

THE FIREARMS OF THE WAFFENSAMMLUNG IN VIENNA

by Ortwin Gamber

Usually old firearms are seen as interesting technical instruments or works of excellent craftsmanship. But firearms of an old dynastic collection can be apart from their technical and artistic quality, testimonies of history too.

Especially in the former Hapsburg collection of Vienna, in the so-called "Hof- Gewehrhammer," the gun depot of the Imperial court, nearly every firearm is connected to the political events of continental Europe, to dynastic festivals, or to marriages. The special value of such an old collection is that you can go back to times passed, following the traces of history.

The Hof- Gewehrhammer has been preserved in the Imperial palace at Vienna, an 18th century building (figure 1). Now, since 1968, the Gewehrhammer has its new home in the 19th century wing of the Imperial castle (figure 2). The Neue Hofburg was added to the "Old Castle" by Emperor Francis Joseph. Together with the collection of arms and armour it forms part of the rich collections of the Kunsthistorisches Museum. About 1200 firearms of

Figure 1. Kunsthistorisches Museum, Vienna



first quality as well as trophies and painted hunting scenes are exhibited there in the splendid decorated Imperial halls (figure 3).

The first firearms of our collection date from about 1500. They are simple pieces for military purposes (figure 4). Emperor Maximilian I ordered them for his armies. The first Hapsburg really interested in firearms was his grandson Karl V (figure 5), ruler of an enormous empire. He was interested in the newly invented short firearm, the pistol, with mechanical ignition by a wheel lock. His early pistols, dating from about 1534, are preserved in the Armeria at Madrid.

The younger brother Ferdinand I, king in Germany and later Emperor, wanted to imitate Karl. From his

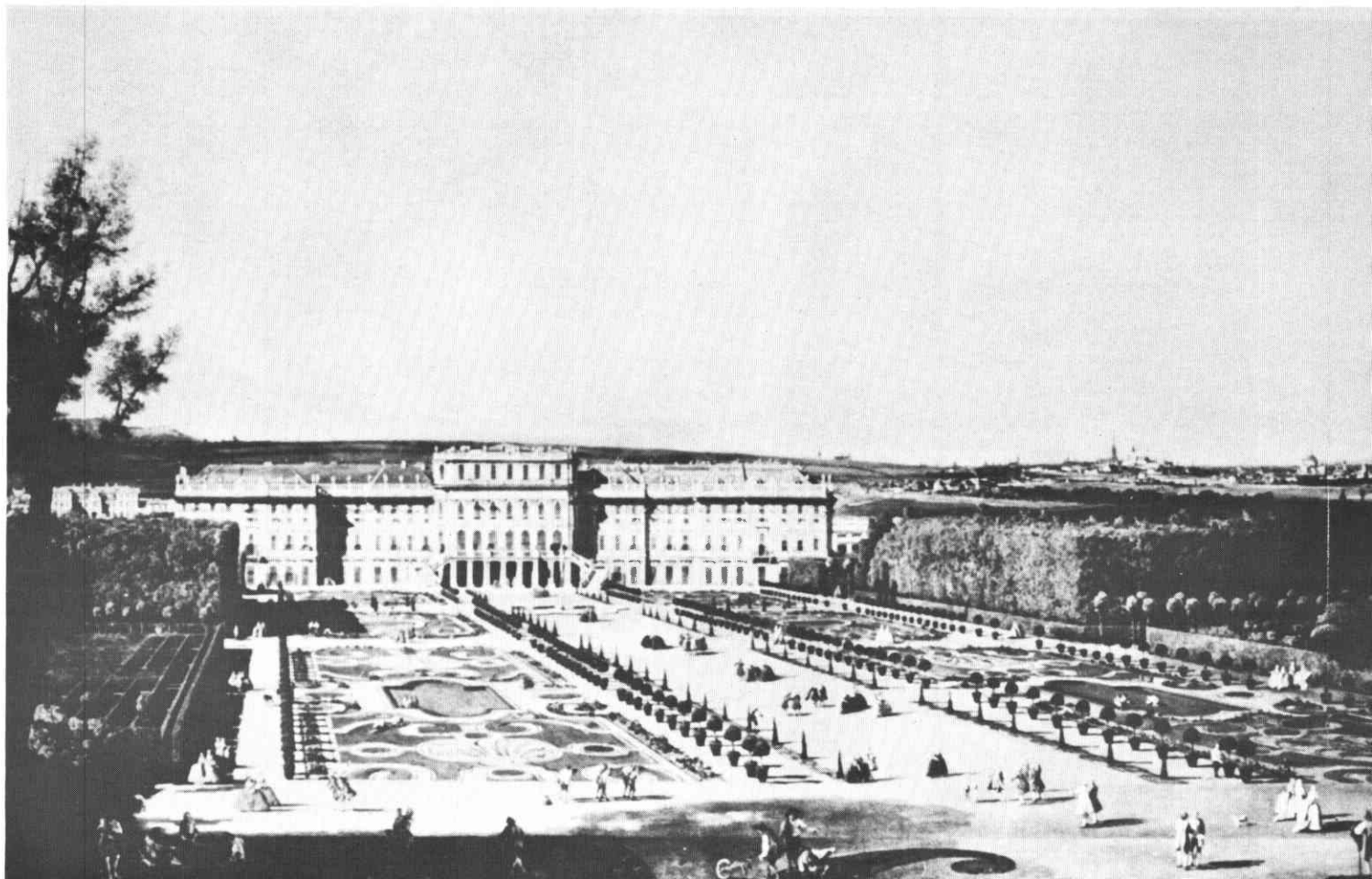




Figure 2. Neue Hofburg

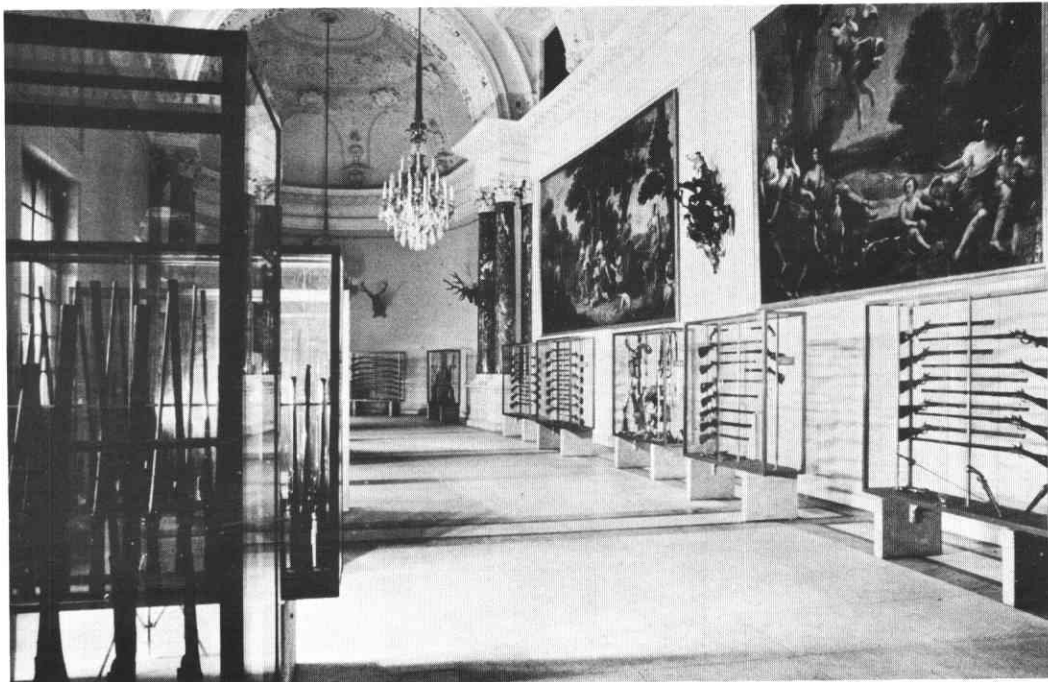


Figure 3. Displays,
Kunsthistorisches Museum

Figure 4. Illustration from
Maximilian's Arsenal Inventory

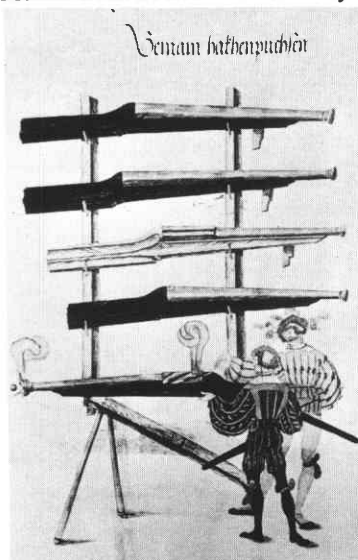
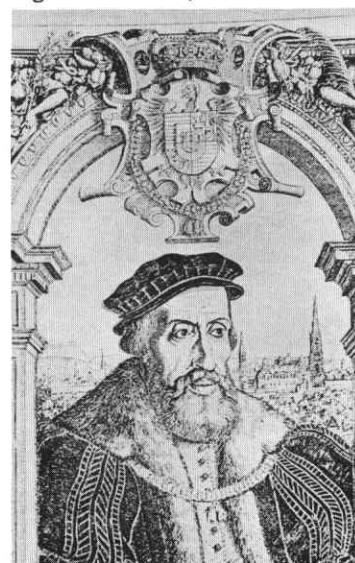


Figure 5. Karl V (1519-1556)



