



Early pre-Revolutionary pocket pistols by Nicholas Noël Boutet, circa 1788-1789, Louis XVI reign. Converted to percussion about 1825 and cased. Lockplates engraved "Boutet/Arq^{re} Ord^{re} Du Roi/Versailles". Barrels engraved "Boutet Versailles". 7 1/2 inches long, .57 calibre, multi-groove rifling. Author's collection.

The Pocket Pistols (Pistolet l'Écossaise) of Nicholas Noël Boutet

Dean Taylor

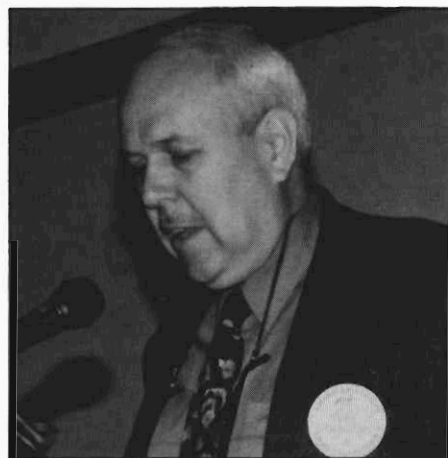
When Nicholas Noël Boutet married Leonie-Emile Desante, daughter of the gunmaker to Louis XVI, it gave him his father-in-law's title "Ordinary Gunmaker to the King." His creative endeavors as a gunmaker began at Versailles for Louis XVI. Small pocket pistols that can be attributed to this period of Boutet's work are exceedingly rare, as most early work of this period appears to be primarily double fowlers, rifles, and some horse pistols. Boutet's work at this time was influenced by the mid-18th Century rococo style which is defined by silver wire scrollwork and steel chiselling designs on the locks and mounts. Boutet would have been influenced by others in the design and fabrication of pocket pistols; such examples have appeared in France and were common from 1740 to the French Revolution. In most cases, they were small pocket types or scaled-down versions of belt and horse holster models, shown on page 72.

Initially, during the early years of the Eighteenth Century, small flintlock pistols with screw-off barrels were popular. There was no ramrod on these pistols and often the barrel was fashioned by lathe-turning in the pattern of a small cannon barrel. These earlier pistols utilized sidelocks, as did the conventional larger-scaled horse and belt pistols.

During the mid-years of the Eighteenth Century, the "box lock" was developed, with the hammer mounted in the center of the frame and all mechanism concealed within a removable, often engraved, plate. The flintlock pan, touch hole, and frizzen springs were integrated into the top of the barrel. Some later versions had the frizzen incorporating a spring relating to the frizzen's retaining screw.

The main theme of this paper is the evolution of Boutet's distinctive style of pocket pistol or, in the French language, "Pistolet l'Écossaise."* This was expressed in unique proportions, varying barrel lengths, folding triggers, sliding top button safety, and refinement of the frizzen spring which Boutet built into the barrel, thus eliminating the visually and functionally cumbersome effect of an externally mounted spring.

The Pistolet de Poche (Pocket Pistol) or Écossaises, which were pocket pistols with a barrel that could be removed easily for loading in the breech chamber, were made by Boutet in a range of standard designs from the



beginning grade to the most ornate deluxe grade.

The traditional continental line at the junction of the action with the stock was usually square or angular. Boutet, on his most elegant deluxe pistols, followed the English style with a decorative junction. Écossaises were occasionally known as "pochettes à l'Anglaises"; perhaps this was the distinction.

Initially, while researching, it was speculated that Boutet might have developed some of these features. However, examples were discovered (as figure 5A) that had features such as the folding trigger, internal frizzen spring and sliding safeties, that had been fabricated much earlier. In the work of Dupont, Cazes and Bizouard, one can see certain "form" relationships which would have influenced Boutet's work.

One noticeable specific is the frame cut-out allowing the wooden stock to fit tightly. Figure 2 shows strong stylistic roots in the rococo manner by relationships such as the carving on the stocks, engraving, and, most obviously, the cannon barrel detail.

All of the pocket pistols have removable barrels, as do most of the examples in this paper; the main function of this feature is to facilitate breechloading. Loading is accomplished by unscrewing the barrel, which exposes the breech. The breech has a central chamber for the powder charge and at the front of this chamber there is a machined cupped surface which acts as a seat for the round lead ball. The rear of the inside diameter of the barrel is counter-bored, as this type of pistol shot a round ball which was slightly larger than that of the barrel bore diameter. This bore reduction of the inside diameter acted as a gas seal during the ignition of the

* Écossaise = Scottish. Why the French call pocket pistols by this term, I have no idea. Typical descriptions appear, as "Pistolet Tromblon, à l'Écossaise" or "Petit Pistolet à l'Écossaise." It appears to refer to the boxlock construction of these pocket pistols.



Pocket Pistol, circa 1780 by "Bizovard Paris". Turn off barrel.

powder charge and resulted in increasing the velocity and accuracy of the ball.

From a functional standpoint, these barrels were easier to clean than the standard muzzle loading pocket sidelock pistols of the period. Removal of the barrel from the breech was facilitated by a circular spanner wrench which engaged in integral lug on the underside of the barrel or, in some instances, an octagonal portion of the barrel itself.

