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More on Ludwig Lück at Vienna, 1750—1751

by T. H. Clark

Johann Christoph Ludwig Lück has aroused more interest than he deserves in ceramic literature, mainly because his name, in a variety of spellings (Lücke, von Lücke), is to be found incised or painted on a small group of figures and *Galanteriewaren* of Vienna porcelain of the early State period. Two of his signed «Toys» or *Galanteriewaren* have already been published: an étui or «Flohbein» in the Untermeyer Collection and a hunting knife handle¹. To these must now be added a further example of the knife handle in an English collection (figs. 17-20) and a snuffbox in a private collection in Paris (fig. 21).

To place these four signed objects of Viennese porcelain in perspective, it is worth glancing at the long career of Ludwig Lück². Born about 1703 in Dresden, he came from a family of ivory carvers working for the most part in Saxony. He first enters the porcelain world when employed as a journeyman sculptor (*Bildhauergeselle*) at Meissen in April 1728, after Kirchner's first dismissal, only to be sacked himself as unfit for the job nine months later. To this short period Ducret attributes certain tureen handles and mask spouts in the form of grimacing heads. Lück returned, evidently, to his earlier occupation as ivory carver on his dismissal from Meissen early in 1729. His development can be followed in the long list of works, signed or attributed, some dated, mentioned by Scherer in his account of the artist. These include portrait busts and reliefs, allegorical works, figures from classical mythology and, what is more to the point, a series of scientific monstrosities or freaks («naturwissenschaftliche Monstrositäten», in Scherer's words), dismissed sternly, and possibly correctly, by the author of the article in Thieme-Becker, as «several anatomical curiosities in ivory without artistic value». I have been unable to secure photographs of these freaks, which include a bearded girl and Siamese twins. These, surely, are works in a vein similar to the signed pieces here illustrated.

Ludwig Lück, having worked steadily at Dresden, Schwerin and elsewhere as an ivory carver from 1729 to 1750, now, partly as a result of typical family intrigues, seems to have wearied of his occupation and to have decided to re-enter the porcelain world. His opportunity came when the Vienna factory of Du Paquier, taken over by the state in May 1744, was looking for new talent to revive its fortunes in its competition with Meissen's continued success. A very competent modeller in Johann Josef Niedermayer had been appointed in 1747. Early in 1750, Lück managed to talk himself into an appointment, also as a modeller, and with a salary apparently of 1000 florins, 400 more than Niedermayer was getting. Whether Lück was of equal rank to or placed over the head of Niedermayer is not clear; there is a conflict of evidence³. At any rate Graf Rudolf Chotek in a detailed edict of 1 August 1750 quoted by von Falke⁴ considered Lück the superior: he is described not only as «Modellmeister» but also as being in charge of the modelling, repairing and grinding workshops.

It is worth quoting further from this document, the importance of which seems to have been overlooked in so far as it relates to Lück's work at Vienna. The two modellers in this same edict of 1 August 1750 were instructed — and I quote the German original, for an adequate translation is difficult — «sich auf Inventionen von Gusto zu verlegen, aber nicht allein auf jene, so etwan mehr auf Curiosität und Hervorthuung ihrer Kunst dienen, sondern auch auf jene, so currente Waare abgeben und doch auf einen besonderen Gusto, wozu Liebhaber angereizt werden, das sorgsame Auge tragen».

«Inventionen von Gusto» seems an admirable description, then, of these four pieces: the two knife handles, the snuff box and the étui or «Flohbein». The knife handle or hunting hanger (Jagdmesser), 103 mm in length, has a silver mount (the steel blade is missing). Its principal feature (figs. 17, 19, 20) is the grotesque head of a man with hooked nose, bushy eyebrows and rubicund complexion, his plaited beard threaded through a disc, his hat of three petals or gadroons decorated with gilt foliage. On each side are painted stags in tones of brown and green, evidently after Ridinger, though the precise engraving has not yet been traced. At the back (fig. 18) is, above, the *Bindenschild* in puce flanked by green crossed leaf sprays, and below, also in puce, the inscription or signature «L. Lück Inven:».

Abb. 17
bis 20 Messergriff. Bemalt von L. Lück, Wien 1750/51.

Abb. 21 Tabakdose. Bemalt von L. Lück, Wien 1750/51.

Abb. 22 Büste eines lachenden Mannes aus weiss glasiertem Porzellan. Höhe 22 cm. Wien, um 1750. Oesterreichisches Museum für angewandte Kunst, Wien.

The shaped triangular snuffbox from a French collection (fig. 21) bears the same signature, «L. Lück Inven:». Again we have a grotesque head, or perhaps caricature, this time of a younger man, modelled not in the round but in low relief and in silhouette. He is not only bearded but also unshaven, the hair dank and dark brown, the complexion stippled in dirty russets, the mouth open to show decaying teeth, a rubbery nose and, reminiscent perhaps of the Flohbein, an insect, bed-bug rather than flea, on the shoulder of his open shirt. The rocaillerie on the edge of the box is crisply modelled, and coloured alternately gilt and green. There is a landscape with figures in the inside of the lid of which unfortunately there is no photograph.