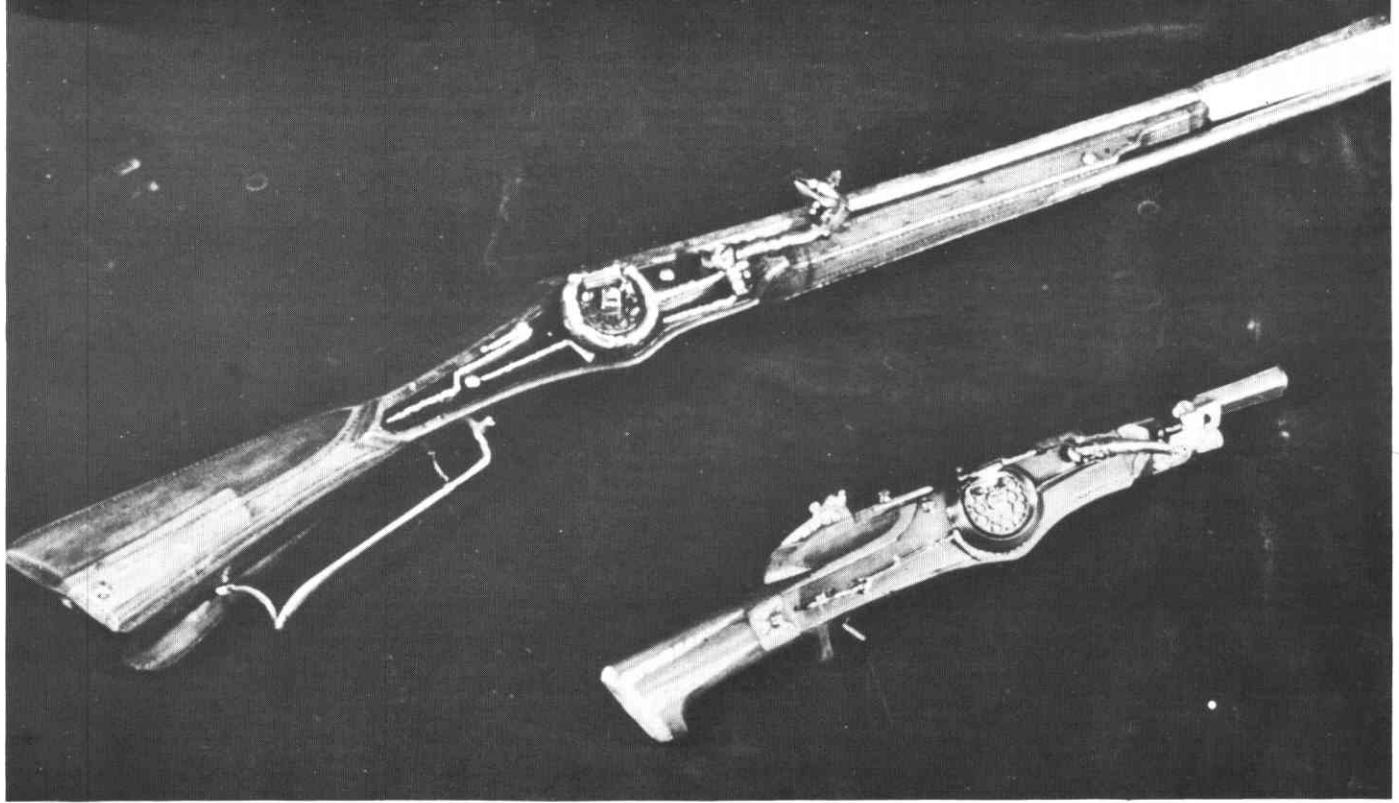


Figure 6. Wheel lock carbine, South German (Augsburg?) circa 1540-50. Wheel lock breech loading pistol, South German (Augsburg?), circa 1545-50.



Figure 7. Ferdinand II (1619-1637)

armory we have in Vienna a beautiful gun with etched and gilded barrel and a pistol (figure 6). Both firearms can be dated from 1545. They are made ten years later as the famous pistols of Karl V in Madrid, but the pistol is more developed in a technical sense. It is a breechloader. The back of the barrel can be opened by a clasp in order to put in a paper cartridge. The lock is self-spanning by moving the cock.

When Karl V died in 1558, the brother Ferdinand I became Emperor. The Hapsburg family was divided in a Spanish and an Austrian branch. Ferdinand I was not only Emperor, but also by inheritance, King of Bohemia and King of Hungary. All his life he had to fight against the turkish invaders, who had conquered the whole southeast of Europe. When the Emperor's younger son, named Ferdinand (figure 7) like his father, in 1555 prepared a counter-attack against the Turkish occupation of Hungary, the secretary of the young prince presented to him a pair of pistols with stocks of silver cast (figure 8). They are among the most beautiful pistols of the sixteen century. In the next year, the short and not very successful campaign started. A lot of simple military and costly aristocratic firearms made during 1555 or 1556 are all connected to this event.

When Ferdinand I died in 1564, Austria was divided into three governments. The eldest son Maximilian II, king of Bohemia and Hungary, became Emperor. The above mentioned younger son Ferdinand became governor of Tirolia. The youngest son Karl became governor of Styria. In the Imperial court of Vienna, in the courts of Innsbruck in Tirolia, and Graz in Styria a glittering life developed.

Emperor Maximilian II was a man of high taste, a lover of Italian art like king Henry II of France. He called the painter Accimbollo for his court in

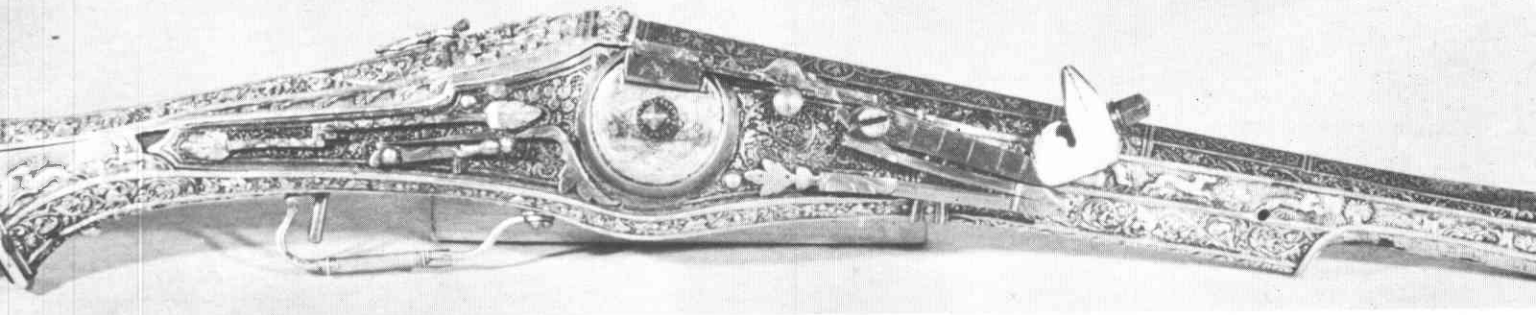


Figure 8. Saxon, 1554-1555

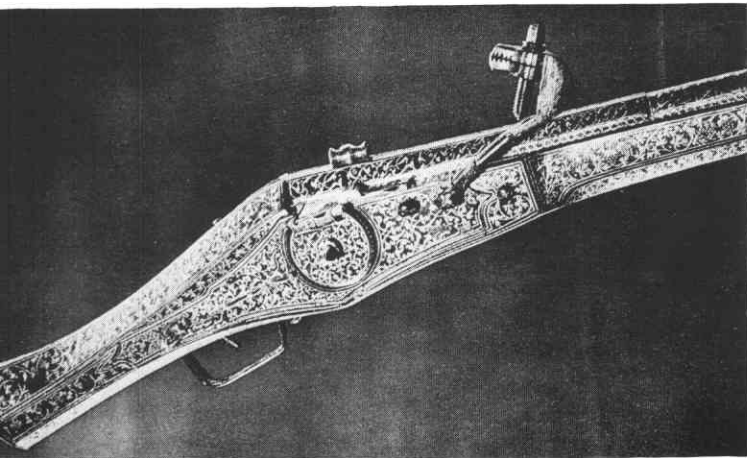


Figure 9. German, circa 1560-70

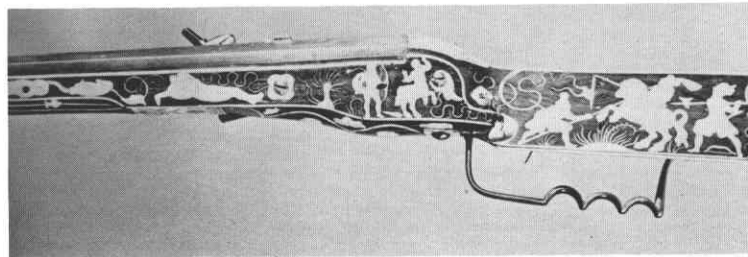


Figure 10. Wheel lock gun stocked by Hans Paumgartner, dated 1563.