In the author's collection there is a pair of small pocket pistols scaled-down from a large horse pistol; They are an early example of Boutet's work, circa 1788-89. Strong artistic evidence is shown in this pair, with their stylistic points showing the mid-eighteenth Century rococo style, during the reign of Louis XVI.¹

Boutet as early as 1795 began to decorate his facility (showroom) with the intent to retail luxury arms direct to officers and people of high social standing; page 78 shows a typical example of pocket pistols merchandised in this fashion. This particular pair have side locks with exposed frizzen springs and with non-removable smooth bore barrels. They have sliding safeties which are notched and serve as rear sights, and roller bearings on the frizzen springs (which Boutet is credited with having introduced after studying English examples). The pistols have strong rococo design styling; the stocks are ebony and begin to show the emergence of Boutet's later neoclassical style-of-form development. The overall engraving exhibits motifs such as zig-zag lines, foliate scrolls, tendril lines, leaf ornaments, classical urns, and acorns. Indeed, the engraving begins to combine both rococo and neoclassical styles and suggests they were made during the transition of the rococo and neoclassical periods in 1795. It is often found that Boutet's pieces are difficult to date from the standpoint of form and ornament as well as the nature of his engraved signatures. Pieces fabricated during Louis XVIII's reign after 1815 often exhibit features of the First Empire style of neo-classicism and those made in the 1805-15 period often have pre-1793 style features. The ardent researcher is often put in the position of making an educated guess, and the best

guide is a broad exposure to as many of Boutet's works as possible throughout the Directory, Consulate, Empire and Restoration periods. After 1795, the gradual transition from the rococo of the mid- and late-Eighteenth century to the Neo-Roman and Greek classicism took place.

On Boutet pocket pistols in the neo-classical style, details have been noted to have been developed with the application of different colored woods.

Cameo motifs are seen in the form of Sphinxes and Chimeras. The boxlock construction and barrels are burnished to a mirror-like finish and engraved with garlands of flowers, gallic cockerels, grotesque masks, and neo-classical female figures.

Other boxlock engraving formats include hunting dogs with wild animals, military drums and flags, military trophies, grenades, and oval scrolls and caryatids.

Some motifs are built up in gold on the burnished bright metal and carved in bas-relief in the form of Libyan lions, pyramids, Cleopatra's asp, mythical dragons and classical urns.

Inlaid plaques of gold and silver set into rosewood or ebony stocks were neo-classic griffins, foliage, winged dragons, baskets of flowers, egg and dart borders, and smaller scroll motifs at the junction point of stock and boxlock frame. Often silver or gold stud beads were set around the perimeter of the stocks framing the center motifs.

Napoleon's success as a young General at the Battle of the Pyramids, as well as the excavation of classical antiquities with their subsequent removal from Egypt and transfer back to France and to Paris, caused a great interest in things classical. Stylistic details such as ancient vases, urns, classical figures of gods, sphinxes, architectural elements, Roman eagles, Medusa, Zeus, Jupiter, pyramids, flaming braziers, and acanthus foliage all began to be incorporated into Boutet's designing.

The National Convention's establishment in 1792 of an armsmaking facility at Versailles in the Grand Commune of the Palace gave Boutet's full production and administrative skills a chance to flourish. In 1795, he requested to set up a department of "Armes Deluxe" to be put at the disposal of the War Minister, and through his administration to the

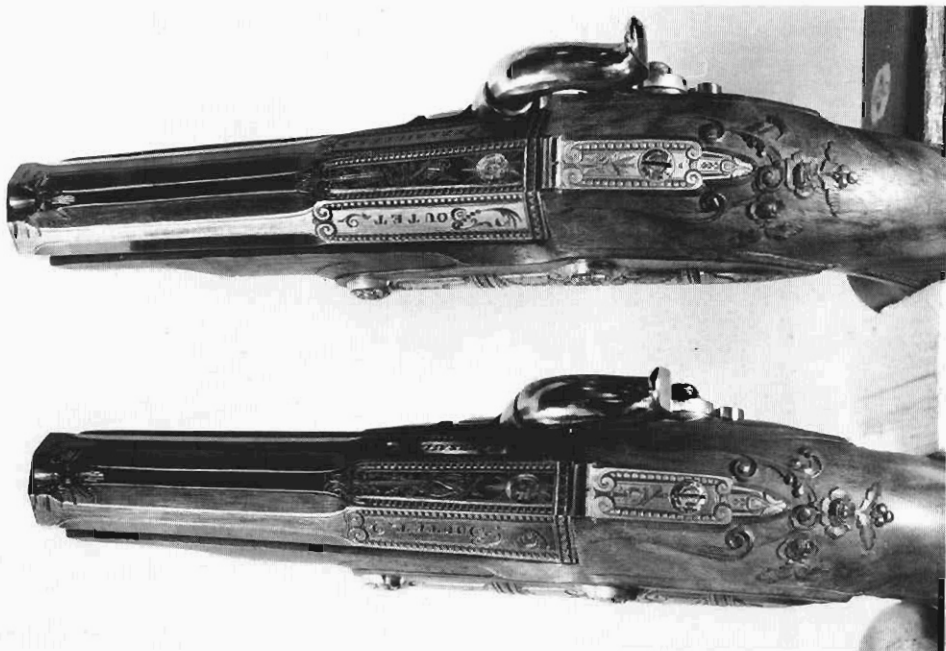


Close-up of lock engraving on the pistols on page 70.

