

FLINTLOCK PISTOLS

Overall Length: 46 cm.

Signed Gilbert¹ a Strasbourg.

Silver mounts by Johann Jacob Dörffer², Strasbourg 1766.

Full stocks of walnut, carved in relief showing foliate scrolls and bunches of grapes, the lock plates, body of the cocks, upper jaws and backs of steel chiselled in relief and burnished against a fire gilded ground with scrolls, trophies and blossoms, also finely engraved. Signatures “F Gilbert” and “a Strasbourg” within two *Rocaille* ornaments on the lock plates.

Silver mounts encompass side plates, butt caps and spurs, trigger guards, escutcheon plates and ramrod pipes. Butt caps depict Mars, the god of war, surrounded by typical Rococo ornaments like grapes and trophies, all chiselled in relief against a criss-cross engraved fire gilded ground. Similar decorations can be found on the trigger guards, which do also show the hallmark of Strasbourg for the year 1766, the mark of Johann Jacob Dörffer and on the first pistol the number 4. Escutcheon plates with an eagle's head, trophies and leaves, a circular space left blank in the center. Side plates with typical Rocaille ornaments.

Finely damascened two-stage barrels, of slightly tapering octagonal section at their breeches and round in the latter. Octagonal stage and the muzzle, which shows a foresight made of silver, are damascened with a silver wire. There is a golden inscription in an arab manner in the center of the breech. Barrel tang chiselled and burnished against a gilded ground with European Rococo ornaments. Original ramrods still preserved.



Discussion

A pair of flintlock pistols as fine and precious as the present example was supposedly commissioned by a high - ranking individual, in order to represent his status, wealth and power. Once the escutcheon plates and maybe the Rocaille frame within the side plates presumably showed his monogram or the ruler's profile as an inlay. There is the number 4 engraved on one trigger guard, which indicates that these works formed part of a garniture. This is a set of several firearms showing an identical design, serving for hunting or target shooting. Suchlike sets could encompass several rifles together with a pair of pistols. Since our examples show a dog on the barrel tangs and depict a boar's head and a horn on the trigger guard, they were probably intended for hunting.

Several crafts were involved in order to manufacture the present pistols in the city of Strasbourg, which has a good reputation for its silver works. The gunsmith Gilbert³ was responsible for delivering the garniture according to his client's desires. By presenting possible ornaments from pattern books, showing designs for the various elements of a firearm, that could be adapted by own suggestions, an individual decoration was determined and probably a drawing showed the prospective works in detail. One of these pattern books that circulated among gunsmiths during the Rococo fashion was published by Demarteau.⁴ There is a strong similarity between the carving on the wrist and on the forestock cartouche to the drawings on the plates no. 7 and 14 respectively, as you can see on the pictures below. If not taken directly from this book, the ornaments from Demarteau at least influenced the design of the present luxury pistols.

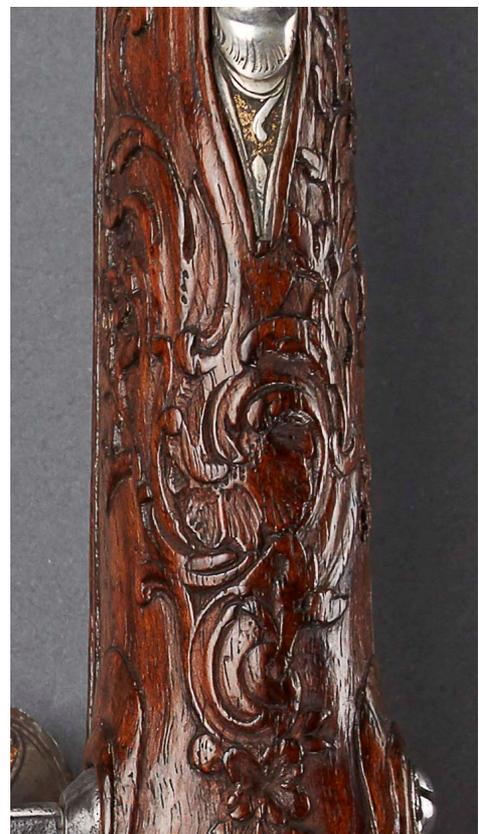




Fig. 1.



