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fine art

# Robert Nanteuil

## The Large Portraits



catalogue 23

# Robert Nanteuil

## The Large Portraits

GILLIS GOLDMAN FINE ART

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February 2021



*There is a wonderful fancifulness in the old man's long gray hair*  
Robert Henry in *The Art Spirit* (1923)

Dear Friends

This is an exceptional ensemble of large portraits by Robert Nanteuil. The present sheets are all early states and in great quality of impression. Nanteuil carried out the genre of portrait to an unmatched level. He took advantage of the fact that during the reign of Louis XIV, portraits experienced a growing enthusiasm. An interest that culminated in 1699, when the Academy decided that in order to be accepted as a member, any engraver should propose a portrait, a *passage obligé*, to be recognised. Most of the engraved portraits were made to decorate theses, dedicated to dignitaries to earn their patronage; the rest of the production was to be found at *marchands d'images*. In this vein, Nanteuil produced more than 230 engravings, but most of them were of small size and printed in large quantities.

At the opposite, the large Nanteuil portraits are of another sort and are impressive. They were made to be so. Faces are represented life-size and Nanteuil took great care to demonstrate his *maestria*. One distinctive feature of his practice was to draw his sitter *ad vivum*. To preserve his model's presence captured during sessions, the artist relied on his drawings to translate a faithful likeness onto the plate. Domenico Tempesti wrote an account of these sessions, explaining Nanteuil's habit of conversing and even laughing with his models, to observe their physiognomy in movement and gain insight into their personality. Only the French royals and grand dignitaries were portrayed, including the Queen of France, Anne of Austria, her son Louis XIV, the Colberts and Le Tellier. When dignitaries ordered their own depictions, their courtiers eagerly took care of the portraits to assert their loyalty, and hopefully be rewarded.

Generally, the large court portraits show an oval border on the edge of which are inscribed in epigraphic characters the person's name and titles. Getting his portrait was expensive. In 1675, one had to pay 2200 pounds for a portrait made by Nanteuil, an amount afforded by who commissioned it, as he was proud to say that the portrait was made *ad vivum*. This mention appears systematically as it was the guarantee of the resemblance. For the artist,

an *ad vivum* portrait demonstrated not only his artistic skill but also his social status: not anyone could have access to a minister, a bishop, a duke, even the king, and obtain an hour of his precious time. Rare now, these portraits were little marketed. They were sometimes offered to relatives or to the clientele of the person represented, or sometimes sold by the engraver himself according to his notoriety.

The connection between Nanteuil and Louis XIV is worth mentioning. The king praised Nanteuil, who was appointed *dessinateur et graveur ordinaire du roi* in 1658. By virtue of Nanteuil's influence, printmaking would no longer be a mechanical art following the edict of 1661, as the king granted printmakers the same privileges as artists. Nanteuil had direct access to the king, and between 1661 and 1678, he offered him no less than ten portraits. It is recorded for instance that the king posed from the 5<sup>th</sup> to the 19<sup>th</sup> of February 1666, an event rare enough that Nanteuil wrote about the honour he felt was done to him in a poem. Nanteuil portrayed the king in his mid-thirties, a king then self-assured of his uncontested royal authority, a king ready to lead the military campaigns against the *Provinces Unies*.

Early in his career, Nanteuil's art followed the lines of his predecessors. Operating with straight lines that, similar to the work of Claude Mellan, were strengthened but not crossed in the shadows. In a number of prints, he made use of crosshatching, like his brother-in-law Nicolas Regnesson, or stippling, in the same manner as Jean Boulanger. With time, Nanteuil progressively got a hold of his own style, managing to bring his portraits to an almost unmatched level of precision and completeness. He also showcased creativity when it came to the draperies and other parts of his plates. They are astonishing.

