

Karl Meyerheim's (1780–1841) portraits of his parents and other works. A contribution to the history of the Meyerheim family

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Słowa kluczowe: Karl Meyerheim, portret, rodzice, naszyjnik bursztynowy

O portretach rodziców i innych dziełach Karla Friedricha Meyerheima. Przyczynek do badań nad malarstwem w Gdańsku w XIX wieku

Artykuł poświęcony jest postaci Karla Friedricha Meyerheima (1780–1841), gdańskiego malarza specjalizującego się w sztuce portretu, dyrektora Królewskiej Szkoły Sztuk Pięknych i nestora artystycznej rodziny. Na twórczości tego artysty nie koncentrowano się wcześniej w zbyt dużym stopniu, tekst stanowi podsumowanie malarskiego *oeuvre* Meyerheima, obrazów zachowanych, zaginionych i znanych jedynie z katalogów wystaw oraz ze zbiorów prywatnych. Szczególną uwagę skierowano na dwa wizerunki z gdańskiej kolekcji. W zbiorach Muzeum Narodowego w Gdańsku znajdują się dwa portrety autorstwa Karla Friedricha Meyerheima, wizerunki matki i ojca artysty. Małżonkowie są w stroju domowym, ojciec w szlafmycy i szlafroku, a matka w czepku przewiązanym kokardą, wzorzystej sukni osłoniętej chustą, jej szyć zdobią bursztynowe paciorki. Bursztynowy naszyjnik na szyi matki jest dowodem, że posiadanie biżuterii i przedmiotów z tego materiału było w XIX wieku wciąż popularne w Gdańsku.

Abstract

This article presents Karl Friedrich Meyerheim (1780–1841), portrait painter from Gdańsk, director of the Royal Academy of Fine Arts and founder of the artistic dynasty. The work of this artist received little attention to date; this contribution summarises Meyerheim's *oeuvre* covering surviving artworks as well as those once in private collections now known only from exhibition catalogues. Special attention is given to two images from the collection of the National

Museum in Gdańsk. This encompasses two portraits by Karl Friedrich Meyerheim, likenesses of the artist's mother and father. They are presented in domestic dress, the father in a dressing gown, and the mother in a bonnet tied with a bow, a patterned dress covered with a shawl, and wearing amber beads. The amber necklace around the mother's neck is evidence that owning jewellery and objects made of this material was still popular in 19th-century Gdańsk.

Karl
Meyerheim's
(1780–1841)
portraits...

Portraits by Karl Friedrich Meyerheim (1780–1841), a painter active in Gdańsk in the beginning of the 19th century, specifically the likenesses of his parents from the collection of National Museum in Gdańsk are the subject of this article (figs. 1, 2).¹ They are both presented in their domestic attire, father in his night robe and a nightcap, mother in a simple patterned dress with a shawl around



Fig. 1. Karl Friedrich Meyerheim, *Portrait of a mother*, 1796, oil on cardboard and panel, 39 × 31 cm, National Museum in Gdańsk, inv. no. MNG/SD/202/M, photo: National Museum in Gdańsk



Fig. 2. Karl Friedrich Meyerheim, *Portrait of a father*, 1796, oil on cardboard and panel, 39 × 31 cm, National Museum in Gdańsk inv. no. MNG/SD/202/M, photo: National Museum in Gdańsk

her arms, and a cap. A strand of amber beads graces her neck. This is a short collar-type necklace strung with globular beads made from light and clear amber and takes the typical modest form still popular today². Both spouses have a trace

¹ Karl Friedrich Meyerheim, *Portrait of a mother*, 1796, oil on panel and a cardboard, 39 × 31 cm, inv. no. MNG/SD/202/M; Karl Friedrich Meyerheim, *Portrait of a father*, 1796, oil on panel and a cardboard, 39 × 31 cm, inv. no. MNG/SD/202/M.

² I would like to thank dr Anna Sobecka for drawing my attention to the necklace and to dr Rachel King and dr Anna Sobecka for the help in its analysis.

of smile on their lips, as if shown informally and going about their usual life. However, the story of the creation of these portraits is quite unusual. Dating of the portrait and in this regard also the necklace have long been uncertain, but the analysis of Friedrich Eduard Meyerheim's autobiography offers the evidence that helps date both of them more precisely.