Fig. 2.



In the next step, Gilbert would have ordered the silver mounts from Johann Jacob Dörffer, who was master in Strasbourg since 1763. Since the hallmark of the city can be identified as the one for 1766 we do know the exact year when the garniture was produced. Gilbert created the flintlock, while the wonderful chiselling, gilding and the production of the walnut haft with its rich carvings was executed either by himself or maybe by further specialised artisans involved. Finally it was his duty to create a well-functioning firearm by mounting all components with a barrel, which would normally be produced by himself.

In the present case however, there is an interesting feature. The barrels are Ottoman ones, showing a fine damascene pattern and distinctive silver inlays incorporating tulip ornaments that were popular in this empire. How got these barrels to the city of Strasbourg and why were they mounted as precious European firearms?

The Great Turkish War

Back in 1529 the Ottoman Empire had in vain tried to conquer Vienna, the residence of the Holy Roman Emperor, for the first time. In their attempt to expand into central Europe, in 1683 the Ottomans intended to deliver the final blow to the Habsburgs and tear down the walls of the *golden apple* as they called this city. Against the background of this threat an alliance between the Holy Roman Empire, Poland and several smaller powers was formed in a desperate effort to defend against the Turks.

Under the command of Kara Mustafa Pascha an army of 150000 men laid siege to Vienna in July, facing only 15000 soldiers and 8700 volunteers within the city walls. After the Ottoman sappers had destroyed great parts of the fortification it was only a question of days when the city would have been conquered. At the last minute, the Polish King Jan III Sobieski arrived with the allied forces of about 80000 soldiers under his command at the battlefield. It was his brilliant military manoeuvre of attacking a flank of the ottomans in their rear that was under the command of the Khan of crimea, finally leading to victory.



Fig. 3.

The battle of Vienna marked a turning point for the expansion of the Ottoman Empire and the great Turkish wars began. In the course of this campaign, the Ottoman forces were pushed back gradually and lost nearly all of their central European territory to the Holy League. Finally in 1699 the Ottomans were defeated and had to sign the Treaty of Karlowitz.

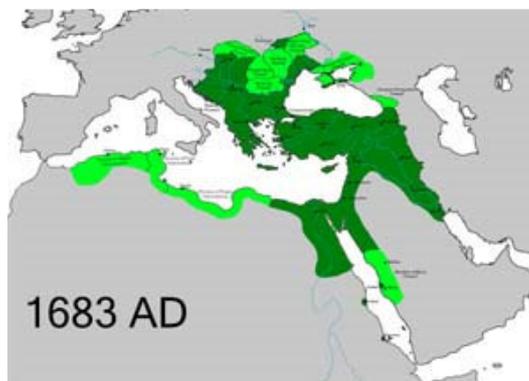


Fig. 4.





The Turkish War Booty of the Margraves of Baden⁵

After each successful battle, the military leaders involved collected all the items left by the defeated Ottoman army from the battlefield and took them as a war booty. One of the most successful generals was Louis William, Margrave of Baden (8 April 1655 - 4 January 1707), who was also called *Türkenlouis* ("Turkish Louis") due to his great victories. On the grounds of his military skills, he became chief commander of the Imperial army. In 1691, after the *Türkenlouis* won the battle of Slankamen and full victory was only a question of time, Emperor Leopold I. sent him back to the Rhine in order to defend the western frontier of the Holy Roman Empire against the French, who invaded the Alsace region, benefitting from the absence of forces involved in the Turkish war.

