

## Figure of a Turk

Around 1780, the Kilchberg-Schooren porcelain manufactory near Zurich produced a porcelain figure depicting a Turkish comedian. It consists of white, painted porcelain and is about 16.5 cm large. The man depicted is wearing a red coat which is open to the front. With his right hand he throws the hem of the coat away to the right side, the left one rests on his hip. His body is slightly turned to the left with his left leg protruding. This gives the appearance of a dancing movement. The garment that he wears under his coat is light blue and golden. Protruding buttons hold the top together over the length of his upper body. At hip level there is a yellow scarf tied to a knot on the left side. His shoes as well as the turban on his head are painted in the same yellow tone. The turban is decorated with a flower-like bud in the same red as the coat. His face appears reddish and below the jaw a dark red line is visible framing the man's face. It can be assumed that it is a mask. He wears a mustache and his hair is grey. The colours are probably not original anymore and have changed over the years. The figure stands on a white pedestal which is elevated behind his feet and serves as a support for the figure's body. On the underside of the pedestal there is the inscription "3." in black letters and "HA 3." in red letters, which indicates the inventory number of the object. The object was purchased by Heinrich Angst (1847-1922), first director of the Landesmuseum Zürich, who bequeathed his entire porcelain collection to the museum in 1903. Thus the Turkish figure came into the possession of the National Collection.

According to Siegfried Ducret the depiction can be traced back to the *Commedia dell'Arte* which enjoyed great prestige in Europe especially in the 18th century. The *Commedia dell'Arte* is a form of theatre which originated in Italy and in the 16th century also reached France, Germany and Austria. Wolfgang Theile said that the theatre often differed according to the circumstances of the geographical and historical reception and underwent a continuous transformation. The figures achieved a high recognition value especially through their masks. And it is exactly these masks that make up the *Commedia dell'Arte*, because by putting on a face it became clear that the scenes were theatre and not reality. The actors dealt so much with the assigned role that they partly identified themselves with the portrayed character. Nevertheless, the theatre had no socially critical attitude. It was not about questioning critical situations, but only about depicting the uncomplicated, everyday life. The plays were performed for the first time in public places and served to entertain amateurs. Later the play gained a higher reputation and also took place in theatres and royal courts. When the Enlightenment came up in the 18th century the attitude towards the *Commedia dell'Arte* changed drastically. The playful, a little naive figures did not fit to the new attitude of mind and so the theatre form lost its reputation.

Around 1780 the Kilchberg-Schooren Porzellanmanufaktur produced a uniform group of seven comedians. Among them are the roles of Pierrot with a fantasy figure as counterpart, a dancer and an Oriental, two actors and another dancer. Ducret theorizes that the dancer is the antithesis of the Oriental figure, because the Oriental figure shows coordinated actions and movements. He calls the figure of the "turc amoureux" designed by Peter Reinicke, modeller at the Meissen porcelain manufactory, around 1744 a comparative object. Such representations of turquoise appear increasingly in connection with the emergence of *Turquerie* in the 18th century. Meissen was the first factory to do this from 1740 onwards in the form of porcelain figures. When it comes to the modeller of the Schooren figure, little is known. Ducret assumes that it must be the same artist who had made figures of dance groups similar in style and form. Although the *Commedia dell'Arte* took place in neighbouring countries, there is no evidence that such plays were also performed in Switzerland. This raises the question of the source of inspiration for Zurich porcelain modellers. According to Ducret,

the modeller of the Turkish figure relied on copper engravings showing the *Commedia dell'Arte* and thus did an excellent job in the elegant and characteristic depiction.

The comedian figure of the Kilchberg-Schooren Manufaktur is thus a depicted theatrical figure. A figure of the figure, so to speak. This is interesting in the context of the fact that around 1780 the *Commedia dell'Arte* actually lost approval and so the question arises why exactly at the time when the movement of the Enlightenment arose in Switzerland, such a figure was made together with an entire group. As already mentioned, the figurative depiction of the Oriental was not about critically dealing with the subject, but rather about reproducing the lightness and playfulness of the actor depicted without any significant moral reason. What seems controversial here is the fact that the portrayal of a Turk or Oriental actually has a deeper meaning and should be treated anything but superficial. In the section on the porcelain figure, Ducret mentions the book "Recueil de cent Estampes représentant différent Nations de Levant" (1714) by Jacques Le Hay. This work contains over 100 prints depicting people of different origins, with a focus on Eastern cultures. Especially the costumes of the cultures were important. It contains a picture of a Turk, designed by Jean Baptiste Van Mour. This has a significant similarity with the Kilchberg-Schooren porcelain figure and, according to Ducret, the modeller referred to images like this when designing the figure.

Another person worth mentioning in connection with the Turkish culture is the Geneva artist Jean-Etienne Liotard (1702-1789). After his trip to the East, the artist saw his task in the art of artistically reproducing the local people's traditional costumes. It was a matter of an exact observation of the garment. In his work "Richard Pococke" (1740), the English writer is depicted in an oriental costume that can be compared to the costume of the porcelain figure. The fact that this was a European in oriental clothing was not fictitious, but Pococke really wore this robe. Liotard himself, too, dressed in oriental clothes after his journey, as his self-portrait of 1744, in which he is depicted in Turkish garb, testifies. Thus a fusion of cultures takes place, which is extremely interesting with regard to the object to be examined. For what is the Turkish figure other than a European in a Turkish costume? The extent to which this is the same artistic confrontation can only be confirmed to a limited extent. In contrast to Liotard's paintings, the porcelain figure wears a mask, which gives it the character of an acting role and thus does not represent the actual person who identifies with Turkish fashion. On the basis of these observations, the thesis can be formulated that the Zurich porcelain figure is an object that served the purpose of social amusement.

## Literature

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