

Today I shall deal primarily with Ripoll firearms. However, it is now becoming evident that Ripoll was involved in the firearms manufacture of neighbouring Catalan towns such as Igualada and Manresa as well as in that of Barcelona. It also appears that many so-called Ripoll pistols were manufactured in at least two areas of Italy.

Every arms collector has a nodding acquaintance at least with those funny-looking Spanish pistols covered with sheet metal. But, to paraphrase the theme of a talk given by Dr. Arne Hoff to this group in 1970, "what do we really know about the firearms of Ripoll?"

For years the broad generalities of Ripoll arms have been familiar to us: stock covered with sheet metal tracery; pistols with ball butts, arquebuses with the so-called "Catalán stock"; miquelet locks on both. We know many makers' names and marks, but have only the sketchiest idea of their working lifespan (since present compilations are based on guesswork and the most rudimentary information and are thus practically worthless), and we are hard-pressed even to place them correctly in time.

What we do not know is considerably more comprehensive. What is it that makes a Ripoll arm so easily recognizable, and why should this be? Or, in fact are Ripoll firearms as recognizable as it would appear at first glance?

It has been suggested that the elements of design apparently peculiar to Ripoll firearms have their source in Moorish art. This is an easy answer since the Moors, or Arabs, ruled areas of Spain from 711 until 1492. Their influence in the art of certain of these areas endured until well into the sixteenth century. In fewer than ten years following their invasion from Africa, the Moors had driven a wedge into the land which extended almost to the northern coast thereby dividing the Spanish Visigothic empire into two separate groups. To oversimplify, these groups developed independently into what were to become the kingdoms of Castile and Aragon, the latter comprised in part of the powerful counties of Cataluna. The two kingdoms were not united until almost eight centuries later under Ferdinand and Isabel. This division was such that Aragon remained as a buffer between Castile and the rest of Europe. However, the Arab advance of the eighth century was stopped short or quickly reversed before it made any significant penetration of the Catalán counties or what was then the tiny county of Aragon. When these areas were united, and a concerted effort at reconquest began to drive back the boundaries of the adjacent Arab kingdoms, no manifestations of Muslim art remained in Cataluña as they did in central or southern Spain.

In 1283 the king of Aragon inherited the kingdom of Sicily consequently bringing Sardinia and Naples into the sphere of Aragonese influence. Until the Napoleonic Wars of the nineteenth century the Kingdom of Naples was either governed or directly influenced by Spain. Political considerations, therefore, quite early set the direction of the orientation: away from the Arabs and Castile, toward the Mediterranean and Italy.

Our interest in Catalán firearms, and those of Ripoll, begins, for all practical purposes, with the seventeenth century, over three hundred years after Aragon acquired her first Italian possession. Until now, only one sixteenth-century Catalan firearm has been identified, a wheel-lock arquebus dated 1546 and now in Madrid's Real Armeria. Its self-spanning lock is German in concept and shows none of the characteristics later to be associated with the area. Although apparently manufactured in the area of Montserrat, it may well be the product of an immigrant German gunsmith.

The earliest firearms to be encountered which definitely can be connected with Ripoll are the five wheel-lock arms, three pistols and two arquebuses, scattered between Venice and Chicago. None of these dates any later than the second decade of the seventeenth century and apparently no earlier than 1600. They are all closely related by their decoration which consists of Renaissance-type scrollwork chiselled in low relief on lock, barrel, and sheet-iron stock overlay. The three pistols have unusually long barrels of small caliber in the manner of French wheel-locks of precisely the same period (Fig. 1). They have abbreviated fishtail butts which, in contrast to their long barrels, gives them an appearance which is peculiarly their own. The three originally had belt hooks, but the original sideplate which would have supported the hook of the V&A example is lost and a more modern screwplate has been substituted. Renaissance classicism is obvious in the decoration of three of the five arms whose cock necks are in the form of fluted columns (Fig. 2). All five locks have pancovers which rotate in a manner reminiscent of the earliest years of the German wheel-lock and this feature seems to be directly derived.

Interestingly enough, before Ripoll firearms were recognized in Spain, the Count of Valencia de Don Juan described the Royal Armoury example in his 1898 catalog as "an Italian wheel-lock petronel . . . the lock, sideplate, and other plates which adorn the stock are . . . profusely chiselled with small figures and grotesques of best Italian taste." This gentleman, whose enormous private collection consisted in large part of Moorish artifacts, saw nothing Arabic in the ornamentation of this pistol. We can apply the same measure to its counterparts.

Apparently in the second decade of the seventeenth century the fishtail pistol butt gave way to the lemon butt—slightly less ovoid than the French—which in turn was to evolve into the ball butt so typical of the area. The lemon butt appears only on later Ripoll wheel-lock pistols whose barrels are much shorter than those of the fishtail pistols, and on the *pedrenyals*, the earliest of the miquelet pistols, which appear to be contemporaneous with the later wheel-locks, and which still retain the earlier exaggerated barrels (Fig. 3).

