

MUSEUMS OF ARMS AND MILITARY HISTORY IN TORINO —

THE ROLE OF ACCADEMIA DI SAN MARCIANO

by Raffaele Natta-Soleri



RAFFAELE NATTA-SOLERI

Mr. President, Ladies and Gentlemen:

First of all I wish to thank the American Society of Arms Collectors, in the person of its President, Mr. Tom Hall, for inviting me to present the MUSEUMS OF ARMS AND MILITARY HISTORY OF TORINO, as well as the ACCADEMIA DI SAN MARCIANO.

A sincere thanks also to Mr. Merrill K. Lindsay for giving me the opportunity of visiting your big and great Country, and the beautiful city of Boston, where our meeting is being held.

May I express my sincere appreciation to all of you, who are honoring me with your presence, and my gratitude for the forbearance you will have to use both in respect of . . . my English, and of the time which my conversation will take.

The subject is particularly dear to my heart.

We will have together a panoramic view of our Museums of Arms and Military History, which contain a remarkable quantity of specimens of the highest value, which would deserve being dealt with much more thoroughly and in detail.

I will try to draw your attention to the relics of the past, whose forms and evolutions are the memories of historical events and personages in their most human aspects even though, unfortunately, often linked to occurrences which cannot be described as peaceful.

I would have been unable to show you the treasures of my City, if it weren't for the aid and support of some other gentlemen, whose names I am proud and grateful to mention here: Professor Franco Mazzini, Superintendent to the Art Galleries of Piedmont, Director of Armeria Reale; Professor Luciano Vernetti, Curator of the Museo Nazionale del Risorgimento; General Pietro Roggero, Director of the Museo Storico Nazionale d'Artiglieria; Colonel Guido Amoretti, Curator of the Museo "Pietro Micca" e "dell'assedio di Torino, 1706" (Siege of Turin, 1706).

A particular thank you to my friend, member of the Accademia di S. Marciانو, Mister Piero Chomon Ruiz, who made the slides which I am going to show.

Mr. President, Ladies and Gentlemen:

Before starting with the projection of the slides, I would like to give you a brief outline of the program.

I will show the Museums in order of historical connections and of subjects, following, as far as possible, the usual itinerary of a visit, the classes of the objects, and the chronology.

Naturally, I will also spend a few words to describe, in short, the origins and the importance of each Museum.

At first I would like to give you some information about my City: TORINO, or if you like TURIN.

Turin is one of the gates to Italy.

Its origins are lost in the mists of time.

Editor's note: It was with deep regret that we found it necessary to delete some of the slides used by Raffaele Natta-Soleri in his fine talk due to limited space in our Bulletin. The original talk consisted of 251 color slides, and all of great interest. Those members that missed the Boston meeting not only missed a fine talk but also missed meeting two fine Italian gentlemen, Raffaele Natta-Soleri and his friend the maker of fine miniatures, Agnoletto Walter.

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The ancient Taurais inhabited by the Celts, later became "Julia Augusta Taurinorum" and was, since the very beginning, a theatre of sanguinary battles.

In 218 B.C. it was sacked by Hannibal for having honoured the engagements towards its allies, the Romans.

The topography of Turin did not change through the centuries and the "layout" of streets and avenues is still the same of the ancient "Castra Romanorum."

Later on, it endured the French domination, until it was delivered by Emanuele Filiberto.

Formerly the capital of the Duchy of Savoy, then of the kingdom of Sardinia, Turin saw an intensive period enlivened by noble ideals and political activities, during the Independence Wars.

Many statesmen and writers worked for the liberation of Italy, till the day when Turin knew the glory of being the first capital of the Italian kingdom.

It still keeps and cherishes the memories of its millenary and glorious history.

And now, some words about our ARMERIA REALE.

This Armoury was initiated in 1837 by Carlo Alberto, who gathered there the personal relics belonging to his family, originating from Royal Arsenals and Palaces.

The Armoury also contains the collections of painter Sanquirico of Milan, of the Family Martinego della Fabirca of Brescia, of Count Vidua, as well as the donations of the Sovereigns and Chiefs of several States.

Entering from Piazza Castello, the visitor finds, at the summit of Alfieri's stairway, the Rotunda designed by Palagi, decorated by Gonin and Bellosio; the Rotunda opens on the square with a balcony from which Carlo Alberto proclaimed the 1st War of Independence, on 23rd March, 1848.

The Rotunda leads to the Gallery - still the work of Alfieri - which bears the name of the painter by whom it was decorated with frescoes depicting scenes from the Aeneid: Beaumont.

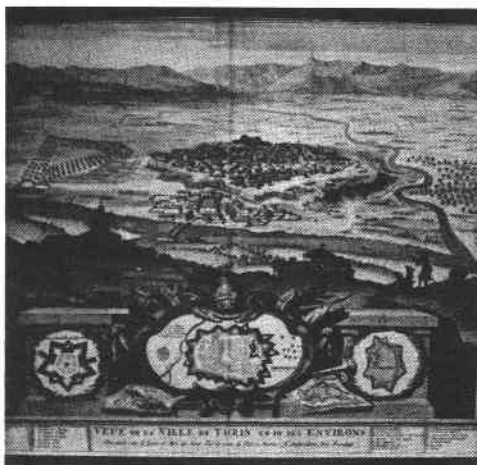
Over 4,000 pieces are displayed, ranging from the prehistorical weapons to those of the bronze age, the medieval and renaissance arms, those of the 17th, 18th and 19th century, as well as a number of relics of the two World Wars.