¹ (Pages 70, 73)



Reverse view of the pair on page 70.



Detail of barrel breech and tang engraving. Gold oval stamps of barrel maker Le Clerc.



Detail of the underside of one of the pistols.



Louis XVI, 1774-1792, of The House of Bourbon. From the book, *The Age of Napoleon*.



Small ivory miniature of Nicholas Noel Boutet, 1761-1833. From *Guns magazine*, 1967.

Directory. It is during this period that Boutet's pocket pistols appeared in their initial form and they generally related in terms of materials and the ornament to the "Pistols de Recompense" or "pistols of reward" type of horse pistols. These were presentation pistols given to officers for bravery, and in some instances were cased with pocket pistols as shown on page 77.

This paper has attempted to show a chronological progression of form development and level of ornamentation or luxury that Boutet developed in his pocket pistols. They range from the plainest or most basic to the ultimate in luxury and taste in the choice of materials and artistic fabrication. Pages 79-80 show this range; the Directory, Consulate and Empire periods reflect this chronology to a greater or lesser extent.

During the Consulate Period, Napoleon as First Consul had granted Boutet an eighteen year concession at Versailles which would run its course in 1818. Besides retailing his products at Versailles, Boutet opened a second retail operation in Paris at "No. 12 rue de la Loi" and enjoyed further prosperity. Many luxury pocket pistols in varying grades became the personal side arms of Boutet's growing number of admirers. Officers as well as civilians desired these pistols as travelling companions for personal safety, and many pistols were cased in elaborate sets. These deluxe pocket pistols were merchandised in wooden boxes or cases covered in fine grade leathers, often embossed with exquisite gold leaf ornament. The cases were usually velvet-lined, with the interiors partitioned so that each pistol of the pair lay firmly within its own section. Elaborate tools and other accessories for cleaning and loading, and other equipment such as bullet molds, powder flasks, and screwdrivers were fitted into their own compartments.

In many examples gold braid is used at the top edge of the separate compartments to contrast color and accentuate the individual items. Ivory, ebony and brass was used in the individual lid-pulls on the enclosed compartments containing extra lead balls, cleaning wads, and flints. It appears that Boutet fabricated many of the small silver and brass mounted flasks, as they are found engraved with his signature. The cases were designed to hold the pistols in a flat position, as well as upright, and had a locking key provided. Many of these fine cases had elegant silver commemorative and ownership plaques inlaid in their tops, which express the elegance of Boutet's attention to detail.

Relative to casing types, a most elaborate one is illustrated in the book *La Manufacture d'Armes de Versailles, Boutet Directeur Artiste* by Capt. Maurice Bottet in 1903. This cased type contains a deluxe carbine, a dress sword, two long duellers, and a pair of pocket pistols, and

was presented to General Massena by Napoleon in 1805.

Several vertical casings of Boutet pocket pistols have been studied. One such casing was sold in California and contains a pair of converted percussion pistols presented by the King of Spain to his queen in the 1840s. The vertical case is constructed of rosewood and is lined with green velvet, with all openings bordered in gold braid. The pair of pistols have smoothbore one-inch barrels and the ebony butts are inlaid with boxwood and carved beautifully in floral patterns. The barrels are engraved "Boutet Directeur Artiste" and the side panels "Manufacture Versailles."

Another vertical casing has flintlocks, again converted to percussion, in this instance by William Parker, High Holborn, London. September, 1826, which is engraved on a silver plaque. The case is palisander wood and is lined with wine-red velvet bordered by gold braid. Also, in vertical position with the pair, are a powder-measuring ladle and bullet mold with an integral barrel wrench. Each pistol is engraved on the underside of the barrel "Boutet Directeur Artiste" and on the top frame "Manufact. Versailles." Caliber of this pair is .43 inch smooth bore.

The majority of Boutet's high end deluxe presentation pistols have extremely short barrels. Whether plain or heavily ornamented, many of these pistols' barrels are less than one inch in length and only rarely more than 1 1/2 inches. The caliber range is from about .40 to .50, with the average about .43 caliber. Boutet's finest deluxe pocket pistols are shown on pages 80-81, exhibiting all the refinements of exquisite taste in form, detail, and materials that this Director-Artist could create.

Boutet's annuaire or "Manufacturing Annual" records that in 1810, he made in his deluxe shop a pair of such "Pist. de Poche, Grav.Riche. Ebene, Placage Or," in a mahogany case, for Elisa Bonaparte (Napoleon's sister) at a cost of 1,000 francs.

BONAPARTE, ELISA- 1810 Pist..DePoche, Grav.
Riche, Ebene, placage or, dans
une boite acajou, Fr.1000

The Annuaire also records this entry for Louis XVIII, King of France:

LE ROI (LOUIS XVIII)- 1814-neces pistol, tournant,
calot or, enrich or rasé, Fr.4000
(Prince Regent)

This casing is shown on page 82.

