

Simon Thomassin, Portrait of King Louis XIV of France, c. 1696, engraving on paper, 217 x 173 mm (image), 222 x 176 mm (plate), 278 x 210 mm (sheet), inscription in the medallion “LVDOVICVS MAGNVS REX / CHRISTIANISSIMVS / Rotier“, on the pedestal “Thomassin deline. et Sculpsit. / Cum Privil. Regis.“, in the text field of the pedestal „C’est ce Roy glorieux qui donne azile aux Rois, / Qui combat les Tirans; qui détruit l’Heresie; / Et qui S’est attiré par d’immortels Exploix / Tant d’admiration, et tant de Jalousie. / Bourçault“ and below “Se vend chez Thomassin Graveur di Roy rue S. Jacques vis a vis la rue du plastre.“ as well as below right handwritten “13/50”. On the backside the collector’s stamp of Horst von Rabenau, added handwritten with a pencil “nur Medaillon von Rotier / auf 1/2 verkl.“ and diverse auction and art dealer numbers.

The print was provided – in museum quality – with a new passe-partout (50 x 40 cm) of the company HALBE. A fitting frame – in museum quality – with museum glass (anti-reflective, very high UV protection, anti-static, abrasion resistant) of the company HALBE can be provided on request.

This engraving, which is in excellent condition, shows King Louis XIV of France (1638–1715), whose 72-year reign is known to have marked an unparalleled high point in French art, music, literature, architecture and science. His court at the Palace of Versailles became a model for courts throughout Europe. He himself is regarded as the most important representative of courtly absolutism and divine right in the Baroque era. He was nicknamed the *Sun King* (French: *Roi-Soleil*) and *the Great* (French: *Louis le Grand*).

The center of the sheet is a copperplate engraving of a medal by the Flemish artist Joseph Roëttiers (1635–1703), who was one of the first artists to work on the series of medals celebrating the glory of Louis XIV, begun in 1680. A member of a famous family of goldsmiths, silversmiths and engravers, he initially worked for the Royal Mint in England before moving to Paris in the early 1680s. There he soon obtained the position of master engraver at the Paris mint (*Graveur particulier*) and was finally appointed *Primier graveur de l’Histoire en Medailles* in 1694.

The medal depicts Louis XIV at an advanced age in the style of rulers of the Roman Empire: in austere profile, wearing armor, a coat of honour and a curly wig topped with a laurel wreath. The Latin inscription “Ludovicus XIV Rex Christianissimus”, meaning “Louis XIV, the most Christian king”, emphasizes the ruler’s personal piety on the one hand, while on the other it is intended to underline the king’s religious and political power and his role as the leader of Catholic Christendom. It was often used on coins, medals and other commemorative pieces.

The inscription on the pedestal below is by an unidentifiable person named Bourçault. It reads in English “He is the glorious king who grants asylum to kings, / who fights against tyrants, who destroys heresy; / and who through immortal successes / has won so much admiration and so much envy” and glorifies Louis XIV as an unsurpassed king who stands above all other kings.

The engraving was made by Simon Thomassin (Troyes 1655 – 1733 Paris), who came from a family of artists and was married to Geneviève, the daughter of the important painter and engraver Jacques Bailly (1634–1679). After a period at the French Academy in Rome, he returned to Paris, became a member of the *Académie royale de peinture et de sculpture* and was eventually appointed *Graveur du Roy*, i.e. engraver to the king. In 1694, he published his most

famous work: the Recueil des statues, groupes, fontaines..., du chateau & parc de Versailles, a collection of 218 engravings after his own drawings of statues, reliefs, fountains and other sights of the Palace of Versailles and its gardens. Artistically not without controversy, Thomassin nevertheless made a decisive contribution to the glorification of Louis XIV, his deeds and buildings.

Literature

D. Gv. 8414

Provenance

The print was once part of the Collection of Horst von Rabenau, which became apparent by the collector's stamp (Lugt 4427) on the backside. The handwritten addition "Iris" probably refers to the last owner of the sheet from the von Rabenau family. It was most likely acquired from the Düsseldorf art dealer C. G. Boerner.

Horst von Rabenau, who came from an aristocratic family first mentioned in documents in the 13th century, was born in Rybnik in Silesia in 1899, but spent his youth in Pyritz (Polish: Pyrzyce) in West Pomerania. After serving as a soldier in the First World War, he studied dentistry at the University of Greifswald, received his doctorate in 1923 and set up as a dentist in Stolp (Polish: Słupsk). During this time, he began to collect African art in particular, partly as a result of several trips to Africa, but also prints, and became friends with the painter Walter Timmling (1891–1948). Von Rabenau fought on several fronts during the Second World War. Afterwards, his family had to flee their homeland, which had now become Polish, and found a new home in Wuppertal, where his wife was from. He lost his entire collection during the Second World War.

From the 1950s onwards, von Rabenau built up a new collection, concentrating now primarily on German, Dutch and French prints and – to a lesser extent – drawings from the 15th to 19th centuries. He acquired these mainly from the Düsseldorf art dealer C. G. Boerner. Horst von Rabenau's collection remained in the family until his death in 1993 and was only gradually broken up in the last two decades.

The enclosed former passepartout of the von Rabenau collection contains various information on the people involved as well as bibliographical references.