Ripoll Pistols



James D. Lavin



Figure 1
Ripoll Wheel-lock pistol
dated 1614. London, Victoria
and Albert Museum

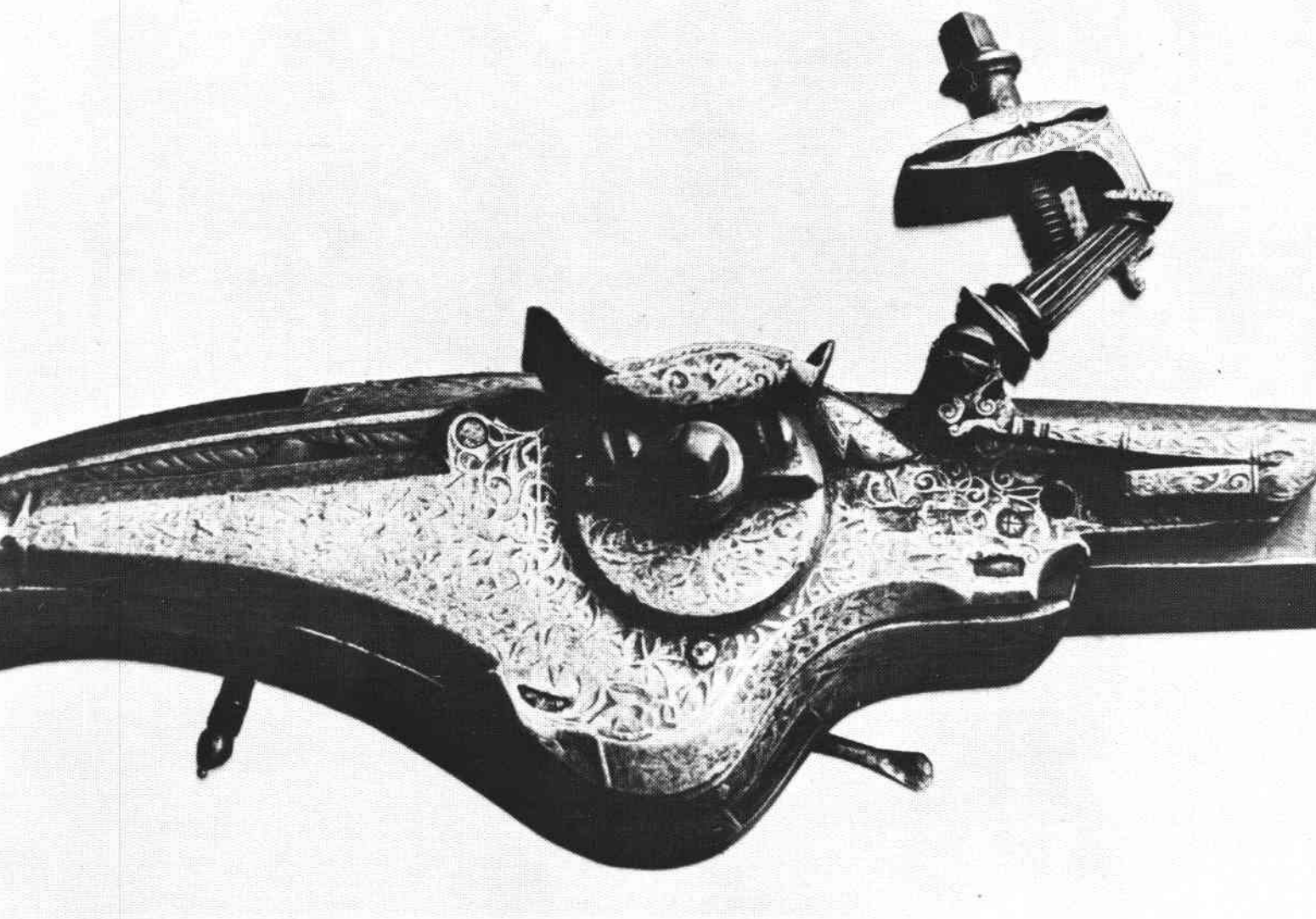


Figure 2
Lock of early Seventeenth Century
Ripoll Wheel-lock pistol. Note
fluted cock neck and lack of
manual safety. Venice, Museo Correr.

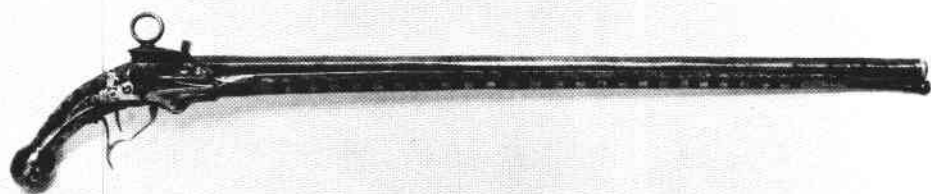


Figure 3
Miquelet "pedrenyal", Early
lock has downward-acting
mainspring, Museo de Ripoll

