

The Duviviers: Medalists to Kings

The rich legacy of five generations of the artistically gifted Duvivier family is found in medals created for French royalty.

by Charles J. Ricard
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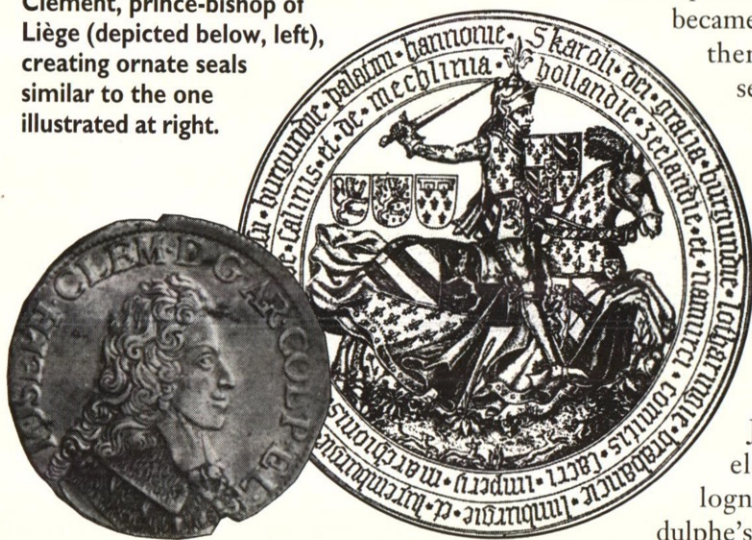
THROUGHOUT FRENCH HISTORY, a number of families have carried on traditions of painting, sculpture and medallic art by appointment to the king. One such family, the Duviviers, served as medalists to the king in the 18th and 19th centuries, leaving a legacy of exquisite, handheld works of art.

Gendulphe Duvivier (1667-1724)

A RESIDENT OF the Province of Liège in eastern Belgium, Gendulphe Duvivier began his career in the arts as a “chaser,” a craftsman who ornamented strips of metal by impressing a design with a hammer, then completing the image using tools without a cutting edge (as opposed to the implements employed by an etcher). Gendulphe became an engraver of *sceaux* (“seals”) used to authenticate letters and legal documents. Hot sealing wax generally was applied to a document, marked with a seal, then allowed to cool and set.

Such seals usually were very ornate, and thus not easily duplicated. Often bearing the image of a knight in full regalia, along with an individual coat of arms, seals represented nobles, universities, cities, townships and other entities. Gendulphe Duvivier worked for Joseph Clement, prince-bishop of Liège, elector of Bavaria and archbishop of Cologne. Unfortunately, few examples of Gendulphe’s work survive.

Gendulphe Duvivier (1667-1724) worked for Joseph Clement, prince-bishop of Liège (depicted below, left), creating ornate seals similar to the one illustrated at right.





Jean Duvivier's graceful portraits for medals and coins show Louis XV as he matured from child to elder.

Jean Duvivier (1686-1761)

LIKE HIS FATHER, Gendulphe, who taught him the basics of engraving, Jean Duvivier resided in Liège. In 1705 Jean took up painting and learned to copy the masters. As his skills developed, he traveled to Paris, then a great center for the arts. His work became recognized, and he entered the Académie Royale de Peinture, where he engraved portraits and prints. He was fortunate to find a patron in an acquaintance of his father's, Jean-Baptist de Valdor, ambassador of the prince of Liège to Paris.

Jean's early assignments entailed engraving the king's plate. His first medallion endeavor came in 1714 with a portrait of Joseph Clement, prince-bishop of Liège, for the Treaty of Baden.