During Boutet's most important period, from 1804 to 1815, he competed with many contemporaries who worked in their own interpretations of form, materials and ornament, or were strongly influenced by his work at Versailles.

One was Jean LePage, who at his Paris facility made many fine sporting fowlers for Napoleon and his court.



Napoleon, 1769-1821. First Consul 1799-1804, Emperor 1804-1815. Granted Boutet an eighteen year concession at Versailles, 1800-1818. Jaques-Louis David, "Napoleon In His Study".



Louis XVIII, 1755-1824. Returned to be King of France in 1815 after Waterloo. Boutet had concession at Versailles until 1818.

Page 81 shows that he was very much up to the standards set by Boutet with pocket pistols. Another rival was Pirmet, who operated his gunmaking establishment on the same "rue de la Loi" as Boutet's retail outlet and appears to have worked there from 1802 to 1818. He is recorded to have been involved with the partnership of "Pirmet-Baucheron," Paris, in 1828. With the fabrication of pocket pistols, his sense of form, development, and attention to detail is of the highest quality standards.

The author has noted that, in 20 years of research, very few of this type of pocket pistols are rifled. During the percussion era, more of this type with screw-off barrels utilized multigroove rifling.

The majority of Boutet's pocket pistols of this type during the flintlock era almost always had smooth bore barrels which unscrewed with a lug wrench for loading and cleaning. Makers such as Gosset show the influence of Boutet's design in ornament and form in short barrelled pocket pistols to be concealed in waistcoats and carried in lady's fur muffs.

Page 81 shows an example of the fine craftsmanship and quality of the work of Louis Martin Gosset, who worked at the Versailles factory with Boutet. After the closure of the Manufacture, Gosset competed with Boutet for discriminating customers in his shop at 15 avenue d'Antin. Gosset, with the assistance of Baucheron, did an inventory of Boutet's materials in 1822 following the closure of the Manufacture of Arms at Versailles. Pierre Jarlier, in his monumental work *Repertoire d'Arquebusiers et de Fourbisseurs Français* gives reference to the above material and further states that Gosset's son carried on the business from 1823 to 1850 at the 15 avenue d'Antin address.

With Louis XVIII's return to power as King of France, Boutet still had patrons but now they were members of the ancient aristocracy. His styling left the influence of the neo-Greek or Roman classicism and returned to his earlier mid-Eighteenth Century rococo influences. Boutet's pocket pistols after 1818 were for the most part plain, and occasionally had cannon barrels. His choice of materials for the stocks and general fabrication were still of the highest quality, but never again would they reflect the elegance of his 1800 to 1815 period.

The flintlock period was doomed with Alexander Forsyth's patent for a detonating system that evolved into the simple copper percussion cap in the mid-1820s and 1830s. Many fine Boutet works as well as works of his contemporaries were converted. Even with this transition, Boutet's work in finely engraved and inlaid silver or gold sheet, engraving on bright steel, relief chiselling, imaginative and exquisite ornamentation does not diminish his stature as the premier designer and maker of deluxe pocket pistols of

the flintlock era. The "Directeur Artiste" has left us a body of work that is pre-eminent in artistic and historical importance.

ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

This paper is dedicated to two of my mentor friends: the late Merrill K. Lindsay and the late Chuck Darling, both ASAC members. Their assistance with my researches and service to the arms collecting fraternity over the years has been immense and appreciated.

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The illustrations on the following pages show a wide variety of pistols of the Boutet period, made by Boutet and others.



Screw barrel pistol of plain grade with engraved "Manufacture" on one side of the breech and "A Versailles" on the other. Plain uncarved walnut butt.



Cased set of flintlock pistols of the Consulate period. Given to officers for valor in military service, circa 1799-1801. H.H. Thomas collection.



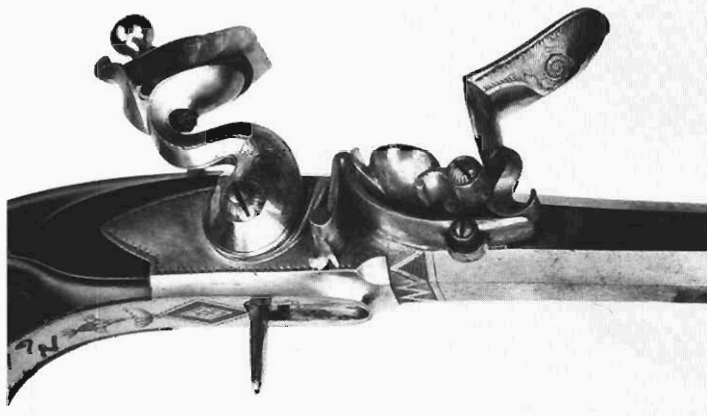
Cased pair of Boutet pocket pistols, circa 1795-1798. Top of frame engraved "Boutet Versailles". Henry J. Nunnemacher collection, Milwaukee Public Museum.



One of the pair of side hammer box lock pistols shown above. The roller on the frizzen spring may have been introduced by Boutet, based on British duellers which he may have seen.