This article is a supplement to the work on 19th-century painting from the collection of National Museum in Gdańsk catalogue published in 2023.³ I came across a valuable information concerning the circumstances in which the portraits were created in the autobiography of the painter's son, Friedrich Eduard Meyerheim (1808–1879), too late to include in the publication.

Biographies were then very popular among readers.⁴ Friedrich Eduard's autobiography was printed in 1880, a year after his death.⁵ He was certainly the most famous member of this family, active throughout the 19th century in Gdańsk and in Berlin, and the youngest of artist's sons, Paul Friedrich Meyerheim (1842–1915), compelled its publication.

A reader looking for the exact information about works of art by the artist in this book will be disappointed. Very few paintings are mentioned in the Friedrich's autobiography, though *In front of the church*⁶ today in the collection of National Museum in Gdańsk is among them. This notwithstanding, the publication is a significant source of information about Karl – Friedrich Eduard's father and founder of the artistic dynasty. When describing his childhood, Friedrich Eduard recounts the story of his father's life, including details about the circumstances in which the grandparental portraits were created.

Meyerheim's memoir describes a father and son who were very close to each other, with family life playing a vital role for both. Friedrich underlines his father's influence on his artistic background and education. He mentions similar

³ Magdalena Mielnik, *Dobrzy przyjaciele, dobre przyjaciółki. Malarstwo w Gdańsku w XIX wieku*, Gdańsk 2023, cat. no. 31, cat. no. 32, pp. 93–95.

⁴ For example: Johann Wilhelm Schirmer, *Ein Düsseldorf'scher Lehrjahre. Ein autobiographisches fragment* [in:] *Deutsche Rundschau*, Bd. 12, Hrsg. Julius Rosenberg, Berlin 1877; Albrecht Adam, *Aus dem Leben eines Schlachtenmalers: (1786–1862); Selbstbiographie nebst einem Anhang; mit dem Bildnis des Künstlers von eigener Hand.*, Stuttgart 1886; re-edited *Old Master's biographies: Cellini Benvenuto, Leben des Benvenuto Cellini, florentinischen Goldschmieds und Bildhauers, von ihm selbst geschrieben*, Wien 1810, but also merchants, like in Gdańsk: Karl Raimund Behrend, *Aus dem Tagebuch meines Vaters Theodor Behrend in Danzig*, Königsberg 1896.

⁵ Friedrich Eduard Meyerheim, *Eine Selbstbiographie des Meisters, ergänzt von Paul Meyerheim, eingeleitet von Ludwig Pietsch. Mit einem Vorw. von Berthold Auerbach*, Berlin 1880.

⁶ Friedrich Eduard Meyerheim (1808–1879), *Before the church*, 1850, oil on canvas, 57 × 47.5 cm, inv. no. MNG/SD/786/M; *Dobrzy przyjaciele...*, cat. no. 54, p. 139. In his autobiography the artist mentions, that the painting was commissioned by Pierre Louisa Ravené (1793–1861). The artist rarely left Berlin, but on this case he went with the whole family to Oldenburg in 1849, where he started to work on the painting, sketching the surroundings from nature. Soon after completion the painting was presented at the exhibition in Munich, where it was awarded with St. Michael's medal, Meyerheim, *Eine Selbstbiographie...*, p. 45.

topics in his short life enclosed among the documents he submitted to the Prussian Academy of Arts (Preussische Akademie der Künste) when the painter became a member of this institution in 1837.⁷ Friedrich was tutored, then went to Gdańsk Academic Grammar School until the age of 14 (in 1822), when his father decided to remove him to continue his education in painting and drawing under his guidance. The father's role in shaping the young Friedrich's artistic abilities is also described in the autobiography, which may explain why his father's position as an artist is emphasised.