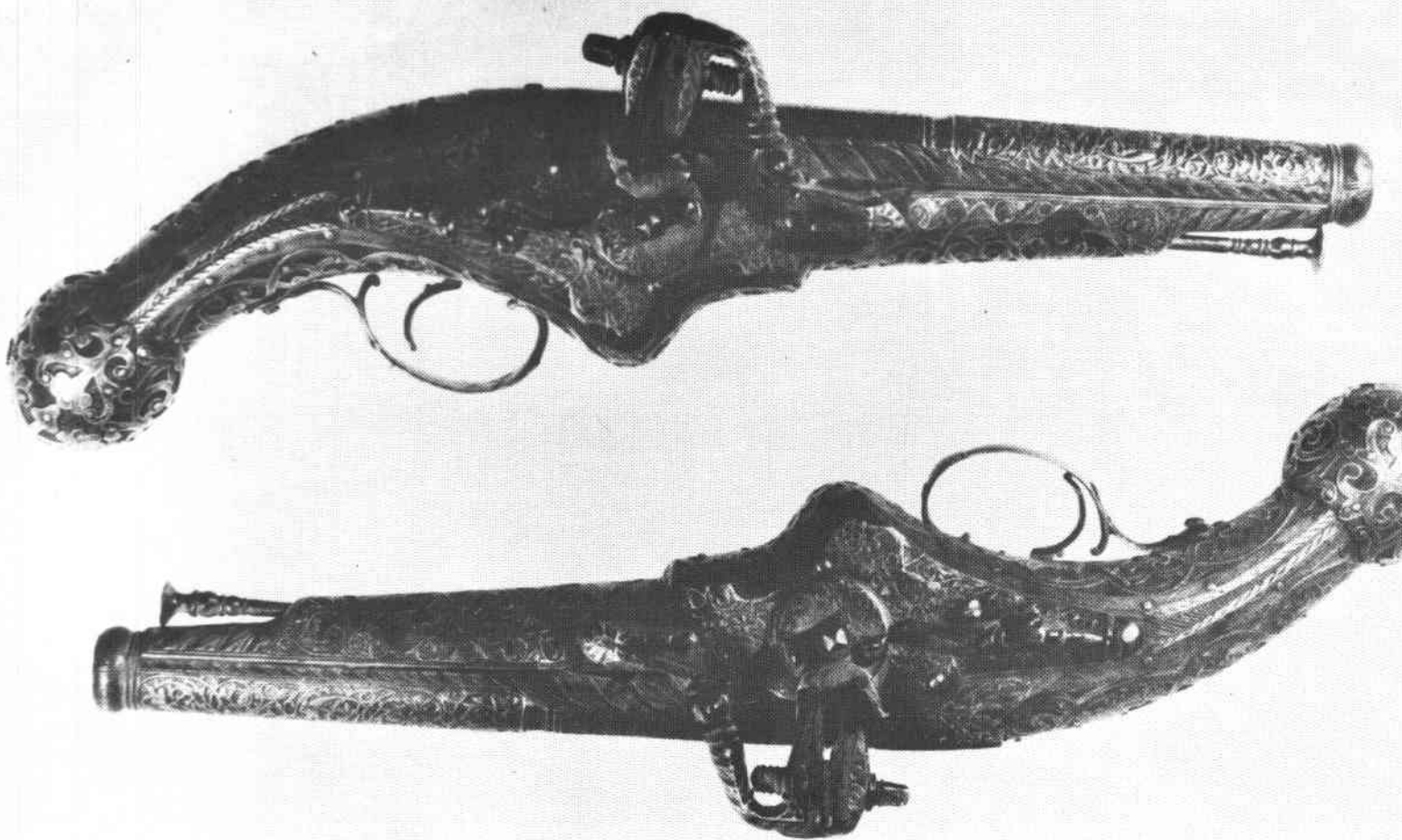


Figure 4
 Later Wheel-lock pistols from
 Ripoll. Locks signed SOLER
 have manual safeties.
 Madrid, Museo Arqueologico

Figure 8
 Degenerate form of renaissance
 decoration of the type used in
 Ripoll from about the middle of
 the Seventeenth Century.
 Collection of C. P. Bedford.

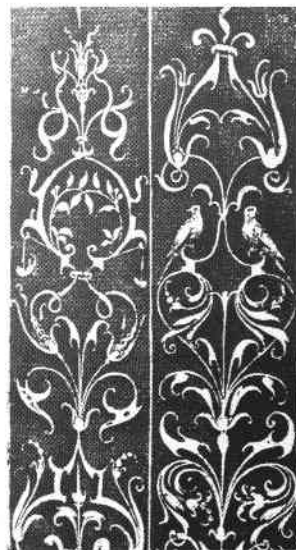
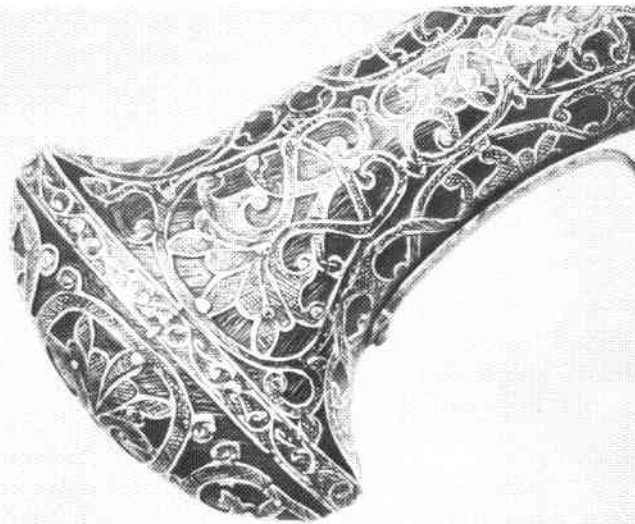


Figure 6
 Symmetrical design with
 birds, from the 1638 pattern
 book of Piquot



There is little difference between the locks of the lemon-butt wheel-locks and those of the earlier fishtail style. The rather archaic rotating pancover is even retained, but the lemon-butt models have the added feature of a manual safety. Three examples of this type are signed SOLER, the only signature to appear on any Ripoll wheellocks (Fig. 4). One excavated lemon-butt pistol now in the museum at Ripoll is fitted with an imported Brescian wheel-lock.

There is a significant change in the stocks of these later pistols. Apart from the shape of the butt, the sheet-iron covering shows a degeneration in the execution of the ornamentation. Where this was relief chiselled in the case of the earlier wheel-locks, it is now simply engraved, often rather cursorily, in casual imitation of renaissance scrollwork. This feature, plus the lack of a manual safety, places the two wheel-lock arquebuses previously mentioned in the same early category as the fishtail pistols.

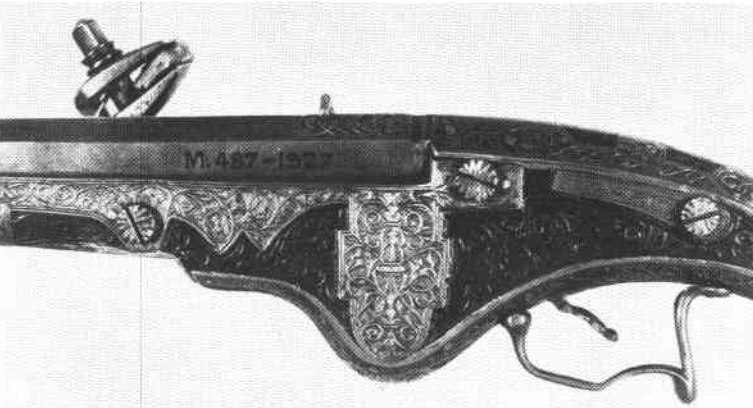


Figure 5
Reverse side of Fig. 1
showing renaissance
ornament



Figure 7
Design from Piquot's
pattern book showing
variation of figure eight
pattern

The miquelet *pedrenyals*, except for their length, have the same stock construction as the later wheel-locks, and like them are mounted only in iron. Brass seems to appear as a stock covering after the middle of the seventeenth century while silver apparently was not used until the eighteenth.

The *pedrenyal* lock is the earliest miquelet to appear in Cataluña. There are examples in the Paulilhac collection which may date as early as the 1620's. These oppose the common cliché that Spanish miquelet mainsprings work upward against the heel of the cock while Italian springs work downward against the toe. The *pedrenyal* mainspring is downward-acting and the cock has a dog catch at its heel. The dip in the *pedrenyal* lockplate is reminiscent of the wheel-lock, but simply indicates conformity to a style. These locks were not used to modernize antiquated wheel-lock arms.