Eric Gillis & Noémie Goldman



1

## Anne d'Autriche

---

Engraving on laid paper, 1666

Plate 500 x 423 mm

Reference Robert-Dumesnil 23; Petitjean – Wickert, first state of three

Provenance Private collection, France



2

## Cardinal de Bonzi

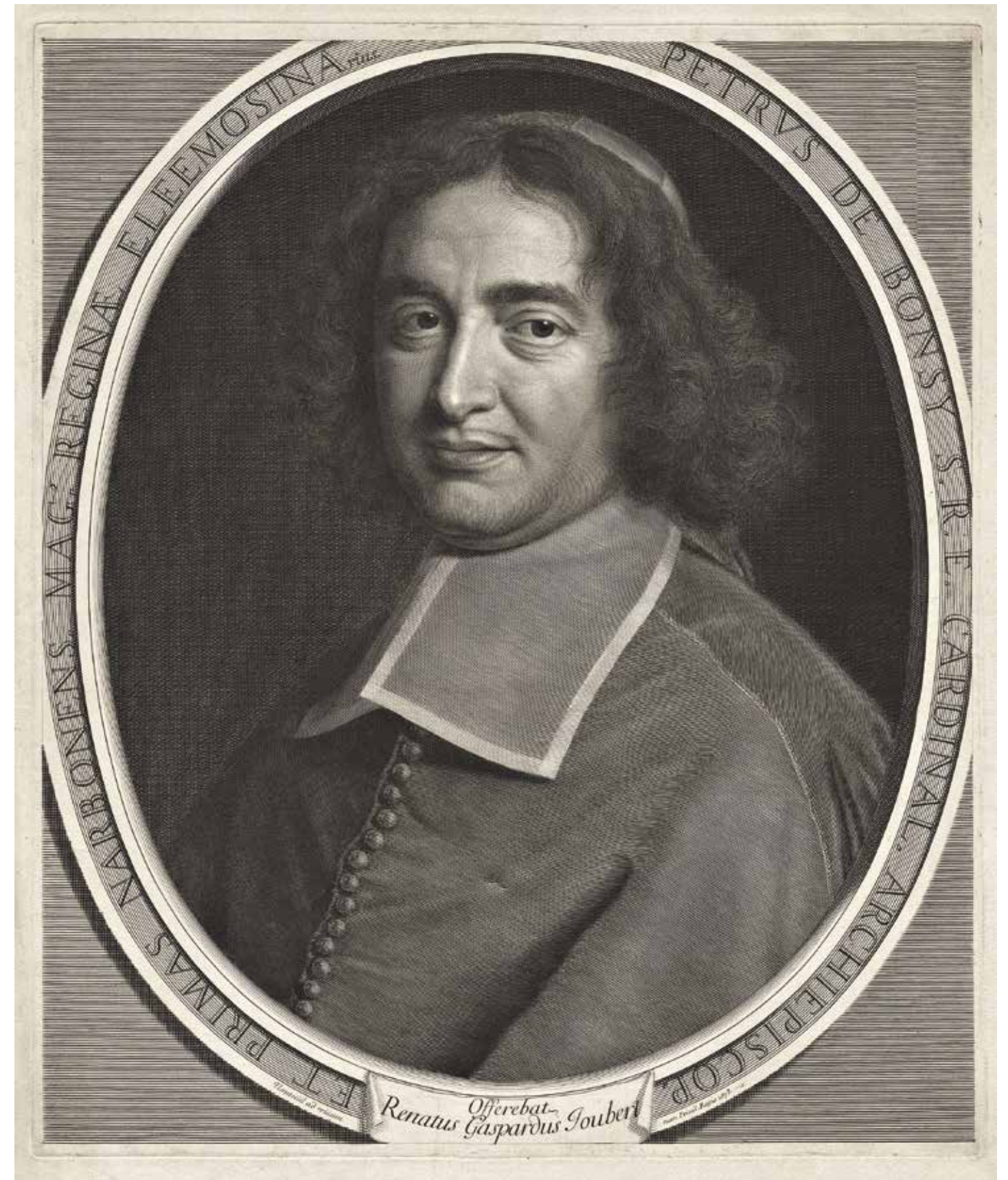
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Engraving on laid paper, 1678

Plate 524 x 437 mm

Reference Robert-Dumesnil Ap. 1; Petitjean - Wickert 23, first (?) state of fifteen ("Très rare")

Provenance Private collection, France



3

## Jacques-Benigne Bossuet

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Engraving on laid paper, 1675

Plate 459 x 385 mm

Reference Robert-Dumesnil 45; Petitjean - Wickert 25, second state of four ("Rare")

Provenance Private collection, France



4

## Chancelier Boucherat

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Engraving on laid paper, ca. 1677