Basic information on Karl Friedrich Meyerheim can be found in literature, mainly lexica,⁸ he was a house painter, portraitist and restorer. He was responsible for the conservation of artifacts in Saint Mary's Church and at the Artus Court in Gdańsk. As a young man he completed an artistic pilgrimage through St. Petersburg, Königsberg and Riga. He held many representative functions, between 1826–1830 he was a member of a City Council in Gdańsk, he was an elder in a Gdańsk painter's guild before 1838, and between 1831–1834 he was a director of the Royal School of Art in Gdańsk. The memoir written by his son adds to the picture of Karl as an important figure in the city's cultural and artistic landscape of a time. A man who, from a rather poor family and living in a very difficult historical circumstances, achieved a lot in short time.

As the spelling "Karl" is used in modern literature, it is worth recalling here that his son used a form "Carl". Karl was born in Gdańsk on 28th of October 1780, an only child.⁹ His family originated from Sweden,¹⁰ writing their surname "Mejerjelm". Karl's great-grandfather had fought in a Gustav Adolf's army and

⁷ Preussische Akademie der Künste (PrAdK) Pers. BK 354, "Friedrich Eduard Meyerheim, geboren zu Danzig...", p. 6; in 1825 Friedrich Eduard started his education in Royal Art's School in Gdańsk (Königliche Kunstschule), see Joanna Kawecka-Kąkol, *Friedrich Eduard Meyerheim, monografia artysty*, master's degree, Nicolaus Copernicus University in Toruń, 1996, p. 22.

⁸ Georg Cuny, *Zur Geschichte der Danziger Malerinnung* [in:] *Festschrift zum 300 jährigen Jubiläum der Maler- u. Lackierer-Innung zu Danzig am 18 Oktober 1912*, Danzig 1912, p. 19; Walther Domansky, *Alte Danziger Lebensbeschreibungen*, Danzig 1923; *Allgemeines Künstler Lexikon der Bildenden Künstler von der Antike bis zur Gegenwart*, Bd. 24, Hrsg. Hans Vollmer, Leipzig 1930 [death date 1837], p. 498; *Altpreussische Biographie*, Band 2, Lieferung 1–3, Hrsg. Christian Krollmann. Nachdruck der ersten Ausgabe Königsberg, Gräfe und Unzer 1942–1944, pp. 435–436 [death date 1837]; Mirosław Gliński, *Ludzie dziewiętnastowiecznego Gdańska, informator biograficzny*, Gdańsk 1994; Janusz Pałubicki, *Malarze gdańscy. Malarze, szklarze, rysownicy i rytownicy w okresie nowożytnym w gdańskich materiałach archiwalnych*, t. 2, Gdańsk 2009, p. 531 [death date 1837]; Mirosław Gliński, https://gdansk.gedanopedia.pl/gdansk/?title=MEYERHEIM_KARL_FRIEDRICH,_artysta_malarz,_radny [accessed: 30.10.2024]; Grażyna Zinówko, *Katalog zbiorów Muzeum Narodowego w Gdańsku. Rysunki artystów gdańskich i obcych działających w Gdańsku w XIX wieku*, Gdańsk 2016, p. 106; Janusz Pałubicki, *Artyści i rzemieślnicy artystyczni Gdańska, Prus Królewskich oraz Warmii epoki nowożytnej. Skorowidz kwerendalny*, Gdańsk 2019, p. 412 [death date 1837].

⁹ Meyerheim, *Eine selbstbiographie...*, p. 19.

¹⁰ Domansky, *Alte Danziger...*, p. 52, the author recalls Paul Meyerheim's memoir who wrote that this information was given to the family by a friend who found it in the Gdańsk archives; translation of Eduard Meyerheim's biographic entry by Janusz Mosakowski was published in a newspaper "30 dni" 2024, no. 3(173), pp. 52–54.

been a collector of payments.¹¹ After concluding his service, he had decided to settle in Gdańsk. Karl's father, whose first name is unrecorded was Meyerheim and a glovemaking. He died soon after his son was born. His widow wed a mason, Kamin, who also died soon afterwards. Her third husband was a bookbinder called Reiman¹² and he is the one depicted in the portrait from the museum's collection. Reiman raised Karl, but it is not clear when the marriage took place, presumably long before the portraits were painted. The inscription on the back of the male likeness, refers to him as a father, not a stepfather. The names of the second and the third husband are unfortunately not mentioned. Nor is the mother's, and Friedrich Eduard consistently omitted the names of female relatives (with the exception of his mother Therese, and Caroline, his wife).

