten-Spielen'.                 |
| 19 Orange seller (S17)                        | 19 Fiddler or violinist (CH22).<br>Repaired S. October 1777.<br>'Mit Violine'.                    |
| 20 Flower seller (S16)                        | 20 Vielleuse or hurdy-gurdy player<br>(CH23).<br>Repaired S. October 1777. 'Mit Leyer'.           |
| 21 Lottery (S18)                              | 21 Tisane seller (CH24).<br>Repaired S. October 1777.<br>'Mit Weinfass auf dem Rücken'.           |
| 22 Fiddler or violinist (S19)                 | 22 Savoyarde with child (CH26).<br>Repaired S. November 1777.                                     |
| 23 Hurdy-gurdy player (S20)                   | 23 Savoyarde with marmot (CH25).<br>Repaired S. November 1777.<br>'Frau mit Murmel Thier'.        |
| 24 Tisane seller (S21)<br><i>Iptisane.</i>    | 24 Savoyarde and magic lantern (CH27).<br>Repaired S. November 1777.<br>'Guckkastenmann'.         |
| 25 Savoyarde with marmot (S23)                | 25 Cook plucking chicken (CH28).<br>Repaired S. January 1778.                                     |
| 26 Savoyarde demanding alms (S22)             | 26 Peasant girl feeding chicks (CH32).<br>Repaired S. January 1778.                               |
| 27 Savoyard with magic lantern (S24)          | 27 Radish seller (CH29).  |
| 28 Cook plucking a chicken (S25)              | 28 Bouquetière de l'opera (CH30).   |
| 29 Radish seller (S29)                        | 29 Oboe player (CH31).  |
| 30 Bouquetière de l'opera (S28)               | 30 Vinegar seller (CH33).<br><i>Le Vinaigrier. Weinessigverkäufer.</i>                            |
| 31 Oboe player (S29)                          | 31 Turnspit (CH34).<br>'Un rotisseur qui amboche un Dindon'.                                      |
| 32 Peasant girl feeding chicks (S26)          | 32 Coquette (CH37).<br>'Coquette elle a une montre d'or'.   |
| 33 Vinegar seller (S30)                       | 33 Petit Maitre or Dandy (CH36).  |
| 34 Turnspit (S31)                             | 34 Huntsman with hound (CH34).  |
| 35 Huntsman with hound (S34)                  |   |
| 36 Dandy or Petit Maitre (S33)                |   |
| 37 Coquette (S32)                             |   |