The inspiration for the relief chiselling and stock carving on the earliest Ripoll firearms is entirely European Renaissance and its equivalent is to be found in the French pattern books of Picquot and Marcou dating from the 1630's. Since the Spanish arms themselves predate the published patterns by about two decades, it is obviously that Ripoll makers, far from being isolated, were acutely aware of current European design. The V&A pistol illustrates this very well. Comparatively large metal plaques are decorated with foliar scrolls (Fig. 5). This design is repeated in the carving of the stock. The plate opposite the lock has a symmetrical spray passing through an ornamental central ring just as in several versions of a like design in Picquot's 1638 patterns (Fig. 6). The symmetrical spray, often with exotic birds, also found in Picquot, continues as a major element of Ripoll decoration through the middle of the eighteenth century. Another common element is the figure eight scroll, sometimes interpreted as a series of circles (Fig. 7), which is retained in the "arabesques" of stock sheathing long after it disappears in the chiselling of locks and barrels.

Oddly enough, after an auspicious beginning, Ripoll firearms decoration quickly begins a period of decline starting with the later wheel-lock and the *pedrenyal*. Chiselling on comparatively large plates covering the stock, and stock carving as well, is often reduced to simple hashmarks or checkering on both metal and surrounding wood, a process requiring only the most elementary command of the engraver's burin (Fig. 8). On some guns the elaborate "arabesque" effect is retained through more openwork in the stock overlay which often incorporates a variation of the figure eight or circle design. Similar cursory work was done on barrels and locks, but this

does not seem to have outlasted the seventeenth century. In truth, what is now considered typical Ripoll decoration is, beyond the second decade of the seventeenth century, merely a manifestation of arrested development and varying degrees of degeneration. Probably during the second quarter of the seventeenth century this combination produced the Ripoll pistol which is the direct cultural descendant of the earliest wheel-locks and which I shall refer to as the Type I (Fig. 9). It is the arm whose stock is covered from muzzle to ball butt with iron or brass ornament varying in quality from passable to crude according to the ability of the artisan. Where brass is used it is generally either complete or with only small openings in relation to the surrounding metal plate. Iron, because of its greater strength, allows a lacier covering with much wood showing.

The Type I endured, with apparently diminishing popularity, until the early nineteenth century and is associated with arms whose miquelet locks have the traditional wasp-waisted plate. Other characteristics generally present and associated with this type from the 1680's on are the octagonal and round barrel

which is invariably pinned to the forend with a single pin and held at the tang by the forward extension of the triggerguard bow which doubles as a tang screw. There are also: a pronounced spur on the trigger-guard; a barrel divided at mid-section by a filed ring extending no farther than halfway around the barrel and sometimes less; a striated breech, again extending no farther around than the central ring; and a ring filed entirely around the muzzle. The ramrod will be of iron. Locks associated with the Type I, besides having the wasp-waisted plate, will probably have fluted or fan-shaped cock and battery bridles. The cock neck will be columnar (Fig. 10). Pans will be brazed to the plate.

Characteristics indicating manufacture earlier in the seventeenth century than the above, but with no determinable date are: a completely round or completely octagonal barrel, a sighting ridge along the round part of any barrel, stock design continued in the chiselling of the barrel, extremely long barrels, extremely short cock jaws in combination with a raised and striated battery face dovetailed into the battery.