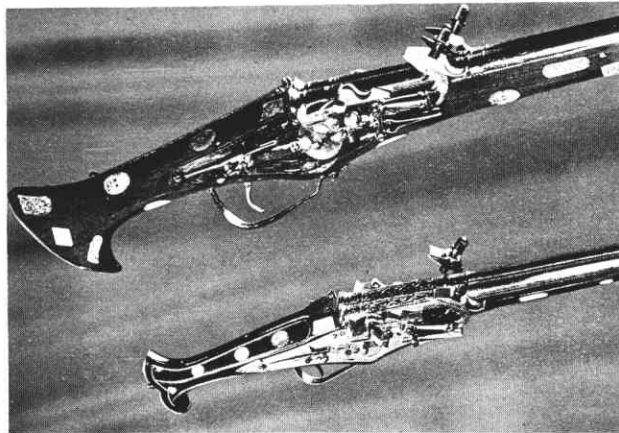
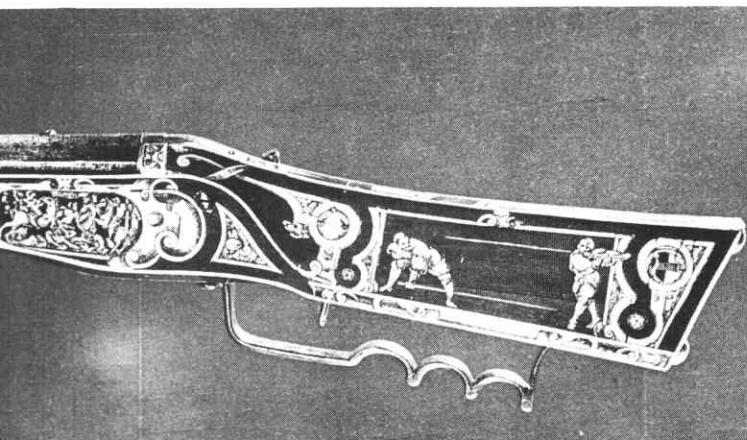


Figure 11. Two double barreled wheel lock pistols by Valentin Geitner of Dresden, circa 1600.

Figure 12, 13. Examples of bone inlay. Right, Southern German Rifle, wheel lock – match lock superimposed loads, circa 1565-70. left, gun stocked by Hieronymus Borstorffer of Munich, circa 1610.



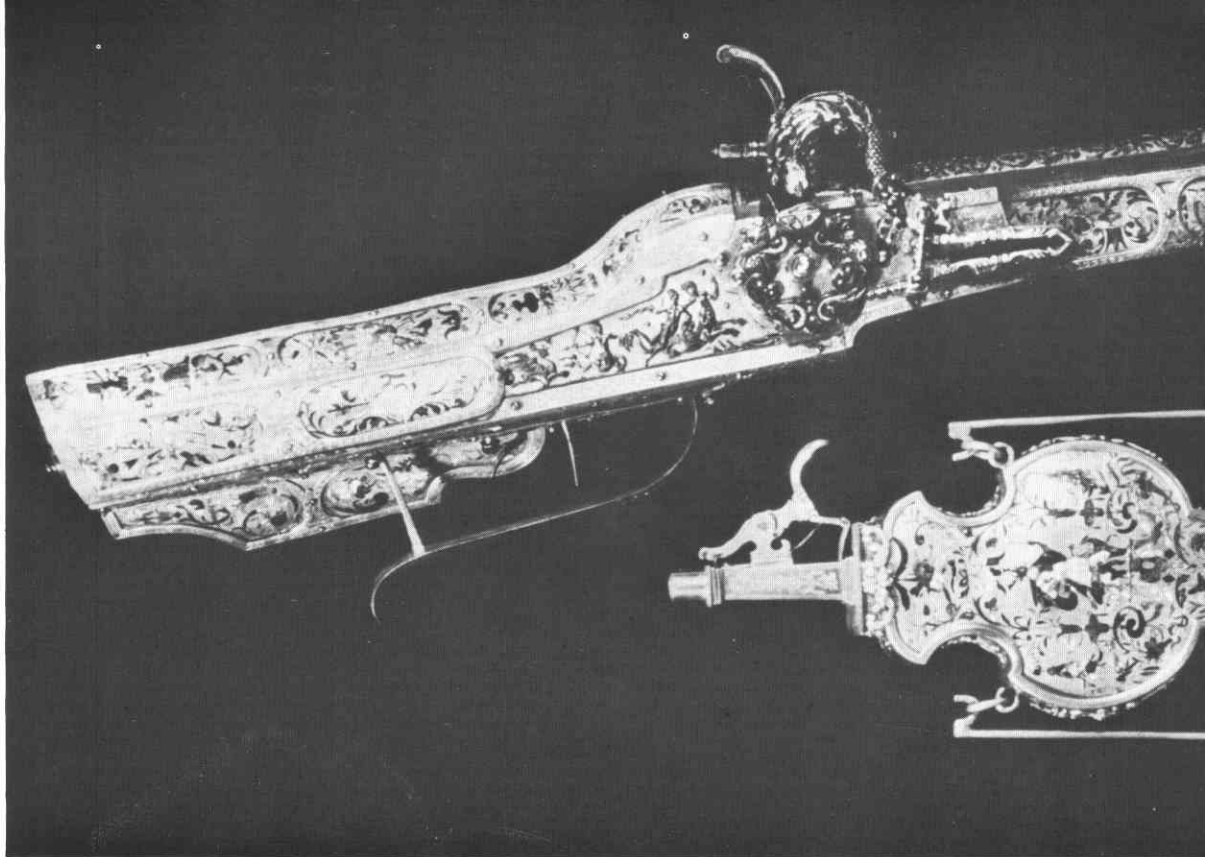


Figure 14. Wheel lock gun made for Rudolf II by David Altenstetter (goldsmith and enameler) and Daniel Sadeler (metal chisler/engraver) in 1608.

Vienna and tried, in vain, to get the famous architect Palladio to join his service. His guns and pistols with carved or plated stocks were made by the best German gunmakers, being inlaid with gold and silver in the Italian manner (figure 9).

Archduke Ferdinand of Tirolia built up his famous collection of arts, arms and armor in his castle Ambras near Innsbruck.

Archduke Karl of Styria was a man of high taste like his Imperial brother. The stockmaker Hans Paumgartner worked for him in Graz. The works of this artist are marked by delicate "Intarsia" or inlaid work of ivory in wood. A gun for the Archduke is dated 1563 (figure 10). There are about 30 parade firearms of this period in the collection of Vienna.

Maximilian II was succeeded by his son Rudolf II in 1576. Rudolf fell heir to one of the greatest art collections in history. The Imperial court was transferred from Vienna to Prague in Bohemia.

Emperor Rudolf was a good friend with his neighbors, the Elector of Saxony and the Duke of Bavaria. Therefore, we have beautiful firearms made by Valentin Geitner in Dresden (figure 11) and by Sadeler-Borsdorfer in Munich, probably presented to the Emperor by the Duke of Bavaria. In Prague the goldsmith David Altenstetter and the iron carver Daniel Sadeler worked together on the Emperor's gun (figure 14), which is covered by enameled silver. It is among the most beautiful firearms of the world.

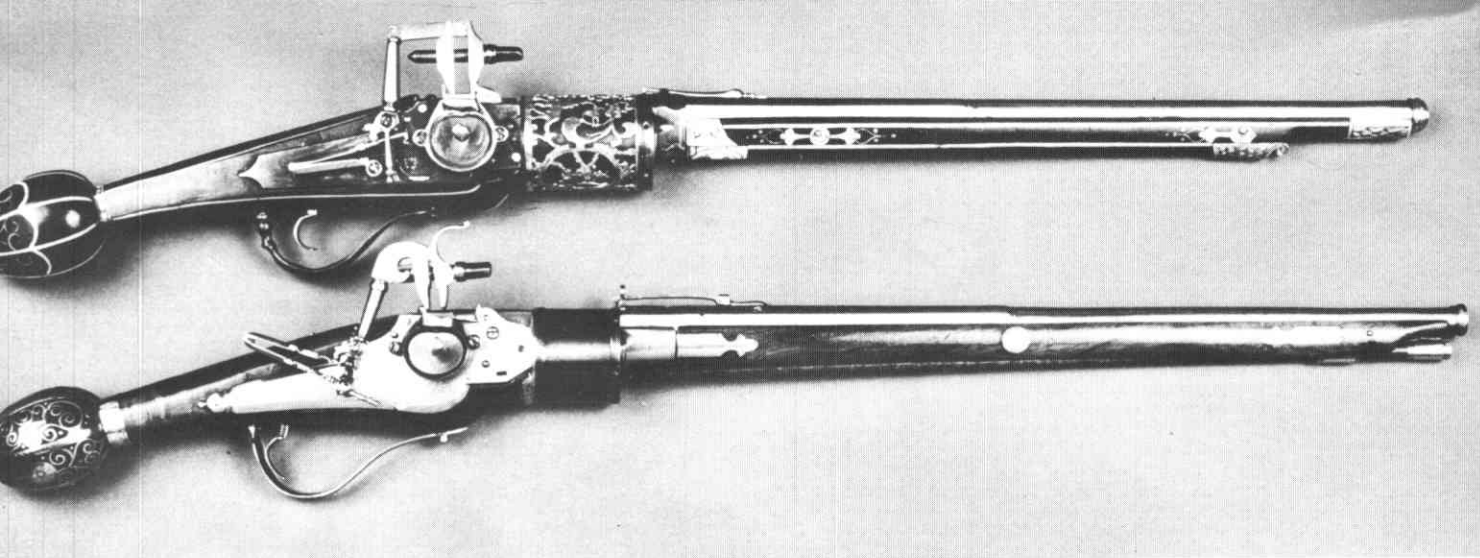
After an unhappy quarrel with his own family, Rudolf died in 1612, succeeded by his brother Mat-

thias. From Matthias we have repeating pistols which anticipate the Colt-System (figures 15 and 16). Under the not very prudent reign of Matthias, the terrible Thirty Year War began, which nearly made Germany into a desert. More than the half of the German population was killed or died by famine and diseases. Nevertheless, between the horrors of war, the schools of gunmaking in Vienna and Prague flourished, as one can see on the gun of Max Wenger (figure 18), made for Emperor Ferdinand II (dated 1634). The intarsia is of finest quality and of incredible "raffiness."

