

The Representation of Maritime Ports in Louis XIV's *Histoire métallique*

Summary*

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Louis XIV reshaped France as a maritime power. However, the role of ports (and other maritime efforts) in the famous *Medailles sur les principaux evenements du regne de Louis le Grand, avec des explications historiques*, Paris, Imprimerie royale, 1702, has only rarely been studied so far.¹

Analyzing different forms of texts and paratexts in both the medals and the contemporaneous official catalogue as well as forms of visual representation of maritime ports in the *Histoire métallique*, I have identified four different groups of port-medals:

1. Medals with an inscription containing a form of the word *port*, that is
 - a) three medals on the ports and arsenals of Brest (no. 189, fig. 1), Rochefort (no. 93, fig. 2), and Toulon (no. 182, fig. 3), all showing a map and a deity,
 - b) one medal showing the deployment of galleys in the port of Le Havre (no. 232, fig. 4). The medal representing the port of Marseille (no. 224, fig. 5) is very similar although the word *port* is present only in the text of the catalogue. Both medals show a map and a ship.
 - c) Two medals depicting the port of Sète (no. 91, fig. 6) as part of the *Canal des deux Mers* (no. 101, fig. 7).

*Summary of: *La distribution de l'image du port maritime dans l'Histoire métallique de Louis XIV*. In: Yvan LOSKOUTOFF (ed.): *Les médailles de Louis XIV et leur livre*. Mont-Saint-Aignan 2015, 213-233. The numbers by the medals refer to a copy of the 1702 grand edition published by the Bibliothèque nationale de France <http://gallica.bnf.fr/ark:/12148/bpt6k1041715f>.

1. See: *Josèphe Jacquot: Les difficultés rencontrées par l'académie royale des inscriptions à propos de la Médaille du port et de l'arsenal de Brest*. In: *Actes du 91e congrès national des sociétés savantes, Rennes 1966, section d'archéologie (Comité des travaux historiques et scientifiques, Ministère de l'éducation nationale)*, Paris 1968, 389-405.

2. Medals showing ports or port cities in combat,
 - a) being attacked by the French navy, Cartagena² (no. 9, fig. 8), Messina (no. 144, fig. 9), Chio³ (no. 190, fig. 10), Genoa (no. 202, fig. 11), Palamós⁴ (no. 255, fig. 12), all being represented in a perspective view, and, lastly
 - b) being defended against an enemy attack: Dunkirk (no. 261, fig. 13).
3. Medals that value groups of seamen (conscripts (no. 183, fig. 14), prizes made by French corsairs (no. 262, fig. 15), Guards of the Navy (no. 199, fig. 16)) while showing views of ports or situations typical for ports.
4. Medals that give attention to Louis XIV's maritime policy by means of visual elements or by the text of catalogue from 1702. This group contains about 60 medals.

The majority of the medals in group no. 1 combines a map—a fundamental symbol of power—and a maritime symbol (or, in the case of Toulon, the explicit word *portus*) when it comes to representing French ports (Brest, Toulon, Rochefort, Le Havre, Marseille). The prominence of this iconographic model does probably result from the fact that these medals have been designed in a close connection since 1697. This dominant form takes up the layout of the medal on the fortification of Dunkirk (no. 117), a layout that has been conceived before 1694 and that refers to a medal on the port of Ostia Antica struck under Nero. Alternatives to this design had been discussed several times—but in vain.

Although Louis XIV's maritime policy is well represented in this series of medals on ports and maritime infrastructure (the disputable consistency of this series is due to a combination of iconographic and textual/paratextual elements including the catalogue), the *Histoire métallique* is no encyclopedic display of maritime affairs. The authors, members of the *Petite Académie*, eliminated many maritime elements from the descriptions before going to press. In any case, the catalogue emphasises in the activity of the king: his deeds serve as framework for passages on maritime infrastructure.

The minutes of the *Petite Académie* reveal that attention to the subject of ports arose rather late in the process of the conceptual design and production of the 286 medals that were to constitute the *Medailles sur les principaux evenements du regne de Louis le Grand*

2. In the region of Murcia, not Cartagena de Indias in America.

3. Against the pirates of Tripoli of Barbary, but in the Aegean Sea.

4. In Catalonia.

the so-called uniform series, or better: the “medals and their book” (LOSKOUTOFF). Other medals dealing with maritime issues have been designed rather lately, too. Even if medals commemorating victorious naval battles with clear representations of ports have been struck before the uniform series was commissioned (Chio, Genoa, Cartagena), maritime infrastructure enjoyed less and therefore later attention. Additionally, it was not always very easy to insert lengthy periods of construction into a narrative focused on punctual action; back-dating was sometimes matter of deliberation.

The representation of ports in the *Histoire métallique* is full of contrasts. Maritime infrastructure is an important topic, yet it was integrated only lately. The dominant iconography refers to an antique model, but is at the same time “modern”. The texts seem to inform about maritime affairs; still, they primarily argue for Louis XIV being a great king, *Louis le Grand*. In this complexity, it is frequently the text (be it the inscription of the medal, the title of medal given in the catalogue, or its explicit description of the medal) that makes beholders—in reality: readers—see what the *Petite Académie* and Louis XIV wanted us to see. This deferral as well as the frequent formula *on y voit* shapes perception.

It seems noteworthy to me that this very adjustment of perception has been revived for the next large-scale and exclusive representation of French ports, for the series of the *Ports de France* painted by Joseph Vernet (1714-1789). Entitling texts on frames and in catalogues explicitly informed the reader about what he was intended to see.