A remarkable number of flags, 250, is included.

Equestrian armours, armours of foot-warriors, all types of sidearms, spears, maces; assorted firearms (match, wheel, flintlock, percussion, up to the automatics), all these items are widely represented in the Armeria Reale, which also houses a worthy Collection of Oriental arms.

The names of the best known Italian armourers are represented.

Although this Museum was partly reorganized for the celebrations of the Centennial of the Italian Unit, so as to give it a more technical set-up, it nevertheless still retains the Romance of a private collection.



A view of the city of Turin and its outskirts, etched on copper by Charles Inselin, from "Nouveau Theatre d'Italie," Amsterdam, 1704.

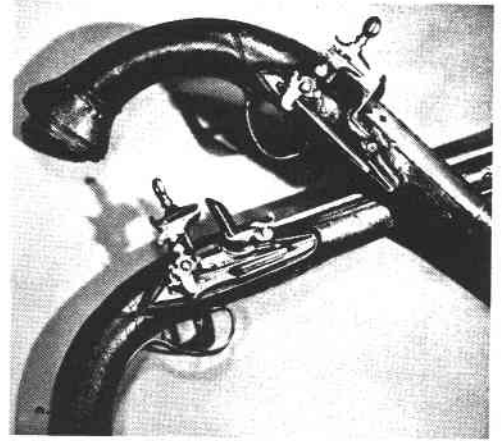
At the foot of the print, the maps of the fortifications: the citadel of Turin, the strongholds of Verrula, Vercelli, Montmelian (Savoy) and Carmagnola.



Arranged on the balcony, the flags of the ancient regiments at the service of the House of Savoy, of the Bourbons of Naples, of some Volunteer Corps during the Independence Wars, and the flags donated by the Italian cities at the moment of their union with Piedmont. There are also some flags captured to foreign armies. The first part of the room houses the oriental collection.



The sword and the pistols which Emperor Napoleon the 1st wore during the Italian campaigns. One of the Eagles of gilt bronze which the Emperor delivered to the Grenadiers of the Italian Guard on 22nd September, 1805. They bear, engraved, the names of the places where the regiment distinguished itself.

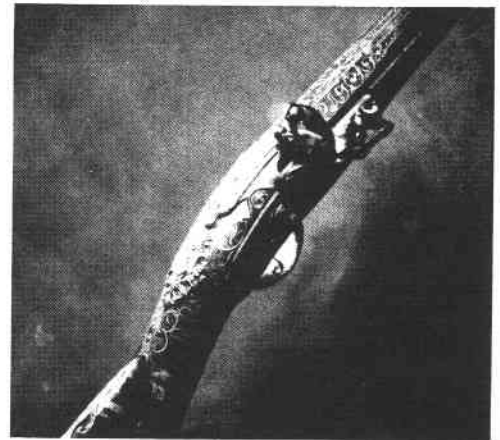


A pair of holster pistols belonged to King Gioacchino Murat, (about 1807). Two section barrel, square and round.

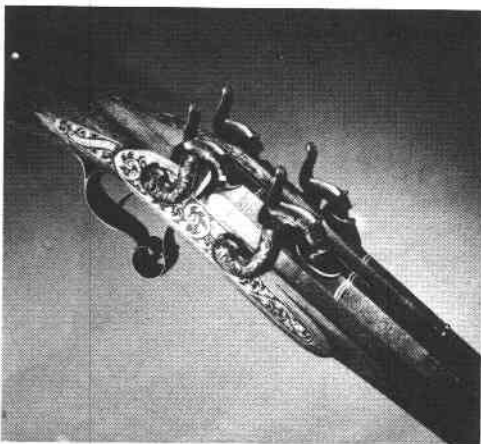
Roman style lock ("alla Romana"), silver-inlaid walnut butt, with the monogram "G.R."



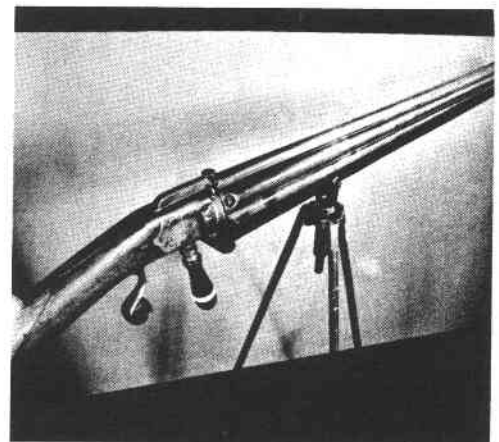
Sardinian flintlock shotgun. Manufactured in the Royal Arsenal of Cagliari and presented to Carlo Alberto, when he was still Prince of Carignano. It bears on the stock the arms of Sardinia.



Flintlock shotgun, with two shots in the same barrel. Three section barrel, gold-inlaid, with the arms of Tuscany and the inscription "DOLEP LONDINI FECIT." The lock has double pan for priming the front charge. Walnut-briar stock, with open-work iron mountings and sculptures. On the butt, a silver grandducal crown and the monogram "F. M."



