

Special exhibit

Saxonia numismatica

From medieval times, the Saxon electors were among the richest princes in the Holy Roman Empire. In addition to Saxony's already highly developed commercial activities, the silver deposits in the Ore Mountains formed the main basis for their wealth. Following the initial mining rush in the 12th and 13th centuries, new discoveries of silver ore were made in this mountain range towards the end of the 15th century, triggering what is known as the *Zweites Berggeschrey* (Second Mining Rush). This caused a huge wave of immigration to the Ore Mountains; new mines were opened and mining towns such as Annaberg, Marienberg and Schneeberg were repopulated. The Saxon princes were skilful in using their wealth to obtain political power. From the mid-16th century they were, after the Habsburgs, the most powerful and influential princes in the Holy Roman Empire and the leading force among German Protestants.



*Prince Elector August;
two-thaler coin
commemorating his death
in 1586*



The Saxon rulers used coins and medals to display images of themselves and their deeds in a variety of ways. Commemorative coins were often minted to mark dynastic events such as weddings or deaths. They depict the Saxon princes in half-length portraits or on horseback, usually brandishing their electoral swords as a symbol of their nobility.

*Prince Elector Johann Georg II; four-thaler coin
commemorating the Imperial Vicariate in 1657*

The Saxon princes also liked to draw attention to their prominent role in the political system of the Holy Roman Empire by minting coins that made reference to their functions as Governor General or Imperial Vicar, and thus to their role as proxy to the Emperor in his absence or upon his death.



Prince Elector Johann Georg I; ten ducat coin commemorating the centenary of the Imperial Vicariate in 1630

In addition, some coins and medals were minted to mark particularly important historical events, such as the centenary of the Augsburg Confession in 1630, the Battle of Breitenfeld in 1631 and the Peace of Westphalia in 1648.

Prince Elector Johann Georg I; medal commemorating the Battle of Breitenfeld in 1631 (medallist: Sebastian Dadler)



Occasionally, Saxon coins and medals would also feature the economic basis for Saxony's wealth: mining in the Ore Mountains. This particularly striking commemorative thaler coin depicts the construction of an aqueduct to the St Anna mine in the Freiberg mining district. The

intricate detail and precision

of the design

provides us with a vivid impression of the mining technology used towards the end of the 17th

century.

Prince Elector Johann Georg III, medal commemorating the construction of an aqueduct to the St Anna mine in 1690 (medallist: Martin Heinrich Omeis)