Returning to Karl, despite the difficult family situation, his mother managed to educate her son. He attended so-called *Freischule*.¹³ They were Ragged-School-like institutions created by the Gdańsk pastor, Joachim Weickhmann (1662–1736), who organised free schools for the children of poor families and opened them from 1711 onwards. There were a few such educational institutions in different districts such as the Nowe Ogrody, Dolne Miasto, Stare Przedmieście, among others.¹⁴ He was given a small amount of pocket money there, eight pence a week. Karl was soon recognised a brilliant student on account of his drawing abilities. He drew facetious sketches for other students that brought him to the attention of local authorities. A scholarship in Berlin which would have enabled him to train as a printmaker was generously proposed but it was decided – as the only son – that he would stay with his mother. He was initially meant to become a bookbinder like his stepfather, but he leant towards the fine arts and was sent to learn under a house painter called Behrend “who decorated walls in various patterns”¹⁵ and was a very strict and fearsome teacher. After completing his education, Karl went to Königsberg, Riga and St. Petersburg.¹⁶ While in Russia, he became seriously ill with “nervous fever” (probably typhus) and was hospitalized. The rumour spread that he had died, leading to the sale of his personal belongings and worsening of his situation.

When he felt stronger, Karl decided to come back to his family home and settle down. He needed a wife and conveniently his master's daughter was of marriageable age. It was expected that he would marry her (and improve his future prospects). Karl chose differently. His heart was stolen by his mother's ward, Therese Klinkoschewsky (1785–about 1880?), who had come into the household while Karl was abroad. The couple wed in 1807, the same year as siege of Gdańsk. Friedrich Eduard, was born a year after. The couple had nine

¹¹ Zahlmeister; transl. After Janusz Mosakowski.

¹² Meyerheim, *Eine Selbstbiographie...*, p. 19.

¹³ *Ibidem*, p. 20.

¹⁴ Dominika Janus, https://gdansk.gedanopedia.pl/gdansk/?title=WEICKHMANN_JOACHIM,_pastor_ko%C5%9Bcio%C5%82a_NMP [accessed: 31.10.2024].

¹⁵ Meyerheim, *Eine Selbstbiographie...*, pp. 20, 21.

¹⁶ *Ibidem*, p. 22.

children, three daughters and six sons. Four of the sons reached adulthood and all followed in their father's footsteps and became painters. The firstborn was Friedrich Eduard,¹⁷ then his younger brother Wilhelm Alexander (1815–1882),¹⁸ Gustav Adolf (1816–1894?)¹⁹ and Hermann Robert (1829–1880/1903?).²⁰ Karl Friedrich was Lutheran, and his wife Catholic; all children were raised in the Lutheran faith. Only Gustav Adolf converted to Catholicism (under the influence of his wife, or so Friedrich Eduard states).

For Karl and Theresa, the first years of their marriage were a real struggle. Commissions were hard to come by during the French siege and the family suffered from severe hunger. Karl portrayed French officers and their wives; he painted a house for the mistress of General Jean Rapp (1807–1813).²¹ The family lived in different locations but always in the same district, the Main City, firstly on Grobla IV Street, then Świętego Ducha Street and finally until Karl's death on Grobla III Street. The third son Gustav took over the workshop and was given a home on Szeroka Street worth 600 thalers by his elder brothers.²² A lithograph after Friedrich Eduard's drawing commemorating his father from 1842 is preserved in the collection of Gdańsk Library of Polish Academy of Science.²³

Let us now turn to the portraits as the biography gives the detailed story of their origin, completing this gap in their provenance.²⁴ They are not nostalgic ramblings of the imagination created by a mature artist as previously suspected,²⁵ but instead the work of a very young man. According to Friedrich, the sixteen-year-old Karl had terrible accident while decorating a house in Stare Przedmieście of Gdańsk. While working on a window frame he fell and injured both legs. Convalescence took some time, Karl had to use crutches and was at home. It was then that he painted his parents likenesses, meaning their date of creation should be changed to 1796. On the back of the paintings there are faint inscriptions in pencil stating that the sitters are grandfather and grandmother, most probably added by Friedrich Eduard himself.