Plate 518 x 432 mm

Reference Robert-Dumesnil 46; Petitjean - Wickert 26, only stae ("Très rare")

Provenance Private collection, France



5

*Cardinal Bouillon*

Engraving on laid paper, ca. 1677-78

Plate 524 x 434 mm

|           |                                                                |
|-----------|----------------------------------------------------------------|
| Reference | Robert-Dumesnil 53; Petitjean - Wickert 34, first state of two |
|-----------|----------------------------------------------------------------|

|            |                             |
|------------|-----------------------------|
| Reference  | Robert E. Jamieson 33, 1904 |
| Provenance | Private collection, France  |



6

## *Jean-Baptise Colbert*

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Engraving on laid paper, 1667

Plate 506 × 428 mm

Reference Robert-Dumesnil 74; Petitjean - Wickert 52, first or second state of three

Provenance Private collection, France



*Jean-Baptiste Colbert*

|                               |                                                                 |
|-------------------------------|-----------------------------------------------------------------|
| Engraving on laid paper, 1676 |                                                                 |
| Plate                         | 478 x 398 mm                                                    |
| Reference                     | Robert-Dumesnil 76; Petitjean - Wickert 55, ninth (final) state |
| Provenance                    | Private collection, France                                      |



8

## Jacques-Nicolas Colbert

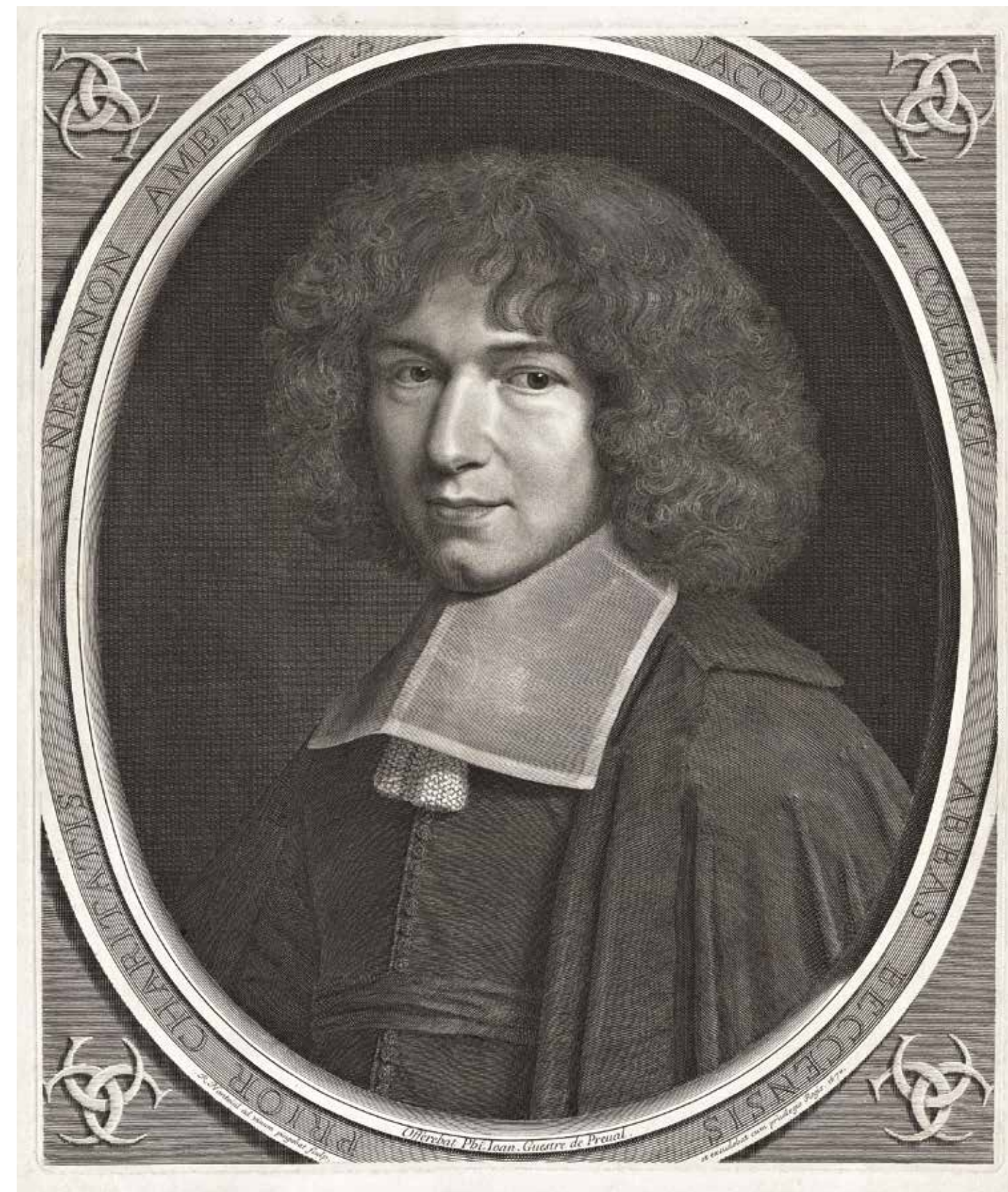
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Engraving on laid paper, 1670