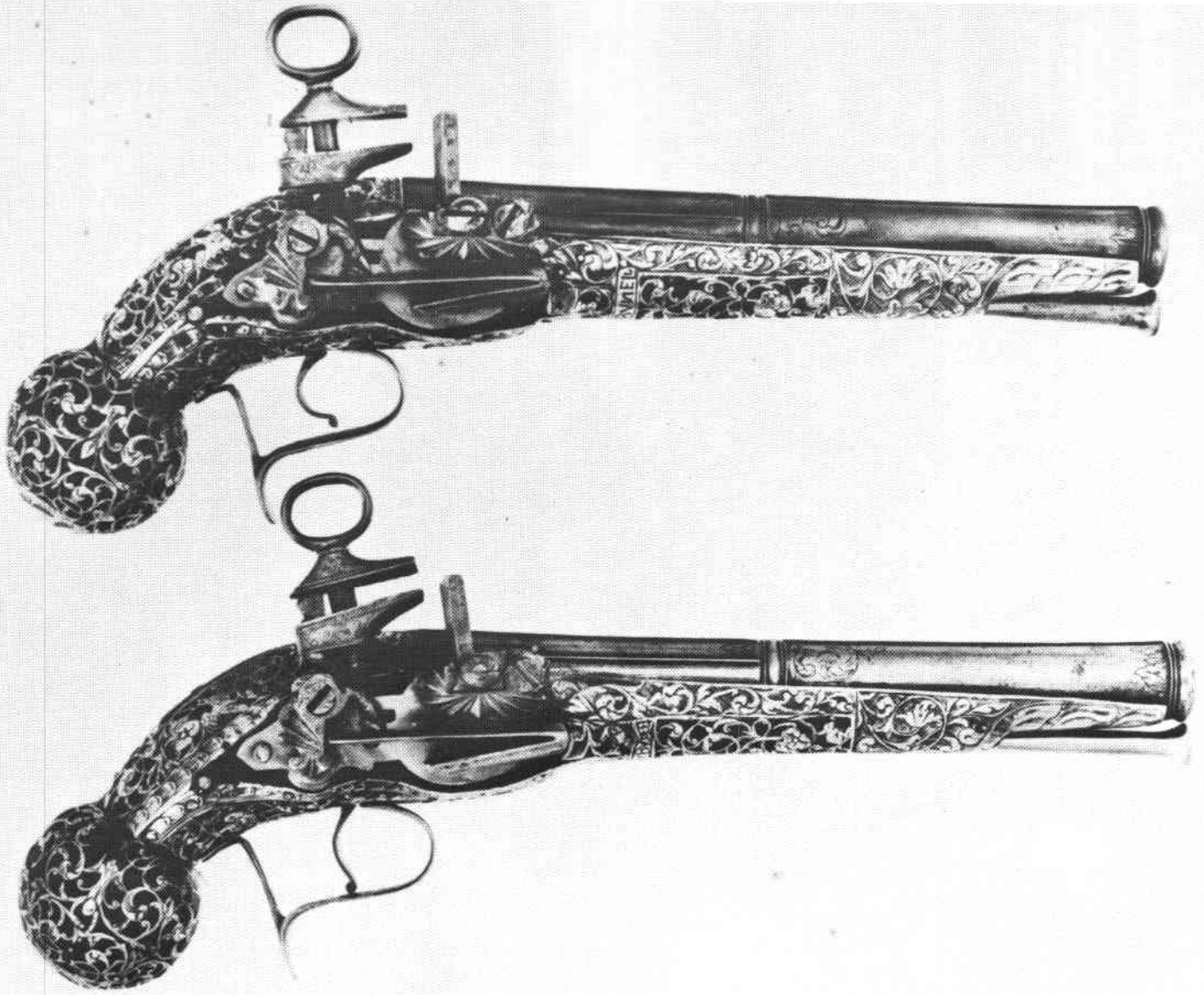


Figure 10
Type I pistol with wasp-waisted
locks dated 1708. Stocks signed
by Cartenell who at this date was
marking some arms BARCELONA;
Geneva, Musee d Art et d' Histoire.

Figure 9
Type I Ripoll pistols dated 1687.
Note wasp-waisted lock plate and
figure eight design along brass
forend sheathing. Metropolitan
Museum.

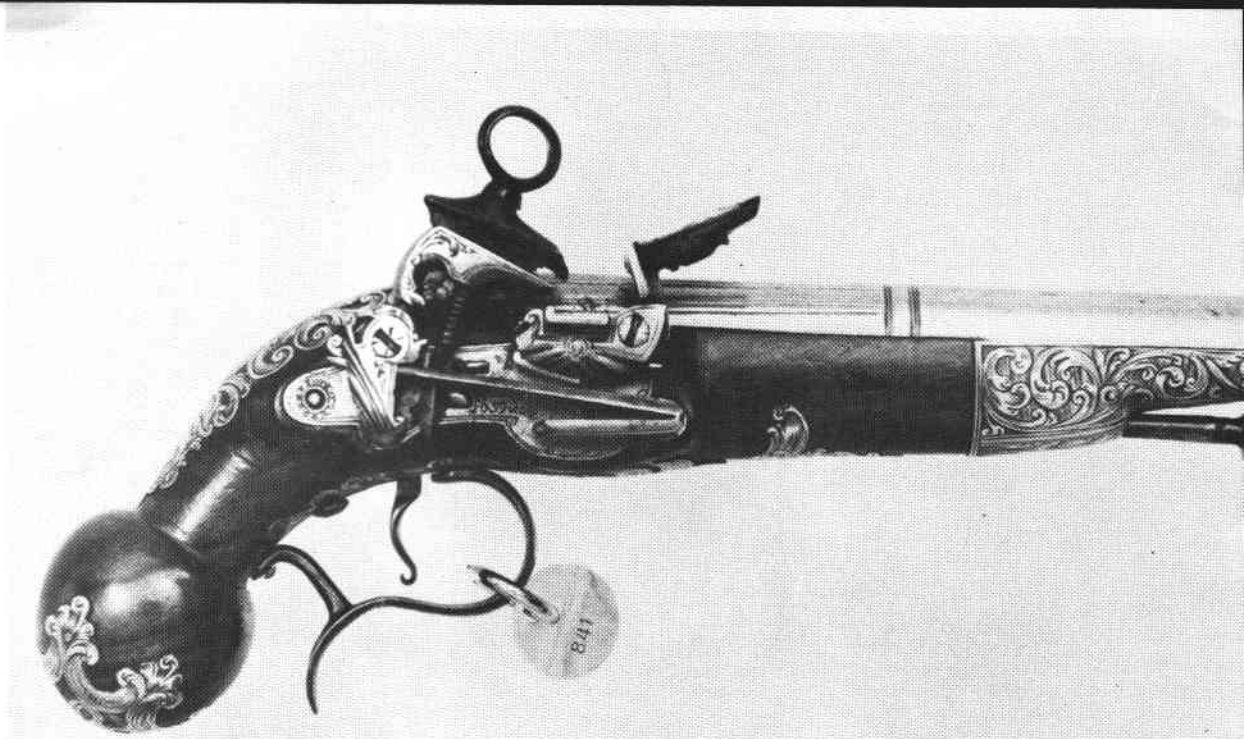


Figure 12
Underside of Fig. 11 Note
engraved plate inlaid in
triggerguard.

