

## A Nast Biscuit Porcelain Figure of Neptune, Paris Circa 1810.

Height: 12,99 in. (33 cm)

Width: 4,7 in. (12 cm)

**Provenance:** Appendino Collection, Torino.

### Literature:

- Palazzo Reale, *Porcellane E Argenti Del Palazzo Reale Di Torino*, Fratelli Fabbri, Milano, 1996, pp. 296–297.
- Bourgeois Emile, *Le Biscuit de Sèvres au XVIIIe siècle*; Goupiol & Cie, Paris, 1909, vol. II, p. 13.

The present piece appears to belong to a series of similar, large-scale biscuit figurines representing classical deities attributed to the Parisian manufacture of Nast today held by the Royal Palace of Turin – from which the figure of Neptune is notably missing. Historically dated to the late eighteenth century, we believe the group was in fact realized in the early nineteenth. As for the attribution to the Nast manufactory, it is based on the material and stylistic consistency of the group, of which only five pieces are marked 'NAST'



The Royal Palace of Turin holds two such series. The present sculpture of Neptune appears consistent with the second group: of seven figures, all ranging in size between 31.7 and 34.7 cm. (see P. San Martino in AA.VV., *Porcellane e argenti del Palazzo Reale di Torino*, exhibition catalogue, Turin, 1986, cat. nos. 128 and 129, p. 296).

The collections of the Royal Palace of Turin contain a large number of biscuits attributable to the Nast manufactory and dating from the late 18th to the early 19th century, the heyday period of this type of production.

The Nast biscuits were probably acquired by the Savoy Royal House directly from France, as suggested by their absence from the inventories of the residences of the Duchy of Parma and the Pitti Palace in Florence, where the provenance of objects transferred to Turin after the unification of Italy is often traceable. After all, the Savoy court could boast a sizable collection of "*figure di porcellane*" already from the 1770s onward.

The Nast biscuits today in Turin are documented already in the inventory of *Argenti Bisquit* of 1869–71. They are described as part of a single group of "*21 statuette rappresentanti personaggi Mitologici*", stored on a shelf of the cabinet 7 of the ground floor room of the Royal Palace, where all the biscuit objects were kept. In fact, recent studies have demonstrated that the figurines belong to two different groups, with appreciable differences in iconography, style and size, constituting two different 'table services' or *surtout de table* (the utilitarian nature of inventory cataloguing is explicitly admitted by the authors, who also note the "height of cent.m (sic) 20 to 30", which is decisive for the grouping of the pieces).

Ten of the twenty-one statuettes can be grouped together in a set certainly attributable to the Nast factory – five examples are marked – which pairs well with another centerpiece from the same manufactory, mentioned separately in the same 1869–71 inventory, composed of seven statuettes. However, since there is no central group large enough to justify the presence of a whole, ideal surtout arrangement, it was probably preferred to opt for a "minimal" intervention in the merging of the different pieces – a fact that may attest to the occasional and contingency-related use of these biscuits in court ceremonial.

The *Libri Mastri Categorici*, the *Conti Camerali* and the *Registri dei Recapiti* of the Archive of Turin provide a fairly detailed portrait of the whole collection, composed of some hundreds of pieces in both glazed porcelain and biscuit, in which the rocaille taste and a traditional interest in mythology prevail.

The production of entire table-arrangements of groups of individual mythological figures is not uncommon among porcelain manufactories of the period: starting with the Sèvres manufactory, which since 1769 had produced models of statuettes (ranging from 19 to 22 cm in height) of Mercury, Mars, Ceres, Apollo, Juno, Neptune, Atlas, Hercules, Diana (E. Bougeois, *Le Biscuit de Sèvres au XVIIIe siècle*, Paris 1909, vol. II, p. 13). Sèvres remained a model for French, as well as European, manufactories both for its technical mastery and iconographic refinement, and also Nast was particularly attentive to that production.

### **The Nast Manufactory:**

The Manufacture de Nast was a prominent hard-paste porcelain manufactory founded in Paris in 1783 by Jean Népomucène Hermann Nast, an Austrian-born French citizen. The production is documented until 1835. It was one of a number of manufactories making very high-quality porcelain in Paris in this period, together with, for example, Dihl et Guérhard. Also known as the Rue Popincourt Manufactory, Nast was characterized by the exceptional quality of its paste, combining candor and hardness. Through its recognitions and successes sales to the government of the French Directory and the court of Napoleon I, in 1806 with his two sons opened a new large factory still in Paris. The manufacture de Nast was also in the forefront of developing new highly pigmented colour glazes. The firm's products were sold to the French upper class and to several courts of Europe, and one of the earliest state China services for the White House in 1814 and a tea and coffee service for the wedding of Ferdinand VII of Spain and Isabella of Braganza in 1816. Following the death of Nast in 1817, the factory continued under the leadership of his sons. Visiting an exhibit of the firm's wares at the Louvre during the Paris Exposition of 1819 (also called the Restoration Exposition), Louis XVIII gave Nast's sons praise - "I observe with great pleasure the talent passed from father to son, I urge you to cultivate this."

**Conditions:** Minor traces of wear and defects including the reattached left arm.