

Curator's Choice

Friderich Emich Medallion

By: Erin Wingfield, Collections Assistant, MAC Lab

Fragments of a large stoneware vessel with a medallion (Figure 1) were found scattered throughout a 17th century rubbish pit at the Buck Site (18KE292) along with other ceramics, pipe stems and general household artifacts. The Buck Site is located in Kent County, Maryland about 9 miles southwest of Chestertown. The site was brought to the attention of an archaeologist, L.T. Alexander, by a private landowner who had found several artifacts in his field. A pit feature was discovered undisturbed and capped by a thick layer of oyster shell (Alexander 1984:15). The majority of artifacts unearthed were simple ceramic storage and cooking vessels, leading to the belief that this trash pit belonged to a modest household of slaves or indentured servants (Alexander 1984:16, 31).



Figure 1: Stoneware vessel decorated with the Friderich Emich medallion (photo by Marco de Pompa III.)

This vessel is categorized as a Rhenish blue and grey stoneware. Rhenish is recognized by its grey salt glazed body and painted decoration in blue or manganese purple. On this vessel, the decoration is a raised medallion featuring the coat of arms of Friderich Emich and is accented with swirls of blue paint. The complete vessel could have been a very large bottle or jug most likely produced in the Westerwald region of Germany. Throughout the 17th and 18th centuries, Westerwald was the largest exporter of Rhenish stoneware ceramics. Molds were used to apply decorative relief to multiple vessels such as this one. This increased the rate of production and allowed the same mold design to be applied to several different vessel forms (Gaimster 1997:251-252).



Figure 2: Close-up of the Friderich Emich coat of arms (photo by Marco de Pompa III)



Figure 3: Leingen and Westerburg coat of arms(Wappenbuck.)

The Emich Medallion depicts the coat of arms of Frederich Emich containing images of eagles and lions (Figure 2). The completed inscription under the shield would read, "FRIDERICH EMICH GRAF ZU LEININGEN UND TAXBURG HERR ZU APPIRMUN". This inscription states that Friderich Emich was the Count of Leiningen and Taxburg or Dagsburg. Several bottles similar to this vessel were produced for the wedding of Count Emich's son Emich XIII on February 24, 1676. The inscription on these vessels is exactly the same but the wedding bottles include the date 1676 at the end (Alexander 1984:25).

Political portraits and heraldry on ceramic vessels were popular throughout the 16th and 17th centuries. Potters would favor producing vessels decorated with the arms of their benefactors and regional nobility (Gaimster 1997:153). Today, archaeologists continue to find examples throughout England, Scandinavia and North America (Gaimster 1997:156).

References Cited

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10515 Mackall Road
St. Leonard, Maryland 20685
410-586-8501 www.jefpat.org



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