









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

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.

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

³ Heer, E. (1991): Der neue Stöckel, p. 432.

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.



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 is of distinguished quality in the present case.

⁴ Demarteau, G. (circa 1750 - 55): *Nouveaux Ornemens D'Arquebuseries*. Metropolitan Museum of Art, Acc. No: 2006.350.1-.19, ink on paper.

Made in the Ottoman fashion, the barrels show an extraordinary fine damascene pattern, inlaid ornaments in silver and a pseudo arabic inscription in gold. Stylistic aspects argue for a European origin. In the aftermath of the Great Turkish War a strong fascination for the foreign culture had developed at several European courts, despite the devastation and suffering this conflict had caused. A cultural exchange and trade relations added to a fashion that incorporated various field of courtly life, also the design of firearms. After defeating the Turks a war booty was divided among the successful European allies, comprising arms, clothing, tents and equipment or provisions unknown to the European soldiers before, like coffee. While the ottoman barrels taken as a booty were often reused for European arms, soon gunsmiths adapted the technique of damascening in the Ottoman manner, first in Vienna and later in other places. There was a strong appreciation for the finely executed pieces and their qualities as being hard and light at the same time, notwithstanding the fact they were considered pieces of art.⁵

Interestingly enough, during our research we encountered several other firearms with nearly identical barrels that must have been manufactured in the same workshop. Most notable among these is a fine pair of pistols of elector Maximilian III of Bavaria (1727 -1777), made in Munich by the courtly gunsmith Christoph Joseph Frey (died 1782), circa 1750.⁶ Different places of manufacture of the other comparative arms suggest that this group of barrels must have been sold to gunsmiths over long distances in Europe.

⁵ Hoff, A. (1969): Feuerwaffen II, pp. 20 – 26.

⁶ Auctioned Dec. 2nd 1968 at Galerie Fischer, Luzern, lot 180.





Richard-Wagner-Str. 17 · 28209 Bremen · Germany
T+49 (0)421 4093 6994 · info@lennartviebahn.com
www.lennartviebahn.com