FIGURE 1 – Académie Royale des Médailles, TUTELA CLASSIUM OCEANI (no. 189), Brest (BNF/Gallica, FOL-H-4580)



FIGURE 2 – Académie Royale des Médailles, URBE ET NAVALI FUNDATIS (no. 93), Rochefort (BNF/Gallica, FOL-H-4580)



FIGURE 3 – Académie Royale des Médailles, TOLONII PORTUS ET NAVALE (no. 182), Toulon (BNF/Gallica, FOL-H-4580)



FIGURE 4 – Académie Royale des Médailles, PORTUUM SECURITAS (no. 232), LeHavre (BNF/Gallica, FOL-H-4580)



FIGURE 5 – Académie Royale des Médailles, ASSERTUM MARIS MEDITERRANEI IMPERIUM (no. 224), Marseille (BNF/Gallica, FOL-H-4580)

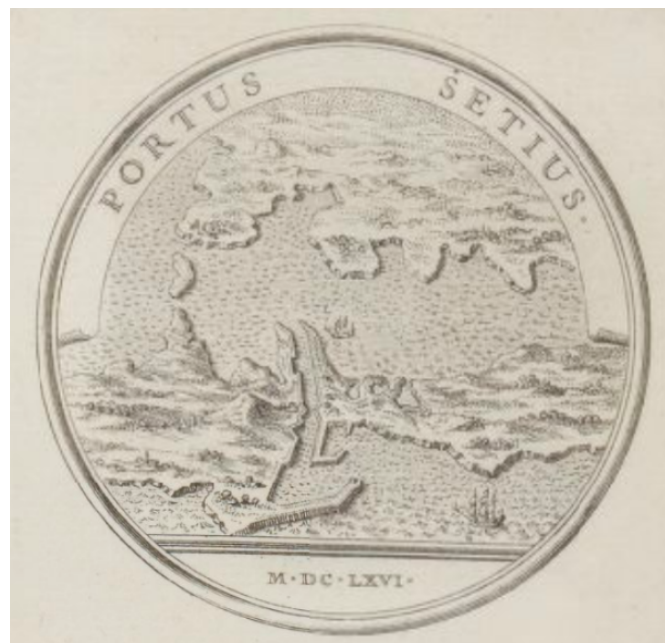


FIGURE 6 – Académie Royale des Médailles, PORTUS SETIUS (no. 91), Sète (BNF/Gallica, FOL-H-4580)

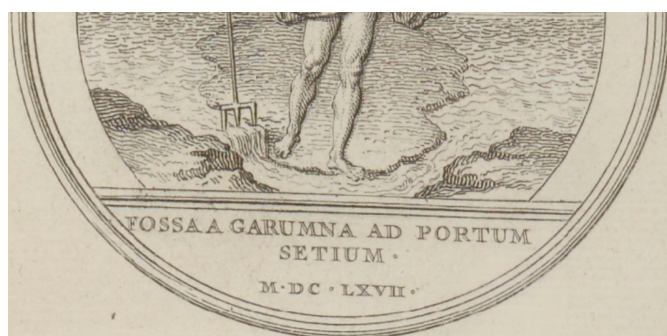


FIGURE 7 – Académie Royale des Médailles, JUNCTA MARIA / FOSSA A GARUMNA AD PORTUM SETIUM (no. 101), Sète (BNF/Gallica, FOL-H-4580)

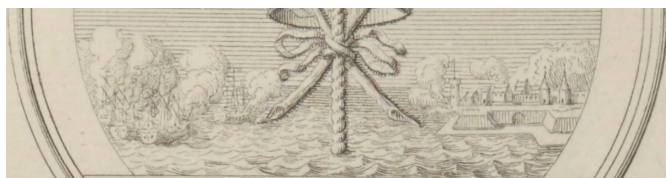


FIGURE 8 – Académie Royale des Médailles, OMEN IMPERII MARITIMI (no. 9), Chartagene (BNF/Gallica, FOL-H-4580)



FIGURE 9 – Académie Royale des Médailles, ALIMENTA MESSANAE (no. 144), Messina (BNF/Gallica, FOL-H-4580)



FIGURE 10 – Académie Royale des Médailles, DE PIRATIS TURCÂ SPECTANTE (no. 190), Chio (BNF/Gallica, FOL-H-4580)



FIGURE 11 – Académie Royale des Médailles, VIBRATA IN SUPERBOS FULMINA (no. 202), Genua (BNF/Gallica, FOL-H-4580)



FIGURE 12 – Académie Royale des Médailles, Palamós (no. 255), PALAMO VI CAPTA (BNF/Gallica, FOL-H-4580)



FIGURE 13 – Académie Royale des Médailles, DUNKERCA ILLAESA (no. 261), Dunkerque defended (BNF/Gallica, FOL-H-4580)



FIGURE 14 – Académie Royale des Médailles, BELLO ET COM-MERCIO (no. 183), naval conscription (BNF/Gallica, FOL-H-4580)



FIGURE 15 – Académie Royale des Médailles, INDICAE HOS-TIUM OPES INTERCEPTAE (no. 262), prizes made by French shipowners (BNF/Gallica, FOL-H-4580)



FIGURE 16 – Académie Royale des Médailles, LECTI JUVENES IN NAVALEM MILITIAM CONSCRIPTI DCCC (no. 199), naval cadets (BNF/Gallica, FOL-H-4580)