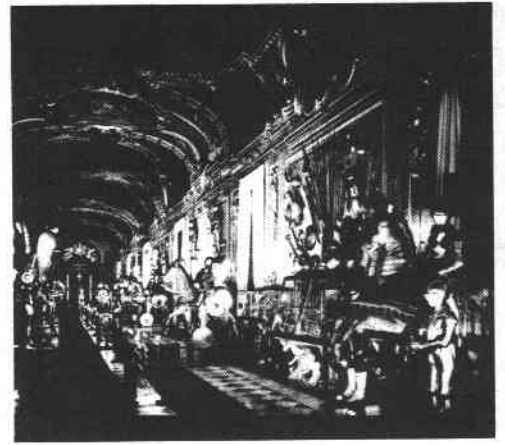
Double-barrels, four shot percussion shotgun, made in Turin by gunsmith Panattaro in 1866.



Tripod-mounted percussion gun with six revolving barrels. It is marked "7th December 1843. Registered by Jr. Cooper." The gun is supported by an iron frame with fork, on which the barrels revolve when the handle is pushed forward. By pulling the handle, the hammer is released.



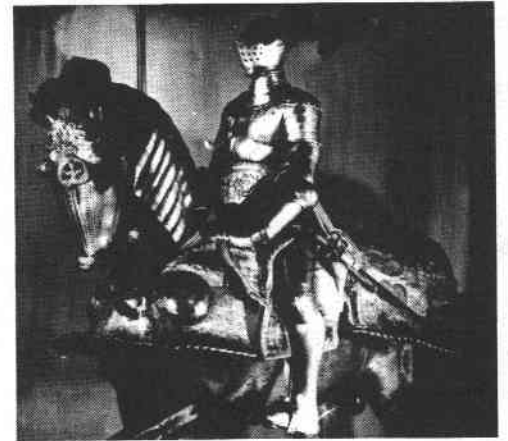
The Beaumont Gallery, as it looked around 1860. From a print by G. Bossoli.



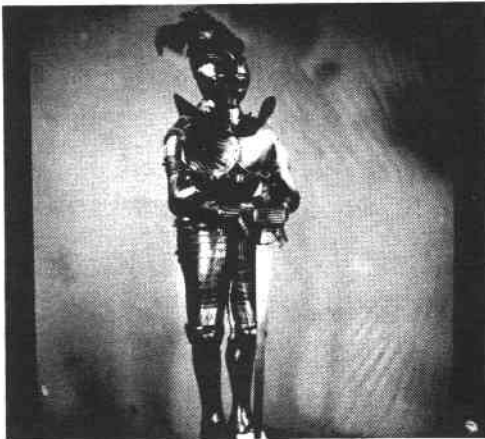
Today's view of the gallery. It houses a wonderful collection of weapons, from those of the paleolithic age, to the neolithic, the bronze and the iron ages, the barbaric age, the Middle-Ages, the Renaissance up to the French Revolution. Many armours, of mounted warriors and of foot soldiers, are displayed. Those in the picture are on horses mounted; their attitudes are impressively natural.



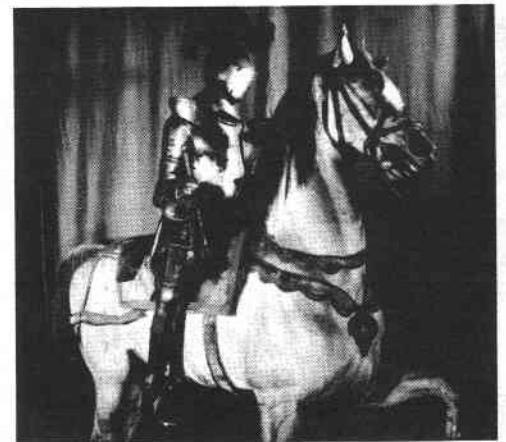
A rare specimen of brigandine, dating back to the 14th - 15th century. It was the property of a nobleman of the Challant family, in the Valley of Aosta. It consists of a canvas garment, reinforced by steel plates inside, and covered with crimson velvet decorated with brass tacks.



An armour of the first half of the 16th century. It belonged to Prince Ott Heinrich of Bavaria. The barding is made of rhinoceroe hide, partly decorated. A rare and valuable piece.



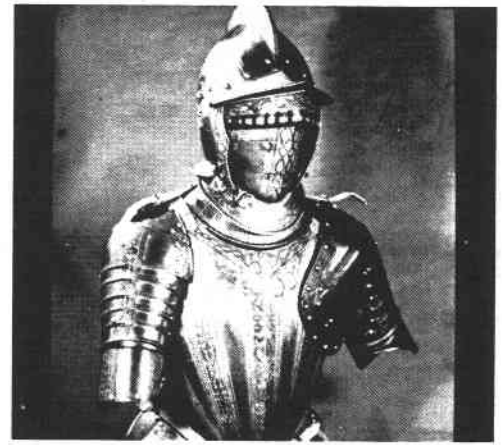
Milanese armour, with black flutings, of the period astride the 15th and 16th century. It has rather high shoulder-guards, suitable for breaking the sweeping blows.



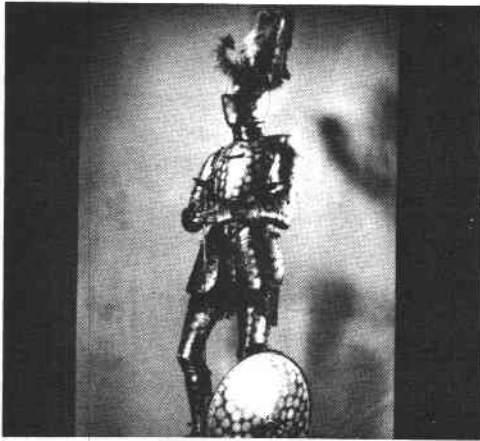
16th century armour, by the famous Milanese master Negrolì. It belonged to Captain Valerio Corvino Zacchei from Spoleto.