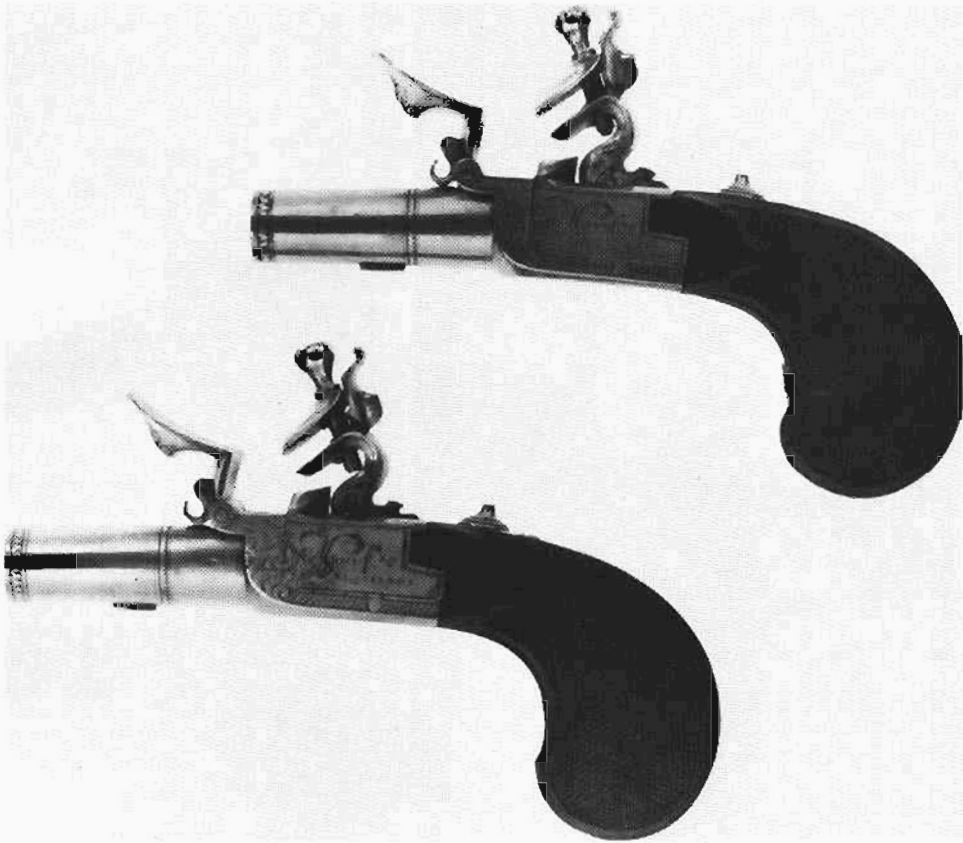
Side view of one of the Boutet side lock pocket pistols showing a departure from the elaborate floral designs to one with geometric patterns.



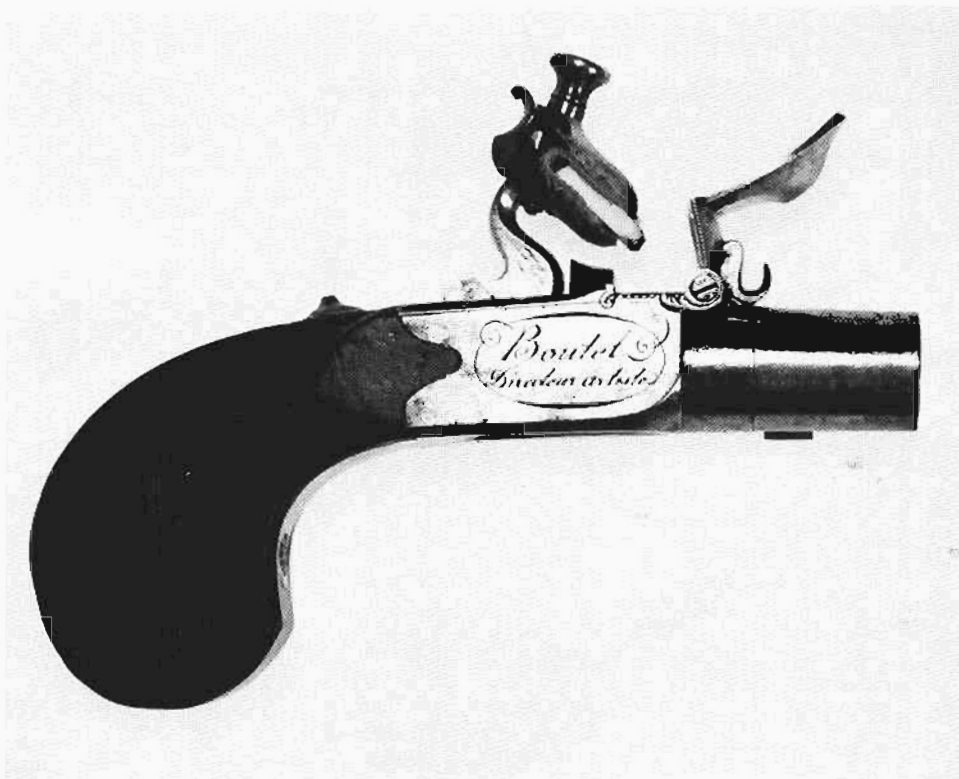
Detail of the Boutet side lock pocket pistol.



