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THE EDITOR'S ATTIC

DECORATED PEWTER

ONE OF THE MOST ATTRACTIVE features of American pewter, to many collectors, is its lack of decorative embellishment. Certain cast elements, such as porringer handles and thumbpieces for tankards, are usually of a decorative character, but few pieces are ornamented with engraving, or chasing, or piercing, or even with what is descriptively called wriggle work. The great majority, like those shown in this month's Frontispiece, were made for utility rather than decoration. What decorative quality they have — and it is often very considerable — comes from the form itself and the quality of the metal, rather than from any striving for effect on the part of the maker.

In European pewter surface decoration employing various techniques is more frequent, though in that of England little other than wriggle work was done before the eighteenth century. Two items from the collection of Percy E. Raymond of Lexington, Massachusetts, illustrate unusual treatments.



PEWTER CHARGER (c. 1650-1675). Probably English, with stamped decoration. From the collection of Percy E. Raymond.

The round dish or charger is believed to be English, of about 1650-1675. Its wide rim, just within the reeded edge, has a stamped border. The design was apparently done with two stamps, one a lunette motif, the other a cluster of three acorns. Stamped decoration is suitable technically to the relatively soft pewter, and in this case very effective.



PEWTER PLATTER. Probably French. From the collection of Percy E. Raymond. Photographs of pewter by Frederick Orchard.

The oblong dish or platter, 16 inches in length, makes an interesting contrast. Within its rather deep, molded rim, the entire flat surface is covered with pictorial decoration. The lines, which appear in the photograph to be engraved, are actually produced by various means, according to the owner. Most of them are cut with a burin, but some are stamped, and the main vertical outlines are apparently impressed with a small chisel rather than incised, for they show in relief on the back.

Apart from its technical interest, the artistic merit of the lugubrious scene has been challenged by some observers, and its historical significance has been given various interpretations. The most plausible explanation is that it depicts the return to France of the body of Louis IX, later canonized, after his death from the plague while he was leading a crusade against Tunis in 1270. It is not assumed that the platter is of any such early date — though it is probably French. Possibly there is somewhere a source picture from which this was derived, an engraving on copper printed on paper instead of perpetuated in pewter.

I SAY WHAT'S TRUE

PENNSYLVANIA GERMAN TULIPWARE is found far less frequently in the form of a mug than in pie plates and platters. A choice specimen in this unusual form has recently been acquired by the Philadelphia Museum of Art. It came to the Museum from the Cumberland Valley region of Pennsylvania.

PENNSYLVANIA GERMAN SGRAFFITO MUG. Dated 1801. Encircling the rim is the inscription: *Ich Sag was Wahr Ist; und Trinck Was klar ist* (I say what's true and drink what's clear). From the Philadelphia Museum of Art.



This mug exemplifies the slip-engraved or sgraffito technique. The glaze provides a light-colored background relieved with green mottling, through which the design is incised, appearing as light reddish brown. The outside surface of the mug, including the handle, is decorated with the tulip-and-vine motif, with conventionalized flower designs which recall the symbols often seen in Pennsylvania barn decoration. The arrangement of the whole is nearly symmetrical and the available space is thoroughly filled.

There are two inscriptions intended for show: one, encircling the rim reads: *Ich Sag was Wahr Ist; und Trinck Was klar ist* (I say what's true and drink what's clear); the other, near the base of the handle: *A.D. 1801*. Scratched in *Schritt* on the bottom is: *den Sten february 1801*.

The capacity of this mug when filled to the brim is somewhat more than a quart — perhaps to allow for a generous collar on a full quart of beer.