An Italian armour, which belonged to Duke Emanuele Filiberto of Savoy, with the sword used for investing the Knights of the Santissima Annunziata. It resembles closely, for style and decoration, the armour of Captain Valerio Corvino Zacchei from Spoleto. The author of both armours is Negroli.



Bourgonet and armour of Duke Emanuele Filiberto of Savoy, made of steel with plain furbished bands alternated with etched bands, decorated with knots of Savoy and gilded.



Armour in bronze, with inlaid and gilded suns. It belonged to Prince Emanuele Filiberto of Savoy, son of Carlo Emanuele the 1st. This armour is the work of Orazio Calino, a famous armour-maker of Brescia.



Among the armours of the family Martinengo della Fabbri ca, a peculiarity is represented by this armour for a child.

The young boys grew accustomed to the armour, by wearing it when accompanying the ladies and the knights to the tournaments.



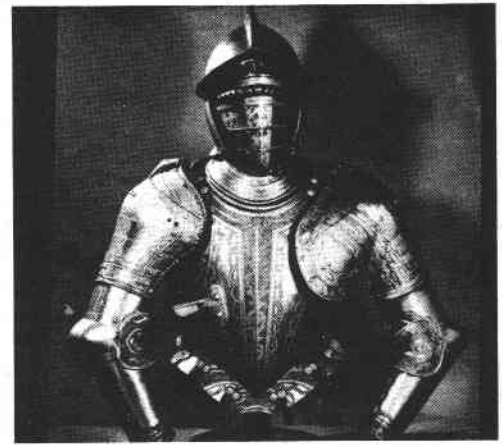
A gigantic Italian armour of the 17th century when the greaves and solerets were no longer in use, having been replaced by buffalo boots. The armour belonged to Don Diego Filippo Guzman, 1st Marquis of Leganes, Spanish Governor of Milan. The reinforcing breast-plate of this armour is kept in the Metropolitan Museum of Art in New York.



Bronze Italian armour of the 16th century, which belonged to a galley Captain in the service of the Venitian Republic. It is inlaid with allegorical subjects and latin inscriptions, with decorations of arms and galleys.



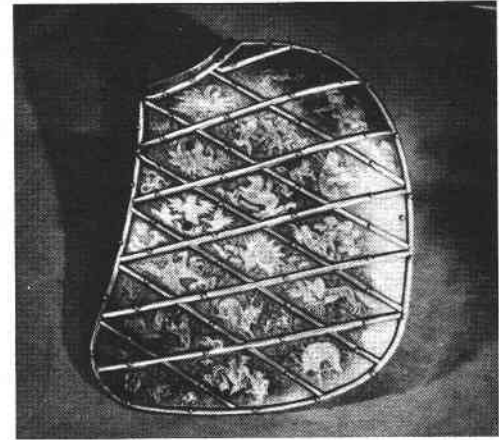
An outstanding Italian armour, which belonged to Alessio Maurizio of the Counts of Parella, captain of the cuirassiers and Governor of Turin at the time of Madama Reale Cristina of France. The corselet worn over the armour is embroidered with the family monogram.



Sallet with neck-collar and Italian armour in German style and with German decoration. Made of steel with etched bands of golden leaves on black background. Dates to 1560.



Half suit, Roman style, gold and white, etched. This type of armour is significant of a return to the Neo-classic style. It belonged to the family Martinengo della Babbica.



Tilting breast-shield (manteau d'armes) - a reinforcing piece which was screwed to the left side of the breast-plate.

It is the work of Master Anton Peffenhauser Ausburg (1525-1603) etched in the style of Jorg Sornbier bearing the date 1549.



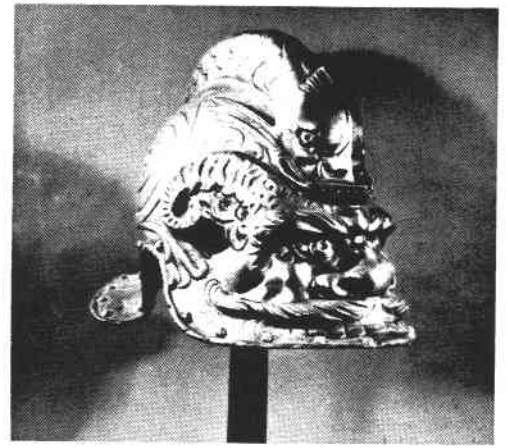
Bronze-plated buckler, which belonged to Duke Carlo Emanuele the 1st of Savoy. Gilded engravings with the inscriptions "Solus Deus, Solus Sol, Solus Miles, Solus Sabaudiae Dux."



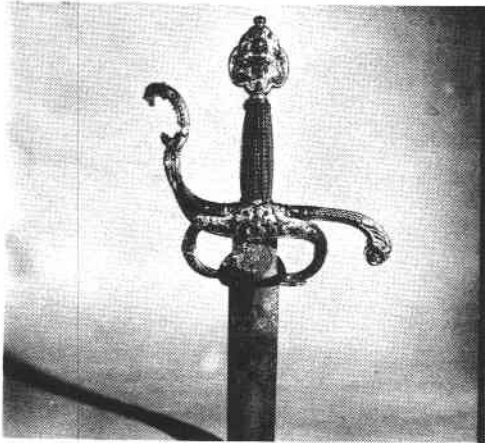
Among the numerous helmets, morions, cabasset, burgonets, etc., an outstanding piece is this Sallet with golden bas-relief decorations on black background. A beautiful piece of work, which belonged to Duke Vittorio Amedeo the 1st of Savoy.