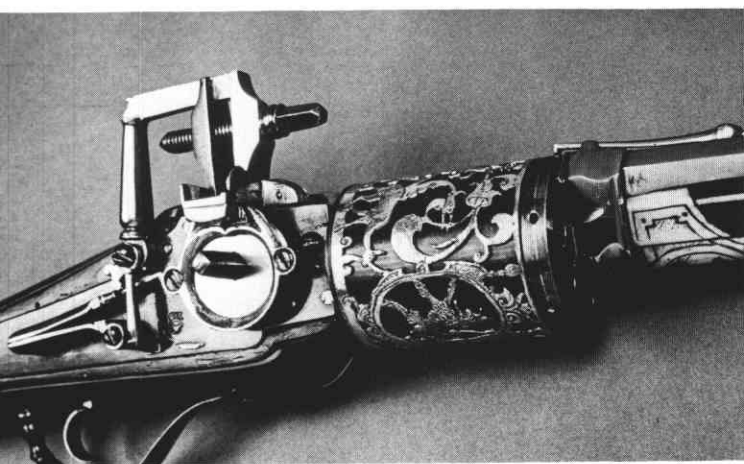
The Emperor's brother Archduke Leopold wanted to renew the gun work shops at Ferlach in Austria. For this purpose he called master Hans Schmidt from Germany, who, in 1628, working for the Archduke produced a rifle with inlaid hunting scenes in silver (figure 19).

But with the years of war the style of gunmaking declined. During the reign of Emperor Ferdinand III (figure 19), the Viennese gunmaker Hans Faschang was active, together with the unknown stockmaker, who has been named "Master of the Tierkopfranke." His stocks are prettily carved, but a little bit folkloristic (figure 19), like furniture of a farmhouse. Among this group of guns often a little chimney is added to the cock to remove the pan smoke from the shooters eyes. This Emperor was a great hunter and many of his firearms have been preserved.

A gun for the hunting of birds or for target shooting was the speciality of the city Teschen, now situated in Poland, but at that time belonging to Austria. This firearm has been called "Teschinka" or "Tschinke" (figure 21) after the name of the city. Its decoration is also elaborate, but a little bit rough. This piece was presented to the Emperor in 1655.



Figures 15, 16. Revolvers,
German circa 1600.



The Spanish Hapsburgs had bad experiences with their own governors in the Netherlands, so they called on the Austrian princes, who had a softer manner of ruling. One of the best governors was Archduke Leopold Wilhelm, a brother of Emperor Ferdinand. Like king Charles I of England Leopold Wilhelm was a collector of paintings. A picture of Teniers (figure 22) shows him in his art gallery at Brussels. He later presented this collection to the court in Vienna, founding the Imperial picture gallery. Probably for him, firearms of the western style were produced in Sedan, Maastricht, and Utrecht, which then were introduced to the court at Vienna. With such firearms, the French invention of the flintlock became well known. A pair of Leopold Wilhelm's personal pistols, covered with tortoiseshell (figure 23), have been preserved. They are Augsburg work but made in a French style.

A gun with a barrel, decorated by carved steel, is probably an example of craftsmanship from northern Netherlands (figure 24).

Far off the gunmakers in Prague and Vienna produced guns in the traditional way, with wheellocks and German stocks. Formerly belonging to the guild of the locksmiths, the Viennese gunmakers Michael Gull, Heinrich Khrafft, Georg Pasch, and Hans Furst founded their own gunmakers guild in 1661. Michael Gull made a beautiful gun for the Emperor Leopold I (figure 25). The stock of ivory is

carved in form of hunting animals. Like a similar carved black gun of Prague, it was ordered in 1664. The occasion for this order seems to have been a victory of the Imperial army against the Turks near St. Gotthard in Hungary.

Leopold I (figure 26) was a great ruler, a man of science and an important composer. He introduced the art of the Italian Opera, now so important to Vienna. A portrait shows him as an actor in an opera. Unhappily he had wars during all his life against Louis XIV of France and against the Turks. Nonetheless, in his time, Austria became a main power on the continent.

In 1683 the Turks besieged Vienna. An allied Imperial and Polish army liberated the city. During the following years the Turks lost one position after the other. The shock of this eastern attack against central Europe led to a short period of peace between the Emperor and Louis XIV. The French king sent as a present two splendid rifles, made by his famous masters Gruche and Chateau (figure 27), to Leopold and his elder son Josef. The impression of these French works, from the cultural leading court of Versailles, must have been substantial in Vienna. The Emperor took the French gunmaker Pierre de La Marre into his service, La Marre worked in the last years of the 17th century in Vienna and introduced the French style of gunmaking here. His works are marked by well fashioned French stocks, decorated with finely chiseled mountings of steel or silver (figure 28).

In 1700 the last Spanish king of the Hapsburg dynasty died. Austria and France each coveted the Spanish kingdom. The war of succession began (1701-1714). In the beginning the Austrian pretender, Archduke Karl, the younger son of Emperor Leopold, was successful and crowned as the King of Spain. Unhappily his father, Leopold, died in 1705 and his brother, Emperor Josef, in 1711.

Karl became Emperor Karl VI (1711-1740). He united in his person the Imperial crown and the crowns of Spain, Bohemia, and Hungary. He felt himself to be the real successor of Emperor Karl V. A counter-alliance of the other European powers

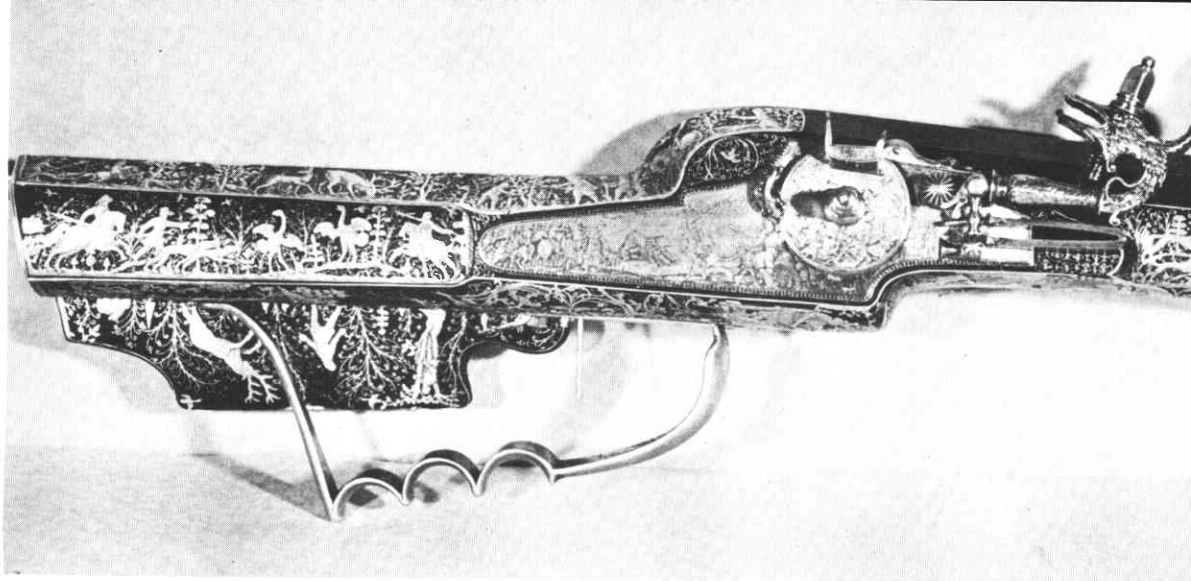


Figure 17. Silver inlaid gun by Hands Schmidt of Ferlach in 1626

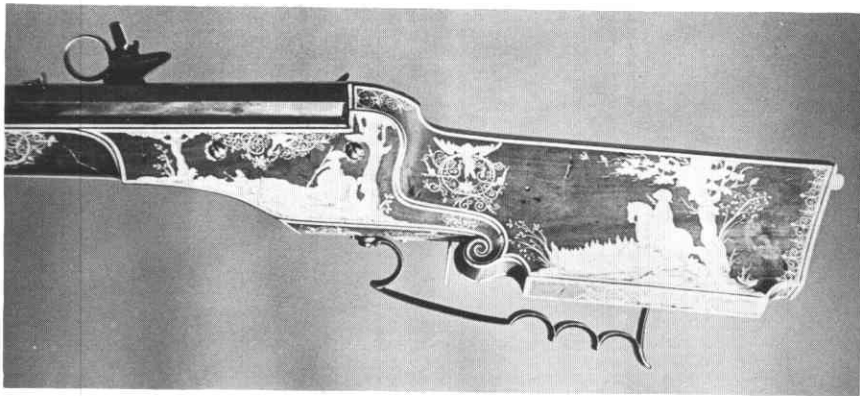


Figure 18. Gun by Maximilian Wenger, Prauge, Vienna, circa 1630-40.



Figure 19. Ferdinand III, 1637 to 1657

Figure 20-lower left: Gun by Hans Faschang, dated 1637.

