

A Survey of Frame History

Part III: Louis XIII and Louis XIV Frames

by Diane Day, CPF



Figure 1: French Renaissance-style frame carved with rose branches and foliage, 2nd quarter 17th Century, possibly made for Raphael's "Portrait of Baldassare Castiglione." From *Frameworks* by Paul Mitchell and Lynn Roberts.

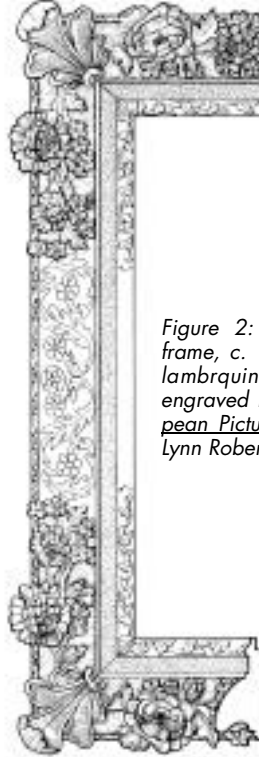


Figure 2: Louis XIII-Louis XIV transitional frame, c. 1650 convex frame with fanned lambrquins and flower corners and engraved reposes. From *A History of European Picture Frames* by Paul Mitchell and Lynn Roberts.

The traditional sources for commissions through the centuries have been, primarily, the church and the nobility, both of which required expensive, finely carved, gilded frames. Things began to change in the 17th century as genre painting was developing in Northern Europe. Painters began producing works of common, everyday scenes that appealed to the rising merchant class. There was also a growing demand for portraits and other non-religious subjects. These developments produced a growing market for varying types of frames. While rooms had been primarily decorated with wallpaintings and tapestries at that time, it now became customary for portable paintings to hang on walls in the home. As paintings began to relate less to the interiors in which they hung, the picture frame became more and more important as a transitional element.

After the Renaissance (c.1450-1600), there was a major shift in the patronage of the arts from the church to the kings, resulting in an even greater public show of wealth and power, and thus, an increased demand for

elaborate frames. For varying reasons, there was also a shift of the artistic center of Europe from Italy to France. By the middle of the 17th century the Louis XIII frame style had emerged. Louis XIII, the king for which this style of frame is named actually, died in 1643.

Louis XIII frames are characterized by a close bonding of ornamentation to the profile and straight rails with decorative borders. Three mouldings make up the profiles: an inner, middle and outer. Leaf, branch and flower elements are tied together in a weblike pattern on the surface (Figure 1). The most common organic motifs are oak or laurel leaves bordered by ribbons, husks or leaf tips. The general style came out of French architectural Baroque ceiling and door frame design. Variations of this style can be seen on frames of all sizes and were used until the end of the 1600's. They represented the first national standard for pattern design.

The Louis XIII style overlapped the period of Louis XIV (1643-1715) and resulted in two transitional styles characterized by accented corners and/or centers. The

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Figure 3: Louis XIII-Louis XIV transitional frame, c. 1650. Acanthus-spiral torus frame with corner and centre clasps. From *A History of European Picture Frames* by Paul Mitchell and Lynn Roberts.



Figure 4: French Louis XIV 17th century corner-and-centre baroque frame on Renoir's "Portrait of Therese Berard." From *Frameworks* by Paul Mitchell and Lynn Roberts.



Figure 5: Provincial Louis XIV convex frame with dentil front, foliate corners and shell centres on cross-hatched ground, 17th century. From *A History of European Picture Frames* by Paul Mitchell and Lynn Roberts.

more common type has raised corners with a number of flowers and often includes the sunflower (Figure 2), that was symbolic of Louis XIV, known as the Sun King. The second style is architectural in feel with a torus section on a flat moulding bordered by panels and leaf tips. The leaves are not bunched together as in the Louis XIII frames, but carved in a spiral pattern. The corners and centers are accented by cartouches which usually do not protrude beyond the outer edge of the moulding (Figure 3).

In this period known as the Baroque (c. 1600-1730) there was a preference for organic rather than geometric patterns. The bunches of overlapping leaves, usually laurel and oak, were boldly carved. Picture frames during this era needed to be powerful sculptural forms in order to hold their own with Baroque style paintings and building interiors of the day. The use of opulent, distorted decorative elements is exemplified by the Louis XIV frame style which has heavy and solid ornate forms. Profiles are generally wide and deep with stylized floral elements. These frames were made to hang in the richly decorated interior spaces of churches and palaces.

The basic characteristics of the Louis XIV frame style are overall carving with generally lower relief than on

Louis XIII and Louis XV frames and often incorporates cross-hatching as well (Figure 4).

There are a number of variations on the basic Louis XIV frame patterns, but there are two common types which stand out. One has straight sides and the other protruding corners and centers. The primary sections of the first type are generally the same as the Louis XIII frame style, but the decoration is quite different. The foliage is carved in a complex series of C-scrolls, linked by flowers, all on a cross-hatched ground. This basic pattern is repeated on the borders.

The second style is the one synonymous with the Baroque and has cartouches in the corners and centers containing shells, leaves or fleur-de-lis on a broadly hatched ground (Figure 5). As a result of this design, attention is diverted from the straight edges of the frames. Simpler versions of these frames were made, with the extent of the carved decoration determined by the wealth of the buyer, the setting the frame was going into, or the status of the person receiving the frame. ■

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