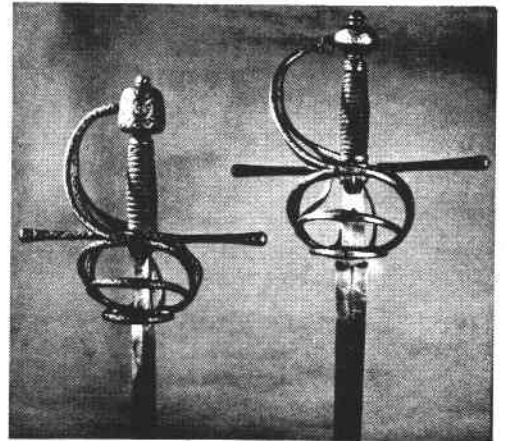
Three-comb morion, in furgished steel; chisel decoration with the Florentine lily. It was used by the Medicean Mounted Harquebusiers of the 16th and 17th centuries.



A typical Italian Bourgonet of the 16th century. Notwithstanding its grotesque look, it is nevertheless in excellent artistic taste, thanks to the fine chisel-work in bas- and high-relief.

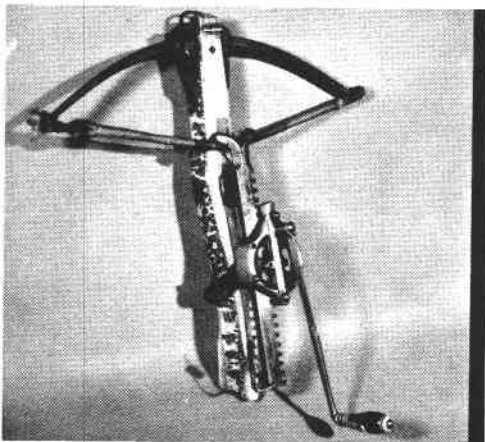


Sword donated to Duke Carlo Emanuele the 2nd by Elector Maximilian the 2nd of Bavaria. The blade is inlaid with Arabic inscriptions and gold and silver decorations. The hilt is finely chiseled. The author is Emanuel Sadeler, first half of the 17th century.



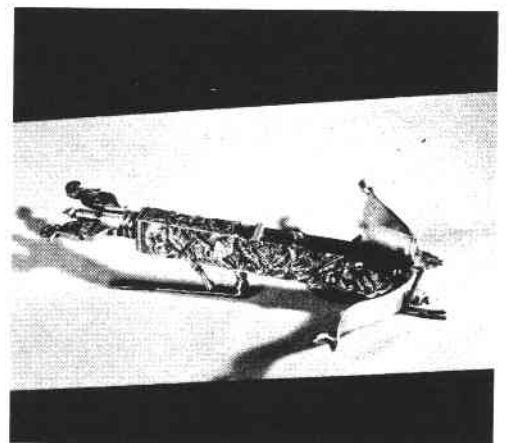
Left: An Italian sword of the 16th century. Diamond-section blade, marked "CAINO." Hilt with silver-etched decorations.

Right: Another Italian sword of the same century. The blade is marked with a cross. Bronze-plated iron hilt, with gold and silver etchings. It belonged to the family Martinengo della Fabbrica.



Italian cross-bow, with jack and rack. A very strong steel structure, with stock in black wood, veneered and inlaid with ivory decorations showing ancient legendary characters. It bears the date of 1579.

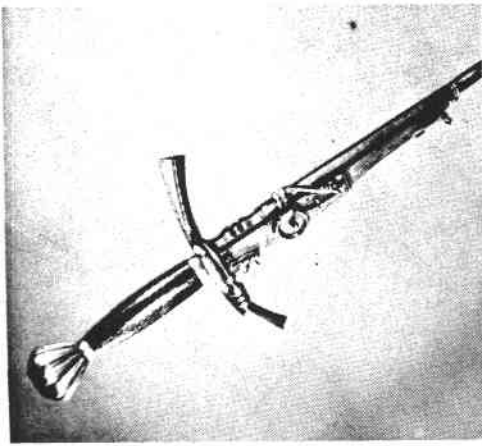
The jack is the same used by the foot-crossbowmen. The toothed wheel is shown in the photograph.



Among the many types of cross-bows (windlass, moulinet, goat-foot lever, prodd) we see here an interesting light cross-bow which belonged to Carlo Emanuele the 1st of Savoy.

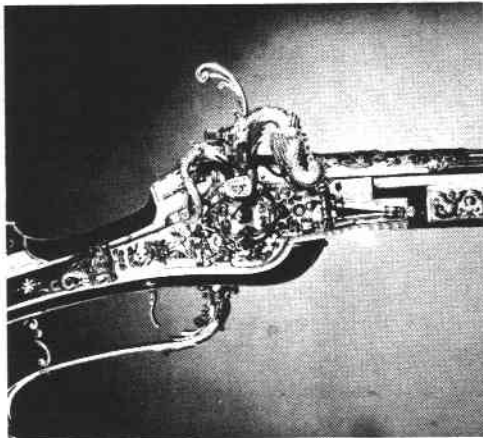
It is made of iron, with bas-relief decorations showing arms, armours and eagles carrying the cross of Savoy.