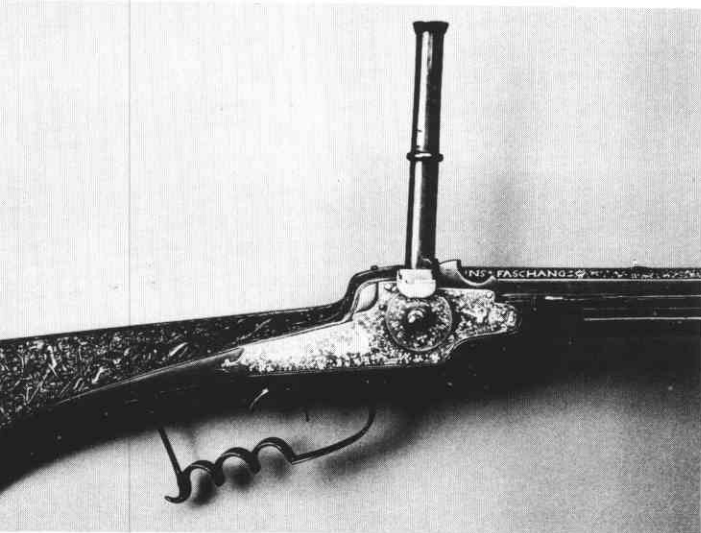


Figure 21-lower right: Teschinke by Christoph Kloss, Teschen, circa 1650.

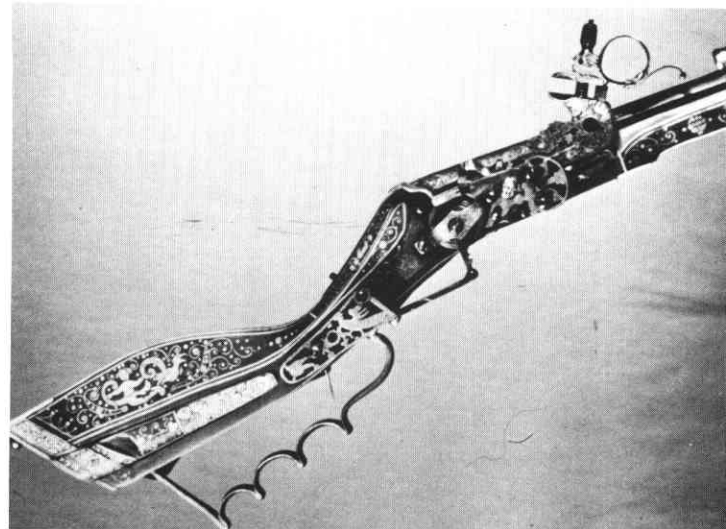




Figure 22. Archduke Leopold Wilhelm in his Art Gallery

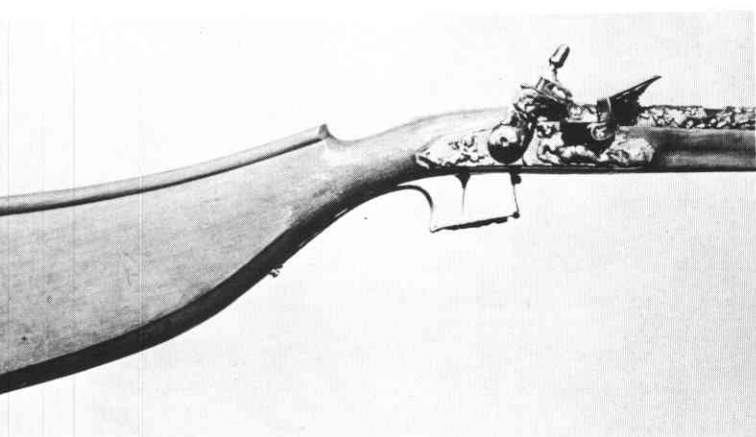


Figure 24. Netherlands, circa 1660

broke this short dream of a new worldwide Empire, and a French prince got the throne of Spain. Nevertheless, Austria had received in this war all eastern Spanish properties, that is upper Italy and the Netherlands.

As a passionate hunter, Karl had brought with him rifles from Spain with typical fluted stocks, mountings of brass, and blued barrels with the gilded stamps of the maker. Under the impact of these pieces, came a synthesis of the French Spanish styles (figure 30) in Vienna. It was the birth of the Baroque school of Viennese gunmaking. On the earliest pieces, even the fluted Spanish stock was copied, as shown in example made by Caspar Zellner (figure 31). Between 1720 and 1730, the Viennese manner of gunmaking was highly developed into the composition of a French stock, rich golden cast mountings, and blued barrels with gilded stamps (figures 32 and 33). This synthesis also influenced the art of the gunmaker from Bohemia to Northern Germany, especially since the wife of the emperor was a princess of Brunswick-Wolfenbittel. This period was the most splendid in the history of Austria. Many monasteries, churches, and palaces testify it. The garden palace of the victorious Austrian commander-in-chief Prince Eugene of

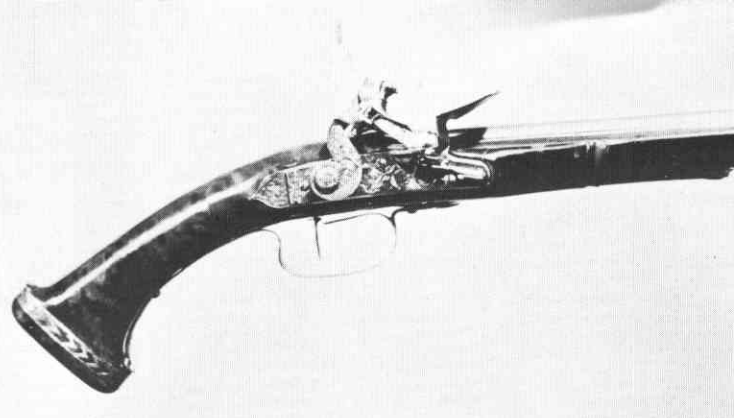


Figure 23. One of a pair of tortoise shell stocked pistols, Angsburg, circa 1650-60

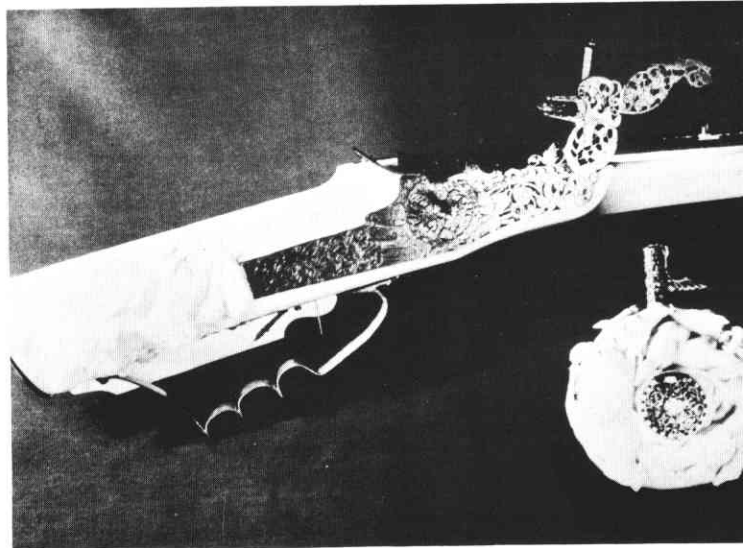


Figure 25. Ivory stocked by Michael Gull for Leopold I, circa 1665

Savoy, the so called "Belvedere" in Vienna, belongs to the most beautiful palaces of the world.

Austrian troops gained control of the greater part of former Turkish territories in Europe. For a short time Karl even won the Kingdom of Naples in Italy where he obtained many beautiful paintings and firearms. But the Emperor had two handicaps. In 1734 his superb commander, Eugene of Savoy, died. Second, Karl left behind him only a daughter.

This daughter, Maria Theresia (figure 34), had married Prince Francis Stephan of Lotharingia, who later became Emperor. He was the founder of the dynasty Hapsburg-Lotharingia. In the beginning of her reign, Maria Theresia had to fight against France, Bavaria, and Prussia, since Austria in the hands of a woman seemed to be an easy prey. She won against France and Bavaria, but not King Frederic of Prussia and, as a consequence, lost Silesia.

Maria Theresia and Francis Stephen had 16 children. A lot of firearms for the little princes were ordered in the workshops of Christoph Ries and Johann Fruhwirt in Vienna. Her eldest daughter, Marie Antoinette, married Louis, King of France. French rifles of de Saint in Versailles came into the Hofgewehrhammer during this time. The pretty, but

not very prudent French queen, together with her husband, died later under the guillotine of the French revolution. Another daughter, Maria Carolina, was married with King Ferdinand of Bourbon-Naples. She sent simple, but beautifully designed Spanish firearms to Vienna (figure 35).

In 1767 Josef II, eldest son of Maria Theresia, became Emperor (figure 36). He was a reformer and liberal ruler in the sense of Voltaire and Rousseau. He was more interested in engineering and inventions than in the arts. During his reign, Girandoni developed for him the famous repeating airgun, which was copied often and later even feared by the troops of Napoleon (figure 37).

Josef died in 1790. After a short reign of Leopold II, Franz I (figure 38) succeeded as Emperor in 1794. Twenty years he had to fight against the military genius Napoleon. He was compelled to marry his daughter Marie Louise with the victorious French Emperor. Protesting against an alliance between Napoleon and German sovereigns he abdicated as Roman Emperor and took the title of Emperor of Austria. With this act, Austria began to go its own way, apart from Germany.