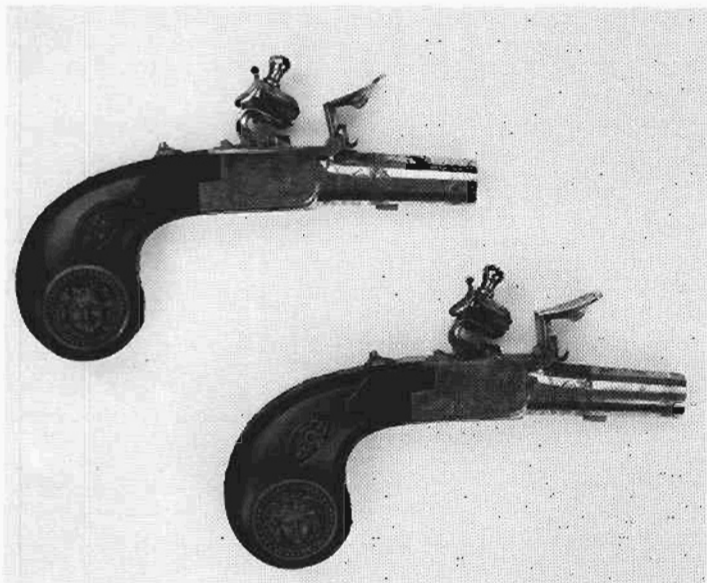
View of the top flat of the frame and signature panels of the pistol. Note the notched sliding safety which serves as a rear sight.



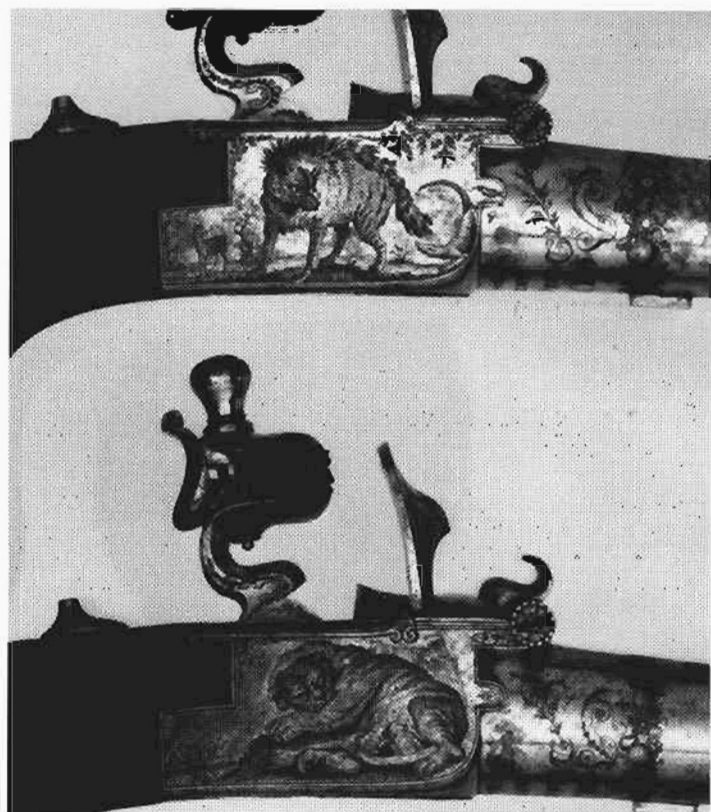
Pocket pistols with screw off smooth bore barrels engraved 1 and 2. Box frame engraved "Manufacture de Versailles" on the left side and "Boutet Directeur Artiste" on the right. Checkered walnut grips. Author's collection.



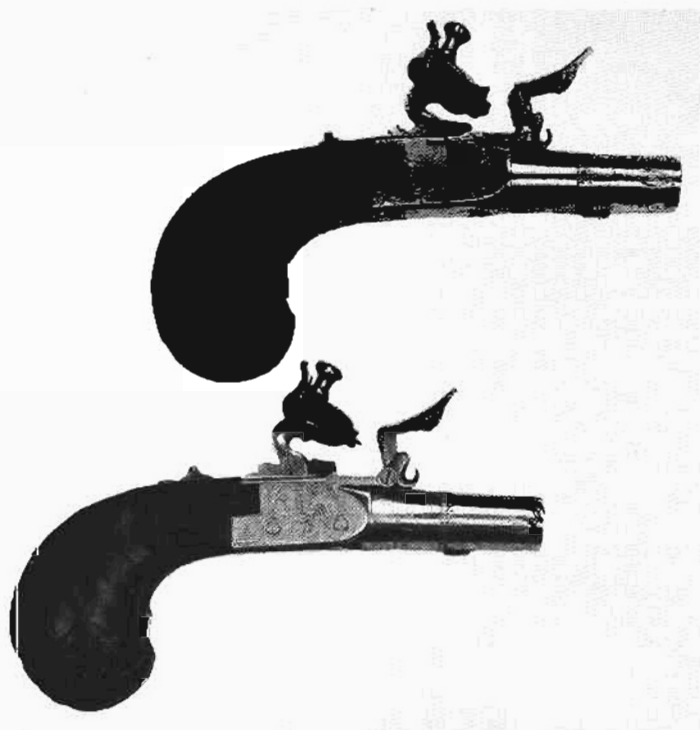
Smooth bore, screw-off barrel, sliding safety button. Frame engraved "Boutet Directeur Artiste" on one side and "Manufre de Versailles" on the other. Author's collection.



