

Marks In Common: Current Research on African American Marks on Colonoware and Edgefield Stoneware

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In a recent issue of *Historical Archaeology*, J. W. Joseph (2011) speculated that X, cross, and circle, and cross marks found on alkaline glazed stoneware of South Carolina's Edgefield District were placed by African American potters, rather than white stoneware pottery manufacturers, and served as symbols of African ethnic identity in the manufacture of southern stoneware. Joseph identified four sets of marks that he felt were African American symbols: impressed cross marks found on the pottery produced by Reverend John Landrum, a four punctate circle and cross mark used at the Reverend Landrum pottery, a circle and cross mark used at the B. F. Landrum pottery apparently made by a wooden dowel, and the use of "X" as a mark by the literate African American potter Dave Drake. In his review of marks used by the potters and potteries of the Edgefield District, Joseph noted that these marks were not consistent with other marks used by potters of the district to identify their ware, and speculated that cross marks, X's, and circle and cross marks (which resemble the African Bakongo Cosmogram or Dikenga de Kongo) all had African associations that would have made them recognizable to other African Americans working with stoneware from the Edgefield District as African marks, signifying African makers.

As Joseph's article and associated forum papers by Leland Ferguson (2011), Chris Fennell (2011), Carl Steen (2011), and Gray Gundaker (2011) were being prepared for press, Ferguson relayed to Joseph word of the discovery of decorated colonowares with marks that resembled the Edgefield marks from excavations by Brockington and Associates at Dean Hall Plantation. Andrew Agha and Nicole Isenbarger (2011) provided images and descriptions of an impressed mark found on Dean Hall colonowares that is virtually identical to the B. F. Landrum Cross found in Edgefield. The Dean Hall Plantation collections date to the late 1790s and early 1800s, prior to the formation of the Edgefield potteries in the 1810s, and suggest that this mark was first developed and used on Lowcountry colonoware and somehow later transferred to Edgefield stoneware.

The authors are currently working on a comparative analysis of marks found on colonoware and marks from Edgefield stoneware to better understand common marks and their meanings. To date, we have identified six marks that appear on both colonoware from Dean Hall and stoneware from the Edgefield District. These include the

B. F. Landrum circle and cross mark, a circle and cross mark made from four punctuates similar to the Reverend John Landrum mark, a waffle stamp mark, an impressed "V" with associated line, a circle and line mark made by impressing a barrel or skeleton key into the clay body, and incised "X's." Other Edgefield marks include U's, crescents, stars, paired slashes, slashes, and other impressed letters including "C" and "E."

We are interested in receiving information on other colonoware marks to add to our catalog and analysis. Readers are encouraged to send descriptions, photographs, and measurements of marks on colonoware to nisenbarger@hotmail and jwjoseph@newsouthsassoc.com. We thank you in advance for your cooperation.

References Cited

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