The bad experiences of his life had formed the personality of Franz I. He was a man of bad humor and hated revolutions, new things, and ingenious persons. Chancellor Metternich was the real master of the State. Parade firearms of the Napoleonic "Empire" style had been imported from Western Europe, but personally Emperor Francis and his unable son Ferdinand I liked simple firearms in the taste of the Austrian "Biedermaier." Nevertheless, in design and decoration these firearms are the fore-runners of all decorated firearms up to today. The gun with beautiful but few decorations, a work of Dasch in Graz, was bought by Emperor Ferdinand in 1842 (figure 40).

Ferdinand I abdicated during the revolution of 1848, succeeded by his nephew Emperor Franz Josef (figure 41). The long reign of this Emperor, up to 1916, was the Silver-Period of Austria. This period was overshadowed by the rising nationalism under the different peoples of the monarchy, by the rivalry of Prussia, and by the hate of the newly formed state of Italy.

In Vienna, the Ringstrasse with its monumental buildings was erected. Music from Vienna went over the world. Also the firearms began to be more decorated, as seen in the System Werndl (figure 43), made for the Emperor in Steyr in 1870. Franz Josef, who was a good hunter preferred the gunmakers Ignaz Fischer in Vienna, Anton Lebeda in Prague, and Wolfgang Leitner in Ischl. Nonetheless firearms of new foreign systems came into the Hofgewehr-kammer too, such as Jennings, Sharp, Colt, Remington, Mauser, Lefauchaux and so on.

When Emperor Franz Josef died in 1916 during World War I, with him died the Hofgewehr-kammer as a living institution. Two years later the great monarchy broke down and the different peoples



Figure 26. Leopold I (1658-1705), in opera costume.

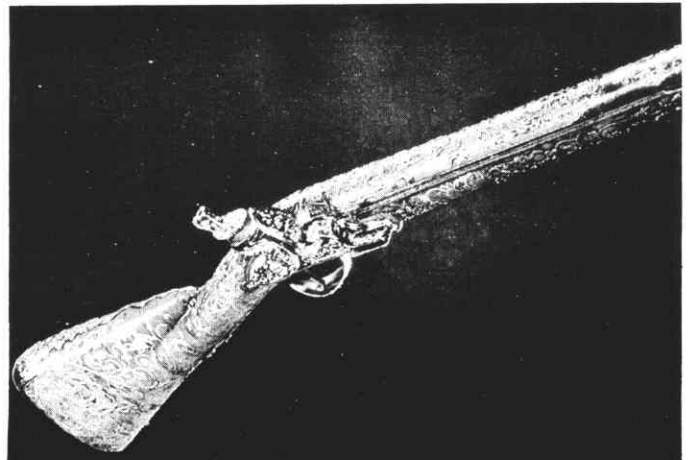


Figure 27. Flintlock gun by Chasteau, Paris, circa 1700.

departed this old community to go their own, but not ever very happy, way. The firearms of the Hofgewehr-kammer are the remaining traces of the history of a former great and now very small land in the center of Europe, my homeland Austria.

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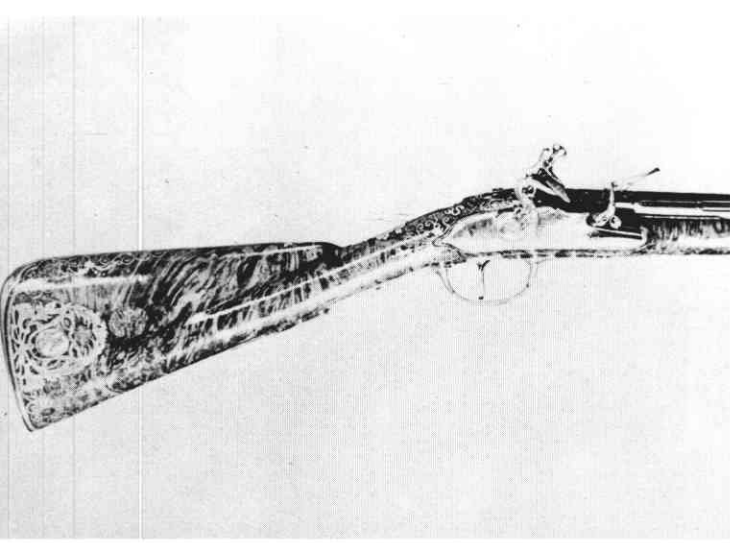


Figure 28. Flintlock by Jacob la Mort de LaMarre, Vienna, circa 1680-90

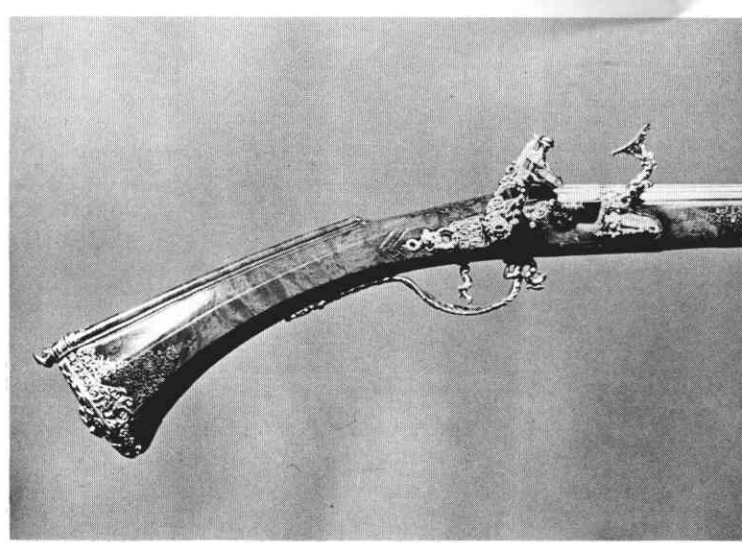


Figure 29. Breseia, Lazarino Cominuzzo barrel, circa 1660

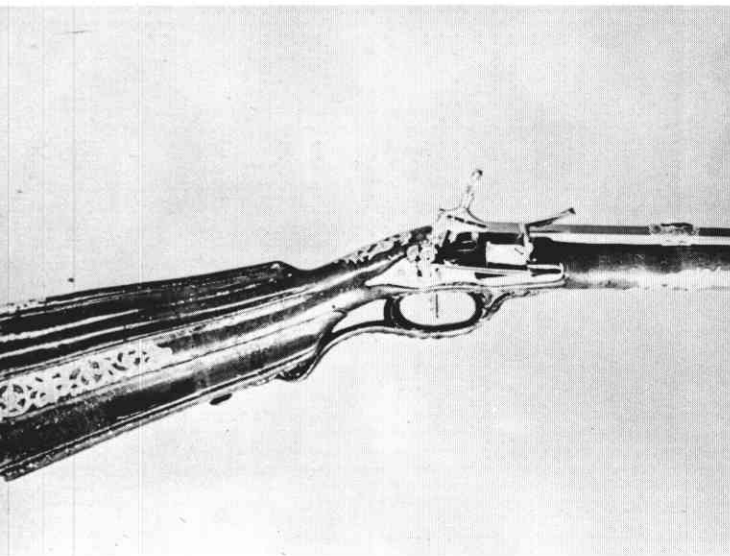


Figure 30. Rifle by G. Affiero (Ripol?) circa 1730.

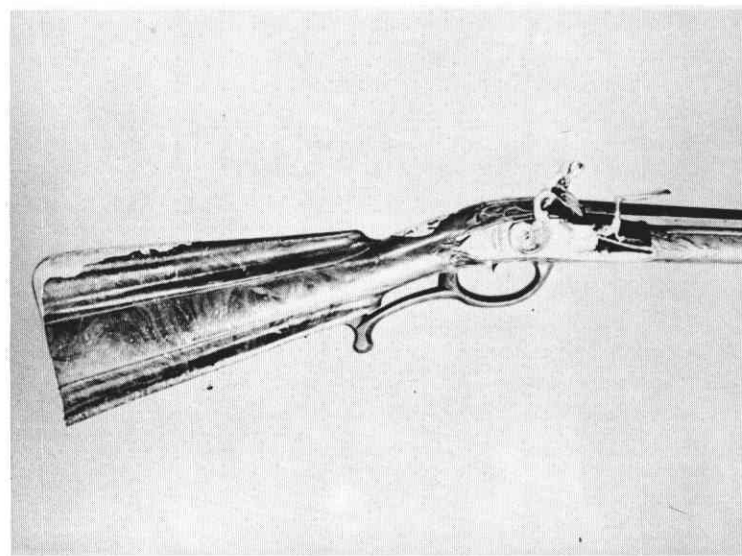


Figure 31. Austrian gun in Spanish style, circa 1750.