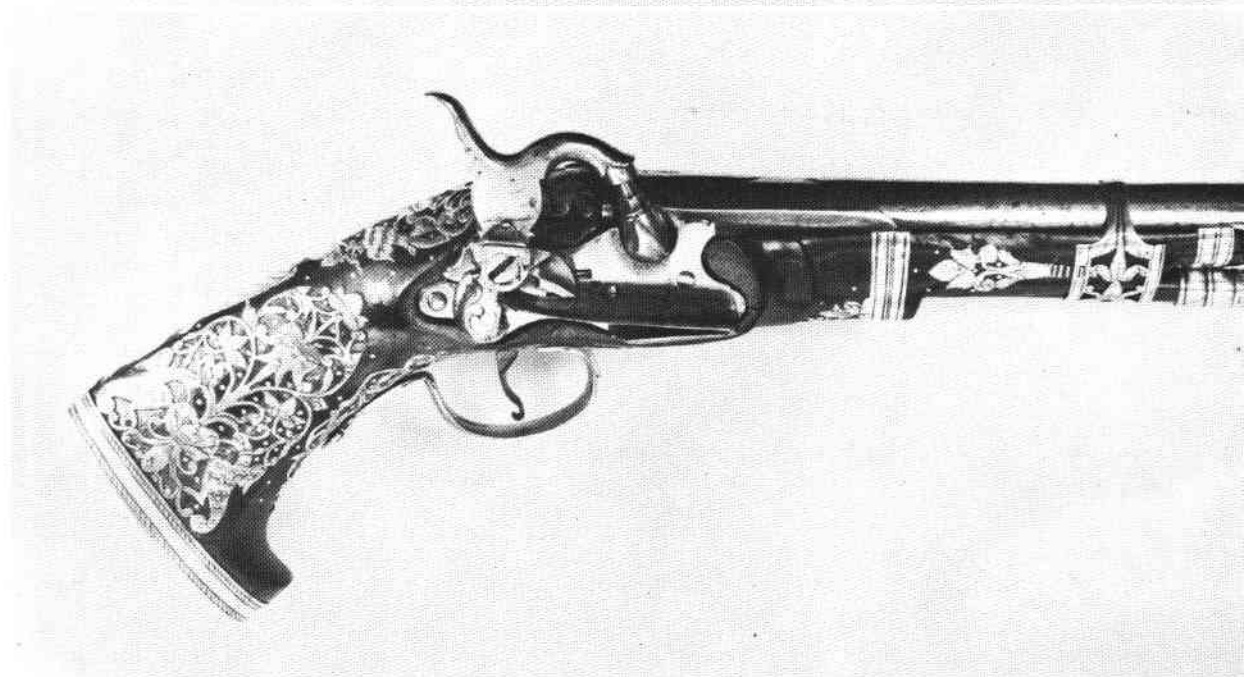
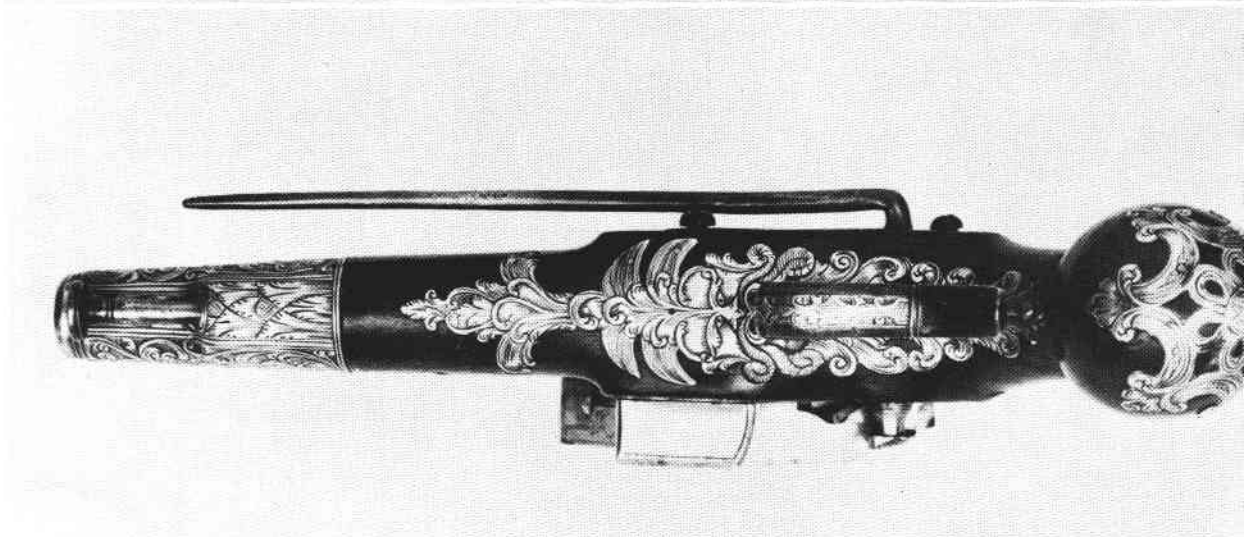


Figure 13
Type III pistol dated 1757. While
converted to percussion, it retains
the pinched lockplate and mended
cock bridge. Authors' collection.

Figure 11
 Type II pistol which appears to be Italian made, possibly Neapolitan because of the lock style; note crescent cock and profile of battery. Collection of C. P. Bedford.

Figure 14
 Symmetrical silver decoration with birds on butt of pistol shown in Fig. 13.

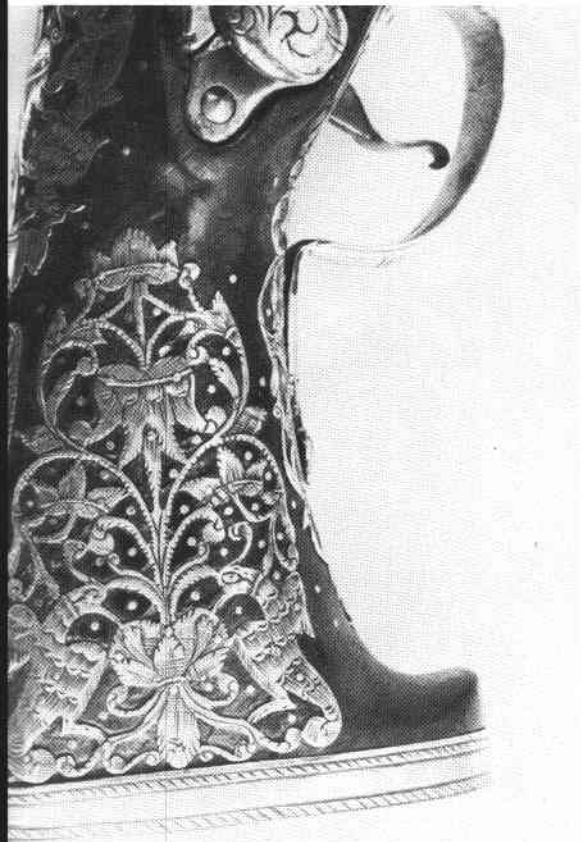


Figure 15
 Type III blunderbus pistols of carbine form. Locks are pinched and have crescent cock necks and rounded battery and cock bridles. Metropolitan Museum.

In referring to the Type I pistol, I mentioned the wasp-waisted lockplate. This is the conventional Spanish miquelet lockplate which was known in Castile at least by the first quarter of the seventeenth century. Just when it appeared in Cataluña is unknown. It is wide through its forward section to supply mounting surface for battery, pan, battery bridle and spring, and mainspring; less wide at its rear to accommodate the cock and cock bridle. These two wider sections are joined by a straight center portion through which pass both full and half-cock screws. Associated with this lock in Spain is the cock with a columnar neck. When made in Cataluña this lock will have either flat-surfaced or fluted bridles and an angular battery. An otherwise similar lock has the contour of its center portion curved rather than straight. I shall call this the pinched plate in order to differentiate (see Fig. 13). I have observed that Catalán locks with the pinched plate generally have rounded bridles, a crescent cock neck, and a curved, more European style of battery. The wasp-waisted lockplate with its accompanying characteristics is associated with the Type I pistol.