Plate 506 × 428 mm

Reference Robert-Dumesnil 77; Petitjean - Wickert 56, first state of two ("Très rare")

Provenance Private collection, France



## Jacques-Nicolas Colbert

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Engraving on laid paper, 1673

Plate 516 x 433 mm

Reference Robert-Dumesnil 78; Petitjean - Wickert 57, first state of two ("Rare")

Provenance Private collection, France



10

*François de Harlay*

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Engraving on laid paper, 1673

Plate 512 x 430 mm

Reference Robert-Dumesnil 108; Petitjean - Wickert 86, second state of four ("Très rare")

Provenance Private collection, France



11

## Guillaume Lamoignon

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Engraving on laid paper, 1674

Plate 520 x 437 mm

Reference Robert-Dumesnil 121; Petitjean - Wickert 98, fourth (final) state ("Rare")

Provenance Private collection, France



12

## Michel Le Tellier

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Engraving on laid paper, 1676

Plate 516 x 434 mm

Reference Robert-Dumesnil 137; Petitjean - Wickert 117, second state of three ("Très rare")

Provenance Private collection, France



13

## Charles-Maurice Le Tellier

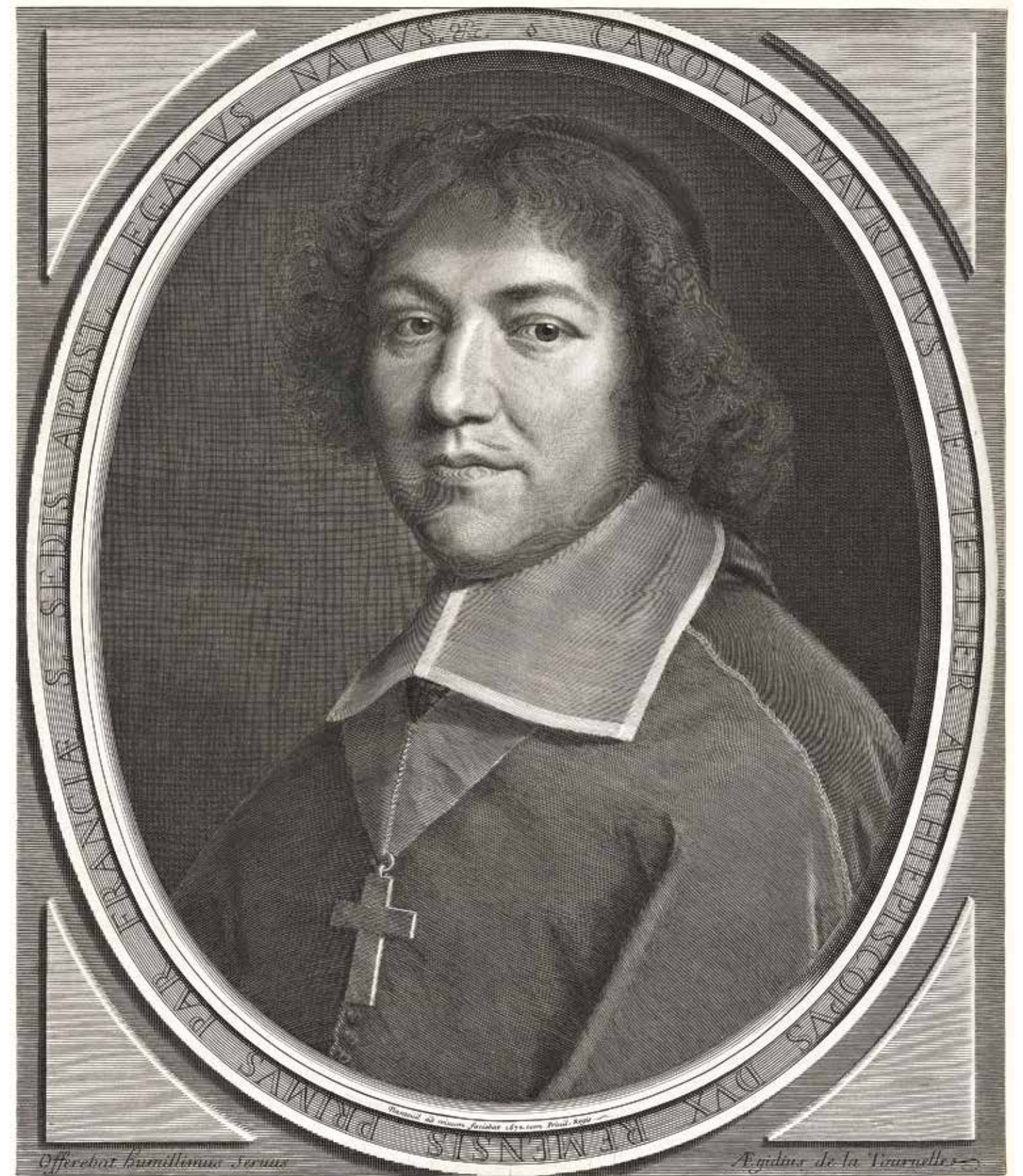
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Engraving on laid paper, 1674