Jean Duvivier was introduced to Nicolas DeLaunay, director of the French Mint, who was impressed with his work and took him into his service. Jean's first assignment was a medal of Louis XIV. From that period, he devoted all his time and effort to medallion art. His artistic medals of Louis XV were well received, and in 1719 the king selected him to succeed Jean Mauger at the Medal Mint. It was customary to strike a medal to mark the visits of foreign dignitaries to Paris and the mint, and Jean made one such piece for the 1717 stay of Russian Tsar Peter the Great.

A series of medals shows how Jean successfully met the challenge of gracefully aging Louis XIV's successor, his great-grandson Louis XV. Under the guardianship of his royal cousin, the Duke of Orleans, who served as Regent, the young king learned nothing but extravagance. When he assumed his royal duties as king of France in 1723, he was but 13 years old and had little knowledge of his responsibilities or subjects. He had a long reign of 51 years. Jean Duvivier reflected the king's maturation from child to elder on coins and medals.

For a six-year period, Jean Duvivier fell out of the king's favor as a result of an argument with Edme Bouchardson, head of the Académie des Inscriptions. Jean had refused to copy Bouchardson's profile of the king,



Jean Duvivier, portrayed at top by his son Benjamin, rendered a likeness of Peter the Great for the obverse of a medal (bottom) struck in 1717 to mark the Russian tsar's visit to Paris.



Many consider Benjamin Duvivier's 1789 medal of the royal family's arrival in Paris (top) to be his finest medallic work. On a 1781 medal, he displayed exquisite detail in his depiction of Louis XVI and Marie Antoinette (bottom).



Among the medals Benjamin Duvivier designed to commemorate the American Revolution are two "Battle of the Clouds" pieces, honoring the infantry and cavalry (top, left and right), and the "Washington before Boston" issue (bottom).

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Out of Louis XV's favor from 1737 to 1743, Jean Duvivier increased his production of jetons (left). He returned with a commission for a medal celebrating the king as "Protector of the French Academy" (right).

and he fought for his right to continue signing his medallic work. During this time, Jean increased his production of jetons (metallic pieces intended to be used for computing purposes or games), many of which truly can be considered medallic works of art. His jetons vary in theme and in many cases are mythological in representation. He designed jetons for kings and queens; royal and military departments; the royal treasury; chambers of money; academies; the clergy, religious orders, churches and saints; merchants and tradesmen; and cities, provinces and villages. In 1743 he returned to the king's favor.

Jean Duvivier continued to produce medallic pieces until his death on April 30, 1761. In all, he engraved more than 400 dies and 200 jetons, 17 different portraits of the king, and medals commemorating political and military events in the reigns of Kings Louis XIV and XV. Considered the medalist of Louis XIV's reign, he remains one of the greatest medallic artists of the 18th century.

Benjamin Duvivier (1730-1819)

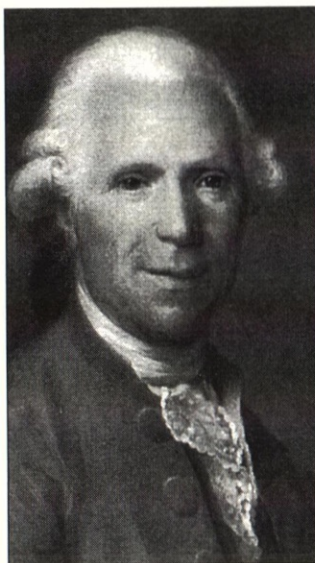
SON OF JEAN, Pierre-Simon-Benjamin Duvivier was born in Paris. It was said that out of jealousy after seeing how artistically gifted "Benjamin" was, Jean did not want to teach his son medallic art. Caught copying one of his father's medals, Benjamin was banished from home. His brother-in-law Tardieu, a portrait artist, took him in and

helped him with his studies. Benjamin studied at the Académie and won prizes for his efforts in 1744, 1746 and 1756.

On the death of Jean Duvivier on April 30, 1761, Benjamin successfully petitioned Louis XV to occupy the family apartments in the Louvre. Three years later, he was appointed medal engraver to the king. In 1772 he was appointed *graveur général* (chief engraver) of French coinage, and in 1776 he was elected a member of the Académie.