During the campaign against the Turks Louis' residence in Baden had been devastated by French troops in 1689. Consequently after marrying Sibylla Augusta of Saxony - Lauenburg (1675 - 1733) his temporary residence became Schlackenwerth castle near Karlsbad in Bohemia. Therefore, after being stored in Vienna, his portion of the war booty was transferred to this place. For many years it was unthinkable of returning the residence home to Baden. First, it was the war of the great alliance that constantly threatened Louis homeland until 1697 and from 1702 to 1715 the War of the Spanish Succession continued the conflict with France. Besides the fact that Louis had started to rebuild his residence in 1697, his major belongings remained at Schlackenwerth until the treaty of Rastatt in 1714 put an end to the threat and allowed for plans to return the household. Louis had died in 1707 and the eldest son, Ludwig Georg (1702 - 1761) was supposed to become the new ruler. Sibylla had stayed at Schlackenwerth all these years. It was in 1721 when she undertook the first steps of moving parts of the Turkish war booty to the new residence of Ludwig Georg in Rastatt. Substantial portions of it remained in Schlackenwerth however, until they were finally sent to Rastatt in 1741, some 50 years after Louis had ended his campaign against the Ottoman Empire.

Another 30 years had passed, until the youngest son of the Türkenlouis, August Georg (1706 - 1771) erected the famous Turkish chamber in honour of the great military accomplishments of his father, which is still on view at the *Badisches Landesmuseum* in Karlsruhe today. Within these latter years something happened that is of particular interest for our present pair of luxury pistols: On several occasions, items of the war booty had been sold to tradesmen in the city of Strasbourg.⁶

Alternative hypotheses about the provenance

Therefore, it makes perfectly sense to assume that our barrels were among these items and purchased by the gunsmith Gilbert who manufactured the garniture for a high-ranking individual.

If you examine other European mountings of Ottoman barrels, it becomes evident, that these were generally undertaken by gunsmiths, located around those places, where a war booty was stored. There are a couple of these from Vienna and from Karlsbad, for example, where the craftsmen had access to the items stored at Schlackenwerth. Since France did not take part in the Turkish war, the only residences near Strasbourg storing Ottoman pieces were Rastatt and Stuttgart, since the Dukes of Württemberg also participated in the campaign.



Hence, it seems also plausible that a member of the Baden or Württemberg families directly commissioned the garniture at the gunsmith Gilbert, providing him the barrels. They might have given these weapons as a diplomatic luxury gift to a befriended house. Alternatively the garniture could have formed part of the own hunting equipment and got lost in the course of history, due to theft during the revolution of 1848 for instance, or on other occasions. Hopefully further research will one day uncover the full exciting history of these pieces. Unfortunately the preserved inventories do describe firearms very sparingly, so this is a difficult undertaking.

A comparable example for a preserved fine garniture from the Rastatt inventory comprising a long arm and a pair of pistols mounted with Ottoman barrels was made by Leopold Becher from Karlsbad in the first half of the 18th century.⁷ This set of firearms belongs to the finest in the collection. The stylized tulip ornaments on their unsigned barrels show certain similarities to our present ones and there is also an arab inscription inlaid in gold. It is written incorrectly and seems rather stiff regarding its writing according to Z. Abrahamowicz. On these grounds he questions, whether the barrels might be a European work, an imitation of the Ottoman ones in the course of the European Turkish fashion. After the threat of Vienna had vanished and the Ottoman forces had been pushed back in the following years, people started to get fascinated about the Turkish culture, Ottoman objects, its music and food like coffee. Also due to civilian contacts like trade, there had always been a certain cultural exchange.

So at a first glance, it might well be possible that Lichtenfels manufactured these barrels in order to meet the upcoming fashion and we do know, that European gunsmiths adapted the damascening of the Turkish barrels, first in Vienna and later in other places. There was a strong appreciation for the finely executed damascened pieces and their qualities as being hard and light at the same time, notwithstanding the fact they were considered pieces of art.⁸





However, does it make sense to assume that Lichtenfels copied Ottoman barrels as early as in the first half of the 18th century for works commissioned by the Margrave himself at Karlsbad, which is only a few kilometres away from Schlackenwerth castle? We do know that great portions of the war booty remained at Schlackenwerth until 1741. So why should the Margrave order a garniture with imitated Ottoman barrels from him? It is more plausible to assume an Ottoman origin and an alternative explanation for the incorrect inscription seems convincing: Craftsmen in the Islamic world were simply not familiar with the highest standards of arab lettering. This is the reason why you can find many inscriptions in the Islamic arts that are incorrect or do not make any sense at all, being applied for purely decorative purposes.⁹

Barrels of the Gilbert pistols

It would be desirable to learn more about the particular workshop of our barrels, its localisation within the Ottoman Empire and the time range when it was active, in order to uncover the whole history of these luxury pistols.