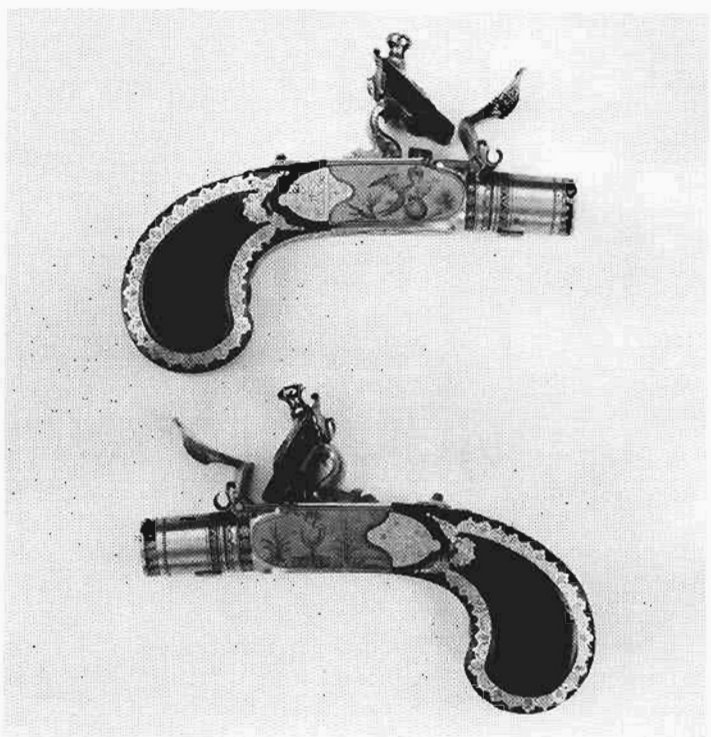
Pair of a garniture presented to Napoleon in 1797 by the Directory of France. Engraving of animals on the breeches derived from prints by Johann Elias Ridinger. Photo courtesy of Peter Finer, Antique Arms.



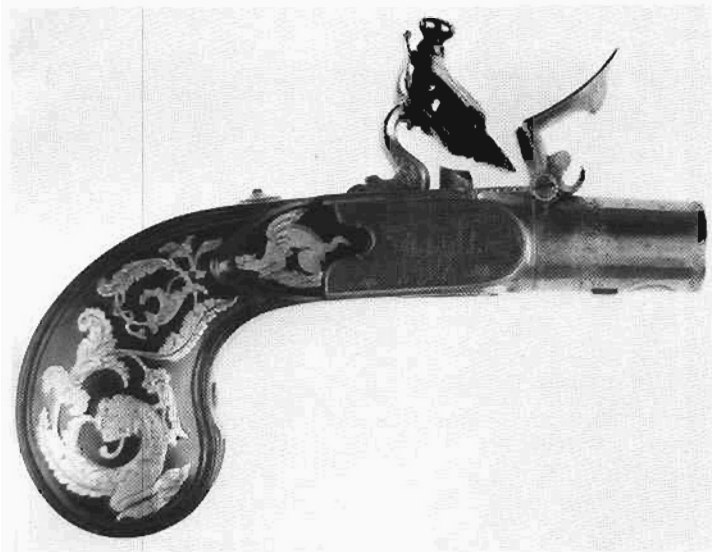
Close-up of the breech engraving of animals at left, derived from prints by Johann Elias Ridinger. Photo courtesy of Peter Finer, Antique Arms.



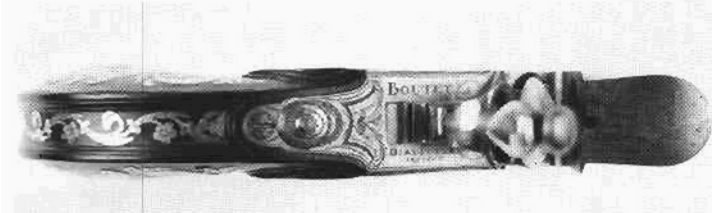
Pair of screw off barrel pistols, underside of barrels engraved "Boutet Directeur Artiste", circa 1797, carved stocks. Philadelphia Museum of Art Collection.



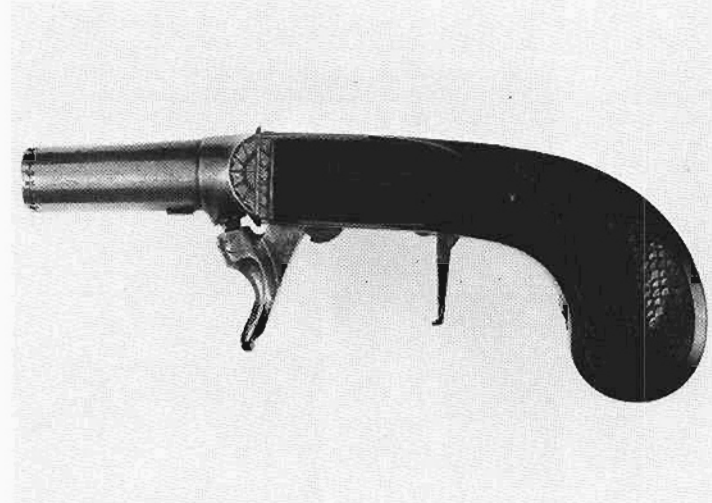
Pair of smooth bore screw-off pocket pistols. Barrel lugs engraved 1 and 2. The top plate is engraved "Boutet Directeur Artiste". Ebony butts inlaid with gold borders. Photo courtesy of The Wallace Collection, London, England.



