Ornaments on English Table Clocks 1660–1730

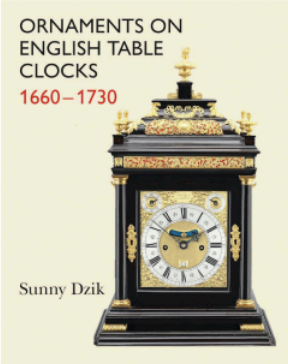
Book review by Bob Frishman, NAWCC Silver Star Fellow (MA)

Dr. Walter "Sunny" Dzik was the lead-off speaker at the "Horology 1776" symposium that I organized in 2021 as chairman of our Time Symposium Committee. He presented an educational and entertaining lecture based on his first major book, *Engraving on English Table Clocks: Art on a Canvas of Brass, 1660–1800,* a 438-page thousand-illustration wealth of new and unique scholarship. That lecture was professionally recorded, along with the 17 other symposium presentations, and it may be viewed at vimeo.com/showcase/8987339.

In 2023, Sunny published an even thicker book, *Beneath the Dial: English Clock Pull Repeat Striking 1675–1725,* that chronicles the revolutionary developments of hour and quarter striking in early English clocks. Nearly all of those described have invaluable full-color photographs of movement front plates.

Now in 2026 comes his 460-page third tour de force, *Ornaments on English Table Clocks 1660–1730,* the first major study of this aspect of horology. It turns back to decorative details after the second book's focus on advanced and complex technical innovations by Tompion and dozens of his contemporaries. He restricted this book's 70-year period to when the pendulum first was applied and there were vast leaps forward in science and the art of timekeeping.

Readers should know that Dr. Dzik has a day job as a world-renowned Boston-based Harvard professor and physician specializing in hematology. Our readers should know, too, that they have free access, without owning these costly books printed in Oxford, England, to the accompanying online image library that showcases more than a thousand examples of the clocks we see in those hardcover volumes. A visit to www.englishtableclocks.org will confirm the hugely important value of this digital library.



Ornaments on English Table Clocks 1660–1730
by Sunny Dzik, 2026, 460 pages, 8.5" x 11.5", hardcover, ISBN 979-8-234-03355-0, available at the Museum Store, shop.nawcc.org.

The *Ornaments* book has more than 600 color images that lead us from the earliest Fromanteel table clocks, with little ornamentation, to eye-candy examples of "Baroque Extravagance" by makers including Jeremie Gregory and Thomas Cattell. We learn about handles, finials, dome mounts, basket tops, horizontal rail mounts and frets, vertical door mounts and keyhole escutcheons, dial and door spandrels. The connections of case design to classical architectural motifs are explained, as are the stories of the skilled artisans who produced the uniquely English wooden cases and their brass and silver embellishments. Huguenot transplants, fleeing persecution and expulsion, figure large in these histories.

Research on the sourcing of cases and ornaments emphasizes the divisions of labor that already were widespread. Old city maps are labeled to show areas where these allied artisans were concentrated. Similar work and designs reveal that horologists certainly were not casemakers or ornamental brass casters, and that London clockmakers—an estimated 600 by the end of

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the 17th century—shared the services of those other craft specialists.

Technical information related to those founders and metalsmiths is abundant as well. Fabrication techniques—casting, embossing, chasing, gilding, etc.—are fully described, with links to related online videos. Cast versus repoussé objects are compared. Metal analysis by modern XRF (X-ray fluorescence) spectroscopy provides exact percentages of the copper, zinc, tin, and other elements, and allows confirmation, or rejection, of an ornament's originality and age. Handheld lightweight WRF (Weather Research and Forecasting Model) surface analyzers, nondestructive to the object, can detect sufficient mercury in fire gilding to prove that the gold was not more recently electroplated or painted.

We are warned in "Case Studies" that ornaments are easily lost, replaced, unoriginal, and wrongly applied, and should not be trusted for making overall assessments. On page 187 we read that Tompion No. 262, conserved at the Metropolitan Museum of Art, has incorrect oversize finials and that this maker "generally did not use finials on his domestic clocks, reserving them for special commissions."

Extensive notes follow each section, citing not only familiar books but also lesser-known articles published in *Antiquarian Horology,* the quarterly journal of the UK's Antiquarian Horological Society. The two multipage bibliographies are helpfully divided between horological and non-horological publications. A general index is next, followed by a 10-page name index, allowing quick searches for anything related to a specific maker.

Sunny presently has no big fourth book in process, but he acknowledges that English clocks produced after his cutoff dates also deserve new research and publications. In the meantime, his three books should keep us all busy for quite a while.