Unfortunately scholarship does know very little about Ottoman firearms. Since many barrels bear marks there must have existed well organized workshops. However, their structure, localisation and regional stylistic features of their products being fashionable at different times remain almost entirely unclear. Therefore, it is difficult to date these works and to assign a region of origin.

Still we tried to figure out more about the present examples. In a first step, we hoped it would be possible to decipher the golden inscription in the center of the breech. Apparently the letters do not express any meaning and were probably applied by an illiterate craftsman as ornaments only.¹⁰

Consequently, it will only be possible to assign a date and origin to these fine damascened barrels on the grounds of stylistic comparisons and hopefully further research will help to shed light on this aspect in the future. The rows of repeating letters resembling *zo* seem to be characteristic of a certain workshop and might help to draw comparisons.

Notes

- 1) Heer, E. (1991): Der neue Stöckel, p. 432.
- 2) Born 1738, master in Strasbourg since 1763. A small sword with a silver hilt by Dörffer is preserved in the Philadelphia Museum of Art, Accession Number: 2009-8-1.
- 3) Heer, E. (1991): Der neue Stöckel, p. 432.
- 4) Demarteau, G. (circa 1750 - 55): Nouveaux Ornemens D'Arquebuseries. Metropolitan Museum of Art, Acc. No: 2006.350.1-.19, ink on paper.
- 5) Petrasch, E. et al (1991): Die Karlsruher Türkenbeute.
- 6) Petrasch, E. et al (1991): Die Karlsruher Türkenbeute, p. 31.
- 7) Inv. No. G487, G645, G646; published in Petrasch, E. et al (1991): Die Karlsruher Türkenbeute, pp. 277 - 278.
- 8) Hoff, A. (1969): Feuerwaffen II, pp. 20 - 26.
- 9) My special thanks to Dr. Mostafawy (Badisches Landesmuseum).
- 10) My special thanks to Dr. Mostafawy (Badisches Landesmuseum), Holger Schuckelt (Rüstkammer Staatliche Kunstsammlungen Dresden) and Prof. Dr. em. Hans Georg Majer (Ludwig Maximilian University of Munich) for their judgement.

Figures

- 1) Demarteau, G. (circa 1750 - 55): Nouveaux Ornemens D'Arquebuseries, pl. 7. Metropolitan Museum of Art, Acc. No: 2006.350.1-.19, ink on paper.
- 2) Demarteau, G. (circa 1750 - 55): Nouveaux Ornemens D'Arquebuseries, pl. 14. Metropolitan Museum of Art, Acc. No: 2006.350.1-.19, ink on paper.
- 3) Kara Mustafa Pasha, Grand Vizier of the Ottoman Empire. Oil painting, unknown artist, Wien Museum.
- 4) The Ottoman Empire in the year 1683.
- 5) Battle of Vienna by Pauwel Casteels, created 1683 - 1685.
- 6) Louis William, Margrave of Baden (8 April 1655 - 4 January 1707).
- 7) Louis William, Margrave of Baden wearing turkish clothing from the war booty at a festivity. Portrait by Ivenet, early 18th century.



Fig. 7.

LITERATURE

Demarteau, G.: Nouveaux Ornemens D'Arquebuseries, Paris circa 1750 – 55.

Heer, E.: Der Neue Stöckel, Schwäbisch Hall 1978.

Hoff, A.: Feuerwaffen II, Braunschweig 1969.

Petrasch, E. et al: Die Karlsruher Türkenbeute, München 1991.



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