¹⁷ He had three children with his wife Caroline: Franz Eduard (1838–1880), Richard Christian (1842–1848) and Paul Friedrich, both sons who lived to the adulthood were also painters.

¹⁸ With his wife (name unknown) he had two children a daughter and a son, painter Paul Wilhelm (1848–1900).

¹⁹ Married after 1843 (wife's name unknown), father of four children with prominent painter Robert Gustav (1846/7?–1920) among them one who married an Englishwoman and moved to Great Britain.

²⁰ Married to Ida Bertha Böhm (1829–1891), no information of children.

²¹ Meyerheim, *Eine Selbstbiographie...*, p. 22.

²² *Ibidem*, p. 23.

²³ Karl Friedrich Meyerheim, 1842, paper, lithography, 19 × 17 cm, PAN Gdańsk library inv. no. 5014; *Gdańsk i okolice 1793–1914. Miasto – ludzie – wydarzenia w rysunku i grafice*, Gdańsk 2014, cat. note Anna Frąckowska, cat. no. 65, p. 106.

²⁴ Both portraits were in family possession until Paul Meyerheim bequethed them to the City of Gdańsk Museum (Stadtmuseum Danzig) in 1915, evacuated to the Royal Armoury in 1944, brought back to the museum in July 1945.

²⁵ Mielnik, *Dobre przyjaciółki...*, pp. 92–95, earlier literature there.

The name Reimann is written (previously mis-transcribed as Rechmann) on the rear of the male portrait. It was previously impossible to link this name to the family in any way. Thanks to Friedrich Eduard we now know Reimann is the name of Karl Friedrich's stepfather. Confusion over the name led to an error in the course of research being conducted into war losses in the Museum. A painting of "a bookseller Reimann" under the inventory number Stm. 276 was included in a list of paintings evacuated from the Museum to the Royal Armory of Gdańsk (then City Museum of Gdańsk-Stadtmuseum Danzig) in 1944.²⁶ This is the same number as the portrait but it was either unnoticed or thought that the number had been reused in the reinventarisation of the collection. At some point after 1925 the whole collection was reinventarised and the numbers allocated in a new order, meaning some objects from the historical collection have two different numbers and others are repeated. Helena Kowalska subsequently included the bookseller painting in her catalogue of war losses.²⁷ In fact, there were never two portraits but one.

In his autobiography, Friedrich Meyerheim wrote that his grandmother was always able to remain happy despite her difficulties. After the death of her first husband, she made gloves with visible stitches according to the newest fashion herself. She lived with her son until she died in 1825. Stepfather Reimann, on the other hand, passed away much earlier, while Karl was in St. Petersburg.²⁸ Both images seem to reflect kindness and good humour. Though the comparison with Hans Holbein made by Karl's affectionate son is much exaggerated, the paintings show his ability to capture the sitter's character and good technique given his young age.

Later works by the painter also show a Biedermeier-like naturalism especially in the face but Karl would never excel at painting textiles. There are four more portraits in the collection of the National Museum in Gdańsk: two paintings showing a merchant called Taubert, first in his mid-life and then a decade later (figs. 3, 4),²⁹ a likeness of mayor Johann Wilhelm Wernsdorff (1749–1837) (fig. 5) with preparatory drawing,³⁰ and a painting of wife Mrs Crüger, a colonel's wife (attributed) (fig. 6).³¹ A portrait of court doctor's wife, Mrs Leofass (fig. 7),

²⁶ An institution created in 1945 by Polish authorities in the same building is a continuator of previous, German Stadtmuseum Danzig.

²⁷ Helena Kowalska, *Straty wojenne Muzeum Miejskiego (Stadtmuseum) w Gdańsku*, Seria Nowa, t. 1, Malarstwo, cat. no. 186, p. 194.

²⁸ Meyerheim, *Eine Selbstbiographie...*, p. 25.

²⁹ *Male portrait (Portrait of a merchant Taubert?)*, 1820, oil on canvas, 32 × 25 cm, inv. no. MNG/SD/213/M, Mielnik, *Dobrzy przyjaciele...*, cat. no. 28, pp. 86–87; *Portrait of a merchant Taubert*, 1830, oil on canvas, 28 × 22 cm, inv. no. MNG/SD/214/M, Mielnik, *Dobrzy przyjaciele...*, cat. no. 29, pp. 88–89.

