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THE CERAMIC WARE OF THE POTTER RUDOLPH CHRIST AT BETHABARA AND SALEM, NORTH CAROLINA, 1786-1821

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Excavations at the eighteenth century Moravian town site of Bethabara, North Carolina, in 1966, revealed that the potter Rudolph Christ was making a polychrome mottled glazed slipware using English type molds, between 1786 and 1789, during which time he operated a shop there. In 1789, after the death of the master potter Gottfried Aust, Christ moved to Salem and took over the management of the pottery shop, where he remained as master potter until he retired in 1821. He continued to make the "Tortoise-shell" ware, as well as milk pots, pans and other utilitarian forms.

Excavations at Salem in 1968, and documents found in the Salem Archives, revealed that Christ was making tin-enamelled ware, or faience in white, blue, green and yellow, after 1793, and fragments of white and green glazed faience were recovered. Some of these were painted with blue designs over a white glaze, on ware made on English type plate molds. The use of such molds was introduced by William Ellis into the Salem pottery shop in 1773, but it was apparently many years later before Christ was able to go into production with such plates.

Of particular importance in the 1968 excavations was the discovery of a kiln waster dump in which the finest of the "fine pottery" made by Christ was discovered. Here examples of sprigged ware with pearl beading around the rim and base, and double intertwined reeded handles with applied terminal spriggs were found. The close relationship to this polychrome glazed "Tortoise-shell" ware to examples made at the Leeds factories in England is remarkable.

The excavations at Bethabara and Salem have resulted in the recovery of "Tortoise-shell", mold made zoomorphic bottles, sauceboats, dishes, plates made on molds in patterns of "Queens", "Royal", and "Feather" designs. Also found to have been made was "faience", and coloring and figuring of porcelain, mugs and teapots with double intertwined handles and terminal spriggs, as well as white stoneware, and an olive-green glazed stoneware product. In the face of these discoveries the fact remains that the surface has only been scratched at Salem, and excavation in the years to come should produce more surprises from the pottery shop of Gottfried Aust and Rudolph Christ.

This statement is only an outline of the ware found to have been made by Rudolph Christ at Bethabara and Salem as revealed in excavations in 1966 and 1968. Since the paper dealing with this material was presented at the Ninth Annual Conference on Historic Site Archaeology in Knoxville, it has been revised and expanded so that it is too long for inclusion in this volume, and only this summary is presented. However, the complete paper is to be published as a technical paper of the Institute of Archeology and Anthropology at the University of South Carolina.
Figure One

Ware of Rudolph Christ from the Christ-Krause kiln waster dump at Bethabara, North Carolina. The top center sauce boat is a reconstruction made from the plaster mold restored from fragments found in the waster dump. The handle is a form sometimes found on sauceboats of this type, though a double intertwined reeded handle may have been used on such pieces. The polychrome "Tortoise-shell" plates and bowls are covered with a white slip, onto which splotches of manganese and copper glazing was applied, producing a brown and green coloration on a bright yellow or cream-colored background. The bowl in the lower right has a light buff paste, and is, therefore, closer related to the English examples than are the red-paste slip-coated pieces.
Figure Two

Ware of Rudolph Christ Recovered from Excavations at Salem, North Carolina.

Upper Left: Green tin-enamelled glazed "faience" vase, made by Christ after 1793.

Upper Right: "Tortoise-shell" ware teapot with pearl-beaded rim and base, with double intertwined, reeded handles with applied terminal spriggs; perhaps the finest Christ piece yet discovered.

Lower Left: Brown lead glazed mug with rouletted rim similar to those found on English scratch-blue salt-glazed stoneware; with double intertwined, reeded handles with applied terminal spriggs typically found on Christ's ware from Salem.

Lower Right: Bisque fired mug with "bead and reel" gadrooning in relief, with double intertwined handles with applied terminal spriggs. This particular form resembles closely early Leeds mugs.