During the eighteenth century, possibly not earlier than the second quarter, there appeared a variation of the Type I pistol which I shall call the Type II. As far as can be determined, existing examples seem to be grouped around the middle of the century.

The Type II pistol has the same profile as the Type I. Although a very few archaic examples, possibly from the first quarter of the century, indicate a groping toward this style, in its maturity it is practically invariable. Brass sheet, or possibly silver, but never iron, covers the stock in determined areas: a solid sheet from muzzle to more than halfway down the forend where it ends in a straight line, a plate surrounding the tang and extending down the stock toward the ball, a plate around the trigger and guard which is usually without the spur so common on the Type I, and swags around the lower portion of the ball butt. These are engraved, usually very passably, in conventional rococo designs often incorporating the C-scroll and tattered shell.

The Type II pistol, and this type only, appears to have been extensively copied in Italy at the same time it was being manufactured in Spain (Fig. 11). The only reason I can imagine for its popularity outside its homeland would have been the novelty of its appearance and its value as a costume accessory. Examples from both Naples and the area of Bologna are known. However, the majority of such Italian pistols are unsigned and have long been passing for Spanish. In fact, the presence of a large unidentified number of these "ringers" makes generalizations about the legitimate Ripoll Type II more difficult than in the case of the other types. Very generally, and not without exceptions, the Ripoll Type II has rococo engraving on the forend sheath, no spur on the trigger-guard, no stock carving, a wasp-waisted lock with a columnar cock neck and no fluting on cock or battery bridles. Italian examples will have one, and probably more, of the following characteristics: floral engraving on the forend cap not based on the C-scroll

and tattered shell; a spur triggerguard of the style found on the Type I Spanish pistol, often with an inlaid brass or silver plate never found on genuine Ripoll pistols (Fig. 12); some stock carving; a wasp-waisted lockplate in conjunction with some form of crescent forming the cock neck; fluted cock and battery bridles; a high comb on the back of a curved battery instead of the flat back of the angular battery common to the Spanish wasp-waisted lock. The Italian Type II pistol may also have a figured walnut stock contrasting sharply with the plain straight-grained walnut or fruitwood used in Spain. I am, in fact, suspicious of all silver-mounted Type II pistols since in my experience I have never seen one which was definitely attributable to Spain.

The third type, or Type III, Ripoll pistol is perhaps not so well known (Fig. 13). Its stock is derived from the common arquebus shoulder stock of the form often called "Catalán." Actually, the so-called "Catalán stock" is a misnomer just as is the term "Madrid stock." The downward curving shoulder stock was used in Spain from early in the sixteenth century and is considered by some to be a Spanish invention. It is so well documented pictorially and by existing examples that it might well be called the traditional or even the Spanish stock. The fluted stock which has earned the name "Madrid" apparently because of its popularity over the traditional form in the capital, especially during the eighteenth century, oddly enough may have come to Castile by way of Cataluña (see Fig. 16). An early example appears on a Ripoll revolving arquebus which, if we can believe the inscription, dates from 1648, another is on a three-barrelled Ripoll shotgun by Molas and Prats dated 1686. While the fluted stock enjoyed some popularity in Italy as well during the eighteenth century, I know of no examples which predate those of Cataluña. However, Cataluña did not take to the fluted stock as did the capital, and the traditional stock retained its popularity throughout the provinces where it became more and more stylized until well into the nineteenth century.

The Type three pistol with this butt shape is found in greater variety than the previously mentioned styles. Nor is it restricted to Ripoll or even Cataluña. Examples are known from all areas of Spain including Madrid, but outside Cataluña they remain novelties rather than the rule. A few early seventeenth century iron-mounted examples are known, but while because of our current orientation they appear to be Catalán, they may well be Castilian.

In the 1740's and 50's in Cataluña the arquebus-like pistol stock denoted an arm just as stylized in its way as the preceding types. Although its stock is not metal sheathed, it is heavily covered with silver—hardly ever with brass or iron—pierced in renaissance design harking back to that of the earliest wheel-locks (Fig. 14). The elements are exactly those of the seventeenth-century pattern books of Picquot and Marcou and even Simonin. This is definitely a

throwback since the fowl and animal elements were re-introduced rather than having been preserved in continuity. Only certain stylized foliar elements had been kept in the case of the Type I. The barrel was banded rather than pinned to the forend, and the tang was secured by a screw passing from above and fastening into the silver triggerguard. A silver stock band reinforced the point where the ramrod hole entered the stock, another band protected the tip of the forend. Both bands are also to be found on seventeenth-century Italian arms. A silver retaining spring frequently holds the barrel band and often takes the form of a dragon or serpent. Silver nails may decorate areas of the stock not covered by filigree. Ramrods on this type are of wood tipped with silver. Curiously, a significant majority of these pistols have pinched locks with crescent necks and rounded bridles and batteries. This is so frequently the case as to make the Type III with the standard wasp-waisted plate a rarity. Large blunderbuss pistols and tiny pistol-carbines generally adhere to this fashion as well (Fig. 15), but a very few arms of this size follow no style and appear to be more whimsical than practical (Fig. 16).

Toward the final quarter of the eighteenth century a more modern element takes over the Type III (Fig. 17). Mouldings appear along the forend and around the lock mortise. The ramrod is tipped with ivory. The filigree has given way to more simple silver inlay, sometimes still based on the earlier themes, and the lock is commonly wasp-waisted. Carving, usually rococo, appears around the barrel tang.



Figure 16
Ripoll pistol of carbine form,
but having the so-called
Madrid stock instead of the
traditional form. Madrid,
Museo del Ejercito.



Figure 18
Pistol of indeterminate date, possibly as early as the mid-17th Century. An early example of Type IV butt which was retained throughout the 18th Century. Collection C. P. Bedford.



Figure 19
Eighteenth Century Type IV with iron mounts. Putto in garland on grip. Bridles do not match. Crescent cock neck with wasp-waisted plate. Mouldings along barrel and ram rod mortises. Madrid, Museo del Ejercito.