³⁰ *Portrait of Johann Wilhelm Wernsdorff*, before 1820, oil on canvas, 28 × 22 cm, inv. no. MNG/SD/215/M, Mielnik, *Dobrzy przyjaciele...*, cat. no. 30, p. 90–91; *Portrait of Johann Wilhelm Wernsdorff*, before 1820, paper, pencil, inv. no. MNG/SD/576/R, Zinówko, *Katalog rysunków...*, cat. no. 183, p. 106.

³¹ Attributed to Karl Friedrich Meyerheim *Portrait of Mrs Crüger*, ca. 1830, oil on canvas, 55 × 43 cm, inv. no. MNG/Sd/248/M, Mielnik, *Dobrzy przyjaciele...*, cat. no. 33, pp. 96–97.



Fig. 3. Karl Friedrich Meyerheim *Male portrait (Portrait of a merchant Taubert ?)*, 1820, oil on canvas, 32 × 25 cm, National Museum in Gdańsk, inv. no. MNG/SD/213/M, photo: National Museum in Gdańsk



Fig. 4. Karl Friedrich Meyerheim, *Portrait of a merchant Taubert*, 1830, oil on canvas, 28 × 22 cm, National Museum in Gdańsk, inv. no. MNG/SD/214/M, photo: National Museum in Gdańsk



Fig. 5. Karl Friedrich Meyerheim, *Portrait of Johann Wilhelm Wernsdorff*, before 1820, oil on canvas, 28 × 22 cm, National Museum in Gdańsk, inv. no. MNG/SD/215/M, photo: National Museum in Gdańsk



Fig. 6. Karl Friedrich Meyerheim?, *Portrait of Mrs Crüger*, ca. 1830, oil on canvas, 55 × 43 cm, National Museum in Gdańsk, inv. no. MNG/SD/248/M, photo: National Museum in Gdańsk



Fig. 7. Karl Friedrich Meyerheim, *Portrait of Mrs Leofass, wife of a court doctor*, oil on canvas, 58 × 48 cm, war loss, photo: National Museum in Gdańsk



Fig. 8. Karl Friedrich Meyerheim, *Portrait of Carolina Concordia Oertel, de domo Liedke*, 1807, oil on canvas, 58.5 × 48 cm, location unknown, after: *Ältere Malerei...*

is a war loss. In the latter, the decorative, embellished lace (orange according to the description) was very accurately painted.³² Three more portraits (one early, two late examples of the artist's *oeuvre*) are mentioned in a catalogue from 1919, describing an exhibition bringing artworks from private collections together and organised by the Art Scholarship Society (Kunstforschungsgesellschaft).³³ Visitors could admire the 1807 portrait of Mrs Concordia Oertel from Lili Claassen-Suermondt collection (fig. 8)³⁴ and pendant marital portraits of the city doctor and surgeon Heinrich Wilhelm Otto (1773–1831) and his wife Johanna Dorothea Otto de domo Schroeder painted in 1829 originating from Erich Stumpf's collection (figs. 9, 10).³⁵ These were dated on a basis of a drawing of the wife, also in possession of Stumpf family not shown at the exhibition. Hans Secker, then chief curator of the Museum, characterised the pieces as simple work but with a great sense of colour.

³² *Portrait of Mrs Leofass, court doctor's wife*, oil on canvas, 58 × 48 cm, Kowalska, *Straty wojenne...*, cat. no. 185, p. 193.

³³ Hans Friedrich Secker, *Ältere Malerei und Zeichnungen aus Danziger Privatbesitz, 1. Ausstellung der Kunstforschenden Gesellschaft im Stadtmuseum, Danzig*, 1919, pp. 20–23.

³⁴ *Portrait of Carolina Concordia Oertel, of the house of Liedke*, 1807, oil on canvas, 58.5 × 48 cm, Secker, *Ältere Malerei...*, cat. no. 10, p. 20.