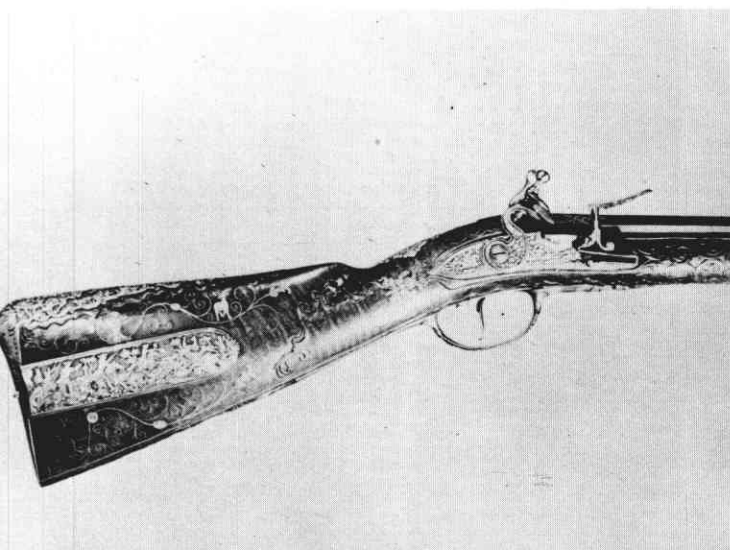


Figure 32. Austrain, circa 1750

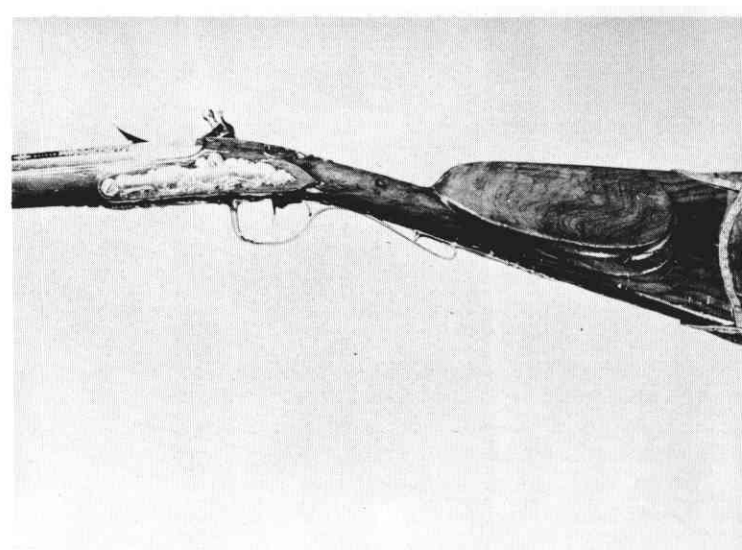


Figure 33. Flintlock by De Sainte, Versailles, circa 1780.



Figure 34. Maria Theresia (1740-1780) and family.

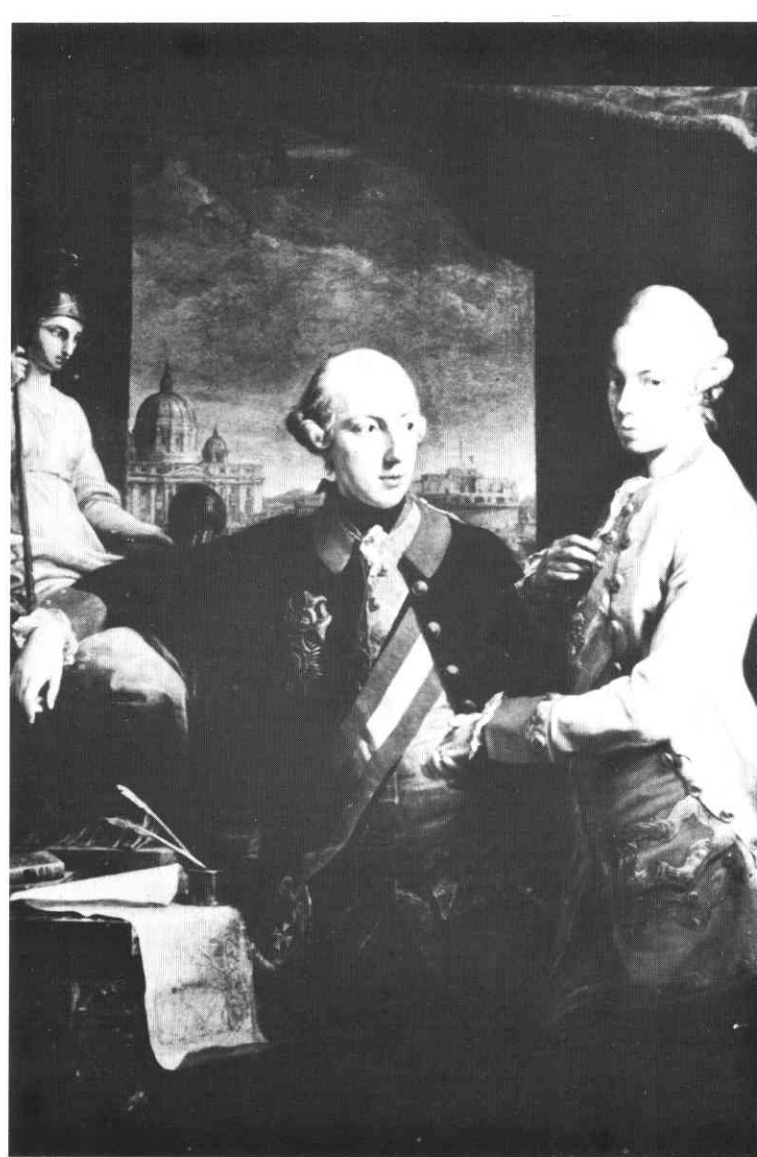
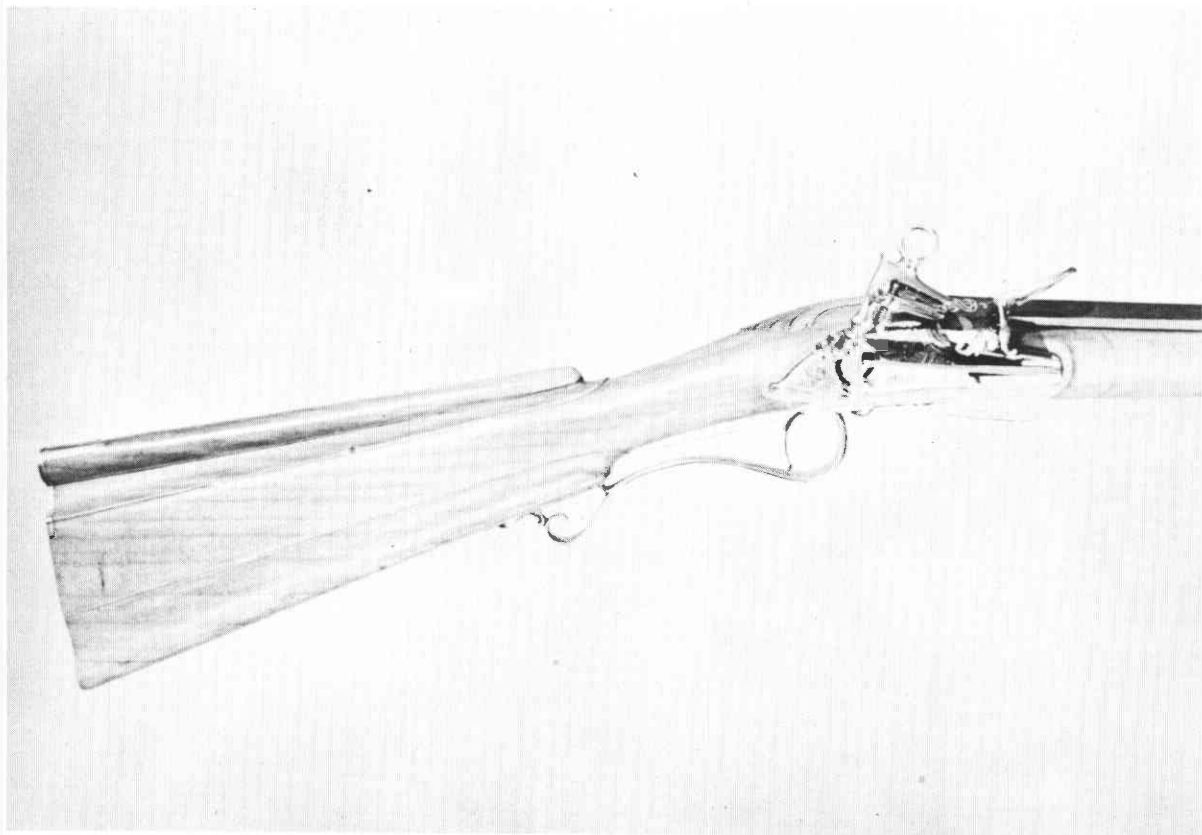


Figure 36. Josef II (1780-1790) and Leopold II (1790-1792)

Figure 35. Spanish gun, circa 1800



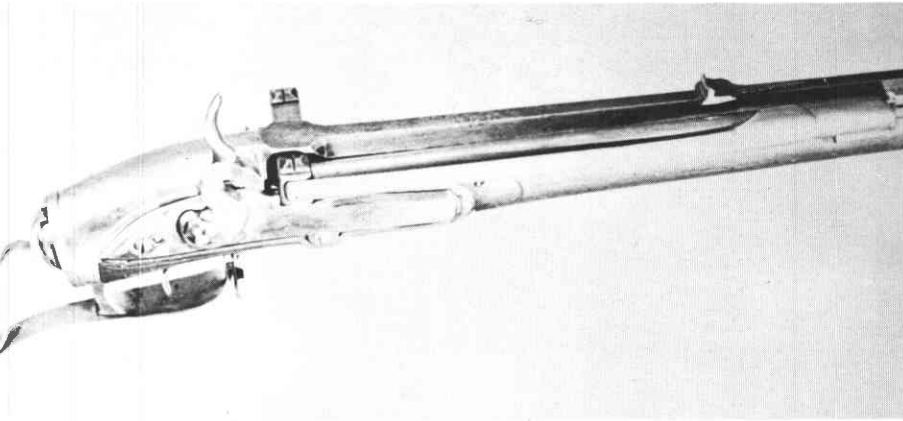


Figure 37. Repeating air gun,
System Girandoni, by
Leopold Zana, Vienna 1770.