Plate 464 × 391 mm

Reference Robert-Dumesnil 141; Petitjean - Wickert 122, first state of four ("Rare")

Provenance Private collection, France



14

## *Louis XIV*

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Engraving on laid paper, 1661

Plate 389 × 450 mm

Reference Robert-Dumesnil 152; Petitjean - Wickert 133, third (final) state

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15

## *Louis XIV*

---

Engraving on laid paper, 1664

Plate 496 x 424 mm

Reference Robert-Dumesnil 156; Petitjean - Wickert 137, second state of five ("Très rare")

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16

## *Louis XIV*

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Engraving on laid paper, 1666

Plate 497 x 426 mm

Reference Robert-Dumesnil 157; Petitjean - Wickert 138, sixth state (?) of twelve ("Très rare")

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17

## Louis XIV

---

Engraving on laid paper, 1667

Plate 452 x 312 mm

Reference Robert-Dumesnil 158; Petitjean - Wickert 139, third state of four

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18

## *Louis XIV*

---

Engraving on laid paper, ca. 1668-70

Plate 499 x 426 mm

Reference Robert-Dumesnil XXX; Petitjean - Wickert 141, second state of six ("Très rare")

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19

## Louis XIV

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Engraving on laid paper, 1676

Plate 523 × 438 mm

Reference Robert-Dumesnil 162; Petitjean - Wickert 143, eight or ninth state of sixteen ("Rarissime")

Provenance Private collection, France



20

## *Louis, Dauphin de France*

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Engraving on laid paper, 1677

Plate 527 x 438 mm

Reference Robert-Dumesnil 163; Petitjean - Wickert 144, eleventh (?) state of sixteen ("Très rare")

Provenance Private collection, France



21

## *Hardouin de Perefine*

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Engraving on laid paper, 1665

Plate 512 x 422 mm

Reference Robert-Dumesnil 214; Petitjean - Wickert 193, fourth (final) state

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22

## *Denis Talon*

---

Engraving on laid paper, 1669

Plate 500 x 425 mm

Reference Robert-Dumesnil 229; Petitjean - Wickert 215, first state of four ("Rare")

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**Design**

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**Translation/Editing**

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**Scan**

Jérôme Allard, Imprimerie HORS NORME

Special thanks to (by alphabetical order) to Sarah Avenel Tafani, Joseph de Colbert, Elisabeth De Coninck, Julie Dumont, Melissa Hughes, Dominique Lejeune, Didier Martinez, and to all of those who have contributed to the publication of this catalogue.

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