Pocket pistol with short screw-off barrel, circa 1810. Ebony stock with engraved gold inlaid plaques. Barrel engraved "Manufre A Versailles".



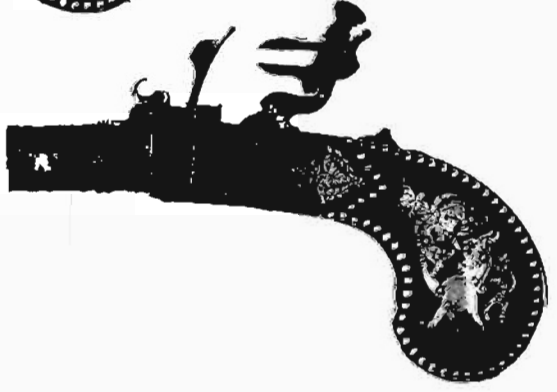
Top view, engraved "Boutet Directeur Artiste". Frank M. Sellers collection.



Early 19th Century percussion pocket pistol by "Gosset A Paris". Screw-off barrel, folding trigger, circa 1822.



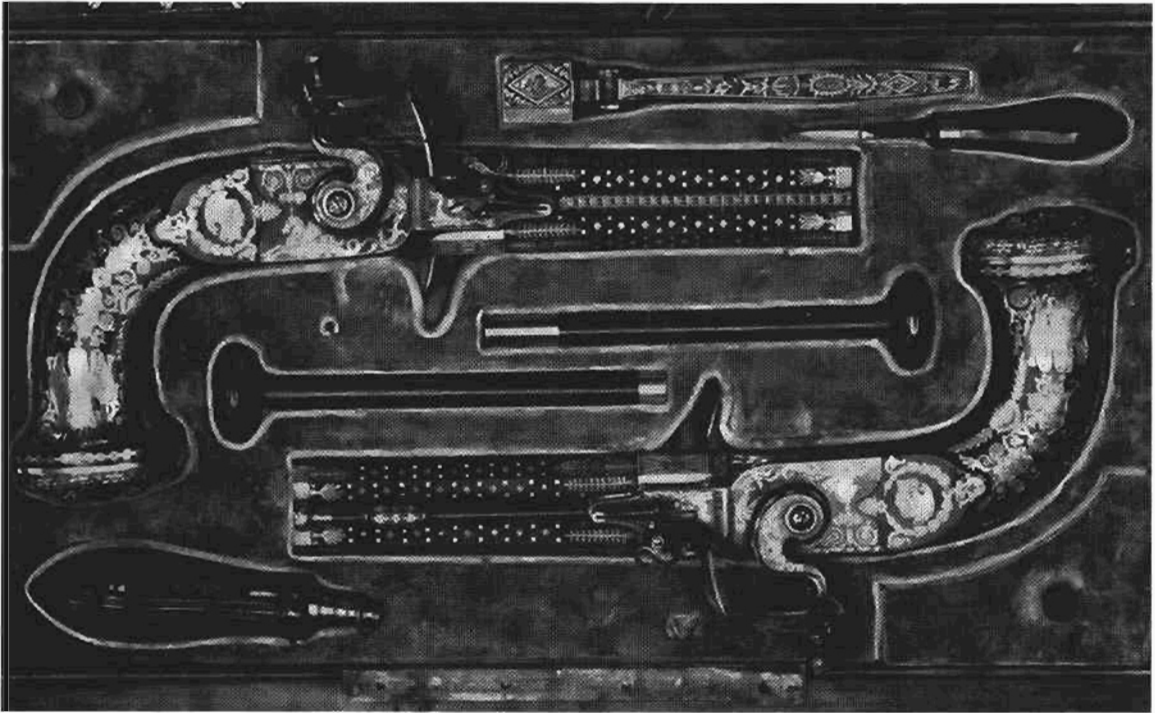
Smooth bore pocket pistol with screw-off barrel. Rosewood stock with silver inlaid engraved borders and motifs. Metropolitan Museum of Art.



Pistols from the Prince Napoleon Collection, Chateau de Prangins. Circa 1800. Signed "Manufacture à Versailles" and "Boutet Directeur Artiste". From a 1975 Sotheby's catalog.



Box-lock, turn-off smooth bore pocket pistol, barrel engraved "LePage A Paris". Circa 1810.



Cased double barrel pocket pistols, breeches engraved horizontally "Boutet A Versailles." Presented to the Prince Regent by Louis 18th of France. Circa 1814. Collection of Her Majesty the Queen, Windsor Castle. Illustration from Claude Blair, *Pistols of the World*.



Cased pocket pistols by "LePage A Paris," circa 1798. The Metropolitan Museum of Art, Rogers Fund, 1928.