Benjamin's medals of Louis XVI are considered masterpieces of execution, tending toward ancient greatness in style, and giving a complete picture of an event in the finest detail. He faced little competition, and unlike his elder, was willing to teach medallic art and sculpture. His works include a portrait medal of his father, Jean, one of very few likenesses that exist. His coins for Louis XVI were well received by the public and in international trade. His medals of the Napoleonic era are equal to any in the series.

From 1781 to 1789, Benjamin Duvivier was commissioned to produce



Benjamin Duvivier (left) was portrayed on a medal (top) by his most famous student, his nephew Nicolas Tiolier. Benjamin's work included jetons (below, top) and coins, such as a double louis d'or of 1790 (below, bottom).



The Castorland Medal

THE "CASTORLAND" MEDAL truly is a Franco-American issue. Having witnessed the bloodshed of the "Reign of Terror," many Parisians sought an opportunity to leave their city and, indeed, France. In 1792 approximately 200,000 acres of land in upper New York State were purchased and offered for sale in 1793, the year Louis XVI was beheaded. The Company of New York managed the sale of land to many potential refugees.

One subscriber to 500 acres was Benjamin Duvivier, who was called upon to produce dies for a medal that would identify this Franco-American territory as "Castorland." Some called the silver disk a "demi-ecu," others a jeton or token. These early silver pieces were distributed to the directors of the Castorland Company; copper-bronze specimens may have been made for collectors at a later time. Interestingly, only the silver pieces were found among the items in Duvivier's estate when he died in 1819.



General F.E. Duvivier

AN 1848 MEDAL memorializes Benjamin Duvivier's nephew General F.E. Duvivier, who fought and died a hero in Napoleon's army on January 7, 1797. When asked by an Austrian colonel to surrender, he shouted, "Come take me." He then proceeded to draw his sabre and, with two blows, brought the challenger to the ground. The general soon was followed by his encouraged regiment, which rallied to gain a French victory at Rivoli.



In 1801 Pierre Joseph Tiolier modeled this medal for the "Association pour la Construction des Trois Ponts en Fer sur la Seine."



Pierre Joseph Tiolier

a series of medals commemorating the American Revolution. The most significant of these is the first medal authorized by the Continental Congress, struck in gold for presentation to George Washington for his leadership in driving the British from Boston in 1776.

Pierre Joseph Tiolier (1763-1815)

BORN IN LONDON, Pierre Joseph Tiolier served as graveur général of the French Mint from 1803 to 1815. He studied under his brother-in-law Benjamin Duvivier, who taught him the skills needed to become a master engraver of French coins and pattern pieces.



Nicolas Pierre Tiolier, chief engraver of the French Mint from 1816 to 1842, sculpted this laureate bust of Napoleon.



Nicolas Pierre Tiolier

Nicolas Pierre Tiolier (1784-1843)

THE SON OF Pierre Joseph Tiolier, Nicolas learned medallic art from both his father and his uncle, Benjamin Duvivier. He was graveur général of the mint from 1816 to 1842.

THIS SAGA OF the Duvivier family (1667-1843) presents a challenge to numismatists—particularly young collectors—who have access via the Internet to extensive libraries and museums. May they be encouraged to research the background of other families involved in the numismatic arts and relate their findings to the hobby community.

SPECIAL THANKS GO to J.-L. Desnier of the French Mint for providing illustrations of medals depicting Jean and Benjamin Duvivier.

A descendant of the Duviviers, **Charles J. Ricard** is past president of the Rochester (NY) Numismatic Association, Chicago Coin Club and Token and Medal Society, and a member of the American Numismatic Society. A NUMISMATIC NEWS Numismatic Ambassador, he has received the ANA's Medal of Merit, Lifetime Achievement, Glenn Smedley Memorial Award and Heath Literary Award.