These two grotesque and slightly sinister heads recall the scientific curiosities of Lück's earlier career as ivory carver, and they tend to confirm the attribution to Lück of the figures of a laughing and a crying man to be seen in the Vienna exhibition of 1970⁵, the latter illustrated here again for comparison (fig. 22). As for the rococo shell and scrollwork on the box's lid, this could be interpreted as Lück's contribution to the design of the «*currente Waare*». It is noticeable that around the 1750's the Vienna factory did develop a fanciful rococo style in its useful wares, perhaps anticipating Nymphenburg in this respect, and it may be that Lück was in part responsible: at any rate this box demonstrates that a fluent rococo was within his capabilities, whereas as ivory carver his style was a rather heavy baroque.

It has been suggested⁶ on the evidence of the two signed pieces previously published, the Untermeyer Flohbein and the knife handle, that Lück, apart from being a modeller, was also an accomplished painter on porcelain; and if this argument is accepted, then the two pieces published here would be confirmation of this talent. But although he might have been the painter of all the four *Galanteriewaren*, I am not convinced. First, he seems nowhere in the Vienna records to be named as a painter. Although as pointed out earlier in this article, Lück combined a number of functions at the Viennese porcelain factory, the painting workshop was clearly controlled by Johann Sigmund Fischer. Further the quality of the miniature painting on both of the knives and on the inside of the snuffbox is too accomplished to attribute to an untrained hand such as Lück's. Secondly, of the Vienna figures signed by Lück, as Rudolf Just pointed out⁷, only one had painted decoration, and this in underglaze blue. If he was such an accomplished decorator he would surely not have left these in the white. Thirdly, the meaning of the word «Inven:» on the four pieces under discussion should by no means be taken as proof that Lück was the painter. It was not unusual in the mid-18th century, as far as engravings were concerned, for the original artist's name,

usually in the left-hand bottom corner, to be followed by the abbreviation Inv: (for Invenit). The engraver would add after his name Sc: (or Sculps.) or Fec: (or Fecit). On this analogy, if Lück had been the painter as well as the modeller he would probably, in the bombastic mood he seems to have been in, have added the words «et fecit» or «et pinxit», just as in another medium a greater ivory carver, Balthasar Permoser, in his «Hercules and Omphale» in the Grünes Gewölbe signed IN. V. F inventit und fecit⁸. And there can be quite a different interpretation of the abbreviation «Inven:», namely that it refers to the instructions of the edict of 1 August 1750, in short, an abbreviation of the words «Inventionem von Gusto».

Ludwig Lück's stay in Vienna was to prove short. In 1751 he has already left and is writing from Hamburg to Oberjägermeister von Langen at Fürstenberg, describing himself as formerly «Ober-Direktor das gantzen sammtlichen Werkes» at Vienna, and asking for work⁹. Why he ever left Vienna is not known.

Notes

¹ See Yvonne Hackenbroch, Meissen and Continental Porcelain, Faience and Enamel in the Irwin Untermeyer Collection, 1956, no. 169, plate 30; p. 177; S. Ducret, *Weltkunst*, 1954, vol. XXIV no. 19, p. 4, «Wiener Porzellan bemalt von Ludwig von Lück»; and S. Ducret, *Unknown Porcelain*, 1956, pp. 79–80.

² See Christian Scherer, *Elfenbeinplastik seit der Renaissance*, Leipzig, n. d., p. 88 et seq. and Thieme-Becker, vol. XXIII, p. 446.

³ Jacob von Falke in the earliest monograph on the Vienna factory, *Die K. K. Wiener Porzellanfabrik*, 1887 on pp. 12–3 states clearly that Niedermayer was assistant to Lück. Folnesics and Braun, however, in their *Geschichte der K. K. Wiener Porzellanmanufaktur*, 1907, p. 62, say that Lück was of an equal rank to Niedermayer though his salary was 600 florins higher (that is, 1000 against Niedermayer's 400). But on p. 178 they quote a contemporary letter from a Dr. Otto writing from Vienna on 23 January 1751 saying that Lück's salary was 1500 florins.

Mrazek in the 1970 Catalogue, p. 43 hedges by writing that Lück «wurde neben Niedermayer mit einem hohen Gehalt als Modellmeister angestellt», while Ducret in *German Porcelain and Faience*, 1967, on p. 21 calls Niedermayer Lück's chief assistant.

⁴ Jacob von Falke, op. cit. p. 13.

⁵ Mrazek/Neuwirth, *Wiener Porzellan*, 1970, nos. 369–70, pl. 61, and for the crying man also E. Fischer in *K. F. S.*, 77/1968, pl. III.

⁶ By Ducret in *Weltkunst*, 1954, vol. XXIV, no. 19, p. 4 and *Unknown Porcelain*, pp. 79–80.

⁷ In an article by Rudolf Just, Prague, «Signierte Wiener Porzellanfiguren von Lück», in *K. F. S.* 38/1957.

⁸ Exhibited in Zurich 1971 and described in the catalogue *Kunstschätze aus Dresden*, Kunsthau, Zurich, 1971, no. 139, p. 175.

⁹ Quoted by Christian Scherer, *Studien zur Elfenbeinplastik der Barockzeit*, Strasbourg, 1897, pp. 77–8.