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these people wanted
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The style of silversmithing called “ Le Style Schleissner” from Hanau, Germany, while beautiful, causes headaches for historians, dealers, and collectors. The story of Hanau as a silversmithing town started with its conception when the original city father lured silversmiths from across Europe to his city from the late-1500s to the mid-1600s. The reason for this being that silversmiths were often wealthy, and produced higher tax revenue which could go into the city’s coffers. Outside styles were the inspiration for Hanau works since its inception.

Most of the silversmiths styled their work after what was coming out of France. Instead of using the silver marks from Hanau (silver marks being a set of standard marks put on silver to denote where it was made, the quality, and the date it was made), these silversmiths used marks that were similar to the proper French marks to falsify their work as French. Doing this was a highly controversial practice, and upset French silversmiths, especially because silversmiths in Hanau used lower grade silver at around 75% purity. Economic hardships in the 1700s crushed the silversmithing industry in Hanau until the 1800s, when a man named Johann Daniel Christian Schleissner (1793-1862) moved his goldsmithing family to Hanau around 1816-1817. His success brought in others, and the industry once again flourished. Johann’s son Daniel Philipp August Schleissner (1825-1891), when he started silversmithing, was the father of “ antique style” also known as “ Le Style Schleissner,” named after him. Schleissner, who was a painter, silversmith, and a very well travelled man – having seen modern silversmithing practices around the world – recognized a market that was untapped.

The industrial revolution had pulled many people up into the middle class and beyond, and these people wanted to purchase silver for the first time. The problem, however, that while antiques were popular there were not enough antique pieces to meet demand. Schleissner had a solution.

Schleissner created a style that was a mixture of a renaissance, baroque, and rococo pieces - the three styles being difficult to distinguish between to the untrained eye. These styles do have similar levels of filigree, but their level of detail and what kind of details were favoured did differ.

For instance, rococo pieces tended to have "other-worldly" elements to them, as that was a popular aesthetic of the time (think of the French panniers dresses). Schlissner's creations were based on older collections that already existed, with new stylized elements between 1650-1800 added. They were incredibly opulent and heavily decorated. Schleissner's business boomed, and soon his style was copied by the other silversmiths of Hanau, until "Le Style Schleissner" was synonymous with Hanau. Just as with the original silversmiths of Hanau, the second wave also created fraudulent markings on their pieces. Instead of making them look like they were produced in more popular countries, they used variations on old marks that were not quite right to make it appear that the pieces were genuine antiques and not merely styled to look like one.

By claiming that the marks - which were not exact duplicates - were stylistic additions to the piece they slipped through legal loopholes regarding forgeries. Sometimes they also put no marks on their work, allowing dealers to add fraudulent marks themselves. The makers always claimed that they

were working in a new style “ Le Style Schleissner,” and that they never sold their pieces as genuine antiques. While this style is beautiful and ornate, it can be challenging to identify what pieces are made in this style versus what is an original renaissance, baroque, or rococo piece. It usually comes down to an expert judging the marks that were made of the piece, as they can suss out if they match the style and “ date” the piece should be. Identifying pieces by style alone, however, is very difficult.

Considering the confusion around “ Le Style Schleissner,” the pieces just need to be enjoyed for their aesthetics, and maybe their exciting place in history.