Figure 38. Franz I (1804-1835)

Figure 39. 4 barrel Flintlock
rifle by Devillers, Liege.
Gift from Napoleon to Franz I.

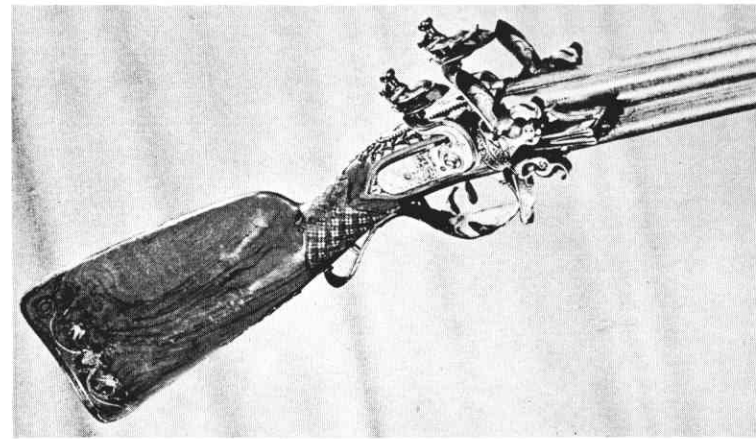
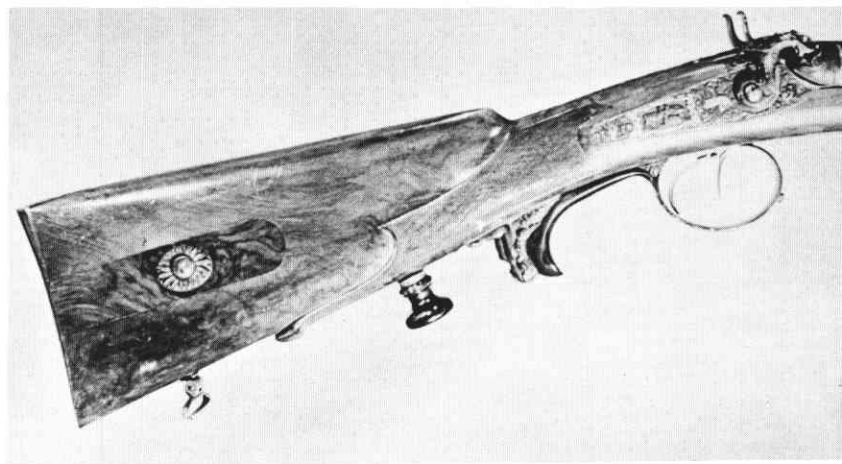


Figure 40. Percussion double
rifle, Graz, circa 1840.



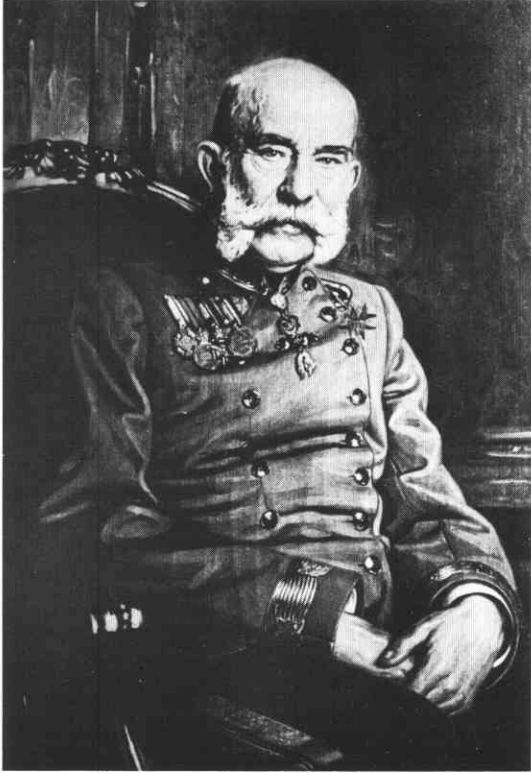


Figure 41. Franz Josef
(1848-1916)

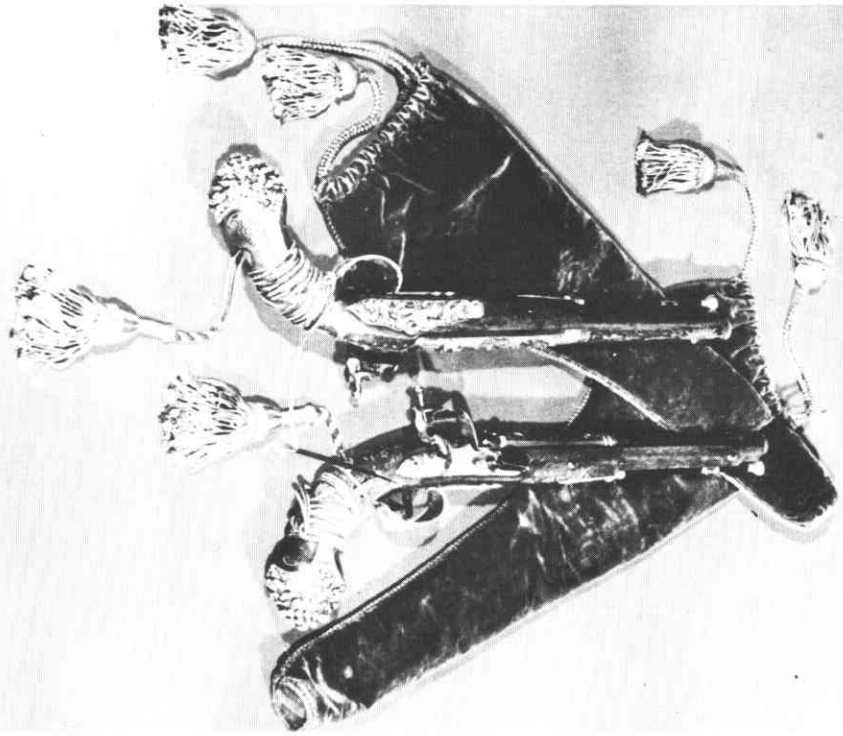


Figure 41. Flintlock pistols
by Claude Bizouard, Marseille,
1857. Given by the Bey of
Tunis to Franz Josef.

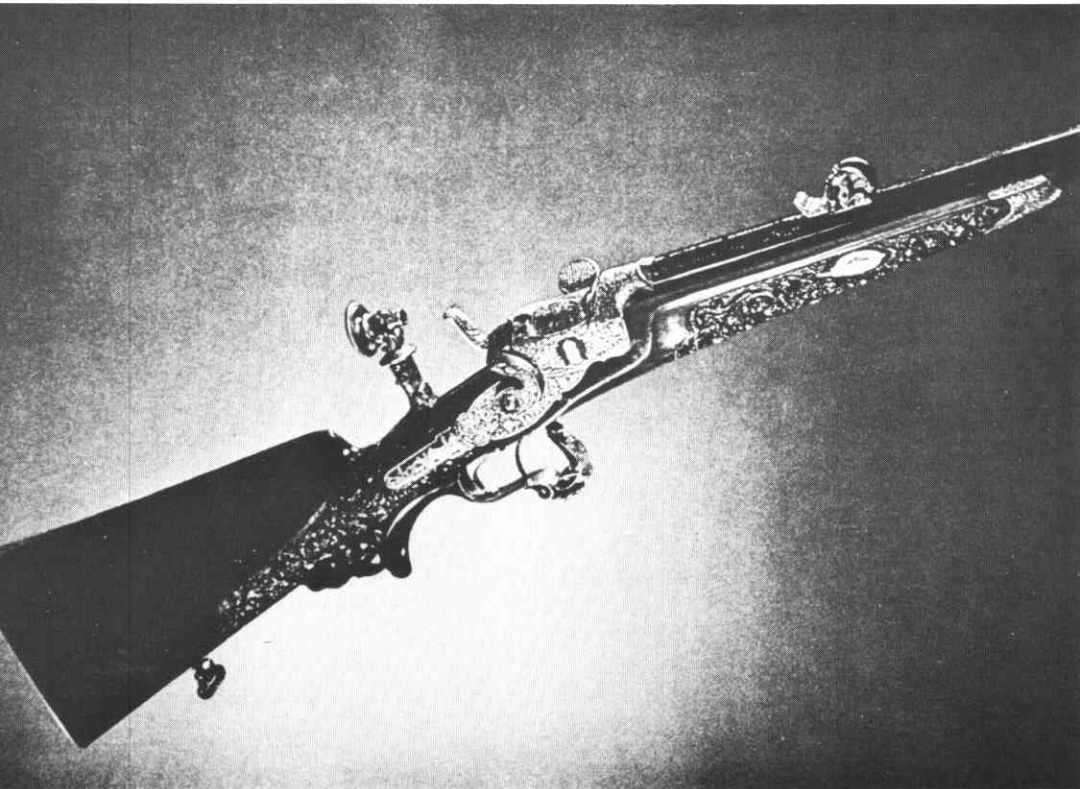


Figure 43. Werndl rifle. Gift
to Franz Josef, 1870.