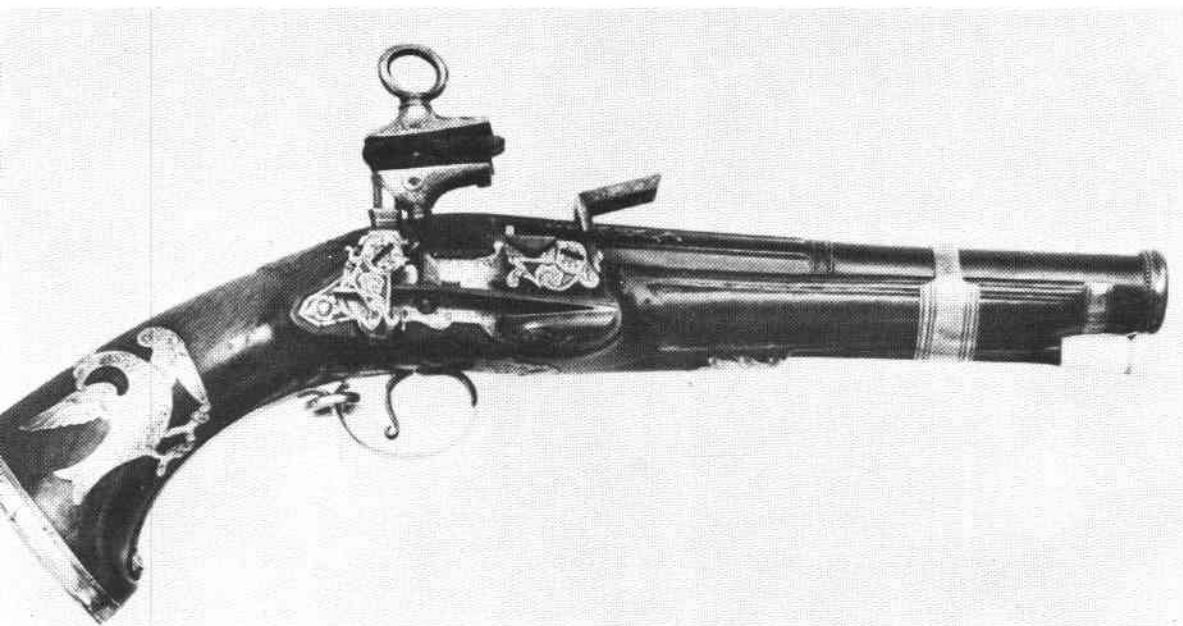


Figure 17
Type III pistol dating late 18th Century. Lock signed by Joseph Deop of Ripoll; the barrel has the stamp of LLORENS POUS, also believed to be a Ripoll maker, while the barrel is also countermarked with the Arms of Barcelona. Note moulding on stock along barrel. Collection C. P. Bedford.

A type IV pistol also had its origins in the seventeenth century when it is closely related decoratively to the Type I (Fig. 18). It is distinguished by its modified fishtail butt which is rounded or bagged below an encircling metal ring. Its form may derive from a Castilian or even a foreign style. Toward the turn of the century it begins to show a character of its own, and by 1750 it has achieved its own stereotype (Fig. 19). Its mounts are of any of the three metals commonly used, and there is never a triggerguard spur. Barrels are invariably pinned except on earliest examples. Ramrods are of wood and frequently are ivory tipped. Mouldings are common along the forend, ramrod groove, and lock mortise. While floral motifs dominate the inlaid stock decoration, there is one recurring theme which seems to be restricted to the Type IV. This is a cherub or putto in a garland repeated on either side of the grip. In some cases the execution is so casual that the putto may appear to be a monkey climbing vines. Lock bridles are seldom if every fluted and, for the first time, battery and cock bridles need not agree in style. Likewise in this category, some crescent cock necks appear on wasp-waisted locks.

It has been suggested, purely upon the basis of style, that these are export pistols. If so, "export" may indicate no farther away than Castile or other areas of Aragon.

Possibly the true Catalan export pistol is the one which conforms so closely to European fashion that it stands out only because of its miquelet lock or because it carries the name of a known Catalán gunsmith. On these arms and numerous Type III and Type IV pistols there often appears the Barcelona mark. It is entirely possible that there may have existed the practice in Ripoll and its environs of thus marking pieces for sale in Barcelona which, because of its location, had a large transient trade. This would account, then, for the Barcelona mark appearing on locks and barrels signed by makers who at the time were known to be working in Ripoll or Manresa.

Ripoll, like the rest of Spain, seems to have switched early to the percussion system. At the same time, however, both traditional Spanish style and construction were rejected. By the time of the town's destruction in 1839, the Ripoll pistol had become an international cur. The grip was angular in the current French fashion and either checkered or scaled. Locks were the standard forward-action percussion, sometimes with stamped rather than engraved decoration. Barrels, still blued rather than browned, were keyed to the stock, and the sideplate gave way to screw cups. Construction verged on shoddiness. Sights were mounted on pistol barrels as a concession to European taste. Only the name Ripoll remained on the lock or barrel as a reminder of how far the industry had sunk.

In summary, I hope I have indicated that: (1) Ripoll serves as a generic name for a type of firearm made in Ripoll as well as in a number of other surrounding Catalán towns. Except for marked pieces, there is at present no definite way of identifying arms actually made in Ripoll. However, in the case of Italian-made copies of Ripoll pistols, there are various characteristics which make them stand out from their counterparts. (2) Typical Ripoll ornament is not a manifestation of an artistic tradition continuing uninterrupted from Moorish times. Rather, it represents an early awareness and adoption of European Renaissance design which in turn had its origins partly in Islamic culture. Its subsequent degeneration brought about the loss of some of the more European elements and gave rise to the idea of Moorish origin. (3) During the eighteenth century, there were at least four distinct categories of Ripoll pistols, all existing concurrently and having their own peculiar characteristics.

Finally, I have undertaken an extensive study of Catalán firearms for which the material in this paper serves as the nucleus. Therefore, I should greatly appreciate receiving from the members any information which substantiates or refutes what I have said today. I should appreciate having names of gunsmiths when in association with definitely datable arms, marks, photographs of long arms as well as pistols, photographs of locks, details of design, all with the eventual aim of publication.