These light cross-bows, as well as the pocket-pistols, were prohibited by the 16th and 17th century bans, because too easy to hide.



Combine weapon, sword and wheel-lock gun, German.

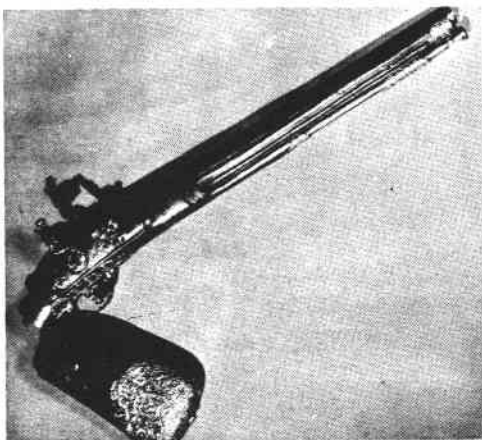
Two-section barrel, square and round, peculiarly cut so as to end in a sword-tip. It is decorated in relief.



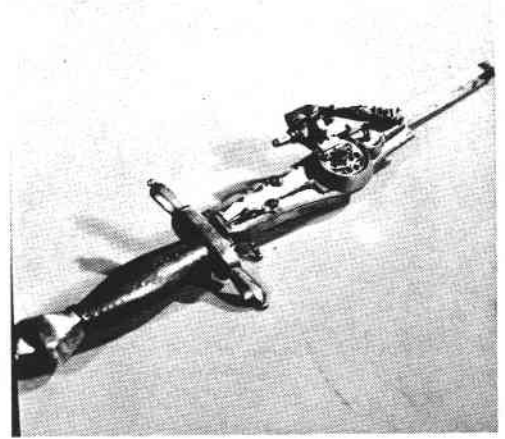
Double-system harquebus, matchlock and wheel-lock.

The barrel is alternatively square and round, bas-relief decorated, with gold and silver etchings. The stock is ivory, gold and silver-inlaid.

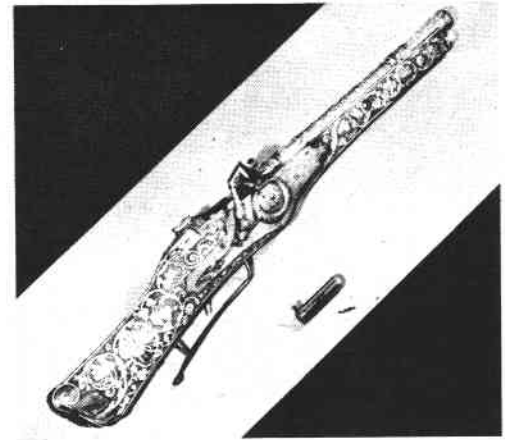
The decoration contains mythological, allegorical, hunting, pastoral, war and musical subjects. Barrel and lock are the work of Emanuel Sadeler, the stock of Adam Vischer.



Flintlock short-musket ("pistone"), a typical Italian firearm named "scavezzo." The stock can be folded, to carry the gun under the cloak. This "Pistone" is signed by two famous masters of Brescia: "Lazzarino Cominazzo" on the barrel, and "Andrea Pizzi" on the plate. It is sculptured in bas-relief with allegorical subjects; the mountings are sculptured on iron. An identical "pistone" is kept at the Hermitage of Lenin-grad.

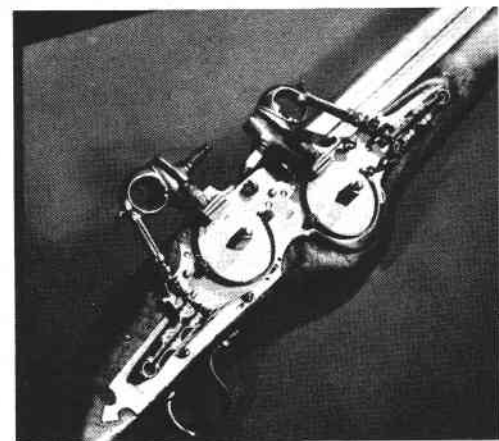


German wheel-lock pistol, in the shape of a dagger. Octagonal barrel, dated 1551. It is rather considered a curiosity.



This is an absolutely exceptional weapon, both from the artistic and the technical point of view. It is a saddle-bow dag, made in Brescia in the early 17th century, breech-loading, of the so-called "snuff-box" type (in Italian "a tabacchiera"). The charge (see specimen below) is inserted by opening the breech.

The wheel is not key-wound. This arm is finely decorated with gold-etchings and acanthus leaves.



German wheel-lock double-barreled (over and under) pistol. Double wheels, uncovered. Polish Walnut butt.

From a military point of view, the MUSEO STORICO NAZIONALE DI ARTIGLIERIA plays an important role.

In 1893, Engineer Brayda restored the surviving portion of the ancient citadel of Turin; and transferred there the collections of the previous Artillery Museum, located in the Military Arsenal.

It was Duke Emanuele Filiberto who had the Citadel erected, after ordering Francesco Pacciotto of Urbino, military engineer, to work out its plan.

The first stone was laid in 1564, and the armament was completed during 1566.

