

## The Bagpiper – possible inspirations for ceramic figures

In this paper, selected English ceramic figures are investigated to establish possible sources of inspiration to their modellers for their design. The findings that follow bring together details not new to the literature per se, but highlight the intriguing history of many figures well known to collectors. As the field for such investigation is huge, two specific cases of bagpipers have been chosen for study. It is evident that the inspiration for these two forms of bagpiper figures came from very different design sources, and they will be dealt with separately.

Examples also exist of 18<sup>th</sup>-century figures depicting bagpipers made in porcelain by Capodimonte, Zurich, Chelsea, Derby, West Pans and also in Staffordshire pottery. There are no doubt examples by other factories. The history of the bagpipe goes back a long way and covers many countries and civilisations from Europe through the Middle and Far East and North Africa. The evidence for bagpipes prior to the 13th century AD is still uncertain but several textual and visual clues have been suggested. The *Oxford History of Music* says that a sculpture of bagpipes has been found on a Hittite slab at Euyuk in Anatolia, dated to 1000 BC.<sup>1</sup> Hieronymus Bosch depicted two bagpipers clambering precariously on the roof above the Holy Family in his triptych, *The Adoration of the Magi* painted in the last decade of the 15<sup>th</sup> century. (1a and b)



1a. Hieronymus Bosch, *The Adoration of the Magi*, triptych, c.1491-8, Museo del Prado, Madrid.



1b. Detail of bagpipers on thatched roof indicated by a red arrow in (1a).

### **Meissen and English porcelain figure inspiration traceable back to a Dürer engraving**

Only a decade or so after Bosch painted his *Adoration*, Albrecht Dürer (1471-1528) executed an engraving of a standing cross-legged bagpiper, signed and dated 1514. (2) It is believed that Giambologna (1529-1608) owned a print of this engraving, and it supplied the inspiration for his *Seated boy playing the bagpipes* bronze of c.1590. (3) Giovanni Di Bologna (Giambologna) was a Flemish sculptor who studied first in Antwerp and then moved to Rome in 1550, later moving to Florence where he worked for Francisco de Medici. He died in Florence in 1608.





2. Albrecht Dürer, *The bagpiper*, engraving printed on paper, dated 1514. ©Met Museum, New York (19.73.103).



3. Giambologna, *Seated boy playing the bagpipes*, bronze, c.1590-1610. ©Victoria and Albert Museum, London (A.59-1956).



4. Meissen c.1740-5, Bow c.1755-65, and Longton Hall c.1754-7 Harlequin (Arlecchino) seated cross-legged bagpipers. ©Gardiner Museum of Ceramic Art, Toronto, Canada.<sup>2</sup>

It is believed that Johann Joachim Kändler modelled his several porcelain figure versions of a cross-legged and seated bagpiper at the Meissen factory based on the Giambologna bronze, which was well known in Europe at the time. Like so many figures from the Meissen factory, English factories copied, or at least were directly influenced by the Meissen figures that were in the ownership of the upper classes in Britain in the 18<sup>th</sup> century. The Bow and Longton Hall factories produced Harlequin seated cross-legged bagpiper figures just a decade or so after Kändler produced his versions at Meissen. (4)

There is a rather interesting addendum to this story. A Danish sculptor, Caius Gabriel Cibber (1630-1700), who studied in The Netherlands and Rome before settling in England in the 1650s, introduced a fluent style of sculpture, as well as new figurative subjects into Britain. He was appointed Sculptor in Ordinary to King William III in 1693. This artist produced a large figure of a *Boy playing the bagpipes* in Portland stone in c.1680-90 probably for the Duke of Argyll, as it was housed in Whitton for 100 years.<sup>3</sup> (5) The modelling of this work is remarkably like the Giambologna bronze of nearly 100 years earlier. It is tempting to surmise that English figures of this form were inspired by the Cibber work rather than the Giambologna, but the stone piece's weathered surface suggests that it was used as a garden ornament – hardly a place where a ceramic modeller would draw his/her inspiration, but truth can sometimes be stranger than fiction. It is surely wiser to concur with the generally held view that Meissen had the form from Giambologna, and the English factories copied Meissen for at least their seated cross-legged bagpiper ceramic figures.



5. Caius Gabriel Cibber, *Boy playing the bagpipes*, Portland stone, figure height 108 cm, c.1680-90. ©Victoria and Albert Museum, London (A.3-1930).



## ***The Piedmontese bagpiper figures by Meissen and Bow***

The second figural form investigated for this paper is a standing figure playing the Piedmontese bagpipes. There is probably general consensus amongst porcelain academics that Kändler at Meissen modelled his porcelain figure of 1741 from the 'Le Romain' engraving of 1739. (6) Whether this image was purely of 'Le Romain's' creation, the authors have not been able to establish, but the Meissen (7), and the Bow version (8), copied from the Meissen, faithfully represent the form of the earlier engraving.



**6.** Jacques Dumont, 'Le Romain', finished by Jean Daullé, *The Bagpipe Player*, dated 1739, engraving, ©National Gallery of South Australia (NGA 163748).



**7.** Meissen, Piedmontese bagpiper, modelled by J J Kändler, 1741. ©Art Gallery of South Australia, Adelaide (C1615).



**8.** Bow Piedmontese bagpiper, c.1755. © Victoria and Albert Museum, London (C.284-1923).

In this paper, only two forms have been examined, and a full treatment of this topic over all factories, both porcelain and pottery, would be worthy of a book, even if just bagpipers remained the topic of choice. This indicates that bagpipes in their many national forms were important to those societies over time, and probably still are today.

*Betsy Wilkie and Patrick Hagglund, September 2021*

## Notes

---

<sup>1</sup> <https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Bagpipes>.

<sup>2</sup> Chilton, Meredith, *Harlequin unmasked – The Commedia dell'Arte and porcelain sculpture* (New Haven & London: Yale University Press, 2001), fig.57, p.49.

<sup>3</sup> <https://collections.vam.ac.uk/item/O67329/boy-playing-the-bagpipes-statue-cibber-caius-gabriel/>.