³⁵ *Portrait of Heinrich Wilhelm Otto (1773–1831)*, 1829, oil on canvas, 57.5 × 48 cm, Secker, *Ältere Malerei...*, cat. no. 11, p. 21; *Portrait of Johanna Dorothea Otto, of the house Schroeder (1780–1848)*, 1829, oil on canvas, 57.5 × 47 cm, Secker, *Ältere Malerei...*, cat. no. 12, p. 22.



Fig. 9. Karl Friedrich Meyerheim, *Portrait of Heinrich Wilhelm Otto*, 1829, oil on canvas, 57.5 × 48 cm, location unknown, after: *Ältere Malerei...*



Fig. 10. Karl Friedrich Meyerheim, *Portrait of Johanna Dorothea Otto de domo Schoeder*, 1829, oil on canvas, 57.5 × 47 cm, location unknown, after: *Ältere Malerei...*

The biography also gives some information about work Karl conducted for Count Sierakowski, but without any specific details.³⁶ It gives the date when the artist worked on the restoration of Anton Möller's *Last Judgment* and other paintings from the Artus Court (in winter 1828 Friedrich Eduard worked on these together with his father).³⁷ Other than portraits, little is known about Karl's output. He may also have tried other subjects than portraiture. A standard landscape with figures sold at auction in Munich in 2017 confirms other works exist. Signed at lower left,³⁸ this sketchy painting shows a genre scene on a forest road. A Prussian (?) officer on horseback is in conversation with a peasant family, another family depicted in a middle distance unpacks a picnic basket, and we can see sheep and a city view in the distance.

The current findings regarding the work of this little-known artist, collected in this article, allow us to expand on the status of a painter described in most biographies as a "house painter". In the context of a volume on amber, the redating of the portraits and confirmation that they were painted from life rather than memory is significant. The collar Karl's mother wears can now be dated to before 1796, which makes it one of the earliest depictions of amber being worn at the neck to have been discussed in the context of amber studies

³⁶ Secker, *Ältere Malerei...*, p. 31.

³⁷ Meyerheim, *Eine selbstbiographie...*, p. 34.

³⁸ *Landstrasse mit Figurenstaffage*, oil on canvas, 32.5 × 47.5 cm, 6.12.2017, Fine Arts and Antiques auction at the Neumeister's Munich, lot 279.



Fig. 11. Karl Friedrich Meyerheim (1780–1841), *Portrait of a mother*, 1796, oil on cardboard and panel, 39 × 31 cm, National Museum in Gdańsk, inv. no. MNG/SD/202/M, photo: National Museum in Gdańsk, detail with the amber necklace

(fig. 11).³⁹ It is impossible to know whether Karl's mother's necklace was old or new at the time of depiction. When the curate C.W. Haken arrived in the town of Stolp (Słupsk) to minister to its people in 1771, he noted the size of the local amber-bead making industry, bemoaning rather than celebrating the region's global reach. Less than half of the beads remaining in Europe, according to his estimate.⁴⁰ Perhaps Słupsk was the source of her beads. Given Haken's words, Słupsk may very well have been the origin of the beads strung in the amber necklace worn by the first present of the United States' wife Martha Washington (d. 1802).⁴¹ Martha's necklace is the only surviving string of amber beads in a public collection which can be securely dated to the second half of the 18th century. Research on beads, bead production, consumption, and circulation in the Meyerheim era would be of wider benefit, for example in enabling the dating of portraiture as can be done through other forms of jewellery.

³⁹ Works of Thomas Lawrence, like *Portrait of a Young Lady with an Amber Necklace*, 1814 from the collection of Metropolitan Museum of Art are mentioned as the earliest depictions of amber necklaces, see: Rachel King, *Amber. From Antiquity to Eternity*, London 2022, p. 156. Before this time there are multiple examples of rosaries made of amber beads shown in paintings; see Anna Sobecka, *Bursztyn w malarstwie XV wieku/ Amber in 15th century painting*, "Bursztynisko/The Amber Magazine", no. 49, 2025, in print.

⁴⁰ Rachel King, *Amber. From Antiquity to Eternity*, London 2022, p. 150.

⁴¹ *Ibidem*, p. 156.

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Karl
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