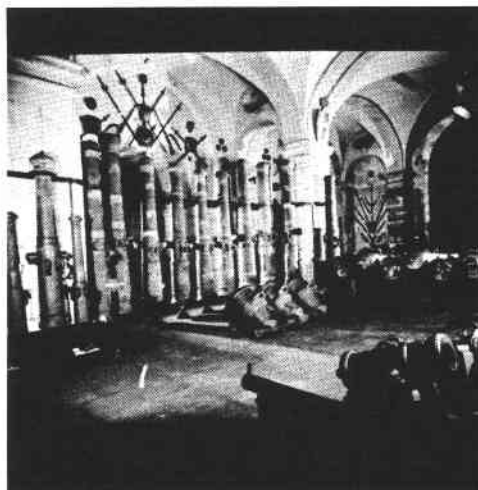
The halls of the museum house a very interesting* chronological collection of artillery, starting from the stone throwing cannons in wrought iron, the bronze guns, up to the modern repeating artilleries.

The best names of gun casters, and of the inventors of breech-loading and repetition systems, are represented.

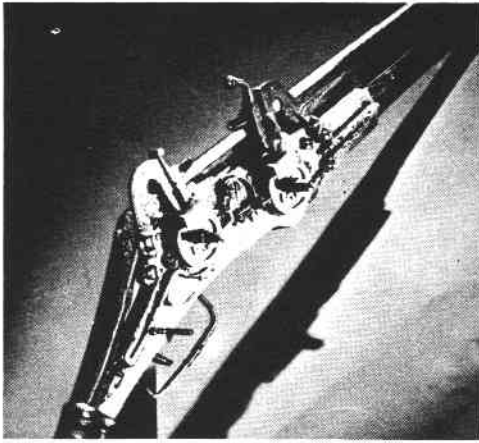
The collection containing more than 10,000 pieces includes a remarkable selection of side-arms, portable fire-arms of all time, small-scale models of artilleries, carriages, defense and offense installations, uniforms, military equipment.



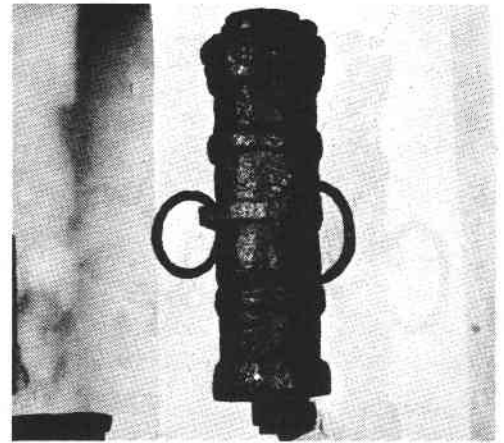
The Citadel of Turin, entrance to the National Historical Museum of Artillery. In the garden on the right there is the big Turkish bombard of the 15th century. Bronze barrel, 70 cms diameter, 420 cms total length, 15,000 kilos weight; it fired stone balls. Artilleries of this kind were used by Mohamed the 2nd for besieging and conquering Constantinople (fall of the Eastern Roman Empire, May 29, 1453).



A partial view of the big Hall, which contains the ancient artilleries.



Double-barrel wheel-lock German dag. The barrels are superimposed: the upper one with square and round sections; the lower one is round, connected to the other barrel. On the tang, the mark of the Augsburg chisellers. They are chisel and aquaforte-etched.



14th century Italian movable chamber for bombard 85 mm bore, 665 mm length, 85 kilos weight, found in the port of Naples.



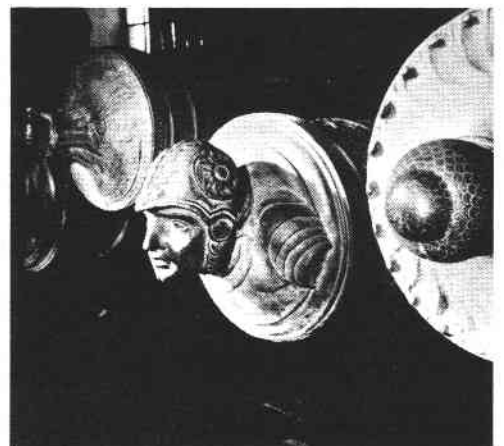
14th - 15th century Italian bombard, in cast iron, consisting of two parts: bell-shaped barrel, and movable chamber.
520 mm. bore, 1430 mm length, 1085 kilos weight.
In front: a spherical stone ball for 600 mm bore bombard.



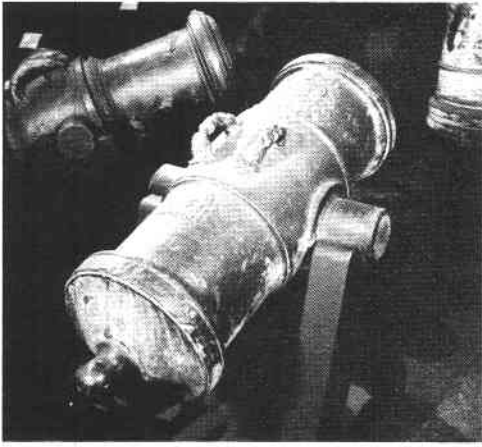
Venetian rampart cannon (modern culverin) of the 16th century. 132 mm bore, 4200 mm length, 2474 kilos weight. Cast in Venice, 1594, by Emilio Alberghetti.



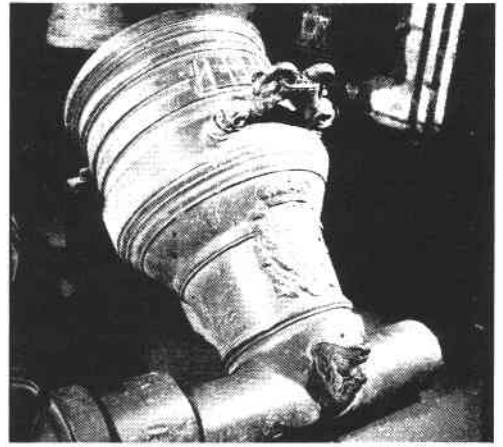
17th century Tuscan demi-cannon, modern, 130 mm. bore, 3100 mm. length, 1532 kilos weight. Cast in Florence, 1633 by Cosimo Cenni.



Detail of the warrior's head on the breech of the 18th century Genoese demi-cannon, in bronze. Gauge 153 mm, length 3585 mm, weight 2764 kilos. Cast in Genoa in 1710. Jacobus Rocca was the caster.

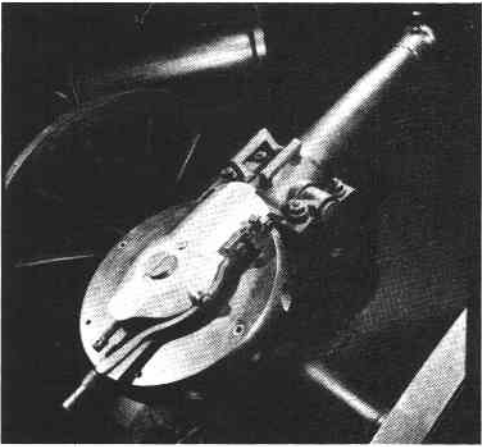


18th century bronze howitzer of the Papal States. 168 mm gauge; 915 mm length, 345 kilos weight.

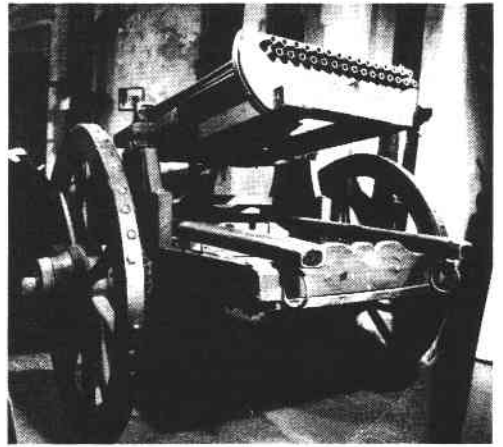


18th century, Neapolitan stone-throwing mortar, in bronze. 400 mm gauge, 910 mm length, weight 601,176 kilos.

Cast in Naples during 1741; caster D. Hie. us. Rs. Fs. Castronovo.



19th century Italian revolving cannon, six shots, 57 mm, gauge. Invented by Ferdinando Guerrini of Bergamo, presented to His Majesty King Vittorio Emanuele the 2nd.



Piedmontese "Organ" machine-gun, with thirty barrels on two wheels. It dates back to the 18th century. Proposed in 1775 by Benedetto Doria De Maro, second Lieutenant of the Royal Artillery Corps. Satisfactory firing tests were performed with this type of fire-arm in 1776, 1777, 1778, 1779. Worthy of mention the tests made in 1779 at Veneria Reale, in the presence of King Vittorio Amedeo the 3rd and of the Royal Princes. Twelve salvos were fired in 9 minutes, hitting with 60% of the shots a target of 9 x 3 meters at a distance of 360 meters.

By now, I think, you will know all the Museums of our City!

Now, let me say something about the role of the ACCADEMIA DI SAN MARCIANO.

The Accademia di S. Marciano was founded in Turin, during 1952, by a restricted group of friends, all sharing the same liking for the ancient arms.

Two years later, the number of the members having increased, the Accademia began the publication of its bulletin "Armi Antiche."

Year by year, keeping pace with the growing number of the members, in Italy and abroad, the Accademia extends the scope of its interests which, no longer confined to the study of the Ancient Arms, embraces Uniform, Military Art and History as well.

Thus, new co-operators contributed their participation, and the bulletin achieved a more and more extensive diffusion, encouraging new memberships and drawing the interest of Italian and Foreign archives, libraries, museums and associations, which eventually joined the Accademia.

No minor contribution to the purposes of the Accademia, the Research Center performs a valuable work aimed at safeguarding and enhancing the historical, artistic and technical treasures, through intensive archive research, lectures and film-shows.

The Research Center has also been effective in fostering a further development aimed towards the historical, technical and information aspects, through a new periodical publication (Notiziario).

The publication informs the members about the initiatives of the Accademia, its findings and discoveries, and contains short illustrated articles, a review of the press, and a column regarding information and exchanges.

The members of the Accademia with a liking for ancient firearms form a group named "The Harquebusier Corps," to recall and continue the tradition of the old Companies of Harquebusiers, which were famous in many Italian towns.

The purpose of "The Harquebusier Corps" is to promote relations, meetings and co-operation amongst the Italian and foreign fans.

Considering the interest shown by the members for Vexillology, the Accademia has decided to include this science among the subjects of study.

A great development has been given to the organization of visits to Museum and Private Collections, as well as of meetings and lectures.

The latest achievement of the Accademia has been its setting into more stately and functional premises, which better serve the increasing requirements of the Association, with representation halls, secretariat office, library and archive.

And now, a few glimpses of the premises of Accademia di San Marciano.